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Honoré de Balzac

Honoré de Balzac (May 20, 1799 - August 18, 1850) was a nineteenth-century French novelist and playwright. His *magnum opus* was a sequence of almost 100 novels and plays collectively entitled *La Comédie humaine*, which presents a panorama of French life in the years after the fall of Napoléon Bonaparte in 1815.

Due to his keen observation of detail and unfiltered representation of society, Balzac is regarded as one of the founders of realism in European literature. He is renowned for his multi-faceted characters; even his lesser characters are complex, morally ambiguous and fully human. Inanimate objects are imbued with character as well; the city of Paris, a backdrop for much of his writing, takes on many human qualities. His writing influenced many famous authors, including the novelists Marcel Proust, Émile Zola, Charles Dickens, Gustave Flaubert, Henry James and Jack Kerouac, as well as important philosophers such as Friedrich Engels. Many of Balzac's works have been made into films, and they continue to inspire other writers.

An enthusiastic reader and independent thinker as a child, Balzac had trouble adapting himself to the teaching style of his grammar school. His wilful nature caused trouble throughout his life, and frustrated his ambitions to succeed in the world of business. When he finished school, Balzac was apprenticed as a legal clerk, but he turned his back on the law after wearying of its inhumanity and banal routine. Before and during his career as a writer, he attempted to be a publisher, printer, businessman, critic, and politician. He failed in all of these efforts. *La Comédie Humaine* reflects his real-life difficulties, and includes scenes from his own experience.

Balzac suffered from health problems throughout his life, possibly due to his intense writing schedule. His relationship with his family was often strained by financial and personal drama, and he lost more than one friend over critical reviews. In 1850, he married Ewelina Hanska, his longtime paramour; he died five months later.

Biography

Family

Honoré de Balzac was born into a family which had struggled to achieve respectability. His father, born Bernard-François Balssa, was one of eleven children from a poor family in Tarn, a region in the south of France. In 1760 the elder Balzac set off for Paris with only a louis in his pocket, determined to improve his social standing; by
1776 he had become Secretary to the King's Council and a Freemason. (He had also changed his name to that of an ancient noble family, and added - without any official cause - the aristocratic-sounding de.) After the Reign of Terror (1793-94), he was sent to Tours to coordinate supplies for the Army.

Balzac's mother, born Anne-Charlotte-Laure Sallambier, came from a family of haberdashers in Paris. Her family's wealth was a considerable factor in the match: she was eighteen at the time of the wedding, and Bernard-François fifty. As British writer and critic V. S. Pritchett puts it, "She was certainly drily aware that she had been given to an old husband as a reward for his professional services to a friend of her family and that the capital was on her side. She was not in love with her husband."

Honoré (so named after Saint Honoré of Amiens, who is commemorated on May 16, four days before Balzac's birthday) was actually the second child born to the Balzacs; exactly one year previous, Louis-Daniel had been born, but he lived for only a month. Honoré's sisters Laure and Laurence were born in 1800 and 1802, and his brother Henry-François in 1807.

**Early life**

Immediately after his birth, Honoré was sent to a wet-nurse; the following year he was joined by his sister Laure and they spent four years away from home. (Although Genevan philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau's influential book *Émile* convinced many mothers of the time to nurse their own children, sending babies to wet-nurses was still common among the middle and upper classes.) When the Balzac children returned home, they were kept at a frigid distance by their parents, which affected the author-to-be significantly. His 1835 novel *Le Lys dans la Vallée* features a cruel governess named Miss Caroline, modeled after his own caretaker.

At the age of eight Balzac was sent to the Oratorian grammar school at Vendôme, where he studied for seven years. His father, seeking to instill the same hardscrabble work ethic which had gained him the esteem of society, intentionally sent very little spending money to the boy. This made him the object of ridicule among his much wealthier schoolmates.

Balzac had difficulty adapting himself to the rote style of learning at the school. As a result, he was frequently sent to the "alcove", a punishment cell reserved for disobedient students. (The janitor at the school, when asked later if he remembered Honoré, replied: "Remember M. Balzac? I should think I do! I had the honour of escorting him to the dungeon more than a hundred times!") Still, his time alone gave the boy ample freedom to read every book which came his way.

Balzac worked these scenes from his boyhood - as he did many aspects of his life and the lives of those around him - into *La Comédie Humaine*. His time at Vendôme is reflected in *Louis Lambert*, his 1832 novel about a young boy studying at an Oratorian grammar school at Vendôme. The narrator states: "He devoured books of every kind, feeding indiscriminately on religious works, history and literature, philosophy and physics. He had told me that he found indescribable delight in reading dictionaries for lack of other books."

But though his mind was receiving nourishment, the same could not be said for Balzac's body. He often fell ill, finally causing the headmaster to contact his family with news of a "sort of a coma". When he returned home, his grandmother said: "Voilà donc comme le collège nous renvoie les jolis que nous lui envoyons!" ("Look how the academy returns the pretty ones we send them!") Balzac himself attributed his condition to "intellectual congestion", but his extended confinement in the "alcove" was surely a factor. (Meanwhile, his father had been writing a treatise on "the means of preventing thefts and murders, and of restoring the men who commit them to a useful role in society", in which he heaped disdain on prison as a form of crime prevention.)

In 1814 the Balzac family moved to Paris, and Honoré was sent to private tutors and schools for the next two and a half years. This was an unhappy time in his life, during which he attempted suicide on a bridge over the Loire River.

In 1816 Balzac entered the Sorbonne, where he studied under three famous professors. François Guizot, who later became prime minister, was Professor of Modern History. Abel-François Villemain, a recent arrival from the Collège Charlemagne, delivered lectures on French and classical literature to packed audiences. And - most influential of all - Victor Cousin's courses on philosophy encouraged his students to think independently.

Once his studies were completed, Balzac was persuaded by his father to follow him into the law; for three years he trained and worked at the office of Victor Passez, a friend of the family. It was during this time that he began to understand the vagaries of human nature. In his 1840 novel *Le Notaire*, Balzac wrote that a young person in the legal profession sees "the oily wheels of every fortune, the hideous wrangling of heirs over corpses not yet cold, the human heart grappling with the Penal Code."

In 1819 Passez offered to make Balzac his successor, but his apprentice had had enough of the law. He despaired of being "a clerk, a machine, a riding-school hack, eating and drinking and sleeping at fixed hours. I should be like
everyone else. And that's what they call living, that life at the grindstone, doing the same thing over and over again..
I am hungry and nothing is offered to appease my appetite." He announced his intention to be a writer.

The loss of this opportunity caused serious discord in the Balzac household, although Honoré was not turned away entirely. Instead, in April 1819, he was allowed to live in the French capital - as English critic George Saintsbury describes it - "in a garret furnished in the most Spartan fashion, with a starvation allowance and an old woman to look after him," while the rest of the family moved to a house twenty miles [32 km] outside Paris.

First literary efforts

Balzac's first project was a libretto for a comic opera called Le Corsaire, based on Lord Byron's tale of Conrad the pirate. Realizing he would have trouble finding a composer, however, he turned to other pursuits.

In 1820, he completed the five-act verse tragedy Cromwell. Although it pales in comparison to later works, some critics consider it a quality text. When he finished, Balzac went to Villeparisis and read the entire work to his family; they were unimpressed. He followed this effort by starting (but never finishing) three novels: Steenie, Falthurne, and Corsino.

In 1821 Balzac met the enterprising Auguste Lepoitevin, who convinced the author to write short stories, which Lepoitevin would then sell to publishers. Balzac then quickly turned to longer works, and by 1826 he had written nine novels, all published under pseudonyms and often produced in collaboration with other writers. For example, the scandalous novel Vicaire des Ardennes (1822) - banned for its depiction of nearly-incestuous relations and, more egregiously, of a married priest - was attributed to a 'Horace de Saint-Aubin'. These books were potboiler novels, designed to sell quickly and titillate audiences. In Saintsbury's view, "They are curiously, interestingly, almost entrallingly bad." He indicates that Robert Louis Stevenson tried to dissuade him from reading these early works of Balzac's. American critic Samuel Rogers, however, notes that "without the training they gave Balzac, as he groped his way to his mature conception of the novel, and without the habit he formed as a young man of writing under pressure, one can hardly imagine his producing La Comédie Humaine." Biographer Graham Robb suggests that as he discovered the Novel, Balzac discovered himself.

Also during this time, Balzac wrote two pamphlets in support of primogeniture and the Society of Jesus. The latter, regarding the Jesuit order, illustrated his life-long admiration for the Catholic Church. Later, in a preface to La Comédie Humaine, he wrote: "Christianity, and especially Catholicism, being a complete repression of man's depraved tendencies, is the greatest element in Social Order."

"Une bonne spéculation"

In the late 1820s, Balzac also dabbled in several business ventures, blamed by his sister on the temptation of an unknown neighbor. The first of these was a publishing enterprise which turned out cheap one-volume editions of French classics including the works of Molière. This business failed miserably, with many of the books "sold as waste paper". Balzac had better luck publishing the memoirs of Laure Junot, Duchesse d'Abrantès - with whom he also had an affair.

Borrowing money from his family and other sources, he tried again as a printer and then as a typefounder. But as with the publishing business, Balzac's inexperience and lack of capital caused his ruin in these trades. He gave the businesses to a friend (who made them successful) but carried the debts for many years. In April 1828, he owed his own mother 50,000 francs.

This penchant for une bonne spéculation never left Balzac. It resurfaced painfully much later when - as a renowned and busy author - he traveled to Sardinia in the hopes of reprocessing the slag from the Roman mines in that country. Toward the end of his life, he became captivated by the idea of cutting 20,000 acres (81 km²) of oak wood in Ukraine and transporting it for sale in France.

La Comédie Humaine and literary success

In 1832 (after writing several novels), Balzac conceived the idea for an enormous series of books that would paint a panoramic portrait of "all aspects of society." When the idea struck, he raced to his sister's apartment and proclaimed: "I am about to become a genius." Although he originally called it Etudes des Mœurs, it eventually became known as La Comédie Humaine, and he included in it all of the fiction he published in his lifetime under his own name. This was to be Balzac's life work and his greatest achievement.

After the collapse of his businesses, Balzac traveled to Brittany and stayed with the de Pommereul family.
outside Fougères. It was here that he drew inspiration for Le Chouans (1829), a tale of love gone wrong amid the Chouan royalist forces. A supporter of the crown himself, Balzac paints the counter-revolutionaries in a sympathetic light - even though they are the center of the book's most brutal scenes. This was the first book Balzac released under his own name, and it gave him what one critic called "passage into the Promised Land". It established him as an author of note (even if the surface owes a debt to Walter Scott) and provided him with a name outside the pseudonyms of his past.

Soon afterwards, around the time of his father's death, Balzac wrote El Verdugo - about a 30-year-old man who kills his father (Balzac was 30 years old at the time). This was the first work signed "Honoré de Balzac". Like his father, he added the aristocratic-sounding particle to help him fit into respected society, but it was a choice based on skill, not birthright. "The aristocracy and authority of talent are more substantial than the aristocracy of names and material power," he wrote in 1830. The timing of the decision was also significant. Robb frames it this way: "The disappearance of the father coincides with the adoption of the nobiliary particle. A symbolic inheritance." Just as his father had worked his way up from poverty into respectable society, Balzac considered tool and effort his real mark of nobility.

When the July Revolution overthrew Charles X in 1830, Balzac declared himself a Legitimist, supporting Charles' House of Bourbon - but with qualifications. He felt that the new July Monarchy (which claimed widespread popular support) was disorganized and unprincipled, in need of a mediator to keep the political peace between the King and insurgent forces. He called for "a young and vigorous man who belongs neither to the Directoire nor to the Empire, but who is 1830 incarnate." He planned to be such a candidate, appealing especially to the higher classes in Chiton. But after a near-fatal accident in 1832 (he slipped and cracked his head on the street), Balzac decided not to stand for election.

1831 saw the success of La Peau de Chagrin (The Wild Ass's Skin), a fable-like tale about a despondent young man named Raphaël de Valentin who finds an animal skin promising great power and wealth. He obtains these things, but loses the ability to manage them. In the end, his health fails and he is consumed by his own confusion. Balzac meant the story to bear witness to the treacherous turns of life, its "serpentine motion."

In 1833, Balzac released Eugénie Grandet, his first best-selling novel. A story about a young lady who inherits her father's miserliness, it also became the most critically acclaimed book of his career. The writing is simple, yet the individuals (especially the bourgeois title character) are dynamic and complex.

Le Père Goriot (Old Father Goriot, 1835) was his next big success, in which Balzac transposes the story of King Lear to 1820s Paris in order to rage at a society bereft of all love save the love of money. The centrality of a father in this novel matches Balzac's own position - not only as mentor to his troubled young secretary, Jules Sandeau, but also the fact that he had (most likely) fathered a child, Marie-Caroline, with his otherwise-married lover, Maria Du Fresnay.

In 1836, Balzac took the helm of the Chronique de Paris, a weekly magazine of society and politics. He tried to enforce strict impartiality in its pages and a reasoned assessment of various ideologies. As Rogers notes, "Balzac was interested in any social, political, or economic theory, whether from the right or the left." The magazine failed, but in July 1840, he founded another publication called the Revue Parisienne. It lasted for only three issues.

These dismal business efforts - and his misadventures in Sardinia - provided an appropriate milieu in which to set the two-volume Illusions Perdues (Lost Illusions, 1843). The novel concerns Lucien de Rubempré, a young poet trying to make a name for himself, who becomes trapped in the morass of society's darkest contradictions. Lucien's journalism work is informed by Balzac's own failed ventures in the field. Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes (The Harlot High and Low, 1847) continues Lucien's story. He is trapped by the Abbé Herrera (Vautrin) in a convoluted and disastrous plan to regain social status. The book undergoes a massive temporal rift; the first part (of four) covers a span of six years, while the final two sections focus on just three days.

Le Cousin Pons (1847) and La Cousine Bette (1848) tell the story of Les Parents Pauvres (The Poor Relations). The conniving and wrangling over wills and inheritances reflects the expertise gained by the author as a young law clerk. Balzac's health was deteriorating by this point, making the completion of this pair of books a significant accomplishment.

Many of his novels were initially serialized, like those of Dickens. Their length was not predetermined. Illusions Perdues extends to a thousand pages after starting inauspiciously in a small-town print shop, whereas La fille aux yeux d'Or (Tiger-eyes, 1835) opens with a broad panorama of Paris but becomes a closely plotted novella of only fifty.

Work habits

Balzac's work habits are legendary - he did not work quickly, but toiled with an incredible focus and dedication.
His preferred method was to eat a light meal at five or six in the afternoon, then sleep until midnight. He then rose and wrote for many hours, fuelled by innumerable cups of black coffee. He would often work for fifteen hours or more at a stretch; he claimed to have once worked for 48 hours with only three hours of rest in the middle.

He revised obsessively, covering printer's proofs with changes and additions to be reset. Balzac sometimes repeated this process during the publication of a book, causing significant expense for both himself and the publisher. As a result, the finished product was frequently quite different from the original book. While some of his books never reached a finished state, some of those - such as Les employés (The Government Clerks, 1841) - are nonetheless noted by critics.

Although Balzac was "by turns a hermit and a vagrant", he managed to stay connected to the social world which nourished his writing. He was friends with Théophile Gautier and Pierre-Marie-Charles de Bernard du Grail de la Villette, and he knew Victor Hugo. Nevertheless, he did not spend as much time in salons and clubs as did many of his characters. "In the first place he was too busy," explains Saintsbury, "in the second he would not have been at home there. [H]e felt it was his business not to frequent society but to create it." He would, however, often spend long periods staying at Château de Saché, near Tours, the home of his friend Jean de Margonne, his mother's lover and father to her youngest child. Many of Balzac's tormented characters were conceived in the small second-floor bedroom. Today the Château is a museum dedicated to the author's life.

Marriage and later life

In February 1832, Balzac received a letter from Odessa - lacking a return address and signed only by "L'Étrangère" ("The Foreigner") - expressing sadness at the cynicism and atheism in La Peau de Chagrin and its negative portrayal of women. He responded by purchasing a classified advertisement in the Gazette de France, hoping that his secret critic would find it. Thus began a fifteen-year correspondence between Balzac and "the object of [his] sweetest dreams": Ewelina Hanska.

She was wed to a man twenty years older than herself: Waclaw Hanski, a wealthy Polish landowner living in Kiev; it was a marriage of convenience to preserve her family's fortune. In Balzac, Ewelina found a kindred spirit for her emotional and social desires, with the added benefit of feeling a connection to the glamorous capital of France. Their correspondence reveals an intriguing balance of passion, propriety and patience; Robb says it is "like an experimental novel in which the female protagonist is always trying to pull in extraneous realities but which the hero is determined to keep on course, whatever tricks he has to use."

When Waclaw Hanski died in 1841, his widow and her admirer finally had the chance to pursue their affections. Competing with the Hungarian composer Franz Liszt, Balzac visited her in St. Petersburg in 1843 and impressed himself on her heart. After a series of economic setbacks, health problems, and prohibitions from the Tsar, the couple was finally able to wed. On March 14, 1850, with Balzac's health in serious decline, they drove from their home in Wierzchownia to a church in Berdyczów and were married. The ten-hour journey to and from the ceremony took a toll on both husband and wife: her feet were too swollen to walk, and he endured severe heart trouble.

Although he married late in life, Balzac had already written two treatises on marriage: Physiologie du Mariage and Scènes de la Vie Conjugale. These works suffered from a lack of first-hand knowledge; Saintsbury points out that "Coelebs cannot talk of [marriage] with much authority." It late April the newly married couple set off for Paris. His health deteriorated on the way, and Ewelina wrote to her daughter about Balzac being "in a state of extreme weakness" and "sweating profusely". They arrived in the French capital on 20 May, his fifty-first birthday.

Five months after his wedding, on August 18, Balzac died. His mother was the only one with him when he expired; Mme. Hanska had gone to bed. He had been visited that day by Victor Hugo, who later served as pallbearer and eulogist at Balzac's funeral.

He is buried at the Cimetière du Père Lachaise in Paris. "Today," said Hugo at the ceremony, "we have a people in black because of the death of the man of talent; a nation in mourning for a man of genius." The funeral was attended by "almost every writer in Paris", including Frédérick Lemaître, Gustave Courbet, Dumas père and Dumas fils. Later, Balzac became the subject of a monumental statue by the French sculptor Auguste Rodin, which stands near the intersection of Boulevard Raspail and Boulevard Montparnasse. Rodin featured Balzac in several of his smaller sculptures as well.

Writing style

The Comédie Humaine remained unfinished at the time of his death - Balzac had plans to include numerous other books, most of which he never started. He frequently moved between works in progress, and "finished" works
were often revised between editions. This piecemeal style is reflective of the author's own life, a possible attempt to stabilize it through fiction. "The vanishing man," writes Pritchett, "who must be pursued from the rue Cassini to..Versailles, Ville d'Avray, Italy, and Vienna can construct a settled dwelling only in his work."

Realism

Balzac's extensive use of detail, especially the detail of objects, to illustrate the lives of his characters made him an early pioneer of literary realism. While he admired and drew inspiration from the Romantic style of Scottish novelist Walter Scott, Balzac sought to depict human existence through the use of particulars. In the preface to the first edition of *Scènes de la Vie privée*, he writes: "The author firmly believes that details alone will henceforth determine the merit of works..." Plentiful descriptions of décor, clothing, and possessions help breathe life into the characters. For example, Balzac's friend Hyacinthe de Latouche had knowledge of hanging wallpaper. Balzac transferred this to his descriptions of the Pension Vauquer in *Le Père Goriot*, making the wallpaper speak of the identities of those living inside.

Some critics consider Balzac's writing exemplary of naturalism - a more pessimistic and analytical form of realism, which seeks to explain human behavior as intrinsically linked with the environment. French novelist Émile Zola declared Balzac the father of the naturalist novel. Elsewhere, Zola indicated that, whereas Romantics saw the world through a colored lens, the naturalist sees through a clear glass - precisely the sort of effect Balzac attempted to achieve in his works.

Characters

Balzac sought to present his characters as real people, neither fully good nor fully evil, but fully human. "To arrive at the truth," he wrote in the preface to *Le Lys dans la vallée*, "writers use whatever literary device seems capable of giving the greatest intensity of life to their characters." "Balzac's characters," Robb notes, "were as real to him as if he were observing them in the outside world." This reality was noted by playwright Oscar Wilde, who said: "One of the greatest tragedies of my life is the death of [Illusions Perdues protagonist] Lucien de Rubempré.. It haunts me in my moments of pleasure. I remember it when I laugh."

At the same time, the characters represent a particular range of social types: the noble soldier, the scoundrel, the proud workman, the fearless spy, and the alluring mistress, among others. That Balzac was able to balance the strength of the individual against the representation of the type is evidence of the author's skill. One critic explained that "there is a center and a circumference to Balzac's world."

Balzac's use of repeating characters, moving in and out of the *Comédie*’s books, strengthens the realist representation. "When the characters reappear," notes Rogers, "they do not step out of nowhere; they emerge from the privacy of their own lives which, for an interval, we have not been allowed to see." He also used a realist technique which French novelist Marcel Proust later named "retrospective illumination", whereby a character's past is revealed long after she or he first appears.

A nearly infinite reserve of energy propels the characters in Balzac's novels. Struggling against the currents of human nature and society, they may lose more often than they win - but only rarely do they give up. This universal trait is a reflection of Balzac's own social wrangling, that of his family, and an interest in the Austrian mystic and physician Franz Mesmer, who pioneered the study of animal magnetism. Balzac spoke often of a "nervous and fluid force" between individuals, and Raphaël Valentin's decline in *La Peau de Chagrin* exemplifies the danger of withdrawing from the company of other people.

Place

Representations of the city, countryside, and building interiors are essential to Balzac's realism, often serving to paint a naturalistic backdrop before which the characters' lives follow a particular course. (This gave him a reputation as an early naturalist.) Intricate details about locations sometimes stretch for fifteen or twenty pages. As he did with the people around him, Balzac studied these places in depth, traveling to remote locations and surveying notes he had made on previous visits.

The influence of Paris permeates *La Comédie*. Nature takes a back seat to the artificial metropolis, in stark contrast to the depictions of weather and wildlife in the countryside. "If in Paris," Rogers says, "we are in a man-made region where even the seasons are forgotten, these provincial towns are nearly always pictured in their natural setting." Balzac himself said, "the streets of Paris possess human qualities and we cannot shake off the impressions
they make upon our minds.” His labyrinthine city provided a literary model used later by English novelist Charles Dickens and Russian author Fyodor Dostoevsky. The centrality of Paris in La Comédie Humaine is key to Balzac's legacy as a realist. "Realism is nothing if not urban," notes critic Peter Brooks; the scene of a young man coming into the city to find his fortune is ubiquitous in the realist novel, and appears repeatedly in Balzac's works, such as Illusions Perdues.

**Perspective**

Balzac's literary mood evolved over time from one of despondency and chagrin to one of solidarity and courage - but not optimism. La Peau de Chagrin, among his earliest novels, is a pessimistic tale of confusion and destruction. But the cynicism declined as his oeuvre progressed, and the characters of Illusions Perdues reveal sympathy for those who are pushed to one side by society. As part of the 19th century evolution of the novel as a "democratic literary form," Balzac once wrote that "les livres sont faits pour tout le monde," ("these books are written for everybody").

Balzac concerned himself overwhelmingly with the darker essence of human nature and the corrupting influence of middle and high societies. He worked hard to observe humanity in its most representative state, frequently passing incognito among the masses of Parisian society to do research. He used incidents from his life and the people around him, in works like Eugénie Grandet and Louis Lambert.

**Legacy**

Balzac had a significant influence on the writers of his time and beyond. He has been compared to - and cited as an influence on - Charles Dickens. Critic W. H. Helm calls one "the French Dickens" and the other "the English Balzac". Another critic, Richard Lehan, says that "Balzac was the bridge between the comic realism of Dickens and the naturalism of Zola."

French author Gustave Flaubert was also substantially influenced by Balzac. Praising his portrayal of society while attacking his prose style, Flaubert once wrote: "What a man he would have been had he known how to write!" While he disdained the label of "realist", Flaubert clearly took heed of Balzac's close attention to detail and unvarnished depictions of bourgeois life. This influence shows in Flaubert's work L'éducation sentimentale, which owes a debt to Balzac's Illusions Perdues. "What Balzac started," says Lehan, "Flaubert helped finish."

Marcel Proust similarly learned from the Realist example; he adored Balzac and studied his works carefully. Balzac's story Une Heure de ma Vie (An Hour of my Life, 1822), in which minute details are followed by deep personal reflections, is a clear ancestor of the style used by Proust in À la recherche du temps perdu.

Perhaps no author was more affected by Balzac than the American expatriate novelist Henry James. In 1878 James wrote with sadness about the lack of commentary attention paid to Balzac, and lavished praise on the French writer in four essays (in 1875, 1877, 1902, and 1913). "Large as Balzac is," James wrote, "he is all of one piece and he hangs perfectly together." He wrote with admiration of Balzac's attempt to portray in writing "a beast with a hundred claws." In his own novels, James chose to explore more of the psychological motives of the characters and less of the historical sweep exhibited by Balzac - a conscious style preference. "[T]he artist of the Comédie Humaine," he wrote, "is half smothered by the historian." Still, both authors used the form of the realist novel to probe the machinations of society and the myriad motives of human behavior.

Balzac's vision of a society in which class, money and personal ambition are the major players has been endorsed by critics of both left-wing and right-wing political tendencies. Marxist Friedrich Engels wrote: "I have learned more [from Balzac] than from all the professional historians, economists and statisticians put together." Balzac has received high praise from critics as diverse as Walter Benjamin and Camille Paglia. In 1970 Roland Barthes published S/Z, a detailed analysis of Balzac's story Sarrasine and a key work in structuralist literary criticism.

Balzac has also influenced popular culture. Many of his works have been made into popular films, including Les Chouans (in 1947), Le Père Goriot (BBC mini-series, in 1968), and La Cousine Bette (in 1998, starring Jessica Lange). He is significantly included in Francois Truffaut's film, "The 400 Blows" (1959). As a screenwriter, Truffaut believed Balzac and Proust to be the greatest French writers. He was also adapted into a character in Orson Scott Card's alternate history series The Tales of Alvin Maker. Balzac is presented as a crude but deeply witty and insightful man. In 2000, Chinese author Dai Sijie published Balzac et la Petite Tailleuse Chinoise (Balzac and the Little Chinese Seamstress), in which a suitcase filled with novels helps to sustain prisoners being "re-educated" during the Chinese Cultural Revolution. It was made into a film (adapted and directed by the author) in 2002.
Works

Tragic verse
- *Cromwell* (1819)

Incomplete at time of death
- *Le Corsaire* (opera)
- Sténie
- Falthurne
- Corsino

Published pseudonymously
As "Lord R'Hoone", in collaboration
- *L'Héritière de Birague* (1822)
- *Jean-Louis* (1822)
As "Horace de Saint-Aubin"
- *Clotilde de Lusignan* (1822)
- *Le Centenaire* (1822)
- *Le Vicaire des Ardennes* (1822)
- *La Dernière Fée* (1823)
- *Annette et le Criminal (Argon le Pirate)* (1824)
- *Wann-Chlore* (1826)

Published anonymously
- *Du Droit d'aînesse* (1824)
- *Histoire impartiale des Jésuites* (1824)
- *Code des gens honnêtes* (1826)

Selected titles from *La Comédie humaine*
- *Les Chouans* (1829)
- *Sarrasine* (1830)
- *La Peau de chagrin* (1830)
- *Le Colonel Chabert* (1832)
- *La Fille aux yeux d'or* (1833)
- *Eugénie Grandet* (1833)
- *Le Contrat de mariage* (1835)
- *Le Père Goriot* (1835)
- *Le Lys dans la vallée* (1835)
- *Illusions perdues* (I, 1837; II, 1839; III, 1843)
- *La Cousine Bette* (1846)
- *Le Cousin Pons* (1847)
- *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes* (1847)

Plays
- *L'École des ménages* (1839)
- *Vautrin* (1839)
- *Les Ressources de Quinola* (1842)
- *Paméla Figaud* (1842)
- *La Marâtre* (1848)
- Mercadet ou le faiseur (1848)

  Tales

- Contes drolatiques (1832-37)
Early life

Buchan was the eldest child in a family of four sons and a daughter (the novelist Anna Buchan) born to a Free Church of Scotland minister, also named John Buchan (1847-1911), and his wife Helen Jane (1857-1937), daughter of John Masterton, a farmer, of Broughton Green, near Peebles. Although born in Perth, he grew up in Fife and spent many summer holidays with his grandparents in Broughton in the Borders, developing a love of walking and the Borders scenery and wildlife that is often featured in his novels. One example is Sir Edward Leithen, the hero of a number of Buchan's books, whose name is borrowed from the Leithen Water, a tributary of the River Tweed. Broughton village is also home to the John Buchan Centre and makes up one end of the John Buchan Way.

After attending Hutchesons' Grammar School, Buchan won a scholarship to the University of Glasgow where he studied Classics and wrote poetry and first became a published author. He then studied Literae Humaniores at Brasenose College, Oxford, winning the Newdigate prize for poetry. He had a genius for friendship which he retained all his life. His friends at Oxford included Hilaire Belloc, Raymond Asquith and Aubrey Herbert.

Life as an author and politician

Buchan at first entered into a career in law in 1901, but almost immediately moved into politics, becoming private secretary to British colonial administrator Alfred Milner, who was high commissioner for South Africa, Governor of Cape Colony and colonial administrator of Transvaal and the Orange Free State-Buchan gained an acquaintance with the country that was to feature prominently in his writing. On his return to London, he became a partner in a publishing company while he continued to write books. Buchan married Susan Charlotte Grosvenor (1882-1977), cousin of the Duke of Westminster, on July 15, 1907. Together they had four children, two of whom would spend most of their lives in Canada.

In 1910, he wrote Prester John, the first of his adventure novels, set in South Africa. In 1911, he first suffered from duodenal ulcers, an illness he would give to one of his characters in later books. He also entered politics running as a Tory candidate for a Border constituency. During this time Buchan supported Free Trade, woman's suffrage, national insurance and curtailing the power of the House of Lords. However he opposed the Liberal reforms of 1905-1915 and what he considered the "class hatred" fostered by demagogic Liberals like David Lloyd George.

During World War I, he wrote for the War Propaganda Bureau and was a correspondent for The Times in France. In 1915, he published his most famous book The Thirty-Nine Steps, a spy thriller set just before the outbreak of World War I, featuring his hero Richard Hannay, who was based on a friend from South African days, Edmund Ironside. The following year he published a sequel Greemmantle. In 1916, he joined the British Army Intelligence Corps where as a 2nd Lieutenant he wrote speeches and communiques for Sir Douglas Haig.

In 1917, he returned to Britain where he became Director of Information under Lord Beaverbrook. After the war he began to write on historical subjects as well as continuing to write thrillers and historical novels. Buchan's 100
works include nearly 30 novels and seven collections of short stories. He also wrote biographies of Sir Walter Scott, Caesar Augustus, Oliver Cromwell and was awarded the James Tait Black Memorial Prize for his biography of James Graham, 1st Marquess of Montrose, but the most famous of his books were the spy thrillers and it is probably for these that he is now best remembered. The "last Buchan" (as Graham Greene entitled his appreciative review) is *Sick Heart River* (American title: *Mountain Meadow*), 1941, in which a dying protagonist confronts in the Canadian wilderness the questions of the meaning of life.

The Thirty-Nine Steps was filmed (much altered) by Alfred Hitchcock in 1935; later versions followed in 1959 and 1978.

In the mid-1920s Buchan was living near Oxford - Robert Graves, who was living on Boar's Hill whilst attending Oxford University, mentions Colonel Buchan recommending him for a lecturing position as a lecturer at the newly founded Cairo University in Egypt. Buchan became president of the Scottish Historical Society. He was twice Lord High Commissioner to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland and in a 1927 by-election was elected a Scottish Unionist MP for the Scottish Universities. Politically he was of the Unionist-Nationalist Tradition that believed in Scotland's promotion as a nation within the British Empire and once remarked "I believe every Scotsman should be a Scottish nationalist. If it could be proved that a Scottish parliament were desirable..Scotsmen should support it". The effects of depression in Scotland and the subsequent high emigration also led him to say "We do not want to be like the Greeks, powerful and prosperous wherever we settle, but with a dead Greece behind us" (Hansard, November 24, 1932). During the early months of the Second World War Buchan read John Morley's *Life of Gladstone*, which had a profound impact on him. He believed Gladstone had taught people to combat materialism, complacency and authoritarianism; he wrote to H. A. L. Fisher, Stair Gillon and Gilbert Murray that he was "becoming a Gladstonian Liberal". The insightful quotation "It's a great life, if you don't weaken" is also famously attributed to him. Another memorable quote is "No great cause is ever lost or won, The battle must always be renewed, And the creed must always be restated."

Buchan's branch of the Free Church of Scotland joined the Church of Scotland in 1929. He was an active elder of St Columba's Church, London and of the Oxford Presbyterian parish. In 1933-4 he was lord high commissioner to the church's general assembly.

**Life in Canada**

In 1935 he became Governor General of Canada and was created Baron Tweedsmuir of Elsfieild in the County of Oxford. Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King had wanted him to go to Canada as a commoner, but King George V insisted on being represented by a peer.

Buchan's writing continued even after he was appointed Governor General. His later books included novels and histories and his views of Canada. He also wrote an autobiography, *Memory Hold-the-Door*, while Governor-General. His wife was a writer, producing many books and plays as Susan Buchan. While pursuing his own writing career, he also promoted the development of a distinctly Canadian culture. In 1936, encouraged by Lady Tweedsmuir, he founded the Governor General's Awards, still some of Canada's premier literary awards.

Lady Tweedsmuir was active in promoting literacy in Canada. She used Rideau Hall as a distribution centre for 40,000 books, which were sent out to readers in remote areas of the west. Her programme was known as the "Lady Tweedsmuir Prairie Library Scheme". Together, Lord and Lady Tweedsmuir established the first proper library at Rideau Hall.

Tweedsmuir took his responsibilities in Canada seriously and tried to make the office of Governor General relevant to the lives of ordinary Canadians. In his own words, "a Governor General is in a unique position for it is his duty to know the whole of Canada and all the various types of her people".

Tweedsmuir travelled throughout Canada, including the Arctic regions. He took every opportunity to speak to Canadians and to encourage them to develop their own distinct identity. He wanted to build national unity by diminishing the religious and linguistic barriers that divided the country. Tweedsmuir was aware of the suffering experienced by many Canadians due to the Depression and often wrote with compassion about their difficulties.

Tweedsmuir was recognized by Glasgow, St. Andrews, McGill, Toronto and Montréal Universities, all of which conferred on him the degree of Doctor of Laws, and he was made an Honorary Fellow and an Honorary D.C.L. of Oxford.

When King George V died in 1936, the front of Rideau Hall was covered in black crepe and Lord Tweedsmuir cancelled all entertaining during the period of mourning. The new heir to the throne, King Edward VIII, soon abdicated to marry Wallis Simpson - creating a crisis for the monarchy. However, when the new King, George VI and Queen Elizabeth travelled throughout Canada in 1939; the regal visit - the first visit to Canada by a reigning
Sovereign - was extremely popular.

Like many people of his time, the experience of the First World War convinced Tweedsmuir of the horrors of armed conflict and he worked with both United States President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Mackenzie King in trying to avert the ever-growing threat of another world war.

While shaving on February 6, 1940, Tweedsmuir had a stroke and injured his head badly in the fall. He received the best possible care - the famous Dr. Wilder Penfield of the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital, operated twice - but the injury proved fatal. On February 11, just 10 months before his term of office was to expire, Tweedsmuir died. Prime Minister Mackenzie King reflected the loss that all Canadians felt when he read the following words over the radio, "In the passing of His Excellency, the people of Canada have lost one of the greatest and most revered of their Governors General, and a friend who, from the day of his arrival in this country, dedicated his life to their service."

This was the first time a Governor General had died during his term of office since Confederation. After the lying-in-state in the Senate Chamber, a state funeral for Lord Tweedsmuir was held at St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church in Ottawa. His ashes were returned to England on the cruiser HMS Orion for final burial at Elsfield, where he had bought the Manor in 1920.

**Reputation**

In recent years in common with some of his contemporaries, Buchan's reputation has been tarnished by the lack of political correctness, e.g. the anti-semitism and racism expressed in some passages from his novels, such as the opening chapter of The Thirty-Nine Steps. The view in 'The Thirty-Nine Steps' that 'the Jews are behind it all' is actually expressed by a minor character, the American Scudder. This causes the main character, Richard Hannay, to doubt Scudder's sanity; another character in the book later says Scudder is a little cracked about the Jews.

It should also be noted that he was active on behalf of the Jews during the 1930s and, for this reason, his name appeared on Adolf Hitler's "hit list".

A thoroughly engaging storyteller, Buchan's work stands the test of time, and he is currently undergoing a resurgence in popularity.

Buchan had a reputation for discretion. He was involved with the Intelligence Corps as a propagandist during World War I and may have had an involvement with British intelligence later; he is cited as having some involvement during the years leading to the Second World War by Canadian-born British spymaster William Stephenson.

In the 1930s Buchan gave financial and moral support to the poor, young academic Roberto Weiss, as Buchan was fascinated by the classical antiquity period Weiss studied, and wished to support this.

His autobiography Memory Hold-the-Door (published in the United States as Pilgrim's Way) was said to be John F. Kennedy's favourite book although a list given to Life magazine in 1961 quoted Montrose at the head of the list.

John Buchan is commemorated in Makars' Court, outside The Writers' Museum, Lawnmarket, Edinburgh.

Selections for Makars' Court are made by The Writers' Museum; The Saltire Society; The Scottish Poetry Library.

**Bibliography of principal works**

**Fiction**

- 1898 John Burnet of Barns
- 1899 Grey Weather (stories and poems)
- 1899 A Lost Lady of Old Years
- 1900 The Half-Hearted
- 1902 The Watcher by the Threshold (stories)
- 1906 A Lodge in the Wilderness
- 1910 Prester John
- 1912 The Moon Endureth (stories and poems)
- 1915 Salute to Adventurers
- 1915 The Thirty-Nine Steps
- 1916 The Power House
- 1916 Greenmantle
1919 Mr Standfast
1921 The Path of the King
1922 Huntingtower
1923 Midwinter
1924 The Three Hostages
1925 John Macnab
1926 The Dancing Floor
1927 Witch Wood
1928 The Runagates Club (stories 1913-28)
1929 The Courts of the Morning
1930 Castle Gay
1931 The Blanket of the Dark
1932 The Gap in the Curtain
1932 The Magic Walking Stick (for children)
1933 A Prince of the Captivity
1934 The Free Fishers
1935 The House of the Four Winds
1936 The Island of Sheep
1941 Sick Heart River (also published as Mountain Meadow)
1941 The Long Traverse (also published as Lake of Gold)

Non-fiction

1896 Scholar-Gipsies (essays)
1903 The African Colony
1905 The Law Relating to the Taxation of Foreign Income
1908 Some Eighteenth Century Byways (essays and articles)
1911 Sir Walter Raleigh
1912 What the Home Rule Bill Means
1913 The Marquis of Montrose
1913 Andrew Jameson, Lord Ardwall
1915 Britain's War by Land
1915 The Achievement of France
1915 Ordeal by Marriage
1916 The Future of the War
1916 The Battle of the Somme, First Phase
1916 The Purpose of War
1916 The Battle of Jutland
1917 Poems, Scots and English
1917 The Battle of the Somme, Second Phase
1919 These for Remembrance
1919 The Battle Honours of Scotland 1914-1918
1920 The History of the South African Forces in France
1920 Francis and Riversdale Grenfell
1920 The Long Road to Victory
1921-2 A History of the Great War
1922 A Book of Escapes and Hurried Journeys
1923 The Last Secrets (essays and articles)
1923 A History of English Literature
1923 Days to Remember
1924 Some Notes on Sir Walter Scott
1925 The History of the Royal Scots Fusiliers 1678-1918
1925 The Man and the Book: Sir Walter Scott
1925 Two Ordeals of Democracy
1926 Homilies and Recreations (essays and addresses)
1930 The Kirk in Scotland (with George Adam Smith)
• 1930 Montrose and Leadership
• 1930 Lord Rosebery, 1847-1929
• 1931 The Novel and the Fairy Tale
• 1932 Julius Caesar
• 1932 Andrew Lang and the Borders
• 1933 The Massacre of Glencoe
• 1933 The Margins of Life
• 1934 Gordon at Khartoum
• 1934 Oliver Cromwell
• 1935 The King's Grace
• 1937 Augustus
• 1938 The Interpreter's House
• 1938 Presbyterianism Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow
• 1940 Memory Hold-the-Door (published as Pilgrim's Way in the United States)
• 1940 Comments and Characters
• 1940 Canadian Occasions

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Edmund Clerihew Bentley

E. C. Bentley (July 10, 1875 - March 30, 1956), was a popular English novelist and humorist of the early twentieth century, and the inventor of the clerihew, an irregular form of humorous verse on biographical topics.

Born in London, and educated at St Paul's School and Merton College, Oxford, Bentley worked as a journalist on several newspapers, including the Daily Telegraph. His first published collection of poetry, titled Biography for Beginners (1905), popularized the clerihew form; it was followed by two other collections, in 1929 and 1939. His detective novel, Trent's Last Case (1913), was much praised, numbering Dorothy L. Sayers among its admirers, and with its labyrinthine and mystifying plotting can be seen as the first truly modern mystery. The success of the work inspired him, after 23 years, to write a sequel, Trent's Own Case (1936). There was also a book of Trent short stories, Trent Intervenes. Several of his books were reprinted in the early 2000s by House of Stratus.

From 1936 until 1949 Bentley was president of the Detection Club and contributed to both of their radio serials broadcast in 1930 and 1931 and published in 1983 as The Scoop and Behind The Screen. He died at the age of 80 in 1956. His son Nicolas Bentley was a famous illustrator.

Go to Start | This article uses material from: -1-
Gilbert Keith Chesterton (May 29, 1874-June 14, 1936) was an influential English writer of the early 20th century. His prolific and diverse output included journalism, philosophy, poetry, biography, Christian apologetics, fantasy, and detective fiction.

Chesterton has been called the "prince of paradox." He wrote in an off-hand, whimsical prose studded with startling formulations. For example: "Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it." He is one of the few Christian thinkers who are equally admired and quoted by both liberal and conservative Christians, and indeed by many non-Christians. Chesterton's own theological and political views were far too nuanced to fit comfortably under the "liberal" or "conservative" banner. And in his own words he cast aspersions on the labels saying, "The whole modern world has divided itself into Conservatives and Progressives. The business of Progressives is to go on making mistakes. The business of the Conservatives is to prevent the mistakes from being corrected." He routinely referred to himself as an "orthodox Christian," and came to identify such a position with Roman Catholicism more and more, eventually converting to the Church of Rome.

He is not to be confused with his politically radical cousin, A. K. Chesterton.

Life

Born in Campden Hill in Kensington in London, Chesterton was educated at St Paul's School. He attended the Slade School of Art in order to become an illustrator and also took literature classes at University College London but did not complete a degree at either. In 1896 Chesterton began working for the London publisher Redway, and T. Fisher Unwin, where he remained until 1902. During this period he also undertook his first journalistic work as a freelance art and literary critic. In 1901 he married Frances Blogg, to whom he remained married for the rest of his life. In 1902 he was given a weekly opinion column in the Daily News, followed in 1905 by a weekly column in The Illustrated London News, for which he would continue to write for the next thirty years.

According to Chesterton, as a young man he became fascinated with the occult and, along with his brother Cecil, experimented with Ouija boards. However, as he grew older, he became an increasingly orthodox Christian, culminating in his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 1922.

Chesterton was a large man, standing 6 feet 4 inches (1.93 m) and weighing around 21 stone (134 kg or 294 lb). His girth gave rise to a famous anecdote. During World War I a lady in London asked why he wasn't 'out at the Front'; he replied, 'If you go round to the side, you will see that I am.' On another occasion he remarked to his friend George Bernard Shaw, 'To look at you, anyone would think there was a famine in England.' Shaw retorted, 'To look at you, anyone would think you caused it.'

He usually wore a cape and a crumpled hat, with a swordstick in hand, and had a cigar hanging out of his mouth. Chesterton often forgot where he was supposed to be going and would miss the train that was supposed to take him there. It is reported that on several occasions he sent a telegram to his wife from some distant (and incorrect) location, writing such things as "Am at Market Harborough. Where ought I to be?" to which she would reply, "Home."

Chesterton loved to debate, often engaging in friendly public disputes with such men as George Bernard Shaw, H. G. Wells, Bertrand Russell and Clarence Darrow. According to his autobiography, he and Shaw played cowboys in a silent movie that was never released.

Chesterton died on 14 June 1936, at his home in Beaconsfield, Buckinghamshire. The homily at Chesterton's Requiem Mass in Westminster Cathedral, London, was delivered by Ronald Knox. He is buried in Beaconsfield in the Catholic Cemetery. Chesterton's estate was probated at 28,389 pounds sterling, approximately equivalent to USD
2.6 million in modern terms.

**Writing**

Chesterton wrote around 80 books, several hundred poems, some 200 short stories, 4000 essays, and several plays. He was a literary and social critic, historian, playwright, novelist, Catholic theologian and apologist, debater, and mystery writer. He was a columnist for the *Daily News*, the *Illustrated London News*, and his own paper, *G. K.’s Weekly*; he also wrote articles for the Encyclopedia Britannica. His best-known character is the priest-detective Father Brown, who appeared only in short stories, while *The Man Who Was Thursday* is arguably his best-known novel. He was a convinced Christian long before he was received into the Catholic church, and Christian themes and symbolism appear in much of his writing. In the United States, his writings on distributism were popularized through *The American Review*, published by Seward Collins in New York.

Much of his poetry is little known, though well reflecting his beliefs and opinions. The best written is probably *Lepanto*, with *The Rolling English Road* the most familiar, and *The Secret People* perhaps the most quoted (“we are the people of England; and we have not spoken yet”). Another excellent poem is *A Ballade of Suicide*.

Of his nonfiction, *Charles Dickens* (1903) has received some of the broadest-based praise. According to Ian Ker (*The Catholic Revival in English Literature, 1845-1961*, 2003), "In Chesterton's eyes Dickens belongs to Merry, not Puritan, England" (see Merry England); Ker treats in Chapter 4 of that book Chesterton's thought as largely growing out of his true appreciation of Dickens, a somewhat shop-soiled property in the view of other literary opinions of the time.

Chesterton's writings consistently displayed wit and a sense of humour. He employed paradox, while making serious comments on the world, government, politics, economics, philosophy, theology and many other topics. When *The Times* invited several eminent authors to write essays on the theme "What's Wrong with the World?" Chesterton's contribution took the form of a letter:

> Dear Sirs,
> I am.
> Sincerely yours,
> G. K. Chesterton

Typically, Chesterton here combined wit with a serious point (that of human sinfulness) and self-deprecation.

Much of Chesterton's work remains in print, including collections of the Father Brown detective stories. Ignatius Press is currently in the process of publishing a Complete Works.

**Views and contemporaries**

The roots of Chesterton's approach have been taken to be in two earlier strands in English literature, Dickens being one. In the use of paradox, against complacent acceptance of things as they are, he is often categorised with Oscar Wilde and George Bernard Shaw, whom he knew well, as Victorian satirists and social commentators in a tradition coming also from Samuel Butler.

Chesterton's style and thinking were all his own, however, and his conclusions were often diametrically opposed to those of his predecessors and contemporaries. In his book *Heretics*, Chesterton has this to say of Oscar Wilde:

"The same lesson [of the pessimistic pleasure-seeker] was taught by the very powerful and very desolate philosophy of Oscar Wilde. It is the carpe diem religion; but the carpe diem religion is not the religion of happy people, but of very unhappy people. Great joy does not gather the rosebuds while it may; its eyes are fixed on the immortal rose which Dante saw."

More briefly, and with a closer approximation of Wilde's own style, he writes in *Orthodoxy* concerning the necessity of making symbolic sacrifices for the gift of creation:

"Oscar Wilde said that sunsets were not valued because we could not pay for sunsets. But Oscar Wilde was wrong; we can pay for sunsets. We can pay for them by not being Oscar Wilde."

Chesterton and George Bernard Shaw were famous friends and enjoyed their arguments and discussions. Although rarely in agreement, they both maintained good-will towards and respect for each other. However, in his writing, Chesterton expressed himself very plainly on where they differed and why. In *Heretics* he writes of Shaw:

"After belabouring a great many people for a great many years for being unprogressive, Mr. Shaw has discovered, with characteristic sense, that it is very doubtful whether any existing human being with two legs can be progressive at all. Having come to doubt whether humanity can be combined with progress, most people, easily pleased, would have elected to abandon progress and remain with humanity. Mr. Shaw, not being easily pleased,
decides to throw over humanity with all its limitations and go in for progress for its own sake. If man, as we know him, is incapable of the philosophy of progress, Mr. Shaw asks, not for a new kind of philosophy, but for a new kind of man. It is rather as if a nurse had tried a rather bitter food for some years on a baby, and on discovering that it was not suitable, should not throw away the food and ask for a new food, but throw the baby out of window, and ask for a new baby.”

Shaw represented the new school of thought, humanism, which was rising at the time. Chesterton’s views, on the other hand, became increasingly more polarized towards the church. In Orthodoxy he writes:

"The worship of will is the negation of will... If Mr. Bernard Shaw comes up to me and says, "Will something," that is tantamount to saying, "I do not mind what you will," and that is tantamount to saying, "I have no will in the matter." You cannot admire will in general, because the essence of will is that it is particular."

This style of argumentation is what Chesterton refers to as using 'Uncommon Sense'—that is, that the thinkers and popular philosophers of the day, though very clever, were saying things that appeared, to him, to be nonsensical. This is illustrated again in Orthodoxy:

"Thus when Mr. H. G. Wells says (as he did somewhere), "All chairs are quite different," he utters not merely a misstatement, but a contradiction in terms. If all chairs were quite different, you could not call them "all chairs."

Or, again from Orthodoxy:

"The wild worship of lawlessness and the materialist worship of law end in the same void. Nietzsche scales staggering mountains, but he turns up ultimately in Tibet. He sits down beside Tolstoy in the land of nothing and Nirvana. They are both helpless—one because he must not grasp anything, and the other because he must not let go of anything. The Tolstoyan’s will is frozen by a Buddhist instinct that all special actions are evil. But the Nietzsche’s will is quite equally frozen by his view that all special actions are good; for if all special actions are good, none of them are special. They stand at the crossroads, and one hates all the roads and the other likes all the roads. The result is—well, some things are not hard to calculate. They stand at the crossroads."

"All healthy men, ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, know that there is a certain fury in sex that we cannot afford to inflame and that a certain mystery and awe must forever surround it if we are to remain sane."

Incisive comments and observations occurred almost impulsively in Chesterton’s writing. In the middle of his epic poem The Ballad of the White Horse he famously states:

For the great Gaels of Ireland
Are the men that God made mad,
For all their wars are merry,
And all their songs are sad.

**The Chesterbelloc**

Chesterton is often associated with his close friend, the poet and essayist Hilaire Belloc. Shaw coined the name Chesterbelloc for their partnership, and this stuck. Though they were very different men, they shared many beliefs; Chesterton eventually joined Belloc in his natal Catholicism, and both voiced criticisms towards capitalism and socialism. They instead espoused a third way: distributism.

G. K.'s Weekly, which occupied much of Chesterton’s energy in the last 15 years of his life, was the successor to Belloc's New Witness, taken over from Cecil Chesterton, Gilbert's brother who died in World War I.

Both Chesterton and Belloc have faced accusations of anti-Semitism during their lifetimes and subsequently. Their criticisms of the “international Jewish banking families’ are some of the most important reasons for these accusations. For example, G.K., Belloc, and G.K.’s brother Cecil were vehement critics of the Isaacs, who were involved in the Marconi scandal in the years before World War I. George Orwell accused Chesterton of being guilty of "endless tirades against Jews, which he thrust into stories and essays upon the flimsiest pretexts."

In *The New Jerusalem*, Chesterton made it clear that he believed that there was a "Jewish Problem" in Europe, in the sense that he believed that Jewish culture (not Jewish ethnicity/Semitism) separated itself from the nationalities of Europe. He suggested the formation of a Jewish homeland as a solution, and was later invited to Palestine by Jewish Zionists who saw him as an ally in their cause. In 1934, after the Nazi Party took power in Germany he wrote that:

"In our early days Hilaire Belloc and myself were accused of being uncompromising Anti-Semites. Today, although I still think there is a Jewish problem, I am appalled by the Hitlerite atrocities. They have absolutely no reason or logic behind them. It is quite obviously the expedient of a man who has been driven to seeking a scapegoat, and has found with relief the most famous scapegoat in European history, the Jewish people."

The Wiener Library (London's archive on anti-semitism and Holocaust history) has defended Chesterton against
the charge of anti-Semitism: "he was not an enemy, and when the real testing time came along he showed what side he was on."

Chesterton condemned the Nuremberg Laws, and he died in 1936, as the Hitlerite antisemitic measures were temporarily decreased due to the Berlin Olympics, long before lethal persecution by the Nazis would start.

### List of major works

- Charles Dickens (1903)
- *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* (1904)
- Heretics (1905)
- *The Man Who Was Thursday* (1907)
- Orthodoxy (1908)
- *The Ballad Of The White Horse* (1911)
- Father Brown short stories (detective fiction)
- *The Everlasting Man* (1925)

### Influence

- Chesterton's *The Everlasting Man* contributed to C. S. Lewis's conversion to Christianity. In a letter to Sheldon Vanauken (December 14, 1950) Lewis calls the book "the best popular apologetic I know", and to Rhonda Bodle he wrote (December 31, 1947) "the [very] best popular defence of the full Christian position I know is G. K. Chesterton *The Everlasting Man." The book was also cited in a list of 10 books that "most shaped his vocational attitude and philosophy of life".
- Chesterton's biography of Charles Dickens was largely responsible for creating a popular revival for Dickens's work as well as a serious reconsideration of Dickens by scholars. Considered by T. S. Eliot, Peter Ackroyd, and others, to be the best book on Dickens ever written.
- Chesterton's writings have been praised by such authors as Ernest Hemingway, Graham Greene, Frederick Buechner, Evelyn Waugh, Jorge Luis Borges, Gabriel García Márquez, Karel Capek, David Dark, Paul Claudel, Dorothy L. Sayers, Agatha Christie, Andrew Greeley, Sigrid Undset, Ronald Knox, Kingsley Amis, W. H. Auden, Anthony Burgess, E. F. Schumacher, Orson Welles, Dorothy Day and Franz Kafka.
- Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* is considered a religious classic by many. Philip Yancey said that if he were "stranded on a desert island.. and could choose only one book apart from the Bible, I may well select Chesterton's own spiritual autobiography, Orthodoxy."
- Chesterton's novel *The Man Who Was Thursday* inspired the Irish Republican military leader Michael Collins with the idea: 'if you didn't seem to be hiding nobody hunted you out.'
- His physical appearance and apparently some of his mannerisms were a direct inspiration for the character of Dr. Gideon Fell, a well-known fictional detective created in the early 1930s by the Anglo-American mystery writer John Dickson Carr.
- The author Neil Gaiman has stated that *The Napoleon of Notting Hill* was an important influence on his own book *Neverwhere*. Gaiman also based the character Gilbert, from the comic book The Sandman, on Chesterton, as well as featuring a quotation from "The Man who was October", a book Chesterton wrote "only in dreams", at the end of Season of Mists. Gaiman's novel *Good Omens*, co-authored with Terry Pratchett is dedicated "to the memory of G.K. Chesterton: A man who knew what was going on."
- Ingmar Bergman considered Chesterton's little known play *Magic* to be one of his favourites and even staged a production in Swedish. Later he reworked *Magic* into his movie *The Magician* in 1958.
- The Third Way (UK) campaigns for the widespread ownership of property are inspired by the economic system Chesterton espoused: Distributism.
- *The Innocence of Father Brown* is cited by Guillermo Martinez as one of the inspirations for his thriller *The Oxford Murders*. Martinez explicitly quotes from Chesterton's story in Chapter 25 of *The Oxford Murders*. 

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Robert Erskine Childers

Early life

Childers was born in London to a Protestant family originally from Glendalough, Ireland. His father was English and his mother Irish, but he was orphaned as a child and raised by an uncle in County Wicklow. He was sent to Haileybury College and then studied at Trinity College, Cambridge and after graduation took a job in 1895 as a clerk in the House of Commons. He was an enthusiastic yachtsman, owning several boats during his life and sailing them regularly. At this point in his career he was a supporter of the British Empire.

Military career

On the outbreak of the Second Boer War in 1899 he volunteered for action, serving as an officer in the City Imperial Volunteers, while he was part of the Honourable Artillery Company in the British Army. He was wounded in South Africa and invalided back to Britain. On his return he wrote the novel *The Riddle of the Sands* which was published in 1903. Based on his own sailing trips along the German coast, it predicted war with Germany and called for British preparedness. Widely popular, the book has never gone out of print.

It has been called the first spy novel (a claim challenged by advocates of Rudyard Kipling's *Kim*, published two years earlier), and enjoyed immense popularity in the years before World War I. It was an extremely influential book: Winston Churchill later credited it as a major reason that the Admiralty decided to establish naval bases at Invergordon, Rosyth on the Firth of Forth and Scapa Flow in Orkney.

In 1903, Childers visited the United States. There he met and married Mollie Osgood, who shared his love of sailing. The two received a small sailing yacht, the *Asgard*, as a wedding gift.

He wrote Volume V of the Times' *History of the War in South Africa* (1907), which drew attention to British errors in that war and praised the tactics of the Boer guerrillas. He also wrote two books on cavalry warfare based on his experiences, *War and the Arme Blanche* (1910) and the *German Influence on British Cavalry* (1911). Both books were strongly critical of the British Army.

Home Rule

Around this time Childers became increasingly attracted to Irish Nationalism and became an advocate of Home Rule. He resigned his post at the House of Commons in 1910 in order to campaign for this cause, writing *The Form and Purpose of Home Rule* in 1912. In July 1914 he and his wife even smuggled German arms to Howth, County Dublin, in their yacht *Asgard*, days before the outbreak of World War I. These weapons would later arm the Irish Volunteers during the Easter Rising of 1916. This had been organised in response to the Larne gunrunning of the Ulster Volunteer Force. The remainder of the consignment of guns purchased in Germany for the Irish Volunteers...
was landed a week later at Kilcoole, county Wicklow by Sir Thomas Myles from his own yacht, the Chotah.

With the start of war, Childers joined the Royal Navy as an Intelligence Officer and was active in the North Sea and the Dardanelles. He was awarded the DSO and promoted to Lieutenant Commander in 1916.

However the violent suppression of the Easter Rising had angered Childers, and after the war he moved to Dublin to become fully involved in the struggle against British rule. He joined Sinn Féin, forming a close association with Éamon de Valera and Michael Collins.

In 1919 he was made Director of Publicity for the First Irish Parliament and represented the Irish nationalists at the Versailles conference in Paris. In 1920 Childers published Military Rule in Ireland, a strong attack on British policy. In 1921 he was elected (unopposed) to the Dáil as member for Wicklow and published the pamphlet Is Ireland a Danger to England?, which attacked the British prime minister, David Lloyd George. He became editor of the Irish Bulletin after the arrest of Desmond FitzGerald.

Civil War and death

Childers was secretary-general of the Irish delegation that negotiated the Anglo-Irish Treaty with the British government. He stayed at the delegation headquarters in Hans Place throughout the period of the negotiations, 11 October-6 December 1921. Childers became vehemently opposed to the final draft of the agreement, particularly the clauses that required Irish leaders to take an Oath of Allegiance to the British king. The Treaty bitterly divided Sinn Féin and the IRA, and Ireland slipped into civil war. Soon Childers was regarded as a traitor not only by the British, but by the pro-Treaty Free State government in Dublin, which was under increasing pressure from Winston Churchill and the British government to take violent reprisal measures against the anti-treaty forces and their leaders.

Said to be the inspiration behind the irregulars' propaganda, Childers was hunted by Free State soldiers and had to travel secretly. The ambush death of Michael Collins intensified the desire of Free State authorities to exact retribution, and in September 1922 the Irish Dáil introduced the Emergency Powers legislation, establishing martial law powers and new capital offences for the carrying of firearms. In November of the same year, Childers was arrested by Free State forces at his home, Glendalough, in County Wicklow, while travelling to meet De Valera. He was tried by a military court on the pretext of possessing a small-calibre automatic pistol on his person in violation of the Emergency Powers Resolution. Ironically, the pistol was alleged to be a gift from Michael Collins before the latter swore allegiance to the Free State. Childers was convicted by the military court and sentenced to death. While his appeal of the sentence was still pending, Childers was executed by firing squad at the Beggar's Bush Barracks in Dublin. He is buried in Glasnevin Cemetery.

Before his execution, in a spirit of reconciliation, Childers obtained a promise from his then 16-year-old son, the future President Erskine Hamilton Childers, to seek out and shake the hand of every man who had signed his father's death warrant. Childers himself shook hands with each member of the firing squad that was about to execute him. His last words, spoken to them, were (characteristically) in the nature of a joke: "Take a step or two forward, lads. It will be easier that way."

Winston Churchill, who had actively pressured Michael Collins and the Free State government to crush the rebellion by armed force, expressed the British view of Childers at the time: "No man has done more harm or done more genuine malice or endeavoured to bring a greater curse upon the common people of Ireland than this strange being, actuated by a deadly and malignant hatred for the land of his birth." In Ireland, however, many saw Childers's execution as politically-motivated revenge, an expedient method of halting the continuing flow of anti-British political texts for which Childers was widely acknowledged.

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Agatha Christie

Biography | Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple | In popular culture | List of works | Novels | Collections of Short Stories | Novels written as Mary Westmacott | Plays | Radio Plays | Television Plays | Nonfiction | Other published works | Co-authored works

Agatha Mary Clarissa, Lady Mallowan, DBE (15 September 1890 - 12 January 1976), mainly known as Agatha Christie, was an English crime fiction writer. She also wrote romance novels under the name Mary Westmacott, but is best remembered for her 80 detective novels and her successful West End theatre plays. Her works, particularly featuring detectives Hercule Poirot or Miss Jane Marple, have given her the title the 'Queen of Crime' and made her one of the most important and innovative writers in the development of the genre.

Christie has been called - by the Guinness Book of World Records, among others - the best-selling writer of books of all time, and the best-selling writer of any kind second only to William Shakespeare. An estimated one billion copies of her novels have been sold in English, and another billion in 103 other languages. As an example of her broad appeal, she is the all-time best-selling author in France, with over 40 million copies sold in French (as of 2003) versus 22 million for Emile Zola, the nearest contender.

Her stage play, The Mousetrap, holds the record for the longest run ever in London, opening at the Ambassadors Theatre on 25 November 1952, and as of 2007 is still running after more than 20,000 performances. In 1955, Christie was the first recipient of the Mystery Writers of America's highest honor, the Grand Master Award, and in the same year, Witness for the Prosecution was given an Edgar Award by the MWA, for Best Play. Most of her books and short stories have been filmed, some many times over (Murder on the Orient Express, Death on the Nile, 4.50 From Paddington), and many have been adapted for television, radio, video games and comics.

In 1998, the control of the rights to most of the literary works of Agatha Christie passed to the company Chorion, when it purchased a majority 64% share in Agatha Christie Limited.

Biography

Agatha Christie was born as Agatha Mary Clarissa Miller in Torquay, Devon, to an American father and an English mother. She never held or claimed United States citizenship. Her father was Frederick Miller, a rich American stockbroker, and her mother was Clara Boehmer, a British aristocrat. Christie had a sister, Margaret Frary Miller (1879-1950), called Madge, eleven years her senior, and a brother, Louis Montant Miller (1880-1929), called Monty, ten years older than Christie. Her father died when she was very young. Her mother resorted to teaching her at home, encouraging her to write at a very young age. At the age of 16 she went to a school in Paris to study singing and piano.

Her first marriage, an unhappy one, was in 1914 to Colonel Archibald Christie, an aviator in the Royal Flying Corps. The couple had one daughter, Rosalind Hicks, and divorced in 1928.

During World War I she worked at a hospital and then a pharmacy, a job that influenced her work; many of the murders in her books are carried out with poison. (See also cyanide, ricin, and thallium.)

On 8 December 1926, while living in Sunningdale in Berkshire, she disappeared for ten days, causing great interest in the press. Her car was found in a chalk pit in Newland's Corner, Surrey. She was eventually found staying at the Swan Hydro (now the Old Swan hotel) in Harrogate under the name of the woman with whom her husband had recently admitted to having an affair. She claimed to have suffered a nervous breakdown and a fugue state caused by the death of her mother and her husband's infidelity. Opinions are still divided as to whether this was a publicity stunt. Public sentiment at the time was negative, with many feeling that an alleged publicity stunt had cost the taxpayers a substantial amount of money. A 1979 film, Agatha, starring Vanessa Redgrave as Christie, recounted a fictionalised version of the disappearance. Other media accounts of this event exist; it was featured on a segment of Paul Harvey's The Rest of the Story, for example.

In 1930, Christie married a Roman Catholic (despite her divorce and her Anglican faith), the archaeologist Sir
Max Mallowan. Mallowan was 14 years younger than Christie, and his travels with her contributed background to several of her novels set in the Middle East. Their marriage was happy in the early years, and endured despite Mallowan's many affairs in later life, notably with Barbara Parker, whom he married in 1977, the year after Christie's death. Other novels (such as And Then There Were None) were set in and around Torquay, Devon, where she was born. Christie's 1934 novel, Murder on the Orient Express was written in the Pera Palas hotel in Istanbul, Turkey, the southern terminus of the railroad. The hotel maintains Christie's room as a memorial to the author. The Greenway Estate in Devon, acquired by the couple as a summer residence in 1938, is now in the care of the National Trust. Christie often stayed at Abney Hall in Cheshire, which was owned by her brother-in-law, James Watts. She based at least two of her stories on the hall: The short story The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding which is in the story collection of the same name and the novel After the Funeral. "Abney became Agatha's greatest inspiration for country-house life, with all the servants and grandeur which have been woven into her plots. The descriptions of the fictional Styles, Chimneys, Stoneygates and the other houses in her stories are mostly Abney in various forms."

In 1971 she was made a Dame Commander of the Order of the British Empire.

Agatha Christie died on 12 January 1976, at age 85, from natural causes, at Winterbrook House in the north of Cholsey parish, adjoining Wallingford in Oxfordshire (formerly Berkshire). She is buried in the nearby St Mary's Churchyard in Cholsey.

Christie's only child, Rosalind Hicks, died on 28 October 2004, also aged 85, from natural causes. Christie's grandson, Mathew Prichard, now owns the copyright to his grandmother's works.

Hercule Poirot and Miss Marple

Agatha Christie's first novel The Mysterious Affair at Styles was published in 1920 and introduced the long-running character detective Hercule Poirot, who appeared in 30 of Christie's novels and 50 short stories.

Her other well known character, Miss Marple, was introduced in The Murder at the Vicarage in 1930, and was based on Christie's grandmother.

During World War II, Christie wrote two novels intended as the last cases of these two great detectives, Hercule Poirot and Jane Marple, respectively. They were Curtain and Sleeping Murder. Both books were sealed in a bank vault for over thirty years, and were released for publication by Christie only at the end of her life, when she realised that she could not write any more novels. These publications came on the heels of the success of the film version of Murder on the Orient Express in 1974.

Like Arthur Conan Doyle, Christie was to become increasingly tired of her detective, Poirot. In fact, by the end of the 1930s, Christie confided to her diary that she was finding Poirot "insufferable", and by the 1960s she felt that he was an "an ego-centric creep". However, unlike Conan Doyle, Christie resisted the temptation to kill her detective off while he was still popular. She saw herself as an entertainer whose job was to produce what the public liked, and what the public liked was Poirot.

In contrast, Christie was fond of Miss Marple. However it is interesting to note that the Belgian detective's titles outnumber the Marple titles by more than two to one.

Poirot is the only fictional character to have been given an obituary in The New York Times, following the publication of Curtain in 1975.

Following the great success of Curtain, Christie gave permission for the release of Sleeping Murder sometime in 1976, but died in January 1976 before the book could be released. This may explain some of the inconsistencies in the book with the rest of the Marple series - for example, Colonel Arthur Bantry, husband of Miss Marple's friend, Dolly, is still alive and well in Sleeping Murder (which, like Curtain, was written in the 1940s) despite the fact he is noted as having died in books that were written after but published before the posthumous release of Sleeping Murder in 1976-such as, The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side. It may be that Christie simply did not have time to revise the manuscript before she died. Miss Marple fared better than Poirot, since after solving the mystery in Sleeping Murder, she returns home to her regular life in Saint Mary Mead.

On an edition of Desert Island Discs in 2007, Brian Aldiss recounted how Agatha Christie told him that she wrote her books up to the last chapter, and then decided who the most unlikely suspect was. She would then go back and make the necessary changes to "frame" that person.

In popular culture

Christie has been portrayed on a number of occasions in film and television:
• The first occasion was the 1979 *Agatha*, when Vanessa Redgrave portrayed her.
• Hilda Gobbi in a 1980 Hungarian film, *Kojak Budapesten*
• Peggy Ashcroft in a 1986 TV play, *Murder by the Book* in which Ian Holm appeared as Poirot
• Esme Lambert played the part in *The Dead Zone* episode "Unreasonable Doubt", transmitted on July 14, 2002.
• Olivia Williams played the part in the TV programme entitled *Agatha Christie: A Life in Pictures* which, like *Agatha*, revolved around the 1926 disappearance. It was transmitted on September 22, 2004.
• Aya Sugimoto in an episode of a Japanese television series called *Hyakunin no Ijin* in 2006
• On August 10, 2007, it was announced that actress Fenella Woolgar (who had appeared as Ellis in Lord Edgware Dies) would appear as Christie in the 2008 season of the science fiction TV series *Doctor Who*.
• Michelle Trout will play the part in a US film, *Lives and Deaths of the Poets*, which is due for release in 2009.
• A precog in the movie *Minority Report* (film) is named after her.

### List of works

**Novels**

**Year**

1920: *The Mysterious Affair at Styles*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Arthur Hastings, Chief Inspector Japp

1922: *The Secret Adversary*; **Detectives**: Tommy and Tuppence

1923: *The Murder on the Links*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Arthur Hastings

1924: *The Man in the Brown Suit*; **Detectives**: Anne Beddingfeld, Colonel Race

1925: *The Secret of Chimneys*; **Detectives**: Superintendent Battle

1926: *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1927: *The Big Four*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Arthur Hastings, Chief Inspector Japp

1928: *The Mystery of the Blue Train*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1929: *The Seven Dials Mystery*; **Detectives**: Bill Eversleigh, Superintendent Battle

1930: *The Murder at the Vicarage*; **Detectives**: Miss Marple

1931: *The Sittaford Mystery*, also *Murder at Hazelmoor*; **Detectives**: Emily Trefusis

1932: *Peril at End House*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Arthur Hastings, Chief Inspector Japp

1933: *Lord Edgware Dies*, also *Thirteen at Dinner*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Arthur Hastings, Chief Inspector Japp

1934: *Murder on the Orient Express*, also *Murder on the Calais Coach*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1935: *Why Didn’t They Ask Evans?*, also *The Boomerang Clue*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1935: *Three Act Tragedy*, also *Murder in Three Acts*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1935: *Death in the Clouds*, also *Death in the Air*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Chief Inspector Japp

1936: *The A.B.C. Murders*, also *The Alphabet Murders*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Arthur Hastings, Chief Inspector Japp

1936: *Murder in Mesopotamia*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1936: *Cards on the Table*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Colonel Race, Superintendent Battle, Ariadne Oliver

1937: *Dumb Witness*, also *Poirot Loses a Client*, also *Mystery at Littlegreen House*, also *Murder at Littlegreen House*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Arthur Hastings

1937: *Death on the Nile*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Colonel Race

1938: *Appointment with Death*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1938: *Hercule Poirot’s Christmas*, also *Murder for Christmas*, also *A Holiday for Murder*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1939: *Murder is Easy*, also *Easy to Kill*; **Detectives**: Superintendent Battle

1939: *And Then There Were None*, also *Ten Little Indians*, also *Ten Little Niggers*;

1940: *Sad Cypress*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1940: *One, Two, Buckle My Shoe*, also *An Overdose of Death*, also *The Patriotic Murders*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot, Chief Inspector Japp

1941: *Evil Under the Sun*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot

1941: *N or M?*; **Detectives**: Tommy and Tuppence

1942: *The Body in the Library*; **Detectives**: Miss Marple

1942: *Five Little Pigs*, also *Murder in Retrospect*; **Detectives**: Hercule Poirot
**Year:** 1942: *The Moving Finger*, also *The Case of the Moving Finger*; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Year:** 1944: *Towards Zero*, also *Come and Be Hanged*; **Detectives:** Superintendent Battle, Inspector James Leach

**Year:** 1944: *Death Comes as the End*

**Year:** 1945: *Sparkling Cyanide*, also *Remembered Death*; **Detectives:** Colonel Race

**Year:** 1946: *The Hollow*, also *Murder After Hours*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot

**Year:** 1948: *Taken at the Flood*, also *There is a Tide*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot

**Year:** 1949: *Crooked House*; **Detectives:** Charles Hayward

**Year:** 1950: *A Murder is Announced*; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Year:** 1951: *They Came to Baghdad*; **Detectives:**

**Year:** 1952: *Mrs McGinty's Dead*, also *Blood Will Tell*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot, Ariadne Oliver

**Year:** 1952: *They Do It with Mirrors*, also *Murder with Mirrors*; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Year:** 1953: *After the Funeral*, also *Funerals are Fatal*, also *Murder at the Gallop*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot

**Year:** 1953: *A Pocket Full of Rye*; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Year:** 1954: *Destination Unknown*, also *So Many Steps to Death*; **Detectives:**

**Year:** 1955: *Hickory Dickory Dock*, also *Hickory Dickory Death*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot

**Year:** 1956: *Dead Man's Folly*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot, Ariadne Oliver

**Year:** 1957: *4.50 from Paddington*, also *What Mrs. McGillycuddy Saw*, also *Murder She Said*; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Year:** 1958: *Ordeal by Innocence*

**Year:** 1959: *Cat Among the Pigeons*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot

**Year:** 1961: *The Pale Horse*; **Detectives:** Inspector Lejeune, Ariadne Oliver

**Year:** 1962: *The Mirror Crack'd from Side to Side*, also *The Mirror Crack'd*; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Year:** 1963: *The Clocks*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot

**Year:** 1964: *A Caribbean Mystery*; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Year:** 1965: *At Bertram's Hotel*; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Year:** 1966: *Third Girl*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot, Ariadne Oliver

**Year:** 1967: *Endless Night*

**Year:** 1968: *By the Pricking of My Thumbs*; **Detectives:** Tommy and Tuppence

**Year:** 1969: *Hallowe'en Party*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot, Ariadne Oliver

**Year:** 1970: *Passenger to Frankfurt*

**Year:** 1971: *Nemesis*; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Year:** 1972: *Elephants Can Remember*; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot, Ariadne Oliver

**Year:** 1973: *Postern of Fate*, final Tommy and Tuppence, last novel Christie wrote; **Detectives:** Tommy and Tuppence

**Year:** 1975: *Curtain*, Poirot's last case, written four decades earlier; **Detectives:** Hercule Poirot, Arthur Hastings

**Year:** 1976: *Sleeping Murder*, Miss Marple's last case, written four decades earlier; **Detectives:** Miss Marple

**Collections of Short Stories**

- 1924 *Poirot Investigates* (short stories: eleven in the UK, fourteen in the US)
- 1929 *Partners in Crime* (fifteen short stories; featuring Tommy and Tuppence)
- 1930 *The Mysterious Mr. Quin* (twelve short stories; introducing Mr. Harley Quin)
- 1932 *The Thirteen Problems* (thirteen short stories; featuring Miss Marple, also known as *The Tuesday Club Murders*)
- 1933 *The Hound of Death* (twelve short stories - UK only)
- 1934 *The Listerdale mystery* (twelve short stories - UK only)
- 1934 *Parker Pyne Investigates* (twelve short stories; introducing Parker Pyne and Ariadne Oliver, also known as *Mr. Parker Pyne, Detective*)
- 1937 *Murder in the Mews* (four novella-length stories; featuring Hercule Poirot, also known as *Dead Man's Mirror*)
- 1939 *Regatta Mystery and Other Stories* (nine short stories - US only)
- 1947 *The Labours of Hercules* (twelve short stories; featuring Hercule Poirot)
- 1948 *The Witness for the Prosecution and Other Stories* (eleven short stories - US only)
- 1950 *Three Blind Mice and Other Stories* (nine short stories - US only)
- 1951 *The Under Dog and Other Stories* (nine short stories - US only)
• 1960 *The Adventure of the Christmas Pudding* (six short stories - UK only)
• 1961 *Double Sin and Other Stories* (eight short stories - US only)
• 1966 *Surprise! Surprise!* (twelve short stories)
• 1971 *The Golden Ball and Other Stories* (fifteen short stories - US only)
• 1974 *Poirot's Early Cases* (eighteen short stories, also known as *Hercule Poirot's Early Cases*)
• 1979 *Miss Marple's Final Cases and Two Other Stories* (eight short stories - UK only)
• 1991 *The Harlequin Tea Set* (nine short stories - US only)
• 1997 *While the Light Lasts and Other Stories* (nine short stories - UK only)

Novels written as Mary Westmacott

• 1930 *Giant's Bread*
• 1934 *Unfinished Portrait*
• 1944 *Absent in the Spring*
• 1948 *The Rose and the Yew Tree*
• 1952 *A Daughter's a Daughter*
• 1956 *The Burden*

Plays

• 1930 *Black Coffee*
• 1937 or 1939 *A Daughter's a Daughter* (Unpublished - later turned into the 1952 Mary Westmacott novel)
• 1943 *And Then There Were None*
• 1945 *Appointment with Death*
• 1946 *Murder on the Nile/Hidden Horizon*
• 1951 *The Hollow*
• 1952 *The Mousetrap*
• 1953 *Witness for the Prosecution*
• 1954 *Spider's Web*
• 1958 *Verdict*
• 1958 *The Unexpected Guest*
• 1960 *Go Back for Murder*
• 1962 *Rule of Three* (Comprised of *Afternoon at the Seaside, The Rats and The Patient*)
• 1972 *Fiddler's Three* (Originally written as *Fiddler's Five*. Unpublished. The final play she wrote)
• 1973 *Akhnaton* (Written in 1937)

Radio Plays

• 1937 *Yellow Iris* (Based on the short story of the same name)
• 1947 *Three Blind Mice* (Christie's celebrated stage play *The Mousetrap* was based on this radio play)
• 1948 *Butter In a Lordly Dish*
• 1960 *Personal Call* (A BBC Radio recording of this play is known to exist)

Television Plays

• 1937 *Wasp's Nest* (Based on the short story of the same name)

Nonfiction

• 1946 *Come Tell Me How You Live*
• 1977 *Agatha Christie: An Autobiography*

Other published works
1925 *The Road of Dreams* (Poetry)
1965 *Star Over Bethlehem and other stories* (Christian stories and poems)
1973 *Poems*

**Co-authored works**

- **1956** *Towards Zero* (A West End theatre dramatization of her 1944 novel co-written with Gerard Verner)
William Wilkie Collins (8 January 1824 - 23 September 1889) was an English novelist, playwright, and writer of short stories. He was hugely popular in his time, and wrote 27 novels, more than 50 short stories, at least 15 plays, and over 100 pieces of non-fiction work. His best-known works are The Woman in White, The Moonstone, Armadale and No Name.

Life

Collins was born in London, the son of a well-known landscape artist, William Collins. Named after his father, he swiftly became known by his second name (which honoured his godfather, David Wilkie). At 17 he left school and was apprenticed to a firm of tea merchants, but after five unhappy years, during which he wrote his first novel, Iolani, he entered Lincoln's Inn to study law. (Iolani remained unpublished for over 150 years until 1999.) After his father's death in 1847, Collins produced his first published book, Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A. (1848), and also considered a career in painting, exhibiting a picture at the Royal Academy summer exhibition in 1849, but it was with the publication of his first published novel Antonina in 1850 that his career as a writer began in earnest.

An instrumental event in Collins' career occurred in 1851 when he was introduced to Charles Dickens by a mutual friend, Augustus Egg. They became lifelong friends and collaborators; several of Collins' novels were serialised in Dickens' weekly publication All the Year Round, and Dickens later edited and published them himself.

Collins suffered from a form of arthritis known as 'rheumatic gout' and became severely addicted to the opium that he took (in the form of laudanum) to relieve the pain. As a result he experienced paranoid delusions, the most notable being his conviction that he was constantly accompanied by a doppelganger he dubbed 'Ghost Wilkie'. His novel The Moonstone prominently features the effects of opium and opium addiction. While he was writing it, Collins' consumption of laudanum was such that he later claimed to have no memory of writing large parts of the novel.

Collins never married, but lived, on and off from 1858, with a widow, Mrs. Caroline Graves, and her daughter. He also fathered three children by another woman, Martha Rudd, whom he met after Mrs. Graves left him in 1868. Mrs. Graves returned to Collins after two years, and he continued both relationships until his death in 1889.

He is buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, West London. His grave notes him as the author of The Woman in White. Grave Number 31754, Square 141, Row 1.

Works

His works were classified at the time as 'sensation novels', a genre seen nowadays as the precursor to detective fiction and suspense fiction. He also wrote penetratingly on the plight of women and on the social and domestic issues of his time. Like many writers of his time, he published most of his novels as serials in magazines such as Dickens's All the Year Round, and was known as a master of the form, creating just the right degree of suspense to keep his audience reading from week to week. (Sales of All The Year Round actually increased when The Woman in White succeeded A Tale of Two Cities.)

He enjoyed ten years of great success following publication of The Woman in White in 1859. His next novel, No
Name combined social commentary - the absurdity of the law as it applied to children of unmarried parents - with a densely-plotted revenge thriller. Armadale, (the first and only of Collins’ major novels of the 1860s to be serialised in a magazine other than Dickens' "All The Year Round") provoked strong criticism, generally centred around its transgressive villainess Lydia Gwilt; and provoked in part by Collins’ typically confrontational prefatory material. The novel was simultaneously a financial coup for its author and a comparative commercial failure: the sum paid by the Cornhill magazine for the serialisation rights was exceptional, eclipsing the prices paid for the vast majority of similar novels by a substantial margin, yet the novel itself failed to recoup its publishers’ investment. The Moonstone, published in 1868, and the last novel of what is generally regarded as the most successful decade of its authors’ career was, despite a somewhat cool reception from both Dickens and the critics, a significant return to form and reestablished the market value of an author whose success in the competitive Victorian literary marketplace had been gradually waning in the wake of his first "masterpiece.” Viewed by many to represent the advent of the Detective Story within the tradition of the English Novel, it remains one of Collins’ most critically acclaimed productions.

However, various factors (most often cited are the loss of Dickens’ literary mentoring after that author’s death in 1870; Collins’ increased dependence upon laudanum; and a somewhat ill-advised penchant for utilising his fiction to rail against social injustices) appear to have led to a decline in the two decades following the success of his sensation novels of the 1860s and prior to his death in 1889; and Collins’ novels and novellas of the ’70s and ’80s, whilst by no means entirely devoid of merit or literary interest, are generally regarded as inferior to his previous productions and receive comparatively little critical attention today.

The Woman in White and The Moonstone share an unusual narrative structure, somewhat resembling an epistolary novel, in which different portions of the book have different narrators, each with a distinctive narrative voice (Armadale has this to a lesser extent through the correspondence between some characters). The Moonstone, being the most popular of Collin’s novels, is known as a precursor for detective fiction such as Sherlock Holmes.

After The Moonstone, Collins’s novels contained fewer thriller elements and more social commentary. The subject matter continued to be "sensational", but his popularity declined. Swinburne commented: “What brought good Wilkie's genius nigh perdition? Some demon whispered - 'Wilkie! have a mission.'”

Bibliography

- Antonina (1850)
- Rambles Beyond Railways (1851)
- Basil (1852)
- Mr Wray’s Cash Box (1852)
- Hide and Seek (1854)
- The Ostler (1855)
- After the Dark (1856)
- The Dead Secret (1857)
- The Frozen Deep (1857), a play co-written with Charles Dickens
- A House to Let (1858), a short story co-written with Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and Adelaide Anne Procter
- The Queen of Hearts (1859)
- The Woman in White (1860)
- No Name (1862)
- My Miscellanies (1863)
- Armadale (1866)
- No Thoroughfare (1867), a story and play co-written with Charles Dickens
- The Moonstone (1868)
- Man and Fish (1870)
- Poor Miss Finch (1872)
- Miss or Mrs? (1873)
- The New Magdalen (1873)
- The Frozen Deep and Other Stories (1874)
  - The Frozen Deep
  - Dream Woman
- John Jago's Ghost; or The Dead Alive
- *The Law and the Lady* (1875)
- *The Two Destinies* (1876)
- *The Haunted Hotel* (1878)
- *The Fallen Leaves* (1879)
- *A Rogue's Life* (1879)
- *My Lady's Money* (1879)
- *Jezebel's Daughter* (1880)
- *The Black Robe* (1881)
- *Heart and Science* (1883)
- *I Say No* (1884)
- *The Ghost's Touch and Other Stories* (1885)
- *The Evil Genius* (1886)
- *The Guilty River* (1886)
- *Little Novels* (1887)
- *The Legacy of Cain* (1889)
- *Blind Love* (1889 - unfinished. Completed by Walter Besant)
- *Iolani, or Tahiti as it was. A Romance* (1999)
Biography of Charles Dickens

Charles John Huffam Dickens; (7 February 1812 - 9 June 1870), pen-name "Boz", was the foremost English novelist of the Victorian era, as well as a vigorous social campaigner. Considered one of the English language's greatest writers, he was acclaimed for his rich storytelling and memorable characters, and achieved massive worldwide popularity in his lifetime.

Later critics, beginning with George Gissing and G. K. Chesterton, championed his mastery of prose, his endless invention of memorable characters and his powerful social sensibilities, yet writers such as George Henry Lewes, Henry James, and Virginia Woolf fault his work for sentimentality, implausible occurrence and grotesque characters.

The popularity of Dickens's novels and short stories has meant that none has ever gone out of print. Dickens wrote serialised novels, which was the usual format for fiction at the time, and each new part of his stories was eagerly anticipated by the reading public.

Life

Early years

Charles Dickens was born in Landport, Portsmouth in Hampshire, the second of eight children to John Dickens (1786-1851), a clerk in the Navy Pay Office at Portsmouth, and his wife Elizabeth Dickens (née Barrow, 1789-1863) on February 7, 1812. When he was five, the family moved to Chatham, Kent. When he was ten, the family relocated to 16 Bayham Street, Camden Town in London.

Although his early years seem to have been an idyllic time, he thought himself then as a "very small and not-over-particularly-taken-care-of boy". He spent his time outdoors, reading voraciously with a particular fondness for the picaresque novels of Tobias Smollett and Henry Fielding. He talked later in life of his extremely poignant memories of childhood and his continuing photographic memory of people and events that helped bring his fiction to life. His family was moderately wealthy, and he received some education at the private William Giles's school in Chatham. However, this time of prosperity came to an abrupt end when his father, after spending too much money entertaining and retaining his social position, was imprisoned at Marshalsea debtors' prison.

A 12-year-old Dickens began working 10 hour days in a Warren's boot-blacking factory, located near the present Charing Cross railway station. He earned six shillings a week pasting labels on the jars of thick polish. This money paid for his lodging in Camden Town and helped support his family.

After a few months his family was able to leave Marshalsea but their financial situation did not improve until later, partly due to money inherited from his father's family. His mother did not immediately remove Charles from the boot-blackling factory, which was owned by a relation of hers. Dickens never forgave his mother for this, and resentment of his situation and the conditions under which working-class people lived became major themes of his works. As Dickens wrote in David Copperfield, judged to be his most clearly autobiographical novel, "I had no advice, no counsel, no encouragement, no consolatio, no assistance, no support, of any kind, from anyone, that I can call to mind, as I hope to go to heaven!" Eventually he attended the Wellington House Academy in North London.

In May 1827, Dickens began work in the office of Ellis and Blackmore as a law clerk, a junior office position with potential to become a lawyer, a profession for which he later showed his dislike in his many literary works. He later became a court stenographer at the age of 17. In 1830, Dickens met his first love, Maria Beadnell, who has been said to be the model for Dora in David Copperfield. Her parents disapproved of their courtship and they
effectively ended the relationship when they sent her to school in Paris.

**Journalism and early novels**

In 1834, Dickens became a journalist, reporting parliamentary debate and travelling Britain by stagecoach to cover election campaigns for the *Morning Chronicle*. His journalism, in the form of sketches which appeared in periodicals from 1833, formed his first collection of pieces *Sketches by Boz* which were published in 1836 and led to the serialization of his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers* in March 1836. He continued to contribute to and edit journals throughout much of his subsequent literary career.

On 2 April 1836, he married Catherine Thompson Hogarth (1816-1879), the daughter of George Hogarth, editor of the *Evening Chronicle*. After a brief honeymoon in Chalk, Kent, they set up home in Bloomsbury where they produced ten children:

- Charles Culliford Boz Dickens (6 January 1837-1896).
- Mary Angela Dickens (6 March 1838-1896).
- Kate Macready Dickens (29 October 1839-1929).
- Walter Landor Dickens (8 February 1841-1863). Died in India.
- Francis Jeffrey Dickens (15 January 1844-1886).
- Alfred D'Orsay Tennyson Dickens (28 October 1845-1912).
- Sydney Smith Haldimand Dickens (18 April 1847-1872).
- (Sir) Henry Fielding Dickens (15 January 1849-1933).
  - Henry Charles Dickens (1882-1966), barrister. (Grandson)
  - Monica Dickens (1915-1992). (Great-granddaughter)
- Dora Annie Dickens (16 August 1850-April 1851).
- Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens (13 March 1852-23 January 1902). He migrated to Australia, and became a member of the New South Wales state parliament. He died in Moree, NSW.

In the same year, he accepted the job of editor of *Bentley's Miscellany*, a position he would hold until 1839 when he fell out with the owner. However, his success as a novelist continued, producing *Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), then *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge* as part of the *Master Humphrey's Clock* series (1840-41), all being published in monthly instalments before being made into books.

In 1842, he travelled with his wife to the United States and Canada, a journey which was successful despite his support for the abolition of slavery. The trip is described in the short travelogue *American Notes for General Circulation* and is also the basis of some of the episodes in *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Shortly thereafter, he began to show interest in Unitarian Christianity, although he remained an Anglican, at least nominally, for the rest of his life. Dickens's work continued to be popular, especially *A Christmas Carol* written in 1843, the first of his Christmas books, which was reputedly written in a matter of weeks.

After living briefly abroad in Italy (1844) and Switzerland (1846), Dickens continued his success with *Dombey and Son* (1848); *David Copperfield* (1849-50); *Bleak House* (1852-53); *Hard Times* (1854); *Little Dorrit* (1857); *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859); and *Great Expectations* (1861). Dickens was also the publisher and editor of, and a major contributor to, the journals *Household Words* (1850-1859) and *All the Year Round* (1858-1870).

**Middle years**

In 1856, his popularity had allowed him to buy Gad's Hill Place. This large house in Higham, Kent, had a particular meaning to Dickens as he had walked past it as a child and had dreamed of living in it. The area was also the scene of some of the events of Shakespeare's *Henry IV, part 1* and this literary connection pleased him.

In 1857, in preparation for public performances of *The Frozen Deep*, a play on which he and his protégé Wilkie Collins had collaborated, Dickens hired professional actresses to play the female parts. With one of these, Ellen Ternan, Dickens formed a bond which was to last the rest of his life. The exact nature of their relationship is unclear, as both Dickens and Ternan burned each other's letters, but it was clearly central to Dickens's personal and professional life. On his death, he settled an annuity on her which made her a financially independent woman. Claire Tomalin's book, *The Invisible Woman*, set out to prove that Ellen Ternan lived with Dickens secretly for the last 13 years of his life, and has subsequently been turned into a play by Simon Gray called *Little Nell*.

When Dickens separated from his wife in 1858, divorce was almost unthinkable, particularly for someone as
famous as he was, and so he continued to maintain her in a house for the next 20 years until she died. Although they appeared to be initially happy together, Catherine did not seem to share quite the same boundless energy for life which Dickens had. Nevertheless, her job of looking after their ten children, and the pressure of living with a world-famous novelist and keeping house for him, certainly did not help.

Catherine had her sister Mary move in to help her, but there were rumours that Charles was romantically linked to his sister-in-law, possibly fuelled by the fact that she remained at Gadshill to look after the younger children when Catherine left. An indication of his marital dissatisfaction was when, in 1855, he went to meet his first love, Maria Beadnell. Maria was by this time married as well, but seemed to have fallen short of Dickens's romantic memory of her.

Rail accident and last years

On 9 June 1865, while returning from France with the actress Ellen Ternan, Dickens was involved in the Staplehurst rail crash in which the first seven carriages of the train plunged off a bridge that was being repaired. The only first-class carriage to remain on the track was the one in which Dickens was travelling. Dickens spent some time tending the wounded and the dying before rescuers arrived. Before leaving, he remembered the unfinished manuscript for Our Mutual Friend, and he returned to his carriage to retrieve it. Typically, Dickens later used this experience as material for his short ghost story The Signal-Man in which the central character has a premonition of his own death in a rail crash. He based the story around several previous rail accidents, such as the Clayton Tunnel rail crash of 1861.

Dickens managed to avoid an appearance at the inquiry into the crash, as it would have become known that he was travelling that day with Ellen Ternan and her mother, which could have caused a scandal. Ellen had been Dickens's companion since the breakdown of his marriage, and, as he had met her in 1857, she was most likely the ultimate reason for that breakdown. She continued to be his companion, and likely mistress, until his death. The dimensions of the affair were unknown until the publication of Dickens and Daughter, a book about Dickens's relationship with his daughter Kate, in 1939. Kate Dickens worked with author Gladys Storey on the book prior to her death in 1929, and alleged that Dickens and Ternan had a son who died in infancy, though no contemporary evidence exists.

Dickens, though unharmed, never really recovered from the Staplehurst crash, and his normally prolific writing shrunk to completing Our Mutual Friend and starting the unfinished The Mystery of Edwin Drood after a long interval. Much of his time was taken up with public readings from his best-loved novels. Dickens was fascinated by the theatre as an escape from the world, and theatres and theatrical people appear in Nicholas Nickleby. The traveling shows were extremely popular and, after three tours of British Isles, Dickens gave his first public reading in the United States at a New York City theatre on 2 December 1867.

The effort and passion he put into these readings with individual character voices is also thought to have contributed to his death. When he undertook another English tour of readings (1869-1870), he became ill and five years to the day after the Staplehurst crash, on 9 June 1870, he died at home at Gad's Hill Place after suffering a stroke.

Contrary to his wish to be buried in Rochester Cathedral, he was buried in the Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey. The inscription on his tomb reads: "He was a sympathiser to the poor, the suffering, and the oppressed; and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world." Dickens's will stipulated that no memorial be erected to honour him. The only life-size bronze statue of Dickens, cast in 1891 by Francis Edwin Elwell, is located in Clark Park in the Spruce Hill neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania in the United States of America.

Literary style

Dickens's writing style is florid and poetic, with a strong comic touch. His satires of British aristocratic snobbery - he calls one character the "Noble Refrigerator" - are often popular. Comparing orphans to stocks and shares, people to tug boats, or dinner-party guests to furniture are just some of Dickens's acclaimed flights of fancy.

Characters

The characters are among the most memorable in English literature; certainly their names are. The likes of Ebenezer Scrooge, Fagin, Mrs Gamp, Charles Darnay, Oliver Twist, Micawber, Abel Magwitch, Samuel Pickwick, Miss Havisham, Wackford Squeers and many others are so well known and can be believed to be living a life
outside the novels that their stories have been continued by other authors.

Dickens loved the style of 18th century gothic romance, though it had already become a target for parody - Jane Austen's *Northanger Abbey* being a well known example - and while some of his characters are grotesques, their eccentricities do not usually overshadow the stories. One 'character' most vividly drawn throughout his novels is London itself. From the coaching inns on the outskirts of the city to the lower reaches of the Thames, all aspects of the capital are described over the course of his corpus.

**Episodic writing**

As noted above, most of Dickens's major novels were first written in monthly or weekly instalments in journals such as *Master Humphrey's Clock* and *Household Words*, later reprinted in book form. These instalments made the stories cheap, accessible and the series of regular cliff-hangers made each new episode widely anticipated. American fans even waited at the docks in New York, shouting out to the crew of an incoming ship, "Is Little Nell dead?" Part of Dickens's great talent was to incorporate this episodic writing style but still end up with a coherent novel at the end. The monthly numbers were illustrated by, amongst others, "Phiz" (a pseudonym for Hablot Browne). Among his best-known works are *Great Expectations*, *David Copperfield*, *Oliver Twist*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Bleak House*, *Nicholas Nickleby*, *The Pickwick Papers*, and *A Christmas Carol*.

Dickens's technique of writing in monthly or weekly instalments (depending on the work) can be understood by analysing his relationship with his illustrators. The several artists who filled this role were privy to the contents and intentions of Dickens's instalments before the general public. Thus, by reading these correspondences between author and illustrator, the intentions behind Dickens's work can be better understood. What was hidden in his art is made plain in these letters. These also reveal how the interests of the reader and author do not coincide. A great example of that appears in the monthly novel *Oliver Twist*. At one point in this work, Dickens had Oliver become embroiled in a robbery. That particular monthly instalment concludes with young Oliver being shot. Readers expected that they would be forced to wait only a month to find out the outcome of that gunshot. In fact, Dickens did not reveal what became of young Oliver in the succeeding number. Rather, the reading public was forced to wait two months to discover if the boy lived.

Another important impact of Dickens's episodic writing style was his exposure to the opinions of his readers. Since Dickens did not write the chapters very far ahead of their publication, he was allowed to witness the public reaction and alter the story depending on those public reactions. A fine example of this process can be seen in his weekly serial *The Old Curiosity Shop*, which is a chase story. In this novel, Little Nell and her Grandfather are fleeing the villain Quilp. The progress of the novel follows the gradual success of that pursuit. As Dickens wrote and published the weekly instalments, his friend John Forster pointed out: "You know you're going to have to kill her, don't you." Why this end was necessary can be explained by a brief analysis of the difference between the structure of a comedy versus a tragedy. In a comedy, the action covers a sequence "You think they're going to lose, you think they're going to lose, they win." In tragedy, it's: "You think they're going to win, you think they're going to win, they lose". The dramatic conclusion of the story is implicit throughout the novel. So, as Dickens wrote the novel in the form of a tragedy, the sad outcome of the novel was a foregone conclusion. If he had not caused his heroine to lose, he would not have completed his dramatic structure. Dickens admitted that his friend Forster was right and, in the end, Little Nell died.

**Social commentary**

Dickens's novels were, among other things, works of social commentary. He was a fierce critic of the poverty and social stratification of Victorian society. Dickens's second novel, *Oliver Twist* (1839), shocked readers with its images of poverty and crime and was responsible for the clearing of the actual London slum that was the basis of the story's Jacob's Island. In addition, with the character of the tragic prostitute, Nancy, Dickens "humanised" such women for the reading public; women who were regarded as "unfortunates," inherently immoral casualties of the Victorian class/economic system. *Bleak House* and *Little Dorrit* elaborated expansive critiques of the Victorian institutional apparatus: the interminable lawsuits of the Court of Chancery that destroyed people's lives in *Bleak House* and a dual attack in *Little Dorrit* on inefficient, corrupt patent offices and unregulated market speculation.

**Literary techniques**

Dickens is often described as using 'idealised' characters and highly sentimental scenes to contrast with his
caricatures and the ugly social truths he reveals. The extended death scene of Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) was received as incredibly moving by contemporary readers but viewed as ludicrously sentimental by Oscar Wilde: "You would need to have a heart of stone," he declared in one of his famous witticisms, "not to laugh at the death of Little Nell." In 1903 Chesterton said, "It is not the death of Little Nell, but the life of Little Nell, that I object to."

In *Oliver Twist* Dickens provides readers with an idealised portrait of a young boy so inherently and unrealistically 'good' that his values are never subverted by either brutal orphanages or coerced involvement in a gang of young pickpockets (similar to Tiny Tim in *A Christmas Carol*). While later novels also centre on idealised characters (Esther Summerson in *Bleak House* and Amy Dorrit in *Little Dorrit*) this idealism serves only to highlight Dickens's goal of poignant social commentary. Many of his novels are concerned with social realism, focusing on mechanisms of social control that direct people's lives (for instance, factory networks in *Hard Times* and hypocritical exclusionary class codes in *Our Mutual Friend*).

Dickens also employs incredible coincidences (e.g. Oliver Twist turns out to be the lost nephew of the upper class family that randomly rescues him from the dangers of the pickpocket group). Such coincidences are a staple of eighteenth century picaresque novels such as Henry Fielding’s *Tom Jones* that Dickens enjoyed so much. But to Dickens these were not just plot devices but an index of the humanism that led him to believe that good wins out in the end and often in unexpected ways.

**Autobiographical elements**

All authors might be said to incorporate autobiographical elements in their fiction, but with Dickens this is very noticeable, even though he took pains to cover up what he considered his shameful, lowly past. *David Copperfield* is one of the most clearly autobiographical but the scenes from *Bleak House* of interminable court cases and legal arguments are drawn from the author's brief career as a court reporter. Dickens's own family was sent to prison for poverty, a common theme in many of his books, and the detailed depiction of life in the Marshalsea prison in *Little Dorrit* is due to Dickens's own experiences of the institution. Little Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop* is thought to represent Dickens's sister-in-law, Nicholas Nickleby's father and Wilkins Micawber are certainly Dickens's own father, just as Mrs. Nickleby and Mrs. Micawber are similar to his mother. The snobbish nature of Pip from *Great Expectations* also has some affinity to the author himself. The character of Fagin is believed to be based upon Ikey Solomon, a 19th century Jewish criminal of London and later Australia. It is reported that Dickens, during his time as a journalist, interviewed Solomon after a court appearance and that he was the inspiration for the gang leader in *Oliver Twist*. Dickens may have drawn on his childhood experiences, but he was also ashamed of them and would not reveal that this was where he got his realistic accounts of squalor. Very few knew the details of his early life until six years after his death when John Forster published a biography on which Dickens had collaborated. A shameful past in Victorian times could taint reputations, just as it did for some of his characters, and this may have been Dickens's own fear.

**Legacy**

Charles Dickens was a well-known personality and his novels were immensely popular during his lifetime. His first full novel, *The Pickwick Papers* (1837), brought him immediate fame and this continued right through his career. Although rarely departing greatly from his typical "Dickensian" method of always attempting to write a great "story" in a somewhat conventional manner (the dual narrators of *Bleak House* are a notable exception), he experimented with varied themes, characterisations and genres. Some of these experiments have proved more popular than others and the public's taste and appreciation of his many works have varied over time. He was usually keen to give his readers what they wanted, and the monthly or weekly publication of his works in episodes meant that the books could change as the story proceeded at the whim of the public. A good example of this are the American episodes in *Martin Chuzzlewit* which were put in by Dickens in response to lower than normal sales of the earlier chapters. In *Our Mutual Friend*, the inclusion of the character of Riah was a positive portrayal of a Jewish character after he was criticised for the depiction of Fagin in *Oliver Twist*.

His popularity has waned little since his death and he is still one of the best known and most read of English authors. At least 180 motion pictures and TV adaptations based on Dickens's works help confirm his success. Many of his works were adapted for the stage during his own lifetime and as early as 1913 a silent film of *The Pickwick Papers* was made. His characters were often so memorable that they took on a life of their own outside his books.

Gamp became a slang expression for an umbrella from the character Mrs Gamp and Pickwickian, Pecksniffian and...
Gradgrind all entered dictionaries due to Dickens's original portraits of such characters who were quixotic, hypocritical or emotionlessly logical. Sam Weller, the carefree and irreverent valet of *The Pickwick Papers*, was an early superstar, perhaps better known than his author at first. It is likely that *A Christmas Carol* is his best-known story, with new adaptations almost every year. It is also the most-filmed of Dickens's stories, many versions dating from the early years of cinema. This simple morality tale with both pathos and its theme of redemption, for many, sums up the true meaning of Christmas and eclipses all other Yuletide stories in not only popularity, but in adding archetypal figures (Scrooge, Tiny Tim, the Christmas ghosts) to the Western cultural consciousness. Some historians consider this book to have played a major factor in redefining the holiday and its major sentiments. *A Christmas Carol* was written by Dickens in an attempt to forestall financial disaster as a result of flagging sales of his novel *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Years later, Dickens shared that he was “deeply affected” in writing *A Christmas Carol* and the novel rejuvenated his career as a renowned author.

At a time when Britain was the major economic and political power of the world, Dickens highlighted the life of the forgotten poor and disadvantaged at the heart of empire. Through his journalism he campaigned on specific issues - such as sanitation and the workhouse - but his fiction was probably all the more powerful in changing public opinion in regard to class inequalities. He often depicted the exploitation and repression of the poor and condemned the public officials and institutions that allowed such abuses to exist. His most strident indictment of this condition is in *Hard Times* (1854), Dickens's only novel-length treatment of the industrial working class. In that work, he uses both vitriol and satire to illustrate how this marginalised social stratum was termed "Hands" by the factory owners, that is, not really "people" but rather only appendages of the machines that they operated. His writings inspired others, in particular journalists and political figures, to address such problems of class oppression. For example, the prison scenes in *Little Dorrit* and *The Pickwick Papers* were prime movers in having the Marshalsea and Fleet Prisons shut down. As Karl Marx said, Dickens, and the other novelists of Victorian England, "...issued to the world more political and social truths than have been uttered by all the professional politicians, publicists and moralists put together...". The exceptional popularity of his novels, even those with socially oppositional themes (*Bleak House*, 1853; *Little Dorrit*, 1857; *Our Mutual Friend*, 1865) underscored not only his almost preternatural ability to create compelling storylines and unforgettable characters, but also insured that the Victorian public confronted issues of social justice that had commonly been ignored.

His fiction, with often vivid descriptions of life in nineteenth-century England, has inaccurately and anachronistically come to globally symbolise Victorian society (1837-1901) as uniformly "Dickensian," when in fact, his novels' time span is from the 1770s to the 1860s. In the decade following his death in 1870, a more intense degree of socially and philosophically pessimistic perspectives invested British fiction; such themes were in contrast to the religious faith that ultimately held together even the bleakest of Dickens's novels. Later Victorian novelists such as Thomas Hardy and George Gissing were influenced by Dickens, but their works display a greater willingness to confront and challenge the Victorian institution of religion. They also portray characters caught up by social forces (primarily via lower-class conditions) but which usually steer them to tragic ends beyond their control.

Novelists continue to be influenced by his books; for example, such disparate current writers as Anne Rice, Tom Wolfe and John Irving evidence direct Dickensian connections. Humorist James Finn Garner even wrote a tongue-in-cheek “politically correct” version of *A Christmas Carol*.

Although Dickens's life has been the subject of at least two TV miniseries and two famous one-man shows, he has never been the subject of a Hollywood "big screen" biography.

### Adaptations of readings

There have been several performances of Dickens readings by Emlyn Williams, Bransby Williams and also Simon Callow in the *Mystery of Charles Dickens* by Peter Ackroyd.

### Museums and festivals

There are museums and festivals celebrating Dickens's life and works in many of the towns with which he was associated.

- **The Charles Dickens Museum**, in Doughty Street, Holborn is the only one of Dickens's London homes to survive. He lived there only two years but in this time wrote *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby*. It contains a major collection of manuscripts, original furniture and memorabilia.
- **Charles Dickens' Birthplace Museum** in Portsmouth is the house in which Dickens was born. It has been re-
furnished in the likely style of 1812 and contains Dickens memorabilia.

- The **Dickens House Museum** in Broadstairs is the house of Miss Mary Pearson Strong, the basis for Miss Betsey Trotwood in *David Copperfield*. It is visible across the bay from the original Bleak House (also a museum until 2005) where *David Copperfield* was written. The museum contains memorabilia, general Victoriana and some of Dickens's letters. Broadstairs has held a **Dickens Festival** annually since 1937.

- The **Charles Dickens Centre** in Eastgate House, Rochester, closed in 2004, but the garden containing the author's Swiss chalet is still open. The 16th-Century house, which appeared as Westgate House in *The Pickwick Papers* and the Nun's House in *Edwin Drood*, will probably re-open under a related use. The city's annual **Dickens Festival** (summer) and **Dickensian Christmas** celebrations continue unaffected.

- The Dickens World themed attraction, covering 71500 square feet, and including a cinema and restaurants, opened in Chatham on 25 May 2007. It stands on a small part of the site of the former naval dockyard where Dickens's father had once worked in the Navy Pay Office.

- **Dickens Festival** in Rochester, Kent. **Summer Dickens** is held at the end of May or in the first few days of June, it commences with an invitation only ball on the Thursday and then continues with street entertainment, and many costumed characters, on the Friday, Saturday and Sunday. **Christmas Dickens** is the first weekend in December- Saturday and Sunday only.

Dickens festivals are also held across the world. Three notable ones in the United States are:

- The **Riverside Dickens Festival** in Riverside, California, includes literary studies as well as entertainments.

- **The Great Dickens Christmas Fair** ([http://www.dickensfair.com/](http://www.dickensfair.com/)) has been held in San Francisco, California, since the 1970s. During the four or five weekends before Christmas, over 500 costumed performers mingle with and entertain thousands of visitors amidst the recreated full-scale blocks of Dickensian London in over 90,000 square feet of public area. This is the oldest, largest, and most successful of the modern Dickens festivals outside England. Many (including the Martin Harris who acts in the Rochester festival and flies out from London to play Scrooge every year in SF) say it is the most impressive in the world.

- **Dickens on The Strand** in Galveston, Texas, is a holiday festival held on the first weekend in December since 1974, where bobbies, Beefeaters and the “Queen” herself are on hand to recreate the Victorian London of Charles Dickens. Many festival volunteers and attendees dress in Victorian attire and bring the world of Dickens to life.

### Notable works by Charles Dickens

Charles Dickens published over a dozen major novels, a large number of short stories (including a number of Christmas-themed stories), a handful of plays, and several nonfiction books. Dickens's novels were initially serialized in weekly and monthly magazines, then reprinted in standard book formats.

#### Novels

- *The Pickwick Papers* (Monthly serial, April 1836 to November 1837)
- *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (Monthly serial in *Bentley's Miscellany*, February 1837 to April 1839)
- *The Life and Adventures of Nicholas Nickleby* (Monthly serial, April 1838 to October 1839)
- *The Old Curiosity Shop* (Weekly serial in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, April 25, 1840, to February 6, 1841)
- *Barnaby Rudge: A Tale of the Riots of 'Eighty* (Weekly serial in *Master Humphrey's Clock*, February 13, 1841, to November 27, 1841)
- The Christmas books:
  - *A Christmas Carol* (1843)
  - *The Chimes* (1844)
  - *The Cricket on the Hearth* (1845)
  - *The Battle of Life* (1846)
  - *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* (1848)
- *The Life and Adventures of Martin Chuzzlewit* (Monthly serial, January 1843 to July 1844)
- *Dombey and Son* (Monthly serial, October 1846 to April 1848)
- *David Copperfield* (Monthly serial, May 1849 to November 1850)
• *Bleak House* (Monthly serial, March 1852 to September 1853)
• *Hard Times: For These Times* (Weekly serial in *Household Words*, April 1, 1854, to August 12, 1854)
• *Little Dorrit* (Monthly serial, December 1855 to June 1857)
• *A Tale of Two Cities* (Weekly serial in *All the Year Round*, April 30, 1859, to November 26, 1859)
• *Great Expectations* (Weekly serial in *All the Year Round*, December 1, 1860 to August 3, 1861)
• *Our Mutual Friend* (Monthly serial, May 1864 to November 1865)
• *No Thoroughfare* (1867) (with Wilkie Collins)
• *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (Monthly serial, April 1870 to September 1870. Only six of twelve planned numbers completed)
• *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* (1890)

**Short story collections**

• *Sketches by Boz* (1836)
• *Boots at the Holly-tree Inn: And Other Stories* (1858)
• *Reprinted Pieces* (1861)
• *The Haunted House* (1862) (with Wilkie Collins, Elizabeth Gaskell, Adelaide Proctor, George Sala and Hesba Setton)
• *The Mudfog Papers* (1880) aka Mudfog and Other Sketches
• *To Be Read At Dusk* (1898)

**Selected nonfiction, poetry, and plays**

• *The Village Coquettes* (Plays, 1836)
• *The Fine Old English Gentleman* (poetry, 1841)
• *American Notes: For General Circulation* (1842)
• *Pictures from Italy* (1846)
• *The Life of Our Lord: As written for his children* (1849)
• *A Child's History of England* (1853)
• *The Frozen Deep* (play, 1857)
• *Speeches, Letters and Sayings* (1870)

**Dickens as a Character in Fiction**

• *Dickens of London* (1976) is a miniseries about Dickens. He is played as an adult by Roy Dotrice.
• Portrayed by Simon Callow in the 2005 Doctor Who episode The Unquiet Dead.

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Arthur Conan Doyle

Sir Arthur Ignatius Conan Doyle, DL (22 May 1859-7 July 1930) was a Scottish author most noted for his stories about the detective Sherlock Holmes, which are generally considered a major innovation in the field of crime fiction, and for the adventures of Professor Challenger. He was a prolific writer whose other works include science fiction stories, historical novels, plays and romances, poetry, and non-fiction.

Life

Arthur Conan Doyle was born on 22 May 1859, in Edinburgh, Scotland, to an English father, Charles Altamont Doyle, and an Irish mother, Mary Foley, who had married in 1855. Although he is now referred to as "Conan Doyle", the origin of this compound surname is uncertain. Conan Doyle's father was an artist, as were his paternal uncles (one of whom was Richard Doyle), and his paternal grandfather John Doyle.

Conan Doyle was sent to the Roman Catholic Jesuit preparatory school St Marys Hall, Stonyhurst, at the age of nine. He then went on to Stonyhurst College, but by the time he left the school in 1875, he had rejected Christianity to become an agnostic.

From 1876 to 1881 he studied medicine at the University of Edinburgh, including a period working in the town of Aston (now a district of Birmingham). While studying, he also began writing short stories; his first published story appeared in Chambers's Edinburgh Journal before he was 20. Following his term at university, he served as a ship's doctor on a voyage to the West African coast, and then in 1882 he set up a practice in Plymouth. He completed his doctorate on the subject of tabes dorsalis in 1885.

In 1882 he took up medical practice in Portsmouth. The practice was initially not very successful; while waiting for patients, he again began writing stories. His first significant work was A Study in Scarlet, which appeared in Beeton's Christmas Annual for 1887 and featured the first appearance of Sherlock Holmes, who was partially modelled after his former university professor, Joseph Bell. Future short stories featuring Sherlock Holmes were published in the English magazine The Strand. Interestingly, Rudyard Kipling congratulated Conan Doyle on his success, asking "Could this be my old friend, Dr. Joe?" Sherlock Holmes, however, was even more closely modelled after the famous Edgar Allan Poe character, C. Auguste Dupin.

While living in Southsea he played football for an amateur side (that disbanded in 1894), Portsmouth Athletic Football Club, and not Portsmouth F.C., as is the common myth.

In 1885 he married Louisa (or Louise) Hawkins, known as "Touie", who suffered from tuberculosis and died on July 4, 1906. He married Jean Leckie in 1907, whom he had first met and fallen in love with in 1897 but had maintained a platonic relationship with her out of loyalty to his first wife. Conan Doyle had five children, two with his first wife (Mary Louise (born 1889) and Alleyne Kingsley (1892-1918), and three with his second wife (Jean Lena Annette, Denis Percy Stewart (March 17, 1909-March 9, 1955), second husband in 1936 of Georgian Princess Nina Mdivani (circa 1910-February 19, 1987) (former sister-in-law of Barbara Hutton), and Adrian Malcolm).

In 1890 Conan Doyle studied the eye in Vienna; he moved to London in 1891 to set up a practice as an ophthalmologist. He wrote in his autobiography that not a single patient crossed his door. This gave him more time for writing, and in November 1891 he wrote to his mother: "I think of slaying Holmes.. and winding him up for good and all. He takes my mind from better things." His mother responded, saying, "You may do what you deem fit, but the crowds will not take this lightheartedly." In December 1893, he did so in order to dedicate more of his time...
to more "important" works (his historical novels).

Holmes and Moriarty apparently plunged to their deaths together down a waterfall in the story, "The Final Problem". Public outcry led him to bring the character back; Conan Doyle returned to the story in "The Adventure of the Empty House", with the explanation that only Moriarty had fallen but, since Holmes had other dangerous enemies, he had arranged to be temporarily "dead" also. Holmes ultimately appears in a total of 56 short stories and four Conan Doyle novels (he has since appeared in many novels and stories by other authors).

Following the Boer War in South Africa at the turn of the 20th century and the condemnation from around the world over the United Kingdom's conduct, Conan Doyle wrote a short pamphlet titled, The War in South Africa: Its Cause and Conduct, which justified the UK's role in the Boer war, and was widely translated.

Conan Doyle believed that it was this pamphlet that resulted in 1902 in his being knighted and appointed Deputy-Lieutenant of Surrey. He also in 1900 wrote the longer book, The Great Boer War. During the early years of the 20th century, Sir Arthur twice ran for Parliament as a Liberal Unionist, once in Edinburgh and once in the Hawick Burghs, but although he received a respectable vote he was not elected.

Conan Doyle was involved in the campaign for the reform of the Congo Free State, led by the journalist E. D. Morel and the diplomat Roger Casement. He wrote The Crime of the Congo in 1909, a long pamphlet in which he denounced the horrors in that country. He became acquainted with Morel and Casement, taking inspiration from them for two of the main characters in the novel, The Lost World (1912).

He broke with both when Morel became one of the leaders of the pacifist movement during the First World War, and when Casement committed treason against the UK during the Easter Rising out of conviction for his Irish nationalist views. Conan Doyle tried, unsuccessfully, to save Casement from the death penalty, arguing that he had been driven mad and was not responsible for his actions.

Conan Doyle was also a fervent advocate of justice, and personally investigated two closed cases, which led to two imprisoned men being released. The first case, in 1906, involved a shy half-British, half-Indian lawyer named George Edalji, who had allegedly penned threatening letters and mutilated animals. Police were set on Edalji's conviction, even though the mutilations continued after their suspect was jailed.

It was partially as a result of this case that the Court of Criminal Appeal was established in 1907, so not only did Conan Doyle help George Edalji, his work helped establish a way to correct other miscarriages of justice. The story of Conan Doyle and Edalji is told in fictional form in Julian Barnes' 2005 novel, Arthur & George.

The second case, that of Oscar Slater, a German Jew and gambling-den operator convicted of bludgeoning an 82-year-old woman in Glasgow in 1908, excited Conan Doyle's curiosity because of inconsistencies in the prosecution case and a general sense that Slater was framed.

After the death of his wife Louisa in 1906, and the deaths of his son Kingsley, his brother, his two brothers-in-law, and his two nephews in World War I, Conan Doyle sank into depression. He found solace supporting Spiritualism and its alleged scientific proof of existence beyond the grave.

According to the History Channel program Houdini: Unlocking the Mystery (which briefly explored the friendship between the two), Conan Doyle became involved with Spiritualism after the death of his own son during the First World War. Kingsley Doyle died from pneumonia in October 1917, which he contracted during his year plus convalescence after being seriously wounded during the disastrous 1916 Battle of the Somme. The elder Doyle became involved with Spiritualism to the extent that he wrote a Professor Challenger novel on the subject, The Land of Mist.

One of the odder aspects of this period of his life was his book, The Coming of the Fairies (1921). He was apparently totally convinced of the veracity of the Cottingley fairy photographs, which he reproduced in the book, together with theories about the nature and existence of fairies and spirits.

In his The History of Spiritualism (1926) Conan Doyle highly praised the psychic phenomena and spirit materialisations produced by Eusapia Palladino and Mina "Margery" Crandon, based on the investigations of duped scientists and conjurers who deeply desired to encounter psychic phenomena and refused to listen to sceptical and well-informed scientists and conjurers.

His work on this topic was one of the reasons that one of his short story collections, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, was banned in the Soviet Union in 1929 for supposed occultism. This ban was later lifted. Russian actor Vasily Livanov later received an Order of the British Empire for his portrayal of Sherlock Holmes.

Conan Doyle was friends for a time with the American magician Harry Houdini, who himself became a prominent opponent of the Spiritualist movement in the 1920s following the death of his own beloved mother. Although Houdini insisted that Spiritualist mediums employed trickery (and consistently attempted to expose them as frauds), Conan Doyle became convinced that Houdini himself possessed supernatural powers, a view expressed in Conan Doyle's The Edge of the Unknown. Houdini was apparently unable to convince Conan Doyle that his feats were simply magic tricks, leading to a bitter, public, falling-out between the two. Doyle was totally stunned when
Houdini pulled off his thumb and then replaced it.

Richard Milner, an American historian of science, has presented a case that Conan Doyle may have been the perpetrator of the Piltdown Man hoax of 1912, creating the counterfeit hominid fossil that fooled the scientific world for over 40 years. Milner says that Conan Doyle had a motive, namely revenge on the scientific establishment for debunking one of his favourite psychics, and that The Lost World contains several encrypted clues regarding his involvement in the hoax.

Samuel Rosenberg's 1974 book Naked is the Best Disguise purports to explain how Conan Doyle left, throughout his writings, open clues that related to hidden and suppressed aspects of his mentality.

Conan Doyle was found clutching his chest in the family garden on July 7, 1930. He soon died of his heart attack, aged 71, and is buried in the Church Yard at Minstead in the New Forest, Hampshire, England. His last words were directed toward his wife: "You are wonderful." The epitaph on his gravestone reads:

STEEL TRUE
BLADE STRAIGHT
ARTHUR CONAN DOYLE
KNIGHT
PATRIOT, PHYSICIAN & MAN OF LETTERS

Undershaw, the home Conan Doyle had built near Hindhead, south of London, and lived in for at least a decade, was a hotel and restaurant from 1924 until 2004. It was then bought by a developer, and has been empty since then while conservationists and Conan Doyle fans fight to preserve it.

A statue has been erected in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's honour at Crowborough Cross in Crowborough, East Sussex, England, where Sir Arthur lived for 23 years. There is also a statue of Sherlock Holmes in Picardy Place, Edinburgh, Scotland, close to the house where Conan Doyle was born.
Anna Katharine Green

Anna Katharine Green (November 11, 1846 - April 11, 1935) was an American poet and novelist. She was one of the first writers of detective fiction in America and distinguished herself by writing well plotted, legally accurate stories (no doubt assisted by her lawyer father).

**Life and work**

Born in Brooklyn, New York, Green's early ambition was to write romantic verse, and she corresponded with Ralph Waldo Emerson. When her poetry failed to gain recognition, she produced her first and best known novel, *The Leavenworth Case* (1878). She became a bestselling author, eventually publishing about 40 books.

Green was in some ways a progressive woman for her time-succeeding in a genre dominated by male writers—but she did not approve of many of her feminist contemporaries, and she was opposed to women's suffrage.

Green married the actor, and later designer and artist, Charles Rohlfs on November 25, 1884. They had one daughter and two sons, Roland Rohlfs and Sterling Rohlfs, who were test pilots. Green died in Buffalo, New York, at the age of 88.

**Selected works**

- *The Leavenworth Case* (1878)
- *A Strange Disappearance* (1880)
- *Hand and Ring* (1883)
- *Behind Closed Doors* (1888)
- *Forsaken Inn* (1890)
- *Marked "Personal"* (1893)
- *The Doctor, His Wife, and the Clock* (1895)
- *The Affair Next Door* (1897)
- *Lost Man's Lane* (1898)
- *The Filigree Ball* (1903)
- *The House in the Mist* (1905)
- *The Woman in the Alcove* (1906)
- *The House of the Whispering Pines* (1910)
- *The Mystery of the Hasty Arrow* (1917)
- *The Step on the Stair* (1923)
**Biography**

Thomas Hardy, OM (2 June 1840 - 11 January 1928) was an English novelist, short story writer, and poet of the naturalist movement. The bulk of his work, set mainly in the semi-imaginary county of Wessex, delineates characters struggling against their passions and circumstances. Hardy's poetry, first published in his fifties, has come to be as well regarded as his novels, especially after The Movement of the 1950s and 60s.

Thomas Hardy was born at Higher Bockhampton, a hamlet in the parish of Stinsford to the east of Dorchester in Dorset, England. His father worked as a stonemason and local builder. His mother was ambitious and well read, supplementing his formal education, which ended at the age of 16 when he became apprenticed to John Hicks, a local architect. Hardy trained as an architect in Dorchester before moving to London in 1862. There he enrolled as a student at King's College London. He won prizes from the Royal Institute of British Architects and the Architectural Association. He never truly felt at home in London and when he returned five years later to Dorset he decided to dedicate himself to writing.

In 1870, while on an architectural mission to restore the parish church of St Juliot in Cornwall, Hardy met and fell in love with Emma Lavinia Gifford, whom he married in 1874. Although he later became estranged from his wife, her death in 1912 had a traumatic effect on him. He made a trip to Cornwall to revisit places linked with their courtship; his *Poems 1912-13* explore his grief. In 1914, Hardy married his secretary Florence Dugdale, 40 years his junior, whom he had met in 1905. However, Hardy remained preoccupied with Emma's sudden death, and tried to overcome his remorse by writing poetry.

Hardy fell ill with pleurisy in December 1927 and died in January 1928, having dictated his final poem to his wife on his deathbed. His funeral, on 16 January at Westminster Abbey, proved a controversial occasion: Hardy, his family and friends had wished him to be buried at Stinsford in the same grave as his first wife, Emma. However, his executor, Sir Sydney Carlyle Cockerell, insisted he be placed in the abbey's Poets' Corner. A compromise was reached whereby his heart was buried at Stinsford with Emma, and his ashes in Poets' Corner.

Shortly after Hardy's death, the executors of his estate burnt his letters and notebooks. Twelve records survived, one of them containing notes and extracts of newspaper stories from the 1820s. Research into these provided insight into how Hardy kept track of them and how he used them in his later work.

Hardy's work was admired by many authors, amongst them D.H. Lawrence and Virginia Woolf. The writer Robert Graves, in his autobiography *Goodbye to All That*, recalls meeting Hardy in Dorset in the early 1920s. Hardy received Graves and his newly married wife warmly, and was encouraging about the younger author's work.

In 1910, Hardy was awarded the Order of Merit.

Hardy's cottage at Bockhampton and Max Gate in Dorchester are owned by the National Trust.

**Religious beliefs**

Hardy's religious life seems to have mixed agnosticism and spiritism. Once, when asked in correspondence by a
clergyman about the question of reconciling the horrors of pain with the goodness of a loving God, Hardy replied,

"Mr. Hardy regrets that he is unable to offer any hypothesis which would reconcile the existence of such evils as Dr. Grosart describes with the idea of omnipotent goodness. Perhaps Dr. Grosart might be helped to a provisional view of the universe by the recently published Life of Darwin, and the works of Herbert Spencer, and other agnostics."

Nevertheless, Hardy frequently conceived of and wrote about supernatural forces that control the universe, more through indifference or caprice than any firm will. Also, Hardy showed in his writing some degree of fascination with ghosts and spirits. Despite these sentiments, Hardy retained a strong emotional attachment to the Christian liturgy and church rituals, particularly as manifested in rural communities, that had been such a formative influence in his early years. Some attributed the bleak outlook of many of his novels as reflecting his view of the absence of God. A sentence found in his Tess of the d'Urbervilles neatly sums up Hardy's philosophical stance:

"The inherent will to enjoy and the circumstantial will against enjoyment"

**Novels**

Hardy's first novel, The Poor Man and the Lady, finished by 1867, failed to find a publisher and Hardy destroyed the manuscript so only parts of the novel remain. He was encouraged to try again by his mentor and friend, Victorian poet and novelist George Meredith. Desperate Remedies (1871) and Under the Greenwood Tree (1872) were published anonymously. In 1873 A Pair of Blue Eyes, a story drawing on Hardy's courtship of his first wife, was published under his own name.

Hardy said that he first introduced Wessex in Far from the Madding Crowd (1874), his next (and first important) novel. It was successful enough for Hardy to give up architectural work and pursue a literary career. Over the next twenty-five years Hardy produced ten more novels.

The Hardys moved from London to Yeovil and then to Sturminster Newton, where he wrote The Return of the Native (1878). In 1885, they moved for a last time, to Max Gate, a house outside Dorchester designed by Hardy and built by his brother. There he wrote The Mayor of Casterbridge (1886), The Woodlanders (1887) and Tess of the d'Urbervilles (1891), the last of which attracted criticism for its sympathetic portrayal of a "fallen woman" and was initially refused publication. Its subtitle, A Pure Woman: Faithfully Presented, was intended to raise the eyebrows of the Victorian middle-classes.

Jude the Obscure, published in 1895, met with even stronger negative outrages from the Victorian public for its frank treatment of sex, and was often referred to as "Jude the Obscene". Heavily criticized for its apparent attack on the institution of marriage, the book caused further strain on Hardy's already difficult marriage because Emma Hardy was concerned that Jude the Obscure would be read as being autobiographical. Some booksellers sold the novel in brown paper bags, and the Bishop of Wakefield is reputed to have burnt a copy.

Despite this criticism, Hardy had become a celebrity in English literature by the 1900s, with several blockbuster novels under his belt, yet he felt disgust at the public reception of two of his greatest works and gave up writing novels altogether. Several critics have commented, however, that there was very little left for Hardy to write about, having creatively exhausted the increasingly fatalistic tone of his novels.

**Literary Themes**

Although he wrote a lot of poetry, mostly unpublished until after 1898, Hardy is best remembered for the series of novels and short stories he wrote between 1871 and 1895. His novels are set in the imaginary world of Wessex, a large area of south and south-west England, using the name of the Anglo-Saxon kingdom that covered the area. Hardy was part of two worlds; on the one hand he had a deep emotional bond with the rural way of life which he had known as a child, but on the other he was aware of the changes which were under way, and the current social problems from the innovations in agriculture - he captured the epoch just before the railways and the industrial revolution changed the English countryside - to the unfairness and hypocrisy of Victorian sexual behaviour.

He paints a vivid picture of rural life in the nineteenth century, with all its joys and suffering, a fatalistic world full of superstition and injustice. His heroes and heroines are often alienated from society and rarely become readmitted into it. He tends to emphasize the impersonal and, generally, negative powers of fate over the mainly working class people he represented in his novels. Hardy exhibits in his books elemental passion, deep instinct, the human will struggling against fatal and ill-comprehended laws, a victim also of unforeseeable change. Tess, for example, ends with some of the most poignant lines in British Literature on this theme:

In particular, Hardy's novel Jude the Obscure is full of the sense of crisis of the later Victorian period (as
It describes the tragedy of two new social types, Jude Fawley, a working man who attempts to educate himself, and his lover and cousin, Sue Bridehead, who represents the 'new woman' of the 1890s.

His mastery, as both an author and poet, lies in the creation of natural surroundings making discoveries through close observation and acute sensitiveness. He notices the smallest and most delicate details, yet he can also paint vast landscapes of his own Wessex in melancholy or noble moods (his eye for poignant detail - such as the spreading bloodstain on the ceiling at the end of *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* and little Jude's suicide note - often came from clippings from newspaper reports of real events).

**Poetry**

In 1898 Hardy published his first volume of poetry, *Wessex Poems*, a collection of poems written over 30 years. Hardy claimed poetry as his first love, and published collections until his death in 1928. Although not as well received by his contemporaries as his novels, Hardy's poetry has been applauded considerably in recent years, in part because of the influence on Philip Larkin. However, critically it is still not regarded as highly as his prose.

Most of his poems deal with themes of disappointment in love and life, and mankind's long struggle against indifference to human suffering. Some, like *The Darkling Thrush* and *An August Midnight*, appear as poems about writing poetry, because the nature mentioned in them gives Hardy the inspiration to write those. A vein of regret tinges his often seemingly banal themes. His compositions range in style from the three-volume epic closet drama *The Dynasts* to smaller, and often hopeful or even cheerful ballads of the moment such as the little-known *The Children and Sir Nameless*, a comic poem inspired by the tombs of the Martyns, builders of Athelhampton.

A few of Hardy's poems, such as *The Blinded Bird* (a melancholy polemic against the sport of vivisectioning), display his love of the natural world and his firm stance against animal cruelty, exhibited in his antivivisectionist views and his membership in the RSPCA.

Composer Lee Hoiby's setting of "The Darkling Thrush" became the basis of the multimedia opera *Darkling*. Other composers who set Hardy's text to music include Gerald Finzi, who produced six song-cycles for poems by Hardy, and Benjamin Britten, who based his song-cycle *Winter Words* on Hardy's poetry. Ralph Vaughan Williams and Gustav Holst also set texts by Hardy; Holst also based one of his last orchestral works, *Egdon Heath*, on Hardy's work. It is said to be Holst's masterpiece. Timothy Takach, a graduate of St. Olaf, has also put "The Darkling Thrush" into arrangement for a 4-part mixed choir.

**Works**

**Prose**

Hardy divided his novels and collected short stories into three classes:

**Novels of Character and Environment**

- *The Poor Man and the Lady* (1867, unpublished and lost)
- *Under the Greenwood Tree* (1872)
- *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874)
- *The Return of the Native* (1878)
- *The Mayor of Casterbridge* (1886)
- *The Woodlanders* (1887)
- *Wessex Tales* (1888, a collection of short stories)
- *Tess of the d'Urbervilles* (1891)
- *Life's Little Ironies* (1894, a collection of short stories)
- *Jude the Obscure* (1895)

**Romances and Fantasies**

- *A Pair of Blue Eyes* (1873)
- *The Trumpet-Major* (1880)
- *Two on a Tower* (1882)
- *A Group of Noble Dames* (1891, a collection of short stories)
- *The Well-Beloved* (1897) (first published as a serial from 1892).
Novels of Ingenuity

- *Desperate Remedies* (1871)
- *The Hand of Ethelberta* (1876)
- *A Laodicean* (1881)

Hardy also produced a number of minor tales and a collaborative novel, *The Spectre of the Real* (1894). An additional short-story collection, beyond the ones mentioned above, is *A Changed Man and Other Tales* (1913). His works have been collected as the 24-volume Wessex Edition (1912-1913) and the 37-volume Mellstock Edition (1919-1920). His largely self-written biography appears under his second wife's name in two volumes from 1928-1930, as *The Early Life of Thomas Hardy, 1840-1891* and *The Later Years of Thomas Hardy, 1892-1928*, now published in a critical one-volume edition as *The Life and Work of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Michael Millgate (1984).

**Poetry** (not a comprehensive list)

- *Wessex Poems and Other Verses* (1898)
- *Poems of the Past and Present* (1901)
- *The Dynasts, Part 1* (1904)
- *The Dynasts, Part 2* (1906)
- *The Dynasts, Part 3* (1908)
- *Time's Laughingstocks and Other Verses* (1909)
- *Satires of Circumstance* (1914)
- *Moments of Vision* (1919)
- *Collected Poems* (1919, part of the Mellstock Edition of his novels and poems)
- *Late Lyrics and Earlier with Many Other Verses* (1922)
- *Human Shows, Far Phantasies, Songs and Trifles* (1925)
- *Winter Words in Various Moods and Metres* (1928, published posthumously)

**Drama**

- The Famous Tragedy of the Queen of Cornwall (1923)

**Locations in novels**

Berkshire is *North Wessex*, Devon is *Lower Wessex*, Dorset is *South Wessex*, Somerset is *Outer* or *Nether Wessex*, Wiltshire is *Mid-Wessex*.

Bere Regis is King's-Bere of *Tess*, Bincombe Down cross roads is the scene of the military execution in *A Melancholy Hussar*. It is a true story, the deserters from the German Legion were shot in 1801 and are recorded in the parish register. Bindon Abbey is where Clare carried her. Bournemouth is Sandbourne of *Hand of Ethelberta* and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Bridport is Port Bredy, Charborough House and its folly tower at 50°46'38.75''N, 2°6'7.09''W is the model for *Welland House* in the novel *Two on a Tower*. Corfe Castle is the Corvsgate-Castle of *Hand of Ethelberta*. Cranborne Chase is *The Chase* scene of Tess's seduction. (Note - Bowerchalke on Cranborne Chase at 51°0'30.75''N, 1°59'18.30''W was the film location for the great fire in John Schlesinger's 1967 film Far from the Madding Crowd.)

Dorchester, Dorset is *Casterbridge*, the scene of *Mayor of Casterbridge*. Dunster Castle in Somerset is *Castle De Stancy* of *A Laodicean*. Fordington moor is Durnover moor and fields. Greenhill Fair near Bere Regis is Woodbury Hill Fair, Lulworth Cove is Lulstead Cove, Mannhull is Marlott of *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Melbury House near Evershot is Great Hintock Court in *A Group of Noble Dames*. Minterne is Little Hintock, Owermoigne is Nether Moynot in Wessex Tales.

Piddlehinton and Piddle Trethinte are the Longpuddle of *A Few Crusted Characters*. Puddletown Heath, Moreton Heath, Tincleton Heath and Bere Heath are Egdon Heath. Poole is Havenpool in *Life's Little Ironies*. Portland is the scene of *The Pursuit of the Well-Beloved*. Puddletown is Weatherbury in *Far from the Madding Crowd*, River Frome valley is the scene of Talbothays dairy in *Tess*. Salisbury is Melchester in *On the Western Circuit*, *Life's Little Ironies* and Jude the Obscure etc. Shaftesbury is Shaston in *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* and Jude the Obscure. Sherborne is Sherton-Abbas, Sherborne Castle is home of Lady Baxby in *A Group of Noble Dames*. Stonehenge is the scene of Tess's apprehension. Sutton Poyntz is *Overcombe*. Swanage is the Knollsea of *Hand of
Ethelberta. Taunton is known as Toneborough in both Hardy's novels and poems (see http://www.wessex.me.uk/taunton.html). Wantage is Alfredston, of Jude the Obscure. Fawley, Berkshire is Marygreen of Jude the Obscure. Weyhill is Weydon Priors, Weymouth is Budmouth Regis, the scene of Trumpet Major & portions of other novels; Winchester is Wintoncester where Tess was executed. Wimborne is Warborne of Two on a Tower. Wolfeton House, near Dorchester is the scene of The Lady Penelope in a Group of Noble Dames. Woolbridge old Manor House, close to Wool station, is the scene of Tess's confession and honeymoon.

In Other Literature

Hardy provides the springboard for D. H. Lawrence's Study of Thomas Hardy (1936). Though this work became a platform for Lawrence's own developing philosophy rather than a more standard literary study, the influence of Hardy's treatment of character and Lawrence's own response to the central metaphysic behind many of Hardy's novels helped significantly in the development of The Rainbow (1915, suppressed) and Women in Love (1920, private publication).
Jacques Heath Futrelle (April 9, 1875 - April 15, 1912) was an American journalist and mystery writer. He is best known for writing short detective stories featuring the "Thinking Machine", Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen.

Career

Futrelle, who was born in Pike County, Georgia, worked for the Atlanta Journal, where he began their sports section; the New York Herald; the Boston Post; and the Boston American, where, in 1905, his Thinking Machine character first appeared in a serialized version of "The Problem of Cell 13". In 1895, he married fellow writer Lily May Peel, with whom he had two children, Virginia and Jacques "John" Jr. Futrelle left the Boston American in 1906 to focus his attention on writing novels. He had a house built in Scituate, Massachusetts, which he called "Stepping Stones", and spent most of his time there until his death in 1912.

Returning from Europe aboard the RMS Titanic, Futrelle, a first-cabin passenger, refused to board a lifeboat insisting his wife board instead, according to his wife, with the belief that her boarding would give him a better chance of surviving; he perished in the Atlantic. On 29 July 1912 his mother, Linnie Futrelle, died in her Georgia home; her death was attributed to grief over her son's death.

Futrelle is used as the protagonist in The Titanic Murders, a novel about two murders aboard the Titanic, by Max Allan Collins.

Selected works

Novels

- The Chase of the Golden Plate (1906)
- The Simple Case of Susan (1908)
- The Thinking Machine on the Case (1908)
- The Diamond Master (1909)
- Elusive Isabel (1909)
- The High Hand (1911)
- My Lady's Garter (1912)
- Blind Man's Bluff (1914)

Stories

- "The House That Was" (a literary experiment with his wife, in which The Thinking Machine provided a rational solution to the seemingly impossible and supernatural events of a ghost story written by May)
- "The Phantom Motor"
- "The Problem of Cell 13" (1907)
- Various other short stories (see Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen for more)
Gaston Leroux

Gaston Louis Alfred Leroux (6 May 1868, Paris, France - 15 April 1927) was a French journalist, detective, and novelist.

In the English-speaking world, he is best known for writing the novel The Phantom of the Opera (Le Fantôme de l'Opéra, 1910), which has been made into several film and stage productions of the same name, such as the 1925 film starring Lon Chaney; and Andrew Lloyd Webber's 1986 musical. It was also the basis of the 1990 novel Phantom by Susan Kay.

Leroux went to school in Normandy and studied law in Paris, graduating in 1889. He inherited millions of francs and lived wildly until he nearly reached bankruptcy. Then in 1890, he began working as a court reporter and theater critic for L'Echo de Paris. His most important journalism came when he began working as an international correspondent for the Paris newspaper Le Matin. In 1905 he was present at and covered the Russian Revolution. Another case he was present at involved the investigation and deep coverage of an opera house in Paris, later to become a ballet house. The basement consisted of a cell that held prisoners in the Paris Commune, which were the rulers of Paris through much of the Franco-Prussian war.

He suddenly left journalism in 1907, and began writing fiction; in 1909, he made his own film company, Cinéromans. He first wrote a mystery novel entitled Le mystère de la chambre jaune (1908; The Mystery of the Yellow Room), starring the amateur detective Joseph Rouletabille. Leroux's contribution to French detective fiction is considered a parallel to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's in the United Kingdom and Edgar Allan Poe's in America. Leroux died in Nice on April 15, 1927, of a urinary tract infection.

Leroux's novels

English Titles:

The Adventures of Joseph Rouletabille

- The Mystery of the Yellow Room (1908)
- The Perfume of the Lady in Black (1909)
- The Secret of the Night (1914)
- The Sleuth Hound aka The Octopus of Paris (1926)

Adventures of Chéri-Bibi

- Cheri-Bibi and Cecily aka Missing Men (1923)
- The Veiled Prisoner (1923)
- Wolves of the Sea aka The Floating Prison
- The Dark Road (1924)
- Nomads of the Night aka The Dancing Girl (1925)
- The New Idol (1928)
Independent works

- *The Double Life* (1904) aka *The Man with the Black Feather* (1912)
- *The Bride of the Sun* (1915)
- *The Man Who Came Back From the Dead* (1916)
- *The Phantom of the Opera* (1910)
- *The Haunted Chair* (1922)
- *The Kiss that Killed* (1924)
- *The Machine to Kill* (1924)
- *The Adventures of a Coquette* (1926)
- *The Man of a Hundred Faces* aka *Mister Flow* (1930)
- *Balooy*
- *Lady Helena*
- *The Vase of Camelry* (1922)

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Biography of Edgar Allan Poe

Life and career

Edgar Allan Poe (January 19, 1809 - October 7, 1849) was an American poet, short story writer, playwright, editor, critic, essayist and one of the leaders of the American Romantic Movement. Best known for his tales of the macabre and mystery, Poe was one of the early American practitioners of the short story and a progenitor of detective fiction and crime fiction. He is also credited with contributing to the emergent science fiction genre. Poe died at the age of 40. The cause of his death is undetermined and has been attributed to alcohol, drugs, cholera, rabies, suicide (although likely to be mistaken with his suicide attempt in the previous year), tuberculosis, heart disease, brain congestion and other agents.

Life and career

Early life

Poe was born Edgar Poe to a Scots-Irish family in Boston, Massachusetts, on January 19, 1809, the son of actress Elizabeth Arnold Hopkins Poe and actor David Poe, Jr. He had a Mayflower descent, though, from Edward Fuller, through an American great-grandmother. The second of three children, his elder brother was William Henry Leonard Poe, and younger sister, Rosalie Poe. His father abandoned their family in 1810. His mother died a year later from "consumption" (TB). Poe was then taken into the home of John Allan, a successful Scottish merchant in Richmond, Virginia who dealt in a variety of goods including tobacco, cloths, wheat, tombstones, and slaves. The Allans served as a foster family but never formally adopted Poe, though they gave him the name "Edgar Allan Poe."

The Allan family baptised young Edgar as Episcopalian in 1812 and John Allan alternatively spoiled and aggressively disciplined his foster son. The family, which included Allan's wife Frances Valentine Allan, traveled to England in 1815, and Edgar sailed with them. He attended the Grammar School in Irvine, Scotland (where John Allan was born) for a short period in 1815, before rejoining the family in London in 1816. He studied at a boarding school in Chelsea until the summer of 1817. He was then entered at Reverend John Bransby's Manor House School at Stoke Newington, then a suburb four miles north of London. Bransby is mentioned by name as a character in "William Wilson."

Poe moved back with the Allans to Richmond, Virginia in 1820. In 1825, John Allan's friend and business benefactor William Galt, said to be the wealthiest man in Richmond, died and left Allan several acres of real estate. The inheritance was estimated at three quarters of a million dollars. By the summer of 1825, Allan celebrated his expansive wealth by purchasing a two-story brick home named "Moldavia." Poe may have become engaged to Sarah Elmira Royster before he registered at the one-year old University of Virginia in February 1826 with the intent to study languages. The University, in its infancy, was established on the ideals of its founder Thomas Jefferson. It had strict rules against gambling, horses, guns, tobacco and alcohol; these rules were generally ignored. Jefferson had enacted a system of student self-government, allowing students to choose their own studies, make their own arrangements for boarding, and to report all wrongdoing to the faculty. The unique system was still in chaos and there was a high drop-out rate. During his time there, Poe lost touch with Royster and also became estranged from his foster father over gambling debts. Poe claimed that Allan had not given him sufficient money to register for classes, purchase texts, and procure and furnish a dormitory. Allan did send additional money and clothes, but Poe's debts increased. Poe gave up on the University after a year and, not feeling welcome in Richmond, especially when he learned of his sweetheart Royster having married Alexander Shelton, he traveled to Boston in April 1827,
sustaining himself with odd jobs as a clerk and newspaper writer. At some point, he was using the name Henry Le Rennett as a pseudonym.

Military career

Reduced to destitution, Poe enlisted in the United States Army as a private, using the name "Edgar A. Perry" and claiming he was 22 years old (he was 18) on May 26, 1827. He first served at Fort Independence in Boston Harbor for five dollars a month. That same year, he released his first book, a 40-page collection of poetry, *Tamerlane and Other Poems* attributed only as "by a Bostonian." Only 50 copies were printed, and the book received virtually no attention. Poe's regiment was posted to Fort Moultrie in Charleston, South Carolina and traveled by ship on the brig *Waltham* on November 8, 1827. Poe was promoted to "artificer," an officer who prepared shells for artillery, and had his monthly pay doubled. After serving for two years and attaining the rank of sergeant major for artillery (the highest rank a noncommissioned officer can achieve), Poe sought to end his five-year enlistment early. He revealed his real name and his circumstances to his commanding officer, Lieutenant Howard, who would only allow Poe to be discharged if he reconciled with John Allan. Howard wrote a letter to Allan, but he was unsympathetic. Several months passed and pleas to Allan were ignored; Allan may not have written to Poe even to make him aware of his foster mother's illness. Frances Allan died on February 28, 1829 and Poe visited the day after her burial. Perhaps softened by his wife's death, John Allan agreed to support Poe's attempt to be discharged in order to receive an appointment to the United States Military Academy at West Point.

Poe finally was discharged on April 15, 1829 after securing a replacement to finish his enlisted term for him. Before entering West Point, Poe moved to Baltimore, Maryland to stay with his widowed aunt, Maria Clemm, her daughter, Poe's first cousin, Virginia Eliza Clemm, and his brother Henry. Meanwhile, Poe published his second book, *Al Aaraaf Tamerlane and Minor Poems* in Baltimore in 1829.

Poe traveled to West Point, and took his oath on July 1, 1830. John Allan married a second time. The marriage, and bitter quarrels with Poe over the children born to Allan out of affairs, led to the foster father finally disowning Poe. Poe decided to leave West Point by purposely getting court-martialed. On February 8, 1831, he was tried for gross neglect of duty and disobedience of orders for refusing to attend formations, classes, or church. Poe tactically pled not guilty to induce dismissal, knowing he would be found guilty. He left for New York in February 1831, and released a third volume of poems, simply titled *Poems*. The book was financed with help from his fellow cadets at West Point, many of whom donated 75 cents to the cause, raising a total of $170. They may have been expecting verses similar to the satirical ones Poe had been writing about commanding officers. Printed by Elam Bliss of New York, it was labeled as "Second Edition" and included a page saying, "To the U.S. Corps of Cadets this volume is respectfully dedicated." The book once again reprinted the long poems "Tamerlane" and "Al Aaraaf" but also six previously unpublished poems including early versions of "To Helen," "Israfel," and "The City in the Sea."

Publishing career

He returned to Baltimore, to his aunt, brother and cousin, in March 1831. Henry died from tuberculosis in August 1831. Poe turned his attention to prose, and placed a few stories with a Philadelphia publication. He also began work on his only drama, *Politian*. The *Saturday Visitor*, a Baltimore paper, awarded a prize in October 1833 to his *The Manuscript Found in a Bottle*. The story brought him to the attention of John P. Kennedy, a Baltimorian of considerable means. He helped Poe place some of his stories, and also introduced him to Thomas W. White, editor of the *Southern Literary Messenger* in Richmond. Poe became assistant editor of the periodical in July 1835. Within a few weeks, he was discharged after being found drunk repeatedly. Returning to Baltimore, he secretly married Virginia, his cousin, on September 22, 1835. She was 13 at the time, though she is listed on the marriage certificate as being 21.

Reinstated by White after promising good behavior, Poe went back to Richmond with Virginia and her mother, and remained at the paper until January 1837. During this period, its circulation increased from 700 to 3500. He published several poems, book reviews, criticism, and stories in the paper. On May 16, 1836, he entered into marriage in Richmond with Virginia Clemm, this time in public.

*The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* was published and widely reviewed in 1838. In the summer of 1839, Poe became assistant editor of *Burton's Gentleman's Magazine*. He published a large number of articles, stories, and reviews, enhancing the reputation as a trenchant critic that he had established at the *Southern Literary Messenger*. Also in 1839, the collection *Tales of the Grotesque and Arabesque* was published in two volumes. Though not a financial success, it was a milestone in the history of American literature, collecting such classic Poe tales as "The
Fall of the House of Usher”, “MS. Found in a Bottle”, “Berenice”, “Ligeia” and "William Wilson". Poe left Burton's after about a year and found a position as assistant at *Graham's Magazine*.

In June 1840, Poe published a prospectus announcing his intentions to start his own journal, *The Stylus*. Originally, Poe intended to call the journal *The Penn*, as it would have been based in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. In the June 6, 1840 issue of Philadelphia's *Saturday Evening Post*, Poe purchased advertising space for his prospectus: "PROSPECTUS OF THE PENN MAGAZINE, A MONTHLY LITERARY JOURNAL, TO BE EDITED AND PUBLISHED IN THE CITY OF PHILADELPHIA, BY EDGAR A. POE." The journal would never be produced.

The evening of January 20, 1842, Virginia broke a blood vessel while singing and playing the piano. Blood began to rush forth from her mouth. It was the first sign of consumption, now more commonly known as tuberculosis. She only partially recovered. Poe began to drink more heavily under the stress of Virginia's illness. He left *Graham's* and attempted to find a new position, for a time angling for a government post. He returned to New York, where he worked briefly at the *Evening Mirror* before becoming editor of the *Broadway Journal* and, later, sole owner. There he became involved in a noisy public feud with Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. On January 29, 1845, his poem "The Raven" appeared in the *Evening Mirror* and became a popular sensation.

The *Broadway Journal* failed in 1846. Poe moved to a cottage in the Fordham section of The Bronx, New York. He loved the Jesuits at Fordham University and frequently strolled about its campus conversing with both students and faculty. Fordham University's bell tower even inspired him to write "The Bells." The Poe Cottage is on the southeast corner of the Grand Concourse and Kingsbridge Road, and is open to the public. Virginia died there on January 30, 1847.

Increasingly unstable after his wife's death, Poe attempted to court the poet Sarah Helen Whitman, who lived in Providence, Rhode Island. Their engagement failed, purportedly because of Poe's drinking and erratic behavior; however there is also strong evidence that Miss Whitman's mother intervened and did much to derail their relationship. He then returned to Richmond and resumed a relationship with a childhood sweetheart, Sarah Elmira Royster.

Death

On October 3, 1849, Poe was found on the streets of Baltimore delirious and “in great distress, and... in need of immediate assistance,” according to the friend who found him, Dr. E. Snodgrass. He was taken to the Washington College Hospital, where he died early on the morning of October 7. Poe was never coherent long enough to explain how he came to be in his dire condition, and, oddly, was wearing clothes that were not his own. Poe is said to have repeatedly called out the name "Reynolds" on the night before his death. Some sources say Poe's final words were "Lord help my poor soul." Poe suffered from bouts of depression and madness, and he may have attempted suicide in 1848.

Poe finally died on Sunday, October 7, 1849 at 5:00 in the morning. The precise cause of Poe's death is disputed and has aroused great controversy.

Griswold's "Memoir"

The day Edgar Allan Poe was buried, a long obituary appeared in the *New York Tribune* signed "Ludwig" which was soon published throughout the country. The piece began, "Edgar Allan Poe is dead. He died in Baltimore the day before yesterday. This announcement will startle many, but few will be grieved by it." "Ludwig" was soon identified as Rufus Wilmot Griswold, a minor editor and anthologist who had borne a grudge against Poe since 1842. Griswold somehow became executor of Poe's literary estate and attempted to destroy his enemy's reputation after his death.

Rufus Griswold wrote a biographical "Memoir" of Poe, which he included in an 1850 volume of the collected works. Griswold depicted Poe as a depraved, drunk, drug-addled madman and included forged letters as evidence. Griswold's book was denounced by those who knew Poe well, but it became a popularly accepted one. This was due in part because it was the only full biography available and was widely reprinted, and in part because it seemed to accord with the narrative voice Poe used in much of his fiction.

The Poe Toaster
Adding to the mystery surrounding Poe's death, an unknown visitor affectionately referred to as the "Poe Toaster" has paid homage to Poe's grave every year since 1949. Though likely to have been several individuals in the more than 50 year history of this tradition, the tribute is always the same. Every January 19 in the early hours of the morning the man makes a toast of cognac to Poe's original grave marker and leaves three roses. Members of the Edgar Allan Poe Society in Baltimore have helped in protecting this tradition for decades.

**Literary and artistic theory**

In his essay "The Poetic Principle", Poe would argue that there is no such thing as a long poem, since the ultimate purpose of art is aesthetic, that is, its purpose is the effect it has on its audience, and this effect can only be maintained for a brief period of time (the time it takes to read a lyric poem, or watch a drama performed, or view a painting, etc.). He argued that an epic, if it has any value at all, must be actually a series of smaller pieces, each geared towards a single effect or sentiment, which "elevates the soul".

Poe associated the aesthetic aspect of art with pure ideality claiming that the mood or sentiment created by a work of art elevates the soul, and is thus a spiritual experience. In many of his short stories, artistically inclined characters (especially Roderick Usher from "The Fall of the House of Usher") are able to achieve this ideal aesthetic through fixation, and often exhibit obsessive personalities and reclusive tendencies. "The Oval Portrait" also examines fixation, but in this case the object of fixation is itself a work of art.

He championed art for art's sake (before the term itself was coined). He was consequentially an opponent of didacticism, arguing in his literary criticisms that the role of moral or ethical instruction lies outside the realm of poetry and art, which should only focus on the production of a beautiful work of art. He criticized James Russell Lowell in a review for being excessively didactic and moralistic in his writings, and argued often that a poem should be written "for a poem's sake". Since a poem's purpose is to convey a single aesthetic experience, Poe argues in his literary theory essay "The Philosophy of Composition", the ending should be written first. Poe's inspiration for this theory was Charles Dickens, who wrote to Poe in a letter dated March 6, 1842, Apropos of the "construction" of "Caleb Williams," do you know that Godwin wrote it backwards, - the last volume first, - and that when he had produced the hunting down of Caleb, and the catastrophe, he waited for months, casting about for a means of accounting for what he had done?

Poe refers to the letter in his essay. Dickens's literary influence on Poe can also be seen in Poe's short story "The Man of the Crowd." Its depictions of urban blight owe much to Dickens and in many places purposefully echo Dickens's language.

He was a proponent and supporter of magazine literature, and felt that short stories, or "tales" as they were called in the early nineteenth century, which were usually considered "vulgar" or "low art" along with the magazines that published them, were legitimate art forms on par with the novel or epic poem. His insistence on the artistic value of the short story was influential in the short story's rise to prominence in later generations.

Poe often included elements of popular pseudosciences such as phrenology and physiognomy in his fiction. Poe also focused the theme of each of his short stories on one human characteristic. In "The Tell-Tale Heart", he focused on guilt, in "The Fall of the House of Usher", his focus was fear, etc.

Much of Poe's work was allegorical, but his position on allegory was a nuanced one: "In defence of allegory, (however, or for whatever object, employed,) there is scarcely one respectable word to be said. Its best appeals are made to the fancy - that is to say, to our sense of adaptation, not of matters proper, but of matters improper for the purpose, of the real with the unreal; having never more of intelligible connection than has something with nothing, never half so much of effective affinity as has the substance for the shadow."

**Legacy and lore**

Poe's works have had a broad influence on American and world literature (sometimes even despite those who tried to resist it), and even on the art world beyond literature. The scope of Poe's influence on art is evident when one sees the many and diverse artists who were directly and profoundly influenced by him.

**American literature**

Poe's literary reputation was greater abroad than in the United States, perhaps as a result of America's general revulsion towards the macabre. Rufus Griswold's defamatory reminiscences did little to commend Poe to U.S.
literary society. However, American authors as diverse as Walt Whitman, H. P. Lovecraft, William Faulkner, and Herman Melville were influenced by Poe's works. Nathanael West used the concept and remarkable black humor of Poe's "The Man That Was Used Up" in his third novel, A Cool Million.

Flannery O'Connor, however, who grew up reading Poe's satirical works, claimed the influence of Poe on her works was "something I'd rather not think about". T. S. Eliot, who was often quite hostile to Poe, describing him as having "the intellect of a highly gifted person before puberty," professed that he was impressed, however, by Poe's abilities as a literary critic, calling him "the directest, the least pedantic, the least pedagogical of the critics writing in his time in either America or England."

Mark Twain was also a sharp critic of Poe. "To me his prose is unreadable-like Jane Austen's," he wrote in a January 18, 1909 letter to William Dean Howells.

Influence on French literature

In France, where he is commonly known as "Edgar Poe," Poe's works first arrived when two French papers published separate (and uncredited) translations of Poe's detective story "The Murders in the Rue Morgue". A third newspaper, La Presse, accused the editor of the second paper, E. D. Forgues, of plagiarizing the first paper. Forgues explained that the story was original to neither paper, but was a translation of "les Contes d'E. Poe, littérateur américain." ("the stories of E. Poe, American author." When La Presse did not acknowledge Forgues' explanation of the events, Forgues responded with a libel lawsuit, during which he repeatedly proclaimed, "Avez-vous lu Edgar Poe? Lisez Edgar Poe." ("Have you read Edgar Poe? Read Edgar Poe!") The notoriety of this trial spread Poe's name throughout Paris, gaining the interest of many poets and writers.

Among these was Charles Baudelaire, who translated almost all of Poe's stories and several of the poems into French. His excellent translations meant that Poe enjoyed a vogue among avant-garde writers in France while being ignored in his native land. Poe also exerted a powerful influence over Baudelaire's own poetry, as can be seen from Baudelaire's obsession with macabre imagery, morbid themes, musical verse and aesthetic pleasure. In a draft preface to his most famous work, Les Fleurs du mal, Baudelaire lists Poe as one of the authors whom he plagiarized. Baudelaire also found in Poe an example of what he saw as the destructive elements of bourgeois society. Poe himself was critical of democracy and capitalism (in his story "Mellonta Tauta," Poe proclaims that "democracy is a very admirable form of government-for dogs"), and the tragic poverty and misery of Poe's biography seemed, to Baudelaire, to be the ultimate example of how the bourgeoisie destroys genius and originality. Raymond Foye, editor of the book The Unknown Poe, put Baudelaire's and Poe's shared political sympathies this way: Poe's anti-democratic views persuaded Baudelaire to abandon his socialism, and if these two men shared a single political preference it was monarchy. But each was a country unto himself, a majority of one, an aristocrat of the mind. There is arrogance here: the arrogance of loneliness.

Poe was much admired, also, by the school of Symbolism. Stéphane Mallarmé dedicated several poems to him and translated some of Poe's works into French, accompanied by illustrations by Manet (see below). The later authors Paul Valéry and Marcel Proust were great admirers of Poe, the latter saying "Poe sought to arrive at the beautiful through evocation and an elimination of moral motives in his art."

Other world literature

Britain

From France, Poe's works made their way to Britain, where writers like Algernon Swinburne caught the Poe-bug, and Swinburne's musical verse owes much to Poe's technique. Oscar Wilde called Poe "this marvellous lord of rhythmic expression" and drew on Poe's works for his novel The Picture of Dorian Gray and his short stories.

The poet and critic W. H. Auden revitalized interest in Poe's works, especially his criticism. Auden said of Poe, "His portraits of abnormal or self-destructive states contributed much to Dostoyevsky, his ratiocinating hero is the ancestor of Sherlock Holmes and his many successors, his tales of the future lead to H. G. Wells, his adventure stories to Jules Verne and Robert Louis Stevenson."

Other English writers, such as Aldous Huxley, however, were less fond of him. Huxley considered Poe to be the embodiment of vulgarity in literature.

Russia
Poe's poetry was translated into Russian by the symbolist poet Konstantin Balmont and enjoyed great popularity there in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, influencing artists such as Nabokov, who makes several references to Poe's work in his most famous novel, *Lolita*.

Fyodor Dostoevsky called Poe "an enormously talented writer", favorably reviewing Poe's detective stories and briefly referencing "The Raven" in his novel *The Brothers Karamazov*. It has been suggested that *Crime and Punishment*'s Raskolnikov was inspired in part by Montresor from "The Cask of Amontillado", and that the same novel's Porfiry Petrovich owes a debt to C. Auguste Dupin.

**Argentina**

Argentinian author Jorge Luis Borges was a great admirer of Poe's works and translated his stories into Spanish. A few of the characters from Borges' stories are borrowed directly from Poe's stories, and in several of his stories Poe is mentioned by name. Another Argentinian author, Julio Cortázar, translated Poe's complete fiction and essays into Spanish.

**Other countries**

Poe was also an influence for the Swedish poet and author Viktor Rydberg, who translated a considerable amount of Poe's work into Swedish; a Japanese author who even took a pseudonym, Edogawa Rampo, from a rendering of Poe's name in that language; and German author Thomas Mann, in whose novel *Buddenbrooks*, a character reads Poe's short novels and professes to be influenced by his works. Friedrich Nietzsche refers to Poe in his masterpiece *Beyond Good and Evil*, and some have found evidence of Poe's influence on the philosopher.

Poe is one of the main topics in *Zettel's Traum*, the 1,334-pages novel of Folio format by Arno Schmidt, type-written between 1962 and 1970. Trying to infer missing facts of Poe's life by a subliminal reading of the work, Schmidt at length expounds an extremely extravagant - and humoristic - overall theory about Poe's life and works.

Edogawa Rampo, a pioneer author of Japanese detective stories in the early 20th century, acknowledged Poe as one of his major influences.

**Detective fiction**

He is often credited as being an originator in the genre of detective fiction with his three stories about C. Auguste Dupin, the most famous of which is "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." (Poe also wrote a satirical detective story called "Thou Art the Man") There is no doubt that he inspired mystery writers who came after him, particularly Arthur Conan Doyle in his series of stories featuring Sherlock Holmes. Doyle was once quoted as saying, "Each [of Poe's detective stories] is a root from which a whole literature has developed.. Where was the detective story until Poe breathed the breath of life into it?". Though Poe's Dupin was not the first detective in fiction, he became an archetype for all subsequent detectives, and Doyle acknowledged the primacy of C. Auguste Dupin in his Sherlock Holmes story, *A Study in Scarlet*, in which Watson compares Holmes to Dupin, much to Holmes's chagrin.

The Mystery Writers of America have named their awards for excellence in the genre the "Edgars."

**Science fiction, gothic fiction and horror fiction**

Poe also profoundly influenced the development of early science fiction author Jules Verne, who discussed Poe in his essay *Poe et ses œuvres* and also wrote a sequel to Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* called *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, Le sphinx des glaces*. H. G. Wells, in discussing the construction of his classics of science fiction, *The War of the Worlds* and *The First Men in the Moon*, noted that "Pym tells what a very intelligent mind could imagine about the south polar region a century ago".

Renowned science fiction author Ray Bradbury has also professed a love for Poe. He often draws upon Poe in his stories and mentions Poe by name in several stories. His anti-censorship story "Usher II", set in a dystopian future in which the works of Poe (and some other authors) have been censored, features an eccentric who constructs a house based on Poe's tale "The Fall of the House of Usher".

Along with Mary Shelley, Poe is regarded as the foremost proponent of the Gothic strain in literary Romanticism. Death, decay and madness were an obsession for Poe. His curious and often nightmarish work greatly influenced the horror and fantasy genres, and the horror fiction writer H. P. Lovecraft claimed to have been profoundly influenced by Poe's works.
Playwrights and filmmakers

On the stage, the great dramatist George Bernard Shaw was greatly influenced by Poe's literary criticism, calling Poe "the greatest journalistic critic of his time" (Poe Encyclopaedia 315). Alfred Hitchcock declared Poe as a major inspiration, saying, "It's because I liked Edgar Allan Poe's stories so much that I began to make suspense films."

Actor John Astin, who performed as Gomez in the Addams Family television series, is an ardent admirer of Poe, whom he resembles, and in recent years has starred in a one-man play based on Poe's life and works, Edgar Allan Poe: Once Upon a Midnight. The musical play Nevermore, by Matt Conner and Grace Barnes, was inspired by Poe's poems and essays. Actor Vincent Price played in many films based on Poe's stories like The Pit and the Pendulum (1961), The Masque of the Red Death (1964), The Tomb of Ligeia (1965), and The Oblong Box (1969) among many more. There has also been talk about Marilyn Manson making movies out of three of Poe's stories.

Another Poe impersonator is Baltimore-native David Keltz, notable as the star actor in the annual Poe birthday celebration at Westminster Hall and Burying Ground every January.

In 2005, a reading of the Broadway-bound musical "Poe" was announced, with a book by David Kogeas and music and lyrics by David Lenchus, featuring Deven May as Edgar Allan Poe. Plans for a full production have not been announced. In early 2007, NYC composer Phill Greenland and book writer/actor Ethan Angelica announced a new Poe stage musical titled "Edgar," which uses only Poe's prose and letters as text, and Poe's poems as lyrics.

Physics and cosmology

Eureka, an essay written in 1848, included a cosmological theory that anticipated black holes and the big bang theory by 80 years, as well as the first plausible solution to Olbers' paradox. Though described as a "prose poem" by Poe, who wished it to be considered as art, this work is a remarkable scientific and mystical essay unlike any of his other works. He wrote that he considered Eureka to be his career masterpiece.

Poe eschewed the scientific method in his Eureka. He argued that he wrote from pure intuition, not the Aristotelian a priori method of axioms and syllogisms, nor the empirical method of modern science set forth by Francis Bacon. For this reason, he considered it a work of art, not science, but insisted that it was still true. Though some of his assertions have later proven to be false (such as his assertion that gravity must be the strongest force—it is actually the weakest), others have been shown to be surprisingly accurate and decades ahead of their time.

Cryptography

Poe had a keen interest in the field of cryptography, as exemplified in his short story The Gold Bug. In particular he placed a notice of his abilities in the Philadelphia paper Alexander's Weekly (Express) Messenger, inviting submissions of ciphers, which he proceeded to solve. His success created a public stir for some months.

Poe's success in cryptography relied not so much on his knowledge of that field (his method was limited to the simple substitution cryptogram), as on his knowledge of the magazine and newspaper culture. His keen analytical abilities, which were so evident in his detective stories, allowed him to see that the general public was largely ignorant of the methods by which a simple substitution cryptogram can be solved, and he used this to his advantage. The sensation Poe created with his cryptography stunt played a major role in popularizing cryptograms in newspapers and magazines.

Preserved homes

The earliest surviving home in which Poe lived is in Baltimore, preserved as the Edgar Allan Poe House and Museum. Poe is believed to have lived in the home at the age of 23 when he first lived with Maria Clemm and Virginia (as well as his grandmother and possibly his brother William Henry Leonard Poe). It is open to the public and is also the home of the Edgar Allan Poe Society.

Poe, his wife Virginia, and his mother-in-law Maria would later rent several homes in Philadelphia, but only the last house has survived. The Spring Garden home, where the author lived in 1843-44, is today preserved by the National Park Service as the Edgar Allan Poe National Historic Site. It is located on 7th and Spring Garden Streets, and is open Wednesday through Sunday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Poe's final home is also preserved as the Poe Cottage in the Bronx, New York. The oldest home in Richmond, Virginia, which Poe never lived in, today serves as another Edgar Allan Poe Museum, focusing on his early years with the Allan family in particular.
Imitators

"For my soul from out that shadow
Hath been lifted evermore-
From that deep and dismal shadow,
In the streets of Baltimore!

Like many famous artists, Poe's works have spawned legions of imitators and plagiarists. One interesting trend among imitators of Poe, however, has been claims by clairvoyants or psychics to be "channelling" poems from Poe's spirit beyond the grave. One of the most notable of these was Lizzie Doten, who in 1863 published *Poems from the Inner Life*, in which she claimed to have "received" new compositions by Poe's spirit. The compositions were re-workings of famous Poe poems such as "The Bells", but which reflected a new, positive outlook. Poe researcher Thomas Ollive Mabbott notes that, at least compared to many other Poe imitators, Doten was not entirely without poetic talent, whether that talent was her own or "channelled" from Poe.

Selected bibliography

Poetry

* "Annabel Lee"
* "The Bells"
* "Eldorado"
* "Lenore"
* "The Raven"
* "Ulalume"

Tales

* "The Black Cat"
* "The Cask of Amontillado"
* "The Fall of the House of Usher"
* "The Gold-Bug"
* "Hop-Frog"
* "Ligeia"
* "The Man of the Crowd"
* "The Masque of the Red Death"
* "The Murders in the Rue Morgue"
* "The Pit and the Pendulum"
* "The Purloined Letter"
* "The Tell-Tale Heart"

Poe in popular culture

Audio interpretations

* Vincent Price collaborated with actor Basil Rathbone on a collection of their readings of Poe's stories and poems.
* A double-CD organized by Hal Willner, "Closed On Account of Rabies" with poems and tales of Poe performed by artists as diverse as Christopher Walken, Marianne Faithfull, Iggy Pop and Jeff Buckley was issued in 1997.

Literature

* Author Ray Bradbury is a great admirer of Poe, and has either featured Poe as a character or alluded to Poe's stories in many of his works. Notable is *Fahrenheit 451*, a novel based in a world where books are banned and
burned. A character in the novel memorizes *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* to make sure it is not lost forever.

- Robert R. McCammon wrote *Ushers Passing*, a sequel to *Fall of the House of Usher*, published in 1984
- The comic/graphic novel "Lenore, the Cute Little Dead Girl" features a dead little girl inspired by Poe's poem "Lenore."
- Writer Stephen Marlowe adapted the strange details of Poe's death into his 1995 novel *The Lighthouse at the End of the World.*
- Clive Cussler's 2004 novel *Lost City* has numerous references to Poe's works. For example, the end is similar to "The Fall of the House of Usher;" during the costume party, all the guest are dressed up as characters from his works, and death and torture methods in the novel are similar to "The Pit and the Pendulum" and "The Cask of Amontillado."
- Norwegian comic *Nemi* has got a special page with Nemi drawings to a poem by Poe.
- The 1995 novel *Nevermore*, by William Hjortsberg concerns a serial killer whose murders are based on Poe's stories; the detectives are the odd couple Harry Houdini and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.

**Video games**

- In 1995 several of Poe's stories were combined to make an interactive novel stylised as a video game called *The Dark Eye*. Beat legend William S. Burroughs read the poem "Annabel Lee" and the story "The Masque of the Red Death" for the game soundtrack.
- In the Nintendo video game series *The Legend Of Zelda*, the ghost-like beings that are featured throughout the games are called Poes.
- In 2002, *Eternal Darkness: Sanity's Requiem* (a video game for the Nintendo Gamecube) features a quote from "The Raven" upon startup, and is often said to have many elements inspired by his works (although it draws more inspiration from H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos).
- In the Konami video game *Lunar Knights*, there's a pair of enemies collectively named The Poes, with their individual names being Viscount Edgar and Viscountess Virginia.

**Visual arts**

- In the world of visual arts, Gustave Doré and Édouard Manet composed several illustrations for Poe's works.
- Edgar Allan Poe is a semi-frequent character in the webcomic Thinkin' Lincoln.

**Other**

- The bar in which Poe was last seen drinking before his death still stands in Fells Point in Baltimore, MD. Though the name has changed and it is now known as The Horse You Came In On, local lore insists that a ghost they call "Edgar" haunts the rooms above.
- The United States Navy commissioned a vessel named after Poe, the USS E.A. Poe (IX-103).
- Poe's image adorns the bottle cap of Raven Beer.
- Edgar Allan Poe is credited with the inspiration for pro wrestler Scott Levy's stage name, Raven.
- In 1996, the NFL franchise known as the Cleveland Browns relocated to Baltimore and assumed a new identity, including a new nickname, the Ravens, which was chosen following a telephone poll by the Baltimore Sun. The poll included three choices, the others being Americans and Marauders, but Ravens won by a wide margin, garnering nearly two-thirds of the 33,288 votes. The Ravens have 3 mascots named Edgar, Allan and Poe.

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Mary Roberts Rinehart

Mary Roberts Rinehart (August 12, 1876-September 22, 1958) was a prolific author often called the American Agatha Christie. "Dorothy B. Hughes, crime critic and novelist, says she 'has been and continues to be' the most important American woman mystery writer." She is considered the source of the phrase "The butler did it", although she did not actually use the phrase herself, and also considered to have invented the "Had-I-But-Known" school of mystery writing.

Biography

She was born in Allegheny City, Pennsylvania, which has been a part of the city of Pittsburgh since 1907. Her father was a frustrated inventor, and throughout her childhood, the family often had financial problems. She was left-handed at a time when that was considered inappropriate, and she was trained to use her right hand instead.

She attended public schools and graduated at the age of sixteen, then enrolled at the Pittsburgh Training School for Nurses at Homeopathic Hospital, where graduated in 1896. She described the experience as "all the tragedy of the world under one roof." After graduation she married Stanley Marshall Rinehart, a physician whom she met there. They had three sons: Stanley Jr., Frederick, and Alan.

During the stock market crash of 1903 the couple lost their savings, and this spurred Rinehart's efforts at writing as way to earn income. She was 27 that year, and she produced 45 short stories. In 1907 she wrote The Circular Staircase, the novel that launched her to national fame. According to her obituary in The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette, that book alone sold a million and a quarter copies. Her regular contributions to the Saturday Evening Post were immensely popular and helped the magazine mold American middle-class taste and manners. Rinehart's commercial success sometimes conflicted with her domestic roles of wife and mother. Yet she often pursued adventure, including a job as the first woman war correspondent at the Belgian front during World War I.

In the early 1920s the family moved to Washington, DC when Dr. Rinehart was appointed to a post in the Veterans Administration. He died in 1932, but she continued to live there until 1935, when she moved to New York City. There she helped her sons found the publishing house Farrar & Rinehart, serving as its director.

She also maintained a vacation home in Bar Harbor, Maine, where she was involved in a real-life drama in 1947. Her Filipino chef, who had worked for her for 25 years, fired a gun at her and then attempted to slash her with knives, until other servants rescued her. The chef committed suicide in his cell the next day.

Rinehart suffered from breast cancer, which led to a radical mastectomy; she eventually went public with her story, at a time when such matters were not openly discussed. The interview "I Had Cancer" was published in a 1947 issue of the Ladies' Home Journal and in it Rinehart encouraged women to have breast examinations.

"The Rinehart career was crowned with a Mystery Writers of America Special Award a year after she published her last novel.. and by the award, as early as 1923, of an honorary Doctorate in Literature from George Washington University."

She died at age 82 in her New York City home.

Writing

Rinehart wrote hundreds of short stories, poems, travelogues and special articles. Many of her books and plays, such as The Bat (1920) were adapted for movies, such as The Bat (1926), The Bat Whispers (1930), and The Bat
(1959). While many of her books were best-sellers, critics were most appreciative of her murder mysteries.

Rinehart, in *The Circular Staircase*, is credited with inventing the "Had-I-But-Known" school of mystery writing. *The Circular Staircase* is a novel in which "a middle-aged spinster is persuaded by her niece and nephew to rent a country house for the summer. The house they choose belonged to a bank defaulter who had hidden stolen securities in the walls. The gentle, peace-loving trio is plunged into a series of crimes solved with the help of the aunt. This novel is credited with being the first in the "Had-I-But-Known" school." The Had-I-But-Known mystery novel is one where the principal character (frequently female) does less than sensible things in connection with a crime which have the effect of prolonging the action of the novel. Ogden Nash parodied the school in his poem *Don't Guess Let Me Tell You*: "Sometimes the Had I But Known then what I know now I could have saved at least three lives by revealing to the Inspector the conversation I heard through that fortuitous hole in the floor."

The phrase "The butler did it", which has become a cliché, came from Rinehart's novel *The Door*, in which the butler actually did do it, although that exact phrase does not actually appear in the work. Tim Kelly adapted Rinehart's play into a musical "The Butler Did It, Singing." This play includes five lead female roles and five lead male roles.

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**Novels and plays**

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- *The Window at the White Cat* (1910)
- *Where There's a Will* (1912)
- *The Cave on Thundercloud* (1912)
- *Mind Over Motor* (1912)
- *The Case of Jennie Brice* (1913)
- *Street of Seven Stars* (1914)
- *The After House: a story of love, mystery and a private yacht* (1914)
- *K* (1915)
- *Bab, a Sub-Deb* (1916)
- *Long live the King!* (1917)
- *The Amazing Interlude* (1918)
- *Tenting To-Night: a chronicle of sport and adventure in Glacier park and the Cascade mountains* (1918)
- *Dangerous Days* (1919)
- *Salvage* (1919)
- *A Poor Wise Man* (1920)
- *The Bat* (with Avery Hopwood, 1920)
- *The Breaking Point* (1922)
- *The Red Lamp* (1925)
- *The Mystery Lamp* (1925)
- *Two Flights Up* (1928)
- *The Truce of God* (1920)
- *The Door* (1930)
- *The Double Alibi* (1932)
- *The Album* (1933)
- *The State Vs Elinor Norton* (1933)
- *The Wall* (1938)
- *The Great Mistake* (1940)
- *The Yellow Room* (1945)
- *The Swimming Pool* (1952)
- *The Wandering Knife* (1952)
- *The Frightened Wife* (1953) (Special Edgar Award, 1954)

**Series**

- Miss Cornelia Van Gorder
- The Man in Lower Ten (1906)
- The Circular Staircase (1907)
- "The Bat" (1920)
- Letitia (Tish) Carberry
  - The Amazing Adventures of Letitia Carberry (1911)
  - Tish (1916)
  - More Tish (1921)
  - The Book of Tish (1926)
  - Tish Plays the Game (1926)
  - Tish Marches On (1937)
- Hilda Adams
  - Miss Pinkerton (1932)
  - Haunted Lady (1942)
  - Episode of the Wandering Knife (1950)

Collections

- Love Stories (1919)
- Affinities: and other stories (1920)
- Sight Unseen / The Confession (omnibus) (1921)
- Temperamental People (1924)
- Nomad's Land (1926)
- The Romantics (1929)
- Mary Roberts Rinehart's Crime Book (1933)
- Married People (1937)
- Familiar faces; stories of people you know (1941)
- Alibi for Isabel (1944)
- The Confession / Sight Unseen (1959)

Autobiography

- My Story (1931, revised 1948)

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Sax Rohmer

Arthur Henry Sarsfield Ward (February 15, 1883 - June 1, 1959), better known as Sax Rohmer, was a prolific English novelist. He is most remembered for his series of novels featuring the master criminal Dr. Fu Manchu.

Born in Birmingham he had an entirely working class education and early career before beginning to write. His first published work was in 1903, the short story The Mysterious Mummy for Pearson's Weekly. He made his early living writing comedy sketches for music hall performers and short stories and serials for magazines. In 1909 he married Rose Knox. He published his first novel Pause! anonymously in 1910 and the first Fu Manchu story, The Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu, was serialized over 1912-13. It was an immediate success with its fast paced story of Sir Denis Nayland Smith and Dr. Petrie facing the worldwide conspiracy of the 'Yellow Peril'. The Fu Manchu stories, together with those featuring Gaston Max or Morris Klaw, made Rohmer one of the most successful and well-paid writers in of the 1920s and 1930s. But Rohmer was very poor at handling his wealth. After World War II the Rohmers moved to New York.


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- Pause!, 1910
- Little Tich (Autobiography)(ghostwritten by Ward) 191?
- The Sins of Severac Bablon, 1914
- The Mystery of Dr. Fu Manchu, [US Title: The Insidious Dr. Fu Manchu] 1913
- The Yellow Claw, 1915
- The Exploits of Captain O'Hagan 1916
- The Devil Doctor, [US Title: The Return of Dr. Fu Manchu] 1916
- The Si-Fan Mysteries, [US Title: The Hand of Fu Manchu] 1917 "Nayland Smith and Dr. Petrie, aided by Scotland Yard, battle the evil genius, Fu Manchu, and his mysterious, world-wide organization, the Si-Fan. The scene in London ranges from foreign embassies to the underworld; the stakes are no less than world domination. Using weapons that range from crude missiles to occult animal magnetism, the Orientals threaten to extinguish the white race and to make Dr. Fu Manchu Emperor of the World."
• Brood of the Witch Queen, 1918
• Tales of Secret Egypt, 1918
• The Orchard of Tears 1918
• Dope, 1919
• The Golden Scorpion, 1919
• Quest of the Sacred Slipper, 1919
• The Dream Detective, 1920
• The Green Eyes of Bast, 1920
• The Haunting of Low Fennel, 1920
• Bat Wing, 1921
• Tales of Chinatown, 1922
• Fire Tongue, 1921
• Grey Face, 1924
• Yellow Shadows, 1925
• Moon of Madness, 1927
• She Who Sleeps, 1928
• The Book of Fu Manchu, [Compilation of first 3 Books] 1929
• The Emperor of America 1929
• The Day the World Ended 1930
• The Daughter of Fu Manchu, 1931
• Yu'an Hee See Laughs, 1932
• The Mask of Fu Manchu, 1932
• Tales of East and West (British edition) 1932
• Tales of East and West (American edition) 1933
• Fu Manchu's Bride, 1933 [UK Title: The Bride of Fu Manchu]
• The Trail of Fu Manchu 1934
• The Bat Flies Low, 1935
• President Fu Manchu, 1936
• White Velvet, 1936
• Salute to Bazarada and other stories 1939
• The Drums of Fu Manchu, 1939
• The Island of Fu Manchu, 1941
• Seven Sins 1943
• Egyptian Nights (Bimbashi Barak of Egypt) 1944
• The Shadow of Fu Manchu, 1948
• Hanover House 1949
• The Sins of Sumuru, [US Title: Nude in Mink] 1950
• Wulfheim (written as Michael Furey) later printing as Sax Rohmer 1950
• The Slaves of Sumuru, [US Title: Sumuru] 1951
• Virgin in Flames, [US Title: Fire Goddess] 1953
• Sand and Satin, [US Title: Return of Sumuru] 1954
• The Moon is Red 1954
• Sinister Madonna, 1956
• Re-enter Fu Manchu, 1957 [UK Title: Re-Enter Dr. Fu Manchu]
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AN HISTORICAL MYSTERY (The Gondreville Mystery)

BY HONORE DE BALZAC
Translated By Katharine Prescott Wormeley

DEDICATION

To Monsieur de Margone.
In grateful remembrance, from his guest at the Chateau de Sache.
De Balzac.
CHAPTER I
Judas

The autumn of the year 1803 was one of the finest in the early part of that period of the present century which we now call "Empire." Rain had refreshed the earth during the month of October, so that the trees were still green and leafy in November. The French people were beginning to put faith in a secret understanding between the skies and Bonaparte, then declared Consul for life,--a belief in which that man owes part of his prestige; strange to say, on the day the sun failed him, in 1812, his luck ceased!

About four in the afternoon on the fifteenth of November, 1803, the sun was casting what looked like scarlet dust upon the venerable tops of four rows of elms in a long baronial avenue, and sparkling on the sand and grassy places of an immense _rond-point_, such as we often see in the country where land is cheap enough to be sacrificed to ornament. The air was so pure, the atmosphere so tempered that a family was sitting out of doors as if it were summer. A man dressed in a hunting-jacket of green drilling with green buttons, and breeches of the same stuff, and wearing shoes with thin soles and gaiters to the knee, was cleaning a gun with the minute care a skilful huntsman gives to the work in his leisure hours. This man had neither game nor game-bag, nor any of the accoutrements which denote either departure for a hunt or the return from it; and two women sitting near were looking at him as though beset by a terror they could ill-conceal. Any one observing the scene taking place in this leafy nook would have shuddered, as the old mother-in-law and the wife of the man we speak of were now shuddering. A huntsman does not take such minute precautions with his weapon to kill small game, neither does he use, in the department of the Aube, a heavy rifled carbine.

"Shall you kill a roe-buck, Michu?" said his handsome young wife, trying to assume a laughing air.

Before replying, Michu looked at his dog, which had been lying in the sun, its paws stretched out and its nose on its paws, in the charming attitude of a trained hunter. The animal had just raised its head and was snuffing the air, first down the avenue nearly a mile long which stretched before them, and then up the cross road where it entered the _rond-point_ to the left.

"No," answered Michu, "but a brute I do not wish to miss, a lynx."

The dog, a magnificent spaniel, white with brown spots, growled.

"Hah!" said Michu, talking to himself, "spies! the country swarms with them."

Madame Michu looked appealingly to heaven. A beautiful fair woman with blue eyes, composed and thoughtful in expression and made like an antique statue, she seemed to be a prey to some dark and bitter grief. The husband's appearance may explain to a certain extent the evident fear of the two women. The laws of physiognomy are precise, not only in their application to character, but also in relation to the destinies of life. There is such a thing as prophetic physiognomy. If it were possible (and such a vital statistic would be of value to society) to obtain exact likenesses of those who perish on the scaffold, the science of Lavater and also that of Gall would prove unmistakably that the heads of all such persons, even those who are innocent, show prophetic signs. Yes, fate sets its mark on the faces of those who are doomed to die a violent death of any kind. Now, this sign, this seal, visible to the eye of an observer, was imprinted on the expressive face of the man with the rifled carbine. Short and stout, abrupt and active in his motions as a monkey, though calm in temperament, Michu had a white face injected with blood, and features set close together like those of a Tartar,--a likeness to which his crinkled red hair conveyed a sinister expression. His eyes, clear and yellow as those of a tiger, showed depths behind them in which the glance of whoever examined the man might lose itself and never find either warmth or motion. Fixed, luminous, and rigid, those eyes terrified whoever gazed into them. The singular contrast between the immobility of the eyes and the activity of the body increased the chilling impression conveyed by a first sight of Michu. Action, always prompt in this man, was the outcome of a single thought; just as the life of animals is, without reflection, the outcome of instinct. Since 1793 he had trimmed his red beard to the shape of a fan. Even if he had not been (as he was during
the Terror) president of a club of Jacobins, this peculiarity of his head would in itself have made him terrible to behold. His Socratic face with its blunt nose was surmounted by a fine forehead, so projecting, however, that it overhung the rest of the features. The ears, well detached from the head, had the sort of mobility which we find in those of wild animals, which are ever on the qui-vive. The mouth, half-open, as the custom usually is among country-people, showed teeth that were strong and white as almonds, but irregular. Gleaming red whiskers framed this face, which was white and yet mottled in spots. The hair, cropped close in front and allowed to grow long at the sides and on the back of the head, brought into relief, by its savage redness, all the strange and fateful peculiarities of this singular face. The neck which was short and thick, seemed to tempt the axe.

At this moment the sunbeams, falling in long lines athwart the group, lighted up the three heads at which the dog from time to time glanced up. The spot on which this scene took place was magnificently fine. The _rond-point_ is at the entrance of the park of Gondreville, one of the finest estates in France, and by far the finest in the departments of the Aube; it boasts of long avenues of elms, a castle built from designs by Mansart, a park of fifteen hundred acres enclosed by a stone wall, nine large farms, a forest, mills, and meadows. This almost regal property belonged before the Revolution to the family of Simeuse. Ximeuse was a feudal estate in Lorraine; the name was pronounced Simeuse, and in course of time it came to be written as pronounced.

The great fortune of the Simeuse family, adherents of the House of Burgundy, dates from the time when the Guises were in conflict with the Valois. Richelieu first, and afterwards Louis XIV. remembered their devotion to the factious house of Lorraine, and rebuffed them. Then the Marquis de Simeuse, an old Burgundian, old Guiser, old leaguer, old _frondeur_ (he inherited the four great rancors of the nobility against royalty), came to live at Cinq-Cygne. The former courtier, rejected at the Louvre, married the widow of the Comte de Cinq-Cygne, younger branch of the famous family of Chargeboeuf, one of the most illustrious names in Champagne, and now as celebrated and opulent as the elder. The marquis, among the richest men of his day, instead of wasting his substance at court, built the chateau of Gondreville, enlarged the estate by the purchase of others, and unified the several domains, solely for the purposes of a hunting-ground. He also built the Simeuse mansion at Troyes, not far from that of the Cinq-Cygnes. These two old houses and the bishop's palace were long the only stone mansions at Troyes. The marquis sold Simeuse to the Duc de Lorraine. His son wasted the father's savings and some part of his great fortune under the reign of Louis XV., but he subsequently entered the navy, became a vice-admiral, and redeemed the follies of his youth by brilliant services. The Marquis de Simeuse, son of this naval worthy, perished with his wife on the scaffold at Troyes, leaving twin sons, who emigrated and were, at the time our history opens, still in foreign parts following the fortunes of the house of Conde.

The _rond-point_ was the scene of the meet in the time of the "Grand Marquis"--a name given in the family to the Simeuse who built Gondreville. Since 1789 Michu lived in the hunting lodge at the entrance to the park, built in the reign of Louis XIV., and called the pavilion of Cinq-Cygne. The village of Cinq-Cygne is at the end of the forest of Nodesme (a corruption of Notre-Dame) which was reached through the fine avenue of four rows of elms where Michu's dog was now suspecting spies. After the death of the Grand Marquis this pavilion fell into disuse. The vice-admiral preferred the court and the sea to Champagne, and his son gave the dilapidated building to Michu for a dwelling.

This noble structure is of brick, with vermiculated stone-work at the angles and on the casings of the doors and windows. On either side is a gateway of finely wrought iron, eaten with rust and connected by a railing, beyond which is a wide and deep ha-ha, full of vigorous trees, its parapets bristling with iron arabesques, the innumerable sharp points of which are a warning to evil-doers.

The park walls begin on each side of the circumference of the _rond-point_; on the one hand the fine semi-circle is defined by slopes planted with elms; on the other, within the park, a corresponding half-circle is formed by groups of rare trees. The pavilion, therefore, stands at the centre of this round open space, which extends before it and behind it in the shape of two horseshoes. Michu had turned the rooms on the lower floor into a stable, a kitchen, and a wood-shed. The only trace remaining of their ancient splendor was an antechamber paved with marble in squares of black and white, which was entered on the park side through a door with small leaded panes, such as might still be seen at Versailles before Louis-Philippe turned that Chateau into an asylum for the glories of France. The pavilion is divided inside by an old staircase of worm-eaten wood, full of character, which leads to the first story. Above that is an immense garret. This venerable edifice is covered by one of those vast roofs with four sides, a ridgepole decorated with leaden ornaments, and a round projecting window on each side, such as Mansart very justly delighted in; for in France, the Italian attics and flat roofs are a folly against which our climate protests. Michu kept his fodder in this garret. That portion of the park which surrounds the old pavilion is English in style. A hundred feet from the house a former lake, now a mere pond well stocked with fish, makes known its vicinity as much by a thin mist rising above the tree-tops as by the croaking of a thousand frogs, toads, and other amphibious gossips who discourse at sunset. The time-worn look of everything, the deep silence of the woods, the long
knew how to read) to blow his brains out if he opened the paper. Michu's action was so sudden and violent, the tone
of the avenue, the forest in the distance, the rusty iron-work, the masses of stone draped with velvet
mosses, all made poetry of this old structure, which still exists.

At the moment when our history begins Michu was leaning against a mossy parapet on which he had laid his
powder-horn, cap, handkerchief, screw-driver, and rags,—in fact, all the utensils needed for his suspicious
occupation. His wife's chair was against the wall beside the outer door of the house, above which could still be seen
the arms of the Simeuse family, richly carved, with their noble motto, "Cy meurs." The old mother, in peasant dress,
had moved her chair in front of Madame Michu, so that the latter might put her feet upon the rungs and keep them
from dampness.

"Where's the boy?" said Michu to his wife.

"Round the pond; he is crazy about the frogs and the insects," answered the mother.

Michu whistled in a way that made his hearers tremble. The rapidity with which his son ran up to him proved
plainly enough the despotic power of the bailiff of Gondreville. Since 1789, but more especially since 1793, Michu
had been well-nigh master of the property. The terror he inspired in his wife, his mother-in-law, a servant-lad named
Gaucher, and the cook named Marianne, was shared throughout a neighborhood of twenty miles in circumference. It
may be well to give, without further delay, the reasons for this fear,—all the more because an account of them will
complete the moral portrait of the man.

The old Marquis de Simeuse transferred the greater part of his property in 1790; but, overtaken by
circumstances, he had not been able to put the estate of Gondreville into sure hands. Accused of corresponding with
the Duke of Brunswick and the Prince of Cobourg, the marquis and his wife were thrust into prison and condemned
to death by the revolutionary tribunal of Troyes, of which Madame Michu's father was then president. The fine
domain of Gondreville was sold as national property. The head-keeper, to the horror of many, was present at the
execution of the marquis and his wife in his capacity as president of the club of Jacobins at Arcis. Michu, the orphan
son of a peasant, showered with benefactions by the marquise, who brought him up in her own home and gave him
his place as keeper, was regarded as a Brutus by excited demagogues; but the people of the neighborhood ceased to
recognize him after this act of base ingratitude. The purchaser of the estate was a man from Arcis named Marion,
grandson of a former bailiff in the Simeuse family. This man, a lawyer before and after the Revolution, was afraid of
the keeper; he made him his bailiff with a salary of three thousand francs, and gave him an interest in the sales of
timber; Michu, who was thought to have some ten thousand francs of his own laid by, married the daughter of a
tanner at Troyes, an apostle of the Revolution in that town, where he was president of the revolutionary tribunal.
This tanner, a man of profound convictions, who resembled Saint-Just as to character, was afterwards mixed up in
Baboeuf's conspiracy and killed himself to escape execution. Marthe was the handsomest girl in Troyes. In spite of
her shrinking modesty she had been forced by her formidable father to play the part of Goddess of Liberty in some
republican ceremony.

The new proprietor came only three times to Gondreville in the course of seven years. His grandfather had been
bailiff of the estate under the Simeuse family, and all Arcis took for granted that the citizen Marion was the secret
representative of the present Marquis and his twin brother. As long as the Terror lasted, Michu, still bailiff of
Gondreville, a devoted patriot, son-in-law of the president of the revolutionary tribunal of Troyes and flattered by
Malin, representative from the department of the Aube, was the object of a certain sort of respect. But when the
Mountain was overthrown and after his father-in-law committed suicide, he found himself a scape-goat; everybody
hastened to accuse him, in common with his father-in-law, of acts to which, so far as he was concerned, he was a
total stranger. The bailiff resented the injustice of the community; he stiffened his back and took an attitude of
hostility. He talked boldly. But after the 18th Brumaire he maintained an unbroken silence, the philosophy of the
strong; he struggled no longer against public opinion, and contented himself with attending to his own affairs, —wise
conduct, which led his neighbors to pronounce him sly, for he owned, it was said, a fortune of not less than a
hundred thousand francs in landed property. In the first place, he spent nothing; next, this property was legitimately
acquired, partly from the inheritance of his father-in-law's estate, and partly from the savings of six-thousand francs
a year, the salary he derived from his place with its profits and emoluments. He had been bailiff of Gondreville for
the last twelve years and every one had estimated the probable amount of his savings, so that when, after the
Consulate was proclaimed, he bought a farm for fifty thousand francs, the suspicions attaching to his former
opinions lessened, and the community of Arcis gave him credit for intending to recover himself in public estimation.
Unfortunately, at the very moment when public opinion was condoning his past a foolish affair, envenomed by the
gossip of the country-side, revived the latent and very general belief in the ferocity of his character.

One evening, coming away from Troyes in company with several peasants, among whom was the farmer at
Cinq-Cygne, he let fall a paper on the main road; the farmer, who was walking behind him, stooped and picked it up.
Michu turned round, saw the paper in the man's hands, pulled a pistol from his belt and threatened the farmer (who
knew how to read) to blow his brains out if he opened the paper. Michu's action was so sudden and violent, the tone
of his voice so alarming, his eyes blazed so savagely, that the men about him turned cold with fear. The farmer of Cinq-Cygne was already his enemy. Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, the man's employer, was a cousin of the Simeuse brothers; she had only one farm left for her maintenance and was now residing at her chateau of Cinq-Cygne. She lived for her cousins the twins, with whom she had played in childhood at Troyes and at Gondreville. Her only brother, Jules de Cinq-Cygne, who emigrated before the twins, died at Mayence, but by a privilege which was somewhat rare and will be mentioned later, the name of Cinq-Cygne was not to perish through lack of male heirs.

This affair between Michu and the farmer made a great noise in the arrondissement and darkened the already mysterious shadows which seemed to veil him. Nor was it the only circumstance which made him feared. A few months after this scene the citizen Marion, present owner of the Gondreville estate, came to inspect it with the citizen Malin. Rumor said that Marion was about to sell the property to his companion, who had profited by political events and had just been appointed on the Council of State by the First Consul, in return for his services on the 18th Brumaire. The shrewd heads of the little town of Arcis now perceived that Marion had been the agent of Malin in the purchase of the property, and not of the brothers Simeuse, as was first supposed. The all-powerful Councillor of State was the most important personage in Arcis. He had obtained for one of his political friends the prefecture of Troyes, and for a farmer at Gondreville the exemption of his son from the draft; in fact, he had done services to many. Consequently, the sale met with no opposition in the neighborhood where Malin then reigned, and where he still reigns supreme.

The Empire was just dawning. Those who in these days read the histories of the French Revolution can form no conception of the vast spaces which public thought traversed between events which now seem to have been so near together. The strong need of peace and tranquility which every one felt after the violent tumults of the Revolution brought about a complete forgetfulness of important anterior facts. History matured rapidly under the advance of new and eager interests. No one, therefore, except Michu, looked into the past of this affair, which the community accepted as a simple matter. Marion, who had bought Gondreville for six hundred thousand francs in assignats, sold it for the value of a couple of million in coin; but the only payments actually made by Malin were for the costs of registration. Grevin, a seminary comrade of Malin, assisted the transaction, and the Councillor rewarded his help with the office of notary at Arcis. When the news of the sale reached the pavilion, brought there by a farmer whose farm, at Grouage, was situated between the forest and the park on the left of the noble avenue, Michu turned pale and left the house. He lay in wait for Marion, and finally met him alone in one of the shrubberies of the park.

"Is monsieur about to sell Gondreville?" asked the bailiff.

"Yes, Michu, yes. You will have a man of powerful influence for your master. He is the friend of the First Consul, and very intimate with all the ministers; he will protect you."

"Then you were holding the estate for him?"

"I don't say that," replied Marion. "At the time I bought it I was looking for a place to put my money, and I invested in national property as the best security. But it doesn't suit me to keep an estate once belonging to a family in which my father was--"

"--a servant," said Michu, violently. "But you shall not sell it! I want it; and I can pay for it."

"You?"

"Yes, I; seriously, in good gold,--eight hundred thousand francs."

"Eight hundred thousand francs!" exclaimed Marion. "Where did you get them?"

"That's none of your business," replied Michu; then, softening his tone, he added in a low voice: "My father-in-law saved the lives of many persons."

"You are too late, Michu; the sale is made."

"You must put it off, monsieur!" cried the bailiff, seizing his master by the hand which he held as in a vice. "I am hated, but I choose to be rich and powerful, and I must have Gondreville. Listen to me; I don't cling to life; sell me that place or I'll blow your brains out!--"

"But do give me time to get off my bargain with Malin; he's troublesome to deal with."

"I'll give you twenty-four hours. If you say a word about this matter I'll chop your head off as I would chop a turnip."

Marion and Malin left the chateau in the course of the night. Marion was frightened; he told Malin of the meeting and begged him to keep an eye on the bailiff. It was impossible for Marion to avoid delivering the property to the man who had been the real purchaser, and Michu did not seem likely to admit any such reason. Moreover, this service done by Marion to Malin was to be, and in fact ended by being, the origin of the former's political fortune, and also that of his brother. In 1806 Malin had him appointed chief justice of an imperial court, and after the creation of tax-collectors his brother obtained the post of receiver-general for the department of the Aube. The State Councillor told Marion to stay in Paris, and he warned the minister of police, who gave orders that Michu should be secretly watched. Not wishing to push the man to extremes, Malin kept him on as bailiff, under the iron rule of
Grevin the notary of Arcis.

From that moment Michu became more absorbed and taciturn than ever, and obtained the reputation of a man who was capable of committing a crime. Malin, the Councillor of State (a function which the First Consul raised to the level of a ministry), and a maker of the Code, played a great part in Paris, where he bought one of the finest mansions in the Faubourg Saint-Germain after marrying the only daughter of a rich contractor named Sibuelle. He never came to Gondreville; leaving all matters concerning the property to the management of Grevin, the Arcis notary. After all, what had he to fear?--he, a former representative of the Aube, and president of a club of Jacobins. And yet, the unfavorable opinion of Michu held by the lower classes was shared by the bourgeoisie, and Marion, Grevin, and Malin, without giving any reason or compromising themselves on the subject, showed that they regarded him as an extremely dangerous man. The authorities, who were under instructions from the minister of police to watch the bailiff, did not of course lessen this belief. The neighborhood wondered that he kept his place, but supposed it was in consequence of the terror he inspired. It is easy now, after these explanations, to understand the anxiety and sadness expressed in the face of Michu's wife.

In the first place, Marthe had been piously brought up by her mother. Both, being good Catholics, had suffered much from the opinions and behavior of the tanner. Marthe could never think without a blush of having marched through the street of Troyes in the garb of a goddess. Her father had forced her to marry Michu, whose bad reputation was then increasing, and she feared him too much to be able to judge him. Nevertheless, she knew that he loved her, and at the bottom of her heart lay the truest affection for this awe-inspiring man; she had never known him to do anything that was not just; never did he say a brutal word, to her at least; in fact, he endeavored to forestall her every wish. The poor pariah, believing himself disagreeable to his wife, spent most of his time out of doors. Marthe and Michu, distrustful of each other, lived in what is called in these days an "armed peace." Marthe, who saw no one, suffered keenly from the ostracism which for the last seven years had surrounded her as the daughter of a revolutionary butcher, and the wife of a so-called traitor. More than once she had overheard the laborers of the adjoining farm (held by a man named Beauvisage, greatly attached to the Simeuse family) say as they passed the pavilion, "That's where Judas lives!" The singular resemblance between the bailiff's head and that of the thirteenth apostle, which his conduct appeared to carry out, won him that odious nickname throughout the neighborhood. It was this distress of mind, added to vague but constant fears for the future, which gave Marthe her thoughtful and subdued air. Nothing saddens so deeply as unmerited degradation from which there seems no escape. A painter could have made a fine picture of this family of pariahs in the bosom of their pretty nook in Champagne, where the landscape is generally sad.

"Francois!" called the bailiff, to hasten his son.

Francois Michu, a child of ten, played in the park and forest, and levied his little tithes like a master; he ate the fruits; he chased the game; he at least had neither cares nor troubles. Of all the family, Francois alone was happy in a home thus isolated from the neighborhood by its position between the park and the forest, and by the still greater moral solitude of universal repulsion.

"Pick up these things," said his father, pointing to the parapet, "and put them away. Look at me! You love your father and your mother, don't you?" The child flung himself on his father as if to kiss him, but Michu made a movement to shift the gun and pushed him back. "Very good. You have sometimes chattered about things that are done here," continued the father, fixing his eyes, dangerous as those of a wild-cat, on the boy. "Now remember this; if you tell the least little thing that happens here to Gaucher, or to the Grouage and Bellache people, or even to Marianne who loves us, you will kill your father. Never tattle again, and I will forgive what you said yesterday." The child began to cry. "Don't cry; but when any one questions you, say, as the peasants do, 'I don't know.' There are persons roaming about whom I distrust. Run along! As for you two," he added, turning to the women, "you have heard what I said. Keep a close mouth, both of you."

"Husband, what are you going to do?"

Michu, who was carefully measuring a charge of powder, poured it into the barrel of his gun, rested the weapon against the parapet and said to Marthe:--

"No one knows I own that gun. Stand in front of it."

Couraut, who had sprung to his feet, was barking furiously.

"Good, intelligent fellow!" cried Michu. "I am certain there are spies about--"

Man and beast feel a spy. Couraut and Michu, who seemed to have one and the same soul, lived together as the Arab and his horse in the desert. The bailiff knew the modulations of the dog's voice, just as the dog read his master's meaning in his eyes, or felt it exhaling in the air from his body.

"What do you say to that?" said Michu, in a low voice, calling his wife's attention to two strangers who appeared in a by-path making for the _rond-point_.

"What can it mean?" cried the old mother. "They are Parisians."
"Here they come!" said Michu. "Hide my gun," he whispered to his wife.

The two men who now crossed the wide open space of the _rond-point_ were typical enough for a painter. One, who appeared to be the subaltern, wore top-boots, turned down rather low, showing well-made calves, and colored silk stockings of doubtful cleanliness. The breeches, of ribbed cloth, apricot color with metal buttons, were too large; they were baggy about the body, and the lines of their creases seemed to indicate a sedentary man. A marseilles waistcoat, overloaded with embroidery, open, and held together by one button only just above the stomach, gave to the wearer a dissipated look,—all the more so, because his jet black hair, in corkscrew curls, hid his forehead and hung down his cheeks. Two steel watch-chains were festooned upon his breeches. The shirt was adorned with a cameo in white and blue. The coat, cinnamon-colored, was a treasure to caricaturists by reason of its long tails, which, when seen from behind, bore so perfect a resemblance to a cod that the name of that fish was given to them. The fashion of codfish tails lasted ten years; almost the whole period of the empire of Napoleon. The cravat, loosely fastened, and with numerous small folds, allowed the wearer to bury his face in it up to the nostrils. His pimped skin, his long, thick, brick-dust colored nose, his high cheek-bones, his mouth, lacking half its teeth but greedy for all that and menacing, his ears adorned with huge gold rings, his low forehead,—all these personal details, which might have seemed grotesque in many men, were rendered terrible in him by two small eyes set in his head like those of a pig, expressive of insatiable covetousness, and of insolent, half-jovial cruelty. These ferreting and perspicacious blue eyes, glassy and glacial, might be taken for the model of that famous Eye, the formidable emblem of the police, invented during the Revolution. Black silk gloves were on his hands and he carried a switch. He was certainly some official personage, for he showed in his bearing, in his way of taking snuff and ramming it into his nose, the bureaucratic importance of an office subordinate, one who signs for his superiors and acquires a passing sovereignty by enforcing their orders.

The other man, whose dress was in the same style, but elegant and elegantly put on and careful in its smallest detail, wore boots _a la_ Suwaroff which came high upon the leg above a pair of tight trousers, and creaked as he walked. Above his coat he wore a spencer, an aristocratic garment adopted by the Clichiens and the young bloods of Paris, which survived both the Clichiens and the fashionable youths. In those days fashions sometimes lasted longer than parties,—a symptom of anarchy which the year of our Lord 1830 has again presented to us. This accomplished dandy seemed to be thirty years of age. His manners were those of good society; he wore jewels of value; the collar of his shirt came to the tops of his ears. His conceited and even impertinent air betrayed a consciousness of hidden superiority. His pallid face seemed bloodless, his thin flat nose had the sardonic expression which we see in a death's head, and his green eyes were inscrutable; their glance was discreet in meaning just as the thin closed mouth was discreet in words. The first man seemed on the whole a good fellow compared with this younger man, who was slashing the air with a cane, the top of which, made of gold, glittered in the sunshine. The first man might have cut off a head with his own hand, but the second was capable of entangling innocence, virtue, and beauty in the nets of calumny and intrigue, and then poisoning them or drowning them. The rubicund stranger would have comforted his victim with a jest; the other was incapable of a smile. The first was forty-five years old, and he loved, undoubtedly, both women and good cheer. Such men have passions which keep them slaves to their calling. But the young man was plainly without passions and without vices. If he was a spy he belonged to diplomacy, and did such work from a pure love of art. He conceived, the other executed; he was the idea, the other was the form.

"This must be Gondreville, is it not, my good woman?" said the young man.

"We don't say 'my good woman' here," said Michu. "We are still simple enough to say 'citizen' and 'citizeness' in these parts."

"Ah!" exclaimed the young man, in a natural way, and without seeming at all annoyed.

Players of ecarte often have a sense of inward disaster when some unknown person sits down at the same table with them, whose manners, look, voice, and method of shuffling the cards, all, to their fancy, foretell defeat. The instant Michu looked at the young man he felt an inward and prophetic collapse. He was struck by a fatal presentiment; he had a sudden confused foreboding of the scaffold. A voice told him that that dandy would destroy him, although there was nothing whatever in common between them. For this reason his answer was rude; he was and he wished to be forbidding.

"Don't you belong to the Councillor of State, Malin?" said the younger man.

"I am my own master," answered Malin.

"Mesdames," said the young man, assuming a most polite air, "are we not at Gondreville? We are expected there by Monsieur Malin."

"There's the park," said Michu, pointing to the open gate.

"Why are you hiding that gun, my fine girl?" said the elder, catching sight of the carbine as he passed through the gate.

"You never let a chance escape you, even in the country!" cried his companion.
They both turned back with a sense of distrust which the bailiff understood at once in spite of their impassible faces. Marthe let them look at the gun, to the tune of Couraut's bark; she was so convinced that her husband was meditating some evil deed that she was thankful for the curiosity of the strangers.

Michu flung a look at his wife which made her tremble; he took the gun and began to load it, accepting quietly the fatal ill-luck of this encounter and the discovery of the weapon. He seemed no longer to care for life, and his wife fathomed his inward feeling.

"So you have wolves in these parts?" said the young man, watching him.

"There are always wolves where there are sheep. You are in Champagne, and there's a forest; we have wild-boars, large and small game both, a little of everything," replied Michu, in a truculent manner.

"I'll bet, Corentin," said the elder of the two men, after exchanging a glance with his companion, "that this is my friend Michu--"

"We never kept pigs together that I know of," said the bailiff.

"No, but we both presided over Jacobins, citizen," replied the old cynic,--"you at Arcis, I elsewhere. I see you've kept your Carmagnole civility, but it's no longer in fashion, my good fellow."

"The park strikes me as rather large; we might lose our way. If you are really the bailiff show us the path to the chateau," said Corentin, in a peremptory tone.

Michu whistled to his son and continued to load his gun. Corentin looked at Marthe with indifference, while his companion seemed charmed by her; but the young man noticed the signs of her inward distress, which escaped the old libertine, who had, however, noticed and feared the gun. The natures of the two men were disclosed in this trifling yet important circumstance.

"I've an appointment the other side of the forest," said the bailiff. "I can't go with you, but my son here will take you to the chateau. How did you get to Gondreville? did you come by Cinq-Cygne?"

"We had, like yourself, business in the forest," said Corentin, without apparent sarcasm.

"Francois," cried Michu, "take these gentlemen to the chateau by the wood path, so that no one sees them; they don't follow the beaten tracks. Come here," he added, as the strangers turned to walk away, talking together as they did so in a low voice. Michu caught the boy in his arms, and kissed him almost solemnly with an expression which confirmed his wife's fears; cold chills ran down her back; she glanced at her mother with haggard eyes, for she could not weep.

"Go," said Michu; and he watched the boy until he was entirely out of sight. Couraut was barking on the other side of the road in the direction of Grouage. "Oh, that's Violette," remarked Michu. "This is the third time that old fellow has passed here to-day. What's in the wind? Hush, Couraut!"

CHAPTER II
A CRIME RELINQUISHED

Violette, mounted on one of those little nags which the farmers in the neighborhood of Paris use so much, soon appeared, wearing a round hat with a broad brim, beneath which his wood-colored face, deeply wrinkled, appeared in shadow. His gray eyes, mischievous and lively, concealed in a measure the treachery of his nature. His skinny legs, covered with gaiters of white linen which came to the knee, hung rather than rested in the stirrups, seemingly held in place by the weight of his hob-nailed shoes. Above his jacket of blue cloth he wore a cloak of some coarse woollen stuff woven in black and white stripes. His gray hair fell in curls behind his ears. This dress, the gray horse with its short legs, the manner in which Violette sat him, stomach projecting and shoulders thrown back, the big chapped hands which held the shabby bridle, all depicted him plainly as the grasping, ambitious peasant who desires to own land and buys it at any price. His mouth, with its bluish lips parted as if a surgeon had pried them open with a scalpel, and the innumerable wrinkles of his face and forehead hindered the play of features which were expressive only in their outlines. Those hard, fixed lines seemed menacing, in spite of the humility which country-folks assume and beneath which they conceal their emotions and schemes, as savages and Easterns hide theirs behind an imperturbable gravity. First a mere laborer, then the farmer of Grouage through a long course of persistent ill-doing, he continued his evil practices after conquering a position which surpassed his early hopes. He wished harm to all men and wished it vehemently. When he could assist in doing harm he did it eagerly. He was openly envious; but, no matter how malignant he might be, he kept within the limits of the law,--neither beyond it nor behind it, like a parliamentary opposition. He believed his prosperity depended on the ruin of others, and that whoever was above him was an enemy against whom all weapons were good. A character like this is very common among the peasantry.

Violette's present business was to obtain from Malin an extension of the lease of his farm, which had only six years longer to run. Jealous of the bailiff's means, he watched him narrowly. The neighbors reproached him for his intimacy with "Judas"; but the sly old farmer, wishing to obtain a twelve years' lease, was really lying in wait for an opportunity to serve either the government or Malin, who distrusted Michu. Violette, by the help of the game-keeper
of Gondreville and others belonging to the estate, kept Malin informed of all Michu's actions. Malin had
endeavored, fruitlessly, to win over Marianne, the Michus' servant-woman; but Violette and his satellites heard
everything from Gaucher,—a lad on whose fidelity Michu relied, but who betrayed him for cast-off clothing,
waistcoats, buckles, cotton socks and sugar-plums. The boy had no suspicion of the importance of his gossip.
Violette in his reports blackened all Michu's actions and gave them a criminal aspect by absurd suggestions,—
unknown, of course, to the bailiff, who was aware, however, of the base part played by the farmer, and took delight
in mystifying him.
"You must have a deal of business at Bellache to be here again," said Michu.
"Again! is that meant as a reproach, Monsieur Michu?—Hey! I did not know you had that gun. You are not going
to whistle for the sparrows on that pipe, I suppose—"
"It grew in a field of mine which bears guns," replied Michu. "Look! this is how I sow them."
The bailiff took aim at a viper thirty feet away and cut it in two.
"Have you got that bandit's weapon to protect your master?" said Violette. "Perhaps he gave it to you."
"He came from Paris expressly to bring it to me," replied Michu.
"People are talking all round the neighborhood of this journey of his; some say he is in disgrace and has to retire
from office; others that he wants to see things for himself down here. But anyway, why does he come, like the First
Consul, without giving warning? Did you know he was coming?"
"I am not on such terms with him as to be in his confidence."
"Then you have not seen him?"
"I did not know he was here till I got back from my rounds in the forest," said Michu, reloading his gun.
"He has sent to Arcis for Monsieur Grevin," said Violette; "they are scheming something."
"If you are going round by Cinq-Cygne, take me up behind you," said the bailiff. "I'm going there."
Violette was too timid to have a man of Michu's strength on his crupper, and he spurred his beast. Judas slung
his gun over his shoulder and walked rapidly up the avenue.
"Who can it be that Michu is angry with?" said Marthe to her mother.
"Ever since he heard of Monsieur Malin's arrival he has been gloomy," replied the old woman. "But it is getting
damp here, let us go in."

After the two women had settled themselves in the chimney corner they heard Couraut's bark.
"There's my husband returning!" cried Marthe.
Michu passed up the stairs; his wife, uneasy, followed him to their bedroom.
"See if any one is about," he said to her, in a voice of some emotion.
"No one," she replied. "Marianne is in the field with the cow, and Gaucher--"
"Where is Gaucher?" he asked.
"I don't know."
"I distrust that little scamp. Go up in the garret, look in the hay-loft, look everywhere for him."
Marthe left the room to obey the order. When she returned she found Michu on his knees, praying.
"What is the matter?" she said, frightened.
The bailiff took his wife round the waist and drew her to him, saying in a voice of deep feeling: "If we never see
each other again remember, my poor wife, that I loved you well. Follow minutely the instructions which you will
find in a letter buried at the foot of the larch in that copse. It is enclosed in a tin tube. Do not touch it until after my
death. And remember, Marthe, whatever happens to me, that in spite of man's injustice, my arm has been the
instrument of the justice of God."

Marthe, who turned pale by degrees, became white as her own linen; she looked at her husband with fixed eyes
widened by fear; she tried to speak, but her throat was dry. Michu disappeared like a shadow, having tied Couraut
to the foot of his bed where the dog, after the manner of all dogs, howled in despair.

Michu's anger against Monsieur Marion had serious grounds, but it was now concentrated on another man, far
more criminal in his eyes,—on Malin, whose secrets were known to the bailiff, he being in a better position than
others to understand the conduct of the State Councillor. Michu's father-in-law had had, politically speaking, the
confidence of the former representative to the Convention, through Grevin.

Perhaps it would be well here to relate the circumstances which brought the Simeuse and the Cinq-Cygne
families into connection with Malin,—circumstances which weighed heavily on the fate of Mademoiselle de Cinq-
Cygne's twin cousins, but still more heavily on that of Marthe and Michu.

The Cinq-Cygne mansion at Troyes stands opposite to that of Simeuse. When the populace, incited by minds
that were as shrewd as they were cautious, pillaged the hotel Simeuse, discovered the marquis and marchioness, who
were accused of corresponding with the nation's enemies, and delivered them to the national guards who took them
to prison, the crowd shouted, "Now for the Cinq-Cygnés!" To their minds the Cinq-Cygnés were as guilty as other
aristocrats. The brave and worthy Monsieur de Simeuse in the endeavor to save his two sons, then eighteen years of age, whose courage was likely to compromise them, had confided them, a few hours before the storm broke, to their aunt, the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne. Two servants attached to the Simeuse family accompanied the young men to her house. The old marquis, who was anxious that his name should not die out, requested that what was happening might be concealed from his sons, even in the event of dire disaster. Laurence, the only daughter of the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne, was then twelve years of age; her cousins both loved her and she loved them equally. Like other twins the Simeuse brothers were so alike that for a long while their mother dressed them in different colors to know them apart. The first comer, the eldest, was named Paul-Marie, the other Marie-Paul. Laurence de Cinq-Cygne, to whom their danger was revealed, played her woman's part well though still a mere child. She coaxed and petted her cousins and kept them occupied until the very moment when the populace surrounded the Cinq-Cygne mansion. The two brothers then knew their danger for the first time, and looked at each other. Their resolution was instantly taken; they armed their own servants and those of the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne, barricaded the doors, and stood guard at the windows, after closing the wooden blinds, with the five men-servants and the Abbe d'Hauteserre, a relative of the Cinq-Cygnes. These eight courageous champions poured a deadly fire into the crowd. Every shot killed or wounded an assailant. Laurence, instead of wringing her hands, loaded the guns with extraordinary coolness, and passed the balls and powder to those who needed them. The Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne was on her knees.

"What are you doing, mother?" said Laurence.
"I am praying," she answered, "for them and for you."

Sublime words,--said also by the mother of Godoy, prince of the Peace, in Spain, under similar circumstances.

In a moment eleven persons were killed and lying on the ground among a number of wounded. Such results either cool or excite a populace; either it grows savage at the work or discontinues it. On the present occasion those in advance recoiled; but the crowd behind them were there to kill and rob, and when they saw their own dead, they cried out: "Murder! Murder! Revenge!" The wiser heads went in search of the representative to the Convention, Malin. The twins, by this time aware of the disastrous events of the day, suspected Malin of desiring the ruin of their family, and of causing the arrest of their parents, and the suspicion soon became a certainty. They posted themselves beneath the porte-cochere, gun in hand, intending to kill Malin as soon as he made his appearance; but the countess lost her head; she imagined her house in ashes and her daughter assassinated, and she blamed the young men for their heroic defence and compelled them to desist. It was Laurence who opened the door slightly when Malin summoned the household to admit him. Seeing her, the representative relied upon the awe he expected to inspire in a mere child, and he entered the house. To his first words of inquiry as to why the family were making such a resistance, the girl replied: "If you really desire to give liberty to France how is it that you do not protect us in our homes? They are trying to tear down this house, monsieur, to murder us, and you say we have no right to oppose force to force!"

Malin stood rooted to the ground.
"You, the son of a mason employed by the Grand Marquis to build his castle!" exclaimed Marie-Paul, "you have let them drag our father to prison--you have believed calumnies!"

"He shall be released at once," said Malin, who thought himself lost when he saw each youth clutch his weapon convulsively.
"You owe your life to that promise," said Marie-Paul, solemnly. "If it is not fulfilled to-night we shall find you again."
"As to that howling populace," said Laurence, "If you do not send them away, the next blood will be yours. Now, Monsieur Malin, leave this house!"

The Conventionalist did leave it, and he harangued the crowd, dwelling on the sacred rights of the domestic hearth, the habeas corpus and the English "home." He told them that the law and the people were sovereigns, that the law _was_ the people, and that the people could only act through the law, and that power was vested in the law. The particular law of personal necessity made him eloquent, and he managed to disperse the crowd. But he never forgot the contemptuous expression of the two brothers, nor the "Leave this house!" of Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. Therefore, when it was a question of selling the estates of the Comte de Cinq-Cygne, Laurence's brother, as national property, the sale was rigorously made. The agents left nothing for Laurence but the chateau, the park and gardens, and one farm called that of Cinq-Cygne. Malin instructed the appraisers that Laurence had no rights beyond her property, the sale was rigorously made. Laurence, instead of wringing her hands, loaded the guns with extraordinary coolness, and passed the balls and powder to those who needed them. The Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne was on her knees.

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The evening after this terrible tumult, Laurence so entreated her cousins to leave the country, fearing treachery on the part of Malin, or some trap into which they might fall, that they took horse that night and gained the Prussian outposts. They had scarcely reached the forest of Gondreville before the hotel Cinq-Cygne was surrounded; Malin came himself to arrest the heirs of the house of Simeuse. He dared not lay hands on the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne,
who was in bed with a nervous fever, nor on Laurence, a child of twelve. The servants, fearing the severity of the
Republic, had disappeared. The next day the news of the resistance of the brothers and their flight to Prussia was
known to the neighborhood. A crowd of three thousand persons assembled before the hotel de Cinq-Cygne, which
was demolished with incredible rapidity. Madame de Cinq-Cygne, carried to the hotel Simeuse, died there from the
effects of the fever aggravated by terror.

Michu did not appear in the political arena until after these events, for the marquis and his wife remained in
prison over five months. During this time Malin was away on a mission. But when Monsieur Marion sold
Gondreville to the Councillor of State, Michu understood the latter's game,—or rather, he thought he did; for Malin
was, like Fouche, one of those personages who are of such depth in all their different aspects that they are
impenetrable when they play a part, and are never understood until long after their drama is ended.

In all the chief circumstances of Malin's life he had never failed to consult his faithful friend Grevin, the notary
of Arcis, whose judgment on men and things was, at a distance, clear-cut and precise. This faculty is the wisdom and
makes the strength of second-rate men. Now, in November, 1803, a combination of events (already related in the
"Depute d'Arcis") made matters so serious for the Councillor of State that a letter might have compromised the two
friends. Malin, who hoped to be appointed senator, was afraid to offer his explanations in Paris. He came to
Gondreville, giving the First Consul only one of the reasons that made him wish to be there; that reason gave him an
appearance of zeal in the eyes of Bonaparte; whereas his journey, far from concerning the interests of the State,
related to his own interests only. On this particular day, as Michu was watching the park and expecting, after the
manner of a red Indian, a propitious moment for his vengeance, the astute Malin, accustomed to turn all events to his
own profit, was leading his friend Grevin to a little field in the English garden, a lonely spot in the park, favorable
for a secret conference. There, standing in the centre of the grass plot and speaking low, the friends were at too great
a distance to be overheard if any one were lurking near enough to listen to them; they were also sure of time to
change the conversation if others unwarily approached.

"Why couldn't we have stayed in a room in the chateau?" asked Grevin.

"Didn't you take notice of those two men whom the prefect of police has sent here to me?"

Though Fouche made himself in the matter of the Pichegru, Georges, Moreau, and Polignac conspiracy the soul
of the Consular cabinet, he did not at this time control the ministry of police, but was merely a councillor of State
like Malin.

"Those men," continued Malin, "are Fouche's two arms. One, that dandy Corentin, whose face is like a glass of
lemonade, vinegar on his lips and verjuice in his eyes, put an end to the insurrection at the West in the year VII. in
less than fifteen days. The other is a disciple of Lenoir; he is the only one who preserves the great traditions of the
police. I had asked for an agent of no great account, backed by some official personage, and they send me those
past-masters of the business! Ah, Grevin, Fouche wants to pry into my game. That's why I left those fellows dining
at the chateau; they may look into everything for all I care; they won't find Louis XVIII. nor any sign of him."

"But see here, my dear fellow, what game are you playing?" cried Grevin.

"Ha, my friend, a double game is a dangerous one, but this, taking Fouche into account, is a triple one. He may
have nosed the fact that I am in the secrets of the house of Bourbon."

"You?"

"I," replied Malin.

"Have you forgotten Favras?"

The words made an impression on the councillor.

"Since when?" asked Grevin, after a pause.

"Since the Consulate for life."

"I hope there's no proof of it?"

"Not that!" said Malin, clicking his thumb-nail against his teeth.

In few words the Councillor of State gave a clear and succinct account of the critical position in which
Bonaparte was about to hold England, by threatening her with invasion from the camp at Boulogne; he explained to
Grevin the bearings of that project, which was unobserved by France and Europe but suspected by Pitt; also the
critical position in which England was about to put Bonaparte. A powerful coalition, Prussia, Austria, and Russia,
paid by English gold, was pledged to furnish seven hundred thousand men under arms. At the same time a
formidable conspiracy was throwing a network over the whole of France, including among its members
montagnards, chouans, royalists, and their princes.

"Louis XVIII. held that as long as there were three Consuls anarchy was certain, and that he could at some
opportunite moment take his revenge for the 13th Vendemaire and the 18th Fructidor," said Malin, "but the
Consulate for life has unmasked Bonaparte's intentions--he will soon be emperor. The late sub-lieutenant means to
create a dynasty! This time his life is in actual danger; and the plot is far better laid than that of the Rue Saint-
Nicaise. Pichegru, Georges, Moreau, the Duc d'Enghien, Polignac and Riviere, the two friends of the Comte d'Artois are in it.

"What an amalgamation!" cried Grevin.

"France is being silently invaded; no stone is left unturned; the thing will be carried with a rush. A hundred picked men, commanded by Georges, are to attack the Consular guard and the Consul hand to hand."

"Well then, denounce them."

"For the last two months the Consul, his minister of police, the prefect and Fouche, hold some of the clues of this vast conspiracy; but they don't know its full extent, and at this particular moment they are leaving nearly all the conspirators free, so as to discover more about it."

"As to rights," said the notary, "the Bourbons have much more right to conceive, plan, and execute a scheme against Bonaparte, than Bonaparte had on the 18th Brumaire against the Republic, whose product he was. He murdered his mother on that occasion, but these royalists only seek to recover what was theirs. I can understand that the princes and their adherents, seeing the lists of the _emigres_ closed, mortgages suppressed, the Catholic faith restored, anti-revolutionary decrees accumulating, should begin to see that their return is becoming difficult, not to say impossible. Bonaparte being the sole obstacle now in their way, they want to get rid of him--nothing simpler. Conspirators if defeated are brigands, if successful, heroes; and your perplexity seems to me very natural."

"The matter now is," said Malin, "to make Bonaparte fling the head of the Duc d'Enghien at the Bourbons, just as the Convention flung the head of Louis XVI. at the kings, so as to commit him as fully as we are to the Revolution; or else, we must upset the idol of the French people and their future emperor, and seat the true throne upon his ruins. I am at the mercy of some event, some fortunate pistol-shot, some infernal machine which does its work. Even I don't know the whole conspiracy; they don't tell me all; but they have asked me to call the Council of State at the critical moment and direct its action towards the restoration of the Bourbons."

"Wait," said the notary.

"Impossible! I am compelled to make my decision at once."

"Why?"

"Well, the Simeuse brothers are in the conspiracy; they are here in the neighborhood; I must either have them watched, let them compromise themselves, and so be rid of them, or else I must privately protect them. I asked the prefect for underlings and he has sent me lynxes, who came through Troyes and have got the gendarmerie to support them."

"Gondreville is your real object," said Grevin, "and this conspiracy your best chance of keeping it. Fouche, Talleyrand, and those two fellows have nothing to do with that. Therefore play fair with them. What nonsense! those who cut Louis XVI.'s head off are in the government; France is full of men who have bought national property, and yet you talk of bringing back those who would require you to give up Gondreville! If the Bourbons were not imbeciles they would pass a sponge over all we have done. Warn Bonaparte, that's my advice."

"A man of my rank can't denounce," said Malin, quickly.

"Your rank!" exclaimed Grevin, smiling.

"They have offered to make me Keeper of the Seals."

"Ah! Now I understand your bewilderment, and it is for me to see clear in this political darkness and find a way out for you. Now, it is quite impossible to foresee what events may happen to bring back the Bourbons when a General Bonaparte is in possession of eighty line of battle ships and four hundred thousand men. The most difficult thing of all in expectant politics is to know when a power that totters will fall; but, my old man, Bonaparte's power is not tottering, it is in the ascendant. Don't you think that Fouche may be sounding you so as to get to the bottom of your mind, and then get rid of you?"

"No; I am sure of my go-between. Besides, Fouche would never, under those circumstances, send me such fellows as these; he would know they would make me suspicious."

"They alarm me," said Grevin. "If Fouche does not distrust you, and is not seeking to probe you, why does he send them? Fouche doesn't play such a trick as that without a motive; what is it?"

"What decides me," said Malin, "is that I should never be easy with those two Simeuse brothers in France. Perhaps Fouche, who knows how I am placed towards them, wants to make sure they don't escape him, and hopes through them to reach the Condes."

"That's right, old fellow; it is not under Bonaparte that the present possessor of Gondreville can be ousted."

Just then Malin, happening to look up, saw the muzzle of a gun through the foliage of a tall linden.

"I was not mistaken, I thought I heard the click of a trigger," he said to Grevin, after getting behind the trunk of a large tree, where the notary, uneasy at his friend's sudden movement, followed him.

"It is Michu," said Grevin; "I see his red beard."

"Don't let us seem afraid," said Malin, who walked slowly away, saying at intervals: "Why is that man so bitter
against the owners of this property? It was not you he was covering. If he overheard us he had better ask the prayers of the congregation! Who the devil would have thought of looking up into the trees!"

"There's always something to learn," said the notary. "But he was a good distance off, and we spoke low."

"I shall tell Corentin about it," replied Malin.

CHAPTER III
THE MASK THROWN OFF
A few moments later Michu returned home, his face pale, his features contracted.

"What is the matter?" said his wife, frightened.

"Nothing," he replied, seeing Violette whose presence silenced him.

Michu took a chair and sat down quietly before the fire, into which he threw a letter which he drew from a tin tube such as are given to soldiers to hold their papers. This act, which enabled Marthe to draw a long breath like one relieved of a great burden, greatly puzzled Violette. The bailiff laid his gun on the mantel-shelf with admirable composure. Marianne the servant, and Marthe's mother were spinning by the light of a lamp.

"Come, Francois," said the father, presently, "it is time to go to bed."

He lifted the boy roughly by the middle of his body and carried him off.

"Run down to the cellar," he whispered, when they reached the stairs. "Empty one third out of two bottles of the Macon wine, and fill them up with the Cognac brandy which is on the shelf. Then mix a bottle of white wine with one half brandy. Do it neatly, and put the three bottles on the empty cask which stands by the cellar door. When you hear me open the window in the kitchen come out of the cellar, run to the stable, saddle my horse, mount it, and go and wait for me at Poteaudes-Gueux--That little scamp hates to go to bed," said Michu, returning; "he likes to do as grown people do, see all, hear all, and know all. You spoil my people, pere Violette."

"Goodness!" cried Violette, "what has loosened your tongue? I never heard you say as much before."

"Do you suppose I let myself be spied upon without taking notice of it? You are on the wrong side, pere Violette. If, instead of serving those who hate me, you were on my side I could do better for you than renew that lease of yours."

"How?" said the peasant, opening wide his avaricious eyes.

"I'll sell you my property cheap."

"Nothing is cheap when we have to pay," said Violette, sententiously.

"I want to leave the neighborhood, and I'll let you have my farm of Mousseau, the buildings, granary, and cattle for fifty thousand francs."

"Really?"

"Does that suit you?"

"Hang it! I must think--"

"We'll talk about it--I shall want earnest money."

"I have no money."

"Well, a note."

"Can't give it."

"Tell me who sent you here to-day."

"I am on my way back from where I spent this afternoon, and I only stopped in to say good-evening."

"Back without your horse? What a fool you must take me for! You are lying, and you shall not have my farm."

"Well, to tell you the truth, it was monsieur Grevin who sent me. He said 'Violette, we want Michu; do you go and get him; if he isn't at home, wait for him.' I saw I should have to stay here all this evening."

"Are those sharks from Paris still at the chateau?"

"Ah! that I don't know; but there were people in the salon."

"You shall have my farm; we'll settle the terms now. Wife, go and get some wine to wash down the contract. Take the best Roussillon, the wine of the ex-marquis,--we are not babes. You'll find a couple of bottles on the empty cask near the door, and a bottle of white wine."

"Very good," said Violette, who never got drunk. "Let us drink."

"You have fifty thousand francs beneath the floor of your bedroom under your bed, pere Violette; you will give them to me two weeks after we sign the deed of sale before Grevin--" Violette stared at Michu and grew livid. "Ah! you came here to spy upon a Jacobin who had the honor to be president of the club at Arcis, and you imagine he will let you get the better of him! I have eyes, I saw where your tiles have been freshly cemented, and I concluded that you did not try them up to plant wheat there. Come, drink."

Violette, much troubled, drank a large glass of wine without noticing the quality; terror had put a hot iron in his stomach, the brandy was not hotter than his cupidity. He would have given many things to be safely home and able to change the hiding-place of his treasure. The three women smiled.
"Do you like that wine?" said Michu, refilling his glass.
"Yes, I do."

After a good half-hour's decision on the time when the buyer might take possession, and on the various punctilios which the peasantry bring forward when concluding a bargain,—in the midst of assertions and counter-assertions, the filling and emptying of glasses, the giving of promises and denials, Violette suddenly fell forward with his head on the table, not tipsy, but dead-drunk. The instant that Michu saw his eyes blur he opened the window.

"Where's that scamp, Gaucher?" he said to his wife.
"In bed."

"You, Marianne," said the bailiff to his faithful servant, "stand in front of his door and watch him. You, mother, stay down here, and keep an eye on this spy; keep your eyes and ears open and don't unfasten the door to any one but Francois. It is a question of life or death," he added, in a deep voice. "Every creature beneath my roof must remember that I have not quitted it this night; all of you must assert that—even though your heads were on the block. Come," he said to Marthe, "come, wife, put on your shoes, take your coat, and let us be off! No questions—I go with you."

For the last three quarters of an hour the man's demeanor and glance were of despotic authority, all-powerful, irresistible, drawn from the same mysterious source from which great generals on fields of battle who inflame an army, great orators inspiring vast audiences, and (it must be said) great criminals perpetrating bold crimes derive their inspiration. At such times invincible influence seems to exhale from the head and issue from the tongue; the gesture even can inject the will of the one man into others. The three women knew that some dreadful crisis was at hand; without warning of its nature they felt it in the rapid actions of the man, whose countenance shone, whose forehead spoke, whose brilliant eyes glittered like stars; they saw it in the sweat that covered his brow to the roots of his hair, while more than once his voice vibrated with impatience and fury. Marthe obeyed passively. Armed to the teeth and with his gun over his shoulder Michu dashed into the avenue, followed by his wife. They soon reached the cross-roads where Francois was in waiting hidden among the bushes.

"The boy is intelligent," said Michu, when he caught sight of him.
These were his first words. His wife had rushed after him, unable to speak.

"Go back to the house, hide in a thick tree, and watch the country and the park," he said to his son. "We have all gone to bed, no one is stirring. Your grandmother will not open the door until you ask her to let you in. Remember every word I say to you. The life of your father and mother depends on it. No one must know we did not sleep at home."

After whispering these words to the boy, who instantly disappeared in the forest like an eel in the mud, Michu turned to his wife.

"Mount behind me," he said, "and pray that God be with us. Sit firm, the beast may die of it." So saying he kicked the horse with both heels, pressing him with his powerful knees, and the animal sprang forward with the rapidity of a hunter, seeming to understand what his master wanted of him, and crossed the forest in fifteen minutes. Then Michu, who had not swerved from the shortest way, pulled up, found a spot at the edge of the woods from which he could see the roofs of the chateau of Cinq-Cygne lighted by the moon, tied his horse to a tree, and followed by his wife, gained a little eminence which overlooked the valley.

The chateau, which Marthe and Michu looked at together for a moment, makes a charming effect in the landscape. Though it has little extent and is of no importance whatever as architecture, yet archaeologically it is not without a certain interest. This old edifice of the fifteenth century, placed on an eminence, surrounded on all sides by a moat, or rather by deep, wide ditches always full of water, is built in cobble-stones buried in cement, the walls being seven feet thick. Its simplicity recalls the rough and warlike life of feudal days. The chateau, plain and unadorned, has two large reddish towers at either end, connected by a long main building with casement windows, the stone mullions of which, being roughly carved, bear some resemblance to vine-shoots. The stairway is outside the house, at the middle, in a sort of pentagonal tower entered through a small arched door. The interior of the ground-floor together with the rooms on the first storey were modernized in the time of Louis XIV., and the whole building is surmounted by an immense roof broken by casement windows with carved triangular pediments. Before the castle lies a vast green sward the trees of which had recently been cut down. On either side of the entrance bridge are two small dwellings where the gardeners live, connected across the road by a paltry iron railing without character, evidently modern. To right and left of the lawn, which is divided in two by a paved road-way, are the stables, cow-sheds, barns, wood-house, bakery, poultry-yard, and the offices, placed in what were doubtless the remains of two wings of the old building similar to those that were still standing. The two large towers, with their pepper-pot roofs which had not been rased, and the belfry of the middle tower, gave an air of distinction to the village. The church, also very old, showed near by its pointed steeple, which harmonized well with the solid masses
of the castle. The moon brought out in full relief the various roofs and towers on which it played and sparkled.

Michu gazed at this baronial structure in a manner that upset all his wife's ideas about him; his face, now calm, wore a look of hope and also a sort of pride. His eyes scanned the horizon with a glance of defiance; he listened for sounds in the air. It was now nine o'clock; the moon was beginning to cast its light upon the margin of the forest and to illumine the little bluff on which they stood. The position struck him as dangerous and he left it, fearful of being seen. But no suspicious noise troubled the peace of the beautiful valley encircled on this side by the forest of Nodesme. Marthe, exhausted and trembling, was awaiting some explanation of their hurried ride. What was she engaged in? Was she to aid in a good deed or an evil one? At that instant Michu bent to his wife's ear and whispered:--

"Go the house and ask to speak to the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne; when you see her beg her to speak to you alone. If no one can overhear you, say to her: 'Mademoiselle, the lives of your two cousins are in danger, and he who can explain the how and why is waiting to speak to you.' If she seems afraid, if she distrusts you, add these words: 'They are conspiring against the First Consul and the conspiracy is discovered.' Don't give your name; they distrust us too much."

Marthe raised her face towards her husband and said:--
"Can it be that you serve them?"
"What if I do?" he said, frowning, taking her words as a reproach.
"You don't understand me," cried Marthe, seizing his large hand and falling on her knees beside him as she kissed it and covered it with her tears.
"Go, go, you shall cry later," he said, kissing her vehemently.

When he no longer heard her step his eyes filled with tears. He had distrusted Marthe on account of her father's opinions; he had hidden the secrets of his life from her; but the beauty of her simple nature had suddenly appeared to him, just as the grandeur of his had, as suddenly, revealed itself to her. Marthe had passed in a moment from the deep humiliation caused by the degradation of the man whose name she bore, to the exaltation given by a sense of his nobleness. The change was instantaneous, without transition; it was enough to make her tremble. She told him later that she went, as it were, through blood from the pavilion to the edge of the forest, and there was lifted to heaven, in a moment, among the angels. Michu, who had known he was not appreciated, and who mistook his wife's griefed and melancholy manner for lack of affection, and who mistrusted her husband's gun. She darted forward like a doe, and soon reached the road to the chateau. There she was surprised by the steps of a man following behind her; she turned, with a cry, and her husband's large hand closed her mouth.

"From the hill up there I saw the silver lace of the gendarmes' hats. Go in by the breach in the moat between Mademoiselle's tower and the stables. The dogs won't bark at you. Go through the garden and call the countess by the window; order them to saddle her horse, and ask her to come out through the breach. I'll be there, after discovering what the Parisians are planning, and how to escape them."

Danger, which seemed to be rolling like an avalanche upon them, gave wings to Marthe's feet.

CHAPTER IV
LAURENCE DE CINQ-CYNGE

The old Frank name of the Cinq-Cygnes and the Chargeboeufs was Duineff. Cinq-Cygne became that of the younger branch of the Chargeboeufs after the defence of a castle made, during their father's absence, by five daughters of that race, all remarkably fair, and of whom no one expected such heroism. One of the first Comtes de Champagne wished, by bestowing this pretty name, to perpetuate the memory of their deed as long as the family existed. Laurence, the last of her race, was, contrary to Salic law, heiress of the name, the arms, and the manor. She was therefore Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne in her own right; her husband would have to take both her name and her blazon, which bore for device the glorious answer made by the elder of the five sisters when summoned to surrender the castle, "We die singing." Worthy descendant of these noble heroines, Laurence was fair and lily-white as though nature had made her for a wager. The lines of her blue veins could be seen through the delicate close texture of her skin. Her beautiful golden hair harmonized delightfully with eyes of the deepest blue. Everything about her
belonged to the type of delicacy. Within that fragile though active body, and in defiance as it were of its pearly
whiteness, lived a soul like that of a man of noble nature; but no one, not even a close observer, would have
suspected it from the gentle countenance and rounded features which, when seen in profile, bore some slight
resemblance to those of a lamb. This extreme gentleness, though noble, had something of the stupidity of the little
animal. "I look like a dreamy sheep," she would say, smiling. Laurence, who talked little, seemed not so much
dreamy as dormant. But, did any important circumstance arise, the hidden Judith was revealed, sublime; and
circumstances had, unfortunately, not been wanting.

At thirteen years of age, Laurence, after the events already related, was an orphan living in a house opposite to
the empty space where so recently had stood one of the most curious specimens in France of sixteenth-century
architecture, the hotel Cinq-Cygne. Monsieur d'Hauteserre, her relation, now her guardian, took the young heiress to
live in the country at her chateau of Cinq-Cygne. That brave provincial gentleman, alarmed at the death of his
brother, the Abbe d'Hauteserre, who was shot in the open square as he was about to escape in the dress of a peasant,
was not in a position to defend the interests of his ward. He had two sons in the army of the princes, and every day,
at the slightest unusual sound, he believed that the municipals of Arcis were coming to arrest him. Laurence, proud
of having sustained a siege and of possessing the historic whiteness of her swan-like ancestors, despised the prudent
cowardice of the old man who bent to the storm, and dreamed only of distinguishing herself. So, she boldly hung the
portrait of Charlotte Corday on the walls of her poor salon at Cinq-Cygne, and crowned it with oak-leaves. She
responded by messenger with her twin cousins, in defiance of the law, which punished the act, when discovered,
with death. The messenger, who risked his life, brought back the answers. Laurence lived only, after the
catastrophes at Troyes, for the triumph of the royal cause. After soberly judging Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre
(who lived with her at the chateau de Cinq-Cygne), and recognizing their honest, but stolid natures, she put them
outside the lines of her own life. She had, moreover, too good a mind and too sound a judgment to complain of their
natures; always kind, amiable, and affectionate towards them, she nevertheless told them none of her secrets.
Nothing forms a character so much as the practice of constant concealment in the bosom of a family.

After she attained her majority Laurence allowed Monsieur d'Hauteserre to manage her affairs as in the past. So
long as her favorite mare was well-groomed, her maid Catherine dressed to please her, and Gothard the little page
was suitably clothed, she cared for nothing else. Her thoughts were aimed too high to come down to occupations and
interests which in other times than these would doubtless have pleased her. Dress was a small matter to her mind;
moreover her cousins were not there to see her. She wore a dark-green habit when she rode, and a gown of some
common woollen stuff with a cape trimmed with braid when she walked; in the house she was always seen in a silk
wrapper. Gothard, the little groom, a brave and clever lad of fifteen, attended her wherever she went, and she was
nearly always out of doors, riding or hunting over the farms of Gondreville, without objection being made by either
Michu or the farmers. She rode admirably well, and her cleverness in hunting was thought miraculous. In the
country she was never called anything but "Mademoiselle" even during the Revolution.

Whoever has read the fine romance of "Rob Roy" will remember that rare woman for whose making Walter
Scott's imagination abandoned its customary coldness,—Diana Vernon. The recollection will serve to make Laurence
understood if, to the noble qualities of the Scottish huntress you add the restrained exaltation of Charlotte Corday,
surpassing, however, the charming vivacity which rendered Diana so attractive. The young countess had seen her
mother die, the Abbe d'Hauteserre shot down, the Marquis de Simeuse and his wife executed; her only brother had
died of his wounds; her two cousins serving in Conde's army might be killed at any moment; and, finally, the
fortunes of the Simeuse and the Cinq-Cygne families had been seized and wasted by the Republic without being of
any benefit to the nation. Her grave demeanor, now lapsing into apparent stolidity, can be readily understood.
Dreamy as dormant. But, did any important circumstance arise, the hidden Judith was revealed, sublime; and
circumstances had, unfortunately, not been wanting.

The Hauteserres, as niggardly for their ward as they were for themselves, laid up every year nearly the whole of
their annuity for the benefit of their sons, and kept the young heiress on miserable fare. The whole cost of the Cinq-
Cygne household never exceeded five thousand francs a year. But Laurence, who condescended to no details, was
satisfied. Her guardian and his wife, unconsciously ruled by the imperceptible influence of her strong character,
which was felt even in little things, had ended by admiring her whom they had known and treated as a child,--a sufficiently rare feeling. But in her manner, her deep voice, her commanding eye, Laurence held that inexplicable power which rules all men,--even when its strength is mere appearance. To vulgar minds real depth is incomprehensible; it is perhaps for that reason that the populace is so prone to admire what it cannot understand. Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, impressed by the habitual silence and erratic habits of the young girl, were constantly expecting some extraordinary thing of her.

Laurence, who did good intelligently and never allowed herself to be deceived, was held in the utmost respect by the peasantry although she was an aristocrat. Her sex, name, and great misfortunes, also the originality of her present life, contributed to give her authority over the inhabitants of the valley of Cinq-Cygne. She was sometimes absent for two days, attended by Gothard, but neither Monsieur nor Madame d'Hauteserre questioned her, on her return, as to the reasons of her absence. Please observe, however, that there was nothing odd or eccentric about Laurence. What she was and what she did was masked, as it were, by a feminine and even fragile appearance. Her heart was full of extreme sensibility, though her head contained a stoical firmness and the virile gift of resolution. Her clear-seeing eyes knew not how to weep; but no one would have imagined that the delicate white wrist with its tracery of blue veins could defy that of the boldest horseman. Her hand, so noble, so flexible, could handle gun or pistol with the ease of a practised marksman. She always wore when out of doors the coquettish little cap with visor and green veil which women wear on horseback. Her delicate fair face, thus protected, and her white throat tied with a black cravat, were never injured by her long rides in all weathers.

Under the Directory and at the beginning of the Consulate, Laurence had been able to escape the observation of others; but since the government had become a more settled thing, the new authorities, the prefect of the Aube, Malin's friends, and Malin himself had endeavored to undermine her in the community. Her preoccupying thought was the overthrow of Bonaparte, whose ambition and its triumphs excited the anger of her soul,--a cold, deliberate anger. The obscure and hidden enemy of a man at the pinnacle of glory, she kept her gaze upon him from the depths of her valley and her forests, with relentless fixity; there were times when she thought of killing him in the roads about Malmaison or Saint-Cloud. Plans for the execution of this idea may have been the cause of many of her past actions, but having been initiated, after the peace of Amiens, into the conspiracy of the men who expected to make the 18th Brumaire recoil upon the First Consul, she had thenceforth subordinated her faculties and her hatred to their vast and well laid scheme, which was to strike at Bonaparte externally by the vast coalition of Russia, Austria, and Prussia (vanquished at Austerlitz) and internally by the coalition of men politically opposed to each other, but united by their common hatred of a man whose death some of them were meditating, like Laurence herself, without shrinking from the word assassination. This young girl, so fragile to the eye, so powerful to those who knew her well, was at the present moment the faithful guide and assistant of the exiled gentlemen who came from England to take part in this deadly enterprise.

Fouche relied on the co-operation of the _emigres_ everywhere beyond the Rhine to lure the Duc d'Enghien into the plot. The presence of that prince in the Baden territory, not far from Strasburg, gave much weight later to the accusation. The great question of whether the prince really knew of the enterprise, and was waiting on the frontier to enter France on its success, is one of those secrets about which, as about several others, the house of Bourbon has maintained an unbroken silence. As the history of that period recedes into the past, impartial historians will declare the imprudence, to say the least, of the Duc d'Enghien in placing himself close to the frontier at a time when a vast conspiracy was about to break forth, the secret of which was undoubtedly known to every member of the Bourbon family.

The caution which Malin displayed in talking with Grevin in the open air, Laurence applied to her every action. She met the emissaries and conferred with them either at various points in the Nodesme forest, or beyond the valley of the Cinq-Cygne, between the villages of Sezanne and Brienne. Often she rode forty miles on a stretch with Gothard, and returned to Cinq-Cygne without the least sign of weariness or pre-occupation on her fair young face.

Some years earlier, Laurence had seen in the eyes of a little cow-boy, then nine years old, the artless admiration which children feel for everything that is out of the common way. She made him her page, and taught him to groom a horse with the nicety and care of an Englishman. She saw in the lad a desire to do well, a bright intelligence, and a total absence of sly motives; she tested his devotion and found he had not only mind but nobility of character; he never dreamed of reward. The young girl trained this soul that was still so young; she was good to him, good with dignity; she attached him to her by attaching herself to him, and by herself polishing a nature that was half wild, without destroying its freshness or its simplicity. When she had sufficiently tested the almost canine fidelity she had nurtured, Gothard became her intelligent and ingenious accomplice. The little peasant, whom no one could suspect, went from Cinq-Cygne to Nancy, and often returned before any one had missed him from the neighborhood. He knew how to practise all the tricks of a spy. The extreme distrust and caution his mistress had taught him did not change his natural self. Gothard, who possessed all the craft of a woman, the candor of a child, and the ceaseless
observation of a conspirator, hid every one of these admirable qualities beneath the torpor and dull ignorance of a
country lad. The little fellow had a silly, weak, and clumsy appearance; but once at work he was active as a fish; he
escaped like an eel; he understood, as the dogs do, the merest glance; he nosed a thought. His good fat face, both
round and red, his sleepy brown eyes, his hair, cut in the peasant fashion, his clothes, and his slow growth gave him
the appearance of a child of ten.

The two young d’Hauteserres and the twin brothers Simeuse, under the guidance of their cousin Laurence, who
had been watching over their safety and that of the other _emigres_ who accompanied them from Strasbourg to Bar-
sur-Aube, had just passed through Alsace and Lorraine, and were now in Champagne while other conspirators, not
less bold, were entering France by the cliffs of Normandy. Dressed as workmen the d’Hauteserres and the Simeuse
twins had walked from forest to forest, guided on their way by relays of persons, chosen by Laurence during the last
three months from among the least suspected of the Bourbon adherents living in each neighborhood. The _emigres_
slept by day and travelled by night. Each brought with him two faithful soldiers; one of whom went before to warn
of danger, the other behind to protect a retreat. Thanks to these military precautions, this valuable detachment had at
last reached, without accident, the forest of Nodesme, which was chosen as the rendezvous. Twenty-seven other
gentlemen had entered France from Switzerland and crossed Burgundy, guided towards Paris with the same caution.

Monsieur de Riviere counted on collecting five hundred men, one hundred of whom were young nobles, the
officers of this sacred legion. Monsieur de Polignac and Monsieur de Riviere, whose conduct as chiefs of this
advance was most remarkable, afterwards preserved an impenetrable secrecy as to the names of those of their
accomplices who were not discovered. It may be said, therefore, now that the Restoration has made matters clearer,
that Bonaparte never knew the extent of the danger he then ran, any more than England knew the peril she had
escaped from the camp at Boulogne; and yet the police of France was never more intelligently or ably managed.

At the period when this history begins, a coward—for cowards are always to be found in conspiracies which are
certainly confined to a small number of equally strong men—a sworn confederate, brought face to face with death, gave
certain information, happily insufficient to show the object of the enterprise. The police had therefore, as Malin told Grevin, left the conspirators at liberty, though all the while watching them, hoping to discover the ramifications of the plot. Nevertheless, the government found its hand to a
certain extent forced by Georges Cadoudal, a man of action who took counsel of himself only, and who was hiding
in Paris with twenty-five _chouans_ for the purpose of attacking the First Consul.

Laurence combined both hatred and love within her breast. To destroy Bonaparte and bring back the Bourbons
was to recover Gondreville and make the fortune of her cousins. The two sentiments, one the counterpart of the
other, were sufficient, more especially at twenty-three years of age, to excite all the faculties of her soul and all the
powers of her being. So, for the last two months, she had seemed to the inhabitants of Cinq-Cygne more beautiful
than at any other period of her life. Her cheeks became rosy; hope gave pride to her brow; but when old d’Hauteserre
read the Gazette at night and discussed the conservative course of the First Consul she lowered her eyes to conceal
her passionate hopes of the coming fall of that enemy of the Bourbons.

No one at the chateau had the faintest idea that the young countess had met her cousins the night before. The two
sons of Monsieur and Madame d’Hauteserre had passed the preceding night in Laurence’s own room, under the same
roof with their father and mother; and Laurence, after knowing them safely in bed had gone between one and two
o’clock in the morning to a rendezvous with her cousins in the forest, where she hid them in the deserted hut of a
wood-dealer’s agent. The following day, certain of seeing them again, she showed no signs of her joy; nothing about
her betrayed emotion; she was able to efface all traces of pleasure at having met them again; in fact, she was
impassible. Catherine, her pretty maid, daughter of her former nurse, and Gothard, both in the secret, modelled their
behavior upon hers. Catherine was nineteen years old. At that age a girl is a fanatic and would let her throat be cut
before betraying a thought of one she loves. As for Gothard, merely to inhale the perfume which the countess used
in her hair and among her clothes he would have borne the rack without a word.

CHAPTER V
ROYALIST HOMES AND PORTRAITS UNDER THE CONSULATE

At the moment when Marthe, driven by the imminence of the peril, was gliding with the rapidity of a shadow
towards the breach of which Michu had told her, the salon of the chateau of Cinq-Cygne presented a peaceful sight.
Its occupants were so far from suspecting the storm that was about to burst upon them that their quiet aspect would
have roused the compassion of any one who knew their situation. In the large fireplace, the mantel of which was
adorned with a mirror with shepherdesses in paniers painted on its frame, burned a fire such as can be seen only in
chateaus bordering on forests. At the corner of this fireplace, on a large square sofa of gilded wood, there was a
magnificent brocaded cover, the young countess lay as it were extended, in an attitude of utter weariness. Returning
at six o’clock from the confines of Brie, having played the part of scout to the four gentlemen whom she guided
safely to their last halting-place before they entered Paris, she had found Monsieur and Madame d’Hauteserre just
finishing their dinner. Pressed by hunger she sat down to table without changing either her muddy habit or her boots. Instead of doing so at once after dinner, she was suddenly overcome with fatigue and allowed her head with its beautiful fair curls to drop on the back of the sofa, her feet being supported in front of her by a stool. The warmth of the fire had dried the mud on her habit and on her boots. Her doeskin gloves and the little peaked cap with its green veil and a whip lay on the table where she had flung them. She looked sometimes at the old Boule clock which stood on the mantelshelf between the candelabra, perhaps to judge if her four conspirators were asleep, and sometimes at the card-table in front of the fire where Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, the cure of Cinq-Cygne, and his sister were playing a game of boston.

Even if these personages were not embedded in this drama, their portraits would have the merit of representing one of the aspects of the aristocracy after its overthrow in 1793. From this point of view, a sketch of the salon at Cinq-Cygne has the raciness of history seen in dishabille.

Monsieur d'Hauteserre, then fifty-two years of age, tall, spare, high-colored, and robust in health, would have seemed the embodiment of vigor if it were not for a pair of porcelain blue eyes, the glance of which denoted the most absolute simplicity. In his face, which ended in a long pointed chin, there was, judging by the rules of design, an unnatural distance between his nose and mouth which gave him a submissive air, wholly in keeping with his character, which harmonized, in fact, with other details of his appearance. His gray hair, flattened by his hat, which he wore nearly all day, looked much like a skull-cap on his head, and defined its pear-shaped outline. His forehead, much wrinkled by life in the open air and by constant anxieties, was flat and expressionless. His aquiline nose redeemed the face somewhat; but the sole indication of any strength of character lay in the bushy eyebrows which retained their blackness, and in the brilliant coloring of his skin. These signs were in some respects not misleading, for the worthy gentlemen, though simple and very gentle, was Catholic and monarchical in faith, and no consideration on earth could make him change his views. Nevertheless he would have let himself be arrested without an effort at defence, and would have gone to the scaffold quietly. His annuity of three thousand francs kept him from emigrating. He therefore obeyed the government _de facto_ without ceasing to love the royal family and to pray for their return, though he would firmly have refused to compromise himself by any effort in their favor. He belonged to that class of royalists who ceaselessly remembered that they were beaten and robbed; and who remained thenceforth dumb, economical, rancorous, without energy; incapable of abjuring the past, but equally incapable of sacrifice; waiting to greet triumphant royalty; true to religion and true to the priesthood, but firmly resolved to bear in silence the shocks of fate. Such an attitude cannot be considered that of maintaining opinions, it becomes sheer obstinacy. Action is the essence of party. Without intelligence, but loyal, miserly as a peasant yet noble in demeanor, bold in his wishes but discreet in word and action, turning all things to profit, willing even to be made mayor of Cinq-Cygne, Monsieur d'Hauteserre was an admirable representative of those honorable gentlemen on whose brow God Himself has written the word _mites_,--Frenchmen who burrowed in their country homes and let the storms of the Revolution pass above their heads; who came once more to the surface under the Restoration, rich with their hidden savings, proud of their discreet attachment to the monarchy, and who, after 1830, recovered their estates.

Monsieur d'Hauteserre's costume, expressive envelope of his distinctive character, described to the eye both the man and his period. He always wore one of those nut-colored great-coats with small collars which the Duc d'Orleans made the fashion after his return from England, and which, during the Revolution, a sort of compromise between the hideous popular garments and the elegant surtouts of the aristocracy. His velvet waistcoat with flowered stripes, the style of which recalled those of Robespierre and Saint-Just, showed the upper part of a shirt-frill in fine plaits. He still wore breeches; but his were of coarse blue cloth, with burnished steel buckles. His stockings of black spun-silk defined his deer-like legs, the feet of which were shod in thick shoes, held in place by gaiters of black cloth. He retained the former fashion of a muslin cravat in innumerable folds fastened by a gold buckle at the throat. The worthy man had not intended an act of political eclecticism in adopting this costume, which combined the styles of peasant, revolutionist, and aristocrat; he simply and innocently obeyed the dictates of circumstances.

Madame d'Hauteserre, forty years of age and wasted by emotions, had a faded face which seemed to be always posing for its portrait. A lace cap, trimmed with bows of white satin, contributed singularly to give her a solemn air. She still wore powder, in spite of a white kercchief, and a gown of puce-colored silk with tight sleeves and full skirt, the sad last garments of Marie-Antoinette. Her nose was pinched, her chin sharp, the whole face nearly triangular, the eyes worn-out with weeping; but she now wore a touch of rouge which brightened their grayness. She took snuff, and each time that she did so she employed all the pretty precautions of the fashionable women of her early days; the details of this snuff-taking constituted a ceremony which could be explained by one fact--she had very pretty hands.

For the last two years the former tutor of the Simeuse twins, a friend of the late Abbe d'Hauteserre, named Goujet, Abbe des Minimes, had taken charge of the parish of Cinq-Cygne out of friendship for the d'Hauteserres and the young countess. His sister, Mademoiselle Goujet, who possessed a little income of seven hundred francs, added
Gothard. Though blamed for this imprudence by Monsieur d'Hauteserre, the housekeeper took great pleasure in
An old gardener, his wife, a son paid by the day, and a daughter who served as a dairy-woman, made up the
catherine, laurence's maid, to whom he was teaching his art and who gave promise of becoming an excellent cook.
the factotum of the chateau, and his wife was the housekeeper. He was helped in the cooking by the sister of
the last six months he had ventured to dig up the family silver, which the cook had buried in the cellar of a little house
the salon, at other times part of a dinner service, or a bit of rare old porcelain of either sevres or dresden. During the
had been taken or destroyed, for the pillage of the mansions in town was imitated in the valley. Each time that the
furniture. The salon was furnished for the first time since their occupation of the house. Handsome curtains of white
not to alter its aspect during the revolutionary troubles; but after the peace of amiens he made a journey to Troyes
and their consequent return to France. The Treasury had lately made up the arrearages and now paid its dividends
mademoiselle goujet was one of those unmarried women whose portrait can be drawn in one word which will
enable the least imaginative mind to picture her; she was ungainly. She knew her own ugliness and was the first to
laugh at it, showing her long teeth, yellow as her complexion and her bony hands. She was gay and hearty. She wore
the famous short gown of former days, a very full skirt with pockets full of keys, a cap with ribbons and a false
front. She was forty years of age very early, but had, so she said, caught up with herself by keeping at that age for
twenty years. She revered the nobility; and knew well how to preserve her own dignity by giving to persons of noble
birth the respect and deference that were due to them.
this little company was a god-send to Madame d'Hauteserre, who had not, like her husband, rural occupations,
nor, like laurence, the tonic of hatred, to enable her to bear the dulness of a retired life. Many things had happened
to ameliorate that life within the last six years. The restoration of Catholic worship allowed the faithful to fulfil their
religious duties, which play more of a part in country life than elsewhere. Protected by the conservative edicts of the
First Consul, Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre had been able to correspond with their sons, and no longer in
dread of what might happen to them could even hope for the erasure of their names from the lists of the proscribed
and their consequent return to France. The Treasury had lately made up the arrearages and now paid its dividends
promptly; so that the d'Hauteserres received, over and above their annuity, about eight thousand francs a year. The
old man congratulated himself on the sagacity of his foresight in having put all his savings, amounting to twenty
thousand francs, together with those of his ward, in the public Funds before the 18th Brumaire, which, as we all
know, sent those stocks up from twelve to eighteen francs.
the chateau of Cinq-Cygne had long been empty and denuded of furniture. The prudent guardian was careful
not to alter its aspect during the revolutionary troubles; but after the peace of Amiens he made a journey to Troyes
and brought back various relics of the pillaged mansions which he obtained from the dealers in second-hand
furniture. The salon was furnished for the first time since their occupation of the house. Handsome curtains of white
brocade with green flowers, from the hotel de Simeuse, draped the six windows of the salon, in which the family
were now assembled. The walls of this vast room were entirely of wood, with panels encased in beaded mouldings
with masks at the angles; the whole painted in two shades of gray. The spaces over the four doors were filled with
those designs, painted in cameo of two colors, which were so much in vogue under Louis XV. Monsieur
d'Hauteserre had picked up at Troyes certain gilded pier-tables, a sofa in green damask, a crystal chandelier, a card-
table of marquetry, among other things that served him to restore the chateau. In 1792 all the furniture of the house
had been taken or destroyed, for the pillage of the mansions in town was imitated in the valley. Each time that the
old man went to Troyes he returned with some relic of the former splendor, sometimes a fine carpet for the floor of
the salon, at other times part of a dinner service, or a bit of rare old porcelain of either Sevres or Dresden. During the
last six months he had ventured to dig up the family silver, which the cook had buried in the cellar of a little house
belonging to him at the end of one of the long faubourgs in Troyes.
that faithful servant, named Durieu, and his wife had followed the fortunes of their young mistress. Durieu was
the factotum of the chateau, and his wife was the housekeeper. He was helped in the cooking by the sister of
Catherine, laurence's maid, to whom he was teaching his art and who gave promise of becoming an excellent cook.
An old gardener, his wife, a son paid by the day, and a daughter who served as a dairy-woman, made up the
household. Madame Durieu had lately and secretly had the Cinq-Cygne liversies made for the gardener's son and for
Gothard. Though blamed for this imprudence by Monsieur d'Hauteserre, the housekeeper took great pleasure in
seeing the dinner served on the festival of Saint-Laurence, the countess's fete-day, with almost as much style as in former times.

This slow and difficult restoration of departed things was the delight of Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre and the Durieus. Laurence smiled at what she thought nonsense. But the worthy old d'Hauteserre did not forget the more solid matters; he repaired the buildings, put up the walls, planted trees wherever there was a chance to make them grow, and did not leave an inch of unproductive land. The whole valley regarded him as an oracle in the matter of agriculture. He had managed to recover a hundred acres of contested land, not sold as national property, being in some way confounded with that of the township. This land he had turned into fields which afforded good pasturage for his horses and cattle, and he planted them round with poplars, which now, at the end of six years, were making a fine growth. He intended to buy back some of the lost estate, and to utilize all the out-buildings of the chateau by making a second farm and managing it himself.

Life at the chateau had thus become during the last two years prosperous and almost happy. Monsieur d'Hauteserre was off at daybreaks to overlook his laborers, for he employed them in all weathers. He came home to breakfast, mounted his farm pony as soon as the meal was over, and made his rounds of the estate like a bailiff, getting home in time for dinner, and finishing the day with a game of boston. All the inhabitants of the chateau had their stated occupations; life was as closely regulated there as in a convent. Laurence alone disturbed its even tenor by her sudden journeys, her uncertain returns, and by what Madame d'Hauteserre called her pranks. But with all this peacefulness there existed at Cinq-Cygne conflicting interests and certain causes of dissension. In the first place Durieu and his wife were jealous of Catherine and Gothard, who lived in greater intimacy with their young mistress, the idol of the household, than they did. Then the two d'Hauteserres, encouraged by Mademoiselle Goujet and the abbe, wanted their sons as well as the Simeuse brothers to take the oath and return to this quiet life, instead of living miserably in foreign countries. Laurence scouted the odious compromise and stood firmly for the monarchy, militant and implacable. The four old people, anxious that their present peaceful existence should not be risked, nor their spot of refuge, saved from the furious waters of the revolutionary torrent, lost, did their best to convert Laurence to their cautious views, believing that her influence counted for much in the unwillingness of their sons and the Simeuse twins to return to France. The superb disdain with which she met the project frightened these poor people, who were not mistaken in their fears that she was meditating what they called knight-errantry. This jarring of opinion came to the surface after the explosion of the infernal machine in the rue Saint-Nicaise, the first royalist attempt against the conqueror of Marengo after his refusal to treat with the house of Bourbon. The d'Hauteserres considered it fortunate that Bonaparte escaped that danger, believing that the republicans had instigated it. But Laurence wept with rage when she heard he was safe. Her despair overcame her usual reticence, and she vehemently complained that God had deserted the sons of Saint-Louis.

"I," she exclaimed, "I could have succeeded! Have we no right," she added, seeing the stupefaction her words produced on the faces about her, and addressing the abbe, "no right to attack the usurper by every means in our power?"

"My child," replied the abbe, "the Church has been greatly blamed by philosophers for declaring in former times that the same weapons might be employed against usurpers which the usurpers themselves had employed to succeed; but in these days the Church owes far too much to the First Consul not to protect him against that maxim,--which, by the by, was due to the Jesuits."

"So the Church abandons us!" she answered, gloomily.

From that day forth whenever the four old people talked of submitting to the decrees of Providence, Laurence left the room. Of late, the abbe, shrewder than Monsieur d'Hauteserre, instead of discussing principles, drew pictures of the material advantages of the consular rule, less to convert the countess than to detect in her eyes some expression which might enlighten him as to her projects. Gothard's frequent disappearances, the long rides of his mistress, and her evident preoccupation, which, for the last few days, had appeared in her face, together with other little signs not to be hidden in the silence and tranquility of such a life, had roused the fears of these submissive royalists. Still, as no event happened, and perfect quiet appeared to reign in the political atmosphere, the minds of the little household were soothed into peace, and the countess's long rides were one more attributed to her passion for hunting.

It is easy to imagine the deep silence which reigned at nine o'clock in the evening in the park, courtyards, and gardens of Cinq-Cygne, where at that particular moment the persons we have described were harmoniously grouped, where perfect peace pervaded all things, where comfort and abundance were again enjoyed, and where the worthy and judicious old gentleman was still hoping to convert his late ward to his system of obedience to the ruling powers by the argument of what we may call the continuity of prosperous results.

These royalists continued to play their boston, a game which spread ideas of independence under a frivolous form over the whole of France; for it was first invented in honor of the American insurgents, its very terms applying
to the struggle which Louis XVI. encouraged. While making their “independences” and “poverties,” the players kept
an eye on the countess, who had fallen asleep, overcome by fatigue, with a singular smile on her lips, her last
waking thought having been of the terror two words could inspire in the minds of the peaceful company by
informing the d’Hauteserres that their sons had passed the preceding night under that roof. What young girl of
twenty-three would not have been, as Laurence was, proud to play the part of Destiny? and who would not have felt,
as she did, a sense of compassion for those whom she felt to be so far below her in loyalty?
"She sleeps," said the abbe. "I have never seen her so wearied."
"Durieu tells me her mare is almost founedered," remarked Madame d’Hauteserre. "Her gun has not been fired;
the breech is clean; she has evidently not hunted."
"Oh! that’s neither here nor there," said the abbe.
"Bah?" cried Mademoiselle Goujet; "when I was twenty-three and saw I should be an old maid all my life, I
rushed about and fatigued myself in a dozen ways. I understand how the countess can scour the country for hours
without thinking of the game. It is nearly twelve years now since she has seen her cousins, and you know she loves
them. Well, if I were she, if I were as young and pretty, I’d make a straight line for Germany! Poor darling, perhaps
she is thinking of the frontier, and that may be the reason why she rides so far towards it."
"You are rather giddy, Mademoiselle Goujet," said the abbe, smiling.
"Not at all," she replied. "I see you all uneasy about the goings on of a young girl, and I am explaining them to
you."
"Her cousins will submit and return soon; they will all be rich, and she will end by calming down," said old
d’Hauteserre.
"God grant it!" said his wife, taking out a gold snuff-box which had again seen the light under the Consulate.
"There is something stirring in the neighborhood," remarked Monsieur d’Hauteserre to the abbe. "Malin has been
two days at Gondreville."
"Malin!" cried Laurence, roused by the name, though her sleep was sound.
"Yes," replied the abbe, "but he leaves to-night; everybody is conjecturing the motive of this hasty visit."
"That man," said Laurence, "is the evil genius of our two houses."
The countess had been dreaming of her cousins and the young Hauteserres; she saw them in peril. Her beautiful
eyes grew fixed and glassy as her mind thus warned dwelled on the dangers they were about to incur in Paris. She
rose suddenly and went to her bedroom without speaking. Her bedroom was the best in the house; next came a
dressing-room and an oratory, in the tower which faced towards the forest. Soon after she had left the salon the dogs
barked, the bell of the small gate rang, and Durieu rushed into the salon with a frightened face. "Here is the mayor!"
he said. "Something is the matter."

CHAPTER VI
A DOMICILIARY VISIT

The mayor, a former huntsman of the house of Simeuse, came occasionally to the chateau, where the
d’Hauteserres showed him out of policy, a deference to which he attached great value. His name was Goulard; he
had married a rich woman of Troyes, whose property, which was in the commune of Cinq-Cygne, he had further
increased by the purchase of a fine abbey and its lands, in which he invested all his savings. The vast abbey of Val-
des-Preux, standing about a mile from the chateau, he had turned into a dwelling that was almost as splendid as
Gondreville; in it his wife and he were now living like rats in a cathedral. "Ah! Goulard, you have been greedy,"
Mademoiselle had said to him with a laugh the first time she received him at Cinq-Cygne. Though greatly attached
to the Revolution and coldly received by the countess, the mayor always felt himself bound by ties of respect to the
Cinq-Cygne and Simeuse families. He therefore shut his eyes to what went on at the chateau. He called shutting his
eyes not seeing the portraits of Louis XVI., Marie Antoinette, and the royal children, and those of Monsieur, the
Comte d’Artois, Cazales and Charlotte Corday, which filled the various panels of the salon; not resenting either the
wishes freely expressed in his presence for the ruin of the Republic, or the ridicule flung at the five directors and all
the other governmental combinations of that time. The position of this man, who, like many parvenus, having once
made his fortune, reverted to his early faith in the old families, and sought to attach himself to them, was now being
made use of by the two members of the Paris police whose profession had been so quickly guessed by Michu, and
who, before going to Gondreville had reconnoitred the neighborhood.

The worthy described as the depositary of the best traditions of the old police, and Corentin phoenix of spies,
were in fact employed on a secret mission. Malin was not mistaken in attributing a double purpose to those stars of
tragic farces. But, before seeing them at work, it is advisable to show the head of which they were the arms. When
Bonaparte became First Consul he found Fouche at the head of the police. The Revolution had frankly and with
good reason made the management of the police into a special ministry. But after his return from Marengo,
Bonaparte created the prefecture of police, placed Dubois in charge of it, and called Fouche to the Council of State,
naming as his successor in the ministry a conventional named Cochon, since known as Comte de Lapparent. Fouche,
who considered the ministry of police as by far the most important in a government of broad ideas and fixed policy,
saw disgrace or at any rate distrust in the change. After Napoleon became aware of the immense superiority of this
great statesman, as evidenced in the affair of the infernal machine and in the conspiracy with which we are now
concerned, he returned him to the ministry of police. Later still, becoming alarmed at the powers Fouche displayed
during his absence at the time of the affair at Walcheren, the Emperor gave that ministry to the Duc de Rovigo, and
sent Fouche (Duc d’Otrante) as governor to the Illyrian provinces,—an appointment which was in fact an exile.

The singular genius of this man, Fouche, which had the power of inspiring Napoleon with a sort of fear, did not
reveal itself all at once. This obscure conventional, one of the most extraordinary men of our time, and the most
misjudged, was moulded, as it were, by the whirlwind of events. He raised himself under the Directory to the height
from which men of genius could see the future and judge the past, and then, like certain commonplace actors who
suddenly become admirable through the light of some vivid perception, he gave proofs of his dexterity during the
rapid revolution of the 18th Brumaire. This man with the pallid face, educated to monastic dissimulation, possessing
the secrets of the _montagnards_ to whom he belonged, and those of the royalists to whom he ended by belonging,
had slowly and silently studied the men, the events, and the interests on the political stage; he penetrated Napoleon's
secrets, he gave him useful counsel and precious information. Satisfied with having proven his capacity and his
usefulness, Fouche was careful not to disclose himself completely. He wished to remain at the head of affairs, but
the Emperor's restless uneasiness about him cost him his place.

The ingratitude or rather the distrust shown by Napoleon after the affair at Walcheren, gives the key-note to the
character of a man who, unfortunately for himself, was not a great _seigneur_, and whose conduct was modelled on
that of Talleyrand. At that time neither his former colleagues nor his present ones had suspected the amplitude of his
genius, which was purely ministerial, essentially governmental, just in its forecasts and incredibly sagacious. To-
day, every impartial historian perceives that Napoleon's inordinate self-love was among the chief causes of his fall, a
punishment which cruelly expiated his wrong-doing. In the mind of that distrustful sovereign lurked a constant
jealousy for his own rising power, which influenced all his actions, and caused his secret hatred for men of talent,
the precious legacy of the Revolution, with whom he might have made himself a cabinet capable of being a true
repository for his thoughts. Talleyrand and Fouche were not the only ones who gave him umbrage. The misfortune
of usurpers is that those who have given them a crown are as much their enemies as those from whom they snatch it.
Napoleon's sovereignty was never convincingly felt by those who were once his superiors or his equals, nor by those
who still held to the doctrine of rights; none of them regarded their oath of allegiance to him as binding.

Malin, an inferior man, incapable of comprehending Fouche's hidden genius, or of distrusting his own
perceptions, burned himself, like a moth in a candle, by asking him confidentially to send agents to Gondreville,
where, he said, he hoped to obtain certain clues to the conspiracy. Fouche, without alarming his friend by any
questions, asked himself why Malin was going to Gondreville, and why he did not immediately and without loss of
time, give the information he already possessed. The ex-Oratorian, fed from his youth up on trickery, and well aware
of the double part played by a good many of the conventionals, said to himself: "From whom is Malin likely to
obtain information when we ourselves know little or nothing?" Fouche concluded therefore that there was some
either latent or prospective collusion, and took care to say nothing about it to the First Consul. He preferred to make
Malin his instrument rather than destroy him. It was Fouche's habit to keep to himself a good part of the secrets he
detected, and he thus obtained for his own purposes a power over those concerned which was even greater than that
of Bonaparte. This duplicity was one of the Emperor's charges against his minister.

Fouche knew of the swindling transaction by which Malin became possessed of Gondreville and which led him
to keep his eyes so anxiously on the Simeuse brothers. These gentlemen were now serving in the army of Conde;
Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne was their cousin; possibly they were in her neighborhood, and were sharers in the
conspiracy; if so, it would implicate the house of Conde to which they were devoted. Talleyrand and Fouche were
bent on casting light into this dark corner of the conspiracy of 1803. All these considerations Fouche saw at a
glance, rapidly and with great clearness. But between Malin, Talleyrand, and himself there were strong ties which
forced him to the utmost circumspection, and made him anxious to know the exact state of things within the walls of
Gondreville. Corentin was unreservedly attached to Fouche, just as Monsieur de la Besnardiere was to Talleyrand,
Gentz to Monsieur de Metternich, Dundas to Pitt, Duroc to Napoleon, Chavigny to Cardinal Richelieu. Corentin was
not the counsellor of his master, but his instrument, the Tristan to this Louis XI. of low estate. Fouche had kept him
in the ministry of the police when he himself left it, so as to still keep an eye and a finger in it. It was said that
Corentin belonged to Fouche by some unavowed relationship, for he rewarded him lavishly after every service.
Corentin had a friend in Peyrade, the old pupil of the last lieutenant of police; but he kept a good many of his secrets
from him. Fouche gave Corentin an order to explore the chateau of Gondreville, to get the plan of it into his
memory, and to know every hiding-place within its walls.
"We may be obliged to return there," said the ex-minister, precisely as Napoleon told his lieutenants to explore the field of Austerlitz on which he intended to fall back.

Corentin was also to study Malin's conduct, discover what influence he had in the neighborhood, and observe the men he employed. Fouche regarded it as certain that the Simeuse brothers were in that part of the country. By cautiously watching the two officers, who were closely allied with the Prince de Conde, Peyrade and Corentin could obtain precious light on the ramifications of the conspiracy beyond the Rhine. In any case, however, Corentin received the means, the orders, and the agents, to surround the chateau of Cinq-Cygne and watch the whole region, from the forest of Nodesme into Paris. Fouche insisted on the utmost caution, and would only allow a domiciliary visit to Cinq-Cygne in case Malin gave them positive information which made it necessary. By way of instructions he explained to Corentin the otherwise inexplicable personality of Michu, who had been watched by the police for the last three years. Corentin's idea was that of his master: "Malin knows all about the conspiracy--But," he added to himself, "perhaps Fouche does, too; who knows?"

Corentin, having started for Troyes before Malin, had made arrangements with the commandant of the gendarmerie in that town, who picked out a number of his most intelligent men and placed them under orders of an able captain. Corentin chose Gondreville as the place of rendezvous, and directed the captain to send some of his men at night in four detachments to different points of the valley of Cinq-Cygne at sufficient distance from each other to cause no alarm. These four pickets were to form a square and close in around the chateau of Cinq-Cygne. By leaving Corentin alone at Gondreville during his consultation in the fields with Grevin, Malin had enabled him to fulfil part of Fouche's orders and explore the house. When the Councillor of State returned home he told Corentin so positively that the d'Hauteserre and Simeuse brothers were in the neighborhood and probably at Cinq-Cygne that the two agents despatched the captain with the rest of his company, who, fortunately for the four gentlemen, crossed the forest on their way to the chateau during the time when Michu was making Violette drunk. Malin had told Corentin and Peyrade of the escape he had from lying in wait for him. The two agents related the incident of the gun they had seen the bailiff load, and Grevin had sent Violette to obtain information as to what was going on at Michu's house. Corentin advised the notary to take Malin to his own house in the little town of Arcis, and let him sleep there as a measure of precaution. At the moment when Michu and his wife were rushing through the forest on their way to Cinq-Cygne, Peyrade and Corentin were starting from Gondreville for Cinq-Cygne in a shabby wicker carriage, drawn by one post-horse driven by the corporal of Arcis, one of the shrewdest men in the Legion, whom the commandant at Troyes advised them to employ.

"The surest way to seize them all is to warn them," said Peyrade to Corentin. "At the moment when they are well frightened and are trying to save their papers or to escape we'll fall upon them like a thunderbolt. The gendarmes surround the chateau now and are as good as a net. We sha'n't lose one of them!"

"You had better send the mayor to warn them," said the corporal. "He is friendly to them and wouldn't like to see them harmed; they won't distrust him."

Just as Goulard was preparing to go to bed, Corentin, who stopped the vehicle in a little wood, went to his house and told him, confidentially, that in a few moments an emissary from the government would require him to enter the chateau of Cinq-Cygne and arrest the brothers d'Hauteserre and Simeuse; and in case they had already disappeared he would have to ascertain if they had slept there the night before, search Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's papers, and, possibly, arrest both the masters and servants of the household.

"Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne," said Corentin, "is undoubtedly protected by some great personages, for I have received private orders to warn her of this visit, and to do all I can to save her without compromising myself. Once on the ground, I shall no longer be able to do so, for I am not alone; go to the chateau yourself and warn them."

The mayor's visit at that time of night was all the more bewildering to the card-players when they saw the agitation of his face.

"Where is the countess?" were his first words.

"She has gone to bed," said Madame d'Hauteserre.

The mayor, incredulous, listened to noises that were heard on the upper floor.

"What is the matter with you, Goulard?" said Monsieur d'Hauteserre.

Goulard was dumb with surprise as he noted the tranquil ease of the faces about him. Observing the peaceful and innocent game of cards which he had thus interrupted, he was unable to imagine what the Parisian police meant by their suspicions.

At that moment Laurence, kneeling in her oratory, was praying fervently for the success of the conspiracy. She prayed to God to send help and succor to the murderers of Bonaparte. She implored Him ardently to destroy that fatal being. The fanaticism of Harmodius, Judith, Jacques Clement, Ankarstroem, of Charlotte Corday and Limoenian, inspired this pure and virgin spirit. Catherine was preparing the bed, Gothard was closing the blinds, when Marthe Michu coming under the windows flung a pebble on the glass and was seen at once.
"Mademoiselle, here's some one," said Gothard, seeing a woman.

"Hush!" said Marthe, in a low voice. "Come down and speak to me."

Gothard was in the garden in less time than a bird would have taken to fly down from a tree.

"In a minute the chateau will be surrounded by the gendarmerie. Saddle mademoiselle's horse without making any noise and take it down through the breach in the moat between the stables and this tower."

Marthe quivered when she saw Laurence, who had followed Gothard, standing beside her.

"What is it?" asked Laurence, quietly.

"The conspiracy against the First Consul is discovered," replied Marthe, in a whisper. "My husband, who seeks to save your two cousins, sends me to ask you to come and speak to him."

Laurence drew back and looked at Marthe. "Who are you?" she said.

"Marthe Michu."

"I do not know what you want of me," replied the countess, coldly.

"Take care, you will kill them. Come with me, I implore you in the Simeuse name," said Marthe, clasping her hands and stretching them towards Laurence. "Have you papers here which may compromise you? If so, destroy them. From the heights over there my husband has just seen the silver-laced hats and the muskets of the gendarmerie."

Gothard had already clambered to the hay-loft and seen the same sight; he heard in the stillness of the evening the sound of their horses' hoofs. Down he slipped into the stable and saddled his mistress's mare, whose feet muffled in linen.

"Where am I to go?" said Laurence to Marthe, whose look and language bore the unmistakable signs of sincerity.

"Through the breach," she replied; "my noble husband is there. You shall learn the value of a 'Judas!'"

Catherine went quickly into the salon, picked up the hat, veil, whip, and gloves of her mistress, and disappeared.

This sudden apparition and action were so striking a commentary on the mayor's inquiry that Madame d'Hauteserre and the abbe exchanged glances which contained the melancholy thought: "Farewell to all our peace! Laurence is conspiring; she will be the death of her cousins."

"But what do you really mean?" said Monsieur d'Hauteserre to the mayor.

"The chateau is surrounded. You are about to receive a domiciliary visit. If your sons are here tell them to escape, and the Simeuse brothers too, if they are with them."

"My sons!" exclaimed Madame d'Hauteserre, stupefied.

"We have seen no one," said Monsieur d'Hauteserre.

"So much the better," said Goulard; "but I care too much for the Cinq-Cygne and Simeuse families to let any harm come to them. Listen to me. If you have any compromising papers---"

"Papers!" repeated the old gentleman.

"Yes, if you have any, burn them at once," said the mayor. "I'll go and amuse the police agents."

Goulard, whose object was to run with the royalist hare and hold with the republican hounds, left the room; at that moment the dogs barked violently.

"There is no longer time," said the abbe, "here they come! But who is to warn the countess? Where is she?"

"Catherine didn't come for her hat and whip to make relics of them," remarked Mademoiselle Goujet.

Goulard tried to detain the two agents for a few moments, assuring them of the perfect ignorance of the family at Cinq-Cygne.

"You don't know these people!" said Peyrade, laughing at him.

The two agents, insinuatingly dangerous, entered the house at once, followed by the corporal from Arcis and one gendarme. The sight of them paralyzed the peaceful card-players, who kept their seats at the table, terrified by such a display of force. The noise produced by a dozen gendarmes whose horses were stamping on the terrace, was heard without.

"I do not see Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne," said Corentin.

"She is probably asleep in her bedroom," said Monsieur d'Hauteserre.

"Come with me, ladies," said Corentin, turning to pass through the ante-chamber and up the staircase, followed by Mademoiselle Goujet and Madame d'Hauteserre. "Rely upon me," he whispered to the old lady. "I am in your interests. I sent the mayor to warn you. Distrust my colleague and look to me. I can save every one of you."

"But what is it all about?" said Mademoiselle Goujet.

"A matter of life and death; you must know that," replied Corentin.

Madame d'Hauteserre fainted. To Mademoiselle Goujet's great astonishment and Corentin's disappointment, Laurence's room was empty. Certain that no one could have escaped from the park or the chateau, for all the issues were guarded, Corentin stationed a gendarme in every room and ordered others to search the farm buildings, stables, and sheds. Then he returned to the salon, where Durieu and his wife and the other servants had rushed in the wildest
excitement. Peyrade was studying their faces with his little blue eye, cold and calm in the midst of the uproar. Just as Corentin reappeared alone (Mademoiselle Goujet remaining behind to take care of Madame d'Hauteserre) the tramp of horses was heard, and presently the sound of a child's weeping. The horses entered by the small gate; and the general suspense was put an end to by a corporal appearing at the door of the salon pushing Gothard, whose hands were tied, and Catherine whom he led to the agents.

"Here are some prisoners," he said; "that little scamp was escaping on horseback."

"Fool!" said Corentin, in his ear, "why didn't you let him alone? You could have found out something by following him."

Gothard had chosen to burst into tears and behave like an idiot. Catherine took an attitude of artless innocence which made the old agent reflective. The pupil of Lenoir, after considering the two prisoners carefully, and noting the vacant air of the old gentleman whom he took to be sly, the intelligent eye of the abbe who was still fingering the cards, and the utter stupefaction of the servants and Durieu, approached Corentin and whispered in his ear, "We are not dealing with ninnyes."

Corentin answered with a look at the card-table; then he added, "They were playing at boston! Mademoiselle's bed was just being made for the night; she escaped in a hurry; it is a regular surprise; we shall catch them."

CHAPTER VII
A FOREST NOOK

A breach has always a cause and a purpose. Here is the explanation of how the one which led from the tower called that of Mademoiselle and the stables came to be made. After his installation as Laurence's guardian at Cinq-Cygne old d'Hauteserre converted a long ravine, through which the water of the forest flowed into the moat, into a roadway between two tracts of uncultivated land belonging to the chateau, by merely planting out in it about a hundred walnut trees which he found ready in the nursery. In eleven years these trees had grown and branched so as to nearly cover the road, hidden already by steep banks, which ran into a little wood of thirty acres recently purchased. When the chateau had its full complement of inhabitants they all preferred to take this covered way through the breach to the main road which skirted the park walls and led to the farm, rather than go round by the entrance. By dint of thus using it the breach in the sides of the moat had gradually been widened on both sides, with all the less scruple because in this nineteenth century of ours moats are no longer of the slightest use, and Laurence's guardian had often talked of putting this one to some other purpose. The constant crumbling away of the earth and stones and gravel had ended by filling up the ditch, so that only after heavy rains was the causeway thus constructed covered. But the bank was still so steep that it was difficult to make a horse descend it, and even more difficult to get him up upon the main road. Horses, however, seem in times of peril to share their masters' thought.

While the young countess was hesitating to follow Marthe, and asking explanations, Michu, from his vantage-ground watched the closing in of the gendarmes and understood their plan. He grew desperate as time went by and the countess did not come to him. A squad of gendarmes were marching along the park wall and stationing themselves as sentinels, each man being near enough to communicate with those on either side of them, by voice and eye. Michu, lying flat on his stomach, his ear to earth, gauged, like a red Indian, by the strength of the sounds the time that remained to him.

"I came too late!" he said to himself. "Violette shall pay dear for this! what a time it took to make him drunk! What can be done?"

He heard the detachment that was coming through the forest reach the iron gates and turn into the main road, where before long it would meet the squad coming up from the other direction.

"Still five or six minutes!" he said.

At that instant the countess appeared. Michu took her with a firm hand and pushed her into the covered way.

"Keep straight before you! Lead her to where my horse is," he said to his wife, "and remember that gendarmes have ears."

Seeing Catherine, who carried the hat and whip, and Gothard leading the mare, the man, keen-witted in presence of danger, bethought himself of playing the gendarmes a trick as useful as the one he had just played Violette. Gothard had forced the mare to mount the bank.

"Her feet muffled! I thank thee, boy," exclaimed the bailiff.

Michu let the mare follow her mistress and took the hat, gloves, and whip from Catherine.

"You have sense, boy, you'll understand me," he said. "Force your own horse up here, jump on him, and draw the gendarmes after you across the fields towards the farm; get the whole squad to follow you--And you," he added to Catherine, "there are other gendarmes coming up on the road from Cinq-Cygne to Gondreville; run in the opposite direction to the one Gothard takes, and draw them towards the forest. Manage so that we shall not be interfered with in the covered way."

Catherine and the boy, who were destined to give in this affair such remarkable proofs of intelligence, executed
the manoeuvre in a way to make both detachments of gendarmes believe that they held the game. The dim light of
the moon prevented the pursuers from distinguishing the figure, clothing, sex, or number of those they followed. The
pursuit was based on the maxim, "Always arrest those who are escaping,"--the folly of which saying was, as we
have seen, energetically declared by Corentin to the corporal in command. Michu, counting on this instinct of the
gendarmes, was able to reach the forest a few moments after the countess, whom Marthe had guided to the
appointed place.

"Go home now," he said to Marthe. "The forest is watched and it is dangerous to remain here. We need all our
freedom."

Michu unfastened his horse and asked the countess to follow him.

"I shall not go a step further," said Laurence, "unless you give me some proof of the interest you seem to have in
us--for, after all, you are Michu."

"Mademoiselle," he answered, in a gentle voice; "the part I am playing can be explained to you in two words. I
am, unknown to the Marquis de Simeuse and his brother, the guardian of their property. On this subject I received
the last instructions of their late father and their dear mother, my protectress. I have played the part of a virulent
Jacobin to serve my dear young masters. Unhappily, I began this course too late; I could not save their parents."
Here, Michu's voice broke down. "Since the young men emigrated I have sent them regularly the sums they needed
to live upon."

"Through the house of Breintmayer of Strasburg?" asked the countess.

"Yes, mademoiselle; the correspondents of Monsieur Girel of Troyes, a royalist who, like me, made himself for
good reasons, a Jacobin. The paper which your farmer picked up one evening and which I forced him to surrender,
related to the affair and would have compromised your cousins. My life no longer belongs to me, but to them, you
understand. I could not buy in Gondreville. In my position, I should have lost my head had the authorities known I
had the money. I preferred to wait and buy it later. But that scoundrel of a Marion was the slave of another
scoundrel, Malin. All the same, Gondreville shall once more belong to its rightful masters. That's my affair. Four
hours ago I had Malin sighted by my gun; ha! he was almost gone then! Were he dead, the property would be sold
and you could have bought it. In case of my death my wife would have brought you a letter which would have given
you the means of buying it. But I overheard that villain telling his accomplice Grevin--another scoundrel like
himself--that the Marquis and his brother were conspiring against the First Consul, that they were here in the
neighborhood, and that he meant to give them up and get rid of them so as to keep Gondreville in peace. I myself
saw the police spies; I laid aside my gun, and I have lost no time in coming here, thinking that you must be the one
to know best how to warn the young men. That's the whole of it."

"You are worthy to be a noble," said Laurence, offering her hand to Michu, who tried to kneel and kiss it. She
saw his motion and prevented it, saying: "Stand up!" in a tone of voice and with a look which made him amends for
all the scorn of the last twelve years.

"You reward me as though I had done all that remains for me to do," he said. "But don't you hear them, those
hussars of the guillotine? Let us go elsewhere."

He took the mare's bridle, and led her a little distance.

"Think only of sitting firm," he said, "and of saving your head from the branches of the trees which might strike
you in the face."

Then he mounted his own horse and guided the young girl for half an hour at full gallop; making turns and half
turns, and striking into wood-paths, so as to confuse their traces, until they reached a spot where he pulled up.

"I don't know where I am," said the countess looking about her,--"I, who know the forest as well as you do."

"We are in the heart of it," he replied. "Two gendarmes are after us, but we are quite safe."

The picturesque spot to which the bailiff had guided Laurence was destined to be so fatal to the principal
personages of this drama, and to Michu himself, that it becomes our duty, as an historian, to describe it. The scene
became, as we shall see hereafter, one of noted interest in the judiciary annals of the Empire.

The forest of Nodesme belonged to the monastery of Notre-Dame. That monastery, seized, sacked, and
demolished, had disappeared entirely, monks and property. The forest, an object of much cupidity, was taken into
the domain of the Comtes de Champagne, who mortgaged it later and allowed it to be sold. In the course of six
centuries nature covered its ruins with her rich and vigorous green mantle, and effaced them so thoroughly that the
existence of one of the finest convents was no longer even indicated except by a slight eminence shaded by noble
trees and circled by thick, impenetrable shrubbery, which, since 1794, Michu had taken great pains to make still
more impenetrable by planting the thorny acacia in all the slight openings between the bushes. A pond was at the
foot of the eminence and showed the existence of a hidden stream which no doubt determined in former days the site
of the monastery. The late owner of the title to the forest of Nodesme was the first to recognize the etymology of the
name, which dated back for eight centuries, and to discover that at one time a monastery had existed in the heart of
the forest. When the first rumblings of the thunder of the Revolution were heard, the Marquis de Simeuse, who had been forced to look into his title by a lawsuit and so learned the above facts as it were by chance, began, with a secret intention not difficult to conceive, to search for some remains of the former monastery. The keeper, Michu, to whom the forest was well known, helped his master in the search, and it was his sagacity as a forester which led to the discovery of the site. Observing the trend of the five chief roads of the forest, some of which were now effaced, he saw that they all ended either at the little eminence or by the pond at the foot of it, to which points travellers from Troyes, from the valley of Arcis and that of Cinq-Cygne, and from Bar-sur-Aube doubtless came. The marquis wished to excavate the hillock but he dared not employ the people of the neighborhood. Pressed by circumstances, he abandoned the intention, leaving in Michu's mind a strong conviction that the eminence had either the treasure or the foundations of the former abbey. He continued, all alone, this archaeological enterprise; he sounded the earth and discovered a hollowness on the level of the pond between two trees, at the foot of the only craggy part of the hillock.

One fine night he came to the place armed with a pickaxe, and by the sweat of his brow uncovered a succession of cellars, which were entered by a flight of stone steps. The pond, which was three feet deep in the middle, formed a sort of dipper, the handle of which seemed to come from the little eminence, and went far to prove that a spring had once issued from the crags, and was now lost by infiltration through the forest. The marshy shores of the pond, covered with aquatic trees, alders, willow, and ash, were the terminus of all the wood-paths, the remains of former roads and forest by-ways, now abandoned. The water, flowing from a spring, though apparently stagnant, was covered with large-leaved plants and cresses, which gave it a perfectly green surface almost indistinguishable from the shores, which were covered with fine close herbage. The place is too far from human habitations for any animal, unless a wild one, to come there. Convinced that no game was in the marsh and repelled by the craggy sides of the hills, keepers and hunters had never explored or visited this nook, which belonged to a part of the forest where the timber had not been cut for many years and which Michu meant to keep in its full growth when the time came round to fell it.

At the further end of the first cellar was a vaulted chamber, clean and dry, built with hewn stone, a sort of convent dungeon, such as they called in monastic days the _in pace_. The salubrity of the chamber and the preservation of this part of the staircase and of the vaults were explained by the presence of the spring, which had been enclosed at some time by a wall of extraordinary thickness built in brick and cement like those of the Romans, and received all the waters. Michu closed the entrance to this retreat with large stones; then, to keep the secret of it to himself and make it impenetrable to others, he made a rule never to enter it except from the wooded height above, by clambering down the crag instead of approaching it from the pond.

Just as the fugitives arrived, the moon was casting her beautiful silvery light on the aged tree-tops above the crag, and flickering on the splendid foliage at the corners of the several paths, all of which ended here, some with one tree, some with a group of trees. On all sides the eye was irresistibly led along their vanishing perspectives, following the curve of a wood-path or the solemn stretch of a forest glade flanked by a wall of verdure that was nearly black. The moonlight, filtering through the branches of the crossways, made the lonely, tranquil waters, where they peeped between the crosses and the lily-pads, sparkle like diamonds. The croaking of the frogs broke the deep silence of this beautiful forest-nook, the wild odors of which incited the soul to thoughts of liberty.

"Are we safe?" said the countess to Michu.

"Yes, mademoiselle. But we have each some work to do. Do you go and fasten our horses to the trees at the top of the little hill; tie a handkerchief round the mouth of each of them," he said, giving her his cravat; "your beast and mine are both intelligent, they will understand they are not to neigh. When you have done that, come down the crag directly above the pond; but don't let your habit catch anywhere. You will find me below."

While the countess hid the horses and tied and gagged them, Michu removed the stones and opened the entrance to the caverns. The countess, who thought she knew the forest by heart, was amazed when she descended into the vaulted chambers. Michu replaced the stones above them with the dexterity of a mason. As he finished, the sound of horses' feet and the voices of the gendarmes echoed in the darkness; but he quietly struck a match, lighted a resinous bit of wood and led the countess to the _in pace_, where there was still a piece of the candle with which he had first explored the caves. An iron door of some thickness, eaten in several places by rust, had been put in good order by the bailiff, and could be fastened securely by bars slipping into holes in the wall on either side of it. The countess, half dead with fatigue, sat down on a stone bench, above which there still remained an iron ring, the staple of which was embedded in the masonry.

"We have a salon to converse in," said Michu. "The gendarmes may prowl as much as they like; the worst they could do would be to take our horses."

"If they do that," said Laurence, "it would be the death of my cousins and the Messieurs d'Hauteserre. Tell me now, what do you know?"
Michu related what he had overheard Malin say to Grevin.

"They are already on the road to Paris; they were to enter it to-morrow morning," said the countess when he had finished.

"Lost!" exclaimed Michu. "All persons entering or leaving the barriers are examined. Malin has strong reasons to let my masters compromise themselves; he is seeking to get them killed out of his way."

"And I, who don't know anything of the general plan of the affair," cried Laurence, "how can I warn Georges, Riviere, and Moreau? Where are they?--However, let us think only of my cousins and the d'Hauteserres; you must catch up with them, no matter what it costs."

"The telegraph goes faster than the best horse," said Michu; "and of all the nobles concerned in this conspiracy your cousins are the closest watched. If I can find them, they must be hidden here and kept here till the affair is over. Their poor father may have had a foreboding when he set me to search for this hiding-place; perhaps he felt that his sons would be saved here."

"My mare is from the stables of the Comte d'Artois,—she is the daughter of his finest English horse," said Laurence; "but she has already gone sixty miles, she would drop dead before you reached them."

"Mine is in good condition," replied Michu; "and if you did sixty miles I shall have only thirty to do."

"Nearer forty," she said, "they have been walking since dark. You will overtake them beyond Lagny, at Coupvraie, where they expected to be at daybreak. They are disguised as sailors, and will enter Paris by the river on some vessel. This," she added, taking half of her mother's wedding-ring from her finger, "is the only thing which will make them trust you; they have the other half. The keeper of Coupvrai is the father of one of their soldiers; he has hidden them tonight in a hut in the forest deserted by charcoal-burners. They are eight in all, Messieurs d'Hauteserre and four others are with my cousins."

"Mademoiselle, no one is looking for the others! let them save themselves as they can; we must think only of the Messieurs de Simeuse. It is enough just to warn the rest."

"What! abandon the Hauteserres? never!" she said. "They must all perish or be saved together!"

"Only petty noblemen!" remarked Michu.

"They are only chevaliers, I know that," she replied, "but they are related to the Cinq-Cygne and Simeuse blood. Save them all, and advise them how best to regain this forest."

"The gendarmes are here,—don't you hear them? they are holding a council of war.""

"Well, you have twice had luck to-night; go! bring my cousins here and hide them in these vaults; they'll be safe from all pursuit—Alas! I am good for nothing!" she cried, with rage; "I should be only a beacon to light the enemy—but the police will never imagine that my cousins are in the forest if they see me at my ease. So the question resolves itself into this: how can we get five good horses to bring them in six hours from Lagny to the forest,—five horses to be killed and hidden in some thicket."

"And the money?" said Michu, who was thinking deeply as he listened to the young countess.

"I gave my cousins a hundred louis this evening," she replied.

"I'll answer for them!" cried Michu. "But once hidden here you must not attempt to see them. My wife, or the little one, shall bring them food twice a week. But, as I can't be sure of what may happen to me, remember, mademoiselle, in case of trouble, that the main beam in my hay-loft has been bored with an auger. In the hole, which is plugged with a bit of wood, you will find a plan showing how to reach this spot. The trees which you will find marked with a red dot on the plan have a black mark at their foot close to the earth. Each of these trees is a sign-post. At the foot of the third old oak which stands to the left of each sign-post, two feet in front of it and buried seven feet in the ground, you will find a large metal tube; in each tube are one hundred thousand francs in gold. These eleven trees—there are only eleven—contain the whole fortune of the Simeuse brothers, now that Gondreville has been taken from them."

"It will take a hundred years for the nobility to recover from such blows," said Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, slowly.

"Is there a pass-word?" asked Michu.

"'France and Charles' for the soldiers, 'Laurence and Louis' for the Messieurs d'Hauteserre and Simeuse. Good God! to think that I saw them yesterday for the first time in eleven years, and that now they are in danger of death—and what a death! Michu," she said, with a melancholy look, "be as prudent during the next fifteen hours as you have been grand and devoted during the last twelve years. If disaster were to overtake my cousins now I should die of it—No," she added, quickly, "I would live long enough to kill Bonaparte."

"There will be two of us to do that when all is lost," said Michu.

Laurence took his rough hand and wrung it warmly, as the English do. Michu looked at his watch; it was midnight.

"We must leave here at any cost," he said. "Death to the gendarme who attempts to stop me! And you, madame
la comtesse, without presuming to dictate, ride back to Cinq-Cygne as fast as you can. The police are there by this time; fool them! delay them!"

The hole once opened, Michu flung himself down with his ear to the earth; then he rose precipitately. "The gendarmes are at the edge of the forest towards Troyes!" he said. "Ha, I'll get the better of them yet!"

He helped the countess to come out, and replaced the stones. When this was done he heard her soft voice telling him she must see him mounted before mounting herself. Tears came to the eyes of the stern man as he exchanged a last look with his young mistress, whose own eyes were tearless.

"Fool them! yes, he is right!" she said when she heard him no longer. Then she darted towards Cinq-Cygne at full gallop.

CHAPTER VIII
TRIALS OF THE POLICE

Madame d'Hauteserre, roused by the danger of her sons, and not believing that the Revolution was over, but still fearing its summary justice, recovered her senses by the violence of the same distress which made her lose them. Led by an agonizing curiosity she returned to the salon, which presented a picture worthy of the brush of a genre painter. The abbe, still seated at the card-table and mechanically playing with the counters, was covertly observing Corentin and Peyrade, who were standing together at a corner of the fireplace and speaking in a low voice. Several times Corentin's keen eye met the not less keen glance of the priest; but, like two adversaries who knew themselves equally strong, and who return to their guard after crossing their weapons, each averted his eyes the instant they met. The worthy old d'Hauteserre, poised on his long thin legs like a heron, was standing beside the stout form of the mayor, in an attitude expressive of utter stupefaction. The mayor, though dressed as a bourgeois, always looked like a servant. Each gazed with a bewildered eye at the gendarmes, in whose clutches Gothard was still sobbing, his hands purple and swollen from the tightness of the cord that bound them. Catherine maintained her attitude of artless simplicity, which was quite impenetrable. The corporal, who, according to Corentin, had committed a great blunder in arresting these smaller fry, did not know whether to stay where he was or to depart. He stood pensively in the middle of the salon, his hand on the hilt of his sabre, his eye on the two Parisians. The Durieux, also stupefied, and the other servants of the chateau made an admirable group of expressive uneasiness. If it had not been for Gothard's convulsive snifflings those present could have heard the flies fly.

When Madame d'Hauteserre, pale and terrified, opened the door and entered the room, almost carried by Mademoiselle Goujet, whose red eyes had evidently been weeping, all faces turned to her at once. The two agents hoped as much as the household feared to see Laurence enter. This spontaneous movement of both masters and servants seemed produced by the sort of mechanism which makes a number of wooden figures perform the same gesture or wink the same eye.

Madame d'Hauteserre advanced by three rapid strides towards Corentin and said, in a broken voice but violently: "For pity's sake, monsieur, tell me what my sons are accused of. Do you really think they have been here?"

The abbe, who seemed to be saying to himself when he saw the old lady, "She will certainly commit some folly," lowered his eyes.

"My duty and the mission I am engaged in forbid me to tell you," answered Corentin, with a gracious but rather mocking air.

This refusal, which the detestable politeness of the vulgar fop seemed to make all the more emphatic, petrified the poor mother, who fell into a chair beside the Abbe Goujet, clasped her hands and began to pray.

"Where did you arrest that blubber?" asked Corentin, addressing the corporal and pointing to Laurence's little henchman.

"On the road that leads to the farm along the park walls; the little scamp had nearly reached the Closeaux woods," replied the corporal.

"And that girl?"

"She? oh, it was Oliver who caught her."

"Where was she going?"

"Towards Gondreville."

"They were going in opposite directions?" said Corentin.

"Yes," replied the gendarme.

"Is that boy the groom, and the girl the maid of the citizeness Cinq-Cygne?" said Corentin to the mayor.

"Yes," replied Goulard.

After Corentin had exchanged a few words with Peyrade in a whisper, the latter left the room, taking the corporal of gendarmes with him.

Just then the corporal of Arcis made his appearance. He went up to Corentin and spoke to him in a low voice: "I know these premises well," he said; "I have searched everywhere; unless those young fellows are buried, they are
Peyrade, who presently returned, signed to Corentin to come out, and then took him to the breach in the moat
and showed him the sunken way.
"We have guessed the trick," said Peyrade.
"And I'll tell you how it was done," added Corentin. "That little scamp and the girl decoyed those idiots of
gendarmes and thus made time for the game to escape."
"We can't know the truth till daylight," said Peyrade. "The road is damp; I have ordered two gendarmes to
barricade it top and bottom. We'll examine it after daylight, and find out by the footsteps who went that way."
"I see a hoof-mark," said Corentin; "let us go to the stables."
"How many horses do you keep?" said Peyrade, returning to the salon with Corentin, and addressing Monsieur
d'Hauteserre and Goulard.
"Come, monsieur le maire, you know, answer," cried Corentin, seeing that that functionary hesitated.
"Why, there's the countess's mare, Gothard's horse, and Monsieur d'Hauteserre's."
"There is only one in the stable," said Peyrade.
"Mademoiselle is out riding," said Durieu.
"Does she often ride about at this time of night?" said the libertine Peyrade, addressing Monsieur d'Hauteserre.
"Often," said the good man, simply. "Monsieur le maire can tell you that."
"Everybody knows she has her freaks," remarked Catherine; "she looked at the sky before she went to bed, and I
think the glitter of your bayonets in the moonlight puzzled her. She told me she wanted to know if there was going
to be another revolution."
"When did she go?" asked Peyrade.
"When she saw your guns."
"Which road did she take?"
"I don't know."
"There's another horse missing," said Corentin.
"The gendarmes--took it--away from me," said Gothard.
"Where were you going?" said one of them.
"I was--following--my mistress to the farm," sobbed the boy.
The gendarme looked towards Corentin as if expecting an order. But Gothard's speech was evidently so true and
yet so false, so perfectly innocent and so artful that the two Parisians again looked at each other as if to echo
Peyrade's former words: "They are not ninnies."
Monsieur d'Hauteserre seemed incapable of a word; the mayor was bewildered; the mother, imbecile from
maternal fears, was putting questions to the police agents that were idiotically innocent; the servants had been
roused from their sleep. Judging by these trifling signs, and these diverse characters, Corentin came to the
conclusion that his only real adversary was Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. Shrewd and dexterous as the police may
be, they are always under certain disadvantages. Not only are they forced to discover all that is known to a
conspirator, but they must also suppose and test a great number of things before they hit upon the right one. The
conspirator is always thinking of his own safety, whereas the police is only on duty at certain hours. Were it not for
treachery and betrayals, nothing would be easier than to conspire successfully. The conspirator has more mind
concentrated upon himself than the police can bring to bear with all its vast facilities of action. Finding themselves
stopped short morally, as they might be physically by a door which they expected to find open being shut in their
faces, Corentin and Peyrade saw they were tricked and misled, without knowing by whom.
"I assert," said the corporal of Arcis, in their ear, "that if the four young men slept here last night it must have
been in the beds of their father and mother, and Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, or those of the servants; or they must
have spent the night in the park. There is not a trace of their presence."
"Who could have warned them?" said Corentin, to Peyrade. "No one but the First Consul, Fouche, the ministers,
the prefect of police, and Malin knew anything about it."
"We must set spies in the neighborhood," whispered Peyrade.
"And watch the spies," said the abbe, who smiled as he overheard the word and guessed all.
"Good God!" thought Corentin, replying to the abbe's smile with one of his own; "there is but one intelligent
being here,—he's the one to come to an understanding with; I'll try him."
"Gentlemen--" said the mayor, anxious to give some proof of devotion to the First Consul and addressing the
two agents.
"Say 'citizens'; the Republic still exists," interrupted Corentin, looking at the priest with a quizzical air.
"Citizens," resumed the mayor, "just as I entered this salon and before I had opened my mouth Catherine rushed
in and took her mistress's hat, gloves, and whip."
A low murmur of horror came from the breasts of all the household except Gothard. All eyes but those of the agent and the gendarmes were turned threateningly on Goulard, the informer, seeming to dart flames at him.

"Very good, citizen mayor," said Peyrade. "We see it all plainly. Some one" (this with a glance of evident distrust at Corentin) "warned the citizeness Cinq-Cygne in time."

"Corporal, handcuff that boy," said Corentin, to the gendarme, "and take him away by himself. And shut up that girl, too," pointing to Catherine. "As for you, Peyrade, search for papers," adding in his ear, "Ransack everything, spare nothing.--Monsieur l'abbe," he said, confidentially, "I have an important communication to make to you"; and he took him into the garden.

"Listen to me attentively, monsieur," he went on; "you seem to have the mind of a bishop, and (no one can hear us) you will understand me. I have no longer any hope except through you of saving these families, who, with the greatest folly, are letting themselves roll down a precipice where no one can save them. The Messieurs Simeuse and d'Hauteserre have been betrayed by one of those infamous spies whom governments introduce into all conspiracies to learn their objects, means, and members. Don't confound me, I beg of you, with the wretch who is with me. He belongs to the police; but I am honorably attached to the Consular cabinet, I am therefore behind the scenes. The ruin of the Simeuse brothers is not desired. Though Malin would like to see them shot, the First Consul, if they are here and have come without evil intentions, wishes them to be warned out of danger, for he likes good soldiers. The agent who accompanies me has all the powers, I, apparently, am nothing. But I see plainly what is hatching. The agent is pledged to Malin, who has doubtless promised him his influence, an office, and perhaps money if he finds the Simeuse brothers and delivers them up. The First Consul, who is a really great man, never favors selfish schemes--I don't want to know if those young men are here," he added, quickly, observing the abbe's gesture, "but I wish to tell you that there is only one way to save them. You know the law of the 6th Floreal, year X., which amended all the _emigres_ who were still in foreign countries on condition that they returned home before the 1st Vendemiaire of the year XI., that is to say, in September of last year. But the Messieurs Simeuse having, like the Messieurs d'Hauteserre, served in the army of Conde, they come into the category of exceptions to this law. Their presence in France is therefore criminal, and suffices, under the circumstances in which we are, to make them suspected of collusion in a horrible plot. The First Consul saw the error of this exception which has made enemies for his government, and he wishes the Messieurs Simeuse to know that no steps will be taken against them, if they will send him a petition saying that they have re-entered France intending to submit to the laws, and agreeing to take oath to the Constitution. You can understand that the document ought to be in my hands before they are arrested, and be dated some days earlier. I would then be the bearer of it--I do not ask you where those young men are," he said again, seeing another gesture of denial from the priest. "We are, unfortunately, sure of finding them; the forest is guarded, the entrances to Paris and the frontiers are all watched. Pray listen to me; if these gentlemen are between the forest and Paris they must be taken; if they are in Paris they will be found; if they retreat to the frontier they will still be arrested. The First Consul likes the _ci-devants_ and cannot endure the republicans--simple enough; if he wants a throne he must needs strangle Liberty. Keep the matter a secret between us. This is what I will do; I will stay here till to-morrow and _be blind_; but beware of the agent; that cursed Provencal is the devil's own valet; he has the ear of Fouche just as I have that of the First Consul."

"If the Messieurs Simeuse are here," said the abbe, "I would give ten pints of my blood and my right arm to save them; but if Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne is in the secret she has not--and this I swear on my eternal salvation--betrayed it in any way, neither has she done me the honor to consult me. I am now very glad of her discretion, if discretion there be. We played cards last night as usual, at Boston, in almost complete silence, until half-past ten o'clock, and we neither saw nor heard anything. Not a child can pass through this solitary valley without the whole community knowing it, and for the last two weeks no one has come from other places. Now the d'Hauteserre and the Simeuse brothers would make a party of four. Old d'Hauteserre and his wife have submitted to the present government, and they have made all imaginable efforts to persuade their sons to return to France; they wrote to them again yesterday. I can only say, upon my soul and conscience, that your visit has alone shaken my firm belief that these young men are living in Germany. Between ourselves, there is no one here, except the young countess, who does not do justice to the eminent qualities of the First Consul."

"Fox!" thought Corentin. "Well, if those young men are shot," he said, aloud; "it is because their friends have willed it--I wash my hands of the affair."

He had led the abbe to a part of the garden which lay in the moonlight, and as he said the last words he looked at him suddenly. The priest was greatly distressed, but his manner was that of a man surprised and wholly ignorant.

"Understand this, monsieur l'abbe," resumed Corentin; "the right of these young men to the estate of Gondreville will render them doubly criminal in the eyes of the middle class. I'd like to see them put faith in God and not in his saints--"

"Is there really a plot?" asked the abbe, simply.
"Base, odious, cowardly, and so contrary to the generous spirit of the nation," replied Corentin, "that it will meet with universal opprobrium."

"Well! Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne is incapable of baseness," cried the abbe.

"Monsieur l'abbe," replied Corentin, "let me tell you this; there is for us (meaning you and me) proof positive of her guilt; but there is not enough for the law. You see she took flight when we came; I sent the mayor to warn her."

"Yes, but for one who is so anxious to save them, you followed rather closely on his heels," said the abbe.

At those words the two men looked at each other, and all was said. Each belonged to those profound anatomists of thought to whom a mere inflexion of the voice, a look, a word suffices to reveal a soul, just as the Indians track their enemies by signs invisible to European eyes.

"I expected to draw something out of him, and I have only betrayed myself," thought Corentin.

"Ha! the sly rogue!" thought the priest.

Midnight rang from the old church clock just as Corentin and the abbe re-entered the salon. The opening and shutting of doors and closets could be heard from the bedrooms above. The gendarmes pulled open the beds; Peyrade, with the quick perception of a spy, handled and sounded everything. Such desecration excited both fear and indignation among the faithful servants of the house, who still stood motionless about the salon. Monsieur d'Hauteserre exchanged looks of commiseration with his wife and Mademoiselle Goujet. A species of horrible curiosity kept every one on the qui vive. Peyrade at length came down, holding in his hand a sandal-wood box which had probably been brought from China by Admiral de Simeuse. This pretty casket was flat and about the size of a quarto volume.

Peyrade made a sign to Corentin and took him into the embrasure of a window.

"I've an idea!" he said, "that Michu, who was ready to pay Marion eight hundred thousand francs in gold for Gondreville, and who evidently meant to shoot Malin yesterday, is the man who is helping the Simeuse brothers. His motive in threatening Marion and aiming at Malin must be the same. I thought when I saw him that he was capable of ideas; evidently he has but one; he discovered what was going on and he must have come here to warn them."

"Probably Malin talked about the conspiracy to his friend the notary, and Michu from his ambush overheard what was said," remarked Corentin, continuing the inductions of his colleague. "No doubt he has only postponed his shot to prevent an evil he thinks worse than the loss of Gondreville."

"He knew what we were the moment he laid eyes on us," said Peyrade. "I thought then that he was amazingly intelligent for a peasant."

"That proves that he is always on his guard," replied Corentin. "But, mind you, my old man, don't let us make a mistake. Treachery stinks in the nostrils, and primitive folks do scent it from afar."

"But that's our strength," said the Provencal.

"Call the corporal of Arcis," cried Corentin to one of the gendarmes. "I shall send him at once to Michu's house," he added to Peyrade.

"Our ear, Violette, is there," said Peyrade.

"We started without getting news from him. Two of us are not enough; we ought to have had Sabatier with us--Corporal," he said, when the gendarme appeared, taking him aside with Peyrade, "don't let them fool you as they did the Troyes corporal just now. We think Michu is in this business. Go to his house, put your eye on everything, and bring word of the result."

"One of my men heard horses in the forest just as they arrested the little groom; I've four fine fellows now on the track of whoever is hiding there," replied the gendarme.

He left the room, and the gallop of his horse which echoed on the paved courtyard died rapidly away.

"One thing is certain," said Corentin to himself, "either they have gone to Paris or they are retreating to Germany."

He sat down, pulled a note-book from the pocket of his spencer, wrote two orders in pencil, sealed them, and made a sign to one of the gendarmes to come to him.

"Be off at full gallop to Troyes, wake up the prefect, and tell him to start the telegraph as soon as there's light enough."

The gendarme departed. The meaning of this movement and Corentin's intentions were so evident that the hearts of the household sank within them; but this new anxiety was additional to another that was now martyzing them; their eyes were fixed on the sandal-wood box! All the while the two agents were talking together they were each taking note of those eager looks. A sort of cold anger stirred the unfeeling hearts of these men who relished the power of inspiring terror. The police man has the instincts and emotions of a hunter: but where the one employs his powers of mind and body in killing a hare, a partridge, or a deer, the other is thinking of saving the State, or a king, and of winning a large reward. So the hunt for men is superior to the other class of hunting by all the distance that there is between animals and human beings. Moreover, a spy is forced to lift the part he plays to the level and the
importance of the interests to which he is bound. Without looking further into this calling, it is easy to see that the man who follows it puts as much passionate ardor into his chase as another man does into the pursuit of game. Therefore the further these men advanced in their investigations the more eager they became; but the expression of their faces and their eyes continued calm and cold, just as their ideas, their suspicions, and their plans remained impenetrable. To any one who watched the effects of the moral scent, if we may so call it, of these bloodhounds on the track of hidden facts, and who noted and understood the movements of canine agility which led them to strike the truth in their rapid examination of probabilities, there was in it all something actually horrifying. How and why should men of genius fall so low when it was in their power to be so high? What imperfection, what vice, what passion debases them? Does a man become a police-agent as he becomes a thinker, writer, statesmen, painter, general, on the condition of knowing nothing but how to spy, as the others speak, write, govern, paint, and fight? The inhabitants of the chateau had but one wish,--that the thunderbolts of heaven might fall upon these miscreants; they were athirst for vengeance; and had it not been for the presence, up to this time, of the gendarmes there would undoubtedly have been an outbreak.

"No one, I suppose, has the key of this box?" said the cynical Peyrade, questioning the family as much by the movement of his huge red nose as by his words.

The Provencal noticed, not without fear, that the guards were no longer present; he and Corentin were alone with the family. The younger man drew a small dagger from his pocket, and began to force the lock of the box. Just then the desperate galloping of a horse was heard upon the road and then upon the pavement by the lawn; but most horrible of all was the fall and sighing of the animal, which seemed to drop all at once at the door of the middle tower. A convulsion like that which a thunderbolt might produce shook the spectators when Laurence, the trailing of whose riding-habit announced her coming, entered the room. The servants hastily formed into two lines to let her pass.

In spite of her rapid ride, the girl had felt the full anguish the discovery of the conspiracy must needs cause her. All her hopes were overthrown! she had galloped through ruins as her thoughts turned to the necessity of submission to the Consular government. Were it not for the danger which threatened the four gentlemen, and which served as a tonic to conquer her weariness and her despair, she would have dropped asleep on the way. The mare was almost killed in her haste to reach the chateau, and stand between her cousins and death. As all present looked at the heroic girl, pale, her features drawn, her veil aside, her whip in her hand, standing on the threshold of the door, whence her burning glance grasped the whole scene and comprehended it, each knew from the almost imperceptible motion which crossed the soured and bittered face of Corentin, that the real adversaries had met. A terrible duel was about to begin.

Noticing the box, now in the hands of Corentin, the countess raised her whip and sprang rapidly towards him. Striking his hands with so violent a blow that the casket fell to the ground, she seized it, flung it into the middle of the fire, and stood with her back to the chimney in a threatening attitude before either of the agents recovered from their surprise. The scorn which flamed from her eyes, her pale brow, her disdainful lips, were even more insulting than the haughty action which treated Corentin as though he were a venomous reptile. Old d'Hauteserre felt himself once more a cavalier; all his blood rushed to his face, and he grieved that he had no sword. The servants trembled for an instant with joy. The vengeance they had called down upon these men had come. But their joy was driven back within their souls by a terrible fear; the gendarmes were still heard coming and going in the garrets.

The spy--noun of strength, under which all shades of the police are confounded, for the public has never chosen to specify in language the varieties of those who compose this dispensary of social remedies so essential to all governments--the spy has this curious and magnificent quality: he never becomes angry; he possesses the Christian humility of a priest; his eyes are stolid with an indifference which he holds as a barrier against the world of passion debases them? Does a man become a police-agent as he becomes a thinker, writer, statesmen, painter,

Peyrade sprang to the hearth, caught Laurence's foot, raised it, and compelled her, out of modesty, to throw herself on the sofa, where she had lately lain asleep. The scene, like other contrasts in human things, was burlesque in the midst of terror. Peyrade scorched his hand as he dashed it into the fire to seize the box; but he got it, threw it on the floor and sat down upon it. These little actions were done with great rapidity and without a word being uttered. Corentin, recovering from the pain of the blow, caught Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne by both hands, and held her.

"Do not compel me to use force against you," he said, with withering politeness.

Peyrade's action had extinguished the fire by the natural process of suppressing the air.
"Gendarmes! here!" he cried, still occupying his ridiculous position.

"Will you promise to behave yourself?" said Corentin, insolently, addressing Laurence, and picking up his dagger, but not committing the great fault of threatening her with it.

"The secrets of that box do not concern the government," she answered, with a tinge of melancholy in her tone and manner. "When you have read the letters it contains you will, in spite of your infamy, feel ashamed of having read them—that is, if you can still feel shame at anything," she added, after a pause.

The abbe looked at her as if to say, "For God's sake, be calm!"

Peyrade rose. The bottom of the box, which had been nearly burned through, left a mark upon the floor; the lid was scorched and the sides gave way. The grotesque Scaevola, who had offered to the god of the Police and Terror the seat of his apricot breeches, opened the two sides of the box as if it had been a book, and slid three letters and two locks of hair upon the card-table. He was about to smile at Corentin when he perceived that the locks were of two shades of gray. Corentin released Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's hands and went up to the table to read the letter from which the hair had fallen.

Laurence rose, moved to the table beside the spies, and said:--"Read it aloud; that shall be your punishment."

As the two men continued to read to themselves, she herself read out the following words:--

Dear Laurence,—My husband and I have heard of your noble conduct on the day of our arrest. We know that you love our dear twins as much, almost, as we love them ourselves. Therefore it is with you that we leave a token which will be both precious and sad to them. The executioner has come to cut our hair, for we are to die in a few moments; he has promised to put into your hands the only remembrance we are able to leave to our beloved orphans. Keep these last remains of us and give them to our sons in happier days. We have kissed these locks of hair and have laid our blessing upon them. Our last thought will be of our sons, of you, and of God. Love them, Laurence.

Berthe de Cinq-Cygne. Jean de Simeuse.

Tears came to the eyes of all the household as they listened to the letter.

Laurence looked at the agents with a petrifying glance and said, in a firm voice:--

"You have less pity than the executioner."

Corentin quietly folded the hair in the letter, laid the letter aside on the table, and put a box of counters on the top of it as if to prevent its blowing away. His coolness in the midst of the general emotion was horrible.

Peyrade unfolded the other letters.

"Oh, as for those," said Laurence, "they are very much alike. You hear the will; you can now hear of its fulfilment. In future I shall have no secrets from any one."

1794, Andernach. Before the battle.

My dear Laurence,—I love you for life, and I wish you to know it. But you ought also to know, in case I die, that my brother, Paul-Marie, loves you as much as I love you. My only consolation in dying would be the thought that you might some day make my brother your husband without being forced to see me die of jealousy—which must surely happen if, both of us being alive, you preferred him to me. After all, that preference seems natural, for he is, perhaps, more worthy of your love than I—

Marie-Paul.

"Here is the other letter," she said, with the color in her cheeks.

Andernach. Before the battle.

My kind Laurence,—My heart is sad; but Marie-Paul has a gayer nature, and will please you more than I am able to do. Some day you will have to choose between us—well, though I love you passionately—

"You are corresponding with _emigres_," said Peyrade, interrupting Laurence, and holding the letters between himself and the light to see if they contained between the lines any treasonable writing with invisible ink.

"Yes," replied Laurence, folding the precious letters, the paper of which was already yellow with time. "But by virtue of what right do you presume to violate my dwelling and my personal liberty?"

"Ah, that's the point!" cried Peyrade. "By what right, indeed!—it is time to let you know it, beautiful aristocrat," he added, taking a warrant from his pocket, which came from the minister of justice and was countersigned by the minister of the interior. "See, the authorities have their eye upon you."

"We might also ask you," said Corentin, in her ear, "by what right you harbor in this house the assassins of the First Consul. You have applied your whip to my hands in a manner that authorizes me to take my revenge upon your cousins, whom I came here to save."

At the mere movement of her lips and the glance which Laurence cast upon Corentin, the abbe guessed what that great artist was saying, and he made her a sign to be distrustful, which no one intercepted but Goulard. Peyrade struck the cover of the box to see if there were a double top.

"Don't break it!" she exclaimed, taking the cover from him.

She took a pin, pushed the head of one of the carved figures, and the two halves of the top, joined by a spring,
opened. In the hollow half lay miniatures of the Messieurs de Simeuse, in the uniform of the army of Conde, two portraits on ivory done in Germany. Corentin, who felt himself in presence of an adversary worthy of his efforts, called Peyrade aside into a corner of the room and conferred with him.

"How could you throw _that_ into the fire?" said the abbe, speaking to Laurence and pointing to the letter of the marquise which enclosed the locks of hair.

For all answer the young girl shrugged her shoulders significantly. The abbe comprehended then that she had made the sacrifice to mislead the agents and gain time; he raised his eyes to heaven with a gesture of admiration.

"Where did they arrest Gothard, whom I hear crying?" she asked him, loud enough to be overheard.

"I don't know," said the abbe.

"Did he reach the farm?"

"The farm!" whispered Peyrade to Corentin. "Let us send there."

"No," said Corentin; "that girl never trusted her cousins' safety to a farmer. She is playing with us. Do as I tell you, so that we mayn't have to leave here without detecting something, after committing the great blunder of coming here at all."

Corentin stationed himself before the fire, lifting the long pointed skirts of his coat to warm himself and assuming the air, manner, and tone of a gentleman who was paying a visit.

"Mesdames, you can go to bed, and the servants also. Monsieur le maire, your services are no longer needed. The sternness of our orders does not permit us to act otherwise than as we have done; but as soon as the walls, which seem to me rather thick, have been thoroughly examined, we shall take our departure."

The mayor bowed to the company and retired; but neither the abbe nor Mademoiselle Goujet stirred. The servants were too uneasy not to watch the fate of their young mistress. Madame d'Hauteserre, who, from the moment of Laurence's entrance, had studied her with the anxiety of a mother, rose, took her by the arm, led her aside, and said in a low voice, "Have you seen them?"

"Do you think I could have let your sons be under this roof without your knowing it?" replied Laurence. "Durieu," she added, "see if it is possible to save my poor Stella; she is still breathing."

"She must have gone a great distance," said Corentin.

"Forty miles in three hours," she answered, addressing the abbe, who watched her with amazement. "I started at half-past nine, and it was well past one when I returned."

She looked at the clock which said half-past two.

"So you don't deny that you have ridden forty miles?" said Corentin.

"No," she said. "I admit that my cousins, in their perfect innocence, expected not to be excluded from the amnesty, and were on their way to Cinq-Cygne. When I found that the Sieur Malin was plotting to injure them, I went to warn them to return to Germany, where they will be before the telegraph can have guarded the frontier. If I have done wrong I shall be punished for it."

This answer, which Laurence had carefully considered, was so probable in all its parts that Corentin's convictions were shaken. In that decisive moment, when every soul present hung suspended, as it were, on the faces of the two adversaries, and all eyes turned from Corentin to Laurence and from Laurence to Corentin, again the gallop of a horse, coming from the forest, resounded on the road and from there through the gates to the paved courtyard. Frightful anxiety was stamped on every face.

Peyrade entered, his eyes gleaming with joy. He went hastily to Corentin and said, loud enough for the countess to hear him: "We have caught Michu."

Laurence, to whom the agony, fatigue, and tension of all her intellectual faculties had given an unusual color, turned white and fell back almost fainting on a chair. Madame Durieu, Mademoiselle Goujet, and Madame d'Hauteserre sprang to help her, for she was suffocating. She signed to cut the frogging of her habit.

"Duped!" said Corentin to Peyrade. "I am certain now they are on their way to Paris. Change the orders."

They left the room and the house, placing one gendarme on guard at the door of the salon. The infernal cleverness of the two men had gained a terrible advantage by taking Laurence in the trap of a not uncommon trick.

CHAPTER IX

FOILED

At six o'clock in the morning, as day was dawning, Corentin and Peyrade returned. Having explored the covered way they were satisfied that horses had passed through it to reach the forest. They were now awaiting the report of the captain of gendarmerie sent to reconnoitre the neighborhood. Leaving the chateau in charge of a corporal, they went to the tavern at Cinq-Cygne to get their breakfast, giving orders that Gothard, who never ceased to reply to all questions with a burst of tears, should be set at liberty, also Catherine, who still continued silent and immovable. Catherine and Gothard went to the salon to kiss the hands of their mistress, who lay exhausted on the sofa; Durieu also went in to tell her that Stella would recover, but needed great care.
The mayor, uneasy and inquisitive, met Peyrade and Corentin in the village. He declared that he could not allow such important officials to breakfast in a miserable tavern, and he took them to his own house. The abbey was only three quarters of a mile distant. On the way, Peyrade remarked that the corporal of Arcis had sent no news of Michu or of Violette.

"We are dealing with very able people," said Corentin; "they are stronger than we. The priest no doubt has a finger in all this."

Just as the mayor's wife was ushering her guests into a vast dining-room (without any fire) the lieutenant of gendarmes arrived with an anxious air.

"We met the horse of the corporal of Arcis in the forest without his master," he said to Peyrade.

"Lieutenant," cried Corentin, "go instantly to Michu's house and find out what is going on there. They must have murdered the corporal."

This news interfered with the mayor's breakfast. Corentin and Peyrade swallowed their food with the rapidity of hunters halting for a meal, and drove back to the chateau in their wicker carriage, so as to be ready to start at the first call for any point where their presence might be necessary. When the two men reappeared in the salon into which they had brought such trouble, terror, grief, and anxiety, they found Laurence, in a dressing-gown, Monsieur d'Hauteserre and his wife, the abbe and his sister, sitting round the fire, to all appearance tranquil.

"If they had caught Michu," Laurence told herself, "they would have brought him with them. I have the mortification of knowing that I was not the mistress of myself, and that I threw some light upon the matter for those wretches; but the harm can be undone--How long are we to be your prisoners?" she asked sarcastically, with an easy manner.

"How can she know anything about Michu? No one from the outside has got near the chateau; she is laughing at us," said the two agents to each other by a look.

"We shall not inconvenience you long," replied Corentin. "In three hours from now we shall offer our regrets for having troubled your solitude."

No one replied. This contemptuous silence redoubled Corentin's inward rage. Laurence and the abbe (the two minds of their little world) had talked the man over and drawn their conclusions. Gothard and Catherine had set the breakfast-table near the fire and the abbe and his sister were sharing the meal. Neither masters nor servants paid the slightest attention to the two spies, who walked up and down the garden, the courtyard or the lawn, returning every now and then to the salon.

At half-past two the lieutenant reappeared.

"I found the corporal," he said to Corentin, "lying in the road which leads from the pavilion of Cinq-Cygne to the farm at Bellache. He has no wound, only a bad contusion of the head, caused, apparently, by his fall. He told me he had been lifted suddenly off his horse and flung so violently to the ground that he could not discover how the thing was done. His feet left the stirrups, which was lucky, for he might have been killed by the horse dragging him. We put him in charge of Michu and Violette--"

"Michu! is Michu in his own house?" said Corentin, glancing at Laurence. The countess smiled ironically, like a woman obtaining her revenge.

"He is bargaining with Violette about the sale of some land," said the lieutenant. "They seemed to me drunk; and it's no wonder, for they have been drinking all night and discussing the matter, and they haven't come to terms yet."

"Did Violette tell you so?" cried Corentin.

"Yes," said the lieutenant.

"Nothing is right if we don't attend to it ourselves!" cried Peyrade, looking at Corentin, who doubted the lieutenant's news as much as the other did.

"At what hour did you get to Michu's house?" asked Corentin, noticing that the countess had glanced at the clock.

"About two," replied the lieutenant.

Laurence covered Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre and the abbe and his sister in one comprehensive glance, which made them fancy they were wrapped in an azure mantle; triumph sparkled in her eyes, she blushed, and the tears welled up beneath her lids. Strong under all misfortunes, the girl knew not how to weep except from joy. At this moment she was all glorious, especially to the priest, who was sometimes distressed by the virility of her character, and who now caught a glimpse of the infinite tenderness of her woman's nature. But such feelings lay in her soul like a treasure hidden at a great depth beneath a block of granite.

Just then a gendarme entered the salon to ask if he might bring in Michu's son, sent by his father to speak to the gentlemen from Paris. Corentin gave an affirmative nod. Francois Michu, a sly little chip of the old block, was in the courtyard, where Gothard, now at liberty, got a chance to speak to him for an instant under the eyes of a gendarme. The little fellow managed to slip something into Gothard's hand without being detected, and the latter glided into the
salon after him till he reached his mistress, to whom he stealthily conveyed both halves of the wedding-ring, a sure
sign, she knew, that Michu had met the four gentlemen and put them in safety.

"My papa wants to know what he's to do with the corporal, who ain't doing well," said Francois.

"What's the matter with him?" asked Peyrade.

"It's his head—he pitched down hard on the ground," replied the boy. "For a gendarme who knows how to ride it
was bad luck—I suppose the horse stumbled. He's got a hole—my! as big as your fist—in the back of his head. Seems
as if he must have hit some big stone, poor man! He may be a gendarme, but he suffers all the same—you'd pity him."

The captain of the gendarmerie now arrived and dismounted in the courtyard. Corentin threw up the window, not
to lose time.

"What has been done?"

"We are back like the Dutchmen! We found nothing but five dead horses, their coats stiff with sweat, in the
middle of the forest. I have kept them to find out where they came from and who owns them. The forest is
surrounded; whoever is in it can't get out."

"At what hour do you suppose those horsemen entered the forest?"

"About half-past twelve."

"Don't let a hare leave that forest without your seeing it," whispered Corentin. "I'll station Peyrade at the village
to help you; I am going to see the corporal myself—Go to the mayor's house," he added, still whispering, to Peyrade.
"I'll send some able man to relieve you. We shall have to make use of the country-people; examine all faces." He
turned towards the family and said in a threatening tone, "Au revoir!"

No one replied, and the two agents left the room.

"What would Fouche say if he knew we had made a domiciliary visit without getting any results?" remarked
Peyrade as he helped Corentin into the osier vehicle.

"It isn't over yet," replied the other, "those four young men are in the forest. Look there!" and he pointed to
Laurence who was watching them from a window. "I once revenged myself on a woman who was worth a dozen of
that one and had stirred my bile a good deal less. If this girl comes in the way of my hatchet I'll pay her for the lash
of that whip."

"The other was a strumpet," said Peyrade; "this one has rank."

"What difference is that to me? All's fish that swims in the sea," replied Corentin, signing to the gendarme who
drove him to whip up.

Ten minutes later the chateau de Cinq-Cygne was completely evacuated.

"How did they get rid of the corporal?" said Laurence to Francois Michu, whom she had ordered to sit down and
eat some breakfast.

"My father told me it was a matter of life and death and I mustn't let anybody get into our house," replied the
boy. "I knew when I heard the horses in the forest that I'd got to do with them hounds of gendarmes, and I meant to
keep 'em from getting in. So I took some big ropes that were in my garret and fastened one of 'em to a tree at the
corner of the road. Then I drew the rope high enough to hit the breast of a man on horseback, and tied it to the tree
on the opposite side of the way in the direction where I heard the horses. That barred the road. It didn't miss fire, I
can tell you! There was no moon, and the corporal just pitched!—but he wasn't killed; they're tough, them gendarmes!
I did what I could."

"You have saved us!" said Laurence, kissing him as she took him to the gate. When there, she looked about her
and seeing no one she said cautiously, "Have they provisions?"

"I have just taken them twelve pounds of bread and four bottles of wine," said the boy. "They'll be snug for a
week."

Returning to the salon, the girl was beset with mute questions in the eyes of all, each of whom looked at her with
as much admiration as eagerness.

"But have you really seen them?" cried Madame d'Hauteserre.

The countess put a finger on her lips and smiled; then she left the room and went to bed; her triumph sure, utter
weariness had overtaken her.

The shortest road from Cinq-Cygne to Michu's lodge was that which led from the village past the farm at
Bellache to the _rond-point_ where the Parisian spies had first seen Michu on the preceding evening. The gendarme
who was driving Corentin took this way, which was the one the corporal of Arcis had taken. As they drove along,
the agent was on the look-out for signs to show why the corporal had been unhorsed. He blamed himself for having
sent but one man on so important an errand, and he drew from this mistake an axiom for the police Code, which he
afterwards applied.

"If they have got rid of the corporal," he said to himself, "they have done as much by Violette. Those five horses
have evidently brought the four conspirators and Michu from the neighborhood of Paris to the forest. Has Michu a
horse?" he inquired of the gendarme who was driving him and who belonged to the squad from Arcis.

"Yes, and a famous little horse it is," answered the man, "a hunter from the stables of the ci-devant Marquis de Simeuse. There's no better beast, though it is nearly fifteen years old. Michu can ride him fifty miles and he won't turn a hair. He takes mighty good care of him and wouldn't sell him at any price."

"What does the horse look like?"
"He's brown, turning rather to black; white stockings above the hoofs, thin, all nerves like an Arab."
"Did you ever see an Arab?"

"In Egypt--last year. I've ridden the horses of the mamelukes. We have to serve twelve years in the cavalry, and I was on the Rhine under General Steingel, after that in Italy, and then I followed the First Consul to Egypt. I'll be a corporal soon."

"When I get to Michu's house go to the stable; if you have served twelve years in the cavalry you know when a horse is blown. Let me know the condition of Michu's beast."

"See! that's where our corporal was thrown," said the man, pointing to a spot where the road they were following entered the _rond-point_.

"Tell the captain to come and pick me up at Michu's, and I'll go with him to Troyes."

So saying Corentin got down, and stood about for a few minutes examining the ground. He looked at the two elms which faced each other,--one against the park wall, the other on the bank of the _rond-point_; then he saw (what no one had yet noticed) the button of a uniform lying in the dust, and he picked it up. Entering the lodge he saw Violette and Michu sitting at the table in the kitchen and talking eagerly. Violette rose, bowed to Corentin, and offered him some wine.

"Thank you, no; I came to see the corporal," said the young man, who saw with half a glance that Violette had been drunk all night.

"My wife is nursing him upstairs," said Michu.

"Well, corporal, how are you?" said Corentin who had run up the stairs and found the gendarme with his head bandaged, and lying on Madame Michu's bed; his hat, sabre, and shoulder-belt on a chair.

Marthe, faithful in her womanly instincts, and knowing nothing of her son's prowess, was giving all her care to the corporal, assisted by her mother.

"We expect Monsieur Varlet the doctor from Arcis," she said to Corentin; "our servant-lad has gone to fetch him."

"Leave us alone for a moment," said Corentin, a good deal surprised at the scene, which amply proved the innocence of the two women. "Where were you struck?" he asked the man, examining his uniform.

"On the breast," replied the corporal.

"Let's see your belt," said Corentin.

On the yellow band with a white edge, which a recent regulation had made part of the equipment of the guard now called National, was a metal plate a good deal like that of the foresters, on which the law required the inscription of these remarkable words: "Respect to persons and to properties." Francois's rope had struck the belt and defaced it. Corentin took up the coat and found the place where the button he had picked up upon the road belonged.

"What time did they find you?" asked Corentin.

"About daybreak."

"Did they bring you up here at once?" said Corentin, noticing that the bed had not been slept in.

"Yes."

"Who brought you up?"

"The women and little Michu, who found me unconscious."

"So!" thought Corentin: "evidently they didn't go to bed. The corporal was not shot at, nor struck by any weapon, for an assailant must have been at his own height to strike a blow. Something, some obstacle, was in his way and that unhorsed him. A piece of wood? not possible! an iron chain? that would have left marks. What did you feel?" he said aloud.

"I was knocked over so suddenly--"

"The skin is rubbed off under your chin," said Corentin quickly.

"I think," said the corporal, "that a rope did go over my face."

"I have it!" cried Corentin; "somebody tied a rope from tree to tree to bar the way."

"Like enough," replied the corporal.

Corentin went downstairs to the kitchen.

"Come, you old rascal," Michu was saying to Violette, "let's make an end of this. One hundred thousand francs for the place, and you are master of my whole property. I shall retire on my income."

"I tell you, as there's a God in heaven, I haven't more than sixty thousand."
"But don't I offer you time to pay the rest? You've kept me here since yesterday, arguing it. The land is in prime order."
"Yes, the soil is good," said Violette.
"Wife, some more wine," cried Michu.
"Haven't you drunk enough?" called down Marthe's mother. "This is the fourteenth bottle since nine o'clock yesterday."
"You have been here since nine o'clock this morning, haven't you?" said Corentin to Violette.
"No, beg your pardon, since last night I haven't left the place, and I've gained nothing after all; the more he makes me drink the more he puts up the price."
"In all markets he who raises his elbow raises a price," said Corentin.
A dozen empty bottles ranged along the table proved the truth of the old woman's words. Just then the gendarme who had driven him made a sign to Corentin, who went to the door to speak to him.
"There is no horse in the stable," said the man.
"You sent your boy on horseback to the chateau, didn't you?" said Corentin, returning to the kitchen. "Will he be back soon?"
"No, monsieur," said Michu, "he went on foot."
"What have you done with your horse, then?"
"I have lent him," said Michu, curtly.
"Come out here, my good fellow," said Corentin; "I've a word for your ear."
Corentin and Michu left the house.
"The gun which you were loading yesterday at four o'clock you meant to use in murdering the Councillor of State; but we can't take you up for that--plenty of intention, but no witnesses. You managed, I don't know how, to stupefy Violette, and you and your wife and that young rascal of yours spent the night out of doors to warn Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and save her cousins, whom you are hiding here,--though I don't as yet know where. Your son or your wife threw the corporal off his horse cleverly enough. Well, you've got the better of us just now; you're a devil of a fellow. But the end is not yet, and you won't have the last word. Hadn't you better compromise? your masters would be the better for it."
"Come this way, where we can talk without being overheard," said Michu, leading the way through the park to the pond.
When Corentin saw the water he looked fixedly at Michu, who was no doubt reckoning on his physical strength to fling the spy into seven feet of mud below three feet of water. Michu replied with a look that was not less fixed. The scene was absolutely as if a cold and flabby boa constrictor had defied one of those tawny, fierce leopards of Brazil.
"I am not thirsty," said Corentin, stopping short at the edge of the field and putting his hand into his pocket to feel for his dagger.
"We shall never come to terms," said Michu, coldly.
"Mind what you're about, my good fellow; the law has its eye upon you."
"If the law can't see any clearer than you, there's danger to every one," said the bailiff.
"Do you refuse?" said Corentin, in a significant tone.
"I'd rather have my head cut off a thousand times, if that could be done, than come to an agreement with such a villain as you."
Corentin got into his vehicle hastily, after one more comprehensive look at Michu, the lodge, and Couraut, who barked at him. He gave certain orders in passing through Troyes, and then returned to Paris. All the brigades of gendarmerie in the neighborhood received secret instructions and special orders.
During the months of December, January, and February the search was active and incessant, even in remote villages. Spies were in all the taverns. Corentin learned some important facts: a horse like that of Michu had been found dead in the neighborhood of Lagny; the five horses burned in the forest of Nodesme had been sold, for five hundred francs each, by farmers and millers to a man who answered to the description of Michu. When the decree against the accomplices and harborers of Georges was put in force Corentin confined his search to the forest of Nodesme. After Moreau, the royalists, and Pichegru were arrested no strangers were ever seen about the place.
Michu lost his situation at that time; the notary of Arcis brought him a letter in which Malin, now made senator, requested Grevin to settle all accounts with the bailiff and dismiss him. Michu asked and obtained a formal discharge and became a free man. To the great astonishment of the neighborhood he went to live at Cinq-Cygne, where Laurence made him the farmer of all the reserved land about the chateau. The day of his installation as farmer coincided with the fatal day of the death of the Duc d'Enghien, when nearly the whole of France heard at the same time of the arrest, trial, condemnation, and death of the prince,--terrible reprisals, which preceded the trial of
While the new farm-house was being built Michu the Judas, so-called, and his family occupied the rooms over the stables at Cinq-Cygne on the side of the chateau next to the famous breach. He bought two horses, one for himself and one for Francois, and they both joined Gothard in accompanying Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne in her many rides, which had for their object, as may well be imagined, the feeding of the four gentlemen and perpetual watching that they were still in safety. Francois and Gothard, assisted by Couraut and the countess's dogs, went in front and beat the woods all around the hiding-place to make sure that there was no one within sight. Laurence and Michu carried the provisions which Marthe, her mother, and Catherine prepared, unknown to the other servants of the household so as to restrict the secret to themselves, for all were sure that there were spies in the village. These expeditions were never made oftener than twice a week and on different days and at different hours, sometimes by day, sometimes by night.

These precautions lasted until the trial of Riviere, Polignac, and Moreau ended. When the senatus-consultum, which called the dynasty of Bonaparte to the throne and nominated Napoleon as Emperor of the French, was submitted to the French people for acceptance Monsieur d'Hauteserre signed the paper Goulard brought him. When it was made known that the Pope would come to France to crown the Emperor, Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne no longer opposed the general desire that her cousins and the young d'Hauteserres should petition to have their names struck off the list of _emigres_, and be themselves reinstated in their rights as citizens. On this, old d'Hauteserre went to Paris and consulted the ci-devant Marquis de Chargeboeuf who knew Talleyrand. That minister, then in favor, conveyed the petition to Josephine, and Josephine gave it to her husband, who was addressed as Emperor, Majesty, Sire, before the result of the popular vote was known. Monsieur de Chargeboeuf, Monsieur d'Hauteserre, and the Abbe Goujet, who also went to Paris, obtained an interview with Talleyrand, who promised them his support. Napoleon had already pardoned several of the principal actors in the great royalist conspiracy; and yet, though the four gentlemen were merely suspected of complicity, the Emperor, after a meeting of the Council of State, called the senator Malin, Fouché, Talleyrand, Cambaceres, Lebrun, and Dubois, prefect of police, into his cabinet.

"Gentlemen," said the future Emperor, who still wore the dress of the First Consul, "we have received from the Sieurs de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre, officers in the army of the Prince de Conde, a request to be allowed to re-enter France."

"They are here now," said Fouché.

"Like many others whom I meet in Paris," remarked Talleyrand.

"I think you have not met these gentlemen," said Malin, "for they are hidden in the forest of Nodesme, where they consider themselves at home."

He was careful not to tell the First Consul and Fouché how he himself had given them warning, by talking with Grevin within hearing of Michu, but he made the most of Corentin's reports and convinced Napoleon that the four gentlemen were sharers in the plot of Riviere and Polignac, with Michu for an accomplice. The prefect of police confirmed these assertions.

"But how could that bailiff know that the conspiracy was discovered?" said the prefect, "for the Emperor and the council and I were the only persons in the secret."

No one paid attention to this remark.

"If they have been hidden in that forest for the last seven months and you have not been able to find them," said the Emperor to Fouché, "they have expiated their misdeeds."

"Since they are my enemies as well," said Malin, frightened by the Emperor's clear-sightedness, "I desire to follow the magnificent example of your Majesty; I therefore make myself their advocate and ask that their names be stricken from the list of _emigres_."

"They will be less dangerous to you here than if they are exiled; for they will now have to swear allegiance to the Empire and the laws," said Fouché, looking at Malin fixedly.

"In what way are they dangerous to the senator?" asked Napoleon.

Talleyrand spoke to the Emperor for some minutes in a low voice. The reinstatement of the Messieurs de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre appeared to be granted.

"Sire," said Fouché, "rely upon it, you will hear of those men again."

Talleyrand, who had been urged by the Duc de Grandlieu, gave the Emperor pledges in the name of the young men on their honor as gentlemen (a term which had great fascination for Napoleon), to abstain from all attacks upon his Majesty and to submit themselves to his government in good faith.

"Messieurs d'Hauteserre and de Simeuse are not willing to bear arms against France, now that events have taken
their present course," he said, aloud; "they have little sympathy, it is true, with the Imperial government, but they are just the men that your Majesty ought to conciliate. They will be satisfied to live on French soil and obey the laws."

Then he laid before the Emperor a letter he had received from the brothers in which these sentiments were expressed.

"Anything so frank is likely to be sincere," said the Emperor, returning the letter and looking at Lebrun and Cambaceres. "Have you any further suggestions?" he asked of Fouche.

"In your Majesty's interests," replied the future minister of police, "I ask to be allowed to inform these gentlemen of their reinstatement --when it is _really granted_," he added, in a louder tone.

"Very well," said Napoleon, noticing an anxious look on Fouche's face.

The matter did not seem positively decided when the Council rose; but it had the effect of putting into Napoleon's mind a vague distrust of the four young men. Monsieur d'Hauteserre, believing that all was gained, wrote a letter announcing the good news. The family at Cinq-Cygne were therefore not surprised when, a few days later, Goulard came to inform the countess and Madame d'Hauteserre that they were to send the four gentlemen to Troyes, where the prefect would show them the decree reinstating them in their rights and administer to them the oath of allegiance to the Empire and the laws. Laurence replied that she would send the notification to her cousins and the Messieurs d'Hauteserre.

"Then they are not here?" said Goulard.

Madame d'Hauteserre looked anxiously after Laurence, who left the room to consult Michu. Michu saw no reason why the young men should not be released at once from their hiding-place. Laurence, Michu, his son, and Gothard therefore started as soon as possible for the forest, taking an extra horse, for the countess resolved to accompany her cousins to Troyes and return with them. The whole household, made aware of the good news, gathered on the lawn to witness the departure of the happy cavalcade. The four young men issued from their long confinement, mounted their horses, and took the road to Troyes, accompanied by Mademoiselle Cinq-Cygne. Michu, with the help of his son and Gothard, closed the entrance to the cellar with a taper in his hand. On the way he recollected that he had left the forks and spoons and a silver cup, which the young men had been using, in the cave, and he went back for them alone. When he reached the edge of the pond he heard voices, and went straight to the entrance of the cave through the brushwood.

"Have you come for your silver?" said Peyrade, showing his big red nose through the branches.

Without knowing why, for at any rate his young masters were safe, Michu felt a sharp agony in all his joints, so keen was the sense of vague, indefinable coming evil which took possession of him; but he went forward at once, and found Corentin on the stairs with a taper in his hand.

"We are not very harsh," he said to Michu; "we might have seized your ci-devants any day for the last week; but we knew they were reinstated--You're a tough fellow to deal with, and you gave us too much trouble not to make us anxious to satisfy our curiosity about this hiding-place of yours."

"I'd give something," cried Michu, "to know how and by whom we have been sold."

"If that puzzles you, old fellow," said Peyrade, laughing, "look at your horses' shoes, and you'll see that you betrayed yourselves."

"Well, there need be no rancor!" said Corentin,whistling for the captain of gendarmerie and their horses.

"So that rascally Parisian blacksmith who shoed the horses in the English fashion and left Cinq-Cygne only the other day was their spy!" thought Michu. "They must have followed our tracks when the ground was damp. Well, we're quits now!"

Michu consoled himself by thinking that the discovery was of no consequence, as the young men were now safe, Frenchmen once more, and at liberty. Yet his first presentiment was a true one. The police, like the Jesuits, have the one virtue of never abandoning their friends or their enemies.

Old d'Hauteserre returned from Paris and was more than surprised not to be the first to bring the news. Durieu prepared a succulent dinner, the servants donned their best clothes, and the household impatiently awaited the exiles, who arrived about four o'clock, happy,--and yet humiliated, for they found they were to be under police surveillance for two years, obliged to present themselves at the prefecture every month and ordered to remain in the commune of Cinq-Cygne during the said two years. "I'll send you the papers for signature," the prefect said to them. "Then, in the course of a few months, you can ask to be relieved of these conditions, which are imposed on all of Pichegru's accomplices. I will back your request."

These restrictions, fairly deserved, rather dispirited the young men, but Laurence laughed at them.

"The Emperor of the French," she said, "was badly brought up; he has not yet acquired the habit of bestowing favors graciously."

The party found all the inhabitants of the chateau at the gates, and a goodly proportion of the people of the village waiting on the road to see the young men, whose adventures had made them famous throughout the
department. Madame d'Hauteserre held her sons to her breast for a long time, her face covered with tears; she was unable to speak and remained silent, though happy, through a part of the evening. No sooner had the Simeuse twins dismounted than a cry of surprise arose on all sides, caused by their amazing resemblance,—the same look, the same voice, the same actions. They both had the same movement in rising from their saddles, in throwing their leg over the crupper of their horses when disembarking, in flinging the reins upon the animal's neck. Their dress, precisely the same, contributed to this likeness. They wore boots a la Suwaroff, made to fit the instep, tight trousers of white leather, green hunting-jackets with metal buttons, black cravats, and buckskin gloves. The two young men, just thirty-one years of age, were—to use a term in vogue in those days—charming cavaliers, of medium height but well set up, brilliant eyes with long lashes, floating in liquid like those of children, black hair, noble brows, and olive skin. Their speech, gentle as that of a woman, fell graciously from their fresh red lips; their manners, more elegant and polished than those of the provincial gentlemen, showed that knowledge of men and things had given them that supplementary education which makes its possessor a man of the world.

Not lacking money, thanks to Michu, during their emigration, they had been able to travel and be received at foreign courts. Old d'Hauteserre and the abbé thought them rather haughty; but in their present position this may have been the sign of nobility of character. They possessed all the eminent little marks of a careful education, to which they added a wonderful dexterity in bodily exercises. Their only dissimilarity was in the region of ideas. The youngest charmed others by his gaiety, the eldest by his melancholy; but the contrast, which was purely spiritual, was not at first observable.

"Ah, wife," whispered Michu in Marthe's ear, "how could one help devoting one's self to those young fellows?"

Marthe, who admired them as a wife and mother, nodded her head prettily and pressed her husband's hand. The servants were allowed to kiss their new masters.

During their seven months' seclusion in the forest (which the young men had brought upon themselves) they had several times committed the imprudence of taking walks about their hiding-place, carefully guarded by Michu, his son, and Gothard. During these walks, taken usually on starlit nights, Laurence, reuniting the thread of their past and present lives, felt the utter impossibility of choosing between the brothers. A pure and equal love for each divided her heart. She fancied indeed that she had two hearts. On their side, the brothers dared not speak to themselves of their impending rivalry. Perhaps all three were trusting to time and accident. The condition of her mind on this subject acted no doubt upon Laurence as they entered the house, for she hesitated a moment, and then took an arm of each as she entered the salon followed by Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, who were occupied with their sons. Just then a cheer burst from the servants, "Long live the Cinq-Cygne and the Simeuse families!" Laurence turned round, still between the brothers, and made a charming gesture of acknowledgement.

When these nine persons came to actually observe each other,—for in all meetings, even in the bosom of families, there comes a moment when friends observe those from whom they have been long parted,—the first glance which Adrien d'Hauteserre cast upon Laurence seemed to his mother and to the abbé to betray love. Adrien, the youngest of the d'Hauteserres, had a sweet and tender soul; his heart had remained adolescent in spite of the catastrophes which had nerved the man. Like many young heroes, kept virgin in spirit by perpetual peril, he was daunted by the timidities of youth. In this he was very different from his brother, a man of rough manners, a great hunter, an intrepid soldier, full of resolution, but coarse in fibre and without activity of mind or delicacy in matters of the heart. One was all soul, the other all action; and yet they both possessed in the same degree that sense of honor which is the vital essence of a gentleman. Dark, short, slim and wiry, Adrien d'Hauteserre gave an impression of strength; whereas Robert, who was tall, pale and fair, seemed weakly. Adrien, nervous in temperament, was stronger in soul; while his brother though lymphatic, was fonder of bodily exercise. Families often present these singularities of contrast, the causes of which it might be interesting to examine; but they are mentioned here merely to explain how it was that Adrien was not likely to find a rival in his brother. Robert's affection for Laurence was that of a relation, the respect of a noble for a girl of his own caste. In matters of sentiment the elder d'Hauteserre belonged to the class of men who consider woman as an appendage to man, limiting her sphere to the physical duties of maternity; demanding perfection in that respect, but regarding her mentally as of no account. To such men the admittance of woman as an actual sharer in society, in the body politic, in the family, meant the subversion of the social system. In these days we are so far removed from this theory of primitive people that almost all women, even those who do not desire the fatal emancipation offered by the new sects, will be shocked in merely hearing of it; but it must be owned that Robert d'Hauteserre had the misfortune to think in that way. Robert was a man of the middle-ages, Adrien a man of to-day. These differences instead of hindering their affection had drawn its bonds the closer. On the first evening after the return of the young men these shades of character were caught and understood by the abbé, Mademoiselle Goujet, and Madame d'Hauteserre, who, while playing their boston, were secretly foreseeing the difficulties of the future.

At twenty-three years of age, having passed through the many reflections of a long solitude and the anguish of a
The four elders, who were the last to leave the salon that night, admitted to each other that they felt uneasy at the new position of this charming girl. What power might not passion have on a young woman of her character and with her nobility of soul? The twin brothers loved her with one and the same love and a blind devotion; which of the two would Laurence choose? To choose one was to kill the other. Countess in her own right, she could bring her husband a title and certain prerogatives, together with a long lineage. Perhaps in thinking of these advantages the elder of the twins, the Marquis de Simeuse, would sacrifice himself to give Laurence to his brother, who, according to the old laws, was poor and without a title. But would the younger brother deprive the elder of the happiness of having Laurence for a wife? At a distance, this strife of love and generosity might do no harm;--in fact, so long as the brothers were facing danger the chances of war might end the difficulty; but what would be the result of this reunion? When Marie-Paul and Paul-Marie reached the age when passions rise to their greatest height could they share, as now, the looks and words and attentions of their cousin? must there not inevitably arise a jealousy between them the consequences of which might be horrible? What would then become of the unity of those beautiful lives, one in heart though twain in body? To these questionings, passed from one to another as they finished their game, Madame d’Hauteserre replied that in her opinion Laurence would not marry either of her cousins. The poor lady had experienced in the evening one of those inexplicable presentiments which are secrets between the mother's heart and God.

Laurence, in her inward consciousness, was not less alarmed at finding herself tete-a-tete with her cousins. To the active drama of conspiracy, to the dangers which the brothers had incurred, to the pain and penalties of their exile, was now succeeding another sort of drama, of which she had never thought. This noble girl could not resort to the violent means of refusing to marry either of the twins; and she was too honest a woman to marry one and keep an irresistible passion for the other in her heart. To remain unmarried, to weary her cousins' love by no decision, and then to take the one who was faithful to her in spite of her caprices, was a solution of the difficulty not so much sought for by her as vaguely admitted. As she fell asleep that night she told herself the wisest course to follow was to let things take their chance. Chance is, in love, the providence of women.

The next morning Michu went to Paris, whence he returned a few days later with four fine horses for his new masters. In six weeks’ time the hunting would begin, and the young countess sagely reflected that the violent excitement of that exercise would be a help against the tete-a-tetes of the chateau. At first, however, an unexpected result surprised the spectators of these strange loves and roused their admiration. Without any premeditated agreement the brothers rivalled each other in attentions to Laurence, with a sense of pleasure in so doing which appeared to suffice them. The relation between themselves and Laurence was just as fraternal as that between themselves. What could be more natural? After so long an absence they felt the necessity of studying her, of knowing her well and letting her know them, leaving to her the right of choice. They were sustained in this first trial by the mutual affection which made their double life one and the same life.

Love, like their own mother, was unable to distinguish between the brothers. Laurence was obliged (in order to know them apart and make no mistakes) to give them different cravats--to the elder a white one, to the younger black. Without this perfect resemblance, this identity of life, which misled all about them, such a situation would be justly thought impossible. It can, indeed, be explained only by the fact itself, which is one of those which men do not believe in unless they see them; and then the mind is more bewildered by having to explain them than by the actual sight which caused belief. If Laurence spoke, her voice echoed in two hearts equally faithful and loving with one tone. Did she give utterance to an intelligent, or witty, or noble thought, her glance encountered the delight expressed in two glances which followed her every movement, interpreted her slightest wish, and beamed upon her ever with a new expression, gaiety in the one, tender melancholy in the other. In any matter that concerned their mistress the brothers showed an admirable quick-wittedness of heart coupled with instant action which (to use the abbe's own expression) approached the sublime. Often, if something had to be fetched, if it was a question of some little attention which men delight to pay to a beloved woman, the elder would leave that pleasure to the younger with a look at Laurence that was proud and tender. The younger, on the other hand, put all his own pride into paying such debts. This rivalry of noble natures in a feeling which leads men often to the jealous ferocity of the beasts amazed the old people who were watching it, and bewildered their ideas.

Such little details often drew tears to the eyes of the countess. A single sensation, which is perhaps all-powerful in some rare organizations, will give an idea of Laurence's emotions; it may be perceived by recalling the perfect unison of two fine voices (like those of Malibran and Sontag) in some harmonious _duo_, or the blending of two
The world was breathless, awaiting the results of the campaign. When the British power. The camp at Boulogne had just been raised. Napoleon, whose soldiers were, as always, inferior in their conceptions; by which, if it had succeeded, the Emperor would have paid the nation for his election by the ruin of the common enemy. The disaster at Trafalgar had overthrown one of the most amazing plans which human genius ever conceived; by which the affairs of Europe were decided for many years to come. The failure of all conspiracies attempted within the borders of France, was now arming all Europe against their common enemy.

During the last few days his only hold on life had been the pleasure of seeing Laurence and of listening to her. That answer showed the priest her total want of coquetry. Laurence did not conceive that she was loved by two men.

"But, my dear child," said Madame d'Hauteserre one evening (her own son silently dying of love for Laurence), "you must choose!"

"Oh, let us be happy," she replied; "God will save us from ourselves."

Adrien d'Hauteserre buried within his breast the jealousy that was consuming him; he kept the secret of his feelings, knowing that he could not hope. He tried to be content with the happiness of seeing the charming woman who during the few months this struggle lasted shone in all her brilliancy. In one sense Laurence had become coquettish, taking that dainty care of her person which women who are loved delight in. She followed the fashions, and went more than once to Paris to deck her beauty with chiffons or some choice novelty. Desirous of giving her cousins a sense of home and its every enjoyment, from which they had so long been severed, she made her chateau, in spite of the remembrances of her late guardian, the most completely comfortable house in Champagne.

Robert d'Hauteserre saw nothing of this hidden drama; he never noticed his brother's love for Laurence. As to the girl herself, he liked to tease her about her coquetry,--for he confounded that odious defect with the natural desire to please; he was always mistaken in matters of feeling, taste, and the higher ethics. So, whenever this man of the middle-ages appeared on the scene, Laurence immediately made him, unknown to himself, the clown of the play; she amused her cousins by arguing with Robert, and leading him, step by step, into some bog of ignorance and stupidity. She excelled in such clever mischief, which, to be really successful, must leave the victim content with himself. And yet, though his nature was a coarse one, Robert never, during those delightful months (the only happy period in the lives of the three young people) said one virile word which might have brought matters to a crisis between Laurence and her cousins. He was struck with the sincerity of the brothers; he saw how the one could be glad at the happiness of the other and yet suffer anguish in the depths of his heart, and he did perceive how a woman might shrink from showing tenderness to one which would grieve the other. This perception on Robert's part was a just one; it explains a situation which, in times of faith, when the sovereign pontiff had power to intervene and cut the Gordian knot of such phenomena (allied to the deepest and most impenetrable mysteries), would have found its solution. The Revolution had deepened the Catholic faith in these young hearts, and religion now rendered this crisis in their lives the more severe, because nobility of character is ever heightened by the grandeur of circumstances. A sense of this truth kept Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre and the abbe from the slightest fear of any unworthy result on the part of the brothers or of Laurence.

This private drama, secretly developing within the limits of the family life where each member watched it silently, ran its course so rapidly and withal so slowly, it carried with it so many unhoped-for pleasures, trifling jars, frustrated fancies, hopes reversed, anxious waitings, delayed explanations and mute avowals that the dwellers at Cinq-Cygne paid no attention to the public drama of the Emperor's coronation. At times these passions made a truce to wander in the dangerous meadows of reverie. Neither Laurence nor her cousins had a thought now for public affairs; each day brought its palpitating and absorbing interests for their hearts.

"Really," said Mademoiselle Goujet one evening, "I don't know which of all the lovers loves the most."

Adrien, who happened to be alone in the salon with the four card-players, raised his eyes and turned pale. For the last few days his only hold on life had been the pleasure of seeing Laurence and of listening to her.

"I think," said the abbe, "that the countess, being a woman, loves with the greater abandonment to love."

Laurence, the twins, and Robert entered the room soon after. The newspapers had just arrived. England, seeing the failure of all conspiracies attempted within the borders of France, was now arming all Europe against their common enemy. The disaster at Trafalgar had overthrown one of the most amazing plans which human genius ever conceived; by which, if it had succeeded, the Emperor would have paid the nation for his election by the ruin of the British power. The camp at Boulogne had just been raised. Napoleon, whose soldiers were, as always, inferior in numbers to the enemy, was about to carry the war into parts of Europe where he had not before waged it. The whole world was breathless, awaiting the results of the campaign.

"He'll surely be defeated this time," said Robert, laying down the paper.

"The armies of Austria and of Russia are before him," said Marie-Paul.

"He has never fought in Germany," added Paul-Marie.
'Of whom are you speaking?' asked Laurence.
'The Emperor,' answered the three gentlemen.

The jealous girl threw a disdainful look at her twin lovers, which humiliated them while it rejoiced the heart of Adrien, who made a gesture of admiration and gave her one proud look, which said plainly that _he_ thought only of her,—of Laurence.

'I told you,' said the abbe in a low voice, 'that love would some day cause her to forget her animosity.'

It was the first, last, and only reproach the brothers ever received from her; but certainly at that moment their love, which could still be distracted by national events, was inferior to that of Laurence, which, absorbed her mind so completely that she only knew of the amazing triumph at Austerlitz by overhearing a discussion between Monsieur d'Hauteserre and his sons.

Faithful to his ideas of submission, the old man wished both Robert and Adrien to re-enter the French army and apply for service; they could, he thought, be reinstated in their rank and soon find an opening to military honors. But royalist opinions were now all-powerful at Cinq-Cygne. The four young men and Laurence laughed at their prudent elder, who seemed to foresee a coming evil. Possibly, prudence is less virtue than the exercise of some instinct, or _sense_ of the mind (if it is allowable to couple those two words). A day will come, no doubt, when physiologists and philosophers will both admit that the senses are, in some way, the sheath or vehicle of a keen and penetrative active power which issues from the mind.

CHAPTER XI
WISE COUNSEL

After peace was concluded between France and Austria, towards the end of the month of February, 1806, a relative, whose influence had been employed for the reinstatement of the Simeuse brothers, and who was destined later to give them signal proofs of family attachment, the ci-devant Marquis de Chargeboeuf, whose estates extended from the department of the Seine-et-Marne to that of the Aube, arrived one morning at Cinq-Cygne in a species of caleche which was then named in derision a _berlingot_. When this shabby carriage was driven past the windows the inhabitants of the chateau, who were at breakfast, were convulsed with laughter; but when the bald head of the old man was seen issuing from behind the leather curtain of the vehicle Monsieur d'Hauteserre told his name, and all present rose instantly to receive and do honor to the head of the house of Chargeboeuf.

"We have done wrong to let him come to us," said the Marquis de Simeuse to his brother and the d'Hauteserres; "we ought to have gone to him and made our acknowledgements."

A servant, dressed as a peasant, who drove the horses from a seat on a level with the body of the carriage, slipped his cartman's whip into a coarse leather socket, and got down from the box to assist the marquis from the carriage; but Adrien and the younger de Simeuse prevented him, unbuttoned the leather apron, and helped the old man out in spite of his protestations. This gentleman of the old school chose to consider his yellow _berlingot_ with its leather curtains a most convenient and excellent equipage. The servant, assisted by Gothard, unharnessed the stout horses with shining flanks, accustomed no doubt to do as much duty at the plough as in a carriage.

"In spite of this cold weather! Why, you are a knight of the olden time," said Laurence, to her visitor, taking his arm and leading him into the salon.

"What has he come for?" thought old d'Hauteserre.

Monsieur de Chargeboeuf, a handsome old gentleman of sixty-six, in light-colored breeches, his small weak legs encased in colored stockings, wore powder, pigeon-wings and a queue. His green cloth hunting-coat with gold buttons was braided and frogged with gold. His white waistcoat glittered with gold embroidery. This apparel, still in vogue among old people, became his face, which was not unlike that of Frederick the Great. He never put on his three-cornered hat lest he should destroy the effect of the half-moon traced upon his cranium by a layer of powder. His right hand, resting on a hooked cane, held both cane and hat in a manner worthy of Louis XIV. The fine old gentleman took off his wadded silk pelisse and seated himself in an armchair, holding the three-cornered hat and the cane between his knees in an attitude the secret of which has never been grasped by any but the roues of Louis XV.'s court, an attitude which left the hands free to play with a snuff-box, always a precious trinket. Accordingly the marquis drew from the pocket of his waistcoat, which was closed by a flap embroidered in gold arabesques, a sumptuous snuff-box. While fingering his own pinch and offering the box around him with another charming gesture accompanied with kindly smiles, he noticed the pleasure which his visit gave. He seemed then to comprehend why these young _emigres_ had been remiss in their duty towards him, and to be saying to himself, "When we are making love we can't make visits."

"You will stay with us some days?" said Laurence.

"Impossible," he replied. "If we were not so separated by events (for as to distance, you go farther than that which lies between us) you would know, my dear child, that I have daughters, daughters-in-law, and grand-children. All these dear creatures would be very uneasy if I did not return to them to-night, and I have forty-five miles to go."
"Your horses are in good condition," said the Marquis de Simeuse.

"Oh! I am just from Troyes, where I had business yesterday."

After the customary polite inquiries for the Marquise de Chargeboeuf and other matters really uninteresting but about which politeness assumes that we are keenly interested, it dawned on Monsieur d'Hauteserre that the old gentleman had come to warn his young relatives against imprudence. He remarked that times were changed and no one could tell what the Emperor might now become.

"Oh!" said Laurence, "he'll make himself God."

The Marquis spoke of the wisdom of concession. When he stated, with more emphasis and authority than he put into his other remarks, the necessity of submission, Monsieur d'Hauteserre looked at his sons with an almost supplicating air.

"Would you serve that man?" asked the Marquis de Simeuse.

"Yes, I would, if the interests of my family required it," replied Monsieur de Chargeboeuf.

Gradually the old man made them aware, though vaguely, of some threatened danger. When Laurence begged him to explain the nature of it, he advised the four young men to refrain from hunting and to keep themselves as much in retirement as possible.

"You treat the domain of Gondreville as if it were your own," he said to the Messieurs de Simeuse, "and you are keeping alive a deadly hatred. I see, by the surprise upon your faces, that you are quite unaware of the ill-will against you at Troyes, where your late brave conduct is remembered. They tell of how you foiled the police of the Empire; some praise you for it, but others regard you as enemies of the Emperor; partisans declare that Napoleon's clemency is inexplicable. That, however, is nothing. The real danger lies here; you foiled men who thought themselves cleverer than you; and low-bred men never forgive. Sooner or later justice, which in your department emanates from your enemy, Senator Malin (who has his henchmen everywhere, even in the ministerial offices),--his justice will rejoice to see you involved in some annoying scrape. A peasant, for instance, will quarrel with you for riding over his field; your guns are in your hands, you are hot-tempered, and something happens. In your position it is absolutely essential that you should not put yourselves in the wrong. I do not speak to you thus without good reason. The police keep this arrondissement under strict surveillance; they have an agent in that little hole of Arcis expressly to protect the Imperial senator Malin against your attacks. He is afraid of you, and says so openly."

"It is a calumny!" cried the younger Simeuse.

"A calumny,--I am sure of it myself, but will the public believe it? Michu certainly did aim at the senator, who does not forget the danger he was in; and since your return the countess has taken Michu into her service. To many persons, in fact to the majority, Malin will seem to be in the right. You do not understand how delicate the position of an _emigre_ is towards those who are now in possession of his property. The prefect, a very intelligent man, dropped a word to me yesterday about you which has made me uneasy. In short, I sincerely wish you would not remain here."

This speech was received in dumb amazement. Marie-Paul rang the bell.

"Gothard," he said, to the little page, "send Michu here."

"Michu, my friend," said the Marquis de Simeuse when the man appeared, "is it true that you intended to kill Malin?"

"Yes, Monsieur le marquis; and when he comes here again I shall lie in wait for him."

"Do you know that we are suspected of instigating it, and that our cousin, by taking you as her farmer is supposed to be furthering your scheme?"

"Good God!" cried Michu, "am I accursed? Shall I never be able to rid you of that villain?"

"No, my man, no!" said Paul-Marie. "But we will always take care of you, though you will have to leave our service and the country too. Sell your property here; we will send you to Trieste to a friend of ours who has immense business connections, and he'll employ you until things are better in this country for all of us."

Tears came into Michu's eyes; he stood rooted to the floor.

"Were there any witnesses when you aimed at Malin?" asked the Marquis de Chargeboeuf.

"Grevin the notary was talking with him, and that prevented my killing him--very fortunately, as Madame la Comtesse knows," said Michu, looking at his mistress. "Grevin is not the only one who knows it?" said Monsieur de Chargeboeuf, who seemed annoyed at what was said, though none but the family were present.

"That police spy who came here to trap my masters, he knew it too," said Michu.

Monsieur de Chargeboeuf rose as if to look at the gardens, and said, "You have made the most of Cinq-Cygne." Then he left the house, followed by the two brothers and Laurence, who now saw the meaning of his visit.

"You are frank and generous, but most imprudent," said the old man. "It was natural enough that I should warn you of a rumor which was certain to be a slander; but what have you done now? you have let such weak persons as
Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre and their sons see that there was truth in it. Oh, young men! young men! You ought to keep Michu here and go away yourselves. But if you persist in remaining, at least write a letter to the senator and tell him that having heard the rumors about Michu you have dismissed him from your employ."

"Well!" exclaimed the brothers; "what, write to Malin,—to the murderer of our father and our mother, to the insolent plunderer of our property!"

"All true; but he is one of the chief personages at the Imperial court, and the king of your department."

"He, who voted for the death of Louis XVI. in case the army of Conde entered France!" cried Laurence.

"He, who probably advised the murder of the Duc d'Enghien!" exclaimed Paul-Marie.

"Well, well, if you want to recapitulate his titles of nobility," cried Monsieur de Chargeboeuf, "say he who pulled Robespierre by the skirts of his coat to make him fall when he saw that his enemies were stronger than he; he who would have shot Bonaparte if the 18th Brumaire had missed fire; he who manoeuvres now to bring back the Bourbons if Napoleon totters; he whom the strong will ever find on their side to handle either sword or pistol and put an end to an adversary whom they fear! But—all that is only reason the more for what I urge upon you."

"We have fallen very low," said Laurence.

"Children," said the old marquis, taking them by the hand and going to the lawn, then covered by a slight fall of snow; "you will be angry at the prudent advice of an old man, but I am bound to give it, and here it is: If I were you I would employ as go-between some trustworthy old fellow—like myself, for instance; I would commission him to ask Malin for a million of francs for the title-deeds of Gondreville; he would gladly consent if the matter were kept secret. You will then have capital in hand, an income of a hundred thousand francs, and you can buy a fine estate in another part of France. As for Cinq-Cygne, it can safely be left to the management of Monsieur d'Hauteserre, and you can draw lots as to which of you shall win the hand of this dear heiress —But ah! I know the words of an old man in the ears of the young are like the words of the young in the ears of the old, a sound without meaning."

The old marquis signed to his three relatives that he wished no answer, and returned to the salon, where, during their absence, the abbé and his sister had arrived.

The proposal to draw lots for their cousin's hand had offended the brothers, while Laurence revolted in her soul at the bitterness of the remedy the old marquis counselled. All three were now less gracious to him, though they did not cease to be polite. The warmth of their feeling was chilled. Monsieur de Chargeboeuf, who felt the change, cast frequent looks of kindly compassion on these charming young people. The conversation became general, but the old marquis still dwelt on the necessity of submitting to events, and he applauded Monsieur d'Hauteserre for his persistence in urging his sons to take service under the Empire.

"Bonaparte," he said, "makes dukes. He has created Imperial fiefs, he will therefore make counts. Malin is determined to be Comte de Gondreville. That is a fancy," he added, looking at the Simeuse brothers, "which might be profitable to you—"

"Or fatal," said Laurence.

As soon as the horses were put-to the marquis took leave, accompanied to the door by the whole party. When fairly in the carriage he made a sign to Laurence to come and speak to him, and she sprang upon the foot-board with the lightness of a swallow.

"You are not an ordinary woman, and you ought to understand me," he said in her ear. "Malin's conscience will never allow him to leave you in peace; he will set some trap to injure you. I implore you to be careful of all your actions, even the most unimportant. Compromise, negotiate; those are my last words."

The brothers stood motionless behind their cousin and watched the _berlingot_ as it turned through the iron gates and took the road to Troyes. Laurence repeated the old man's last words. But sage experience should not present itself to the eyes of youth in a _berlingot_, colored stockings, and a queue. These ardent young hearts had no conception of the change that had passed over France; indignation crisped their nerves, honor boiled with their noble blood through every vein.

"He, the head of the house of Chargeboeuf!" said the Marquis de Simeuse. "A man who bears the motto _Adsit fortior_, the noblest of warcries!

"We are no longer in the days of Saint-Louis," said the younger Simeuse.

"But 'We die singing,'" said the countess. "The cry of the five young girls of my house is mine!"

"And ours, 'Cy meurs,'" said the elder Simeuse. "Therefore, no quarter, I say; for, on reflection, we shall find that our relative had pondered well what he told us—Gondreville to be the title of a Malin!"

"And his seat!" said the younger.

"Mansart designed it for noble stock, and the populace will get their children in it!" exclaimed the elder.

"If that were to come to pass, I'd rather see Gondreville in ashes!" cried Mademoiselle Cinq-Cygne.

One of the villagers, who had entered the grounds to examine a calf Monsieur d'Hauteserre was trying to sell him, overheard these words as he came from the cow-sheds.
"Let us go in," said Laurence, laughing; "this is very imprudent; we are giving the old marquis a right to blame us. My poor Michu," she added, as she entered the salon, "I had forgotten your adventure; as we are not in the odor of sanctity in these parts you must be careful not to compromise us in future. Have you any other peccadilloes on your conscience?"

"I blame myself for not having killed the murderer of my old masters before I came to the rescue of my present ones--"

"Michu!" said the abbe in a warning tone.

"But I'll not leave the country," Michu continued, paying no heed to the abbe's exclamation, "till I am certain you are safe. I see fellows roaming about here whom I distrust. The last time we hunted in the forest, that keeper who took my place at Gondreville came to me and asked if we supposed we were on our own property. 'Ho! my lad,' I said, 'we can't get rid in two weeks of ideas we've had for centuries.'"

"You did wrong, Michu," said the Marquis de Simeuse, smiling with satisfaction.

"What answer did he make?" asked Monsieur d'Hauteserre.

"He said he would inform the senator of our claims," replied Michu.

"Comte de Gondreville!" repeated the elder Simeuse; "what a masquerade! But after all, they say 'your Majesty' to Bonaparte!"

"And to the Grand Duc de Berg, 'your Highness!'" said the abbe.

"Who is he?" asked the Marquis de Simeuse.

"Murat, Napoleon's brother-in-law," replied old d'Hauteserre.

"Delightful!" remarked Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. "Do they also say 'your Majesty' to the widow of Beauharnais?"

"Yes, mademoiselle," said the abbe.

"We ought to go to Paris and see it all," cried Laurence.

"Alas, mademoiselle," said Michu, "I was there to put Francois at school, and I swear to you there's no joking with what they call the Imperial Guard. If the rest of the army are like them, the thing may last longer than we.

"They say many of the noble families are taking service," said Monsieur d'Hauteserre.

"According to the present law," added the abbe, "you will be compelled to serve. The conscription makes no distinction of ranks or names."

"That man is doing us more harm with his court than the Revolution did with its axe!" cried Laurence.

"The Church prays for him," said the abbe.

These remarks, made rapidly one after another, were so many commentaries on the wise counsel of the old Marquis de Chargeboeuf; but the young people had too much faith, too much honor, to dream of resorting to a compromise. They told themselves, as all vanquished parties in all times have declared, that the luck of the conquerors would soon be at an end, that the Emperor had no support but that of the army, that the power _de facto_ must sooner or later give way to the Divine Right, etc. So, in spite of the wise counsel given to them, they fell into the pitfall, which others, like old d'Hauteserre, more prudent and more amenable to reason, would have been able to avoid. If men were frank they might perhaps admit that misfortunes never overtake them until after they have received either an actual or an occult warning. Many do not perceive the deep meaning of such visible or invisible signs until after the disaster is upon them.

"In any case, Madame la comtesse knows that I cannot leave the country until I have given up a certain trust," said Michu in a low voice to Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne.

For all answer she made him a sign of acquiescence, and he left the room.

CHAPTER XII
THE FACTS OF A MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR

Michu sold his farm at once to Beauvisage, a farmer at Bellache, but he was not to receive the money for twenty days. A month after the Marquis de Chargeboeuf's visit, Laurence, who had told her cousins of their buried fortune, proposed to them to take the day of the Mi-careme to disinter it. The unusual quantity of snow which fell that winter had hitherto prevented Michu from obtaining the treasure, and it now gave him pleasure to undertake the operation with his masters. He was determined to leave the neighborhood as soon as it was over, for he feared himself.

"Malin has suddenly arrived at Gondreville, and no one knows why," he said to his mistress. "I shall never be able to resist putting the property into the market by the death of its owner. I feel I am guilty in not following my inspirations."

"Why should he leave Paris at this season?" said the countess.

"All Arcis is talking about it," replied Michu; "he has left his family in Paris, and no one is with him but his valet. Monsieur Grevin, the notary of Arcis, Madame Marion, the wife of the receiver-general, and her sister-in-law are staying at Gondreville."
Laurence had chosen the mid-lent day for their purpose because it enabled her to give her servants a holiday and so get them out of the way. The usual masquerade drew the peasantry to the town and no one was at work in the fields. Chance made its calculations with as much cleverness as Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne made hers. The uneasiness of Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre at the idea of keeping eleven hundred thousand francs in gold in a lonely chateau on the borders of a forest was likely to be so great that their sons advised they should know nothing about it. The secret of the expedition was therefore confined to Gothard, Michu, Laurence, and the four gentlemen.

After much consultation it seemed possible to put forty-eight thousand francs in a long sack on the crupper of each of their horses. Three trips would therefore bring the whole. It was agreed to send all the servants, whose curiosity might be troublesome, to Troyes to see the shows. Catherine, Marthe, and Durieu, who could be relied on, stayed at home in charge of the house. The other servants were glad of their holiday and started by daybreak. Gothard, assisted by Michu, saddled the horses as soon as they were gone, and the party started by way of the gardens to reach the forest. Just as they were mounting—for the park gate was so low on the garden side that they led their horses until they were through it—old Beauvisage, the farmer at Bellache, happened to pass.

"There!" cried Gothard, "I hear some one."

"Oh, it is only I," said the worthy man, coming toward them. "Your servant, gentleman; are you off hunting, in spite of the new decrees? I don't complain of you; but do take care! though you have friends you have also enemies."

"Oh, as for that," said the elder Hauteserre, smiling, "God grant that our hunt may be lucky to-day,—if so, you will get your masters back again."

These words, to which events were destined to give a totally different meaning, earned a severe look from Laurence. The elder Simeuse was confident that Malin would restore Gondreville for an indemnity. These rash youths were determined to do exactly the contrary of what the Marquis de Chargeboeuf had advised. Robert, who shared these hopes, was thinking of them when he gave utterance to the fatal words.

"Not a word of this, old friend," said Michu to Beauvisage, waiting behind the others to lock the gate.

It was one of those fine mornings in March when the air is dry, the earth pure, the sky clear, and the atmosphere a contradiction to the leafless trees; the season was so mild that the eye caught glimpses here and there of verdure.

"We are seeking treasure when all the while you are the real treasure of our house, cousin," said the elder Simeuse, gaily.

Laurence was in front, with a cousin on each side of her. The d'Hauteserres were behind, followed by Michu. Gothard had gone forward to clear the way.

"Now that our fortune is restored, you must marry my brother," said the younger in a low voice. "He adores you; together you will be as rich as nobles ought to be in these days."

"No, give the whole fortune to him and I will marry you," said Laurence; "I am rich enough for two."

"So be it," cried the Marquis; "I will leave you, and find a wife worthy to be your sister."

"So you really love me less than I thought you did?" said Laurence looking at him with a sort of jealousy.

"No; I love you better than either of you love me," replied the marquis.

"And therefore you would sacrifice yourself?" asked Laurence with a glance full of momentary preference. The marquis was silent.

"Well, then, I shall think only of you, and that will be intolerable to my husband," exclaimed Laurence, impatient at his silence.

"How could I live without you?" said the younger twin to his brother.

"But, after all, you can't marry us both," said the marquis, replying to Laurence; "and the time has come," he continued, in the brusque tone of a man who is struck to the heart, "to make your decision."

He urged his horse in advance so that the d'Hauteserres might not overhear them. His brother's horse and Laurence's followed him. When they had put some distance between themselves and the rest of the party Laurence attempted to speak, but tears were at first her only language.

"I will enter a cloister," she said at last.

"And let the race of Cinq-Cygne end?" said the younger brother. "Instead of one unhappy man, would you make two? No, whichever of us must be your brother only, will resign himself to that fate. It is the knowledge that we are no longer poor that has brought us to explain ourselves," he added, glancing at the marquis. "If I am the one preferred, all this money is my brother's. If I am rejected, he will give it to me with the title of de Simeuse, for he must then take the name and title of Cinq-Cygne. Whichever way it ends, the loser will have a chance of recovery—but if he feels he must die of grief, he can enter the army and die in battle, not to sadden the happy household."

"We are true knights of the olden time, worthy of our fathers," cried the elder. "Speak, Laurence; decide between us."

"We cannot continue as we are," said the younger.
"Do not think, Laurence, that self-denial is without its joys," said the elder.

"My dear loved ones," said the girl, "I am unable to decide. I love you both as though you were one being--as your mother loved you. God will help us. I cannot choose. Let us put it to chance--but I make one condition."

"What is it?"

"Whichever one of you becomes my brother must stay with me until I suffer him to leave me. I wish to be sole judge of when to part."

"Yes, yes," said the brothers, without explaining to themselves her meaning.

"The first of you to whom Madame d'Hauteserre speaks to-night at table after the Benedicite, shall be my husband. But neither of you must practise fraud or induce her to answer a question."

"We will play fair," said the younger, smiling.

Each kissed her hand. The certainty of some decision which both could fancy favorable made them gay.

"Either way, dear Laurence, you create a Comte de Cinq-Cygne--"

"I believe," thought Michu, riding behind them, "that mademoiselle will not long be unmarried. How gay my masters are! If my mistress makes her choice I shall not leave; I must stay and see that wedding."

Just then a magpie flew suddenly before his face. Michu, superstitious like all primitive beings, fancied he heard the muffled tones of a death-knell. The day, however, began brightly enough for lovers, who rarely see magpies when together in the woods. Michu, armed with his plan, verified the spots; each gentleman had brought a pickaxe, and the money was soon found. The part of the forest where it was buried was quite wild, far from all paths or habitations, so that the cavalcade bearing the gold returned unseen. This proved to be a great misfortune. On their way from Cinq-Cygne to fetch the last two hundred thousand francs, the party, emboldened by success, took a more direct way than on their other trips. The path passed an opening from which the park of Gondreville could be seen.

"What is that?" cried Laurence, pointing to a column of blue flame.


Laurence, who knew all the by-ways of the forest, left the rest of the party and galloped towards the pavilion, Michu's old home. Though the building was closed and deserted, the iron gates were open, and traces of the recent passage of several horses struck Laurence instantly. The column of blue smoke was rising from a field in what was called the English park, where, as she supposed, they were burning brush.

"Ah! so you are concerned in it, too, are you, mademoiselle?" cried Violette, who came out of the park at top speed on his pony, and pulled up to meet Laurence. "But, of course, it is only a carnival joke? They surely won't kill him?"

"Who?"

"Your cousins wouldn't put him to death?"

"Death! whose death?"

"The senator's."

"You are crazy, Violette!"

"Well, what are you doing here, then?" he demanded.

At the idea of a danger which was threatening her cousins, Laurence turned her horse and galloped back to them, reaching the ground as the last sacks were filled.

"Quick, quick!" she cried. "I don't know what is going on, but let us get back to Cinq-Cygne."

While the happy party were employed in recovering the fortune saved by the old marquis, and guarded for so many years by Michu, an extraordinary scene was taking place in the chateau of Gondreville.

About two o'clock in the afternoon Malin and his friend Grevin were playing chess before the fire in the great salon on the ground-floor. Madame Grevin and Madame Marion were sitting on a sofa and talking together at a corner of the fireplace. All the servants had gone to see the masquerade, which had long been announced in the arrondissement. The family of the bailiff who had replaced Michu had gone too. The senator's valet and Violette were the only persons beside the family at the chateau. The porter, two gardeners, and their wives were on the place, but their lodge was at the entrance of the courtyards at the farther end of the avenue to Arcis, and the distance from there to the chateau is beyond the sound of a pistol-shot. Violette was waiting in the antechamber until the senator and Grevin could see him on business, to arrange a matter relating to his lease. At that moment five men, masked and gloved, who in height, manner, and bearing strongly resembled the Simeuse and d'Hauteserre brothers and Michu, rushed into the antechamber, seized and gagged the valet and Violette, and fastened them to their chairs in a side room. In spite of the rapidity with which this was done, Violette and the servant had time to utter one cry. It was heard in the salon. The two ladies thought it a cry of fear.

"Listen!" said Madame Grevin, "can there be robbers?"

"No, nonsense!" said Grevin, "only carnival cries; the masqueraders must be coming to pay us a visit."

This discussion gave time for the four strangers to close the doors towards the courtyards and to lock up Violette
and the valet. Madame Grevin, who was rather obstinate, insisted on knowing what the noise meant. She rose, left the room, and came face to face with the five masked men, who treated her as they had treated the farmer and the valet. Then they rushed into the salon, where the two strongest seized and gagged Malin, and carried him off into the park, while the three others remained behind to gag Madame Marion and Grevin and lash them to their armchairs. The whole affair did not take more than half an hour. The three unknown men, who were quickly rejoined by the two who had carried off the senator, then proceeded to ransack the chateau from cellar to garret. They opened all closets and doors, and sounded the walls; until five o'clock they were absolute masters of the place. By that time the valet had managed to loosen with his teeth the rope that bound Violette. Violette, able then to get the gag from his mouth, began to shout for help. Hearing the shouts the five men withdrew to the gardens, where they mounted horses closely resembling those at Cinq-Cygne and rode away, but not so rapidly that Violette was unable to catch sight of them. After releasing the valet, the two ladies, and the notary, Violette mounted his pony and rode after help. When he reached the pavilion he was amazed to see the gates open and Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne apparently on the watch.

Directly after the young countess had ridden off, Violette was overtaken by Grevin and the forester of the township of Gondreville, who had taken horses from the stables at the chateau. The porter’s wife was on her way to summon the gendarmerie from Arcis. Violette at once informed Grevin of his meeting with Laurence and the sudden flight of the daring girl, whose strong and decided character was known to all of them.

"She was keeping watch," said Violette.

"Is it possible that those Cinq-Cygne people have done this thing?" cried Grevin.

"Do you mean to say you didn’t recognize that stout Michu?" exclaimed Violette. "It was he who attacked me; I knew his fist. Besides, they rode the Cinq-Cygne horses."

Noticing the hoof-marks on the sand of the _rond-point_ and along the park road the notary stationed the forester at the gateway to see to the preservation of these precious traces until the justice of peace of Arcis (for whom he now sent Violette) could take note of them. He himself returned hastily to the chateau, where the lieutenant and sub-lieutenant of the Imperial gendarmerie at Arcis had arrived, accompanied by four men and a corporal. The lieutenant was the same man whose head Francois Michu had broken two years earlier, and who had heard from Corentin the name of his mischievous assailant. This man, whose name was Giguet (his brother was in the army, and became one of the finest colonels of artillery), was an extremely able officer of gendarmerie. Later he commanded the squadron of the Aube. The sub-lieutenant, named Welff, had formerly driven Corentin from Cinq-Cygne to the pavilion, and from the pavilion to Troyes. On the way, the spy had fully informed him as to what he called the trickery of Laurence and Michu. The two officers were therefore well inclined to show, and did show, great eagerness against the family at Cinq-Cygne.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CODE OF BRUMAIRE, YEAR IV.

Malin and Grevin had both, the latter working for the former, taken part in the construction of the Code called that of Brumaire, year IV., the judicial work of the National Convention, so-called, and promulgated by the Directory. Grevin knew its provisions thoroughly, and was able to apply them in this affair with terrible celerity, under a theory, now converted into a certainty, of the guilt of Michu and the Messieurs de Simeuse and d’Hauteserre. No one in these days, unless it be some antiquated magistrates, will remember this system of justice, which Napoleon was even then overthrowing by the promulgation of his own Codes, and by the institution of his magistracy under the form in which it now rules France.

The Code of Brumaire, year IV., gave to the director of the jury of the department the duty of discovering, indicting, and prosecuting the persons guilty of the delinquency committed at Gondreville. Remark, by the way, that the Convention had eliminated from its judicial vocabulary the word "crime"; _delinquencies_ and _misdemeanors_ were alone admitted; and these were punished with fines, imprisonment, and penalties "afflictive or infamous." Death was an afflictive punishment. But the penalty of death was to be done away with after the restoration of peace, and twenty-four years of hard labor were to take its place. Thus the Convention estimated twenty-four years of hard labor as the equivalent of death. What therefore can be said for a code which inflicts the punishment of hard labor for life? The system then in process of preparation by the Napoleonic Council of State suppressed the function of the directors of juries, which united many enormous powers. In relation to the discovery of delinquencies and their prosecution the director of the jury was, in fact, agent of police, public prosecutor, municipal judge, and the court itself. His proceedings and his indictments were, however, submitted for signature to a commissioner of the executive power and to the verdict of eight jurymen, before whom he laid the facts of the case, and who examined the witnesses and the accused and rendered the preliminary verdict, called the indictment. The director was, however, in a position to exercise such influence over the jurymen, who met in his private office, that they could not well avoid agreeing with him. These jurymen were called the jury of indictment. There were others who formed the...
The countess, evidently on guard, at the pavilion. From such a combination of facts, therefore, was not robbery. More than all, when Violette had followed the tracks of the horses as far as the _rond-point_, he had found the countess, evidently on guard, at the pavilion. The locks of none of the opened closets had shown that they knew what they wanted to find and where to find it. The assailants seemed to have blundered in their search; they had gone through the house in a confident way which resembled Michu. The color of the hair and whiskers and the thick-set figure of the man made the mask he wore useless. Besides, who but Michu could have opened the iron gates of the park with a key? The present bailiff and his wife, Violette, and Madame Marion declared that they had recognized among the five masked men one who exactly resembled Michu. The color of the hair and whiskers and the thick-set figure of the man made the mask he wore useless. Besides, who but Michu could have opened the iron gates of the park with a key? The present bailiff and his wife, now returned from the masquerade, deposed to have locked both gates before leaving the pavilion. The gates when examined showed no sign of being forced.

"When we turned him off he must have taken some duplicate keys with him," remarked Grevin. "No doubt he has been meditating a desperate step, for he has lately sold his whole property, and he received the money for it in my office day before yesterday."

"The others have followed his lead!" exclaimed Lechesneau, struck with the circumstances. "He has been their evil genius."

Moreover, who could know as well as the Messieurs de Simeuse the ins and outs of the chateau. None of the assailants seemed to have blundered in their search; they had gone through the house in a confident way which showed that they knew what they wanted to find and where to find it. The locks of none of the opened closets had been forced; therefore the delinquents had keys. Strange to say, however, nothing had been taken; the motive, therefore, was not robbery. More than all, when Violette had followed the tracks of the horses as far as the _rond-point_, he had found the countess, evidently on guard, at the pavilion. From such a combination of facts and
depositions arose a presumption as to the guilt of the Messieurs de Simeuse, d'Hauteserre, and Michu, which would have been strong to unprejudiced minds, and to the director of the jury had the force of certainty. What were they likely to do to the future Comte de Gondreville? Did they mean to force him to make over the estate for which Michu declared in 1799 he had the money to pay?

But there was another aspect of the cast to the knowing criminal lawyer. He asked himself what could be the object of the careful search made of the chateau. If revenge were at the bottom of the matter, the assailants would have killed the senator. Perhaps he had been killed and buried. The abduction, however, seemed to point to imprisonment. But why keep their victim imprisoned after searching the castle? It was folly to suppose that the abduction of a dignitary of the Empire could long remain secret. The publicity of the matter would prevent any benefit from it.

To these suggestions Pigoult replied that justice was never able to make out all the motives of scoundrels. In every criminal case there were obscurities, he said, between the judge and the guilty person; conscience had depths into which no human mind could enter unless by the confession of the criminal.

Grevin and Lechesneau nodded their assent, without, however, relaxing their determination to see to the bottom of the present mystery.

"The Emperor pardoned those young men," said Pigoult to Grevin. "He removed their names from the list of _émigrés_, though they certainly took part in that last conspiracy against him."

Lechesneau made no delay in sending his whole force of gendarmerie to the forest and to the valley of Cinq-Cygne; telling Giguet to take with him the justice of peace, who, according to the terms of the Code, would then become an auxiliary police-officer. He ordered them to make all preliminary inquiries in the township of Cinq-Cygne, and to take testimony if necessary; and to save time, he dictated and signed a warrant for the arrest of Michu, against whom the charge was evident on the positive testimony of Violette. After the departure of the gendarmes Lechesneau returned to the important question of issuing warrants for the arrest of the Simeuse and d'Hauteserre brothers. According to the Code these warrants would have to contain the charges against the delinquents.

Giguet and the justice of peace rode so rapidly to Cinq-Cygne that they met Laurence's servants returning from the festivities at Troyes. Stopped, and taken before the mayor where they were interrogated, they all stated, being ignorant of the importance of the answer, that their mistress had given them permission to spend the whole day at Troyes. To a question put by the justice of the peace, each replied that Mademoiselle had offered them the amusement which they had not thought of asking for. This testimony seemed so important to the justice of the peace that he sent back a messenger to Gondreville to advise Lechesneau to proceed himself to Cinq-Cygne and arrest the four gentlemen, while he went to Michu's farm, so that the five arrests might be made simultaneously.

This new element was so convincing that Lechesneau started at once for Cinq-Cygne. He knew well what pleasure would be felt in Troyes at such proceedings against the old nobles, the enemies of the people, now become the enemies of the Emperor. In such circumstances a magistrate is very apt to take mere presumptive evidence for actual proof. Nevertheless, on his way from Gondreville to Cinq-Cygne, in the senator's own carriage, it did occur to Lechesneau (who would certainly have made a fine magistrate had it not been for his love-affair, and the Emperor's sudden morality to which he owed his disgrace) to think the audacity of the young men and Michu a piece of folly which was not in keeping with what he knew of the judgment and character of Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. He imagined in his own mind some other motives for the deed than the restitution of Gondreville. In all things, even in the magistracy, there is what may be called the conscience of a calling. Lechesneau's perplexities came from this conscience, which all men put into the proper performance of the duties they like--scientific men into science, artists into art, judges into the rendering of justice. Perhaps for this reason judges are really greater safeguards for persons accused of wrong-doing than are juries. A magistrate relies only on reason and its laws; juries are floated to and fro by the waves of sentiment. The director of the jury accordingly set several questions before his mind, resolving to find in their solution satisfactory reasons for making the arrests.

Though the news of the abduction was already agitating the town of Troyes, it was still unknown at Arcis, where the inhabitants were supposing when the messenger arrived to summon the gendarmes. No one, of course, knew it in the village of Cinq-Cygne, the valley and the chateau of which were now, for the second time, encircled by gendarmes.

Laurence had only to tell Marthe, Catherine, and the Durieus not to leave the chateau, to be strictly obeyed. After each trip to fetch the gold, the horses were fastened in the covered way opposite to the breach in the moat, and from there Robert and Michu, the strongest of the party, carried the sacks through the breach to a cellar under the staircase in the tower called Mademoiselle's. Reaching the chateau with the last load about half-past five o'clock, the four gentlemen and Michu proceeded to bury the treasure in the floor of the cellar and then to wall up the entrance. Michu took charge of the matter with Gothard to help him; the lad was sent to the farm for some sacks of plaster left over when the new buildings were put up, and Marthe went with him to show him where they were. Michu, very
hungry, made such haste that by half-past seven o'clock the work was done; and he started for home at a quick pace to stop Gothard, who had been sent for another sack of plaster which he thought he might want. The farm was already watched by the forester of Cinq-Cygne, the justice of peace, his clerk and four gendarmes who, however, kept out of sight and allowed him to enter the house without seeing them.

Michu saw Gothard with the sack on his shoulder and called to him from a distance: "It is all finished, my lad; take that back and stay and dine with us."

Michu, his face perspiring, his clothes soiled with plaster and covered with fragments of muddy stone from the breach, reached home joyfully and entered the kitchen where Marthe and her mother were serving the soup in expectation of his coming.

Just as Michu was turning the faucet of the water-pipe intending to wash his hands, the justice of peace entered the house accompanied by his clerk and the forester.

"What have you come for, Monsieur Pigoult?" asked Michu.

"In the name of the Emperor and the laws, I arrest you," replied the justice.

The three gendarmes entered the kitchen leading Gothard. Seeing the silver lace on their hats Marthe and her mother looked at each other in terror.

"Pooh! why?" asked Michu, who sat down at the table and called to his wife, "Give me something to eat; I'm famished."

"You know why as well as we do," said the justice, making a sign to his clerk to begin the _proces-verbal_ and exhibiting the warrant of arrest.

"Well, well, Gothard, you needn't stare so," said Michu. "Do you want some dinner, yes or no? Let them write down their nonsense."

"You admit, of course, the condition of your clothes?" said the justice of peace; "and you can't deny the words you said just now to Gothard?"

Michu, supplied with food by his wife, who was amazed at his coolness, was eating with the avidity of a hungry man. He made no answer to the justice, for his mouth was full and his heart innocent. Gothard's appetite was destroyed by fear.

"Look here," said the forester, going up to Michu and whispering in his ear: "What have you done with the senator? You had better make a clean breast of it, for if we are to believe these people it is a matter of life or death to you."

"Good God!" cried Marthe, who overheard the last words and fell into a chair as if annihilated.

"Violette must have played us some infamous trick," cried Michu, recollecting what Laurence had said in the forest.

"Ha! so you do know that Violette saw you?" said the justice of peace.

Michu bit his lips and resolved to say no more. Gothard imitated him. Seeing the uselessness of all attempts to make them talk, and knowing what the neighborhood chose to call Michu's perversity, the justice ordered the gendarmes to bind his hands and those of Gothard, and take them both to the chateau, whither he now went himself to rejoin the director of the jury.

CHAPTER XIV
THE ARRESTS

The four young men and Laurence were so hungry and the dinner so acceptable that they would not delay it by changing their dress. They entered the salon, she in her riding-habit, they in their white leather breeches, high-top boots and green-cloth jackets, where they found Monsieur d'Hauteserre and his wife, not a little uneasy at their long absence. The goodman had noticed their goings and comings, and, above all, their evident distrust of him, for Laurence had been unable to get rid of him as she had of her servants. Once when his own sons evidently avoided making any reply to his questions, he went to his wife and said, "I am afraid that Laurence may still get us into trouble!"

"What sort of game did you hunt to-day?" said Madame d'Hauteserre to Laurence.

"Ah!" replied the young girl, laughing, "you'll hear some day what a strange hunt your sons have joined in to-day."

Though said in jest the words made the old lady tremble. Catherine entered to announce dinner. Laurence took Monsieur d'Hauteserre's arm, smiling for a moment at the necessity she thus forced upon her cousins to offer an arm to Madame d'Hauteserre, who, according to agreement, was now to be the arbiter of their fate.

The Marquis de Simeuse took in Madame d'Hauteserre. The situation was so momentous that after the Benedicite was said Laurence and the young men trembled from the violent palpitation of their hearts. Madame d'Hauteserre, who carved, was struck by the anxiety on the faces of the Simeuse brothers and the great alteration that was noticeable in Laurence's lamb-like features.
"Something extraordinary is going on, I am sure of it!" she exclaimed, looking at all of them.

"To whom are you speaking?" asked Laurence.

"To all of you," said the old lady.

"As for me, mother," said Robert, "I am frightfully hungry, and that is not extraordinary."

Madame d'Hauteserre, still troubled, offered the Marquis de Simeuse a plate intended for his brother.

"I am like your mother," she said. "I don't know you apart even by your cravats. I thought I was helping your brother."

"You have helped me better than you thought for," said the youngest, turning pale; "you have made him Comte de Cinq-Cygne."

"What! do you mean to tell me the countess has made her choice?" cried Madame d'Hauteserre.

"No," said Laurence; "we left the decision to fate and you are its instrument."

She told of the agreement made that morning. The elder Simeuse, watching the increasing pallor of his brother's face, was momentarily on the point of crying out, "Marry her; I will go away and die!" Just then, as the dessert was being served, all present heard raps upon the window of the dining-room on the garden side. The eldest d'Hauteserre opened it and gave entrance to the abbe, whose breeches were torn in climbing over the walls of the park.

"Fly! they are coming to arrest you," he cried.

"Why?"

"I don't know yet; but there's a warrant against you."

The words were greeted with general laughter.

"We are innocent," said the young men.

"Innocent or guilty," said the abbe, "mount your horses and make for the frontier. There you can prove your innocence. You could overcome a sentence by default; you will never overcome a sentence rendered by popular passion and instigated by prejudice. Remember the words of President de Harlay, 'If I were accused of carrying off the towers of Notre-Dame the first thing I should do would be to run away.'"

"To run away would be to admit we were guilty," said the Marquis de Simeuse.

"Don't do it!" cried Laurence.

"Always the same sublime folly!" exclaimed the abbe, in despair. "If I had the power of God I would carry you away. But if I am found here in this state they will turn my visit against you, and against me too; therefore I leave you by the way I came. Consider my advice; you have still time. The gendarmes have not yet thought of the wall which adjoins the parsonage; but you are hemmed in on the other sides."

The sound of many feet and the jangle of the sabres of the gendarmerie echoed through the courtyard and reached the dining-room a few moments after the departure of the poor abbe, whose advice had met the same fate as that of the Marquis de Chargeboeuf.

"Our twin existence," said the younger Simeuse, speaking to Laurence, "is an anomaly--our love for you is anomalous; it is that very quality which won your heart. Possibly, the reason why all twins known to us in history have been unfortunate is that the laws of nature are subverted in them. In our case, see how persistently an evil fate follows us! your decision is now postponed."

Laurence was stupefied; the fatal words of the director of the jury hummed in her ears:--"In the name of the Emperor and the laws, I arrest the Sieurs Paul-Marie and Marie-Paul Simeuse, Adrien and Robert d'Hauteserre--These gentlemen," he added, addressing the men who accompanied him and pointing to the mud on the clothing of the prisoners, "cannot deny that they have spent the greater part of this day on horseback."

"Of what are they accused?" asked Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, haughtily.

"Don't you mean to arrest Mademoiselle?" said Giguet.

"I shall leave her at liberty under bail, until I can carefully examine the charges against her," replied the director.

The mayor offered bail, asking the countess to merely give her word of honor that she would not escape. Laurence blasted him with a look which was won your heart. Possibly, the reason why all twins known to us in history have been unfortunate is that the laws of nature are subverted in them. In our case, see how persistently an evil fate follows us! your decision is now postponed."

Lechesneau, who at first was much struck by the evident tranquillity in which the whole party were dining, now returned to his former opinion of their guilt as he noticed the stupefaction of the old people and the evident anxiety
of Laurence, who was seeking to discover the nature of the trap which was set for them.

"Gentlemen," he said, politely, "you are too well-bred to make a useless resistance; follow me to the stables, where I must, in your presence, have the shoes of your horses taken off; they afford important proof of either guilt or innocence. Come, too, mademoiselle."

The blacksmith of Cinq-Cygne and his assistant had been summoned by Lechesneau as experts. While the operation at the stable was going on the justice of peace brought in Gothard and Michu. The work of detaching the shoes of each horse, putting them together and ticketing them, so as to compare them with the hoof-prints in the park, took time. Lechesneau, notified of the arrival of Pigoult, left the prisoners with the gendarmes and returned to the dining-room to dictate the indictment. The justice of peace called his attention to the condition of Michu's clothes and related the circumstances of his arrest.

"They must have killed the senator and plastered the body up in some wall," said Pigoult.

"I begin to fear it," answered Lechesneau. "Where did you carry that plaster?" he said to Gothard.

The boy began to cry.

"The law frightens him," said Michu, whose eyes were darting flames like those of a lion in the toils.

The servants, who had been detained at the village by order of the mayor, now arrived and filled the antechamber where Catherine and Gothard were weeping. To all the questions of the director of the jury and the justice of peace Gothard replied by sobs; and by dint of weeping he brought on a species of convulsion which alarmed them so much that they let him alone. The little scamp, perceiving that he was no longer watched, looked at Michu with a grin, and Michu signified his approval by a glance. Lechesneau left the justice of peace and returned to the stables.

"Monsieur," said Madame d'Hauteserre, at last, addressing Pigoult; "can you explain these arrests?"

"The gentlemen are accused of abducting the senator by armed force and keeping him a prisoner; for we do not think they have murdered him—in spite of appearances," replied Pigoult.

"What penalties are attached to the crime?" asked Monsieur d'Hauteserre.

"Well, as the old law continues in force, and they are not amenable under the Code, the penalty is death," replied the justice.

"Death!" cried Madame d'Hauteserre, fainting away.

The abbe now came in with his sister, who stopped to speak to Catherine and Madame Durieu.

"We haven't even seen your cursed senator!" said Michu.

"Madame Marion, Madame Grevin, Monsieur Grevin, the senator's valet, and Violette all tell another tale," replied Pigoult, with the sour smile of magisterial conviction.

"I don't understand a thing about it," said Michu, dumbfounded by his reply, and beginning now to believe that his masters and himself were entangled in some plot which had been laid against them.

Just then the party from the stables returned. Laurence went up to Madame d'Hauteserre, who recovered her senses enough to say: "The penalty is death!"

"Death!" repeated Laurence, looking at the four gentlemen.

The word excited a general terror, of which Giguet, formerly instructed by Corentin, took immediate advantage.

"Everything can be arranged," he said, drawing the Marquis de Simeuse into a corner of the dining-room. "Perhaps after all it is nothing but a joke; you've been a soldier and soldiers understand each other. Tell me, what have you really done with the senator? If you have killed him—why, that's the end of it! But if you have only locked him up, release him, for you see for yourself your game is balked. Do this and I am certain the director of the jury and the senator himself will drop the matter."

"We know absolutely nothing about it," said the marquis.

"If you take that tone the matter is likely to go far," replied the lieutenant.

"Dear cousin," said the Marquis de Simeuse, "we are forced to go to prison; but do not be uneasy; we shall return in a few hours, for there is some misunderstanding in all this which can be explained."

"I hope so, for your sakes, gentlemen," said the magistrate, signing to the gendarmes to remove the four gentlemen, Michu, and Gothard. "Don't take them to Troyes; keep them in your guardhouse at Arcis," he said to the lieutenant; "they must be present to-morrow, at daybreak, when we compare the shoes of their horses with the hoof-prints in the park."

Lechesneau and Pigoult did not follow until they had closely questioned Catherine, Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, and Laurence. The Durieus, Catherine, and Marthe declared they had only seen their masters at breakfast-time; Monsieur d'Hauteserre said he had seen them at three o'clock.

When, at midnight, Laurence found herself alone with Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, the abbe and his sister, and without the four young men who for the last eighteen months had been the life of the chateau and the love and joy of her own life, she fell into a gloomy silence which no one present dared to break. No affliction was ever
deeper or more complete than hers. At last a deep sigh broke the stillness, and all eyes turned towards the sound.

"Marthe, forgotten in a corner, rose, exclaiming, "Death! They will kill them in spite of their innocence!"

"Mademoiselle, what is the matter with you?" said the abbe.

Laurence left the room without replying. She needed solitude to recover strength in presence of this terrible unforeseen disaster.

CHAPTER XV
DOUBTS AND FEARS OF COUNSEL

At a distance of thirty-four years, during which three great revolutions have taken place, none but elderly persons can recall the immense excitement produced in Europe by the abduction of a senator of the French Empire. No trial, if we except that of Trumeaux, the grocer of the Place Saint-Michel, and that of the widow Morin, under the Empire; those of Fualdes and de Castaing, under the Restoration; those of Madame Lafarge and Fieschi, under the present government, ever roused so much curiosity or so deep an interest as that of the four young men accused of abducting Malin. Such an attack against a member of his Senate excited the wrath of the Emperor, who was told of the arrest of the delinquents almost at the moment when he first heard of the crime and the negative results of the inquiries. The forest, searched throughout, the department of the Aube, ransacked from end to end, gave not the slightest indication of the passage of the Comte de Gondreville nor of his imprisonment. Napoleon sent for the chief justice, who, after obtaining certain information from the ministry of police, explained to his Majesty the position of Malin in regard to the Simeuse brothers and the Gondreville estate. The Emperor, at that time pre-occupied with serious matters, considered the affair explained by these anterior facts.

"Those young men are fools," he said. "A lawyer like Malin will escape any deed they may force him to sign under violence. Watch those nobles, and discover the means they take to set the Comte de Gondreville at liberty."

He ordered the affair to be conducted with the utmost celerity, regarding it as an attack on his own institutions, a fatal example of resistance to the results of the Revolution, an effort to open the great question of the sales of "national property," and a hindrance to that fusion of parties which was the constant object of his home policy. Besides all this, he thought himself tricked by these young nobles, who had given him their promise to live peaceably.

"Fouche's prediction has come true," he cried, remembering the words uttered two years earlier by his present minister of police, who said them under the impressions conveyed to him by Corentin's report as to the character and designs of Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne.

It is impossible for persons living under a constitutional government, where no one really cares for that cold and thankless, blind, deaf Thing called public interest, to imagine the zeal which a mere word of the Emperor was able to inspire in his political or administrative machine. That powerful will seemed to impress itself as much upon things as upon men. His decision once uttered, the Emperor, overtaken by the coalition of 1806, forgot the whole matter. He thought only of new battles to fight, and his mind was occupied in massing his regiments to strike the great blow at the heart of the Prussian monarchy. His desire for prompt justice in the present case found powerful assistance in the great uncertainty which affected the position of all magistrates of the Empire. Just at this time Cambaceres, as arch-chancellor, and Regnier, chief justice, were preparing to organize _tribunaux de premiere instance_ (lower civil courts), imperial courts, and a court of appeal or supreme court. They were agitating the question of a legal garb or costume; to which Napoleon attached, and very justly, so much importance in all official stations; and they were also inquiring into the character of the persons composing the magistracy. Naturally, therefore, the officials of the department of the Aube considered they could have no better recommendation than to give proofs of their zeal in the matter of the abduction of the Comte de Gondreville. Napoleon's suppositions became certainties to these courtiers and also to the populace.

Peace still reigned on the continent; admiration for the Emperor was unanimous in France; he cajoled all interests, persons, vanities, and things, in short, everything, even memories. This attack, therefore, directed against his senator, seemed in the eyes of all an assault upon the public welfare. The luckless and innocent gentlemen were the objects of general opprobrium. A few nobles living quietly on their estates deplored the affair among themselves but dared not open their lips; in fact, how was it possible for them to oppose the current of public opinion. Throughout the department the deaths of the eleven persons killed by the Simeuse brothers in 1792 from the windows of the hotel Cinq-Cygne were brought up against them. It was feared that other returned and now emboldened _emigres_ might follow this example of violence against those who had bought their estates from the "national domain," as a method of protesting against what they might call an unjust spoliation.

The unfortunate young nobles were therefore considered as robbers, brigands, murderers; and their connection with Michu was particularly fatal to them. Michu, who was declared, either he or his father-in-law, to have cut off all the heads that fell under the Terror in that department, was made the subject of ridiculous tales. The exasperation of the public mind was all the more intense because nearly all the functionaries of the department owed their offices
to Malin. No generous voice uplifted itself against the verdict of the public. Besides all this, the accused had no legal means with which to combat prejudice; for the Code of Brumaire, year IV., giving as it did both the prosecution of a charge and the verdict upon it into the hands of a jury, deprived the accused of the vast protection of an appeal against legal suspicion.

The day after the arrest all the inhabitants of the chateau of Cinq-Cygne, both masters and servants, were summoned to appear before the prosecuting jury. Cinq-Cygne was left in charge of a farmer, under the supervision of the abbe and his sister who moved into it. Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, with Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, went to Troyes and occupied a small house belonging to Durieu in one of the long and wide faubourgs which lead from the little town. Laurence's heart was wrung when she at last comprehended the temper of the populace, the malignity of the bourgeoisie, and the hostility of the administration, from the many little events which happened to them as relatives of prisoners accused of criminal wrong-doing and about to be judged in a provincial town. Instead of hearing encouraging or compassionate words they heard only speeches which called for vengeance; proofs of hatred surrounded them in place of the strict politeness or the reserve required by mere decency; but above all they were conscious of an isolation which every mind must feel, but more particularly those which are made distrustful by misfortune.

Laurence, who had recovered her vigor of mind, relied upon the innocence of the accused, and despised the community too much to be frightened by the stern and silent disapproval they met with everywhere. She sustained the courage of Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, all the while thinking of the judicial struggle which was now being hurried on. She was, however, to receive a blow she little expected, which, undoubtedly, diminished her courage.

In the midst of this great disaster, at the moment when this afflicted family were made to feel themselves, as it were, in a desert, a man suddenly became exalted in Laurence's eyes and showed the full beauty of his character. The day after the indictment was found by the jury, and the prisoners were finally committed for trial, the Marquis de Chargeboeuf courageously appeared, still in the same old calèche, to support and protect his young cousin. Foreseeing the haste with which the law would be administered, this chief of a great family had already gone to Paris and secured the services of the most able as well as the most honest lawyer of the old school, named Bordin, who was for ten years counsel of the nobility in Paris, and was ultimately succeeded by the celebrated Derville. This excellent lawyer chose for his assistant the grandson of a former president of the parliament of Normandy, whose studies had been made under his tuition. This young lawyer, who was destined to be appointed deputy-attorney-general in Paris after the conclusion of the present trial, became eventually one of the most celebrated of French magistrates. Monsieur de Grandville, for that was his name, accepted the defence of the four young men, being glad of an opportunity to make his first appearance as an advocate with distinction.

The old marquis, alarmed at the ravages which troubles had wrought in Laurence's appearance, was charmingly kind and considerate. He made no allusion to his neglected advice; he presented Bordin as an oracle whose counsel must be followed to the letter, and young de Grandville as a defender in whom the utmost confidence might be placed.

Laurence held out her hand to the kind old man, and pressed his with an eagerness which delighted him.

"You were right," she said.

"Will you now take my advice?" he asked.

The young countess bowed her head in assent, as did Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre.

"Well, then, come to my house; it is in the middle of town, close to the courthouse. You and your lawyers will be better off there than here, where you are crowded and too far from the field of battle. Here, you would have to cross the town twice a day."

Laurence, accepted, and the old man took her with Madame d'Hauteserre to his house, which became the home of the Cinq-Cygne household and the lawyers of the defence during the whole time the trial lasted. After dinner, when the doors were closed, Bordin made Laurence relate every circumstance of the affair, entreating her to omit nothing, not the most trifling detail. Though many of the facts had already been told to him and his young assistant by the marquis on their journey from Paris to Troyes, Bordin listened, his feet on the fender, without obtruding himself into the recital. The young lawyer, however, could not help being divided between his admiration for Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, and the attention he was bound to give to the facts of his case.

"Is that really all?" asked Bordin when Laurence had related the events of the drama just as the present narrative has given them up to the present time.

"Yes," she answered.

Profound silence reigned for several minutes in the salon of the Chargeboeuf mansion where this scene took place,—one of the most important which occur in life. All cases are judged by the counsellors engaged in them, just as the death or life or a patient is foreseen by a physician, before the final struggle which the one sustains against
nature, the other against law. Laurence, Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, and the marquis sat with their eyes fixed on the swarthy and deeply pitted face of the old lawyer, who was now to pronounce the words of life or death. Monsieur d'Hauteserre wiped the sweat from his brow. Laurence looked at the younger man and noted his saddened face.

"Well, my dear Bordin?" said the marquis at last, holding out his snuffbox, from which the old lawyer took a pinch in an absent-minded way.

Bordin rubbed the calf of his leg, covered with thick stockings of black raw silk, for he always wore black cloth breeches and a coat made somewhat in the shape of those which are now termed _a la Francaise_. He cast his shrewd eyes upon his clients with an anxious expression, the effect of which was icy.

"Must I analyze all that?" he said; "am I to speak frankly?"

"Yes; go on, monsieur," said Laurence.

"All that you have innocently done can be converted into proof against you," said the old lawyer. "We cannot save your friends; we can only reduce the penalty. The sale which you induced Michu to make of his property will be taken as evident proof of your criminal intentions against the senator. You sent your servants to Troyes so that you might be alone; that is all the more plausible because it is actually true. The elder d'Hauteserre made an unfortunate speech to Beauvisage, which will be your ruin. You yourself, mademoiselle, made another in your own courtyard, which proves that you have long shown ill-will to the possessor of Gondreville. Besides, you were at the gate of the _rond-point_ apparently on the watch, about the time when the abduction took place; if they have not arrested you, it is solely because they fear to bring a sentimental element into the affair."

"The case cannot be successfully defended," said Monsieur de Grandville.

"The less so," continued Bordin, "because we cannot tell the whole truth. Michu and the Messieurs de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre must hold to the assertion that you merely went for an excursion into the forest and returned to Cinq-Cygne for luncheon. Allowing that we can show you were in the house at three o'clock (the exact hour at which the attack was made), who are our witnesses? Marthe, the wife of one of the accused, the Durieus, and Catherine, your own servants, and Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre, father and mother of two of the accused. Such testimony is valueless; the law does not admit it against you, and commonsense rejects it when given in your favor. If, on the other hand, you were to say you went to the forest to recover eleven hundred thousand francs in gold, you would send the accused to the galleys as robbers. Judge, jury, audience, and the whole of France would believe that you took that gold from Gondreville, and abducted the senator that you mightransack his house. The accusation as it now stands is not wholly clear, but tell the truth about the matter and it would become as plain as day; the jury would declare that the robbery explained the mysterious features,--for in these days, you must remember, a royalist means a thief. This very case is welcomed as a legitimate political vengeance. The prisoners are now in danger of the death penalty; but that is not dishonoring under some circumstances. Whereas, if they can be proved to have stolen money, which can never be made to seem excusable, you lose all benefit of whatever interest may attach to persons condemned to death for other crimes. If, at the first, you had shown the hiding-places of the treasure, the plan of the forest, the tubes in which the gold was buried, and the gold itself, as an explanation of your day's work, it is possible you might have been believed by an impartial magistrate, but as it is we must be silent. God grant that none of the prisoners may reveal the truth and compromise the defence; if they do, we must rely on our cross-examinations."

Laurence wrung her hands in despair and raised her eyes to heaven with a despondent look, for she saw at last in all its depths the gulf into which her cousins had fallen. The marquis and the young lawyer agreed with the dreadful view of Bordin. Old d'Hauteserre wept.

"Ah! why did they not listen to the Abbe Goujet and fly!" cried Madame d'Hauteserre, exasperated.

"If they could have escaped, and you prevented them," said Bordin, "you have killed them yourselves. Judgment by default gains time; time enables the innocent to clear themselves. This is the most mysterious case I have ever known in my life, in the course of which I have certainly seen and known many strange things."

"It is inexplicable to every one, even to us," said Monsieur de Grandville. "If the prisoners are innocent some one else has committed the crime. Five persons do not come to a place as if by enchantment, obtain five horses shod precisely like those of the accused, imitate the appearance of some of them, and put Malin apparently underground for the sole purpose of casting suspicion on Michu and the four gentlemen. The unknown guilty parties must have had some strong reason for wearing the skin, as it were, of five innocent men. To discover them, even to get upon their traces, we need as much power as the government itself, as many agents and as many eyes as there are townsiphs in a radius of fifty miles."

"The thing is impossible," said Bordin. "There's no use thinking of it. Since society invented law it has never found a way to give an innocent prisoner an equal chance against a magistrate who is pre-disposed against him. Law is not bilateral. The defence, without spies or police, cannot call social power to the rescue of its innocent clients."
Innocence has nothing on her side but reason, and reasoning which may strike a judge is often powerless on the narrow minds of jurymen. The whole department is against you. The eight jurors who have signed the indictment are each and all purchasers of national domain. Among the trial jurors we are certain to have some who have either sold or bought the same property. In short, we can get nothing but a Malin jury. You must therefore set up a consistent defence, hold fast to it, and perish in your innocence. You will certainly be condemned. But there's a court of appeal; we will go there and try to remain there as long as possible. If in the mean time we can collect proofs in your favor you must apply for pardon. That's the anatomy of the business, and my advice. If we triumph (for everything is possible in law) it will be a miracle; but your advocate Monsieur de Grandville is the most likely man among all I know to produce that miracle, and I'll do my best to help him."

"The senator has the key to the mystery," said Monsieur de Grandville; "for a man knows his enemies and why they are so. Here we find him leaving Paris at the close of the winter, coming to Gondreville alone, shutting himself up with his notary, and delivering himself over, as one might say, to five men who seize him."

"Certainly," said Bordin, "his conduct seems inexplicable. But how could we, in the face of a hostile community, become accusers when we ourselves are the accused? We should need the help and good-will of the government and a thousand times more proof than is wanted in ordinary circumstances. I am convinced there was premeditation, and subtle premeditation, on the part of our mysterious adversaries, who must have known the situation of Michu and the Messieurs de Simeuse towards Malin. Not to utter one word; not to steal one thing! --remarkable prudence! I see something very different from ordinary evil-doers behind those masks. But what would be the use of saying so to the sort of jurors we shall have to face?"

This insight into hidden matters which gives such power to certain lawyers and certain magistrates astonished and confounded Laurence; her heart was wrung by that inexorable logic.

"Out of every hundred criminal cases," continued Bordin, "there are not ten where the law really lays bare the truth to its full extent; and there is perhaps a good third in which the truth is never brought to light at all. Yours is one of those cases which are inexplicable to all parties, to accused and accusers, to the law and to the public. As for the Emperor, he has other fish to fry than to consider the case of these gentlemen, supposing even that they had not conspired against him. But who the devil_is_Malin's enemy? and what has really been done with him?"

Bordin and Monsieur de Grandville looked at each other; they seemed in doubt as to Laurence's veracity. This evident suspicion was the most cutting of all the many pangs the girl had suffered in the affair; and she turned upon the lawyers a look which effectually put an end to their distrust.

The next day the indictment was handed over to the defence, and the lawyers were then enabled to communicate with the prisoners. Bordin informed the family that the six accused men were "well supported," --using a professional term.

"Monsieur de Grandville will defend Michu," said Bordin.

"Michu!" exclaimed the Marquis de Chargeboeuf, amazed at the change.

"He is the pivot of the affair--the danger lies there," replied the old lawyer.

"If he is more in danger than the others, I think that is just," cried Laurence.

"We see certain chances," said Monsieur de Grandville, "and we shall study them carefully. If we are able to save these gentlemen it will be because Monsieur d'Hauteserre ordered Michu to repair one of the stone posts in the covered way, and also because a wolf has been seen in the forest; in a criminal court everything depends on discussions, and discussions often turn on trivial matters which then become of immense importance."

Laurence sank into that inward dejection which humiliates the soul of all thoughtful and energetic persons when the uselessness of thought and action is made manifest to them. It was no longer a matter of overthrowing a usurper, or of coming to the help of devoted friends, --fanatical sympathies wrapped in a shroud of mystery. She now saw all social forces full-armed against her cousins and herself. There was no taking a prison by assault with her own hands, or of coming to the help of devoted friends, --fanatical sympathies wrapped in a shroud of mystery. She now saw all social forces full-armed against her cousins and herself. There was no taking a prison by assault with her own hands, or bought the same property. In short, we can get nothing but a Malin jury. You must therefore set up a consistent defence, hold fast to it, and perish in your innocence. You will certainly be condemned. But there's a court of appeal; we will go there and try to remain there as long as possible. If in the mean time we can collect proofs in your favor you must apply for pardon. That's the anatomy of the business, and my advice. If we triumph (for everything is possible in law) it will be a miracle; but your advocate Monsieur de Grandville is the most likely man among all I know to produce that miracle, and I'll do my best to help him."

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CHAPTER XVI
MARTHE INVEIGLED

While the masters of Cinq-Cygne were waiting at Troyes for the opening of the trial before the Criminal court and vainly soliciting permission to see the prisoners, an event of the utmost importance had taken place at the chateau.

Marthe returned to Cinq-Cygne as soon as she had given her testimony before the indicting jury. This testimony was so insignificant that it was not thought necessary to summon her before the Criminal court. Like all persons of extreme sensibility, the poor woman sat silent in the salon, where she kept company with Mademoiselle Goujet, in a pitiably state of stupefaction. To her, as to the abbe, and indeed to all others who did not know how the accused had been employed on that day, their innocence seemed doubtful. There were moments when Marthe believed that Michu and his masters and Laurence had executed vengeance on the senator. The unhappy woman now knew Michu's devotion well enough to be certain that he was the one who would be most in danger, not only because of his antecedents, but because of the part he was sure to have taken in the execution of the scheme.

The Abbe Goujet and his sister and Marthe were bewildered among the possibilities to which this opinion gave rise; and yet, in the process of thinking them over, their minds insensibly took hold of them in a certain way. The absolute doubt which Descartes demands can no more exist in the brain of a man than a vacuum can exist in nature, and the mental operation required to produce it would, like the effect of a pneumatic machine, be exceptional and anomalous. Whatever a case may be, the mind believes in something. Now Marthe was so afraid that the accused were guilty that her fear became equivalent to belief; and this condition of her mind proved fatal to her.

Five days after the arrests, just as she was in the act of going to bed about ten o'clock at night, she was called from the courtyard by her mother, who had come from the farm on foot.

"A laboring man from Troyes wants to speak to you; he is sent by Michu, and is waiting in the covered way," she said to Marthe.

They passed through the breach so as to take the shortest path. In the darkness it was impossible for Marthe to distinguish anything more than the form of a person which loomed through the shadows.

"Speak, madame; so that I may be certain you are really Madame Michu," said the person, in a rather anxious voice.

"I am Madame Michu," said Marthe; "what do you want of me?"

"Very good," said the unknown, "give me your hand; do not fear me. I come," he added, leaning towards her and speaking low, "from Michu with a note for you. I am employed at the prison, and if my superiors discover my absence we shall all be lost. Trust me; your good father placed me where I am. For that reason Michu counted on my helping him."

He put the letter into Marthe's hand and disappeared toward the forest without waiting for an answer. Marthe trembled at the thought that she was now to hear the secret of the mystery. She ran to the farm with her mother and shut herself up to read the following letter:--

My dear Marthe,--You can rely on the discretion of the man who will give you this letter; he does not know how to read or to write. He is a stanch Republican, and shared in Baboeuf's conspiracy; your father often made use of him, and he regards the senator as a traitor. Now, my dear wife, attend to my directions. The senator has been shut up by us in the cave where our masters were hidden. The poor creature had provisions for only five days, and as it is our interest that he should live, I wish you, as soon as you receive this letter, to take him food for at least five days more. The forest is of course watched; therefore take as many precautions as we formerly did for our young masters. Don't say a word to Malin; don't speak to him; and put on one of our masks which you will find on the steps which lead down to the cave. Unless you wish to compromise our heads you must be absolutely silent about this letter and the secret I have now confided to you. Don't say a word to Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, who might tell of it. Don't fear for me. We are certain that the matter will turn out well; when the time comes Malin himself will save us. I don't need to tell you to burn this letter as soon as you have read it, for it would cost me my head if a line of it were seen. I kiss you for now and always,

Michu.

The existence of the cave was known only to Marthe, her son, Michu, the four gentlemen, and Laurence; or rather, Marthe, to whom her husband had not related the incident of his meeting with Peyrade and Corentin, believed it was known only to them. Had she consulted her mistress and the two lawyers, who knew the innocence of the prisoners, the shrewd Bordin would have gained some light upon the perfidious trap which was evidently laid for his clients. But Marthe, acting like most women under a first impulse, was convinced by this proof which came to her own eyes, and flung the letter into the fire as directed. Nevertheless, moved by a singular gleam of caution, she caught a portion of it from the flames, tore off the five first lines, which compromised no one, and sewed them into the hem of her dress. Terrified at the thought that the prisoner had been without food for twenty-four hours, she
resolved to carry bread, meat, and wine to him at once; curiosity was well as humanity permitting no delay. Accordingly, she heated her oven and made, with her mother's help, a _pate_ of hare and ducks, a rice cake, roasted two fowls, selected three bottles of wine, and baked two loaves of bread. About two in the morning she started for the forest, carrying the load on her back, accompanied by Couraut, who in all such expeditions showed wonderful sagacity as a guide. He scented strangers at immense distances, and as soon as he was certain of their presence he returned to his mistress with a low growl, looking at her fixedly and turning his muzzle in the direction of the danger.

Marthe reached the pond about three in the morning, and left the dog as sentinel on the bank. After half an hour's labor in clearing the entrance she came with a dark lantern to the door of the cave, her face covered with a mask, which she had found, as directed, on the steps. The imprisonment of the senator seemed to have been long premeditated. A hole about a foot square, which Marthe had never seen before, was roughly cut in the upper part of the iron door which closed the cave; but in order to prevent Malin from using the time and patience all prisoners have at their command in loosening the iron bar which held the door, it was securely fastened with a padlock.

The senator, who had risen from his bed of moss, sighed when he saw the masked face and felt that there was no chance then of his deliverance. He examined Marthe, as much as he could by the unsteady light of her dark lantern, and he recognized her by her clothes, her stoutness, and her motions. When she passed the _pate_ through the door he dropped it to seize her hand and then, with great swiftness, he tried to pull the rings from her fingers,—one her wedding-ring, the other a gift from Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne.

"You cannot deny that it is you, my dear Madame Michu," he said.

Marthe closed her fist the moment she felt his fingers, and gave him a vigorous blow in the chest. Then, without a word, she turned away and cut a stick, at the end of which she held out to the senator the rest of the provisions.

"What do they want of me?" he asked.

Marthe departed giving him no answer. By five o'clock she had reached the edge of the forest and was warned by Couraut of the presence of strangers. She retraced her steps and made for the pavilion where she had lived so long; but just as she entered the avenue she was seen from afar by the forester of Gondreville, and she quickly reflected that her best plan was to go straight up to him.

"You are out early, Madame Michu," he said, accosting her.

"We are so unfortunate," she replied, "that I am obliged to do a servant's work myself. I am going to Bellache for some grain."

"Haven't you any at Cinq-Cygne?" said the forester.

Marthe made no answer. She continued on her way and reached the farm at Bellache, where she asked Beauvisage to give her some seed-grain, saying that Monsieur d'Hauteserre advised her to get it from him to renew her crop. As soon as Marthe had left the farm, the forester went there to find out what she asked for.

Six days later, Marthe, determined to be prudent, went at midnight with her provisions so as to avoid the keepers who were evidently patrolling the forest. After carrying a third supply to the senator she suddenly became terrified on hearing the abbe read aloud the public examination of the prisoners,—for the trial was by that time begun. She took the abbe aside, and after obliging him to swear that he would keep the secret she was about to reveal as though it was said to him in the confessional, she showed him the fragments of Michu's letter, told him the contents of it, and also the secret of the hiding-place where the senator then was.

The abbe at once inquired if she had other letters from her husband that he might compare the writing. Marthe went to her home to fetch them and there found a summons to appear in court. By the time she returned to the chateau the abbe and his sister had received a similar summons on behalf of the defence. They were obliged therefore to start for Troyes immediately. Thus all the personages of our drama, even those who were only, as it were, supernumeraries, were collected on the spot where the fate of the two families was about to be decided.

CHAPTER XVII
THE TRIAL

There are but few localities in France where Law derives from outward appearance the dignity which ought always to accompany it. Yet it surely is, after religion and royalty, the greatest engine of society. Everywhere, even in Paris, the meanness of its surroundings, the wretched arrangement of the courtrooms, their barrenness and want of decoration in the most ornate and showy nation upon earth in the matter of its public monuments, lessens the action of the law's mighty power. At the farther end of some oblong room may be seen a desk with a green baize covering raised on a platform; behind it sit the judges on the commonest of arm-chairs. To the left, is the seat of the public prosecutor, and beside him, close to the wall, is a long pen filled with chairs for the jury. Opposite to the jury is another pen with a bench for the prisoners and the gendarmes who guard them. The clerk of the court sits below the platform at a table covered with the papers of the case. Before the imperial changes in the administration of justice were instituted, a commissary of the government and the director of the jury each had a seat and a table, one to the
right, the other to the left of the baize-covered desk. Two sheriffs hovered about in the space left in front of the desk for the station of witnesses. Facing the judges and against the wall above the entrance, there is always a shabby gallery reserved for officials and for women, to which admittance is granted only by the president of the court, to whom the proper management of the courtroom belongs. The non-privileged public are compelled to stand in the empty space between the door of the hall and the bar. This normal appearance of all French law courts and assize-rooms was that of the Criminal court of Troyes.

In April, 1806, neither the four judges nor the president (or chief-justice) who made up the court, nor the public prosecutor, the director of the jury, the commissary of the government, nor the sheriffs or lawyers, in fact no one except the gendarmes, wore any robes or other distinctive sign which might have relieved the nakedness of the surroundings and the somewhat meagre aspect of the figures. The crucifix was suppressed; its example was no longer held up before the eyes of justice and of guilt. All was dull and vulgar. The paraphernalia so necessary to excite social interest is perhaps a consolation to criminals. On this occasion the eagerness of the public was what it has ever been and ever will be in trials of this kind, so long as France refuses to recognize that the admission of the public to the courts involves publicity, and that the publicity given to trials is a terrible penalty which would never have been inflicted had legislators reflected on it. Customs are often more cruel than laws. Customs are the deeds of men, but laws are the judgment of a nation. Customs in which there is often no judgment are stronger than laws.

Crowds surrounded the courtroom; the president was obliged to station squads of soldiers to guard the doors. The audience, standing below the bar, was so crowded that persons suffocated. Monsieur de Grandville, defending Michu, Bordin, defending the Simeuse brothers, and a lawyer of Troyes who appeared for the d'Hauteserre, were in their seats before the opening of the court; their faces wore a look of confidence. When the prisoners were brought in, sympathetic murmurs were heard at the appearance of the young men, whose faces, in twenty days' imprisonment and anxiety, had somewhat paled. The perfect likeness of the twins excited the deepest interest. Perhaps the spectators thought that Nature would exercise some special protection in the case of her own anomalies, and felt ready to join in repairing the harm done to them by destiny. Their noble, simple faces, showing no signs of shame, still less of bravado, touched the women's hearts. The four gentlemen and Gothard wore the clothes in which they had been arrested; but Michu, whose coat and trousers were among the "articles of testimony," so-called, had put on his best clothes,—a blue surtout, a brown velvet waistcoat _a la_ Robespierre, and a white cravat. The poor man paid the penalty of his dangerous-looking face. When he cast a glance of his yellow eye, so clear and so profound upon the audience, a murmur of repulsion answered it. The assembly chose to see the finger of God bringing him to the dock where his father-in-law had sacrificed so many victims. This man, truly great, looked at his masters, repressing a smile of scorn. He seemed to say to them, "I am injuring your cause." Five of the prisoners exchanged greetings with their counsel. Gothard still played the part of an idiot.

After several challenges, made with much sagacity by the defence under advice of the Marquis de Chargeboeuf, who boldly took a seat beside Bordin and de Grandville, the jury were empanelled, the indictment was read, and the prisoners were brought up separately to be examined. They answered every question with remarkable unanimity. After riding about the forest all the morning they had returned to Cinq-Cygne for breakfast at one o'clock. After that meal, from three to half-past five in the afternoon, they had returned to the forest. That was the basis of each testimony; any variations were merely individual circumstances. When the president asked the Messieurs de Simeuse why they had ridden out so early, they both declared that wishing, since their return, to buy back to the Messieurs d'Hauteserre, their cousin, and Gothard had chased a wolf which was reported in the forest by the peasants. If the director of the jury had sought for the prints of their horses' feet in the forest as carefully as in the park of Gondreville, he would have found proof of their presence at long distances from the house.

The examination of the Messieurs d'Hauteserre corroborated this testimony, and was in harmony with their preliminary dispositions. The necessity of some reason for their ride suggested to each of them the excuse of hunting. The peasants had given warning, a few days earlier, of a wolf in the forest, and on that they had fastened as a pretext.

The public prosecutor, however, pointed out a discrepancy between the first statements of the Messieurs d'Hauteserre, in which they mentioned that the whole party hunted together, and the defence now made by the Messieurs de Simeuse that their purpose on that day was the valuation of the forest.

Monsieur de Grandville here called attention to the fact that as the crime was not committed until after two o'clock in the afternoon, the prosecution had no ground to question their word when they stated the manner in which they had employed their morning.

The prosecutor replied that the prisoners had an interest in concealing their preparations for the abduction of the senator.
The remarkable ability of the defence was now felt. Judges, jurors, and audience became aware that victory would be hotly contested. Bordin and Monsieur de Grandville had studied their ground and foreseen everything. Innocence is required to render a clear and plausible account of its actions. The duty of the defence is to present a consistent and probable tale in opposition to an insufficient and improbable accusation. To counsel who regard their client as innocent, an accusation is false. The public examination of the four gentlemen sufficiently explained the matter in their favor. So far all was well. But the examination of Michu was more serious; there the real struggle began. It was now clear to every one why Monsieur de Grandville had preferred to take charge of the servant's defence rather than that of his masters.

Michu admitted his threats against Marion; but denied that he had made them violently. As for the ambush in which he was supposed to have watched for his enemy, he said he was merely making his rounds in his park; the senator and Monsieur Grevin might perhaps have been alarmed at the sight of his gun and have thought his intentions hostile when they were really inoffensive. He called attention to the fact that in the dusk a man who was not in the habit of hunting might easily fancy a gun was pointed at him, whereas, in point of fact, it was held in his hand at half-cock. To explain the condition of his clothes when arrested, he said he had slipped and fallen in the breach on his way home. "I could scarcely see my way," he said, "and the loose stones slipped from under me as I climbed the bank." As for the plaster which Gothard was bringing him, he replied as he had done in all previous examinations, that he wanted it to secure one of the stone posts of the covered way.

The public prosecutor and the president asked him to explain how he could have been at the top of the covered way engaged in mending a stone post and at the same time in the breach of the moat leading to the chateau; more especially as the justice of peace, the gendarmes and the forester all declared they had heard him approach them from the lower road. To this Michu replied that Monsieur d'Hauteserre had blamed him for not having mended the post,--which he was anxious to have finished because there were difficulties about that road with the township,--and he had therefore gone up to the chateau to report that the work was done.

Monsieur d'Hauteserre had, in fact, put up a fence above the covered way to prevent the township from taking possession of it. Michu seeing the important part which the state of his clothes was likely to play, invented this subterfuge. If, in law, truth is often like falsehood, falsehood on the other hand has a very great resemblance to truth. The defence and the prosecution both attached much importance to this testimony, which became one of the leading points of the trial on account of the vigor of the defence and the suspicions of the prosecution.

Gothard, instructed no doubt by Monsieur de Grandville, for up to that time he had only wept when they questioned him, admitted that Michu had told him to carry the plaster.

"Why did neither you nor Gothard take the justice of peace and the forester to the stone post and show them your work?" said the public prosecutor, addressing Michu.

"Because," replied the man, "I didn't believe there was any serious accusation against us."

All the prisoners except Gothard were now removed from the courtroom. When Gothard was left alone the president adjured him to speak the truth for his own sake, pointing out that his pretended idiocy had come to an end; none of the jurors believed him imbecile; if he refused to answer the court he ran the risk of serious penalty; whereas by telling the truth at once he would probably be released. Gothard wept, hesitated, and finally ended by saying that Michu had told him to carry several sacks of plaster; but that each time he had met him near the farm. He was asked how many sacks he had carried.

"Three," he replied.

An argument hereupon ensued as to whether the three sacks included the one which Gothard was carrying at the time of the arrest (which reduced the number of the other sacks to two) or whether there were three without the last. The debate ended in favor of the first proposition, the jury considering that only two sacks had been used. They appeared to have a foregone conviction on that point, but Bordin and Monsieur de Grandville judged it best to surfeit them with plaster, and weary them so thoroughly with the argument that they would no longer comprehend the question. Monsieur de Grandville made it appear that experts ought to have been sent to examine the stone posts.

"The director of the jury," he said, "has contented himself with merely visiting the place, less for the purpose of making a careful examination than to trap Michu in a lie; this, in our opinion, was a failure of duty, but the blunder is to our advantage."

On this the Court appointed experts to examine the posts and see if one of them had been really mended and reset. The public prosecutor, on his side, endeavored to make capital of the affair before the experts could testify. "You seem to have chosen," he said to Michu, who was now brought back into the courtroom, "an hour when the daylight was waning, from half-past five to half-past six o'clock, to mend this post and to cement it all alone."

"Monsieur d'Hauteserre had blamed me for not doing it," replied Michu.

"But," said the prosecutor, "if you used that plaster on the post you must have had a trough and a trowel. Now, if you went to the chateau to tell Monsieur d'Hauteserre that you had done the work, how do you explain the fact that..."
Gothard was bringing you more plaster. You must have passed your farm on your way to the chateau, and you would naturally have left your tools at home and stopped Gothard."

   This overwhelming argument produced a painful silence in the courtroom.
   "Come," said the prosecutor, "you had better admit at once that what you buried was _not a stone post_."
   "Do you think it was the senator?" said Michu, sarcastically.

   Monsieur de Grandville hereupon demanded that the public prosecutor should explain his meaning. Michu was accused of abduction and the concealment of a person, but not of murder. Such an insinuation was a serious matter. The code of Brumaire, year IV., forbade the public prosecutor from presenting any fresh count at the trial; he must keep within the indictment or the proceedings would be annulled.

   The public prosecutor replied that Michu, the person chiefly concerned in the abduction and who, in the interests of his masters, had taken the responsibility on his own shoulders, might have thought it necessary to plaster up the entrance of the hiding-place, still undiscovered, where the senator was now immured.

   Pressed with questions, hampered by the presence of Gothard, and brought into contradiction with himself, Michu struck his fist upon the edge of the dock with a resounding blow and said: "I have had nothing whatever to do with the abduction of the senator. I hope and believe his enemies have merely imprisoned him; when he reappears you'll find out that the plaster was put to no such use."

   "Good!" said de Grandville, addressing the public prosecutor; "you have done more for my client's cause than anything I could have said."

   The first day's session ended with this bold declaration, which surprised the judges and gave an advantage to the defence. The lawyers of the town and Bordin himself congratulated the young advocate. The prosecutor, uneasy at the assertion, feared that he had fallen into some trap; in fact he was really caught in a snare that was cleverly set for him by the defence and admiringly played off by Gothard. The wits of the town declared that he had white-washed the affair and splashed his own cause, and had made the accused as white as the plaster itself. France is the domain of satire, which reigns supreme in our land; Frenchmen jest on a scaffold, at the Beresina, at the barricades, and some will doubtless appear with a quirk upon their lips at the grand assizes of the Last Judgment.

   CHAPTER XVIII
   TRIAL CONTINUED: CRUEL VICISSITUDES

   On the morrow the witnesses for the prosecution were examined,—Madame Marion, Madame Grevin, Grevin himself, the senator's valet, and Violette, whose testimony can readily be imagined from the facts already told. They all identified the five prisoners, with more or less hesitation as to the four gentlemen, but with absolute certainty as to Michu. Beauvisage repeated Robert d'Hauteserre's speech when he met them at daybreak in the park. The peasant who had bought Monsieur d'Hauteserre's calf testified to overhearing that of Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. The experts, who had compared the hoof-prints with the shoes on the horses ridden by the five prisoners and found them absolutely alike, confirmed their previous depositions. This point was naturally one of vehement contention between Monsieur de Grandville and the prosecuting officer. The defence called the blacksmith at Cinq-Cygne and succeeded in proving that he had sold several horseshoes of the same pattern to strangers who were not known in the place. The blacksmith declared, moreover, that he was in the habit of shoeing in this particular manner not only the horses of the chateau de Cinq-Cygne, but those from other places in the canton. It was also proved that the horse which Michu habitually rode was always shod at Troyes, and the mark of that shoe was not among the hoof-prints found in the park.

   "Michu's double was not aware of this circumstance, or he would have provided for it," said Monsieur de Grandville, looking at the jury. "Neither has the prosecution shown what horses our clients rode."

   He ridiculed the testimony of Violette so far as it concerned a recognition of the horses, seen from a long distance, from behind, and after dusk. Still, in spite of all his efforts, the body of the evidence was against Michu; and the prosecutor, judge, jury, and audience were impressed with a feeling (as the lawyers for the defence had foreseen) that the guilt of the servant carried with it that of the masters. So the vital interest centred on all that concerned Michu. His bearing was noble. He showed in his answers the sagacity with which nature had endowed him; and the public, seeing him on his mettle, recognized his superiority. And yet, strange to say, the more they understood him the more certainty they felt that he was the instigator of the outrage.

   The witnesses for the defence, always less important in the eyes of a jury and of the law than the witnesses for the prosecution, seemed to testify as in duty bound, and were listened to with that allowance. In the first place neither Marthe, nor Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre took the oath. Catherine and the Durieux, in their capacity as servants, did not take it. Monsieur d'Hauteserre stated that he had ordered Michu to replace and mend the stone post which had been thrown down. The deposition of the experts sent to examine the fence, which was now read, confirmed his testimony; but they helped the prosecution by declaring they could not fix the exact time at which the repairs had been made; it might have been several weeks or no more than twenty days.
The appearance of Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne excited the liveliest curiosity; but the sight of her cousins in the prisoners' dock after three weeks' separation affected her so much that her emotions gave the audience an impression of guilt. She felt an overwhelming desire to stand beside the twins, and was obliged, as she afterwards admitted, to use all her strength to repress the longing that came into her mind to kill the prosecutor so as to stand in the eyes of the world as a criminal beside them. She testified, with simplicity, that riding from Cinq-Cygne and seeing smoke in the park of Gondreville, she had supposed there was a fire; at first she thought they were burning weeds or brush; "but later," she added, "I observed a circumstance which I offer to the attention of the Court. I found in the frogging of my habit and in the folds of my collar small fragments of what appeared to be burned paper which were floating in the air."

"Was there much smoke?" asked Bordin.
"Yes," replied Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, "I feared a conflagration."
"This is enough to change the whole inquiry," remarked Bordin. "I request the Court to order an immediate examination of that region of the park where the fire occurred."

The president ordered the inquiry.

Grevin, recalled by the defence and questioned on this circumstance, declared he knew nothing about it. But Bordin and he exchanged looks which mutually enlightened them.
"The gist of the case is there," thought the old notary.
"They've laid their finger on it," thought the notary.

But each shrewd head considered the following up of this point useless. Bordin reflected that Grevin would be silent as the grave; and Grevin congratulated himself that every sign of the fire had been effaced.

To settle this point, which seemed a mere accessory to the trial and somewhat puerile (but which is really essential in the justification which history owes to these young men), the experts and Pigoult, who were despatched by the president to examine the park, reported that they could find no traces of a bonfire.

Bordin summoned two laborers, who testified to having dug over, under the direction of the forester, a tract of ground in the park where the grass had been burned; but they declared they had not observed the nature of the ashes they had buried.

The forester, recalled by the defence, said he had received from the senator himself, as he was passing the chateau of Gondreville on his way to the masquerade at Arcis, an order to dig over that particular piece of ground which the senator had remarked as needing it.
"Had papers, or herbage been burned there?"
"I could not say. I saw nothing that made me think that papers had been burned there," replied the forester.
"At any rate," said Bordin, "if, as it appears, a fire was kindled on that piece of ground some one brought to the spot whatever was burned there."

The testimony of the abbe and that of Mademoiselle Goujet made a favorable impression. They said that as they left the church after vespers and were walking towards home, they met the four gentlemen and Michu leaving the chateau on horseback and making their way to the forest. The character, position, and known uprightness of the Abbe Goujet gave weight to his words.

The summing up of the public prosecutor, who felt sure of obtaining a verdict, was in the nature of all such speeches. The prisoners were the incorrigible enemies of France, her institutions and laws. They thirsted for tumult and conspiracy. Though they had belonged to the army of Conde and had shared in the late attempts against the life of the Emperor, that magnanimous sovereign had erased their names from the list of _emigres_. This was the return they made for his clemency! In short, all the oratorical declamations of the Bourbons against the Bonapartists, which in our day are repeated against the republicans and the legitimists by the Younger Branch, flourished in the speech. These trite commonplaces, which might have some meaning under a fixed government, seem farcical in the mouth of administrators of all epochs and opinions. A saying of the troublous times of yore is still applicable: "The label is changed, but the wine is the same as ever." The public prosecutor, one of the most distinguished legal men under the Empire, attributed the crime to a fixed determination on the part of returned _emigres_ to protest against the sale of their estates. He made the audience shudder at the probable condition of the senator; then he massed together proofs, half-proofs, and probabilities with a cleverness stimulated by a sense that his zeal was certain of its reward, and sat down tranquilly to await the fire of his opponents.

Monsieur de Grandville never argued but this one criminal case; and it made his reputation. In the first place, he spoke with the same glowing eloquence which to-day we admire in Berryer. He was profoundly convinced of the innocence of his clients, and that in itself is a most powerful auxiliary of speech. The following are the chief points of his defence, which was reported in full by all the leading newspapers of the period. In the first place he exhibited the character and life of Michu in its true light. He made it a noble tale, ringing with lofty sentiments, and it awakened the sympathies of many. When Michu heard himself vindicated by that eloquent voice, tears sprang from
his yellow eyes and rolled down his terrible face. He appeared then for what he really was,—a man as simple and as wily as a child; a being whose whole existence had but one thought, one aim. He was suddenly explained to the minds of all present, more especially by his tears, which produced a great effect upon the jury. His able defender seized that moment of strong interest to enter upon a discussion of the charges:—

"Where is the body of the person abducted? Where is the senator?" he asked. "You accuse us of walling him up with stones and plaster. If so, we alone know where he is; you have kept us twenty-three days in prison, and the senator must be dead by this time for want of food. We are therefore murderers, but you have not accused us of murder. On the other hand, if he still lives, we must have accomplices. If we have them, and if the senator is living, we should assuredly have set him at liberty. The scheme in relation to Gondreville which you attribute to us is a failure, and only aggravates our position uselessly. We might perhaps obtain a pardon for an abortive attempt by releasing our victim; instead of that we persist in detaining a man from whom we can obtain no benefit whatever. It is absurd! Take away your plaster; the effect is a failure," he said, addressing the public prosecutor. "We are either idiotic criminals (which you do not believe) or the innocent victims of circumstances as inexplicable to us as they are to you. You ought rather to search for the mass of papers which were burned at Gondreville, which will reveal motives stronger far than yours or ours and put you on the track of the causes of this abduction."

The speaker discussed these hypotheses with marvellous ability. He dwelt on the moral character of the witnesses for the defence, whose religious faith was a living one, who believed in a future life and in eternal punishment. He rose to grandeur in this part of his speech and moved his hearers deeply:--

"Remember!" he said; "these criminals were tranquilly dining when told of the abduction of the senator. When the officer of gendarmes intimated to them the best means of ending the whole affair by giving up the senator, they refused, for they did not understand what was asked of them!"

Then, reverting to the mystery of the matter, he declared that its solution was in the hands of time, which would eventually reveal the injustice of the charge. Once on this ground, he boldly and ingeniously supposed himself a juror; related his deliberations with his colleagues; imagined his distress lest, having condemned the innocent, the error should be known too late, and drew such a picture of his remorse, dwelling on the grave doubts which the case presented, that he brought the jury to a condition of intense anxiety.

Juries were not in those days so blase to this sort of allocution as they are now; Monsieur de Grandville's appeal had the power of things new, and the jurors were evidently shaken. After this passionate outburst they had to listen to the wily and specious prosecutor, who went over the whole case, brought out the darkest points against the prisoners and made the rest inexplicable. His aim was to reach the minds and the reasoning faculties of his hearers just as Monsieur de Grandville had aimed at the heart and the imagination. The latter, however, had seriously entangled the convictions of the jury, and the public prosecutor found his well-laid arguments ineffectual. This was so plain that the counsel for the Messieurs d'Hauteserre and Gothard appealed to the judgment of the jury, asking that the case against their clients be abandoned. The prosecutor demanded a postponement till the next day in order that he might prepare an answer. Bordin, who saw acquittal in the eyes of the jury if they deliberated on the case at once, opposed the delay of even one night by arguments of legal right and justice to his innocent clients; but in vain,—the court allowed it.

"The interests of society are as great as those of the accused," said the president. "The court would be lacking in equity if it denied a like request when made by the defence; it ought therefore to grant that of the prosecution."

"All is luck or ill-luck!" said Bordin to his clients when the session was over. "Almost acquitted tonight you may be condemned to-morrow."

"In either case," said the elder de Simeuse, "we can only admire your skill."

Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne's eyes were full of tears. After the doubts and fears of the counsel for the defence, she had not expected this success. Those around her congratulated her and predicted the acquittal of her cousins. But alas! the matter was destined to end in a startling and almost theatrical event, the most unexpected and disastrous circumstance which ever changed the face of a criminal trial.

At five in the morning of the day after Monsieur de Grandville's speech, the senator was found on the high road to Troyes, delivered from captivity during his sleep, unaware of the trial that was going on or of the excitement attaching to his name in Europe, and simply happy in being once more able to breathe the fresh air. The man who was the pivot of the drama was quite as amazed at what was now told to him as the persons who met him on his way to Troyes were astounded at his reappearance. A farmer lent him a carriage and he soon reached the house of the prefect at Troyes. The prefect notified the director of the jury, the commissary of the government, and the public prosecutor, who, after a statement made to them by Malin, arrested Marthe, while she was still in bed at the Durieu's house in the suburbs. Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, who was only at liberty under bail, was also snatched from one of the few hours of slumber she had been able to obtain at rare intervals in the course of her ceaseless anxiety, and taken to the prefecture to undergo an examination. An order to keep the accused from holding any communication
with each other or with their counsel was sent to the prison. At ten o'clock the crowd which assembled around the
courtroom were informed that the trial was postponed until one o'clock in the afternoon of the same day.

This change of hour, following on the news of the senator's deliverance, Marthe's arrest, and that of
Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, together with the denial of the right to communicate with the prisoners carried terror
to the hotel de Chargeboeuf. The whole town and the spectators who had come to Troyes to be present at the trial,
the short-hand writers for the daily journals, even the populace were in a ferment which can readily be imagined.
The Abbe Goujet came at ten o'clock to see Monsieur and Madame d'Hauteserre and the counsel for the defence,
who were interrogated—as well as they could under the circumstances. The abbe took Bordin and Monsieur
Grandville apart, told them what Marthe had confided to him the day before, and gave them the fragment of the
letter she had received. The two lawyers exchanged a look, after which Bordin said to the abbe: "Not a word of all
this! The case is lost; but at any rate let us show a firm front."

Marthe was not strong enough to evade the cross-questioning of the director of the jury and the public
prosecutor. Moreover the proof against her was too overwhelming. Lechesneau had sent for the under crust of the
last loaf of bread she had carried to the cavern, also for the empty bottles and various other articles. During the
senator's long hours of captivity he had formed conjectures in his own mind and had looked for indications which
might put him on the track of his enemies. These he now communicated to the authorities. Michu's farmhouse, lately
built, had, he supposed, a new oven; the tiles or bricks on which the bread was baked would show their jointed lines
on the bottom of the loaves, and thus afford a proof that the bread supplied to him was baked on that particular oven.
So with the wine brought in bottles sealed with green wax, which would probably be found identical with other
bottles in Michu's cellar. These shrewd observations, which Malin imparted to the justice of peace, who made the
first examination (taking Marthe with him), led to the results foreseen by the senator.

Marthe, deceived by the apparent friendliness of Lechesneau and the public prosecutor, who assured her that
complete confession could alone save her husband's life, admitted that the cavern where the senator had been hidden
was known only to her husband and the Messieurs de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre, and that she herself had taken
provisions to the senator on three separate occasions at midnight.

Laurence, questioned about the cavern, was forced to acknowledge that Michu had discovered it and had shown
it to her at the time when the four young men evaded the police and were hidden in it.

As soon as these preliminary examinations were ended, the jury, lawyers, and audience were notified that the
trial would be resumed. At three o'clock the president opened the session by announcing that the case would be
continued under a new aspect. He exhibited to Michu three bottles of wine and asked him if he recognized them as
bottles from his own cellar, showing him at the same time the identity between the green wax on two empty bottles
with the green wax on a full bottle taken from his cellar that morning by the justice of peace in presence of his wife.
Michu refused to recognize anything as his own. But these proofs for the prosecution were understood by the jurors,
to whom the president explained that the empty bottles were found in the place where the senator was imprisoned.

Each prisoner was questioned as to the cavern or cellar beneath the ruins of the old monastery. It was proved by
all witnesses for the prosecution, and also for the defence, that the existence of this hiding-place discovered by
Michu was known only to him and his wife, and to Laurence and the four gentlemen. We may judge of the effect in
the courtroom when the public prosecutor made known the fact that this cavern, known only to the accused and to
their two witnesses, was the place where the senator had been imprisoned.

Marthe was summoned. Her appearance caused much excitement among the spectators and keen anxiety to the
prisoners. Monsieur de Grandville rose to protest against the testimony of a wife against her husband. The public
prosecutor replied that Marthe by her own confession was an accomplice in the outrage; that she had neither sworn
nor testified, and was to be heard solely in the interests of truth.

"We need only submit her preliminary examination to the jury," remarked the president, who now ordered the
clerk of the court to read the said testimony aloud.

"Do you now confirm your own statement?" said the president, addressing Marthe.

Michu looked at his wife, and Marthe, who saw her fatal error, fainted away and fell to the floor. It may be truly
said that a thunderbolt had fallen upon the prisoners and their counsel.

"I never wrote to my wife from prison, and I know none of the persons employed there," said Michu.

Bordin passed to him the fragments of the letter Marthe had received. Michu gave but one glance at it. "My
writing has been imitated," he said.

"Denial is your last resource," said the public prosecutor.

The senator was introduced into the courtroom with all the ceremonies due to his position. His entrance was like
a stage scene. Malin (now called Comte de Gondreville, without regard to the feelings of the late owners of the
property) was requested by the president to look at the prisoners, and did so with great attention and for a long time.
He stated that the clothing of his abductors was exactly like that worn by the four gentlemen; but he declared that the
trouble of his mind had been such that he could not be positive that the accused were really the guilty parties.

"More than that," he said, "it is my conviction that these four gentlemen had nothing to do with it. The hands that blindfolded me in the forest were coarse and rough. I should rather suppose," he added, looking at Michu, "that my old enemy took charge of that duty; but I beg the gentlemen of the jury not to give too much weight to this remark. My suspicions are very slight, and I feel no certainty whatever—for this reason. The two men who seized me put me on horseback behind the man who blindfolded me, and whose hair was red like Michu's. However singular you may consider the observation I am about to make, it is necessary to make it because it is the ground of an opinion favorable to the accused—who, I hope, will not feel offended by it. Fastened to the man's back I would naturally have been affected by his odor—yet I did not perceive that which is peculiar to Michu. As to the person who brought me provisions on three several occasions, I am certain it was Marthe, the wife of Michu. I recognized her the first time she came by a ring she always wore, which she had forgotten to remove. The Court and jury will please allow for the contradictions which appear in the facts I have stated, which I myself am wholly unable to reconcile."

A murmur of approval followed this testimony. Bordin asked permission of the Court to address a few questions to the witness.

"Does the senator think that his abduction was due to other causes than the interests respecting property which the prosecution attributes to the prisoners?"

"I do," replied the senator, "but I am wholly ignorant of what the real motives were; for during a captivity of twenty days I saw and heard no one."

"Do you think," said the public prosecutor, "that your chateau at Gondreville contains information, title-deeds, or other papers of value which would induce a search on the part of the Messieurs de Simeuse?"

"I do not think so," replied Malin; "I believe those gentlemen to be incapable of attempting to get possession of such papers by violence. They had only to ask me for them to obtain them."

"You burned certain papers in the park, did you not?" said Monsieur de Gondreville, abruptly.

Malin looked at Grevin. After exchanging a rapid glance with the notary, which Bordin intercepted, he replied that he had not burned any papers. The public prosecutor having asked him to describe the ambush to which he had so nearly fallen a victim two years earlier, the senator replied that he had seen Michu watching him from the fork of a tree. This answer, which agreed with Grevin's testimony, produced a great impression.

The four gentlemen remained impassible during the examination of their enemy, who seemed determined to overwhelm them with generosity. Laurence suffered horrible agony. From time to time the Marquis de Chargeboeuf held her by the arm, fearing she might dart forward to the rescue. The Comte de Gondreville retired from the courtroom and as he did so he bowed to the four gentlemen, who did not return the salutation. This trifling matter made the jury indignant.

"They are lost now," whispered Bordin to the Marquis de Chargeboeuf.

"Alas, yes! and always through the nobility of their sentiments," replied the marquis.

"My task is now only too easy, gentlemen," said the prosecutor, rising to address the jury.

He explained the use of the cement by the necessity of securing an iron frame on which to fasten a padlock which held the iron bar with which the gate of the cavern was closed; a description of which was given in the _proces-verbal_ made that morning by Pigoult. He put the falsehoods of the accused into the strongest light, and pulverized the arguments of the defence with the new evidence so miraculously obtained. In 1806 France was still too near the Supreme Being of 1793 to talk about divine justice; he therefore spared the jury all reference to the intervention of heaven; but he said that earthly justice would be on the watch for the mysterious accomplices who had set the senator at liberty, and he sat down, confidently awaiting the verdict.

The jury believed there was a mystery, but they were all persuaded that it came from the prisoners, who were probably concealing some matter of a private interest of great importance to them.

Monsieur de Grandville, to whom a plot or machination of some kind was quite evident, rose; but he seemed discouraged,—less, however, by the new evidence than by the manifest opinion of the jury. He surpassed, if anything, his speech of the previous evening; his argument was more compact and logical; but he felt his fervor repelled by the coldness of the jury; he spoke ineffectually, and he knew it,—a chilling situation for an advocate. He called attention to the fact that the release of the senator, as if by magic and clearly without the aid of any of the accused or of Marthe, corroborated his previous argument. Yesterday the prisoners could most surely rely on acquittal, and if they had, as the prosecution claimed, the power to hold or to release the senator, they certainly would not have released him until after their acquittal. He endeavored to bring before the minds of the Court and jury the fact that mysterious enemies, undiscovered as yet, could alone have struck the accused this final blow.

Strange to say, the only minds Monsieur de Grandville reached with this argument were those of the public prosecutor and the judges. The jury listened perfunctorily; the audience, usually so favorable to prisoners, were convinced of their guilt. In a court of justice the sentiments of the crowd do unquestionably weigh upon the judges.
and the jury, and _vice versa_. Seeing this condition of the minds about him, which could be felt if not defined, the counsel uttered his last words in a tone of passionate excitement caused by his conviction:--

"In the name of the accused," he cried, "I forgive you for the fatal error you are about to commit, and which nothing can repair! We are the victims of some mysterious and Machiavellian power. Marthe Michu was inveigled by vile perfidy. You will discover this too late, when the evil you now do will be irreparable."

Bordin simply claimed the acquittal of the prisoners on the testimony of the senator himself.

The president summed up the case with all the more impartiality because it was evident that the minds of the jurors were already made up. He even turned the scales in favor of the prisoners by dwelling on the senator's evidence. This clemency, however, did not in the least endanger the success of the prosecution. At eleven o'clock that night, after the jury had replied through their foreman to the usual questions, the Court condemned Michu to death, the Messieurs de Simeuse to twenty-four years' and the Messieurs d'Hauteserre to ten years, penal servitude at hard labor. Gothard was acquitted.

The whole audience was eager to observe the bearing of the five guilty men in this supreme moment of their lives. The four gentlemen looked at Laurence, who returned them, with dry eyes, the ardent look of the martyrs.

"She would have wept had we been acquitted," said the younger de Simeuse to his brother.

Never did convicted men meet an unjust fate with serener brows or countenances more worthy of their manhood than these five victims of a cruel plot.

"Our counsel has forgiven you," said the eldest de Simeuse to the Court.

* * * * *

Madame d'Hauteserre fell ill, and was three months in her bed at the hotel de Chargeboeuf. Monsieur d'Hauteserre returned patiently to Cinq-Cygne, inwardly gnawed by one of those sorrows of old age which have none of youth's distractions; often he was so absent-minded that the abbe, who watched him, knew the poor father was living over again the scene of the fatal verdict. Marthe passed away from all blame; she died three weeks after the condemnation of her husband, confiding her son to Laurence, in whose arms she died.

The trial once over, political events of the utmost importance effaced even the memory of it, and nothing further was discovered. Society is like the ocean; it returns to its level and its specious calmness after a disaster, effacing all traces of it in the tide of its eager interests.

Without her natural firmness of mind and her knowledge of her cousins' innocence, Laurence would have succumbed; but she gave fresh proof of the grandeur of her character; she astonished Monsieur de Grandville and Bordin by the apparent serenity which these terrible misfortunes called forth in her noble soul. She nursed Madame d'Hauteserre and went daily to the prison, saying openly that she would marry one of the cousins when they were taken to the galleys.

"To the galleys!" cried Bordin, "Mademoiselle! our first endeavor must be to wring their pardon from the Emperor."

"Their pardon!--_from a Bonaparte_,?" cried Laurence in horror.

The spectacles of the old lawyer jumped from his nose; he caught them as they fell and looked at the young girl who was now indeed a woman; he understood her character at last in all its bearings; then he took the arm of the Marquis de Chargeboeuf, saying:--

"Monsieur le Marquis, let us go to Paris instantly and save them without her!"

The appeal of the Messieurs de Simeuse and d'Hauteserre and that of Michu was the first case to be brought before the new court. Its decision was fortunately delayed by the ceremonies attending its installation.

CHAPTER XIX

THE EMPEROR'S BIVOUAC

Towards the end of September, after three sessions of the Court of Appeals in which the lawyers for the defence pleaded, and the attorney-general Merlin himself spoke for the prosecution, the appeal was rejected. The Imperial Court of Paris was by this time instituted. Monsieur de Grandville was appointed assistant attorney-general, and the department of the Aube coming under the jurisdiction of this court, it became possible for him to take certain steps in favor of the convicted prisoners, among them that of importuning Cambaceres, his protector. Bordin and Monsieur de Chargeboeuf came to his house in the Marais the day after the appeal was rejected, where they found him in the midst of his honeymoon, for he had married in the interval. In spite of all these changes in his condition, Monsieur de Chargeboeuf saw very plainly that the young lawyer was faithful to his late clients. Certain lawyers, the artists of their profession, treat their causes like mistresses. This is rare, however, and must not be depended on.

As soon as they were alone in his study, Monsieur de Grandville said to the marquis: "I have not waited for your visit; I have already employed all my influence. Don't attempt to save Michu; if you do, you cannot obtain the pardon of the Messieurs de Simeuse. The law will insist on one victim."

"Good God!" cried Bordin, showing the young magistrate the three petitions for mercy; "how can I take upon
myself to withdraw the application for that man. If I suppress the paper I cut off his head."

He held out the petition; de Grandville took it, looked it over, and said:--

"We can't suppress it; but be sure of one thing, if you ask all you will obtain nothing."

"Have we time to consult Michu?" asked Bordin.

"Yes. The order for execution comes from the office of the attorney-general; I will see that you have some days. We kill men," he said with some bitterness, "but at least we do it formally, especially in Paris."

Monsieur de Chargeboeuf had already received from the chief justice certain information which added weight to these sad words of Monsieur de Grandville.

"Michu is innocent, I know," continued the young lawyer, "but what can we do against so many? Remember, too, that my present influence depends on my keeping silent. I must order the scaffold to be prepared, or my late client is certain to be beheaded."

Monsieur de Chargeboeuf knew Laurence well enough to be certain she would never consent to save her cousins at the expense of Michu; he therefore resolved on making one more effort. He asked an audience of the minister of foreign affairs to learn if salvation could be looked for through the influence of the great diplomat. He took Bordin with him, for the latter knew the minister and had done him some service. The two old men found Talleyrand sitting with his feet stretched out, absorbed in contemplation of his fire, his head resting on his hand, his elbow on the table, a newspaper lying at his feet. The minister had just read the decision of the Court of Appeals.

"Pray sit down, Monsieur le marquis," said Talleyrand, "and you, Bordin," he added, pointing to a place at the table, "write as follows:--"

Sire,—Four innocent gentlemen, declared guilty by a jury have just had their condemnation confirmed by your Court of Appeals.

Your Imperial Majesty can now only pardon them. These gentlemen ask this pardon of your august clemency, in the hope that they may enter your army and meet their death in battle before your eyes; and thus praying, they are, of your Imperial and Royal Majesty, with reverence, etc.

"None but princes can do such prompt and graceful kindness," said the Marquis de Chargeboeuf, taking the precious draft of the petition from the hands of Bordin that he might have it signed by the four gentlemen; resolving in his own mind that he would also obtain the signatures of several august names.

"The life of your young relatives, Monsieur le marquis," said the minister, "now depends on the turn of a battle. Endeavor to reach the Emperor on the morning after a victory and they are saved."

He took a pen and himself wrote a private and confidential letter to the Emperor, and another of ten lines to Marechal Duroc. Then he rang the bell, asked his secretary for a diplomatic passport, and said tranquilly to the old lawyer, "What is your honest opinion of that trial?"

"Do you know, monseigneur, who was at the bottom of this cruel wrong?"

"I presume I do; but I have reasons to wish for certainty," replied Talleyrand. "Return to Troyes; bring me the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne, here, to-morrow at the same hour, but secretly; ask to be ushered into Madame de Talleyrand's salon; I will tell her you are coming. If Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, who shall be placed where she can see a man who will be standing before me, recognizes that man as an individual who came to her house during the conspiracy of de Polignac and Riviere, tell her to remember that, no matter what I say or what he answers me, she must not utter a word nor make a gesture. One thing more, think only of saving the de Simeuse brothers; don't embarrass yourself with that scoundrel of a bailiff.--"

"A sublime man, monseigneur!" exclaimed Bordin.

"Enthusiasm! in you, Bordin! The man must be remarkable. Our sovereign has an immense self-love, Monsieur le marquis," he said, changing the conversation. "He is about to dismiss me that he may commit follies without warning. The Emperor is a great soldier who can change the laws of time and distance, but he cannot change men; yet he persists in trying to run them in his own mould! Now, remember this; the young men's pardon can be obtained by one person only--Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne."

The marquis went alone to Troyes and told the whole matter to Laurence. She obtained permission from the authorities to see Michu, and the marquis accompanied her to the gates of the prison, where he waited for her. When she came out her face was bathed in tears.

"Poor man!" she said; "he tried to kneel to me, praying that I would not think of him, and forgetting the shackles that were on his feet! Ah, marquis, I _will_ plead his cause. Yes, I'll kiss the boot of their Emperor. If I fail--well, the memory of that man shall live eternally honored in our family. Present his petition for mercy so as to gain time; meantime I am resolved to have his portrait. Come, let us go."

The next day, when Talleyrand was informed by a sign agreed upon that Laurence was at her post, he rang the bell; his orderly came to him, and received orders to admit Monsieur Corentin.

"My friend, you are a very clever fellow," said Talleyrand, "and I wish to employ you."
"Monsieur--"

"Listen. In serving Fouche you will get money, but never honor nor any position you can acknowledge. But in
serving me, as you have lately done at Berlin, you can win credit and repute."

"Monseigneur is very good."

"You displayed genius in that late affair at Gondreville."

"To what does Monseigneur allude?" said Corentin, with a manner that was neither too reserved nor too
surprised.

"Ah, Monsieur!" observed the minister, dryly, "you will never make a successful man; you fear--"

"What, monseigneur?"

"Death!" replied Talleyrand, in his fine, deep voice. "Adieu, my good friend."

"That is the man," said the Marquis de Chargeboeuf entering the room after Corentin was dismissed; "but we
have nearly killed the countess."

"He is the only man I know capable of playing such a trick," replied the minister. "Monsieur le marquis, you are
in danger of not succeeding in your mission. Start ostensibly for Strasburg; I'll send you double passports in blank to
be filled out. Provide yourself with substitutes; change your route and above all your carriage; let your substitutes go
on to Strasburg, and do you reach Prussia through Switzerland and Bavaria. Not a word--prudence! The police are
against you; and you do not know what the police are--"

Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne offered the then celebrated Robert Lefebvre a sufficient sum to induce him to go
to Troyes and take Michu's portrait. Monsieur de Grandville promised to afford the painter every possible facility.
Monsieur de Chargeboeuf then started in the old _berlingot_, with Laurence and a servant who spoke German. Not
far from Nancy they overtook Mademoiselle Goujet and Gothard, who had preceded them in an excellent carriage,
which the marquis took, giving them in exchange the _berlingot_.

Talleyrand was right. At Strasburg the commissary-general of police refused to countersign the passport of the
travellers, and gave them positive orders to return. By that time the marquis and Laurence were leaving France by
way of Besancon with the diplomatic passport.

Laurence crossed Switzerland in the first days of October, without paying the slightest attention to that glorious
land. She lay back in the carriage in the torpor which overtakes a criminal on the eve of his execution. To her eyes
all nature was shrouded in a seething vapor; even common things assumed fantastic shapes. The one thought, "If I
do not succeed they will kill themselves," fell upon her soul with reiterated blows, as the bar of the executioner fell
upon the victim's members when tortured on the wheel. She felt herself breaking; she lost her energy in this terrible
waiting for the cruel moment, short and decisive, when she should find herself face to face with that man on whom
the fate of the condemned depended. She chose to yield to her depression rather than waste her strength uselessly.
The marquis, who was incapable of understanding this resolve of firm minds, which often assumes quite diverse
aspects (for in such moments of tension certain superior minds give way to surprising gaiety), began to fear that he
might never bring Laurence alive to the momentous interview, solemn to them only, and yet beyond the ordinary
limits of private life. To Laurence, the necessity of humiliating herself before that man, the object of her hatred and
contempt, meant the sacrifice of all her noblest feelings.

"After this," she said, "the Laurence who survives will bear no likeness to her who is now to perish."

The travellers could not fail to be aware of the vast movement of men and material which surrounded them the
moment they entered Prussia. The campaign of Jena had just begun. Laurence and the marquis beheld the
magnificent divisions of the French army deploying and parading as if at the Tuileries. In this display of military
power, which can be adequately described only with the words and images of the Bible, the proportions of the Man
whose spirit moved these masses grew gigantic to Laurence's imagination. Soon, the cry of victory resounded in her
ears. The Imperial arms had just obtained two signal advantages. The Prince of Prussia had been killed the evening
before the day on which the travellers arrived at Saalfeld on their endeavor to overtake Napoleon, who was
marching with the rapidity of lightning.

At last, on the 13th of October (date of ill-omen) Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne was skirting a river in the midst
of the Grand Army, seeing nought but confusion, sent hither and thither from one village to another, from division to
division, frightened at finding herself alone with one old man tossed about in an ocean of a hundred and fifty
thousand armed men facing a hundred and fifty thousand more. Weary of watching the river through the hedges of
the muddy road which she was following along a hillside, she asked its name of a passing soldier.

"That's the Saale," he said, showing her the Prussian army, grouped in great masses on the other side of the
stream.

Night came on. Laurence beheld the camp-fires lighted and the glitter of stacked arms. The old marquis, whose
courage was chivalric, drove the horses himself (two strong beasts bought the evening before), his servant sitting
beside him. He knew very well he should find neither horses nor postilions within the lines of the army. Suddenly
the bold equipage, an object of great astonishment to the soldiers, was stopped by a gendarme of the military
gendarmerie, who galloped up to the carriage, calling out to the marquis: "Who are you? where are you going? what
do you want?"

"The Emperor," replied the Marquis de Chargeboeuf; "I have an important dispatch for the Grand-marechal
Duroc."

"Well, you can't stay here," said the gendarme.

Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and the marquis were, however, compelled to remain where they were on account
of the darkness.

"Where are we?" she asked, stopping two officers whom she saw passing, whose uniforms were concealed by
cloth overcoats.

"You are among the advanced guard of the French army," answered one of the officers. "You cannot stay here, for
if the enemy makes a movement and the artillery opens you will be between two fires."

"Ah!" she said, with an indifferent air.

Hearing that "Ah!" the other officer turned and said: "How did that woman come here?"

"We are waiting," said Laurence, "for a gendarme who has gone to find General Duroc, a protector who will
enable us to speak to the Emperor."

"Speak to the Emperor!" exclaimed the first officer; "how can you think of such a thing--on the eve of a decisive
battle?"

"True," she said; "I ought to speak to him on the morrow--victory would make him kind."

The two officers stationed themselves at a little distance and sat motionless on their horses. The carriage was
now surrounded by a mass of generals, marshals, and other officers, all extremely brilliant in appearance, who
appeared to pay deference to the carriage merely because it was there.

"Good God!" said the marquis to Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne; "I am afraid you spoke to the Emperor."

"The Emperor?" said a colonel, beside them, "why there he is!" pointing to the officer who had said, "How did
that woman get here?" He was mounted on a white horse, richly caparisoned, and wore the celebrated gray top-coat
over his green uniform. He was scanning with a field-glass the Prussian army massed beyond the Saale. Laurence
understood then why the carriage remained there, and why the Emperor's escort respected it. She was seized with a
convulsive tremor--the hour had come! She heard the heavy sound of the tramp of men and the clang of their arms
as they arrived at a quick step on the plateau. The batteries had a language, the caissons thundered, the brass
glittered.

"Marechal Lannes will take position with his whole corps in the advance; Marechal Lefebvre and the Guard will
occupy this hill," said the other officer, who was Major-general Berthier.

The Emperor dismounted. At his first motion Roustan, his famous mameluke, hastened to hold his horse.
Laurence was stupefied with amazement; she had never dreamed of such simplicity.

"I shall pass the night on the plateau," said the Emperor.

Just then the Grand-marechal Duroc, whom the gendarme had finally found, came up to the Marquis de
Chargeboeuf and asked the reason of his coming. The marquis replied that a letter from the Prince de Talleyrand, of
which he was the bearer, would explain to the marshal how urgent it was that Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and
himself should obtain an audience of the Emperor.

"His Majesty will no doubt dine at his bivouac," said Duroc, taking the letter, "and when I find out what your
object is, I will let you know if you can see him. Corporal," he said to the gendarme, "accompany this carriage, and
take it close to that hut at the rear."

Monsieur de Chargeboeuf followed the gendarme and stopped his horses behind a miserable cabin, built of mud
and branches, surrounded by a few fruit-trees, and guarded by pickets of infantry and cavalry.

It may be said that the majesty of war appeared here in all its grandeur. From this height the lines of the two
armies were visible in the moonlight. After an hour's waiting, the time being occupied by the incessant coming and
going of the aides-de-camp, Duroc himself came for Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne and the marquis, and made them
enter the hut, the floor of which was of battened earth like that of a stable.

Before a table with the remains of dinner, and before a fire made of green wood which smoked, Napoleon was
seated in a clumsy chair. His muddy boots gave evidence of a long tramp across country. He had taken off the
famous top-coat; and his equally famous green uniform, crossed by the red cordon of the Legion of honor and
heightened by the white of his kerseymere breeches and of his waistcoat, brought out vividly his pale and terrible
Caesarian face. One hand was on a map which lay unfolded on his knees. Berthier stood near him in the brilliant
uniform of the vice-constable of the Empire. Constant, the valet, was offering the Emperor his coffee from a tray.

"What do you want?" said Napoleon, with a show of roughness, darting his eye like a flash through Laurence's
head. "You are no longer afraid to speak to me before the battle? What is it about?"
"Sire," she said, looking at him with as firm an eye, "I am Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne."

"Well?" he replied, in an angry voice, thinking her look braved him.

"Do you not understand? I am the Comtesse de Cinq-Cygne, come to ask mercy," she said, falling on her knees and holding out to him the petition drawn up by Talleyrand, endorsed by the Empress, by Cambaceres and by Malin.

The Emperor raised her graciously, and said with a keen look: "Have you come to your senses? Do you now understand what the French Empire is and must be?"

"Ah! at this moment I understand only the Emperor," she said, vanquished by the kindly manner with which the man of destiny had said the words that foretold to her ears success.

"Are they innocent?" asked the Emperor.

"Yes, all of them," she said with enthusiasm.

"All? No, that bailiff is a dangerous man, who would have killed my senator without taking your advice."

"Ah, Sire," she said, "if you had a friend devoted to you, would you abandon him? Would you not rather--"

"You are a woman," he said, interrupting her in a faint tone of ridicule.

"And you, a man of iron!" she replied with a passionate sternness which pleased him.

"That man has been condemned to death by the laws of his country," he continued.

"But he is innocent!"

"Child!" he said.

He took Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne by the hand and led her from the hut to the plateau.

"See," he continued, with that eloquence of his which changed even cowards to brave men, "see those three hundred thousand men--all innocent. And yet to-morrow thirty thousand of them will be lying dead, dead for their country! Among those Prussians there is, perhaps, some great mathematician, a man of genius, an idealist, who will be mown down. On our side we shall assuredly lose many a great man never known to fame. Perhaps even I shall see my best friend die. Shall I blame God? No. I shall bear it silently. Learn from this, mademoiselle, that a man must die for the laws of his country just as men die here for her glory." So saying, he led her back into the hut.

"Return to France," he said, looking at the marquis; "my orders shall follow you."

Laurence believed in a commutation of Michu's punishment, and in her gratitude she knelt again before the Emperor and kissed his hand.

"You are the Marquis de Chargeboeuf?" said Napoleon, addressing the marquis.

"Yes, Sire."

"You have children?"

"Many children."

"Why not give me one of your grandsons? he shall be my page."

"Ah!" thought Laurence, "there's the sub-lieutenant after all; he wants to be paid for his mercy."

The marquis bowed without replying. Happily at this moment General Rapp rushed into the hut.

"Sire, the cavalry of the Guard, and that of the Grand-duc de Berg cannot be set up before midday to-morrow."

"Never mind," said Napoleon, turning to Berthier, "we, too, get our reprieves; let us profit by them."

At a sign of his hand the marquis and Laurence retired and again entered their carriage; the corporal showed them their road and accompanied them to a village where they passed the night. The next day they left the field of battle behind them, followed by the thunder of the cannon,--eight hundred pieces,--which pursued them for ten hours. While still on their way they learned of the amazing victory of Jena.

Eight days later, they were driving through the faubourg of Troyes, where they learned that an order of the chief justice, transmitted through the _procureur imperial_, of Troyes, commanded the release of the four gentlemen on bail during the Emperor's pleasure. But Michu's sentence was confirmed, and the warrant for his execution had been forwarded from the ministry of police. These orders had reached Troyes that very morning. Laurence went at once to the prison, though it was two in the morning, and obtained permission to stay with Michu, who was about to undergo the melancholy ceremony called "the toilet." The good abbe, who had asked permission to accompany him to the scaffold, had just given absolution to the man, whose only distress in dying was his uncertainty as to the fate of his young masters. When Laurence entered his cell he uttered a cry of joy.

"I can die now," he said.

"They are pardoned," she said; "I do not know on what conditions, but they are pardoned. I did all I could for you, dear friend--against the advice of others. I thought I had saved you; but the Emperor deceived me with his graciousness."

"It was written above," said Michu, "that the watch-dog should be killed on the spot where his old masters died."

The last hour passed rapidly. Michu, at the moment of parting, asked to kiss her hand, but Laurence held her cheek to the lips of the noble victim that he might sacredly kiss it. Michu refused to mount the cart.

"Innocent men should go afoot," he said.
He would not let the abbe give him his arm; resolutely and with dignity he walked alone to the scaffold. As he laid his head on the plank he said to the executioner, after asking him to turn down the collar of his coat, "My clothes belong to you; try not to spot them."

* * * * *

The four gentlemen had hardly time to even see Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne. An orderly of the general commanding the division to which they were assigned, brought them their commissions as sub-lieutenants in the same regiment of cavalry, with orders to proceed at once to Bayonne, the base of supplies for its particular army-corps. After a scene of heart-rending farewells, for they all foreboded what the future should bring forth, Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne returned to her desolate home.

The two brothers were killed together under the eyes of the Emperor at Sommo-Sierra, the one defending the other, both being already in command of their troop. The last words of each of were, "Laurence, _cy meurs_!"

The elder d'Hauteserre died a colonel at the attack on the redoubt at Moscow, where his brother took his place. Adrien d'Hauteserre, appointed brigadier-general at the battle of Dresden, was dangerously wounded there and was sent to Cinq-Cygne for proper nursing. While endeavoring to save this relic of the four gentlemen who for a few brief months had been so happy around her, Laurence, then thirty-two years of age, married him. She offered him a withered heart, but he accepted it; those who truly love doubt nothing or doubt all.

The Restoration found Laurence without enthusiasm. The Bourbons returned too late for her. Nevertheless, she had no cause for complaint. Her husband, made peer of France with the title of Marquis de Cinq-Cygne, became lieutenant-general in 1816, and was rewarded with the blue ribbon for the eminent services which he then performed.

Michu's son, of whom Laurence took care as though he were her own child, was admitted to the bar in 1817. After practising two years he was made assistant-judge at the court of Alencon, and from there he became _procureur-du-roi_ at Arcis in 1827. Laurence, who had also taken charge of Michu's property, made over to the young man on the day of his majority an investment in the public Funds which yielded him an income of twelve thousand francs a year. Later, she arranged a marriage for him with Mademoiselle Girel, an heiress at Troyes.

The Marquis de Cinq-Cygne died in 1829, in the arms of his wife, surrounded by his father and mother, and his children who adored him. At the time of his death no one had ever fathomed the mystery of the senator's abduction. Louis XVIII. did not neglect to repair, as far as possible, the wrongs done by that affair; but he was silent as to the causes of the disaster. From that time forth the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne believed him to have been an accomplice in the catastrophe.

CHAPTER XX
THE MYSTERY SOLVED

The late Marquis de Cinq-Cygne had used his savings, as well as those of his father and mother, in the purchase of a fine house in the rue de Faubourg-du-Roule, entailing it on heirs male for the support of the title. The sordid economy of the marquis and his parents, which had often troubled Laurence, was then explained. After this purchase the marquise, who lived at Cinq-Cygne and economized on her own account for her children, spent her winters in Paris,—all the more willingly because her daughter Berthe and her son Paul were now of an age when their education required the resources of Paris.

Madame de Cinq-Cygne went but little into society. Her husband could not be ignorant of the regrets which lay in her tender heart; but he showed her always the most exquisite delicacy, and died having loved no other woman. This noble soul, not fully understood for a period of time but to which the generous daughter of the Cinq-Cygnes returned in his last years as true a love as that he gave to her, was completely happy in his married life. Laurence lived for the joys of home. No woman has ever been more cherished by her friends or more respected. To be received in her house is an honor. Gentle, indulgent, intellectual, above all things simple and natural, she pleases choice souls and draws them to her in spite of her saddened aspect; each longs to protect this woman, inwardly so strong, and that sentiment of secret protection counts for much in the wondrous charm of her friendship. Her life, so painful during her youth, is beautiful and serene towards evening. Her sufferings are known, and no one asks who was the original of that portrait by Lefebvre which is the chief and sacred ornament of her salon. Her face has the maturity of fruits that have ripened slowly; a hallowed pride dignifies that long-tried brow.

At the period when the marquise came to Paris to open the new house, her fortune, increased by the law of indemnities, gave her some two hundred thousand francs a year, not counting her husband's salary; besides this, Laurence had inherited the money guarded by Michu for his young masters. From that time forth she made a practice of spending half her income and of laying by the rest for her daughter Berthe.

Berthe is the living image of her mother, but without her warrior nerve; she is her mother in delicacy, in intellect,—"more a woman," Laurence says, sadly. The marquise was not willing to marry her daughter until she was twenty years of age. Her savings, judiciously invested in the Funds by old Monsieur d'Hauteserre at the moment
when consols fell in 1830, gave Berthe a dowry of eighty thousand francs a year in 1833, when she was twenty.

About that time the Princesse de Cadignan, who was seeking to marry her son, the Duc de Maufrigneuse, brought him into intimate relations with Madame de Cinq-Cygne. Georges de Maufrigneuse dined with the marquise three times a week, accompanied the mother and daughter to the Opera, and curvetted in the Bois around their carriage when they drove out. It was evident to all the world of the Faubourg Saint-Germain that Georges loved Berthe. But no one could discover to a certainty whether Madame de Cinq-Cygne was desirous of making her daughter a duchess, to become a princess later, or whether it was only the princess who coveted for her son the splendid dowry. Did the celebrated Diane court the noble provincial house? and was the daughter of the Cinq-Cyngses frightened by the celebrity of Madame de Cadignan, her tastes and her ruinous extravagance? In her strong desire not to injure her son's prospects the princess grew devout, shut the door on her former life, and spent the summer season at Geneva in a villa on the lake.

One evening there were present in the salon of the Princesse de Cadignan, the Marquise d'Espard, and de Marsay, then president of the Council (on this occasion the princess saw her former lover for the last time, for he died the following year), Eugene de Rastignac, under-secretary of State attached to de Marsay's ministry, two ambassadors, two celebrated orators from the Chamber of Peers, the old dukes of Lenoncourt and de Navarreins, the Comte de Vandenesse and his young wife, and d'Arthez,—who formed a rather singular circle, the composition of which can be thus explained. The princess was anxious to obtain from the prime minister of the crown a permit for the return of the Prince de Cadignan. De Marsay, who did not choose to take upon himself the responsibility of granting it came to tell the princess the matter had been entrusted to safe hands, and that a certain political manager had promised to bring her the result in the course of that evening.

Madame and Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne were announced. Laurence, whose principles were unyielding, was not only surprised but shocked to see the most illustrious representatives of Legitimacy talking and laughing in a friendly manner with the prime minister of the man whom she never called anything but Monsieur le Duc d'Orleans. De Marsay, like an expiring lamp, shone with a last brilliancy. He laid aside for the moment his political anxieties, and Madame de Cinq-Cygne endured him, as they say the Court of Austria endured de Saint-Aulaire; the man of the world effaced the minister of the citizen-king. But she rose to her feet as though her chair were of red-hot iron when the name was announced of "Monsieur le Comte de Gondreville."

"Adieu, madame," she said to the princess in a curt tone.

She left the room with Berthe, measuring her steps to avoid encountering that fatal being.

"You may have caused the loss of Georges' marriage," said the princess to de Marsay, in a low voice. "Why did you not tell me your agent's name?"

The former clerk of Arcis, former Conventional, former Thermidorien, tribune, Councillor of State, count of the Empire and senator, peer of the Restoration, and now peer of the monarchy of July, made a servile bow to the princess.

"Fear nothing, madame," he said; "we have ceased to make war on princes. I bring you an assurance of the permit," he added, seating himself beside her.

Malin was long in the confidence of Louis XVIII., to whom his varied experience was useful. He had greatly aided in overthrowing Decazes, and had given much good advice to the ministry of Villele. Coldly received by Charles X., he had adopted all the rancors of Talleyrand. He was now in high favor under the twelfth government he had served since 1789, and which in turn he would doubtless betray. For the last fifteen months he had broken the long friendship which had bound him for thirty-six years to our greatest diplomat, the Prince de Talleyrand. It was in the course of this very evening that he made answer to some one who asked why the Prince showed such hostility to the Duc de Bordeaux, "The Pretender is too young!"

"Singular advice to give young men," remarked Rastignac.

De Marsay, who grew thoughtful after Madame de Cadignan's reproachful speech, took no notice of these jests. He looked askance at Gondreville and was evidently biding his time until that now old man, who went to bed early, had taken leave. All present, who had witnessed the abrupt departure of Madame de Cinq-Cygne (whose reasons were well-known to them), imitated de Marsay's conduct and kept silence. Gondreville, who had not recognized the marquise, was ignorant of the cause of the general reticence, but the habit of dealing with public matters had given him a certain tact; he was moreover a clever man; he saw that his presence was embarrassing to the company and he took leave. De Marsay, standing with his back to the fire, watched the slow departure of the old man in a manner which revealed the gravity of his thoughts.

"I did wrong, madame, not to tell you the name of my negotiator," said the prime minister, listening for the sound of Malin's wheels as they rolled away. "But I will redeem my fault and give you the means of making your peace with the Cinq-Cyngses. It is now thirty years since the affair I am about to speak of took place; it is as old to the present day as the death of Henri IV. (which between ourselves and in spite of the proverb is still a mystery, like
so many other historical catastrophes). I can, however, assure you that even if this affair did not concern Madame de Cinq-Cygne it would be none the less curious and interesting. Moreover, it throws light on a celebrated exploit in our modern annals,—I mean that of the Mont Saint-Bernard. Messieurs les Ambassadeurs," he added, bowing to the two diplomats, "will see that in the element of profound intrigue the political men of the present day are far behind the Machiavellis whom the waves of the popular will lifted, in 1793, above the storm,—some of whom have 'found,' as the old song says, 'a haven.' To be anything in France in these days a man must have been tossed in those tempests."

"It seems to me," said the princess, smiling, "that from that point of view the present state of things under your regime leaves nothing to be desired."

A well-bred laugh went round the room, and even the prime minister himself could not help smiling. The ambassadors seemed impatient for the tale; de Marsay coughed dryly and silence was obtained.

"On a June night in 1800," began the minister, "about three in the morning, just as daylight was beginning to pale the brilliancy of the wax candles, two men tired of playing at _bouillotte_ (or who were playing merely to keep others employed) left the salon of the ministry of foreign affairs, then situated in the rue du Bac, and went apart into a boudoir. These two men, of whom one is dead and the other has _one_ foot in the grave, were, each in his own way, equally extraordinary. Both had been priests; both had abjured religion; both were married. One had been merely an Oratorian, the other had worn the mitre of a bishop. The first was named Fouche; I shall not tell you the name of the second;[*_] both were then mere simple citizens—with very little simplicity. When they were seen to leave the salon and enter the boudoir, the rest of the company present showed a certain curiosity. A third person followed them,—a man who thought himself far stronger than the other two. His name was Sieyes, and you all know that he too had been a priest before the Revolution. The one who _walked with difficulty_ was then the minister of foreign affairs; Fouche was minister of police; Sieyes had resigned the consulate.

[*_] Talleyrand was still living when de Marsay related these circumstances.

"A small man, cold and stern in appearance, left his seat and followed the three others, saying aloud in the hearing of the person from whom I have the information, 'I mistrust the gambling of priests.' This man was Carnot, minister of war. His remark did not trouble the two consuls who were playing cards in the salon. Cambaceres and Lebrun were then at the mercy of their ministers, men who were infinitely stronger than they.

"Nearly all these statesmen are dead, and no secrecy is due to them. They belong to history; and the history of that night and its consequences has been terrible. I tell it to you now because I alone know it; because Louis XVIII. never revealed the truth to that poor Madame de Cinq-Cygne; and because the present government which I serve is wholly indifferent as to whether the truth be known to the world or not.

"All four of these personages sat down in the boudoir. The lame man undoubtedly closed the door before a word was said; it is even thought that he ran the bolt. It is only persons of high rank who pay attention to such trifles. The three priests had the livid, impassible faces which you all remember. Carnot alone was ruddy. He was the first to speak. 'What is the point to be discussed?' he asked. 'France,' must have been the answer of the Prince (whom I admire as one of the most extraordinary men of our time). 'The Republic,' undoubtedly said Fouche. 'Power,' probably said Sieyes."

All present looked at each other. With voice, look, and gesture de Marsay had wonderfully represented the three men.

"The three priests fully understood one another," he continued, resuming his narrative. "Carnot no doubt looked at his colleagues and the ex-consul in a dignified manner. He must, however, have felt bewildered in his own mind.

"Do you believe in the success of the army?" Sieyes said to him.

"We may expect everything from Bonaparte,' replied the minister of war; 'he has crossed the Alps.'

"At this moment,' said the minister of foreign affairs, with deliberate slowness, 'he is playing his last stake.'

"Come, let's speak out,' said Fouche; 'what shall we do if the First Consul is defeated? Is it possible to collect another army? Must we continue his humble servants?'

"There is no republic now,' remarked Sieyes; 'Bonaparte is consul for ten years.'

"He has more power than ever Cromwell had,' said the former bishop, 'and he did not vote for the death of the king.'

"We have a master,' said Fouche; 'the question is, shall we continue to keep him if he loses the battle or shall we return to a pure republic?"

"France,' replied Carnot, sententiously, 'cannot resist except she reverts to the old Conventional _energy_.'

"I agree with Carnot,' said Sieyes; 'if Bonaparte returns defeated we must put an end to him; he has let us know him too well during the last seven months.'

"The army is for him,' remarked Carnot, thoughtfully.

"And the people for us!' cried Fouche."
"'You go fast, monsieur,' said the Prince, in that deep bass voice which he still preserves and which now drove Fouche back into himself.

"'Be frank,' said a voice, as a former Conventional rose from a corner of the boudoir and showed himself; 'if Bonaparte returns a victor, we shall adore him; if vanquished, we'll bury him!'

"'So you were there, Malin, were you?' said the Prince, without betraying the least feeling. 'Then you must be one of us; sit down'; and he made him a sign to be seated.

"'It is to this one circumstance that Malin, a Conventional of small repute, owes the position he afterwards obtained and, ultimately, that in which we see him at the present moment. He proved discreet, and the ministers were faithful to him; but they made him the pivot of the machine and the cat's-paw of the machination. To return to my tale.

"'Bonaparte has never yet been vanquished,' cried Carnot, in a tone of conviction, 'and he has just surpassed Hannibal.'

"'If the worst happens, here is the Directory,' said Sieyes, artfully, indicating with a wave of his hand the five persons present.

"'And,' added the Prince, 'we are all committed to the maintenance of the French republic; we three priests have literally unfrocked ourselves; the general, here, voted for the death of the king; and you,' he said, turning to Malin, 'have got possession of the property of _émigrés._'

"'Yes, we have all the same interests,' said Sieyes, dictatorially, 'and our interests are one with those of the nation.'

"'A rare thing,' said the Prince, smiling.

"'We must act,' interrupted Fouche. 'In all probability the battle is now going on; the Austrians outnumber us; Genoa has surrendered; Massena has committed the great mistake of embarking for Antibes; it is very doubtful if he can rejoin Bonaparte, who will then be reduced to his own resources.'

"'Who gave you that news?' asked Carnot.

"'It is sure,' replied Fouche. 'You will have the courier when the Bourse opens.'

"'Those men didn't mince their words,' said de Marsay, smiling, and stopping short for a moment.

"'Remember,' continued Fouche, 'it is not when the news of a disaster comes that we can organize clubs, rouse the patriotism of the people, and change the constitution. Our 18th Brumaire ought to be prepared beforehand.'

"'Let us leave the care of that to the minister of police,' said the Prince, bowing to Fouche, 'and beware ourselves of Lucien.' (Lucien Bonaparte was then minister of the interior.)

"'I'll arrest him,' said Fouche.

"'Messieurs!' cried Sieyes, 'our Directory ought not to be subject to anarchical changes. We must organize a government of the few, a Senate for life, and an elective chamber the control of which shall be in our hands; for we ought to profit by the blunders of the past.'

"'With such a system, there would be peace for me,' remarked the ex-bishop.

"'Find me a sure man to negotiate with Moreau; for the Army of the Rhine will be our sole resource,' cried Carnot, who had been plunged in meditation.

"'Ah!' said de Marsay, pausing, 'those men were right. They were grand in this crisis. I should have done as they did'; then he resumed his narrative.

"'Messieurs!' cried Sieyes, in a grave and solemn tone.

"'That word 'Messieurs!' was perfectly understood by all present; all eyes expressed the same faith, the same promise, that of absolute silence, and unswerving loyalty to each other in case the First Consul returned triumphant.

"'We all know what we have to do,' added Fouche.

"'Sieyes softly unbolted the door; his priestly ear had warned him. Lucien entered the room.

"'Good news!' he said. 'A courier has just brought Madame Bonaparte a line from the First Consul. The campaign has opened with a victory at Montebello.'

"'The three ministers exchanged looks.

"'Was it a general engagement?' asked Carnot.

"'No, a fight, in which Lannes has covered himself with glory. The affair was bloody. Attacked with ten thousand men by eighteen thousand, he was only saved by a division sent to his support. Ott is in full retreat. The Austrian line is broken.'

"'When did the fight take place?' asked Carnot.

"'On the 8th,' replied Lucien.

"'And this is the 13th,' said the sagacious minister. 'Well, if that is so, the destinies of France are in the scale at the very moment we are speaking.'

(In fact, the battle of Marengo did begin at dawn of the 14th.)
"Four days of fatal uncertainty!" said Lucien.

"Fatal?" said the minister of foreign affairs, coldly and interrogatively.

"Four days,' echoed Fouche.

"An eye-witness told me," said de Marsay, continuing the narrative in his own person, "that the consuls, Cambaceres and Lebrun, knew nothing of this momentous news until after the six personages returned to the salon. It was then four in the morning. Fouche left first. That man of dark and mysterious genius, extraordinary, profound, and little understood, but who undoubtedly had the gifts of a Philip the Second, a Tiberius and a Borgia, went at once to work with an infernal and secret activity. His conduct at the time of the affair at Walcheren was that of a consummate soldier, a great politician, a far-seeing administrator. He was the only real minister that Napoleon ever had. And you all know how he then alarmed him.

"Fouche, Massena and the Prince," continued de Marsay, reflectively, "are the three greatest men, the wisest heads in diplomacy, war, and government, that I have ever known. If Napoleon had frankly allied them with his work there would no longer be a Europe, only a vast French Empire. Fouche did not finally detach himself from Napoleon until he saw Sieyes and the Prince de Talleyrand shoved aside.

"He now went to work, and in three days (all the while hiding the hand that stirred the ashes of the Montagne) he had organized that general agitation which then arose all over France and revived the republicanism of 1793. As it is necessary that I should explain this obscure corner of our history, I must tell you that this agitation, starting from Fouche's own hand (which held the wires of the former Montagne), produced republican plots against the life of the First Consul, which was in peril from this cause long after the victory of Marengo. It was Fouche's sense of the evil he had thus brought about which led him to warn Napoleon, who held a contrary opinion, that republicans were more concerned than royalists in the various conspiracies.

"Fouche was an admirable judge of men; he relied on Sieyes because of his thwarted ambition, on Talleyrand because he was a great _seigneur_, on Carnot for his perfect honesty; but the man he dreaded was the one whom you have seen here this evening. I will now tell how he entangled that man in his meshes.

"Malin was only Malin in those days,—a secret agent and correspondent of Louis XVIII. Fouche now compelled him to reduce to writing all the proclamations of the proposed revolutionary government, its warrants and edicts against the factions of the 18th Brumaire. An accomplice against his own will, Malin was required to have these documents secretly printed, and the copies held ready in his own house for distribution if Bonaparte were defeated. The printer was subsequently imprisoned and detained two months; he died in 1816, and always believed he had been employed by a Montagnard conspiracy.

"One of the most singular scenes ever played by Fouche's police was caused by the blunder of an agent, who despatched a courier to a famous banker of that day with the news of a defeat at Marengo. Victory, you will remember, did not declare itself for Napoleon until seven o'clock in the evening of the battle. At midday the banker's agent, considering the day lost and the French army about to be annihilated, hastened to despatch the courier. On receipt of that news Fouche was about to put into motion a whole army of bill-posters and cries, with a truck full of proclamations, when the second courier arrived with the news of the triumph which put all France beside itself with joy. There were heavy losses at the Bourse, of course. But the criers and posters who were gathered to announce the political death of Bonaparte and to post up the new proclamations were only kept waiting awhile till the news of the victory could be struck off!

"Malin, on whom the whole responsibility of the plot of which he had been the working agent was likely to fall if it ever became known, was so terrified that he packed the proclamations and other papers in carts and took them down to Gondreville in the night-time, where no doubt they were hidden in the cellars of that chateau, which he had bought in the name of another man—who was it, by the bye? he had him made chief-justice of an Imperial court—Ah! Marion. Having thus disposed of these damning proofs he returned to Paris to congratulate the First Consul on his victory. Napoleon, as you know, rushed from Italy to Paris after the battle of Marengo with alarming celerity. The minister of the interior had foreseen the attitude of the Montagnard party, and though he had no idea of the quarter from which the wind really blew, he feared a storm. Incapable of suspecting the three ministers and Carnot, he attributed the movement which stirred all France to the hatred his brother had excited by the 18th Brumaire, and to the confident belief of the men of 1793 that defeat was certain in Italy.

"The battle of Marengo detained Napoleon on the plains of Lombardy until the 25th of June, but he reached Paris on the 2nd of July. Imagine the faces of the five conspirators as they met the First Consul at the Tuileries, and congratulated him on the victory. Fouche on that very occasion at the palace told Malin to have patience, for _all was not over yet_. The truth was, Talleyrand and Fouche both held that Bonaparte was not as much bound to the principles of the Revolution as they were, and as he ought to be; and for this reason, as well as for their own safety, they subsequently, in 1804, buckled him irrevocably, as they believed, to its cause by the affair of the Duc
d'Enghien. The execution of that prince is connected by a series of discoverable ramifications with the plot which
was laid on that June evening in the boudoir of the ministry of foreign affairs, the night before the battle of Marengo.
Those who have the means of judging, and who have known persons who were well-informed, are fully aware that
Bonaparte was handled like a child by Talleyrand and Fouche, who were determined to alienate him irrevocably
from the House of Bourbon, whose agents were even then, at the last moment, endeavoring to negotiate with the
First Consul."

"Talleyrand was playing whist in the salon of Madame de Luynes," said a personage who had been listening
attentively to de Marsay's narrative. "It was about three o'clock in the morning, when he pulled out his watch, looked
at it, stopped the game, and asked his three companions abruptly and without any preface whether the Prince de
Conde had any other children than the Duc d'Enghien. Such an absurd inquiry from the lips of Talleyrand caused the
utmost surprise. 'Why do you ask us what you know perfectly well yourself?' they said to him. 'Only to let you know
that the House of Conde comes to an end at this moment.' Now Monsieur de Talleyrand had been at the hotel de
Luynes the entire evening, and he must have known that Bonaparte was absolutely unable to grant the pardon."

"But," said Eugene de Rastignac, "I don't see in all this any connection with Madame de Cinq-Cygnes and her
troubles."

"Ah, you were so young at that time, my dear fellow; I forgot to explain the conclusion. You all know the affair
of the abduction of the Comte de Gondreville, then senator of the Empire, for which the Simeuse brothers and the
two d'Hauteserres were condemned to the galleys,—an affair which did, in fact, lead to their death."

De Marsay, entreated by several persons present to whom the circumstances were unknown, related the whole
trial, stating that the mysterious abductors were five sharks of the secret service of the ministry of the police, who
were ordered to obtain the proclamations of the would-be Directory which Malin had surreptitiously taken from his
house in Paris, and which he had himself come to Gondreville for the express purpose of destroying, being
convinced at last that the Empire was on a sure foundation and could not be overthrown. "I have no doubt," added de
Marsay, "that Fouche took the opportunity to have the house searched for the correspondence between Malin and
Louis XVIII., which was always kept up, even during the Terror. But in this cruel affair there was a private element,
a passion of revenge in the mind of the leader of the party, a man named Corentin, who is still living, and who is one
of those subaltern agents whom nothing can replace and who makes himself felt by his amazing ability. It appears
that Madame, then Mademoiselle de Cinq-Cygne, had ill-treated him on a former occasion when he attempted to
arrest the Simeuse brothers. What happened afterwards in connection with the senator's abduction was the result of
his private vengeance.

"These facts were known, of course, to Malin, and through him to Louis XVIII. You may therefore," added de
Marsay, turning to the Princesse de Cadignan, "explain the whole matter to the Marquise de Cinq-Cygne, and show
her why Louis XVIII. thought fit to keep silence."

ADDENDUM
The following personages appear in other stories of the Human Comedy.
Beauvisage The Member for Arcis
Berthier, Alexandre The Chouans
Bonaparte, Lucien The Vendetta
Bordin The Seamy Side of History The Commission in Lunacy Jealousies of a Country Town
Cinq-Cygne, Laurence, Comtesse (afterwards Marquise de) The Secrets of a Princess The Seamy Side of History
The Member for Arcis
Corentin The Chouans Scenes from a Courtesan's Life The Middle Classes
Derville Gobseck A Start in Life Father Goriot Colonel Chabert Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Duroc, Gerard-Christophe-Michel A Woman of Thirty
Espard, Jeanne-Clementine-Athenais de Blamont-Chauvry, Marquise d' The Commission in Lunacy A Distinguished Provincial at Paris Scenes from a Courtesan's Life Letters of Two Brides Another Study of Woman
The Secrets of a Princess A Daughter of Eve Beatrix
Fouche, Joseph The Chouans Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Giguet, Colonel The Member for Arcis
Gondreville, Malin, Comte de A Start in Life Domestic Peace The Member for Arcis
Gothard The Member for Arcis
Goujet, Abbe The Member for Arcis
Grandlieu, Duc Ferdinand de The Thirteen A Bachelor's Establishment Modeste Mignon Scenes from a
Courtesan's Life
Granville, Vicomte de A Second Home Farewell (Adieu) Cesar Birotteau Scenes from a Courtesan's Life A Daughter of Eve Cousin Pons
Grevin A Start in Life The Member for Arcis Hauteserre, D' The Member for Arcis

Lefebvre, Robert Cousin Betty
Lenoncourt, Duc de The Lily of the Valley Cesar Birotteau Jealousies of a Country Town Beatrix Louis XVIII., Louis-Stanislas-Xavier The Chouans The Seamy Side of History Scenes from a Courtesan's Life The Ball at Sceaux The Lily of the Valley Colonel Chabert The Government Clerks
Marion (of Arcis) The Member for Arcis Marion (brother) The Member for Arcis
Marsay, Henri de The Thirteen The Unconscious Humorists Another Study of Woman The Lily of the Valley Father Goriot Jealousies of a Country Town Ursule Mirouet A Marriage Settlement Lost Illusions A Distinguished Provincial at Paris Letters of Two Brides The Ball at Sceaux Modeste Mignon The Secrets of a Princess A Daughter of Eve
Maufrigneuse, Duchesse de The Secrets of a Princess Modeste Mignon Jealousies of a Country Town The Muse of the Department Scenes from a Courtesan's Life Letters of Two Brides Another Study of Woman The Member for Arcis
Maufrigneuse, Georges de The Secrets of a Princess Beatrix The Member for Arcis
Maufrigneuse, Berthe de Beatrix The Member for Arcis
Michu, Francois Jealousies of a Country Town The Member for Arcis
Michu, Madame Francois The Member for Arcis
Murat, Joachim, Prince The Vendetta Colonel Chabert Domestic Peace The Country Doctor
Navarreins, Duc de A Bachelor's Establishment Colonel Chabert The Muse of the Department The Thirteen Jealousies of a Country Town The Peasantry Scenes from a Courtesan's Life The Country Parson The Magic Skin The Secrets of a Princess Cousin Betty
Peyrade Scenes from a Courtesan's Life
Rapp The Vendetta
Rastignac, Eugene de Father Goriot A Distinguished Provincial at Paris Scenes from a Courtesan's Life The Ball at Sceaux The Commission in Lunacy A Study of Woman Another Study of Woman The Magic Skin The Secrets of a Princess A Daughter of Eve The Firm of Nucingen Cousin Betty The Member for Arcis The Unconscious Humorists
Regnier, Claude-Antoine A Second Home
Simeuse, Admiral de Beatrix Jealousies of a Country Town
Steingel The Peasantry
Talleyrand-Perigord, Charles-Maurice de The Chouans The Thirteen Letters of Two Brides Gaudissart II.
Vandenesse, Comte Felix de The Lily of the Valley Lost Illusions A Distinguished Provincial at Paris Cesar Birotteau Letters of Two Brides A Start in Life The Marriage Settlement The Secrets of a Princess Another Study of Woman A Daughter of Eve
Varlet The Gondreville Mystery The Member for Arcis
CHAPTER I: Bad News

Between what matters and what seems to matter, how should the world we know judge wisely?

When the scheming, indomitable brain of Sigsbee Manderson was scattered by a shot from an unknown hand, that world lost nothing worth a single tear; it gained something memorable in a harsh reminder of the vanity of such wealth as this dead man had piled up—without making one loyal friend to mourn him, without doing an act that could help his memory to the least honour. But when the news of his end came, it seemed to those living in the great vortices of business as if the earth too shuddered under a blow.

In all the lurid commercial history of his country there had been no figure that had so imposed itself upon the mind of the trading world. He had a niche apart in its temples. Financial giants, strong to direct and augment the forces of capital, and taking an approved toll in millions for their labour, had existed before; but in the case of Manderson there had been this singularity, that a pale halo of piratical romance, a thing especially dear to the hearts of his countrymen, had remained incongruously about his head through the years when he stood in every eye as the unquestioned guardian of stability, the stamper-out of manipulated crises, the foe of the raiding chieftains that infest the borders of Wall Street.

The fortune left by his grandfather, who had been one of those chieftains on the smaller scale of his day, had descended to him with accretion through his father, who during a long life had quietly continued to lend money and never had margined a stock. Manderson, who had at no time known what it was to be without large sums to his hand, should have been altogether of that newer American plutocracy which is steadied by the tradition and habit of great wealth. But it was not so. While his nurture and education had taught him European ideas of a rich man's proper external circumstance; while they had rooted in him an instinct for quiet magnificence, the larger costliness which does not shriek of itself with a thousand tongues; there had been handed on to him nevertheless much of the Forty-Niner and financial buccaneer, his forbear. During that first period of his business career which had been called his early bad manner, he had been little more than a gambler of genius, his hand against every man's—an infant prodigy who brought to the enthralling pursuit of speculation a brain better endowed than any opposed to it. At St Helena it was laid down that war is une belle occupation; and so the young Manderson had found the multitudinous and complicated dog-fight of the Stock Exchange of New York.

Then came his change. At his father's death, when Manderson was thirty years old, some new revelation of the power and the glory of the god he served seemed to have come upon him. With the sudden, elastic adaptability of his nation he turned to steady labour in his father's banking business, closing his ears to the sound of the battles of the Street. In a few years he came to control all the activity of the great firm whose unimpeached conservatism, safety, and financial weight lifted it like a cliff above the angry sea of the markets. All mistrust founded on the performances of his youth had vanished. He was quite plainly a different man. How the change came about none could with authority say, but there was a story of certain last words spoken by his father, whom alone he had respected and perhaps loved.

He began to tower above the financial situation. Soon his name was current in the bourses of the world. One who spoke the name of Manderson called up a vision of all that was broad-based and firm in the vast wealth of the United States. He planned great combinations of capital, drew together and centralized industries of continental scope, financed with unerring judgement the large designs of state or of private enterprise. Many a time when he 'took hold' to smash a strike, or to federate the ownership of some great field of labour, he sent ruin upon a multitude of tiny homes; and if miners or steelworkers or cattlemen defied him and invoked disorder, he could be more lawless and ruthless than they. But this was done in the pursuit of legitimate business ends. Tens of thousands of the poor might curse his name, but the financier and the speculator execrated him no more. He stretched a hand to protect or to manipulate the power of wealth in every corner of the country. Forcible, cold, and unerring, in all he did he ministered to the national lust for magnitude; and a grateful country surnamed him the Colossus.

But there was an aspect of Manderson in this later period that lay long unknown and unsuspected save by a few, his secretaries and lieutenants and certain of the associates of his bygone hurling time. This little circle knew that Manderson, the pillar of sound business and stability in the markets, had his hours of nostalgia for the lively times when the Street had trembled at his name. It was, said one of them, as if Blackbeard had settled down as a decent merchant in Bristol on the spoils of the Main. Now and then the pirate would glare suddenly out, the knife in his teeth and the sulphur matches sputtering in his hatband. During such spasms of reversion to type a score of
tempestuous raids upon the market had been planned on paper in the inner room of the offices of Manderson, Colefax and Company. But they were never carried out. Blackbeard would quell the mutiny of his old self within him and go soberly down to his counting-house—humming a stave or two of 'Spanish Ladies', perhaps, under his breath. Manderson would allow himself the harmless satisfaction, as soon as the time for action had gone by, of pointing out to some Rupert of the markets a coup worth a million to the depredator might have been made. 'Seems to me,' he would say almost wistfully, 'the Street is getting to be a mighty dull place since I quit.' By slow degrees this amiable weakness of the Colossus became known to the business world, which exulted greatly in the knowledge.

At the news of his death panic went through the markets like a hurricane; for it came at a luckless time. Prices tottered and crashed like towers in an earthquake. For two days Wall Street was a clamorous inferno of pale despair. All over the United States, wherever speculation had its devotees, went a waft of ruin, a plague of suicide. In Europe also not a few took with their own hands lives that had become pitiably linked to the destiny of a financier whom most of them had never seen. In Paris a well-known banker walked quietly out of the Bourse and fell dead upon the broad steps among the raving crowd of Jews, a phial crushed in his hand. In Frankfort one leapt from the Cathedral top, leaving a redder stain where he struck the red tower. Men stabbed and shot and strangled themselves, drank death or breathed it as the air, because in a lonely corner of England the life had departed from one cold heart vowed to the service of greed.

The blow could not have fallen at a more disastrous moment. It came when Wall Street was in a condition of suppressed 'scare'—suppressed, because for a week past the great interests known to act with or to be actually controlled by the Colossus had been desperately combating the effects of the sudden arrest of Lucas Hahn, and the exposure of his plundering of the Hahn banks. This bombshell, in its turn, had fallen at a time when the market had been 'boosted' beyond its real strength. In the language of the place, a slump was due. Reports from the corn-lands had not been good, and there had been two or three railway statements which had been expected to be much better than they were. But at whatever point in the vast area of speculation the shudder of the threatened break had been felt, 'the Manderson crowd' had stepped in and held the market up. All through the week the speculator's mind, as shallow as it is quick- witted, as sentimental as greedy, had seen in this the hand of the giant stretched out in protection from afar. Manderson, said the newspapers in chorus, was in hourly communication with his lieutenants in the Street. One journal was able to give in round figures the sum spent on cabling between New York and Marlstone in the past twenty-four hours; it told how a small staff of expert operators had been sent down by the Post Office authorities to Marlstone to deal with the flood of messages. Another revealed that Manderson, on the first news of the Hahn crash, had arranged to abandon his holiday and return home by the Lusitania; but that he soon had the situation so well in hand that he had determined to remain where he was.

All this was falsehood, more or less consciously elaborated by the 'finance editors', consciously initiated and encouraged by the shrewd business men of the Manderson group, who knew that nothing could better help their plans than this illusion of hero-worship—knew also that no word had come from Manderson in answer to their messages, and that Howard B. Jeffrey, of Steel and Iron fame, was the true organizer of victory. So they fought down apprehension through four feverish days, and minds grew calmer. On Saturday, though the ground beneath the feet of Mr. Jeffrey yet rumbled now and then with Etna-mutterings of disquiet, he deemed his task almost done. The market was firm, and slowly advancing. Wall Street turned to its sleep of Sunday, worn out but thankfully at peace.

In the first trading hour of Monday a hideous rumour flew round the sixty acres of the financial district. It came into being as the lightning comes—a blink that seems to begin nowhere; though it is to be suspected that it was first whispered over the telephone—together with an urgent selling order by some employee in the cable service. A sharp spasm convulsed the convalescent share-list. In five minutes the dull noise of the kerbstone market in Broad Street had leapt to a high note of frantic interrogation. From within the hive of the Exchange itself could be heard a droning hubbub of fear, and men rushed hatless in and out. Was it true? asked every man; and every man replied, with trembling lips, that it was a lie put out by some unscrupulous 'short' interest seeking to cover itself. In another quarter of an hour news came of a sudden and ruinous collapse of 'Yankees' in London at the close of the Stock Exchange day. It was enough. New York had still four hours' trading in front of her. The strategy of pointing to Manderson as the saviour and warden of the markets had recoiled upon its authors with annihilating force, and Jeffrey, his ear at his private telephone, listened to the tale of disaster with a set jaw. The new Napoleon had lost his Marengo. He saw the whole financial landscape sliding and falling into chaos before him. In half an hour the news of the finding of Manderson's body, with the inevitable rumour that it was suicide, was printing in a dozen newspaper offices; but before a copy reached Wall Street the tornado of the panic was in full fury, and Howard B. Jeffrey and his collaborators were whirled away like leaves before its breath.

All this sprang out of nothing.

Nothing in the texture of the general life had changed. The corn had not ceased to ripen in the sun. The rivers
bore their barges and gave power to a myriad engines. The flocks fattened on the pastures, the herds were unnumbered. Men laboured everywhere in the various servitudes to which they were born, and chafed not more than usual in their bonds. Bellona tossed and murmured as ever, yet still slept her uneasy sleep. To all mankind save a million or two of half-crazed gamblers, blind to all reality, the death of Manderson meant nothing; the life and work of the world went on. Weeks before he died strong hands had been in control of every wire in the huge network of commerce and industry that he had supervised. Before his corpse was buried his countrymen had made a strange discovery—that the existence of the potent engine of monopoly that went by the name of Sigsbee Manderson had not been a condition of even material prosperity. The panic blew itself out in two days, the pieces were picked up, the bankrupts withdrew out of sight; the market ‘recovered a normal tone’.

While the brief delirium was yet subsiding there broke out a domestic scandal in England that suddenly fixed the attention of two continents. Next morning the Chicago Limited was wrecked, and the same day a notable politician was shot down in cold blood by his wife's brother in the streets of New Orleans. Within a week of its rising, 'the Manderson story', to the trained sense of editors throughout the Union, was 'cold'. The tide of American visitors pouring through Europe made eddies round the memorial or statue of many a man who had died in poverty; and never thought of their most famous plutocrat. Like the poet who died in Rome, so young and poor, a hundred years ago, he was buried far away from his own land; but for all the men and women of Manderson's people who flock round the tomb of Keats in the cemetery under the Monte Testaccio, there is not one, nor ever Will be, to stand in reverence by the rich man's grave beside the little church of Marlstone.

CHAPTER II: Knocking the Town Endways

In the only comfortably furnished room in the offices of the Record, the telephone on Sir James Molloy's table buzzed. Sir James made a motion with his pen, and Mr. Silver, his secretary, left his work and came over to the instrument.

'Who is that?' he said. 'Who?... I can't hear you .... Oh, it's Mr. Bunner, is it?... Yes, but... I know, but he's fearfully busy this afternoon. Can't you... Oh, really? Well, in that case--just hold on, will you?'

He placed the receiver before Sir James. 'It's Calvin Bunner, Sigsbee Manderson's right-hand man,' he said concisely. 'He insists on speaking to you personally. Says it is the gravest piece of news. He is talking from the house down by Bishopsbridge, so it will be necessary to speak clearly.'

Sir James looked at the telephone, not affectionately, and took up the receiver. 'Well?' he said in his strong voice, and listened. 'Yes,' he said. The next moment Mr. Silver, eagerly watching him, saw a look of amazement and horror. 'Good God!' murmured Sir James. Clutching the instrument, he slowly rose to his feet, still bending ear intently. At intervals he repeated 'Yes.' Presently, as he listened, he glanced at the clock, and spoke quickly to Mr. Silver over the top of the transmitter. 'Go and hunt up Figgis and young Williams. Hurry.' Mr. Silver darted from the room.

The great journalist was a tall, strong, clever Irishman of fifty, swart and black-moustached, a man of untiring business energy, well known in the world, which he understood very thoroughly, and played upon with the half-cynical competence of his race. Yet was he without a touch of the charlatan: he made no mysteries, and no pretences of knowledge, and he saw instantly through these in others. In his handsome, well-bred, well-dressed appearance there was something a little sinister when anger or intense occupation put its imprint about his eyes and brow; but when his generous nature was under no restraint he was the most cordial of men. He was managing director of the company which owned that most powerful morning paper, the Record, and also that most indispensable evening paper, the Sun, which had its offices on the other side of the street. He was, moreover, editor-in-chief of the Record, to which he had in the course of years attached the most variously capable personnel in the country. It was a maxim of his that where you could not get gifts, you must do the best you could with solid merit; and he employed a great deal of both. He was respected by his staff as few are respected in a profession not favourable to the growth of the sentiment of reverence.

'You're sure that's all?' asked Sir James, after a few minutes of earnest listening and questioning. 'And how long has this been known?... Yes, of course, the police are; but the servants? Surely it's all over the place down there by now .... Well, we'll have a try .... Look here, Bunner, I'm infinitely obliged to you about this. I owe you a good turn. You know I mean what I say. Come and see me the first day you get to town .... All right, that's understood. Now I must act on your news. Goodbye.'

Sir James hung up the receiver, and seized a railway timetable from the rack before him. After a rapid consultation of this oracle, he flung it down with a forcible word as Mr. Silver hurried into the room, followed by a hard-featured man with spectacles, and a youth with an alert eye.

'I want you to jot down some facts, Figgis,' said Sir James, banishing all signs of agitation and speaking with a rapid calmness. 'When you have them, put them into shape just as quick as you can for a special edition of the Sun.'
notebook and drew a chair up to the big writing-table. 'Silver,' Sir James went on, 'go and tell Jones to wire our local correspondent very urgently, to drop everything and get down to Marlstone at once. He is not to say why in the telegram. There must not be an unnecessary word about this news until the Sun is on the streets with it—you all understand. Williams, cut across the way and tell Mr. Anthony to hold himself ready for a two-column opening that will knock the town endways. Just tell him that he must take all measures and precautions for a scoop. Say that Figgis will be over in five minutes with the facts, and that he had better let him write up the story in his private room. As you go, ask Miss Morgan to see me here at once, and tell the telephone people to see if they can get Mr. Trent on the wire for me. After seeing Mr. Anthony, return here and stand by.' The alert-eyed young man vanished like a spirit.

Sir James turned instantly to Mr. Figgis, whose pencil was poised over the paper. 'Sigsbee Manderson has been murdered,' he began quickly and clearly, pacing the floor with his hands behind him. Mr. Figgis scratched down a line of shorthand with as much emotion as if he had been told that the day was fine—the pose of his craft. 'He and his wife and two secretaries have been for the past fortnight at the house called White Gables, at Marlstone, near Bishopsbridge. He bought it four years ago. He and Mrs. Manderson have since spent a part of each summer there. Last night he went to bed about half-past eleven, just as usual. No one knows when he got up and left the house. He was not missed until this morning. About ten o'clock his body was found by a gardener. It was lying by a shed in the grounds. He was shot in the head, through the left eye. Death must have been instantaneous. The body was not robbed, but there were marks on the wrists which pointed to a struggle having taken place. Dr Stock, of Marlstone, was at once sent for, and will conduct the post-mortem examination. The police from Bishopsbridge, who were soon on the spot, are reticent, but it is believed that they are quite without a clue to the identity of the murderer. There you are, Figgis. Mr. Anthony is expecting you. Now I must telephone him and arrange things.'

Mr. Figgis looked up. 'One of the ablest detectives at Scotland Yard,' he suggested, 'has been put in charge of the case. It's a safe statement.'

'If you like,' said Sir James.

'And Mrs. Manderson? Was she there?'

'Yes. What about her?'

'Prostrated by the shock,' hinted the reporter, 'and sees nobody. Human interest.'

'I wouldn't put that in, Mr. Figgis,' said a quiet voice. It belonged to Miss Morgan, a pale, graceful woman, who had silently made her appearance while the dictation was going on. 'I have seen Mrs. Manderson,' she proceeded, turning to Sir James. 'She looks quite healthy and intelligent. Has her husband been murdered? I don't think the shock would prostrate her. She is more likely to be doing all she can to help the police.'

'Something in your own style, then, Miss Morgan,' he said with a momentary smile. Her imperturbable efficiency was an office proverb. 'Cut it out, Figgis. Off you go! Now, madam, I expect you know what I want.'

'Our Manderson biography happens to be well up to date,' replied Miss Morgan, drooping her dark eyelashes as she considered the position. 'I was looking over it only a few months ago. It is practically ready for tomorrow's paper. I should think the Sun had better use the sketch of his life they had about two years ago, when he went to Berlin and settled the potash difficulty. I remember it was a very good sketch, and they won't be able to carry much more than that. As for our paper, of course we have a great quantity of cuttings, mostly rubbish. The sub-editors shall have them as soon as they come in. Then we have two very good portraits that are our own property; the best is a drawing Mr. Trent made when they were both on the same ship somewhere. It is better than any of the photographs; but you say the public prefers a bad photograph to a good drawing. I will send them down to you at once, and you can choose. As far as I can see, the Record is well ahead of the situation, except that you will not be able to get a special man down there in time to be of any use for tomorrow's paper.'

Sir James sighed deeply. 'What are we good for, anyhow?' he enquired dejectedly of Mr. Silver, who had returned to his desk. 'She even knows Bradshaw by heart.'

Miss Morgan adjusted her cuffs with an air of patience. 'Is there anything else?' she asked, as the telephone bell rang.

'Yes, one thing,' replied Sir James, as he took up the receiver. 'I want you to make a bad mistake some time, Miss Morgan—an everlasting bloomer—just to put us in countenance.' She permitted herself the fraction of what would have been a charming smile as she went out.

'Anthony?' asked Sir James, and was at once deep in consultation with the editor on the other side of the road. He seldom entered the Sun building in person; the atmosphere of an evening paper, he would say, was all very well if you liked that kind of thing. Mr. Anthony, the Murat of Fleet Street, who delighted in riding the whirlwind and fighting a tumultuous battle against time, would say the same of a morning paper.

It was some five minutes later that a uniformed boy came in to say that Mr. Trent was on the wire. Sir James abruptly closed his talk with Mr. Anthony.
'They can put him through at once,' he said to the boy.
'Hullo!' he cried into the telephone after a few moments.
A voice in the instrument replied, 'Hullo be blowed! What do you want?'
'This is Mollo,' said Sir James.
'I know it is,' the voice said. 'This is Trent. He is in the middle of painting a picture, and he has been interrupted at a critical moment. Well, I hope it's something important, that's all!'
'Trent,' said Sir James impressively, 'it is important. I want you to do some work for us.'
'Some play, you mean,' replied the voice. 'Believe me, I don't want a holiday. The working fit is very strong. I am doing some really decent things. Why can't you leave a man alone? 'Something very serious has happened.'
'What?'
'Sigsbee Manderson has been murdered--shot through the brain--and they don't know who has done it. They found the body this morning. It happened at his place near Bishopsbridge.' Sir James proceeded to tell his hearer, briefly and clearly, the facts that he had communicated to Mr. Figgis. 'What do you think of it?' he ended. A considering grunt was the only answer. 'Come now,' urged Sir James. 'Tempter!'
'You will go down?'
There was a brief pause.
'Are you there?' said Sir James.
'Look here, Molloy,' the voice broke out querulously, 'the thing may be a case for me, or it may not. We can't possibly tell. It may be a mystery; it may be as simple as bread and cheese. The body not being robbed looks interesting, but he may have been outed by some wretched tramp whom he found sleeping in the grounds and tried to kick out. It's the sort of thing he would do. Such a murderer might easily have sense enough to know that to leave the money and valuables was the safest thing. I tell you frankly, I wouldn't have a hand in hanging a poor devil who had let daylight into a man like Sig Manderson as a measure of social protest.'
Sir James smiled at the telephone--a smile of success. 'Come, my boy, you're getting feeble. Admit you want to go and have a look at the case. You know you do. If it's anything you don't want to handle, you're free to drop it. By the by, where are you?
'I am blown along a wandering wind,' replied the voice irresolutely, 'and hollow, hollow, hollow all delight.'
'Can you get here within an hour?' persisted Sir James.
'I suppose I can,' the voice grumbled. 'How much time have I?'
'Good man! Well, there's time enough--that's just the worst of it. I've got to depend on our local correspondent for tonight. The only good train of the day went half an hour ago. The next is a slow one, leaving Paddington at midnight. You could have the Buster, if you like'--Sir James referred to a very fast motor car of his--'but you wouldn't get down in time to do anything tonight.'
'And I'd miss my sleep. No, thanks. The train for me. I am quite fond of railway travelling, you know; I have a gift for it. I am the stoker and the stoked. I am the song the porter sings.'
'What's that you say?'
'It doesn't matter,' said the voice sadly. 'I say,' it continued, 'will your people look out a hotel near the scene of action, and telegraph for a room?'
'At once,' said Sir James. 'Come here as soon as you can.'
He replaced the receiver. As he turned to his papers again a shrill outcry burst forth in the street below. He walked to the open window. A band of excited boys was rushing down the steps of the Sun building and up the narrow thoroughfare toward Fleet Street. Each carried a bundle of newspapers and a large broadsheet with the simple legend:
MURDER OF SIGSBEE MANDERSON
Sir James smiled and rattled the money in his pockets cheerfully. 'It makes a good bill,' he observed to Mr. Silver, who stood at his elbow.
Such was Manderson's epitaph.
CHAPTER III: Breakfast
At about eight o'clock in the morning of the following day Mr. Nathaniel Burton Cupples stood on the veranda of the hotel at Marlston. He was thinking about breakfast. In his case the colloquialism must be taken literally; he really was thinking about breakfast, as he thought about every conscious act of his life when time allowed deliberation. He reflected that on the preceding day the excitement and activity following upon the discovery of the dead man had disorganized his appetite, and led to his taking considerably less nourishment than usual. This morning he was very hungry, having already been up and about for an hour; and he decided to allow himself a third piece of toast and an additional egg; the rest as usual. The remaining deficit must be made up at luncheon, but that could be gone into later.
So much being determined, Mr. Cupples applied himself to the enjoyment of the view for a few minutes before ordering his meal. With a connoisseur's eye he explored the beauty of the rugged coast, where a great pierced rock rose from a glassy sea, and the ordered loveliness of the vast tilted levels of pasture and tillage and woodland that sloped gently up from the cliffs toward the distant moor. Mr. Cupples delighted in landscape.

He was a man of middle height and spare figure, nearly sixty years old, by constitution rather delicate in health, but wiry and active for his age. A sparse and straggling beard and moustache did not conceal a thin but kindly mouth; his eyes were keen and pleasant; his sharp nose and narrow jaw gave him very much of a clerical air, and this impression was helped by his commonplace dark clothes and soft black hat. The whole effect of him, indeed, was priestly. He was a man of unusually conscientious, industrious, and orderly mind, with little imagination. His father's household had been used to recruit its domestic establishment by means of advertisements in which it was truthfully described as a serious family. From that fortress of gloom he had escaped with two saintly gifts somehow unspoiled: an inexhaustible kindness of heart, and a capacity for innocent gaiety which owed nothing to humour. In an earlier day and with a clerical training he might have risen to the scarlet hat. He was, in fact, a highly regarded member of the London Positivist Society, a retired banker, a widower without children. His austere but not unhappy life was spent largely among books and in museums; his profound and patiently accumulated knowledge of a number of curiously disconnected subjects which had stirred his interest at different times had given him a place in the quiet, half-lit world of professors and curators and devotees of research; at their amiable, unconvivial dinner parties he was most himself. His favourite author was Montaigne.

Just as Mr. Cupples was finishing his meal at a table on the veranda, a big motor car turned into the drive before the hotel. 'Who is this?' he enquired of the waiter. 'Id is der manager,' said the young man listlessly. 'He have been to meed a gendleman by der train.'

The car drew up and the porter hurried from the entrance. Mr. Cupples uttered an exclamation of pleasure as a long, loosely built man, much younger than himself, stepped from the car and mounted the veranda, flinging his hat on a chair. His high-boned, quixotic face wore a pleasant smile; his rough tweed clothes, his hair and short moustache were tolerably untidy.

'Cupples, by all that's miraculous!' cried the man, pouncing upon Mr. Cupples before he could rise, and seizing his outstretched hand in a hard grip. 'My luck is serving me today,' the newcomer went on spasmodically. 'This is the second slice within an hour. How are you, my best of friends? And why are you here? Why sit'st thou by that ruined breakfast? Dost thou its former pride recall, or ponder how it passed away? I am glad to see you!'

'I was half expecting you, Trent,' Mr. Cupples replied, his face wreathed in smiles. 'You are looking splendid, my dear fellow. I will tell you all about it. But you cannot have had your own breakfast yet. Will you have it at my table here?'

'Rather!' said the man. 'An enormous great breakfast, too--with refined conversation and tears of recognition never dry. Will you get young Siegfried to lay a place for me while I go and wash? I shan't be three minutes.' He disappeared into the hotel, and Mr. Cupples, after a moment's thought, went to the telephone in the porter's office.

He returned to find his friend already seated, pouring out tea, and showing an unaffected interest in the choice of food. 'I expect this to be a hard day for me,' he said, with the curious jerky utterance which seemed to be his habit. 'I shan't eat again till the evening, very likely. You guess why I'm here, don't you?'

'Undoubtedly,' said Mr. Cupples. 'You have come down to write about the murder.'

'That is rather a colourless way of stating it,' the man called Trent replied, as he dissected a sole. 'I should prefer to put it that I have come down in the character of avenger of blood, to hunt down the guilty, and vindicate the honour of society. That is my line of business. Families waited on at their private residences. I say, Cupples, I have made a good beginning already. Wait a bit, and I'll tell you.' There was a silence, during which the newcomer ate second slice within an hour. How are you, my best of friends? And why are you here? Why sit'st thou by that ruined breakfast? Dost thou its former pride recall, or ponder how it passed away? I am glad to see you!'

'Your manager here,' said the tall man at last, 'is a fellow of remarkable judgement. He is an admirer of mine. He knows more about my best cases than I do myself. The Record wired last night to say I was coming, and when I got out of the train at seven o'clock this morning, there he was waiting for me with a motor car the size of a haystack. He is beside himself with joy at having me here. It is fame.' He drank a cup of tea and continued: 'Almost his first words were to ask me if I would like to see the body of the murdered man if so, he thought he could manage it for me. He disappeared into the hotel, and Mr. Cupples, after a moment's thought, went to the telephone in the porter's office.

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'That is rather a colourless way of stating it,' the man called Trent replied, as he dissected a sole. 'I should prefer to put it that I have come down in the character of avenger of blood, to hunt down the guilty, and vindicate the honour of society. That is my line of business. Families waited on at their private residences. I say, Cupples, I have made a good beginning already. Wait a bit, and I'll tell you.' There was a silence, during which the newcomer ate second slice within an hour. How are you, my best of friends? And why are you here? Why sit'st thou by that ruined breakfast? Dost thou its former pride recall, or ponder how it passed away? I am glad to see you!'

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'I saw the body before it was removed,' remarked Mr. Cupples. 'I should not have said there was anything remarkable about it, except that the shot in the eye had scarcely disfigured the face at all, and caused scarcely any
effusion of blood, apparently. The wrists were scratched and bruised. I expect that, with your trained faculties, you
were able to remark other details of a suggestive nature.'

'Other details, certainly; but I don't know that they suggest anything. They are merely odd. Take the wrists, for
instance. How was it you could see bruises and scratches on them? I dare say you saw something of Manderson
down here before the murder.' 'Certainly,' Mr. Cupples said.

'Well, did you ever see his wrists?'

Mr. Cupples reflected. 'No. Now you raise the point, I am reminded that when I interviewed Manderson here he
was wearing stiff cuffs, coming well down over his hands.'

'He always did,' said Trent. 'My friend the manager says so. I pointed out to him the fact you didn't observe, that
there were no cuffs visible, and that they had, indeed, been dragged up inside the coat-sleeves, as yours would be if
you hurried into a coat without pulling your cuffs down. That was why you saw his wrists.'

'Well, I call that suggestive,' observed Mr. Cupples mildly. 'You might infer, perhaps, that when he got up he
hurried over his dressing.'

'Yes, but did he? The manager said just what you say. "He was always a bit of a swell in his dress," he told me,
and he drew the inference that when Manderson got up in that mysterious way, before the house was stirring, and
went out into the grounds, he was in a great hurry. "Look at his shoes," he said to me: "Mr. Manderson was always
specially neat about his footwear. But those shoe-laces were tied in a hurry." I agreed. "And he left his false teeth in
his room," said the manager. "Doesn't that prove he was flustered and hurried?" I allowed that it looked like it. But I
said, "Look here: if he was so very much pressed, why did he part his hair so carefully? That parting is a work of art.
Why did he put on so much? for he had on a complete outfit of underclothing, studs in his shirt, sock-suspenders, a
watch and chain, money and keys and things in his pockets." That's what I said to the manager. He couldn't find an
explanation. Can you?'

Mr. Cupples considered. 'Those facts might suggest that he was hurried only at the end of his dressing. Coat and
shoes would come last.'

'But not false teeth. You ask anybody who wears them. And besides, I'm told he hadn't washed at all on getting
up, which in a neat man looks like his being in a violent hurry from the beginning. And here's another thing. One of
his waistcoat pockets was lined with wash-leather for the reception of his gold watch. But he had put his watch into
the pocket on the other side. Anybody who has settled habits can see how odd that is. The fact is, there are signs of
great agitation and haste, and there are signs of exactly the opposite. For the present I am not guessing. I must
reconnoitre the ground first, if I can manage to get the right side of the people of the house.' Trent applied himself
again to his breakfast.

Mr. Cupples smiled at him benevolently. 'That is precisely the point,' he said, 'on which I can be of some
assistance to you.' Trent glanced up in surprise. 'I told you I half expected you. I will explain the situation. Mrs.
Manderson, who is my niece--'

'What!' Trent laid down his knife and fork with a clash. 'Cupples, you are jesting with me.'

'I am perfectly serious, Trent, really,' returned Mr. Cupples earnestly. 'Her father, John Peter Domecq, was my
wife's brother. I never mentioned my niece or her marriage to you before, I suppose. To tell the truth, it has always
been a painful subject to me, and I have avoided discussing it with anybody. To return to what I was about to say:
last night, when I was over at the house--by the way, you can see it from here. You passed it in the car.' He indicated
a red roof among poplars some three hundred yards away, the only building in sight that stood separate from the tiny
village in the gap below them.

'Certainly I did,' said Trent. 'The manager told me all about it, among other things, as he drove me in from
Bishopsbridge.'

'Other people here have heard of you and your performances,' Mr. Cupples went on. 'As I was saying, when I
was over there last night, Mr. Bunner, who is one of Manderson's two secretaries, expressed a hope that the Record
would send you down to deal with the case, as the police seemed quite at a loss. He mentioned one or two of your
past successes, and Mabel--my niece--was interested when I told her afterwards. She is bearing up wonderfully well,
Trent; she has remarkable fortitude of character. She said she remembered reading your articles about the Abinger
case. She has a great horror of the newspaper side of this sad business, and she had entreated me to do anything I
could to keep journalists away from the place--I'm sure you can understand her feeling, Trent; it isn't really any
reflection on that profession. But she said you appeared to have great powers as a detective, and she would not stand
in the way of anything that might clear up the crime. Then I told her you were a personal friend of mine, and gave
you a good character for tact and consideration of others' feelings; and it ended in her saying that, if you should
come, she would like you to be helped in every way.'

Trent leaned across the table and shook Mr. Cupples by the hand in silence. Mr. Cupples, much delighted with
the way things were turning out, resumed:
'I spoke to my niece on the telephone only just now, and she is glad you are here. She asks me to say that you may make any enquiries you like, and she puts the house and grounds at your disposal. She had rather not see you herself; she is keeping to her own sitting-room. She has already been interviewed by a detective officer who is there, and she feels unequal to any more. She adds that she does not believe she could say anything that would be of the smallest use. The two secretaries and Martin, the butler (who is a most intelligent man), could tell you all you want to know, she thinks.'

Trent finished his breakfast with a thoughtful brow. He filled a pipe slowly, and seated himself on the rail of the veranda. 'Cupples,' he said quietly, 'is there anything about this business that you know and would rather not tell me?'

Mr. Cupples gave a slight start, and turned an astonished gaze on the questioner. 'What do you mean?' he said.

'I mean about the Mandersons. Look here! Shall I tell you a thing that strikes me about this affair at the very beginning? Here's a man suddenly and violently killed, and nobody's heart seems to be broken about it, to say the least. The manager of this hotel spoke to me about him as coolly as if he'd never set eyes on him, though I understand they've been neighbours every summer for some years. Then you talk about the thing in the coldest of blood. And Mrs. Manderson--well, you won't mind my saying that I have heard of women being more cut up about their husbands being murdered than she seems to be. Is there something in this, Cupples, or is it my fancy? Was there something queer about Manderson? I travelled on the same boat with him once, but never spoke to him. I only know his public character, which was repellent enough. You see, this may have a bearing on the case; that's the only reason why I ask.'

Mr. Cupples took time for thought. He fingered his sparse beard and looked out over the sea. At last he turned to Trent. 'I see no reason,' he said, 'why I shouldn't tell you as between ourselves, my dear fellow. I need not say that this must not be referred to, however distantly. The truth is that nobody really liked Manderson; and I think those who were nearest to him liked him least.'

'Why?' the other interjected.

'Most people found a difficulty in explaining why. In trying to account to myself for my own sensations, I could only put it that one felt in the man a complete absence of the sympathetic faculty. There was nothing outwardly repellent about him. He was not ill-mannered, or vicious, or dull--indeed, he could be remarkably interesting. But I received the impression that there could be no human creature whom he would not sacrifice in the pursuit of his schemes, in his task of imposing himself and his will upon the world. Perhaps that was fanciful, but I think not altogether so. However, the point is that Mabel, I am sorry to say, was very unhappy. I am nearly twice your age, my dear boy, though you always so kindly try to make me feel as if we were contemporaries--I am getting to be an old man, and a great many people have been good enough to confide their matrimonial troubles to me; but I never knew another case like my niece's and her husband's. I have known her since she was a baby, Trent, and I know--you understand, I think, that I do not employ that word lightly--I know that she is as amiable and honourable a woman, to say nothing of her other good gifts, as any man could wish. But Manderson, for some time past, had made her miserable.'

'What did he do?' asked Trent, as Mr. Cupples paused.

'When I put that question to Mabel, her words were that he seemed to nurse a perpetual grievance. He maintained a distance between them, and he would say nothing. I don't know how it began or what was behind it; and all she would tell me on that point was that he had no cause in the world for his attitude. I think she knew what was in his mind, whatever it was; but she is full of pride. This seems to have gone on for months. At last, a week ago, she wrote to me. I am the only near relative she has. Her mother died when she was a child; and after John Peter died I was something like a father to her until she married--that was five years ago. She asked me to come and help her, and I came at once. That is why I am here now.'

Mr. Cupples paused and drank some tea. Trent smoked and stared out at the hot June landscape.

'I would not go to White Gables,' Mr. Cupples resumed. 'You know my views, I think, upon the economic constitution of society, and the proper relationship of the capitalist to the employee, and you know, no doubt, what use that person made of his vast industrial power upon several very notorious occasions. I refer especially to the trouble in the Pennsylvania coal-fields, three years ago. I regarded him, apart from an all personal dislike, in the light of a criminal and a disgrace to society. I came to this hotel, and I saw my niece here. She told me What I have more briefly told you. She said that the worry and the humiliation of it, and the strain of trying to keep up appearances before the world, were telling upon her, and she asked for my advice. I said I thought she should face him and demand an explanation of his way of treating her. But she would not do that. She had always taken the line of affecting not to notice the change in his demeanour, and nothing, I knew, would persuade her to admit to him that she was injured, once pride had led her into that course. Life is quite full, my dear Trent,' said Mr. Cupples with a sigh, 'of these obstinate silences and cultivated misunderstandings.'
"Did she love him?" Trent enquired abruptly. Mr. Cupples did not reply at once. 'Had she any love left for him?'
Trent amended.

Mr. Cupples played with his teaspoon. 'I am bound to say,' he answered slowly, 'that I think not. But you must not misunderstand the woman, Trent. No power on earth would have persuaded her to admit that to any one--even to herself, perhaps--so long as she considered herself bound to him. And I gather that, apart from this mysterious sulking of late, he had always been considerate and generous.'

'You were saying that she refused to have it out with him.'

'She did,' replied Mr. Cupples. 'And I knew by experience that it was quite useless to attempt to move a Domecq where the sense of dignity was involved. So I thought it over carefully, and next day I watched my opportunity and met Manderson as he passed by this hotel. I asked him to favour me with a few minutes' conversation, and he stepped inside the gate down there. We had held no communication of any kind since my niece's marriage, but he remembered me, of course. I put the matter to him at once and quite definitely. I told him what Mabel had confided to me. I said that I would neither approve nor condemn her action in bringing me into the business, but that she was suffering, and I considered it my right to ask how he could justify himself in placing her in such a position.'

'And how did he take that?' said Trent, smiling secretly at the landscape. The picture of this mildest of men calling the formidable Manderson to account pleased him.

'Not very well,' Mr. Cupples replied sadly. 'In fact, far from well. I can tell you almost exactly what he said--it wasn't much. He said, "See here, Cupples, you don't want to butt in. My wife can look after herself. I've found that out, along with other things." He was perfectly quiet--you know he was said never to lose control of himself--though there was a light in his eyes that would have frightened a man who was in the wrong, I dare say. But I had been thoroughly roused by his last remark, and the tone of it, which I cannot reproduce. You see,' said Mr. Cupples simply, 'I love my niece. She is the only child that there has been in our--in my house. Moreover, my wife brought her up as a girl, and any reflection on Mabel I could not help feeling, in the heat of the moment, as an indirect reflection upon one who is gone.'

'You turned upon him,' suggested Trent in a low tone. 'You asked him to explain his words.'

'That is precisely what I did,' said Mr. Cupples. 'For a moment he only stared at me, and I could see a vein on his forehead swelling--an unpleasant sight. Then he said quite quietly, "This thing has gone far enough, I guess," and turned to go.'

'Did he mean your interview?' Trent asked thoughtfully.

'From the words alone you would think so,' Mr. Cupples answered. 'But the way in which he uttered them gave me a strange and very apprehensive feeling. I received the impression that the man had formed some sinister resolve. But I regret to say I had lost the power of dispassionate thought. I fell into a great rage--Mr. Cupples's tone was mildly apologetic--and said a number of foolish things. I reminded him that the law allowed a measure of freedom to wives who received intolerable treatment. I made some utterly irrelevant references to his public record, and expressed the view that such men as he were unfit to live. I said these things, and others as ill-considered, under the eyes, and very possibly within earshot, of half a dozen persons sitting on this veranda. I noticed them, in spite of my agitation, looking at me as I walked up to the hotel again after relieving my mind for it undoubtedly did relieve it,' sighed Mr. Cupples, lying back in his chair.

'And Manderson? Did he say no more?'

'Not a word. He listened to me with his eyes on my face, as quiet as before. When I stopped he smiled very slightly, and at once turned away and strolled through the gate, making for White Gables. 'And this happened--?''  

'On the Sunday morning.'

'Then I suppose you never saw him alive again?'

'No,' said Mr. Cupples. 'Or rather yes--once. It was later in the day, on the golf-course. But I did not speak to him. And next morning he was found dead.'

The two regarded each other in silence for a few moments. A party of guests who had been bathing came up the steps and seated themselves, with much chattering, at a table near them. The waiter approached. Mr. Cupples rose, and, taking Trent's arm, led him to a long tennis-lawn at the side of the hotel.

'I have a reason for telling you all this,' began Mr. Cupples as they paced slowly up and down.

'Trust you for that,' rejoined Trent, carefully filling his pipe again. He lit it, smoked a little, and then said, 'I'll try and guess what your reason is, if you like.'

Mr. Cupples's face of solemnity relaxed into a slight smile. He said nothing.

'You thought it possible,' said Trent meditatively--'may I say you thought it practically certain?--that I should find out for myself that there had been something deeper than a mere conjugal tiff between the Mandersons. You thought that my unwholesome imagination would begin at once to play with the idea of Mrs. Manderson having something to do with the crime. Rather than that I should lose myself in barren speculations about this, you decided.
to tell me exactly how matters stood, and incidentally to impress upon me, who know how excellent your judgement is, your opinion of your niece. Is that about right?'

'It is perfectly right. Listen to me, my dear fellow,' said Mr. Cupples earnestly, laying his hand on the other's arm. 'I am going to be very frank. I am extremely glad that Manderson is dead. I believe him to have done nothing but harm in the world as an economic factor. I know that he was making a desert of the life of one who was like my own child to me. But I am under an intolerable dread of Mabel being involved in suspicion with regard to the murder. It is horrible to me to think of her delicacy and goodness being in contact, if only for a time, with the brutalities of the law. She is not fitted for it. It would mark her deeply. Many young women of twenty-six in these days could face such an ordeal, I suppose. I have observed a sort of imitative hardness about the products of the higher education of women today which would carry them through anything, perhaps.

I am not prepared to say it is a bad thing in the conditions of feminine life prevailing at present. Mabel, however, is not like that. She is as unlike as she is unlike the simpering misses that used to surround me as a child. She has plenty of brains; she is full of character; her mind and her tastes are cultivated; but it is all mixed up'-Mr. Cupples waved his hands in a vague gesture--'with ideals of refinement and reservation and womanly mystery. I fear she is not a child of the age. You never knew my wife, Trent. Mabel is my wife's child.'

The younger man bowed his head. They paced the length of the lawn before he asked gently, 'Why did she marry him?'

'I don't know,' said Mr. Cupples briefly.

'Admired him, I suppose,' suggested Trent.

Mr. Cupples shrugged his shoulders. 'I have been told that a woman will usually be more or less attracted by the most successful man in her circle. Of course we cannot realize how a wilful, dominating personality like his would influence a girl whose affections were not bestowed elsewhere; especially if he laid himself out to win her. It is probably an overwhelming thing to be courted by a man whose name is known all over the world. She had heard of him, of course, as a financial great power, and she had no idea--she had lived mostly among people of artistic or literary propensities--how much soulless inhumanity that might involve. For all I know, she has no adequate idea of it to this day. When I first heard of the affair the mischief was done, and I knew better than to interpose my unsought opinions. She was of age, and there was absolutely nothing against him from the conventional point of view. Then I dare say his immense wealth would cast a spell over almost any woman. Mabel had some hundreds a year of her own; just enough, perhaps, to let her realize what millions really meant. But all this is conjecture. She certainly had not wanted to marry some scores of young fellows who to my knowledge had asked her; and though I don't believe, and never did believe, that she really loved this man of forty-five, she certainly did want to marry him. But if you ask me why, I can only say I don't know.'

Trent nodded, and after a few more paces looked at his watch. 'You've interested me so much,' he said, 'that I had quite forgotten my main business. I mustn't waste my morning. I am going down the road to White Gables at once, and I dare say I shall be poking about there until midday. If you can meet me then, Cupples, I should like to talk over anything I find out with you, unless something detains me.'

'I am going for a walk this morning,' Mr. Cupples replied. 'I meant to have luncheon at a little inn near the golf-course, The Three Tuns. You had better join me there. It's further along the road, about a quarter of a mile beyond White Gables. You can just see the roof between those two trees. The food they give one there is very plain, but good.'

'So long as they have a cask of beer,' said Trent, 'they are all right. We will have bread and cheese, and oh, may Heaven our simple lives prevent from luxury's contagion, weak and vile! Till then, goodbye.' He strode off to recover his hat from the veranda, waved it to Mr. Cupples, and was gone.

The old gentleman, seating himself in a deck-chair on the lawn, clasped his hands behind his head and gazed up into the speckless blue sky. 'He is a dear fellow,' he murmured. 'The best of fellows. And a terribly acute fellow. Dear me! How curious it all is!'

CHAPTER IV: Handcuffs in the Air

A painter and the son of a painter, Philip Trent had while yet in his twenties achieved some reputation within the world of English art. Moreover, his pictures sold. An original, forcible talent and a habit of leisurely but continuous working, broken by fits of strong creative enthusiasm, were at the bottom of it. His father's name had helped; a patrimony large enough to relieve him of the perilous imputation of being a struggling man had certainly not hindered. But his best aid to success had been an unconscious power of getting himself liked. Good spirits and a lively, humorous fancy will always be popular. Trent joined to these a genuine interest in others that gained him something deeper than popularity. His judgement of persons was penetrating, but its process was internal; no one felt on good behaviour with a man who seemed always to be enjoying himself. Whether he was in a mood for floods of nonsense or applying himself vigorously to a task, his face seldom lost its expression of contained vivacity. Apart
from a sound knowledge of his art and its history, his culture was large and loose, dominated by a love of poetry. At thirty-two he had not yet passed the age of laughter and adventure.

His rise to a celebrity a hundred times greater than his proper work had won for him came of a momentary impulse. One day he had taken up a newspaper to find it chiefly concerned with a crime of a sort curiously rare in our country—a murder done in a railway train. The circumstances were puzzling; two persons were under arrest upon suspicion. Trent, to whom an interest in such affairs was a new sensation, heard the thing discussed among his friends, and set himself in a purposeless mood to read up the accounts given in several journals. He became intrigued; his imagination began to work, in a manner strange to him, upon facts; an excitement took hold of him such as he had only known before in his bursts of art-inspiration or of personal adventure. At the end of the day he wrote and dispatched a long letter to the editor of the Record, which he chose only because it had contained the fullest and most intelligent version of the facts.

In this letter he did very much what Poe had done in the case of the murder of Mary Rogers. With nothing but the newspapers to guide him, he drew attention to the significance of certain apparently negligible facts, and ranged the evidence in such a manner as to throw grave suspicion upon a man who had presented himself as a witness. Sir James Molloy had printed this letter in leaded type. The same evening he was able to announce in the Sun the arrest and full confession of the incriminated man.

Sir James, who knew all the worlds of London, had lost no time in making Trent's acquaintance. The two men got on well, for Trent possessed some secret of native tact which had the effect of almost abolishing differences of age between himself and others. The great rotary presses in the basement of the Record building had filled him with a new enthusiasm. He had painted there, and Sir James had bought at sight, what he called a machinery-scape in the manner of Heinrich Kley.

Then a few months later came the affair known as the Ilkley mystery. Sir James had invited Trent to an emollient dinner, and thereafter offered him what seemed to the young man a fantastically large sum for his temporary services as special representative of the Record at Ilkley.

'You could do it,' the editor had urged. 'You can write good stuff, and you know how to talk to people, and I can teach you all the technicalities of a reporter's job in half an hour. And you have a head for a mystery; you have imagination and cool judgement along with it. Think how it would feel if you pulled it off!'

Trent had admitted that it would be rather a lark. He had smoked, frowned, and at last convinced himself that the only thing that held him back was fear of an unfamiliar task. To react against fear had become a fixed moral habit with him, and he had accepted Sir James's offer.

He had pulled it off. For the second time he had given the authorities a start and a beating, and his name was on all tongues. He withdrew and painted pictures. He felt no leaning towards journalism, and Sir James, who knew a good deal about art, honourably refrained—as other editors did not—from tempting him with a good salary. But in the course of a few years he had applied to him perhaps thirty times for his services in the unravelling of similar problems at home and abroad. Sometimes Trent, busy with work that held him, had refused; sometimes he had been forestalled in the discovery of the truth. But the result of his irregular connection with the Record had been to make his name one of the best known in England. It was characteristic of him that his name was almost the only detail of his personality known to the public. He had imposed absolute silence about himself upon the Molloy papers; and the others were not going to advertise one of Sir James's men.

The Manderson case, he told himself as he walked rapidly up the sloping road to White Gables, might turn out to be terribly simple. Cupples was a wise old boy, but it was probably impossible for him to have an impartial opinion about his niece. But it was true that the manager of the hotel, who had spoken of her beauty in terms that aroused his attention, had spoken even more emphatically of her goodness. Not an artist in words, the manager had yet conveyed a very definite idea to Trent's mind. 'There isn't a child about here that don't brighten up at the sound of her voice,' he had said, 'nor yet a grown-up, for the matter of that. Everybody used to look forward to her coming over in the summer. I don't mean that she's one of those women that are all kind heart and nothing else. There's backbone with it, if you know what I mean—pluck any amount of go. There's nobody in Marlstone that isn't sorry for the lady in her trouble—not but what some of us may think she's lucky at the last of it.' Trent wanted very much to meet Mrs. Manderson.

He could see now, beyond a spacious lawn and shrubbery, the front of the two-storied house of dull-red brick, with the pair of great gables from which it had its name. He had had but a glimpse of it from the car that morning. A modern house, he saw; perhaps ten years old. The place was beautifully kept, with that air of opulent peace that clothes even the smallest houses of the well-to-do in an English countryside. Before it, beyond the road, the rich meadow-land ran down to the edge of the cliffs; behind it a woody landscape stretched away across a broad vale to the moors. That such a place could be the scene of a crime of violence seemed fantastic; it lay so quiet and well ordered, so eloquent of disciplined service and gentle living. Yet there beyond the house, and near the hedge that
rose between the garden and the hot, white road, stood the gardener's toolshed, by which the body had been found, lying tumbled against the wooden wall, Trent walked past the gate of the drive and along the road until he was opposite this shed. Some forty yards further along the road turned sharply away from the house, to run between thick plantations; and just before the turn the grounds of the house ended, with a small white gate at the angle of the boundary hedge. He approached the gate, which was plainly for the use of gardeners and the service of the establishment. It swung easily on its hinges, and he passed slowly up a path that led towards the back of the house, between the outer hedge and a tall wall of rhododendrons. Through a gap in this wall a track led him to the little neatly built erection of wood, which stood among trees that faced a corner of the front. The body had lain on the side away from the house; a servant, he thought, looking out of the nearer windows in the earlier hours of the day before, might have glanced unseeing at the hut, as she wondered what it could be like to be as rich as the master.

He examined the place carefully and ransacked the hut within, but he could note no more than the trodden appearance of the uncut grass where the body had lain. Crouching low, with keen eyes and feeling fingers, he searched the ground minutely over a wide area; but the search was fruitless.

It was interrupted by the sound—the first he had heard from the house—of the closing of the front door. Trent unbent his long legs and stepped to the edge of the drive. A man was walking quickly away from the house in the direction of the great gate.

At the noise of a footstep on the gravel, the man wheeled with nervous swiftness and looked earnestly at Trent. The sudden sight of his face was almost terrible, so white and worn it was. Yet it was a young man's face. There was not a wrinkle about the haggard blue eyes, for all their tale of strain and desperate fatigue. As the two approached each other, Trent noted with admiration the man's breadth of shoulder and lithe, strong figure. In his carriage, inelastic as weariness had made it; in his handsome, regular features; in his short, smooth, yellow hair; and in his voice as he addressed Trent, the influence of a special sort of training was confessed. 'Oxford was your playground, I think, my young friend,' said Trent to himself.

'If you are Mr. Trent,' said the young man pleasantly, 'you are expected. Mr. Cupples telephoned from the hotel. My name is Marlowe.'

'You were secretary to Mr. Manderson, I believe,' said Trent. He was much inclined to like young Mr. Marlowe. Though he seemed so near a physical breakdown, he gave out none the less that air of clean living and inward health that is the peculiar glory of his social type at his years. But there was something in the tired eyes that was a challenge to Trent's penetration; an habitual expression, as he took it to be, of meditating and weighing things not present to their sight. It was a look too intelligent, too steady and purposeful, to be called dreamy. Trent thought he had seen such a look before somewhere. He went on to say: 'It is a terrible business for all of you. I fear it has upset you completely, Mr. Marlowe.'

'A little limp, that's all,' replied the young man wearily. 'I was driving the car all Sunday night and most of yesterday, and I didn't sleep last night after hearing the news—who would? But I have an appointment now, Mr. Trent, down at the doctor's—arranging about the inquest. I expect it'll be tomorrow. If you will go up to the house and ask for Mr. Bunner, you'll find him expecting you; he will tell you all about things and show you round. He's the other secretary; an American, and the best of fellows; he'll look after you. There's a detective here, by the way—Inspector Murch, from Scotland Yard. He came yesterday.'

'Murch!' Trent exclaimed. 'But he and I are old friends. How under the sun did he get here so soon?'

'I have no idea,' Mr. Marlowe answered. 'But he was here last evening, before I got back from Southampton, interviewing everybody, and he's been about here since eight this morning. He's in the library now—that's where the open French window is that you see at the end of the house there. Perhaps you would like to step down there and talk about things.'

'I think I will,' said Trent. Marlowe nodded and went on his way. The thick turf of the lawn round which the drive took its circular sweep made Trent's footsteps as noiseless as a cat's. In a few moments he was looking in through the open leaves of the window at the southward end of the house, considering with a smile a very broad back and a bent head covered with short grizzled hair. The man within was stooping over a number of papers laid out on the table.

'Twas ever thus,' said Trent in a melancholy tone, at the first sound of which the man within turned round with startling swiftness. 'From childhood's hour I've seen my fondest hopes decay. I did think I was ahead of Scotland Yard this time, and now here is the hugest officer in the entire Metropolitan force already occupying the position.'

The detective smiled grimly and came to the window. 'I was expecting you, Mr. Trent,' he said. 'This is the sort of case that you like.'

'Since my tastes were being considered,' Trent replied, stepping into the room, 'I wish they had followed up the idea by keeping my hated rival out of the business. You have got a long start, too—I know all about it.' His eyes began to wander round the room. 'How did you manage it? You are a quick mover, I know; the dun deer's hide on
fleeter foot was never tied; but I don't see how you got here in time to be at work yesterday evening. Has Scotland Yard secretly started an aviation corps? Or is it in league with the infernal powers? In either case the Home Secretary should be called upon to make a statement.'

'It's simpler than that,' said Mr. Murch with professional stolidity. 'I happened to be on leave with the missus at Halvey, which is only twelve miles or so along the coast. As soon as our people there heard of the murder they told me. I wired to the Chief, and was put in charge of the case at once. I bicycled over yesterday evening, and have been at it since then.'

'Arising out of that reply,' said Trent inattentively, 'how is Mrs. Inspector Murch?'

'Never better, thank you,' answered the inspector, 'and frequently speaks of you and the games you used to have with our kids. But you'll excuse me saying, Mr. Trent, that you needn't trouble to talk your nonsense to me while you're using your eyes. I know your ways by now. I understand you've fallen on your feet as usual, and have the lady's permission to go over the place and make enquiries.'

'Such is the fact,' said Trent. 'I am going to cut you out again, inspector. I owe you one for beating me over the Abinger case, you old fox. But if you really mean that you're not inclined for the social amenities just now, let us leave compliments and talk business.' He stepped to the table, glanced through the papers arranged there in order, and then turned to the open roll-top desk. He looked into the drawers swiftly. 'I see this has been cleared out. Well now, inspector, I suppose we play the game as before.'

Trent had found himself on a number of occasions in the past thrown into the company of Inspector Murch, who stood high in the councils of the Criminal Investigation Department. He was a quiet, tactful, and very shrewd officer, a man of great courage, with a vivid history in connection with the more dangerous class of criminals. His humanity was as broad as his frame, which was large even for a policeman. Trent and he, through some obscure working of sympathy, had appreciated one another from the beginning, and had formed one of those curious friendships with which it was the younger man's delight to adorn his experience. The inspector would talk more freely to him than to any one, under the rose, and they would discuss details and possibilities of every case, to their mutual enlightenment. There were necessarily rules and limits. It was understood between them that Trent made no journalistic use of any point that could only have come to him from an official source. Each of them, moreover, for the honour and prestige of the institution he represented, openly reserved the right to withhold from the other any discovery or inspiration that might come to him which he considered vital to the solution of the difficulty. Trent had insisted on carefully formulating these principles of what he called detective sportsmanship. Mr. Murch, who loved a contest, and who only stood to gain by his association with the keen intelligence of the other, entered very heartily into 'the game'. In these strivings for the credit of the press and of the police, victory sometimes attended the experience and method of the officer, sometimes the quicker brain and livelier imagination of Trent, his gift of instinctively recognizing the significant through all disguises.

The inspector then replied to Trent's last words with cordial agreement. Leaning on either side of the French window, with the deep peace and hazy splendor of the summer landscape before them, they reviewed the case.

Trent had taken out a thin notebook, and as they talked he began to make, with light, secure touches, a rough sketch plan of the room. It was a thing he did habitually on such occasions, and often quite idly, but now and then the habit had served him to good purpose.

This was a large, light apartment at the corner of the house, with generous window-space in two walls. A broad table stood in the middle. As one entered by the window the roll-top desk stood just to the left of it against the wall. The inner door was in the wall to the left, at the farther end of the room; and was faced by a broad window divided into openings of the casement type. A beautifully carved old corner-cupboard rose high against the wall beyond the door, and another cupboard filled a recess beside the fireplace. Some coloured prints of Harunobu, with which Trent had promised himself a better acquaintance, hung on what little wall-space was unoccupied by books. These had a very uninspiring appearance of having been bought by the yard and never taken from their shelves. Bound with a sober book-bind, the great English novelists, essayists, historians, and poets stood ranged like an army struck dead in its ranks. There were a few chairs made, like the cupboard and table, of old carved oak; a modern armchair and a swivel office-chair before the desk. The room looked costly but very bare. Almost the only portable objects were a great porcelain bowl of a wonderful blue on the table, a clock and some cigar boxes on the mantelshelf, and a movable telephone standard on the top of the desk.

'Seen the body?' enquired the inspector.

Trent nodded. 'And the place where it lay,' he said.

'First impressions of this case rather puzzle me,' said the inspector. 'From what I heard at Halvey I guessed it might be common robbery and murder by some tramp, though such a thing is very far from common in these parts. But as soon as I began my enquiries I came on some curious points, which by this time I dare say you've noted for yourself. The man is shot in his own grounds, quite near the house, to begin with. Yet there's not the slightest trace
of any attempt at burglary. And the body wasn't robbed. In fact, it would be as plain a case of suicide as you could wish to see, if it wasn't for certain facts. Here's another thing: for a month or so past, they tell me, Manderson had been in a queer state of mind. I expect you know already that he and his wife had some trouble between them. The servants had noticed a change in his manner to her for a long time, and for the past week he had scarcely spoken to her. They say he was a changed man, moody and silent—whether on account of that or something else. The lady's maid says he looked as if something was going to arrive. It's always easy to remember that people looked like that, after something has happened to them. Still, that's what they say. There you are again, then: suicide! Now, why wasn't it suicide, Mr. Trent?

'TThe facts so far as I know them are really all against it,' Trent replied, sitting on the threshold of the window and clasping his knees. 'First, of course, no weapon is to be found. I've searched, and you've searched, and there's no trace of any firearm anywhere within a stone's throw of where the body lay. Second, the marks on the wrists, fresh scratches and bruises, which we can only assume to have been done in a struggle with somebody. Third, who ever heard of anybody shooting himself in the eye? Then I heard from the manager of the hotel here another fact, which strikes me as the most curious detail in this affair. Manderson had dressed himself fully before going out there, but he forgot his false teeth. Now how could a suicide who dressed himself to make a decent appearance as a corpse forget his teeth?'

'TThat last argument hadn't struck me,' admitted Mr. Murch. 'There's something in it. But on the strength of the other points, which had occurred to me, I am not considering suicide. I have been looking about for ideas in this house, this morning. I expect you were thinking of doing the same.'

'TThat is so. It is a case for ideas, it seems to me. Come, Murch, let us make an effort; let us bend our spirits to a temper of general suspicion. Let us suspect everybody in the house, to begin with. Listen: I will tell you whom I suspect. I suspect Mrs. Manderson, of course. I also suspect both the secretaries—I hear there are two, and I hardly know which of them I regard as more thoroughly open to suspicion. I suspect the butler and the lady's maid. I suspect the other domestics, and especially do I suspect the boot-boy. By the way, what domestics are there? I have more than enough suspicion to go round, whatever the size of the establishment; but as a matter of curiosity I should like to know.'

'All very well to laugh,' replied the inspector, 'but at the first stage of affairs it's the only safe principle, and you know that as well as I do, Mr. Trent. However, I've seen enough of the people here, last night and today, to put a few of them out of my mind for the present at least. You will form your own conclusions. As for the establishment, there's the butler and lady's maid, cook, and three other maids, one a young girl. One chauffeur, who's away with a broken wrist. No boy.'

'What about the gardener? You say nothing about that shadowy and sinister figure, the gardener. You are keeping him in the background, Murch. Play the game. Out with him—or I report you to the Rules Committee.'

'The garden is attended to by a man in the village, who comes twice a week. I've talked to him. He was here last on Friday.'

'Then I suspect him all the more,' said Trent. 'And now as to the house itself. What I propose to do, to begin with, is to sniff about a little in this room, where I am told Manderson spent a great deal of his time, and in his bedroom; especially the bedroom. But since we're in this room, let's start here. You seem to be at the same stage of the inquiry. Perhaps you've done the bedrooms already?'

'The inspector nodded. 'I've been over Manderson's and his wife's. Nothing to be got there, I think. His room is very simple and bare, no signs of any sort—that I could see. Seems to have insisted on the simple life, does Manderson. Never employed a valet. The room's almost like a cell, except for the clothes and shoes. You'll find it all exactly as I found it; and they tell me that's exactly as Manderson left it, at we don't know what o'clock yesterday morning. Opens into Mrs. Manderson's bedroom—not much of the cell about that, I can tell you. I should say the lady was as fond of pretty things as most. But she cleared out of it on the morning of the discovery—told the maid she could never sleep in a room opening into her murdered husband's room. Very natural feeling in a woman, Mr. Trent. She's camping out, so to say, in one of the spare bedrooms now.'

'Come, my friend,' Trent was saying to himself, as he made a few notes in his little book. 'Have you got your eye on Mrs. Manderson? Or haven't you? I know that colourless tone of the inspectorial voice. I wish I had seen her. Either you've got something against her and you don't want me to get hold of it; or else you've made up your mind she's innocent, but have no objection to my wasting my time over her. Well, it's all in the game; which begins to look extremely interesting as we go on.' To Mr. Murch he said aloud: 'Well, I'll draw the bedroom later on. What about this?'

'They call it the library,' said the inspector. 'Manderson used to do his writing and that in here; passed most of the time he spent indoors here. Since he and his wife ceased to hit it off together, he had taken to spending his evenings alone, and when at this house he always spent 'em in here. He was last seen alive, as far as the servants are
concerned, in this room.'

Trent rose and glanced again through the papers set out on the table. 'Business letters and documents, mostly,' said Mr. Murch. 'Reports, prospectuses, and that. A few letters on private matters, noth-in4g in them that I can see. The American secretary--Bunner his name is, and a queerer card I never saw turned-- he's been through this desk with me this morning. He had got it into his head that Manderson had been receiving threatening letters, and that the murder was the outcome of that. But there's no trace of any such thing; and we looked at every blessed paper. The only unusual things we found were some packets of banknotes to a considerable amount, and a couple of little bags of unset diamonds. I asked Mr. Bunner to put them in a safer place. It appears that Manderson had begun buying diamonds lately as a speculation--it was a new game to him, the secretary said, and it seemed to amuse him.'

'What about these secretaries?' Trent enquired. 'I met one called Marlowe just now outside; a nice-looking chap with singular eyes, unquestionably English. The other, it seems, is an American. What did Manderson want with an English secretary?'

'Mr. Marlowe explained to me how that was. The American was his right-hand business man, one of his office staff, who never left him. Mr. Marlowe had nothing to do with Manderson's business as a financier, knew nothing of it. His job was to look after Manderson's horses and motors and yacht and sporting arrangements and that--make himself generally useful, as you might say. He had the spending of a lot of money, I should think. The other was confined entirely to the office affairs, and I dare say he had his hands full. As for his being English, it was just a fad of Manderson's to have an English secretary. He'd had several before Mr. Marlowe.'

'He showed his taste,' observed Trent. 'It might be more than interesting, don't you think, to be minister to the pleasures of a modern plutocrat with a large P. Only they say that Manderson's were exclusively of an innocent kind. Certainly Marlowe gives me the impression that he would be weak in the part of Petronius. But to return to the matter in hand. He looked at his notes. 'You said just ' now that he was last seen alive here, "so far as the servants were concerned". That meant--?'

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'He had a conversation with his wife on going to bed. But for that, the manservant, Martin by name, last saw him in this room. I had his story last night, and very glad he was to tell it. An affair like this is meat and drink to the servants of the house.'

Trent considered for some moments, gazing through the open window over the sun- flooded slopes. 'Would it bore you to hear what he has to say again?' he asked at length. For reply, Mr. Murch rang the bell. A spare, clean-shaven, middle-aged man, having the servant's manner in its most distinguished form, answered it.

'This is Mr. Trent, who is authorized by Mrs. Manderson to go over the house and make enquiries,' explained the detective. 'He would like to hear your story.' Martin bowed distantly. He recognized Trent for a gentleman. Time would show whether he was what Martin called a gentleman in every sense of the word.

'I observed you approaching the house, sir,' said Martin with impassive courtesy. He spoke with a slow and measured utterance. 'My instructions are to assist you in every possible way. Should you wish me to recall the circumstances of Sunday night?'

'Please,' said Trent with ponderous gravity. Martin's style was making clamorous appeal to his sense of comedy. He banished with an effort all vivacity of expression from his face.

'I last saw Mr. Manderson--'

'No, not that yet,' Trent checked him quietly. 'Tell me all you saw of him that evening--after dinner, say. Try to recollect every little detail.'

'After dinner, sir?--yes. I remember that after dinner Mr. Manderson and Mr. Marlowe walked up and down the path through the orchard, talking. If you ask me for details, it struck me they were talking about something important, because I heard Mr. Manderson say something when they came in through the back entrance. He said, as near as I can remember, "If Harris is there, every minute is of importance. You want to start right away. And not a word to a soul." Mr. Marlowe answered, "Very well. I will just change out of these clothes and then I am ready"--or words to that effect. I heard this plainly as they passed the window of my pantry. Then Mr. Marlowe went up to his bedroom, and Mr. Manderson entered the library and rang for me. He handed me some letters for the postman in the morning and directed me to sit up, as Mr. Marlowe had persuaded him to go for a drive in the car by moonlight.'

'That was curious,' remarked Trent.

'I thought so, sir. But I recollected what I had heard about "not a word to a soul", and I concluded that this about a moonlight drive was intended to mislead.'

'What time was this?'

'It would be about ten, sir, I should say. After speaking to me, Mr. Manderson waited until Mr. Marlowe had come down and brought round the car. He then went into the drawing-room, where Mrs. Manderson was.'

'Did that strike you as curious?'

Martin looked down his nose. 'If you ask me the question, sir,' he said with reserve, 'I had not known him enter
that room since we came here this year. He preferred to sit in the library in the evenings. That evening he only
remained with Mrs. Manderson for a few minutes. Then he and Mr. Marlowe started immediately.'

'You saw them start?'
'Yes, sir. They took the direction of Bishopsbridge.'
'And you saw Mr. Manderson again later?'
'After an hour or thereabouts, sir, in the library. That would have been about a quarter past eleven, I should say; I
had noticed eleven striking from the church. I may say I am peculiarly quick of hearing, sir.'
'Mr. Manderson had rung the bell for you, I suppose. Yes? And what passed when you answered it?'
'Mr. Manderson had put out the decanter of whisky and a syphon and glass, sir, from the cupboard where he kept
them--'

Trent held up his hand. 'While we are on that point, Martin, I want to ask you plainly, did Mr. Manderson drink
very much? You understand this is not impertinent curiosity on my part. I want you to tell me, because it may
possibly help in the clearing up of this case.'

'Perfectly, sir,' replied Martin gravely. 'I have no hesitation in telling you what I have already told the inspector.
Mr. Manderson was, considering his position in life, a remarkably abstemious man. In my four years of service with
him I never knew anything of an alcoholic nature pass his lips, except a glass or two of wine at dinner, very rarely a
little at luncheon, and from time to time a whisky and soda before going to bed. He never seemed to form a habit of
it. Often I used to find his glass in the morning with only a little soda water in it; sometimes he would have been
having whisky with it, but never much. He never was particular about his drinks; ordinary soda was what he
preferred, though I had ventured to suggest some of the natural minerals, having personally acquired a taste for them
in my previous service. He used to keep them in the cupboard here, because he had a great dislike of being waited
on more than was necessary. It was an understood thing that I never came near him after dinner unless sent for. And
when he sent for anything, he liked it brought quick, and to be left alone again at once. He hated to be asked if he
required anything more. Amazingly simple in his tastes, sir, Mr. Manderson was.'

'Very well; and he rang for you that night about a quarter past eleven. Now can you remember exactly what he
said?'

I think I can tell you with some approach to accuracy, sir. It was not much. Zzz First he asked me if Mr. Bunner
had gone to bed, and I replied that he had been gone up some time. He then said that he wanted some one to sit up
until 12.30, in case an important message should come by telephone, and that Mr. Marlowe having gone to
Southampton for him in the motor, he wished me to do this, and that

I was to take down the message if it came, and not disturb him. He also ordered a fresh syphon of soda water. I
believe that was all, sir.'

'You noticed nothing unusual about him, I suppose?'
'No, sir, nothing unusual. When I answered the ring, he was seated at the desk listening at the telephone, waiting
for a number, as I supposed. He gave his orders and went on listening at the same time. When I returned with the
syphon he was engaged in conversation over the wire.'

'Do you remember anything of what he was saying?

'Very little, sir; it was something about somebody being at some hotel--of no interest to me. I was only in the
room just time enough to place the syphon on the table and withdraw. As I closed the door he was saying, "You're
sure he isn't in the hotel?" or words to that effect.'

'And that was the last you saw and heard of him alive?'

'No, sir. A little later, at half-past eleven, when I had settled down in my pantry with the door ajar, and a book to
pass the time, I heard Mr. Manderson go upstairs to bed. I immediately went to close the library window, and
slipped the lock of the front door. I did not hear anything more.'

Trent considered. 'I suppose you didn't doze at all,' he said tentatively, 'while you were sitting up waiting for the
telephone message?'

'Oh no, sir. I am always very wakeful about that time. I'm a bad sleeper, especially in the neighbourhood of the
sea, and I generally read in bed until somewhere about midnight.'

'And did any message come?'

'No, sir.'

'No. And I suppose you sleep with your window open, these warm nights?'

'It is never closed at night, sir.'

Trent added a last note; then he looked thoughtfully through those he had taken. He rose and paced up and down
the room for some moments with a downcast eye. At length he paused opposite Martin.

'It all seems perfectly ordinary and simple,' he said. 'I just want to get a few details clear. You went to shut the
windows in the library before going to bed. Which windows?'
'The French window, sir. It had been open all day. The windows opposite the door were seldom opened.'

'And what about the curtains? I am wondering whether any one outside the house could have seen into the room.'

'Easily, sir, I should say, if he had got into the grounds on that side. The curtains were never drawn in the hot weather. Mr. Manderson would often sit right in the doorway at nights, smoking and looking out into the darkness. But nobody could have seen him who had any business to be there.'

'I see. And now tell me this. Your hearing is very acute, you say, and you heard Mr. Manderson enter the house when he came in after dinner from the garden. Did you hear him re-enter it after returning from the motor drive?'

Martin paused. 'Now you mention it, sir, I remember that I did not. His ringing the bell in this room was the first I knew of his being back. I should have heard him come in, if he had come in by the front. I should have heard the door go. But he must have come in by the window.' The man reflected for a moment, then added, 'As a general rule, Mr. Manderson would come in by the front, hang up his hat and coat in the hall, and pass down the hall into the study. It seems likely to me that he was in a great hurry to use the telephone, and so went straight across the lawn to the window he was like that, sir, when there was anything important to be done. He had his hat on, now I remember, and had thrown his greatcoat over the end of the table. He gave his order very sharp, too, as he always did when busy. A very precipitate man indeed was Mr. Manderson; a hustler, as they say.'

'Ah! he appeared to be busy. But didn't you say just now that you noticed nothing unusual about him?'

A melancholy smile flitted momentarily over Martin's face. 'That observation shows that you did not know Mr. Manderson, sir, if you will pardon my saying so. His being like that was nothing unusual; quite the contrary. It took me long enough to get used to it. Either he would be sitting quite still and smoking a cigar, thinking or reading, or else he would be writing, dictating, and sending off wires all at the same time, till it almost made one dizzy to see it, sometimes for an hour or more at a stretch. As for being in a hurry over a telephone message, I may say it wasn't in him to be anything else.'

Trent turned to the inspector, who met his eye with a look of answering intelligence. Not sorry to show his understanding of the line of inquiry opened by Trent, Mr. Murch for the first time put a question.

'Then you left him telephoning by the open window, with the lights on, and the drinks on the table; is that it?'

'That is so, Mr. Murch.' The delicacy of the change in Martin's manner when called upon to answer the detective momentarily distracted Trent's appreciative mind. But the big man's next question brought it back to the problem at once.

'About those drinks. You say Mr. Manderson often took no whisky before going to bed. Did he have any that night?'

'I could not say. The room was put to rights in the morning by one of the maids, and the glass washed, I presume, as usual. I know that the decanter was nearly full that evening. I had refilled it a few days before, and I glanced at it when I brought the fresh syphon, just out of habit, to make sure there was a decent-looking amount.'

The inspector went to the tall corner-cupboard and opened it. He took out a decanter of cut glass and set it on the table before Martin. 'Was it fuller than that?' he asked quietly. 'That's how I found it this morning.' The decanter was more than half empty.

For the first time Martin's self-possession wavered. He took up the decanter quickly, tilted it before his eyes, and then stared amazedly at the others. He said slowly: 'There's not much short of half a bottle gone out of this since I last set eyes on it--and that was that Sunday night.'

'Nobody in the house, I suppose?' suggested Trent discreetly. 'Out of the question!' replied Martin briefly; then he added, 'I beg pardon, sir, but this is a most extraordinary thing to me. Such a thing never happened in all my experience of Mr. Manderson. As for the women-servants, they never touch anything, I can answer for it; and as for me, when I want a drink I can help myself without going to the decanters.' He took up the decanter again and aimlessly renewed his observation of the contents, while the inspector eyed him with a look of serene satisfaction, as a master contemplates his handiwork.

Trent turned to a fresh page of his notebook, and tapped it thoughtfully with his pencil. Then he looked up and said, 'I suppose Mr. Manderson had dressed for dinner that night?'

'Certainly, sir. He had on a suit with a dress-jacket, what he used to refer to as a Tuxedo, which he usually wore when dining at home.'

'And he was dressed like that when you saw him last?'

'All but the jacket, sir. When he spent the evening in the library, as usually happened, he would change it for an old shooting-jacket after dinner, a light-coloured tweed, a little too loud in pattern for English tastes, perhaps. He had it on when I saw him last. It used to hang in this cupboard here!'--Martin opened the door of it as he spoke--along with Mr. Manderson's fishing-rods and such things, so that he could slip it on after dinner without going upstairs.'

'Leaving the dinner-jacket in the cupboard?'

'Yes, sir. The housemaid used to take it upstairs in the morning.'
'In the morning,' Trent repeated slowly. 'And now that we are speaking of the morning, will you tell me exactly what you know about that? I understand that Mr. Manderson was not missed until the body was found about ten o'clock.'

'That is so, sir. Mr. Manderson would never be called, or have anything brought to him in the morning. He occupied a separate bedroom. Usually he would get up about eight and go round to the bathroom, and he would come down some time before nine. But often he would sleep till nine or ten o'clock. Mrs. Manderson was always called at seven. The maid would take in tea to her. Yesterday morning Mrs. Manderson took breakfast about eight in her sitting-room as usual, and every one supposed that Mr. Manderson was still in bed and asleep, when Evans came rushing up to the house with the shocking intelligence.'

'I see,' said Trent. 'And now another thing. You say you slipped the lock of the front door before going to bed. Was that all the locking-up you did?'

'To the front door, sir, yes; I slipped the lock. No more is considered necessary in these parts. But I had locked both the doors at the back, and seen to the fastenings of all the windows on the ground floor. In the morning everything was as I had left it.'

'As you had left it. Now here is another point--the last, I think. Were the clothes in which the body was found the clothes that Mr. Manderson would naturally have worn that day?'

Martin rubbed his chin. 'You remind me how surprised I was when I first set eyes on the body, sir. At first I couldn't make out what was unusual about the clothes, and then I saw what it was. The collar was a shape of collar Mr. Manderson never wore except with evening dress. Then I found that he had put on all the same things that he had worn the night before--large fronted shirt and all--except just the coat and waistcoat and trousers, and the brown shoes, and blue tie. As for the suit, it was one of half a dozen he might have worn. But for him to have simply put on all the rest just because they were there, instead of getting out the kind of shirt and things he always wore by day; well, sir, it was unprecedented. It shows, like some other things, what a hurry he must have been in when getting up.'

'Of course,' said Trent. 'Well, I think that's all I wanted to know. You have put everything with admirable clearness, Martin. If we want to ask any more questions later on, I suppose you will be somewhere about.'

'I shall be at your disposal, sir.' Martin bowed, and went out quietly.

Trent flung himself into the armchair and exhaled a long breath. 'Martin is a great creature,' he said. 'He is far, far better than a play. There is none like him, none, nor will be when our summers have deceased. Straight, too; not an atom of harm in dear old Martin. Do you know, Murch, you are wrong in suspecting that man.'

'I never said a word about suspecting him.' The inspector was taken aback. 'You know, Mr. Trent, he would never have told his story like that if he thought I suspected him.'

'I dare say he doesn't think so. He is a wonderful creature, a great artist; but, in spite of that, he is not at all a sensitive type. It has never occurred to his mind that you, Murch, could suspect him, Martin, the complete, the accomplished. But I know it. You must understand, inspector, that I have made a special study of the psychology of officers of the law. It is a grossly neglected branch of knowledge. They are far more interesting than criminals, and not nearly so easy. All the time I was questioning him I saw handcuffs in your eye. Your lips were mutely framing the syllables of those tremendous words: "It is my duty to tell you that anything you now say will be taken down and used in evidence against you." Your manner would have deceived most men, but it could not deceive me.'

Mr. Murch laughed heartily. Trent's nonsense never made any sort of impression on his mind, but he took it as a mark of esteem, which indeed it was; so it never failed to please him. 'Well, Mr. Trent,' he said, 'you're perfectly right. There's no point in denying it, I have got my eye on him. Not that there's anything definite; but you know as well as I do how often servants are mixed up in affairs of this kind, and this man is such a very quiet customer. You remember the case of Lord William Russell's valet, who went in as usual, in the morning, to draw up the blinds in his master's bedroom, as quiet and starchy as you please, a few hours after he had murdered him in his bed. I've talked to all the women of the house, and I don't believe there's a morsel of harm in one of them. But Martin's not so far better than a play. There is none like him, none, nor will be when our summers have deceased. Straight, too; not an atom of harm in dear old Martin. Do you know, Murch, you are wrong in suspecting that man.'

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'To the front door, sir, yes; I slipped the lock. No more is considered necessary in these parts. But I had locked both the doors at the back, and seen to the fastenings of all the windows on the ground floor. In the morning everything was as I had left it.'

'As you had left it. Now here is another point--the last, I think. Were the clothes in which the body was found the clothes that Mr. Manderson would naturally have worn that day?'

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'Cease!' said Trent. 'Drain not to its dregs the urn of bitter prophecy. Let us get back to facts. Have you, as a matter of evidence, anything at all to bring against Martin's story as he has told it to us?'

'Nothing whatever at present. As for his suggestion that Manderson came in by way of the window after leaving Marlowe and the car, that's right enough, I should say. I questioned the servant who swept the room next morning, and she tells me there were gravelly marks near the window, on this plain drugget that goes round the carpet. And there's a footprint in this soft new gravel just outside.' The inspector took a folding rule from his pocket and with it pointed out the traces. 'One of the patent shoes Manderson was wearing that night exactly fits that print; you'll find them,' he added, 'on the top shelf in the bedroom, near the window end, the only patents in the row. The girl who polished them in the morning picked them out for me.'

Trent bent down and studied the faint marks keenly. 'Good!' he said. 'You have covered a lot of ground, Murch, I
must say. That was excellent about the whisky; you made your point finely. I felt inclined to shout "Encore!" It's a thing that I shall have to think over.'

'I thought you might have fitted it in already,' said Mr. Murch. 'Come, Mr. Trent, we're only at the beginning of our enquiries, but what do you say to this for a preliminary theory? There's a plan of burglary, say a couple of men in it and Martin squared. They know where the plate is, and all about the handy little bits of stuff in the drawing-room and elsewhere. They watch the house; see Manderson off to bed; Martin comes to shut the window, and leaves it ajar, accidentally on purpose. They wait till Martin goes to bed at twelve-thirty; then they just walk into the library, and begin to sample the whisky first thing. Now suppose Manderson isn't asleep, and suppose they make a noise opening the window, or however it might be. He hears it; thinks of burglars; gets up very quietly to see if anything's wrong; creeps down on them, perhaps, just as they're getting ready for work. They cut and run; he chases them down to the shed, and collars one; there's a fight; one of them loses his temper and his head, and makes a swinging job of it. Now, Mr. Trent, pick that to pieces.'

'Very well,' said Trent; 'just to oblige you, Murch, especially as I know you don't believe a word of it. First: no traces of any kind left by your burglar or burglars, and the window found fastened in the morning, according to Martin. Not much force in that, I allow. Next: nobody in the house hears anything of this stampede through the library, nor hears any shout from Manderson either inside the house or outside. Next: Manderson goes down without a word to anybody, though Bunner and Martin are both at hand. Next: did you ever hear, in your long experience, of a householder getting up in the night to pounce on burglars, who dressed himself fully, with underclothing, shirt; collar and tie, trousers, waistcoat and coat, socks and hard leather shoes; and who gave the finishing touches to a somewhat dandified toilet by doing his hair, and putting on his watch and chain? Personally, I call that over-dressing the part. The only decorative detail he seems to have forgotten is his teeth.'

The inspector leaned forward thinking, his large hands clasped before him. 'No,' he said at last. 'Of course there's no help in that theory. I rather expect we have some way to go before we find out why a man gets up before the servants are awake, dresses himself awry, and is murdered within sight of his house early enough to be 'cold and stiff by ten in the morning.'

Trent shook his head. 'We can't build anything on that last consideration. I've gone into the subject with people who know. I shouldn't wonder,' he added, 'if the traditional notions about loss of temperature and rigour after death had occasionally brought an innocent man to the gallows, or near it. Dr. Stock has them all, I feel sure; most general practitioners of the older generation have. That Dr. Stock will make an ass of himself at the inquest, is almost as certain as that tomorrow's sun will rise. I've seen him. He will say the body must have been dead about so long, because of the degree of coldness and rigor mortis. I can see him nosing it all out in some textbook that was out of date when he was a student. Listen, Murch, and I will tell you some facts which will be a great hindrance to you in your professional career. There are many things that may hasten or retard the cooling of the body. This one was lying in the long dewy grass on the shady side of the shed. As for rigidity, if Manderson died in a struggle, or labouring under sudden emotion, his corpse might stiffen practically instantaneously; there are dozens of cases noted, particularly in cases of injury to the skull, like this one. On the other hand, the stiffening might not have begun until eight or ten hours after death. You can't hang anybody on rigor mortis nowadays, inspector, much as you may resent the limitation. No, what we can say is this. If he had been shot after the hour at which the world begins to get up and go about its business, it would have been heard, and very likely seen too. In fact, we must reason, to begin with, at any rate, on the assumption that he wasn't shot at a time when people might be awake; it isn't done in these parts. Put that time at 6.30 a.m. Manderson went up to bed at 11 p.m., and Martin sat up till 12.30. Assuming that he went to sleep at once on turning in, that leaves us something like six hours for the crime to be committed in; and that is a long time. But whenever it took place, I wish you would suggest a reason why Manderson, who was a fairly late riser, was up and dressed at or before 6.30; and why neither Martin, who sleeps lightly, nor Bunner, nor his wife heard him moving about, or letting himself out of the house. He must have been careful. He must have crept about like a cat. Do you feel as I do, Murch, about all this; that it is very, very strange and baffling? 'That's how it looks,' agreed the inspector.

'And now,' said Trent, rising to his feet, 'I'll leave you to your meditations, and take a look at the bedrooms. Perhaps the explanation of all this will suddenly burst upon you while I am poking about up there. But,' concluded Trent in a voice of sudden exasperation, turning round in the doorway, 'if you can tell me at any time, how under the sun a man who put on all those clothes could forget to put in his teeth, you may kick me from here to the nearest lunatic asylum, and hand me over as an incipient dement.'

CHAPTER V: Poking About

There are moments in life, as one might think, when that which is within us, busy about its secret affair, lets escape into consciousness some hint of a fortunate thing ordained. Who does not know what it is to feel at times a wave of unaccountable persuasion that it is about to go well with him?--not the feverish confidence of men in danger
of a blow from fate, not the persistent illusion of the optimist, but an unsought conviction, springing up like a bird from the heather, that success is at hand in some great or fine thing. The general suddenly knows at dawn that the day will bring him victory; the man on the green suddenly knows that he will put down the long putt. As Trent mounted the stairway outside the library door he seemed to rise into certainty of achievement. A host of guesses and inferences swarmed apparently unsorted through his mind; a few secret observations that he had made, and which he felt must have significance, still stood unrelated to any plausible theory of the crime; yet as he went up he seemed to know indubitably that light was going to appear.

The bedrooms lay on either side of a broad carpeted passage, lighted by a tall end window. It went the length of the house until it ran at right angles into a narrower passage, out of which the servants' rooms opened. Martin's room was the exception: it opened out of a small landing half-way to the upper floor. As Trent passed it he glanced within. A little square room, clean and commonplace. In going up the rest of the stairway he stepped with elaborate precaution against noise, hugging the wall closely and placing each foot with care; but a series of very audible creaks marked his passage.

He knew that Manderson's room was the first on the right hand when the bedroom floor was reached, and he went to it at once. He tried the latch and the lock, which worked normally, and examined the wards of the key. Then he turned to the room.

It was a small apartment, strangely bare. The plutocrat's toilet appointments were of the simplest. All remained just as it had been on the morning of the ghastly discovery in the grounds. The sheets and blankets of the unmade bed lay tumbled over a narrow wooden bedstead, and the sun shone brightly through the window upon them. It gleamed, too, upon the gold parts of the delicate work of dentistry that lay in water in a shallow bowl of glass placed on a small, plain table by the bedside. On this also stood a wrought-iron candlestick. Some clothing lay untidily over one of the two rush-bottomed chairs. Various objects on the top of a chest of drawers, which had been used as a dressing-table, lay in such disorder as a hurried man might make. Trent looked them over with a questing eye. He noted also that the occupant of the room had neither washed nor shaved. With his finger he turned over the dental plate in the bowl, and frowned again at its incomprehensible presence.

The emptiness and disarray of the little room, flooded by the sunbeams, were producing in Trent a sense of gruesomeness. His fancy called up a picture of a haggard man dressing himself in careful silence by the first light of dawn, glancing constantly at the inner door behind which his wife slept, his eyes full of some terror.

Trent shivered, and to fix his mind again on actualities, opened two tall cupboards in the wall on either side of the bed. They contained clothing, a large choice of which had evidently been one of the very few conditions of comfort for the man who had slept there.

In the matter of shoes, also, Manderson had allowed himself the advantage of wealth. An extraordinary number of these, treed and carefully kept, was ranged on two low shelves against the wall. No boots were among them. Trent, himself an amateur of good shoe-leather, now turned to these, and glanced over the collection with an appreciative eye. It was to be seen that Manderson had been inclined to pride himself on a rather small and well-formed foot. The shoes were of a distinctive shape, narrow and round-toed, beautifully made; all were evidently from the same last.

Suddenly his eyes narrowed themselves over a pair of patent-leather shoes on the upper shelf. These were the shoes of which the inspector had already described the position to him; the shoes worn by Manderson the night before his death. They were a well-worn pair, he saw at once; he saw, too, that they had been very recently polished. Something about the uppers of these shoes had seized his attention. He bent lower and frowned again at its incomprehensible presence.

As he did this, Trent began unconsciously to whistle faintly, and with great precision, an air which Inspector Murch, if he had been present, would have recognized.

Most men who have the habit of self-control have also some involuntary trick which tells those who know them that they are suppressing excitement. The inspector had noted that when Trent had picked up a strong scent he whistled faintly a certain melodious passage; though the inspector could not have told you that it was in fact the opening movement of Mendelssohn's Lied ohne Worter in A Major.

He turned the shoes over, made some measurements with a marked tape, and looked minutely at the bottoms. On each, in the angle between the heel and the instep, he detected a faint trace of red gravel.

Trent placed the shoes on the floor, and walked with his hands behind him to the window, out of which, still faintly whistling, he gazed with eyes that saw nothing. Once his lips opened to emit mechanically the Englishman's expletive of sudden enlightenment. At length he turned to the shelves again, and swiftly but carefully examined every one of the shoes there.

This done, he took up the garments from the chair, looked them over closely and replaced them. He turned to the
wardrobe cupboards again, and hunted through them carefully. The litter on the dressing-table now engaged his attention for the second time. Then he sat down on the empty chair, took his head in his hands, and remained in that attitude, staring at the carpet, for some minutes. He rose at last and opened the inner door leading to Mrs Manderson's room.

It was evident at a glance that the big room had been hurriedly put down from its place as the lady's bower. All the array of objects that belong to a woman's dressing-table had been removed; on bed and chairs and smaller tables there were no garments or hats, bags or boxes; no trace remained of the obstinate conspiracy of gloves and veils, handkerchiefs and ribbons, to break the captivity of the drawer. The room was like an unoccupied guest-chamber. Yet in every detail of furniture and decoration it spoke of an unconventional but exacting taste. Trent, as his expert eye noted the various perfection of colour and form amid which the ill-mated lady dreamed her dreams and thought her loneliest thoughts, knew that she had at least the resources of an artistic nature. His interest in this unknown personality grew stronger; and his brows came down heavily as he thought of the burdens laid upon it, and of the deed of which the history was now shaping itself with more and more of substance before his busy mind.

He went first to the tall French window in the middle of the wall that faced the door, and opening it, stepped out upon a small balcony with an iron railing. He looked down on a broad stretch of lawn that began immediately beneath him, separated from the house-wall only by a narrow flower-bed, and stretched away, with an abrupt dip at the farther end, toward the orchard. The other window opened with a sash above the garden-entrance of the library. In the farther inside corner of the room was a second door giving upon the passage; the door by which the maid was wont to come in, and her mistress to go out, in the morning.

Trent, seated on the bed, quickly sketched in his notebook a plan of the room and its neighbour. The bed stood in the angle between the communicating-door and the sash-window, its head against the wall dividing the room from Manderson's. Trent stared at the pillows; then he lay down with deliberation on the bed and looked through the open door into the adjoining room.

This observation taken, he rose again and proceeded to note on his plan that on either side of the bed was a small table with a cover. Upon that furthest from the door was a graceful electric-lamp standard of copper connected by a free wire with the wall. Trent looked at it thoughtfully, then at the switches connected with the other lights in the room. They were, as usual, on the wall just within the door, and some way out of his reach as he sat on the bed. He rose, and satisfied himself that the lights were all in order. Then he turned on his heel, walked quickly into Manderson's room, and rang the bell.

'I want your help again, Martin,' he said, as the butler presented himself, upright and impassive, in the doorway. 'I want you to prevail upon Mrs Manderson's maid to grant me an interview.'

'Certainly, sir,' said Martin.

'What sort of a woman is she? Has she her wits about her?'

'She's French, sir,' replied Martin succinctly; adding after a pause: 'She has not been with us long, sir, but I have formed the impression that the young woman knows as much of the world as is good for her--since you ask me.'

'You think butter might possibly melt in her mouth, do you?' said Trent. 'Well, I am not afraid. I want to put some questions to her.'

'I will send her up immediately, sir.' The butler withdrew, and Trent wandered round the little room with his hands at his back. Sooner than he had expected, a small neat figure in black appeared quietly before him.

The lady's maid, with her large brown eyes, had taken favourable notice of Trent from a window when he had crossed the lawn, and had been hoping desperately that the resolver of mysteries (whose reputation was as great below-stairs as elsewhere) would send for her. For one thing, she felt the need to make a scene; her nerves were overwrought. But her scenes were at a discount with the other domestics, and as for Mr Murch, he had chilled her into self-control with his official manner. Trent, her glimpse of him had told her, had not the air of a policeman, and at a distance he had appeared sympathique.

As she entered the room, however, instinct decided for her that any approach to coquetry would be a mistake, if she sought to make a good impression at the beginning. It was with an air of amiable candour, then, that she said, 'Monsieur desire to speak with me.' She added helpfully, 'I am called Celestine.'

'Naturally,' said Trent with businesslike calm. 'Now what I want you to tell me, Celestine, is this. When you took tea to your mistress yesterday morning at seven o'clock, was the door between the two bedrooms--this door here--open?'

Celestine became intensely animated in an instant. 'Oh yes!' she said, using her favourite English idiom. 'The door was open as always, monsieur, and I shut it as always. But it is necessary to explain. Listen! When I enter the room of madame from the other door in there--ah! but if monsieur will give himself the pain to enter the other room, all explains itself.' She tripped across to the door, and urged Trent before her into the larger bedroom with a hand on his arm. 'See! I enter the room with the tea like this. I approach the bed. Before I come quite near the bed, here is the


door to my right hand--open always--so! But monsieur can perceive that I see nothing in the room of Monsieur Manderson. The door opens to the bed, not to me who approach from down there. I shut it without seeing in. It is the order. Yesterday it was as ordinary. I see nothing of the next room. Madame sleep like an angel--she see nothing. I shut the door. I place the plateau--I open the curtains--I prepare the toilette--I retire--voila! Celestine paused for breath and spread her hands abroad.

Trent, who had followed her movements and gesticulations with deepening gravity, nodded his head. 'I see exactly how it was now,' he said. 'Thank you, Celestine. So Mr Manderson was supposed to be still in his room while your mistress was getting up, and dressing, and having breakfast in her boudoir?'

'Oui, monsieur.'

'Nobody missed him, in fact,' remarked Trent. 'Well, Celestine, I am very much obliged to you.' He reopened the door to the outer bedroom.

'It is nothing, monsieur,' said Celestine, as she crossed the small room. 'I hope that monsieur will catch the assassin of Monsieur Manderson. But I not regret him too much,' she added with sudden and amazing violence, turning round with her hand on the knob of the outer door. She set her teeth with an audible sound, and the colour rose in her small dark face. English departed from her. 'Je ne le regrette pas du tout, du tout!' she cried with a flood of words. 'Madame--ah! je me jetterais au leu pour madame--une femme si charmante, si adorable! Mais un homme comme monsieur--maussade, bouteur, impassible! Ah, non!--de ma vie! J'en avais par-dessus la tete, de monsieur! Ah! vrai! Est-ce insupportable, tout de meme, qu'il existe des types comme ca? Je vous jure que--'

'Finissez ce chahut, Celestine!' Trent broke in sharply. Celestine's tirade had brought back the memory of his student days with a rush. 'En voila une scene! C'est rasant, vous savez. Faut rentret ca, mademoiselle. Du reste, c'est bien imprudent, croyez-moi. Hang it! Have some common sense! If the inspector downstairs heard you saying that kind of thing, you would get into trouble. And don't wave your fists about so much; you might hit something. You seem,' he went on more pleasantly, as Celestine grew calmer under his authoritative eye, 'to be even more glad than other people that Mr Manderson is out of the way. I could almost suspect, Celestine, that Mr Manderson did not take as much notice of you as you thought necessary and right.'

'A peine s'il m'avait regarde!' Celestine answered simply.

'Ca, c'est un comble!' observed Trent. 'You are a nice young woman for a small tea-party, I don't think. A star upon your birthday burned, whose fierce, serene, red, pulseless planet never yearned in heaven, Celestine. Mademoiselle, I am busy. Bon jour. You certainly are a beauty!'

Celestine took this as a scarcely expected compliment. The surprise restored her balance. With a sudden flash of her eyes and teeth at Trent over her shoulder, the lady's maid opened the door and swiftly disappeared.

Trent, left alone in the little bedroom, relieved his mind with two forcible descriptive terms in Celestine's language, and turned to his problem. He took the pair of shoes which he had already examined, and placed them on one of the two chairs in the room, then seated himself on the other opposite to this. With his hands in his pockets he sat with eyes fixed upon those two dumb witnesses. Now and then he whistled, almost inaudibly, a few bars. It was very still in the room. A subdued twittering came from the trees through the open window. From time to time a breeze rustled in the leaves of the thick creeper about the sill. But the man in the room, his face grown hard and sombre now with his thoughts, never moved.

So he sat for the space of half an hour. Then he rose quickly to his feet. He replaced the shoes on their shelf with care, and stepped out upon the landing.

Two bedroom doors faced him on the other side of the passage. He opened that which was immediately opposite, and entered a bedroom by no means austerely tidy. Some sticks and fishing-rods stood confusedly in one corner, a pile of books in another. The housemaid's hand had failed to give a look of order to the jumble of heterogeneous objects left on the dressing-table and on the mantelshelf--pipes, penknives, pencils, keys, golf-balls, old letters, photographs, small boxes, tins, and bottles. Two fine etchings and some water-colour sketches hung on the walls; leaning against the end of the wardrobe, unhung, were a few framed engravings. A row of shoes and boots was ranged beneath the window. Trent crossed the room and studied them intently; then he measured some of them with his tape, whistling very softly. This done, he sat on the side of the bed, and his eyes roamed gloomily about the room.

The photographs on the mantelshelf attracted him presently. He rose and examined one representing Marlowe and Manderson on horseback. Two others were views of famous peaks in the Alps. There was a faded print of three youths--one of them unmistakably his acquaintance of the haggard blue eyes--clothed in tatterdemalion soldier's gear of the sixteenth century. Another was a portrait of a majestic old lady, slightly resembling Marlowe. Trent, mechanically taking a cigarette from an open box on the mantel-shelf, lit it and stared at the photographs. Next he turned his attention to a flat leathern case that lay by the cigarette-box.

It opened easily. A small and light revolver, of beautiful workmanship, was disclosed, with a score or so of loose
cartridges. On the stock were engraved the initials 'J. M.'

A step was heard on the stairs, and as Trent opened the breech and peered into the barrel of the weapon, Inspector Murch appeared at the open door of the room. 'I was wondering--' he began; then stopped as he saw what the other was about. His intelligent eyes opened slightly. 'Whose is the revolver, Mr Trent?' he asked in a conversational tone.

'Evidently it belongs to the occupant of the room, Mr Marlowe,' replied Trent with similar lightness, pointing to the initials. 'I found this lying about on the mantelpiece. It seems a handy little pistol to me, and it has been very carefully cleaned, I should say, since the last time it was used. But I know little about firearms.'

'Well, I know a good deal,' rejoined the inspector quietly, taking the revolver from Trent's outstretched hand. 'It's a bit of a speciality with me, is firearms, as I think you know, Mr Trent. But it don't require an expert to tell one thing.' He replaced the revolver in its case on the mantel-shelf, took out one of the cartridges, and laid it on the spacious palm of one hand; then, taking a small object from his waistcoat pocket, he laid it beside the cartridge. It was a little leaden bullet, slightly battered about the nose, and having upon it some bright new scratches.

'Is that the one?' Trent murmured as he bent over the inspector's hand.

'那就是 him,' replied Mr Murch. 'Lodged in the bone at the back of the skull. Dr Stock got it out within the last hour, and handed it to the local officer, who has just sent it on to me. These bright scratches you see were made by the doctor's instruments. These other marks were made by the rifling of the barrel a barrel like this one.' He tapped the revolver. 'Same make, same calibre. There is no other that marks the bullet just like this.'

With the pistol in its case between them, Trent and the inspector looked into each other's eyes for some moments. Trent was the first to speak. 'This mystery is all wrong,' he observed. 'It is insanity. The symptoms of mania are very marked. Let us see how we stand. We were not in any doubt, I believe, about Manderson having dispatched Marlowe in the car to Southampton, or about Marlowe having gone, returning late last night, many hours after the murder was committed.'

'There is no doubt whatever about all that,' said Mr Murch, with a slight emphasis on the verb.

'And now,' pursued Trent, 'we are invited by this polished and insinuating firearm to believe the following line of propositions: that Marlowe never went to Southampton; that he returned to the house in the night; that he somehow, without waking Mrs Manderson or anybody else, got Manderson to get up, dress himself, and go out into the grounds; that he then and there shot the said Manderson with his incriminating pistol; that he carefully cleaned the said pistol, returned to the house and, again without disturbing any one, replaced it in its case in a favourable position to be found by the officers of the law; that he then withdrew and spent the rest of the day in hiding--with a large motor car; and that he turned up, feigning ignorance of the whole affair, at-- what time was it?'

'A little after 9 p.m.' The inspector still stared moodily at Trent. 'As you say, Mr Trent, that is the first theory suggested by this find, and it seems wild enough--at least it would do if it didn't fall to pieces at the very start. When the murder was done Marlowe must have been fifty to a hundred miles away. He did go to Southampton.'

'How do you know?'

'I questioned him last night, and took down his story. He arrived in Southampton about 6.30 on the Monday morning.'

'Come off' exclaimed Trent bitterly. 'What do I care about his story? What do you care about his story? I want to know how you know he went to Southampton.'

Mr Murch chuckled. 'I thought I should take a rise out of you, Mr Trent,' he said. 'Well, there's no harm in telling you. After I arrived yesterday evening, as soon as I had got the outlines of the story from Mrs Manderson and the servants, the first thing I did was to go to the telegraph office and wire to our people in Southampton. Manderson had told his wife when he went to bed that he had changed his mind, and sent Marlowe to Southampton to get some important information from some one who was crossing by the next day's boat. It seemed right enough, but, you see, Marlowe was the only one of the household who wasn't under my hand, so to speak. He didn't return in the car until later in the evening; so before thinking the matter out any further, I wired to Southampton making certain enquiries. Early this morning I got this reply. 'He handed a series of telegraph slips to Trent, who read:

PERSON ANSWERING DESCRIPTION IN MOTOR ANSWERING DESCRIPTION ARRIVED BEDFORD HOTEL HERE 6.30 THIS MORNING GAVE NAME MARLOWE LEFT CAR HOTEL GARAGE TOLD ATTENDANT CAR BELONGED MANDERSON HAD BATH AND BREAKFAST WENT OUT HEARD OF LATER AT DOCKS ENQUIRING FOR PASSENGER NAME HARRIS ON HAVRE BOAT ENQUIRED REPEATEDLY UNTIL BOAT LEFT AT NOON NEXT HEARD OF AT HOTEL WHERE HE LUNCHED ABOUT 1.15 LEFT SOON AFTERWARDS IN CAR COMPANY'S AGENTS INFORM BERTH WAS BOOKED NAME HARRIS LAST WEEK BUT HARRIS DID NOT TRAVEL BY BOAT BURKE INSPECTOR.

'Simple and satisfactory,' observed Mr Murch as Trent, after twice reading the message, returned it to him. 'His own story corroborated in every particular. He told me he hung about the dock for half an hour or so on the chance
g gentlemen, you must excuse me. I am going into Bishopsbridge. There is a lot to do these days, and I have to send
somebody laying for Manderson. And now,' Mr Bunner concluded sadly, 'they got him when I wasn't around. Well,
natural to me as wearing my pants. I have carried one for some years now, because there was always likely to be
or so, and he's practised until he is pretty good. But he never could get the habit of carrying it around. Why, it's as
conceded, squinting along the sights. 'Marlowe was poor with it at first, but I've coached him some in the last month
went out and bought what they offered him, I guess--never consulted me. Not but what it's a good gun,' Mr Bunner
please the old man. Manderson said it was ridiculous for a man to be without a pistol in the twentieth century. So he
Trent--it's loaded, by the way. Now this Little Arthur--Marlowe bought it just before we came over this year to
mechanically feeling under the tail of his jacket, and producing an ugly looking weapon. 'Feel of that, now, Mr
of familiarity; 'the captain is right. This is what we call out home a Little Arthur, and I dare say there are duplicates
of it in a hundred thousand hip-pockets this minute. I consider it too light in the hand myself,' Mr Bunner went on,
expression was banished, and Mr Bunner then looked the consummately cool and sagacious Yankee that he was.

Born in Connecticut, he had gone into a broker's office on leaving college, and had attracted the notice of
Manderson, whose business with his firm he had often handled. The Colossus had watched him for some time, and
at length offered him the post of private secretary. Mr Bunner was a pattern business man, trustworthy, long-headed,
Manderson, whose business with his firm he had often handled. The Colossus had watched him for some time, and

Trent and the inspector. They, who had not heard a sound to herald this entrance, simultaneously looked at his long,
narrow feet. He wore rubber-soled tennis shoes.

'You must be Mr Bunner,' said Trent.

CHAPTER VI: Mr Bunner on the Case

'Calvin C. Bunner, at your service,' amended the newcomer, with a touch of punctilio, as he removed an
unlighted cigar from his mouth. He was used to finding Englishmen slow and ceremonious with strangers, and
Trent's quick remark plainly disconcerted him a little. 'You are Mr Trent, I expect,' he went on. 'Mrs Manderson was
telling me a while ago. Captain, good-morning.' Mr Murch acknowledged the outlandish greeting with a nod. 'I was
coming up to my room, and I heard a strange voice in here, so I thought I would take a look in.' Mr Bunner laughed
easily. 'You thought I might have been eavesdropping, perhaps,' he said. 'No, sir; I heard a word or two about a
pistol--this one, I guess--and that's all.'

Mr Bunner was a thin, rather short young man with a shaven, pale, bony, almost girlish face, and large, dark,
intelligent eyes. His waving dark hair was parted in the middle. His lips, usually occupied with a cigar, in its absence
were always half open with a curious expression as of permanent eagerness. By smoking or chewing a cigar this
expression was banished, and Mr Bunner then looked the consummately cool and sagacious Yankee that he was.

Trent and the American measured one another coolly with their eyes. Both appeared satisfied with what they
saw. 'I was having it explained to me,' said Trent pleasantly, 'that my discovery of a pistol that might have shot
Manderson does not amount to very much. I am told it is a favourite weapon among your people, and has become
quite popular over here.'

Mr Bunner stretched out a bony hand and took the pistol from its case. 'Yes, sir,' he said, handling it with an air
of familiarity; 'the captain is right. This is what we call out home a Little Arthur, and I dare say there are duplicates
of it in a hundred thousand hip-pockets this minute. I consider it too light in the hand myself.' Mr Bunner went on,
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went out and bought what they offered him, I guess--never consulted me. Not but what it's a good gun,' Mr Bunner
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natural to me as wearing my pants. I have carried one for some years now, because there was always likely to be
somebody laying for Manderson. And now,' Mr Bunner concluded sadly, 'they got him when I wasn't around. Well,
gentlemen, you must excuse me. I am going into Bishopsbridge. There is a lot to do these days, and I have to send
off a bunch of cables big enough to choke a cow.'

'I must be off too,' said Trent. 'I have an appointment at the "Three Tuns" inn.'

Let me give you a lift in the automobile,' said Mr Bunner cordially. 'I go right by that joint. Say, cap., are you coming my way too? No? Then come along, Mr Trent, and help me get out the car. The chauffeur is out of action, and we have to do most everything ourselves except clean the dirt off her.'

Still tirelessly talking in his measured drawl, Mr Bunner led Trent downstairs and through the house to the garage at the back. It stood at a little distance from the house, and made a cool retreat from the blaze of the midday sun.

Mr Bunner seemed to be in no hurry to get out the car. He offered Trent a cigar, which was accepted, and for the first time lit his own. Then he seated himself on the footboard of the car, his thin hands clasped between his knees, and looked keenly at the other.

'See here, Mr Trent,' he said, after a few moments. 'There are some things I can tell you that may be useful to you. I know your record. You are a smart man, and I like dealing with smart men. I don't know if I have that detective sized up right, but he strikes me as a mutt. I would answer any questions he had the gumption to ask me--I have done so, in fact--but I don't feel encouraged to give him any notions of mine without his asking. See?'

Trent nodded. 'That is a feeling many people have in the presence of our police,' he said. 'It's the official manner, I suppose. But let me tell you, Murch is anything but what you think. He is one of the shrewdest officers in Europe. He is not very quick with his mind, but he is very sure. And his experience is immense. My forte is imagination, but I assure you in police work experience outweighs it by a great deal.'

'Outweigh nothing!' replied Mr Bunner crisply. 'This is no ordinary case, Mr Trent. I will tell you one reason why. I believe the old man knew there was something coming to him. Another thing: I believe it was something he thought he couldn't dodge.'

Trent pulled a crate opposite to Mr Bunner's place on the footboard and seated himself. 'This sounds like business,' he said. 'Tell me your ideas.'

'I say what I do because of the change in the old man's manner this last few weeks. I dare say you have heard, Mr Trent, that he was a man who always kept himself well in hand. That was so. I have always considered him the coolest and hardest head in business. That man's calm was just deadly--I never saw anything to beat it. And I knew Manderson as nobody else did. I was with him in the work he really lived for. I guess I knew him a heap better than his wife did, poor woman. I knew him better than Marlowe could--he never saw Manderson in his office when there was a big thing on. I knew him better than any of his friends.'

'Had he any friends?' interjected Trent.

Mr Bunner glanced at him sharply. 'Somebody has been putting you next, I see that,' he remarked. 'No: properly speaking, I should say not. He had many acquaintances among the big men, people he saw, most every day; they would even go yachting or hunting together. But I don't believe there ever was a man that Manderson opened a corner of his heart to. But what I was going to say was this. Some months ago the old man began to get like I never knew him before--gloomy and sullen, just as if he was everlastingly brooding over something bad, something that he couldn't fix. This went on without any break; it was the same down town as it was up home, he acted just as if there was something lying heavy on his mind. But it wasn't until a few weeks back that his self-restraint began to go; and let me tell you this, Mr Trent--the American laid his bony claw on the other's knee--I'm the only man that knows it. With every one else he would be just morose and dull; but when he was alone with me in his office, or anywhere where we would be working together, if the least little thing went wrong, by George! he would fly off the handle to beat the Dutch. In this library here I have seen him open a letter with something that didn't just suit him in it, and he would rip around and carry on like an Indian, saying he wished he had the man that wrote it here, he wouldn't do a thing to him, and so on, till it was just pitiful. I never saw such a change. And here's another thing. For a week before he died Manderson neglected his work, for the first time in my experience. He wouldn't answer a letter or a cable, though things looked like going all to pieces over there. I supposed that this anxiety of his, whatever it was, had got on to his nerves till they were worn out. Once I advised him to see a doctor, and he told me to go to hell. But nobody saw this side of him but me. If he was having one of these rages in the library here, for example, and Mrs Manderson would come into the room, he would be all calm and cold again in an instant.'

'And you put this down to some secret anxiety, a fear that somebody had designs on his life?' asked Trent.

The American nodded.

'I suppose,' Trent resumed, 'you had considered the idea of there being something wrong with his mind--a break-down from overstrain, say. That is the first thought that your account suggests to me. Besides, it is what is always happening to your big business men in America, isn't it? That is the impression one gets from the newspapers.'

'Don't let them slip you any of that bunk,' said Mr Bunner earnestly. 'It's only the ones who have got rich too quick, and can't make good, who go crazy. Think of all our really big men--the men anywhere near Manderson's
size: did you ever hear of any one of them losing his senses? They don't do it--believe me. I know they say every
man has his loco point,' Mr Bunner added reflectively, 'but that doesn't mean genuine, sure-enough craziness; it just
means some personal eccentricity in a man...like hating cats...or my own weakness of not being able to touch any
kind of fish-food.'

'Well, what was Manderson's?'

'He was full of them--the old man. There was his objection to all the unnecessary fuss and luxury that wealthy
people don't kick at much, as a general rule. He didn't have any use for expensive trifles and ornaments. He wouldn't
have anybody do little things for him; he hated to have servants tag around after him unless he wanted them. And
although Manderson was as careful about his clothes as any man I ever knew, and his shoes--well, sir, the amount of
money he spent on shoes was sinful--in spite of that, I tell you, he never had a valet. He never liked to have anybody
touch him. All his life nobody ever shaved him.'

'I've heard something of that,' Trent remarked. 'Why was it, do you think?'

'Well,' Mr Bunner answered slowly, 'it was the Manderson habit of mind, I guess; a sort of temper of general
suspicion and jealousy.

They say his father and grandfather were just the same ...Like a dog with a bone, you know, acting as if all the
rest of creation was laying for a chance to steal it. He didn't really think the barber would start in to saw his head off;
he just felt there was a possibility that he might, and he was taking no risks. Then again in business he was always
convinced that somebody else was after his bone--which was true enough a good deal of the time; but not all the
time. The consequence of that was that the old man was the most cautious and secret worker in the world of finance;
and that had a lot to do with his success, too .... But that doesn't amount to being a lunatic, Mr Trent; not by a long
way. You ask me if Manderson was losing his mind before he died. I say I believe he was just worn out with
worrying over something, and was losing his nerve.'

Trent smoked thoughtfully. He wondered how much Mr Bunner knew of the domestic difficulty in his chief's
household, and decided to put out a feeler. 'I understood that he had trouble with his wife.'

'Sure,' replied Mr Bunner. 'But do you suppose a thing like that was going to upset Sig Manderson that way? No,
sir! He was a sight too big a man to be all broken up by any worry of that kind.'

Trent looked half-incredulously into the eyes of the young man. But behind all their shrewdness and intensity he
saw a massive innocence. Mr Bunner really believed a serious breach between husband and wife to be a minor
source of trouble for a big man.

'What was the trouble between them, anyhow?' Trent enquired.

'You can search me,' Mr Bunner replied briefly. He puffed at his cigar. 'Marlowe and I have often talked about it,
and we could never make out a solution. I had a notion at first,' said Mr Bunner in a lower voice, leaning forward,
'that the old man was disappointed and vexed because he had expected a child; but Marlowe told me that the
disappointment on that score was the other way around, likely as not. His idea was all right, I guess; he gathered it
from something said by Mrs Manderson's French maid.'

Trent looked up at him quickly. 'Celestine!' he said; and his thought was, 'So that was what she was getting at!

Mr Bunner misunderstood his glance. 'Don't you think I'm giving a man away, Mr Trent,' he said. 'Marlowe isn't
that kind. Celestine just took a fancy to him because he talks French like a native, and she would always be holding
him up for a gossip. French servants are quite unlike English that way. And servant or no servant,' added Mr Bunner
with emphasis, 'I don't see how a woman could mention such a subject to a man. But the French beat me.' He shook
his head slowly.

'But to come back to what you were telling me just now,' Trent said. 'You believe that Manderson was going in
terror of his life for some time. Who should threaten it? I am quite in the dark.'

'Terror--I don't know,' replied Mr Bunner meditatively. 'Anxiety, if you like. Or suspense--that's rather my idea
of it. The old man was hard to terrify, anyway; and more than that, he wasn't taking any precautions--he was actually
avoiding them. It looked more like he was asking for a quick finish--supposing there's any truth in my idea. Why, he
would sit in that library window, nights, looking out into the dark, with his white shirt just a target for anybody's
gun. As for who should threaten his life well, sir,' said Mr Bunner with a faint smile, 'it's certain you have not lived
in the States. To take the Pennsylvania coal hold-up alone, there were thirty thousand men, with women and children
to keep, who would have jumped at the chance of drilling a hole through the man who fixed it so that they must
starve or give in to his terms. Thirty thousand of the toughest aliens in the country, Mr Trent. There's a type of
desperado you find in that kind of push who has been known to lay for a man for years, and kill him when he had
forgotten what he did. They have been known to dynamite a man in Idaho who had done them dirt in New Jersey ten
years before. Do you suppose the Atlantic is going to stop them?... It takes some sand, I tell you, to be a big business
man in our country. No, sir: the old man knew--had always known--that there was a whole crowd of dangerous men
scattered up and down the States who had it in for him. My belief is that he had somehow got to know that some of
them were definitely after him at last. What licks me altogether is why he should have just laid himself open to them the way he did—why he never tried to dodge, but walked right down into the garden yesterday morning to be shot at.'

Mr Bunner ceased to speak, and for a little while both men sat with wrinkled brows, faint blue vapours rising from their cigars. Then Trent rose. 'Your theory is quite fresh to me,' he said. 'It's perfectly rational, and it's only a question of whether it fits all the facts, I mustn't give away what I'm doing for my newspaper, Mr Bunner, but I will say this: I have already satisfied myself that this was a premeditated crime, and an extraordinarily cunning one at that. I'm deeply obliged to you. We must talk it over again.' He looked at his watch. 'I have been expected for some time by my friend. Shall we make a move?'

'Two o'clock,' said Mr Bunner, consulting his own, as he got up from the foot-board. 'Ten a.m. in little old New York. You don't know Wall Street, Mr Trent. Let's you and I hope we never see anything nearer hell than what's loose in the Street this minute.'

CHAPTER VII: The Lady in Black

The sea broke raging upon the foot of the cliff under a good breeze; the sun flooded the land with life from a dappled blue sky. In this perfection of English weather Trent, who had slept ill, went down before eight o'clock to a pool among the rocks, the direction of which had been given him, and dived deep into clear water. Between vast grey boulders he swam out to the tossing open, forced himself some little way against a coast-wise current, and then returned to his refuge battered and refreshed. Ten minutes later he was scaling the cliff again, and his mind, cleared for the moment of a heavy disgust for the affair he had in hand, was turning over his plans for the morning.

It was the day of the inquest, the day after his arrival in the place. He had carried matters not much further after parting with the American on the road to Bishopsbridge. In the afternoon he had walked from the inn into the town, accompanied by Mr Cupples, and had there made certain purchases at a chemist's shop, conferred privately for some time with a photographer, sent off a reply-paid telegram, and made an enquiry at the telephone exchange. He had said but little about the case to Mr Cupples, who seemed incurious on his side, and nothing at all about the results of his investigation or the steps he was about to take. After their return from Bishopsbridge, Trent had written a long dispatch for the Record and sent it to be telegraphed by the proud hands of the paper's local representative. He had afterwards dined with Mr Cupples, and had spent the rest of the evening in meditative solitude on the veranda.

This morning as he scaled the cliff he told himself that he had never taken up a case he liked so little, or which absorbed him so much. The more he contemplated it in the golden sunshine of this new day, the more evil and the more challenging it appeared. All that he suspected and all that he almost knew had occupied his questing brain for hours to the exclusion of sleep; and in this glorious light and air, though washed in body and spirit by the fierce purity of the sea, he only saw the more clearly the darkness of the guilt in which he believed, and was more bitterly repelled by the motive at which he guessed. But now at least his zeal was awaked again, and the sense of the hunt quickened. He would neither slacken nor spare; here need be no compunction. In the course of the day, he hoped, his net would be complete. He had work to do in the morning; and with very vivid expectancy, though not much serious hope, he awaited the answer to the telegram which he had shot into the sky, as it were, the day before.

The path back to the hotel wound for some way along the top of the cliff, and on nearing a spot he had marked from the sea level, where the face had fallen away long ago, he approached the edge and looked down, hoping to follow with his eyes the most delicately beautiful of all the movements of water—the wash of a light sea over broken rock. But no rock was there. A few feet below him a broad ledge stood out, a rough platform as large as a great net would be complete. He had work to do in the morning; and with very vivid expectancy, though not much serious hope, he awaited the answer to the telegram which he had shot into the sky, as it were, the day before.

This woman seemed to Trent, whose training had taught him to live in his eyes, to make the most beautiful picture he had ever seen. Her face of southern pallor, touched by the kiss of the wind with colour on the cheek, presented to him a profile of delicate regularity in which there was nothing hard; nevertheless the black brows bending down toward the point where they almost met gave her in repose a look of something like severity, strangely redeemed by the open curves of the mouth. Trent said to himself that the absurdity or otherwise of a lover writing sonnets to his mistress's eyebrow depended after all on the quality of the eyebrow. Her nose was of the strangely redeemed by the open curves of the mouth. Trent said to himself that the absurdity or otherwise of a lover writing sonnets to his mistress's eyebrow depended after all on the quality of the eyebrow. Her nose was of the

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knees. With the suggestion of French taste in her clothes, she made a very modern figure seated there, until one
looked at her face and saw the glow and triumph of all vigorous beings that ever faced sun and wind and sea
in the prime of the year. One saw, too, a womanhood so unmixed and vigorous, so unconsciously sure of
itself, as scarcely to be English, still less American.

Trent, who had halted only for a moment in the surprise of seeing the woman in black, had passed by on the cliff
above her, perceiving and feeling as he went the things set down. At all times his keen vision and active brain took
in and tasted details with an easy swiftness that was marvellous to men of slower chemistry; the need to stare, he
held, was evidence of blindness. Now the feeling of beauty was awakened and exultant, and doubled the power of
his sense. In these instants a picture was printed on his memory that would never pass away.

As he went by unheard on the turf the woman, still alone with her thoughts, suddenly moved. She unclasped her
long hands from about her knees, stretched her limbs and body with feline grace, then slowly raised her head and
extended her arms with open, curving fingers, as if to gather to her all the glory and overwhelming sanity of the
morning. This was a gesture not to be mistaken: it was a gesture of freedom, the movement of a soul's resolution to
be, to possess, to go forward, perhaps to enjoy.

So he saw her for an instant as he passed, and he did not turn. He knew suddenly who the woman must be, and it
was as if a curtain of gloom were drawn between him and the splendour of the day.

During breakfast at the hotel Mr Cupples found Trent little inclined to talk. He excused himself on the plea of a
restless night. Mr Cupples, on the other hand, was in a state of bird-like alertness. The prospect of the inquest
seemed to enliven him. He entertained Trent with a disquisition upon the history of that most ancient and once busy
tribunal, the coroner's court, and remarked upon the enviable freedom of its procedure from the shackles of rule and
precedent. From this he passed to the case that was to come before it that morning.

'Young Bunner mentioned to me last night,' he said, 'when I went up there after dinner, the hypothesis which he
puts forward in regard to the crime. A very remarkable young man, Trent. His meaning is occasionally obscure, but
in my opinion he is gifted with a clearheaded knowledge of the world quite unusual in one of his apparent age. Indeed,
his promotion by Manderson to the position of his principal lieutenant speaks for itself. He seems to have
assumed with perfect confidence the control at this end of the wire, as he expresses it, of the complicated business
situation caused by the death of his principal, and he has advised very wisely as to the steps I should take on Mabel's
behalf, and the best course for her to pursue until effect has been given to the provisions of the will. I was
accordingly less disposed than I might otherwise have been to regard his suggestion of an industrial vendetta as far-
fetched. When I questioned him he was able to describe a number of cases in which attacks of one sort or another--
too often successful--had been made upon the lives of persons who had incurred the hostility of powerful labour
organizations. This is a terrible time in which we live, my dear boy. There is none recorded in history, I think, in
which the disproportion between the material and the moral constituents of society has been so great or so menacing
to the permanence of the fabric. But nowhere, in my judgement, is the prospect so dark as it is in the United States.'

'I thought,' said Trent listlessly, 'that Puritanism was about as strong there as the money-getting craze.'

'Your remark,' answered Mr Cupples, with as near an approach to humour as was possible to him, 'is not in the
nature of a testimonial to what you call Puritanism--a convenient rather than an accurate term; for I need not remind
you that it was invented to describe an Anglican party which aimed at the purging of the services and ritual of their
Church from certain elements repugnant to them. The sense of your observation, however, is none the less sound,
and its truth is extremely well illustrated by the case of Manderson himself, who had, I believe, the virtues of purity,
abstinence, and self-restraint in their strongest form. No, Trent, there are other and more worthy things among the
moral constituents of which I spoke; and in our finite nature, the more we preoccupy ourselves with the bewildering
complexity of external apparatus which science places in our hands, the less vigour have we left for the development
of the holier purposes of humanity within us. Agricultural machinery has abolished the festival of the Harvest Home.
Mechanical travel has abolished the inn, or all that was best in it. I need not multiply instances. The view I am
expressing to you,' pursued Mr Cupples, placidly buttering a piece of toast, 'is regarded as fundamentally erroneous
by many of those who think generally as I do about the deeper concerns of life, but I am nevertheless firmly
persuaded of its truth.'

'It needs epigrammatic expression,' said Trent, rising from the table. 'If only it could be crystallized into some
handy formula, like "No Popery", or "Tax the Foreigner", you would find multitudes to go to the stake for it. But
you were planning to go to White Gables before the inquest, I think. You ought to be off if you are to get back to the
court in time. I have something to attend to there myself, so we might walk up together. I will just go and get my
camera.'

'By all means,' Mr Cupples answered; and they set off at once in the ever-growing warmth of the morning. The
roof of White Gables, a surly patch of dull red against the dark trees, seemed to harmonize with Trent's mood; he felt
heavy, sinister, and troubled. If a blow must fall that might strike down that creature radiant of beauty and life whom
he had seen that morning, he did not wish it to come from his hand. An exaggerated chivalry had lived in Trent since
the first teachings of his mother; but at this moment the horror of bruising anything so lovely was almost as much
the artist's revulsion as the gentleman's. On the other hand, was the hunt to end in nothing? The quality of the affair
was such that the thought of forbearance was an agony. There never was such a case; and he alone, he was
confident, held the truth of it under his hand. At least, he determined, that day should show whether what he
believed was a delusion. He would trample his compunction underfoot until he was quite sure that there was any call
for it. That same morning he would know.

As they entered at the gate of the drive they saw Marlowe and the American standing in talk before the front
door. In the shadow of the porch was the lady in black.

She saw them, and came gravely forward over the lawn, moving as Trent had known that she would move, erect
and balanced, stepping lightly. When she welcomed him on Mr Cupples's presentation her eyes of golden-flecked
brown observed him kindly. In her pale composure, worn as the mask of distress, there was no trace of the emotion
that had seemed a halo about her head on the ledge of the cliff. She spoke the appropriate commonplace in a low and
even voice. After a few words to Mr Cupples she turned her eyes on Trent again.

'I hope you will succeed,' she said earnestly. 'Do you think you will succeed?'

He made his mind up as the words left her lips. He said, 'I believe I shall do so, Mrs Manderson. When I have
the case sufficiently complete I shall ask you to let me see you and tell you about it. It may be necessary to consult
you before the facts are published.'

She looked puzzled, and distress showed for an instant in her eyes. 'If it is necessary, of course you shall do so,'
she said.

On the brink of his next speech Trent hesitated. He remembered that the lady had not wished to repeat to him the
story already given to the inspector—or to be questioned at all. He was not unconscious that he desired to hear her
voice and watch her face a little longer, if it might be; but the matter he had to mention really troubled his mind, it
was a queer thing that fitted nowhere into the pattern within whose corners he had by this time brought the other
queer things in the case. It was very possible that she could explain it away in a breath; it was unlikely that any one
else could. He summoned his resolution.

'You have been so kind,' he said, 'in allowing me access to the house and every opportunity of studying the case,
that I am going to ask leave to put a question or two to yourself—nothing that you would rather not answer, I think.
May I?'

She glanced at him wearily. 'It would be stupid of me to refuse, Ask your questions, Mr Trent.' 'It's only this,'
said Trent hurriedly. 'We know that your husband lately drew an unusually large sum of ready money from his
London bankers, and was keeping it here. It is here now, in fact. Have you any idea why he should have done that?'

She opened her eyes in astonishment. 'I cannot imagine,' she said. 'I did not know he had done so. I am very
much surprised to hear it.'

'Why is it surprising?'

'I thought my husband had very little money in the house. On Sunday night, just before he went out in the motor,
he came into the drawing-room where I was sitting. He seemed to be irritated about something, and asked me at
once if I had any notes or gold I could let him have until next day. I was surprised at that, because he was never
without money; he made it a rule to carry a hundred pounds or so about him always in a note-case. I unlocked my
escritoire, and gave him all I had by me. It was nearly thirty pounds.'

'And he did not tell you why he wanted it?'

'No. He put it in his pocket, and then said that Mr Marlowe had persuaded him to go for a run in the motor by
moonlight, and he thought it might help him to sleep. He had been sleeping badly, as perhaps you know. Then he
went off with Mr Marlowe. I thought it odd he should need money on Sunday night, but I soon forgot about it. I
never remembered it again until now.'

'It was curious, certainly,' said Trent, staring into the distance. Mr Cupples began to speak to his niece of the
arrangements for the inquest, and Trent moved away to where Marlowe was pacing slowly upon the lawn. The
young man seemed relieved to talk about the coming business of the day. Though he still seemed tired out and
nervous, he showed himself not without a quiet humour in describing the pomposities of the local police and the
portentous airs of Dr Stock. Trent turned the conversation gradually toward the problem of the crime, and all
Marlowe's gravity returned.

'Bunner has told me what he thinks,' he said when Trent referred to the American's theory. 'I don't find myself
convinced by it, because it doesn't really explain some of the oddest facts. But I have lived long enough in the
United States to know that such a stroke of revenge, done in a secret, melodramatic way, is not an unlikely thing. It
is quite a characteristic feature of certain sections of the labour movement there. Americans have a taste and a talent
for that sort of business. Do you know Huckleberry Finn?'
'Do I know my own name?' exclaimed Trent.

'Well, I think the most American thing in that great American epic is Tom Sawyer's elaboration of an extremely difficult and romantic scheme, taking days to carry out, for securing the escape of the nigger Jim, which could have been managed quite easily in twenty minutes. You know how fond they are of lodges and brotherhoods. Every college club has its secret signs and handgrips. You've heard of the Know-Nothing movement in politics, I dare say, and the Ku Klux Klan. Then look at Brigham Young's penny-dreadful tyranny in Utah, with real blood. The founders of the Mormon State were of the purest Yankee stock in America; and you know what they did. It's all part of the same mental tendency. Americans make fun of it among themselves. For my part, I take it very seriously.'

'It can have a very hideous side to it, certainly,' said Trent, 'when you get it in connection with crime--or with vice--or even mere luxury. But I have a sort of sneaking respect for the determination to make life interesting and lively in spite of civilization. To return to the matter in hand, however; has it struck you as a possibility that Manderson's mind was affected to some extent by this menace that Bunner believes in? For instance, it was rather an extraordinary thing to send you posting off like that in the middle of the night.'

'About ten o'clock, to be exact,' replied Marlowe. 'Though, mind you, if he'd actually roused me out of my bed at midnight I shouldn't have been very much surprised. It all chimes in with what we've just been saying. Manderson had a strong streak of the national taste for dramatic proceedings. He was rather fond of his well-earned reputation for unexpected strokes and for going for his object with ruthless directness through every opposing consideration. He had decided suddenly that he wanted to have word from this man Harris--'

'Who is Harris?' interjected Trent.

'Nobody knows. Even Bunner never heard of him, and can't imagine what the business in hand was. All I know is that when I went up to London last week to attend to various things I booked a deck-cabin, at Manderson's request, for a Mr George Harris on the boat that sailed on Monday. It seems that Manderson suddenly found he wanted news from Harris which presumably was of a character too secret for the telegraph; and there was no train that served; so I was sent off as you know.'

'Trent looked round to make sure that they were not overheard, then faced the other gravely, 'There is one thing I may tell you,' he said quietly, 'that I don't think you know. Martin the butler caught a few words at the end of your conversation with Manderson in the orchard before you started with him in the car, He heard him say, "If Harris is there, every moment is of importance." Now, Mr Marlowe, you know my business here. I am sent to make enquiries, and you mustn't take offence. I want to ask you if, in the face of that sentence, you will repeat that you know nothing of what the business was.'

'Marlowe shook his head. 'I know nothing, indeed. I'm not easily offended, and your question is quite fair. What passed during that conversation I have already told the detective. Manderson plainly said to me that he could not tell me what it was all about. He simply wanted me to find Harris in the orchard before you started with him in the car, He heard him say, "If Harris is there, every moment is of importance." Now, Mr Marlowe, you know my business here. I am sent to make enquiries, and you mustn't take offence. I want to ask you if, in the face of that sentence, you will repeat that you know nothing of what the business was.'

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Trent turned to her. 'Mrs Manderson will excuse me, I hope,' he said. 'I really came up this morning in order to look about me here for some indications I thought I might possibly find. I had not thought of attending the--the court just yet.'

She looked at him with eyes of perfect candour. 'Of course, Mr Trent. Please do exactly as you wish. We are all relying upon you. If you will wait a few moments, Mr Marlowe, I shall be ready.'

She entered the house. Her uncle and the American had already strolled towards the gate.

Trent looked into the eyes of his companion. 'That is a wonderful woman,' he said in a lowered voice.

'You say so without knowing her,' replied Marlowe in a similar tone. 'She is more than that.'

Trent said nothing to this. He stared out over the fields towards the sea. In the silence a noise of hobnailed haste rose on the still air. A little distance down the road a boy appeared trotting towards them from the direction of the hotel. In his hand was the orange envelope, unmistakable afar off, of a telegram. Trent watched him with an indifferent eye as he met and passed the two others. Then he turned to Marlowe. 'A propos of nothing in particular,' he said, 'were you at Oxford?'

'Yes,' said the young man. 'Why do you ask?'

'I just wondered if I was right in my guess. It's one of the things you can very often tell about a man, isn't it?'

'I suppose so,' Marlowe said. 'Well, each of us is marked in one way or another, perhaps. I should have said you were an artist, if I hadn't known it.'

'Why? Does my hair want cutting?'

'Oh, no! It's only that you look at things and people as I've seen artists do, with an eye that moves steadily from detail to detail--rather looking them over than looking at them.'

The boy came up panting. 'Telegram for you, sir,' he said to Trent. 'Just come, sir.'

Trent tore open the envelope with an apology, and his eyes lighted up so visibly as he read the slip that Marlowe's tired face softened in a smile.

'It must be good news,' he murmured half to himself.

Trent turned on him a glance in which nothing could be read. 'Not exactly news,' he said. 'It only tells me that another little guess of mine was a good one.'

CHAPTER VIII: The Inquest

The coroner, who fully realized that for that one day of his life as a provincial solicitor he was living in the gaze of the world, had resolved to be worthy of the fleeting eminence. He was a large man of jovial temper, with a strong interest in the dramatic aspects of his work, and the news of Manderson's mysterious death within his jurisdiction had made him the happiest coroner in England. A respectable capacity for marshalling facts was fortified in him by a copiousness of impressive language that made juries as clay in his hands, and sometimes disguised a doubtful interpretation of the rules of evidence.

The court was held in a long, unfurnished room lately built on to the hotel, and intended to serve as a ballroom or concert-hall. A regiment of reporters was entrenched in the front seats, and those who were to be called on to give evidence occupied chairs to one side of the table behind which the coroner sat, while the jury, in double row, with plastered hair and a spurious ease of manner, flanked him on the other side. An undistinguished public filled the rest of the space, and listened, in an awed silence, to the opening solemnities. The newspaper men, well used to these, muttered among themselves. Those of them who knew Trent by sight assured the rest that he was not in the court.

The identity of the dead man was proved by his wife, the first witness called, from whom the coroner, after some enquiry into the health and circumstances of the deceased, proceeded to draw an account of the last occasion on which she had seen her husband alive. Mrs Manderson was taken through her evidence by the coroner with the sympathy which every man felt for that dark figure of grief. She lifted her thick veil before beginning to speak, and the extreme paleness and unbroken composure of the lady produced a singular impression. This was not an impression of hardness. Interesting femininity was the first thing to be felt in her presence. She was not even enigmatic. It was only clear that the force of a powerful character was at work to master the emotions of her situation. Once or twice as she spoke she touched her eyes with her handkerchief, but her voice was low and clear to the end.

Her husband, she said, had come up to his bedroom about his usual hour for retiring on Sunday night. His room was really a dressing-room attached to her own bedroom, communicating with it by a door which was usually kept open during the night. Both dressing-room and bedroom were entered by other doors giving on the passage. Her husband had always had a preference for the greatest simplicity in his bedroom arrangements, and liked to sleep in a small room. She had not been awake when he came up, but had been half-awakened, as usually happened, when the light was switched on in her husband's room. She had spoken to him. She had no clear recollection of what she had said, as she had been very drowsy at the time; but she had remembered that he had been out for a moonlight run in the car, and she believed she had asked whether he had had a good run, and what time it was. She had asked what
the time was because she felt as if she had only been a very short time asleep, and she had expected her husband to be out very late. In answer to her question he had told her it was half-past eleven, and had gone on to say that he had changed his mind about going for a run.

'Did he say why?' the coroner asked.

'Yes,' replied the lady, 'he did explain why. I remember very well what he said, because--' she stopped with a little appearance of confusion.

'Because--' the coroner insisted gently.

'Because my husband was not as a rule communicative about his business affairs,' answered the witness, raising her chin with a faint touch of defiance. 'He did not--did not think they would interest me, and as a rule referred to them as little as possible. That was why I was rather surprised when he told me that he had sent Mr Marlowe to Southampton to bring back some important information from a man who was leaving for Paris by the next day's boat. He said that Mr Marlowe could do it quite easily if he had no accident. He said that he had started in the car, and then walked back home a mile or so, and felt all the better for it.'

'Did he say any more?'

'Nothing, as well as I remember,' the witness said. 'I was very sleepy, and I dropped off again in a few moments. I just remember my husband turning his light out, and that is all. I never saw him again alive.'

'And you heard nothing in the night?'

'No: I never woke until my maid brought my tea in the morning at seven o'clock. She closed the door leading to my husband's room, as she always did, and I supposed him to be still there. He always needed a great deal of sleep. He sometimes slept until quite late in the morning. I had breakfast in my sitting-room. It was about ten when I heard that my husband's body had been found.' The witness dropped her head and silently waited for her dismissal.

But it was not to be yet.

'Mrs Manderson.' The coroner's voice was sympathetic, but it had a hint of firmness in it now. 'The question I am going to put to you must, in these sad circumstances, be a painful one; but it is my duty to ask it. Is it the fact that your relations with your late husband had not been, for some time past, relations of mutual affection and confidence? Is it the fact that there was an estrangement between you?'

The lady drew herself up again and faced her questioner, the colour rising in her cheeks. 'If that question is necessary,' she said with cold distinctness, 'I will answer it so that there shall be no misunderstanding. During the last few months of my husband's life his attitude towards me had given me great anxiety and sorrow. He had changed towards me; he had become very reserved, and seemed mistrustful. I saw much less of him than before; he seemed to prefer to be alone. I can give no explanation at all of the change. I tried to work against it; I did all I could with justice to my own dignity, as I thought. Something was between us, I did not know what, and he never told me. My own obstinate pride prevented me from asking what it was in so many words; I only made a point of being to him exactly as I had always been, so far as he would allow me. I suppose I shall never know now what it was.' The witness, whose voice had trembled in spite of her self-control over the last few sentences, drew down her veil when she had said this, and stood erect and quiet.

One of the jury asked a question, not without obvious hesitation. 'Then was there never anything of the nature of what they call Words between you and your husband, ma'am?'

'Never.' The word was colourlessly spoken; but every one felt that a crass misunderstanding of the possibilities of conduct in the case of a person like Mrs Manderson had been visited with some severity.

Did she know, the coroner asked, of any other matter which might have been preying upon her husband's mind recently?

Mrs Manderson knew of none whatever. The coroner intimated that her ordeal was at an end, and the veiled lady made her way to the door. The general attention, which followed her for a few moments, was now eagerly directed upon Martin, whom the coroner had proceeded to call.

It was at this moment that Trent appeared at the doorway and edged his way into the great room. But he did not look at Martin. He was observing the well-balanced figure that came quickly toward him along an opening path in the crowd, and his eye was gloomy. He started, as he stood aside from the door with a slight bow, to hear Mrs Manderson address him by name in a low voice. He followed her a pace or two into the hall.

'I wanted to ask you,' she said in a voice now weak and oddly broken, 'if you would give me your arm a part of the way to the house. I could not see my uncle near the door, and I suddenly felt rather faint .... I shall be better in the air .... No, no; I cannot stay here--please, Mr Trent!' she said, as he began to make an obvious suggestion. 'I must go to the house.' Her hand tightened momentarily on his arm as if, for all her weakness, she could drag him from the place; then again she leaned heavily upon it, and with that support, and with bent head, she walked slowly from the hotel and along the oak-shaded path toward White Gables.

Trent went in silence, his thoughts whirling, dancing insanely to a chorus of 'Fool! fool!' All that he alone knew,
all that he guessed and suspected of this affair, rushed through his brain in a rout; but the touch of her unnerved hand upon his arm never for an instant left his consciousness, filling him with an exaltation that enraged and bewildered him. He was still cursing himself furiously behind the mask of conventional solicitude that he turned to the lady when he had attended her to the house and seen her sink upon a couch in the morning-room. Raising her veil, she thanked him gratefully and frankly, with a look of sincere gratitude in her eyes. She was much better now, she said, and a cup of tea would work a miracle upon her. She hoped she had not taken him away from anything important. She was ashamed of herself; she thought she could go through with it, but she had not expected those last questions. ‘I am glad you did not hear me,’ she said when he explained. ‘But of course you will read it all in the reports. It shook me so to have to speak of that,’ she added simply; ‘and to keep from making an exhibition of myself took it out of me. And all those staring men by the door! Thank you again for helping me when I asked you .... I thought I might,’ she ended queerly, with a little tired smile; and Trent took himself away, his hand still quivering from the cool touch of her fingers.

The testimony of the servants and of the finder of the body brought nothing new to the reporters’ net. That of the police was as colourless and cryptic as is usual at the inquest stage of affairs of the kind. Greatly to the satisfaction of Mr Bunner, his evidence afforded the sensation of the day, and threw far into the background the interesting revelation of domestic difficulty made by the dead man’s wife. He told the court in substance what he had already told Trent. The flying pencils did not miss a word of the young American’s story, and it appeared with scarcely the omission of a sentence in every journal of importance in Great Britain and the United States.

Public opinion next day took no note of the faint suggestion of the possibility of suicide which the coroner, in his final address to the jury, had thought it right to make in connection with the lady’s evidence. The weight of evidence, as the official had indeed pointed out, was against such a theory. He had referred with emphasis to the fact that no weapon had been found near the body.

‘This question, of course, is all-important, gentlemen,’ he had said to the jury. ‘It is, in fact, the main issue before you. You have seen the body for yourselves. You have just heard the medical evidence; but I think it would be well for me to read you my notes of it in so far as they bear on this point, in order to refresh your memories. Dr Stock told you—I am going to omit all technical medical language and repeat to you merely the plain English of his testimony—that in his opinion death had taken place six or eight hours previous to the finding of the body. He said that the cause of death was a bullet wound, the bullet having entered the left eye, which was destroyed, and made its way to the base of the brain, which was quite shattered. The external appearance of the wound, he said, did not support the hypothesis of its being self-inflicted, inasmuch as there were no signs of the firearm having been pressed against the eye, or even put very close to it; at the same time it was not physically impossible that the weapon should have been discharged by the deceased with his own hand, at some small distance from the eye. Dr Stock also told us that it was impossible to say with certainty, from the state of the body, whether any struggle had taken place at the time of death; that when seen by him, at which time he understood that it had not been moved since it was found, the body was lying in a collapsed position such as might very well result from the shot alone; but that the scratches and bruises upon the wrists and the lower part of the arms had been very recently inflicted, and were, in his opinion, marks of violence.

‘In connection with this same point, the remarkable evidence given by Mr Bunner cannot be regarded, I think, as without significance. It may have come as a surprise to some of you to hear that risks of the character described by this witness are, in his own country, commonly run by persons in the position of the deceased. On the other hand, it may have been within the knowledge of some of you that in the industrial world of America the discontent of labour often proceeds to lengths of which we in England happily know nothing. I have interrogated the witness somewhat fully upon this. At the same time, gentlemen, I am by no means suggesting that Mr Bunner’s personal conjecture as to the cause of death can fitly be adopted by you. That is emphatically not the case. What his evidence does is to raise two questions for your consideration. First, can it be said that the deceased was to any extent in the position of the deceased who could fitly be adopted by you. That is emphatically not the case. What his evidence does is to raise two questions for your consideration. First, can it be said that the deceased was to any extent in the position of the deceased who could fitly be adopted by you. That is emphatically not the case. What his evidence does is to raise two questions for your consideration. First, can it be said that the deceased was to any extent in the position of a threatened man—of a man more exposed to the danger of murderous attack than an ordinary person? Second, does the recent alteration in his demeanour, as described by this witness, justify the belief that his last days were overshadowed by a great anxiety? These points may legitimately be considered by you in arriving at a conclusion upon the rest of the evidence.’

Thereupon the coroner, having indicated thus clearly his opinion that Mr Bunner had hit the right nail on the head, desired the jury to consider their verdict.

CHAPTER IX: A Hot Scent

‘Come in!’ called Trent.

Mr Cupples entered his sitting-room at the hotel. It was the early evening of the day on which the coroner’s jury, without leaving the box, had pronounced the expected denunciation of a person or persons unknown. Trent, with a hasty glance upward, continued his intent study of what lay in a photographic dish of enamelled metal, which he
moved slowly about in the light of the window. He looked very pale, and his movements were nervous.

‘Sit on the sofa,’ he advised. ‘The chairs are a job lot bought at the sale after the suppression of the Holy Inquisition in Spain. This is a pretty good negative,’ he went on, holding it up to the light with his head at the angle of discriminating judgement. ‘Washed enough now, I think. Let us leave it to dry, and get rid of all this mess.’

Mr Cupples, as the other busily cleared the table of a confusion of basins, dishes, racks, boxes, and bottles, picked up first one and then another of the objects and studied them with innocent curiosity.

‘That is called hypo-eliminator,’ said Trent, as Mr Cupples uncorked and smelt at one of the bottles. ‘Very useful when you're in a hurry with a negative. I shouldn't drink it, though, all the same. It eliminates sodium hypophosphite, but I shouldn't wonder if it would eliminate human beings too.’ He found a place for the last of the litter on the crowded mantel-shelf, and came to sit before Mr Cupples on the table. ‘The great thing about a hotel sitting-room is that its beauty does not distract the mind from work. It is no place for the mayfly pleasures of a mind at ease. Have you ever been in this room before, Cupples? I have, hundreds of times. It has pursued me all over England for years. I should feel lost without it if, in some fantastic, far-off hotel, they were to give me some other sitting-room. Look at this table-cover; there is the ink I spilt on it when I had this room in Halifax. I burnt that hole in the carpet when I had it in Ipswich. But I see--nothing has mended the glass over the picture of “Silent Sympathy”, which I threw a boot at in Banbury. I do all my best work here. This afternoon, for instance, since the inquest, I have finished several excellent negatives. There is a very good dark room downstairs.’

‘The inquest--that reminds me,’ said Mr Cupples, who knew that this sort of talk in Trent meant the excitement of action, and was wondering what he could be about. ‘I came in to thank you, my dear fellow, for looking after Mabel this morning. I had no idea she was going to feel ill after leaving the box; she seemed quite unmoved, and, really, she is a woman of such extraordinary self-command, I thought I could leave her to her own devices and hear out the evidence, which I thought it important I should do. It was a very fortunate thing she found a friend to assist her, and she is most grateful. She is quite herself again now.’

Trent, with his hands in his pockets and a slight frown on his brow, made no reply to this. ‘I tell you what,’ he said after a short pause, ‘I was just getting to the really interesting part of the job when you came in. Come; would you like to see a little bit of high-class police work? It’s the very same kind of work that old Murch ought to be doing at this moment. Perhaps he is; but I hope to glory he isn’t.’ He sprang off the table and disappeared into his bedroom. Presently he came out with a large drawing-board on which a number of heterogeneous objects was ranged.

‘First I must introduce you to these little things,’ he said, setting them out on the table. ‘Here is a big ivory paper-knife; here are two leaves cut out of a diary--my own diary; here is a bottle containing dentifrice; here is a little case of polished walnut. Some of these things have to be put back where they belong in somebody’s bedroom at White Gables before night. That’s the sort of man I am--nothing stops me. I borrowed them this very morning when every one was down at the inquest, and I dare say some people would think it rather an odd proceeding if they knew. Now there remains one object on the board. Can you tell me, without touching it, what it is?’

‘Certainly I can,’ said Mr Cupples, peering at it with great interest. ‘It is an ordinary glass bowl. It looks like a finger-bowl. I see nothing odd about it,’ he added after some moments of close scrutiny.

‘I can’t see much myself,’ replied Trent, ‘and that is exactly where the fun comes in. Now take this little fat bottle, Cupples, and pull out the cork. Do you recognize that powder inside it? You have swallowed pounds of it in your time, I expect. They give it to babies. Grey powder is its ordinary name--mercury and chalk. It is great stuff. Now, while I hold the basin sideways over this sheet of paper, I want you to pour a little powder out of the bottle over this part of the bowl--just here .... Perfect! Sir Edward Henry himself could not have handled the powder better. You have done this before, Cupples, I can see. You are an old hand.’

‘I really am not,’ said Mr Cupples seriously, as Trent returned the fallen powder to the bottle. ‘I assure you it is all a complete mystery to me. What did I do then?’

‘I brush the powdered part of the bowl lightly with this camel-hair brush. Now look at it again. You saw nothing odd about it before. Do you see anything now?’

Mr Cupples peered again. ‘How curious!’ he said. ‘Yes, there are two large grey finger-marks on the bowl. They were not there before.’

‘I am Hawkshaw the detective,’ observed Trent. ‘Would it interest you to hear a short lecture on the subject of glass finger-bowls? When you take one up with your hand you leave traces upon it, usually practically invisible, which may remain for days or months. You leave the marks of your fingers. The human hand, even when quite clean, is never quite dry, and sometimes--in moments of great anxiety, for instance, Cupples--it is very moist. It leaves a mark on any cold smooth surface it may touch. That bowl was moved by somebody with a rather moist hand quite lately.’ He sprinkled the powder again. ‘Here on the other side, you see, is the thumb-mark very good impressions all of them.’ He spoke without raising his voice, but Mr Cupples could perceive that he was ablaze with
excitement as he stared at the faint grey marks. 'This one should be the index finger. I need not tell a man of your knowledge of the world that the pattern of it is a single-spiral whorl, with deltas symmetrically disposed. This, the print of the second finger, is a simple loop, with a staple core and fifteen counts. I know there are fifteen, because I have just the same two prints on this negative, which I have examined in detail. Look!'--he held one of the negatives up to the light of the declining sun and demonstrated with a pencil point. 'You can see they're the same. You see the bifurcation of that ridge. There it is in the other. You see that little scar near the centre. There it is in the other. There are a score of ridge-characteristics on which an expert would swear in the witness-box that the marks on that bowl and the marks I have photographed on this negative were made by the same hand.'

'And where did you photograph them? What does it all mean?' asked Mr Cupples, wide-eyed.

'I found them on the inside of the left-hand leaf of the front window in Mrs Manderson's bedroom. As I could not bring the window with me, I photographed them, sticking a bit of black paper on the other side of the glass for the purpose. The bowl comes from Manderson's room. It is the bowl in which his false teeth were placed at night. I could bring that away, so I did.'

'But those cannot be Mabel's finger-marks.'

'I should think not!' said Trent with decision. 'They are twice the size of any print Mrs Manderson could make.'

'Then they must be her husband's.'

'Perhaps they are. Now shall we see if we can match them once more? I believe we can.' Whistling faintly, and very white in the face, Trent opened another small squat bottle containing a dense black powder. 'Lamp-black,' he explained. 'Hold a bit of paper in your hand for a second or two, and this little chap will show you the pattern of your fingers.' He carefully took up with a pair of tweezers one of the leaves cut from his diary, and held it out for the other to examine. No marks appeared on the leaf. He tilted some of the powder out upon one surface of the paper, then, turning it over, upon the other; then shook the leaf gently to rid it of the loose powder. He held it out to Mr Cupples in silence. On one side of the paper appeared unmistakably, clearly printed in black, the same two fingerprints that he had already seen on the bowl and on the photographic plate. He took up the bowl and compared them. Trent turned the paper over, and on the other side was a bold black replica of the thumb-mark that was printed in grey on the glass in his hand.

'Same man, you see,' Trent said with a short laugh. 'I felt that it must be so, and now I know.' He walked to the window and looked out. 'Now I know,' he repeated in a low voice, as if to himself. His tone was bitter. Mr Cupples, understanding nothing, stared at his motionless back for a few moments.

'I am still completely in the dark,' he ventured presently. 'I have often heard of this fingerprint business, and wondered how the police went to work about it. It is of extraordinary interest to me, but upon my life I cannot see how in this case Manderson's fingerprints are going--'

'I am very sorry, Cupples,' Trent broke in upon his meditative speech with a swift return to the table. 'When I began this investigation I meant to take you with me every step of the way. You mustn't think I have any doubts about your discretion if I say now that I must hold my tongue about the whole thing, at least for a time. I will tell you this: I have come upon a fact that looks too much like having very painful consequences if it is discovered by any one else.' He looked at the other with a hard and darkened face, and struck the table with his hand. 'It is terrible for me here and now. Up to this moment I was hoping against hope that I was wrong about the fact. I may still be wrong in the surmise that I base upon that fact. There is only one way of finding out that is open to me, and I must nerve myself to take it.' He smiled suddenly at Mr Cupples's face of consternation. 'All right--I'm not going to be tragic any more, and I'll tell you all about it when I can. Look here, I'm not half through my game with the powder-bottles yet.'

He drew one of the defamed chairs to the table and sat down to test the broad ivory blade of the paper knife. Mr Cupples, swallowing his amazement, bent forward in an attitude of deep interest and handed Trent the bottle of lamp-black.

CHAPTER X: The Wife of Dives

Mrs Manderson stood at the window of her sitting-room at White Gables gazing out upon a wavering landscape of fine rain and mist. The weather had broken as it seldom does in that part in June. White wreathings drifted up the fields from the sullen sea; the sky was an unbroken grey deadness shedding pin-point moisture that was now and then blown against the panes with a crepitation of despair. The lady looked out on the dim and chilling prospect with a woeful face. It was a bad day for a woman bereaved, alone, and without a purpose in life.

There was a knock, and she called 'Come in,' drawing herself up with an unconscious gesture that always came when she realized that the weariness of the world had been gaining upon her spirit. Mr Trent had called, the maid said; he apologized for coming at such an early hour, but hoped that Mrs Manderson would see him on a matter of urgent importance. Mrs Manderson would see Mr Trent. She walked to a mirror, looked into the olive face she saw reflected there, shook her head at herself with the flicker of a grimace, and turned to the door as Trent was shown in.
His appearance, she noted, was changed. He had the jaded look of the sleepless, and a new and reserved expression, in which her quick sensibilities felt something not propitious, took the place of his half smile of fixed good-humour.

'May I come to the point at once?' he said, when she had given him her hand. 'There is a train I ought to catch at Bishopsbridge at twelve o'clock, but I cannot go until I have settled this thing, which concerns you only, Mrs Manderson. I have been working half the night and thinking the rest; and I know now what I ought to do.'

'You look wretchedly tired,' she said kindly. 'Won't you sit down? This is a very restful chair. Of course it is about this terrible business and your work as correspondent. Please ask me anything you think I can properly tell you, Mr Trent. I know that you won't make it worse for me than you can help in doing your duty here. If you say you must see me about something, I know it must be because, as you say, you ought to do it.'

'Mrs Manderson,' said Trent, slowly measuring his words, 'I won't make it worse for you than I can help. But I am bound to make it bad for you--only between ourselves, I hope. As to whether you can properly tell me what I shall ask you, you will decide that; but I tell you this on my word of honour: I shall ask you only as much as will decide me whether to publish or to withhold certain grave things that I have found out about your husband's death, things not suspected by any one else, nor, I think, likely to be so. What I have discovered--what I believe that I have practically proved--will be a great shock to you in any case. But it may be worse for you than that; and if you give me reason to think it would be so, then I shall suppress this manuscript,' he laid a long envelope on the small table beside him, 'and nothing of what it has to tell shall ever be printed. It consists, I may tell you, of a short private note to my editor, followed by a long dispatch for publication in the Record. Now you may refuse to say anything to me. If you do refuse, my duty to my employers, as I see it, is to take this up to London with me today and leave it with my editor to be dealt with at his discretion. My view is, you understand, that I am not entitled to suppress it on the strength of a mere possibility that presents itself to my imagination. But if I gather from you--and I can gather it from no other person--that there is substance in that imaginary possibility I speak of, then I have only one thing to do as a gentleman and as one who--he hesitated for a phrase--wishes you well. I shall not publish that dispatch of mine. In some directions I decline to assist the police. Have you followed me so far?' he asked with a touch of anxiety in his careful coldness; for her face, but for its pallor, gave no sign as she regarded him, her hands clasped beside her, and her shoulders drawn back in a pose of rigid calm. She looked precisely as she had looked at the inquest.

'I understand quite well,' said Mrs Manderson in a low voice. She drew a deep breath, and went on: 'I don't know what dreadful thing you have found out, or what the possibility that has occurred to you can be, but it was good, it was honourable of you to come to me about it. Now will you please tell me?'

'I cannot do that,' Trent replied. 'The secret is my newspaper's if it is not yours. If I find it is yours, you shall have my manuscript to read and destroy. Believe me,' he broke out with something of his old warmth, 'I detest such mystery-making from the bottom of my soul; but it is not I who have made this mystery. This is the most painful hour of my life, and you make it worse by not treating me like a bound. The first thing I ask you to tell me,' he reverted with an effort to his colourless tone, 'is this: is it true, as you stated at the inquest, that you had no idea at all during the last few months of his life?'

Mrs Manderson's dark brows lifted and her eyes flamed; she quickly rose from her chair. Trent got up at the same moment, and took his envelope from the table; his manner said that he perceived the interview to be at an end. But she held up a hand, and there was colour in her cheeks and quick breathing in her voice as she said: 'Do you know what you ask, Mr Trent? You ask me if I perjured myself.'

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have been despising myself for that for five years. My husband's feeling for me... well, I cannot speak of that ... what I want to say is that along with it there had always been a belief of his that I was the sort of woman to take a great place in society, and that I should throw myself into it with enjoyment, and become a sort of personage and do him great credit--that was his idea; and the idea remained with him after other delusions had gone. I was a part of his ambition. That was his really bitter disappointment, that I failed him as a social success. I think he was too shrewd not to have known in his heart that such a man as he was, twenty years older than I, with great business responsibilities that filled every hour of his life, and caring for nothing else--he must have felt that there was a risk of great unhappiness in marrying the sort of girl I was, brought up to music and books and unpractical ideas, always enjoying myself in my own way. But he had really reckoned on me as a wife who would do the honours of his position in the world; and I found I couldn't."

Mrs Manderson had talked herself into a more emotional mood than she had yet shown to Trent. Her words flowed freely, and her voice had begun to ring and give play to a natural expressiveness that must hitherto have been dulled, he thought, by the shock and self-restraint of the past few days. Now she turned swiftly from the window and faced him as she went on, her beautiful face flushed and animated, her eyes gleaming, her hands moving in slight emphatic gestures, as she surrendered herself to the impulse of giving speech to things long pent up.

'The people,' she said. 'Oh, those people! Can you imagine what it must be for any one who has lived in a world where there was always creative work in the background, work with some dignity about it, men and women with professions or arts to follow, with ideals and things to believe in and quarrel about, some of them wealthy, some of them quite poor; can you understand what it means to step out of that into another world where you have to be very rich, shamefully rich, to exist at all--where money is the only thing that counts and the first thing in everybody's thoughts--where the men who make the millions are so jaded by the work, that sport is the only thing they can occupy themselves with when they have any leisure, and the men who don't have to work are even duller than the men who do, and vicious as well; and the women live for display and silly amusements and silly immoralities; do you know how awful that life is? Of course I know there are clever people, and people of taste in that set, but they're swamped and spoiled, and it's the same thing in the end; empty, empty! Oh! I suppose I'm exaggerating, and I did make friends and have some happy times; but that's how I feel after it all. The seasons in New York and London--how I hated them! And our house-parties and cruises in the yacht and the rest--the same people, the same emptiness.

'And you see, don't you, that my husband couldn't have an idea of all this. His life was never empty. He did not live it in society, and when he was in society he had always his business plans and difficulties to occupy his mind. He hadn't a suspicion of what I felt, and I never let him know; I couldn't, it wouldn't have been fair. I felt I must do something to justify myself as his wife, sharing his position and fortune; and the only thing I could do was to try, and try, to live up to his idea about my social qualities... I did try. I acted my best. And it became harder year by year... I never was what they call a popular hostess, how could I be? I was a failure; but I went on trying... I used to steal holidays now and then. I used to feel as if I was not doing my part of a bargain--it sounds horrid to put it like that, I know, but it was so--when I took one of my old school-friends, who couldn't afford to travel, away to Italy for a month or two, and we went about cheaply all by ourselves, and were quite happy; or when I went and made a long stay in London with some quiet people who had known me all my life, and we all lived just as in the old days, when we had to think twice about seats at the theatre, and told each other about cheap dressmakers. Those and a few other expeditions of the same sort were my best times after I was married, and they helped me to go through with it the rest of the time. But I felt my husband would have hated to know how much I enjoyed every hour of those returns to the old life.

'And in the end, in spite of everything I could do, he came to know .... He could see through anything, I think, once his attention was turned to it. He had always been able to see that I was not fulfilling his idea of me as a figure in the social world, and I suppose he thought it was my misfortune rather than my fault. But the moment he began to see, in spite of my pretending, that I wasn't playing my part with any spirit, he knew the whole story; he divined how I loathed and was weary of the luxury and the brilliancy and the masses of money just because of the people who lived among them--who were made so by them, I suppose .... It happened last year. I don't know just how or when. It may have been suggested to him by some woman--for they all understood, of course. He said nothing to me, and I think he tried not to change in his manner to me at first; but such things hurt--and it was working in both of us. I knew that he knew. After a time we were just being polite and considerate to each other. Before he found me out we had been on a footing of--how can I express it to you?--of intelligent companionship, I might say. We talked without restraint of many things of the kind we could agree or disagree about without its going very deep... if you understand. And then that came to an end. I felt that the only possible basis of our living in each other's company was going under my feet. And at last it was gone.

'It had been like that,' she ended simply, 'for months before he died.' She sank into the corner of a sofa by the window, as though relaxing her body after an effort. For a few moments both were silent. Trent was hastily sorting
out a tangle of impressions. He was amazed at the frankness of Mrs Manderson's story. He was amazed at the vigorous expressiveness in her telling of it. In this vivid being, carried away by an impulse to speak, talking with her whole personality, he had seen the real woman in a temper of activity, as he had already seen the real woman by chance in a temper of reverie and unguarded emotion. In both she was very unlike the pale, self-disciplined creature of majesty that she had been to the world. With that amazement of his went something like terror of her dark beauty, which excitement kindled into an appearance scarcely mortal in his eyes. Incongruously there rushed into his mind, occupied as it was with the affair of the moment, a little knot of ideas... she was unique not because of her beauty but because of its being united with intensity of nature; in England all the very beautiful women were placid, all the fiery women seemed to have burnt up the best of their beauty; that was why no beautiful woman had ever cast this sort of spell on him before; when it was a question of wit in women he had preferred the brighter flame to the duller, without much regarding the lamp. 'All this is very disputable,' said his reason; and instinct answered, 'Yes, except that I am under a spell'; and a deeper instinct cried out, 'Away with it!' He forced his mind back to her story, and found growing swiftly in him an irrepressible conviction. It was all very fine; but it would not do.

'I feel as if I had led you into saying more than you meant to say, or than I wanted to learn,' he said slowly. 'But there is one brutal question which is the whole point of my enquiry.' He braced his frame like one preparing for a plunge into cold waters. 'Mrs Manderson, will you assure me that your husband's change toward you had nothing to do with John Marlowe?'

And what he had dreaded came. 'Oh!' she cried with a sound of anguish, her face thrown up and open hands stretched out as if for pity; and then the hands covered the burning face, and she flung herself aside among the cushions at her elbow, so that he saw nothing but her heavy crown of black hair, and her body moving with sobs that stabbed his heart, and a foot turned inward gracelessly in an abandonment of misery. Like a tall tower suddenly breaking apart she had fallen in ruins, helplessly weeping.

Trent stood up, his face white and calm. With a senseless particularity he placed his envelope exactly in the centre of the little polished table. He walked to the door, closed it noiselessly as he went out, and in a few minutes was tramping through the rain out of sight of White Gables, going nowhere, seeing nothing, his soul shaken in the fierce effort to kill and trample the raving impulse that had seized him in the presence of her shame, that clamoured to him to drag himself before her feet, to pray for pardon, to pour out words-- he knew not what words, but he knew that they had been straining at his lips--to wreck his self-respect for ever, and hopelessly defeat even the crazy purpose that had almost possessed him, by drowning her wretchedness in disgust, by babbling with the tongue of infatuation to a woman with a husband not yet buried, to a woman who loved another man.

Such was the magic of her tears, quickening in a moment the thing which, as his heart had known, he must not let come to life. For Philip Trent was a young man, younger in nature even than his years, and a way of life that kept his edge keen and his spirit volcanic had prepared him very ill for the meeting that comes once in the early manhood of most of us, usually--as in his case, he told himself harshly--to no purpose but the testing of virtue and the power of the will.

CHAPTER XI: Hitherto Unpublished

My Dear Molloy:---This is in case I don't find you at your office. I have found out who killed Manderson, as this dispatch will show. This was my problem; yours is to decide what use to make of it. It definitely charges an unsuspected person with having a hand in the crime, and practically accuses him of being the murderer, so I don't suppose you will publish it before his arrest, and I believe it is illegal to do so afterwards until he has been tried and found guilty. You may decide to publish it then; and you may find it possible to make some use or other before then of the facts I have given. That is your affair. Meanwhile, will you communicate with Scotland Yard, and let them see what I have written? I have done with the Manderson mystery, and I wish to God I had never touched it. Here follows my dispatch.--P.T.

Marlstone, June 16th. I begin this, my third and probably my final dispatch to the Record upon the Manderson murder, with conflicting feelings. I have a strong sense of relief, because in my two previous dispatches I was obliged, in the interests of justice, to withhold facts ascertained by me which would, if published then, have put a certain person upon his guard and possibly have led to his escape; for he is a man of no common boldness and resource. These facts I shall now set forth. But I have, I confess, no liking for the story of treachery and perverted cleverness which I have to tell. It leaves an evil taste in the mouth, a savour of something revolting in the deeper puzzle of motive underlying the puzzle of the crime itself, which I believe I have solved.

It will be remembered that in my first dispatch I described the situation as I found it on reaching this place early on Tuesday morning. I told how the body was found, and in what state; dwelt upon the complete mystery surrounding the crime, and mentioned one or two local theories about it; gave some account of the dead man's domestic surroundings; and furnished a somewhat detailed description of his movements on the evening before his death. I gave, too, a little fact which may or may not have seemed irrelevant: that a quantity of whisky much larger
than Manderson habitually drank at night had disappeared from his private decanter since the last time he was seen alive. On the following day, the day of the inquest, I wired little more than an abstract of the proceedings in the coroner's court, of which a verbatim report was made at my request by other representatives of the Record. That day is not yet over as I write these lines; and I have now completed an investigation which has led me directly to the man who must be called upon to clear himself of the guilt of the death of Manderson.

Apart from the central mystery of Manderson's having arisen long before his usual hour to go out and meet his death, there were two minor points of oddity about this affair which, I suppose, must have occurred to thousands of those who have read the accounts in the newspapers: points apparent from the very beginning. The first of these was that, whereas the body was found at a spot not thirty yards from the house, all the people of the house declared that they had heard no cry or other noise in the night. Manderson had not been gagged; the marks on his wrists pointed to a struggle with his assailant; and there had been at least one pistol-shot. (I say at least one, because it is the fact that in murders with firearms, especially if there has been a struggle, the criminal commonly misses his victim at least once.) This odd fact seemed all the more odd to me when I learned that Martin the butler was a bad sleeper, very keen of hearing, and that his bedroom, with the window open, faced almost directly toward the shed by which the body was found.

The second odd little fact that was apparent from the outset was Manderson's leaving his dental plate by the bedside. It appeared that he had risen and dressed himself fully, down to his necktie and watch and chain, and had gone out of doors without remembering to put in this plate, which he had carried in his mouth every day for years, and which contained all the visible teeth of the upper jaw. It had evidently not been a case of frantic hurry; and even if it had been, he would have been more likely to forget almost anything than this denture. Any one who wears such a removable plate will agree that the putting it in on rising is a matter of second nature. Speaking as well as eating, to say nothing of appearances, depend upon it.

Neither of these queer details, however, seemed to lead to anything at the moment. They only awakened in me a suspicion of something lurking in the shadows, something that lent more mystery to the already mysterious question how and why and through whom Manderson met his end.

With this much of preamble I come at once to the discovery which, in the first few hours of my investigation, set me upon the path which so much ingenuity had been directed to concealing.

I have already described Manderson's bedroom, the rigorous simplicity of its furnishing, contrasted so strangely with the multitude of clothes and shoes, and the manner of its communication with Mrs Manderson's room. On the upper of the two long shelves on which the shoes were ranged I found, where I had been told I should find them, the pair of patent leather shoes which Manderson had worn on the evening before his death. I had glanced over the row, not with any idea of their giving me a clue, but merely because it happens that I am a judge of shoes, and all these shoes were of the very best workmanship. But my attention was at once caught by a little peculiarity in this particular pair. They were the lightest kind of lace-up dress shoes, very thin in the sole, without toe-caps, and beautifully made, like all the rest. These shoes were old and well worn; but being carefully polished, and fitted, as all the shoes were, upon their trees, they looked neat enough. What caught my eye was a slight splitting of the leather in that part of the upper known as the vamp--a splitting at the point where the two laced parts of the shoe rise from the upper. It is at this point that the strain comes when a tight shoe of this sort is forced upon the foot, and it is usually guarded with a strong stitching across the bottom of the opening. In both the shoes I was examining this stitching had parted, and the leather below had given way. The splitting was a tiny affair in each case, not an eighth of an inch long, and the torn edges having come together again on the removal of the strain, there was nothing that a person who was not something of a connoisseur of shoe-leather would have noticed. Even less noticeable, and indeed not to be seen at all unless one were looking for it, was a slight straining of the stitches uniting the upper to the sole. At the toe and on the outer side of each shoe this stitching had been dragged until it was visible on a close inspection of the join.

These indications, of course, could mean only one thing--the shoes had been worn by some one for whom they were too small.

Now it was clear at a glance that Manderson was always thoroughly well shod, and careful, perhaps a little vain, of his small and narrow feet. Not one of the other shoes in the collection, as I soon ascertained, bore similar marks; they had not belonged to a man who squeezed himself into tight shoe-leather. Some one who was not Manderson had worn these shoes, and worn them recently; the edges of the tears were quite fresh.

The possibility of some one having worn them since Manderson's death was not worth considering; the body had only been found about twenty-six hours when I was examining the shoes; besides, why should any one wear them? The possibility of some one having borrowed Manderson's shoes and spoiled them for him while he was alive seemed about as negligible. With others to choose from he would not have worn these. Besides, the only men in the place were the butler and the two secretaries. But I do not say that I gave those possibilities even as much
husband about an hour before. Martin, I perceived, could only have seen the man's back, as he sat crouching over the

She had merely spoken with him as she lay half asleep, resuming a conversation which she had had with her living

Record stenographers in court) had not seen the man at all. She hardly could have done, as I shall show presently.

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Manderson at the first glance.

this unmistakable garment was a cardinal feature of the unknown's plan. He knew that Martin would take him for

mistaken--upon the man who sat at the telephone in the library. It was now quite plain (if my guess was right) that

jacket. They were there before my eyes in the bedroom; and Martin had seen the jacket--which nobody could have

unknown in Manderson's shoes had certainly had possession of Manderson's trousers, waistcoat, and shooting

Madman came to the house, and other things confirmed this.

and had gone to bed there. This, of course, led me to the inference that Manderson was dead before the false

he had in leaving the shoes: to make it impossible that any one should doubt that Manderson had been in the house

right, the unknown had brought the denture to the house with him, and left it in the bedroom, with the same object as

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on the shoe-shelves later in the morning, after the body had been found.

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All these thoughts, as I say, came flocking into my mind together, drawn from various parts of my memory of

the morning's enquiries and observations. They had all presented themselves, in far less time than it takes to read

them as set down here, as I was turning over the shoes, confirming my own certainty on the main point. And yet

when I confronted the definite idea that had sprung up suddenly and unsupported before me--'It was not Manderson

who was in the house at that night'--it seemed a stark absurdity at the first formulating. It was certainly Manderson

who had dined at the house and gone out with Marlowe in the car. People had seen him at close quarters. But was it

he who returned at ten? That question too seemed absurd enough. But I could not set it aside. It seemed to me as if a

faint light was beginning to creep over the whole expanse of my mind, as it does over land at dawn, and that

presently the sun would be rising. I set myself to think over, one by one, the points that had just occurred to me, so

as to make out, if possible, why any man masquerading as Manderson should have done these things that Manderson

would not have done.

I had not to cast about very long for the motive a man might have in forcing his feet into Manderson's narrow

shoes. The examination of footmarks is very well understood by the police. But not only was the man concerned to

leave no footmarks of his own: he was concerned to leave Manderson's, if any; his whole plan, if my guess was

right, must have been directed to producing the belief that Manderson was in the place that night. Moreover, his plan
did not turn upon leaving footmarks. He meant to leave the shoes themselves, and he did so. The maidservant had

found them outside the bedroom door, as Manderson always left his shoes, and had polished them, replacing them

on the shoe-shelves later in the morning, after the body had been found.

When I came to consider in this new light the leaving of the false teeth, an explanation of what had seemed the

maddest part of the affair broke upon me at once. A dental plate is not inseparable from its owner. If my guess was

right, the unknown had brought the denture to the house with him, and left it in the bedroom, with the same object as

he had in leaving the shoes: to make it impossible that any one should doubt that Manderson had been in the house

and had gone to bed there. This, of course, led me to the inference that Manderson was dead before the false

Manderson came to the house, and other things confirmed this.

For instance, the clothing, to which I now turned in my review of the position. If my guess was right, the

unknown in Manderson's shoes had certainly had possession of Manderson's trousers, waistcoat, and shooting

jacket. They were there before my eyes in the bedroom; and Martin had seen the jacket--which nobody could have

mistaken--upon the man who sat at the telephone in the library. It was now quite plain (if my guess was right) that

this unmistakable garment was a cardinal feature of the unknown's plan. He knew that Martin would take him for

Manderson at the first glance.

And there my thinking was interrupted by the realization of a thing that had escaped me before. So strong had

been the influence of the unquestioned assumption that it was Manderson who was present that night, that neither I

nor, as far as I know, any one else had noted the point. Martin had not seen the man's face, nor had Mrs Manderson.

Mrs Manderson (judging by her evidence at the inquest, of which, as I have said, I had a full report made by the

Record stenographers in court) had not seen the man at all. She hardly could have done, as I shall show presently.

She had merely spoken with him as she lay half asleep, resuming a conversation which she had had with her living

husband about an hour before. Martin, I perceived, could only have seen the man's back, as he sat crouching over the
telephone; no doubt a characteristic pose was imitated there. And the man had worn his hat, Manderson's broad-brimmed hat! There is too much character in the back of a head and neck. The unknown, in fact, supposing him to have been of about Manderson's build, had had no need for any disguise, apart from the jacket and the hat and his powers of mimicry.

I paused there to contemplate the coolness and ingenuity of the man. The thing, I now began to see, was so safe and easy, provided that his mimicry was good enough, and that his nerve held. Those two points assured, only some wholly unlikely accident could unmask him.

To come back to my puzzling out of the matter as I sat in the dead man's bedroom with the tell-tale shoes before me. The reason for the entrance by the window instead of by the front door will already have occurred to any one reading this. Entering by the door, the man would almost certainly have been heard by the sharp-eared Martin in his pantry just across the hall; he might have met him face to face.

Then there was the problem of the whisky. I had not attached much importance to it; whisky will sometimes vanish in very queer ways in a household of eight or nine persons; but it had seemed strange that it should go in that way on that evening. Martin had been plainly quite dumbfounded by the fact. It seemed to me now that many a man-fresh, as this man in all likelihood was, from a bloody business, from the unclothing of a corpse, and with a desperate part still to play--would turn to that decanter as to a friend. No doubt he had a drink before sending for Martin; after making that trick with ease and success, he probably drank more.

But he had known when to stop. The worst part of the enterprise was before him: the business--clearly of such vital importance to him, for whatever reason--of shutting himself in Manderson's room and preparing a body of convincing evidence of its having been occupied by Manderson; and this with the risk--very slight, as no doubt he understood, but how unnerving!--of the woman on the other side of the half-open door awaking and somehow discovering him. True, if he kept out of her limited field of vision from the bed, she could only see him by getting up and going to the door. I found that to a person lying in her bed, which stood with its head to the wall a little beyond the door, nothing was visible through the doorway but one of the cupboards by Manderson's bed-head. Moreover, since this man knew the ways of the household, he would think it most likely that Mrs Manderson was asleep. Another point with him, I guessed, might have been the estrangement between the husband and wife, which they had tried to cloak by keeping up, among other things, their usual practice of sleeping in connected rooms, but which was well known to all who had anything to do with them. He would hope from this that if Mrs Manderson heard him, she would take no notice of the supposed presence of her husband.

So, pursuing my hypothesis, I followed the unknown up to the bedroom, and saw him setting about his work. And it was with a catch in my own breath that I thought of the hideous shock with which he must have heard the sound of all others he was dreading most: the drowsy voice from the adjoining room.

What Mrs Manderson actually said, she was unable to recollect at the inquest. She thinks she asked her supposed husband whether he had had a good run in the car. And now what does the unknown do? Here, I think, we come to a supremely significant point. Not only does he--standing rigid there, as I picture him, before the dressing-table, listening to the sound of his own leaping heart--not only does he answer the lady in the voice of Manderson; he volunteers an explanatory statement. He tells her that he has, on a sudden inspiration, sent Marlowe in the car to Southampton; that he has sent him to bring back some important information from a man leaving for Paris by the steamboat that morning. Why these details from a man who had long been uncommunicative to his wife, and that upon a point scarcely likely to interest her? Why these details about Marlowe?

Having taken my story so far, I now put forward the following definite propositions: that between a time somewhere about ten, when the car started, and a time somewhere about eleven, Manderson was shot--probably at a considerable distance from the house, as no shot was heard; that the body was brought back, left by the shed, and stripped of its outer clothing; that at some time round about eleven o'clock a man who was not Manderson, wearing Manderson's shoes, hat, and jacket, entered the library by the garden window; that he had with him Manderson's black trousers, waistcoat, and motor-coat, the denture taken from Manderson's mouth, and the weapon with which he had been murdered; that he concealed these, rang the bell for the butler, and sat down at the telephone with his hat on and his back to the door; that he was occupied with the telephone all the time Martin was in the room; that on going up to the bedroom floor he quietly entered Marlowe's room and placed the revolver with which the crime had been committed--Marlowe's revolver--in the case on the mantelpiece from which it had been taken; and that he then went to Manderson's room, placed Manderson's shoes outside the door, threw Manderson's garments on a chair, placed the denture in the bowl by the bedside, and selected a suit of clothes, a pair of shoes, and a tie from those in the bedroom.

Here I will pause in my statement of this man's proceedings to go into a question for which the way is now sufficiently prepared:

Who was the false Manderson?
Reviewing what was known to me, or might almost with certainty be surmised, about that person, I set down the 
following five conclusions:
(1.) He had been in close relations with the dead man. In his acting before Martin and his speaking to Mrs 
Manderson he had made no mistake.
(2.) He was of a build not unlike Manderson's, especially as to height and breadth of shoulder, which mainly 
determine the character of the back of a seated figure when the head is concealed and the body loosely clothed. But 
his feet were larger, though not greatly larger, than Manderson's.
(3.) He had considerable aptitude for mimicry and acting--probably some experience too.
(4.) He had a minute acquaintance with the ways of the Manderson household.
(5.) He was under a vital necessity of creating the belief that Manderson was alive and in that house until some 
time after midnight on the Sunday night.
So much I took as either certain or next door to it. It was as far as I could see. And it was far enough.
I proceed to give, in an order corresponding with the numbered paragraphs above, such relevant facts as I was 
able to obtain about Mr John Marlowe, from himself and other sources:
(1.) He had been Mr Manderson's private secretary, upon a footing of great intimacy, for nearly four years.
(2.) The two men were nearly of the same height, about five feet eleven inches; both were powerfully built and 
heavy in the shoulder. Marlowe, who was the younger by some twenty years, was rather slighter about the body, 
though Manderson was a man in good physical condition. Marlowe's shoes (of which I examined several pairs) were 
roughly about one shoemaker's size longer and broader than Manderson's.
(3.) In the afternoon of the first day of my investigation, after arriving at the results already detailed, I sent a 
telegram to a personal friend, a Fellow of a college at Oxford, whom I knew to be interested in theatrical matters, in 
these terms:
PLEASE WIRE JOHN MARLOWE'S RECORD IN CONNECTION WITH ACTING AT OXFORD SOME 
TIME PAST DECADE VERY URGENT AND CONFIDENTIAL.
My friend replied in the following telegram, which reached me next morning (the morning of the inquest):
MARLOWE WAS MEMBER O.U.D.S FOR THREE YEARS AND PRESIDENT 19- PLAYED BARDOLPH 
CLEON AND MERCUTIO EXCELLED IN CHARACTER ACTING AND IMITATIONS IN GREAT DEMAND 
AT SMOKERS WAS HERO OF SOME HISTORIC HOAXES.
I had been led to send the telegram which brought this very helpful answer by seeing on the mantel-shelf in 
Marlowe's bedroom a photograph of himself and two others in the costume of Falstaff's three followers, with an 
inscription from The Merry Wives, and by noting that it bore the imprint of an Oxford firm of photographers.
(4.) During his connection with Manderson, Marlowe had lived as one of the family. No other person, apart from 
the servants, had his opportunities for knowing the domestic life of the Mandersons in detail.
(5.) I ascertained beyond doubt that Marlowe arrived at a hotel in Southampton on the Monday morning at 6.30, 
and there proceeded to carry out the commission which, according to his story, and according to the statement made 
to Mrs Manderson in the bedroom by the false Manderson, had been entrusted to him by his employer. He had then 
returned in the car to Marlstone, where he had shown great amazement and horror at the news of the murder.
These, I say, are the relevant facts about Marlowe. We must now examine fact number 5 (as set out above) in 
connection with conclusion number 5 about the false Manderson.
I would first draw attention to one important fact. The only person who professed to have heard Manderson 
mention Southampton at all before he started in the car was Marlowe. His story--confirmed to some extent by what 
the butler overheard--was that the journey was all arranged in a private talk before they set out, and he could not say, 
when I put the question to him, why Manderson should have concealed his intentions by giving out that he was 
going with Marlowe for a moonlight drive. This point, however, attracted no attention. Marlowe had an absolutely 
air-tight alibi in his presence at Southampton by 6.30; nobody thought of him in connection with a murder which 
must have been committed after 12.30--the hour at which Martin the butler had gone to bed. But it was the 
Manderson who came back from the drive who went out of his way to mention Southampton openly to two persons. 
He even went so far as to ring up a hotel at Southampton and ask questions which bore out Marlowe's story of his 
errand. This was the call he was busy with when Martin was in the library.
Now let us consider the alibi. If Manderson was in the house that night, and if he did not leave it until some time 
after 12.30, Marlowe could not by any possibility have had a direct hand in the murder. It is a question of the 
distance between Marlstone and Southampton. If he had left Marlstone in the car at the hour when he is supposed to 
have done so--between 10 and 10.30--with a message from Manderson, the run would be quite an easy one to do in 
the time. But it would be physically impossible for the car--a 15 h.p. four-cylinder Northumberland, an average 
medium-power car--to get to Southampton by half-past six unless it left Marlstone by midnight at latest. Motorists 
who will examine the road-map and make the calculations required, as I did in Manderson's library that day, will
agree that on the facts as they appeared there was absolutely no case against Marlowe.

But even if they were not as they appeared; if Manderson was dead by eleven o'clock, and if at about that time Marlowe impersonated him at White Gables; if Marlowe retired to Manderson's bedroom--how can all this be reconciled with his appearance next morning at Southampton? He had to get out of the house, unseen and unheard, and away in the car by midnight. And Martin, the sharp-eared Martin, was sitting up until 12.30 in his pantry, with the door open, listening for the telephone bell. Practically he was standing sentry over the foot of the staircase, the only staircase leading down from the bedroom floor.

With this difficulty we arrive at the last and crucial phase of my investigation. Having the foregoing points clearly in mind, I spent the rest of the day before the inquest in talking to various persons and in going over my story, testing it link by link. I could only find the one weakness which seemed to be involved in Martin's sitting up until 12.30; and since his having been instructed to do so was certainly a part of the plan, meant to clinch the alibi for Marlowe, I knew there must be an explanation somewhere. If I could not find that explanation, my theory was valueless. I must be able to show that at the time Martin went up to bed the man who had shut himself in Manderson's bedroom might have been many miles away on the road to Southampton.

I had, however, a pretty good idea already--as perhaps the reader of these lines has by this time, if I have made myself clear--of how the escape of the false Manderson before midnight had been contrived. But I did not want what I was now about to do to be known. If I had chanced to be discovered at work, there would have been no concealing the direction of my suspicions. I resolved not to test them on this point until the next day, during the opening proceedings at the inquest. This was to be held, I knew, at the hotel, and I reckoned upon having White Gables to myself so far as the principal inmates were concerned.

So in fact it happened. By the time the proceedings at the hotel had begun I was hard at work at White Gables. I had a camera with me. I made search, on principles well known to and commonly practised by the police, and often enough by myself, for certain indications. Without describing my search, I may say at once that I found and was able to photograph two fresh fingerprints, very large and distinct, on the polished front of the right-hand top drawer of the chest of drawers in Manderson's bedroom; five more (among a number of smaller and less recent impressions made by other hands) on the glasses of the French window in Mrs Manderson's room, a window which always stood open at night with a curtain before it; and three more upon the glass bowl in which Manderson's dental plate had been found lying.

I took the bowl with me from White Gables. I took also a few articles which I selected from Marlowe's bedroom, as bearing the most distinct of the innumerable fingerprints which are always to be found upon toilet articles in daily use. I already had in my possession, made upon leaves cut from my pocket diary, some excellent fingerprints of Marlowe's which he had made in my presence without knowing it. I had shown him the leaves, asking if he recognized them; and the few seconds during which he had held them in his fingers had sufficed to leave impressions which I was afterwards able to bring out.

By six o'clock in the evening, two hours after the jury had brought in their verdict against a person or persons unknown, I had completed my work, and was in a position to state that two of the five large prints made on the window- glasses, and the three on the bowl, were made by the left hand of Marlowe; that the remaining three on the window and the two on the drawer were made by his right hand.

By eight o'clock I had made at the establishment of Mr H. T. Copper, photographer, of Bishopsbridge, and with his assistance, a dozen enlarged prints of the finger-marks of Marlowe, clearly showing the identity of those which he unknowingly made in my presence and those left upon articles in his bedroom, with those found by me as I have described, and thus establishing the facts that Marlowe was recently in Manderson's bedroom, where he had in the ordinary way no business, and in Mrs Manderson's room, where he had still less. I hope it may be possible to reproduce these prints for publication with this dispatch.

At nine o'clock I was back in my room at the hotel and sitting down to begin this manuscript. I had my story complete. I bring it to a close by advancing these further propositions: that on the night of the murder the impersonator of Manderson, being in Manderson's bedroom, told Mrs Manderson, as he had already told Martin, that Marlowe was at that moment on his way to Southampton; that having made his dispositions in the room, he switched off the light, and lay in the bed in his clothes; that he waited until he was assured that Mrs Manderson was asleep; that he then arose and stealthily crossed Mrs Manderson's bedroom in his stocking feet, having under his arm the bundle of clothing and shoes for the body; that he stepped behind the curtain, pushing the doors of the window a little further open with his hands, strode over the iron railing of the balcony, and let himself down until only a drop of a few feet separated him from the soft turf of the lawn.

All this might very well have been accomplished within half an hour of his entering Manderson's bedroom, which, according to Martin, he did at about half- past eleven.

What followed your readers and the authorities may conjecture for themselves. The corpse was found next
morning clothed—rather untidily. Marlowe in the car appeared at Southampton by half-past six.

I bring this manuscript to an end in my sitting-room at the hotel at Marlstone. It is four o'clock in the morning. I leave for London by the noon train from Bishopsbridge, and immediately after arriving I shall place these pages in your hands. I ask you to communicate the substance of them to the Criminal Investigation Department.

PHILIP TRENT.

CHAPTER XII: Evil Days

'I am returning the cheque you sent for what I did on the Manderson case,' Trent wrote to Sir James Molloy from Munich, whither he had gone immediately after handing in at the Record office a brief dispatch bringing his work on the case to an unexciting close. 'What I sent you wasn't worth one-tenth of the amount; but I should have no scruple about pocketing it if I hadn't taken a fancy—never mind why—not to touch any money at all for this business. I should like you, if there is no objection, to pay for the stuff at your ordinary space-rate, and hand the money to some charity which does not devote itself to bullying people, if you know of any such. I have come to this place to see some old friends and arrange my ideas, and the idea that comes out uppermost is that for a little while I want some employment with activity in it. I find I can't paint at all: I couldn't paint a fence. Will you try me as your Own Correspondent somewhere? If you can find me a good adventure I will send you good accounts. After that I could settle down and work.'

Sir James sent him instructions by telegram to proceed at once to Kurland and Livonia, where Citizen Browning was abroad again, and town and countryside blazed in revolt. It was a roving commission, and for two months Trent followed his luck. It served him not less well than usual. He was the only correspondent who saw General Dragilew killed in the street at Volmar by a girl of eighteen. He saw burnings, lynchings, fusillades, hangings; each day his soul sickened afresh at the imbecilities born of misrule. Many nights he lay down in danger. Many days he went fasting. But there was never an evening or a morning when he did not see the face of the woman whom he hopelessly loved.

He discovered in himself an unhappy pride at the lasting force of this infatuation. It interested him as a phenomenon; it amazed and enlightened him. Such a thing had not visited him before. It confirmed so much that he had found dubious in the recorded experience of men.

It was not that, at thirty-two, he could pretend to ignorance of this world of emotion. About his knowledge let it be enough to say that what he had learned had come unpursued and unpurchased, and was without intolerable memories; broken to the realities of sex, he was still troubled by its inscrutable history. He went through life full of a strange respect for certain feminine weakness and a very simple terror of certain feminine strength. He had held to a rather lukewarm faith that something remained in him to be called forth, and that the voice that should call would be heard in its own time, if ever, and not through any seeking.

But he had not thought of the possibility that, if this proved true some day, the truth might come in a sinister shape. The two things that had taken him utterly by surprise in the matter of his feeling towards Mabel Manderson were the insane suddenness of its uprising in full strength and its extravagant hopelessness. Before it came, he had been much disposed to laugh at the permanence of unrequited passion as a generous boyish delusion. He knew now that he had been wrong, and he was living bitterly in the knowledge.

Before the eye of his fancy the woman always came just as she was when he had first had sight of her, with the gesture which he had surpassed as he walked past unseen on the edge of the cliff; that great gesture of passionate joy in her new liberty which had told him more plainly than speech that her widowhood was a release from torment, and that great gesture of passionate joy which he had surprised as he walked past unseen on the edge of the cliff; that great gesture of passionate joy in her new liberty which had told him more plainly than speech that her widowhood was a release from torment, and had confirmed with terrible force the suspicion, active in his mind before, that it was her passport to happiness with a man whom she loved. He could not with certainty name to himself the moment when he had first suspected that it might be so. The seed of the thought must have been sown, he believed, at his first meeting with Marlowe; his mind would have noted automatically that such evident strength and grace, with the sort of looks and manners that the tall young man possessed, might go far with any woman of unfixed affections. And the connection of this with what Mr Cupples had told him of the Mandersons' married life must have formed itself in the unconscious depths of his mind. Certainly it had presented itself as an already established thing when he began, after satisfying himself of the identity of the murderer, to cast about for the motive of the crime. Motive, motive! How desperately he had sought for another, turning his back upon that grim thought, that Marlowe—obsessed by passion like himself, and privy perhaps to maddening truths about the wife's unhappiness—had taken a leaf, the guiltiest, from the book of Bothwell. But in all his investigations at the time, in all his broodings on the matter afterwards, he had been able to discover nothing that could prompt Marlowe to such a deed—nothing but that temptation, the whole strength of which he could not know, but which if it had existed must have pressed urgently upon a bold spirit in which scruple had been somehow paralysed. If he could trust his senses at all, the young man was neither insane nor by nature evil. But that could not clear him. Murder for a woman's sake, he thought, was not a rare crime, Heaven knew! If the modern feebleness of impulse in the comfortable classes, and their respect for the modern apparatus of detection, had made it
One morning in June, as he descended the slope of the Rue des Martyrs, he saw approaching a figure that he remembered. He glanced quickly round, for the thought of meeting Mr Bunner again was unacceptable. For some
time he had recognized that his wound was healing under the spell of creative work; he thought less often of the woman he loved, and with less pain. He would not have the memory of those three days reopened.

But the straight and narrow thoroughfare offered no refuge, and the American saw him almost at once.

His unforced geniality made Trent ashamed, for he had liked the man. They sat long over a meal, and Mr Bunner talked. Trent listened to him, now that he was in for it, with genuine pleasure, now and then contributing a question or remark. Besides liking his companion, he enjoyed his conversation, with its unending verbal surprises, for its own sake.

Bunner was, it appeared, resident in Paris as the chief Continental agent of the Manderson firm, and fully satisfied with his position and prospects. He discoursed on these for some twenty minutes. This subject at length exhausted, he went on to tell Trent, who confessed that he had been away from England for a year, that Marlowe had shortly after the death of Manderson entered his father's business, which was now again in a flourishing state, and had already come to be practically in control of it. They had kept up their intimacy, and were even now planning a holiday for the summer. Mr Bunner spoke with generous admiration of his friend's talent for affairs. 'Jack Marlowe has a natural big head,' he declared, 'and if he had more experience, I wouldn't want to have him up against me. He would put a crimp in me every time.'

As the American's talk flowed on, Trent listened with a slowly growing perplexity. It became more and more plain that something was very wrong in his theory of the situation; there was no mention of its central figure. Presently Mr Bunner mentioned that Marlowe was engaged to be married to an Irish girl, whose charms he celebrated with native enthusiasm.

Trent clasped his hands savagely together beneath the table. What could have happened? His ideas were sliding and shifting. At last he forced himself to put a direct question.

Mr Bunner was not very fully informed. He knew that Mrs Manderson had left England immediately after the settlement of her husband's affairs, and had lived for some time in Italy. She had returned not long ago to London, where she had decided not to live in the house in Mayfair, and had bought a smaller one in the Hampstead neighbourhood; also, he understood, one somewhere in the country. She was said to go but little into society. 'And all the good hard dollars just waiting for some one to spraddle them around,' said Mr Bunner, with a note of pathos in his voice. 'Why, she has money to burn--money to feed to the birds-- and nothing doing. The old man left her more than half his wad. And think of the figure she might make in the world. She is beautiful, and she is the best woman I ever met, too. But she couldn't ever seem to get the habit of spending money the way it ought to be spent.'

His words now became a soliloquy: Trent's thoughts were occupying all his attention. He pleaded business soon, and the two men parted with cordiality.

Half an hour later Trent was in his studio, swiftly and mechanically 'cleaning up'. He wanted to know what had happened; somehow he must find out. He could never approach herself, he knew; he would never bring back to her the shame of that last encounter with him; it was scarcely likely that he would even set eyes on her. But he must get to know!... Cupples was in London, Marlowe was there .... And, anyhow, he was sick of Paris.

Such thoughts came and went; and below them all strained the fibres of an unseen cord that dragged mercilessly at his heart, and that he cursed bitterly in the moments when he could not deny to himself that it was there. The folly, the useless, pitiable folly of it!

In twenty-four hours his feeble roots in Paris had been torn out. He was looking over a leaden sea at the shining fortress-wall of the Dover cliffs.

But though he had instinctively picked out the lines of a set purpose from among the welter of promptings in his mind, he found it delayed at the very outset.

He had decided that he must first see Mr Cupples, who would be in a position to tell him much more than the American knew. But Mr Cupples was away on his travels, not expected to return for a month; and Trent had no reasonable excuse for hastening his return. Marlowe he would not confront until he had tried at least to reconnoitre the position. He constrained himself not to commit the crowning folly of seeking out Mrs Manderson's house in Hampstead; he could not enter it, and the thought of the possibility of being seen by her lurking in its neighbourhood brought the blood to his face.

He stayed at an hotel, took a studio, and while he awaited Mr Cupples's return attempted vainly to lose himself in work.

At the end of a week he had an idea that he acted upon with eager precipitancy. She had let fall some word at their last meeting, of a taste for music. Trent went that evening, and thenceforward regularly, to the opera. He might see her; and if, in spite of his caution, she caught sight of him, they could be blind to each other's presence--anybody might happen to go to the opera.

So he went alone each evening, passing as quickly as he might through the people in the vestibule; and each evening he came away knowing that she had not been in the house. It was a habit that yielded him a sort of
satisfaction along with the guilty excitement of his search; for he too loved music, and nothing gave him so much peace while its magic endured.

One night as he entered, hurrying through the brilliant crowd, he felt a touch on his arm. Flooded with an incredible certainty at the touch, he turned.

It was she: so much more radiant in the absence of grief and anxiety, in the fact that she was smiling, and in the allurement of evening dress, that he could not speak. She, too, breathed a little quickly, and there was a light of daring in her eyes and cheeks as she greeted him.

Her words were few. 'I wouldn't miss a note of Tristan,' she said, 'nor must you. Come and see me in the interval.' She gave him the number of the box.

CHAPTER XIII: Eruption

The following two months were a period in Trent's life that he has never since remembered without shuddering. He met Mrs Manderson half a dozen times, and each time her cool friendliness, a nicely calculated mean between mere acquaintance and the first stage of intimacy, baffled and maddened him. At the opera he had found her, to his further amazement, with a certain Mrs Wallace, a frisky matron whom he had known from childhood. Mrs Manderson, it appeared, on her return from Italy, had somehow wandered into circles to which he belonged by nurture and disposition. It came, she said, of her having pitched her tent in their hunting-grounds; several of his friends were near neighbours. He had a dim but horrid recollection of having been on that occasion unlike himself, ill at ease, burning in the face, talking with idiot loquacity of his adventures in the Baltic provinces, and finding from time to time that he was addressing himself exclusively to Mrs Wallace. The other lady, when he joined them, had completely lost the slight appearance of agitation with which she had stopped him in the vestibule. She had spoken pleasantly to him of her travels, of her settlement in London, and of people whom they both knew.

During the last half of the opera, which he had stayed in the box to hear, he had been conscious of nothing, as he sat behind them, but the angle of her cheek and the mass of her hair, the lines of her shoulder and arm, her hand upon the cushion. The black hair had seemed at last a forest, immeasurable, pathless and enchanted, luring him to a fatal adventure .... At the end he had been pale and subdued, parting with them rather formally.

The next time he saw her—it was at a country house where both were guests—and the subsequent times, he had had himself in hand. He had matched her manner and had acquitted himself, he thought, decently, considering--

Considering that he lived in an agony of bewilderment and remorse and longing. He could make nothing, absolutely nothing, of her attitude. That she had read his manuscript and understood the suspicion indicated in his last question to her at White Gables was beyond the possibility of doubt. Then how could she treat him thus and frankly, as she treated all the world of men who had done no injury?

For it had become clear to his intuitive sense, for all the absence of any shade of differentiation in her outward manner, that an injury had been done, and that she had felt it. Several times, on the rare and brief occasions when they had talked apart, he had warning from the same sense that she was approaching this subject; and each time he had turned the conversation with the ingenuity born of fear. Two resolutions he made. The first was that when he had completed a commissioned work which tied him to London he would go away and stay away. The strain was too great. He no longer burned to know the truth; he wanted nothing to confirm his fixed internal conviction by faith, that he had blundered, that he had misread the situation, misinterpreted her tears, written himself down a slanderous fool. He speculated no more on Marlowe's motive in the killing of Manderson. Mr Cupples returned to London, and Trent asked him nothing. He knew now that he had been right in those words—Trent remembered them for the emphasis with which they were spoken--'So long as she considered herself bound to him... no power on earth could have persuaded her.' He met Mrs Manderson at dinner at her uncle's large and tomb-like house in Bloomsbury, and there he conversed most of the evening with a professor of archaeology from Berlin.

His other resolution was that he would not be with her alone.

But when, a few days after, she wrote asking him to come and see her on the following afternoon, he made no attempt to excuse himself. This was a formal challenge.

While she celebrated the rites of tea, and for some little time thereafter, she joined with such natural ease in his slightly fevered conversation on matters of the day that he began to hope she had changed what he could not doubt had been her resolve, to corner him and speak to him gravely. She was to all appearance careless now, smiling so that he recalled, not for the first time since that night at the opera, what was written long ago of a Princess of Brunswick: 'Her mouth has ten thousand charms that touch the soul.' She made a tour of the beautiful room where she had received him, singling out this treasure or that from the spoils of a hundred bric-a-brac shops, laughing over her quests, discoveries, and bargainings. And when he asked if she would delight him again with a favourite piece of his which he had heard her play at another house, she consented at once.

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She played with a perfection of execution and feeling that moved him now as it had moved him before. 'You are a musician born,' he said quietly when she had finished, and the last tremor of the music had passed away. 'I knew
that before I first heard you.'

'I have played a great deal ever since I can remember. It has been a great comfort to me,' she said simply, and half-turned to him smiling. 'When did you first detect music in me? Oh, of course: I was at the opera. But that wouldn't prove much, would it?'

'No,' he said abstractedly, his sense still busy with the music that had just ended. 'I think I knew it the first time I saw you.' Then understanding of his own words came to him, and turned him rigid. For the first time the past had been invoked.

There was a short silence. Mrs Manderson looked at Trent, then hastily looked away. Colour began to rise in her cheeks, and she pursed her lips as if for whistling. Then with a defiant gesture of the shoulders which he remembered she rose suddenly from the piano and placed herself in a chair opposite to him.

'That speech of yours will do as well as anything,' she began slowly, looking at the point of her shoe, 'to bring us to what I wanted to say. I asked you here today on purpose, Mr Trent, because I couldn't bear it any longer. Ever since the day you left me at White Gables I have been saying to myself that it didn't matter what you thought of me in that affair; that you were certainly not the kind of man to speak to others of what you believed about me, after what you had told me of your reasons for suppressing your manuscript. I asked myself how it could matter. But all the time, of course, I knew it did matter. It mattered horribly. Because what you thought was not true.' She raised her eyes and met his gaze calmly. Trent, with a completely expressionless face, returned her look.

'Since I began to know you,' he said, 'I have ceased to think it.' 'Thank you,' said Mrs Manderson; and flushed suddenly and deeply. Then, playing with a glove, she added, 'But I want you to know what was true.

I did not know if I should ever see you again,' she went on in a lower voice, 'but I felt that if I did I must speak to you about this. I thought it would not be hard to do so, because you seemed to me an understanding person; and besides, a woman who has been married isn't expected to have the same sort of difficulty as a young girl in speaking about such things when it is necessary. And then we did meet again, and I discovered that it was very difficult indeed. You made it difficult.'

'How?' he asked quietly.

'I don't know,' said the lady. 'But yes--I do know. It was just because you treated me exactly as if you had never thought or imagined anything of that sort about me. I had always supposed that if I saw you again you would turn on me that hard, horrible sort of look you had when you asked me that last question--do you remember?--at White Gables. Instead of that you were just like any other acquaintance. You were just--she hesitated and spread out her hands--nice. You know. After that first time at the opera when I spoke to you I went home positively wondering if you had really recognized me. I mean, I thought you might have recognized my face without remembering who it was.'

A short laugh broke from Trent in spite of himself, but he said nothing.

She smiled deprecatingly. 'Well, I couldn't remember if you had spoken my name; and I thought it might be so. But the next time, at the Iretons', you did speak it, so I knew; and a dozen times during those few days I almost brought myself to tell you, but never quite. I began to feel that you wouldn't let me, that you would slip away from the subject if I approached it. Wasn't I right? Tell me, please.' He nodded. 'But why?' He remained silent.

'Well,' she said, 'I will finish what I had to say, and then you will tell me, I hope, why you had to make it so hard. When I began to understand that you wouldn't let me talk of the matter to you, it made me more determined than ever. I suppose you didn't realize that I would insist on speaking even if you were quite discouraging. I dare say I couldn't have done it if I had been guilty, as you thought. You walked into my parlour today, never thinking I should dare. Well, now you see.'

Mrs Manderson had lost all her air of hesitancy. She had, as she was wont to say, talked herself enthusiastic, and in the ardour of her purpose to annihilate the misunderstanding that had troubled her so long she felt herself mistress of the situation.

'I am going to tell you the story of the mistake you made,' she continued, as Trent, his hands clasped between his knees, still looked at her enigmatically. 'You will have to believe it, Mr Trent; it is utterly true to life, with its confusions and hidden things and cross-purposes and perfectly natural mistakes that nobody thinks twice about taking for facts. Please understand that I don't blame you in the least, and never did, for jumping to the conclusion you did. You knew that I was estranged from my husband, and you knew what that so often means. You knew before I told you, I expect, that he had taken up an injured attitude towards me; and I was silly enough to try and explain it away. I gave you the explanation of it that I had given myself at first, before I realized the wretched truth; I told you he was disappointed in me because I couldn't take a brilliant lead in society. Well, that was true; he was so. But I could see you weren't convinced. You had guessed what it took me much longer to see, because I knew how irrational it was. Yes; my husband was jealous of John Marlowe; you divined that.

'Then I behaved like a fool when you let me see you had divined it; it was such a blow, you understand, when I
had supposed all the humiliation and strain was at an end, and that his delusion had died with him. You practically asked me if my husband's secretary was not my lover, Mr Trent--I have to say it, because I want you to understand why I broke down and made a scene. You took that for a confession; you thought I was guilty of that, and I think you even thought I might be a party to the crime, that I had consented .... That did hurt me; but perhaps you couldn't have thought anything else--I don't know.'

Trent, who had not hitherto taken his eyes from her face, hung his head at the words. He did not raise it again as she continued. 'But really it was simple shock and distress that made me give way, and the memory of all the misery that mad suspicion had meant to me. And when I pulled myself together again you had gone.'

She rose and went to an escritoire beside the window, unlocked a drawer, and drew out a long, sealed envelope.

'This is the manuscript you left with me,' she said. 'I have read it through again and again. I have always wondered, as everybody does, at your cleverness in things of this kind.' A faintly mischievous smile flashed upon her face, and was gone. I thought it was splendid, Mr Marlowe--I almost forgot that the story was my own, I was so interested. And I want to say now, while I have this in my hand, how much I thank you for your generous, chivalrous act in sacrificing this triumph of yours rather than put a woman's reputation in peril. If all had been as you supposed, the facts must have come out when the police took up the case you put in their hands. Believe me, I understood just what you had done, and I never ceased to be grateful even when I felt most crushed by your suspicion.'

As she spoke her thanks her voice shook a little, and her eyes were bright. Trent perceived nothing of this. His head was still bent. He did not seem to hear. She put the envelope into his hand as it lay open, palm upwards, on his knee. There was a touch of gentleness about the act which made him look up.

'Can you--' he began slowly.

She raised her hand as she stood before him. 'No, Mr Trent; let me finish before you say anything. It is such an unspeakable relief to me to have broken the ice at last, and I want to end the story while I am still feeling the triumph of beginning it.' She sank down into the sofa from which she had first risen. 'I am telling you a thing that nobody else knows. Everybody knew, I suppose, that something had come between us, though I did everything in my power to hide it. But I don't think any one in the world ever guessed what my husband's notion was. People who know me don't think that sort of thing about me, I believe. And his fancy was so ridiculously opposed to the facts. I will tell you what the situation was. Mr Marlowe and I had been friendly enough since he came to us. For all his cleverness--my husband said he had a keener brain than any man he knew--I looked upon him as practically a boy. You know I am a little older than he is, and he had a sort of amiable lack of ambition that made me feel it the more. One day my husband asked me what I thought was the best thing about Marlowe, and not thinking much about it I

Nothing was ever said about that again until a year ago, when I found that Mr Marlowe had done what I always expected he would do--fallen desperately in love with an American girl. But to my disgust he had picked out the most worthless girl, I do believe, of all those whom we used to meet. She was the daughter of wealthy parents, and she did as she liked with them; very beautiful, well educated, very good at games--what they call a woman-athlete--and caring for nothing on earth but her own amusement. She was one of the most unprincipled flirts I ever knew, and quite the cleverest. Every one knew it, and Mr Marlowe must have heard it; but she made a complete fool of him, brain and all. I don't know how she managed it, but I can imagine. She liked him, of course; but it was quite plain to me that she was playing with him. The whole affair was so idiotic, I got perfectly furious. One day I asked him to row me in a boat on the lake--all this happened at our house by Lake George. We had never been alone together for any length of time before. In the boat I talked to him. I was very kind about it, I think, and he took it admirably, but he didn't believe me a bit. He had the impudence to tell me that I misunderstood Alice's nature. When I hinted at his prospects--I knew he had scarcely anything of his own--he said that if she loved him he could make himself a position in the world. I dare say that was true, with his abilities and his friends--he is rather well connected, you know, as well as popular. But his enlightenment came very soon after that.

'My husband helped me out of the boat when we got back. He joked with Mr Marlowe about something, I remember; for through all that followed he never once changed in his manner to him, and that was one reason why I took so long to realize what he thought about him and myself. But to me he was reserved and silent that evening--not angry. He was always perfectly cold and expressionless to me after he took this idea into his head. After dinner he only spoke to me once. Mr Marlowe was telling him about some horse he had bought for the farm in Kentucky, and my husband looked at me and said, "Marlowe may be a gentleman, but he seldom quits loser in a horse-trade." I was surprised at that, but at that time--and even on the next occasion when he found us together--I didn't understand what was in his mind. That next time was the morning when Mr Marlowe received a sweet little note from the girl asking for his congratulations on her engagement. It was in our New York house. He looked so wretched at
breakfast that I thought he was ill, and afterwards I went to the room where he worked, and asked what was the matter. He didn't say anything, but just handed me the note, and turned away to the window. I was very glad that was all over, but terribly sorry for him too, of course. I don't remember what I said, but I remember putting my hand on his arm as he stood there staring out on the garden and just then my husband appeared at the open door with some papers. He just glanced at us, and then turned and walked quietly back to his study. I thought that he might have heard what I was saying to comfort Mr Marlowe, and that it was rather nice of him to slip away. Mr Marlowe neither saw nor heard him. My husband left the house that morning for the West while I was out. Even then I did not understand. He used often to go off suddenly like that, if some business project called him.

'It was not until he returned a week later that I grasped the situation. He was looking white and strange, and as soon as he saw me he asked me where Mr Marlowe was. Somehow the tone of his question told me everything in a flash.

'I almost gasped; I was wild with indignation. You know, Mr Trent, I don't think I should have minded at all if any one had thought me capable of openly breaking with my husband and leaving him for somebody else. I dare say I might have done that. But that coarse suspicion... a man whom he trusted... and the notion of concealment. It made me see scarlet. Every shred of pride in me was strung up till I quivered, and I swore to myself on the spot that I would never show by any word or sign that I was conscious of his having such a thought about me. I would behave exactly as I always had behaved, I determined--and that I did, up to the very last. Though I knew that a wall had been made between us now that could never be broken down--even if he asked my pardon and obtained it--I never once showed that I noticed any change.

'And so it went on. I never could go through such a time again. My husband showed silent and cold politeness to me always when we were alone--and that was only when it was unavoidable. He never once alluded to what was in his mind; but I felt it, and he knew that I felt it. Both of us were stubborn in our different attitudes. To Mr Marlowe he was more friendly, if anything, than before--Heaven only knows why. I fancied he was planning some sort of revenge; but that was only a fancy. Certainly Mr Marlowe never knew what was suspected of him. He and I remained good friends, though we never spoke of anything intimate after that disappointment of his; but I made a point of seeing no less of him than I had always done. Then we came to England and to White Gables, and after that followed--my husband's dreadful end.'

She threw out her right hand in a gesture of finality. 'You know about the rest--so much more than any other man,' she added, and glanced up at him with a quaint expression.

Trent wondered at that look, but the wonder was only a passing shadow on his thought. Inwardly his whole being was possessed by thankfulness. All the vivacity had returned to his face. Long before the lady had ended her story he had recognized the certainty of its truth, as from the first days of their renewed acquaintance he had doubted the story that his imagination had built up at White Gables, upon foundations that seemed so good to him.

He said, 'I don't know how to begin the apologies I have to make. There are no words to tell you how ashamed and disgraced I feel when I realize what a crude, cock-sure blundering at a conclusion my suspicion was. Yes, I suspected--you! I had almost forgotten that I was ever such a fool. Almost--not quite. Sometimes when I have been alone I have remembered that folly, and poured contempt on it. I have tried to imagine what the facts were. I have tried to excuse myself.'

She interrupted him quickly. 'What nonsense! Do be sensible, Mr Trent. You had only seen me on two occasions in your life before you came to me with your solution of the mystery.' Again the quaint expression came and was gone. 'If you talk of folly, it really is folly for a man like you to pretend to a woman like me that I had innocence written all over me in large letters--so large that you couldn't believe very strong evidence against me after seeing me twice.'

'What do you mean by "a man like me"? he demanded with a sort of fierceness. 'Do you take me for a person without any normal instincts? I don't say you impress people as a simple, transparent sort of character--what Mr Calvin Bunner calls a case of open-work; I don't say a stranger might not think you capable of wickedness, if there was good evidence for it; but I say that a man who, after seeing you and being in your atmosphere, could associate you with the particular kind of abomination I imagined, is a fool--the kind of fool who is afraid to trust his senses .... As for my making it hard for you to approach the subject, as you say, it is true. It was simply moral cowardice. I understood that you wished to clear the matter up; and I was revolted at the notion of my injurious blunder being discussed. I tried to show you by my actions that it was as if it had never been. I hoped you would pardon me without any words. I can't forgive myself, and I never shall. And yet if you could know--' He stopped short, and then added quietly, 'Well, will you accept all that as an apology? The very scruffiest sackcloth made, and the grittiest ashes on the heap....I didn't mean to get worked up,' he ended lamely.

Mrs Manderson laughed, and her laugh carried him away with it. He knew well by this time that sudden rush of cascading notes of mirth, the perfect expression of enjoyment; he had many times tried to amuse her merely for his
delight in the sound of it.

'But I love to see you worked up,' she said. 'The bump with which you always come down as soon as you realize that you are up in the air at all is quite delightful. Oh, we're actually both laughing. What a triumphant end to our explanations, after all my dread of the time when I should have it out with you. And now it's all over, and you know; and we'll never speak of it any more.'

'I hope not,' Trent said in sincere relief. 'If you're resolved to be so kind as this about it, I am not high-principled enough to insist on your blasting me with your lightnings. And now, Mrs Manderson, I had better go. Changing the subject after this would be like playing puss-in-the-corner after an earthquake.' He rose to his feet.

'You are right,' she said. 'But no! Wait. There is another thing--part of the same subject; and we ought to pick up all the pieces now while we are about it. Please sit down.' She took the envelope containing Trent's manuscript dispatch from the table where he had laid it. 'I want to speak about this.'

His brows bent, and he looked at her questioningly. 'So do I, if you do,' he said slowly. 'I want very much to know one thing.'

'Tell me.'

'Since my reason for suppressing that information was all a fantasy, why did you never make any use of it? When I began to realize that I had been wrong about you, I explained your silence to myself by saying that you could not bring yourself to do a thing that would put a rope round a man's neck, whatever he might have done. I can quite understand that feeling. Was that what it was? Another possibility I thought of was that you knew of something that was by way of justifying or excusing Marlowe's act. Or I thought you might have a simple horror, quite apart from humanitarian scruples, of appearing publicly in connection with a murder trial. Many important witnesses in such cases have to be practically forced into giving their evidence. They feel there is defilement even in the shadow of the scaffold.'

Mrs Manderson tapped her lips with the envelope without quite concealing a smile. 'You didn't think of another possibility, I suppose, Mr Trent,' she said.

'No.' He looked puzzled.

'I mean the possibility of your having been wrong about Mr Marlowe as well as about me. No, no; you needn't tell me that the chain of evidence is complete. I know it is. But evidence of what? Of Mr Marlowe having impersonated my husband that night, and having escaped by way of my window, and built up an alibi. I have read your dispatch again and again, Mr Trent, and I don't see that those things can be doubted.'

Trent gazed at her with narrowed eyes. He said nothing to fill the brief pause that followed. Mrs Manderson smoothed her skirt with a preoccupied air, as one collecting her ideas.

'I did not make any use of the facts found out by you,' she slowly said at last, 'because it seemed to me very likely that they would be fatal to Mr Marlowe.'

'I agree with you,' Trent remarked in a colourless tone.

'And,' pursued the lady, looking up at him with a mild reasonableness in her eyes, 'as I knew that he was innocent I was not going to expose him to that risk.'

There was another little pause. Trent rubbed his chin, with an affectation of turning over the idea. Inwardly he was telling himself, somewhat feebly, that this was very right and proper; that it was quite feminine, and that he liked her to be feminine. It was permitted to her--more than permitted--to set her loyal belief in the character of a friend above the clearest demonstrations of the intellect. Nevertheless, it chafed him. He would have had her declaration of faith a little less positive in form. It was too irrational to say she 'knew'. In fact (he put it to himself bluntly), it was quite unlike her. If to be unreasonable when reason led to the unpleasant was a specially feminine trait, and if Mrs Manderson had it, she was accustomed to wrap it up better than any woman he had known.

'You suggest,' he said at length, 'that Marlowe constructed an alibi for himself, by means which only a desperate man would have attempted, to clear himself of a crime he did not commit. Did he tell you that he was innocent?'

She uttered a little laugh of impatience. 'So you think he has been talking me round. No, that is not so. I am merely sure he did not do it. Ah! I see you think that absurd. But see how unreasonable you are, Mr Trent! Just now you were explaining to me quite sincerely that it was foolishness in you to have a certain suspicion of me after seeing me and being in my atmosphere, as you said.' Trent started in his chair. She glanced at him, and went on: 'Now, I and my atmosphere are much obliged to you, but we must stand up for the rights of other atmospheres. I know a great deal more about Mr Marlowe's atmosphere than you know about mine even now. I saw him constantly for several years. I don't pretend to know all about him; but I do know that he is incapable of a crime of bloodshed. The idea of his planning a murder is as unthinkable to me as the idea of your picking a poor woman's pocket, Mr Trent. I can imagine you killing a man, you know... if the man deserved it and had an equal chance of killing you. I could kill a person myself in some circumstances. But Mr Marlowe was incapable of doing it, I don't care what the provocation might be. He had a temper that nothing could shake, and he looked upon human nature with a sort of
cold magnanimity that would find excuses for absolutely anything. It wasn't a pose; you could see it was a part of him. He never put it forward, but it was there always. It was quite irritating at times. Now and then in America, I remember, I have heard people talking about lynching, for instance, when he was there. He would sit quite silent and expressionless, appearing not to listen; but you could feel disgust coming from him in waves. He really loathed and hated physical violence. He was a very strange man in some ways, Mr Trent. He gave one a feeling that he might do unexpected things--do you know that feeling one has about some people? What part he really played in the events of that night I have never been able to guess. But nobody who knew anything about him could possibly believe in his deliberately taking a man's life.' Again the movement of her head expressed finality, and she leaned back in the sofa, calmly regarding him.

'Then,' said Trent, who had followed this with earnest attention, 'we are forced back on two other possibilities, which I had not thought worth much consideration until this moment. Accepting what you say, he might still conceivably have killed in self-defence; or he might have done so by accident.'

The lady nodded. 'Of course I thought of those two explanations when I read your manuscript.'

'And I suppose you felt, as I did myself, that in either of those cases the natural thing, and obviously the safest thing, for him to do was to make a public statement of the truth, instead of setting up a series of deceptions which would certainly stamp him as guilty in the eyes of the law, if anything went wrong with them.'

'Yes,' she said wearily, 'I thought over all that until my head ached. And I thought somebody else might have done it, and that he was somehow screening the guilty person. But that seemed wild. I could see no light in the mystery, and after a while I simply let it alone. All I was clear about was that Mr Marlowe was not a murderer, and that if I told what you had found out, the judge and jury would probably think he was. I promised myself that I would speak to you about it if we should meet again; and now I've kept my promise.'

Trent, his chin resting on his hand, was staring at the carpet. The excitement of the hunt for the truth was steadily rising in him. He had not in his own mind accepted Mrs Manderson's account of Marlowe's character as unquestionable. But she had spoken forcibly; he could by no means set it aside, and his theory was much shaken.

'There is only one thing for it,' he said, looking up. 'I must see Marlowe. It worries me too much to have the thing left like this. I will get at the truth. Can you tell me,' he broke off, 'how he behaved after the day I left White Gables?'

'I never saw him after that,' said Mrs Manderson simply. 'For some days after you went away I was ill, and didn't go out of my room. When I got down he had left and was in London, settling things with the lawyers. He did not come down to the funeral. Immediately after that I went abroad. After some weeks a letter from him reached me, saying he had concluded his business and given the solicitors all the assistance in his power. He thanked me very nicely for what he called all my kindness, and said goodbye. There was nothing in it about his plans for the future, and I thought it particularly strange that he said not a word about my husband's death. I didn't answer. Knowing what I knew, I couldn't. In those days I shuddered whenever I thought of that masquerade in the night. I never wanted to see or hear of him again.'

'Then you don't know what has become of him?'

'No, but I dare say Uncle Burton--Mr Cupples, you know--could tell you. Some time ago he told me that he had met Mr Marlowe in London, and had some talk with him. I changed the conversation.' She paused and smiled with a trace of mischief. 'I rather wonder what you supposed had happened to Mr Marlowe after you withdrew from the scene of the drama that you had put together so much to your satisfaction.'

'Trent flushed. 'Do you really want to know?' he said.

'I ask you,' she retorted quietly.

'You ask me to humiliate myself again, Mrs Manderson. Very well. I will tell you what I thought I should most likely find when I returned to London after my travels: that you had married Marlowe to live abroad.'

'She heard him with unmoved composure. 'We certainly couldn't have lived very comfortably in England on his money and mine,' she observed thoughtfully. 'He had practically nothing then.'

'Trent stared at her--'gaped', she told him some time afterwards. At the moment she laughed with a little embarrassment.

'Dear me, Mr Trent! Have I said anything dreadful? You surely must know .... I thought everybody understood by now .... I'm sure I've had to explain it often enough... if I marry again I lose everything that my husband left me.'

The effect of this speech upon Trent was curious. For an instant his face was flooded with the emotion of surprise. As this passed away he gradually drew himself together, as he sat, into a tense attitude. He looked, she thought as she saw his knuckles grow white on the arms of the chair, like a man prepared for pain under the hand of the surgeon. But all he said, in a voice lower than his usual tone, was, 'I had no idea of it.'

'It is so,' she said calmly, trifling with a ring on her finger. 'Really, Mr Trent, it is not such a very unusual thing. I think I am glad of it. For one thing, it has secured me--at least since it became generally known--from a good many
 attentions of a kind that a woman in my position has to put up with as a rule.'

'No doubt,' he said gravely. 'And... the other kind?'

She looked at him questioningly. 'Ah!' she laughed. 'The other kind trouble me even less. I have not yet met a man silly enough to want to marry a widow with a selfish disposition, and luxurious habits and tastes, and nothing but the little my father left me.'

She shook her head, and something in the gesture shattered the last remnants of Trent's self-possession.

'Haven't you, by Heaven!' he exclaimed, rising with a violent movement and advancing a step towards her. 'Then I am going to show you that human passion is not always stifled by the smell of money. I am going to end the business—my business. I am going to tell you what I dare say scores of better men have wanted to tell you, but couldn't summon up what I have summoned up—the infernal cheek to do it. They were afraid of making fools of themselves. I am not. You have accustomed me to the feeling this afternoon.' He laughed aloud in his rush of words, and spread out his hands. 'Look at me! It is the sight of the century! It is one who says he loves you, and would ask you to give up very great wealth to stand at his side.'

She was hiding her face in her hands. He heard her say brokenly, 'Please... don't speak in that way.'

He answered: 'It will make a great difference to me if you will allow me to say all I have to say before I leave you. Perhaps it is in bad taste, but I will risk that; I want to relieve my soul; it needs open confession. This is the truth. You have troubled me ever since the first time I saw you—and you did not know it—as you sat under the edge of the cliff at Marlstone, and held out your arms to the sea. It was only your beauty that filled my mind then. As I passed by you it seemed as if all the life in the place were crying out a song about you in the wind and the sunshine. And the song stayed in my ears; but even your beauty would be no more than an empty memory to me by now if that had been all. It was when I led you from the hotel there to your house, with your hand on my arm, that—what was it that happened? I only knew that your stronger magic had struck home, and that I never should forget that day, whatever the love of my life should be. Till that day I had admired as I should admire the loveliness of a still lake; but that day I felt the spell of the divinity of the lake. And next morning the waters were troubled, and she rose—the morning when I came to you with my questions, tired out with doubts that were as bitter as pain, and when I saw you without your pale, sweet mask of composure—when I saw you moved and glowing, with your eyes and your hands alive, and when you made me understand that for such a creature as you there had been emptiness and the mere waste of yourself for so long. Madness rose in me then, and my spirit was clamouring to say what I say at last now: that life would never seem a full thing again because you could not love me, that I was taken for ever in the nets of your black hair and by the incantation of your voice—'

'Oh, stop!' she cried, suddenly throwing back her head, her face flaming and her hands clutching the cushions beside her. She spoke fast and disjointedly, her breath coming quick. 'You shall not talk me into forgetting common sense. What does all this mean? Oh, I do not recognize you at all—you seem another man. We are not children; have you forgotten that? You speak like a boy in love for the first time. It is foolish, unreal—I know that if you do not. I will not hear it. What has happened to you?' She was half sobbing. 'How can these sentimentalities come from a man like you? Where is your self-restraint?'

'Gone!' exclaimed Trent, with an abrupt laugh. 'It has got right away. I am going after it in a minute.' He looked gravely down into her eyes. 'I don't care so much now. I never could declare myself to you under the cloud of your great fortune. It was too heavy. There's nothing creditable in that feeling, as I look at it; as a matter of simple fact it was a form of cowardice—fear of what you would think, and very likely say—fear of the world's comment too, I suppose. But the cloud being rolled away, I have spoken, and I don't care so much. I can face things with a quiet mind now that I have told you the truth in its own terms. You may call it sentimentality or any other nickname you like. It is quite true that it was not intended for a scientific statement. Since it annoys you, let it be extinguished. But please believe that it was serious to me if it was comedy to you. I have said that I love you, and honour you, and would hold you dearest of all the world. Now give me leave to go.'

But she held out her hands to him.

CHAPTER XIV: Writing a Letter

'If you insist,' Trent said, 'I suppose you will have your way. But I had much rather write it when I am not with you. However, if I must, bring me a tablet whiter than a star, or hand of hymning angel; I mean a sheet of note-paper not stamped with your address. Don't underestimate the sacrifice I am making. I never felt less like correspondence in my life.'

She rewarded him.

'What shall I say?' he enquired, his pen hovering over the paper. 'Shall I compare him to a summer's day? What shall I say?'

'Say what you want to say,' she suggested helpfully.

He shook his head. 'What I want to say--what I have been wanting for the past twenty-four hours to say to every
man, woman, and child I met—is "Mabel and I are betrothed, and all is gas and gaiters." But that wouldn't be a very
good opening for a letter of strictly formal, not to say sinister, character. I have got as far as "Dear Mr Marlowe."
What comes next?"

'I am sending you a manuscript,' she prompted, 'which I thought you might like to see.'

'Do you realize,' he said, 'that in that sentence there are only two words of more than one syllable? This letter is
meant to impress, not to put him at his ease. We must have long words.'

'I don't see why,' she answered. 'I know it is usual, but why is it? I have had a great many letters from lawyers
and business people, and they always begin, "with reference to our communication", or some such mouthful, and go
on like that all the way through. Yet when I see them they don't talk like that. It seems ridiculous to me.'

'It is not at all ridiculous to them.' Trent laid aside the pen with an appearance of relief and rose to his feet. 'Let
me explain. A people like our own, not very fond of using its mind, gets on in the ordinary way with a very small
and simple vocabulary. Long words are abnormal, and like everything else that is abnormal, they are either very
funny or tremendously solemn. Take the phrase "intelligent anticipation", for instance. If such a phrase had been
used in any other country in Europe, it would not have attracted the slightest attention. With us it has become a
proverb; we all grin when we hear it in a speech or read it in a leading article; it is considered to be one of the best
things ever said. Why? Just because it consists of two long words. The idea expressed is as commonplace as cold
mutton. Then there's "terminological inexactitude". How we all roared, and are still roaring, at that! And the whole
of the joke is that the words are long. It's just the same when we want to be very serious; we mark it by turning to
long words. When a solicitor can begin a sentence with, "pursuant to the instructions communicated to our
representative, or some such gibberish, he feels that he is earning his six-and-eighthpence. Don't laugh! It is perfectly
true. Now Continentals haven't got that feeling. They are always bothering about ideas, and the result is that every
shopkeeper or peasant has a vocabulary in daily use that is simply Greek to the vast majority of Britons. I remember
some time ago I was dining with a friend of mine who is a Paris cabman. We had dinner at a dirty little restaurant
opposite the central post office, a place where all the clients were cabmen or porters. Conversation was general, and
it struck me that a London cabman would have felt a little out of his depth. Words like "functionary" and
"unforgettable" and "exterminate" and "independence" hurtled across the table every instant. And these were just
ordinary, vulgar, jolly, red-faced cabmen. Mind you,' he went on hurriedly, as the lady crossed the room and took up
his pen, 'I merely mention this to illustrate my point. I'm not saying that cab-men ought to be intellectuals. I don't
think so; I agree with Keats--happy is England, sweet her artless cabmen, enough their simple loveliness for me. But
when you come to the people who make up the collective industrial brain-power of the country .... Why, do you
know--'

'Oh no, no, no!' cried Mrs Manderson. 'I don't know anything at the moment, except that your talking must be
stopped somehow, if we are to get any further with that letter to Mr Marlowe. You shall not get out of it. Come!' She
put the pen into his hand.

Trent looked at it with distaste. 'I warn you not to discourage my talking,' he said dejectedly. 'Believe me, men
who don't talk are even worse to live with than men who do. O have a care of natures that are mute. I confess I'm
shirking writing this thing. It is almost an indecency. It's mixing two moods to write the sort of letter I mean to write,
and the same time to be sitting in the same room with you.'

She led him to his abandoned chair before the escritoire and pushed him gently into it. 'Well, but please try. I
want to see what you write, and I want it to go to him at once. You see, I would be contented enough to leave things
as they are; but you say you must get at the truth, and if you must, I want it to be as soon as possible. Do it now--you
know you can if you will--and I'll send it off the moment it's ready. Don't you ever feel that--the longing to get the
worrying letter into the post and off your hands, so that you can't recall it if you would, and it's no use fussing any
more about it?'

'I will do as you wish,' he said, and turned to the paper, which he dated as from his hotel. Mrs Manderson looked
down at his bent head with a gentle light in her eyes, and made as if to place a smoothing hand upon his rather
untidy crop of hair. But she did not touch it. Going in silence to the piano, she began to play very softly. It was ten
minutes before Trent spoke.

'If he chooses to reply that he will say nothing?'

Mrs Manderson looked over her shoulder. 'Of course he dare not take that line. He will speak to prevent you
from denouncing him.'

'But I'm not going to do that anyhow. You wouldn't allow it--you said so; besides, I won't if you would. The
thing's too doubtful now.'

'But,' she laughed, 'poor Mr Marlowe doesn't know you won't, does he?'

Trent sighed. 'What extraordinary things codes of honour are!' he remarked abstractedly. 'I know that there are
things I should do, and never think twice about, which would make you feel disgraced if you did them--such as
giving any one who grossly insulted me a black eye, or swearing violently when I barked my shin in a dark room. And now you are calmly recommending me to bluff Marlowe by means of a tacit threat which I don't mean; a thing which hews most abandoned fiend did never, in the drunkenness of guilt--well, anyhow, I won't do it.' He resumed his writing, and the lady, with an indulgent smile, returned to playing very softly.

In a few minutes more, Trent said: 'At last I am his faithfully. Do you want to see it?' She ran across the twilight room, and turned on a reading lamp beside the escritoire. Then, leaning on his shoulder, she read what follows:

DEAR MR MARLOWE,--YOU WILL PERHAPS REMEMBER THAT WE MET, UNDER UNHAPPY CIRCUMSTANCES, IN JUNE OF LAST YEAR AT MARLSTONE.

ON THAT OCCASION IT WAS MY DUTY, AS REPRESENTING A NEWSPAPER, TO MAKE AN INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATION OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DEATH OF THE LATE SIGSBEE MANDERSON. I DID SO, AND I ARRIVED AT CERTAIN CONCLUSIONS. YOU MAY LEARN FROM THE ENCLOSED MANUSCRIPT, WHICH WAS ORIGINALLY WRITTEN AS A DISPATCH FOR MY NEWSPAPER, WHAT THOSE CONCLUSIONS WERE, FOR REASONS WHICH IT IS NOT NECESSARY TO STATE I DECIDED AT THE LAST MOMENT NOT TO MAKE THEM PUBLIC, OR TO COMMUNICATE THEM TO YOU, AND THEY ARE KNOWN TO ONLY TWO PERSONS BESIDE MYSELF.

At this point Mrs Manderson raised her eyes quickly from the letter. Her dark brows were drawn together. 'Two persons?' she said with a note of enquiry.

'Your uncle is the other. I sought him out last night and told him the whole story. Have you anything against it? I always felt uneasy at keeping it from him as I did, because I had led him to expect I should tell him all I discovered, and my silence looked like mystery-making. Now it is to be cleared up finally, and there is no question of shielding you, I wanted him to know everything. He is a very shrewd adviser, too, in a way of his own; and I should like to have him with me when I see Marlowe. I have a feeling that two heads will be better than one on my side of the interview.'

She sighed. 'Yes, of course, uncle ought to know the truth. I hope there is nobody else at all.' She pressed his hand. 'I so much want all that horror buried--buried deep. I am very happy now, dear, but I shall be happier still when you have satisfied that curious mind of yours and found out everything, and stamped down the earth upon it all.' She continued her reading.

QUITE RECENTLY, HOWEVER [the letter went on], FACTS HAVE COME TO MY KNOWLEDGE WHICH HAVE LED ME TO CHANGE MY DECISION. I DO NOT MEAN THAT I SHALL PUBLISH WHAT I DISCOVERED, BUT THAT I HAVE DETERMINED TO APPROACH YOU AND ASK YOU FOR A PRIVATE STATEMENT. IF YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO SAY WHICH WOULD PLACE THE MATTER IN ANOTHER LIGHT, I CAN IMAGINE NO REASON WHY YOU SHOULD WITHHOLD IT.

I EXPECT, THEN, TO HEAR FROM YOU WHEN AND WHERE I MAY CALL UPON YOU; UNLESS YOU PREFER THE INTERVIEW TO TAKE PLACE AT MY HOTEL. IN EITHER CASE I DESIRE THAT MR CUPPLES, WHOM YOU WILL REMEMBER, AND WHO HAS READ THE ENCLOSED DOCUMENT, SHOULD BE PRESENT ALSO--FAITHFULLY YOURS, PHILIP TRENT.

What a very stiff letter!' she said. 'Now I am sure you couldn't have made it any stiffer in your own rooms.'

Trent slipped the letter and enclosure into a long envelope. 'Yes,' he said, 'I think it will make him sit up suddenly. Now this thing mustn't run any risk of going wrong. It would be best to send a special messenger with orders to deliver it into his own hands. If he's away it oughtn't to be left.'

She nodded. 'I can arrange that. Wait here for a little.'

When Mrs Manderson returned, he was hunting through the music cabinet. She sank on the carpet beside him in a wave of dark brown skirts. 'Tell me something, Philip,' she said.

'If it is among the few things that I know.'

'When you saw uncle last night, did you tell him about--about us?' 'I did not,' he answered. 'I remembered you had said nothing about telling any one. It is for you--isn't it?--to decide whether we take the world into our confidence at once or later on.'

'Then will you tell him?' She looked down at her clasped hands. 'I wish you to tell him. Perhaps if you think you will guess why .... There! that is settled.' She lifted her eyes again to his, and for a time there was silence between them.

He leaned back at length in the deep chair. 'What a world!' he said. 'Mabel, will you play something on the piano that expresses mere joy, the genuine article, nothing feverish or like thorns under a pot, but joy that has decided in favour of the universe? It's a mood that can't last altogether, so we had better get all we can out of it.'

She went to the instrument and struck a few chords while she thought. Then she began to work with all her soul at the theme in the last movement of the Ninth Symphony which is like the sound of the opening of the gates of Paradise.
CHAPTER XV: Double Cunning

An old oaken desk with a deep body stood by the window in a room that overlooked St James's Park from a height. The room was large, furnished and decorated by some one who had brought taste to the work; but the hand of the bachelor lay heavy upon it. John Marlowe unlocked the desk and drew a long, stout envelope the back of the well.

'I understand,' he said to Mr Cupples, 'that you have read this.'

'I read it for the first time two days ago,' replied Mr Cupples, who, seated on a sofa, was peering about the room with a benignant face. 'We have discussed it fully.'

Marlowe turned to Trent. 'There is your manuscript,' he said, laying the envelope on the table. 'I have gone over it three times. I do not believe there is another man who could have got at as much of the truth as you have set down there.'

Trent ignored the compliment. He sat by the table gazing stonily at the fire, his long legs twisted beneath his chair. 'You mean, of course, he said, drawing the envelope towards him, 'that there is more of the truth to be disclosed now. We are ready to hear you as soon as you like. I expect it will be a long story, and the longer the better, so far as I am concerned; I want to understand thoroughly. What we should both like, I think, is some preliminary account of Manderson and your relations with him. It seemed to me from the first that the character of the dead man must be somehow an element in the business.'

'You were right, Marlowe answered grimly. He crossed the room and seated himself on a corner of the tall cushion-topped fender. 'I will begin as you suggest.'

'I ought to tell you beforehand, said Trent, looking him in the eyes, 'that although I am here to listen to you, I have not as yet any reason to doubt the conclusions I have stated here.' He tapped the envelope. 'It is a defence that you will be putting forward--you understand that?'

'Perfectly.' Marlowe was cool and in complete possession of himself, a man different indeed from the worn-out, nervous being Trent remembered at Marlstone a year and a half ago. His tall, lithe figure was held with the perfection of muscular tone. His brow was candid, his blue eyes were clear, though they still had, as he paused collecting his ideas, the look that had troubled Trent at their first meeting. Only the lines of his mouth showed that he knew himself in a position of difficulty, and meant to face it.

'Sigsbee Manderson was not a man of normal mind,' Marlowe began in his quiet voice. 'Most of the very rich men I met with in America had become so by virtue of abnormal greed, or abnormal industry, or abnormal personal force, or abnormal luck. None of them had remarkable intellects. Manderson delighted too in heaping up wealth; he worked incessantly at it; he was a man of dominant will; he had quite his share of luck; but what made him singular was his brainpower. In his own country they would perhaps tell you that it was his ruthlessness in pursuit of his aims that was his most striking characteristic; but there are hundreds of them who would have carried out his plans with just as little consideration for others if they could have formed the plans.

'I'm not saying Americans aren't clever; they are ten times cleverer than we are, as a nation; but I never met another who showed such a degree of sagacity and foresight, such gifts of memory and mental tenacity, such sheer force of intelligence, as there was behind everything Manderson did in his money-making career. They called him the "Napoleon of Wall Street" often enough in the papers; but few people knew so well as I did how much truth there was in the phrase. He seemed never to forget a fact that might be of use to him, in the first place; and he did systematically with the business facts that concerned him what Napoleon did, as I have read, with military facts. He studied them in special digests which were prepared for him at short intervals, and which he always had at hand, so that he could take up his report on coal or wheat or railways, or whatever it might be, in any unoccupied moment. Then he could make a bolder and cleverer plan than any man of them all. People got to know that Manderson would never do the obvious thing, but they got no further; the thing he did do was almost always a surprise, and much of his success flowed from that. The Street got rattled, as they used to put it, when known that the old man was out with his gun, and often his opponents seemed to surrender as easily as Colonel Crockett's coon in the story. The scheme I am going to describe to you would have occupied most men long enough. Manderson could have plotted the thing, down to the last detail, while he shaved himself.

'I used to think that his strain of Indian blood, remote as it was, might have something to do with the cunning and ruthlessness of the man. Strangely enough, its existence was unknown to any one but himself and me. It was when he asked me to apply my taste for genealogical work to his own obscure family history that I made the discovery that he had in him a share of the blood of the Iroquois chief Montour and his French wife, a terrible woman who ruled the savage politics of the tribes of the Wilderness two hundred years ago. The Mandersons were active in the fur trade on the Pennsylvanian border in those days, and more than one of them married Indian women. Other Indian blood than Montour's may have descended to Manderson, for all I can say, through previous and subsequent unions; some of the wives' antecedents were quite untraceable, and there were so many generations of pioneering before the
whole country was brought under civilization. My researches left me with the idea that there is a very great deal of the aboriginal blood present in the genealogical make-up of the people of America, and that it is very widely spread. The newer families have constantly intermarried with the older, and so many of them had a strain of the native in them—and were often rather proud of it, too, in those days. But Manderson had the idea about the disgracefulness of mixed blood, which grew much stronger, I fancy, with the rise of the negro question after the war. He was thunderstruck at what I told him, and was anxious to conceal it from every soul. Of course I never gave it away while he lived, and I don't think he supposed I would; but I have thought since that his mind took a turn against me from that time onward. It happened about a year before his death.'

'Had Manderson,' asked Mr Cupples, so unexpectedly that the others started, 'any definable religious attitude?'

Marlowe considered a moment. 'None that ever I heard of,' he said. 'Worship and prayer were quite unknown to him, so far as I could see, and I never heard him mention religion. I should doubt if he had any real sense of God at all, or if he was capable of knowing God through the emotions. But I understood that as a child he had had a religious upbringing with a strong moral side to it. His private life was, in the usual limited sense, blameless. He was almost ascetic in his habits, except as to smoking. I lived with him four years without ever knowing him to tell a direct verbal falsehood, constantly as he used to practise deceit in other forms. Can you understand the soul of a man who never hesitated to take steps that would have the effect of hoodwinking people, who would use every trick of the markets to mislead, and who was at the same time scrupulous never to utter a direct lie on the most insignificant matter? Manderson was like that, and he was not the only one. I suppose you might compare the state of mind to that of a soldier who is personally a truthful man, but who will stick at nothing to deceive the enemy. The rules of the game allow it; and the same may be said of business as many business men regard it. Only with them it is always wartime.'

'It is a sad world,' observed Mr Cupples.

'As you say,' Marlowe agreed. 'Now I was saying that one could always take Manderson's word if he gave it in a definite form. The first time I ever heard him utter a downright lie was on the night he died; and hearing it, I believe, saved me from being hanged as his murderer.'

Marlowe stared at the light above his head and Trent moved impatiently in his chair. 'Before we come to that,' he said, 'will you tell us exactly on what footing you were with Manderson during the years you were with him?'

'We were on very good terms from beginning to end,' answered Marlowe. 'Nothing like friendship—he was not a man for making friends—but the best of terms as between a trusted employee and his chief. I went to him as private secretary just after getting my degree at Oxford. I was to have gone into my father's business, where I am now, but my father suggested that I should see the world for a year or two. So I took this secretaryship, which seemed to promise a good deal of varied experience, and I had let the year or two run on to four years before the end came. The offer came to me through the last thing in the world I should have put forward as a qualification for a salaried post, and that was chess.'

At the word Trent struck his hands together with a muttered exclamation. The others looked at him in surprise.

'Chess!' repeated Trent. 'Do you know,' he said, rising and approaching Marlowe, 'what was the first thing I noted about you at our first meeting? It was your eye, Mr Marlowe. I couldn't place it then, but I know now where I had seen your eyes before. They were in the head of no less a man than the great Nikolay Korchagin, with whom I once sat in the same railway carriage for two days. I thought I should never forget the chess eye after that, but I could not put a name to it when I saw it in you. I beg your pardon,' he ended suddenly, resuming marmoreal attitude in his chair.

'I have played the game from my childhood, and with good players,' said Marlowe simply. 'It is an hereditary gift, if you can call it a gift. At the University I was nearly as good as anybody there, and I gave most of my brains to that and the OUDS and playing about generally. At Oxford, as I dare say you know, inducements to amuse oneself at the expense of one's education are endless, and encouraged by the authorities. Well, one day toward the end of my last term, Dr Munro of Queen's, whom I had never defeated, sent for me. He told me that I played a fairish game of chess. I said it was very good of him to say so. Then he said, 'They tell me you hunt, too.' I said, 'Now and then.' He asked, 'Is there anything else you can do? 'No,' I said, not much liking the tone of the conversation—the old man generally succeeded in putting people's backs up. He grunted fiercely, and then told me that enquiries were being made on behalf of a wealthy American man of business who wanted an English secretary. Manderson was the name, he said. He seemed never to have heard it before, which was quite possible, as he never opened a newspaper and had not slept a night outside the college for thirty years. If I could rub up my spelling—as the old gentleman put it—I might have a good chance for the post, as chess and riding and an Oxford education were the only indispensable points.

'Well, I became Manderson's secretary. For a long time I liked the position greatly. When one is attached to an active American plutocrat in the prime of life one need not have many dull moments. Besides, it made me
you go?" I said, "Certainly. I am here to obey orders."

Somebody has got to go by that boat and take certain papers to Paris. Or else my plan is going to fall to pieces. Will Harris cannot leave England tomorrow. I find I shall want him where he is. And I want Bunner where he is. But that goes tomorrow. I gave you the ticket." "Here it is," he said, producing it from his pocket.

"Yes," I said, "when I went up to London a week ago you asked me to book a cabin in that name on the boat from Southampton to Havre. His name is George Harris--at least that's the name he is going by. Do you remember that?

"You never suspected that he hated you before that time?" asked Trent; and Mr Cupples asked at the same moment, 'To what did you attribute it?'

'I never guessed until that night,' answered Marlowe, 'that he had the smallest ill-feeling toward me. How long it had existed I do not know. I cannot imagine why it was there. I was forced to think, when I considered the thing in those awful days after his death, that it was a case of a madman's delusion, that he believed me to be plotting against him, as they so often do. Some such insane conviction must have been at the root of it. But who can sound the abysses of a lunatic's fancy? Can you imagine the state of mind in which a man dooms himself to death with the object of delivering some one he hates to the hangman?'

Mr Cupples moved sharply in his chair. 'You say Manderson was responsible for his own death?' he asked.

'That is what I said.'

'The eyes of Trent and Mr Cupples met for an instant. You never suspected that he hated you before that time?' asked Trent; and Mr Cupples asked at the same moment, 'To what did you attribute it?'

'I never guessed until that night,' answered Marlowe, 'that he had the smallest ill-feeling toward me. How long it had existed I do not know. I cannot imagine why it was there. I was forced to think, when I considered the thing in those awful days after his death, that it was a case of a madman's delusion, that he believed me to be plotting against him, as they so often do. Some such insane conviction must have been at the root of it. But who can sound the abysses of a lunatic's fancy? Can you imagine the state of mind in which a man dooms himself to death with the object of delivering some one he hates to the hangman?'

Mr Cupples moved sharply in his chair. 'You say Manderson was responsible for his own death?' he asked.

Trent glanced at him with an eye of impatience, and resumed his intent watch upon the face of Marlowe. In the relief of speech it was now less pale and drawn.

'I do say so,' Marlowe answered concisely, and looked his questioner in the face. Mr Cupples nodded.

'Before we proceed to the elucidation of your statement,' observed the old gentleman, in a tone of one discussing a point of abstract science, 'it may be remarked that the state of mind which you attribute to Manderson-

'Suppose we have the story first,' Trent interrupted, gently laying a hand on Mr Cupples's arm. 'You were telling us,' he went on, turning to Marlowe, 'how things stood between you and Manderson. Now you tell us the facts of what happened that night?'

Marlowe flushed at the barely perceptible emphasis which Trent laid upon the word 'facts'. He drew himself up.

'Bunner and myself dined with Mr and Mrs Manderson that Sunday evening,' he began, speaking carefully. 'It was just like other dinners at which the four of us had been together. Manderson was taciturn and gloomy, as we had lately been accustomed to see him. We others kept a conversation going. We rose from the table, I suppose, about nine. Mrs Manderson went to the drawing-room, and Bunner went up to the hotel to see an acquaintance. Manderson asked me to come into the orchard behind the house, saying he wished to have a talk. We paced up and down the pathway there, out of earshot from the house, and Manderson, as he smoked his cigar, spoke to me in his cool, deliberate way. He had never seemed more sane, or more well-disposed to me. He said he wanted me to do him an important service. There was a big thing on. It was a secret affair. Bunner knew nothing of it, and the less I knew the better. He wanted me to do exactly as he directed, and not bother my head about reasons.

'This, I may say, was quite characteristic of Manderson's method of going to work. If at times he required a man to be a mere tool in his hand, he would tell him so. He had used me in the same kind of way a dozen times. I assured him he could rely on me, and said I was ready. "Right now?" he asked. I said of course I was.

'He nodded, and said--I tell you his words as well as I can recollect them--attend to this. There is a man in this house who is in this thing with me. He was to have left tomorrow for Paris by the noon boat from Southampton to Havre. His name is George Harris--at least that's the name he is going by. Do you remember that name?" "Yes," I said, "when I went up to London a week ago you asked me to book a cabin in that name on the boat that goes tomorrow. I gave you the ticket." "Here it is," he said, producing it from his pocket.

'Now," Manderson said to me, poking his cigar-butt at me with each sentence in a way he used to have, "George Harris cannot leave England tomorrow. I find I shall want him where he is. And I want Bunner where he is. But somebody has got to go by that boat and take certain papers to Paris. Or else my plan is going to fall to pieces. Will you go?" I said, "Certainly. I am here to obey orders."
'He bit his cigar, and said, "That's all right; but these are not just ordinary orders. Not the kind of thing one can ask of a man in the ordinary way of his duty to an employer. The point is this. The deal I am busy with is one in which neither myself nor any one known to be connected with me must appear as yet. That is vital. But these people I am up against know your face as well as they know mine. If my secretary is known in certain quarters to have crossed to Paris at this time and to have interviewed certain people--and that would be known as soon as it happened--then the game is up." He threw away his cigar-end and looked at me questioningly.

'I didn't like it much, but I liked failing Manderson at a pinch still less. I spoke lightly. I said I supposed I should have to conceal my identity, and I would do my best. I told him I used to be pretty good at make-up.

'He nodded in approval. He said, "That's good. I judged you would not let me down." Then he gave me my instructions. "You take the car right now," he said, "and start for Southampton--there's no train that will fit in. You'll be driving all night. Barring accidents, you ought to get there by six in the morning. But whenever you arrive, drive straight to the Bedford Hotel and ask for George Harris. If he's there, tell him you are to go over instead of him, and ask him to telephone me here. It is very important he should know that at the earliest moment possible. But if he isn't there, that means he has got the instructions I wired today, and hasn't gone to Southampton. In that case you don't want to trouble about him any more, but just wait for the boat. You can leave the car at a garage under a fancy name--mine must not be given. See about changing your appearance--I don't care how, so you do it well. Travel by the boat as George Harris. Let on to be anything you like, but be careful, and don't talk much to anybody. When you arrive, take a room at the Hotel St Petersburg. You will receive a note or message there, addressed to George Harris, telling you where to take the wallet I shall give you. The wallet is locked, and you want to take good care of it. Have you got that all clear?"

'I repeated the instructions. I asked if I should return from Paris after handing over the wallet. "As soon as you like," he said. "And mind this-- whatever happens, don't communicate with me at any stage of the journey. If you don't get the message in Paris at once, just wait until you do--days, if necessary. But not a line of any sort to me. Understand? Now get ready as quick as you can. I'll go with you in the car a little way. Hurry."

'That is, as far as I can remember, the exact substance of what Manderson said to me that night. I went to my room, changed into day clothes, and hastily threw a few necessaries into a kit-bag. My mind was in a whirl, not so much at the nature of the business as at the suddenness of it. I think I remember telling you the last time we met--he turned to Trent--'that Manderson shared the national fondness for doing things in a story-book style. Other things being equal, he delighted in a bit of mystification and melodrama, and I told myself that this was Manderson all over. I hurried downstairs with my bag and rejoined him in the library. He handed me a stout leather letter-case, being equal, he delighted in a bit of mystification and melodrama, and I told myself that this was Manderson all over. I hurried downstairs with my bag and rejoined him in the library. He handed me a stout leather letter-case, about eight inches by six, fastened with a strap with a lock on it. I could just squeeze it into my side-pocket. Then I went to get the car from the garage behind the house.

'As I was bringing it round to the front a disconcerting thought struck me. I remembered that I had only a few shillings in my pocket.

'For some time past I had been keeping myself very short of cash, and for this reason--which I tell you because it is a vital point, as you shall see in a minute. I was living temporarily on borrowed money. I had always been careless about money while I was with Manderson, and being a gregarious animal I had made many friends, some of them belonging to a New York set that had little to do but get rid of the large incomes given them by their parents. Still, I was very well paid, and I was too busy even to attempt to go very far with them in that amusing occupation. I was still well on the right side of the ledger until I began, merely out of curiosity, to play at speculation. It's a very old story-- particularly in Wall Street. I thought it was easy; I was lucky at first; I would always be prudent--and so on. Then came the day when I went out of my depth. In one week I was separated from my toll, as Bunner expressed it when I told him; and I owed money too. I had had my lesson. Now in this pass I went to Manderson and told him what I had done and how I stood. He heard me with a very grim smile, and then, with the nearest approach to sympathy I had ever found in him, he advanced me a sum on account of my salary that would clear me. "Don't play the markets any more," was all he said.

'Now on that Sunday night Manderson knew that I was practically without any money in the world. He knew that Bunner knew it too. He may have known that I had even borrowed a little more from Bunner for pocket-money until my next cheque was due, which, owing to my anticipation of my salary, would not have been a large one. Bear this knowledge of Manderson's in mind.

'As soon as I had brought the car round I went into the library and stated the difficulty to Manderson.

'What followed gave me, slight as it was, my first impression of something odd being afoot. As soon as I mentioned the word "expenses" his hand went mechanically to his left hip-pocket, where he always kept a little case containing notes to the value of about a hundred pounds in our money. This was such a rooted habit in him that I was astonished to see him check the movement suddenly. Then, to my greater amazement, he swore under his breath. I had never heard him do this before; but Bunner had told me that of late he had often shown irritation in this
way when they were alone. "Has he mislaid his note-case?" was the question that flashed through my mind. But it seemed to me that it could not affect his plan at all, and I will tell you why. The week before, when I had gone up to London to carry out various commissions, including the booking of a berth for Mr George Harris, I had drawn a thousand pounds for Manderson from his bankers, and all, at his request, in notes of small amounts. I did not know what this unusually large sum in cash was for, but I did know that the packets of notes were in his locked desk in the library, or had been earlier in the day, when I had seen him fingering them as he sat at the desk.

'But instead of turning to the desk, Manderson stood looking at me. There was fury in his face, and it was a strange sight to see him gradually master it until his eyes grew cold again. "Wait in the car," he said slowly. "I will get some money."' We both went out, and as I was getting into my overcoat in the hall I saw him enter the drawing-room, which, you remember, was on the other side of the entrance hall.

I stepped out on to the lawn before the house and smoked a cigarette, pacing up and down. I was asking myself again and again where that thousand pounds was; whether it was in the drawing-room, and if so, why. Presently, as I passed one of the drawing-room windows, I noticed Mrs Manderson's shadow on the thin silk curtain. She was standing at her escritoire. The window was open, and as I passed I heard her say, "I have not quite thirty pounds here. Will that be enough?" I did not hear the answer, but next moment Manderson's shadow was mingled with hers, and I heard the chink of money. Then, as he stood by the window, and as I was moving away, these words of his came to my ears—and these at least I can repeat exactly, for astonishment stamped them on my memory—"I'm going out now. Marlowe has persuaded me to go for a moonlight run in the car. He is very urgent about it. He says it will help me to sleep, and I guess he is right."

I have told you that in the course of four years I had never once heard Manderson utter a direct lie about anything, great or small. I believed that I understood the man's queer, skin-deep morality, and I could have sworn that if he was firmly pressed with a question that could not be evaded he would either refuse to answer or tell the truth. But what had I just heard? No answer to any question. A voluntary statement, precise in terms, that was utterly false. The unimaginable had happened. It was almost as if some one I knew well, in a moment of closest sympathy, had suddenly struck me in the face. The blood rushed to my head, and I stood still on the grass. I stood there until I heard his step at the front door, and then I pulled myself together and stepped quickly to the car. He handed me a banker's paper bag with gold and notes in it. "There's more than you'll want there," he said, and I pocketed it mechanically.

'For a minute or so I stood discussing with Manderson—it was by one of those tours de force of which one's mind is capable under great excitement--points about the route of the long drive before me. I had made the run several times by day, and I believe I spoke quite calmly and naturally about it. But while I spoke my mind was seething in a flood of suddenly born suspicion and fear. I did not know what I feared. I simply felt fear, somehow--I did not know how--connected with Manderson. My soul once opened to it, fear rushed in like an assaulting army. I felt--I knew--that something was altogether wrong and sinister, and I felt myself to be the object of it. Yet Manderson was surely no enemy of mine. Then my thoughts reached out wildly for an answer to the question why he had told that lie. And all the time the blood hammered in my ears, "Where is that money?" Reason struggled hard to set up the suggestion that the two things were not necessarily connected. The instinct of a man in danger would not listen to it. As we started, and the car took the curve into the road, it was merely the unconscious part of me that steered and controlled it, and that made occasional empty remarks as we slid along in the moonlight. Within me was a confusion and vague alarm that was far worse than any definite terror I ever felt.

'About a mile from the house, you remember, one passed on one's left a gate, on the other side of which was the golf-course. There Manderson said he would get down, and I stopped the car. "You've got it all clear?" he asked. With a sort of wrench I forced myself to remember and repeat the directions given me. "That's OK," he said. "Goodbye, then. Stay with that wallet." Those were the last words I heard him speak, as the car moved gently away from him.'

Marlowe rose from his chair and pressed his hands to his eyes. He was flushed with the excitement of his own narrative, and there was in his look a horror of recollection that held both the listeners silent. He shook himself with a movement like a dog's, and then, his hands behind him, stood erect before the fire as he continued his tale.

'I expect you both know what the back-reflector of a motor car is.'

Trent nodded quickly, his face alive with anticipation; but Mr Cupples, who cherished a mild but obstinate prejudice against motor cars, readily confessed to ignorance.

'It is a small round or more often rectangular mirror,' Marlowe explained, 'rigged out from the right side of the screen in front of the driver, and adjusted in such a way that he can see, without turning round, if anything is coming up behind to pass him. It is quite an ordinary appliance, and there was one on this car. As the car moved on, and Manderson ceased speaking behind me, I saw in that mirror a thing that I wish I could forget.'

Marlowe was silent for a moment, staring at the wall before him.
'Manderson's face,' he said in a low tone. 'He was standing in the road, looking after me, only a few yards behind, and the moonlight was full on his face. The mirror happened to catch it for an instant.

Physical habit is a wonderful thing. I did not shift hand or foot on the controlling mechanism of the car. Indeed, I dare say it steadied me against the shock to have myself braced to the business of driving. You have read in books, no doubt, of hell looking out of a man's eyes, but perhaps you don't know what a good metaphor that is. If I had not known Manderson was there, I should not have recognized the face. It was that of a madman, distorted, hideous in the imbecility of hate, the teeth bared in a simian grin of ferocity and triumph; the eyes .... In the little mirror I had this glimpse of the face alone. I saw nothing of whatever gesture there may have been as that writhing white mask glared after me. And I saw it only for a flash. The car went on, gathering speed, and as it went, my brain, suddenly purged of the vapours of doubt and perplexity, was as busy as the throbbing engine before my feet. I knew.

You say something in that manuscript of yours, Mr Trent, about the swift automatic way in which one's ideas arrange themselves about some new illuminating thought. It is quite true. The awful intensity of ill-will that had flamed after me from those straining eyeballs poured over my mind like a searchlight. I was thinking quite clearly now, and almost coldly, for I knew what--at least I knew whom--I had to fear, and instinct warned me that it was not a time to give room to the emotions that were fighting to possess me. The man hated me insanely. That incredible fact I suddenly knew. But the face had told me, it would have told anybody, more than that. It was a face of hatred gratified, it proclaimed some damnable triumph. It had gloated over me driving away to my fate. This too was plain to me. And to what fate?

'I stopped the car. It had gone about two hundred and fifty yards, and a sharp bend of the road hid the spot where I had set Manderson down. I lay back in the seat and thought it out. Something was to happen to me. In Paris? Probably--why else should I be sent there, with money and a ticket? But why Paris? That puzzled me, for I had no melodramatic ideas about Paris. I put the point aside for a moment. I turned to the other things that had roused my attention that evening. The lie about my "persuading him to go for a moonlight run". What was the intention of that? Manderson, I said to myself, will be returning without me while I am on my way to Southampton. What will he tell them about me? How account for his returning alone, and without the car? As I asked myself that sinister question there rushed into my mind the last of my difficulties: "Where are the thousand pounds?" And in the same instant came the answer: "The thousand pounds are in my pocket."

'I got up and stepped from the car. My knees trembled and I felt very sick. I saw the plot now, as I thought. The whole of the story about the papers and the necessity of their being taken to Paris was a blind. With Manderson's money about me, of which he would declare I had robbed him, I was, to all appearance, attempting to escape from England, with every precaution that guilt could suggest. He would communicate with the police at once, and would know how to put them on my track. I should be arrested in Paris, if I got so far, living under a false name, after having left the car under a false name, disguised myself, and travelled in a cabin which I had booked in advance, also under a false name. It would be plainly the crime of a man without money, and for some reason desperately in want of it. As for my account of the affair, it would be too preposterous.

'As this ghastly array of incriminating circumstances rose up before me, I dragged the stout letter-case from my pocket. In the intensity of the moment, I never entertained the faintest doubt that I was right, and that the money was there. It would easily hold the packets of notes. But as I felt it and weighed it in my hands it seemed to me there must be more than this. It was too bulky. What more was to be laid to my charge? After all, a thousand pounds was not much to tempt a man like myself to run the risk of penal servitude. In this new agitation, scarcely knowing what I did, I caught the surrounding strap in my fingers just above the fastening and tore the staple out of the lock. Those locks, you know, are pretty flimsy as a rule.'

Here Marlowe paused and walked to the oaken desk before the window. Opening a drawer full of miscellaneous objects, he took out a box of odd keys, and selected a small one distinguished by a piece of pink tape.

He handed it to Trent. 'I keep that by me as a sort of morbid memento. It is the key to the lock I smashed. I might have saved myself the trouble, if I had known that this key was at that moment in the left-hand side-pocket of my overcoat. Manderson must have slipped it in, either while the coat was hanging in the hall or while he sat at my side in the car. I might not have found the tiny thing there for weeks: as a matter of fact I did find it two days after Manderson was dead, but a police search would have found it in five minutes. And then I--I with the case and its contents in my pocket, my false name and my sham spectacles and the rest of it--I should have had no explanation to offer but the highly convincing one that I didn't know the key was there.'

Trent dangled the key by its tape idly. Then: 'How do you know this is the key of that case?' he asked quickly.

'I tried it. As soon as I found it I went up and fitted it to the lock. I knew where I had left the thing. So do you, I think, Mr Trent. Don't you?' There was a faint shade of mockery in Marlowe's voice.

'Touche,' Trent said, with a dry smile. 'I found a large empty letter-case with a burst lock lying with other odds and ends on the dressing-table in Manderson's room. Your statement is that you put it there. I could make nothing of
it.' He closed his lips.

'There was no reason for hiding it,' said Marlowe. 'But to get back to my story. I burst the lock of the strap. I
opened the case before one of the lamps of the car. The first thing I found in it I ought to have expected, of course,
but I hadn't.' He paused and glanced at Trent.

'It was--' began Trent mechanically, and then stopped himself. 'Try not to bring me in any more, if you don't
mind,' he said, meeting the other's eye. 'I have complimented you already in that document on your cleverness. You
need not prove it by making the judge help you out with your evidence.'

'All right,' agreed Marlowe. 'I couldn't resist just that much. If you had been in my place you would have known
before I did that Manderson's little pocket-case was there. As soon as I saw it, of course, I remembered his not
having had it about him when I asked for money, and his surprising anger. He had made a false step. He had already
fastened his note-case up with the rest of what was to figure as my plunder, and placed it in my hands. I opened it. It
contained a few notes as usual, I didn't count them.

'Tucked into the flaps of the big case in packets were the other notes, just as I had brought them from London.
And with them were two small wash-leather bags, the look of which I knew well. My heart jumped sickeningly
again, for this, too, was utterly unexpected. In those bags Manderson kept the diamonds in which he had been
investing for some time past. I didn't open them; I could feel the tiny stones shifting under the pressure of my
fingers. How many thousands of pounds' worth there were there I have no idea. We had regarded Manderson's
diamond-buying as merely a speculative fad. I believe now that it was the earliest movement in the scheme for my
ruin. For any one like myself to be represented as having robbed him, there ought to be a strong inducement shown.
That had been provided with a vengeance.

'Now, I thought, I have the whole thing plain, and I must act. I saw instantly what I must do. I had left
Manderson about a mile from the house. It would take him twenty minutes, fifteen if he walked fast, to get back to
the house, where he would, of course, immediately tell his story of robbery, and probably telephone at once to the
police in Bishopsbridge. I had left him only five or six minutes ago; for all that I have just told you was as quick
thinking as I ever did. It would be easy to overtake him in the car before he neared the house. There would be an
awkward interview. I set my teeth as I thought of it, and all my fears vanished as I began to savour the gratification
of telling him my opinion of him. There are probably few people who ever positively looked forward to an awkward
interview with Manderson; but I was mad with rage. My honour and my liberty had been plotted against with
detestable treachery. I did not consider what would follow the interview. That would arrange itself.

'I had started and turned the car, I was already going fast toward White Gables, when I heard the sound of a shot
in front of me, to the right.

'Instantly I stopped the car. My first wild thought was that Manderson was shooting at me. Then I realized that
the noise had not been close at hand. I could see nobody on the road, though the moonlight flooded it. I had left
Manderson at a spot just round the corner that was now about a hundred yards ahead of me. After half a minute or
so, I started again, and turned the corner at a slow pace. Then I stopped again with a jar, and for a moment I sat
perfectly still.

'Manderson lay dead a few steps from me on the turf within the gate, clearly visible to me in the moonlight.'

'Marlowe made another pause, and Trent, with a puckered brow, enquired, 'On the golf-course?'

'Obviously,' remarked Mr Cupples. 'The eighth green is just there.' He had grown more and more interested as
Marlowe went on, and was now playing feverishly with his thin beard.

'On the green, quite close to the flag,' said Marlowe. 'He lay on his back, his arms were stretched abroad, his
jacket and heavy overcoat were open; the light shone hideously on his white face and his shirt-front; it glistened on
his bared teeth and one of the eyes. The other ... you saw it. The man was certainly dead. As I sat there stunned,
unable for the moment to think at all, I could even see a thin dark line of blood running down from the shattered
socket to the ear. Close by lay his soft black hat, and at his feet a pistol.

'I suppose it was only a few seconds that I sat helplessly staring at the body. Then I rose and moved to it with
dragging feet; for now the truth had come to me at last, and I realized the fullness of my appalling danger. It was not
only my liberty or my honour that the maniac had undermined. It was death that he had planned for me; death with
the degradation of the scaffold. To strike me down with certainty, he had not hesitated to end his life; a life which
was, no doubt, already threatened by a melancholic impulse to self-destruction; and the last agony of the suicide had
been turned, perhaps, to a devilish joy by the thought that he dragged down my life with his. For as far as I could see
at the moment my situation was utterly hopeless. If it had been desperate on the assumption that Manderson meant
to denounce me as a thief, what was it now that his corpse denounced me as a murderer?

'I picked up the revolver and saw, almost without emotion, that it was my own. Manderson had taken it from my
room, I suppose, while I was getting out the car. At the same moment I remembered that it was by Manderson's
suggestion that I had had it engraved with my initials, to distinguish it from a precisely similar weapon which he had
of his own.

I bent over the body and satisfied myself that there was no life left in it. I must tell you here that I did not notice, then or afterwards, the scratches and marks on the wrists, which were taken as evidence of a struggle with an assailant. But I have no doubt that Manderson deliberately injured himself in this way before firing the shot; it was a part of his plan.

Though I never perceived that detail, however, it was evident enough as I looked at the body that Manderson had not forgotten, in his last act on earth, to tie me tighter by putting out of court the question of suicide. He had clearly been at pains to hold the pistol at arm's length, and there was not a trace of smoke or of burning on the face. The wound was absolutely clean, and was already ceasing to bleed outwardly. I rose and paced the green, reckoning up the points in the crushing case against me.

I was the last to be seen with Manderson. I had persuaded him--so he had lied to his wife and, as I afterwards knew, to the butler--to go with me for the drive from which he never returned. My pistol had killed him. It was true that by discovering his plot I had saved myself from heaping up further incriminating facts--flight, concealment, the possession of the treasure. But what need of them, after all? As I stood, what hope was there? What could I do?

Marlowe came to the table and leaned forward with his hands upon it. 'I want,' he said very earnestly, 'to try to make you understand what was in my mind when I decided to do what I did. I hope you won't be bored, because I must do it. You may both have thought I acted like a fool. But after all the police never suspected me. I walked that green for a quarter of an hour, I suppose, thinking the thing out like a game of chess. I had to think ahead and think coolly; for my safety depended on upsetting the plans of one of the longest-headed men who ever lived. And remember that, for all I knew, there were details of the scheme still hidden from me, waiting to crush me.

Two plain courses presented themselves at once. Either of them, I thought, would certainly prove fatal. I could, in the first place, do the completely straightforward thing: take back the dead man, tell my story, hand over the notes and diamonds, and trust to the saving power of truth and innocence. I could have laughed as I thought of it. I saw myself bringing home the corpse and giving an account of myself, boggling with sheer shame over the absurdity of my wholly unsupported tale, as I brought a charge of mad hatred and fiendish treachery against a man who had never, as far as I knew, had a word to say against me. At every turn the cunning of Manderson had forestalled me. His careful concealment of such a hatred was a characteristic feature of the stratagem; only a man of his iron self-restraint could have done it. You can see for yourselves how every fact in my statement would appear, in the shadow of Manderson's death, a clumsy lie. I tried to imagine myself telling such a story to the counsel for my defence. I could see the face with which he would listen to it; I could read in the lines of it his thought, that to put forward such an impudent farrago would mean merely the disappearance of any chance there might be of a commutation of the capital sentence.

True, I had not fled. I had brought back the body; I had handed over the property. But how did that help me? It would only suggest that I had yielded to a sudden funk after killing my man, and had no nerve left to clutch at the fruits of the crime; it would suggest, perhaps, that I had not set out to kill but only to threaten, and that when I found that I had done murder the heart went out of me. Turn it which way I would, I could see no hope of escape by this plan of action.

The second of the obvious things that I might do was to take the hint offered by the situation, and to fly at once. That too must prove fatal. There was the body. I had no time to hide it in such a way that it would not be found at the first systematic search. But whatever I should do with the body, Manderson's not returning to the house would cause uneasiness in two or three hours at most. Martin would suspect an accident to the car, and would telephone to the police. At daybreak the roads would be scoured and enquiries telegraphed in every direction. The police would act on the possibility of there being foul play. They would spread their nets with energy in such a big business as the disappearance of Manderson. Ports and railway termini would be watched. Within twenty-four hours the body would be found, and the whole country would be on the alert for me--all Europe, scarcely less; I did not believe there was a spot in Christendom where the man accused of Manderson's murder could pass unchallenged, with every newspaper crying the fact of his death into the ears of all the world. Every stranger would be suspect; every man, woman, and child would be a detective. The car, wherever I should abandon it, would put people on my track. If I had to choose between two utterly hopeless courses, I decided, I would take that of telling the preposterous truth.

But now I cast about desperately for some tale that would seem more plausible than the truth. Could I save my neck by a lie? One after another came into my mind; I need not trouble to remember them now. Each had its own futilities and perils; but every one split upon the fact--or what would be taken for fact--that I had induced Manderson to go out with me, and the fact that he had never returned alive. Notion after notion I swiftly rejected as I paced there by the dead man, and doom seemed to settle down upon me more heavily as the moments passed. Then a strange thought came to me.

Several times I had repeated to myself half-consciously, as a sort of refrain, the words in which I had heard
Manderson tell his wife that I had induced him to go out. "Marlowe has persuaded me to go for a moonlight run in the car. He is very urgent about it." All at once it struck me that, without meaning to do so, I was saying this in Manderson's voice.

'As you found out for yourself, Mr Trent, I have a natural gift of mimicry. I had imitated Manderson's voice many times so successfully as to deceive even Bunner, who had been much more in his company than his own wife. It was, you remember'--Marlowe turned to Mr Cupples--'a strong, metallic voice, of great carrying power, so unusual as to make it a very fascinating voice to imitate, and at the same time very easy. I said the words carefully to myself again, like this--' he uttered them, and Mr Cupples opened his eyes in amazement--'and then I struck my hand upon the low wall beside me. "Manderson never returned alive?" I said aloud. "But Manderson shall return alive!"'

'In thirty seconds the bare outline of the plan was complete in my mind. I did not wait to think over details. Every instant was precious now. I lifted the body and laid it on the floor of the car, covered with a rug. I took the hat and the revolver. Not one trace remained on the green, I believe, of that night's work. As I drove back to White Gables my design took shape before me with a rapidity and ease that filled me with a wild excitement. I should escape yet! It was all so easy if I kept my pluck. Putting aside the unusual and unlikely, I should not fail. I wanted to shout, to scream!

'Nearing the house I slackened speed, and carefully reconnoitred the road. Nothing was moving. I turned the car into the open field on the other side of the road, about twenty paces short of the little door at the extreme corner of the grounds. I brought it to rest behind a stack. When, with Manderson's hat on my head and the pistol in my pocket, I had staggered with the body across the moonlit road and through that door, I left much of my apprehension behind me. With swift action and an unbroken nerve I thought I ought to succeed.'

With a long sigh Marlowe threw himself into one of the deep chairs at the fireside and passed his handkerchief over his damp forehead. Each of his hearers, too, drew a deep breath, but not audibly.

'Everything else you know,' he said. He took a cigarette from a box beside him and lighted it. Trent watched the very slight quiver of the hand that held the match, and privately noted that his own was at the moment not so steady.

'The shoes that betrayed me to you,' pursued Marlowe after a short silence, 'were painful all the time I wore them, but I never dreamed that they had given anywhere. I knew that no footprint of mine must appear by any accident in the soft ground about the hut where I laid the body, or between the hut and the house, so I took the shoes off and crammed my feet into them as soon as I was inside the little door. I left my own shoes, with my own jacket and overcoat, near the body, ready to be resumed later. I made a clear footmark on the soft gravel outside the French window, and several on the drugget round the carpet. The stripping off of the outer clothing of the body, and the dressing of it afterwards in the brown suit and shoes, and putting the things into the pockets, was a horrible business; and getting the teeth out of the mouth was worse. The head--but you don't want to hear about it. I didn't feel it much at the time. I was wriggling my own head out of a noose, you see. I wish I had thought of pulling down the cuffs, and had tied the shoes more neatly. And putting the watch in the wrong pocket was a bad mistake. It had all to be done so hurriedly.

'You were wrong, by the way, about the whisky. After one stiffish drink I had no more; but I filled up a flask that was in the cupboard, and pocketed it. I had a night of peculiar anxiety and effort in front of me and I didn't know how I should stand it. I had to take some once or twice during the drive. Speaking of that, you give rather a generous allowance of time in your document for doing that run by night. You say that to get to Southampton by half-past six in that car, under the conditions, a man must, even if he drove like a demon, have left Marlstone by twelve at latest. I had not got the body dressed in the other suit, with tie and watch-chain and so forth, until nearly ten minutes past; and then I had to get to the car and start it going. But then I don't suppose any other man would have taken the risks I did in that car at night, without a headlight. It turns me cold to think of it now.

'There's nothing much to say about what I did in the house. I spent the time after Martin had left me in carefully thinking over the remaining steps in my plan, while I unloaded and thoroughly cleaned the revolver using my handkerchief and a penholder from the desk. I also placed the packets of notes, the note-case, and the diamonds in the roll-top desk, which I opened and relocked with Manderson's key. When I went upstairs it was a trying moment, for though I was safe from the eyes of Martin, as he sat in his pantry, there was a faint possibility of somebody being about on the bedroom floor. I had sometimes found the French maid wandering about there when the other servants were in bed. Bunner, I knew, was a deep sleeper, Mrs Manderson, I had gathered from things I had heard her say, was usually asleep by eleven; I had thought it possible that her gift of sleep had helped her to retain all her beauty and vitality in spite of a marriage which we all knew was an unhappy one. Still it was uneasy work mounting the stairs, and holding myself ready to retreat to the library again at the least sound from above. But nothing happened.

'The first thing I did on reaching the corridor was to enter my room and put the revolver and cartridges back in the case. Then I turned off the light and went quietly into Manderson's room.

'What I had to do there you know. I had to take off the shoes and put them outside the door, leave Manderson's
Manderson's room I knew exactly what I had to face. As I lay in my clothes in Manderson's bed and listened for the things was very likely; but they were all too likely for me. They were uncertainties. Shut off from the household in the corner from the other passage--I had found Celestine prowling about quite as late as it was then. None of these Bunner might come out of his bedroom. One of the servants who were supposed to be in bed might come round the empty rooms. The moonlight was flooding the corridor through the end window. Even if my face was concealed, Manderson's clothes and shoes, had opened that door again and gone in my shirt-sleeves and socks to enter one of the bedrooms and Mrs sitting-room. I should have thought it would have been safer, after you had done what was necessary to your plan in Manderson's room, to leave it quietly and escape through one of those three rooms .... The fact that you went through her window, you know,' he added coldly, 'would have suggested, if it became known, the crime. They couldn't have done it. The pistol, left openly in my room, might have been used by anybody, even if it could be proved that that particular pistol was used. Nobody could reasonably connect me with the shooting so long as it was believed that it was Manderson who had returned to the house. The suspicion could not, I was confident, enter any one's mind. All the same, I wanted to introduce the element of absolute physical impossibility; I knew I should feel ten times as safe with that. So when I knew from the sound of her breathing that Mrs Manderson was asleep again, I walked quickly across her room in my stocking feet, and was on the grass with my bundle in ten seconds. I don't think I made the least noise. The curtain before the window was of soft, thick stuff and didn't rustle, and when I pushed the glass doors further open there was not a sound.'

'Tell me,' said Trent, as the other stopped to light a new cigarette, 'why you took the risk of going through Mrs Manderson's room to escape from the house. I could see when I looked into the thing on the spot why it had to be on that side of the house; there was a danger of being seen by Martin, or by some servant at a bedroom window, if you got out by a window on one of the other sides. But there were three unoccupied rooms on that side; two spare bedrooms and Mrs sitting-room. I should have thought it would have been safer, after you had done what was necessary to your plan in Manderson's room, to leave it quietly and escape through one of those three rooms .... The fact that you went through her window, you know,' he added coldly, 'would have suggested, if it became known, various suspicions in regard to the lady herself. I think you understand me.'

Marlowe turned upon him with a glowing face. 'And I think you will understand me, Mr Trent,' he said in a voice that shook a little, 'when I say that if such a possibility had occurred to me then, I would have taken any risk rather than make my escape by that way.... Oh well!' he went on more coolly, 'I suppose that to any one who didn't know her, the idea of her being privy to her husband's murder might not seem so indescribably fatuous. Forgive the expression.' He looked attentively at the burning end of his cigarette, studiously unconscious of the red flag that flew in Trent's eyes for an instant at his words and the tone of them.

That emotion, however, was conquered at once. 'Your remark is perfectly just,' Trent said with answering coolness. 'I can quite believe, too, that at the time you didn't think of the possibility I mentioned. But surely, apart from that, it would have been safer to do as I said; go by the window of an unoccupied room.'

'Do you think so?' said Marlowe. 'All I can say is, I hadn't the nerve to do it. I tell you, when I entered Manderson's room I shut the door of it on more than half my terrors. I had the problem confined before me in a closed space, with only one danger in it, and that a known danger: the danger of Mrs Manderson. The thing was almost done; I had only to wait until she was certainly asleep after her few moments of waking up, for which, as I told you, I was prepared as a possibility. Barring accidents, the way was clear. But now suppose that I, carrying Manderson's clothes and shoes, had opened that door again and gone in my shirt-sleeves and socks to enter one of the empty rooms. The moonlight was flooding the corridor through the end window. Even if my face was concealed, nobody could mistake my standing figure for Manderson's. Martin might be going about the house in his silent way. Bunner might come out of his bedroom. One of the servants who were supposed to be in bed might come round the corner from the other passage--I had found Celestine prowling about quite as late as it was then. None of these things was very likely; but they were all too likely for me. They were uncertainties. Shut off from the household in Manderson's room I knew exactly what I had to face. As I lay in my clothes in Manderson's bed and listened for the
almost inaudible breathing through the open door, I felt far more ease of mind, terrible as my anxiety was, than I had felt since I saw the dead body on the turf. I even congratulated myself that I had had the chance, through Mrs Manderson's speaking to me, of tightening one of the screws in my scheme by repeating the statement about my having been sent to Southampton.

Marlowe looked at Trent, who nodded as who should say that his point was met.

'As for Southampton,' pursued Marlowe, 'you know what I did when I got there, I have no doubt. I had decided to take Manderson's story about the mysterious Harris and act it out on my own lines. It was a carefully prepared lie, better than anything I could improvise. I even went so far as to get through a trunk call to the hotel at Southampton from the library before starting, and ask if Harris was there. I expected, he wasn't.'

Was that why you telephoned?' Trent enquired quickly.

'The reason for telephoning was to get myself into an attitude in which Martin couldn't see my face or anything but the jacket and hat, yet which was a natural and familiar attitude. But while I was about it, it was obviously better to make a genuine call. If I had simply pretended to be telephoning, the people at the exchange could have told at once that there hadn't been a call from White Gables that night.'

'One of the first things I did was to make that enquiry,' said Trent. 'That telephone call, and the wire you sent from Southampton to the dead man to say Harris hadn't turned up, and you were returning—I particularly appreciated both those.'

A constrained smile lighted Marlowe's face for a moment. 'I don't know that there's anything more to tell. I returned to Marlstone, and faced your friend the detective with such nerve as I had left. The worst was when I heard you had put on the case--no, that wasn't the worst. The worst was when I saw you walk out of the shrubbery the next day, coming away from the shed where I had laid the body. For one ghastly moment I thought you were going to give me in charge on the spot. Now I've told you everything, you don't look so terrible.'

He closed his eyes, and there was a short silence. Then Trent got suddenly to his feet.

'Cross-examination?' enquired Marlowe, looking at him gravely.

'Not at all,' said Trent, stretching his long limbs. 'Only stiffness of the legs. I don't want to ask any questions. I believe what you have told us. I don't believe it simply because I always liked your face, or because it saves awkwardness, which are the most usual reasons for believing a person, but because my vanity will have it that no man could lie to me steadily for an hour without my perceiving it. Your story is an extraordinary one; but Manderson was an extraordinary man, and so are you. You acted like a lunatic in doing what you did; but I quite agree with you that if you had acted like a sane man you wouldn't have had the hundredth part of a dog's chance with a judge and jury. One thing is beyond dispute on any reading of the affair: you are a man of courage.'

The colour rushed into Marlowe's face, and he hesitated for words. Before he could speak Mr Cupples arose with a dry cough.

'For my part,' he said, 'I never supposed you guilty for a moment.' Marlowe turned to him in grateful amazement, Trent with an incredulous stare. 'But,' pursued Mr Cupples, holding up his hand, 'there is one question which I should like to put.'

Marlowe bowed, saying nothing.

'Suppose,' said Mr Cupples, 'that some one else had been suspected of the crime and put upon trial. What would you have done?'

'I think my duty was clear. I should have gone with my story to the lawyers for the defence, and put myself in their hands.'

Trent laughed aloud. Now that the thing was over, his spirits were rapidly becoming ungovernable. 'I can see their faces!' he said. 'As a matter of fact, though, nobody else was ever in danger. There wasn't a shred of evidence against any one. I looked up Murch at the Yard this morning, and he told me he had come round to Bunner's view, that it was a case of revenge on the part of some American black-hand gang. So there's the end of the Manderson case. Holy, suffering Moses! What an ass a man can make of himself when he thinks he's being preternaturally clever!' He seized the bulky envelope from the table and stuffed it into the heart of the fire. 'There's for you, old friend! For want of you the world's course will not fail. But look here! It's getting late--nearly seven, and Cupples and I have an appointment at half-past. We must go. Mr Marlowe, goodbye.' He looked into the other's eyes. 'I am a man who has worked hard to put a rope round your neck. Considering the circumstances, I don't know whether you will blame me. Will you shake hands?'

CHAPTER XVI: The Last Straw

'What was that you said about our having an appointment at half-past seven?' asked Mr Cupples as the two came out of the great gateway of the pile of flats. 'Have we such an appointment?'

'Certainly we have,' replied Trent. 'You are dining with me. Only one thing can properly celebrate this occasion, and that is a dinner for which I pay. No, no! I asked you first. I have got right down to the bottom of a case that must
be unique—a case that has troubled even my mind for over a year—and if that isn't a good reason for standing a dinner, I don't know what is. Cupples, we will not go to my club. This is to be a festival, and to be seen in a London club in a state of pleasurable emotion is more than enough to shatter any man's career. Besides that, the dinner there is always the same, or, at least, they always make it taste the same, I know not how. The eternal dinner at my club hath bored millions of members like me, and shall bore; but tonight let the feast be spread in vain, so far as we are concerned. We will not go where the satraps throng the hall. We will go to Sheppard's.'

'Who is Sheppard?' asked Mr Cupples mildly, as they proceeded up Victoria Street. His companion went with an unnatural lightness, and a policeman, observing his face, smiled indulgently at a look of happiness which he could only attribute to alcohol.

'Who is Sheppard?' echoed Trent with bitter emphasis. 'That question, if you will pardon me for saying so, Cupples, is thoroughly characteristic of the spirit of aimless enquiry prevailing in this restless day. I suggest our dining at Sheppard's, and instantly you fold your arms and demand, in a frenzy of intellectual pride, to know who Sheppard is before you will cross the threshold of Sheppard's. I am not going to pander to the vices of the modern mind. Sheppard's is a place where one can dine. I do not know Sheppard. It never occurred to me that Sheppard existed. Probably he is a myth of totemistic origin. All I know is that you can get a bit of saddle of mutton at Sheppard's that has made many an American visitor curse the day that Christopher Columbus was born .... Taxi!' A cab rolled smoothly to the kerb, and the driver received his instructions with a majestic nod.

'Another reason I have for suggesting Sheppard's,' continued Trent, feverishly lighting a cigarette, 'is that I am going to be married to the most wonderful woman in the world. I trust the connection of ideas is clear.'

'You are going to marry Mabel!' cried Mr Cupples. 'My dear friend, what good news this is! Shake hands, Trent; this is glorious! I congratulate you both from the bottom of my heart. And may I say—I don't want to interrupt your flow of high spirits, which is very natural indeed, and I remember being just the same in similar circumstances long ago—but may I say how earnestly I have hoped for this? Mabel has seen so much unhappiness, yet she is surely a woman formed in the great purpose of humanity to be the best influence in the life of a good man. But I did not know her mind as regarded yourself. Your mind I have known for some time,' Mr Cupples went on, with a twinkle in his eye that would have done credit to the worldliest of creatures. 'I saw it at once when you were both dining at Sheppard's, and instantly you fold your arms and demand, in a frenzy of intellectual pride, to know who Sheppard is before you will cross the threshold of Sheppard's. I am not going to pander to the vices of the modern mind. Sheppard's is a place where one can dine. I do not know Sheppard. It never occurred to me that Sheppard existed. Probably he is a myth of totemistic origin. All I know is that you can get a bit of saddle of mutton at Sheppard's that has made many an American visitor curse the day that Christopher Columbus was born .... Taxi!' A cab rolled smoothly to the kerb, and the driver received his instructions with a majestic nod.

'Mabel says she knew it before that,' replied Trent, with a slightly crestfallen air. 'And I thought I was acting the part of a person who was not mad about her to the life. Well, I never was any good at dissembling. I shouldn't wonder if even old Peppmuller noticed something through his double convex lenses. But however crazy I may have been as an undeclared suitor,' he went on with a return to vivacity, 'I am going to be much worse now. As for your congratulations, thank you a thousand times, because I know you mean them. You are the sort of uncomfortable brute who would pull a face three feet long if you thought we were making a mistake. By the way, I can't help being an ass tonight; I'm obliged to go on blithering. You must try to bear it. Perhaps it would be easier if I sang you a song--one of your old favourites. What was that song you used always to be singing? Like this, wasn't it?' He accompanied the following stave with a dexterous clog-step on the floor of the cab:

There was an old nigger, and he had a wooden leg. He had no tobacco, no tobacco could he beg. Another old nigger was as cunning as a fox, And he always had tobacco in his old tobacco-box.

'Now for the chorus!

'Yes, he always had tobacco in his old tobacco-box.

'But you're not singing. I thought you would be making the welkin ring."

'I never sang that song in my life,' protested Mr Cupples. 'I never heard it before."

'Are you sure?' enquired Trent doubtfully. 'Well, I suppose I must take your word for it. It is a beautiful song, anyhow: not the whole warbling grove in concert heard can beat it. Somehow it seems to express my feelings at the present moment as nothing else could; it rises unbidden to the lips. Out of the fullness of the heart the mouth speaketh, as the Bishop of Bath and Wells said when listening to a speech of Mr Balfour's.'

'When was that?' asked Mr Cupples.

'On the occasion,' replied Trent, 'of the introduction of the Compulsory Notification of Diseases of Poultry Bill, which ill-fated measure you of course remember. Hullo!' he broke off, as the cab rushed down a side street and swung round a corner into a broad and populous thoroughfare, 'we're there already.' The cab drew up.

'Here we are,' said Trent, as he paid the man, and led Mr Cupples into a long, panelled room set with many tables and filled with a hum of talk. 'This is the house of fulfilment of craving, this is the bower with the roses around it. I

He conferred earnestly with a waiter, while Mr Cupples, in a pleasant meditation, warmed himself before the great fire. 'The wine here,' Trent resumed, as they seated themselves, 'is almost certainly made out of grapes. What
shall we drink?"

Mr Cupples came out of his reverie. 'I think,' he said, 'I will have milk and soda water.'

'Speak lower!' urged Trent. 'The head-waiter has a weak heart, and might hear you. Milk and soda water! Cupples, you may think you have a strong constitution, and I don't say you have not, but I warn you that this habit of mixing drinks has been the death of many a robust man than you. Be wise in time. Fill high the bowl with Samian wine, leave soda to the Turkish hordes. Here comes our food.' He gave another order to the waiter, who ranged the dishes before them and darted away. Trent was, it seemed, a respected customer. 'I have sent,' he said, 'for wine that I know, and I hope you will try it. If you have taken a vow, then in the name of all the teetotal saints drink water, which stands at your elbow, but don't seek a cheap notoriety by demanding milk and soda.'

'I have never taken any pledge,' said Mr Cupples, examining his mutton with a favourable eye. 'I simply don't care about wine. I bought a bottle once and drank it to see what it was like, and it made me ill. But very likely it was bad wine. I will taste some of yours, as it is your dinner, and I do assure you, my dear Trent, I should like to do something unusual to show how strongly I feel on the present occasion. I have not been so delighted for many years. To think,' he reflected aloud as the waiter filled his glass, 'of the Manderson mystery disposed of, the innocent exculpated, and your own and Mabel's happiness crowned--all coming upon me together! I drink to you, my dear friend.' And Mr Cupples took a very small sip of the wine.

'You have a great nature,' said Trent, much moved. 'Your outward semblance doth belie your soul's immensity. I should have expected as soon to see an elephant conducting at the opera as you drinking my health. Dear Cupples! May his beak retain ever that delicate rose-stain!--No, curse it all!' he broke out, surprising a shade of discomfort which flitted over his companion's face as he tasted the wine again. 'I have no business to meddle with your tastes. I apologize. You shall have what you want, even if it causes the head-waiter to perish in his pride.'

When Mr Cupples had been supplied with his monastic drink, and the waiter had retired, Trent looked across the table with significance. 'In this babble of many conversations,' he said, 'we can speak as freely as if we were on a bare hillside. The waiter is whispering soft nothings into the ear of the young woman at the pay-desk. We are alone. What do you think of that interview of this afternoon?' He began to dine with an appetite.

Without pausing in the task of cutting his mutton into very small pieces Mr Cupples replied: 'The most curious feature of it, in my judgement, was the irony of the situation. We both held the clue to that mad hatred of Manderson's which Marlowe found so mysterious. We knew of his jealous obsession; which knowledge we withheld, as was very proper, if only in consideration of Mabel's feelings. Marlowe will never know of what he was suspected by that person. Strange! Nearly all of us, I venture to think, move unconsciously among a network of opinions, often quite erroneous, which other people entertain about us. I remember, for instance, discovering quite by accident some years ago that a number of people of my acquaintance believed me to have been secretly received into the Church of Rome. This absurd fiction was based upon the fact, which in the eyes of many appeared conclusive, that I had expressed myself in talk as favouring the plan of a weekly abstinence from meat. Manderson's belief in regard to his secretary probably rested upon a much slighter ground. It was Mr Bunner, I think you said, who told you of his rooted and apparently hereditary temper of suspicious jealousy .... With regard to Marlowe's story, it appeared to me entirely straightforward, and not, in its essential features, especially remarkable, once we have admitted, as we surely must, that in the case of Manderson we have to deal with a more or less disordered mind.'

Trent laughed loudly. 'I confess,' he said, 'that the affair struck me as a little unusual.

'Only in the development of the details,' argued Mr Cupples. 'What is there abnormal in the essential facts? A madman conceives a crazy suspicion; he hatches a cunning plot against his fancied injurer; it involves his own destruction. Put thus, what is there that any man with the least knowledge of the ways of lunatics would call remarkable? Turn now to Marlowe's proceedings. He finds himself in a perilous position from which, though he is innocent, telling the truth will not save him. Is that an unheard-of situation? He escapes by means of a bold and ingenious piece of deception. That seems to me a thing that might happen every day, and probably does do.' He attacked his now unrecognizable mutton.

'I should like to know,' said Trent, after an alimentary pause in the conversation, 'whether there is anything that ever happened on the face of the earth that you could not represent as quite ordinary and commonplace by such a line of argument as that.'

A gentle smile illuminated Mr Cupples's face. 'You must not suspect me of empty paradox,' he said. 'My meaning will become clearer, perhaps, if I mention some things which do appear to me essentially remarkable. Let me see .... Well, I would call the life history of the liver-fluke, which we owe to the researches of Poulton, an essentially remarkable thing.'

'I am unable to argue the point,' replied Trent. 'Fair science may have smiled upon the liver-fluke's humble birth, but I never even heard it mentioned.'
'It is not, perhaps, an appetizing subject,' said Mr Cupples thoughtfully, 'and I will not pursue it. All I mean is, my dear Trent, that there are really remarkable things going on all round us if we will only see them; and we do our perceptions no credit in regarding as remarkable only those affairs which are surrounded with an accumulation of sensational detail.'

Trent applauded heartily with his knife-handle on the table, as Mr Cupples ceased and refreshed himself with milk and soda water. 'I have not heard you go on like this for years,' he said. 'I believe you must be almost as much above yourself as I am. It is a bad case of the unrest which men miscall delight. But much as I enjoy it, I am not going to sit still and hear the Manderson affair dismissed as commonplace. You may say what you like, but the idea of impersonating Manderson in those circumstances was an extraordinarily ingenious idea.'

'Ingenious--certainly!' replied Mr Cupples. 'Extraordinarily so--no! In those circumstances (your own words) it was really not strange that it should occur to a clever man. It lay almost on the surface of the situation. Marlowe was famous for his imitation of Manderson's voice; he had a talent for acting; he had a chess-player's mind; he knew the ways of the establishment intimately. I grant you that the idea was brilliantly carried out; but everything favoured it. As for the essential idea, I do not place it, as regards ingenuity, in the same class with, for example, the idea of utilizing the force of recoil in a discharged firearm to actuate the mechanism of ejecting and reloading. I do, however, admit, as I did at the outset, that in respect of details the case had unusual features. It developed a high degree of complexity.'

'Did it really strike you in that way?' enquired Trent with desperate sarcasm.

'The affair became complicated,' went on Mr Cupples unmoved, 'because after Marlowe's suspicions were awakened, a second subtle mind came in to interfere with the plans of the first. That sort of duel often happens in business and politics, but less frequently, I imagine, in the world of crime.'

'I should say never,' Trent replied; 'and the reason is, that even the cleverest criminals seldom run to strategic subtlety. When they do, they don't get caught, since clever policemen have if possible less strategic subtlety than the ordinary clever criminal. But that rather deep quality seems very rarely to go with the criminal make-up. Look at Crippen. He was a very clever criminal as they go. He solved the central problem of every clandestine murder, the disposal of the body, with extreme neatness. But how far did he see through the game? The criminal and the policeman are often swift and bold tacticians, but neither of them is good for more than a quite simple plan. After all, it's a rare faculty in any walk of life.'

'One disturbing reflection was left on my mind,' said Mr Cupples, who seemed to have had enough of abstractions for the moment, 'by what we learned today. If Marlowe had suspected nothing and walked into the trap, he would almost certainly have been hanged. Now how often may not a plan to throw the guilt of murder on an innocent person have been practised successfully? There are, I imagine, numbers of cases in which the accused, being found guilty on circumstantial evidence, have died protesting their innocence. I shall never approve again of a death-sentence imposed in a case decided upon such evidence.'

'I never have done so, for my part,' said Trent. 'To hang in such cases seems to me flying in the face of the perfectly obvious and sound principle expressed in the saying that "you never can tell". I agree with the American jurist who lays it down that we should not hang a yellow dog for stealing jam on circumstantial evidence, not even if he has jam all over his nose. As for attempts being made by malevolent persons to fix crimes upon innocent men, of course it is constantly happening. It's a marked feature, for instance, of all systems of rule by coercion, whether in Ireland or Russia or India or Korea; if the police cannot get hold of a man they think dangerous by fair means, they do it by foul. But there's one case in the State Trials that is peculiarly to the point, because not only was it a case of fastening a murder on innocent people, but the plotter did in effect what Manderson did; he gave up his own life in order to secure the death of his victims. Probably you have heard of the Campden Case.'

Mr Cupples confessed his ignorance and took another potato.

'John Masefield has written a very remarkable play about it,' said Trent, 'and if it ever comes on again in London, you should go and see it, if you like having the fan-tods. I have often seen women weeping in an undemonstrative manner at some slab of oleo-margarine sentiment in the theatre. By George! what everlasting smelling-bottle hysterics they ought to have if they saw that play decently acted! Well, the facts were that John Perry accused his mother and brother of murdering a man, and swore he had helped them to do it. He told a story full of elaborate detail, and had an answer to everything, except the curious fact that the body couldn't be found; but the judge, who was probably drunk at the time--this was in Restoration days--made nothing of that. The mother and brother denied the accusation. All three prisoners were found guilty and hanged, purely on John's evidence. Two years after, the man whom they were hanged for murdering came back to Campden. He had been kidnapped by pirates and taken to sea. His disappearance had given John his idea. The point about John is, that his including himself in the accusation, which amounted to suicide, was the thing in his evidence which convinced everybody of its truth. It was so obvious that no man would do himself to death to get somebody else hanged. Now that is exactly the answer which the
prosecution would have made if Marlowe had told the truth. Not one juryman in a million would have believed in the Manderson plot.'

Mr Cupples mused upon this a few moments. 'I have not your acquaintance with that branch of history,' he said at length; 'in fact, I have none at all. But certain recollections of my own childhood return to me in connection with this affair. We know from the things Mabel told you what may be termed the spiritual truth underlying this matter; the insane depth of jealous hatred which Manderson concealed. We can understand that he was capable of such a scheme. But as a rule it is in the task of penetrating to the spiritual truth that the administration of justice breaks down. Sometimes that truth is deliberately concealed, as in Manderson's case. Sometimes, I think, it is concealed because simple people are actually unable to express it, and nobody else divines it. When I was a lad in Edinburgh the whole country went mad about the Sandyford Place murder.'

Trent nodded. 'Mrs M'Lachlan's case. She was innocent right enough.'

'My parents thought so,' said Mr Cupples. 'I thought so myself when I became old enough to read and understand that excessively sordid story. But the mystery of the affair was so dark, and the task of getting at the truth behind the lies told by everybody concerned proved so hopeless, that others were just as fully convinced of the innocence of old James Fleming. All Scotland took sides on the question. It was the subject of debates in Parliament. The press divided into two camps, and raged with a fury I have never seen equalled. Yet it is obvious, is it not? for I see you have read of the case—that if the spiritual truth about that old man could have been known there would have been very little room for doubt in the matter. If what some surmised about his disposition was true, he was quite capable of murdering Jessie M'Pherson and then casting the blame on the poor feeble-minded creature who came so near to suffering the last penalty of the law.'

'Even a commonplace old dotard like Fleming can be an unfathomable mystery to all the rest of the human race,' said Trent, 'and most of all in a court of justice. The law certainly does not shine when it comes to a case requiring much delicacy of perception. It goes wrong easily enough over the Flemings of this world. As for the people with temperaments who get mixed up in legal proceedings, they must feel as if they were in a forest of apes, whether they win or lose. Well, I dare say it's good for their sort to have their noses rubbed in reality now and again. But what would twelve red-faced realities in a jury-box have done to Marlowe? His story would, as he says, have been a great deal worse than no defence at all. It's not as if there were a single piece of evidence in support of his tale. Can't you imagine how the prosecution would tear it to rags? Can't you see the judge simply taking it in his stride when it came to the summing up? And the jury—you've served on juries, I expect—in their room, snorting with indignation over the feebleness of the lie, telling each other it was the clearest case they ever heard of, and that they'd have thought better of him if he hadn't lost his nerve at the crisis, and had cleared off with the swag as he intended. Imagine yourself on that jury, not knowing Marlowe, and trembling with indignation over the feebleness of the lie. How can you be certain? You are generally more careful about terms than that, Cupples.'

Mr Cupples interposed again, folding his hands above his plate. 'I assure you I am far from certain,' he said firmly. 'I said “certain”,' Mr Cupples repeated firmly.

Trent shrugged his shoulders. 'If you really were, after reading my manuscript and discussing the whole thing as we did,' he rejoined, 'then I can only say that you must have totally renounced all trust in the operations of the human reason; an attitude which, while it is bad Christianity and also infernal nonsense, is oddly enough bad Positivism too, unless I misunderstand that system. Why, man—'

'Let me say a word,' Mr Cupples interposed again, folding his hands above his plate. 'I assure you I am far from abandoning reason. I am certain he is innocent, and I always was certain of it, because of something that I know, and knew from the very beginning. You asked me just now to imagine myself on the jury at Marlowe's trial. That would be an unprofitable exercise of the mental powers, because I know that I should be present in another capacity. I should be in the witness-box, giving evidence for the defence. You said just now, “If there were a single piece of evidence in support of his tale.” There is, and it is my evidence. And, he added quietly, 'it is conclusive.' He took up his knife and fork and went contentedly on with his dinner.

The pallor of sudden excitement had turned Trent to marble while Mr Cupples led laboriously up to this statement. At the last word the blood rushed to his face again, and he struck the table with an unnatural laugh. 'It can't be!' he exploded. 'It's something you fancied, something you dreamed after one of those debauches of soda and milk. You can't really mean that all the time I was working on the case down there you knew Marlowe was innocent.'
Mr Cupples, busy with his last mouthful, nodded brightly. He made an end of eating, wiped his sparse moustache, and then leaned forward over the table. 'It's very simple,' he said. 'I shot Manderson myself.'

'I am afraid I startled you,' Trent heard the voice of Mr Cupples say. He forced himself out of his stupefaction like a diver striking upward for the surface, and with a rigid movement raised his glass. But half of the wine splashed upon the cloth, and he put it carefully down again untasted. He drew a deep breath, which was exhaled in a laugh wholly without merriment. 'Go on,' he said.

'It was not murder,' began Mr Cupples, slowly measuring off inches with a fork on the edge of the table. 'I will tell you the whole story. On that Sunday night I was taking my before-bedtime constitutional, having set out from the hotel about a quarter past ten. I went along the field path that runs behind White Gables, cutting off the great curve of the road, and came out on the road nearly opposite that gate that is just by the eighth hole on the golf-course. Then I turned in there, meaning to walk along the turf to the edge of the cliff, and go back that way. I had only gone a few steps when I heard the car coming, and then I heard it stop near the gate. I saw Manderson at once. Do you remember my telling you I had seen him once alive after our quarrel in front of the hotel? Well, this was the time. You asked me if I had, and I did not care to tell a falsehood.'

A slight groan came from Trent. He drank a little wine, and said stonily, 'Go on, please.'

'It was, as you know,' pursued Mr Cupples, 'a moonlight night, but I was in shadow under the trees by the stone wall, and anyhow they could not suppose there was any one near them. I heard all that passed just as Marlowe has narrated it to us, and I saw the car go off towards Bishopsbridge. I did not see Manderson's face as it went, because his back was to me, but he shook the back of his left hand at the car with extraordinary violence, greatly to my amazement. Then I waited for him to go back to White Gables, as I did not want to meet him again. But he did not go. He opened the gate through which I had just passed, and he stood there on the turf of the green, quite still. His head was bent, his arms hung at his sides, and he looked some-how--rigid. For a few moments he remained in this tense attitude, then all of a sudden his right arm moved swiftly, and his hand was at the pocket of his overcoat. I saw his face raised in the moonlight, the teeth bared, and the eyes glittering, and all at once I knew that the man was not sane. Almost as quickly as that flashed across my mind, something else flashed in the moonlight. He held the pistol before him, pointing at his breast.

'Now I may say here I shall always be doubtful whether Manderson really meant to kill himself then. Marlowe naturally thinks so, knowing nothing of my intervention. But I think it quite likely he only meant to wound himself, and to charge Marlowe with attempted murder and robbery.

'At that moment, however, I assumed it was suicide. Before I knew what I was doing I had leapt out of the shadows and seized his arm. He shook me off with a furious snarling noise, giving me a terrific blow in the chest, and presenting the revolver at my head. But I seized his wrists before he could fire, and clung with all my strength--you remember how bruised and scratched they were. I knew I was fighting for my own life now, for murder was in his eyes. We struggled like two beasts, without an articulate word, I holding his pistol-hand down and keeping a grip on the other. I never dreamed that I had the strength for such an encounter. Then, with a perfectly instinctive movement--I never knew I meant to do it--I flung away his free hand and clutched like lightning at the weapon, tearing it from his fingers. By a miracle it did not go off. I darted back a few steps, he sprang at my throat like a wild cat, and I fired blindly in his face. He would have been about a yard away, I suppose. His knees gave way instantly, and he fell in a heap on the turf.

'I flung the pistol down and bent over him. The heart's action ceased under my hand. I knelt there staring, struck motionless; and I don't know how long it was before I heard the noise of the car returning.

'Trent, all the time that Marlowe paced that green, with the moonlight on his white and working face, I was within a few yards of him, crouching in the shadow of the furze by the ninth tee. I dared not show myself. I was thinking. My public quarrel with Manderson the same morning was, I suspected, the talk of the hotel. I assure you that every horrible possibility of the situation for me had rushed across my mind the moment I saw Manderson fall. I became cunning. I knew what I must do. I must get back to the hotel as fast as I could, get in somehow unperceived, and play a part to save myself. I must never tell a word to any one. Of course I was assuming that Marlowe would tell every one how he had found the body. I knew he would suppose it was suicide; I thought every one would suppose so.

'When Marlowe began at last to lift the body, I stole away down the wall and got out into the road by the clubhouse, where he could not see me. I felt perfectly cool and collected. I crossed the road, climbed the fence, and ran across the meadow to pick up the field path I had come by that runs to the hotel behind White Gables. I got back to the hotel very much out of breath.'

'Out of breath,' repeated Trent mechanically, still staring at his companion as if hypnotized.

'I had had a sharp run,' Mr Cupples reminded him. 'Well, approaching the hotel from the back I could see into the writing-room through the open window. There was nobody in there, so I climbed over the sill, walked to the bell and
rang it, and then sat down to write a letter I had meant to write the next day. I saw by the clock that it was a little past eleven. When the waiter answered the bell I asked for a glass of milk and a postage stamp. Soon afterwards I went up to bed. But I could not sleep.

Mr Cupples, having nothing more to say, ceased speaking. He looked in mild surprise at Trent, who now sat silent, supporting his bent head in his hands.

‘He could not sleep,’ murmured Trent at last in a hollow tone. ‘A frequent result of over-exertion during the day. Nothing to be alarmed about.’ He was silent again, then looked up with a pale face. ‘Cupples, I am cured. I will never touch a crime-mystery again. The Manderson affair shall be Philip Trent's last case. His high-blown pride at length breaks under him.’ Trent's smile suddenly returned. ‘I could have borne everything but that last revelation of the impotence of human reason. Cupples, I have absolutely nothing left to say, except this: you have beaten me. I drink your health in a spirit of self-abasement. And you shall pay for the dinner.’
THE THIRTY-NINE STEPS

by JOHN BUCHAN

TO

THOMAS ARTHUR NELSON
(LOTHIAN AND BORDER HORSE)

My Dear Tommy,

You and I have long cherished an affection for that elemental type of tale which Americans call the 'dime novel' and which we know as the 'shocker'--the romance where the incidents defy the probabilities, and march just inside the borders of the possible. During an illness last winter I exhausted my store of those aids to cheerfulness, and was driven to write one for myself. This little volume is the result, and I should like to put your name on it in memory of our long friendship, in the days when the wildest fictions are so much less improbable than the facts.

J.B.

CHAPTER ONE The Man Who Died

I returned from the City about three o'clock on that May afternoon pretty well disgusted with life. I had been three months in the Old Country, and was fed up with it. If anyone had told me a year ago that I would have been feeling like that I should have laughed at him; but there was the fact. The weather made me liverish, the talk of the ordinary Englishman made me sick, I couldn't get enough exercise, and the amusements of London seemed as flat as soda-water that has been standing in the sun. 'Richard Hannay,' I kept telling myself, 'you have got into the wrong ditch, my friend, and you had better climb out.'

It made me bite my lips to think of the plans I had been building up those last years in Bulawayo. I had got my pile--not one of the big ones, but good enough for me; and I had figured out all kinds of ways of enjoying myself. My father had brought me out from Scotland at the age of six, and I had never been home since; so England was a sort of Arabian Nights to me, and I counted on stopping there for the rest of my days.

But from the first I was disappointed with it. In about a week I was tired of seeing sights, and in less than a month I had had enough of restaurants and theatres and race-meetings. I had no real pal to go about with, which probably explains things. Plenty of people invited me to their houses, but they didn't seem much interested in me. They would fling me a question or two about South Africa, and then get on their own affairs. A lot of Imperialist ladies asked me to tea to meet schoolmasters from New Zealand and editors from Vancouver, and that was the dismaldest business of all. Here was I, thirty-seven years old, sound in wind and limb, with enough money to have a good time, yawning my head off all day. I had just about settled to clear out and get back to the veld, for I was the best bored man in the United Kingdom.

That afternoon I had been worrying my brokers about investments to give my mind something to work on, and on my way home I turned into my club--rather a pot-house, which took in Colonial members. I had a long drink, and read the evening papers. They were full of the row in the Near East, and there was an article about Karolides, the Greek Premier. I rather fancied the chap. From all accounts he seemed the one big man in the show; and he played a straight game too, which was more than could be said for most of them. I gathered that they hated him pretty blackly in Berlin and Vienna, but that we were going to stick by him, and one paper said that he was the only barrier between Europe and Armageddon. I remember wondering if I could get a job in those parts. It struck me that Albania was the sort of place that might keep a man from yawning.

About six o'clock I went home, dressed, dined at the Cafe Royal, and turned into a music-hall. It was a silly show, all capering women and monkey-faced men, and I did not stay long. The night was fine and clear as I walked back to the flat I had hired near Portland Place. The crowd surged past me on the pavements, busy and chattering, and I envied the people for having something to do. These shop-girls and clerks and dandies and policemen had some interest in life that kept them going. I gave half-a-crown to a beggar because I saw him yawn; he was a fellow-sufferer. At Oxford Circus I looked up into the spring sky and I made a vow. I would give the Old Country another day to fit me into something; if nothing happened, I would take the next boat for the Cape.

My flat was the first floor in a new block behind Langham Place. There was a common staircase, with a porter and a liftman at the entrance, but there was no restaurant or anything of that sort, and each flat was quite shut off from the others. I hate servants on the premises, so I had a fellow to look after me who came in by the day. He arrived before eight o'clock every morning and used to depart at seven, for I never dined at home.

I was just fitting my key into the door when I noticed a man at my elbow. I had not seen him approach, and the sudden appearance made me start. He was a slim man, with a short brown beard and small, gimletly blue eyes. I
recognized him as the occupant of a flat on the top floor, with whom I had passed the time of day on the stairs.

'Can I speak to you?' he said. 'May I come in for a minute?' He was steadying his voice with an effort, and his hand was pawing my arm.

I got my door open and motioned him in. No sooner was he over the threshold than he made a dash for my back room, where I used to smoke and write my letters. Then he bolted back.

'Is the door locked?' he asked feverishly, and he fastened the chain with his own hand.

'I'm very sorry,' he said humbly. 'It's a mighty liberty, but you looked the kind of man who would understand.

I've had you in my mind all this week when things got troublesome. Say, will you do me a good turn?'

'I'll listen to you,' I said. 'That's all I'll promise.' I was getting worried by the antics of this nervous little chap.

There was a tray of drinks on a table beside him, from which he filled himself a stiff whisky-and-soda. He drank it off in three gulps, and cracked the glass as he set it down.

'Pardon,' he said, 'I'm a bit rattled tonight. You see, I happen at this moment to be dead.'

I sat down in an armchair and lit my pipe.

'A smile flickered over his drawn face. 'I'm not mad--yet. Say, Sir, I've been watching you, and I reckon you're a cool customer. I reckon, too, you're an honest man, and not afraid of playing a bold hand. I'm going to confide in you. I need help worse than any man ever needed it, and I want to know if I can count you in.'

'Get on with your yarn,' I said, 'and I'll tell you.'

He seemed to brace himself for a great effort, and then started on the queerest rigmarole. I didn't get hold of it at first, and I had to stop and ask him questions. But here is the gist of it:

He was an American, from Kentucky, and after college, being pretty well off, he had started out to see the world. He wrote a bit, and acted as war correspondent for a Chicago paper, and spent a year or two in South-Eastern Europe. I gathered that he was a fine linguist, and had got to know pretty well the society in those parts. He spoke familiarly of many names that I remembered to have seen in the newspapers.

He had played about with politics, he told me, at first for the interest of them, and then because he couldn't help himself. I read him as a sharp, restless fellow, who always wanted to get down to the roots of things. He got a little further down than he wanted.

I am giving you what he told me as well as I could make it out. Away behind all the Governments and the armies there was a big subterranean movement going on, engineered by very dangerous people. He had come on it by accident; it fascinated him; he went further, and then he got caught. I gathered that most of the people in it were the sort of educated anarchists that make revolutions, but that beside them there were financiers who were playing for money. A clever man can make big profits on a falling market, and it suited the book of both classes to set Europe by the ears.

He told me some queer things that explained a lot that had puzzled me--things that happened in the Balkan War, how one state suddenly came out on top, why alliances were made and broken, why certain men disappeared, and where the sinews of war came from. The aim of the whole conspiracy was to get Russia and Germany at loggerheads.

When I asked why, he said that the anarchist lot thought it would give them their chance. Everything would be in the melting-pot, and they looked to see a new world emerge. The capitalists would rake in the shekels, and make fortunes by buying up wreckage. Capital, he said, had no conscience and no fatherland. Besides, the Jew was behind it, and the Jew hated Russia worse than hell.

'Do you wonder?' he cried. 'For three hundred years they have been persecuted, and this is the return match for the pogroms. The Jew is everywhere, but you have to go far down the backstairs to find him. Take any big Teutonic business concern. If you have dealings with it the first man you meet is Prince von und Zu Something, an elegant young man who talks Eton-and-Harrow English. But he cuts no ice. If your business is big, you get behind him and find a prognathous Westphalian with a retreating brow and the manners of a hog. He is the German business man that gives your English papers the shakes. But if you're on the biggest kind of job and are bound to get to the real boss, ten to one you are brought up against a little white-faced Jew in a bath-chair with an eye like a rattlesnake. Yes, Sir, he is the man who is ruling the world just now, and he has his knife in the Empire of the Tzar, because his aunt was outraged and his father flogged in some one-horse location on the Volga.'

I could not help saying that his Jew-anarchists seemed to have got left behind a little.

'Yes and no,' he said. 'They won up to a point, but they struck a bigger thing than money, a thing that couldn't be bought, the old elemental fighting instincts of man. If you're going to be killed you invent some kind of flag and country to fight for, and if you survive you get to love the thing. Those foolish devils of soldiers have found something they care for, and that has upset the pretty plan laid in Berlin and Vienna. But my friends haven't played their last card by a long sight. They've gotten the ace up their sleeves, and unless I can keep alive for a month they
are going to play it and win.'

'But I thought you were dead,' I put in.

'MORS JANUA VITAE,' he smiled. (I recognized the quotation: it was about all the Latin I knew.) 'I'm coming to that, but I've got to put you wise about a lot of things first. If you read your newspaper, I guess you know the name of Constantine Karolides?'

I sat up at that, for I had been reading about him that very afternoon.

'He is the man that has wrecked all their games. He is the one big brain in the whole show, and he happens also to be an honest man. Therefore he has been marked down these twelve months past. I found that out—not that it was difficult, for any fool could guess as much. But I found out the way they were going to get him, and that knowledge was deadly. That's why I have had to decease.'

He had another drink, and I mixed it for him myself, for I was getting interested in the beggar.

'They can't get him in his own land, for he has a bodyguard of Epirotes that would skin their grandmothers. But on the 15th day of June he is coming to this city. The British Foreign Office has taken to having International tea-parties, and the biggest of them is due on that date. Now Karolides is reckoned the principal guest, and if my friends have their way he will never return to his admiring countrymen.'

'That's simple enough, anyhow,' I said. 'You can warn him and keep him at home.'

'And play their game?' he asked sharply. 'If he does not come they win, for he's the only man that can straighten out the tangle. And if his Government are warned he won't come, for he does not know how big the stakes will be on June the 15th.'

'What about the British Government?' I said. 'They're not going to let their guests be murdered. Tip them the wink, and they'll take extra precautions.'

'No good. They might stuff your city with plain-clothes detectives and double the police and Constantine would still be a doomed man. My friends are not playing this game for candy. They want a big occasion for the taking off, with the eyes of all Europe on it. He'll be murdered by an Austrian, and there'll be plenty of evidence to show the connivance of the big folk in Vienna and Berlin. It will all be an infernal lie, of course, but the case will look black enough to the world. I'm not talking hot air, my friend. I happen to know every detail of the hellish contrivance, and I can tell you it will be the most finished piece of blackguardism since the Borgias. But it's not going to come off if there's a certain man who knows the wheels of the business alive right here in London on the 15th day of June. And that man is going to be your servant, Franklin P. Scudder.'

I was getting to like the little chap. His jaw had shut like a rat-trap, and there was the fire of battle in his gimlety eyes. If he was spinning me a yarn he could act up to it.

'Where did you find out this story?' I asked.

'I got the first hint in an inn on the Achensee in Tyrol. That set me inquiring, and I collected my other clues in a fur-shop in the Galician quarter of Buda, in a Strangers' Club in Vienna, and in a little bookshop off the Racknitstrasse in Leipsic. I completed my evidence ten days ago in Paris. I can't tell you the details now, for it's something of a history. When I was quite sure in my own mind I judged it my business to disappear, and I reached this city by a mighty queer circuit. I left Paris a dandified young French-American, and I sailed from Hamburg a Jew diamond merchant. In Norway I was an English student of Ibsen collecting materials for lectures, but when I left Bergen I was a cinema-man with special ski films. And I came here from Leith with a lot of pulp-wood propositions in my pocket to put before the London newspapers. Till yesterday I thought I had muddied my trail some, and was feeling pretty happy. Then ...'

The recollection seemed to upset him, and he gulped down some more whisky.

'Then I saw a man standing in the street outside this block. I used to stay close in my room all day, and only slip out after dark for an hour or two. I watched him for a bit from my window, and I thought I recognized him ... He came in and spoke to the porter ... When I came back from my walk last night I found a card in my letter-box. It bore the name of the man I want least to meet on God's earth.'

I think that the look in my companion's eyes, the sheer naked scare on his face, completed my conviction of his honesty. My own voice sharpened a bit as I asked him what he did next.

'I realized that I was bottled as sure as a pickled herring, and that there was only one way out. I had to die. If my pursuers knew I was dead they would go to sleep again.'

'How did you manage it?'

'I told the man that valets me that I was feeling pretty bad, and I got myself up to look like death. That wasn't difficult, for I'm no slouch at disguises. Then I got a corpse—you can always get a body in London if you know where to go for it. I fetched it back in a trunk on the top of a four-wheeler, and I had to be assisted upstairs to my room. You see I had to pile up some evidence for the inquest. I went to bed and got my man to mix me a sleeping-draught, and then told him to clear out. He wanted to fetch a doctor, but I swore some and said I couldn't abide
leeches. When I was left alone I started in to fake up that corpse. He was my size, and I judged had perished from too much alcohol, so I put some spirits handy about the place. The jaw was the weak point in the likeness, so I blew it away with a revolver. I daresay there will be somebody tomorrow to swear to having heard a shot, but there are no neighbours on my floor, and I guessed I could risk it. So I left the body in bed dressed up in my pyjamas, with a revolver lying on the bed-clothes and a considerable mess around. Then I got into a suit of clothes I had kept waiting for emergencies. I didn't dare to shave for fear of leaving tracks, and besides, it wasn't any kind of use my trying to get into the streets. I had had you in my mind all day, and there seemed nothing to do but to make an appeal to you. I watched from my window till I saw you come home, and then slipped down the stair to meet you ... There, Sir, I guess you know about as much as me of this business.'

He sat blinking like an owl, fluttering with nerves and yet desperately determined. By this time I was pretty well convinced that he was going straight with me. It was the wildest sort of narrative, but I had heard in my time many steep tales which had turned out to be true, and I had made a practice of judging the man rather than the story. If he had wanted to get a location in my flat, and then cut my throat, he would have pitched a milder yarn.

'Hand me your key,' I said, 'and I'll take a look at the corpse. Excuse my caution, but I'm bound to verify a bit if I can.'

He shook his head mournfully. 'I reckoned you'd ask for that, but I haven't got it. It's on my chain on the dressing-table. I had to leave it behind, for I couldn't leave any clues to breed suspicions. The gentry who are after me are pretty bright-eyed citizens. You'll have to take me on trust for the night, and tomorrow you'll get proof of the corpse business right enough.'

I thought for an instant or two. 'Right. I'll trust you for the night. I'll lock you into this room and keep the key. Just one word, Mr Scudder. I believe you're straight, but if so be you are not I should warn you that I'm a handy man with a gun.'

'Sure,' he said, jumping up with some briskness. 'I haven't the privilege of your name, Sir, but let me tell you that you're a white man. I'll thank you to lend me a razor.'

I took him into my bedroom and turned him loose. In half an hour's time a figure came out that I scarcely recognized. Only his gimlety, hungry eyes were the same. He was shaved clean, his hair was parted in the middle, and he had cut his eyebrows. Further, he carried himself as if he had been drilled, and was the very model, even to the brown complexion, of some British officer who had had a long spell in India. He had a monocle, too, which he stuck in his eye, and every trace of the American had gone out of his speech.

'My hat! Mr Scudder--' I stammered.

'Not Mr Scudder,' he corrected; 'Captain Theophilus Digby, of the 40th Gurkhas, presently home on leave. I'll thank you to remember that, Sir.'

I made him up a bed in my smoking-room and sought my own couch, more cheerful than I had been for the past month. Things did happen occasionally, even in this God-forgotten metropolis.

I woke next morning to hear my man, Paddock, making the deuce of a row at the smoking-room door. Paddock was a fellow I had done a good turn to out on the Selakwe, and I had inspanned him as my servant as soon as I got to England. He had about as much gift of the gab as a hippopotamus, and was not a great hand at valeting, but I knew I could count on his loyalty.

'Stop that row, Paddock,' I said. 'There's a friend of mine, Captain--Captain' (I couldn't remember the name) 'dossing down in there. Get breakfast for two and then come and speak to me.'

I told Paddock a fine story about how my friend was a great swell, with his nerves pretty bad from overwork, who wanted absolute rest and stillness. Nobody had got to know he was here, or he would be besieged by communications from the India Office and the Prime Minister and his cure would be ruined. I am bound to say Scudder played up splendidly when he came to breakfast. He fixed Paddock with his eyeglass, just like a British officer, asked him about the Boer War, and slung out at me a lot of stuff about imaginary pals. Paddock couldn't learn to call me 'Sir', but he 'sirred' Scudder as if his life depended on it.

I left him with the newspaper and a box of cigars, and went down to the City till luncheon. When I got back the lift-man had an important face.

'Nawsty business 'ere this morning, Sir. Gent in No. 15 been and shot 'isself. They've just took 'im to the mortuary. The police are up there now.'

I ascended to No. 15, and found a couple of bobbies and an inspector busy making an examination. I asked a few idiotic questions, and they soon kicked me out. Then I found the man that had valeted Scudder, and pumped him, but I could see he suspected nothing. He was a whining fellow with a churchyard face, and half-a-crown went far to console him.

I attended the inquest next day. A partner of some publishing firm gave evidence that the deceased had brought him wood-pulp propositions, and had been, he believed, an agent of an American business. The jury found it a case
of suicide while of unsound mind, and the few effects were handed over to the American Consul to deal with. I gave Scudder a full account of the affair, and it interested him greatly. He said he wished he could have attended the inquest, for he reckoned it would be about as spicy as to read one's own obituary notice.

The first two days he stayed with me in that back room he was very peaceful. He read and smoked a bit, and made a heap of jottings in a note-book, and every night we had a game of chess, at which he beat me hollow. I think he was nursing his nerves back to health, for he had had a pretty trying time. But on the third day I could see he was beginning to get restless. He fixed up a list of the days till June 15th, and ticked each off with a red pencil, making remarks in shorthand against them. I would find him sunk in a brown study, with his sharp eyes abstracted, and after those spells of meditation he was apt to be very despondent.

Then I could see that he began to get edgy again. He listened for little noises, and was always asking me if Paddock could be trusted. Once or twice he got very peevish, and apologized for it. I didn't blame him. I made every allowance, for he had taken on a fairly stiff job.

It was not the safety of his own skin that troubled him, but the success of the scheme he had planned. That little man was clean grit all through, without a soft spot in him. One night he was very solemn.

'Say, Hannay,' he said, 'I judge I should let you a bit deeper into this business. I should hate to go out without leaving somebody else to put up a fight.' And he began to tell me in detail what I had only heard from him vaguely.

I did not give him very close attention. The fact is, I was more interested in his own adventures than in his high politics. I reckoned that Karolides and his affairs were not my business, leaving all that to him. So a lot that he said slipped clean out of my memory. I remember that he was very clear that the danger to Karolides would not begin till he had got to London, and would come from the very highest quarters, where there would be no thought of suspicion. He mentioned the name of a woman--Julia Czechenyi--as having something to do with the danger. She would be the decoy, I gathered, to get Karolides out of the care of his guards. He talked, too, about a Black Stone and a man that lisped in his speech, and he described very particularly somebody that he never referred to without a shudder--an old man with a young voice who could hood his eyes like a hawk.

He spoke a good deal about death, too. He was mortally anxious about winning through with his job, but he didn't care a rush for his life.

'I reckon it's like going to sleep when you are pretty well tired out, and waking to find a summer day with the scent of hay coming in at the window. I used to thank God for such mornings way back in the Blue-Grass country, and I guess I'll thank Him on the other side of Jordan.'

Next day he was much more cheerful, and read the life of Stonewall Jackson much of the time. I went out to dinner with a mining engineer I had got to see on business, and came back about half-past ten in time for our game of chess before turning in.

I had a cigar in my mouth, I remember, as I pushed open the smoking-room door. The lights were not lit, which struck me as odd. I wondered if Scudder had turned in already.

I snapped the switch, but there was nobody there. Then I saw something in the far corner which made me drop my cigar and fall into a cold sweat.

My guest was lying sprawled on his back. There was a long knife through his heart which skewered him to the floor.

CHAPTER TWO The Milkman Sets Out on his Travels

I sat down in an armchair and felt very sick. That lasted for maybe five minutes, and was succeeded by a fit of the horrors. The poor staring white face on the floor was more than I could bear, and I managed to get a table-cloth and cover it. Then I staggered to a cupboard, found the brandy and swallowed several mouthfuls. I had seen men die violently before; indeed I had killed a few myself in the Matabele War; but this cold-blooded indoor business was different. Still I managed to pull myself together. I looked at my watch, and saw that it was half-past ten.

An idea seized me, and I went over the flat with a small-tooth comb. There was nobody there, nor any trace of anybody, but I shuttered and bolted all the windows and put the chain on the door. By this time my wits were beginning to get restless. It took me about an hour to figure the thing out, and I did not hurry, for, unless the murderer came back, I had till about six o'clock in the morning for my cogitations.

I was in the soup--that was pretty clear. Any shadow of a doubt I might have had about the truth of Scudder's tale was now gone. The proof of it was lying under the table-cloth. The men who knew that he knew what he knew had found him, and had taken the best way to make certain of his silence. Yes; but he had been in my rooms four days, and his enemies must have reckoned that he had confided in me. So I would be the next to go. It might be that very night, or next day, or the day after, but my number was up all right.

Then suddenly I thought of another probability. Supposing I went out now and called in the police, or went to bed and let Paddock find the body and call them in the morning. What kind of a story was I to tell about Scudder? I had lied to Paddock about him, and the whole thing looked desperately fishy. If I made a clean breast of it and told
the police everything he had told me, they would simply laugh at me. The odds were a thousand to one that I would be charged with the murder, and the circumstantial evidence was strong enough to hang me. Few people knew me in England; I had no real pal who could come forward and swear to my character. Perhaps that was what those secret enemies were playing for. They were clever enough for anything, and an English prison was as good a way of getting rid of me till after June 15th as a knife in my chest.

Besides, if I told the whole story, and by any miracle was believed, I would be playing their game. Karolides would stay at home, which was what they wanted. Somehow or other the sight of Scudder's dead face had made me a passionate believer in his scheme. He was gone, but he had taken me into his confidence, and I was pretty well bound to carry on his work.

You may think this ridiculous for a man in danger of his life, but that was the way I looked at it. I am an ordinary sort of fellow, not braver than other people, but I hate to see a good man downed, and that long knife would not be the end of Scudder if I could play the game in his place.

It took me an hour or two to think this out, and by that time I had come to a decision. I must vanish somehow, and keep vanished till the end of the second week in June. Then I must somehow find a way to get in touch with the Government people and tell them what Scudder had told me. I wished to Heaven he had told me more, and that I had listened more carefully to the little he had told me. I knew nothing but the barest facts. There was a big risk that, even if I weathered the other dangers, I would not be believed in the end. I must take my chance of that, and hope that something might happen which would confirm my tale in the eyes of the Government.

My first job was to keep going for the next three weeks. It was now the 24th day of May, and that meant twenty days of hiding before I could venture to approach the powers that be. I reckoned that two sets of people would be looking for me--Scudder's enemies to put me out of existence, and the police, who would want me for Scudder's murder. It was going to be a giddy hunt, and it was queer how the prospect comforted me. I had been slack so long that almost any chance of activity was welcome. When I had to sit alone with that corpse and wait on Fortune I was no better than a crushed worm, but if my neck's safety was to hang on my own wits I was prepared to be cheerful about it.

My next thought was whether Scudder had any papers about him to give me a better clue to the business. I drew back the table-cloth and searched his pockets, for I had no longer any shrinking from the body. The face was wonderfully calm for a man who had been struck down in a moment. There was nothing in the breast-pocket, and only a few loose coins and a cigar-holder in the waistcoat. The trousers held a little penknife and some silver, and the side pocket of his jacket contained an old crocodile-skin cigar-case. There was no sign of the little black book in which I had seen him making notes. That had no doubt been taken by his murderer.

But as I looked up from my task I saw that some drawers had been pulled out in the writing-table. Scudder would never have left them in that state, for he was the tidiest of mortals. Someone must have been searching for something--perhaps for the pocket-book.

I went round the flat and found that everything had been ransacked--the inside of books, drawers, cupboards, boxes, even the pockets of the clothes in my wardrobe, and the sideboard in the dining-room. There was no trace of the book. Most likely the enemy had found it, but they had not found it on Scudder's body.

Then I got out an atlas and looked at a big map of the British Isles. My notion was to get off to some wild district, where my veldcraft would be of some use to me, for I would be like a trapped rat in a city. I considered that Scotland would be best, for my people were Scotch and I could pass anywhere as an ordinary Scotsman. I had half an idea at first to be a German tourist, for my father had had German partners, and I had been brought up to speak the tongue pretty fluently, not to mention having put in three years prospecting for copper in German Damaraland. But I calculated that it would be less conspicuous to be a Scot, and less in a line with what the police might know of my past. I fixed on Galloway as the best place to go. It was the nearest wild part of Scotland, so far as I could figure it out, and from the look of the map was not over thick with population.

A search in Bradshaw informed me that a train left St Pancras at 7.10, which would land me at any Galloway station in the late afternoon. That was well enough, but a more important matter was how I was to make my way to St Pancras, for I was pretty certain that Scudder's friends would be watching outside. This puzzled me for a bit; then I had an inspiration, on which I went to bed and slept for two troubled hours.

I got up at four and opened my bedroom shutters. The faint light of a fine summer morning was flooding the skies, and the sparrows had begun to chatter. I had a great revulsion of feeling, and felt a God-forgotten fool. My inclination was to let things slide, and trust to the British police taking a reasonable view of my case. But as I reviewed the situation I could find no arguments to bring against my decision of the previous night, so with a wry mouth I resolved to go on with my plan. I was not feeling in any particular funk; only disinclined to go looking for trouble, if you understand me.

I hunted out a well-used tweed suit, a pair of strong nailed boots, and a flannel shirt with a collar. Into my
pockets I stuffed a spare shirt, a cloth cap, some handkerchiefs, and a tooth-brush. I had drawn a good sum in gold from the bank two days before, in case Scudder should want money, and I took fifty pounds of it in sovereigns in a belt which I had brought back from Rhodesia. That was about all I wanted. Then I had a bath, and cut my moustache, which was long and drooping, into a short stubbly fringe.

Now came the next step. Paddock used to arrive punctually at 7.30 and let himself in with a latch-key. But about twenty minutes to seven, as I knew from bitter experience, the milkman turned up with a great clatter of cans, and deposited my share outside my door. I had seen that milkman sometimes when I had gone out for an early ride. He was a young man about my own height, with an ill-nourished moustache, and he wore a white overall. On him I staked all my chances.

I went into the darkened smoking-room where the rays of morning light were beginning to creep through the shutters. There I breakfasted off a whisky-and-soda and some biscuits from the cupboard. By this time it was getting on for six o'clock. I put a pipe in My Pocket and filled my pouch from the tobacco jar on the table by the fireplace.

As I poked into the tobacco my fingers touched something hard, and I drew out Scudder's little black pocket-book ...

That seemed to me a good omen. I lifted the cloth from the body and was amazed at the peace and dignity of the dead face. 'Goodbye, old chap,' I said; 'I am going to do my best for you. Wish me well, wherever you are.'

Then I hung about in the hall waiting for the milkman. That was the worst part of the business, for I was fairly choking to get out of doors. Six-thirty passed, then six-forty, but still he did not come. The fool had chosen this day of all days to be late.

At one minute after the quarter to seven I heard the rattle of the cans outside. I opened the front door, and there was my man, singling out my cans from a bunch he carried and whistling through his teeth. He jumped a bit at the sight of me.

'Come in here a moment,' I said. 'I want a word with you.' And I led him into the dining-room.

'I reckon you're a bit of a sportsman,' I said, 'and I want you to do me a service. Lend me your cap and overall for ten minutes, and here's a sovereign for you.'

His eyes opened at the sight of the gold, and he grinned broadly. 'Wot's the gyme?' he asked.

'A bet,' I said. 'I haven't time to explain, but to win it I've got to be a milkman for the next ten minutes. All you've got to do is to stay here till I come back. You'll be a bit late, but nobody will complain, and you'll have that quid for yourself.'

'Right-o!' he said cheerily. 'I ain't the man to spoil a bit of sport. 'Ere's the rig, guv'nor.'

I stuck on his flat blue hat and his white overall, picked up the cans, banged my door, and went whistling downstairs. The porter at the foot told me to shut my jaw, which sounded as if my make-up was adequate.

At first I thought there was nobody in the street. Then I caught sight of a policeman a hundred yards down, and a loafer shuffling past on the other side. Some impulse made me raise my eyes to the house opposite, and there at a first-floor window was a face. As the loafer passed he looked up, and I fancied a signal was exchanged.

I crossed the street, whistling gaily and imitating the jaunty swing of the milkman. Then I took the first side street, and went up a left-hand turning which led past a bit of vacant ground. There was no one in the little street, so I dropped the milk-cans inside the hoarding and sent the cap and overall after them. I had only just put on my cloth cap when a postman came round the corner. I gave him good morning and he answered me unsuspiciously. At the moment the clock of a neighbouring church struck the hour of seven.

There was not a second to spare. As soon as I got to Euston Road I took to my heels and ran. The clock at Euston Station showed five minutes past the hour. At St Pancras I had no time to take a ticket, let alone that I had not settled upon my destination. A porter told me the platform, and as I entered it I saw the train already in motion. Two station officials blocked the way, but I dodged them and clambered into the last carriage.

Three minutes later, as we were roaring through the northern tunnels, an irate guard interviewed me. He wrote out for me a ticket to Newton-Stewart, a name which had suddenly come back to my memory, and he conducted me from the first-class compartment where I had ensconced myself to a third-class smoker, occupied by a sailor and a stout woman with a child. He went off grumbling, and as I mopped my brow I observed to my companions in my broadest Scots that it was a sore job catching trains. I had already entered upon my part.

'The impidence o' that gyaird!' said the lady bitterly. 'He needit a Scotch tongue to pit him in his place. He was complainin' o' this wean no haein' a ticket and her no fower till August twalmonth, and he was objectin' to this gentleman spittin'.'

The sailor morosely agreed, and I started my new life in an atmosphere of protest against authority. I reminded myself that a week ago I had been finding the world dull.

CHAPTER THREE The Adventure of the Literary Innkeeper

I had a solemn time travelling north that day. It was fine May weather, with the hawthorn flowering on every
hedge, and I asked myself why, when I was still a free man, I had stayed on in London and not got the good of this heavenly country. I didn't dare face the restaurant car, but I got a luncheon-basket at Leeds and shared it with the fat woman. Also I got the morning's papers, with news about starters for the Derby and the beginning of the cricket season, and some paragraphs about how Balkan affairs were settling down and a British squadron was going to Kiel.

When I had done with them I got out Scudder's little black pocket-book and studied it. It was pretty well filled with jottings, chiefly figures, though now and then a name was printed in. For example, I found the words 'Hofgaard', 'Luneville', and 'Avocado' pretty often, and especially the word 'Pavia'.

Now I was certain that Scudder never did anything without a reason, and I was pretty sure that there was a cypher in all this. That is a subject which has always interested me, and I did a bit at it myself once as intelligence officer at Delagoa Bay during the Boer War. I have a head for things like chess and puzzles, and I used to reckon myself pretty good at finding out cyphers. This one looked like the numerical kind where sets of figures correspond to the letters of the alphabet, but any fairly shrewd man can find the clue to that sort after an hour or two's work, and I didn't think Scudder would have been content with anything so easy. So I fastened on the printed words, for you can make a pretty good numerical cypher if you have a key word which gives you the sequence of the letters.

I tried for hours, but none of the words answered. Then I fell asleep and woke at Dumfries just in time to bundle out and get into the slow Galloway train. There was a man on the platform whose looks I didn't like, but he never glanced at me, and when I caught sight of myself in the mirror of an automatic machine I didn't wonder. With my brown face, my old tweeds, and my slouch, I was the very model of one of the hill farmers who were crowding into the third-class carriages.

I travelled with half a dozen in an atmosphere of shag and clay pipes. They had come from the weekly market, and their mouths were full of prices. I heard accounts of how the lambing had gone up the Cairn and the Deuch and a dozen other mysterious waters. Above half the men had lunched heavily and were highly flavoured with whisky, but they took no notice of me. We rumbled slowly into a land of little wooded glens and then to a great wide moorland place, gleaming with lochs, with high blue hills showing northwards.

About five o'clock the carriage had emptied, and I was left alone as I had hoped. I got out at the next station, a little place whose name I scarcely noted, set right in the heart of a bog. It reminded me of one of those forgotten moorland places, gleaming with lochs, with high blue hills showing northwards. When I asked for a night's lodging she said I was welcome to the 'bed in the loft', which I tucked away in my memory for future use. At ten I was nodding in my chair, and the 'bed in the loft' seemed to me the very model of one of the hill farmers who were crowding into the third-class carriages.

It was a gorgeous spring evening, with every hill showing as clear as a cut amethyst. The air had the queer, rooty smell of bogs, but it was as fresh as mid-ocean, and it had the strangest effect on my spirits. I actually felt light-hearted. I might have been a boy out for a spring holiday tramp, instead of a man of thirty-seven very much wanted by the police. I felt just as I used to feel when I was starting for a big trek on a frosty morning on the high veld. If you believe me, I swung along that road whistling. There was no plan of campaign in my head, only just to go on and on in this blessed, honest-smelling hill country, for every mile put me in better humour with myself.

In a roadside planting I cut a walking-stick of hazel, and presently struck off the highway up a bypath which followed the glen of a brawling stream. I reckoned that I was still far ahead of any pursuit, and for that night might please myself. It was some hours since I had tasted food, and I was getting very hungry when I came to a herd's little station in the Karroo. An old station-master was digging in his garden, and with his spade over his shoulder sauntered to the train, took charge of a parcel, and went back to his potatoes. A child of ten received my ticket, and I emerged on a white road that straggled over the brown moor.

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At the darkening her man came in from the hills, a lean giant, who in one step covered as much ground as three paces of ordinary mortals. They asked me no questions, for they had the perfect breeding of all dwellers in the wilds, but they took no notice of me. We rumbled slowly into a land of little wooded glens and then to a great wide moorland place, gleaming with lochs, with high blue hills showing northwards. When I asked for a night's lodging she said I was welcome to the 'bed in the loft', and very soon she set before me a hearty meal of ham and eggs, scones, and thick sweet milk.

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As I passed by the police would naturally assume that I was always making farther return to the railway line a station or two farther on than the place where I had alighted yesterday and to double back. I reckoned that that was the safest way, for the police would naturally assume that I was always making farther from London in the direction of some western port. I thought I had still a good bit of a start, for, as I reasoned, it would take some hours to fix the blame on me, and several more to identify the fellow who got on board the train at St Pancras.

It was the same jolly, clear spring weather, and I simply could not contrive to feel careworn. Indeed I was in better spirits than I had been for months. Over a long ridge of moorland I took my road, skirting the side of a high hill which the herd had called Cairnsmore of Fleet. Nesting curlews and plovers were crying everywhere, and the
links of green pasture by the streams were dotted with young lambs. All the slackness of the past months was
slipping from my bones, and I stepped out like a four-year-old. By-and-by I came to a swell of moorland which
dipped to the vale of a little river, and a mile away in the heather I saw the smoke of a train.

The station, when I reached it, proved to be ideal for my purpose. The moor surged up around it and left room
only for the single line, the slender siding, a waiting-room, an office, the station- master's cottage, and a tiny yard of
gooseberries and sweet-william. There seemed no road to it from anywhere, and to increase the desolation the waves
of a tarn lapped on their grey granite beach half a mile away. I waited in the deep heather till I saw the smoke of an
east-going train on the horizon. Then I approached the tiny booking-office and took a ticket for Dumfries.

The only occupants of the carriage were an old shepherd and his dog—a wall-eyed brute that I mistrusted. The
man was asleep, and on the cushions beside him was that morning's SCOTSMAN. Eagerly I seized on it, for I
fancied it would tell me something.

There were two columns about the Portland Place Murder, as it was called. My man Paddock had given the
alarm and had the milkman arrested. Poor devil, it looked as if the latter had earned his sovereign hardly; but for me
he had been cheap at the price, for he seemed to have occupied the police for the better part of the day. In the latest
news I found a further instalment of the story. The milkman had been released, I read, and the true criminal, about
whose identity the police were reticent, was believed to have got away from London by one of the northern lines.
There was a short note about me as the owner of the flat. I guessed the police had stuck that in, as a clumsy
contrivance to persuade me that I was unsuspected.

There was nothing else in the paper, nothing about foreign politics or Karolides, or the things that had interested
Scudder. I laid it down, and found that we were approaching the station at which I had got out yesterday. The
potato-digging station-master had been gingered up into some activity, for the west-going train was waiting to let us
pass, and from it had descended three men who were asking him questions. I supposed that they were the local
police, who had been stirred up by Scotland Yard, and had traced me as far as this one-horse siding. Sitting well
back in the shadow I watched them carefully. One of them had a book, and took down notes. The old potato-digger
seemed to have turned peevish, but the child who had collected my ticket was talking volubly. All the party looked
out across the moor where the white road departed. I hoped they were going to take up my tracks there.

As we moved away from that station my companion woke up. He fixed me with a wandering glance, kicked his
dog viciously, and inquired where he was. Clearly he was very drunk.

"That's what comes o' bein' a teetotaller," he observed in bitter regret.

"I expressed my surprise that in him I should have met a blue-ribbon stalwart.

"'Ay, but I'm a strong teetotaller," he said pugnaciously. 'I took the pledge last Martinmas, and I havena touched a
drop o' whisky sinsyne. Not even at Hogmanay, though I was sair temptit.'"

He swung his heels up on the seat, and burrowed a frowsy head into the cushions.

"And that's a' I get," he moaned. 'A heid better than hell fire, and twae een lookin' different ways for the Sabbath.'

"What did it?" I asked.

"A drink they ca' brandy. Bein' a teetotaller I keepit off the whisky, but I was nip-nippin' a' day at this brandy,
and I doubt I'll no be weel for a fortnicht." His voice died away into a splutter, and sleep once more laid its heavy
hand on him.

My plan had been to get out at some station down the line, but the train suddenly gave me a better chance, for it
came to a standstill at the end of a culvert which spanned a brawling porter-coloured river. I looked out and saw that
every carriage window was closed and no human figure appeared in the landscape. So I opened the door, and
dropped quickly into the tangle of hazels which edged the line.

it would have been all right but for that infernal dog. Under the impression that I was decamping with its
master's belongings, it started to bark, and all but got me by the trousers. This woke up the herd, who stood bawling
at the carriage door in the belief that I had committed suicide. I crawled through the thicket, reached the edge of the
stream, and in cover of the bushes put a hundred yards or so behind me. Then from my shelter I peered back, and
saw the guard and several passengers gathered round the open carriage door and staring in my direction. I could not
have made a more public departure if I had left with a bugler and a brass band.

Happily the drunken herd provided a diversion. He and his dog, which was attached by a rope to his waist,
suddenly cascaded out of the carriage, landed on their heads on the track, and rolled some way down the bank
towards the water. In the rescue which followed the dog bit somebody, for I could hear the sound of hard swearing.
Presently they had forgotten me, and when after a quarter of a mile's crawl I ventured to look back, the train had
started again and was vanishing in the cutting.

I was in a wide semicircle of moorland, with the brown river as radius, and the high hills forming the northern
circumference. There was not a sign or sound of a human being, only the plashing water and the interminable crying
of curlews. Yet, oddly enough, for the first time I felt the terror of the hunted on me. It was not the police that I
thought of, but the other folk, who knew that I knew Scudder's secret and dared not let me live. I was certain that they would pursue me with a keenness and vigilance unknown to the British law, and that once their grip closed on me I should find no mercy.

I looked back, but there was nothing in the landscape. The sun glinted on the metals of the line and the wet stones in the stream, and you could not have found a more peaceful sight in the world. Nevertheless I started to run. Crouching low in the runnels of the bog, I ran till the sweat blinded my eyes. The mood did not leave me till I had reached the rim of mountain and flung myself panting on a ridge high above the young waters of the brown river.

From my vantage-ground I could scan the whole moor right away to the railway line and to the south of it where green fields took the place of heather. I have eyes like a hawk, but I could see nothing moving in the whole countryside. Then I looked east beyond the ridge and saw a new kind of landscape--shallow green valleys with plentiful fir plantations and the faint lines of dust which spoke of highroads. Last of all I looked into the blue May sky, and there I saw that which set my pulses racing ...

Low down in the south a monoplane was climbing into the heavens. I was as certain as if I had been told that that aeroplane was looking for me, and that it did not belong to the police. For an hour or two I watched it from a pit of heather. It flew low along the hill-tops, and then in narrow circles over the valley up which I had come. Then it seemed to change its mind, rose to a great height, and flew away back to the south.

I did not like this espionage from the air, and I began to think less well of the countryside I had chosen for a refuge. These heather hills were no sort of cover if my enemies were in the sky, and I must find a different kind of sanctuary. I looked with more satisfaction to the green country beyond the ridge, for there I should find woods and stone houses.

About six in the evening I came out of the moorland to a white ribbon of road which wound up the narrow vale of a lowland stream. As I followed it, fields gave place to bent, the glen became a plateau, and presently I had reached a kind of pass where a solitary house smoked in the twilight. The road swung over a bridge, and leaning on the parapet was a young man.

He was smoking a long clay pipe and studying the water with spectacled eyes. In his left hand was a small book with a finger marking the place. Slowly he repeated--

As when a Gryphon through the wilderness With winged step, o'er hill and moory dale Pursues the Arimasпian.

He jumped round as my step rung on the keystone, and I saw a pleasant sunburnt boyish face.

'Good evening to you,' he said gravely. 'It's a fine night for the road.'

The smell of peat smoke and of some savoury roast floated to me from the house.

'Is that place an inn?' I asked.

'At your service,' he said politely. 'I am the landlord, Sir, and I hope you will stay the night, for to tell you the truth I have had no company for a week.'

I pulled myself up on the parapet of the bridge and filled my pipe. I began to detect an ally.

'You're young to be an innkeeper,' I said.

'My father died a year ago and left me the business. I live there with my grandmother. It's a slow job for a young man, and it wasn't my choice of profession.'

'Which was?'

He actually blushed. 'I want to write books,' he said.

'And what better chance could you ask?' I cried. 'Man, I've often thought that an innkeeper would make the best story-teller in the world.'

'Not now,' he said eagerly. 'Maybe in the old days when you had pilgrims and ballad-makers and highwaymen and mail-coaches on the road. But not now. Nothing comes here but motor-cars full of fat women, who stop for lunch, and a fisherman or two in the spring, and the shooting tenants in August. There is not much material to be got out of that. I want to see life, to travel the world, and write things like Kipling and Conrad. But the most I've done yet is to get some verses printed in CHAMBERS'S JOURNAL.' I looked at the inn standing golden in the sunset against the brown hills.

'I've knocked a bit about the world, and I wouldn't despise such a hermitage. D'you think that adventure is found only in the tropics or among gentry in red shirts? Maybe you're rubbing shoulders with it at this moment.'

'That's what Kipling says,' he said, his eyes brightening, and he quoted some verse about 'Romance bringing up the 9.15'.

'Here's a true tale for you then,' I cried, 'and a month from now you can make a novel out of it.'

Sitting on the bridge in the soft May gloaming I pitched him a lovely yarn. It was true in essentials, too, though I altered the minor details. I made out that I was a mining magnate from Kimberley, who had had a lot of trouble with I.D.B. and had shown up a gang. They had pursued me across the ocean, and had killed my best friend, and were now on my tracks.
I told the story well, though I say it who shouldn't. I pictured a flight across the Kalahari to German Africa, the crackling, parching days, the wonderful blue-velvet nights. I described an attack on my life on the voyage home, and I made a really horrid affair of the Portland Place murder. 'You're looking for adventure,' I cried; 'well, you've found it here. The devils are after me, and the police are after them. It's a race that I mean to win.'

'By God!' he whispered, drawing his breath in sharply, 'it is all pure Rider Haggard and Conan Doyle.'

'You believe me,' I said gratefully.

'Of course I do,' and he held out his hand. 'I believe everything out of the common. The only thing to distrust is the normal.'

He was very young, but he was the man for my money.

'I think they're off my track for the moment, but I must lie close for a couple of days. Can you take me in?'

He caught my elbow in his eagerness and drew me towards the house. 'You can lie as snug here as if you were in a moss-hole. I'll see that nobody blabs, either. And you'll give me some more material about your adventures?'

As I entered the inn porch I heard from far off the beat of an engine. There silhouetted against the dusky West was my friend, the monoplane.

He gave me a room at the back of the house, with a fine outlook over the plateau, and he made me free of his own study, which was stacked with cheap editions of his favourite authors. I never saw the grandmother, so I guessed she was bedridden. An old woman called Margit brought me my meals, and the innkeeper was around me at all hours. I wanted some time to myself, so I invented a job for him. He had a motor-bicycle, and I sent him off next morning for the daily paper, which usually arrived with the post in the late afternoon. I told him to keep his eyes skinned, and make note of any strange figures he saw, keeping a special sharp look-out for motors and aeroplanes. Then I sat down in real earnest to Scudder's note-book.

He came back at midday with the SCOTSMAN. There was nothing in it, except some further evidence of Paddock and the milkman, and a repetition of yesterday's statement that the murderer had gone North. But there was a long article, reprinted from THE TIMES, about Karolides and the state of affairs in the Balkans, though there was no mention of any visit to England. I got rid of the innkeeper for the afternoon, for I was getting very warm in my search for the cypher.

As I told you, it was a numerical cypher, and by an elaborate system of experiments I had pretty well discovered what were the nulls and stops. The trouble was the key word, and when I thought of the odd million words he might have used I felt pretty hopeless. But about three o'clock I had a sudden inspiration.

The name Julia Czechenyi flashed across my memory. Scudder had said it was the key to the Karolides business, and it occurred to me to try it on his cypher.

It worked. The five letters of 'Julia' gave me the position of the vowels. A was J, the tenth letter of the alphabet, and so represented by X in the cypher. E was XXI, and so on. 'Czechenyi' gave me the numerals for the principal consonants. I scribbled that scheme on a bit of paper and sat down to read Scudder's pages.

In half an hour I was reading with a whitish face and fingers that drummed on the table.

I glanced out of the window and saw a big touring-car coming up the glen towards the inn. It drew up at the door, and there was the sound of people alighting. There seemed to be two of them, men in aquascutums and tweed caps.

Ten minutes later the innkeeper slipped into the room, his eyes bright with excitement.

'There's two chaps below looking for you,' he whispered. 'They're in the dining-room having whiskies-and-sodas. They asked about you and said they had hoped to meet you here. Oh! and they described you jolly well, down to your boots and shirt. I told them you had been here last night and had gone off on a motor bicycle this morning, and one of the chaps swore like a navvy.'

I made him tell me what they looked like. One was a dark-eyed thin fellow with bushy eyebrows, the other was always smiling and lisped in his talk. Neither was any kind of foreigner; on this my young friend was positive.

I took a bit of paper and wrote these words in German as if they were part of a letter--

... 'Black Stone. Scudder had got on to this, but he could not act for a fortnight. I doubt if I can do any good now, especially as Karolides is uncertain about his plans. But if Mr T. advises I will do the best I ...'

I manufactured it rather neatly, so that it looked like a loose page of a private letter.

'Take this down and say it was found in my bedroom, and ask them to return it to me if they overtake me.'

Three minutes later I heard the car begin to move, and peeping from behind the curtain caught sight of the two figures. One was slim, the other was sleek; that was the most I could make of my reconnaissance.

The innkeeper appeared in great excitement. 'Your paper woke them up,' he said gleefully. 'The dark fellow went as white as death and cursed like blazes, and the fat one whistled and looked ugly. They paid for their drinks with half-a-sovereign and wouldn't wait for change.'

'Now I'll tell you what I want you to do,' I said. 'Get on your bicycle and go off to Newton-Stewart to the Chief
The Adventure of the Radical Candidate

You may picture me driving that 40 h.p. car for all she was worth over the crisp moor roads on that shining May morning; glancing back at first over my shoulder, and looking anxiously to the next turning; then driving with a vague eye, just wide enough awake to keep on the highway. For I was thinking desperately of what I had found in Scudder's pocket-book.

The little man had told me a pack of lies. All his yarns about the Balkans and the Jew-Anarchists and the Foreign Office Conference were eyewash, and so was Karolides. And yet not quite, as you shall hear. I had staked everything on my belief in his story, and had been let down; here was his book telling me a different tale, and instead of being once-bitten-twice-shy, I believed it absolutely.

Why, I don't know. It rang desperately true, and the first yarn, if you understand me, had been in a queer way true also in spirit. The fifteenth day of June was going to be a day of destiny, a bigger destiny than the killing of a Dago. It was so big that I didn't blame Scudder for keeping me out of the game and wanting to play a lone hand. That, I was pretty clear, was his intention. He had told me something which sounded big enough, but the real thing was so immortally big that he, the man who had found it out, wanted it all for himself. I didn't blame him. It was risks after all that he was chiefly greedy about.

The whole story was in the notes--with gaps, you understand, which he would have filled up from his memory. He stuck down his authorities, too, and had an odd trick of giving them all a numerical value and then striking a balance, which stood for the reliability of each stage in the yarn. The four names he had printed were authorities, and there was a man, Ducrosne, who got five out of a possible five; and another fellow, Ammersfoort, who got three. The bare bones of the tale were all that was in the book--these, and one queer phrase which occurred half a dozen times inside brackets. '(Thirty-nine steps)' was the phrase; and at its last time of use it ran--'(Thirty-nine steps, I counted them--high tide 10.17 p.m.).' I could make nothing of that.

The first thing I learned was that it was no question of preventing a war. That was coming, as sure as Christmas: had been arranged, said Scudder, ever since February 1912. Karolides was going to be the occasion. He was booked all right, and was to hand in his checks on June 14th, two weeks and four days from that May morning. I gathered from Scudder's notes that nothing on earth could prevent that. His talk of Epirote guards that would skin their own grandmothers was all billy-o.

The second thing was that this war was going to come as a mighty surprise to Britain. Karolides' death would set the Balkans by the ears, and then Vienna would chip in with an ultimatum. Russia wouldn't like that, and there would be high words. But Berlin would play the peacemaker, and pour oil on the waters, till suddenly she would find a good cause for a quarrel, pick it up, and in five hours let fly at us. That was the idea, and a pretty good one too. Honey and fair speeches, and then a stroke in the dark. While we were talking about the goodwill and good intentions of Germany our coast would be silently ringed with mines, and submarines would be waiting for every battleship.

But all this depended upon the third thing, which was due to happen on June 15th. I would never have grasped this if I hadn't once happened to meet a French staff officer, coming back from West Africa, who had told me a lot
of things. One was that, in spite of all the nonsense talked in Parliament, there was a real working alliance between France and Britain, and that the two General Staffs met every now and then, and made plans for joint action in case of war. Well, in June a very great swell was coming over from Paris, and he was going to get nothing less than a statement of the disposition of the British Home Fleet on mobilization. At least I gathered it was something like that; anyhow, it was something uncommonly important.

But on the 15th day of June there were to be others in London-- others, at whom I could only guess. Scudder was content to call them collectively the 'Black Stone'. They represented not our Allies, but our deadly foes; and the information, destined for France, was to be diverted to their pockets. And it was to be used, remember-- used a week or two later, with great guns and swift torpedoes, suddenly in the darkness of a summer night.

This was the story I had been deciphering in a back room of a country inn, overlooking a cabbage garden. This was the story that hummed in my brain as I swung in the big touring-car from glen to glen.

My first impulse had been to write a letter to the Prime Minister, but a little reflection convinced me that that would be useless. Who would believe my tale? I must show a sign, some token in proof, and Heaven knew what that could be. Above all, I must keep going myself, ready to act when things got riper, and that was going to be no light job with the police of the British Isles in full cry after me and the watchers of the Black Stone running silently and swiftly on my trail.

I had no very clear purpose in my journey, but I steered east by the sun, for I remembered from the map that if I went north I would come into a region of coalpits and industrial towns. Presently I was down from the moorlands and traversing the broad haugh of a river. For miles I ran alongside a park wall, and in a break of the trees I saw a great castle. I swung through little old thatched villages, and over peaceful lowland streams, and past gardens blazing with hawthorn and yellow laburnum. The land was so deep in peace that I could scarcely believe that somewhere behind me were those who sought my life; ay, and that in a month's time, unless I had the almightiest of luck, these round country faces would be pinched and staring, and men would be lying dead in English fields.

About mid-day I entered a long straggling village, and had a mind to stop and eat. Half-way down was the Post Office, and on the steps of it stood the postmistress and a policeman hard at work conning a telegram. When they saw me they wakened up, and the policeman advanced with raised hand, and cried on me to stop.

I nearly was fool enough to obey. Then it flashed upon me that the wire had to do with me; that my friends at the inn had come to an understanding, and were united in desiring to see more of me, and that it had been easy enough for them to wire the description of me and the car to thirty villages through which I might pass. I released the brakes just in time. As it was, the policeman made a claw at the hood, and only dropped off when he got my left in his eye.

I saw that main roads were no place for me, and turned into the byways. It wasn't an easy job without a map, for there was the risk of getting on to a farm road and ending in a duck-pond or a stable-yard, and I couldn't afford that kind of delay. I began to see what an ass I had been to steal the car. The big green brute would be the safest kind of clue to me over the breadth of Scotland. If I left it and took to my feet, it would be discovered in an hour or two and I would get no start in the race.

The immediate thing to do was to get to the loneliest roads. These I soon found when I struck up a tributary of the big river, and got into a glen with steep hills all about me, and a corkscrew road at the end which climbed over a pass. Here I met nobody, but it was taking me too far north, so I slewed east along a bad track and finally struck a big double-line railway. Away below me I saw another broadish valley, and it occurred to me that if I crossed it I would be useless. Who would believe my tale? I must show a sign, some token in proof, and Heaven knew what that could be. Above all, I must keep going myself, ready to act when things got riper, and that was going to be no light job with the police of the British Isles in full cry after me and the watchers of the Black Stone running silently and swiftly on my trail.

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Suddenly on my left I heard the hoot of another car, and realized to my horror that I was almost up on a couple of gate-posts through which a private road debouched on the highway. My horn gave an agonized roar, but it was too late. I clapped on my brakes, but my impetus was too great, and there before me a car was sliding athwart my course. In a second there would have been the deuce of a wreck. I did the only thing possible, and ran slap into the hedge on the right, trusting to find something soft beyond.

But there I was mistaken. My car slithered through the hedge like butter, and then gave a sickening plunge forward. I saw what was coming, leapt on the seat and would have jumped out. But a branch of hawthorn got me in the chest, lifted me up and held me, while a ton or two of expensive metal slipped below me, bucked and pitched, and then dropped with an almighty smash fifty feet to the bed of the stream.
Slowly that thorn let me go. I subsided first on the hedge, and then very gently on a bower of nettles. As I scrambled to my feet a hand took me by the arm, and a sympathetic and badly scared voice asked me if I were hurt.

I found myself looking at a tall young man in goggles and a leather ulster, who kept on blessing his soul and whinnying apologies. For myself, once I got my wind back, I was rather glad than otherwise. This was one way of getting rid of the car.

'My blame, Sir,' I answered him. 'It's lucky that I did not add homicide to my follies. That's the end of my Scotch motor tour, but it might have been the end of my life.'

He plucked out a watch and studied it. 'You're the right sort of fellow,' he said. 'I can spare a quarter of an hour, and my house is two minutes off. I'll see you clothed and fed and snug in bed. Where's your kit, by the way? Is it in the burn along with the car?'

'It's in my pocket,' I said, brandishing a toothbrush. 'I'm a Colonial and travel light.'

'A Colonial,' he cried. 'By Gad, you're the very man I've been praying for. Are you by any blessed chance a Free Trader?'

'I am,' said I, without the foggiest notion of what he meant.

He patted my shoulder and hurried me into his car. Three minutes later we drew up before a comfortable-looking shooting box set among pine-trees, and he ushered me indoors. He took me first to a bedroom and flung half a dozen of his suits before me, for my own had been pretty well reduced to rags. I selected a loose blue serge, which differed most conspicuously from my former garments, and borrowed a linen collar. Then he haled me to the dining-room, where the remnants of a meal stood on the table, and announced that I had just five minutes to feed. 'You can take a snack in your pocket, and we'll have supper when we get back. I've got to be at the Masonic Hall at eight o'clock, or my agent will comb my hair.'

I had a cup of coffee and some cold ham, while he yawned away on the hearth-rug.

'You find me in the deuce of a mess, Mr--by-the-by, you haven't told me your name. Twisdon? Any relation of old Tommy Twisdon of the Sixtieth? No? Well, you see I'm Liberal Candidate for this part of the world, and I had a meeting on tonight at Brattleburn--that's my chief town, and an infernal Tory stronghold. I had got the Colonial ex-Premier fellow, Crumpleton, coming to speak for me tonight, and had the thing tremendously billed and the whole place ground-baited. This afternoon I had a wire from the ruffian saying he had got influenza at Blackpool, and here am I left to do the whole thing myself. I had meant to speak for ten minutes and must now go on for forty, and, though I've been racking my brains for three hours to think of something, I simply cannot last the course. Now you've got to be a good chap and help me. You're a Free Trader and can tell our people what a wash-out Protection is in the Colonies. All you fellows have the gift of the gab--I wish to Heaven I had it. I'll be for evermore in your debt.'

I had very few notions about Free Trade one way or the other, but I saw no other chance to get what I wanted. My young gentleman was far too absorbed in his own difficulties to think how odd it was to ask a stranger who had just missed death by an ace and had lost a 1,000-guinea car to address a meeting for him on the spur of the moment. But my necessities did not allow me to contemplate oddnesses or to pick and choose my supports.

'All right,' I said. 'I'm not much good as a speaker, but I'll tell them a bit about Australia.'

At my words the cares of the ages slipped from his shoulders, and he was rapturous in his thanks. He lent me a big driving coat-- and never troubled to ask why I had started on a motor tour without possessing an ulster--and, as we slipped down the dusty roads, poured into my ears the simple facts of his history. He was an orphan, and his uncle had brought him up--I've forgotten the uncle's name, but he was in the Cabinet, and you can read his speeches in the papers. He had gone round the world after leaving Cambridge, and then, being short of a job, his uncle had advised politics. I gathered that he had no preference in parties. 'Good chaps in both,' he said cheerfully, 'and plenty of blighters, too. I'm Liberal, because my family have always been Whigs.' But if he was lukewarm politically he advised politics. I had very few notions about Free Trade one way or the other, but I saw no other chance to get what I wanted. My young gentleman was far too absorbed in his own difficulties to think how odd it was to ask a stranger who had just missed death by an ace and had lost a 1,000-guinea car to address a meeting for him on the spur of the moment. But my necessities did not allow me to contemplate oddnesses or to pick and choose my supports.

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We passed through a little town two policemen signalled us to stop, and flashed their lanterns on us.

'Beg pardon, Sir Harry,' said one. 'We've got instructions to look out for a car, and the description's no unlike yours.'

'Right-o,' said my host, while I thanked Providence for the devious ways I had been brought to safety. After that he spoke no more, for his mind began to labour heavily with his coming speech. His lips kept muttering, his eye wandered, and I began to prepare myself for a second catastrophe. I tried to think of something to say myself, but my mind was dry as a stone. The next thing I knew we had drawn up outside a door in a street, and were being welcomed by some noisy gentlemen with rosettes. The hall had about five hundred in it, women mostly, a lot of bald heads, and a dozen or two young men. The chairman, a weaselly minister with a reddish nose, lamented Crumpleton's absence, soliloquized on his influenza, and gave me a certificate as a 'trusted leader of Australian
thought'. There were two policemen at the door, and I hoped they took note of that testimonial. Then Sir Harry
started.

I never heard anything like it. He didn't begin to know how to talk. He had about a bushel of notes from which
he read, and when he let go of them he fell into one prolonged stutter. Every now and then he remembered a phrase
he had learned by heart, straightened his back, and gave it off like Henry Irving, and the next moment he was bent
double and crooning over his papers. It was the most appalling rot, too. He talked about the 'German menace', and
said it was all a Tory invention to cheat the poor of their rights and keep back the great flood of social reform, but
that 'organized labour' realized this and laughed the Tories to scorn. He was all for reducing our Navy as a proof of
our good faith, and then sending Germany an ultimatum telling her to do the same or we would knock her into a
cocked hat. He said that, but for the Tories, Germany and Britain would be fellow-workers in peace and reform. I
thought of the little black book in my pocket! A giddy lot Scudder's friends cared for peace and reform.

Yet in a queer way I liked the speech. You could see the niceness of the chap shining out behind the muck with
which he had been spoon-fed. Also it took a load off my mind. I mightn't be much of an orator, but I was a thousand
per cent better than Sir Harry.

I didn't get on so badly when it came to my turn. I simply told them all I could remember about Australia,
praying there should be no Australian there--all about its labour party and emigration and universal service. I doubt
if I remembered to mention Free Trade, but I said there were no Tories in Australia, only Labour and Liberals. That
fetched a cheer, and I woke them up a bit when I started in to tell them the kind of glorious business I thought could
be made out of the Empire if we really put our backs into it.

Altogether I fancy I was rather a success. The minister didn't like me, though, and when he proposed a vote of
thanks, spoke of Sir Harry's speech as 'statesmanlike' and mine as having 'the eloquence of an emigration agent'.

When we were in the car again my host was in wild spirits at having got his job over. 'A ripping speech,
Twisdon,' he said. 'Now, you're coming home with me. I'm all alone, and if you'll stop a day or two I'll show you
some very decent fishing.'

We had a hot supper--and I wanted it pretty badly--and then drank grog in a big cheery smoking-room with a
crackling wood fire. I thought the time had come for me to put my cards on the table. I saw by this man's eye that he
was the kind you can trust.

'Listen, Sir Harry,' I said. 'I've something pretty important to say to you. You're a good fellow, and I'm going to
be frank. Where on earth did you get that poisonous rubbish you talked tonight?'

His face fell. 'Was it as bad as that?' he asked ruefully. 'It did sound rather thin. I got most of it out of the
PROGRESSIVE MAGAZINE and pamphlets that agent chap of mine keeps sending me. But you surely don't think
Germany would ever go to war with us?'

'Ask that question in six weeks and it won't need an answer,' I said. 'If you'll give me your attention for half an
hour I am going to tell you a story.'

I can see yet that bright room with the deers' heads and the old prints on the walls, Sir Harry standing restlessly
on the stone curb of the hearth, and myself lying back in an armchair, speaking. I seemed to be another person,
standing aside and listening to my own voice, and judging carefully the reliability of my tale. It was the first time I
had ever told anyone the exact truth, so far as I understood it, and it did me no end of good, for it straightened out
the thing in my own mind. I blinked no detail. He heard all about Scudder, and the milkman, and the note-book, and
my doings in Galloway. Presently he got very excited and walked up and down the hearth-rug.

'So you see,' I concluded, 'you have got here in your house the man that is wanted for the Portland Place murder.
Your duty is to send your car for the police and give me up. I don't think I'll get very far. There'll be an accident, and
I'll have a knife in my ribs an hour or so after arrest. Nevertheless, it's your duty, as a law-abiding citizen. Perhaps in
a month's time you'll be sorry, but you have no cause to think of that.'

He was looking at me with bright steady eyes. 'What was your job in Rhodesia, Mr Hannay?' he asked.

'Mining engineer,' I said. 'I've made my pile cleanly and I've had a good time in the making of it.'

'Not a profession that weakens the nerves, is it?'

I laughed. 'Oh, as to that, my nerves are good enough.' I took down a hunting-knife from a stand on the wall, and
did the old Mashona trick of tossing it and catching it in my lips. That wants a pretty steady heart.

He watched me with a smile. 'I don't want proof. I may be an ass on the platform, but I can size up a man. You're
no murderer and you're no fool, and I believe you are speaking the truth. I'm going to back you up. Now, what can I
do?'

'First, I want you to write a letter to your uncle. I've got to get in touch with the Government people sometime
before the 15th of June.'

He pulled his moustache. 'That won't help you. This is Foreign Office business, and my uncle would have
nothing to do with it. Besides, you'd never convince him. No, I'll go one better. I'll write to the Permanent Secretary
at the Foreign Office. He's my godfather, and one of the best going. What do you want?"

He sat down at a table and wrote to my dictation. The gist of it was that if a man called Twisdon (I thought I had better stick to that name) turned up before June 15th he was to entreat him kindly. He said Twisdon would prove his bona fides by passing the word 'Black Stone' and whistling 'Annie Laurie'.

'Good,' said Sir Harry. 'That's the proper style. By the way, you'll find my godfather--his name's Sir Walter Bullivant--down at his country cottage for Whitsuntide. It's close to Artinswell on the Kenner. That's done. Now, what's the next thing?'

'You're about my height. Lend me the oldest tweed suit you've got. Anything will do, so long as the colour is the opposite of the clothes I destroyed this afternoon. Then show me a map of the neighbourhood and explain to me the lie of the land. Lastly, if the police come seeking me, just show them the car in the glen. If the other lot turn up, tell them I caught the south express after your meeting.'

He did, or promised to do, all these things. I shaved off the remnants of my moustache, and got inside an ancient suit of what I believe is called heather mixture. The map gave me some notion of my whereabouts, and told me the two things I wanted to know--where the main railway to the south could be joined and what were the wildest districts near at hand. At two o'clock he wakened me from my slumbers in the smoking-room armchair, and led me blinking into the dark starry night. An old bicycle was found in a tool-shed and handed over to me.

'First turn to the right up by the long fir-wood,' he enjoined. 'By daybreak you'll be well into the hills. Then I should pitch the machine into a bog and take to the moors on foot. You can put in a week among the shepherds, and be as safe as if you were in New Guinea.'

I pedalled diligently up steep roads of hill gravel till the skies grew pale with morning. As the mists cleared before the sun, I found myself in a wide green world with glens falling on every side and a far-away blue horizon. Here, at any rate, I could get early news of my enemies.

CHAPTER FIVE The Adventure of the Spectacled Roadman

I sat down on the very crest of the pass and took stock of my position.

Behind me was the road climbing through a long cleft in the hills, which was the upper glen of some notable river. In front was a flat space of maybe a mile, all pitted with bog-holes and rough with tussocks, and then beyond it the road fell steeply down another glen to a plain whose blue dimness melted into the distance. To left and right were round-shouldered green hills as smooth as pancakes, but to the south--that is, the left hand--there was a glimpse of high heathery mountains, which I remembered from the map as the big knot of hill which I had chosen for my sanctuary. I was on the central boss of a huge upland country, and could see everything moving for miles. In the meadows below the road half a mile back a cottage smoked, but it was the only sign of human life. Otherwise there was only the calling of plovers and the tinkling of little streams.

It was now about seven o'clock, and as I waited I heard once again that ominous beat in the air. Then I realized that my vantage-ground might be in reality a trap. There was no cover for a tomtit in those bald green places.

I sat quite still and hopeless while the beat grew louder. Then I saw an aeroplane coming up from the east. It was flying high, but as I looked it dropped several hundred feet and began to circle round the knot of hill in narrowing circles, just as a hawk wheels before it pounces. Now it was flying very low, and now the observer on board caught sight of me. I could see one of the two occupants examining me through glasses.

Suddenly it began to rise in swift whorls, and the next I knew it was speeding eastward again till it became a speck in the blue morning.

That made me do some savage thinking. My enemies had located me, and the next thing would be a cordon round me. I didn't know what force they could command, but I was certain it would be sufficient. The aeroplane had seen my bicycle, and would conclude that I would try to escape by the road. In that case there might be a chance on the moors to the right or left. I wheeled the machine a hundred yards from the highway, and plunged it into a moss-hole, where it sank among pond-weed and water-buttercups. Then I climbed to a knoll which gave me a view of the two valleys. Nothing was stirring on the long white ribbon that threaded them.

I have said there was not cover in the whole place to hide a rat. As the day advanced it was flooded with soft fresh light till it had the fragrant sunniness of the South African veld. At other times I would have liked the place, but now it seemed to suffocate me. The free moorlands were prison walls, and the keen hill air was the breath of a dungeon.

I tossed a coin--heads right, tails left--and it fell heads, so I turned to the north. In a little I came to the brow of the ridge which was the containing wall of the pass. I saw the highroad for maybe ten miles, and far down it something that was moving, and that I took to be a motor-car. Beyond the ridge I looked on a rolling green moor, which fell away into wooded glens.

Now my life on the veld has given me the eyes of a kite, and I can see things for which most men need a telescope ... Away down the slope, a couple of miles away, several men were advancing. like a row of beaters at a
I dropped out of sight behind the sky-line. That way was shut to me, and I must try the bigger hills to the south beyond the highway. The car I had noticed was getting nearer, but it was still a long way off with some very steep gradients before it. I ran hard, crouching low except in the hollows, and as I ran I kept scanning the brow of the hill before me. Was it imagination, or did I see figures—one, two, perhaps more—moving in a glen beyond the stream?

If you are hemmed in on all sides in a patch of land there is only one chance of escape. You must stay in the patch, and let your enemies search it and not find you. That was good sense, but how on earth was I to escape notice in that table-cloth of a place? I would have buried myself to the neck in mud or lain below water or climbed the tallest tree. But there was not a stick of wood, the bog-holes were little puddles, the stream was a slender trickle. There was nothing but short heather, and bare hill bent, and the white highway.

Then in a tiny bight of road, beside a heap of stones, I found the roadman.

He had just arrived, and was wearily flinging down his hammer. He looked at me with a fishy eye and yawned. 'Confound the day I ever left the herdin'!' he said, as if to the world at large. 'There I was my ain maister. Now I'm a slave to the Goavernment, tethered to the roadside, wi' sair een, and a back like a suckle.'

He took up the hammer, struck a stone, dropped the implement with an oath, and put both hands to his ears. 'Mercy on me! My heid's burstin'!' he cried.

He was a wild figure, about my own size but much bent, with a week's beard on his chin, and a pair of big horn spectacles.

'I canna dae't,' he cried again. 'The Surveyor maun just report me. I'm for my bed.'

I asked him what was the trouble, though indeed that was clear enough.

'The trouble is that I'm no sober. Last nicht my dochter Merran was waddit, and they danced till fower in the byre. Me and some ither chiel sat down to the drinkin', and here I am. Peety that I ever lookit on the wine when it was red!'

I agreed with him about bed. 'It's easy speakin',' he moaned. 'But I got a postcard yestreen sayin' that the new Road Surveyor would be round the day. He'll come and he'll no find me, or else he'll find me fou, and either way I'm a done man. I'll awa' back to my bed and say I'm no weel, but I doot that'll no help me, for they ken my kind o' no-weel-ness.'

Then I had an inspiration. 'Does the new Surveyor know you?' I asked.

'No him. He's just been a week at the job. He rins about in a wee motor-cawr, and wad speir the inside oot o' a whelk.'

'Where's your house?' I asked, and was directed by a wavering finger to the cottage by the stream.

'Well, back to your bed,' I said, 'and sleep in peace. I'll take on your job for a bit and see the Surveyor.'

He stared at me blankly; then, as the notion dawned on his fuddled brain, his face broke into the vacant drunkard's smile.

'You're the billy,' he cried. 'It'll be easy eneuch managed. I've finished that bing o' stanes, so you needna chap ony mair this forenoon. Just take the barry, and wheel eneuch metal frae yon quarry doon the road to mak anither bing the morn. My name's Alexander Turnbull, and I've been sevven year at the trade, and twenty afore that herdin' on Leithen Water. My freens ca' me Ecky, and whiles Specky, for I wear glesses, being waik i' the sicht. Just you speak the Surveyor fair, and ca' him Sir, and he'll be fell pleased. I'll be back or mid-day.'

I borrowed his spectacles and filthy old hat; stripped off coat, waistcoat, and collar, and gave him them to carry home; borrowed, too, the foul stump of a clay pipe as an extra property. He indicated my simple tasks, and without more ado set off at an amble bedwards. Bed may have been his chief object, but I think there was also something left in the foot of a bottle. I prayed that he might be safe under cover before my friends arrived on the scene.

Then I set to work to dress for the part. I opened the collar of my shirt—such as ploughmen wear—and revealed a neck as brown as any tinker's. I rolled up my sleeves, and there was a forearm which might have been a blacksmith's, sunburnt and rough with old scars. I got my boots and trouser-legs all white from the dust of the road, and hitched up my trousers, tying them with string below the knee. Then I set to work on my face. With a handful of dust I made a water-mark round my neck, the place where Mr Turnbull's Sunday ablutions might be expected to stop. I rubbed a good deal of dirt also into the sunburn of my cheeks. A roadman's eyes would no doubt be a little inflamed, so I contrived to get some dust in both of mine, and by dint of vigorous rubbing produced a bleary effect.

The sandwiches Sir Harry had given me had gone off with my coat, but the roadman's lunch, tied up in a red handkerchief, was at my disposal. I ate with great relish several of the thick slabs of scone and cheese and drank a little of the cold tea. In the handkerchief was a local paper tied with string and addressed to Mr Turnbull—obviously meant to solace his mid-day leisure. I did up the bundle again, and put the paper conspicuously beside it.

My boots did not satisfy me, but by dint of kicking among the stones I reduced them to the granite-like surface
which marks a roadman's foot-gear. Then I bit and scraped my finger-nails till the edges were all cracked and uneven. The men I was matched against would miss no detail. I broke one of the bootlaces and retied it in a clumsy knot, and loosened the other so that my thick grey socks bulged over the uppers. Still no sign of anything on the road. The motor I had observed half an hour ago must have gone home.

My toilet complete, I took up the barrow and began my journeys to and from the quarry a hundred yards off.

I remember an old scout in Rhodesia, who had done many queer things in his day, once telling me that the secret of playing a part was to think yourself into it. You could never keep it up, he said, unless you could manage to convince yourself that you were it. So I shut off all other thoughts and switched them on to the road-mending. I thought of the little white cottage as my home, I recalled the years I had spent herding on Leithen Water, I made my mind dwell lovingly on sleep in a box-bed and a bottle of cheap whisky. Still nothing appeared on that long white road.

Now and then a sheep wandered off the heather to stare at me. A heron flopped down to a pool in the stream and started to fish, taking no more notice of me than if I had been a milestone. On I went, trundling my loads of stone, with the heavy step of the professional. Soon I grew warm, and the dust on my face changed into solid and abiding grit. I was already counting the hours till evening should put a limit to Mr Turnbull's monotonous toil. Suddenly a crisp voice spoke from the road, and looking up I saw a little Ford two-seater, and a round-faced young man in a bowler hat.

'Are you Alexander Turnbull?' he asked. 'I am the new County Road Surveyor. You live at Blackhopefoot, and have charge of the section from Laidlawbyres to the Riggs? Good! A fair bit of road, Turnbull, and not badly engineered. A little soft about a mile off, and the edges want cleaning. See you look after that. Good morning. You'll know me the next time you see me.'

Clearly my get-up was good enough for the dreaded Surveyor. I went on with my work, and as the morning grew towards noon I was cheered by a little traffic. A baker's van breasted the hill, and sold me a bag of ginger biscuits which I stowed in my trouser-pockets against emergencies. Then a herd passed with sheep, and disturbed me somewhat by asking loudly, 'What had become o' Specky?'

'In bed wi' the colic,' I replied, and the herd passed on . . . just about mid-day a big car stole down the hill, glided past and drew up a hundred yards beyond. Its three occupants descended as if to stretch their legs, and sauntered towards me.

Two of the men I had seen before from the window of the Galloway inn--one lean, sharp, and dark, the other comfortable and smiling. The third had the look of a countryman--a vet, perhaps, or a small farmer. He was dressed in ill-cut knickerbockers, and the eye in his head was as bright and wary as a hen's.

'Morning,' said the last. 'That's a fine easy job o' yours.'

I had not looked up on their approach, and now, when accosted, I slowly and painfully straightened my back, after the manner of roadmen; spat vigorously, after the manner of the low Scot; and regarded them steadily before replying. I confronted three pairs of eyes that missed nothing.

'There's waur jobs and there's better,' I said sententiously. 'I wad rather hae yours, sittin' a' day on your hinderlands on thae cushions. It's you and your muckle cawrs that wreck my roads! If we a' had oor richts, ye sud be made to mend what ye break.'

The bright-eyed man was looking at the newspaper lying beside Turnbull's bundle.

'I see you get your papers in good time,' he said.

I glanced at it casually. 'Aye, in gude time. Seein' that that paper cam' out last Setterday I'm just Sax days late.'

He picked it up, glanced at the superscription, and laid it down again. One of the others had been looking at my boots, and a word in German called the speaker's attention to them.

'You've a fine taste in boots,' he said. 'These were never made by a country shoemaker.'

'They were not,' I said readily. 'They were made in London. I got them frae the gentleman that was here last year for the shootin'. What was his name now?' And I scratched a forgetful head. Again the sleek one spoke in German.

'Let us get on,' he said.

They asked one last question.

'Did you see anyone pass early this morning? He might be on a bicycle or he might be on foot.'

I very nearly fell into the trap and told a story of a bicyclist hurrying past in the grey dawn. But I had the sense to see my danger. I pretended to consider very deeply.

'I wasna up very early,' I said. 'Ye see, my dochter was merrit last nicht, and we keepit it up late. I opened the house door about seeven and there was naebody on the road then. Since I cam' up here there has just been the baker and the Ruchill herd, besides you gentlemen.'

One of them gave me a cigar, which I smelt gingerly and stuck in Turnbull's bundle. They got into their car and were out of sight in three minutes.
My heart leaped with an enormous relief, but I went on wheeling my stones. It was as well, for ten minutes later the car returned, one of the occupants waving a hand to me. Those gentry left nothing to chance.

I finished Turnbull's bread and cheese, and pretty soon I had finished the stones. The next step was what puzzled me. I could not keep up this roadmaking business for long. A merciful Providence had kept Mr Turnbull indoors, but if he appeared on the scene there would be trouble. I had a notion that the cordon was still tight round the glen, and that if I walked in any direction I should meet with questioners. But get out I must. No man's nerve could stand more than a day of being spied on.

I stayed at my post till five o'clock. By that time I had resolved to go down to Turnbull's cottage at nightfall and take my chance of getting over the hills in the darkness. But suddenly a new car came up the road, and slowed down a yard or two from me. A fresh wind had risen, and the occupant wanted to light a cigarette. It was a touring car, with the tonneau full of an assortment of baggage. One man sat in it, and by an amazing chance I knew him. His name was Marmaduke jopely, and he was an offence to creation. He was a sort of blood stockbroker, who did his business by toadying eldest sons and rich young peers and foolish old ladies. 'Marmie' was a familiar figure, I understood, at balls and polo-weeks and country houses. He was an adroit scandal-monger, and would crawl a mile on his belly to anything that had a title or a million. I had a business introduction to his firm when I came to London, and he was good enough to ask me to dinner at his club. There he showed off at a great rate, and pattered about his duchesses till the snobbery of the creature turned me sick. I asked a man afterwards why nobody kicked him, and was told that Englishmen reverenced the weaker sex.

Anyhow there he was now, nattily dressed, in a fine new car, obviously on his way to visit some of his smart friends. A sudden daftness took me, and in a second I had jumped into the tonneau and had him by the shoulder.

'Hullo, jopely,' I sang out. 'Well met, my lad!' He got a horrid fright. His chin dropped as he stared at me. 'Who the devil are YOU?' he gasped.

'My name's Hannay,' I said. 'From Rhodesia, you remember.'

'Good God, the murderer!' he choked.

'Just so. And there'll be a second murder, my dear, if you don't do as I tell you. Give me that coat of yours. That cap, too.'

He did as bid, for he was blind with terror. Over my dirty trousers and vulgar shirt I put on his smart driving-coat, which buttoned high at the top and thereby hid the deficiencies of my collar. I stuck the cap on my head, and added his gloves to my get-up. The dusty roadman in a minute was transformed into one of the neatest motorists in Scotland. On Mr jopely's head I clapped Turnbull's unspeakable hat, and told him to keep it there.

Then with some difficulty I turned the car. My plan was to go back the road he had come, for the watchers, having seen it before, would probably let it pass unremarked, and Marmie's figure was in no way like mine.

'Now, my child,' I said, 'sit quite still and be a good boy. I mean you no harm. I'm only borrowing your car for an hour or two. But if you play me any tricks, and above all if you open your mouth, as sure as there's a God above me I'll wring your neck. SAVEZ?'

I enjoyed that evening's ride. We ran eight miles down the valley, through a village or two, and I could not help noticing several strange-looking folk lounging by the roadside. These were the watchers who would have had much to say to me if I had come in other garb or company. As it was, they looked incuriously on. One touched his cap in salute, and I responded graciously.

As the dark fell I turned up a side glen which, as I remember from the map, led into an unfrequented corner of the hills. Soon the villages were left behind, then the farms, and then even the wayside cottage. Presently we came to a lonely moor where the night was blackening the sunset gleam in the bog pools. Here we stopped, and I obligingly reversed the car and restored to Mr jopely his belongings.

'A thousand thanks,' I said. 'There's more use in you than I thought. Now be off and find the police.'

As I sat on the hillside, watching the tail-light dwindle, I reflected on the various kinds of crime I had now sampled. Contrary to general belief, I was not a murderer, but I had become an unholy liar, a shameless impostor, and a highwayman with a marked taste for expensive motor-cars.

CHAPTER SIX The Adventure of the Bald Archaeologist

I spent the night on a shelf of the hillside, in the lee of a boulder where the heather grew long and soft. It was a cold business, for I had neither coat nor waistcoat. These were in Mr Turnbull's keeping, as was Scudder's little book, my watch and--worst of all--my pipe and tobacco pouch. Only my money accompanied me in my belt, and about half a pound of ginger biscuits in my trousers pocket.

I supped off half those biscuits, and by worming myself deep into the heather got some kind of warmth. My spirits had risen, and I was beginning to enjoy this crazy game of hide-and-seek. So far I had been miraculously lucky. The milkman, the literary innkeeper, Sir Harry, the roadman, and the idiotic Marmie, were all pieces of undeserved good fortune. Somehow the first success gave me a feeling that I was going to pull the thing through.
My chief trouble was that I was desperately hungry. When a Jew shoots himself in the City and there is an inquest, the newspapers usually report that the deceased was ‘well-nourished’. I remember thinking that they would not call me well-nourished if I broke my neck in a bog-hole. I lay and tortured myself—for the ginger biscuits merely emphasized the aching void—with the memory of all the good food I had thought so little of in London. There were Paddock’s crisp sausages and fragrant shavings of bacon, and shapely poached eggs—how often I had turned up my nose at them! There were the cutlets they did at the club, and a particular ham that stood on the cold table, for which my soul lusted. My thoughts hovered over all varieties of mortal edible, and finally settled on a porterhouse steak and a quart of bitter with a Welsh rabbit to follow. In longing hopelessly for these dainties I fell asleep.

I woke very cold and stiff about an hour after dawn. It took me a little while to remember where I was, for I had been very weary and had slept heavily. I saw first the pale blue sky through a net of heather, then a big shoulder of hill, and then my own boots placed neatly in a blueberry bush. I raised myself on my arms and looked down into the valley, and that one look set me lacing up my boots in mad haste.

For there were men below, not more than a quarter of a mile off, spaced out on the hillside like a fan, and beating the heather. Marmie had not been slow in looking for his revenge.

I crawled out of my shelf into the cover of a boulder, and from it gained a shallow trench which slanted up the mountain face. This led me presently into the narrow gully of a burn, by way of which I scrambled to the top of the ridge. From there I looked back, and saw that I was still undiscovered. My pursuers were patiently quartering the hillside and moving upwards.

Keeping behind the skyline I ran for maybe half a mile, till I judged I was above the uppermost end of the glen. Then I showed myself, and was instantly noted by one of the flankers, who passed the word to the others. I heard cries coming up from below, and saw that the line of search had changed its direction. I pretended to retreat over the skyline, but instead went back the way I had come, and in twenty minutes was behind the ridge overlooking my sleeping place. From that viewpoint I had the satisfaction of seeing the pursuit streaming up the hill at the top of the glen on a hopelessly false scent.

I had before me a choice of routes, and I chose a ridge which made an angle with the one I was on, and so would soon put a deep glen between me and my enemies. The exercise had warmed my blood, and I was beginning to enjoy myself amazingly. As I went I breakfasted on the dusty remnants of the ginger biscuits.

I knew very little about the country, and I hadn’t a notion what I was going to do. I trusted to the strength of my legs, but I was well aware that those behind me would be familiar with the lie of the land, and that my ignorance would be a heavy handicap. I saw in front of me a sea of hills, rising very high towards the south, but northwards breaking down into broad ridges which separated wide and shallow dales. The ridge I had chosen seemed to sink after a mile or two to a moor which lay like a pocket in the uplands. That seemed as good a direction to take as any other.

My stratagem had given me a fair start—call it twenty minutes—and I had the width of a glen behind me before I saw the first heads of the pursuers. The police had evidently called in local talent to their aid, and the men I could see had the appearance of herdsmen or gamekeepers. They hallooed at the sight of me, and I waved my hand. Two dived into the glen and began to climb my ridge, while the others kept their own side of the hill. I felt as if I were taking part in a schoolboy game of hare and hounds.

But very soon it began to seem less of a game. Those fellows behind were hefty men on their native heath. Looking back I saw that only three were following direct, and I guessed that the others had fetched a circuit to cut my skew. I had before me a choice of routes, and I chose a ridge which made an angle with the one I was on, and so would soon put a deep glen between me and my enemies. The exercise had warmed my blood, and I was beginning to enjoy myself amazingly. As I went I breakfasted on the dusty remnants of the ginger biscuits.

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But very soon it began to seem less of a game. Those fellows behind were hefty men on their native heath. Looking back I saw that only three were following direct, and I guessed that the others had fetched a circuit to cut me off. My lack of local knowledge might very well be my undoing, and I resolved to get out of this tangle of glens to the pocket of moor I had seen from the tops. I must so increase my distance as to get clear away from them, and I believed I could do this if I could find the right ground for it. If there had been cover I would have tried a bit of stalking, but on these bare slopes you could see a fly a mile off. My hope must be in the length of my legs and the soundness of my wind, but I needed easier ground for that, for I was not bred a mountaineer. How I longed for a good Afrikander pony!

I put on a great spurt and got off my ridge and down into the moor before any figures appeared on the skyline behind me. I crossed a burn, and came out on a highroad which made a pass between two glens. All in front of me was a big field of heather sloping up to a crest which was crowned with an odd feather of trees. In the dyke by the roadside was a gate, from which a grass-grown track led over the first wave of the moor.

I jumped the dyke and followed it, and after a few hundred yards—as soon as it was out of sight of the highway—the grass stopped and it became a very respectable road, which was evidently kept with some care. Clearly it ran to a house, and I began to think of doing the same. Hitherto my luck had held, and it might be that my best chance would be found in this remote dwelling. Anyhow there were trees there, and that meant cover.

I did not follow the road, but the burnside which flanked it on the right, where the bracken grew deep and the high banks made a tolerable screen. It was well I did so, for no sooner had I gained the hollow than looking back, I
saw the pursuit topping the ridge from which I had descended.

After that I did not look back; I had no time. I ran up the burnside, crawling over the open places, and for a large part wading in the shallow stream. I found a deserted cottage with a row of phantom peat-stacks and an overgrown garden. Then I was among young hay, and very soon had come to the edge of a plantation of wind-blown firs. From there I saw the chimneys of the house smoking a few hundred yards to my left. I forsook the burnside, crossed another dyke, and almost before I knew was on a rough lawn. A glance back told me that I was well out of sight of the pursuit, which had not yet passed the first lift of the moor.

The lawn was a very rough place, cut with a scythe instead of a mower, and planted with beds of scrubby rhododendrons. A brace of black-game, which are not usually garden birds, rose at my approach. The house before me was the ordinary moorland farm, with a more pretentious whitewashed wing added. Attached to this wing was a glass veranda, and through the glass I saw the face of an elderly gentleman meekly watching me.

I stalked over the border of coarse hill gravel and entered the open veranda door. Within was a pleasant room, glass on one side, and on the other a mass of books. More books showed in an inner room. On the floor, instead of tables, stood cases such as you see in a museum, filled with coins and queer stone implements.

There was a knee-hole desk in the middle, and seated at it, with some papers and open volumes before him, was the benevolent old gentleman. His face was round and shiny, like Mr Pickwick's, big glasses were stuck on the end of his nose, and the top of his head was as bright and bare as a glass bottle. He never moved when I entered, but raised his placid eyebrows and waited on me to speak.

'It was not an easy job, with about five minutes to spare, to tell a stranger who I was and what I wanted, and to win his aid. I did not attempt it. There was something about the eye of the man before me, something so keen and knowledgeable, that I could not find a word. I simply stared at him and stuttered.'

'You seem in a hurry, my friend,' he said slowly.

I nodded towards the window. It gave a prospect across the moor through a gap in the plantation, and revealed certain figures half a mile off straggling through the heather.

'Ah, I see,' he said, and took up a pair of field-glasses through which he patiently scrutinized the figures.

'A fugitive from justice, eh? Well, we'll go into the matter at our leisure. Meantime I object to my privacy being broken in upon by the clumsy rural policeman. Go into my study, and you will see two doors facing you. Take the one on the left and close it behind you. You will be perfectly safe.'

And this extraordinary man took up his pen again.

I did as I was bid, and found myself in a little dark chamber which smelt of chemicals, and was lit only by a tiny window high up in the wall. The door had swung behind me with a click like the door of a safe. Once again I had found an unexpected sanctuary.

All the same I was not comfortable. There was something about the old gentleman which puzzled and rather terrified me. He had been too easy and ready, almost as if he had expected me. And his eyes had been horribly intelligent.

No sound came to me in that dark place. For all I knew the police might be searching the house, and if they did they would want to know what was behind this door. I tried to possess my soul in patience, and to forget how hungry I was.

Then I took a more cheerful view. The old gentleman could scarcely refuse me a meal, and I fell to reconstructing my breakfast. Bacon and eggs would content me, but I wanted the better part of a flitch of bacon and half a hundred eggs. And then, while my mouth was watering in anticipation, there was a click and the door stood open.

I emerged into the sunlight to find the master of the house sitting in a deep armchair in the room he called his study, and regarding me with curious eyes.

'Have they gone?' I asked.

'They have gone. I convinced them that you had crossed the hill. I do not choose that the police should come between me and one whom I am delighted to honour. This is a lucky morning for you, Mr Richard Hannay.'

As he spoke his eyelids seemed to tremble and to fall a little over his keen grey eyes. In a flash the phrase of Scudder's came back to me, when he had described the man he most dreaded in the world. He had said that he 'could hood his eyes like a hawk'. Then I saw that I had walked straight into the enemy's headquarters.

My first impulse was to throttle the old ruffian and make for the open air. He seemed to anticipate my intention, for he smiled gently, and nodded to the door behind me.

'I don't know what you mean,' I said roughly. 'And who are you calling Richard Hannay? My name's Ainslie.'
'So?' he said, still smiling. 'But of course you have others. We won't quarrel about a name.'

I was pulling myself together now, and I reflected that my garb, lacking coat and waistcoat and collar, would at any rate not betray me. I put on my surliest face and shrugged my shoulders.

'I suppose you're going to give me up after all, and I call it a damned dirty trick. My God, I wish I had never seen that cursed motor-car! Here's the money and be damned to you,' and I flung four sovereigns on the table.

He opened his eyes a little. 'Oh no, I shall not give you up. My friends and I will have a little private settlement with you, that is all. You know a little too much, Mr Hannay. You are a clever actor, but not quite clever enough.'

He spoke with assurance, but I could see the dawning of a doubt in his mind.

'Oh, for God's sake stop jawing,' I cried. 'Everything's against me. I haven't had a bit of luck since I came on shore at Leith. What's the harm in a poor devil with an empty stomach picking up some money he finds in a bust-up motor-car? That's all I done, and for that I've been chivvied for two days by those blasted bobbies over those blasted hills. I tell you I'm fair sick of it. You can do what you like, old boy! Ned Ainslie's got no fight left in him.'

I could see that the doubt was gaining.

'Will you oblige me with the story of your recent doings?' he asked. 'I can't, guv'nor,' I said in a real beggar's whine. 'I've not had a bite to eat for two days. Give me a mouthful of food, and then you'll hear God's truth.'

I must have showed my hunger in my face, for he signalled to one of the men in the doorway. A bit of cold pie was brought and a glass of beer, and I wolfed them down like a pig—or rather, like Ned Ainslie, for I was keeping up my character. In the middle of my meal he spoke suddenly to me in German, but I turned on him a face as blank as a stone wall.

Then I told him my story—how I had come off an Archangel ship at Leith a week ago, and was making my way overland to my brother at Wigtown. I had run short of cash—I hinted vaguely at a spree—and I was pretty well on my uppers when I had come on a hole in a hedge, and, looking through, had seen a big motor-car lying in the burn. I had poked about to see what had happened, and had found three sovereigns lying on the seat and one on the floor. There was nobody there or any sign of an owner, so I had pocketed the cash. But somehow the law had got after me. When I had tried to change a sovereign in a baker's shop, the woman had cried on the police, and a little later, when I was washing my face in a burn, I had been nearly gripped, and had only got away by leaving my coat and waistcoat behind me.

'They can have the money back,' I cried, 'for a fat lot of good it's done me. Those perishers are all down on a poor man. Now, if it had been you, guv'nor, that had found the quids, nobody would have troubled you.'

'You're a good liar, Hannay,' he said.

I flew into a rage. 'Stop fooling, damn you! I tell you my name's Ainslie, and I never heard of anyone called Hannay in my born days. I'd sooner have the police than you with your Hannays and your monkey-faced pistol tricks ... No, guv'nor, I beg pardon, I don't mean that. I'm much obliged to you for the grub, and I'll thank you to let me go now the coast's clear.'

It was obvious that he was badly puzzled. You see he had never seen me, and my appearance must have altered considerably from my photographs, if he had got one of them. I was pretty smart and well dressed in London, and now I was a regular tramp.

'I do not propose to let you go. If you are what you say you are, you will soon have a chance of clearing yourself. If you are what I believe you are, I do not think you will see the light much longer.'

He rang a bell, and a third servant appeared from the veranda.

'I want the Lanchester in five minutes,' he said. 'There will be three to luncheon.'

Then he looked steadily at me, and that was the hardest ordeal of all.

There was something weird and devilish in those eyes, cold, malignant, unearthly, and most hellishly clever. They fascinated me like the bright eyes of a snake. I had a strong impulse to throw myself on his mercy and offer to join his side, and if you consider the way I felt about the whole thing you will see that that impulse must have been purely physical, the weakness of a brain mesmerized and mastered by a stronger spirit. But I managed to stick it out and even to grin.

'You'll know me next time, guv'nor,' I said.

'Karl,' he spoke in German to one of the men in the doorway, 'you will put this fellow in the storeroom till I return, and you will be answerable to me for his keeping.'

I was marched out of the room with a pistol at each ear.

The storeroom was a damp chamber in what had been the old farmhouse. There was no carpet on the uneven floor, and nothing to sit down on but a school form. It was black as pitch, for the windows were heavily shuttered. I made out by groping that the walls were lined with boxes and barrels and sacks of some heavy stuff. The whole place smelt of mould and disuse. My gaolers turned the key in the door, and I could hear them shifting their feet as they stood on guard outside.
I sat down in that chilly darkness in a very miserable frame of mind. The old boy had gone off in a motor to collect the two ruffians who had interviewed me yesterday. Now, they had seen me as the roadman, and they would remember me, for I was in the same rig. What was a roadman doing twenty miles from his beat, pursued by the police? A question or two would put them on the track. Probably they had seen Mr Turnbull, probably Marmie too; most likely they could link me up with Sir Harry, and then the whole thing would be crystal clear. What chance had I in this moorland house with three desperadoes and their armed servants?

I began to think wistfully of the police, now plodding over the hills after my wraith. They at any rate were fellow-countrymen and honest men, and their tender mercies would be kinder than these ghoulish aliens. But they wouldn't have listened to me. That old devil with the eyelids had not taken long to get rid of them. I thought he probably had some kind of graft with the constabulary. Most likely he had letters from Cabinet Ministers saying he was to be given every facility for plotting against Britain. That's the sort of owlish way we run our politics in the Old Country.

The three would be back for lunch, so I hadn't more than a couple of hours to wait. It was simply waiting on destruction, for I could see no way out of this mess. I wished that I had Scudder's courage, for I am free to confess I didn't feel any great fortitude. The only thing that kept me going was that I was pretty furious. It made me boil with rage to think of those three spies getting the pull on me like this. I hoped that at any rate I might be able to twist one of their necks before they downed me.

The more I thought of it the angrier I grew, and I had to get up and move about the room. I tried the shutters, but they were the kind that lock with a key, and I couldn't move them. From the outside came the faint clucking of hens in the warm sun. Then I groped among the sacks and boxes. I couldn't open the latter, and the sacks seemed to be full of things like dog-biscuits that smelt of cinnamon. But, as I circumnavigated the room, I found a handle in the wall which seemed worth investigating.

It was the door of a wall cupboard--what they call a 'press' in Scotland--and it was locked. I shook it, and it seemed rather flimsy. For want of something better to do I put out my strength on that door, getting some purchase on the handle by looping my braces round it. Presently the thing gave with a crash which I thought would bring in my warders to inquire. I waited for a bit, and then started to explore the cupboard shelves.

There was a multitude of queer things there. I found an odd vesta or two in my trouser pockets and struck a light. It was out in a second, but it showed me one thing. There was a little stock of electric torches on one shelf. I picked up one, and found it was in working order.

With the torch to help me I investigated further. There were bottles and cases of queer-smelling stuffs, chemicals no doubt for experiments, and there were coils of fine copper wire and yanks and yanks of thin oiled silk. There was a box of detonators, and a lot of cord for fuses. Then away at the back of the shelf I found a stout brown cardboard box, and inside it a wooden case. I managed to wrench it open, and within lay half a dozen little grey bricks, each a couple of inches square.

I took up one, and found that it crumbled easily in my hand. Then I smelt it and put my tongue to it. After that I sat down to think. I hadn't been a mining engineer for nothing, and I knew lentonite when I saw it.

With one of these bricks I could blow the house to smithereens. I had used the stuff in Rhodesia and knew its power. But the trouble was that my knowledge wasn't exact. I had forgotten the proper charge and the right way of preparing it, and I wasn't sure about the timing. I had only a vague notion, too, as to its power, for though I had used it I had not handled it with my own fingers.

But it was a chance, the only possible chance. It was a mighty risk, but against it was an absolute black certainty. If I used it the odds were, as I reckoned, about five to one in favour of my blowing myself into the tree-tops; but if I didn't I should very likely be occupying a six-foot hole in the garden by the evening. That was the way I had to look at it. The prospect was pretty dark either way, but anyhow there was a chance, both for myself and for my country.

The remembrance of little Scudder decided me. It was about the beastliest moment of my life, for I'm no good at these cold-blooded resolutions. Still I managed to rake up the pluck to set my teeth and choke back the horrid doubts that flooded in on me. I simply shut off my mind and pretended I was doing an experiment as simple as Guy Fawkes fireworks.

I got a detonator, and fixed it to a couple of feet of fuse. Then I took a quarter of a lentonite brick, and buried it near the door below one of the sacks in a crack of the floor, fixing the detonator in it. For all I knew half those boxes might be dynamite. If the cupboard held such deadly explosives, why not the boxes? In that case there would be a glorious sk委ward journey for me and the German servants and about an acre of surrounding country. There was also the risk that the detonation might set off the other bricks in the cupboard, for I had forgotten most that I knew about lentonite. But it didn't do to begin thinking about the possibilities. The odds were horrible, but I had to take them.

I ensconced myself just below the sill of the window, and lit the fuse. Then I waited for a moment or two. There was dead silence--only a shuffle of heavy boots in the passage, and the peaceful cluck of hens from the warm out-
of-doors. I commended my soul to my Maker, and wondered where I would be in five seconds ...

A great wave of heat seemed to surge upwards from the floor, and hang for a blistering instant in the air. Then the wall opposite me flashed into a golden yellow and dissolved with a rending thunder that hammered my brain into a pulp. Something dropped on me, catching the point of my left shoulder.

And then I think I became unconscious.

My stupor can scarcely have lasted beyond a few seconds. I felt myself being choked by thick yellow fumes, and struggled out of the debris to my feet. Somewhere behind me I felt fresh air. The jams of the window had fallen, and through the ragged rent the smoke was pouring out to the summer noon. I stepped over the broken lintel, and found myself standing in a yard in a dense and acrid fog. I felt very sick and ill, but I could move my limbs, and I staggered blindly forward away from the house.

A small mill-lade ran in a wooden aqueduct at the other side of the yard, and into this I fell. The cool water revived me, and I had just enough wits left to think of escape. I squirmed up the lade among the slippery green slime till I reached the mill-wheel. Then I wriggled through the axle hole into the old mill and tumbled on to a bed of chaff. A nail caught the seat of my trousers, and I left a wisp of heather-mixture behind me.

The mill had been long out of use. The ladders were rotten with age, and in the loft the rats had gnawed great holes in the floor. Nausea shook me, and a wheel in my head kept turning, while my left shoulder and arm seemed to be stricken with the palsy. I looked out of the window and saw a fog still hanging over the house and smoke escaping from an upper window. Please God I had set the place on fire, for I could hear confused cries coming from the other side.

But I had no time to linger, since this mill was obviously a bad hiding-place. Anyone looking for me would naturally follow the lade, and I made certain the search would begin as soon as they found that my body was not in the storeroom. From another window I saw that on the far side of the mill stood an old stone dovecot. If I could get there without leaving tracks I might find a hiding-place, for I argued that my enemies, if they thought I could move, would conclude I had made for open country, and would go seeking me on the moor.

I crawled down the broken ladder, scattering chaff behind me to cover my footsteps. I did the same on the mill floor, and on the threshold where the door hung on broken hinges. Peeping out, I saw that between me and the dovecot was a piece of bare cobbled ground, where no footmarks would show. Also it was mercifully hid by the mill buildings from any view from the house. I slipped across the space, got to the back of the dovecot and prospected a way of ascent.

That was one of the hardest jobs I ever took on. My shoulder and arm ached like hell, and I was so sick and giddy that I was always on the verge of falling. But I managed it somehow. By the use of out-jutting stones and gaps in the masonry and a tough ivy root I got to the top in the end. There was a little parapet behind which I found space to lie down. Then I proceeded to go off into an old-fashioned swoon.

I woke with a burning head and the sun glaring in my face. For a long time I lay motionless, for those horrible fumes seemed to have loosened my joints and dulled my brain. Sounds came to me from the house—men speaking throatily and the throbbing of a stationary car. There was a little gap in the parapet to which I wriggled, and from which I had some sort of prospect of the yard. I saw figures come out—a servant with his head bound up, and then a younger man in knickerbockers. They were looking for something, and moved towards the mill. Then one of them caught sight of the wisp of cloth on the nail, and cried out to the other. They both went back to the house, and brought two more to look at it. I saw the rotund figure of my late captor, and I thought I made out the man with the lisp. I noticed that all had pistols.

For half an hour they ransacked the mill. I could hear them kicking over the barrels and pulling up the rotten planking. Then they came outside, and stood just below the dovecot arguing fiercely. The servant with the bandage was being soundly rated. I heard them fiddling with the door of the dovecote and for one horrid moment I fancied I had made for open country, and would go seeking me on the moor.

All that long blistering afternoon I lay baking on the rooftop. Thirst was my chief torment. My tongue was like a stick, and to make it worse I could hear the cool drip of water from the mill- lade. I watched the course of the little stream as it came in from the moor, and my fancy followed it to the top of the glen, where it must issue from an icy fountain fringed with cool ferns and mosses. I would have given a thousand pounds to plunge my face into that.

I had a fine prospect of the whole ring of moorland. I saw the car speed away with two occupants, and a man on a hill pony riding east. I judged they were looking for me, and I wished them joy of their quest.

But I saw something else more interesting. The house stood almost on the summit of a swell of moorland which crowned a sort of plateau, and there was no higher point nearer than the big hills six miles off. The actual summit, as I have mentioned, was a biggish clump of trees—firs mostly, with a few ashes and beeches. On the dovecot I was almost on a level with the tree-tops, and could see what lay beyond. The wood was not solid, but only a ring, and inside was an oval of green turf, for all the world like a big cricket-field.
I didn't take long to guess what it was. It was an aerodrome, and a secret one. The place had been most cunningly chosen. For suppose anyone were watching an aeroplane descending here, he would think it had gone over the hill beyond the trees. As the place was on the top of a rise in the midst of a big amphitheatre, any observer from any direction would conclude it had passed out of view behind the hill. Only a man very close at hand would realize that the aeroplane had not gone over but had descended in the midst of the wood. An observer with a telescope on one of the higher hills might have discovered the truth, but only herds went there, and herds do not carry spy-glasses. When I looked from the dovecot I could see far away a blue line which I knew was the sea, and I grew furious to think that our enemies had this secret conning-tower to rake our waterways.

Then I reflected that if that aeroplane came back the chances were ten to one that I would be discovered. So through the afternoon I lay and prayed for the coming of darkness, and glad I was when the sun went down over the big western hills and the twilight haze crept over the moor. The aeroplane was late. The gloaming was far advanced when I heard the beat of wings and saw it volplaning downward to its home in the wood. Lights twinkled for a bit and there was much coming and going from the house. Then the dark fell, and silence.

Thank God it was a black night. The moon was well on its last quarter and would not rise till late. My thirst was too great to allow me to tarry, so about nine o'clock, so far as I could judge, I started to descend. It wasn't easy, and half-way down I heard the back door of the house open, and saw the gleam of a lantern against the mill wall. For some agonizing minutes I hung by theivy and prayed that whoever it was would not come round by the dovecot. Then the light disappeared, and I dropped as softly as I could on to the hard soil of the yard.

I crawled on my belly in the lee of a stone dyke till I reached the fringe of trees which surrounded the house. If I had known how to do it I would have tried to put that aeroplane out of action, but I realized that any attempt would probably be futile. I was pretty certain that there would be some kind of defence round the house, so I went through the wood on hands and knees, feeling carefully every inch before me. It was as well, for presently I came on a wire about two feet from the ground. If I had tripped over that, it would doubtless have rung some bell in the house and I would have been captured.

A hundred yards farther on I found another wire cunningly placed on the edge of a small stream. Beyond that lay the moor, and in five minutes I was deep in bracken and heather. Soon I was round the shoulder of the rise, in the little glen from which the mill-lade flowed. Ten minutes later my face was in the spring, and I was soaking down pints of the blessed water.

But I did not stop till I had put half a dozen miles between me and that accursed dwelling.

CHAPTER SEVEN The Dry-Fly Fisherman

I sat down on a hill-top and took stock of my position. I wasn't feeling very happy, for my natural thankfulness at my escape was clouded by my severe bodily discomfort. Those lentonite fumes had fairly poisoned me, and the baking hours on the dovecot hadn't helped matters. I had a crushing headache, and felt as sick as a cat. Also my shoulder was in a bad way. At first I thought it was only a bruise, but it seemed to be swelling, and I had no use of my left arm.

My plan was to seek Mr Turnbull's cottage, recover my garments, and especially Scudder's note-book, and then make for the main line and get back to the south. It seemed to me that the sooner I got in touch with the Foreign Office man, Sir Walter Bullivant, the better. I didn't see how I could get more proof than I had got already. He must just take or leave my story, and anyway, with him I would be in better hands than those devilish Germans. I had begun to feel quite kindly towards the British police.

It was a wonderful starry night, and I had not much difficulty about the road. Sir Harry's map had given me the lie of the land, and all I had to do was to steer a point or two west of south-west to come to the stream where I had met the roadman. In all these travels I never knew the names of the places, but I believe this stream was no less than the upper waters of the river Tweed. I calculated I must be about eighteen miles distant, and that meant I could not get there before morning. So I must lie up a day somewhere, for I was too outrageous a figure to be seen in the sunlight. I had neither coat, waistcoat, collar, nor hat, my trousers were badly torn, and my face and hands were black with the explosion. I daresay I had other beauties, for my eyes felt as if they were furiously bloodshot.

It was as well, for presently I came on a wire about two feet from the ground. If I had tripped over that, it would doubtless have rung some bell in the house and I would have been captured.

Then I reflected that if that aeroplane came back the chances were ten to one that I would be discovered. So through the afternoon I lay and prayed for the coming of darkness, and glad I was when the sun went down over the big western hills and the twilight haze crept over the moor. The aeroplane was late. The gloaming was far advanced when I heard the beat of wings and saw it volplaning downward to its home in the wood. Lights twinkled for a bit and there was much coming and going from the house. Then the dark fell, and silence.

Thank God it was a black night. The moon was well on its last quarter and would not rise till late. My thirst was too great to allow me to tarry, so about nine o'clock, so far as I could judge, I started to descend. It wasn't easy, and half-way down I heard the back door of the house open, and saw the gleam of a lantern against the mill wall. For some agonizing minutes I hung by the ivy and prayed that whoever it was would not come round by the dovecot. Then the light disappeared, and I dropped as softly as I could on to the hard soil of the yard.

I crawled on my belly in the lee of a stone dyke till I reached the fringe of trees which surrounded the house. If I had known how to do it I would have tried to put that aeroplane out of action, but I realized that any attempt would probably be futile. I was pretty certain that there would be some kind of defence round the house, so I went through the wood on hands and knees, feeling carefully every inch before me. It was as well, for presently I came on a wire about two feet from the ground. If I had tripped over that, it would doubtless have rung some bell in the house and I would have been captured.

A hundred yards farther on I found another wire cunningly placed on the edge of a small stream. Beyond that lay the moor, and in five minutes I was deep in bracken and heather. Soon I was round the shoulder of the rise, in the little glen from which the mill-lade flowed. Ten minutes later my face was in the spring, and I was soaking down pints of the blessed water.

But I did not stop till I had put half a dozen miles between me and that accursed dwelling.

CHAPTER SEVEN The Dry-Fly Fisherman

I sat down on a hill-top and took stock of my position. I wasn't feeling very happy, for my natural thankfulness at my escape was clouded by my severe bodily discomfort. Those lentonite fumes had fairly poisoned me, and the baking hours on the dovecot hadn't helped matters. I had a crushing headache, and felt as sick as a cat. Also my shoulder was in a bad way. At first I thought it was only a bruise, but it seemed to be swelling, and I had no use of my left arm.

My plan was to seek Mr Turnbull's cottage, recover my garments, and especially Scudder's note-book, and then make for the main line and get back to the south. It seemed to me that the sooner I got in touch with the Foreign Office man, Sir Walter Bullivant, the better. I didn't see how I could get more proof than I had got already. He must just take or leave my story, and anyway, with him I would be in better hands than those devilish Germans. I had begun to feel quite kindly towards the British police.

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Altogether I was no spectacle for God-fearing citizens to see on a highroad.

Very soon after daybreak I made an attempt to clean myself in a hill burn, and then approached a herd's cottage, for I was feeling the need of food. The herd was away from home, and his wife was alone, with no neighbour for five miles. She was a decent old body, and a plucky one, for though she got a fright when she saw me, she had an axe handy, and would have used it on any evil-doer. I told her that I had had a fall--I didn't say how--and she saw by my looks that I was pretty sick. Like a true Samaritan she asked no questions, but gave me a bowl of milk with a dash of whisky in it, and let me sit for a little by her kitchen fire. She would have bathed my shoulder, but it ached so badly that I would not let her touch it.

I don't know what she took me for--a repentant burglar, perhaps; for when I wanted to pay her for the milk and
tendered a sovereign which was the smallest coin I had, she shook her head and said something about ‘giving it to
to them that had a right to it’. At this I protested so strongly that I think she believed me honest, for she took the money
and gave me a warm new plaid for it, and an old hat of her man’s. She showed me how to wrap the plaid around my
shoulders, and when I left that cottage I was the living image of the kind of Scotsman you see in the illustrations to
Burns’s poems. But at any rate I was more or less clad.

It was as well, for the weather changed before midday to a thick drizzle of rain. I found shelter below an
overhanging rock in the crook of a burn, where a drift of dead brackens made a tolerable bed. There I managed to
sleep till nightfall, waking very cramped and wretched, with my shoulder gnawing like a toothache. I ate the oatcake
and cheese the old wife had given me and set out again just before the darkening.

I pass over the miseries of that night among the wet hills. There were no stars to steer by, and I had to do the best
I could from my memory of the map. Twice I lost my way, and I had some nasty falls into peat-bogs. I had only
about ten miles to go as the crow flies, but my mistakes made it nearer twenty. The last bit was completed with set
teeth and a very light and dizzy head. But I managed it, and in the early dawn I was knocking at Mr Turnbull’s door.
The mist lay close and thick, and from the cottage I could not see the highroad.

Mr Turnbull himself opened to me--sober and something more than sober. He was primly dressed in an ancient
but well-tended suit of black; he had been shaved not later than the night before; he wore a linen collar; and in his
left hand he carried a pocket Bible. At first he did not recognize me.

‘Whae are ye that comes stravaigin’ here on the Sabbath mornin’?’ he asked.

I had lost all count of the days. So the Sabbath was the reason for this strange decorum.

My head was swimming so wildly that I could not frame a coherent answer. But he recognized me, and he saw
that I was ill.

‘Hae ye got my specs?’ he asked.

I fetched them out of my trouser pocket and gave him them.

‘Ye'll hae come for your jaicket and westcoat,’ he said. ‘Come in- bye. Losh, man, ye’re terrible dune i’ the legs.
Haud up till I get ye to a chair.’

I perceived I was in for a bout of malaria. I had a good deal of fever in my bones, and the wet night had brought
it out, while my shoulder and the effects of the fumes combined to make me feel pretty bad. Before I knew, Mr
Turnbull was helping me off with my clothes, and putting me to bed in one of the two cupboards that lined the
kitchen walls.

He was a true friend in need, that old roadman. His wife was dead years ago, and since his daughter’s marriage
he lived alone.

For the better part of ten days he did all the rough nursing I needed. I simply wanted to be left in peace while the
fever took its course, and when my skin was cool again I found that the bout had more or less cured my shoulder.
But it was a baddish go, and though I was out of bed in five days, it took me some time to get my legs again.

He went out each morning, leaving me milk for the day, and locking the door behind him; and came in in the
evening to sit silent in the chimney corner. Not a soul came near the place. When I was getting better, he never
bothered me with a question. Several times he fetched me a two days’ old SCOTSMAN, and I noticed that the
interest in the Portland Place murder seemed to have died down. There was no mention of it, and I could find very
little about anything except a thing called the General Assembly--some ecclesiastical spree, I gathered.

One day he produced my belt from a lockfast drawer. ‘There’s a terrible heap o’ siller in’t,’ he said. ‘Ye’d better
count it to see it’s a’ there.’

He never even sought my name. I asked him if anybody had been around making inquiries subsequent to my
spell at the road-making.

‘Ay, there was a man in a motor-cawr. He speired whae had ta’en my place that day, and I let on I thocht him
daft. But he keepit on at me, and syne I said he maun be thinkin’ o’ my gude-brither frae the Cleuch that whiles lent
me a haun’. He was a wersh-lookin’ sowl, and I couldna understand the half o’ his English tongue.’

I was getting restless those last days, and as soon as I felt myself fit I decided to be off. That was not till the
twelth day of June, and as luck would have it a drover went past that morning taking some cattle to Moffat. He was
a man named Hislop, a friend of Turnbull’s, and he came in to his breakfast with us and offered to take me with him.

I made Turnbull accept five pounds for my lodging, and a hard job I had of it. There never was a more
independent being. He grew positively rude when I pressed him, and shy and red, and took the money at last without
a thank you. When I told him how much I owed him, he grunted something about ‘ae guid turn deservin’ anither’.
You would have thought from our leave-taking that we had parted in disgust.

Hislop was a cheery soul, who chattered all the way over the pass and down the sunny vale of Annan. I talked of
Galloway markets and sheep prices, and he made up his mind I was a ‘pack-shepherd’ from those parts--whatever
that may be. My plaid and my old hat, as I have said, gave me a fine theatrical Scots look. But driving cattle is a
mortally slow job, and we took the better part of the day to cover a dozen miles.

If I had not had such an anxious heart I would have enjoyed that time. It was shining blue weather, with a constantly changing prospect of brown hills and far green meadows, and a continual sound of larks and curlews and falling streams. But I had no mind for the summer, and little for Hislop's conversation, for as the fateful fifteenth of June drew near I was overweighed with the hopeless difficulties of my enterprise.

I got some dinner in a humble Moffat public-house, and walked the two miles to the junction on the main line. The night express for the south was not due till near midnight, and to fill up the time I went up on the hillside and fell asleep, for the walk had tired me. I all but slept too long, and had to run to the station and catch the train with two minutes to spare. The feel of the hard third-class cushions and the smell of stale tobacco cheered me up wonderfully. At any rate, I felt now that I was getting to grips with my job.

I was decanted at Crewe in the small hours and had to wait till six to get a train for Birmingham. In the afternoon I got to Reading, and changed into a local train which journeyed into the deeps of Berkshire. Presently I was in a land of lush water-meadows and slow reedy streams. About eight o'clock in the evening, a weary and travel-stained being—a cross between a farm-labourer and a vet—with a checked black-and-white plaid over his arm (for I did not dare to wear it south of the Border), descended at the little station of Artinswell. There were several people on the platform, and I thought I had better wait to ask my way till I was clear of the place.

The road led through a wood of great beeches and then into a shallow valley, with the green backs of downs peeping over the distant trees. After Scotland the air smelt heavy and flat, but infinitely sweet, for the limes and chestnuts and lilac bushes were domes of blossom. Presently I came to a bridge, below which a clear slow stream flowed between snowy beds of water-buttercups. A little above it was a mill; and the lasher made a pleasant cool sound in the scented dusk. Somehow the place soothed me and put me at my ease. I fell to whistling as I looked into the green depths, and the tune which came to my lips was 'Annie Laurie'.

A fisherman came up from the waterside, and as he neared me he too began to whistle. The tune was infectious, for he followed my suit. He was a huge man in untidy old flannels and a wide-brimmed hat, with a canvas bag slung on his shoulder. He nodded to me, and I thought I had never seen a shrewder or better-tempered face. He leaned his delicate ten-foot split-cane rod against the bridge, and looked with me at the water.

'Clear, isn't it?' he said pleasantly. 'I back our Kenner any day against the Test. Look at that big fellow. Four pounds if he's an ounce. But the evening rise is over and you can't tempt 'em.'

'I don't see him,' said I.

'Look! There! A yard from the reeds just above that stickle.'

'I've got him now. You might swear he was a black stone.'

'So,' he said, and whistled another bar of 'Annie Laurie'.

'Twisdon's the name, isn't it?' he said over his shoulder, his eyes still fixed on the stream.

'No,' I said. 'I mean to say, Yes.' I had forgotten all about my alias.

'It's a wise conspirator that knows his own name,' he observed, grinning broadly at a moor-hen that emerged from the bridge's shadow.

I stood up and looked at him, at the square, cleft jaw and broad, lined brow and the firm folds of cheek, and began to think that here at last was an ally worth having. His whimsical blue eyes seemed to go very deep.

Suddenly he frowned. 'I call it disgraceful,' he said, raising his voice. 'Disgraceful that an able-bodied man like you should dare to beg. You can get a meal from my kitchen, but you'll get no money from me.'

A dog-cart was passing, driven by a young man who raised his whip to salute the fisherman. When he had gone, he picked up his rod.

'That's my house,' he said, pointing to a white gate a hundred yards on. 'Wait five minutes and then go round to the back door.' And with that he left me.

I did as I was bidden. I found a pretty cottage with a lawn running down to the stream, and a perfect jungle of guelder-rose and lilac flanking the path. The back door stood open, and a grave butler was awaiting me.

'Come this way, Sir,' he said, and he led me along a passage and up a back staircase to a pleasant bedroom looking towards the river. There I found a complete outfit laid out for me--dress clothes with all the fixings, a brown flannel suit, shirts, collars, ties, shaving things and hair-brushes, even a pair of patent shoes. 'Sir Walter thought as how Mr Reggie's things would fit you, Sir,' said the butler. 'He keeps some clothes 'ere, for he comes regular on the week-ends. There's a bathroom next door, and I've prepared a 'ot bath. Dinner in 'alf an hour, Sir. You'll 'ear the gong.'

The grave being withdrew, and I sat down in a chintz-covered easy-chair and gaped. It was like a pantomime, to come suddenly out of beggardom into this orderly comfort. Obviously Sir Walter believed in me, though why he did I could not guess. I looked at myself in the mirror and saw a wild, haggard brown fellow, with a fortnight's ragged beard, and dust in ears and eyes, collarless, vulgarly shirted, with shapeless old tweed clothes and boots that had not
been cleaned for the better part of a month. I made a fine tramp and a fair drover; and here I was ushered by a prim butler into this temple of gracious ease. And the best of it was that they did not even know my name.

I resolved not to puzzle my head but to take the gifts the gods had provided. I shaved and bathed luxuriously, and got into the dress clothes and clean crackling shirt, which fitted me not so badly. By the time I had finished the looking-glass showed a not unpersonable young man.

Sir Walter awaited me in a dusky dining-room where a little round table was lit with silver candles. The sight of him--so respectable and established and secure, the embodiment of law and government and all the conventions--took me aback and made me feel an interloper. He couldn't know the truth about me, or he wouldn't treat me like this. I simply could not accept his hospitality on false pretenses.

'I'm more obliged to you than I can say, but I'm bound to make things clear,' I said. 'I'm an innocent man, but I'm wanted by the police. I've got to tell you this, and I won't be surprised if you kick me out.'

He smiled. 'That's all right. Don't let that interfere with your appetite. We can talk about these things after dinner.' I never ate a meal with greater relish, for I had had nothing all day but railway sandwiches. Sir Walter did me proud, for we drank a good champagne and had some uncommon fine port afterwards. It made me almost hysterical to be sitting there, waited on by a footman and a sleek butler, and remember that I had been living for three weeks like a brigand, with every man's hand against me. I told Sir Walter about tiger-fish in the Zambesi that bite off your fingers if you give them a chance, and we discussed sport up and down the globe, for he had hunted a bit in his day.

We went to his study for coffee, a jolly room full of books and trophies and untidiness and comfort. I made up my mind that if ever I got rid of this business and had a house of my own, I would create just such a room. Then when the coffee-cups were cleared away, and we had got our cigars alight, my host swung his long legs over the side of his chair and bade me get started with my yarn.

'I've obeyed Harry's instructions,' he said, 'and the bribe he offered me was that you would tell me something to wake me up. I'm ready, Mr Hannay.'

I noticed with a start that he called me by my proper name.

I began at the very beginning. I told of my boredom in London, and the night I had come back to find Scudder gibbering on my doorstep. I told him all Scudder had told me about Karolides and the Foreign Office conference, and that made him purse his lips and grin.

Then I got to the murder, and he grew solemn again. He heard all about the milkman and my time in Galloway, and my deciphering Scudder's notes at the inn.

'You've got them here?' he asked sharply, and drew a long breath when I whipped the little book from my pocket.

I said nothing of the contents. Then I described my meeting with Sir Harry, and the speeches at the hall. At that he laughed uproariously.

'Harry talked dashed nonsense, did he? I quite believe it. He's as good a chap as ever breathed, but his idiot of an uncle has stuffed his head with maggots. Go on, Mr Hannay.'

My day as roadman excited him a bit. He made me describe the two fellows in the car very closely, and seemed to be raking back in his memory. He grew merry again when he heard of the fate of that ass jopley.

But the old man in the moorland house solemnized him. Again I had to describe every detail of his appearance.

'Bland and bald-headed and hooded his eyes like a bird ... He sounds a sinister wild-fowl! And you dynamited his hermitage, after he had saved you from the police. Spirited piece of work, that!' Presently I reached the end of my wanderings. He got up slowly, and looked down at me from the hearth-rug.

'You may dismiss the police from your mind,' he said. 'You're in no danger from the law of this land.'

'Great Scot!' I cried. 'Have they got the murderer?'

'No. But for the last fortnight they have dropped you from the list of possibles.'

'Why?' I asked in amazement.

'Principally because I received a letter from Scudder. I knew something of the man, and he did several jobs for me. He was half crank, half genius, but he was wholly honest. The trouble about him was his partiality for playing a lone hand. That made him pretty well useless in any Secret Service--a pity, for he had uncommon gifts. I think he was the bravest man in the world, for he was always shivering with fright, and yet nothing would choke him off. I had a letter from him on the 31st of May.'

'But he had been dead a week by then.'

'The letter was written and posted on the 23rd. He evidently did not anticipate an immediate decease. His communications usually took a week to reach me, for they were sent under cover to Spain and then to Newcastle. He had a mania, you know, for concealing his tracks.'

'What did he say?' I stammered.
Nothing. Merely that he was in danger, but had found shelter with a good friend, and that I would hear from him before the 15th of June. He gave me no address, but said he was living near Portland Place. I think his object was to clear you if anything happened. When I got it I went to Scotland Yard, went over the details of the inquest, and concluded that you were the friend. We made inquiries about you, Mr Hannay, and found you were respectable. I thought I knew the motives for your disappearance—not only the police, the other one too—and when I got Harry's scrawl I guessed at the rest. I have been expecting you any time this past week.' You can imagine what a load this took off my mind. I felt a free man once more, for I was now up against my country's enemies only, and not my country's law.

'Now let us have the little note-book,' said Sir Walter.

It took us a good hour to work through it. I explained the cypher, and he was jolly quick at picking it up. He emended my reading of it on several points, but I had been fairly correct, on the whole. His face was very grave before he had finished, and he sat silent for a while.

'I don't know what to make of it,' he said at last. 'He is right about one thing—what is going to happen the day after tomorrow. How the devil can it have got known? That is ugly enough in itself. But all this about war and the Black Stone—it reads like some wild melodrama. If only I had more confidence in Scudder's judgement. The trouble about him was that he was too romantic. He had the artistic temperament, and wanted a story to be better than God meant it to be. He had a lot of odd biases, too. Jews, for example, made him see red. Jews and the high finance.

'The Black Stone,' he repeated. 'DER SCHWARZE STEIN. It's like a penny novelette. And all this stuff about Karolides. That is the weak part of the tale, for I happen to know that the virtuous Karolides is likely to outlast us both. There is no State in Europe that wants him gone. Besides, he has just been playing up to Berlin and Vienna and giving my Chief some uneasy moments. No! Scudder has gone off the track there. Frankly, Hannay, I don't believe that part of his story. There's some nasty business afoot, and he found out too much and lost his life over it. But I am ready to take my oath that it is ordinary spy work. A certain great European Power makes a hobby of her spy system, and her methods are not too particular. Since she pays by piecework her blackguards are not likely to stick at a murder or two. They want our naval dispositions for their collection at the Marineamt; but they will be pigeon-holed—nothing more.'

Just then the butler entered the room.

'There's a trunk-call from London, Sir Walter. It's Mr 'Eath, and he wants to speak to you personally.'

My host went off to the telephone.

He returned in five minutes with a whitish face. 'I apologize to the shade of Scudder,' he said. 'Karolides was shot dead this evening at a few minutes after seven.'

CHAPTER EIGHT The Coming of the Black Stone

I came down to breakfast next morning, after eight hours of blessed dreamless sleep, to find Sir Walter decoding a telegram in the midst of muffins and marmalade. His fresh rosiness of yesterday seemed a thought tarnished.

'I had a busy hour on the telephone after you went to bed,' he said. 'I got my Chief to speak to the First Lord and the Secretary for War, and they are bringing Royer over a day sooner. This wire clinches it. He will be in London at five. Odd that the code word for a SOUS-CHEF D'ETAT MAJOR-GENERAL should be "Porker".'

He directed me to the hot dishes and went on.

'Not that I think it will do much good. If your friends were clever enough to find out the first arrangement they are clever enough to discover the change. I would give my head to know where the leak is. We believed there were only five men in England who knew about Royer's visit, and you may be certain there were fewer in France, for they manage these things better there.'

While I ate he continued to talk, making me to my surprise a present of his full confidence.

'Can the dispositions not be changed?' I asked.

'They could,' he said. 'But we want to avoid that if possible. They are the result of intense thought, and no alteration would be as good. Besides, on one or two points change is simply impossible. Still, something could be done, I suppose, if it were absolutely necessary. But you see the difficulty, Hannay. Our enemies are not going to be such fools as to pick Royer's pocket or any childish game like that. They know that would mean a row and put us on our guard. Their aim is to get the details without any one of us knowing, so that Royer will go back to Paris in the belief that the whole business is still deadly secret. If they can't do that they fail, for, once we suspect, they know that the whole thing must be altered.'

'Then we must stick by the Frenchman's side till he is home again,' I said. 'If they thought they could get the information in Paris they would try there. It means that they have some deep scheme on foot in London which they reckon is going to win out.'

Royer dines with my Chief, and then comes to my house where four people will see him—Whittaker from the Admiralty, myself, Sir Arthur Drew, and General Winstanley. The First Lord is ill, and has gone to Sheringham. At
my house he will get a certain document from Whittaker, and after that he will be motored to Portsmouth where a
destroyer will take him to Havre. His journey is too important for the ordinary boat-train. He will never be left
unattended for a moment till he is safe on French soil. The same with Whittaker till he meets Royer. That is the best
we can do, and it's hard to see how there can be any miscarriage. But I don't mind admitting that I'm horribly
nervous. This murder of Karolides will play the deuce in the chancelleries of Europe.'

After breakfast he asked me if I could drive a car. 'Well, you'll be my chauffeur today and wear Hudson's rig.
You're about his size. You have a hand in this business and we are taking no risks. There are desperate men against
us, who will not respect the country retreat of an overworked official.'

When I first came to London I had bought a car and amused myself with running about the south of England, so
I knew something of the geography. I took Sir Walter to town by the Bath Road and made good going. It was a soft
breathless June morning, with a promise of sultriness later, but it was delicious enough swinging through the little
towns with their freshly watered streets, and past the summer gardens of the Thames valley. I landed Sir Walter at
his house in Queen Anne's Gate punctually by half-past eleven. The butler was coming up by train with the luggage.

The first thing he did was to take me round to Scotland Yard. There we saw a prim gentleman, with a clean-
shaven, lawyer's face.

'I've brought you the Portland Place murderer,' was Sir Walter's introduction.
The reply was a wry smile. 'It would have been a welcome present, Bullivant. This, I presume, is Mr Richard
Hannay, who for some days greatly interested my department.'

'Mr Hannay will interest it again. He has much to tell you, but not today. For certain grave reasons his tale must
wait for four hours. Then, I can promise you, you will be entertained and possibly edified. I want you to assure Mr
Hannay that he will suffer no further inconvenience.'

This assurance was promptly given. 'You can take up your life where you left off,' I was told. 'Your flat, which
probably you no longer wish to occupy, is waiting for you, and your man is still there. As you were never publicly
accused, we considered that there was no need of a public exculpation. But on that, of course, you must please
yourself.'

'We may want your assistance later on, MacGillivray,' Sir Walter said as we left.
Then he turned me loose.

'Come and see me tomorrow, Hannay. I needn't tell you to keep deadly quiet. If I were you I would go to bed, for
you must have considerable arrears of sleep to overtake. You had better lie low, for if one of your Black Stone
friends saw you there might be trouble.'

I felt curiously at a loose end. At first it was very pleasant to be a free man, able to go where I wanted without
fearing anything. I had only been a month under the ban of the law, and it was quite enough for me. I went to the
Savoy and ordered very carefully a very good luncheon, and then smoked the best cigar the house could provide.
But I was still feeling nervous. When I saw anybody look at me in the lounge, I grew shy, and wondered if they
were thinking about the murder.

After that I took a taxi and drove miles away up into North London. I walked back through fields and lines of
villas and terraces and then slums and mean streets, and it took me pretty nearly two hours. All the while my
restlessness was growing worse. I felt that great things, tremendous things, were happening or about to happen, and
I, who was the cog-wheel of the whole business, was out of it. Royer would be landing at Dover, Sir Walter would
be making plans with the few people in England who were in the secret, and somewhere in the darkness the Black
Stone would be working. I felt the sense of danger and impending calamity, and I had the curious feeling, too, that I
alone could avert it, alone could grapple with it. But I was out of the game now. How could it be otherwise? It was
not likely that Cabinet Ministers and Admiralty Lords and Generals would admit me to their councils.

I actually began to wish that I could run up against one of my three enemies. That would lead to developments. I
felt that I wanted enormously to have a vulgar scrap with those gentry, where I could hit out and flatten something. I
was rapidly getting into a very bad temper.

I didn't feel like going back to my flat. That had to be faced some time, but as I still had sufficient money I
thought I would put it off till next morning, and go to a hotel for the night.

My irritation lasted through dinner, which I had at a restaurant in Jermyn Street. I was no longer hungry, and let
several courses pass untasted. I drank the best part of a bottle of Burgundy, but it did nothing to cheer me. An
abominable restlessness had taken possession of me. Here was I, a very ordinary fellow, with no particular brains,
and yet I was convinced that somehow I was needed to help this business through—that without me it would all go to
blazes. I told myself it was sheer silly conceit, that four or five of the cleverest people living, with all the might of
the British Empire at their back, had the job in hand. Yet I couldn't be convinced. It seemed as if a voice kept
speaking in my ear, telling me to be up and doing, or I would never sleep again.

The upshot was that about half-past nine I made up my mind to go to Queen Anne's Gate. Very likely I would
not be admitted, but it would ease my conscience to try.

I walked down Jermyn Street, and at the corner of Duke Street passed a group of young men. They were in evening dress, had been dining somewhere, and were going on to a music-hall. One of them was Mr Marmaduke jopley.

He saw me and stopped short.

'By God, the murderer!' he cried. 'Here, you fellows, hold him! That's Hannay, the man who did the Portland Place murder!' He gripped me by the arm, and the others crowded round. I wasn't looking for any trouble, but my ill-temper made me play the fool. A policeman came up, and I should have told him the truth, and, if he didn't believe it, demanded to be taken to Scotland Yard, or for that matter to the nearest police station. But a delay at that moment seemed to me unendurable, and the sight of Marmie's imbecile face was more than I could bear. I let out with my left, and had the satisfaction of seeing him measure his length in the gutter.

Then began an unholy row. They were all on me at once, and the policeman took me in the rear. I got in one or two good blows, for I think, with fair play, I could have licked the lot of them, but the policeman pinned me behind, and one of them got his fingers on my throat.

Through a black cloud of rage I heard the officer of the law asking what was the matter, and Marmie, between his broken teeth, declaring that I was Hannay the murderer.

'Oh, damn it all,' I cried, 'make the fellow shut up. I advise you to leave me alone, constable. Scotland Yard knows all about me, and you'll get a proper wigging if you interfere with me.'

'You've got to come along of me, young man,' said the policeman. 'I saw you strike that gentleman crool 'ard. You began it too, for he wasn't doing nothing. I seen you. Best go quietly or I'll have to fix you up.'

Exasperation and an overwhelming sense that at no cost must I delay gave me the strength of a bull elephant. I fairly wrenched the constable off his feet, floored the man who was gripping my collar, and set off at my best pace down Duke Street. I heard a whistle being blown, and the rush of men behind me.

I have a very fair turn of speed, and that night I had wings. In a jiffy I was in Pall Mall and had turned down towards St James's Park. I dodged the policeman at the Palace gates, dived through a press of carriages at the entrance to the Mall, and was making for the bridge before my pursuers had crossed the roadway. In the open ways of the Park I put on a spurt. Happily there were few people about and no one tried to stop me. I was staking all on getting to Queen Anne's Gate.

When I entered that quiet thoroughfare it seemed deserted. Sir Walter's house was in the narrow part, and outside it three or four motor-cars were drawn up. I slackened speed some yards off and walked briskly up to the door. If the butler refused me admission, or if he even delayed to open the door, I was done.

He didn't delay. I had scarcely rung before the door opened.

'I must see Sir Walter,' I panted. 'My business is desperately important.'

That butler was a great man. Without moving a muscle he held the door open, and then shut it behind me. 'Sir Walter is engaged, Sir, and I have orders to admit no one. Perhaps you will wait.'

The house was of the old-fashioned kind, with a wide hall and rooms on both sides of it. At the far end was an alcove with a telephone and a couple of chairs, and there the butler offered me a seat.

'See here,' I whispered. 'There's trouble about and I'm in it. But Sir Walter knows, and I'm working for him. If anyone comes and asks if I am here, tell him a lie.'

He nodded, and presently there was a noise of voices in the street, and a furious ringing at the bell. I never admired a man more than that butler. He opened the door, and with a face like a graven image waited to be questioned. Then he gave them it. He told them whose house it was, and what his orders were, and simply froze them off the doorstep. I could see it all from my alcove, and it was better than any play.

I hadn't waited long till there came another ring at the bell. The butler made no bones about admitting this new visitor.

While he was taking off his coat I saw who it was. You couldn't open a newspaper or a magazine without seeing that face—the grey beard cut like a spade, the firm fighting mouth, the blunt square nose, and the keen blue eyes. I recognized the First Sea Lord, the man, they say, that made the new British Navy.

He passed my alcove and was ushered into a room at the back of the hall. As the door opened I could hear the sound of low voices. It shut, and I was left alone again.

For twenty minutes I sat there, wondering what I was to do next. I was still perfectly convinced that I was wanted, but when or how I had no notion. I kept looking at my watch, and as the time crept on to half-past ten I began to think that the conference must soon end. In a quarter of an hour Royer should be speeding along the road to Portsmouth ...

Then I heard a bell ring, and the butler appeared. The door of the back room opened, and the First Sea Lord came out. He walked past me, and in passing he glanced in my direction, and for a second we looked each other in
the face.

Only for a second, but it was enough to make my heart jump. I had never seen the great man before, and he had never seen me. But in that fraction of time something sprang into his eyes, and that something was recognition. You can't mistake it. It is a flicker, a spark of light, a minute shade of difference which means one thing and one thing only. It came involuntarily, for in a moment it died, and he passed on. In a maze of wild fancies I heard the street door close behind him.

I picked up the telephone book and looked up the number of his house. We were connected at once, and I heard a servant's voice.

'Is his Lordship at home?' I asked.

'His Lordship returned half an hour ago,' said the voice, 'and has gone to bed. He is not very well tonight. Will you leave a message, Sir?'

I rang off and almost tumbled into a chair. My part in this business was not yet ended. It had been a close shave, but I had been in time.

Not a moment could be lost, so I marched boldly to the door of that back room and entered without knocking.

Five surprised faces looked up from a round table. There was Sir Walter, and Drew the War Minister, whom I knew from his photographs. There was a slim elderly man, who was probably Whittaker, the Admiralty official, and there was General Winstanley, conspicuous from the long scar on his forehead. Lastly, there was a short stout man with an iron-grey moustache and bushy eyebrows, who had been arrested in the middle of a sentence.

Sir Walter's face showed surprise and annoyance.

'This is Mr Hannay, of whom I have spoken to you,' he said apologetically to the company. 'I'm afraid, Hannay, this visit is ill-timed.'

I was getting back my coolness. 'That remains to be seen, Sir,' I said; 'but I think it may be in the nick of time. For God's sake, gentlemen, tell me who went out a minute ago?'

'Lord Alloa,' Sir Walter said, reddening with anger. 'It was not,' I cried; 'it was his living image, but it was not Lord Alloa. It was someone who recognized me, someone I have seen in the last month. He had scarcely left the doorstep when I rang up Lord Alloa's house and was told he had come in half an hour before and had gone to bed.'

'Who--who--' someone stammered.

'The Black Stone,' I cried, and I sat down in the chair so recently vacated and looked round at five badly scared gentlemen.

CHAPTER NINE The Thirty-Nine Steps

'Nonsense!' said the official from the Admiralty.

Sir Walter got up and left the room while we looked blankly at the table. He came back in ten minutes with a long face. 'I have spoken to Alloa,' he said. 'Had him out of bed--very grumpy. He went straight home after Mulross's dinner.'

'But it's madness,' broke in General Winstanley. 'Do you mean to tell me that that man came here and sat beside me for the best part of half an hour and that I didn't detect the imposture? Alloa must be out of his mind.'

'Don't you see the cleverness of it?' I said. 'You were too interested in other things to have any eyes. You took Lord Alloa for granted. It had been anybody else you might have looked more closely, but it was natural for him to be here, and that put you all to sleep.'

Then the Frenchman spoke, very slowly and in good English.

'The young man is right. His psychology is good. Our enemies have not been foolish!'

He bent his wise brows on the assembly.

'I will tell you a tale,' he said. 'It happened many years ago in Senegal. I was quartered in a remote station, and to pass the time used to go fishing for big barbel in the river. A little Arab mare used to carry my luncheon basket--one of the salted dun breed you got at Timbuctoo in the old days. Well, one morning I had good sport, and the mare was unaccountably restless. I could hear her whinnying and squealing and stamping her feet, and I kept soothing her with my voice while my mind was intent on fish. I could see her all the time, as I thought, out of a corner of my eye, tethered to a tree twenty yards away. After a couple of hours I began to think of food. I collected my fish in a tarpaulin bag, and moved down the stream towards the mare, trolling my line. When I got up to her I flung the tarpaulin on her back--'

He paused and looked round.

'It was the smell that gave me warning. I turned my head and found myself looking at a lion three feet off ... An old man-eater, that was the terror of the village ... What was left of the mare, a mass of blood and bones and hide, was behind him.'

'What happened?' I asked. I was enough of a hunter to know a true yarn when I heard it.

'I stuffed my fishing-rod into his jaws, and I had a pistol. Also my servants came presently with rifles. But he left
his mark on me.' He held up a hand which lacked three fingers.

'Consider,' he said. 'The mare had been dead more than an hour, and the brute had been patiently watching me ever since. I never saw the kill, for I was accustomed to the mare's fretting, and I never marked her absence, for my consciousness of her was only of something tawny, and the lion filled that part. If I could blunder thus, gentlemen, in a land where men's senses are keen, why should we busy preoccupied urban folk not err also?'

Sir Walter nodded. No one was ready to gainsay him.

'But I don't see,' went on Winstanley. 'Their object was to get these dispositions without our knowing it. Now it only required one of us to mention to Alloa our meeting tonight for the whole fraud to be exposed.'

Sir Walter laughed dryly. 'The selection of Alloa shows their acumen. Which of us was likely to speak to him about tonight? Or was he likely to open the subject?'

I remembered the First Sea Lord's reputation for taciturnity and shortness of temper.

'The one thing that puzzles me,' said the General, 'is what good his visit here would do that spy fellow? He could not carry away several pages of figures and strange names in his head.'

'That is not difficult,' the Frenchman replied. 'A good spy is trained to have a photographic memory. Like your own Macaulay. You noticed he said nothing, but went through these papers again and again. I think we may assume that he has every detail stamped on his mind. When I was younger I could do the same trick.'

'Well, I suppose there is nothing for it but to change the plans,' said Sir Walter ruefully.

Whittaker was looking very glum. 'Did you tell Lord Alloa what has happened?' he asked. 'No? Well, I can't speak with absolute assurance, but I'm nearly certain we can't make any serious change unless we alter the geography of England.'

'Another thing must be said,' it was Royer who spoke. 'I talked freely when that man was here. I told something of the military plans of my Government. I was permitted to say so much. But that information would be worth many millions to our enemies. No, my friends, I see no other way. The man who came here and his confederates must be taken, and taken at once.'

'Good God,' I cried, 'and we have not a rag of a clue.'

'Besides,' said Whittaker, 'there is the post. By this time the news will be on its way.'

'No,' said the Frenchman. 'You do not understand the habits of the spy. He receives personally his reward, and he delivers personally his intelligence. We in France know something of the breed. There is still a chance, MES AMIS. These men must cross the sea, and there are ships to be searched and ports to be watched. Believe me, the need is desperate for both France and Britain.'

Royer's grave good sense seemed to pull us together. He was the man of action among fumblers. But I saw no hope in any face, and I felt none. Where among the fifty millions of these islands and within a dozen hours were we to lay hands on the three cleverest rogues in Europe?

Then suddenly I had an inspiration.

'Where is Scudder's book?' I cried to Sir Walter. 'Quick, man, I remember something in it.'

He unlocked the door of a bureau and gave it to me.

I found the place. THIRTY-NINE STEPS, I read, and again, THIRTY-NINE STEPS--I COUNTED THEM--HIGH TIDE 10.17 P.M.

The Admiralty man was looking at me as if he thought I had gone mad.

'Don't you see it's a clue,' I shouted. 'Scudder knew where these fellows laired--he knew where they were going to leave the country, though he kept the name to himself. Tomorrow was the day, and it was some place where high tide was at 10.17.'

'They may have gone tonight,' someone said.

'Not they. They have their own snug secret way, and they won't be hurried. I know Germans, and they are mad about working to a plan. Where the devil can I get a book of Tide Tables?'

Whittaker brightened up. 'It's a chance,' he said. 'Let's go over to the Admiralty.'

We got into two of the waiting motor-cars--all but Sir Walter, who went off to Scotland Yard--to 'mobilize MacGillivray', so he said. We marched through empty corridors and big bare chambers where the charwomen were busy, till we reached a little room lined with books and maps. A resident clerk was unearthed, who presently fetched from the library the Admiralty Tide Tables. I sat at the desk and the others stood round, for somehow or other I had got charge of this expedition.

It was no good. There were hundreds of entries, and so far as I could see 10.17 might cover fifty places. We had to find some way of narrowing the possibilities.

I took my head in my hands and thought. There must be some way of reading this riddle. What did Scudder mean by steps? I thought of dock steps, but if he had meant that I didn't think he would have mentioned the number. It must be some place where there were several staircases, and one marked out from the others by having thirty-nine
Then I had a sudden thought, and hunted up all the steamer sailings. There was no boat which left for the Continent at 10.17 p.m.

Why was high tide so important? If it was a harbour it must be some little place where the tide mattered, or else it was a heavy-draught boat. But there was no regular steamer sailing at that hour, and somehow I didn't think they would travel by a big boat from a regular harbour. So it must be some little harbour where the tide was important, or perhaps no harbour at all.

But if it was a little port I couldn't see what the steps signified. There were no sets of staircases on any harbour that I had ever seen. It must be some place which a particular staircase identified, and where the tide was full at 10.17. On the whole it seemed to me that the place must be a bit of open coast. But the staircases kept puzzling me.

Then I went back to wider considerations. Whereabouts would a man be likely to leave for Germany, a man in a hurry, who wanted a speedy and a secret passage? Not from any of the big harbours. And not from the Channel or the West Coast or Scotland, for, remember, he was starting from London. I measured the distance on the map, and tried to put myself in the enemy's shoes. I should try for Ostend or Antwerp or Rotterdam, and I should sail from somewhere on the East Coast between Cromer and Dover.

All this was very loose guessing, and I don't pretend it was ingenious or scientific. I wasn't any kind of Sherlock Holmes. But I have always fancied I had a kind of instinct about questions like this. I don't know if I can explain myself, but I used to use my brains as far as they went, and after they came to a blank wall I guessed, and I usually found my guesses pretty right.

So I set out all my conclusions on a bit of Admiralty paper. They ran like this:

**FAIRLY CERTAIN**
1. Place where there are several sets of stairs; one that matters distinguished by having thirty-nine steps.
2. Full tide at 10.17 p.m. Leaving shore only possible at full tide.
3. Steps not dock steps, and so place probably not harbour.
4. No regular night steamer at 10.17. Means of transport must be tramp (unlikely), yacht, or fishing-boat.

There my reasoning stopped. I made another list, which I headed 'Guessed', but I was just as sure of the one as the other.

**GUessed**
1. Place not harbour but open coast.
2. Boat small--trawler, yacht, or launch.
3. Place somewhere on East Coast between Cromer and Dover.

It struck me as odd that I should be sitting at that desk with a Cabinet Minister, a Field-Marshal, two high Government officials, and a French General watching me, while from the scribble of a dead man I was trying to drag a secret which meant life or death for us.

Sir Walter had joined us, and presently MacGillivray arrived. He had sent out instructions to watch the ports and railway stations for the three men whom I had described to Sir Walter. Not that he or anybody else thought that that would do much good.

'Here's the most I can make of it,' I said. 'We have got to find a place where there are several staircases down to the beach, one of which has thirty-nine steps. I think it's a piece of open coast with biggish cliffs, somewhere between the Wash and the Channel. Also it's a place where full tide is at 10.17 tomorrow night.'

Then an idea struck me. 'Is there no Inspector of Coastguards or some fellow like that who knows the East Coast?'

Whittaker said there was, and that he lived in Clapham. He went off in a car to fetch him, and the rest of us sat about the little room and talked of anything that came into our heads. I lit a pipe and went over the whole thing again till my brain grew weary.

About one in the morning the coastguard man arrived. He was a fine old fellow, with the look of a naval officer, and was desperately respectful to the company. I left the War Minister to cross-examine him, for I felt he would think it cheek in me to talk.

'Ve want you to tell us the places you know on the East Coast where there are cliffs, and where several sets of steps run down to the beach.'

He thought for a bit. 'What kind of steps do you mean, Sir? There are plenty of places with roads cut down through the cliffs, and most roads have a step or two in them. Or do you mean regular staircases--all steps, so to speak?'

Sir Arthur looked towards me. 'We mean regular staircases,' I said.

He reflected a minute or two. 'I don't know that I can think of any. Wait a second. There's a place in Norfolk--Brattlesham--beside a golf-course, where there are a couple of staircases, to let the gentlemen get a lost ball.'

'That's not it,' I said.
'Then there are plenty of Marine Parades, if that's what you mean. Every seaside resort has them.'

I shook my head. 'It's got to be more retired than that,' I said.

'Well, gentlemen, I can't think of anywhere else. Of course, there's the Ruff--'

'What's that?' I asked.

'The big chalk headland in Kent, close to Bradgate. It's got a lot of villas on the top, and some of the houses have staircases down to a private beach. It's a very high-toned sort of place, and the residents there like to keep by themselves.'

I tore open the Tide Tables and found Bradgate. High tide there was at 10.17 P.m. on the 15th of June.

'We're on the scent at last,' I cried excitedly. 'How can I find out what is the tide at the Ruff?'

'I can tell you that, Sir,' said the coastguard man. 'I once was lent a house there in this very month, and I used to go out at night to the deep-sea fishing. The tide's ten minutes before Bradgate.'

I closed the book and looked round at the company.

'If one of those staircases has thirty-nine steps we have solved the mystery, gentlemen,' I said. 'I want the loan of your car, Sir Walter, and a map of the roads. If Mr MacGillivray will spare me ten minutes, I think we can prepare something for tomorrow.'

It was ridiculous in me to take charge of the business like this, but they didn't seem to mind, and after all I had been in the show from the start. Besides, I was used to rough jobs, and these eminent gentlemen were too clever not to see it. It was General Royer who gave me my commission. 'I for one,' he said, 'am content to leave the matter in Mr Hannay's hands.'

By half-past three I was tearing past the moonlit hedgerows of Kent, with MacGillivray's best man on the seat beside me.

CHAPTER TEN Various Parties Converging on the Sea

A pink and blue June morning found me at Bradgate looking from the Griffin Hotel over a smooth sea to the lightship on the Cock sands which seemed the size of a bell-buoy. A couple of miles farther south and much nearer the shore a small destroyer was anchored. Scaife, MacGillivray's man, who had been in the Navy, knew the boat, and told me her name and her commander's, so I sent off a wire to Sir Walter.

After breakfast Scaife got from a house-agent a key for the gates of the staircases on the Ruff. I walked with him along the sands, and sat down in a nook of the cliffs while he investigated the half-dozen of them. I didn't want to be seen, but the place at this hour was quite deserted, and all the time I was on that beach I saw nothing but the sea-gulls.

It took him more than an hour to do the job, and when I saw him coming towards me, conning a bit of paper, I can tell you my heart was in my mouth. Everything depended, you see, on my guess proving right.

He read aloud the number of steps in the different stairs. 'Thirty-four, thirty-five, thirty-nine, forty-two, forty-seven,' and 'twenty-one' where the cliffs grew lower. I almost got up and shouted.

We hurried back to the town and sent a wire to MacGillivray. I wanted half a dozen men, and I directed them to divide themselves among different specified hotels. Then Scaife set out to prospect the house at the head of the thirty-nine steps.

He came back with news that both puzzled and reassured me. The house was called Trafalgar Lodge, and belonged to an old gentleman called Appleton--a retired stockbroker, the house-agent said. Mr Appleton was there a good deal in the summer time, and was in residence now--had been for the better part of a week. Scaife could pick up very little information about him, except that he was a decent old fellow, who paid his bills regularly, and was always good for a fiver for a local charity. Then Scaife seemed to have penetrated to the back door of the house, pretending he was an agent for sewing-machines. Only three servants were kept, a cook, a parlour-maid, and a housemaid, and they were just the sort that you would find in a respectable middle-class household. The cook was not the gossiping kind, and had pretty soon shut the door in his face, but Scaife said he was positive she knew nothing. Next door there was a new house building which would give good cover for observation, and the villa on the other side was to let, and its garden was rough and shrubby.

I borrowed Scaife's telescope, and before lunch went for a walk along the Ruff. I kept well behind the rows of villas, and found a good observation point on the edge of the golf-course. There I had a view of the line of turf along the cliff top, with seats placed at intervals, and the little square plots, railed in and planted with bushes, whence the staircases descended to the beach. I saw Trafalgar Lodge very plainly, a red-brick villa with a veranda, a tennis lawn behind, and in front the ordinary seaside flower-garden full of marguerites and scraggy geraniums. There was a flagstaff from which an enormous Union Jack hung limply in the still air.

Presently I observed someone leave the house and saunter along the cliff. When I got my glasses on him I saw it was an old man, wearing white flannel trousers, a blue serge jacket, and a straw hat. He carried field-glasses and a newspaper, and sat down on one of the iron seats and began to read. Sometimes he would lay down the paper and
turn his glasses on the sea. He looked for a long time at the destroyer. I watched him for half an hour, till he got up and went back to the house for his luncheon, when I returned to the hotel for mine.

I wasn't feeling very confident. This decent common-place dwelling was not what I had expected. The man might be the bald archaeologist of that horrible moorland farm, or he might not. He was exactly the kind of satisfied old bird you will find in every suburb and every holiday place. If you wanted a type of the perfectly harmless person you would probably pitch on that.

But after lunch, as I sat in the hotel porch, I perked up, for I saw the thing I had hoped for and had dreaded to miss. A yacht came up from the south and dropped anchor pretty well opposite the Ruff. She seemed about a hundred and fifty tons, and I saw she belonged to the Squadron from the white ensign. So Scaife and I went down to the harbour and hired a boatman for an afternoon's fishing.

I spent a warm and peaceful afternoon. We caught between us about twenty pounds of cod and lythe, and out in that dancing blue sea I took a cheerier view of things. Above the white cliffs of the Ruff I saw the green and red of the villas, and especially the great flagstaff of Trafalgar Lodge. About four o'clock, when we had fished enough, I made the boatman row us round the yacht, which lay like a delicate white bird, ready at a moment to flee. Scaife said she must be a fast boat for her build, and that she was pretty heavily engined.

Her name was the ARIADNE, as I discovered from the cap of one of the men who was polishing brasswork. I spoke to him, and got an answer in the soft dialect of Essex. Another hand that came along passed me the time of day in an unmistakable English tongue. Our boatman had an argument with one of them about the weather, and for a few minutes we lay on our oars close to the starboard bow.

Then the men suddenly disregarded us and bent their heads to their work as an officer came along the deck. He was a pleasant, clean-looking young fellow, and he put a question to us about our fishing in very good English. But there could be no doubt about him. His close-cropped head and the cut of his collar and tie never came out of England.

That did something to reassure me, but as we rowed back to Bradgate my obstinate doubts would not be dismissed. The thing that worried me was the reflection that my enemies knew that I had got my knowledge from Scudder, and it was Scudder who had given me the clue to this place. If they knew that Scudder had this clue, would they not be certain to change their plans? Too much depended on their success for them to take any risks. The whole question was how much they understood about Scudder's knowledge. I had talked confidently last night about Germans always sticking to a scheme, but if they had any suspicions that I was on their track they would be fools not to cover it. I wondered if the man last night had seen that I recognized him. Somehow I did not think he had, and to that I had clung. But the whole business had never seemed so difficult as that afternoon when by all calculations I should have been rejoicing in assured success.

In the hotel I met the commander of the destroyer, to whom Scaife introduced me, and with whom I had a few words. Then I thought I would put in an hour or two watching Trafalgar Lodge.

I found a place farther up the hill, in the garden of an empty house. From there I had a full view of the court, on which two figures were having a game of tennis. One was the old man, whom I had already seen; the other was a younger fellow, wearing some club colours in the scarf round his middle. They played with tremendous zest, like two city gents who wanted hard exercise to open their pores. You couldn't conceive a more innocent spectacle. They shouted and laughed and stopped for drinks, when a maid brought out two tankards on a salver. I rubbed my eyes and asked myself if I was not the most immortal fool on earth. Mystery and darkness had hung about the men who hunted me over the Scotch moor in aeroplane and motor-car, and notably about that infernal antiquarian. It was easy to dismiss. The thing that worried me was the reflection that my enemies knew that I had got my knowledge from Scudder, and it was Scudder who had given me the clue to this place. If they knew that Scudder had this clue, would they not be certain to change their plans? Too much depended on their success for them to take any risks. The whole business had never seemed so difficult as that afternoon when by all calculations I should have been rejoicing in assured success.

In the hotel I met the commander of the destroyer, to whom Scaife introduced me, and with whom I had a few words. Then I thought I would put in an hour or two watching Trafalgar Lodge.

I found a place farther up the hill, in the garden of an empty house. From there I had a full view of the court, on which two figures were having a game of tennis. One was the old man, whom I had already seen; the other was a younger fellow, wearing some club colours in the scarf round his middle. They played with tremendous zest, like two city gents who wanted hard exercise to open their pores. You couldn't conceive a more innocent spectacle. They shouted and laughed and stopped for drinks, when a maid brought out two tankards on a salver. I rubbed my eyes and asked myself if I was not the most immortal fool on earth. Mystery and darkness had hung about the men who hunted me over the Scotch moor in aeroplane and motor-car, and notably about that infernal antiquarian. It was easy enough to connect those folk with the knife that pinned Scudder to the floor, and with fell designs on the world's peace. But here were two guileless citizens taking their innocuous exercise, and soon about to go indoors to a humdrum dinner, where they would talk of market prices and the last cricket scores and the gossip of their native Surbiton. I had been making a net to catch vultures and falcons, and lo and behold! two plump thrushes had blundered into it.

Presently a third figure arrived, a young man on a bicycle, with a bag of golf-clubs slung on his back. He strolled round to the tennis lawn and was welcomed riotously by the players. Evidently they were chaffing him, and their chaff sounded horribly English. Then the plump man, mopping his brow with a silk handkerchief, announced that he must have a tub. I heard his very words--'I've got into a proper lather,' he said. 'This will bring down my weight and my handicap, Bob. I'll take you on tomorrow and give you a stroke a hole.' You couldn't find anything much more English than that.

They all went into the house, and left me feeling a precious idiot. I had been barking up the wrong tree this time. These men might be acting; but if they were, where was their audience? They didn't know I was sitting thirty yards off in a rhododendron. It was simply impossible to believe that these three hearty fellows were anything but what they seemed--three ordinary, game-playing, suburban Englishmen, wearisome, if you like, but sordidly innocent.
And yet there were three of them; and one was old, and one was plump, and one was lean and dark; and their
house chimed in with Scudder's notes; and half a mile off was lying a steam yacht with at least one German officer. I
thought of Karolides lying dead and all Europe trembling on the edge of earthquake, and the men I had left behind
in London who were waiting anxiously for the events of the next hours. There was no doubt that hell was afoot
somewhere. The Black Stone had won, and if it survived this June night would bank its winnings.

There seemed only one thing to do--go forward as if I had no doubts, and if I was going to make a fool of myself
to do it handsomely. Never in my life have I faced a job with greater disinclination. I would rather in my then mind
have walked into a den of anarchists, each with his Browning handy, or faced a charging lion with a popgun, than
enter that happy home of three cheerful Englishmen and tell them that their game was up. How they would laugh at
me!

But suddenly I remembered a thing I once heard in Rhodesia from old Peter Pienaar. I have quoted Peter already
in this narrative. He was the best scout I ever knew, and before he had turned respectable he had been pretty often on
the windy side of the law, when he had been wanted badly by the authorities. Peter once discussed with me the
question of disguises, and he had a theory which struck me at the time. He said, barring absolute certainties like
fingerprints, mere physical traits were very little use for identification if the fugitive really knew his business. He
laughed at things like dyed hair and false beards and such childish follies. The only thing that mattered was what
Peter called 'atmosphere'.

If a man could get into perfectly different surroundings from those in which he had been first observed, and--this
is the important part--really play up to these surroundings and behave as if he had never been out of them, he would
puzzle the cleverest detectives on earth. And he used to tell a story of how he once borrowed a black coat and went
to church and shared the same hymn-book with the man that was looking for him. If that man had seen him in decent
company before he would have recognized him; but he had only seen him snuffing the lights in a public-house with
a revolver.

The recollection of Peter's talk gave me the first real comfort that I had had that day. Peter had been a wise old
bird, and these fellows I was after were about the pick of the aviary. What if they were playing Peter's game? A fool
tries to look different: a clever man looks the same and is different.

Again, there was that other maxim of Peter's which had helped me when I had been a roadman. 'If you are
playing a part, you will never keep it up unless you convince yourself that you are it.' That would explain the game
of tennis. Those chaps didn't need to act, they just turned a handle and passed into another life, which came as
naturally to them as the first. It sounds a platitude, but Peter used to say that it was the big secret of all the famous
criminals.

It was now getting on for eight o'clock, and I went back and saw Scaife to give him his instructions. I arranged
with him how to place his men, and then I went for a walk, for I didn't feel up to any dinner. I went round the
deserted golf-course, and then to a point on the cliffs farther north beyond the line of the villas.

On the little trim newly-made roads I met people in flannels coming back from tennis and the beach, and a
coastguard from the wireless station, and donkeys and pierrots padding homewards. Out at sea in the blue dusk I saw
lights appear on the ARIADNE and on the destroyer away to the south, and beyond the Cock sands the bigger lights
of steamers making for the Thames. The whole scene was so peaceful and ordinary that I got more dashed in spirits
every second. It took all my resolution to stroll towards Trafalgar Lodge about half-past nine.

On the way I got a piece of solid comfort from the sight of a greyhound that was swinging along at a nursemaid's
heels. He reminded me of a dog I used to have in Rhodesia, and of the time when I took him hunting with me in the
Pali hills. We were after rhebok, the dun kind, and I recollected how we had followed one beast, and both he and I
had clean lost it. A greyhound works by sight, and my eyes are good enough, but that buck simply leaked out of the
landscape. Afterwards I found out how it managed it. Against the grey rock of the kopjes it showed no more than a
crow against a thundercloud. It didn't need to run away; all it had to do was to stand still and melt into the
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Suddenly as these memories chased across my brain I thought of my present case and applied the moral. The
Black Stone didn't need to bolt. They were quietly absorbed into the landscape. I was on the right track, and I
jaunted that down in my mind and vowed never to forget it. The last word was with Peter Pienaar.

Scaife's men would be posted now, but there was no sign of a soul. The house stood as open as a market-place
for anybody to observe. A three-foot railing separated it from the cliff road; the windows on the ground-floor were
all open, and shaded lights and the low sound of voices revealed where the occupants were finishing dinner.
Everything was as public and above-board as a charity bazaar. Feeling the greatest fool on earth, I opened the gate
and rang the bell.

A man of my sort, who has travelled about the world in rough places, gets on perfectly well with two classes,
what you may call the upper and the lower. He understands them and they understand him. I was at home with herds
and tramps and roadmen, and I was sufficiently at my ease with people like Sir Walter and the men I had met the night before. I can't explain why, but it is a fact. But what fellows like me don't understand is the great comfortable, satisfied middle-class world, the folk that live in villas and suburbs. He doesn't know how they look at things, he doesn't understand their conventions, and he is as shy of them as of a black mamba. When a trim parlour-maid opened the door, I could hardly find my voice.

I asked for Mr Appleton, and was ushered in. My plan had been to walk straight into the dining-room, and by a sudden appearance wake in the men that start of recognition which would confirm my theory. But when I found myself in that neat hall the place mastered me. There were the golf-clubs and tennis-rackets, the straw hats and caps, the rows of gloves, the sheaf of walking-sticks, which you will find in ten thousand British homes. A stack of neatly folded coats and waterproofs covered the top of an old oak chest; there was a grandfather clock ticking; and some polished brass warming-pans on the walls, and a barometer, and a print of Chiltern winning the St Leger. The place was as orthodox as an Anglican church. When the maid asked me for my name I gave it automatically, and was shown into the smoking-room, on the right side of the hall.

That room was even worse. I hadn't time to examine it, but I could see some framed group photographs above the mantelpiece, and I could have sworn they were English public school or college. I had only one glance, for I managed to pull myself together and go after the maid. But I was too late. She had already entered the dining-room and given my name to her master, and I had missed the chance of seeing how the three took it.

When I walked into the room the old man at the head of the table had risen and turned round to meet me. He was in evening dress—a short coat and black tie, as was the other, whom I called in my own mind the plump one. The third, the dark fellow, wore a blue serge suit and a soft white collar, and the colours of some club or school.

The old man's manner was perfect. 'Mr Hannay?' he said hesitatingly. 'Did you wish to see me? One moment, you fellows, and I'll rejoin you. We had better go to the smoking-room.'

Though I hadn't an ounce of confidence in me, I forced myself to play the game. I pulled up a chair and sat down on it.

'I think we have met before,' I said, 'and I guess you know my business.'

The light in the room was dim, but so far as I could see their faces, they played the part of mystification very well.

'Maybe, maybe,' said the old man. 'I haven't a very good memory, but I'm afraid you must tell me your errand, Sir, for I really don't know it.'

'Well, then,' I said, and all the time I seemed to myself to be talking pure foolishness—'I have come to tell you that the game's up. I have a warrant for the arrest of you three gentlemen.'

'Arrest,' said the old man, and he looked really shocked. 'Arrest! Good God, what for?'

'For the murder of Franklin Scudder in London on the 23rd day of last month.'

'I never heard the name before,' said the old man in a dazed voice.

One of the others spoke up. 'That was the Portland Place murder. I read about it. Good heavens, you must be mad, Sir! Where do you come from?'

'Scotland Yard,' I said.

After that for a minute there was utter silence. The old man was staring at his plate and fumbling with a nut, the very model of innocent bewilderment.

Then the plump one spoke up. He stammered a little, like a man picking his words.

'Don't get flustered, uncle,' he said. 'It is all a ridiculous mistake; but these things happen sometimes, and we can easily set it right. It won't be hard to prove our innocence. I can show that I was out of the country on the 23rd of May, and Bob was in a nursing home. You were in London, but you can explain what you were doing.'

'Right, Percy! Of course that's easy enough. The 23rd! That was the day after Agatha's wedding. Let me see. What was I doing? I came up in the morning from Woking, and lunched at the club with Charlie Symons. Then--oh yes, I dined with the Fishmongers. I remember, for the punch didn't agree with me, and I was seedy next morning. Hang it all, there's the cigar-box I brought back from the dinner.' He pointed to an object on the table, and laughed nervously.

'I think, Sir,' said the young man, addressing me respectfully, 'you will see you are mistaken. We want to assist the law like all Englishmen, and we don't want Scotland Yard to be making fools of themselves. That's so, uncle?'

'Certainly, Bob.' The old fellow seemed to be recovering his voice. 'Certainly, we'll do anything in our power to assist the authorities. But--but this is a bit too much. I can't get over it.'

'How Nellie will chuckle,' said the plump man. 'She always said that you would die of boredom because nothing ever happened to you. And now you've got it thick and strong,' and he began to laugh very pleasantly.

'By Jove, yes. Just think of it! What a story to tell at the club. Really, Mr Hannay, I suppose I should be angry, to show my innocence, but it's too funny! I almost forgive you the fright you gave me! You looked so glum, I thought I
might have been walking in my sleep and killing people.'

It couldn't be acting, it was too confoundedly genuine. My heart went into my boots, and my first impulse was to apologize and clear out. But I told myself I must see it through, even though I was to be the laughing-stock of Britain. The light from the dinner-table candlesticks was not very good, and to cover my confusion I got up, walked to the door and switched on the electric light. The sudden glare made them blink, and I stood scanning the three faces.

Well, I made nothing of it. One was old and bald, one was stout, one was dark and thin. There was nothing in their appearance to prevent them from being the three who had hunted me in Scotland, but there was nothing to identify them. I simply can't explain why I who, as a roadman, had looked into two pairs of eyes, and as Ned Ainslie into another pair, why I, who have a good memory and reasonable powers of observation, could find no satisfaction. They seemed exactly what they professed to be, and I could not have sworn to one of them.

There in that pleasant dining-room, with etchings on the walls, and a picture of an old lady in a bib above the mantelpiece, I could see nothing to connect them with the moorland desperadoes. There was a silver cigarette-box beside me, and I saw that it had been won by Percival Appleton, Esq., of the St Bede's Club, in a golf tournament. I had to keep a firm hold of Peter Pienaar to prevent myself bolting out of that house.

'Well,' said the old man politely, 'are you reassured by your scrutiny, Sir?'

I couldn't find a word.

'I hope you'll find it consistent with your duty to drop this ridiculous business. I make no complaint, but you'll see how annoying it must be to respectable people.'

I shook my head.

'O Lord,' said the young man. 'This is a bit too thick!'

'Do you propose to march us off to the police station?' asked the plump one. 'That might be the best way out of it, but I suppose you won't be content with the local branch. I have the right to ask to see your warrant, but I don't wish to cast any aspersions upon you. You are only doing your duty. But you'll admit it's horribly awkward. What do you propose to do?'

There was nothing to do except to call in my men and have them arrested, or to confess my blunder and clear out. I felt mesmerized by the whole place, by the air of obvious innocence--not innocence merely, but frank honest bewilderment and concern in the three faces.

'Oh, Peter Pienaar,' I groaned inwardly, and for a moment I was very near damning myself for a fool and asking their pardon.

'Meantime I vote we have a game of bridge,' said the plump one. 'It will give Mr Hannay time to think over things, and you know we have been wanting a fourth player. Do you play, Sir?'

I accepted as if it had been an ordinary invitation at the club. The whole business had mesmerized me. We went into the smoking-room where a card-table was set out, and I was offered things to smoke and drink. I took my place at the table in a kind of dream. The window was open and the moon was flooding the cliffs and sea with a great tide of yellow light. There was moonshine, too, in my head. The three had recovered their composure, and were talking easily--just the kind of slangy talk you will hear in any golf club-house. I must have cut a rum figure, sitting there knitting my brows with my eyes wandering.

My partner was the young dark one. I play a fair hand at bridge, but I must have been rank bad that night. They saw that they had got me puzzled, and that put them more than ever at their ease. I kept looking at their faces, but they conveyed nothing to me. It was not that they looked different; they were different. I clung desperately to the words of Peter Pienaar.

Then something awoke me.

The old man laid down his hand to light a cigar. He didn't pick it up at once, but sat back for a moment in his chair, with his fingers tapping on his knees.

It was the movement I remembered when I had stood before him in the moorland farm, with the pistols of his servants behind me.

A little thing, lasting only a second, and the odds were a thousand to one that I might have had my eyes on my cards at the time and missed it. But I didn't, and, in a flash, the air seemed to clear. Some shadow lifted from my brain, and I was looking at the three men with full and absolute recognition.

The clock on the mantelpiece struck ten o'clock.

The three faces seemed to change before my eyes and reveal their secrets. The young one was the murderer. Now I saw cruelty and ruthlessness, where before I had only seen good-humour. His knife, I made certain, had skewered Scudder to the floor. His kind had put the bullet in Karolides.

The plump man's features seemed to dislimn, and form again, as I looked at them. He hadn't a face, only a hundred masks that he could assume when he pleased. That chap must have been a superb actor. Perhaps he had
been Lord Alloa of the night before; perhaps not; it didn't matter. I wondered if he was the fellow who had first tracked Scudder, and left his card on him. Scudder had said he lisped, and I could imagine how the adoption of a lisp might add terror.

But the old man was the pick of the lot. He was sheer brain, icy, cool, calculating, as ruthless as a steam hammer. Now that my eyes were opened I wondered where I had seen the benevolence. His jaw was like chilled steel, and his eyes had the inhuman luminosity of a bird's. I went on playing, and every second a greater hate welled up in my heart. It almost choked me, and I couldn't answer when my partner spoke. Only a little longer could I endure their company.

'Whew! Bob! Look at the time,' said the old man. 'You'd better think about catching your train. Bob's got to go to town tonight,' he added, turning to me. The voice rang now as false as hell. I looked at the clock, and it was nearly half-past ten.

'I am afraid he must put off his journey,' I said.

'Oh, damn,' said the young man. 'I thought you had dropped that rot. I've simply got to go. You can have my address, and I'll give any security you like.'

'No,' I said, 'you must stay.'

At that I think they must have realized that the game was desperate. Their only chance had been to convince me that I was playing the fool, and that had failed. But the old man spoke again.

'I'll go bail for my nephew. That ought to content you, Mr Hannay.' Was it fancy, or did I detect some halt in the smoothness of that voice?

There must have been, for as I glanced at him, his eyelids fell in that hawk-like hood which fear had stamped on my memory.

I blew my whistle.

In an instant the lights were out. A pair of strong arms gripped me round the waist, covering the pockets in which a man might be expected to carry a pistol.

'SCHNELL, FRANZ,' cried a voice, 'DAS BOOT, DAS BOOT!' As it spoke I saw two of my fellows emerge on the moonlit lawn.

The young dark man leapt for the window, was through it, and over the low fence before a hand could touch him. I grappled the old chap, and the room seemed to fill with figures. I saw the plump one collared, but my eyes were all for the out-of-doors, where Franz sped on over the road towards the railed entrance to the beach stairs. One man followed him, but he had no chance. The gate of the stairs locked behind the fugitive, and I stood staring, with my hands on the old boy's throat, for such a time as a man might take to descend those steps to the sea.

Suddenly my prisoner broke from me and flung himself on the wall. There was a click as if a lever had been pulled. Then came a low rumbling far, far below the ground, and through the window I saw a cloud of chalky dust pouring out of the shaft of the stairway.

Someone switched on the light.

The old man was looking at me with blazing eyes.

'He is safe,' he cried. 'You cannot follow in time ... He is gone ... He has triumphed ... DER SCHWARZE STEIN IST IN DER SIEGESKRONE.'

There was more in those eyes than any common triumph. They had been hooded like a bird of prey, and now they flamed with a hawk's pride. A white fanatic heat burnished in them, and I realized for the first time the terrible thing I had been up against. This man was more than a spy; in his foul way he had been a patriot.

As the handcuffs clinked on his wrists I said my last word to him.

'I hope Franz will bear his triumph well. I ought to tell you that the ARIADNE for the last hour has been in our hands.'

Three weeks later, as all the world knows, we went to war. I joined the New Army the first week, and owing to my Matabele experience got a captain's commission straight off. But I had done my best service, I think, before I put on khaki.
"Oh, no, I assure you, you are not boring Mr. Marshfield," said this personage himself in his gentle voice—that curious voice that could flow on for hours, promulgating profound and startling theories on every department of human knowledge or conducting paradoxical arguments without a single inflection or pause of hesitation. "I am, on the contrary, much interested in your hunting talk. To paraphrase a well-worn quotation somewhat widely, _nihil humanum a me alienum est_. Even hunting stories may have their point of biological interest; the philologist sometimes pricks his ear to the jargon of the chase; moreover, I am not incapable of appreciating the subject matter itself. This seems to excite some derision. I admit I am not much of a sportsman to look at, nor, indeed, by instinct, yet I have had some out-of-the-way experiences in that line—generally when intent on other pursuits. I doubt, for instance, if even you, Major Travers, notwithstanding your well-known exploits against man and beast, notwithstanding that doubtful smile of yours, could match the strangeness of a certain hunting adventure in which I played an important part."

The speaker's small, deep-set, black eyes, that never warmed to anything more human than a purely speculative scientific interest in his surroundings, here wandered round the skeptical yet expectant circle with bland amusement. He stretched out his bloodless fingers for another of his host's superfine cigars and proceeded, with only such interruptions as were occasioned by the lighting and careful smoking of the latter.

"I was returning home after my prolonged stay in Petersburg, intending to linger on my way and test with mine own ears certain among the many dialects of Eastern Europe—anent which there is a symmetrical little cluster of philological knotty points it is my modest intention one day to unravel. However, that is neither here nor there. On the road to Hungary I bethought myself opportunely of proving the once pressingly offered hospitality of the Baron Kossowski.

"You may have met the man, Major Travers; he was a tremendous sportsman, if you like. I first came across him at McNeil's place in remote Ireland. Now, being in Bukowina, within measurable distance of his Carpathian abode, and curious to see a Polish lord at home, I remembered his invitation. It was already of long standing, but it had been warm, born in fact of a sudden fit of enthusiasm for me"—here a half-mocking smile quivered an instant under the speaker's black mustache—"which, as it was characteristic, I may as well tell you about.

"It was on the day of, or, rather, to be accurate, on the day after my arrival, toward the small hours of the morning, in the smoking room at Rathdrum. Our host was peacefully snoring over his empty pipe and his seventh glass of whisky, also empty. The rest of the men had slunk off to bed. The baron, who all unknown to himself had been a subject of most interesting observation to me the whole evening, being now practically alone with me, condescended to turn an eye, as wide awake as a fox's, albeit slightly bloodshot, upon the contemptible white-faced person who had preferred spending the raw hours over his papers, within the radius of a glorious fire's warmth, to creeping slyly over treacherous quagmires in the pursuit of timid bog creatures (snipe shooting had been the order of the day)—the baron, I say, became aware of my existence and entered into conversation with me.

"He would no doubt have been much surprised could he have known that he was already mapped out, craniologically and physiognomically, catalogued with care and neatly laid by in his proper ethnological box, in my private type museum; that, as I sat and examined him from my different coigns of vantage in library, in dining and smoking room that evening, not a look of his, not a gesture went forth but had significance for me.

"You, I had thought, with your broad shoulders and deep chest; your massive head that should have gone with a tall stature, not with those short sturdy limbs; with your thick red hair, that should have been black for that matter, as should your wide-set yellow eyes—you would be a real puzzle to one who did not recognize in you equal mixtures of the fair, stalwart and muscular Slav with the bilious-sanguine, thick-set, wiry Turanian. Your pedigree would not doubt bear me out: there is as much of the Magyar as of the Pole in your anatomy. Athlete, and yet a tangle of nerves; a ferocious brute at bottom, I dare say, for your broad forehead inclines to flatness; under your bristling beard your jaw must protrude, and the base of your skull is ominously thick. And, with all that, capable of ideal transports: when that girl played and sang to-night I saw the swelling of your eyelid veins, and how that small, tenacious, claw-like hand of yours twitched! You would be a fine leader of men—but God help the wretches in your power!

"So had I mused upon him. Yet I confess that when we came in closer contact with each other, even I was not proof against the singular courtesy of his manner and his unaccountable personal charm.

"Our conversation soon grew interesting; to me as a matter of course, and evidently to him also. A few general words led to interchange of remarks upon the country we were both visitors in and so to national characteristics—
Pole and Irishman have not a few in common, both in their nature and history. An observation which he made, not without a certain flash in his light eyes and a transient uncovering of the teeth, on the Irish type of female beauty suddenly suggested to me a stanza of an ancient Polish ballad, very full of milk-and-blood imagery, of alternating ferocity and voluptuousness. This I quoted to the astounded foreigner in the vernacular, and this it was that metamorphosed his mere perfection of civility into sudden warmth, and, in fact, procured me the invitation in question.

"When I left Rathdrum the baron's last words to me were that if I ever thought of visiting his country otherwise than in books, he held me bound to make Yany, his Galician seat, my headquarters of study.

"From Czernowicz, therefore, where I stopped some time, I wrote, received in due time a few lines of prettily worded reply, and ultimately entered my sled in the nearest town to, yet at a most forbidding distance from, Yany, and started on my journey thither.

"The undertaking meant many long hours of undulation and skidding over the November snow, to the somniferous bell jangle of my dirty little horses, the only impression of interest being a weird gypsy concert I came in for at a miserable drinking-booth half buried in the snow where we halted for the refreshment of man and beast. Here, I remember, I discovered a very definite connection between the characteristic run of the tsimbol, the peculiar bite of the Zigeuner's bow on his fiddle-string, and some distinctive points of Turanian tongues. In other countries, in Spain, for instance, your gypsy speaks differently on his instrument. But, oddly enough, when I later attempted to put this observation on paper I could find no word to express it."

"There stands Yany," said he. I looked at my far-off goal with interest. As we drew nearer, the sinking sun, just dipping behind the hills, tinged the now distinct frontage with a cold copper-like gleam, but it was only for a minute; the next the building became nothing more to the eye than a black irregular silhouette against the crimson sky.

"Before we entered the long, steep avenue of poplars, the early winter darkness was upon us, rendered all the more depressing by gray mists which gave a ghostly aspect to such objects as the sheen of the snow rendered visible. Once or twice there were feeble flashes of light looming in iridescent halos as we passed little clusters of hovels, but for which I should have been induced to fancy that the great Hof stood alone in the wilderness, such was the deathly stillness around. But even as the tall, square building rose before us above the vapor, yellow lighted in various stories, and mighty in height and breadth, there broke upon my ear a deep-mouthed, menacing bay, which gave at once almost alarming reality to the eerie surroundings. 'His lordship's boar and wolf hounds,' quoth my charioteer calmly, unmindful of the regular pandemonium, of howls and barks which ensued as he skillfully turned his horses through the gateway and haggled the tired beasts into a sort of shambling canter that we might land with glory before the house door: a weakness common, I believe, to drivers of all nations.

"I alighted in the court of honor, and while awaiting an answer to my tug at the bell, stood, broken with fatigue, depressed, chilled and aching, questioning the wisdom of my proceedings and the amount of comfort, physical and moral, that was likely to await me in a tete-a-tete visit with a well-mannered savage in his own home.

"The unkempt tribe of stable retainers who began to gather round me and my rough vehicle in the gloom, with their evil-smelling sheepskins and their resigned, battered visages, were not calculated to reassure me. Yet when the door opened, there stood a smart chasseur and a solemn major-domo who might but just have stepped out of Mayfair; and there was displayed a spreading vista of warm, deep-colored halls, with here a statue and there a somniferous bell jangle of my dirty little horses, the only impression of interest being a weird gypsy concert I came

"Marveling, yet comforted withal, I followed the solemn butler, who received me with the deference due to an expected guest and expressed the master's regret for his enforced absence till dinner time. I traversed vast rooms, each more sumptuous than the last, feeling the strangeness of the contrast between the outer desolation and this sybaritic excess of luxury growing ever more strongly upon me; caught a glimpse of a picture gallery, where peculiar yet admirably executed latter-day French pictures hung side by side with ferocious boar hunts of Snyder and such kin; and, at length, was ushered into a most cheerful room, modern to excess in its comfortable promise, where, in addition to the tall stove necessary for warmth, there burned on an open hearth a vastly pleasant fire of resinous logs, and where, on a low table, awaited me a dainty service of fragrant Russian tea.

"My impression of utter novelty seemed somehow enhanced by this unexpected refinement in the heart of the
solitudes and in such a rugged shell, and yet, when I came to reflect, it was only characteristic of my cosmopolitan host. But another surprise was in store for me.

“When I had recovered bodily warmth and mental equilibrium in my downy armchair, before the roaring logs, and during the delicious absorption of my second glass of tea, I turned my attention to the French valet, evidently the baron’s own man, who was deftly unpacking my portmanteau, and who, unless my practiced eye deceived me, asked for nothing better than to entertain me with agreeable conversation the while.

“Your master is out, then?” quoth I, knowing that the most trivial remark would suffice to start him.

“True, Monseigneur was out; he was desolated in despair (this with the national amiable and imaginative instinct); ‘but it was doubtless important business. M. le Baron had the visit of his factor during the midday meal; had left the table hurriedly, and had not been seen since. Madame la Baronne had been a little suffering, but she would receive monsieur!’

“Madame!” exclaimed I, astounded, ‘is your master then married?—since when?’—visions of a fair Tartar, fit mate for my baron, immediately springing somewhat alluringly before my mental vision. But the answer dispelled the picturesque fancy.

“Oh, yes,” said the man, with a somewhat peculiar expression. ‘Yes, Monseigneur is married. Did Monsieur not know? And yet it was from England that Monseigneur brought back his wife.’

“An Englishwoman!”

“My first thought was one of pity; an Englishwoman alone in this wilderness—two days’ drive from even a railway station—and at the mercy of Kossowski! But the next minute I reversed my judgment. Probably she adored her rufous lord, took his veneer of courtesy—a veneer of the most exquisite polish, I grant you, but perilously thin—for the very perfection of chivalry. Or perchance it was his inner savageness itself that charmed her; the most refined women often amaze one by the fascination which the preponderance of the brute in the opposite sex seems to have for them.

“I was anxious to hear more.

“Is it not dull for the lady here at this time of the year?”

“The valet raised his shoulders with a gesture of despair that was almost passionate.

“Dull! Ah, monsieur could not conceive to himself the dullness of it. That poor Madame la Baronne! not even a little child to keep her company on the long, long days when there was nothing but snow in the heaven and on the earth and the howling of the wind and the dogs to cheer her. At the beginning, indeed, it had been different; when the master first brought home his bride the house was gay enough. It was all redecorated and refurnished to receive her (monsieur should have seen it before, a mere _rendezvous-de-chasse_—for the matter of that so were all the country houses in these parts). Ah, that was the good time! There were visits month after month; parties, sleighing, dancing, trips to St. Petersburg and Vienna. But this year it seemed they were to have nothing but boars and wolves. How madame could stand it—well, it was not for him to speak—and heaving a deep sigh he delicately inserted my white tie round my collar, and with a flourish twisted it into an irreproachable bow beneath my chin. I did not think it right to cross-examine the willing talker any further, especially as, despite his last asseveration, there were evidently volumes he still wished to pour forth; but I confess that, as I made my way slowly out of my room along the noiseless length of passage, I was conscious of an unwonted, not to say vulgar, curiosity concerning the woman who had captivated such a man as the Baron Kossowski.

“In a fit of speculative abstraction I must have taken the wrong turning, for I presently found myself in a long, narrow passage. I did not remember. I was retracing my steps when there came the sound of rapid footfalls upon stone flags; a little door flew open in the wall close to me, and a small, thick-set man, huddled in the rough sheepskin of the Galician peasant, with a mangy fur cap on his head, nearly ran headlong into my arms. I was about condescendingly to interpellate him in my best Polish, when I caught the gleam of an angry yellow eye and noted the bristle of a red beard—Kossowski!

“Amazed, I fell back a step in silence. With a growl like an uncouth animal disturbed, he drew his filthy cap over his brow with a savage gesture and pursued his way down the corridor at a sort of wild-boar trot.

“This first meeting between host and guest was so odd, so incongruous, that it afforded me plenty of food for a fresh line of conjecture as I traced my way back to the picture gallery, and from thence successfully to the drawing room, which, as the door was ajar, I could not this time mistake.

“It was large and lofty and dimly lit by shaded lamps; through the rosy gloom I could at first only just make out a slender figure by the hearth; but as I advanced, this was resolved into a singularly graceful woman in clinging, fur-trimmed velvet gown, who, with one hand resting on the high mantelpiece, the other hanging listlessly by her side, stood gazling down at the crumbling wood fire as if in a dream.

“My friends are kind enough to say that I have a cat-like tread; I know not how that may be; at any rate the carpet I was walking upon was thick enough to smother a heavier footfall: not until I was quite close to her did my
hostess become aware of my presence. Then she started violently and looked over her shoulder at me with dilating eyes. Evidently a nervous creature, I saw the pulse in her throat, strained by her attitude, flutter like a terrified bird.

"The next instant she had stretched out her hand with sweet English words of welcome, and the face, which I had been comparing in my mind to that of Guido's Cenci, became transformed by the arch and exquisite smile of a Greuse. For more than two years I had had no intercourse with any of my nationality. I could conceive the sound of his native tongue under such circumstances moving a man in a curious unexpected fashion.

"I babbled some commonplace reply, after which there was silence while we stood opposite each other, she looking at me expectantly. At length, with a sigh checked by a smile and an overtone of sadness in a voice that yet tried to be sprightly:

"'Am I then so changed, Mr. Marshfield?' she asked. And all at once I knew her: the girl whose nightingale throat had redeemed the desolation of the evenings at Rathdrum, whose sunny beauty had seemed (even to my celebrated cold-blooded aestheticism) worthy to haunt a man's dreams. Yes, there was the subtle curve of the waist, the warm line of throat, the dainty foot, the slender tip-tilted fingers--witty fingers, as I had classified them--which I now shook like a true Briton, instead of availing myself of the privilege the country gave me, and kissing her slender wrist.

"But she was changed; and I told her so with unconventional frankness, studying her closely as I spoke.

"'I am afraid,' I said gravely, 'that this place does not agree with you.'

"She shrank from my scrutiny with a nervous movement and flushed to the roots of her red-brown hair. Then she answered coldly that I was wrong, that she was in excellent health, but that she could not expect any more than other people to preserve perennial youth (I rapidly calculated she might be two-and-twenty), though, indeed, with a little forced laugh, it was scarcely flattering to hear one had altered out of all recognition. Then, without allowing me time to reply, she plunged into a general topic of conversation which, as I should have been obtuse indeed not to take the hint, I did my best to keep up.

"But while she talked of Vienna and Warsaw, of her distant neighbors, and last year's visitors, it was evident that her mind was elsewhere; her eye wandered, she lost the thread of her discourse, answered me at random, and smiled her piteous smile incongruously.

"However lonely she might be in her solitary splendor, the company of a countryman was evidently no such welcome diversion.

"After a little while she seemed to feel herself that she was lacking in cordiality, and, bringing her absent gaze to bear upon me with a puzzled strained look: 'I fear you will find it very dull,' she said, 'my husband is so wrapped up this winter in his country life and his sport. You are the first visitor we have had. There is nothing but guns and horses here, and you do not care for these things.'

"The door creaked behind us; and the baron entered, in faultless evening dress. Before she turned toward him I was sharp enough to catch again the upleaping of a quick dread in her eyes, not even so much dread perhaps, I thought afterwards, as horror--the horror we notice in some animals at the nearing of a beast of prey. It was gone in a second, and she was smiling. But it was a revelation.

"Perhaps he beat her in Russian fashion, and she, as an Englishwoman, was narrow-minded enough to resent this; or perhaps, merely, I had the misfortune to arrive during a matrimonial misunderstanding.

"The baron would not give me leisure to reflect; he was so very effusive in his greeting--not a hint of our previous meeting--unlike my hostess, all in all to me; eager to listen, to reply; almost affectionate, full of references to old times and genial allusions. No doubt when he chose he could be the most charming of men; there were moments when, looking at him in his quiet smile and restrained gesture, the almost exaggerated politeness of his manner to his wife, whose fingers he had kissed with pretty, old-fashioned gallantry upon his entrance, I asked myself, Could that encounter in the passage have been a dream? Could that savage in the sheepskin be my courteous entertainer?

"Just as I came in, did I hear my wife say there was nothing for you to do in this place?' he said presently to me. Then, turning to her:

"You do not seem to know Mr. Marshfield. Wherever he can open his eyes there is for him something to see which might not interest other men. He will find things in my library which I have no notion of. He will discover objects for scientific observation in all the members of my household, not only in the good-looking maids--though he could, I have no doubt, tell their points as I could those of a horse. We have maidens here of several distinct races, Marshfield. We have also witches, and Jew leeches, and holy daft people. In any case, Yany, with all its dependencies, material, male and female, are at your disposal, for what you can make out of them.

"'It is good,' he went on gayly, 'that you should happen to have this happy disposition, for I fear that, no later than to-morrow, I may have to absent myself from home. I have heard that there are news of wolves--they threaten to be a greater pest than usual this winter, but I am going to drive them on quite a new plan, and it will go hard with
me if I don't come even with them. Well for you, by the way, Marshfield, that you did not pass within their scent to-day.' Then, musingly: 'I should not give much for the life of a traveler who happened to wander in these parts just now.' Here he interrupted himself hastily and went over to his wife, who had sunk back on her chair, livid, seemingly on the point of swooning.

"His gaze was devouring; so might a man look at the woman he adored, in his anxiety.

"What! faint, Violet, alarmed! His voice was subdued, yet there was an unmistakable thrill of emotion in it.

"Pshaw! I thought I to myself, 'the man is a model husband.'

"She clinched her hands, and by sheer force of will seemed to pull herself together. These nervous women have often an unexpected fund of strength.

"Come, that is well," said the baron with a flickering smile; 'Mr. Marshfield will think you but badly acclimatized to Poland if a little wolf scare can upset you. My dear wife is so soft-hearted,' he went on to me, 'that she is capable of making herself quite ill over the sad fate that might have, but has not, overcome you. Or, perhaps,' he added, in a still gentler voice, 'her fear is that I may expose myself to danger for the public weal.'

"She turned her head away, but I saw her set her teeth as if to choke a sob. The baron chuckled in his throat and seemed to luxuriate in the pleasant thought.

"At this moment folding doors were thrown open, and supper was announced. I offered my arm, she rose and took it in silence. This silence she maintained during the first part of the meal, despite her husband's brilliant conversation and almost uproarious spirits. But by and by a bright color mounted to her cheeks and luster to her eyes. I suppose you will think me horrible unpoetical if I add that she drank several glasses of champagne one after the other, a fact which perhaps may account for the change.

"At any rate she spoke and laughed and looked lovely, and I did not wonder that the baron could hardly keep his eyes off her. But whether it was her wifely anxiety or not—it was evident her mind was not at ease through it all, and I fancied that her brightness was feverish, her merriment slightly hysterical.

"After supper—an exquisite one it was—we adjourned together, in foreign fashion, to the drawing-room; the baron threw himself into a chair and, somewhat with the air of a pasha, demanded music. He was flushed; the veins of his forehead were swollen and stood out like cords; the wine drunk at table was potent: even through my phlegmatic frame it ran hotly.

"She hesitated a moment or two, then docilely sat down to the piano. That she could sing I have already made clear: how she could sing, with what pathos, passion, as well as perfect art, I had never realized before.

"When the song was ended she remained for a while, with eyes lost in distance, very still, save for her quick breathing. It was clear she was moved by the music; indeed she must have thrown her whole soul into it.

"At first we, the audience, paid her the rare compliment of silence. Then the baron broke forth into loud applause. 'Brava, brava! that was really said _con amore_. A delicious love song, delicious—but French! You must sing one of our Slav melodies for Marshfield before you allow us to go and smoke.'

"She started from her reverie with a flush, and after a pause struck slowly a few simple chords, then began one of those strangely sweet, yet intensely pathetic Russian airs, which give one a curious revelation of the profound, endless melancholy lurking in the national mind.

"What do you think of it?" asked the baron of me when it ceased.

"What I have always thought of such music—it is that of a hopeless people; poetical, crushed, and resigned.'

"He gave a loud laugh. 'Hear the analyst, the psychologue—why, man, it is a love song! Is it possible that we, uncivilized, are truer realists than our hypercultured Western neighbors? Have we gone to the root of the matter, in our simple way?'

"The baroness got up abruptly. She looked white and spent; there were bister circles round her eyes.

"'I am tired,' she said, with dry lips. 'You will excuse me, Mr. Marshfield, I must really go to bed.'

"'Go to bed, go to bed,' cried her husband gayly. Then, quoting in Russian from the song she had just sung: 'Sleep, my little soft white dove: my little innocent tender lamb!' She hurried from the room. The baron laughed again, and, taking me familiarly by the arm, led me to his own set of apartments for the promised smoke. He ensconced me in an armchair, placed cigars of every description and a Turkish pipe ready to my hand, and a little table on which stood cut-glass flasks and beakers in tempting array.

"After I had selected my cigar with some precautions, I glanced at him over a careless remark, and was startled to see a sudden alteration in his whole look and attitude.

"'You will forgive me, Marshfield,' he said, as he caught my eye, speaking with spasmodic politeness. 'It is more than probable that I shall have to set out upon this chase I spoke of to-night, and I must now go and change my clothes, that I may be ready to start at any moment. This is the hour when it is most likely these hell beasts are to be got at. You have all you want, I hope,' interrupting an outbreak of ferocity by an effort after his former courtesy.

"It was curious to watch the man of the world struggling with the primitive man.
"'But, baron,' said I, 'I do not at all see the fun of sticking at home like this. You know my passion for witnessing everything new, strange, and outlandish. You will surely not refuse me such an opportunity for observation as a midnight wolf raid. I will do my best not to be in the way if you will take me with you.'

'At first it seemed as if he had some difficulty in realizing the drift of my words, he was so engrossed by some inner thought. But as I repeated them, he gave vent to a loud cachinnation.

'By heaven! I like your spirit,' he exclaimed, clapping me strongly on the shoulder. 'Of course you shall come. You shall,' he repeated, 'and I promise you a sight, a hunt such as you never heard or dreamed of--you will be able to tell them in England the sort of thing we can do here in line--such wolves are rare quarry,' he added, looking slyly at me, 'and I have a new plan for getting at them.'

'There was a long pause, and then there rose in the stillness the unearthly howling of the baron's hounds, a cheerful sound which only their owner's somewhat loud converse of the evening had kept from becoming excessively obtrusive.

'Hark at them--the beauties!' cried he, showing his short, strong teeth, pointed like a dog's in a wide grin of anticipative delight. 'They have been kept on pretty short commons, poor things! They are hungry. By the way, Marshfield, you can sit tight to a horse, I trust? If you were to roll off, you know, these splendid fellows--they would chop you up in a second. They would chop you up,' he repeated unctuously, 'snap, crunch, gobble, and there would be an end of you!'

'If I could not ride a decent horse without being thrown,' I retorted, a little stung by his manner, 'after my recent three months' torture with the Guard Cossacks, I should indeed be a hopeless subject. Do not think of frightening me from the exploit, but say frankly if my company would be displeasing.'

'Tut!' he said, waving his hand impatiently, 'it is your affair. I have warned you. Go and get ready if you want to come. Time presses.'

'I was determined to be of the fray; my blood was up. I have hinted that the baron's Tokay had stirred it.

'I went to my room and hurriedly donned clothes more suitable for rough night work. My last care was to slip into my pockets a brace of double-barreled pistols which formed part of my traveling kit. When I returned I found the baron already booted and spurred; this without metaphor. He was stretched full length on the divan, and did not speak as I came in, or even look at me. Chewing an unlit cigar, with eyes fixed on the ceiling, he was evidently following some absorbing train of ideas.

'The silence was profound; time went by; it grew oppressive; at length, wearied out, I fell, over my chibouque, into a doze filled with puzzling visions, out of which I was awakened with a start. My companion had sprung up, very lightly, to his feet. In his throat was an odd, half-suppressed cry, gravely to hear. He stood on tiptoe, with eyes fixed, as though looking through the wall, and I distinctly saw his ears point in the intensity of his listening.

'After a moment, with hasty, noiseless energy, and without the slightest ceremony, he blew the lamps out, drew back the heavy curtains and threw the tall window wide open. A rush of icy air, and the bright rays of the moon--

'Presently, far, far away, came a faint tinkle of bells; so faint, at first, that I thought it was but fancy, then distinct. It was even more eerie than the silence, I thought, though I knew it could come but from some passing sleigh. All at once that ceased, and again my duller senses could perceive nothing, though I saw by my host's craning neck that he was more on the alert than ever. But at last I too heard once more, this time not bells, but as it were the tread of horses muffled by the snow, intermittent and dull, yet drawing nearer. And then in the inner silence of the great house it seemed to me I caught the noise of closing doors; but here the hounds, as if suddenly becoming alive to some disturbance, raised the same fearsome concert of yells and barks with which they had greeted my arrival, and listening became useless.

'I had risen to my feet. My host, turning from the window, seized my shoulder with a fierce grip, and bade me 'hold my noise'; for a second or two I stood motionless under his iron talons, then he released me with an exultant whisper: "Now for our chase!" and made for the door with a spring. Hastily gulping down a mouthful of arrack from one of the bottles on the table, I followed him, and, guided by the sound of his footsteps before me, groped my way through passages as black as Erebus.

'After a time, which seemed a long one, a small door was flung open in front, and I saw Kossowski glide into the moonlit courtyard and cross the square. When I too came out he was disappearing into the gaping darkness of the open stable door, and there I overtook him.
"A man who seemed to have been sleeping in a corner jumped up at our entrance, and led out a horse ready saddled. In obedience to a gruff order from his master, as the latter mounted, he then brought forward another which he had evidently thought to ride himself and held the stirrup for me.

"We came delicately forth, and the Cossack hurriedly barred the great door behind us. I caught a glimpse of his worn, scarred face by the moonlight, as he peeped after us for a second before shutting himself in; it was stricken with terror.

"The baron trotted briskly toward the kennels, from whence there was now issuing a truly infernal clangor, and, as my steed followed suit of his own accord, I could see how he proceeded dexterously to unbolt the gates without dismounting, while the beasts within dashed themselves against them and tore the ground in their fury of impatience.

"He smiled, as he swung back the barriers at last, and his 'beauties' came forth. Seven or eight monstrous brutes, hounds of a kind unknown to me: fulvous and sleek of coat, tall on their legs, square-headed, long-tailed, deep-chested; with terrible jaws slobbering in eagerness. They leaped around and up at us, much to our horses' distaste. Kossowski, still smiling, lashed at them unsparingly with his hunting whip, and they responded, not with yells of pain, but with snarls of fury.

"Managing his restless steed and his cruel whip with consummate ease, my host drove the unruly crew before him out of the precincts, then halted and bent down from his saddle to examine some slight prints in the snow which led, not the way I had come, but toward what seemed another avenue. In a second or two the hounds were gathered round this spot, their great snake-like tails quivering, nose to earth, yelping with excitement. I had some ado to manage my horse, and my eyesight was far from being as keen as the baron's, but I had then no doubt he had come already upon wolf tracks, and I shuddered mentally, thinking of the sleigh bells.

"Suddenly Kossowski raised himself from his strained position; under his low fur cap his face, with its fixed smile, looked scarcely human in the white light: and then we broke into a hand canter just as the hounds dashed, in a compact body, along the trail.

"But we had not gone more than a few hundred yards before they began to falter, then straggled, stopped and ran back and about with dismal cries. It was clear to me they had lost the scent. My companion reined in his horse, and mine, luckily a well-trained brute, halted of himself.

"We had reached a bend in a broad avenue of firs and larches, and just where we stood, and where the hounds ever returned and met nose to nose in frantic conclave, the snow was trampled and soiled, and a little farther on planed in a great sweep, as if by a turning sleigh. Beyond was a double-furrowed track of skaits and regular hoof prints leading far away.

"Before I had time to reflect upon the bearing of this unexpected interruption, Kossowski, as if suddenly possessed by a devil, fell upon the hounds with his whip, flogging them upon the new track, uttering the while the most savage cries I have ever heard issue from human throat. The disappointed beasts were nothing loath to seize upon another trail; after a second of hesitation they had understood, and were off upon it at a tearing pace, we after them at the best speed of our horses.

"Some unformed idea that we were going to escort, or rescue, benighted travelers flickered dimly in my mind as I galloped through the night air; but when I managed to approach my companion and called out to him for explanation, he only turned half round and grinned at me.

"Before us lay now the white plain, scintillating under the high moon's rays. That light is deceptive; I could be sure of nothing upon the wide expanse but of the dark, leaping figures of the hounds already spread out in a straggling line, some right ahead, others just in front of us. In a short time also the icy wind, cutting my face mercilessly as we increased our pace, well nigh blinded me with tears of cold.

"I can hardly realize how long this pursuit after an unseen prey lasted; I can only remember that I was getting rather faint with fatigue, and ignominiously held on to my pommel, when all of a sudden the black outline of a sleigh merged into sight in front of us.

"I rubbed my smarting eyes with my benumbed hand; we were gaining upon it second by second; two of those hell hounds of the baron's were already within a few leaps of it.

"Soon I was able to make out two figures, one standing up and urging the horses on with whip and voice, the other clinging to the back seat and looking toward us in an attitude of terror. A great fear crept into my half-frozen brain--were we not bringing deadly danger instead of help to these travelers? Great God! did the baron mean to use them as a bait for his new method of wolf hunting?

"I would have turned upon Kossowski with a cry of expostulation or warning, but he, urging on his hounds as he galloped on their flank, howling and gesticulating like a veritable Hun, passed me by like a flash--and all at once I knew."

Marshfield paused for a moment and sent his pale smile round upon his listeners, who now showed no signs of sleepiness; he knocked the ash from his cigar, twisted the latter round in his mouth, and added dryly:
"And I confess it seemed to me a little strong even for a baron in the Carpathians. The travelers were our quarry. But the reason why the Lord of Yany had turned man-hunter I was yet to learn. Just then I had to direct my energies to frustrating his plans. I used my spurs mercilessly. While I drew up even with him I saw the two figures in the sleigh change places; he who had hitherto driven now faced back, while his companion took the reins, there was the pale blue sheen of a revolver barrel under the moonlight, followed by a yellow flash, and the nearest hound rolled over in the snow.

"With an oath the baron twisted round in his saddle to call up and urge on the remainder. My horse had taken fright at the report and dashed irresistibly forward, bringing me at once almost level with the fugitives, and the next instant the revolver was turned menacingly toward me. There was no time to explain; my pistol was already drawn, and as another of the brutes bounded up, almost under my horse's feet, I loosed it upon him. I must have let off both barrels at once, for the weapon flew out of my hand, but the hound's back was broken. I presume the traveler understood; at any rate, he did not fire at me.

"In moments of intense excitement like these, strangely enough, the mind is extraordinarily open to impressions. I shall never forget that man's countenance in the sledge, as he stood upright and defied us in his mortal danger; it was young, very handsome, the features not distorted, but set into a sort of desperate, stony calm, and I knew it, beyond all doubt, for that of an Englishman. And then I saw his companion—it was the baron's wife. And I understood why the bells had been removed.

"It takes a long time to say this; it only required an instant to see it. The loud explosion of my pistol had hardly ceased to ring before the baron, with a fearful imprecation, was upon me. First he lashed at me with his whip as we tore along side by side, and then I saw him wind the reins round his off arm and bend over, and I felt his angry fingers close tightly on my right foot. The next instant I should have been lifted out of my saddle, but there came another shot from the sledge. The baron's horse plunged and stumbled, and the baron, hanging on to my foot with a fierce grip, was wrenched from his seat. His horse, however, was up again immediately, and I was released, and then I caught a confused glimpse of the frightened and wounded animal galloping wildly away to the right, leaving a black track of blood behind him in the snow, his master, entangled in the reins, running with incredible swiftness by his side and endeavoring to vault back into the saddle.

"And now came to pass a terrible thing which, in his savage plans, my host had doubtless never anticipated.

"One of the hounds that had during this short check recovered lost ground, coming across this hot trail of blood, turned away from his course, and with a joyous yell darted after the running man. In another instant the remainder of the pack was upon the new scent.

"As soon as I could stop my horse, I tried to turn him in the direction the new chase had taken, but just then, through the night air, over the receding sound of the horse's scamper and the sobbing of the pack in full cry, there came a long scream, and after that a sickening silence. And I knew that somewhere yonder, under the beautiful moonlight, the Baron Kossowski was being devoured by his starving dogs.

"I looked round, with the sweat on my face, vaguely, for some human being to share the horror of the moment, and I saw, gliding away, far away in the white distance, the black silhouette of the sledge."

"Well?" said we, in divers tones of impatience, curiosity, or horror, according to our divers temperaments, as the speaker uncrossed his legs and gazed at us in mild triumph, with all the air of having said his say, and satisfactorily proved his point.

"Well," repeated he, "what more do you want to know? It will interest you but slightly, I am sure, to hear how I found my way back to the Hof; or how I told as much as I deemed prudent of the evening's grewsome work to the baron's servants, who, by the way, to my amazement, displayed the profoundest and most unmistakable sorrow at the tidings, and sallied forth (at their head the Cossack who had seen us depart) to seek for his remains. Excuse the unpleasantness of the remark: I fear the dogs must have left very little of him, he had dieted them so carefully.

"And I saw, gliding away, far away in the white distance, the black silhouette of the sledge."

"Nor am I going to inflict upon you," continued Marshfield, after draining his glass, "a full account of my impressions when I found myself once more in that immense, deserted, and stricken house, so luxuriously prepared for the mistress who had fled from it; how I philosophized over all this, according to my wont; the conjectures I made as to the first acts of the drama; the untold sufferings my countrywoman must have endured from the moment her husband first grew jealous till she determined on this desperate step; as to how and when she had met her lover, how they communicated, and how the baron had discovered the intended flitting in time to concoct his characteristic revenge.

"One thing you may be sure of, I had no mind to remain at Yany an hour longer than necessary. I even contrived to get well clear of the neighborhood before the lady's absence was discovered. Luckily for me—or I might have
been taxed with connivance, though indeed the simple household did not seem to know what suspicion was, and
accepted my account with childlike credence--very typical, and very convenient to me at the same time."

"But how do you know," said one of us, "that the man was her lover? He might have been her brother or some
other relative."

"That," said Marshfield, with his little flat laugh, "I happen to have ascertained--and, curiously enough, only a
few weeks ago. It was at the play, between the acts, from my comfortable seat (the first row in the pit). I was looking
leisurely round the house when I caught sight of a woman, in a box close by, whose head was turned from me, and
who presented the somewhat unusual spectacle of a young neck and shoulders of the most exquisite contour--and
perfectly gray hair; and not dull gray, but rather of a pleasing tint like frosted silver. This aroused my curiosity. I
brought my glasses to a focus on her and waited patiently till she turned round. Then I recognized the Baroness
Kassowski, and I no longer wondered at the young hair being white.

"Yet she looked placid and happy; strangely so, it seemed to me, under the sudden reviving in my memory of
such scenes as I have now described. But presently I understood further: beside her, in close attendance, was the
man of the sledge, a handsome fellow with much of a military air about him.

"During the course of the evening, as I watched, I saw a friend of mine come into the box, and at the end I
slipped out into the passage to catch him as he came out.

"Who is the woman with the white hair?" I asked. Then, in the fragmentary style approved of by ultra-
fashionable young men--this earnest-languid mode of speech presents curious similarities in all languages--he told
me: 'Most charming couple in London--awfully pretty, wasn't she?--he had been in the Guards--attache at Vienna
once--they adored each other. White hair, devilish queer, wasn't it? Suited her, somehow. And then she had been
married to a Russian, or something, somewhere in the wilds, and their names were--' But do you know," said
Marshfield, interrupting himself, "I think I had better let you find that out for yourselves, if you care."
The Incredulity of Father Brown

ONE: The Resurrection of Father Brown

THERE was a brief period during which Father Brown enjoyed, or rather did not enjoy, something like fame. He was a nine days' wonder in the newspapers; he was even a common topic of controversy in the weekly reviews; his exploits were narrated eagerly and inaccurately in any number of clubs and drawing-rooms, especially in America. Incongruous and indeed incredible as it may seem to any one who knew him, his adventures as a detective were even made the subject of short stories appearing in magazines.

Strangely enough, this wandering limelight struck him in the most obscure, or at least the most remote, of his many places of residence. He had been sent out to officiate, as something between a missionary and a parish priest, in one of those sections of the northern coast of South America, where strips of country still cling insecurely to European powers, or are continually threatening to become independent republics, under the gigantic shadow of President Monroe. The population was red and brown with pink spots; that is, it was Spanish - American, and largely Spanish - American - Indian, but there was a considerable and increasing infiltration of Americans of the northern sort - Englishmen, Germans, and the rest. And the trouble seems to have begun when one of these visitors, very recently landed and very much annoyed at having lost one of his bags, approached the first building of which he came in sight - which happened to be the mission-house and chapel attached to it, in front of which ran a long veranda and a long row of stakes, up which were trained the black twisted vines, their square leaves red with autumn. Behind them, also in a row, a number of human beings sat almost as rigid as the stakes, and coloured in some fashion like the vines. For while their broad-brimmed hats were as black as their unblinking eyes, the complexions of many of them might have been made out of the dark red timber of those transatlantic forests. Many of them were smoking very long, thin black cigars; and in all that group the smoke was almost the only moving thing. The visitor would probably have described them as natives, though some of them were very proud of Spanish blood. But he was not one to draw any fine distinction between Spaniards and Red Indians, being rather disposed to dismiss people from the scene when once he had convicted them of being native to it.

He was a newspaper man from Kansas City, a lean, light-haired man with what Meredith called an adventurous nose; one could almost fancy it found its way by feeling its way and moved like the proboscis of an ant - eater. His name was Snaithe, and his parents, after some obscure meditation, had called him Saul, a fact which he had the good feeling to conceal as far as possible. Indeed, he had ultimately compromised by calling himself Paul, though by no means for the same reason that had affected the Apostle of the Gentiles. On the contrary, so far as he had any views on such things, the name of the persecutor would have been more appropriate; for he regarded organized religion with the conventional contempt which can be learnt more easily from Ingersoll than from Voltaire. And this was, as it happened, the not very important side of his character which he turned towards the mission - station and the groups in front of the veranda. Something in their shameless repose and indifference inflamed his own fury of efficiency; and, as he could get no particular answer to his first questions, he began to do all the talking himself.

Standing out there in the strong sunshine, a spick - and - span figure in his Panama hat and neat clothes, his grip-sack held m a steely grip, he began to shout at the people in the shadow. He began to explain to them very loudly why they were lazy and filthy, and bestially ignorant and lower than the beasts that perish, in case this problem should have previously exercised their minds. In his opinion it was the deleterious influence of priests that had made them so miserably poor and so hopelessly oppressed that they were able to sit in the shade and smoke and do nothing.

'And a mighty soft crowd you must be at that,' he said, 'to be bullied by these stuck - up josses because they walk about in their mitres and their tiaras and their gold copes and other glad rags, looking down on everybody else like dirt - being bamboozled by crowns and canopies and sacred umbrellas like a kid at a pantomime; just because a pompous old High Priest of Mumbo - Jumbo looks as if he was the lord of the earth. What about you? What do you look like, you poor simps? I tell you, that's why you're way - back in barbarism and can't read or write and - '

At this point the High Priest of Mumbo - Jumbo came in an undignified hurry out of the door of the mission-house, not looking very like a lord of the earth, but rather like a bundle of black second - hand clothes buttoned round a short bolster in the semblance of a guy. He was not wearing his tiara, supposing him to possess one, but a shabby broad hat not very dissimilar from those of the Spanish Indians, and it was thrust to the back of his head with a gesture of botheration. He seemed just about to speak to the motionless natives when he caught sight of the stranger and said quickly:

'Oh, can I be of any assistance? Would you like to come inside?'
Mr Paul Snaith came inside; and it was the beginning of a considerable increase of that journalist's information on many things. Presumably his journalistic instinct was stronger than his prejudices, as, indeed, it often is in clever journalists; and he asked a good many questions, the answers to which interested and surprised him. He discovered that the Indians could read and write, for the simple reason that the priest had taught them; but that they did not read or write any more than they could help, from a natural preference for more direct communications. He learned that these strange people, who sat about in heaps on the veranda without stirring a hair, could work quite hard on their own patches of land; especially those of them who were more than half Spanish; and he learned with still more astonishment that they all had patches of land that were really their own. That much was part of a stubborn tradition that seemed quite native to natives. But in that also the priest had played a certain part, and by doing so had taken perhaps what was his first and last part in politics, if it was only local politics.

There had recently swept through that region one of those fevers of atheist and almost anarchist Radicalism which break out periodically in countries of the Latin culture, generally beginning in a secret society and generally ending in a civil war and in very little else. The local leader of the iconoclastic party was a certain Alvarez, a rather picturesque adventurer of Portuguese nationality but, as his enemies said, of partly Negro origin, the head of any number of lodges and temples of initiation of the sort that in such places clothe even atheism with something mystical. The leader on the more conservative side was a much more commonplace person, a very wealthy man named Mendoza, the owner of many factories and quite respectable, but not very exciting. It was the general opinion that the cause of law and order would have been entirely lost if it had not adopted a more popular policy of its own, in the form of securing land for the peasants; and this movement had mainly originated from the little mission - station of Father Brown.

While he was talking to the journalist, Mendoza, the Conservative leader, came in. He was a stout, dark man, with a bald head like a pear and a round body also like a pear; he was smoking a very fragrant cigar, but he threw it away, perhaps a little theatrically, when he came into the presence of the priest, as if he had been entering church; and bowed with a curve that in so corpulent a gentleman seemed quite improbable. He was always exceedingly serious in his social gestures, especially towards religious institutions. He was one of those laymen who are much more ecclesiastical than ecclesiastics. It embarrassed Father Brown a good deal, especially when carried thus into private life.

'I think I am an anti-clerical,' Father Brown would say with a faint smile; 'but there wouldn't be half so much clericalism if they would only leave things to the clerics.'

'Why Mr Mendoza,' exclaimed the journalist with a new animation,' I think we have met before. Weren't you at the Trade Congress in Mexico last year?'

The heavy eyelids of Mr Mendoza showed a flutter of recognition, and he smiled in his slow way. 'I remember.'

'Pretty big business done there in an hour or two,' said Snaith with relish. 'Made a good deal of difference to you, too, I guess.'

'I have been very fortunate,' said Mendoza modestly.

'Don't you believe it!' cried the enthusiastic Snaith. 'Good fortune comes to the people who know when to catch hold; and you caught hold good and sure. But I hope I'm not interrupting your business?'

'Not at all,' said the other. 'I often have the honour of calling on the padre for a little talk. Merely for a little talk.'

It seemed as if this familiarity between Father Brown and a successful and even famous man of business completed the reconciliation between the priest and the practical Mr Snaith. He felt, it might be supposed, a new respectability clothe the station and the mission, and was ready to overlook such occasional reminders of the existence of religion as a chapel and a presbytery can seldom wholly avoid. He became quite enthusiastic about the priest's programme - at least on its secular and social side - and announced himself ready at any moment to act in the capacity of a live wire for its communication to the world at large. And it was at this point that Father Brown began to find the journalist rather more troublesome in his sympathy than in his hostility.

Mr Paul Snaith set out vigorously to feature Father Brown. He sent long and loud eulogies on him across the continent to his newspaper in the Middle West. He took snapshots of the unfortunate cleric in the most commonplace occupations, and exhibited them in gigantic photographs in the gigantic Sunday papers of the United States. He turned his sayings into slogans, and was continually presenting the world with 'A message' from the reverend gentleman in South America. Any stock less strong and strenuously receptive than the American race would have become very much bored with Father Brown. As it was, he received handsome and eager offers to go on a lecturing tour in the States; and when he declined, the terms were raised with expressions of respectful wonder. A series of stories about him, like the stories of Sherlock Holmes, were, by the instrumentality of Mr Snaith, planned out and put before the hero with requests for his assistance and encouragement. As the priest found they had started, he could offer no suggestion except that they should stop. And this in turn was taken by Mr Snaith as the text for a discussion on whether Father Brown should disappear temporarily over a cliff, in the manner of Dr Watson's hero.
To all these demands the priest had patiently to reply in writing, saying that he would consent on such terms to the temporary cessation of the stories and begging that a considerable interval might occur before they began again. The notes he wrote grew shorter and shorter; and as he wrote the last of them, he sighed.

Needless to say, this strange boom in the North reacted on the little outpost in the South where he had expected to live in so lonely an exile. The considerable English and American population already on the spot began to be proud of possessing so widely advertised a person. American tourists, of the sort who land with a loud demand for Westminster Abbey, landed on that distant coast with a loud demand for Father Brown. They were within measurable distance of running excursion trains named after him, and bringing crowds to see him as if he were a public monument. He was especially troubled by the active and ambitious new traders and shopkeepers of the place, who were perpetually pestering him to try their wares and to give them testimonials. Even if the testimonials were not forthcoming, they would prolong the correspondence for the purpose of collecting autographs. As he was a good-natured person they got a good deal of what they wanted out of him; and it was in answer to a particular request from a Frankfort wine-merchant named Eckstein that he wrote hastily a few words on a card, which were to prove a terrible turning-point in his life.

Eckstein was a fussy little man with fuzzy hair and pince-nez, who was wildly anxious that the priest should not only try some of his celebrated medicinal port, but should let him know where and when he would drink it, in acknowledging its receipt. The priest was not particularly surprised at the request, for he was long past surprise at the lunacies of advertisement. So he scribbled something down and turned to other business which seemed a little more sensible. He was again interrupted, by a note from no less a person than his political enemy Alvarez, asking him to come to a conference at which it was hoped that a compromise on an outstanding question might be reached; and suggesting an appointment that evening at a cafe just outside the walls of the little town. To this also he sent a message of acceptance by the rather florid and military messenger who was waiting for it; and then, having an hour or two before him, sat down to attempt to get through a little of his own legitimate business. At the end of the time he poured himself out a glass of Mr Eckstein's remarkable wine and, glancing at the clock with a humorous expression, drank it and went out into the night.

Strong moonlight lay on the little Spanish town, so that when he came to the picturesque gateway, with its rather rococo arch and the fantastic fringe of palms beyond it, it looked rather like a scene in a Spanish opera. One long leaf of palm with jagged edges, black against the moon, hung down on the other side of the arch, visible through the archway, and had something of the look of the jaw of a black crocodile. The fancy would not have lingered in his imagination but for something else that caught his naturally alert eye. The air was deathly still, and there was not a stir of wind; but he distinctly saw the pendent palm-leaf move.

He looked around him and realized that he was alone. He had left behind the last houses, which were mostly closed and shuttered, and was walking between two long blank walls built of large and shapeless but flattened stones, tufted here and there with the queer prickly weeds of that region - walls which ran parallel all the way to the gateway. He could not see the lights of the cafe outside the gate; probably it was too far away. Nothing could be seen under the arch but a wider expanse of large-flagged pavement, pale in the moon, with the straggling prickly pear here and there. He had a strong sense of the smell of evil; he felt queer physical oppression; but he did not think of stopping. His courage, which was considerable, was perhaps even less strong a part of him than his curiosity. All his life he had been led by an intellectual hunger for the truth, even of trifles. He often controlled it in the name of proportion; but it was always there. He walked straight through the gateway, and on the other side a man sprang like a monkey out of the tree-top and struck at him with a knife. At the same moment another man came crawling swiftly along the wall and, whirling a cudgel round his head, brought it down. Father Brown turned, staggered, and sank in a heap, but as he sank there dawned on his round face an expression of mild and immense surprise.

There was living in the same little town at this time another young American, particularly different from Mr Paul Snaith. His name was John Adams Race, and he was an electrical engineer, employed by Mendoza to fit out the old town with all the new conveniences. He was a figure far less familiar in satire and international gossip than that of Snaith. His name was John Adams Race, and he was an electrical engineer, employed by Mendoza to fit out the old town with all the new conveniences. He had been taught a very Puritan, or purely Evangelical, sort of Christianity from the Family Bible at his mother's knee; and in so far as he had time to have any religion, that was still his religion. Amid all the dazzling lights of the latest and even wildest discoveries, when he was at the very edge and extreme of experiment, working miracles of light and sound like a god creating new stars and solar systems, he never for a moment doubted that the things 'back home' were the best things in the world; his mother and the Family Bible and the quiet and quaint morality of his village. He had as serious and noble a sense of the sacredness of his mother as if he had been a frivolous Frenchman. He was quite sure the Bible religion
was really the right thing; only he vaguely missed it wherever he went in the modern world. He could hardly be expected to sympathize with the religious externals of Catholic countries; and in a dislike of mitres and croziers he sympathized with Mr Snaith, though not in so cocksure a fashion. He had no liking for the public bowings and scrapings of Mendoza and certainly no temptation to the masonic mysticism of the atheist Alvarez. Perhaps all that semi-tropical life was too coloured for him, shot with Indian red and Spanish gold. Anyhow, when he said there was nothing to touch his home town, he was not boasting. He really meant that there was somewhere something plain and unpretentious and touching, which he really respected more than anything else in the world. Such being the mental attitude of John Adams Race in a South American station, there had been growing on him for some time a curious feeling, which contradicted all his prejudices and for which he could not account. For the truth was this: that the only thing he had ever met in his travels that in the least reminded him of the old wood-pile and the provincial proprieties and the Bible on his mother's knee was (for some inscrutable reason) the round face and black clumsy umbrella of Father Brown.

He found himself insensibly watching that commonplace and even comic black figure as it went bustling about; watching it with an almost morbid fascination, as if it were a walking riddle or contradiction. He had found something he could not help liking in the heart of everything he hated; it was as if he had been horribly tormented by lesser demons and then found that the Devil was quite an ordinary person.

Thus it happened that, looking out of his window on that moonlit night, he saw the Devil go by, the demon of unaccountable blamelessness, in his broad black hat and long black coat, shuffling along the street towards the gateway, and saw it with an interest which he could not himself understand. He wondered where the priest was going, and what he was really up to; and remained gazing out into the moonlit street long after the little black figure had passed. And then he saw something else that intrigued him further. Two other men whom he recognized passed across his window as across a lighted stage. A sort of blue limelight of the moon ran in a spectral halo round the big bush of hair that stood erect on the head of little Eckstein, the wine-seller, and it outlined a taller and darker figure with an eagle profile and a queer old-fashioned and very top-heavy black hat, which seemed to make the whole outline still more bizarre, like a shape in a shadow pantomime. Race rebuked himself for allowing the moon to play such tricks with his fancy; for on a second glance he recognized the black Spanish sidewhiskers and high-featured face of Dr Calderon, a worthy medical man of the town, whom he had once found attending professionally on Mendoza. Still, there was something in the way the men were whispering to each other and peering up the street that struck him as peculiar. On a sudden impulse he leapt over the low window-sill and himself went bareheaded up the road, following their trail. He saw them disappear under the dark archway, and a moment after there came a dreadful cry from beyond; curiously loud and piercing, and all the more blood-curdling to Race because it said something very distinctly in some tongue that he did not know.

The next moment there was a rushing of feet, more cries, and then a confused roar of rage or grief that shook the turrets and tall palm trees of the place; there was a movement in the mob that had gathered, as if they were sweeping backwards through the gateway. And then the dark archway resounded with a new voice, this time intelligible to him and falling with the note of doom, as someone shouted through the gateway:

'Father Brown is dead!'

He never knew what prop gave way in his mind, or why something on which he had been counting suddenly failed him; but he ran towards the gateway and was just in time to meet his countryman, the journalist Snaith, coming out of the dark entrance, deadly pale and snapping his fingers nervously.

'It's quite true,' said Snaith, with something which for him approached to reverence. 'He's a goner. The doctor's been looking at him, and there's no hope. Some of these damned Dagos clubbed him as he came through the gate - God knows why. It'll be a great loss to the place.'

Race did not or perhaps could not reply, but ran on under the arch to the scene beyond. The small black figure lay where it had fallen on the wilderness of wide stones starred here and there with green thorn; and the great crowd was being kept back, chiefly by the mere gestures of one gigantic figure in the foreground. For there were many there who swayed hither and thither at the mere movement of his hand, as if he had been a magician.

Alvarez, the dictator and demagogue, was a tall, swaggering figure, always rather flamboyantly clad, and on this occasion he wore a green uniform with embroideries like silver snakes crawling all over it, with an order round his neck hung on a very vivid maroon ribbon. His close curling hair was already grey, and in contrast his complexion, which his friends called olive and his foes octoroon, looked almost literally golden, as if it were a mask moulded in gold. But his large-featured face, which was powerful and humorous, was at this moment properly grave and grim. He had been waiting, he explained, for Father Brown at the cafe when he had heard a rustle and a fall and, coming out, had found the corpse lying on the flagstones.

'I know what some of you are thinking,' he said, looking round proudly, 'and if you are afraid of me - as you are - I will say it for you. I am an atheist; I have no god to call on for those who will not take my word. But I tell you in
the name of every root of honour that may be left to a soldier and a man, that I had no part in this. If I had the men here that did it, I would rejoice to hang them on that tree.'

'Naturally we are glad to hear you say so,' said old Mendoza stiffly and solemnly, standing by the body of his fallen coadjutor. 'This blow has been too appalling for us to say what else we feel at present. I suggest that it will be more decent and proper if we remove my friend's body and break up this irregular meeting. I understand,' he added gravely to the doctor, 'that there is unfortunately no doubt.'

'There is no doubt,' said Dr Calderon.

John Race went back to his lodgings sad and with a singular sense of emptiness. It seemed impossible that he should miss a man whom he never knew. He learned that the funeral was to take place next day; for all felt that the crisis should be past as quickly as possible, for fear of riots that were hourly growing more probable. When Snaith had seen the row of Red Indians sitting on the veranda, they might have been a row of ancient Aztec images carved in red wood. But he had not seen them as they were when they heard that the priest was dead.

Indeed they would certainly have risen in revolution and lynched the republican leader, if they had not been immediately blocked by the direct necessity of behaving respectfully to the coffin of their own religious leader. The actual assassins, whom it would have been most natural to Lynch, seemed to have vanished into thin air. Nobody knew their names; and nobody would ever know whether the dying man had even seen their faces. That strange look of surprise that was apparently his last look on earth might have been the recognition of their faces. Alvarez repeated violently that it was no work of his, and attended the funeral, walking behind the coffin in his splendid silver and green uniform with a sort of bravado of reverence.

Behind the veranda a flight of stone steps scaled a very steep green bank, fenced by a cactus - hedge, and up this the coffin was laboriously lifted to the ground above, and placed temporarily at the foot of the great gaunt crucifix that dominated the road and guarded the consecrated ground. Below in the road were great seas of people lamenting and telling their beads - an orphan population that had lost a father. Despite all these symbols that were provocative enough to him, Alvarez behaved with restraint and respect; and all would have gone well - as Race told himself - had the others only let him alone.

Race told himself bitterly that old Mendoza had always looked like an old fool and had now very conspicuously and completely behaved like an old fool. By a custom common in simpler societies, the coffin was left open and the face uncovered, bringing the pathos to the point of agony for all those simple people. This, being consonant to tradition, need have done no harm; but some officious person had added to it the custom of the French freethinkers, of having speeches by the graveside. Mendoza proceeded to make a speech - a rather long speech, and the longer it was, the longer and lower sank John Race's spirits and sympathies with the religious ritual involved. A list of saintly attributes, apparently of the most antiquated sort, was rolled out with the dilatory dullness of an after - dinner speaker who does not know how to sit down. That was bad enough; but Mendoza had also the ineffable stupidity to start reproaching and even taunting his political opponents. In three minutes he had succeeded in making a scene, and a very extraordinary scene it was.

'We may well ask,' he said, looking around him pompously; 'we may well ask where such virtues can be found among those who have madly abandoned the creed of their fathers. It is when we have atheists among us, atheist leaders, nay sometimes even atheist rulers, that we find their infamous philosophy bearing fruit in crimes like this. If we ask who murdered this holy man, we shall assuredly find - '

Africa of the forests looked out of the eyes of Alvarez the hybrid adventurer; and Race fancied he could see suddenly that the man was after all a barbarian, who could not control himself to the end; one might guess that all his 'illuminated' transcendentalism had a touch of Voodoo. Anyhow, Mendoza could not continue, for Alvarez had sprung up and was shouting back at him and shouting him down, with infinitely superior lungs.

'Who murdered him?' he roared. 'Your God murdered him! His own God murdered him! According to you, he murders all his faithful and foolish servants - as he murdered that one,' and he made a violent gesture, not towards the coffin but the crucifix. Seeming to control himself a little, he went on in a tone still angry but more argumentative: 'I don't believe it, but you do. Isn't it better to have no God than one that robs you in this fashion? I, at least, am not afraid to say that there is none. There is no power in all this blind and brainless universe that can hear your prayer or return your friend. Though you beg Heaven to raise him, he will not rise. Though I dare Heaven to raise him, he will not rise. Here and now I will put it to the test - I defy the God who is not there to waken the man who sleeps for ever.'

There was a shock of silence, and the demagogue had made his sensation.

'We might have known,' cried Mendoza in a thick gobbling voice, 'when we allowed such men as you - '

A new voice cut into his speech; a high and shrill voice with a Yankee accent.

'Stop! Stop!' cried Snaith the journalist; 'something's up! I swear I saw him move.'

He went racing up the steps and rushed to the coffin, while the mob below swayed with indescribable frenzies.
The next moment he had turned a face of amazement over his shoulder and made a signal with his finger to Dr Calderon, who hastened forward to confer with him. When the two men stepped away again from the coffin, all could see that the position of the head had altered. A roar of excitement rose from the crowd and seemed to stop suddenly, as if cut off in mid-air; for the priest in the coffin gave a groan and raised himself on one elbow, looking with blearied and blinking eyes at the crowd.

John Adams Race, who had hitherto known only miracles of science, never found himself able in after-years to describe the topsy-turviedom of the next few days. He seemed to have burst out of the world of time and space, and to be living in the impossible. In half an hour the whole of that town and district had been transformed into something never known for a thousand years; a medieval people turned to a mob of monks by a staggering miracle; a Greek city where the god had descended among men. Thousands prostrated themselves in the road; hundreds took vows on the spot; and even the outsiders, like the two Americans, were able to think and speak of nothing but the prodigy. Alvarez himself was shaken, as well he might be; and sat down, with his head upon his hands.

And in the midst of all this tornado of beatitude was a little man struggling to be heard. His voice was small and faint, and the noise was deafening. He made weak little gestures that seemed more those of irritation than anything else. He came to the edge of the parapet above the crowd, waving it to be quiet, with movements rather like the flap of the short wings of a penguin. There was something a little more like a lull in the noise; and then Father Brown for the first time reached the utmost stretch of the indignation that he could launch against his children.

'Oh, you silly people,' he said in a high and quavering voice; 'Oh, you silly, silly people.'

Then he suddenly seemed to pull himself together, made a bolt for the steps with his more normal gait, and began hurriedly to descend.

'Where are you going, Father?' said Mendoza, with more than his usual veneration.

'To the telegraph office,' said Father Brown hastily. 'What? No; of course it's not a miracle. Why should there be a miracle? Miracles are not so cheap as all that.'

And he came tumbling down the steps, the people flinging themselves before him to implore his blessing.

'Bless you, bless you,' said Father Brown hastily. 'God bless you all and give you more sense.'

And he scuttled away with extraordinary rapidity to the telegraph office, where he wired to his Bishop's secretary: 'There is some mad story about a miracle here; hope his lordship not give authority. Nothing in it.'

As he turned away from his effort, he tottered a little with the reaction, and John Race caught him by the arm.

'Let me see you home,' he said; 'you deserve more than these people are giving you.'

John Race and the priest were seated in the presbytery; the table was still piled up with the papers with which the latter had been wrestling the day before; the bottle of wine and the emptied wine-glass still stood where he had left them.

'And now,' said Father Brown almost grimly, 'I can begin to think.'

'I shouldn't think too hard just yet,' said the American. 'You must be wanting a rest. Besides, what are you going to think about?'

'I have pretty often had the task of investigating murders, as it happens,' said Father Brown. 'Now I have got to investigate my own murder.'

'If I were you,' said Race, 'I should take a little wine first.'

Father Brown stood up and filled himself another glass, lifted it, looked thoughtfully into vacancy, and put it down again. Then he sat down once more and said:

'Do you know what I felt like when I died? You may not believe it, but my feeling was one of overwhelming astonishment.'

'Well,' answered Race, 'I suppose you were astonished at being knocked on the head.'

Father Brown leaned over to him and said in a low voice, 'I was astonished at not being knocked on the head.'

Race looked at him for a moment as if he thought the knock on the head had been only too effective; but he only said: 'What do you mean?'

'I mean that when that man brought his bludgeon down with a great swipe, it stopped at my head and did not even touch it. In the same way, the other fellow made as if to strike me with a knife, but he never gave me a scratch. It was just like play-acting. I think it was. But then followed the extraordinary thing.'

He looked thoughtfully at the papers on the table for a moment and then went on:

'Though I had not even been touched with knife or stick, I began to feel my legs doubling up under me and my very life failing. I knew I was being struck down by something, but it was not by those weapons. Do you know what I think it was? And he pointed to the wine on the table.

Race picked up the wine-glass and looked at it and smelt it.

'I think you are right,' he said. 'I began as a druggist and studied chemistry. I couldn't say for certain without an analysis; but I think there's something very unusual in this stuff. There are drugs by which the Asiatics produce a
temporary sleep that looks like death.'

'Quite so,' said the priest calmly. 'The whole of this miracle was faked, for some reason or other. That funeral scene was staged - and timed. I think it is part of that raving madness of publicity that has got hold of Snaith; but I can hardly believe he would go quite so far, merely for that. After all, it's one thing to make copy out of me and run me as a sort of sham Sherlock Holmes, and -'

Even as the priest spoke his face altered. His blinking eyelids shut suddenly and he stood up as if he were choking. Then he put one wavering hand as if groping his way towards the door.

'Where are you going?' asked the other in some wonder.

'If you ask me,' said Father Brown, who was quite white, 'I was going to pray. Or rather, to praise.'

'I'm not sure I understand. What is the matter with you?'

'I was going to praise God for having so strangely and so incredibly saved me - saved me by an inch.'

'Of course,' said Race, 'I am not of your religion; but believe me, I have religion enough to understand that. Of course, you would thank God for saving you from death.'

'No,' said the priest. 'Not from death. From disgrace.'

The other sat staring; and the priest's next words broke out of him with a sort of cry. 'And if it had only been my disgrace! But it was the disgrace of all I stand for; the disgrace of the Faith that they went about to encompass. What it might have been! The most huge and horrible scandal ever launched against us since the last lie was choked in the throat of Titus Oates.'

'What on earth are you talking about?' demanded his companion.

'Well, I had better tell you at once,' said the priest; and sitting down, he went on more composedly: 'It came to me in a flash when I happened to mention Snaith and Sherlock Holmes. Now I happen to remember what I wrote about his absurd scheme; it was the natural thing to write, and yet I think they had ingeniously manoeuvred me into writing just those words. They were something like 'I am ready to die and come to life again like Sherlock Holmes, if that is the best way.' And the moment I thought of that, I realized that I had been made to write all sorts of things of that kind, all pointing to the same idea. I wrote, as if to an accomplice, saying that I would drink the drugged wine at a particular time. Now, don't you see?'

Race sprang to his feet still staring: 'Yes,' he said, 'I think I began to see.'

'They would have boomed the miracle. Then they would have bust up the miracle. And what is the worst, they would have proved that I was in the conspiracy. It would have been our sham miracle. That's all there is to it; and about as near hell as you and I will ever be, I hope.'

Then he said, after a pause, in quite a mild voice: 'They certainly would have got quite a lot of good copy out of me.'

Race looked at the table and said darkly: 'How many of these brutes were in it?'

Father Brown shook his head. 'More than I like to think of,' he said; 'but I hope some of them were only tools. Alvarez might think that all's fair in war, perhaps; he has a queer mind. I'm very much afraid that Mendoza is an old hypocrite; I never trusted him, and he hated my action in an industrial matter. But all that will wait; I have only got to thank God for the escape. And especially that I wired at once to the Bishop.'

John Race appeared to be very thoughtful. 'You've told me a lot I didn't know,' he said at last, 'and I feel inclined to tell you the only thing you don't know. I can imagine how those fellows calculated well enough. They thought any man alive, waking up in a coffin to find himself canonized like a saint, and made into a walking miracle for everyone to admire, would be swept along with his worshippers and accept the crown of glory that fell on him out the sky. And I reckon their calculation was pretty practical psychology, as men go. I've seen all sorts of men in all sorts of places; and I tell you frankly I don't believe there's one man in a thousand who could wake up like that with all his wits about him; and while he was still almost talking in his sleep, would have the sanity and the simplicity and the humility to - ' He was much surprised to find himself moved, and his level voice wavering.

Father Brown was gazing abstractedly, and in a rather cockeyed fashion, at the bottle on the table. 'Look here,' he said, 'what about a bottle of real wine?'

TWO: The Arrow of Heaven

IT is to be feared that about a hundred detective stories have begun with the discovery that an American millionaire has been murdered; an event which is, for some reason, treated as a sort of calamity. This story, I am happy to say, has to begin with a murdered millionaire; in one sense, indeed, it has to begin with three murdered millionaires, which some may regard as an embarras de richesse. But it was chiefly this coincidence or continuity of criminal policy that took the whole affair out of the ordinary run of criminal cases and made it the extraordinary problem that it was.

It was very generally said that they had all fallen victims to some vendetta or curse attaching to the possession of a relic of great value both intrinsically and historically: a sort of chalice inlaid with precious stones and commonly
called the Coptic Cup. Its origin was obscure, but its use was conjectured to be religious; and some attributed the fate that followed its possessors to the fanaticism of some Oriental Christian horrified at its passing through such materialistic hands. But the mysterious slayer, whether or no he was such a fanatic, was already a figure of lurid and sensational interest in the world of journalism and gossip. The nameless being was provided with a name, or a nickname. But it is only with the story of the third victim that we are now concerned; for it was only in this case that a certain Father Brown, who is the subject of these sketches, had an opportunity of making his presence felt.

When Father Brown first stepped off an Atlantic liner on to American soil, he discovered as many other Englishman has done, that he was a much more important person than he had ever supposed. His short figure, his short-sighted and undistinguished countenance, his rather rusty - black clerical clothes, could pass through any crowd in his own country without being noticed as anything unusual, except perhaps unusually insignificant. But America has a genius for the encouragement of fame; and his appearance in one or two curious criminal problems, together with his long association with Flambeau, the ex - criminal and detective, had consolidated a reputation in America out of what was little more than a rumour in England. His round face was blank with surprise when he found himself held up on the quay by a group of journalists, as by a gang of brigands, who asked him questions about all the subjects on which he was least likely to regard himself as an authority, such as the details of female dress and the criminal statistics of the country that he had only that moment clapped his eyes on. Perhaps it was the contrast with the black embattled solidity of this group that made more vivid another figure that stood apart from it, equally black against the burning white daylight of that brilliant place and season, but entirely solitary; a tall, rather yellow - faced man in great goggles, who arrested him with a gesture when the journalists had finished and said: 'Excuse me, but maybe you are looking for Captain Wain.'

Some apology may be made for Father Brown; for he himself would have been sincerely apologetic. It must be remembered that he had never seen America before, and more especially that he had never seen that sort of tortoise - shell spectacles before; for the fashion at this time had not spread to England. His first sensation was that of gazing at some goggle sea - monster with a faint suggestion of a diver's helmet. Otherwise the man was exquisitely dressed; and to Brown, in his innocence, the spectacles seemed the queerest disfigurement for a dandy. It was as if a dandy had adorned himself with a wooden leg as an extra touch of elegance. The question also embarrassed him. An American aviator of the name of Wain, a friend of some friends of his own in France, was indeed one of a long list of people he had some hope of seeing during his American visit; but he had never expected to hear of him so soon.

'Well, I'm pretty confident I'm not Captain Wain,' said the man in goggles, with a face of wood. 'I was pretty clear about that when I saw him waiting for you over there in the car. But the other question's a bit more problematical. I reckon I know Wain and his uncle, and old man Merton, too. I know old man Merton, but old man Merton don't know me. And he thinks he has the advantage, and I think I have the advantage. See?'

Father Brown did not quite see. He blinked at the glittering seascape and the pinnacles of the city, and then at the man in goggles. It was not only the masking of the man's eyes that produced the impression of something impenetrable. Something in his yellow face was almost Asiatic, even Chinese; and his conversation seemed to consist of stratified layers of irony. He was a type to be found here and there in that hearty and sociable population; he was the inscrutable American.

'My name's Drage,' he said, 'Norman Drage, and I'm an American citizen, which explains everything. At least I imagine your friend Wain would like to explain the rest; so we'll postpone The Fourth of July till another date.'

Father Brown was dragged in a somewhat dazed condition towards a car at some little distance, in which a young man with tufts of untidy yellow hair and a rather harassed and haggard expression, hailed him from afar, and presented himself as Peter Wain. Before he knew where he was he was stowed in the car and travelling with considerable speed through and beyond the city. He was unused to the impetuous practicality of such American action, and felt about as bewildered as if a chariot drawn by dragons had carried him away into fairyland. It was under these disconcerting conditions that he heard for the first time, in long monologues from Wain, and short sentences from Drage, the story of the Coptic Cup and the two crimes already connected with it.

It seemed that Wain had an uncle named Crake who had a partner named Merton, who was number three in the series of rich business men to whom the cup had belonged. The first of them, Titus P. Trant, the Copper King, had received threatening letters from somebody signing himself Daniel Doom. The name was presumably a pseudonym, but it had come to stand for a very public if not a very popular character; for somebody as well known as Robin Hood and Jack the Ripper combined. For it soon became clear that the writer of the threatening letter did not confine himself to threatening. Anyhow, the upshot was that old Trant was found one morning with his head in his own lily - pond, and there was not the shadow of a clue. The cup was, fortunately, safe in the bank; and it passed with the rest of Trant's property to his cousin, Brian Horder, who was also a man of great wealth and who was also threatened by the nameless enemy. Brian Horder was picked up dead at the foot of a cliff outside his seaside residence, at which
there was a burglary, this time on a large scale. For though the cup apparently again escaped, enough bonds and securities were stolen to leave Horder's financial affairs in confusion.

'Brian Horder's widow,' explained Wain, 'had to sell most of his valuables, I believe, and Brander Merton must have purchased the cup at that time, for he had it when I first knew him. But you can guess for yourself that it's not a very comfortable thing to have.'

'Has Mr Merton ever had any of the threatening letters?' asked Father Brown, after a pause.

'I imagine he has,' said Mr Drage; and something in his voice made the priest look at him curiously, until he realized that the man in goggles was laughing silently, in a fashion that gave the newcomer something of a chill.

'I'm pretty sure he has,' said Peter Wain, frowning. 'I've not seen the letters, only his secretary sees any of his letters, for he is pretty reticent about business matters, as big business men have to be. But I've seen him real upset and annoyed with letters; and letters that he tore up, too, before even his secretary saw them. The secretary himself is getting nervous and says he is sure somebody is laying for the old man; and the long and the short of it is, that we'd be very grateful for a little advice in the matter. Everybody knows your great reputation. Father Brown, and the secretary asked me to see if you'd mind coming straight out to the Merton house at once.'

'Oh, I see,' said Father Brown, on whom the meaning of this apparent kidnapping began to dawn at last. 'But, really, I don't see that I can do any more than you can. You're on the spot, and must have a hundred times more data for a scientific conclusion than a chance visitor.'

'Yes,' said Mr Drage dryly; 'our conclusions are much too scientific to be true. I reckon if anything hit a man like Titus P. Trant, it just came out of the sky without waiting for any scientific explanation. What they call a bolt from the blue.'

'You can't possibly mean,' cried Wain, 'that it was supernatural!'

But it was by no means easy at any time to discover what Mr Drage could possibly mean; except that if he said somebody was a real smart man, he very probably meant he was a fool. Mr Drage maintained an Oriental immobility until the car stopped, a little while after, at what was obviously their destination. It was rather a singular place. They had been driving through a thinly - wooded country that opened into a wide plain, and just in front of them was a building consisting of a single wall or very high fence, round, like a Roman camp, and having rather the appearance of an aerodrome. The barrier did not look like wood or stone, and closer inspection proved it to be of metal.

They all alighted from the car, and one small door in the wall was slid open with considerable caution, after manipulations resembling the opening of a safe. But, much to Father Brown's surprise, the man called Norman Drage showed no disposition to enter, but took leave of them with sinister gaiety.

'I won't come in,' he said. 'It 'ud be too much pleasurable excitement for old man Merton, I reckon. He loves the sight of me so much that he'd die of joy.'

And he strode away, while Father Brown, with increasing wonder, was admitted through the steel door which instantly clicked behind him. Inside was a large and elaborate garden of gay and varied colours, but entirely without any trees or tall shrubs or flowers. In the centre of it rose a house of handsome and even striking architecture, but so high and narrow as rather to resemble a tower. The burning sunlight gleamed on glass roofing here and there at the top, but there seemed to be no windows at all in the lower part of it. Over everything was that spotless and sparkling cleanliness that seemed so native to the clear American air. When they came inside the portal, they stood amid resplendent marble and metals and enamels of brilliant colours, but there was no staircase. Nothing but a single shaft for a lift went up the centre between the solid walls, and the approach to it was guarded by heavy, powerful men like plain - clothes policemen.

'Pretty elaborate protection, I know,' said Wain. 'Maybe it makes you smile a little, Father Brown, to find Merton has to live in a fortress like this without even a tree in the garden for anyone to hide behind. But you don't know what sort of proposition we're up against in this country. And perhaps you don't know just what the name of Brander Merton means. He's a quiet - looking man enough, and anybody might pass him in the street; not that they get much notice of him. But there seemed to be no windows at all in the lower part of it. Over everything was that spotless and sparkling cleanliness that seemed so native to the clear American air. When they came inside the portal, they stood amid resplendent marble and metals and enamels of brilliant colours, but there was no staircase. Nothing but a single shaft for a lift went up the centre between the solid walls, and the approach to it was guarded by heavy, powerful men like plain - clothes policemen.

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and got away with it.'

The top floor of the mansion, inside the enormously thick walls, consisted of two rooms; an outer room which they entered, and an inner room that was the great millionaire's sanctum. They entered the outer room just as two other visitors were coming out of the inner one. One was hailed by Peter Wain as his uncle - a small but very stalwart and active man with a shaven head that looked bald, and a brown face that looked almost too brown to have ever been white. This was old Crake, commonly called Hickory Crake in reminiscence of the more famous Old Hickory, because of his fame in the last Red Indian wars. His companion was a singular contrast - a very dapper gentleman with dark hair like a black varnish and a broad, black ribbon to his monocle: Barnard Blake, who was old Merton's lawyer and had been discussing with the partners the business of the firm. The four men met in the middle of the outer room and paused for a little polite conversation, in the act of respectively going and coming. And through all goings and comings another figure sat at the back of the room near the inner door, massive and motionless in the half-light from the inner window; a man with a Negro face and enormous shoulders. This was what the humorous self-criticism of America playfully calls the Bad Man; whom his friends might call a bodyguard and his enemies a bravo.

This man never moved or stirred to greet anybody; but the sight of him in the outer room seemed to move Peter Wain to his first nervous query.

'Is anybody with the chief?' he asked.

'Don't get rattled, Peter,' chuckled his uncle. 'Wilton the secretary is with him, and I hope that's enough for anybody. I don't believe Wilton ever sleeps for watching Merton. He is better than twenty bodyguards. And he's quick and quiet as an Indian.'

'Well, you ought to know,' said his nephew, laughing. 'I remember the Red Indian tricks you used to teach me when I was a boy and liked to read Red Indian stories. But in my Red Indian stories Red Indians seemed always to have the worst of it.'

'They didn't in real life,' said the old frontiersman grimly.

'Indeed?' inquired the bland Mr Blake. 'I should have thought they could do very little against our firearms.'

'I've seen an Indian stand under a hundred guns with nothing but a little scalping-knife and kill a white man standing on the top of a fort,' said Crake.

'Why, what did he do with it?' asked the other.

'Threw it,' replied Crake, 'threw it in a flash before a shot could be fired. I don't know where he learnt the trick.'

'Well, I hope you didn't learn it,' said his nephew, laughing.

'It seems to me,' said Father Brown, thoughtfully, 'that the story might have a moral.'

While they were speaking Mr Wilton, the secretary, had come out of the inner room and stood waiting; a pale, fair-haired man with a square chin and steady eyes with a look like a dog's; it was not difficult to believe that he had the single-eye of a watchdog.

He only said, 'Mr Merton can see you in about ten minutes,' but it served for a signal to break up the gossiping group. Old Crake said he must be off, and his nephew went out with him and his legal companion, leaving Father Brown for the moment alone with his secretary; for the negroid giant at the other end of the room could hardly be felt as if he were human or alive; he sat so motionless with his broad back to them, staring towards the inner room.

'Arrangements rather elaborate here, I'm afraid,' said the secretary. 'You've probably heard all about this Daniel Doom, and why it isn't safe to leave the boss very much alone.'

'But he is alone just now, isn't he?' said Father Brown.

The secretary looked at him with grave, grey eyes. 'For fifteen minutes,' he said. 'For fifteen minutes out of the twenty-four hours. That is all the real solitude he has; and that he insists on, for a pretty remarkable reason.'

'And what is the reason?' inquired the visitor. Wilton, the secretary, continued his steady gaze, but his mouth, that had been merely grave, became grim.

'The Coptic Cup,' he said. 'Perhaps you've forgotten the Coptic Cup; but he hasn't forgotten that or anything else. He doesn't trust any of us about the Coptic Cup. It's locked up somewhere and somehow in that room so that only he can find it; and he won't take it out till we're all out of the way. So we have to risk that quarter of an hour while he sits and worships it; I reckon it's the only worshipping he does. Not that there's any risk really; for I've turned all this place into a trap I don't believe the devil himself could get into - or at any rate, get out of. If this infernal Daniel Doom pays us a visit, he'll stay to dinner and a good bit later, by God! I sit here on hot bricks for the fifteen minutes, and the instant I heard a shot or a sound of struggle I'd press this button and an electrocuting current would run in a ring round that garden wall, so that it 'ud be death to cross or climb it. Of course, there couldn't be a shot, for this is the only way in; and the only window he sits at is away up on the top of a tower as smooth as a greasy pole. But, anyhow, we're all armed here, of course; and if Doom did get into that room he'd be dead before he got out.'

Father Brown was blinking at the carpet in a brown study. Then he said suddenly, with something like a jerk: 'I
hope you won't mind my mentioning it, but a kind of a notion came into my head just this minute. It's about you.'

'Indeed,' remarked Wilton, 'and what about me?'

'I think you are a man of one idea,' said Father Brown, 'and you will forgive me for saying that it seems to be even more the idea of catching Daniel Doom than of defending Brander Merton.'

Wilton started a little and continued to stare at his companion; then very slowly his grim mouth took on a rather curious smile. 'How did you - what makes you think that?' he asked.

'You said that if you heard a shot you could instantly electrocute the escaping enemy,' remarked the priest. 'I suppose it occurred to you that the shot might be fatal to your employer before the shock was fatal to his foe. I don't mean that you wouldn't protect Mr Merton if you could, but it seems to come rather second in your thoughts. The arrangements are very elaborate, as you say, and you seem to have elaborated them. But they seem even more designed to catch a murderer than to save a man.'

'Father Brown,' said the secretary, who had recovered his quiet tone, 'you're very smart, but there's something more to you than smartness. Somehow you're the sort of man to whom one wants to tell the truth; and besides, you'll probably hear it, anyhow, for in one way it's a joke against me already. They all say I'm a monomaniac about running down this big crook, and perhaps I am. But I'll tell you one thing that none of them know. My full name is John Wilton Border.' Father Brown nodded as if he were completely enlightened, but the other went on.

'This fellow who calls himself Doom killed my father and uncle and ruined my mother. When Merton wanted a secretary I took the job, because I thought that where the cup was the criminal might sooner or later be. But I didn't know who the criminal was and could only wait for him; and I meant to serve Merton faithfully.'

'I understand,' said Father Brown gently; 'and, by the way, isn't it time that we attended on him?'

'Why, yes,' answered Wilton, again starting a little out of his brooding so that the priest concluded that his vindictive mania had again absorbed him for a moment.' Go in now by all means.'

Father Brown walked straight into the inner room. No sound of greetings followed, but only a dead silence; and a moment after the priest reappeared in the doorway.

At the same moment the silent bodyguard sitting near the door moved suddenly; and it was as if a huge piece of furniture had come to life. It seemed as though something in the very attitude of the priest had been a signal; for his head was against the light from the inner window and his face was in shadow.

'I suppose you will press that button,' he said with a sort of sigh.

Wilton seemed to awake from his savage brooding with a bound and leapt up with a catch in his voice.

'There was no shot,' he cried.

'Well,' answered Father Brown, 'it depends what you mean by a shot.'

Wilton rushed forward, and they plunged into the inner room together. It was a comparatively small room and simply though elegantly furnished. Opposite to them one wide window stood open, over - looking the garden and the wooded plain. Close up against the window stood a chair and a small table, as if the captive desired as much air and light as was allowed him during his brief luxury of loneliness.

On the little table under the window stood the Coptic Cup; its owner had evidently been looking at it in the best light. It was well worth looking at, for that white and brilliant daylight turned its precious stones to many - coloured flames so that it might have been a model of the Holy Grail. It was well worth looking at; but Brander Merton was not looking at it. For his head had fallen back over his chair, his mane of white hair hanging towards the floor, and his spike of grizzled beard thrust up towards the ceiling, and out of his throat stood a long, brown - painted arrow with red leathers at the other end.

'A silent shot,' said Father Brown, in a low voice; 'I was just wondering about those new inventions for silencing firearms. But this is a very old invention, and quite as silent.'

Then, after a moment, he added: 'I'm afraid he is dead. What are you going to do?'

The pale secretary roused himself with abrupt resolution. 'I'm going to press that button, of course,' he said, 'and if that doesn't do for Daniel Doom, I'm going to hunt him through the world till I find him.'

'Take care it doesn't do for any of our friends,' observed Father Brown; 'they can hardly be far off; we'd better call them.'

'That lot know all about the wall,' answered Wilton. 'None of them will try to climb it, unless one of them ... is in a great hurry.'

Father Brown went to the window by which the arrow had evidently entered and looked out. The garden, with its flat flower - beds, lay far below like a delicately coloured map of the world. The whole vista seemed so vast and empty, the tower seemed set so far up in the sky that as he stared out a strange phrase came back to his memory.

'A bolt from the blue,' he said. 'What was that somebody said about a bolt from the blue and death coming out of the sky? Look how far away everything looks; it seems extraordinary that an arrow could come so far, unless it were an arrow from heaven.'
Wilton had returned, but did not reply, and the priest went on as in soliloquy. 'One thinks of aviation. We must ask young Wain ... about aviation.'

'There's a lot of it round here,' said the secretary.

'Case of very old or very new weapons,' observed Father Brown. 'Some would be quite familiar to his old uncle, I suppose; we must ask him about arrows. This looks rather like a Red Indian arrow. I don't know where the Red Indian shot it from; but you remember the story the old man told. I said it had a moral.'

'If it had a moral,' said Wilton warmly, 'it was only that a real 'Red Indian might shoot a thing farther than you'd fancy. It's nonsense your suggesting a parallel.'

'I don't think you've got the moral quite right,' said Father Brown.

Although the little priest appeared to melt into the millions of New York next day, without any apparent attempt to be anything but a number in a numbered street, he was, in fact, unobtrusively busy for the next fortnight with the commission that had been given him, for he was filled with profound fear about a possible miscarriage of justice. Without having any particular air of singling them out from his other new acquaintances, he found it easy to fall into talk with the two or three men recently involved in the mystery; and with old Hickory Crake especially he had a curious and interesting conversation. It took place on a seat in Central Park, where the veteran sat with his bony hands and hatchet face resting on the oddly-shaped head of a walking-stick of dark red wood, possibly modelled on a tomahawk.

'Well, it may be a long shot,' he said, wagging his head, 'but I wouldn't advise you to be too positive about how far an Indian arrow could go. I've known some bow-shots that seemed to go straighter than any bullets, and hit the mark to amazement, considering how long they had been travelling. Of course, you practically never hear now of a Red Indian with a bow and arrows, still less of a Red Indian hanging about here. But if by any chance there were one of the old Indian marksmen, with one of the old Indian bows, hiding in those trees hundreds of yards beyond the Merton outer wall—why, then I wouldn't put it past the noble savage to be able to send an arrow over the wall and into the top window of Merton's house; no, nor into Merton, either. I've seen things quite as wonderful as that done in the old days.'

'No doubt,' said the priest, 'you have done things quite as wonderful, as well as seen them.'

Old Crake chuckled, and then said gruffly: 'Oh, that's all ancient history.'

'Some people have a way of studying ancient history,' the priest said. 'I suppose we may take it there is nothing in your old record In make people talk unpleasantly about this affair.'

'What do you mean?' demanded Crake, his eyes shifting sharply for the first time, in his red, wooden face, that was rather like I he head of a tomahawk.

'Well, since you were so well acquainted with all the arts and crafts of the Redskin—' began Father Brown slowly.

Crake had had a hunched and almost shrunken appearance as he sat with his chin propped on its queer-shaped crutch. But the next instant he stood erect in the path like a fighting bravo with the crutch clutched like a cudgel.

'What?' he cried - in something like a raucous screech - 'what the hell! Are you standing up to me to tell me I might happen to have murdered my own brother - in - law?'

From a dozen seats dotted about the path looked to - wards the disputants, as they stood facing each other in the middle of the path, the bald-headed energetic little man brandishing his outlandish stick like a club, and the black, dumpy figure of the little cleric looking at him without moving a muscle, save for his hinging eyelids. For a moment it looked as if the black, dumpy figure would be knocked on the head, and laid out with true Red Indian promptitude and dispatch; and the large form of an Irish policeman could be seen heaving up in the distance and bearing down on the group. But the priest only said, quite placidly, like one answering an ordinary query:

'I have formed certain conclusions about it, but I do not think I will mention them till I make my report.'

Whether under the influence of the footsteps of the policeman or of the eyes of the priest, old Hickory tucked his stick under his arm and put his hat on again, grunting. The priest bade him a placid good morning, and passed in an unhurried fashion out of the park, making his way to the lounge of the hotel where he knew that young Wain was to be found. The young man sprang up with a greeting; he looked even more haggard and harassed than before, as if some worry were eating him away; and the priest had a suspicion that his young friend had recently been engaged, with only too conspicuous success, in evading the last Amendment to the American Constitution. But at the first word about his hobby or favourite science he was vigilant and concentrated enough. For Father Brown had asked, in an idle and conversational fashion, whether much flying was done in that district, and had told how he had at first mistaken Mr Merton's circular wall for an aerodrome.

'It's a wonder you didn't see any while we were there,' answered Captain Wain. 'Sometimes they're as thick as flies; that open plain is a great place for them, and I shouldn't wonder if it were the chief breeding - ground, so to speak, for my sort of birds in the future. I've flown a good deal there myself, of course, and I know most of the
fellows about here who flew in the war; but there are a whole lot of people taking to it out there now whom I never heard of in my life. I suppose it will be like motoring soon, and every man in the States will have one.'

'Being endowed by his Creator,' said Father Brown with a smile, 'with the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of motoring - not to mention aviation. So I suppose we may take it that one strange aeroplane passing over that house, at certain times, wouldn't be noticed much.'

'No,' replied the young man; 'I don't suppose it would.'

'Or even if the man were known,' went on the other, 'I suppose he might get hold of a machine that wouldn't be recognized as his. If you, for instance, flew in the ordinary way, Mr Merton and his friends might recognize the rig - out, perhaps; but you might pass pretty near that window on a different pattern of plane, or whatever you call it; near enough for practical purposes.'

'Well, yes;' began the young man, almost automatically, and then ceased, and remained staring at the cleric with an open mouth and eyes standing out of his head.

'My God!' he said, in a low voice; 'my God!' Then he rose from the lounge seat, pale and shaking from head to foot and still staring at the priest.

'Are you mad?' he said; 'are you raving mad?'

'There was a silence and then he spoke again in a swift hissing fashion. 'You positively come here to suggest -'

'No; only to collect suggestions,' said Father Brown, rising. 'I may have formed some conclusions provisionally, but I had better reserve them for the present.'

And then saluting the other with the same stiff civility, he passed out of the hotel to continue his curious peregrinations.

By the dusk of that day they had led him down the dingy streets and steps that straggled and tumbled towards the river in the oldest and most irregular part of the city. Immediately under the coloured lantern that marked the entrance to a rather low Chinese restaurant he encountered a figure he had seen before, though by no means presenting itself to the eye as he had seen it.

Mr Norman Drage still confronted the world grimly behind his great goggles, which seemed somehow to cover his face like a dark musk of glass. But except for the goggles, his appearance had undergone a strange transformation in the month that had elapsed since the murder. He had then, as Father Brown had noted, been dressed up to the nines - up to that point, indeed, where there begins to be too fine a distinction between the dandy and the dummy outside a tailor's shop. But now all those externals were mysteriously altered for the worse; as if the tailor's dummy had been turned into a scarecrow. His top hat still existed, but it was battered and shabby; his clothes were dilapidated; his watch - chain and minor ornaments were gone. Father Brown, however, addressed him as if they had met yesterday, and made no demur to silting down with him on a bench in the cheap eating - house whither he was bound. It was not he, however, who began the conversation.

'Well?' growled Drage, 'and have you succeeded in avenging your holy and sainted millionaire? We know all millionaires are holy and sainted; you can find it all in the papers next day, about how they lived by the light of the Family Bible they read at their mother's knee. Gee! if they'd only read out some of the things there are in the Family Bible, the mother might have been startled some. And the millionaire, too, I reckon. The old Book's full of a lot of grand fierce old notions they don't grow nowadays; sort of wisdom of the Stone Age and buried under the Pyramids. Suppose somebody had flung old man Merton from the top of that tower of his, and let him be eaten by dogs at the bottom, it would be no worse than what happened to Jezebel. Wasn't Agag hacked into little pieces, for all he went walking delicately? Merton walked delicately all his life, damn him - until he got too delicate to walk at all. But the shaft of the Lord found him out, as it might have done in the old Book, and struck him dead on the top of his tower to be a spectacle to the people.

'The shaft was material, at least,' said his companion.

'The Pyramids are mighty material, and they hold down the dead kings all right,' grinned the man in the goggles. 'I think there's a lot to be said for these old material religions. There's old carvings that have lasted for thousands of years, showing their gods and emperors with bended bows; with hands that look as if they could really bend bows of stone. Material, perhaps - but what materials! Don't you sometimes stand staring at those old Eastern patterns and things, till you have a hunch that old Lord God is still driving like a dark Apollo, and shooting black rays of death?'

'If he is,' replied Father Brown, 'I might call him by another name. But I doubt whether Merton died by a dark ray or even a stone arrow.'

'I guess you think he's St Sebastian,' sneered Drage, 'killed with an arrow. A millionaire must be a martyr. How do you know he didn't deserve it? You don't know much about your millionaire, I fancy. Well, let me tell you he deserved it a hundred times over.'

'Well,' asked Father Brown gently, 'why didn't you murder him?'

'You want to know why I didn't?' said the other, staring. 'Well, you're a nice sort of clergyman.'
'Not at all,' said the other, as if waving away a compliment.
'I suppose it's your way of saying I did,' snarled Drage. 'Well, prove it, that's all. As for him, I reckon he was no loss.'
'Yes, he was,' said Father Brown, sharply. 'He was a loss to you. That's why you didn't kill him.'
And he walked out of the room, leaving the man in goggles gaping after him.
It was nearly a month later that Father Brown revisited the house where the third millionaire had suffered from the vendetta of Daniel Doom. A sort of council was held of the persons most interested. Old Crake sat at the head of the table with his nephew at his right hand, the lawyer on his left; the big man with the African features, whose name appeared to be Harris, was ponderously present, if only as a material witness; a red-haired, sharp-nosed individual addressed as Dixon seemed to be the representative of Pinkerton's or some such private agency; and Father Brown slipped unobtrusively into an empty seat beside him.
Every newspaper in the world was full of the catastrophe of the colossus of finance, of the great organizer of the Big Business that bestrides the modern world; but from the tiny group that had been nearest to him at the very instant of his death very little could be learned. The uncle, nephew, and attendant solicitor declared they were well outside the outer wall before the alarm was raised; and inquiries of the official guardians at both barriers brought answers that were rather confused, but on the whole confirmatory. Only one other complication seemed to call for consideration. It seemed that round about the time of the death, before or after, a stranger had been found hanging mysteriously round the entrance and asking to see Mr Merton. The servants had some difficulty in understanding what he meant, for his language was very obscure; but it was afterwards considered to be also very suspicious, since he had said something about a wicked man being destroyed by a word out of the sky.
Peter Wain leaned forward, the eyes bright in his haggard face, and said:
'I'll bet on that, anyhow. Norman Drage.'
'And who in the world is Norman Drage?' asked his uncle.
'That's what I want to know,' replied the young man. 'I practically asked him, but he has got a wonderful trick of twisting every straight question crooked; it's like lunging at a fencer. He hooked on to me with hints about the flying-ship of the future; but I never trusted him much.'
'But what sort of a man is he?' asked Crake.
'He's a mystagogue,' said Father Brown, with innocent promptitude. 'There are quite a lot of them about; the sort of men about town who hint to you in Paris cafes and cabarets that they've lifted the veil of Isis or know the secret of Stonehenge. In a case like this they're sure to have some sort of mystical explanations.'
The smooth, dark head of Mr Barnard Blake, the lawyer, was inclined politely towards the speaker, but his smile was faintly hostile.
'I should hardly have thought, sir,' he said, 'that you had any quarrel with mystical explanations.'
'On the contrary,' replied Father Brown, blinking amiably at him. 'That's just why I can quarrel with 'em. Any sham lawyer could bamboozle me, but he couldn't bamboozle you; because you're a lawyer yourself. Any fool could dress up as a Red Indian and I'd swallow him whole as the only original Hiawatha; but Mr Crake would see through him at once. A swindler could pretend to me that he knew all about aeroplanes, but not to Captain Wain. And it's just the same with the other, don't you see? It's just because I have picked up a little about mystics that I have no use for mystagogues. Real mystics don't hide mysteries, they reveal them. They set a thing up in broad daylight, and when you've seen it it's still a mystery. But the mystagogues hide a thing in darkness and secrecy, and when you find it, it's a platitude. But in the case of Drage, I admit he had also another and more practical notion in talking about fire from heaven or bolts from the blue.'
'And what was his notion?' asked Wain. 'I think it wants watching whatever it is.'
'Well,' replied the priest, slowly, 'he wanted us to think the murders were miracles because . . . well, because he knew they weren't.'
'Ah,' said Wain, with a sort of hiss, 'I was waiting for that. In plain words, he is the criminal.'
'In plain words, he is the criminal who didn't commit the crime,' answered Father Brown calmly.
'Is that your conception of plain words?' inquired Blake politely.
'You'll be saying I'm the mystagogue now,' said Father Brown somewhat abashed, but with a broad smile, 'but it was really quite accidental. Drage didn't commit the crime - I mean this crime. His only crime was blackmailing somebody, and he hung about here to do it; but he wasn't likely to want the secret to be public property or the whole business to be cut short by death. We can talk about him afterwards. Just at the moment, I only want him cleared out of the way.'
'Out of the way of what?' asked the other.
'Out of the way of the truth,' replied the priest, looking at him tranquilly, with level eyelids.
'Do you mean,' faltered the other, 'that you know the truth?'
'I rather think so,' said Father Brown modestly.

There was an abrupt silence, after which Crake cried out suddenly and irrelevantly in a rasping voice:

'Why, where is that secretary fellow? Wilton! He ought to be here.'

'I am in communication with Mr Wilton,' said Father Brown gravely; 'in fact, I asked him to ring me up here in a few minutes from now. I may say that we've worked the thing out together, in a manner of speaking.'

'If you're working together, I suppose it's all right,' grumbled Crake. 'I know he was always a sort of bloodhound on the trail of his vanished crook, so perhaps it was well to hunt in couples with him. But if you know the truth about this, where the devil did you get it from?'

'I got it from you,' answered the priest, quietly, and continued to gaze mildly at the glaring veteran. 'I mean I made the first guess from a hint in a story of yours about an Indian who threw a knife and hit a man on the top of a fortress.'

'You've said that several times,' said Wain, with a puzzled air; 'but I can't see any inference, except that this murderer threw an arrow and hit a man on the top of a house very like a fortress. But of course the arrow wasn't thrown but shot, and would go much further. Certainly it went uncommonly far; but I don't see how it brings us any farther.'

'I'm afraid you missed the point of the story,' said Father Brown. 'It isn't that if one thing cap go far another can go farther. It is that the wrong use of a tool can cut both ways. The men on Crake's fort thought of a knife as a thing for a hand - to - hand fight and forgot that it could be a missile like a javelin. Some other people I know thought of a thing as a missile like a javelin and forgot that, after all, it could be used hand - to - hand as a spear. In short, the moral of the story is that since a dagger can be turned into an arrow, so can an arrow be turned into a dagger.'

They were all looking at him now; but he continued in the same casual and unconscious tone: 'Naturally we wondered and worried a good deal about who shot that arrow through the window and whether it came from far away, and so on. But the truth is that nobody shot the arrow at all. It never came in at the window at all.'

'Somebody,' said old Crake, in a voice as heavy as stone.

The telephone bell rang with a strident and horrible clamour of insistence. It was in the adjoining room, and Father Brown had darted there before anybody else could move.

'What the devil is it all about?' cried Peter Wain, who seemed all shaken and distracted.

'He said he expected to be rung up by Wilton, the secretary,' replied his uncle in the same dead voice.

'Very well,' observed the lawyer, like one speaking to fill up a silence. But nobody answered the question until Father Brown reappeared suddenly and silently in the room, bringing the answer.

'Gentlemen,' he said, when he had resumed his seat, 'it was you who asked me to look into the truth about this puzzle; and having found the truth, I must tell it, without any pretence of softening the shock. I'm afraid anybody who pokes his nose into things like this can't afford to be a respecter of persons.'

'I suppose,' said Crake, breaking the silence that followed, 'that means that some of us are accused, or suspected.'

'All of us are suspected,' answered Father Brown. 'I may be suspected myself, for I found the body.'

'Of course we're suspected,' snapped Wain. 'Father Brown kindly explained to me how I could have besieged the tower in a flying - machine.'

'No,' replied the priest, with a smile; 'you described to me how you could have done it. That was just the interesting part of it.'

'He seemed to think it likely,' growled Crake, 'that I killed him myself with a Red Indian arrow.'

'I thought it most unlikely,' said Father Brown, making rather a wry face. 'I'm sorry if I did wrong, but I couldn't think of any other way of testing the matter. I can hardly think of anything more improbable than the notion that Captain Wain went careering in a huge machine past the window, at the very moment of the murder, and nobody noticed it; unless, perhaps, it were the notion that a respectable old gentleman should play at Red Indians with a bow and arrow behind the bushes, to kill somebody he could have killed in twenty much simpler ways. But I had to find out if they had had anything to do with it; and so I had to accuse them in order to prove their innocence.'

'And how have you proved their innocence?' asked Blake the lawyer, leaning forward eagerly.

'Only by the agitation they showed when they were accused,' answered the other.

'What do you mean, exactly?'

'If you will permit me to say so,' remarked Father Brown, composedly enough, 'I did undoubtedly think it my duty to suspect them and everybody else. I did suspect Mr Crake and I did suspect Captain Wain, in the sense that I
considered the possibility or probability of their guilt. I told them I had formed conclusions about it; and I will now
tell them what those conclusions were. I was sure they were innocent, because of the manner and the moment in
which they passed from unconsciousness to indignation. Then they suddenly realized with a shock and a shout of rage that they were accused; they realized it long after they might well have expected to be accused, but long before I had accused them. Now no guilty person could
possibly do that. He might be snappy and suspicious from the first; or he might simulate unconsciousness and
innocence up to the end. But he wouldn't begin by making things worse for himself and then give a great jump and
begin furiously denying the notion he had himself helped to suggest. That could only come by his having really
failed to realize what he was suggesting. The self-consciousness of a murderer would always be at least morbidly
vivid enough to prevent him first forgetting his relation with the thing and then remembering to deny it. So I ruled
you both out and others for other reasons I needn't discuss now. For instance, there was the secretary -

'But I'm not talking about that just now. Look here, I've just heard from Wilton on the phone, and he's given me
permission to tell you some rather serious news. Now I suppose you all know by this time who Wilton was, and
what he was after.'

'I know he was after Daniel Doom and wouldn't be happy till he got him,' answered Peter Wain; 'and I've heard
the story that he's the son of old Horder, and that's why he's the avenger of blood. Anyhow, he's certainly looking for
the man called Doolm.'

'Well,' said Father Brown, 'he has found him.'

Peter Wain sprang to his feet in excitement.

'The murderer!' he cried. 'Is the murderer in the lock-up already?'

'No,' said Father Brown, gravely; 'I said the news was serious, and it's more serious than that. I'm afraid poor
Wilton has taken a terrible responsibility. I'm afraid he's going to put a terrible responsibility on us. He hunted the
criminal down, and just when he had him cornered at last - well, he has taken the law into his own hands.'

'You mean that Daniel Doom - ' began the lawyer.

'I mean that Daniel Doom is dead,' said the priest. 'There was some sort of wild struggle, and Wilton killed him.'

'Serve him right,' growled Mr. Hickory Crake.

'Can't blame Wilton for downing a crook like that, especially considering the feud,' assented Wain; 'it was like
stepping on a viper.'

'I don't agree with you,' said Father Brown. 'I suppose we all talk romantic stuff at random in defence of lynching
and lawlessness; but I have a suspicion that if we lose our laws and liberties we shall regret it. Besides, it seems to
me illogical to say there is something to be said for Wilton committing murder, without even inquiring whether there
was anything to be said for Doom committing it. I rather doubt whether Doom was merely a vulgar assassin; he may
have been a sort of outlaw with a mania about the cup, demanding it with threats and only killing after a struggle;
both victims were thrown down just outside their houses. The objection to Wilton's way of doing it is that we shall
never hear Doom's side of the case.'

'Oh, I've no patience with all this sentimental whitewashing of worthless, murderous blackguards,' cried Wain,
heatedly. 'If Wilton croaked the criminal he did a jolly good day's work, and there's an end of it.'

'Quite so, quite so,' said his uncle, nodding vigorously.

Father Brown's face had a yet heavier gravity as he looked slowly round the semicircle effaces. 'Is that really
what you all think?' he asked. Even as he did so he realized that he was an Englishman and an exile. He realized that
he was among foreigners, even if he was among friends. Around that ring of foreigners ran a restless fire that was
not native to his own breed; the fiercer spirit of the western nation that can rebel and lynch, and above all, combine.
He knew that they had already combined.

'Well,' said Father Brown, with a sigh, 'I am to understand, then, that you do definitely condone this unfortunate
man's crime, or act of private justice, or whatever you call it. In that case it will not hurt him if I tell you a little more
about it.'

He rose suddenly to his feet; and though they saw no meaning in his movement, it seemed in some way to
change or chill the very air in the room.

'Wilton killed Doom in a rather curious way,' he began.

'How did Wilton kill him?' asked Crake, abruptly.

'With an arrow,' said Father Brown.

'Twilight was gathering in the long room, and daylight dwindling to a gleam from the great window in the inner
room, where the great millionaire had died. Almost automatically the eyes of the group turned slowly towards it, but
as yet there was no sound. Then the voice of Crake came cracked and high and senile in a sort of crowing gabble.

'What you mean? What you mean? Brander Merton killed by an arrow. This crook killed by an arrow -'
'By the same arrow,' said the priest, 'and at the same moment.'

Again there was a sort of strangled and yet swollen and bursting silence, and young Wain began: 'You mean -'

'I mean that your friend Merton was Daniel Doom,' said Father Brown firmly; 'and the only Daniel Doom you'll ever find. Your friend Merton was always crazy after that Coptic Cup that he used to worship like an idol every day; and in his wild youth he had really killed two men to get it, though I still think the deaths may have been in a sense accidents of the robbery. Anyhow, he had it; and that man Drage knew the story and was blackmailing him. But Wilton was after him for a very different purpose; I fancy he only discovered the truth when he'd got into this house. But anyhow, it was in this house, and in that room, that this hunt ended, and he slew the slayer of his father.'

For a long time nobody answered. Then old Crake could be heard drumming with his fingers on the table and muttering:

'Brander must have been mad. He must have been mad.'

'But, good Lord!' burst out Peter Wain; 'what are we to do? What are we to say? Oh, it's all quite different! What about the papers and the big business people? Brander Merton is a thing like the President or the Pope of Rome.'

'I certainly think it is rather different,' began Barnard Blake, the lawyer, in a low voice. 'The difference involves a whole -'

Father Brown struck the table so that the glasses on it rang; and they could almost fancy a ghostly echo from the mysterious chalice that still stood in the room beyond.

'No!' he cried, in a voice like a pistol - shot. 'There shall be no difference. I gave you your chance of pitying the poor devil when you thought he was a common criminal. You wouldn't listen then; you were all for private vengeance then. You were all for letting him be butchered like a wild beast without a hearing or a public trial, and said he had only got his deserts. Very well then, if Daniel Doom has got his deserts, Brander Merton has got his deserts. If that was good enough for Doom, by all that is holy it is good enough for Merton. Take your wild justice or our dull legality; but in the name of Almighty God, let there be an equal lawlessness or an equal law.'

Nobody answered except the lawyer, and he answered with something like a snarl: 'What will the police say if we tell them we mean to condone a crime?'

'What will they say if I tell them you did condone it?' replied Father Brown. 'Your respect for the law comes rather late, Mr Barnard Blake.'

After a pause he resumed in a milder tone: 'I, for one, am ready to tell the truth if the proper authorities ask me; and the rest of you can do as you like. But as a fact, it will make very little difference. Wilton only rang me up to tell me that I was now free to lay his confession before you; for when you heard it, he would be beyond pursuit.'

He walked slowly into the inner room and stood there by the little table beside which the millionaire had died. The Coptic Cup still stood in the same place, and he remained there for a space staring at its cluster of all the colours of the rainbow, and beyond it into a blue abyss of sky.

THREE: The Oracle of the Dog

'YES,' said Father Brown, 'I always like a dog, so long as he isn't spelt backwards.'

Those who are quick in talking are not always quick in listening. Sometimes even their brilliancy produces a sort of stupidity. Father Brown's friend and companion was a young man with a stream of ideas and stories, an enthusiastic young man named Fiennes, with eager blue eyes and blond hair that seemed to be brushed back, not merely with a hair - brush but with the wind of the world as be rushed through it. But he stopped in the torrent of his talk in a momentary bewilderment before he saw the priest's very simple meaning.

'You mean that people make too much of them?' he said. 'Well, I don't know. They're marvellous creatures. Sometimes I think they know a lot more than we do.'

Father Brown said nothing, but continued to stroke the head of the big retriever in a half - abstracted but apparently soothing fashion.

'Why,' said Fiennes, warming again to his monologue, 'there was a dog in the case I've come to see you about: what they call the 'Invisible Murder Case', you know. It's a strange story, but from my point of view the dog is about the strangest thing in it. Of course, there's the mystery of the crime itself, and how old Druce can have been killed by somebody else when he was all alone in the summer - house -'

The hand stroking the dog stopped for a moment in its rhythmic movement, and Father Brown said calmly: 'Oh, it was a summer - house, was it?'

'I thought you'd read all about it in the papers,' answered Fiennes. 'Stop a minute; I believe I've got a cutting that will give you all the particulars.' He produced a strip of newspaper from his pocket and handed it to the priest, who began to read it, holding it close to his blinking eyes with one hand while the other continued its half - conscious caresses of the dog. It looked like the parable of a man not letting his right hand know what his left hand did.

Many mystery stories, about men murdered behind locked doors and windows, and murderers escaping without
means of entrance and exit, have come true in the course of the extraordinary events at Cranston on the coast of Yorkshire, where Colonel Druce was found stabbed from behind by a dagger that has entirely disappeared from the scene, and apparently even from the neighbourhood.

The summer-house in which he died was indeed accessible at one entrance, the ordinary doorway which looked down the central walk of the garden towards the house. But, by a combination of events almost to be called a coincidence, it appears that both the path and the entrance were watched during the crucial time, and there is a chain of witnesses who confirm each other. The summer-house stands at the extreme end of the garden, where there is no exit or entrance of any kind. The central garden path is a lane between two ranks of tall delphiniums, planted so close that any stray step off the path would leave its traces; and both path and plants run right up to the very mouth of the summer-house, so that no straying from that straight path could fail to be observed, and no other mode of entrance can be imagined.

Patrick Floyd, secretary of the murdered man, testified that he had been in a position to overlook the whole garden from the time when Colonel Druce last appeared alive in the doorway to the time when he was found dead; as he, Floyd, had been on the top of a step-ladder clipping the garden hedge. Janet Druce, the dead man's daughter, confirmed this, saying that she had sat on the terrace of the house throughout that time and had seen Floyd at his work. Touching some part of the time, this is again supported by Donald Druce, her brother-who overlooked the garden-standing at his bedroom window in his dressing-gown, for he had risen late. Lastly, the account is consistent with that given by Dr Valentine, a neighbour, who called for a time to talk with Miss Druce on the terrace, and by the Colonel's solicitor, Mr Aubrey Traill, who was apparently the last to see the murdered man alive-presumably with the exception of the murderer.

All are agreed that the course of events was as follows: About half past three in the afternoon, Miss Druce went down the path to ask her father when he would like tea; but he said he did not want any and was waiting to see Traill, his lawyer, who was to be sent to him in the summer-house. The girl then came away and met Traill coming down the path; she directed him to her father and he went in as directed. About half an hour afterwards he came out again, the Colonel coming with him to the door and showing himself to all appearance in health and even high spirits. He had been somewhat annoyed earlier in the day by his son's irregular hours, but seemed to recover his temper in a perfectly normal fashion, and had been rather markedly genial in receiving other visitors, including two of his nephews, who came over for the day. But as these were out walking during the whole period of the tragedy, they had no evidence to give. It is said, indeed, that the Colonel was not on very good terms with Dr Valentine, but that gentleman only had a brief interview with the daughter of the house, to whom he is supposed to be paying serious attentions.

Traill, the solicitor, says he left the Colonel entirely alone in the summer-house, and this is confirmed by Floyd's bird's-eye view of the garden, which showed nobody else passing the only entrance. Ten minutes later. Miss Druce again went down the garden and had not reached the end of the path when she saw her father, who was conspicuous by his white linen coat, lying in a heap on the floor. She uttered a scream which brought others to the spot, and on entering the place they found the Colonel lying dead beside his basket-chair, which was also upset. Dr Valentine, who was still in the immediate neighbourhood, testified that the wound was made by some sort of stiletto, entering under the shoulder-blade and piercing the heart. The police have searched the neighbourhood for such a weapon, but no trace of it can be found.

'So Colonel Druce wore a white coat, did he?' said Father Brown as he put down the paper.

'Trick he learnt in the tropics,' replied Fiennes, with some wonder. 'He'd had some queer adventures there, by his own account; and I fancy his dislike of Valentine was connected with the doctor coming from the tropics, too. But it's all an infernal puzzle. The account there is pretty accurate. I didn't see the tragedy, in the sense of the discovery; I was out walking with the young nephews and the dog - the dog I wanted to tell you about. But I saw the stage set for it as described; the straight lane between the blue flowers right up to the dark entrance, and the lawyer going down it in his blacks and his silk hat, and the red head of the secretary showing high above the green hedge as he worked on it with his shears. Nobody could have mistaken that red head at any distance; and if people say they saw it there all the time, you may be sure they did.

This red-haired secretary, Floyd, is quite a character; a breathless bounding sort of fellow, always doing everybody's work as he was doing the gardener's. I think he is an American; he's certainly got the American view of life - what they call the view - point, bless 'em.'

'What about the lawyer?' asked Father Brown. There was a silence and then Fiennes spoke quite slowly for him. 'Traill struck me as a singular man. In his fine black clothes he was almost foppish, yet you can hardly call him fashionable. For he wore a pair of long, luxuriant black whiskers such as haven't been seen since Victorian times. He had rather a fine grave face and a fine grave manner, but every now and then he seemed to remember to smile. And when he showed his white teeth he seemed to lose a little of his dignity, and there was something faintly fawning
about him. It may have been only embarrassment, for he would also fidget with his cravat and his tie - pin, which were at once handsome and unusual, like himself. If I could think of anybody - but what's the good, when the whole thing's impossible? Nobody knows who did it. Nobody knows how it could be done. At least there's only one exception I'd make, and that's why I really mentioned the whole thing. The dog knows.'

Father Brown sighed and then said absently: 'You were there as a friend of young Donald, weren't you? He didn't go on your walk with you?'

'No,' replied Fiennes smiling. 'The young scoundrel had gone to bed that morning and got up that afternoon. I went with his cousins, two young officers from India, and our conversation was trivial enough. I remember the elder, whose name I think is Herbert Druce and who is an authority on horse - breeding, talked about nothing but a mare he had bought and the moral character of the man who sold her; while his brother Harry seemed to be brooding on his bad luck at Monte Carlo. I only mention it to show you, in the light of what happened on our walk, that there was nothing psychic about us. The dog was the only mystic in our company.'

'What sort of a dog was he?' asked the priest.

'Same breed as that one,' answered Fiennes. 'That's what started me off on the story, your saying you didn't believe in believing in a dog. He's a big black retriever, named Nox, and a suggestive name, too; for I think what he did a darker mystery than the murder. You know Druce's house and garden are by the sea; we walked about a mile from it along the sands and then turned back, going the other way. We passed a rather curious rock called the Rock of Fortune, famous in the neighbourhood because it's one of those examples of one stone barely balanced on another, so that a touch would knock it over. It is not really very high but the hanging outline of it makes it look a little wild and sinister; at least it made it look so to me, for I don't imagine my jolly young companions were afflicted with the picturesque. But it may be that I was beginning to feel an atmosphere; for just then the question arose of whether it was time to go back to tea, and even then I think I had a premonition that time counted for a good deal in the business. Neither Herbert Druce nor I had a watch, so we called out to his brother, who was some paces behind, having stopped to light his pipe under the hedge. Hence it happened that he shouted out the hour, which was twenty past four, in his big voice through the growing twilight; and somehow the loudness of it made it sound like the proclamation of something tremendous. His unconsciousness seemed to make it all the more so; but that was always the way with omens; and particular ticks of the clock were really very ominous things that afternoon. According to Dr Valentine's testimony, poor Druce had actually died just about half past four.

'Well, they said we needn't go home for ten minutes, and we walked a little farther along the sands, doing nothing in particular - throwing stones for the dog and throwing sticks into the sea for, him to swim after. But to me the twilight seemed to grow oddly oppressive, and the very shadow of the top - heavy Rock of Fortune lay on me like a load. And then the curious thing happened. Nox had just brought back Herbert's walking - stick out of the sea and his brother had thrown his in also. The dog swam out again, but just about what must have been the stroke of the half - hour, he stopped swimming. He came back again on to the shore and stood in front of us. Then he suddenly threw up his head and sent up a howl or wail of woe - if ever I heard one in the world.

'What the devil's the matter with the dog?' asked Herbert; but none of us could answer. There was a long silence after the brute's wailing and whining died away on the desolate shore; and then the silence was broken. As I live, it was broken by a faint and far - off shriek, like the shriek of a woman from beyond the hedges inland. We didn't know what it was then; but we knew afterwards. It was the cry the girl gave when she first saw the body of her father.'

'You went back, I suppose,' said Father Brown patiently. 'What happened then?'

'I'll tell you what happened then,' said Fiennes with a grim emphasis. 'When we got back into that garden the first thing we saw was Traill, the lawyer; I can see him now with his black hat and black whiskers relieved against the perspective of the blue flowers stretching down to the summer - house, with the sunset and the strange outline of the Rock of Fortune in the distance. His face and figure were in shadow against the sunset; but I swear the white teeth were showing in his head and he was smiling. The moment Nox saw that man the dog dashed forward and stood in the middle of the path barking at him madly, murderously, volleying out curses that were almost verbal in their dreadful distinctness of hatred. And the man doubled up and fled, along the path between the flowers.'

Father Brown sprang to his feet with a startling impatience. 'So the dog denounced him, did he?' he cried. 'The oracle of the dog condemned him. Did you see what birds were flying, and are you sure whether they were on the right hand or the left? Did you consult the augurs about the sacrifices? Surely you didn't omit to cut open the dog and examine his entrails. That is the sort of scientific test you heathen humanitarians seem to trust when you are thinking of taking away the life and honour of a man.'

Fiennes sat gaping for an instant before he found breath to say: 'Why, what's the matter with you? What have I done now?' A sort of anxiety came back into the priest's eyes - the anxiety of a man who has run against a post in the dark and wonders for a moment whether he has hurt it.
'I'm most awfully sorry,' he said with sincere distress. 'I beg your pardon for being so rude; pray forgive me.'

Fiennes looked at him curiously. 'I sometimes think you are more of a mystery than any of the mysteries,' he said. 'But anyhow, if you don't believe in the mystery of the dog, at least you can't get over the mystery of the man. You can't deny that at the very moment when the beast came back from the sea and bellowed, his master's soul was driven out of his body by the blow of some unseen power that no mortal man can trace or even imagine. And as for the lawyer - I don't go only by the dog - there are other curious details, too. He struck me as a smooth, smiling, equivocal sort of person; and one of his tricks seemed like a sort of hint. You know the doctor and the police were on the spot very quickly; Valentine was brought back when walking away from the house, and he telephoned instantly. That, with the secluded house, small numbers, and enclosed space, made it pretty possible to search everybody who could have been near; and everybody was thoroughly searched - for a weapon. The whole house, garden, and shore were combed for a weapon. The disappearance of the dagger is almost as crazy as the disappearance of the man.'

'The disappearance of the dagger,' said Father Brown, nodding. He seemed to have become suddenly attentive.

'Well,' continued Fiennes, 'I told you that man Traill had a trick of fidgeting with his tie and tie-pin - especially his tie-pin. His pin, like himself, was at once showy and old-fashioned. It had one of those stones with concentric coloured rings that look like an eye; and his own concentration on it got on my nerves, as if he had been a Cyclops with one eye in the middle of his body. But the pin was not only large but long; and it occurred to me that his anxiety about its adjustment was because it was even longer than it looked; as long as a stiletto in fact.'

Father Brown nodded thoughtfully. 'Was any other instrument ever suggested?' he asked.

'There was another suggestion,' answered Fiennes, 'from one of the young Druces - the cousins, I mean. Neither Herbert nor Harry Druce would have struck one at first as likely to be of assistance in scientific detection; but while Herbert was really the traditional type of heavy Dragoon, caring for nothing but horses and being an ornament to the Horse Guards, his younger brother Harry had been in the Indian Police and knew something about such things. Indeed, in his own way he was quite clever; and I rather fancy he had been too clever; I mean he had left the police through breaking some red-tape regulations and taking some sort of risk and responsibility of his own. Anyhow, he was in some sense a detective out of work, and threw himself into this business with more than the ardour of an amateur. And it was with him that I had an argument about the weapon - an argument that led - to something new. It began by his countering my description of the dog barking at Traill; and he said that a dog at his worst didn't bark, but growled.'

'He was quite right there,' observed the priest.

'This young fellow went on to say that, if it came to that, he'd heard Nox growling at other people before then; and among others at Floyd, the secretary. I retorted that his own argument answered itself; for the crime couldn't be brought home to two or three people, and least of all to Floyd, who was as innocent as a harum-scarum schoolboy, and had been seen by everybody all the time perched above the garden hedge with his fan of red hair as conspicuous as a scarlet cockatoo.

'I know there's difficulties anyhow,' said my colleague, 'but I wish you'd come with me down the garden a minute. I want to show you something I don't think any one else has seen.' This was on the very day of the discovery, and the garden was just as it had been. The step-ladder was still standing by the hedge, and just under the hedge my guide stopped and disentangled something from the deep grass. It was the sheers used for clipping the hedge, and on the point of one of them was a smear of blood.'

There was a short silence, and then Father Brown said suddenly; 'What was the lawyer there for?'

'He told us the Colonel sent for him to alter his will,' answered Fiennes. 'And, by the way, there was another thing about the business of the will that I ought to mention. You see, the will wasn't actually signed in the summer - house that afternoon.'

'I suppose not,' said Father Brown; 'there would have to be two witnesses.'

'The lawyer actually came down the day before and it was signed then; but he was sent for again next day because the old man had a doubt about one of the witnesses and had to be reassured.'

'Who were the witnesses?' asked Father Brown.

'That's just the point,' replied his informant eagerly, 'the witnesses were Floyd, the secretary, and this Dr Valentine, the foreign sort of surgeon or whatever he is; and the two had a quarrel. Now I'm bound to say that the secretary is something of a busybody. He's one of those hot and headlong people whose warmth of temperament has unfortunately turned mostly to pugnacity and bristling suspicion; to distrusting people instead of to trusting them. That sort of red-haired red-hot fellow is always either universally credulous or universally incredulous; and sometimes both. He was not only a Jack-of-all-trades, but he knew better than all tradesmen. He not only knew everything, but he warned everybody against everybody. All that must be taken into account in his suspicions about Valentine; but in that particular case there seems to have been something behind it. He said the name of Valentine
was not really Valentine. He said he had seen him elsewhere known by the name of De Villon. He said it would invalidate the will; of course he was kind enough to explain to the lawyer what the law was on that point. They were both in a frightful wax.'

Father Brown laughed. 'People often are when they are to witness a will,' he said; 'for one thing, it means that they can't have any legacy under it. But what did Dr Valentine say? No doubt the universal secretary knew more about the doctor's name than the doctor did. But even the doctor might have some information about his own name.'

Fiennes paused a moment before he replied. 'Dr Valentine took it in a curious way. Dr Valentine is a curious man. His appearance is rather striking but very foreign. He is young but wears a beard cut square; and his face is very pale, dreadfully pale - and dreadfully serious. His eyes have a sort of ache in them, as if he ought to wear glasses, or had given himself a headache with thinking; but he is quite handsome and always very formally dressed, with a top hat and a dark coat and a little red rosette. His manner is rather cold and haughty, and he has a way of staring at you which is very disconcerting. When thus charged with having changed his name, he merely stared like a sphinx and then said with a little laugh that he supposed Americans had no names to change. At that I think the Colonel also got into a fuss and said all sorts of angry things to the doctor; all the more angry because of the doctor's pretensions to a future place in his family. But I shouldn't have thought much of that but for a few words that I happened to hear later, early in the afternoon of the tragedy. I don't want to make a lot of them, for they weren't the sort of words on which one would like, in the ordinary way, to play the eavesdropper. As I was passing out towards the front gate with my two companions and the dog, I heard voices which told me that Dr Valentine and Miss Druce had withdrawn for a moment in the shadow of the house, in an angle behind a row of flowering plants, and were talking to each other in passionate whisperings - sometimes almost like hissing; for it was something of a lovers' quarrel as well as a lovers' tryst. Nobody repeats the sort of things they said for the most part; but in an unfortunate business like this I'm bound to say that there was repeated more than once a phrase about killing somebody. In fact, the girl seemed to be begging him not to kill somebody, or saying that no provocation could justify killing anybody; which seems an unusual sort of talk to address to a gentleman who has dropped in to tea.'

'Do you know,' asked the priest, 'whether Dr Valentine seemed to be very angry after the scene with the secretary and the Colonel - I mean about witnessing the will?'

'By all accounts,' replied the other, 'he wasn't half so angry as the secretary was. It was the secretary who went away raging after witnessing the will.'

'And now,' said Father Brown, 'what about the will itself?'

'The Colonel was a very wealthy man, and his will was important. Traill wouldn't tell us the alteration at that stage, but I have since heard only this morning in fact - that most of the money was transferred from the son to the daughter. I told you that Druce was wild with my friend Donald over his dissipated hours.'

'The question of motive has been rather over - shadowed by the question of method,' observed Father Brown thoughtfully. 'At that moment, apparently, Miss Druce was the immediate gainer by the death.'

'Good God! What a cold - blooded way of talking,' cried Fiennes, staring at him. 'You don't really mean to hint that she - ':

'Is she going to marry that Dr Valentine?' asked the other.

'Some people are against it,' answered his friend. 'But he is liked and respected in the place and is a skilled and devoted surgeon.'

'So devoted a surgeon,' said Father Brown, 'that he had surgical instruments with him when he went to call on the young lady at teatime. For he must have used a lancet or something, and he never seems to have gone home.'

Fiennes sprang to his feet and looked at him in a heat of inquiry. 'You suggest he might have used the very same lancet - '

Father Brown shook his head. 'All these suggestions are fancies just now,' he said. 'The problem is not who did it or what did it, but how it was done. We might find many men and even many tools - pins and shears and lancets. But how did a man get into the room? How did even a pin get into it?'

He was staring reflectively at the ceiling as he spoke, but as he said the last words his eye cocked in an alert fashion as if he had suddenly seen a curious fly on the ceiling.

'Well, what would you do about it?' asked the young man. 'You have a lot of experience; what would you advise now?'

'I'm afraid I'm not much use,' said Father Brown with a sigh. 'I can't suggest very much without having ever been near the place or the people. For the moment you can only go on with local inquiries. I gather that your friend from the Indian Police is more or less in charge of your inquiry down there. I should run down and see how he is getting on. See what he's been doing in the way of amateur detection. There may be news already.'

As his guests, the biped and the quadruped, disappeared, Father Brown took up his pen and went back to his interrupted occupation of planning a course of lectures on the Encyclical Rerum Novarum. The subject was a large
one and he had to recast it more than once, so that he was somewhat similarly employed some two days later when
the big black dog again came bounding into the room and sprawled all over him with enthusiasm and excitement.
The master who followed the dog shared the excitement if not the enthusiasm. He had been excited in a less pleasant
fashion, for his blue eyes seemed to start from his head and his eager face was even a little pale.

'You told me,' he said abruptly and without preface, 'to find out what Harry Druce was doing. Do you know what
he's done?' The priest did not reply, and the young man went on in jerky tones: 'I'll tell you what he's done. He's
killed himself.'

Father Brown's lips moved only faintly, and there was nothing practical about what he was saying - nothing that
has anything to do with this story or this world.

'You give me the creeps sometimes,' said Fiennes. 'Did you - did you expect this?'

'I thought it possible,' said Father Brown; 'that was why I asked you to go and see what he was doing. I hoped
you might not be too late.'

'It was I who found him,' said Fiennes rather huskily. 'It was the ugliest and most uncanny thing ever knew. I
went down that old garden again, and I knew there was something new and unnatural about it besides the murder.
The flowers still tossed about in blue masses on each side of the black entrance into the old grey summer - house;
but to me the blue flowers looked like blue devils dancing before some dark cavern of the underworld. I looked all
round, everything seemed to be in its ordinary place. But the queer notion grew on me that there was something
wrong with the very shape of the sky. And then I saw what it was. The Rock of Fortune always rose in the
background beyond the garden hedge and against the sea. The Rock of Fortune was gone.'

Father Brown had lifted his head and was listening intently.

'It was as if a mountain had walked away out of a landscape or a moon fallen from the sky; though I knew, of
course, that a touch at any time would have tipped the thing over. Something possessed me and I rushed down that
garden path like the wind and went crashing through that hedge as if it were a spider's web. It was a thin hedge
really, though its undisturbed trimness had made it serve all the purposes of a wall. On the shore I found the loose
rock fallen from its pedestal; and poor Harry Druce lay like a wreck underneath it. One arm was thrown round it in a
sort of embrace as if he had pulled it down on himself; and on the broad brown sands beside it, in large crazy
lettering, he had scrawled the words: 'The Rock of Fortune falls on the Fool.' -

'It was the Colonel's will that did that,' observed Father Brown. 'The young man had staked everything on
profiting himself by Donald's disgrace, especially when his uncle sent for him on the same day as the lawyer, and
welcomed him with so much warmth. Otherwise he was done; he'd lost his police job; he was beggared at Monte
Carlo. And he killed himself when he found he'd killed his kinsman for nothing.'

'Here, stop a minute!' cried the staring Fiennes. 'You're going too fast for me.'

'Talking about the will, by the way,' continued Father Brown calmly, 'before I forget it, or we go on to bigger
things, there was a simple explanation, I think, of all that business about the doctor's name. I rather fancy I have
heard both names before somewhere. The doctor is really a French nobleman with the title of the Marquis de Villon.
But he is also an ardent Republican and has abandoned his title and fallen back on the forgotten family surname.

'With your Citizen Riquetti you have puzzled Europe for ten days.'

'What is that?' asked the young man blankly.

'Never mind,' said the priest. 'Nine times out of ten it is a rascally thing to change one's name; but this was a
piece of fine fanaticism. That's the point of his sarcasm about Americans having no names - that is, no titles. Now in
England the Marquis of Hartington is never called Mr Hartington; but in France the Marquis de Villon is called M.
de Villon. So it might well look like a change of name. As for the talk about killing, I fancy that also was a point of
French etiquette. The doctor was talking about challenging Floyd to a duel, and the girl was trying to dissuade him.'

'Oh, I see,' cried Fiennes slowly. 'Now I understand what she meant.'

'And what is that about?' asked his companion, smiling.

'Well,' said the young man, 'it was something that happened to me just before I found that poor fellow's body;
only the catastrophe drove it out of my head. I suppose it's hard to remember a little romantic idyll when you've just
come on top of a tragedy. But as I went down the lanes leading to the Colonel's old place I met his daughter walking
with Dr Valentine. She was in mourning, of course, and he always wore black as if he were going to a funeral; but I
can't say that their faces were very funereal. Never have I seen two people looking in their own way more
respectably radiant and cheerful. They stopped and saluted me, and then she told me they were married and living in
a little house on the outskirts of the town, where the doctor was continuing his practice. This rather surprised me,
because I knew that her old father's will had left her his property; and I hinted at it delicately by saying I was going
along to her father's old place and had half expected to meet her there. But she only laughed and said: 'Oh, we've
given up all that. My husband doesn't like heiresses.' And I discovered with some astonishment they really had
insisted on restoring the property to poor Donald; so I hope he's had a healthy shock and will treat it sensibly. There
was never much really the matter with him; he was very young and his father was not very wise. But it was in
connexion with that that she said something I didn't understand at the time; but now I'm sure it must be as you say.
She said with a sort of sudden and splendid arrogance that was entirely altruistic:

"I hope it'll stop that red-haired fool from fussing any more about the will. Does he think my husband, who has
given up a crest and a coronet as old as the Crusades for his principles, would kill an old man in a summer - house
for a legacy like that?" Then she laughed again and said, 'My husband isn't killing anybody except in the way of
business. Why, he didn't even ask his friends to call on the secretary.' Now, of course, I see what she meant.'

'I see part of what she meant, of course,' said Father Brown. 'What did she mean exactly by the secretary fussing
about the will?'

Fiennes smiled as he answered, 'I wish you knew the secretary, Father Brown. It would be a joy to you to watch
him make things hum, as he calls it. He made the house of mourning hum. He filled the funeral with all the snap
and zip of the brightest sporting event. There was no holding him, after something had really happened. I've told you
how he used to oversee the gardener as he did the garden, and how he instructed the lawyer in the law. Needless to
say, he also instructed the surgeon in the practice of surgery; and as the surgeon was Dr Valentine, you may be sure
it ended in accusing him of something worse than bad surgery. The secretary got it fixed in his red head that the
doctor had committed the crime, and when the police arrived he was perfectly sublime. Need I say that he became,
on the spot, the greatest of all amateur detectives? Sherlock Holmes never towered over Scotland Yard with more
Titanic intellectual pride and scorn than Colonel Druce's private secretary over the police investigating Colonel
Druce's death. I tell you it was a joy to see him. He strode about with an abstracted air, tossing his scarlet crest of
hair and giving curt impatient replies. Of course it was his demeanour during these days that made Druce's daughter
so wild with him. Of course he had a theory. It's just the sort of theory a man would have in a book; and Floyd is the
sort of man who ought to be in a book. He'd be better fun and less bother in a book.'

'What was his theory?' asked the other.

'Oh, it was full of pep,' replied Fiennes gloomily. 'It would have been glorious copy if it could have held together
for ten minutes longer. He said the Colonel was still alive when they found him in the summer - house, and the
doctor killed him with the surgical instrument on pretence of cutting the clothes.'

'I see,' said the priest. 'I suppose he was lying flat on his face on the mud floor as a form of siesta.'

'It's wonderful what hustle will do,' continued his informant. 'I believe Floyd would have got his great theory
into the papers at any rate, and perhaps had the doctor attested, when all these things were blown sky high as if by
dynamite by the discovery of that dead body lying under the Rock of Fortune. And that's what we come back to after
all. I suppose the suicide is almost a confession. But nobody will ever know the whole story.'

There was a silence, and then the priest said modestly: 'I rather think I know the whole story.'

Fiennes stared. 'But look here,' he cried; 'how do you come to know the whole story, or to be sure it's the true
story? You've been sitting here a hundred miles away writing a sermon; do you mean to tell me you really know
what happened already? If you've really come to the end, where in the world do you begin? What started you off
with your own story?'

Father Brown jumped up with a very unusual excitement and his first exclamation was like an explosion.

'The dog!' he cried. 'The dog, of course! You had the whole story in your hands in the business of the dog on the
beach, if you'd only noticed the dog properly.'

Fiennes stared still more. 'But you told me before that my feelings about the dog were all nonsense, and the dog
had nothing to do with it.'

'The dog had everything to do with it,' said Father Brown, 'as you'd have found out if you'd only treated the dog
as a dog, and not as God Almighty judging the souls of men.'

He paused in an embarrassed way for a moment, and then said, with a rather pathetic air of apology: 'The truth
is, I happen to be awfully fond of dogs. And it seemed to me that in all this lurid halo of dog superstitions nobody
was really thinking about the poor dog at all. To begin with a small point, about his barking at the lawyer or
growing at the secretary. You asked how I could guess things a hundred miles away; but honestly it's mostly to your
credit, for you described people so well that I know the types. A man like Traill, who frowns usually and smiles
suddenly, a man who fiddles with things, especially at his throat, is a nervous, easily embarrassed man. I shouldn't
wonder if Floyd, the efficient secretary, is nervy and jumpy, too; those Yankee hustlers often are. Otherwise he
wouldn't have cut his fingers on the shears and dropped them when he heard Janet Druce scream.

'Now dogs hate nervous people. I don't know whether they make the dog nervous, too; or whether, being after all
a brute, he is a bit of a bully; or whether his canine vanity (which is colossal) is simply offended at not being liked.
But anyhow there was nothing in poor Nox protesting against those people, except that he disliked them for being
afraid of him. Now I know you're awfully clever, and nobody of sense sneers at cleverness. But I sometimes fancy,
for instance, that you are too clever to understand animals. Sometimes you are too clever to understand men,
especially when they act almost as simply as animals. Animals are very literal; they live in a world of truisms. Take this case: a dog barks at a man and a man runs away from a dog. Now you do not seem to be quite simple enough to see the fact: that the dog barked because he disliked the man and the man fled because he was frightened of the dog.

They had no other motives and they needed none; but you must read psychological mysteries into it and suppose the dog had super-normal vision, and was a mysterious mouthpiece of doom. You must suppose the man was running away, not from the dog but from the hangman. And yet, if you come to think if it, all this deeper psychology is exceedingly improbable. If the dog really could completely and consciously realize the murderer of his master he wouldn't stand yapping as he might at a curate at a tea-party; he's much more likely to fly at his throat. And on the other hand, do you really think a man who had hardened his heart to murder an old friend and then walk about smiling at the old friend's family, under the eyes of his old friend's daughter and post-mortem doctor - do you think a man like that would be doubled up by mere remorse because a dog barked? He might feel the tragic irony of it; it might shake his soul, like any other tragic trifle. But he wouldn't rush madly the length of a garden to escape from the only witness whom he knew to be unable to talk. People have a panic like that when they are frightened, not of tragic ironies, but of teeth. The whole thing is simpler than you can understand.

'But when we come to that business by the seashore, things are much more interesting. As you stated them, they were much more puzzling. I didn't understand that tale of the dog going in and out of the water; it didn't seem to me a doggy thing to do. If Nox had been very much upset about something else, he might possibly have refused to go after the stick at all. He'd probably go off nosing in whatever direction he suspected the mischief. But when once a dog is actually chasing a thing, a stone or a stick or a rabbit, my experience is that he won't stop for anything but the most peremptory command, and not always for that. That he should turn round because his mood changed seems to me unthinkable.'

'But he did turn round,' insisted Fiennes; 'and came back without the stick.'

'He came back without the stick for the best reason in the world,' replied the priest. 'He came back because he couldn't find it. He whined because he couldn't find it. That's the sort of thing a dog really does whine about. A dog is a devil of a ritualist. He is as particular about the precise routine of a game as a child about the precise repetition of a fairy-tale. In this case something had gone wrong with the game. He came back to complain seriously of the conduct of the stick. Never had such a thing happened before. Never had an eminent and distinguished dog been so treated by a rotten old walking-stick.'

'Why, what had the walking-stick done?' inquired the young man.

'It had sunk,' said Father Brown.

Fiennes said nothing, but continued to stare; and it was the priest who continued: 'It had sunk because it was not really a stick, but a rod of steel with a very thin shell of cane and a sharp point. In other words, it was a sword-stick. I suppose a murderer never gets rid of a bloody weapon so oddly and yet so naturally as by throwing it into the sea for a retriever.'

'I begin to see what you mean,' admitted Fiennes; 'but even if a sword-stick was used, I have no guess of how it was used.'

'I had a sort of guess,' said Father Brown, 'right at the beginning when you said the word summer-house. And another when you said that Druce wore a white coat. As long as everybody was looking for a short dagger, nobody thought of it; but if we admit a rather long blade like a rapier, it's not so impossible.'

He was leaning back, looking at the ceiling, and began like one going back to his own first thoughts and fundamentals.

'All that discussion about detective stories like the Yellow Room, about a man found dead in sealed chambers which no one could enter, does not apply to the present case, because it is a summer-house. When we talk of a Yellow Room, or any room, we imply walls that are really homogeneous and impenetrable. But a summer-house is not made like that; it is often made, as it was in this case, of closely interlaced but separate boughs and strips of wood, in which there are chinks here and there. There was one of them just behind Druce's back as he sat in his chair up against the wall. But just as the room was a summer-house, so the chair was a basket-chair. That also was a lattice of loopholes. Lastly, the summer-house was close up under the hedge; and you have just told me that it was really a thin hedge. A man standing outside it could easily see, amid a network of twigs and branches and canes, one white spot of the Colonel's coat as plain as the white of a target.

'Now, you left the geography a little vague; but it was possible to put two and two together. You said the Rock of Fortune was not really high; but you also said it could be seen dominating the garden like a mountain-peak. In other words, it was very near the end of the garden, though your walk had taken you a long way round to it. Also, it isn't likely the young lady really howled so as to be heard half a mile. She gave an ordinary involuntary cry, and yet you heard it on the shore. And among other interesting things that you told me, may I remind you that you said Harry Druce had fallen behind to light his pipe under a hedge.'
Fiennes shuddered slightly. 'You mean he drew his blade there and sent it through the hedge at the white spot. But surely it was a very odd chance and a very sudden choice. Besides, he couldn't be certain the old man's money had passed to him, and as a fact it hadn't.'

Father Brown's face became animated. 'You misunderstand the man's character,' he said, as if he himself had known the man all his life. 'A curious but not unknown type of character. If he had really known the money would come to him, I seriously believe he wouldn't have done it. He would have seen it as the dirty thing it was.'

'Isn't that rather paradoxical?' asked the other.

'This man was a gambler,' said the priest, 'and a man in disgrace for having taken risks and anticipated orders. It was probably for something pretty unscrupulous, for every imperial police is more like a Russian secret police than we like to think. But he had gone beyond the line and failed. Now, the temptation of that type of man is to do a mad thing precisely because the risk will be wonderful in retrospect. He wants to say, 'Nobody but I could have seized that chance or seen that it was then or never. What a wild and wonderful guess it was, when I put all those things together; Donald in disgrace; and the lawyer being sent for; and Herbert and I sent for at the same time - and then nothing more but the way the old man grinned at me and shook hands. Anybody would say I was mad to risk it; but that is how fortunes are made, by the man mad enough to have a little foresight.' In short, it is the vanity of guessing. It is the megalomania of the gambler. The more incongruous the coincidence, the more instantaneous the decision, the more likely he is to snatch the chance. The accident, the very triviality of the white speck and the hole in the hedge intoxicated him like a vision of the world's desire. Nobody clever enough to see such a combination of accidents could be cowardly enough not to use them! That is how the devil talks to the gambler. But the devil himself would hardly have induced that unhappy man to go down in a dull, deliberate way and kill an old uncle from whom he'd always had expectations. It would be too respectable.'

He paused a moment, and then went on with a certain quiet emphasis.

'And now try to call up the scene, even as you saw it yourself. As he stood there, dizzy with his diabolical opportunity, he looked up and saw that strange outline that might have been the image of his own tottering soul; the one great crag poised perilously on the other like a pyramid on its point, and remembered that it was called the Rock of Fortune. Can you guess how such a man at such a moment would read such a signal? I think it strung him up to action and even to vigilance. He who would be a tower must not fear to be a toppling tower. Anyhow, he acted; his next difficulty was to cover his tracks. To be found with a sword-stick, let alone a blood-stained sword-stick, would be fatal in the search that was certain to follow. If he left it anywhere, it would be found and probably traced. Even if he threw it into the sea the action might be noticed, and thought noticeable - unless indeed he could think of some more natural way of covering the action. As you know, he did think of one, and a very good one. Being the only one of you with a watch, he told you it was not yet time to return, strolled a little farther, and started the game of throwing in sticks for the retriever. But how his eyes must have rolled darkly over all that desolate sea-shore before they alighted on the dog!'

Fiennes nodded, gazing thoughtfully into space. His mind seemed to have drifted back to a less practical part of the narrative.

'It's queer,' he said, 'that the dog really was in the story after all.'

'The dog could almost have told you the story, if he could talk,' said the priest. 'All I complain of is that because he couldn't talk you made up his story for him, and made him talk with the tongues of men and angels. It's part of something I've noticed more and more in the modern world, appearing in all sorts of newspaper rumours and conversational catchwords; something that's arbitrary without being authoritative. People readily swallow the untested claims of this, that, or the other. It's drowning all your old rationalism and scepticism, it's coming in like a sea; and the name of it is superstition.' He stood up abruptly, his face heavy with a sort of frown, and went on talking almost as if he were alone. 'It's the first effect of not believing in God that you lose your common sense and can't see things as they are. Anything that anybody talks about, and says there's a good deal in it, extends itself indefinitely; Donald in disgrace; and the lawyer being sent for; and Herbert and I sent for at the same time - and then nothing more but the way the old man grinned at me and shook hands. Anybody would say I was mad to risk it; but that is how fortunes are made, by the man mad enough to have a little foresight.' In short, it is the vanity of guessing. It is the megalomania of the gambler. The more incongruous the coincidence, the more instantaneous the decision, the more likely he is to snatch the chance. The accident, the very triviality of the white speck and the hole in the hedge intoxicated him like a vision of the world's desire. Nobody clever enough to see such a combination of accidents could be cowardly enough not to use them! That is how the devil talks to the gambler. But the devil himself would hardly have induced that unhappy man to go down in a dull, deliberate way and kill an old uncle from whom he'd always had expectations. It would be too respectable.'

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'He was made Man.'

The young man got up with a little embarrassment, almost as if he had overheard a soliloquy. He called to the dog and left the room with vague but breezy farewells. But he had to call the dog twice, for the dog had remained behind quite motionless for a moment, looking up steadily at Father Brown as the wolf looked at St Francis.

**FOUR: The Miracle of Moon Crescent**

MOON CRESCENT was meant in a sense to be as romantic as its name; and the things that happened there were romantic enough in their way. At least it had been an expression of that genuine element of sentiment - historic and
almost heroic - which manages to remain side by side with commercialism in the elder cities on the eastern coast of
America. It was originally a curve of classical architecture really recalling that eighteenth - century atmosphere in
which men like Washington and Jefferson had seemed to be all the more republicans for being aristocrats. Travellers
faced with the recurrent query of what they thought of our city were understood to be specially answerable for what
they thought of our Moon Crescent. The very contrasts that confuse its original harmony were characteristic of its
survival. At one extremity or horn of the crescent its last windows looked over an enclosure like a strip of a
gentleman's park, with trees and hedges as formal as a Queen Anne garden. But immediately round the corner, the
other windows, even of the same rooms, or rather 'apartments', looked out on the blank, unsightly wall of a huge
warehouse attached to some ugly industry. The apartments of Moon Crescent itself were at that end remodelled on
the monotonous pattern of an American hotel, and rose to a height, which, though lower than the colossal
warehouse, would have been called a skyscraper in London. But the colonnade that ran round the whole frontage
upon the street had a grey and weather - stained stateliness suggesting that the ghosts of the Fathers of the Republic
might still be walking to and fro in it. The insides of the rooms, however, were as neat and new as the last New York
fittings could make them, especially at the northern end between the neat garden and the blank warehouse wall.
They were a system of very small flats, as we should say in England, each consisting of a sitting - room, bedroom,
and bathroom, as identical as the hundred cells of a hive. In one of these the celebrated Warren Wynd sat at his desk
sorting letters and scattering orders with wonderful rapidity and exactitude. He could only be compared to a tidy
whirlwind.

Warren Wynd was a very little man with loose grey hair and a pointed beard, seemingly frail but fierily active.
He had very wonderful eyes, brighter than stars and stronger than magnets, which nobody who had ever seen them
could easily forget. And indeed in his work as a reformer and regulator of many good works he had shown at least
that he had a pair of eyes in his head. All sorts of stories and even legends were told of the miraculous rapidity with
which he could form a sound judgement, especially of human character. It was said that he selected the wife who
worked with him so long in so charitable a fashion, by picking her out of a whole regiment of women in uniform
marching past at some official celebration, some said of the Girl Guides and some of the Women Police. Another
story was told of how three tramps, indistinguishable from each other in their community of filth and rags, had
presented themselves before him asking for charity. Without a moment's hesitation he had sent one of them to a
particular hospital devoted to a certain nervous disorder, had recommended the second to an inebriates' home, and
had engaged the third at a handsome salary as his own private servant, a position which he filled successfully for
years afterwards. There were, of course, the inevitable anecdotes of his prompt criticisms and curt repartees when
brought in contact with Roosevelt, with Henry Ford, and with Mrs Asquith and all other persons with whom an
American public man ought to have a historic interview, if only in the newspapers. Certainly he was not likely to be
overawed by such personages; and at the moment here in question he continued very calmly his centrifugal whirl of
papers, though the man confronting him was a personage of almost equal importance.

Silas T. Vandam, the millionaire and oil magnate, was a lean man with a long, yellow face and blue - black hair,
colours which were the less conspicuous yet somehow the more sinister because his face and figure showed dark
against the window and the white warehouse wall outside it; he was buttoned up tight in an elegant overcoat with
strips of astrakhan. The eager face and brilliant eyes of Wynd, on the other hand, were in the full light from the other
window over - looking the little garden, for his chair and - desk stood facing it; and though the face was
preoccupied, it did not seem unduly preoccupied about the millionaire. Wynd's valet or personal servant, a big,
powerful man with flat fair hair, was standing behind his master's desk holding a sheaf of letters; and Wynd's private
secretary, a neat, red - haired youth with a sharp face, had his hand already on the door handle, as if guessing some
purpose or obeying some gesture of his employer. The room was not only neat, but austere to the point of emptiness;
for Wynd, with characteristic thoroughness, had rented the whole floor above, and turned it into a loft or storeroom,
where all his other papers and possessions were stacked in boxes and corded bales.

'Give these to the floor - clerk, Wilson,' said Wynd to the servant holding the letters, 'and then get me the
pamphlet on the Minneapolis Night Clubs; you'll find it in the bundle marked 'G'. I shall want it in half an hour, but
don't disturb me till then. Well, Mr Vandam, I think your proposition sounds very promising; but I can't give a final
answer till I've seen the report. It ought to reach me to - morrow afternoon, and I'll phone you at once. I'm sorry I
can't say anything more definite just now.'

Mr Vandam seemed to feel that this was something like a polite dismissal; and his sallow, saturnine face
suggested that he found a certain irony in the fact.

'Well, I suppose I must be going,' he said.

'Very good of you to call, Mr Vandam,' said Wynd, politely; 'you will excuse my not coming out, as I've
something here I must fix at once. Fenner,' he added to the secretary, 'show Mr Vandam to his car, and don't come
back again for half an hour. I've something here I want to work out by myself; after that I shall want you.'
The three men went out into the hallway together, closing the door behind them. The big servant, Wilson, was turning down the hallway in the direction of the floor - clerk, and the other two moving in the opposite direction towards the lift; for Wynd's apartment was high up on the fourteenth floor. They had hardly gone a yard from the closed door when they became conscious that the corridor was filled with a marching and even magnificent figure. The man was very tall and broad - shouldered, his bulk being the more conspicuous for being clad in white, or a light grey that looked like it, with a very wide white panama hat and an almost equally wide fringe or halo of almost equally white hair. Set in this aureole his face was strong and handsome, like that of a Roman emperor, save that there was something more than boyish, something a little childish, about the brightness of his eyes and the beatitude of his smile. 'Mr Warren Wynd in?' he asked, in hearty tones.

'Mr Warren Wynd is engaged,' said Fenner; 'he must not be disturbed on any account. I may say I am his secretary and can take any message.'

'Mr Warren Wynd is not at home to the Pope or the Crowned Heads,' said Vandam, the oil magnate, with sour satire. 'Mr Warren Wynd is mighty particular. I went in there to hand him over a trifle of twenty thousand dollars on certain conditions, and, he told me to call again like as if I was a call - boy.'

'It's a fine thing to be a boy,' said the stranger, 'and a finer to have a call; and I've got a call he's just got to listen to. It's a call of the great good country out West, where the real American is being made while you're all snoring. Just tell him that Art Alboin of Oklahoma City has come to convert him.'

'I tell you nobody can see him,' said the red - haired secretary sharply. 'He has given orders that he is not to be disturbed for half an hour.'

'You folks down East are all against being disturbed,' said the breezy Mr Alboin, 'but I calculate there's a big breeze getting up in the West that will have to disturb you. He's been figuring out how much money must go to this and that stuffy old religion; but I tell you any scheme that leaves out the new Great Spirit movement in Texas and Oklahoma, is leaving out the religion of the future.'

'Oh; I've sized up those religions of the future,' said the millionaire, contemptuously. 'I've been through them with a tooth - comb and they're as mangy as yellow dogs. There was that woman called herself Sophia: ought to have called herself Sapphira, I reckon. Just a plum fraud. Strings tied to all the tables and tambourines. Then there were the Invisible Life bunch; said they could vanish when they liked, and they did vanish, too, and a hundred thousand of my dollars vanished with them. I knew Jupiter Jesus out in Denver; saw him for weeks on end; and he was just a common crook. So was the Patagonian Prophet; you bet he's made a bolt for Patagonia. No, I'm through with all that; from now on I only believe what I see. I believe they call it being an atheist.'

'I guess you got me wrong,' said the man from Oklahoma, almost eagerly. 'I guess I'm as much of an atheist as you are. No supernatural or superstitious stuff in our movement; just plain science. The only real right science is just health, and the only real right health is just breathing. Fill your lungs with the wide air of the prairie and you could blow all your old eastern cities into the sea. You could just puff away their biggest men like thistledown. That's what we do in the new movement out home: we breathe. We don't pray; we breathe.'

'Well, I suppose you do,' said the secretary, warily. He had a keen, intelligent face which could hardly conceal the weariness; but he had listened to the two monologues with the admirable patience and politeness (so much in contrast with the legends of impatience and insolence) with which such monologues are listened to in America.

'Nothing supernatural,' continued Alboin, 'just the great natural fact behind all the supernatural fancies. What did the Jews want with a God except to breathe into man's nostrils the breath of life? We do the breathing into our own nostrils out in Oklahoma. What's the meaning of the very word Spirit? It's just the Greek for breathing exercises. Life, progress, prophecy; it's all breath.'

'Some would allow it's all wind,' said Vandam; 'but I'm glad you've got rid of the divinity stunt, anyhow.'

The keen face of the secretary, rather pale against his red hair, showed a flicker of some odd feeling suggestive of a secret bitterness.

'I'm not glad,' he said, 'I'm just sure. You seem to like being atheists; so you may be just believing what you like to believe. But, I wish to God there were a God; and there ain't. It's just my luck.'

Without a sound or stir they all became almost creepily conscious at this moment that the group, halted outside Wynd's door, had silently grown from three figures to four. How long the fourth figure had stood there none of the earnest disputants could tell, but he had every appearance of waiting respectfully and even timidly for the opportunity to say something urgent. But to their nervous sensibility he seemed to have sprung up suddenly and silently like a mushroom. And indeed, he looked rather like a big, black mushroom, for he was quite short and his small, stumpy figure was eclipsed by his big, black clerical hat; the resemblance might have been more complete if mushrooms were in the habit of carrying umbrellas, even of a shabby and shapeless sort.

Fenner, the secretary, was conscious of a curious additional surprise at recognizing the figure of a priest; but when the priest turned up a round face under the round hat and innocently asked for Mr Warren Wynd, he gave the
regular negative answer rather more curtly than before. But the priest stood his ground.

'I do really want to see Mr Wynd,' he said. 'It seems odd, but that's exactly what I do want to do. I don't want to speak to him. I just want to see him. I just want to see if he's there to be seen.'

'Well, I tell you he's there and can't be seen,' said Fenner, with increasing annoyance. 'What do you mean by saying you want to see if he's there to be seen? Of course he's there. We all left him there five minutes ago, and we've stood outside this door ever since.'

'Well, I want to see if he's all right,' said the priest.

'Why?' demanded the secretary, in exasperation. 'Because I have a serious, I might say solemn, reason,' said the cleric, gravely, 'for doubting whether he is all right.'

'Oh, Lord!' cried Vandam, in a sort of fury; 'not more superstitions.'

'I see I shall have to give my reasons,' observed the little clerk, gravely. 'I suppose I can't expect you even to let me look through the crack of a door till I tell you the whole story. He was silent a moment as in reflection, and then went on without noticing the wondering faces around him. 'I was walking outside along the front of the colonnade when I saw a very ragged man running hard round the corner at the end of the crescent. He came pounding along the pavement towards me, revealing a great raw - boned figure and a face I knew. It was the face of a wild Irish fellow I once helped a little; I will not tell you his name. When he saw me he staggered, calling me by mine and saying, 'Saints alive, it's Father Brown; you're the only man whose face could frighten me to - day.'

'I knew he meant he'd been doing some wild thing or other, and I don't think my face frightened him much, for he was soon telling me about it. And a very strange thing it was. He asked me if I knew Warren Wynd, and I said no, though I knew he lived near the top of these flats. He said, 'That's a man who thinks he's a saint of God; but if he knew what I was saying of him he should be ready to hang himself.' And he repeated hysterically more than once, 'Yes, ready to hang himself.' I asked him if he'd done any harm to Wynd, and his answer was rather a queer one. He said: 'I took a pistol and I loaded it with neither shot nor slug, but only with a curse.' As far as I could make out, all he had done was to go down that little alley between this building and the big warehouse, with an old pistol loaded with a blank charge, and merely fire it against the wall, as if that would bring down the building. 'But as I did it,' he said, 'I cursed him with the great curse, that the justice of God should take him by the hair and the vengeance of hell by the heels, and he should be torn asunder like Judas and the world know him no more.'

'Well, it doesn't matter now what else I said to the poor, crazy fellow; he went away quieted down a little, and I went round to the back of the building to inspect. And sure enough, in the little alley at the foot of this wall there lay a rusty antiquated pistol; I know enough about pistols to know it had been loaded only with a little powder, there were the black marks of powder and smoke on the wall, and even the mark of the muzzle, but not even a dent of any bullet. He had left no trace of destruction; he had left no trace of anything, except those black marks and that black curse he had hurled into heaven. So I came back here to ask for this Warren Wynd and find out if he's all right.'

Penner the secretary laughed. 'I can soon settle that difficulty for you. I assure you he's quite all right; we left him writing at his desk only a few minutes ago. He was alone in his flat; it's a hundred feet up from the street, and so placed that no shot could have reached him, even if your friend hadn't fired blank. There's no other entrance to this place but this door, and we've been standing outside it ever since.'

'All the same,' said Father Brown, gravely, 'I should like to look in and see.'

'Well, you can't,' retorted the other. 'Good Lord, you don't tell me you think anything of the curse.'

'You forget,' said the millionaire, with a slight sneer, 'the reverend gentleman's whole business is blessings and cursings. Come, sir, if he's been cursed to hell, why don't you bless him back again? What's the good of your blessings if they can't beat an Irish larrykin's curse?'

'Does anybody believe such things now?' protested the Westener.

'Father Brown believes a good number of things, I take it,' said Vandam, whose temper was suffering from the past snub and the present bickering. 'Father Brown believes a hermit crossed a river on a crocodile conjured out of nowhere, and then he told the crocodile to die, and it sure did. Father Brown believes that some blessed saint or other died, and had his dead body turned into three dead bodies, to be served out to three parishes that were all I bent on figuring as his home - town. Father Brown believes that a saint hung his cloak on a sunbeam, and another used his for a boat to cross the Atlantic. Father Brown believes the holy donkey had six legs and the house of Loretto flew through the air. He believes in hundreds of stone virgins winking and weeping all day long. It's nothing to him to believe that a man might escape through the keyhole or vanish out of a locked room. I reckon he doesn't take much stock of the laws of nature.'

'Anyhow, I have to take stock in the laws of Warren Wynd,' said the secretary, wearily, 'and it's his rule that he's to be left alone when he says so. Wilson will tell you just the same,' for the large servant who had been sent for the pamphlet, passed placidly down the corridor even as he spoke, carrying the pamphlet, but serenely passing the door. 'He'll go and sit on the bench by the floor - clerk and twiddle his thumbs till he's wanted; but he won't go in before
then; and nor will I. I reckon we both know which side our bread is buttered, and it'd take a good many of Father Brown's saint and angels to make us forget it.'

'As for saints and angels - ' began the priest.

'It's all nonsense,' repeated Fenner. 'I don't want to say anything offensive, but that sort of thing may be very well for crypts and cloisters and all sorts of moonshiny places. But ghosts can't get through a closed door in an American hotel.'

'But men can open a door, even in an American hotel,' replied Father Brown, patiently. 'And it seems to me the simplest thing would be to open it.'

'It would be simple enough to lose me my job,' answered the secretary, 'and Warren Wynd doesn't like his secretaries so simple as that. Not simple enough to believe in the sort of fairy tales you seem to believe in.'

'Well,' said the priest gravely, 'it is true enough that I believe in a good many things that you probably don't. But it would take a considerable time to explain all the things I believe in, and all the reasons I have for thinking I'm right. It would take about two seconds to open that door and prove I am wrong.'

Something in the phrase seemed to please the more wild and restless spirit of the man from the West.

'I'll allow I'd love to prove you wrong,' said Alboin, striding suddenly past them, 'and I will.'

He threw open the door of the flat and looked in. The first glimpse showed that Warren Wynd's chair was empty. The second glance showed that his room was empty also.

Fenner, electrified with energy in his turn, dashed past the other into the apartment.

'He's in his bedroom,' he said curtly, 'he must be.'

As he disappeared into the inner chamber the other men stood in the empty outer room staring about them. The severity and simplicity of its fittings, which had already been noted, returned on them with a rigid challenge. Certainly in this room there was no question of hiding a mouse, let alone a man. There were no curtains and, what is rare in American arrangements, no cupboards. Even the desk was no more than a plain table with a shallow drawer and a tilted lid. The chairs were hard and high - backed skeletons. A moment after the secretary reappeared at the inner door, having searched the two inner rooms. A starving negation stood in his eyes, and his mouth seemed to move in a mechanical detachment from it as he said sharply: 'He didn't come out through here?'

Somehow the others did not even think it necessary to answer that negation in the negative. Their minds had come up against something like the blank wall of the warehouse that stared in at the opposite window, gradually turning from white to grey as dusk slowly descended with the advancing afternoon. Vandam walked over to the window - sill against which he had leant half an hour before and looked out of the open window. There was no pipe or fire - escape, no shelf or foothold of any kind on the sheer fall to the little by - street below, there was nothing on the similar expanse of wall that rose many stories above. There was even less variation on the other side of the street; there was nothing whatever but the wearisome expanse of whitewashed wall. He peered downwards, as if expecting to see the vanished philanthropist lying in a suicidal wreck on the path. He could see nothing but one small dark object which, though diminished by distance, might well be the pistol that the priest had found lying there. Meanwhile, Fenner had walked to the other window, which looked out from a wall equally blank and inaccessible, but looking out over a small ornamental park instead of a side street. Here a clump of trees interrupted the actual view of the ground; but they reached but a little way up the huge human cliff. Both turned back into the room and faced each other in the gathering twilight where the last silver gleams of daylight on the shiny tops of desks and tables were rapidly turning grey. As if the twilight itself irritated him, Fenner touched the switch and the scene sprang into the startling distinctness of electric light.

'As you said just now,' said Vandam grimly, 'there's no shot from down there could bit him, even if there was a shot in the gun. But even if he was hit with a bullet he wouldn't have just burst like a bubble.'

The secretary, who was paler than ever, glanced irritably at the bilious visage of the millionaire. 'What's got you started on those morbid notions? Who's talking about bullets and bubbles? Why shouldn't he be alive?'

'As you said just now,' said Vandam, 'there's no shot from down there could bit him, even if there was a shot in the gun. But even if he was hit with a bullet he wouldn't have just burst like a bubble.'

The secretary, who was paler than ever, glanced irritably at the bilious visage of the millionaire. 'What's got you started on those morbid notions? Who's talking about bullets and bubbles? Why shouldn't he be alive?'

'Why not indeed?' replied Vandam smoothly. 'If you'll tell me where he is, I'll tell you how he got there.'

After a pause the secretary muttered, rather sulkily: 'I suppose you're right. We're right up against the very thing we were talking about. It'd be a queer thing if you ever came to think there was anything in cursing. But who could have harmed Wynd shut up in here?'

Mr Alboin, of Oklahoma, had been standing rather astraddle in the middle of the room, his white, hairy halo as well as his round eyes seeming to radiate astonishment. At this point he said, abstractedly, with something of the irrelevant impudence of an enfant terrible: 'You didn't cotton to him much, did you, Mr Vandam?'

Mr Vandam's long yellow face seemed to grow longer as it grew more sinister, while he smiled and answered quietly: 'If it comes to these coincidences, it was you, I think, who said that a wind from the West would blow away out big men like thistledown.'

'I know I said it would,' said the Westerner, with candour; 'but all the same, how the devil could it?'
The silence was broken by Fenner saying with an abruptness amounting to violence: 'There's only one thing to say about this affair. It simply hasn't happened. It can't have happened.'

'Oh, yes,' said Father Brown out of the corner; 'it has happened all right.'

They all jumped; for the truth was they had all forgotten the insignificant little man who had originally induced them to open the door. And the recovery of memory went with a sharp reversal of mood; it came back to them with a rush that they had all dismissed him as a superstitious dreamer for even hinting at the very thing that had since happened before their eyes.

'Snakes!' cried the impetuous Westerner, like one speaking before he could stop himself; 'suppose there were something in it, after all!'

'I must confess,' said Fenner, frowning at the table, 'that his reverence's anticipations were apparently well founded. I don't know whether he has anything else to tell us.'

'He might possibly tell us,' said Vandam, sardonically, 'what the devil we are to do now.'

The little priest seemed to accept the position in a modest, but matter-of-fact manner. 'The only thing I can think of,' he said, 'is first to tell the authorities of this place, and then to see if there were any more traces of my man who let off the pistol. He vanished round the other end of the Crescent where the little garden is. There are seats there, and it's a favourite place for tramps.'

Direct consultations with the headquarters of the hotel, leading to indirect consultations with the authorities of the police, occupied them for a considerable time; and it was already nightfall when they went out under the long, classical curve of the colonnade. The crescent looked as cold and hollow as the moon after which it was named, and the moon itself was rising luminous but spectral behind the black tree-tops when they turned the corner by the little public garden. Night veiled much of what was merely urban and artificial about the place, and as they melted into the shadows of the trees they had a strange feeling of having suddenly travelled many hundred miles from their homes. When they had walked in silence for a little, Alboin, who had something elemental about him, suddenly exploded.

'I give up,' he cried; 'I hand in my checks. I never thought I should come to such things; but what happens when the things come to you? I beg your pardon, Father Brown; I reckon I'll just come across, so far as you and your fairy-tales are concerned. After this, it's me for the fairy-tales. Why, you said yourself, Mr. Vandam, that you're an atheist and only believe what you see. Well, what was it you did see? Or rather, what was it you didn't see?'

'I know,' said Vandam and nodded in a gloomy fashion.

'Oh, it's partly all this moon and trees that get on one's nerves,' said Fenner obstinately. 'Trees always look queer by moonlight, with their branches crawling about. Look at that -'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, standing still and peering at the moon through a tangle of trees. 'That's a very queer branch up there.'

When he spoke again he only said: 'I thought it was a broken branch.'

But this time there was a catch in his voice that unaccountably turned his hearers cold. Something that looked rather like a dead branch was certainly dependent in a limp fashion from the tree that showed dark against the moon; but it was not a dead branch. When they came close to it to see what it was it was Fenner sprang away again with a ringing oath. Then he ran in again and loosened a rope from the neck of the dingy little body dangling with drooping plumes of grey hair. Somehow he knew that the body was a dead body before he managed to take it down from the tree. A very long coil of rope was wrapped round and round the branches, and a comparatively short length of it hung from the fork of the branch to the body. A long garden tub was rolled a yard or so from under the feet, like the stool kicked away from the feet of a suicide.

'Oh, my God!' said Alboin, so that it seemed as much a prayer as an oath. 'What was it that man said about him? - 'If he knew, he would be ready to hang himself.' Wasn't that what he said, Father Brown?"'

'Yes,' said Father Brown.

'Well,' said Vandam in a hollow voice, 'I never thought to see or say such a thing. But what can one say except that the curse has worked?'

Fenner was standing with hands covering his face; and the priest laid a hand on his arm and said, gently, 'Were you very fond of him?'

The secretary dropped his hands and his white face was ghastly under the moon.

'I hated him like hell,' he said; 'and if he died by a curse it might have been mine.'

'The pressure of the priest's hand on his arm tightened; and the priest said, with an earnestness he had hardly yet shown: 'It wasn't your curse; pray be comforted.'

The police of the district had considerable difficulty in dealing with the four witnesses who were involved in the case. All of them were reputable, and even reliable people in the ordinary sense; and one of them was a person of considerable power and importance: Silas Vandam of the Oil Trust. The first police-officer who tried to express
scepticism about his story struck sparks from the steel of that magnate's mind very rapidly indeed.

'Don't you talk to me about sticking to the facts,' said the millionaire with asperity. 'I've stuck to a good many facts before you were born and a few of the facts have stuck to me. I'll give you the facts all right if you've got the sense to take 'em down correctly.'

The policeman in question was youthful and subordinate, and had a hazy idea that the millionaire was too political to be treated as an ordinary citizen; so he passed him and his companions on to a more stolid superior, one Inspector Collins, a grizzled man with a grimly comfortable way of talking; as one who was genial but would stand no nonsense.

'Well, well,' he said, looking at the three figures before him with twinkling eyes, 'this seems to be a funny sort of a tale.'

Father Brown had already gone about his daily business; but Silas Vandam had suspended even the gigantic business of the markets for an hour or so to testify to his remarkable experience. Fenner's business as secretary had ceased in a sense with his employer's life; and the great Art Alboin, having no business in New York or anywhere else, except the spreading of the Breath of Life religion or the Great Spirit, had nothing to draw him away at the moment from the immediate affair. So they stood in a row in the inspector's office, prepared to corroborate each other.

'Now I'd better tell you to start with,' said the inspector cheerfully, 'that it's no good for anybody to come to me with any miraculous stuff. I'm a practical man and a policeman, and that sort of thing is all very well for priests and parsons. This priest of yours seems to have got you all worked up about some story of a dreadful death and judgement; but I'm going to leave him and his religion out of it altogether. If Wynd came out of that room, somebody let him out. And if Wynd was found hanging on that tree, somebody hung him there.'

'Quite so,' said Fenner; 'but as out evidence is that nobody let him out, the question is how could anybody have hung him there?'

'How could anybody have a nose on his face?' asked the inspector. 'He had a nose on his face, and he had a noose round his neck. Those are facts; and, as I say, I'm a practical man and go by the facts. It can't have been done by a miracle, so it must have been done by a man.'

Alboin had been standing rather in the background; and indeed his broad figure seemed to form a natural background to the leaner and more vivacious men in front of him. His white head was bowed with a certain abstraction; but as the inspector said the last sentence, he lifted it, shaking his hoary mane in a leonine fashion, and looking dazed but awakened. He moved forward into the centre of the group, and they had a vague feeling that he was even vaster than before. They had been only too prone to take him for a fool or a mountebank; but he was not altogether wrong when he said that there was in him a certain depth of lungs and life, like a west wind stored up in its strength, which might some day puff lighter things away.

'So you're a practical man, Mr Collins,' he said, in a voice at once soft and heavy. 'It must be the second or third time you've mentioned in this little conversation that you are a practical man; so I can't be mistaken about that. And a very interesting little fact it is for anybody engaged in writing your life, letters, and table-talk, with portrait at the age of five, daguerreotype of your grandmother and views of the old home-town; and I'm sure your biographer won't forget to mention it along with the fact that you had a pug nose with a pimple on it, and were nearly too fat to walk. And as you're a practical man, perhaps you would just go on practising till you've brought Warren Wynd to life again, and found out exactly how a practical man gets through a deal door. But I think you've got it wrong. You're not a practical man. You're a practical joke; that's what you are. The Almighty was having a bit of fun with us when he thought of you.'

With a characteristic sense of drama he went sailing towards the door before the astonished inspector could reply; and no after - recriminations could rob him of a certain appearance of triumph.

'I think you were perfectly right,' said Fenner. 'If those are practical men, give me priests.'

Another attempt was made to reach an official version of the event when the authorities fully realized who were the backers of the story, and what were the implications of it. Already it had broken out in the Press in its most sensationally and even shamelessly psychic form. Interviews with Vandam on his marvellous adventure, articles about Father Brown and his mystical intuitions, soon led those who feel responsible for guiding the public, to wish to guide it into a wiser channel. Next time the inconvenient witnesses were approached in a more indirect and tactful manner. They were told, almost in an airy fashion, that Professor Vair was very much interested in such abnormal experiences; was especially interested in their own astonishing case. Professor Vair was a psychologist of great distinction; he had been known to take a detached interest in criminology; it was only some little time afterwards that they discovered that he was in any way connected with the police.

Professor Vair was a courteous gentleman, quietly dressed in pale grey clothes, with an artistic tie and a fair, pointed beard; he looked more like a landscape painter to anyone not acquainted with a certain special type of don.
He had an air not only of courtesy, but of frankness.

'Yes, yes, I know,' he said smiling; 'I can guess what you must have gone through. The police do not shine in inquiries of a psychic sort, do they? Of course, dear old Collins said he only wanted the facts. What an absurd blunder! In a case of this kind we emphatically do not only want the facts. It is even more essential to have the fancies.'

'Do you mean,' asked Vandam gravely, 'that all that we thought facts were merely fancies?'

'Not at all,' said the professor; 'I only mean that the police are stupid in thinking they can leave out the psychological element in these things. Well, of course, the psychological element is everything in everything, though it is only just beginning to be understood. To begin with, take the element called personality. Now I have heard of this priest, Father Brown, before; and he is one of the most remarkable men of our time. Men of that sort carry a sort of atmosphere with them; and nobody knows how much his nerves and even his very senses are affected by it for the time being. People are hypnotized - yes, hypnotized; for hypnotism, like everything else, is a matter of degree; it enters slightly into all daily conversation: it is not necessarily conducted by a man in evening dress on a platform in a public hall. Father Brown's religion has always understood the psychology of atmospheres, and knows how to appeal to everything simultaneously; even, for instance, to the sense of smell. It understands those curious effects produced by music on animals and human beings; it can -'

'Hang it,' protested Fenner, 'you don't think he walked down the corridor carrying a church organ?'

'He knows better than to do that,' said Professor Vair laughing. 'He knows how to concentrate the essence of all these spiritual sounds and sights, and even smells, in a few restrained gestures; in an art or school of manners. He could contrive so to concentrate your minds on the supernatural by his mere presence, that natural things slipped off your minds to left and right unnoticed. Now you know,' he proceeded with a return to cheerful good sense, 'that the more we study it the more queer the whole question of human evidence becomes. There is not one man in twenty who really observes things at all. There is not one in a hundred who observes them with real precision; certainly not one in a hundred who can first observe, then remember, and finally describe. Scientific experiments have been made again and again showing that men under strain have thought a door was shut when it was open, or open when it was shut. Men have differed about the number of doors or windows in a wall just in front of them. They have suffered optical illusions in broad daylight. They have done this even without the hypnotic effect of personality; but here we have a very powerful and persuasive personality bent upon fixing only one picture on your minds; the picture of the wild Irish rebel shaking his pistol at the sky and firing that vain volley, whose echoes were the thunders of heaven.'

'Professor,' cried Fenner, 'I'd swear on my deathbed that door never opened.'

'Recent experiments,' went on the professor, quietly, 'have suggested that our consciousness is not continuous, but is a succession of very rapid impressions like a cinema; it is possible that somebody or something may, so to speak, slip in or out between the scenes. It acts only in the instant while the curtain is down. Probably the patter of conjurors and all forms of sleight of hand depend on what we may call these black flashes of blindness between the flashes of sight. Now this priest and preacher of transcendental notions had filled you with a transcendental imagery; the image of the Celt like a Titan shaking the tower with his curse. Probably he accompanied it with some slight but compelling gesture, pointing your eyes and minds in the direction of the unknown destroyer below. Or perhaps something else happened, or somebody else passed by.'

'Wilson, the servant,' grunted Alboin, 'went down the hallway to wait on the bench, but I guess he didn't distract us much.'

'You never know how much,' replied Vair; 'it might have been that or more likely your eyes following some gesture of the priest as he told his tale of magic. It was in one of those black flashes that Mr Warren Wynd slipped out of his door and went to his death. That is the most probable explanation. It is an illustration of the new discovery. The mind is not a continuous line, but rather a dotted line.'

'Very dotted,' said Fenner feebly. 'Not to say dotty.'

'You don't really believe,' asked Vair, 'that your employer was shut up in a room like a box?'

'It's better than believing that I ought to be shut up in a room like a padded cell,' answered Fenner. 'That's what I complain of in your suggestions, professor. I'd as soon believe in a priest who believes in a miracle, as disbelieve in any man having any right to believe in a fact. The priest tells me that a man can appeal to a God I know nothing about to avenge him by the laws of some higher justice that I know nothing about. There's nothing for me to say except that I know nothing about it. But, at least, if the poor Paddy's prayer and pistol could be heard in a higher world, that higher world might act in some way that seems odd to us. But you ask me to disbelieve the facts of this world as they appear to my own five wits. According to you, a whole procession of Irishmen carrying blunderbusses may have walked through this room while we were talking, so long as they took care to tread on the blind spots in our minds. Miracles of the monkish sort, like materializing a crocodile or hanging a cloak on a sunbeam, seem quite
sane compared to you.'

'Oh, well,' said Professor Vair, rather curtly, 'if you are resolved to believe in your priest and his miraculous Irishman I can say no more. I'm afraid you have not had an opportunity of studying psychology.'

'No,' said Fenner dryly; 'but I've had an opportunity of studying psychologists.'

And, bowing politely, he led his deputation out of the room and did not speak till he got into the street; then he addressed them rather explosively.

'Raving lunatics!' cried Fenner in a fume. 'What the devil do they think is to happen to the world if nobody knows whether he's seen anything or not? I wish I'd blown his silly head off with a blank charge, and then explained that I did it in a blind flash. Father Brown's miracle may be miraculous or no, but he said it would happen and it did happen. All these blasted cranks can do is to see a thing happen and then say it didn't. Look here, I think we owe it to the padre to testify to his little demonstration. We're all sane, solid men who never believed in anything. We weren't drunk. We weren't devout. It simply happened just as he said it would.'

'I quite agree,' said the millionaire. 'It may be the beginning of mighty big things in the spiritual line; but anyhow, the man who's in the spiritual line himself, Father Brown, has certainly scored over this business.'

A few days afterwards Father Brown received a very polite note signed Silas T. Vandam, and asking him if he would attend at a stated hour at the apartment which was the scene of the disappearance, in order to take steps for the establishment of that marvellous occurrence. The occurrence itself had already begun to break out in the newspapers, and was being taken up everywhere by the enthusiasts of occultism. Father Brown saw the flaring posters inscribed 'Suicide of Vanishing Man', and 'Man's Curse Hangs Philanthropist', as he passed towards Moon Crescent and mounted the steps on the way to the elevator. He found the little group much as he left it, Vandam, Alboin, and the secretary; but there was an entirely new respectfulness and even reverence in their tone towards himself. They were standing by Wynd's desk, on which lay a large paper and writing materials; they turned to greet him.

'Father Brown,' said the spokesman, who was the white-haired Westerner, somewhat sobered with his responsibility, 'we asked you here in the first place to offer our apologies and our thanks. We recognize that it was you that spotted the spiritual manifestation from the first. We were hard-shell sceptics, all of us; but we realize now that a man must break that shell to get at the great things behind the world. You stand for those things; you stand for the super-normal explanation of things; and we have to hand it to you. And in the second place, we feel that this document would not be complete without your signature. We are notifying the exact facts to the Psychical Research Society, because the newspaper accounts are not what you might call exact. We've stated how the curse was spoken out in the street; how the man was sealed up here in a room like a box; how the curse dissolved him straight into thin air, and in some unthinkable way materialized him as a suicide hoisted on a gallows. That's all we can say about it; but all that we know, and have seen with our own eyes. And as you were the first to believe in the miracle, we all feel that you ought to be the first to sign.'

'No, really,' said Father Brown, in embarrassment. 'I don't think I should like to do that.'

'You mean you'd rather not sign first?'

'I mean I'd rather not sign at all,' said Father Brown, modestly. 'You see, it doesn't quite do for a man in my position to joke about miracles.'

'But it was you who said it was a miracle,' said Alboin, staring.

'I'm so sorry,' said Father Brown; 'I'm afraid there's some mistake. I don't think I ever said it was a miracle. All I said was that it might happen. What you said was that it couldn't happen, because it would be a miracle if it did. And then it did. And so you said it was a miracle. But I never said a word about miracles or magic, or anything of the sort from beginning to end.'

'But I thought you believed in miracles,' broke out the secretary.

'Yes,' answered Father Brown, 'I believe in miracles. I believe in man - eating tigers, but I don't see them running about everywhere. If I want any miracles, I know where to get them.'

'I can't understand your taking this line, Father Brown,' said Vandam, earnestly. 'It seems so narrow; and you don't look narrow to me, though you are a parson. Don't you see, a miracle like this will knock all materialism endways? It will just tell the whole world in big print that spiritual powers can work and do work. You'll be serving religion as no parson ever served it yet.'

The priest had stiffened a little and seemed in some strange way clothed with unconscious and impersonal dignity, for all his stumpy figure. 'Well,' he said, 'you wouldn't suggest I should serve religion by what I know to be a lie? I don't know precisely what you mean by the phrase; and, to be quite candid, I'm not sure you do. Lying may be serving religion; I'm sure it's not serving God. And since you are harping so insistently on what I believe, wouldn't it be as well if you had some sort of notion of what it is?'

'I don't think I quite understand,' observed the millionaire, curiously.
'I don't think you do,' said Father Brown, with simplicity. 'You say this thing was done by spiritual powers. What spiritual powers? You don't think the holy angels took him and hung him on a garden tree, do you? And as for the unholy angels - no, no, no. The men who did this did a wicked thing, but they went no further than their own wickedness; they weren't wicked enough to be dealing with spiritual powers. I know something about Satanism, for my sins; I've been forced to know. I know what it is, what it practically always is. It's proud and it's sly. It likes to be superior; it loves to horrify the innocent with things half understood, to make children's flesh creep. That's why it's so fond of mysteries and initiations and secret societies and all the rest of it. Its eyes are turned inwards, and however grand and grave it may look, it's always hiding a small, mad smile.' He shuddered suddenly, as if caught in an icy draught of air. 'Never mind about them; they've got nothing to do with this, believe me. Do you think that poor, wild Irishman of mine, who ran raving down the street, who blurted out half of it when he first saw my face, and ran away for fear he should blurt out more, do you think Satan confides any secrets to him? I admit he joined in a plot, probably in a plot with two other men worse than himself; but for all that, he was just in an everlasting rage when he rushed down the lane and let off his pistol and his curse.'

'But what on earth does all this mean?' demanded Vandam. 'Letting off a toy pistol and a twopenny curse wouldn't do what was done, except by a miracle. It wouldn't make Wynd disappear like a fairy. It wouldn't make him reappear a quarter of a mile away with a rope round his neck.'

'No,' said Father Brown sharply; 'but what would it do?'

'And still I don't follow you,' said the millionaire gravely.

'I say, what would it do?' repeated the priest; showing, for the first time, a sort of animation verging on annoyance. 'You keep on repeating that a blank pistol - shot wouldn't do this and wouldn't do that; that if that was all, the murder wouldn't happen or the miracle wouldn't happen. It doesn't seem to occur to you to ask what would happen. What would happen to you if a lunatic let off a firearm without rhyme or reason right under your window? What's the very first thing that would happen?'

Vandam looked thoughtful. 'I guess I should look out of the window,' he said.

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'you'd look out of the window. That's the whole story. It's a sad story, but it's finished now; and there were extenuating circumstances.'

'Why should looking out of the window hurt him?' asked Alboin. 'He didn't fall out, or he'd have been found in the lane.'

'No,' said Father Brown, in a low voice. 'He didn't fall. He rose.'

There was something in his voice like the groan of a gong, a note of doom, but otherwise he went on steadily: 'He rose, but not on wings; not on the wings of any holy or unholy angels. He rose at the end of a rope, exactly as you saw him in the garden; a noose dropped over his head the moment it was poked out of the window. Don't you remember Wilson, that big servant of his, a man of huge strength, while Wynd was the lightest of little shrimps? Didn't Wilson go to the floor above to get a pamphlet, to a room full of luggage corded in coils and coils of rope? Has Wilson been seen since that day? I fancy not.'

'Do you mean,' asked the secretary, 'that Wilson whisked him clean out of his own window like a trout on a line?'

'Yes,' said the other, 'and let him down again out of the other window into the park, where the third accomplice hooked him on to a tree. Remember the lane was always empty; remember the wall opposite was quite blank; remember it was all over in five minutes after the Irishman gave the signal with the pistol. There were three of them in it of course; and I wonder whether you can all guess who they were.'

They were all three staring at the plain, square window and the blank, white wall beyond; and nobody answered.

'By the way,' went on Father Brown, 'don't I blame you for jumping to preternatural conclusions. The reason's very simple, really. You all swore you were hard-shelled materialists; and as a matter of fact you were all balanced on the very edge of belief - of belief in almost anything. There are thousands balanced on it today; but it's a sharp, uncomfortable edge to sit on. You won't rest till you believe something; that's why Mr Vandam went through new religions with a toothcomb, and Mr Alboin quotes Scripture for his religion of breathing exercises, and Mr Fenner grumbles at the very God he denies. That's where you all split; it's natural to believe in the supernatural. It never feels natural to accept only natural things. But though it wanted only a touch to tip you into preternaturalism about these things, these things really were only natural things. They were not only natural, they were almost unnaturally simple. I suppose there never was quite so simple a story as this.'

Fenner laughed and then looked puzzled. 'I don't understand one thing,' he said. 'If it was Wilson, how did Wynd come to have a man like that on such intimate terms? How did he come to be killed by a man he'd seen every day for years? He was famous as being a judge of men.'

Father Brown thumped his umbrella on the ground with an emphasis he rarely showed.

'Yes,' he said, almost fiercely; 'that was how he came to be killed. He was killed for just that. He was killed for being a judge of men.'
They all stared at him, but he went on, almost as if they were not there.

'What is any man that he should be a judge of men?' he demanded. 'These three were the tramps that once stood before him and were dismissed rapidly right and left to one place or another; as if for them there were no cloak of courtesy, no stages of intimacy, no free - will in friendship. And twenty years has not exhausted the indignation born of that unfathomable insult in that moment when he dared to know them at a glance.'

'Yes,' said the secretary; 'I understand ... and I understand how it is that you understand - all sorts of things.'

'Well, I'm blamed if I understand,' cried the breezy Western gentleman boisterously. 'Your Wilson and your Irishman seem to be just a couple of cut - throat murderers who killed their benefactor. I've no use for a black and bloody assassin of that sort, in my morality, whether it's religion or not.'

'He was a black and bloody assassin, no doubt,' said Fenner quietly. 'I'm not defending him; but I suppose it's Father Brown's business to pray for all men, even for a man like -'

'Yes,' assented Father Brown, 'it's my business to pray for all men, even for a man like Warren Wynd.'

**FIVE: The Curse of the Golden Cross**

Six people sat around a small table, seeming almost as incongruous and accidental as if they had been shipwrecked separately on the same small desert island. At least the sea surrounded them; for in one sense their island was enclosed in another island, a large and flying island like Laputa. For the little table was one of many little tables dotted about in the dining saloon of that monstrous ship the Moravia, speeding through the night and the everlasting emptiness of the Atlantic. The little company had nothing in common except that all were travelling from America to England. Two of them at least might be called celebrities; others might be called obscure, and in one or two cases even dubious.

The first was the famous Professor Smaill, an authority on certain archaeological studies touching the later Byzantine Empire. His lectures, delivered in an American University, were accepted as of the first authority even in the most authoritative seats of learning in Europe. His literary works were so steeped in a mellow and imaginative sympathy with the European past, that it often gave strangers a start to hear him speak with an American accent. Yet he was, in his way, very American; he had long fair hair brushed back from a big square forehead, long straight features and a curious mixture of preoccupation with a poise of potential swiftness, like a lion pondering absent - mindedly on his next leap.

There was only one lady in the group; and she was (as the journalists often said of her) a host in herself; being quite prepared to play hostess, not to say empress, at that or any other table. She was Lady Diana Wales, the celebrated lady traveller in tropical and other countries; but there was nothing rugged or masculine about her appearance at dinner. She was herself handsome in an almost tropical fashion, with a mass of hot and heavy red hair; she was dressed in what the journalists call a daring fashion, but her face was intelligent and her eyes had that bright appearance which belongs to the eyes of ladies who ask questions at political meetings.

The other four figures seemed at first like shadows in this shining presence; but they showed differences on a close view. One of them was a young man entered on the ship's register as Paul T. Tarrant. He was an American type which might be more truly called an American antitype. Every nation probably has an antitype; a sort of extreme exception that proves the national rule. Americans really respect work, rather as Europeans respect war. There is a halo of heroism about it; and he who shrinks from it is less than a man. The antitype is evident through being exceedingly rare. He is the dandy or dude: the wealthy waster who makes a weak villain for so many American novels. Paul Tarrant seemed to have nothing whatever to do but change his clothes, which he did about six times a day; passing into paler or richer shades of his suit of exquisite light grey, like the delicate silver changes of the twilight. Unlike most Americans, he cultivated very carefully a short, curly beard; and unlike most dandies, even of his own type, he seemed rather sulky than showy. Perhaps there was something almost Byronic about his silence and his gloom.

The next two travellers were naturally classed together; merely because they were both English lecturers returning from an American tour. One of them was described as Leonard Smyth, apparently a minor poet, but something of a major journalist; long - headed, light - haired, perfectly dressed, and perfectly capable of looking after himself. The other was a rather comic contrast, being short and broad, with a black, walrus moustache, and as taciturn as the other was talkative. But as he had been both charged with robbing and praised for rescuing a Roumanian Princess threatened by a jaguar in his travelling menagerie, and had thus figured in a fashionable case, it was naturally felt that his views on God, progress, his own early life, and the future of Anglo - American relations would be of great interest and value to the inhabitants of Minneapolis and Omaha. The sixth and most insignificant figure was that of a little English priest going by the name of Brown. He listened to the conversation with respectful attention, and he was at that moment forming the impression that there was one rather curious thing about it.

'I suppose those Byzantine studies of yours, Professor,' Leonard Smyth was saying, 'would throw some light on this story of a tomb found somewhere on the south coast; near Brighton, isn't it? Brighton's a long way from
Byzantium, of course. But I read something about the style of burying or embalming or something being supposed to be Byzantine.'

'Byzantine studies certainly have to reach a long way,' replied the Professor dryly. 'They talk about specialists; but I think the hardest thing on earth is to specialize. In this case, for instance: how can a man know anything about Byzantium till he knows everything about Rome before it and about Islam after it? Most Arab arts were old Byzantine arts. Why, take algebra - '

'But I won't take algebra,' cried the lady decisively. 'I never did, and I never do. But I'm awfully interested in embalming. I was with Gatton, you know, when he opened the Babylonian tombs. Ever since then I found mummies and preserved bodies all that perfectly thrilling. Do tell us about this one.'

'Gatton was an interesting man,' said the Professor. 'They were an interesting family. That brother of his who went into Parliament was much more than an ordinary politician. I never understood the Fascisti till he made that speech about Italy.'

'Well, we're not going to Italy on this trip,' said Lady Diana persistently, 'and I believe you're going to that little place where they've found the tomb. In Sussex, isn't it?'

'Sussex is pretty large, as these little English sections go,' replied the Professor. 'One might wander about in it for a goodish time; and it's a good place to wander in. It's wonderful how large those low hills seem when you're on them.'

There was an abrupt accidental silence; and then the lady said, 'Oh, I'm going on deck,' and rose, the men rising with her. But the Professor lingered and the little priest was the last to leave the table, carefully folding up his napkin. And as they were thus left alone together the Professor said suddenly to his companion:

'What would you say was the point of that little talk?'

'Well,' said Father Brown, smiling, 'since you ask me, there was something that amused me a little. I may be wrong; but it seemed to me that the company made three attempts to get you to talk about an embalmed body said to be found in Sussex. And you, on your side, very courteously offered to talk - first about algebra, and then about the Fascisti, and then about the landscape of the Downs.'

'In short,' replied the Professor, 'you thought I was ready to talk about any subject but that one. You were quite right.'

The Professor was silent for a little time, looking down at the tablecloth; then he looked up and spoke with that swift impulsiveness that suggested the lion's leap.

'See here. Father Brown,' he said, 'I consider you about wisest and whitest man I ever met.'

Father Brown was very English. He had all the normal nation helplessness about what to do with a serious and sincere compliment suddenly handed to him to his face in the American manner. His reply was a meaningless murmur; and it was the Professor who proceeded, with the same staccato earnestness: 'You see, up to a point it's all simple enough. A Christian tomb of the Dark Ages, apparently that of a bishop, has been found under a little church at Dulham on the Sussex coast. The Vicar happens to be a good bit of an archaeologist himself and has been able to find a good deal more than I know yet. There was a rumour of the corpse being embalmed in a way peculiar to Greeks and Egyptians but unknown in the West, especially at that date. So Mr Walters (that is the Vicar) naturally wonders about Byzantine influences. But he also mentions something else, that is of even more personal interest to me.'

His long grave face seemed to grow even longer and graver as he frowned down at the tablecloth. His long finger seemed to be tracing patterns on it like the plans of dead cities and their temples and tombs.

'So I'm going to tell you, and nobody else, why it is I have to be careful about mentioning that matter in mixed company; and why, the more eager they are to talk about it, the more cautious I have to be. It is also stated that in the coffin is a chain with a cross, common enough to look at, but with a certain secret symbol on the back found on only one other cross in the world. It is from the arcana of the very earliest Church, and is supposed to indicate St Peter setting up his See at Antioch before he came to Rome. Anyhow, I believe there is but one other like it, and it belongs to me. I hear there is some story about a curse on it; but I take no notice of that. But whether or no there is a curse, there really is, in one sense, a conspiracy; though the conspiracy should only consist of one man.'

'Of one man?' repeated Father Brown almost mechanically.

'Of one madman, for all I know,' said Professor Smaill. 'It's a long story and in some ways a silly one.'

He paused again, tracing plans like architectural drawings with his finger on the cloth, and then resumed: 'Perhaps I had better tell you about it from the beginning, in case you see some little point in the story that is meaningless to me. It began years and years ago, when I was conducting some investigations on my own account in the antiquities of Crete and the Greek islands. I did a great deal of it practically single - handed; sometimes with the most rude and temporary help from the inhabitants of the place, and sometimes literally alone. It was under the latter circumstances that I found a maze of subterranean passages which led at last to a heap of rich refuse, broken
perfection that a Chinese craftsman or an Indian embroiderer gives to the artistic work of a lifetime. Yet he was no

one with the certainty of success, with every detail developed and every danger warded off, with the sort of artistic

loaded revolver, and that he ran as much risk as I. But he told me, equally calmly, that he would plan my murder

buried alive with no more passion or melodrama than if we had been sitting in two armchairs at a club. But he had

faceless, nameless and yet calling me by my name, had talked to me in those crypts and cracks where we were

grass stirred with a whisper of flight nor the shadow of a shadow of man.

on a sea of stainless blue, and the sun shone steadily on utter loneliness and silence; and there was not a blade of

mountain like a marble terrace, varied only with a green vegetation that seemed somehow more tropical than the

disappeared again into the underworld of the caves. I only know that I came out on the lonely steps of a great

openings and cracks and chasms, and it would not have been difficult for him to have somehow darted back and

could not see in what fashion he vanished into the light of day. But the mouth of the labyrinth was full of many

conversation with I know not whom, which lasted all the way to the first white gleam of daylight, and even there I

illuminated by my small electric torch was always as empty as an empty room. Under these conditions I had a

always at some such angle of the crooked path that it paused and spoke. The little space in front of me that could be

stopped an instant too late; I called out a question; and my cry was answered; but the voice was not my own.

the material reverberation of a sound. I stopped again, and the steps stopped also; but I could have sworn they

my heart stopped, too; for my own feet had halted, but the echo went marching on.

caught sight of the symbolical shape scrawled on the wall of rock. I stopped, and at the same instant it seemed as if

his loneliness. I had got used to the effects of this echo and had not noticed it much for some time past, when I

flapping or clapping behind or in front, so that it is almost impossible for the man who is really lonely to believe in

fish, dumb and dwelling in a fallen world of twilight and silence, dropped far below the feet of men and moving in

dark and twilight and a soundless world.

I ran forward, and it seemed as if the ghostly footsteps ran also, but not with that exact imitation which marks

the material reverberation of a sound. I stopped again, and the steps stopped also; but I could have sworn they

stopped an instant too late; I called out a question; and my cry was answered; but the voice was not my own.

It came round the corner of a rock just in front of me, and throughout that uncanny chase I noticed that it was

always at some such angle of the crooked path that it paused and spoke. The little space in front of me that could be

illuminated by my small electric torch was always as empty as an empty room. Under these conditions I had a

conversation with I know not whom, which lasted all the way to the first white gleam of daylight, and even there I

could not see in what fashion he vanished into the light of day. But the mouth of the labyrinth was full of many

openings and cracks and chasms, and it would not have been difficult for him to have somehow darted back and

disappeared again into the underworld of the caves. I only know that I came out on the lonely steps of a great

mountain like a marble terrace, varied only with a green vegetation that seemed somehow more tropical than the

purity of the rock, like the Oriental invasion that has spread sporadically over the fall of classic Hellas. I looked out

on a sea of stainless blue, and the sun shone steadily on utter loneliness and silence; and there was not a blade of

grass stirred with a whisper of flight nor the shadow of a shadow of man.

It had been a terrible conversation; so intimate and so individual and in a sense so casual. This being, bodiless,

faceless, nameless and yet calling me by my name, had talked to me in those crypts and cracks where we were

buried alive with no more passion or melodrama than if we had been sitting in two armchairs at a club. But he had

told me also that he would unquestionably kill me or any other man who came into the possession of the cross with

the mark of the fish. He told me frankly he was not fool enough to attack me there in the labyrinth, knowing I had a

loaded revolver, and that he ran as much risk as I. But he told me, equally calmly, that he would plan my murder

with the certainty of success, with every detail developed and every danger warded off, with the sort of artistic

perfection that a Chinese craftsman or an Indian embroiderer gives to the artistic work of a life-time. Yet he was no
Oriental; I am certain he was a white man. I suspect that he was a countryman of my own.

'Since then I have received from time to time signs and symbols and queer impersonal messages that have made me certain, at least, that the man is a maniac he is a monomaniac. He is always telling me, in this airy and detached way, that the preparations for my death and burial are proceeding satisfactorily; and that the only way in which I can prevent their being crowned with a comfortable success is to give up the relic in my possession - the unique cross that I found in the cavern. He does not seem to have any religious sentiment or fanaticism on the point; he seems to have no passion but the passion of a collector of curiosities. That is one of the things that makes me feel sure he is a man of the West and not of the East. But this particular curiosity seems to have driven him quite crazy.

'And then came this report, as yet unsubstantiated, about the duplicate relic found on an embalmed body in a Sussex tomb. If he had been a maniac before, this news turned him into a demoniac possessed of seven devils. That there should be one of them belonging to another man was bad enough, but that there should be two of them and neither belonging to him was a torture not to be borne. His mad messages began to come thick and fast like showers of poisoned arrows, and each cried out more confidently than the last that death would strike me at the moment when I stretched out my unworthy hand towards the cross in the tomb.

'You will never know me,' he wrote, 'you will never say my name; you will never see my face; you will die, and never know who has killed you. I may be in any form among those about you; but I shall be in that alone at which you have forgotten to look.'

'From those threats I deduce that he is quite likely to shadow me on this expedition; and try to steal the relic or do me some mischief for possessing it. But as I never saw the man in my life, he may be almost any man I meet. Logically speaking, he may be any of the waiters who wait on me at table. He may be any of the passengers who sit with me at table.'

'He may be me,' said Father Brown, with cheerful contempt for grammar.

'He may be anybody else,' answered Smaill seriously. 'That is what I meant by what I said just now. You are the only man I feel sure is not the enemy.'

Father Brown again looked embarrassed; then he smiled and said: 'Well, oddly enough, I'm not. What we have to consider is any chance of finding out if he really is here before he - before he makes himself unpleasant.'

'There is one chance of finding out, I think,' remarked the Professor rather grimly. 'When we get to Southampton I shall take a car at once along the coast; I should be glad if you would come with me, but in the ordinary sense, of course, our little party will break up. If any one of them turns up again in that little churchyard on the Sussex coast, we shall know who he really is.'

The Professor's programme was duly carried out, at least to the extent of the car and its cargo in the form of Father Brown. They coasted along the road with the sea on one side and the hills of Hampshire and Sussex on the other; nor was there visible to the eye any shadow of pursuit. As they approached the village of Dulham only one man crossed their path who had any connexion with the matter in hand; a journalist who had just visited the church and been courteously escorted by the vicar through the new excavated chapel; but his remarks and notes seemed to be of the ordinary newspaper sort. But Professor Smaill was perhaps a little fanciful, and could not dismiss the sense of something odd and discouraging in the attitude and appearance of the man, who was tall and shabby, hook-nosed and hollow-eyed, with moustaches that drooped with depression. He seemed anything but enlivened by his late experiment as a sightseer; indeed, he seemed to be striding as fast as possible from the sight, when they stopped him with a question.

'It's all about a curse,' he said; 'a curse on the place, according to the guide - book or the parson, or the oldest inhabitant or whoever is the authority; and really, it feels jolly like it. Curse or curse, I'm glad to have got out of it.'

'Do you believe in curses?' asked Smaill curiously.

'I don't believe in anything; I'm a journalist,' answered the melancholy being - 'Boon, of the Daily Wire. But there's a some - thing creepy about that crypt; and I'll never deny I felt a chill.' And he strode on towards the railway station with a further accelerated pace.

'Looks like a raven or a crow, that fellow,' observed Smaill as they turned towards the churchyard. 'What is it they say about a bird of ill omen?'

They entered the churchyard slowly, the eyes of the American antiquary lingering luxuriantly over the isolated roof of the lynch-gate and the large unfathomable black growth of the yew looking like night itself defying the broad daylight. The path climbed up amid heaving levels of turf in which the gravestones were tilted at all angles like stone rafts tossed on a green sea, till it came to the ridge beyond which the great sea itself ran like an iron bar, with pale lights in it like steel. Almost at their feet the tough rank grass turned into a tuft of sea - holly, and outlined darkly against the steely sea, stood a motionless figure. But for its dark - grey clothing it might almost have been the statue on some sepulchral monument. But Father Brown instantly recognized something in the elegant stoop of the shoulders and the rather sullen outward
thrust of the short beard.

'Gee!' exclaimed the professor of archaeology; 'it's that man Tarrant, if you call him a man. Did you think, when I spoke on the boat, that I should ever get so quick an answer to my question?'

'I thought you might get too many answers to it,' answered Father Brown.

'Why, how do you mean?' inquired the Professor, darting a look at him over his shoulder.

'I mean,' answered the other mildly, 'that I thought I heard voices behind the yew - tree. I don't think Mr Tarrant is so solitary as he looks; I might even venture to say, so solitary as he likes to look.'

Even as Tarrant turned slowly round in his moody manner, the confirmation came. Another voice, high and rather hard, but none the less feminine, was saying with experienced raillery: 'And how was I to know he would be here?' It was borne in upon Professor Smaill that this gay observation was not addressed to him; so he was forced to conclude in some bewilderment, that yet a third person was present. As Lady Diana Wales came out, radiant and resolute as ever, from the shadow of the yew, he noted grimly that she had a living shadow of her own. The lean dapper figure of Leonard Smyth, that insinuating man of letters, appeared immediately behind her own flamboyant form, smiling, his head a little on one side like a dog's.

'Snakes!' muttered Smaill; 'why, they're all here! Or all except that little showman with the walrus whiskers.'

He heard Father Brown laughing softly beside him; and indeed the situation was becoming something more than laughable. It seemed to be turning topsy - turvy and tumbling about their ears like a pantomime trick; for even while the Professor had been speaking, his words had received the most comical contradiction. The round head with the grotesque black crescent of moustache had appeared suddenly and seemingly out of a hole in the ground. An instant afterwards they realized that the hole was in fact a very large hole, leading to a ladder which descended into the bowels of the earth; that it was in fact the entrance to the subterranean scene they had come to visit. The little man had been the first to find the entrance and had already descended a rung or two of the ladder before he put his head out again to address his fellow - travellers. He looked like some particularly preposterous Grave - digger in a burlesque of Hamlet. He only said thickly behind his thick moustaches, 'It is down here.' But it came to the rest of the company with a start of realization that, though they had sat opposite him at meal - times for a week, they had hardly ever heard him speak before; and that though he was supposed to be an English lecturer, he spoke with a rather occult foreign accent.

'You see, my dear Professor,' cried Lady Diana with trenchant cheerfulness, 'your Byzantine mummy was simply too exciting to be missed. I simply had to come along and see it; and I'm sure the gentlemen felt just the same. Now you must tell us all about it.'

'I do not know all about it,' said the Professor gravely, not to say grimly, 'In some respects I don't even know what it's all about. It certainly seems odd that we should have all met again so soon, but I suppose there are no limits to the modern thirst for information. But if we are all to visit the place it must be done in a responsible way and, if you will forgive me, under responsible leadership. We must notify whoever is in charge of the excavations; we shall probably at least have to put our names in a book.'

Something rather like a wrangle followed on this collision between the impatience of the lady and the suspicions of the archaeologist; but the latter's insistence on the official rights of the Vicar and the local investigation ultimately prevailed; the little man with the moustaches came reluctantly out of his grave again and silently acquiesced in a less impetuous descent. Fortunately, the clergyman himself appeared at this stage - a grey - haired, good - looking gentleman with a droop accentuated by doublet eyeglasses; and while rapidly establishing sympathetic relations with the Professor as a fellow - antiquarian, he did not seem to regard his rather motley group of companions with anything more hostile than amusement.

'I hope you are none of you superstitious,' he said pleasedly. 'I ought to tell you, to start with, that there are supposed to be all sorts of bad omens and curses hanging over our devoted heads in this business. I have just been deciphering a Latin inscription which was found over the entrance to the chapel; and it would seem that there are no less than three curses involved; a curse for entering the sealed chamber, a double curse for opening the coffin, and a triple and most terrible curse for touching the gold relic found inside it. The two first maledictions I have already incurred myself;' he added with a smile; 'but I fear that even you will have to incur the first and mildest of them if you are to see anything at all. According to the story, the curses descend in a rather lingering fashion, at long intervals and on later occasions. I don't know whether that is any comfort to you.' And the Reverend Mr Walters smiled once more in his drooping and benevolent manner.

'Story,' repeated Professor Smaill, 'why, what story is that?'

'It is rather a long story and varies, like other local legends,' answered the Vicar. 'But it is undoubtedly contemporary with the time of the tomb; and the substance of it is embodied in the inscription and is roughly this: Guy de Gisors, a lord of the manor here early in the thirteenth century, had set his heart on a beautiful black horse in the possession of an envoy from Genoa, which that practical merchant prince would not sell except for a huge price.
Guy was driven by avarice to the crime of pillaging the shrine and, according to one story, even killing the bishop, who was then resident there. Anyhow, the bishop uttered a curse which was to fall on anybody who should continue to withhold the gold cross from its resting-place in his tomb, or should take steps to disturb it when it had returned there. The feudal lord raised the money for the horse by selling the gold relic to a goldsmith in the town; but on the first day he mounted the horse the animal reared and threw him in front of the church porch, breaking his neck. Meanwhile the goldsmith, hitherto wealthy and prosperous, was ruined by a series of inexplicable accidents, and fell into the power of a Jew money-lender living in the manor. Eventually the unfortunate goldsmith, faced with nothing but starvation, hanged himself on an apple-tree. The gold cross with all his other goods, his house, shop, and tools, had long ago passed into the possession of the money-lender. Meanwhile, the son and heir of the feudal lord, shocked by the judgement on his blasphemous sire, had become a religious devotee in the dark and stern spirit of those times, and conceived it his duty to persecute all heresy and unbelief among his vassals. Thus the Jew, in his turn, who had been cynically tolerated by the father, was ruthlessly burnt by order of the son; so that he, in his turn, suffered for the possession of the relic; and after these three judgements, it was returned to the bishop’s tomb; since when no eye has seen and no hand has touched it.

Lady Diana Wales seemed to be more impressed than might have been expected. ‘It really gives one rather a shiver,’ she said, ‘to think that we are going to be the first, except the vicar.’

The pioneer with the big moustaches and the broken English did not descend after all by his favourite ladder, which indeed had only been used by some of the workmen conducting the excavation; for the clergyman led them round to a larger and more convenient entrance about a hundred yards away, out of which he himself had just emerged from his investigations underground. Here the descent was by a fairly gradual slope with no difficulties save the increasing darkness; for they soon found themselves moving in single file down a tunnel as black as pitch, and it was some little time before they saw a glimmer of light ahead of them. Once during that silent march there was a sound like a catch in somebody’s breath, it was impossible to say whose; and once there was an oath like a dull explosion, and it was in an unknown tongue.

They came out in a circular chamber like a basilica in a ring of round arches; for that chapel had been built before the first pointed arch of the Gothic had pierced our civilization like a spear. A glimmer of greenish light between some of the pillars marked the place of the other opening into the world above, and gave a vague sense of being under the sea, which was intensified by one or two other incidental and perhaps fanciful resemblances. For the dog-tooth pattern of the Norman was faintly traceable round all the arches, giving them, above the cavernous darkness, something of the look of the mouths of monstrous sharks. And in the centre the dark bulk of the tomb itself, with its lifted lid of stone, might almost have been the jaws of some such leviathan.

Whether out of the sense of fitness or from the lack of more modern appliances, the clerical antiquary had arranged for the illumination of the chapel only by four tall candles in big wooden candlesticks standing on the floor. Of these only one was alight when they entered, casting a faint glimmer over the mighty architectural forms. When they had all assembled, the clergyman proceeded to light the three others, and the appearance and contents of the great sarcophagus came more clearly into view.

All eyes went first to the face of the dead, preserved across all those ages in the lines of life by some secret Eastern process, it was said, inherited from heathen antiquity and unknown to the simple graveyards of our own island. The Professor could hardly repress an exclamation of wonder; for, though the face was as pale as a mask of wax, it looked otherwise like a sleeping man, who had but that moment closed his eyes. The face was of the ascetic, perhaps even the fanatical type, with a high framework of bones; the figure was clad in a golden cope and gorgeous vestments, and high up on the breast, at the base of the throat, glittered the famous gold cross upon a short gold chain, or rather necklace. The stone coffin had been opened by lifting the lid of it at the head and propping it aloft upon two strong wooden shafts or poles, hitched above under the edge of the upper slab and wedged below into the corners of the coffin behind the head of the corpse. Less could therefore be seen of the feet or the lower part of the body, which indeed had only been used by some of the workmen conducting the excavation; for the clergyman led them round to a larger and more convenient entrance about a hundred yards away, out of which he himself had just emerged from his investigations underground. Here the descent was by a fairly gradual slope with no difficulties save the increasing darkness; for they soon found themselves moving in single file down a tunnel as black as pitch, and it was some little time before they saw a glimmer of light ahead of them. Once during that silent march there was a sound like a catch in somebody’s breath, it was impossible to say whose; and once there was an oath like a dull explosion, and it was in an unknown tongue.

Professor Smaill’s big forehead had carried a big furrow of reflection, or possibly of worry, ever since the clergyman had told the story of the curse. But feminine intuition, not untouched by feminine hysteria, understood the meaning of his brooding immobility better than did the men around him. In the silence of that candle-lit cavern Lady Diana cried out suddenly: ‘Don’t touch it, I tell you!’

But the man had already made one of his swift leonine movements, leaning forward over the body. The next instant they all darted, some forward and some backward, but all with a dreadful ducking motion as if the sky were falling.

As the Professor laid a finger on the gold cross, the wooden props, that bent very slightly in supporting the lifted lid of stone, seemed to jump and straighten themselves with a jerk. The lip of the stone slab slipped from its wooden
perch; and in all their souls and stomachs came a sickening sense of down - rushing ruin, as if they had all been flung off a precipice. Smaill had withdrawn his head swiftly, but not in time; and he lay senseless beside the coffin, in a red puddle of blood from scalp or skull. And the old stone coffin was once more closed as it had been for centuries; save that one or two sticks or splinters stuck in the crevice, horribly suggestive of bones crunched by an ogre. The leviathan had snapped its jaws of stone.

Lady Diana was looking at the wreck with eyes that had an electric glare as of lunacy; her red hair looked scarlet against the pallor of her face in the greenish twilight. Smyth was looking at her, still with something dog - like in the turn of his head; but it was the expression of a god who looks at a master whose catastrophe he can only partly understand. Tarrant and the foreigner had stiffened in their usual sullen attitudes, but their faces had turned the colour of clay. The Vicar seemed to have fainted. Father Brown was kneeling beside the fallen figure, trying to test its condition.

Rather to the general surprise, the Byronic lounger, Paul Tarrant, came forward to help him.

'He'd better be carried up into the air,' he said. 'I suppose there's just a chance for him.'

'He isn't dead,' said Father Brown in a low voice, 'but I think it's pretty bad; you aren't a doctor by any chance?'

'No; but I've had to pick up a good many things in my time,' said the other. 'But never mind about me just now. My real profession would probably surprise you.'

'I don't think so,' replied Father Brown, with a slight smile. 'I thought of it about halfway through the voyage. You are a detective shadowing somebody. Well, the cross is safe from thieves now, anyhow.'

While they were speaking Tarrant had lifted the frail figure of the fallen man with easy strength and dexterity, and was carefully carrying him towards the exit. He answered over his shoulder:

'Yes, the cross is safe enough.'

'You mean that nobody else is,' replied Brown. 'Are you thinking of the curse, too?'

Father Brown went about for the next hour or two under a burden of frowning perplexity that was something beyond the shock of the tragic accident. He assisted in carrying the victim to the little inn opposite the church, interviewed the doctor, who reported the injury as serious and threatening, though not certainly fatal, and carried the news to the little group of travellers who had gathered round the table in the inn parlour. But wherever he went the cloud of mystification rested on him and seemed to grow darker the more deeply he pondered. For the central mystery was growing more and more mysterious, actually in proportion as many of the minor mysteries began to clear themselves up in his mind. Exactly in proportion as the meaning of individual figures in that motley group began to explain itself, the thing that had happened grew more and more difficult to explain. Leonard Smyth had come merely because Lady Diana had come; and Lady Diana had come merely because she chose. They were engaged in one of those floating Society flirtations that are all the more silly for being semi - intellectual. But the lady's romanticism had a superstitious side to it; and she was pretty well prostrated by the terrible end of her adventure. Paul Tarrant was a private detective, possibly watching the flirtation, for some wife or husband; possibly shadowing the foreign lecturer with the moustaches, who had much the air of an undesirable alien. But if he or anybody else had intended to steal the relic, the intention had been finally frustrated. And to all mortal appearance, what had frustrated it was either an incredible coincidence or the intervention of the ancient curse.

As he stood in unusual perplexity in the middle of the village street, between the inn and the church, he felt a mild shock of surprise at seeing a recently familiar but rather unexpected figure advancing up the street. Mr Boon, the journalist, looking very haggard in the sunshine, which showed up his shabby raiment like that of a scarecrow, had his dark and deep - set eyes (rather close together on either side of the long drooping nose) fixed on the priest. The latter looked twice before he realized that the heavy dark moustache hid something like a grin or at least a grim smile.

'I thought you were going away,' said Father Brown a little sharply. 'I thought you left by that train two hours ago.'

'Well, you see I didn't,' said Boon.

'Why have you come back?' asked the priest almost sternly.

'This is not the sort of little rural paradise for a journalist to leave in a hurry,' replied the other. 'Things happen too fast here to make it worth while to go back to a dull place like London. Besides, they can't keep me out of the affair - I mean this second affair. It was I that found the body, or at any rate the clothes. Quite suspicious conduct on my part, wasn't it? Perhaps you; think I wanted to dress up in his clothes. Shouldn't I make a lovely parson?'

And the lean and long - nosed mountebank suddenly made an extravagant gesture in the middle of the market - place, stretching out his arms and spreading out his dark - gloved hands in a sort of burlesque benediction and saying: 'Oh, my dear brethren and sisters, for I would embrace you all....'

'What on earth are you talking about?' cried Father Brown, and rapped the stones slightly with his stumpy umbrella, for he was a little less patient than usual.
'Oh, you'll find out all about it if you ask that picnic party of yours at the inn,' replied Boon scornfully. 'That man Tarrant seems to suspect me merely because I found the clothes; though he only came up a minute too late to find them himself. But there are all sorts of mysteries in this business. The little man with the big moustaches may have more in him than meets the eye. For that matter I don't see why you shouldn't have killed the poor fellow yourself.'

Father Brown did not seem in the least annoyed at the suggestion, but he seemed exceedingly bothered and bewildered by the remark. 'Do you mean,' he asked with simplicity, 'that it was I who tried to kill Professor Smaill?'

'Not at all,' said the other, waving his hand with the air of one making a handsome concession. 'Plenty of dead people for you to choose from. Not limited to Professor Smaill. Why, didn't you know somebody else had turned up, a good deal deader than Professor Smaill? And I don't see why you shouldn't have done him in, in a quiet way. Religious differences, you know... lamentable disunion of Christendom. ... I suppose you've always wanted to get the English parishes back.'

'I'm going back to the inn,' said the priest quietly; 'you say the people there know what you mean, and perhaps they may be able to say it.'

In truth, just afterwards his private perplexities suffered a momentary dispersal at the news of a new calamity. The moment he entered the little parlour where the rest of the company were collected, something in their pale faces told him they were shaken by something yet more recent than the accident at the tomb. Even as he entered, Leonard Smyth was saying: 'Where is all this going to end?'

'It will never end, I tell you,' repeated Lady Diana, gazing into vacancy with glassy eyes; 'it will never end till we all end. One after another the curse will take us; perhaps slowly, as the poor vicar said; but it will take us all as it has taken him.'

'What in the world has happened now?' asked Father Brown.

There was a silence, and then Tarrant said in a voice that sounded a little hollow: 'Mr Walters, the Vicar, has committed suicide. I suppose it was the shock unhinged him. But I fear there can be no doubt about it. We've just found his black hat and clothes on a rock jutting out from the shore. He seems to have jumped into the sea. I thought he looked as if it had knocked him half-witted, and perhaps we ought to have looked after him; but there was so much to look after.'

'You could have done nothing,' said the lady. 'Don't you see the thing is dealing doom in a sort of dreadful order? The Professor touched the cross, and he went first; the Vicar had opened the tomb, and he went second; we only entered the chapel, and we -'

'Hold on,' said Father Brown, in a sharp voice he very seldom used; 'this has got to stop.'

He still wore a heavy though unconscious frown, but in his eyes was no longer the cloud of mystification, but a light of almost terrible understanding. 'What a fool I am!' he muttered. 'I ought to have seen it long ago. The tale of the curse ought to have told me.'

'Do you mean to say,' demanded Tarrant, 'that we can really be killed now by something that happened in the thirteenth century?'

Father Brown shook his head and answered with quiet emphasis: 'I won't discuss whether we can be killed by something that happened in the thirteenth century; but I'm jolly certain that we can't be killed by something that never happened in the thirteenth century, something that never happened at all.'

'Well,' said Tarrant, 'it's refreshing to find a priest so sceptical of the supernatural as all that.'

'Not at all,' replied the priest calmly; 'it's not the supernatural part I doubt. It's the natural part. I'm exactly in the position of the man who said, 'I can believe the impossible, but not the improbable.'"

'That's what you call a paradox, isn't it?' asked the other.

'It's what I call common sense, properly understood,' replied Father Brown. 'It really is more natural to believe a preternatural story, that deals with things we don't understand, than a natural story that contradicts things we do understand. Tell me that the great Mr Gladstone, in his last hours, was haunted by the ghost of Parnell, and I will be agnostic about it. But tell me that Mr Gladstone, when first presented to Queen Victoria, wore his hat in her drawing-room and slapped her on the back and offered her a cigar, and I am not agnostic at all. That is not impossible; it's only incredible. But I'm much more certain it didn't happen than that Parnell's ghost didn't appear; because it violates the laws of the world I do understand. So it is with that tale of the curse. It isn't the legend that I disbelieve - it's the history.'

Lady Diana had recovered a little from her trance of Cassandra, and her perennial curiosity about new things began to peer once more out of her bright and prominent eyes.

'What a curious man you are!' she said. 'Why should you disbelieve the history?'

'I disbelieve the history because it isn't history,' answered Father Brown. 'To anybody who happens to know a little about the Middle Ages, the whole story was about as probable as Gladstone offering Queen Victoria a cigar. But does anybody know anything about the Middle Ages? Do you know what a Guild was? Have you ever heard of
salvo managio suo? Do you know what sort of people were Servi Regis?

'No, of course I don't,' said the lady, rather crossly. 'What a lot of Latin words!'  

'No, of course,' said Father Brown. 'If it had been Tutankhamen and a set of dried-up Africans preserved, Heaven knows why, at the other end of the world; if it had been Babylonia or China; if it had been some race as remote and mysterious as the Man in the Moon, your newspapers would have told you all about it, down to the last discovery of a tooth-brush or a collar-stud. But the men who built your own parish churches, and gave the names to your own towns and trades, and the very roads you walk on - it has never occurred to you to know anything about them. I don't claim to know a lot myself; but I know enough to see that story is stuff and nonsense from beginning to end. It was illegal for a money-lender to distrain on a man's shop and tools. It's exceedingly unlikely that the Guild would not have saved a man from such utter ruin, especially if he were ruined by a Jew. Those people had vices and tragedies of their own; they sometimes tortured and burned people. But that idea of a man, without God or hope in the world, crawling away to die because nobody cared whether he lived - that isn't a medieval idea. That's a product of our economic science and progress. The Jew wouldn't have been a vassal of the feudal lord. The Jews normally had a special position as servants of the King. Above all, the Jew couldn't possibly have been burned for his religion.'

'The paradoxes are multiplying,' observed Tarrant; 'but surely, you won't deny that Jews were persecuted in the Middle Ages?'

'It would be nearer the truth,' said Father Brown, 'to say they were the only people who weren't persecuted in the Middle Ages. If you want to satirize medievalism, you could make a good case by saying that some poor Christian might be burned alive for 'making a mistake about the Homooision, while a rich Jew might walk down the street openly sneering at Christ and the Mother of God. Well, that's what the story is like. It was never a story of the Middle Ages; it was never even a legend about the Middle Ages. It was made up by somebody whose notions came from novels and newspapers, and probably made up on the spur of the moment.'

The others seemed a little dazed by the historical digression, and seemed to wonder vaguely why the priest emphasized it and made it so important a part of the puzzle. But Tarrant, whose trade it was to pick the practical detail out of many tangles of digression, had suddenly become alert. His bearded chin was thrust forward farther than ever, out his sullen eyes were wide awake. 'Ah,' he said; 'made up on the spur of the moment!'

'Perhaps that is an exaggeration,' admitted Father Brown calmly. 'I should rather say made up more casually and carelessly than the rest of an uncommonly careful plot. But the plotter did not think the details of medieval history would matter much to anybody. And his calculation in a general way was pretty nearly right, like most of his other calculations.'

'Whose calculations? Who was right?' demanded the lady with a sudden passion of impatience. 'Who is this person you are talking about? Haven't we gone through enough, without your making our flesh creep with your he's and him's?'

'I am talking about the murderer,' said Father Brown.

'What murderer?' she asked sharply. 'Do you mean that the poor Professor was murdered?'

'Well,' said the staring Tarrant gruffly into his beard, 'we can't say 'murdered', for we don't know he's killed.'

'The murderer killed somebody else, who was not Professor Smaill,' said the priest gravely.

'Why, whom else could he kill?' asked the other. 'He killed the Reverend John Walters, the Vicar of Dulham,' replied Father Brown with precision. 'He only wanted to kill those two, because they both had got hold of relics of one rare pattern. The murderer was a sort of monomaniac on the point.'

'It all sounds very strange,' muttered Tarrant. 'Of course we can't swear that the Vicar's really dead either. We haven't seen his body.'

'Oh yes, you have,' said Father Brown.

There was a silence as sudden as the stroke of a gong; a silence in which that sub-conscious guesswork that was so active and accurate in the woman moved her almost to a shriek.

'That is exactly what you have seen,' went on the priest. 'You have seen his body. You haven't seen him - the real living man; but you have seen his body all right. You have stared at it hard by the light of four great candles; and it was not tossing suicidally in the sea but lying in state like a Prince of the Church in a shrine built before the Crusade.'

'In plain words,' said Tarrant, 'you actually ask us to believe that the embalmed body was really the corpse of a murdered man.'

Father Brown was silent for a moment; then he said almost with an air of irrelevance: 'The first thing I noticed about it was the cross; or rather the string suspending the cross. Naturally, for most of you, it was only a string of beads and nothing else in particular; but, naturally also, it was rather more in my line than yours. You remember it lay close up to the chin, with only a few beads showing, as if the whole necklet were quite short. But the beads that
looked up and saw, in the moment when he first heard round the corner of the dark passage the voice of his enemy.

of the fish was traced as with a finger dipped in the phosphorescence of fishes. For that was the sign which he once
which they were traced as upon fire; and nothing remained but the dark bare wall of rock on which the shining shape
his imaginative memory. Again and again all these Byzantine patterns would fade away like the fading gold on
women. Only, as he told his friend, there was one much simpler and less entangled type, that continually recurred to
dark and flattened faces, of eagles out of the east and the high headdresses of bearded men with their hair bound like
they were full of strange saints with square and triangular haloes, of golden out-standing crowns and glories round
bold and big designs rather out of drawing, as they can be seen in the strong but stiff archaic arts that he had studied;

unbalancing business to recover slowly from a bad knock on the head; and when the head is as interesting a head as
morbid phases of recovery and the monstrous dreams that often accompany delirium. It is often rather an
way and Smaill was encouraged by it to talk about many strange things not always easy to talk about; such as the
most of it upon these interviews with his clerical friend. Father Brown had a talent for being silent in an encouraging

clergyman.'

'By George!' said Tarrant; 'I'm beginning to think there's something in what you say. This is a queer story if it's
ture.'

'When I realized that,' went on Father Brown, 'I could manage more or less to guess the rest. Remember, first of
all, that there never was any responsible archaeological authority for anything more than investigation. Poor old
Walters was an honest antiquary, who was engaged in opening the tomb to find out if there was any truth in the
legend about embalmed bodies. The rest was all rumour, of the sort that often anticipates or exaggerates such finds.
As a fact, he found the body had not been embalmed, but had fallen into dust long ago. Only while he was working
there by the light of his lonely candle in that sunken chapel, the candlelight threw another shadow that was not his
own.'

'Ah!' cried Lady Diana with a catch in her breath; 'and I know what you mean now. You mean to tell us we have
met the murderer, talked and joked with the murderer, let him tell us a romantic tale, and let him depart untouched.'

'Leaving his clerical disguise on a rock,' assented Brown. 'It is all dreadfully simple. This man got ahead of the
Professor in the race to the churchyard and chapel, possibly while the Professor was talking to that lugubrious
journalist. He came on the old clergyman beside the empty coffin and killed him. Then he dressed himself in the
black clothes from the corpse, wrapped it in an old cope which had been among the real finds of the exploration, and
put it in the coffin, arranging the rosary and the wooden support as I have described. Then, having thus set the trap
for his second enemy, he went up into the daylight and greeted us all with the most amiable politeness of a country
clergyman.'

'He ran a considerable risk,' objected Tarrant, 'of somebody knowing Walters by sight.'

'I admit he was half - mad,' agreed Father Brown; 'and I think you will admit that the risk was worth taking, for
he has got off, after all.'

'I'll admit he was very lucky,' growled Tarrant. 'And who the devil was he?'

'As you say, he was very lucky,' answered Father Brown, 'and not least in that respect. For that is the one thing
we may never know.' He frowned at the table for a moment and then went on: 'This fellow has been hovering round
and threatening for years, but the one thing he was careful of was to keep the secret of who he was; and he has kept
it still. But if poor Smaill recovers, as I think he will, it is pretty safe to say that you will hear more of it.'

'Why, what will Professor Smaill do, do you think?' asked Lady Diana.

'I should think the first thing he would do,' said Tarrant, 'would be to put the detectives on like dogs after this
murdering devil. I should like to have a go at him myself.'

'Well,' said Father Brown, smiling suddenly after his long fit of frowning perplexity, 'I think I know the very first
thing he ought to do.'

'And what is that?' asked Lady Diana with graceful eagerness.

'He ought to apologize to all of you,' said Father Brown.

It was not upon this point, however, that Father Brown found himself talking to Professor Smaill as he sat by the
bedside during the slow convalescence of that eminent archaeologist. Nor, indeed, was it chiefly Father Brown who
did the talking; for though the Professor was limited to small doses of the stimulant of conversation, he concentrated
most of it upon these interviews with his clerical friend. Father Brown had a talent for being silent in an encouraging
way and Smaill was encouraged by it to talk about many strange things not always easy to talk about; such as the
morbid phases of recovery and the monstrous dreams that often accompany delirium. It is often rather an
unbalancing business to recover slowly from a bad knock on the head; and when the head is as interesting a head as
that of Professor Smaill even its disturbances and distortions are apt to be original and curious. His dreams were like
bold and big designs rather out of drawing, as they can be seen in the strong but stiff archaic arts that he had studied;
they were full of strange saints with square and triangular haloes, of golden out - standing crowns and glories round
dark and flattened faces, of eagles out of the east and the high headdresses of bearded men with their hair bound like
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his imaginative memory. Again and again all these Byzantine patterns would fade away like the fading gold on
which they were traced as upon fire; and nothing remained but the dark bare wall of rock on which the shining shape
of the fish was traced as with a finger dipped in the phosphorescence of fishes. For that was the sign which he once
looked up and saw, in the moment when he first heard round the corner of the dark passage the voice of his enemy.
'And at last,' he said, 'I think I have seen a meaning in the picture and the voice; and one that I never understood before. Why should I worry because one madman among a million of sane men, leagued in a great society against him, chooses to brag of persecuting me or pursuing me to death? The man who drew in the dark catacomb the secret symbol of Christ was persecuted in a very different fashion. He was the solitary madman; the whole sane society was leagued together not to save but to slay him. I have sometimes fussed and fidgeted and wondered whether this or that man was my persecutor; whether it was Tarrant; whether it was Leonard Smyth; whether it was any one of them. Suppose it had been all of them? Suppose it had been all the men on the boat and the men on the train and the men in the village. Suppose, so far as I was concerned, they were all murderers. I thought I had a right to be alarmed because I was creeping through the bowels of the earth in the dark and there was a man who would destroy me. What would it have been like, if the destroyer had been up in the daylight and had owned all the earth and commanded all the armies and the crowds? How if he had been able to stop all the earths or smoke me out of my hole, or kill me the moment I put my nose out in the daylight? What was it like to deal with murder on that scale? The world has forgotten these things, as until a little while ago it had forgotten war.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'but the war came. The fish may be driven underground again, but it will come up into the daylight once more. As St Antony of Padua humorously remarked, 'It is only fishes who survive the Deluge.'

SIX: The Dagger with Wings

FATHER BROWN, at one period of his life, found it difficult to hang his hat on a hat-peg without repressing a slight shudder. The origin of this idiosyncrasy was indeed a mere detail in much more complicated events; but it was perhaps the only detail that remained to him in his busy life to remind him of the whole business. Its remote origin was to be found in the facts which led Dr Boyne, the medical officer attached to the police force, to send for the priest on a particular frosty morning in December.

Dr Boyne was a big dark Irishman, one of those rather baffling Irishmen to be found all over the world, who will talk scientific scepticism, materialism, and cynicism at length and at large, but who never dream of referring anything touching the ritual of religion to anything except the traditional religion of their native land. It would be hard to say whether their creed is a very superficial varnish or a very fundamental substratum; but most probably it is both, with a mass of materialism in between. Anyhow, when he thought that matters of that sort might be involved, he asked Father Brown to call, though he made no pretence of preference for that aspect of them.

'I'm not sure I want you, you know,' was his greeting. 'I'm not sure about anything yet. I'm hanged if I can make out whether it's a case for a doctor, or a policeman, or a priest.'

'Well,' said Father Brown with a smile, 'as I suppose you're both a policeman and a doctor, I seem to be rather in a minority.'

'I admit you're what politicians call an instructed minority,' replied the doctor. 'I mean, I know you've had to do a little in our line as well as your own. But it's precious hard to say whether this business is in your line or ours, or merely in the line of the Commissioners in Lunacy. We've just had a message from a man living near here, in that white house on the hill, asking for protection against a murderous persecution. We've gone into the facts as far as we could, and perhaps I'd better tell you the story as it is supposed to have happened, from the beginning.

'It seems that a man named Aylmer, who was a wealthy landowner in the West Country, married rather late in life and had three sons, Philip, Stephen, and Arnold. But in his bachelor days, when he thought he would have no heir, he had adopted a boy whom he thought very brilliant and promising, who went by the name of John Strake. His origin seems to be vague; they say he was a foundling; some say he was a gipsy. I think the last notion is mixed up with the fact that Aylmer in his old age dabbled in all sorts of dingy occultism, including palmistry and astrology, and his three sons say that Strake encouraged him in it. But they said a great many other things besides that. They said Strake was an amazing scoundrel, and especially an amazing liar; a genius in inventing lies on the spur of the moment, and telling them so as to deceive a detective. But that might very well be a natural prejudice, in the light of what happened.

Perhaps you can more or less imagine what happened. The old man left practically everything to the adopted son; and when he died the three real sons disputed the will. They said their father had been frightened into surrender and, not to put too fine a point on it, into gibbering idiocy. They said Strake had the strangest and most cunning ways of getting at him, in spite of the nurses and the family, and terrorizing him on his death-bed. Anyhow, they seemed to have proved something about the dead man's mental condition, for the courts set aside the will and the sons inherited. Strake is said to have broken out in the most dreadful fashion, and sworn he would kill all three of them, one after another, and that nothing could hide them from his vengeance. It is the third or last of the brothers, Arnold Aylmer, who is asking for police protection.'

'Third and last,' said the priest, looking at him gravely.

'Yes,' said Boyne. 'The other two are dead.' There was a silence before he continued. 'That is where the doubt comes in. There is no proof they were murdered, but they might possibly have been. The eldest, who took up his
position as squire, was supposed to have committed suicide in his garden. The second, who went into trade as a manufacturer, was knocked on the head by the machinery in his factory; he might very well have taken a false step and fallen. But if Strake did kill them, he is certainly very cunning in his way of getting to work and getting away. On the other hand, it's more than likely that the whole thing is a mania of conspiracy founded on a coincidence. Look here, what I want is this. I want somebody of sense, who isn't an official, to go up and have a talk with this Mr Arnold Aylmer and form an impression of him. You know what a man with a delusion is like, and how a man looks when he is telling the truth. I want you to be the advance guard, before we take the matter up.'

'It seems rather odd,' said Father Brown, 'that you haven't had to take it up before. If there is anything in this business, it seems to have been going on for a good time. Is there any particular reason why he should send for you just now, any more than any other time?'

'That had occurred to me, as you may imagine,' answered Dr Boyne. 'He does give a reason, but I confess it is one of the things that make me wonder whether the whole thing isn't only the whim of some half-witted crank. He declared that all his servants have suddenly gone on strike and left him, so that he is obliged to call on the police to look after his house. And on making inquiries, I certainly do find that there has been a general exodus of servants from that house on the hill; and of course the town is full of tales, very one-sided tales I dare say. Their account of it seems to be that their employer had become quite impossible in his fidgets and fears and exactions; that he wanted them to guard the house like sentries, or sit up like night nurses in a hospital; that they could never be left alone because he must never be left alone. So they all announced in a loud voice that he was a lunatic, and left. Of course that does not prove he is a lunatic; but it seems rather rum nowadays for a man to expect his valet or his parlour-maid to act as an armed guard.'

'And so,' said the priest with a smile, 'he wants a policeman to act as his parlour-maid because his parlour-maid won't act as a policeman.'

'I thought that rather thick, too,' agreed the doctor; 'but I can't take the responsibility of a flat refusal till I've tried a compromise. You are the compromise.'

'Very well,' said Father Brown simply. 'I'll go and call on him now if you like.'

The rolling country round the little town was sealed and bound with frost, and the sky was as clear and cold as steel, except in the north-east where clouds with lurid haloes were beginning to climb up the sky. It was against these darker and more sinister colours that the house on the hill gleamed with a row of pale pillars, forming a short colonnade of the classical sort. A winding road led up to it across the curve of the down, and plunged into a mass of dark bushes. Just before it reached the bushes the air seemed to grow colder and colder, as if he were approaching an ice-house or the North Pole. But he was a highly practical person, never entertaining such fancies except as fancies. And he merely cocked his eye at the great livid cloud crawling up over the house, and remarked cheerfully: 'It's going to snow.'

Through a low ornamental iron gateway of the Italianate pattern he entered a garden having something of that desolation which only belongs to the disorder of orderly things. Deep-green growths were grey with the faint powder of the frost, large weeds - had fringed the fading pattern of the flower-beds as if in a ragged frame; and the house stood as if waist-high in a stunted forest of shrubs and bushes. The vegetation consisted largely of evergreens or very hardy plants; and though it was thus thick and heavy, it was too northern to be called luxuriant. It might be described as an Arctic jungle. So it was in some sense with the house itself, which had a row of columns and a classical facade, which might have looked out on the Mediterranean; but which seemed now to be withering in the wind of the North Sea. Classical ornament here and there accentuated the contrast; caryatides and carved masks of comedy or tragedy looked down from corners of the building upon the grey confusion of the garden paths; but the faces seemed to be frost-bitten. The very volutes of the capitals might have curled up with the cold.

Father Brown went up the grassy steps to a square porch flanked by big pillars and knocked at the door. About four minutes afterwards he knocked again. Then he stood patiently waiting with his back to the door and looked out on the slowly darkening landscape. It was darkening under the shadow of that one great continent of cloud that had come flying out of the north; and even as he looked out beyond the pillars of the porch, which seemed huge and black above him in the twilight, he saw the opalescent crawling rim of the great cloud as it sailed over the roof and bowed over the porch like a canopy. The great canopy with its faintly coloured fringes seemed to sink lower and lower upon the garden beyond, until what had recently been a clear and pale-hued winter sky was left in a few silver ribbons and rags like a sickly sunset. Father Brown waited, and there was no sound within.

Then he betook himself briskly down the steps and round the house to look for another entrance. He eventually found one, a side door in the flat wall, and on this also he hammered and outside this also he waited. Then he tried the handle and found the door apparently bolted or fastened in some fashion; and then he moved along that side of the house, musing on the possibilities of the position, and wondering whether the eccentric Mr Aylmer had barricaded himself too deep in the house to hear any kind of summons; or whether perhaps he would barricade...
himself all the more, on the assumption that any summons must be the challenge of the avenging Strake. It might be that the decamping servants had only unlocked one door when they left in the morning, and that their master had locked that; but whatever he might have done it was unlikely that they, in the mood of that moment, had looked so carefully to the defences. He continued his prowl round the place: it was not really a large place, though perhaps a little pretentious; and in a few moments he found he had made the complete circuit. A moment after he found what he suspected and sought. The French window of one room, curtained and shadowed with creeper, stood open by a crack, doubtless accidentally left ajar, and he found himself in a central room, comfortably upholstered in a rather old-fashioned way, with a staircase leading up from it on one side and a door leading out of it on the other. Immediately opposite him was another door with red glass let into it, a little gaudily for later tastes; something that looked like a red-robbed figure in cheap stained glass. On a round table to the right stood a sort of aquarium - a great bowl full of greenish water, in which fishes and similar things moved about as in a tank; and just opposite it a plant of the palm variety with very large green leaves. All this looked so very dusty and Early Victorian that the telephone, visible in the curtained alcove, was almost a surprise.

"Who is that?" a voice called out sharply and rather suspiciously from behind the stained-glass door.

"Could I see Mr Aylmer?" asked the priest apologetically.

The door opened and a gentleman in a peacock-green dressing-gown came out with an inquiring look. His hair was rather rough and untidy, as if he had been in bed or lived in a state of slowly getting up, but his eyes were not only awake but alert, and some would have said alarmed. Father Brown knew that the contradiction was likely enough in a man who had rather run to seed under the shadow either of a delusion or a danger. He had a fine aquiline face when seen in profile, but when seen full face the first impression was that of the untidiness and even the wilderness of his loose brown beard.

"I am Mr Aylmer," he said, "but I've got out of the way of expecting visitors."

Something about Mr Aylmer's unrestful eye prompted the priest to go straight to the point. If the man's persecution was only a monomania, he would be the less likely to resent it.

"I was wondering," said Father Brown softly, "whether it is quite true that you never expect visitors."

"You are right," replied his host steadily, "I always expect one visitor. And he may be the last."

"I hope not," said Father Brown, "but at least I am relieved to infer that I do not look very like him."

Mr Aylmer shook himself with a sort of savage laugh. "You certainly do not," he said.

"Mr Aylmer," said Father Brown frankly, "I apologize for the liberty, but some friends of mine have told me about your trouble, and asked me to see if I could do anything for you. The truth is, I have some little experience in affairs like this."

"There are no affairs like this," said Aylmer.

"You mean," observed Father Brown, "that the tragedies in your unfortunate family were not normal deaths?"

"I mean they were not even normal murders," answered the other. "The man who is hounding us all to death is a hell-hound, and his power is from hell."

"All evil has one origin," said the priest gravely. "But how do you know they were not normal murders?"

Aylmer answered with a gesture which offered his guest a chair; then he seated himself slowly in another, frowning, with his hands on his knees; but when he looked up his expression had grown milder and more thoughtful, and his voice was quite cordial and composed.

"Sirs," he said, "I don't want you to imagine that I'm in the least an unreasonable person. I have come to these conclusions by reason, because unfortunately reason really leads there. I have read a great deal on these subjects; for I was the only one who inherited my father's scholarship in somewhat obscure matters, and I have since inherited his library. But what I tell you does not rest on what I have read but on what I have seen."

Father Brown nodded, and the other proceeded, as if picking his words: "In my elder brother's case I was not certain at first. There were no marks or footprints where he was found shot, and the pistol was left beside him. But he had just received a threatening letter certainly from our enemy, for it was marked with a sign like a winged dagger, which was one of his infernal cabalistic tricks. And a servant said she had seen something moving along the garden wall in the twilight that was much too large to be a cat. I leave it there; all I can say is that if the murderer came, he managed to leave no traces of his coming. But when my brother Stephen died it was different; and since then I have known. A machine was working in an open scaffolding under the factory tower; I scaled the platform a moment after he had fallen under the iron hammer that struck him; I did not see anything else strike him, but I saw what I saw."

"A great drift of factory smoke was rolling between me and the factory tower; but through a rift of it I saw on the top of it a dark human figure wrapped in what looked like a black cloak. Then the sulphurous smoke drove between us again; and when it cleared I looked up at the distant chimney - there was nobody there. I am a rational man, and I will ask all rational men how he had reached that dizzy unapproachable turret, and how he left it."
He stared across at the priest with a sphinx-like challenge; then after a silence he said abruptly: 'My brother's brains were knocked out, but his body was not much damaged. And in his pocket we found one of those warning messages dated the day before and stamped with the flying dagger.

'I am sure,' he went on gravely, 'that the symbol of the winged dagger is not merely arbitrary or accidental. Nothing about that abominable man is accidental. He is all design; though it is indeed a most dark and intricate design. His mind is woven not only out of elaborate schemes but out of all sorts of secret languages and signs, and dumb signals and wordless pictures which are the names of nameless things. He is the worst sort of man that the world knows: he is the wicked mystic. Now, I don't pretend to penetrate all that is conveyed by this symbol; but it seems surely that it must have a relation to all that was most remarkable, or even incredible, in his movements as he had hovered round my unfortunate family. Is there no connexion between the idea of a winged weapon and the mystery by which Philip was struck dead on his own lawn without the lightest touch of any footprint having disturbed the dust or grass? Is there no connexion between the plumed poignard flying like a feathered arrow and that figure which hung on the far top of the toppling chimney, clad in a cloak for pinions?'

'You mean,' said Father Brown thoughtfully, 'that he is in a perpetual state of levitation.'

'Simon Magus did it,' replied Aylmer, 'and it was one of the commonest predictions of the Dark Ages that Antichrist would be able to fly. Anyhow, there was the flying dagger on the document; and whether or no it could fly, it could certainly strike.'

'Did you notice what sort of paper it was on?' asked Father Brown. 'Common paper?'

The sphinx-like face broke abruptly into a harsh laugh.

'You can see what they're like,' said Aylmer grimly, 'for I got one myself this morning.'

He was leaning back in his chair now, with his long legs thrust out from under the green dressing-gown, which was a little short for him, and his bearded chin pillowed on his chest. Without moving otherwise, he thrust his hand deep in the dressing-gown pocket and held out a fluttering scrap of paper at the end of a rigid arm. His whole attitude was suggestive of a sort of paralysis, that was both rigidity and collapse. But the next remark of the priest had a curious effect of rousing him.

Father Brown was blinking in his short-sighted way at the paper presented to him. It was a singular sort of paper, rough without being common, as from an artist's sketch-book; and on it was drawn boldly in red ink a dagger decorated with wings like the rod of Hermes, with the written words, 'Death comes the day after this, as it came to your brothers.'

Father Brown tossed the paper on the floor and sat bolt upright in his chair.

'You mustn't let that sort of stuff stupefy you,' he said sharply. 'These devils always try to make us helpless by making us hopeless.'

Rather to his surprise, an awakening wave went over the prostrate figure, which sprang from its chair as if startled out of a dream.

'You're right, you're right!' cried Aylmer with a rather uncanny animation; 'and the devils shall find that I'm not so hopeless after all, nor so helpless either. Perhaps I have more hope and better help than you fancy.'

He stood with his hands in his pockets, frowning down at the priest, who had a momentary doubt, during that strained silence, about whether the man's long peril had not touched his brain. But when he spoke it was quite soberly.

'I believe my unfortunate brothers failed because they used the wrong weapons. Philip carried a revolver, and that was how his death came to be called suicide. Stephen had police protection, but he also had a sense of what made him ridiculous; and he could not allow a policeman to climb up a ladder after him to a scaffolding where he stood only a moment. They were both scoffers, reacting into scepticism from the strange mysticism of my father's last days. But I always knew there was more in my father than they understood. It is true that by studying magic he fell at last under the blight of black magic; the black magic of this scoundrel Strake. But my brothers were wrong about the antidote. The antidote to black magic is not brute materialism or worldly wisdom. The antidote to black magic is white magic.'

'It rather depends,' said Father Brown, 'what you mean by white magic.'

'I mean silver magic,' said the other, in a low voice, like one speaking of a secret revelation. Then after a silence he said: 'Do you know what I mean by silver magic? Excuse me a moment.'

He turned and opened the central door with the red glass and went into a passage beyond it. The house had less depth than Brown had supposed; instead of the door opening into interior rooms, the corridor it revealed ended in another door on the garden. The door of one room was on one side of the passage; doubtless, the priest told himself, the proprietor's bedroom whence he had rushed out in his dressing-gown. There was nothing else on that side but an ordinary hat-stand with the ordinary dingy cluster of old hats and overcoats; but on the other side was something more interesting: a very dark old oak sideboard laid out with some old silver, and overhung by a trophy or ornament.
of old weapons. It was by that that Arnold Aylmer halted, looking up at a long antiquated pistol with a bell-shaped mouth.

The door at the end of the passage was barely open, and through the crack came a streak of white daylight. The priest had very quick instincts about natural things, and something in the unusual brilliancy of that white line told him what had happened outside. It was indeed what he had prophesied when he was approaching the house. He ran past his rather startled host and opened the door, to face something that was at once a blank and a blaze. What he had seen shining through the crack was not only the most negative whiteness of daylight but the positive whiteness of snow. All round, the sweeping fall of the country was covered with that shining pallor that seems at once hoary and innocent.

'Here is white magic anyhow,' said Father Brown in his cheerful voice. Then, as he turned back into the hall, he murmured, 'And silver magic too, I suppose,' for the white lustre touched the silver with splendour and lit up the old steel here and there in the darkling armoury. The shaggy head of the brooding Aylmer seemed to have a halo of silver fire, as he turned with his face in shadow and the outlandish pistol in his hand.

'Do you know why I chose this sort of old blunderbuss?' he asked. 'Because I can load it with this sort of bullet.'

He had picked up a small apostle spoon from the sideboard and by sheer violence broke off the small figure at the top. 'Let us go back into the other room,' he added.

'Did you ever read about the death of Dundee?' he asked when they had reseated themselves. He had recovered from his momentary annoyance at the priest's restlessness. 'Graham of Claverhouse, you know, who persecuted the Covenanters and had a black horse that could ride straight up a precipice. Don't you know he could only be shot with a silver bullet, because he had sold himself to the Devil? That's one comfort about you; at least you know enough to believe in the Devil.'

'Oh, yes,' replied Father Brown, 'I believe in the Devil. What I don't believe in is the Dundee of Covenanting legends, with his nightmare of a horse. John Graham was simply a seventeenth-century professional soldier, rather better than most. If he dragooned them it was because he was a dragoon, but not a dragon. Now my experience is that it's not that sort of swaggering blade who sells himself to the Devil. The devil-worshippers I've known were quite different. Not to mention names, which might cause a social flutter, I'll take a man in Dundee's own day. Have you ever heard of Dalrymple of Stair?'

'No,' replied the other gruffly.

'You've heard of what he did,' said Father Brown, 'and it was worse than anything Dundee ever did; yet he escapes the infamy by oblivion. He was the man who made the Massacre of Glencoe. He was a very learned man and lucid lawyer, a statesman with very serious and enlarged ideas of statesmanship, a quiet man with a very refined and intellectual face. That's the sort of man who sells himself to the Devil.'

Aylmer half started from his chair with an enthusiasm of eager assent.

'By God! you are right,' he cried. 'A refined intellectual face! That is the face of John Strake.'

Then he raised himself and stood looking at the priest with a curious concentration. 'If you will wait here a little while,' he said, 'I will show you something.'

He went back through the central door, closing it after him; going, the priest presumed, to the old sideboard or possibly to his bedroom. Father Brown remained seated, gazing abstractedly at the carpet, where a faint red glimmer shone from the glass in the doorway. Once it seemed to brighten like a ruby and then darkened again, as if the sun of that stormy day had passed from cloud to cloud. Nothing moved except the aquatic creatures which floated to and fro in the dim green bowl. Father Brown was thinking hard.

A minute or two afterwards he got up and slipped quietly to the alcove of the telephone, where he rang up his friend Dr Boyne, at the official headquarters. 'I wanted to tell you about Aylmer and his affairs,' he said quietly. 'It's a queer story, but I rather think there's something in it. If I were you I'd send some men up here straight away; four or five men, I think, and surround the house. If anything does happen there'll probably be something startling in the way of an escape.'

Then he went back and sat down again, staring at the dark carpet, which again glowed blood-red with the light from the glass door. Something in the filtered light set his mind drifting on certain borderlands of thought, with the first white daybreak before the coming of colour, and all that mystery which is alternately veiled and revealed in the symbol of windows and of doors.

An inhuman howl in a human voice came from beyond the closed doors, almost simultaneously with the noise of firing. Before the echoes of the shot had died away the door was violently flung open and his host staggered into the room, the dressing-gown half torn from his shoulder and the long pistol smoking in his hand. He seemed to be shaking in every limb, yet he was shaken in part with an unnatural laughter.

'Glory be to the White Magic!' he cried. 'Glory be to the silver bullet! The hell-hound had hunted once too often, and my brothers are avenged at last.'
He sank into a chair and the pistol slid from his hand and fell on the floor. Father Brown darted past him, slipped through the glass door and went down the passage. As he did so he put his hand on the handle of the bedroom door, as if half intending to enter; then he stooped a moment, as if examining something - and then he ran to the outer door and opened it.

On the field of snow, which had been so blank a little while before, lay one black object. At the first glance it looked a little like an enormous bat. A second glance showed that it was, after all, a human figure; fallen on its face, the whole head covered by a broad black hat having something of a Latin - American look; while the appearance of black - wings came from the two flaps or loose sleeves of a very vast black cloak spread out, perhaps by accident, to their utmost length on either side. Both the hands were hidden, though Father Brown thought he could detect the position of one of them, and saw close to it, under the edge of the cloak, the glimmer of some metallic weapon. The main effect, however, was curiously like that of the simple extravagances of heraldry; like a black eagle displayed on a white ground. But by walking round it and peering under the hat the priest got a glimpse of the face, which was indeed what his host had called refined and intellectual; even sceptical and austere: the face of John Strake.

'Well, I'm jiggered,' muttered Father Brown. 'It really does look like some vast vampire that has swooped down like a bird.'

'How else could he have come?' came a voice from the doorway, and Father Brown looked up to see Aylmer once more standing there.

'Couldn't he have walked?' replied Father Brown evasively.

Aylmer stretched out his arm and swept the white landscape with a gesture.

'Look at the snow,' he said in a deep voice that had a sort of roll and thrill in it. 'Is not the snow unspotted - pure as the white magic you yourself called it? Is there a speck on it for miles, save that one foul black blot that has fallen there? There are no footprints, but a few of yours and mine; there are none approaching the house from anywhere.'

Then he looked at the little priest for a moment with a concentrated and curious expression, and said: 'I will tell you something else. That cloak he flies with is too long to walk with. He was not a very tall man, and it would trail behind him like a royal train. Stretch it out over his body, if you like, and see.'

'What happened to you both?' asked Father Brown abruptly.

'It was too swift to describe,' answered Aylmer. 'I had looked out of the door and was turning back when there came a kind of rushing of wind all around me, as if I were being buffeted by a wheel revolving in mid - air. I spun round somehow and fired blindly; and then I saw nothing but what you see now. But I am morally certain that you wouldn't see it if I had not had a silver shot in my gun. It would have been a different body lying there in the snow.'

'By the way,' remarked Father Brown, 'shall we leave it lying there in the snow? Or would you like it taken into your room - I suppose that's your bedroom in the passage?'

'No, no,' replied Aylmer hastily, 'we must leave it here till the police have seen it. Besides, I've had as much of such things as I can stand for the moment. Whatever else happens, I'm going to have a drink. After that, they can hang me if they like.'

Inside the central apartment, between the palm plant and the bowl of fishes, Aylmer tumbled into a chair. He had nearly knocked the bowl over as he lurched into the room, but he had managed to find the decanter of brandy after plunging his hand rather blindly into several cupboards and corners. He did not at any time look like a methodical person, but at this moment his distraction must have been extreme. He drank with a long gulp and began to talk rather feverishly, as if to fill up a silence.

'I see you are still doubtful,' he said, 'though you have seen the thing with your own eyes. Believe me, there was something more behind the quarrel between the spirit of Strake and the spirit of the house of Aylmer. Besides, you have no business to be an unbeliever. You ought to stand for all the things these stupid people call superstitions. Come now, don't you think there's a lot in those old wives' tales about luck and charms and so on, silver bullets included? What do you say about them as a Catholic?'

'I say I'm an agnostic,' replied Father Brown, smiling.

'Nonsense,' said Aylmer impatiently. 'It's your business to believe things.'

'Well, I do believe some things, of course,' conceded Father Brown; 'and therefore, of course, I don't believe other things.'

Aylmer was leaning forward, and looking at him with a strange intensity that was almost like that of a mesmerist.

'You do believe it,' he said. 'You do believe everything. We all believe everything, even when we deny everything. The deniers believe. The unbelievers believe. Don't you feel in your heart that these contradictions do not really contradict: that there is a cosmos that contains them all? The soul goes round upon a wheel of stars and all things return; perhaps Strake and I have striven in many shapes, beast against beast and bird against bird, and perhaps we shall strive for ever. But since we seek and need each other, even that eternal hatred is an eternal love.'
Good and evil go round in a wheel that is one thing and not many. Do you not realize in your heart, do you not believe behind all your beliefs, that there is but one reality and we are its shadows; and that all things are but aspects of one thing: a centre where men melt into Man and Man into God?'

'No,' said Father Brown.

Outside, twilight had begun to fall, in that phase of such a snow-laden evening when the land looks brighter than the sky. In the porch of the main entrance, visible through a half-curtained window. Father Brown could dimly see a bulky figure standing. He glanced casually at the French windows through which he had originally entered, and saw they were darkened with two equally motionless figures. The inner door with the coloured glass stood slightly ajar; and he could see in the short corridor beyond, the ends of two long shadows, exaggerated and distorted by the level light of evening, but still like grey caricatures of the figures of men. Dr Boyne had already obeyed the telephone message. The house was surrounded.

'What is the good of saying no?' insisted his host, still with the same hypnotic stare. 'You have seen part of that eternal drama with your own eyes. You have seen the threat of John Strake to slay Arnold Aylmer by black magic. You have seen Arnold Aylmer slay John Strake by white magic. You see Arnold Aylmer alive and talking to you now. And yet you don't believe it.'

'No, I do not believe it,' said Father Brown, and rose from his chair like one terminating a visit.

'Why not?' asked the other.

The priest only lifted his voice a little, but it sounded in every corner of the room like a bell. 'Because you are not Arnold Aylmer,' he said. 'I know who you are. Your name is John Strake; and you have murdered the last of the brothers, who is lying outside in the snow.'

A ring of white showed round the iris of the other man's eyes; he seemed to be making, with bursting eyeballs, a last effort to mesmerize and master his companion. Then he made a sudden movement sideways; and even as he did so the door behind him opened and a big detective in plain clothes put one hand quietly on his shoulder. The other hand hung down, but it held a revolver. The man looked wildly round, and saw plain-clothes men in all corners of the quiet room.

That evening Father Brown had another and longer conversation with Dr Boyne about the tragedy of the Aylmer family. By that time there was no longer any doubt of the central fact of the case, for John Strake had confessed his identity and even confessed his crimes; only it would be truer to say that he boasted of his victories. Compared to the fact that he had rounded off his life's work with the last Aylmer lying dead, everything else, including existence itself, seemed to be indifferent to him.

'The man is a sort of monomaniac,' said Father Brown. 'He is not interested in any other matter; not even in any other murder. I owe him something for that; for I had to comfort myself with the reflection a good many times this afternoon. As has doubtless occurred to you, instead of weaving all that wild but ingenious romance about winged vampires and silver bullets, he might have put an ordinary leaden bullet into me, and walked out of the house. I assure you it occurred quite frequently to me.'

'I wonder why he didn't,' observed Boyne. 'I don't understand it; but I don't understand anything yet. How on earth did you discover it, and what in the world did you discover?'

'Oh, you provided me with very valuable information,' replied Father Brown modestly, 'especially the one piece of information that really counted. I mean the statement that Strake was a very inventive and imaginative liar, with great presence of mind in producing his lies. This afternoon he needed it; but he rose to the occasion. Perhaps his only mistake was in choosing a preternatural story; he had the notion that because I am a clergyman I should believe anything. Many people have little notions of that kind.'

'But I can't make head or tail of it,' said the doctor. 'You must really begin at the beginning.'

'The beginning of it was a dressing-gown,' said Father Brown simply. 'It was the one really good disguise I've ever known. When you meet a man in a house with a dressing-gown on, you assume quite automatically that he's in his own house. I assumed it myself; but afterwards queer little things began to happen. When he took the pistol down he clicked it at arm's length, as a man does to make sure a strange weapon isn't loaded; of course he would know whether the pistols in his own hall were loaded or not. I didn't like the way he looked for the brandy, or the way he nearly barged into the bowl of fishes. For a man who has a fragile thing of that sort as a fixture in his rooms gets a quite mechanical habit of avoiding it. But these things might possibly have been fancies; the first real point was this. He came out from the little passage between the two doors; and in that passage there's only one other door leading to a room; so I assumed it was the bedroom he had just come from. I tried the handle; but it was locked. I thought this odd; and looked through the keyhole. It was an utterly bare room, obviously deserted; no bed, no anything. Therefore he had not come from inside any room, but from outside the house. And when I saw that, I think I saw the whole picture.'

'Poor Arnold Aylmer doubtless slept and perhaps lived upstairs, and came down in his dressing-gown and
passed through the red glass door. At the end of the passage, black against the winter daylight, he saw the enemy of his house. He saw a tall bearded man in a broad-brimmed black hat and a large flapping black cloak. He did not see much more in this world. Strake sprang at him, throttling or stabbing him; we cannot be sure till the inquest. Then Strake, standing in the narrow passage between the hat-stand and the old sideboard, and looking down in triumph on the last of his foes heard something he had not expected. He heard footsteps in the parlour beyond. It was myself entering by the French windows.

'His masquerade was a miracle of promptitude. It involved not only a disguise but a romance - an impromptu romance. He took off his big black hat and cloak and put on the dead man's dressing-gown. Then he did a rather grimy thing; at least a thing that affects my fancy as more grisly than the rest. He hung the corpse like a coat on one of the hat pegs. He draped it in his own long cloak, and found it hung well below the heels; he covered the head entirely with his own wide hat. It was the only possible way of hiding it in that little passage with the locked door; but it was really a very clever one. I myself walked past the hat-stand once without knowing it was anything but a hat-stand. I think that unconsciousness of mine will always give me a shiver.

'He might perhaps have left it at that; but I might have discovered the corpse at any minute; and, hung where it was, it was a corpse calling for what you might call an explanation. He adopted the bolder stroke of discovering it himself and explaining it himself."

'Then there dawned on this strange and frightfully fertile mind the conception of a story of substitution; the reversal of the parts. He had already assumed the part of Arnold Aylmer. Why should not his dead enemy assume the part of John Strake? There must have been something in that topsy-turveydom to take the fancy of that darkly fanciful man. It was like some frightful fancy - dress ball to which the two mortal enemies were to go dressed up as each other. Only, the fancy - dress ball was to be a dance of death: and one of the dancers would be dead. That is why I can imagine that man putting it in his own mind, and I can imagine him smiling.'

'Father Brown was gazing into vacancy with his large grey eyes, which, when not blurred by his trick of blinking, were the one notable thing in his face. He went on speaking simply and seriously: 'All things are from God; and above all, reason and imagination and the great gifts of the mind. They are good in themselves; and we must not altogether forget their origin even in their perversion. Now this man had in him a very noble power to be perverted, the power of telling stories. He was a great novelist; only he had twisted his fictive power to practical and to evil ends; to deceiving men with false fact instead of with true fiction. It began with his deceiving old Aylmer with elaborate excuses and ingeniously detailed lies; but even that may have been, at the beginning, little more than the tall stories and tarradiddles of the child who may say equally he has seen the King of England or the King of the Fairies. It grew strong in him through the vice that perpetuates all vices, pride; he grew more and more vain of his promptitude in producing stories of his originality, and subtlety in developing them. That is what the young Aylmers meant by saying that he could always cast a spell over their father; and it was true. It was the sort of spell that the storyteller cast over the tyrant in the Arabian Nights. And to the last he walked the world with the pride of a poet, and with the false yet unfathomable courage of a great liar. He could always produce more Arabian Nights if ever his neck was in danger. And today his neck was in danger.'

'But I am sure, as I say, that he enjoyed it as a fantasy as well as a conspiracy. He set about the task of telling the true story the wrong way round: of treating the dead man as living and the live man as dead. He had already got into Aylmer's dressing-gown; he proceeded to get into Aylmer's body and soul. He looked at the corpse as if it were his own corpse lying cold in the snow. Then he spread - eagled it in that strange fashion to suggest the sweeping descent of a bird of prey, and decked it out not only in his own dark and flying garments but in a whole dark fairy-tale romance. He took off his big black hat and cloak and put on the dead man's dressing-gown. Then he did a rather prompt and with the false yet unfathomable courage of a great liar. He could always produce more Arabian Nights if ever his neck was in danger. And today his neck was in danger.'

Dr Boyne looked thoughtful. 'Had you discovered the truth by then?' he asked. 'There is something very queer and close to the nerves, I think, about notions affecting identity. I don't know whether it would be more weird to get a guess like that swiftly or slowly. I wonder when you suspected and when you were sure.'

'I think I really suspected when I telephoned to you,' replied his friend. 'And it was nothing more than the red light from the closed door brightening and darkening on the carpet. It looked like a splash of blood that grew vivid
as it cried for vengeance. Why should it change like that? I knew the sun had not come out; it could only be because
the second door behind it had been opened and shut on the garden. But if he had gone out and seen his enemy then,
he would have raised the alarm then; and it was some time afterwards that the fracas occurred. I began to feel he had
gone out to do something ... to prepare something ... but as to when I was certain, that is a different matter. I knew
that right at the end he was trying to hypnotize me, to master me by the black art of eyes like talismans and a voice
like an incantation. That's what he used to do with old Aylmer, no doubt. But it wasn't only the way he said it, it was
what he said. It was the religion and philosophy of it.'

'I'm afraid I'm a practical man,' said the doctor with gruff humour, 'and I don't bother much about religion and
philosophy.'

'You'll never be a practical man till you do,' said Father Brown. 'Look here, doctor; you know me pretty well; I
think you know I'm not a bigot. You know I know there are all sorts in all religions; good men in bad ones and bad
men in good ones. But there's just one little fact I've learned simply as a practical man, an entirely practical point,
that I've picked up by experience, like the tricks of an animal or the trade - mark of a good wine. I've scarcely ever
met a criminal who philosophized at all, who didn't philosophize along those lines of orientalism and recurrence and
reincarnation, and the wheel of destiny and the serpent biting its own tail. I have found merely in practice that there
is a curse on the servants of that serpent; on their belly shall they go and the dust shall they eat; and there was never
a blackguard or a profligate born who could not talk that sort of spirituality. It may not be like that in its real
religious origins; but here in our working world it is the religion of rascals; and I knew it was a rascal who was
speaking.'

'Why,' said Boyne, 'I should have thought that a rascal could pretty well profess any religion he chose.'

'Yes,' assented the other; 'he could profess any religion; that is he could pretend to any religion, if it was all a
pretence. If it was mere mechanical hypocrisy and nothing else, no doubt it could be done by a mere mechanical
hypocrite. Any sort of mask can be put on any sort of face. Anybody can learn certain phrases or state verbally that
he holds certain views. I can go out into the street and state that I am a Wesleyan Methodist or a Sandemanian,
though I fear in no very convincing accent. But we are talking about an artist; and for the enjoyment of the artist the
mask must be to some extent moulded on the face. What he makes outside him must correspond to something inside
him; he can only make his effects out of some of the materials of his soul. I suppose he could have said he was a
Wesleyan Methodist; but he could never be an eloquent Methodist as he can be an eloquent mystic and fatalist. I am
talking of the sort of ideal such a man thinks of if he really tries to be idealistic. It was his whole game with me to be
as idealistic as possible; and whenever that is attempted by that sort of man, you will generally find it is that sort of
ideal. That sort of man may be dripping with gore; but he will always be able to tell you quite sincerely that
Buddhism is better than Christianity. Nay, he will tell you quite sincerely that Buddhism is more Christian than
Christianity. That alone is enough to throw a hideous and ghastly ray of light on his notion of Christianity.'

'Upon my soul,' said the doctor, laughing, 'I can't make out whether you're denouncing or defending him.'

'IT isn't defending a man to say he is a genius,' said Father Brown. 'Far from it. And it is simply a psychological
fact that an artist will betray himself by some sort of sincerity. Leonardo da Vinci cannot draw as if he couldn't
draw. Even if he tried, it will always be a strong parody of a weak thing. This man would have made something
much too fearful and wonderful out of the Wesleyan Methodist.'

When the priest went forth again and set his face homeward, the cold had grown more intense and yet was
somehow intoxicating. The trees stood up like silver candelabra of some incredible cold candlemas of purification. It
was a piercing cold, like that silver sword of pure pain that once pierced the very he of purity. But it was not a
killing cold, save in the sense of seeming to kill all the mortal obstructions to our immortal and immeasurable
vitality. The pale green sky of twilight, with one star like the star of Bethlehem, seemed by some strange
contradiction to be a cavern of clarity. It was as if there could be a green furnace of cold which wakened all things to
life like warmth, and that the deeper they went into those cold crystalline colours the more were they light like
winged creatures and clear like coloured glass! It tingled with truth and it divided truth from error with a blade like
ice; but all that was left had never felt so much alive. It was as if all joy were a jewel in the heart of an iceberg. The
priest hardly understood his own mood as he advanced deeper and, deeper into the green gloaming, drinking deeper
and deeper draughts of that virginal vivacity of the air. Some forgotten muddle and morbidity seemed to be left
behind, or wiped out as the snow had painted out the footprints of the man of blood. As he shuffled homewards
through the snow, he muttered to himself: 'And yet he is right enough about there being a white magic, if he only
knows where to look for it.'

SEVEN: The Doom of the Darnaways

Two landscape - painters stood looking at one landscape, which was also a seascape, and both were curiously
impressed by it, though their impressions were not exactly the same. To one of them, who was a rising artist from
London, it was new as well as strange. To the other, who was a local artist but with something more than a local
celebrity, it was better known; but perhaps all the more strange for what he knew of it.

In terms of tone and form, as these men saw it, it was a stretch of sands against a stretch of sunset, the whole scene lying in strips of sombre colour, dead green and bronze and brown and a drab that was not merely dull but in that gloaming in some way more mysterious than gold. All that broke these level lines was a long building which ran out from the fields into the sands of the sea, so that its fringe of dreary weeds and rushes seemed almost to meet the seaweed. But its most singular feature was that the upper part of it had the ragged outlines of a ruin, pierced by so many wide windows and large rents as to be a mere dark skeleton against the dying light; while the lower bulk of the building had hardly any windows at all, most of them being blind and bricked up and their outlines only faintly traceable in the twilight. But one window at least was still a window; and it seemed strangest of all that it showed a light.

'Who on earth can live in that old shell?' exclaimed the Londoner, who was a big, bohemian-looking man, young but with a shaggy red beard that made him look older; Chelsea knew him familiarly as Harry Payne.

'Ghosts, you might suppose,' replied his friend Martin Wood. 'Well, the people who live there really are rather like ghosts.'

It was perhaps rather a paradox that the London artist seemed almost bucolic in his boisterous freshness and wonder, while the local artist seemed a more shrewd and experienced person, regarding him with mature and amiable amusement; indeed, the latter was altogether a quieter and more conventional figure, wearing darker clothes and with his square and stolid face clean shaven.

'It is only a sign of the times, of course,' he went on, 'or of the passing of old times and old families with them. The last of the great Darnaways live in that house, and not many of the new poor are as poor as they are. They can't even afford to make their own top-storey habitable; but have to live in the lower rooms of a ruin, like bats and owls. Yet they have family portraits that go back to the Wars of the Roses and the first portrait—painting in England, and very fine some of them are; I happen to know, because they asked for my professional advice in overhauling them. There's one of them especially, and one of the earliest, but it's so good that it gives you the creeps.'

'The whole place gives you the creeps, I should think by the look of it,' replied Payne.

'Well,' said his friend, 'to tell you the truth, it does.'

The silence that followed was stirred by a faint rustle among the rushes by the moat; and it gave them, rationally enough, a slight nervous start when a dark figure brushed along the bank, moving rapidly and almost like a startled bird. But it was only a man walking briskly with a black bag in his hand: a man with a long sallow face and sharp eyes that glanced at the London stranger in a slightly darkling and suspicious manner.

'It's only Dr Barnet,' said Wood with a sort of relief. 'Good evening, Doctor. Are you going up to the house? I hope nobody's ill.'

'Everybody's always ill in a place like that,' growled the doctor; 'only sometimes they're too ill to know it. The very air of the place is a blight and a pestilence. I don't envy the young man from Australia.'

'And who,' asked Payne abruptly and rather absently, 'may the young man from Australia be?'

'Ah!' snorted the doctor; 'hasn't your friend told you about him? As a matter of fact I believe he is arriving today. Quite a romance in the old style of melodrama: the heir back from the colonies to his ruined castle, all complete even down to an old family compact for his marrying the lady watching in the ivied tower. Queer old stuff, isn't it? But it really happens sometimes. He's even got a little money, which is the only bright spot there ever was in this business.'

'What does Miss Darnaway herself, in her ivied tower, think of the business?' asked Martin Wood dryly.

'What she thinks of everything else by this time,' replied the doctor. 'They don't think in this weedy old den of superstitions, they only dream and drift. I think she accepts the family contract and the colonial husband as part of the Doom of the Darnaways, don't you know. I really think that if he turned out to be a humpbacked Negro with one eye and a homicidal mania, she would only think it added a finishing touch and fitted in with the twilight scenery.'

'You're not giving my friend from London a very lively picture of my friends in the country,' said Wood, laughing. 'I had intended taking him there to call; no artist ought to miss those Darnaway portraits if he gets the chance. But perhaps I'd better postpone it if they're in the middle of the Australian invasion.'

'Oh, do go in and see them, for the Lord's sake,' said Dr Barnet warmly. 'Anything that will brighten their blighted lives will make my task easier. It will need a good many colonial cousins to cheer things up, I should think; and the more the merrier. Come, I'll take you in myself.'

As they drew nearer to the house it was seen to be isolated like an island in a moat of brackish water which they crossed by a bridge. On the other side spread a fairly wide stony floor or embankment with great cracks across it, in which little tufts of weed and thorn sprouted here and there. This rock platform looked large and bare in the grey twilight, and Payne could hardly have believed that such a corner of space could have contained so much of the soul of a wilderness. This platform only jutted out on one side, like a giant door-step and beyond it was the door; a very
low-browed Tudor archway standing open, but dark like a cave.

When the brisk doctor led them inside without ceremony, Payne had, as it were, another shock of depression. He could have expected to find himself mounting to a very ruinous tower, by very narrow winding staircases; but in this case the first steps into the house were actually steps downwards. They went down several short and broken stairways into large twilit rooms which but for their lines of dark pictures and dusty bookshelves, might have been the traditional dungeons beneath the castle moat. Here and there a candle in an old candlestick lit up some dusty accidental detail of a dead elegance; but the visitor was not so much impressed or depressed by this artificial light as by the one pale gleam of natural light. As he passed down the long room he saw the only window in that wall - a curious low oval window of a late-seventeenth-century fashion. But the strange thing about it was that it did not look out directly on any space of sky but only on a reflection of sky; a pale strip of daylight merely mirrored in the moat, under the hanging shadow of the bank. Payne had a memory of the Lady of Shallot who never saw the world outside except in a mirror. The lady of this Shallot not only in some sense saw the world in a mirror, but even saw the world upside-down.

'It's as if the house of Darnaway were falling literally as well as metaphorically,' said Wood in a low voice; 'as if it were sinking slowly into a swamp or a quicksand, until the sea goes over it like a green roof.'

Even the sturdy Dr Barnet started a little at the silent approach of the figure that came to receive them. Indeed, the room was so silent that they were all startled to realize that it was not empty. There were three people in it when they entered: three dim figures motionless in the dim room; all three dressed in black and looking like dark shadows. As the foremost figure drew nearer the grey light from the window, he showed a face that looked almost as grey as its frame of hair. This was old Vine, the steward, long left in loco parentis since the death of that eccentric parent, the last Lord Darnaway. He would have been a handsome old man if he had had no teeth. As it was, he had one which showed every now and then and gave him a rather sinister appearance. He received the doctor and his friends with a fine courtesy and escorted them to where the other two figures in black were seated. One of them seemed to Payne to give another appropriate touch of gloomy antiquity to the castle by the mere fact of being a Roman Catholic priest, who might have come out of a priest's hole in the dark old days. Payne could imagine him muttering prayers or telling beads, or tolling bells or doing a number of indistinct and melancholy things in that melancholy place. Just then he might be supposed to have been giving religious consolation to the lady; but it could hardly be supposed that the consolation was very consoling, or at any rate that it was very cheering. For the rest, the priest was personally insignificant enough, with plain and rather expressionless features; but the lady was a very different matter. Her face was very far from being plain or insignificant; it stood out from the darkness of her dress and hair and background with a pallor that was almost awful, but a beauty that was almost awfully alive. Payne looked at it as long as he dared; and he was to look at it a good deal longer before he died.

Wood merely exchanged with his friends such pleasant and polite phrases as would lead up to his purpose of revisiting the portraits. He apologized for calling on the day which he heard was to be one of family welcome; but he was soon convinced that the family was rather mildly relieved to have visitors to distract them or break the shock. He did not hesitate, therefore, to lead Payne through the central reception-room into the library beyond, where hung the portrait, for there was one which he was especially bent on showing, not only as a picture but almost as a puzzle. The little priest trudged along with them; he seemed to know something about old pictures as well as about old prayers.

'I'm rather proud of having spotted this,' said Wood. 'I believe it's a Holbein. If it isn't, there was somebody living in Holbein's time who was as great as Holbein.'

It was a portrait in the hard but sincere and living fashion of the period, representing a man clad in black trimmed with gold and fur, with a heavy, full, rather pale face but watchful eyes.

'What a pity art couldn't have stopped for ever at just that transition stage,' cried Wood, 'and never transitioned any more. Don't you see it's just realistic enough to be real? Don't you see the face speaks all the more because it stands out from a rather stiffer framework of less essential things? And the eyes are even more real than the face. On my soul, I think the eyes are too real for the face! It's just as if those sly, quick eyeballs were protruding out of a great pale mask.'

'The stiffness extends to the figure a little, I think,' said Payne. 'They hadn't quite mastered anatomy when medievalism ended, at least in the north. That left leg looks to me a good deal out of drawing.'

'I'm not so sure,' replied Wood quietly. 'Those fellows who painted just when realism began to be done, and before it began to be overdone, were often more realistic than we think. They put real details of portraiture into things that are thought merely conventional. You might say this fellow's eyebrows or eye-sockets are a little lop-sided; but I bet if you knew him you'd find that one of his eyebrows did really stick up more than the other. And I shouldn't wonder if he was lame or something, and that black leg was meant to be crooked.'

'What an old devil he looks!' burst out Payne suddenly. 'I trust his reverence will excuse my language.'
'I believe in the devil, thank you,' said the priest with an inscrutable face. 'Curiously enough there was a legend
that the devil was lame.'

'I say,' protested Payne, 'you can't really mean that he was the devil; but who the devil was he?'

'He was the Lord Darnaway under Henry VII and Henry VIII,' replied his companion. 'But there are curious
legends about him, too; one of them is referred to in that inscription round the frame, and further developed in some
notes left by somebody in a book I found here. They are both rather curious reading.'

Payne leaned forward, craning his head so as to follow the archaic inscription round the frame. Leaving out the
antiquated lettering and spelling, it seemed to be a sort of rhyme running somewhat thus:

In the seventh heir I shall return: In the seventh hour I shall depart: None in that hour shall hold my hand:
And woe to her that holds my heart.

'It sounds creepy somehow,' said Payne, 'but that may be partly because I don't understand a word of it.'

'It's pretty creepy even when you do,' said Wood in a low voice. 'The record made at a later date, in the old book
I found, is all about how this beauty deliberately killed himself in such a way that his wife was executed for his
murder. Another note commemorates a later tragedy, seven successions later - under the Georges - in which another
Darnaway committed suicide, having first thoughtfully left poison in his wife's wine. It's said that both suicides took
place at seven in the evening. I suppose the inference is that he does really return with every seventh inheritor and
makes things unpleasant, as the rhyme suggests, for any lady unwise enough to marry him.'

'On that argument,' replied Payne, 'it would be a trifle uncomfortable for the next seventh gentleman.'

Wood's voice was lower still as he said: 'The new heir will be the seventh.'

Harry Payne suddenly heaved up his great chest and shoulders like a man flinging off a burden.

'What crazy stuff are we all talking?' he cried. 'We're all educated men in an enlightened age, I suppose. Before I
came into this damned dank atmosphere I'd never have believed I should be talking of such things, except to laugh at
them.'

'You are right,' said Wood. 'If you lived long enough in this underground palace you'd begin to feel differently
about things. I've begun to feel very curiously about that picture, having had so much to do with handling and
hanging it. It sometimes seems to me that the painted face is more alive than the dead faces of the people living here;
that it is a sort of talisman or magnet: that it commands the elements and draws out the destinies of men and things. I
suppose you would call it very fanciful.'

'What is that noise?' cried Payne suddenly.

They all listened, and there seemed to be no noise except the dull boom of the distant sea; then they began to
have the sense of something mingling with it; something like a voice calling through the sound of the surf, dulled by
it at first, but coming nearer and nearer. The next moment they were certain: someone was shouting outside in the
dusk.

Payne turned to the low window behind him and bent to look out. It was the window from which nothing could
be seen except the moat with its reflection of bank and sky. But that inverted vision was not the same that he had
seen before. From the hanging shadow of the bank in the water depended two dark shadows reflected from the feet
and legs of a figure standing above upon the bank. Through that limited aperture they could see nothing but the two
legs black against the reflection of a pale and livid sunset. But somehow that very fact of the head being invisible, as
if in the clouds, gave something dreadful to the sound that followed; the voice of a man crying aloud what they
could not properly hear or understand. Payne especially was peering out of the little window with an altered face,
and he spoke with an altered voice:

'How queerly he's standing!'

'No, no,' said Wood, in a sort of soothing whisper. 'Things often look like that in reflection. It's the waverthing of
the water that makes you think that.'

'Think what?' asked the priest shortly.

'That his left leg is crooked,' said Wood.

Payne had thought of the oval window as a sort of mystical mirror; and it seemed to him that there were in it
other inscrutable images of doom. There was something else beside the figure that he did not understand; three
thinner legs showing in dark lines against the light, as if some monstrous three-legged spider or bird were standing
beside the stranger. Then he had the less crazy thought of a tripod like that of the heathen oracles; and the next
moment the thing had vanished and the legs of the human figure passed out of the picture.

He turned to meet the pale face of old Vine, the steward, with his mouth open, eager to speak, and his single
tooth showing. 'He has come,' he said. 'The boat arrived from Australia this morning.'

Even as they went back out of the library into the central salon they heard the footsteps of the newcomer
clattering down the entrance steps, with various items of light luggage trailed behind him. When Payne saw one of
them, he laughed with a reaction of relief. His tripod was nothing but the telescopic legs of a portable camera, easily
packed and unpacked; and the man who was carrying it seemed so far to take on equally solid and normal qualities. He was dressed in dark clothes, but of a careless and holiday sort; his shirt was of grey flannel, and his boots echoed uncompromisingly enough in those still chambers. As he strode forward to greet his new circle his stride had scarcely more than the suggestion of a limp. But Payne and his companions were looking at his face, and could scarcely take their eyes from it.

He evidently felt there was something curious and uncomfortable about his reception; but they could have sworn that he did not himself know the cause of it. The lady, supposed to be in some sense already betrothed to him, was certainly beautiful enough to attract him; but she evidently also frightened him. The old steward brought him a sort of feudal homage, yet treated him as if he were the family ghost. The priest still looked at him with a face which was quite indecipherable, and therefore perhaps all the more unnerving. A new sort of irony, more like the Greek irony, began to pass over Payne's mind. He had dreamed of the stranger as a devil, but it seemed almost worse that he was an unconscious destiny. He seemed to march towards crime with the monstrous innocence of Oedipus. He had approached the family mansion in so blindly buoyant a spirit as to have set up his camera to photograph his first sight of it; and even the camera had taken on the semblance of the tripod of a tragic pythoness.

Payne was surprised, when taking his leave a little while after, at something which showed that the Australian was already less unconscious of his surroundings. He said in a low voice:

'Don't go ... or come again soon. You look like a human being. This place fairly gives me the jumps.'

When Payne emerged out of those almost subterranean halls and came into the night air and the smell of the sea, he felt as if he had come out of that underworld of dreams in which events jumble on top of each other in a way at once unrestful and unreal.

The arrival of the strange relative had been somehow unsatisfying and, as it were, unconvincing. The doubling of the same face in the old portrait and the new arrival troubled him like a two headed monster. And yet it was not altogether a nightmare; nor was it that face, perhaps, that he saw most vividly.

'Did you say?' he asked of the doctor, as they strode together across the striped dark sands by the darkening sea; 'did you say that young man was betrothed to Miss Darnaway by a family compact or something? Sounds rather like a novel.'

'But an historical novel,' answered Dr Barnet. 'The Darnaways all went to sleep a few centuries ago, when things were really done that we only read of in romances. Yes; I believe there's some family tradition by which second or third cousins always marry when they stand in a certain relation of age, in order to unite the property. A damned silly tradition, I should say; and if they often married in and in, in that fashion, it may account on principles of heredity for their having gone so rotten.'

'I should hardly say,' answered Payne a little stuffily, 'that they had all gone rotten.'

'Well,' replied the doctor, 'the young man doesn't look rotten, of course, though he's certainly lame.'

'The young man!' cried Payne, who was suddenly and unreasonably angry. 'Well, if you think the young lady looks rotten, I think it's you who have rotten taste.'

The doctor's face grew dark and bitter. 'I fancy I know more about it than you do,' he snapped.

They completed the walk in silence, each feeling that he had been irrationally rude and had suffered equally irrational rudeness; and Payne was left to brood alone on the matter, for his friend Wood had remained behind to attend to some of his business in connexion with the pictures.

Payne took very full advantage of the invitation extended by the colonial cousin, who wanted somebody to cheer him up. During the next few weeks he saw a good deal of the dark interior of the Darnaway home; though it might be said that he did not confine himself entirely to cheering up the colonial cousin. The lady's melancholy was of longer standing and perhaps needed more lifting; anyhow, he showed a laborious readiness to lift it. He was not without a conscience, however, and the situation made him doubtful and uncomfortable. Weeks went by and nobody could discover from the demeanour of the new Darnaway whether he considered himself engaged according to the old compact or no. He went mooning about the dark galleries and stood staring vacantly at the dark and sinister picture. The shades of that prison-house were certainly beginning to close on him, and there was little of his Australian assurance left. But Payne could discover nothing upon the point that concerned him most. Once he attempted to confide in his friend Martin Wood, as he was pottering about in his capacity of picture-hanger; but even out of him he got very little satisfaction.

'It seems to me you can't butt in,' said Wood shortly, 'because of the engagement.'

'Of course I shan't butt in if there is an engagement,' retorted his friend; 'but is there? I haven't said a word to her of course; but I've seen enough of her to be pretty certain she doesn't think there is, even if she thinks there may be. He doesn't say there is, or even hint that there ought to be. It seems to me this shillyshallying is rather unfair on everybody.'

'Especially on you, I suppose,' said Wood a little harshly. 'But if you ask me, I'll tell you what I think - I think
He's afraid.'

'Afraid of being refused?' asked Payne.

'No; afraid of being accepted,' answered the other. 'Don't bite my head off - I don't mean afraid of the lady. I mean afraid of the picture.'

'Afraid of the picture!' repeated Payne.

'I mean afraid of the curse,' said Wood. 'Don't you remember the rhyme about the Darnaway doom falling on him and her.'

'Yes, but look here,' cried Payne; 'even the Darnaway doom can't have it both ways. You tell me first that I mustn't have my own way because of the compact, and then that the compact mustn't have its own way because of the curse. But if the curse can destroy the compact, why should she be tied to the compact? If they're frightened of marrying each other, they're free to marry anybody else, and there's an end of it. Why should I suffer for the observance of something they don't propose to observe? It seems to me your position is very unreasonable.'

'Of course it's all a tangle,' said Wood rather crossly, and went on hammering at the frame of a canvas.

Suddenly, one morning, the new heir broke his long and baffling silence. He did it in a curious fashion, a little crude, as was his way, but with an obvious anxiety to do the right thing. He asked frankly for advice, not of this or that individual as Payne had done, but collectively as of a crowd. When he did speak he threw himself on the whole company like a statesman going to the country. He called it 'a show - down'. Fortunately the lady was not included in this large gesture; and Payne shuddered when he thought of her feelings. But the Australian was quite honest; he thought the natural thing was to ask for help and for information, calling a sort of family council at which he put his cards on the table. It might be said that he flung down his cards on the table, for he did it with a rather desperate air, like one who had been harassed for days and nights by the increasing pressure of a problem. In that short time the shadows of that place of low windows and sinking pavements had curiously changed him, and increased a certain resemblance that crept through all their memories.

The five men, including the doctor, were sitting round a table; and Payne was idly reflecting that his own light tweeds and red hair must be the only colours in the room, for the priest and the steward were in black, and Wood and Darnaway habitually wore dark grey suits that looked almost like black. Perhaps this incongruity had been what the young man had meant by calling him a human being. At that moment the young man himself turned abruptly in his chair and began to talk. A moment after the dazed artist knew that he was talking about the most tremendous thing in the world.

'Is there anything in it?' he was saying. 'That is what I've come to asking myself till I'm nearly crazy. I'd never have believed I should come to thinking of such things; but I think of the portrait and the rhyme and the coincidences or whatever you call them, and I go cold. Is there anything in it? Is there any Doom of the Darnaways or only a damned queer accident? Have I got a right to marry, or shall I bring something big and black out of the sky, that I know nothing about, on myself and somebody else?'

His rolling eye had roamed round the table and rested on the plain face of the priest, to whom he now seemed to be speaking. Payne's submerged practicality rose in protest against the problem of superstition being brought before that supremely superstitious tribunal. He was sitting next to Darnaway and struck in before the priest could answer.

'Well, the coincidences are curious, I admit,' he said, rather forcing a note of cheerfulness; 'but surely we - ' and then he stopped as if he had been struck by lightning. For Darnaway had turned his head sharply over his shoulder at the interruption, and with the movement, his left eyebrow jerked up far above its fellow and for an instant the face of the portrait glared at him with a ghastly exaggeration of exactitude. The rest saw it; and all had the air of having been dazzled by an instant of light. The old steward gave a hollow groan.

'It is no good,' he said hoarsely; 'we are dealing with something too terrible.'

'Yes,' assented the priest in a low voice, 'we are dealing with something terrible; with the most terrible thing I know, and the name of it is nonsense.'

'What did you say?' said Darnaway, still looking towards him.

'I said nonsense,' repeated the priest. 'I have not said anything in particular up to now, for it was none of my business; I was only taking temporary duty in the neighbourhood and Miss Darnaway wanted to see me. But since you're asking me personally and point - blank, why, it's easy enough to answer. Of course there's no Doom of the Darnaways to prevent your marrying anybody you have any decent reason for marrying. A man isn't fated to fall into the smallest venial sin, let alone into crimes like suicide and murder. You can't be made to do wicked things against your will because your name is Darnaway, any more than I can because my name is Brown. The Doom of the Browns,' he added with relish - 'the Weird of the Browns would sound even better.'

'And you of all people,' repeated the Australian, staring, 'tell me to think like that about it.'

'I tell you to think about something else,' replied the priest cheerfully. 'What has become of the rising art of photography? How is the camera getting on? I know it's rather dark downstairs, but those hollow arches on the floor
above could easily be turned into a first-rate photographic studio. A few workmen could fit it out with a glass roof in no time.'

'Really,' protested Martin Wood, 'I do think you should be the last man in the world to tinker about with those beautiful Gothic arches, which are about the best work your own religion has ever done in the world. I should have thought you'd have had some feeling for that sort of art; but I can't see why you should be so uncommonly keen on photography.'

'I'm uncommonly keen on daylight,' answered Father Brown, 'especially in this dingy business; and photography has the virtue of depending on daylight. And if you don't know that I would grind all the Gothic arches in the world to powder to save the sanity of a single human soul, you don't know so much about my religion as you think you do.'

The young Australian had sprung to his feet like a man rejuvenated. 'By George! that's the talk,' he cried; 'though I never thought to hear it from that quarter. I'll tell you what, reverend sir, I'll do something that will show I haven't lost my courage after all.'

The old steward was still looking at him with quaking watchfulness, as if he felt something fey about the young man's defiance. 'Oh,' he cried, 'what are you going to do now?'

'I am going to photograph the portrait,' replied Darnaway.

Yet it was barely a week afterwards that the storm of the catastrophe seemed to stoop out of the sky, darkening that sun of sanity to which the priest had appealed in vain, and plunging the mansion once more in the darkness of the Darnaway doom. It had been easy enough to fit up the new studio; and seen from inside it looked very like any other such studio, empty except for the fullness of the white light. A man coming from the gloomy rooms below had more than normally the sense of stepping into a more than modern brilliancy, as blank as the future. At the suggestion of Wood, who knew the castle well and had got over his first aesthetic grumblings, a small room remaining intact in the upper ruins was easily turned into a dark room, into which Darnaway went out of the white daylight to grope by the crimson gleams of a red lamp. Wood said, laughing, that the red lamp had reconciled him to the vandalism; as that bloodshot darkness was as romantic as an alchemist's cave.

Darnaway had risen at daybreak on the day that he meant to photograph the mysterious portrait, and had it carried up from the library by the single corkscrew staircase that connected the two floors. There he had set it up in the wide white daylight on a sort of easel and planted his photographic tripod in front of it. He said he was anxious to send a reproduction of it to a great antiquary who had written on the antiquities of the house; but the others knew that this was an excuse covering much deeper things. It was, if not exactly a spiritual duel between Darnaway and the demoniac picture, at least a duel between Darnaway and his own doubts. He wanted to bring the daylight of photography face to face with that dark masterpiece of painting; and to see whether the sunshine of the new art would not drive out the shadows of the old.

Perhaps this was why he preferred to do it by himself, even if some of the details seemed to take longer and involve more than normal delay. Anyhow, he rather discouraged the few who visited his studio during the day of the experiment, and who found him focusing and fussing about in a very isolated and impenetrable fashion. The steward had left a meal for him, as he refused to come down; the old gentleman also returned some hours afterwards and found the meal more or less normally disposed of; but when he brought it he got no more gratitude than a grunt. Payne went up once to see how he was getting on, but finding the photographer disinclined for conversation came down again. Father Brown had wandered that way in an unobtrusive style to lake Darnaway a letter from the expert to whom the photograph was to be sent. But he left the letter on a tray, and whatever he thought of that great glasshouse full of daylight and devotion to a hobby, a world he had himself in some sense created, he kept it to himself and came down. He had reason to remember very soon that he was the last to come down the solitary staircase connecting the floors, leaving a lonely man and an empty room behind him. The others were standing in the salon that led into the library, just under the great black ebony clock that looked like a titanic coffin.

'How was Darnaway getting on,' asked Payne, a little later, 'when you last went up?'

The priest passed a hand over his forehead. 'Don't tell me I'm getting psychic,' he said with a sad smile. 'I believe I'm quite dazzled with daylight up in that room and couldn't see things straight. Honestly, I felt for a flash as if there were something uncanny about Darnaway's figure standing before that portrait.'

'Oh, that's the lame leg,' said Barnet promptly. 'We know all about that.'

'Do you know,' said Payne abruptly, but lowering his voice, 'I don't think we do know all about it or anything about it. What's the matter with his leg? What was the matter with his ancestor's leg?'

'Oh, there's something about that in the book I was reading in there, in the family archives,' said Wood; 'I'll fetch it for you.' And he stepped into the library just beyond.

'I think,' said Father Brown quietly, 'Mr Payne must have some particular reason for asking that.'

'I may as well blurt it out once and for all,' said Payne, but in a yet lower voice. 'After all, there is a rational explanation. A man from anywhere might have made up to look like the portrait. What do we know about
Darnaway? He is behaving rather oddly - 'The others were staring at him in a rather startled fashion; but the priest seemed to take it very calmly.

'I don't think the old portrait's ever been photographed,' he said. 'That's why he wants to do it. I don't think there's anything odd about that.'

'Quite an ordinary state of things, in fact,' said Wood with a smile; he had just returned with the book in his hand. And even as he spoke there was a stir in the clockwork of the great dark clock behind him and successive strokes thrilled through the room up to the number of seven. With the last stroke there came a crash from the floor above that shook the house like a thunderbolt; and Father Brown was already two steps up the winding staircase before the sound had ceased.

'My God!' cried Payne involuntarily; 'he is alone up there.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown without turning, as he vanished up the stairway. 'We shall find him alone.'

When the rest recovered from their first paralysis and ran helter - skelter up the stone steps and found their way to the new studio, it was true in that sense that they found him alone. They found him lying in a wreck of his tall camera, with its long splintered legs standing out grotesquely at three different angles; and Darnaway had fallen on top of it with one black crooked leg lying at a fourth angle along the floor. For the moment the dark heap looked as if he were entangled with some huge and horrible spider. Little more than a glance and a touch were needed to tell them that he was dead. Only the portrait stood untouched upon the easel, and one could fancy the smiling eyes shone.

An hour afterwards Father Brown in helping to calm the confusion of the stricken household, came upon the old steward muttering almost as mechanically as the clock had ticked and struck the terrible hour. Almost without hearing them, he knew what the muttered words must be.

In the seventh heir I shall return
In the seventh hour I shall depart.

As he was about to say something soothing, the old man seemed suddenly to start awake and stiffen into anger; his mutterings changed to a fierce cry.

'You!' he cried; 'you and your daylight! Even you won't say now there is no Doom for the Darnaways.'

'My opinion about that is unchanged,' said Father Brown mildly. Then after a pause he added: 'I hope you will observe poor Darnaway's last wish, and see the photograph is sent off.'

'The photograph!' cried the doctor sharply. 'What's the good of that? As a matter of fact, it's rather curious; but there isn't any photograph. It seems he never took it after all, after pottering about all day.'

Father Brown swung round sharply. 'Then take it yourselves,' he said. 'Poor Darnaway was perfectly right. It's most important that the photograph should be taken.'

As all the visitors, the doctor, the priest, and the two artists trailed away in a black and dismal procession across the brown and yellow sands, they were at first more or less silent, rather as if they had been stunned. And certainly there had been something like a crack of thunder in a clear sky about the fulfilment of that forgotten superstition at the very time when they had most forgotten it; when the doctor and the priest had both filled their minds with rationalism as the photographer had filled his rooms with daylight. They might be as rationalistic as they liked; but in broad daylight the seventh heir had returned, and in broad daylight at the seventh hour he had perished.

'I'm afraid everybody will always believe in the Darnaway superstition now,' said Martin Wood.

'I know one who won't,' said the doctor sharply. 'Why should I indulge in superstition because somebody else indulges in suicide?'

'You think poor Mr Darnaway committed suicide?' asked the priest.

'I'm sure he committed suicide,' replied the doctor.

'It is possible,' agreed the other.

'He was quite alone up there, and he had a whole drug - store of poisons in the dark room. Besides, it's just the sort of thing that Darnaways do.'

'You don't think there's anything in the fulfilment of the family curse?'

'Yes,' said the doctor; 'I believe in one family curse, and that is the family constitution. I told you it was heredity, and they are all half mad. If you stagnate and breed in and brood in your own swamp like that, you're bound to degenerate whether you like it or not. The laws of heredity can't be dodged; the truths of science can't be denied. The minds of the Darnaways are falling to pieces, as their blighted old sticks and stones are falling to pieces, eaten away by the sea and the salt air. Suicide - of course he committed suicide; I dare say all the rest will commit suicide. Perhaps the best thing they could do.'

As the man of science spoke there sprang suddenly and with startling clearness into Payne's memory the face of the daughter of the Darnaways, a tragic mask pale against an unfathomable blackness, but itself of a blinding and more than mortal beauty. He opened his mouth to speak and found himself speechless.

'I see,' said Father Brown to the doctor; 'so you do believe in the superstition after all?'
'What do you mean - believe in the superstition? I believe in the suicide as a matter of scientific necessity.'

'Well,' replied the priest, 'I don't see a pin to choose between your scientific superstition and the other magical superstition. They both seem to end in turning people into paralytics, who can't move their own legs or arms or save their own lives or souls. The rhyme said it was the Doom of the Darnaways to be killed, and the scientific textbook says it is the Doom of the Darnaways to kill themselves. Both ways they seem to be slaves.'

'But I thought you said you believed in rational views of these things,' said Dr Barnet. 'Don't you believe in heredity?'

'I said I believed in daylight,' replied the priest in a loud and clear voice, 'and I won't choose between two tunnels of subterranean superstition that both end in the dark. And the proof of it is this: that you are all entirely in the dark about what really happened in that house.'

'Do you mean about the suicide?' asked Payne.

'I mean about the murder,' said Father Brown; and his voice, though only slightly lifted to a louder note, seemed somehow to resound over the whole shore. 'It was murder; but murder is of the will, which God made free.'

What the other said at the moment in answer to it Payne never knew. For the word had a rather curious effect on him; stirring him like the blast of a trumpet and yet bringing him to a halt. He stood still in the middle of the sandy waste and let the others go on in front of him; he felt the blood crawling through all his veins and the sensation that is called the hair standing on end; and yet he felt a new and unnatural happiness. A psychological process too quick and too complicated for himself to follow had already reached a conclusion that he could not analyse; but the conclusion was one of relief. After standing still for a moment he turned and went back slowly across the sands to the house of the Darnaways.

He crossed the moat with a stride that shook the bridge, descended the stairs and traversed the long rooms with a resounding tread, till he came to the place where Adelaide Darnaway sat haloed with the low light of the oval window, almost like some forgotten saint left behind in the land of death. She looked up, and an expression of wonder made her face yet more wonderful.

'What is it?' she said. 'Why have you come back?'

'I have come for the Sleeping Beauty,' he said in a tone that had the resonance of a laugh. 'This old house went to sleep long ago, as the doctor said; but it is silly for you to pretend to be old. Come up into the daylight and hear the truth. I have brought you a word; it is a terrible word, but it breaks the spell of your captivity.'

She did not understand a word he said, but something made her rise and let him lead her down the long hall and up the stairs and out under the evening sky. The ruins of a dead garden stretched towards the sea, and an old fountain with the figure of a triton, green with rust, remained poised there, pouring nothing out of a dried horn into an empty basin. He had often seen that desolate outline against the evening sky as he passed, and it had seemed to him a type of fallen fortunes in more ways than one. Before long, doubtless, those hollow fonts would be filled, but it would be with the pale green bitter waters of the sea and the flowers would be drowned and strangled in seaweed. So, he had told himself, the daughter of the Darnaways might indeed be wedded; but she would be wedded to death and a doom as deaf and ruthless as the sea. But now he laid a hand on the bronze triton that was like the hand of a giant, and shook it as if he meant to hurl it like an idol or an evil god of the garden.

'What do you mean?' she asked steadily. 'What is this word that will set us free?'

'The word is murder,' he said, 'and the freedom it brings is as fresh as the flowers of spring. No; I do not mean I have murdered anybody. But the fact that anybody can be murdered is itself good news, after the evil dreams you have been living in. Don't you understand? In that dream of yours everything that happened to you came from inside you; the Doom of the Darnaways was stored up in the Darnaways; it unfolded itself like a horrible flower. There was no escape even by happy accident; it was all inevitable; whether it was Vine and his old - wives' tales, or Barnet and his new - fangled heredity. But this man who died was not the victim of a magic curse or an inherited madness. He was murdered; and for us that murder is simply an accident; yes, requiescat in pace: but a happy accident. It is a ray of daylight, because it comes from outside.'

She suddenly smiled. 'Yes, I believe I understand. I suppose you are talking like a lunatic, but I understand. But who murdered him?'

'I do not know,' he answered calmly, 'but Father Brown knows. And as Father Brown says, murder is at least done by the will, free as that wind from the sea.'

'Father Brown is a wonderful person,' she said after a pause; 'he was the only person who ever brightened my existence in any way at all until -'

'Until what?' asked Payne, and made a movement almost impetuous, leaning towards her and thrusting away the bronze monster so that it seemed to rock on its pedestal.

'Well, until you did,' she said and smiled again.

So was the sleeping palace awakened, and it is no part of this story to describe the stages of its awakening,
though much of it had come to pass before the dark of that evening had fallen upon the shore. As Harry Payne strode homewards once more, across those dark sands that he had crossed in so many moods, he was at the highest turn of happiness that is given in this mortal life, - and the whole red sea within him was at the top of its tide. He would have had no difficulty in picturing all that place again in flower, and the bronze triton bright as a golden god and the fountain flowing with water or with wine. But all this brightness and blossoming had been unfolded for him by the one word 'murder', and it was still a word that he did not understand. He had taken it on trust, and he was not unwise; for he was one of those who have a sense of the sound of truth.

It was more than a month later that Payne returned to his London house to keep an appointment with Father Brown, taking the required photograph with him. His personal romance had prospered as well as was fitting under the shadow of such a tragedy, and the shadow itself therefore lay rather more lightly on him; but it was hard to view it as anything but the shadow of a family fatality. In many ways he had been much occupied; and it was not until the Darnaway household had resumed its somewhat stern routine, and the portrait had long been restored to its place in the library, that he had managed to photograph it with a magnesium flare. Before sending it to the antiquary, as originally arranged, he brought it to the priest who had so pressingly demanded it.

'I can't understand your attitude about all this. Father Brown,' he said.' You act as if you had already solved the problem in some way of your own.'

The priest shook his head mournfully. 'Not a bit of it,' he answered. 'I must be very stupid, but I'm quite stuck; stuck about the most practical point of all. It's a queer business; so simple up to a point and then - Let me have a look at that photograph, will you?'

He held it close to his screwed, short - sighted eyes for a moment, and then said: 'Have you got a magnifying glass?'

Payne produced one, and the priest looked through it intently for some time and then said: 'Look at the title of that book at the edge of the bookshelf beside the frame; it's 'The History of Pope Joan'. Now, I wonder ... yes, by George; and the one above is something or other of Iceland. Lord! what a queer way to find it out! What a dolt and donkey I was not to notice it when I was there!'

'But what have you found out?' asked Payne impatiently.

'The last link,' said Father Brown, 'and I'm not stuck any longer. Yes; I think I know how that unhappy story went from first to last now.'

'But why?' insisted the other.

'Why, because,' said the priest with a smile, 'the Darnaway library contained books about Pope Joan and Iceland, not to mention another I see with the title beginning 'The Religion of Frederick', which is not so very hard to fill up. Then, seeing the other's annoyance, his smile faded and he said more earnestly: 'As a matter of fact, this last point, though it is the last link, is not the main business. There were much more curious things in the case than that. One of them is rather a curiosity of evidence. Let me begin by saying something that may surprise you. Darnaway did not die at seven o'clock that evening. He had been already dead for a whole day.'

'Surprise is rather a mild word,' said Payne grimly, 'since you and I both saw him walking about afterwards.'

'No, we did not,' replied Father Brown quietly. 'I think we both saw him, or thought we saw him, fussing about with the focusing of his camera. Wasn't his head under that black cloak when you passed through the room? It was when I did. And that's why I felt there was something queer about the room and the figure. It wasn't that the leg was crooked, but rather that it wasn't crooked. It was dressed in the same sort of dark clothes; but if you see what you believe to be one man standing in the way that another man stands, you will think he's in a strange and strained attitude.'

'Do you really mean,' cried Payne with something like a shudder, 'that it was some unknown man?'

'It was the murderer,' said Father Brown. 'He had already killed Darnaway at daybreak and hid the corpse and himself in the dark room - an excellent hiding - place, because nobody normally goes into it or can see much if he does. But he let it fall out on the floor at seven o'clock, of course, that the whole thing might be explained by the curse.'

'But I don't understand' observed Payne. 'Why didn't he kill him at seven o'clock then, instead of loading himself with a corpse for fourteen hours?'

'Let me ask you another question,' said the priest. 'Why was there no photograph taken? Because the murderer made sure of killing him when he first got up, and before he could take it. It was essential to the murderer to prevent that photograph reaching the expert on the Darnaway antiquities.'

There was a sudden silence for a moment, and then the priest went on in a lower tone: 'Don't you see how simple it is? Why, you yourself saw one side of the possibility; but it's simpler even than you thought. You said a man might be faked to resemble an old picture. Surely it's simpler that a picture should be faked to resemble a man. In plain words, it's true in a rather special way that there was no Doom of the Darnaways. There was no old picture;
there was no old rhyme; there was no legend of a man who caused his wife's death. But there was a very wicked and a very clever man who was willing to cause another man's death in order to rob him of his promised wife.'

The priest suddenly gave Payne a sad smile, as if in reassurance. 'For the moment I believe you thought I meant you,' he said, 'but you were not the only person who haunted that house for sentimental reasons. You know the man, or rather you think you do. But there were depths in the man called Martin Wood, artist and antiquary, which none of his mere artistic acquaintances were likely to guess. Remember that he was called in to criticize and catalogue the pictures; in an aristocratic dustbin of that sort that practically means simply to tell the Darnaways what art treasures they had got. They would not be surprised at things turning up they had never noticed before. It had to be done well, and it was; perhaps he was right when he said that if it wasn't Holbein it was somebody of the same genius.'

'I feel rather stunned,' said Payne; 'and there are twenty things I don't see yet. How did he know what Darnaway looked like? How did he actually kill him? The doctors seem rather puzzled at present.'

'I saw a photograph the lady had which the Australian sent on before him,' said the priest, 'and there are several ways in which he could have learned things when the new heir was once recognized. We may not know these details; but they are not difficulties. You remember he used to help in the dark room; it seems to me an ideal place, say, to prick a man with a poisoned pin, with the poison's all handy. No; I say these were not difficulties. The difficulty that stumped me was how Wood could be in two places at once. How could he take the corpse from the dark room and prop it against the camera so that it would fall in a few seconds, without coming downstairs, when he was in the library looking out a book? And I was such a fool that I never looked at the books in the library; and it was only in this photograph, by very undeserved good luck, that I saw the simple fact of a book about Pope Joan.'

'You've kept your best riddle for the end,' said Payne, 'What on earth can Pope Joan have to do with it?'

'Don't forget the book about the Something of Iceland,' advised the priest, 'or the religion of somebody called Frederick. It only remains to ask what sort of man was the late Lord Darnaway.'

'Oh, does it?' observed Payne heavily.

'He was a cultivated, humorous sort of eccentric, I believe,' went on Father Brown. 'Being cultivated, he knew there was no such person as Pope Joan. Being humorous, he was very likely to have thought of the title of 'The Snakes of Iceland' or something else that didn't exist. I venture to reconstruct the third title as 'The Religion of Frederick the Great' - which also doesn't exist. Now, doesn't it strike you that those would be just the titles to put on the backs of books that didn't exist; or in other words on a bookcase that wasn't a book-case?'

'Ah!' cried Payne; 'I see what you mean now. There was some hidden staircase - '

'Up to the room Wood himself selected as a dark room,' said the priest nodding. 'I'm sorry. It couldn't be helped. It's dreadfully banal and stupid, as stupid as I have been on this pretty banal case. But we were mixed up in a real musty old romance of decayed gentility and a fallen family mansion; and it was too much to hope that we could escape having a secret passage. It was a priest's hole; and I deserve to be put in it.'

EIGHT: The Ghost of Gideon Wise

FATHER BROWN always regarded the case as the queerest example of the theory of an alibi: the theory by which it is maintained, in defiance of the mythological Irish bird, that it is impossible for anybody to be in two places at once. To begin with, James Byrne, being an Irish journalist, was perhaps the nearest approximation to the Irish bird. He came as near as anybody could to being in two places at once: for he was in two places at the opposite extremes of the social and political world within the space of twenty minutes. The first was in the Babylonian halls of the big hotel, which was the meeting place of the three commercial magnates concerned with arranging for a coal lock-out and denouncing it as a coal-strike, the second was in a curious tavern, having the facade of a grocery store, where met the more subterranean triumvirate of those who would have been very glad to turn the lock-out into a strike - and the strike into a revolution. The reporter passed to and fro between the three millionaires and the three Bolshevist leaders with the immunity of the modern herald or the new ambassador.

He found the three mining magnates hidden in a jungle of flowering plants and a forest of fluted and florid columns of gilded plaster; gilded birdcages hung high under the painted domes amid the highest leaves of the palms; and in them were birds of motley colours and varied cries. No bird in the wilderness ever sang more unheeded, and no flower ever wasted its sweetness on the desert air more completely than the blossoms of those tall plants wasted theirs upon the brisk and breathless business men, mostly American, who talked and ran to and fro in that place. And there, amid a riot of rococo ornament that nobody ever looked at, and a chatter of expensive foreign birds that nobody ever heard, and a mass of gorgeous upholstery and a labyrinth of luxurious architecture, the three men sat and talked of how success was founded on thought and thrift and a vigilance of economy and self-control.

One of them indeed did not talk so much as the others; but he watched with very bright and motionless eyes, which seemed to be pinched together by his pince-nez, and the permanent smile under his small black moustache was rather like a permanent sneer. This was the famous Jacob P. Stein, and he did not speak till he had something to say. But his companion, old Gallup the Pennsylvanian, a huge fat fellow with reverend grey hair but a face like a
pugilist, talked a great deal. He was in a jovial mood and was half rallying, half bullying the third millionaire, Gideon Wise - a hard, dried, angular old bird of the type that his countrymen compare to hickory, with a stiff grey chin - beard and the manners and clothes of any old farmer from the central plains. There was an old argument between Wise and Gallup about combination and competition. For old Wise still retained, with the manners of the old backwoodsman, something of his opinions of the old individualist; he belonged, as we should say in England, to the Manchester School; and Gallup was always trying to persuade him to cut out competition and pool the resources of the world.

'You'll have to come in, old fellow, sooner or later,' Gallup was saying genially as Byrne entered. 'It's the way the world is going, and we can't go back to the one - man - business now. We've all got to stand together.'

'If I might say a word,' said Stein, in his tranquil way, 'I would say there is something a little more urgent even than standing together commercially. Anyhow, we must stand together politically; and that's why I've asked Mr Byrne to meet us here today. On the political issue we must combine; for the simple reason that all our most dangerous enemies are already combined.'

'Oh, I quite agree about political combination,' grumbled Gideon Wise.

'See here,' said Stein to the journalist; 'I know you have the run of these queer places, Mr Byrne, and I want you to do something for us unofficially. You know where these men meet; there are only two or three of them that count, John Elias and Jake Halket, who does all the spouting, and perhaps that poet fellow Home.'

'Why Home used to be a friend of Gideon,' said the jeering Mr Gallup; 'used to be in his Sunday School class or something.'

'He was a Christian, then,' said old Gideon solemnly; 'but when a man takes up with atheists you never know. I still meet him now and then. I was quite ready to back him against war and conscription and all that, of course, but when it comes to all the goddam bolshevis in creation - '

'Excuse me,' interposed Stein, 'the matter is rather urgent, so I hope you will excuse me putting it before Mr Byrne at once. Mr Byrne, I may tell you in confidence that I hold information, or rather evidence that would land at least two of those men in prison for long terms, in connexion with conspiracies during the late war. I don't want to use that evidence. But I want you to go to them quietly and tell them that I shall use it, and use it tomorrow, unless they alter their attitude.'

'Well,' replied Byrne, 'what you propose would certainly be called compounding a felony and might be called blackmail, Don't you think it is rather dangerous?'

'I think it is rather dangerous for them,' said Stein with a snap; 'and I want you to go and tell them so.'

'Oh, very well,' said Byrne standing up, with a half humorous sigh. 'It's all in the day's work; but if I get into trouble, I warn you I shall try to drag you into it.'

'You will try, boy,' said old Gallup with a hearty laugh.

For so much still lingers of that great dream of Jefferson and, the thing that men have called Democracy that in his country, while the rich rule like tyrants, the poor do not talk like slaves; but there is candour between the oppressor and the oppressed.

The meeting - place of the revolutionists was a queer, bare, whitewashed place, on the walls of which were one or two distorted uncouth sketches in black and white, in the style of something that was supposed to be Proletarian Art, of which not one proletarian in a million could have made head or tail. Perhaps the one point in common to the two council chambers was that both violated the American Constitution by the display of strong drink. Cocktails of various colours had stood before the three millionaires. Halket, the most violent of the Bolshevists, thought it only appropriate to drink vodka. He was a long, hulking fellow with a menacing stoop, and his very profile was aggressive like a dog's, the nose and lips thrust out together, the latter carrying a ragged red moustache and the whole curling outwards with perpetual scorn. John Elias was a dark watchful man in spectacles, with a black pointed beard; and he had learnt in many European cafes a taste for absinthe. He was a long, hulking fellow with a menacing stoop, and his very profile was aggressive like a dog's, the nose and lips thrust out together, the latter carrying a ragged red moustache and the whole curling outwards with perpetual scorn. John Elias was a dark watchful man in spectacles, with a black pointed beard; and he had learnt in many European cafes a taste for absinthe. He was a long, hulking fellow with a menacing stoop, and his very profile was aggressive like a dog's, the nose and lips thrust out together, the latter carrying a ragged red moustache and the whole curling outwards with perpetual scorn.

The third man also had a curious taste in drinks, and his drink was symbolic of him. For what stood in front of the poet Home was a glass of milk, and its very mildness seemed in that setting to have something sinister about it, as if its opaque and colourless colour were of some leprous paste more poisonous than the dead sick green of absinthe. Yet in truth the mildness was so far genuine enough; for Henry Home came to the camp of revolution along a very different road and from very different origins from those of Jake, the common tub - thumper, and Elias, the cosmopolitan wire - puller. He had had what is called a careful upbringing, had gone to chapel in his childhood, and carried through life a teetotalism which he could not shake off when he cast away such trifles as Christianity and marriage. He had fair hair and a fine face that might have looked like Shelley, if he had not weakened the chin with
a little foreign fringe of beard. Somehow the beard made him look more like a woman; it was as if those few golden hairs were all he could do.

When the journalist entered, the notorious Jake was talking, as he generally was. Home had uttered some casual and conventional phrase about 'Heaven forbid' something or other, and this was quite enough to set Jake off with a torrent of profanity.

‘Heaven forbid! and that’s about all it bally well does do,’ he said. ‘Heaven never does anything but forbid this, that and the other; forbids us to strike, and forbids us to fight, and forbids us to shoot the damned usurers and blood-suckers where they sit. Why doesn’t Heaven forbid them something for a bit? Why don’t the damned priests and parsons stand up and tell the truth about those brutes for a change? Why doesn’t their precious God - ’

Elias allowed a gentle sigh, as of faint fatigue, to escape him.

‘Priests,’ he said, ‘belonged, as Marx has shown, to the feudal stage of economic development and are therefore no longer really any part of the problem. The part once played by the priest is now played by the capitalist expert and - ’

‘Yes,’ interrupted the journalist, with his grim and ironic implacability, ‘and it’s about time you knew that some of them are jolly expert in playing it.’ And without moving his own eyes from the bright but dead eyes of Elias, he told him of the threat of Stein.

‘I was prepared for something of that sort,’ said the smiling Elias without moving; ‘I may say quite prepared.’

‘Dirty dogs!’ exploded Jake. ‘If a poor man said a thing like that he’d go to penal servitude. But I reckon they’ll go somewhere worse before they guess. If they don’t go to hell, I don’t know where the hell they’ll go to - ’

Home made a movement of protest, perhaps not so much at what the man was saying as at what he was going to say, and Elias cut the speech short with cold exactitude.

‘It is quite unnecessary for us,’ he said, looking at Byrne steadily through his spectacles, ‘to bandy threats with the other side. It is quite sufficient that their threats are quite ineffective so far as we are concerned. We also have made all our own arrangements, and some of them will not appear until they appear in motion. So far as we are concerned, an immediate rupture and an extreme trial of strength will be quite according to plan.’

As he spoke in a quite quiet and dignified fashion, something in his motionless yellow face and his great goggles started a faint fear creeping up the journalist’s spine. Halket’s savage face might seem to have a snarl in its very silhouette when seen sideways; but when seen face to face, the smouldering rage in his eyes had also something of anxiety, as if the ethical and economic riddle were after all a little too much for him; and Home seemed even more hanging on wires of worry and self-criticism. But about this third man with the goggles, who spoke so sensibly and simply, there was something uncanny; it was like a dead man talking at the table.

As Byrne went out with his message of defiance, and passed along the very narrow passage beside the grocery store, he found the end of it blocked by a strange though strangely familiar figure: short and sturdy, and looking rather quaint when seen in dark outline with its round head and wide hat.

‘Father Brown!’ cried the astonished journalist. ‘I think you must have come into the wrong door. You’re not likely to be in this little conspiracy.’

‘Mine is a rather older conspiracy,’ replied Father Brown smiling, ‘but it is quite a widespread conspiracy.’

‘Well,’ replied Byrne, you can’t imagine any of the people here being within a thousand miles of your concern.’

‘It is not always easy to tell,’ replied the priest equably; ‘but as a matter of fact, there is one person here who’s within an inch of it.’

He disappeared into the dark entrance and the journalist went on his way very much puzzled. He was still more puzzled by a small incident that happened to him as he turned into the hotel to make his report to his capitalist clients. The bower of blossoms and bird-cages in which those crabbed old gentlemen were embosomed was approached by a flight of marble steps, flanked by gilded nymphs and tritons. Down these steps ran an active young man with black hair, a snub nose, and a flower in his buttonhole, who seized him and drew him aside before he could ascend the stair.

‘I say,’ whispered the young man, ‘I’m Potter - old Gid’s secretary, you know: now, between ourselves, there is a sort of a thunderbolt being forged, isn’t there, now?’

‘I came to the conclusion,’ replied Byrne cautiously, ‘that the Cyclops had something on the anvil. But always remember that the Cyclops is a giant, but he has only one eye. I think Bolshevism is - ’

While he was speaking the secretary listened with a face that had a certain almost Mongolian immobility, despite the liveliness of his legs and his attire. But when Byrne said the word ‘Bolshevism’, the young man’s sharp eyes shifted and he said quickly:

‘What has that - oh yes, that sort of thunderbolt; so sorry, my mistake. So easy to say anvil when you mean ice-box.’

With which the extraordinary young man disappeared down the steps and Byrne continued to mount them, more
and more mystification clouding his mind.

He found the group of three augmented to four by the presence of a hatchet-faced person with very thin straw-coloured hair and a monocle, who appeared to be a sort of adviser to old Gallup, possibly his solicitor, though he was not definitely so called. His name was Nares, and the questions which he directed towards Byrne referred chiefly, for some reason or other, to the number of those probably enrolled in the revolutionary organization. Of this, as Byrne knew little, he said less; and the four men eventually rose from their seats, the last word being with the man who had been most silent.

'Thank you, Mr Byrne,' said Stein, folding up his eyeglasses. 'It only remains to say that everything is ready; on that point I quite agree with Mr Elias. Tomorrow, before noon, the police will have arrested Mr Elias, on evidence I shall by then have put before them, and those three at least will be in jail before night. As you know, I attempted to avoid this course. I think that is all, gentlemen.'

But Mr Jacob P. Stein did not lay his formal information next day, for a reason that has often interrupted the activities of such industrious characters. He did not do it because he happened to be dead; and none of the rest of the programme was carried out, for a reason which Byrne found displayed in gigantic letters when he opened his morning paper: 'Terrific Triple Murder: Three Millionaires Slain in One Night.' Other exclamatory phrases followed in smaller letters, only about four times the size of normal type, which insisted on the special feature of the mystery: the fact that the three men had been killed not only simultaneously but in three widely separated places - Stein in his artistic and luxurious country seat a hundred miles inland, Wise outside the little bungalow on the coast where he lived on sea breezes and the simple life, and old Gallup in a thicket just outside the lodge - gates of his great house at the other end of the county. In all three cases there could be no doubt about the scenes of violence that had preceded death, though the actual body of Gallup was not found till the second day, where it hung, huge and horrible, amid the broken forks and branches of the little wood into which its weight had crashed, like a bison rushing on the spears: while Wise had clearly been flung over the cliff into the sea, not without a struggle, for his scraping and slipping footprints could still be traced upon the very brink. But the first signal of the tragedy had been the sight of his large limp straw hat, floating far out upon the waves and conspicuous from the cliffs above. Stein's body also had at first eluded search, till a faint trail of blood led the investigators to a bath on the ancient Roman model he had been constructing in his garden; for he had been a man of an experimental turn of mind with a taste for antiquities.

Whatever he might think, Byrne was bound to admit that there was no legal evidence against anybody as things stood. A motive for murder was not enough. Even a moral aptitude for murder was not enough. And he could not conceive that pale young pacifist, Henry Home, butchering another man by brutal violence, though he might imagine the blaspheming Jake and even the sneering Jew as capable of anything. The police, and the man who appeared to be assisting them (who was no other than the rather mysterious man with the monocle, who had been introduced as Mr Nares), realized the position quite as clearly as the journalist.

They knew that at the moment the Bolshevik conspirators could not be prosecuted and convicted, and that it would be a highly sensational failure if they were prosecuted and acquitted. Nares started with an artful candour by calling them in some sense to the council, inviting them to a private conclave and asking them to give their opinions freely in the interests of humanity. He had started his investigations at the nearest scene of tragedy, the bungalow by the sea; and Byrne was permitted to be present at a curious scene, which was at once a peaceful parler of diplomatists and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inquisition or putting of suspects to the question. Rather to Byrne's surprise the diplomats and a veiled inqui
either to ask us for information or to subject us to cross-examination. If you trust us, we tell you we have no information. If you distrust us, you must tell us of what we are accused, or have the politeness to keep the fact to yourselves. Nobody has been able to suggest the faintest trace of evidence connecting any one of us with these tragedies any more than with the murder of Julius Caesar. You dare not arrest us, and you will not believe us. What is the good of our remaining here?"

And he rose, calmly buttoning his coat, his friends following his example. As they went towards the door, young Home turned back and faced the investigators for a moment with his pale fanatical face.

'I wish to say,' he said, 'that I went to a filthy jail during the whole war because I would not consent to kill a man.'

With that they passed out, and the members of the group remaining looked grimly at each other.

'I hardly think,' said Father Brown, 'that we remain entirely victorious, in spite of the retreat.'

'I don't mind anything,' said Nares, 'except being bullyragged by that blasphemous blackguard Halket. Home is a gentleman, anyhow. But whatever they say, I am dead certain they know; they are in it, or most of them are. They almost admitted it. They taunted us with not being able to prove we're right, much more than with being wrong. What do you think, Father Brown?'

The person addressed looked across at Nares with a gaze almost disconcertingly mild and meditative.

'It is quite true,' he said, 'that I have formed an idea that one particular person knows more than he has told us. But I think it would be well if I did not mention his name just yet.'

Nares' eyeglass dropped from his eye, and he looked up sharply. 'This is unofficial so far,' he said. 'I suppose you know that at a later stage if you withhold information, your position may be serious.'

'My position is simple,' replied the priest. 'I am here to look after the legitimate interests of my friend Halket. I think it will be in his interest, under the circumstances, if I tell you I think he will before long sever his connexion with this organization, and cease to be a Socialist in that sense. I have every reason to believe he will probably end as a Catholic.'

'Halket!' exploded the other incredulously. 'Why he curses priests from morning till night!'

'I don't think you quite understand that kind of man,' said Father Brown mildly. 'He curses priests for failing (in his opinion) to defy the whole world for justice. Why should he expect them to defy the whole world for justice, unless he had already begun to assume they were - what they are? But we haven't met here to discuss the psychology of conversion. I only mention this because it may simplify your task - perhaps narrow your search.'

'If it is true, it would jolly well narrow it to that narrow-faced rascal Elias - and I shouldn't wonder, for a more creepy, coldblooded, sneering devil I never saw.'

Father Brown sighed. 'He always reminded me of poor Stein,' he said, 'in fact I think he was some relation.'

'Oh, I say,' began Nares, when his protest was cut short by the door being flung open, revealing once more the long loose figure and pale face of young Home; but it seemed as if he had not merely his natural, but a new and unnatural pallor.

'Hullo,' cried Nares, putting up his single eyeglass, 'why have you come back again?'

Home crossed the room rather shakily without a word and sat down heavily in a chair. Then he said, as in a sort of daze: 'I missed the others ... I lost my way. I thought I'd better come back.'

The remains of evening refreshments were on the table, and Henry Home, that lifelong Prohibitionist, poured himself out a wine-glassful of liqueur brandy and drank it at a gulp. 'You seem upset,' said Father Brown.

Home had put his hands to his forehead and spoke as from under the shadow of it: he seemed to be speaking to the priest only, in a low voice.

'I may as well tell you. I have seen a ghost.'

'A ghost!' repeated Nares in astonishment. 'Whose ghost?'

'The ghost of Gideon Wise, the master of this house,' answered Home more firmly, 'standing over the abyss into which he fell.'

'Oh, nonsense!' said Nares; 'no sensible person believes in ghosts.'

'That is hardly exact,' said Father Brown, smiling a little. 'There is really quite as good evidence for many ghosts as there is for most crimes.'

'Well, it's my business to run after the criminals,' said Nares rather roughly, 'and I will leave other people to run away from the ghosts. If anybody at this time of day chooses to be frightened of ghosts it's his affair.'

'I didn't say I was frightened of them, though I dare say I might be,' said Father Brown. 'Nobody knows till he tries. I said I believed in them, at any rate, enough to want to hear more about this one. What, exactly, did you see, Mr Home?'

'It was over there on the brink of those crumbling cliffs; you know there is a sort of gap or crevice just about the spot where he was thrown over. The others had gone on ahead, and I was crossing the moor towards the path along
the cliff. I often went that way, for I liked seeing the high seas dash up against the crags. I thought little of it to-night, beyond wondering that the sea should be so rough on this sort of clear moonlight night. I could see the pale crests of spray appear and disappear as the great waves leapt up at the headland. Thrice I saw the momentary flash of foam in the moonlight and then I saw something inscrutable. The fourth flash of the silver foam seemed to be fixed in the sky. It did not fall; I waited with insane intensity for it to fall. I fancied I was mad, and that time had been for me mysteriously arrested or prolonged. Then I drew nearer, and then I think I screamed aloud. For that suspended spray, like unfallen snowflakes, had fitted together into a face and a figure, white as the shining leper in a legend, and terrible as the fixed lightning.'

'And it was Gideon Wise, you say?'

Home nodded without speech. There was a silence broken abruptly by Nares rising to his feet; so abruptly indeed that he knocked a chair over.

'Oh, this is all nonsense,' he said, 'but we'd better go out and see.'

'I won't go,' said Home with sudden violence. 'I'll never walk by that path again.'

'I will not... God, how you all goad me,' cried Home, and his eyes began to roll in a strange fashion. He had risen with the rest, but he made no motion towards the door.

'Mr Home,' said Nares firmly, 'I am a police-officer, and this house, though you may not know it, is surrounded by the police. I have tried to investigate in a friendly fashion, but I must investigate everything, even anything so silly as a ghost. I must ask you to take me to the spot you speak of.'

There was another silence while Home stood heaving and panting as with indescribable fears. Then he suddenly sat down on his chair again and said with an entirely new and much more composed voice:

'I can't do it. You may just as well know why. You will know it sooner or later. I killed him.'

For an instant there was the stillness of a house struck by a thunderbolt and full of corpses. Then the voice of Father Brown sounded in that enormous silence strangely small like the squeak of a mouse.

'Did you kill him deliberately?' he asked.

'How can one answer such a question?' answered the man in the chair, moodily gnawing his finger. 'I was mad, I suppose. He was intolerable and insolent, I know. I was on his land and I believe he struck me; anyhow, we came to a grapple and he went over the cliff. When I was well away from the scene it burst upon me that I had done a crime that cut me off from men; the brand of Cain throbbed on my brow and my very brain; I realized for the first time that I had indeed killed a man. I knew I should have to confess it sooner or later.' He sat suddenly erect in his chair. 'But I will say nothing against anybody else. It is no use asking me about plots or accomplices - I will say nothing.'

'In the light of the other murders,' said Nares, 'it is difficult to believe that the quarrel was quite so unpremeditated. Surely somebody sent you there?'

'I will say nothing against anybody I worked with,' said Home proudly. 'I am a murderer, but I will not be a traitor.'

Nares stepped between the man and the door and called out in an official fashion to someone outside.

'We will all go to the place, anyhow,' he said in a low voice to the secretary; 'but this man must go in custody.'

The company generally felt that to go spook-hunting on a seacliff was a very silly anti-climax after the confession of the murderer. But Nares, though the most sceptical and scornful of all, thought it his duty to leave no stone unturned; as one might say, no gravestone unturned. For, after all, that crumbling cliff was the only gravestone over the watery grave of poor Gideon Wise. Nares locked the door, being the last out of the house, and followed the rest across the moor to the cliff, when he was astonished to see young Potter, the secretary, coming back quickly towards them, his face in the moonlight looking white as a moon.

'By God, sir,' he said, speaking for the first time that night, 'there really is something there. It - it's just like him.'

'Why, you're raving,' gasped the detective. 'Everybody's raving.'

'Do you think I don't know him when I see him?' cried the secretary with singular bitterness. 'I have reason to.'

'Perhaps,' said the detective sharply, 'you are one of those who had reason to hate him, as Halket said.'

'Perhaps,' said the secretary; 'anyhow, I know him, and I tell you I can see him standing there stark and staring under this hellish moon.'

And he pointed towards the crack in the cliffs, where they could already see something that might have been a moonbeam or a streak of foam, but which was already beginning to look a little more solid. They had crept a hundred yards nearer, and it was still motionless; but it looked like a statue in silver.

Nares himself looked a little pale and seemed to stand debating what to do. Potter was frankly as much frightened as Home himself; and even Byrne, who was a hardened reporter, was rather reluctant to go any nearer if he could help it. He could not help considering it a little quaint, therefore, that the only man who did not seem to be
frightened of a ghost was the man who had said openly that he might be. For Father Brown was advancing as steadily, at his stumping pace, as if he were going to consult a notice-board.

'It don't seem to bother you much,' said Byrne to the priest; 'and yet I thought you were the only one who believed in spooks.'

'If it comes to that,' replied Father Brown, 'I thought you were one who didn't believe in them. But believing in ghosts is one thing, and believing in a ghost is quite another.'

Byrne looked rather ashamed of himself, and glanced almost covertly at the crumbling headlands in the cold moonlight which were the haunts of the vision or delusion. 'I didn't believe in it till I saw it,' he said.

'And I did believe in it till I saw it,' said Father Brown. The journalist stared after him as he went stumping across the great waste ground that rose towards the cloven headland like the sloping side of a hill cut in two. Under the discoloring moon the grass looked like long grey hair all combed one way by the wind, and seeming to point towards the place where the breaking cliff showed pale gleams of chalk in the grey-green turf, and where stood the pale figure or shining shade that none could yet understand. As yet that pale figure dominated a desolate landscape that was empty except for the black square back and business-like figure of the priest advancing alone towards it. Then the prisoner Home broke suddenly from his captors with a piercing cry and ran ahead of the priest, falling on his knees before the spectre.

'I have confessed,' they heard him crying. 'Why have you come to tell them I killed you?'

'I have come to tell them you did not,' said the ghost, and stretched forth a hand to him. Then the kneeling man sprang up with quite a new kind of scream; and they knew it was the hand of flesh.

It was the most remarkable escape from death in recent records, said the experienced detective and the no less experienced journalist. Yet, in a sense, it had been very simple after all. Flakes and shards of the cliff were continually falling away, and some had caught in the gigantic crevice, so as to form what was really a ledge or pocket in what was supposed to be a sheer drop through darkness to the sea. The old man, who was a very tough and wiry old man, had fallen on this lower shoulder of rock and had passed a pretty terrible twenty-four hours in trying to climb back by crags that constantly collapsed under him, but at length formed by their very ruins a sort of stairway of escape. This might be the explanation of Home's optical illusion about a white wave that appeared and disappeared, and finally came to stay. But anyhow there was Gideon Wise, solid in bone and sinew, with his white hair and white dusty country clothes and harsh country features, which were, however, a great deal less harsh than usual. Perhaps it is good for millionaires to spend twenty-four hours on a ledge of rock within a foot of eternity. Anyhow, he not only disclaimed all malice against the criminal, but gave an account of the matter which considerably modified the crime. He declared that Home had not thrown him over at all; that the continually falling ground had given way under him, and that Home had even made some movement as of attempted rescue.

'On that providential bit of rock down there,' he said solemnly, 'I promised the Lord to forgive my enemies; and the Lord would think it mighty mean if I didn't forgive a little accident like that.'

Home had to depart under police supervision, of course, but the detective did not disguise from himself that the prisoner's detention would probably be short, and his punishment, if any, trifling. It is not every murderer who can put the murdered man in the witness-box to give him a testimonial.

'It's a strange case,' said Byrne, as the detective and the others hastened along the cliff path towards the town.

'It is,' said Father Brown. 'It's no business of ours; but I wish you'd stop with me and talk it over.'

There was a silence and then Byrne complied by saying suddenly: 'I suppose you were thinking of Home already, when you said somebody wasn't telling all he knew.'

'When I said that,' replied his friend, 'I was thinking of the exceedingly silent Mr Potter, the secretary of the no longer late or (shall we say) lamented Mr Gideon Wise.'

'Well, the only time Potter ever spoke to me I thought he was a lunatic,' said Byrne, staring, 'but I never thought of his being a criminal. He said something about it all having to do with an icebox.'

'Yes, I thought he knew something about it,' said Father Brown reflectively. 'I never said he had anything to do with it ... I suppose old Wise really is strong enough to have climbed out of that chasm.'

'What do you mean?' asked the astonished reporter. 'Why, of course he got out of that chasm; for there he is.'

The priest did not answer the question but asked abruptly: 'What do you think of Home?'

'Well, one can't call him a criminal exactly,' answered Byrne. 'He never was at all like any criminal I ever knew, and I've had some experience; and, of course, Nares has had much more. I don't think we ever quite believed him a criminal.'

'And I never believed in him in another capacity,' said the priest quietly. 'You may know more about criminals. But there's one class of people I probably do know more about than you do, or even Nares for that matter. I've known quite a lot of them, and I know their little ways.'

'Another class of people,' repeated Byrne, mystified. 'Why, what class do you know about?'
'Penitents,' said Father Brown.

'I don't quite understand,' objected Byrne. 'Do you mean you don't believe in his crime?'

'I don't believe in his confession,' said Father Brown. 'I've heard a good many confessions, and there was never a genuine one like that. It was romantic; it was all out of books. Look how he talked about having the brand of Cain. That's out of books. It's not what anyone would feel who had in his own person done a thing hitherto horrible to him. Suppose you were an honest clerk or shop - boy shocked to feel that for the first time you'd stolen money. Would you immediately reflect that your action was the same as that of Barabbas? Suppose you'd killed a child in some ghastly anger. Would you go back through history, till you could identify your action with that of an Idumean potentate named Herod? Believe me, our own crimes are far too hideously private and prosaic to make our first thoughts turn towards historical parallels, however apt. And why did he go out of his way to say he would not give his colleagues away? Even in saying so, he was giving them away. Nobody had asked him so far to give away anything or anybody. No; I don't think he was genuine, and I wouldn't give him absolution. A nice state of things, if people started getting absolved for what they hadn't done.' And Father Brown, his head turned away, looked steadily out to sea.

'But I don't understand what you're driving at,' cried Byrne. 'What's the good of buzzing round him with suspicions when he's pardoned? He's out of it anyhow. He's quite safe.'

Father Brown spun round like a teetotum and caught his friend by the coat with unexpected and inexplicable excitement.

'That's it,' he cried emphatically. 'Freeze on to that! He's quite safe. He's out of it. That's why he's the key of the whole puzzle.'

'Oh, help,' said Byrne feebly.

'I mean,' persisted the little priest, 'he's in it because he's out of it. That's the whole explanation.'

'And a very lucid explanation too,' said the journalist with feeling.

They stood looking out to sea for a time in silence, and then Father Brown said cheerfully: 'And so we come back to the ice-box. Where you have all gone wrong from the first in this business is where a good many of the papers and the public men do go wrong. It's because you assumed that there is nothing whatever in the modern world to fight about except Bolshevism. This story has nothing whatever to do with Bolshevism; except perhaps as a blind.'

'I don't see how that can be,' remonstrated Byrne. 'Here you have the three millionaires in that one business murdered -'

'No!' said the priest in a sharp ringing voice. 'You do not. That is just the point. You do not have three millionaires murdered. You have two millionaires murdered; and you have the third millionaire very much alive and kicking and quite ready to kick. And you have that third millionaire freed for ever from the threat that was thrown at his head before your very face, in playfully polite terms, and in that conversation you described as taking place in the hotel. Gallup and Stein threatened the more old-fashioned and independent old huckster that if he would not come into their combine they would freeze him out. Hence the ice-box, of course.'

After a pause he went on. 'There is undoubtedly a Bolshevist movement in the modern world, and it must undoubtedly be resisted, though I do not believe very much in your way of resisting it. But what nobody notices is that there is another movement equally modern and equally moving: the great movement towards monopoly or the turning of all trades into trusts. That also is a revolution. That also produces what all revolutions produce. Men will kill for that and against that, as they do for and against Bolshevism. It has its ultimatums and its invasions and its executions. These trust magnates have their courts like kings; they have their bodyguard and bravos; they have their spies in the enemy camp. Home was one of old Gideon's spies in one of the enemy camps; but he was used here against another enemy: the rivals who were ruining him for standing out.'

'I still don't quite see how he was used,' said Byrne, 'or what was the good of it.'

'Don't you see,' cried Father Brown sharply, 'that they gave each other an alibi?'

Byrne still looked at him a little doubtfully, though understanding was dawning on his face.

'That's what I mean,' continued the other, 'when I said they were in it because they were out of it. Most people would say they must be out of the other two crimes, because they were in this one. As a fact, they were in the other two because they were out of this one; because this one never happened at all. A very queer, improbable sort of alibi, of course; improbable and therefore impenetrable. Most people would say a man who confesses a murder must be sincere; a man who forgives his murderer must be sincere. Nobody would think of the notion that the thing never happened, so that one man had nothing to forgive and the other nothing to fear. They were fixed here for that night by a story against themselves. But they were not here that night; for Home was murdering old Gallup in the Wood, while Wise was strangling that little Jew in his Roman bath. That's why I ask whether Wise was really strong enough for the climbing adventure.'
'It was quite a good adventure,' said Byrne regretfully. 'It fitted into the landscape, and was really very convincing.'

'Too convincing to convince,' said Father Brown, shaking his head. 'How very vivid was that moonlit foam flung up and turning to a ghost. And how very literary! Home is a sneak and a skunk, but do not forget that, like many other sneaks and skunks in history, he is also a poet.'

THE END
The Blue Cross

The Secret Garden

The Queer Feet

The Flying Stars

The Invisible Man

The Honour of Israel Gow

The Wrong Shape

The Sins of Prince Saradine

The Hammer of God

The Eye of Apollo

The Sign of the Broken Sword

The Three Tools of Death

The Blue Cross

Between the silver ribbon of morning and the green glittering ribbon of sea, the boat touched Harwich and let loose a swarm of folk like flies, among whom the man we must follow was by no means conspicuous--nor wished to be. There was nothing notable about him, except a slight contrast between the holiday gaiety of his clothes and the official gravity of his face. His clothes included a slight, pale grey jacket, a white waistcoat, and a silver straw hat with a grey-blue ribbon. His lean face was dark by contrast, and ended in a curt black beard that looked Spanish and suggested an Elizabethan ruff. He was smoking a cigarette with the seriousness of an idler. There was nothing about him to indicate the fact that the grey jacket covered a loaded revolver, that the white waistcoat covered a police card, or that the straw hat covered one of the most powerful intellects in Europe. For this was Valentin himself, the head of the Paris police and the most famous investigator of the world; and he was coming from Brussels to London to make the greatest arrest of the century.

Flambeau was in England. The police of three countries had tracked the great criminal at last from Ghent to Brussels, from Brussels to the Hook of Holland; and it was conjectured that he would take some advantage of the unfamiliarity and confusion of the Eucharistic Congress, then taking place in London. Probably he would travel as some minor clerk or secretary connected with it; but, of course, Valentin could not be certain; nobody could be certain about Flambeau.

It is many years now since this colossus of crime suddenly ceased keeping the world in a turmoil; and when he ceased, as they said after the death of Roland, there was a great quiet upon the earth. But in his best days (I mean, of course, his worst) Flambeau was a figure as statuesque and international as the Kaiser. Almost every morning the daily paper announced that he had escaped the consequences of one extraordinary crime by committing another. He was a Gascon of gigantic stature and bodily daring; and the wildest tales were told of his outbursts of athletic humour; how he turned the juge d'instruction upside down and stood him on his head, "to clear his mind"; how he ran down the Rue de Rivoli with a policeman under each arm. It is due to him to say that his fantastic physical strength was generally employed in such bloodless though undignified scenes; his real crimes were chiefly those of ingenious and wholesale robbery. But each of his thefts was almost a new sin, and would make a story by itself. It was he who ran the great Tyrolean Dairy Company in London, with no dairies, no cows, no carts, no milk, but with some thousand subscribers. These he served by the simple operation of moving the little milk cans outside people's doors to the doors of his own customers. It was he who had kept up an unaccountable and close correspondence with a young lady whose whole letter-bag was intercepted, by the extraordinary trick of photographing his messages infinitesimally small upon the slides of a microscope. A sweeping simplicity, however, marked many of his experiments. It is said that he once repainted all the numbers in a street in the dead of night merely to divert one traveller into a trap. It is quite certain that he invented a portable pillar-box, which he put up at corners in quiet suburbs on the chance of strangers dropping postal orders into it. Lastly, he was known to be a startling acrobat; despite his huge figure, he could leap like a grasshopper and melt into the tree-tops like a monkey. Hence the great Valentin, when he set out to find Flambeau, was perfectly aware that his adventures would not end when he had found him.

But how was he to find him? On this the great Valentin's ideas were still in process of settlement.

There was one thing which Flambeau, with all his dexterity of disguise, could not cover, and that was his singular height. If Valentin's quick eye had caught a tall apple-woman, a tall grenadier, or even a tolerably tall duchess, he might have arrested them on the spot. But all along his train there was nobody that could be a disguised
Flambeau, any more than a cat could be a disguised giraffe. About the people on the boat he had already satisfied himself; and the people picked up at Harwich or on the journey limited themselves with certainty to six. There was a short railway official travelling up to the terminus, three fairly short market gardeners picked up two stations afterwards, one very short widow lady going up from a small Essex town, and a very short Roman Catholic priest going up from a small Essex village. When it came to the last case, Valentin gave it up and almost laughed. The little priest was so much the essence of those Eastern flats; he had a face as round and dull as a Norfolk dumpling; he had eyes as empty as the North Sea; he had several brown paper parcels, which he was quite incapable of collecting. The Eucharistic Congress had doubtless sucked out of their local stagnation many such creatures, blind and helpless, like moles disinterred. Valentin was a sceptic in the severe style of France, and could have no love for priests. But he could have pity for them, and this one might have provoked pity in anybody. He had a large, shabby umbrella, which constantly fell on the floor. He did not seem to know which was the right end of his return ticket. He explained with a moon-calf simplicity to everybody in the carriage that he had to be careful, because he had something made of real silver “with blue stones” in one of his brown-paper parcels. His quaint blending of Essex flatness with saintly simplicity continuously amused the Frenchman till the priest arrived (somehow) at Tottenham with all his parcels, and came back for his umbrella. When he did the last, Valentin even had the good nature to warn him not to take care of the silver by telling everybody about it. But to whomever he talked, Valentin kept his eye open for someone else; he looked out steadily for anyone, rich or poor, male or female, who was well up to six feet; for Flambeau was four inches above it.

He alighted at Liverpool Street, however, quite conscientiously secure that he had not missed the criminal so far. He then went to Scotland Yard to regularise his position and arrange for help in case of need; he then lit another cigarette and went for a long stroll in the streets of London. As he was walking in the streets and squares beyond Victoria, he paused suddenly and stood. It was a quaint, quiet square, very typical of London, full of an accidental stillness. The tall, flat houses round looked at once prosperous and uninhabited; the square of shrubbery in the centre looked as deserted as a green Pacific islet. One of the four sides was much higher than the rest, like a dais; and the line of this side was broken by one of London’s admirable accidents—a restaurant that looked as if it had strayed from Soho. It was an unreasonable attractive object, with dwarf plants in pots and long, striped blinds of lemon yellow and white. It stood specially high above the street, and in the usual patchwork way of London, a flight of steps from the street ran up to meet the front door almost as a fire-escape might run up to a first-floor window. Valentin stood and smoked in front of the yellow-white blinds and considered them long.

The most incredible thing about miracles is that they happen. A few clouds in heaven do come together into the staring shape of one human eye. A tree does stand up in the landscape of a doubtful journey in the exact and elaborate shape of a note of interrogation. I have seen both these things myself within the last few days. Nelson does die in the instant of victory; and a man named Williams does quite accidentally murder a man named Williamson; it sounds like a sort of infanticide. In short, there is in life an element of elfin coincidence which people reckoning on the prosaic may perpetually miss. As it has been well expressed in the paradox of Poe, wisdom should reckon on the unforeseen.

Aristide Valentin was unfathomably French; and the French intelligence is intelligence specially and solely. He was not “a thinking machine”; for that is a brainless phrase of modern fatalism and materialism. A machine only is a machine because it cannot think. But he was a thinking man, and a plain man at the same time. All his wonderful successes, that looked like conjuring, had been gained by plodding logic, by clear and commonplace French thought. The French electrify the world not by starting any paradox, they electrify it by carrying out a truism. They carry a truism so far—as in the French Revolution. But exactly because Valentin understood reason, he understood the limits of reason. Only a man who knows nothing of motors talks of motoring without petrol; only a man who knows nothing of reason talks of reasoning without strong, undisputed first principles. Here he had no strong first principles. Flambeau had been missed at Harwich; and if he was in London at all, he might be anything from a tall tramp on Wimbledon Common to a tall toast-master at the Hotel Metropole. In such a naked state of nescience, Valentin had a view and a method of his own.

In such cases he reckoned on the unforeseen. In such cases, when he could not follow the train of the reasonable, he coldly and carefully followed the train of the unreasonable. Instead of going to the right places—banks, police stations, rendezvous—he systematically went to the wrong places; knocked at every empty house, turned down every cul de sac, went up every lane blocked with rubbish, went round every crescent that led him uselessly out of the way. He defended this crazy course quite logically. He said that if one had a clue this was the worst way; but if one had no clue at all it was the best, because there was just the chance that any oddity that caught the eye of the pursuer might be the same that had caught the eye of the pursued. Somewhere a man must begin, and it had better be just where another man might stop. Something about that flight of steps up to the shop, something about the quietude and quaintness of the restaurant, roused all the detective’s rare romantic fancy and made him resolve to
strike at random. He went up the steps, and sitting down at a table by the window, asked for a cup of black coffee.

It was half-way through the morning, and he had not breakfasted; the slight litter of other breakfasts stood about on the table to remind him of his hunger; and adding a poached egg to his order, he proceeded musingly to shake some white sugar into his coffee, thinking all the time about Flambeau. He remembered how Flambeau had escaped, once by a pair of nail scissors, and once by a house on fire; once by having to pay for an unstamped letter, and once by getting people to look through a telescope at a comet that might destroy the world. He thought his detective brain as good as the criminal's, which was true. But he fully realised the disadvantage. "The criminal is the creative artist; the detective only the critic," he said with a sour smile, and lifted his coffee cup to his lips slowly, and put it down very quickly. He had put salt in it.

He looked at the vessel from which the silvery powder had come; it was certainly a sugar-basin; as unmistakably meant for sugar as a champagne-bottle for champagne. He wondered why they should keep salt in it. He looked to see if there were any more orthodox vessels. Yes; there were two salt-cellars quite full. Perhaps there was some speciality in the condiment in the salt-cellars. He tasted it; it was sugar. Then he looked round at the restaurant with a refreshed air of interest, to see if there were any other traces of that singular artistic taste which puts the sugar in the salt-cellars and the salt in the sugar-basin. Except for an odd splash of some dark fluid on one of the white-papered walls, the whole place appeared neat, cheerful and ordinary. He rang the bell for the waiter.

When that official hurried up, fuzzy-haired and somewhat blear-eyed at that early hour, the detective (who was not without an appreciation of the simpler forms of humour) asked him to taste the sugar and see if it was up to the high reputation of the hotel. The result was that the waiter yawned suddenly and woke up.

"Do you play this delicate joke on your customers every morning?" inquired Valentin. "Does changing the salt and sugar never pall on you as a jest?"

The waiter, when this irony grew clearer, stammeringly assured him that the establishment had certainly no such intention; it must be a most curious mistake. He picked up the sugar-basin and looked at it; he picked up the salt-cellar and looked at that, his face growing more and more bewildered. At last he abruptly excused himself, and hurrying away, returned in a few seconds with the proprietor. The proprietor also examined the sugar-basin and then the salt-cellar; the proprietor also looked bewildered.

Suddenly the waiter seemed to grow inarticulate with a rush of words.

"I zink," he stuttered eagerly, "I zink it is those two clergy-men."

"What two clergymen?"

"The two clergymen," said the waiter, "that threw soup at the wall."

"Threw soup at the wall?" repeated Valentin, feeling sure this must be some singular Italian metaphor.

"Yes, yes," said the attendant excitedly, and pointed at the dark splash on the white paper; "threw it over there on the wall."

Valentin looked his query at the proprietor, who came to his rescue with fuller reports.

"Yes, sir," he said, "it's quite true, though I don't suppose it has anything to do with the sugar and salt. Two clergymen came in and drank soup here very early, as soon as the shutters were taken down. They were both very quiet, respectable people; one of them paid the bill and went out; the other, who seemed a slower coach altogether, was some minutes longer getting his things together. But he went at last. Only, the instant before he stepped into the street he deliberately picked up his cup, which he had only half emptied, and threw the soup slap on the wall. I was in the back room myself, and so was the waiter; so I could only rush out in time to find the wall splashed and the shop empty. It don't do any particular damage, but it was confounded cheek; and I tried to catch the men in the street. They were too far off though; I only noticed they went round the next corner into Carstairs Street." The detective was on his feet, hat settled and stick in hand. He had already decided that in the universal darkness of his mind he could only follow the first odd finger that pointed; and this finger was odd enough. Paying his bill and clashing the glass doors behind him, he was soon swinging round into the other street.

It was fortunate that even in such fevered moments his eye was cool and quick. Something in a shop-front went by him like a mere flash; yet he went back to look at it. The shop was a popular greengrocer and fruitierer's, an array of goods set out in the open air and plainly ticketed with their names and prices. In the two most prominent compartments were two heaps, of oranges and of nuts respectively. On the heap of nuts lay a scrap of cardboard, on which was written in bold, blue chalk, "Best tangerine oranges, two a penny." On the oranges was the equally clear and exact description, "Finest Brazil nuts, 4d. a lb." M. Valentin looked at these two placards and fancied he had met this highly subtle form of humour before, and that somewhat recently. He drew the attention of the red-faced fruitierer, who was looking rather sullenly up and down the street, to this inaccuracy in his advertisements. The fruitierer said nothing, but sharply put each card into its proper place. The detective, leaning elegantly on his walking-cane, continued to scrutinise the shop. At last he said, "Pray excuse my apparent irrelevance, my good sir, but I should like to ask you a question in experimental psychology and the association of ideas."
The red-faced shopman regarded him with an eye of menace; but he continued gaily, swinging his cane, "Why," he pursued, "why are two tickets wrongly placed in a greengrocer's shop like a shovel hat that has come to London for a holiday? Or, in case I do not make myself clear, what is the mystical association which connects the idea of nuts marked as oranges with the idea of two clergymen, one tall and the other short?"

The eyes of the tradesman stood out of his head like a snail's; he really seemed for an instant likely to fling himself upon the stranger. At last he stammered angrily: "I don't know what you 'ave to do with it, but if you're one of their friends, you can tell 'em from me that I'll knock their silly 'eads off, parsons or no parsons, if they upset my apples again."

"Indeed?" asked the detective, with great sympathy. "Did they upset your apples?"

"One of 'em did," said the heated shopman; "rolled 'em all over the street. I'd 'ave caught the fool but for havin' to pick 'em up."

"Which way did these parsons go?" asked Valentin.

"Up that second road on the left-hand side, and then across the square," said the other promptly.

"Thanks," replied Valentin, and vanished like a fairy. On the other side of the second square he found a policeman, and said: "This is urgent, constable; have you seen two clergymen in shovel hats?"

The policeman began to chuckle heavily. "I 'ave, sir; and if you arst me, one of 'em was drunk. He stood in the middle of the road that bewildered that--"

"Which way did they go?" snapped Valentin.

"They took one of them yellow buses over there," answered the man; "them that go to Hampstead."

Valentin produced his official card and said very rapidly: "Call up two of your men to come with me in pursuit," and crossed the road with such contagious energy that the ponderous policeman was moved to almost agile obedience. In a minute and a half the French detective was joined on the opposite pavement by an inspector and a man in plain clothes.

"Well, sir," began the former, with smiling importance, "and what may--?"

Valentin pointed suddenly with his cane. "I'll tell you on the top of that omnibus," he said, and was darting and dodging across the tangle of the traffic. When all three sank panting on the top seats of the yellow vehicle, the inspector said: "We could go four times as quick in a taxi."

"Quite true," replied their leader placidly, "if we only had an idea of where we were going."

"Well, where are you going?" asked the other, staring.

Valentin smoked frowningly for a few seconds; then, removing his cigarette, he said: "If you know what a man's doing, get in front of him; but if you want to guess what he's doing, keep behind him. Stray when he strays; stop when he stops; travel as slowly as he. Then you may see what he saw and may act as he acted. All we can do is to keep our eyes skinned for a queer thing."

"What sort of queer thing do you mean?" asked the inspector.

"Any sort of queer thing," answered Valentin, and relapsed into obstinate silence.

The yellow omnibus crawled up the northern roads for what seemed like hours on end; the great detective would not explain further, and perhaps his assistants felt a silent and growing doubt of his errand. Perhaps, also, they felt a silent and growing desire for lunch, for the hours crept long past the normal luncheon hour, and the long roads of the North London suburbs seemed to shoot out into length after length like an infernal telescope. It was one of those journeys on which a man perpetually feels that now at last he must have come to the end of the universe, and then finds he has only come to the beginning of Tufnell Park. London died away in draggled taverns and dreary scrubs, and then was unaccountably born again in blazing high streets and blatant hotels. It was like passing through thirteen separate vulgar cities all just touching each other. But though the winter twilight was already threatening the road ahead of them, the Parisian detective still sat silent and watchful, eyeing the frontage of the streets that slid by on either side. By the time they had left Camden Town behind, the policemen were nearly asleep; at least, they gave something like a jump as Valentin leapt erect, struck a hand on each man's shoulder, and shouted to the driver to stop.

They tumbled down the steps into the road without realising why they had been dislodged; when they looked round for enlightenment they found Valentin triumphantly pointing his finger towards a window on the left side of the road. It was a large window, forming part of the long facade of a gild and palatial public-house; it was the part reserved for respectable dining, and labelled "Restaurant." This window, like all the rest along the frontage of the hotel, was of frosted and figured glass; but in the middle of it was a big, black smash, like a star in the ice.

"Our cue at last," cried Valentin, waving his stick; "the place with the broken window."

"What window? What cue?" asked his principal assistant. "Why, what proof is there that this has anything to do with them?"

Valentin almost broke his bamboo stick with rage.
"Proof!" he cried. "Good God! the man is looking for proof! Why, of course, the chances are twenty to one that it has nothing to do with them. But what else can we do? Don't you see we must either follow one wild possibility or else go home to bed?" He banged his way into the restaurant, followed by his companions, and they were soon seated at a late luncheon at a little table, and looked at the star of smashed glass from the inside. Not that it was very informative to them even then.

"Got your window broken, I see," said Valentin to the waiter as he paid the bill.

"Yes, sir," answered the attendant, bending busily over the change, to which Valentin silently added an enormous tip. The waiter straightened himself with mild but unmistakable animation.

"Ah, yes, sir," he said. "Very odd thing, that, sir."

"Indeed?" Tell us about it," said the detective with careless curiosity.

"Well, two gents in black came in," said the waiter; "two of those foreign parsons that are running about. They had a cheap and quiet little lunch, and one of them paid for it and went out. The other was just going out to join him when I looked at my change again and found he'd paid me more than three times too much. 'Here,' I says to the chap who was nearly out of the door, 'you've paid too much.' 'Oh,' he says, very cool, 'have we?' 'Yes,' I says, and picks up the bill to show him. Well, that was a knock-out."

"What do you mean?" asked his interlocutor.

"Well, I'd have sworn on seven Bibles that I'd put 4s. on that bill. But now I saw I'd put 14s., as plain as paint."

"Well?" cried Valentin, moving slowly, but with burning eyes, "and then?"

"The parson at the door he says all serene, 'Sorry to confuse your accounts, but it'll pay for the window.' 'What window?' I says. 'The one I'm going to break,' he says, and smashed that blessed pane with his umbrella."

All three inquirers made an exclamation; and the inspector said under his breath, "Are we after escaped lunatics?" The waiter went on with some relish for the ridiculous story:

"I was so knocked silly for a second, I couldn't do anything. The man marched out of the place and joined his friend just round the corner. Then they went so quick up Bullock Street that I couldn't catch them, though I ran round the bars to do it."

"Bullock Street," said the detective, and shot up that thoroughfare as quickly as the strange couple he pursued.

Their journey now took them through bare brick ways like tunnels; streets with few lights and even with few windows; streets that seemed built out of the blank backs of everything and everywhere. Dusk was deepening, and it was not easy even for the London policemen to guess in what exact direction they were treading. The inspector, however, was pretty certain that they would eventually strike some part of Hampstead Heath. Abruptly one bulging gas-lit window broke the blue twilight like a bull's-eye lantern; and Valentin stopped an instant before a little garish sweetstuff shop. After an instant's hesitation he went in; he stood amid the gaudy colours of the confectionery with entire gravity and bought thirteen chocolate cigars with a certain care. He was clearly preparing an opening; but he did not need one.

An angular, elderly young woman in the shop had regarded his elegant appearance with a merely automatic inquiry; but when she saw the door behind him blocked with the blue uniform of the inspector, her eyes seemed to wake up.

"Oh," she said, "if you've come about that parcel, I've sent it off already."

"Parcel?" repeated Valentin; and it was his turn to look inquiring.

"I mean the parcel the gentleman left--the clergyman gentleman."

"For goodness' sake," said Valentin, leaning forward with his first real confession of eagerness, "for Heaven's sake tell us what happened exactly."

"Well," said the woman a little doubtfully, "the clergymen came in about half an hour ago and bought some peppermints and talked a bit, and then went off towards the Heath. But a second after, one of them runs back into the shop and says, 'Have I left a parcel!' Well, I looked everywhere and couldn't see one; so he says, 'Never mind; but if it should turn up, please post it to this address,' and he left me the address and a shilling for my trouble. And sure enough, though I thought I'd looked everywhere, I found he'd left a brown paper parcel, so I posted it to the place he said. I can't remember the address now; it was somewhere in Westminster. But as the thing seemed so important, I thought perhaps the police had come about it."

"So they have," said Valentin shortly. "Is Hampstead Heath near here?"

"Straight on for fifteen minutes," said the woman, "and you'll come right out on the open." Valentin sprang out of the shop and began to run. The other detectives followed him at a reluctant trot.

The street they threaded was so narrow and shut in by shadows that when they came out unexpectedly into the void common and vast sky they were startled to find the evening still so light and clear. A perfect dome of peacock-green sank into gold amid the blackening trees and the dark violet distances. The glowing green tint was just deep enough to pick out in points of crystal one or two stars. All that was left of the daylight lay in a golden glitter across
the edge of Hampstead and that popular hollow which is called the Vale of Health. The holiday makers who roam this region had not wholly dispersed; a few couples sat shapelessly on benches; and here and there a distant girl still shrieked in one of the swings. The glory of heaven deepened and darkened around the sublime vulgarity of man; and standing on the slope and looking across the valley, Valentin beheld the thing which he sought.

Among the black and breaking groups in that distance was one especially black which did not break—a group of two figures clerically clad. Though they seemed as small as insects, Valentin could see that one of them was much smaller than the other. Though the other had a student's stoop and an inconspicuous manner, he could see that the man was well over six feet high. He shut his teeth and went forward, whirling his stick impatiently. By the time he had substantially diminished the distance and magnified the two black figures as in a vast microscope, he had perceived something else; something which startled him, and yet which he had somehow expected. Whoever was the tall priest, there could be no doubt about the identity of the short one. It was his friend of the Harwich train, the stumpy little cure of Essex whom he had warned about his brown paper parcels.

Now, so far as this went, everything fitted in finally and rationally enough. Valentin had learned by his inquiries that morning that a Father Brown from Essex was bringing up a silver cross with sapphires, a relic of considerable value, to show some of the foreign priests at the congress. This undoubtedly was the "silver with blue stones"; and Father Brown undoubtedly was the little greenhorn in the train. Now there was nothing wonderful about the fact that what Valentin had found out Flambeau had also found out; Flambeau found out everything. Also there was nothing wonderful in the fact that when Flambeau heard of a sapphire cross he should try to steal it; that was the most natural thing in all natural history. And most certainly there was nothing wonderful about the fact that Flambeau should have it all his own way with such a silly sheep as the man with the umbrella and the parcels. He was the sort of man whom anybody could lead on a string to the North Pole; it was not surprising that an actor like Flambeau, dressed as another priest, could lead him to Hampstead Heath. So far the crime seemed clear enough; and while the detective pitied the priest for his helplessness, he almost despised Flambeau for condescending to so gullible a victim. But when Valentin thought of all that had happened in between, of all that had led him to his triumph, he racked his brains for the smallest rhyme or reason in it. What had the stealing of a blue-and-silver cross from a priest from Essex do to with chucking soup at wall paper? What had it to do with calling nuts oranges, or with paying for windows first and breaking them afterwards? He had come to the end of his chase; yet somehow he had missed the middle of it. When he failed (which was seldom), he had usually grasped the clue, but nevertheless missed the criminal. Here he had grasped the criminal, but still he could not grasp the clue.

The two figures that they followed were crawling like black flies across the huge green contour of a hill. They were evidently sunk in conversation, and perhaps did not notice where they were going; but they were certainly going to the wilder and more silent heights of the Heath. As their pursuers gained on them, the latter had to use the undignified attitudes of the deer-stalker, to crouch behind clumps of trees and even to crawl prostrate in deep grass. By these ungenerous ingenuities the hunters even came close enough to the quarry to hear the murmur of the inexplicable attitudes of the opposite pair. At last they met and dragged them. The taller priest, there could be no doubt about the identity of the shorter one. It was his friend of the Harwich train, the stumpy little cure of Essex whom he had warned about his brown paper parcels.

After he had listened for a minute and a half, he was gripped by a devilish doubt. Perhaps he had dragged the two English policemen to the wastes of a nocturnal heath on an errand no saner than seeking figs on its thistles. For the two priests were talking exactly like priests, piously, with learning and leisure, about the most aerial enigmas of theology. The little Essex priest spoke the more simply, with his round face turned to the strengthening stars; the other talked with his head bowed, as if he were not even worthy to look at them. But no more innocently clerical conversation could have been heard in any white Italian cloister or black Spanish cathedral.

The first he heard was the tail of one of Father Brown's sentences, which ended: "... what they really meant in the Middle Ages by the heavens being incorruptible."

The taller priest nodded his bowed head and said:

"Ah, yes, these modern infidels appeal to their reason; but who can look at those millions of worlds and not feel that there may well be wonderful universes above us where reason is utterly unreasonable?"

"No," said the other priest; "reason is always reasonable, even in the last limbo, in the lost borderland of things. I know that people charge the Church with lowering reason, but it is just the other way. Alone on earth, the Church
makes reason really supreme. Alone on earth, the Church affirms that God himself is bound by reason."

The other priest raised his austere face to the spangled sky and said:
"Yet who knows if in that infinite universe--?"
"Only infinite physically," said the little priest, turning sharply in his seat, "not infinite in the sense of escaping
from the laws of truth."

Valentin behind his tree was tearing his fingernails with silent fury. He seemed almost to hear the sniggers of the
English detectives whom he had brought so far on a fantastic guess only to listen to the metaphysical gossip of two
mild old parsons. In his impatience he lost the equally elaborate answer of the tall cleric, and when he listened again
it was again Father Brown who was speaking:
"Reason and justice grip the remotest and the loneliest star. Look at those stars. Don't they look as if they were
single diamonds and sapphires? Well, you can imagine any mad botany or geology you please. Think of forests of
adamant with leaves of brilliants. Think the moon is a blue moon, a single elephantine sapphire. But don't fancy that
all that frantic astronomy would make the smallest difference to the reason and justice of conduct. On plains of opal,
under cliffs cut out of pearl, you would still find a notice-board, 'Thou shalt not steal.'"

Valentin was just in the act of rising from his rigid and crouching attitude and creeping away as softly as might
be, jellied by the one great folly of his life. But something in the very silence of the tall priest made him stop until the
latter spoke. When at last he did speak, he said simply, his head bowed and his hands on his knees:
"Well, I think that other worlds may perhaps rise higher than our reason. The mystery of heaven is
unfathomable, and I for one can only bow my head."

Then, with brow yet bent and without changing by the faintest shade his attitude or voice, he added:
"Just hand over that sapphire cross of yours, will you? We're all alone here, and I could pull you to pieces like a
straw doll."

The utterly unaltered voice and attitude added a strange violence to that shocking change of speech. But the
guarder of the relic only seemed to turn his head by the smallest section of the compass. He seemed still to have a
somewhat foolish face turned to the stars. Perhaps he had not understood. Or, perhaps, he had understood and sat
rigid with terror.
"Yes," said the tall priest, in the same low voice and in the same still posture, "yes, I am Flambeau."
Then, after a pause, he said:
"Come, will you give me that cross?"
"No," said the other, and the monosyllable had an odd sound.

Flambeau suddenly flung off all his pontifical pretensions. The great robber leaned back in his seat and laughed
low but long.
"No," he cried, "you won't give it me, you proud prelate. You won't give it me, you little celibate simpleton.
Shall I tell you why you won't give it me? Because I've got it already in my own breast-pocket."

The small man from Essex turned what seemed to be a dazed face in the dusk, and said, with the timid eagerness
of "The Private Secretary":
"Are--are you sure?"

Flambeau yelled with delight.
"Really, you're as good as a three-act farce," he cried. "Yes, you turnip, I am quite sure. I had the sense to make a
duplicate of the right parcel, and now, my friend, you've got the duplicate and I've got the jewels. An old dodge,
Father Brown-- a very old dodge."

"Yes," said Father Brown, and passed his hand through his hair with the same strange vagueness of manner.
"Yes, I've heard of it before."

The colossus of crime leaned over to the little rustic priest with a sort of sudden interest.
"You have heard of it?" he asked. "Where have you heard of it?"

"Well, I mustn't tell you his name, of course," said the little man simply. "He was a penitent, you know. He had
lived prosperously for about twenty years entirely on duplicate brown paper parcels. And so, you see, when I began
to suspect you, I thought of this poor chap's way of doing it at once."

"Began to suspect me?" repeated the outlaw with increased intensity. "Did you really have the gumption to
suspect me just because I brought you up to this bare part of the heath?"

"No, no," said Brown with an air of apology. "You see, I suspected you when we first met. It's that little bulge up
the sleeve where you people have the spiked bracelet."

"How in Tartarus," cried Flambeau, "did you ever hear of the spiked bracelet?"

"Oh, one's little flock, you know!" said Father Brown, arching his eyebrows rather blankly. "When I was a curate
in Hartlepool, there were three of them with spiked bracelets. So, as I suspected you from the first, don't you see, I
made sure that the cross should go safe, anyhow. I'm afraid I watched you, you know. So at last I saw you change
the parcels. Then, don't you see, I changed them back again. And then I left the right one behind."

"Left it behind?" repeated Flambeau, and for the first time there was another note in his voice beside his triumph.

"Well, it was like this," said the little priest, speaking in the same unaffected way. "I went back to that sweet-
shop and asked if I'd left a parcel, and gave them a particular address if it turned up. Well, I knew I hadn't; but when I went away again I did. So, instead of running after me with that valuable parcel, they have sent it flying to a friend of mine in Westminster." Then he added rather sadly: "I learnt that, too, from a poor fellow in Hartlepool. He used to do it with handbags he stole at railway stations, but he's in a monastery now. Oh, one gets to know, you know," he added, rubbing his head again with the same sort of desperate apology. "We can't help being priests. People come and tell us these things."

Flambeau tore a brown-paper parcel out of his inner pocket and rent it in pieces. There was nothing but paper and sticks of lead inside it. He sprang to his feet with a gigantic gesture, and cried:

"I don't believe you. I don't believe a bumpkin like you could manage all that. I believe you've still got the stuff on you, and if you don't give it up--why, we're all alone, and I'll take it by force!"

"No," said Father Brown simply, and stood up also, "you won't take it by force. First, because I really haven't still got it. And, second, because we are not alone."

Flambeau stopped in his stride forward.

"Behind that tree," said Father Brown, pointing, "are two strong policemen and the greatest detective alive. How did they come here, do you ask? Why, I brought them, of course! How did I do it? Why, I'll tell you if you like! Lord bless you, we have to know twenty such things when we work among the criminal classes! Well, I wasn't sure you were a thief, and it would never do to make a scandal against one of our own clergy. So I just tested you to see if anything would make you show yourself. A man generally makes a small scene if he finds salt in his coffee; if he doesn't, he has some reason for keeping quiet. I changed the salt and sugar, and you kept quiet. A man generally objects if his bill is three times too big. If he pays it, he has some motive for passing unnoticed. I altered your bill, and you paid it."

The world seemed waiting for Flambeau to leap like a tiger. But he was held back as by a spell; he was stunned with the utmost curiosity.

"Well," went on Father Brown, with lumbering lucidity, "as you wouldn't leave any tracks for the police, of course somebody had to. At every place we went to, I took care to do something that would get us talked about for the rest of the day. I didn't do much harm--a splashed wall, spilt apples, a broken window; but I saved the cross, as the cross will always be saved. It is at Westminster by now. I rather wonder you didn't stop it with the Donkey's Whistle."

"With the what?" asked Flambeau.

"I'm glad you've never heard of it," said the priest, making a face. "It's a foul thing. I'm sure you're too good a man for a Whistler. I couldn't have countered it even with the Spots myself; I'm not strong enough in the legs."

"What on earth are you talking about?" asked the other.

"Well, I did think you'd know the Spots," said Father Brown, agreeably surprised. "Oh, you can't have gone so very wrong yet!"

"How in blazes do you know all these horrors?" cried Flambeau.

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"How in blazes do you know all these horrors?" cried Flambeau.

The shadow of a smile crossed the round, simple face of his clerical opponent.

"Oh, by being a celibate simpleton, I suppose," he said. "Has it never struck you that a man who does next to nothing but hear men's real sins is not likely to be wholly unaware of human evil? But, as a matter of fact, another part of my trade, too, made me sure you weren't a priest."

"What?" asked the thief, almost gaping.

"You attacked reason," said Father Brown. "It's bad theology."

And even as he turned away to collect his property, the three policemen came out from under the twilight trees. Flambeau was an artist and a sportsman. He stepped back and swept Valentin a great bow.

"Do not bow to me, mon ami," said Valentin with silver clearness. "Let us both bow to our master."

And they both stood an instant uncovered while the little Essex priest blinked about for his umbrella.

The Secret Garden

Aristide Valentin, Chief of the Paris Police, was late for his dinner, and some of his guests began to arrive before him. These were, however, reassured by his confidential servant, Ivan, the old man with a scar, and a face almost as grey as his moustaches, who always sat at a table in the entrance hall—a hall hung with weapons. Valentin's house was perhaps as peculiar and celebrated as its master. It was an old house, with high walls and tall poplars almost overhanging the Seine; but the oddity—and perhaps the police value—of its architecture was this: that there was no ultimate exit at all except through this front door, which was guarded by Ivan and the armoury. The garden was large and elaborate, and there were many exits from the house into the garden. But there was no exit from the garden
into the world outside; all round it ran a tall, smooth, unscalable wall with special spikes at the top; no bad garden, perhaps, for a man to reflect in whom some hundred criminals had sworn to kill.

As Ivan explained to the guests, their host had telephoned that he was detained for ten minutes. He was, in truth, making some last arrangements about executions and such ugly things; and though these duties were rootedly repulsive to him, he always performed them with precision. Ruthless in the pursuit of criminals, he was very mild about their punishment. Since he had been supreme over French--and largely over European--policial methods, his great influence had been honourably used for the mitigation of sentences and the purification of prisons. He was one of the great humanitarian French freethinkers; and the only thing wrong with them is that they make mercy even colder than justice.

When Valentin arrived he was already dressed in black clothes and the red rosette--an elegant figure, his dark beard already streaked with grey. He went straight through his house to his study, which opened on the grounds behind. The garden door of it was open, and after he had carefully locked his box in its official place, he stood for a few seconds at the open door looking out upon the garden. A sharp moon was fighting with the flying rags and tatters of a storm, and Valentin regarded it with a wistfulness unusual in such scientific natures as his. Perhaps such scientific natures have some psychic prevision of the most tremendous problem of their lives. From any such occult mood, at least, he quickly recovered, for he knew he was late, and that his guests had already begun to arrive. A glance at his drawing-room when he entered it was enough to make certain that his principal guest was not there, at any rate. He saw all the other pillars of the little party; he saw Lord Galloway, the English Ambassador--a choleric old man with a russet face like an apple, wearing the blue ribbon of the Garter. He saw Lady Galloway, slim and threadlike, with silver hair and a face sensitive and superior. He saw her daughter, Lady Margaret Graham, a pale and pretty girl with an elfish face and copper-coloured hair. He saw the Duchess of Mont St. Michel, black-eyed and opulent, and with her her two daughters, black-eyed and opulent also. He saw Dr. Simon, a typical French scientist, with glasses, a pointed brown beard, and a forehead barred with those parallel wrinkles which are the penalty of superciliousness, since they come through constantly elevating the eyebrows. He saw Father Brown, of Cobhole, in Essex, whom he had recently met in England. He saw--perhaps with more interest than any of these--a tall man in uniform, who had bowed to the Galloways without receiving any very hearty acknowledgment, and who now advanced alone to pay his respects to his host. This was Commandant O'Brien, of the French Foreign Legion. He was a slim yet somewhat swaggering figure, clean-shaven, dark-haired, and blue-eyed, and, as seemed natural in an officer of that famous regiment of victorious failures and successful suicides, he had an air at once dashing and melancholy. He was by birth an Irish gentleman, and in boyhood had known the Galloways--especially Margaret Graham. He had left his country after some crash of debts, and now expressed his complete freedom from British etiquette by swinging about in uniform, sabre and spurs. When he bowed to the Ambassador's family, Lord and Lady Galloway bent stiffly, and Lady Margaret looked away.

But for whatever old causes such people might be interested in each other, their distinguished host was not specially interested in them. No one of them at least was in his eyes the guest of the evening. Valentin was expecting, for special reasons, a man of world-wide fame, whose friendship he had secured during some of his great detective tours and triumphs in the United States. He was expecting Julius K. Brayne, that multi-millionaire whose colossal and even crushing endowments of small religions have occasioned so much easy sport and easier solemnity for the American and English papers. Nobody could quite make out whether Mr. Brayne was an atheist or a Mormon or a Christian Scientist; but he was ready to pour money into any intellectual vessel, so long as it was an untried vessel. One of his hobbies was to wait for the American Shakespeare--a hobby more patient than angling. He admired Walt Whitman, but thought that Luke P. Tanner, of Paris, Pa., was more "progressive" than Whitman any day. He liked anything that he thought "progressive." He thought Valentin "progressive," thereby doing him a grave injustice.

The solid appearance of Julius K. Brayne in the room was as decisive as a dinner bell. He had this great quality, which very few of us can claim, that his presence was as big as his absence. He was a huge fellow, as fat as he was tall, clad in complete evening black, without so much relief as a watch-chain or a ring. His hair was white and well brushed back like a German's; his face was red, fierce and cherubic, with one dark tuft under the lower lip that threw up that otherwise infantile visage with an effect theatrical and even Mephistophelean. Not long, however, did that salon merely stare at the celebrated American; his lateness had already become a domestic problem, and he was sent with all speed into the dining-room with Lady Galloway on his arm.

Except on one point the Galloways were genial and casual enough. So long as Lady Margaret did not take the arm of that adventurer O'Brien, her father was quite satisfied; and she had not done so, she had decorously gone in with Dr. Simon. Nevertheless, old Lord Galloway was restless and almost rude. He was diplomatic enough during dinner, but when, over the cigars, three of the younger men--Simon the doctor, Brown the priest, and the detrimental O'Brien, the exile in a foreign uniform--all melted away to mix with the ladies or smoke in the conservatory, then
the English diplomatist grew very undiplomatic indeed. He was stung every sixty seconds with the thought that the
scamp O'Brien might be signalling to Margaret somehow; he did not attempt to imagine how. He was left over the
coffee with Brayne, the hoary Yankee who believed in all religions, and Valentin, the grizzled Frenchman who
believed in none. They could argue with each other, but neither could appeal to him. After a time this "progressive"
logomachy had reached a crisis of tedium; Lord Galloway got up also and sought the drawing-room. He lost his way
in long passages for some six or eight minutes: till he heard the high-pitched, didactic voice of the doctor, and then
the dull voice of the priest, followed by general laughter. They also, he thought with a curse, were probably arguing
about "science and religion." But the instant he opened the salon door he saw only one thing—he saw what was not
there. He saw that Commandant O'Brien was absent, and that Lady Margaret was absent too.

Rising impatiently from the drawing-room, as he had from the dining-room, he stamped along the passage once
more. His notion of protecting his daughter from the Irish-Algerian n'er-do-whel had become something central and
even mad in his mind. As he went towards the back of the house, where was Valentin's study, he was surprised to
meet his daughter, who swept past with a white, scornful face, which was a second enigma. If she had been with
O'Brien, where was O'Brien! If she had not been with O'Brien, where had she been? With a sort of senile and
passionate suspicion he groped his way to the dark back parts of the mansion, and eventually found a servants'
entrance that opened on to the garden. The moon with her scimitar had now ripped up and rolled away all the storm-
wrack. The argent light lit up all four corners of the garden. A tall figure in blue was striding across the lawn
_towards the study door; a glint of moonlit silver on his facings picked him out as Commandant O'Brien.

He vanished through the French windows into the house, leaving Lord Galloway in an indescribable temper, at
once virulent and vague. The blue-and-silver garden, like a scene in a theatre, seemed to taunt him with all that
tyrannic tenderness against which his worldly authority was at war. The length and grace of the Irishman's stride
enraged him as if he were a rival instead of a father; the moonlight maddened him. He was trapped as if by magic
into a garden of troubadours, a Watteau fairyland; and, willing to shake off such amorous imbecilities by speech, he
stepped briskly after his enemy. As he did so he tripped over some tree or stone in the grass; looked down at it first
with irritation and then a second time with curiosity. The next instant the moon and the tall poplars looked at an
unusual sight—an elderly English diplomatist running hard and crying or bellowing as he ran.

His hoarse shouts brought a pale face to the study door, the beaming glasses and worried brow of Dr. Simon,
who heard the nobleman's first clear words. Lord Galloway was crying: "A corpse in the grass—a blood-stained
corpse." O'Brien at last had gone utterly out of his mind.

"We must tell Valentin at once," said the doctor, when the other had brokenly described all that he had dared to
examine. "It is fortunate that he is here"; and even as he spoke the great detective entered the study, attracted by the
cry. It was almost amusing to note his typical transformation; he had come with the common concern of a host and a
gentleman, fearing that some guest or servant was ill. When he was told the gory fact, he turned with all his gravity
instantly bright and businesslike; for this, however abrupt and awful, was his business.

"Strange, gentlemen," he said as they hurried out into the garden, "that I should have hunted mysteries all over
the earth, and now one comes and settles in my own back-yard. But where is the place?" They crossed the lawn less
easily, as a slight mist had begun to rise from the river; but under the guidance of the shaken Galloway they found
the body sunken in deep grass—the body of a very tall and broad-shouldered man. He lay face downwards, so they
could only see that his big shoulders were clad in black cloth, and that his big head was bald, except for a wisp or
two of brown hair that clung to his skull like wet seaweed. A scarlet serpent of blood crawled from under his fallen
face.

"At least," said Simon, with a deep and singular intonation, "he is none of our party."

"Examine him, doctor," cried Valentin rather sharply. "He may not be dead."

The doctor bent down. "He is not quite cold, but I am afraid he is dead enough," he answered. "Just help me to
lift him up."

They lifted him carefully an inch from the ground, and all doubts as to his being really dead were settled at once
and frightfully. The head fell away. It had been entirely sundered from the body; whoever had cut his throat had
managed to sever the neck as well. Even Valentin was slightly shocked. "He must have been as strong as a gorilla,"
he muttered.

Not without a shiver, though he was used to anatomical abortions, Dr. Simon lifted the head. It was slightly
slashed about the neck and jaw, but the face was substantially unhurt. It was a ponderous, yellow face, at once
sunken and swollen, with a hawk-like nose and heavy lids—a face of a wicked Roman emperor, with, perhaps, a
distant touch of a Chinese emperor. All present seemed to look at it with the coldest eye of ignorance. Nothing else
could be noted about the man except that, as they had lifted his body, they had seen underneath it the white gleam of
a shirt-front defaced with a red gleam of blood. As Dr. Simon said, the man had never been of their party. But he
might very well have been trying to join it, for he had come dressed for such an occasion.
Valentin went down on his hands and knees and examined with his closest professional attention the grass and ground for some twenty yards round the body, in which he was assisted less skilfully by the doctor, and quite vaguely by the English lord. Nothing rewarded their grovellings except a few twigs, snapped or chopped into very small lengths, which Valentin lifted for an instant's examination and then tossed away.

"Twigs," he said gravely; "twigs, and a total stranger with his head cut off; that is all there is on this lawn."

There was an almost creepy stillness, and then the unnerved Galloway called out sharply:

"Who's that! Who's that over there by the garden wall!"

A small figure with a foolishly large head drew waveringly near them in the moonlit haze; looked for an instant like a goblin, but turned out to be the harmless little priest whom they had left in the drawing-room.

"I say," he said meekly, "there are no gates to this garden, do you know."

Valentin's black brows had come together somewhat crossly, as they did on principle at the sight of the cassock. But he was far too just a man to deny the relevance of the remark. "You are right," he said. "Before we find out how he came to be killed, we may have to find out how he came to be here. Now listen to me, gentlemen. If it can be done without prejudice to my position and duty, we shall all agree that certain distinguished names might well be kept out of this. There are ladies, gentlemen, and there is a foreign ambassador. If we must mark it down as a crime, then it must be followed up as a crime. But till then I can use my own discretion. I am the head of the police; I am so public that I can afford to be private. Please Heaven, I will clear everyone of my own guests before I call in my men to look for anybody else. Gentlemen, upon your honour, you will none of you leave the house till tomorrow at noon; there are bedrooms for all. Simon, I think you know where to find my man, Ivan, in the front hall; he is a confidential man. Tell him to leave another servant on guard and come to me at once. Lord Galloway, you are certainly the best person to tell the ladies what has happened, and prevent a panic. They also must stay. Father Brown and I will remain with the body."

When this spirit of the captain spoke in Valentin he was obeyed like a bugle. Dr. Simon went through to the armoury and routed out Ivan, the public detective's private detective. Galloway went to the drawing-room and told the terrible news tactfully enough, so that by the time the company assembled there the ladies were already startled and already soothed. Meanwhile the good priest and the good atheist stood at the head and foot of the dead man motionless in the moonlight, like symbolic statues of their two philosophies of death.

Ivan, the confidential man with the scar and the moustaches, came out of the house like a cannon ball, and came racing across the lawn to Valentin like a dog to his master. His livid face was quite lively with the glow of this domestic detective story, and it was with almost unpleasant eagerness that he asked his master's permission to examine the remains.

"Yes; look, if you like, Ivan," said Valentin, "but don't be long. We must go in and thrash this out in the house."

Ivan lifted the head, and then almost let it drop.

"Why," he gasped, "it's--no, it isn't; it can't be. Do you know this man, sir?"

"No," said Valentin indifferently; "we had better go inside."

Between them they carried the corpse to a sofa in the study, and then all made their way to the drawing-room. The detective sat down at a desk quietly, and even without hesitation; but his eye was the iron eye of a judge at assize. He made a few rapid notes upon paper in front of him, and then said shortly: "Is everybody here?"

"Not Mr. Brayne," said the Duchess of Mont St. Michel, looking round.

"No," said Lord Galloway in a hoarse, harsh voice. "And not Mr. Neil O'Brien, I fancy. I saw that gentleman walking in the garden when the corpse was still warm."

"Ivan," said the detective, "go and fetch Commandant O'Brien and Mr. Brayne. Mr. Brayne, I know, is finishing a cigar in the dining-room; Commandant O'Brien, I think, is walking up and down the conservatory. I am not sure."

The faithful attendant flashed from the room, and before anyone could stir or speak Valentin went on with the same soldierly swiftness of exposition.

"Everyone here knows that a dead man has been found in the garden, his head cut clean from his body. Dr. Simon, you have examined it. Do you think that to cut a man's throat like that would need great force? Or, perhaps, only a very sharp knife?"

"I should say that it could not be done with a knife at all," said the pale doctor.

"Have you any thought," resumed Valentin, "of a tool with which it could be done?"

"Speaking within modern probabilities, I really haven't," said the doctor, arching his painful brows. "It's not easy to hack a neck through even clumsily, and this was a very clean cut. It could be done with a battle-axe or an old headman's axe, or an old two-handed sword."

"But, good heavens!" cried the Duchess, almost in hysterics, "there aren't any two-handed swords and battle-axes round here."

Valentin was still busy with the paper in front of him. "Tell me," he said, still writing rapidly, "could it have
been done with a long French cavalry sabre?"

A low knocking came at the door, which, for some unreasonable reason, curdled everyone's blood like the knocking in Macbeth. Amid that frozen silence Dr. Simon managed to say: "A sabre--yes, I suppose it could."

"Thank you," said Valentin. "Come in, Ivan."

The confidential Ivan opened the door and ushered in Commandant Neil O'Brien, whom he had found at last pacing the garden again.

The Irish officer stood up disordered and defiant on the threshold. "What do you want with me?" he cried.

"Please sit down," said Valentin in pleasant, level tones. "Why, you aren't wearing your sword. Where is it?"

"I left it on the library table," said O'Brien, his brogue deepening in his disturbed mood. "It was a nuisance, it was getting--"

"Ivan," said Valentin, "please go and get the Commandant's sword from the library." Then, as the servant vanished, "Lord Galloway says he saw you leaving the garden just before he found the corpse. What were you doing in the garden?"


A heavy silence sank and endured, and at the end of it came again that trivial and terrible knocking. Ivan reappeared, carrying an empty steel scabbard. "This is all I can find," he said.

"Put it on the table," said Valentin, without looking up.

There was an inhuman silence in the room, like that sea of inhuman silence round the dock of the condemned murderer. The Duchess's weak exclamations had long ago died away. Lord Galloway's swollen hatred was satisfied and even sobered. The voice that came was quite unexpected.

"I think I can tell you," cried Lady Margaret, in that clear, quivering voice with which a courageous woman speaks publicly. "I can tell you what Mr. O'Brien was doing in the garden, since he is bound to silence. He was asking me to marry him. I refused; I said in my family circumstances I could give him nothing but my respect. He was a little angry at that; he did not seem to think much of my respect. I wonder," she added, with rather a wan smile, "if he will care at all for it now. For I offer it him now. I will swear anywhere that he never did a thing like this."

Lord Galloway had edged up to his daughter, and was intimidating her in what he imagined to be an undertone. "Hold your tongue, Maggie," he said in a thunderous whisper. "Why should you shield the fellow? Where's his sword? Where's his confounded cavalry--"

He stopped because of the singular stare with which his daughter was regarding him, a look that was indeed a lurid magnet for the whole group.

"You old fool!" she said in a low voice without pretence of piety, "what do you suppose you are trying to prove? I tell you this man was innocent while with me. But if he wasn't innocent, he was still with me. If he murdered a man in the garden, who was it who must have seen--who must at least have known? Do you hate Neil so much as to put your own daughter--"

Lady Galloway screamed. Everyone else sat tingling at the touch of those satanic tragedies that have been between lovers before now. They saw the proud, white face of the Scotch aristocrat and her lover, the Irish adventurer, like old portraits in a dark house. The long silence was full of formless historical memories of murdered husbands and poisonous paramours.

In the centre of this morbid silence an innocent voice said: "Was it a very long cigar?"

The change of thought was so sharp that they had to look round to see who had spoken.

"I mean," said little Father Brown, from the corner of the room, "I mean that cigar Mr. Brayne is finishing. It seems nearly as long as a walking-stick."

Despite the irrelevance there was assent as well as irritation in Valentin's face as he lifted his head.

"Quite right," he remarked sharply. "Ivan, go and see about Mr. Brayne again, and bring him here at once."

The instant the factotum had closed the door, Valentin addressed the girl with an entirely new earnestness.

"Lady Margaret," he said, "we all feel, I am sure, both gratitude and admiration for your act in rising above your lower dignity and explaining the Commandant's conduct. But there is a hiatus still. Lord Galloway, I understand, met you passing from the study to the drawing-room, and it was only some minutes afterwards that he found the garden and the Commandant still walking there."

"You have to remember," replied Margaret, with a faint irony in her voice, "that I had just refused him, so we should scarcely have come back arm in arm. He is a gentleman, anyhow; and he loitered behind--and so got charged with murder."

"In those few moments," said Valentin gravely, "he might really--"

The knock came again, and Ivan put in his scarred face.
"Beg pardon, sir," he said, "but Mr. Brayne has left the house."

"Left!" cried Valentin, and rose for the first time to his feet.

"Gone. Scooted. Evaporated," replied Ivan in humorous French. "His hat and coat are gone, too, and I'll tell you something to cap it all. I ran outside the house to find any traces of him, and I found one, and a big trace, too."

"What do you mean?" asked Valentin.

"I'll show you," said his servant, and reappeared with a flashing naked cavalry sabre, streaked with blood about the point and edge. Everyone in the room eyed it as if it were a thunderbolt; but the experienced Ivan went on quite quietly:

"I found this," he said, "flung among the bushes fifty yards up the road to Paris. In other words, I found it just where your respectable Mr. Brayne threw it when he ran away."

There was again a silence, but of a new sort. Valentin took the sabre, examined it, reflected with unaffected concentration of thought, and then turned a respectful face to O'Brien. "Commandant," he said, "we trust you will always produce this weapon if it is wanted for police examination. Meanwhile," he added, slapping the steel back in the ringing scabbard, "let me return you your sword."

At the military symbolism of the action the audience could hardly refrain from applause.

For Neil O'Brien, indeed, that gesture was the turning-point of existence. By the time he was wandering in the mysterious garden again in the colours of the morning the tragic futility of his ordinary mien had fallen from him; he was a man with many reasons for happiness. Lord Galloway was a gentleman, and had offered him an apology. Lady Margaret was something better than a lady, a woman at least, and had perhaps given him something better than an apology, as they drifted among the old flowerbeds before breakfast. The whole company was more lighthearted and humane, for though the riddle of the death remained, the load of suspicion was lifted off them all, and sent flying off to Paris with the strange millionaire—a man they hardly knew. The devil was cast out of the house—he had cast himself out.

Still, the riddle remained; and when O'Brien threw himself on a garden seat beside Dr. Simon, that keenly scientific person at once resumed it. He did not get much talk out of O'Brien, whose thoughts were on pleasanter things.

"I can't say it interests me much," said the Irishman frankly, "especially as it seems pretty plain now. Apparently Brayne hated this stranger for some reason; lured him into the garden, and killed him with my sword. Then he fled to the city, tossing the sword away as he went. By the way, Ivan tells me the dead man had a Yankee dollar in his pocket. So he was a countryman of Brayne's, and that seems to clinch it. I don't see any difficulties about the business."

"There are five colossal difficulties," said the doctor quietly; "like high walls within walls. Don't mistake me. I don't doubt that Brayne did it; his flight, I fancy, proves that. But as to how he did it. First difficulty: Why should a man kill another man with a great hulking sabre, when he can almost kill him with a pocket knife and put it back in his pocket? Second difficulty: Why was there no noise or outcry? Does a man commonly see another come up waving a scimitar and offer no remarks? Third difficulty: A servant watched the front door all the evening; and a rat cannot get into Valentin's garden anywhere. How did the dead man get into the garden? Fourth difficulty: Given the same conditions, how did Brayne get out of the garden?"

"And the fifth," said Neil, with eyes fixed on the English priest who was coming slowly up the path.

"Is a trifle, I suppose," said the doctor, "but I think an odd one. When I first saw how the head had been slashed, I supposed the assassin had struck more than once. But on examination I found many cuts across the truncated section; in other words, they were struck after the head was off. Did Brayne hate his foe so fiendishly that he stood sabring his body in the moonlight?"

"Horrible!" said O'Brien, and shuddered.

The little priest, Brown, had arrived while they were talking, and had waited, with characteristic shyness, till they had finished. Then he said awkwardly:

"I say, I'm sorry to interrupt. But I was sent to tell you the news!"

"News?" repeated Simon, and stared at him rather painfully through his glasses.

"Yes, I'm sorry," said Father Brown mildly. "There's been another murder, you know."

Both men on the seat sprang up, leaving it rocking.

"And, what's stranger still," continued the priest, with his dull eye on the rhododendrons, "it's the same disgusting sort; it's another beheading. They found the second head actually bleeding into the river, a few yards along Brayne's road to Paris; so they suppose that he—"

"Great Heaven!" cried O'Brien. "Is Brayne a monomaniac?"

"There are American vendettas," said the priest impassively. Then he added: "They want you to come to the library and see it."
Commandant O’Brien followed the others towards the inquest, feeling decidedly sick. As a soldier, he loathed all this secretive carnage; where were these extravagant amputations going to stop? First one head was hacked off, and then another; in this case (he told himself bitterly) it was not true that two heads were better than one. As he crossed the study he almost staggered at a shocking coincidence. Upon Valentin's table lay the coloured picture of yet a third bleeding head; and it was the head of Valentin himself. A second glance showed him it was only a Nationalist paper, called The Guillotine, which every week showed one of its political opponents with rolling eyes and writhing features just after execution; for Valentin was an anti-clerical of some note. But O'Brien was an Irishman, with a kind of chastity even in his sins; and his gorge rose against that great brutality of the intellect which belongs only to France. He felt Paris as a whole, from the grotesques on the Gothic churches to the gross caricatures in the newspapers. He remembered the gigantic jests of the Revolution. He saw the whole city as one ugly energy, from the sanguinary sketch lying on Valentin's table up to where, above a mountain and forest of gargoyles, the great devil grins on Notre Dame.

The library was long, low, and dark; what light entered it shot from under low blinds and had still some of the ruddy tinge of morning. Valentin and his servant Ivan were waiting for them at the upper end of a long, slightly-sloping desk, on which lay the mortal remains, looking enormous in the twilight. The big black figure and yellow face of the man found in the garden confronted them essentially unchanged. The second head, which had been fished from among the river reeds that morning, lay streaming and dripping beside it; Valentin's men were still seeking to recover the rest of this second corpse, which was supposed to be afloat. Father Brown, who did not seem to share O'Brien's sensibilities in the least, went up to the second head and examined it with his blinking care. It was little more than a mop of wet white hair, fringed with silver fire in the red and level morning light; the face, which seemed of an ugly, empurpled and perhaps criminal type, had been much battered against trees or stones as it tossed in the water.

"Good morning, Commandant O'Brien," said Valentin, with quiet cordiality. "You have heard of Brayne's last experiment in butchery, I suppose?"

Father Brown was still bending over the head with white hair, and he said, without looking up:

"I suppose it is quite certain that Brayne cut off this head, too."

"Well, it seems common sense," said Valentin, with his hands in his pockets. "Killed in the same way as the other. Found within a few yards of the other. And sliced by the same weapon which we know he carried away."

"Yes, yes; I know," replied Father Brown submissively. "Yet, you know, I doubt whether Brayne could have cut off this head."

"Why not?" inquired Dr. Simon, with a rational stare.

"Well, doctor," said the priest, looking up blinking, "can a man cut off his own head? I don't know."

O'Brien felt an insane universe crashing about his ears; but the doctor sprang forward with impetuous practicality and pushed back the wet white hair.

"Oh, there's no doubt it's Brayne," said the priest quietly. "He had exactly that chip in the left ear."

The detective, who had been regarding the priest with steady and glittering eyes, opened his clenched mouth and said sharply: "You seem to know a lot about him, Father Brown."

"I do," said the little man simply. "I've been about with him for some weeks. He was thinking of joining our church."

The star of the fanatic sprang into Valentin's eyes; he strode towards the priest with clenched hands. "And, perhaps," he cried, with a blasting sneer, "perhaps he was also thinking of leaving all his money to your church."

"Perhaps he was," said Brown stolidly; "it is possible."

"In that case," cried Valentin, with a dreadful smile, "you may indeed know a great deal about him. About his life and about his--"

Commandant O'Brien laid a hand on Valentin's arm. "Drop that slanderous rubbish, Valentin," he said, "or there may be more swords yet."

But Valentin (under the steady, humble gaze of the priest) had already recovered himself. "Well," he said shortly, "people's private opinions can wait. You gentlemen are still bound by your promise to stay; you must enforce it on yourselves--and on each other. Ivan here will tell you anything more you want to know; I must get to business and write to the authorities. We can't keep this quiet any longer. I shall be writing in my study if there is any more news."

"Is there any more news, Ivan?" asked Dr. Simon, as the chief of police strode out of the room.

"Only one more thing, I think, sir," said Ivan, wrinkling up his grey old face, "but that's important, too, in its way. There's that old buffer you found on the lawn," and he pointed without pretence of reverence at the big black body with the yellow head. "We've found out who he is, anyhow."

"Indeed!" cried the astonished doctor, "and who is he?"
"His name was Arnold Becker," said the under-detective, "though he went by many aliases. He was a wandering sort of scamp, and is known to have been in America; so that was where Brayne got his knife into him. We didn't have much to do with him ourselves, for he worked mostly in Germany. We've communicated, of course, with the German police. But, oddly enough, there was a twin brother of his, named Louis Becker, whom we had a great deal to do with. In fact, we found it necessary to guillotine him only yesterday. Well, it's a rum thing, gentlemen, but when I saw that fellow flat on the lawn I had the greatest jump of my life. If I hadn't seen Louis Becker guillotined with my own eyes, I'd have sworn it was Louis Becker lying there in the grass. Then, of course, I remembered his twin brother in Germany, and following up the clue--"

The explanatory Ivan stopped, for the excellent reason that nobody was listening to him. The Commandant and the doctor were both staring at Father Brown, who had sprung stiffly to his feet, and was holding his temples tight like a man in sudden and violent pain.

"Stop, stop, stop!" he cried; "stop talking a minute, for I see half. Will God give me strength? Will my brain make the one jump and see all? Heaven help me! I used to be fairly good at thinking. I could paraphrase any page in Aquinas once. Will my head split—or will it see? I see half—I only see half."

He buried his head in his hands, and stood in a sort of rigid torture of thought or prayer, while the other three could only go on staring at this last prodigy of their wild twelve hours.

When Father Brown's hands fell they showed a face quite fresh and serious, like a child's. He heaved a huge sigh, and said: "Let us get this said and done with as quickly as possible. Look here, this will be the quickest way to convince you all of the truth." He turned to the doctor. "Dr. Simon," he said, "you have a strong head-piece, and I heard you this morning asking the five hardest questions about this business. Well, if you will ask them again, I will answer them."

Simon's pince-nez dropped from his nose in his doubt and wonder, but he answered at once. "Well, the first question, you know, is why a man should kill another with a clumsy sabre at all when a man can kill with a bodkin?"

"A man cannot behead with a bodkin," said Brown calmly, "and for this murder beheading was absolutely necessary."

"Why?" asked O'Brien, with interest.

"And the next question?" asked Father Brown.

"Well, why didn't the man cry out or anything?" asked the doctor; "sabres in gardens are certainly unusual."

"Twigs," said the priest gloomily, and turned to the window which looked on the scene of death. "No one saw the point of the twigs. Why should they lie on that lawn (look at it) so far from any tree? They were not snapped off; they were chopped off. The murderer occupied his enemy with some tricks with the sabre, showing how he could cut a branch in mid-air, or what-not. Then, while his enemy bent down to see the result, a silent slash, and the head fell."

"Well," said the doctor slowly, "that seems plausible enough. But my next two questions will stump anyone."

The priest still stood looking critically out of the window and waited.

"You know how all the garden was sealed up like an air-tight chamber," went on the doctor. "Well, how did the strange man get into the garden?"

Without turning round, the little priest answered: "There never was any strange man in the garden."

There was a silence, and then a sudden cackle of almost childish laughter relieved the strain. The absurdity of Brown's remark moved Ivan to open taunts.

"Oh!" he cried; "then we didn't lug a great fat corpse on to a sofa last night? He hadn't got into the garden, I suppose?"

"Got into the garden?" repeated Brown reflectively. "No, not entirely."

"Hang it all," cried Simon, "a man gets into a garden, or he doesn't."

"Not necessarily," said the priest, with a faint smile. "What is the next question, doctor?"

"I fancy you're ill," exclaimed Dr. Simon sharply; "but I'll ask the next question if you like. How did Brayne get out of the garden?"

"He didn't get out of the garden," said the priest, still looking out of the window.

"Didn't get out of the garden?" exploded Simon.

"Not completely," said Father Brown.

Simon shook his fists in a frenzy of French logic. "A man gets out of a garden, or he doesn't," he cried.

"Not always," said Father Brown.

Dr. Simon sprang to his feet impatiently. "I have no time to spare on such senseless talk," he cried angrily. "If you can't understand a man being on one side of a wall or the other, I won't trouble you further."

"Doctor," said the cleric very gently, "we have always got on very pleasantly together. If only for the sake of old friendship, stop and tell me your fifth question."
The impatient Simon sank into a chair by the door and said briefly: "The head and shoulders were cut about in a queer way. It seemed to be done after death."

"Yes," said the motionless priest, "it was done so as to make you assume exactly the one simple falsehood that you did assume. It was done to make you take for granted that the head belonged to the body."

The borderland of the brain, where all the monsters are made, moved horrifically in the Gaelic O'Brien. He felt the chaotic presence of all the horse-men and fish-women that man's unnatural fancy has begotten. A voice older than his first fathers seemed saying in his ear: "Keep out of the monstrous garden where grows the tree with double fruit. Avoid the evil garden where died the man with two heads." Yet, while these shameful symbolic shapes passed across the ancient mirror of his Irish soul, his Frenchified intellect was quite alert, and was watching the odd priest as closely and incredulously as all the rest.

Father Brown had turned round at last, and stood against the window, with his face in dense shadow; but even in that shadow they could see it was pale as ashes. Nevertheless, he spoke quite sensibly, as if there were no Gaelic souls on earth.

"Gentlemen," he said, "you did not find the strange body of Becker in the garden. You did not find any strange body in the garden. In face of Dr. Simon's rationalism, I still affirm that Becker was only partly present. Look here!" (pointing to the black bulk of the mysterious corpse) "you never saw that man in your lives. Did you ever see this man?"

He rapidly rolled away the bald, yellow head of the unknown, and put in its place the white-maned head beside it. And there, complete, unified, unmistakable, lay Julius K. Brayne.

"The murderer," went on Brown quietly, "hacked off his enemy's head and flung the sword far over the wall. But he was too clever to fling the sword only. He flung the head over the wall also. Then he had only to clap on another head to the corpse, and (as he insisted on a private inquest) you all imagined a totally new man."

"Clap on another head!" said O'Brien staring. "What other head? Heads don't grow on garden bushes, do they?"

"No," said Father Brown huskily, and looking at his boots; "there is only one place where they grow. They grow in the basket of the guillotine, beside which the chief of police, Aristide Valentin, was standing not an hour before the murder. Oh, my friends, hear me a minute more before you tear me in pieces. Valentin is an honest man, if being mad for an arguable cause is honesty. But did you never see in that cold, grey eye of his that he is mad! He would do anything, anything, to break what he calls the superstition of the Cross. He has fought for it and starved for it, and now he has murdered for it. Brayne's crazy millions had hitherto been scattered among so many sects that they did little to alter the balance of things. But Valentin heard a whisper that Brayne, like so many scatter-brained sceptics, was drifting to us; and that was quite a different thing. Brayne would pour supplies into the impoverished and pugnacious Church of France; he would support six Nationalist newspapers like The Guillotine. The battle was already balanced on a point, and the fanatic took flame at the risk. He resolved to destroy the millionaire, and he did it as one would expect the greatest of detectives to commit his only crime. He abstracted the severed head of Becker on some criminological excuse, and took it home in his official box. He had that last argument with Brayne, that Lord Galloway did not hear the end of; that failing, he led him out into the sealed garden, talked about swordsmanship, used twigs and a sabre for illustration, and--"

Ivan of the Scar sprang up. "You lunatic," he yelled; "you'll go to my master now, if I take you by--"

"Why, I was going there," said Brown heavily; "I must ask him to confess, and all that."

Driving the unhappy Brown before them like a hostage or sacrifice, they rushed together into the sudden stillness of Valentin's study.

The great detective sat at his desk apparently too occupied to hear their turbulent entrance. They paused a moment, and then something in the look of that upright and elegant back made the doctor run forward suddenly. A touch and a glance showed him that there was a small box of pills at Valentin's elbow, and that Valentin was dead in his chair; and on the blind face of the suicide was more than the pride of Cato.

The Queer Feet

If you meet a member of that select club, "The Twelve True Fishermen," entering the Vernon Hotel for the annual club dinner, you will observe, as he takes off his overcoat, that his evening coat is green and not black. If (supposing that you have the star-defying audacity to address such a being) you ask him why, he will probably answer that he does it to avoid being mistaken for a waiter. You will then retire crushed. But you will leave behind you a mystery as yet unsolved and a tale worth telling.

If (to pursue the same vein of improbable conjecture) you were to meet a mild, hard-working little priest, named Father Brown, and were to ask him what he thought was the most singular luck of his life, he would probably reply that upon the whole his best stroke was at the Vernon Hotel, where he had averted a crime and, perhaps, saved a soul, merely by listening to a few footsteps in a passage. He is perhaps a little proud of this wild and wonderful guess of his, and it is possible that he might refer to it. But since it is immeasurably unlikely that you will ever rise
high enough in the social world to find “The Twelve True Fishermen,” or that you will ever sink low enough among slums and criminals to find Father Brown, I fear you will never hear the story at all unless you hear it from me.

The Vernon Hotel at which The Twelve True Fishermen held their annual dinners was an institution such as can only exist in an oligarchical society which has almost gone mad on good manners. It was that topsy-turvy product—an "exclusive" commercial enterprise. That is, it was a thing which paid not by attracting people, but actually by turning people away. In the heart of a plutocracy tradesmen become cunning enough to be more fastidious than their customers. They positively create difficulties so that their wealthy and weary clients may spend money and diplomacy in overcoming them. If there were a fashionable hotel in London which no man could enter who was under six foot, society would meekly make up parties of six-foot men to dine in it. If there were an expensive restaurant which by a mere caprice of its proprietor was only open on Thursday afternoon, it would be crowded on Thursday afternoon. The Vernon Hotel stood, as if by accident, in the corner of a square in Belgravia. It was a small hotel; and a very inconvenient one. But its very inconveniences were considered as walls protecting a particular class. One inconvenience, in particular, was held to be of vital importance: the fact that practically only twenty-four people could dine in the place at once. The only big dinner table was the celebrated terrace table, which stood open to the air on a sort of veranda overlooking one of the most exquisite old gardens in London. Thus it happened that even the twenty-four seats at this table could only be enjoyed in warm weather; and this making the enjoyment yet more difficult made it yet more desired. The existing owner of the hotel was a Jew named Lever; and he made nearly a million out of it, by making it difficult to get into. Of course he combined with this limitation in the scope of his enterprise the most careful polish in its performance. The wines and cooking were really as good as any in Europe, and the demeanour of the attendants exactly mirrored the fixed mood of the English upper class. The proprietor knew all his waiters like the fingers on his hand; there were only fifteen of them all told. It was much easier to become a Member of Parliament than to become a waiter in that hotel. Each waiter was trained in terrible silence and smoothness, as if he were a gentleman's servant. And, indeed, there was generally at least one waiter to every gentleman who dined.

The club of The Twelve True Fishermen would not have consented to dine anywhere but in such a place, for it insisted on a luxurious privacy; and would have been quite upset by the mere thought that any other club was even dining in the same building. On the occasion of their annual dinner the Fishermen were in the habit of exposing all their treasures, as if they were in a private house, especially the celebrated set of fish knives and forks which were, as it were, the insignia of the society, each being exquisitely wrought in silver in the form of a fish, and each loaded at the hilt with one large pearl. These were always laid out for the fish course, and the fish course was always the most magnificent in that magnificent repast. The society had a vast number of ceremonies and observances, but it had no history and no object; that was where it was so very aristocratic. You did not have to be anything in order to be one of the Twelve Fishers; unless you were already a certain sort of person, you never even heard of them. It had been in existence twelve years. Its president was Mr. Audley. Its vice-president was the Duke of Chester.

If I have in any degree conveyed the atmosphere of this appalling hotel, the reader may feel a natural wonder as to how I came to know anything about it, and may even speculate as to how so ordinary a person as my friend Father Brown came to find himself in that golden galley. As far as that is concerned, my story is simple, or even vulgar. There is in the world a very aged rioter and demagogue who breaks into the most refined retreats with the dreadful information that all men are brothers, and wherever this leveller went on his pale horse it was Father Brown's trade to follow. One of the waiters, an Italian, had been struck down with a paralytic stroke that afternoon; and his Jewish employer, marvelling mildly at such superstitions, had consented to send for the nearest Popish priest. With what the waiter confessed to Father Brown we are not concerned, for the excellent reason that that cleric kept it to himself; but apparently it involved him in writing out a note or statement for the conveying of some message or the righting of some wrong. Father Brown, therefore, with a meek impudence which he would have shown equally in Buckingham Palace, asked to be provided with a room and writing materials. Mr. Lever was torn in two. He was a kind man, and had also that bad imitation of kindness, the dislike of any difficulty or scene. At the same time the presence of one unusual stranger in his hotel that evening was like a speck of dirt on something just cleaned. There was never any borderland or anteroom in the Vernon Hotel, no people waiting in the hall, no customers coming in on chance. There were fifteen waiters. There were twelve guests. It would be as startling to find a new guest in the hotel that night as to find a new brother taking breakfast or tea in one's own family. Moreover, the priest's appearance was second-rate and his clothes muddy; a mere glimpse of him afar off might precipitate a crisis in the club. Mr. Lever at last hit on a plan to cover, since he might not obliterate, the disgrace. When you enter (as you never will) the Vernon Hotel, you pass down a short passage decorated with a few dingy but important pictures, and come to the main vestibule and lounge which opens on your right into passages leading to the public rooms, and on your left to a similar passage pointing to the kitchens and offices of the hotel. Immediately on your left hand is the corner of a glass office, which abuts upon the lounge—a house within a house, so to speak, like the old hotel bar
which probably once occupied its place.

In this office sat the representative of the proprietor (nobody in this place ever appeared in person if he could help it), and just beyond the office, on the way to the servants' quarters, was the gentlemen's cloak room, the last boundary of the gentlemen's domain. But between the office and the cloak room was a small private room without other outlet, sometimes used by the proprietor for delicate and important matters, such as lending a duke a thousand pounds or declining to lend him sixpence. It is a mark of the magnificent tolerance of Mr. Lever that he permitted this holy place to be for about half an hour profaned by a mere priest, scribbling away on a piece of paper. The story which Father Brown was writing down was very likely a much better story than this one, only it will never be known. I can merely state that it was very nearly as long, and that the last two or three paragraphs of it were the least exciting and absorbing.

For it was by the time that he had reached these that the priest began a little to allow his thoughts to wander and his animal senses, which were commonly keen, to awaken. The time of darkness and dinner was drawing on; his own forgotten little room was without a light, and perhaps the gathering gloom, as occasionally happens, sharpened the sense of sound. As Father Brown wrote the last and least essential part of his document, he caught himself writing to the rhythm of a recurrent noise outside, just as one sometimes thinks to the tune of a railway train. When he became conscious of the thing he found what it was: only the ordinary patter of feet passing the door, which in an hotel was no very unlikely matter. Nevertheless, he stared at the darkened ceiling, and listened to the sound. After he had listened for a few seconds dreamily, he got to his feet and listened intently, with his head a little on one side. Then he sat down again and buried his brow in his hands, now not merely listening, but listening and thinking also.

The footsteps outside at any given moment were such as one might hear in any hotel; and yet, taken as a whole, there was something very strange about them. There were no other footsteps. It was always a very silent house, for the few familiar guests went at once to their own apartments, and the well-trained waiters were told to be almost invisible until they were wanted. One could not conceive any place where there was less reason to apprehend anything irregular. But these footsteps were so odd that one could not decide to call them regular or irregular. Father Brown followed them with his finger on the edge of the table, like a man trying to learn a tune on the piano.

First, there came a long rush of rapid little steps, such as a light man might make in winning a walking race. At a certain point they stopped and changed to a sort of slow, swinging stamp, numbering not a quarter of the steps, but occupying about the same time. The moment the last echoing stamp had died away would come again the run or ripple of light, hurrying feet, and then again the thud of the heavier walking. It was certainly the same pair of boots, partly because (as has been said) there were no other boots about, and partly because they had a small but unmistakable creak in them. Father Brown had the kind of head that cannot help asking questions; and on this apparently trivial question his head almost split. He had seen men run in order to jump. He had seen men run in order to slide. But why on earth should a man run in order to walk? Or, again, why should he walk in order to run? Yet no other description would cover the antics of this invisible pair of legs. The man was either walking very fast down one-half of the corridor in order to walk very slow down the other half; or he was walking very slow at one end to have the rapture of walking fast at the other. Neither suggestion seemed to make much sense. His brain was growing darker and darker, like his room.

Yet, as he began to think steadily, the very blackness of his cell seemed to make his thoughts more vivid; he began to see as in a kind of vision the fantastic feet capering along the corridor in unnatural or symbolic attitudes. Was it a heathen religious dance? Or some entirely new kind of scientific exercise? Father Brown began to ask himself with more exactness what the steps suggested. Taking the slow step first: it certainly was not the step of the proprietor. Men of his type walk with a rapid waddle, or they sit still. It could not be any servant or messenger waiting for directions. It did not sound like it. The poorer orders (in an oligarchy) sometimes lurch about when they are slightly drunk, but generally, and especially in such gorgeous scenes, they stand or sit in constrained attitudes. No; that heavy yet springy step, with a kind of careless emphasis, not specially noisy, yet not caring what noise it made, belonged to only one of the animals of this earth. It was a gentleman of western Europe, and probably one who had never worked for his living.

Just as he came to this solid certainty, the step changed to the quicker one, and ran past the door as feverishly as a rat. The listener remarked that though this step was much swifter it was also much more noiseless, almost as if the man were walking on tiptoe. Yet it was not associated in his mind with secrecy, but with something else--something that he could not remember. He was maddened by one of those half-memories that make a man feel half-witted. Surely he had heard that strange, swift walking somewhere. Suddenly he sprang to his feet with a new idea in his head, and walked to the door. His room had no direct outlet on the passage, but let on one side into the glass office, and on the other into the cloak room beyond. He tried the door into the office, and found it locked. Then he looked at the window, now a square pane full of purple cloud cleft by livid sunset, and for an instant he smelt evil as a dog smells rats.
The rational part of him (whether the wiser or not) regained its supremacy. He remembered that the proprietor had told him that he should lock the door, and would come later to release him. He told himself that twenty things he had not thought of might explain the eccentric sounds outside; he reminded himself that there was just enough light left to finish his own proper work. Bringing his paper to the window so as to catch the last stormy evening light, he resolutely plunged once more into the almost completed record. He had written for about twenty minutes, bending closer and closer to his paper in the lessening light; then suddenly he sat upright. He had heard the strange feet once more.

This time they had a third oddity. Previously the unknown man had walked, with levity indeed and lightning quickness, but he had walked. This time he ran. One could hear the swift, soft, bounding steps coming along the corridor, like the pads of a fleeing and leaping panther. Whoever was coming was a very strong, active man, in still yet tearing excitement. Yet, when the sound had swept up to the office like a sort of whispering whirlwind, it suddenly changed again to the old slow, swaggering stamp.

Father Brown flung down his paper, and, knowing the office door to be locked, went at once into the cloak room on the other side. The attendant of this place was temporarily absent, probably because the only guests were at dinner and his office was a sinecure. After groping through a grey forest of overcoats, he found that the dim cloak room opened on the lighted corridor in the form of a sort of counter or half-door, like most of the counters across which we have all handed umbrellas and received tickets. There was a light immediately above the semicircular arch of this opening. It threw little illumination on Father Brown himself, who seemed a mere dark outline against the dim sunset window behind him. But it threw an almost theatrical light on the man who stood outside the cloak room in the corridor.

He was an elegant man in very plain evening dress; tall, but with an air of not taking up much room; one felt that he could have slid along like a shadow where many smaller men would have been obvious and obstructive. His face, now flung back in the lamplight, was swarthly and vivacious, the face of a foreigner. His figure was good, his manners good humoured and confident; a critic could only say that his black coat was a shade below his figure and manners, and even bulged and bagged in an odd way. The moment he caught sight of Brown's black silhouette against the sunset, he tossed down a scrap of paper with a number and called out with amiable authority: "I want my hat and coat, please; I find I have to go away at once."

Father Brown took the paper without a word, and obediently went to look for the coat; it was not the first menial work he had done in his life. He brought it and laid it on the counter; meanwhile, the strange gentleman who had been feeling in his waistcoat pocket, said laughing: "I haven't got any silver; you can keep this." And he threw down half a sovereign, and caught up his coat.

Father Brown's figure remained quite dark and still; but in that instant he had lost his head. His head was always most valuable when he had lost it. In such moments he put two and two together and made four million. Often the Catholic Church (which is wedded to common sense) did not approve of it. Often he did not approve of it himself. But it was real inspiration—important at rare crises—when whosoever shall lose his head the same shall save it.

"I think, sir," he said civilly, "that you have some silver in your pocket."

The tall gentleman stared. "Hang it," he cried, "if I choose to give you gold, why should you complain?"

"Because silver is sometimes more valuable than gold," said the priest mildly; "that is, in large quantities."

The stranger looked at him curiously. Then he looked still more curiously up the passage towards the main entrance. Then he looked back at Brown again, and then he looked very carefully at the window beyond Brown's head, still coloured with the after-glow of the storm. Then he seemed to make up his mind. He put one hand on the counter, vaulted over as easily as an acrobat and towered above the priest, putting one tremendous hand upon his head, still coloured with the after-glow of the storm. Then he seemed to make up his mind. He put one hand on the counter, vaulted over as easily as an acrobat and towered above the priest, putting one tremendous hand upon his collar.

"Stand still," he said, in a hacking whisper. "I don't want to threaten you, but—"

"I do want to threaten you," said Father Brown, in a voice like a rolling drum, "I want to threaten you with the worm that dieth not, and the fire that is not quenched."

"You're a rum sort of cloak-room clerk," said the other.

"I am a priest, Monsieur Flambeau," said Brown, "and I am ready to hear your confession."

The other stood gasping for a few moments, and then staggered back into a chair.

The first two courses of the dinner of The Twelve True Fishermen had proceeded with placid success. I do not possess a copy of the menu; and if I did it would not convey anything to anybody. It was written in a sort of superb-French employed by cooks, but quite unintelligible to Frenchmen. There was a tradition in the club that the hors d'oeuvres should be various and manifold to the point of madness. They were taken seriously because they were avowedly useless extras, like the whole dinner and the whole club. There was also a tradition that the soup course should be light and unpretending—a sort of simple and austere vigil for the feast of fish that was to come. The talk was that strange, slight talk which governs the British Empire, which governs it in secret, and yet would scarcely
enlighten an ordinary Englishman even if he could overhear it. Cabinet ministers on both sides were alluded to by their Christian names with a sort of bored benignity. The Radical Chancellor of the Exchequer, whom the whole Tory party was supposed to be cursing for his extortions, was praised for his minor poetry, or his saddle in the hunting field. The Tory leader, whom all Liberals were supposed to hate as a tyrant, was discussed and, on the whole, praised—as a Liberal. It seemed somehow that politicians were very important. And yet, anything seemed important about them except their politics. Mr. Audley, the chairman, was an amiable, elderly man who still wore Gladstone collars; he was a kind of symbol of all that phantasmal and yet fixed society. He had never done anything—not even anything wrong. He was not fast; he was not even particularly rich. He was simply in the thing; and there was an end of it. No party could ignore him, and if he had wished to be in the Cabinet he certainly would have been put there. The Duke of Chester, the vice-president, was a young and rising politician. That is to say, he was a pleasant youth, with flat, fair hair and a freckled face, with moderate intelligence and enormous estates. In public his appearances were always successful and his principle was simple enough. When he thought of a joke he made it, and was called brilliant. When he could not think of a joke he said that this was no time for trifling, and was called able. In private, in a club of his own class, he was simply quite pleasantly frank and silly, like a schoolboy. Mr. Audley, never having been in politics, treated them a little more seriously. Sometimes he even embarrassed the company by phrases suggesting that there was some difference between a Liberal and a Conservative. He himself was a Conservative, even in private life. He had a roll of grey hair over the back of his collar, like certain old-fashioned statesmen, and seen from behind he looked like the man the empire wants. Seen from the front he looked like a mild, self-indulgent bachelor, with rooms in the Albany—which he was.

As has been remarked, there were twenty-four seats at the terrace table, and only twelve members of the club. Thus they could occupy the terrace in the most luxurious style of all, being ranged along the inner side of the table, with no one opposite, commanding an uninterrupted view of the garden, the colours of which were still vivid, though evening was closing in somewhat luridly for the time of year. The chairman sat in the centre of the line, and the vice-president at the right-hand end of it. When the twelve guests first trooped into their seats it was the custom (for some unknown reason) for all the fifteen waiters to stand lining the wall like troops presenting arms to the king, while the fat proprietor stood and bowed to the club with radiant surprise, as if he had never heard of them before. But before the first chink of knife and fork this army of retainers had vanished, only the one or two required to collect and distribute the plates darting about in deathly silence. Mr. Lever, the proprietor, of course had disappeared in convulsions of courtesy long before. It would be exaggerative, indeed irreverent, to say that he ever positively appeared again. But when the important course, the fish course, was being brought on, there was—how shall I put it?—a vivid shadow, a projection of his personality, which told that he was hovering near. The sacred fish course consisted (to the eyes of the vulgar) in a sort of monstrous pudding, about the size and shape of a wedding cake, in which some considerable number of interesting fishes had finally lost the shapes which God had given to them. The Twelve True Fishermen took up their celebrated fish knives and fish forks, and approached it as gravely as if every inch of the pudding cost as much as the silver fork it was eaten with. So it did, for all I know. This course was dealt with in eager and devouring silence; and it was only when his plate was nearly empty that the young duke made the ritual remark: "They can't do this anywhere but here."

"Nowhere," said Mr. Audley, in a deep bass voice, turning to the speaker and nodding his venerable head a number of times. "Nowhere, assuredly, except here. It was represented to me that at the Cafe Anglais—"

Here he was interrupted and even agitated for a moment by the removal of his plate, but he recaptured the valuable thread of his thoughts. "It was represented to me that the same could be done at the Cafe Anglais. Nothing like it, sir," he said, shaking his head ruefully, like a hanging judge. "Nothing like it."

"Overrated place," said a certain Colonel Pound, speaking (by the look of him) for the first time for some months.

"Oh, I don't know," said the Duke of Chester, who was an optimist, "it's jolly good for some things. You can't beat it at—"

A waiter came swiftly along the room, and then stopped dead. His stoppage was as silent as his tread; but all those vague and kindly gentlemen were so used to the utter smoothness of the unseen machinery which surrounded and supported their lives, that a waiter doing anything unexpected was a start and a jar. They felt as you and I would feel if the inanimate world disobeyed— if a chair ran away from us.

The waiter stood staring a few seconds, while there deepened on every face at table a strange shame which is wholly the product of our time. It is the combination of modern humanitarianism with the horrible modern abyss between the souls of the rich and poor. A genuine historic aristocrat would have thrown things at the waiter, beginning with empty bottles, and very probably ending with money. A genuine democrat would have asked him, with comrade-like clearness of speech, what the devil he was doing. But these modern plutocrats could not bear a poor man near to them, either as a slave or as a friend. That something had gone wrong with the servants was merely
a dull, hot embarrassment. They did not want to be brutal, and they dreaded the need to be benevolent. They wanted the thing, whatever it was, to be over. It was over. The waiter, after standing for some seconds rigid, like a cataleptic, turned round and ran madly out of the room.

When he reappeared in the room, or rather in the doorway, it was in company with another waiter, with whom he whispered and gesticulated with southern fierceness. Then the first waiter went away, leaving the second waiter, and reappeared with a third waiter. By the time a fourth waiter had joined this hurried synod, Mr. Audley felt it necessary to break the silence in the interests of Tact. He used a very loud cough, instead of a presidential hammer, and said: "Splendid work young Moocher's doing in Burmah. Now, no other nation in the world could have--"

A fifth waiter had sped towards him like an arrow, and was whispering in his ear: "So sorry. Important! Might the proprietor speak to you?"

The chairman turned in disorder, and with a dazed stare saw Mr. Lever coming towards them with his lumbering quickness. The gait of the good proprietor was indeed his usual gait, but his face was by no means usual. Generally it was a genial copper-brown; now it was a sickly yellow.

"You will pardon me, Mr. Audley," he said, with asthmatic breathlessness. "I have great apprehensions. Your fish-plates, they are cleared away with the knife and fork on them!"

"Well, I hope so," said the chairman, with some warmth.

"You see him?" panted the excited hotel keeper; "you see the waiter who took them away? You know him?"

"Know the waiter?" answered Mr. Audley indignantly. "Certainly not!"

Mr. Lever opened his hands with a gesture of agony. "I never send him," he said. "I know not when or why he come. I send my waiter to take away the plates, and he find them already away."

Mr. Audley still looked rather too bewildered to be really the man the empire wants; none of the company could say anything except the man of wood--Colonel Pound--who seemed galvanised into an unnatural life. He rose rigidly from his chair, leaving all the rest sitting, screwed his eyeglass into his eye, and spoke in a raucous undertone as if he had half-forgotten how to speak. "Do you mean," he said, "that somebody has stolen our silver fish service?"

The proprietor repeated the open-handed gesture with even greater helplessness and in a flash all the men at the table were on their feet.

"Are all your waiters here?" demanded the colonel, in his low, harsh accent.

"Yes; they're all here. I noticed it myself," cried the young duke, pushing his boyish face into the inmost ring.

"Always count 'em as I come in; they look so queer standing up against the wall."

"But surely one cannot exactly remember," began Mr. Audley, with heavy hesitation.

"I remember exactly, I tell you," cried the duke excitedly. "There never have been more than fifteen waiters at this place, and there were no more than fifteen tonight, I'll swear; no more and no less."

The proprietor turned upon him, quaking in a kind of palsy of surprise. "You say--you say," he stammered, "that you see all my fifteen waiters?"

"As usual," assented the duke. "What is the matter with that?"

"Nothing," said Lever, with a deepening accent, "only you did not. For one of zem is dead upstairs."

There was a shocking stillness for an instant in that room. It may be (so supernatural is the word death) that each of those idle men looked for a second at his soul, and saw it as a small dried pea. One of them--the duke, I think--even said with the idiotic kindness of wealth: "Is there anything we can do?"

"He has had a priest," said the Jew, not untouched.

Then, as to the clang of doom, they awoke to their own position. For a few weird seconds they had really felt as if the fifteenth waiter might be the ghost of the dead man upstairs. They had been dumb under that oppression, for ghosts were to them an embarrassment, like beggars. But the remembrance of the silver broke the spell of the miraculous; broke it abruptly and with a brutal reaction. The colonel flung over his chair and strode to the door. "If there was a fifteenth man here, friends," he said, "that fifteenth fellow was a thief. Down at once to the front and back doors and secure everything; then we'll talk. The twenty-four pearls of the club are worth recovering."

Mr. Audley seemed at first to hesitate about whether it was gentlemanly to be in such a hurry about anything; but, seeing the duke dash down the stairs with youthful energy, he followed with a more mature motion.

At the same instant a sixth waiter ran into the room, and declared that he had found the pile of fish plates on a sideboard, with no trace of the silver.

The crowd of diners and attendants that tumbled helter-skelter down the passages divided into two groups. Most of the Fishermen followed the proprietor to the front room to demand news of any exit. Colonel Pound, with the chairman, the vice-president, and one or two others darted down the corridor leading to the servants' quarters, as the more likely line of escape. As they did so they passed the dim alcove or cavern of the cloak room, and saw a short, black-coated figure, presumably an attendant, standing a little way back in the shadow of it.

"Hallo, there!" called out the duke. "Have you seen anyone pass?"
The short figure did not answer the question directly, but merely said: "Perhaps I have got what you are looking for, gentlemen.

They paused, wavering and wondering, while he quietly went to the back of the cloak room, and came back with both hands full of shining silver, which he laid out on the counter as calmly as a salesman. It took the form of a dozen quaintly shaped forks and knives.

"You--you--" began the colonel, quite thrown off his balance at last. Then he peered into the dim little room and saw two things: first, that the short, black-clad man was dressed like a clergyman; and, second, that the window of the room behind him was burst, as if someone had passed violently through. "Valuable things to deposit in a cloak room, aren't they?" remarked the clergyman, with cheerf ul composure.

"Did--did you steal those things?" stammered Mr. Audley, with staring eyes.

"If I did," said the cleric pleasantly, "at least I am bringing them back again."

"But you didn't," said Colonel Pound, still staring at the broken window.

"To make a clean breast of it, I didn't," said the other, with some humour. And he seated himself quite gravely on a stool. "But you know who did," said the colonel.

"I don't know his real name," said the priest placidly, "but I know something of his fighting weight, and a great deal about his spiritual difficulties. I formed the physical estimate when he was trying to throttle me, and the moral estimate when he repented."

"Oh, I say--repented!" cried young Chester, with a sort of crow of laughter.

Father Brown got to his feet, putting his hands behind him. "Odd, isn't it," he said, "that a thief and a vagabond should repent, when so many who are rich and secure remain hard and frivolous, and without fruit for God or man? But there, if you will excuse me, you trespass a little upon my province. If you doubt the penitence as a practical fact, there are your knives and forks. You are The Twelve True Fishers, and there are all your silver fish. But He has made me a fisher of men."

"Did you catch this man?" asked the colonel, frowning.

Father Brown looked him full in his frowning face. "Yes," he said, "I caught him, with an unseen hook and an invisible line which is long enough to let him wander to the ends of the world, and still to bring him back with a twitch upon the thread."

There was a long silence. All the other men present drifted away to carry the recovered silver to their comrades, or to consult the proprietor about the queer condition of affairs. But the grim-faced colonel still sat sideways on the counter, swinging his long, lank legs and biting his dark moustache.

At last he said quietly to the priest: "He must have been a clever fellow, but I think I know a cleverer."

"He was a clever fellow," answered the other, "but I am not quite sure of what other you mean."

"I mean you," said the colonel, with a short laugh. "I don't want to get the fellow jailed; make yourself easy about that. But I'd give a good many silver forks to know exactly how you fell into this affair, and how you got the stuff out of him. I reckon you're the most up-to-date devil of the present company."

Father Brown seemed rather to like the saturnine candour of the soldier. "Well," he said, smiling, "I mustn't tell you anything of the man's identity, or his own story, of course; but there's no particular reason why I shouldn't tell you of the mere outside facts which I found out for myself."

He hopped over the barrier with unexpected activity, and sat beside Colonel Pound, kicking his short legs like a little boy on a gate. He began to tell the story as easily as if he were telling it to an old friend by a Christmas fire.

"You see, colonel," he said, "I was shut up in that small room there doing some writing, when I heard a pair of feet in this passage doing a dance that was as queer as the dance of death. First came quick, funny little steps, like a man walking on tiptoe for a wager; then came slow, careless, creaking steps, as of a big man walking about with a cigar. But they were both made by the same feet, I swear, and they came in rotation; first the run and then the walk, and then the run again. I wondered at first idly and then wildly why a man should act these two parts at once. One walk I knew; it was just like yours, colonel. It was the walk of a well-fed gentleman waiting for something, who strolls about rather because he is physically alert than because he is mentally impatient. I knew that I knew the other walk, too, but I could not remember what it was. What wild creature had I met on my travels that tore along on tiptoe in that extraordinary style? Then I heard a clink of plates somewhere; and the answer stood up as plain as St. Peter's. It was the walk of a waiter--that walk with the body slanted forward, the eyes looking down, the ball of the toe spurning away the ground, the coat tails and napkin flying. Then I thought for a minute and a half more. And I believe I saw the manner of the crime, as clearly as if I were going to commit it."

Colonel Pound looked at him keenly, but the speaker's mild grey eyes were fixed upon the ceiling with almost empty wistfulness.

"A crime," he said slowly, "is like any other work of art. Don't look surprised; crimes are by no means the only works of art that come from an infernal workshop. But every work of art, divine or diabolic, has one indispensable
mark—I mean, that the centre of it is simple, however much the fulfilment may be complicated. Thus, in Hamlet, let
us say, the grotesqueness of the grave-digger, the flowers of the mad girl, the fantastic finery of Osric, the pallor of
the ghost and the grin of the skull are all oddities in a sort of tangled wreath round one plain tragic figure of a man in
black. Well, this also," he said, getting slowly down from his seat with a smile, "this also is the plain tragedy of a
man in black. Yes," he went on, seeing the colonel look up in some wonder, "the whole of this tale turns on a black
coat. In this, as in Hamlet, there are the rococo excrescences—yourselves, let us say. There is the dead waiter, who
was there when he could not be there. There is the invisible hand that swept your table clear of silver and melted into
air. But every clever crime is founded ultimately on some one quite simple fact—some fact that is not itself
mysterious. The mystification comes in covering it up, in leading men's thoughts away from it. This large and subtle
and (in the ordinary course) most profitable crime, was built on the plain fact that a gentleman's evening dress is the
same as a waiter's. All the rest was acting, and thundering good acting, too."

"Still," said the colonel, getting up and frowning at his boots, "I am not sure that I understand."

"Colonel," said Father Brown, "I tell you that this archangel of impudence who stole your forks walked up and
down this passage twenty times in the blaze of all the lamps, in the glare of all the eyes. He did not go and hide in
dim corners where suspicion might have searched for him. He kept constantly on the move in the lighted corridors,
and everywhere that he went he seemed to be there by right. Don't ask me what he was like; you have seen him
yourself six or seven times tonight. You were waiting with all the other grand people in the reception room at the
end of the passage there, with the terrace just beyond. Whenever he came among you gentlemen, he came in the
lightning style of a waiter, with bent head, flapping napkin and flying feet. He shot out on to the terrace, did
something to the table cloth, and shot back again towards the office and the waiters' quarters. By the time he had
come under the eye of the office clerk and the waiters he had become another man in every inch of his body, in
every instinctive gesture. He strolled among the servants with the absent-minded insolence which they have all seen
in their patrons. It was no new thing to them that a swell from the dinner party should pace all parts of the house like
an animal at the Zoo; they know that nothing marks the Smart Set more than a habit of walking where one chooses.
When he was magnificently weary of walking down that particular passage he would wheel round and pace back
past the office; in the shadow of the arch just beyond he was altered as by a blast of magic, and went hurrying
forward again among the Twelve Fishermen, an obsequious attendant. Why should the gentlemen look at a chance
waiter? Why should the waiters suspect a first-rate walking gentleman? Once or twice he played the coolest tricks.
In the proprietor's private quarters he called out breezily for a syphon of soda water, saying he was thirsty. He said
genially that he would carry it himself, and he did; he carried it quickly and correctly through the thick of you, a
waiter with an obvious errand. Of course, it could not have been kept up long, but it only had to be kept up till the
end of the fish course.

"His worst moment was when the waiters stood in a row; but even then he contrived to lean against the wall just
round the corner in such a way that for that important instant the waiters thought him a gentleman, while the
gentlemen thought him a waiter. The rest went like winking. If any waiter caught him away from the table, that
waiter caught a languid aristocrat. He had only to time himself two minutes before the fish was cleared, become a
swift servant, and clear it himself. He put the plates down on a sideboard, stuffed the silver in his breast pocket,
giving it a bulgy look, and ran like a hare (I heard him coming) till he came to the cloak room. There he had only to
be a plutocrat again—a plutocrat called away suddenly on business. He had only to give his ticket to the cloak-room
attendant, and go out again elegantly as he had come in. Only—only I happened to be the cloak-room attendant."
Father Brown buttoned up his commonplace overcoat to the neck, for the night was stormy, and took his commonplace umbrella from the stand.

“Yes,” he said; “it must be very hard work to be a gentleman; but, do you know, I have sometimes thought that it may be almost as laborious to be a waiter.”

And saying "Good evening," he pushed open the heavy doors of that palace of pleasures. The golden gates closed behind him, and he went at a brisk walk through the damp, dark streets in search of a penny omnibus.

The Flying Stars

"The most beautiful crime I ever committed," Flambeau would say in his highly moral old age, "was also, by a singular coincidence, my last. It was committed at Christmas. As an artist I had always attempted to provide crimes suitable to the special season or landscapes in which I found myself, choosing this or that terrace or garden for a catastrophe, as if for a statuary group. Thus squires should be swindled in long rooms panelled with oak; while Jews, on the other hand, should rather find themselves unexpectedly penniless among the lights and screens of the Cafe Riche. Thus, in England, if I wished to relieve a dean of his riches (which is not so easy as you might suppose), I wished to frame him, if I make myself clear, in the green lawns and grey towers of some cathedral town. Similarly, in France, when I had got money out of a rich and wicked peasant (which is almost impossible), it gratified me to get his indignant head relieved against a grey line of clipped poplars, and those solemn plains of Gaul over which broods the mighty spirit of Millet.

"Well, my last crime was a Christmas crime, a cheery, cosy, English middle-class crime; a crime of Charles Dickens. I did it in a good old middle-class house near Putney, a house with a crescent of carriage drive, a house with a stable by the side of it, a house with the name on the two outer gates, a house with a monkey tree. Enough, you know the species. I really think my imitation of Dickens's style was dexterous and literary. It seems almost a pity I repented the same evening."

Flambeau would then proceed to tell the story from the inside; and even from the inside it was odd. Seen from the outside it was perfectly incomprehensible, and it is from the outside that the stranger must study it. From this standpoint the drama may be said to have begun when the front doors of the house with the stable opened on the garden with the monkey tree, and a young girl came out with bread to feed the birds on the afternoon of Boxing Day. She had a pretty face, with brave brown eyes; but her figure was beyond conjecture, for she was so wrapped up in brown furs that it was hard to say which was hair and which was fur. But for the attractive face she might have been a small toddling bear.

The winter afternoon was reddening towards evening, and already a ruby light was rolled over the bloomless beds, filling them, as it were, with the ghosts of the dead roses. On one side of the house stood the stable, on the other an alley or cloister of laurels led to the larger garden behind. The young lady, having scattered bread for the birds (for the fourth or fifth time that day, because the dog ate it), passed unobtrusively down the lane of laurels and into a glimmering plantation of evergreens behind. Here she gave an exclamation of wonder, real or ritual, and looking up at the high garden wall above her, beheld it fantastically bestridden by a somewhat fantastic figure.

"Oh, don't jump, Mr. Crook," she called out in some alarm; "it's much too high."

The individual riding the party wall like an aerial horse was a tall, angular young man, with dark hair sticking up like a hair brush, intelligent and even distinguished lineaments, but a sallow and almost alien complexion. This showed the more plainly because he wore an aggressive red tie, the only part of his costume of which he seemed to take any care. Perhaps it was a symbol. He took no notice of the girl's alarmed adjuration, but leapt like a grasshopper to the ground beside her, where he might very well have broken his legs.

"I think I was meant to be a burglar," he said placidly, "and I have no doubt I should have been if I hadn't happened to be born in that nice house next door. I can't see any harm in it, anyhow."

"How can you say such things!" she remonstrated.

"Well," said the young man, "if you're born on the wrong side of the wall, I can't see that it's wrong to climb over it."

"I never know what you will say or do next," she said.

"I don't often know myself," replied Mr. Crook; "but then I am on the right side of the wall now."

"And which is the right side of the wall?" asked the young lady, smiling.

"Whichever side you are on," said the young man named Crook.

As they went together through the laurels towards the front garden a motor horn sounded thrice, coming nearer and nearer, and a car of splendid speed, great elegance, and a pale green colour swept up to the front doors like a bird and stood throbbing.

"Hullo, hullo!" said the young man with the red tie, "here's somebody born on the right side, anyhow. I didn't know, Miss Adams, that your Santa Claus was so modern as this."

"Oh, that's my godfather, Sir Leopold Fischer. He always comes on Boxing Day."
Then, after an innocent pause, which unconsciously betrayed some lack of enthusiasm, Ruby Adams added:

"He is very kind."

John Crook, journalist, had heard of that eminent City magnate; and it was not his fault if the City magnate had not heard of him; for in certain articles in The Clarion or The New Age Sir Leopold had been dealt with austerely. But he said nothing and grimly watched the unloading of the motor-car, which was rather a long process. A large, neat chauffeur in green got out from the front, and a small, neat manservant in grey got out from the back, and between them they deposited Sir Leopold on the doorstep and began to unpack him, like some very carefully protected parcel. Rugs enough to stock a bazaar, furs of all the beasts of the forest, and scarves of all the colours of the rainbow were unwrapped one by one, till they revealed something resembling the human form; the form of a friendly, but foreign-looking old gentleman, with a grey goat-like beard and a beaming smile, who rubbed his big fur gloves together.

Long before this revelation was complete the two big doors of the porch had opened in the middle, and Colonel Adams (father of the furry young lady) had come out himself to invite his eminent guest inside. He was a tall, sunburnt, and very silent man, who wore a red smoking-cap like a fez, making him look like one of the English Sirdars or Pashas in Egypt. With him was his brother-in-law, lately come from Canada, a big and rather boisterous young gentleman-farmer, with a yellow beard, by name James Blount. With him also was the more insignificant figure of the priest from the neighbouring Roman Church; for the colonel's late wife had been a Catholic, and the children, as is common in such cases, had been trained to follow her. Everything seemed undistinguished about the priest, even down to his name, which was Brown; yet the colonel had always found something companionable about him, and frequently asked him to such family gatherings.

In the large entrance hall of the house there was ample room even for Sir Leopold and the removal of his wraps. Porch and vestibule, indeed, were unduly large in proportion to the house, and formed, as it were, a big room with the front door at one end, and the bottom of the staircase at the other. In front of the large hall fire, over which hung the colonel's sword, the process was completed and the company, including the saturnine Crook, presented to Sir Leopold Fischer. That venerable financier, however, still seemed struggling with portions of his well-lined attire, and at length produced from a very interior tail-coat pocket, a black oval case which he radiantly explained to be his Christmas present for his god-daughter. With an unaffected vain-glory that had something disarming about it he held out the case before them all; it flew open at a touch and half-blinded them. It was just as if a crystal fountain had spurted in their eyes. In a nest of orange velvet lay like three eggs, three white and vivid diamonds that seemed to set out the case before them all; it flew open at a touch and half-blinded them. It was just as if a crystal fountain had spurted in their eyes. In a nest of orange velvet lay like three eggs, three white and vivid diamonds that seemed to set out the case before them all; it flew open at a touch and half-blinded them. It was just as if a crystal fountain had spurted in their eyes. In a nest of orange velvet lay like three eggs, three white and vivid diamonds that seemed to set out the case before them all; it flew open at a touch and half-blinded them. It was just as if a crystal fountain had spurted in their eyes. In a nest of orange velvet lay like three eggs, three white and vivid diamonds that seemed to set out the case before them all; it flew open at a touch and half-blinded them.
"Any of you gentlemen Mr. Blount?" he asked, and held forward a letter doubtfully. Mr. Blount started, and stopped in his shout of assent. Ripping up the envelope with evident astonishment he read it; his face clouded a little, and then cleared, and he turned to his brother-in-law and host.

"I'm sick at being such a nuisance, colonel," he said, with the cheery colonial conventions; "but would it upset you if an old acquaintance called on me here tonight on business? In point of fact it's Florian, that famous French acrobat and comic actor; I knew him years ago out West (he was a French-Canadian by birth), and he seems to have business for me, though I hardly guess what."

"Of course, of course," replied the colonel carelessly--"My dear chap, any friend of yours. No doubt he will prove an acquisition."

"He'll black his face, if that's what you mean," cried Blount, laughing. "I don't doubt he'd black everyone else's eyes. I don't care; I'm not refined. I like the jolly old pantomime where a man sits on his top hat."

"Not on mine, please," said Sir Leopold Fischer, with dignity.

"Well, well," observed Crook, airily, "don't let's quarrel. There are lower jokes than sitting on a top hat."

Dislike of the red-tied youth, born of his predatory opinions and evident intimacy with the pretty godchild, led Fischer to say, in his most sarcastic, magisterial manner: "No doubt you have found something much lower than sitting on a top hat. What is it, pray?"

"Letting a top hat sit on you, for instance," said the Socialist.

"Now, now, now," cried the Canadian farmer with his barbarian benevolence, "don't let's spoil a jolly evening. What I say is, let's do something for the company tonight. Not blacking faces or sitting on hats, if you don't like those--but something of the sort. Why couldn't we have a proper old English pantomime--clown, columbine, and so on. I saw one when I left England at twelve years old, and it's blazed in my brain like a bonfire ever since. I came back to the old country only last year, and I find the thing's extinct. Nothing but a lot of snivelling fairy plays. I want a hot poker and a policeman made into sausages, and they give me princesses moralising by moonlight, Blue Birds, or something. Blue Beard's more in my line, and him I like best when he turned into the pantaloon."

"I'm all for making a policeman into sausages," said John Crook. "It's a better definition of Socialism than some recently given. But surely the get-up would be too big a business."

"Not a scrap," cried Blount, quite carried away. "A harlequinade's the quickest thing we can do, for two reasons. First, one can gag to any degree; and, second, all the objects are household things--tables and towel-horses and washing baskets, and things like that."

"That's true," admitted Crook, nodding eagerly and walking about. "But I'm afraid I can't have my policeman's uniform? Haven't killed a policeman lately."

Blount frowned thoughtfully a space, and then smote his thigh. "Yes, we can!" he cried. "I've got Florian's address here, and he knows every costumier in London. I'll phone him to bring a police dress when he comes." And he went bounding away to the telephone.

"Oh, it's glorious, godfather," cried Ruby, almost dancing. "I'll be columbine and you shall be pantaloon."

The millionaire held himself stiff with a sort of heathen solemnity. "I think, my dear," he said, "you must get someone else for pantaloon."

"You ought to have a statue," cried the Canadian, as he came back, radiant, from the telephone. "There, we are all fitted. Mr. Crook shall be clown; he's a journalist and knows all the oldest jokes. I can be harlequin, that only wants long legs and jumping about. My friend Florian 'phones he's bringing the police costume; he's changing on the way. We can act it in this very hall, the audience sitting on those broad stairs opposite, one row above another. These front doors can be the back scene, either open or shut. Shut, you see an English interior. Open, a moonlit garden. It all goes by magic." And snatching a chance piece of billiard chalk from his pocket, he ran it across the hall floor, half-way between the front door and the staircase, to mark the line of the footlights.

How even such a banquet of bosh was got ready in the time remained a riddle. But they went at it with that mixture of recklessness and industry that lives when youth is in a house; and youth was in that house that night, though not all may have isolated the two faces and hearts from which it flamed. As always happens, the invention grew wilder and wilder through the very tameness of the bourgeois conventions from which it had to create. The columbine looked charming in an outstanding skirt that strangely resembled the large lamp-shade in the drawing-room. The clown and pantaloon made themselves white with flour from the cook, and red with rouge from some other domestic, who remained (like all true Christian benefactors) anonymous. The harlequin, already clad in silver paper out of cigar boxes, was, with difficulty, prevented from smashing the old Victorian lustre chandeliers, that he might cover himself with resplendent crystals. In fact he would certainly have done so, had not Ruby unearthed some old pantomime paste jewels she had worn at a fancy dress party as the Queen of Diamonds. Indeed, her uncle,
James Blount, was getting almost out of hand in his excitement; he was like a schoolboy. He put a paper donkey's head unexpectedly on Father Brown, who bore it patiently, and even found some private manner of moving his ears. He even essayed to put the paper donkey's tail to the coat-tails of Sir Leopold Fischer. This, however, was frowned down. "Uncle is too absurd," cried Ruby to Crook, round whose shoulders she had seriously placed a string of sausages. "Why is he so wild?"

"He is harlequin to your columbine," said Crook. "I am only the clown who makes the old jokes."

"I wish you were the harlequin," she said, and left the string of sausages swinging.

Father Brown, though he knew every detail done behind the scenes, and had even evoked applause by his transformation of a pillow into a pantomime baby, went round to the front and sat among the audience with all the solemn expectation of a child at his first matinee. The spectators were few, relations, one or two local friends, and the servants; Sir Leopold sat in the front seat, his full and still fur-collared figure largely obscuring the view of the little cleric behind him; but it has never been settled by artistic authorities whether the cleric lost much. The pantomime was utterly chaotic, yet not contemptible; there ran through it a rage of improvisation which came chiefly from Crook the clown. Commonly he was a clever man, and he was inspired tonight with a wild omniscience, a folly wiser than the world, that which comes to a young man who has seen for an instant a particular expression on a particular face. He was supposed to be the clown, but he was really almost everything else, the author (so far as there was an author), the prompter, the scene-painter, the scene-shifter, and, above all, the orchestra. At abrupt intervals in the outrageous performance he would hurl himself in full costume at the piano and bang out some popular music equally absurd and appropriate.

The climax of this, as of all else, was the moment when the two front doors at the back of the scene flew open, showing the lovely moonlit garden, but showing more prominently the famous professional guest; the great Florian, dressed up as a policeman. The clown at the piano played the constabulary chorus in the "Pirates of Penzance," but it was drowned in the deafening applause, for every gesture of the great comic actor was an admirable though restrained version of the carriage and manner of the police. The harlequin leapt upon him and hit him over the helmet; the pianist playing "Where did you get that hat?" he faced about in admirably simulated astonishment, and then the leaping harlequin hit him again (the pianist suggesting a few bars of "Then we had another one"). Then the harlequin rushed right into the arms of the policeman and fell on top of him, amid a roar of applause. Then it was that the strange actor gave that celebrated imitation of a dead man, of which the fame still lingers round Putney. It was almost impossible to believe that a living person could appear so limp.

The athletic harlequin swung him about like a sack or twisted or tossed him like an Indian club; all the time to the most maddeningly ludicrous tunes from the piano. When the harlequin heaved the comic constable heavily off the floor the clown played "I arise from dreams of thee." When he shuffled him across his back, "With my bundle on my shoulder," and when the harlequin finally let fall the policeman with a most convincing thud, the lunatic at the instrument struck into a jingling measure with some words which are still believed to have been, "I sent a letter to my love and on the way I dropped it."

At about this limit of mental anarchy Father Brown's view was obscured altogether; for the City magnate in front of him rose to his full height and thrust his hands savagely into all his pockets. Then he sat down nervously, still fumbling, and then stood up again. For an instant it seemed seriously likely that he would stride across the footlights; then he turned a glare at the clown playing the piano; and then he burst in silence out of the room.

The priest had only watched for a few more minutes the absurd but not inelegant dance of the amateur harlequin over his splendidly unconscious foe. With real though rude art, the harlequin danced slowly backwards out of the door into the garden, which was full of moonlight and stillness. The vamped dress of silver paper and paste, which had been too glaring in the footlights, looked more and more magical and silvery as it danced away under a brilliant moon. The audience was closing in with a cataract of applause, when Brown felt his arm abruptly touched, and he was asked in a whisper to come into the colonel's study.

He followed his summoner with increasing doubt, which was not dispelled by a solemn comicality in the scene of the study. There sat Colonel Adams, still unaffectedly dressed as a pantaloon, with the knobbed whalebone nodding above his brow, but with his poor old eyes sad enough to have sobered a Saturnalia. Sir Leopold Fischer was leaning against the mantelpiece and heaving with all the importance of panic.

"This is a very painful matter, Father Brown," said Adams. "The truth is, those diamonds we all saw this afternoon seem to have vanished from my friend's tail-coat pocket. And as you--"

"As I," supplemented Father Brown, with a broad grin, "was sitting just behind him--"

"Nothing of the sort shall be suggested," said Colonel Adams, with a firm look at Fischer, which rather implied that some such thing had been suggested. "I only ask you to give me the assistance that any gentleman might give."

"Which is turning out his pockets," said Father Brown, and proceeded to do so, displaying seven and sixpence, a return ticket, a small silver crucifix, a small breviary, and a stick of chocolate.
The colonel looked at him long, and then said, "Do you know, I should like to see the inside of your head more than the inside of your pockets. My daughter is one of your people, I know; well, she has lately--" and he stopped.

"She has lately," cried out old Fischer, "opened her father's house to a cut-throat Socialist, who says openly he would steal anything from a richer man. This is the end of it. Here is the richer man--and none the richer."

"If you want the inside of my head you can have it," said Brown rather wearily. "What it's worth you can say afterwards. But the first thing I find in that disused pocket is this: that men who mean to steal diamonds don't talk Socialism. They are more likely," he added demurely, "to denounce it."

Both the others shifted sharply and the priest went on:

"You see, we know these people, more or less. That Socialist would no more steal a diamond than a Pyramid. We ought to look at once to the one man we don't know. The fellow acting the policeman --Florian. Where is he exactly at this minute, I wonder."

The pantaloon sprang erect and strode out of the room. An interlude ensued, during which the millionaire stared at the priest, and the priest at his breviary; then the pantaloon returned and said, with staccato gravity, "The policeman is still lying on the stage. The curtain has gone up and down six times; he is still lying there."

Father Brown dropped his book and stood staring with a look of blank mental ruin. Very slowly a light began to creep in his grey eyes, and then he made the scarcely obvious answer.

"Please forgive me, colonel, but when did your wife die?"

"Wife!" replied the staring soldier, "she died this year two months. Her brother James arrived just a week too late to see her."

The little priest bounded like a rabbit shot. "Come on!" he cried in quite unusual excitement. "Come on! We've got to go and look at that policeman!"

They rushed on to the now curtained stage, breaking rudely past the columbine and clown (who seemed whispering quite contentedly), and Father Brown bent over the prostrate comic policeman.

"Chloroform," he said as he rose; "I only guessed it just now."

There was a startled stillness, and then the colonel said slowly, "Please say seriously what all this means."

Father Brown suddenly shouted with laughter, then stopped, and only struggled with it for instants during the rest of his speech. "Gentlemen," he gasped, "there's not much time to talk. I must run after the criminal. But this great French actor who played the policeman--this clever corpse the harlequin waltzed with and dandled and threw about--he was--" His voice again failed him, and he turned his back to run.

"He was?" called Fischer inquiringly.

"A real policeman," said Father Brown, and ran away into the dark.

There were hollows and bowers at the extreme end of that leafy garden, in which the laurels and other immortal shrubs showed against sapphire sky and silver moon, even in that midwinter, warm colours as of the south. The green gaiety of the waving laurels, the rich purple indigo of the night, the moon like a monstrous crystal, make an almost irresponsible romantic picture; and among the top branches of the garden trees a strange figure is climbing, who looks not so much romantic as impossible. He sparkles from head to heel, as if clad in ten million moons; the real moon catches him at every movement and sets a new inch of him on fire. But he swings, flashing and successful, from the short tree in this garden to the tall, rambling tree in the other, and only stops there because a shade has slid under the smaller tree and has unmistakably called up to him.

"Well, Flambeau," says the voice, "you really look like a Flying Star; but that always means a Falling Star at last."

The silver, sparkling figure above seems to lean forward in the laurels and, confident of escape, listens to the little figure below.

"You never did anything better, Flambeau. It was clever to come from Canada (with a Paris ticket, I suppose) just a week after Mrs. Adams died, when no one was in a mood to ask questions. It was cleverer to have marked down the Flying Stars and the very day of Fischer's coming. But there's no cleverness, but mere genius, in what followed. Stealing the stones, I suppose, was nothing to you. You could have done it by sleight of hand in a hundred other ways besides that pretence of putting a paper donkey's tail to Fischer's coat. But in the rest you eclipsed yourself."

The silvery figure among the green leaves seems to linger as if hypnotised, though his escape is easy behind him; he is staring at the man below.

"Oh, yes," says the man below, "I know all about it. I know you not only forced the pantomime, but put it to a double use. You were going to steal the stones quietly; news came by an accomplice that you were already suspected, and a capable police officer was coming to rout you up that very night. A common thief would have been thankful for the warning and fled; but you are a poet. You already had the clever notion of hiding the jewels in a blaze of false stage jewellery. Now, you saw that if the dress were a harlequin's the appearance of a policeman
would be quite in keeping. The worthy officer started from Putney police station to find you, and walked into the queerest trap ever set in this world. When the front door opened he walked straight on to the stage of a Christmas pantomime, where he could be kicked, clubbed, stunned and drugged by the dancing harlequin, amid roars of laughter from all the most respectable people in Putney. Oh, you will never do anything better. And now, by the way, you might give me back those diamonds."

"I want you to give them back, Flambeau, and I want you to give up this life. There is still youth and honour and humour in you; don't fancy they will last in that trade. Men may keep a sort of level of good, but no man has ever been able to keep on one level of evil. That road goes down and down. The kind man drinks and turns cruel; the frank man kills and lies about it. Many a man I've known started like you to be an honest outlaw, a merry robber of the rich, and ended stamped into slime. Maurice Blum started out as an anarchist of principle, a father of the poor; he ended a greasy spy and tale-bearer that both sides used and despised. Harry Burke started his free money movement sincerely enough; now he's sponging on a half-starved sister for endless brandies and sodas. Lord Amber went into wild society in a sort of chivalry; now he's paying blackmail to the lowest vultures in London. Captain Barillon was the great gentleman-chivalry before your time; he died in a madhouse, screaming with fear of the "narks" and receivers that had betrayed him and hunted him down. I know the woods look very free behind you, Flambeau; I know that in a flash you could melt into them like a monkey. But some day you will be an old grey monkey, Flambeau. You will sit up in your free forest cold at heart and close to death, and the tree-tops will be very bare."

Everything continued still, as if the small man below held the other in the tree in some long invisible leash; and he went on:

"Your downward steps have begun. You used to boast of doing nothing mean, but you are doing something mean tonight. You are leaving suspicion on an honest boy with a good deal against him already; you are separating him from the woman he loves and who loves him. But you will do meaner things than that before you die."

Three flashing diamonds fell from the tree to the turf. The small man stooped to pick them up, and when he looked up again the green cage of the tree was emptied of its silver bird.

The restoration of the gems (accidentally picked up by Father Brown, of all people) ended the evening in uproarious triumph; and Sir Leopold, in his height of good humour, even told the priest that though he himself had broader views, he could respect those whose creed required them to be cloistered and ignorant of this world.

The Invisible Man

In the cool blue twilight of two steep streets in Camden Town, the shop at the corner, a confectioner's, glowed like the butt of a cigar. One should rather say, perhaps, like the butt of a firework, for the light was of many colours and some complexity, broken up by many mirrors and dancing on many gilt and gaily-coloured cakes and sweetmeats. Against this one fiery glass were glued the noses of many gutter-snipes, for the chocolates were all wrapped in those red and gold and green metallic colours which are almost better than chocolate itself; and the huge white wedding-cake in the window was somehow at once remote and satisfying, just as if the whole North Pole were wrapped in those red and gold and green metallic colours which are almost better than chocolate itself; and the huge white wedding-cake in the window was somehow at once remote and satisfying, just as if the whole North Pole were good to eat. Such rainbow provocations could naturally collect the youth of the neighbourhood up to the ages of ten or twelve. But this corner was also attractive to youth at a later stage; and a young man, not less than twenty-four, was staring into the same shop window. To him, also, the shop was of fiery charm, but this attraction was not wholly to be explained by chocolates; which, however, he was far from despising.

He was a tall, burly, red-haired young man, with a resolute face but a listless manner. He carried under his arm a flat, grey portfolio of black-and-white sketches, which he had sold with more or less success to publishers ever since his uncle (who was an admiral) had disinherited him for Socialism, because of a lecture which he had delivered against that economic theory. His name was John Turnbull Angus.

Entering at last, he walked through the confectioner's shop to the back room, which was a sort of pastry-cook restaurant, merely raising his hat to the young lady who was serving there. She was a dark, elegant, alert girl in black, with a high colour and very quick, dark eyes; and after the ordinary interval she followed him into the inner room to take his order.

His order was evidently a usual one. "I want, please," he said with precision, "one halfpenny bun and a small cup of black coffee." An instant before the girl could turn away he added, "Also, I want you to marry me."

The young lady of the shop stiffened suddenly and said, "Those are jokes I don't allow."

"Really and truly," he said, "it's as serious--as serious as the halfpenny bun. It is expensive, like the bun; one pays for it. It is indigestible, like the bun. It hurts."

The dark young lady had never taken her dark eyes off him, but seemed to be studying him with almost tragic exactitude. At the end of her scrutiny she had something like the shadow of a smile, and she sat down in a chair.
"Don't you think," observed Angus, absently, "that it's rather cruel to eat these halfpenny buns? They might grow up into penny buns. I shall give up these brutal sports when we are married."

The dark young lady rose from her chair and walked to the window, evidently in a state of strong but not unsympathetic cogitation. When at last she swung round again with an air of resolution she was bewildered to observe that the young man was carefully laying out on the table various objects from the shop-window. They included a pyramid of highly coloured sweets, several plates of sandwiches, and the two decanters containing that mysterious port and sherry which are peculiar to pastry-cooks. In the middle of this neat arrangement he had carefully let down the enormous load of white sugared cake which had been the huge ornament of the window.

"What on earth are you doing?" she asked.

"Duty, my dear Laura," he began.

"Oh, for the Lord's sake, stop a minute," she cried, "and don't talk to me in that way. I mean, what is all that?"

"A ceremonial meal, Miss Hope."

"And what is that?" she asked impatiently, pointing to the mountain of sugar.

"The wedding-cake, Mrs. Angus," he said.

The girl marched to that article, removed it with some clatter, and put it back in the shop window; she then returned, and, putting her elegant elbows on the table, regarded the young man not unfavourably but with considerable exasperation.

"You don't give me any time to think," she said.

"I'm not such a fool," he answered; "that's my Christian humility."

She was still looking at him; but she had grown considerably graver behind the smile.

"Mr. Angus," she said steadily, "before there is a minute more of this nonsense I must tell you something about myself as shortly as I can."

"Delighted," replied Angus gravely. "You might tell me something about myself, too, while you are about it."

"Oh, do hold your tongue and listen," she said. "It's nothing that I'm ashamed of, and it isn't even anything that I'm specially sorry about. But what would you say if there were something that is no business of mine and yet is my nightmare?"

"In that case," said the man seriously, "I should suggest that you bring back the cake."

"Well, you must listen to the story first," said Laura, persistently. "To begin with, I must tell you that my father owned the inn called the 'Red Fish' at Ludbury, and I used to serve people in the bar."

"Ludbury is a sleepy, grassy little hole in the Eastern Counties, and the only kind of people who ever came to the 'Red Fish' were occasional commercial travellers, and for the rest, the most awful people you can see, only you've never seen them. I mean little, loungy men, who had just enough to live on and had nothing to do but lean about in bar-rooms and bet on horses, in bad clothes that were just too good for them. Even these wretched young rotters were not very common at our house; but there were two of them that were a lot too common—common in every sort of way. They both lived on money of their own, and were wearisomely idle and over-dressed. But yet I was a bit sorry for them, because I half believe they slunk into our little empty bar because each of them had a slight deformity; the sort of thing that some yokels laugh at. It wasn't exactly a deformity either; it was more an oddity. One of them was a surprisingly small man, something like a dwarf, or at least like a jockey. He was not at all jockeyish to look at, though; he had a round black head and a well-trimmed black beard, bright eyes like a bird's; he jingled money in his pockets; he jangled a great gold watch chain; and he never turned up except dressed just too much like a gentleman to be one. He was no fool though, though a futile idler; he was curiously clever at all kinds of things that couldn't be the slightest use; a sort of impromptu conjuring; making fifteen matches set fire to each other like a regular firework; or cutting a banana or some such thing into a dancing doll. His name was Isidore Smythe; and I can see him still, with his little dark face, just coming up to the counter, making a jumping kangaroo out of five cigars.

"The other fellow was more silent and more ordinary; but somehow he alarmed me much more than poor little Smythe. He was very tall and slight, and light-haired; his nose had a high bridge, and he might almost have been handsome in a spectral sort of way; but he had one of the most appalling squints I have ever seen or heard of. When he looked straight at you, you didn't know where you were yourself, let alone what he was looking at. I fancy this sort of disfigurement embittered the poor chap a little; for while Smythe was ready to show off his monkey tricks anywhere, James Welkin (that was the squinting man's name) never did anything except soak in our bar parlour, and go for great walks by himself in the flat, grey country all round. All the same, I think Smythe, too, was a little sensitive about being so small, though he carried it off more smartly. And so it was that I was really puzzled, as well as startled, and very sorry, when they both offered to marry me in the same week.

"Well, I did what I've since thought was perhaps a silly thing. But, after all, these freaks were my friends in a
way; and I had a horror of their thinking I refused them for the real reason, which was that they were so impossibly ugly. So I made up some gas of another sort, about never meaning to marry anyone who hadn't carved his way in the world. I said it was a point of principle with me not to live on money that was just inherited like theirs. Two days after I had talked in this well-meaning sort of way, the whole trouble began. The first thing I heard was that both of them had gone off to seek their fortunes, as if they were in some silly fairy tale.

"Well, I've never seen either of them from that day to this. But I've had two letters from the little man called Smythe, and really they were rather exciting."

"Ever heard of the other man?" asked Angus.

"No, he never wrote," said the girl, after an instant's hesitation. "Smythe's first letter was simply to say that he had started out walking with Welkin to London; but Welkin was such a good walker that the little man dropped out of it, and took a rest by the roadside. He happened to be picked up by some travelling show, and, partly because he was nearly a dwarf, and partly because he was really a clever little wretch, he got on quite well in the show business, and was soon sent up to the Aquarium, to do some tricks that I forget. That was his first letter. His second was much more of a startler, and I only got it last week."

The man called Angus emptied his coffee-cup and regarded her with mild and patient eyes. Her own mouth took a slight twist of laughter as she resumed, "I suppose you've seen on the hoardings all about this 'Smythe's Silent Service'? Or you must have seen the advertisements. Well, whatever these machines are, they are making pots of money; and they are making it all for that little imp whom I knew down in Ludbury. I can't help feeling pleased the poor little chap has fallen on his feet; but the plain fact is, I'm in terror of his turning up any minute and telling me he's carved his way in the world--as he certainly has."

"And the other man?" repeated Angus with a sort of obstinate quietude.

Laura Hope got to her feet suddenly. "My friend," she said, "I think you are a witch. Yes, you are quite right. I have not seen a line of the other man's writing; and I have no more notion than the dead of what or where he is. But it is of him that I am frightened. It is he who is all about my path. It is he who has half driven me mad. Indeed, I think he has driven me mad; for I have felt him where he could not have been, and I have heard his voice when he could not have spoken."

"Well, my dear," said the young man, cheerfully, "if he were Satan himself, he is done for now you have told somebody. One goes mad all alone, old girl. But when was it you fancied you felt and heard our squinting friend?"

"I heard James Welkin laugh as plainly as I hear you speak," said the girl, steadily. "There was nobody there, for I stood just outside the shop at the corner, and could see down both streets at once. I had forgotten how he laughed, though his laugh was as odd as his squint. I had not thought of him for nearly a year. But it's a solemn truth that a few seconds later the first letter came from his rival."

"Did you ever make the spectre speak or squeak, or anything?" asked Angus, with some interest.

Laura suddenly shuddered, and then said, with an unshaken voice, "Yes. Just when I had finished reading the second letter from Isidore Smythe announcing his success. Just then, I heard Welkin say, 'He shan't have you, though. It was quite plain, as if he were in the room. It is awful, I think I must be mad.'"

"If you really were mad," said the young man, "you would think you must be sane. But certainly there seems to me to be something a little rum about this unseen gentleman. Two heads are better than one--I spare you allusions to any other organs and really, if you would allow me, as a sturdy, practical man, to bring back the wedding-cake out of the window--"

Even as he spoke, there was a sort of steely shriek in the street outside, and a small motor, driven at devilish speed, shot up to the door of the shop and stuck there. In the same flash of time a small man in a shiny top hat stood stamping in the outer room.

Angus, who had hitherto maintained hilarious ease from motives of mental hygiene, revealed the strain of his soul by striding abruptly out of the inner room and confronting the new-comer. A glance at him was quite sufficient to confirm the savage guesswork of a man in love. This very dapper but dwarfish figure, with the spike of black beard carried insolently forward, the clever unrestful eyes, the neat but very nervous fingers, could be none other than the man just described to him: Isidore Smythe, who made dolls out of banana skins and match-boxes; Isidore Smythe, who made millions out of undrinking butlers and unflirting housemaids of metal. For a moment the two men, instinctively understanding each other's air of possession, looked at each other with that curious cold generosity which is the soul of rivalry.

Mr. Smythe, however, made no allusion to the ultimate ground of their antagonism, but said simply and explosively, "Has Miss Hope seen that thing on the window?"

"On the window?" repeated the staring Angus.
"There's no time to explain other things," said the small millionaire shortly. "There's some tomfoolery going on here that has to be investigated."

He pointed his polished walking-stick at the window, recently depleted by the bridal preparations of Mr. Angus; and that gentleman was astonished to see along the front of the glass a long strip of paper pasted, which had certainly not been on the window when he looked through it some time before. Following the energetic Smythe outside into the street, he found that some yard and a half of stamp paper had been carefully gummed along the glass outside, and on this was written in straggly characters, "If you marry Smythe, he will die."

"Laura," said Angus, putting his big red head into the shop, "you're not mad."

"It's the writing of that fellow Welkin," said Smythe gruffly. "I haven't seen him for years, but he's always bothering me. Five times in the last fortnight he's had threatening letters left at my flat, and I can't even find out who leaves them, let alone if it is Welkin himself. The porter of the flats swears that no suspicious characters have been seen, and here he has pasted up a sort of dado on a public shop window, while the people in the shop--"

"Quite so," said Angus modestly, "while the people in the shop were having tea. Well, sir, I can assure you I appreciate your common sense in dealing so directly with the matter. We can talk about other things afterwards. The fellow cannot be very far off yet, for as Smythe took there was no paper there when I went last to the window, ten or fifteen minutes ago. On the other hand, he's too far off to be chased, as we don't even know the direction. If you'll take my advice, Mr. Smythe, you'll put this at once in the hands of some energetic inquiry man, private rather than public. I know an extremely clever fellow, who has set up in business five minutes from here in your car. His name's Flambeau, and though his youth was a bit stormy, he's a strictly honest man now, and his brains are worth money. He lives in Lucknow Mansions, Hampstead."

"That is odd," said the little man, arching his black eyebrows. "I live, myself, in Himylaya Mansions, round the corner. Perhaps you might care to come with me; I can go to my rooms and sort out these queer Welkin documents, while you run round and get your friend the detective."

"You are very good," said Angus politely. "Well, the sooner we act the better."

Both men, with a queer kind of impromptu fairness, took the same sort of formal farewell of the lady, and both jumped into the brisk little car. As Smythe took the handles and they turned the great corner of the street, Angus was amused to see a gigantesque poster of "Smythe's Silent Service," with a picture of a huge headless iron doll, carrying a saucepan with the legend, "A Cook Who is Never Cross."

"I use them in my own flat," said the little black-bearded man, laughing, "partly for advertisements, and partly for real convenience. Honestly, and all above board, those big clockwork dolls of mine do bring your coals or claret or a timetable quicker than any live servants I've ever known, if you know which knob to press. But I'll never deny, between ourselves, that such servants have their disadvantages, too."

"Indeed?" said Angus; "is there something they can't do?"

"Yes," replied Smythe coolly; "they can't tell me who left those threatening letters at my flat."

The man's motor was small and swift like himself; in fact, like his domestic service, it was of his own invention. If he was an advertising quack, he was one who believed in his own wares. The sense of something tiny and flying was accentuated as they swept up long white curves of road in the dead but open daylight of evening. Soon the white curves came sharper and dizzier; they were upon ascending spirals, as they say in the modern religions. For, indeed, they were cresting a corner of London which is almost as precipitous as Edinburgh, if not quite so picturesque. Terrace rose above terrace, and the special tower of flats they sought, rose above them all to almost Egyptian height, gilt by the level sunset. The change, as they turned the corner and entered the crescent known as Himylaya Mansions, was as abrupt as the opening of a window; for they found that pile of flats sitting above London as above a green sea of slate. Opposite to the mansions, on the other side of the gravel crescent, was a bushy enclosure more like a steep hedge or dyke than a garden, and some way below that ran a strip of artificial water, a sort of canal, like the moat of that embowered fortress. As the car swept round the crescent it passed, at one corner, the stray stall of a man selling chestnuts; and right away at the other end of the curve, Angus could see a dim blue policeman walking slowly. These were the only human shapes in that high suburban solitude; but he had an irrational sense that they expressed the speechless poetry of London. He felt as if they were figures in a story.

The little car shot up to the right house like a bullet, and shot out its owner like a bomb shell. He was immediately inquiring of a tall commissionaire in shining braid, and a short porter in shirt sleeves, whether anybody or anything had been seeking his apartments. He was assured that nobody and nothing had passed these officials since his last inquiries; whereupon he and the slightly bewildered Angus were shot up in the lift like a rocket, till they reached the top floor.

"Just come in for a minute," said the breathless Smythe. "I want to show you those Welkin letters. Then you might run round the corner and fetch your friend." He pressed a button concealed in the wall, and the door opened of itself.
It opened on a long, commodious ante-room, of which the only arresting features, ordinarily speaking, were the rows of tall half-human mechanical figures that stood up on both sides like tailors' dummies. Like tailors' dummies they were headless; and like tailors' dummies they had a handsome unnecessary humpiness in the shoulders, and a pigeon-breasted protuberance of chest; but barring this, they were not much more like a human figure than any automatic machine at a station that is about the human height. They had two great hooks like arms, for carrying trays; and they were painted pea-green, or vermilion, or black for convenience of distinction; in every other way they were only automatic machines and nobody would have looked twice at them. On this occasion, at least, nobody did. For between the two rows of these domestic dummies lay something more interesting than most of the mechanics of the world. It was a white, tattered scrap of paper scrawled with red ink; and the agile inventor had snatched it up almost as soon as the door flew open. He handed it to Angus without a word. The red ink on it actually was not dry, and the message ran, "If you have been to see her today, I shall kill you."

There was a short silence, and then Isidore Smythe said quietly, "Would you like a little whiskey? I rather feel as if I should."

"Thank you; I should like a little Flambeau," said Angus, gloomily. "This business seems to me to be getting rather grave. I'm going round at once to fetch him."

"Right you are," said the other, with admirable cheerfulness. "Bring him round here as quick as you can."

But as Angus closed the front door behind him he saw Smythe push back a button, and one of the clockwork images glided from its place and slid along a groove in the floor carrying a tray with syphon and decanter. There did seem something a trifle weird about leaving the little man alone among those dead servants, who were coming to life as the door closed.

Six steps down from Smythe's landing the man in shirt sleeves was doing something with a pail. Angus stopped to extract a promise, fortified with a prospective bribe, that he would remain in that place until the return with the detective, and would keep count of any kind of stranger coming up those stairs. Dashing down to the front hall he then laid similar charges of vigilance on the commissionaire at the front door, from whom he learned the simplifying circumstances that there was no back door. Not content with this, he captured the floating policeman and induced him to stand opposite the entrance and watch it; and finally paused an instant for a pennyworth of chestnuts, and an inquiry as to the probable length of the merchant's stay in the neighbourhood.

The chestnut seller, turning up the collar of his coat, told him he should probably be moving shortly, as he thought it was going to snow. Indeed, the evening was growing grey and bitter, but Angus, with all his eloquence, proceeded to nail the chestnut man to his post.

"Keep yourself warm on your own chestnuts," he said earnestly. "Eat up your whole stock; I'll make it worth your while. I'll give you a sovereign if you'll wait here till I come back, and then tell me whether any man, woman, or child has gone into that house where the commissionaire is standing."

He then walked away smartly, with a last look at the besieged tower.

"I've made a ring round that room, anyhow," he said. "They can't all four of them be Mr. Welkin's accomplices."

Lucknow Mansions were, so to speak, on a lower platform of that hill of houses, of which Himylaya Mansions might be called the peak. Mr. Flambeau's semi-official flat was on the ground floor, and presented in every way a marked contrast to the American machinery and cold hotel-like luxury of the flat of the Silent Service. Flambeau, who was a friend of Angus, received him in a rococo artistic den behind his office, of which the ornaments were sabres, harquebuses, Eastern curiosities, flasks of Italian wine, savage cooking-pots, a plumy Persian cat, and a small dusty-looking Roman Catholic priest, who looked particularly out of place.

"This is my friend Father Brown," said Flambeau. "I've often wanted you to meet him. Splendid weather, this; a little cold for Southerners like me."

"Yes, I think it will keep clear," said Angus, sitting down on a violet-striped Eastern ottoman.

"No," said the priest quietly, "it has begun to snow."

And, indeed, as he spoke, the first few flakes, foreseen by the man of chestnuts, began to drift across the darkening windowpane.

"Well," said Angus heavily. "I'm afraid I've come on business, and rather jumpy business at that. The fact is, Flambeau, within a stone's throw of your house is a fellow who badly wants your help; he's perpetually being haunted and threatened by an invisible enemy --a scoundrel whom nobody has even seen." As Angus proceeded to tell the whole tale of Smythe and Welkin, beginning with Laura's story, and going on with his own, the supernatural laugh at the corner of two empty streets, the strange distinct words spoken in an empty room, Flambeau grew more and more vividly concerned, and the little priest seemed to be left out of it, like a piece of furniture. When it came to the scribbled stamp-paper pasted on the window, Flambeau rose, seeming to fill the room with his huge shoulders.

"If you don't mind," he said, "I think you had better tell me the rest on the nearest road to this man's house. It strikes me, somehow, that there is no time to be lost."
"Delighted," said Angus, rising also, "though he's safe enough for the present, for I've set four men to watch the
only hole to his burrow."

They turned out into the street, the small priest trundling after them with the docility of a small dog. He merely
said, in a cheerful way, like one making conversation, "How quick the snow gets thick on the ground."

As they threaded the steep side streets already powdered with silver, Angus finished his story; and by the time
they reached the crescent with the towering flats, he had leisure to turn his attention to the four sentinels. The
chestnut seller, both before and after receiving a sovereign, swore stubbornly that he had watched the door and seen
no visitor enter. The policeman was even more emphatic. He said he had had experience of crooks of all kinds, in
top hats and in rags; he wasn't so green as to expect suspicious characters to look suspicious; he looked out for
anybody, and, so help him, there had been nobody. And when all three men gathered round the gilded
commissionaire, who still stood smiling astride of the porch, the verdict was more final still.

"I've got a right to ask any man, duke or dustman, what he wants in these flats," said the genial and gold-laced
giant, "and I'll swear there's been nobody to ask since this gentleman went away."

The unimportant Father Brown, who stood back, looking modestly at the pavement, here ventured to say
meekly, "Has nobody been up and down stairs, then, since the snow began to fall? It began while we were all round
at Flambeau's."

"Nobody's been in here, sir, you can take it from me," said the official, with beaming authority.

"Then I wonder what that is?" said the priest, and stared at the ground blankly like a fish.

The others all looked down also; and Flambeau used a fierce exclamation and a French gesture. For it was
unquestionably true that down the middle of the entrance guarded by the man in gold lace, actually between the
arrogant, stretched legs of that colossus, ran a stringy pattern of grey footprints stamped upon the white snow.

"God!" cried Angus involuntarily, "the Invisible Man!"

Without another word he turned and dashed up the stairs, with Flambeau following; but Father Brown still stood
looking about him in the snow-clad street as if he had lost interest in his query.

Flambeau was plainly in a mood to break down the door with his big shoulders; but the Scotchman, with more
reason, if less intuition, fumbled about on the frame of the door till he found the invisible button; and the door
swung slowly open.

It showed substantially the same serried interior; the hall had grown darker, though it was still struck here and
there with the last crimson shafts of sunset, and one or two of the headless machines had been moved from their
places for this or that purpose, and stood here and there about the twilit place. The green and red of their coats were
all darkened in the dusk; and their likeness to human shapes slightly increased by their very shapelessness. But in
the middle of them all, exactly where the paper with the red ink had lain, there lay something that looked like red ink
spilt out of its bottle. But it was not red ink.

With a French combination of reason and violence Flambeau simply said "Murder!" and, plunging into the flat,
had explored, every corner and cupboard of it in five minutes. But if he expected to find a corpse he found none.
Isidore Smythe was not in the place, either dead or alive. After the most tearing search the two men met each other
in the outer hall, with streaming faces and staring eyes. "My friend," said Flambeau, talking French in his
excitement, "not only is your murderer invisible, but he makes invisible also the murdered man."

Angus looked round at the dim room full of dummies, and in some Celtic corner of his Scotch soul a shudder
started. One of the life-size dolls stood immediately overshadowing the blood stain, summoned, perhaps, by the
slain man an instant before he fell. One of the high-shouldered hooks that served the thing for arms, was a little
lifted, and Angus had suddenly the horrid fancy that poor Smythe's own iron child had struck him down. Matter had
rebelled, and these machines had killed their master. But even so, what had they done with him?

"Eaten him?" said the nightmare at his ear; and he sickened for an instant at the idea of rent, human remains
absorbed and crushed into all that acephalous clockwork.

He recovered his mental health by an emphatic effort, and said to Flambeau, "Well, there it is. The poor fellow
has evaporated like a cloud and left a red streak on the floor. The tale does not belong to this world."

"There is only one thing to be done," said Flambeau, "whether it belongs to this world or the other. I must go
down and talk to my friend."

They descended, passing the man with the pail, who again asseverated that he had let no intruder pass, down to
the commissionaire and the hovering chestnut man, who rigidly reasserted their own watchfulness. But when Angus
looked round for his fourth confirmation he could not see it, and called out with some nervousness, "Where is the
policeman?"

"I beg your pardon," said Father Brown; "that is my fault. I just sent him down the road to investigate
something--that I just thought worth investigating."

"Well, we want him back pretty soon," said Angus abruptly, "for the wretched man upstairs has not only been
murdered, but wiped out."

"How?" asked the priest.

"Father," said Flambeau, after a pause, "upon my soul I believe it is more in your department than mine. No friend or foe has entered the house, but Smythe is gone, as if stolen by the fairies. If that is not supernatural, I--"

As he spoke they were all checked by an unusual sight; the big blue policeman came round the corner of the crescent, running. He came straight up to Brown.

"You're right, sir," he panted, "they've just found poor Mr. Smythe's body in the canal down below."

Angus put his hand wildly to his head. "Did he run down and drown himself?" he asked.

"He never came down, I'll swear," said the constable, "and he wasn't drowned either, for he died of a great stab over the heart."

"And yet you saw no one enter?" said Flambeau in a grave voice.

"Let us walk down the road a little," said the priest.

As they reached the other end of the crescent he observed abruptly, "Stupid of me! I forgot to ask the policeman something. I wonder if they found a light brown sack."

"Why a light brown sack?" asked Angus, astonished.

"Because if it was any other coloured sack, the case must begin over again," said Father Brown; "but if it was a light brown sack, why, the case is finished."

"I am pleased to hear it," said Angus with hearty irony. "It hasn't begun, so far as I am concerned."

"You must tell us all about it," said Flambeau with a strange heavy simplicity, like a child.

Unconsciously they were walking with quickening steps down the long sweep of road on the other side of the high crescent, Father Brown leading briskly, though in silence. At last he said with an almost touching vagueness, "Well, I'm afraid you'll think it so prosy. We always begin at the abstract end of things, and you can't begin this story anywhere else.

"Have you ever noticed this--that people never answer what you say? They answer what you mean--or what they think you mean. Suppose one lady says to another in a country house, 'Is anybody staying with you?' the lady doesn't answer 'Yes; the butler, the three footmen, the parlourmaid, and so on,' though the parlourmaid may be in the room, or the butler behind her chair. She says 'There is nobody staying with us,' meaning nobody of the sort you mean. But suppose a doctor inquiring into an epidemic asks, 'Who is staying in the house?' then the lady will remember the butler, the parlourmaid, and the rest. All language is used like that; you never get a question answered literally, even when you get it answered truly. When those four quite honest men said that no man had gone into the Mansions, they did not really mean that no man had gone into them. They meant no man whom they could suspect of being your man. A man did go into the house, and did come out of it, but they never noticed him."


A minute or two after he resumed in the same unassuming voice, like a man thinking his way. "Of course you can't think of such a man, until you do think of him. That's where his cleverness comes in. But I came to think of him through two or three little things in the tale Mr. Angus told us. First, there was the fact that this Welkin went for long walks. And then there was the vast lot of stamp paper on the window. And then, most of all, there were the two things the young lady said--things that couldn't be true. Don't get annoyed," he added hastily, noting a sudden movement of the Scotchman's head; "she thought they were true. A person can't be quite alone in a street a second before she receives a letter. She can't be quite alone in a street when she starts reading a letter just received. There must be somebody pretty near her; he must be mentally invisible."

"Why must there be somebody near her?" asked Angus.

"Because," said Father Brown, "barring carrier-pigeons, somebody must have brought her the letter."

"Do you really mean to say," asked Flambeau, with energy, "that Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady?"

"Yes," said the priest. "Welkin carried his rival's letters to his lady. You see, he had to."

"Oh, I can't stand much more of this," exploded Flambeau. "Who is this fellow? What does he look like? What is the usual get-up of a mentally invisible man?"

"He is dressed rather handsomely in red, blue and gold," replied the priest promptly with precision, "and in this striking, and even showy, costume he entered Himylaya Mansions under eight human eyes; he killed Smythe in cold blood, and came down into the street again carrying the dead body in his arms--"

"Reverend sir," cried Angus, standing still, "are you raving mad, or am I?"

"You are not mad," said Brown, "only a little unobservant. You have not noticed such a man as this, for example."

He took three quick strides forward, and put his hand on the shoulder of an ordinary passing postman who had bustled by them unnoticed under the shade of the trees.

"Nobody ever notices postmen somehow," he said thoughtfully; "yet they have passions like other men, and
even carry large bags where a small corpse can be stowed quite easily."

The postman, instead of turning naturally, had ducked and tumbled against the garden fence. He was a lean fair-bearded man of very ordinary appearance, but as he turned an alarmed face over his shoulder, all three men were fixed with an almost fiendish squint.

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Flambeau went back to his sabres, purple rugs and Persian cat, having many things to attend to. John Turnbull Angus went back to the lady at the shop, with whom that imprudent young man contrives to be extremely comfortable. But Father Brown walked those snow-covered hills under the stars for many hours with a murderer, and what they said to each other will never be known.

The Honour of Israel Gow

A stormy evening of olive and silver was closing in, as Father Brown, wrapped in a grey Scotch plaid, came to the end of a grey Scotch valley and beheld the strange castle of Glengyle. It stopped one end of the glen or hollow like a blind alley; and it looked like the end of the world. Rising in steep roofs and spires of seagreen slate in the manner of the old French-Scotch chateaux, it reminded an Englishman of the sinister steeple-hats of witches in fairy tales; and the pine woods that rocked round the green turrets looked, by comparison, as black as numberless flocks of ravens. This note of a dreamy, almost a sleepy devilry, was no mere fancy from the landscape. For there did rest on the place one of those clouds of pride and madness and mysterious sorrow which lie more heavily on the noble houses of Scotland than on any other of the children of men. For Scotland has a double dose of the poison called heredity; the sense of blood in the aristocrat, and the sense of doom in the Calvinist.

The priest had snatched a day from his business at Glasgow to meet his friend Flambeau, the amateur detective, who was at Glengyle Castle with another more formal officer investigating the life and death of the late Earl of Glengyle. That mysterious person was the last representative of a race whose valour, insanity, and violent cunning had made them terrible even among the sinister nobility of their nation in the sixteenth century. None were deeper in that labyrinthine ambition, in chamber within chamber of that palace of lies that was built up around Mary Queen of Scots.

The rhyme in the country-side attested the motive and the result of their machinations candidly:

As green sap to the simmer trees Is red gold to the Ogilvies.

For many centuries there had never been a decent lord in Glengyle Castle; and with the Victorian era one would have thought that all eccentricities were exhausted. The last Glengyle, however, satisfied his tribal tradition by doing the only thing that was left for him to do; he disappeared. I do not mean that he went abroad; by all accounts he was still in the castle, if he was anywhere. But though his name was in the church register and the big red Peerage, nobody ever saw him under the sun.

If anyone saw him it was a solitary man-servant, something between a groom and a gardener. He was so deaf that the more business-like assumed him to be dumb; while the more penetrating declared him to be half-witted. A gaunt, red-haired labourer, with a dogged jaw and chin, but quite blank blue eyes, he went by the name of Israel Gow, and was the one silent servant on that deserted estate. But the energy with which he dug potatoes, and the regularity with which he disappeared into the kitchen gave people an impression that he was providing for the meals of a superior, and that the strange earl was still concealed in the castle. If society needed any further proof that he was there, the servant persistently asserted that he was not at home. One morning the provost and the minister (for the Glengyles were Presbyterians) were summoned to the castle. There they found that the gardener, groom and cook had added to his many professions that of an undertaker, and had nailed up his noble master in a coffin. With how much or how little further inquiry this odd fact was passed, did not as yet very plainly appear; for the thing had never been legally investigated till Flambeau had gone north two or three days before. By then the body of Lord Glengyle (if it was the body) had lain for some time in the little churchyard on the hill.

As Father Brown passed through the dim garden and came under the shadow of the chateau, the clouds were thick and the whole air damp and thundery. Against the last stripe of the green-gold sunset he saw a black human silhouette; a man in a chimney-pot hat, with a big spade over his shoulder. The combination was queerly suggestive of a sexton; but when Brown remembered the deaf servant who dug potatoes, he thought it natural enough. He knew something of the Scotch peasant; he knew the respectability which might well feel it necessary to wear "blacks" for an official inquiry; he knew also the economy that would not lose an hour's digging for that. Even the man's start and suspicious stare as the priest went by were consonant enough with the vigilance and jealousy of such a type.

The great door was opened by Flambeau himself, who had with him a lean man with iron-grey hair and papers in his hand: Inspector Craven from Scotland Yard. The entrance hall was mostly stripped and empty; but the pale, sneering faces of one or two of the wicked Ogilvies looked down out of black periwigs and blackening canvas.

Following them into an inner room, Father Brown found that the allies had been seated at a long oak table, of which their end was covered with scribbled papers, flanked with whisky and cigars. Through the whole of its
remaining length it was occupied by detached objects arranged at intervals; objects about as inexplicable as any objects could be. One looked like a small heap of glittering broken glass. Another looked like a high heap of brown dust. A third appeared to be a plain stick of wood.

"You seem to have a sort of geological museum here," he said, as he sat down, jerking his head briefly in the direction of the brown dust and the crystalline fragments.

"Not a geological museum," replied Flambeau; "say a psychological museum."

"Oh, for the Lord's sake," cried the police detective laughing, "don't let's begin with such long words."

"Don't you know what psychology means?" asked Flambeau with friendly surprise. "Psychology means being off your chump."

"Still I hardly follow," replied the official.

"Well," said Flambeau, with decision, "I mean that we've only found out one thing about Lord Glengyle. He was a maniac."

The black silhouette of Gow with his top hat and spade passed the window, dimly outlined against the darkening sky. Father Brown stared passively at it and answered:

"I can understand there must have been something odd about the man, or he wouldn't have buried himself alive--nor been in such a hurry to bury himself dead. But what makes you think it was lunacy?"

"Well," said Flambeau, "you just listen to the list of things Mr. Craven has found in the house."

"We must get a candle," said Craven, suddenly. "A storm is getting up, and it's too dark to read."

"Have you found any candles," asked Brown smiling, "among your oddities?"

Flambeau raised a grave face, and fixed his dark eyes on his friend.

"That is curious, too," he said. "Twenty-five candles, and not a trace of a candlestick."

In the rapidly darkening room and rapidly rising wind, Brown went along the table to where a bundle of wax candles lay among the other scrappy exhibits. As he did so he bent accidentally over the heap of red-brown dust; and a sharp sneeze cracked the silence.

"Hullo!" he said, "snuff!"

He took one of the candles, lit it carefully, came back and stuck it in the neck of the whisky bottle. The unrestful night air, blowing through the crazy window, waved the long flame like a banner. And on every side of the castle they could hear the miles and miles of black pine wood seething like a black sea around a rock.

"I will read the inventory," began Craven gravely, picking up one of the papers, "the inventory of what we found loose and unexplained in the castle. You are to understand that the place generally was dismantled and neglected; but one or two rooms had plainly been inhabited in a simple but not squalid style by somebody; somebody who was not the servant Gow. The list is as follows:

"First item. A very considerable hoard of precious stones, nearly all diamonds, and all of them loose, without any setting whatever. Of course, it is natural that the Ogilvies should have family jewels; but those are exactly the jewels that are almost always set in particular articles of ornament. The Ogilvies would seem to have kept theirs loose in their pockets, like coppers."

"Second item. Heaps and heaps of loose snuff, not kept in a horn, or even a pouch, but lying in heaps on the mantelpieces, on the sideboard, on the piano, anywhere. It looks as if the old gentleman would not take the trouble to look in a pocket or lift a lid."

"Third item. Here and there about the house curious little heaps of minute pieces of metal, some like steel springs and some in the form of microscopic wheels. As if they had gutted some mechanical toy."

"Fourth item. The wax candles, which have to be stuck in bottle necks because there is nothing else to stick them in. Now I wish you to note how very much queerer all this is than anything we anticipated. For the central riddle we are prepared; we have all seen at a glance that there was something wrong about the last earl. We have come here to find out whether he really lived here, whether he really died here, whether that red-haired scarecrow who did his burying had anything to do with his dying. But suppose the worst in all this, the most lurid or melodramatic solution you like. Suppose the servant really killed the master, or suppose the master isn't really dead, or suppose the master is dressed up as the servant, or suppose the servant is buried for the master; invent what Wilkie Collins' tragedy you like, and you still have not explained a candle without a candlestick, or why an elderly gentleman of good family should habitually spill snuff on the piano. The core of the tale we could imagine; it is the fringes that are mysterious. By no stretch of fancy can the human mind connect together snuff and diamonds and wax and loose clockwork."

"I think I see the connection," said the priest. "This Glengyle was mad against the French Revolution. He was an enthusiast for the ancien regime, and was trying to re-enact literally the family life of the last Bourbons. He had snuff because it was the eighteenth century luxury; wax candles, because they were the eighteenth century lighting; the mechanical bits of iron represent the locksmith hobby of Louis XVI; the diamonds are for the Diamond Necklace of Marie Antoinette."
Both the other men were staring at him with round eyes. "What a perfectly extraordinary notion!" cried Flambeau. "Do you really think that is the truth?"

"I am perfectly sure it isn't," answered Father Brown, "only you said that nobody could connect snuff and diamonds and clockwork and candles. I give you that connection off-hand. The real truth, I am very sure, lies deeper."

He paused a moment and listened to the wailing of the wind in the turrets. Then he said, "The late Earl of Glengyle was a thief. He lived a second and darker life as a desperate housebreaker. He did not have any candlesticks because he only used these candles cut short in the little lantern he carried. The snuff he employed as the fiercest French criminals have used pepper: to fling it suddenly in dense masses in the face of a captor or pursuer. But the final proof is in the curious coincidence of the diamonds and the small steel wheels. Surely that makes everything plain to you? Diamonds and small steel wheels are the only two instruments with which you can cut out a pane of glass."

The bough of a broken pine tree lashed heavily in the blast against the windowpane behind them, as if in parody of a burglar, but they did not turn round. Their eyes were fastened on Father Brown.

"Diamonds and small wheels," repeated Craven ruminating. "Is that all that makes you think it the true explanation?"

"I don't think it the true explanation," replied the priest placidly; "but you said that nobody could connect the four things. The true tale, of course, is something much more humdrum. Glengyle had found, or thought he had found, precious stones on his estate. Somebody had bamboozled him with those loose brilliants, saying they were found in the castle caverns. The little wheels are some diamond-cutting affair. He had to do the thing very roughly and in a small way, with the help of a few shepherds or rude fellows on these hills. Snuff is the one great luxury of such Scotch shepherds; it's the one thing with which you can bribe them. They didn't have candlesticks because they didn't want them; they held the candles in their hands when they explored the caves."

"Is that all?" asked Flambeau after a long pause. "Have we got to the dull truth at last?"

"Oh, no," said Father Brown.

As the wind died in the most distant pine woods with a long hoot as of mockery Father Brown, with an utterly impassive face, went on:

"I only suggested that because you said one could not plausibly connect snuff with clockwork or candles with bright stones. Ten false philosophies will fit the universe; ten false theories will fit Glengyle Castle. But we want the real explanation of the castle and the universe. But are there no other exhibits?"

Craven laughed, and Flambeau rose smiling to his feet and strolled down the long table.

"Items five, six, seven, etc.," he said, "and certainly more varied than instructive. A curious collection, not of lead pencils, but of the lead out of lead pencils. A senseless stick of bamboo, with the top rather splintered. It might be the instrument of the crime. Only, there isn't any crime. The only other things are a few old missals and little Catholic pictures, which the Ogilvies kept, I suppose, from the Middle Ages--their family pride being stronger than their Puritanism. We only put them in the museum because they seem curiously cut about and defaced."

The heady tempest without drove a dreadful wrack of clouds across Glengyle and threw the long room into darkness as Father Brown picked up the little illuminated pages to examine them. He spoke before the drift of darkness had passed; but it was the voice of an utterly new man.

"Mr. Craven," said he, talking like a man ten years younger, "you have got a legal warrant, haven't you, to go up and examine that grave? The sooner we do it the better, and get to the bottom of this horrible affair. If I were you I should start now."

"Now," repeated the astonished detective, "and why now?"

"Because this is serious," answered Brown; "this is not spilt snuff or loose pebbles, that might be there for a hundred reasons. There is only one reason I know of for this being done; and the reason goes down to the roots of the world. These religious pictures are not just dirtied or torn or scrawled over, which might be done in idleness or bigotry, by children or by Protestants. These have been treated very carefully--and very queerly. In every place where the great ornamented name of God comes in the old illuminations it has been elaborately taken out. The only other thing that has been removed is the halo round the head of the Child Jesus. Therefore, I say, let us get our warrant and our spade and our hatchet, and go up and break open that coffin."

"What do you mean?" demanded the London officer.

"I mean," answered the little priest, and his voice seemed to rise slightly in the roar of the gale, "I mean that the great devil of the universe may be sitting on the top tower of this castle at this moment, as big as a hundred elephants, and roaring like the Apocalypse. There is black magic somewhere at the bottom of this."

"Black magic," repeated Flambeau in a low voice, for he was too enlightened a man not to know of such things; "but what can these other things mean?"
"Oh, something damnable, I suppose," replied Brown impatiently. "How should I know? How can I guess all their mazes down below? Perhaps you can make a torture out of snuff and bamboo. Perhaps lunatics lust after wax and steel filings. Perhaps there is a maddening drug made of lead pencils! Our shortest cut to the mystery is up the hill to the grave."

His comrades hardly knew that they had obeyed and followed him till a blast of the night wind nearly flung them on their faces in the garden. Nevertheless they had obeyed him like automata; for Craven found a hatchet in his hand, and the warrant in his pocket; Flambeau was carrying the heavy spade of the strange gardener; Father Brown was carrying the little gilt book from which had been torn the name of God.

The path up the hill to the churchyard was crooked but short; only under that stress of wind it seemed laborious and long. Far as the eye could see, farther and farther as they mounted the slope, were seas beyond seas of pines, now all aslope one way under the wind. And that universal gesture seemed as vain as it was vast, as vain as if that wind were whistling about some unpeopled and purposeless planet. Through all that infinite growth of grey-blue forests sang, shrill and high, that ancient sorrow that is in the heart of all heathen things. One could fancy that the voices from the under world of unfathomable foliage were cries of the lost and wandering pagan gods: gods who had gone roaming in that irrational forest, and who will never find their way back to heaven.

"You see," said Father Brown in low but easy tone, "Scotch people before Scotland existed were a curious lot. In fact, they're a curious lot still. But in the prehistoric times I fancy they really worshipped demons. That," he added genially, "is why they jumped at the Puritan theology."

"My friend," said Flambeau, turning in a kind of fury, "what does all that snuff mean?"

"My friend," replied Brown, with equal seriousness, "there is one mark of all genuine religions: materialism. Now, devil-worship is a perfectly genuine religion."

They had come up on the grassy scalp of the hill, one of the few bald spots that stood clear of the crashing and roaring pine forest. A mean enclosure, partly timber and partly wire, rattled in the tempest to tell them the border of the graveyard. But by the time Inspector Craven had come to the corner of the grave, and Flambeau had planted his spade point downwards and leaned on it, they were both almost as shaken as the shaky wood and wire. At the foot of the grave grew great tall thistles, grey and silver in their decay. Once or twice, when a ball of thistledown broke under the breeze and flew past him, Craven jumped slightly as if it had been an arrow.

Flambeau drove the blade of his spade through the whistling grass into the wet clay below. Then he seemed to stop and lean on it as on a staff.

"Go on," said the priest very gently. "We are only trying to find the truth. What are you afraid of?"

"I am afraid of finding it," said Flambeau.

The London detective spoke suddenly in a high crowing voice that was meant to be conversational and cheery. "I wonder why he really did hide himself like that. Something nasty, I suppose; was he a leper?"

"Something worse than that," said Flambeau.

"And what do you imagine," asked the other, "would be worse than a leper?"

"I don't imagine it," said Flambeau.

He dug for some dreadful minutes in silence, and then said in a choked voice, "I'm afraid of his not being the right shape."

"Nor was that piece of paper, you know," said Father Brown quietly, "and we survived even that piece of paper."

Flambeau dug on with a blind energy. But the tempest had shouldered away the choking grey clouds that clung to the hills like smoke and revealed grey fields of faint starlight before he cleared the shape of a rude timber coffin, and somehow tipped it up upon the turf. Craven stepped forward with his axe; a thistle-top touched him, and he flinched. Then he took a firmer stride, and hacked and wrenched with an energy like Flambeau's till the lid was torn off, and all that was there lay glimmering in the grey starlight.

"Bones," said Craven; and then he added, "but it is a man," as if that were something unexpected.

"Is he," asked Flambeau in a voice that went oddly up and down, "is he all right?"

"Seems so," said the officer huskily, bending over the obscure and decaying skeleton in the box. "Wait a minute."

A vast heave went over Flambeau's huge figure. "And now I come to think of it," he cried, "why in the name of madness shouldn't he be all right? What is it gets hold of a man on these cursed cold mountains? I think it's the black, brainless repetition; all these forests, and over all an ancient horror of unconsciousness. It's like the dream of an atheist. Pine-trees and more pine-trees and millions more pine-trees--"

"God!" cried the man by the coffin, "but he hasn't got a head."

While the others stood rigid the priest, for the first time, showed a leap of startled concern. "No head!" he repeated. "No head?" as if he had almost expected some other deficiency.

Half-witted visions of a headless baby born to Glengyle, of a headless youth hiding himself in the castle, of a
headless man pacing those ancient halls or that gorgeous garden, passed in panorama through their minds. But even in that stiffened instant the tale took no root in them and seemed to have no reason in it. They stood listening to the loud woods and the shrieking sky quite foolishly, like exhausted animals. Thought seemed to be something enormous that had suddenly slipped out of their grasp.

"There are three headless men," said Father Brown, "standing round this open grave."

The pale detective from London opened his mouth to speak, and left it open like a yokel, while a long scream of wind tore the sky; then he looked at the axe in his hands as if it did not belong to him, and dropped it.

"Father," said Flambeau in that infantile and heavy voice he used very seldom, "what are we to do?"

His friend's reply came with the pent promptitude of a gun going off.

"Sleep!" cried Father Brown. "Sleep. We have come to the end of the ways. Do you know what sleep is? Do you know that every man who sleeps believes in God? It is a sacrament; for it is an act of faith and it is a food. And we need a sacrament, if only a natural one. Something has fallen on us that falls very seldom on men; perhaps the worst thing that can fall on them."

Craven's parted lips came together to say, "What do you mean?"

The priest had turned his face to the castle as he answered: "We have found the truth; and the truth makes no sense."

He went down the path in front of them with a plunging and reckless step very rare with him, and when they reached the castle again he threw himself upon sleep with the simplicity of a dog.

Despite his mystic praise of slumber, Father Brown was up earlier than anyone else except the silent gardener; and was found smoking a big pipe and watching that expert at his speechless labours in the kitchen garden. Towards daybreak the rocking storm had ended in roaring rains, and the day came with a curious freshness. The gardener seemed even to have been conversing, but at sight of the detectives he planted his spade sullenly in a bed and, saying something about his breakfast, shifted along the lines of cabbages and shut himself in the kitchen. "He's a valuable man, that," said Father Brown. "He does the potatoes amazingly. Still," he added, with a dispassionate charity, "he has his faults; which of us hasn't? He doesn't dig this bank quite regularly. There, for instance," and he stamped suddenly on one spot. "I'm really very doubtful about that potato."

"And why?" asked Craven, amused with the little man's hobby.

"I'm doubtful about it," said the other, "because old Gow was doubtful about it himself. He put his spade in methodically in every place but just this. There must be a mighty fine potato just here."

Flambeau pulled up the spade and impetuously drove it into the place. He turned up, under a load of soil, something that did not look like a potato, but rather like a monstrous, over-domed mushroom. But it struck the spade with a cold click; it rolled over like a ball, and grinned up at them.

"The Earl of Glengyle," said Brown sadly, and looked down heavily at the skull.

Then, after a momentary meditation, he plucked the spade from Flambeau, and, saying "We must hide it again," clamped the skull down in the earth. Then he leaned his little body and huge head on the great handle of the spade, that stood up stiffly in the earth, and his eyes were empty and his forehead full of wrinkles. "If one could only conceive," he muttered, "the meaning of this last monstrosity." And leaning on the large spade handle, he buried his brows in his hands, as men do in church.

All the corners of the sky were brightening into blue and silver; the birds were chattering in the tiny garden trees; so loud it seemed as if the trees themselves were talking. But the three men were silent enough.

"Well, I give it all up," said Flambeau at last boisterously. "My brain and this world don't fit each other; and there's an end of it. Snuff, spoilt Prayer Books, and the insides of musical boxes--what--"

Brown threw up his bothered brow and rapped on the spade handle with an intolerance quite unusual with him. "Oh, tut, tut, tut, tut!" he cried. "All that is as plain as a pikestaff. I understood the snuff and clockwork, and so on, when I first opened my eyes this morning. And since then I've had it out with old Gow, the gardener, who is neither so deaf nor so stupid as he pretends. There's nothing amiss about the loose items. I was wrong about the torn mass-book, too; there's no harm in that. But it's this last business. Desecrating graves and stealing dead men's heads--surely there's harm in that? Surely there's black magic still in that? That doesn't fit in to the quite simple story of the snuff and the cabbages." And, striding about again, he smoked moodily.

"My friend," said Flambeau, with a grim humour, "you must be careful with me and remember I was once a criminal. The great advantage of that estate was that I always made up the story myself, and acted it as quick as I chose. This detective business of waiting about is too much for my French impatience. All my life, for good or evil, I have done things at the instant; I always fought duels the next morning; I always paid bills on the nail; I never even put off a visit to the dentist--"

Father Brown's pipe fell out of his mouth and broke into three pieces on the gravel path. He stood rolling his eyes, the exact picture of an idiot. "Lord, what a turnip I am!" he kept saying. "Lord, what a turnip!" Then, in a
somewhat groggy kind of way, he began to laugh.

"The dentist!" he repeated. "Six hours in the spiritual abyss, and all because I never thought of the dentist! Such a simple, such a beautiful and peaceful thought! Friends, we have passed a night in hell; but now the sun is risen, the birds are singing, and the radiant form of the dentist consoles the world."

"I will get some sense out of this," cried Flambeau, striding forward, "if I use the tortures of the Inquisition."

Father Brown repressed what appeared to be a momentary disposition to dance on the now sunlit lawn and cried quite piteously, like a child, "Oh, let me be silly a little. You don't know how unhappy I have been. And now I know that there has been no deep sin in this business at all. Only a little lunacy, perhaps --and who minds that?"

He spun round once more, then faced them with gravity.

"This is not a story of crime," he said; "rather it is the story of a strange and crooked honesty. We are dealing with the one man on earth, perhaps, who has taken no more than his due. It is a study in the savage living logic that has been the religion of this race.

"That old local rhyme about the house of Glengyle--

As green sap to the simmer trees Is red gold to the Ogilvies--

was literal as well as metaphorical. It did not merely mean that the Glengyles sought for wealth; it was also true that they literally gathered gold; they had a huge collection of ornaments and utensils in that metal. They were, in fact, misers whose mania took that turn. In the light of that fact, run through all the things we found in the castle. Diamonds without their gold rings; candles without their gold candlesticks; snuff without the gold snuff-boxes; pencil-leads without the gold pencil-cases; a walking stick without its gold top; clockwork without the gold clocks-- or rather watches. And, mad as it sounds, because the halos and the name of God in the old missals were of real gold; these also were taken away."

The garden seemed to brighten, the grass to grow gayer in the strengthening sun, as the crazy truth was told. Flambeau lit a cigarette as his friend went on.

"Were taken away," continued Father Brown; "were taken away-- but not stolen. Thieves would never have left this mystery. Thieves would have taken the gold snuff-boxes, snuff and all; the gold pencil-cases, lead and all. We have to deal with a man with a peculiar conscience, but certainly a conscience. I found that mad moralist this morning in the kitchen garden yonder, and I heard the whole story.

"The late Archibald Ogilvie was the nearest approach to a good man ever born at Glengyle. But his bitter virtue took the turn of the misanthrope; he moped over the dishonesty of his ancestors, from which, somehow, he generalised a dishonesty of all men. More especially he distrusted philanthropy or free-giving; and he swore if he could find one man who took his exact rights he should have all the gold of Glengyle. Having delivered this defiance to humanity he shut himself up, without the smallest expectation of its being answered. One day, however, a deaf and seemingly senseless lad from a distant village brought him a belated telegram; and Glengyle, in his acrid pleasantry, gave him a new farthing. At least he thought he had done so, but when he turned over his change he found the new farthing still there and a sovereign gone. The accident offered him vistas of sneering speculation. Either way, the boy would show the greedy greed of the species. Either he would vanish, a thief stealing a coin; or he would sneak back with it virtuously, a snob seeking a reward. In the middle of that night Lord Glengyle was knocked up out of his bed--for he lived alone--and forced to open the door to the deaf idiot. The idiot brought with him, not the sovereign, but exactly nineteen shillings and eleven-pence three-farthings in change.

"Then the wild exactitude of this action took hold of the mad lord's brain like fire. He swore he was Diogenes, that had long sought an honest man, and at last had found one. He made a new will, which I have seen. He took the literal youth into his huge, neglected house, and trained him up as his solitary servant and --after an odd manner--his heir. And whatever that queer creature understands, he understood absolutely his lord's two fixed ideas: first, that the letter of right is everything; and second, that he himself was to have the gold of Glengyle. So far, that is all; and that is simple. He has stripped the house of gold, and taken not a grain that was not gold; not so much as a grain of snuff. He lifted the gold leaf off an old illumination, fully satisfied that he left the rest unspoilt. All that I understood; but I could not understand this skull business. I was really uneasy about that human head buried among the potatoes. It distressed me--till Flambeau said the word.

"It will be all right. He will put the skull back in the grave, when he has taken the gold out of the tooth."

And, indeed, when Flambeau crossed the hill that morning, he saw that strange being, the just miser, digging at the desecrated grave, the plaid round his throat thrashing out in the mountain wind; the sober top hat on his head.

The Wrong Shape

Certain of the great roads going north out of London continue far into the country a sort of attenuated and interrupted spectre of a street, with great gaps in the building, but preserving the line. Here will be a group of shops, followed by a fenced field or paddock, and then a famous public-house, and then perhaps a market garden or a nursery garden, and then one large private house, and then another field and another inn, and so on. If anyone walks
Anyone passing this house, I say, would be namelessly fascinated by it; would feel that it was a place about which some story was to be told. And he would have been right, as you shall shortly hear. For this is the story—the story of the strange things that did really happen in it in the Whitsuntide of the year 18--:

Anyone passing the house on the Thursday before WhitSunday at about half-past four p.m. would have seen the front door open, and Father Brown, of the small church of St. Mungo, come out smoking a large pipe in company with a very tall French friend of his called Flambeau, who was smoking a very small cigarette. These persons may or may not be of interest to the reader, but the truth is that they were not the only interesting things that were displayed when the front door of the white-and-green house was opened. There are further peculiarities about this house, which must be described to start with, not only that the reader may understand this tragic tale, but also that he may realise what it was that the opening of the door revealed.

The whole house was built upon the plan of a T, but a T with a very long cross piece and a very short tail piece. The long cross piece was the frontage that ran along in face of the street, with the front door in the middle; it was two stories high, and contained nearly all the important rooms. The short tail piece, which ran out at the back immediately opposite the front door, was one story high, and consisted only of two long rooms, the one leading into the other. The first of these two rooms was the study in which the celebrated Mr. Quinton wrote his wild Oriental poems and romances. The farther room was a glass conservatory full of tropical blossoms of quite unique and almost monstrous beauty, and on such afternoons as these glowing with gorgeous sunlight. Thus when the hall door was open, many a passer-by literally stopped to stare and gasp; for he looked down a perspective of rich apartments to something really like a transformation scene in a fairy play: purple clouds and golden suns and crimson stars that were at once scorchingly vivid and yet transparent and far away.

Leonard Quinton, the poet, had himself most carefully arranged this effect; and it is doubtful whether he so perfectly expressed his personality in any of his poems. For he was a man who drank and bathed in colours, who indulged his lust for colour somewhat to the neglect of form—even of good form. This it was that had turned his genius so wholly to eastern art and imagery; to those bewildering carpets or blinding embroideries in which all the colours seem fallen into a fortunate chaos, having nothing to typify or to teach. He had attempted, not perhaps with complete artistic success, but with acknowledged imagination and invention, to compose epics and love stories reflecting the riot of violent and even cruel colour; tales of tropical heavens of burning gold or blood-red copper; of eastern heroes who rode with twelve-turbaned mitres upon elephants painted purple or peacock green; of gigantic jewels that a hundred negroes could not carry, but which burned with ancient and strange-hued fires.

In short (to put the matter from the more common point of view), he dealt much in eastern heavens, rather worse than most western hells; in eastern monarchs, whom we might possibly call maniacs; and in eastern jewels which a Bond Street jeweller (if the hundred staggering negroes brought them into his shop) might possibly not regard as genuine. Quinton was a genius, if a morbid one; and even his morbidity appeared more in his life than in his work. In temperament he was weak and waspish, and his health had suffered heavily from oriental experiments with opium. His wife—a handsome, hard-working, and, indeed, over-worked woman objected to the opium, but objected much more to a live Indian hermit in white and yellow robes, whom her husband insisted on entertaining for months together, a Virgil to guide his spirit through the heavens and the hells of the east.

It was out of this artistic household that Father Brown and his friend stepped on to the door-step; and to judge from their faces, they stepped out of it with much relief. Flambeau had known Quinton in wild student days in Paris, and they had renewed the acquaintance for a week-end; but apart from Flambeau’s more responsible developments of late, he did not get on well with the poet now. Choking oneself with opium and writing little erotic verses on vellum was not his notion of how a gentleman should go to the devil. As the two paused on the door-step, before taking a turn in the garden, the front garden gate was thrown open with violence, and a young man with a billycock hat on the back of his head tumbled up the steps in his eagerness. He was a dissipated-looking youth with a gorgeous red necktie all awry, as if he had slept in it, and he kept fidgeting and lashing about with one of those little jointed canes.

"I say," he said breathlessly, "I want to see old Quinton. I must see him. Has he gone?"

"Mr. Quinton is in, I believe," said Father Brown, cleaning his pipe, "but I do not know if you can see him. The doctor is with him at present."
The young man, who seemed not to be perfectly sober, stumbled into the hall; and at the same moment the
doctor came out of Quinton's study, shutting the door and beginning to put on his gloves.

"See Mr. Quinton?" said the doctor coolly. "No, I'm afraid you can't. In fact, you mustn't on any account.
Nobody must see him; I've just given him his sleeping draught."

"No, but look here, old chap," said the youth in the red tie, trying affectionately to capture the doctor by the
lapels of his coat. "Look here. I'm simply sewn up, I tell you. I--"

"It's no good, Mr. Atkinson," said the doctor, forcing him to fall back; "when you can alter the effects of a drug
I'll alter my decision," and, settling on his hat, he stepped out into the sunlight with the other two. He was a bull-
necked, good-tempered little man with a small moustache, inexpressibly ordinary, yet giving an impression of
capacity.

The young man in the billycock, who did not seem to be gifted with any tact in dealing with people beyond the
general idea of clutching hold of their coats, stood outside the door, as dazed as if he had been thrown out bodily,
and silently watched the other three walk away together through the garden.

"That was a sound, spanking lie I told just now," remarked the medical man, laughing. "In point of fact, poor
Quinton doesn't have his sleeping draught for nearly half an hour. But I'm not going to have him bothered with that
little beast, who only wants to borrow money that he wouldn't pay back if he could. He's a dirty little scamp, though
he is Mrs. Quinton's brother, and she's as fine a woman as ever walked."

"Yes," said Father Brown. "She's a good woman."

"So I propose to hang about the garden till the creature has cleared off," went on the doctor, "and then I'll go in
to Quinton with the medicine. Atkinson can't get in, because I locked the door."

"In that case, Dr. Harris," said Flambeau, "we might as well walk round at the back by the end of the
conservatory. There's no entrance to it that way, but it's worth seeing, even from the outside."

"Yes, and I might get a squint at my patient," laughed the doctor, "for he prefers to lie on an ottoman right at the
end of the conservatory amid all those blood-red poinsettias; it would give me the creeps. But what are you doing?"

Father Brown had stopped for a moment, and picked up out of the long grass, where it had almost been wholly
hidden, a queer, crooked Oriental knife, inlaid exquisitely in coloured stones and metals.

"What is this?" asked Father Brown, regarding it with some disfavour.

"Oh, Quinton's, I suppose," said Dr. Harris carelessly; "he has all sorts of Chinese knickknacks about the place.
Or perhaps it belongs to that mild Hindoo of his whom he keeps on a string."

"What Hindoo?" asked Father Brown, still staring at the dagger in his hand.

"Oh, some Indian conjuror," said the doctor lightly; "a fraud, of course."

"You don't believe in magic?" asked Father Brown, without looking up.

"O crickey! magic!" said the doctor.

"It's very beautiful," said the priest in a low, dreaming voice; "the colours are very beautiful. But it's the wrong
shape."

"What for?" asked Flambeau, staring.

"For anything. It's the wrong shape in the abstract. Don't you ever feel that about Eastern art? The colours are
intoxicatingly lovely; but the shapes are mean and bad--deliberately mean and bad. I have seen wicked things in a
Turkey carpet."

"Mon Dieu!" cried Flambeau, laughing.

"They are letters and symbols in a language I don't know; but I know they stand for evil words," went on the
priest, his voice growing lower and lower. "The lines go wrong on purpose--like serpents doubling to escape."

"What the devil are you talking about?" said the doctor with a loud laugh.

Flambeau spoke quietly to him in answer. "The Father sometimes gets this mystic's cloud on him," he said; "but
I give you fair warning that I have never known him to have it except when there was some evil quite near."

"Oh, rats!" said the scientist.

"Why, look at it," cried Father Brown, holding out the crooked knife at arm's length, as if it were some glittering
snake. "Don't you see it is the wrong shape? Don't you see that it has no hearty and plain purpose? It does not point
like a spear. It does not sweep like a scythe. It does not look like a weapon. It looks like an instrument of torture."

"Well, as you don't seem to like it," said the jolly Harris, "it had better be taken back to its owner. Haven't we
come to the end of this confounded conservatory yet? This house is the wrong shape, if you like."

"You don't understand," said Father Brown, shaking his head. "The shape of this house is quaint--it is even
laughable. But there is nothing wrong about it."

As they spoke they came round the curve of glass that ended the conservatory, an uninterrupted curve, for there
was neither door nor window by which to enter at that end. The glass, however, was clear, and the sun still bright,
though beginning to set; and they could see not only the flamboyant blossoms inside, but the frail figure of the poet
in a brown velvet coat lying languidly on the sofa, having, apparently, fallen half asleep over a book. He was a pale, slight man, with loose, chestnut hair and a fringe of beard that was the paradox of his face, for the beard made him look less manly. These traits were well known to all three of them; but even had it not been so, it may be doubted whether they would have looked at Quinton just then. Their eyes were riveted on another object.

Exactly in their path, immediately outside the round end of the glass building, was standing a tall man, whose drapery fell to his feet in faultless white, and whose bare, brown skull, face, and neck gleamed in the setting sun like splendid bronze. He was looking through the glass at the sleeper, and he was more motionless than a mountain.

"Who is that?" cried Father Brown, stepping back with a hissing intake of his breath.

"Oh, it is only that Hindoo humbug," growled Harris; "but I don't know what the deuce he's doing here."

"It looks like hypnotism," said Flambeau, biting his black moustache.

"Why are you unmedical fellows always talking bosh about hypnotism?" cried the doctor. "It looks a deal more like burglary."

"Well, we will speak to it, at any rate," said Flambeau, who was always for action. One long stride took him to the place where the Indian stood. Bowing from his great height, which overtopped even the Oriental's, he said with placid impudence:

"Good evening, sir. Do you want anything?"

Quite slowly, like a great ship turning into a harbour, the great yellow face turned, and looked at last over its white shoulder. They were startled to see that its yellow eyelids were quite sealed, as in sleep. "Thank you," said the face in excellent English. "I want nothing." Then, half opening the lids, so as to show a slit of opalescent eyeball, he repeated, "I want nothing." Then he opened his eyes wide with a startling stare, said, "I want nothing," and went rustling away into the rapidly darkening garden.

"The Christian is more modest," muttered Father Brown; "he wants something."

"What on earth was he doing?" asked Flambeau, knitting his black brows and lowering his voice.

"I should like to talk to you later," said Father Brown.

The sunlight was still a reality, but it was the red light of evening, and the bulk of the garden trees and bushes grew blacker and blacker against it. They turned round the end of the conservatory, and walked in silence down the other side to get round to the front door. As they went they seemed to wake something, as one startles a bird, in the deeper corner between the study and the main building; and again they saw the white-robed fakir slide out of the shadow, and slip round towards the front door. To their surprise, however, he had not been alone. They found themselves abruptly pulled up and forced to banish their bewilderment by the appearance of Mrs. Quinton, with her heavy golden hair and square pale face, advancing on them out of the twilight. She looked a little stern, but was entirely courteous.

"Good evening, Dr. Harris," was all she said.

"Good evening, Mrs. Quinton," said the little doctor heartily. "I am just going to give your husband his sleeping draught."

"Yes," she said in a clear voice. "I think it is quite time." And she smiled at them, and went sweeping into the house.

"That woman's over-driven," said Father Brown; "that's the kind of woman that does her duty for twenty years, and then does something dreadful."

The little doctor looked at him for the first time with an eye of interest. "Did you ever study medicine?" he asked.

"You have to know something of the mind as well as the body," answered the priest; "we have to know something of the body as well as the mind."

"Well," said the doctor, "I think I'll go and give Quinton his stuff."

They had turned the corner of the front facade, and were approaching the front doorway. As they turned into it they saw the man in the white robe for the third time. He came so straight towards the front door that it seemed quite incredible that he had not just come out of the study opposite to it. Yet they knew that the study door was locked.

Father Brown and Flambeau, however, kept this weird contradiction to themselves, and Dr. Harris was not a man to waste his thoughts on the impossible. He permitted the omnipresent Asiatic to make his exit, and then stepped briskly into the hall. There he found a figure which he had already forgotten. The inane Atkinson was still hanging about, humming and poking things with his knobby cane. The doctor's face had a spasm of disgust and decision, and he whispered rapidly to his companion: "I must lock the door again, or this rat will get in. But I shall be out again in two minutes."

He rapidly unlocked the door and locked it again behind him, just balking a blundering charge from the young man in the billycock. The young man threw himself impatiently on a hall chair. Flambeau looked at a Persian illumination on the wall; Father Brown, who seemed in a sort of daze, dully eyed the door. In about four minutes the
door was opened again. Atkinson was quicker this time. He sprang forward, held the door open for an instant, and
called out: "Oh, I say, Quinton, I want--"

From the other end of the study came the clear voice of Quinton, in something between a yawn and a yell of
weary laughter.

"Oh, I know what you want. Take it, and leave me in peace. I'm writing a song about peacocks."

Before the door closed half a sovereign came flying through the aperture; and Atkinson, stumbling forward,
caught it with singular dexterity.

"So that's settled," said the doctor, and, locking the door savagely, he led the way out into the garden.

"Poor Leonard can get a little peace now," he added to Father Brown; "he's locked in all by himself for an hour
or two."

"Yes," answered the priest; "and his voice sounded jolly enough when we left him." Then he looked gravely
round the garden, and saw the loose figure of Atkinson standing and jingling the half-sovereign in his pocket, and
beyond, in the purple twilight, the figure of the Indian sitting bolt upright upon a bank of grass with his face turned
towards the setting sun. Then he said abruptly: "Where is Mrs. Quinton?"

"She has gone up to her room," said the doctor. "That is her shadow on the blind."

Father Brown looked up, and frowningly scrutinised a dark outline at the gas-lit window.

"Yes," he said, "that is her shadow," and he walked a yard or two and threw himself upon a garden seat.

Flambeau sat down beside him; but the doctor was one of those energetic people who live naturally on their legs.

He walked away, smoking, into the twilight, and the two friends were left together.

"My father," said Flambeau in French, "what is the matter with you?"

Father Brown was silent and motionless for half a minute, then he said: "Superstition is irreligious, but there is
something in the air of this place. I think it's that Indian—at least, partly."

He sank into silence, and watched the distant outline of the Indian, who still sat rigid as if in prayer. At first sight
he seemed motionless, but as Father Brown watched him he saw that the man swayed ever so slightly with a
rhythmic movement, just as the dark tree-tops swayed ever so slightly in the wind that was creeping up the dim
garden paths and shuffling the fallen leaves a little.

The landscape was growing rapidly dark, as if for a storm, but they could still see all the figures in their various
places. Atkinson was leaning against a tree with a listless face; Quinton's wife was still at her window; the doctor
had gone strolling round the end of the conservatory; they could see his cigar like a will-o'-the-wisp; and the fakir
still sat rigid and yet rocking, while the trees above him began to rock and almost to roar. Storm was certainly
coming.

"When that Indian spoke to us," went on Brown in a conversational undertone, "I had a sort of vision, a vision of
him and all his universe. Yet he only said the same thing three times. When first he said 'I want nothing,' it meant
only that he was impenetrable, that Asia does not give itself away. Then he said again, 'I want nothing,' and I knew
that he meant that he was sufficient to himself, like a cosmos, that he needed no God, neither admitted any sins. And
when he said the third time, 'I want nothing,' he said it with blazing eyes. And I knew that he meant literally what he
said; that nothing was his desire and his home; that he was weary for nothing as for wine; that annihilation, the mere
destruction of everything or anything--"

Two drops of rain fell; and for some reason Flambeau started and looked up, as if they had stung him. And the
same instant the doctor down by the end of the conservatory began running towards them, calling out something as
he ran.

As he came among them like a bombshell the restless Atkinson happened to be taking a turn nearer to the house
front; and the doctor clutched him by the collar in a convulsive grip. "Foul play!" he cried; "what have you been
doing to him, you dog?"

The priest had sprung erect, and had the voice of steel of a soldier in command.

"No fighting," he cried coolly; "we are enough to hold anyone we want to. What is the matter, doctor?"

"Things are not right with Quinton," said the doctor, quite white. "I could just see him through the glass, and I
don't like the way he's lying. It's not as I left him, anyhow."

"Let us go in to him," said Father Brown shortly. "You can leave Mr. Atkinson alone. I have had him in sight
since we heard Quinton's voice."

"I will stop here and watch him," said Flambeau hurriedly. "You go in and see."

The doctor and the priest flew to the study door, unlocked it, and fell into the room. In doing so they nearly fell
over the large mahogany table in the centre at which the poet usually wrote; for the place was lit only by a small fire
kept for the invalid. In the middle of this table lay a single sheet of paper, evidently left there on purpose. The doctor
snatched it up, glanced at it, handed it to Father Brown, and crying, "Good God, look at that!" plunged toward the
glass room beyond, where the terrible tropic flowers still seemed to keep a crimson memory of the sunset.
Father Brown read the words three times before he put down the paper. The words were: "I die by my own hand; yet I die murdered!" They were in the quite inimitable, not to say illegible, handwriting of Leonard Quinton.

Then Father Brown, still keeping the paper in his hand, strode towards the conservatory, only to meet his medical friend coming back with a face of assurance and collapse. "He's done it," said Harris.

They went together through the gorgeous unnatural beauty of cactus and azalea and found Leonard Quinton, poet and romancer, with his head hanging downward off his ottoman and his red curls sweeping the ground. Into his left side was thrust the queer dagger that they had picked up in the garden, and his limp hand still rested on the hilt.

Outside the storm had come at one stride, like the night in Coleridge, and garden and glass roof were darkened with driving rain. Father Brown seemed to be studying the paper more than the corpse; he held it close to his eyes; and seemed trying to read it in the twilight. Then he held it up against the faint light, and, as he did so, lightning stared at them for an instant so white that the paper looked black against it.

 Darkness full of thunder followed, and after the thunder Father Brown's voice said out of the dark: "Doctor, this paper is the wrong shape."

"What do you mean?" asked Doctor Harris, with a frowning stare.

"It isn't square," answered Brown. "It has a sort of edge snipped off at the corner. What does it mean?"

"How the deuce should I know?" growled the doctor. "Shall we move this poor chap, do you think? He's quite dead."

"No," answered the priest; "we must leave him as he lies and send for the police." But he was still scrutinising the paper.

As they went back through the study he stopped by the table and picked up a small pair of nail scissors. "Ah," he said, with a sort of relief, "this is what he did it with. But yet--" And he knitted his brows.

"Oh, stop fooling with that scrap of paper," said the doctor emphatically. "It was a fad of his. He had hundreds of them. He cut all his paper like that," as he pointed to a stack of sermon paper still unused on another and smaller table. Father Brown went up to it and held up a sheet. It was the same irregular shape.

"Quite so," he said. "And here I see the corners that were snipped off." And to the indignation of his colleague he began to count them.

"That's all right," he said, with an apologetic smile. "Twenty-three sheets cut and twenty-two corners cut off them. And as I see you are impatient we will rejoin the others."

"Who is to tell his wife?" asked Dr. Harris. "Will you go and tell her now, while I send a servant for the police?"

"As you will," said Father Brown indifferently. And he went out to the hall door.

Here also he found a drama, though of a more grotesque sort. It showed nothing less than his big friend Flambeau in an attitude to which he had long been unaccustomed, while upon the pathway at the bottom of the steps was sprawling with his boots in the air the amiable Atkinson, his billycock hat and walking cane sent flying in opposite directions along the path. Atkinson had at length wearied of Flambeau's almost paternal custody, and had endeavoured to knock him down, which was by no means a smooth game to play with the Roi des Apaches, even after that monarch's abdication.

Flambeau was about to leap upon his enemy and secure him once more, when the priest patted him easily on the shoulder.

"Make it up with Mr. Atkinson, my friend," he said. "Beg a mutual pardon and say `Good night.' We need not detain him any longer." Then, as Atkinson rose somewhat doubtfully and gathered his hat and stick and went towards the garden gate, Father Brown said in a more serious voice: "Where is that Indian?"

They all three (for the doctor had joined them) turned involuntarily towards the dim grassy bank amid the tossing trees purple with twilight, where they had last seen the brown man swaying in his strange prayers. The Indian was gone.

"Confound him," cried the doctor, stamping furiously. "Now I know that it was that nigger that did it."

"I thought you didn't believe in magic," said Father Brown quietly.

"No more I did," said the doctor, rolling his eyes. "I only know that I loathed that yellow devil when I thought he was a sham wizard. And I shall loathe him more if I come to think he was a real one."

"Well, his having escaped is nothing," said Flambeau. "For we could have proved nothing and done nothing against him. One hardly goes to the parish constable with a story of suicide imposed by witchcraft or auto-suggestion."

Meanwhile Father Brown had made his way into the house, and now went to break the news to the wife of the dead man.

When he came out again he looked a little pale and tragic, but what passed between them in that interview was never known, even when all was known.

Flambeau, who was talking quietly with the doctor, was surprised to see his friend reappear so soon at his elbow;
but Brown took no notice, and merely drew the doctor apart. "You have sent for the police, haven't you?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Harris. "They ought to be here in ten minutes."

"Will you do me a favour?" said the priest quietly. "The truth is, I make a collection of these curious stories, which often contain, as in the case of our Hindoo friend, elements which can hardly be put into a police report. Now, I want you to write out a report of this case for my private use. Yours is a clever trade," he said, looking the doctor gravely and steadily in the face. "I sometimes think that you know some details of this matter which you have not thought fit to mention. Mine is a confidential trade like yours, and I will treat anything you write for me in strict confidence. But write the whole."

The doctor, who had been listening thoughtfully with his head a little on one side, looked the priest in the face for an instant, and said: "All right," and went into the study, closing the door behind him.

"Flambeau," said Father Brown, "there is a long seat there under the veranda, where we can smoke out of the rain. You are my only friend in the world, and I want to talk to you. Or, perhaps, be silent with you."

They established themselves comfortably in the veranda seat; Father Brown, against his common habit, accepted a good cigar and smoked it steadily in silence, while the rain shrieked and rattled on the roof of the veranda.

"My friend," he said at length, "this is a very queer case. A very queer case."

"I should think it was," said Flambeau, with something like a shudder.

"You call it queer, and I call it queer," said the other, "and yet we mean quite opposite things. The modern mind always mixes up two different ideas: mystery in the sense of what is marvellous, and mystery in the sense of what is complicated. That is half its difficulty about miracles. A miracle is startling; but it is simple. It is simple because it is a miracle. It is power coming directly from God (or the devil) instead of indirectly through nature or human wills. Now, you mean that this business is marvellous because it is miraculous, because it is witchcraft worked by a wicked Indian. Understand, I do not say that it was not spiritual or diabolic. Heaven and hell only know by what surrounding influences strange sins come into the lives of men. But for the present my point is this: If it was pure magic, as you think, then it is marvellous; but it is not mysterious—that is, it is not complicated. The quality of a miracle is mysterious, but its manner is simple. Now, the manner of this business has been the reverse of simple."

The storm that had slackened for a little seemed to be swelling again, and there came heavy movements as of faint thunder. Father Brown let fall the ash of his cigar and went on:

"There has been in this incident," he said, "a twisted, ugly, complex quality that does not belong to the straight bolts either of heaven or hell. As one knows the crooked track of a snail, I know the crooked track of a man."

The white lightning opened its enormous eye in one wink, the sky shut up again, and the priest went on:

"Of all these crooked things, the crookedest was the shape of that piece of paper. It was crookeder than the dagger that killed him."

"You mean the paper on which Quinton confessed his suicide," said Flambeau.

"I mean the paper on which Quinton wrote, 'I die by my own hand,'" answered Father Brown. "The shape of that paper, my friend, was the wrong shape; the wrong shape, if ever I have seen it in this wicked world."

"It only had a corner snipped off," said Flambeau, "and I understand that all Quinton's paper was cut that way."

"It was a very odd way," said the other, "and a very bad way, to my taste and fancy. Look here, Flambeau, this Quinton—God receive his soul!—was perhaps a bit of a cur in some ways, but he really was an artist, with the pencil as well as the pen. His handwriting, though hard to read, was bold and beautiful. I can't prove what I say; I can't prove anything. But I tell you with the full force of conviction that he could never have cut that mean little piece off a sheet of paper. If he had wanted to cut down paper for some purpose of fitting in, or binding up, or what not, he would have made quite a different slash with the scissors. Do you remember the shape? It was a mean shape. It was a wrong shape. Like this. Don't you remember?"

And he waved his burning cigar before him in the darkness, making irregular squares so rapidly that Flambeau really seemed to see them as fiery hieroglyphics upon the darkness—hieroglyphics such as his friend had spoken of, which are indecipherable, yet can have no good meaning.

"But," said Flambeau, as the priest put his cigar in his mouth again and leaned back, staring at the roof, "suppose somebody else did use the scissors. Why should somebody else, cutting pieces off his sermon paper, make Quinton commit suicide?"

Father Brown was still leaning back and staring at the roof, but he took his cigar out of his mouth and said: "Quinton never did commit suicide."

Flambeau stared at him. "Why, confound it all," he cried, "then why did he confess to suicide?"

The priest leaned forward again, settled his elbows on his knees, looked at the ground, and said, in a low, distinct voice: "He never did confess to suicide."

Flambeau laid his cigar down. "You mean," he said, "that the writing was forged?"

"No," said Father Brown. "Quinton wrote it all right."
"Well, there you are," said the aggravated Flambeau; "Quinton wrote, 'I die by my own hand,' with his own hand on a plain piece of paper."

"Of the wrong shape," said the priest calmly.

"Oh, the shape be damned!" cried Flambeau. "What has the shape to do with it?"

"There were twenty-three snipped papers," resumed Brown unmoved, "and only twenty-two pieces snipped off. Therefore one of the pieces had been destroyed, probably that from the written paper. Does that suggest anything to you?"

A light dawned on Flambeau's face, and he said: "There was something else written by Quinton, some other words. 'They will tell you I die by my own hand,' or 'Do not believe that--'"

"Hotter, as the children say," said his friend. "But the piece was hardly half an inch across; there was no room for one word, let alone five. Can you think of anything hardly bigger than a comma which the man with hell in his heart had to tear away as a testimony against him?"

"I can think of nothing," said Flambeau at last.

"What about quotation marks?" said the priest, and flung his cigar far into the darkness like a shooting star.

All words had left the other man's mouth, and Father Brown said, like one going back to fundamentals:

"Leonard Quinton was a romancer, and was writing an Oriental romance about wizardry and hypnotism. He--"

At this moment the door opened briskly behind them, and the doctor came out with his hat on. He put a long envelope into the priest's hands.

"That's the document you wanted," he said, "and I must be getting home. Good night."

"Good night," said Father Brown, as the doctor walked briskly to the gate. He had left the front door open, so that a shaft of gaslight fell upon them. In the light of this Brown opened the envelope and read the following words:

DEAR FATHER BROWN,--Vicisti Galilee. Otherwise, damn your eyes, which are very penetrating ones. Can it be possible that there is something in all that stuff of yours after all?

I am a man who has ever since boyhood believed in Nature and in all natural functions and instincts, whether men called them moral or immoral. Long before I became a doctor, when I was a schoolboy keeping mice and spiders, I believed that to be a good animal is the best thing in the world. But just now I am shaken; I have believed in Nature; but it seems as if Nature could betray a man. Can there be anything in your bosh? I am really getting morbid.

I loved Quinton's wife. What was there wrong in that? Nature told me to, and it's love that makes the world go round. I also thought quite sincerely that she would be happier with a clean animal like me than with that tormenting little lunatic. What was there wrong in that? I was only facing facts, like a man of science. She would have been happier.

According to my own creed I was quite free to kill Quinton, which was the best thing for everybody, even himself. But as a healthy animal I had no notion of killing myself. I resolved, therefore, that I would never do it until I saw a chance that would leave me scot free. I saw that chance this morning.

I have been three times, all told, into Quinton's study today. The first time I went in he would talk about nothing but the weird tale, called "The Cure of a Saint," which he was writing, which was all about how some Indian hermit made an English colonel kill himself by thinking about him. He showed me the last sheets, and even read me the last paragraph, which was something like this: "The conqueror of the Punjab, a mere yellow skeleton, but still gigantic, managed to lift himself on his elbow and gasp in his nephew's ear: 'I die by my own hand, yet I die murdered!'" It so happened by one chance out of a hundred, that those last words were written at the top of a new sheet of paper. I left the room, and went out into the garden intoxicated with a frightful opportunity.

We walked round the house; and two more things happened in my favour. You suspected an Indian, and you found a dagger which the Indian might most probably use. Taking the opportunity to stuff it in my pocket I went back to Quinton's study, locked the door, and gave him his sleeping draught. He was against answering Atkinson at all, but I urged him to call out and quiet the fellow, because I wanted a clear proof that Quinton was alive when I left the room for the second time. Quinton lay down in the conservatory, and I came through the study. I am a quick man with my hands, and in a minute and a half I had done what I wanted to do. I had emptied all the first part of Quinton's romance into the fireplace, where it burnt to ashes. Then I saw that the quotation marks wouldn't do, so I snipped them off, and to make it seem likelier, snipped the whole quire to match. Then I came out with the knowledge that Quinton's confession of suicide lay on the front table, while Quinton lay alive but asleep in the conservatory beyond.

The last act was a desperate one; you can guess it: I pretended to have seen Quinton dead and rushed to his room. I delayed you with the paper, and, being a quick man with my hands, killed Quinton while you were looking at his confession of suicide. He was half-asleep, being drugged, and I put his own hand on the knife and drove it into his body. The knife was of so queer a shape that no one but an operator could have calculated the angle that would
reach his heart. I wonder if you noticed this.

When I had done it, the extraordinary thing happened. Nature deserted me. I felt ill. I felt just as if I had done something wrong. I think my brain is breaking up; I feel some sort of desperate pleasure in thinking I have told the thing to somebody; that I shall not have to be alone with it if I marry and have children. What is the matter with me? .. Madness ... or can one have remorse, just as if one were in Byron's poems! I cannot write any more.

James Erskine Harris.

Father Brown carefully folded up the letter, and put it in his breast pocket just as there came a loud peal at the gate bell, and the wet waterproofs of several policemen gleamed in the road outside.

The Sins of Prince Saradine

When Flambeau took his month's holiday from his office in Westminster he took it in a small sailing-boat, so small that it passed so much of its time as a rowing-boat. He took it, moreover, in little rivers in the Eastern counties, rivers so small that the boat looked like a magic boat, sailing on land through meadows and cornfields. The vessel was just comfortable for two people; there was room only for necessities, and Flambeau had stocked it with such things as his special philosophy considered necessary. They reduced themselves, apparently, to four essentials: tins of salmon, if he should want to eat; loaded revolvers, if he should want to fight; a bottle of brandy, presumably in case he should faint; and a priest, presumably in case he should die. With this light luggage he crawled down the little Norfolk rivers, intending to reach the Broads at last, but meanwhile delighting in the overhanging gardens and meadows, the mirrored mansions or villages, lingering to fish in the pools and corners, and in some sense hugging the shore.

Like a true philosopher, Flambeau had no aim in his holiday; but, like a true philosopher, he had an excuse. He had a sort of half purpose, which he took just so seriously that its success would crown the holiday, but just so lightly that its failure would not spoil it. Years ago, when he had been a king of thieves and the most famous figure in Paris, he had often received wild communications of approval, denunciation, or even love; but one had, somehow, stuck in his memory. It consisted simply of a visiting-card, in an envelope with an English postmark. On the back of the card was written in French and in green ink: "If you ever retire and become respectable, come and see me. I want to meet you, for I have met all the other great men of my time. That trick of yours of getting one detective to arrest the other was the most splendid scene in French history." On the front of the card was engraved in the formal fashion, "Prince Saradine, Reed House, Reed Island, Norfolk."

He had not troubled much about the prince then, beyond ascertaining that he had been a brilliant and fashionable figure in southern Italy. In his youth, it was said, he had eloped with a married woman of high rank; the escapade was scarcely startling in his social world, but it had clung to men's minds because of an additional tragedy: the alleged suicide of the insulted husband, who appeared to have flung himself over a precipice in Sicily. The prince then lived in Vienna for a time, but his more recent years seemed to have been passed in perpetual and restless travel. But when Flambeau, like the prince himself, had left European celebrity and settled in England, it occurred to him that he might pay a surprise visit to this eminent exile in the Norfolk Broads. Whether he should find the place he had no idea; and, indeed, it was sufficiently small and forgotten. But, as things fell out, he found it much sooner than he expected.

They had moored their boat one night under a bank veiled in high grasses and short pollarded trees. Sleep, after heavy sculling, had come to them early, and by a corresponding accident they awoke before it was light. To speak more strictly, they awoke before it was daylight; for a large lemon moon was only just setting in the forest of high grass above their heads, and the sky was of a vivid violet-blue, nocturnal but bright. Both men had simultaneously a reminiscence of childhood, of the elfin and adventurous time when tall weeds close over us like woods. Standing up thus against the large low moon, the daisies really seemed to be giant daisies, the dandelions to be giant dandelions. Somehow it reminded them of the dado of a nursery wall-paper. The drop of the river-bed sufficed to sink them under the roots of all shrubs and flowers and make them gaze upwards at the grass. "By Jove!" said Flambeau, "it's like being in fairyland."

Father Brown sat bolt upright in the boat and crossed himself. His movement was so abrupt that his friend asked him, with a mild stare, what was the matter.

"The people who wrote the mediaeval ballads," answered the priest, "knew more about fairies than you do. It isn't only nice things that happen in fairyland."

"Oh, bosh!" said Flambeau. "Only nice things could happen under such an innocent moon. I am for pushing on now and seeing what does really come. We may die and rot before we ever see again such a moon or such a mood."

"All right," said Father Brown. "I never said it was always wrong to enter fairyland. I only said it was always dangerous."

They pushed slowly up the brightening river; the glowing violet of the sky and the pale gold of the moon grew fainter and fainter, and faded into that vast colourless cosmos that precedes the colours of the dawn.
faint stripes of red and gold and grey split the horizon from end to end they were broken by the black bulk of a town or village which sat on the river just ahead of them. It was already an easy twilight, in which all things were visible, when they came under the hanging roofs and bridges of this riverside hamlet. The houses, with their long, low, stooping roofs, seemed to come down to drink at the river, like huge grey and red cattle. The broadening and whitening dawn had already turned to working daylight before they saw any living creature on the wharves and bridges of that silent town. Eventually they saw a very placid and prosperous man in his shirt sleeves, with a face as round as the recently sunken moon, and rays of red whisker around the low arc of it, who was leaning on a post above the sluggish tide. By an impulse not to be analysed, Flambeau rose to his full height in the swaying boat and shouted at the man to ask if he knew Reed Island or Reed House. The prosperous man's smile grew slightly more expansive, and he simply pointed up the river towards the next bend of it. Flambeau went ahead without further speech.

The boat took many such grassy corners and followed many such reedy and silent reaches of river; but before the search had become monotonous they had swung round a specially sharp angle and come into the silence of a sort of pool or lake, the sight of which instinctively arrested them. For in the middle of this wider piece of water, fringed on every side with rushes, lay a long, low islet, along which ran a long, low house or bungalow built of bamboo or some kind of tough tropic cane. The upstanding rods of bamboo which made the walls were pale yellow, the sloping rods that made the roof were of darker red or brown, otherwise the long house was a thing of repetition and monotony. The early morning breeze rustled the reeds round the island and sang in the strange ribbed house as in a giant pan-pipe.

"By George!" cried Flambeau; "here is the place, after all! Here is Reed Island, if ever there was one. Here is Reed House, if it is anywhere. I believe that fat man with whiskers was a fairy."

"Perhaps," remarked Father Brown impartially. "If he was, he was a bad fairy."

But even as he spoke the impetuous Flambeau had run his boat ashore in the rattling reeds, and they stood in the long, quaint islet beside the odd and silent house.

The house stood with its back, as it were, to the river and the only landing-stage; the main entrance was on the other side, and looked down the long island garden. The visitors approached it, therefore, by a small path running round nearly three sides of the house, close under the low eaves. Through three different windows on three different sides they looked in on the same long, well-lit room, panelled in light wood, with a large number of looking-glasses, and laid out as for an elegant lunch. The front door, when they came round to it at last, was flanked by two turquoise-blue flower pots. It was opened by a butler of the drearier type--long, lean, grey and listless--who murmured that Prince Saradine was from home at present, but was expected hourly; the house being kept ready for him and his guests. The exhibition of the card with the scrawl of green ink awoke a flicker of life in the parchment face of the depressed retainer, and it was with a certain shaky courtesy that he suggested that the strangers should remain. "His Highness may be here any minute," he said, "and would be distressed to have just missed any gentleman he had invited. We have orders always to keep a little cold lunch for him and his friends, and I am sure he would wish it to be offered."

Moved with curiosity to this minor adventure, Flambeau assented gracefully, and followed the old man, who ushered him ceremoniously into the long, lightly panelled room. There was nothing very notable about it, except the rather unusual alternation of many long, low windows with many long, low oblongs of looking-glass, which gave a singular air of lightness and unsubstantialness to the place. It was somehow like lunching out of doors. One or two pictures of a quiet kind hung in the corners, one a large grey photograph of a very young man in uniform, another a red chalk sketch of two long-haired boys. Asked by Flambeau whether the soldierly person was the prince, the butler answered shortly in the negative; it was the prince's younger brother, Captain Stephen Saradine, he said. And with that the old man seemed to dry up suddenly and lose all taste for conversation.

After lunch had tailed off with exquisite coffee and liqueurs, the guests were introduced to the garden, the library, and the housekeeper--a dark, handsome lady, of no little majesty, and rather like a plutonic Madonna. It appeared that she and the butler were the only survivors of the prince's original foreign menage the other servants now in the house being new and collected in Norfolk by the housekeeper. This latter lady went by the name of Mrs. Anthony, but she spoke with a slight Italian accent, and Flambeau did not doubt that Anthony was a Norfolk version of some more Latin name. Mr. Paul, the butler, also had a faintly foreign air, but he was in tongue and training English, as are many of the most polished men-servants of the cosmopolitan nobility.

Pretty and unique as it was, the place had about it a curious luminous sadness. Hours passed in it like days. The long, well-windowed rooms were full of daylight, but it seemed a dead daylight. And through all other incidental noises, the sound of talk, the clink of glasses, or the passing feet of servants, they could hear on all sides of the house the melancholy noise of the river.

"We have taken a wrong turning, and come to a wrong place," said Father Brown, looking out of the window at
the grey-green sedges and the silver flood. "Never mind; one can sometimes do good by being the right person in the wrong place."

Father Brown, though commonly a silent, was an oddly sympathetic little man, and in those few but endless hours he unconsciously sank deeper into the secrets of Reed House than his professional friend. He had that knack of friendly silence which is so essential to gossip; and saying scarcely a word, he probably obtained from his new acquaintances all that in any case they would have told. The butler indeed was naturally uncommunicative. He betrayed a sullen and almost animal affection for his master; who, he said, had been very badly treated. The chief offender seemed to be his highness's brother, whose name alone would lengthen the old man's lantern jaws and pucker his parrot nose into a sneer. Captain Stephen was a ne'er-do-weel, apparently, and had drained his benevolent brother of hundreds and thousands; forced him to fly from fashionable life and live quietly in this retreat. That was all Paul, the butler, would say, and Paul was obviously a partisan.

The Italian housekeeper was somewhat more communicative, being, as Brown fancied, somewhat less content. Her tone about her master was faintly acid; though not without a certain awe. Flambeau and his friend were standing in the room of the looking-glasses examining the red sketch of the two boys, when the housekeeper swept in swiftly on some domestic errand. It was a peculiarity of this glittering, glass-panelled place that anyone entering was reflected in four or five mirrors at once; and Father Brown, without turning round, stopped in the middle of a sentence of family criticism. But Flambeau, who had his face close up to the picture, was already saying in a loud voice, "The brothers Saradine, I suppose. They both look innocent enough. It would be hard to say which is the good brother and which the bad." Then, realising the lady's presence, he turned the conversation with some triviality, and strolled out into the garden. But Father Brown still gazed steadily at the red crayon sketch; and Mrs. Anthony still gazed steadily at Father Brown.

She had large and tragic brown eyes, and her olive face glowed darkly with a curious and painful wonder—as of one doubtful of a stranger's identity or purpose. Whether the little priest's coat and creed touched some southern memories of confession, or whether she fancied he knew more than he did, she said to him in a low voice as to a fellow plotter, "He is right enough in one way, your friend. He says it would be hard to pick out the good and bad brothers. Oh, it would be hard, it would be mighty hard, to pick out the good one."

"I don't understand you," said Father Brown, and began to move away.

The woman took a step nearer to him, with thunderous brows and a sort of savage stoop, like a bull lowering his horns.

"There isn't a good one," she hissed. "There was badness enough in the captain taking all that money, but I don't think there was much goodness in the prince giving it. The captain's not the only one with something against him."

A light dawned on the cleric's averted face, and his mouth formed silently the word "blackmail." Even as he did so the woman turned an abrupt white face over her shoulder and almost fell. The door had opened soundlessly and the pale Paul stood like a ghost in the doorway. By the weird trick of the reflecting walls, it seemed as if five Pauls had entered by five doors simultaneously.

"His Highness," he said, "has just arrived."

In the same flash the figure of a man had passed outside the first window, crossing the sunlit pane like a lighted stage. An instant later he passed at the second window and the many mirrors repainted in successive frames the same eagle profile and marching figure. He was erect and alert, but his hair was white and his complexion of an odd ivory yellow. He had that short, curved Roman nose which generally goes with long, lean cheeks and chin, but these were partly masked by moustache and imperial. The moustache was much darker than the beard, giving an effect slightly theatrical, and he was dressed up to the same dashing part, having a white top hat, an orchid in his coat, a yellow waistcoat and yellow gloves which he flapped and swung as he walked. When he came round to the front door they heard the stiff Paul open it, and heard the new arrival say cheerfully, "Well, you see I have come." The stiff Mr. Paul bowed and answered in his inaudible manner; for a few minutes their conversation could not be heard. Then the butler said, "Everything is at your disposal"; and the glove-flapping Prince Saradine came gaily into the room to greet them. They beheld once more that spectral scene—five princes entering a room with five doors.

The prince put the white hat and yellow gloves on the table and offered his hand quite cordially.

"Delighted to see you here, Mr. Flambeau," he said. "Knowing you very well by reputation, if that's not an indiscreet remark."

"Not at all," answered Flambeau, laughing. "I am not sensitive. Very few reputations are gained by unsullied virtue."

The prince flashed a sharp look at him to see if the retort had any personal point; then he laughed also and offered chairs to everyone, including himself.

"Pleasant little place, this, I think," he said with a detached air. "Not much to do, I fear; but the fishing is really good."
The priest, who was staring at him with the grave stare of a baby, was haunted by some fancy that escaped definition. He looked at the grey, carefully curled hair, yellow white visage, and slim, somewhat foppish figure. These were not unnatural, though perhaps a shade pronounced, like the outfit of a figure behind the footlights. The nameless interest lay in something else, in the very framework of the face; Brown was tormented with a half memory of having seen it somewhere before. The man looked like some old friend of his dressed up. Then he suddenly remembered the mirrors, and put his fancy down to some psychological effect of that multiplication of human masks.

Prince Saradine distributed his social attentions between his guests with great gaiety and tact. Finding the detective of a sporting turn and eager to employ his holiday, he guided Flambeau and Flambeau's boat down to the best fishing spot in the stream, and was back in his own canoe in twenty minutes to join Father Brown in the library and plunge equally politely into the priest's more philosophic pleasures. He seemed to know a great deal both about the fishing and the books, though of these not the most edifying; he spoke five or six languages, though chiefly the slang of each. He had evidently lived in varied cities and very motley societies, for some of his cheerfulest stories were about gambling hells and opium dens, Australian bushrangers or Italian brigands. Father Brown knew that the once-celebrated Saradine had spent his last few years in almost ceaseless travel, but he had not guessed that the travels were so disreputable or so amusing.

Indeed, with all his dignity of a man of the world, Prince Saradine radiated to such sensitive observers as the priest, a certain atmosphere of the restless and even the unreliable. His face was fastidious, but his eye was wild; he had little nervous tricks, like a man shaken by drink or drugs, and he neither had, nor professed to have, his hand on the helm of household affairs. All these were left to the two old servants, especially to the butler, who was plainly the central pillar of the house. Mr. Paul, indeed, was not so much a butler as a sort of steward or, even, chamberlain; he dined privately, but with almost as much pomp as his master; he was feared by all the servants; and he consulted with the prince decorously, but somewhat unbendingly—rather as if he were the prince's solicitor. The sombre housekeeper was a mere shadow in comparison; indeed, she seemed to efface herself and wait only on the butler, and Brown heard no more of those volcanic whispers which had half told him of the younger brother who blackmailed the elder. Whether the prince was really being thus bled by the absent captain, he could not be certain, but there was something insecure and secretive about Saradine that made the tale by no means incredible.

When they went once more into the long hall with the windows and the mirrors, yellow evening was dropping over the waters and the willowy banks; and a bittern sounded in the distance like an elf upon his dwarfish drum. The same singular sentiment of some sad and evil fairyland crossed the priest's mind again like a little grey cloud. "I wish Flambeau were back," he muttered.

"Do you believe in doom?" asked the restless Prince Saradine suddenly.

"No," answered his guest. "I believe in Doomsday."

The prince turned from the window and stared at him in a singular manner, his face in shadow against the sunset. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"I mean that we here are on the wrong side of the tapestry," answered Father Brown. "The things that happen here do not seem to mean anything; they mean something somewhere else. Somewhere else retribution will come on the real offender. Here it often seems to fall on the wrong person."

The prince made an inexplicable noise like an animal; in his shadowed face the eyes were shining queerly. A new and shrewd thought exploded silently in the other's mind. Was there another meaning in Saradine's blend of brilliancy and abruptness? Was the prince—Was he perfectly sane? He was repeating, "The wrong person—the wrong person," many more times than was natural in a social exclamation.

Then Father Brown awoke tardily to a second truth. In the mirrors before him he could see the silent door standing open, and the silent Mr. Paul standing in it, with his usual pallid impassiveness.

"I thought it better to announce at once," he said, with the same stiff respectfulness as of an old family lawyer, "a boat rowed by six men has come to the landing-stage, and there's a gentleman sitting in the stern."

"A boat!" repeated the prince; "a gentleman?" and he rose to his feet.

There was a startled silence punctuated only by the odd noise of the bird in the sedge; and then, before anyone could speak again, a new face and figure passed in profile round the three sunlit windows, as the prince had passed an hour or two before. But except for the accident that both outlines were aquiline, they had little in common. Instead of the new white topper of Saradine, was a black one of antiquated or foreign shape; under it was a young and very solemn face, clean shaven, blue about its resolute chin, and carrying a faint suggestion of the young Napoleon. The association was assisted by something old and odd about the whole get-up, as of a man who had never troubled to change the fashions of his fathers. He had a shabby blue frock coat, a red, soldierly looking waistcoat, and a kind of coarse white trousers common among the early Victorians, but strangely incongruous today. From all this old clothes-shop his olive face stood out strangely young and monstrously sincere.
"The deuce!" said Prince Saradine, and clapping on his white hat he went to the front door himself, flinging it open on the sunset garden.

By that time the new-comer and his followers were drawn up on the lawn like a small stage army. The six boatmen had pulled the boat well up on shore, and were guarding it almost menacingly, holding their oars erect like spears. They were swarthy men, and some of them wore earrings. But one of them stood forward beside the olive-faced young man in the red waistcoat, and carried a large black case of unfamiliar form.

"Your name," said the young man, "is Saradine?"

Saradine assented rather negligently.

The new-comer had dull, dog-like brown eyes, as different as possible from the restless and glittering grey eyes of the prince. But once again Father Brown was tortured with a sense of having seen somewhere a replica of the face; and once again he remembered the repetitions of the glass-panelled room, and put down the coincidence to that. "Confound this crystal palace!" he muttered. "One sees everything too many times. It's like a dream."

"If you are Prince Saradine," said the young man, "I may tell you that my name is Antonelli."

"Antonelli," repeated the prince languidly. "Somehow I remember the name."

"Permit me to present myself," said the young Italian.

With his left hand he politely took off his old-fashioned top-hat; with his right he caught Prince Saradine so ringing a crack across the face that the white top hat rolled down the steps and one of the blue flower-pots rocked upon its pedestal.

The prince, whatever he was, was evidently not a coward; he sprang at his enemy's throat and almost bore him backwards to the grass. But his enemy extricated himself with a singularly inappropriate air of hurried politeness.

"That is all right," he said, panting and in halting English. "I have insulted. I will give satisfaction. Marco, open the case."

The man beside him with the earrings and the big black case proceeded to unlock it. He took out of it two long Italian rapiers, with splendid steel hilts and blades, which he planted point downwards in the lawn. The strange young man standing facing the entrance with his yellow and vindictive face, the two swords standing up in the turf like two crosses in a cemetery, and the line of the ranked towers behind, gave it all an odd appearance of being some barbaric court of justice. But everything else was unchanged, so sudden had been the interruption. The sunset gold still glowed on the lawn, and the bittern still boomed as announcing some small but dreadful destiny.

"Prince Saradine," said the man called Antonelli, "when I was an infant in the cradle you killed my father and stole my mother; my father was the more fortunate. You did not kill him fairly, as I am going to kill you. You and my wicked mother took him driving to a lonely pass in Sicily, flung him down a cliff, and went on your way. I could imitate you if I chose, but imitating you is too vile. I have followed you all over the world, and you have always fled from me. But this is the end of the world--and of you. I have you now, and I give you the chance you never gave my father. Choose one of those swords."

Prince Saradine, with contracted brows, seemed to hesitate a moment, but his ears were still singing with the blow, and he sprang forward and snatched at one of the hilts. Father Brown had also sprung forward, striving to compose the dispute; but he soon found his personal presence made matters worse. Saradine was a French freemason and a fierce atheist, and a priest moved him by the law of contraries. And for the other man neither priest nor layman moved him at all. This young man with the Bonaparte face and the brown eyes was something far sterner than a puritan--a pagan. He was a simple slayer from the morning of the earth; a man of the stone age--a man of stone.

One hope remained, the summoning of the household; and Father Brown ran back into the house. He found, however, that all the under servants had been given a holiday ashore by the autocrat Paul, and that only the sombre Mrs. Anthony moved uneasily about the long rooms. But the moment she turned a ghastly face upon him, he resolved one of the riddles of the house of mirrors. The heavy brown eyes of Antonelli were the heavy brown eyes of Mrs. Anthony; and in a flash he saw half the story.

"Your son is outside," he said without wasting words; "either he or the prince will be killed. Where is Mr. Paul?"

"He is at the landing-stage," said the woman faintly. "He is--he is--signalling for help."

"Mrs. Anthony," said Father Brown seriously, "there is no time for nonsense. My friend has his boat down the river fishing. Your son's boat is guarded by your son's men. There is only this one canoe; what is Mr. Paul doing with it?"

"Santa Maria! I do not know," she said; and swooned all her length on the matted floor.

Father Brown lifted her to a sofa, flung a pot of water over her, shouted for help, and then rushed down to the landing-stage of the little island. But the canoe was already in mid-stream, and old Paul was pulling and pushing it up the river with an energy incredible at his years.

"I will save my master," he cried, his eyes blazing maniacally. "I will save him yet!"
Father Brown could do nothing but gaze after the boat as it struggled up-stream and pray that the old man might waken the little town in time.

"A duel is bad enough," he muttered, rubbing up his rough dust-coloured hair, "but there's something wrong about this duel, even as a duel. I feel it in my bones. But what can it be?"

As he stood staring at the water, a wavering mirror of sunset, he heard from the other end of the island garden a small but unmistakable sound—the cold concussion of steel. He turned his head.

Away on the farthest cape or headland of the long islet, on a strip of turf beyond the last rank of roses, the duellists had already crossed swords. Evening above them was a dome of virgin gold, and, distant as they were, every detail was picked out. They had cast off their coats, but the yellow waistcoat and white hair of Saradine, the red waistcoat and white trousers of Antonelli, glittered in the level light like the colours of the dancing clockwork dolls. The two swords sparkled from point to pommele like two diamond pins. There was something frightful in the two figures appearing so little and so gay. They looked like two butterflies trying to pin each other to a cork.

Father Brown ran as hard as he could, his little legs going like a wheel. But when he came to the field of combat he found he was born too late and too early—too late to stop the strife, under the shadow of the grim Sicilians leaning on their oars, and too early to anticipate any disastrous issue of it. For the two men were singularly well matched, the prince using his skill with a sort of cynical confidence, the Sicilian using his with a murderous care. Few finer fencing matches can ever have been seen in crowded amphitheatres than that which tinkled and sparkled on that forgotten island in the reedy river. The dizzy fight was balanced so long that hope began to revive in the protesting priest; by all common probability Paul must soon come back with the police. It would be some comfort even if Flambeau came back from his fishing, for Flambeau, physically speaking, was worth four other men. But there was no sign of Flambeau, and, what was much queerer, no sign of Paul or the police. No other raft or stick was left to float on; in that lost island in that vast nameless pool, they were cut off as on a rock in the Pacific.

Almost as he had the thought the ringing of the rapiers quickened to a rattle, the prince's arms flew up, and the point shot out behind between his shoulder-blades. He went over with a great whirling movement, almost like one throwing the half of a boy's cart-wheel. The sword flew from his hand like a shooting star, and dived into the distant river. And he himself sank with so earth-shaking a subsidence that he broke a big rose-tree with his body and shook up into the sky a cloud of red earth—like the smoke of some heathen sacrifice. The Sicilian had made blood-offering to the ghost of his father.

The priest was instantly on his knees by the corpse; but only to make too sure that it was a corpse. As he was still trying some last hopeless tests he heard for the first time voices from farther up the river, and saw a police boat shoot up to the landing-stage, with constables and other important people, including the excited Paul. The little priest rose with a distinctly dubious grimace.

"Now, why on earth," he muttered, "why on earth couldn't he have come before?"

Some seven minutes later the island was occupied by an invasion of townsfolk and police, and the latter had put their hands on the victorious duellist, ritually reminding him that anything he said might be used against him.

"I shall not say anything," said the monomaniac, with a wonderful and peaceful face. "I shall never say anything more. I am very happy, and I only want to be hanged."

Then he shut his mouth as they led him away, and it is the strange but certain truth that he never opened it again in this world, except to say "Guilty" at his trial.

Father Brown had stared at the suddenly crowded garden, the arrest of the man of blood, the carrying away of the corpse after its examination by the doctor, rather as one watches the break-up of some ugly dream; he was motionless, like a man in a nightmare. He gave his name and address as a witness, but declined their offer of a boat to the shore after its examination by the doctor, rather as one watches the break-up of some ugly dream; he was motionless, like a man in a nightmare. He gave his name and address as a witness, but declined their offer of a boat to the shore, and remained alone in the island garden, gazing at the broken rose bush and the whole green theatre of that swift and inexplicable tragedy. The light died along the river; mist rose in the marshy banks; a few belated birds flew up to the landing-stage, with constables and other important people, including the excited Paul. The little priest rose with a distinctly dubious grimace.

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Stuck stubbornly in his sub-consciousness (which was an unusually lively one) was an unspeakable certainty that there was something still unexplained. This sense that had clung to him all day could not be fully explained by his fancy about "looking-glass land." Somehow he had not seen the real story, but some game or masque. And yet there was something still unexplained. This sense that had clung to him all day could not be fully explained by his fancy about "looking-glass land." Somehow he had not seen the real story, but some game or masque.
thank God, you're in the same one." And he took the bewildered Flambeau's arm.

As they turned from the landing-stage they came under the eaves of the low bamboo house, and looked in through one of the windows, as they had done on their first arrival. They beheld a lamp-lit interior well calculated to arrest their eyes. The table in the long dining-room had been laid for dinner when Saradine's destroyer had fallen like a stormbolt on the island. And the dinner was now in placid progress, for Mrs. Anthony sat somewhat sullenly at the foot of the table, while at the head of it was Mr. Paul, the major domo, eating and drinking of the best, his blearèd, bluish eyes standing queerly out of his face, his gaunt countenance inscrutable, but by no means devoid of satisfaction.

With a gesture of powerful impatience, Flambeau rattled at the window, wrenched it open, and put an indignant head into the lamp-lit room.

"Well," he cried. "I can understand you may need some refreshment, but really to steal your master's dinner while he lies murdered in the garden--"

"I have stolen a great many things in a long and pleasant life," replied the strange old gentleman placidly; "this dinner is one of the few things I have not stolen. This dinner and this house and garden happen to belong to me."

A thought flashed across Flambeau's face. "You mean to say," he began, "that the will of Prince Saradine--"

"I am Prince Saradine," said the old man, munching a salted almond.

Father Brown, who was looking at the birds outside, jumped as if he were shot, and put in at the window a pale face like a turnip.

"You are what?" he repeated in a shrill voice.

"Paul, Prince Saradine, A vos ordres," said the venerable person politely, lifting a glass of sherry. "I live here very quietly, being a domestic kind of fellow; and for the sake of modesty I am called Mr. Paul, to distinguish me from my unfortunate brother Mr. Stephen. He died, I hear, recently—in the garden. Of course, it is not my fault if enemies pursue him to this place. It is owing to the regrettable irregularity of his life. He was not a domestic character."

He relapsed into silence, and continued to gaze at the opposite wall just above the bowed and sombre head of the woman. They saw plainly the family likeness that had haunted them in the dead man. Then his old shoulders began to heave and shake a little, as if he were choking, but his face did not alter.

"My God!" cried Flambeau after a pause, "he's laughing!"

"Come away," said Father Brown, who was quite white. "Come away from this house of hell. Let us get into an honest boat again."

Night had sunk on rushes and river by the time they had pushed off from the island, and they went down-stream in the dark, warming themselves with two big cigars that glowed like crimson ships' lanterns. Father Brown took his cigar out of his mouth and said:

"I suppose you can guess the whole story now? After all, it's a primitive story. A man had two enemies. He was a wise man. And so he discovered that two enemies are better than one."

"I do not follow that," answered Flambeau.

"Oh, it's really simple," rejoined his friend. "Simple, though anything but innocent. Both the Saradines were scamps, but the prince, the elder, was the sort of scamp that gets to the top, and the younger, the captain, was the sort that sinks to the bottom. This squalid officer fell from beggar to blackmailer, and one ugly day he got his hold upon his brother, the prince. Obviously it was for no light matter, for Prince Paul Saradine was frankly 'fast,' and had no reputation to lose as to the mere sins of society. In plain fact, it was a hanging matter, and Stephen literally had a rope round his brother's neck. He had somehow discovered the truth about the Sicilian affair, and could prove that Paul murdered old Antonelli in the mountains. The captain raked in the hush money heavily for ten years, until even the prince's splendid fortune began to look a little foolish.

"But Prince Saradine bore another burden besides his blood-sucking brother. He knew that the son of Antonelli, a mere child at the time of the murder, had been trained in savage Sicilian loyalty, and lived only to avenge his father, not with the gibbet (for he lacked Stephen's legal proof), but with the old weapons of vendetta. The boy had practised arms with a deadly perfection, and about the time that he was old enough to use them Prince Saradine began, as the society papers said, to travel. The fact is that he began to flee for his life, passing from place to place like a hunted criminal; but with one relentless man upon his trail. That was Prince Paul's position, and by no means a pretty one. The more money he spent on eluding Antonelli the less he had to silence Stephen. The more he gave to silence Stephen the less chance there was of finally escaping Antonelli. Then it was that he showed himself a great man—a genius like Napoleon.

"Instead of resisting his two antagonists, he surrendered suddenly to both of them. He gave way like a Japanese wrestler, and his foes fell prostrate before him. He gave up the race round the world, and he gave up his address to young Antonelli; then he gave up everything to his brother. He sent Stephen money enough for smart clothes and
easy travel, with a letter saying roughly: 'This is all I have left. You have cleaned me out. I still have a little house in Norfolk, with servants and a cellar, and if you want more from me you must take that. Come and take possession if you like, and I will live there quietly as your friend or agent or anything.' He knew that the Sicilian had never seen the Saradine brothers save, perhaps, in pictures; he knew they were somewhat alike, both having grey, pointed beards. Then he shaved his own face and waited. The trap worked. The unhappy captain, in his new clothes, entered the house in triumph as a prince, and walked upon the Sicilian's sword.

"There was one hitch, and it is to the honour of human nature. Evil spirits like Saradine often blunder by never expecting the virtues of mankind. He took it for granted that the Italian's blow, when it came, would be dark, violent and nameless, like the blow it avenged; that the victim would be knifed at night, or shot from behind a hedge, and so die without speech. It was a bad minute for Prince Paul when Antonelli's chivalry proposed a formal duel, with all its possible explanations. It was then that I found him putting off in his boat with wild eyes. He was fleeing, bareheaded, in an open boat before Antonelli should learn who he was.

"But, however agitated, he was not hopeless. He knew the adventurer and he knew the fanatic. It was quite probable that Stephen, the adventurer, would hold his tongue, through his mere histrionic pleasure in playing a part, his lust for clinging to his new cosy quarters, his rascal's trust in luck, and his fine fencing. It was certain that Antonelli, the fanatic, would hold his tongue, and be hanged without telling tales of his family. Paul hung about on the river till he knew the fight was over. Then he roused the town, brought the police, saw his two vanquished enemies taken away forever, and sat down smiling to his dinner."

"Laughing, God help us!" said Flambeau with a strong shudder. "Do they get such ideas from Satan?"

"He got that idea from you," answered the priest.

"God forbid!" ejaculated Flambeau. "From me! What do you mean?"

The priest pulled a visiting-card from his pocket and held it up in the faint glow of his cigar; it was scrawled with green ink.

"Don't you remember his original invitation to you?" he asked, "and the compliment to your criminal exploit? 'That trick of yours,' he says, 'of getting one detective to arrest the other? He has just copied your trick. With an enemy on each side of him, he slipped swiftly out of the way and let them collide and kill each other.'"

Flambeau tore Prince Saradine's card from the priest's hands and rent it savagely in small pieces.

"There's the last of that old skull and crossbones," he said as he scattered the pieces upon the dark and disappearing waves of the stream; "but I should think it would poison the fishes."

The last gleam of white card and green ink was drowned and darkened; a faint and vibrant colour as of morning changed the sky, and the moon behind the grasses grew paler. They drifted in silence.

"Father," said Flambeau suddenly, "do you think it was all a dream?"

The priest shook his head, whether in dissent or agnosticism, but remained mute. A smell of hawthorn and of orchards came to them through the darkness, telling them that a wind was awake; the next moment it swayed their little boat and swelled their sail, and carried them onward down the winding river to happier places and the homes of harmless men.

The Hammer of God

The little village of Bohun Beacon was perched on a hill so steep that the tall spire of its church seemed only like the peak of a small mountain. At the foot of the church stood a smithy, generally red with fires and always littered with hammers and scraps of iron; opposite to this, over a rude cross of cobbled paths, was "The Blue Boar," the only inn of the place. It was upon this crossway, in the lifting of a leaden and silver daybreak, that two brothers met in the street and spoke; though one was beginning the day and the other finishing it. The Rev. and Hon. Wilfred Bohun was very devout, and was making his way to some austere exercises of prayer or contemplation at dawn. Colonel the Hon. Norman Bohun, his elder brother, was by no means devout, and was sitting in evening dress on the bench outside "The Blue Boar," drinking what the philosophic observer was free to regard either as his last glass on Tuesday or his first on Wednesday. The colonel was not particular.

The Bohuns were one of the very few aristocratic families really dating from the Middle Ages, and their pennon had actually seen Palestine. But it is a great mistake to suppose that such houses stand high in chivalric tradition. Few except the poor preserve traditions. Aristocrats live not in traditions but in fashions. The Bohuns had been Mohocks under Queen Anne and Mashers under Queen Victoria. But like more than one of the really ancient houses, they had rotted in the last two centuries into mere drunkards and dandy degenerates, till there had even come a whisper of insanity. Certainly there was something hardly human about the colonel's wolfish pursuit of pleasure, and his chronic resolution not to go home till morning had a touch of the hideous clarity of insomnia. He was a tall, fine animal, elderly, but with hair still startlingly yellow. He would have looked merely blonde and leonine, but his blue eyes were sunk so deep in his face that they looked black. They were a little too close together. He had very long yellow moustaches; on each side of them a fold or furrow from nostril to jaw, so that a sneer seemed cut into
his face. Over his evening clothes he wore a curious pale yellow coat that looked more like a very light dressing
gown than an overcoat, and on the back of his head was stuck an extraordinary broad-brimmed hat of a bright green
colour, evidently some oriental curiosity caught up at random. He was proud of appearing in such incongruous
attire—proud of the fact that he always made them look congruous.

His brother the curate had also the yellow hair and the elegance, but he was buttoned up to the chin in black, and
his face was clean-shaven, cultivated, and a little nervous. He seemed to live for nothing but his religion; but there
were some who said (notably the blacksmith, who was a Presbyterian) that it was a love of Gothic architecture rather
than of God, and that his haunting of the church like a ghost was only another and purer turn of the almost morbid
thirst for beauty which sent his brother raging after women and wine. This charge was doubtful, while the man's
practical piety was indubitable. Indeed, the charge was mostly an ignorant misunderstanding of the love of solitude
and secret prayer, and was founded on his being often found kneeling, not before the altar, but in peculiar places, in
the crypts or gallery, or even in the belfry. He was at the moment about to enter the church through the yard of the
smithy, but stopped and frowned a little as he saw his brother's cavernous eyes staring in the same direction. On the
hypothesis that the colonel was interested in the church he did not waste any speculations. There only remained the
blacksmith's shop, and though the blacksmith was a Puritan and none of his people, Wilfred Bohun had heard some
scandals about a beautiful and rather celebrated wife. He flung a suspicious look across the shed, and the colonel
stood up laughing to speak to him.

"Good morning, Wilfred," he said. "Like a good landlord I am watching sleeplessly over my people. I am going
to call on the blacksmith."

Wilfred looked at the ground, and said: "The blacksmith is out. He is over at Greenford."

"I know," answered the other with silent laughter; "that is why I am calling on him."

"Norman," said the cleric, with his eye on a pebble in the road, "are you ever afraid of thunderbolts?"

"What do you mean?" asked the colonel. "Is your hobby meteorology?"

"I mean," said Wilfred, without looking up, "do you ever think that God might strike you in the street?"

"I beg your pardon," said the colonel; "I see your hobby is folk-lore."

"I know your hobby is blasphemy," retorted the religious man, stung in the one live place of his nature. "But if
you do not fear God, you have good reason to fear man."

The elder raised his eyebrows politely. "Fear man?" he said.

"Barnes the blacksmith is the biggest and strongest man for forty miles round," said the clergyman sternly. "I
know you are no coward or weakling, but he could throw you over the wall."

This struck home, being true, and the lowering line by mouth and nostril darkened and deepened. For a moment
he stood with the heavy sneer on his face. But in an instant Colonel Bohun had recovered his own cruel good
humour and laughed, showing two dog-like front teeth under his yellow moustache. "In that case, my dear Wilfred,"
he said quite carelessly, "it was wise for the last of the Bohuns to come out partially in armour."

And he took off the queer round hat covered with green, showing that it was lined within with steel. Wilfred
recognised it indeed as a light Japanese or Chinese helmet torn down from a trophy that hung in the old family hall.

"It was the first hat to hand," explained his brother airily; "always the nearest hat—and the nearest woman."

"The blacksmith is away at Greenford," said Wilfred quietly; "the time of his return is unsettled."

And with that he turned and went into the church with bowed head, crossing himself like one who wishes to be
quit of an unclean spirit. He was anxious to forget such grossness in the cool twilight of his tall Gothic cloisters; but
on that morning it was fated that his still round of religious exercises should be everywhere arrested by small
shocks. As he entered the church, hitherto always empty at that hour, a kneeling figure rose hastily to its feet and
came towards the full daylight of the doorway. When the curate saw it he stood still with surprise. For the early
worshipper was none other than the village idiot, a nephew of the blacksmith, one who neither would nor could care
for the church or for anything else. He was always called "Mad Joe," and seemed to have no other name; he was a
dark, strong, slouching lad, with a heavy white face, dark straight hair, and a mouth always open. As he passed the
priest, his moon-calf countenance gave no hint of what he had been doing or thinking of. He had never been known
to pray before. What sort of prayers was he saying now? Extraordinary prayers surely.

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blossoms and sapphire sky.

In this place half an hour afterwards he was found by Gibbs, the village cobbler, who had been sent for him in some haste. He got to his feet with promptitude, for he knew that no small matter would have brought Gibbs into such a place at all. The cobbler was, as in many villages, an atheist, and his appearance in church was a shade more extraordinary than Mad Joe's. It was a morning of theological enigmas.

"What is it?" asked Wilfred Bohun rather stiffly, but putting out a trembling hand for his hat.

The atheist spoke in a tone that, coming from him, was quite startledly respectful, and even, as it were, huskily sympathetic.

"You must excuse me, sir," he said in a hoarse whisper, "but we didn't think it right not to let you know at once. I'm afraid a rather dreadful thing has happened, sir. I'm afraid your brother--"

Wilfred clenched his frail hands. "What devilry has he done now?" he cried in voluntary passion.

"Why, sir," said the cobbler, coughing, "I'm afraid he's done nothing, and won't do anything. I'm afraid he's done for. You had really better come down, sir."

The curate followed the cobbler down a short winding stair which brought them out at an entrance rather higher than the street. Bohun saw the tragedy in one glance, flat underneath him like a plan. In the yard of the smithy were standing five or six men mostly in black, one in an inspector's uniform. They included the doctor, the Presbyterian minister, and the priest from the Roman Catholic chapel, to which the blacksmith's wife belonged. The latter was speaking to her, indeed, very rapidly, in an undertone, as she, a magnificent woman with red-gold hair, was sobbing blindly on a bench. Between these two groups, and just clear of the main heap of hammers, lay a man in evening dress, spread-eagled and flat on his face. From the height above Wilfred could have sworn to every item of his costume and appearance, down to the Bohun rings upon his fingers; but the skull was only a hideous splash, like a star of blackness and blood.

Wilfred Bohun gave but one glance, and ran down the steps into the yard. The doctor, who was the family physician, saluted him, but he scarcely took any notice. He could only stammer out: "My brother is dead. What does it mean? What is this horrible mystery?" There was an unhappy silence; and then the cobbler, the most outspoken man present, answered: "Plenty of horror, sir," he said; "but not much mystery."

"What do you mean?" asked Wilfred, with a white face.

"It's plain enough," answered Gibbs. "There is only one man for forty miles round that could have struck such a blow as that, and he's the man that had most reason to."

"We must not prejudge anything," put in the doctor, a tall, black-bearded man, rather nervously; "but it is competent for me to corroborate what Mr. Gibbs says about the nature of the blow, sir; it is an incredible blow. Mr. Gibbs says that only one man in this district could have done it. I should have said myself that nobody could have done it."

A shudder of superstition went through the slight figure of the curate. "I can hardly understand," he said.

"Mr. Bohun," said the doctor in a low voice, "metaphors literally fail me. It is inadequate to say that the skull was smashed to bits like an eggshell. Fragments of bone were driven into the body and the ground like bullets into a mud wall. It was the hand of a giant."

He was silent a moment, looking grimly through his glasses; then he added: "The thing has one advantage--that it clears most people of suspicion at one stroke. If you or I or any normally made man in the country were accused of this crime, we should be acquitted as an infant would be acquitted of stealing the Nelson column."

"That's what I say," repeated the cobbler obstinately; "there's only one man that could have done it, and he's the man that would have done it. Where's Simeon Barnes, the blacksmith?"

"He's over at Greenford," faltered the curate.

"More likely over in France," muttered the cobbler.

"No; he is in neither of those places," said a small and colourless voice, which came from the little Roman priest who had joined the group. "As a matter of fact, he is coming up the road at this moment."

The little priest was not an interesting man to look at, having stubbly brown hair and a round and stolid face. But if he had been as splendid as Apollo no one would have looked at him at that moment. Everyone turned round and peered at the pathway which wound across the plain below, along which was indeed walking, at his own huge stride and with a hammer on his shoulder, Simeon the smith. He was a bony and gigantic man, with deep, dark, sinister eyes and a dark chin beard. He was walking and talking quietly with two other men; and though he was never specially cheerful, he seemed quite at his ease.

"My God!" cried the atheistic cobbler, "and there's the hammer he did it with."

"No," said the inspector, a sensible-looking man with a sandy moustache, speaking for the first time. "There's the hammer he did it with over there by the church wall. We have left it and the body exactly as they are."

All glanced round and the short priest went across and looked down in silence at the tool where it lay. It was one
of the smallest and the lightest of the hammers, and would not have caught the eye among the rest; but on the iron edge of it were blood and yellow hair.

After a silence the short priest spoke without looking up, and there was a new note in his dull voice. "Mr. Gibbs was hardly right," he said, "in saying that there is no mystery. There is at least the mystery of why so big a man should attempt so big a blow with so little a hammer."

"Oh, never mind that," cried Gibbs, in a fever. "What are we to do with Simeon Barnes?"

"Leave him alone," said the priest quietly. "He is coming here of himself. I know those two men with him. They are very good fellows from Greenford, and they have come over about the Presbyterian chapel."

Even as he spoke the tall smith swung round the corner of the church, and strode into his own yard. Then he stood there quite still, and the hammer fell from his hand. The inspector, who had preserved impenetrable propriety, immediately went up to him.

"I won't ask you, Mr. Barnes," he said, "whether you know anything about what has happened here. You are not bound to say. I hope you don't know, and that you will be able to prove it. But I must go through the form of arresting you in the King's name for the murder of Colonel Norman Bohun."

"You are not bound to say anything," said the cobbler in officious excitement. "They've got to prove everything. They haven't proved yet that it is Colonel Bohun, with the head all smashed up like that."

"That won't wash," said the doctor aside to the priest. "That's out of the detective stories. I was the colonel's medical man, and I knew his body better than he did. He had very fine hands, but quite peculiar ones. The second and third fingers were the same length. Oh, that's the colonel right enough."

As he glanced at the brained corpse upon the ground the iron eyes of the motionless blacksmith followed them and rested there also.

"Is Colonel Bohun dead?" said the smith quite calmly. "Then he's damned."

"Don't say anything! Oh, don't say anything," cried the atheist cobbler, dancing about in an ecstasy of admiration of the English legal system. For no man is such a legalist as the good Secularist.

The blacksmith turned on him over his shoulder the august face of a fanatic.

"It's well for you infidels to dodge like foxes because the world's law favours you," he said; "but God guards His own in His pocket, as you shall see this day."

Then he pointed to the colonel and said: "When did this dog die in his sins?"

"Moderate your language," said the doctor.

"Moderate the Bible's language, and I'll moderate mine. When did he die?"

"I saw him alive at six o'clock this morning," stammered Wilfred Bohun.

"God is good," said the smith. "Mr. Inspector, I have not the slightest objection to being arrested. It is you who may object to arresting me. I don't mind leaving the court without a stain on my character. You do mind perhaps leaving the court with a bad set-back in your career."

The solid inspector for the first time looked at the blacksmith with a lively eye; as did everybody else, except the short, strange priest, who was still looking down at the little hammer that had dealt the dreadful blow.

"There are two men standing outside this shop," went on the blacksmith with ponderous lucidity, "good tradesmen in Greenford whom you all know, who will swear that they saw me from before midnight till daybreak and long after in the committee room of our Revival Mission, which sits all night, we save souls so fast. In Greenford itself twenty people could swear to me for all that time. If I were a heathen, Mr. Inspector, I would let you walk on to your downfall. But as a Christian man I feel bound to give you your chance, and ask you whether you will hear my alibi now or in court."

The inspector seemed for the first time disturbed, and said, "Of course I should be glad to clear you altogether now."

The smith walked out of his yard with the same long and easy stride, and returned to his two friends from Greenford, who were indeed friends of nearly everyone present. Each of them said a few words which no one ever thought of disbelieving. When they had spoken, the innocence of Simeon stood up as solid as the great church above them.

One of those silences struck the group which are more strange and insufferable than any speech. Madly, in order to make conversation, the curate said to the Catholic priest:

"You seem very much interested in that hammer, Father Brown."

"Yes, I am," said Father Brown; "why is it such a small hammer?"

The doctor swung round on him.

"By George, that's true," he cried; "who would use a little hammer with ten larger hammers lying about?"

Then he lowered his voice in the curate's ear and said: "Only the kind of person that can't lift a large hammer. It is not a question of force or courage between the sexes. It's a question of lifting power in the shoulders. A bold
woman could commit ten murders with a light hammer and never turn a hair. She could not kill a beetle with a heavy one."

Wilfred Bohun was staring at him with a sort of hypnotised horror, while Father Brown listened with his head a little on one side, really interested and attentive. The doctor went on with more hissing emphasis:

"Why do these idiots always assume that the only person who hates the wife's lover is the wife's husband? Nine times out of ten the person who most hates the wife's lover is the wife. Who knows what insolence or treachery he had shown her--look there!"

He made a momentary gesture towards the red-haired woman on the bench. She had lifted her head at last and the tears were drying on her splendid face. But the eyes were fixed on the corpse with an electric glare that had in it something of idiocy.

The Rev. Wilfred Bohun made a limp gesture as if waving away all desire to know; but Father Brown, dusting off his sleeve some ashes blown from the furnace, spoke in his indifferent way.

"You are like so many doctors," he said; "your mental science is really suggestive. It is your physical science that is utterly impossible. I agree that the woman wants to kill the co-respondent much more than the petitioner does. And I agree that a woman will always pick up a small hammer instead of a big one. But the difficulty is one of physical impossibility. No woman ever born could have smashed a man's skull out flat like that." Then he added reflectively, after a pause: "These people haven't grasped the whole of it. The man was actually wearing an iron helmet, and the blow scattered it like broken glass. Look at that woman. Look at her arms."

Silence held them all up again, and then the doctor said rather sulkily: "Well, I may be wrong; there are objections to everything. But I stick to the main point. No man but an idiot would pick up that little hammer if he could use a big hammer."

With that the lean and quivering hands of Wilfred Bohun went up to his head and seemed to clutch his scanty yellow hair. After an instant they dropped, and he cried: "That was the word I wanted; you have said the word."

Then he continued, mastering his discomposure: "The words you said were, 'No man but an idiot would pick up the small hammer.'"

"Yes," said the doctor. "Well?"

"Well," said the curate, "no man but an idiot did." The rest stared at him with eyes arrested and riveted, and he went on in a febrile and feminine agitation.

"I am a priest," he cried unsteadily, "and a priest should be no shedder of blood. I--I mean that he should bring no one to the gallows. And I thank God that I see the criminal clearly now--because he is a criminal who cannot be brought to the gallows."

"You will not denounce him?" inquired the doctor.

"He would not be hanged if I did denounce him," answered Wilfred with a wild but curiously happy smile. "When I went into the church this morning I found a madman praying there--that poor Joe, who has been wrong all his life. God knows what he prayed; but with such strange folk it is not incredible to suppose that their prayers are all upside down. Very likely a lunatic would pray before killing a man. When I last saw poor Joe he was with my brother. My brother was mocking him."

"By Jove!" cried the doctor, "this is talking at last. But how do you explain--"

The Rev. Wilfred was almost trembling with the excitement of his own glimpse of the truth. "Don't you see; don't you see," he cried feverishly; "that is the only theory that covers both the queer things, that answers both the riddles. The two riddles are the little hammer and the big blow. The smith might have struck the big blow, but would not have chosen the little hammer. His wife would have chosen the little hammer, but she could not have struck the big blow. But the madman might have done both. As for the little hammer--why, he was mad and might have picked up anything. And for the big blow, have you never heard, doctor, that a maniac in his paroxysm may have the strength of ten men?"

The doctor drew a deep breath and then said, "By golly, I believe you've got it."

Father Brown had fixed his eyes on the speaker so long and steadily as to prove that his large grey, ox-like eyes were not quite so insignificant as the rest of his face. When silence had fallen he said with marked respect: "Mr. Bohun, yours is the only theory yet propounded which holds water every way and is essentially unassailable. I think, therefore, that you deserve to be told, on my positive knowledge, that it is not the true one."

And with that the old little man walked away and stared again at the hammer.

"That fellow seems to know more than he ought to," whispered the doctor peevishly to Wilfred. "Those popish priests are deucedly sly."

"No, no," said Bohun, with a sort of wild fatigue. "It was the lunatic. It was the lunatic."

The group of the two clerics and the doctor had fallen away from the more official group containing the inspector and the man he had arrested. Now, however, that their own party had broken up, they heard voices from
the others. The priest looked up quietly and then looked down again as he heard the blacksmith say in a loud voice:

"I hope I've convinced you, Mr. Inspector. I'm a strong man, as you say, but I couldn't have flung my hammer bang here from Greenford. My hammer hasn't got wings that it should come flying half a mile over hedges and fields."

The inspector laughed amicably and said: "No, I think you can be considered out of it, though it's one of the rummiest coincidences I ever saw. I can only ask you to give us all the assistance you can in finding a man as big and strong as yourself. By George! you might be useful, if only to hold him! I suppose you yourself have no guess at the man?"

"I may have a guess," said the pale smith, "but it is not at a man." Then, seeing the scared eyes turn towards his wife on the bench, he put his huge hand on her shoulder and said: "Nor a woman either."

"What do you mean?" asked the inspector jocularly. "You don't think cows use hammers, do you?"

"I think no thing of flesh held that hammer," said the blacksmith in a stifled voice; "mortal speaking, I think the man died alone."

Wilfred made a sudden forward movement and peered at him with burning eyes.

"Do you mean to say, Barnes," came the sharp voice of the cobbler, "that the hammer jumped up of itself and knocked the man down?"

"Oh, you gentlemen may stare and snigger," cried Simeon; "you clergymen who tell us on Sunday in what a stillness the Lord smote Sennacherib. I believe that One who walks invisible in every house defended the honour of mine, and laid the defiler dead before the door of it. I believe the force in that blow was just the force there is in earthquakes, and no force less."

Wilfred said, with a voice utterly undescribable: "I told Norman myself to beware of the thunderbolt."

"That agent is outside my jurisdiction," said the inspector with a slight smile.

"You are not outside His," answered the smith; "see you to it," and, turning his broad back, he went into the house.

The shaken Wilfred was led away by Father Brown, who had an easy and friendly way with him. "Let us get out of this horrid place, Mr. Bohun," he said. "May I look inside your church? I hear it's one of the oldest in England. We take some interest, you know," he added with a comical grimace, "in old English churches."

Wilfred Bohun did not smile, for humour was never his strong point. But he nodded rather eagerly, being only too ready to explain the Gothic splendours to someone more likely to be sympathetic than the Presbyterian blacksmith or the atheist cobbler.

"By all means," he said; "let us go in at this side." And he led the way into the high side entrance at the top of the flight of steps. Father Brown was mounting the first step to follow him when he felt a hand on his shoulder, and turned to behold the dark, thin figure of the doctor, his face darker yet with suspicion.

"Sir," said the physician harshly, "you appear to know some secrets in this black business. May I ask if you are going to keep them to yourself?"

"Why, doctor," answered the priest, smiling quite pleasantly, "there is one very good reason why a man of my trade should keep things to himself when he is not sure of them, and that is that it is so constantly his duty to keep them to himself when he is sure of them. But if you think I have been discourteously reticent with you or anyone, I will go to the extreme limit of my custom. I will give you two very large hints."

"Well, sir?" said the doctor gloomily.

"First," said Father Brown quietly, "the thing is quite in your own province. It is a matter of physical science. The blacksmith is mistaken, not perhaps in saying that the blow was divine, but certainly in saying that it came by a miracle. It was no miracle, doctor, except in so far as man is himself a miracle, with his strange and wicked and yet half-heroic heart. The force that smashed that skull was a force well known to scientists-- one of the most frequently debated of the laws of nature."

The doctor, who was looking at him with frowning intentness, only said: "And the other hint?"

"The other hint is this," said the priest. "Do you remember the blacksmith, though he believes in miracles, talking scornfully of the impossible fairy tale that his hammer had wings and flew half a mile across country?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "I remember that."

"Well," added Father Brown, with a broad smile, "that fairy tale was the nearest thing to the real truth that has been said today." And with that he turned his back and stumped up the steps after the curate.

The Reverend Wilfred, who had been waiting for him, pale and impatient, as if this little delay were the last straw for his nerves, led him immediately to his favourite corner of the church, that part of the gallery closest to the carved roof and lit by the wonderful window with the angel. The little Latin priest explored and admired everything exhaustively, talking cheerfully but in a low voice all the time. When in the course of his investigation he found the side exit and the winding stair down which Wilfred had rushed to find his brother dead, Father Brown ran not down
but up, with the agility of a monkey, and his clear voice came from an outer platform above.

"Come up here, Mr. Bohun," he called. "The air will do you good."

Bohun followed him, and came out on a kind of stone gallery or balcony outside the building, from which one could see the illimitable plain in which their small hill stood, wooded away to the purple horizon and dotted with villages and farms. Clear and square, but quite small beneath them, was the blacksmith's yard, where the inspector still stood taking notes and the corpse still lay like a smashed fly.

"Might be the map of the world, mightn't it?" said Father Brown.

"Yes," said Bohun very gravely, and nodded his head.

Immediately beneath and about them the lines of the Gothic building plunged outwards into the void with a sickening swiftness akin to suicide. There is that element of Titan energy in the architecture of the Middle Ages that, from whatever aspect it be seen, it always seems to be rushing away, like the strong back of some maddened horse. This church was hewn out of ancient and silent stone, bearded with old fungoids and stained with the nests of birds. And yet, when they saw it from below, it sprang like a fountain at the stars; and when they saw it, as now, from above, it poured like a cataract into a voiceless pit. For these two men on the tower were left alone with the most terrible aspect of Gothic; the monstrous foreshortening and disproportion, the dizzy perspectives, the glimpses of great things small and small things great; a topsy-turvydom of stone in the mid-air. Details of stone, enormous by their proximity, were relieved against a pattern of fields and farms, pygmy in their distance. A carved bird or beast at a corner seemed like some vast walking or flying dragon wasting the pastures and villages below. The whole atmosphere was dizzy and dangerous, as if men were upheld in air amid the gyrating wings of colossal genii; and the whole of that old church, as tall and rich as a cathedral, seemed to sit upon the sunlit country like a cloudburst.

"I think there is something rather dangerous about standing on these high places even to pray," said Father Brown. "Heights were made to be looked at, not to be looked from."

"Do you mean that one may fall over," asked Wilfred.

"I mean that one's soul may fall if one's body doesn't," said the other priest.

"I scarcely understand you," remarked Bohun indistinctly.

"Look at that blacksmith, for instance," went on Father Brown calmly; "a good man, but not a Christian—hard, imperious, unforgiving. Well, his Scotch religion was made up by men who prayed on hills and high crags, and learnt to look down on the world more than to look up at heaven. Humility is the mother of giants. One sees great things from the valley; only small things from the peak."

"But he—he didn't do it," said Bohun tremulously.

"No," said the other in an odd voice; "we know he didn't do it."

After a moment he resumed, looking tranquilly out over the plain with his pale grey eyes. "I knew a man," he said, "who began by worshiping with others before the altar, but who grew fond of high and lonely places to pray from, corners or niches in the belfry or the spire. And once in one of those dizzy places, where the whole world seemed to turn under him like a wheel, his brain turned also, and he fancied he was God. So that, though he was a good man, he committed a great crime."

Wilfred's face was turned away, but his bony hands turned blue and white as they tightened on the parapet of stone.

"He thought it was given to him to judge the world and strike down the sinner. He would never have had such a thought if he had been kneeling with other men upon a floor. But he saw all men walking about like insects. He saw one especially strutting just below him, insolent and evident by a bright green hat—a poisonous insect."

Rooks cawed round the corners of the belfry; but there was no other sound till Father Brown went on.

"This also tempted him, that he had in his hand one of the most awful engines of nature; I mean gravitation, that mad and quickening rush by which all earth's creatures fly back to her heart when released. See, the inspector is strutting just below us in the smithy. If I were to toss a pebble over this parapet it would be something like a bullet by the time it struck him. If I were to drop a hammer—even a small hammer—"

Wilfred Bohun threw one leg over the parapet, and Father Brown had him in a minute by the collar.

"Not by that door," he said quite gently; "that door leads to hell."

Bohun staggered back against the wall, and stared at him with frightful eyes.

"How do you know all this?" he cried. "Are you a devil?"

"I am a man," answered Father Brown gravely; "and therefore have all devils in my heart. Listen to me," he said after a short pause. "I know what you did—at least, I can guess the great part of it. When you left your brother you were racked with no unrighteous rage, to the extent even that you snatched up a small hammer, half inclined to kill him with his foulness on his mouth. Recoiling, you thrust it under your buttoned coat instead, and rushed into the church. You pray wildly in many places, under the angel window, upon the platform above, and a higher platform still, from which you could see the colonel's Eastern hat like the back of a green beetle crawling about. Then
something snapped in your soul, and you let God's thunderbolt fall."

Wilfred put a weak hand to his head, and asked in a low voice: "How did you know that his hat looked like a green beetle?"

"Oh, that," said the other with the shadow of a smile, "that was common sense. But hear me further. I say I know all this; but no one else shall know it. The next step is for you; I shall take no more steps; I will seal this with the seal of confession. If you ask me why, there are many reasons, and only one that concerns you. I leave things to you because you have not yet gone very far wrong, as assassins go. You did not help to fix the crime on the smith when it was easy; or on his wife, when that was easy. You tried to fix it on the imbecile because you knew that he could not suffer. That was one of the gleams that it is my business to find in assassins. And now come down into the village, and go your own way as free as the wind; for I have said my last word."

They went down the winding stairs in utter silence, and came out into the sunlight by the smithy. Wilfred Bohun carefully unlatched the wooden gate of the yard, and going up to the inspector, said: "I wish to give myself up; I have killed my brother."

The Eye of Apollo

That singular smoky sparkle, at once a confusion and a transparency, which is the strange secret of the Thames, was changing more and more from its grey to its glittering extreme as the sun climbed to the zenith over Westminster, and two men crossed Westminster Bridge. One man was very tall and the other very short; they might even have been fantastically compared to the arrogant clock-tower of Parliament and the humbler humped shoulders of the Abbey, for the short man was in clerical dress. The official description of the tall man was M. Hercule Flambeau, private detective, and he was going to his new offices in a new pile of flats facing the Abbey entrance. The official description of the short man was the Reverend J. Brown, attached to St. Francis Xavier's Church, Camberwell, and he was coming from a Camberwell deathbed to see the new offices of his friend.

The building was American in its sky-scraping altitude, and American also in the oiled elaboration of its machinery of telephones and lifts. But it was barely finished and still understaffed; only three tenants had moved in; the office just above Flambeau was occupied, as also was the office just below him; the two floors above that and the three floors below were entirely bare. But the first glance at the new tower of flats caught something much more arresting. Save for a few relics of scaffolding, the one glaring object was erected outside the office just above Flambeau's. It was an enormous gilt effigy of the human eye, surrounded with rays of gold, and taking up as much room as two or three of the office windows.

"What on earth is that?" asked Father Brown, and stood still. "Oh, a new religion," said Flambeau, laughing; "one of those new religions that forgive your sins by saying you never had any. Rather like Christian Science, I should think. The fact is that a fellow calling himself Kalon (I don't know what his name is, except that it can't be that) has taken the flat just above me. I have two lady typewriters underneath me, and this enthusiastic old humbug on top. He calls himself the New Priest of Apollo, and he worships the sun."

"Let him look out," said Father Brown. "The sun was the cruellest of all the gods. But what does that monstrous eye mean?"

"As I understand it, it is a theory of theirs," answered Flambeau, "that a man can endure anything if his mind is quite steady. Their two great symbols are the sun and the open eye; for they say that if a man were really healthy he could stare at the sun."

"If a man were really healthy," said Father Brown, "he would not bother to stare at it."

"Well, that's all I can tell you about the new religion," went on Flambeau carelessly. "It claims, of course, that it can cure all physical diseases."

"Can it cure the one spiritual disease?" asked Father Brown, with a serious curiosity.

"And what is the one spiritual disease?" asked Flambeau, smiling.

"Oh, thinking one is quite well," said his friend.

Flambeau was more interested in the quiet little office below him than in the flamboyant temple above. He was a lucid Southerner, incapable of conceiving himself as anything but a Catholic or an atheist; and new religions of a bright and pallid sort were not much in his line. But humanity was always in his line, especially when it was good-looking; moreover, the ladies downstairs were characters in their way. The office was kept by two sisters, both slight and dark, one of them tall and striking. She had a dark, eager and aquiline profile, and was one of those women whom one always thinks of in profile, as of the clean-cut edge of some weapon. She seemed to cleave her way through life. She had eyes of startling brilliancy, but it was the brilliancy of steel rather than of diamonds; and her straight, slim figure was a shade too stiff for its grace. Her younger sister was like her shortened shadow, a little greyer, paler, and more insignificant. They both wore a business-like black, with little masculine cuffs and collars. There are thousands of such curt, strenuous ladies in the offices of London, but the interest of these lay rather in their real than their apparent position.
For Pauline Stacey, the elder, was actually the heiress of a crest and half a county, as well as great wealth; she had been brought up in castles and gardens, before a frigid fierceness (peculiar to the modern woman) had driven her to what she considered a harsher and a higher existence. She had not, indeed, surrendered her money; in that there would have been a romantic or monkish abandon quite alien to her masterful utilitarianism. She held her wealth, she would say, for use upon practical social objects. Part of it she had put into her business, the nucleus of a model typewriting emporium; part of it was distributed in various leagues and causes for the advancement of such work among women. How far Joan, her sister and partner, shared this slightly prosaic idealism no one could be very sure. But she followed her leader with a dog-like affection which was somehow more attractive, with its touch of tragedy, than the hard, high spirits of the elder. For Pauline Stacey had nothing to say to tragedy; she was understood to deny its existence.

Her rigid rapidity and cold impatience had amused Flambeau very much on the first occasion of his entering the flats. He had lingered outside the lift in the entrance hall waiting for the lift-boy, who generally conducts strangers to the various floors. But this bright-eyed falcon of a girl had openly refused to endure such official delay. She said sharply that she knew all about the lift, and was not dependent on boys--or men either. Though her flat was only three floors above, she managed in the few seconds of ascent to give Flambeau a great many of her fundamental views in an off-hand manner; they were to the general effect that she was a modern working woman and loved modern working machinery. Her bright black eyes blazed with abstract anger against those who rebuke mechanic science and ask for the return of romance. Everyone, she said, ought to be able to manage machines, just as she could manage the lift. She seemed almost to resent the fact of Flambeau opening the lift-door for her; and that gentleman went up to his own apartments smiling with somewhat mingled feelings at the memory of such spit-fire self-dependence.

She certainly had a temper, of a snappy, practical sort; the gestures of her thin, elegant hands were abrupt or even destructive.

Once Flambeau entered her office on some typewriting business, and found she had just flung a pair of spectacles belonging to her sister into the middle of the floor and stamped on them. She was already in the rapids of an ethical tirade about the "sickly medical notions" and the morbid admission of weakness implied in such an apparatus. She dared her sister to bring such artificial, unhealthy rubbish into the place again. She asked if she was expected to wear wooden legs or false hair or glass eyes; and as she spoke her eyes sparkled like the terrible crystal.

Flambeau, quite bewildered with this fanaticism, could not refrain from asking Miss Pauline (with direct French logic) why a pair of spectacles was a more morbid sign of weakness than a lift, and why, if science might help us in the one effort, it might not help us in the other.

"That is so different," said Pauline Stacey, loftily. "Batteries and motors and all those things are marks of the force of man--yes, Mr. Flambeau, and the force of woman, too! We shall take our turn at these great engines that devour distance and defy time. That is high and splendid--that is really science. But these nasty props and plasters the doctors sell--why, they are just badges of poltroonery. Doctors stick on legs and arms as if we were born cripples and sick slaves. But I was free-born, Mr. Flambeau! People only think they need these things because they have been trained in fear instead of being trained in power and courage, just as the silly nurses tell children not to stare at the sun, and so they can't do it without blinking. But why among the stars should there be one star I may not see? The sun is not my master, and I will open my eyes and stare at him whenever I choose."

"Your eyes," said Flambeau, with a foreign bow, "will dazzle the sun." He took pleasure in complimenting this strange stiff beauty, partly because it threw her a little off her balance. But as he went upstairs to his floor he drew a deep breath and whistled, saying to himself: "So she has got into the hands of that conjurer upstairs with his golden eye." For, little as he knew or cared about the new religion of Kalon, he had heard of his special notion about sun-gazing.

He soon discovered that the spiritual bond between the floors above and below him was close and increasing. The man who called himself Kalon was a magnificent creature, worthy, in a physical sense, to be the pontiff of Apollo. He was nearly as tall even as Flambeau, and very much better looking, with a golden beard, strong blue eyes, and a mane flung back like a lion's. In structure he was the blonde beast of Nietzsche, but all this animal beauty was heightened, brightened and softened by genuine intellect and spirituality. If he looked like one of the great Saxon kings, he looked like one of the kings that were also saints. And this despite the cockney incongruity of his surroundings; the fact that he had an office half-way up a building in Victoria Street; that the clerk (a commonplace youth in cuffs and collars) sat in the outer room, between him and the corridor; that his name was on a brass plate, and the gilt emblem of his creed hung above his street, like the advertisement of an oculist. All this vulgarity could not take away from the man called Kalon the vivid oppression and inspiration that came from his soul and body. When all was said, a man in the presence of this quack did feel in the presence of a great man. Even in the loose jacket-suit of linen that he wore as a workshop dress in his office he was a fascinating and formidable
figure; and when robed in the white vestments and crowned with the golden circlet, in which he daily saluted the sun, he really looked so splendid that the laughter of the street people sometimes died suddenly on their lips. For three times in the day the new sun-worshipper went out on his little balcony, in the face of all Westminster, to say some litany to his shining lord: once at daybreak, once at sunset, and once at the shock of noon. And it was while the shock of noon still shook faintly from the towers of Parliament and parish church that Father Brown, the friend of Flambeau, first looked up and saw the white priest of Apollo.

Flambeau had seen quite enough of these daily salutations of Phoebus, and plunged into the porch of the tall building without even looking for his clerical friend to follow. But Father Brown, whether from a professional interest in ritual or a strong individual interest in tomfoolery, stopped and stared up at the balcony of the sun-worshipper, just as he might have stopped and stared up at a Punch and Judy. Kalon the Prophet was already erect, with argent garments and uplifted hands, and the sound of his strangely penetrating voice could be heard all the way down the busy street uttering his solar litanies. He was already in the middle of it; his eyes were fixed upon the flaming disc. It is doubtful if he saw anything or anyone on this earth; it is substantially certain that he did not see a stunted, round-faced priest who, in the crowd below, looked up at him with blinking eyes. That was perhaps the most startling difference between even these two far divided men. Father Brown could not look at anything without blinking; but the priest of Apollo could look on the blaze at noon without a quiver of the eyelid.

"O sun," cried the prophet, "O star that art too great to be allowed among the stars! O fountain that flowest quietly in that secret spot that is called space. White Father of all white unwearied things, white flames and white flowers and white peaks. Father, who art more innocent than all thy most innocent and quiet children; primal purity, into the peace of which--"

A rush and crash like the reversed rush of a rocket was cloven with a strident and incessant yelling. Five people rushed into the gate of the mansions as three people rushed out, and for an instant they all deafened each other. The sense of some utterly abrupt horror seemed for a moment to fill half the street with bad news--bad news that was all the worse because no one knew what it was. Two figures remained still after the crash of commotion: the fair priest of Apollo on the balcony above, and the ugly priest of Christ below him.

At last the tall figure and titanic energy of Flambeau appeared in the doorway of the mansions and dominated the little mob. Talking at the top of his voice like a fog-horn, he told somebody or anybody to go for a surgeon; and as he turned back into the dark and thronged entrance his friend Father Brown dipped in insignificantly after him. Even as he ducked and dived through the crowd he could still hear the magnificent melody and monotony of the solar priest still calling on the happy god who is the friend of fountains and flowers.

Father Brown found Flambeau and some six other people standing round the enclosed space into which the lift commonly descended. But the lift had not descended. Something else had descended; something that ought to have come by a lift.

For the last four minutes Flambeau had looked down on it; had seen the brained and bleeding figure of that beautiful woman who denied the existence of tragedy. He had never had the slightest doubt that it was Pauline Stacey; and, though he had sent for a doctor, he had not the slightest doubt that she was dead.

He could not remember for certain whether he had liked her or disliked her; there was so much both to like and dislike. But she had been a person to him, and the unbearable pathos of details and habit stabbed him with all the small daggers of bereavement. He remembered her pretty face and priggish speeches with a sudden secret vividness. But she had been a person to him, and the unbearable pathos of details and habit stabbed him with all the small daggers of bereavement.

"Then, if he has been up there all the time, who can have done it?"

"Perhaps," said the other, "we might go upstairs and find out. We have half an hour before the police will move."

Leaving the body of the slain heiress in charge of the surgeons, Flambeau dashed up the stairs to the typewriting office, found it utterly empty, and then dashed up to his own. Having entered that, he abruptly returned with a new and white face to his friend.

"Her sister," he said, with an unpleasant seriousness, "her sister seems to have gone out for a walk."

Father Brown nodded. "Or, she may have gone up to the office of that sun man," he said. "If I were you I should just verify that, and then let us all talk it over in your office. No," he added suddenly, as if remembering something, "shall I ever get over that stupidity of mine? Of course, in their office downstairs."

Flambeau stared; but he followed the little father downstairs to the empty flat of the Staceys, where that
impenetrable pastor took a large red-leather chair in the very entrance, from which he could see the stairs and landings, and waited. He did not wait very long. In about four minutes three figures descended the stairs, alike only in their solemnity. The first was Joan Stacey, the sister of the dead woman—evidently she had been upstairs in the temporary temple of Apollo; the second was the priest of Apollo himself, his litany finished, sweeping down the empty stairs in utter magnificence—something in his white robes, beard and parted hair had the look of Dore's Christ leaving the Pretorium; the third was Flambeau, black browsed and somewhat bewildered.

Miss Joan Stacey, dark, with a drawn face and hair prematurely touched with grey, walked straight to her own desk and set out her papers with a practical flap. The mere action rallied everyone else to sanity. If Miss Joan Stacey was a criminal, she was a cool one. Father Brown regarded her for some time with an odd little smile, and then, without taking his eyes off her, addressed himself to somebody else.

"Prophet," he said, presumably addressing Kalon, "I wish you would tell me a lot about your religion."

"I shall be proud to do it," said Kalon, inclining his still crowned head, "but I am not sure that I understand."

"Why, it's like this," said Father Brown, in his frankly doubtful way: "We are taught that if a man has really bad first principles, that must be partly his fault. But, for all that, we can make some difference between a man who insults his quite clear conscience and a man with a conscience more or less clouded with sophistries. Now, do you really think that murder is wrong at all?"

"Is this an accusation?" asked Kalon very quietly.

"No," answered Brown, equally gently, "it is the speech for the defence."

In the long and startled stillness of the room the prophet of Apollo slowly rose; and really it was like the rising of the sun. He filled that room with his light and life in such a manner that a man felt he could as easily have filled Salisbury Plain. His robed form seemed to hang the whole room with classic draperies; his epic gesture seemed to extend it into grander perspectives, till the little black figure of the modern cleric seemed to be a fault and an intrusion, a round, black blot upon some splendour of Hellas.

"We meet at last, Caiaphas," said the prophet. "Your church and mine are the only realities on this earth. I adore the sun, and you the darkening of the sun; you are the priest of the dying and I of the living God. Your present work of suspicion and slander is worthy of your coat and creed. All your church is but a black police; you are only spies and detectives seeking to tear from men confessions of guilt, whether by treachery or torture. You would convict men of crime, I would convict them of innocence. You would convince them of sin, I would convince them of virtue.

"Reader of the books of evil, one more word before I blow away your baseless nightmares for ever. Not even faintly could you understand how little I care whether you can convict me or no. The things you call disgrace and horrible hanging are to me no more than an ogre in a child's toy-book to a man once grown up. You said you were offering the speech for the defence. I care so little for the cloudland of this life that I will offer you the speech for the prosecution. There is but one thing that can be said against me in this matter, and I will say it myself. The woman that is dead was my love and my bride; not after such manner as your tin chapels call lawful, but by a law purer and sterner than you will ever understand. She and I walked another world from yours, and trod palaces of crystal while you were plodding through tunnels and corridors of brick. Well, I know that policemen, theological and otherwise, always fancy that where there has been love there must soon be hatred; so there you have the first point made for the prosecution. But the second point is stronger; I do not grudge it you. Not only is it true that Pauline loved me, but it is also true that this very morning, before she died, she wrote at that table a will leaving me and my new church half a million. Come, where are the handcuffs? Do you suppose I care what foolish things you do with me? Penal servitude will only be like waiting for her at a wayside station. The gallows will only be going to her in a headlong car."

He spoke with the brain-shaking authority of an orator, and Flambeau and Joan Stacey stared at him in amazed admiration. Father Brown's face seemed to express nothing but extreme distress; he looked at the ground with one wrinkle of pain across his forehead. The prophet of the sun leaned easily against the mantelpiece and resumed:

"In a few words I have put before you the whole case against me—the only possible case against me. In fewer words still I will blow it to pieces, so that not a trace of it remains. As to whether I have committed this crime, the truth is in one sentence: I could not have committed this crime. Pauline Stacey fell from this floor to the ground at five minutes past twelve. A hundred people will go into the witness-box and say that I was standing out upon the balcony of my own rooms above from just before the stroke of noon to a quarter-past—the usual period of my public prayers. My clerk (a respectable youth from Clapham, with no sort of connection with me) will swear that he sat in my outer office all the morning, and that no communication passed through. He will swear that I arrived a full ten minutes before the hour, fifteen minutes before any whisper of the accident, and that I did not leave the office or the balcony all that time. No one ever had so complete an alibi; I could subpoena half Westminster. I think you had better put the handcuffs away again. The case is at an end."
"But last of all, that no breath of this idiotic suspicion remain in the air, I will tell you all you want to know. I believe I do know how my unhappy friend came by her death. You can, if you choose, blame me for it, or my faith and philosophy at least; but you certainly cannot lock me up. It is well known to all students of the higher truths that certain adepts and illuminati have in history attained the power of levitation— that is, of being self-sustained upon the empty air. It is but a part of that general conquest of matter which is the main element in our occult wisdom. Poor Pauline was of an impulsive and ambitious temper. I think, to tell the truth, she thought herself somewhat deeper in the mysteries than she was; and she has often said to me, as we went down in the lift together, that if one's will were strong enough, one could float down as harmlessly as a feather. I solemnly believe that in some ecstasy of noble thoughts she attempted the miracle. Her will, or faith, must have failed her at the crucial instant, and the lower law of matter had its horrible revenge. There is the whole story, gentlemen, very sad and, as you think, very presumptuous and wicked, but certainly not criminal or in any way connected with me. In the short-hand of the police-courts, you had better call it suicide. I shall always call it heroic failure for the advance of science and the slow scaling of heaven."

It was the first time Flambeau had ever seen Father Brown vanquished. He still sat looking at the ground, with a painful and corrugated brow, as if in shame. It was impossible to avoid the feeling which the prophet's winged words had fanned, that here was a sullen, professional suspecter of men overwhelmed by a prouder and purer spirit of natural liberty and health. At last he said, blinking as if in bodily distress: "Well, if that is so, sir, you need do no more than take the testamentary paper you spoke of and go. I wonder where the poor lady left it."

"It will be over there on her desk by the door, I think," said Kalon, with that massive innocence of manner that seemed to acquit him wholly. "She told me specially she would write it this morning, and I actually saw her writing as I went up in the lift to my own room."

"Was her door open then?" asked the priest, with his eye on the corner of the matting.

"Yes," said Kalon calmly.

"Ah! it has been open ever since," said the other, and resumed his silent study of the mat.

"There is a paper over here," said the grim Miss Joan, in a somewhat singular voice. She had passed over to her sister's desk by the doorway, and was holding a sheet of blue foolscap in her hand. There was a sour smile on her face that seemed unfit for such a scene or occasion, and Flambeau looked at her with a darkening brow.

Kalon the prophet stood away from the paper with that loyal unconsciousness that had carried him through. But Flambeau took it out of the lady's hand, and read it with the utmost amazement. It did, indeed, begin in the formal manner of a will, but after the words "I give and bequeath all of which I die possessed" the writing abruptly stopped with a set of scratches, and there was no trace of the name of any legatee. Flambeau, in wonder, handed this truncated testament to his clerical friend, who glanced at it and silently gave it to the priest of the sun.

An instant afterwards that pontiff, in his splendid sweeping draperies, had crossed the room in two great strides, and was towering over Joan Stacey, his blue eyes standing from his head.

"What monkey tricks have you been playing here?" he cried. "That's not all Pauline wrote."

They were startled to hear him speak in quite a new voice, with a Yankee shrillness in it; all his grandeur and good English had fallen from him like a cloak.

"That is the only thing on her desk," said Joan, and confronted him steadfastly with the same smile of evil favour. Of a sudden the man broke out into blasphemies and cataracts of incredulous words. There was something shocking about the dropping of his mask; it was like a man's real face falling off.

"See here!" he cried in broad American, when he was breathless with cursing, "I may be an adventurer, but I guess you're a murderess. Yes, gentlemen, here's your death explained, and without any levitation. The poor girl is writing a will in my favour; her cursed sister comes in, struggles for the pen, drags her to the well, and throws her down before she can finish it. Sakes! I reckon we want the handcuffs after all."

"As you have truly remarked," replied Joan, with ugly calm, "your clerk is a very respectable young man, who knows the nature of an oath; and he will swear in any court that I was up in your office arranging some typewriting work for five minutes before and five minutes after my sister fell. Mr. Flambeau will tell you that he found me there."

There was a silence.

"Why, then," cried Flambeau, "Pauline was alone when she fell, and it was suicide!"

"She was alone when she fell," said Father Brown, "but it was not suicide."

"Then how did she die?" asked Flambeau impatiently.

"She was murdered."

"But she was alone," objected the detective.

"She was murdered when she was all alone," answered the priest.

All the rest stared at him, but he remained sitting in the same old dejected attitude, with a wrinkle in his round
forehead and an appearance of impersonal shame and sorrow; his voice was colourless and sad.

"What I want to know," cried Kalon, with an oath, "is when the police are coming for this bloody and wicked sister. She's killed her flesh and blood; she's robbed me of half a million that was just as sacredly mine as--"

"Come, come, prophet," interrupted Flambeau, with a kind of sneer; "remember that all this world is a cloudland."

The hierophant of the sun-god made an effort to climb back on his pedestal. "It is not the mere money," he cried, "though that would equip the cause throughout the world. It is also my beloved one's wishes. To Pauline all this was holy. In Pauline's eyes--"

Father Brown suddenly sprang erect, so that his chair fell over flat behind him. He was deathly pale, yet he seemed fired with a hope; his eyes shone.

"That's it!" he cried in a clear voice. "That's the way to begin. In Pauline's eyes--"

The tall prophet retreated before the tiny priest in an almost mad disorder. "What do you mean? How dare you?" he cried repeatedly.

"In Pauline's eyes," repeated the priest, his own shining more and more. "Go on--in God's name, go on. The foulest crime the fiends ever prompted feels lighter after confession; and I implore you to confess. Go on, go on--in Pauline's eyes--"

"Let me go, you devil!" thundered Kalon, struggling like a giant in bonds. "Who are you, you cursed spy, to weave your spiders' webs round me, and peep and peer? Let me go."

"Shall I stop him?" asked Flambeau, bounding towards the exit, for Kalon had already thrown the door wide open.

"No; let him pass," said Father Brown, with a strange deep sigh that seemed to come from the depths of the universe. "Let Cain pass by, for he belongs to God."

There was a long-drawn silence in the room when he had left it, which was to Flambeau's fierce wits one long agony of interrogation. Miss Joan Stacey very coolly tidied up the papers on her desk.

"Father," said Flambeau at last, "it is my duty, not my curiosity only--it is my duty to find out, if I can, who committed the crime."

"Which crime?" asked Father Brown.

"The one we are dealing with, of course," replied his impatient friend.

"We are dealing with two crimes," said Brown, "crimes of very different weight--and by very different criminals."

Miss Joan Stacey, having collected and put away her papers, proceeded to lock up her drawer. Father Brown went on, noticing her as little as she noticed him.

"The two crimes," he observed, "were committed against the same weakness of the same person, in a struggle for her money. The author of the larger crime found himself thwarted by the smaller crime; the author of the smaller crime got the money."

"Oh, don't go on like a lecturer," groaned Flambeau; "put it in a few words."

"I can put it in one word," answered his friend.

Miss Joan Stacey skewered her business-like black hat on to her head with a business-like black frown before a little mirror, and, as the conversation proceeded, took her handbag and umbrella in an unhurried style, and left the room.

"The truth is one word, and a short one," said Father Brown. "Pauline Stacey was blind."

"Blind!" repeated Flambeau, and rose slowly to his whole huge stature.

"She was subject to it by blood," Brown proceeded. "Her sister would have started eyeglasses if Pauline would have let her; but it was her special philosophy or fad that one must not encourage such diseases by yielding to them. She would not admit the cloud; or she tried to dispel it by will. So her eyes got worse and worse with straining; but the worst strain was to come. It came with this precious prophet, or whatever he calls himself, who taught her to stare at the hot sun with the naked eye. It was called accepting Apollo. Oh, if these new pagans would only be old pagans, they would be a little wiser! The old pagans knew that mere naked Nature-worship must have a cruel side. They knew that the eye of Apollo can blast and blind."

There was a pause, and the priest went on in a gentle and even broken voice. "Whether or no that devil deliberately made her blind, there is no doubt that he deliberately killed her through her blindness. The very simplicity of the crime is sickening. You know he and she went up and down in those lifts without official help; you know also how smoothly and silently the lifts slide. Kalon brought the lift to the girl's landing, and saw her, through the open door, writing in her slow, sightless way the will she had promised him. He called out to her cheerily that he had the lift ready for her, and she was to come out when she was ready. Then he pressed a button and shot soundlessly up to his own floor, walked through his own office, out on to his own balcony, and was safely praying
before the crowded street when the poor girl, having finished her work, ran gaily out to where lover and lift were to receive her, and stepped--"

"Don't!" cried Flambeau.

"He ought to have got half a million by pressing that button," continued the little father, in the colourless voice in which he talked of such horrors. "But that went smash. It went smash because there happened to be another person who also wanted the money, and who also knew the secret about poor Pauline's sight. There was one thing about that will that I think nobody noticed: although it was unfinished and without signature, the other Miss Stacey and some servant of hers had already signed it as witnesses. Joan had signed first, saying Pauline could finish it later, with a typical feminine contempt for legal forms. Therefore, Joan wanted her sister to sign the will without real witnesses. Why? I thought of the blindness, and felt sure she had wanted Pauline to sign in solitude because she had wanted her not to sign at all.

"People like the Staceys always use fountain pens; but this was specially natural to Pauline. By habit and her strong will and memory she could still write almost as well as if she saw; but she could not tell when her pen needed dipping. Therefore, her fountain pens were carefully filled by her sister--all except this fountain pen. This was carefully not filled by her sister; the remains of the ink held out for a few lines and then failed altogether. And the prophet lost five hundred thousand pounds and committed one of the most brutal and brilliant murders in human history for nothing."

Flambeau went to the open door and heard the official police ascending the stairs. He turned and said: "You must have followed everything devilish close to have traced the crime to Kalon in ten minutes."

Father Brown gave a sort of start.

"Oh! to him," he said. "No; I had to follow rather close to find out about Miss Joan and the fountain pen. But I knew Kalon was the criminal before I came into the front door."

"You must be joking!" cried Flambeau.

"I'm quite serious," answered the priest. "I tell you I knew he had done it, even before I knew what he had done."

"But why?"

"These pagan stoics," said Brown reflectively, "always fail by their strength. There came a crash and a scream down the street, and the priest of Apollo did not start or look round. I did not know what it was. But I knew that he was expecting it."

The Sign of the Broken Sword

The thousand arms of the forest were grey, and its million fingers silver. In a sky of dark green-blue-like slate the stars were bleak and brilliant like splintered ice. All that thickly wooded and sparsely tenanted countryside was stiff with a bitter and brittle frost. The black hollows between the trunks of the trees looked like bottomless, black caverns of that Scandinavian hell, a hell of incalculable cold. Even the square stone tower of the church looked northern to the point of heathenry, as if it were some barbaric tower among the sea rocks of Iceland. It was a queer night for anyone to explore a churchyard. But, on the other hand, perhaps it was worth exploring.

It rose abruptly out of the ashen wastes of forest in a sort of hump or shoulder of green turf that looked grey in the starlight. Most of the graves were on a slant, and the path leading up to the church was as steep as a staircase. On the top of the hill, in the one flat and prominent place, was the monument for which the place was famous. It contrasted strangely with the featureless graves all round, for it was the work of one of the greatest sculptors of modern Europe; and yet his fame was at once forgotten in the fame of the man whose image he had made. It showed, by touches of the small silver pencil of starlight, the massive metal figure of a soldier recumbent, the strong hands sealed in an everlasting worship, the great head pillowed upon a gun. The venerable face was bearded, or rather whiskered, in the old, heavy Colonel Newcome fashion. The uniform, though suggested with the few strokes of simplicity, was that of modern war. By his right side lay a sword, of which the tip was broken off; on the left side lay a Bible. On glowing summer afternoons wagonettes came full of Americans and cultured suburbans to see the sepulchre; but even then they felt the vast forest land with its one dumpy dome of churchyard and church as a place oddly dumb and neglected. In this freezing darkness of mid-winter one would think he might be left alone with the stars. Nevertheless, in the stillness of those stiff woods a wooden gate creaked, and two dim figures dressed in black climbed up the little path to the tomb.

So faint was that frigid starlight that nothing could have been traced about them except that while they both wore black, one man was enormously big, and the other (perhaps by contrast) almost startlingly small. They went up to the great graven tomb of the historic warrior, and stood for a few minutes staring at it. There was no human, perhaps no living, thing for a wide circle; and a morbid fancy might well have wondered if they were human themselves. In any case, the beginning of their conversation might have seemed strange. After the first silence the small man said to the other:

"Where does a wise man hide a pebble?"
And the tall man answered in a low voice: "On the beach."
The small man nodded, and after a short silence said: "Where does a wise man hide a leaf?"
And the other answered: "In the forest."
There was another stillness, and then the tall man resumed: "Do you mean that when a wise man has to hide a real diamond he has been known to hide it among sham ones?"
"No, no," said the little man with a laugh, "we will let bygones be bygones."
He stamped his cold feet for a second or two, and then said: "I'm not thinking of that at all, but of something else; something rather peculiar. Just strike a match, will you?"
The big man fumbled in his pocket, and soon a scratch and a flare painted gold the whole flat side of the monument. On it was cut in black letters the well-known words which so many Americans had reverently read: "Sacred to the Memory of General Sir Arthur St. Clare, Hero and Martyr, who Always Vanquished his Enemies and Always Spared Them, and Was Treacherously Slain by Them At Last. May God in Whom he Trusted both Reward and Revenge him."

The match burnt the big man's fingers, blackened, and dropped. He was about to strike another, but his small companion stopped him. "That's all right, Flambeau, old man; I saw what I wanted. Or, rather, I didn't see what I didn't want. And now we must walk a mile and a half along the road to the next inn, and I will try to tell you all about it. For Heaven knows a man should have a fire and ale when he dares tell such a story."

They descended the precipitous path, they relatched the rusty gate, and set off at a stamping, ringing walk down the frozen forest road. They had gone a full quarter of a mile before the smaller man spoke again. He said: "Yes; the wise man hides a pebble on the beach. But what does he do if there is no beach? Do you know anything of that great St. Clare trouble?"

"I know nothing about English generals, Father Brown," answered the large man, laughing, "though a little about English policemen. I only know that you have dragged me a precious long dance to all the shrines of this fellow, whoever he is. One would think he got buried in six different places. I've seen a memorial to General St. Clare in Westminster Abbey. I've seen a ramping equestrian statue of General St. Clare on the Embankment. I've seen a medallion of St. Clare in the street he was born in, and another in the street he lived in; and now you drag me after dark to his coffin in the village churchyard. I am beginning to be a bit tired of his magnificent personality, especially as I don't in the least know who he was. What are you hunting for in all these crypts and effigies?"

"I am only looking for one word," said Father Brown. "A word that isn't there."
"Well," asked Flambeau; "are you going to tell me anything about it?"
"I must divide it into two parts," remarked the priest. "First there is what everybody knows; and then there is what I know. Now, what everybody knows is short and plain enough. It is also entirely wrong."
"Right you are," said the big man called Flambeau cheerfully. "Let's begin at the wrong end. Let's begin with what everybody knows, which isn't true."

"If not wholly untrue, it is at least very inadequate," continued Brown; "for in point of fact, all that the public knows amounts precisely to this: The public knows that Arthur St. Clare was a great and successful English general. It knows that after splendid yet careful campaigns both in India and Africa he was in command against Brazil when the great Brazilian patriot Olivier issued his ultimatum. It knows that on that occasion St. Clare with a very small force attacked Olivier with a very large one, and was captured after heroic resistance. And it knows that after his capture, and to the abhorrence of the civilised world, St. Clare was hanged on the nearest tree. He was found swinging there after the Brazilians had retired, with his broken sword hung round his neck."

"And that popular story is untrue?" suggested Flambeau.
"No," said his friend quietly, "that story is quite true, so far as it goes."
"Well, I think it goes far enough!" said Flambeau; "but if the popular story is true, what is the mystery?"
They had passed many hundreds of grey and ghostly trees before the little priest answered. Then he bit his finger reflectively and said: "Why, the mystery is a mystery of psychology. Or, rather, it is a mystery of two psychologies. In that Brazilian business two of the most famous men of modern history acted flat against their characters. Mind you, Olivier and St. Clare were both heroes—the old thing, and no mistake; it was like the fight between Hector and Achilles. Now, what would you say to an affair in which Achilles was timid and Hector was treacherous?"

"Go on," said the large man impatiently as the other bit his finger again.

"Sir Arthur St. Clare was a soldier of the old religious type—the type that saved us during the Mutiny," continued Brown. "He was always more for duty than for dash; and with all his personal courage was decidedly a prudent commander, particularly indignant at any needless waste of soldiers. Yet in this last battle he attempted something that a baby could see was absurd. One need not be a strategist to see it was as wild as wind; just as one need not be a strategist to keep out of the way of a motor-bus. Well, that is the first mystery; what had become of the English general's head? The second riddle is, what had become of the Brazilian general's heart? President Olivier
might be called a visionary or a nuisance; but even his enemies admitted that he was magnanimous to the point of knight errantry. Almost every other prisoner he had ever captured had been set free or even loaded with benefits. Men who had really wronged him came away touched by his simplicity and sweetness. Why the deuce should he diabolically revenge himself only once in his life; and that for the one particular blow that could not have hurt him? Well, there you have it. One of the wisest men in the world acted like an idiot for no reason. One of the best men in the world acted like a fiend for no reason. That's the long and the short of it; and I leave it to you, my boy."

"No, you don't," said the other with a snort. "I leave it to you; and you jolly well tell me all about it."

"Well," resumed Father Brown, "it's not fair to say that the public impression is just what I've said, without adding that two things have happened since. I can't say they threw a new light; for nobody can make sense of them. But they threw a new kind of darkness; they threw the darkness in new directions. The first was this. The family physician of the St. Clare's quarrelled with that family, and began publishing a violent series of articles, in which he said that the late general was a religious maniac; but as far as the tale went, this seemed to mean little more than a religious man.

"Anyhow, the story fizzled out. Everyone knew, of course, that St. Clare had some of the eccentricities of puritan piety. The second incident was much more arresting. In the luckless and unsupported regiment which made that rash attempt at the Black River there was a certain Captain Keith, who was at that time engaged to St. Clare's daughter, and who afterwards married her. He was one of those who were captured by Olivier, and, like all the rest except the general, appears to have been bounteously treated and promptly set free. Some twenty years afterwards this man, then Lieutenant-Colonel Keith, published a sort of autobiography called 'A British Officer in Burmah and Brazil.' In the place where the reader looks eagerly for some account of the mystery of St. Clare's disaster may be found the following words: 'Everywhere else in this book I have narrated things exactly as they occurred, holding as I do the old-fashioned opinion that the glory of England is old enough to take care of itself. The exception I shall make is in this matter of the defeat by the Black River; and my reasons, though private, are honourable and compelling. I will, however, add this in justice to the memories of two distinguished men. General St. Clare has been accused of incapacity on this occasion; I can at least testify that this action, properly understood, was one of the most brilliant and sagacious of his life. President Olivier by similar report is charged with savage injustice. I think it due to the honour of an enemy to say that he acted on this occasion with even more than his characteristic good feeling. To put the matter popularly, I can assure my countrymen that St. Clare was by no means such a fool nor Olivier such a brute as he looked. This is all I have to say; nor shall any earthly consideration induce me to add a word to it.'"

A large frozen moon like a lustrous snowball began to show through the tangle of twigs in front of them, and by its light the narrator had been able to refresh his memory of Captain Keith's text from a scrap of printed paper. As he folded it up and put it back in his pocket Flambeau threw up his hand with a French gesture.

"Wait a bit, wait a bit," he cried excitedly. "I believe I can guess it at the first go."

He strode on, breathing hard, his black head and bull neck forward, like a man winning a walking race. The little priest, amused and interested, had some trouble in trotting beside him. Just before them the trees fell back a little to left and right, and the road swept downwards across a clear, moonlit valley, till it dived again like a rabbit into the wall of another wood. The entrance to the farther forest looked small and round, like the black hole of a remote railway tunnel. But it was within some hundred yards, and gaped like a cavern before Flambeau spoke again.

"I've got it," he cried at last, slapping his thigh with his great hand. 'Four minutes' thinking, and I can tell your whole story myself."

"All right," assented his friend. "You tell it."

Flambeau lifted his head, but lowered his voice. "General Sir Arthur St. Clare," he said, "came of a family in which madness was hereditary; and his whole aim was to keep this from his daughter, and even, if possible, from his future son-in-law. Rightly or wrongly, he thought the final collapse was close, and resolved on suicide. Yet ordinary suicide would blazon the very idea he dreaded. As the campaign approached the clouds came thicker on his brain; and at last in a mad moment he sacrificed his public duty to his private. He rushed rashly into battle, hoping to fall by the first shot. When he found that he had only attained capture and discredit, the sealed bomb in his brain burst, and he broke his own sword and hanged himself."

He stared firmly at the grey facade of forest in front of him, with the one black gap in it, like the mouth of the grave, into which their path plunged. Perhaps something menacing in the road thus suddenly swallowed reinforced his vivid vision of the tragedy, for he shuddered.

"A horrid story," he said.

"A horrid story," repeated the priest with bent head. "But not the real story."

Then he threw back his head with a sort of despair and cried: "Oh, I wish it had been."

The tall Flambeau faced round and stared at him.

"Yours is a clean story," cried Father Brown, deeply moved. "A sweet, pure, honest story, as open and white as
that moon. Madness and despair are innocent enough. There are worse things, Flambeau."

Flambeau looked up wildly at the moon thus invoked; and from where he stood one black tree-bough curved across it exactly like a devil's horn.

"Father--father," cried Flambeau with the French gesture and stepping yet more rapidly forward, "do you mean it was worse than that?"

"Worse than that," said Paul like a grave echo. And they plunged into the black cloister of the woodland, which ran by them in a dim tapestry of trunks, like one of the dark corridors in a dream.

They were soon in the most secret entrails of the wood, and felt close about them foliage that they could not see, when the priest said again:

"Where does a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest. But what does he do if there is no forest?"

"Well, well," cried Flambeau irritably, "what does he do?"

"He grows a forest to hide it in," said the priest in an obscure voice. "A fearful sin."

"Look here," cried his friend impatiently, for the dark wood and the dark saying got a little on his nerves; "will you tell me this story or not? What other evidence is there to go on?"

"There are three more bits of evidence," said the other, "that I have dug up in holes and corners; and I will give them in logical rather than chronological order. First of all, of course, our authority for the issue and event of the battle is in Olivier's own dispatches, which are lucid enough. He was entrenched with two or three regiments on the heights that swept down to the Black River, on the other side of which was lower and more marshy ground. Beyond this again was gently rising country, on which was the first English outpost, supported by others which lay, however, considerably in its rear. The British forces as a whole were greatly superior in numbers; but this particular regiment was just far enough from its base to make Olivier consider the project of crossing the river to cut it off. By sunset, however, he had decided to retain his own position, which was a specially strong one. At daybreak next morning he was thunderstruck to see that this stray handful of English, entirely unsupported from their rear, had flung themselves across the river, half by a bridge to the right, and the other half by a ford higher up, and were massed upon the marshy bank below him.

"That they should attempt an attack with such numbers against such a position was incredible enough; but Olivier noticed something yet more extraordinary. For instead of attempting to seize more solid ground, this mad regiment, having put the river in its rear by one wild charge, did nothing more, but stuck there in the mire like flies in treacle. Needless to say, the Brazilians blew great gaps in them with artillery, which they could only return with spirited but lessening rifle fire. Yet they never broke; and Olivier's curt account ends with a strong tribute of admiration for the mystic valour of these imbeciles. 'Our line then advanced finally,' writes Olivier, 'and drove them into the river; we captured General St. Clare himself and several other officers. The colonel and the major had both fallen in the battle. I cannot resist saying that few finer sights can have been seen in history than the last stand of this extraordinary regiment; wounded officers picking up the rifles of dead soldiers, and the general himself facing us on horseback bareheaded and with a broken sword.' On what happened to the general afterwards Olivier is as silent as Captain Keith."

"Well," grunted Flambeau, "get on to the next bit of evidence."

"The next evidence," said Father Brown, "took some time to find, but it will not take long to tell. I found at last in an almshouse down in the Lincolnshire Fens an old soldier who not only was wounded at the Black River, but had actually knelt beside the colonel of the regiment when he died. This latter was a certain Colonel Clancy, a big bull of an Irishman; and it would seem that he died almost as much of rage as of bullets. He, at any rate, was not responsible for that ridiculous raid; it must have been imposed on him by the general. His last edifying words, according to my informant, were these: 'And there goes the damned old donkey with the end of his sword knocked off. I wish it was his head.' You will remark that everyone seems to have noticed this detail about the broken sword blade, though most people regard it somewhat more reverently than did the late Colonel Clancy. And now for the third fragment."

Their path through the woodland began to go upward, and the speaker paused a little for breath before he went on. Then he continued in the same business-like tone:

"Only a month or two ago a certain Brazilian official died in England, having quarrelled with Olivier and left his country. He was a well-known figure both here and on the Continent, a Spaniard named Espado; I knew him myself, a yellow-faced old dandy, with a hooked nose. For various private reasons I had permission to see the documents he had left; he was a Catholic, of course, and I had been with him towards the end. There was nothing of his that lit up any corner of the black St. Clare business, except five or six common exercise books filled with the diary of some English soldier. I can only suppose that it was found by the Brazilians on one of those that fell. Anyhow, it stopped abruptly the night before the battle.

"But the account of that last day in the poor fellow's life was certainly worth reading. I have it on me; but it's too
dark to read it here, and I will give you a resume. The first part of that entry is full of jokes, evidently flung about among the men, about somebody called the Vulture. It does not seem as if this person, whoever he was, was one of themselves, nor even an Englishman; neither is he exactly spoken of as one of the enemy. It sounds rather as if he were some local go-between and non-combatant; perhaps a guide or a journalist. He has been closeted with old Colonel Clancy; but is more often seen talking to the major. Indeed, the major is somewhat prominent in this soldier's narrative; a lean, dark-haired man, apparently, of the name of Murray—a north of Ireland man and a Puritan. There are continual jests about the contrast between this Ulsterman's austerity and the conviviality of Colonel Clancy. There is also some joke about the Vulture wearing bright-coloured clothes.

"But all these levities are scattered by what may well be called the note of a bugle. Behind the English camp and almost parallel to the river ran one of the few great roads of that district. Westward the road curved round towards the river, which it crossed by the bridge before mentioned. To the east the road swept backwards into the wilds, and some two miles along it was the next English outpost. From this direction there came along the road that evening a glitter and clatter of light cavalry, in which even the simple diarist could recognise with astonishment the general with his staff. He rode the great white horse which you have seen so often in illustrated papers and Academy pictures; and you may be sure that the salute they gave him was not merely ceremonial. He, at least, wasted no time on ceremony, but, springing from the saddle immediately, mixed with the group of officers, and fell into emphatic though confidential speech. What struck our friend the diarist most was his special disposition to discuss matters with Major Murray; but, indeed, such a selection, so long as it was not marked, was in no way unnatural. The two men were made for sympathy; they were men who 'read their Bibles'; they were both the old Evangelical type of officer. However this may be, it is certain that when the general mounted again he was still talking earnestly to Murray; and that as he walked his horse slowly down the road towards the river, the tall Ulsterman still walked by his bridle rein in earnest debate. The soldiers watched the two until they vanished behind a clump of trees where the road turned towards the river. The colonel had gone back to his tent, and the men to their pickets; the man with the diary lingered for another four minutes, and saw a marvellous sight.

"The great white horse which had marched slowly down the road, as it had marched in so many processions, flew back, galloping up the road towards them as if it were mad to win a race. At first they thought it had run away with the man on its back; but they soon saw that the general, a fine rider, was himself urging it to full speed. Horse and man swept up to them like a whirlwind; and then, reining up the reeling charger, the general turned on them a face like flame, and called for the colonel like the trumpet that wakes the dead.

"I conceive that all the earthquake events of that catastrophe tumbled on top of each other rather like lumber in the minds of men such as our friend with the diary. With the dazed excitement of a dream, they found themselves falling—literally falling—into their ranks, and learned that an attack was to be led at once across the river. The general and the major, it was said, had found out something at the bridge, and there was only just time to strike for life. The major had gone back at once to call up the reserve along the road behind; it was doubtful if even with that prompt appeal help could reach them in time. But they must pass the stream that night, and seize the heights by morning. It is with the very stir and throb of that romantic nocturnal march that the diary suddenly ends."

"Father Brown had mounted ahead; for the woodland path grew smaller, steeper, and more twisted, till they felt as if they were ascending a winding staircase. The priest's voice came from above out of the darkness.

"There was one other little and enormous thing. When the general urged them to their chivalric charge he half drew his sword from the scabbard; and then, as if ashamed of such melodrama, thrust it back again. The sword again, you see."

A half-light broke through the network of boughs above them, flinging the ghost of a net about their feet; for they were mounting again to the faint luminosity of the naked night. Flambeau felt truth all round him as an atmosphere, but not as an idea. He answered with bewildered brain: "Well, what's the matter with the sword? Officers generally have swords, don't they?"

"They are not often mentioned in modern war," said the other dispassionately; "but in this affair one falls over the blessed sword everywhere."

"Well, what is there in that?" growled Flambeau; "it was a twopence coloured sort of incident; the old man's blade breaking in his last battle. Anyone might bet the papers would get hold of it, as they have. On all these tombs and things it's shown broken at the point. I hope you haven't dragged me through this Polar expedition merely because two men with an eye for a picture saw St. Clare's broken sword."

"No," cried Father Brown, with a sharp voice like a pistol shot; "but who saw his unbroken sword?"

"What do you mean?" cried the other, and stood still under the stars. They had come abruptly out of the grey gates of the wood.

"I say, who saw his unbroken sword?" repeated Father Brown obstinately. "Not the writer of the diary, anyhow; the general sheathed it in time."
Flambeau looked about him in the moonlight, as a man struck blind might look in the sun; and his friend went on, for the first time with eagerness:

"Flambeau," he cried, "I cannot prove it, even after hunting through the tombs. But I am sure of it. Let me add just one more tiny fact that tips the whole thing over. The colonel, by a strange chance, was one of the first struck by a bullet. He was struck long before the troops came to close quarters. But he saw St. Clare's sword broken. Why was it broken? How was it broken? My friend, it was broken before the battle."

"Oh!" said his friend, with a sort of forlorn jocularity; "and pray where is the other piece?"

"I can tell you," said the priest promptly. "In the northeast corner of the cemetery of the Protestant Cathedral at Belfast."

"Indeed?" inquired the other. "Have you looked for it?"

"I couldn't," replied Brown, with frank regret. "There's a great marble monument on top of it; a monument to the heroic Major Murray, who fell fighting gloriously at the famous Battle of the Black River."

Flambeau seemed suddenly galvanised into existence. "You mean," he cried hoarsely, "that General St. Clare hated Murray, and murdered him on the field of battle because--"

"You are still full of good and pure thoughts," said the other. "It was worse than that."

"Well," said the large man, "my stock of evil imagination is used up."

The priest seemed really doubtful where to begin, and at last he said again:

"Where would a wise man hide a leaf? In the forest."

The other did not answer.

"If there were no forest, he would make a forest. And if he wished to hide a dead leaf, he would make a dead forest."

There was still no reply, and the priest added still more mildly and quietly:

"And if a man had to hide a dead body, he would make a field of dead bodies to hide it in."

Flambeau began to stamp forward with an intolerance of delay in time or space; but Father Brown went on as if he were continuing the last sentence:

"Sir Arthur St. Clare, as I have already said, was a man who read his Bible. That was what was the matter with him. When will people understand that it is useless for a man to read his Bible unless he also reads everybody else's Bible? A printer reads a Bible for misprints. A Mormon reads his Bible, and finds polygamy; a Christian Scientist reads his, and finds we have no arms and legs. St. Clare was an old Anglo-Indian Protestant soldier. Now, just think what that might mean; and, for Heaven's sake, don't cant about it. It might mean a man physically formidable living under a tropic sun in an Oriental society, and soaking himself without sense or guidance in an Oriental Book. Of course, he read the Old Testament rather than the New. Of course, he found in the Old Testament anything that he wanted--lust, tyranny, treason. Oh, I dare say he was honest, as you call it. But what is the good of a man being honest in his worship of dishonesty?

"In each of the hot and secret countries to which the man went he kept a harem, he tortured witnesses, he amassed shameful gold; but certainly he would have said with steady eyes that he did it to the glory of the Lord. My own theology is sufficiently expressed by asking which Lord? Anyhow, there is this about such evil, that it opens door after door in hell, and always into smaller and smaller chambers. This is the real case against crime, that a man does not become wilder and wilder, but only meaner and meaner. St. Clare was soon suffocated by difficulties of bribery and blackmail; and needed more and more cash. And by the time of the Battle of the Black River he had fallen from world to world to that place which Dante makes the lowest floor of the universe."

"What do you mean?" asked his friend again.

"I mean that," retorted the cleric, and suddenly pointed at a puddle sealed with ice that shone in the moon. "Do you remember whom Dante put in the last circle of ice?"

"The traitors," said Flambeau, and shuddered. As he looked around at the inhuman landscape of trees, with taunting and almost obscene outlines, he could almost fancy he was Dante, and the priest with the rivulet of a voice was, indeed, a Virgil leading him through a land of eternal sins.

The voice went on: "Olivier, as you know, was quixotic, and would not permit a secret service and spies. The thing, however, was done, like many other things, behind his back. It was managed by my old friend Espado; he was the bright-clad fop, whose hook nose got him called the Vulture. Posing as a sort of philanthropist at the front, he felt his way through the English Army, and at last got his fingers on its one corrupt man--please God!--and that man at the top. St. Clare was in foul need of money, and mountains of it. The discredited family doctor was threatening those extraordinary exposures that afterwards began and were broken off; tales of monstrous and prehistoric things in Park Lane; things done by an English Evangelist that smelt like human sacrifice and hordes of slaves. Money was wanted, too, for his daughter's dowry; for to him the fame of wealth was as sweet as wealth itself. He snapped the last thread, whispered the word to Brazil, and wealth poured in from the enemies of England. But another man had
talked to Espado the Vulture as well as he. Somehow the dark, grim young major from Ulster had guessed the
divine truth; and when they walked slowly together down that road towards the bridge Murray was telling the
general that he must resign instantly, or be court-martialled and shot. The general temporised with him till they came
to the fringe of tropic trees by the bridge; and there by the singing river and the sunlit palms (for I can see the
picture) the general drew his sabre and plunged it through the body of the major."

The wintry road curved over a ridge in cutting frost, with cruel black shapes of bush and thicket; but Flambeau
fancied that he saw beyond it faintly the edge of an aureole that was not starlight and moonlight, but some fire such
as is made by men. He watched it as the tale drew to its close.

"St. Clare was a hell-hound, but he was a hound of breed. Never, I'll swear, was he so lucid and so strong as
when poor Murray lay a cold lump at his feet. Never in all his triumphs, as Captain Keith said truly, was the great
man so great as he was in this last world-despised defeat. He looked coolly at his weapon to wipe off the blood; he
saw the point he had planted between his victim's shoulders had broken off in the body. He saw quite calmly, as
through a club windowpane, all that must follow. He saw that men must find the unaccountable corpse; must extract
the unaccountable sword-point; must notice the unaccountable broken sword—or absence of sword. He had killed,
but not silenced. But his imperious intellect rose against the facer; there was one way yet. He could make the corpse
less unaccountable. He could create a hill of corpses to cover this one. In twenty minutes eight hundred English
soldiers were marching down to their death."

The warmer glow behind the black winter wood grew richer and brighter, and Flambeau strode on to reach it.
Father Brown also quickened his stride; but he seemed merely absorbed in his tale.

"Such was the valour of that English thousand, and such the genius of their commander, that if they had at once
attacked the hill, even their mad march might have met some luck. But the evil mind that played with them like
pawns had other aims and reasons. They must remain in the marshes by the bridge at least till British corpses should
be a common sight there. Then for the last grand scene; the silver-haired soldier-saint would give up his shattered
sword to save further slaughter. Oh, it was well organised for an impromptu. But I think (I cannot prove), I think that
it was while they stuck there in the bloody mire that someone doubted—and someone guessed."

He was mute a moment, and then said: "There is a voice from nowhere that tells me the man who guessed was
the lover... the man to wed the old man's child."

"But what about Olivier and the hanging?" asked Flambeau.

"Olivier, partly from chivalry, partly from policy, seldom encumbered his march with captives," explained the
narrator. "He released everybody in most cases. He released everybody in this case."

"Everybody but the general," said the tall man.

"Everybody," said the priest.

Flambeau knit his black brows. "I don't grasp it all yet," he said.

"There is another picture, Flambeau," said Brown in his more mystical undertone. "I can't prove it; but I can do
more—I can see it. There is a camp breaking up on the bare, torrid hills at morning, and Brazilian uniforms massed
in blocks and columns to march. There is the red shirt and long black beard of Olivier, which blows as he stands, his
broad-brimmed hat in his hand. He is saying farewell to the great enemy he is setting free—the simple, snow-headed
English veteran, who thanks him in the name of his men. The English remnant stand behind at attention; beside them
are stores and vehicles for the retreat. The drums roll; the Brazilians are moving; the English are still like statues. So
they abide till the last hum and flash of the enemy have faded from the tropic horizon. Then they alter their postures
all at once, like dead men coming to life; they turn their fifty faces upon the general—faces not to be forgotten."

Flambeau gave a great jump. "Ah," he cried, "you don't mean—"

"Yes," said Father Brown in a deep, moving voice. "It was an English hand that put the rope round St. Clare's
neck; I believe the hand that put the ring on his daughter's finger. They were English hands that dragged him up to
the tree of shame; the hands of men that had adored him and followed him to victory. And they were English souls
(God pardon and endure us all!) who stared at him swinging in that foreign sun on the green gallows of palm, and
prayed in their hatred that he might drop off it into hell."

As the two topped the ridge there burst on them the strong scarlet light of a red-curtained English inn. It stood
sideways in the road, as if standing aside in the amplitude of hospitality. Its three doors stood open with invitation;
and even where they stood they could hear the hum and laughter of humanity happy for a night.

"I need not tell you more," said Father Brown. "They tried him in the wilderness and destroyed him; and then,
for the honour of England and of his daughter, they took an oath to seal up for ever the story of the traitor's purse
and the assassin's sword blade. Perhaps—Heaven help them—they tried to forget it. Let us try to forget it, anyhow;
here is our inn."

"With all my heart," said Flambeau, and was just striding into the bright, noisy bar when he stepped back and
almost fell on the road.
"Look there, in the devil's name!" he cried, and pointed rigidly at the square wooden sign that overhung the road. It showed dimly the crude shape of a sabre hilt and a shortened blade; and was inscribed in false archaic lettering, "The Sign of the Broken Sword."

"Were you not prepared?" asked Father Brown gently. "He is the god of this country; half the inns and parks and streets are named after him and his story."

"I thought we had done with the leper," cried Flambeau, and spat on the road.

"You will never have done with him in England," said the priest, looking down, "while brass is strong and stone abides. His marble statues will erect the souls of proud, innocent boys for centuries, his village tomb will smell of loyalty as of lilies. Millions who never knew him shall love him like a father--this man whom the last few that knew him dealt with like dung. He shall be a saint; and the truth shall never be told of him, because I have made up my mind at last. There is so much good and evil in breaking secrets, that I put my conduct to a test. All these newspapers will perish; the anti-Brazil boom is already over; Olivier is already honoured everywhere. But I told myself that if anywhere, by name, in metal or marble that will endure like the pyramids, Colonel Clancy, or Captain Keith, or President Olivier, or any innocent man was wrongly blamed, then I would speak. If it were only that St. Clare was wrongly praised, I would be silent. And I will."

They plunged into the red-curtained tavern, which was not only cosy, but even luxurious inside. On a table stood a silver model of the tomb of St. Clare, the silver head bowed, the silver sword broken. On the walls were coloured photographs of the same scene, and of the system of wagonettes that took tourists to see it. They sat down on the comfortable padded benches.

"Come, it's cold," cried Father Brown; "let's have some wine or beer."

"Or brandy," said Flambeau.

The Three Tools of Death

Both by calling and conviction Father Brown knew better than most of us, that every man is dignified when he is dead. But even he felt a pang of incongruity when he was knocked up at daybreak and told that Sir Aaron Armstrong had been murdered. There was something absurd and unseemly about secret violence in connection with so entirely entertaining and popular a figure. For Sir Aaron Armstrong was entertaining to the point of being comic; and popular in such a manner as to be almost legendary. It was like hearing that Sunny Jim had hanged himself; or that Mr. Pickwick had died in Hanwell. For though Sir Aaron was a philanthropist, and thus dealt with the darker side of our society, he prided himself on dealing with it in the brightest possible style. His political and social speeches were cataracts of anecdotes and "loud laughter"; his bodily health was of a bursting sort; his ethics were all optimism; and he dealt with the Drink problem (his favourite topic) with that immortal or even monotonous gaiety which is so often a mark of the prosperous total abstainer.

The established story of his conversion was familiar on the more puritanic platforms and pulpits, how he had been, when only a boy, drawn away from Scotch theology to Scotch whisky, and how he had risen out of both and become (as he modestly put it) what he was. Yet his wide white beard, cherubic face, and sparkling spectacles, at the numberless dinners and congresses where they appeared, made it hard to believe, somehow, that he had ever been anything so morbid as either a dram-drinker or a Calvinist. He was, one felt, the most seriously merry of all the sons of men.

He had lived on the rural skirt of Hampstead in a handsome house, high but not broad, a modern and prosaic tower. The narrowest of its narrow sides overhung the steep green bank of a railway, and was shaken by passing trains. Sir Aaron Armstrong, as he boisterously explained, had no nerves. But if the train had often given a shock to the house, that morning the tables were turned, and it was the house that gave a shock to the train.

The engine slowed down and stopped just beyond that point where an angle of the house impinged upon the sharp slope of turf. The arrest of most mechanical things must be slow; but the living cause of this had been very rapid. A man clad completely in black, even (it was remembered) to the dreadful detail of black gloves, appeared on the ridge above the engine, and waved his black hands like some sable windmill. This in itself would hardly have stopped even a lingering train. But there came out of him a cry which was talked of afterwards as something utterly unnatural and new. It was one of those shouts that are horribly distinct even when we cannot hear what is shouted. The word in this case was "Murder!"

But the engine-driver swears he would have pulled up just the same if he had heard only the dreadful and definite accent and not the word.

The train once arrested, the most superficial stare could take in many features of the tragedy. The man in black on the green bank was Sir Aaron Armstrong's man-servant Magnus. The baronet in his optimism had often laughed at the black gloves of this dismal attendant; but no one was likely to laugh at him just now.

So soon as an inquirer or two had stepped off the line and across the smoky hedge, they saw, rolled down almost to the bottom of the bank, the body of an old man in a yellow dressing-gown with a very vivid scarlet lining. A scrap
of rope seemed caught about his leg, entangled presumably in a struggle. There was a smear or so of blood, though very little; but the body was bent or broken into a posture impossible to any living thing. It was Sir Aaron Armstrong. A few more bewildered moments brought out a big fair-bearded man, whom some travellers could salute as the dead man’s secretary, Patrick Royce, once well known in Bohemian society and even famous in the Bohemian arts. In a manner more vague, but even more convincing, he echoed the agony of the servant. By the time the third figure of that household, Alice Armstrong, daughter of the dead man, had come already tottering and waving into the garden, the engine-driver had put a stop to his stoppage. The whistle had blown and the train had panted on to get help from the next station.

Father Brown had been thus rapidly summoned at the request of Patrick Royce, the big ex-Bohemian secretary. Royce was an Irishman by birth; and that casual kind of Catholic that never remembers his religion until he is really in a hole. But Royce’s request might have been less promptly complied with if one of the official detectives had not been a friend and admirer of the unofficial Flambeau; and it was impossible to be a friend of Flambeau without hearing numberless stories about Father Brown. Hence, while the young detective (whose name was Merton) led the little priest across the fields to the railway, their talk was more confidential than could be expected between two total strangers.

"As far as I can see," said Mr. Merton candidly, "there is no sense to be made of it at all. There is nobody one can suspect. Magnus is a solemn old fool; far too much of a fool to be an assassin. Royce has been the baronet’s best friend for years; and his daughter undoubtedly adored him. Besides, it’s all too absurd. Who would kill such a cheery old chap as Armstrong? Who could dip his hands in the gore of an after-dinner speaker? It would be like killing Father Christmas."

“Yes, it was a cheery house,” assented Father Brown. "It was a cheery house while he was alive. Do you think it will be cheery now he is dead?"

Merton started a little and regarded his companion with an enlivened eye. "Now he is dead?" he repeated.

“Yes,” continued the priest stolidly, “he was cheerful. But did he communicate his cheerfulness? Frankly, was anyone else in the house cheerful but he?”

A window in Merton’s mind let in that strange light of surprise in which we see for the first time things we have known all along. He had often been to the Armstrongs’, on little police jobs of the philanthropist; and, now he came to think of it, it was in itself a depressing house. The rooms were very high and very cold; the decoration mean and provincial; the draughty corridors were lit by electricity that was bleaker than moonlight. And though the old man’s scarlet face and silver beard had blazed like a bonfire in each room or passage in turn, it did not leave any warmth behind it. Doubtless this spectral discomfort in the place was partly due to the very vitality and exuberance of its owner; he needed no stoves or lamps, he would say, but carried his own warmth with him. But when Merton recalled the other inmates, he was compelled to confess that they also were as shadows of their lord. The moody man-servant, with his monstrous black gloves, was almost a nightmare; Royce, the secretary, was solid enough, a big bull of a man, in tweeds, with a short beard; but the straw-coloured beard was startlingly salted with grey like the tweeds, and the broad forehead was barred with premature wrinkles. He was good-natured enough also, but it was a sad sort of good-nature, almost a heart-broken sort—he had the general air of being some sort of failure in life. As for Armstrong’s daughter, it was almost incredible that she was his daughter; she was so pallid in colour and sensitive in outline. She was graceful, but there was a quiver in the very shape of her that was like the lines of an aspen. Merton had sometimes wondered if she had learnt to quail at the crash of the passing trains.

"You see,” said Father Brown, blinking modestly, "I’m not sure that the Armstrong cheerfulness is so very cheerful— for other people. You say that nobody could kill such a happy old man, but I’m not sure; ne nos inducas in tentationem. If ever I murdered somebody,” he added quite simply, "I dare say it might be an Optimist."

"Why?" cried Merton amused. "Do you think people dislike cheerfulness?"

"People like frequent laughter,” answered Father Brown, "but I don’t think they like a permanent smile. Cheerfulness without humour is a very trying thing."

They walked some way in silence along the windy grassy bank by the rail, and just as they came under the far-flung shadow of the tall Armstrong house, Father Brown said suddenly, like a man throwing away a troublesome thought rather than offering it seriously: "Of course, drink is neither good nor bad in itself. But I can’t help sometimes feeling that men like Armstrong want an occasional glass of wine to sadden them."

Merton’s official superior, a grizzled and capable detective named Gilder, was standing on the green bank waiting for the coroner, talking to Patrick Royce, whose big shoulders and bristly beard and hair towered above him. This was the more noticeable because Royce walked always with a sort of powerful stoop, and seemed to be going about his small clerical and domestic duties in a heavy and humbled style, like a buffalo drawing a go-cart.

He raised his head with unusual pleasure at the sight of the priest, and took him a few paces apart. Meanwhile Merton was addressing the older detective respectfully indeed, but not without a certain boyish impatience.
"Well, Mr. Gilder, have you got much farther with the mystery?"
"There is no mystery," replied Gilder, as he looked under dreamy eyelids at the rooks.
"Well, there is for me, at any rate," said Merton, smiling.
"It is simple enough, my boy," observed the senior investigator, stroking his grey, pointed beard. "Three minutes after you'd gone for Mr. Royce's parson the whole thing came out. You know that pasty-faced servant in the black gloves who stopped the train?"
"I should know him anywhere. Somehow he rather gave me the creeps."
"Well," drawled Gilder, "when the train had gone on again, that man had gone too. Rather a cool criminal, don't you think, to escape by the very train that went off for the police?"
"You're pretty sure, I suppose," remarked the young man, "that he really did kill his master?"
"Yes, my son, I'm pretty sure," replied Gilder drily, "for the trifling reason that he has gone off with twenty thousand pounds in papers that were in his master's desk. No, the only thing worth calling a difficulty is how he killed him. The skull seems broken as with some big weapon, but there's no weapon at all lying about, and the murderer would have found it awkward to carry it away, unless the weapon was too small to be noticed."
"Perhaps the weapon was too big to be noticed," said the priest, with an odd little giggle.
Gilder looked round at this wild remark, and rather sternly asked Brown what he meant.
"Silly way of putting it, I know," said Father Brown apologetically. "Sounds like a fairy tale. But poor Armstrong was killed with a giant's club, a great green club, too big to be seen, and which we call the earth. He was broken against this green bank we are standing on."
"How do you mean?" asked the detective quickly.
Father Brown turned his moon face up to the narrow facade of the house and blinked hopelessly up. Following his eyes, they saw that right at the top of this otherwise blind back quarter of the building, an attic window stood open.
"Don't you see," he explained, pointing a little awkwardly like a child, "he was thrown down from there?"
Gilder frowningly scrutinised the window, and then said: "Well, it is certainly possible. But I don't see why you are so sure about it."
Brown opened his grey eyes wide. "Why," he said, "there's a bit of rope round the dead man's leg. Don't you see that other bit of rope up there caught at the corner of the window?"
At that height the thing looked like the faintest particle of dust or hair, but the shrewd old investigator was satisfied. "You're quite right, sir," he said to Father Brown; "that is certainly one to you."
Almost as he spoke a special train with one carriage took the curve of the line on their left, and, stopping, disgorged another group of policemen, in whose midst was the hangdog visage of Magnus, the absconded servant.
"By Jove! they've got him," cried Gilder, and stepped forward with quite a new alertness.
"Have you got the money!" he cried to the first policeman.
The man looked him in the face with a rather curious expression and said: "No." Then he added: "At least, not here."
"Which is the inspector, please?" asked the man called Magnus.
When he spoke everyone instantly understood how this voice had stopped a train. He was a dull-looking man with flat black hair, a colourless face, and a faint suggestion of the East in the level slits in his eyes and mouth. His blood and name, indeed, had remained dubious, ever since Sir Aaron had "rescued" him from a waitership in a London restaurant, and (as some said) from more infamous things. But his voice was as vivid as his face was dead. Whether through exactitude in a foreign language, or in deference to his master (who had been somewhat deaf), Magnus's tones had a peculiarly ringing and piercing quality, and the whole group quite jumped when he spoke.
"I always knew this would happen," he said aloud with brazen blandness. "My poor old master made game of me for wearing black; but I always said I should be ready for his funeral."
And he made a momentary movement with his two dark-gloved hands.
"Sergeant," said Inspector Gilder, eyeing the black hands with wrath, "aren't you putting the bracelets on this fellow; he looks pretty dangerous."
"Well, sir," said the sergeant, with the same odd look of wonder, "I don't know that we can."
"What do you mean?" asked the other sharply. "Haven't you arrested him?"
A faint scorn widened the slit-like mouth, and the whistle of an approaching train seemed oddly to echo the mockery.
"We arrested him," replied the sergeant gravely, "just as he was coming out of the police station at Highgate, where he had deposited all his master's money in the care of Inspector Robinson."
Gilder looked at the man-servant in utter amazement. "Why on earth did you do that?" he asked of Magnus.
"To keep it safe from the criminal, of course," replied that person placidly.
“Surely,” said Gilder, “Sir Aaron's money might have been safely left with Sir Aaron's family."

The tail of his sentence was drowned in the roar of the train as it went rocking and clanking; but through all the hell of noises to which that unhappy house was periodically subject, they could hear the syllables of Magnus's answer, in all their bell-like distinctness: "I have no reason to feel confidence in Sir Aaron's family."

All the motionless men had the ghostly sensation of the presence of some new person; and Merton was scarcely surprised when he looked up and saw the pale face of Armstrong's daughter over Father Brown's shoulder. She was still young and beautiful in a silvery style, but her hair was of so dusty and hueless a brown that in some shadows it seemed to have turned totally grey.

"Be careful what you say," said Royce gruffly, "you'll frighten Miss Armstrong."

"I hope so," said the man with the clear voice.

As the woman winced and everyone else wondered, he went on: "I am somewhat used to Miss Armstrong's tremors. I have seen her trembling off and on for years. And some said she was shaking with cold and some she was shaking with fear, but I know she was shaking with hate and wicked anger--fiends that have had their feast this morning. She would have been away by now with her lover and all the money but for me. Ever since my poor old master prevented her from marrying that tipsy blackguard--"

"Stop," said Gilder very sternly. "We have nothing to do with your family fancies or suspicions. Unless you have some practical evidence, your mere opinions--"

"Oh! I'll give you practical evidence," cut in Magnus, in his hacking accent. "You'll have to subpoena me, Mr. Inspector, and I shall have to tell the truth. And the truth is this: An instant after the old man was pitched bleeding out of the window, I ran into the attic, and found his daughter swooning on the floor with a red dagger still in her hand. Allow me to hand that also to the proper authorities." He took from his tail-pocket a long horn-hilted knife with a red smear on it, and handed it politely to the sergeant. Then he stood back again, and his slits of eyes almost faded from his face in one fat Chinese sneer.

Merton felt an almost bodily sickness at the sight of him; and he muttered to Gilder: "Surely you would take Miss Armstrong's word against his?"

Father Brown suddenly lifted a face so absurdly fresh that it looked somehow as if he had just washed it. "Yes," he said, radiating innocence, "but is Miss Armstrong's word against his?"

The girl uttered a startled, singular little cry; everyone looked at her. Her figure was rigid as if paralysed; only her face within its frame of faint brown hair was alive with an appalling surprise. She stood like one of a sudden lassoed and throttled.

"This man," said Mr. Gilder gravely, "actually says that you were found grasping a knife, insensible, after the murder."

"He says the truth," answered Alice.

The next fact of which they were conscious was that Patrick Royce strode with his great stooping head into their ring and uttered the singular words: "Well, if I've got to go, I'll have a bit of pleasure first."

His huge shoulder heaved and he sent an iron fist smash into Magnus's bland Mongolian visage, laying him on the lawn as flat as a starfish. Two or three of the police instantly put their hands on Royce; but to the rest it seemed as if all reason had broken up and the universe were turning into a brainless harlequinade.

"None of that, Mr. Royce," Gilder had called out authoritatively. "I shall arrest you for assault."

"No, you won't," answered the secretary in a voice like an iron gong, "you will arrest me for murder."

Gilder threw an alarmed glance at the man knocked down; but since that outraged person was already sitting up and wiping a little blood off a substantially uninjured face, he only said shortly: "What do you mean?"

"It is quite true, as this fellow says," explained Royce, "that Miss Armstrong fainted with a knife in her hand. But she had not snatched the knife to attack her father, but to defend him."

"To defend him," repeated Gilder gravely. "Against whom?"

"Against me," answered the secretary.

Alice looked at him with a complex and baffling face; then she said in a low voice: "After it all, I am still glad you are brave."

"Come upstairs," said Patrick Royce heavily, "and I will show you the whole cursed thing."

The attic, which was the secretary's private place (and rather a small cell for so large a hermit), had indeed all the vestiges of a violent drama. Near the centre of the floor lay a large revolver as if flung away; nearer to the left was rolled a whisky bottle, open but not quite empty. The cloth of the little table lay dragged and trampled, and a length of cord, like that found on the corpse, was cast wildly across the windowsill. Two vases were smashed on the mantelpiece and one on the carpet.

"I was drunk," said Royce; and this simplicity in the prematurely battered man somehow had the pathos of the first sin of a baby.
"You all know about me," he continued huskily; "everybody knows how my story began, and it may as well end like that too. I was called a clever man once, and might have been a happy one; Armstrong saved the remains of a brain and body from the taverns, and was always kind to me in his own way, poor fellow! Only he wouldn't let me marry Alice here; and it will always be said that he was right enough. Well, you can form your own conclusions, and you won't want me to go into details. That is my whisky bottle half emptied in the corner; that is my revolver quite emptied on the carpet. It was the rope from my box that was found on the corpse, and it was from my window the corpse was thrown. You need not set detectives to grub up my tragedy; it is a common enough weed in this world. I give myself to the gallows; and, by God, that is enough!"

At a sufficiently delicate sign, the police gathered round the large man to lead him away; but their unobtrusiveness was somewhat staggered by the remarkable appearance of Father Brown, who was on his hands and knees on the carpet in the doorway, as if engaged in some kind of undignified prayers. Being a person utterly insensible to the social figure he cut, he remained in this posture, but turned a bright round face up at the company, presenting the appearance of a quadruped with a very comic human head.

"I say," he said good-naturedly, "this really won't do at all, you know. At the beginning you said we'd found no weapon. But now we're finding too many; there's the knife to stab, and the rope to strangle, and the pistol to shoot; and after all he broke his neck by falling out of a window! It won't do. It's not economical." And he shook his head at the ground as a horse does grazing.

Inspector Gilder had opened his mouth with serious intentions, but before he could speak the grotesque figure on the floor had gone on quite volubly.

"And now three quite impossible things. First, these holes in the carpet, where the six bullets have gone in. Why on earth should anybody fire at the carpet? A drunken man lets fly at his enemy's head, the thing that's grinning at him. He doesn't pick a quarrel with his feet, or lay siege to his slippers. And then there's the rope"--and having done with the carpet the speaker lifted his hands and put them in his pocket, but continued unaffectedly on his knees--"in what conceivable intoxication would anybody try to put a rope round a man's neck and finally put it round his leg? Royce, anyhow, was not so drunk as that, or he would be sleeping like a log by now. And, plainest of all, the whisky bottle. You suggest a dipsomaniac fought for the whisky bottle, and then having won, rolled it away in a corner, spilling one half and leaving the other. That is the very last thing a dipsomaniac would do."

He scrambled awkwardly to his feet, and said to the self-accused murderer in tones of limpid penitence: "I'm awfully sorry, my dear sir, but your tale is really rubbish."

"Sir," said Alice Armstrong in a low tone to the priest, "can I speak to you alone for a moment?"

This request forced the communicative cleric out of the gangway, and before he could speak in the next room, the girl was talking with strange incisiveness.

"You are a clever man," she said, "and you are trying to save Patrick, I know. But it's no use. The core of all this is black, and the more things you find out the more there will be against the miserable man I love."

"Why?" asked Brown, looking at her steadily.

"Because," she answered equally steadily, "I saw him commit the crime myself."

"Ah!" said the unmoved Brown, "and what did he do?"

"I was in this room next to them," she explained; "both doors were closed, but I suddenly heard a voice, such as I had never heard on earth, roaring 'Hell, hell, hell,' again and again, and then the two doors shook with the first explosion of the revolver. Thrice again the thing banged before I got the two doors open and found the room full of smoke; but the pistol was smoking in my poor, mad Patrick's hand; and I saw him fire the last murderous volley with my own eyes. Then he leapt on my father, who was clinging in terror to the window-sill, and, grappling, tried to strangle him with the rope, which he threw over his head, but which slipped over his struggling shoulders to his feet. Then it tightened round one leg and Patrick dragged him along like a maniac. I snatched a knife from the mat, and, rushing between them, managed to cut the rope before I fainted."

"I see," said Father Brown, with the same wooden civility. "Thank you."

As the girl collapsed under her memories, the priest passed stiffly into the next room, where he found Gilder and Merton alone with Patrick Royce, who sat in a chair, handcuffed. There he said to the Inspector submissively:

"Might I say a word to the prisoner in your presence; and might he take off those funny cuffs for a minute?"

"He is a very powerful man," said Merton in an undertone. "Why do you want them taken off?"

"Why, I thought," replied the priest humbly, "that perhaps I might have the very great honour of shaking hands with him."

Both detectives stared, and Father Brown added: "Won't you tell them about it, sir?"

The man on the chair shook his tousled head, and the priest turned impatiently.

"Then I will," he said. "Private lives are more important than public reputations. I am going to save the living, and let the dead bury their dead."
He went to the fatal window, and blinked out of it as he went on talking. "I told you that in this case there were too many weapons and only one death. I tell you now that they were not weapons, and were not used to cause death. All those grisly tools, the noose, the bloody knife, the exploding pistol, were instruments of a curious mercy. They were not used to kill Sir Aaron, but to save him."

"To save him!" repeated Gilder. "And from what?"

"From himself," said Father Brown. "He was a suicidal maniac."

"What?" cried Merton in an incredulous tone. "And the Religion of Cheerfulness--"

"It is a cruel religion," said the priest, looking out of the window. "Why couldn't they let him weep a little, like his fathers before him? His plans stiffened, his views grew cold; behind that merry mask was the empty mind of the atheist. At last, to keep up his hilarious public level, he fell back on that dram-drinking he had abandoned long ago. But there is this horror about alcoholism in a sincere teetotaler: that he pictures and expects that psychological inferno from which he has warned others. It leapt upon poor Armstrong prematurely, and by this morning he was in such a case that he sat here and cried he was in hell, in so crazy a voice that his daughter did not know it. He was mad for death, and with the monkey tricks of the mad he had scattered round him death in many shapes—a running noose and his friend's revolver and a knife. Royce entered accidentally and acted in a flash. He flung the knife on the mat behind him, snatched up the revolver, and having no time to unload it, emptied it shot after shot all over the floor. The suicide saw a fourth shape of death, and made a dash for the window. The rescuer did the only thing he could—ran after him with the rope and tried to tie him hand and foot. Then it was that the unlucky girl ran in, and misunderstanding the struggle, strove to slash her father free. At first she only slashed poor Royce's knuckles, from which has come all the little blood in this affair. But, of course, you noticed that he left blood, but no wound, on that servant's face? Only before the poor woman swooned, she did hack her father loose, so that he went crashing through that window into eternity."

There was a long stillness slowly broken by the metallic noises of Gilder unlocking the handcuffs of Patrick Royce, to whom he said: "I think I should have told the truth, sir. You and the young lady are worth more than Armstrong's obituary notices."

"Confound Armstrong's notices," cried Royce roughly. "Don't you see it was because she mustn't know?"

"Mustn't know what?" asked Merton.

"Why, that she killed her father, you fool!" roared the other. "He'd have been alive now but for her. It might craze her to know that."

"No, I don't think it would," remarked Father Brown, as he picked up his hat. "I rather think I should tell her. Even the most murderous blunders don't poison life like sins; anyhow, I think you may both be the happier now. I've got to go back to the Deaf School."

As he went out on to the gusty grass an acquaintance from Highgate stopped him and said:

"The Coroner has arrived. The inquiry is just going to begin."

"I've got to get back to the Deaf School," said Father Brown. "I'm sorry I can't stop for the inquiry."

Go to Start
The Scandal of Father Brown

I

It would not be fair to record the adventures of Father Brown, without admitting that he was once involved in a grave scandal. There still are persons, perhaps even of his own community, who would say that there was a sort of blot upon his name. It happened in a picturesque Mexican road-house of rather loose repute, as appeared later; and to some it seemed that for once the priest had allowed a romantic streak in him, and his sympathy for human weakness, to lead him into loose and unorthodox action. The story in itself was a simple one; and perhaps the whole surprise of it consisted in its simplicity.

Burning Troy began with Helen; this disgraceful story began with the beauty of Hypatia Potter. Americans have a great power, which Europeans do not always appreciate, of creating institutions from below; that is by popular initiative. Like every other good thing, it has its lighter aspects; one of which, as has been remarked by Mr Wells and others, is that a person may become a public institution without becoming an official institution. A girl of great beauty or brilliancy will be a sort of uncrowned queen, even if she is not a Film Star or the original of a Gibson Girl. Among those who had the fortune, or misfortune, to exist beautifully in public in this manner, was a certain Hypatia Hard, who had passed through the preliminary stage of receiving florid compliments in society paragraphs of the local press, to the position of one who is actually interviewed by real pressmen. On War and Peace and Patriotism and Prohibition and Evolution and the Bible she had made her pronouncements with a charming smile; and if none of them seemed very near to the real grounds of her own reputation, it was almost equally hard to say what the grounds of her reputation really were. Beauty, and being the daughter of a rich man, are things not rare in her country; but to these she added whatever it is that attracts the wandering eye of journalism. Next to none of her admirers had even seen her, or even hoped to do so; and none of them could possibly derive any sordid benefit from her father's wealth. It was simply a sort of popular romance, the modern substitute for mythology; and it laid the first foundations of the more turgid and tempestuous sort of romance in which she was to figure later on; and in which many held that the reputation of Father Brown, as well as of others, had been blown to rags.

It was accepted, sometimes romantically, sometimes resignedly, by those whom American satire has named the Sob Sisters, that she had already married a very worthy and respectable business man of the name of Potter. It was even possible to regard her for a moment as Mrs Potter, on the universal understanding that her husband was only the husband of Mrs Potter.

Then came the Great Scandal, by which her friends and enemies were horrified beyond their wildest hopes. Her name was coupled (as the queer phrase goes) with a literary man living in Mexico; in status an American, but in spirit a very Spanish American. Unfortunately his vices resembled her virtues, in being good copy. He was no less a person than the famous or infamous Rudel Romanes; the poet whose works had been so universally popularized by being vetoed by libraries or prosecuted by the police. Anyhow, her pure and placid star was seen in conjunction with this comet. He was of the sort to be compared to a comet, being hairy and hot; the first in his portraits, the second in his poetry. He was also destructive; the comet's tail was a trail of divorces, which some called his success as a lover and some his prolonged failure as a husband. It was hard on Hypatia; there are disadvantages in conducting the perfect private life in public; like a domestic interior in a shop-window. Interviewers reported doubtful utterances about Love's Larger Law of Supreme Self - Realization. The Pagans applauded. The Sob Sisterhood permitted themselves a note of romantic regret; some having even the hardened audacity to quote from the poem of Maud Mueller, to the effect that of all the words of tongue or pen, the saddest are 'It might have been.' And Mr Agar P. Rock, who hated the Sob Sisterhood with a holy and righteous hatred, said that in this case he thoroughly agreed with Bret Harte's emendation of the poem:

'More sad are those we daily see; it is, but it hadn't ought to be.'

For Mr Rock was very firmly and rightly convinced that a very large number of things hadn't ought to be. He was a slashing and savage critic of national degeneration, on the Minneapolis Meteor, and a bold and honest man. He had perhaps come to specialize too much in the spirit of indignation, but it had had a healthy enough origin in his reaction against sloppy attempts to confuse right and wrong in modern journalism and gossip. He expressed it first in the form of a protest against an unholy halo of romance being thrown round the gunman and the gangster. Perhaps he was rather too much inclined to assume, in robust impatience, that all gangsters were Dagos and that all Dagos were gangsters. But his prejudices, even when they were a little provincial, were rather refreshing after a certain sort of maudlin and unmanly hero-worship, which was ready to regard a professional murderer as a leader of fashion, so long as the pressmen reported that his smile was irresistible or his tuxedo was all right. Anyhow, the prejudices
did not boil the less in the bosom of Mr Rock, because he was actually in the land of the Dagos when this story opens; striding furiously up a hill beyond the Mexican border, to the white hotel, fringed with ornamental palms, in which it was supposed that the Potters were staying and that the mysterious Hypatia now held her court. Agar Rock was a good specimen of a Puritan, even to look at; he might even have been a virile Puritan of the seventeenth century, rather than the softer and more sophisticated Puritan of the twentieth. If you had told him that his antiquated black hat and habitual black frown, and fine flinty features, cast a gloom over the sunny land of palms and vines, he would have been very much gratified. He looked to right and left with eyes bright with universal suspicions. And, as he did so, he saw two figures on the ridge above him, outlined against the clear sub-tropical sunset; figures in a momentary posture which might have made even a less suspicious man suspect something.

One of the figures was rather remarkable in itself. It was poised at the exact angle of the turning road above the valley, as if by an instinct for the site as well as the attitude of statuaries. It was wrapt in a great black cloak, in the Byronic manner, and the head that rose above it in swarthy beauty was remarkably like Byron's. This man had the same curling hair and curling nostrils; and he seemed to be snorting something of the same scorn and indignation against the world. He grasped in his hand a rather long cane or walking-stick, which having a spike of the sort used for mountaineering, carried at the moment a fanciful suggestion of a spear. It was rendered all the more fanciful by something comically contradictory in the figure of the other man, who carried an umbrella. It was indeed a new and neatly-rolled umbrella, very different, for instance, from Father Brown's umbrella: and he was neatly clad like a clerk in light holiday clothes; a stumpy stoutish bearded man; but the prosaic umbrella was raised and even brandished at an acute angle of attack. The taller man thrust back at him, but in a hasty defensive manner; and then the scene rather collapsed into comedy; for the umbrella opened of itself and its owner almost seemed to sink behind it, while the other man had the air of pushing his spear through a great grotesque shield. But the other man did not push it, or the quarrer, very far; he plucked out the point, turned away impatiently and strode down the road; while the other, rising and carefully refolding his umbrella, turned in the opposite direction towards the hotel. Rock had not heard any of the words of the quarrel, which must have immediately preceded this brief and rather absurd bodily conflict; but as he went up the road in the track of the short man with the beard, he revolved many things. And the romantic cloak and rather operatic good looks of the one man, combined with the sturdy self-assertion of the other, fitted in with the whole story which he had come to seek; and he knew that he could have fixed those two strange figures with their names: Romanes and Potter.

His view was in every way confirmed when he entered the pillared porch; and heard the voice of the bearded man raised high in altercation or command. He was evidently speaking to the manager or staff of the hotel, and Rock heard enough to know that he was warning them of a wild and dangerous character in the neighbourhood.

'If he's really been to the hotel already,' the little man was saying, in answer to some murmur, 'all I can say is that you'd better not let him in again. Your police ought to be looking after a fellow of that sort, but anyhow, I won't have the lady pestered with him.'

Rock listened in grim silence and growing conviction; then he slid across the vestibule to an alcove where he saw the hotel register and turning to the last page, saw 'the fellow' had indeed been to the hotel already. There appeared the name of 'Rudel Romanes,' that romantic public character, in very large and florid foreign lettering; and after a space under it, rather close together, the names of Hypatia Potter and Ellis T. Potter, in a correct and quite American handwriting.

Agar Rock looked moodily about him, and saw in the surroundings and even the small decorations of the hotel everything that he hated most. It is perhaps unreasonable to complain of oranges growing on orange-trees, even in small tubs; still more of their only growing on threadbare curtains or faded wallpapers as a formal scheme of ornament. But to him those red and golden moons, decoratively alternated with silver moons, were in a queer way the quintessence of all moonshine. He saw in them all that sentimental deterioration which his principles deplored in modern manners, and which his prejudices vaguely connected with the warmth and softness of the South. It annoyed him even to catch sight of a patch of dark canvas, half-showing a Watteau shepherd with a guitar, or a blue tile with a common-place design of a Cupid on a dolphin. His common sense would have told him that he might have seen these things in a shop-window on Fifth Avenue; but where they were, they seemed like a taunting siren voice of the Paganism of the Mediterranean. And then suddenly, the look of all these things seemed to alter, as a still mirror will flicker when a figure has flashed past it for a moment; and he knew the whole room was full of a challenging presence. He turned almost stiffly, and with a sort of resistance, and knew that he was facing the famous Hypatia, of whom he had read and heard for so many years.

Hypatia Potter, nee Hard, was one of those people to whom the word 'radiant' really does apply definitely and derivatively. That is, she allowed what the papers called her Personality to go out from her in rays. She would have been equally beautiful, and to some tastes more attractive, if she had been self-contained; but she had always been taught to believe that self-containment was only selfishness. She would have said that she had lost Self in Service;
it would perhaps be truer to say that she had asserted Self in Service; but she was quite in good faith about the service. Therefore her outstanding starry blue eyes really struck outwards, as in the old metaphor that made eyes like Cupid's darts, killing at a distance; but with an abstract conception of conquest beyond any mere coquetry. Her pale fair hair, though arranged in a saintly halo, had a look of almost electric radiation. And when she understood that the stranger before her was Mr Agar Rock, of the Minneapolis Meteor, her eyes took on themselves the range of long searchlights, sweeping the horizon of the States.

But in this the lady was mistaken; as she sometimes was. For Agar Rock was not Agar Rock of the Minneapolis Meteor. He was at that moment merely Agar Rock; there had surged up in him a great and sincere moral impulsion, beyond the coarse courage of the interviewer. A feeling profoundly mixed of a chivalrous and national sensibility to beauty, with an instant itch for moral action of some definite sort, which was also national, nerved him to face a great scene; and to deliver a noble insult. He remembered the original Hypatia, the beautiful Neo-Platonist, and how he had been thrilled as a boy by Kingsley's romance in which the young monk denounces her for harlotries and idolatries. He confronted her with an iron gravity and said:

'If you'll pardon me, Madam, I should like to have a word with you in private.'

'Well,' said the lady, 'I don't know whether you consider this place private.'

'Oh, you are all too funny,' she said, and, in a way very unusual with her, ducked and darted to the door and disappeared.

'Bit hysterical when they laugh like that,' said Rock uncomfortably; then, rather at a loss, turning to the little priest: 'As a matter of fact, I'm English and my name is Brown. But pray let me leave you if you wish to be private.'

'If you're English,' said Rock warmly, 'you ought really to be on my side against these Dagos, anyhow. Oh, I'm not one of those who talk tosh about Anglo-Saxons; but there is such a thing as history. You can always claim that America got her civilization from England.'

'Also, to temper our pride,' said Father Brown, 'we must always admit that England got her civilization from Dagos.'

Again there glowed in the other's mind the exasperated sense that his interlocutor was fencing with him, and fencing on the wrong side, in some secret and evasive way; and he curtly professed a failure to comprehend.

'Well, there was a Dago, or possibly a Wop, called Julius Caesar,' said Father Brown; 'he was afterwards killed in a stabbing match; you know these Dagos always use knives. And there was another one called Augustine, who brought Christianity to our little island; and really, I don't think we should have had much civilization without those two.'

'Anyhow, that's all ancient history,' said the somewhat irritated journalist, 'and I'm very much interested in modern history. What I see is that these scoundrels are bringing Paganism to our country, and destroying all the Christianity there is. Also destroying all the common sense there is. All settled habits, all solid social order, all the
way in which the farmers who were our fathers and grandfathers did manage to live in the world, melted into a hot mush by sensations and sensualities about filmstars who divorced every month or so, and make every silly girl think that marriage is only a way of getting divorced.'

'You are quite right,' said Father Brown. 'Of course I quite agree with you there. But you must make some allowances. Perhaps these Southern people are a little prone to that sort of fault. You must remember that Northern people have other kinds of faults. Perhaps these surroundings do encourage people to give too rich an importance to mere romance.'

The whole integral indignation of Agar Rock's life rose up within him at the word.

'I hate Romance,' he said, hitting the little table before him. 'I've fought the papers I worked for for forty years about the infernal trash. Every blackguard bolting with a barmaid is called a romantic elopement or something; and now our own Hypatia Hard, a daughter of a decent people, may get dragged into some rotten romantic divorce case, that will be trumpeted to the whole world as happily as a royal wedding. This mad poet Romanes is hanging round her; and you bet the spotlight will follow him, as if he were any rotten little Dago who is called the Great Lover on the films. I saw him outside; and he's got the regular spotlight face. Now my sympathies are with decency and common sense. My sympathies are with poor Potter, a plain straightforward broker from Pittsburgh, who thinks he has a right to his own home. And he's making a fight for it, too. I heard him hollering at the management, telling them to keep that rascal out; and quite right too. The people here seem a sly and slinky lot; but I rather fancy he's put the fear of God into them already.'

'As a matter of fact,' said Father Brown, 'I rather agree with you about the manager and the men in this hotel; but you mustn't judge all Mexicans by them. Also I fancy the gentleman you speak of has not only hollered, but handed round dollars enough to get the whole staff on his side. I saw them locking doors and whispering most excitedly. By the way, your plain straightforward friend seems to have a lot of money.'

'I've no doubt his business does well,' said Rock. 'He's quite the best type of sound business man. What do you mean?'

'I fancied it might suggest another thought to you,' said Father Brown; and, rising with rather heavy civility, he left the room.

Rock watched the Potters very carefully that evening at dinner; and gained some new impressions, though none that disturbed his deep sense of the wrong that probably threatened the peace of the Potter home. Potter himself proved worthy of somewhat closer study; though the journalist had at first accepted him as prosaic and unpretentious, there was a pleasure in recognizing finer lines in what he considered the hero or victim of a tragedy. Potter had really rather a thoughtful and distinguished face, though worried and occasionally petulant. Rock got an impression that the man was recovering from an illness; his faded hair was thin but rather long, as if it had been lately neglected, and his rather unusual beard gave the onlooker the same notion. Certainly he spoke once or twice to his wife in a rather sharp and acid manner, fussing about tablets or some detail of digestive science; but his real worry was doubtless concerned with the danger from without. His wife played up to him in the splendid if somewhat condescending manner of a Patient Griselda; but her eyes also roamed continually to the doors and shutters, as if in half-hearted fear of an invasion. Rock had only too good reason to dread, after her curious outbreak, the fact that her fear might turn out to be only half-hearted.

It was in the middle of the night that the extraordinary event occurred. Rock, imagining himself to be the last to go up to bed, was surprised to find Father Brown still tucked obscurely under an orange-tree in the hall, and placidly reading a book. He returned the other's farewell without further words, and the journalist had his foot on the lowest step of the stair, when suddenly the outer door sprang on its hinges and shook and rattled under the shock of blows planted from without; and a great voice louder than the blows was heard violently demanding admission. Somehow the journalist was certain that the blows had been struck with a pointed stick like an alpenstock. He looked back at the darkened lower floor, and saw the servants of the hotel sliding here and there to see that the doors were locked; and not unlocking them. Then he slowly mounted to his room, and sat down furiously to write his report.

He described the siege of the hotel; the evil atmosphere; the shabby luxury of the place; the shifty evasions of the priest; above all, that terrible voice crying without, like a wolf prowling round the house. Then, as he wrote, he heard a new sound and sat up suddenly. It was a long repeated whistle, and in his mood he hated it doubly, because it was like the signal of a conspirator and like the love-call of a bird. There followed an utter silence, in which he sat rigid; then he rose abruptly; for he had heard yet another noise. It was a faint swish followed by a sharp rap or rattle; and he was almost certain that somebody was throwing something at the window. He walked stiffly downstairs, to the floor which was now dark and deserted; or nearly deserted. For the little priest was still sitting under the orange shrub, lit by a low lamp; and still reading his book.

'You seem to be sitting up late,' he said harshly.
'Quite a dissipated character,' said Father Brown, looking up with a broad smile, 'reading Economics of Usury at all wild hours of the night.'
'The place is locked up,' said Rock.
'Very thoroughly locked up,' replied the other. 'Your friend with the beard seems to have taken every precaution. By the way, your friend with the beard is a little rattled; I thought he was rather cross at dinner.'
'Natural enough,' growled the other, 'if he thinks savages in this savage place are out to wreck his home life.'
'Wouldn't it be better,' said Father Brown, 'if a man tried to make his home life nice inside, while he was protecting it from the things outside.'
'Oh, I know you will work up all the casuistical excuses,' said the other; 'perhaps he was rather snappy with his wife; but he's got the right on his side. Look here, you seem to me to be rather a deep dog. I believe you know more about this than you say. What the devil is going on in this infernal place? Why are you sitting up all night to see it through?'
'Well,' said Father Brown patiently, 'I rather thought my bedroom might be wanted.'
'Wanted by whom?'
'As a matter of fact, Mrs Potter wanted another room,' explained Father Brown with limpid clearness. 'I gave her mine, because I could open the window. Go and see, if you like.'
'I'll see to something else first,' said Rock grinding his teeth. 'You can play your monkey tricks in this Spanish monkey - house, but I'm still in touch with civilization.' He strode into the telephone - booth and rang up his paper; pouring out the whole tale of the wicked priest who helped the wicked poet. Then he ran upstairs into the priest's room, in which the priest had just lit a short candle, showing the windows beyond wide open.
He was just in time to see a sort of rude - ladder unhooked from the window - sill and rolled up by a laughing gentleman on the lawn below. The laughing gentleman was a tall and swarthy gentleman, and was accompanied by a blonde but equally laughing lady. This time, Mr Rock could not even comfort himself by calling her laughter hysterical. It was too horribly genuine; and rang down the rambling garden - paths as she and her troubadour disappeared into the dark thickets.
Agar Rock turned on his companion a face of final and awful justice; like the Day of Judgement.
'Well, all America is going to hear of this,' he said. 'In plain words, you helped her to bolt with that curly - haired lover.'
'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'I helped her to bolt with that curly - haired lover.'
'You call yourself a minister of Jesus Christ,' cried Rock, 'and you boast of a crime.'
'I have been mixed up with several crimes,' said the priest gently. 'Happily for once this is a story without a crime. This is a simple fire - side idyll; that ends with a glow of domesticity.'
'And ends with a rope - ladder instead of a rope,' said Rock. 'Isn't she a married woman?'
'Oh, yes,' said Father Brown.
'Well, oughtn't she to be with her husband?' demanded Rock.
'She is with her husband,' said Father Brown.
'The other was startled into anger. 'You lie,' he said. 'The poor little man is still snoring in bed.'
'You seem to know a lot about his private affairs,' said Father Brown plaintively. 'You could almost write a life of the Man with a Beard. The only thing you don't seem ever to have found out about him is his name.'
'Nonsense,' said Rock. 'His name is in the hotel book.'
'I know it is,' answered the priest, nodding gravely, 'in very large letters; the name of Rudel Romanes. Hypatia Potter, who met him here, put her name boldly under his, when she meant to elope with him; and her husband put his name under that, when he pursued them to this place. He put it very close under hers, by way of protest. The Romanes (who has pots of money, as a popular misanthrope despising men) bribed the brutes in this hotel to bar and bolt it and keep the lawful husband out. And I, as you truly say, helped him to get in.'
When a man is told something that turns things upside - down; that the tail wags the dog; that the fish has caught the fisherman; that the earth goes round the moon; he takes some little time before he even asks seriously if it is true. He is still content with the consciousness that it is the opposite of the obvious truth. Rock said at last: 'You don't mean that little fellow is the romantic Rudel we're always reading about; and that curly haired fellow is Mr Potter of Pittsburgh.'
'Yes,' said Father Brown. 'I knew it the moment I clapped eyes on both of them. But I verified it afterwards.'
Rock ruminated for a time and said at last: 'I suppose it's barely possible you're right. But how did you come to have such a notion, in the face of the facts?'
Father Brown looked rather abashed; subsided into a chair, and stared into vacancy, until a faint smile began to dawn on his round and rather foolish face.
'Well,' he said, 'you see - the truth is, I'm not romantic.'
'I don't know what the devil you are,' said Rock roughly.

'Now you are romantic,' said Father Brown helpfully. 'For instance, you see somebody looking poetical, and you assume he is a poet. Do you know what the majority of poets look like? What a wild confusion was created by that coincidence of three good-looking aristocrats at the beginning of the nineteenth century: Byron and Goethe and Shelley! Believe me, in the common way, a man may write: "Beauty has laid her flaming lips on mine," or whatever that chap wrote, without being himself particularly beautiful. Besides, do you realize how old a man generally is by the time his fame has filled the world? Watts painted Swinburne with a halo of hair; but Swinburne was bald before most of his last American or Australian admirers had heard of his hyacinthine locks. So was D'Annunzio. As a fact, Romanes still has rather a fine head, as you will see if you look at it closely; he looks like an intellectual man; and he is. Unfortunately, like a good many other intellectual men, he's a fool. He's let himself go to seed with selfishness and fussing about his digestion. So that the ambitious American lady, who thought it would be like soaring to Olympus with the Nine Muses to elope with a poet, found that a day or so of it was about enough for her. So that when her husband came after her, and stormed the place, she was delighted to go back to him.'

'But her husband?' queried Rock. 'I am still rather puzzled about her husband.'

'Ah, you've been reading too many of your erotic modern novels,' said Father Brown; and partly closed his eyes in answer to the protesting glare of the other. 'I know a lot of stories start with a wildly beautiful woman wedded to some elderly swine in the stock market. But why? In that, as in most things, modern novels are the very reverse of modern. I don't say it never happens; but it hardly ever happens now except by her own fault. Girls nowadays marry whom they like; especially spoilt girls like Hypatia. And whom do they marry? A beautiful wealthy girl like that would have a ring of admirers; and whom would she choose? The chances are a hundred to one that she'd marry very young and choose the handsomest man she met at a dance or a tennis-party. Well, ordinary business men are sometimes handsome. A young god appeared (called Potter) and she wouldn't care if he was a broker or a burglar. But, given the environment, you will admit it's more likely he would be a broker; also, it's quite likely that he'd be called Potter. You see, you are so incurably romantic that your whole case was founded on the idea that a man looking like a young god couldn't be called Potter. Believe me, names are not so appropriately distributed.'

'Well,' said the other, after a short pause, 'and what do you suppose happened after that?'

Father Brown got up rather abruptly from the seat in which he had collapsed; the candlelight threw the shadow of his short figure across the wall and ceiling, giving an odd impression that the balance of the room had been altered.

'Ah,' he muttered, 'that's the devil of it. That's the real devil. Much worse than the old Indian demons in this jungle. You thought I was only making out a case for the loose ways of these Latin Americans - well, the queer thing about you - and he blinked owlishly at the other through his spectacles - 'the queerest thing about you is that in a way you're right.'

'You say down with romance. I say I'd take my chance in fighting the genuine romances - all the more because they are precious few, outside the first fiery days of youth. I say - take away the Intellectual Friendships; take away the Platonic Unions; take away the Higher Laws of Self - Fulfilment and the rest, and I'll risk the normal dangers of the job. Take away the love that isn't love, but only pride and vainglory and publicity and making a splash; and we'll take our chance of fighting the love that is love, when it has to be fought, as well as the love that is lust and lechery. Priests know young people will have passions, as doctors know they will have measles. But Hypatia Potter is forty if she is a day, and she cares no more for that little poet than if he were her publisher or her publicity man. That's just the point - he was her publicity man. It's your newspapers that have ruined her; it's living in the limelight; it's wanting to see herself in the headlines, even in a scandal if it were only sufficiently psychic and superior. It's wanting to be George Sand, her name immortally linked with Alfred de Musset. When her real romance of youth was over, it was the sin of middle age that got hold of her; the sin of intellectual ambition. She hasn't got any intellect to speak of; but you don't need any intellect to be an intellectual.'

'I should say she was pretty brainy in one sense,' observed Rock reflectively.

'Yes, in one sense,' said Father Brown. 'In only one sense. In a business sense. Not in any sense that has anything to do with these poor lounging Dagos down here. You curse the Film Stars and tell me you hate romance. Do you suppose the Film Star, who is married for the fifth time, is misled by any romance? Such people are very practical; more practical than you are. You say you admire the simple solid Business Man. Do you suppose that Rudel Romanes isn't a Business Man? Can't you see he knew, quite as well as she did, the advertising advantages of this grand affair with a famous beauty. He also knew very well that his hold on it was pretty insecure; hence his fussing about and bribing servants to lock doors. But what I mean to say, first and last, is that there'd be a lot less scandal if people didn't idealize sin and pose as sinners. These poor Mexicans may seem sometimes to live like beasts, or rather sin like men; but they don't go in for Ideals. You must at least give them credit for that.'

He sat down again, as abruptly as he had risen, and laughed apologetically. 'Well, Mr Rock,' he said, 'that is my
complete confession; the whole horrible story of how I helped a romantic elopement. You can do what you like with it.'

'In that case,' said Rock, rising, 'I will go to my room and make a few alterations in my report. But, first of all, I must ring up my paper and tell them I've been telling them a pack of lies.'

Not much more than half an hour had passed, between the time when Rock had telephoned to say the priest was helping the poet to run away with the lady, and the time when he telephoned to say that the priest had prevented the poet from doing precisely the same thing. But in that short interval of time was born and enlarged and scattered upon the winds the Scandal of Father Brown. The truth is still half an hour behind the slander; and nobody can be certain when or where it will catch up with it. The garrulity of pressmen and the eagerness of enemies had spread the first story through the city, even before it appeared in the first printed version. It was instantly corrected and contradicted by Rock himself, in a second message stating how the story had really ended; but it was by no means certain that the first story was killed. A positively incredible number of people seemed to have read the first issue of the paper and not the second. Again and again, in every corner of the world, like a flame bursting from blackened ashes, there would appear the old tale of the Brown Scandal, or Priest Ruins Potter Home. Tireless apologists of the priest's party watched for it, and patiently tagged after it with contradictions and exposures and letters of protest. Sometimes the letters were published in the papers; and sometimes they were not. But still nobody knew how many people had heard the story without hearing the contradiction. It was possible to find whole blocks of blameless and innocent people who thought the Mexican Scandal was an ordinary recorded historical incident like the Gunpowder Plot. Then somebody would enlighten these simple people, only to discover that the old story had started afresh among a few quite educated people, who would seem the last people on earth to be duped by it. And so the two Father Browns chase each other round the world for ever; the first a shameless criminal fleeing from justice; the second a martyr broken by slander, in a halo of rehabilitation. But neither of them is very like the real Father Brown, who is not broken at all; but goes stumping with his stout umbrella through life, liking most of the people in it; accepting the world as his companion, but never as his judge.

TWO: The Quick One

The strange story of the incongruous strangers is still remembered along that strip of the Sussex coast, where the large and quiet hotel called the Maypole and Garland looks across its own gardens to the sea. Two quaintly assorted figures did, indeed, enter that quiet hotel on that sunny afternoon; one being conspicuous in the sunlight, and visible over the whole shore, by the fact of wearing a lustrous green turban, surrounding a brown face and a black beard; the other would have seemed to some even more wild and weird, by reason of his wearing a soft black clergyman's hat with a yellow moustache and yellow hair of leonine length. He at least had often been seen preaching on the sands or conducting Band of Hope services with a little wooden spade; only he had certainly never been seen going into the bar of an hotel. The arrival of these quaint companions was the climax of the story, but not the beginning of it; and, in order to make a rather mysterious story as clear as possible, it is better to begin at the beginning.

Half an hour before those two conspicuous figures entered the hotel, and were noticed by everybody, two other very inconspicuous figures had also entered it, and been noticed by nobody. One was a large man, and handsome in a heavy style, but he had a knack of taking up very little room, like a background; only an almost morbidly suspicious examination of his boots would have told anybody that he was an Inspector of Police in plain clothes; in very plain clothes. The other was a drab and insignificant little man, also in plain clothes, only that they happened to be clerical clothes; but nobody had ever seen him preaching on the sands.

These travellers also found themselves in a sort of large smoking - room with a bar, for a reason which determined all the events of that tragic afternoon. The truth is that the respectable hotel called the Maypole and Garland was being 'done - up'. Those who had liked it in the past were moved to say that it was being done down; or possibly done in. This was the opinion of the local grumbler, Mr Raggle, the eccentric old gentleman who drank cherry brandy in a corner and cursed. Anyhow, it was being carefully stripped of all the stray indications that it had once been an English inn; and being busily turned, yard by yard and room by room, into something resembling the sham palace of a Levantine usurer in an American film. It was, in short, being 'decorated'; but the only part where the decoration was complete, and where customers could yet be made comfortable, was this large room leading out of the hall. It had once been honourably known as a Bar Parlour and was now mysteriously known as a Saloon Lounge, and was newly 'decorated', in the manner of an Asiatic Divan. For Oriental ornament pervaded the new scheme; and where there had once been a gun hung on hooks, and sporting prints and a stuffed fish in a glass case, there were now festoons of Eastern drapery and trophies of scimitars, tulwards and yataghans, as if in unconscious preparation for the coming of the gentleman with the turban. The practical point was, however, that the few guests who did arrive had to be shepherd into this lounge, now swept and garnished, because all the more regular and refined parts of the hotel were still in a state of transition. Perhaps that was also the reason why even those few guests were somewhat neglected, the manager and others being occupied with explanations or exhortations.
elsewhere. Anyhow, the first two travellers who arrived had to kick their heels for some time unattended. The bar was at the moment entirely empty, and the Inspector rang and rapped impatiently on the counter; but the little clergyman had already dropped into a lounge seat and seemed in no hurry for anything. Indeed his friend the policeman, turning his head, saw that the round face of the little cleric had gone quite blank, as it had a way of doing sometimes; he seemed to be staring through his moonlike spectacles at the newly decorated wall.

'I may as well offer you a penny for your thoughts,' said Inspector Greenwood, turning from the counter with a sigh, 'as nobody seems to want my pennies for anything else. This seems to be the only room in the house that isn't full of ladders and whitewash; and this is so empty that there isn't even a potboy to give me a pot of beer.'

'Oh . . . my thoughts are not worth a penny, let alone a pot of beer,' answered the cleric, wiping his spectacles, 'I don't know why . . . but I was thinking how easy it would be to commit a murder here.'

'It's all very well for you. Father Brown,' said the Inspector good-humouredly. 'You've had a lot more murders than your fair share; and we poor policemen sit starving all our lives, even for a little one. But why should you say . . . Oh I see, you're looking at all those Turkish daggers on the wall. There are plenty of things to commit a murder with, if that's what you mean. But not more than there are in any ordinary kitchen: carving knives or pokers or what not. That isn't where the snag of a murder comes in.'

Father Brown seemed to recall his rambling thoughts in some bewilderment; and said that he supposed so.

'Murder is always easy,' said Inspector Greenwood. 'There can't possibly be anything more easy than murder. I could murder you at this minute - more easily than I can get a drink in this damned bar. The only difficulty is committing a murder without committing oneself as a murderer. It's this shyness about owning up to a murder; it's this silly modesty of murderers about their own masterpieces, that makes the trouble. They will stick to this extraordinary fixed idea of killing people without being found out; and that's what restrains them, even in a room full of daggers. Otherwise every cutler's shop would be piled with corpses. And that, by the way, explains the one kind of murder that really can't be prevented. Which is why, of course, we poor bobbies are always blamed for not preventing it. When a madman murders a King or a President, it can't be prevented. You can't make a King live in a coal-cellar, or carry about a President in a steel box. Anybody can murder him who does not mind being a murderer. That is where the madman is like the martyr - sort of beyond this world. A real fanatic can always kill anybody he likes.'

Before the priest could reply, a joyous band of bagmen rolled into the room like a shoal of porpoises; and the magnificent bellow of a big, beaming man, with an equally big and beaming tie-pin, brought the eager and obsequious manager running like a dog to the whistle, with a rapidity which the police in plain clothes had failed to inspire.

'I'm sure I'm very sorry, Mr Jukes,' said the manager, who wore a rather agitated smile and a wave or curl of very varnished hair across his forehead. 'We're rather understaffed at present; and I had to attend to something in the hotel, Mr Jukes.'

Mr Jukes was magnanimous, but in a noisy way; and ordered drinks all round, conceding one even to the almost cringing manager. Mr Jukes was a traveller for a very famous and fashionable wine and spirits firm; and may have conceived himself as lawfully the leader in such a place. Anyhow, he began a boisterous monologue, rather tending to tell the manager how to manage his hotel; and the others seemed to accept him as an authority. The policeman and the priest had retired to a low bench and small table in the background, from which they watched events, up to that rather remarkable moment when the policeman had very decisively to intervene.

For the next thing that happened, as already narrated, was the astonishing apparition of a brown Asiatic in a green turban, accompanied by the (if possible) more astonishing apparition of a Nonconformist minister; omens such as appear before a doom. In this case there was no doubt about evidence for the portent. A taciturn but observant boy cleaning the steps for the last hour (being a leisurely worker), the dark, fat, bulky bar-attendant, even the diplomatic but distracted manager, all bore witness to the miracle.

The apparitions, as the sceptics say, were due to perfectly natural causes. The man with the mane of yellow hair and the semi-clerical clothes was not only familiar as a preacher on the sands, but as a propagandist throughout the modern world. He was no less a person than the Rev. David Pryce-Jones, whose far-resounding slogan was Prohibition and Purification for Our Land and the Britains Overseas. He as an excellent public speaker and organizer; and an idea had occurred to him that ought to have occurred to Prohibitionists long ago. It was the simple idea that, if Prohibition is right, some honour is due to the Prophet who was perhaps the first Prohibitionist. He had corresponded with the leaders of Mahommedan religious thought, and had finally induced a distinguished Moslem (one of whose names was Akbar and the rest an untranslatable ululation of Allah with attributes) to come and lecture in England on the ancient Moslem veto on wine. Neither of them certainly had been in a public-house bar before; but they had come there by the process already described; driven from the genteel tea-rooms, shepherded into the newly-decorated saloon. Probably all would have been well, if the great Prohibitionist, in his innocence, had not
advanced to the counter and asked for a glass of milk.

The commercial travellers, though a kindly race, emitted involuntary noises of pain; a murmur of suppressed jests was heard, as 'Shun the bowl,' or 'Better bring out the cow'. But the magnificent Mr Jukes, feeling it due to his wealth and tie - pin to produce more refined humour, fanned himself as one about to faint, and said pathetically: 'They know they can knock me down with a feather. They know a breath will blow me away. They know my doctor says I'm not to have these shocks. And they come and drink cold milk in cold blood, before my very eyes.'

The Rev. David Pryce - Jones, accustomed to deal with hecklers at public meetings, was so unwise as to venture on remonstrance and recrimination, in this very different and much more popular atmosphere. The Oriental total abstainer abstained from speech as well as spirits; and certainly gained in dignity by doing so. In fact, so far as he was concerned, the Moslem culture certainly scored a silent victory; he was obviously so much more of a gentleman than the commercial gentlemen, that a faint irritation began to arise against his aristocratic aloofness; and when Mr Pryce - Jones began to refer in argument to something of the kind, the tension became very acute indeed.

'I ask you, friends,' said Mr Pryce - Jones, with expansive platform gestures, 'why does our friend here set an example to us Christians in truly Christian self - control and brotherhood? Why does he stand here as a model of true Christianity, of real refinement, of genuine gentlemanly behaviour, amid all the quarrels and riots of such places as these? Because, whatever the doctrinal differences between us, at least in his soil the evil plant, the accursed hop or vine, has never - '

At this crucial moment of the controversy it was that John Raggley, the stormy petrel of a hundred storms of controversy, red - faced, white - haired, his antiquated top - hat on the back of his head, his stick swinging like a club, entered the house like an invading army.

John Raggley was generally regarded as a crank. He was the sort of man who writes letters to the newspaper, which generally do not appear in the newspaper; but which do appear afterwards as pamphlets, printed (or misprinted) at his own expense; and circulated to a hundred waste - paper baskets. He had quarrelled alike with the Tory squires and the Radical County Councils; he hated Jews; and he distrusted nearly everything that is sold in shops, or even in hotels. But there was a backing of facts behind his fads; he knew the county in every corner and curious detail; and he was a sharp observer. Even the manager, a Mr Wills, had a shadowy respect for Mr Raggley, having a nose for the sort of lunacy allowed in the gentry; not indeed the prostrate reverence which he had for the jovial magnificence of Mr Jukes, who was really good for trade, but a least a disposition to avoid quarrelling with the old grumbler, partly perhaps out of fear of the old grumbler's tongue.

'And you will have your usual, Sir,' said Mr Wills, leaning and leering across the counter.

'Damn it, I sometimes think the only English thing left in England is cherry brandy. Cherry brandy does taste of cherries. Can you find me any beer that tastes of hops, or any cider that tastes of apples, or any wine that has the remotest indication of being made out of grapes? There's an infernal swindle going on now in every inn in the country, that would have raised a revolution in any other country. I've found out a thing or two about it, I can tell you. You wait till I can get it printed, and people will sit up. If I could stop our people being poisoned with all this bad drink - '

Here again the Rev. David Pryce - Jones showed a certain failure in tact; though it was a virtue he almost worshipped. He was so unwise as to attempt to establish an alliance with Mr Raggley, by a fine confusion between the idea of bad drink and the idea that drink is bad. Once more he endeavoured to drag his stiff and stately Eastern friend into the argument, as a refined foreigner superior to our rough English ways. He was even so foolish as to talk of a broad theological outlook; and ultimately to mention the name of Mahomet, which was echoed in a sort of explosion.

'God damn your soul!' roared Mr Raggley, with a less broad theological outlook. 'Do you mean that Englishmen mustn't drink English beer, because wine was forbidden in a damned desert by that dirty old humbug Mahomet?'

In an instant the Inspector of Police had reached the middle of the room with a stride. For, the instant before that, a remarkable change had taken place in the demeanour of the Oriental gentleman, who had hitherto stood perfectly still, with steady and shining eyes. He now proceeded, as his friend had said, to set an example in truly Christian self - control and brotherhood by reaching the wall with the bound of a tiger, tearing down one of the heavy knives hanging there and sending it smack like a stone from a sling, so that it stuck quivering in the wall exactly half an inch above Mr Raggley's eye. It would undoubtedly have stuck quivering in Mr Raggley, if Inspector Greenwood had not been just in time to jerk the arm and deflect the aim. Father Brown continued in his seat, watching the scene with screwed - up eyes and a screw of something almost like a smile at the corners of his mouth, as if he saw something beyond the mere momentary violence of the quarrel.

And then the quarrel took a curious turn; which may not be understood by everybody, until men like Mr John Raggley are better understood than they are. For the red - faced old fanatic was standing up and laughing
uproariously as if it were the best joke he had ever heard. All his snapping vituperation and bitterness seemed to have gone out of him; and he regarded the other fanatic, who had just tried to murder him, with a sort of boisterous benevolence.

'Blast your eyes,' he said, 'you're the first man I've met in twenty years!'

'Do you charge this man, Sir?' said the Inspector, looking doubtful.

'Charge him, of course not,' said Raggley. 'I'd stand him a drink if he were allowed any drinks. I hadn't any business to insult his religion; and I wish to God all you skunks had the guts to kill a man, I won't say for insulting your religion, because you haven't got any, but for insulting anything - even your beer.'

'Now he's called us all skunks,' said Father Brown to Greenwood, 'peace and harmony seem to be restored. I wish that teetotal lecturer could get himself impaled on his friend's knife; it was he who made all the mischief.'

As he spoke, the odd groups in the room were already beginning to break up; it had been found possible to clear the commercial room for the commercial travellers, and they adjourned to it, the potboy carrying a new round of drinks after them on a tray. Father Brown stood for a moment gazing at the glasses left on the counter; recognizing at once the ill-o mened glass of milk, and another which smelt of whisky; and then turned just in time to see the parting between those two quaint figures, fanatics of the East and West. Raggley was still ferociously genial; there was still something a little darkling and sinister about the Moslem, which was perhaps natural; but he bowed himself out with grave gestures of dignified reconciliation; and there was every indication that the trouble was really over.

Some importance, however, continued attached, in the mind of Father Brown at least, to the memory and interpretation of those last courteous salutes between the combatants. Because curiously enough, when Father Brown came down very early next morning, to perform his religious duties in the neighbourhood, he found the long saloon bar, with its fantastic Asiatic decoration, filled with a dead white light of daybreak in which every detail was distinct; and one of the details was the dead body of John Raggley bent and crushed into a corner of the room, with the heavy-hilted crooked dagger rammed through his heart.

Father Brown went very softly upstairs again and summoned his friend the Inspector; and the two stood beside the corpse, in a house in which no one else was as yet stirring. 'We mustn't either assume or avoid the obvious,' said Greenwood after a silence, 'but it is well to remember, I think, what I was saying to you yesterday afternoon. It's rather odd, by the way, that I should have said it - yesterday afternoon.'

'I know,' said the priest, nodding with an owlish stare.

'I said,' observed Greenwood, 'that the one sort of murder we can't stop is murder by somebody like a religious fanatic. That brown fellow probably thinks that if he's hanged, he'll go straight to Paradise for defending the honour of the Prophet.'

'There is that, of course,' said Father Brown. 'It would be very reasonable, so to speak, of our Moslem friend to have stabbed him. And you may say we don't know of anybody else yet, who could at all reasonably have stabbed him. But...but I was thinking...'. And his round face suddenly went blank again and all speech died on his lips.

'What's the matter now?' asked the other.

'Well, I know it sounds funny,' said Father Brown in a forlorn voice. 'But I was thinking... I was thinking, in a way, it doesn't much matter who stabbed him.'

'Is this the New Morality?' asked his friend. 'Or the old Casuistry, perhaps. Are the Jesuits really going in for murder?'

'I didn't say it didn't matter who murdered him,' said Father Brown. 'Of course the man who stabbed him might possibly be the man who murdered him. But it might be quite a different man. Anyhow, it was done at quite a different time. I suppose you'll want to work on the hilt for finger-prints; but don't take too much notice of them. I can imagine other reasons for other people sticking this knife in the poor old boy. Not very edifying reasons, of course, but quite distinct from the murder. You'll have to put some more knives into him, before you find out about that.'

'You mean - ' began the other, watching him keenly.

'I mean the autopsy,' said the priest, 'to find the real cause of death.'

'You're quite right, I believe,' said the Inspector, 'about the stabbing, anyhow. We must wait for the doctor; but I'm pretty sure he'll say you're right. There isn't blood enough. This knife was stuck in the corpse when it had been cold for hours. But why?'

'Possibly to put the blame on the Mahommedan,' answered Father Brown. 'Pretty mean, I admit, but not necessarily murder. I fancy there are people in this place trying to keep secrets, who are not necessarily murderers.'

'I haven't speculated on that line yet,' said Greenwood. 'What makes you think so?'

'What I said yesterday, when we first came into this horrible room. I said it would be easy to commit a murder here. But I wasn't thinking about all those stupid weapons, though you thought I was. About something quite different.'
For the next few hours the Inspector and his friend conducted a close and thorough investigation into the goings and comings of everybody for the last twenty-four hours, the way the drinks had been distributed, the glasses that were washed or unwashed, and every detail about every individual involved, or apparently not involved. One might have supposed they thought that thirty people had been poisoned, as well as one.

It seemed certain that nobody had entered the building except by the big entrance that adjoined the bar; all the others were blocked in one way or another by the repairs. A boy had been cleaning the steps outside this entrance; but he had nothing very clear to report. Until the amazing entry of the Turk in the Turban, with his teetotal lecturer, there did not seem to have been much custom of any kind, except for the commercial travellers who came in to take what they called 'quick ones'; and they seemed to have moved together, like Wordsworth's Cloud; there was a slight difference of opinion between the boy outside and the men inside about whether one of them had not been abnormally quick in obtaining a quick one, and come out on the doorstep by himself; but the manager and the barman had no memory of any such independent individual. The manager and the barman knew all the travellers quite well, and there was no doubt about their movements as a whole. They had stood at the bar chaffing and drinking; they had been involved, through their lordly leader, Mr Jukes, in a not very serious altercation with Mr Pryce-Jones; and they had witnessed the sudden and very serious altercation between Mr Akbar and Mr Raggley. Then they were told they could adjourn to the Commercial Room and did so, their drinks being borne after them like a trophy.

'There's precious little to go on,' said Inspector Greenwood. 'Of course a lot of officious servants must do their duty as usual, and was out all the glasses; including old Raggley's glass. If it weren't for everybody else's efficiency, we detectives might be quite efficient.'

'I know,' said Father Brown, and his mouth took on again the twisted smile. 'I sometimes think criminals invented hygiene. Or perhaps hygienic reformers invented crime; they look like it, some of them. Everybody talks about foul dens and filthy slums in which crime can run riot; but it's just the other way. They are called foul, not because crimes are committed, but because crimes are discovered. It's in the neat, spotless, clean and tidy places that crime can run riot; no mud to make footprints; no dregs to contain poison; kind servants washing out all traces of the murder; and the murderer killing and cremating six wives and all for want of a little Christian dirt. Perhaps I express myself with too much warmth - but look here. As it happens, I do remember one glass, which has doubtless been cleaned since, but I should like to know more about it.'

'Do you mean Raggley's glass?' asked Greenwood.

'No; I mean Nobody's glass,' replied the priest. 'It stood near that glass of milk and it still held an inch or two of whisky. Well, you and I had no whisky. I happen to remember that the manager, when treated by the jovial Jukes, had "a drop of gin". I hope you don't suggest that our Moslem was a whisky-drinker disguised in a green turban; or that the Rev. David Pryce-Jones managed to drink whisky and milk together, without noticing it.'

'Most of the commercial travellers took whisky,' said the Inspector. 'They generally do.'

'Yes; and they generally see they get it too,' answered Father Brown. 'In this case, they had it all carefully carted after them to their own room. But this glass was left behind.'

'An accident, I suppose,' said Greenwood doubtfully. 'The man could easily get another in the Commercial Room afterwards.'

Father Brown shook his head. 'You've got to see people as they are. Now these sort of men - well, some call them vulgar and some common; but that's all likes and dislikes. I'd be content to say that they are mostly simple men. Lots of them very good men, very glad to go back to the missus and the kids; some of them might be blackguards; might have had several missuses; or even murdered several missuses. But most of them are simple men; and, mark you, just the least tiny bit drunk. Not much; there's many a duke or don at Oxford drunker; but when that sort of man is at that stage of conviviality, he simply can't help noticing things, and noticing them very loud. Don't you observe that the least little incident jerks them into speech; if the beer froths over, they froth over with it, and have to say, "Whoa, Emma," or "Doing me proud, aren't you?" Now I should say it's flatly impossible for five of these festive beings to sit round a table in the Commercial Room, and have only four glasses set before them, the fifth man being left out, without making a shout about it. Probably they would make a shout about it. Certainly he would make a shout about it. He wouldn't wait, like an Englishman of another class, till he could get a drink quietly later. The air would resound with things like, "And what about little me?" or, "Here, George, have I joined the Band of Hope?" or, "Do you see any green in my turban, George?" But the barman heard no such complaints. I take it as certain that the glass of whisky left behind had been nearly emptied by somebody else; somebody we haven't thought about yet.'

'But can you think of any such person?' ask the other.

'It's because the manager and the barman won't hear of any such person, that you dismiss the one really independent piece of evidence; the evidence of that boy outside cleaning the steps. He says that a man, who well
may have been a bagman, but who did not, in fact, stick to the other bagmen, went in and came out again almost immediately. The manager and the barman never saw him; or say they never saw him. But he got a glass of whisky from the bar somehow. Let us call him, for the sake of argument, The Quick One. Now you know I don't often interfere with your business, which I know you do better than I should do it, or should want to do it. I've never had anything to do with setting police machinery at work, or running down criminals, or anything like that. But, for the first time in my life, I want to do it now. I want you to find The Quick One; to follow The Quick One to the ends of the earth; to set the whole infernal official machinery at work like a drag-net across the nations, and jolly well recapture The Quick One. Because he is the man we want.'

Greenwood made a despairing gesture. 'Has he face or form or any visible quality except quickness?' he inquired.

'He was wearing a sort of Inverness cape,' said Father Brown, 'and he told the boy outside he must reach Edinburgh by next morning. That's all the boy outside remembers. But I know your organization has got on to people with less clue than that.'

'You seem very keen on this,' said the Inspector, a little puzzled.

The priest looked puzzled also, as if at his own thoughts; he sat with knotted brow and then said abruptly: 'You see, it's so easy to be misunderstood. All men matter. You matter. I matter. It's the hardest thing in theology to believe.'

The Inspector stared at him without comprehension; but he proceeded.

'We matter to God - God only knows why. But that's the only possible justification of the existence of policemen.' The policeman did not seem enlightened as to his own cosmic justification. 'Don't you see, the law really is right in a way, after all. If all men matter, all murders matter. That which He has so mysteriously created, we must not suffer to be mysteriously destroyed. But -'

He said the last word sharply, like one taking a new step in decision.

'But, when once I step off that mystical level of equality, I don't see that most of your important murders are particularly important. You are always telling me that this case and that is important. As a plain, practical man of the world, I don't think that the Prime Minister matters at all. As a plain, practical man of the world, I don't think that the Prime Minister matters at all. As a mere matter of human importance, I should say he hardly exists at all. Do you suppose if he and the other public men were shot dead tomorrow, wouldn't be other people to stand up and say that every avenue was being explored, or that the Government had the matter under the gravest consideration? The masters of the modern world don't matter. Even the real masters don't matter much. Hardly anybody you ever read about in a newspaper matters at all.'

He stood up, giving the table a small rap: one of his rare gestures; and his voice changed again. 'But Raggley did matter. He was one of a great line of some half a dozen men who might have saved England. They stand up stark and dark like disregarded sign-posts, down all that smooth descending road which has ended in this swamp of merely commercial collapse. Dean Swift and Dr Johnson and old William Cobbett; they had all without exception the name of being surly or savage, and they were all loved by their friends, and they all deserved to be. Didn't you see how that old man, with the heart of a lion, stood up and forgave his enemy as only fighters can forgive? He jolly well did do what that temperance lecturer talked about; he set an example to us Christians and was a model of Christianity. And when there is foul and secret murder of a man like that - then I do think it matters, matters so much that even the modern machinery of police will be a thing that any respectable person may make use of ... Oh, don't mention it. And so, for once in a way, I really do want to make use of you.'

And so, for some stretch of those strange days and nights, we might almost say that the little figure of Father Brown drove before him into action all the armies and engines of the police forces of the Crown, as the little figure of Napoleon drove the batteries and the battle-lines of the vast strategy that covered Europe. Police stations and post offices worked all night; traffic was stopped, correspondence was intercepted, inquiries were made in a hundred places, in order to track the flying trail of that ghostly figure, without face or name, with an Inverness cape and an Edinburgh ticket.

Meanwhile, of course, the other lines of investigation were not neglected. The full report of the post-mortem had not yet come in; but everybody seemed certain that it was a case of poisoning. This naturally threw the primary suspicion upon the cherry brandy; and this again naturally threw the primary suspicion on the hotel.

'Most probably on the manager of the hotel,' said Greenwood gruffly. 'He looks a nasty little worm to me. Of course it might be something to do with some servant, like the barman; he seems rather a sulky specimen, and Raggley might have cursed him a bit, having a flaming temper, though he was generally generous enough afterwards. But, after all, as I say, the primary responsibility, and therefore the primary suspicion, rests on the manager.'

'Oh, I knew the primary suspicion would rest on the manager,' said Father Brown. 'That was why I didn't suspect
him. You see, I rather fancied somebody else must have known that the primary suspicion would rest on the manager; or the servants of the hotel. That is why I said it would be easy to kill anybody in the hotel . . . But you'd better go and have it out with him, I suppose.'

The Inspector went; but came back again after a surprisingly short interview, and found his clerical friend turning over some papers that seemed to be a sort of dossier of the stormy career of John Raggley.

'This is a rum go,' said the Inspector. 'I thought I should spend hours cross - examining that slippery little toad there, for we haven't legally got a thing against him. And instead of that, he went to pieces all at once, and I really think he's told me all he knows in sheer funk.

'I know,' said Father Brown. 'That's the way he went to pieces when he found Raggley's corpse apparently poisoned in his hotel. That's why he lost his head enough to do such a clumsy thing as decorate the corpse with a Turkish knife, to put the blame on the nigger, as he would say. There never is anything the matter with him but funk; he's the very last man that ever would really stick a knife into a live person. I bet he had to nerve himself to stick it into a dead one. But he's the very first person to be frightened of being charged with what he didn't do; and to make a fool of himself, as he did.'

'I suppose I must see the barman too,' observed Greenwood.

'I suppose so,' answered the other. 'I don't believe myself it was any of the hotel people - well, because it was made to look as if it must be the hotel people . . . But look here, have you seen any of this stuff they've got together about Raggley? He had a jolly interesting life; I wonder whether anyone will write his biography.'

'I took a note of everything likely to affect an affair like this,' answered the official. 'He was a widower; but he did once have a row with a man about his wife; a Scotch land - agent then in these parts; and Raggley seems to have been pretty violent. They say he hated Scotchmen; perhaps that's the reason . . . Oh, I know what you are smiling grimly about. A Scotchman . . . Perhaps an Edinburgh man.'

'Perhaps,' said Father Brown. 'It's quite likely, though, that he did dislike Scotchmen, apart from private reasons. It's an odd thing, but all that tribe of Tory Radicals, or whatever you call them, who resisted the Whig mercantile movement, all of them did dislike Scotchmen. Cobbett did; Dr Johnson did; Swift described their accent in one of his deadliest passages; even Shakespeare has been accused of the prejudice. But the prejudices of great men generally have something to do with principles. And there was a reason, I fancy. The Scot came from a poor agricultural land, that became a rich industrial land. He was able and active; he thought he was bringing industrial civilization from the north; he simply didn't know that there had been for centuries a rural civilization in the south. His own grandfather's land was highly rural but not civilized . . . Well, well, I suppose we can only wait for more news.'

'I hardly think you'll get the latest news out of Shakespeare and Dr Johnson,' grinned the police officer. 'What Shakespeare thought of Scotchmen isn't exactly evidence.'

Father Brown cocked an eyebrow, as if a new thought had surprised him. 'Why, now I come to think of it,' he said, 'there might be better evidence, even out of Shakespeare. He doesn't often mention Scotchmen. But he was rather fond of making fun of Welshmen.'

The Inspector was searching his friend's face; for he fancied he recognized an alertness behind its demure expression. 'By Jove,' he said. 'Nobody thought of turning the suspicions that way, anyhow.'

'Well,' said Father Brown, with broad - minded calm, 'you started by talking about fanatics; and how a fanatic could do anything. Well, I suppose we had the honour of entertaining in this bar - parlour yesterday, about the biggest and loudest and most fat - headed fanatic in the modern world. If being a pig - headed idiot with one idea is the way to murder, I put in a claim for my reverend brother Pryce - Jones, the Prohibitionist, in preference to all the fakirs in Asia, and it's perfectly true, as I told you, that his horrible glass of milk was standing side by side on the counter with the mysterious glass of whisky.'

'Which you think was mixed up with the murder,' said Greenwood, staring. 'Look here, I don't know whether you're really serious or not.'

Even as he was looking steadily in his friend's face, finding something still inscrutable in its expression, the telephone rang stridently behind the bar. Lifting the flap in the counter Inspector Greenwood passed rapidly inside, unhooked the receiver, listened for an instant, and then uttered a shout; not addressed to his interlocutor, but to the universe in general. Then he listened still more attentively and said explosively at intervals, 'Yes, yes . . . Come round at once; bring him round if possible . . . Good piece of work . . . Congratulate you.'

Then Inspector Greenwood came back into the outer lounge, like a man who has renewed his youth, sat down squarely on his seat, with his hands planted on his knees, stared at his friend, and said:

'Father Brown, I don't know how you do it. You seem to have known he was a murderer before anybody else knew he was a man. He was nobody; he was nothing; he was a slight confusion in the evidence; nobody in the hotel saw him; the boy on the steps could hardly swear to him; he was just a fine shade of doubt founded on an extra dirty
Father Brown had risen with the sense of the crisis, mechanically clutching the papers destined to be so valuable to the biographer of Mr Raggley; and stood staring at his friend. Perhaps this gesture jerked his friend's mind to fresh confirmations.

'Yes, we've got The Quick One. And very quick he was, like quicksilver, in making his get-away; we only just stopped him - off on a fishing trip to Orkney, he said. But he's the man, all right; he's the Scotch land-agent who made love to Raggley's wife; he's the man who drank Scotch whisky in this bar and then took a train to Edinburgh. And nobody would have known it but for you.'

'Well, what I meant,' began Father Brown, in a rather dazed tone; and at that instant there was a rattle and rumble of heavy vehicles outside the hotel; and two or three other and subordinate policemen blocked the bar with their presence. One of them, invited by his superior to sit down, did so in an expansive manner, like one at once happy and fatigued; and he also regarded Father Brown with admiring eyes.

'Got the murderer. Sir, oh yes,' he said: 'I know he's a murderer, 'cause he bally nearly murdered me. I've captured some tough characters before now; but never one like this - hit me in the stomach like the kick of a horse and nearly got away from five men. Oh, you've got a real killer this time. Inspector.'

'Where is he?' asked Father Brown, staring.

'Outside in the van, in handcuffs,' replied the policeman, 'and, if you're wise, you'll leave him there - for the present.'

Father Brown sank into a chair in a sort of soft collapse; and the papers he had been nervously clutching were shed around him, shooting and sliding about the floor like sheets of breaking snow. Not only his face, but his whole body, conveyed the impression of a punctured balloon.

'Oh . . . Oh,' he repeated, as if any further oath would be inadequate. 'Oh . . . I've done it again.'

'If you mean you've caught the criminal again,' began Greenwood. But his friend stopped him with a feeble explosion, like that of expiring soda-water.

'I mean,' said Father Brown, 'that it's always happening; and really, I don't know why. I always try to say what I mean. But everybody else means such a lot by what I say.'

'What in the world is the matter now?' cried Greenwood, suddenly exasperated.

'I say things,' said Father Brown in a weak voice, which could alone convey the weakness of the words. 'I say things, but everybody seems to know they mean more than they say. Once I saw a broken mirror and said “Something has happened” and they all answered, “Yes, yes, as you truly say, two men wrestled and one ran into the garden,” and so on. I don't understand it, “Something happened,” and “Two men wrestled,” don't seem to me at all the same; but I dare say I read old books of logic. Well, it's like that here. You seem to be all certain this man is a murderer. But I never said he was a murderer. I said he was the man we wanted. He is. I want him very much. I want him frightfully. I want him as the one thing we haven't got in the whole of this horrible case - a witness!'

They all stared at him, but in a frowning fashion, like men trying to follow a sharp new turn of the argument; and it was he who resumed the argument.

'From the first minute I entered that big empty bar or saloon, I knew what was the matter with all this business was emptiness; solitude; too many chances for anybody to be alone. In a word, the absence of witnesses. All we knew was that when we came in, the manager and the barman were not in the bar. But when were they in the bar? What chance was there of making any sort of time - table of when anybody was anywhere? The whole thing was blank for want of witnesses. I rather fancy the barman or somebody was in the bar just before we came; and that's how the Scotchman got his Scotch whisky. He certainly didn't get it after we came. But we can't begin to inquire whether anybody in the hotel poisoned poor Raggley's cherry brandy, till we really know who was in the bar and when. Now I want you to do me another favour, in spite of this stupid muddle, which is probably all my fault. I want you to collect all the people involved in this room - I think they're all still available, unless the Asiatic has gone back to Asia - and then take the poor Scotchman out of his handcuffs, and bring him in here, and let him tell us who did serve him with whisky, and who was in the bar, and who else was in the room, and all the rest. He's the only man whose evidence can cover just that period when the crime was done. I don't see the slightest reason for doubting his word.'

'But look here,' said Greenwood. 'This brings it all back to the hotel authorities; and I thought you agreed that the manager isn't the murderer. Is it the barman, or what?'

'I don't know,' said the priest blankly. 'I don't know for certain even about the manager. I don't know anything about the barman. I fancy the manager might be a bit of a conspirator, even if he wasn't a murderer. But I do know there's one solitary witness on earth who may have seem something; and that's why I set all your police dogs on his trail to the ends of the earth.'

The mysterious Scotchman, when he finally appeared before the company thus assembled, was certainly a
formidable figure; tall, with a hulking stride and a long sardonic hatchet face, with tufts of red hair; and wearing not only an Inverness cape but a Glengarry bonnet, he might well be excused for a somewhat acrid attitude; but anybody could see he was of the sort to resist arrest, even with violence. It was not surprising that he had come to blows with a fighting fellow like Raggley. It was not even surprising that the police had been convinced, by the mere details of capture, that he was a tough and a, typical killer. But he claimed to be a perfectly respectable farmer, in Aberdeenshire, his name being James Grant; and somehow not only Father Brown, but Inspector Greenwood, a shrewd man with a great deal of experience, was pretty soon convinced that the Scot's ferocity was the fury of innocence rather than guilt.

'Now what we want from you, Mr Grant,' said the Inspector gravely, dropping without further parley into tones of courtesy, 'is simply your evidence on one very important fact. I am greatly grieved at the misunderstanding by which you have suffered, but I am sure you wish to serve the ends of justice. I believe you came into this bar just after it opened, at half past five, and were served with a glass of whisky. We are not certain what servant of the hotel, whether the barman or the manager or some subordinate, was in the bar at the time. Will you look round the room, and tell me whether the bar - attendant who served you is present here.'

'Aye, he's present,' said Mr Grant, grimly smiling, having swept the group with a shrewd glance. 'I'd know him anywhere; and ye'll agree he's big enough to be seen. Do ye have all your inn - servants as grand as yon?'

The Inspector's eye remained hard and steady, and his voice colourless and continuous; the face of Father Brown was a blank; but on many other faces there was a cloud; the barman was not particularly big and not at all grand; and the manager was decidedly small.

'We only want the barman identified,' said the Inspector calmly. 'Of course we know him; but we should like you to verify it independently. You mean . . .?' And he stopped suddenly.

'Whe, there he is plain enough,' said the Scotchman wearily; and made a gesture, and with that gesture the gigantic Jukes, the prince of commercial travellers, rose like a trumpeting elephant; and in a flash had three policemen fastened on him like hounds on a wild beast.

'Well, all that was simple enough,' said Father Brown to his friend afterwards. 'As I told you, the instant I entered the empty bar - room, my first thought was that, if the barman left the bar unguarded like that, there was nothing in the world to stop you or me or anybody else lifting the flap and walking in, and putting poison in any of the bottles standing waiting for customers. Of course, a practical poisoner would probably do it as Jukes did, by substituting a poisoned bottle for the ordinary bottle; that could be done in a flash. It was easy enough for him, as he travelled in bottles, to carry a flask of cherry brandy prepared and of the same pattern. Of course, it requires one condition; but it's a fairly common condition. It would hardly do to start poisoning the beer or whisky that scores of people drink; it would cause a massacre. But when a man is well known as drinking only one special thing, like cherry brandy, that isn't very widely drunk, it's just like poisoning him in his own home. Only it's a jolly sight safer. For practically the whole suspicion instantly falls on the hotel, or somebody to do with the hotel; and there's no earthly argument to show that it was done by anyone out of a hundred customers that might come into the bar: even if people realized that a customer could do it. It was about as absolutely anonymous and irresponsible a murder as a man could commit.'

'And why exactly did the murderer commit it?' asked his friend.

Father Brown rose and gravely gathered the papers which he had previously scattered in a moment of distraction.

'May I recall your attention,' he said smiling, 'to the materials of the forthcoming Life and Letters of the Late John Raggley? Or, for that matter, his own spoken words? He said in this very bar that he was going to expose a scandal about the management of hotels; and the scandal was the pretty common one of a corrupt agreement between hotel proprietors and a salesman who took and gave secret commissions, so that his business had a monopoly of all the drink sold in the place. It wasn't even an open slavery like an ordinary tied house; it was a swindle at the expense of everybody the manager was supposed to serve. It was a legal offence. So the ingenious Jukes, taking the first moment when the bar was empty, as it often was, stepped inside and made the exchange of bottles; unfortunately at that very moment a Scotchman in an Inverness cape came in harshly demanding whisky. Jukes saw his only chance was to pretend to be the barman and serve the customer. He was very much relieved that the customer was a Quick One.'

'I think you're rather a Quick One yourself,' observed Greenwood; 'if you say you smelt something at the start, in the mere air of an empty room. Did you suspect Jukes at all at the start?'

'Well, he sounded rather rich somehow,' answered Father Brown vaguely. 'You know when a man has a rich voice. And I did sort of ask myself why he should have such a disgustingly rich voice, when all those honest fellows were fairly poor. But I think I knew he was a sham when I saw that big shining breast - pin.'

'You mean because it was sham?' asked Greenwood doubtfully.
'Oh, no; because it was genuine,' said Father Brown.

THREE: The Blast of the Book

Professor Openshaw always lost his temper, with a loud bang, if anybody called him a Spiritualist; or a believer in Spiritualism. This, however, did not exhaust his explosive elements; for he also lost his temper if anybody called him a disbeliever in Spiritualism. It was his pride to have given his whole life to investigating Psychic Phenomena; it was also his pride never to have given a hint of whether he thought they were really psychic or merely phenomenal. He enjoyed nothing so much as to sit in a circle of devout Spiritualists and give devastating descriptions of how he had exposed medium after medium and detected fraud after fraud; for indeed he was a man of much detective talent and insight, when once he had fixed his eye on an object, and he always fixed his eye on a medium, as a highly suspicious object. There was a story of his having spotted the same Spiritualist mountebank under three different disguises: dressed as a woman, a white-bearded old man, and a Brahmin of a rich chocolate brown. These recitals made the true believers rather restless, as indeed they were intended to do; but they could hardly complain, for no Spiritualist denies the existence of fraudulent mediums; only the Professor's flowing narrative might well seem to indicate that all mediums were fraudulent.

But woe to the simple-minded and innocent Materialist (and Materialists as a race are rather innocent and simple-minded) who, presuming on this narrative tendency, should advance the thesis that ghosts were against the laws of nature, or that such things were only old superstitions; or that it was all tosh, or, alternatively, bunk. Him would the Professor, suddenly reversing all his scientific batteries, sweep from the field with a cannonade of unquestionable cases and unexplained phenomena, of which the wretched rationalist had never heard in his life, giving all the dates and details, stating all the attempted and abandoned natural explanations; stating everything, indeed, except whether he, John Oliver Openshaw, did or did not believe in Spirits, and that neither Spiritualist nor Materialist could ever boast of finding out.

Professor Openshaw, a lean figure with pale leonine hair and hypnotic blue eyes, stood exchanging a few words with Father Brown, who was a friend of his, on the steps outside the hotel where both had been breakfasting that morning and sleeping the night before. The Professor had come back rather late from one of his grand experiments, in general exasperation, and was still tingling with the fight that he always waged alone and against both sides.

'Oh, I don't mind you,' he said laughing. 'You don't believe in it even if it's true. But all these people are perpetually asking me what I'm trying to prove. They don't seem to understand that I'm a man of science. A man of science isn't trying to prove anything. He's trying to find out what will prove itself.'

'But he hasn't found out yet,' said Father Brown.

'Well, I have some little notions of my own, that are not quite so negative as most people think,' answered the Professor, after an instant of frowning silence; 'anyhow, I've begun to fancy that if there is something to be found, they're looking for it along the wrong line. It's all too theatrical; it's showing off, all their shiny ectoplasm and trumpets and voices and the rest; all on the model of old melodramas and mouldy historical novels about the Family Ghost. If they'd go to history instead of historical novels, I'm beginning to think they'd really find something. But not Apparitions.'

'After all,' said Father Brown, 'Apparitions are only Appearances. I suppose you'd say the Family Ghost is only keeping up appearances.'

The Professor's gaze, which had commonly a fine abstracted character, suddenly fixed and focused itself as it did on a dubious medium. It had rather the air of a man screwing a strong magnifying-glass into his eye. Not that he thought the priest was in the least like a dubious medium; but he was startled into attention by his friend's thought following so closely on his own.

'Appearances!' he muttered, 'crikey, but it's odd you should say that just now. The more I learn, the more I fancy they lose by merely looking for appearances. Now if they'd look a little into Disappearances -'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'after all, the real fairy legends weren't so very much about the appearance of famous fairies; calling up Titania or exhibiting Oberon by moonlight. But there were no end of legends about people disappearing, because they were stolen by the fairies. Are you on the track of Kilmenny or Thomas the Rhymer?'

'I'm on the track of ordinary modern people you've read of in the newspapers,' answered Openshaw. 'You may well stare; but that's my game just now; and I've been on it for a long time. Frankly, I think a lot of psychic appearances could be explained away. It's the disappearances I can't explain, unless they're psychic. These people in the newspaper who vanish and are never found - if you knew the details as I do ... and now only this morning I got confirmation; an extraordinary letter from an old missionary, quite a respectable old boy. He's coming to see me at my office this morning. Perhaps you'd lunch with me or something; and I'd tell the results - in confidence.'

'Thanks; I will - unless,' said Father Brown modestly, 'the fairies have stolen me by then.'

With that they parted and Openshaw walked round the corner to a small office he rented in the neighbourhood; chiefly for the publication of a small periodical, of psychical and psychological notes of the driest and most agnostic
sort. He had only one clerk, who sat at a desk in the outer office, totting up figures and facts for the purposes of the printed report; and the Professor paused to ask if Mr Pringle had called. The clerk answered mechanically in the negative and went on mechanically adding up figures; and the Professor turned towards the inner room that was his study. 'Oh, by the way, Berridge,' he added, without turning round, 'if Mr Pringle comes, send him straight in to me. You needn't interrupt your work; I rather want those notes finished tonight if possible. You might leave them on my desk tomorrow, if I am late.'

And he went into his private office, still brooding on the problem which the name of Pringle had raised; or rather, perhaps, had ratified and confirmed in his mind. Even the most perfectly balanced of agnostics is partially human; and it is possible that the missionary's letter seemed to have greater weight as promising to support his private and still tentative hypothesis. He sat down in his large and comfortable chair, opposite the engraving of Montaigne; and read once more the short letter from the Rev. Luke Pringle, making the appointment for that morning. No man knew better than Professor Openshaw the marks of the letter of the crank; the crowded details; the spidery handwriting; the unnecessary length and repetition. There were none of these things in this case; but a brief and businesslike typewritten statement that the writer had encountered some curious cases of Disappearance, which seemed to fall within the province of the Professor as a student of psychic problems. The Professor was favourably impressed; nor had he any unfavourable impression, in spite of a slight movement of surprise, when he looked up and saw that the Rev. Luke Pringle was already in the room.

'Your clerk told me to come straight in,' said Mr Pringle apologetically, but with a broad and rather agreeable grin. The grin was partly masked by masses of reddish - grey beard and whiskers; a perfect jungle of a beard, such as is sometimes grown by white men living in the jungles; but the eyes above the snub nose had nothing about them in the least wild or outlandish. Openshaw had instantly turned on them that concentrated spotlight or burning - glass of sceptical scrutiny which he turned on men to see if they were mountebanks or maniacs; and, in this case, he had a rather unusual sense of reassurance. The wild beard might have belonged to a crank, but the eyes completely contradicted the beard; they were full of that quite frank and friendly laughter which is never found in the faces of those who are serious frauds or serious lunatics. He would have expected a man with those eyes to be a Philistine, a jolly sceptic, a man who shouted out shallow but hearty contempt of ghosts and spirits; but anyhow, no professional humbug could afford to look as frivolous as that. The man was buttoned up to the throat in a shabby old cape, and only his broad limp hat suggested the cleric; but missionaries from wild places do not always bother to dress like clerics.

'You probably think all this another hoax. Professor,' said Mr Pringle, with a sort of abstract enjoyment, 'and I hope you will forgive my laughing at your very natural air of disapproval. All the same, I've got to tell my story to somebody who knows, because it's true. And, all joking apart, it's tragic as well as true. Well, to cut it short, I was missionary in Nya - Nya, a station in West Africa, in the thick of the forests, where almost the only other white man was the officer in command of the district, Captain Wales; and he and I grew rather thick. Not that he liked missions; he was, if I may say so, thick in many ways; one of those square - headed, square - shouldered men of action who hardly need to think, let alone believe.

That's what makes it all the queerer. One day he came back to his tent in the forest, after a short leave, and said he had gone through a jolly rum experience, and didn't know what to do about it. He was holding a rusty old book in a leather binding, and he put it down on a table beside his revolver and an old Arab sword he kept, probably as a curiosity. He said this book had belonged to a man on the boat he had just come off; and the man swore that nobody must open the book, or look inside it; or else they would be carried off by the devil, or disappear, or something. Wales said this was all nonsense, of course; and they had a quarrel; and the upshot seems to have been that this man, taunted with cowardice or superstition, actually did look into the book; and instantly dropped it; walked to the side of the boat -'

'One moment,' said the Professor, who had made one or two notes. 'Before you tell me anything else. Did this man tell Wales where he had got the book, or who it originally belonged to?'

'Yes,' replied Pringle, now entirely grave. 'It seems he said he was bringing it back to Dr Hankey, the Oriental traveller now in England, to whom it originally belonged, and who had warned him of its strange properties. Well, Hankey is an able man and a rather crabbed and sneering sort of man; which makes it queerer still. But the point of Wales's story is much simpler. It is that the man who had looked into the book walked straight over the side of the ship, and was never seen again.'

'Do you believe it yourself?' asked Openshaw after a pause.

'Well, I do,' replied Pringle. 'I believe it for two reasons. First, that Wales was an entirely unimaginative man; and he added one touch that only an imaginative man could have added. He said that the man walked straight over the side on a still and calm day; but there was no splash.'

The Professor looked at his notes for some seconds in silence; and then said: 'And your other reason for
believing it?

'My other reason,' answered the Rev. Luke Pringle, 'is what I saw myself.'

There was another silence; until he continued in the same matter - of - fact way. Whatever he had, he had nothing of the eagerness with which the crank, or even the believer, tried to convince others.

'I told you that Wales put down the book on the table beside the sword. There was only one entrance to the tent; and it happened that I was standing in it, looking out into the forest, with my back to my companion. He was standing by the table grumbling and growling about the whole business; saying it was tomfoolery in the twentieth century to be frightened of opening a book; asking why the devil he shouldn't open it himself. Then some instinct stirred in me and I said he had better not do that; it had better be returned to Dr Hankey. "What harm could it do?" he said restlessly. "What harm did it do?" I answered obstinately. "What happened to your friend on the boat?" He didn't answer. Indeed I didn't know what he could answer; but I pressed my logical advantage in mere vanity. "If it comes to that," I said, "what is your version of what really happened on the boat?" Still he didn't answer; and I looked round and saw that he wasn't there.

The clerk's desk stood against the wide window that looked out into the street; and the window was shattered with a huge ragged hole in the glass; as if a human body had been shot through it into the world without. There was no specimen, immersed in business calculations.'

Openshaw laughed unaffectedly. 'Oh, Babbage,' he cried, 'your magic tomes are safe enough with him, I assure you. His name's Berridge - but I often call him Babbage; because he's so exactly like a Calculating Machine. No human being, if you can call him a human being, would be less likely to open other people's brown paper parcels. Well, we may as well go and bring it in now; though I assure you I will consider seriously the course to be taken with it. Indeed, I tell you frankly,' and he stared at the man again, 'that I'm not quite sure whether we ought to open it here and now, or send it to this Dr Hankey.'

Both the two men left in the office stood as still as statues; and then it was the Professor who slowly came to life. The two had passed together out of the inner into the outer office; and even as they did so, Mr Pringle gave a cry and ran forward towards the clerk's desk. For the clerk's desk was there; but not the clerk. On the clerk's desk lay a faded old leather book, torn out of its brown - paper wrappings, and lying closed, but as if it had just been opened. The clerk's desk stood against the wide window that looked out into the street; and the window was shattered with a huge ragged hole in the glass; as if a human body had been shot through it into the world without. There was no other trace of Mr Berridge.

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Both the two men left in the office stood as still as statues; and then it was the Professor who slowly came to life. He looked even more judicial than he had ever looked in his life, as he slowly turned and held out his hand to the missionary.

'Mr Pringle,' he said, 'I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon only for thoughts that I have had; and half - thoughts
at that. But nobody could call himself a scientific man and not face a fact like this."

'Think so,' said Pringle doubtfully, 'that we ought to make some inquiries. Can you ring up his house and find out if he has gone home?'

'I don't know that he's on the telephone,' answered Openshaw, rather absently; 'he lives somewhere up Hampstead way, I think. But I suppose somebody will inquire here, if his friends or family miss him.'

'Could we furnish a description,' asked the other, 'if the police want it?'

'The police!' said the Professor, starting from his reverie. 'A description . . . Well, he looked awfully like everybody else, I'm afraid, except for goggles. One of those clean-shaven chaps. But the police . . . look here, what are we to do about this mad business?'

'I know what I ought to do,' said the Rev. Mr Pringle firmly, 'I am going to take this book straight to the only original Dr Hankey, and ask him what the devil it's all about. He lives not very far from here, and I'll come straight back and tell you what he says.'

'Oh, very well,' said the Professor at last, as he sat down rather wearily; perhaps relieved for the moment to be rid of the responsibility. But long after the brisk and ringing footsteps of the little missionary had died away down the street, the Professor sat in the same posture, staring into vacancy like a man in a trance.

He was still in the same seat and almost in the same attitude, when the same brisk footsteps were heard on the pavement without and the missionary entered, this time, as a glance assured him, with empty hands.

'Dr Hankey,' said Pringle gravely, 'wants to keep the book for an hour and consider the point. Then he asks us both to call, and he will give us his decision. He specially desired, Professor, that you should accompany me on the second visit.'

Openshaw continued to stare in silence; then he said, suddenly: 'Who the devil is Dr Hankey?'

'You sound rather as if you meant he was the devil,' said Pringle smiling, 'and I fancy some people have thought so. He had quite a reputation in your own line; but he gained it mostly in India, studying local magic and so on, so perhaps he's not so well known here. He is a yellow skinny little devil with a lame leg, and a doubtful temper; but he seems to have set up in an ordinary respectable practice in these parts, and I don't know anything definitely wrong about him - unless it's wrong to be the only person who can possibly know anything about all this crazy affair.'

Professor Openshaw rose heavily and went to the telephone; he rang up Father Brown, changing the luncheon engagement to a dinner, that he might hold himself free for the expedition to the house of the Anglo-Indian doctor; after that he sat down again, lit a cigar and sank once more into his own unfathomable thoughts.

Father Brown went round to the restaurant appointed for dinner, and kicked his heels for some time in a vestibule full of mirrors and palms in pots; he had been informed of Openshaw's afternoon engagement, and, as the evening closed - in dark and stormy round the glass and the green plants, guessed that it had produced something unexpected and unduly prolonged. He even wondered for a moment whether the Professor would turn up at all; but when the Professor eventually did, it was clear that his own more general guesses had been justified. For it was a very wild-eyed and even wild-haired Professor who eventually drove back with Mr Pringle from the expedition to the North of London, where suburbs are still fringed with heathy wastes and scraps of common, looking more sombre under the rather thunderstorm sunset. Nevertheless, they had apparently found the house, standing a little apart though within hail of other houses; they had verified the brass-plate duly engraved: 'J. I. Hankey, MD, MRCS.' Only they did not find J. I. Hankey, MD, MRCS. They found only what a nightmare whisper had already subconsciously prepared them to find: a commonplace parlour with the accursed volume lying on the table, as if it had just been read; and beyond, a back door burst open and a faint trail of footsteps that ran a little way up so steep a garden-path that it seemed that no lame man could have run up so lightly. But it was a lame man who had run; for in those few steps there was the misshapen unequal mark of some sort of surgical boot; then two marks of that boot alone (as if the creature had hopped) and then nothing. There was nothing further to be learnt from Dr J. I. Hankey, except that he had made his decision. He had read the oracle and received the doom.

When the two came into the entrance under the palms, Pringle put the book down suddenly on a small table, as if it burned his fingers. The priest glanced at it curiously; there was only some rude lettering on the front with a couplet:

They that looked into this book Them the Flying Terror took;

and underneath, as he afterwards discovered, similar warnings in Greek, Latin and French. The other two had turned away with a natural impulsion towards drinks, after their exhaustion and bewilderment; and Openshaw had called to the waiter, who brought cocktails on a tray.

'You will dine with us, I hope,' said the Professor to the missionary; but Mr Pringle amially shook his head.

'If you'll forgive me,' he said, 'I'm going off to wrestle with this book and this business by myself somewhere. I suppose I couldn't use your office for an hour or so?'

'I suppose - I'm afraid it's locked,' said Openshaw in some surprise.
'You forget there's a hole in the window.' The Rev. Luke Pringle gave the very broadest of all broad grins and vanished into the darkness without.

'A rather odd fellow, that, after all,' said the Professor, frowning.

He was rather surprised to find Father Brown talking to the waiter who had brought the cocktails, apparently about the waiter's most private affairs; for there was some mention of a baby who was now out of danger. He commented on the fact with some surprise, wondering how the priest came to know the man; but the former only said, 'Oh, I dine here every two or three months, and I've talked to him now and then.'

The Professor, who himself dined there about five times a week, was conscious that he had never thought of talking to the man; but his thoughts were interrupted by a strident ringing and a summons to the telephone. The voice on the telephone said it was Pringle, it was rather a muffled voice, but it might well be muffled in all those bushes of beard and whisker. Its message was enough to establish identity.

'Professor,' said the voice, 'I can't stand it any longer. I'm going to look for myself. I'm speaking from your office and the book is in front of me. If anything happens to me, this is to say good - bye. No - it's no good trying to stop me. You wouldn't be in time anyhow. I'm opening the book now. I . . . '

Openshaw thought he heard something like a sort of thrilling or shivering yet almost soundless crash; then he shouted the name of Pringle again and again; but he heard no more. He hung up the receiver, and, restored to a superb academic calm, rather like the calm of despair, went back and quietly took his seat at the dinner - table. Then, as coolly as if he were describing the failure of some small silly trick at a seance, he told the priest every detail of this monstrous mystery.

'Five men have now vanished in this impossible way,' he said. 'Every one is extraordinary; and yet the one case I simply can't get over is my clerk, Berridge. It's just because he was the quietest creature that he's the queerest case.'

'Yes,' replied Father Brown, 'it was a queer thing for Berridge to do, anyway. He was awfully conscientious. He was also so jolly careful to keep all the office business separate from any fun of his own. Why, hardly anybody knew he was quite a humorist at home and - '

'Berridge!' cried the Professor. 'What on earth are you talking about? Did you know him?'

'Oh no,' said Father Brown carelessly, 'only as you say I know the waiter. I've often had to wait in your office, till you turned up; and of course I passed the time of day with poor Berridge. He was rather a card. I remember he once said he would like to collect valueless things, as collectors did the silly things they thought valuable. You know the old story about the woman who collected valueless things.'

'I'm not sure I know what you're talking about,' said Openshaw. 'But even if my clerk was eccentric (and I never knew a man I should have thought less so), it wouldn't explain what happened to him; and it certainly wouldn't explain the others.'

'What others?' asked the priest.

The Professor stared at him and spoke distinctly, as if to a child: 'My dear Father Brown, Five Men have disappeared.'

'My dear Professor Openshaw, no men have disappeared.'

Father Brown gazed back at his host with equal steadiness and spoke with equal distinctness. Nevertheless, the Professor required the words repeated, and they were repeated as distinctly. 'I say that no men have disappeared.'

After a moment's silence, he added, 'I suppose the hardest thing is to convince anybody that 0+0+0=0. Men believe the oddest things if they are in a series; that is why Macbeth believed the three words of the three witches; though the first was something he knew himself; and the last something he could only bring about himself. But in your case the middle term is the weakest of all.'

'What do you mean?'

'You saw nobody vanish. You did not see the man vanish from the boat. You did not see the man vanish from the tent. All that rests on the word of Mr Pringle, which I will not discuss just now. But you'll admit this; you would never have taken his word yourself, unless you had seen it confirmed by your clerk's disappearance; just as Macbeth would never have believed he would be king, if he had not been confirmed in believing he would be Cawdor.'

'That may be true,' said the Professor, nodding slowly. 'But when it was confirmed, I knew it was the truth. You say I saw nothing myself. But I did; I saw my own clerk disappear. Berridge did disappear.'

'Berridge did not disappear,' said Father Brown. 'On the contrary.'

'What the devil do you mean by 'on the contrary'?'

'I mean,' said Father Brown, 'that he never disappeared. He appeared.'

Openshaw stared across at his friend, but the eyes had already altered in his head, as they did when they concentrated on a new presentation of a problem. The priest went on: 'He appeared in your study, disguised in a bushy red beard and buttoned up in a clumsy cape, and announced himself as the Rev. Luke Pringle. And you had never noticed your own clerk enough to know him again, when he was in so rough - and - ready a disguise.'
'But surely,' began the Professor.

'Could you describe him for the police?' asked Father Brown. 'Not you. You probably knew he was clean-shaven and wore tinted glasses; and merely taking off those glasses was a better disguise than putting on anything else. You had never seen his eyes any more than his soul; jolly laughing eyes. He had planted his absurd book and all the properties; then he calmly smashed the window, put on the beard and cape and walked into your study; knowing that you had never looked at him in your life.'

'But why should he play me such an insane trick?' demanded Openshaw.

'Why, because you had never looked at him in your life,' said Father Brown; and his hand slightly curled and clinched, as if he might have struck the table, if he had been given to gesture. 'You called him the Calculating Machine, because that was all you ever used him for. You never found out even what a stranger strolling into your office could find out, in five minutes' chat: that he was a character; that he was full of antics; that he had all sorts of views on you and your theories and your reputation for “spotting” people. Can't you understand his itching to prove that you couldn't spot your own clerk? He has nonsense notions of all sorts. About collecting useless things, for instance. Don't you know the story of the woman who bought the two most useless things: an old doctor's brass-plate and a wooden leg? With those your ingenious clerk created the character of the remarkable Dr Hankey; as easily as the visionary Captain Wales. Planting them in his own house -'

'Do you mean that place we visited beyond Hampstead was Berridge's own house?' asked Openshaw.

'Did you know his house - or even his address?' retorted the priest. 'Look here, don't think I'm speaking disrespectfully of you or your work. You are a great servant of truth and you know I could never be disrespectful to that. You've seen through a lot of liars, when you put your mind to it. But don't only look at liars. Do, just occasionally, look at honest men - like the waiter.'

'Where is Berridge now?' asked the Professor, after a long silence.

'I haven't the least doubt,' said Father Brown, 'that he is back in your office. In fact, he came back into your office at the exact moment when the Rev. Luke Pringle read the awful volume and faded into the void.'

There was another long silence and then Professor Openshaw laughed; with the laugh of a great man who is great enough to look small. Then he said abruptly:

'I suppose I do deserve it; for not noticing the nearest helpers I have. But you must admit the accumulation of incidents was rather formidable. Did you never feel just a momentary awe of the awful volume?'

'Oh, that,' said Father Brown. 'I opened it as soon as I saw it lying there. It's all blank pages. You see, I am not superstitious.'

FOUR: The Green Man

A young man in knickerbockers, with an eager sanguine profile, was playing golf against himself on the links that lay parallel to the sand and sea, which were all growing grey with twilight. He was not carelessly knocking a ball about, but rather practising particular strokes with a sort of microscopic fury; like a neat and tidy whirlwind. He had learned many games quickly, but he had a disposition to learn them a little more quickly than they can be learnt. He was rather prone to be a victim of those remarkable invitations by which a man may learn the Violin in Six Lessons - or acquire a perfect French accent by a Correspondence Course. He lived in the breezy atmosphere of such hopeful advertisement and adventure. He was at present the private secretary of Admiral Sir Michael Craven, who owned the big house behind the park abutting on the links. He was ambitious, and had no intention of continuing indefinitely to be private secretary to anybody. But he was also reasonable; and he knew that the best way of ceasing to be a secretary was to be a good secretary. Consequently he was a very good secretary; dealing with the ever-accumulating arrears of the Admiral's correspondence with the same swift centripetal concentration with which he addressed the golf-ball. He had to struggle with the correspondence alone and at his own discretion at present; for the Admiral had been with his ship for the last six months, and, though now returning, was not expected for hours, or possibly days.

With an athletic stride, the young man, whose name was Harold Harker, crested the rise of turf that was the rampart of the links and, looking out across the sands to the sea, saw a strange sight. He did not see it very clearly; for the dusk was darkening every minute under stormy clouds; but it seemed to him, by a sort of momentary illusion, like a dream of days long past or a drama played by ghosts, out of another age in history.

The last of the sunset lay in long bars of copper and gold above the last dark strip of sea that seemed rather black than blue. But blacker still against this gleam in the west, there passed in sharp outline, like figures in a shadow pantomime, two men with three-cornered cocked hats and swords; as if they had just landed from one of the wooden ships of Nelson. It was not at all the sort of hallucination that would have come natural to Mr Harker, had he been prone to hallucinations. He was of the type that is at once sanguine and scientific; and would be more likely to fancy the flying-ships of the future than the fighting ships of the past. He therefore very sensibly came to the conclusion that even a futurist can believe his eyes.
The second figure was much more singular; somewhat singular in appearance, despite his correct lieutenant's uniform, and still more extraordinary in behaviour. He walked in a strangely irregular and uneasy manner; sometimes quickly and sometimes slowly; as if he could not make up his mind whether to overtake the Admiral or not. The Admiral was rather deaf and certainly heard no footsteps behind him on the yielding sand; but the footsteps behind him, if traced in the detective manner, would have given rise to twenty conjectures from a limp to a dance. The man's face was swarthy as well as darkened with shadow, and every now and then the eyes in it shifted and shone, as if to accent his agitation. Once he began to run and then abruptly relapsed into a swaggering slowness and carelessness. Then he did something which Mr. Harold Harker could never have conceived any normal naval officer in His Britannic Majesty's Service doing, even in a lunatic asylum. He drew his sword.

It was at this bursting - point of the prodigy that the two passing figures disappeared behind a headland on the shore. The staring secretary had just time to notice the swarthy stranger, with a resumption of carelessness, knock off a head of sea - holly with his glittering blade. He seemed then to have abandoned all idea of catching the other man up. But Mr. Harold Harker's face became very thoughtful indeed; and he stood there ruminating for some time before he gravely took himself inland, towards the road that ran past the gates of the great house and so by a long curve down to the sea.

It was up this curving road from the coast that the Admiral might be expected to come, considering the direction in which he had been walking, and making the natural assumption that he was bound for his own door. The path along the sands, under the links, turned inland just beyond the headland and solidifying itself into a road, returned towards Craven House. It was down this road, therefore, that the secretary darted, with characteristic impetuosity, to meet his patron returning home. But the patron was apparently not returning home. What was still more peculiar, the secretary was not returning home either; at least until many hours later; a delay quite long enough to arouse alarm and mystification at Craven House.

Behind the pillars and palms of that rather too palatial country house, indeed, there was expectancy gradually changing to uneasiness. Gryce the butler, a big bilious man abnormally silent below as well as above stairs, showed a certain restlessness as he moved about the main front - hall and occasionally looked out of the side windows of the porch, on the white road that swept towards the sea. The Admiral's sister Marion, who kept house for him, had her brother's high nose with a more sniffy expression; she was voluble, rather rambling, not without humour, and capable of sudden emphasis as shrill as a cockatoo. The Admiral's daughter Olive was dark, dreamy, and as a rule abstractedly silent, perhaps melancholy; so that her aunt generally conducted most of the conversation, and that without reluctance. But the girl also had a gift of sudden laughter that was very engaging.

'I can't think why they're not here already,' said the elder lady. 'The postman distinctly told me he'd seen the Admiral coming along the beach; along with that dreadful creature Rook. Why in the world they call him Lieutenant Rook - '

'Perhaps,' suggested the melancholy young lady, with a momentary brightness, 'perhaps they call him Lieutenant because he is a Lieutenant.'

'I can't think why the Admiral keeps him,' snorted her aunt, as if she were talking of a housemaid. She was very proud of her brother and always called him the Admiral; but her notions of a commission in the Senior Service were inexact.

'Well, Roger Rook is sulky and unsociable and all that,' replied Olive, 'but of course that wouldn't prevent him being a capable sailor.'

'Sailor!' cried her aunt with one of her rather startling cockatoo notes, 'he isn't my notion of a sailor. The Lass
that Loved a Sailor, as they used to sing when I was young. . . . Just think of it! He's not gay and free and what's-its-name. He doesn't sing chanties or dance a hornpipe.'

'Well,' observed her niece with gravity. 'The Admiral doesn't very often dance a hornpipe.'

'Oh, you know what I mean - he isn't bright or breezy or anything,' replied the old lady. 'Why, that secretary fellow could do better than that.'

Olive's rather tragic face was transfigured by one of her good and rejuvenating waves of laughter.

'I'm sure Mr Harker would dance a hornpipe for you,' she said, 'and say he had learnt it in half an hour from the book of instructions. He's always learning things of that sort.'

She stopped laughing suddenly and looked at her aunt's rather strained face.

'I can't think why Mr Harker doesn't come,' she added.

'I don't care about Mr Harker,' replied the aunt, and rose and looked out of the window.

The evening light had a long turned from yellow to grey and was now turning almost to white under the widening moonlight, over the large flat landscape by the coast; unbroken by any features save a clump of sea-twisted trees round a pool and beyond, rather gaunt and dark against the horizon, the shabby fishermen's tavern on the shore that bore the name of the Green Man. And all that road and landscape was empty of any living thing. Nobody had seen the figure in the cocked hat that had been observed, earlier in the evening, walking by the sea; or the other and stranger figure that had been seen trailing after him. Nobody had even seen the secretary who saw them.

It was after midnight when the secretary at last burst in and aroused the household; and his face, white as a ghost, looked all the paler against the background of the stolid face and figure of a big Inspector of Police. Somehow that red, heavy, indifferent face looked, even more than the white and harassed one, like a mask of doom. The news was broken to the two women with such consideration or concealments as were possible. But the news was that the body of Admiral Craven had been eventually fished out of the foul weeds and scum of the pool under the trees; and that he was drowned and dead.

Anybody acquainted with Mr Harold Harker, secretary, will realize that, whatever his agitation, he was by morning in a mood to be tremendously on the spot. He hustled the Inspector, whom he had met the night before on the road down by the Green Man, into another room for private and practical consultation. He questioned the Inspector rather as the Inspector might have questioned a yokel. But Inspector Burns was a stolid character; and was either too stupid or too clever to resent such trifles. It soon began to look as if he were by no means so stupid as he looked; for he disposed of Harker's eager questions in a manner that was slow but methodical and rational.

'Well,' said Harker (his head full of many manuals with titles like 'Be a Detective in Ten Days'). 'Well, it's the old triangle, I suppose. Accident, Suicide or Murder.'

'I don't see how it could be accident,' answered the policeman. 'It wasn't even dark yet and the pool's fifty yards from the straight road that he knew like his own doorstep. He'd no more have got into that pond than he'd go and carefully lie down in a puddle in the street. As for suicide, it's rather a responsibility to suggest it, and rather improbable too. The Admiral was a pretty spry and successful man and frightfully rich, nearly a millionaire in fact; though of course that doesn't prove anything. He seemed to be pretty normal and comfortable in his private life too; he's the last man I should suspect of drowning himself.'

'So that we come,' said the secretary, lowering his voice with the thrill, 'I suppose we come to the third possibility.'

'We won't be in too much of a hurry about that,' said the Inspector to the annoyance of Harker, who was in a hurry about everything. 'But naturally there are one or two things one would like to know. One would like to know - about his property, for instance. Do you know who's likely to come in for it? You're his private secretary; do you know anything about his will?'

'I'm not so private a secretary as all that,' answered the young man. 'His solicitors are Messrs Willis, Hardman and Dyke, over in Suttford High Street; and I believe the will is in their custody.'

'Well, I'd better get round and see them pretty soon,' said the Inspector.

'Let's get round and see them at once,' said the impatient secretary.

He took a turn or two restlessly up and down the room and then exploded in a fresh place.

'What have you done about the body, Inspector?' he asked.

'Dr Straker is examining it now at the Police Station. His report ought to be ready in an hour or so.'

'It can't be ready too soon,' said Harker. 'It would save time if we could meet him at the lawyer's.' Then he stopped and his impetuous tone changed abruptly to one of some embarrassment.

'Look here,' he said, 'I want ... we want to consider the young lady, the poor Admiral's daughter, as much as possible just now. She's got a notion that may be all nonsense; but I wouldn't like to disappoint her. There's some friend of hers she wants to consult, staying in the town at present. Man of the name of Brown; priest or parson of
some sort - she's given me his address. I don't take much stock in priests or parsons, but - ’

The Inspector nodded. 'I don't take any stock in priests or parsons; but I take a lot of stock in Father Brown,' he
said. 'I happened to have to do with him in a queer sort of society jewel case. He ought to have been a policeman
instead of parson.'

'Oh, all right,' said the breathless secretary as he vanished from the room. 'Let him come to the lawyer's too.'

Thus it happened that, when they hurried across to the neighbouring town to meet Dr Straker at the solicitor's
office, they found Father Brown already seated there, with his hands folded on his heavy umbrella, chatting
pleasantly to the only available member of the firm. Dr Straker also had arrived, but apparently only at that moment,
as he was carefully placing his gloves in his top - hat and his top - hat on a side - table. And the mild and beaming
expression of the priest's moonlike face and spectacles, together with the silent chuckles of the jolly old grizzled
lawyer, to whom he was talking, were enough to show that the doctor had not yet opened his mouth to bring the
news of death.

'A beautiful morning after all,' Father Brown was saying. 'That storm seems to have passed over us. There were
some big black clouds, but I notice that not a drop of rain fell.'

'Not a drop,' agreed the solicitor toying with a pen; he was the third partner, Mr. Dyke; 'there's not a cloud in the
sky now. It's the sort of day for a holiday.' Then he realized the newcomers and looked up, laying down the pen and
rising. 'Ah, Mr. Harker, how are you? I hear the Admiral is expected home soon.' Then Harker spoke, and his voice
rang hollow in the room.

'I am sorry to say we are the bearers of bad news. Admiral Craven was drowned before reaching home.'

There was a change in the very air of the still office, though not in the attitudes of the motionless figures; both
were staring at the speaker as if a joke had been frozen on their lips. Both repeated the word 'drowned' and looked at
each other, and then again at their informant. Then there was a small hubbub of questions.

'When did this happen?' asked the priest.

'Where was he found?' asked the lawyer.

'He was found,' said the Inspector, 'in that pool by the coast, not far from the Green Man, and dragged out all
covered with green scum and weeds so as to be almost unrecognizable. But Dr Straker here has - What is the matter.
Father Brown? Are you ill?'

'The Green Man,' said Father Brown with a shudder. 'I'm so sorry ... I beg your pardon for being upset.'

'Upset by what?' asked the staring officer.

'By his being covered with green scum, I suppose,' said the priest, with a rather shaky laugh. Then he added
rather more firmly, 'I thought it might have been seaweed.'

By this time everybody was looking at the priest, with a not unnatural suspicion that he was mad; and yet the
next crucial surprise was not to come from him. After a dead silence, it was the doctor who spoke.

Dr Straker was a remarkable man, even to look at. He was very tall and angular, formal and professional in his
dress; yet retaining a fashion that has hardly been known since Mid - Victorian times. Though comparatively young,
he wore his brown beard, very long and spreading over his waistcoat; in contrast with it, his features, which were
both harsh and handsome, looked singularly pale. His good looks were also diminished by something in his deep
eyes that was not squinting, but like the shadow of a squint. Everybody noticed these things about him, because the
moment he spoke, he gave forth an indescribable air of authority. But all he said was:

'There is one more thing to be said, if you come to details, about Admiral Craven being drowned.' Then he added
reflectively, 'Admiral Craven was not drowned.'

The Inspector turned with quite a new promptitude and shot a question at him.

'I have just examined the body,' said Dr Straker, 'the cause of death was a stab through the heart with some
pointed blade like a stiletto. It was after death, and even some little time after, that the body was hidden in the pool.'

Father Brown was regarding Dr Straker with a very lively eye, such as he seldom turned upon anybody; and
when the group in the office began to break up, he managed to attach himself to the medical man for a little further
conversation, as they went back down the street. There had not been very much else to detain them except the rather
formal question of the will. The impatience of the young secretary had been somewhat tried by the professional
etiquette of the old lawyer. But the latter was ultimately induced, rather by the tact of the priest than the authority of
the policeman, to refrain from making a mystery where there was no mystery at all. Mr Dyke admitted, with a smile,
that the Admiral's will was a very normal and ordinary document, leaving everything to his only child Olive; and
that there really was no particular reason for concealing the fact.

The doctor and the priest walked slowly down the street that struck out of the town in the direction of Craven
House. Harker had plunged on ahead of him with all his native eagerness to get somewhere; but the two behind
seemed more interested in their discussion than their direction. It was in rather an enigmatic tone that the tall doctor
said to the short cleric beside him:
'Well, Father Brown, what do you think of a thing like this?'

Father Brown looked at him rather intently for an instant, and then said:

'Well, I've begun to think of one or two things; but my chief difficulty is that I only knew the Admiral slightly; though I've seen something of his daughter.'

'The Admiral,' said the doctor with a grim immobility of feature, 'was the sort of man of whom it is said that he had not an enemy in the world.'

'I suppose you mean,' answered the priest, 'that there's something else that will not be said.'

'Oh, it's no affair of mine,' said Straker hastily but rather harshly. 'He had his moods, I suppose. He once threatened me with a legal action about an operation; but I think he thought better of it. I can imagine his being rather rough with a subordinate.'

Father Brown's eyes were fixed on the figure of the secretary striding far ahead; and as he gazed he realized the special cause of his hurry. Some fifty yards farther ahead the Admiral's daughter was dawdling along the road towards the Admiral's house. The secretary soon came abreast of her; and for the remainder of the time Father Brown watched the silent drama of two human backs as they diminished into the distance. The secretary was evidently very much excited about something; but if the priest guessed what it was, he kept it to himself. When he came to the corner leading to the doctor's house, he only said briefly: 'I don't know if you have anything more to tell us.'

'Why should I?' answered the doctor very abruptly; and striding off, left it uncertain whether he was asking why he should have anything to tell, or why he should tell it.

Father Brown went stumping on alone, in the track of the two young people; but when he came to the entrance and avenues of the Admiral's park, he was arrested by the action of the girl, who turned suddenly and came straight towards him; her face unusually pale and her eyes bright with some new and as yet nameless emotion.

'Father Brown,' she said in a low voice, 'I must talk to you as soon as possible. You must listen to me, I can't see any other way out.'

'Why certainly,' he replied, as coolly as if a gutter - boy had asked him the time. 'Where shall we go and talk?'

The girl led him at random to one of the rather tumbledown arbours in the grounds; and they sat down behind a screen of large ragged leaves. She began instantly, as if she must relieve her feelings or faint.

'H Harold Harker,' she said, 'has been talking to me about things. Terrible things.'

'The priest nodded and the girl went on hastily. 'About Roger Rook. Do you know about Roger?'

'I've been told,' he answered, 'that his fellow - seamen call him The Jolly Roger, because he is never jolly; and looks like the pirate's skull and crossbones.'

'He was not always like that,' said Olive in a low voice. 'Something very queer must have happened to him. I knew him well when we were children; we used to play over there on the sands. He was harum - scarum and always talking about being a pirate; I dare say he was the sort they say might take to crime through reading shockers; but there was something poetical in his way of being piratical. He really was a Jolly Roger then. I suppose he was the last boy who kept up the old legend of really running away to sea; and at last his family had to agree to his joining the Navy. Well . . . .'...

'Yes,' said Father Brown patiently.

'Well,' she admitted, caught in one of her rare moments of mirth, 'I suppose poor Roger found it disappointing. Naval officers so seldom carry knives in their teeth or wave bloody cutlasses and black flags. But that doesn't explain the change in him. He just stiffened; grew dull and dumb, like a dead man walking about. He always avoids me; but that doesn't matter. I supposed some great grief that's no business of mine had broken him up. And now - well, if what Harold says is true, the grief is neither more nor less than going mad; or being possessed of a devil.'

'And what does Harold say?' asked the priest.

'It's so awful I can hardly say it,' she answered. 'He swears he saw Roger creeping behind my father that night; hesitating and then drawing his sword . . . and the doctor says father was stabbed with a steel point ... I can't believe Roger Rook had anything to do with it. His sulks and my father's temper sometimes led to quarrels; but what are quarrels? I can't exactly say I'm standing up for an old friend; because he isn't even friendly. But you can't help feeling sure of some things, even about an old acquaintance. And yet Harold swears that he -'

'Harold seems to swear a great deal,' said Father Brown.

'There was a sudden silence; after which she said in a different tone: 'Well, he does swear other things too. Harold Harker proposed to me just now.'

'Am I to congratulate you, or rather him?' inquired her companion.

'I told him he must wait. He isn't good at waiting.' She was caught again in a ripple of her incongruous sense of the comic: 'He said I was his ideal and his ambition and so on. He has lived in the States; but somehow I never remember it when he is talking about dollars; only when he is talking about ideals.'
'And I suppose,' said Father Brown very softly, 'that it is because you have to decide about Harold that you want to know the truth about Roger.'

She stiffened and frowned, and then equally abruptly smiled, saying: 'Oh, you know too much.'

'I know very little, especially in this affair,' said the priest gravely. 'I only know who murdered your father.' She started up and stood staring down at him stricken white. Father Brown made a wry face as he went on: 'I made a fool of myself when I first realized it; when they'd just been asking where he was found, and went on talking about green scum and the Green Man.'

Then he also rose; clutching his clumsy umbrella with a new resolution, he addressed the girl with a new gravity.

'There is something else that I know, which is the key to all these riddles of yours; but I won't tell you yet. I suppose it's bad news; but it's nothing like so bad as the things you have been fancying.' He buttoned up his coat and turned towards the gate. 'I'm going to see this Mr Rook of yours. In a shed by the shore, near where Mr Harker saw him walking. I rather think he lives there.' And he went bustling off in the direction of the beach.

Olive was an imaginative person; perhaps too imaginative to be safely left to brood over such hints as her friend had thrown out; but he was in rather a hurry to find the best relief for her broodings. The mysterious connection between Father Brown's first shock of enlightenment and the chance language about the pool and the inn, hag - rode her fancy in a hundred forms of ugly symbolism. The Green Man became a ghost trailing loathsome weeds and walking the countryside under the moon; the sign of the Green Man became a human figure hanging as from a gibbet; and the tarn itself became a tavern, a dark subaqueous tavern for the dead sailors. And yet he had taken the most rapid method to overthrow all such nightmares, with a burst of blinding daylight which seemed more mysterious than the night.

For before the sun had set, something had come back into her life that turned her whole world topsy - turvy once more; something she had hardly known that she desired until it was abruptly granted; something that was, like a dream, old and familiar, and yet remained incomprehensible and incredible. For Roger Rook had come striding across the sands, and even when he was a dot in the distance, she knew he was transfigured; and as he came nearer and nearer, she saw that his dark face was alive with laughter and exultation. He came straight toward her, as if they had never parted, and seized her shoulders saying: 'Now I can look after you, thank God.'

She hardly knew what she answered; but she heard herself questioning rather wildly why he seemed so changed and so happy.

'Because I am happy,' he answered. 'I have heard the bad news.'

All parties concerned, including some who seemed rather unconcerned, found themselves assembled on the garden - path leading to Craven House, to hear the formality, now truly formal, of the lawyer's reading of the will; and the probable, and more practical sequel of the lawyer's advice upon the crisis. Besides the grey - haired solicitor himself, armed with the testamentary document, there was the Inspector armed with more direct authority touching the crime, and Lieutenant Rook in undisguised attendance on the lady; some were rather mystified on seeing the tall figure of the doctor, some smiled a little on seeing the dumpy figure of the priest. Mr Harker, that Flying Mercury, had shot down to the lodge - gates to meet them, led them back on to the lawn, and then dashed ahead of them again to prepare their reception. He said he would be back in a jiffy; and anyone observing his piston - rod of energy could well believe it; but, for the moment, they were left rather stranded on the lawn outside the house.

'Reminds me of somebody making runs at cricket,' said the Lieutenant.

'That young man,' said the lawyer, 'is rather annoyed that the law cannot move quite so quickly as he does. Fortunately Miss Craven understands our professional difficulties and delays. She has kindly assured me that she still has confidence in my slowness.'

'I wish,' said the doctor, suddenly, 'that I had as much confidence in his quickness.'

'Why, what do you mean?' asked Rook, knitting his brows; 'do you mean that Harker is too quick?'

'Too quick and too slow,' said Dr Straker, in his rather cryptic fashion. 'I know one occasion at least when he was not so very quick. Why was he hanging about half the night by the pond and the Green Man, before the Inspector came down and found the body? Why did he meet the Inspector? Why should he expect to meet the Inspector outside the Green Man?'

'I don't understand you,' said Rook. 'Do you mean that Harker wasn't telling the truth?'

Dr Straker was silent. The grizzled lawyer laughed with grim good humour. 'I have nothing more serious to say against the young man,' he said, 'than that he made a prompt and praiseworthy attempt to teach me my own business.'

'For that matter, he made an attempt to teach me mine,' said the Inspector, who had just joined the group in front. 'But that doesn't matter. If Dr Straker means anything by his hints, they do matter. I must ask you to speak plainly, doctor. It may be my duty to question him at once.'

'Well, here he comes,' said Rook, as the alert figure of the secretary appeared once more in the doorway.
At this point Father Brown, who had remained silent and inconspicuous at the tail of the procession, astonished everybody very much; perhaps especially those who knew him. He not only walked rapidly to the front, but turned facing the whole group with an arresting and almost threatening expression, like a sergeant bringing soldiers to the halt.

'Stop!' he said almost sternly. 'I apologize to everybody; but it's absolutely necessary that I should see Mr Harker first. I've got to tell him something I know; and I don't think anybody else knows; something he's got to hear. It may save a very tragic misunderstanding with somebody later on.'

'What on earth do you mean?' asked old Dyke the lawyer.

'I mean the bad news,' said Father Brown.

'Here, I say,' began the Inspector indignantly; and then suddenly caught the priest's eye and remembered strange things he had seen in other days. 'Well, if it were anyone in the world but you I should say of all the infernal cheek -'

But Father Brown was already out of hearing, and a moment afterwards was plunged in talk with Harker in the porch. They walked to and fro together for a few paces and then disappeared into the dark interior. It was about twelve minutes afterwards that Father Brown came out alone.

To their surprise he showed no disposition to re-enter the house, now that the whole company were at last about to enter it. He threw himself down on the rather rickety seat in the leafy arbour, and as the procession disappeared through the doorway, lit a pipe and proceeded to stare vacantly at the long ragged leaves about his head and to listen to the birds. There was no man who had a more hearty and enduring appetite for doing nothing.

He was, apparently, in a cloud of smoke and a dream of abstraction, when the front doors were once more flung open and two or three figures came out helter-skelter, running towards him, the daughter of the house and her young admirer Mr Rook being easily winners in the race. Their faces were alight with astonishment; and the face of Inspector Burns, who advanced more heavily behind them, like an elephant shaking the garden, was inflamed with some indignation as well.

'What can all this mean?' cried Olive, as she came panting to a halt. 'He's gone!'

'Bolted!' said the Lieutenant explosively. 'Harker's just managed to pack a suitcase and bolted! Gone clean out of the back door and over the garden - wall to God knows where. What did you say to him?'

'Don't be silly!' said Olive, with a more worried expression. 'Of course you told him you'd found him out, and now he's gone. I never could have believed he was wicked like that!'

'Well!' gasped the Inspector, bursting into their midst. 'What have you done now? What have you let me down like this for?'

'Well,' repeated Father Brown, 'what have I done?'

'You have let a murderer escape,' cried Burns, with a decision that was like a thunderclap in the quiet garden; 'you have helped a murderer to escape. Like a fool I let you warn him; and now he is miles away.'

'I have helped a few murderers in my time, it is true,' said Father Brown; then he added, in careful distinction, 'not, you will understand, helped them to commit the murder.'

'But you knew all the time,' insisted Olive. 'You guessed from the first that it must be he. That's what you meant about being upset by the business of finding the body. That's what the doctor meant by saying my father might be disliked by a subordinate.'

'That's what I complain of,' said the official indignantly. 'You knew even then that he was the - '

'You knew even then,' insisted Olive, 'that the murderer was - '

Father Brown nodded gravely. 'Yes,' he said. 'I knew even then that the murderer was old Dyke.'

'Was who?' repeated the Inspector and stopped amid a dead silence; punctuated only by the occasional pipe of birds.

'I mean Mr Dyke, the solicitor,' explained Father Brown, like one explaining something elementary to an infant class. 'That gentleman with grey hair who's supposed to be going to read the will.'

They all stood like statues staring at him, as he carefully filled his pipe again and struck a match. At last Burns rallied his vocal powers to break the strangling silence with an effort resembling violence.

'But, in the name of heaven, why?'

'Ah, why?' said the priest and rose thoughtfully, puffing at his pipe. 'As to why he did it ... Well, I suppose the time has come to tell you, or those of you who don't know, the fact that is the key of all this business. It's a great calamity; and it's a great crime; but it's not the murder of Admiral Craven.'

He looked Olive full in the face and said very seriously: 'I tell you the bad news bluntly and in few words; because I think you are brave enough, and perhaps happy enough, to take it well. You have the chance, and I think the power, to be something like a great woman. You are not a great heiress.'

Amid the silence that followed it was he who resumed his explanation.
Most of your father's money, I am sorry to say, has gone. It went by the financial dexterity of the grey-haired gentleman named Dyke, who is (I grieve to say) a swindler. Admiral Craven was murdered to silence him about the way in which he was swindled. The fact that he was ruined and you were disinherited is the single simple clue, not only to the murder, but to all the other mysteries in this business.' He took a puff or two and then continued.

'I told Mr Rook you were disinherited and he rushed back to help you. Mr Rook is a rather remarkable person.'

'Oh, chuck it,' said Mr Rook with a hostile air.

'Mr Rook is a monster,' said Father Brown with scientific calm. 'He is an anachronism, an atavism, a brute survival of the Stone Age. If there was one barbarous superstition we all supposed to be utterly extinct and dead in these days, it was that notion about honour and independence. But then I get mixed up with so many dead superstitions. Mr Rook is an extinct animal. He is a plesiosaurus. He did not want to live on his wife or have a wife who could call him a fortune-hunter. Therefore he shulked in a grotesque manner and only came to life again when I brought him the good news that you were ruined. He wanted to work for his wife and not be kept by her. Disgusting, isn't it? Let us turn to the brighter topic of Mr Harker.

'I told Mr Harker you were disinherited and he rushed away in a sort of panic. Do not be too hard on Mr Harker. He really had better as well as worse enthusiasms; but he had them all mixed up. There is no harm in having ambitions; but he had ambitions and called them ideals. The old sense of honour taught men to suspect success; to say, "This is a benefit; it may be a bribe." The new nine-times-accursed nonsense about Making Good teaches men to identify being good with making money. That was all that was the matter with him; in every other way he was a thoroughly good fellow, and there are thousands like him. Gazing at the stars and rising in the world were all Uplift. Marrying a good wife and marring a rich wife were all Making Good. But he was not a cynical scoundrel; or he would simply have come back and jilted or cut you as the case might be. He could not face you; while you were there, half of his broken ideal was left.

'I did not tell the Admiral; but somebody did. Word came to him somehow, during the last grand parade on board, that his friend the family lawyer had betrayed him. He was in such a towering passion that he did what he could never have done in his sense; came straight on shore in his cocked hat and gold lace to catch the criminal; he wired to the police station, and that was why the Inspector was wandering round the Green Man. Lieutenant Rook followed him on shore because he suspected some family trouble and had half a hope he might help and put himself right. Hence his hesitating behaviour. As for his drawing his sword when he dropped behind and thought he was alone, well that's a matter of imagination. He was a romantic person who had dreamed of swords and run away to sea; and found himself in a service where he wasn't even allowed to wear a sword except about once in three years. He thought he was quite alone on the sands where he played as a boy. If you don't understand what he did, I can only say, like Stevenson, "you will never be a pirate." Also you will never be a poet; and you have never been a boy.'

'I never have,' answered Olive gravely, 'and yet I think I understand.'

'Almost every man,' continued the priest musing, 'will play with anything shaped like a sword or dagger, even if it is a paper knife. That is why I thought it so odd when the lawyer didn't.'

'What do you mean?' asked Burns, 'didn't what?'

'Why, didn't you notice,' answered Brown, 'at that first meeting in the office, the lawyer played with a pen and not with a paper-knife; though he had a beautiful bright steel paper-knife in the pattern of a stiletto? The pens were dusty and splashed with ink; but the knife had just been cleaned. But he did not play with it. There are limits to the irony of assassins.'

After a silence the Inspector said, like one waking from a dream: 'Look here ... I don't know whether I'm on my head or my heels; I don't know whether you think you've got to the end; but I haven't got to the beginning. Where do you get all this lawyer stuff from? What started you out on that trail?'

Father Brown laughed curtly and without mirth.

'The murderer made a slip at the start,' he said, 'and I can't think why nobody else noticed it. When you brought the first news of the death to the solicitor's office, nobody was supposed to know anything there, except that the Admiral was expected home. When you said he was drowned, I asked when it happened and Mr Dyke asked where the corpse was found.'

He paused a moment to knock out his pipe and resumed reflectively: 'Now when you are simply told of a seaman, returning from the sea, that he had drowned, it is natural to assume that he had been drowned at sea. At any rate, to allow that he may have been drowned at sea. If he had been washed overboard, or gone down with his ship, or had his body “committed to the deep”, there would be no reason to expect his body to be found at all. The moment that man asked where it was found, I was sure he knew were it was found. Because he had put it there. Nobody but the murderer need have thought of anything so unlikely as a seaman being drowned in a landlocked pool a few hundred yards from the sea. That is why I suddenly felt sick and turned green, I dare say; as green as the
prepared to be led to the lonely chateau where the expert wore a purple dressing-gown, to the attic where he lived library like an intellectual spider, and throws out theoretical filaments of a web as large as the world. He was staying in the town. Mr Muggleton had read reports and romances about the Great Criminologist, who sits in his dapper secretary, a Mr Anthony Taylor. The Inspector was more sympathetic than the secretary; but the sequel of his story to the police and to the only available representative of Braham Bruce, the dead millionaire; that is, to his very remarkable experience in the matter of the murder, had very properly put all his cards on the table. He told his destiny to meet. To explain this second and more momentous meeting, it must be pointed out that Muggleton, after some reflection, very much surprised Mr Muggleton by advising him to consult an able amateur whom he knew to be staying in the town. Olive and Roger were calling to each other across the sands at evening, as they did when they were children together.

FIVE: The Pursuit of Mr Blue

Along a seaside parade on a sunny afternoon, a person with the depressing name of Muggleton was moving with suitable gloom. There was a horseshoe of worry in his forehead, and the numerous groups and strings of entertainers stretched along the beach below looked up to him in vain for applause. Pierrots turned up their pale moon faces, like the white bellies of dead fish, without improving his spirits; niggers with faces entirely grey with a sort of grimy soot were equally unsuccessful in filling his fancy with brighter things. He was a sad and disappointed man. His other features, besides the bald brow with its furrow, were retiring and almost sunken; and a certain dingy refinement about them made more incongruous the one aggressive ornament of his face. It was an outstanding and bristling military moustache; and it looked suspiciously like a false moustache. It is possible, indeed, that it was a false moustache. It is possible, on the other hand, that even if it was not false it was forced. He might almost have grown it in a hurry, by a mere act of will; so much was it a part of his job rather than his personality.

For the truth is that Mr Muggleton was a private detective in a small way, and the cloud on his brow was due to a big blunder in his professional career; anyhow it was connected with something darker than the mere possession of such a surname. He might almost, in an obscure sort of way, have been proud of his surname; for he came of poor but decent Nonconformist people who claimed some connection with the founder of the Muggletonians; the only man who had hitherto had the courage to appear with that name in human history.

The more legitimate cause of his annoyance (at least as he himself explained it) was that he had just been present at the bloody murder of a world-famous millionaire, and had failed to prevent it, though he had been engaged at a salary of five pounds a week to do so. Thus we may explain the fact that even the languorous singing of the song entitled, 'Won't You Be My Loodah Doodah Day?' failed to fill him with the joy of life.

For that matter, there were others on the beach, who might have had more sympathy with his murderous theme and Muggletonian tradition. Seaside resorts are the chosen pitches, not only of pierrots appealing to the amorous emotions, but also of preachers who often seem to specialize in a correspondingly sombre and sulphurous style of preaching. There was one aged ranter whom he could hardly help noticing, so piercing were the cries, not to say shrieks of religious prophecy that rang above all the banjos and castanets. This was a long, loose, shambling old man, dressed in something like a fisherman's jersey; but inappropriately equipped with a pair of those very long and drooping whiskers which have never been seen since the disappearance of certain sportive Mid-Victorian dandies. As it was the custom for all mountebanks on the beach to display something, as if they were selling it, the old man displayed a rather rotten-looking fisherman's net, which he generally spread out invitingly on the sands, as if it were a carpet for queens; but occasionally whisked wildly round his head with a gesture almost as terrific as that of the Roman Retarius, ready to impale people on a trident. Indeed, he might really have impaled people, if he had had a trident. His words were always pointed towards punishment; his hearers heard nothing except threats to the body or the soul; he was so far in the same mood as Mr. Muggleton, that he might almost have been a mad hangman addressing a crowd of murderers. The boys called him Old Brimstone; but he had other eccentricities besides the purely theological. One of his eccentricities was to climb up into the nest of iron girders under the pier and trail his net in the water, declaring that he got his living by fishing; though it is doubtful whether anybody had ever seen him catching fish. Worldly trippers, however, would sometimes start at a voice in their ear, threatening judgement as from a thundercloud, but really coming from the perch under the iron roof where the old monomaniac sat glaring, his fantastic whiskers hanging like grey seaweed.

The detective, however, could have put up with Old Brimstone much better than with the other parson he was destined to meet. To explain this second and more momentous meeting, it must be pointed out that Muggleton, after his remarkable experience in the matter of the murder, had very properly put all his cards on the table. He told his story to the police and to the only available representative of Braham Bruce, the dead millionaire; that is, to his very dapper secretary, a Mr Anthony Taylor. The Inspector was more sympathetic than the secretary; but the sequel of his sympathy was the last thing Muggleton would normally have associated with police advice. The Inspector, after some reflection, very much surprised Mr Muggleton by advising him to consult an able amateur whom he knew to be staying in the town. Mr Muggleton had read reports and romances about the Great Criminologist, who sits in his library like an intellectual spider, and throws out theoretical filaments of a web as large as the world. He was prepared to be led to the lonely chateau where the expert wore a purple dressing-gown, to the attic where he lived...
on opium and acrostics, to the vast laboratory or the lonely tower. To his astonishment he was led to the very edge of the crowded beach by the pier to meet a dumpy little clergyman, with a broad hat and a broad grin, who was at that moment hopping about on the sands with a crowd of poor children; and excitedly waving a very little wooden spade.

When the criminologist clergyman, whose name appeared to be Brown, had at last been detached from the children, though not from the spade, he seemed to Muggleton to grow more and more unsatisfactory. He hung about helplessly among the idiotic side-shows of the seashore, talking about random topics and particularly attaching himself to those rows of automatic machines which are set up in such places; solemnly spending penny after penny in order to play vicarious games of golf, football, cricket, conducted by clockwork figures; and finally contenting himself with the miniature exhibition of a race, in which one metal doll appeared merely to run and jump after the other. And yet all the time he was listening very carefully to the story which the defeated detective poured out to him. Only his way of not letting his right hand know what his left hand was doing, with pennies, got very much on the detective's nerves.

'Can't we go and sit down somewhere,' said Muggleton impatiently. 'I've got a letter you ought to see, if you're to know anything at all of this business.'

Father Brown turned away with a sigh from the jumping dolls, and went and sat down with his companion on an iron seat on the shore; his companion had already unfolded the letter and handed it silently to him.

It was an abrupt and queer sort of letter. Father Brown thought. He knew that millionaires did not always specialize in manners, especially in dealing with dependants like detectives; but there seemed to be something more in the letter than mere brusquerie.

DEAR MUGGLETON,

I never thought I should come down to wanting help of this sort; but I'm about through with things. It's been getting more and more intolerable for the last two years. I guess all you need to know about the story is this. There is a dirty rascal who is a cousin of mine, I'm ashamed to say. He's been a tout, a tramp, a quack doctor, an actor, and all that; even has the brass to act under our name and call himself Bertrand Bruce. I believe he's either got some potty job at the theatre here, or is looking for one. But you may take it from me that the job isn't his real job. His real job is running me down and knocking me out for good, if he can. It's an old story and no business of anybody's; there was a time when we started neck and neck and ran a race of ambition - and what they call love as well. Was it my fault that he was a rotter and I was a man who succeeds in things? But the dirty devil swears he'll succeed yet; shoot me and run off with my - never mind. I suppose he's a sort of madman, but he'll jolly soon try to be some sort of murderer. I'll give you £5 a week if you'll meet me at the lodge at the end of the pier, just after the pier closes tonight - and take on my job. It's the only safe place to meet - if anything is safe by this time.

J. BRAHAM BRUCE

'Dear me,' said Father Brown mildly. 'Dear me. A rather hurried letter.'

Muggleton nodded; and after a pause began his own story; in an oddly refined voice contrasting with his clumsy appearance. The priest knew well the hobbies of concealed culture hidden in many dingy lower and middle class men; but even he was startled by the excellent choice of words only a shade too pedantic; the man talked like a book.

'I arrived at the little round - house at the end of the pier before there was any sign of my distinguished client. I opened the door and went inside, feeling that he might prefer me, as well as himself, to be as inconspicuous as possible. Not that it mattered very much; for the pier was too long for anybody to have seen us from the beach or the parade, and, on glancing at my watch, I saw by the time that the pier entrance must have already closed. It was flattering, after a fashion, that he should thus ensure that we should be alone together at the rendezvous, as showing that he did really rely on my assistance or protection. Anyhow, it was his idea that we should meet on the pier after closing time, so I fell in with it readily enough. There were two chairs inside the little round pavilion, or whatever you call it; so I simply took one of them and waited. I did not have to wait long. He was famous for his punctuality, and sure enough, as I looked up at the one little round window opposite me I saw him pass slowly, as if making a preliminary circuit of the place.

'I had only seen portraits of him, and that was a long time ago; and naturally he was rather older than the portraits, but there was no mistaking the likeness. The profile that passed the window was of the sort called aquiline, after the beak of the eagle; but he rather suggested a grey and venerable eagle; an eagle in repose; an eagle that has long folded its wings. There was no mistaking, however, that look of authority, or silent pride in the habit of command, that has always marked men who, like him, have organized great systems and been obeyed. He was quietly dressed, what I could see of him; especially as compared with the crowd of seaside trippers which had filled so much of my day; but I fancied his overcoat was of that extra elegant sort that is cut to follow the line of the figure, and it had a strip of astrakhan lining showing on the lapels. All this, of course, I took in at a glance, for I had
already got to my feet and gone to the door. I put out my hand and received the first shock of that terrible evening. The door was locked. Somebody had locked me in.

For a moment I stood stunned, and still staring at the round window, from which, of course, the moving profile had already passed; and then I suddenly saw the explanation. Another profile, pointed like that of a pursuing hound, flashed into the circle of vision, as into a round mirror. The moment I saw it, I knew who it was. It was the Avenger; the murderer or would - be murderer, who had trailed the old millionaire for so long across land and sea, and had now tracked him to this blind - alley of an iron pier that hung between sea and land. And I knew, of course, that it was the murderer who had locked the door.

The man I saw first had been tall, but his pursuer was even taller; an effect that was only lessened by his carrying his shoulders hunched very high and his neck and head thrust forward like a true beast of the chase. The effect of the combination gave him rather the look of a gigantic hunchback. But something of the blood relationship that connected this ruffian with his famous kinsman showed in the two profiles as they passed across the circle of glass. The pursuer also had a nose rather like the beak of a bird; though his general air of ragged degradation suggested the vulture rather than the eagle. He was unshaven to the point of being bearded, and the humped look of his shoulders was increased by the coils of a coarse woollen scarf. All these are trivialities, and can give no impression of the ugly energy of that outline, or the sense of avenging doom in that stooping and striding figure. Have you ever seen William Blake's design, sometimes called with some levity, "The Ghost of a Flea," but also called, with somewhat greater lucidity, "A Vision of Blood Guilt," or something of that kind? That is just such a nightmare of a stealthy giant, with high shoulders, carrying a knife and bowl. This man carried neither, but as he passed the window the second time, I saw with my own eyes that he loosened a revolver from the folds of the scarf and held it gripped and poised in his hand. The eyes in his head shifted and shone in the moonlight, and that in a very creepy way; they shot forward and back with lightning leaps; almost as if he could shoot them out like luminous horns, as do certain reptiles.

Three times the pursued and the pursuer passed in succession outside the window, treading their narrow circle, before I fully awoke to the need of some action, however desperate. I shook the door with rattling violence; when next I saw the face of the unconscious victim I beat furiously on the window; then I tried to break the window. But it was a double window of exceptionally thick glass, and so deep was the embrasure that I doubted if I could properly reach the outer window at all. Anyhow, my dignified client took no notice of my noise or signals; and the revolving shadow - pantomime of those two masks of doom continued to turn round and round me, till I felt almost dizzy as well as sick. Then they suddenly ceased to reappear. I waited; and I knew that they would not come again. I knew that the crisis had come.

I need not tell you more. You can almost imagine the rest, even as I sat there helpless, trying to imagine it; or trying not to imagine it. It is enough to say that in that awful silence, in which all sounds of footsteps had died away, there were only two other noises besides the rumbling undertones of the sea. The first was the loud noise of a shot and the second the duller noise of a splash.

My client had been murdered within a few yards of me, and I could make no sign. I will not trouble you with what I felt about that. But even if I could recover from the murder, I am still confronted with the mystery.

'Yes,' said Father Brown very gently, 'which mystery?'

'The mystery of how the murderer got away,' answered the other. 'The instant people were admitted to the pier next morning, I was released from my prison and went racing back to the entrance gates, to inquire who had left the pier since they were opened. Without bothering you with details, I may explain that they were, by a rather unusual arrangement, real full - size iron doors that would keep anybody out (or in) until they were opened. The officials there had seen nobody in the least resembling the assassin returning that way. And he was a rather unmistakable person. Even if he had disguised himself somehow, he could hardly have disguised his extraordinary height or got rid of the family nose. It is extraordinarily unlikely that he tried to swim ashore, for the sea was very rough; and there are certainly no traces of any landing. And, somehow, having seen the face of that fiend even once, let alone about six times, something gives me an overwhelming conviction that he did not simply drown himself in the hour of triumph.'

'I quite understand what you mean by that,' replied Father Brown. 'Besides, it would be very inconsistent with the tone of his original threatening letter, in which he promised himself all sorts of benefits after the crime . . . there's another point it might be well to verify. What about the structure of the pier underneath? Piers are very often made with a whole network of iron supports, which a man might climb through as a monkey climbs through a forest.'

'Yes, I thought of that,' replied the private investigator; 'but unfortunately this pier is oddly constructed in more ways than one. It's quite unusually long, and there are iron columns with all that tangle of iron girders; only they're very far apart and I can't see any way a man could climb from one to the other.'

'I only mentioned it,' said Father Brown thoughtfully, 'because that queer fish with the long whiskers, the old
man who preaches on the sand, often climbs up on to the nearest girder. I believe he sits there fishing when the tide comes up. And he's a very queer fish to go fishing.'

'Why, what do you mean?'

'Well,' said Father Brown very slowly, twiddling with a button and gazing abstractedly out to the great green waters glittering in the last evening light after the sunset. 'Well ... I tried to talk to him in a friendly sort of way - friendly and not too funny, if you understand, about his combining the ancient trades of fishing and preaching; I think I made the obvious reference; the text that refers to fishing for living souls. And he said quite queerly and harshly, as he jumped back on to his iron perch, “Well, at least I fish for dead bodies.”'

'Good God!' exclaimed the detective, staring at him.

'Yes,' said the priest. 'It seemed to me an odd remark to make in a chatty way, to a stranger playing with children on the sands.'

After another staring silence his companion eventually ejaculated: 'You don't mean you think he had anything to do with the death.'

'I think,' answered Father Brown, 'that he might throw some light on it.'

'Well, it's beyond me now,' said the detective. 'It's beyond me to believe that anybody can throw any light on it. It's like a welter of wild waters in the pitch dark; the sort of waters that he ... that he fell into. It's simply stark staring unreason; a big man vanishing like a bubble; nobody could possibly ... Look here!' He stopped suddenly, staring at the priest, who had not moved, but was still twiddling with the button and staring at the breakers. 'What do you mean? What are you looking like that for? You don't mean to say that you . . . that you can make any sense of it?'

'It would be much better if it remained nonsense,' said Father Brown in a low voice. 'Well, if you ask me right out - yes, I think I can make some sense of it.'

There was a long silence, and then the inquiry agent said with a rather singular abruptness: 'Oh, here comes the old man's secretary from the hotel. I must be off. I think I'll go and talk to that mad fisherman of yours.'

'Post hoc propter hoc?' asked the priest with a smile.

'Well,' said the other, with jerky candour, 'the secretary don't like me and I don't think I like him. He's been poking around with a lot of questions that didn't seem to me to get us any further, except towards a quarrel. Perhaps he's jealous because the old man called in somebody else, and wasn't content with his elegant secretary's advice. See you later.'

And he turned away, ploughing through the sand to the place where the eccentric preacher had already mounted his marine nest; and looked in the green gloaming rather like some huge polyp or stinging jelly - fish trailing his poisonous filaments in the phosphorescent sea.

Meanwhile the priest was serenely watching the serene approach of the secretary; conspicuous even from afar, in that popular crowd, by the clerical neatness and sobriety of his top - hat and tail - coat. Without feeling disposed to take part in any feuds between the secretary and the inquiry agent. Father Brown had a faint feeling of irrational sympathy with the prejudices of the latter. Mr Anthony Taylor, the secretary, was an extremely presentable young man, in countenance, as well as costume; and the countenance was firm and intellectual as well as merely good - looking. He was pale, with dark hair coming down on the sides of his head, as if pointing towards possible whiskers; he kept his lips compressed more tightly than most people. The only thing that Father Brown's fancy could tell itself in justification sounded queerer than it really looked. He had a notion that the man talked with his nostrils. Anyhow, the strong compression of his mouth brought out something abnormally sensitive and flexible in these movements at the sides of his nose, so that he seemed to be communicating and conducting life by snuffling and smelling, with his head up, as does a dog. It somehow fitted in with the other features that, when he did speak, it was with a sudden rattling rapidity like a gatling - gun, which sounded almost ugly from so smooth and polished a figure.

For once he opened the conversation, by saying: 'No bodies washed ashore, I imagine.'

'None have been announced, certainly,' said Father Brown.

'No gigantic body of the murderer with the woollen scarf,' said Mr Taylor.

'No,' said Father Brown.

Mr Taylor's mouth did not move any more for the moment; but his nostrils spoke for him with such quick and quivering scorn, that they might almost have been called talkative.

When he did speak again, after some polite commonplaces from the priest, it was to say curtly: 'Here comes the Inspector; I suppose they've been scouring England for the scarf.'

Inspector Grinstead, a brown - faced man with a grey pointed beard, addressed Father Brown rather more respectfully than the secretary had done.

'I thought you would like to know, sir,' he said, 'that there is absolutely no trace of the man described as having escaped from the pier.'

'Or rather not described as having escaped from the pier,' said Taylor. 'The pier officials, the only people who
could have described him, have never seen anybody to describe."

'Well,' said the Inspector, 'we've telephoned all the stations and watched all the roads, and it will be almost impossible for him to escape from England. It really seems to me as if he couldn't have got out that way. He doesn't seem to be anywhere."

'He never was anywhere,' said the secretary, with an abrupt grating voice, that sounded like a gun going off on that lonely shore.

The Inspector looked blank; but a light dawned gradually on the face of the priest, who said at last with almost ostentatious unconcern:

'Do you mean that the man was a myth? Or possibly a lie?'

'Ah,' said the secretary, inhaling through his haughty nostrils, 'you've thought of that at last.'

'I thought of that at first,' said Father Brown. 'It's the first thing anybody would think of, isn't it, hearing an unsupported story from a stranger about a strange murderer on a lonely pier. In plain words, you mean that little Muggleton never heard anybody murdering the millionaire. Possibly you mean that little Muggleton murdered him himself."

'Well,' said the secretary, 'Muggleton looks a dingy down - and - out sort of cove to me. There's no story but his about what happened on the pier, and his story consists of a giant who vanished; quite a fairy - tale. It isn't a very creditable tale, even as he tells it. By his own account, he bungled his case and let his patron be killed a few yards away. He's a pretty rotten fool and failure, on his own confession.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown. 'I'm rather fond of people who are fools and failures on their own confession.'

'I don't know what you mean,' snapped the other.

'Perhaps,' said Father Brown, wistfully, 'it's because so many people are fools and failures without any confession.'

Then, after a pause, he went on: 'But even if he is a fool and a failure, that doesn't prove he is a liar and a murderer. And you've forgotten that there is one piece of external evidence that does really support history. I mean the letter from the millionaire, telling the whole tale of his cousin and his vendetta. Unless you can prove that the document itself is actually a forgery, you have to admit there was some probability of Bruce being pursued by somebody who had a real motive. Or rather, I should say, the one actually admitted and recorded motive.'

'I'm not quite sure that I understand you,' said the Inspector, 'about the motive.'

'My dear fellow,' said Father Brown, for the first time stung by impatience into familiarity, 'everybody's got a motive in a way. Considering the way that Bruce made his money, considering the way that most millionaires make their money, almost anybody in the world might have done such a perfectly natural thing as throw him into the sea. In many, one might almost fancy, it would be almost automatic. To almost all it must have occurred at some time or other. Mr Taylor might have done it.'

'What's that?' snapped Mr Taylor, and his nostrils swelled visibly.

'I might have done it,' went on Father Brown, ' nisi me constringeret ecclesiae auctoritas. Anybody, but for the one true morality, might be tempted to accept so obvious, so simple a social solution. I might have done it; you might have done it; the Mayor or the muffin - man might have done it. The only person on this earth I can think of, who probably would not have done it, is the private inquiry agent whom Bruce had just engaged at five pounds a week, and who hadn't yet had any of his money.'

The secretary was silent for a moment; then he snorted and said: 'If that's the offer in the letter, we'd certainly better see whether it's a forgery. For really, we don't know that the whole tale isn't as false as a forgery. The fellow admits himself that the disappearance of his hunch - backed giant is utterly incredible and inexplicable.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown; 'that's what I like about Muggleton. He admits things.'

'All the same,' insisted Taylor, his nostrils vibrant with excitement. 'All the same, the long and the short of it is that he can't prove that his tall man in the scarf ever existed or does exist; and every single fact found by the police and the witnesses proves that he does not exist. No, Father Brown. There is only one way in which you can justify this little scallywag you seem to be so fond of. And that is by producing his Imaginary Man. And that is exactly what you can't do.'

'By the way,' said the priest, absent - mindedly, 'I suppose you come from the hotel where Bruce has rooms, Mr Taylor?'

'Taylor looked a little taken aback, and seemed almost to stammer. 'Well, he always did have those rooms; and they're practically his. I haven't actually seen him there this time.'

'I suppose you motored down with him,' observed Brown; 'or did you both come by train?'

'I came by train and brought the luggage,' said the secretary impatiently. 'Something kept him, I suppose. I haven't actually seen him since he left Yorkshire on his own a week or two ago.'

'So it seems,' said the priest very softly, 'that if Muggleton wasn't the last to see Bruce by the wild sea - waves,
Taylor had turned quite white, but he forced his grating voice to composure: 'I never said Muggleton didn't see Bruce on the pier.'

'No; and why didn't you?' asked Father Brown. 'If he made up one man on the pier, why shouldn't he make up two men on the pier? Of course we do know that Bruce did exist; but we don't seem to know what has happened to him for several weeks. Perhaps he was left behind in Yorkshire.'

Therather strident voice of the secretary rose almost to a scream. All his veneer of society suavity seemed to have vanished.

'You're simply shuffling! You're simply shirking! You're trying to drag in mad insinuations about me, simply because you can't answer my question.'

'Let me see,' said Father Brown reminiscently. 'What was your question?'

'You know well enough what it was; and you know you're damned well stumped by it. Where is the man with the scarf? Who has seen him? Whoever heard of him or spoke of him, except that little liar of yours? If you want to convince us, you must produce him. If he ever existed, he may be hiding in the Hebrides or off to Callao. But you've got to produce him, though I know he doesn't exist. Well then! Where is he?'

'I rather think he is over there,' said Father Brown, peering and blinking towards the nearer waves that washed round the iron pillars of the pier; where the two figures of the agent and the old fisher and preacher were still dark against the green glow of the water. 'I mean in that sort of net thing that's tossing about in the sea.'

With whatever bewilderment, Inspector Grinstead took the upper hand again with a flash, and strode down the beach.

'Do you mean to say,' he cried, 'that the murderer's body is in the old boy's net?'

Father Brown nodded as he followed down the shingly slope; and, even as they moved, little Muggleton the agent turned and began to climb the same shore, his mere dark outline a pantomime of amazement and discovery.

'It's true, for all we said,' he gasped. 'The murderer did try to swim ashore and was drowned, of course, in that weather. Or else he did really commit suicide. Anyhow, he drifted dead into Old Brimstone's fishing-net, and that's what the old maniac meant when he said he fished for dead men.'

The Inspector ran down the shore with an agility that outstripped them all, and was heard shouting out orders. In a few moments the fishermen and a few bystanders, assisted by the policemen, had hauled the net into shore, and rolled it with its burden on to the wet sands that still reflected the sunset. The secretary looked at what lay on the sands and the words died on his lips. For what lay on the sands was indeed the body of a gigantic man in rags, with the huge shoulders somewhat humped and bony eagle face; and a great red ragged woollen scarf or comforter, sprawled along the sunset sands like a great stain of blood. But Taylor was staring not at the gory scarf or the fabulous stature, but at the face; and his own face was a conflict of incredulity and suspicion.

The Inspector instantly turned to Muggleton with a new air of civility.

'This certainly confirms your story,' he said. And until he heard the tone of those words, Muggleton had never guessed how almost universally his story had been disbelieved. Nobody had believed him. Nobody but Father Brown.

Therefore, seeing Father Brown edging away from the group, he made a movement to depart in his company; but even then he was brought up rather short by the discovery that the priest was once more being drawn away by the deadly attractions of the funny little automatic machines. He even saw the reverend gentleman fumbling for a penny. He stopped, however, with the penny poised in his finger and thumb, as the secretary spoke for the last time in his loud discordant voice.

'And I suppose we may add,' he said, 'that the monstrous and imbecile charges against me are also at an end.'

'My dear sir,' said the priest, 'I never made any charges against you. I'm not such a fool as to suppose you were likely to murder your master in Yorkshire and then come down here to fool about with his luggage. All I said was that I could make out a better case against you than you were making out so vigorously against poor Mr Muggleton. All the same, if you really want to learn the truth about his business (and I assure you the truth isn't generally grasped yet), I can give you a hint even from your own affairs. It is rather a rum and significant thing that Mr Bruce the millionaire had been unknown to all his usual haunts and habits for weeks before he was really killed. As you seem to be a promising amateur detective, I advise you to work on that line.'

'What do you mean?' asked Taylor sharply.

But he got no answer out of Father Brown, who was once more completely concentrated on jiggling the little handle of the machine, that made one doll jump out and then another doll jump after it.

'Father Brown,' said Muggleton, his old annoyance faintly reviving: 'Will you tell me why you like that fool thing so much?'

'For one reason,' replied the priest, peering closely into the glass puppet-show. 'Because it contains the secret of
this tragedy.'

Then he suddenly straightened himself; and looked quite seriously at his companion.

'I knew all along,' he said, 'that you were telling the truth and the opposite of the truth.'

Muggleton could only stare at a return of all the riddles.

'It's quite simple,' added the priest, lowering his voice. 'That corpse with the scarlet scarf over there is the corpse of Braham Bruce the millionaire. There won't be any other.'

'But the two men - ' began Muggleton, and his mouth fell open.

'Your description of the two men was quite admirably vivid,' said Father Brown. 'I assure you I'm not at all likely to forget it. If I may say so, you have a literary talent; perhaps journalism would give you more scope than detection. I believe I remember practically each point about each person. Only, you see, queerly enough, each point affected you in one way and me in exactly the opposite way. Let's begin with the first you mentioned. You said that the first man you saw had an indescribable air of authority and dignity. And you said to yourself, “That's the Trust Magnate, the great merchant prince, the ruler of markets.” But when I heard about the air of dignity and authority, I said to myself, “That's the actor; everything about this is the actor, “You don't get that look by being President of the Chain Store Amalgamation Company. You get that look by being Hamlet's Father's Ghost, or Julius Caesar, or King Lear, and you never altogether lose it. You couldn't see enough of his clothes to tell whether they were really seedy, but you saw a strip of fur and a sort of faintly fashionable cut; and I said to myself again, “The actor.”

Next, before we go into details about the other man, notice one thing about him evidently absent from the first man. You said the second man was not only ragged but unshaven to the point of being bearded. Now we have all seen shabby actors, dirty actors, drunken actors, utterly disreputable actors. But such a thing as a scrub - bearded actor, in a job or even looking round for a job, has scarcely been seen in this world. On the other hand, shaving is often almost the first thing to go, with a gentleman or a wealthy eccentric who is really letting himself go to pieces. Now we have every reason to believe that your friend the millionaire was letting himself go to pieces. His letter was the letter of a man who had already gone to pieces. But it wasn't only negligence that made him look poor and shabby. Don't you understand that the man was practically in hiding? That was why he didn't go to his hotel; and his own secretary hadn't seen him for weeks. He was a millionaire; but his whole object was to be a completely disguised millionaire. Have you ever read “The Woman in White”? Don't you remember that the fashionable and luxurious Count Fosco, fleeing for his life before a secret society, was found stabbed in the blue blouse of a common French workman? Then let us go back for a moment to the demeanour of these men. You saw the first man calm and collected and you said to yourself, “That's the innocent victim”; though the innocent victim's own letter wasn't at all calm and collected. I heard he was calm and collected; and I said to myself, “That's the murderer.” Why should he be anything else but calm and collected? He knew what he was going to do. He had made up his mind to do it for a long time; if he had ever had any hesitation or remorse he had hardened himself against them before he came on the scene - in his case, we might say, on the stage. He wasn't likely to have any particular stage - fright. He didn't pull out his pistol and wave it about; why should he? He kept it in his pocket till he wanted it; very likely he fired from his pocket. The other man fidgeted with his pistol because he was nervous as a cat, and very probably had never had a pistol before. He did it for the same reason that he rolled his eyes; and I remember that, even in your own unconscious evidence, it is particularly stated that he rolled them backwards. In fact, he was looking behind him. In fact, he was not the pursuer but the pursued. But because you happened to see the first man first, you couldn't help thinking of the other man as coming up behind him. In mere mathematics and mechanics, each of them was running after the other - just like the others.'

'What others?' inquired the dazed detective.

'Why, these,' cried Father Brown, striking the automatic machine with the little wooden spade, which had incongruously remained in his hand throughout these murderous mysteries. 'These little clockwork dolls that chase each other round and round for ever. Let us call them Mr Blue and Mr Red, after the colour of their coats. I happened to start off with Mr Blue, and so the children said that Mr Red was running after him; but it would have looked exactly the contrary if I had started with Mr Red.'

'Yes, I begin to see,' said Muggleton; 'and I suppose all the rest fits in. The family likeness, of course, cuts both ways, and they never saw the murderer leaving the pier -'
straying towards the horrible heap on the shore.

'One more penny left in the world,' said Father Brown, 'and then we must go home to tea. Do you know, Doris, I rather like those revolving games, that just go round and round like the Mulberry - Bush. After all, God made all the suns and stars to play Mulberry - Bush. But those other games, where one must catch up with another, where runners are rivals and run neck and neck and outstrip each other; well - much nastier things seem to happen. I like to think of Mr Red and Mr Blue always jumping with undiminished spirits; all free and equal; and never hurting each other.

"Fond lover, never, never, wilt thou kiss - or kill." Happy, happy Mr Red!

He cannot change; though thou hast not thy bliss,
For ever will thou jump; and he be Blue.

Reciting this remarkable quotation from Keats, with some emotion. Father Brown tucked the little spade under one arm, and giving a hand to two of the children, stumped solemnly up the beach to tea.

SIX: The Crime of the Communist

Three men came out from under the lowbrowed Tudor arch in the mellow facade of Mandeville College, into the strong evening sunlight of a summer day which seemed as if it would never end; and in that sunlight they saw something that blasted like lightning; well - fitted to be the shock of their lives.

Even before they had realized anything in the way of a catastrophe, they were conscious of a contrast. They themselves, in a curious quiet way, were quite harmonious with their surroundings. Though the Tudor arches that ran like a cloister round the College gardens had been built four hundred years ago, at that moment when the Gothic fell from heaven and bowed, or almost crouched, over the cosier chambers of Humanism and the Revival of Learning - though they themselves were in modern clothes (that is in clothes whose ugliness would have amazed any of the four centuries) yet something in the spirit of the place made them all at one. The gardens had been tended so carefully as to achieve the final triumph of looking careless; the very flowers seemed beautiful by accident, like elegant weeds; and the modern costumes had at least any picturesqueness that can be produced by being untidy. The first of the three, a tall, bald, bearded maypole of a man, was a familiar figure in the Quad in cap and gown; the gown slipped off one of his sloping shoulders. The second was very square - shouldered, short and compact, with a rather jolly grin, commonly clad in a jacket, with his gown over his arm. The third was even shorter and much shabbier, in black clerical clothes. But they all seemed suitable to Mandeville College; and the indescribable atmosphere of the two ancient and unique Universities of England. They fitted into it and they faded into it; which is there regarded as most fitting.

The two men seated on garden chairs by a little table were a sort of brilliant blot on this grey - green landscape. They were clad mostly in black and yet they glittered from head to heel, from their burnished top - hats to their perfectly polished boots. It was dimly felt as an outrage that anybody should be so well - dressed in the well - bred freedom of Mandeville College. The only excuse was that they were foreigners. One was an American, a millionaire named Hake, dressed in the spotlessly and sparklingly gentlemanly manner known only to the rich of New York. The other, who added to all these things the outrage of an astrakhan overcoat (to say nothing of a pair of florid whiskers), was a German Count of great wealth, the shortest part of whose name was Von Zimmern. The mystery of this story, however, is not the mystery of why they were there. They were there for the reason that commonly explains the meeting of incongruous things; they proposed to give the College some money. They had inspected the College with that tireless conscientious sightseeing of which no sons of Eve are capable except the American and the German. And now they were resting from their labours and looking solemnly at the College gardens. So far so good.

The three other men, who had already met them, passed with a vague salutation; but one of them stopped; the smallest of the three, in the black clerical clothes.

'I say,' he said, with rather the air of a frightened rabbit, 'I don't like the look of those men.'

'Good God! Who could?' ejaculated the tall man, who happened to be the Master of Mandeville. 'At least we have some rich men who don't go about dressed up like tailors' dummies.'

'Yes,' hissed the little cleric, 'that's what I mean. Like tailors' dummies.'

'Why, what do you mean?' asked the shorter of the other men, sharply.

'I mean they're like horrible waxworks,' said the cleric in a faint voice. 'I mean they don't move. Why don't they move?'

Suddenly starting out of his dim retirement, he darted across the garden and touched the German Baron on the elbow. The German Baron fell over, chair and all, and the trousered legs that stuck up in the air were as stiff as the legs of the chair.

Mr Gideon P. Hake continued to gaze at the College gardens with glassy eyes; but the parallel of a waxwork confirmed the impression that they were like eyes made of glass. Somehow the rich sunlight and the coloured garden
increased the creepy impression of a stiffly dressed doll; a marionette on an Italian stage. The small man in black, who was a priest named Brown, tentatively touched the millionaire on the shoulder, and the millionaire fell sideways, but horribly all of a piece, like something carved in wood.

'Rigor mortis,' said Father Brown, 'and so soon. But it does vary a good deal.'

The reason the first three men had joined the other two men so late (not to say too late) will best be understood by noting what had happened just inside the building, behind the Tudor archway, but a short time before they came out. They had all dined together in Hall, at the High Table; but the two foreign philanthropists, slaves of duty in the matter of seeing everything, had solemnly gone back to the chapel, of which one cloister and a staircase remained unexamined; promising to rejoin the rest in the garden, to examine as earnestly the College cigars. The rest, in a more reverent and right-minded spirit, had adjourned as usual to the long narrow oak table, round which the after-dinner wine had circulated, for all anybody knew, ever since the College had been founded in the Middle Ages by Sir John Mandeville, for the encouragement of telling stories. The Master, with the big fair beard and bald brow, took the head of the table, and the squat man in the square jacket sat on his left; for he was the Bursar or business man of the College. Next to him, on that side of the table, sat a queer-looking man with what could only be called a crooked face; for its dark tufts of moustache and eyebrow, slanting at contrary angles, made a sort of zig-zag, as if half his face were puckered or paralysed. His name was Byles; he was the lecturer in Roman History, and his political opinions were founded on those of Coriolanus, not to mention Tarquinius Superbus. This tart Toryism, and rabidly reactionary view of all current problems, was not altogether unknown among the more old-fashioned sort of dons; but in the case of Byles there was a suggestion that it was a result rather than a cause of his acerbity. More than one sharp observer had received the impression that there was something really wrong with Byles; that some secret or some great misfortune had embittered him; as if that half-withered face had really been blasted like a storm-stricken tree. Beyond him again sat Father Brown and at the end of the table a Professor of Chemistry, large and blond and bland, with eyes that were sleepy and perhaps a little sly. It was well known that this natural philosopher regarded the other philosophers, of a more classical tradition, very much as old logics. On the other side of the table, opposite Father Brown, was a very swarthy and silent young man, with a black pointed beard, introduced because somebody had insisted on having a Chair of Persian; opposite the sinister Byles was a very mild-looking little Chaplain, with a head like an egg. Opposite the Bursar and at the right hand of the Master, was an empty chair; and there were many there who were glad to see it empty.

'I don't know whether Craken is coming,' said the Master, not without a nervous glance at the chair, which contrasted with the usual languid freedom of his demeanour. 'I believe in giving people a lot of rope myself; but I confess I've reached the point of being glad when he is here, merely because he isn't anywhere else.'

'Never know what he'll be up to next,' said the Bursar, cheerfully, 'especially when he's instructing the young.'

'A brilliant fellow, but fiery of course,' said the Master, with a rather abrupt relapse into reserve.

'Fireworks are fiery, and also brilliant,' growled old Byles, 'but I don't want to be burned in my bed so that Craken can figure as a real Guy Fawkes.'

'Do you really think he would join a physical force revolution, if there were one,' asked the Bursar smiling.

'Well, he thinks he would,' said Byles sharply. 'Told a whole hall full of undergraduates the other day that nothing now could avert the Class War turning into a real war, with killing in the streets of the town; and it didn't matter, so long as it ended in Communism and the victory of the working-class.'

'The Class War,' mused the Master, with a sort of distaste mellowed by distance; for he had known William Morris long ago and been familiar enough with the more artistic and leisurely Socialists. 'I never can understand all this about the Class War. When I was young, Socialism was supposed to mean saying that there are no classes.'

'Nother way of saying that Socialists are no class,' said Byles with sour relish.

'Of course, you'd be more against them than I should,' said the Master thoughtfully, 'but I suppose my Socialism is almost as old-fashioned as your Toryism. Wonder what our young friends really think. What do you think, Baker?' he said abruptly to the Bursar on his left.

'Oh, I don't think, as the vulgar saying is,' said the Bursar laughing. 'You must remember I'm a very vulgar person. I'm not a thinker. I'm only a business man; and as a business man I think it's all bosh. You can't make men equal and it's damned bad business to pay them equal; especially a lot of them not worth paying for at all. Whatever it is, you've got to take the practical way out, because it's the only way out. It's not our fault if nature made everything a scramble.'

'I agree with you there,' said the Professor of Chemistry, speaking with a lisp that seemed childish in so large a man. 'Communism pretends to be oh so modern; but it is not. Throwback to the superstitions of monks and primitive tribes. A scientific government, with a really ethical responsibility to posterity, would be always looking for the line of promise and progress; not levelling and flattening it all back into the mud again. Socialism is sentimentalism; and more dangerous than a pestilence, for in that at least the fittest would survive.'
The Master smiled a little sadly. 'You know you and I will never feel quite the same about differences of opinion. Didn't somebody say up here, about walking with a friend by the river, "Not differing much, except in opinion." Isn't that the motto of a university? To have hundreds of opinions and not be opinionated. If people fall here, it's by what they are, not what they think. Perhaps I'm a relic of the eighteenth century; but I incline to the old sentimental heresy, "For forms of faith let graceless zealots fight; he can't he wrong whose life is in the right." What do you think about that, Father Brown?'

He glanced a little mischievously across at the priest and was mildly startled. For he had always found the priest very cheerful and amiable and easy to get on with; and his round face was mostly solid with good humour. But for some reason the priest's face at this moment was knotted with a frown much more sombre than any the company had ever seen on it; so that for an instant that commonplace countenance actually looked darker and more ominous than the haggard face of Byles. An instant later the cloud seemed to have passed; but Father Brown still spoke with a certain sobriety and firmness.

'I don't believe in that, anyhow,' he said shortly. 'How can his life be in the right, if his whole view of life is wrong? That's a modern muddle that arose because people didn't know how much views of life can differ. Baptists and Methodists knew they didn't differ very much in morality; but then they didn't differ very much in religion or philosophy. It's quite different when you pass from the Baptists to the Anabaptists; or from the Theosophists to the Thugs. Heresy always does affect morality, if it's heretical enough. I suppose a man may honestly believe that thieving isn't wrong. But what's the good of saying that he honestly believes in dishonesty?'

'Damned good,' said Byles with a ferocious contortion of feature, believed by many to be meant for a friendly smile. 'And that's why I object to having a Chair of Theoretical Thieving in this College.'

'Well, you're all very down on Communism, of course,' said the Master, with a sigh. 'But do you really think there's so much of it to be down on? Are any of your heresies really big enough to be dangerous?'

'I think they have grown so big,' said Father Brown gravely, 'that in some circles they are already taken for granted. They are actually unconscious. That is, without conscience.'

'And the end of it,' said Byles, 'will be the ruin of this country.'

'The end will be something worse,' said Father Brown.

A shadow shot or slid rapidly along the panelled wall opposite, as swiftly followed by the figure that had flung it; a tall but stooping figure with a vague outline like a bird of prey; accentuated by the fact that its sudden appearance and swift passage were like those of a bird startled and flying from a bush. It was only the figure of a long-limbed, high-shouldered man with long drooping moustaches, in fact, familiar enough to them all; but something in the twilight and candelight and the flying and streaking shadow connected it strangely with the priest's unconscious words of omen; for all the world, as if those words had indeed been an augury, in the old Roman sense; and the sign of it the flight of a bird. Perhaps Mr Byles might have given a lecture on such Roman augury; and especially on that bird of ill-omen.

The tall man shot along the wall like his own shadow until he sank into the empty chair on the Master's right, and looked across at the Bursar and the rest with hollow and cavernous eyes. His hanging hair and moustache were quite fair, but his eyes were so deep - set that they might have been black. Everyone knew, or could guess, who the newcomer was; but an incident instantly followed that sufficiently illuminated the situation. The Professor of Roman History rose stiffly to his feet and stalked out of the room, indicating with little finesse his feelings about sitting at the same table with the Professor of Theoretical Thieving, otherwise the Communist, Mr Craken.

The Master of Mandeville covered the awkward situation with nervous grace. 'I was defending you, or some aspects of you, my dear Craken,' he said smiling, 'though I am sure you would find me quite indefensible. After all, I can't forget that the old Socialist friends of my youth had a very fine ideal of fraternity and comradeship. William Morris put it all in a sentence, "Fellowship is heaven; and lack of a Fellowship is hell."'

'Dons as Democrats; see headline,' said Mr Craken rather disagreeably. 'And is Hard - Case Hake going to dedicate the new Commercial Chair to the memory of William Morris?'

'Well,' said the Master, still maintaining a desperate geniality, 'I hope we may say, in a sense, that all our Chairs are Chairs of good - fellowship.'

'Yes; that's the academic version of the Morris maxim,' growled Craken. '"A Fellowship is heaven; and lack of a Fellowship is hell."'

'Don't be so cross, Craken,' interposed the Bursar briskly. 'Take some port. Tenby, pass the port to Mr Craken.'

'Oh well, I'll have a glass,' said the Communist Professor a little less ungraciously. 'I really came down here to have a smoke in the garden. Then I looked out of the window and saw your two precious millionaires were actually blooming in the garden; fresh, innocent buds. After all, it might be worth while to give them a bit of my mind.'

The Master had risen under cover of his last conventional cordiality, and was only too glad to leave the Bursar to do his best with the Wild Man. Others had risen, and the groups at the table had begun to break up; and the Bursar
and Mr Craken were left more or less alone at the end of the long table. Only Father Brown continued to sit staring into vacancy with a rather cloudy expression.

'Oh, as to that,' said the Bursar. 'I'm pretty tired of them myself, to tell the truth; I've been with them the best part of a day going into facts and figures and all the business of this new Professorship. But look here, Craken,' and he leaned across the table and spoke with a sort of soft emphasis, 'you really needn't cut up so rough about this new Professorship. It doesn't really interfere with your subject. You're the only Professor of Political Economy at Mandeville and, though I don't pretend to agree with your notions, everybody knows you've got a European reputation. This is a special subject they call Applied Economics. Well, even today, as I told you, I've had a hell of a lot of Applied Economics. In other words, I've had to talk business with two business men. Would you particularly want to do that? Would you envy it? Would you stand it? Isn't that evidence enough that there is a separate subject and may well be a separate Chair?'

'Good God,' cried Craken with the intense invocation of the atheist. 'Do you think I don't want to apply Economics? Only, when we apply it, you call it red ruin and anarchy; and when you apply it, I take the liberty of calling it exploitation. If only you fellows would apply Economics, it's just possible that people might get something to eat. We are the practical people; and that's why you're afraid of us. That's why you have to get two greasy Capitalists to start another Lectureship; just because I've let the cat out of the bag.'

'Rather a wild cat, wasn't it?' said the Bursar smiling, 'that you let out of the bag?'

'And rather a gold - bag, wasn't it,' said Craken, 'that you are tying the cat up in again?'

'Well, I don't suppose we shall ever agree about all that,' said the other. 'But those fellows have come out of their chapel into the garden; and if you want to have your smoke there, you'd better come.' He watched with some amusement his companion fumbling in all his pockets till he produced a pipe, and then, gazing at it with an abstracted air, Craken rose to his feet, but even in doing so, seemed to be feeling all over himself again. Mr Baker the Bursar ended the controversy with a happy laugh of reconciliation. 'You are the practical people, and you will blow up the town with dynamite. Only you'll probably forget the dynamite, as I bet you've forgotten the tobacco. Never mind, take a fill of mine. Matches?' He threw a tobacco - pouch and its accessories across the table; to be caught by Mr Craken with that dexterity never forgotten by a cricketer, even when he adopts opinions generally regarded as not cricket. The two men rose together; but Baker could not forbear remarking, 'Are you really the only practical people? Isn't there anything to be said for the Applied Economics, that remembers to carry a tobacco - pouch as well as a pipe?'

Craken looked at him with smouldering eyes; and said at last, after slowly draining the last of his wine: 'Let's say there's another sort of practicality. I dare say I do forget details and so on. What I want you to understand is this - he automatically returned the pouch; but his eyes were far away and jet - burning, almost terrible - because the inside of our intellect has changed, because we really have a new idea of right, we shall do things you think really wrong. And they will be very practical.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, suddenly coming out of his trance. 'That's exactly what I said.'

He looked across at Craken with a glassy and rather ghastly smile, saying: 'Mr Craken and I are in complete agreement.'

'Well,' said Baker, 'Craken is going out to smoke a pipe with the plutocrats; but I doubt whether it will be a pipe of peace.'

He turned rather abruptly and called to an aged attendant in the background. Mandeville was one of the last of the very old - fashioned Colleges; and even Craken was one of the first of the Communists; before the Bolshevism of today. 'That reminds me,' the Bursar was saying, 'as you won't hand round your peace pipe, we must send out the cigars to our distinguished guests. If they're smokers they must be longing for a smoke; for they've been nosing about in the chapel since feeding - time.'

Craken exploded with a savage and jarring laugh. 'Oh, I'll take them their cigars,' he said. 'I'm only a proletarian.'

Baker and Brown and the attendant were all witnesses to the fact that the Communist strode furiously into the garden to confront the millionaires; but nothing more was seen or heard of them until, as is already recorded, Father Brown found them dead in their chairs.

It was agreed that the Master and the priest should remain to guard the scene of tragedy, while the Bursar, younger and more rapid in his movements, ran off to fetch doctors and policemen. Father Brown approached the table on which one of the cigars had burned itself away all but an inch or two; the other had dropped from the hand and been dashed out into dying sparks on the crazy - pavement. The Master of Mandeville sat down rather shakily on a sufficiently distant seat and buried his bald brow in his hands. Then he looked up at first rather wearily; and then he looked very startled indeed and broke the stillness of the garden with a word like a small explosion of horror.

There was a certain quality about Father Brown which might sometimes be called blood - curdling. He always
thought about what he was doing and never about whether it was done; he would do the most ugly or horrible or undignified or dirty things as calmly as a surgeon. There was a certain blank, in his simple mind, of all those things commonly associated with being superstitious or sentimental. He sat down on the chair from which the corpse had fallen, picked up the cigar the corpse had partially smoked, carefully detached the ash, examined the butt-end and then stuck it in his mouth and lit it. It looked like some obscene and grotesque antic in derision of the dead; and it seemed to him to be the most ordinary common sense. A cloud floated upwards like the smoke of some savage sacrifice and idolatry; but to Father Brown it appeared a perfectly self-evident fact that the only way to find out what a cigar is like is to smoke it. Nor did it lessen the horror for his old friend, the Master of Mandeville, to have a dim but shrewd guess that Father Brown was, upon the possibilities of the case, risking his own life.

'No; I think that's all right,' said the priest, putting the stump down again. 'Jolly good cigars. Your cigars. Not American or German. I don't think there's anything odd about the cigar itself; but they'd better take care of the ashes. These men were poisoned somehow with the sort of stuff that stiffens the body quickly... By the way, there goes somebody who knows more about it than we do.'

The Master sat up with a curiously uncomfortable jolt; for indeed the large shadow which had fallen across the pathway preceded a figure which, however heavy, was almost as soft-footed as a shadow. Professor Wadham, eminent occupant of the Chair of Chemistry, always moved very quietly in spite of his size, and there was nothing odd about his strolling in the garden; yet there seemed something unnaturally neat in his appearing at the exact moment when chemistry was mentioned.

Professor Wadham prided himself on his quietude; some would say his insensibility. He did not turn a hair on his flattened flaxen head, but stood looking down at the dead men with a shade of something like indifference on his large froglike face. Only when he looked at the cigar-ash, which the priest had preserved, he touched it with one finger; then he seemed to stand even stiller than before; but in the shadow of his face his eyes for an instant seemed to shoot out telescopically like one of his own microscopes. He had certainly realized or recognized something; but he said nothing.

'I don't know where anyone is to begin in this business,' said the Master.

'I should begin,' said Father Brown, 'by asking where these unfortunate men had been most of the time today.'

'They were messing about in my laboratory for a good time,' said Wadham, speaking for the first time. 'Baker often comes up to have a chat, and this time he brought his two patrons to inspect my department. But I think they went everywhere; real tourists. I know they went to the chapel and even into the tunnel under the crypt, where you have to light candles; instead of digesting their food like sane men. Baker seems to have taken them everywhere.'

'Were they interested in anything particular in your department?' asked the priest. 'What were you doing there just then?'

The Professor of Chemistry murmured a chemical formula beginning with 'sulphate', and ending with something that sounded like 'silicium'; unintelligible to both his hearers. He then wandered wearily away and sat on a remote bench in the sun, closing his eyes, but turning up his large face with heavy forbearance.

At his point, by a sharp contrast, the lawns were crossed by a brisk figure travelling as rapidly and as straight as a bullet; and Father Brown recognized the neat black clothes and shrewd doglike face of a police-surgeon whom he had met in the poorer parts of town. He then wandered wearily away and sat on a remote bench in the sun, closing his eyes, but turning up his large face with heavy forbearance.

At his point, by a sharp contrast, the lawns were crossed by a brisk figure travelling as rapidly and as straight as a bullet; and Father Brown recognized the neat black clothes and shrewd doglike face of a police-surgeon whom he had met in the poorer parts of town. He was the first to arrive of the official contingent.

'Look here,' said the Master to the priest, before the doctor was within earshot. 'I must know something. Did you mean what you said about Communism being a real danger and leading to crime?'

'Yes,' said Father Brown smiling rather grimly, 'I have really noticed the spread of some Communist ways and influences; and, in one sense, this is a Communist crime.'

'Thank you,' said the Master. 'Then I must go off and see to something at once. Tell the authorities I'll be back in ten minutes.'

The Master had vanished into one of the Tudor archways at just about the moment when the police-doctor had reached the table and cheerfully recognized Father Brown. On the latter's suggestion that they should sit down at the tragic table, Dr Blake threw one sharp and doubtful glance at the big, bland and seemingly somnolent chemist, who occupied a more remote seat. He was duly informed of the Professor's identity, and what had so far been gathered of the Professor's evidence; and listened to it silently while conducting a preliminary examination of the dead bodies. Naturally, he seemed more concentrated on the actual corpses than on the hearsay evidence, until one detail suddenly distracted him entirely from the science of anatomy.

'What did the Professor say he was working at?' he inquired.

Father Brown patiently repeated the chemical formula he did not understand.

'What?' snapped Dr Blake, like a pistol-shot. 'Gosh! This is pretty frightful!' 'Because it's poison?' inquired Father Brown.

'Because it's piffle,' replied Dr Blake. 'It's simply nonsense. The Professor is quite a famous chemist. Why is a
famous chemist deliberately talking nonsense?"

'Well, I think I know that one,' answered Father Brown mildly. 'He is talking nonsense, because he is telling lies. He is concealing something; and he wanted specially to conceal it from these two men and their representatives.'

The doctor lifted his eyes from the two men and looked across at the almost unnaturally immobile figure of the great chemist. He might almost have been asleep; a garden butterfly had settled upon him and seemed to turn his stillness into that of a stone idol. The large folds of his froglike face reminded the doctor of the hanging skins of a rhinoceros.

'Yes,' said Father Brown, in a very low voice. 'He is a wicked man.'

'God damn it all!' cried the doctor, suddenly moved to his very depths. 'Do you mean that a great scientific man like that deals in murder?'

'Fastidious critics would have complained of his dealing in murder,' said the priest dispassionately. 'I don't say I'm very fond of people dealing in murder in that way myself. But what's much more to the point - I'm sure that these poor fellows were among his fastidious critics.'

'You mean they found his secret and he silenced them?' said Blake frowning. 'But what in hell was his secret? How could a man murder on a large scale in a place like this?'

'I have told you his secret,' said the priest. 'It is a secret of the soul. He is a bad man. For heaven's sake don't fancy I say that because he and I are of opposite schools or traditions. I have a crowd of scientific friends; and most of them are heroically disinterested. Even of the most sceptical, I would only say they are rather irrationally disinterested. But now and then you do get a man who is a materialist, in the sense of a beast. I repeat he's a bad man. Much worse than - ' And Father Brown seemed to hesitate for a word.

'You mean much worse than the Communist?' suggested the other.

'No; I mean much worse than the murderer,' said Father Brown.

He got to his feet in an abstracted manner; and hardly realized that his companion was staring at him.

'But didn't you mean,' asked Blake at last, 'that this Wadham is the murderer?'

'Oh, no,' said Father Brown more cheerfully. 'The murderer is a much more sympathetic and understandable person. He at least was desperate; and had the excuses of sudden rage and despair.'

'Why,' cried the doctor, 'do you mean it was the Communist after all?'

It was at this very moment, appropriately enough, that the police officials appeared with an announcement that seemed to conclude the case in a most decisive and satisfactory manner. They had been somewhat delayed in reaching the scene of the crime, by the simple fact that they had already captured the criminal. Indeed, they had captured him almost at the gates of their own official residence. They had already had reason to suspect the activities of Craken the Communist during various disorders in the town; when they heard of the outrage they felt it safe to arrest him; and found the arrest thoroughly justified. For, as Inspector Cook radiantly explained to dons and doctors on the lawn of Mandeville garden, no sooner was the notorious Communist searched, than it was found that he was actually carrying a box of poisoned matches.

The moment Father Brown heard the word 'matches', he jumped from his seat as if a match had been lighted under him.

'Ah,' he cried, with a sort of universal radiance, 'and now it's all clear.'

'What do you mean by all clear?' demanded the Master of Mandeville, who had returned in all the pomp of his own officialism to match the pomp of the police officials now occupying the College like a victorious army. 'Do you mean you are convinced now that the case against Craken is clear?'

'I mean that Craken is cleared,' said Father Brown firmly, 'and the case against Craken is cleared away. Do you really believe Craken is the kind of man who would go about poisoning people with matches?'

'That's all very well,' replied the Master, with the troubled expression he had never lost since the first sensation occurred. 'But it was you yourself who said that fanatics with false principles may do wicked things. For that matter, it was you yourself who said that Communism is creeping up everywhere and Communistic habits spreading.'

Father Brown laughed in a rather shamefaced manner.

'As to the last point,' he said, 'I suppose I owe you all an apology. I seem to be always making a mess of things with my silly little jokes.'

'Jokes!' repeated the Master, staring rather indignantly.

'Well,' explained the priest, rubbing his head. 'When I talked about a Communist habit spreading, I only meant a habit I happen to have noticed about two or three times even today. It is a Communist habit by no means confined to Communists. It is the extraordinary habit of so many men, especially Englishmen, of putting other people's matchboxes in their pockets without remembering to return them. Of course, it seems an awfully silly little trifle to talk about. But it does happen to be the way the crime was committed.'

'It sounds to me quite crazy,' said the doctor.
'Well, if almost any man may forget to return matches, you can bet your boots that Craken would forget to return them. So the poisoner who had prepared the matches got rid of them on to Craken, by the simple process of lending them and not getting them back. A really admirable way of shedding responsibility; because Craken himself would be perfectly unable to imagine where he had got them from. But when he used them quite innocently to light the cigars he offered to our two visitors, he was caught in an obvious trap; one of those too obvious traps. He was the bold bad Revolutionist murdering two millionaires.'

'Well, who else would want to murder them?' growled the doctor.

'Ah, who indeed?' replied the priest; and his voice changed to much greater gravity. There we come to the other thing I told you; and that, let me tell you, was not a joke. I told you that heresies and false doctrines had become common and conversational; that everybody was used to them; that nobody really noticed them. Did you think I meant Communism when I said that? Why, it was just the other way. You were all as nervous as cats about Communism; and you watched Craken like a wolf. Of course. Communism is a heresy; but it isn't a heresy that you people take for granted. It is Capitalism you take for granted; or rather the vices of Capitalism disguised as a dead Darwinism. Do you recall what you were all saying in the Common Room, about life being only a scramble, and nature demanding the survival of the fittest, and how it doesn't matter whether the poor are paid justly or not? Why, that is the heresy that you have grown accustomed to, my friends; and it's every bit as much a heresy as Communism. That's the anti-Christian morality or immorality that you take quite naturally. And that's the immorality that has made a man a murderer today.'

'What man?' cried the Master, and his voice cracked with a sudden weakness.

'Let me approach it another way,' said the priest placidly. 'You all talk as if Craken ran away; but he didn't. When the two men toppled over, he ran down the street, summoned the doctor merely by shouting through the window, and shortly afterwards was trying to summon the police. That was how he was arrested. But doesn't it strike you, now one comes to think of it, that Mr Baker the Bursar is rather a long time looking for the police?'

'What is he doing then?' asked the Master sharply.

'I fancy he's destroying papers; or perhaps ransacking these men's rooms to see they haven't left us a letter. Or it may have something to do with our friend Wadham. Where does he come in? That is really very simple and a sort of joke too. Mr Wadham is experimenting in poisons for the next war; and has something of which a whiff of flame will stiffen a man dead. Of course, he had nothing to do with killing these men; but he did conceal his chemical secret for a very simple reason. One of them was a Puritan Yankee and the other a cosmopolitan Jew; and those two types are often fanatical Pacifists. They would have called it planning murder and probably refused to help the College. But Baker was a friend of Wadham and it was easy for him to dip matches in the new material.'

Another peculiarity of the little priest was that his mind was all of a piece, and he was unconscious of many incongruities; he would change the note of his talk from something quite public to something quite private, without any particular embarrassment. On this occasion, he made most of the company stare with mystification, by beginning to talk to one person when he had just been talking to ten; quite indifferent to the fact that only the one could have any notion of what he was talking about.

'I'm sorry if I misled you, doctor, by that maundering metaphysical digression on the man of sin,' he said apologetically. 'Of course it had nothing to do with the murder; but the truth is I'd forgotten all about the murder for the moment. I'd forgotten everything, you see, but a sort of vision of that fellow, with his vast unhuman face, squatting among the flowers like some blind monster of the Stone Age. And I was thinking that some men are pretty monstrous, like men of stone; but it was all irrelevant. Being bad inside has very little to do with committing crimes outside. The worst criminals have committed no crimes. The practical point is why did the practical criminal commit this crime. Why did Baker the Bursar want to kill these men? That's all that concerns us now. The answer is the answer to the question I've asked twice. Where were these men most of the time, apart from nosing in chapels or laboratories? By the Bursar's own account, they were talking business with the Bursar.'

'Now, with all respect to the dead, I do not exactly grovel before the intellect of these two financiers. Their views on economics and ethics were heathen and heartless. Their views on Peace were tosh. Their views on Port were even more deplorable. But one thing they did understand; and that was business. And it took them a remarkably short time to discover that the business man in charge of the funds of this College was a swindler. Or shall I say, a true follower of the doctrine of the unlimited struggle for life and the survival of the fittest.'

'You mean they were going to expose him and he killed them before they could speak,' said the doctor frowning. 'There are a lot of details I don't understand.'

'There are some details I'm not sure of myself,' said the priest frankly. 'I suspect all that business of candles underground had something to do with abstracting the millionaires' own matches, or perhaps making sure they had no matches. But I'm sure of the main gesture, the gay and careless gesture of Baker tossing his matches to the careless Craken. That gesture was the murderous blow.'
'There's one thing I don't understand,' said the Inspector.  'How did Baker know that Craken wouldn't light up himself then and there at the table and become an unwanted corpse?'

The face of Father Brown became almost heavy with reproach; and his voice had a sort of mournful yet generous warmth in it.

'Well, hang it all,' he said, 'he was only an atheist.'

'I'm afraid I don't know what you mean,' said the Inspector, politely.

'He only wanted to abolish God,' explained Father Brown in a temperate and reasonable tone.  'He only wanted to destroy the Ten Commandments and root up all the religion and civilization that had made him, and wash out all the common sense of ownership and honesty; and let his culture and his country be flattened out by savages from the ends of the earth.  That's all he wanted.  You have no right to accuse him of anything beyond that.  Hang it all, everybody draws the line somewhere!  And you come here and calmly suggest that a Mandeville Man of the old generation (for Craken was of the old generation, whatever his views) would have begun to smoke, or even strike a match, while he was still drinking the College Port, of the vintage of '08 - no, no; men are not so utterly without laws and limits as all that!  I was there; I saw him; he had not finished his wine, and you ask me why he did not smoke!  No such anarchic question has ever shaken the arches of Mandeville College.  Funny place, Oxford.  Funny place, England.'

'But you haven't anything particular to do with Oxford?' asked the doctor curiously.

'I have to do with England,' said Father Brown.  'I come from there.  And the funniest thing of all is that even if you love it and belong to it, you still can't make head or tail of it.'

SEVEN: The Point of a Pin

Father Brown always declared that he solved this problem in his sleep.  And this was true, though in rather an odd fashion; because it occurred at a time when his sleep was rather disturbed.  It was disturbed very early in the morning by the hammering that began in the huge building, or half-building, that was in process of erection opposite to his rooms; a colossal pile of flats still mostly covered with scaffolding and with boards announcing Messrs Swindon & Sand as the builders and owners.  The hammering was renewed at regular intervals and was easily recognizable: because Messrs Swindon & Sand specialized in some new American system of cement flooring which, in spite of its subsequent smoothness, solidity, impenetrability and permanent comfort (as described in the advertisements), had to be clamped down at certain points with heavy tools.  Father Brown endeavoured, however, to extract exiguous comfort from it; saying that it always woke him up in time for the very earliest Mass, and was therefore something almost in the nature of a carillon.  After all, he said, it was almost as poetic that Christians should be awakened by hammers as by bells.  As a fact, however, the building operations were a little on his nerves, for another reason.  For there was hanging like a cloud over the half-built skyscraper the possibility of a Labour crisis, which the newspapers doggedly insisted on describing as a Strike.  As a matter of fact, if it ever happened, it would be a Lock-out.  But he worried a good deal about whether it would happen.  And it might be questioned whether hammering is more of a strain on the attention because it may go on for ever, or because it may stop at any minute.

'As a mere matter of taste and fancy,' said Father Brown, staring up at the edifice with his owlish spectacles, 'I rather wish it would stop.  I wish all houses would stop while they still have the scaffolding up.  It seems almost a pity that houses are ever finished.  They look so fresh and hopeful with all that fairy filigree of white wood, all light and bright in the sun; and a man so often only finishes a house by turning it into a tomb.'

As he turned away from the object of his scrutiny, he nearly ran into a man who had just darted across the road towards him.  It was a man whom he knew slightly, but sufficiently to regard him (in the circumstances) as something of a bird of ill-omen.  Mr Mastyk was a squat man with a square head that looked hardly European, dressed with a heavy dandyism that seemed rather too consciously Europeanized.  But Brown had seen him lately talking to young Sand of the building firm; and he did not like it.  This man Mastyk was the head of an organization rather new in English industrial politics; produced by extremes at both ends; a definite army of non-Union and largely alien labour hired out in gangs to various firms; and he was obviously hovering about in the hope of hiring it out to this one.  In short, he might negotiate some way of out-maneuuvring the Trade Union and flooding the works with blacklegs.  Father Brown had been drawn into some of the debates, being in some sense called in on both sides.  And as the Capitalists all reported that, to their positive knowledge, he was a Bolshevist; and as the Bolshevists all testified that he was a reactionary rigidly attached to bourgeois ideologies, it may be inferred that he talked a certain amount of sense without any appreciable effect on anybody.  The news brought by Mr Mastyk, however, was calculated to jerk everybody out of the ordinary rut of the dispute.

'They want you to go over there at once,' said Mr Mastyk, in awkwardly accented English.  'There is a threat to murder.'

Father Brown followed his guide in silence up several stairways and ladders to a platform of the unfinished
building, on which were grouped the more or less familiar figures of the heads of the building business. They included even what had once been the head of it; though the head had been for some time rather a head in the clouds. It was at least a head in a coronet, that hid it from human sight like a cloud. Lord Stanes, in other words, had not only retired from the business but been caught up into the House of Lords and disappeared. His rare reappearances were languid and somewhat dreary; but this one, in conjunction with that of Mastyk, seemed none the less menacing. Lord Stanes was a lean, long-headed, hollow-eyed man with very faint fair hair fading into baldness; and he was the most evasive person the priest had ever met. He was unrivalled in the true Oxford talent of saying, 'No doubt you're right,' so as to sound like, 'No doubt you think you're right,' or of merely remarking, 'You think so?' so as to imply the acid addition, 'You would.' But Father Brown fancied that the man was not merely bored but faintly embittered, though whether at being called down from Olympus to control such trade squabbles, or merely at not being really any longer in control of them, it was difficult to guess.

On the whole, Father Brown rather preferred the more bourgeois group of partners. Sir Hubert Sand and his nephew Henry; though he doubted privately whether they really had very many ideologies. True, Sir Hubert Sand had obtained considerable celebrity in the newspapers; both as a patron of sport and as a patriot in many crises during and after the Great War. He had won notable distinction in France, for a man of his years, and had afterwards been featured as a triumphant captain of industry overcoming difficulties among the munition-workers. He had been called a Strong Man; but that was not his fault. He was in fact a heavy, hearty Englishman; a great swimmer; a good squire; an admirable amateur colonel. Indeed, something that can only be called a military makeup pervaded his appearance. He was growing stout, but he kept his shoulders set back; his curly hair and moustache were still brown while the colours of his face were already somewhat withered and faded. His nephew was a burly youth of his head down; a gesture somehow rendered rather quaint and boyish by the pince-nez that were balanced on his pugnacious pug-nose.

Father Brown had looked at all these things before; and at that moment everybody was looking at something entirely new. In the centre of the wood-work there was nailed up a large loose flapping piece of paper on which something was scrawled in crude and almost crazy capital letters, as if the writer were either almost illiterate or were affecting or parodying illiteracy. The words actually ran: 'The Council of the Workers warns Hubert Sand that he will lower wages and lock out workmen at his peril. If the notices go out tomorrow, he will be dead by the justice of the people.'

Lord Stanes was just stepping back from his examination of the paper, and, looking across at his partner, he said with rather a curious intonation: 'Well, it's you they want to murder. Evidently I'm not considered worth murdering.'

One of those still electric shocks of fancy that sometimes thrilled Father Brown's mind in an almost meaningless way shot through him at that particular instant. He had a queer notion that the man who was speaking could not now be murdered, because he was already dead. It was, he cheerfully admitted, a perfectly senseless idea. But there was something that always gave him the creeps about the cold disenchanted detachment of the noble senior partner; about his cadaverous colour and inhospitable eyes. 'The fellow,' he thought in the same perverse mood, 'has green eyes and looks as if he had green blood.'

Anyhow, it was certain that Sir Hubert Sand had not got green blood. His blood, which was red enough in every sense, was creeping up into his withered or weather-beaten cheeks with all the warm fullness of life that belongs to the natural and innocent indignation of the good-natured.

In all my life,' he said, in a strong voice and yet shakily, 'I have never had such a thing said or done about me. I may have differed -'

'We can none of us differ about this,' struck in his nephew impetuously. 'I've tried to get on with them, but this is a bit too thick.'

'You don't really think,' began Father Brown, 'that your workmen -'

'I say we may have differed,' said old Sand, still a little tremulously, 'God knows I never like the idea of threatening English workmen with cheaper labour -'

'We none of us liked it,' said the young man, 'but if I know you, uncle, this has about settled it.'

Then after a pause he added, 'I suppose, as you say, we did disagree about details; but as to real policy -'

'My dear fellow,' said his uncle, comfortably. 'I hoped there would never be any real disagreement.' From which anybody who understands the English nation may rightly infer that there had been very considerable disagreement. Indeed the uncle and nephew differed almost as much as an Englishman and an American. The uncle had the English ideal of getting outside the business, and setting up a sort of an alibi as a country gentleman. The nephew had the American ideal of getting inside the business; of getting inside the very mechanism like a mechanic. And, indeed, he had worked with most of the mechanics and was familiar with most of the processes and tricks of the trade. And he was American again, in the fact that he did this partly as an employer to keep his men up to the mark,
but in some vague way also as an equal, or at least with a pride in showing himself also as a worker. For this reason
he had often appeared almost as a representative of the workers, on technical points which were a hundred miles
away from his uncle's popular eminence in politics or sport. The memory of those many occasions, when young
Henry had practically come out of the workshop in his shirt-sleeves, to demand some concession about the
conditions of the work, lent a peculiar force and even violence to his present reaction the other way.

'Well, they've damned - well locked themselves out this time,' he cried. 'After a threat like that there's simply
nothing left but to defy them. There's nothing left but to sack them all now; instanter; on the spot. Otherwise we'll be
the laughing - stock of the world.'

Old Sand frowned with equal indignation, but began slowly: 'I shall be very much criticized -'

'Criticized!' cried the young man shrilly. 'Criticized if you defy a threat of murder! Have you any notion how
you'll be criticized if you don't defy it? Won't you enjoy the headlines? “Great Capitalist Terrorized” - “Employer
Yields to Murder Threat.”

'Particularly,' said Lord Stanes, with something faintly unpleasant in his tone. 'Particularly when he has been in
so many headlines already as “The Strong Man of Steel - Building.”'

Sand had gone very red again and his voice came thickly from under his thick moustache. 'Of course you're right
there. If these brutes think I'm afraid -'

At this point there was an interruption in the conversation of the group; and a slim young man came towards
them swiftly. The first notable thing about him was that he was one of those whom men, and women too, think are
just a little too nice - looking to look nice. He had beautiful dark curly hair and a silken moustache and he spoke like
a gentleman, but with almost too refined and exactly modulated an accent. Father Brown knew him at once as
Rupert Rae, the secretary of Sir Hubert, whom he had often seen pottering about in Sir Hubert's house; but never
with such impatience in his movements or such a wrinkle on his brow.

'I'm sorry, sir,' he said to his employer, 'but there's a man been hanging about over there. I've done my best to get
rid of him. He's only got a letter, but he swears he must give it to you personally.'

'You mean he went first to my house?' said Sand, glancing swiftly at his secretary. 'I suppose you've been there
all the morning.'

'Yes, sir,' said Mr Rupert Rae.

There was a short silence; and then Sir Hubert Sand curtly intimated that the man had better be brought along;
and the man duly appeared.

Nobody, not even the least fastidious lady, would have said that the newcomer was too nice - looking. He had
very large ears and a face like a frog, and he stared before him with an almost ghastly fixity, which Father Brown
attributed to his having a glass eye. In fact, his fancy was tempted to equip the man with two glass eyes; with so
glassy a stare did he contemplate the company. But the priest's experience, as distinct from his fancy, was able to
suggest several natural causes for that unnatural waxwork glare; one of them being an abuse of the divine gift of
fermented liquor. The man was short and shabby and carried a large bowler hat in one hand and a large sealed letter
in the other.

Sir Hubert Sand looked at him; and then said quietly enough, but in a voice that somehow seemed curiously
small, coming out of the fullness of his bodily presence: 'Oh - it's you.'

He held out his hand for the letter; and then looked around apologetically, with poised finger, before ripping it
open and reading it. When he had read it, he stuffed it into his inside pocket and said hastily and a little harshly:
'Well, I suppose all this business is over, as you say. No more negotiations possible now; we couldn't pay the wages
they want anyhow. But I shall want to see you again, Henry, about - about winding things up generally.'

'All right,' said Henry, a little sulkily perhaps, as if he would have preferred to wind them up by himself. 'I shall
be up in number 188 after lunch; got to know how far they've got up there.'

The man with the glass eye, if it was a glass eye, stumped stiffly away; and the eye of Father Brown (which was
by no means a glass eye) followed him thoughtfully as he threaded his way through the ladders and disappeared into
the street.

It was on the following morning that Father Brown had the unusual experience of over-sleeping himself; or at
least of starting from sleep with a subjective conviction that he must be late. This was partly due to his
remembering, as a man may remember a dream, the fact of having been half-awakened at a more regular hour and
fallen asleep again; a common enough occurrence with most of us, but a very uncommon occurrence with Father
Brown. And he was afterwards oddly convinced, with that mystic side of him which was normally turned away from
the world, that in that detached dark islet of dreamland, between the two wakings, there lay like buried treasure the
truth of this tale.

As it was, he jumped up with great promptitude, plunged into his clothes, seized his big knobby umbrella and
bustled out into the street, where the bleak white morning was breaking like splintered ice about the huge black
building facing him. He was surprised to find that the streets shone almost empty in the cold crystalline light; the
very look of it told him it could hardly be so late as he had feared. Then suddenly the stillness was cloven by the
arrowlike swiftness of a long grey car which halted before the big deserted flats. Lord Stanes unfolded himself from
within and approached the door, carrying (rather languidly) two large suitcases. At the same moment the door
opened, and somebody seemed to step back instead of stepping out into the street. Stanes called twice to the man
within, before that person seemed to complete his original gesture by coming out on to the doorstep; then the two
held a brief colloquy, ending in the nobleman carrying his suitcases upstairs, and the other coming out into full
daylight and revealing the heavy shoulders and peering head of young Henry Sand.

Father Brown made no more of this rather odd meeting, until two days later the young man drove up in his own
car, and implored the priest to enter it. ‘Something awful has happened,’ he said, ‘and I’d rather talk to you than
Stanes. You know Stanes arrived the other day with some mad idea of camping in one of the flats that’s just finished.
That’s why I had to go there early and open the door to him. But all that will keep. I want you to come up to my
uncle’s place at once.’

‘Is he ill?’ inquired the priest quickly.

‘I think he’s dead,’ answered the nephew.

‘What do you mean by saying you think he’s dead?’ asked Father Brown a little briskly. ‘Have you got a doctor?’

‘No,’ answered the other. ‘I haven’t got a doctor or a patient either . . . It’s no good calling in doctors to examine
the body; because the body has run away. But I’m afraid I know where it has run to ... the truth is - we kept it dark
for two days; but he’s disappeared.

‘Wouldn’t it be better,’ said Father Brown mildly, ‘if you told me what has really happened from the beginning?’

‘I know,’ answered Henry Sand; ‘it’s an infernal shame to talk flippantly like this about the poor old boy; but
people get like that when they’re rattled. I’m not much good at hiding things; the long and the short of it is - well, I
won’t tell you the long of it now. It’s what some people would call rather a long shot; shooting suspicions at random
and so on. But the short of it is that my unfortunate uncle has committed suicide.

They were by this time skimming along in the car through the last fringes of the town and the first fringes of the
forest and park beyond it; the lodge gates of Sir Hubert Sand’s small estate were about a half mile farther on amid
the thickening throng of the beeches. The estate consisted chiefly of a small park and a large ornamental garden,
which descended in terraces of a certain classical pomp to the very edge of the chief river of the district. As soon as
they arrived at the house, Henry took the priest somewhat hastily through the old Georgian rooms and out upon the
other side; where they silently descended the slope, a rather steep slope embanked with flowers, from which they
could see the pale river spread out before them almost as flat as in a bird’s - eye view. They were just turning the
corner of the path under an enormous classical urn crowned with a somewhat incongruous garland of geraniums,
when Father Brown saw a movement in the bushes and thin trees just below him, that seemed as swift as a
movement of startled birds.

In the tangle of thin trees by the river two figures seemed to divide or scatter; one of them glided swiftly into the
shadows and the other came forward to face them; bringing them to a halt and an abrupt and rather unaccountable
silence. Then Henry Sand said in his heavy way: ‘I think you know Father Brown . . . Lady Sand.’

Father Brown did know her; but at that moment he might almost have said that he did not know her. The pallor
and constriction of her face was like a mask of tragedy; she was much younger than her husband, but at that moment
she looked somehow older than everything in that old house and garden. And the priest remembered, with a
subconscious thrill, that she was indeed older in type and lineage and was the true possessor of the place. For her
own family had owned it as impoverished aristocrats, before she had restored its fortunes by marrying a successful
business man. As she stood there, she might have been a family picture, or even a family ghost. Her pale face was
of that pointed yet oval type seen in some old pictures of Mary Queen of Scots; and its expression seemed almost to go
beyond the natural unnaturalness of a situation, in which her husband had vanished under suspicion of suicide.
Father Brown, with the same subconscious movement of the mind, wondered who it was with whom she had been
talking among the trees.

‘I suppose you know all this dreadful news,’ she said, with a comfortless composure. ‘Poor Hubert must have
broken down under all this revolutionary persecution, and been just maddened into taking his own life. I don’t know
whether you can do anything; or whether these horrible Bolsheviks can be made responsible for hounding him to
death.

‘I am terribly distressed, Lady Sand,’ said Father Brown. ‘And still, I must own, a little bewildered. You speak of
persecution; do you think that anybody could hound him to death merely by pinning up that paper on the wall?’

‘I fancy,’ answered the lady, with a darkening brow, ‘that there were other persecutions besides the paper.’

‘It shows what mistakes one may make,’ said the priest sadly. ‘I never should have thought he would be so
illogical as to die in order to avoid death.’
'I know,' she answered, gazing at him gravely. 'I should never have believed it, if it hadn't been written with his own hand.'

'What?' cried Father Brown, with a little jump like a rabbit that has been shot at.

'Yes,' said Lady Sand calmly. 'He left a confession of suicide; so I fear there is no doubt about it.' And she passed on up the slope alone, with all the inviolable isolation of the family ghost.

The spectacles of Father Brown were turned in mute inquiry to the eyeglasses of Mr Henry Sand. And the latter gentleman, after an instant's hesitation, spoke again in his rather blind and plunging fashion: 'Yes, you see, it seems pretty clear now what he did. He was always a great swimmer and used to come down in his dressing-gown every morning for a dip in the river. Well, he came down as usual, and left his dressing-gown on the bank; it's lying there still. But he also left a message saying he was going for his last swim and then death, or something like that.'

'Where did he leave the message?' asked Father Brown.

'He scrawled it on that tree there, overhanging the water, I suppose the last thing he took hold of; just below where the dressing-gown's lying. Come and see for yourself.'

Father Brown ran down the last short slope to the shore and peered under the hanging tree, whose plumes were almost dipping in the stream. Sure enough, he saw on the smooth bark the words scratched conspicuously and unmistakably: 'One more swim and then drowning. Good-bye. Hubert Sand.' Father Brown's gaze travelled slowly up the bank till it rested on a gorgeous rag of raiment, all red and yellow with gilded tassels. It was the dressing-gown and the priest picked it up and began to turn it over. Almost as he did so he was conscious that a figure had flashed across his field of vision; a tall dark figure that slipped from one clump of trees to another, as if following the trail of the vanishing lady. He had little doubt that it was the companion from whom she had lately parted. He had still less doubt that it was the dead man's secretary, Mr Rupert Rae.

'Of course, it might be a final afterthought to leave the message,' said Father Brown, without looking up, his eye riveted on the red and gold garment. 'We've all heard of love-messages written on trees; and I suppose there might be death-messages written on trees too.'

'Well, he wouldn't have anything in the pockets of his dressing-gown, I suppose,' said young Sand. 'And a man might naturally scratch his message on a tree if he had no pens, ink or paper.'

'Sounds like French exercises,' said the priest dismally. 'But I wasn't thinking of that.' Then, after a silence, he said in a rather altered voice:

'To tell the truth, I was thinking whether a man might not naturally scratch his message on a tree, as the song says, if all the world were paper and all the sea were ink; if that river flowed with everlasting ink or all these woods were a forest of quills and fountain-pens.'

It was evident that Sand felt something creepy about the priest's fanciful imagery; whether because he found it incomprehensible or because he was beginning to comprehend.

'You see,' said Father Brown slowly, 'I don't exactly mean that postmen will carry letters in the form of logs, or that you will ever drop a line to a friend by putting a postage stamp on a pinetree. It would have to be a particular sort of position - in fact, it would have to be a particular sort of person, who really preferred this sort of arboreal correspondence. But, given the position and the person, I repeat what I said. He would still write on a tree, as the song says, if all the world were paper and all the sea were ink; if that river flowed with everlasting ink or all these woods were a forest of quills and fountain-pens.'

Henry was looking at him with a rather startled air, his eyeglasses crooked on his pug-nose. 'And what do you mean by that?' he asked sharply.

'Well,' said Father Brown slowly, 'I don't exactly mean that postmen will carry letters in the form of logs, or that you will ever drop a line to a friend by putting a postage stamp on a pinetree. It would have to be a particular sort of position - in fact, it would have to be a particular sort of person, who really preferred this sort of arboreal correspondence. But, given the position and the person, I repeat what I said. He would still write on a tree, as the song says, if all the world were paper and all the sea were ink; if that river flowed with everlasting ink or all these woods were a forest of quills and fountain-pens.'

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'You see,' said Father Brown, turning the dressing-gown over slowly as he spoke, 'a man isn't expected to write his very best handwriting when he chips it on a tree. And if the man were not the man, if I make myself clear - Hullo!'

He was looking down at the red dressing-gown, and it seemed for the moment as if some of the red had come off on his finger; but both the faces turned towards it were already a shade paler.

'Blood!' said Father Brown; and for the instant there was a deadly stillness save for the melodious noises of the river.

Henry Sand cleared his throat and nose with noises that were by no means melodious. Then he said rather hoarsely: 'Whose blood?'

'Oh, mine,' said Father Brown; but he did not smile.

A moment after he said: 'There was a pin in this thing and I pricked myself. But I don't think you quite appreciate the point . . . the point of the pin, I do'; and he sucked his finger like a child.

'You see,' he said after another silence, 'the gown was folded up and pinned together; nobody could have unfolded it - at least without scratching himself. In plain words, Hubert Sand never wore this dressing-gown. Any more than Hubert Sand ever wrote on that tree. Or drowned himself in that river.'

The pince-nez tilted on Henry's inquiring nose fell off with a click; but he was otherwise motionless, as if rigid
with surprise.

'Which brings us back,' went on Father Brown cheerfully, 'to somebody's taste for writing his private correspondence on trees, like Hiawatha and his picture - writing. Sand had all the time there was, before drowning himself. Why didn't he leave a note for his wife like a sane man? Or, shall we say . . . Why didn't the Other Man leave a note for the wife like a sane man? Because he would have had to forge the husband's handwriting; always a tricky thing now that experts are so nosey about it. But nobody can be expected to imitate even his own handwriting, let alone somebody else's when he carves capital letters in the bark of a tree. This is not a suicide, Mr Sand. If it's anything at all, it's a murder.'

The bracken and bushes of the undergrowth snapped and crackled as the big young man rose out of them like a leviathan, and stood lowering, with his thick neck thrust forward.

'I'm no good at hiding things,' he said, 'and I half - suspected something like this - expected it, you might say, for a long time. To tell the truth, I could hardly be civil to the fellow - to either of them, for that matter.'

'What exactly do you mean?' asked the priest, looking him gravely full in the face.

'I mean,' said Henry Sand, 'that you have shown me the murder and I think I could show you the murderers.'

Father Brown was silent and the other went on rather jerkily.

'You said people sometimes wrote love - messages on trees. Well, as a fact, there are some of them on that tree; there are two sort of monograms twisted together up there under the leaves - I suppose you know that Lady Sand was the heiress of this place long before she married; and she knew that damned dandy of a secretary even in those days. I guess they used to meet here and write their vows upon the trysting - tree. They seem to have used the trysting - tree for another purpose later on. Sentiment, no doubt, or economy.'

'They must be very horrible people,' said Father Brown.

'Haven't there been any horrible people in history or the police - news?' demanded Sand with some excitement. 'Haven't there been lovers who made love seem more horrible than hate? Don't you know about Bothwell and all the bloody legends of such lovers?'

'I know the legend of Bothwell,' answered the priest. 'I also know it to be quite legendary. But of course it's true that husbands have been sometimes put away like that. By the way, where was he put away? I mean, where did they hide the body?'

'I suppose they drowned him, or threw him in the water when he was dead,' snorted the young man impatiently.

Father Brown blinked thoughtfully and then said: 'A river is a good place to hide an imaginary body. It's a rotten bad place to hide a real one. I mean, it's easy to say you've thrown it in, because it might be washed away to sea. But if you really did throw it in, it's about a hundred to one it wouldn't; the chances of it going ashore somewhere are enormous. I think they must have had a better scheme for hiding the body than that - or the body would have been found by now. And if there were any marks of violence - '

'Oh, bother hiding the body,' said Henry, with some irritation; 'haven't we witness enough in the writing on their own devilish tree?'

'The body is the chief witness in every murder,' answered the other. 'The hiding of the body, nine times out of ten, is the practical problem to be solved.'

'There was a silence; and Father Brown continued to turn over the red dressing - gown and spread it out on the shining grass of the sunny shore; he did not look up. But, for some time past he had been conscious that the whole landscape had been changed for him by the presence of a third party; standing as still as a statue in the garden.

'By the way,' he said, lowering his voice, 'how do you explain that little guy with the glass eye, who brought your poor uncle a letter yesterday? It seemed to me he was entirely altered by reading it; that's why I wasn't surprised at the suicide, when I thought it was a suicide. That chap was a rather low - down private detective, or I'm much mistaken.'

'Why,' said Henry in a hesitating manner, 'why, he might have been - husbands do sometimes put on detectives in domestic tragedies like this, don't they? I suppose he'd got the proofs of their intrigue; and so they - '

'I shouldn't talk too loud,' said Father Brown, 'because your detective is detecting us at this moment, from about a yard beyond those bushes.'

'They looked up, and sure enough the goblin with the glass eye was fixing them with that disagreeable optic, looking all the more grotesque for standing among the white and waxen blooms of the classical garden.

Henry Sand scrambled to his feet again with a rapidity that seemed breathless for one of his bulk, and asked the man very angrily and abruptly what he was doing, at the same time telling him to clear out at once.

'Lord Stanes,' said the goblin of the garden, 'would be much obliged if Father Brown would come up to the house and speak to him.'

Henry Sand turned away furiously; but the priest put down his fury to the dislike that was known to exist between him and the nobleman in question. As they mounted the slope, Father Brown paused a moment as if tracing
patterns on the smooth tree-trunk, glanced upwards once at the darker and more hidden hieroglyph said to be a record of romance; and then stared at the wider and more sprawling letters of the confession, or supposed confession of suicide.

'Do those letters remind you of anything?' he asked. And when his sulky companion shook his head, he added: 'They remind me of the writing on that placard that threatened him with the vengeance of the strikers.'

'This is the hardest riddle and the queerest tale I have ever tackled,' said Father Brown, a month later, as he sat opposite Lord Stanes in the recently furnished apartment of No. 188, the end flat which was the last to be finished before the interregnum of the industrial dispute and the transfer of work from the Trade Union. It was comfortably furnished; and Lord Stanes was presiding over grog and cigars, when the priest made his confession with a grimace. Lord Stanes had become rather surprisingly friendly, in a cool and casual way.

'I know that is saying a good deal, with your record,' said Stanes, 'but certainly the detectives, including our seductive friend with the glass eye, don't seem at all able to see the solution.'

Father Brown laid down his cigar and said carefully: 'It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem.'

'Indeed,' said the other, 'perhaps I can't see the problem either.'

'The problem is unlike all other problems, for this reason,' said Father Brown. 'It seems as if the criminal deliberately did two different things, either of which might have been successful; but which, when done together, could only defeat each other. I am assuming, what I firmly believe, that the same murderer pinned up the proclamation threatening a sort of Bolshevik murder, and also wrote on the tree confessing to an ordinary suicide. Now you may say it is after all possible that the proclamation was a proletarian proclamation; that some extremist workmen wanted to kill their employer, and killed him. Even if that were true, it would still stick at the mystery of why they left, or why anybody left, a contrary trail of private self-destruction. But it certainly isn't true. None of these workmen, however, bitter, would have done a thing like that. I know them pretty well; I know their leaders quite well. To suppose that people like Tom Bruce or Hogan would assassinate somebody they could go for in the newspapers, and damage in all sorts of different ways, is the sort of psychology that sensible people call lunacy. No; there was somebody, who was not an indignant workman, who first played the part of an indignant workman, and then played the part of a suicidal employer. But, in the name of wonder, why? If he thought he could pass it off smoothly as a suicide, why did he first spoil it all by publishing a threat of murder? You might say it was an afterthought to fix up the suicide story, as less provocative than the murder story. But it wasn't less provocative after the murder story. He must have known he had already turned our thoughts towards murder, when it should have been his whole object to keep our thoughts away from it. If it was an after-thought, it was the after-thought of a very thoughtless person. And I have a notion that this assassin is a very thoughtful person. Can you make anything of it?'

'No; but I see what you mean,' said Stanes, 'by saying that I didn't even see the problem. It isn't merely who killed Sand; it's why anybody should accuse somebody else of killing Sand and then accuse Sand of killing himself.'

Father Brown's face was knotted and the cigar was clenched in his teeth; the end of it plowed and darkened rhythmically like the signal of some burning pulse of the brain. Then he spoke as if to himself:

'We've got to follow very closely and very clearly. It's like separating threads of thought from each other; something like this. Because the murder charge really rather spoilt the suicide charge, he wouldn't normally have made the murder charge. But he did make it; so he had some other reason for making it. It was so strong a reason that perhaps it reconciled him even to weakening his other line of defence; that it was a suicide. In other words, the murder charge wasn't really a murder charge. I mean he wasn't using it as a murder charge; he wasn't doing it so as to shift to somebody else the guilt of murder; he was doing it for some other extraordinary reason of his own. His plan had to contain a proclamation that Sand would be murdered; whether it threw suspicion on other people or not. Somehow or other the mere proclamation itself was necessary. But why?'

He smoked and smouldered away with the same volcanic concentration for five minutes before he spoke again. 'What could a murderous proclamation do, besides suggesting that the strikers were the murderers? What did it do? One thing is obvious; it inevitably did the opposite of what it said. It told Sand not to lock out his men; and it was perhaps the only thing in the world that would really have made him do it. You've got to think of the sort of man and the sort of reputation. When a man has been called a Strong Man in our silly sensational newspapers, when he is fondly regarded as a Sportsman by all the most distinguished asses in England, he simply can't back down because he is threatened with a pistol. It would be like walking about at Ascot with a white feather stuck in his absurd white hat. It would break that inner idol or ideal of oneself, which every man not a downright dastard does really prefer to life. And Sand wasn't a dastard; he was courageous; he was also impulsive. It acted instantly like a charm: his nephew, who had been more or less mixed up with the workmen, cried out instantly that the threat must be absolutely and instantly defied.'
'Yes,' said Lord Stanes, 'I noticed that.' They looked at each other for an instant, and then Stanes added carelessly: 'So you think the thing the criminal wanted was…'

'The Lock - out!' cried the priest energetically. 'The Strike or whatever you call it; the cessation of work, anyhow. He wanted the work to stop at once; perhaps the blacklegs to come in at once; certainly the Trade Unionists to go out at once. That is what he really wanted; God knows why. And he brought that off, I think, really without bothering much about its other implication of the existence of Bolshevist assassins. But then . . . then I think something went wrong. I'm only guessing and groping very slowly here; but the only explanation I can think of is that something began to draw attention to the real seat of the trouble; to the reason, whatever it was, of his wanting to bring the building to a halt. And then belatedly, desperately, and rather inconsistently, he tried to lay the other trail that led to the river, simply and solely because it led away from the flats.'

He looked up through his moonlike spectacles, absorbing all the quality of the background and furniture; the restrained luxury of a quiet man of the world; and contrasting it with the two suitcases with which its occupant had arrived so recently in a newly - finished and unfurnished flat. Then he said rather abruptly: 'In short, the murderer was frightened of something or somebody in the flats. By the way, why did you come to live in the flats? . . . Also by the way, young Henry told me you made an early appointment with him when you moved in. Is that true?'

'Not in the least,' said Stanes. 'I got the key from his uncle the night before. I've no notion why Henry came here that morning.'

'Ah,' said Father Brown, 'then I think I have some notion of why he came . . . I thought you startled him by coming in just when he was coming out.'

'And yet,' said Stanes, looking across with a glitter in his grey - green eyes, 'you do rather think that I also am a mystery.'

'I think you are two mysteries,' said Father Brown. 'The first is why you originally retired from Sand's business. The second is why you have since come back to live in Sand's buildings.'

Stanes smoked reflectively, knocked out his ash, and rang a bell on the table before him. 'If you'll excuse me,' he said, 'I will summon two more to the council. Jackson, the little detective you know of, will answer the bell; and I've asked Henry Sand to come in a little later.'

Father Brown rose from his seat, walked across the room and looked down frowning into the fire - place. 'Meanwhile,' continued Stanes, 'I don't mind answering both your questions. I left the Sand business because I was sure there was some hanky - panky in it and somebody was pinching all the money. I came back to it, and took this flat, because I wanted to watch for the real truth about old Sand's death - on the spot.'

Father Brown faced round as the detective entered the room; he stood staring at the hearthrug and repeated: 'On the spot.'

'Mr Jackson will tell you,' said Stanes, 'that Sir Hubert commissioned him to find out who was the thief robbing the firm; and he brought a note of his discoveries the day before old Hubert disappeared.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'and I know now where he disappeared to. I know where the body is.'

'Do you mean -?' began his host hastily.

'It is here,' said Father Brown, and stamped on the hearthrug. 'Here, under the elegant Persian rug in this cosy and comfortable room.'

'Where in the world did you find that?'

'I've just remembered,' said Father Brown, 'that I found it in my sleep.'

He closed his eyes as if trying to picture a dream, and went on dreamily:

'This is a murder story turning on the problem of How to Hide the Body; and I found it in my sleep. I was always woken up every morning by hammering from this building. On that morning I half - woke up, went to sleep again and woke once more, expecting to find it late; but it wasn't. Why? Because there had been hammering that morning, though all the usual work had stopped; short, hurried hammering in the small hours before dawn. Automatically a man sleeping stirs at such a familiar sound. But he goes to sleep again, because the usual sound is not at the usual hour. Now why did a certain secret criminal want all the work to cease suddenly; and only new workers come in? Because, if the old workers had come in next day, they would have found a new piece of work done in the night. The old workers would have known where they left off; and they would have found the whole flooring of this room already nailed down. Nailed down by a man who knew how to do it; hating mixed a good deal with the workmen and learned their ways.'

As he spoke, the door was pushed open and a head poked in with a thrusting motion; a small head at the end of a thick neck and a face that blinked at them through glasses.

'Henry Sand said,' observed Father Brown, staring at the ceiling, 'that he was no good at hiding things. But I think he did himself an injustice.'

Henry Sand turned and moved swiftly away down the corridor.
'He not only hid his thefts from the firm quite successfully for years,' went on the priest with an air of abstraction, 'but when his uncle discovered them, he hid his uncle's corpse in an entirely new and original manner.'

At the same instant Stanes again rang a bell, with a long strident steady ringing; and the little man with the glass eye was propelled or shot along the corridor after the fugitive, with something of the rotatory motion of a mechanical figure in a zoetrope. At the same moment, Father Brown looked out of the window, leaning over a small balcony, and saw five or six men start from behind bushes and railings in the street below and spread out equally mechanically like a fan or net; opening out after the fugitive who had shot like a bullet out of the front door. Father Brown saw only the pattern of the story; which had never strayed from that room; where Henry had strangled Hubert and hid his body under impenetrable flooring, stopping the whole work on the building to do it. A pin-prick had started his own suspicions; but only to tell him he had been led down the long loop of a lie. The point of the pin was that it was pointless.

He fancied he understood Stanes at last, and he liked to collect queer people who were difficult to understand. He realized that this tired gentleman, whom he had once accused of having green blood, had indeed a sort of cold green flame of conscientiousness or conventional honour, that had made him first shift out of a shady business, and then feel ashamed of having shifted it on to others; and come back as a bored laborious detective; pitching his camp on the very spot where the corpse had been buried; so that the murderer, finding him sniffing so near the corpse, had wildly staged the alternative drama of the dressing-gown and the drowned man. All that was plain enough, but, before he withdrew his head from the night air and the stars. Father Brown threw one glance upwards at the vast black bulk of the cyclopean building heaved far up into the night, and remembered Egypt and Babylon, and all that is at once eternal and ephemeral in the work of man.

'I was right in what I said first of all,' he said. 'It reminds one of Coppee's poem about the Pharaoh and the Pyramid. This house is supposed to be a hundred houses; and yet the whole mountain of building is only one man's tomb.'

EIGHT: The Insoluble Problem

This queer incident, in some ways perhaps the queerest of the many that came his way, happened to Father Brown at the time when his French friend Flambeau had retired from the profession of crime and had entered with great energy and success on the profession of crime investigator. It happened that both as a thief and a thief-taker, Flambeau had rather specialized in the matter of jewel thefts, on which he was admitted to be an expert, both in the matter of identifying jewels and the equally practical matter of identifying jewel-thieves. And it was in connection with his special knowledge of this subject, and a special commission which it had won for him, that he rang up his friend the priest on the particular morning on which this story begins.

Father Brown was delighted to hear the voice of his old friend, even on the telephone; but in a general way, and especially at that particular moment, Father Brown was not very fond of the telephone. He was one who preferred to watch people's faces and feel social atmospheres, and he knew well that without these things, verbal messages are apt to be very misleading, especially from total strangers. And it seemed as if, on that particular morning, a swarm of total strangers had been buzzing in his ear with more or less unenlightening verbal messages; the telephone seemed to be possessed of a demon of triviality. Perhaps the most distinctive voice was one which asked him whether he did not issue regular permits for murder and theft upon the payment of a regular tariff hung up in his church; and as the stranger, on being informed that this was not the case, concluded the colloquy with a hollow laugh, it may be presumed that he remained unconvincing. Then an agitated, rather inconsequent female voice rang up requesting him to come round at once to a certain hotel he had heard of some forty - five miles on the road to a neighbouring cathedral town; the request being immediately followed by a contradiction in the same voice, more agitated and yet more inconsequent, telling him that it did not matter and that he was not wanted after all. Then came an interlude of a Press agency asking him if he had anything to say on what a Film Actress had said about Moustaches for Men; and finally yet a third return of the agitated and inconsequent lady at the hotel, saying that he was wanted, after all. He vaguely supposed that this marked some of the hesitations and panics not unknown among those who are vaguely veering in the direction of Instruction, but he confessed to a considerable relief when the voice of Flambeau wound up the series with a hearty threat of immediately turning up for breakfast.

Father Brown very much preferred to talk to a friend sitting comfortably over a pipe, but it soon appeared that his visitor was on the warpath and full of energy, having every intention of carrying off the little priest captive on some important expedition of his own. It was true that there was a special circumstance involved which might be supposed to claim the priest's attention. Flambeau had figured several times of late as successfully thwarting a theft of famous precious stones; he had torn the tiara of the Duchess of Dulwich out of the very hand of the bandit as he bolted through the garden. He laid so ingenious a trap for the criminal who planned to carry off the celebrated Sapphire Necklace that the artist in question actually carried off the copy which he had himself planned to leave as a substitute.
Such were doubtless the reasons that had led to his being specially summoned to guard the delivery of a rather different sort of treasure; perhaps even more valuable in its mere materials, but possessing also another sort of value. A world-famous reliquary, supposed to contain a relic of St. Dorothy the martyr, was to be delivered at the Catholic monastery in a cathedral town; and one of the most famous of international jewel-thieves was supposed to have an eye on it; or rather presumably on the gold and rubies of its setting, rather than its purely hagiographical importance. Perhaps there was something in this association of ideas which made Flambeau feel that the priest would be a particularly appropriate companion in his adventure; but anyhow, he descended on him, breathing fire and ambition and very voluble about his plans for preventing the theft.

Flambeau indeed bestrode the priest's hearth gigantically and in the old swaggering musketeer attitude, twirling his great moustaches.

'You can't,' he cried, referring to the sixty-mile road to Casterbury. 'You can't allow a profane robbery like that to happen under your very nose.'

The relic was not to reach the monastery till the evening; and there was no need for its defenders to arrive earlier; for indeed a motor-journey would take them the greater part of the day. Moreover, Father Brown casually remarked that there was an inn on the road, at which he would prefer to lunch, as he had been already asked to look in there as soon as was convenient.

As they drove along through a densely wooded but sparsely inhabited landscape, in which inns and all other buildings seemed to grow rarer and rarer, the daylight began to take on the character of a stormy twilight even in the heat of noon; and dark purple clouds gathered over dark grey forests. As is common under the lurid quietude of that kind of light, what colour there was in the landscape gained a sort of secretive glow which is not found in objects under the full sunlight; and ragged red leaves or golden or orange fungi seemed to burn with a dark fire of their own. Under such a half-light they came to a break in the woods like a great rent in a grey wall, and saw beyond, standing above the gap, the tall and rather outlandish-looking inn that bore the name of the Green Dragon.

The two old companions had often arrived together at inns and other human habitations, and found a somewhat singular state of things there; but the signs of singularity had seldom manifested themselves so early. For while their car was still some hundreds of yards from the dark green door, which matched the dark green shutters of the high and narrow building, the door was thrown open with violence and a woman with a wild mop of red hair rushed to meet them, as if she were ready to board the car in full career. Flambeau brought the car to a standstill but almost before he had done so, she thrust her white and tragic face into the window, crying:

1 'Are you Father Brown?' and then almost in the same breath; 'who is this man?'

2 'This gentleman's name is Flambeau,' said Father Brown in a tranquil manner, 'and what can I do for you?'

3 'Come into the inn,' she said, with extraordinary abruptness even under the circumstances. 'There's been a murder done.'

They got out of the car in silence and followed her to the dark green door which opened inwards on a sort of dark green alley, formed of stakes and wooden pillars, wreathed with vine and ivy, showing square leaves of black and red and many sombre colours. This again led through an inner door into a sort of large parlour hung with rusty trophies of Cavalier arms, of which the furniture seemed to be antiquated and also in great confusion, like the inside of a lumber-room. They were quite startled for the moment; for it seemed as if one large piece of lumber rose and moved towards them; so dusty and shabby and ungainly was the man who thus abandoned what seemed like a state of permanent immobility.

Strangely enough, the man seemed to have a certain agility of politeness, when once he did move; even if it suggested the wooden joints of a courtly step-ladder or an obsequious towel-horse. Both Flambeau and Father Brown felt that they had hardly ever clapped eyes on a man who was so difficult to place. He was not what is called a gentleman; yet he had something of the dusty refinement of a scholar; there was something faintly disreputable or declasse about him; and yet the smell of him was rather bookish than Bohemian. He was thin and pale, with a pointed nose and a dark pointed beard; his brow was bald, but his hair behind long and lank and stringy; and the expression of his eyes was almost entirely masked by a pair of blue spectacles. Father Brown felt that he had met something of the sort somewhere, and a long time ago; but he could no longer put a name to it. The lumber he sat among was largely literary lumber; especially bundles of seventeenth-century pamphlets.

'Do I understand the lady to say,' asked Flambeau gravely, 'that there is a murder here?'

The lady nodded her red ragged head rather impatiently; except for those flaming elf-locks she had lost some of her look of wildness; her dark dress was of a certain dignity and neatness; her features were strong and handsome; and there was something about her suggesting that double strength of body and mind which makes women powerful, particularly in contrast with men like the man in blue spectacles. Nevertheless, it was he who gave the only articulate answer, intervening with a certain antic gallantry.

'It is true that my unfortunate sister - in - law,' he explained, 'has almost this moment suffered a most appalling
careful inspection of the sword - hilt and the hanging corpse. The woman turned and began to walk towards them across the garden, just as Father Brown turned also and began a rapid walk towards the mulberry plantation. Only Flambeau heard the little priest say to the doctor: 'He doesn't seem to love us really, does he? By the way, who is he?'

'I am Dr Oscar Flood,' replied the other. 'My brother, this lady's husband, is at present away on the Continent on business, and she is running the hotel. Her grandfather was partially paralysed and very far advanced in years. He was never known to leave his bedroom; so that really these extraordinary circumstances . . .

'Have you sent for a doctor or the police?' asked Flambeau.

'Yes,' replied Dr Flood, 'we rang up after making the dreadful discovery; but they can hardly be here for some hours. This roadhouse stands so very remote. It is only used by people going to Casterbury or even beyond. So we thought we might ask for your valuable assistance until - '

'If we are to be of any assistance,' said Father Brown, interrupting in too abstracted a manner to seem uncivil, 'I should say we had better go and look at the circumstances at once.'

He stepped almost mechanically towards the door; and almost ran into a man who was shouldering his way in; a big, heavy young man with dark hair unbrushed and untidy, who would nevertheless have been rather handsome save for a slight disfigurement of one eye, which gave him rather a sinister appearance.

'What the devil are you doing?' he blurted out, 'telling every Tom, Dick and Harry - at least you ought to wait for the police.'

'I will be answerable to the police,' said Flambeau with a certain magnificence, and a sudden air of having taken command of everything. He advanced to the doorway, and as he was much bigger than the big young man, and his moustaches were as formidable as the horns of a Spanish bull, the big young man backed before him and had an inconsequent air of being thrown out and left behind, as the group swept out into the garden and up the flagged path towards the mulberry plantation. Only Flambeau heard the little priest say to the doctor: 'He doesn't seem to love us really, does he? By the way, who is he?'

'His name is Dunn,' said the doctor, with a certain restraint of manner. 'My sister - in - law gave him the job of managing the garden, because he lost an eye in the War.'

As they went through the mulberry bushes, the landscape of the garden presented that rich yet ominous effect which is found when the land is actually brighter than the sky. In the broken sunlight from behind, the tree - tops in front of them stood up like pale green flames against a sky steadily blackening with storm, through every shade of purple and violet. The same light struck strips of the lawn and garden beds; and whatever it illuminated seemed more mysteriously sombre and secret for the light. The garden bed was dotted with tulips that looked like drops of dark blood, and some of which one might have sworn were truly black; and the line ended appropriately with a tulip tree; which Father Brown was disposed, if partly by some confused memory, to identify with what is commonly called the Judas tree. What assisted the association was the fact that there was hanging from one of the branches, like a dried fruit, the dry, thin body of an old man, with a long beard that wagged grotesquely in the wind.

There lay on it something more than the horror of darkness, the horror of sunlight; for the fitful sun painted tree and man in gay colours like a stage property; the tree was in flower and the corpse was hung with a faded peacock - green dressing - gown, and wore on its wagging head a scarlet smoking - cap. Also it had red bedroom - slippers, one of which had fallen off and lay on the grass like a blot of blood.

But neither Flambeau or Father Brown was looking at these things as yet. They were both staring at a strange object that seemed to stick out of the middle of the dead man's shrunken figure; and which they gradually perceived to be the black but rather rusty iron hilt of a seventeenth - century sword, which had completely transfixed the body. They both remained almost motionless as they gazed at it; until the restless Dr Flood seemed to grow quite impatient with their stolidity.

'What puzzles me most,' he said, nervously snapping his fingers, 'is the actual state of the body. And yet it has given me an idea already.'

Flambeau had stepped up to the tree and was studying the sword - hilt through an eye - glass. But for some odd reason, it was at that very instant that the priest in sheer perversity spun round like a teetotum, turned his back on the corpse, and looked peeringly in the very opposite direction. He was just in time to see the red head of Mrs Flood at the remote end of the garden, turned towards a dark young man, too dim with distance to be identified, who was at that moment mounting a motor - bicycle; who vanished, leaving behind him only the dying din of that vehicle. Then the woman turned and began to walk towards them across the garden, just as Father Brown turned also and began a careful inspection of the sword - hilt and the hanging corpse.
'I understand you only found him about half an hour ago,' said Flambeau. 'Was there anybody about here just before that? I mean anybody in his bedroom, or that part of the house, or this part of the garden - say for an hour beforehand?'

'No,' said the doctor with precision. 'That is the very tragic accident. My sister-in-law was in the pantry, which is a sort of out-house on the other side; this man Dunn was in the kitchen-garden, which is also in that direction; and I myself was poking about among the books, in a room just behind the one you found me in. There are two female servants, but one had gone to the post and the other was in the attic.'

'And were any of these people,' asked Flambeau, very quietly, 'I say any of these people, at all on bad terms with the poor old gentleman?'

'He was the object of almost universal affection,' replied the doctor solemnly. 'If there were any misunderstandings, they were mild and of a sort common in modern times. The old man was attached to the old religious habits; and perhaps his daughter and son-in-law had rather wider views. All that can have had nothing to do with a ghastly and fantastic assassination like this.'

'It depends on how wide the modern views were,' said Father Brown, 'or how narrow.'

At this moment they heard Mrs Flood hallooing across the garden as she came, and calling her brother-in-law to her with a certain impatience. He hurried towards her and was soon out of earshot; but as he went he waved his hand apologetically and then pointed with a long finger to the ground.

'You will find the footprints very intriguing,' he said; with the same strange air, as of a funereal showman.

The two amateur detectives looked across at each other. 'I find several other things intriguing,' said Flambeau.

'Oh, yes,' said the priest, staring rather foolishly at the grass.

'I was wondering,' said Flambeau, 'why they should hang a man by the neck till he was dead, and then take the trouble to stick him with a sword.'

'And I was wondering,' said Father Brown, 'why they should kill a man with a sword thrust through his heart, and then take the trouble to hang him by the neck.'

'Oh, you are simply being contrary,' protested his friend. 'I can see at a glance that they didn't stab him alive. The body would have bled more and the wound wouldn't have closed like that.'

'And I could see at a glance,' said Father Brown, peering up very awkwardly, with his short stature and short sight, 'that they didn't hang him alive. If you'll look at the knot in the noose, you will see it's tied so clumsily that a twist of rope holds it away from the neck, so that it couldn't throttle a man at all. He was dead before they put the rope on him; and he was dead before they put the sword in him. And how was he really killed?'

'I think,' remarked the other, 'that we'd better go back to the house and have a look at his bedroom - and other things.'

'So we will,' said Father Brown. 'But among other things perhaps we had better have a look at these footprints. Better begin at the other end, I think, by his window. Well, there are no footprints on the paved path, as there might be; but then again there mightn't be. Well, here is the lawn just under his bedroom window. And here are his footprints plain enough.'

He blinked ominously at the footprints; and then began carefully retracing his path towards the tree, every now and then ducking in an undignified manner to look at something on the ground. Eventually he returned to Flambeau and said in a chatty manner:

'Well, do you know the story that is written there very plainly? Though it's not exactly a plain story.'

'I wouldn't be content to call it plain,' said Flambeau. 'I should call it quite ugly -'

'Well,' said Father Brown, 'the story that is stamped quite plainly on the earth, with exact moulds of the old man's slippers, is this. The aged paralytic leapt from the window and ran down the beds parallel to the path, quite eager for all the fun of being strangled and stabbed; so eager that he hopped on one leg out of sheer lightheartedness; and even occasionally turned cartwheels -'

'Stop!' cried Flambeau, angrily. 'What the hell is all this hellish pantomime?'

Father Brown merely raised his eyebrows and gestured mildly towards the hieroglyphs in the dust. 'About half the way there's only the mark of one slipper; and in some places the mark of a hand planted all by itself.'

'Couldn't he have limped and then fallen?' asked Flambeau.

Father Brown shook his head. 'At least he'd have tried to use his hands and feet, or knees and elbows, in getting up. There are no other marks there of any kind. Of course the flagged path is quite near, and there are no marks on that; though there might be on the soil between the cracks; it's a crazy pavement.'

'By God, it's a crazy pavement; and a crazy garden; and a crazy story!' And Flambeau looked gloomily across the gloomy and storm-stricken garden, across which the crooked patchwork paths did indeed give a queer aptness to the quaint old English adjective.

'And now,' said Father Brown, 'let us go up and look at his room.' They went in by a door not far from the
bedroom window; and the priest paused a moment to look at an ordinary garden broomstick, for sweeping up leaves, that was leaning against the wall. ‘Do you see that?’

‘It’s a broomstick,’ said Flambeau, with solid irony.

‘It’s a blunder,’ said Father Brown; ‘the first blunder that I’ve seen in this curious plot.’

They mounted the stairs and entered the old man’s bedroom; and a glance at it made fairly clear the main facts, both about the foundation and disunion of the family. Father Brown had felt from the first that he was in what was, or had been, a Catholic household; but was, at least partly, inhabited by lapsed or very loose Catholics. The pictures and images in the grandfather’s room made it clear that what positive piety remained had been practically confined to him; and that his kindred had, for some reason or other, gone Pagan. But he agreed that this was a hopelessly inadequate explanation even of an ordinary murder; let alone such a very extraordinary murder as this. ‘Hang it all,’ he muttered, ‘the murder is really the least extra-ordinary part of it.’ And even as he used the chance phrase, a slow light began to dawn upon his face.

Flambeau had seated himself on a chair by the little table which stood beside the dead man’s bed. He was frowning thoughtfully at three or four white pills or pellets that lay in a small tray beside a bottle of water.

‘The murderer or murderess,’ said Flambeau, ‘had some incomprehensible reason or other for wanting us to think the dead man was strangled or stabbed or both. He was not strangled or stabbed or anything of the kind. Why did they want to suggest it? The most logical explanation is that he died in some particular way which would, in itself, suggest a connection with some particular person. Suppose, for instance, he was poisoned. And suppose somebody is involved who would naturally look more like a poisoner than anybody else.’

‘After all,’ said Father Brown softly, ‘our friend in the blue spectacles is a doctor.’

‘I’m going to examine these pills pretty carefully,’ went on Flambeau. ‘I don’t want to lose them, though. They look as if they were soluble in water.’

‘It may take you some time to do anything scientific with them,’ said the priest, ‘and the police doctor may be here before that. So I should certainly advise you not to lose them. That is, if you are going to wait for the police doctor.’

‘I am going to stay here till I have solved this problem,’ said Flambeau.

‘Then you will stay here for ever,’ said Father Brown, looking calmly out of the window. ‘I don’t think I shall stay in this room, anyhow.’

‘Do you mean that I shan’t solve the problem?’ asked his friend. ‘Why shouldn’t I solve the problem?’

‘Because it isn’t soluble in water. No, nor in blood,’ said the priest; and he went down the dark stairs into the darkening garden. There he saw again what he had already seen from the window.

The heat and weight and obscurity of the thunderous sky seemed to be pressing yet more closely on the landscape; the clouds had conquered the sun which, above, in a narrowing clearance, stood up paler than the moon. There was a thrill of thunder in the air, but now no more stirring of wind or breeze; and even the colours of the garden seemed only like richer shades of darkness. But one colour still glowed with a certain dusky vividness; and that was the red hair of the woman of that house, who was standing with a sort of rigidity, staring, with her hands thrust up into her hair. That scene of eclipse, with something deeper in his own doubts about its significance, brought to the surface the memory of haunting and mystical lines; and he found himself murmuring: ‘A secret spot, as savage and enchanted as e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted by woman wailing for her demon lover.’ His muttering became more agitated. ‘Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners . . . that’s what it is; that’s terribly like what it is; woman wailing for her demon lover.’

He was hesitant and almost shaky as he approached the woman; but he spoke with his common composure. He was gazing at her very steadily, as he told her earnestly that she must not be morbid because of the mere accidental accessories of the tragedy, with all their mad ugliness. ‘The pictures in your grandfather’s room were truer to him than that ugly picture that we saw,’ he said gravely. ‘Something tells me he was a good man; and it does not matter what his murderers did with his body.’

‘Oh, I am sick of his holy pictures and statues!’ she said, turning her head away. ‘Why don’t they defend themselves, if they are what you say they are? But rioters can knock off the Blessed Virgin’s head and nothing happens to them. Oh, what’s the good? You can’t blame us, you daren’t blame us, if we’ve found out that Man is stronger than God.’

‘Surely,’ said Father Brown very gently, ‘it is not generous to make even God’s patience with us a point against Him.’

‘God may be patient and Man impatient,’ she answered, ‘and suppose we like the impatience better. You call it sacrilege; but you can’t stop it.’

Father Brown gave a curious little jump. ‘Sacrilege!’ he said; and suddenly turned back to the doorway with a new brisk air of decision. At the same moment Flambeau appeared in the doorway, pale with excitement, with a
screw of paper in his hands. Father Brown had already opened his mouth to speak, but his impetuous friend spoke before him.

'I'm on the track at last!' cried Flambeau. 'These pills look the same, but they're really different. And do you know that, at the very moment I spotted them, that one-eyed brute of a gardener thrust his white face into the room; and he was carrying a horse-pistol. I knocked it out of his hand and threw him down the stairs, but I begin to understand everything. If I stay here another hour or two, I shall finish my job.'

'Then you will not finish it,' said the priest, with a ring in his voice very rare in him indeed. 'We shall not stay here another hour. We shall not stay here another minute. We must leave this place at once!'

'What!' cried the astounded Flambeau. 'Just when we are getting near the truth! Why, you can tell that we're getting near the truth because they are afraid of us.'

Father Brown looked at him with a stony and inscrutable face, and said: 'They are not afraid of us when we are here. They will only be afraid of us when we are not here.'

They had both become conscious that the rather fidgety figure of Dr Flood was hovering in the lurid haze; now it precipitated itself forward with the wildest gestures.

'Stop! Listen!' cried the agitated doctor. 'I have discovered the truth!'

'Then you can explain it to your own police,' said Father Brown, briefly. 'They ought to be coming soon. But we must be going.'

The doctor seemed thrown into a whirlpool of emotions, eventually rising to the surface again with a despairing cry. He spread out his arms like a cross, barring their way.

'Be it so!' he cried. 'I will not deceive you now, by saying I have discovered the truth. I will only confess the truth.'

'Then you can confess it to your own priest,' said Father Brown, and strode towards the garden gate, followed by his staring friend. Before he reached the gate, another figure had rushed athwart him like the wind; and Dunn the gardener was shouting at him some unintelligible derision at detectives who were running away from their job. Then the priest ducked just in time to dodge a blow from the horse-pistol, wielded like a club. But Dunn was just not in time to dodge a blow from the fist of Flambeau, which was like the club of Hercules. The two left Mr Dunn spread flat behind them on the path, and, passing out of the gate, went out and got into their car in silence. Flambeau only asked one brief question and Father Brown only answered: 'Casterbury.'

At last, after a long silence, the priest observed: 'I could almost believe the storm belonged only to that garden, and came out of a storm in the soul.'

'My friend,' said Flambeau. 'I have known you a long time, and when you show certain signs of certainty, I follow your lead. But I hope you are not going to tell me that you took me away from that fascinating job, because you did not like the atmosphere.'

'Well, it was certainly a terrible atmosphere,' replied Father Brown, calmly. 'Dreadful and passionate and oppressive. And the most dreadful thing about it was this - that there was no hate in it at all.'

'Somebody,' suggested Flambeau, 'seems to have had a slight dislike of grandpapa.'

'Nobody had any dislike of anybody,' said Father Brown with a groan. 'That was the dreadful thing in that darkness. It was love.'

'Curious way of expressing love - to strangle somebody and stick him with a sword,' observed the other.

'It was love,' repeated the priest, 'and it filled the house with terror.'

'Don't tell me,' protested Flambeau, 'that that beautiful woman is in love with that spider in spectacles.'

'No,' said Father Brown and groaned again. 'She is in love with her husband. It is ghastly.'

'It is a state of things that I have often heard you recommend,' replied Flambeau. 'You cannot call that lawless love.'

'Not lawless in that sense,' answered Father Brown; then he turned sharply on his elbow and spoke with a new warmth: 'Do you think I don't know that the love of a man and a woman was the first command of God and is glorious for ever? Are you one of those idiots who think we don't admire love and marriage? Do I need to be told of the Garden of Eden or the wine of Cana? It is just because the strength in the thing was the strength of God, that it rages with that awful energy even when it breaks loose from God. When the Garden becomes a jungle, but still a glorious jungle; when the second fermentation turns the wine of Cana into the vinegar of Calvary. Do you think I don't know all that?'

'I'm sure you do,' said Flambeau, 'but I don't yet know much about my problem of the murder.'

'The murder cannot be solved,' said Father Brown.

'And why not?' demanded his friend.

'Because there is no murder to solve,' said Father Brown.

Flambeau was silent with sheer surprise; and it was his friend who resumed in a quiet tone:
'I'll tell you a curious thing. I talked with that woman when she was wild with grief; but she never said anything about the murder. She never mentioned murder, or even alluded to murder. What she did mention repeatedly was sacrilege.' Then, with another jerk of verbal disconnection, he added: 'Have you ever heard of Tiger Tyrone?'

'Haven't I!' cried Flambeau. 'Why, that's the very man who's supposed to be after the reliquary, and whom I've been commissioned specially to circumvent. He's the most violent and daring gangster who ever visited this country; Irish, of course, but the sort that goes quite crazily anti-clerical. Perhaps he's dabbled in a little diabolism in these secret societies; anyhow, he has a macabre taste for playing all sorts of wild tricks that look wickedther than they are. Otherwise he's not the wickedest; he seldom kills, and never for cruelty; but he loves doing anything to shock people, especially his own people; robbing churches or digging up skeletons or what not.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'it all fits in. I ought to have seen it all long before.'

'I don't see how we could have seen anything, after only an hour's investigation,' said the detective defensively.

'I ought to have seen it before there was anything to investigate,' said the priest. 'I ought to have known it before you arrived this morning.'

'What on earth do you mean?'

'It only shows how wrong voices sound on the telephone,' said Father Brown reflectively. 'I heard all three stages of the thing this morning; and I thought they were trifles. First, a woman rang me up and asked me to go to that inn as soon as possible. What did that mean? Of course it meant that the old grandfather was dying. Then she rang up to say that I needn't go, after all. What did that mean? Of course it meant that the old grandfather was dead. He had died quite peaceably in his bed; probably heart failure from sheer old age. And then she rang up a third time and said I was to go, after all. What did that mean? Ah, that is rather more interesting!'

He went on after a moment's pause: 'Tiger Tyrone, whose wife worships him, took hold of one of his mad ideas, and yet it was a crafty idea, too. He had just heard that you were tracking him down, that you knew him and his methods and were coming to save the reliquary; he may have heard that I have sometimes been of some assistance. He wanted to stop us on the road; and his trick for doing it was to stage a murder. It was a pretty horrible thing to do; but it wasn't a murder. Probably he bullied his wife with an air of brutal common sense, saying he could only escape penal servitude by using a dead body that couldn't suffer anything from such use. Anyhow, his wife would do anything for him; but she felt all the unnatural hideousness of that hanging masquerade; and that's why she talked about sacrilege. She was thinking of the desecration of the relic; but also of the desecration of the death-bed. The brother's one of those shoddy "scientific" rebels who tinker with dud bombs; an idealist run to seed. But he's devoted to Tiger; and so is the gardener. Perhaps it's a point in his favour that so many people seem devoted to him.

'There was one little point that set me guessing very early. Among the old books the doctor was turning over, was a bundle of seventeenth-century pamphlets; and I caught one title: True Declaration of the Trial and Execution of My Lord Stafford. Now Stafford was executed in the Popish Plot business, which began with one of history's detective stories; the death of Sir Edmund Berry Godfrey. Godfrey was found dead in a ditch, and part of the mystery was that he had marks of strangulation, but was also transfixed with his own sword. I thought at once that somebody in the house might have got the idea from here. But he couldn't have wanted it as a way of committing a murder. He can only have wanted it as a way of creating a mystery. Then I saw that this applied to all the other outrageous details. They were devilish enough; but it wasn't mere devilry; there was a rag of excuse; because they had to make the mystery as contradictory and complicated as possible, to make sure that we should be a long time solving it - or rather seeing through it. So they dragged the poor old man off his deathbed and made the corpse hop and turn cartwheels and do everything that it couldn't have done. They had to give us an Insoluble Problem. They swept their own tracks off the path, leaving the broom. Fortunately we did see through it in time.'

'You saw through it in time,' said Flambeau. 'I might have lingered a little longer over the second trail they left, sprinkled with assorted pills.'

'Well, anyhow, we got away,' said Father Brown, comfortably.

'And that, I presume,' said Flambeau, 'is the reason I am driving at this rate along the road to Casterbury.'

That night in the monastery and church at Casterbury there were events calculated to stagger monastic seclusion. The reliquary of St Dorothy, in a casket gorgeous with gold and rubies, was temporarily placed in a side room near the chapel of the monastery, to be brought in with a procession for a special service at the end of Benediction. It was guarded for the moment by one monk, who watched it in a tense and vigilant manner; for he and his brethren knew all about the shadow of peril from the prowling of Tiger Tyrone. Thus it was that the monk was on his feet in a flash, when he saw one of the low-latticed windows beginning to open and a dark object crawling like a black serpent through the crack. Rushing across, he gripped it and found it was the arm and sleeve of a man, terminating with a handsome cuff and a smart dark-grey glove. Laying hold of it, he shouted for help, and even as he did so, a man darted into the room through the door behind his back and snatched the casket he had left behind him on the table. Almost at the same instant, the arm wedged in the window came away in his hand, and he stood holding the
stuffed limb of a dummy.

Tiger Tyron had played that trick before, but to the monk it was a novelty. Fortunately, there was at least one person to whom the Tiger's tricks were not a novelty; and that person appeared with militant moustaches, gigantically framed in the doorway, at the very moment when the Tiger turned to escape by it. Flambeau and Tiger Tyrone looked at each other with steady eyes and exchanged something that was almost like a military salute.

Meanwhile Father Brown had slipped into the chapel, to say a prayer for several persons involved in these unseemly events. But he was rather smiling than otherwise, and, to tell the truth, he was not by any means hopeless about Mr Tyrone and his deplorable family; but rather more hopeful than he was for many more respectable people. Then his thoughts widened with the grander perspectives of the place and the occasion. Against black and green marbles at the end of the rather rococo chapel, the dark-red vestments of the festival of a martyr were in their turn a background for a fierier red; a red like red-hot coals; the rubies of the reliquary; the roses of St Dorothy. And he had again a thought to throw back to the strange events of that day, and the woman who had shuddered at the sacrilege she had helped. After all, he thought, St Dorothy also had a Pagan lover; but he had not dominated her or destroyed her faith. She had died free and for the truth; and then had sent him roses from Paradise.

He raised his eyes and saw through the veil of incense smoke and of twinkling lights that Benediction was drawing to its end while the procession waited. The sense of accumulated riches of time and tradition pressed past him like a crowd moving in rank after rank, through unending centuries; and high above them all, like a garland of unfading flames, like the sun of our mortal midnight, the great monstrance blazed against the darkness of the vaulted shadows, as it blazed against the black enigma of the universe. For some are convinced that this enigma also is an Insoluble Problem. And others have equal certitude that it has but one solution.

NINE: The Vampire of the Village

At the twist of a path in the hills, where two poplars stood up like pyramids dwarfing the tiny village of Potter's Pond, a mere huddle of houses, there once walked a man in a costume of a very conspicuous cut and colour, wearing a vivid magenta coat and a white hat tilted upon black ambrosial curls, which ended with a sort of Byronic flourish of whisker.

The riddle of why he was wearing clothes of such fantastic antiquity, yet wearing them with an air of fashion and even swagger, was but one of the many riddles that were eventually solved in solving the mystery of his fate. The point here is that when he had passed the poplars he seemed to have vanished; as if he had faded into the wan and widening dawn or been blown away upon the wind of morning.

It was only about a week afterwards that his body was found a quarter of a mile away, broken upon the steep rockeries of a terraced garden leading up to a gaunt and shuttered house called The Grange. Just before he had vanished, he had been accidentally overheard apparently quarrelling with some bystanders, and especially abusing their village as 'a wretched little hamlet'; and it was supposed that he had aroused some extreme passions of local patriotism and eventually been their victim. At least the local doctor testified that the skull had suffered a crushing blow that might have caused death, through probably only inflicted with some sort of club or cudgel. This fitted in well enough with the notion of an attack by rather savage yokels. But nobody ever found any means of tracing any particular yokel; and the inquest returned a verdict of murder by some persons unknown.

A year or two afterwards the question was reopened in a curious way; a series of events which led a certain Dr Mulborough, called by his intimates Mulberry in apt allusion to something rich and fruity about his dark rotundity and rather empurpled visage, travelling by train down to Potter's Pond, with a friend whom he had often consulted upon problems of the kind. In spite of the somewhat port-wine and ponderous exterior of the doctor, he had a shrewd eye and was really a man of very remarkable sense; which he considered that he showed in consulting a little priest named Brown, whose acquaintance he had made over a poisoning case long ago. The little priest was sitting opposite to him, with the air of a patient baby absorbing instruction; and the doctor was explaining at length the real reasons for the journey.

'I cannot agree with the gentleman in the magenta coat that Potter's Pond is only a wretched little hamlet. But it is certainly a very remote and secluded village; so that it seems quite outlandish, like a village of a hundred years ago. The spinsters are really spinsters - damn it, you could almost imagine you saw them spin. The ladies are not just ladies. They are gentlewomen; and their chemist is not a chemist, but an apothecary; pronounced potecary. They do just admit the existence of an ordinary doctor like myself to assist the apothecary. But I am considered rather a juvenile innovation, because I am only fifty-seven years old and have only been in the county for twenty-eight years. The solicitor looks as if he had known it for twenty-eight thousand years. Then there is the old Admiral, who is just like a Dickens illustration; with a house full of cutlasses and cuttlefish and equipped with a telescope.'

'I suppose,' said Father Brown, 'there are always a certain number of Admirals washed up on the shore. But I never understood why they get stranded so far inland.'

'Certainly no dead-alive place in the depths of the country is complete without one of these little creatures,' said
the doctor. 'And then, of course, there is the proper sort of clergyman; Tory and High Church in a dusty fashion
dating from Archbishop Laud; more of an old woman than any of the old women. He's a white - haired studious old
bird, more easily shocked than the spinsters. Indeed, the gentlewomen, though Puritan in their principles, are
sometimes pretty plain in their speech; as the real Puritans were. Once or twice I have known old Miss Carstairs -
Carew use expressions as lively as anything in the Bible. The dear old clergyman is assiduous in reading the Bible;
but I almost fancy he shuts his eyes when he comes to those words. Well, you know I'm not particularly modern. I
don't enjoy this jarring and joy - riding of the Bright Young Things - '
'The Bright Young Things don't enjoy it,' said Father Brown. 'That is the real tragedy.'
'But I am naturally rather more in touch with the world than the people in this prehistoric village,' pursued the
doctor. 'And I had reached a point when I almost welcomed the Great Scandal.'
'Don't say the Bright Young Things have found Potter's Pond after all,' observed the priest, smiling.
'Oh, even our scandal is on old - established melodramatic lines. Need I say that the clergyman's son promises to
be our problem? It would be almost irregular, if the clergyman's son were quite regular. So far as I can see, he is
very mildly and almost feebly irregular. He was first seen drinking ale outside the Blue Lion. Only it seems he is a
poet, which in those parts is next door to being a poacher.'
'Surely,' said Father Brown, 'even in Potter's Pond that cannot be the Great Scandal.'
'No,' replied the doctor gravely. 'The Great Scandal began thus. In the house called The Grange, situated at the
extreme end of The Grove, there lives a lady. A Lonely Lady. She calls herself Mrs Maltravers (that is how we put
it); but she only came a year or two ago and nobody knows anything about her. "I can't think why she wants to live
here," said Miss Carstairs - Carew; "we do not visit her."
'Perhaps that's why she wants to live there,' said Father Brown.
'Well, her seclusion is considered suspicious. She annoys them by being good - looking and even what is called
good style. And all the young men are warned against her as a vamp.'
'People who lose all their charity generally lose all their logic,' remarked Father Brown. 'It's rather ridiculous to
complain that she keeps to herself; and then accuse her of vamping the whole male population.'
'That is true,' said the doctor. 'And yet she is really rather a puzzling person. I saw her and found her intriguing;
one of those brown women, long and elegant and beautifully ugly, if you know what I mean. She is rather witty, and
though young enough certainly gives me an impression of what they call - well, experience. What the old ladies call
a Past.'
'All the old ladies having been born this very minute,' observed Father Brown. 'I think I can assume she is
supposed to have vamped the parson's son.'
'Yes, and it seems to be a very awful problem to the poor old parson. She is supposed to be a widow.'
Father Brown's face had a flash and spasm of his rare irritation. 'She is supposed to be a widow, as the parson's
son is supposed to be the parson's son, and the solicitor is supposed to be a solicitor and you are supposed to be a
doctor. Why in thunder shouldn't she be a widow? Have they one speck of prima facie evidence for doubting that
she is what she says she is?'
Dr Mulborough abruptly squared his broad shoulders and sat up. 'Of course you're right again,' he said. 'But we
haven't come to the scandal yet. Well, the scandal is that she is a widow.'
'Oh,' said Father Brown; and his face altered and he said something soft and faint, that might almost have been
'My God!'
'First of all,' said the doctor, 'they have made one discovery about Mrs Maltravers. She is an actress.'
'I fancied so,' said Father Brown. 'Never mind why. I had another fancy about her, that would seem even more
irrelevant.'
'Well, at that instant it was scandal enough that she was an actress. The dear old clergyman of course is
heartbroken, to think that his white hairs should be brought in sorrow to the grave by an actress and adventuress.
The spinsters shriek in chorus. The Admiral admits he has sometimes been to a theatre in town; but objects to such
things in what he calls "our midst". Well, of course I've no particular objections of that kind. This actress is certainly
a lady, if a bit of a Dark Lady, in the manner of the Sonnets; the young man is very much in love with her; and I am
no doubt a sentimental old fool in having a sneaking sympathy with the misguided youth who is sneaking round the
Moated Grange; and I was getting into quite a pastoral frame of mind about this idyll, when suddenly the
thunderbolt fell. And I, who am the only person who ever had any sympathy with these people, am sent down to be
the messenger of doom.'
'Yes,' said Father Brown, 'and why were you sent down?'
The doctor answered with a sort of groan:
'Mrs Maltravers is not only a widow, but she is the widow of Mr Maltravers.'
'It sounds like a shocking revelation, as you state it,' acknowledged the priest seriously.
'And Mr Maltravers,' continued his medical friend, 'was the man who was apparently murdered in this very village a year or two ago; supposed to have been bashed on the head by one of the simple villagers.'

'I remember you told me,' said Father Brown. 'The doctor, or some doctor, said he had probably died of being clubbed on the head with a cudgel.'

Dr Mulborough was silent for a moment in frowning embarrassment, and then said curtly:

'Dog doesn't eat dog, and doctors don't bite doctors, not even when they are mad doctors. I shouldn't care to cast any reflection on my eminent predecessor in Potter's Pond, if I could avoid it; but I know you are really safe for secrets. And, speaking in confidence, my eminent predecessor at Potter's Pond was a blasted fool; a drunken old humbug and absolutely incompetent. I was asked, originally by the Chief Constable of the County (for I've lived a long time in the county, though only recently in the village), to look into the whole business; the depositions and reports of the inquest and so on. And there simply isn't any question about it. Maltravers may have been hit on the head; he was a strolling actor passing through the place; and Potter's Pond probably thinks it is all in the natural order that such people should be hit on the head. But whoever hit him on the head did not kill him; it is simply impossible for the injury, as described, to do more than knock him out for a few hours. But lately I have managed to turn up some other facts bearing on the matter; and the result of it is pretty grim.'

He sat louring at the landscape as it slid past the window, and then said more curtly: 'I am coming down here, and asking your help, because there's going to be an exhumation. There is very strong suspicion of poison.'

'And here we are at the station,' said Father Brown cheerfully. 'I suppose your idea is that poisoning the poor man would naturally fall among the household duties of his wife.'

'Well, there never seems to have been anyone else here who had any particular connection with him,' replied Mulborough, as they alighted from the train. 'At least there is one queer old cron y of his, a broken - down actor, hanging around; but the police and the local solicitor seem convinced he is an unbalanced busybody; with some idee fixe about a quarrel with an actor who was his enemy; but who certainly wasn't Maltravers. A wandering accident, I should say, and certainly nothing to do with the problem of the poison.'

Father Brown had heard the story. But he knew that he never knew a story until he knew the characters in the story. He spent the next two or three days in going the rounds, on one polite excuse or another, to visit the chief actors of the drama. His first interview with the mysterious widow was brief but bright. He brought away from it at least two facts; one that Mrs Maltravers sometimes talked in a way which the Victorian village would call cynical; and, second, that like not a few actresses, she happened to belong to his own religious communion.

He was not so illogical (nor so unorthodox) as to infer from this alone that she was innocent of the alleged crime. He was well aware that his old religious communion could boast of several distinguished poisoners. But he had no difficulty in understanding its connection, in this sort of case, with a certain intellectual liberty which these Puritans would call laxity; and which would certainly seem to this parochial patch of an older England to be almost cosmopolitan. Anyhow, he was sure she could count for a great deal, whether for good or evil. Her brown eyes were brave to the point of battle, and her enigmatic mouth, humorous and rather large, suggested that her purposes touching the parson's poetical son, whatever they might be, were planted pretty deep.

The parson's poetical son himself, interviewed amid vast village scandal on a bench outside the Blue Lion, gave an impression of pure sulks. Hurrel Horner, a son of the Rev. Samuel Horner, was a square - built young man in a pale grey suit with a touch of something arty in a pale green tie, otherwise mainly notable for a mane of auburn hair and a permanent scowl. But Father Brown had a way with him in getting people to explain at considerable length whatever they might be, were planted pretty deep.

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'Well, there it is. He denounces her day and night as a painted adventuress; a sort of barmaid with gilt hair. I tell him she's not; you've met her yourself, and you know she's not. But he won't even meet her. He won't even see her in the street or look at her out of a window. An actress would pollute his house and even his holy presence. If he is called a Puritan he says he's proud to be a Puritan.'

'Your father,' said Father Brown, 'is entitled to have his views respected, whatever they are; they are not views I understand very well myself. But I agree he is not entitled to lay down the law about a lady he has never seen and then refuse even to look at her, to see if he is right. That is illogical.'

'That's his very stiffest point,' replied the youth. 'Not even one momentary meeting. Of course, he thunders against my other theatrical tastes as well.'

Father Brown swiftly followed up the new opening, and learnt much that he wanted to know. The alleged poetry,
which was such a blot on the young man's character, was almost entirely dramatic poetry. He had written tragedies in verse which had been admired by good judges. He was no mere stage - struck fool; indeed he was no fool of any kind. He had some really original ideas about acting Shakespeare; it was easy to understand his having been dazzled and delighted by finding the brilliant lady at the Grange. And even the priest's intellectual sympathy so far mellowed the rebel of Potter's Pond that at their parting he actually smiled.

It was that smile which suddenly revealed to Father Brown that the young man was really miserable. So long as he frowned, it might well have been only sulks; but when he smiled it was somehow a more real revelation of sorrow.

Something continued to haunt the priest about that interview with the poet. An inner instinct certified that the sturdy young man was eaten from within, by some grief greater even than the conventional story of conventional parents being obstacles to the course of true love. It was all the more so, because there were not any obvious alternative causes. The boy was already rather a literary and dramatic success; his books might be said to be booming. Nor did he drink or dissipate his well - earned wealth. His notorious revels at the Blue Lion reduced themselves to one glass of light ale; and he seemed to be rather careful with his money. Father Brown thought of another possible complication in connection with Hurrel's large resources and small expenditure; and his brow darkened.

The conversation of Miss Carstairs - Carew, on whom he called next, was certainly calculated to paint the parson's son in the darkest colours. But as it was devoted to blasting him with all the special vices which Father Brown was quite certain the young man did not exhibit, he put it down to a common combination of Puritanism and gossip. The lady, though lofty, was quite gracious, however, and offered the visitor a small glass of port - wine and a slice of seed - cake, in the manner of everybody's most ancient great - aunts, before he managed to escape from a sermon on the general decay of morals and manners.

His next port of call was very much of a contrast; for he disappeared down a dark and dirty alley, where Miss Carstairs - Carew would have refused to follow him even in thought; and then into a narrow tenement made noisier by a high and declamatory voice in an attic . . . From this he re - emerged, with a rather dazed expression, pursued on to the pavement by a very excited man with a blue chin and a black frock - coat faded to bottle - green, who was shouting argumentatively: 'He did not disappear! Maltravers never disappeared! He appeared: he appeared dead and I've appeared alive. But where's all the rest of the company? Where's that man, that monster, who deliberately stole my lines, crabbed my best scenes and ruined my career? I was the finest Tubal that ever trod the boards. He acted Shylock - he didn't need to act much for that! And so with the greatest opportunity of my whole career. I could show you press - cuttings on my renderings of Fortinbras - '

'I'm quite sure they were splendid and very well - deserved,' gasped the little priest. 'I understood the company had left the village before Maltravers died. But it's all right. It's quite all right.' And he began to hurry down the street again.

'He was to act Polonius,' continued the unquenchable orator behind him. Father Brown suddenly stopped dead.

'Oh,' he said very slowly, 'he was to act Polonius.'

'That villain Hankin!' shrieked the actor. 'Follow his trail. Follow him to the ends of the earth! Of course he'd left the village; trust him for that. Follow him - find him; and may the curses - ' But the priest was again hurrying away down the street.

Two much more prosaic and perhaps more practical interviews followed this melodramatic scene. First the priest went into the bank, where he was closeted for ten minutes with the manager; and then paid a very proper call on the aged and amiable clergyman. Here again all seemed very much as described, unaltered and seemingly unalterable; a touch or two of devotion from more austere traditions, in the narrow crucifix on the wall, the big Bible on the bookstand and the old gentleman's opening lament over the increasing disregard of Sunday; but all with a flavour of gentility that was not without its little refinements and faded luxuries.

The clergyman also gave his guest a glass of port; but accompanied by an ancient British biscuit instead of seedcake. The priest had again the weird feeling that everything was almost too perfect, and that he was living a century before his time. Only on one point the amiable old parson refused to melt into any further amiability: he meekly but firmly maintained that his conscience would not allow him to meet a stage player. However, Father Brown put down his glass of port with expressions of appreciation and thanks; and went off to meet his friend the doctor by appointment at the corner of the street; whence they were to go together to the offices of Mr Carver, the solicitor.

'I suppose you've gone the dreary round,' began the doctor, 'and found it a very dull village.'

Father Brown's reply was sharp and almost shrill. 'Don't call your village dull. I assure you it's a very extraordinary village indeed.'

'I've been dealing with the only extraordinary thing that ever happened here, I should think,' observed Dr
Mulborough. 'And even that happened to somebody from outside. I may tell you they managed the exhumation quietly last night; and I did the autopsy this morning. In plain words we've been digging up a corpse that's simply stuffed with poison.'

'A corpse stuffed with poison,' repeated Father Brown rather absently. 'Believe me, your village contains something much more extraordinary than that.'

There was abrupt silence, followed by the equally abrupt pulling of the antiquated bell - pull in the porch of the solicitor's house; and they were soon brought into the presence of that legal gentleman, who presented them in turn to a white-haired, yellow-faced gentleman with a scar, who appeared to be the Admiral.

By this time the atmosphere of the village had sunk almost into the subconsciousness of the little priest; but he was conscious that the lawyer was indeed the sort of lawyer to be the adviser of people like Miss Carstairs - Carew. But though he was an archaic old bird, he seemed something more than a fossil. Perhaps it was the uniformity of the background; but the priest had again the curious feeling that he himself was transplanted back into the early nineteenth century, rather than that the solicitor had survived into the early twentieth. His collar and cravat contrived to look almost like a stock as he settled his long chin into them; but they were clean as well as clean-cut; and there was even something about him of a very-dry old dandy. In short, he was what is called well preserved, even if partly by being petrified.

The lawyer and the Admiral, and even the doctor, showed some surprise on finding that Father Brown was rather disposed to defend the parson's son against the local lamentations on behalf of the parson.

'I thought our young friend rather attractive, myself,' he said. 'He's a good talker and I should guess a good poet; and Mrs Maltravers, who is serious about that at least, says he's quite a good actor.'

'Indeed,' said the lawyer. 'Potter's Pond, outside Mrs Maltravers, is rather more inclined to ask if he is a good son.'

'He is a good son,' said Father Brown. 'That's the extraordinary thing.'

'Damn it all,' said the Admiral. 'Do you mean he's really fond of his father?'

The priest hesitated. Then he said, 'I'm not quite so sure about that. That's the other extraordinary thing.'

'What the devil do you mean?' demanded the sailor with nautical profanity.

'I mean,' said Father Brown, 'that the son still speaks of his father in a hard unforgiving way; but he seems after all to have done more than his duty by him. I had a talk with the bank manager, and as we were inquiring in confidence into a serious crime, under authority from the police, he told me the facts. The old clergyman has retired from parish work; indeed, this was never actually his parish. Such of the populace, which is pretty pagan, as goes to church at all, goes to Dutton-Abbot, not a mile away. The old man has no private means, but his son is earning good money; and the old man is well looked after. He gave me some port of absolutely first-class vintage; I saw rows of dusty old bottles of it; and I left him sitting down to a little lunch quite recherché in an old-fashioned style. It must be done on the young man's money.'

'Quite a model son,' said Carver with a slight sneer.

Father Brown nodded, frowning, as if revolving a riddle of his own; and then said: 'A model son. But rather a mechanical model.'

At this moment a clerk brought in an unstamped letter for the lawyer; a letter which the lawyer tore impatiently across after a single glance. As it fell apart, the priest saw a spidery, crazy crowded sort of handwriting and the signature of 'Phoenix Fitzgerald'; and made a guess which the other curtly confirmed.

'It's that melodramatic actor that's always pestering us,' he said. 'He's got some fixed feud with some dead and gone fellow mummer of his, which can't have anything to do with the case. We all refuse to see him, except the doctor, who did see him; and the doctor says he's mad.'

'Yes,' said Father Brown, pursing his lips thoughtfully. 'I should say he's mad. But of course there can't be any doubt that he's right.'

'Right?' cried Carver sharply. 'Right about what?'

'About this being connected with the old theatrical company,' said Father Brown. 'Do you know the first thing that stumped me about this story? It was that notion that Maltravers was killed by villagers because he insulted their village. It's extraordinary what coroners can get jurymen to believe; and journalists, of course, are quite incredibly credulous. They can't know much about English rustics. I'm an English rustic myself; at least I was grown, with other turnips, in Essex. Can you imagine an English agricultural labourer idealizing and personifying his village, like the citizen of an old Greek city state; drawing the sword for its sacred banner, like a man in the tiny medieval republic of an Italian town? Can you hear a jolly old gaffer saying, "Blood alone can wipe out one spot on the escutcheon of Potter's Pond"? By St George and the Dragon, I only wish they would! But, as a matter of fact, I have a more practical argument for the other notion.'

He paused for a moment, as if collecting his thoughts, and then went on: 'They misunderstood the meaning of
those few last words poor Maltravers was heard to say. He wasn't telling the villagers that the village was only a hamlet. He was talking to an actor; they were going to put on a performance in which Fitzgerald was to be Fortinbras, the unknown Hankin to be Polonius, and Maltravers, no doubt, the Prince of Denmark. Perhaps somebody else wanted the part or had views on the part; and Maltravers said angrily, “You'd be a miserable little Hamlet”; that's all.

Dr Mulborough was staring; he seemed to be digesting the suggestion slowly but without difficulty. At last he said, before the others could speak: ‘And what do you suggest that we should do now?’

Father Brown arose rather abruptly; but he spoke civilly enough. ‘If these gentlemen will excuse us for a moment, I propose that you and I, doctor, should go round at once to the Horners. I know the parson and his son will both be there just now. And what I want to do, doctor, is this. Nobody in the village knows yet, I think, about your autopsy and its result. I want you simply to tell both the clergyman and his son, while they are there together, the exact fact of the case; that Maltravers died by poison and not by a blow.’

Dr Mulborough had reason to reconsider his incredulity when told that it was an extraordinary village. The scene which ensued, when he actually carried out the priest's programme, was certainly of the sort in which a man, as the saying is, can hardly believe his eyes.

The Rev. Samuel Horner was standing in his black cassock, which threw up the silver of his venerable head; his hand rested at the moment on the lectern at which he often stood to study the Scripture, now possibly by accident only; but it gave him a greater look of authority. And opposite to him his mutinous son was sitting asprawl in a chair, smoking a cheap cigarette with an exceptionally heavy scowl; a lively picture of youthful impiety.

The old man courteously waved Father Brown to a seat, which he took and sat there silent, staring blandly at the ceiling. But something made Mulborough feel that he could deliver his important news more impressively standing up.

‘I feel,’ he said, ‘that you ought to be informed, as in some sense the spiritual father of this community, that one terrible tragedy in its record has taken on a new significance; possibly even more terrible. You will recall the sad business of the death of Maltravers; who was adjudged to have been killed with the blow of a stick, probably wielded by some rustic enemy.’

The clergyman made a gesture with a wavering hand. ‘God forbid,’ he said, ‘that I should say anything that might seem to palliate murderous violence in any case. But when an actor brings his wickedness into this innocent village, he is challenging the judgement of God.’

‘Perhaps,’ said the doctor gravely. ‘But anyhow it was not so that the judgement fell. I have just been commissioned to conduct a post-mortem on the body; and I can assure you, first, that the blow on the head could not conceivably have caused the death; and, second, that the body was full of poison, which undoubtedly caused death.’

Young Hurrel Horner sent his cigarette, flying and was on his feet with the lightness and swiftness of a cat. His leap landed him within a yard of the reading-desk.

‘Are you certain of this?’ he gasped. ‘Are you absolutely certain that that blow could not cause death?’

‘Absolutely certain,’ said the doctor.

‘Well,’ said Hurrel, ‘I almost wish this one could.’

In a flash, before anyone could move a finger, he had struck the parson a stunning crack on the mouth, dashing him backwards like a disjointed black doll against the door.

‘What are you doing?’ cried Mulborough, shaken from head to foot with the shock and mere sound of the blow.

‘Father Brown, what is this madman doing?’

But Father Brown had not stirred; he was still staring serenely at the ceiling.

‘I was waiting for him to do that,’ said the priest placidly. ‘I rather wonder he hasn’t done it before.’

‘Good God,’ cried the doctor. ‘I know we thought he was wronged in some ways; but to strike his father; to strike a clergyman and a non-combatant - ’

‘He has not struck his father; and he has not struck a clergyman,’ said Father Brown. ‘He has struck a blackmailing blackguard of an actor dressed up as a clergyman, who has lived on him like a leech for years. Now he knows he is free of the blackmail, he lets fly; and I can’t say I blame him much. More especially as I have very strong suspicions that the blackmailer is a poisoner as well. I think, Mulborough, you had better ring up the police.’

They passed out of the room uninterrupted by the two others, the one dazed and staggered, the other still blind and snorting and panting with passions of relief and rage. But as they passed, Father Brown once turned his face to the young man; and the young man was one of the very few human beings who have seen that face implacable.

‘He was right there,’ said Father Brown. ‘When an actor brings his wickedness into this innocent village, he challenges the judgement of God.’

‘Well,’ said Father Brown, as he and the doctor again settled themselves in a railway carriage standing in the
As I did the parson. But you'll already have guessed a real and relevant reason for suspecting the parson.

He also made no disguise of his profession or past connection with the acting world. That's why I didn't suspect him straightforward case, besides the Vampire of the Village, was the Scandal of the Village, the parson's profligate son.

same reason, she went to live in the house outside which her husband had been found dead. The other innocent and well; but she had principles, suggesting that something was due to her married name and to common justice. For the open, under her own name, to help the new inquiries to be made about her own husband. He hadn't treated her too well; but there was really nothing mysterious about her. She had come down here quite recently, quite

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then it came to me suddenly. This is a Stage Parson. That is exactly the vague venerable old fool who would be the he ought to be very solemn and venerable and frown upon the pleasures of the world.

generally don't have that special horror, though Low Churchmen do. He talked like a Puritan about the Sabbath; and he would never call it being a Puritan. He professed a horror of the stage; he didn't know that High Churchmen Churchman; and then he boasted of being a Puritan. A man like that might personally be rather Puritanical; but he he ought to be very solemn and venerable and brown upon the pleasures of the world.

All this time there was a subconscious notion running in my head; something I couldn't fix in my memory; and then it came to me suddenly. This is a Stage Parson. That is exactly the vague venerable old fool who would be the nearest notion a popular playwright or play - actor of the old school had of anything so odd as a religious man.'

'To say nothing of a physician of the old school,' said Mulborough good - humouredly, 'who does not set up to known much about being a religious man.'

As a matter of fact,' went on Father Brown, 'there was a plainer and more glaring cause for suspicion. It concerned the Dark Lady of the Grange, who was supposed to be the Vampire of the Village.

I very early formed the impression that this black blot was rather the bright spot of the village. She was treated as a mystery; but there was really nothing mysterious about her. She had come down here quite recently, quite openly, under her own name, to help the new inquiries to be made about her own husband. He hadn't treated her too well; but she had principles, suggesting that something was due to her married name and to common justice. For the same reason, she went to live in the house outside which her husband had been found dead. The other innocent and straightforward case, besides the Vampire of the Village, was the Scandal of the Village, the parson's profligate son. He also made no disguise of his profession or past connection with the acting world. That's why I didn't suspect him as I did the parson. But you'll already have guessed a real and relevant reason for suspecting the parson.'
'Yes, I think I see,' said the doctor, 'that's why you bring in the name of the actress.'

'Yes, I mean his fanatical fixity about not seeing the actress,' remarked the priest. 'But he didn't really object to seeing her. He objected to her seeing him.'

'Yes, I see that,' assented the other. 'If she had seen the Rev. Samuel Horner, she would instantly have recognized the very unreverend actor Hankin, disguised as a sham parson with a pretty bad character behind the disguise. Well, that is the whole of this simple village idyll, I think. But you will admit I kept my promise; I have shown you something in the village considerably more creepy than a corpse; even a corpse stuffed with poison. The black coat of a parson stuffed with a blackmailer is at least worth noticing and my live man is much deadlier than your dead one.'

'Yes,' said the doctor, settling himself back comfortably in the cushions. 'If it comes to a little cosy company on a railway journey, I should prefer the corpse.'

THE END

Go to Start
FLAMBEAU, once the most famous criminal in France and later a very private detective in England, had long retired from both professions. Some say a career of crime had left him with too many scruples for a career of detection. Anyhow, after a life of romantic escapes and tricks of evasion, he had ended at what some might consider an appropriate address: in a castle in Spain. The castle, however, was solid though relatively small; and the black vineyard and green stripes of kitchen garden covered a respectable square on the brown hillside. For Flambeau, after all his violent adventures, still possessed what is possessed by so many Latins, what is absent (for instance) in so many Americans, the energy to retire. It can be seen in many a large hotel-proprietor whose one ambition is to be a small peasant. It can be seen in many a French provincial shopkeeper, who pauses at the moment when he might develop into a detestable millionaire and buy a street of shops, to fall back quietly and comfortably on domesticity and dominos. Flambeau had casually and almost abruptly fallen in love with a Spanish Lady, married and brought up a large family on a Spanish estate, without displaying any apparent desire to stray again beyond its borders. But on one particular morning he was observed by his family to be unusually restless and excited; and he outran the little boys and descended the greater part of the long mountain slope to meet the visitor who was coming across the valley; even when the visitor was still a black dot in the distance.

The black dot gradually increased in size without very much altering in the shape; for it continued, roughly speaking, to be both round and black. The black clothes of clerics were not unknown upon those hills; but these clothes, however clerical, had about them something at once commonplace and yet almost jaunty in comparison with the cassock or soutane, and marked the wearer as a man from the northwestern islands, as clearly as if he had been labelled Clapham Junction. He carried a short thick umbrella with a knob like a club, at the sight of which his Latin friend almost shed tears of sentiment; for it had figured in many adventures that they shared long ago. For this was the Frenchman's English friend. Father Brown, paying a long-desired but long-delayed visit. They had corresponded constantly, but they had not met for years.

Father Brown was soon established in the family circle, which was quite large enough to give the general sense of company or a community. He was introduced to the big wooden images of the Three Kings, of painted and gilded wood, who bring the gifts to the children at Christmas; for Spain is a country where the affairs of the children bulk large in the life of the home. He was introduced to the dog and the cat and the live-stock on the farm. But he was also, as it happened, introduced to one neighbour who, like himself, had brought into that valley the garb and manners of distant lands.

It was on the third night of the priest's stay at the little chateau that he beheld a stately stranger who paid his respects to the Spanish household with bows that no Spanish grandee could emulate. He was a tall, thin grey-haired and very handsome gentleman, and his hands, cuffs and cuff-links had something overpowering in their polish. But his long face had nothing of that languor which is associated with long cuffs and manicuring in the caricatures of our own country. It was rather arrestingly alert and keen; and the eyes had an innocent intensity of inquiry that does not go often with grey hairs. That alone might have marked the man's nationality, as well the nasal note in his refined voice and his rather too ready assumption of the vast antiquity of all the European things around him. This was, indeed, no less a person than Mr. Grandison Chace, of Boston, an American traveller who had halted for a time in his American travels by taking a lease of the adjoining estate; a somewhat similar castle on a somewhat similar hill. He delighted in his old castle, and he regarded his friendly neighbour as a local antiquity of the same type. For Flambeau managed, as we have said, really to look retired in the sense of rooted. He might have grown there with his own vine and fig-tree for ages. He had resumed his real family name of Duroc; for the other title of "The Torch" had only been a title de guerre, like that under which such a man will often wage war on society. He was fond of his wife and family; he never went farther afield than was needed for a little shooting; and he seemed, to the American globe-trotter, the embodiment of that cult of a sunny respectability and a temperate luxury, which the American was wise enough to see and admire in the Mediterranean peoples. The rolling stone from the West was glad to rest for a moment on this rock in the South that had gathered so very much moss. But Mr. Chace had heard of Father Brown, and his tone faintly changed, as towards a celebrity. The interviewing instinct awoke, tactful but tense. If he did try to draw Father Brown, as if he were a tooth, it was done with the most dexterous and painless American dentistry.

They were sitting in a sort of partly unroofed outer court of the house, such as often forms the entrance to
Spanish houses. It was dusk turning to dark; and as all that mountain air sharpens suddenly after sunset, a small stove stood on the flagstones, glowing with red eyes like a goblin, and painting a red pattern on the pavement; but scarcely a ray of it reached the lower bricks of the great bare, brown brick wall that went soaring up above them into the deep blue night. Flambeau's big broad-shouldered figure and great moustaches, like sabres, could be traced dimly in the twilight, as he moved about, drawing dark wine from a great cask and handing it round. In his shadow, the priest looked very shrunk and small, as if huddled over the stove; but the American visitor leaned forward elegantly with his elbow on his knee and his fine pointed features in the full light; his eyes shone with inquisitive intelligence.

"I can assure you, sir," he was saying, "we consider your achievement in the matter of the Moonshine Murder the most remarkable triumph in the history of detective science."

Father Brown murmured something; some might have imagined that the murmur was a little like a moan.

"We are well acquainted," went on the stranger firmly, "with the alleged achievements of Dupin and others; and with those of Lecocq, Sherlock Holmes, Nicholas Carter, and other imaginative incarnations of the craft. But we observe there is in many ways a marked difference between your own method, of approach and that of these other thinkers, whether fictitious or actual. Some have speculated, sir, as to whether the difference of method may perhaps involve rather the absence of method."

Father Brown was silent; then he started a little, almost as if he had been nodding over the stove, and said: "I beg your pardon. Yes. . . . Absence of method. . . . Absence of mind, too, I'm afraid."

"I should say of strictly tabulated scientific method," went on the inquirer. "Edgar Poe throws off several little essays in a conversational form, explaining Dupin's method, with its fine links of logic. Dr. Watson had to listen to some pretty exact expositions of Holmes's method with its observation of material details. But nobody seems to have got on to any full account of your method. Father Brown, and I was informed you declined the offer to give a series of lectures in the States on the matter."

"Yes," said the priest, frowning at the stove; "I declined."

"Your refusal gave rise to a remarkable lot of interesting talk," remarked Chace. "I may say that some of our people are saying your science can't be expounded, because it's something more than just natural science. They say your secret's not to be divulged, as being occult in its character."

"Being what?" asked Father Brown, rather sharply.

"Why, kind of esoteric," replied the other. "I can tell you, people got considerably worked up about Gallup's murder, and Stein's murder, and then old man Merton's murder, and now Judge Gwynne's murder, and a double murder by Dalmon, who was well known in the States. And there were you, on the spot every time, slap in the middle of it; telling everybody how it was done and never telling anybody how you knew. So some people got to think you knew without looking, so to speak. And Carlotta Brownson gave a lecture on Thought-Forms with illustrations from these cases of yours. The Second Sight Sisterhood of Indianapolis----"

Father Brown, was still staring at the stove; then he said quite loud yet as if hardly aware that anyone heard him: "Oh, I say. This will never do."

"I don't exactly know how it's to be helped," said Mr. Chace humorously. "The Second Sight Sisterhood want a lot of holding down. The only way I can think of stopping it is for you to tell us the secret after all."

Father Brown groaned. He put his head on his hands and remained a moment, as if full of a silent convulsion of thought. Then he lifted his head and said in a dull voice:

"Very well. I must tell the secret."

His eyes rolled darkly over the whole darkling scene, from the red eyes of the little stove to the stark expanse of the ancient wall, over which were standing out, more and more brightly, the strong stars of the south.

"The secret is," he said; and then stopped as if unable to go on. Then he began again and said:

"You see, it was I who killed all those people."

"What?" repeated the other, in a small voice out of a vast silence.

"You see, I had murdered them all myself," explained Father Brown patiently. "So, of course, I knew how it was done."

Grandison Chace had risen to his great height like a man lifted to the ceiling by a sort of slow explosion. Staring down at the other he repeated his incredulous question.

"I had planned out each of the crimes very carefully," went on Father Brown, "I had thought out exactly how a thing like that could be done, and in what style or state of mind a man could really do it. And when I was quite sure that I felt exactly like the murderer myself, of course I knew who he was."

Chace gradually released a sort of broken sigh.

"You frightened me all right," he said. "For the minute I really did think you meant you were the murderer. Just for the minute I kind of saw it splashed over all the papers in the States: "Saintly Sleuth Exposed as Killer: Hundred
"No, no, no," he said, almost angrily; "I don't mean just a figure of speech. This is what comes of trying to talk about deep things. . . . What's the good of words . . . ? If you try to talk about a truth that's merely moral, people always think it's merely metaphorical. A real live man with two legs once said to me: 'I only believe in the Holy Ghost in a spiritual sense.' Naturally, I said: 'In what other sense could you believe it?' And then he thought I meant he needn't believe in anything except evolution, or ethical fellowship, or some bilge. . . . I mean that I really did see myself, and my real self, committing the murders. I didn't actually kill the men by material means; but that's not the point. Any brick or bit of machinery might have killed them by material means. I mean that I thought and thought about how a man might come to be like that, until I realized that I really was like that, in everything except actual final consent to the action. It was once suggested to me by a friend of mine, as a sort of religious exercise. I believe he got it from Pope Leo XIII, who was always rather a hero of mine."

"I'm afraid," said the American, in tones that were still doubtful, and keeping his eye on the priest rather as if he were a wild animal, "that you'd have to explain a lot to me before I knew what you were talking about. The science of detection----"

Father Brown snapped his fingers with the same animated annoyance. "That's it," he cried; "that's just where we part company. Science is a grand thing when you can get it; in its real sense one of the grandest words in the world. But what do these men mean, nine times out often, when they use it nowadays? When they say detection is a science? When they say criminology is a science? They mean getting outside a man and studying him as if he were a gigantic insect: in what they would call a dry impartial light, in what I should call a dead and dehumanized light. They mean getting a long way off him, as if he were a distant prehistoric monster; staring at the shape of his 'criminal skull' as if it were a sort of eerie growth, like the horn on a rhinoceros's nose. When the scientist talks about a type, he never means himself, but always his neighbour; probably his poorer neighbour. I don't deny the dry light may sometimes do good; though in one sense it's the very reverse of science. So far from being knowledge, it's actually suppression of what we know. It's treating a friend as a stranger, and pretending that something familiar is really remote and mysterious. It's like saying that a man has a proboscis between the eyes, or that he falls down in a fit of insensibility once every twenty-four hours. Well, what you call 'the secret' is exactly the opposite. I don't try to get outside the man. I try to get inside the murderer. . . . Indeed it's much more than that, don't you see? I am inside a man. I am always inside a man, moving his arms and legs; but I wait till I know I am inside a murderer, thinking his thoughts, wrestling with his passions; till I have bent myself into the posture of his hunched and peering hatred; till I see the world with his bloodshot and squinting eyes, looking between the blinkers of his half-witted concentration; looking up the short and sharp perspective of a straight road to a pool of blood. Till I am really a murderer."

"Oh," said Mr. Chace, regarding him with a long, grim face, and added: "And that is what you call a religious exercise."

"Yes," said Father Brown; "that is what I call a religious exercise."

After an instant's silence he resumed: "It's so real a religious exercise that I'd rather not have said anything about it. But I simply couldn't have you going off and telling all your countrymen that I had a secret magic connected with Thought-Forms, could I? I've put it badly, but it's true. No man's really any good till he knows how bad he is, or might be; till he's realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about 'criminals,' as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he's got rid of all the dirty self-deception of thinking about low types and deficient skulls; till he's squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till he's realized exactly how much right he has to all this snobbery, and sneering, and talking about 'criminals,' as if they were apes in a forest ten thousand miles away; till he's got rid of all the dirty self-deception of thinking about low types and deficient skulls; till he's squeezed out of his soul the last drop of the oil of the Pharisees; till his only hope is somehow or other to have captured one criminal, and kept him safe and sane under his own hat."

Flambeau came forward and filled a great goblet with Spanish wine and set it before his friend, as he had already set one before his fellow guest. Then he himself spoke for the first time:

"I believe Father Brown has had a new batch of mysteries. We were talking about them the other day, I fancy. He has been dealing with some queer people since we last met."

"Yes; I know the stories more or less--but not the application," said Chace, lifting his glass thoughtfully. "Can you give me any examples, I wonder. . . . I mean, did you deal with this last batch in that introspective style?"

Father Brown also lifted his glass, and the glow of the fire turned the red wine transparent, like the glorious blood-red glass of a martyr's window. The red flame seemed to hold his eyes and absorb his gaze that sank deeper and deeper into it, as if that single cup held a red sea of the blood of all men, and his soul were a diver, ever plunging in dark humility and inverted imagination, lower than its lowest monsters and its most ancient slime. In that cup, as in a red mirror, he saw many things; the doings of his last days moved in crimson shadows; the examples that his companions demanded danced in symbolic shapes; and there passed before him all the stories that
are told here. Now, the luminous wine was like a vast red sunset upon dark red sands, where stood dark figures of men; one was fallen and another running towards him. Then the sunset seemed to break up into patches: red lanterns swinging from garden trees and a pond gleaming red with reflection; and then all the colour seemed to cluster again into a great rose of red crystal, a jewel that irradiated the world like a red sun, save for the shadow of a tall figure with a high head-dress as of some prehistoric priest; and then faded again till nothing was left but a flame of wild red beard blowing in the wind upon a wild grey moor. All these things, which may be seen later from other angles and in other moods than his own, rose up in his memory at the challenge and began to form themselves into anecdotes and arguments.

"Yes," he said, as he raised the wine cup slowly to his lips, "I can remember pretty well----"

I. THE MIRROR OF THE MAGISTRATE

JAMES BAGSHAW and Wilfred Underhill were old friends, and were fond of rambling through the streets at night, talking interminably as they turned corner after corner in the silent and seemingly lifeless labyrinth of the large suburb in which they lived. The former, a big, dark, good-humoured man with a strip of black moustache, was a professional police detective; the latter, a sharp-faced, sensitive-looking gentleman with light hair, was an amateur interested in detection. It will come as a shock to the readers of the best scientific romance to learn that it was the policeman who was talking and the amateur who was listening, even with a certain respect.

"Ours is the only trade," said Bagshaw, "in which the professional is always supposed to be wrong. After all, people don't write stories in which hairdressers can't cut hair and have to be helped by a customer; or in which a cabman can't drive a cab until his fare explains to him the philosophy of cab-driving. For all that, I'd never deny that we often tend to get into a rut: or, in other words, have the disadvantages of going by a rule. Where the romancers are wrong is, that they don't allow us even the advantages of going by a rule."

"Surely," said Underhill, "Sherlock Holmes would say that he went by a logical rule."

"He may be right," answered the other; "Sherlock Holmes would say that he went by a logical rule."

"He may be right," answered the other; "but I mean a collective rule. It's like the staff work of an army. We pool our information."

"And you don't think detective stories allow for that?" asked his friend.

"Well, let's take any imaginary case of Sherlock Holmes, and Lestrade, the official detective. Sherlock Holmes, let us say, can guess that a total stranger crossing the street is a foreigner, merely because he seems to look for the traffic to go to the right instead of the left. I'm quite ready to admit Holmes might guess that. I'm quite sure Lestrade wouldn't guess anything of the kind. But what they leave out is the fact that the policeman, who couldn't guess, might very probably know. Lestrade might know the man was a foreigner merely because his department has to keep an eye on all foreigners; some would say on all natives, too. As a policeman I'm glad the police know so much; for every man wants to do his own job well. But as a citizen, I sometimes wonder whether they don't know too much."

"You don't seriously mean to say," cried Underhill incredulously, "that you know anything about strange people in a strange street. That if a man walked out of that house over there, you would know anything about him?"

"I should if he was the householder," answered Bagshaw. "That house is rented by a literary man of Anglo-Roumanian extraction, who generally lives in Paris, but is over here in connexion with some poetical play of his. His name's Osric Orm, one of the new poets, and pretty steep to read, I believe."

"But I mean all the people down the road," said his companion. "I was thinking how strange and new and nameless everything looks, with these high blank walls and these houses lost in large gardens. You can't know all of them."

"I know a few," answered Bagshaw. "This garden wall we're walking under is at the end of the grounds of Sir Humphrey Gwynne, better known as Mr. Justice Gwynne, the old judge who made such a row about spying during the war. The house next door to it belongs to a wealthy cigar merchant. He comes from Spanish-America and looks very swarthy and Spanish himself; but he bears the very English name of Buller. The house beyond that--did you hear that noise?"

"I heard something," said Underhill, "but I really don't know what it was."

"I know what it was," replied the detective, "it was a rather heavy revolver, fired twice, followed by a cry for help. And it came straight out of the back garden of Mr. Justice Gwynne, that paradise of peace and legality."

He looked up and down the street sharply and then added:

"And the only gate of the back garden is half a mile round on the other side. I wish this wall were a little lower, or I were a little lighter; but it's got to be tried."

"It is lower a little farther on," said Underhill, "and there seems to be a tree that looks helpful."

They moved hastily along and found a place where the wall seemed to stoop abruptly, almost as if it had half-sunk into the earth; and a garden tree, flamboyant with the gayest garden blossom, straggled out of the dark enclosure and was gilded by the gleam of a solitary street-lamp. Bagshaw caught the crooked branch and threw one
leg over the low wall; and the next moment they stood knee-deep amid the snapping plants of a garden border.

The garden of Mr. Justice Gwynne by night was rather a singular spectacle. It was large and lay on the empty edge of the suburb, in the shadow of a tall, dark house that was the last in its line of houses. The house was literally dark, being shuttered and unlighted, at least on the side overlooking the garden. But the garden itself, which lay in its shadow: and should have been a tract of absolute darkness, showed a random glitter, like that of fading fireworks; as if a giant rocket had fallen in fire among the trees. As they advanced they were able to locate it as the light of several coloured lamps, entangled in the trees like the jewel fruits of Aladdin, and especially as the light from a small, round lake or pond, which gleamed, with pale colours as if a lamp were kindled under it.

"Is he having a party?" asked Underhill. "The garden seems to be illuminated."

"No," answered Bagshaw. "It's a hobby of his, and I believe he prefers to do it when he's alone. He likes playing with a little plant of electricity that he works from that bungalow or hut over there, where he does his work and keeps his papers. Buller, who knows him very well, says the coloured lamps are rather more often a sign he's not to be disturbed."

"Sort of red danger signals," suggested the other.

"Good Lord! I'm afraid they are danger signals!" and he began suddenly to run.

A moment after Underhill saw what he had seen. The opalescent ring of light, like the halo of the moon, round the sloping sides of the pond, was broken by two black stripes or streaks which soon proved themselves to be the long, black legs of a figure fallen head downwards into the hollow, with the head in the pond.

"Come on," cried the detective sharply, "that looks to me like----"

His voice was lost, as he ran on across the wide lawn, faintly luminous in the artificial light, making a bee-line across the big garden for the pool and the fallen figure. Underhill was trotting steadily in that straight track, when something happened that startled him for the moment. Bagshaw, who was travelling as steadily as a bullet towards the black figure by the luminous pool, suddenly turned at a sharp angle and began to run even more rapidly towards the shadow of the house. Underhill could not imagine what he meant by the altered direction. The next moment, when the detective had vanished into the shadow of the house, there came out of that obscurity the sound of a scuffle and a curse; and Bagshaw returned lugging with him a little struggling man with red hair. The captive had evidently been escaping under the shelter of the building, when the quicker ears of the detective had heard him rustling like a bird among the bushes.

"Underhill," said the detective, "I wish you'd run on and see what's up by the pool. And now, who are you?" he asked, coming to a halt. "What's your name?"

"Michael Flood," said the stranger in a snappy fashion. He was an unnaturally lean little man, with a hooked nose too large for his face, which was colourless, like parchment, in contrast with the ginger colour of his hair. "I've got nothing to do with this. I found him lying dead and I was scared; but I only came to interview him for a paper."

"When you interview celebrities for the Press," said Bagshaw, "do you generally climb over the garden wall?"

And he pointed grimly to a trail of footprints coming and going along the path towards the flower bed.

The man calling himself Flood wore an expression equally grim.

"An interviewer might very well get over the wall," he said, "for I couldn't make anybody hear at the front door. The servant had gone out."

"How do you know he'd gone out?" asked the detective suspiciously.

"Because," said Flood, with an almost unnatural calm, "I'm not the only person who gets over garden walls. It seems just possible that you did it yourself. But, anyhow, the servant did; for I've just this moment seen him drop over the wall, away on the other side of the garden, just by the garden door."

"Then why didn't he use the garden door?" demanded the cross-examiner.

"How should I know?" retorted Flood. "Because it was shut, I suppose. But you'd better ask him, not me; he's coming towards the house at this minute."

There was, indeed, another shadowy figure beginning to be visible through the fire-shot gloaming, a squat, square-headed figure, wearing a red waistcoat as the most conspicuous part of a rather shabby livery. He appeared to be making with unobtrusive haste towards a side-door in the house, until Bagshaw hallooed to him to halt. He drew nearer to them very reluctantly, revealing a heavy, yellow face, with a touch of something Asiatic which was consonant with his flat, blue-black hair.

Bagshaw turned abruptly to the man called Flood. "Is there anybody in this place," he said, "who can testify to your identity?"

"Not many, even in this country," growled Flood. "I've only just come from Ireland; the only man I know round here is the priest at St. Dominic's Church--Father Brown."

"Neither of you must leave this place," said Bagshaw, and then added to the servant: "But you can go into the house and ring up St. Dominic's Presbytery and ask Father Brown if he would mind coming round here at once. No
tricks, mind."

While the energetic detective was securing the potential fugitives, his companion, at his direction, had hastened on to the actual scene of the tragedy. It was a strange enough scene; and, indeed, if the tragedy had not been tragic it would have been highly fantastic. The dead man (for the briefest examination proved him to be dead) lay with his head in the pond, where the glow of the artificial illumination encircled the head with something of the appearance of an unholy halo. The face was gaunt and rather sinister, the brow bald, and the scanty curls dark grey, like iron rings; and, despite the damage done by the bullet wound in the temple, Underhill had no difficulty in recognizing the features he had seen in the many portraits of Sir Humphrey Gwynne. The dead man was in evening-dress, and his long, black legs, so thin as to be almost spidery, were sprawling at different angles up the steep bank from which he had fallen. As by some weird whim of diabolical arabesque, blood was eddying out, very slowly, into the luminous water in snaky rings, like the transparent crimson of sunset clouds.

Underhill did not know how long he stood staring down at this macabre figure, when he looked up and saw a group of four figures standing above him on the bank. He was prepared for Bagshaw and his Irish captive, and he had no difficulty in guessing the status of the servant in the red waistcoat. But the fourth figure had a sort of grotesque solemnity that seemed strangely congruous to that incongruity. It was a stumpy figure with a round face and a hat like a black halo. He realized that it was, in fact, a priest; but there was something about it that reminded him of some quaint old black woodcut at the end of a Dance of Death.

Then he heard Bagshaw saying to the priest:
"I'm glad you can identify this man; but you must realize that he's to some extent under suspicion. Of course, he may be innocent; but he did enter the garden in an irregular fashion."
"Well, I think he's innocent myself," said the little priest in a colourless voice. "But, of course, I may be wrong."
"Why do you think he is innocent?"
"Because he entered the garden in an irregular fashion," answered the cleric. "You see, I entered it in a regular fashion myself. But I seem to be almost the only person who did. All the best people seem to get over garden walls nowadays."
"What do you mean by a regular fashion?" asked the detective.
"Well," said Father Brown, looking at him with limpid gravity, "I came in by the front door. I often come into houses that way."
"Excuse me," said Bagshaw, "but does it matter very much how you came in, unless you propose to confess to the murder?"
"Yes, I think it does," said the priest mildly. "The truth is, that when I came in at the front door I saw something I don't think any of the rest of you have seen. It seems to me it might have something to do with it."
"What did you see?"
"I saw a sort of general smash-up," said Father Brown in his mild voice. "A big looking-glass broken, and a small palm tree knocked over, and the pot smashed all over the floor. Somehow, it looked to me as if something had happened."
"You are right," said Bagshaw after a pause. "If you saw that, it certainly looks as if it had something to do with it."
"And if it had anything to do with it," said the priest very gently, "it looks as if there was one person who had nothing to do with it; and that is Mr. Michael Flood, who entered the garden over the wall in an irregular fashion, and then tried to leave it in the same irregular fashion. It is his irregularity that makes me believe in his innocence."
"Let us go into the house," said Bagshaw abruptly.

As they passed in at the side-door, the servant leading the way, Bagshaw fell back a pace or two and spoke to his friend.
"Something odd about that servant," he said. "Says his name is Green, though he doesn't look it; but there seems no doubt he's really Gwynne's servant, apparently the only regular servant he had. But the queer thing is, that he flatly denied that his master was in the garden at all, dead or alive. Said the old judge had gone out to a grand legal dinner and couldn't be home for hours, and gave that as his excuse for slipping out."
"Did he," asked Underhill, "give any excuse for his curious way of slipping in?"
"No, none that I can make sense of," answered the detective. "I can't make him out. He seems to be scared of something."

Entering by the side-door, they found themselves at the inner end of the entrance hall, which ran along the side of the house and ended with the front door, surmounted by a dreary fanlight of the old-fashioned pattern. A faint, grey light was beginning to outline its radiation upon the darkness, like some dismal and discoloured sunrise; but what light there was in the hall came from a single, shaded lamp, also of an antiquated sort, that stood on a bracket in a corner. By the light of this Bagshaw could distinguish the debris of which Brown had spoken. A tall palm, with
German spies. Anyhow, one coincidence, only a few moments after his capture, confirmed Bagshaw in the anarchist line. Gwynne was known to have had something of a mania about Bolshevist spies, as he had about it seemed possible that his business with the judge, and perhaps his quarrel with the judge, had been something in to be of a nihilistic and destructive sort, as was indeed the tendency of his poetry for those who could follow it; and either because he really knew hardly any English, or because he knew better than to know any. His opinions seemed he snorted. When it was hinted that the hour was somewhat late, he snarled. The little that he said was obscure, so because he could not get anyone to answer the bell. When it was pointed out that the door was practically open, ominous, he refused to say anything except that he had intended to call on Sir Humphrey Gwynne, but had not done broken bridge, and afterwards in a succession of circumstances and stages of legal inquiry that grew more and more in that corner of the old garden, as the grey twilight before dawn began to creep over the heavy hedges and the people in a drawing-room. Mr. Osric Orm, the poet, was not a model of self-expression when it came to the answering of questions. There, in that corner of the old garden, as the grey twilight before dawn began to creep over the heavy hedges and the broken bridge, and afterwards in a succession of circumstances and stages of legal inquiry that grew more and more ominous, he refused to say anything except that he had intended to call on Sir Humphrey Gwynne, but had not done so because he could not get anyone to answer the bell. When it was pointed out that the door was practically open, he snorted. When it was hinted that the hour was somewhat late, he snarled. The little that he said was obscure, either because he really knew hardly any English, or because he knew better than to know any. His opinions seemed to be of a nihilistic and destructive sort, as was indeed the tendency of his poetry for those who could follow it; and it seemed possible that his business with the judge, and perhaps his quarrel with the judge, had been something in the anarchist line. Gwynne was known to have had something of a mania about Bolshevik spies, as he had about German spies. Anyhow, one coincidence, only a few moments after his capture, confirmed Bagshaw in the
impression that the case must be taken seriously. As they went out of the front gate into the street, they so happened
to encounter yet another neighbour, Duller, the cigar merchant from next door, conspicuous by his brown, shrewd
face and the unique orchid in his buttonhole; for he had a name in that branch of horticulture. Rather to the surprise
of the rest, he hailed his neighbour, the poet, in a matter -of-fact manner, almost as if he had expected to see him.
"Hallo, here we are again," he said. "Had a long talk with old Gwynne, I suppose?"
"Sir Humphrey Gwynne is dead," said Bagshaw. "I am investigating the case and I must ask you to explain."
Buller stood as still as the lamp-post beside him, possibly stiffened with surprise. The red end of his cigar
brightened and darkened rhythmically, but his brown face was in shadow; when he spoke it was with quite a new
voice.
"I only mean," he said, "that when I passed two hours ago Mr. Orm was going in at this gate to see Sir
Humphrey."
"He says he hasn't seen him yet," observed Bagshaw, "or even been into the house."
"It's a long time to stand on the door-step," observed Buller.
"Yes," said Father Brown; "it's rather a long time to stand in the street."
"I've been home since then," said the cigar merchant. "Been writing letters and came out again to post them."
"You'll have to tell all that later," said Bagshaw. "Good night--or good morning."
The trial of Osric Orm for the murder of Sir Humphrey Gwynne, which filled the newspapers for so many
weeks, really turned entirely on the same crux as that little talk under the lamp-post, when the grey-green dawn was
breaking about the dark streets and gardens. Everything came back to the enigma of those two empty hours between
the time when Buller saw Orm going in at the garden gate, and the time when Father Brown found him apparently
still lingering in the garden. He had certainly had the time to commit six murders, and might almost have committed
them for want of something to do; for he could give no coherent account of what he was doing. It was argued by the
prosecution that he had also the opportunity, as the front door was unlatched, and the side-door into the larger
garden left standing open. The court followed, with considerable interest, Bagshaw's clear reconstruction of the
struggle in the passage, of which the traces were so evident; indeed, the police had since found the shot that had
shattered the glass. Finally, the hole in the hedge to which he had been tracked, had very much the appearance of a
hiding-place. On the other hand. Sir Matthew Blake, the very able counsel for the defence, turned this last argument
the other way: asking why any man should entrap himself in a place without possible exit, when it would obviously
be much more sensible to slip out into the street. Sir Matthew Blake also made effective use of the mystery that still
rested upon the motive for the murder. Indeed, upon this point, the passages between Sir Matthew Blake and Sir
Arthur Travers, the equally brilliant advocate for the prosecution, turned rather to the advantage of the prisoner. Sir
Arthur could only throw out suggestions about a Bolshevist conspiracy which sounded a little thin. But when it came
to investigating the facts of Orm's mysterious behaviour that night he was considerably more effective.
The prisoner went into the witness-box, chiefly because his astute counsel calculated that it would create a bad
impression if he did not. But he was almost as uncommunicative to his own counsel as to the prosecuting counsel.
Sir Arthur Travers made all possible capital out of his stubborn silence, but did not succeed in breaking it. Sir Arthur
was a long, gaunt man, with a long, cadaverous face, in striking contrast to the sturdy figure and bright, bird-like eye
of Sir Matthew Blake. But if Sir Matthew suggested a very cocksure sort of cock – sparrow, Sir Arthur might more
truly have been compared to a crane or stork; as he leaned forward, prodding the poet with questions, his long nose
might have been a long beak.
"Do you mean to tell the jury," he asked, in tones of grating incredulity, "that you never went in to see the
deceased gentleman at all?"
"No!" replied Orm shortly.
"You wanted to see him, I suppose. You must have been very anxious to see him. Didn't you wait two whole
hours in front of his front door?"
"Yes," replied the other.
"And yet you never even noticed the door was open?"
"No," said Orm.
"What in the world were you doing for two hours in somebody's else's front garden?" insisted the barrister; "You
were doing something, I suppose?"
"Yes."
"Is it a secret?" asked Sir Arthur, with adamantine jocularity.
"It's a secret from you," answered the poet.
It was upon this suggestion of a secret that Sir Arthur seized in developing his line of accusation. With a
boldness which some thought unscrupulous, he turned the very mystery of the motive, which was the strongest part
of his opponent's case, into an argument for his own. He gave it as the first fragmentary hint of some far-flung and
elaborate conspiracy, in which a patriot had perished like one caught in the coils of an octopus.

"Yes," he cried in a vibrating voice, "my learned friend is perfectly right! We do not know the exact reason why this honourable public servant was murdered. We shall not know the reason why the next public servant is murdered. If my learned friend himself falls a victim to his eminence, and the hatred which the hellish powers of destruction feel for the guardians of law, he will be murdered, and he will not know the reason. Half the decent people in this court will be butchered in their beds, and we shall not know the reason. And we shall never know the reason and never arrest the massacre, until it has depopulated our country, so long as the defence is permitted to stop all proceedings with this stale tag about 'motive,' when every other fact in the case, every glaring incongruity, every gaping silence, tells us that we stand in the presence of Cain."

"I never knew Sir Arthur so excited," said Bagshaw to his group of companions afterwards. "Some people are saying he went beyond the usual limit and that the prosecutor in a murder case oughtn't to be so vindictive. But I must say there was something downright creepy about that little goblin with the yellow hair, that seemed to play up to the impression. I was vaguely recalling, all the time, something that De Quincey says about Mr. Williams, that ghastly criminal who slaughtered two whole families almost in silence. I think he says that Williams had hair of a vivid unnatural yellow; and that he thought it had been dyed by a trick learned in India, where they dye horses green or blue. Then there was his queer, stony silence, like a troglodyte's; I'll never deny that it all worked me up until I felt there was a sort of monster in the dock. If that was only Sir Arthur's eloquence, then he certainly took a heavy responsibility in putting so much passion into it."

"He was a friend of poor Gwynne's, as a matter of fact," said Underhill, more gently; "a man I know saw them hobnobbing together after a great legal dinner lately. I dare say that's why he feels so strongly in this case. I suppose it's doubtful whether a man ought to act in such a case on mere personal feeling."

"He wouldn't," said Bagshaw. "I bet Sir Arthur Travers wouldn't act only on feeling, however strongly he felt. He's got a very stiff sense of his own professional position. He's one of those men who are ambitious even when they've satisfied their ambition. I know nobody who'd take more trouble to keep his position in the world. No; you've got hold of the wrong moral to his rather thundering sermon. If he lets himself go like that, it's because he thinks he can get a conviction, anyhow, and wants to put himself at the head of some political movement against the conspiracy he talks about. He must have some very good reason for wanting to convict Orm and some very good reason for thinking he can do it. That means that the facts will support him. His confidence doesn't look well for the prisoner." He became conscious of an insignificant figure in the group.

"Well, Father Brown," he said with a smile; "what do you think of our judicial procedure?"

"Well," replied the priest rather absently, "I think the thing that struck me most was how different men look in their wigs. You talk about the prosecuting barrister being so tremendous. But I happened to see him take his wig off for a minute, and he really looks quite a different man. He's quite bald, for one thing."

"I'm afraid that won't prevent his being tremendous," answered Bagshaw. "You don't propose to found the defence on the fact that the prosecuting counsel is bald, do you?"

"Not exactly," said Father Brown good-humouredly. "To tell the truth, I was thinking how little some kinds of people know about other kinds of people. Suppose I went among some remote people who had never even heard of England. Suppose I told them that there is a man in my country who won't ask a question of life and death, until he has put an erection made of horse-hair on the top of his head, with little tails behind, and grey corkscrew curls at the side, like an Early Victorian old woman. They would think he must be rather eccentric; but he isn't at all eccentric, he's only conventional. They would think so, because they don't know anything about English barristers; because they don't know what a barrister is. Well, that barrister doesn't know what a poet is. He doesn't understand that a poet's eccentricities wouldn't seem eccentric to other poets. He thinks it odd that Orm should walk about in a beautiful garden for two hours, with nothing to do. God bless my soul! a poet would think nothing of walking about in the same backyard for ten hours if he had a poem to do. Orm's own counsel was quite as stupid. It never occurred to him to ask Orm the obvious question."

"What question do you mean?" asked the other.

"Why, what poem he was making up, of course," said Father Brown rather impatiently. "What line he was stuck at, what epithet he was looking for, what climax he was trying to work up to. If there were any educated people in court, who know what literature is, they would have known well enough whether he had had anything genuine to do. You'd have asked a manufacturer about the conditions of his factory; but nobody seems to consider the conditions under which poetry is manufactured. It's done by doing nothing."

"That's all very well," replied the detective; "but why did he hide? Why did he climb up that crooked little stairway and stop there; it led nowhere."

"Why, because it led nowhere, of course," cried Father Brown explosively. "Anybody who clapped eyes on that blind alley ending in mid-air might have known an artist would want to go there, just as a child would."
He stood blinking for a moment, and then said apologetically: "I beg your pardon; but it seems odd that none of
them understand these things. And then there was another thing. Don't you know that everything has, for an artist,
one aspect or angle that is exactly right? A tree, a cow, and a cloud, in a certain relation only, mean something; as
three letters, in one order only, mean a word. Well, the view of that illuminated garden from that unfinished bridge
was the right view of it. It was as unique as the fourth dimension. It was a sort of fairy foreshortening; it was like
looking down at heaven and seeing all the stars growing on trees and that luminous pond like a moon fallen flat on
the fields in some happy nursery talc. He could have looked at it for ever. If you told him the path led nowhere, he
would tell you it had led him to the country at the end of the world. But do you expect him to tell you that in the
witness – is box? What would you say to him if he did? You talk about a man having a jury of his peers. Why don't
you have a jury of poets?"

"You talk as if you were a poet yourself," said Bagshaw.

"Thank your stars I'm not," said Father Brown. "Thank your lucky stars a priest has to be more charitable than a
poet. Lord have mercy on us, if you knew what a crushing, what a cruel contempt he feels for the lot of you, you'd
feel as if you were under Niagara."

"You may know more about the artistic temperament than I do," said Bagshaw after a pause; "but, after all, the
answer is simple. You can only show that he might have done what he did, without committing the crime. But it's
equally true that he might have committed the crime. And who else could have committed it?"

"Have you thought about the servant, Green?" asked Father Brown, reflectively. "He told a rather queer story."

"Ah," cried Bagshaw quickly, "you think Green did it, after all."

"I'm quite sure he didn't," replied the other. "I only asked if you'd thought about his queer story. He only went
out for some trifle, a drink or an assignation or what not. But he went out by the garden door and came back over the
garden wall. In other words, he left the door open, but he came back to find it shut. Why? Because Somebody Else
had already passed out that way."

"The murderer," muttered the detective doubtfully. "Do you know who he was?"

"I know what he looked like," answered Father Brown quietly. "That's the only thing I do know. I can almost see
him as he came in at the front door, in the gleam of the hall lamp; his figure, his clothes, even his face!"

"What's all this?"

"He looked like Sir Humphrey Gwynne," said the priest.

"What the devil do you mean?" demanded Bagshaw. "Gwynne was lying dead with his head in the pond."

"Oh, yes," said Father Brown.

After a moment he went on: "Let's go back to that theory of yours, which was a very good one, though I don't
quite agree with it. You suppose the murderer came in at the front door, met the Judge in the front hall, struggling
with him and breaking the mirror; that the judge then retreated into the garden, where he was finally shot. Somehow,
it doesn't sound natural to me. Granted he retreated down the hall, there are two exits at the end, one into the garden
and one into the house. Surely, he would be more likely to retreat into the house? His gun was there; his telephone
was there; his servant, so far as he knew, was there. Even the nearest neighbours were in that direction. Why should
he stop to open the garden door and go out alone on the deserted side of the house?"

"But we know he did go out of the house," replied his companion, puzzled. "We know he went out of the house,
because he was found in the garden."

"He never went out of the house, because he never was in the house," said Father Brown. "Not that evening, I
mean. He was sitting in that bungalow. I read that lesson in the dark, at the beginning, in red and golden stars across
the garden. They were worked from the hut; they wouldn't have been burning at all if he hadn't been in the hut. He
was trying to run across to the house and the telephone, when the murderer shot him beside the pond."

"But what about the pot and the palm and the broken mirror?" cried Bagshaw. "Why, it was you who found
them! It was you yourself who said there must have been a struggle in the hall."

The priest blinked rather painfully. "Did I?" he muttered. "Surely, I didn't say that. I never thought that. What I
think I said, was that something had happened in the hall. And something did happen; but it wasn't a struggle."

"Then what broke the mirror?" asked Bagshaw shortly.

"A bullet broke the mirror," answered Father Brown gravely; "a bullet fired by the criminal. The big fragments
of falling glass were quite enough to knock over the pot and the palm."

"Well, what else could he have been firing at except Gwynne?" asked the detective.

"It's rather a fine metaphysical point," answered his clerical companion almost dreamily. "In one sense, of
course, he was firing at Gwynne. But Gwynne wasn't there to be fired at. The criminal was alone in the hall."

He was silent for a moment, and then went on quietly. "Imagine the looking-glass at the end of the passage,
before it was broken, and the tall palm arching over it. In the half-light, reflecting these monochrome walls, it
would, look like the end of the passage. A man reflected in it would look like a man coming from inside the house.
It would look like the master of the house—if only the reflection were a little like him."

"Stop a minute," cried Bagshaw. "I believe I begin—"

"You begin to see," said Father Brown. "You begin to see why all the suspects in this case must be innocent. Not one of them could possibly have mistaken his own reflection for old Gwynne. Orm would have known at once that his bush of yellow hair was not a bald head. Flood would have seen his own red head, and Green his own red waistcoat. Besides, they're all short and shabby; none of them could have thought his own image was a tall, thin, old gentleman in evening-dress. We want another, equally tall and thin, to match him. That's what I meant by saying that I knew what the murderer looked like."

"And what do you argue from that?" asked Bagshaw, looking at him steadily.

The priest uttered a sort of sharp, crisp laugh, oddly different from his ordinary mild manner of speech.

"I am going to argue," he said, "the very thing that you said was so ludicrous and impossible."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to base the defence," said Father Brown, "on the fact that the prosecuting counsel has a bald head."

"Oh, my God!" said the detective quietly, and got to his feet, staring.

Father Brown had resumed his monologue in an unruffled manner.

"You've been following the movements of a good many people in this business; you policemen were prodigiously interested in the movements of the poet, and the servant, and the Irishman. The man whose movements seem to have been rather forgotten is the dead man himself. His servant was quite honestly astonished at finding his master had returned. His master had gone to a great dinner of all the leaders of the legal profession, but had left it abruptly and come home. He was not ill, for he summoned no assistance; he had almost certainly quarrelled with some leader of the legal profession. It's among the leaders of that profession that we should have looked first for his enemy. He returned, and shut himself up in the bungalow, where he kept all his private documents about treasonable practices. But the leader of the legal profession, who knew there was something against him in those documents, was thoughtful enough to follow his accuser home; he also being in evening-dress, but with a pistol in his pocket. That is all; and nobody could ever have guessed it except for the mirror."

He seemed to be gazing into vacancy for a moment, and then added:

"A queer thing is a mirror; a picture frame that holds hundreds of different pictures, all vivid and all vanished for ever. Yet, there was something specially strange about the glass that hung at the end of that grey corridor under that green palm. It is as if it was a magic glass and had a different fate from others, as if its picture could somehow survive it, hanging in the air of that twilight house like a spectre; or at least like an abstract diagram, the skeleton of an argument. We could, at least, conjure out of the void the thing that Sir Arthur Travers saw. And by the way, there was one very true thing that you said about him."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Bagshaw with grim good-nature. "what was it?"

"You said," observed the priest, "that Sir Arthur must have some good reason for wanting to get Orm hanged."

A week later the priest met the police detective once more, and learned that the authorities had already been moving on the new lines of inquiry when they were interrupted by a sensational event.


"Sir Arthur Travers is dead," said Bagshaw, briefly.

"Ah!" said the other, with a little catch in his voice; "you mean that he--"

"Yes," said Bagshaw, "he shot at the same man again, but not in a mirror."

II. THE MAN WITH TWO BEARDS

THIS tale was told by Father Brown to Professor Crake, the celebrated criminologist, after dinner at a club, where the two were introduced to each other as sharing a harmless hobby of murder and robbery. But, as Father Brown's version rather minimized his own part in the matter, it is here re-told in a more impartial style. It arose out of a playful passage of arms, in which the professor was very scientific and the priest rather sceptical.

"My good sir," said the professor in remonstrance, "don't you believe that criminology is a science?"

"I'm not sure," replied Father Brown. "Do you believe that hagiology is a science?"

"What's that?" asked the specialist sharply.

"No; it's not the study of bags, and has nothing to do with burning witches," said the priest, smiling. "It's the study of holy things, saints and so on. You see, the Dark Ages tried to make a science about good people. But our own humane and enlightened age is only interested in a science about bad ones. Yet I think our general experience is that every conceivable sort of man has been a saint. And I suspect you will find, too, that every conceivable sort of man has been a murderer."

"Well, we believe murderers can be pretty well classified," observed Crake. "The list sounds rather long and dull; but I think it's exhaustive. First, all killing can be divided into rational and irrational, and we'll take the last first, because they are much fewer. There is such a thing as homicidal mania, or love of butchery in the abstract.
There is such a thing as irrational antipathy, though it's very seldom homicidal. Then we come to the true motives: of these, some are less rational in the sense of being merely romantic and retrospective. Acts of pure revenge are acts of hopeless revenge. Thus a lover will sometimes kill a rival he could never supplant, or a rebel assassinate a tyrant after the conquest is complete. But, more often, even these acts have a rational explanation. They are hopeful murders. They fall into the larger section of the second division, of what we may call prudential crimes. These, again, fall chiefly under two descriptions. A man kills either in order to obtain what the other man possesses, either by theft or inheritance, or to stop the other man from acting in some way: as in the case of killing a blackmailer or a political opponent; or, in the case of a rather more passive obstacle, a husband or wife whose continued functioning, as such, interferes with other things. We believe that classification is pretty thoroughly thought out and, properly applied, covers the whole ground—But I'm afraid that it perhaps sounds rather dull; I hope I'm not boring you."

"Not at all," said Father Brown. "If I seemed a little absent-minded I must apologize; the truth is, I was thinking of a man I once knew. He was a murderer; but I can't see where he fits into your museum of murderers. He was not mad, nor did he like killing. He did not hate the man he killed; he hardly knew him, and certainly had nothing to avenge on him. The other man did not possess anything that he could possibly want. The other man was not behaving in any way which the murderer wanted to stop. The murdered man was not in a position to hurt, or hinder, or even affect the murderer in any way. There was no woman in the case. There were no politics in the case. This man killed a fellow-creature who was practically a stranger, and that for a very strange reason; which is possibly unique in human history."

And so, in his own more conversational fashion, he told the story. The story may well begin in a sufficiently respectable setting, at the breakfast table of a worthy though wealthy suburban family named Bankes, where the normal discussion of the newspaper had, for once, been silenced by the discussion about a mystery nearer home. Such people are sometimes accused of gossip about their neighbours, but they are in that matter almost inhumanly innocent. Rustic villagers tell tales about their neighbours, true and false; but the curious culture of the modern suburb will believe anything it is told in the papers about the wickedness of the Pope, or the martyrdom of the King of the Cannibal Islands, and, in the excitement of these topics, never knows what is happening next door. In this case, however, the two forms of interest actually coincided in a coincidence of thrilling intensity. Their own suburb had actually been mentioned in their favourite newspaper. It seemed to them like a new proof of their own existence when they saw the name in print. It was almost as if they had been unconscious and invisible before; and now they were as real as the King of the Cannibal Islands.

It was stated in the paper that a once famous criminal, known as Michael Moonshine, and many other names that were presumably not his own, had recently been released after a long term of imprisonment for his numerous burglaries; that his whereabouts was being kept quiet, but that he was believed to have settled down in the suburb in question, which we will call for convenience Chisham. A resume of some of his famous and daring exploits and escapes was given in the same issue. For it is a character of that kind of press, intended for that kind of public, that it assumes that its reader have no memories. While the peasant will remember an outlaw like Robin Hood or Rob Roy for centuries, the clerk will hardly remember the name of the criminal about whom he argued in trams and tubes two years before. Yet, Michael Moonshine had really shown some of the heroic rascality of Rob Roy or Robin Hood. He was worthy to be turned into legend and not merely into news. He was far too capable a burglar to be a murderer. But his terrific strength and the ease with which he knocked policemen over like ninepins, stunned people, and bound and gagged them, gave something almost like a final touch of fear or mystery to the fact that he never killed them. People almost felt that he would have been more human if he had.

Mr. Simon Bankes, the father of the family, was at once better read and more old-fashioned than the rest. He was a sturdy man, with a short grey beard and a brow barred with wrinkles. He had a turn for anecdotes and reminiscence, and he distinctly remembered the days when Londoners had lain awake listening for Mike Moonshine as they did for Spring-heeled Jack. Then there was his wife, a thin, dark lady. There was a sort of acid elegance about her, for her family had much more money than her husband's, if rather less education; and she even possessed a very valuable emerald necklace upstairs, that gave her a right to prominence in a discussion about thieves. There was his daughter, Opal, who was also thin and dark and supposed to be psychic—at any rate, by herself; for she had little domestic encouragement. Spirits of an ardently astral turn will be well advised not to materialize as members of a large family. There was her brother John, a burly youth, particularly boisterous in his indifference to her spiritual development; and otherwise distinguishable only by his interest in motor-cars. He seemed to be always in the act of selling one car and buying another; and by some process, hard for the economic theorist to follow, it was always possible to buy a much better article by selling the one that was damaged or discredited. There was his brother Philip, a young man with dark curly hair, distinguished by his attention to dress; which is doubtless part of the duty of a stockbroker's clerk, but, as the stockbroker was prone to hint, hardly the whole of it. Finally, there was present at this family scene his friend, Daniel Devine, who was also dark and exquisitely dressed, but bearded in a
fashion that was somewhat foreign, and therefore, for many, slightly menacing.

It was Devine who had introduced the topic of the newspaper paragraph, tactfully insinuating so effective an instrument of distraction at what looked like the beginning of a small family quarrel; for the psychic lady had begun the description of a vision she had had of pale faces floating in empty night outside her window, and John Bankes was trying to roar down this revelation of a higher state with more than his usual heartiness.

But the newspaper reference to their new and possibly alarming neighbour soon put both controversialists out of court.

"How frightful," cried Mrs. Bankes. "He must be quite a new-comer; but who can he possibly be?"

"I don't know any particularly new-comers," said her husband, "except Sir Leopold Pulman, at Beechwood House."

"My dear," said the lady, "how absurd you are--Sir Leopold!" Then, after a pause, she added: "If anybody suggested his secretary now-- that man with the whiskers; I've always said, ever since he got the place Philip ought to have had----"

"Nothing doing," said Philip languidly, making his sole contribution to the conversation. "Not good enough."

"The only one I know," observed Devine, "is that man called Carver, who is stopping at Smith's Farm. He lives a very quiet life, but he's quite interesting to talk to. I think John has had some business with him."

"Knows a bit about cars," conceded the monomaniac John. "He'll know a bit more when he's been in my new car."

Devine smiled slightly; everybody had been threatened with the hospitality of John's new car. Then he added reflectively:

"That's a little what I feel about him. He knows a lot about motoring and travelling, and the active ways of the world, and yet he always stays at home pottering about round old Smith's beehives. Says he's only interested in bee culture, and that's why he's staying with Smith. It seems a very quiet hobby for a man of his sort. However, I've no doubt John's car will shake him up a bit."

As Devine walked away from the house that evening his dark face wore an expression of concentrated thought. His thoughts would, perhaps, have been worthy of our attention, even at this stage; but it is enough to say that their practical upshot was a resolution to pay an immediate visit to Mr. Carver at the house of Mr. Smith. As he was making his way thither he encountered Barnard, the secretary at Beechwood House, conspicuous by his lanky figure and the large side whiskers which Mrs. Bankes counted among her private wrongs. Their acquaintance was slight, and their conversation brief and casual; but Devine seemed to find in it food for further cogitation.

"Look here," he said abruptly, "excuse my asking, but is it true that Lady Pulman has some very famous jewellery up at the House? I'm not a professional thief, but I've just heard there's one hanging about."

"I'll get her to give an eye to them," answered the secretary. "To tell the truth, I've ventured to warn her about them already myself. I hope she has attended to it."

As they spoke, there came the hideous cry of a motor-horn just behind, and John Bankes came to a stop beside them, radiant at his own steering -wheel. When he heard of Devine's destination he claimed it as his own, though his tone suggested rather an abstract relish for offering people a ride. The ride was consumed in continuous praises of the car, now mostly in the matter of its adaptability to weather.

"Shuts up as tight as a box," he said, "and opens as easy--as easy as opening your mouth."

Devine's mouth, at the moment, did not seem so easy to open, and they arrived at Smith's farm to the sound of a soliloquy. Passing the outer gate, Devine found the man he was looking for without going into the house. The man was walking about in the garden, with his hands in his pockets, wearing a large, limp straw hat; a man with a long face and a large chin. The wide brim cut off the upper part of his face with a shadow that looked a little like a mask. In the background was a row of sunny beehives, along which an elderly man, presumably Mr. Smith, was moving accompanied by a short, commonplace-looking companion in black clerical costume.

"I say," burst in the irrepressible John, before Devine could offer any polite greeting, "I've brought her round to give you a little run. You see if she isn't better than a 'Thunderbolt.'"

Mr Carver's mouth set into a smile that may have been meant to be gracious, but looked rather grim. "I'm afraid I shall be too busy for pleasure this evening," he said.

"How doth the little busy bee," observed Devine, equally enigmatically. "Your bees must be very busy if they keep you at it all night. I was wondering if----"

"Well," demanded Carver, with a certain cool defiance.

"Well, they say we should make hay while the sun shines," said Devine. "Perhaps you make honey while the moon shines."

There came a flash from the shadow of the broad-brimmed hat, as the whites of the man's eyes shifted and shone.
"Perhaps there is a good deal of moonshine in the business," he said: "but I warn you my bees do not only make honey. They sting."

"Are you coming along in the car?" insisted the staring John. But Carver, though he threw off the momentary air of sinister significance with which he had been answering Devine, was still positive in his polite refusal.

"I can't possibly go," he said. "Got a lot of writing to do. Perhaps you'd be kind enough to give some-of my friends a run, if you want a companion. This is my friend, Mr. Smith, Father Brown."

"Of course," cried Bankes; "let 'em all come."

"Thank you very much," said Father Brown. "I'm afraid I shall have to decline; I've got to go on to Benediction in a few minutes."

"Mr. Smith is your man, then," said Carver, with something almost like impatience. "I'm sure Smith is longing for a motor ride."

Smith, who wore a broad grin, bore no appearance of longing for anything. He was an active little old man with a very honest wig; one of those wigs that look no more natural than a hat. Its tinge of yellow was out of keeping with his colourless complexion. He shook his head and answered with amiable obstinacy:

"I remember I went over this road ten years ago--in one of those contraptions. Came over it from my sister's place at Holmgate, and never been over that road in a car since. It was rough going I can tell you,"

"Ten years ago!" scoffed John Bankes. "Two thousand years ago you went in an ox wagon. Do you think cars haven't changed in ten years--and roads, too, for that matter? In my little bus you don't know the wheels are going round. You think you're just flying."

"I'm sure Smith wants to go flying," urged Carver. "It's the dream of his life. Come, Smith, go over to Holmgate and see your sister. You know you ought to go and see your sister. Go over and stay the night if you like."

"Well, I generally walk over, so I generally do stay the night," said old Smith. "No need to trouble the gentleman to-day, particularly."

"But think what fun it will be for your sister to see you arrive in a car!" cried Carver. "You really ought to go. Don't be so selfish."

"That's it," assented Bankes, with buoyant benevolence. "Don't you be selfish. It won't hurt you. You aren't afraid of it, are you?"

"Well," said Mr. Smith, blinking thoughtfully, "I don't want to be selfish, and I don't think I'm afraid-I'll come with you if you put it that way."

The pair drove off, amid waving salutations that seemed somehow to give the little group the appearance of a cheering crowd. Yet Devine and the priest only joined in out of courtesy, and they both felt it was the dominating gesture of their host that gave it its final air of farewell. The detail gave them a curious sense of the pervasive force of his personality.

The moment the car was out of sight he turned to them with a sort of boisterous apology and said: "Well!"

He said it with that curious heartiness which is the reverse of hospitality. That extreme geniality is the same as a dismissal.

"I must be going," said Devine. "We must not interrupt the busy bee. I'm afraid I know very little about bees; sometimes I can hardly tell a bee from a wasp."

"I've kept wasps, too," answered the mysterious Mr. Carver. When his guests were a few yards down the street, Devine said rather impulsively to his companion: "Rather an odd scene that, don't you think?"

"Yes," replied Father Brown. "And what do you think about it?"

Devine looked at the little man in black, and something in the gaze of his great, grey eyes seemed to renew his impulse.

"I think," he said, "that Carver was very anxious to have the house to himself tonight. I don't know whether you had any such suspicions?"

"I may have my suspicions," replied the priest, "but I'm not sure whether they're the same as yours."

That evening, when the last dusk was turning into dark in the gardens round the family mansion, Opal Bankes was moving through some of the dim and empty rooms with even more than her usual abstraction; and anyone who had looked at her closely would have noted that her pale face had more than its usual pallor. Despite its bourgeois luxury, the house as a whole had a rather unique shade of melancholy. It was the sort of immediate sadness that belongs to things that are old rather than ancient. It was full of faded fashions, rather than historic customs; of the order and ornament that is just recent enough to be recognized as dead. Here and there, Early Victorian coloured glass tinted the twilight; the high ceilings made the long rooms look narrow; and at the end of the long room down which she was walking was one of those round windows, to be found in the buildings of its period. As she came to about the middle of the room, she stopped, and then suddenly swayed a little, as if some invisible hand had struck her on the face.
An instant after there was the noise or knocking on the front door, dulled by the closed doors between. She knew that the rest of the household were in the upper parts of the house, but she could not have analysed the motive that made her go to the front door herself. On the doorstep stood a dumpy and dingy figure in black, which she recognized as the Roman Catholic priest, whose name was Brown. She knew him only slightly; but she liked him. He did not encourage her psychic views; quite the contrary; but he discouraged them as if they mattered and not as if they did not matter. It was not so much that he did not sympathize with her opinions, as that he did sympathize but did not agree. All this was in some sort of chaos in her mind as she found herself saying, without greeting, or waiting to hear his business:

"I'm so glad you've come. I've seen a ghost."

"There's no need to be distressed about that," he said. "It often happens. Most of the ghosts aren't ghosts, and the few that may be won't do you any harm. Was it any ghost in particular?"

"No," she admitted, with a vague feeling of relief, "it wasn't so much the thing itself as an atmosphere of awful decay, a sort of luminous ruin. It was a face. A face at the window. But it was pale and goggling, and looked like the picture of Judas."

"Well, some people do look like that," reflected the priest, "and I dare say they look in at windows, sometimes. May I come in and see where it happened?"

When she returned to the room with the visitor, however, other members of the family had assembled, and those of a less psychic habit had thought it convenient to light the lamps. In the presence of Mrs. Bankes, Father Brown assumed a more conventional civility, and apologized for his intrusion.

"I'm afraid it is taking a liberty with your house, Mrs. Bankes," he said. "But I think I can explain how the business happens to concern you. I was up at the Pulmans' place just now, when I was rung up and asked to come round here to meet a man who is coming to communicate something that may be of some moment to you. I should not have added myself to the party, only I am wanted, apparently, because I am a witness to what has happened up at Beechwood. In fact, it was I who had to give the alarm."

"What has happened?" repeated the lady.

"There has been a robbery up, at Beechwood House," said Father Brown, gravely; "a robbery, and what I fear is worse, Lady Pulman's jewels have gone; and her unfortunate secretary, Mr. Barnard, was picked up in the garden, having evidently been shot by the escaping burglar."

"That man," ejaculated the lady of the house. "I believe he was----"

She encountered the grave gaze of the priest, and her words suddenly went from her; she never knew why.

"I communicated with the police," he went on, "and with another authority interested in this case; and they say that even a superficial examination has revealed foot-prints and finger-prints and other indications of a well-known criminal."

At this point, the conference was for a moment disturbed, by the return of John Bankes, from what appeared to be an abortive expedition in the car. Old Smith seemed to have been a disappointing passenger, after all.

"Funked it, after all, at the last minute," he announced with noisy disgust. "Bolted off while I was looking at what I thought was a puncture. Last time I'll take one of these yokels----"

But his complaints received small attention in the general excitement that gathered round Father Brown and his news.

"Somebody will arrive in a moment," went on the priest, with the same air of weighty reserve, "who will relieve me of this responsibility. When I have confronted, you with him I shall have done my duty as a witness in a serious business. It only remains for me to say that a servant up at Beechwood House told me that she had seen a face at one of the windows----"

"I saw a face," said Opal, "at one of our windows."

"Oh, you are always seeing faces," said her brother John roughly.

"It is as well to see facts even if they are faces," said Father Brown equably, "and I think the face you saw----"

Another knock at the front door sounded through the house, and a minute afterwards the door of the room opened and another figure appeared. Devine half-rose from his chair at the sight of it.

It was a tall, erect figure, with a long, rather cadaverous face, ending in a formidable chin. The brow was rather bald, and the eyes bright and blue, which Devine had last seen obscured with a broad straw hat.

"Pray don't let anybody move," said the man called Carver, in clear and courteous tones. But to Devine's disturbed mind the courtesy had an ominous resemblance to that of a brigand who holds a company motionless with a pistol.

"Please sit down, Mr. Devine," said Carver; "and, with Mrs. Bankes's permission, I will follow your example. My presence here necessitates an explanation. I rather fancy you suspected me of being an eminent and distinguished burglar."
"I did," said Devine grimly.

"As you remarked," said Carver, "it is not always easy to know a wasp from a bee."

After a pause, he continued: "I can claim to be one of the more useful, though equally annoying, insects. I am a
detective, and I have come down to investigate an alleged renewal of the activities of the criminal calling himself
Michael Moonshine. Jewel robberies were his speciality; and there has just been one of them at Beechwood House,
which, by all the technical tests, is obviously his work. Not only do the prints correspond, but you may possibly
know that when he was last arrested, and it is believed on other occasions also, he wore a simple but effective
disguise of a red beard and a pair of large horn-rimmed spectacles."

Opal Bankes leaned forward fiercely.

"That was it," she cried in excitement, "that was the face I saw, with great goggles and a red, ragged beard like
Judas. I thought it was a ghost."

"That was also the ghost the servant at Beechwood saw," said Carver dryly.

He laid some papers and packages on the table, and began carefully to unfold them. "As I say," he continued, "I
was sent down here to make inquiries about the criminal plans of this man, Moonshine. That is why I interested
myself in bee-keeping and went to stay with Mr. Smith."

There was a silence, and then Devine started and spoke: "You don't seriously mean to say that nice old man----"

"Come, Mr. Devine," said Carver, with a smile, "you believed a beehive was only a hiding-place for me. Why
shouldn't it be a hiding-place for him?"

Devine nodded gloomily, and the detective turned back to his papers. "Suspecting Smith, I wanted to get him out
of the way and go through his belongings; so I took advantage of Mr. Bankes's kindness in giving him a joy ride.
Searching his house, I found some curious things to be owned by an innocent old rustic interested only in bees. This
is one of them."

From the unfolded paper he lifted a long, hairy object almost scarlet in colour—the sort of sham beard that is
worn in theatricals.

Beside it lay an old pair of heavy horn-rimmed spectacles.

"But I also found something," continued Carver, "that more directly concerns this house, and must be my excuse
for intruding to-night. I found a memorandum, with notes of the names and conjectural value of various pieces of
jewellery in the neighbourhood. Immediately after the note of Lady Pulman's tiara was the mention of an emerald
necklace belonging to Mrs. Bankes."

Mrs. Bankes, who had hitherto regarded the invasion of her house with an air of supercilious bewilderment,
suddenly grew attentive. Her face suddenly looked ten years older and much more intelligent. But before she could
speak the impetuous John had risen to his full height like a trumpeting elephant.

"And the tiara's gone already," he roared; "and the necklace—I'm going to see about that necklace!"

"Not a bad idea," said Carver, as the young man rushed from the room; "though, of course, we've been keeping
our eyes open since we've been here. Well, it took me a little time to make out the memorandum, which was in
cipher, and Father Brown's telephone message from the House came as I was near the end. I asked him to run round
here first with the news, and I would follow; and so——"

His speech was sundered by a scream. Opal was standing up and pointing rigidly at the round window.

"There it is again!" she cried.

For a moment they all saw something--something that cleared the lady of the charges of lying and hysteria not
uncommonly brought against her. Thrust out of the slate-blue darkness without, the face was pale, or, perhaps,
blanched by pressure against the glass; and the great, glaring eyes, encircled as with rings, gave it rather the look of
a great fish out of the dark-blue sea nosing at the port-hole of a ship. But the gills or fins of the fish were a coppery
red; they were, in truth, fierce red whiskers and the upper part of a red beard. The next moment it had vanished.

Devine had taken a single stride towards the window when a shout resounded through the house, a shout that
seemed almost too deafening to be distinguishable as words; yet it was enough to stop Devine
in his stride, and he knew what had happened.

"Necklace gone!" shouted John Bankes, appearing huge and heaving in the doorway, and almost instantly
vanishing again with the plunge of a pursuing hound.

"Necklace gone!" shouted John Bankes, appearing huge and heaving in the doorway, and almost instantly
vanishing again with the plunge of a pursuing hound.

"Thief was at the window just now!" cried the detective, who had already darted to the door, following the
headlong John, who was already in the garden.

"Be careful," wailed the lady, "they have pistols and things."

"So have I," boomed the distant voice of the dauntless John out of the dark garden.

Devine had, indeed, noticed as the young man plunged past him that he was defiantly brandishing a revolver,
and hoped there would be no need for him to so defend himself. But even as he had the thought, came the shock of
two shots, as if one answered the other, and awakened a wild flock of echoes in that still suburban garden. They
flapped into silence.

"Is John dead?" asked Opal in a low, shuddering voice.

Father Brown had already advanced deeper into the darkness, and stood with his back to them, looking down at something. It was he who answered her.

"No," he said; "it is the other."

Carver had joined him, and for a moment the two figures, the tall and the short, blocked out what view the fitful and stormy moonlight would allow. Then they moved to one side and, the others saw the small, wiry figure lying slightly twisted, as if with its last struggle. The false red beard was thrust upwards, as if scornfully at the sky, and the moon shone on the great sham spectacles of the man who had been called Moonshine.

"What an end," muttered the detective, Carver. "After all his adventures, to be shot almost by accident by a stockbroker in a suburban garden."

The stockbroker himself naturally regarded his own triumph with more solemnity, though not without nervousness.

"I had to do it," he gasped, still panting with exertion. "I'm sorry, he fired at me."

"There will have to be an inquest, of course," said Carver, gravely. "But I think there will be nothing for you to worry about. There's a revolver fallen from his hand with one shot discharged; and he certainly didn't fire after he'd got yours."

By this time they had assembled again in the room, and the detective was getting his papers together for departure. Father Brown was standing opposite to him, looking down at the table, as if in a brown study. Then he spoke abruptly:

"Mr. Carver, you have certainly worked out a very complete case in a very masterly way. I rather suspected your professional business; but I never guessed you would link everything up together so quickly--the bees and the beard and the spectacles and the cipher and the necklace and everything."

"Always satisfactory to get a case really rounded off." said Carver.

"Yes," said Father Brown, still looking at the table. "I admire it very much." Then he added with a modesty verging on nervousness: "It's only fair to you to say that I don't believe a word of it."

Devine leaned forward with sudden interest. "Do you mean you don't believe he is Moonshine, the burglar?"

"I know he is the burglar, but he didn't burgle," answered Father Brown. "I know he didn't come here, or to the great house, to steal jewels, or get shot getting away with them. Where are the jewels?"

"Where they generally are in such cases," said Carver. "He's either hidden them or passed them on to a confederate. This was not a one-man job. Of course, my people are searching the garden and warning the district."

"Perhaps," suggested Mrs. Bankes, "the confederate stole the necklace while Moonshine was looking in at the window."

"Why was Moonshine looking in at the window?" asked Father Brown quietly. "Why should he want to look in at the window?"

"Well, what do you think?" cried the cheery John.

"I think," said Father Brown, "that he never did want to look in at the window."

"Then why did he do it?" demanded Carver. "What's the good of talking in the air like that? We've seen the whole thing acted before our very eyes."

"I've seen a good many things acted before my eyes that I didn't believe in," replied the priest. "So have you, on the stage and off."

"Father Brown," said Devine, with a certain respect in his tones, "will you tell us why you can't believe your eyes?"

"Yes, I will try to tell you," answered the priest. Then he said gently:

"You know what I am and what we are. We don't bother you much. We try to be friends with all our neighbours. But you can't think we do nothing. You can't think we know nothing. We mind our own business; but we know our own people. I knew this dead man very well indeed; I was his confessor, and his friend. So far as a man can, I knew his mind when he left that garden to-day; and his mind was like a glass hive full of golden bees. It's an understatement to say his reformation was sincere. He was one of those great penitents who manage to make more out of penitence than others can make out of virtue. I say I was his confessor; but, indeed, it was I who went to him for comfort. It did me good to be near so good a man. And when I saw him lying there dead in the garden, it seemed to me as if certain strange words that were said of old were spoken over him aloud in my ear. They might well be; for if ever a man went straight to heaven, it might be he."

"Hang it all," said John Bankes restlessly, "after all, he was a convicted thief."

"Yes," said Father Brown; "and only a convicted thief has ever in this world heard that assurance: 'This night shalt thou be with Me in Paradise.'"
Nobody seemed to know what to do with the silence that followed, until Devine said, abruptly, at last:
"Then how in the world would you explain it all?"

The priest shook his head. "I can't explain it at all, just yet," he said, simply. "I can see one or two odd things, but I don't understand them. As yet I've nothing to go on to prove the man's innocence, except the man. But I'm quite sure I'm right."

He sighed, and put out his hand for his big, black hat. As he removed it he remained gazing at the table with rather a new expression, his round, straight-haired head cocked at a new angle. It was rather as if some curious animal had come out of his hat, as out of the hat of a conjurer. But the others, looking at the table, could see nothing there but the detective's documents and the tawdry old property beard and spectacles.

"Lord bless us," muttered Father Brown, "and he's lying outside dead, in a beard and spectacles." He swung round suddenly upon Devine. "Here's something to follow up, if you want to know. Why did he have two beards?"

With that he bustled in his undignified way out of the room; but Devine was now devoured with curiosity, and pursued him into the front garden.

"I can't tell you now," said Father Brown. "I'm not sure, and I'm bothered about what to do. Come round and see me to-morrow, and I may be able to tell you the whole tiling. It may already be settled for me, and--did you hear that noise?"


"Mr. John Bankes's motor-car," said the priest. "I believe it goes very fast."

"He certainly is of that opinion," said Devine, with a smile.

"It will go far, as well as fast, to-night," said Father Brown.

"And what do you mean by that?" demanded the other.

"I mean it will not return," replied the priest. "John Bankes suspected something of what I knew from what I said. John Bankes has gone and the emeralds and all the other jewels with him."

Next day, Devine found Father Brown moving to and fro in front of the row of beehives, sadly, but with a certain serenity.

"I've been telling the bees," he said. "You know one has to tell the bees!" 'Those singing masons building roofs of gold. What a line!' Then more abruptly. "He would like the bees looked after."

"I hope he doesn't want the human beings neglected, when the whole swarm is buzzing with curiosity," observed the young man. "You were quite right when you said that Bankes was gone with the jewels; but I don't know how you knew, or even what there was to be known."

"Father Brown blinked benevolently at the bee-hives and said:

"One sort of stumbles on things, and there was one stumbling-block at the start. I was puzzled by poor Barnard being shot up at Beechwood House. Now, even when Michael was a master criminal, he made it a point of honour, even a point of vanity, to succeed without any killing. It seemed extraordinary that when he had become a sort of saint he should go out of his way to commit the sin he had despised when he was a sinner. The rest of the business puzzled me to the last; I could make nothing out of it, except that it wasn't true. Then I had a belated gleam of sense when I saw the beard and goggles and remembered the thief had come in another beard with other goggles. Now, of course, it was just possible that he had duplicates; but it was at least a coincidence that he used neither the old glasses nor the old beard, both in good repair. Again, it was just possible that he went out without them and had to procure new ones; but it was unlikely. There was nothing to make him go motoring with Bankes at all; if he was really going burgling, he could have taken his outfit easily in his pocket. Besides, beards don't grow on bushes. He would have found it hard to get such things anywhere in the time.

"No, the more I thought of it the more I felt there was something funny about his having a completely new outfit. And then the truth began to dawn on me by reason, which I knew already by instinct. He never did go out with Bankes with any intention of putting on the disguise. He never did put on the disguise. Somebody else manufactured the disguise at leisure, and then put it on him."

"Put it on him!" repeated Devine. "How the devil could they?"

"Let us go back," said Father Brown, "and look at the thing through another window--the window through which the young lady saw the ghost."

"The ghost!" repeated the other, with a slight start.

"She called it the ghost," said the little man, with composure, "and perhaps she was not so far wrong. It's quite true that she is what they call psychic. Her only mistake is in thinking that being psychic is being spiritual. Some animals are psychic; anyhow, she is a sensitive, and she was right when she felt that the face at the window had a son of horrible halo of deathly things."

"You mean----" began Devine.

"I mean it was a dead man who looked in at the window," said Father Brown. "It was a dead man who crawled
round more than one house, looking in at more than one window. Creepy, wasn't it? But in one way it was the reverse of a ghost; for it was not the antic of the soul freed from the body. It was the antic of the body freed from the soul."

He blinked again at the beehive and continued: "But, I suppose, the shortest explanation is to take it from the standpoint of the man who did it. You know the man who did it. John Bankes."

"The very last man I should have thought of," said Devine. "The very first man I thought of," said Father Brown; "in so far as I had any right to think of anybody. My friend, there are no good or bad social types or trades. Any man can be a murderer like poor John; any man, even the same man, can be a saint like poor Michael. But if there is one type that tends at times to be more utterly godless than another, it is that rather brutal sort of business man. He has no social ideal, let alone religion; he has neither the gentleman's traditions nor the trade unionist's class loyalty. All his boasts about getting good bargains were practically boasts of having cheated people. His snubbing of his sister's poor little attempts at mysticism was detestable. Her mysticism was all nonsense; but he only hated spiritualism because it was spirituality. Anyhow, there's no doubt he was the villain of the piece; the only interest is in a rather original piece of villainy. It was really a new and unique motive for murder. It was the motive of using the corpse as a stage property--a sort of hideous doll or dummy. At the start he conceived a plan of killing Michael in the motor, merely to take him home and pretend to have killed him in the garden. But all sorts of fantastic finishing touches followed quite naturally from the primary fact; that he had at his disposal in a closed car at night the dead body of a recognized and recognizable burglar. He could leave his finger-prints and foot-prints; he could lean the familiar face against windows and take it away. You will notice that Moonshine ostensibly appeared and vanished while Bankes was ostensibly out of the room looking for the emerald necklace.

"Finally, he had only to tumble the corpse on to the lawn, fire a shot from each pistol, and there he was. It might never have been found out but for a guess about the two beards."

"Why had your friend Michael kept the old beard?" Devine said thoughtfully. "That seems to me questionable."

"To me, who knew him, it seems quite inevitable," replied Father Brown. "His whole attitude was like that wig that he wore. There was no disguise about his disguises. He didn't want the old disguise any more, but he wasn't frightened of it; he would have felt it false to destroy the false beard. It would have been like hiding; and he was not hiding. He was not hiding from God; he was not hiding from himself. He was in the broad daylight. If they'd taken him back to prison, he'd still have been quite happy. He was not whitewashed, but washed white. There was something very strange about him; almost as strange as the grotesque dance of death through which he was dragged after he was dead. When he moved to and fro smiling among these beehives, even then, in a most radiant and shining sense, he was dead. He was out of the judgment of this world."

There was a short pause, and then Devine shrugged his shoulders and said: "It all comes back to bees and wasps looking very much alike in this world, doesn't it?"

III THE SONG OF THE FLYING FISH

THE soul of Mr. Peregrine Smart hovered like a fly round one possession and one joke. It might be considered a mild joke, for it consisted merely of asking people if they had seen his goldfish. It might also be considered an expensive joke; but it is doubtful whether he was not secretly more attached to the joke than to the evidence of expenditure. In talking to his neighbours in the little group of new houses that had grown up round the old village green, he lost no time in turning the conversation in the direction of his hobby. To Dr. Burdock, a rising biologist with a resolute chin and hair brushed back like a German's, Mr. Smart made the easy transition. "You are interested in natural history; have you seen my goldfish?" To so orthodox an evolutionist as Dr. Burdock doubtless all nature was one; but at first sight the link was not close, as he was a specialist who had concentrated entirely upon the primitive ancestry of the giraffe. To Father Brown, from a church in the neighbouring provincial town, he traced a rapid train of thought which touched on the topics of "Rome--St. Peter--fisherman--fish--goldfish." In talking to Mr. Imlack Smith, the bank manager, a slim and sallow gentleman of dressy appearance but quiet demeanour, he violently wrecked the conversation to the subject of the gold standard, from which it was merely a step to goldfish. In talking to that brilliant Oriental traveller and scholar, Count Yvon de Lara (whose title was French and his face rather Russian, not to say Tartar), the versatile conversationalist showed an intense and intelligent interest in the Ganges and the Indian Ocean, leading naturally to the possible presence of goldfish in those waters.

From Mr. Harry Hartopp, the very rich but very shy and silent young gentleman who had recently come down from London, he had at last extorted the information that the embarrassed youth in question was not interested in fishing, and had then added: "Talking about fishing, have you seen my goldfish?"

The peculiar thing about the goldfish was that they were made of gold. They were part of an eccentric but expensive toy, said to have been made by the freak of some rich Eastern prince, and Mr. Smart had picked it up at some sale or in some curiosity shop, such as he frequented for the purpose of lumbering up his house with unique..."
and useless things. From the other end of the room it looked like a rather unusually large bowl containing rather unusually large living fish; a closer inspection showed it to be a huge bubble of beautifully blown Venetian glass, very thin and delicately clouded with faintly iridescent colour, in the tinted twilight of which hung grotesque golden fishes with great rubies for eyes. The whole thing was undoubtedly worth a great deal in solid material; how much more would depend upon the waves of lunacy passing over the world of collectors. Mr. Smart's new secretary, a young man named Francis Boyle, though an Irishman and not credited with caution, was mildly surprised at his talking so freely of the gems of his collection to the group of comparative strangers who happened to have alighted in a rather nomadic fashion in the neighbourhood; for collectors are commonly vigilant and sometimes secretive. In the course of settling down to his new duties, Mr. Boyle found he was not alone in this sentiment, and that in others, it passed from a mild wonder to a grave disapproval.

"It's a wonder his throat isn't cut," said Mr. Smart's valet, Harris, not without a hypothetical relish, almost as if he had said, in a purely artistic sense: "It's a pity."

"It's extraordinary how he leaves things about," said Mr. Smart's head clerk, Jameson, who had come up from the office to assist the new secretary, "and he won't even put up those ramshackle old bars across his ramshackle old door."

"It's all very well with Father Brown and the doctor," said Mr. Smart's housekeeper, with a certain vigorous vagueness that marked her opinions, "but when it comes to foreigners, I call it tempting providence. It isn't only the Count, either; that man at the bank looks much too yellow to be English."

"Well, that young Hartopp is English enough," said Boyle good- humouredly, "to the extent of not having a word to say for himself."

"He thinks the more," said the housekeeper. "He may not be exactly a foreigner, but he is not such a fool as he looks. Foreign is as foreign does, I say," she added darkly.

Her disapproval would probably have deepened if she had heard the conversation, in her master's drawing-room that afternoon, a conversation of which the goldfish were the text, though the offensive foreigner tended more and more to be the central figure. It was not that he spoke so very much; but even his silences had something positive about them. He looked the more massive for sitting in a sort of heap on a heap of cushions, and in the deepening twilight his wide Mongolian face seemed faintly luminous, like a moon. Perhaps his background brought out something atmospherically Asiatic about his face and figure, for the room was a chaos of more or less costly curiosities, amid which could be seen the crooked curves and burning colours of countless Eastern weapons, Eastern pipes and vessels, Eastern musical instruments and illuminated manuscripts. Anyhow, as the conversation proceeded, Boyle felt more and more that the figure seated on the cushions and dark against the twilight had the exact outline of a huge image of Buddha.

The conversation was general enough, for all the little local group were present. They were, indeed, often in the habit of dropping in at each other's houses, and by this time constituted a sort of club, of people coming from the four or five houses standing round the green. Of these houses Peregrine Smart's was the oldest, largest, and most picturesque; it straggled down almost the whole of one side of the square, leaving only room for a small villa, inhabited by a retired colonel named Varney, who was reported to be an invalid, and certainly was never seen to go abroad. At right angles to these stood two or three shops that served the simpler needs of the hamlet, and at the corner the inn of the Blue Dragon, at which Mr. Hartopp, the stranger from London, was staying. On the opposite side were three houses, one rented by the Count de Lara, one by Dr. Burdock, and the third still standing empty. On the fourth side was the bank, with an adjoining house for the bank manager, and a line offence enclosing some land that was let for building. It was thus a very self-contained group, and the comparative emptiness of the open ground for miles round it threw the members more and more on each other's society. That afternoon, one stranger had indeed broken into the magic circle: a hatchet-faced fellow with fierce tufts of eyebrows and moustache, and so shabbily dressed that he must have been a millionaire or a duke if he had really (as was alleged) come down to do business with the old collector. But he was known, at the Blue Dragon at least, as Mr. Harmer.

To him had been recounted anew the glories of the gilded fish and the criticisms regarding their custody.

"People are always telling me I ought to lock them up more carefully," observed Mr. Smart, cocking an eyebrow over his shoulder at the dependant who stood there holding some papers from the office. Smart was a round-faced, round-bodied little old man rather like a bald parrot. "Jameson and Harris and the rest are always at me to bar the doors as if it were a mediaeval fortress, though really these rotten old rusty bars are too mediaeval to keep anybody out, I should think. I prefer to trust to luck and the local police."

"It is not always the best bars that keep people out," said the Count. "It all depends on who's trying to get in. There was an ancient Hindu hermit who lived naked in a cave and passed through the three armies that encircled the Mogul and took the great ruby out of the tyrant's turban, and went back unscathed like a shadow. For he wished to teach the great how small are the laws of space and time."
"When we really study the small laws of space and time," said Dr. Burdock dryly, "we generally find out how those tricks are done. Western science has let in daylight on a good deal of Eastern magic. Doubtless a great deal can be done with hypnotism and suggestion, to say nothing of sleight-of-hand."

"The ruby was not in the royal tent," observed the Count in his dream fashion; "but he found it among a hundred tents."

"Can't all that be explained by telepathy?" asked the doctor sharply. The question sounded the sharper because it was followed by a heavy silence, almost as if the distinguished Oriental traveller had, with imperfect politeness, gone to sleep. "I beg your pardon," he said rousing himself with a sudden smile. "I had forgotten we were talking with words. In the east we talk with thoughts, and so we never misunderstand each other. It is strange how you people worship words and are satisfied with words. What difference does it make to a thing that you now call it telepathy, as you once called it tomfoolery? If a man climbs into the sky on a mango-tree, how is it altered by saying it is only levitation, instead of saying it is only lies. If a medieval witch waved a wand and turned me into a blue baboon, you would say it was only atavism."

"I will tell you a story," said de Lara, in his motionless way, "which happened not in India, but outside an English barrack in the most modernized part of Cairo. A sentinel was standing inside the grating of an iron gateway looking out between the bars on to the street. There appeared outside the gate a beggar, barefoot and in native rags, who asked him, in English that was startlingly distinct and refined, for a certain official document kept in the building for safety. The soldier told the man, of that he could not come inside; and the man answered, smiling: course, 'What is inside and what is outside?' The soldier was still staring scornfully through the iron grating when he gradually realized that, though neither he nor the gate had moved, he was actually standing in the street and looking in at the barrack yard, where the beggar stood still and smiling and equally motionless. Then, when the beggar turned towards the building, the sentry awoke to such sense as he had left, and shouted a warning to all the soldiers within the gated enclosure to hold the prisoner fast. 'You won't get out of there anyhow,' he said vindictively. Then the beggar said in his silvery voice: 'What is outside and what is inside?' And the soldier, still glaring through the same bars, saw that they were once more between him and the street, where the beggar stood free and smiling with a paper in his hand."

Mr. Imlack Smith, the bank manager, was looking at the carpet with his dark sleek head bowed, and he spoke for the first time. "Did anything happen about the paper?" he asked. "Your professional instincts are correct, sir," said the Count with grim affability. "It was a paper of considerable financial importance. Its consequences were international."

"I hope they don't occur often," said young Hartopp gloomily. "I do not touch the political side," said the Count serenely, "but only the philosophical. It illustrates how the wise man can get behind time and space and turn the levers of them, so to speak, so that the whole world turns round before our eyes. But is it so hard for you people to believe that spiritual powers are really more powerful than material ones."

"Well," said old Smart cheerfully, "I don't profess to be an authority on spiritual powers. What do you say, Father Brown?"

"The only thing that strikes me," answered the little priest, "is that all the supernatural acts we have yet heard of seem to be thefts. And stealing by spiritual methods seem to me much the same as stealing by material ones."

"Father Brown is a Philistine," said the smiling Smith. "I have a sympathy with the tribe," said Father Brown. "A Philistine is only a man who is right without knowing why."

"All this is too clever for me," said Hartopp heartily. "Perhaps," said Father Brown with a smile, "you would like to speak without words, as the Count suggests. He would begin by saying nothing in a pointed fashion, and you would retort with a burst of taciturnity."

"Something might be done with music," murmured the Count dreamily. "It would be better than all these words."

"Yes, I might understand that better," said the young man in a low voice.

Boyle had followed the conversation with curious attention, for there was something in the demeanour of more than one of the talkers that seemed to him significant or even odd. As the talk drifted to music, with an appeal to the
dapper bank manager (who was an amateur musician of some merit), the young secretary awoke with a start to his secretarial duties, and reminded his employer that the head clerk was still standing patiently with the papers in his hand.

"Oh, never mind about those just now, Jameson," said Smart rather hurriedly. "Only something about my account; I'll see Mr. Smith about it later. You were saying that the 'cello, Mr. Smith----"

But the cold breath of business had sufficed to disperse the fumes of transcendental talk, and the guests began one after another to say farewell. Only Mr. Imlack Smith, bank manager and musician, remained to the last; and when the rest were gone he and his host went into the inner room, where the goldfish were kept, and closed the door.

The house was long and narrow, with a covered balcony running along the first floor, which consisted mostly of a sort of suite of rooms used by the householder himself, his bedroom and dressing-room, and an inner room in which his very valuable treasures were sometimes stored for the night instead of being left in the rooms below. This balcony, like the insufficiently barred door below it, was a matter of concern to the housekeeper and the head clerk and the others who lamented the carelessness of the collector; but, in truth, that cunning old gentleman was more careful than he seemed. He professed no great belief in the antiquated fastenings of the old house, which the housekeeper lamented to see rusting in idleness, but he had an eye to the more important point of strategy. He always put his favourite goldfish in the room at the back of his bedroom for the night, and slept in front of it, as it were, with a pistol under his pillow. And when Boyle and Jameson, awaiting his return from the tete-a-tete, at length saw the door open and their employer reappear, he was carrying the great glass bowl as reverently as if it had been the relic of a saint.

Outside, the last edges of the sunset still clung to the corners of the green square; but inside, a lamp had already been kindled; and in the mingling of the two lights the coloured globe glowed like some monstrous jewel, and the fantastic outlines of the fiery fishes seemed to give it, indeed, something of the mystery of a talisman, like strange shapes seen by a seer in the crystal of doom. Over the old man's shoulder the olive face of Imlack Smith stared like a sphinx.

"I am going up to London to-night, Mr. Boyle," said old Smart, with more gravity than he commonly showed. "Mr. Smith and I are catching the six-forty-five. I should prefer you, Jameson, to sleep upstairs in my room to-night; if you put the bowl in the back room as usual, it will be quite safe then. Not that I suppose anything could possibly happen."

"Anything may happen anywhere," said the smiling Mr. Smith. "I think you generally take a gun to bed with you. Perhaps you had better leave it behind in this case."

Peregrine Smart did not reply, and they passed out of the house on to the road round the village green.

The secretary and the head clerk slept that night as directed in their employer's bedroom. To speak more strictly, Jameson, the head clerk, slept in a bed in the dressing-room, but the door stood open between, and the two rooms running along the front were practically one. Only the bedroom had a long French window giving on the balcony, and an entrance at the back into the inner apartment where the goldfish bowl had been placed for safety. Boyle dragged his bed right across so as to bar this entrance, put the revolver under his pillow, and then undressed and went to bed, feeling that he had taken all possible precautions against an impossible or improbable event. He did not see why there should be any particular danger of normal burglary; and as for the spiritual burglary that figured in the traveller's tales of the Count de Lara, if his thoughts ran on them so near to sleep it was because they were such stuff as dreams are made of. They soon turned into dreams with intervals of dreamless slumber. The old clerk was a little more restless as usual; but after fussing about a little longer and repeating some of his favourite regrets and warnings, he also retired to his bed in the same manner and slept. The moon brightened and grew dim again above the green square and the grey blocks of houses in a solitude and silence that seemed to have no human witness; and it was when the white cracks of daybreak had already appeared in the corners of the grey sky that the thing happened.

Boyle, being young, was naturally both the healthier and the heavier sleeper of the two. Though active enough when he was once awake, he always had a load to lift in waking. Moreover, he had dreams of the sort that cling to the emerging minds like the dim tentacles of an octopus. They were a medley of many things, including his last look from the balcony across the four grey roads and the green square. But the pattern of them changed and shifted and turned dizzily, to the accompaniment of a low grinding noise, which sounded somehow like a subterranean river, and may have been no more than old Mr. Jameson snoring in the dressing-room. But in the dreamer's mind all that murmur and motion was vaguely connected with the words of the Count de Lara, about a wisdom that could hold the levers of time and space and turn the world. In the dream it seemed as if a vast murmuring machinery under the world were really moving whole landscapes hither and thither, so that the ends of the earth might appear in a man's front-garden, or his own front-garden be exiled beyond the sea.

The first complete impressions he had were the words of a song, with a rather thin metallic accompaniment; they
were sung in a foreign accent and a voice that was still strange and yet faintly familiar. And yet he could hardly feel sure that he was not making up poetry in his sleep.

Over the land and over the sea
My flying fishes will come to me,
For the note is not of the world that wakes them,
But in----

He struggled to his feet and saw that his fellow-guardian was already out of bed; Jameson was peering out of the long window on to the balcony and calling out sharply to someone in the street below.

"Who's that?" he called out sharply. "What do you want?"

He turned to Boyle in agitation, saying: "There's somebody prowling about just outside. I knew it wasn't safe. I'm going down to bar that front door, whatever they say."

He ran downstairs in a flutter and Boyle could hear the clattering of the bars upon the front door; but Boyle himself stepped out upon the balcony and looked out on the long grey road that led up to the house, and he thought he was still dreaming.

Upon that grey road leading across that empty moor and through that little English hamlet, there had appeared a figure that might have stepped straight out of the jungle or the bazaar--a figure out of one of the Count's fantastic stories; a figure out of the "Arabian Nights." The rather ghostly grey twilight which begins to define and yet to discolour everything when the light in the east has ceased to be localized, lifted slowly like a veil of grey gauze and showed him a figure wrapped in outlandish raiment. A scarf of a strange sea-blue, vast and voluminous, went round the head like a turban, and then again round the chin, giving rather the general character of a hood; so far as the face was concerned it had a the effects of a mask. For the raiment round the head was drawn close as a veil; and the head itself was bowed over a queer-looking musical instrument made of silver or steel, and shaped like a deformed or crooked violin. It was played with something like a silver comb, and the notes were curiously thin and keen. Before Boyle could open his mouth, the same haunting alien accent came from under the shadow of the burnous, singing:

As the golden birds go back to the tree
My golden fishes return to me.
Return----

"You've no right here," called out Boyle in exasperation, hardly knowing what he said.

"I have a right to the goldfish," said the stranger, speaking more like King Solomon than an unsandalled Bedouin in a ragged blue cloak. "And they will come to me. Come!"

He struck his strange fiddle as his voice rose sharply on the word. There was a pang of sound that seemed to pierce the mind, and then there came a fainter sound, like an answer: a vibrant whisper. It came from the dark room behind where the bowl of goldfish was standing.

Boyle turned towards it; and even as he turned the echo in the inner room changed to a long tingling sound like an electric bell, and then to a faint crash. It was still a matter of seconds since he had challenged the man from the balcony; but the old clerk had already regained the top of the stairs, panting a little, for he was an elderly gentleman.

"I've locked up the door, anyhow," he said.

"The stable door," said Boyle out of the darkness of the inner room.

Jameson followed him into that apartment and found him staring down at the floor, which was covered with a litter of coloured glass like the curved bits of a broken rainbow.

"What do you mean by the stable door?" began Jameson.

"I mean that the steed is stolen," answered Boyle. "The flying steeds. The flying fishes our Arab friend outside has just whistled to like so many performing puppies."

"But how could he?" exploded the old clerk, as if such events were hardly respectable.

"Well, they're gone," said Boyle shortly. "The broken bowl is here, which would have taken a long time to open properly, but only a second to smash. But the fish are gone, God knows how, though I think our friend ought to be asked."

"We are wasting time," said the distracted Jameson. "We ought to be after him at once."

"Much better be telephoning the police at once," answered Boyle. "They ought to outstrip him in a flash with motors and telephones that go a good deal farther than we should ever get, running through the village in our nightgowns. But it may be there are things even the police cars and wires won't outstrip."

While Jameson was talking to the police-station through the telephone in an agitated voice, Boyle went out again on to the balcony and hastily scanned that grey landscape of daybreak. There was no trace of the man in the turban, and no other sign of life, except some faint stirrings an expert might have recognized in the hotel of the Blue Dragon. Only Boyle, for the first time, noted consciously something that he had all along been noting unconsciously.
It was like a fact struggling in the submerged mind and demanding its own meaning. It was simply the fact that the grey landscape had never been entirely grey; there was one gold spot amid its stripes of colourless colour, a lamp lighted in one of the houses on the other side of the green-Something, perhaps irrational, told him that it had been burning through all the hours of the darkness and was only fading with the dawn. He counted the houses, and his calculation brought out a result which seemed to fit in with something, he knew not what. Anyhow, it was apparently the house of the Count Yvon de Lara.

Inspector Pinner had arrived with several policemen, and done several things of a rapid and resolute sort, being conscious that the very absurdity of the costly trinkets might give the case considerable prominence in the newspapers. He had examined everything, measured, everything, taken down everybody's deposition, taken everybody's finger-prints, put everybody's back up, and found himself at the end left facing a fact which he could not believe. An Arab from the desert had walked up the public road and stopped in front of the house of Mr. Peregrine Smart, where a bowl of artificial goldfish was kept in an inner room; he had then sung or recited a little poem, and the bowl had exploded like a bomb and the fishes vanished into thin air. Nor did it soothe the inspector to be told by a foreign Count—in a soft, purring voice—that the bounds of experience were being enlarged.

Indeed, the attitude of each member of the little group was characteristic enough. Peregrine Smart himself had come back from London the next morning to hear the news of his loss. Naturally he admitted a shock; but it was typical of something sporting and spirited in the little old gentleman, something that always made his small strutting figure look like a cock-sparrow's, that he showed more vivacity in the search than depression at the loss. The man named Harmer, who had come to the village on purpose to buy the goldfish, might be excused for being a little testy on learning they were not there to be bought. But, in truth, his rather aggressive moustache and eyebrows seemed to bristle with something more definite than disappointment, and the eyes that darted over the company were bright with a vigilance that might well be suspicion. The sallow face of the bank manager, who had also returned from London though by a later train, seemed again and again to attract those shining and shifting eyes like a magnet. Of the two remaining figures of the original circle, Father Brown was generally silent when he was not spoken to, and the dazed Hartopp was often silent even when he was.

But the Count was not a man to let anything pass that gave an apparent advantage to his views. He smiled at his rationalistic rival, the doctor, in the manner of one who knows how it is possible to be irritating by being ingratiating.

"You will admit, doctor," he said, "that at least some of the stories you thought so improbable look a little more realistic to-day than they did yesterday. When a man as ragged as those I described is able, by speaking a word, to dissolve a solid vessel inside the four walls of the house he stands outside, it might perhaps be called an example of what I said about spiritual powers and material barriers."

"And it might be called an example of what I said," said the doctor sharply, "about a little scientific knowledge being enough to show how the tricks are done."

"Do you really mean, doctor," asked Smart in some excitement, "that you can throw any scientific light on this mystery?"

"I can throw light on what the Count calls a mystery," said the doctor, "because it is not a mystery at all. That part of it is plain enough. A sound is only a wave of vibration, and certain vibrations can break glass, if the sound is of a certain kind and the glass of a certain kind. The man did not stand in the road and think, which the Count tells us is the ideal method when Orientals want a little chat. He sang out what he wanted, quite loud, and struck a shrill note on an instrument. It is similar to many experiments by which glass of special composition has been cracked."

"Such as the experiment," said the Count lightly, "by which several lumps of solid gold have suddenly ceased to exist."

"Here comes Inspector Pinner," said Boyle. "Between ourselves, I think he would regard the doctor's natural explanation as quite as much of a fairy tale as the Count's preternatural one. A very sceptical intellect, Mr. Pinner's, especially about me. I rather think I am under suspicion."

"I think we are all under suspicion," said the Count.

It was the presence of this suspicion in his own case that led Boyle to seek the personal advice of Father Brown. They were walking round the village green together, some hours later in the day, when the priest, who was frowning thoughtfully at the ground as he listened, suddenly stopped.

"Do you see that?" he asked. "Somebody's been washing the pavement here—just this little strip of pavement outside Colonel Varney's house. I wonder whether that was done yesterday."

Father Brown looked rather earnestly at the house, which was high and narrow, and carried rows of striped sun-blinds of gay but already faded colours. The chinks or crannies that gave glimpses of the interior looked all the darker; indeed, they looked almost black in contrast with the facade thus golden in the morning light.

"That is Colonel Varney's house, isn't it?" he asked. "He comes from the East, too, I fancy. What sort of man is
"I've never even seen him," answered Boyle. "I don't think anybody's seen him, except Dr. Burdock, and I rather fancy the doctor doesn't see him more than he need."

"Well, I'm going to see him for a minute," said Father Brown.

The big front door opened and swallowed the small priest, and his friend stood staring at it in a dazed and irrational manner, as if wondering whether it would ever open again. It opened in a few minutes, and Father Brown emerged, still smiling, and continued his slow and pottering progress round the square of roads. Sometimes he seemed to have forgotten the matter in hand altogether, for he would make passing remarks on historical and social questions, or on the prospects of development in the district. He remarked on the soil used for the beginning of a new road by the bank; he looked across the old village green with a vague expression.

"Common land. I suppose people ought to feed their pigs and geese on it, if they had any pigs or geese; as it is, it seems to feed nothing but nettles and thistles. What a pity that what was supposed to be a sort of large meadow has been turned into a small and petty wilderness. That's Dr. Burdock's house opposite, isn't it?"

"Yes," answered Boyle, almost jumping at this abrupt postscript.

"Very well," answered Father Brown, "then I think we'll go indoors again."

As they opened the front door of Smart's house and mounted the stairs, Boyle repeated to his companion many details of the drama enacted there at daybreak.

"I suppose you didn't doze off again?" asked Father Brown, "giving time for somebody to scale the balcony while Jameson ran down to secure the door."

"No," answered Boyle; "I am sure of that. I woke up to hear Jameson challenging the stranger from the balcony; then I heard him running downstairs and putting up the bars, and then in two strides I was on the balcony myself."

"Or could he have slipped in between you from another angle? Are there any other entrances besides the front entrance?"

"Apparently there are not," said Boyle gravely.

"I had better make sure, don't you think?" asked Father Brown apologetically, and scuttled softly downstairs again. Boyle remained in the front bedroom gazing rather doubtfully after him. After a comparatively brief interval the round and rather rustic visage appeared again at the head of the stairs, looking rather like a turnip ghost with a broad grin.

"No; I think that settles the matter of entrances," said the turnip ghost, cheerfully. "And now, I think, having got everything in a tight box, so to speak, we can take stock of what we've got. It's rather a curious business."

"Do you think," asked Boyle, 'that the Count or the colonel, or any of these Eastern travellers have anything to do with it? Do you think it is--preternatural?"

"I will grant you this," said the priest gravely, "if the Count, or the colonel, or any of your neighbours did dress up in Arab masquerade and creep up to this house in the dark--then it was preternatural."

"What do you mean? Why?"

"Because the Arab left no footprints," answered Father Brown. "The colonel on the one side and the banker on the other are the nearest of your neighbours. That loose red soil is between you and the bank, it would print off bare feet like a plaster cast and probably leave red marks everywhere. I braved the colonel's curry-seasoned temper to verify the fact that the front pavement was washed yesterday and not to-day; it was wet enough to make wet footprints all along the road. Now, if the visitor were the Count or the doctor in the houses opposite, he might possibly, of course, have come across the common. But he must have found it exceedingly uncomfortable with bare feet, for it is, as I remarked, one mass of thorns and thistles and stinging nettles. He would surely have pricked himself and probably left traces of it. Unless, as you say, he was a preternatural being."

Boyle looked steadily at the grave and indecipherable face of his clerical friend.

"Do you mean that he was?" he asked, at length.

"There is one general truth to remember," said Father Brown, after a pause. "A thing can sometimes be too close to be seen, as, for instance, a man cannot see himself. There was a man who had a fly in his eye when he looked through the telescope, and he discovered that there was a most incredible dragon in the moon. And I am told that if a man hears the exact reproduction of his own voice it sounds like the voice of a stranger. In the same way, if anything is right in the foreground of our life we hardly see it, and if we did we might think it quite odd. If the thing in the foreground got into the middle distance, we should probably think it had come from the remote distance. Just come outside the house again for a moment. I want to show you how it looks from another standpoint."

He had already risen, and as they descended the stairs he continued his remarks in a rather groping fashion as if he were thinking aloud.

"The Count and the Asiatic atmosphere all come in, because, in a case like this, everything depends on the preparation of the mind. A man can reach a condition in which a brick, falling on his head, will seem to be a
Babylonian brick carved with cuneiform, and dropped from the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, so that he will never even look at the brick and see it is of one pattern with the bricks or his own house. So in your case——"

"What does this mean?" interrupted Boyle, staring and pointing at the entrance. "What in the name of wonder does it mean? The door is barred again."

He was staring at the front door by which they had entered but a little while before, and across which stood, once more, the great dark bands of rusty iron which had once, as he had said, locked the stable door too late. There was something darkly and dumbly ironic in those old fastenings closing behind them and imprisoning them as if of their own motion.

"Oh those!" said Father Brown casually. "I put up those bars myself, just now. Didn't you hear me?"

"No," answered Boyle, staring. "I heard nothing."

"Well, I rather thought you wouldn't," said the other equably. "There's really no reason why anybody upstairs should hear those bars being put up. A sort of hook fits easily into a sort of hole. When you're quite close you hear a dull click; but that's all. The only thing that makes any noise a man could hear upstairs, is this."

And he lifted the bar out of its socket and let it fall with a clang at the side of the door,

"It does make a noise if you unbar the door," said Father Brown gravely, "even if you do it pretty carefully."

"You mean--"

"I mean," said Father Brown, "that what you heard upstairs was Jameson opening the door and not shutting it. And now let's open the door ourselves and go outside."

When they stood outside in the street, under the balcony, the little priest resumed his previous explanation as coolly as if it had been a chemical lecture.

"I was saying that a man may be in the mood to look for something very distant, and not realize that it is something very close, something very close to himself, perhaps something very like himself. It was a strange and outlandish thing that you saw when you looked down at this road. I suppose it never occurred to you to consider what he saw when he looked up at that balcony?"

Boyle was staring at the balcony and did not answer, and the other added:

"You thought it very wild and wonderful that an Arab should come through civilized England with bare feet. You did not remember that at the same moment you had bare feet yourself."

Boyle at last found words, and it was to repeat words already spoken.

"Jameson opened the door," he said mechanically.

"Yes," assented, his friend. "Jameson opened the door and came out into the road in his nightclothes, just as you came out on the balcony. He caught up two things that you had seen a hundred times: the length of old blue curtain that he wrapped round his head, and the Oriental musical instrument you must have often seen in that heap of Oriental curiosities. The rest was atmosphere and acting, very fine acting, for he is a very fine artist in crime."

"Jameson!" exclaimed Boyle incredulously. "He was such a dull old stick that I never even noticed him."

"Precisely," said the priest, "he was an artist. If he could act a wizard or a troubadour for six minutes, do you think he could not act a clerk for six weeks?"

"I am still not quite sure of his object," said Boyle.

"His object has been achieved," replied Father Brown, "or very nearly achieved. He had taken the goldfish already, of course, as he had twenty chances of doing. But if he had simply taken them, everybody would have realized that he had twenty chances of doing it. By creating a mysterious magician from the end of the earth, he set everybody's thoughts wandering far afield to Arabia and India, so that you yourself can hardly believe that the whole thing was so near home. It was too close to you to be seen."

"If this is true," said Boyle, "it was an extraordinary risk to run, and he had to cut it very fine. It's true I never heard the man in the street say anything while Jameson was talking from the balcony, so I suppose that was all a fake. And I suppose it's true that there was time for him to get outside before I had fully woken up and got out on to the balcony."

"Every crime depends on somebody not waking up too soon," replied Father Brown; "and in every sense most of us wake up too late. I, for one, have woken up much too late. For I imagine he's bolted long ago, just before or just after they took his finger-prints."

"You woke up before anybody else, anyhow," said Boyle, "and I should never have woken up in that sense. Jameson was so correct and colourless that I forgot all about him."

"Beware of the man you forget," replied his friend; "he is the one man who has you entirely at a disadvantage. But I did not suspect him, either, until you told me how you had heard him barring the door."

"Anyhow, we owe it all to you," said Boyle warmly.

"You owe it all to Mrs. Robinson," said Father Brown with a smile.

"Mrs. Robinson?" questioned the wondering secretary. "You don't mean the housekeeper?"
"Beware of the woman you forget, and even more," answered the other. "This man was a very high-class criminal; he had been an excellent actor, and therefore he was a good psychologist. A man like the Count never hears any voice but his own; but this man could listen, when you had all forgotten he was there, and gather exactly the right materials for his romance and know exactly the right note to strike to lead you all astray. But he made one bad mistake in the psychology of Mrs. Robinson, the housekeeper."

"I don't understand," answered Boyle, "what she can have to do with it."

"Jameson did not expect the doors to be barred," said Father Brown. "He knew that a lot of men, especially careless men like you and your employer, could go on saying for days that something ought to be done, or might as well be done. But if you convey to a woman that something ought to be done, there is always a dreadful danger that she will suddenly do it."

IV THE ACTOR AND THE ALIBI

MR. MUNDON MANDEVILLE, the theatrical manager, walked briskly through the passages behind the scenes, or rather below the scenes. His attire was smart and festive, perhaps a little too festive; the flower in his buttonhole was festive; the very varnish on his boots was festive; but his face was not at all festive. He was a big, bull-necked, black-browed man, and at the moment his brow was blacker than usual. He had in any case, of course, the hundred botherations that besiege a man in such a position; and they ranged from large to small and from new to old. It annoyed him to pass through the passages where the old pantomime scenery was stacked; because he had successfully begun, his career at that theatre with very popular pantomimes, and had since been induced to gamble in more serious and classical drama over which he had dropped a good deal of money. Hence, to see the sapphire Gates of Bluebeard's Blue Palace, or portions of the Enchanted Grove of Golden Orange Trees, leaning up against the wall to be festooned with cobwebs or nibbled by mice, did not give him that soothing sense of a return to simplicity which we all ought to have when given a glimpse of that wonderland of our childhood. Nor had he any time to drop a tear where he had dropped the money, or to dream of this Paradise of Peter Pan; for he had been summoned hurriedly to settle a practical problem, not of the past but of the moment. It was the sort of thing that does sometimes happen in that strange world behind the scenes; but it was big enough to be serious. Miss Maroni, the talented young actress of Italian parentage, who had undertaken to act an important part in the play that was to be rehearsed that afternoon and performed that evening, had abruptly and even violently refused at the last moment to do anything of the kind. He had not even seen the exasperating lady yet; and as she had locked herself up in her dressing-room and defied the world through the door, it seemed unlikely, for the present, that he would. Mr. Mundon Mandeville was sufficiently British to explain it by murmuring that all foreigners were mad; but the thought of his good fortune in inhabiting the only sane island of the planet did not suffice to soothe him any more than the memory of the Enchanted Grove. All these things, and many more, were annoying; and yet a very intimate observer might have suspected that something was wrong with Mr. Mandeville that went beyond annoyance.

If it be possible for a heavy and healthy man to look haggard, he looked haggard. His face was full, but his eyesockets were hollow; his mouth twitched as if it were always trying to bite the black strip of moustache that was just too short to be bitten. He might have been a man who had begun to take drugs; but even on that assumption there was something that suggested that he had a reason for doing it; that the drug was not the cause of the tragedy, but the tragedy the cause of the drug. Whatever was his deeper secret, it seemed to inhabit that dark end of the long passage where was the entrance to his own little study; and as he went along the empty corridor, he threw back a nervous glance now and then.

However, business is business; and he made his way to the opposite end of the passage where the blank green door of Miss Maroni defied the world. A group of actors and other people involved were already standing in front of it, conferring and considering, one might almost fancy, the advisability of a battering-ram. The group contained one figure, at least, who was already well enough known; whose photograph was on many mantelpieces and his autograph in many albums. For though Norman Knight was playing the hero in a theatre that was still a little provincial and old-fashioned and capable of calling him the first walking gentleman, he, at least, was certainly on the way to wider triumphs. He was a good-looking man with a long cleft chin and fair hair low on his forehead, giving him a rather Neronian look that did not altogether correspond to his impulsive and plunging movements. The group also contained Ralph Randall, who generally acted elderly character parts, and had a humorous hatchet face, blue with shaving, and discoloured with grease paint. It contained Mandeville's second walking gentleman, carrying on the not yet wholly vanished tradition of Charles's Friend, a dark, curly-haired youth of somewhat Semitic profile bearing the name of Aubrey Vernon.

It included Mr. Mundon Mandeville's wife's maid or dresser, a very powerful-looking person with tight red hair and a hard wooden face. It also, incidentally, included Mandeville's wife, a quiet woman in the background, with a pale, patient face, the lines of which had not lost a classical symmetry and severity, but which looked all the paler because her very eyes were pale, and her pale yellow hair lay in two plain bands like some very archaic Madonna.
Not everybody knew that she had once been a serious and successful actress in Ibsen and the intellectual drama. But
her husband did not think much of problem plays; and certainly at the moment was more interested in the problem
of getting a foreign actress out of a locked room; a new version of the conjuring trick of the Vanishing Lady.

"Hasn't she come out yet?" he demanded, speaking to his wife's business-like attendant rather than to his wife.

"No, sir," answered the woman--who was known as Mrs. Sands--in a sombre manner.

"We are beginning to get a little alarmed," said old Randall. "She seemed quite unbalanced, and we're afraid she
might even do herself some mischief."

"Hell!" said Mandeville in his simple and artless way. "Advertisement's very good, but we don't want that sort of
advertisement. Hasn't she any friends here? Has nobody any influence with her?"

"Jarvis thinks the only man who might manage her is her own priest round the corner," said Randall; "and in
case she does start hanging herself on a hat peg, I really thought perhaps he'd better be here. Jarvis has gone to fetch
him … and, as a matter of fact, here he comes."

Two more figures appeared in that subterranean passage under the stage: the first was Ashton Jarvis, a jolly
fellow who generally acted villains, but who had surrendered that high vocation for the moment to the curly-headed
youth with the nose. The other figure was short and square and clad all in black; it was Father Brown from the
church round the corner.

Father Brown seemed to take it quite naturally and even casually, that he should be called in to consider the
queer conduct of one of his flock, whether she was to be regarded as a black sheep or only as a lost lamb. But he did
not seem to think much of the suggestion of suicide.

"I suppose there was some reason for her flying off the handle like that," he said. "Does anybody know what it
was?"

"Dissatisfied with her part, I believe," said the older actor.

"They always are," growled Mr. Mundon Mandeville. "And I thought my wife would look after those
arrangements."

"I can only say," said Mrs. Mundon Mandeville rather wearily, "that I gave her what ought to be the best part. It's
supposed to be what stage-struck young women want, isn't it--to act the beautiful young heroine and marry the
beautiful young hero in a shower of bouquets and cheers from the gallery? Women of my age naturally have to fall
back on acting respectable matrons, and I was careful to confine myself to that."

"It would be devilish awkward to alter the parts now, anyhow," said Randall.

"It's not to be thought of," declared Norman Knight firmly. "Why, I could hardly act -- but anyhow it's much too
late."

Father Brown had slipped forward and was standing outside the locked door listening.

"Is there no sound?" asked the manager anxiously; and then added in a lower voice: "Do you think she can have
done herself in?"

"There is a certain sound," replied Father Brown calmly. "I should be inclined to deduce from the sound that she
is engaged in breaking windows or looking-glasses, probably with her feet. No; I do not think there is much danger
of her going on to destroy herself. Breaking looking-glasses with your feet is a very unusual prelude to suicide. If
she had been a German, gone away to think quietly about metaphysics and weltschmerz, I should be all for breaking
the door down. These Italians don't really die so easily; and are not liable to kill themselves in a rage. Somebody
else, perhaps--possibly--it might be well to take ordinary precautions if she comes out with a leap."

"So you're not in favour of forcing the door?" asked Mandeville.

"Not if you want her to act in your play," replied Father Brown. "If you do that, she'll raise the roof and refuse to
stay in the place; if you leave her alone--she'll probably come out from mere curiosity. If I were you, I should just
leave somebody to guard the door, more or less, and trust to time for an hour or two."

"In that case," said Mandeville, "we can only get on with rehearsing the scenes where she doesn't appear. My
wife will arrange all that is necessary for scenery just now. After all, the fourth act is the main business. You had
better get on with that."

"Not a dress rehearsal," said Mandeville's wife to the others.

"Very well," said Knight, "not a dress rehearsal, of course. I wish the dresses of the infernal period weren't so
elaborate."

"What is the play?" asked the priest with a touch of curiosity.

"The School for Scandal," said Mandeville. "It may be literature, but I want plays. My wife likes what she calls
classical comedies. A long sight more classic than comic."

At this moment, the old doorkeeper known as Sam, and the solitary inhabitant of the theatre during off-hours,
came waddling up to the manager with a card, to say that Lady Miriam Marden wished to see him. He turned away,
but Father Brown continued to blink steadily for a few seconds in the direction of the manager's wife, and saw that
her wan face wore a faint smile; not altogether a cheerful smile.

Father Brown moved off in company with the man who had brought him in, who happened, indeed, to be a friend and person of a similar persuasion, which is not uncommon among actors. As he moved off, however, he heard Mrs. Mandeville give quiet directions to Mrs. Sands that she should take up the post of watcher beside the closed door.

"Mrs. Mandeville seems to be an intelligent woman," said the priest to his companion, "though she keeps so much in the background."

"She was once a highly intellectual woman," said Jarvis sadly; "rather washed-out and wasted, some would say, by marrying a bounder like Mandeville. She has the very highest ideals of the drama, you know; but, of course, it isn't often she can get her lord and master to look at anything in that light. Do you know, he actually wanted a woman like that to act as a pantomime boy? Admitted that she was a fine actress, but said pantomimes paid better. That will give you about a measure of his psychological insight and sensibility. But she never complained. As she said to me once: 'Complaint always comes back in an echo from the ends of the world; but silence strengthens us.' If only she were married to somebody who understood her ideas she might have been one of the great actresses of the age; indeed, the highbrow critics still think a lot of her. As it is, she is married to that."

And he pointed to where the big black bulk of Mandeville stood with his back to them, talking to the ladies who had summoned him forth into the vestibule. Lady Miriam was a very long and languid and elegant lady, handsome in a recent fashion largely modelled on Egyptian mummies; her dark hair cut low and square, like a sort of helmet, and her lips very painted and prominent and giving her a permanent expression of contempt. Her companion was a very vivacious lady with an ugly attractive face and hair powdered with grey. She was a Miss Theresa Talbot and she talked a great deal, while her companion seemed too tired to talk at all. Only, just as the two men passed. Lady Miriam summoned up the energy to say:

"Plays are a bore; but I've never seen a rehearsal in ordinary clothes. Might be a bit funny. Somehow, nowadays, one can never find a thing one's never seen."

"Now, Mr. Mandeville," said Miss Talbot, tapping him on the arm with animated persistence, "you simply must let us see that rehearsal. We can't come to-night, and we don't want to. We want to see all the funny people in the wrong clothes."

"Of course I can give you a box if you wish it," said Mandeville hastily. "Perhaps your ladyship would come this way." And he led them off down another corridor.

"I wonder," said Jarvis in a meditative manner, "whether even Mandeville prefers that sort of woman."

"Well," asked his clerical companion, "have you any reason to suppose that Mandeville does prefer her?"

Jarvis looked at him steadily for an instant before answering.

"Mandeville is a mystery," he said gravely. "Oh, yes, I know that he looks about as commonplace a cad as ever walked down Piccadilly. But he really is a mystery for all that. There's something on his conscience. There's a shadow in his life. And I doubt whether it has anything more to do with a few fashionable flirtations than it has with his poor neglected wife. If it has, there's something more in them than meets the eye. As a matter of fact, I happen to know rather more about it than anyone else does, merely by accident. But even I can't make anything of what I know, except a mystery."

He looked around him in the vestibule to see that they were alone and then added, lowering his voice:

"I don't mind telling you, because I know you are a tower of silence where secrets are concerned. But I had a curious shock the other day; and it has been repeated several times since. You know that Mandeville always works in that little room at the end of the passage, just under the stage. Well, twice over I happened to pass by there when everyone thought he was alone; and what's more, when I myself happened to be able to account for all the women in the company, and all the women likely to have to do with him, being absent or at their usual posts."

"All the women?" remarked Father Brown inquiringly.

"There was a woman with him," said Jarvis almost in a whisper. "There's some woman who is always visiting him; somebody that none of us knows. I don't even know how she comes there, since it isn't down the passage to the door; but I think I once saw a veiled or cloaked figure passing out into the twilight at the back of the theatre, like a ghost. But she can't be a ghost. And I don't believe she's even an ordinary 'affair'. I don't think it's love-making. I think it's blackmail."

"What makes you think that?" asked the other.

"Because," said Jarvis, his face turning from grave to grim, "I once heard sounds like a quarrel; and then the strange woman said in a metallic, menacing voice, four words: 'I am your wife.'"

"You think he's a bigamist," said Father Brown reflectively. "Well, bigamy and blackmail often go together, of course. But she may be bluffing as well as blackmailing. She may be mad. These theatrical people often have monomaniacs running after them. You may be right, but I shouldn't jump to conclusions. . . . And talking about
theatrical people, isn't the rehearsal going to begin, and aren't you a theatrical person?"

"I'm not on in this scene," said Jarvis with a smile. "They're only doing one act, you know, until your Italian
friend comes to her senses."

"Talking about my Italian friend," observed the priest, "I should rather like to know whether she has come to her
senses."

"We can go back and see, if you like," said Jarvis; and they descended again to the basement and the long
passage, at one end of which was Mandeville's study and at the other the closed door of Signora Maroni. The door
seemed to be still closed; and. Mrs. Sands sat grimly outside it, as motionless as a wooden idol.

Near the other end of the passage they caught a glimpse of some of the other actors in the scene mounting the
stairs to the stage just above. Vernon and old Randall went ahead, running rapidly up the stairs; but Mrs. Mandeville
went more slowly, in her quietly dignified fashion, and Norman Knight seemed to linger a little to speak to her. A
few words fell on the ears of the unintentional eavesdroppers as they passed.

"I tell you a woman visits him," Knight was saying violently.

"Hush!" said the lady in her voice of silver that still had in it something of steel. "You must not talk like this.
Remember, he is my husband."

"I wish to God I could forget it," said Knight, and rushed up the stairs.

The lady followed him, still pale and calm, to take up her own position there.

"Somebody else knows it," said the priest quietly; "but I doubt whether it is any business of ours."

"Yes," muttered Jarvis; "it seems as if everybody knows it and nobody knows anything about it."

They proceeded along the passage to the other end, where the rigid attendant sat outside the Italian's door.

"No; she ain't come out yet," said the woman in her sullen way; "and she ain't dead, for I heard her moving about
now and then. I dunno what tricks she's up to."

"Do you happen to know, ma'am," said Father Brown with abrupt politeness, "where Mr. Mandeville is just
now?"

"Yes," she replied promptly. "Saw him go into his little room at the end of the passage a minute or two ago; just
before the prompter called and the curtain went up-Must be there still, for I ain't seen him come out."

"There's no other door to his office, you mean," said Father Brown in an off-hand way. "Well, I suppose the
rehearsal's going in full swing now, for all the Signora's sulking."

"Yrs," said Jarvis after a moment's silence; "I can just hear the voices on the stage from here. Old Randall has a
splendid carrying voice."

They both remained for an instant in a listening attitude, so that the booming voice of the actor on the stage
could indeed be heard rolling faintly down the stairs and along the passage. Before they had spoken again or
resumed their normal poise, their ears were filled with another sound. It was a dull but heavy crash and it came from
behind the closed door of Mundon Mandeville's private room.

Father Brown went racing along the passage like an arrow from the bow and was struggling with the door-
handle before Jarvis had wakened with a start and begun to follow him.

"The door is locked," said the priest, turning a face that was a little pale. "And I am all in favour of breaking
down this door."

"Do you mean," asked Jarvis with a rather ghastly look, "that the unknown visitor has got in here again? Do you
think it's anything serious?" After a moment he added: "I may be able to push back the bolt; I know the fastening on
these doors."

He knelt down and pulled out a pocket-knife with a long steel implement, manipulated it for a moment, and the
door swung open on the manager's study. Almost the first thing they noticed was that there was no other door and
even no window, but a great electric lamp stood on the table. But it was not quite the first thing that they noticed; for
even before that they had seen that Mandeville was lying flat on his face in the middle of the room and the blood
was crawling out from under his fallen face like a pattern of scarlet snakes that glittered evilly in that unnatural
subterranean light.

They did not know how long they had been staring at each other when Jarvis said, like one letting loose
something that he had held back with his breath:

"If the stranger got in somehow, she has gone somehow."

"Perhaps we think too much about the stranger," said Father Brown. "There are so many strange things in this
strange theatre that you rather tend to forget some of them."

"Why, which things do you mean?" asked his friend quickly.

"There are many," said the priest. "There is the other locked door, for instance."

"But the other door is locked," cried Jarvis staring.

"But you forgot it all the same," said Father Brown. A few moments afterwards he said thoughtfully: "That Mrs.
Sands is a grumpy and gloomy sort of card."

"Do you mean," asked the other in a lowered voice, "that she's lying and the Italian did come out?"

"No," said the priest calmly; "I think I meant it more or less as a detached study of character."

"You can't mean," cried the actor, "that Mrs. Sands did it herself?"

"I didn't mean a study of her character," said Father Brown.

While they had been exchanging these abrupt reflections, Father Brown had knelt down by the body and ascertained that it was beyond any hope or question a dead body. Lying beside it, though not immediately visible from the doorway, was a dagger of the theatrical sort; lying as if it had fallen from the wound or from the hand of the assassin. According to Jarvis, who recognized the instrument, there was not very much to be learned from it, unless the experts could find some finger-prints. It was a property dagger; that is, it was nobody's property; it had been kic kin about the theatre for a long time, and anybody might have picked it up. Then the priest rose and looked gravely round the room.

"We must send for the police," he said; "and for a doctor, though the doctor comes too late. Looking at this room, by the way, I don't see how our Italian friend could manage it."

"The Italian!" cried his friend; "I should think not. I should have thought she had an alibi, if anybody had. Two separate rooms, both locked, at opposite ends of a long passage, with a fixed witness watching it."

"No," said Father Brown. "Not quite. The difficulty is how she could have got in this end. I think she might have got out the other end."

"And why?" asked the other.

"I told you," said Father Brown, "that it sounded as if she was breaking glass--mirrors or windows. Stupidly enough I forgot something I knew quite well; that she is pretty superstitious. She wouldn't be likely to break a mirror; so I suspect she broke a window. It's true that all this is under the ground floor; but it might be a skylight or a window opening on an area. But there don't seem to be any skylights or areas here." And he stared at the ceiling very intently for a considerable time.

Suddenly he came back to conscious life again with a start. "We must go upstairs and telephone and tell everybody, It is pretty painful ... My God, can you hear those actors still shouting and ranting upstairs? The play is still going on. I suppose that's what they mean by tragic irony."

When it was fated that the theatre should be turned into a house of mourning, an opportunity was given to the actors to show many of the real virtues of their type and trade. They did, as the phrase goes, behave like gentlemen; and not only like first walking gentlemen. They had not all of them liked or trusted Mandeville, but they knew exactly the right things to say about him; they showed not only sympathy but delicacy in their attitude to his widow. She had become, in a new and very different sense, a tragedy queen--her lightest word was law and while she moved about slowly and sadly, they ran her many errands.

"She was always a strong character," said old Randall rather huskily; "and had the best brains of any of us. Of course poor Mandeville was never on her level in education and so on; but she always did her duty splendidly. It was quite pathetic the way she would sometimes say she wished she had more intellectual life; but Mandeville--well, nil nisi bonum, as they say."

And the old gentleman went away wagging his head sadly.

"Nil nisi bonum indeed," said Jarvis grimly. "I don't think Randall at any rate has heard of the story of the strange lady visitor. By the way, don't you think it probably was the strange woman?"

"It depends," said the priest, "whom you mean by the strange woman."

"Oh! I don't mean the Italian woman," said Jarvis hastily. "Though, as a matter of fact, you were quite right about her, too. When they went in the skylight was smashed and the room was empty; but so far as the police can discover, she simply went home in the most harmless fashion. No, I mean the woman who was heard threatening him at that secret meeting; the woman who said she was his wife. Do you think she really was his wife?"

"It is possible," said Father Brown, staring blankly into the void, "that she really was his wife."

"That would give us the motive of jealousy over his bigamous remarriage," reflected Jarvis, "for the body was not robbed in any way. No need to poke about for thieving servants or even impecunious actors. But as for that, of course, you've noticed the outstanding and peculiar thing about the case?"

"I have noticed several peculiar things," said Father Brown. "Which one do you mean?"

"I mean the corporate alibi," said Jarvis gravely. "It's not often that practically a whole company has a public alibi like that; an alibi on a lighted stage and all witnessing to each other. As it turns out it is jolly lucky for our friends here that poor Mandeville did put those two silly society women in the box to watch the rehearsal. They can bear witness that the whole act was performed without a hitch, with the characters on the stage all the time. They began long before Mandeville was last seen going into his room. They went on at least five or ten minutes after you and I found his dead body. And, by a lucky coincidence, the moment we actually heard him fall was during the time when all the characters were on the stage together."

"It's true," said Father Brown, "but as for that, I don't think you've noticed the outstanding and peculiar thing about the case?"

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"Yes, that is certainly very important and simplifies everything," agreed Father Brown. "Let us count the people covered by the alibi. There was Randall: I rather fancy Randall practically hated the manager, though he is very properly covering his feelings just now. But he is ruled out; it was his voice we heard thundering over our heads from the stage. There is our jeune premier, Mr. Knight: I have rather good reason to suppose he was in love with Mandeville's wife and not concealing that sentiment so much as he might; but he is out of it, for he was on the stage at the same time, being thundered at. There was that amiable Jew who calls himself Aubrey Vernon, he's out of it; and there's Mrs. Mandeville, she's out of it. Their corporate alibi, as you say, depends chiefly on Lady Miriam and her friend in the box; though there is the general common-sense corroboration that the act had to be gone through and the routine of the theatre seems to have suffered no interruption. The legal witnesses, however, are Lady Miriam and her friend, Miss Talbot. I suppose you feel sure they are all right?"

"Lady Miriam?" said Jarvis in surprise. "Oh, yes. ... I suppose you mean that she looks a queer sort of vamp. But you've no notion what even the ladies of the best families are looking like nowadays. Besides, is there any particular reason for doubting their evidence?"

"Only that it brings us up against a blank wall," said Father Brown. "Don't you see that this collective alibi practically covers everybody? Those four were the only performers in the theatre at the time; and there were scarcely any servants in the theatre; none indeed, except old Sam, who guards the only regular entrance, and the woman who guarded Miss Maroni's door. There is nobody else left available but you and me. We certainly might be accused of the crime, especially as we found the body. There seems nobody else who can be accused. You didn't happen to kill him when I wasn't looking, I suppose?"

Jarvis looked up with a slight start and stared a moment, then the broad grin returned to his swarthy face. He shook his head.

"You didn't do it," said Father Brown; "and we will assume for the moment, merely for the sake of argument, that I didn't do it. The people on the stage being out of it, it really leaves the Signora behind her locked door, the sentinel in front other door, and old Sam. Or are you thinking of the two ladies in the box? Of course they might have slipped out of the box."

"No," said Jarvis; "I am thinking of the unknown woman who came and told Mandeville she was his wife."

"Perhaps she was," said the priest; and this time there was a note in his steady voice that made his companion start to his feet once more and lean across the table.

"We said," he observed in a low, eager voice, "that this first wife might have been jealous of the other wife."

"No," said Father Brown; "she might have been jealous of the Italian girl, perhaps, or of Lady Miriam Marden. But she was not jealous of the other wife."

"And why not?"

"Because there was no other wife," said Father Brown. "So far from being a bigamist, Mr. Mandeville seems to me to have been a highly monogamous person. His wife was almost too much with him; so much with him that you all charitably suppose that she must be somebody else. But I don't see how she could have been with him when he was killed, for we agree that she was acting all the time in front of the footlights. Acting an important part, too. ..."

"Do you really mean," cried Jarvis, "that the strange woman who haunted him like a ghost was only the Mrs. Mandeville we know?" But he received no answer; for Father Brown was staring into vacancy with a blank expression almost like an idiot's. He always did look most idiotic at the instant when he was most intelligent.

The next moment he scrambled to his feet, looking very harassed and distressed. "This is awful," he said. "I'm not sure it isn't the worst business I ever had; but I've got to go through with it. Would you go and ask Mrs. Mandeville if I may speak to her in private?"

"Oh, certainly," said Jarvis, as he turned towards the door. "But what's the matter with you?"

"Only being a born fool," said Father Brown; "a very common complaint in this vale of tears. I was fool enough to forget altogether that the play was The School For Scandal."

He walked restlessly up and down the room until Jarvis re-appeared at the door with an altered and even alarmed face.

"I can't find her anywhere," he said. "Nobody seems to have seen her."

"They haven't seen Norman Knight either, have they?" asked Father Brown dryly. "Well, it saves me the most painful interview of my life. Saving the grace of God, I was very nearly frightened of that woman. But she was frightened of me, too; frightened of something I'd seen or said. Knight was always begging her to bolt with him. Now she's done it; and I'm devilish sorry for him."

"For him?" inquired Jarvis.

"Well, it can't be very nice to elope with a murderess," said the other dispassionately. "But as a matter of fact she was something very much worse than a murderess."

"And what is that?"
"An egoist," said Father Brown. "She was the sort of person who had looked in the mirror before looking out of the window, and it is the worst calamity of mortal life. The looking-glass was unlucky for her, all right; but rather because it wasn't broken."

"I can't understand what all this means," said Jarvis. "Everybody regarded her as a person of the most exalted ideals, almost moving on a higher spiritual plane than the rest of us. ..."

"She regarded herself in that light," said the other; "and she knew how to hypnotize everybody else into it. Perhaps I hadn't known her long enough to be wrong about her. But I knew the sort of person she was five minutes after I clapped eyes on her."

"Oh, come," cried Jarvis; "I'm sure her behaviour about the Italian was beautiful."

"Her behaviour always was beautiful," said the other. "I've heard from everybody here all about her refinements and subtleties and spiritual soarings above poor Mandeville's head. But all these spiritualities and subtleties seem to me to boil themselves clown to the simple fact that she certainly was a lady and he most certainly was not a gentleman. But, do you know, I have never felt quite sure that St. Peter will make that the only test at the gate of heaven."

"As for the rest," he went on with increasing animation, "I knew from the very first words she said that she was not really being fair to the poor Italian, with all her fine airs of frigid magnanimity. And again, I realized it when I knew that the play was The School for Scandal."

"You are going rather too fast for me," said Jarvis in some bewilderment. "What does it matter what the play was?"

"Well," said the priest, "she said she had given the girl the part of the beautiful heroine and had retired into the background herself with the older part of a matron. Now that might have applied to almost any play; but it falsifies the facts about that particular play. She can only have meant that she gave the other actress the part of Maria, which is hardly a part at all. And the part of the obscure and self-effacing married woman, if you please, must have been the part of Lady Teazle, which is the only part any actress wants to act. If the Italian was a first-rate actress who had been promised a first-rate part, there was really some excuse, or at least some cause, for her mad Italian rage. There generally is for mad Italian rages: Latins are logical and have a reason for going mad. But that one little thing let in daylight for me on the meaning of her magnanimity. And there was another thing, even then. You laughed when I said that the sulky look of Mrs. Sands was a study in character; but not in the character of Mrs. Sands. But it was true. If you want to know what a lady is really like, don't look at her; for she may be too clever for you. Don't look at the men round her, for they may be too silly about her. But look at some other woman who is always near to her, and especially one who is under her. You will see in that mirror her real face, and the face mirrored in Mrs. Sands was very ugly.

"And as for all the other impressions, what were they? I heard a lot about the unworthiness of poor old Mandeville; but it was all about his being unworthy other, and I am pretty certain it came indirectly from her. And, even so, it betrayed itself. Obviously, from what every man said, she had confided in every man about her confounded intellectual loneliness. You yourself said she never complained; and then quoted her about how her uncomplaining silence strengthened her soul. And that is just the note; that's the unmistakable style. People who complain are just jolly, human Christian nuisances; I don't mind them. But people who complain that they never complain are the devil. They are really the devil; isn't that swagger of stoicism the whole point of the Byronic cult of Satan? I heard all this; but for the life of me I couldn't hear of anything tangible she had to complain of. Nobody pretended that her husband drank, or beat her, or left her without money, or even was unfaithful, until the rumour about the secret meetings, which were simply her own melodramatic habit of pestering him with curtain-lectures in his own business office. And when one looked at the facts, apart from the atmospheric impression of martyrdom she contrived to spread, the facts were really quite the other way. Mandeville left off making money on pantomimes to please her; he started losing money on classical drama to please her. She arranged the scenery and furniture as she liked. She wanted Sheridan's play and she had it; she wanted the part of Lady Teazle and she had it; she wanted a rehearsal without costume at that particular hour and she had it. It may be worth remarking on the curious fact that she wanted that."

"But what is the use of all this tirade?" asked the actor, who had hardly ever heard his clerical friend make so long a speech before. "We seem to have got a long way from the murder in all this psychological business. She may have eloped with Knight; she may have bamboozled Randall; she may have bamboozled me. But she can't have murdered her husband--for everyone agrees she was on the stage through the whole scene. She may be wicked; but she isn't a witch."

"Well, I wouldn't be so sure," said Father Brown, with a smile. "But she didn't need to use any witchcraft in this case. I know now that she did it, and very simply indeed."

"Why are you so sure of that?" asked Jarvis, looking at him in a puzzled way.
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There was a silence and then the actor said: "You think she slipped through a trap-door behind a screen down to
the floor below, where the manager's room was?"

"She certainly slipped away in some fashion; and that is the most probable fashion," said the other. "I think it all
the more probable because she took the opportunity of an undress rehearsal, and even indeed arranged for one. It is a
guess; but I fancy if it had been a dress rehearsal it might have been more difficult to get through a trap-door in the
hoops of the eighteenth century. There are many little difficulties, of course, but I think they could all be met in time
and in turn."

"What I can't meet is the big difficulty," said Jarvis, putting his head on his hand with a sort of groan. "I simply
can't bring myself to believe that a radiant and serene creature like that could so lose, so to speak, her bodily
balance, to say nothing of her moral balance. Was any motive strong enough? Was she very much in love with
Knight?"

"I hope so," replied his companion; "for really it would be the most human excuse. But I'm sorry to say that I
have my doubts. She wanted to get rid of her husband, who was an old-fashioned, provincial hack, not even making
much money. She wanted to have a career as the brilliant wife of a brilliant and rapidly-rising actor. But she didn't
want in that sense to act in The School for Scandal. She wouldn't have run away with a man except in the last resort.
It wasn't a human passion with her, but a sort of hellish respectability. She was always dogging her husband in secret
and badgering him to divorce himself or otherwise get out of the way; and as he refused he paid at last for his
refusal. There's another thing you've got to remember. You talk about these highbrows having a higher art and a
more philosophical drama. But remember what a lot of the philosophy is! Remember what sort of conduct those
highbrows often present to the highest! All about the Will to Power and the Right to Live and the Right to
Experience-damned nonsense and more than damned nonsense--nonsense that can damn."

Father Brown frowned, which he did very rarely; and there was still a cloud on his brow as he put on his hat and
went out into the night.

V THE VANISHING OF VAUDREY

SIR ARTHUR VAUDREY, in his light-grey summer suit, and wearing on his grey head the white hat which he
so boldly affected, went walking briskly up the road by the river from his own house to the little group of houses
that were almost like outhouses to his own, entered that little hamlet, and then vanished completely as if he had been
carried away by the fairies.

The disappearance seemed the more absolute and abrupt because of the familiarity of the scene and the extreme
simplicity of the conditions of the problem. The hamlet could not be called a village; indeed, it was little more than a
small and strangely-isolated street. It stood in the middle of wide and open fields and plains, a mere string of the
four or five shops absolutely needed by the neighbours; that is, by a few farmers and the family at the great house.
There was a butcher's at the corner, at which, it appeared, Sir Arthur had last been seen. He was seen by two young
men staying at his house--Evan Smith, who was acting as his secretary, and John Dalmon, who was generally
supposed to be engaged to his ward. There was next to the butcher's a small shop combining a large number of
functions, such as is found in villages, in which a little old woman sold sweets, walking-sticks, golf-balls, gum, balls
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betaking themselves when they last caught a glimpse of their host standing in front of the butcher's shop; and beyond
that was a dingy little dressmaker's, kept by two ladies. A pale and shiny shop, offering to the passer-by great
goblets of very wan, green lemonade, completed the block of buildings; for the only real and Christian inn in the
neighbourhood stood by itself some way, down the main road. Between the inn and the hamlet was a cross-roads, at
which stood a policeman and a uniformed official of a motoring club; and both agreed that Sir Arthur had never
passed that point on the road.

It had been at an early hour of a very brilliant summer day that the old gentleman had gone gaily striding up the
road, swinging his walking-stick and flapping his yellow gloves. He was a good deal of a dandy, but one of a
vigorous and virile sort, especially for his age. His bodily strength and activity were still very remarkable, and his
curly hair might have been a yellow so pale as to look white instead of a white that was a faded yellow. His clean-
shaven face was handsome, with a high-bridged nose like the Duke of Wellington's; but the most outstanding
features were his eyes. They were not merely metaphorically outstanding; something prominent and almost bulging

"Because the play was The School for Scandal," replied Father Brown, "and that particular act of The School for
Scandal. I should like to remind you, as I said just now, that she always arranged the furniture how she liked. I
should also like to remind you that this stage was built and used for pantomimes; it would naturally have trap-doors
and trick exits of that sort. And when you say that witnesses could attest to having seen all the performers on the
stage, I should like to remind you that in the principal scene of The School for Scandal one of the principal
performers remains for a considerable time on the stage, but is not seen. She is technically 'on,' but she might
practically be very much 'off.' That is the Screen of Lady Teazle and the Alibi of Mrs. Mandeville."

There was a silence and then the actor said: "You think she slipped through a trap-door behind a screen down to
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features were his eyes. They were not merely metaphorically outstanding; something prominent and almost bulging
about them was perhaps the only disproportion in his features; but his lips were sensitive and set a little tightly, as if
by an act of will. He was the squire of all that country and the owner of the little hamlet. In that sort of place
everybody not only knows everybody else, but generally knows where anybody is at any given moment. The normal
course would have been for Sir Arthur to walk to the village, to say whatever he wanted to say to the butcher or
anybody else, and then walk back to his house again, all in the course of about half an hour: as the two young men
did when they had bought their cigarettes. But they saw nobody on the road returning; indeed, there was nobody in
sight except the one other guest at the house, a certain Dr. Abbott, who was sitting with his broad back to them on
the river bank, very patiently fishing.

When all the three guests returned to breakfast, they seemed to think little or nothing of the continued absence of
the squire; but when the day wore on and he missed one meal after another, they naturally began to be puzzled, and
Sybil Rye, the lady of the household, began to be seriously alarmed. Expeditions of discovery were dispatched to the
village again and again without finding any trace; and eventually, when darkness fell, the house was full of a definite
fear. Sybil had sent for Father Brown, who was a friend of hers and had helped her out of a difficulty in the past; and
under the pressure of the apparent peril he had consented to remain at the house and see it through.

Thus it happened that when the new day's dawn broke without news, Father Brown was early afoot and on the
look-out for anything; his black, stumpy figure could be seen pacing the garden path where the garden was
embanked along the river, as he scanned the landscape up and down with his short-sighted and rather misty gaze.

He realized that another figure was moving even more restlessly along the embankment, and saluted Evan
Smith, the secretary, by name.

Evan Smith was a tall, fair-haired young man, looking rather harassed, as was perhaps natural in that hour of
distraction. But something of the sort hung about him at all times. Perhaps it was more marked because he had the
sort of athletic reach and poise and the sort of leonine yellow hair and moustache which accompany (always in
fiction and sometimes in fact) a frank and cheerful demeanour of "English youth." As in his case they accompanied
deep and cavernous eyes and a rather haggard look, the contrast with the conventional tall figure and fair hair of
romance may have had a touch of something sinister. But Father Brown smiled at him amiably enough and then said
more seriously:

"This is a trying business."

"It's a very trying business for Miss Rye," answered the young man gloomily; "and I don't see why I should
disguise what's the worst part of it for me, even if she is engaged to Dalmon. Shocked, I suppose?"

Father Brown did not look very much shocked, but his face was often rather expressionless; he merely said,
mildly:

"Naturally, we all sympathize with her anxiety. I suppose you haven't any news or views in the matter?"

"I haven't any news exactly," answered Smith; "no news from outside at least. As for views...." And he relapsed
into moody silence.

"I should be very glad to hear your views," said the little priest pleasantly. "I hope you don't mind my saying that
you seem to have something on your mind."

The young man stirred rather than started and looked at the priest steadily, with a frown that threw his hollow
eyes into dense shadow.

"Well, you're right enough," he said at last. "I suppose I shall have to tell somebody. And you seem a safe sort of
person to tell."

"Do you know what has happened to Sir Arthur?" asked Father Brown calmly, as if it were the most casual
matter in the world.

"Yes," said the secretary harshly. "I think I know what has happened to Sir Arthur."

"A beautiful morning," said a bland voice in his ear; "a beautiful morning for a rather melancholy meeting."

This time the secretary jumped as if he had been shot, as the large shadow of Dr. Abbott fell across his path in
the already strong sunshine. Dr. Abbott was still in his dressing-gown—a sumptuous oriental dressing-gown covered
with coloured flowers and dragons, looking rather like one of the most brilliant flower-beds that were growing under
the glowing sun. He also wore large, flat slippers, which was doubtless why he had come so close to the others
without being heard. He would normally have seemed the last person for such a light and airy approach, for he was a
very big, broad and heavy man, with a powerful benevolent face very much sunburnt, in a frame of old- fashioned
grey whiskers and chin beard, which hung about him luxuriantly, like the long, grey curls of his venerable head. His
long slits of eyes were rather sleepy and, indeed, he was an elderly gentleman to be up so early; but he had a look at
once robust and weatherbeaten, as of an old farmer or sea captain who had once been out in all weathers. He was the
only old comrade and contemporary of the squire in the company that met at the house.

"It seems truly extraordinary," he said, shaking his head. "Those little houses are like dolls' houses, always open
front and back, and there's hardly room to hide anybody, even if they wanted to hide him. And I'm sure they don't.
Dalmon and I cross-examined them all yesterday; they're mostly little old women that couldn't hurt a fly. The men are nearly all away harvesting, except the butcher; and Arthur was seen coining out of the butcher's. And nothing could have happened along that stretch by the river, for I was fishing there all day."

Then he looked at Smith and the look in his long eyes seemed for the moment not only sleepy, but a little sly.

"I think you and Dalmon can testify," he said, "that you saw me sitting there through your whole journey there and back."

"Yes," said Evan Smith shortly, and seemed rather impatient at the long interruption.

"The only thing I can think of," went on Dr. Abbott slowly; and then the interruption was itself interrupted. A figure at once light and sturdy strode very rapidly across the green lawn between the gay flowerbeds, and John Dalmon appeared among them, holding a paper in his hand. He was neatly dressed and rather swarthy, with a very fine square Napoleonic face and very sad eyes--eyes so sad that they looked almost dead. He seemed to be still young, but his black hair had gone prematurely grey about the temples.

"I've just had this telegram from the police," he said "I wired to them last night and they say they're sending down a man at once. Do you know, Dr. Abbott, of anybody else we ought to send for? Relations, I mean, and that sort of thing."

"There is his nephew, Vernon Vaudrey, of course," said the old man. "If you will come with me, I think I can give you his address and --and tell you something rather special about him."

Dr. Abbott and Dalmon moved away in the direction of the house and, when they had gone a certain distance, Father Brown said simply, as if there had been no interruption:

"You were saying?"

"You're a cool hand," said the secretary. "I suppose it comes of hearing confessions. I feel rather as if I were going to make a confession. Some people would feel a bit jolted out of the mood of confidence by that queer old elephant creeping up like a snake. But I suppose I'd better stick to it, though it really isn't my confession, but somebody else's." He stopped a moment, frowning and pulling his moustache; then he said, abruptly:

"I believe Sir Arthur has bolted, and I believe I know why."

There was a silence and then he exploded again.

"I'm in a damnable position, and most people would say I was doing a damnable thing. I am now going to appear in the character of a sneak and a skunk and I believe I am doing my duty."

"You must be the judge," said Father Brown gravely. "What is the matter with your duty?"

"I'm in the perfectly foul position of telling tales against a rival, and a successful rival, too," said the young man bitterly; "and I don't know what else in the world I can do. You were asking what was the explanation of Vaudrey's disappearance. I am absolutely convinced that Dalmon is the explanation."

"You mean," said the priest, with composure, "that Dalmon has killed Sir Arthur?"

"No!" exploded Smith, with startling violence. "No, a hundred times! He hasn't done that, whatever else he's done. He isn't a murderer, whatever else he is. He has the best of all alibis; the evidence of a man who hates him. I'm not likely to perjure myself for love of Dalmon; and I could swear in any court he did nothing to the old man yesterday. Dalmon and I were together all day, or all that part of the day, and he did nothing in the village except buy cigarettes, and nothing here except smoke them and read in the library. No; I believe he is a criminal, but he did not kill Vaudrey. I might even say more; because he is a criminal he did not kill Vaudrey."

"Yes," said the other patiently, "and what does that mean?"

"It means," replied the secretary, "that he is a criminal committing another crime: and his crime depends on keeping Vaudrey alive."

"Oh, I see," said Father Brown.

"I know Sybil Rye pretty well, and her character is a great part of this story. It is a very fine character in both senses: that is, it is of a noble quality and only too delicate a texture. She is one of those people who are terribly conscientious, without any of that armour of habit and hard common sense that many conscientious people get. She is almost insanely sensitive and at the same time quite unselfish. Her history is curious: she was left literally penniless like a foundling and Sir Arthur took her into his house and treated her with consideration, which puzzled many; for, without being hard on the old man, it was not much in his line. But, when she was about seventeen, the explanation came to her with a shock; for her guardian asked her to marry him. Now I come to the curious part of the story. Somehow or other, Sybil had heard from somebody (I rather suspect from old Abbott) that Sir Arthur Vaudrey, in his wilder youth, had committed some crime or, at least, done some great wrong to somebody, which had got him into serious trouble. I don't know what it was. But it was a sort of nightmare to the girl at her crude sentimental age, and made him seem like a monster, at least too much so for the close relation of marriage. What she did was incredibly typical of her. With helpless terror and with heroic courage she told him the truth with her own trembling lips. She admitted that her repulsion might be morbid; she confessed it like a secret madness. To her relief
and surprise he took it quietly and courteously, and apparently said no more on the subject; and her sense of his generosity was greatly increased by the next stage of the story. There came into her lonely life the influence of an equally lonely man. He was camping-out like a sort of hermit on one of the islands in the river; and I suppose the mystery made him attractive, though I admit he is attractive enough; a gentleman, and quite witty, though very melancholy—which, I suppose, increased the romance. It was this man, Dalmon, of course; and to this day I'm not sure how far she really accepted him; but it got as far as his getting permission to see her guardian. I can fancy her awaiting that interview in an agony of terror and wondering how the old beau would take the appearance of a rival. But here, again, she found she had apparently done him an injustice. He received the younger man with hearty hospitality and seemed to be delighted with the prospects of the young couple. He and Dalmon went shooting and fishing together and were the best of friends, when one day she had another shock. Dalmon let slip in conversation some chance phrase that the old man had not changed much in thirty years,' and the truth about the odd intimacy burst upon her. All that introduction and hospitality had been a masquerade; the men had obviously known each other before. That was why the younger man had come down rather covertly to that district. That was why the elder man was lending himself so readily to promote the match. I wonder what you are thinking?"

"I know what you are thinking," said Father Brown, with a smile, "and it seems entirely logical. Here we have Vaudrey, with some ugly story in his past—a mysterious stranger come to haunt him, and getting whatever he wants out of him. In plain words, you think Dalmon is a blackmailer."

"I do," said the other; "and a rotten thing to think, too."

Father Brown reflected for a moment and then said: "I think I should like to go up to the house now and have a talk to Dr. Abbott."

When he came out of the house again an hour or two afterwards, he may have been talking to Dr. Abbott, but he emerged in company with Sybil Rye, a pale girl with reddish hair and a profile delicate and almost tremulous; at the sight other, one could instantly understand all the secretary's story of her shuddering candour. It recalled Godiva and certain tales of virgin martyrs; only the shy can be so shameless for conscience's sake. Smith came forward to meet them, and for a moment they stood talking on the lawn. The day which had been brilliant from daybreak was now glowing and even glaring; but Father Brown carried his black bundle of an umbrella as well as wearing his black umbrella of a hat; and seemed, in a general way, buttoned up to breast the storm. But perhaps it was only an unconscious effect of attitude; and perhaps the storm was not a material storm.

"What I hate about it all," Sybil was saying in a low voice, "is the talk that's beginning already; suspicions against everybody. John and Evan can answer for each other, I suppose; but Dr. Abbott has had an awful scene with the butcher, who thinks he is accused and is throwing accusations about in consequence."

Evan Smith looked very uncomfortable; then blurted out: "Look here, Sybil, I can't say much, but we don't believe there's any need for all that. It's all very beastly, but we don't think there's been—any violence."

"Have you got a theory, then?" said the girl, looking instantly at the priest.

"I have heard a theory," he replied, "which seems to me very convincing."

He stood looking rather dreamily towards the river; and Smith and Sybil began to talk to each other swiftly, in lowered tones. The priest drifted along the river bank, ruminating, and plunged into a plantation of thin trees on an almost overhanging bank. The strong sun beat on the thin veil of little dancing leaves like small green flames, and all the birds were singing as if the tree had a hundred tongues. A minute or two later, Evan Smith heard his own name called cautiously and yet clearly from the green depths of the thicket. He stepped rapidly in that direction and met Father Brown returning. The priest said to him, in a very low voice:

"Don't let the lady come down here. Can't you get rid of her? Ask her to telephone or something; and then come back here again."

Evan Smith turned with a rather desperate appearance of carelessness and approached the girl; but she was not the sort of person whom it is hard to make busy with small jobs for others. In a very short time she had vanished into the house and Smith turned to find that Father Brown had once more vanished into the thicket. Just beyond the clump of trees was a sort of small chasm where the turf had subsided to the level of the sand by the river. Father Brown was standing on the brink of this cleft, looking down; but, either by accident or design, he was holding his hat in his hand, in spite of the strong sun pouring on his head.

"You had better see this yourself," he said, heavily, "as a matter of evidence. But I warn you to be prepared."

"Prepared for what?" asked the other.

"Only for the most horrible thing I ever saw in my life," said Father Brown.

Even Smith stepped to the brink of the bank of turf and with difficulty repressed a cry rather like a scream.

Sir Arthur Vaudrey was glaring and grinning up at him; the face was turned up so that he could have put his foot on it; the head was thrown back, with its wig of whitish yellow hair towards him, so that he saw the face upside down. This made it seem all the more like a part of a nightmare; as if a man were walking about with his head stuck
on the wrong way. What was he doing? Was it possible that Vaudrey was really creeping about, hiding in the cracks of field and bank, and peering out at them in this unnatural posture? The rest of the figure seemed hunched and almost crooked, as if it had been crippled or deformed but on looking more closely, this seemed only the foreshortening of limbs fallen in a heap. Was he mad? Was he? The more Smith looked at him the stiffer the posture seemed.

"You can't see it from here properly," said Father Brown, "but his throat is cut."

Smith shuddered suddenly. "I can well believe it's the most horrible thing you've seen," he said. "I think it's seeing the face upside down. I've seen that face at breakfast, or dinner, every day for ten years; and it always looked quite pleasant and polite. You turn it upside down and it looks like the face of a fiend."

"The face really is smiling," said Father Brown, soberly; "which is perhaps not the least part of the riddle. Not many men smile while their throats are being cut, even if they do it themselves. That smile, combined with those gooseberry eyes of his that always seemed standing out of his head, is enough, no doubt, to explain the expression. But it's true, things look different upside down. Artists often turn their drawings upside down to test their correctness. Sometimes, when it's difficult to turn the object itself upside down (as in the case of the Matterhorn, let us say), they have been known to stand on their heads, or at least look between their legs."

The priest, who was talking thus flippantly to steady the other man's nerves, concluded by saying, in a more serious tone: "I quite understand how it must have upset you. Unfortunately, it also upset something else."

"What do you mean?"

"It has upset the whole of our very complete theory," replied the other; and he began clambering down the bank on to the little strip of sand by the river.

"Perhaps he did it himself," said Smith abruptly. "After all, that's the most obvious sort of escape, and fits in with our theory very well. He wanted a quiet place and he came here and cut his throat."

"He didn't come here at all," said Father Brown. "At least, not alive, and not by land. He wasn't killed here; there's not enough blood. This sun has dried his hair and clothes pretty well by now; but there are the traces of two trickles of water in the sand. Just about here the tide comes up from the sea and makes an eddy that washed the body into the creek and left it when the tide retired. But the body must first have been washed down the river, presumably from the village, for the river runs just behind the row of little houses and shops. Poor Vaudrey died up in the hamlet, somehow; after all, I don't think he committed suicide; but the trouble is who would, or could, have killed him up in that potty little place?"

He began to draw rough designs with the point of his stumpy umbrella on the strip of sand.

"Let's see; how does the row of shops run? First, the butcher's; well, of course, a butcher would be an ideal performer with a large carving knife. But you saw Vaudrey come out, and it isn't very probable that he stood in the outer shop while the butcher said: 'Good morning. Allow me to cut your throat! Thank you. And the next article, please?' Sir Arthur doesn't strike me as the sort of man who'd have stood there with a pleasant smile while this happened. He was a very strong and vigorous man, with rather a violent temper. And who else, except the butcher, could have stood up to him? The next shop is kept by an old woman. Then comes the tobacconist, who is certainly a man, but I am told quite a small and timid one. Then there is the dressmaker's, run by two maiden ladies, and then a refreshment shop run by a man who happens to be in hospital and who has left his wife in charge. There are two or three village lads, assistants and errand boys, but they were away on a special job. The refreshment shop ends the street; there is nothing beyond that but the inn, with the policeman between."

He made a punch with the ferrule of his umbrella to represent the policeman, and remained moodily staring up the river. Then he made a slight movement with his hand and, stepping quickly across, stooped over the corpse.

"Ah," he said, straightening himself and letting out a great breath. "The tobacconist! Why in the world didn't I remember that about the tobacconist?"

"What is the matter with you?" demanded Smith in some exasperation; for Father Brown was rolling his eyes and muttering, and he had uttered the word "tobacconist" as if it were a terrible word of doom.

"Did you notice," said the priest, after a pause, "something rather curious about his face?"

"Curious, my God!" said Evan, with a retrospective shudder. "Anyhow, his throat was cut. ..."

"I said his face," said the cleric quietly. "Besides, don't you notice he has hurt his hand and there's a small bandage round it?"

"Oh, that has nothing to do with it," said Evan hastily. "That happened before and was quite an accident. He cut his hand with a broken ink bottle while we were working together."

"It has something to do with it, for all that," replied Father Brown.

There was a long silence, and the priest walked moodily along the sand, trailing his umbrella and sometimes muttering the word "tobacconist," till the very word chilled his friend with fear. Then he suddenly lifted the umbrella and pointed to a boat-house among the rushes.
"Is that the family boat?" he asked. "I wish you'd just scull me up the river; I want to look at those houses from the back. There's no time to lose. They may find the body; but we must risk that."

Smith was already pulling the little boat upstream towards the hamlet before Father Brown spoke again. Then he said:

"By the way, I found out from old Abbott what was the real story about poor Vaudrey's misdemeanour. It was a rather curious story about an Egyptian official who had insulted him by saying that a good Moslem would avoid swine and Englishmen, but preferred swine; or some such tactful remark. Whatever happened at the time, the quarrel was apparently renewed some years after, when the official visited England; and Vaudrey, in his violent passion, dragged the man to a pig-sty on the farm attached to the country house and threw him in, breaking his arm and leg and leaving him there till next morning. There was rather a row about it, of course, but many people thought Vaudrey had acted in a pardonable passion of patriotism. Anyhow, it seems not quite the thing that would have kept a man silent under deadly blackmail for decades."

"Then you don't think it had anything to do with the story we are considering?" asked the secretary, thoughtfully.

"I think it had a thundering lot to do with the story I am considering now," said Father Brown.

They were now floating past the low wall and the steep strips of back garden running down from the back doors to the river. Father Brown counted them carefully, pointing with his umbrella, and when he came to the third he said again:

"Tobacconist! Is the tobacconist by any chance...? But I think I'll act on my guess till I know. Only, I'll tell you what it was I thought odd about Sir Arthur's face."

"And what was that?" asked his companion, pausing and resting on his oars for an instant.

"He was a great dandy," said Father Brown, "and the face was only half-shaved. . . . Could you stop here a moment? We could tie up the boat to that post."

A minute or two afterwards they had clambered over the little wall and were mounting the steep cobbled paths of the little garden, with its rectangular beds of vegetables and flowers.

"You see, the tobacconist does grow potatoes," said Father Brown. "Associations with Sir Walter Raleigh, no doubt. Plenty of potatoes and plenty of potato sacks. These little country people have not lost all the habits of peasants; they still run two or three jobs at once. But country tobacconists very often do one odd job extra, that I never thought of till I saw Vaudrey's chin. Nine times out of ten you call the shop the tobacconist's, but it is also the barber's. He'd cut his hand and couldn't shave himself; so he came up here. Does that suggest anything else to you?"

"It suggests a good deal," replied Smith; "but I expect it will suggest a good deal more to you."

"Does it suggest, for instance," observed Father Brown, "the only conditions in which a vigorous and rather violent gentleman might be smiling pleasantly when his throat was cut?"

The next moment they had passed through a dark passage or two at the back of the house, and came into the back room of the shop, dimly lit by filtered light from beyond and a dingy and cracked looking-glass. It seemed, somehow, like the green twilight of a tank; but there was light enough to see the rough apparatus of a barber's shop and the pale and even panic-sticken face of a barber.

Father Brown's eye roamed round the room, which seemed to have been just recently cleaned and tidied, till his gaze found something in a dusty corner just behind the door. It was a hat hanging on a hat-peg. It was a white hat, and one very well known to all that village. And yet, conspicuous as it had always seemed in the street, it seemed only an example of the sort of little thing a certain sort of man often entirely forgets, when he has most carefully washed floors or destroyed stained rags.

"Sir Arthur Vaudrey was shaved here yesterday morning, I think," said Father Brown in a level voice.

To the barber, a small, bald-headed, spectacled man whose name was Wicks, the sudden appearance of these two figures out of his own back premises was like the appearance of two ghosts risen out of a grave under the floor. But it was at once apparent that he had more to frighten him than any fancy of superstition. He shrank, we might almost say that he shrivelled, into a corner of the dark room; and everything about him seemed to dwindle, except his great goblin spectacles.

"Tell me one thing," continued the priest, quietly. "You had a reason for hating the squire?"

The man in the corner babbled something that Smith could not hear; but the priest nodded.

"I know you had," be said. "You hated him; and that's how I know you didn't kill him. Will you tell us what happened, or shall I?"

There was a silence filled with the faint ticking of a clock in the back kitchen; and then Father Brown went on.

"What happened was this. When Mr. Dalmon stepped inside your outer shop, he asked for some cigarettes that were in the window. You stepped outside for a moment, as shopmen often do, to make sure of what he meant; and in that moment of time he perceived in the inner room the razor you had just laid down, and the yellow-white head of Sir Arthur in the barber's chair; probably both glimmering in the light of that little window beyond. It took but an
instant for him to pick up the razor and cut the throat and come back to the counter. The victim would not even be alarmed at the razor and the hand. He died smiling at his own thoughts. And what thoughts! Nor, I think, was Dalmon alarmed. He had done it so quickly and quietly that Mr. Smith here could have sworn in court that the two were together all the time. But there was somebody who was alarmed, very legitimately, and that was you. You had quarrelled with your landlord about arrears of rent and so on; you came back into your own shop and found your enemy murdered in your own chair, with your own razor. It was not altogether unnatural that you despaired of clearing yourself, and preferred to clear up the mess; to clean the floor and throw the corpse into the river at night, in a potato sack rather loosely tied. It was rather lucky that there were fixed hours after which your barber's shop was shut; so you had plenty of time. You seem to have remembered everything but the hat. . . . Oh, don't be frightened; I shall forget everything, including the hat."

And he passed placidly through the outer shop into the street beyond, followed by the wondering Smith, and leaving behind the barber stunned and staring.

"You see," said Father Brown to his companion, "it was one of those cases where a motive really is too weak to convict a man and yet strong enough to acquit him. A little nervous fellow like that would be the last man really to kill a big strong man for a tiff about money. But he would be the first man to fear that he would be accused of having done it. ... Ah, there was a thundering difference in the motive of the man who did do it." And he relapsed into reflection, staring and almost glaring at vacancy.

"It is simply awful," groaned Evan Smith. "I was abusing Dalmon as a blackmailer and a blackguard an hour or two ago, and yet it breaks me all up to hear he really did this, after all."

The priest still seemed to be in a sort of trance, like a man staring down into an abyss. At last his lips moved and he murmured, more as if it were a prayer than an oath: "Merciful God, what a horrible revenge!"

His friend questioned him, but he continued as if talking to himself.

"What a horrible tale of hatred! What a vengeance for one mortal worm to take on another! Shall we ever get to the bottom of this bottomless human heart, where such abominable imaginations can abide? God save us all from pride; but I cannot yet make any picture in my mind of hate and vengeance like that."

"Yes," said Smith; "and I can't quite picture why he should kill Vaudrey at all. If Dalmon was a blackmailer, it would seem more natural for Vaudrey to kill him. As you say, the throat-cutting was a horrid business, but----"

Father Brown started, and blinked like a man awakened from sleep.

"Oh, that!" he corrected hastily. "I wasn't thinking about that. I didn't mean the murder in the barber's shop, when--when I said a horrible tale of vengeance. I was thinking of a much more horrible tale than that; though, of course, that was horrible enough, in its way. But that was much more comprehensible; almost anybody might have done it. In fact, it was very nearly an act of self-defence."

"What?" exclaimed the secretary incredulously. "A man creeps up behind another man and cuts his throat, while he is smiling pleasantly at the ceiling in a barber's chair, and you say it was self-defence?"

"I do not say it was justifiable self-defence," replied the other. "I only say that many a man would have been driven to it, to defend himself against an appalling calamity--which was also an appalling crime. It was that other crime that I was thinking about. To begin with, about that question you asked just now--why should the blackmailer be the murderer? Well, there are a good many conventional confusions and errors on a point like that." He paused, as if collecting his thoughts after his recent trance of horror, and went on in ordinary tones.

"You observe that two men, an older and a younger, go about together and agree on a matrimonial project; but the origin of their intimacy is old and concealed. One is rich and the other poor; and you guess at blackmail. You are quite right, at least to that extent. Where you are quite wrong is in guessing which is which. You assume that the poor man was blackmailing the rich man. As a matter offset, the rich man was blackmailing the poor man."

"But that seems nonsense," objected the secretary.

"It is much worse than nonsense; but it is not at all uncommon," replied the other. "Half modern politics consists of rich men blackmailing people. Your notion that it's nonsense rests on two illusions which are both nonsensical. One is, that rich men never want to be richer; the other is, that a man can only be blackmailed for money. It's the last that is in question here. Sir Arthur Vaudrey was acting not for avarice, but for vengeance. And he planned the most hideous vengeance I ever heard of."

"But why should he plan vengeance on John Dalmon?" inquired Smith.

"It wasn't on John Dalmon that he planned vengeance," replied the priest, gravely.

There was a silence; and he resumed, almost as if changing the subject. "When we found the body, you remember, we saw the face upside down; and you said it looked like the face of a fiend. Has it occurred to you that the murderer also saw the face upside down, coming behind the barber's chair?"

"But that's all morbid extravagance," remonstrated his companion. "I was quite used to the face when it was the right way up."
"Perhaps you have never seen it the right way up," said Father Brown. "I told you that artists turn a picture the 
wrong way up when they want to see it the right way up. Perhaps, over all those breakfasts and tea- tables, you had 
got used to the face of a fiend."

"What on earth are you driving at?" demanded Smith, impatiently.

"I speak in parables," replied the other in a rather sombre tone "Of course. Sir Arthur was not actually a fiend; he 
was a man with a character which he had made out of a temperament that might also have been turned to good. But 
those goggling, suspicious eyes; that tight, yet quivering mouth, might have told you something if you had not been 
so used to them. You know, there are physical bodies on which a wound will not heal. Sir Arthur had a mind of that 
sort. It was as if it lacked a skin; he had a feverish vigilance of vanity; those strained eyes were open with an 
insomnia of egoism. Sensibility need not be selfishness. Sybil Rye, for instance, has the same thin skin and manages 
to be a sort of saint. But Vaudrey had turned it all to poisonous pride; a pride that was not even secure and self-
satisfied. Every scratch on the surface of his soul festered. And that is the meaning of that old story about throwing 
the man into the pig-sty. If he'd thrown him then and there, after being called a pig, it might have been a pardonable 
burst of passion. But there was no pig-sty; and that is just the point. Vaudrey remembered the silly insult for years 
and years, till he could get the Oriental into the improbable neighbourhood of a pig-sty; and then he took, what he 
considered the only appropriate and artistic revenge. . . . Oh, my God! he liked his revenges to be appropriate and 
artistic."

Smith looked at him curiously. "You are not thinking of the pig-sty story," he said.

"No," said Father Brown; "of the other story." He controlled the shudder in his voice, and went on:

"Remembering that story of a fantastic and yet patient plot to make the vengeance fit the crime, consider the 
other story before us. Had anybody else, to your knowledge, ever insulted Vaudrey, or offered him what he thought 
a mortal insult? Yes; a woman insulted him."

A sort of vague horror began to dawn in Evan's eyes; he was listening intently.

"A girl, little more than a child, refused to marry him, because he had once been a sort of criminal; had, indeed, 
been in prison for a short time for the outrage on the Egyptian. And that madman said, in the hell of his heart: 'She 
shall marry a murderer.'"

They took the road towards the great house and went along by the river for some time in silence, before he 
resumed: "Vaudrey was in a position to blackmail Dalmon, who had committed a murder long ago; probably he 
knew of several crimes among the wild comrades of his youth. Probably it was a wild crime with some redeeming 
features; for the wildest murders are never the worst. And Dalmon looks to me like a man who knows remorse, even 
for killing Vaudrey. But he was in Vaudrey's power and, between them, they entrapped the girl very cleverly into an 
engagement; letting the lover try his luck first, for instance, and the other only encouraging magnificently. But 
Dalmon himself did not know, nobody but the Devil himself did know, what was really in that old man's mind. 

"Then, a few days ago, Dalmon made a dreadful discovery. He had obeyed, not altogether unwillingly; he had 
been a tool; and he suddenly found how the tool was to be broken and thrown away. He came upon certain notes of 
Vaudrey's in the library which, disguised as they were, told of preparations for giving information to the police. He 
understood the whole plot and stood stunned as I did when I first understood it. The moment the bride and 
bridegroom were married, the bridegroom would be arrested and hanged. The fastidious lady, who objected to a 
husband who had been in prison, should have no husband except a husband on the gallows. That is what Sir Arthur 
Vaudrey considered an artistic rounding off of the story."

Evan Smith, deadly pale, was silent; and, far away, down the perspective of the road, they saw the large figure 
and wide hat of Dr. Abbott advancing towards them, with his large gloved hands thrown out in a sort of despairing gesture and his grey beard tossing in the wind.

"There is dreadful news," he said. "Arthur's body has been found. He seems to have died in his garden."

"Dear me," said Father Brown, rather mechanically. "How dreadful!"

"And there is more," cried the doctor breathlessly. "John Dalmon went off to see Vernon Vaudrey, the nephew; 
but Vernon Vaudrey hasn't heard of him and Dalmon seems to have disappeared entirely."

"Dear me," said Father Brown. "How strange!"

VI THE WORST CRIME IN THE WORLD

FATHER BROWN was wandering through a picture gallery with an expression that suggested that he had not 
come there to look at the pictures. Indeed, he did not want to look at the pictures, though he liked pictures well 
enough. Not that there was anything immoral or improper about those highly modern pictorial designs. He would
indeed be of an inflammable temperament who was stirred to any of the more pagan passions by the display of interrupted spirals, inverted cones and broken cylinders with which the art of the future inspired or menaced mankind. The truth is that Father Brown was looking for a young friend who had appointed that somewhat incongruous meeting-place, being herself of a more futuristic turn. The young friend was also a young relative; one of the few relatives that he had. Her name was Elizabeth Fane, simplified into Betty, and she was the child of a sister who had married into a race of refined but impoverished squires. As the squire was dead as well as impoverished. Father Brown stood in the relation of a protector as well as a priest, and in some sense a guardian as well is an uncle. At the moment, however, he was blinking about at the groups in the gallery without catching sight of the familiar brown hair and bright face of his niece. Nevertheless, he saw some people he knew and a number of people he did not know, including some that, as a mere matter of taste, he did not much want to know.

Among the people the priest did not know and who yet aroused his interest was a lithe and alert young man, very beautifully dressed and looking rather like a foreigner, because, while his beard was cut in a spade shape like an old Spaniard's, his dark hair was cropped so close as to look like a tight black skull-cap. Among the people the priest did not particularly want to know was a very dominant-looking lady, sensationally clad in scarlet, with a mane of yellow hair too long to be called bobbed, but too loose to be called anything else. She had a powerful and rather heavy face of a pale and rather unwholesome complexion, and when she looked at anybody she cultivated the fascinations of a basilisk. She towed in attendance behind her a short man with a big beard and a very broad face, with long sleepy slits of eyes. The expression of his face was beaming and benevolent, if only partially awake; but his bull neck, when seen from behind, looked a little brutal.

Father Brown gazed at the lady, feeling that the appearance and approach of his niece would be an agreeable contrast. Yet he continued to gaze, for some reason, until he reached the point of feeling that the appearance of anybody would be an agreeable contrast It was therefore with a certain relief, though with a slight start as of awakening, that he turned at the sound of his name and saw another face that he knew.

It was the sharp but not unfriendly face of a lawyer named Granby, whose patches of grey hair might almost have been the powder from a wig, so incongruous were they with his youthful energy of movement. He was one of those men in the City who run about like schoolboys in and out of their offices. He could not run round the fashionable picture gallery quite in that fashion; but he looked as if he wanted to, and fretted as he glanced to left and right, seeking somebody he knew.

"I didn't know," said Father Brown, smiling, "that you were a patron of the New Art."

"I didn't know that you were," retorted the other. "I came here to catch a man."

"I hope you will have good sport," answered the priest. "I'm doing much the same."

"Said he was passing through to the Continent," snorted the solicitor, "and could I meet him in this cranky place." He ruminated a moment, and said abruptly: "Look here, I know you can keep a secret. Do you know Sir John Musgrave?"

"No," answered the priest; "but I should hardly have thought he was a secret, though they say he does hide himself in a castle. Isn't he the old man they tell all those tales about--how he lives in a tower with a real portcullis and drawbridge, and generally refuses to emerge from the Dark Ages? Is he one of your clients?"

"No," replied Granby shortly: "It's his son, Captain Musgrave, who has come to us. But the old man counts for a good deal in the affair, and I don't know him; that's the point. Look here, this is confidential, as I say, but I can confide in you. He dropped his voice and drew his friend apart into a side gallery containing representations of various real objects, which was comparatively empty.

"This young Musgrave," he said, "wants to raise a big sum from us on a post obit on his old father in Northumberland. The old man's long past seventy and presumably will obit some time or other; but what about the post, so to speak? What will happen afterwards to his cash and castles and portcullises and all the rest? It's a very fine old estate, and still worth a lot, but strangely enough it isn't entailed. So you see how we stand. The question is, as the man said in Dickens, is the old man friendly?"

"If he's friendly to his son you'll feel all the friendlier," observed Father Brown. "No, I'm afraid I can't help you. I never met Sir John Musgrave, and I understand very few people do meet him nowadays. But it seems obvious you have a right to an answer on that point before you lend the young gentleman your firm's money. Is he the sort that people cut off with a shilling?"

"Well, I'm doubtful," answered the other. "He's very popular and brilliant and a great figure in society; but he's a great deal abroad, and he's been a journalist."

"Well," said Father Brown, "that's not a crime. At least not always."

"Nonsense!" said Granby curtly. "You know what I mean--he's rather a rolling stone, who's been a journalist and a lecturer and an actor, and all sorts of things. I've got to know where I stand. . . . Why, there he is."

And the solicitor, who had been stamping impatiently about the emptier gallery, turned suddenly and darted into
the more crowded room at a run. He was running towards the tall and well-dressed young man with the short hair and the foreign-looking beard.

The two walked away together talking, and for some moments afterwards Father Brown followed them with his screwed, short-sighted eyes. His gaze was shifted and recalled, however, by the breathless and even boisterous arrival of his niece, Betty. Rather to the surprise of her uncle, she led him back into the emptier room and planted him on a seat that was like an island in that sea of floor.

"I've got something I must tell you," she said. "It's so silly that nobody else will understand it."

"You overwhelm me," said Father Brown. "Is it about this business your mother started telling me about? Engagements and all that; not what the military historians call a general engagement."

"You know," she said, "that she wants me to be engaged to Captain Musgrave."

"I didn't," said Father Brown with resignation; "but Captain Musgrave seems to be quite a fashionable topic."

"Of course we're very poor," she said, "and it's no good saying it makes no difference."

"Do you want to marry him?" asked Father Brown, looking at her through his half-closed eyes.

She frowned at the floor, and answered in a lower tone:

"I thought I did. At least I think I thought I did. But I've just had rather a shock."

"Then tell us all about it."

"I heard him laugh," she said.

"It is an excellent social accomplishment," he replied.

"You don't understand," said the girl. "It wasn't social at all. That was just the point of it--that it wasn't social."

She paused a moment, and then went on firmly: "I came here quite early, and saw him sitting quite alone in the middle of that gallery with the new pictures, that was quite empty then. He had no idea I or anybody was near; he was sitting quite alone, and he laughed."

"Well, no wonder,' said Father Brown. "I'm not an art critic myself, but as a general view of the pictures taken as a whole----"

"Oh, you won't understand," she said almost angrily. "It wasn't a bit like that. He wasn't looking at the pictures. He was staring right up at the ceiling; but his eyes seemed to be turned inwards, and he laughed so that my blood ran cold."

The priest had risen and was pacing the room with his hands behind him. "You mustn't be hasty in a case of this sort," he began. "There are two kinds of men--but we can hardly discuss him just now, for here he is."

Captain Musgrave entered the room swiftly and swept it with a smile. Granby, the lawyer, was just behind him, and his legal face bore a new expression of relief and satisfaction.

"I must apologize for everything I said about the Captain," he said to the priest as they drifted together towards the door. "He's a thoroughly sensible fellow and quite sees my point. He asked me himself why I didn't go north and see his old father; I could hear from the old man's own lips how it stood about the inheritance. Well, he couldn't say fairer than that, could he? But he's so anxious to get the thing settled that he offered to take me up in his own car to Musgrave Moss. That's the name of the estate. I suggested that, if he was so kind, we might go together; and we're starting to-morrow morning."

As they spoke Betty and the Captain came through the doorway together, making in that framework at least a sort of picture that some would be sentimental enough to prefer to cones and cylinders. Whatever their other affinities, they were both very good-looking; and the lawyer was moved to a remark on the fact, when the picture abruptly altered.

Captain James Musgrave looked out into the main gallery, and his laughing and triumphant eyes were riveted on something that seemed to change him from head to foot. Father Brown looked round as under an advancing shadow of premonition; and he saw the lowering, almost livid face of the large woman in scarlet under its leonine yellow hair. She always stood with a slight stoop, like a bull lowering its horns, and the expression of her pale pasty face was so oppressive and hypnotic that they hardly saw the little man with the large beard standing beside her.

Musgrave advanced into the centre of the room towards her, almost like a beautifully dressed wax-work wound up to walk. He said a few words to her that could not be heard. She did not answer; but they turned away together, walking down the long gallery as if in debate, the short, bull-necked man with the beard bringing up the rear like some grotesque goblin page.

"Heaven help us!" muttered Father Brown, frowning after them. "Who in the world is that woman?"

"No pal of mine, I'm happy to say," replied Granby with grim flippancy. "Looks as if a little flirtation with her might end fatally, doesn't it?"

"I don't think he's flirting with her," said Father Brown.

Even as he spoke the group in question turned at the end of the gallery and broke up, and Captain Musgrave came back to them in hasty strides.
"Look here," he cried, speaking naturally enough, though they fancied his colour was changed. "I'm awfully sorry, Mr. Granby, but I find I can't come north with you to-morrow. Of course, you will take the car all the same. Please do; I shan't want it. I--I have to be in London for some days. Take a friend with you if you like."

"My friend, Father Brown----" began the lawyer.

"If Captain Musgrave is really so kind," said Father Brown gravely. "I may explain that I have some status in Mr. Granby's inquiry, and it would be a great relief to my mind if I could go."

Which was how it came about that a very elegant car, with an equally elegant chauffeur, shot north the next day over the Yorkshire moors, bearing the incongruous burden of a priest who looked rather like a black bundle, and a lawyer who had the habit of running about on his feet instead of racing on somebody else's wheels.

They broke their journey very agreeably in one of the great dales of the West Riding, dining and sleeping at a comfortable inn, and starting early next day, began to run along the Northumbrian coast till they reached a country that was a maze of sand dunes and rank sea meadows, somewhere in the heart of which lay the old Border castle which had remained so unique and yet so secretive a monument of the old Border wars. They found it at last, by following a path running beside a long arm of the sea that ran inland, and turned eventually into a sort of rude canal ending in the moat of the castle. The castle really was a castle, of the square, embattled plan that the Normans built everywhere from Galilee to the Grampians. It did really and truly have a portcullis and a drawbridge, and they were very realistically reminded of the fact by an accident that delayed their entrance.

They waded amid long coarse grass and thistle to the bank of the moat which ran in a ribbon of black with dead leaves and scum upon it, like ebony inlaid with a pattern of gold. Barely a yard or two beyond the black ribbon was the other green bank and the big stone pillars of the gateway. But so little, it would seem, had this lonely fastness been approached from outside that when the impatient Granby hallooed across to the dim figures behind the portcullis, they seemed, to have considerable difficulty even in lowering the great rusty drawbridge. It started on its way, turning over like a great falling tower above them, and then stuck, sticking out in mid-air at a threatening angle.

The impatient Granby, dancing upon the bank, called out to his companion:

"Oh, I can't stand these stick-in-the-mud ways! Why, it'd be less trouble to jump."

And with characteristic impetuosity he did jump, landing with a slight stagger in safety on the inner shore. Father Brown's short legs were not adapted to jumping. But his temper was more adapted than most people's to falling with a splash into very muddy water. By the promptitude of his companion he escaped falling in very far. But as he was being hauled up the green, slimy bank, he stopped with bent head, peering at a particular point upon the grassy slope.

"Are you botanizing?" asked Granby irritably. "We've got no time for you to collect rare plants after your last attempt as a diver among the wonders of the deep. Come on, muddy or no, we've got to present ourselves before the baronet."

When they had penetrated into the castle, they were received courteously enough by an old servant, the only one in sight, and after indicating their business were shown into a long-oak-panelled room with latticed windows of antiquated pattern. Weapons of many different centuries hung in balanced patterns on the dark walls, and a complete suit of fourteenth-century armour stood like a sentinel beside the large fireplace. In another long room beyond could be seen, through the half-open door, the dark colours of the rows of family portraits.

"I feel as if I'd got into a novel instead of a house," said the lawyer. "I'd no idea anybody did really keep up the 'Mysteries of Udolpho' in this fashion."

"Yes; the old gentleman certainly carries out his historical craze consistently," answered the priest; "and these things are not fakes, either. It's not done by somebody who thinks all mediaeval people lived at the same time. Sometimes they make up suits of armour out of different bits; but that suit all covered one man, and covered him very completely. You, see it's the late sort of tilting-armour."

"I think he's a late sort of host, if it comes to chat," grumbled Granby. "He's keeping us waiting the devil of a time."

"You must expect everything to go slowly in a place like this," said Father Brown. "I think it's very decent of him to see us at all: two total strangers come to ask him highly personal questions."

And, indeed, when the master of the house appeared they had no reason to complain of their reception; but rather became conscious of something genuine in the traditions of breeding and behaviour that could retain their native dignity without difficulty in that barbarous solitude, and after those long years of rustication and moping. The baronet did not seem either surprised or embarrassed at the rare visitation; though they suspected that he had not had a stranger in his house for a quarter of a life-time, he behaved as if he had been bowing out duchesses a moment before. He showed neither shyness nor impatience when they touched on the very private matter of their errand; after a little leisurely reflection he seemed to recognize their curiosity as justified under the circumstances. He was a
thin, keen-looking old gentleman, with black eyebrows and a long chin, and though the carefully-curled hair he wore was undoubtedly a wig, he had the wisdom to wear the grey wig of an elderly man.

"As regards the question that immediately concerns you," he said, "the answer is very simple indeed. I do most certainly propose to hand on the whole of my property to my son, as my father handed it on to me; and nothing--I say advisedly, nothing--would induce me to take any other course."

"I am most profoundly grateful for the information," answered the lawyer. "But your kindness encourages me to say that you are putting it very strongly. I would not suggest that it is in the least likely that your son would do anything to make you doubt his fitness for the charge. Still, he might----"

"Exactly," said Sir John Musgrave dryly, "he might. It is rather an under-statement to say that he might. Will you be good enough to step into the next room with me for a moment."

He led them into the further gallery, of which they had already caught a glimpse, and gravely paused before a row of the blackened and lowering portraits.

"This is Sir Roger Musgrave," he said, pointing to a long-faced person in a black periwig. "He was one of the lowest liars and rascals in the rascally time of William of Orange, a traitor to two kings and something like the murderer of two wives. That is his father, Sir Robert, a perfectly honest old cavalier. That is his son, Sir James, one of the noblest of the Jacobite martyrs and one of the first men to attempt some reparation to the Church and the poor. Does it matter that the House of Musgrave, the power, the honour, the authority, descended from one good man to another good man through the interval of a bad one? Edward I governed England well. Edward III covered England with glory. And yet the second glory came from the first glory through the infamy and imbécility of Edward II, who fawned upon Gaveston and ran away from Bruce. Believe me, Mr. Granby, the greatness of a great house and history is something more than these accidental individuals who carry it on, even though they do not grace it. From father to son our heritage has come down, and from father to son it shall continue. You may assure yourselves, gentlemen, and you may assure my son, that I shall not leave my money to a home for lost cats. Musgrave shall leave it to Musgrave till the heavens fall."

"Yes," said Father Brown thoughtfully; "I see what you mean."

"And we shall be only too glad," said the solicitor, "to convey such a happy assurance to your son."

"You may convey the assurance," said their host gravely, "He is secure in any event of having the castle, the title, the land and the money. There is only a small and merely private addition to that arrangement. Under no circumstances whatever will I ever speak to him as long as I live."

The lawyer remained in the same respectful attitude, but he was now respectfully staring.

"Why, what on earth has he----"

"I am a private gentleman," said Musgrave, "as well as the custodian of a great inheritance. And my son did something so horrible that he has ceased to be--I will not say a gentleman--but even a human being. It is the worst crime in the world. Do you remember what Douglas said when Marmion, his guest, offered to shake hands with him?"

"Yes," said Father Brown.

"'My castles are my king's alone, from turret to foundation stone,'" said Musgrave. "'The hand of Douglas is his own.'"

He turned towards the other room and showed his rather dazed visitors back into it. "I hope you will take some refreshment," he said, in the same equable fashion. "If you have any doubt about your movements, I should be delighted to offer you the hospitality of the castle for the night."

"Thank you, Sir John," said the priest in a dull voice, "but I think we had better go."

"I will have the bridge lowered at once," said their host; and in a few moments the creaking of that huge and absurdly antiquated apparatus filled the castle like the grinding of a mill. Rusty as it was, however, it worked successfully this time, and they found themselves standing once more on the grassy bank beyond the moat.

Granby was suddenly shaken by a shudder.

"What in hell was it that his son did?" he cried.

Father Brown made no answer. But when they had driven off again in their car and pursued their journey to a village not far off, called Graystones, where they alighted at the inn of the Seven Stars, the lawyer learned with a little mild surprise that the priest did not propose to travel much farther; in other words, that he had apparently every intention of remaining in the neighbourhood.

"I cannot bring myself to leave it like this," he said gravely. "I will send back the car, and you, of course, may very naturally want to go with it. Your question is answered; it is simply whether your firm can afford to lend money on young Musgrave's prospects. But my question isn't answered; it is whether he is a fit husband for Betty. I must try to discover whether he's really done something dreadful, or whether it's the delusion of an old lunatic."

"But," objected the lawyer, "if you want to find out about him, why don't you go after him? Why should you
hang about in this desolate hole where he hardly ever comes?"

"What would be the use of my going after him?" asked the other. There's no sense in going up to a fashionable
young man in Bond Street and saying: 'Excuse me, but have you committed a crime too horrible for a human being?"
If he's bad enough to do it, he's certainly bad enough to deny it. And we don't even know what it is. No, there's only
one man that knows, and may tell, in some further outburst of dignified eccentricity. I'm going to keep near him for
the present."

And in truth Father Brown did keep near the eccentric baronet, and did actually meet him on more than one
occasion, with the utmost politeness on both sides. For the baronet, in spite of his years, was very vigorous and a
great walker, and could often be seen stumping through the village, and along the country lanes. Only the day after
their arrival, Father Brown, coming out of the inn on to the cobbled market-place, saw the dark and distinguished
figure stride past in the direction of the post office. He was very quietly dressed in black, but his strong face was
even more arresting in the strong sunlight; with his silvery hair, swarthy eyebrows and long chin, he had something
of a reminiscence of Henry Irving, or some other famous actor. In spite of his hoary hair, his figure as well as his
face suggested strength, and he carried his stick more like a cudgel than a crutch. He saluted the priest, and spoke
with the same air of coming fearlessly to the point which had marked his revelations of yesterday.

"If you are still interested in my son," he said, using the term with an icy indifference, "you will not see very
much of him. He has just left the country. Between ourselves, I might say fled the country."

"Indeed," said Father Brown with a grave stare.

"Some people I never heard of, called Grunov, have been pestering me, of all people, about his whereabouts,"
said Sir John; "and I've just come in to send off a wire to tell them that, so far as I know, he's living in the Poste
Restante, Riga. Even that has been a nuisance. I came in yesterday to do it, but was five minutes too late for the post
office. Are you staying long? I hope you will pay me another visit."

When the priest recounted to the lawyer his little interview with old Musgrave in the village, the lawyer was
both puzzled and interested. "Why has the Captain bolted?" he asked. "Who are the other people who want him?
Who on earth are the Grunovs?"

"For the first, I don't know," replied Father Brown. "Possibly his mysterious sin has come to light. I should rather
guess that the other people are blackmailing him about it. For the third, I think I do know. That horrible fat woman
with yellow hair is called Madame Grunov, and that little man passes as her husband."

The next day Father Brown came in rather wearily, and threw down his black bundle of an umbrella with the air
of a pilgrim laying down his staff. He had an air of some depression. But it was as it was so often in his criminal
investigations. It was not the depression of failure, but the depression of success.

"It's rather a shock," he said in a dull voice; "but I ought to have guessed it. I ought to have guessed it when I
first went in and saw the thing standing there."

"'When you saw what?' asked Granby impatiently.

"When I saw there was only one suit of armour," answered Father Brown. There was a silence during which the
lawyer only stared at his friend, and then the friend resumed.

"Only the other day I was just going to tell my niece that there are two types of men who can laugh when they
are alone. One might almost say the man who does it is either very good or very bad. You see, he is either confiding
the joke to God or confiding it to the Devil. But anyhow he has an inner life. Well, there really is a kind of man who
confides the joke to the Devil. He does not mind if nobody sees the joke; if nobody can safely be allowed even to
know the joke. The joke is enough in itself, if it is sufficiently sinister and malignant."

"But what are you talking about?" demanded Granby. "Whom are you talking about? Which of them, I mean?
Who is this person who is having a sinister joke with his Satanic Majesty?"

Father Brown looked across at him with a ghastly smile.

"Ah," he said, "that's the joke."

There was another silence, but this time the silence seemed to be rather full and oppressive than merely empty; it
seemed to settle down on them like the twilight that was gradually turning from dusk to dark. Father Brown went on
speaking in a level voice, sitting stolidly with his elbows on the table.

"I've been locking up the Musgrave family," he said. "They are vigorous and long-lived stock, and even in the
ordinary way I should think you would wait a good time for your money."

"We're quite prepared for that," answered the solicitor; "but anyhow it can't last indefinitely. The old man is
nearly eighty, though he still walks about, and the people at the inn here laugh and say they don't believe he will
ever die."

Father Brown jumped up with one of his rare but rapid movements, but remained with his hands on the table,
leaning forward and looking his friend in the face.

"That's it," he cried in a low but excited voice. "That's the only problem. That's the only real difficulty. How will
he die? How on earth is he to die?"

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Granby.

"I mean," came the voice of the priest out of the darkening room, "that I know the crime that James Musgrave committed."

His tones had such a chill in them that Granby could hardly repress a shiver; he murmured a further question.

"It was really the worst crime in the world," said Father Brown. "At least, many communities and civilizations have accounted it so. It was always from the earliest times marked out in tribe and village for tremendous punishment. But anyhow, I know now what young Musgrave really did and why he did it."

"And what did he do?" asked the lawyer.

"He killed his father," answered the priest.

The lawyer in his turn rose from his seat and gazed across the table with wrinkled brows.

"But his father is at the castle," he cried in sharp tones.

"His father is in the moat," said the priest, "and I was a fool not to have known it from the first when something bothered me about that suit of armour. Don't you remember the look of that room? How very carefully it was arranged and decorated? There were two crossed battle-axes hung on one side of the fireplace, two crossed battle-axes on the other. There was a round Scottish shield on one wall, a round Scottish shield on the other. And there was a stand of armour guarding one side of the hearth, and an empty space on the other. Nothing will make me believe that a man who arranged all the rest of that room with that exaggerated symmetry left that one feature of it lopsided. There was almost certainly another man in armour. And what has become of him?"

He paused a moment, and then went on in a more matter-of-fact tone; "When you come to think of it, it's a very good plan for a murder, and meets the permanent problem of the disposal of the body. The body could stand inside that complete tilting-armour for hours, or even days, while servants came and went, until the murderer could simply drag it out in the dead of night and lower it into the moat, without even crossing the bridge. And then what a good chance he ran! As soon as the body was at all decayed in the stagnant water there would sooner or later be nothing but a skeleton in fourteenth-century armour, a thing very likely to be found in the moat of an old Border castle. It was unlikely that anybody would look for anything there, but if they did, that would soon be all they would find. And I got some confirmation of that. That was when you said I was looking for a rare plant; it was a plant in a good many senses, if you'll excuse the jest. I saw the marks of two feet sunk so deep into the solid bank I was sure that the man was either very heavy or was carrying something very heavy. Also, by the way, there's another moral from that little incident when I made my celebrated graceful and cat-like leap."

"My brain is rather reeling," said Granby, "but I begin to have some notion of what all this nightmare is about. What about you and your cat-like leap?"

"At the post office to-day," said Father Brown, "I casually confirmed the statement the baronet made to me yesterday, that he had been there just after closing-time on the day previous—that is, not only on the very day we arrived, but at the very time we arrived. Don't you see what that means? It means that he was actually out when we called, and came back while we were waiting; and that was why we had to wait so long. And when I saw that, I suddenly saw a picture that told the whole story."

"Well," asked the other impatiently, "and what about it?"

"An old man of eighty can walk," said Father Brown. "An old man can even walk a good deal, pottering about in country lanes. But an old man can't jump. He would be an even less graceful jumper than I was. Yet, if the baronet came back while we were waiting, he must have come in as we came in—by jumping the moat—for the bridge wasn't lowered till later. I rather guess he had hampered it himself to delay inconvenient visitors, to judge by the rapidity with which it was repaired. But that doesn't matter. When I saw that fancy picture of the black figure with the grey hair taking a flying leap across the moat I knew instantly that it was a young man dressed up as an old man. And there you have the whole story."

"You mean," said Granby slowly, "that this pleasing youth killed his father, hid the corpse first in the armour and then in the moat, disguised himself and so on?"

"They happened to be almost exactly alike," said the priest. "You could sec from the family portraits how strong the likeness ran. And then you talk of his disguising himself. But in a sense everybody's dress is a disguise. The old man disguised himself in a wig, and the young man in a foreign beard. When he shaved and put the wig on his cropped head he was exactly like his father, with a little make-up. Of course, you understand now why he was so very polite about getting you to come up next day here by car. It was because he himself was coming up that night by train. He got in front of you, committed his crime, assumed his disguise, and was ready for the legal negotiations."

"Ah," said Granby thoughtfully, "the legal negotiations! You mean, of course, that the real old baronet would have negotiated very differently."
"He would have told you plainly that the Captain would never get a penny," said Father Brown. "The plot, queer as it sounds, was really the only way of preventing his telling you so. But I want you to appreciate the cunning of what the fellow did tell you. His plan answered several purposes at once. He was being blackmailed by these Russians for some villainy; I suspect for treason during the war. He escaped from them at a stroke, and probably sent them chasing off to Riga after him. But the most beautiful refinement of all was that theory he enunciated about recognizing his son as an heir, but not as a human being. Don't you see that while it secured the post obit, it also provided some sort of answer to what would soon be the greatest difficulty of all?"

"I see several difficulties," said Granby; "which one do you mean?"

"I mean that if the son was not even disinherited, it would look rather odd that the father and son never met. The theory of a private repudiation answered that. So there only remained one difficulty, as I say, which is probably perplexing the gentleman now. How on earth is the old man to die?"

"I know how he ought to die," said Granby.

Father Brown seemed to be a little bemused, and went on in a more abstracted fashion.

"And yet there is something more in it than that," he said. "There was something about that theory that he liked in a way that is more--well, more theoretical. It gave him an insane intellectual pleasure to tell you in one character that he had committed a crime in another character-- when he really had. That is what I mean by the infernal irony; by the joke shared with the Devil. Shall I tell you something that sounds like what they call a paradox? Sometimes it is a joy in the very heart of hell to tell the truth. And above all, to tell it so that everybody misunderstands it. That is why he liked that antic of pretending to be somebody else, and then painting himself as black--as he was. And that was why my niece heard him laughing to himself all alone in the picture gallery."

Granby gave a slight start, like a person brought back to common things with a bump.

"Your niece," he cried. "Didn't her mother want her to marry Musgrave? A question of wealth and position, I suppose."

"Yes," said Father Brown dryly; "her mother was all in favour of a prudent marriage."

VII THE RED MOON OF MERU

EVERYONE agreed that the bazaar at Mallowood Abbey (by kind permission of Lady Mounteagle) was a great success; there were roundabouts and swings and side-shows, which the people greatly enjoyed; I would also mention the Charity, which was the excellent object of the proceedings, if any of them could tell me what it was. However, it is only with a few of them that we are here concerned; and especially with three of them, a lady and two gentlemen, who passed between two of the principal tents or pavilions, their voices high in argument. On their right was the tent of the Master of the Mountain, that world-famous fortune-teller by crystals and chiromancy; a rich purple tent, all over which were traced, in black and gold, the sprawling outlines of Asiatic gods waving any number of arms like octopods. Perhaps they symbolized the readiness of divine help to be had within; perhaps they merely implied that the ideal being of a pious palmist would have as many hands as possible. On the other side stood the plainer tent of Phroso the Phrenologist; more austerity decorated with diagrams of the heads of Socrates and Shakespeare, which were apparently of a lumpy sort. But these were presented merely in black and white, with numbers and notes, as became the rigid dignity of a purely rationalistic science. The purple tent had an opening like a black cavern, and all was fittingly silent within. But Phroso the Phrenologist, a lean, shabby, sunburnt person, with an almost improbably fierce black moustache and whiskers, was standing outside his own temple, and talking, at the top of his voice, to nobody in particular, explaining that the head of any passer-by would doubtless prove, on examination, to be every bit as knobbly as Shakespeare's. Indeed, the moment the lady appeared between the tents, the vigilant Phroso leapt on her and offered, with a pantomime of old-world courtesy, to feel her bumps.

She refused with civility that was rather like rudeness; but she must be excused, because she was in the middle of an argument. She also had to be excused, or at any rate was excused, because she was Lady Mounteagle. She was not a nonentity, however, in any sense; she was at once handsome and haggard, with a hungry look in her deep, dark eyes and something eager and almost fierce about her smile. Her dress was bizarre for the period; for it was before the Great War had left us in our present mood of gravity and recollection. Indeed, the dress was rather like the purple tent; being of a semi-oriental sort, covered with exotic and esoteric emblems. But everyone knew that the Mounteagles were mad; which was the popular way of saying that she and her husband were interested in the creeds and culture of the East.

The eccentricity of the lady was a great contrast to the conventionality of the two gentlemen, who were braced and buttoned up in all the stiffer fashion of that far-off day, from the tips of their gloves to their bright top hats. Yet even here there was a difference; for James Hardcastle managed at once to look correct and distinguished, while Tommy Hunter only looked correct and commonplace. Hardcastle was a promising politician; who seemed in society to be interested in everything except politics. It may be answered gloomily that every politician is emphatically a promising politician. But to do him justice, he had often exhibited himself as a performing politician.
No purple tent in the bazaar, however, had been provided for him to perform in.

"For my part," he said, screwing in the monocle that was the only gleam in his hard, legal face, "I think we must exhaust the possibilities of mesmerism before we talk about magic. Remarkable psychological powers undoubtedly exist, even in apparently backward peoples. Marvellous things have been done by fakirs."

"Did you say done by fakers?" asked the other young man, with doubtful innocence.

"Tommy, you are simply silly," said the lady. "Why will you keep barging in on things you don't understand? You're like a schoolboy screaming out that he knows how a conjuring trick is done. It's all so Early Victorian—that schoolboy scepticism. As for mesmerism, I doubt whether you can stretch it to----"

At this point Lady Mounteagle seemed to catch sight of somebody she wanted; a black stumpy figure standing at a booth where children were throwing hoops at hideous table ornaments. She darted across and cried:

"Father Brown, I've been looking for you. I want to ask you something. Do you believe in fortune-telling?"

The person addressed looked rather helplessly at the little hoop in his hand and said at last:

"I wonder in which sense you're using the word 'believe.' Of course, if it's all a fraud-----"

"Oh, but the Master of the Mountain isn't a bit of a fraud," she cried. "He isn't a common conjurer or a fortune-teller at all. It's really a great honour for him to condescend to tell fortunes at my parties; he's a great religious leader in his own country; a Prophet and a Seer. And even his fortune-telling isn't vulgar stuff about coming into a fortune. He tells you great spiritual truths about yourself, about your ideals."

"Quite so," said Father Brown. "That's what I object to. I was just going to say that if it's all a fraud, I don't mind it so much. It can't be much more of a fraud than most things at fancy bazaars; and there, in a way, it's a sort of practical joke. But if it's a religion and reveals spiritual truths--then it's all as false as hell and I wouldn't touch it with a bargepole."

"That is something of a paradox," said Hardcastle, with a smile.

"I wonder what a paradox is," remarked the priest in a ruminant manner. "It seems to me obvious enough. I suppose it wouldn't do very much harm if somebody dressed up as a German spy and pretended to have told all sorts of lies to the Germans. But if a man is trading in the truth with the Germans--well! So I think if a fortune-teller is trading in truth like that----"

"You really think," began Hardcastle grimly.

"Yes," said the other; "I think he is trading with the enemy."

"When you do," said Father Brown; "You only think he is trading with the enemy."

"Tommy Hunter broke into a chuckle. "Well," he said, "if Father Brown thinks they're good so long as they're frauds, I should think he'd consider this copper-coloured prophet a sort of saint."

"My cousin Tom is incorrigible," said Lady Mounteagle. "He's always going about showing up adepts, as he calls it. He only came down here in a hurry when he heard the Master was to be here, I believe. He'd have tried to show up Buddha or Moses."

"Thought you wanted looking after a bit," said the young man, with a grin on his round face. "So I toddled down. Don't like this brown monkey crawling about."

"There you go again!" said Lady Mounteagle. "Years ago, when I was in India, I suppose we all had that sort of prejudice against brown people. But now I know something about their wonderful spiritual powers, I'm glad to say I know better."

"Our prejudices seem to cut opposite ways," said Father Brown. "You excuse his being brown because he is brahminical; and I excuse his being brahminical because he is brown. Frankly, I don't care for spiritual powers much myself. I've got much more sympathy with spiritual weaknesses. But I can't see why anybody should dislike him merely because he is the same beautiful colour as copper, or coffee, or nut-brown ale, or those jolly peat-streams in the North. But then," he added, looking across at the lady and screwing up his eyes, "I suppose I'm prejudiced in favour of anything that's called brown."

"There now!" cried Lady Mounteagle with a sort of triumph. "I knew you were only talking nonsense!"

"Well," grumbled the aggrieved youth with the round face. "When anybody talks sense you call it schoolboy scepticism. When's the crystal-gazing going to begin?"

"Any time you like," replied the lady. "It isn't crystal-gazing, as a matter of fact, but palmistry; I suppose you would say it was all the same sort of nonsense."

"I think there is a via media between sense and nonsense," said Hardcastle, smiling. "There are explanations that are natural and not at all nonsensical; and yet the results are very amazing. Are you coming in to be operated on? I confess I am full of curiosity."

"Oh, I've no patience with such nonsense," spluttered the sceptic, whose round face had become rather a red face with the heat of his contempt and incredulity. "I'll let you waste your time on your mahogany mountebank; I'd rather go and throw at coco-nuts."

The Phrenologist, still hovering near, darted at the opening.
"Heads, my dear sir," he said, "human skulls are of a contour far more subtle than that of coco-nuts. No coco-nuts can compare with your own most----"

Hardcastle had already dived into the dark entry of the purple tent; and they heard a low murmur of voices within. As Tom Hunter turned on the Phrenologist with an impatient answer, in which he showed a regrettable indifference to the line between natural and preternatural sciences, the lady was just about to continue her little argument with the little priest, when she stopped in some surprise. James Hardcastle had come out of the tent again, and in his grim face and glaring monocle, surprise was even more vividly depicted. "He's not there," remarked the politician abruptly. "He's gone. Some aged nigger, who seems to constitute his suite, jabbered something I to me to the effect that the Master had gone forth rather than sell sacred secrets for gold."

Lady Mounteagle turned radiantly to the rest. "There now," she cried. "I told you he was a cut above anything you fancied! He hates being here in a crowd; he's gone back to his solitude."

"I am sorry," said Father Brown gravely. "I may have done him an injustice. Do you know where he has gone?"

"I think so," said his hostess equally gravely. "When he wants to be alone, he always goes to the cloisters, just at the end of the left wing, beyond my husband's study and private museum, you know. Perhaps you know this house was once an abbey."

"I have heard something about it," answered the priest, with a faint smile.

"We'll go there, if you like," said the lady, briskly. "You really ought to see my husband's collection; or the Red Moon at any rate. Haven't you ever heard of the Red Moon of Meru? Yes, it's a ruby."

"I should be delighted to see the collection," said Hardcastle quietly, "including the Master of the Mountain, if that prophet is one exhibit in the museum. And they all turned towards the path leading to the house.

"All the same," muttered the sceptical Thomas, as he brought up the rear, "I should very much like to know what the brown beast did come here for, if he didn't come to tell fortunes."

As he disappeared, the indomitable Phroso made one more dart after him, almost snatching at his coat-tails. "The bump----" he began.

"No bump," said the youth, "only a hump. Hump I always have when I come down to see Mounteagle." And he took to his heels to escape the embrace of the man of science.

On their way to the cloisters the visitors had to pass through the long room that was devoted by Lord Mounteagle to his remarkable private museum of Asiatic charms and mascots. Through one open door, in the length of the wall opposite, they could see the Gothic arches and the glimmer of daylight between them, marking the square open space, round the roofed border of which the monks had walked in older days. But they had to pass something that seemed at first sight rather more extraordinary than the ghost of a monk.

It was an elderly gentleman, robed from head to foot in white, with a pale green turban, but a very pink and white English complexion and the smooth white moustaches of some amiable Anglo-Indian colonel. This was Lord Mounteagle, who had taken his Oriental pleasures more sadly, or at least more seriously than his wife. He could talk of nothing whatever, except Oriental religion and philosophy; and had thought it necessary even to dress in the manner of an Oriental hermit. While he was delighted to show his treasures, he seemed to treasure them much more for the truths supposed to be symbolized in them than for their value in collections, let alone cash. Even when he brought out the great ruby, perhaps the only thing of great value in the museum, in a merely monetary sense, he seemed to be much more interested in its name than in its size, let alone its price.

The others were all staring at what seemed a stupendously large red stone, burning like a bonfire seen through a rain of blood. But Lord Mounteagle rolled it loosely in his palm without looking at it; and staring at the ceiling, told them a long tale about the legendary character of Mount Meru, and how, in the Gnostic mythology, it had been the place of the wrestling of nameless primeval powers.

Towards the end of the lecture on the Demiurge of the Gnostics (not forgetting its connexion with the parallel concept of Manichaeus), even the tactful Mr. Hardcastle thought it time to create a diversion. He asked to be allowed to look at the stone; and as evening was closing in, and the long room with its single door was steadily darkening, he stepped out in the cloister beyond, to examine the jewel by a better light. It was then that they first became conscious, slowly and almost creepily conscious, of the living presence of the Master of the Mountain.

The cloister was on the usual plan, as regards its original structure; but the line of Gothic pillars and pointed arches that formed the inner square was linked together all along by a low wall, about waist high, turning the Gothic doors into Gothic windows and giving each a sort of flat window-sill of stone. This alteration was probably of ancient date; but there were other alterations of a quaintier sort, which witnessed to the rather unusual individual ideas of Lord and Lady Mounteagle. Between the pillars hung thin curtains, or rather veils, made of beads or light canes, in a continental or southern manner; and on these again could be traced the lines and colours of Asiatic dragons or idols, that contrasted with the grey Gothic framework in which they were suspended. But this, while it further troubled the dying light of the place, was the least of the incongruities of which the company, with very
varying feelings, became aware.

In the open space surrounded by the cloisters, there ran, like a circle in a square, a circular path paved with pale stones and edged with some sort of green enamel like an imitation lawn. Inside that, in the very centre, rose the basin of a dark-green fountain, or raised pond, in which water-lilies floated and goldfish flashed to and fro; and high above these, its outline dark against the dying light, was a great green image. Its back was turned to them and its face so completely invisible in the hunched posture that the statue might almost have been headless. But in that mere dark outline, in the dim twilight, some of them could see instantly that it was the shape of no Christian thing.

A few yards away, on the circular path, and looking towards the great green god, stood the man called the Master of the Mountain. His pointed and finely-finished features seemed moulded by some skilful craftsman as a mask of copper. In contrast with this, his dark-grey beard looked almost blue like indigo; it began in a narrow tuft on his chin, and then spread outwards like a great fan or the tail of a bird. He was robed in peacock green and wore on his bald head a high cap of uncommon outline: a head-dress none of them had ever seen before; but it looked rather Egyptian than Indian. The man was standing with staring eyes; wide open, fish-shaped eyes, so motionless that they looked like the eyes painted on a mummy-case. But though the figure of the Master of the Mountain was singular enough, some of the company, including Father Brown, did not look at him; they still looked at the dark-green idol at which he himself was looking.

"This seems a queer thing," said Hardcastle, frowning a little, "to set up in the middle of an old abbey cloister."

"Now, don't tell me you're going to be silly," said Lady Mounteagle. "That's just what we meant; to link up the great religions of East and West; Buddha and Christ. Surely you must understand that all religions are really the same."

"If they are," said Father Brown mildly, "it seems rather unnecessary to go into the middle of Asia to get one."

"Lady Mounteagle means that they are different aspects or facets, as there are of this stone," began Hardcastle; and becoming interested in the new topic, laid the great ruby down on the stone sill or ledge under the Gothic arch. "But it does not follow that we can mix the aspects in one artistic style. You may mix Christianity and Islam, but you can't mix Gothic and Saracenic, let alone real Indian."

As he spoke, the Master of the Mountain seemed to come to life like a cataleptic, and moved gravely round another quarter segment of the circle, and took up his position outside their own row of arches, standing with his back to them and looking now towards the idol's back. It was obvious that he was moving by stages round the whole circle, like a hand round a clock; but pausing for prayer or contemplation.

"What is his religion?" asked Hardcastle, with a faint touch of impatience.

"He says," replied Lord Mounteagle, reverently, "that it is older than Brahminism and purer than Buddhism."

"Oh," said Hardcastle, and continued to stare through his single eyeglass, standing with both his hands in his pockets.

"They say," observed the nobleman in his gentle but didactic voice, "that the deity called the God of Gods is carved in a colossal form in the cavern of Mount Meru----"

Even his lordship's lecturing serenity was broken abruptly by the voice that came over his shoulder. It came out of the darkness of the museum they had just left, when they stepped out into the cloister. At the sound of it the two younger men looked first incredulous, then furious, and then almost collapsed into laughter.

"I hope I do not intrude," said the urbane and seductive voice of Professor Phroso, that unconquerable wrestler of the truth, "but it occurred to me that some of you might spare a little time for that much despised science of Bumps, which----"

"Look here," cried the impetuous Tommy Hunter, "I haven't got any bumps; but you'll jolly well have some soon, you----""}

Hardcastle mildly restrained him as he plunged back through the door; and for the moment all the group had turned again and were looking back into the inner room.

It was at that moment that the thing happened. It was the impetuous Tommy, once more, who was the first to move, and this time to better effect. Before anyone else had seen anything, when Hardcastle had barely remembered with a jump that he had left the gem on the stone sill, Tommy was across the cloister with the leap of a cat and, leaning with his head and shoulders out of the aperture between two columns, had cried out in a voice that rang down all the arches: "I've got him!"

In that instant of time, just after they turned, and just before they heard his triumphant cry, they had all seen it happen. Round the corner of one of the two columns, there had darted in and out again a brown or rather bronze-coloured hand, the colour of dead gold; such as they had seen elsewhere. The hand had struck as straight as a striking snake; as instantaneous as the flick of the long tongue of an ant-eater. But it had licked up the jewel. The stone slab of the window-sill shone bare in the pale and fading light.

"I've got him," gasped Tommy Hunter; "but he's wriggling pretty hard. You fellows run round him in front--he
can't have got rid of it, anyhow."

The others obeyed, some racing down the corridor and some leaping over the low wall, with the result that a little crowd, consisting of Hardcastle, Lord Mounteagle, Father Brown, and even the undetachable Mr. Phroso of the bumps, had soon surrounded the captive Master of the Mountain, whom Hunter was hanging on to desperately by the collar with one hand, and shaking every now and then in a manner highly insensible to the dignity of Prophets as a class.

"Now we've got him, anyhow," said Hunter, letting go with a sigh. "We've only got to search him. The thing must be here."

Three-quarters of an hour later. Hunter and Hardcastle, their top-hats, ties, gloves, slips and spats somewhat the worse for their recent activities, came face to face in the cloister and gazed at each other.

"Well," asked Hardcastle with restraint, "have you any views on the mystery?"

"Hang it all," replied Hunter; "you can't call it a mystery. Why, we all saw him take it ourselves."

"Yes," replied the other, "but we didn't all see him lose it ourselves. And the mystery is, where has he lost it so that we can't find it?"

"It must be somewhere," said Hunter. "Have you searched the fountain and all round that rotten old god there?"

"I haven't dissected the little fishes," said Hardcastle, lifting his eyeglass and surveying the other. "Are you thinking of the ring of Polycrates?"

Apparently the survey, through the eye-glass, of the round face before him, convinced him that it covered no such meditation on Greek legend.

"It's not on him, I admit," repeated Hunter, suddenly, "unless he's swallowed it."

"Are we to dissect the Prophet, too?" asked the other smiling. "But here comes our host."

"This is a most distressing matter," said Lord Mounteagle, twisting his white moustache with a nervous and even tremulous hand. "Horrible thing to have a theft in one's house, let alone connecting it with a man like the Master. But, I confess, I can't quite make head or tail of the way in which he is talking about it. I wish you'd come inside and see what you think."

They went in together, Hunter falling behind and dropping into conversation with Father Brown, who was kicking his heels round the cloister.

"You must be very strong," said the priest pleasantly. "You held him with one hand; and he seemed pretty vigorous, even when we had eight hands to hold him, like one of those Indian gods."

They took a turn or two round the cloister, talking; and then they also went into the inner room, where the Master of the Mountain was seated on a bench, in the capacity of a captive, but with more of the air of a king.

It was true, as Lord Mounteagle said, that his air and tone were not very easy to understand. He spoke with a serene, and yet secretive sense of power. He seemed rather amused at their suggestions about trivial hiding-places for the gem; and certainly he showed no resentment whatever. He seemed to be laughing, in a still unfathomable fashion at their efforts to trace what they had all seen him take.

"You are learning a little," he said, with insolent benevolence, "of the laws of time and space; about which your latest science is a thousand years behind our oldest religion. You do not even know what is really meant by hiding a thing. Nay, my poor little friends, you do not even know what is meant by seeing a thing; or perhaps you would see this as plainly as I do."

"Do you mean it is here?" demanded Hardcastle harshly.

"Here is a word of many meanings, also," replied the mystic. "But I did not say it was here. I only said I could see it."

There was an irritated silence, and he went on sleepily.

"If you were to be utterly, unfathomably, silent, do you think you might hear a cry from the other end of the world? The cry of a worshipper alone in those mountains, where the original image sits, itself like a mountain. Some say that even Jews and Moslems might worship that image; because it was never made by man. Hark! Do you hear the cry with which he lifts his head and sees in that socket of stone, that has been hollow for ages, the one red and angry moon that is the eye of the mountain?"

"Do you really mean," cried Lord Mounteagle, a little shaken, "that you could make it pass from here to Mount Meru? I used to believe you had great spiritual powers, but----"

"Perhaps," said the Master, "I have more than you will ever believe."

Hardcastle rose impatiently and began to pace the room with his hands in his pockets.

"I never believed so much as you did; but I admit that powers of a- certain type may . . . Good God!"

His high, hard voice had been cut off in mid-air, and he stopped staring; the eye-glass fell out of his eye. They all turned their faces in the same direction; and on every face there seemed to be the same suspended animation.

The Red Moon of Meru lay on the stone window-sill, exactly as they had last seen it. It might have been a red
spark blown there from a bonfire, or a red rose-petal tossed from a broken rose; but it had fallen in precisely the same spot where Hardcastle had thoughtlessly laid it down.

This time Hardcastle did not attempt to pick it up again; but his demeanour was somewhat notable. He turned slowly and began to stride about the room again; but there was in his movements something masterful, where before it had been only restless. Finally, he brought himself to a standstill in front of the seated Master, and bowed with a somewhat sardonic smile.

"Master," he said, "we all owe you an apology and, what is more important, you have taught us all a lesson. Believe me, it will serve as a lesson as well as a joke. I shall always remember the very remarkable powers you really possess, and how harmlessly you use them. Lady Mounteagle," he went on, turning towards her, "you will forgive me for having addressed the Master first; but it was to you I had the honour of offering this explanation some time ago. I may say that I explained it before it had happened. I told you that most of these things could be interpreted by some kind of hypnotism. Many believe that this is the explanation of all those Indian stories about the mango plant and the boy who climbs a rope thrown into the air. It does not really happen; but the spectators are mesmerized into imagining that it happened. So we were all mesmerized into imagining this theft had happened. That brown hand coming in at the window, and whisking away the gem, was a momentary delusion; a hand in a dream. Only, having seen the stone vanish, we never looked for it where it was before. We plunged into the pond and turned every leaf of the water lilies; we were almost giving emetics to the goldfish. But the ruby has been here all the time."

And he glanced across at the opalescent eyes and smiling bearded mouth of the Master, and saw that the smile was just a shade broader. There was something in it that made the others jump to their feet with an air of sudden relaxation and general, gasping relief.

"This is a very fortunate escape for us all," said Lord Mounteagle, smiling rather nervously. "There cannot be the least doubt it is as you say. It has been a most painful episode and I really don't know what apologies----"

"I have no complaints," said the Master or the Mountain, still smiling. "You have never touched Me at all."

While the rest went off rejoicing, with Hardcastle for the hero of the hour, the little Phrenologist with the whiskers sauntered back towards his preposterous tent. Looking over his shoulder he was surprised to find Father Brown following him.

"Can I feel your bumps?" asked the expert, in his mildly sarcastic tone.

"I don't think you want to feel any more, do you?" said the priest good-humouredly. "You're a detective, aren't you?"

"Yep," replied the other. "Lady Mounteagle asked me to keep an eye on the Master, being no fool, for all her mysticism; and when he left his tent, I could only follow by behaving like a nuisance and a monomaniac. If anybody had come into my tent, I'd have had to look up Bumps in an encyclopaedia."

"Bumps, What Ho She; see Folk-Lore," observed Father Brown, dreamily. "Well, you were quite in the part in pesterling people—at a bazaar."

"Rum case, wasn't it?" remarked the fallacious Phrenologist. "Queer to think the thing was there all the time."

"Very queer," said the priest.

Something in his voice made the other man stop and stare.

"Look here!" he cried; "what's the matter with you? What are you looking like that for! Don't you believe that it was there all the time?"

Father Brown blinked rather as if he had received a buffet; then he said slowly and with hesitation: "No, the fact is ... I can't--I can't quite bring myself to believe it."

"You're not the sort of chap," said the other shrewdly, "who'd say that without reason. Why don't you think the ruby had been there all the time?"

"Only because I put it back myself," said Father Brown.

The other man stood rooted to the spot, like one whose hair was standing on end. He opened his mouth without speech.

"Or rather," went on the priest, "I persuaded the thief to let me put it back. I told him what I'd guessed and showed him there was still time for repentance. I don't mind telling you in professional confidence; besides, I don't think the Mounteagles would prosecute, now they've got the thing back, especially considering who stole it."

"Do you mean the Master?" asked the late Phroso.

"No," said Father Brown, "the Master didn't steal it."

"But I don't understand," objected the other. "Nobody was outside the window except the Master; and a hand certainly came from outside."

"The hand came from outside, but the thief came from the inside," said Father Brown.

"We seem to be back among the mystics again. Look here, I'm a practical man; I only wanted to know if it is all
right with the ruby----"

"I knew it was all wrong," said Father Brown, "before I even knew there was a ruby."

After a pause he went on thoughtfully. "Right away back in that argument of theirs, by the tents, I knew things were going wrong. People will tell you that theories don't matter and that logic and philosophy aren't practical. Don't you believe them. Reason is from God, and when things are unreasonable there is something the matter. Now, that quite abstract argument ended with something funny. Consider what the theories were. Hardcastle was a trifle superior and said that all things were perfectly possible; but they were mostly done merely by mesmerism, or clairvoyance; scientific names for philosophical puzzles, in the usual style. But Hunter thought it all sheer fraud and wanted to show it up. By Lady Mounteagle's testimony, he not only went about showing up fortune-tellers and such like, but he had actually come down specially to confront this one. He didn't often come; he didn't get on with Mounteagle, from whom, being a spendthrift, he always tried to borrow; but when he heard the Master was coming, he came hurrying down. Very well. In spite of that, it was Hardcastle who went to consult the wizard and Hunter who refused. He said he'd waste no time on such nonsense; having apparently wasted a lot of his life on proving it to be nonsense. That seems inconsistent. He thought in this case it was crystal-gazing; but he found it was palmistry."

"Do you mean he made that an excuse?" asked his companion, puzzled.

"I thought so at first," replied the priest; "but I know now it was not an excuse, but a reason. He really was put off by finding it was a palmist, because----"

"Well," demanded the other impatiently.

"Because he didn't want to take his glove off," said Father Brown.

"Take his glove off?" repeated the inquirer.

"If he had," said Father Brown mildly, "we should all have seen that his hand was painted pale brown already. ... Oh, yes, he did come down specially because the Master was here. He came down very fully prepared."

"You mean," cried Phroso, "that it was Hunter's hand, painted brown, that came in at the window? Why, he was with us all the time!"

"Go and try it on the spot and you'll find it's quite possible," said the priest. "Hunter leapt forward and leaned out of the window; in a flash he could tear off his glove, tuck up his sleeve, and thrust his hand back round the other side of the pillar, while he gripped the Indian with the other hand and halloed out that he'd caught the thief. I remarked at the time that he held the thief with one hand, where any sane man would have used two. But the other hand was slipping the jewel into his trouser pocket."

There was a long pause and then the ex-Phrenologist said slowly. "Well, that's a staggerer. But the thing stumps me still. For one thing, it doesn't explain the queer behaviour of the old magician himself. If he was entirely innocent, why the devil didn't he say so? Why wasn't he indignant at being accused and searched? Why did he only sit smiling and hinting in a sly way what wild and wonderful things he could do?"

"Ah!" cried Father Brown, with a sharp note in his voice: "there you come up against it! Against everything these people don't and won't understand. All religions are the same, says Lady Mounteagle. Are they, by George! I tell you some of them are so different that the best man of one creed will be callous, where the worst man of another will be sensitive. I told you I didn't like spiritual power, because the accent is on the word; power. I don't say the Master would steal a ruby, very likely he wouldn't; very likely he wouldn't think it worth stealing. It wouldn't be specially his temptation to take jewels; but it would be his temptation to take credit for miracles that didn't belong to him any more than the jewels. It was to that sort of temptation, to that sort of stealing that he yielded today. He liked us to think that he had marvellous mental powers that could make a material object fly through space; and even when he hadn't done it, he allowed us to think he had. The point about private property wouldn't occur primarily to him at all. The question wouldn't present itself in the form: 'Shall I steal this pebble?' but only in the form: 'Could I make a pebble vanish and re-appear on a distant mountain?' The question of whose pebble would strike him as irrelevant. That is what I mean by religious being different. He is very proud of having what he calls spiritual powers. But what he calls spiritual doesn't mean what we call moral. It means rather mental; the power of the mind over matter; the magician controlling the elements. Now we are not like that, even when we are no better; even when we are worse. We, whose fathers at least were Christians, who have grown up under those mediaeval arches even if we bedizen them with all the demons in Asia--we have the very opposite ambition and the very opposite shame. We should all be anxious that nobody should think we had done it. He was actually anxious that everybody should think he had--even when he hadn't. He actually stole the credit of stealing. While we were all casting the crime from us like a snake, he was actually luring it to him like a snake-charmer. But snakes are not pets in this country! Here the traditions of Christendom tell at once under a test like this. Look at old Mounteagle himself, for instance! Ah, you may be as Eastern and esoteric as you like, and weal a turban and a long robe and live on messages from Mahatmas; but if a bit of stone is stolen in your house, and your friends are suspected, you will jolly soon find out that you're an ordinary English gentleman in a fuss. The man who really did it would never want us to think he did it, for he also
was an English gentleman. He was also something very much better; he was a Christian thief. I hope and believe he was a penitent thief."

"By your account," said his companion laughing, "the Christian thief and the heathen fraud went by contraries. One was sorry he'd done it and the other was sorry he hadn't."

"We mustn't be too hard on either of them," said Father Brown. "Other English gentlemen have stolen before now, and been covered by legal and political protection; and the West also has its own way of covering theft with sophistry. After all, the ruby is not the only kind of valuable stone in the world that has changed owners; it is true of other precious stones; often carved like cameos and coloured like flowers." The other looked at him inquiringly; and the priest's finger was pointed to the Gothic outline of the great Abbey. "A great graven stone," he said, "and that was also stolen."

VIII THE CHIEF MOURNER OF MARNE

A BLAZE of lightning blanched the grey woods tracing all the wrinkled foliage down to the last curled leaf, as if every detail were drawn in silverpoint or graven in silver. The same strange trick of lightning by which it seems to record millions of minute things in an instant of time, picked out everything, from the elegant litter of the picnic spread under the spreading tree to the pale lengths of winding road, at the end of which a white car was waiting. In the distance a melancholy mansion with four towers like a castle, which in the grey evening had been but a dim and distant huddle of walls like a crumbling cloud, seemed to spring into the foreground, and stood up with all its embattled, roofs and blank and staring windows. And in this, at least, the light had something in it of revelation. For to some of those grouped under the tree that castle was, indeed, a thing faded and almost forgotten, which was to prove its power to spring up again in the foreground of their lives.

The light also clothed for an instant, in the same silver splendour, at least one human figure that stood up as motionless as one of the towers. It was that of a tall man standing on a rise of ground above the rest, who were mostly sitting on the grass or stooping to gather up the hamper and crockery. He wore a picturesque short cloak or cape clasped with a silver clasp and chain, which blazed like a star when the flash touched it; and something metallic in his motionless figure was emphasized by the fact that his closely-curled hair was of the burnished yellow that can be really called gold; and had the look of being younger than his face, which was handsome in a hard aquiline fashion, but looked, under the strong light, a little wrinkled and withered. Possibly it had suffered from wearing a mask of make-up, for Hugo Romaine was the greatest actor of his day. For that instant of illumination the golden curls and ivory mask-and silver ornament made his figure gleam like that of a man in armour; the next instant his figure was a dark and even black silhouette against the sickly grey of the rainy evening sky.

But there was something about its stillness, like that of a statue, that distinguished it from the group at his feet. All the other figures around him had made the ordinary involuntary movement at the unexpected shock of light; for though the skies were rainy it was the first flash of the storm. The only lady present, whose air of carrying grey hair gracefully, as if she were really proud of it, marked her a matron of the United States, unaffectedly shut her eyes and uttered a sharp cry. Her English husband, General Outram, a very stolid Anglo-Indian, with a bald head and black moustache and whiskers of antiquated pattern, looked up with one stiff movement and then resumed his occupation of tidying up. A young man of the name of Mallow, very big and shy, with brown eyes like a dog's, dropped a cup and apologized awkwardly. A third man, much more dressy, with a resolute head, like an inquisitive terrier's, and grey hair brushed stiffly back, was no other than the great newspaper proprietor, Sir John Cockspur; he cursed freely, but not in an English idiom or accent, for he came from Toronto. But the tall man in the short cloak stood up literally like a statue in the twilight; his eagle face under the full glare had been like the bust of a Roman Emperor, and the carved eyelids had not moved.

A moment after, the dark dome cracked across with thunder, and the statue seemed to come to life. He turned his head over his shoulder and said casually; "About a minute and half between the flash and the bang, but I think the storm's coming nearer. A tree is not supposed to be a good umbrella for the lightning, but we shall want it soon for the rain. I think it will be a deluge.' The young man glanced at the lady a little anxiously and said: "Can't we get shelter anywhere? There seems to be a house over there."

"There is a house over there," remarked the general, rather grimly; "but not quite what you'd call a hospitable hotel."

"It's curious," said his wife sadly, "that we should be caught in a storm with no house near but that one, of all others."

Something in her tone seemed to check the younger man, who was both sensitive and comprehending; but nothing of that sort daunted the man from Toronto.

"What's the matter with it?" he asked. "Looks rather like a ruin."

"That place," said the general dryly, "belongs to the Marquis of Marne."
"Gee!" said Sir John Cockspur. "I've heard all about that bird, anyhow; and a queer bird, too. Ran him as a front-page mystery in the Comet last year. 'The Nobleman Nobody Knows.'"

"Yes, I've heard of him, too," said young Mallow in a low voice. "There seem to be all sorts of weird stories about why he hides himself like that. I've heard that he wears a mask because he's a leper. But somebody else told me quite seriously that there's a curse on the family; a child born with some frightful deformity that's kept in a dark room."

"The Marquis of Marne has three heads," remarked Romaine quite gravely. "Once in every three hundred years a three-headed nobleman adorns the family tree. No human being dares approach the accursed house except a silent procession of hatters, sent to provide an abnormal number of hats. But," --and his voice took one of those deep and terrible turns, that could cause such a thrill in the theatre--"my friends, those hats are of no human shape."

The American lady looked at him with a frown and a slight air of distrust, as if that trick of voice had moved her in spite of herself.

"I don't like your ghoulish jokes," she said; "and I'd rather you didn't joke about this, anyhow."

"I hear and obey," replied the actor; "but am I, like the Light Brigade, forbidden even to reason why?"

"The reason," she replied, "is that he isn't the Nobleman Nobody Knows. I know him myself, or, at least, I knew him very well when he was an attaché at Washington thirty years ago, when we were all young. And he didn't wear a mask, at least, he didn't wear it with me. He wasn't a leper, though he may he almost as lonely. And he had only one head and only one heart, and that was broken."

"Unfortunately affair, of course," said Cockspur. "I should like that for the Comet."

"I suppose it's a compliment to us," she replied thoughtfully, "that you always assume a man's heart is broken by a woman. But there are other kinds of love and bereavement. Have you never read 'In Memoriam'? Have you never heard of David and Jonathan? What broke poor Marne up was the death of his brother; at least, he was really a first cousin, but had been brought up with him like a brother, and was much nearer than most brothers. James Mair, as the marquis was called when I knew him, was the eldest of the two, but he always played the part of worshipper, with Maurice Mair as a god. And, by his account, Maurice Mair was certainly a wonder. James was no fool, and very good at his own political job; but it seems that Maurice could do that and everything else; that he was a brilliant artist and amateur actor and musician, and all the rest of it. James was very good-looking himself, long and strong and strenuous, with a high-bridged nose; though I suppose the young people would think he looked very quaint with his beard divided into two bushy whiskers in the fashion of those Victorian times. But Maurice was clean-shaven, and, by the portraits shown to me, certainly quite beautiful; though he looked a little more like a tenor than a gentleman ought to look. James was always asking me again and again whether his friend was not a marvel, whether any woman wouldn't fall in love with him, and so on, until it became rather a bore, except that it turned so suddenly into a tragedy. His whole life seemed to be in that idolatry, and one day the idol tumbled down, and was broken like any china doll. A chill caught at the seaside, and it was all over."

"And after that," asked the young man, "did he shut himself up like this?"

"He went abroad at first," she answered; "away to Asia and the cannibal Islands and Lord knows where. These deadly strokes take different people in different ways. It took him in the way of an utter sundering or severance from everything, even from tradition and as far as possible from memory. He could not bear a reference to the old tie; a portrait or an anecdote or even an association. He couldn't bear the business of a great public funeral. He longed to get away. He stayed away for ten years. I heard some rumour that lie had begun to revive a little at the end of the exile; but when he came back to his own home he relapsed completely. He settled down into religious melancholia, and that's practically madness."

"The priests got hold of him, they say," grumbled the old general. "I know he gave thousands to found a monastery, and lives himself rather like a monk—or, at any rate, a hermit. Can't understand what good they think that will do."

"Goddarned superstition," snorted Cockspur; "that sort of thing ought to be shown up. Here's a man that might have been useful to the Empire and the world, and these vampires get hold of him and suck him dry. I bet with their unnatural notions they haven't even let him marry."

"No, he has never married," said the lady. "He was engaged when I knew him, as a matter of fact, but I don't think it ever came first with him, and I think it went with the rest when everything else went. Like Hamlet and Ophelia—he lost hold of love because he lost hold of life. But I knew the girl; indeed, I know her still. Between ourselves, it was Viola Grayson, daughter of the old admiral. She's never married either."

"It's infamous! It's infernal!" cried Sir John, bounding up. "It's not only a tragedy, but a crime. I've got a duty to the public, and I mean to see all this nonsensical nightmare. In the twentieth century—"

He was almost choked with his own protest, and then, after a silence, the old soldier said:

"Well, I don't profess to know much about those things, but I think these religious people need to study a text.
which says: 'Let the dead bury their dead.'"

"Only, unfortunately, that's just what it looks like," said his wife with a sigh. "It's just like some creepy story of a dead man burying another dead man, over and over again for ever."

"The storm has passed over us," said Romaine, with a rather inscrutable smile. "You will not have to visit the inhospitable house after all."

She suddenly shuddered.

"Oh, I'll never do that again!" she exclaimed.

Mallow was staring at her.

"Again! Have you tried it before?" he cried.

"Well, I did once," she said, with a lightness not without a touch of pride; "but we needn't go back on all that. It's not raining now, but I think we'd better be moving back to the car."

As they moved off in procession, Mallow and the general brought up the rear; and the latter said abruptly, lowering his voice:

"I don't want that little cad Cockspur to hear but as you've asked you'd better know. It's the one thing I can't forgive Marne; but I suppose these monks have drilled him that way. My wife, who had been the best friend he ever had in America, actually came to that house when he was walking in the garden. He was looking at the ground like a monk, and hidden in a black hood that was really as ridiculous as any mask. She had sent her card in, and stood there in his very path. And lie walked past her without a word or a glance, as if she had been a stone. He wasn't human; he was like some horrible automaton. She may well call him a dead man."

"It's all very strange," said the young man rather vaguely. "It isn't like--like what I should have expected."

Young Mr. Mallow, when he left that rather dismal picnic, took himself thoughtfully in search of a friend. He did not know any monks, but he knew one priest, whom he was very much concerned to confront with the curious revelations he had heard that afternoon. He felt he would very much like to know the truth about the cruel superstition that hung over the house of Marne, like the black thundercloud he had seen hovering over it.

After being referred from one place to another, he finally ran his friend Father Brown to earth in the house of another friend, a Roman Catholic friend, with a large family. He entered somewhat abruptly to find Father Brown sitting on the floor with a serious expression, and attempting to pin the somewhat florid hat belonging to a wax doll on to the head of a teddy bear.

Mallow felt a faint sense of incongruity; but he was far too full of his problem to put off the conversation if he could, help it. He was staggering from a sort of set-back in a subconscious process that had been going on for some time. He poured out the whole tragedy of the house of Marne as he had heard it from the general's wife, along with most of the comments of the general and the newspaper proprietor. A new atmosphere of attention seemed to be created with the mention of the newspaper proprietor.

Father Brown neither knew nor cared that his attitudes were comic or commonplace. He continued to sit on the floor, where his large head and short legs made him look very like a baby playing with toys. But there came into his great grey eyes a certain expression that has been seen in the eyes of many men in many centuries through the story of nineteen hundred years; only the men were not generally sitting on floors, but at council tables, or on the seats of chapters, or the thrones of bishops and cardinals; a far-off, watchful look, heavy with the humility of a charge too great for men. Something of that anxious and far-reaching look is found in the eyes of sailors and of those who have steered through so many storms the ship of St. Peter.

"It's very good of you to tell me this," he said. "I'm really awfully grateful, for we may have to do something about it. If it were only people like you and the general, it might be only a private matter; but if Sir John Cockspur is going to spread some sort or scare in his papers--well, he's a Toronto Orangeman, and we can hardly keep out of it."

"But what will you say about it?" asked Mallow anxiously.

"The first thing I should say about it," said Father Brown, "is that, as you tell it, it doesn't sound like life. Suppose, for the sake of argument, that we are all pessimistic vampires blighting all human happiness. Suppose I'm a pessimistic vampire." He scratched his nose with the teddy bear, became faintly conscious of the incongruity, and put it down. "Suppose we do destroy all human and family ties. Why should we entangle a man again in an old family tie just when he showed signs of getting loose from it? Surely it's a little unfair to charge us both with crushing such affection and encouraging such infatuation. I don't see why even a religious maniac should be that particular sort of monomaniac, or how religion could increase that mania, except by brightening it with a little hope."

Then he said, after a pause: "I should like to talk to that general of yours."

"It was his wife who told me," said Mallow.

"Yes," replied the other; "but I'm more interested in what he didn't tell you than in what she did."

"You think he knows more than she does?"
"I think he knows more than she says," answered Father Brown. "You tell me he used a phrase about forgiving everything except the rudeness to his wife. After all, what else was there to forgive?"

Father Brown had risen and shaken his shapeless clothes, and stood looking at the young man with screwed up eyes and slightly quizzical expression. The next moment he had turned, and picking up his equally shapeless umbrella and large shabby hat, went stumping down the street.

He plodded through a variety of wide streets and squares till he came to a handsome old-fashioned house in the West End, where he asked the servant if he could see General Outram. After some little palaver he was shown into a study, fitted out less with books than with maps and globes, where the bald-headed, black-whiskered Anglo-Indian sat smoking a long, thin, black cigar and playing with pins on a chart.

"I am sorry to intrude," said the priest, "and all the more because I can't help the intrusion looking like interference. I want to speak to you about a private matter, but only in the hope of keeping it private. Unfortunately, some people are likely to make it public. I think, general, that you know Sir John Cockspur."

The mass of black moustache and whisker served as a sort of mask for the lower half of the old general's face; it was always hard to see whether he smiled, but his brown eyes often had a certain twinkle.

"Everybody knows him, I suppose," said Father Brown, smiling, "when he thinks it convenient to print it. And I understand from my friend Mr. Mallow, whom, I think, you know, that Sir John is going to print some scorching anti-clerical articles founded on what he would call the Marne Mystery. "Monks Drive Marquis Mad,' etc."

"If he is," replied the general, "I don't see why you should come to me about it. I ought to tell you I'm a strong Protestant."

"I'm very fond of strong Protestants," said Father Brown. "I came to you because I was sure you would tell the truth. I hope it is not uncharitable to feel less sure of Sir John Cockspur."

The brown eyes twinkled again, but the general said nothing.

"General," said Father Brown, "suppose Cockspur or his sort were going to make the world ring with tales against your country and your flag. Suppose he said your regiment ran away in battle, or your staff were in the pay of the enemy. Would you let anything stand between you and the facts that would refute him? Wouldn't you get on the track of the truth at all costs to anybody? Can you blame me for trying to find it out?"

The soldier was silent, and the priest continued:

"I have heard the story Mallow was told yesterday, about Marne retiring with a broken heart through the death of his more than brother. I am sure there was more in it than that. I came to ask you if you know any more."

"No," said the general shortly; "I cannot tell you any more."

"General," said Father Brown with a broad grin, "you would have called me a Jesuit if I had used that equivocation."

The soldier laughed gruffly, and then growled with much greater hostility.

"Well, I won't tell you, then," he said. "What do you say to that?"

"I only say," said the priest mildly, "that in that case I shall have to tell you."

The brown eyes stared at him; but there was no twinkle in them now. He went on:

"You compel me to state, less sympathetically perhaps than you could, why it is obvious that there is more behind. I am quite sure the marquis has better cause for his brooding and secretiveness than merely having lost an old friend. I doubt whether priests have anything to do with it; I don't even know if he's a convert or merely a man comforting his conscience with charities; but I'm sure he's something more than a chief mourner. Since you insist, I will tell you one or two of the things that made me think so.

"First, it was stated that James Mair was engaged to be married, but somehow became unattached again after the death of Maurice Mair. Why should an honourable man break off his engagement merely because he was depressed by the death of a third party? He's much more likely to have turned for consolation to it; but, anyhow, he was bound in decency to go through with it."

The general was biting his black moustache, and his brown eyes had become very watchful and even anxious, but he did not answer.

"A second point," said Father Brown, frowning at the table. "James Mair was always asking his lady friend whether his cousin Maurice was not very fascinating, and whether women would not admire him. I don't know if it occurred to the lady that there might be another meaning to that inquiry."

The general got to his feet and began to walk or stamp about the room.

"Oh, damn it all," he said, but without any air of animosity.

"The third point," went on Father Brown, "is James Mair's curious manner of mourning--destroying all relics,
veiling all portraits, and so on. It does sometimes happen, I admit; it might mean mere affectionate bereavement. But it might mean something else."

"Confound you," said the other. "How long are you going on piling this up?"

"The fourth and fifth points are pretty conclusive," said the priest calmly, "especially if you take them together. The first is that Maurice Mair seems to have had no funeral in particular, considering he was a cadet of a great family. He must have been buried hurriedly; perhaps secretly. And the last point is, that James Mair instantly disappeared to foreign parts; fled, in fact, to the ends of the earth.

"And so," he went on, still in the same soft voice, "when you would blacken my religion to brighten the story of the pure and perfect affection of two brothers, it seems---

"Stop!" cried Outram in a tone like a pistol shot. "I must tell you more, or you will fancy worse. Let me tell you one thing to start with. It was a fair fight."

"Ah," said Father Brown, and seemed to exhale a huge breath.

"It was a duel," said the other. "It was probably the last duel fought in England, and it is long ago now."

"That's better," said Father Brown. "Thank God; that's a great deal better."

"Better than the ugly things you thought of, I suppose?" said the general gruffly. "Well, it's all very well for you to sneer at the pure and perfect affection; but it was true for all that. James Mair really was devoted to his cousin, who'd grown up with him like a younger brother. Elder brothers and sisters do sometimes devote themselves to a child like that, especially when he's a sort of infant phenomenon. But James Mair was the sort of simple character in whom even hate is in a sense unselfish. I mean that even when his tenderness turns to rage it is still objective, directed outwards to its object; he isn't conscious of himself. Now poor Maurice Mair was just the opposite. He was far more friendly and popular; but his success had made him live in a house of mirrors. He was first in every sort of sport and art and accomplishment; he nearly always won and took his winning amiably. But if ever, by any chance, he lost, there was just a glimpse of something not so amiable; he was a little jealous. I needn't tell you the whole miserable story of how he was a little jealous of his cousin's engagement; how he couldn't keep his restless vanity from interfering. It's enough to say that one of the few things in which James Mair was admittedly ahead of him was marksmanship with a pistol; and with that the tragedy ended."

"You mean the tragedy began," replied the priest. "The tragedy of the survivor. I thought he did not need any monkish vampires to make him miserable."

"To my mind he's more miserable than he need be," said the general. "After all, as I say, it was a ghastly tragedy, but it was a fair fight. And Jim had great provocation."

"How do you know all this?" asked the priest.

"I know it because I saw it," answered Outram stolidly. "I was James Mair's second, and I saw Maurice Mair shot dead on the sands before my very eyes."

"I wish you would tell me more about it," said Father Brown reflectively. "Who was Maurice Mair's second?"

"He had a more distinguished backing," replied the general grimly. "Hugo Romaine was his second; the great actor, you know. Maurice was mad on acting and had taken up Romaine (who was then a rising but still a struggling man), and financed the fellow and his ventures in return for taking lessons from the professional in his own hobby of amateur acting. But Romaine was then, I suppose, practically dependent on his rich friend; though he's richer now than any aristocrat. So his serving as second proves very little about what he thought of the quarrel. They fought in the English fashion, with only one second apiece; I wanted at least to have a surgeon, but Maurice boisterously refused it, saying the fewer people who knew, the better; and at the worst we could immediately get help. 'There's a doctor in the village not half a mile away,' he said; 'I know him and he's got the fastest horse in the country. He can be brought here in no time; but there's no need to bring him here till we know.' Well, we all knew that Maurice ran most risk, as the pistol was not his weapon; so when he refused aid nobody liked to ask for it. The duel was fought on a flat stretch of sand on the east coast of Scotland; and both the sight and sound of it were masked from the hamlets inland by a long rampart of sandhills patched with rank grass; probably part of the links, though in those days no Englishman had heard of golf. There was one deep, crooked cranny in the sandhills through which we came out on the sands. I can see them now; first a wide strip of dead yellow, and beyond, a narrower strip of dark red; a dark red that seemed already like the long shadow of a deed of blood."

"The thing itself seemed to happen with horrible speed; as if a whirlwind had struck the sand. With the very crack of sound Maurice Mair seemed to spin like a teetotum and pitch upon his face like a ninepin. And queerly enough, while I'd been worrying about him up to that moment, the instant he was dead all my pity was for the man who killed him; as it is to this day and hour. I knew that with that, the whole huge terrible pendulum of my friend's life-long love would swing back; and that whatever cause others might find to pardon him, he would never pardon himself for ever and ever. And so, somehow, the really vivid thing, the picture that burns in my memory so that I can't forget it, is not that of the catastrophe, the smoke and the flash and the falling figure. That seemed to be all
over, like the noise that wakes a man up. What I saw, what I shall always see, is poor Jim hurrying across towards his fallen friend and foe; his brown beard looking black against the ghastly pallor of his face, with its high features cut out against the sea; and the frantic gestures with which he waved me to run for the surgeon in the hamlet behind the sandhills. He had dropped his pistol as he ran; he had a glove in one hand and the loose and fluttering fingers of it seemed to elongate and emphasize his wild pantomime of pointing or hailing for help. That is the picture that really remains with me; and there is nothing else in that picture, except the striped background of sands and sea and the dark, dead body lying still as a stone, and the dark figure of the dead man's second standing grim and motionless against the horizon."

"Did Romaine stand motionless?" asked the priest. "I should have thought he would have run even quicker towards the corpse."

"Perhaps he did when I had left," replied the general. "I took in that undying picture in an instant and the next instant I had dived among the sandhills, and was far out of sight of the others. Well, poor Maurice had made a good choice in the matter of doctors; though the doctor came too late, he came quicker than I should have thought possible. This village surgeon was a very remarkable man, red-haired, irascible, but extraordinarily strong in promptitude and presence of mind. I saw him but for a flash as he leapt on his horse and went thundering away to the scene of death, leaving me far behind. But in that flash I had so strong a sense of his personality that I wished to God he had really been called in before the duel began; for I believe on my soul he would have prevented it somehow. As it was, he cleaned up the mess with marvellous swiftness; long before I could trail back to the seashore on my two feet his impetuous practicality had managed everything; the corpse was temporarily buried in the sandhills and the unhappy homicide had been persuaded to do the only thing he could do—to flee for his life. He slipped along the coast till he came to a port and managed to get out of the country. You know the rest; poor Jim remained abroad for many years; later, when the whole thing had been hushed up or forgotten, he returned to his dismal castle and automatically inherited the title. I have never seen him from that day to this, and yet I know what is written in red letters in the inmost darkness of his brain."

"I understand," said Father Brown, "that some of you have made efforts to see him?"

"My wife never relaxed her efforts," said the general. "She refuses to admit that such a crime ought to cut a man off for ever; and I confess I am inclined to agree with her. Eighty years before it would have been thought quite normal; and really it was manslaughter rather than murder. My wife is a great friend of the unfortunate lady who was the occasion of the quarrel and she has an idea that if Jim would consent to see Viola Grayson once again, and receive her assurance that old quarrels are buried, it might restore his sanity. My wife is calling a sort of council of old friends tomorrow, I believe. She is very energetic."

Father Brown was playing with the pins that lay beside the general's map; he seemed to listen rather absent-mindedly. He had the sort of mind that sees things in pictures; and the picture which had coloured even the prosaic mind of the practical soldier took on tints yet more significant and sinister in the more mystical mind of the priest. He saw the dark-red desolation of sand, the very hue of Aeceldama, and the dead man lying in a dark heap, and the desperate figure that stood up like a standing note of interrogation. It might seem to some a detail; but for him it was that stiff figure that stood up like a standing note of interrogation.

Why had not Romaine moved instantly? It was the natural thing for a second to do, in common humanity, let alone friendship. Even if there were some double-dealing or darker motive not yet understood, one would think it would be done for the sake of appearances. Anyhow, when the thing was all over, it would be natural for the second to stir long before the other second had vanished beyond the sandhills."

"Docs this man Romanic move very slowly?" he asked.

"It's queer you should ask that," answered. Outram, with a sharp glance. "No, as a matter of fact he moves very quickly when he moves at all. But, curiously enough, I was just thinking that only this afternoon I saw him stand exactly like that, during the thunderstorm. He stood in that silver-clasped cape of his, and with one hand on his hip, exactly and in every line as he stood on those bloody sands long ago. The lightning blinded us all, but he did not blink. When it was dark again he was standing there still."

"I suppose he isn't standing there now?" inquired Father Brown. "I mean, I suppose he moved sometime?"

"No, he moved quite sharply when the thunder came," replied the other. "He seemed to have been waiting for it, for he told us the exact time of the interval. Is anything the matter?"

"I've pricked myself with one of your pins," said Father Brown. "I hope I haven't damaged it." But his eyes had snapped and his mouth abruptly shut.

"Are you ill?" inquired the general, staring at him."

"No," answered the priest; "I'm only not quite so stoical as your friend Romaine. I can't help blinking when I see
He turned to gather up his hat and umbrella; but when he had got to the door he seemed to remember something and turned back. Coming up close to Outram, he gazed up into his face with a rather helpless expression, as of a dying fish, and made a motion as if to hold him by the waistcoat.

"General," he almost whispered, "for God's sake don't let your wife and that other woman insist on seeing Marne again. Let sleeping dogs lie, or you'll unleash all the hounds of hell."

The general was left alone with a look of bewilderment in his brown eyes, as he sat down again to play with his pins.

Even greater, however, was the bewilderment which attended the successive stages of the benevolent conspiracy of the general's wife, who had assembled her little group of sympathizers to storm the castle of the misanthrope. The first surprise she encountered was the unexplained absence of one of the actors in the ancient tragedy. When they assembled by agreement at a quiet hotel quite near the castle, there was no sign of Hugo Romaine, until a belated telegram from a lawyer told them that the great actor had suddenly left the country. The second surprise, when they began the bombardment by sending up word to the castle with an urgent request for an interview, was the figure which came forth from those gloomy gates to receive the deputation in the name of the noble owner. It was no such figure as they would have conceived suitable to those sombre avenues or those almost feudal formalities. It was not some stately steward or major-domo, nor even a dignified butler or tall and ornamental footman. The only figure that came out of the cavernous castle doorway was the short and shabby figure of Father Brown.

"Look here," he said, in his simple, bothered fashion. "I told you you'd much better leave him alone. He knows what he's doing and it'll only make everybody unhappy."

Lady Outram, who was accompanied by a tall and quietly-dressed lady, still very handsome, presumably the original Miss Grayson, looked at the little priest with cold contempt.

"Really, sir," she said; "this is a very private occasion, and I don't understand what you have to do with it."

"Trust a priest to have to do with a private occasion," snarled Sir John Cockspur. "Don't you know they live behind the scenes like rats behind a wainscot burrowing their way into everybody's private rooms. See how he's already in possession of poor Marne."

Sir John was slightly sulky, as his aristocratic friends had persuaded him to give up the great scoop of publicity in return for the privilege of being really inside a Society secret. It never occurred to him to ask himself whether he was at all like a rat in a wainscot.

"Oh, that's all right," said Father Brown, with the impatience of anxiety. "I've talked it over with the marquis and the only priest he's ever had anything to do with; his clerical tastes have been much exaggerated. I tell you he knows what he's about; and I do implore you all to leave him alone."

"You mean to leave him to this living death of moping and going mad in a ruin!" cried Lady Outram, in a voice that shook a little. "And all because he had the bad luck to shoot a man in a duel more than a quarter of a century ago. Is that what you call Christian charity?"

"Yes," answered the priest stolidly; "that is what I call Christian charity."

"It's about all the Christian charity you'll ever get out of these priests," cried Cockspur bitterly. "That's their only idea of pardoning a poor fellow for a piece of folly; to wall him up alive and starve him to death with fasts and penances and pictures of hell-fire. And all because a bullet went wrong."

"Really, Father Brown," said General Outram, "do you honestly think he deserves this? Is that your Christianity?"

"Surely the true Christianity," pleaded his wife more gently, "is that which knows all and pardons all; the love that can remember--and forget."

"Father Brown," said young Mallow, very earnestly, "I generally agree with what you say; but I'm hanged if I can follow you here. A shot in a duel, followed instantly by remorse, is not such an awful offence."

"I admit," said Father Brown dully, "that I take a more serious view of his offence."

"God soften your hard heart," said the strange lady speaking for the first time. "I am going to speak to my old friend."

Almost as if her voice had raised a ghost in that great grey house, something stirred within and a figure stood in the dark doorway at the top of the great stone flight of steps. It was clad in dead black, but there was something wild about the blanched hair and something in the pale features that was like the wreck of a marble statue.

Viola Grayson began calmly to move up the great flight of steps; and Outram muttered in his thick black moustache: "He won't cut her dead as he did my wife, I fancy."

Father Brown, who seemed in a collapse of resignation, looked up at him for a moment.

"Poor Marne has enough on his conscience," he said. "Let us acquit him of what we can. At least he never cut your wife."

"What do you mean by that?"
"He never knew her," said Father Brown.

As they spoke, the tall lady proudly mounted the last step and came face to face with the Marquis of Marne. His lips moved, but something happened before he could speak.

A scream rang across the open space and went wailing away in echoes along those hollow walls. By the abruptness and agony with which it broke from the woman's lips it might have been a mere inarticulate cry. But it was an articulated word; and they all heard it with a horrible distinctness.

"Maurice!"

"What is it, dear?" cried Lady Outram, and began to run up the steps; for the other woman was swaying as if she might fall down the whole stone flight. Then she faced about and began to descend, all bowed and shrunken and shuddering. "Oh, my God," she was saying. "Oh, my God, it isn't Jim at all. it's Maurice!"

"I think, Lady Outram," said the priest gravely, "you had better go with your friend."

As they turned, a voice fell on them like a stone from the top of the stone stair, a voice that might have come out of an open grave. It was hoarse and unnatural, like the voices of men who are left alone with wild birds on desert islands. It was the voice of the Marquis of Marne, and it said: "Stop!"

"Father Brown," he said, "before your friends disperse I authorize you to tell them all I have told you. Whatever follows, I will hide from it no longer."

"You are right," said the priest, "and it shall be counted to you."

"Yes," said Father Brown quietly to the questioning company afterwards. "He has given me the right to speak; but I will not tell it as he told me, but as I found it out for myself. Well, I knew from the first that the blighting monkish influence was all nonsense out of novels. Our people might possibly, in certain cases, encourage a man to go regularly into a monastery, but certainly not to hang about in a mediaeval castle. In the same way, they certainly wouldn't want him to dress up as a monk when he wasn't a monk. But it struck me that he might himself want to wear a monk's hood or even a mask. I had heard of him as a mourner, and then as a murderer; but already I had hazy suspicions that his reason for hiding might not only be concerned with what lie was, but with who he was.

"Then came the general's vivid description of the duel; and the most vivid thing in it to me was the figure of Mr. Romaine in the background; it was vivid because it was in the background. Why did the general leave behind him on the sand a dead man, whose friend stood yards away from him like a stock or a stone? Then I heard something, a mere trifle, about a trick habit that Romaine has of standing quite still when he is waiting for something to happen; as he waited for the thunder to follow the lightning. Well, that automatic trick in this case betrayed everything. Hugo Romaine on that old occasion, also, was waiting for something."

"But it was all over," said the general. "What could he have been waiting for?"

"He was waiting for the duel," said Father Brown.

"But I tell you I saw the duel!" cried the general.

"And I tell you you didn't see the duel," said the priest.

"Are you mad?" demanded the other. "Or why should you think I am blind?"

"Because you were blinded--that you might not see," said the priest. "Because you are a good man and God had mercy on your innocence, and he turned your face away from that unnatural strife. He set a wall of sand and silence between you and what really happened on that horrible red shore, abandoned to the raging spirits of Judas and of Cain."

"Tell us what happened!" gasped the lady impatiently.

"I will tell it as I found it," proceeded the priest. "The next thing I found was that Romaine the actor had been training Maurice Mair in all the tricks of the trade of acting. I once had a friend who went in for acting. He gave me a very amusing account of how his first week's training consisted entirely of falling down; of learning how to fall flat without a stagger, as if he were stone dead."

"God have mercy on us!" cried the general, and gripped the arms of his chair as if to rise.

"Amen," said Father Brown. "You told me how quickly it seemed to come; in fact, Maurice fell before the bullet flew, and lay perfectly still, waiting. And his wicked friend and teacher stood also in the background, waiting."

"We are waiting," said Cockspur, "and I feel as if I couldn't wait."

"James Mair, already broken with remorse, rushed across to the fallen man and bent over to lift him up. He had thrown away his pistol like an unclean thing; but Maurice's pistol still lay under his hand and it was undischarged. Then as the elder man bent over the younger, the younger lifted himself on his left arm and shot the elder through the body. He knew he was not so good a shot, but there was no question of missing the heart at that distance."

The rest of the company had risen and stood staring down at the narrator with pale faces. "Are you sure of this?" asked Sir John at last, in a thick voice.

"I am sure of it," said Father Brown, "and now I leave Maurice Mair, the present Marquis of Marne, to your Christian charity. You have told me something to-day about Christian charity. You seemed to me to give it almost
too large a place; but how fortunate it is for poor sinners like this man that you err so much on the side of mercy, and
are ready to be reconciled to all mankind."

"Hang it all," exploded the general; "if you think I'm going to be reconciled to a filthy viper like that, I tell you I
wouldn't say a word to save him from hell. I said I could pardon a regular decent duel, but of all the treacherous
assassins-----"

"He ought to be lynched," cried Cockspur excitedly. "He ought to burn alive like a nigger in the States. And if
there is such a thing as burning for ever, he jolly well----"

"I wouldn't touch him with a barge-pole myself," said Mallow.

"There is a limit to human charity," said Lady Outram, trembling all over.

"There is," said Father Brown dryly; "and that is the real difference between human charity and Christian
charity. You must forgive me if I was not altogether crushed by your contempt for my uncharitableness to-
day; or by the lectures you read me about pardon for every sinner. It seems to me that you only pardon the sins that you
don't really think sinful. You only forgive criminals when they commit what you don't regard as crimes, but rather as
conventions. So you tolerate a conventional duel, just as you tolerate a conventional divorce. You forgive because
there isn't anything to be forgiven."

"But, hang it all," cried Mallow, "you don't expect us to be able to pardon a vile thing like this?"

"No," said the priest; "but we have to be able to pardon it."

He stood up abruptly and looked round at them.

"We have to touch such men, not with a bargepole, but with a benediction," he said. "We have to say the word
that will save them from hell. We alone are left to deliver them from despair when your human charity deserts them.
Go on your own primrose path pardoning all your favourite vices and being generous to your fashionable crimes;
and leave us in the darkness, vampires of the night, to console those who really need consolation; who do things
really indefensible, things that neither the world nor they themselves can defend; and none but a priest will pardon.
Leave us with the men who commit the mean and revolting and real crimes; mean as St. Peter when the cock crew,
and yet the dawn came."

"The dawn," repeated Mallow doubtfully. "You mean hope--for him?"

"Yes," replied the other. "Let me ask you one question. You are great ladies and men of honour and secure of
yourselves; you would never, you can tell yourselves, stoop to such squalid reason as that. But tell me this. If any of
you had so stooped, which of you, years afterwards, when you were old and rich and safe, would have been driven
by conscience or confessor to tell such a story of yourself? You say you could not commit so base a crime. Could
you confess so base a crime?" The others gathered their possessions together and drifted by twos and threes out of
the room in silence. And Father Brown, also in silence, went back to the melancholy castle of Marne.

THE SECRET OF FLAMBEAU

"the sort of murders in which I played the part of the murderer," said Father Brown, putting down the wineglass.
The row of red pictures of crime had passed before him in that moment.

"It is true," he resumed, after a momentary pause, "that somebody else had played the part of the murderer
before me and done me out of the actual experience. I was a sort of understudy; always in a state of being ready to
act the assassin. I always made it my business, at least, to know the part thoroughly. What I mean is that, when I
tried to imagine the state of mind in which such a thing would be done, I always realized that I might have done it
myself under certain mental conditions, but not under others; and not generally under the obvious ones. And then, of
course, I knew who really had done it; and he was not generally the obvious person.

"For instance, it seemed obvious to say that the revolutionary poet had killed the old judge who saw red about
red revolutionaries. But that isn't really a reason for the revolutionary poet killing him. It isn't, if you think what it
would really be like to be a revolutionary poet. Now I set myself conscientiously down to be a revolutionary poet. I
mean that particular sort of pessimistic anarchical lover of revolt, not as reform, but rather as destruction. I tried to
clear my mind of such elements of sanity and constructive common sense as I have had the luck to learn or inherit. I
shut down and darkened all the skylights through which comes the good daylight out of heaven; I imagined a mind
lit only by a red light from below; a fire rending rocks and cleaving abysses upwards. And even with the vision at its
wildest and worst, I could not see why such a visionary should cut short his own career by colliding with a common
policeman, for killing one out of a million conventional old fools, as he would have called them. He wouldn't do it;
however much he wrote songs of violence. He wouldn't do it, because he wrote songs of violence. A man who can
express himself in song need not express himself in suicide. A poem was an event to him; and he would want to
have more of them. Then I thought of another sort of heathen; the sort that is not destroying the world but entirely
depending on the world. I thought that, save for the grace of God, I might have been a man for whom the world was
a blaze of electric lights, with nothing but utter darkness beyond and around it. The worldly man, who really lives
only for this world and believes in no other, whose worldly success and pleasure are all he can ever snatch out of
nothingness—that is the man who will really do anything, when he is in danger of losing the whole world and saving nothing. It is not the revolutionary man but the respectable man who would commit any crime—to save his respectability. Think what exposure would mean to a man like that fashionable barrister; and exposure of the one crime still really hated by his fashionable world— treason against patriotism. If I had been in his position, and had nothing better than his philosophy, heaven alone knows what I might have done. That is just where this little religious exercise is so wholesome."

"Some people would think it was rather morbid," said Grandison Chace dubiously. "Some people," said Father Brown gravely, "undoubtedly do think that charity and humility are morbid. Our friend the poet probably would. But I'm not arguing those questions; I'm only trying to answer your question about how I generally go to work. Some of your countrymen have apparently done me the honour to ask how I managed to frustrate a few miscarriages of justice. Well, you can go back and tell them that I do it by morbidity. But I most certainly don't want them to think I do it by magic."

Chace continued to look at him with a reflective frown; he was too intelligent not to understand the idea; he would also have said that he was too healthy-minded to like it. He felt as if he were talking to one man and yet to a hundred murderers. There was something uncanny about that very small figure, perched like a goblin beside the goblin stove; and the sense that its round head had held such a universe of wild reason and imaginative injustice. It was as if the vast void of dark behind it were a throng of dark gigantic figures, the ghosts of great criminals held at bay by the magic circle of the red stove, but ready to tear their master in pieces.

"Well, I'm afraid I do think it's morbid," he said frankly. "And I'm not sure it isn't almost as morbid as magic. But morbidity or no, there's one thing to be said; it must be an interesting experience." Then he added, after reflection: "I don't know whether you would make a really good criminal. But you ought to make a rattling good novelist."

"I only have to deal with real events," said Father Brown. "But it's sometimes harder to imagine real things than unreal ones."

"Especially," said the other, "when they are the great crimes of the world."

"It's not the great crimes but the small crimes that are really hard to imagine," replied the priest. "I don't quite know what you mean by that," said Chace.

"I mean commonplace crimes like stealing jewels," said Father Brown; "like that affair of the emerald necklace or the Ruby of Meru or the artificial goldfish. The difficulty in those cases is that you've got to make your mind small. High and mighty humbugs, who deal in big ideas, don't do those obvious things. I was sure the Prophet hadn't taken the ruby; or the Count the goldfish; though a man like Bankes might easily take the emeralds. For them, a jewel is a piece of glass: and they can see through the glass. But the little, literal people take it at its market value."

"For that you've got to have a small mind. It's awfully hard to get; like focusing smaller and sharper in a wobbling camera. But some things helped; and they threw a lot of light on the mystery, too. For instance, the sort of man who brags about having 'shown up' sham magicians or poor quacks of any sort—he's always got a small mind. He is the sort of man who 'sees through' tramps and trips them up in telling lies. I dare say it might sometimes be a painful duty. It's an uncommonly base pleasure. The moment I realized what a small mind meant, I knew where to look for it—in the man who wanted to expose the Prophet—and it was he that sneaked the ruby; in the man who jeered at his sister's psychic fancies—and it was he who nabbed the emeralds. Men like that always have their eye on jewels; they never could rise, with the higher humbugs, to despising jewels. Those criminals with small minds are always quite conventional. They become criminals out of sheer conventionality."

"It takes you quite a long time to feel so crudely as that, though. It's quite a wild effort of imagination to be so conventional. To want one potty little object as seriously as all that. But you can do it. ... You can get nearer to it. Begin by thinking of being a greedy child; of how you might have stolen a sweet in a shop; of how there was one particular sweet you wanted ... then you must subtract the childish poetry; shut off the fairy light that shone on the sweet-stuff shop; imagine you really think you know the world and the market value of sweets ... you contract your mind like the camera focus ... the thing shapes and then sharpens ... and then, suddenly, it comes!"

He spoke like a man who had once captured a divine vision. Grandison Chace was still looking at him with a frown of mingled mystification and interest. It must be confessed that there did flash once beneath his heavy brow a look of something almost like alarm. It was as if the shock of the first strange confession of the priest still thrilled faintly through him like the last vibration of a thunderclap in the room. Under the surface he was saying to himself that the mistake had only been a temporary madness; that, of course, Father Brown could not really be the monster and murderer he had beheld for that blinding and bewildering instant. But was there not something wrong with the man who talked in that calm way about being a murderer? Was it possible that the priest was a little mad?

"Don't you think," he said, abruptly; "that this notion of yours, of a man trying to feel like a criminal, might make him a little too tolerant of crime?"
Father Brown sat up and spoke in a more staccato style.
"I know it does just the opposite. It solves the whole problem of time and sin. It gives a man his remorse beforehand."

There was a silence; the American looked at the high and steep roof that stretched half across the enclosure; his host gazed into the fire without moving; and then the priest's voice came on a different note, as if from lower down.
"There are two ways of renouncing the devil," he said; "and the difference is perhaps the deepest chasm in modern religion. One is to have a horror of him because he is so far off; and the other to have it because he is so near. And no virtue and vice are so much divided as those two virtues."

They did not answer and he went on in the same heavy tone, as if he were dropping words like molten lead.
"You may think a crime horrible because you could never commit it. I think it horrible because I could commit it. You think of it as something like an eruption of Vesuvius; but that would not really be so terrible as this house catching fire. If a criminal suddenly appeared in this room----"

"If a criminal appeared in this room," said Chace, smiling, "I think you would be a good deal too favourable to him. Apparently you would start by telling him that you were a criminal yourself and explaining how perfectly natural it was that he should have picked his father's pocket or cut his mother's throat. Frankly, I don't think it's practical. I think that the practical effect would be that no criminal would ever reform. It's easy enough to theorize and take hypothetical cases; but we all know we're only talking in the air. Sitting here in M. Duroc's nice, comfortable house, conscious of our respectability and all the rest of it, it just gives us a theatrical thrill to talk about thieves and murderers and the mysteries of their souls. But the people who really have to deal with thieves and murderers have to deal with them differently. We are safe by the fireside; and we know the house is not on fire. We know there is not a criminal in the room."

The M. Duroc to whom allusion had been made rose slowly from what had been called his fireside, and his huge shadow flung from the fire seemed to cover everything and darken even the very night above him.
"There is a criminal in this room," he said. "I am one. I am Flambeau, and the police of two hemispheres are still hunting for me."

"There is a criminal in this room," he said. "I am one. I am Flambeau, and the police of two hemispheres are still hunting for me."

The American remained gazing at him with eyes of a stony brightness; he seemed unable to speak or move.
"There is nothing mystical, or metaphorical, or vicarious about my confession," said Flambeau. "I stole for twenty years with these two hands; I fled from the police on these two feet. I hope you will admit that my activities were practical. I hope you will admit that my judges and pursuers really had to deal with crime. Do you think I do not know all about their way of reprehending it? Have I not heard the sermons of the righteous and seen the cold stare of the respectable; have I not been lectured in the lofty and distant style, asked how it was possible for anyone to fall so low, told that no decent person could ever have dreamed of such depravity? Do you think all that ever did anything but make me laugh? Only my friend told me that he knew exactly why I stole; and I have never stolen since."

Father Brown made a gesture as of deprecation; and Grandison Chace at last let out a long breath like a whistle.
"I have told you the exact truth," said Flambeau; "and it is open to you to hand me over to the police."

There was an instant of profound stillness, in which could be faintly heard the belated laughter of Flambeau's children in the high, dark house above them, and the crunching and snorting of the great, grey pigs in the twilight. And then it was cloven by a high voice, vibrant and with a touch of offence, almost surprising for those who do not understand the sensitive American spirit, and how near, in spite of commonplace contrasts, it can sometimes come to the chivalry of Spain.
"Monsieur Duroc," he said rather stiffly. "We have been friends, I hope, for some considerable period; and I should be pretty much pained to suppose you thought me capable of playing you such a trick while I was enjoying your hospitality and the society of your family, merely because you chose to tell me a little of your own autobiography of your own free will. And when you spoke merely in defence of your friend --no, sir, I can't imagine any gentleman double-crossing another under such circumstances; it would be a damned sight better to be a dirty informer and sell men's blood for money. But in a case like this----! Could you conceive any man being such a Judas?"

"I could try." said Father Brown.
THE END
ONE

The Absence of Mr Glass

THE consulting-rooms of Dr Orion Hood, the eminent criminologist and specialist in certain moral disorders, lay along the sea-front at Scarborough, in a series of very large and well-lighted French windows, which showed the North Sea like one endless outer wall of blue-green marble. In such a place the sea had something of the monotony of a blue-green dado: for the chambers themselves were ruled throughout by a terrible tidiness not unlike the terrible tidiness of the sea. It must not be supposed that Dr Hood’s apartments excluded luxury, or even poetry. These things were there, in their place; but one felt that they were never allowed out of their place. Luxury was there: there stood upon a special table eight or ten boxes of the best cigars; but they were built upon a plan so that the strongest were always nearest the wall and the mildest nearest the window. A tantalus containing three kinds of spirit, all of a liqueur excellence, stood always on this table of luxury; but the fanciful have asserted that the whisky, brandy, and rum seemed always to stand at the same level. Poetry was there: the left-hand corner of the room was lined with as complete a set of English classics as the right hand could show of English and foreign physiologists. But if one took a volume of Chaucer or Shelley from that rank, its absence irritated the mind like a gap in a man’s front teeth. One could not say the books were never read; probably they were, but there was a sense of their being chained to their places, like the Bibles in the old churches. Dr Hood treated his private bookshelf as if it were a public library. And if this strict scientific intangibility steeped even the shelves laden with lyrics and ballads and the tables laden with drink and tobacco, it goes without saying that yet more of such heathen holiness protected the other shelves that held the specialist’s library, and the other tables that sustained the frail and even fairylike instruments of chemistry or mechanics.

Dr Hood paced the length of his string of apartments, bounded—as the boys’ geographies say—as the east by the North Sea and on the west by the serried ranks of his sociological and criminologist library. He was clad in an artist’s velvet, but with none of an artist’s negligence; his hair was heavily shot with grey, but growing thick and healthy; his face was lean, but sanguine and expectant. Everything about him and his room indicated something at once rigid and restless, like that great northern sea by which (on pure principles of hygiene) he had built his home.

Fate, being in a funny mood, pushed the door open and introduced into those long, strict, sea-flanked apartments one who was perhaps the most startling opposite of them and their master. In answer to a curt but civil summons, the door opened inwards and there shambled into the room a shapeless little figure, which seemed to find its own hat and umbrella as unmanageable as a mass of luggage. The umbrella was a black and prosaic bundle long past repair; the hat was a broad-curved black hat, clerical but not common in England; the man was the very embodiment of all that is homely and helpless.

The doctor regarded the new-comer with a restrained astonishment, not unlike that he would have shown if some huge but obviously harmless sea-beast had crawled into his room. The new-comer regarded the doctor with that beaming but breathless geniality which characterizes a corpulent charwoman who has just managed to stuff herself into an omnibus. It is a rich confusion of social self-congratulation and bodily disarray. His hat tumbled to the carpet, his heavy umbrella slipped between his knees with a thud; he reached after the one and ducked after the other, but with an unimpaired smile on his round face spoke simultaneously as follows:

“My name is Brown. Pray excuse me. I’ve come about that business of the MacNabs. I have heard, you often help people out of such troubles. Pray excuse me if I am wrong.”

By this time he had sprawlingly recovered the hat, and made an odd little bobbing bow over it, as if setting everything quite right.

“I hardly understand you,” replied the scientist, with a cold intensity of manner. “I fear you have mistaken the chambers. I am Dr Hood, and my work is almost entirely literary and educational. It is true that I have sometimes been consulted by the police in cases of peculiar difficulty and importance, but—”

“Oh, this is of the greatest importance,” broke in the little man called Brown. “Why, her mother won’t let them get engaged.” And he leaned back in his chair in radiant rationality.

The brows of Dr Hood were drawn down darkly, but the eyes under them were bright with something that might be anger or might be amusement. “And still,” he said, “I do not quite understand.”

“You see, they want to get married,” said the man with the clerical hat. “Maggie MacNab and young Todhunter want to get married. Now, what can be more important than that?”

The great Orion Hood’s scientific triumphs had deprived him of many things—some said of his health, others of his God; but they had not wholly despoiled him of his sense of the absurd. At the last plea of the ingenuous priest a
chuckle broke out of him from inside, and he threw himself into an arm-chair in an ironical attitude of the consulting physician.

"Mr Brown," he said gravely, "it is quite fourteen and a half years since I was personally asked to test a personal problem: then it was the case of an attempt to poison the French President at a Lord Mayor's Banquet. It is now, I understand, a question of whether some friend of yours called Maggie is a suitable fiancee for some friend of hers called Todhunter. Well, Mr Brown, I am a sportsman. I will take it on. I will give the MacNab family my best advice, as good as I gave the French Republic and the King of England--no, better: fourteen years better. I have nothing else to do this afternoon. Tell me your story."

The little clergyman called Brown thanked him with unquestionable warmth, but still with a queer kind of simplicity. It was rather as if he were thanking a stranger in a smoking-room for some trouble in passing the matches, than as if he were (as he was) practically thanking the Curator of Kew Gardens for coming with him into a field to find a four-leaved clover. With scarcely a semi-colon after his hearty thanks, the little man began his recital:

"I told you my name was Brown; well, that's the fact, and I'm the priest of the little Catholic Church I dare say you've seen beyond those straggly streets, where the town ends towards the north. In the last and strangliest of those streets which runs along the sea like a sea-wall there is a very honest but rather sharp-tempered member of my flock, a widow called MacNab. She has one daughter, and she lets lodgings, and between her and the daughter, and between her and the lodgers--well, I dare say there is a great deal to be said on both sides. At present she has only one lodger, the young man called Todhunter; but he has given more trouble than all the rest, for he wants to marry the young woman of the house."

"And the young woman of the house," asked Dr Hood, with huge and silent amusement, "what does she want?"

"Why, she wants to marry him," cried Father Brown, sitting up eagerly. "That is just the awful complication."

"It is indeed a hideous enigma," said Dr Hood.

"This young James Todhunter," continued the cleric, "is a very decent man so far as I know; but then nobody knows very much. He is a bright, brownish little fellow, agile like a monkey, clean-shaven like an actor, and obliging like a born courtier. He seems to have quite a pocketful of money, but nobody knows what his trade is. Mrs MacNab, therefore (being of a pessimistic turn), is quite sure it is something dreadful, and probably connected with dynamite. The dynamite must be of a shy and noiseless sort, for the poor fellow only shuts himself up for several hours of the day and studies something behind a locked door. He declares his privacy is temporary and justified, and promises to explain before the wedding. That is all that anyone knows for certain, but Mrs MacNab will tell you a great deal more than even she is certain of. You know how the tales grow like grass on such a patch of ignorance as that. There are tales of two voices heard talking in the room; though, when the door is opened, Todhunter is always found alone. There are tales of a mysterious tall man in a silk hat, who once came out of the sea-mists and apparently out of the sea, stepping softly across the sandy fields and through the small back garden at twilight, till he was heard talking to the lodger at his open window. The colloquy seemed to end in a quarrel. Todhunter dashed down his window with violence, and the man in the high hat melted into the sea-fog again. This story is told by the family with the fiercest mystification; but I really think Mrs MacNab prefers her own original tale: that the Other Man (or whatever it is) crawls out every night from the big box in the corner, which is kept locked all day. You see, therefore, how this sealed door of Todhunter's is treated as the gate of all the fancies and monstrosities of the "Thousand and One Nights". And yet there is the little fellow in his respectable black jacket, as punctual and innocent as a parlour clock. He pays his rent to the tick; he is practically a teetotaller; he is tirelessly kind with the younger children, and can keep them amused for a day on end; and, last and most urgent of all, he has made himself equally popular with the eldest daughter, who is ready to go to church with him tomorrow.

A man warmly concerned with any large theories has always a relish for applying them to any triviality. The great specialist having condescended to the priest's simplicity, condescended expansively. He settled himself with comfort in his arm-chair and began to talk in the tone of a somewhat absent-minded lecturer:

"Even in a minute instance, it is best to look first to the main tendencies of Nature. A particular flower may not be dead in early winter, but the flowers are dying; a particular pebble may never be wetted with the tide, but the tide is coming in. To the scientific eye all human history is a series of collective movements, destructions or migrations, like the massacre of flies in winter or the return of birds in spring. Now the root fact in all history is Race. Race produces religion; Race produces legal and ethical wars. There is no stronger case than that of the wild, unworldey and perishing stock which we commonly call the Celts, of whom your friends the MacNabs are specimens. Small, swarthy, and of this dreamy and drifting blood, they accept easily the superstitious explanation of any incidents, just as they still accept (you will excuse me for saying) that superstitious explanation of all incidents which you and your Church represent. It is not remarkable that such people, with the sea moaning behind them and the Church (excuse me again) droning in front of them, should put fantastic features into what are probably plain events. You, with your small parochial responsibilities, see only this particular Mrs MacNab, terrified with this particular tale of two voices..."
and a tall man out of the sea. But the man with the scientific imagination sees, as it were, the whole clans of MacNabs scattered over the whole world, in its ultimate average as uniform as a tribe of birds. He sees thousands of Mrs MacNabs, in thousands of houses, dropping their little drop of morbidity in the tea-cups of their friends; he sees--"

Before the scientist could conclude his sentence, another and more impatient summons sounded from without; someone with swishing skirts was marshalled hurriedly down the corridor, and the door opened on a young girl, decently dressed but disordered and red-hot with haste. She had sea-blown blonde hair, and would have been entirely beautiful if her cheek-bones had not been, in the Scotch manner, a little high in relief as well as in colour. Her apology was almost as abrupt as a command.

"I'm sorry to interrupt you, sir," she said, "but I had to follow Father Brown at once; it's nothing less than life or death."

Father Brown began to get to his feet in some disorder. "Why, what has happened, Maggie?" he said.

"James has been murdered, for all I can make out," answered the girl, still breathing hard from her rush. "That man Glass has been with him again; I heard them talking through the door quite plain. Two separate voices: for James speaks low, with a burr, and the other voice was high and quavery."

"That man Glass?" repeated the priest in some perplexity.

"I know his name is Glass," answered the girl, in great impatience. "I heard it through the door. They were quarrelling--about money, I think--for I heard James say again and again, 'That's right, Mr Glass,' or 'No, Mr Glass,' and then, 'Two or three, Mr Glass.' But we're talking too much; you must come at once, and there may be time yet."

"But time for what?" asked Dr Hood, who had been studying the young lady with marked interest. "What is there about Mr Glass and his money troubles that should impel such urgency?"

"I tried to break down the door and couldn't," answered the girl shortly, "Then I ran to the back-yard, and managed to climb on to the window-sill that looks into the room. It was an dim, and seemed to be empty, but I swear I saw James lying huddled up in a corner, as if he were drugged or strangled."

"This is very serious," said Father Brown, gathering his errant hat and umbrella and standing up; "in point of fact I was just putting your case before this gentleman, and his view--"

"Has been largely altered," said the scientist gravely. "I do not think this young lady is so Celtic as I had supposed. As I have nothing else to do, I will put on my hat and stroll down town with you."

In a few minutes all three were approaching the dreary tail of the MacNabs' street: the girl with the stern and breathless stride of the mountaineer, the criminologist with a lounging grace (which was not without a certain leopard-like swiftness), and the priest at an energetic trot entirely devoid of distinction. The aspect of this edge of the town was not entirely without justification for the doctor's hints about desolate moods and environments. The scattered houses stood farther and farther apart in a broken string along the seashore; the afternoon was closing with a premature and partly lurid twilight; the sea was of an inky purple and murmuring ominously. In the scrappy back garden of the MacNabs which ran down towards the sand, two black, barren-looking trees stood up like demon hands held up in astonishment, and as Mrs MacNab ran down the street to meet them with lean hands similarly spread, and her fierce face in shadow, she was a little like a demon herself. The doctor and the priest made scant reply to her shrill reiterations of her daughter's story, with more disturbing details of her own, to the divided vows of vengeance against Mr Glass for murdering, and against Mr Todhunter for being murdered, or against the latter for having dared to want to marry her daughter, and for not having lived to do it. They passed through the narrow passage in the front of the house until they came to the lodger's door at the back, and there Dr Hood, with the trick of an old detective, put his shoulder sharply to the panel and burst in the door.

It opened on a scene of silent catastrophe. No one seeing it, even for a flash, could doubt that the room had been the theatre of some thrilling collision between two, or perhaps more, persons. Playing-cards lay littered across the table or fluttered about the floor as if a game had been interrupted. Two wine glasses stood ready for wine on a side-table, but a third lay smashed in a star of crystal upon the carpet. A few feet from it lay what looked like a long knife or short sword, straight, but with an ornamental and pictured handle, its dull blade just caught a grey glint from the dreary window behind, which showed the black trees against the leaden level of the sea. Towards the opposite corner of the room was rolled a gentleman's silk top hat, as if it had just been knocked off his head; so much so, indeed, that one almost looked to see it still rolling. And in the corner behind it, thrown like a sack of potatoes, but corded like a railway trunk, lay Mr James Todhunter, with a scarf across his mouth, and six or seven ropes knotted round his elbows and ankles. His brown eyes were alive and shifted alertly.

Dr Orion Hood paused for one instant on the doormat and drank in the whole scene of voiceless violence. Then he stepped swiftly across the carpet, picked up the tall silk hat, and gravely put it upon the head of the yet pinioned Todhunter. It was so much too large for him that it almost slipped down on to his shoulders.

"Mr Glass's hat," said the doctor, returning with it and peering into the inside with a pocket lens. "How to
explain the absence of Mr Glass and the presence of Mr Glass's hat? For Mr Glass is not a careless man with his clothes. That hat is of a stylish shape and systematically brushed and burnished, though not very new. An old dandy, I should think."

"But, good heavens!" called out Miss MacNab, "aren't you going to untie the man first?"

"I say 'old' with intention, though not with certainty" continued the expositor; "my reason for it might seem a little far-fetched. The hair of human beings falls out in very varying degrees, but almost always falls out slightly, and with the lens I should see the tiny hairs in a hat recently worn. It has none, which leads me to guess that Mr Glass is bald. Now when this is taken with the high-pitched and querulous voice which Miss MacNab described so vividly (patience, my dear lady, patience), when we take the hairless head together with the tone common in senile anger, I should think we may deduce some advance in years. Nevertheless, he was probably vigorous, and he was almost certainly tall. I might rely in some degree on the story of his previous appearance at the window, as a tall man in a silk hat, but I think I have more exact indication. This wineglass has been smashed all over the place, but one of its splinters lies on the high bracket beside the mantelpiece. No such fragment could have fallen there if the vessel had been smashed in the hand of a comparatively short man like Mr Todhunter."

"By the way," said Father Brown, "might it not be as well to untie Mr Todhunter?"

"Our lesson from the drinking-vessels does not end here," proceeded the specialist. "I may say at once that it is possible that the man Glass was bald or nervous through dissipation rather than age. Mr Todhunter, as has been remarked, is a quiet thrifty gentleman, essentially an abstainer. These cards and wine-cups are no part of his normal habit; they have been produced for a particular companion. But, as it happens, we may go farther. Mr Todhunter may or may not possess this wine-service, but there is no appearance of his possessing any wine. What, then, were these vessels to contain? I would at once suggest some brandy or whisky, perhaps of a luxurious sort, from a flask in the pocket of Mr Glass. We have thus something like a picture of the man, or at least of the type: tall, elderly, fashionable, but somewhat frayed, certainly fond of play and strong waters, perhaps rather too fond of them. Mr Glass is a gentleman not unknown on the fringes of society."

"Look here," cried the young woman, "if you don't let me pass to untie him I'll run outside and scream for the police."

"I should not advise you, Miss MacNab," said Dr Hood gravely, "to be in any hurry to fetch the police. Father Brown, I seriously ask you to compose your flock, for their sakes, not for mine. Well, we have seen something of the figure and quality of Mr Glass; what are the chief facts known of Mr Todhunter? They are substantially three: that he is economical, that he is more or less wealthy, and that he has a secret. Now, surely it is obvious that there are the three chief marks of the kind of man who is blackmailed. And surely it is equally obvious that the faded finery, the profligate habits, and the shrill irritation of Mr Glass are the unmistakable marks of the kind of man who blackmails him. We have the two typical figures of a tragedy of hush money: on the one hand, the respectable man with the finery, the profligate habits, and the shrill irritation of Mr Glass are the unmistakable marks of the kind of man who blackmails him. We have the two typical figures of a tragedy of hush money: on the one hand, the respectable man with a mystery; on the other, the West-end vulture with a scent for a mystery. These two men have met here today and have quarrelled, using blows and a bare weapon."

"Are you going to take those ropes off?" asked the girl stubbornly.

Dr Hood replaced the silk hat carefully on the side table, and went across to the captive. He studied him intently, even moving him a little and half-turning him round by the shoulders, but he only answered:

"No; I think these ropes will do very well till your friends the police bring the handcuffs."

Father Brown, who had been looking dully at the carpet, lifted his round face and said: "What do you mean?"

The man of science had picked up the peculiar dagger-sword from the carpet and was examining it intently as he answered:

"Because you find Mr Todhunter tied up," he said, "you all jump to the conclusion that Mr Glass had tied him up; and then, I suppose, escaped. There are four objections to this: First, why should a gentleman so dressy as our friend Glass leave his hat behind him, if he left of his own free will? Second," he continued, moving towards the window, "this is the only exit, and it is locked on the inside. Third, this blade here has a tiny touch of blood at the point, but there is no wound on Mr Todhunter. Mr Glass took that wound away with him, dead or alive. Add to all this primary probability. It is much more likely that the blackmailed person would try to kill his incubus, rather than that the blackmailer would try to kill the goose that lays his golden egg. There, I think, we have a pretty complete story."

"But the ropes?" inquired the priest, whose eyes had remained open with a rather vacant admiration.

"Ah, the ropes," said the expert with a singular intonation. "Miss MacNab very much wanted to know why I did not set Mr Todhunter free from his ropes. Well, I will tell her. I did not do it because Mr Todhunter can set himself free from them at any minute he chooses."

"What?" cried the audience on quite different notes of astonishment.

"I have looked at all the knots on Mr Todhunter," reiterated Hood quietly. "I happen to know something about
knots; they are quite a branch of criminal science. Every one of those knots he has made himself and could loosen himself; not one of them would have been made by an enemy really trying to pinion him. The whole of this affair of the ropes is a clever fake, to make us think him the victim of the struggle instead of the wretched Glass, whose corpse may be hidden in the garden or stuffed up the chimney."

There was a rather depressed silence; the room was darkening, the sea-blighted boughs of the garden trees looked leaner and blacker than ever, yet they seemed to have come nearer to the window. One could almost fancy they were sea-monsters like krakens or cuttlefish, writhing polypi who had crawled up from the sea to see the end of this tragedy, even as he, the villain and victim of it, the terrible man in the tall hat, had once crawled up from the sea. For the whole air was dense with the morbidity of blackmail, which is the most morbid of human things, because it is a crime concealing a crime; a black plaster on a blacker wound.

The face of the little Catholic priest, which was commonly complacent and even comic, had suddenly become knotted with a curious frown. It was not the blank curiosity of his first innocence. It was rather that creative curiosity which comes when a man has the beginnings of an idea. "Say it again, please," he said in a simple, bothered manner; "do you mean that Todhunter can tie himself up all alone and untie himself all alone?"

"That is what I mean," said the doctor.

"Jerusalem!" ejaculated Brown suddenly, "I wonder if it could possibly be that!"

He scuttled across the room rather like a rabbit, and peered with quite a new impulsiveness into the partially-covered face of the captive. Then he turned his own rather fatuous face to the company. "Yes, that's it!" he cried in a certain excitement. "Can't you see it in the man's face? Why, look at his eyes!"

Both the Professor and the girl followed the direction of his glance. And though the broad black scarf completely masked the lower half of Todhunter's visage, they did grow conscious of something struggling and intense about the upper part of it.

"His eyes do look queer," cried the young woman, strongly moved. "You brutes; I believe it's hurting him!"

"Not that, I think," said Dr Hood; "the eyes have certainly a singular expression. But I should interpret those transverse wrinkles as expressing rather such slight psychological abnormality--"

"Oh, bosh!" cried Father Brown: "can't you see he's laughing?"

"Laughing!" repeated the doctor, with a start; "but what on earth can he be laughing at?"

"Well," replied the Reverend Brown apologetically, "not to put too fine a point on it, I think he is laughing at you. And indeed, I'm a little inclined to laugh at myself, now I know about it."

"Now you know about what?" asked Hood, in some exasperation.

"Now I know," replied the priest, "the profession of Mr Todhunter."

He shuffled about the room, looking at one object after another with what seemed to be a vacant stare, and then invariably bursting into an equally vacant laugh, a highly irritating process for those who had to watch it. He laughed very much over the hat, still more uproariously over the broken glass, but the blood on the sword point sent him into mortal convulsions of amusement. Then he turned to the fuming specialist.

"Dr Hood," he cried enthusiastically, "you are a great poet! You have called an uncreated being out of the void. How much more godlike that is than if you had only ferreted out the mere facts! Indeed, the mere facts are rather commonplace and comic by comparison."

"I have no notion what you are talking about," said Dr Hood rather haughtily; "my facts are all inevitable, though necessarily incomplete. A place may be permitted to intuition, perhaps (or poetry if you prefer the term), but only because the corresponding details cannot as yet be ascertained. In the absence of Mr Glass--"

"That's it, that's it," said the little priest, nodding quite eagerly, "that's the first idea to get fixed; the absence of Mr Glass. He is so extremely absent. I suppose," he added reflectively, "that there was never anybody so absent as Mr Glass."

"Do you mean he is absent from the town?" demanded the doctor.

"I mean he is absent from everywhere," answered Father Brown; "he is absent from the Nature of Things, so to speak."

"Do you seriously mean," said the specialist with a smile, "that there is no such person?"

The priest made a sign of assent. "It does seem a pity," he said.

Orion Hood broke into a contemptuous laugh. "Well," he said, "before we go on to the hundred and one other evidences, let us take the first proof we found; the first fact we fell over when we fell into this room. If there is no Mr Glass, whose hat is this?"

"It is Mr Todhunter's," replied Father Brown.

"But it doesn't fit him," cried Hood impatiently. "He couldn't possibly wear it!"

Father Brown shook his head with ineffable mildness. "I never said he could wear it," he answered. "I said it was his hat. Or, if you insist on a shade of difference, a hat that is his."
"And what is the shade of difference?" asked the criminologist with a slight sneer.

"My good sir," cried the mild little man, with his first movement akin to impatience, "if you will walk down the street to the nearest hatter's shop, you will see that there is, in common speech, a difference between a man's hat and the hats that are his."

"But a hatter," protested Hood, "can get money out of his stock of new hats. What could Todhunter get out of this one old hat?"

"Rabbits," replied Father Brown promptly.

"What?" cried Dr Hood.

"Rabbits, ribbons, sweetmeats, goldfish, rolls of coloured paper," said the reverend gentleman with rapidity. "Didn't you see it all when you found out the faked ropes? It's just the same with the sword. Mr Todhunter hasn't got a scratch on him, as you say; but he's got a scratch in him, if you follow me."

"Do you mean inside Mr Todhunter's clothes?" inquired Mrs MacNab sternly.

"I do not mean inside Mr Todhunter's clothes," said Father Brown. "I mean inside Mr Todhunter."

"Well, what in the name of Bedlam do you mean?"

"Mr Todhunter," explained Father Brown placidly, "is learning to be a professional conjurer, as well as juggler, ventriloquist, and expert in the rope trick. The conjuring explains the hat. It is without traces of hair, not because it is worn by the prematurely bald Mr Glass, but because it has never been worn by anybody. The juggling explains the three glasses, which Todhunter was teaching himself to throw up and catch in rotation. But, being only at the stage of practice, he smashed one glass against the ceiling. And the juggling also explains the sword, which it was Mr Todhunter's professional pride and duty to swallow. But, again, being at the stage of practice, he very slightly grazed the inside of his throat with the weapon. Hence he has a wound inside him, which I am sure (from the expression on his face) is not a serious one. He was also practising the trick of a release from ropes, like the Davenport Brothers, and he was just about to free himself when we all burst into the room. The cards, of course, are for card tricks, and they are scattered on the floor because he had just been practising one of those dodges of sending them flying through the air. He merely kept his trade secret, because he had to keep his tricks secret, like any other conjurer. But the mere fact of an idler in a top hat having once looked in at his back window, and been driven away by him with great indignation, was enough to set us all on a wrong track of romance, and make us imagine his whole life overshadowed by the silk-hatted spectre of Mr Glass."

"But What about the two voices?" asked Maggie, staring.

"Have you never heard a ventriloquist?" asked Father Brown. "Don't you know they speak first in their natural voice, and then answer themselves in just that shrill, squeaky, unnatural voice that you heard?"

There was a long silence, and Dr Hood regarded the little man who had spoken with a dark and attentive smile. "You are certainly a very ingenious person," he said; "it could not have been done better in a book. But there is just one part of Mr Glass you have not succeeded in explaining away, and that is his name. Miss MacNab distinctly heard him so addressed by Mr Todhunter."

The Rev. Mr Brown broke into a rather childish giggle. "Well, that," he said, "that's the silliest part of the whole silly story. When our juggling friend here threw up the three glasses in turn, he counted them aloud as he caught them, and also commented aloud when he failed to catch them. What he really said was: 'One, two and three--missed a glass one, two--missed a glass.' And so on."

There was a second of stillness in the room, and then everyone with one accord burst out laughing. As they did so the figure in the corner complacently uncoiled all the ropes and let them fall with a flourish. Then, advancing into the middle of the room with a bow, he produced from his pocket a big bill printed in blue and red, which announced that ZALADIN, the World's Greatest Conjurer, Contortionist, Ventriloquist and Human Kangaroo would be ready with an entirely new series of Tricks at the Empire Pavilion, Scarborough, on Monday next at eight o'clock precisely.

TWO
The Paradise of Thieves

THE great Muscari, most original of the young Tuscan poets, walked swiftly into his favourite restaurant, which overlooked the Mediterranean, was covered by an awning and fenced by little lemon and orange trees. Waiters in white aprons were already laying out on white tables the insignia of an early and elegant lunch; and this seemed to increase a satisfaction that already touched the top of swagger. Muscari had an eagle nose like Dante; his hair and neckerchief were dark and flowing; he carried a black cloak, and might almost have carried a black mask, so much did he bear with him a sort of Venetian melodrama. He acted as if a troubadour had still a definite social office, like a bishop. He went as near as his century permitted to walking the world literally like Don Juan, with rapier and guitar.

For he never travelled without a case of swords, with which he had fought many brilliant duels, or without a
corresponding case for his mandolin, with which he had actually serenaded Miss Ethel Harrogate, the highly conventional daughter of a Yorkshire banker on a holiday. Yet he was neither a charlatan nor a child; but a hot, logical Latin who liked a certain thing and was it. His poetry was as straightforward as anyone else's prose. He desired fame or wine or the beauty of women with a torrid directness inconceivable among the cloudy ideals or cloudy compromises of the north; to vaguer races his intensity smelt of danger or even crime. Like fire or the sea, he was too simple to be trusted.

The banker and his beautiful English daughter were staying at the hotel attached to Muscari's restaurant; that was why it was his favourite restaurant. A glance flashed around the room told him at once, however, that the English party had not descended. The restaurant was glittering, but still comparatively empty. Two priests were talking at a table in a corner, but Muscari (an ardent Catholic) took no more notice of them than of a couple of crows. But from a yet farther seat, partly concealed behind a dwarf tree golden with oranges, there rose and advanced towards the poet a person whose costume was the most aggressively opposite to his own.

This figure was clad in tweeds of a piebald check, with a pink tie, a sharp collar and protuberant yellow boots. He contrived, in the true tradition of 'Arry at Margate, to look at once startling and commonplace. But as the Cockney apparition drew nearer, Muscari was astounded to observe that the head was distinctly different from the body. It was an Italian head: fuzzy, swarthy and very vivacious, that rose abruptly out of the standing collar like cardboard and the comic pink tie. In fact it was a head he knew. He recognized it, above all the dire erection of English holiday array, as the face of an old but forgotten friend name Ezza. This youth had been a prodigy at college, and European fame was promised him when he was barely fifteen; but when he appeared in the world he failed, first publicly as a dramatist and a demagogue, and then privately for years on end as an actor, a traveller, a commission agent or a journalist. Muscari had known him last behind the footlights; he was but too well attuned to the excitements of that profession, and it was believed that some moral calamity had swallowed him up.

"Ezza!" cried the poet, rising and shaking hands in a pleasant astonishment. "Well, I've seen you in many costumes in the green room; but I never expected to see you dressed up as an Englishman."

"This," answered Ezza gravely, "is not the costume of an Englishman, but of the Italian of the future."

"In that case," remarked Muscari, "I confess I prefer the Italian of the past."

"That is your old mistake, Muscari," said the man in tweeds, shaking his head; "and the mistake of Italy. In the sixteenth century we Tuscans made the morning: we had the newest steel, the newest carving, the newest chemistry. Why should we not now have the newest factories, the newest motors, the newest finance--the newest clothes?"

"Because they are not worth having," answered Muscari. "You cannot make Italians really progressive; they are too intelligent. Men who see the short cut to good living will never go by the new elaborate roads."

"Well, to me Marconi, or D'Annunzio, is the star of Italy" said the other. "That is why I have become a Futurist--and a courier."

"A courier!" cried Muscari, laughing, "Is that the last of your list of trades? And whom are you conducting?"

"Oh, a man of the name of Harrogate, and his family, I believe."

"Not the banker in this hotel?" inquired the poet, with some eagerness.

"That's the man," answered the courier.

"Does it pay well?" asked the troubadour innocently.

"It will pay me," said Ezza, with a very enigmatic smile. "But I am a rather curious sort of courier. Then, as if changing the subject, he said abruptly: "He has a daughter--and a son."

"The daughter is divine," affirmed Muscari, "the father and son are, I suppose, human. But granted his harmless qualities doesn't that banker strike you as a splendid instance of my argument? Harrogate has millions in his safes, and I have--the hole in my pocket. But you daren't say--you can't say--that he's cleverer than I, or bolder than I, or even more energetic. He's not clever, he's got eyes like blue buttons; he's not energetic, he moves from chair to chair like a paralytic. He's a conscientious, kindly old blockhead; but he's got money simply because he collects money, as a boy collects stamps. You're too strong-minded for business, Ezza. You won't get on. To be clever enough to get all that money, one must be stupid enough to want it."

"I'm stupid enough for that," said Ezza gloomily. "But I should suggest a suspension of your critique of the banker, for here he comes."

Mr Harrogate, the great financier, did indeed enter the room, but nobody looked at him. He was a massive elderly man with a boiled blue eye and faded grey-sandy moustaches; but for his heavy stoop he might have been a colonel. He carried several unopened letters in his hand. His son Frank was a really fine lad, curly-haired, sun-burnt and strenuous; but nobody looked at him either. All eyes, as usual, were riveted, for the moment at least, upon Ethel Harrogate, whose golden Greek head and colour of the dawn seemed set purposely above that sapphire sea, like a goddess's. The poet Muscari drew a deep breath as if he were drinking something, as indeed he was. He was drinking the Classic; which his fathers made. Ezza studied her with a gaze equally intense and far more baffling.
Miss Harrogate was specially radiant and ready for conversation on this occasion; and her family had fallen into the easier Continental habit, allowing the stranger Muscari and even the courier Ezza to share their table and their talk. In Ethel Harrogate conventionality crowned itself with a perfection and splendour of its own. Proud of her father's prosperity, fond of fashionable pleasures, a fond daughter but an arrant flirt, she was all these things with a sort of golden good-nature that made her very pride pleasing and her worldly respectability a fresh and hearty thing.

They were in an eddy of excitement about some alleged peril in the mountain path they were to attempt that week. The danger was not from rock and avalanche, but from something yet more romantic. Ethel had been earnestly assured that brigands, the true cut-throats of the modern legend, still haunted that ridge and held that pass of the Apennines.

"They say," she cried, with the awful relish of a schoolgirl, "that all that country isn't ruled by the King of Italy, but by the King of Thieves. Who is the King of Thieves?"

"A great man," replied Muscari, "worthy to rank with your own Robin Hood, signorina. Montano, the King of Thieves, was first heard of in the mountains some ten years ago, when people said brigands were extinct. But his wild authority spread with the swiftness of a silent revolution. Men found his fierce proclamations nailed in every mountain village; his sentinels, gun in hand, in every mountain ravine. Six times the Italian Government tried to dislodge him, and was defeated in six pitched battles as if by Napoleon."

"Now that sort of thing," observed the banker weightily, "would never be allowed in England; perhaps, after all, we had better choose another route. But the courier thought it perfectly safe."

"It is perfectly safe," said the courier contemptuously. "I have been over it twenty times. There may have been some old jailbird called a King in the time of our grandmothers; but he belongs to history if not to fable. Brigandage is utterly stamped out."

"It can never be utterly stamped out," Muscari answered; "because armed revolt is a recreation natural to southerners. Our peasants are like their mountains, rich in grace and green gaiety, but with the fires beneath. There is a point of human despair where the northern poor take to drink—and our own poor take to daggers."

"A poet is privileged," replied Ezza, with a sneer. "If Signor Muscari were English he would still be looking for highwaymen in Wandsworth. Believe me, there is no more danger of being captured in Italy than of being scalped in Boston."

"Then you propose to attempt it?" asked Mr Harrogate, frowning.

"Oh, it sounds rather dreadful," cried the girl, turning her glorious eyes on Muscari. "Do you really think the pass is dangerous?"

Muscari threw back his black mane. "I know it is dangerous," he said. "I am crossing it tomorrow."

The young Harrogate was left behind for a moment emptying a glass of white wine and lighting a cigarette, as the beauty retired with the banker, the courier and the poet, distributing peals of silvery satire. At about the same instant the two priests in the corner rose; the taller, a white-haired Italian, taking his leave. The shorter priest turned and walked towards the banker's son, and the latter was astonished to realize that though a Roman priest the man was an Englishman. He vaguely remembered meeting him at the social crushes of some of his Catholic friends. But the man spoke before his memories could collect themselves.

"Mr Frank Harrogate, I think," he said. "I have had an introduction, but I do not mean to presume on it. The odd thing I have to say will come far better from a stranger. Mr Harrogate, I say one word and go: take care of your sister in her great sorrow."

Even for Frank's truly fraternal indifference the radiance and derision of his sister still seemed to sparkle and ring; he could hear her laughter still from the garden of the hotel, and he stared at his sombre adviser in puzzledom.

"Do you mean the brigands?" he asked; and then, remembering a vague fear of his own, "or can you be thinking of Muscari?"

"One is never thinking of the real sorrow," said the strange priest. "One can only be kind when it comes."

And he passed promptly from the room, leaving the other almost with his mouth open.

A day or two afterwards a coach containing the company was really crawling and staggering up the spurs of the menacing mountain range. Between Ezza's cheery denial of the danger and Muscari's boisterous defiance of it, the financial family were firm in their original purpose; and Muscari made his mountain journey coincide with theirs. A more surprising feature was the appearance at the coast-town station of the little priest of the restaurant; he alleged merely that business led him also to cross the mountains of the midland. But young Harrogate could not but connect his presence with the mystical fears and warnings of yesterday.

The coach was a kind of commodious wagonette, invented by the modernist talent of the courier, who dominated the expedition with his scientific activity and breezy wit. The theory of danger from thieves was banished from thought and speech; though so far conceded in formal act that some slight protection was employed. The courier and the young banker carried loaded revolvers, and Muscari (with much boyish gratification) buckled on a kind of
cutlass under his black cloak.

He had planted his person at a flying leap next to the lovely Englishwoman; on the other side of her sat the priest, whose name was Brown and who was fortunately a silent individual; the courier and the father and son were on the banc behind. Muscari was in towering spirits, seriously believing in the peril, and his talk to Ethel might well have made her think him a maniac. But there was something in the crazy and gorgeous ascent, amid crags like peaks loaded with woods like orchards, that dragged her spirit up alone with his into purple preposterous heavens with wheeling suns. The white road climbed like a white cat; it spanned sunless chasms like a tight-rope; it was flung round far-off headlands like a lasso.

And yet, however high they went, the desert still blossomed like the rose. The fields were burnished in sun and wind with the colour of kingfisher and parrot and humming-bird, the hues of a hundred flowering flowers. There are no lovelier meadows and woodlands than the English, no nobler crests or chasms than those of Snowdon and Glencoe. But Ethel Harrogate had never before seen the southern parks tilted on the splintered northern peaks; the gorge of Glencoe laden with the fruits of Kent. There was nothing here of that chill and desolation that in Britain one associates with high and wild scenery. It was rather like a mosaic palace, rent with earthquakes; or like a Dutch tulip garden blown to the stars with dynamite.

"It's like Kew Gardens on Beachy Head," said Ethel.

"It is our secret," answered he, "the secret of the volcano; that is also the secret of the revolution—that a thing can be violent and yet fruitful."

"You are rather violent yourself," and she smiled at him.

"And yet rather fruitless," he admitted; "if I die tonight I die unmarried and a fool."

"It is not my fault if you have come," she said after a difficult silence.

"It is never your fault," answered Muscari; "it was not your fault that Troy fell."

As they spoke they came under overwhelming cliffs that spread almost like wings above a corner of peculiar peril. Shocked by the big shadow on the narrow ledge, the horses stirred doubtfully. The driver leapt to the earth to hold their heads, and they became ungovernable. One horse reared up to his full height—the titanic and terrifying height of a horse when he becomes a biped. It was just enough to alter the equilibrium; the whole coach heeled over like a ship and crashed through the fringe of bushes over the cliff. Muscari threw an arm round Ethel, who clung to him, and shouted aloud. It was for such moments that he lived.

At the moment when the gorgeous mountain walls went round the poet's head like a purple windmill a thing happened which was superficially even more startling. The elderly and lethargic banker sprang erect in the coach and leapt over the precipice before the tilted vehicle could take him there. In the first flash it looked as wild as suicide; but in the second it was as sensible as a safe investment. The Yorkshireman had evidently more promptitude, as well as more sagacity, than Muscari had given him credit for; for he landed in a lap of land which might have been specially padded with turf and clover to receive him. As it happened, indeed, the whole company were equally lucky, if less dignified in their form of ejection. Immediately under this abrupt turn of the road was a grassy and flowery hollow like a sunken meadow; a sort of green velvet pocket in the long, green, trailing garments of the hills. Into this they were all tipped or tumbled with little damage, save that their smallest baggage and even the contents of their pockets were scattered in the grass around them. The wrecked coach still hung above, entangled in the tough hedge, and the horses plunged painfully down the slope. The first to sit up was the little priest, who scratched his head with a face of foolish wonder. Frank Harrogate heard him say to himself: "Now why on earth have we fallen just here?"

He blinked at the litter around him, and recovered his own very clumsy umbrella. Beyond it lay the broad sombrero fallen from the head of Muscari, and beside it a sealed business letter which, after a glance at the address, he returned to the elder Harrogate. On the other side of him the grass partly hid Miss Ethel's sunshade, and just beyond it lay a curious little glass bottle hardly two inches long. The priest picked it up; in a quick, unobtrusive manner he uncorked and sniffed it, and his heavy face turned the colour of clay.

"Heaven deliver us!" he muttered; "it can't be hers! Has her sorrow come on her already?" He slipped it into his own waistcoat pocket. "I think I'm justified," he said, "till I know a little more."

He gazed painfully at the girl, at that moment being raised out of the flowers by Muscari, who was saying: "We have fallen into heaven; it is a sign. Mortals climb up and they fall down; but it is only gods and goddesses who can fall upwards."

And indeed she rose out of the sea of colours so beautiful and happy a vision that the priest felt his suspicion shaken and shifted. "After all," he thought, "perhaps the poison isn't hers; perhaps it's one of Muscari's melodramatic tricks."

Muscari set the lady lightly on her feet, made her an absurdly theatrical bow, and then, drawing his cutlass, hacked hard at the taut reins of the horses, so that they scrambled to their feet and stood in the grass trembling.
When he had done so, a most remarkable thing occurred. A very quiet man, very poorly dressed and extremely sunburnt, came out of the bushes and took hold of the horses' heads. He had a queer-shaped knife, very broad and crooked, buckled on his belt; there was nothing else remarkable about him, except his sudden and silent appearance. The poet asked him who he was, and he did not answer.

Looking around him at the confused and startled group in the hollow, Muscari then perceived that another tanned and tattered man, with a short gun under his arm, was looking at them from the ledge just below, leaning his elbows on the edge of the turf. Then he looked up at the road from which they had fallen and saw, looking down on them, the muzzles of four other carbines and four other brown faces with bright but quite motionless eyes.

"The brigands!" cried Muscari, with a kind of monstrous gaiety. "This was a trap. Ezza, if you will oblige me by shooting the coachman first, we can cut our way out yet. There are only six of them."

"The coachman," said Ezza, who was standing grimly with his hands in his pockets, "happens to be a servant of Mr Harrogate's."

"Then shoot him all the more," cried the poet impatiently; "he was bribed to upset his master. Then put the lady in the middle, and we will break the line up there—with a rush."

And, wading in wild grass and flowers, he advanced fearlessly on the four carbines; but finding that no one followed except young Harrogate, he turned, brandishing his cutlass to wave the others on. He beheld the courier still standing slightly astride in the centre of the grassy ring, his hands in his pockets; and his lean, ironical Italian face seemed to grow longer and longer in the evening light.

"You thought, Muscari, I was the failure among our schoolfellows," he said, "and you thought you were the success. But I have succeeded more than you and fill a bigger place in history. I have been acting epics while you have been writing them."

"Come on, I tell you!" thundered Muscari from above. "Will you stand there talking nonsense about yourself with a woman to save and three strong men to help you? What do you call yourself?"

"I call myself Montano," cried the strange courier in a voice equally loud and full. "I am the King of Thieves, and I welcome you all to my summer palace."

And even as he spoke five more silent men with weapons ready came out of the bushes, and looked towards him for their orders. One of them held a large paper in his hand.

"This pretty little nest where we are all picnicking," went on the courier-brigand, with the same easy yet sinister smile, "is, together with some caves underneath it, known by the name of the Paradise of Thieves. It is my principal stronghold on these hills; for (as you have doubtless noticed) the eyrie is invisible both from the road above and from the valley below. It is something better than impregnable; it is unnoticeable. Here I mostly live, and here I shall certainly die, if the gendarmes ever track me here. I am not the kind of criminal that 'reserves his defence,' but the better kind that reserves his last bullet."

All were staring at him thunderstruck and still, except Father Brown, who heaved a huge sigh as of relief and fingered the little phial in his pocket. "Thank God!" he muttered; "that's much more probable. The poison belongs to this robber-chief, of course. He carries it so that he may never be captured, like Cato."

The King of Thieves was, however, continuing his address with the same kind of dangerous politeness. "It only remains for me," he said, "to explain to my guests the social conditions upon which I have the pleasure of entertaining them. I need not expound the quaint old ritual of ransom, which it is incumbent upon me to keep up; and even this only applies to a part of the company. The Reverend Father Brown and the celebrated Signor Muscari I shall release tomorrow at dawn and escort to my outposts. Poets and priests, if you will pardon my simplicity of speech, never have any money. And so (since it is impossible to get anything out of them), let us, seize the opportunity to show our admiration for classic literature and our reverence for Holy Church."

He paused with an unpleasing smile; and Father Brown blinked repeatedly at him, and seemed suddenly to be listening with great attention. The brigand captain took the large paper from the attendant brigand and, glancing over it, continued: "My other intentions are clearly set forth in this public document, which I will hand round in a moment; and which after that will be posted on a tree by every village in the valley, and every cross-road in the hills. I will not weary you with the verbalism, since you will be able to check it; the substance of my proclamation is this: I announce first that I have captured the English millionaire, the colossus of finance, Mr Samuel Harrogate. I next announce that I have found on his person notes and bonds for two thousand pounds, which he has given up to me. Now since it would be really immoral to announce such a thing to a credulous public if it had not occurred, I suggest it should occur without further delay. I suggest that Mr Harrogate senior should now give me the two thousand pounds in his pocket."

The banker looked at him under lowering brows, red-faced and sulky, but seemingly cowed. That leap from the failing carriage seemed to have used up his last virility. He had held back in a hang-dog style when his son and Muscari had made a bold movement to break out of the brigand trap. And now his red and trembling hand went
"Excellent!" cried that outlaw gaily; "so far we are all cosy. I resume the points of my proclamation, so soon to be published to all Italy. The third item is that of ransom. I am asking from the friends of the Harrogate family a ransom of three thousand pounds, which I am sure is almost insulting to that family in its moderate estimate of their importance. Who would not pay triple this sum for another day's association with such a domestic circle? I will not conceal from you that the document ends with certain legal phrases about the unpleasant things that may happen if the money is not paid; but meanwhile, ladies and gentlemen, let me assure you that I am comfortably off here for accommodation, wine and cigars, and bid you for the present a sportsman-like welcome to the luxuries of the Paradise of Thieves."

All the time that he had been speaking, the dubious-looking men with carbines and dirty slouch hats had been gathering silently in such preponderating numbers that even Muscari was compelled to recognize his sally with the sword as hopeless. He glanced around him; but the girl had already gone over to soothe and comfort her father, for her natural affection for his person was as strong or stronger than her somewhat snobbish pride in his success. Muscari, with the illogicality of a lover, admired this filial devotion, and yet was irritated by it. He slapped his sword back in the scabbard and went and flung himself somewhat sulkily on one of the green banks. The priest sat down within a yard or two, and Muscari turned his aquiline nose on him in an instantaneous irritation.

"Well," said the poet tartly, "do people still think me too romantic? Are there, I wonder, any brigands left in the mountains?"

"There may be," said Father Brown agnostically.

"What do you mean?" asked the other sharply.

"I mean I am puzzled," replied the priest. "I am puzzled about Ezza or Montano, or whatever his name is. He seems to me much more inexplicable as a brigand even than he was as a courier."

"But in what way?" persisted his companion. "Santa Maria! I should have thought the brigand was plain enough."

"I find three curious difficulties," said the priest in a quiet voice. "I should like to have your opinion on them. First of all I must tell you I was lunching in that restaurant at the seaside. As four of you left the room, you and Miss Harrogate went ahead, talking and laughing; the banker and the courier came behind, speaking sparely and rather low. But I could not help hearing Ezza say these words--'Well, let her have a little fun; you know the blow may smash her any minute.' Mr Harrogate answered nothing; so the words must have had some meaning. On the impulse of the moment I warned her brother that she might be in peril; I said nothing of its nature, for I did not know. But if it meant this capture in the hills, the thing is nonsense. Why should the brigand-courier warn his patron, even by a hint, when it was his whole purpose to lure him into the mountain-mousetrap? It could not have meant that. But if not, what is this disaster, known both to courier and banker, which hangs over Miss Harrogate's head?"

"Disaster to Miss Harrogate!" ejaculated the poet, sitting up with some ferocity. "Explain yourself; go on."

"All my riddles, however, revolve round our bandit chief," resumed the priest reflectively. "And here is the second of them. Why did he put so prominently in his demand for ransom the fact that he had taken two thousand pounds from his victim on the spot? It had no faintest tendency to evoke the ransom. Quite the other way, in fact. Harrogate's friends would be far likelier to fear for his fate if they thought the thieves were poor and desperate. Yet the spoliation on the spot was emphasized and even put first in the demand. Why should Ezza Montano want so specially to tell all Europe that he had picked the pocket before he levied the blackmail?"

"I cannot imagine," said Muscari, rubbing up his black hair for once with an unaffected gesture. "You may think you enlighten me, but you are leading me deeper in the dark. What may be the third objection to the King of the Thieves?" "The third objection," said Father Brown, still in meditation, "is this bank we are sitting on. Why does our brigand-courier call this his chief fortress and the Paradise of Thieves? It is certainly a soft spot to fall on and a sweet spot to look at. It is also quite true, as he says, that it is invisible from valley and peak, and is therefore a hiding-place. But it is not a fortress. It never could be a fortress. I think it would be the worst fortress in the world. For it is actually commanded from above by the common high-road across the mountains--the very place where the police would most probably pass. Why, five shabby short guns held us helpless here about half an hour ago. The quarter of a company of any kind of soldiers could have blown us over the precipice. Whatever is the meaning of this odd little nook of grass and flowers, it is not an entrenched position. It is something else; it has some other strange sort of importance; some value that I do not understand. It is more like an accidental theatre or a natural green-room; it is like the scene for some romantic comedy; it is like..."

As the little priest's words lengthened and lost themselves in a dull and dreamy sincerity, Muscari, whose animal senses were alert and impatient, heard a new noise in the mountains. Even for him the sound was as yet very small and faint; but he could have sworn the evening breeze bore with it something like the pulsation of horses' hoofs and a distant hallooing.
At the same moment, and long before the vibration had touched the less-experienced English ears, Montano the brigand ran up the bank above them and stood in the broken hedge, steadying himself against a tree and peering down the road. He was a strange figure as he stood there, for he had assumed a flapped fantastic hat and swinging baldric and cutlass in his capacity of bandit king, but the bright prosaic tweed of the courier showed through in patches all over him.

The next moment he turned his olive, sneering face and made a movement with his hand. The brigands scattered at the signal, not in confusion, but in what was evidently a kind of guerrilla discipline. Instead of occupying the road along the ridge, they sprinkled themselves along the side of it behind the trees and the hedge, as if watching unseen for an enemy. The noise beyond grew stronger, beginning to shake the mountain road, and a voice could be clearly heard calling out orders. The brigands swayed and huddled, cursing and whispering, and the evening air was full of little metallic noises as they cocked their pistols, or loosened their knives, or trailed their scabbards over the stones. Then the noises from both quarters seemed to meet on the road above; branches broke, horses neighed, men cried out.

"A rescue!" cried Muscari, springing to his feet and waving his hat; "the gendarmes are on them! Now for freedom and a blow for it! Now to be rebels against robbers! Come, don't let us leave everything to the police; that is so dreadfully modern. Fall on the rear of these ruffians. The gendarmes are rescuing us; come, friends, let us rescue the gendarmes!"

And throwing his hat over the trees, he drew his cutlass once more and began to escalade the slope up to the road. Frank Harrogate jumped up and ran across to help him, revolver in hand, but was astounded to hear himself imperatively recalled by the raucous voice of his father, who seemed to be in great agitation.

"I won't have it," said the banker in a choking voice; "I command you not to interfere."

"But, father," said Frank very warmly, "an Italian gentleman has led the way. You wouldn't have it said that the English hung back."

"It is useless," said the older man, who was trembling violently, "it is useless. We must submit to our lot."

Father Brown looked at the banker; then he put his hand instinctively as if on his heart, but really on the little bottle of poison; and a great light came into his face like the light of the revelation of death.

Muscari meanwhile, without waiting for support, had crested the bank up to the road, and struck the brigand king heavily on the shoulder, causing him to stagger and swing round. Montano also had his cutlass unsheathed, and Muscari, without further speech, sent a slash at his head which he was compelled to catch and parry. But even as the two short blades crossed and clashed the King of Thieves deliberately dropped his point and laughed.

"What's the good, old man?" he said in spirited Italian slang; "this damned farce will soon be over."

"What do you mean, you shuffler?" panted the fire-eating poet. "Is your courage a sham as well as your honesty?"

"Everything about me is a sham," responded the ex-courier in complete good humour. "I am an actor; and if I ever had a private character, I have forgotten it. I am no more a genuine brigand than I am a genuine courier. I am only a bundle of masks, and you can't fight a duel with that." And he laughed with boyish pleasure and fell into his old straddling attitude, with his back to the skirmish up the road.

Darkness was deepening under the mountain walls, and it was not easy to discern much of the progress of the struggle, save that tall men were pushing their horses' muzzles through a clinging crowd of brigands, who seemed more inclined to harass and hustle the invaders than to kill them. It was more like a town crowd preventing the passage of the police than anything the poet had ever pictured as the last stand of doomed and outlawed men of blood. Just as he was rolling his eyes in bewilderment he felt a touch on his elbow, and found the odd little priest standing there like a small Noah with a large hat, and requesting the favour of a word or two.

"Signor Muscari," said the cleric, "in this queer crisis personalities may be pardoned. I may tell you without offence of a way in which you will do more good than by helping the gendarmes, who are bound to break through in any case. You will permit me the impertinent intimacy, but do you care about that girl? Care enough to marry her and make her a good husband, I mean?"

"Yes," said the poet quite simply.

"Does she care about you?"

"I think so," was the equally grave reply.

"Then go over there and offer yourself," said the priest: "offer her everything you can; offer her heaven and earth if you've got them. The time is short."

"Why?" asked the astonished man of letters.

"Because," said Father Brown, "her Doom is coming up the road."

"Nothing is coming up the road," argued Muscari, "except the rescue."

"Well, you go over there," said his adviser, "and be ready to rescue her from the rescue."
Almost as he spoke the hedges were broken all along the ridge by a rush of the escaping brigands. They dived into bushes and thick grass like defeated men pursued; and the great cocked hats of the mounted gendarmerie were seen passing along above the broken hedge. Another order was given; there was a noise of dismounting, and a tall officer with cocked hat, a grey imperial, and a paper in his hand appeared in the gap that was the gate of the Paradise of Thieves. There was a momentary silence, broken in an extraordinary way by the banker, who cried out in a hoarse and strangled voice: "Robbed! I've been robbed!"

"Why, that was hours ago," cried his son in astonishment: "when you were robbed of two thousand pounds."

"Not of two thousand pounds," said the financier, with an abrupt and terrible composure, "only of a small bottle."

The policeman with the grey imperial was striding across the green hollow. Encountering the King of the Thieves in his path, he clapped him on the shoulder with something between a caress and a buffet and gave him a push that sent him staggering away. "You'll get into trouble, too," he said, "if you play these tricks."

Again to Muscari's artistic eye it seemed scarcely like the capture of a great outlaw at bay. Passing on, the policeman halted before the Harrogate group and said: "Samuel Harrogate, I arrest you in the name of the law for embezzlement of the funds of the Hull and Huddersfield Bank."

The great banker nodded with an odd air of business assent, seemed to reflect a moment, and before they could interpose took a half turn and a step that brought him to the edge of the outer mountain wall. Then, flinging up his hands, he leapt exactly as he leapt out of the coach. But this time he did not fall into a little meadow just beneath; he fell a thousand feet below, to become a wreck of bones in the valley.

The anger of the Italian policeman, which he expressed volubly to Father Brown, was largely mixed with admiration. "It was like him to escape us at last," he said. "He was a great brigand if you like. This last trick of his I believe to be absolutely unprecedented. He fled with the company's money to Italy, and actually got himself captured by sham brigands in his own pay, so as to explain both the disappearance of the money and the disappearance of himself. That demand for ransom was really taken seriously by most of the police. But for years he's been doing things as good as that, quite as good as that. He will be a serious loss to his family."

Muscari was leading away the unhappy daughter, who held hard to him, as she did for many a year after. But even in that tragic wreck he could not help having a smile and a hand of half-mocking friendship for the indefensible Ezza Montano. "And where are you going next?" he asked him over his shoulder.

"Birmingham," answered the actor, puffing a cigarette. "Didn't I tell you I was a Futurist? I really do believe in those things if I believe in anything. Change, bustle and new things every morning. I am going to Manchester, Liverpool, Leeds, Hull, Huddersfield, Glasgow, Chicago--in short, to enlightened, energetic, civilized society!"

"In short," said Muscari, "to the real Paradise of Thieves."

THREE

The Duel of Dr Hirsch

M. MAURICE BRUN and M. Armand Armagnac were crossing the sunlit Champs Elysee with a kind of vivacious respectability. They were both short, brisk and bold. They both had black beards that did not seem to belong to their faces, after the strange French fashion which makes real hair look like artificial. M. Brun had a dark wedge of beard apparently affixed under his lower lip. M. Armagnac, by way of a change, had two beards; one sticking out from each corner of his emphatic chin. They were both young. They were both atheists, with a depressing fixity of outlook but great mobility of exposition. They were both pupils of the great Dr Hirsch, scientist, publicist and moralist.

M. Brun had become prominent by his proposal that the common expression "Adieu" should be obliterated from all the French classics, and a slight fine imposed for its use in private life. "Then," he said, "the very name of your imagined God will have echoed for the last time in the ear of man." M. Armagnac specialized rather in a resistance to militarism, and wished the chorus of the Marseillaise altered from "Aux armes, citoyens!" to "Aux greves, citoyens". But his antimilitarism was of a peculiar and Gallic sort. An eminent and very wealthy English Quaker, who had come to see him to arrange for the disarmament of the whole planet, was rather distressed by Armagnac's proposal that (by way of beginning) the soldiers should shoot their officers.

And indeed it was in this regard that the two men differed most from their leader and father in philosophy. Dr Hirsch, though born in France and covered with the most triumphant favours of French education, was temperamentally of another type--mild, dreamy, humane; and, despite his sceptical system, not devoid of transcendentalism. He was, in short, more like a German than a Frenchman; and much as they admired him, something in the subconsciousness of these Gauls was irritated at his pleading for peace in so peaceful a manner. To their party throughout Europe, however, Paul Hirsch was a saint of science. His large and daring cosmic theories advertised his austere life and innocent, if somewhat frigid, morality; he held something of the position of Darwin doubled with the position of Tolstoy. But he was neither an anarchist nor an antipatriot; his views on disarmament
were moderate and evolutionary—the Republican Government put considerable confidence in him as to various chemical improvements. He had lately even discovered a noiseless explosive, the secret of which the Government was carefully guarding.

His house stood in a handsome street near the Elysee—a street which in that strong summer seemed almost as full of foliage as the park itself; a row of chestnuts shattered the sunshine, interrupted only in one place where a large cafe ran out into the street. Almost opposite to this were the white and green blinds of the great scientist's house, an iron balcony, also painted green, running along in front of the first-floor windows. Beneath this was the entrance into a kind of court, gay with shrubs and tiles, into which the two Frenchmen passed in animated talk.

The door was opened to them by the doctor's old servant, Simon, who might very well have passed for a doctor himself, having a strict suit of black, spectacles, grey hair, and a confidential manner. In fact, he was a far more presentable man of science than his master, Dr Hirsch, who was a forked radish of a fellow, with just enough bulb of a head to make his body insignificant. With all the gravity of a great physician handling a prescription, Simon handed a letter to M. Armagnac. That gentleman ripped it up with a racial impatience, and rapidly read the following:

I cannot come down to speak to you. There is a man in this house whom I refuse to meet. He is a Chauvinist officer, Dubosc. He is sitting on the stairs. He has been kicking the furniture about in all the other rooms; I have locked myself in my study, opposite that cafe. If you love me, go over to the cafe and wait at one of the tables outside. I will try to send him over to you. I want you to answer him and deal with him. I cannot meet him myself. I cannot: I will not.

There is going to be another Dreyfus case.

P. HIRSCH

M. Armagnac looked at M. Brun. M. Brun borrowed the letter, read it, and looked at M. Armagnac. Then both betook themselves briskly to one of the little tables under the chestnuts opposite, where they procured two tall glasses of horrible green absinthe, which they could drink apparently in any weather and at any time. Otherwise the cafe seemed empty, except for one soldier drinking coffee at one table, and at another a large man drinking a small syrup and a priest drinking nothing.

Maurice Brun cleared his throat and said: "Of course we must help the master in every way, but—"

There was an abrupt silence, and Armagnac said: "He may have excellent reasons for not meeting the man himself, but—"

Before either could complete a sentence, it was evident that the invader had been expelled from the house opposite. The shrubs under the archway swayed and burst apart, as that unwelcome guest was shot out of them like a cannon-ball.

He was a sturdy figure in a small and tilted Tyrolean felt hat, a figure that had indeed something generally Tyrolean about it. The man's shoulders were big and broad, but his legs were neat and active in knee-breeches and knitted stockings. His face was brown like a nut; he had very bright and restless brown eyes; his dark hair was brushed back stiffly in front and cropped close behind, outlining a square and powerful skull; and he had a huge black moustache like the horns of a bison. Such a substantial head is generally based on a bull neck; but this was hidden by a big coloured scarf, swathed round up the man's ears and falling in front inside his jacket like a sort of fancy waistcoat. It was a scarf of strong dead colours, dark red and old gold and purple, probably of Oriental fabrication. Altogether the man had something a shade barbaric about him; more like a Hungarian squire than an ordinary French officer. His French, however, was obviously that of a native; and his French patriotism was so impulsive as to be slightly absurd. His first act when he burst out of the archway was to call in a clarion voice down the street: "Are there any Frenchmen here?" as if he were calling for Christians in Mecca.

Armagnac and Brun instantly stood up; but they were too late. Men were already running from the street corners; there was a small but ever-clustering crowd. With the prompt French instinct for the politics of the street, the man with the black moustache had already run across to a corner of the cafe, sprung on one of the tables, and seizing a branch of chestnut to steady himself, shouted as Camille Desmoulins once shouted when he scattered the oak-leaves among the populace.

"Frenchmen!" he volleyed; "I cannot speak! God help me, that is why I am speaking! The fellows in their filthy parliaments who learn to speak also learn to be silent—silent as that spy cowering in the house opposite! Silent as he is when I beat on his bedroom door! Silent as he is now, though he hears my voice across this street and shakes where he sits! Oh, they can be silent eloquently—the politicians! But the time has come when we that cannot speak must speak. You are betrayed to the Prussians. Betrayed at this moment. Betrayed by that man. I am Jules Dubosc, Colonel of Artillery, Belfort. We caught a German spy in the Vosges yesterday, and a paper was found on him—a paper I hold in my hand. Oh, they tried to hush it up; but I took it direct to the man who wrote it—the man in that house! It is in his hand. It is signed with his initials. It is a direction for finding the secret of this new Noiseless
to Germany. And if he's a German spy he didn't write it, well--because it doesn't give information to Germany."

"But it wasn't written by Hirsch. If he's a French patriot he didn't write it, because it gives information and I thought it as well to investigate the charge, and I must say I'm glad we did."

Duc de Valognes." The other was the big man, whom his friend the priest sought at first to dissuade; and then presently, satisfied. One was the common soldier with the coffee, who said simply: "I will act for you, sir. I am the Duc de Valognes." The other was the big man, whom his friend the priest sought at first to dissuade; and then walked away alone.

"...only two things to say to you now. The first is to my foes, the second to my friends. To my foes I say: It is true I will not meet M. Dubosc, though he is storming outside this very room. It is true I have asked two other men to confront him for me. And I will tell you why! Because I will not and must not see him-- because it would be against all rules of dignity and honour to see him. Before I am triumphantly cleared before a court, there is another arbitration this gentleman owes me as a gentleman, and in referring him to my seconds I am strictly--"

Armagnac and Brun were waving their hats wildly, and even the Doctor's enemies roared applause at this unexpected defiance. Once more a few sentences were inaudible, but they could hear him say: "To my friends--I myself should always prefer weapons purely intellectual, and to these an evolved humanity will certainly confine itself. But our own most precious truth is the fundamental force of matter and heredity. My books are successful; my myself should always prefer weapons purely intellectual, and to these an evolved humanity will certainly confine itself. But our own most precious truth is the fundamental force of matter and heredity. My books are successful; my"

Two men were instantly found in the crowd itself to offer their services to Colonel Dubosc, who came out presently, satisfied. One was the common soldier with the coffee, who said simply: "I will act for you, sir. I am the Duc de Valognes." The other was the big man, whom his friend the priest sought at first to dissuade; and then walked away alone.

In the early evening a light dinner was spread at the back of the Cafe Charlemagne. Though unroofed by any glass or gilt plaster, the guests were nearly all under a delicate and irregular roof of leaves; for the ornamental trees stood so thick around and among the tables as to give something of the dimness and the dazzle of a small orchard. At one of the central tables a very stumpy little priest sat in complete solitude, and applied himself to a pile of papers. Dr Hirsch came out on the balcony. For an instant the fury half turned to laughter; for he was an absurd figure in such a scene. His long bare neck and sloping shoulders were the shape of a champagne bottle, but that was the only festive thing about him. His coat hung on him as on a peg; he wore his carrot-coloured hair long and weedy; his cheeks and chin were fully fringed with one of those irritating beards that begin far from the mouth. He was very pale, and he wore blue spectacles.

Livid as he was, he spoke with a sort of prim decision, so that the mob fell silent in the middle of his third sentence.

"...only two things to say to you now. The first is to my foes, the second to my friends. To my foes I say: It is true I will not meet M. Dubosc, though he is storming outside this very room. It is true I have asked two other men to confront him for me. And I will tell you why! Because I will not and must not see him-- because it would be against all rules of dignity and honour to see him. Before I am triumphantly cleared before a court, there is another arbitration this gentleman owes me as a gentleman, and in referring him to my seconds I am strictly--"

Armagnac and Brun were waving their hats wildly, and even the Doctor's enemies roared applause at this unexpected defiance. Once more a few sentences were inaudible, but they could hear him say: "To my friends--I myself should always prefer weapons purely intellectual, and to these an evolved humanity will certainly confine itself. But our own most precious truth is the fundamental force of matter and heredity. My books are successful; my theories are unrefuted; but I suffer in politics from a prejudice almost physical in the French. I cannot speak like Clemenceau and Deroulede, for their words are like echoes of their pistols. The French ask for a duellist as the English ask for a sportsman. Well, I give my proofs: I will pay this barbaric bribe, and then go back to reason for the rest of my life."

"I'm afraid I must chuck this business," said he heavily. "I'm all on the side of the French soldiers like Dubosc, and I'm all against the French atheists like Hirsch; but it seems to me in this case we've made a mistake. The Duke and I thought it as well to investigate the charge, and I must say I'm glad we did."

"Is the paper a forgery, then?" asked the priest.

"That's just the odd thing," replied Flambeau. "It's exactly like Hirsch's writing, and nobody can point out any mistake in it. But it wasn't written by Hirsch. If he's a French patriot he didn't write it, because it gives information to Germany. And if he's a German spy he didn't write it, well--because it doesn't give information to Germany."

"You mean the information is wrong?" asked Father Brown.

"Wrong," replied the other, "and wrong exactly where Dr Hirsch would have been right--about the hiding-place of..."
of his own secret formula in his own official department. By favour of Hirsch and the authorities, the Duke and I have actually been allowed to inspect the secret drawer at the War Office where the Hirsch formula is kept. We are the only people who have ever known it, except the inventor himself and the Minister for War; but the Minister permitted it to save Hirsch from fighting. After that we really can't support Dubosc if his revelation is a mare's nest."

"And it is?" asked Father Brown.

"It is," said his friend gloomily. "It is a clumsy forgery by somebody who knew nothing of the real hiding-place. It says the paper is in the cupboard on the left of the Secretary's desk. As a fact the cupboard with the secret drawer is some way to the left of the desk. It says the grey envelope contains a long document written in red ink. It isn't written in red ink, but in ordinary black ink. It's manifestly absurd to say that Hirsch can have made a mistake about a paper that nobody knew of but himself; or can have tried to help a foreign thief by telling him to fumble in the wrong drawer. I think we must chuck it up and apologize to old Carrots."

Father Brown seemed to cogitate; he lifted a little whitebait on his fork. "You are sure the grey envelope was in the left cupboard?" he asked.

"Positive," replied Flambeau. "The grey envelope-- it was a white envelope really--was--"

Father Brown put down the small silver fish and the fork and stared across at his companion. "What?" he asked, in an altered voice.

"Well, what?" repeated Flambeau, eating heartily.

"It was not grey," said the priest. "Flambeau, you frighten me."

"What the deuce are you frightened of?"

"I'm frightened of a white envelope," said the other seriously, "If it had only just been grey! Hang it all, it might as well have been grey. But if it was white, the whole business is black. The Doctor has been dabbling in some of the old brimstone after all."

"But I tell you he couldn't have written such a note!" cried Flambeau. "The note is utterly wrong about the facts. And innocent or guilty, Dr Hirsch knew all about the facts."

"The man who wrote that note knew all about the facts," said his clerical companion soberly. "He could never have got 'em so wrong without knowing about 'em. You have to know an awful lot to be wrong on every subject--like the devil."

"Do you mean--?"

"I mean a man telling lies on chance would have told some of the truth," said his friend firmly. "Suppose someone sent you to find a house with a green door and a blue blind, with a front garden but no back garden, with a dog but no cat, and where they drank coffee but not tea. You would say if you found no such house that it was all made up. But I say no. I say if you found a house where the door was blue and the blind green, where there was a back garden and no front garden, where cats were common and dogs instantly shot, where tea was drunk in quarts and coffee forbidden--then you would know you had found the house. The man must have known that particular house to be so accurately inaccurate."

"But what could it mean?" demanded the diner opposite.

"I can't conceive," said Brown; "I don't understand this Hirsch affair at all. As long as it was only the left drawer instead of the right, and red ink instead of black, I thought it must be the chance blunders of a forger, as you say. But three is a mystical number; it finishes things. It finishes this. That the direction about the drawer, the colour of ink, the colour of envelope, should none of them be right by accident, that can't be a coincidence. It wasn't."

"What was it, then? Treason?" asked Flambeau, resuming his dinner.

"I don't know that either," answered Brown, with a face of blank bewilderment."The only thing I can think of.... Well, I never understood that Dreyfus case. I can always grasp moral evidence easier than the other sorts. I go by a man's eyes and voice, don't you know, and whether his family seems happy, and by what subjects he chooses--and avoids. Well, I was puzzled in the Dreyfus case. Not by the horrible things imputed both ways; I know (though it's not modern to say so) that human nature in the highest places is still capable of being Cenci or Borgia. No--, what puzzled me was the sincerity of both parties. I don't mean the political parties; the rank and file are always roughly honest, and often duped. I mean the persons of the play. I mean the conspirators, if they were conspirators. I mean the traitor, if he was a traitor. I mean the men who must have known the truth. Now Dreyfus went on like a man who knew he was a wronged man. And yet the French statesmen and soldiers went on as if they knew he wasn't a wronged man but simply a wrong 'un. I don't mean they behaved well; I mean they behaved as if they were sure. I can't describe these things; I know what I mean."

"I wish I did," said his friend. "And what has it to do with old Hirsch?"

"Suppose a person in a position of trust," went on the priest, "began to give the enemy information because it was false information. Suppose he even thought he was saving his country by misleading the foreigner. Suppose this brought him into spy circles, and little loans were made to him, and little ties tied on to him. Suppose he kept up his
contradictory position in a confused way by never telling the foreign spies the truth, but letting it more and more be
guessed. The better part of him (what was left of it) would still say: 'I have not helped the enemy; I said it was the
left drawer.' The meaner part of him would already be saying: 'But they may have the sense to see that means the
right.' I think it is psychologically possible--in an enlightened age, you know."

"It may be psychologically possible," answered Flambeau, "and it certainly would explain Dreyfus being certain
he was wronged and his judges being sure he was guilty. But it won't wash historically, because Dreyfus's document
(if it was his document) was literally correct."

"I wasn't thinking of Dreyfus," said Father Brown.

Silence had sunk around them with the emptying of the tables; it was already late, though the sunlight still clung
to everything, as if accidentally entangled in the trees. In the stillness Flambeau shifted his seat sharply--making an
isolated and echoing noise-- and threw his elbow over the angle of it. "Well," he said, rather harshly, "if Hirsch is
not better than a timid treason-monger..."

"You mustn't be too hard on them," said Father Brown gently. "It's not entirely their fault; but they have no
instincts. I mean those things that make a woman refuse to dance with a man or a man to touch an investment.
They've been taught that it's all a matter of degree."

"Anyhow," cried Flambeau impatiently, "he's not a patch on my principal; and I shall go through with it. Old
Dubosc may be a bit mad, but he's a sort of patriot after all."

Father Brown continued to consume whitebait.

Something in the stolid way he did so caused Flambeau's fierce black eyes to ramble over his companion afresh.
"What's the matter with you?" Flambeau demanded. "Dubosc's all right in that way. You don't doubt him?"

"My friend," said the small priest, laying down his knife and fork in a kind of cold despair, "I doubt everything.
Everything, I mean, that has happened today. I doubt the whole story, though it has been acted before my face. I
doubt every sight that my eyes have seen since morning. There is something in this business quite different from
the ordinary police mystery where one man is more or less lying and the other man more or less telling the truth. Here
both men... Well! I've told you the only theory I can think of that could satisfy anybody. It doesn't satisfy me."

"Nor me either," replied Flambeau frowning, while the other went on eating fish with an air of entire resignation.
"If all you can suggest is that notion of a message conveyed by contraries, I call it uncommonly clever, but...well,
what would you call it?"

"I should call it thin," said the priest promptly. "I should call it uncommonly thin. But that's the queer thing about
the whole business. The lie is like a schoolboy's. There are only three versions, Dubosc's and Hirsch's and that fancy
of mine. Either that note was written by a French officer to ruin a French official; or it was written by the French
official to help German officers; or it was written by the French official to mislead German officers. Very well.
You'd expect a secret paper passing between such people, officials or officers, to look quite different from that.
You'd expect, probably a cipher, certainly abbreviations; most certainly scientific and strictly professional terms. But
this thing's elaborately simple, like a penny dreadful: 'In the purple grotto you will find the golden casket.' It looks
as if... as if it were meant to be seen through at once."

Almost before they could take it in a short figure in French uniform had walked up to their table like the wind,
and sat down with a sort of thump.

"I have extraordinary news," said the Duc de Valognes. "I have just come from this Colonel of ours. He is
packing up to leave the country, and he asks us to make his excuses sur le terrain."

"What?" cried Flambeau, with an incredulity quite frightful-- "apologize?"

"Yes," said the Duke gruffly; "then and there--before everybody-- when the swords are drawn. And you and I
have to do it while he is leaving the country."

"But what can this mean?" cried Flambeau. "He can't be afraid of that little Hirsch! Confound it!" he cried, in a
kind of rational rage; "nobody could be afraid of Hirsch!"

"I believe it's some plot!" snapped Valognes--"some plot of the Jews and Freemasons. It's meant to work up
glory for Hirsch..."

The face of Father Brown was commonplace, but curiously contented; it could shine with ignorance as well as
with knowledge. But there was always one flash when the foolish mask fell, and the wise mask fitted itself in its
place; and Flambeau, who knew his friend, knew that his friend had suddenly understood. Brown said nothing, but
finished his plate of fish.

"Where did you last see our precious Colonel?" asked Flambeau, irritably.

"He's round at the Hotel Saint Louis by the Elysee, where we drove with him. He's packing up, I tell you."

"Will he be there still, do you think?" asked Flambeau, frowning at the table.

"I don't think he can get away yet," replied the Duke; "he's packing to go a long journey..."

"No," said Father Brown, quite simply, but suddenly standing up, "for a very short journey. For one of the
shortest, in fact. But we may still be in time to catch him if we go there in a motor-cab."

Nothing more could be got out of him until the cab swept round the corner by the Hotel Saint Louis, where they got out, and he led the party up a side lane already in deep shadow with the growing dusk. Once, when the Duke impatiently asked whether Hirsch was guilty of treason or not, he answered rather absently: "No; only of ambition--like Caesar." Then he somewhat inconsequently added: "He lives a very lonely life; he has had to do everything for himself."

"Well, if he's ambitious, he ought to be satisfied now," said Flambeau rather bitterly. "All Paris will cheer him now our cursed Colonel has turned tail."

"Don't talk so loud," said Father Brown, lowering his voice, "your cursed Colonel is just in front."

The other two started and shrank farther back into the shadow of the wall, for the sturdy figure of their runaway principal could indeed be seen shuffling along in the twilight in front, a bag in each hand. He looked much the same as when they first saw him, except that he had changed his picturesque mountaineering knickers for a conventional pair of trousers. It was clear he was already escaping from the hotel.

The lane down which they followed him was one of those that seem to be at the back of things, and look like the wrong side of the stage scenery. A colourless, continuous wall ran down one flank of it, interrupted at intervals by dull-hued and dirt-stained doors, all shut fast and featureless save for the chalk scribbles of some passing gamin. The tops of trees, mostly rather depressing evergreens, showed at intervals over the top of the wall, and beyond them in the grey and purple gloaming could be seen the back of some long terrace of tall Parisian houses, really comparatively close, but somehow looking as inaccessible as a range of marble mountains. On the other side of the lane ran the high gilt railings of a gloomy park.

Flambeau was looking round him in rather a weird way. "Do you know," he said, "there is something about this place that--"

"Hullo!" called out the Duke sharply; "that fellow's disappeared. Vanished, like a blasted fairy!"

"He has a key," explained their clerical friend. "He's only gone into one of these garden doors," and as he spoke they heard one of the dull wooden doors close again with a click in front of them.

Flambeau strode up to the door thus shut almost in his face, and stood in front of it for a moment, biting his black moustache in a fury of curiosity. Then he threw up his long arms and swung himself aloft like a monkey and stood on the top of the wall, his enormous figure dark against the purple sky, like the dark tree-tops.

The Duke looked at the priest. "Dubosc's escape is more elaborate than we thought," he said; "but I suppose he is escaping from France."

"He is escaping from everywhere," answered Father Brown.

Valognes's eyes brightened, but his voice sank. "Do you mean suicide?" he asked.

"You will not find his body," replied the other.

A kind of cry came from Flambeau on the wall above. "My God," he exclaimed in French, "I know what this place is now! Why, it's the back of the street where old Hirsch lives. I thought I could recognize the back of a house as well as the back of a man."

"And Dubosc's gone in there!" cried the Duke, smiting his hip. "Why, they'll meet after all!" And with sudden Gallic vivacity he hopped up on the wall beside Flambeau and sat there positively kicking his legs with excitement. The priest alone remained below, leaning against the wall, with his back to the whole theatre of events, and looking wistfully across to the park palings and the twinkling, twilit trees.

The Duke, however stimulated, had the instincts of an aristocrat, and desired rather to stare at the house than to spy on it; but Flambeau, who had the instincts of a burglar (and a detective), had already swung himself from the wall into the fork of a straggling tree from which he could crawl quite close to the only illuminated window in the back of the high dark house. A red blind had been pulled down over the light, but pulled crookedly, so that it gaped on one side, and by risking his neck along a branch that looked as treacherous as a twig, Flambeau could just see Colonel Dubosc walking about in a brilliantly-lighted and luxurious bedroom. But close as Flambeau was to the house, he heard the words of his colleagues by the wall, and repeated them in a low voice.

"Yes, they will meet now after all!"

"They will never meet," said Father Brown. "Hirsch was right when he said that in such an affair the principals must not meet. Have you read a queer psychological story by Henry James, of two persons who so perpetually missed meeting each other by accident that they began to feel quite frightened of each other, and to think it was fate? This is something of the kind, but more curious."

"There are people in Paris who will cure them of such morbid fancies," said Valognes vindictively. "They will jolly well have to meet if we capture them and force them to fight."

"They will not meet on the Day of Judgement," said the priest. "If God Almighty held the truncheon of the lists, if St Michael blew the trumpet for the swords to cross--even then, if one of them stood ready, the other would not
come."

"Oh, what does all this mysticism mean?" cried the Duc de Valognes, impatiently; "why on earth shouldn't they meet like other people?"

"They are the opposite of each other," said Father Brown, with a queer kind of smile. "They contradict each other. They cancel out, so to speak."

He continued to gaze at the darkening trees opposite, but Valognes turned his head sharply at a suppressed exclamation from Flambeau. That investigator, peering into the lighted room, had just seen the Colonel, after a pace or two, proceed to take his coat off. Flambeau's first thought was that this really looked like a fight; but he soon dropped the thought for another. The solidity and squareness of Dubosc's chest and shoulders was all a powerful piece of padding and came off with his coat. In his shirt and trousers he was a comparatively slim gentleman, who walked across the bedroom to the bathroom with no more pugnacious manner than that of washing himself. He bent over a basin, dried his dripping hands and face on a towel, and turned again so that the strong light fell on his face. His brown complexion had gone, his big black moustache had gone; he--was clean-shaven and very pate. Nothing remained of the Colonel but his bright, hawk-like, brown eyes. Under the wall Father Brown was going on in heavy meditation, as if to himself.

"It is all just like what I was saying to Flambeau. These opposites won't do. They don't work. They don't fight. If it's white instead of black, and solid instead of liquid, and so on all along the line--then there's something wrong, Monsieur, there's something wrong. One of these men is fair and the other dark, one stout and the other slim, one strong and the other weak. One has a moustache and no beard, so you can't see his mouth; the other has a beard and no moustache, so you can't see his chin. One has hair cropped to his skull, but a scarf to hide his neck; the other has low shirt-collars, but long hair to hide his skull. It's all too neat and correct, Monsieur, and there's something wrong. Things made so opposite are things that cannot quarrel. Wherever the one sticks out the other sinks in. Like a face and a mask, like a lock and a key..."

Flambeau was peering into the house with a visage as white as a sheet. The occupant of the room was standing with his back to him, but in front of a looking-glass, and had already fitted round his face a sort of framework of rank red hair, hanging disordered from the head and clinging round the jaws and chin while leaving the mocking mouth uncovered. Seen thus in the glass the white face looked like the face of Judas laughing horribly and surrounded by capering flames of hell. For a spasm Flambeau saw the fierce, red-brown eyes dancing, then they were covered with a pair of blue spectacles. Slipping on a loose black coat, the figure vanished towards the front of the house. A few moments later a roar of popular applause from the street beyond announced that Dr Hirsch had once more appeared upon the balcony.

FOUR The Man in the Passage

TWO men appeared simultaneously at the two ends of a sort of passage running along the side of the Apollo Theatre in the Adelphi. The evening daylight in the streets was large and luminous, opalescent and empty. The passage was comparatively long and dark, so each man could see the other as a mere black silhouette at the other end. Nevertheless, each man knew the other, even in that inky outline; for they were both men of striking appearance and they hated each other.

The covered passage opened at one end on one of the steep streets of the Adelphi, and at the other on a terrace overlooking the sunset-coloured river. One side of the passage was a blank wall, for the building it supported was an old unsuccessful theatre restaurant, now shut up. The other side of the passage contained two doors, one at each end. Neither was what was commonly called the stage door; they were a sort of special and private stage doors used by very special performers, and in this case by the star actor and actress in the Shakespearean performance of the day. Persons of that eminence often like to have such private exits and entrances, for meeting friends or avoiding them.

The two men in question were certainly two such friends, men who evidently knew the doors and counted on their opening, for each approached the door at the upper end with equal coolness and confidence. Not, however, with equal speed; but the man who walked fast was the man from the other end of the tunnel, so they both arrived before the secret stage door almost at the same instant. They saluted each other with civility, and waited a moment before one of them, the sharper walker who seemed to have the shorter patience, knocked at the door.

In this and everything else each man was opposite and neither could be called inferior. As private persons both were handsome, capable and popular. As public persons, both were in the first public rank. But everything about them, from their glory to their good looks, was of a diverse and incomparable kind. Sir Wilson Seymour was the kind of man whose importance is known to everybody who knows. The more you mixed with the innermost ring in every polity or profession, the more often you met Sir Wilson Seymour. He was the one intelligent man on twenty unintelligent committees--on every sort of subject, from the reform of the Royal Academy to the project of bimetallism for Greater Britain. In the Arts especially he was omnipotent. He was so unique that nobody could quite decide whether he was a great aristocrat who had taken up Art, or a great artist whom the aristocrats had taken up.
But you could not meet him for five minutes without realizing that you had really been ruled by him all your life.

His appearance was "distinguished" in exactly the same sense; it was at once conventional and unique. Fashion could have found no fault with his high silk hat--yet it was unlike anyone else's hat--a little higher, perhaps, and adding something to his natural height. His tall, slender figure had a slight stoop yet it looked the reverse of feeble. His hair was silver-grey, but he did not look old; it was worn longer than the common yet he did not look effeminate; it was curly but it did not look curled. His carefully pointted beard made him look more manly and militant than otherwise, as it does in those old admirals of Velazquez with whose dark portraits his house was hung. His grey gloves were a shade bluer, his silver-knobbed cane a shade longer than scores of such gloves and canes flapped and flourished about the theatres and the restaurants.

The other man was not so tall, yet would have struck nobody as short, but merely as strong and handsome. His hair also was curly, but fair and cropped close to a strong, massive head--the sort of head you break a door with, as Chaucer said of the Miller's. His military moustache and the carriage of his shoulders showed him a soldier, but he had a pair of those peculiar frank and piercing blue eyes which are more common in sailors. His face was somewhat square, his jaw was square, his shoulders were square, even his jacket was square. Indeed, in the wild school of caricature then current, Mr Max Beerbohm had represented him as a proposition in the fourth book of Euclid.

For he also was a public man, though with quite another sort of success. You did not have to be in the best society to have heard of Captain Cutler, of the siege of Hong-Kong, and the great march across China. You could not get away from hearing of him wherever you were; his portrait was on every other postcard; his maps and battles in every other illustrated paper; songs in his honour in every other music-hall turn or on every other barrel-organ. His fame, though probably more temporary, was ten times more wide, popular and spontaneous than the other man's. In thousands of English homes he appeared enormous above England, like Nelson. Yet he had infinitely less power in England than Sir Wilson Seymour.

The door was opened to them by an aged servant or "dresser", whose broken-down face and figure and black shabby coat and trousers contrasted queerly with the glittering interior of the great actress's dressing-room. It was fitted and filled with looking-glasses at every angle of refraction, so that they looked like the hundred facets of one huge diamond--if one could get inside a diamond. The other features of luxury, a few flowers, a few coloured cushions, a few scraps of stage costume, were multiplied by all the mirrors into the madness of the Arabian Nights, and danced and changed places perpetually as the shuffling attendant shifted a mirror outwards or shot one back against the wall.

They both spoke to the dingy dresser by name, calling him Parkinson, and asking for the lady as Miss Aurora Rome. Parkinson said she was in the other room, but he would go and tell her. A shade crossed the brow of both visitors; for the other room was the private room of the great actor with whom Miss Aurora was performing, and she was of the kind that does not inflame admiration without inflaming jealousy. In about half a minute, however, the inner door opened, and she entered as she always did, even in private life, so that the very silence seemed to be a roar of applause, and one well-deserved. She was clad in a somewhat strange garb of peacock green and peacock blue satins, that gleamed like blue and green metals, such as delight children and aesthetes, and her heavy, hot brown hair framed one of those magic faces which are dangerous to all men, but especially to boys and to men growing grey. In company with her male colleague, the great American actor, Isidore Bruno, she was producing a particularly poetical and fantastic interpretation of Midsummer Night's Dream: in which the artistic prominence was given to Oberon and Titania, or in other words to Bruno and herself. Set in dreamy and exquisite scenery, and moving in mystical dances, the green costume, like burnished beetle-wings, expressed all the elusive individuality of an elfin queen. But when personally confronted in what was still broad daylight, a man looked only at the woman's face.

She greeted both men with the beaming and baffling smile which kept so many males at the same just dangerous distance from her. She accepted some flowers from Cutler, which were as tropical and expensive as his victories; and another sort of present from Sir Wilson Seymour, offered later on and more nonchalantly by that gentleman. For it was against his breeding to show eagerness, and against his conventional unconventionality to give anything so obvious as flowers. He had picked up a trifle, he said, which was rather a curiosity, it was an ancient Greek dagger of the Mycenaean Epoch, and might well have been worn in the time of Theseus and Hippolyta. It was made of brass like all the Heroic weapons, but, oddly enough, sharp enough to prick anyone still. He had really been attracted to it by the leaf-like shape; it was as perfect as a Greek vase. If it was of any interest to Miss Rome or could come in anywhere in the play, he hoped she would--

The inner door burst open and a big figure appeared, who was more of a contrast to the explanatory Seymour than even Captain Cutler. Nearly six-foot-six, and of more than theatrical thews and muscles, Isidore Bruno, in the gorgeous leopard skin and golden-brown garments of Oberon, looked like a barbaric god. He leaned on a sort of hunting-spear, which across a theatre looked a slight, silvery wand, but which in the small and comparatively
crowded room looked as plain as a pike-staff--and as menacing. His vivid black eyes rolled volcanically, his bronzed face, handsome as it was, showed at that moment a combination of high cheekbones with set white teeth, which recalled certain American conjectures about his origin in the Southern plantations.

"Aurora," he began, in that deep voice like a drum of passion that had moved so many audiences, "will you--"

He stopped indecisively because a sixth figure had suddenly presented itself just inside the doorway--a figure so incongruous in the scene as to be almost comic. It was a very short man in the black uniform of the Roman secular clergy, and looking (especially in such a presence as Bruno's and Aurora's) rather like the wooden secular clergy. He did not, however, seem conscious of any contrast, but said with dull civility: "I believe Miss Rome sent for me."

A shrewd observer might have remarked that the emotional temperature rather rose at so unemotional an interruption. The detachment of a professional celibate seemed to reveal to the others that they stood round the woman as a ring of amorous rivals; just as a stranger coming in with frost on his coat will reveal that a room is like a furnace. The presence of the one man who did not care about her increased Miss Rome's sense that everybody else was in love with her, and each in a somewhat dangerous way: the actor with all the appetite of a savage and a spoilt child; the soldier with all the simple selfishness of a man of will rather than mind; Sir Wilson with that daily hardening concentration with which old Hedonists take to a hobby; nay, even the abject Parkinson, who had known her before her triumphs, and who followed her about the room with eyes or feet, with the dumb fascination of a dog.

A shrewd person might also have noted a yet odder thing. The man like a black wooden Noah (who was not wholly without shrewdness) noted it with a considerable but contained amusement. It was evident that the great Aurora, though by no means indifferent to the admiration of the other sex, wanted at this moment to get rid of all the men who admired her and be left alone with the man who did not-- did not admire her in that sense at least; for the little priest did admire and even enjoy the firm feminine diplomacy with which she set about her task. There was, perhaps, only one thing that Aurora Rome was clever about, and that was one half of humanity-- the other half. The little priest watched, like a Napoleonic campaign, the swift precision of her policy for expelling all while banishing none. Bruno, the big actor, was so babyish that it was easy to send him off in brute sulks, banging the door. Cutler, the British officer, was pachydermatous to ideas, but punctilious about behaviour. He would ignore all hints, but he would die rather than ignore a definite commission from a lady. As to old Seymour, he had to be treated differently; he had to be left to the last. The only way to move him was to appeal to him in confidence as an old friend, to let him into the secret of the clearance. The priest did really admire Miss Rome as she achieved all these three objects in one selected action.

She went across to Captain Cutler and said in her sweetest manner: "I shall value all these flowers, because they must be your favourite flowers. But they won't be complete, you know, without my favourite flower. Do go over to that shop round the corner and get me some lilies-of-the-valley, and then it will be quite lovely."

The first object of her diplomacy, the exit of the enraged Bruno, was at once achieved. He had already handed his spear in a lordly style, like a sceptre, to the piteous Parkinson, and was about to assume one of the cushioned seats like a throne. But at this open appeal to his rival there glowed in his opal eyeballs all the sensitive insolence of the slave; he knotted his enormous brown fists for an instant, and then, dashing open the door, disappeared into his own apartments beyond. But meanwhile Miss Rome's experiment in mobilizing the British Army had not succeeded so simply as seemed probable. Cutler had indeed risen stiffly and suddenly, and walked towards the door, hatless, as if at a word of command. But perhaps there was something ostentatiously elegant about the languid figure of Seymour leaning against one of the looking-glasses that brought him up short at the entrance, turning his head this way and that like a bewildered bulldog.

"I must show this stupid man where to go," said Aurora in a whisper to Seymour, and ran out to the threshold to speed the parting guest.

Seymour seemed to be listening, elegant and unconscious as was his posture, and he seemed relieved when he heard the lady call out some last instructions to the Captain, and then turn sharply and run laughing down the passage towards the other end, the end on the terrace above the Thames. Yet a second or two after Seymour's brow darkened again. A man in his position has so many rivals, and he remembered that at the other end of the passage was the corresponding entrance to Bruno's private room. He did not lose his dignity; he said some civil words to Father Brown about the revival of Byzantine architecture in the Westminster Cathedral, and then, quite naturally, strolled out himself into the upper end of the passage. Father Brown and Parkinson were left alone, and they were neither of them men with a taste for superfluous conversation. The dresser went round the room, pulling out looking-glasses and pushing them in again, his dingy dark coat and trousers looking all the more dismal since he was still holding the festive fairy spear of King Oberon. Every time he pulled out the frame of a new glass, a new black figure of Father Brown appeared; the absurd glass chamber was full of Father Browns, upside down in the air like angels, turning somersaults like acrobats, turning their backs to everybody like very rude persons.
Father Brown seemed quite unconscious of this cloud of witnesses, but followed Parkinson with an idly attentive eye till he took himself and his absurd spear into the farther room of Bruno. Then he abandoned himself to such abstract meditations as always amused him—calculating the angles of the mirrors, the angles of each refraction, the angle at which each must fit into the wall...when he heard a strong but strangled cry.

He sprang to his feet and stood rigidly listening. At the same instant Sir Wilson Seymour burst back into the room, white as ivory. "Who's that man in the passage?" he cried. "Where's that dagger of mine?"

Before Father Brown could turn in his heavy boots Seymour was plunging about the room looking for the weapon. And before he could possibly find that weapon or any other, a brisk running of feet broke upon the pavement outside, and the square face of Cutler was thrust into the same doorway. He was still grotesquely grasping a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley. "What's this?" he cried. "What's that creature down the passage? Is this some of your tricks?"

"My tricks!" hissed his pale rival, and made a stride towards him.

In the instant of time in which all this happened Father Brown stepped out into the top of the passage, looked down it, and at once walked briskly towards what he saw.

At this the other two men dropped their quarrel and darted after him, Cutler calling out: "What are you doing? Who are you?"

"My name is Brown," said the priest sadly, as he bent over something and straightened himself again. "Miss Rome sent for me, and I came as quickly as I could. I have come too late."

The three men looked down, and in one of them at least the life died in that late light of afternoon. It ran along the passage like a path of gold, and in the midst of it Aurora Rome lay lustrous in her robes of green and gold, with her dead face turned upwards. Her dress was torn away as in a struggle, leaving the right shoulder bare, but the wound from which the blood was welling was on the other side. The brass dagger lay flat and gleaming a yard or so away.

There was a blank stillness for a measurable time, so that they could hear far off a flower-girl's laugh outside Charing Cross, and someone whistling furiously for a taxicab in one of the streets off the Strand. Then the Captain, with a movement so sudden that it might have been passion or play-acting, took Sir Wilson Seymour by the throat. Seymour looked at him steadily without either fight or fear. "You need not kill me," he said in a voice quite cold; "I shall do that on my own account."

The Captain's hand hesitated and dropped; and the other added with the same icy candour: "If I find I haven't the nerve to do it with that dagger I can do it in a month with drink."

"Drink isn't good enough for me," replied Cutler, "but I'll have blood for this before I die. Not yours—but I think I know whose."

And before the others could appreciate his intention he snatched up the dagger, sprang at the other door at the lower end of the passage, burst it open, bolt and all, and confronted Bruno in his dressing-room. As he did so, old Parkinson tottered in his wavering way out of the door and caught sight of the corpse lying in the passage. He moved shakily towards it; looked at it weakly with a working face; then moved shakily back into the dressing-room again, and sat down suddenly on one of the richly cushioned chairs. Father Brown instantly ran across to him, taking no notice of Cutler and the colossal actor, though the room already rang with their blows and they began to struggle for the dagger. Seymour, who retained some practical sense, was whistling for the police at the end of the passage.

When the police arrived it was to tear the two men from an almost ape-like grapple; and, after a few formal inquiries, to arrest Isidore Bruno upon a charge of murder, brought against him by his furious opponent. The idea that the great national hero of the hour had arrested a wrongdoer with his own hand doubtless had its weight with the police, who are not without elements of the journalist. They treated Cutler with a certain solemn attention, and pointed out that he had got a slight slash on the hand. Even as Cutler bore him back across tilted chair and table, Bruno had twisted the dagger out of his grasp and disabled him just below the wrist. The injury was really slight, but till he was removed from the room the half-savage prisoner stared at the running blood with a steady smile.

"Looks a cannibal sort of chap, don't he?" said the constable confidentially to Cutler.

Cutler made no answer, but said sharply a moment after: "We must attend to the...the death..." and his voice escaped from articulation.

"The two deaths," came in the voice of the priest from the farther side of the room. "This poor fellow was gone when I got across to him." And he stood looking down at old Parkinson, who sat in a black huddle on the gorgeous chair. He also had paid his tribute, not without eloquence, to the woman who had died.

The silence was first broken by Cutler, who seemed not untouched by a rough tenderness. "I wish I was him," he said huskily. "I remember he used to watch her wherever she walked more than--anybody. She was his air, and he's dried up. He's just dead."

"We are all dead," said Seymour in a strange voice, looking down the road.
They took leave of Father Brown at the corner of the road, with some random apologies for any rudeness they might have shown. Both their faces were tragic, but also cryptic.

The mind of the little priest was always a rabbit-warren of wild thoughts that jumped too quickly for him to catch them. Like the white tail of a rabbit he had the vanishing thought that he was certain of their grief, but not so certain of their innocence.

"We had better all be going," said Seymour heavily; "we have done all we can to help."

"Will you understand my motives," asked Father Brown quietly, "if I say you have done all you can to hurt?"

They both started as if guiltily, and Cutler said sharply: "To hurt whom?"

"To hurt yourselves," answered the priest. "I would not add to your troubles if it weren't common justice to warn you. You've done nearly everything you could do to hang yourselves, if this actor should be acquitted. They'll be sure to subpoena me; I shall be bound to say that after the cry was heard each of you rushed into the room in a wild state and began quarrelling about a dagger. As far as my words on oath can go, you might either of you have done it. You hurt yourselves with that; and then Captain Cutler must have hurt himself with the dagger."

"Hurt myself!" exclaimed the Captain, with contempt. "A silly little scratch."

"Which drew blood," replied the priest, nodding. "We know there's blood on the brass now. And so we shall never know whether there was blood on it before."

There was a silence; and then Seymour said, with an emphasis quite alien to his daily accent: "But I saw a man in the passage."

"I know you did," answered the cleric Brown with a face of wood, "so did Captain Cutler. That's what seems so improbable."

Before either could make sufficient sense of it even to answer, Father Brown had politely excused himself and gone stumping up the road with his stumpy old umbrella.

As modern newspapers are conducted, the most honest and most important news is the police news. If it be true that in the twentieth century more space is given to murder than to politics, it is for the excellent reason that murder is a more serious subject. But even this would hardly explain the enormous omnipresence and widely distributed detail of "The Bruno Case," or "The Passage Mystery," in the Press of London and the provinces. So vast was the excitement that for some weeks the Press really told the truth; and the reports of examination and cross-examination, if interminable, even if intolerable are at least reliable. The true reason, of course, was the coincidence of persons. The victim was a popular actress; the accused was a popular actor; and the accused had been caught red-handed, as it were, by the most popular soldier of the patriotic season. In those extraordinary circumstances the Press was paralysed into probity and accuracy; and the rest of this somewhat singular business can practically be recorded from reports of Bruno's trial.

The trial was presided over by Mr Justice Monkhouse, one of those who are jeered at as humorous judges, but who are generally much more serious than the serious judges, for their levity comes from a living impatience of professional solemnity; while the serious judge is really filled with frivolity, because he is filled with vanity. All the chief actors being of a worldly importance, the barristers were well balanced; the prosecutor for the Crown was Sir Walter Cowdray, a heavy, but weighty advocate of the sort that knows how to seem English and trustworthy, and how to be rhetorical with reluctance. The prisoner was defended by Mr Patrick Butler, K.C., who was mistaken for a mere flaneur by those who misunderstood the Irish character-- and those who had not been examined by him. The medical evidence involved no contradictions, the doctor, whom Seymour had summoned on the spot, agreeing with the eminent surgeon who had later examined the body. Aurora Rome had been stabbed with some sharp instrument such as a knife or dagger; some instrument, at least, of which the blade was short. The wound was just over the heart, and she had died instantly. When the doctor first saw her she could hardly have been dead for twenty minutes. Therefore when Father Brown found her she could hardly have been dead for three.

Some official detective evidence followed, chiefly concerned with the presence or absence of any proof of a struggle; the only suggestion of this was the tearing of the dress at the shoulder, and this did not seem to fit in particularly well with the direction and finality of the blow. When these details had been supplied, though not explained, the first of the important witnesses was called.

Sir Wilson Seymour gave evidence as he did everything else that he did at all--not only well, but perfectly. Though himself much more of a public man than the judge, he conveyed exactly the fine shade of self-effacement before the King's justice; and though everyone looked at him as they would at the Prime Minister or the Archbishop of Canterbury, they could have said nothing of his part in it but that it was that of a private gentleman, with an accent on the noun. He was also refreshingly lucid, as he was on the committees. He had been calling on Miss Rome at the theatre; he had met Captain Cutler there; they had been joined for a short time by the accused, who had then returned to his own dressing-room; they had then been joined by a Roman Catholic priest, who asked for the deceased lady and said his name was Brown. Miss Rome had then gone just outside the theatre to the entrance of the
passage, in order to point out to Captain Cutler a flower-shop at which he was to buy her some more flowers; and
the witness had remained in the room, exchanging a few words with the priest. He had then distinctly heard the
deceased, having sent the Captain on his errand, turn round laughing and run down the passage towards its other
end, where was the prisoner's dressing-room. In idle curiosity as to the rapid movement of his friends, he had
strode out to the head of the passage himself and looked down it towards the prisoner's door. Did he see anything
in the passage? Yes; he saw something in the passage.

Sir Walter Cowdray allowed an impressive interval, during which the witness looked down, and for all his usual
composure seemed to have more than his usual pallor. Then the barrister said in a lower voice, which seemed at
once sympathetic and creepy: "Did you see it distinctly?"

Sir Wilson Seymour, however moved, had his excellent brains in full working-order. "Very distinctly as regards
its outline, but quite indistinctly, indeed not at all, as regards the details inside the outline. The passage is of such
length that anyone in the middle of it appears quite black against the light at the other end." The witness lowered his
steady eyes once more and added: "I had noticed the fact before, when Captain Cutler first entered it." There was
another silence, and the judge leaned forward and made a note.

"Well," said Sir Walter patiently, "what was the outline like? Was it, for instance, like the figure of the murdered
woman?"

"Not in the least," answered Seymour quietly.

"What did it look like to you?"

"It looked to me," replied the witness, "like a tall man."

Everyone in court kept his eyes riveted on his pen, or his umbrella-handle, or his book, or his boots or whatever
he happened to be looking at. They seemed to be holding their eyes away from the prisoner by main force; but they
felt his figure in the dock, and they felt it as gigantic. Tall as Bruno was to the eye, he seemed to swell taller and
taller when an eyes had been torn away from him.

Cowdray was resuming his seat with his solemn face, smoothing his black silk robes, and white silk whiskers.
Sir Wilson was leaving the witness-box, after a few final particulars to which there were many other witnesses,
when the counsel for the defence sprang up and stopped him.

"I shall only detain you a moment," said Mr Butler, who was a rustic-looking person with red eyebrows and an
expression of partial slumber. "Will you tell his lordship how you knew it was a man?"

A faint, refined smile seemed to pass over Seymour's features. "I'm afraid it is the vulgar test of trousers," he
said. "When I saw daylight between the long legs I was sure it was a man, after all."

Butler's sleepy eyes opened as suddenly as some silent explosion. "After all!" he repeated slowly. "So you did
think at first it was a woman?"

Seymour looked troubled for the first time. "It is hardly a point of fact," he said, "but if his lordship would like
me to answer for my impression, of course I shall do so. There was something about the thing that was not exactly a
woman and yet was not quite a man; somehow the curves were different. And it had something that looked like long
hair."

"Thank you," said Mr Butler, K.C., and sat down suddenly, as if he had got what he wanted.

Captain Cutler was a far less plausible and composed witness than Sir Wilson, but his account of the opening
incidents was solidly the same. He described the return of Bruno to his dressing-room, the dispatching of himself to
buy a bunch of lilies-of-the-valley, his return to the upper end of the passage, the thing he saw in the passage, his
suspicion of Seymour, and his struggle with Bruno. But he could give little artistic assistance about the black figure
that he and Seymour had seen. Asked about its outline, he said he was no art critic—with a somewhat too obvious
sneer at Seymour. Asked if it was a man or a woman, he said it looked more like a beast—with a too obvious snarl at
the prisoner. But the man was plainly shaken with sorrow and sincere anger, and Cowdray quickly excused him
from confirming facts that were already fairly clear.

The defending counsel also was again brief in his cross-examination; although (as was his custom) even in being
brief, he seemed to take a long time about it. "You used a rather remarkable expression," he said, looking at Cutler
sleepily. "What do you mean by saying that it looked more like a beast than a man or a woman?"

Cutler seemed seriously agitated. "Perhaps I ought'n't to have said that," he said; "but when the brute has huge
humped shoulders like a chimpanzee, and bristles sticking out of its head like a pig--"

Mr Butler cut short his curious impatience in the middle. "Never mind whether its hair was like a pig's," he said,
"was it like a woman's?"

"A woman's!" cried the soldier. "Great Scott, no!"

"The last witness said it was," commented the counsel, with unscrupulous swiftness. "And did the figure have
any of those serpentine and semi-feminine curves to which eloquent allusion has been made? No? No feminine
curves? The figure, if I understand you, was rather heavy and square than otherwise?"
"He may have been bending forward," said Cutler, in a hoarse and rather faint voice.
"Or again, he may not," said Mr Butler, and sat down suddenly for the second time.

The third, witness called by Sir Walter Cowdray was the little Catholic clergyman, so little, compared with the others, that his head seemed hardly to come above the box, so that it was like cross-examining a child. But unfortunately Sir Walter had somehow got it into his head (mostly by some ramifications of his family's religion) that Father Brown was on the side of the prisoner, because the prisoner was wicked and foreign and even partly black. Therefore he took Father Brown up sharply whenever that proud pontiff tried to explain anything; and told him to answer yes or no, and tell the plain facts without any jesuitry. When Father Brown began, in his simplicity, to say who he thought the man in the passage was, the barrister told him that he did not want his theories.

"A black shape was seen in the passage. And you say you saw the black shape. Well, what shape was it?"

Father Brown blinked as under rebuke; but he had long known the literal nature of obedience. "The shape," he said, "was short and thick, but had two sharp, black projections curved upwards on each side of the head or top, rather like horns, and--"

"Oh! the devil with horns, no doubt," ejaculated Cowdray, sitting down in triumphant jocularity. "It was the devil come to eat Protestants."

"No," said the priest dispassionately; "I know who it was."

Those in court had been wrought up to an irrational, but real sense of some monstrosity. They had forgotten the figure in the dock and thought only of the figure in the passage. And the figure in the passage, described by three capable and respectable men who had all seen it, was a shifting nightmare: one called it a woman, and the other a beast, and the other a devil....

The judge was looking at Father Brown with level and piercing eyes. "You are a most extraordinary witness," he said; "but there is something about you that makes me think you are trying to tell the truth. Well, who was the man you saw in the passage?"

"He was myself," said Father Brown.

Butler, K.C., sprang to his feet in an extraordinary stillness, and said quite calmly: "Your lordship will allow me to cross-examine?" And then, without stopping, he shot at Brown the apparently disconnected question: "You have heard about this dagger; you know the experts say the crime was committed with a short blade?"

"A short blade," assented Brown, nodding solemnly like an owl, "but a very long hilt."

Before the audience could quite dismiss the idea that the priest had really seen himself doing murder with a short dagger with a long hilt (which seemed somehow to make it more horrible), he had himself hurried on to explain.

"I mean daggers aren't the only things with short blades. Spears have short blades. And spears catch at the end of the steel just like daggers, if they're that sort of fancy spear they had in theatres; like the spear poor old Parkinson killed his wife with, just when she'd sent for me to settle their family troubles-- and I came just too late, God forgive me! But he died penitent-- he just died of being penitent. He couldn't bear what he'd done."

The general impression in court was that the little priest, who was gobbling away, had literally gone mad in the box. But the judge still looked at him with bright and steady eyes of interest; and the counsel for the defence went on with his questions unperturbed.

"If Parkinson did it with that pantomime spear," said Butler, "he must have thrust from four yards away. How do you account for signs of struggle, like the dress dragged off the shoulder?" He had slipped into treating his mere witness as an expert; but no one noticed it now.

"The poor lady's dress was torn," said the witness, "because it was caught in a panel that slid to just behind her. She struggled to free herself, and as she did so Parkinson came out of the prisoner's room and lunged with the spear."

"A panel?" repeated the barrister in a curious voice.

"It was a looking-glass on the other side," explained Father Brown. "When I was in the dressing-room I noticed that some of them could probably be slid out into the passage."

There was another vast and unnatural silence, and this time it was the judge who spoke. "So you really mean that when you looked down that passage, the man you saw was yourself--in a mirror?"

"Yes, my lord; that was what I was trying to say," said Brown, "but they asked me for the shape; and our hats have corners just like horns, and so I--"

The judge leaned forward, his old eyes yet more brilliant, and said in specially distinct tones: "Do you really mean to say that when Sir Wilson Seymour saw that wild what-you-call-him with curves and a woman's hair and a man's trousers, what he saw was Sir Wilson Seymour?"

"Yes, my lord," said Father Brown.

"And you mean to say that when Captain Cutler saw that chimpanzee with humped shoulders and hog's bristles, he simply saw himself?"
"Yes, my lord."

The judge leaned back in his chair with a luxuriance in which it was hard to separate the cynicism and the admiration. "And can you tell us why," he asked, "you should know your own figure in a looking-glass, when two such distinguished men don't?"

Father Brown blinked even more painfully than before; then he stammered: "Really, my lord, I don't know unless it's because I don't look at it so often."

FIVE

The Mistake of the Machine

FLAMBEAU and his friend the priest were sitting in the Temple Gardens about sunset; and their neighbourhood or some such accidental influence had turned their talk to matters of legal process. From the problem of the licence in cross-examination, their talk strayed to Roman and mediaeval torture, to the examining magistrate in France and the Third Degree in America.

"I've been reading," said Flambeau, "of this new psychometric method they talk about so much, especially in America. You know what I mean; they put a pulsometer on a man's wrist and judge by how his heart goes at the pronunciation of certain words. What do you think of it?"

"I think it very interesting," replied Father Brown; "it reminds me of that interesting idea in the Dark Ages that blood would flow from a corpse if the murderer touched it."

"Do you really mean," demanded his friend, "that you think the two methods equally valuable?"

"I think them equally valueless," replied Brown. "Blood flows, fast or slow, in dead folk or living, for so many more million reasons than we can ever know. Blood will have to flow very funnyly; blood will have to flow up the Matterhorn, before I will take it as a sign that I am to shed it."

"The method," remarked the other, "has been guaranteed by some of the greatest American men of science."

"What sentimentalists men of science are!" exclaimed Father Brown, "and how much more sentimental must American men of science be! Who but a Yankee would think of proving anything from heart-throbs? Why, they must be as sentimental as a man who thinks a woman is in love with him if she blushes. That's a test from the circulation of the blood, discovered by the immortal Harvey; and a jolly rotten test, too."

"But surely," insisted Flambeau, "it might point pretty straight at something or other."

"There's a disadvantage in a stick pointing straight," answered the other. "What is it? Why, the other end of the stick always points the opposite way. It depends whether you get hold of the stick by the right end. I saw the thing done once and I've never believed in it since." And he proceeded to tell the story of his disillusionment.

It happened nearly twenty years before, when he was chaplain to his co-religionists in a prison in Chicago--where the Irish population displayed a capacity both for crime and penitence which kept him tolerably busy. The official second-in-command under the Governor was an ex-detective named Greywood Usher, a cadaverous, careful-spoken Yankee philosopher, occasionally varying a very rigid visage with an odd apologetic grimace. He liked Father Brown in a slightly patronizing way; and Father Brown liked him, though he heartily disliked his theories. His theories were extremely complicated and were held with extreme simplicity.

One evening he had sent for the priest, who, according to his custom, took a seat in silence at a table piled and littered with papers, and waited. The official selected from the papers a scrap of newspaper cutting, which he handed across to the cleric, who read it gravely. It appeared to be an extract from one of the pinkest of American Society papers, and ran as follows:

"Society's brightest widower is once more on the Freak Dinner stunt. All our exclusive citizens will recall the Perambulator Parade Dinner, in which Last-Trick Todd, at his palatial home at Pilgrim's Pond, caused so many of our prominent debutantes to look even younger than their years. Equally elegant and more miscellaneous and large-hearted in social outlook was Last-Trick's show the year previous, the popular Cannibal Crush Lunch, at which the confections handed round were sarcastically moulded in the forms of human arms and legs, and during which more than one of our gayest mental gymnasts was heard offering to eat his partner. The Witticism which will inspire this evening is as yet in Mr Todd's pretty reticent intellect, or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city's gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the simple manners and customs at the other end of Society's scale. This would be all the more telling, as hospitable Todd is entertaining in Lord Falconroy, the famous traveller, a true-blooded aristocrat fresh from England's oak-groves. Lord Falconroy's travels began before his ancient feudal title was resurrected, he was in the Republic in his youth, and fashion murmurs a sly reason for his return. Miss Etta Todd is one of our deep-souled New Yorkers, and comes into an income of nearly twelve hundred million dollars."

"Well," asked Usher, "does that interest you?"

"Why, words rather fail me," answered Father Brown. "I cannot think at this moment of anything in this world that would interest me less. And, unless the just anger of the Republic is at last going to electrocute journalists for writing like that, I don't quite see why it should interest you either."
“Ah!” said Mr Usher dryly, and handing across another scrap of newspaper. “Well, does that interest you?”

The paragraph was headed "Savage Murder of a Warder. Convict Escapes," and ran: “Just before dawn this morning a shout for help was heard in the Convict Settlement at Sequah in this State. The authorities, hurrying in the direction of the cry, found the corpse of the warder who patrols the top of the north wall of the prison, the steepest and most difficult exit, for which one man has always been found sufficient. The unfortunate officer had, however, been hurled from the high wall, his brains beaten out as with a club, and his gun was missing. Further inquiries showed that one of the cells was empty; it had been occupied by a rather sullen ruffian giving his name as Oscar Rian. He was only temporarily detained for some comparatively trivial assault; but he gave everyone the impression of a man with a black past and a dangerous future. Finally, when daylight had fully revealed the scene of murder, it was found that he had written on the wall above the body a fragmentary sentence, apparently with a finger dipped in blood: ’This was self-defence and he had the gun. I meant no harm to him or any man but one. I am keeping the bullet for Pilgrim’s Pond—O.R.’ A man must have used most fiendish treachery or most savage and amazing bodily daring to have stormed such a wall in spite of an armed man.”

“Well, the literary style is somewhat improved,” admitted the priest cheerfully, “but still I don’t see what I can do for you. I should cut a poor figure, with my short legs, running about this State after an athletic assassin of that sort. I doubt whether anybody could find him. The convict settlement at Sequah is thirty miles from here; the country between is wild and tangled enough, and the country beyond, where he will surely have the sense to go, is a perfect no-man’s land tumbling away to the prairies. He may be in any hole or up any tree.”

“He isn’t in any hole,” said the governor; “he isn’t up any tree.”

“Why, how do you know?” asked Father Brown, blinking.

“Would you like to speak to him?” inquired Usher.

Father Brown opened his innocent eyes wide. “He is here?” he exclaimed. “Why, how did your men get hold of him?”

“I got hold of him myself,” drawled the American, rising and lazily stretching his lanky legs before the fire. “I got hold of him with the crooked end of a walking-stick. Don’t look so surprised. I really did. You know I sometimes take a turn in the country lanes outside this dismal place; well, I was walking early this evening up a steep lane with dark hedges and grey-looking ploughed fields on both sides; and a young moon was up and silvering the road. By the light of it I saw a man running across the field towards the road; running with his body bent and at a good mile-race trot. He appeared to be much exhausted; but when he came to the thick black hedge he went through it as if it were made of spiders’ webs; --or rather (for I heard the strong branches breaking and snapping like bayonets) as if he himself were made of stone. In the instant in which he appeared up against the moon, crossing the road, I slung my hooked cane at his legs, tripping him and bringing him down. Then I blew my whistle long and loud, and our fellows came running up to secure him.”

“It would have been rather awkward,” remarked Brown, “if you had found he was a popular athlete practising a mile race.”

“He was not,” said Usher grimly. “We soon found out who he was; but I had guessed it with the first glint of the moon on him.”

“You thought it was the runaway convict,” observed the priest simply, “because you had read in the newspaper cutting that morning that a convict had run away.”

“I had somewhat better grounds;” replied the governor coolly. “I pass over the first as too simple to be emphasized-- I mean that fashionable athletes do not run across ploughed fields or scratch their eyes out in bramble hedges. Nor do they run all doubled up like a crouching dog. There were more decisive details to a fairly well-trained eye. The man was clad in coarse and ragged clothes, but they were something more than merely coarse and ragged. They were so ill-fitting as to be quite grotesque; even as he appeared in black outline against the moonrise, the coat-collar in which his head was buried made him look like a hunchback, and the long loose sleeves looked as if he had no hands. It at once occurred to me that he had somehow managed to change his convict clothes for some confederate's clothes which did not fit him. Second, there was a pretty stiff wind against which he was running; so that I must have seen the streaky look of blowing hair, if the hair had not been very short. Then I remembered that beyond these ploughed fields he was crossing lay Pilgrim's Pond, for which (you will remember) the convict was keeping his bullet; and I sent my walking-stick flying.”

“A brilliant piece of rapid deduction,” said Father Brown; “but had he got a gun?”

As Usher stopped abruptly in his walk the priest added apologetically: “I’ve been told a bullet is not half so useful without it.”

“He had no gun,” said the other gravely; “but that was doubtless due to some very natural mischance or change of plans. Probably the same policy that made him change the clothes made him drop the gun; he began to repent the coat he had left behind him in the blood of his victim.”
"Well, that is possible enough," answered the priest.

"And it's hardly worth speculating on," said Usher, turning to some other papers, "for we know it's the man by this time."

His clerical friend asked faintly: "But how?" And Greywood Usher threw down the newspapers and took up the two press-cuttings again.

"Well, since you are so obstinate," he said, "let's begin at the beginning. You will notice that these two cuttings have only one thing in common, which is the mention of Pilgrim's Pond, the estate, as you know, of the millionaire Ireton Todd. You also know that he is a remarkable character; one of those that rose on stepping-stones--"

"Of our dead selves to higher things," assented his companion. "Yes; I know that. Petroleum, I think."

"Anyhow," said Usher, "Last-Trick Todd counts for a great deal in this rum affair."

He stretched himself once more before the fire and continued talking in his expansive, radiantly explanatory style.

"To begin with, on the face of it, there is no mystery here at all. It is not mysterious, it is not even odd, that a jailbird should take his gun to Pilgrim's Pond. Our people aren't like the English, who will forgive a man for being rich if he throws away money on hospitals or horses. Last-Trick Todd has made himself big by his own considerable abilities; and there's no doubt that many of those on whom he has shown his abilities would like to show theirs on him with a shot-gun. Todd might easily get dropped by some man he'd never even heard of; some labourer he'd locked out, or some clerk in a business he'd busted. Last-Trick is a man of mental endowments and a high public character; but in this country the relations of employers and employed are considerably strained.

"That's how the whole thing looks supposing this Rian made for Pilgrim's Pond to kill Todd. So it looked to me, till another little discovery woke up what I have of the detective in me. When I had my prisoner safe, I picked up my cane again and strolled down the two or three turns of country road that brought me to one of the side entrances of Todd's grounds, the one nearest to the pool or lake after which the place is named. It was some two hours ago, about seven by this time; the moonlight was more luminous, and I could see the long white streaks of it lying on the mysterious mere with its grey, greasy, half-liquid shores in which they say our fathers used to make witches walk until they sank. I'd forgotten the exact tale; but you know the place I mean; it lies north of Todd's house towards the wilderness, and has two queer wrinkled trees, so dismal that they look more like huge fungoids than decent foliage.

As I stood peering at this misty pool, I fancied I saw the faint figure of a man moving from the house towards it, but it was all too dim and distant for one to be certain of the fact, and still less of the details. Besides, my attention was very sharply arrested by something much closer. I crouched behind the fence which ran not more than two hundred yards from one wing of the great mansion, and which was fortunately split in places, as if specially for the application of a cautious eye. A door had opened in the dark bulk of the left wing, and a figure appeared black against the illuminated interior--a muffled figure bending forward, evidently peering out into the night. It closed the door behind it, and I saw it was carrying a lantern, which threw a patch of imperfect light on the dress and figure of the wearer. It seemed to be the figure of a woman, wrapped up in a ragged cloak and evidently disguised to avoid notice; there was something very strange both about the rags and the furtiveness in a person coming out of those rooms lined with gold. She took cautiously the curved garden path which brought her within half a hundred yards of me--, then she stood up for an instant on the terrace of turf that looks towards the slimy lake, and holding her flaming lantern above her head she deliberately swung it three times to and fro as for a signal. As she swung it the second time a flicker of its light fell for a moment on her own face, a face that I knew. She was unnaturally pale, and her head was bundled in her borrowed plebeian shawl; but I am certain it was Etta Todd, the millionaire's daughter.

"She retraced her steps in equal secrecy and the door closed behind her again. I was about to climb the fence and follow, when I realized that the detective fever that had lured me into the adventure was rather undignified; and that in a more authoritative capacity I already held all the cards in my hand. I was just turning away when a new noise broke on the night. A window was thrown up in one of the upper floors, but just round the corner of the house so that I could not see it; and a voice of terrible distinctness was heard shouting across the dark garden to know where Lord Falconroy was, for he was missing from every room in the house. There was no mistaking that voice. I have heard it on many a political platform or meeting of directors; it was Ireton Todd himself. Some of the others seemed to have gone to the lower windows or on to the steps, and were calling up to him that Falconroy had gone for a stroll down to the Pilgrim's Pond an hour before, and could not be traced since. Then Todd cried "Mighty Murder!" and shut down the window violently; and I could hear him plunging down the stairs inside. Repossessing myself of my former and wiser purpose, I whipped out of the way of the general search that must follow; and returned here not later than eight o'clock."

"I now ask you to recall that little Society paragraph which seemed to you so painfully lacking in interest. If the convict was not keeping the shot for Todd, as he evidently wasn't, it is most likely that he was keeping it for Lord Falconroy; and it looks as if he had delivered the goods. No more handy place to shoot a man than in the curious
geological surroundings of that pool, where a body thrown down would sink through thick slime to a depth practically unknown. Let us suppose, then, that our friend with the cropped hair came to kill Falconroy and not Todd. But, as I have pointed out, there are many reasons why people in America might want to kill Todd. There is no reason why anybody in America should want to kill an English lord newly landed, except for the one reason mentioned in the pink paper—that the lord is paying his attentions to the millionaire's daughter. Our crop-haired friend, despite his ill-fitting clothes, must be an aspiring lover.

"I know the notion will seem to you jarring and even comic; but that's because you are English. It sounds to you like saying the Archbishop of Canterbury's daughter will be married in St George's, Hanover Square, to a crossing-sweeper on ticket-of-leave. You don't do justice to the climbing and aspiring power of our more remarkable citizens. You see a good-looking grey-haired man in evening-dress with a sort of authority about him, you know he is a pillar of the State, and you fancy he had a father. You are in error. You do not realize that a comparatively few years ago he may have been in a tenement or (quite likely) in a jail. You don't allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential citizens have not only risen recently, but risen comparatively late in life. Todd's daughter was fully eighteen when her father first made his pile; so there isn't really anything impossible in her having a hanger-on in low life; or even in her hanging on to him, as I think she must be doing, to judge by the lantern business. If so, the hand that held the lantern may not be unconnected with the hand that held the gun. This case, sir, will make a noise."

"Well," said the priest patiently, "and what did you do next?"

"I reckon you'll be shocked," replied Greywood Usher, "as I know you don't cotton to the march of science in these matters. I am given a good deal of discretion here, and perhaps take a little more than I'm given; and I thought it was an excellent opportunity to test that Psychometric Machine I told you about. Now, in my opinion, that machine can't lie."

"No machine can lie," said Father Brown; "nor can it tell the truth."

"It did in this case, as I'll show you," went on Usher positively. "I sat the man in the ill-fitting clothes in a comfortable chair, and simply wrote words on a blackboard; and the machine simply recorded the variations of his pulse; and I simply observed his manner. The trick is to introduce some word connected with the supposed crime in a list of words connected with something quite different, yet a list in which it occurs quite naturally. Thus I wrote 'heron' and 'eagle' and 'owl', and when I wrote 'falcon' he was tremendously agitated; and when I began to make an 'r' at the end of the word, that machine just bounded. Who else in this republic has any reason to jump at the name of a newly-arrived Englishman like Falconroy except the man who's shot him? Isn't that better evidence than a lot of gable from witnesses—if the evidence of a reliable machine?"

"You always forget," observed his companion, "that the reliable machine always has to be worked by an unreliable machine."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked the detective.

"I mean Man," said Father Brown, "the most unreliable machine I know of. I don't want to be rude; and I don't think you will consider Man to be an offensive or inaccurate description of yourself. You say you observed his manner; but how do you know you observed it right? You say the words have to come in a natural way; but how do you know that you did it naturally? How do you know, if you come to that, that he did not observe your manner? Who is to prove that you were not tremendously agitated? There was no machine tied on to your pulse."

"I tell you," cried the American in the utmost excitement, "I was as cool as a cucumber."

"Criminals also can be as cool as cucumbers," said Brown with a smile. "And almost as cool as you."

"Well, this one wasn't," said Usher, throwing the papers about. "Oh, you make me tired!"

"I'm sorry," said the other. "I only point out what seems a reasonable possibility. If you could tell by his manner when the word that might hang him had come, why shouldn't he tell from your manner that the word that might hang him was coming? I should ask for more than words myself before I hanged anybody."

Usher smote the table and rose in a sort of angry triumph.

"And that," he cried, "is just what I'm going to give you. I tried the machine first just in order to test the thing in other ways afterwards and the machine, sir, is right."

He paused a moment and resumed with less excitement. "I rather want to insist, if it comes to that, that so far I had very little to go on except the scientific experiment. There was really nothing against the man at all. His clothes were ill-fitting, as I've said, but they were rather better, if anything, than those of the submerged class to which he evidently belonged. Moreover, under all the stains of his plunging through ploughed fields or bursting through dusty hedges, the man was comparatively clean. This might mean, of course, that he had only just broken prison; but it reminded me more of the desperate decency of the comparatively respectable poor. His demeanour was, I am bound to confess, quite in accordance with theirs. He was silent and dignified as they are; he seemed to have a big, but buried, grievance, as they do. He professed total ignorance of the crime and the whole question; and showed nothing
but a sullen impatience for something sensible that might come to take him out of his meaningless scrape. He asked me more than once if he could telephone for a lawyer who had helped him a long time ago in a trade dispute, and in every sense acted as you would expect an innocent man to act. There was nothing against him in the world except that little finger on the dial that pointed to the change of his pulse.

"Then, sir, the machine was on its trial; and the machine was right. By the time I came with him out of the private room into the vestibule where all sorts of other people were awaiting examination, I think he had already more or less made up his mind to clear things up by something like a confession. He turned to me and began to say in a low voice: 'Oh, I can't stick this any more. If you must know all about me-

"At the same instant one of the poor women sitting on the long bench stood up, screaming aloud and pointing at him with her finger. I have never in my life heard anything more demonically distinct. Her lean finger seemed to pick him out as if it were a pea-shooter. Though the word was a mere howl, every syllable was as clear as a separate stroke on the clock.

"'Drugger Davis!' she shouted. 'They've got Drugger Davis!'"

"Among the wretched women, mostly thieves and streetwalkers, twenty faces were turned, gaping with glee and hate. If I had never heard the words, I should have known by the very shock upon his features that the so-called Oscar Rian had heard his real name. But I'm not quite so ignorant, you may be surprised to hear. Drugger Davis was one of the most terrible and depreived criminals that ever baffled our police. It is certain he had done murder more than once long before his last exploit with the warder. But he was never entirely fixed for it, curiously enough because he did it in the same manner as those milder—or meaner—crimes for which he was fixed pretty often. He was a handsome, well-bred-looking brute, as he still is, to some extent; and he used mostly to go about with barmaids or shop-girls and do them out of their money. Very often, though, he went a good deal farther; and they were found drugged with cigarettes or chocolates and their whole property missing. Then came one case where the girl was found dead; but deliberation could not quite be proved, and, what was more practical still, the criminal could not be found. I heard a rumour of his having reappeared somewhere in the opposite character this time, lending money instead of borrowing it; but still to such poor widows as he might personally fascinate, but still with the same bad result for them. Well, there is your innocent man, and there is his innocent record. Even, since then, four criminals and three warders have identified him and confirmed the story. Now what have you got to say to my poor little machine after that? Hasn't the machine done for him? Or do you prefer to say that the woman and I have done for him?"

"As to what you've done for him," replied Father Brown, rising and shaking himself in a floppy way, "you've saved him from the electrical chair. I don't think they can kill Drugger Davis on that old vague story of the poison; and as for the convict who killed the warder, I suppose it's obvious that you haven't got him. Mr Davis is innocent of that crime, at any rate."

"What do you mean?" demanded the other. "Why should he be innocent of that crime?"

"Why, bless us all!" cried the small man in one of his rare moments of animation, "why, because he's guilty of the other crimes! I don't know what you people are made of. You seem to think that all sins are kept together in a bag. You talk as if a miser on Monday were always a spendthrift on Tuesday. You tell me this man you have here spent weeks and months wheedling needy women out of small sums of money; that he used a drug at the worst; that he turned up afterwards as the lowest kind of moneylender, and cheated most poor people in the same patient and pacific style. Let it be granted--let us admit, for the sake of argument, that he did all this. If that is so, I will tell you what he didn't do. He didn't storm a spiked wall against a man with a loaded gun. He didn't write his own, initials in a man's blood. Saints alive! Can't you see the whole character is different, in good and evil? Why, you don't seem to be like I am a bit. One would think you'd never had any vices of your own."

The amazed American had already parted his lips in protest when the door of his private and official room was hammerd and rattled in an unceremonious way to which he was totally unaccustomed.

The door flew open. The moment before Greywood Usher had been coming to the conclusion that Father Brown might possibly be mad. The moment after he began to think he was mad himself. There burst and fell into his private room a man in the filthiest rags, with a greasy squash hat still askew on his head, and a shabby green shade shoved up from one of his eyes, both of which were glaring like a tiger's. The rest of his face was almost undiscoverable, being masked with a matted beard and whiskers through which the nose could barely thrust itself, and further buried in a squalid red scarf or handkerchief. Mr Usher prided himself on having seen most of the roughest specimens in the State, but he thought he had never seen such a baboon dressed as a scarecrow as this. But, above all, he had never in all his placid scientific existence heard a man like that speak to him first.
“See here, old man Usher,” shouted the being in the red handkerchief, “I'm getting tired. Don't you try any of your hide-and-seek on me; I don't get fooled any. Leave go of my guests, and I'll let up on the fancy clockwork. Keep him here for a split instant and you'll feel pretty mean. I reckon I'm not a man with no pull.”

The eminent Usher was regarding the bellowing monster with an amazement which had dried up all other sentiments. The mere shock to his eyes had rendered his ears, almost useless. At last he rang a bell with a hand of violence. While the bell was still strong and pealing, the voice of Father Brown fell soft but distinct.

“I have a suggestion to make,” he said, "but it seems a little confusing. I don't know this gentleman--but-- but I think I know him. Now, you know him--you know him quite well-- but you don't know him--naturally. Sounds paradoxical, I know."

“I reckon the Cosmos is cracked,” said Usher, and fell asprawl in his round office chair.

“Now, see here,” vociferated the stranger, striking the table, but speaking in a voice that was all the more mysterious because it was comparatively mild and rational though still resounding. 'I won't let you in. I want--”

“Who in hell are you?” yelled Usher, suddenly sitting up straight.

“I think the gentleman's name is Todd,” said the priest.

Then he picked up the pink slip of newspaper.

“I fear you don't read the Society papers properly,” he said, and began to read out in a monotonous voice, "'Or locked in the jewelled bosoms of our city's gayest leaders; but there is talk of a pretty parody of the manners and customs of the other end of Society's scale. 'There's been a big Slum Dinner up at Pilgrim's Pond tonight; and a man, one of the guests, disappeared. Mr Ireton Todd is a good host, and has tracked him here, without even waiting to take off his fancy-dress.'"

“What man do you mean?”

“I mean the man with comically ill-fitting clothes you saw running across the ploughed field. Hadn't you better go and investigate him? He will be rather impatient to get back to his champagne, from which he ran away in such a hurry, when the convict with the gun hove in sight.”

“Do you seriously mean--” began the official.

“Why, look here, Mr Usher,” said Father Brown quietly, "you said the machine couldn't make a mistake; and in one sense it didn't. But the other machine did; the machine that worked it. You assumed that the man in rags jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy, because he was Lord Falconroy's murderer. He jumped at the name of Lord Falconroy because he is Lord Falconroy." "Then why the blazes didn't he say so?” demanded the staring Usher.

“He felt his plight and recent panic were hardly patrician,” replied the priest, "so he tried to keep the name back at first. But he was just going to tell it you, when"--and Father Brown looked down at his boots--"when a woman found another name for him."

“But you can't be so mad as to say,” said Greywood Usher, very white, "that Lord Falconroy was Drugger Davis,"

The priest looked at him very earnestly, but with a baffling and undecipherable face.

“I am not saying anything about it,” he said. "I leave all the rest to you. Your pink paper says that the title was recently revived for him; but those papers are very unreliable. It says he was in the States in youth; but the whole story seems very strange. Davis and Falconroy are both pretty considerable cowards, but so are lots of other men. I would not hang a dog on my own opinion about this. But I think,” he went on softly and reflectively, "I think you Americans are too modest. I think you idealize the English aristocracy--even in assuming it to be so aristocratic. You see a good-looking Englishman in evening-dress; you know he's in the House of Lords; and you fancy he has a father. You don't allow for our national buoyancy and uplift. Many of our most influential noblemen have not only risen recently, but--"

“Oh, stop it!” cried Greywood Usher, wringing one lean hand in impatience against a shade of irony in the other's face.

"Don't stay talking to this lunatic!” cried Todd brutally. "Take me to my friend."

Next morning Father Brown appeared with the same demure expression, carrying yet another piece of pink newspaper.

"I'm afraid you neglect the fashionable press rather," he said, "but this cutting may interest you."

Usher read the headlines, "Last-Trick's Strayed Revellers: Mirthful Incident near Pilgrim's Pond." The paragraph went on: "A laughable occurrence took place outside Wilkinson's Motor Garage last night. A policeman on duty had his attention drawn by larrikins to a man in prison dress who was stepping with considerable coolness into the steering-seat of a pretty high-toned Panhard; he was accompanied by a girl wrapped in a ragged shawl. On the police interfering, the young woman threw back the shawl, and all recognized Millionaire Todd's daughter, who had just come from the Slum Freak Dinner at the Pond, where all the choicest guests were in a similar deshabille. She and
the gentleman who had donned prison uniform were going for the customary joy-ride."

Under the pink slip Mr Usher found a strip of a later paper, headed, "Astounding Escape of Millionaire's Daughter with Convict. She had Arranged Freak Dinner. Now Safe in--"

Mr Greenwood Usher lifted his eyes, but Father Brown was gone.

SIX

The Head of Caesar

THERE is somewhere in Brompton or Kensington an interminable avenue of tall houses, rich but largely empty, that looks like a terrace of tombs. The very steps up to the dark front doors seem as steep as the side of pyramids; one would hesitate to knock at the door, lest it should be opened by a mummy. But a yet more depressing feature in the grey facade is its telescopic length and changeless continuity. The pilgrim walking down it begins to think he will never come to a break or a corner; but there is one exception—a very small one, but hailed by the pilgrim almost with a shout. There is a sort of mews between two of the tall mansions, a mere slit like the crack of a door by comparison with the street, but just large enough to permit a pigmy ale-house or eating-house, still allowed by the rich to their stable-servants, to stand in the angle. There is something cheery in its very dinginess, and something free and elfin in its very insignificance. At the feet of those grey stone giants it looks like a lighted house of dwarfs.

Anyone passing the place during a certain autumn evening, itself almost fairylike, might have seen a hand pull aside the red half-blind which (along with some large white lettering) half hid the interior from the street, and a face peer out not unlike a rather innocent goblin's. It was, in fact, the face of one with the harmless human name of Brown, formerly priest of Cobhole in Essex, and now working in London. His friend, Flambeau, a semi-official investigator, was sitting opposite him, making his last notes of a case he had cleared up in the neighbourhood. They were sitting at a small table, close up to the window, when the priest pulled the curtain back and looked out. He waited till a stranger in the street had passed the window, to let the curtain fall into its place again. Then his round eyes rolled to the large white lettering on the window above his head, and then strayed to the next table, at which sat only a navvy with beer and cheese, and a young girl with red hair and a glass of milk. Then (seeing his friend put away the pocket-book), he said softly:

"If you've got ten minutes, I wish you'd follow that man with the false nose."

Flambeau looked up in surprise; but the girl with the red hair also looked up, and with something that was stronger than astonishment. She was simply and even loosely dressed in light brown sacking stuff; but she was a lady, and even, on a second glance, a rather needlessly haughty one. "The man with the false nose!" repeated Flambeau. "Who's he?"

"I haven't a notion," answered Father Brown. "I want you to find out; I ask it as a favour. He went down there"—and he jerked his thumb over his shoulder in one of his undistinguished gestures—"and can't have passed three lamp-posts yet. I only want to know the direction."

Flambeau gazed at his friend for some time, with an expression between perplexity and amusement; and then, rising from the table; squeezed his huge form out of the little door of the dwarf tavern, and melted into the twilight.

Father Brown took a small book out of his pocket and began to read steadily; he betrayed no consciousness of the fact that the red-haired lady had left her own table and sat down opposite him. At last she leaned over and said in a low, strong voice: "Why do you say that? How do you know it's false?"

He lifted his rather heavy eyelids, which fluttered in considerable embarrassment. Then his dubious eye roved again to the girl's light canvas sleeve, round the wrist of which ran a very slight thread of artistic pattern, just enough to distinguish it from a working-dress of a common woman and make it more like the working-dress of a lady art-student. He seemed to find much food for thought in this; but his reply was very slow and hesitant. "You see, madam," he said, "from outside the place looks—well, it is a perfectly decent place—but ladies like you don't—don't generally think so. They never go into such places from choice, except—"

"Well?" she repeated.

"Except an unfortunate few who don't go in to drink milk."

"You are a most singular person," said the young lady. "What is your object in all this?"

"Not to trouble you about it," he replied, very gently. "Only to arm myself with knowledge enough to help you, if ever you freely ask my help."

"But why should I need help?"

He continued his dreamy monologue. "You couldn't have come in to see proteges, humble friends, that sort of
thing, or you'd have gone through into the parlour...and you couldn't have come in because you were ill, or you'd have spoken to the woman of the place, who's obviously respectable...besides, you don't look ill in that way, but only unhappy.... This street is the only original long lane that has no turning; and the houses on both sides are shut up.... I could only suppose that you'd seen somebody coming whom you didn't want to meet; and found the public-house was the only shelter in this wilderness of stone.... I don't think I went beyond the licence of a stranger in glancing at the only man who passed immediately after.... And as I thought he looked like the wrong sort...and you looked like the right sort.... I held myself ready to help if he annoyed you; that is all. As for my friend, he'll be back soon; and he certainly can't find out anything by stumping down a road like this.... I didn't think he could."

"Then why did you send him out?" she cried, leaning forward with yet warmer curiosity. She had the proud, impetuous face that goes with reddish colouring, and a Roman nose, as it did in Marie Antoinette.

He looked at her steadily for the first time, and said: "Because I hoped you would speak to me."

She looked back at him for some time with a heated face, in which there hung a red shadow of anger; then, despite her anxieties, humour broke out of her eyes and the corners of her mouth, and she answered almost grimly: "Well, if you're so keen on my conversation, perhaps you'll answer my question." After a pause she added: "I had the honour to ask you why you thought the man's nose was false."

"The wax always spots like that just a little in this weather," answered Father Brown with entire simplicity, "But it's such a crooked nose," remonstrated the red-haired girl.

The priest smiled in his turn. "I don't say it's the sort of nose one would wear out of mere foppery," he admitted. "This man, I think, wears it because his real nose is so much nicer."

"But why?" she insisted.

"What is the nursery-rhyme?" observed Brown absent-mindedly. "There was a crooked man and he went a crooked mile.... That man, I fancy, has gone a very crooked road--by following his nose."

"Why, what's he done?" she demanded, rather shakily.

"I don't want to force your confidence by a hair," said Father Brown, very quietly. "But I think you could tell me more about that than I can tell you."

The girl sprang to her feet and stood quite quietly, but with clenched hands, like one about to stride away; then her hands loosened slowly, and she sat down again. "You are more of a mystery than all the others," she said desperately, "but I feel there might be a heart in your mystery."

"What we all dread most," said the priest in a low voice, "is a maze with no centre. That is why atheism is only a nightmare." "I will tell you everything," said the red-haired girl doggedly, "except why I am telling you; and that I don't know."

She picked at the darned table-cloth and went on: "You look as if you knew what isn't snobbery as well as what is; and when I say that ours is a good old family, you'll understand it is a necessary part of the story; indeed, my chief danger is in my brother's high-and-dry notions, noblesse oblige and all that. Well, my name is Christabel Carstairs; and my father was that Colonel Carstairs you've probably heard of, who made the famous Carstairs Collection of Roman coins. I could never describe my father to you; the nearest I can say is that he was very like a Roman coin himself. He was as handsome and as genuine and as valuable and as metallic and as out-of-date. He was prouder of his Collection than of his coat-of-arms-- nobody could say more than that. His extraordinary character came out most in his will. He had two sons and one daughter. He quarrelled with one son, my brother Giles, and sent him to Australia on a small allowance. He then made a will leaving the Carstairs Collection, actually with a yet smaller allowance, to my brother Arthur. He meant it as a reward, as the highest honour he could offer, in acknowledgement of Arthur's loyalty and rectitude and the distinctions he had already gained in mathematics and economics at Cambridge. He left me practically all his pretty large fortune; and I am sure he meant it in contempt.

"Arthur, you may say, might well complain of this; but Arthur is my father over again. Though he had some differences with my father in early youth, no sooner had he taken over the Collection than he became like a pagan priest dedicated to a temple. He mixed up these Roman halfpence with the honour of the Carstairs family in the same stiff, idolatrous way as his father before him. He acted as if Roman money must be guarded by all the Roman virtues. He took no pleasures; he spent nothing on himself; he lived for the Collection. Often he would not trouble to dress for his simple meals; but pattered about among the corded brown-paper parcels (which no one else was allowed to touch) in an old brown dressing-gown. With its rope and tassel and his pale, thin, refined face, it made him look like an old ascetic monk. Every now and then, though, he would appear dressed like a decidedly fashionable gentleman; but that was only when he went up to the London sales or shops to make an addition to the Carstairs Collection.

"Now, if you've known any young people, you won't be shocked if I say that I got into rather a low frame of mind with all this; the frame of mind in which one begins to say that the Ancient Romans were all very well in their way. I'm not like my brother Arthur; I can't help enjoying enjoyment. I got a lot of romance and rubbish where I got
bending over his net. The stranger came on till he stood within two yards of me, the water washing half-way up to
my head. It seemed to look so much at me alone as not to notice the ocean. Philip was some yards away with his back to me,
disregarding a law of Nature. If he had hesitated an instant at the water's edge it would have been nothing. As it was, he
must have felt immediately after that it was a mere leap of unreasonable nerves; for the man was only a dark dot in
the distance, and I could only just see that he was standing quite still and gazing, with his head a little on one side.

"I come now to the silly part of the story. I think a man as clever as you can guess the sort of thing that would
begin to relieve the monotony for an unruly girl of seventeen placed in such a position. But I am so rattled with more
dreadful things that I can hardly read my own feeling; and don't know whether I despise it now as a flirtation or bear
it as a broken heart. We lived then at a little seaside watering-place in South Wales, and a retired sea-captain living a
dozen years off had a son about five years older than myself, who had been a friend of Giles before he went to the
Colonies. His name does not affect my tale; but I tell you it was Philip Hawker, because I am telling you everything.
We used to go shrimping together, and said and thought we were in love with each other; at least he certainly said he
was, and I certainly thought I was. If I tell you he had bronzed curly hair and a falconish sort of face, bronzed by the
sea also, it's not for his sake, I assure you, but for the story; for it was the cause of a very curious coincidence.

One summer afternoon, when I had promised to go shrimping along the sands with Philip, I was waiting rather
impatiently in the front drawing-room, watching Arthur handle some packets of coins he had just purchased and
slowly shunt them, one or two at a time, into his own dark study and museum which was at the back of the house.

As soon as I heard the heavy door close on him finally, I made a bolt for my shrimping-net and tam-o'-shanter and
was just going to slip out, when I saw that my brother had left behind him one coin that lay gleaming on the long
bench by the window. It was a bronze coin, and the colour, combined with the exact curve of the Roman nose and
something in the very lift of the long, wry neck, made the head of Caesar on it the almost precise portrait of Philip
Hawker. Then I suddenly remembered Giles telling Philip of a coin that was like him, and Philip wishing he had it.
Perhaps you can fancy the wild, foolish thoughts with which my head went round; I felt as if I had had a gift from
the fairies. It seemed to me that if I could only run away with this, and give it to Philip like a wild sort of wedding-
ring, it would be a bond between us for ever; I felt a thousand such things at once. Then there yawned under me, like
the pit, the enormous, awful notion of what I was doing; above all, the unbearable thought, which was like touching
hot iron, of what Arthur would think of it. A Carstairs a thief; and a thief of the Carstairs treasure! I believe my
brother could see me burned like a witch for such a thing, But then, the very thought of such fanatical cruelty
heightened my old hatred of his dingy old antiquarian fussiness and my longing for the youth and liberty that called
to me from the sea. Outside was strong sunlight with a wind; and a yellow head of some broom or gorse in the
garden rapped against the glass of the window. I thought of that living and growing gold calling to me from all the
heaths of the world--and then of that dead, dull gold and bronze and brass of my brother's growing dustier and
dustier as life went by. Nature and the Carstairs Collection had come to grips at last.

"Nature is older than the Carstairs Collection. As I ran down the streets to the sea, the coin clenched tight in my
fist, I felt all the Roman Empire on my back as well as the Carstairs pedigree. It was not only the old lion argent that
was roaring in my ear, but all the eagles of the Caesars seemed flapping and screaming in pursuit of me. And yet my
heart rose higher and higher like a child's kite, until I came over the loose, dry sand-hills and to the flat, wet sands,
where Philip stood already up to his ankles in the shallow shining water, some hundred yards out to sea. There was a
great red sunset; and the long stretch of low water, hardly rising over the ankle for half a mile, was like a lake of
ruby flame. It was not till I had torn off my shoes and stockings and waded to where he stood, which was well away
from the dry land, that I turned and looked round. We were quite alone in a circle of sea-water and wet sand, and I
gave him the head of Caesar.

"At the very instant I had a shock of fancy: that a man far away on the sand-hills was looking at me intently. I
must have felt immediately after that it was a mere leap of unreasonable nerves; for the man was only a dark dot in
the distance, and I could only just see that he was standing quite still and gazing, with his head a little on one side.
There was no earthly logical evidence that he was looking at me; he might have been looking at a ship, or the sunset,
or the sea-gulls, or at any of the people who still strayed here and there on the shore between us. Nevertheless,
whatever my start sprang from was prophetic; for, as I gazed, he started walking briskly in a bee-line towards us
across the wide wet sands. As he drew nearer and nearer I saw that he was dark and bearded, and that his eyes were
marked with dark spectacles. He was dressed poorly but respectably in black, from the old black top hat on his head
to the solid black boots on his feet. In spite of these he walked straight into the sea without a flash of hesitation, and
came on at me with the steadiness of a travelling bullet.

"I can't tell you the sense of monstrosity and miracle I had when he thus silently burst the barrier between land
and water. It was as if he had walked straight off a cliff and still marched steadily in mid-air. It was as if a house had
flown up into the sky or a man's head had fallen off. He was only wetting his boots; but he seemed to be a demon
disregarding a law of Nature. If he had hesitated an instant at the water's edge it would have been nothing. As it was,
he seemed to look so much at me alone as not to notice the ocean. Philip was some yards away with his back to me,
bending over his net. The stranger came on till he stood within two yards of me, the water washing half-way up to
his knees. Then he said, with a clearly modulated and rather mincing articulation: "Would it discommode you to contribute elsewhere a coin with a somewhat different superscription?"

"With one exception there was nothing definably abnormal about him. His tinted glasses were not really opaque, but of a blue kind common enough, nor were the eyes behind them shifty, but regarded me steadily. His dark beard was not really long or wild--, but he looked rather hairy, because the beard began very high up in his face, just under the cheek-bones. His complexion was neither sallow nor livid, but on the contrary rather clear and youthful; yet this gave a pink-and-white wax look which somehow (I don't know why) rather increased the horror. The only oddity one could fix was that his nose, which was otherwise of a good shape, was just slightly turned sideways at the tip; as if, when it was soft, it had been tapped on one side with a toy hammer. The thing was hardly a deformity; yet I cannot tell you what a living nightmare it was to me. As he stood there in the sunset-stained water he affected me as some hellish sea-monster just risen roaring out of a sea like blood. I don't know why a touch on the nose should affect my imagination so much. I think it seemed as if he could move his nose like a finger. And as if he had just that moment moved it.

"Any little assistance," he continued with the same queer, priggish accent, "that may obviate the necessity of my communicating with the family."

"Then it rushed over me that I was being blackmailed for the theft of the bronze piece; and all my merely superstitious fears and doubts were swallowed up in one overpowering, practical question. How could he have found out? I had stolen the thing suddenly and on impulse; I had certainly alone; for I always made sure of being unobserved when I slipped out to see Philip in this way. I had not, to all appearance, been followed in the street; and if I had, they could not 'X-ray' the coin in my closed hand. The man standing on the sand-hills could no more have seen what I gave Philip than shoot a fly in one eye, like the man in the fairy-tale.

"Philip," I cried helplessly, "ask this man what he wants."

"When Philip lifted his head at last from mending his net he looked rather red, as if sulky or ashamed; but it may have been only the exertion of stooping and the red evening light; I may have only had another of the morbid fancies that seemed to be dancing about me. He merely said gruffly to the man: 'You clear out of this.' And, motioning me to follow, set off wading shoreward without paying further attention to him. He stepped on to a stone breakwater that ran out from among the roots of the sand-hills, and so struck homeward, perhaps thinking our incubus would find it less easy to walk on such rough stones, green and slippery with seaweed, than we, who were young and used to it. But my persecutor walked as daintily as he talked; and he still followed me, picking his way and picking his phrases. I heard his delicate, detestable voice appealing to me over my shoulder, until at last, when we had crested the sand-hills, Philip's patience (which was by no means so conspicuous on most occasions) seemed to snap. He turned suddenly, saying, 'Go back. I can't talk to you now.' And as the man hovered and opened his mouth, Philip struck him a buffet on it that sent him flying from the top of the tallest sand-hill to the bottom. I saw him crawling out below, covered with sand.

"This stroke comforted me somehow, though it might well increase my peril; but Philip showed none of his usual elation at his own prowess. Though as affectionate as ever, he still seemed cast down; and before I could ask him anything fully, he parted with me at his own gate, with two remarks that struck me as strange. He said that, all things considered, I ought to put the coin back in the Collection; but that he himself would keep it 'for the present'. And then he added quite suddenly and irrelevantly: 'You know Giles is back from Australia?'"

The door of the tavern opened and the gigantic shadow of the investigator Flambeau fell across the table. Father Brown presented him to the lady in his own slight, persuasive style of speech, mentioning his knowledge and sympathy in such cases; and almost without knowing, the girl was soon reiterating her story to two listeners. But Flambeau, as he bowed and sat down, handed the priest a small slip of paper. Brown accepted it with some surprise and read on it: "Cab to Wagga Wagga, 379, Mafeking Avenue, Putney." The girl was going on with her story.

"I went up the steep street to my own house with my head in a whirl; it had not begun to clear when I came to the doorstep, on which I found a milk-can--and the man with the twisted nose. The milk-can told me the servants were all out; for, of course, Arthur, browsing about in his brown dressing-gown in a brown study, would not hear or answer a bell. Thunders there was no one to help me in the house, except my brother, whose help must be my ruin. In desperation I thrust two shillings into the horrid thing's hand, and told him to call again in a few days, when I had thought it out. He went off sulking, but more sheepishly than I had expected-- perhaps he had been shaken by his fall--and I watched the star of sand splashed on his back receding down the road with a horrid vindictive pleasure. He turned a corner some six houses down.

"Then I let myself in, made myself some tea, and tried to think it out. I sat at the drawing-room window looking on to the garden, which still glowed with the last full evening light. But I was too distracted and dreamy to look at the lawns and flower-pots and flower-beds with any concentration. So I took the shock the more sharply because I'd seen it so slowly.
"The man or monster I'd sent away was standing quite still in the middle of the garden. Oh, we've all read a lot about pale-faced phantoms in the dark; but this was more dreadful than anything of that kind could ever be. Because, though he cast a long evening shadow, he still stood in warm sunlight. And because his face was not pale, but had that waxen bloom still upon it that belongs to a barber's dummy. He stood quite still, with his face towards me; and I can't tell you how horrid he looked among the tulips and all those tall, gaudy, almost hothouse-looking flowers. It looked as if we'd stuck up a waxwork instead of a statue in the centre of our garden.

"Yet almost the instant he saw me move in the window he turned and ran out of the garden by the back gate, which stood open and by which he had undoubtedly entered. This renewed timidity on his part was so different from the impudence with which he had walked into the sea, that I felt vaguely comforted. I fancied, perhaps, that he feared confronting Arthur more than I knew. Anyhow, I settled down at last, and had a quiet dinner alone (for it was against the rules to disturb Arthur when he was rearranging the museum), and, my thoughts, a little released, fled to Philip and lost themselves, I suppose. Anyhow, I was looking blankly, but rather pleasantly than otherwise, at another window, uncertainly, but by this time black as a slate with the final night-fall. It seemed to me that something like a snail was on the outside of the window-pane. But when I stared harder, it was more like a man's thumb pressed on the pane; it had that curled look that a thumb has. With my fear and courage re-awakened together, I rushed at the window and then recoiled with a strangled scream that any man but Arthur must have heard.

"For it was not a thumb, any more than it was a snail. It was the tip of a crooked nose, crushed against the glass; it looked white with the pressure; and the staring face and eyes behind it were at first invisible and afterwards grey like a ghost. I slammed the shutters together somehow, rushed up to my room and locked myself in. But, even as I passed, I could swear I saw a second black window with something on it that was like a snail.

"It might be best to go to Arthur after all. If the thing was crawling close all around the house like a cat, it might have purposes worse even than blackmail. My brother might cast me out and curse me for ever, but he was a gentleman, and would defend me on the spot. After ten minutes' curious thinking, I went down, knocked on the door and then went in: to see the last and worst sight.

"My brother's chair was empty, and he was obviously out. But the man with the crooked nose was sitting waiting for his return, with his hat still insolently on his head, and actually reading one of my brother's books under my brother's lamp. His face was composed and occupied, but his nose-tip still had the air of being the most mobile part of his face, as if it had just turned from left to right like an elephant's proboscis. I had thought him poisonous enough while he was pursuing and watching me; but I think his unconsciousness of my presence was more frightful still.

"I think I screamed loud and long; but that doesn't matter. What I did next does matter: I gave him all the money I had, including a good deal in paper which, though it was mine, I dare say I had no right to touch. He went off at last, with hateful, tactful regrets all in long words; and I sat down, feeling ruined in every sense. And yet I was saved that very night by a pure accident. Arthur had gone off suddenly to London, as he so often did, for bargains; and returned, late but radiant, having nearly secured a treasure that was an added splendour even to the family Collection. He was so resplendent that I was almost emboldened to confess the abstraction of the lesser gem--; but he bore down all other topics with his over-powering projects. Because the bargain might still misfire any moment, he insisted on my packing at once and going up with him to lodgings he had already taken in Fulham, to be near the curio-shop in question. Thus in spite of myself, I fled from my foe almost in the dead of night--but from Philip also.... My brother was often at the South Kensington Museum, and, in order to make some sort of secondary life for myself, I paid for a few lessons at the Art Schools. I was coming back from them this evening, when I saw the abomination of desolation walking alive down the long straight street and the rest is as this gentleman has said.

"I've got only one thing to say. I don't deserve to be helped; and I don't question or complain of my punishment; it is just, it ought to have happened. But I still question, with bursting brains, how it can have happened. Am I punished by miracle? or how can anyone but Philip and myself know I gave him a tiny coin in the middle of the sea?"

"It is an extraordinary problem," admitted Flambeau.

"Not so extraordinary as the answer," remarked Father Brown rather gloomily. "Miss Carstairs, will you be at home if we call at your Fulham place in an hour and a half hence?"

The girl looked at him, and then rose and put her gloves on. "Yes," she said, "I'll be there"; and almost instantly left the place.

That night the detective and the priest were still talking of the matter as they drew near the Fulham house, a tenement strangely mean even for a temporary residence of the Carstairs family.

"Of course the superficial, on reflection," said Flambeau, "would think first of this Australian brother who's been in trouble before, who's come back so suddenly and who's just the man to have shabby confederates. But I can't see how he can come into the thing by any process of thought, unless..."

"Well?" asked his companion patiently.
Flambeau lowered his voice. "Unless the girl's lover comes in, too, and he would be the blacker villain. The Australian chap did know that Hawker wanted the coin. But I can't see how on earth he could know that Hawker had got it, unless Hawker signalled to him or his representative across the shore."
"That is true," assented the priest, with respect.
"Have you noted another thing?" went on Flambeau eagerly. "this Hawker hears his love insulted, but doesn't strike till he's got to the soft sand-hills, where he can be victor in a mere sham-fight. If he'd struck amid rocks and sea, he might have hurt his ally."
"That is true again," said Father Brown, nodding.
"And now, take it from the start. It lies between few people, but at least three. You want one person for suicide; two people for murder; but at least three people for blackmail"
"Why?" asked the priest softly.
"Well, obviously," cried his friend, "there must be one to be exposed; one to threaten exposure; and one at least whom exposure would horrify."
After a long ruminant pause, the priest said: "You miss a logical step. Three persons are needed as ideas. Only two are needed as agents."
"What can you mean?" asked the other.
"Why shouldn't a blackmailer," asked Brown, in a low voice, "threaten his victim with himself? Suppose a wife became a rigid teetotaller in order to frighten her husband into concealing his pub-frequenting, and then wrote him blackmailing letters in another hand, threatening to tell his wife! Why shouldn't it work? Suppose a father forbade a son to gamble and then, following him in a good disguise, threatened the boy with his own sham paternal strictness! Suppose--but, here we are, my friend."
"My God!" cried Flambeau; "you don't mean--"
An active figure ran down the steps of the house and showed under the golden lamplight the unmistakable head that resembled the Roman coin. "Miss Carstairs," said Hawker without ceremony, "wouldn't go in till you came."
"Well," observed Brown confidently, "don't you think it's the best thing she can do to stop outside--with you to look after her? You see, I rather guess you have guessed it all yourself."
"Yes," said the young man, in an undertone, "I guessed on the sands and now I know; that was why I let him fall soft."
Taking a latchkey from the girl and the coin from Hawker, Flambeau let himself and his friend into the empty house and passed into the outer parlour. It was empty of all occupants but one. The man whom Father Brown had seen pass the tavern was standing against the wall as if at bay; unchanged, save that he had taken off his black coat and was wearing a brown dressing-gown.
"We have come," said Father Brown politely, "to give back this coin to its owner." And he handed it to the man with the nose.
Flambeau's eyes rolled. "Is this man a coin-collector?" he asked.
"This man is Mr Arthur Carstairs," said the priest positively, "and he is a coin-collector of a somewhat singular kind."
The man changed colour so horribly that the crooked nose stood out on his face like a separate and comic thing. He spoke, nevertheless, with a sort of despairing dignity. "You shall see, then," he said, "that I have not lost all the family qualities." And he turned suddenly and strode into an inner room, slamming the door.
"Stop him!" shouted Father Brown, bounding and half falling over a chair; and, after a wrench or two, Flambeau had the door open. But it was too late. In dead silence Flambeau strode across and telephoned for doctor and police.
An empty medicine bottle lay on the floor. Across the table the body of the man in the brown dressing-gown lay amid his burst and gaping brown-paper parcels; out of which poured and rolled, not Roman, but very modern English coins.
The priest held up the bronze head of Caesar. "This," he said, "was all that was left of the Carstairs Collection."
After a silence he went on, with more than common gentleness: "It was a cruel will his wicked father made, and you see he did resent it a little. He hated the Roman money he had, and grew fonder of the real money denied him. He not only sold the Collection bit by bit, but sank bit by bit to the basest ways of making money--even to blackmailing his own family in a disguise. He blackmailed his brother from Australia for his little forgotten crime (that is why he took the cab to Wagga Wagga in Putney), he blackmailed his sister for the theft he alone could have noticed. And that, by the way, is why she had that supernatural guess when he was away on the sand-dunes. Mere figure and gait, however distant, are more likely to remind us of somebody than a well-made-up face quite close."
There was another silence. "Well," growled the detective, "and so this great numismatist and coin-collector was nothing but a vulgar miser."
"Is there so great a difference?" asked Father Brown, in the same strange, indulgent tone. "What is there wrong
about a miser that is not often as wrong about a collector? What is wrong, except... thou shalt not make to thyself any graven image; thou shalt not bow down to them nor serve them, for I...but we must go and see how the poor young people are getting on."

"I think," said Flambeau, "that in spite of everything, they are probably getting on very well."

SEVEN

The Purple Wig

MR EDWARD NUTT, the industrious editor of the Daily Reformer, sat at his desk, opening letters and marking proofs to the merry tune of a typewriter, worked by a vigorous young lady.

He was a stoutish, fair man, in his shirt-sleeves; his movements were resolute, his mouth firm and his tones final; but his round, rather babyish blue eyes had a bewildered and even wistful look that rather contradicted all this. Nor indeed was the expression altogether misleading. It might truly be said of him, as for many journalists in authority, that his most familiar emotion was one of continuous fear; fear of libel actions, fear of lost advertisements, fear of misprints, fear of the sack.

His life was a series of distracted compromises between the proprietor of the paper (and of him), who was a senile soap-boiler with three ineradicable mistakes in his mind, and the very able staff he had collected to run the paper; some of whom were brilliant and experienced men and (what was even worse) sincere enthusiasts for the political policy of the paper.

A letter from one of these lay immediately before him, and rapid and resolute as he was, he seemed almost to hesitate before opening it. He took up a strip of proof instead, ran down it with a blue eye, and a blue pencil, altered the word "adultery" to the word "impropriety," and the word "Jew" to the word "Alien," rang a bell and sent it flying upstairs.

Then, with a more thoughtful eye, he ripped open the letter from his more distinguished contributor, which bore a postmark of Devonshire, and read as follows:

DEAR NUTT,--As I see you're working Spooks and Dooks at the same time, what about an article on that rum business of the Eyres of Exmoor; or as the old women call it down here, the Devil's Ear of Eyre? The head of the family, you know, is the Duke of Exmoor; he is one of the few really stiff old Tory aristocrats left, a sound old crusted tyrant it is quite in our line to make trouble about. And I think I'm on the track of a story that will make trouble.

Of course I don't believe in the old legend about James I; and as for you, you don't believe in anything, not even in journalism. The legend, you'll probably remember, was about the blackest business in English history--the poisoning of Overbury by that witch's cat Frances Howard, and the quite mysterious terror which forced the King to pardon the murderers. There was a lot of alleged witchcraft mixed up with it; and the story goes that a man-servant listening at the keyhole heard the truth in a talk between the King and Carr; and the bodily ear with which he heard grew large and monstrous as by magic, so awful was the secret. And though he had to be loaded with lands and gold and made an ancestor of dukes, the elf-shaped ear is still recurrent in the family. Well, you don't believe in black magic; and if you did, you couldn't use it for copy. If a miracle happened in your office, you'd have to hush it up, now so many bishops are agnostics. But that is not the point The point is that there really is something queer about Exmoor and his family; something quite natural, I dare say, but quite abnormal. And the Ear is in it somehow, I fancy; either a symbol or a delusion or disease or something. Another tradition says that Cavaliers just after James I began to wear their hair long only to cover the ear of the first Lord Exmoor. This also is no doubt fanciful.

The reason I point it out to you is this: It seems to me that we make a mistake in attacking aristocracy entirely for its champagne and diamonds. Most men rather admire the nobs for having a good time, but I think we surrender too much when we admit that aristocracy has made even the aristocrats happy. I suggest a series of articles pointing out how dreary, how inhuman, how downright diabolist, is the very smell and atmosphere of some of these great houses. There are plenty of instances; but you couldn't begin with a better one than the Ear of the Eyres. By the end of the week I think I can get you the truth about it.--Yours ever, FRANCIS FINN.

Mr Nutt reflected a moment, staring at his left boot; then he called out in a strong, loud and entirely lifeless voice, in which every syllable sounded alike: "Miss Barlow, take down a letter to Mr Finn, please."

DEAR FINN,--I think it would do; copy should reach us second post Saturday.--Yours, E. NUTT.

This elaborate epistle he articulated as if it were all one word; and Miss Barlow rattled it down as if it were all one word. Then he took up another strip of proof and a blue pencil, and altered the word "supernatural" to the word "marvellous", and the expression "shoot down" to the expression "repress".

In such happy, healthful activities did Mr Nutt disport himself, until the ensuing Saturday found him at the same desk, dictating to the same typist, and using the same blue pencil on the first instalment of Mr Finn's revelations. The opening was a sound piece of slashing invective about the evil secrets of princes, and despair in the high places of the earth. Though written violently, it was in excellent English; but the editor, as usual, had given to somebody else
the task of breaking it up into sub-headings, which were of a spicier sort, as "Peeress and Poisons", and "The Eerie Ear", "The Eyres in their Eyrie", and so on through a hundred happy changes. Then followed the legend of the Ear, amplified from Finn's first letter, and then the substance of his later discoveries, as follows:

I know it is the practice of journalists to put the end of the story at the beginning and call it a headline. I know that journalism largely consists in saying "Lord Jones Dead" to people who never knew that Lord Jones was alive. Your present correspondent thinks that this, like many other journalistic customs, is bad journalism; and that the Daily Reformer has to set a better example in such things. He proposes to tell his story as it occurred, step by step. He will use the real names of the parties, who in most cases are ready to confirm his testimony. As for the headlines, the sensational proclamations—they will come at the end.

I was walking along a public path that threads through a private Devonshire orchard and seems to point towards Devonshire cider, when I came suddenly upon just such a place as the path suggested. It was a long, low inn, consisting really of a cottage and two barns; thatched all over with the thatch that looks like brown and grey hair grown before history. But outside the door was a sign which called it the Blue Dragon; and under the sign was one of those long rustic tables that used to stand outside most of the free English inns, before teetotters and brewers between them destroyed freedom. And at this table sat three gentlemen, who might have lived a hundred years ago.

Now that I know them all better, there is no difficulty about disentangling the impressions; but just then they looked like three very solid ghosts. The dominant figure, both because he was bigger in all three dimensions, and because he sat centrally in the length of the table, facing me, was a tall, fat man dressed completely in black, with a rubicund, even apoplectic visage, but a rather bald and rather bothered brow. Looking at him again, more strictly, I could not exactly say what it was that gave me the sense of antiquity, except the antique cut of his white clerical necktie and the barred wrinkles across his brow.

It was even less easy to fix the impression in the case of the man at the right end of the table, who, to say truth, was as commonplace a person as could be seen anywhere, with a round, brown-haired head and a round snub nose, but also clad in clerical black, of a stricter cut. It was only when I saw his broad curved hat lying on the table beside him that I realized why I connected him with anything ancient. He was a Roman Catholic priest.

Perhaps the third man, at the other end of the table, had really more to do with it than the rest, though he was both slighter in physical presence and more inconsiderate in his dress. His lank limbs were clad, I might also say clutched, in very tight grey sleeves and pantaloons; he had a long, sallow, aquiline face which seemed somehow all the more saturnine because his lantern jaws were imprisoned in his collar and neck-cloth more in the style of the old stock; and his hair (which ought to have been dark brown) was of an odd dim, russet colour which, in conjunction with his yellow face, looked rather purple than red. The unobtrusive yet unusual colour was all the more notable because his hair was almost unnaturally healthy and curling, and he wore it full. But, after all analysis, I incline to think that what gave me my first old-fashioned impression was simply a set of tall, old-fashioned wine-glasses, one or two lemons and two churchwarden pipes. And also, perhaps, the old-world errand on which I had come.

Being a hardened reporter, and it being apparently a public inn, I did not need to summon much of my impudence to sit down at the long table and order some cider. The big man in black seemed very learned, especially about local antiquities; the small man in black, though he talked much less, surprised me with a yet wider culture. So we got on very well together; but the third man, the old gentleman in the tight pantaloons, seemed rather distant and haughty, until I slid into the subject of the Duke of Exmoor and his ancestry.

I thought the subject seemed to embarrass the other two a little; but it broke the spell of the third man's silence most successfully. Speaking with restraint and with the accent of a highly educated gentleman, and puffing at intervals at his long churchwarden pipe, he proceeded to tell me some of the most horrible stories I have ever heard in my life: how one of the Eyres in the former ages had hanged his own father; and another had his wife scourged at intervals at his long churchwarden pipe, he proceeded to tell me some of the most horrible stories I have ever heard in my life: how one of the Eyres in the former ages had hanged his own father; and another had his wife scourged at

Some of the tales, indeed, are not fit for public print—-, such as the story of the Scarlet Nuns, the abominable story of the Spotted Dog, or the thing that was done in the quarry. And all this red roll of impurities came from his thin, genteel lips rather primly than otherwise, as he sat sipping the wine out of his tall, thin glass.

I could see that the big man opposite me was trying, if anything, to stop him; but he evidently held the old gentleman in considerable respect, and could not venture to do so at all abruptly. And the little priest at the other end of the table, though free from any such air of embarrassment, looked steadily at the table, and seemed to listen to the recital with great pain—as well as he might.

"You don't seem," I said to the narrator, "to be very fond of the Exmoor pedigree."

He looked at me a moment, his lips still prim, but whitening and tightening; then he deliberately broke his long pipe and glass on the table and stood up, the very picture of a perfect gentleman with the framing temper of a fiend.

"These gentlemen," he said, "will tell you whether I have cause to like it. The curse of the Eyres of old has lain heavy on this country, and many have suffered from it. They know there are none who have suffered from it as I
have." And with that he crushed a piece of the fallen glass under his heel, and strode away among the green twilight of the twinkling apple-trees.

"That is an extraordinary old gentleman," I said to the other two; "do you happen to know what the Exmoor family has done to him? Who is he?"

The big man in black was staring at me with the wild air of a baffled bull; he did not at first seem to take it in. Then he said at last, "Don't you know who he is?"

I reaffirmed my ignorance, and there was another silence; then the little priest said, still looking at the table, "That is the Duke of Exmoor."

Then, before I could collect my scattered senses, he added equally quietly, but with an air of regularizing things: "My friend here is Doctor Mull, the Duke's librarian. My name is Brown."

"But," I stammered, "if that is the Duke, why does he damn all the old dukes like that?"

"He seems really to believe," answered the priest called Brown, "that they have left a curse on him." Then he added, with some irrelevance, "That's why he wears a wig."

It was a few moments before his meaning dawned on me. "You don't mean that fable about the fantastic ear?" I demanded. "I've heard of it, of course, but surely it must be a superstitious yarn spun out of something much simpler. I've sometimes thought it was a wild version of one of those mutilation stories. They used to crop criminals' ears in the sixteenth century."

"I hardly think it was that," answered the little man thoughtfully, "but it is not outside ordinary science or natural law for a family to have some deformity frequently reappearing--such as one ear bigger than the other."

The big librarian had buried his big bald brow in his big red hands, like a man trying to think out his duty. "No," he groaned. "You do the man a wrong after all. Understand, I've no reason to defend him, or even keep faith with him. He has been a tyrant to me as to everybody else. Don't fancy because you see him sitting here that he isn't a great lord in the worst sense of the word. He would fetch a man a mile to ring a bell a yard off--if it would summon another man three miles to fetch a matchbox three yards off. He must have a footman to carry his walking-stick; a body servant to hold up his opera-glasses--"

"But not a valet to brush his clothes," cut in the priest, with a curious dryness, "for the valet would want to brush his wig, too."

The librarian turned to him and seemed to forget my presence; he was strongly moved and, I think, a little heated with wine. "I don't know how you know it, Father Brown," he said, "but you are right. He lets the whole world do everything for him--except dress him. And that he insists on doing in a literal solitude like a desert. Anybody is kicked out of the house without a character who is so much as found near his dressing-room door."

"He seems a pleasant old party," I remarked.

"No," replied Dr Mull quite simply; "and yet that is just what I mean by saying you are unjust to him after all. Gentlemen, the Duke does really feel the bitterness about the curse that he uttered just now. He does, with sincere shame and terror, hide under that purple wig something he thinks it would blast the sons of man to see. I know it is so; and I know it is not a mere natural disfigurement, like a criminal mutilation, or a hereditary disproportion in the features. I know it is worse than that; because a man told me who was present at a scene that no man could invent, where a stronger man than any of us tried to defy the secret, and was scared away from it."

I opened my mouth to speak, but Mull went on in oblivion of me, speaking out of the cavern of his hands. "I don't mind telling you, Father, because it's really more defending the poor Duke than giving him away. Didn't you ever hear of the time when he very nearly lost all the estates?"

The priest shook his head; and the librarian proceeded to tell the tale as he had heard it from his predecessor in the same post, who had been his patron and instructor, and whom he seemed to trust implicitly. Up to a certain point it was a common enough tale of the decline of a great family's fortunes--the tale of a family lawyer. His lawyer, however, had the sense to cheat honestly, if the expression explains itself. Instead of using funds he held in trust, he took advantage of the Duke's carelessness to put the family in a financial hole, in which it might be necessary for the Duke to let him hold them in reality.

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The lawyer's name was Isaac Green, but the Duke always called him Elisha; presumably in reference to the fact that he was quite bald, though certainly not more than thirty. He had risen very rapidly, but from very dirty beginnings; being first a "nark" or informer, and then a money-lender: but as solicitor to the Eyres he had the sense, as I say, to keep technically straight until he was ready to deal the final blow. The blow fell at dinner; and the old librarian said he should never forget the very look of the lampshades and the decanters, as the little lawyer, with a steady smile, proposed to the great landlord that they should halve the estates between them. The sequel certainly could not be overlooked; for the Duke, in dead silence, smashed a decanter on the man's bald head as suddenly as I had seen him smash the glass that day in the orchard. It left a red triangular scar on the scalp, and the lawyer's eyes altered, but not his smile.
He rose tottering to his feet, and struck back as such men do strike. "I am glad of that," he said, "for now I can
take the whole estate. The law will give it to me."

Exmoor, it seems, was white as ashes, but his eyes still blazed. "The law will give it you," he said; "but you will
not take it.... Why not? Why? because it would mean the crack of doom for me, and if you take it I shall take off my
wig.... Why, you pitiful plucked fowl, anyone can see your bare head. But no man shall see mine and live."

Well, you may say what you like and make it mean what you like. But Mull swears it is the solemn fact that the
lawyer, after shaking his knotted fists in the air for an instant, simply ran from the room and never reappeared in the
countryside; and since then Exmoor has been feared more for a warlock than even for a landlord and a magistrate.

Now Dr Mull told his story with rather wild theatrical gestures, and with a passion I think at least partisan. I was
quite conscious of the possibility that the whole was the extravagance of an old braggart and gossip. But before I end
this half of my discoveries, I think it due to Dr Mull to record that my two first inquiries have confirmed his story. I
learned from an old apothecary in the village that there was a bald man in evening dress, giving the name of Green,
who came to him one night to have a three-cornered cut on his forehead plastered. And I learnt from the legal
records and old newspapers that there was a lawsuit threatened, and at least begun, by one Green against the Duke of
Exmoor.

Mr Nutt, of the Daily Reformer, wrote some highly incongruous words across the top of the copy, made some
highly mysterious marks down the side of it, and called to Miss Barlow in the same loud, monotonous voice: "Take
down a letter to Mr Finn."

DEAR FINN,—Your copy will do, but I have had to headline it a bit; and our public would never stand a
Romanist priest in the story-- you must keep your eye on the suburbs. I've altered him to Mr Brown, a Spiritualist.
Yours,
E. NUTT.

A day or two afterward found the active and judicious editor examining, with blue eyes that seemed to grow
rounder and rounder, the second instalment of Mr Finn's tale of mysteries in high life. It began with the words:

I have made an astounding discovery. I freely confess it is quite different from anything I expected to discover,
and will give a much more practical shock to the public. I venture to say, without any vanity, that the words I now
write will be read all over Europe, and certainly all over America and the Colonies. And yet I heard all I have to tell
before I left this same little wooden table in this same little wood of apple-trees.

I owe it all to the small priest Brown; he is an extraordinary man. The big librarian had left the table, perhaps
ashamed of his long tongue, perhaps anxious about the storm in which his mysterious master had vanished: anyway,
he betook himself heavily in the Duke's tracks through the trees. Father Brown had picked up one of the lemons and
was eyeing it with an odd pleasure.

"What a lovely colour a lemon is!" he said. "There's one thing I don't like about the Duke's wig--the colour."

"I don't think I understand," I answered.

"I dare say he's got good reason to cover his ears, like King Midas," went on the priest, with a cheerful simplicity
which somehow seemed rather flippant under the circumstances. "I can quite understand that it's nicer to cover them
with hair than with brass plates or leather flaps. But if he wants to use hair, why doesn't he make it look like hair?
There never was hair of that colour in this world. It looks more like a sunset-cloud coming through the wood. Why
doesn't he conceal the family curse better, if he's really so ashamed of it? Shall I tell you? It's because he isn't
ashamed of it. He's proud of it."

"It's an ugly wig to be proud of--and an ugly story," I said.

"Consider," replied this curious little man, "how you yourself really feel about such things. I don't suggest you're
either more snobbish or more morbid than the rest of us: but don't you feel in a vague way that a genuine old family
curse is rather a fine thing to have? Would you be ashamed, wouldn't you be a little proud, if the heir of the Glamis
horror called you his friend? or if Byron's family had confided, to you only, the evil adventures of their race? Don't
be too hard on the aristocrats themselves if their heads are as weak as ours would be, and they are snobs about their
own sorrows."

"By Jove!" I cried; "and that's true enough. My own mother's family had a banshee; and, now I come to think of
it, it has comforted me in many a cold hour."

"And think," he went on, "of that stream of blood and poison that spurted from his thin lips the instant you so
much as mentioned his ancestors. Why should he show every stranger over such a Chamber of Horrors unless he is
proud of it? He doesn't conceal his wig, he doesn't conceal his blood, he doesn't conceal his family curse, he doesn't
conceal the family crimes--but--"

The little man's voice changed so suddenly, he shut his hand so sharply, and his eyes so rapidly grew rounder
and brighter like a waking owl's, that it had all the abruptness of a small explosion on the table.

"But," he ended, "he does really conceal his toilet."
It somehow completed the thrill of my fanciful nerves that at that instant the Duke appeared again silently among the glimmering trees, with his soft foot and sunset-hued hair, coming round the corner of the house in company with his librarian. Before he came within earshot, Father Brown had added quite composedly, "Why does he really hide the secret of what he does with the purple wig? Because it isn't the sort of secret we suppose."

The Duke came round the corner and resumed his seat at the head of the table with all his native dignity. The embarrassment of the librarian left him hovering on his hind legs, like a huge bear. The Duke addressed the priest with great seriousness. "Father Brown," he said, "Doctor Mull informs me that you have come here to make a request. I no longer profess an observance of the religion of my fathers; but for their sakes, and for the sake of the days when we met before, I am very willing to hear you. But I presume you would rather be heard in private."

Whatever I retain of the gentleman made me stand up. Whatever I have attained of the journalist made me stand still. Before this paralysis could pass, the priest had made a momentarily detaining motion. "If," he said, "your Grace will permit me my real petition, or if I retain any right to advise you, I would urge that as many people as possible should be present. All over this country I have found hundreds, even of my own faith and flock, whose imaginations are poisoned by the spell which I implore you to break. I wish we could have all Devonshire here to see you do it."

"To see me do what?" asked the Duke, arching his eyebrows.

"To see you take off your wig," said Father Brown.

The Duke's face did not move; but he looked at his petitioner with a glassy stare which was the most awful expression I have ever seen on a human face. I could see the librarian's great legs wavering under him like the shadows of stems in a pool; and I could not banish from my own brain the fancy that the trees all around us were filling softly in the silence with devils instead of birds.

"I spare you," said the Duke in a voice of inhuman pity. "I refuse. If I gave you the faintest hint of the load of horror I have to bear alone, you would lie shrieking at these feet of mine and begging to know no more. I will spare you the hint. You shall not spell the first letter of what is written on the altar of the Unknown God."

"I know the Unknown God," said the little priest, with an unconscious grandeur of certitude that stood up like a granite tower. "I know his name; it is Satan. The true God was made flesh and dwelt among us. And I say to you, wherever you find men ruled merely by mystery, it is the mystery of iniquity. If the devil tells you something is too fearful to look at, look at it. If he says something is too terrible to hear, hear it. If you think some truth unbearable, bear it. I entreat your Grace to end this nightmare now and here at this table."

"If I did," said the Duke in a low voice, "you and all you believe, and all by which alone you live, would be the first to shrivel and perish. You would have an instant to know the great Nothing before you died."

"The Cross of Christ be between me and harm," said Father Brown. "Take off your wig."

I was leaning over the table in ungovernable excitement; in listening to this extraordinary duel half a thought had come into my head. "Your Grace," I cried, "I call your bluff. Take off that wig or I will knock it off."

I suppose I can be prosecuted for assault, but I am very glad I did it. When he said, in the same voice of stone, "I refuse," I simply sprang on him. For three long instants he strained against me as if he had all hell to help him; but I forced his head until the hairy cap fell off it. I admit that, whilst wrestling, I shut my eyes as it fell.

I was awakened by a cry from Mull, who was also by this time at the Duke's side. His head and mine were both bending over the bald head of the wigless Duke. Then the silence was snapped by the librarian exclaiming: "What can it mean? Why, the man had nothing to hide. His ears are just like everybody else's."

"Yes," said Father Brown, "that is what he had to hide."

The priest walked straight up to him, but strangely enough did not even glance at his ears. He stared with an almost comical seriousness at his bald forehead, and pointed to a three-cornered cicatrice, long healed, but still discernible. "Mr Green, I think," he said politely, "and he did get the whole estate after all."

And now let me tell the readers of the Daily Reformer what I think the most remarkable thing in the whole affair. This transformation scene, which will seem to you as wild and purple as a Persian fairy-tale, has been (except for my technical assault) strictly legal and constitutional from its first beginnings. This man with the odd scar and the ordinary ears is not an impostor. Though (in one sense) he wears another man's wig and claims another man's ear, he has not stolen another man's coronet. He really is the one and only Duke of Exmoor. What happened was this. The old Duke really had a slight malformation of the ear, which really was more or less hereditary. He really was morbid about it; and it is likely enough that he did invoke it as a kind of curse in the violent scene (which undoubtedly happened) in which he struck Green with the decanter. But the contest ended very differently. Green pressed his claim and got the estates; the dispossessed nobleman shot himself and died without issue. After a decent interval the beautiful English Government revived the "extinct" peerage of Exmoor, and bestowed it, as is usual, on the most important person, the person who had got the property.

This man used the old feudal fables—properly, in his snobbish soul, really envied and admired them. So that thousands of poor English people trembled before a mysterious chieftain with an ancient destiny and a diadem of
evil stars--when they are really trembling before a gutsersnipe who was a pettifogger and a pawnbroker not twelve years ago. I think it very typical of the real case against our aristocracy as it is, and as it will be till God sends us braver men.

Mr Nutt put down the manuscript and called out with unusual sharpness: "Miss Barlow, please take down a letter to Mr Finn."

DEAR FINN,--You must be mad; we can't touch this. I wanted vampires and the bad old days and aristocracy hand-in-hand with superstition. They like that But you must know the Exmoors would never forgive this. And what would our people say then, I should like to know! Why, Sir Simon is one of Exmoor's greatest pals; and it would ruin that cousin of the Eyres that's standing for us at Bradford. Besides, old Soap-Suds was sick enough at not getting his peerage last year; he'd sack me by wire if I lost him it with such lunacy as this. And what about Duffey? He's doing us some rattling articles on "The Heel of the Norman." And how can he write about Normans if the man's only a solicitor? Do be reasonable.--Yours, E. NUTT.

As Miss Barlow rattled away cheerfully, he crumpled up the copy and tossed it into the waste-paper basket; but not before he had, automatically and by force of habit, altered the word "God" to the word "circumstances."

EIGHT
The Perishing of the Pendragons

FATHER BROWN was in no mood for adventures. He had lately fallen ill with over-work, and when he began to recover, his friend Flambeau had taken him on a cruise in a small yacht with Sir Cecil Fanshaw, a young Cornish squire and an enthusiast for Cornish coast scenery. But Brown was still rather weak; he was no very happy sailor; and though he was never of the sort that either grumbles or breaks down, his spirits did not rise above patience and civility. When the other two men praised the ragged violet sunset or the ragged volcanic crags, he agreed with them. When Flambeau pointed out a rock shaped like a dragon, he looked at it and thought it very like a dragon. When Fanshaw more excitedly indicated a rock that was like Merlin, he looked at it, and signified assent. When Flambeau asked whether this rocky gate of the twisted river was not the gate of Fairyland, he said "Yes." He heard the most important things and the most trivial with the same tasteless absorption. He heard that the coast was death to all but careful seamen; he also heard that the ship's cat was asleep. He heard that Fanshaw couldn't find his cigar-holder anywhere; he also heard the pilot deliver the oracle "Both eyes bright, she's all right; one eye winks, down she sinks." He heard Flambeau say to Fanshaw that no doubt this meant the pilot must keep both eyes open and be spry. And he heard Fanshaw say to Flambeau that, oddly enough, it didn't mean this: it meant that while they saw two of the coast lights, one near and the other distant, exactly side by side, they were in the right river-channel; but that if one light was hidden behind the other, they were going on the rocks. He heard Fanshaw add that his country was full of such quaint fables and idioms; it was the very home of romance; he even pitted this part of Cornwall against Devonshire, as a claimant to the laurels of Elizabethan seamanship. According to him there had been captains among these coves and islets compared with whom Drake was practically a landsman. He heard Flambeau laugh, and ask if, perhaps, the adventurous title of "Westward Ho!" only meant that all Devonshire men wished they were living in Cornwall. He heard Fanshaw say there was no need to be silly; that not only had Cornish captains been heroes, but that they were heroes still: that near that very spot there was an old admiral, now retired, who was scared by thrilling voyages full of adventures; and who had in his youth found the last group of eight Pacific Islands that was added to the chart of the world. This Cecil Fanshaw was, in person, of the kind that commonly urges such crude but pleasing enthusiasms; a very young man, light-haired, high-coloured, with an eager profile; with a boyish bravado of spirits, but an almost girlish delicacy of tint and type. The big shoulders, black brows and black mousquetaire swagger of Flambeau were a great contrast.

All these trivialities Brown heard and saw; but heard them as a tired man hears a tune in the railway wheels, or saw them as a sick man sees the pattern of his wall-paper. No one can calculate the turns of mood in convalescence: but Father Brown's depression must have had a great deal to do with his mere unfamiliarity with the sea. For as the river mouth narrowed like the neck of a bottle, and the water grew calmer and the air warmer and more earthly, he seemed to wake up and take notice like a baby. They had reached that phase just after sunset when air and water both look bright, but earth and all its growing things look almost black by comparison. About this particular evening, however, there was something exceptional. It was one of those rare atmospheres in which a smoked-glass slide seems to have been slid away from between us and Nature; so that even dark colours on that day look more gorgeous than bright colours on cloudier days. The trampled earth of the river-banks and the peaty stain in the pools did not look drab but glowing umber, and the dark woods astir in the breeze did not look, as usual, dim blue with mere depth of distance, but more like wind-tumbled masses of some vivid violet blossom. This magic clearness and intensity in the colours was further forced on Brown's slowly reviving senses by something romantic and even secret in the very form of the landscape.

The river was still well wide and deep enough for a pleasure boat so small as theirs; but the curves of the
country-side suggested that it was closing in on either hand; the woods seemed to be making broken and flying attempts at bridge-building—as if the boat were passing from the romance of a valley to the romance of a hollow and so to the supreme romance of a tunnel. Beyond this mere look of things there was little for Brown's freshening fancy to feed on; he saw no human beings, except some gipsies trailing along the river bank, with faggots and osiers cut in the forest; and one sight no longer unconventional, but in such remote parts still uncommon: a dark-haired lady, bare-headed, and paddling her own canoe. If Father Brown ever attached any importance to either of these, he certainly forgot them at the next turn of the river which brought in sight a singular object.

The water seemed to widen and split, being cloven by the dark wedge of a fish-shaped and wooded islet. With the rate at which they went, the islet seemed to swim towards them like a ship; a ship with a very high prow—or, to speak more strictly, a very high funnel. For at the extreme point nearest them stood up an odd-looking building, unlike anything they could remember or connect with any purpose. It was not specially high, but it was too high for its breadth to be called anything but a tower. Yet it appeared to be built entirely of wood, and that in a most unequal and eccentric way. Some of the planks were set crooked or crisscross at all kinds of angles, giving the whole a most patchy and puzzling appearance. There were one or two windows, which appeared to be coloured and leaded in an old-fashioned but more elaborate style. The travellers looked at it with that paradoxical feeling we have when something reminds us of something, and yet we are certain it is something very different.

Father Brown, even when he was mystified, was clever in analysing his own mystification. And he found himself reflecting that the oddity seemed to consist in a particular shape cut out in an incongruous material; as if one saw a top-hat made of tin, or a frock-coat cut out of tartan. He was sure he had seen timbers of different tints arranged like that somewhere, but never in such architectural proportions. The next moment a glimpse through the dark trees told him all he wanted to know and he laughed. Through a gap in the foliage there appeared for a moment one of those old wooden houses, faced with black beams, which are still to be found here and there in England, but which most of us see imitated in some show called "Old London" or "Shakespeare's England". It was in view only long enough for the priest to see that, however old-fashioned, it was a comfortable and well-kept country-house, with flower-beds in front of it. It had none of the piebald and crazy look of the tower that seemed made out of its refuse.

"What on earth's this?" said Flambeau, who was still staring at the tower.

Fanshaw's eyes were shining, and he spoke triumphantly. "Aha! you've not seen a place quite like this before, I fancy; that's why I've brought you here, my friend. Now you shall see whether I exaggerate about the mariners of Cornwall. This place belongs to Old Pendragon, whom we call the Admiral; though he retired before getting the rank. The spirit of Raleigh and Hawkins is a memory with the Devon folk; it's a modern fact with the Pendragons. If Queen Elizabeth were to rise from the grave and come up this river in a gilded barge, she would be received by the Admiral in a house exactly such as she was accustomed to, in every corner and casement, in every panel on the wall or plate on the table. And she would find an English Captain still talking fiercely of fresh lands to be found in little ships, as much as if she had dined with Drake."

"She'd find a rum sort of thing in the garden," said Father Brown, "which would not please her Renaissance eye. That Elizabethan domestic architecture is charming in its way; but it's against the very nature of it to break out into turrets."

"And yet," answered Fanshaw, "that's the most romantic and Elizabethan part of the business. It was built by the Pendragons in the very days of the Spanish wars; and though it's needed patching and even rebuilding for another reason, it's always been rebuilt in the old way. The story goes that the lady of Sir Peter Pendragon built it in this place and to this height, because from the top you can just see the corner where vessels turn into the river mouth; and she wished to be the first to see her husband's ship, as he sailed home from the Spanish Main."

"For what other reason," asked Father Brown, "do you mean that it has been rebuilt?"

"Oh, there's a strange story about that, too," said the young squire with relish. "You are really in a land of strange stories. King Arthur was here and Merlin and the fairies before him. The story goes that Sir Peter Pendragon, who (I fear) had some of the faults of the pirates as well as the virtues of the sailor, was bringing home three Spanish gentlemen in honourable captivity, intending to escort them to Elizabeth's court. But he was a man of flaming and tigerish temper, and coming to high words with one of them, he caught him by the throat and flung him by accident or design, into the sea. A second Spaniard, who was the brother of the first, instantly drew his sword and flew at Pendragon, and after a short but furious combat in which both got three wounds in as many minutes, Pendragon drove his blade through the other's body and the second Spaniard was accounted for. As it happened the ship had already turned into the river mouth and was close to comparatively shallow water. The third Spaniard sprang over the side of the ship, struck out for the shore, and was soon near enough to it to stand up to his waist in water. And
turning again to face the ship, and holding up both arms to Heaven--like a prophet calling plagues upon a wicked city--he called out to Pendragon in a piercing and terrible voice, that he at least was yet living, that he would go on living, that he would live for ever; and that generation after generation the house of Pendragon should never see him or his, but should know by very certain signs that he and his vengeance were alive. With that he dived under the wave, and was either drowned or swam so long under water that no hair of his head was seen afterwards."

"There's that girl in the canoe again," said Flambeau irrelevantly, for good-looking young women would call him off any topic. "She seems bothered by the queer tower just as we were."

Indeed, the black-haired young lady was letting her canoe float slowly and silently past the strange islet; and was looking intently up at the strange tower, with a strong glow of curiosity on her oval and olive face.

"Never mind girls," said Fanshaw impatiently, "there are plenty of them in the world, but not many things like the Pendragon Tower. As you may easily suppose, plenty of superstitions and scandals have followed in the track of the Spaniard's curse; and no doubt, as you would put it, any accident happening to this Cornish family would be connected with it by rural credulity. But it is perfectly true that this tower has been burnt down two or three times; and the family can't be called lucky, for more than two, I think, of the Admiral's near kin have perished by shipwreck; and one at least, to my own knowledge, on practically the same spot where Sir Peter threw the Spaniard overboard."

"What a pity!" exclaimed Flambeau. "She's going."

"When did your friend the Admiral tell you this family history?" asked Father Brown, as the girl in the canoe paddled off, without showing the least intention of extending her interest from the tower to the yacht, which Fanshaw had already caused to lie alongside the island.

"Many years ago," replied Fanshaw; "he hasn't been to sea for some time now, though he is as keen on it as ever. I believe there's a family compact or something. Well, here's the landing stage; let's come ashore and see the old boy."

They followed him on to the island, just under the tower, and Father Brown, whether from the mere touch of dry land, or the interest of something on the other bank of the river (which he stared at very hard for some seconds), seemed singularly improved in briskness. They entered a wooded avenue between two fences of thin greyish wood, such as often enclose parks or gardens, and over the top of which the dark trees tossed to and fro like black and purple plumes upon the hearse of a giant. The tower, as they left it behind, looked all the quainter, because such entrances are usually flanked by two towers; and this one looked lopsided. But for this, the avenue had the usual appearance of the entrance to a gentleman's grounds; and, being so curved that the house was now out of sight, somehow looked a much larger park than any plantation on such an island could really be. Father Brown was, perhaps, a little fanciful in his fatigue, but he almost thought the whole place must be growing larger, as things do in a nightmare. Anyhow, a mystical monotony was the only character of their march, until Fanshaw suddenly stopped, and pointed to something sticking out through the grey fence--something that looked at first rather like the imprisoned horn of some beast. Closer observation showed that it was a slightly curved blade of metal that shone faintly in the fading light.

Flambeau, who like all Frenchmen had been a soldier, bent over it and said in a startled voice: "Why, it's a sabre! I believe I know the sort, heavy and curved, but shorter than the cavalry; they used to have them in artillery and the--"

As he spoke the blade plucked itself out of the crack it had made and came down again with a more ponderous slash, splitting the fissiparous fence to the bottom with a rending noise. Then it was pulled out again, flashed above the fence some feet further along, and again split it halfway down with the first stroke; and after waggling a little to extricate itself (accompanied with curses in the darkness) split it down to the ground with a second. Then a kick of devilish energy sent the whole loosened square of thin wood flying into the pathway, and a great gap of dark coppice seemed singularly improved in briskness. They entered a wooded avenue between two fences of thin greyish wood, such as often enclose parks or gardens, and over the top of which the dark trees tossed to and fro like black

"No," it said; "I've really got to cut down this fence somehow; it's spoiling all the plants, and no one else here can do it. But I'll only carve another bit off the front door, and then come out and welcome you."

And sure enough, he heaved up his weapon once more, and, hacking twice, brought down another and similar strip of fence, making the opening about fourteen feet wide in all. Then through this larger forest gateway he came out into the evening light, with a chip of grey wood sticking to his sword-blade.

He momentarily fulfilled all Fanshaw's fable of an old piratical Admiral; though the details seemed afterwards to decompose into accidents. For instance, he wore a broad-brimmed hat as protection against the sun; but the front flap of it was turned up straight to the sky, and the two corners pulled down lower than the ears, so that it stood
crossed his forehead in a crescent like the old cocked hat worn by Nelson. He wore an ordinary dark-blue jacket, with nothing special about the buttons, but the combination of it with white linen trousers somehow had a sailorish look. He was tall and loose, and walked with a sort of swagger, which was not a sailor's roll, and yet somehow suggested it; and he held in his hand a short sabre which was like a navy cutlass, but about twice as big. Under the bridge of the hat his eagle face looked eager, all the more because it was not only clean-shaven, but without eyebrows. It seemed almost as if all the hair had come off his face from his thrusting it through a throng of elements. His eyes were prominent and piercing. His colour was curiously attractive, while partly tropical; it reminded one vaguely of a blood-orange. That is, that while it was ruddy and sanguine, there was a yellow in it that was in no way sickly, but seemed rather to glow like gold apples of the Hesperides—Father Brown thought he had never seen a figure so expressive of all the romances about the countries of the Sun.

When Fanshaw had presented his two friends to their host he fell again into a tone of rallying the latter about his wreck age of the fence and his apparent rage of profanity. The Admiral pooh-poohed it at first as a piece of necessary but annoying garden work; but at length the ring of real energy came back into his laughter, and he cried with a mixture of impatience and good humour:

"Well, perhaps I do go at it a bit rabidly, and feel a kind of pleasure in smashing anything. So would you if your only pleasure was in cruising about to find some new Cannibal Islands, and you had to stick on this muddy little rockery in a sort of rustic pond. When I remember how I've cut down a mile and a half of green poisonous jungle with an old cutlass half as sharp as this; and then remember I must stop here and chop this matchwood, because of some confounded old bargain scribbled in a family Bible, why, I--"

He swung up the heavy steel again; and this time sundered the wall of wood from top to bottom at one stroke.

"I feel like that," he said laughing, but furiously flinging the sword some yards down the path, "and now let's go up to the house; you must have some dinner."

The semicircle of lawn in front of the house was varied by three circular garden beds, one of red tulips, a second of yellow tulips, and the third of some white, waxen-looking blossoms that the visitors did not know and presumed to be exotic. A heavy, hairy and rather sullen-looking gardener was hanging up a heavy coil of garden hose. The corners of the expiring sunset which seemed to cling about the corners of the house gave glimpses here and there of the colours of remoter flowerbeds; and in a treeless space on one side of the house opening upon the river stood a tall brass tripod on which was tilted a big brass telescope. Just outside the steps of the porch stood a little painted green garden table, as if someone had just had tea there. The entrance was flanked with two of those half-featured lumps of stone with holes for eyes that are said to be South Sea idols; and on the brown oak beam across the doorway were some confused carvings that looked almost as barbaric.

As they passed indoors, the little cleric hopped suddenly on to the table, and standing on it peered unaffectedly through his spectacles at the mouldings in the oak. Admiral Pendragon looked very much astonished, though not particularly annoyed; while Fanshaw was so amused with what looked like a performing pigmy on his little stand, that he could not control his laughter. But Father Brown was not likely to notice either the laughter or the astonishment.

He was gazing at three carved symbols, which, though very worn and obscure, seemed still to convey some sense to him. The first seemed to be the outline of some tower or other building, crowned with what looked like curly-pointed ribbons. The second was clearer: an old Elizabethan galley with decorative waves beneath it, but interrupted in the middle by a curious jagged rock, which was either a fault in the wood or some conventional representation of the water coming in. The third represented the upper half of a human figure, ending in an escalloped line like the waves; the face was rubbed and featureless, and both arms were held very stiffly up in the air.

"Well," muttered Father Brown, blinking, "here is the legend of the Spaniard plain enough. Here he is holding up his arms and cursing in the sea; and here are the two curses: the wrecked ship and the burning of Pendragon Tower."

Pendragon shook his head with a kind of venerable amusement. "And how many other things might it not be?" he said. "Don't you know that that sort of half-man, like a half-lion or half-stag, is quite common in heraldry? Might not that line through the ship be one of those parti-per-pale lines, indented, I think they call it? And though the third thing isn't so very heraldic, it would be more heraldic to suppose it a tower crowned with laurel than with fire; and it looks just as like it."

"But it seems rather odd," said Flambeau, "that it should exactly confirm the old legend."

"Ah," replied the sceptical traveller, "but you don't know how much of the old legend may have been made up from the old figures. Besides, it isn't the only old legend. Fanshaw, here, who is fond of such things, will tell you there are other versions of the tale, and much more horrible ones. One story credits my unfortunate ancestor with having had the Spaniard cut in two; and that will fit the pretty picture also. Another obligingly credits our family with the possession of a tower full of snakes and explains those little, wriggly things in that way. And a third theory..."
supposes the crooked line on the ship to be a conventionalized thunderbolt; but that alone, if seriously examined, would show what a very little way these unhappy coincidences really go."

"Why, how do you mean?" asked Fanshaw.

"It so happens," replied his host coolly, "that there was no thunder and lightning at all in the two or three shipwrecks I know of in our family."

"Oh!" said Father Brown, and jumped down from the little table.

There was another silence in which they heard the continuous murmur of the river; then Fanshaw said, in a doubtful and perhaps disappointed tone: "Then you don't think there is anything in the tales of the tower in flames?"

"There are the tales, of course," said the Admiral, shrugging his shoulders; "and some of them, I don't deny, on evidence as decent as one ever gets for such things. Someone saw a blaze hereabout, don't you know, as he walked home through a wood; someone keeping sheep on the uplands inland thought he saw a flame hovering over Pendragon Tower. Well, a damp dab of mud like this confounded island seems the last place where one would think of fires."

"What is that fire over there?" asked Father Brown with a gentle suddenness, pointing to the woods on the left river-bank. They were all thrown a little off their balance, and the more fanciful Fanshaw had even some difficulty in recovering his, as they saw a long, thin stream of blue smoke ascending silently into the end of the evening light.

Then Pendragon broke into a scornful laugh again. "Gipsies!" he said; "they've been camping about here for about a week. Gentlemen, you want your dinner," and he turned as if to enter the house.

But the antiquarian superstition in Fanshaw was still quivering, and he said hastily: "But, Admiral, what's that hissing noise quite near the island? It's very like fire."

"It's more like what it is," said the Admiral, laughing as he led the way; "it's only some canoe going by."

Almost as he spoke, the butler, a lean man in black, with very black hair and a very long, yellow face, appeared in the doorway and told him that dinner was served.

The dining-room was as nautical as the cabin of a ship; but its note was rather that of the modern than the Elizabethan captain. There were, indeed, three antiquated cutlasses in a trophy over the fireplace, and one brown sixteenth-century map with Tritons and little ships dotted about a curly sea. But such things were less prominent on the white panelling than some cases of quaint-coloured South American birds, very scientifically stuffed, fantastic shells from the Pacific, and several instruments so rude and queer in shape that savages might have used them either to kill their enemies or to cook them. But the alien colour culminated in the fact that, besides the butler, the Admiral's only servants were two negroes, somewhat quaintly clad in tight uniforms of yellow. The priest's instinctive trick of analysing his own impressions told him that the colour and the little neat coat-tails of these bipeds had suggested the word "Canary," and so by a mere pun connected them with southward travel. Towards the end of the dinner they took their yellow clothes and black faces out of the room, leaving only the black clothes and yellow face of the butler.

"I'm rather sorry you take this so lightly," said Fanshaw to the host; "for the truth is, I've brought these friends of mine with the idea of their helping you, as they know a good deal of these things. Don't you really believe in the family story at all?"

"I don't believe in anything," answered Pendragon very briskly, with a bright eye cocked at a red tropical bird. "I'm a man of science."

Rather to Flambeau's surprise, his clerical friend, who seemed to have entirely woken up, took up the digression and talked natural history with his host with a flow of words and much unexpected information, until the dessert and decanters were set down and the last of the servants vanished. Then he said, without altering his tone.

"Please don't think me impertinent, Admiral Pendragon. I don't ask for curiosity, but really for my guidance and your convenience. Have I made a bad shot if I guess you don't want these old things talked of before your butler?"

The Admiral lifted the hairless arches over his eyes and exclaimed: "Well, I don't know where you got it, but the truth is I can't stand the fellow, though I've no excuse for discharging a family servant. Fanshaw, with his fairy tales, would say my blood moved against men with that black, Spanish-looking hair."

Flambeau struck the table with his heavy fist. "By Jove!" he cried; "and so had that girl!"

"I hope it'll all end tonight," continued the Admiral, "when my nephew comes back safe from his ship. You looked surprised. You won't understand, I suppose, unless I tell you the story. You see, my father had two sons; I remained a bachelor, but my elder brother married, and had a son who became a sailor like all the rest of us, and will inherit the proper estate. Well, my father was a strange man; he somehow combined Fanshaw's superstition with a good deal of my scepticism—they were always fighting in him; and after my first voyages, he developed a notion which he thought somehow would settle finally whether the curse was truth or trash. If all the Pendragons sailed about anyhow, he thought there would be too much chance of natural catastrophes to prove anything. But if we went to sea one at a time in strict order of succession to the property, he thought it might show whether any connected fate
followed the family as a family. It was a silly notion, I think, and I quarrelled with my father pretty heartily; for I was an ambitious man and was left to the last, coming, by succession, after my own nephew."

"And your father and brother," said the priest, very gently, "died at sea, I fear."

"Yes," groaned the Admiral; "by one of those brutal accidents on which are built all the lying mythologies of mankind, they were both shipwrecked. My father, coming up this coast out of the Atlantic, was washed up on these Cornish rocks. My brother's ship was sunk, no one knows where, on the voyage home from Tasmania. His body was never found. I tell you it was from perfectly natural mishap; lots of other people besides Pendragons were drowned; and both disasters are discussed in a normal way by navigators. But, of course, it set this forest of superstition on fire; and men saw the flaming tower everywhere. That's why I say it will be all right when Walter returns. The girl he's engaged to was coming today; but I was so afraid of some chance delay frightening her that I wired her not to come till she heard from me. But he's practically sure to be here some time tonight, and then it'll all end in smoke--tobacco smoke. We'll crack that old lie when we crack a bottle of this wine."

"Very good wine," said Father Brown, gravely lifting his glass, "but, as you see, a very bad wine-bibber. I most sincerely beg your pardon": for he had spilt a small spot of wine on the table-cloth. He drank and put down the glass with a composed face; but his hand had started at the exact moment when he became conscious of a face looking in through the garden window just behind the Admiral-- the face of a woman, swarthy, with southern hair and eyes, and young, but like a mask of tragedy.

After a pause the priest spoke again in his mild manner. "Admiral," he said, "will you do me a favour? Let me, and my friends if they like, stop in that tower of yours just for tonight? Do you know that in my business you're an exorcist almost before anything else?"

Pendragon sprang to his feet and paced swiftly to and fro across the window, from which the face had instantly vanished. "I tell you there is nothing in it," he cried, with ringing violence. "There is one thing I know about this matter. You may call me an atheist. I am an atheist." Here he swung round and fixed Father Brown with a face of frightful concentration. "This business is perfectly natural. There is no curse in it at all."

Father Brown smiled. "In that case," he said, "there can't be any objection to my sleeping in your delightful summer-house."

"The idea is utterly ridiculous," replied the Admiral, beating a tattoo on the back of his chair.

"Please forgive me for everything," said Brown in his most sympathetic tone, "including spilling the wine. But it seems to me you are not quite so easy about the flaming tower as you try to be."

Admiral Pendragon sat down again as abruptly as he had risen; but he sat quite still, and when he spoke again it was in a lower voice. "You do it at your own peril," he said; "but wouldn't you be an atheist to keep sane in all this devilry?"

Some three hours afterwards Fanshaw, Flambeau and the priest were still dawdling about the garden in the dark; and it began to dawn on the other two that Father Brown had no intention of going to bed either in the tower or the house.

"I think the lawn wants weeding," said he dreamily. "If I could find a spud or something I'd do it myself."

They followed him, laughing and half remonstrating; but he replied with the utmost solemnity, explaining to them, in a maddening little sermon, that one can always find some small occupation that is helpful to others. He did not find a spud; but he found an old broom made of twigs, with which he began energetically to brush the fallen leaves off the grass.

"Always some little thing to be done," he said with idiotic cheerfulness; "as George Herbert says: 'Who sweeps an Admiral's garden in Cornwall as for Thy laws makes that and the action fine.' And now," he added, suddenly slinging the broom away, "Let's go and water the flowers."

With the same mixed emotions they watched him uncoil some considerable lengths of the large garden hose, saying with an air of wistful discrimination: "The red tulips before the yellow, I think. Look a bit dry, don't you think?"

He turned the little tap on the instrument, and the water shot out straight and solid as a long rod of steel.

"Look out, Samson," cried Flambeau; "why, you've cut off the tulip's head."

Father Brown stood ruefully contemplating the decapitated plant.

"Mine does seem to be a rather kill or cure sort of watering," he admitted, scratching his head. "I suppose it's a pity I didn't find the spud. You should have seen me with the spud! Talking of tools, you've got that swordstick, Flambeau, you always carry? That's right; and Sir Cecil could have that sword the Admiral threw away by the fence here. How grey everything looks!"

"The mist's rising from the river," said the staring Flambeau.

Almost as he spoke the huge figure of the hairy gardener appeared on a higher ridge of the trenched and terraced lawn, hailing them with a brandished rake and a horribly bellowing voice. "Put down that hose," he shouted; "put
down that hose and go to your--"

"I am fearfully clumsy," replied the reverend gentleman weakly; "do you know, I upset some wine at dinner." He made a wavering half-turn of apology towards the gardener, with the hose still spouting in his hand. The gardener caught the cold crash of the water full in his face like the crash of a cannon-ball; staggered, slipped and went sprawling with his boots in the air.

"How very dreadful!" said Father Brown, looking round in a sort of wonder. "Why, I've hit a man!"

He stood with his head forward for a moment as if looking or listening; and then set off at a trot towards the tower, still trailing the hose behind him. The tower was quite close, but its outline was curiously dim.

"Your river mist," he said, "has a rum smell."

"By the Lord it has," cried Fanshaw, who was very white. "But you can't mean--"

"I mean," said Father Brown, "that one of the Admiral's scientific predictions is coming true tonight. This story is going to end in smoke."

As he spoke a most beautiful rose-red light seemed to burst into blossom like a gigantic rose; but accompanied with a crackling and rattling noise that was like the laughter of devils.

"My God! what is this?" cried Sir Cecil Fanshaw.

"The sign of the flaming tower," said Father Brown, and sent the driving water from his hose into the heart of the red patch.

"Lucky we hadn't gone to bed!" ejaculated Fanshaw. "I suppose it can't spread to the house."

"You may remember," said the priest quietly, "that the wooden fence that might have carried it was cut away."

Flambeau turned electrified eyes upon his friend, but Fanshaw only said rather absently: "Well, nobody can be killed, anyhow."

"This is rather a curious kind of tower," observed Father Brown, "when it takes to killing people, it always kills people who are somewhere else."

At the same instant the monstrous figure of the gardener with the streaming beard stood again on the green ridge against the sky, waving others to come on; but now waving not a rake but a cutlass. Behind him came the two negroes, also with the old crooked cutlasses out of the trophy. But in the blood-red glare, with their black faces and yellow figures, they looked like devils carrying instruments of torture. In the dim garden behind them a distant voice was heard calling out brief directions. When the priest heard the voice, a terrible change came over his countenance.

But he remained composed; and never took his eye off the patch of flame which had begun by spreading, but now seemed to shrink a little as it hissed under the torch of the long silver spear of water. He kept his finger along the nozzle of the pipe to ensure the aim, and attended to no other business, knowing only by the noise and that semi-conscious corner of the eye, the exciting incidents that began to tumble themselves about the island garden. He gave two brief directions to his friends. One was: "Knock these fellows down somehow and tie them up, whoever they are; there's rope down by those faggots. They want to take away my nice hose." The other was: "As soon as you get a chance, call out to that canoeing girl; she's over on the bank with the gipsies. Ask her if they could get some buckets across and fill them from the river." Then he closed his mouth and continued to water the new red flower as ruthlessly as he had watered the red tulip.

He never turned his head to look at the strange fight that followed between the foes and friends of the mysterious fire. He almost felt the island shake when Flambeau collided with the huge gardener; he merely imagined how it would whirl round them as they wrestled. He heard the crashing fall; and his friend's gasp of triumph as he dashed on to the first negro; and the cries of both the blacks as Flambeau and Fanshaw bound them. Flambeau's enormous strength more than redressed the odds in the fight, especially as the fourth man still hovered near the house, only a shadow and a voice. He heard also the water broken by the paddles of a canoe; the girl's voice giving orders, the voices of gipsies answering and coming nearer, the plumping and sucking noise of empty buckets plunged into a full stream; and finally the sound of many feet around the fire. But all this was less to him than the fact that the red rent, which had lately once more increased, had once more slightly diminished.

Then came a cry that very nearly made him turn his head. Flambeau and Fanshaw, now reinforced by some of the gipsies, had rushed after the mysterious man by the house; and he heard from the other end of the garden the Frenchman's cry of horror and astonishment. It was echoed by a howl not to be called human, as the being broke from their hold and ran along the garden. Three times at least it raced round the whole island, in a way that was as horrible as the chase of a lunatic, both in the cries of the pursued and the ropes carried by the pursuers; but was more horrible still, because it somehow suggested one of the chasing games of children in a garden. Then, finding them closing in on every side, the figure sprang upon one of the higher river banks and disappeared with a splash into the dark and driving river.

"You can do no more, I fear," said Brown in a voice cold with pain. "He has been washed down to the rocks by now, where he has sent so many others. He knew the use of a family legend."
"Oh, don't talk in these parables," cried Flambeau impatiently. "Can't you put it simply in words of one syllable?"

"Yes," answered Brown, with his eye on the hose. "Both eyes bright, she's all right; one eye blinks, down she sinks."

The fire hissed and shrieked more and more, like a strangled thing, as it grew narrower and narrower under the flood from the pipe and buckets, but Father Brown still kept his eye on it as he went on speaking:

"I thought of asking this young lady, if it were morning yet, to look through that telescope at the river mouth and the river. She might have seen something to interest her: the sign of the ship, or Mr Walter Pendragon coming home, and perhaps even the sign of the half-man, for though he is certainly safe by now, he may very well have waded ashore. He has been within a shave of another shipwreck; and would never have escaped it, if the lady hadn't had the sense to suspect the old Admiral's telegram and come down to watch him. Don't let's talk about the old Admiral. Don't let's talk about anything. It's enough to say that whenever this tower, with its pitch and resin-wood, really caught fire, the spark on the horizon always looked like the twin light to the coast light-house."

"And that," said Flambeau, "is how the father and brother died. The wicked uncle of the legends very nearly got his estate after all."

Father Brown did not answer; indeed, he did not speak again, save for civilities, till they were all safe round a cigar-box in the cabin of the yacht. He saw that the frustrated fire was extinguished; and then refused to linger, though he actually heard young Pendragon, escorted by an enthusiastic crowd, come tramping up the river bank; and might (had he been moved by romantic curiosities) have received the combined thanks of the man from the ship and the girl from the canoe. But his fatigue had fallen on him once more, and he only started once, when Flambeau abruptly told him he had dropped cigar-ash on his trousers.

"That's no cigar-ash," he said rather wearily. "That's from the fire, but you don't think so because you're all smoking cigars. That's just the way I got my first faint suspicion about the chart."

"Do you mean Pendragon's chart of his Pacific Islands?" asked Fanshaw.

"You thought it was a chart of the Pacific Islands," answered Brown. "Put a feather with a fossil and a bit of coral and everyone will think it's a specimen. Put the same feather with a ribbon and an artificial flower and everyone will think it's for a lady's hat. Put the same feather with an ink-bottle, a book and a stack of writing-paper, and most men will swear they've seen a quill pen. So you saw that map among tropic birds and shells and thought it was a map of Pacific Islands. It was the map of this river."

"But how do you know?" asked Fanshaw.

"I saw the rock you thought was like a dragon, and the one like Merlin, and--"

"You seem to have noticed a lot as we came in," cried Fanshaw. "We thought you were rather abstracted."

"I was sea-sick," said Father Brown simply. "I felt simply horrible. But feeling horrible has nothing to do with not seeing things." And he closed his eyes.

"Do you think most men would have seen that?" asked Flambeau. He received no answer: Father Brown was asleep.

NINE

The God of the Gongs

IT was one of those chilly and empty afternoons in early winter, when the daylight is silver rather than gold and pewter rather than silver. If it was dreary in a hundred bleak offices and yawning drawing-rooms, it was drearier still along the edges of the flat Essex coast, where the monotony was the more inhuman for being broken at very long intervals by a lamp-post that looked less civilized than a tree, or a tree that looked more ugly than a lamp-post. A light fall of snow had half-melted into a few strips, also looking leaden rather than silver, when it had been fixed again by the seal of frost; no fresh snow had fallen, but a ribbon of the old snow ran along the very margin of the coast, so as to parallel the pale ribbon of the foam.

The line of the sea looked frozen in the very vividness of its violet-blue, like the vein of a frozen finger. For miles and miles, forward and back, there was no breathing soul, save two pedestrians, walking at a brisk pace, though one had much longer legs and took much longer strides than the other.

It did not seem a very appropriate place or time for a holiday, but Father Brown had few holidays, and had to take them when he could, and he always preferred, if possible, to take them in company with his old friend Flambeau, ex-criminal and ex-detective. The priest had had a fancy for visiting his old parish at Cobhole, and was going north-eastward along the coast.

After walking a mile or two farther, they found that the shore was beginning to be formally embanked, so as to form something like a parade; the ugly lamp-posts became less few and far between and more ornamental, though quite equally ugly. Half a mile farther on Father Brown was puzzled first by little labyrinths of flowerless flower-pots, covered with the low, flat, quiet-coloured plants that look less like a garden than a tessellated pavement,
between weak curly paths studded with seats with curly backs. He faintly sniffed the atmosphere of a certain sort of seaside town that he did not specially care about, and, looking ahead along the parade by the sea, he saw something that put the matter beyond a doubt. In the grey distance the big bandstand of a watering-place stood up like a giant mushroom with six legs.

"I suppose," said Father Brown, turning up his coat-collar and drawing a woollen scarf rather closer round his neck, "that we are approaching a pleasure resort."

"I fear," answered Flambeau, "a pleasure resort to which few people just now have the pleasure of resorting. They try to revive these places in the winter, but it never succeeds except with Brighton and the old ones. This must be Seawood, I think-- Lord Pooley's experiment; he had the Sicilian Singers down at Christmas, and there's talk about holding one of the great glove-fights here. But they'll have to chuck the rotten place into the sea; it's as dreary as a lost railway-carriage."

They had come under the big bandstand, and the priest was looking up at it with a curiosity that had something rather odd about it, his head a little on one side, like a bird's. It was the conventional, rather tawdry kind of erection for its purpose: a flattened dome or canopy, gilt here and there, and lifted on six slender pillars of painted wood, the whole being raised about five feet above the parade on a round wooden platform like a drum. But there was something fantastic about the snow combined with something artificial about the gold that haunted Flambeau as well as his friend with some association he could not capture, but which he knew was at once artistic and alien.

"I've got it," he said at last. "It's Japanese. It's like those fanciful Japanese prints, where the snow on the mountain looks like sugar, and the gilt on the pagodas is like gilt on gingerbread. It looks just like a little pagan temple."

"Yes," said Father Brown. "Let's have a look at the god." And with an agility hardly to be expected of him, he hopped up on to the raised platform.

"Oh, very well," said Flambeau, laughing; and the next instant his own towering figure was visible on that quaint elevation.

Slight as was the difference of height, it gave in those level wastes a sense of seeing yet farther and farther across land and sea. Inland the little wintry gardens faded into a confused grey copse; beyond that, in the distance, were long low barns of a lonely farmhouse, and beyond that nothing but the long East Anglian plains. Seawards there was no sail or sign of life save a few seagulls: and even they looked like the last snowflakes, and seemed to float rather than fly.

Flambeau turned abruptly at an exclamation behind him. It seemed to come from lower down than might have been expected, and to be addressed to his heels rather than his head. He instantly held out his hand, but he could hardly help laughing at what he saw. For some reason or other the platform had given way under Father Brown, and the unfortunate little man had dropped through to the level of the parade. He was just tall enough, or short enough, for his head alone to stick out of the hole in the broken wood, looking like St John the Baptist's head on a charger. The face wore a disconcerted expression, as did, perhaps, that of St John the Baptist.

In a moment he began to laugh a little. "This wood must be rotten," said Flambeau. "Though it seems odd it should bear me, and you go through the weak place. Let me help you out."

But the little priest was looking rather curiously at the corners and edges of the wood alleged to be rotten, and there was a sort of trouble on his brow.

"Come along," cried Flambeau impatiently, still with his big brown hand extended. "Don't you want to get out?"

The priest was holding a splinter of the broken wood between his finger and thumb, and did not immediately reply. At last he said thoughtfully: "Want to get out? Why, no. I rather think I want to get in." And he dived into the darkness under the wooden floor so abruptly as to knock off his big curved clerical hat and leave it lying on the boards above, without any clerical head in it.

Flambeau looked once more inland and out to sea, and once more could see nothing but seas as wintry as the snow, and snows as level as the sea.

There came a scurrying noise behind him, and the little priest came scrambling out of the hole faster than he had fallen in. His face was no longer disconcerted, but rather resolute, and, perhaps only through the reflections of the snow, a trifle paler than usual.

"Well?" asked his tall friend. "Have you found the god of the temple?"

"No," answered Father Brown. "I have found what was sometimes more important. The Sacrifice."

"What the devil do you mean?" cried Flambeau, quite alarmed.

Father Brown did not answer. He was staring, with a knot in his forehead, at the landscape; and he suddenly pointed at it. "What's that house over there?" he asked.

Following his finger, Flambeau saw for the first time the corners of a building nearer than the farmhouse, but screened for the most part with a fringe of trees. It was not a large building, and stood well back from the shore--,
but a glint of ornament on it suggested that it was part of the same watering-place scheme of decoration as the banstand, the little gardens and the curly-backed iron seats.

Father Brown jumped off the banstand, his friend following; and as they walked in the direction indicated the trees fell away to right and left, and they saw a small, rather flashy hotel, such as is common in resorts--the hotel of the Saloon Bar rather than the Bar Parlour. Almost the whole frontage was of gilt plaster and figured glass, and between that grey seascape and the grey, witch-like trees, its gimcrack quality had something spectral in its melancholy. They both felt vaguely that if any food or drink were offered at such a hostelry, it would be the paste-board ham and empty mug of the pantomime.

In this, however, they were not altogether confirmed. As they drew nearer and nearer to the place they saw in front of the buffet, which was apparently closed, one of the iron garden-seats with curly backs that had adorned the gardens, but much longer, running almost the whole length of the frontage. Presumably, it was placed so that visitors might sit there and look at the sea, but one hardly expected to find anyone doing it in such weather.

Nevertheless, just in front of the extreme end of the iron seat stood a small round restaurant table, and on this stood a small bottle of Chablis and a plate of almonds and raisins. Behind the table and on the seat sat a dark-haired young man, bareheaded, and gazing at the sea in a state of almost astonishing immobility.

But though he might have been a waxwork when they were within four yards of him, he jumped up like a jack-in-the-box when they came within three, and said in a deferential, though not undignified, manner: "Will you step inside, gentlemen? I have no staff at present, but I can get you anything simple myself."

"Much obliged," said Flambeau. "So you are the proprietor?"

"Yes," said the dark man, dropping back a little into his motionless manner. "My waiters are all Italians, you see, and I thought it only fair they should see their countryman beat the black, if he really can do it. You know the great fight between Malvoli and Nigger Ned is coming off after all?"

"I'm afraid we can't wait to trouble your hospitality seriously," said Father Brown. "But my friend would be glad of a glass of sherry, I'm sure, to keep out the cold and drink success to the Latin champion."

Flambeau did not understand the sherry, but he did not object to it in the least. He could only say amiably: "Oh, thank you very much."

"Sherry, sir--certainly," said their host, turning to his hostel. "Excuse me if I detain you a few minutes. As I told you, I have no staff--" And he went towards the black windows of his shuttered and unlighted inn.

"Oh, it doesn't really matter," began Flambeau, but the man turned to reassure him.

"I have the keys," he said. "I could find my way in the dark."

"I didn't mean--" began Father Brown.

He was interrupted by a bellowing human voice that came out of the bowels of the uninhabited hotel. It thundered some foreign name loudly but inaudibly, and the hotel proprietor moved more sharply towards it than he had done for Flambeau's sherry. As instant evidence proved, the proprietor had told, then and after, nothing but the literal truth. But both Flambeau and Father Brown have often confessed that, in all their (often outrageous) adventures, nothing had so chilled their blood as that voice of an ogre, sounding suddenly out of a silent and empty inn.

"My cook!" cried the proprietor hastily. "I had forgotten my cook. He will be starting presently. Sherry, sir?"

And, sure enough, there appeared in the doorway a big white bulk with white cap and white apron, as befits a cook, but with the needless emphasis of a black face. Flambeau had often heard that negroes made good cooks. But somehow something in the contrast of colour and caste increased his surprise that the hotel proprietor should answer the call of the cook, and not the cook the call of the proprietor. But he reflected that head cooks are proverbially arrogant; and, besides, the host had come back with the sherry, and that was the great thing.

"I rather wonder," said Father Brown, "that there are so few people about the beach, when this big fight is coming on after all. We only met one man for miles."

The hotel proprietor shrugged his shoulders. "They come from the other end of the town, you see--from the station, three miles from here. They are only interested in the sport, and will stop in hotels for the night only. After all, it is hardly weather for basking on the shore."

"Or on the seat," said Flambeau, and pointed to the little table.

"I have to keep a look-out," said the man with the motionless face. He was a quiet, well-featured fellow, rather sallow; his dark clothes had nothing distinctive about them, except that his black necktie was worn rather high, like a stock, and secured by a gold pin with some grotesque head to it. Nor was there anything notable in the face, except something that was probably a mere nervous trick--a habit of opening one eye more narrowly than the other, giving the impression that the other was larger, or was, perhaps, artificial.

The silence that ensued was broken by their host saying quietly: "Whereabouts did you meet the one man on your march?"
"Curiously enough," answered the priest, "close by here-- just by that bandstand."

Flambeau, who had sat on the long iron seat to finish his sherry, put it down and rose to his feet, staring at his friend in amazement. He opened his mouth to speak, and then shut it again.

"Curious," said the dark-haired man thoughtfully. "What was he like?"

"It was rather dark when I saw him," began Father Brown, "but he was--"

As has been said, the hotel-keeper can be proved to have told the precise truth. His phrase that the cook was starting presently was fulfilled to the letter, for the cook came out, pulling his gloves on, even as they spoke.

But he was a very different figure from the confused mass of white and black that had appeared for an instant in the doorway. He was buttoned and buckled up to his bursting eyeballs in the most brilliant fashion. A tall black hat was tilted on his broad black head-- a hat of the sort that the French wit has compared to eight mirrors. But somehow the black man was like the black hat. He also was black, and yet his glossy skin flung back the light at eight angles or more. It is needless to say that he wore white spats and a white slip inside his waistcoat. The red flower stood up in his buttonhole aggressively, as if it had suddenly grown there. And in the way he carried his cane in one hand and his cigar in the other there was a certain attitude-- an attitude we must always remember when we talk of racial prejudices: something innocent and insolent--the cake walk.

"Sometimes," said Flambeau, looking after him, "I'm not surprised that they Lynch them."

"I am never surprised," said Father Brown, "at any work of hell. But as I was saying," he resumed, as the negro, still ostentatiously pulling on his yellow gloves, betook himself briskly towards the watering-place, a queer music-hall figure against that grey and frosty scene--"as I was saying, I couldn't describe the man very minutely, but he had a flourish and old-fashioned whiskers and moustachios, dark or dyed, as in the pictures of foreign financiers, round his neck was wrapped a long purple scarf that thrashed out in the wind as he walked. It was fixed at the throat rather in the way that nurses fix children's comforters with a safety-pin. Only this," added the priest, gazing placidly out to sea, "was not a safety-pin."

The man sitting on the long iron bench was also gazing placidly out to sea. Now he was once more in repose. Flambeau felt quite certain that one of his eyes was naturally larger than the other. Both were now well opened, and he could almost fancy the left eye grew larger as he gazed.

"It was a very long gold pin, and had the carved head of a monkey or some such thing," continued the cleric; "and it was fixed in a rather odd way--he wore pince-nez and a broad black--"

The motionless man continued to gaze at the sea, and the eyes in his head might have belonged to two different men. Then he made a movement of blinding swiftness.

Father Brown had his back to him, and in that flash might have fallen dead on his face. Flambeau had no weapon, but his large brown hands were resting on the end of the long iron seat. His shoulders abruptly altered their shape, and he heaved the whole huge thing high over his head, like a headsmen's axe about to fall. The mere height of the thing, as he held it vertical, looked like a long iron ladder by which he was inviting men to climb towards the stars. But the long shadow, in the level evening light, looked like a giant brandishing the Eiffel Tower. It was the shock of that shadow, before the shock of the iron crash, that made the stranger quail and dodge, and then dart into his inn, leaving the flat and shining dagger he had dropped exactly where it had fallen.

"We must get away from here instantly," cried Flambeau, flinging the huge seat away with furious indifference on the beach. He caught the little priest by the elbow and ran him down a grey perspective of barren back garden, at the end of which there was a closed back garden door. Flambeau bent over it an instant in violent silence, and then said: "The door is locked."

As he spoke a black feather from one of the ornamental firs fell, brushing the brim of his hat. It startled him more than the small and distant detonation that had come just before. Then came another distant detonation, and the door he was trying to open shook under the bullet buried in it. Flambeau's shoulders again filled out and altered suddenly. Three hinges and a lock burst at the same instant, and he went out into the empty path behind, carrying the great garden door with him, as Samson carried the gates of Gaza.

Then he flung the garden door over the garden wall, just as a third shot picked up a spurt of snow and dust behind his heel. Without ceremony he snatched up the little priest, slung him astraddle on his shoulders, and went racing towards Seawood as fast as his long legs could carry him. It was not until nearly two miles farther on that he set his small companion down. It had hardly been a dignified escape, in spite of the classic model of Anchises, but Father Brown's face only wore a broad grin.

"Well," said Flambeau, after an impatient silence, as they resumed their more conventional tramp through the streets on the edge of the town, where no outrage need be feared, "I don't know what all this means, but I take it I may trust my own eyes that you never met the man you have so accurately described."

"I did meet him in a way," Brown said, biting his finger rather nervously--"I did really. And it was too dark to see him properly, because it was under that bandstand affair. But I'm afraid I didn't describe him so very accurately.
after all, for his pince-nez was broken under him, and the long gold pin wasn't stuck through his purple scarf but through his heart."

"And I suppose," said the other in a lower voice, "that glass-eyed guy had something to do with it."

"I had hoped he had only a little," answered Brown in a rather troubled voice, "and I may have been wrong in what I did. I acted on impulse. But I fear this business has deep roots and dark."

They walked on through some streets in silence. The yellow lamps were beginning to be lit in the cold blue twilight, and they were evidently approaching the more central parts of the town. Highly coloured bills announcing the glove-fight between Nigger Ned and Malvoli were slapped about the walls.

"Well," said Flambeau, "I never murdered anyone, even in my criminal days, but I can almost sympathize with anyone doing it in such a dreary place. Of all God-forsaken dustbins of Nature, I think the most heart-breaking are places like that bandstand, that were meant to be festive and are forlorn. I can fancy a morbid man feeling he must kill his rival in the solitude and irony of such a scene. I remember once taking a tramp in your glorious Surrey hills, thinking of nothing but gorse and skylarks, when I came out on a vast circle of land, and over me lifted a vast, voiceless structure, tier above tier of seats, as huge as a Roman amphitheatre and as empty as a new letter-rack. A bird sailed in heaven over it. It was the Grand Stand at Epsom. And I felt that no one would ever be happy there again."

"It's odd you should mention Epsom," said the priest. "Do you remember what was called the Sutton Mystery, because two suspected men--ice-cream men, I think--happened to live at Sutton? They were eventually released. A man was found strangled, it was said, on the Downs round that part. As a fact, I know (from an Irish policeman who is a friend of mine) that he was found close up to the Epsom Grand Stand--in fact, only hidden by one of the lower doors being pushed back."

"That is queer," assented Flambeau. "But it rather confirms my view that such pleasure places look awfully lonely out of season, or the man wouldn't have been murdered there."

"I'm not so sure he--" began Brown, and stopped.

"Not so sure he was murdered?" queried his companion.

"Not so sure he was murdered out of the season," answered the little priest, with simplicity. "Don't you think there's something rather tricky about this solitude, Flambeau? Do you feel sure a wise murderer would always want the spot to be lonely? It's very, very seldom a man is quite alone. And, short of that, the more alone he is, the more certain he is to be seen. No; I think there must be some other--Why, here we are at the Pavilion or Palace, or whatever they call it."

They had emerged on a small square, brilliantly lighted, of which the principal building was gay with gilding, gaudy with posters, and flanked with two giant photographs of Malvoli and Nigger Ned.

"Hallo!" cried Flambeau in great surprise, as his clerical friend stumped straight up the broad steps. "I didn't know pugilism was your latest hobby. Are you going to see the fight?"

"I don't think there will be any fight," replied Father Brown.

They passed rapidly through ante-rooms and inner rooms; they passed through the hall of combat itself, raised, roped, and padded with innumerable seats and boxes, and still the cleric did not look round or pause till he came to a clerk at a desk outside a door marked "Committee". There he stopped and asked to see Lord Pooley.

The attendant observed that his lordship was very busy, as the fight was coming on soon, but Father Brown had a good-tempered tedium of reiteration for which the official mind is generally not prepared. In a few moments the rather baffled Flambeau found himself in the presence of a man who was still shouting directions to another man going out of the room. "Be careful, you know, about the ropes after the fourth-- Well, and what do you want, I wonder!"

Lord Pooley was a gentleman, and, like most of the few remaining to our race, was worried--especially about money. He was half grey and half flaxen, and he had the eyes of fever and a high-bridged, frost-bitten nose.

"Only a word," said Father Brown. "I have come to prevent a man being killed."

"I don't mean either of the boxers," said the little priest.

"Well, well, well!" said the nobleman, with a touch of frosty humour. "Who's going to be killed? The referee?"

"I don't know who's going to be killed," replied Father Brown, with a reflective stare. "If I did I shouldn't have to spoil your pleasure. I could simply get him to escape. I never could see anything wrong about prize-fights. As it is, I must ask you to announce that the fight is off for the present."

"Anything else?" jeered the gentleman with feverish eyes. "And what do you say to the two thousand people
who have come to see it?"

"I say there will be one thousand nine-hundred and ninety-nine of them left alive when they have seen it," said Father Brown.

Lord Pooley looked at Flambeau. "Is your friend mad?" he asked.

"Far from it," was the reply.

"And look here," resumed Pooley in his restless way, "it's worse than that. A whole pack of Italians have turned up to back Malvoli--swarthy, savage fellows of some country, anyhow. You know what these Mediterranean races are like. If I send out word that it's off we shall have Malvoli storming in here at the head of a whole Corsican clan."

"My lord, it is a matter of life and death," said the priest. "Ring your bell. Give your message. And see whether it is Malvoli who answers."

The nobleman struck the bell on the table with an odd air of new curiosity. He said to the clerk who appeared almost instantly in the doorway: "I have a serious announcement to make to the audience shortly. Meanwhile, would you kindly tell the two champions that the fight will have to be put off."

The clerk stared for some seconds as if at a demon and vanished.

"What authority have you for what you say?" asked Lord Pooley abruptly. "Whom did you consult?"

"I consulted a bandstand," said Father Brown, scratching his head. "But, no, I'm wrong; I consulted a book, too. I picked it up on a bookstall in London--very cheap, too."

He had taken out of his pocket a small, stout, leather-bound volume, and Flambeau, looking over his shoulder, could see that it was some book of old travels, and had a leaf turned down for reference.

"'The only form in which Voodoo--'" began Father Brown, reading aloud.

"In which what?" inquired his lordship.

"In which Voodoo," repeated the reader, almost with relish, "is widely organized outside Jamaica itself is in the form known as the Monkey, or the God of the Gongs, which is powerful in many parts of the two American continents, especially among half-breeds, many of whom look exactly like white men. It differs from most other forms of devil-worship and human sacrifice in the fact that the blood is not shed formally on the altar, but by a sort of assassination among the crowd. The gongs beat with a deafening din as the doors of the shrine open and the monkey-god is revealed; almost the whole congregation rivet ecstatic eyes on him. But after--"

The door of the room was flung open, and the fashionable negro stood framed in it, his eyeballs rolling, his silk hat still insolently tilted on his head. "Huh!" he cried, showing his apish teeth. "What this? Huh! Huh! You steal a coloured gentleman's prize--prize his already--yo' think yo' jes' save that white 'Talian trash--"

"The matter is only deferred," said the nobleman quietly. "I will be with you to explain in a minute or two."

"Who you to--" shouted Nigger Ned, beginning to storm.

"My name is Pooley," replied the other, with a creditable coolness. "I am the organizing secretary, and I advise you just now to leave the room."

"Who this fellow?" demanded the dark champion, pointing to the priest disdainfully.

"My name is Brown," was the reply. "And I advise you just now to leave the country."

The prize-fighter stood glaring for a few seconds, and then, rather to the surprise of Flambeau and the others, strode out, sending the door to with a crash behind him.

"Well," asked Father Brown rubbing his dusty hair up, "what do you think of Leonardo da Vinci? A beautiful Italian head."

"Look here," said Lord Pooley, "I've taken a considerable responsibility, on your bare word. I think you ought to tell me more about this."

"You are quite right, my lord," answered Brown. "And it won't take long to tell." He put the little leather book in his overcoat pocket. "I think we know all that this can tell us, but you shall look at it to see if I'm right. That negro who has just swaggered out is one of the most dangerous men on earth, for he has the brains of a European, with the instincts of a cannibal. He has turned what was clean, common-sense butchery among his fellow-barbarians into a very modern and scientific secret society of assassins. He doesn't know I know it, nor, for the matter of that, that I can't prove it."

There was a silence, and the little man went on.

"But if I want to murder somebody, will it really be the best plan to make sure I'm alone with him?"

Lord Pooley's eyes recovered their frosty twinkle as he looked at the little clergyman. He only said: "If you want to murder somebody, I should advise it."

Father Brown shook his head, like a murderer of much riper experience. "So Flambeau said," he replied, with a sigh. "But consider. The more a man feels lonely the less he can be sure he is alone. It must mean empty spaces round him, and they are just what make him obvious. Have you never seen one ploughman from the heights, or one shepherd from the valleys? Have you never walked along a cliff, and seen one man walking along the sands? Didn't
you know when he's killed a crab, and wouldn't you have known if it had been a creditor? No! No! No! For an intelligent murderer, such as you or I might be, it is an impossible plan to make sure that nobody is looking at you."

"But what other plan is there?"

"There is only one," said the priest. "To make sure that everybody is looking at something else. A man is throttled close by the big stand at Epsom. Anybody might have seen it done while the stand stood empty--any tramp under the hedges or motorist among the hills. But nobody would have seen it when the stand was crowded and the whole ring roaring, when the favourite was coming in first--or wasn't. The twisting of a neck-cloth, the thrusting of a body behind a door could be done in an instant--so long as it was that instant. It was the same, of course," he continued turning to Flambeau, "with that poor fellow under the bandstand. He was dropped through the hole (it wasn't an accidental hole) just at some very dramatic moment of the entertainment, when the bow of some great violinist or the voice of some great singer opened or came to its climax. And here, of course, when the knock-out blow came--it would not be the only one. That is the little trick Nigger Ned has adopted from his old God of Gongs."

"By the way, Malvolii--" Pooley began.

"Malvolii," said the priest, "has nothing to do with it. I dare say he has some Italians with him, but our amiable friends are not Italians. They are octoroons and African half-bloods of various shades, but I fear we English think all foreigners are much the same so long as they are dark and dirty. Also," he added, with a smile, "I fear the English decline to draw any fine distinction between the moral character produced by my religion and that which blooms out of Voodoo."

The blaze of the spring season had burst upon Seawood, littering its foreshore with famines and bathing-machines, with nomadic preachers and nigger minstrels, before the two friends saw it again, and long before the storm of pursuit after the strange secret society had died away. Almost on every hand the secret of their purpose perished with them. The man of the hotel was found drifting dead on the sea like so much seaweed; his right eye was closed in peace, but his left eye was wide open, and glistened like glass in the moon. Nigger Ned had been overtaken a mile or two away, and murdered three policemen with his closed left hand. The remaining officer was surprised--nay, pained--and the negro got away. But this was enough to set all the English papers in a flame, and for a month or two the main purpose of the British Empire was to prevent the buck nigger (who was so in both senses) escaping by any English port. Persons of a figure remotely reconcilable with his were subjected to quite extraordinary inquisitions, made to scrub their faces before going on board ship, as if each white complexion were made up like a mask, of greasepaint. Every negro in England was put under special regulations and made to report himself; the outgoing ships would no more have taken a nigger than a basilisk. For people had found out how fearful and vast and silent was the force of the savage secret society, and by the time Flambeau and Father Brown were leaning on the parade parapet in April, the Black Man meant in England almost what he once meant in Scotland.

"He must be still in England," observed Flambeau, "and horridly well hidden, too. They must have found him at the ports if he had only whitened his face."

"You see, he is really a clever man," said Father Brown apologetically. "And I'm sure he wouldn't whiten his face."

"Well, but what would he do?"

"I think," said Father Brown, "he would blacken his face."

Flambeau, leaning motionless on the parapet, laughed and said: "My dear fellow!"

Father Brown, also leaning motionless on the parapet, moved one finger for an instant into the direction of the soot-masked niggers singing on the sands.

TEN

The Salad of Colonel Cray

FATHER BROWN was walking home from Mass on a white weird morning when the mists were slowly lifting-one of those mornings when the very element of light appears as something mysterious and new. The scattered trees outlined themselves more and more out of the vapour, as if they were first drawn in grey chalk and then in charcoal. At yet more distant intervals appeared the houses upon the broken fringe of the suburb; their outlines became clearer and clearer until he recognized many in which he had chance acquaintances, and many more the names of whose owners he knew. But all the windows and doors were sealed; none of the people were of the sort that would be up at such a time, or still less on such an errand. But as he passed under the shadow of one handsome villa with verandas and wide ornate gardens, he heard a noise that made him almost involuntarily stop. It was the unmistakable noise of a pistol or carbine or some light firearm discharged; but it was not this that puzzled him most. The first full noise was immediately followed by a series of fainter noises--as he counted them, about six. He supposed it must be the echo; but the odd thing was that the echo was not in the least like the original sound. It was not like anything else that he could think of; the three things nearest to it seemed to be the noise made by siphons of soda-water, one of the many noises made by an animal, and the noise made by a person attempting to conceal laughter. None of which
seemed to make much sense.

Father Brown was made of two men. There was a man of action, who was as modest as a primrose and as punctual as a clock; who went his small round of duties and never dreamed of altering it. There was also a man of reflection, who was much simpler but much stronger, who could not easily be stopped; whose thought was always (in the only intelligent sense of the words) free thought. He could not help, even unconsciously, asking himself all the questions that there were to be asked, and answering as many of them as he could; all that went on like his breathing or circulation. But he never consciously carried his actions outside the sphere of his own duty; and in this case the two attitudes were aptly tested. He was just about to resume his trudge in the twilight, telling himself it was no affair of his, but instinctively twisting and untwisting twenty theories about what the odd noises might mean. Then the grey sky-line brightened into silver, and in the broadening light he realized that he had been to the house which belonged to an Anglo-Indian Major named Putnam; and that the Major had a native cook from Malta who was of his communion. He also began to remember that pistol-shots are sometimes serious things; accompanied with consequences with which he was legitimately concerned. He turned back and went in at the garden gate, making for the front door.

Half-way down one side of the house stood out a projection like a very low shed; it was, as he afterwards discovered, a large dustbin. Round the corner of this came a figure, at first a mere shadow in the haze, apparently bending and peering about. Then, coming nearer, it solidified into a figure that was, indeed, rather unusually solid. Major Putnam was a bald-headed, bull-necked man, short and very broad, with one of those rather apoplectic faces that are produced by a prolonged attempt to combine the oriental climate with the occidental luxuries. But the face was a good-humoured one, and even now, though evidently puzzled and inquisitive, wore a kind of innocent grin. He had a large palm-leaf hat on the back of his head (suggesting a halo that was by no means appropriate to the face), but otherwise he was clad only in a very vivid suit of striped scarlet and yellow pyjamas; which, though glowing enough to behold, must have been, on a fresh morning, pretty chilly to wear. He had evidently come out of his house in a hurry, and the priest was not surprised when he called out without further ceremony: "Did you hear that noise?"

"Yes," answered Father Brown; "I thought I had better look in, in case anything was the matter."

The Major looked at him rather queerly with his good-humoured gooseberry eyes. "What do you think the noise was?" he asked.

"It sounded like a gun or something," replied the other, with some hesitation; "but it seemed to have a singular sort of echo."

The Major was still looking at him quietly, but with protruding eyes, when the front door was flung open, releasing a flood of gaslight on the face of the fading mist; and another figure in pyjamas sprang or tumbled out into the garden. The figure was much longer, leaner, and more athletic; the pyjamas, though equally tropical, were comparatively tasteful, being of white with a light lemon-yellow stripe. The man was haggard, but handsome, more sunburned than the other; he had an aquiline profile and rather deep-sunken eyes, and a slight air of oddity arising from the combination of coal-black hair with a much lighter moustache. All this Father Brown absorbed in detail more at leisure. For the moment he only saw one thing about the man; which was the revolver in his hand.

"Cray!" exclaimed the Major, staring at him; "did you fire that shot?"

"Yes, I did," retorted the black-haired gentleman hotly; "and so would you in my place. If you were chased everywhere by devils and nearly--"

The Major seemed to intervene rather hurriedly. "This is my friend Father Brown," he said. And then to Brown: "I don't know whether you've met Colonel Cray of the Royal Artillery."

"I have heard of him, of course," said the priest innocently. "Did you--did you hit anything?"

"I thought so," answered Cray with gravity.

"Did he--" asked Major Putnam in a lowered voice, "did he fall or cry out, or anything?"

Colonel Cray was regarding his host with a strange and steady stare. "I'll tell you exactly what he did," he said. "He sneezed."

Father Brown's hand went half-way to his head, with the gesture of a man remembering somebody's name. He knew now what it was that was neither soda-water nor the snorting of a dog.

"Well," ejaculated the staring Major, "I never heard before that a service revolver was a thing to be sneezed at."

"Nor I," said Father Brown faintly. "It's lucky you didn't turn your artillery on him or you might have given him quite a bad cold." Then, after a bewildered pause, he said: "Was it a burglar?"

"Let us go inside," said Major Putnam, rather sharply, and led the way into his house.

The interior exhibited a paradox often to be marked in such morning hours: that the rooms seemed brighter than the sky outside; even after the Major had turned out the one gaslight in the front hall. Father Brown was surprised to see the whole dining-table set out as for a festive meal, with napkins in their rings, and wine-glasses of some six
unnecessary shapes set beside every plate. It was common enough, at that time of the morning, to find the remains of a banquet over-night; but to find it freshly spread so early was unusual.

While he stood waverling in the hall Major Putnam rushed past him and sent a raging eye over the whole oblong of the tablecloth. At last he spoke, spluttering: "All the silver gone!" he gasped. "Fish-knives and forks gone. Old cruet-stand gone. Even the old silver cream-jug gone. And now, Father Brown, I am ready to answer your question of whether it was a burglar."

"They're simply a blind," said Cray stubbornly. "I know better than you why people persecute this house; I know better than you why--"

The Major patted him on the shoulder with a gesture almost peculiar to the soothing of a sick child, and said: "It was a burglar. Obviously it was a burglar."

"A burglar with a bad cold," observed Father Brown, "that might assist you to trace him in the neighbourhood."

The Major shook his head in a sombre manner. "He must be far beyond trace now, I fear," he said.

Then, as the restless man with the revolver turned again towards the door in the garden, he added in a husky, confidential voice: "I doubt whether I should send for the police, for fear my friend here has been a little too free with his bullets, and got on the wrong side of the law. He's lived in very wild places; and, to be frank with you, I think he sometimes fancies things."

"I think you once told me," said Brown, "that he believes some Indian secret society is pursuing him."

Major Putnam nodded, but at the same time shrugged his shoulders. "I suppose we'd better follow him outside," he said. "I don't want any more--shall we say, sneezing?"

They passed out into the morning light, which was now even tinged with sunshine, and saw Colonel Cray's tall figure bent almost double, minutely examining the condition of gravel and grass. While the Major strolled unobtrusively towards him, the priest took an equally indolent turn, which took him round the next corner of the house to within a yard or two of the projecting dustbin.

He stood regarding this dismal object for some minute and a half--, then he stepped towards it, lifted the lid and put his head inside. Dust and other discolouring matter shook upwards as he did so; but Father Brown never observed his own appearance, whatever else he observed. He remained thus for a measurable period, as if engaged in some mysterious prayers. Then he came out again, with some ashes on his hair, and walked unconcernedly away.

By the time he came round to the garden door again he found a group there which seemed to roll away morbidities as the sunlight had already rolled away the mists. It was in no way rationally reassuring; it was simply broadly comic, like a cluster of Dickens's characters. Major Putnam had managed to slip inside and plunge into a proper shirt and trousers, with a crimson cummerbund, and a light square jacket over all; thus normally set off, his red festive face seemed bursting with a commonplace cordiality. He was indeed emphatic, but then he was talking to his cook—the swarthy son of Malta, whose lean, yellow and rather careworn face contrasted quaintly with his snow-white cap and costume. The cook might well be careworn, for cookery was the Major's hobby. He was one of those amateurs who always know more than the professional. The only other person he even admitted to be a judge of an omelette was his friend Cray—and as Brown remembered this, he turned to look for the other officer. In the new presence of daylight and people clothed and in their right mind, the sight of him was rather a shock. The taller and more elegant man was still in his night-garb, with tousled black hair, and now crawling about the garden on his hands and knees, still looking for traces of the burglar; and now and again, to all appearance, striking the ground with his hand in anger at not finding him. Seeing him thus quadrupedal in the grass, the priest raised his eyebrows broadly comic, like a cluster of Dickens's characters. Major Putnam had managed to slip inside and plunge into a proper shirt and trousers, with a crimson cummerbund, and a light square jacket over all; thus normally set off, his red festive face seemed bursting with a commonplace cordiality. He was indeed emphatic, but then he was talking to his cook—the swarthy son of Malta, whose lean, yellow and rather careworn face contrasted quaintly with his snow-white cap and costume. The cook might well be careworn, for cookery was the Major's hobby. He was one of those amateurs who always know more than the professional. The only other person he even admitted to be a judge of an omelette was his friend Cray—and as Brown remembered this, he turned to look for the other officer. In the new presence of daylight and people clothed and in their right mind, the sight of him was rather a shock. The taller and more elegant man was still in his night-garb, with tousled black hair, and now crawling about the garden on his hands and knees, still looking for traces of the burglar; and now and again, to all appearance, striking the ground with his hand in anger at not finding him. Seeing him thus quadrupedal in the grass, the priest raised his eyebrows rather sadly; and for the first time guessed that "fancies things" might be an euphemism.

The third item in the group of the cook and the epicure was also known to Father Brown; it was Audrey Watson, the Major's ward and housekeeper; and at this moment, to judge by her apron, tucked-up sleeves and resolute manner, much more the housekeeper than the ward.

"It serves you right," she was saying: "I always told you not to have that old-fashioned cruet-stand."

"I prefer it," said Putnam, placably. "I'm old-fashioned myself; and the things keep together."

"And vanish together, as you see," she retorted. "Well, if you are not going to bother about the burglar, I shouldn't bother about the lunch. It's Sunday, and we can't send for vinegar and all that in the town; and you Indian gentlemen can't enjoy what you call a dinner without a lot of hot things. I wish to goodness now you hadn't asked Cousin Oliver to take me to the musical service. It isn't over till half-past twelve, and the Colonel has to leave by then. I don't believe you men can manage alone."

"Oh yes, we can, my dear," said the Major, looking at her very amiably. "Marco has all the sauces, and we've often done ourselves well in very rough places, as you might know by now. And it's time you had a treat, Audrey; you mustn't be a housekeeper every hour of the day; and I know you want to hear the music."

"I want to go to church," she said, with rather severe eyes.

She was one of those handsome women who will always be handsome, because the beauty is not in an air or a
tint, but in the very structure of the head and features. But though she was not yet middle-aged and her auburn hair was of a Titianesque fullness in form and colour, there was a look in her mouth and around her eyes which suggested that some sorrows wasted her, as winds waste at last the edges of a Greek temple. For indeed the little domestic difficulty of which she was now speaking so decisively was rather comic than tragic. Father Brown gathered, from the course of the conversation, that Cray, the other gourmet, had to leave before the usual lunch-time; but that Putnam, his host, not to be done out of a final feast with an old crony, had arranged for a special dejeuner to be set out and consumed in the course of the morning, while Audrey and other graver persons were at morning service. She was going there under the escort of a relative and old friend of hers, Dr Oliver Oman, who, though a scientific man of a somewhat bitter type, was enthusiastic for music, and would go even to church to get it. There was nothing in all this that could conceivably concern the tragedy in Miss Watson's face; and by a half conscious instinct, Father Brown turned again to the seeming lunatic grubbing about in the grass.

When he strolled across to him, the black, unbrushed head was lifted abruptly, as if in some surprise at his continued presence. And indeed, Father Brown, for reasons best known to himself, had lingered much longer than politeness required; or even, in the ordinary sense, permitted.

"Well!" cried Cray, with wild eyes. "I suppose you think I'm mad, like the rest?"

"I have considered the thesis," answered the little man, composedly. "And I incline to think you are not."

"What do you mean?" snapped Cray quite savagely.

"Real madmen," explained Father Brown, "always encourage their own morbidity. They never strive against it. But you are trying to find traces of the burglar; even when there aren't any. You are struggling against it. You want what no madman ever wants."

"And what is that?"

"You want to be proved wrong," said Brown.

During the last words Cray had sprung or staggered to his feet and was regarding the cleric with agitated eyes. "By hell, but that is a true word!" he cried. "They are all at me here that the fellow was only after the silver--as if I shouldn't be only too pleased to think so! She's been at me," and he tossed his tousled black head towards Audrey, but the other had no need of the direction, "she's been at me today about how cruel I was to shoot a poor harmless house-breaker, and how I have the devil in me against poor harmless natives. But I was a good-natured man once--as good-natured as Putnam."

After a pause he said: "Look here, I've never seen you before; but you shall judge of the whole story. Old Putnam and I were friends in the same mess; but, owing to some accidents on the Afghan border, I got my command much sooner than most men; only we were both invalided home for a bit. I was engaged to Audrey out there; and we all travelled back together. But on the journey back things happened. Curious things. The result of them was that Putnam wants it broken off, and even Audrey keeps it hanging on-- and I know what they mean. I know what they think I am. So do you.

"Well, these are the facts. The last day we were in an Indian city I asked Putnam if I could get some Trichinopoli cigars, he directed me to a little place opposite his lodgings. I have since found he was quite right; but 'opposite' is a dangerous word when one decent house stands opposite five or six squalid ones; and I must have mistaken the door. It opened with difficulty, and then only on darkness; but as I turned back, the door behind me sank back and settled into its place with a noise as of innumerable bolts. There was nothing to do but to walk forward; which I did through passage after passage, pitch-dark. Then I came to a flight of steps, and then to a blind door, secured by a latch of ironwork, which I could only trace by touch, but which I loosened at last. I came out again upon a vast stone platform. There was nothing on record to show that it was an idol. The result of what I saw was that Putnam wants it broken off, and even Audrey keeps it hanging on--and I know what they mean. I know what they think I am. So do you.

"It was hardly half human, I guessed; to judge by the small squat head, and still more by a thing like a tail or extra limb turned up behind and pointing, like a loathsome large finger, at some symbol graven in the centre of the vast stone back. I had begun, in the dim light, to guess at the hieroglyphic, not without horror, when a more horrible thing happened. A door opened silently in the temple wall behind me and a man came out, with a brown face and a black coat. He had a carved smile on his face, of copper flesh and ivory teeth; but I think the most hateful thing about him was that he was in European dress. I was prepared, I think, for shrouded priests or naked fakirs. But this seemed to say that the devilry was over all the earth. As indeed I found it to be.

"If you had only seen the Monkey's Feet,' he said, smiling steadily, and without other preface, 'we should have been very gentle--you would only be tortured and die. If you had seen the Monkey's Face, still we should be very moderate, very tolerant--you would only be tortured and live. But as you have seen the Monkey's Tail, we must pronounce the worst sentence, which is--Go Free.'
"When he said the words I heard the elaborate iron latch with which I had struggled, automatically unlock itself: and then, far down the dark passages I had passed, I heard the heavy street-door shifting its own bolts backwards.

"It is vain to ask for mercy; you must go free," said the smiling man. 'Henceforth a hair shall slay you like a sword, and a breath shall bite you like an adder; weapons shall come against you out of nowhere; and you shall die many times.' And with that he was swallowed once more in the wall behind; and I went out into the street."

Cray paused; and Father Brown unaffectedly sat down on the lawn and began to pick daisies.

Then the soldier continued: "Putnam, of course, with his jolly common sense, pooh-poohed all my fears; and from that time dates his doubt of my mental balance. Well, I'll simply tell you, in the fewest words, the three things that have happened since; and you shall judge which of us is right.

"The first happened in an Indian village on the edge of the jungle, but hundreds of miles from the temple, or town, or type of tribes and customs where the curse had been put on me. I woke in black midnight, and lay thinking of nothing in particular, when I felt a faint tickling thing, like a thread or a hair, trailed across my throat. I shrank back out of its way, and could not help thinking of the words in the temple. But when I got up and sought lights and a mirror, the line across my neck was a line of blood.

"The second happened in a lodging in Port Said, later, on our journey home together. It was a jumble of tavern and curiosity-shop; and though there was nothing there remotely suggesting the cult of the Monkey, it is, of course, possible that some of its images or talismans were in such a place. Its curse was there, anyhow. I woke again in the dark with a sensation that could not be put in colder or more literal words than that a breath bit like an adder. Existence was an agony of extinction; I dashed my head against walls until I dashed it against a window; and fell rather than jumped into the garden below. Putnam, poor fellow, who had called the other thing a chance scratch, was bound to take seriously the fact of finding me half insensible on the grass at dawn. But I fear it was my mental state he took seriously; and not my story.

"The third happened in Malta. We were in a fortress there; and as it happened our bedrooms overlooked the open sea, which almost came up to our window-sills, save for a flat white outer wall as bare as the sea. I woke up again; but it was not dark. There was a full moon, as I walked to the window; I could have seen a bird on the bare battlement, or a sail on the horizon. What I did see was a sort of stick or branch circling, self-supported, in the empty sky. It flew straight in at my window and smashed the lamp beside the pillow I had just quitted. It was one of those queer-shaped war-clubs some Eastern tribes use. But it had come from no human hand."

Father Brown threw away a daisy-chain he was making, and rose with a wistful look. "Has Major Putnam," he asked, "got any Eastern curios, idols, weapons and so on, from which one might get a hint?"

"Plenty of those, though not much use, I fear," replied Cray; "but by all means come into his study."

As they entered they passed Miss Watson buttoning her gloves for church, and heard the voice of Putnam downstairs still giving a lecture on cookery to the cook. In the Major's study and den of curios they came suddenly on a third party, silk-hatted and dressed for the street, who was poring over an open book on the smoking-table—a book which he dropped rather guiltily, and turned.

Cray introduced him civilly enough, as Dr Oman, but he showed such disfavour in his very face that Brown guessed the two men, whether Audrey knew it or not, were rivals. Nor was the priest wholly unsympathetic with the prejudice. Dr Oman was a very well-dressed gentleman indeed; well-featured, though almost dark enough for an Asiatic. But Father Brown had to tell himself sharply that one should be in charity even with those who wax their pointed beards, who have small gloved hands, and who speak with perfectly modulated voices.

Cray seemed to find something specially irritating in the small prayer-book in Oman's dark-gloved hand. "I didn't know that was in your line," he said rather rudely.

Oman laughed mildly, but without offence. "This is more so, I know," he said, laying his hand on the big book he had dropped, "a dictionary of drugs and such things. But it's rather too large to take to church." Then he closed the larger book, and there seemed again the faintest touch of hurry and embarrassment.

"I suppose," said the priest, who seemed anxious to change the subject, "all these spears and things are from India?"

"From everywhere," answered the doctor. "Putnam is an old soldier, and has been in Mexico and Australia, and the Cannibal Islands for all I know."

"I hope it was not in the Cannibal Islands," said Brown, "that he learnt the art of cookery." And he ran his eyes over the stew-pots or other strange utensils on the wall.

At this moment the jolly subject of their conversation thrust his laughing, lobsterish face into the room. "Come along, Cray," he cried. "Your lunch is just coming in. And the bells are ringing for those who want to go to church."

Cray slipped upstairs to change; Dr Oman and Miss Watson betook themselves solemnly down the street, with a string of other churchgoers; but Father Brown noticed that the doctor twice looked back and scrutinized the house; and even came back to the corner of the street to look at it again.
The priest looked puzzled. "He can't have been at the dustbin," he muttered. "Not in those clothes. Or was he there earlier today?"

Father Brown, touching other people, was as sensitive as a barometer; but today he seemed about as sensitive as a rhinoceros. By no social law, rigid or implied, could he be supposed to linger round the lunch of the Anglo-Indian friends; but he lingered, covering his position with torrents of amusing but quite needless conversation. He was the more puzzling because he did not seem to want any lunch. As one after another of the most exquisitely balanced kedgerees of curries, accompanied with their appropriate vintages, were laid before the other two, he only repeated that it was one of his fast-days, and munched a piece of bread and sipped and then left untasted a tumbler of cold water. His talk, however, was exuberant.

"I'll tell you what I'll do for you," he cried--, "I'll mix you a salad! I can't eat it, but I'll mix it like an angel! You've got a lettuce there."

"Unfortunately it's the only thing we have got," answered the good-humoured Major. "You must remember that mustard, vinegar, oil and so on vanished with the cruet and the burglar."

"I know," replied Brown, rather vaguely. "That's what I've always been afraid would happen. That's why I always carry a cruet-stand about with me. I'm so fond of salads."

And to the amazement of the two men he took a pepper-pot out of his waistcoat pocket and put it on the table.

"I wonder why the burglar wanted mustard, too," he went on, taking a mustard-pot from another pocket. "A mustard plaster, I suppose. And vinegar--and producing that condiment--'haven't I heard something about vinegar and brown paper? As for oil, which I think I put in my left--"

His garrulity was an instant arrested; for lifting his eyes, he saw what no one else saw--the black figure of Dr Oman standing on the sunlit lawn and looking steadily into the room. Before he could quite recover himself Cray had cloven in.

"You're an astounding card," he said, staring. "I shall come and hear your sermons, if they're as amusing as your manners." His voice changed a little, and he leaned back in his chair.

"Oh, there are sermons in a cruet-stand, too," said Father Brown, quite gravely. "Have you heard of faith like a grain of mustard-seed; or charity that anoints with oil? And as for vinegar, can any soldiers forget that solitary soldier, who, when the sun was darkened--"

Colonel Cray leaned forward a little and clutched the tablecloth.

Father Brown, who was making the salad, tipped two spoonfuls of the mustard into the tumbler of water beside him; stood up and said in a new, loud and sudden voice--"Drink that!"

At the same moment the motionless doctor in the garden came running, and bursting open a window cried: "Am I wanted? Has he been poisoned?"

"Pretty near," said Brown, with the shadow of a smile; for the emetic had very suddenly taken effect. And Cray lay in a deck-chair, gasping as for life, but alive.

Major Putnam had sprung up, his purple face mottled. "A crime!" he cried hoarsely. "I will go for the police!"

The priest could hear him dragging down his palm-leaf hat from the peg and tumbling out of the front door; he heard the garden gate slam. But he only stood looking at Cray; and after a silence said quietly:

"I shall not talk to you much; but I will tell you what you want to know. There is no curse on you. The Temple of the Monkey was either a coincidence or a part of the trick; the trick was the trick of a white man. There is only one weapon that will bring blood with that mere feathery touch: a razor held by a white man. There is one way of making a common room full of invisible, overpowering poison: turning on the gas--the crime of a white man. And there is only one kind of club that can be thrown out of a window, turn in mid-air and come back to the window next to it: the Australian boomerang. You'll see some of them in the Major's study."

With that he went outside and spoke for a moment to the doctor. The moment after, Audrey Watson came rushing into the house and fell on her knees beside Cray's chair. He could not hear what they said to each other; but their faces moved with amazement, not unhappiness. The doctor and the priest walked slowly towards the garden gate.

"I suppose the Major was in love with her, too," he said with a sigh; and when the other nodded, observed: "You were very generous, doctor. You did a fine thing. But what made you suspect?"

"A very small thing," said Oman; "but it kept me restless in church till I came back to see that all was well. That book on his table was a work on poisons; and was put down open at the place where it stated that a certain Indian poison, though deadly and difficult to trace, was particularly easily reversible by the use of the commonest emetics. I suppose he read that at the last moment--"

"And remembered that there were emetics in the cruet-stand," said Father Brown. "Exactly. He threw the cruet in the dustbin--where I found it, along with other silver--for the sake of a burglary blind. But if you look at that pepper-pot I put on the table, you'll see a small hole. That's where Cray's bullet struck, shaking up the pepper and
There was a silence. Then Dr Oman said grimly: "The Major is a long time looking for the police."
"Or the police in looking for the Major?" said the priest. "Well, good-bye."

**ELEVEN**

The Strange Crime of John Boulnois

MR CALHOUN KIDD was a very young gentleman with a very old face, a face dried up with its own eagerness, framed in blue-black hair and a black butterfly tie. He was the emissary in England of the colossal American daily called the Western Sun-- also humorously described as the "Rising Sunset". This was in allusion to a great journalistic declaration (attributed to Mr Kidd himself) that "he guessed the sun would rise in the west yet, if American citizens did a bit more hustling." Those, however, who mock American journalism from the standpoint of somewhat mellow traditions forget a certain paradox which partly redeems it. For while the journalism of the States permits a pantomimic vulgarity long past anything English, it also shows a real excitement about the most earnest mental problems, of which English papers are innocent, or rather incapable. The Sun was full of the most solemn matters treated in the most farcical way. William James figured there as well as "Weary Willie," and pragmatists alternated with pugilists in the long procession of its portraits.

Thus, when a very unobtrusive Oxford man named John Boulnois wrote in a very unreadable review called the Natural Philosophy Quarterly a series of articles on alleged weak points in Darwinian evolution, it fluttered no corner of the English papers; though Boulnois's theory (which was that of a comparatively stationary universe visited occasionally by convulsions of change) had some rather faddy fashionableness at Oxford, and got so far as to be named "Catastrophism". But many American papers seized on the challenge as a great event; and the Sun threw the shadow of Mr Boulnois quite gigantically across its pages. By the paradox already noted, articles of valuable intelligence and enthusiasm were presented with headlines apparently written by an illiterate maniac, headlines such as "Darwin Chews Dirt; Critic Boulnois says He Jumps the Shocks"--or "Keep Catastrophic, says Thinker Boulnois." And Mr Calhoun Kidd, of the Western Sun, was bidden to take his butterfly tie and lugubrious visage down to the little house outside Oxford where Thinker Boulnois lived in happy ignorance of such a title.

That fated philosopher had consented, in a somewhat dazed manner, to receive the interviewer, and had named the hour of nine that evening. The last of a summer sunset clung about Cumnor and the low wooded hills; the romantic Yankee was both doubtful of his road and inquisitive about his surroundings; and seeing the door of a genuine feudal old-country inn, The Champion Arms, standing open, he went in to make inquiries.

In the bar parlour he rang the bell, and had to wait some little time for a reply to it. The only other person present was a lean man with close red hair and loose, horsey-looking clothes, who was drinking very bad whisky, but smoking a very good cigar. The whisky, of course, was the choice brand of The Champion Arms; the cigar he had probably brought with him from London. Nothing could be more different than his cynical negligence from the dapper dryness of the young American; but something in his pencil and open notebook, and perhaps in the expression of his alert blue eye, caused Kidd to guess, correctly, that he was a brother journalist.

"Could you do me the favour," asked Kidd, with the courtesy of his nation, "of directing me to the Grey Cottage, where Mr Boulnois lives, as I understand?"

"It's a few yards down the road," said the red-haired man, removing his cigar; "I shall be passing it myself in a minute, but I'm going on to Pendragon Park to try and see the fun."

"What is Pendragon Park?" asked Calhoun Kidd.

"Sir Claude Champion's place--haven't you come down for that, too?" asked the other pressman, looking up.

"You're a journalist, aren't you?"

"I have come to see Mr Boulnois," said Kidd.

"I've come to see Mrs Boulnois," replied the other. "But I shan't catch her at home." And he laughed rather unpleasantly.

"Are you interested in Catastrophism?" asked the wondering Yankee.

"I'm interested in catastrophes; and there are going to be some," replied his companion gloomily. "Mine's a filthy trade, and I never pretend it isn't."

With that he spat on the floor; yet somehow in the very act and instant one could realize that the man had been brought up as a gentleman.

The American pressman considered him with more attention. His face was pale and dissipated, with the promise of formidable passions yet to be loosed; but it was a clever and sensitive face; his clothes were coarse and careless, but he had a good seal ring on one of his long, thin fingers. His name, which came out in the course of talk, was James Dalroy; he was the son of a bankrupt Irish landlord, and attached to a pink paper which he heartily despised, called Smart Society, in the capacity of reporter and of something painfully like a spy.

Smart Society, I regret to say, felt none of that interest in Boulnois on Darwin which was such a credit to the
head and hearts of the Western Sun. Dalroy had come down, it seemed, to snuff up the scent of a scandal which might very well end in the Divorce Court, but which was at present hovering between Grey Cottage and Pendragon Park.

Sir Claude Champion was known to the readers of the Western Sun as well as Mr Boulnois. So were the Pope and the Derby Winner; but the idea of their intimate acquaintance would have struck Kidd as equally incongruous. He had heard of (and written about, nay, falsely pretended to know) Sir Claude Champion, as "one of the brightest and wealthiest of England's Upper Ten"; as the great sportsman who raced yachts round the world; as the great traveller who wrote books about the Himalayas, as the politician who swept constituencies with a startling sort of Tory Democracy, and as the great dabbler in art, music, literature, and, above all, acting. Sir Claude was really rather magnificent in other than American eyes. There was something of the Renascence Prince about his omnivorous culture and restless publicity--, he was not only a great amateur, but an ardent one. There was in him none of that antiquarian frivolity that we convey by the word "dilettante".

That faultless falcon profile with purple-black Italian eye, which had been snap-shotted so often both for Smart Society and the Western Sun, gave everyone the impression of a man eaten by ambition as by a fire, or even a disease. But though Kidd knew a great deal about Sir Claude--a great deal more, in fact, than there was to know--it would never have crossed his wildest dreams to connect so showy an aristocrat with the newly-unearthed founder of Catastrophism, or to guess that Sir Claude Champion and John Boulnois could be intimate friends. Such, according to Dalroy's account, was nevertheless the fact. The two had hunted in couples at school and college, and, though their social destinies had been very different (for Champion was a great landlord and almost a millionaire, while Boulnois was a poor scholar and, until just lately, an unknown one), they still kept in very close touch with each other. Indeed, Boulnois's cottage stood just outside the gates of Pendragon Park.

But whether the two men could be friends much longer was becoming a dark and ugly question. A year or two before, Boulnois had married a beautiful and not unsuccessful actress, to whom he was devoted in his own shy and ponderous style; and the proximity of the household to Champion's had given that flighty celebrity opportunities for behaving in a way that could not but cause painful and rather base excitement. Sir Claude had carried the arts of publicity to perfection; and he seemed to take a crazy pleasure in being equally ostentatious in an intrigue that could do him no sort of honour. Footmen from Pendragon were perpetually leaving bouquets for Mrs Boulnois; carriages and motor-cars were perpetually calling at the cottage for Mrs Boulnois; balls and masquerades perpetually filled the grounds in which the baronet paraded Mrs Boulnois, like the Queen of Love and Beauty at a tournament. That very evening, marked by Mr Kidd for the exposition of Catastrophism, had been marked by Sir Claude Champion for an open-air rendering of Romeo and Juliet, in which he was to play Romeo to a Juliet it was needless to name.

"I don't think it can go on without a smash," said the young man with red hair, getting up and shaking himself. "Old Boulnois may be squared--or he may be square. But if he's square he's thick-- what you might call cubic. But I don't believe it's possible."

"He is a man of grand intellectual powers," said Calhoun Kidd in a deep voice.

"Yes," answered Dalroy; "but even a man of grand intellectual powers can't be such a blighted fool as all that. Must you be going on? I shall be following myself in a minute or two."

But Calhoun Kidd, having finished a milk and soda, betook himself smartly up the road towards the Grey Cottage, leaving his cynical informant to his whisky and tobacco. The last of the daylight had faded; the skies were of a dark, green-grey, like slate, studded here and there with a star, but lighter on the left side of the sky, with the promise of a rising moon.

The Grey Cottage, which stood entrenched, as it were, in a square of stiff, high thorn-hedges, was so close under the pines and palisades of the Park that Kidd at first mistook it for the Park Lodge. Finding the name on the narrow wooden gate, however, and seeing by his watch that the hour of the "Thinker's" appointment had just struck, he went in and knocked at the front door. Inside the garden hedge, he could see that the house, though unpretentious enough, was larger and more luxurious than it looked at first, and was quite a different kind of place from a porter's lodge. A dog-kennel and a beehive stood outside, like symbols of old English country-life; the moon was rising behind a plantation of prosperous pear trees, the dog that came out of the kennel was reverend-looking and reluctant to bark; and the plain, elderly man-servant who opened the door was brief but dignified.

"Mr Boulnois asked me to offer his apologies, sir," he said, "but he has been obliged to go out suddenly."

"But see here, I had an appointment," said the interviewer, with a rising voice. "Do you know where he went to?"

"Mr Boulnois asked me to offer his apologies, sir," said the servant, rather sombly, and began to close the door. Kidd started a little.

"Did he go with Mrs--with the rest of the party?" he asked rather vaguely.

"No, sir," said the man shortly; "he stayed behind, and then went out alone." And he shut the door, brutally, but
with an air of duty not done.

The American, that curious compound of impudence and sensitiveness, was annoyed. He felt a strong desire to hustle them all along a bit and teach them business habits; the hoary old dog and the grizzled, heavy-faced old butler with his prehistoric shirt-front, and the drowsy old moon, and above all the scatter-brained old philosopher who couldn't keep an appointment.

"If that's the way he goes on he deserves to lose his wife's purest devotion," said Mr Calhoun Kidd. "But perhaps he's gone over to make a row. In that case I reckon a man from the Western Sun will be on the spot."

And turning the corner by the open lodge-gates, he set off, stumping up the long avenue of black pine-woods that pointed in abrupt perspective towards the inner gardens of Pendragon Park. The trees were as black and orderly as plumes upon a hearse; there were still a few stars. He was a man with more literary than direct natural associations; the word "Ravenswood" came into his head repeatedly. It was partly the raven colour of the pine-woods; but partly also an indescribable atmosphere almost described in Scott's great tragedy; the smell of something that died in the eighteenth century; the smell of dank gardens and broken urns, of wrongs that will never now be righted; of something that is none the less incurably sad because it is strangely unreal.

More than once, as he went up that strange, black road of tragic artifice, he stopped, startled, thinking he heard steps in front of him. He could see nothing in front but the twin sombre walls of pine and the wedge of starlit sky above them. At first he thought he must have fancied it or been mocked by a mere echo of his own tramp. But as he went on he was more and more inclined to conclude, with the remains of his reason, that there really were other feet upon the road. He thought hazily of ghosts; and was surprised how swiftly he could see the image of an appropriate and local ghost, one with a face as white as Pierrot's, but patched with black. The apex of the triangle of dark-blue sky was growing brighter and bluer, but he did not realize as yet that this was because he was coming nearer to the lights of the great house and garden. He only felt that the atmosphere was growing more intense, there was in the sadness more violence and secrecy--more--he hesitated for the word, and then said it with a jerk of laughter--Catastrophism.

More pines, more pathway slid past him, and then he stood rooted as by a blast of magic. It is vain to say that he felt as if he had got into a dream; but this time he felt quite certain that he had got into a book. For we human beings are used to inappropriate things; we are accustomed to the clatter of the incongruous; it is a tune to which we can go to sleep. If one appropriate thing happens, it wakes us up like the pang of a perfect chord. Something happened such as would have happened in such a place in a forgotten tale.

Over the black pine-wood came flying and flashing in the moon a naked sword--such a slender and sparkling rapier as may have fought many an unjust duel in that ancient park. It fell on the pathway far in front of him and lay there glistening like a large needle. He ran like a hare and bent to look at it. Seen at close quarters it had rather a showy look: the big red jewels in the hilt and guard were a little dubious. But there were other red drops upon the blade which were not dubious.

He looked round wildly in the direction from which the dazzling missile had come, and saw that at this point the sable facade of fir and pine was interrupted by a smaller road at right angles; which, when he turned it, brought him in full view of the long, lighted house, with a lake and fountains in front of it. Nevertheless, he did not look at this, having something more interesting to look at.

Above him, at the angle of the steep green bank of the terraced garden, was one of those small picturesque surprises common in the old landscape gardening; a kind of small round hill or dome of grass, like a giant mole-hill, ringed and crowned with three concentric fences of roses, and having a sundial in the highest point in the centre. Kidd could see the finger of the dial stand up dark against the sky like the dorsal fin of a shark and the vain moonlight clinging to that idle clock. But he saw something else clinging to it also, for one wild moment--the figure of a man.

Though he saw it there only for a moment, though it was outlandish and incredible in costume, being clad from neck to heel in tight crimson, with glints of gold, yet he knew in one flash of moonlight who it was. That white face flung up to heaven, clean-shaven and so unnaturally young, like Byron with a Roman nose, those black curls already grizzled-- he had seen the thousand public portraits of Sir Claude Champion. The wild red figure reeled an instant against the sundial; the next it had rolled down the steep bank and lay at the American's feet, faintly moving one arm. A gaudy, unnatural gold ornament on the arm suddenly reminded Kidd of Romeo and Juliet; of course the tight crimson suit was part of the play. But there was a long red stain down the bank from which the man had rolled--that was no part of the play. He had been run through the body.

Mr Calhoun Kidd shouted and shouted again. Once more he seemed to hear phantasmal footsteps, and started to find another figure already near him. He knew the figure, and yet it terrified him. The dissipated youth who had called himself Dalroy had a horribly quiet way with him; if Boulnois failed to keep appointments that had been made, Dalroy had a sinister air of keeping appointments that hadn't. The moonlight discoloured everything, against
Dalroy's red hair his wan face looked not so much white as pale green.

All this morbid impressionism must be Kidd's excuse for having cried out, brutally and beyond all reason: "Did you do this, you devil?"

James Dalroy smiled his unpleasing smile; but before he could speak, the fallen figure made another movement of the arm, waving vaguely towards the place where the sword fell; then came a moan, and then it managed to speak.

"Boulnois.... Boulnois, I say.... Boulnois did it... jealous of me...he was jealous, he was, he was..."

Kidd bent his head down to hear more, and just managed to catch the words:

"Boulnois...with my own sword...he threw it..."

Again the failing hand waved towards the sword, and then fell rigid with a thud. In Kidd rose from its depth all that acrid humour that is the strange salt of the seriousness of his race.

"See here," he said sharply and with command, "you must fetch a doctor. This man's dead."

"And a priest, too, I suppose," said Dalroy in an undecipherable manner. "All these Champions are papists."

The American knelt down by the body, felt the heart, propped up the head and used some last efforts at restoration; but before the other journalist reappeared, followed by a doctor and a priest, he was already prepared to assert they were too late.

"Were you too late also?" asked the doctor, a solid prosperous-looking man, with conventional moustache and whiskers, but a lively eye, which darted over Kidd dubiously.

"In one sense," drawled the representative of the Sun. "I was too late to save the man, but I guess I was in time to hear something of importance. I heard the dead man denounce his assassin."

"And who was the assassin?" asked the doctor, drawing his eyebrows together.

"Boulnois," said Calhoun Kidd, and whistled softly.

The doctor stared at him gloomily with a reddening brow--, but he did not contradict. Then the priest, a shorter figure in the background, said mildly: "I understood that Mr Boulnois was not coming to Pendragon Park this evening."

"There again," said the Yankee grimly, "I may be in a position to give the old country a fact or two. Yes, sir, John Boulnois was going to stay in all this evening; he fixed up a real good appointment there with me. But John Boulnois changed his mind; John Boulnois left his home abruptly and all alone, and came over to this darned Park an hour or so ago. His butler told me so. I think we hold what the all-wise police call a clue--have you sent for them?"

"Yes," said the doctor, "but we haven't alarmed anyone else yet."

"Does Mrs Boulnois know?" asked James Dalroy, and again Kidd was conscious of an irrational desire to hit him on his curling mouth.

"I have not told her," said the doctor gruffly--", but here come the police."

The little priest had stepped out into the main avenue, and now returned with the fallen sword, which looked ludicrously large and theatrical when attached to his dumpy figure, at once clerical and commonplace. ''Just before the police come," he said apologetically, "has anyone got a light?"

The Yankee journalist took an electric torch from his pocket, and the priest held it close to the middle part of the blade, which he examined with blinking care. Then, without glancing at the point or pommel, he handed the long weapon to the doctor.

"I fear I'm no use here," he said, with a brief sigh. "I'll say good night to you, gentlemen." And he walked away up the dark avenue towards the house, his hands clasped behind him and his big head bent in cogitation.

The rest of the group made increased haste towards the lodge-gates, where an inspector and two constables could already be seen in consultation with the lodge-keeper. But the little priest only walked slower and slower in the dim cloister of pine, and at last stopped dead, on the steps of the house. It was his silent way of acknowledging an equally silent approach; for there came towards him a presence that might have satisfied even Calhoun Kidd's demands for a lovely and aristocratic ghost. It was a young woman in silvery satins of a Renascence design; she had golden hair in two long shining ropes, and a face so startlingly pale between them that she might have been chryselephantine--made, that is, like some old Greek statues, out of ivory and gold. But her eyes were very bright, and her voice, though low, was confident.

"Father Brown?" she said.

"Mrs Boulnois?" he replied gravely. Then he looked at her and immediately said: "I see you know about Sir Claude."

"How do you know I know?" she asked steadily.

He did not answer the question, but asked another: "Have you seen your husband?"

"My husband is at home," she said. "He has nothing to do with this."
Again he did not answer; and the woman drew nearer to him, with a curiously intense expression on her face.

"Shall I tell you something more?" she said, with a rather fearful smile. "I don't think he did it, and you don't either." Father Brown returned her gaze with a long, grave stare, and then nodded, yet more gravely.

"Father Brown," said the lady, "I am going to tell you all I know, but I want you to do me a favour first. Will you tell me why you haven't jumped to the conclusion of poor John's guilt, as all the rest have done? Don't mind what you say: I--I know about the gossip and the appearances that are against me."

Father Brown looked honestly embarrassed, and passed his hand across his forehead. "Two very little things," he said. "At least, one's very trivial and the other very vague. But such as they are, they don't fit in with Mr Boulnois being the murderer."

He turned his blank, round face up to the stars and continued absentmindedly: "To take the vague idea first. I attach a good deal of importance to vague ideas. All those things that 'aren't evidence' are what convince me. I think a moral impossibility the biggest of all impossibilities. I know your husband only slightly, but I think this crime of his, as generally conceived, something very like a moral impossibility. Please do not think I mean that Boulnois could not be so wicked. Anybody can be wicked--as wicked as he chooses. We can direct our moral wills; but we can't generally change our instinctive tastes and ways of doing things. Boulnois might commit a murder, but not this murder. He would not snatch Romeo's sword from its romantic scabbard; or slay his foe on the sundial as on a kind of altar; or leave his body among the roses, or fling the sword away among the pines. If Boulnois killed anyone he'd do it quietly and heavily, as he'd do any other doubtful thing-- take a tenth glass of port, or read a loose Greek poet. No, the romantic setting is not like Boulnois. It's more like Champion."

"Ah!" she said, and looked at him with eyes like diamonds.

"And the trivial thing was this," said Brown. "There were finger-prints on that sword; finger-prints can be detected quite a time after they are made if they're on some polished surface like glass or steel. These were on a polished surface. They were half-way down the blade of the sword. Whose prints they were I have no earthly clue; but why should anybody hold a sword half-way down? It was a long sword, but length is an advantage in lunging at an enemy. At least, at most enemies. At all enemies except one."

"Except one," she repeated. "There is only one enemy," said Father Brown, "whom it is easier to kill with a dagger than a sword."

"I know," said the woman. "Oneself."

There was a long silence, and then the priest said quietly but abruptly: "Am I right, then? Did Sir Claude kill himself?"

"Yes" she said, with a face like marble. "I saw him do it."

"He died," said Father Brown, "for love of you?"

An extraordinary expression flashed across her face, very different from pity, modesty, remorse, or anything her companion had expected: her voice became suddenly strong and full. "I don't believe," she said, "he ever cared about me a rap. He hated my husband."

"Why?" asked the other, and turned his round face from the sky to the lady.

"He hated my husband because...it is so strange I hardly know how to say it...because..."

"Yes?" said Brown patiently.

"Because my husband wouldn't hate him."

Father Brown only nodded, and seemed still to be listening; he differed from most detectives in fact and fiction in a small point-- he never pretended not to understand when he understood perfectly well.

Mrs Boulnois drew near once more with the same contained glow of certainty. "My husband," she said, "is a great man. Sir Claude Champion was not a great man: he was a celebrated and successful man. My husband has never been celebrated or successful; and it is the solemn truth that he has never dreamed of being so. He no more expects to be famous for thinking than for smoking cigars. On all that side he has a sort of splendid stupidity. He has never grown up. He still liked Champion exactly as he liked him at school; he admired him as he would admire a conjuring trick done at the dinner-table. But he couldn't be got to conceive the notion of envying Champion. And Champion wanted to be envied. He went mad and killed himself for that."

"Yes," said Father Brown; "I think I begin to understand."

"Oh, don't you see?" she cried; "the whole picture is made for that-- the place is planned for it. Champion put John in a little house at his very door, like a dependant--to make him feel a failure. He never felt it. He thinks no more about such things than-- than an absent-minded lion. Champion would burst in on John's shabbiest hours or homeliest meals with some dazzling present or announcement or expedition that made it like the visit of Haroun Alraschid, and John would accept or refuse amably with one eye off, so to speak, like one lazy schoolboy agreeing or disagreeing with another. After five years of it John had not turned a hair; and Sir Claude Champion was a monomaniac."
"And Haman began to tell them," said Father Brown, "of all the things wherein the king had honoured him; and he said: 'All these things profit me nothing while I see Mordecai the Jew sitting in the gate.'"

"The crisis came," Mrs Boulnois continued, "when I persuaded John to let me take down some of his speculations and send them to a magazine. They began to attract attention, especially in America, and one paper wanted to interview him. When Champion (who was interviewed nearly every day) heard of this late little crumb of success falling to his unconscious rival, the last link snapped that held back his devilish hatred. Then he began to lay that insane siege to my own love and honour which has been the talk of the shire. You will ask me why I allowed such atrocious attentions. I answer that I could not have declined them except by explaining to my husband, and there are some things the soul cannot do, as the body cannot fly. Nobody could have explained to my husband. Nobody could do it now. If you said to him in so many words, 'Champion is stealing your wife,' he would think the joke a little vulgar: that it could be anything but a joke--that notion could find no crack in his great skull to get in by. Well, John was to come and see us act this evening, but just as we were starting he said he wouldn't; he had got an interesting book and a cigar. I told this to Sir Claude, and it was his death-blow. The monomaniac suddenly saw despair. He stabbed himself, crying out like a devil that Boulnois was slaying him; he lies there in the garden dead of his own jealousy to produce jealousy, and John is sitting in the dining-room reading a book."

There was another silence, and then the little priest said: "There is only one weak point, Mrs Boulnois, in all your very vivid account. Your husband is not sitting in the dining-room reading a book. That American reporter told me he had been to your house, and your butler told him Mr Boulnois had gone to Pendragon Park after all."

Her bright eyes widened to an almost electric glare; and yet it seemed rather bewilderment than confusion or fear. "Why, what can you mean?" she cried. "All the servants were out of the house, seeing the theatricals. And we don't keep a butler, thank goodness!"

Father Brown started and spun half round like an absurd teetotum. "What, what?" he cried seeming galvanized into sudden life. "Look here--I say--can I make your husband hear if I go to the house?"

"Oh, the servants will be back by now," she said, wondering.

"Right, right!" rejoined the cleric energetically, and set off scuttling up the path towards the Park gates. He turned once to say: "Better get hold of that Yankee, or 'Crime of John Boulnois' will be all over the Republic in large letters."

"You don't understand," said Mrs Boulnois. "He wouldn't mind. I don't think he imagines that America really is a place."

When Father Brown reached the house with the beehive and the drowsy dog, a small and neat maid-servant showed him into the dining-room, where Boulnois sat reading by a shaded lamp, exactly as his wife described him. A decanter of port and a wineglass were at his elbow; and the instant the priest entered he noted the long ash stand out unbroken on his cigar.

"He has been here for half an hour at least," thought Father Brown. In fact, he had the air of sitting where he had sat when his dinner was cleared away.

"Don't get up, Mr Boulnois," said the priest in his pleasant, prosaic way. "I shan't interrupt you a moment. I fear I break in on some of your scientific studies."

"No," said Boulnois; "I was reading 'The Bloody Thumb.'" He said it with neither frown nor smile, and his visitor was conscious of a certain deep and virile indifference in the man which his wife had called greatness. He laid down a gory yellow "shocker" without even feeling its incongruity enough to comment on it humorously. John Boulnois was a big, slow-moving man with a massive head, partly grey and partly bald, and blunt, burly features. He was in shabby and very old-fashioned evening-dress, with a narrow triangular opening of shirt-front: he had assumed it that evening in his original purpose of going to see his wife act Juliet.

"I won't keep you long from 'The Bloody Thumb' or any other catastrophic affairs," said Father Brown, smiling. "I only came to ask you about the crime you committed this evening."

Boulnois looked at him steadily, but a red bar began to show across his broad brow; and he seemed like one discovering embarrassment for the first time.

"I know it was a strange crime," assented Brown in a low voice. "Stranger than murder perhaps--to you. The little sins are sometimes harder to confess than the big ones--but that's why it's so important to confess them. Your crime is committed by every fashionable hostess six times a week: and yet you find it sticks to your tongue like a nameless atrocity."

"It makes one feel," said the philosopher slowly, "such a damned fool."

"I know," assented the other, "but one often has to choose between feeling a damned fool and being one."

"I can't analyse myself well," went on Boulnois; "but sitting in that chair with that story I was as happy as a schoolboy on a half-holiday. It was security, eternity--I can't convey it... the cigars were within reach... the matches were within reach... the Thumb had four more appearances to... it was not only a peace, but a plenitude. Then that
bell rang, and I thought for one long, mortal minute that I couldn't get out of that chair--literally, physically, muscularly couldn't. Then I did it like a man lifting the world, because I knew all the servants were out. I opened the front door, and there was a little man with his mouth open to speak and his notebook open to write in. I remembered the Yankee interviewer I had forgotten. His hair was parted in the middle, and I tell you that murder--"

"I understand," said Father Brown. "I've seen him."

"I didn't commit murder," continued the Catastrophist mildly, "but only perjury. I said I had gone across to Pendragon Park and shut the door in his face. That is my crime, Father Brown, and I don't know what penance you would inflict for it."

"I shan't inflict any penance," said the clerical gentleman, collecting his heavy hat and umbrella with an air of some amusement; "quite the contrary. I came here specially to let you off the little penance which would otherwise have followed your little offence."

"And what," asked Boulnois, smiling, "is the little penance I have so luckily been let off?"

"Being hanged," said Father Brown.

TWELVE

The Fairy Tale of Father Brown

THE picturesque city and state of Heiligwaldenstein was one of those toy kingdoms of which certain parts of the German Empire still consist. It had come under the Prussian hegemony quite late in history--hardly fifty years before the fine summer day when Flambeau and Father Brown found themselves sitting in its gardens and drinking its beer. There had been not a little of war and wild justice there within living memory, as soon will be shown. But in merely looking at it one could not dismiss that impression of childishness which is the most charming side of Germany--those little pantomime, paternal monarchies in which a king seems as domestic as a cook. The German soldiers by the innumerable sentry-boxes looked strangely like German toys, and the clean-cut battlements of the castle, gilded by the sunshine, looked the more like the gilt gingerbread. For it was brilliant weather. The sky was as Prussian a blue as Potsdam itself could require, but it was yet more like that lavish and glowing use of the colour which a child extracts from a shilling paint-box. Even the grey-ribbed trees looked young, for the pointed buds on them were still pink, and in a pattern against the strong blue looked like innumerable childish figures.

Despite his prosaic appearance and generally practical walk of life, Father Brown was not without a certain streak of romance in his composition, though he generally kept his daydreams to himself, as many children do. Amid the brisk, bright colours of such a day, and in the heraldic framework of such a town, he did feel rather as if he had entered a fairy tale. He took a childish pleasure, as a younger brother might, in the formidable sword-stick which Flambeau always flung as he walked, and which now stood upright beside his tall mug of Munich. Nay, in his sleepy irresponsibility, he even found himself eyeing the knobbed and clumsy head of his own shabby umbrella, with some faint memories of the ogre's club in a coloured toy-book. But he never composed anything in the form of fiction, unless it be the tale that follows:

"I wonder," he said, "whether one would have real adventures in a place like this, if one put oneself in the way? It's a splendid back-scene for them, but I always have a kind of feeling that they would fight you with pasteboard sabres more than real, horrible swords."

"You are mistaken," said his friend. "In this place they not only fight with swords, but kill without swords. And there's worse than that."

"Why, what do you mean?" asked Father Brown.

"Why," replied the other, "I should say this was the only place in Europe where a man was ever shot without firearms."

"Do you mean a bow and arrow?" asked Brown in some wonder.

"I mean a bullet in the brain," replied Flambeau. "Don't you know the story of the late Prince of this place? It was one of the great police mysteries about twenty years ago. You remember, of course, that this place was forcibly annexed at the time of Bismarck's very earliest schemes of consolidation--forcibly, that is, but not at all easily. The empire (or what wanted to be one) sent Prince Otto of Grossenmark to rule the place in the Imperial interests. We saw his portrait in the gallery there--a handsome old gentleman if he'd had any hair or eyebrows, and hadn't been wrinkled all over like a vulture; but he had things to harass him, as I'll explain in a minute. He was a soldier of distinguished skill and success, but he didn't have altogether an easy job with this little place. He was defeated in several battles by the celebrated Arnhold brothers--the three guerrilla patriots to whom Swinburne wrote a poem, you remember:

Wolves with the hair of the ermine, Crows that are crowned and kings--These things be many as vermin, Yet Three shall abide these things.

Or something of that kind. Indeed, it is by no means certain that the occupation would ever have been successful had not one of the three brothers, Paul, despicably, but very decisively declined to abide these things any longer,
and, by surrendering all the secrets of the insurrection, ensured its overthrow and his own ultimate promotion to the post of chamberlain to Prince Otto. After this, Ludwig, the one genuine hero among Mr Swinburne's heroes, was killed, sword in hand, in the capture of the city; and the third, Heinrich, who, though not a traitor, had always been tame and even timid compared with his active brothers, retired into something like a hermitage, became converted to a Christian quietism which was almost Quakerish, and never mixed with men except to give nearly all he had to the poor. They tell me that not long ago he could still be seen about the neighbourhood occasionally, a man in a black cloak, nearly blind, with very wild, white hair, but a face of astonishing softness."

"I know," said Father Brown. "I saw him once."

His friend looked at him in some surprise. "I didn't know you'd been here before," he said. "Perhaps you know as much about it as I do. Anyhow, that's the story of the Arnholds, and he was the last survivor of them. Yes, and of all the men who played parts in that drama."

"You mean that the Prince, too, died long before?"

"Died," repeated Flambeau, "and that's about as much as we can say. You must understand that towards the end of his life he began to have those tricks of the nerves not uncommon with tyrants. He multiplied the ordinary daily and nightly guard round his castle till there seemed to be more sentry-boxes than houses in the town, and doubtful characters were shot without mercy. He lived almost entirely in a little room that was in the very centre of the enormous labyrinth of all the other rooms, and even in this he erected another sort of central cabin or cupboard, lined with steel, like a safe or a battleship. Some say that under the floor of this again was a secret hole in the earth, no more than large enough to hold him, so that, in his anxiety to avoid the grave, he was willing to go into a place pretty much like it. But he went further yet. The populace had been supposed to be disarmed ever since the suppression of the revolt, but Otto now insisted, as governments very seldom insist, on an absolute and literal disarmament. It was carried out, with extraordinary thoroughness and severity, by very well-organized officials over a small and familiar area, and, so far as human strength and science can be absolutely certain of anything, Prince Otto was absolutely certain that nobody could introduce so much as a toy pistol into Heiligwaldenstein."

"Human science can never be quite certain of things like that," said Father Brown, still looking at the red budding of the branches over his head, "if only because of the difficulty about definition and connotation. What is a weapon? People have been murdered with the mildest domestic comforts; certainly with tea-kettles, probably with tea-cosies. On the other hand, if you showed an Ancient Briton a revolver, I doubt if he would know it was a weapon-- until it was fired into him, of course. Perhaps somebody introduced a firearm so new that it didn't even look like a firearm. Perhaps it looked like a thimble or something. Was the bullet at all peculiar?"

"Not that I ever heard of," answered Flambeau; "but my information is fragmentary, and only comes from my old friend Grimm. He was a very able detective in the German service, and he tried to arrest me; I arrested him instead, and we had many interesting chats. He was in charge here of the inquiry about Prince Otto, but I forgot to ask him anything about the bullet. According to Grimm, what happened was this." He paused a moment to drain the greater part of his dark lager at a draught, and then resumed:

"On the evening in question, it seems, the Prince was expected to appear in one of the outer rooms, because he had to receive certain visitors whom he really wished to meet. They were geological experts sent to investigate the old question of the alleged supply of gold from the rocks round here, upon which (as it was said) the small city-state had so long maintained its credit and been able to negotiate with its neighbours even under the ceaseless bombardment of bigger armies. Hitherto it had never been found by the most exacting inquiry which could--"

"Which could be quite certain of discovering a toy pistol," said Father Brown with a smile. "But what about the brother who ratted? Hadn't he anything to tell the Prince?"

"He always asseverated that he did not know," replied Flambeau; "that this was the one secret his brothers had not told him. It is only right to say that it received some support from fragmentary words--spoken by the great Ludwig in the hour of death, when he looked at Heinrich but pointed at Paul, and said, 'You have not told him...!' and was soon afterwards incapable of speech. Anyhow, the deputation of distinguished geologists and mineralogists from Paris and Berlin were there in the most magnificent and appropriate dress, for there are no men who like wearing their decorations so much as the men of science--as anybody knows who has ever been to a soiree of the Royal Society. It was a brilliant gathering, but very late, and gradually the Chamberlain—you saw his portrait, too: a man with black eyebrows, serious eyes, and a meaningless sort of smile underneath—the Chamberlain, I say, discovered there was everything there except the Prince himself. He searched all the outer salons; then, remembering the man's mad fits of fear, hurried to the inmost chamber. That also was empty, but the steel turret or cabin erected in the middle of it took some time to open. When it did open it was empty, too. He went and looked into the hole in the ground, which seemed deeper and somehow all the more like a grave—that is his account, of course. And even as he did so he heard a burst of cries and tumult in the long rooms and corridors without.

"First it was a distant din and thrill of something unthinkable on the horizon of the crowd, even beyond the
castle. Next it was a wordless clamour startlingly close, and loud enough to be distinct if each word had not killed
the other. Next came words of a terrible clearness, coming nearer, and next one man, rushing into the room and
telling the news as briefly as such news is told.

"Otto, Prince of Heiligwaldenstein and Grossenmark, was lying in the dews of the darkening twilight in the
woods beyond the castle, with his arms flung out and his face flung up to the moon. The blood still pulsed from his
shattered temple and jaw, but it was the only part of him that moved like a living thing. He was clad in his full white
and yellow uniform, as to receive his guests within, except that the sash or scarf had been unbound and lay rather
crumpled by his side. Before he could be lifted he was dead. But, dead or alive, he was a riddle--he who had always
hidden in the inmost chamber out there in the wet woods, unarmed and alone."

"Who found his body?" asked Father Brown.

"Some girl attached to the Court named Hedwig von something or other," replied his friend, "who had been out
in the wood picking wild flowers."

"Had she picked any?" asked the priest, staring rather vacantly at the veil of the branches above him.

"Yes," replied Flambeau. "I particularly remember that the Chamberlain, or old Grimm or somebody, said how
horrible it was, when they came up at her call, to see a girl holding spring flowers and bending over that--that bloody
collapse. However, the main point is that before help arrived he was dead, and the news, of course, had to be carried
back to the castle. The consternation it created was something beyond even that natural in a Court at the fall of a
potentate. The foreign visitors, especially the mining experts, were in the wildest doubt and excitement, as well as
many important Prussian officials, and it soon began to be clear that the scheme for finding the treasure bulked
much bigger in the business than people had supposed. Experts and officials had been promised great prizes or
international advantages, and some even said that the Prince's secret apartments and strong military protection were
due less to fear of the populace than to the pursuit of some private investigation of--"

"Had the flowers got long stalks?" asked Father Brown.

Flambeau stared at him. "What an odd person you are!" he said. "That's exactly what old Grimm said. He said
the ugliest part of it, he thought--uglier than the blood and bullet--was that the flowers were quite short, plucked
close under the head."

"Of course," said the priest, "when a grown up girl is really picking flowers, she picks them with plenty of stalk.
If she just pulled their heads off, as a child does, it looks as if--" And he hesitated.

"Well?" inquired the other.

"Well, it looks rather as if she had snatched them nervously, to make an excuse for being there after--well, after
she was there."

"I know what you're driving at," said Flambeau rather gloomily. "But that and every other suspicion breaks down
on the one point-- the want of a weapon. He could have been killed, as you say, with lots of other things--even with
his own military sash; but we have to explain not how he was killed, but how he was shot. And the fact is we can't.
They had the girl most ruthlessly searched; for, to tell the truth, she was a little suspect, though the niece and ward
of the wicked old Chamberlain, Paul Arnhold. But she was very romantic, and was suspected of sympathy with the old
revolutionary enthusiasm in her family. All the same, however romantic you are, you can't imagine a big bullet into
a man's jaw or brain without using a gun or pistol. And there was no pistol, though there were two pistol shots. I
leave it to you, my friend."

"How do you know there were two shots?" asked the little priest.

"There was only one in his head," said his companion, "but there was another bullet-hole in the sash."

Father Brown's smooth brow became suddenly constricted. "Was the other bullet found?" he demanded.

Flambeau started a little. "I don't think I remember," he said.

"Hold on! Hold on! Hold on!" cried Brown, frowning more and more, with a quite unusual concentration of
curiosity. "Don't think me rude. Let me think this out for a moment."

"All right," said Flambeau, laughing, and finished his beer. A slight breeze stirred the budding trees and blew up
into the sky cloudlets of white and pink that seemed to make the sky bluer and the whole coloured scene more
quaint. They might have been cherubs flying home to the casements of a sort of celestial nursery. The oldest tower
of the castle, the Dragon Tower, stood up as grotesque as the ale-mug, but as homely. Only beyond the tower
glimmered the wood in which the man had lain dead.

"What became of this Hedwig eventually?" asked the priest at last.

"She is married to General Schwartz," said Flambeau. "No doubt you've heard of his career, which was rather
romantic. He had distinguished himself even, before his exploits at Sadowa and Gravelotte; in fact, he rose from the
ranks, which is very unusual even in the smallest of the German..."

Father Brown sat up suddenly.

"Rose from the ranks!" he cried, and made a mouth as if to whistle. "Well, well, what a queer story! What a
queer way of killing a man; but I suppose it was the only one possible. But to think of hate so patient--"

"What do you mean?" demanded the other. "In what way did they kill the man?"

"They killed him with the sash," said Brown carefully; and then, as Flambeau protested: "Yes, yes, I know about the bullet. Perhaps I ought to say he died of having a sash. I know it doesn't sound like having a disease."

"I suppose," said Flambeau, "that you've got some notion in your head, but it won't easily get the bullet out of his. As I explained before, he might easily have been strangled. But he was shot. By whom? By what?"

"He was shot by his own orders," said the priest.

"You mean he committed suicide?"

"I didn't say by his own wish," replied Father Brown. "I said by his own orders."

"Well, anyhow, what is your theory?"

Father Brown laughed. "I am only on my holiday," he said. "I haven't got any theories. Only this place reminds me of fairy stories, and, if you like, I'll tell you a story."

The little pink clouds, that looked rather like sweet-stuff, had floated up to crown the turrets of the gilt gingerbread castle, and the pink baby fingers of the budding trees seemed spreading and stretching to reach them; the blue sky began to take a bright violet of evening, when Father Brown suddenly spoke again:

"It was on a dismal night, with rain still dropping from the trees and dew already clustering, that Prince Otto of Grossenmark stepped hurriedly out of a side door of the castle and walked swiftly into the wood. One of the innumerable sentries saluted him, but he did not notice it. He had no wish to be specially noticed himself. He was glad when the great trees, grey and already greasy with rain, swallowed him up like a swamp. He had deliberately chosen the least frequented side of his palace, but even that was more frequented than he liked. But there was no particular chance of officious or diplomatic pursuit, for his exit had been a sudden impulse. All the full-dressed diplomatists he left behind were unimportant. He had realized suddenly that he could do without them.

"His great passion was not the much nobler dread of death, but the strange desire of gold. For this legend of the gold he had left Grossenmark and invaded Heiligwaldenstein. For this and only this he had bought the traitor and butchered the hero, for this he had long questioned and cross-questioned the false Chamberlain, until he had come to the conclusion that, touching his ignorance, the renegade really told the truth. For this he had, somewhat reluctantly, paid and promised money on the chance of gaining the larger amount; and for this he had stolen out of his palace like a thief in the rain, for he had thought of another way to get the desire of his eyes, and to get it cheap.

"Away at the upper end of a rambling mountain path to which he was making his way, among the pillared rocks along the ridge that hangs above the town, stood the hermitage, hardly more than a cavern fenced with thorn, in which the third of the great brethren had long hidden himself from the world. He, thought Prince Otto, could have no real reason for refusing to give up the gold. He had known its place for years, and made no effort to find it, even before his new ascetic creed had cut him off from property or pleasures. True, he had been an enemy, but he now professed a duty of having no enemies. Some concession to his cause, some appeal to his principles, would probably get the mere money secret out of him. Otto was no coward, in spite of his network of military precautions, and, in any case, his avarice was stronger than his fears. Nor was there much cause for fear. Since he was certain there were no private arms in the whole principality, he was a hundred times more certain there were none in the Quaker's little city below him. For as far as the eye could see there ran the rifles of his friends, and not one pinch of powder for his enemies. Rifles ranked so close even to that mountain path that a cry from him would bring the soldiers rushing up the hill, to say nothing of the fact that the wood and ridge were patrolled at regular intervals; rifles so far away, in the dim woods, dwarfed by distance, beyond the river, that an enemy could not sink into the town by any detour. And round the palace rifles at the west door and the east door, at the north door and the south, and all along the four facades linking them. He was safe.

"It was all the more clear when he had crested the ridge and found how naked was the nest of his old enemy. He found himself on a small platform of rock, broken abruptly by the three corners of precipice. Behind was the black cave, masked with green thorn, so low that it was hard to believe that a man could enter it. In front was the fall of the cliffs and the vast but cloudy vision of the valley. On the small rock platform stood an old bronze lectern or reading-stand, groaning under a great German Bible. The bronze or copper of it had grown green with the eating airs of that exalted place, and Otto had instantly the thought, "Even if they had arms, they must be rusted by now." Moonrise had already made a deathly dawn behind the crests and crags, and the rain had ceased.

"Behind the lectern, and looking across the valley, stood a very old man in a black robe that fell as straight as the black hill, to say nothing of the fact that the wood and ridge were patrolled at regular intervals; rifles so far away, in the dim woods, dwarfed by distance, beyond the river, that an enemy could not sink into the town by any detour. And round the palace rifles at the west door and the east door, at the north door and the south, and all along the four facades linking them. He was safe.

"Sir," said the Prince of Heiligwaldenstein, with quite unusual courtesy, 'I should like only one word with you.'
"...and in their chariots,' went on the old man weakly, 'but we will trust in the name of the Lord of Hosts....' His last words were inaudible, but he closed the book reverently and, being nearly blind, made a groping movement and gripped the reading-stand. Instantly his two servants slipped out of the low-browed cavern and supported him. They wore dull-black gowns like his own, but they had not the frosty silver on the hair, nor the frost-bitten refinement of the features. They were peasants, Croat or Magyar, with broad, blunt visages and blinking eyes. For the first time something troubled the Prince, but his courage and diplomatic sense stood firm.

"I fear we have not met,' he said, 'since that awful cannonade in which your poor brother died.'

"All my brothers died,' said the old man, still looking across the valley. Then, for one instant turning on Otto his drooping, delicate features, and the wintry hair that seemed to drip over his eyebrows like icicles, he added: 'You see, I am dead, too.'

"I hope you'll understand,' said the Prince, controlling himself almost to a point of conciliation, 'that I do not come here to haunt you, as a mere ghost of those great quarrels. We will not talk about who was right or wrong in that, but at least there was one point on which we were never wrong, because you were always right. Whatever is to be said of the policy of your family, no one for one moment imagines that you were moved by the mere gold; you have proved yourself above the suspicion that....'

"The old man in the black gown had hitherto continued to gaze at him with watery blue eyes and a sort of weak wisdom in his face. But when the word 'gold' was said he held out his hand as if in arrest of something, and turned away his face to the mountains.

"He has spoken of gold,' he said. 'He has spoken of things not lawful. Let him cease to speak.'

"Otto had the vice of his Prussian type and tradition, which is to regard success not as an incident but as a quality. He conceived himself and his like as perpetually conquering peoples who were perpetually being conquered. Consequently, he was ill acquainted with the emotion of surprise, and ill prepared for the next movement, which startled and stiffened him. He had opened his mouth to answer the hermit, when the mouth was stopped and the voice strangled by a strong, soft gag suddenly twisted round his head like a tourniquet. It was fully forty seconds before he even realized that the two Hungarian servants had done it, and that they had done it with his own military scarf.

"The old man went again weakly to his great brazen-supported Bible, turned over the leaves, with a patience that had something horrible about it, till he came to the Epistle of St James, and then began to read: 'The tongue is a little member, but--'

"Something in the very voice made the Prince turn suddenly and plunge down the mountain-path he had climbed. He was half-way towards the gardens of the palace before he even tried to tear the strangling scarf from his neck and jaws. He tried again and again, and it was impossible; the men who had knotted that gag knew the difference between what a man can do with his hands in front of him and what he can do with his hands behind his head. His legs were free to leap like an antelope on the mountains, his arms were free to use any gesture or wave any signal, but he could not speak. A dumb devil was in him.

"He had come close to the woods that walled in the castle before he had quite realized what his wordless state meant and was meant to mean. Once more he looked down grimly at the bright, square labyrinths of the lamp-lit city below him, and he smiled no more. He felt himself repeating the phrases of his former mood with a murderous irony. Far as the eye could see ran the rifles of his friends, every one of whom would shoot him dead if he could not answer the challenge. Rifles were so near that the wood and ridge could be patrolled at regular intervals; therefore it was useless to hide in the wood till morning. Rifles were ranked so far away that an enemy could not slink into the town by any detour; therefore it was vain to return to the city by any remote course. A cry from him would bring his soldiers rushing up the hill. But from him no cry would come.

"The moon had risen in strengthening silver, and the sky showed in stripes of bright, nocturnal blue between the black stripes of the pines about the castle. Flowers of some wide and feathery sort-- for he had never noticed such things before--were at once luminous and discoloured by the moonshine, and seemed indescribably fantastic as they clustered, as if crawling about the roots of the trees. Perhaps his reason had been suddenly unseated by the unnatural captivity he carried with him, but in that wood he felt something unfathomably German--the fairy tale. He knew with half his mind that he was drawing near to the castle of an ogre--he had forgotten that he was the ogre. He remembered asking his mother if bears lived in the old park at home. He stooped to pick a flower, as if it were a charm against enchantment. The stalk was stronger than he expected, and broke with a slight snap. Carefully trying to place it in his scarf, he heard the halloo, 'Who goes there?' Then he remembered the scarf was not in its usual place.

"He tried to scream and was silent. The second challenge came; and then a shot that shrieked as it came and then was stilled suddenly by impact. Otto of Grossenmark lay very peacefully among the fairy trees, and would do no more harm either with gold or steel; only the silver pencil of the moon would pick out and trace here and there the
intricate ornament of his uniform, or the old wrinkles on his brow. May God have mercy on his soul.

"The sentry who had fired, according to the strict orders of the garrison, naturally ran forward to find some trace of his quarry. He was a private named Schwartz, since not unknown in his profession, and what he found was a bald man in uniform, but with his face so bandaged by a kind of mask made of his own military scarf that nothing but open, dead eyes could be seen, glittering stonily in the moonlight. The bullet had gone through the gag into the jaw; that is why there was a shot-hole in the scarf, but only one shot. Naturally, if not correctly, young Schwartz tore off the mysterious silken mask and cast it on the grass; and then he saw whom he had slain.

"We cannot be certain of the next phase. But I incline to believe that there was a fairy tale, after all, in that little wood, horrible as was its occasion. Whether the young lady named Hedwig had any previous knowledge of the soldier she saved and eventually married, or whether she came accidentally upon the accident and their intimacy began that night, we shall probably never know. But we can know, I fancy, that this Hedwig was a heroine, and deserved to marry a man who became something of a hero. She did the bold and the wise thing. She persuaded the sentry to go back to his post, in which place there was nothing to connect him with the disaster; he was but one of the most loyal and orderly of fifty such sentries within call. She remained by the body and gave the alarm; and there was nothing to connect her with the disaster either, since she had not got, and could not have, any firearms.

"Well," said Father Brown rising cheerfully "I hope they're happy."

"Where are you going?" asked his friend.

"I'm going to have another look at that portrait of the Chamberlain, the Arnhold who betrayed his brethren," answered the priest. "I wonder what part--I wonder if a man is less a traitor when he is twice a traitor?"

And he ruminated long before the portrait of a white-haired man with black eyebrows and a pink, painted sort of smile that seemed to contradict the black warning in his eyes.
Harold March, the rising reviewer and social critic, was walking vigorously across a great tableland of moors and commons, the horizon of which was fringed with the far-off woods of the famous estate of Torwood Park. He was a good-looking young man in tweeds, with very pale curly hair and pale clear eyes. Walking in wind and sun in the very landscape of liberty, he was still young enough to remember his politics and not merely try to forget them. For his errand at Torwood Park was a political one; it was the place of appointment named by no less a person than the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Sir Howard Horne, then introducing his so-called Socialist budget, and prepared to expound it in an interview with so promising a penman. Harold March was the sort of man who knows everything about politics, and nothing about politicians. He also knew a great deal about art, letters, philosophy, and general culture; about almost everything, indeed, except the world he was living in.

Abruptly, in the middle of those sunny and windy flats, he came upon a sort of cleft almost narrow enough to be called a crack in the land. It was just large enough to be the water-course for a small stream which vanished at intervals under green tunnels of undergrowth, as if in a dwarfish forest. Indeed, he had an odd feeling as if he were a giant looking over the valley of the pygmies. When he dropped into the hollow, however, the impression was lost; the rocky banks, though hardly above the height of a cottage, hung over and had the profile of a precipice. As he began to wander down the course of the stream, in idle but romantic curiosity, and saw the water shining in short strips between the great gray boulders and bushes as soft as great green mosses, he fell into quite an opposite vein of fantasy. It was rather as if the earth had opened and swallowed him into a sort of underworld of dreams. And when he became conscious of a human figure dark against the silver stream, sitting on a large boulder and looking rather like a large bird, it was perhaps with some of the premonitions proper to a man who meets the strangest friendship of his life.

The man was apparently fishing; or at least was fixed in a fisherman's attitude with more than a fisherman's immobility. March was able to examine the man almost as if he had been a statue for some minutes before the statue spoke. He was a tall, fair man, cadaverous, and a little lackadaisical, with heavy eyelids and a high-bridged nose. When his face was shaded with his wide white hat, his light mustache and lithe figure gave him a look of youth. But the Panama lay on the moss beside him; and the spectator could see that his brow was prematurely bald; and this, combined with a certain hollowness about the eyes, had an air of headwork and even headache. But the most curious thing about him, realized after a short scrutiny, was that, though he looked like a fisherman, he was not fishing.

He was holding, instead of a rod, something that might have been a landing-net which some fishermen use, but which was much more like the ordinary toy net which children carry, and which they generally use indifferently for shrimps or butterflies. He was dipping this into the water at intervals, gravely regarding its harvest of weed or mud, and emptying it out again.

"No, I haven't caught anything," he remarked, calmly, as if answering an unspoken query. "When I do I have to throw it back again; especially the big fish. But some of the little beasts interest me when I get 'em."

"A scientific interest, I suppose?" observed March.

"Of a rather amateurish sort, I fear," answered the strange fisherman. "I have a sort of hobby about what they call 'phenomena of phosphorescence.' But it would be rather awkward to go about in society carrying stinking fish."

"I suppose it would," said March, with a smile.

"Rather odd to enter a drawing-room carrying a large luminous cod," continued the stranger, in his listless way. "How quaint it would be if one could carry it about like a lantern, or have little sprats for candles. Some of the seabeasts would really be very pretty like lampshades; the blue sea-snail that glitters all over like starlight; and some of the red starfish really shine like red stars. But, naturally, I'm not looking for them here."

March thought of asking him what he was looking for; but, feeling unequal to a technical discussion at least as deep as the deep-sea fishes, he returned to more ordinary topics.

"Delightful sort of hole this is," he said. "This little dell and river here. It's like those places Stevenson talks about, where something ought to happen."

"I know," answered the other. "I think it's because the place itself, so to speak, seems to happen and not merely to exist. Perhaps that's what old Picasso and some of the Cubists are trying to express by angles and jagged lines. Look at that wall like low cliffs that juts forward just at right angles to the slope of turf sweeping up to it. That's like a silent collision. It's like a breaker and the back-wash of a wave."

March looked at the low-browed crag overhanging the green slope and nodded. He was interested in a man who
turned so easily from the technicalities of science to those of art; and asked him if he admired the new angular artists.

"As I feel it, the Cubists are not Cubist enough," replied the stranger. "I mean they're not thick enough. By making things mathematical they make them thin. Take the living lines out of that landscape, simplify it to a right angle, and you flatten it out to a mere diagram on paper. Diagrams have their own beauty; but it is of just the other sort. They stand for the unalterable things; the calm, eternal, mathematical sort of truths; what somebody calls the 'white radiance of--'"

He stopped, and before the next word came something had happened almost too quickly and completely to be realized. From behind the overhanging rock came a noise and rush like that of a railway train; and a great motor car appeared. It tipped the crest of cliff, black against the sun, like a battle-chariot rushing to destruction in some wild epic. March automatically put out his hand in one futile gesture, as if to catch a falling tea-cup in a drawing-room.

For the fraction of a flash it seemed to leave the ledge of rock like a flying ship; then the very sky seemed to turn over like a wheel, and it lay a ruin amid the tall grasses below, a line of gray smoke going up slowly from it into the silent air. A little lower the figure of a man with gray hair lay tumbled down the steep green slope, his limbs lying all at random, and his face turned away.

The eccentric fisherman dropped his net and walked swiftly toward the spot, his new acquaintance following him. As they drew near there seemed a sort of monstrous irony in the fact that the dead machine was still throbbing and thundering as busily as a factory, while the man lay so still.

He was unquestionably dead. The blood flowed in the grass from a hopelessly fatal fracture at the back of the skull; but the face, which was turned to the sun, was uninjured and strangely arresting in itself. We feel, somehow, that we ought to recognize it, even though we do not. It was of the broad, square sort with great jaws, almost like that of a highly intellectual ape; the wide mouth shut so tight as to be traced by a mere line; the nose short with the sort of nostrils that seem to gape with an appetite for the air. The oddest thing about the face was that one of the eyebrows was cocked up at a much sharper angle than the other. March thought he had never seen a face so naturally alive as that dead one. And its ugly energy seemed all the stranger for its halo of hoary hair. Some papers lay half fallen out of the pocket, and from among them March extracted a card-case. He read the name on the card aloud.

"Sir Humphrey Turnbull. I'm sure I've heard that name somewhere."

His companion only gave a sort of a little sigh and was silent for a moment, as if ruminating, then he merely said, "The poor fellow is quite gone," and added some scientific terms in which his auditor once more found himself out of his depth.

"As things are," continued the same curiously well-informed person, "it will be more legal for us to leave the body as it is until the police are informed. In fact, I think it will be well if nobody except the police is informed. Don't be surprised if I seem to be keeping it dark from some of our neighbors round here." Then, as if prompted to regularize his rather abrupt confidence, he said: "I've come down to see my cousin at Torwood; my name is Horne Fisher. Might be a pun on my pottering about here, mightn't it?"

"Is Sir Howard Horne your cousin?" asked March. "I'm going to Torwood Park to see him myself; only about his public work, of course, and the wonderful stand he is making for his principles. I think this Budget is the greatest thing in English history. If it fails, it will be the most heroic failure in English history. Are you an admirer of your great kinsman, Mr. Fisher?"

"Rather," said Mr. Fisher. "He's the best shot I know."

Then, as if sincerely repentant of his nonchalance, he added, with a sort of enthusiasm:

"No, but really, he's a _beautiful_ shot."

As if fired by his own words, he took a sort of leap at the ledges of the rock above him, and scaled them with a sudden agility in startling contrast to his general lassitude. He had stood for some seconds on the headland above, with his aquiline profile under the Panama hat relieved against the sky and peering over the countryside before his companion had collected himself sufficiently to scramble up after him.

The level above was a stretch of common turf on which the tracks of the fated car were plowed plainly enough; but the brink of it was broken as with rocky teeth; broken boulders of all shapes and sizes lay near the edge; it was almost incredible that any one could have deliberately driven into such a death trap, especially in broad daylight.

"I can't make head or tail of it," said March. "Was he blind? Or blind drunk?"

"Neither, by the look of him," replied the other.

"Then it was suicide."

"It doesn't seem a cozy way of doing it," remarked the man called Fisher. "Besides, I don't fancy poor old Puggy would commit suicide, somehow."

"Poor old who?" inquired the wondering journalist. "Did you know this unfortunate man?"
"Nobody knew him exactly," replied Fisher, with some vagueness. "But one knew him, of course. He'd been a terror in his time, in Parliament and the courts, and so on; especially in that row about the aliens who were deported as undesirables, when he wanted one of 'em hanged for murder. He was so sick about it that he retired from the bench. Since then he mostly motored about by himself; but he was coming to Torwood, too, for the week-end; and I don't see why he should deliberately break his neck almost at the very door. I believe Hogs--I mean my cousin Howard--was coming down specially to meet him."

"Torwood Park doesn't belong to your cousin?" inquired March.

"No; it used to belong to the Winthrops, you know," replied the other. "Now a new man's got it; a man from Montreal named Jenkins. Hogs comes for the shooting; I told you he was a lovely shot."

This repeated eulogy on the great social statesman affected Harold March as if somebody had defined Napoleon as a distinguished player of nap. But he had another half-formed impression struggling in this flood of unfamiliar things, and he brought it to the surface before it could vanish.

"Jenkins," he repeated. "Surely you don't mean Jefferson Jenkins, the social reformer? I mean the man who's fighting for the new cottage-estate scheme. It would be as interesting to meet him as any Cabinet Minister in the world, if you'll excuse my saying so."

"Yes; Hogs told him it would have to be cottages," said Fisher. "He said the breed of cattle had improved too often, and people were beginning to laugh. And, of course, you must hang a peerage on to something; though the poor chap hasn't got it yet. Hullo, here's somebody else."

They had started walking in the tracks of the car, leaving it behind them in the hollow, still humming horribly like a huge insect that had killed a man. The tracks took them to the corner of the road, one arm of which went on in the same line toward the distant gates of the park. It was clear that the car had been driven down the long straight road, and then, instead of turning with the road to the left, had gone straight on over the turf to its doom. But it was not this discovery that had riveted Fisher's eye, but something even more solid. At the angle of the white road a dark and solitary figure was standing almost as still as a finger post. It was that of a big man in rough shooting-clothes, bareheaded, and with tousled curly hair that gave him a rather wild look. On a nearer approach this first more fantastic impression faded; in a full light the figure took on more conventional colors, as of an ordinary gentleman who happened to have come out without a hat and without very studiously brushing his hair. But the massive stature remained, and something deep and even cavernous about the setting of the eyes redeemed his animal good looks from the commonplace. But March had no time to study the man more closely, for, much to his astonishment, his guide merely observed, "Hullo, Jack!" and walked past him as if he had indeed been a signpost, and without attempting to inform him of the catastrophe beyond the rocks. It was relatively a small thing, but it was only the first in a string of singular antics on which his new and eccentric friend was leading him.

The man they had passed looked after them in rather a suspicious fashion, but Fisher continued serenely on his way along the straight road that ran past the gates of the great estate.

"That's John Burke, the traveler," he condescended to explain. "I expect you've heard of him; shoots big game and all that. Sorry I couldn't stop to introduce you, but I dare say you'll meet him later on."

"I know his book, of course," said March, with renewed interest. "That is certainly a fine piece of description, about their being only conscious of the closeness of the elephant when the colossal head blocked out the moon."

"Yes, young Halkett writes jolly well, I think. What? Didn't you know Halkett wrote Burke's book for him? Burke can't use anything except a gun; and you can't write with that. Oh, he's genuine enough in his way, you know, as brave as a lion, or a good deal braver by all accounts."

"You seem to know all about him," observed March, with a rather bewildered laugh, "and about a good many other people."

Fisher's bald brow became abruptly corrugated, and a curious expression came into his eyes.

"I know too much," he said. "That's what's the matter with me. That's what's the matter with all of us, and the whole show; we know too much. Too much about one another; too much about ourselves. That's why I'm really interested, just now, about one thing that I don't know."

"And that is?" inquired the other.

"Why that poor fellow is dead."

They had walked along the straight road for nearly a mile, conversing at intervals in this fashion; and March had a singular sense of the whole world being turned inside out. Mr. Horne Fisher did not especially abuse his friends and relatives in fashionable society; of some of them he spoke with affection. But they seemed to be an entirely new set of men and women, who happened to have the same nerves as the men and women mentioned most often in the newspapers. Yet no fury of revolt could have seemed to him more utterly revolutionary than this cold familiarity. It was like daylight on the other side of stage scenery.

They reached the great lodge gates of the park, and, to March's surprise, passed them and continued along the
interminable white, straight road. But he was himself too early for his appointment with Sir Howard, and was not disinclined to see the end of his new friend's experiment, whatever it might be. They had long left the moorland behind them, and half the white road was gray in the great shadow of the Torwood pine forests, themselves like gray bars shuttered against the sunshine and within, amid that clear noon, manufacturing their own midnight. Soon, however, rifts began to appear in them like gleams of colored windows; the trees thinned and fell away as the road went forward, showing the wild, irregular copses in which, as Fisher said, the house-party had been blazing away all day. And about two hundred yards farther on they came to the first turn of the road.

At the corner stood a sort of decayed inn with the dingy sign of The Grapes. The signboard was dark and indiscernible by now, and hung black against the sky and the gray moorland beyond, about as inviting as a gallows. March remarked that it looked like a tavern for vinegar instead of wine.

"A good phrase," said Fisher, "and so it would be if you were silly enough to drink wine in it. But the beer is very good, and so is the brandy."

March followed him to the bar parlor with some wonder, and his dim sense of repugnance was not dismissed by the first sight of the innkeeper, who was widely different from the genial innkeepers of romance, a bony man, very silent behind a black mustache, but with black, restless eyes. Taciturn as he was, the investigator succeeded at last in extracting a scrap of information from him, by dint of ordering beer and talking to him persistently and minutely on the subject of motor cars. He evidently regarded the innkeeper as in some singular way an authority on motor cars; as being deep in the secrets of the mechanism, management, and mismanagement of motor cars; holding the man all the time with a glittering eye like the Ancient Mariner. Out of all this rather mysterious conversation there did emerge at last a sort of admission that one particular motor car, of a given description, had stopped before the inn about an hour before, and that an elderly man had alighted, requiring some mechanical assistance. Asked if the visitor required any other assistance, the innkeeper said shortly that the old gentleman had filled his flask and taken a packet of sandwiches. And with these words the somewhat inhospitable host had walked hastily out of the bar, and they heard him banging doors in the dark interior.

Fisher's weary eye wandered round the dusty and dreary inn parlor and rested dreamily on a glass case containing a stuffed bird, with a gun hung on hooks above it, which seemed to be its only ornament.

"Puggy was a humorist," he observed, "at least in his own rather grim style. But it seems rather too grim a joke for a man to buy a packet of sandwiches when he is just going to commit suicide."

"If you come to that," answered March, "it isn't very usual for a man to buy a packet of sandwiches when he's just outside the door of a grand house he's going to stop at."

"No... no," repeated Fisher, almost mechanically; and then suddenly cocked his eye at his interlocutor with a much livelier expression.

"By Jove! that's an idea. You're perfectly right. And that suggests a very queer idea, doesn't it?"

There was a silence, and then March started with irrational nervousness as the door of the inn was flung open and another man walked rapidly to the counter. He had struck it with a coin and called out for brandy before he saw the other two guests, who were sitting at a bare wooden table under the window. When he turned about with a rather wild stare, March had yet another unexpected emotion, for his guide hailed the man as Hoggs and introduced him as Sir Howard Horne.

He looked rather older than his boyish portraits in the illustrated papers, as is the way of politicians; his flat, fair hair was touched with gray, but his face was almost comically round, with a Roman nose which, when combined with his quick, bright eyes, raised a vague reminiscence of a parrot. He had a cap rather at the back of his head and a gun under his arm. Harold March had imagined many things about his meeting with the great political reformer, but he had never pictured him with a gun under his arm, drinking brandy in a public house.

"So you're stopping at Jink's, too," said Fisher. "Everybody seems to be at Jink's."

"Yes," replied the Chancellor of the Exchequer. "Jolly good shooting. At least all of it that isn't Jink's shooting. I never knew a chap with such good shooting that was such a bad shot. Mind you, he's a jolly good fellow and all that; I don't say a word against him. But he never learned to hold a gun when he was packing pork or whatever he did. They say he shot the cockade off his own servant's hat; just like him to have cockades, of course. He shot the weathercock off his own ridiculous gilded summerhouse. It's the only cock he'll ever kill, I should think. Are you coming up there now?"

Fisher said, rather vaguely, that he was following soon, when he had fixed something up; and the Chancellor of the Exchequer left the inn. March fancied he had been a little upset or impatient when he called for the brandy; but he had talked himself back into a satisfactory state, if the talk had not been quite what his literary visitor had expected. Fisher, a few minutes afterward, slowly led the way out of the tavern and stood in the middle of the road, looking down in the direction from which they had traveled. Then he walked back about two hundred yards in that direction and stood still again.
"I should think this is about the place," he said.
"What place?" asked his companion.
"The place where the poor fellow was killed," said Fisher, sadly.
"What do you mean?" demanded March.
"He was smashed up on the rocks a mile and a half from here."
"No, he wasn't," replied Fisher. "He didn't fall on the rocks at all. Didn't you notice that he only fell on the slope of soft grass underneath? But I saw that he had a bullet in him already."

Then after a pause he added:

"He was alive at the inn, but he was dead long before he came to the rocks. So he was shot as he drove his car down this strip of straight road, and I should think somewhere about here. After that, of course, the car went straight on with nobody to stop or turn it. It's really a very cunning dodge in its way; for the body would be found far away, and most people would say, as you do, that it was an accident to a motorist. The murderer must have been a clever brute."

"But wouldn't the shot be heard at the inn or somewhere?" asked March.
"It would be heard. But it would not be noticed. That," continued the investigator, "is where he was clever again. Shooting was going on all over the place all day; very likely he timed his shot so as to drown it in a number of others. Certainly he was a first-class criminal. And he was something else as well."

"What do you mean?" asked his companion, with a creepy premonition of something coming, he knew not why.
"He was a first-class shot," said Fisher. He had turned his back abruptly and was walking down a narrow, grassy lane, little more than a cart track, which lay opposite the inn and marked the end of the great estate and the beginning of the open moors. March plodded after him with the same idle perseverance, and found him staring through a gap in giant weeds and thorns at the flat face of a painted paling. From behind the paling rose the great gray columns of a row of poplars, which filled the heavens above them with dark-green shadow and shook faintly in a wind which had sunk slowly into a breeze. The afternoon was already deepening into evening, and the titanic shadows of the poplars lengthened over a third of the landscape.

"Are you a first-class criminal?" asked Fisher, in a friendly tone. "I'm afraid I'm not. But I think I can manage to be a sort of fourth-rate burglar."

And before his companion could reply he had managed to swing himself up and over the fence; March followed without much bodily effort, but with considerable mental disturbance. The poplars grew so close against the fence that they had some difficulty in slipping past them, and beyond the poplars they could see only a high hedge of laurel, green and lustrous in the level sun. Something in this limitation by a series of living walls made him feel as if he were really entering a shattered house instead of an open field. It was as if he came in by a disused door or window and found the way blocked by furniture. When they had circumvented the laurel hedge, they came out on a sort of terrace of turf, which fell by one green step to an oblong lawn like a bowling green. Beyond this was the only building in sight, a low conservatory, which seemed far away from anywhere, like a glass cottage standing in its own fields in fairyland. Fisher knew that lonely look of the outlying parts of a great house well enough. He realized that it is more of a satire on aristocracy than if it were choked with weeds and littered with ruins. For it is not neglected and yet it is deserted; at any rate, it is disused. It is regularly swept and garnished for a master who never comes.

Looking over the lawn, however, he saw one object which he had not apparently expected. It was a sort of tripod supporting a large disk like the round top of a table tipped sideways, and it was not until they had dropped on to the lawn and walked across to look at it that March realized that it was a target. It was worn and weatherstained; the gay colors of its concentric rings were faded; possibly it had been set up in those far-off Victorian days when there was a fashion of archery. March had one of his vague visions of ladies in cloudy crinolines and gentlemen in outlandish hats and whiskers revisiting that lost garden like ghosts.

Fisher, who was peering more closely at the target, startled him by an exclamation.

"Hullo!" he said. "Somebody has been peppering this thing with shot, after all, and quite lately, too. Why, I believe old Jink's been trying to improve his bad shooting here."

"Yes, and it looks as if it still wanted improving," answered March, laughing. "Not one of these shots is anywhere near the bull's-eye; they seem just scattered about in the wildest way."

"In the wildest way," repeated Fisher, still peering intently at the target. He seemed merely to assent, but March fancied his eye was shining under its sleepy lid and that he straightened his stooping figure with a strange effort.

"Excuse me a moment," he said, feeling in his pockets. "I think I've got some of my chemicals; and after that we'll go up to the house." And he stooped again over the target, putting something with his finger over each of the shot-holes, so far as March could see merely a dull-gray smear. Then they went through the gathering twilight up the long green avenues to the great house.
Here again, however, the eccentric investigator did not enter by the front door. He walked round the house until he found a window open, and, leaping into it, introduced his friend to what appeared to be the gun-room. Rows of the regular instruments for bringing down birds stood against the walls; but across a table in the window lay one or two weapons of a heavier and more formidable pattern.

"Hullo! these are Burke's big-game rifles," said Fisher. "I never knew he kept them here." He lifted one of them, examined it briefly, and put it down again, frowning heavily. Almost as he did so a strange young man came hurriedly into the room. He was dark and sturdy, with a bumpy forehead and a bulldog jaw, and he spoke with a curt apology.

"I left Major Burke's guns here," he said, "and he wants them packed up. He's going away to-night."

And he carried off the two rifles without casting a glance at the stranger; through the open window they could see his short, dark figure walking away across the glimmering garden. Fisher got out of the window again and stood looking after him.

"That's Halkett, whom I told you about," he said. "I knew he was a sort of secretary and had to do with Burke's papers; but I never knew he had anything to do with his guns. But he's just the sort of silent, sensible little devil who might be very good at anything; the sort of man you know for years before you find he's a chess champion."

He had begun to walk in the direction of the disappearing secretary, and they soon came within sight of the rest of the house-party talking and laughing on the lawn. They could see the tall figure and loose mane of the lion-hunter dominating the little group.

"By the way," observed Fisher, "when we were talking about Burke and Halkett, I said that a man couldn't very well write with a gun. Well, I'm not so sure now. Did you ever hear of an artist so clever that he could draw with a gun? There's a wonderful chap loose about here."

Sir Howard hailed Fisher and his friend the journalist with almost boisterous amiability. The latter was presented to Major Burke and Mr. Halkett and also (by way of a parenthesis) to his host, Mr. Jenkins, a commonplace little man in loud tweeds, whom everybody else seemed to treat with a sort of affection, as if he were a baby.

The irrepressible Chancellor of the Exchequer was still talking about the birds he had brought down, the birds that Burke and Halkett had brought down, and the birds that Jenkins, their host, had failed to bring down. It seemed to be a sort of sociable monomania.

"You and your big game," he ejaculated, aggressively, to Burke. "Why, anybody could shoot big game. You want to be a shot to shoot small game."

"Quite so," interposed Horne Fisher. "Now if only a hippopotamus could fly up in the air out of that bush, or you preserved flying elephants on the estate, why, then--"

"Why even Jink might hit that sort of bird," cried Sir Howard, hilariously slapping his host on the back. "Even he might hit a haystack or a hippopotamus."

"Look here, you fellows," said Fisher. "I want you to come along with me for a minute and shoot at something else. Not a hippopotamus. Another kind of queer animal I've found on the estate. It's an animal with three legs and one eye, and it's all the colors of the rainbow."

"What the deuce are you talking about?" asked Burke.

"You come along and see," replied Fisher, cheerfully.

Such people seldom reject anything nonsensical, for they are always seeking for something new. They gravely rearmed themselves from the gun-room and trooped along at the tail of their guide, Sir Howard only pausing, in a sort of ecstasy, to point out the celebrated gilt summerhouse on which the gilt weathercock still stood crooked. It was dusk turning to dark by the time they reached the remote green by the poplars and accepted the new and aimless game of shooting at the old mark.

The last light seemed to fade from the lawn, and the poplars against the sunset were like great plumes upon a purple hearse, when the futile procession finally curved round, and came out in front of the target. Sir Howard again slapped his host on the shoulder, shoving him playfully forward to take the first shot. The shoulder and arm he touched seemed unnaturally stiff and angular. Mr. Jenkins was holding his gun in an attitude more awkward than any that his satiric friends had seen or expected.

At the same instant a horrible scream seemed to come from nowhere. It was so unnatural and so unsuited to the scene that it might have been made by some inhuman thing flying on wings above them or eavesdropping in the dark woods beyond. But Fisher knew that it had started and stopped on the pale lips of Jefferson Jenkins, of Montreal, and no one at that moment catching sight of Jefferson Jenkins's face would have complained that it was commonplace. The next moment a torrent of guttural but good-humored oaths came from Major Burke as he and the two other men saw what was in front of them. The target stood up in the dim grass like a dark goblin grinning at them, and it was literally grinning. It had two eyes like stars, and in similar livid points of light were picked out the two upturned and open nostrils and the two ends of the wide and tight mouth. A few white dots above each eye
indicated the hoary eyebrows; and one of them ran upward almost erect. It was a brilliant caricature done in bright dotted lines and March knew of whom. It shone in the shadowy grass, smeared with sea fire as if one of the submarine monsters had crawled into the twilight garden; but it had the head of a dead man.

"It's only luminous paint," said Burke. "Old Fisher's been having a joke with that phosphorescent stuff of his."

"Seems to be meant for old Puggy" observed Sir Howard. "Hits him off very well."

With that they all laughed, except Jenkins. When they had all done, he made a noise like the first effort of an animal to laugh, and Horne Fisher suddenly strode across to him and said:

"Mr. Jenkins, I must speak to you at once in private."

It was by the little watercourse in the moors, on the slope under the hanging rock, that March met his new friend Fisher, by appointment, shortly after the ugly and almost grotesque scene that had broken up the group in the garden.

"It was a monkey-trick of mine," observed Fisher, gloomily, "putting phosphorus on the target; but the only chance to make him jump was to give him the horrors suddenly. And when he saw the face he'd shot at shining on the target he practiced on, all lit up with an infernal light, he did jump. Quite enough for my own intellectual satisfaction."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand even now," said March, "exactly what he did or why he did it."

"You ought to," replied Fisher, with his rather dreary smile, "for you gave me the first suggestion yourself. Oh yes, you did; and it was a very shrewd one. You said a man wouldn't take sandwiches with him to dine at a great house. It was quite true; and the inference was that, though he was going there, he didn't mean to dine there. Or, at any rate, that he might not be dining there. It occurred to me at once that he probably expected the visit to be unpleasant, or the reception doubtful, or something that would prevent his accepting hospitality. Then it struck me that Turnbull was a terror to certain shady characters in the past, and that he had come down to identify and denounce one of them. The chances at the start pointed to the host—that is, Jenkins. I'm morally certain now that Jenkins was the undesirable alien Turnbull wanted to convict in another shooting-affair, but you see the shooting gentleman had another shot in his locker."

"But you said he would have to be a very good shot," protested March.

"Jenkins is a very good shot," said Fisher. "A very good shot who can pretend to be a very bad shot. Shall I tell you the second hint I hit on, after yours, to make me think it was Jenkins? It was my cousin's account of his bad shooting. He'd shot a cockade off a hat and a weathercock off a building. Now, in fact, a man must shoot very well indeed to shoot so badly as that. He must shoot very neatly to hit the cockade and not the head, or even the hat. If the shots had really gone at random, the chances are a thousand to one that they would not have hit such prominent and picturesque objects. They were chosen because they were prominent and picturesque objects. They make a story to go the round of society. He keeps the crooked weathercock in the summerhouse to perpetuate the story of a legend. And then he lay in wait with his evil eye and wicked gun, safely ambushed behind the legend of his own incompetence."

"But there is more than that. There is the summerhouse itself. I mean there is the whole thing. There's all that Jenkins gets chaffed about, the gilding and the gaudy colors and all the vulgarity that's supposed to stamp him as an upstart. Now, as a matter of fact, upstarts generally don't do this. God knows there's enough of 'em in society; and one knows 'em well enough. And this is the very last thing they do. They're generally only too keen to know the right thing and do it; and they instantly put themselves body and soul into the hands of art decorators and art experts, who do the whole thing for them. There's hardly another millionaire alive who has the moral courage to have a gilt monogram on a chair like that one in the gun-room. For that matter, there's the name as well as the monogram. Names like Tompkins and Jenkins and Jinks are funny without being vulgar; I mean they are vulgar without being common. If you prefer it, they are commonplace without being common. They are just the names to be chosen to _look_ ordinary, but they're really rather extraordinary. Do you know many people called Tompkins? It's a good deal rarer than Talbot. It's pretty much the same with the comic clothes of the parvenu. Jenkins dresses like a character in Punch. But that's because he is a character in Punch. I mean he's a fictitious character. He's a fabulous animal. He doesn't exist."

"Have you ever considered what it must be like to be a man who doesn't exist? I mean to be a man with a fictitious character that he has to keep up at the expense not merely of personal talents: To be a new kind of hypocrite hiding a talent in a new kind of napkin. This man has chosen his hypocrisy very ingeniously; it was really a new one. A subtle villain has dressed up as a dashing gentleman and a worthy business man and a philanthropist and a saint; but the loud checks of a comical little cad were really rather a new disguise. But the disguise must be very irksome to a man who can really do things. This is a dexterous little cosmopolitan guttersnipe who can do scores of things, not only shoot, but draw and paint, and probably play the fiddle. Now a man like that may find the hiding of his talents useful; but he could never help wanting to use them where they were useless. If he can draw, he
will draw absent-mindedly on blotting paper. I suspect this rascal has often drawn poor old Puggy's face on blotting paper. Probably he began doing it in blots as he afterward did it in dots, or rather shots. It was the same sort of thing; he found a disused target in a deserted yard and couldn't resist indulging in a little secret shooting, like secret drinking. You thought the shots all scattered and irregular, and so they were; but not accidental. No two distances were alike; but the different points were exactly where he wanted to put them. There's nothing needs such mathematical precision as a wild caricature. I've dabbed a little in drawing myself, and I assure you that to put one dot where you want it is a marvel with a pen close to a piece of paper. It was a miracle to do it across a garden with a gun. But a man who can work those miracles will always itch to work them, if it's only in the dark."

After a pause March observed, thoughtfully, "But he couldn't have brought him down like a bird with one of those little guns."

"No; that was why I went into the gun-room," replied Fisher. "He did it with one of Burke's rifles, and Burke thought he knew the sound of it. That's why he rushed out without a hat, looking so wild. He saw nothing but a car passing quickly, which he followed for a little way, and then concluded he'd made a mistake."

There was another silence, during which Fisher sat on a great stone as motionless as on their first meeting, and watched the gray and silver river eddying past under the bushes. Then March said, abruptly, "Of course he knows the truth now."

"Nobody knows the truth but you and I," answered Fisher, with a certain softening in his voice. "And I don't think you and I will ever quarrel."

"But you know it was not." "I told you that I know too much," replied Fisher, with his eye on the river. "I know the atmosphere and the way the whole thing works. I know this fellow has succeeded in making himself curiously commonplace and comic. I know that, and I know a great many other things. I know the atmosphere and the way the whole thing works. I know this fellow has succeeded in making himself curiously commonplace and comic. I know you can't get up a persecution of old Toole or Little Tich. If I were to tell Hogs or Halkett that old Jink was an assassin, they would almost die of laughter before my eyes. Oh, I don't say their laughter's quite innocent, though it's genuine in its way. They want old Jink, and they couldn't do without him. I don't say I'm quite innocent. I like Hogs; I don't want him to be down and out; and he'd be done for if Jink can't pay for his coronet. They were devilish near the line at the last election. But the only real objection to it is that it's impossible. Nobody would believe it; it's not in the picture. The crooked weathercock would always turn it into a joke."

"Don't you think this is infamous?" asked March, quietly.

"I think a good many things," replied the other. "If you people ever happen to blow the whole tangle of society to hell with dynamite, I don't know that the human race will be much the worse. But don't be too hard on me merely because I know what society is. That's why I moon away my time over things like stinking fish."

There was a pause as he settled himself down again by the stream; and then he added:

"I told you before I had to throw back the big fish."

II. THE VANISHING PRINCE

This tale begins among a tangle of tales round a name that is at once recent and legendary. The name is that of Michael O'Neill, popularly called Prince Michael, partly because he claimed descent from ancient Fenian princes, and partly because he was credited with a plan to make himself prince president of Ireland, as the last Napoleon did of France. He was undoubtedly a gentleman of honorable pedigree and of many accomplishments, but two of his accomplishments emerged from all the rest. He had a talent for appearing when he was not wanted and a talent for disappearing when he was wanted, especially when he was wanted by the police. It may be added that his disappearances were more dangerous than his appearances. In the latter he seldom went beyond the sensational--pasting up seditious placards, tearing down official placards, making flamboyant speeches, or unfurling forbidden flags. But in order to effect the former he would sometimes fight for his freedom with startling energy, from which men were sometimes lucky to escape with a broken head instead of a broken neck. His most famous feats of escape, however, were due to dexterity and not to violence. On a cloudless summer morning he had come down a country road white with dust, and, pausing outside a farmhouse, had told the farmer's daughter, with elegant indifference, that the local police were in pursuit of him. The girl's name was Bridget Royce, a somber and even sullen type of beauty, and she looked at him darkly, as if in doubt, and said, "Do you want me to hide you?" Upon which he only laughed, leaped lightly over the stone wall, and strode toward the farm, merely throwing over his shoulder the remark, "Thank you, I have generally been quite capable of hiding myself." In which proceeding he acted with a tragic ignorance of the nature of women; and there fell on his path in that sunshine a shadow of doom.

While he disappeared through the farmhouse the girl remained for a few moments looking up the road, and two
perspiring policemen came plowing up to the door where she stood. Though still angry, she was still silent, and a quarter of an hour later the officers had searched the house and were already inspecting the kitchen garden and cornfield behind it. In the ugly reaction of her mood she might have been tempted even to point out the fugitive, but for a small difficulty that she had no more notion than the policemen had of where he could possibly have gone. The kitchen garden was inclosed by a very low wall, and the cornfield beyond lay aslant like a square patch on a great green hill on which he could still have been seen even as a dot in the distance. Everything stood solid in its familiar place; the apple tree was too small to support or hide a climber; the only shed stood open and obviously empty; there was no sound save the droning of summer flies and the occasional flutter of a bird unfamiliar enough to be surprised by the scarecrow in the field; there was scarcely a shadow save a few blue lines that fell from the thin tree; every detail was picked out by the brilliant day light as if in a microscope. The girl described the scene later, with all the passionate realism of her race, and, whether or no the policemen had a similar eye for the picturesque, they had at least an eye for the facts of the case, and were compelled to give up the chase and retire from the scene. Bridget Royce remained as if in a trance, staring at the sunlit garden in which a man had just vanished like a fairy. She was still in a sinister mood, and the miracle took in her mind a character of unfriendliness and fear, as if the fairy were decidedly a bad fairy. The sun upon the glittering garden depressed her more than the darkness, but she continued to stare at it. Then the world itself went half-witted and she screamed. The scarecrow moved in the sun light. It had stood with its back to her in a battered old black hat and a tattered garment, and with all its tatters flying, it strode away across the hill.

She did not analyze the audacious trick by which the man had turned to his advantage the subtle effects of the expected and the obvious; she was still under the cloud of more individual complexities, and she noticed most of all that the vanishing scarecrow did not even turn to look at the farm. And the fates that were running so adverse to his fantastic career of freedom ruled that his next adventure, though it had the same success in another quarter, should increase the danger in this quarter. Among the many similar adventures related of him in this manner it is also said that some days afterward another girl, named Mary Cregan, found him concealed on the farm where she worked; and if the story is true, she must also have had the shock of an uncanny experience, for when she was busy at some lonely task in the yard she heard a voice speaking out of the well, and found that the eccentric had managed to drop himself into the bucket which was some little way below, the well only partly full of water. In this case, however, he had to appeal to the woman to wind up the rope. And men say it was when this news was told to the other woman that her soul walked over the border line of treason.

Such, at least, were the stories told of him in the countryside, and there were many more--as that he had stood insolently in a splendid green dressing gown on the steps of a great hotel, and then led the police a chase through a long suite of grand apartments, and finally through his own bedroom on to a balcony that overhung the river. The moment the pursuers stepped on to the balcony it broke under them, and they dropped pell-mell into the eddying waters, while Michael, who had thrown off his gown and dived, was able to swim away. It was said that he had carefully cut away the props so that they would not support anything so heavy as a policeman. But here again he was immediately fortunate, yet ultimately unfortunate, for it is said that one of the men was drowned, leaving a family feud which made a little rift in his popularity. These stories can now be told in some detail, not because they are the most marvelous of his many adventures, but because these alone were not covered with silence by the loyalty of the peasantry. These alone found their way into official reports, and it is these which three of the chief officials of the country were reading and discussing when the more remarkable part of this story begins.

Night was far advanced and the lights shone in the cottage that served for a temporary police station near the coast. On one side of it were the last houses of the straggling village, and on the other nothing but a waste moorland stretching away toward the sea, the line of which was broken by no landmark except a solitary tower of the prehistoric pattern still found in Ireland, standing up as slender as a column, but pointed like a pyramid. At a wooden table in front of the window, which normally looked out on this landscape, sat two men in plain clothes, but with something of a military bearing, for indeed they were the two chiefs of the detective service of that district. The senior of the two, both in age and rank, was a sturdy man with a short white beard, and frosty eyebrows fixed in a frown which suggested rather worry than severity.

His name was Morton, and he was a Liverpool man long pickled in the Irish quarrels, and doing his duty among them in a sour fashion not altogether unsympathetic. He had spoken a few sentences to his companion, Nolan, a tall, dark man with a cadaverous equine Irish face, when he seemed to remember something and touched a bell which rang in another room. The subordinate he had summoned immediately appeared with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Sit down, Wilson," he said. "Those are the depositions, I suppose."

"Yes," replied the third officer. "I think I've got all there is to be got out of them, so I sent the people away."

"Did Mary Cregan give evidence?" asked Morton, with a frown that looked a little heavier than usual.

"No, but her master did," answered the man called Wilson, who had flat, red hair and a plain, pale face, not
without sharpness. "I think he's hanging round the girl himself and is out against a rival. There's always some reason of that sort when we are told the truth about anything. And you bet the other girl told right enough."

"Well, let's hope they'll be some sort of use," remarked Nolan, in a somewhat hopeless manner, gazing out into the darkness.

"Anything is to the good," said Morton, "that lets us know anything about him."

"Do we know anything about him?" asked the melancholy Irishman.

"We know one thing about him," said Wilson, "and it's the one thing that nobody ever knew before. We know where he is."

"Are you sure?" inquired Morton, looking at him sharply.

"Quite sure," replied his assistant. "At this very minute he is in that tower over there by the shore. If you go near enough you'll see the candle burning in the window."

As he spoke the noise of a horn sounded on the road outside, and a moment after they heard the throbbing of a motor car brought to a standstill before the door. Morton instantly sprang to his feet.

"Thank the Lord that's the car from Dublin," he said. "I can't do anything without special authority, not if he were sitting on the top of the tower and putting out his tongue at us. But the chief can do what he thinks best."

He hurried out to the entrance and was soon exchanging greetings with a big handsome man in a fur coat, who brought into the dingy little station the indescribable glow of the great cities and the luxuries of the great world. For this was Sir Walter Carey, an official of such eminence in Dublin Castle that nothing short of the case of Prince Michael would have brought him on such a journey in the middle of the night. But the case of Prince Michael, as it happened, was complicated by legalism as well as lawlessness. On the last occasion he had escaped by a forensic quibble and not, as usual, by a private escape; and it was a question whether at the moment he was amenable to the law or not. It might be necessary to stretch a point, but a man like Sir Walter could probably stretch it as far as he liked.

Whether he intended to do so was a question to be considered. Despite the almost aggressive touch of luxury in the fur coat, it soon became apparent that Sir Walter's large leonine head was for use as well as ornament, and he considered the matter soberly and sanely enough. Five chairs were set round the plain deal table, for who should Sir Walter bring with him but his young relative and secretary, Horne Fisher. Sir Walter listened with grave attention, and his secretary with polite boredom, to the string of episodes by which the police had traced the flying rebel from the steps of the hotel to the solitary tower beside the sea. There at least he was cornered between the moors and the breakers; and the scout sent by Wilson reported him as writing under a solitary candle, perhaps composing another of his tremendous proclamations. Indeed, it would have been typical of him to choose it as the place in which finally to turn to bay. He had some remote claim on it, as on a family castle; and those who knew him thought him capable of imitating the primitive Irish chieftains who fell fighting against the sea.

"I saw some queer-looking people leaving as I came in," said Sir Walter Carey. "I suppose they were your witnesses. But why do they turn up here at this time of night?"

Morton smiled grimly. "They come here by night because they would be dead men if they came here by day. They are criminals committing a crime that is more horrible here than theft or murder."

"What crime do you mean?" asked the other, with some curiosity.

"They are helping the law," said Morton.

There was a silence, and Sir Walter considered the papers before him with an abstracted eye. At last he spoke.

"Quite so; but look here, if the local feeling is as lively as that there are a good many points to consider. I believe the new Act will enable me to collar him now if I think it best. But is it best? A serious rising would do us no good in Parliament, and the government has enemies in England as well as Ireland. It won't do if I have done what looks a little like sharp practice, and then only raised a revolution."

"It's all the other way," said the man called Wilson, rather quickly. "There won't be half so much of a revolution if you arrest him as there will if you leave him loose for three days longer. But, anyhow, there can't be anything nowadays that the proper police can't manage."

"Mr. Wilson is a Londoner," said the Irish detective, with a smile.

"Yes, I'm a cockney, all right," replied Wilson, "and I think I'm all the better for that. Especially at this job, oddly enough."

Sir Walter seemed slightly amused at the pertinacity of the third officer, and perhaps even more amused at the slight accent with which he spoke, which rendered rather needless his boast about his origin.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that you know more about the business here because you have come from London?"

"Sounds funny, I know, but I do believe it," answered Wilson. "I believe these affairs want fresh methods. But most of all I believe they want a fresh eye."
The superior officers laughed, and the red-haired man went on with a slight touch of temper:

"Well, look at the facts. See how the fellow got away every time, and you'll understand what I mean. Why was he able to stand in the place of the scarecrow, hidden by nothing but an old hat? Because it was a village policeman who knew the scarecrow was there, was expecting it, and therefore took no notice of it. Now I never expect a scarecrow. I've never seen one in the street, and I stare at one when I see it in the field. It's a new thing to me and worth noticing. And it was just the same when he hid in the well. You are ready to find a well in a place like that; you look for a well, and so you don't see it. I don't look for it, and therefore I do look at it."

"It is certainly an idea," said Sir Walter, smiling, "but what about the balcony? Balconies are occasionally seen in London."

"But not rivers right under them, as if it was in Venice," replied Wilson.

"It is certainly a new idea," repeated Sir Walter, with something like respect. He had all the love of the luxurious classes for new ideas. But he also had a critical faculty, and was inclined to think, after due reflection, that it was a true idea as well.

Growing dawn had already turned the window panes from black to gray when Sir Walter got abruptly to his feet. The others rose also, taking this for a signal that the arrest was to be undertaken. But their leader stood for a moment in deep thought, as if conscious that he had come to a parting of the ways.

Suddenly the silence was pierced by a long, wailing cry from the dark moors outside. The silence that followed it seemed more startling than the shriek itself, and it lasted until Nolan said, heavily:

"'Tis the banshee. Somebody is marked for the grave."

His long, large-featured face was as pale as a moon, and it was easy to remember that he was the only Irishman in the room.

"Well, I know that banshee," said Wilson, cheerfully, "ignorant as you think I am of these things. I talked to that banshee myself an hour ago, and I sent that banshee up to the tower and told her to sing out like that if she could get a glimpse of our friend writing his proclamation."

"Do you mean that girl Bridget Royce?" asked Morton, drawing his frosty brows together. "Has she turned king's evidence to that extent?"

"Yes," answered Wilson. "I know very little of these local things, you tell me, but I reckon an angry woman is much the same in all countries."

Nolan, however, seemed still moody and unlike himself. "It's an ugly noise and an ugly business altogether," he said. "If it's really the end of Prince Michael it may well be the end of other things as well. When the spirit is on him he would escape by a ladder of dead men, and wade through that sea if it were made of blood."

"Is that the real reason of your pious alarms?" asked Wilson, with a slight sneer.

The Irishman's pale face blackened with a new passion.

"I have faced as many murderers in County Clare as you ever fought with in Clapham Junction, Mr. Cockney," he said.

"Hush, please," said Morton, sharply. "Wilson, you have no kind of right to imply doubt of your superior's conduct. I hope you will prove yourself as courageous and trustworthy as he has always been."

The pale face of the red-haired man seemed a shade paler, but he was silent and composed, and Sir Walter went up to Nolan with marked courtesy, saying, "Shall we go outside now, and get this business done?"

Dawn had lifted, leaving a wide chasm of white between a great gray cloud and the great gray moorland, beyond which the tower was outlined against the daybreak and the sea.

Something in its plain and primitive shape vaguely suggested the dawn in the first days of the earth, in some prehistoric time when even the colors were hardly created, when there was only blank daylight between cloud and clay. These dead hues were relieved only by one spot of gold—the spark of the candle alight in the window of the lonely tower, and burning on into the broadening daylight. As the group of detectives, followed by a cordon of policemen, spread out into a crescent to cut off all escape, the light in the tower flashed as if it were moved for a moment, and then went out. They knew the man inside had realized the daylight and blown out his candle.

"There are other windows, aren't there?" asked Morton, "and a door, of course, somewhere round the corner? Only a round tower has no corners."

"Another example of my small suggestion," observed Wilson, quietly. "That queer tower was the first thing I saw when I came to these parts; and I can tell you a little more about it—or, at any rate, the outside of it. There are four windows altogether, one a little way from this one, but just out of sight. Those are both on the ground floor, and so is the third on the other side, making a sort of triangle. But the fourth is just above the third, and I suppose it looks on an upper floor."

"It's only a sort of loft, reached by a ladder, said Nolan. "I've played in the place when I was a child. It's no more than an empty shell." And his sad face grew sadder, thinking perhaps of the tragedy of his country and the part that
leaving the rest to spread themselves in a search party outside.

"He has touched more valuable things than the tower," said Wilson, gloomily.

There was a long silence, and then Sir Walter said, seriously: "Well, Mr. Wilson, I am not a detective, and these unhappy happenings have left you in charge of that branch of the business. We all lament the cause of this, but I should like to say that I myself have the strongest confidence in your capacity for carrying on the work. What do you think we should do next?"

Wilson seemed to rouse himself from his depression and acknowledged the speaker's words with a warmer civility than he had hitherto shown to anybody. He called in a few of the police to assist in routing out the interior, leaving the rest to spread themselves in a search party outside.
"I think," he said, "the first thing is to make quite sure about the inside of this place, as it was hardly physically possible for him to have got outside. I suppose poor Nolan would have brought in his banshee and said it was supernaturally possible. But I've got no use for disembodied spirits when I'm dealing with facts. And the facts before me are an empty tower with a ladder, a chair, and a table."

"The spiritualists," said Sir Walter, with a smile, "would say that spirits could find a great deal of use for a table."

"I dare say they could if the spirits were on the table--in a bottle," replied Wilson, with a curl of his pale lip. "The people round here, when they're all sodden up with Irish whisky, may believe in such things. I think they want a little education in this country."

Horne Fisher's heavy eyelids fluttered in a faint attempt to rise, as if he were tempted to a lazy protest against the contemptuous tone of the investigator.

"The Irish believe far too much in spirits to believe in spiritualism," he murmured. "They know too much about 'em. If you want a simple and childlike faith in any spirit that comes along you can get it in your favorite London."

"I don't want to get it anywhere," said Wilson, shortly. "I say I'm dealing with much simpler things than your simple faith, with a table and a chair and a ladder. Now what I want to say about them at the start is this. They are all three made roughly enough of plain wood. But the table and the chair are fairly new and comparatively clean. The ladder is covered with dust and there is a cobweb under the top rung of it. That means that he borrowed the first two quite recently from some cottage, as we supposed, but the ladder has been a long time in this rotten old dustbin. Probably it was part of the original furniture, an heirloom in this magnificent palace of the Irish kings."

Again Fisher looked at him under his eyelids, but seemed too sleepy to speak, and Wilson went on with his argument.

"Now it's quite clear that something very odd has just happened in this place. The chances are ten to one, it seems to me, that it had something specially to do with this place. Probably he came here because he could do it only here; it doesn't seem very inviting otherwise. But the man knew it of old; they say it belonged to his family, so that altogether, I think, everything points to something in the construction of the tower itself."

"Your reasoning seems to me excellent," said Sir Walter, who was listening attentively. "But what could it be?"

"You see now what I mean about the ladder," went on the detective; "it's the only old piece of furniture here and the first thing that caught that cockney eye of mine. But there is something else. That loft up there is a sort of lumber room without any lumber. So far as I can see, it's as empty as everything else; and, as things are, I don't see the use of the ladder leading to it. It seems to me, as I can't find anything unusual down here, that it might pay us to look up there."

He got briskly off the table on which he was sitting (for the only chair was allotted to Sir Walter) and ran rapidly up the ladder to the platform above. He was soon followed by the others, Mr. Fisher going last, however, with an appearance of considerable nonchalance.

At this stage, however, they were destined to disappointment; Wilson nosed in every corner like a terrier and examined the roof almost in the posture of a fly, but half an hour afterward they had to confess that they were still without a clue. Sir Walter's private secretary seemed more and more threatened with inappropriate slumber, and, having been the last to climb up the ladder, seemed now to lack the energy even to climb down again.

"Come along, Fisher," called out Sir Walter from below, when the others had regained the floor. "We must consider whether we'll pull the whole place to pieces to see what it's made of."

"I'm coming in a minute," said the voice from the ledge above their heads, a voice somewhat suggestive of an articulate yawn.

"What are you waiting for?" asked Sir Walter, impatiently. "Can you see anything there?"

"Well, yes, in a way," replied the voice, vaguely. "In fact, I see it quite plain now."

"What is it?" asked Wilson, sharply, from the table on which he sat kicking his heels restlessly.

"Well, it's a man," said Horne Fisher.

Wilson bounded off the table as if he had been kicked off it. "What do you mean?" he cried. "How can you possibly see a man?"

"I can see him through the window," replied the secretary, mildly. "I see him coming across the moor. He's making a bee line across the open country toward this tower. He evidently means to pay us a visit. And, considering who it seems to be, perhaps it would be more polite if we were all at the door to receive him." And in a leisurely manner the secretary came down the ladder.

"Who it seems to be!" repeated Sir Walter in astonishment.

"Well, I think it's the man you call Prince Michael," observed Mr. Fisher, airily. "In fact, I'm sure it is. I've seen the police portraits of him."

There was a dead silence, and Sir Walter's usually steady brain seemed to go round like a windmill.
"But, hang it all!" he said at last, "even supposing his own explosion could have thrown him half a mile away, without passing through any of the windows, and left him alive enough for a country walk--even then, why the devil should he walk in this direction? The murderer does not generally revisit the scene of his crime so rapidly as all that."

"He doesn't know yet that it is the scene of his crime," answered Horne Fisher.

"What on earth do you mean? You credit him with rather singular absence of mind."

"Well, the truth is, it isn't the scene of his crime," said Fisher, and went and looked out of the window.

There was another silence, and then Sir Walter said, quietly: "What sort of notion have you really got in your head, Fisher? Have you developed a new theory about how this fellow escaped out of the ring round him?"

"He never escaped at all," answered the man at the window, without turning round. "He never escaped out of the ring because he was never inside the ring. He was not in this tower at all, at least not when we were surrounding it."

He turned and leaned back against the window, but, in spite of his usual listless manner, they almost fancied that the face in shadow was a little pale.

"I began to guess something of the sort when we were some way from the tower," he said. "Did you notice that sort of flash or flicker the candle gave before it was extinguished? I was almost certain it was only the last leap the flame gives when a candle burns itself out. And then I came into this room and I saw that."

He pointed at the table and Sir Walter caught his breath with a sort of curse at his own blindness. For the candle in the candlestick had obviously burned itself away to nothing and left him, mentally, at least, very completely in the dark.

"Then there is a sort of mathematical question," went on Fisher, leaning back in his limp way and looking up at the bare walls, as if tracing imaginary diagrams there. "It's not so easy for a man in the third angle to face the other two at the same moment, especially if they are at the base of an isosceles. I am sorry if it sounds like a lecture on geometry, but--"

"I'm afraid we have no time for it," said Wilson, coldly. "If this man is really coming back, I must give my orders at once."

"I think I'll go on with it, though," observed Fisher, starring at the roof with insolent serenity.

"I must ask you, Mr. Fisher, to let me conduct my inquiry on my own lines," said Wilson, firmly. "I am the officer in charge now."

"Yes," remarked Horne Fisher, softly, but with an accent that somehow chilled the hearer. "Yes. But why?" Sir Walter was staring, for he had never seen his rather lackadaisical young friend look like that before. Fisher was looking at Wilson with lifted lids, and the eyes under them seemed to have shed or shifted a film, as do the eyes of an eagle.

"Why are you the officer in charge now?" he asked. "Why can you conduct the inquiry on your own lines now? How did it come about, I wonder, that the elder officers are not here to interfere with anything you do?"

Nobody spoke, and nobody can say how soon anyone would have collected his wits to speak when a noise came from without. It was the heavy and hollow sound of a blow upon the door of the tower, and to their shaken spirits it sounded strangely like the hammer of doom.

The wooden door of the tower moved on its rusty hinges under the hand that struck it and Prince Michael came into the room. Nobody had the smallest doubt about his identity. His light clothes, though frayed with his adventures, were of fine and almost foppish cut, and he wore a pointed beard, or imperial, perhaps as a further reminiscence of Louis Napoleon; but he was a much taller and more graceful man that his prototype. Before anyone could speak he had silenced everyone for an instant with a slight but splendid gesture of hospitality.

"Gentlemen," he said, "this is a poor place now, but you are heartily welcome."

Wilson was the first to recover, and he took a stride toward the newcomer.

"Michael O'Neill, I arrest you in the king's name for the murder of Francis Morton and James Nolan. It is my duty to warn you--"

"No, no, Mr. Wilson," cried Fisher, suddenly. "You shall not commit a third murder."

Sir Walter Carey rose from his chair, which fell over with a crash behind him. "What does all this mean?" he called out in an authoritative manner.

"It means," said Fisher, "that this man, Hooker Wilson, as soon as he had put his head in at that window, killed his two comrades who had put their heads in at the other windows, by firing across the empty room. That is what it means. And if you want to know, count how many times he is supposed to have fired and then count the charges left in his revolver."

Wilson, who was still sitting on the table, abruptly put a hand out for the weapon that lay beside him. But the next movement was the most unexpected of all, for the prince standing in the doorway passed suddenly from the dignity of a statue to the swiftness of an acrobat and rent the revolver out of the detective's hand.
"You dog!" he cried. "So you are the type of English truth, as I am of Irish tragedy—you who come to kill me, wading through the blood of your brethren. If they had fallen in a feud on the hillside, it would be called murder, and yet your sin might be forgiven you. But I, who am innocent, I was to be slain with ceremony. There would be long speeches and patient judges listening to my vain plea of innocence, noting down my despair and disregarding it. Yes, that is what I call assassination. But killing may be no murder; there is one shot left in this little gun, and I know where it should go."

Wilson turned quickly on the table, and even as he turned he twisted in agony, for Michael shot him through the body where he sat, so that he tumbled off the table like lumber.

The police rushed to lift him; Sir Walter stood speechless; and then, with a strange and weary gesture, Horne Fisher spoke.

"You are indeed a type of the Irish tragedy," he said. "You were entirely in the right, and you have put yourself in the wrong."

The prince's face was like marble for a space then there dawned in his eyes a light not unlike that of despair. He laughed suddenly and flung the smoking pistol on the ground.

"I am indeed in the wrong," he said. "I have committed a crime that may justly bring a curse on me and my children."

Horne Fisher did not seem entirely satisfied with this very sudden repentance; he kept his eyes on the man and only said, in a low voice, "What crime do you mean?"

"I have helped English justice," replied Prince Michael. "I have avenged your king's officers; I have done the work of his hangman. For that truly I deserve to be hanged."

And he turned to the police with a gesture that did not so much surrender to them, but rather command them to arrest him.

This was the story that Horne Fisher told to Harold March, the journalist, many years after, in a little, but luxurious, restaurant near Piccadilly. He had invited March to dinner some time after the affair he called "The Face in the Target," and the conversation had naturally turned on that mystery and afterward on earlier memories of Fisher's life and the way in which he was led to study such problems as those of Prince Michael. Horne Fisher was fifteen years older; his thin hair had faded to frontal baldness, and his long, thin hands dropped less with affectation and more with fatigue. And he told the story of the Irish adventure of his youth, because it recorded the first occasion on which he had ever come in contact with crime, or discovered how darkly and how terribly crime can be entangled with law.

"Hooker Wilson was the first criminal I ever knew, and he was a policeman," explained Fisher, twirling his wine glass. "And all my life has been a mixed-up business of the sort. He was a man of very real talent, and perhaps genius, and well worth studying, both as a detective and a criminal. His white face and red hair were typical of him, for he was one of those who are cold and yet on fire for fame; and he could control anger, but not ambition. He swallowed the snubs of his superiors in that first quarrel, though he boiled with resentment; but when he suddenly saw the two heads dark against the dawn and framed in the two windows, he could not miss the chance, not only of revenge, but of the removal of the two obstacles to his promotion. He was a dead shot and counted on silencing both, though proof against him would have been hard in any case. But, as a matter of fact, he had a narrow escape, in the case of Nolan, who lived just long enough to say, 'Wilson' and point. We thought he was summoning help for his comrade, but he was really denouncing his murderer. After that it was easy to throw down the ladder above him (for a man up a ladder cannot see clearly what is below and behind) and to throw himself on the ground as another victim of the catastrophe.

"But there was mixed up with his murderous ambition a real belief, not only in his own talents, but in his own theories. He did believe in what he called a fresh eye, and he did want scope for fresh methods. There was something in his view, but it failed where such things commonly fail, because the fresh eye cannot see the unseen. It is true about the ladder and the scarecrow, but not about the life and the soul; and he made a bad mistake about what a man like Michael would do when he heard a woman scream. All Michael's very vanity and vainglory made him rush out at once; he would have walked into Dublin Castle for a lady's glove. Call it his pose or what you will, but he would have done it. What happened when he met her is another story, and one we may never know, but from tales I've heard since, they must have been reconciled. Wilson was wrong there; but there was something, for all that, in his notion that the newcomer sees most, and that the man on the spot may know too much to know anything. He was right about some things. He was right about me."

"About you?" asked Harold March in some wonder.

"I am the man who knows too much to know anything, or, at any rate, to do anything," said Horne Fisher. "I don't mean especially about Ireland. I mean about England. I mean about the whole way we are governed, and perhaps the only way we can be governed. You asked me just now what became of the survivors of that tragedy.
Indeed, the things that interested Summers Minor, and the things that did not interest him, had mystified and amused his uncle for several hours. He exhibited the English schoolboy's startling ignorance and startling knowledge--knowledge of some special classification in which he can generally correct and confound his elders. He considered himself entitled, at Hampton Court on a holiday, to forget the very names of Cardinal Wolsey or William of Orange; but he could hardly be dragged from some details about the arrangement of the electric bells in the neighboring hotel. He was solidly dazed by Westminster Abbey, which is not so unnatural since that church became the lumber room of the larger and less successful statuary of the eighteenth century. But he had a magic and minute knowledge of the Westminster omnibuses, and indeed of the whole omnibus system of London, the colors and numbers of which he knew as a herald knows heraldry. He would cry out against a momentary confusion between a light-green Paddington and a dark-green Bayswater vehicle, as his uncle would at the identification of a Greek ikon containing literally nothing whatever but one old silver coin. But the coin, to those who knew, was more solitary and splendid than the Koh-i-noor. It was Roman, and was said to bear the head of St. Paul; and round it raged the most vital controversies about the ancient British Church. It could hardly be denied, however, that the controversies left Summers Minor comparatively cold.

"Do you collect omnibuses like stamps?" asked his uncle. "They must need a rather large album. Or do you keep them in your locker?"

"I keep them in my head," replied the nephew, with legitimate firmness.

"It does you credit, I admit," replied the clergyman. "I suppose it were vain to ask for what purpose you have learned that out of a thousand things. There hardly seems to be a career in it, unless you could be permanently on the pavement to prevent old ladies getting into the wrong bus. Well, we must get out of this one, for this is our place. I want to show you what they call St. Paul's Penny."

"Is it like St. Paul's Cathedral?" asked the youth with resignation, as they alighted.

At the entrance their eyes were arrested by a singular figure evidently hovering there with a similar anxiety to

"Let us change the subject by all means, if you like. What do you think of this Burgundy? It's rather a discovery of mine, like the restaurant itself."

And he proceeded to talk learnedly and luxuriantly on all the wines of the world; on which subject, also, some moralists would consider that he knew too much.

III. THE SOUL OF THE SCHOOLBOY

A large map of London would be needed to display the wild and zigzag course of one day's journey undertaken by an uncle and his nephew; or, to speak more truly, of a nephew and his uncle. For the nephew, a schoolboy on a holiday, was in theory the god in the car, or in the cab, tram, tube, and so on, while his uncle was at most a priest dancing before him and offering sacrifices. To put it more soberly, the schoolboy had something of the stolid air of a young duke doing the grand tour, while his elderly relative was reduced to the position of a courier, who nevertheless had to pay for everything like a patron. The schoolboy was officially known as Summers Minor, and in a more social manner as Stinks, the only public tribute to his career as an amateur photographer and electrician. The uncle was the Rev. Thomas Twyford, a lean and lively old gentleman with a red, eager face and white hair. He was in the ordinary way a country clergyman, but he was one of those who achieve the paradox of being famous in an obscure way, because they are famous in an obscure world. In a small circle of ecclesiastical archaeologists, who were the only people who could even understand one another's discoveries, he occupied a recognized and respectable place. And a critic might have found even in that day's journey at least as much of the uncle's hobby as of the nephew's holiday.

His original purpose had been wholly paternal and festive. But, like many other intelligent people, he was not above the weakness of playing with a toy to amuse himself, on the theory that it would amuse a child. His toys were crowns and mites and croziers and swords of state; and he had lingered over them, telling himself that the boy ought to see all the sights of London. And at the end of the day, after a tremendous tea, he rather gave the game away by winding up with a visit in which hardly any human boy could be conceived as taking an interest--an underground chamber supposed to have been a chapel, recently excavated on the north bank of the Thames, and containing literally nothing whatever but one old silver coin. But the coin, to those who knew, was more solitary and splendid than the Koh-i-noor. It was Roman, and was said to bear the head of St. Paul; and round it raged the most vital controversies about the ancient British Church. It could hardly be denied, however, that the controversies left Summers Minor comparatively cold.

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"Is it like St. Paul's Cathedral?" asked the youth with resignation, as they alighted.

Well, Wilson recovered and we managed to persuade him to retire. But we had to pension that damnable murderer more magnificently than any hero who ever fought for England. I managed to save Michael from the worst, but we had to send that perfectly innocent man to penal servitude for a crime we know he never committed, and it was only afterward that we could connive in a sneakish way at his escape. And Sir Walter Carey is Prime Minister of this country, which he would probably never have been if the truth had been told of such a horrible scandal in his department. It might have done for us altogether in Ireland; it would certainly have done for him. And he is my father's old friend, and has always smothered me with kindness. I am too tangled up with the whole thing, you see, and I was certainly never born to set it right. You look distressed, not to say shocked, and I'm not at all offended at it. Let us change the subject by all means, if you like. What do you think of this Burgundy? It's rather a discovery of mine, like the restaurant itself."
enter. It was that of a dark, thin man in a long black robe rather like a cassock; but the black cap on his head was of too strange a shape to be a biretta. It suggested, rather, some archaic headdress of Persia or Babylon. He had a curious black beard appearing only at the corners of his chin, and his large eyes were oddly set in his face like the flat decorative eyes painted in old Egyptian profiles. Before they had gathered more than a general impression of him, he had dived into the doorway that was their own destination.

Nothing could be seen above ground of the sunken sanctuary except a strong wooden hut, of the sort recently run up for many military and official purposes, the wooden floor of which was indeed a mere platform over the excavated cavity below. A soldier stood as a sentry outside, and a superior soldier, an Anglo-Indian officer of distinction, sat writing at the desk inside. Indeed, the sightseers soon found that this particular sight was surrounded with the most extraordinary precautions. I have compared the silver coin to the Koh-i-noor, and in one sense it was even conventionally comparable, since by a historical accident it was at one time almost counted among the Crown jewels, or at least the Crown relics, until one of the royal princes publicly restored it to the shrine to which it was supposed to belong. Other causes combined to concentrate official vigilance upon it; there had been a scare about spies carrying explosives in small objects, and one of those experimental orders which pass like waves over bureaucracy had decreed first that all visitors should change their clothes for a sort of official sackcloth, and then (when this method caused some murmers) that they should at least turn out their pockets. Colonel Morris, the officer in charge, was a short, active man with a grim and leathery face, but a lively and humorous eye—a contradiction borne out by his conduct, for he at once derided the safeguards and yet insisted on them.

"I don't care a button myself for Paul's Penny, or such things," he admitted in answer to some antiquarian openings from the clergyman who was slightly acquainted with him, "but I wear the King's coat, you know, and it's a serious thing when the King's uncle leaves a thing here with his own hands under my charge. But as for saints and relics and things, I fear I'm a bit of a Voltairian; what you would call a skeptic."

"I'm not sure it's even skeptical to believe in the royal family and not in the 'Holy' Family," replied Mr. Twyford. "But, of course, I can easily empty my pockets, to show I don't carry a bomb."

The little heap of the parson's possessions which he left on the table consisted chiefly of papers, over and above a pipe and a tobacco pouch and some Roman and Saxon coins. The rest were catalogues of old books, and pamphlets, like one entitled "The Use of Sarum," one glance at which was sufficient both for the colonel and the schoolboy. They could not see the use of Sarum at all. The contents of the boy's pockets naturally made a larger heap, and included marbles, a ball of string, an electric torch, a magnet, a small catapult, and, of course, a large pocketknife, almost to be described as a small tool box, a complex apparatus on which he seemed disposed to linger, pointing out that it included a pair of nippers, a tool for punching holes in wood, and, above all, an instrument for taking stones out of a horse's hoof. The comparative absence of any horse he appeared to regard as irrelevant, as if it were a mere appendage easily supplied. But when the turn came of the gentleman in the black gown, he did not turn out his pockets, but merely spread out his hands.

"I have no possessions," he said.

"I'm afraid I must ask you to empty your pockets and make sure," observed the colonel, gruffly.

"I have no pockets," said the stranger.

Mr. Twyford was looking at the long black gown with a learned eye.

"Are you a monk?" he asked, in a puzzled fashion.

"I am a magus," replied the stranger. "You have heard of the magi, perhaps? I am a magician."

"Oh, I say!" exclaimed Summers Minor, with prominent eyes.

"But I was once a monk," went on the other. "I am what you would call an escaped monk. Yes, I have escaped into eternity. But the monks held one truth at least, that the highest life should be without possessions. I have no pocket money and no pockets, and all the stars are my trinkets."

"They are out of reach, anyhow," observed Colonel Morris, in a tone which suggested that it was well for them. "I've known a good many magicians myself in India—mango plant and all. But the Indian ones are all frauds, I'll swear. In fact, I had a good deal of fun showing them up. More fun than I have over this dreary job, anyhow. But here comes Mr. Symon, who will show you over the old cellar downstairs."

Mr. Symon, the official guardian and guide, was a young man, prematurely gray, with a grave mouth which contrasted curiously with a very small, dark mustache with waxed points, that seemed somehow, separate from it, as if a black fly had settled on his face. He spoke with the accent of Oxford and the permanent official, but in as dead a fashion as the most indifferent hired guide. They descended a dark stone staircase, at the floor of which Symon pressed a button and a door opened on a dark room, or, rather, a room which had an instant before been dark. For almost as the heavy iron door swung open an almost blinding blaze of electric lights filled the whole interior. The fitful enthusiasm of Stinks at once caught fire, and he eagerly asked if the lights and the door worked together.

"Yes, it's all one system," replied Symon. "It was all fitted up for the day His Royal Highness deposited the thing
here. You see, it's locked up behind a glass case exactly as he left it."

A glance showed that the arrangements for guarding the treasure were indeed as strong as they were simple. A single pane of glass cut off one corner of the room, in an iron framework let into the rock walls and the wooden roof above; there was now no possibility of reopening the case without elaborate labor, except by breaking the glass, which would probably arouse the night watchman who was always within a few feet of it, even if he had fallen asleep. A close examination would have showed many more ingenious safeguards; but the eye of the Rev. Thomas Twyford, at least, was already riveted on what interested him much more--the dull silver disk which shone in the white light against a plain background of black velvet.

"St. Paul's Penny, said to commemorate the visit of St. Paul to Britain, was probably preserved in this chapel until the eighth century," Symon was saying in his clear but colorless voice. "In the ninth century it is supposed to have been carried away by the barbarians, and it reappears, after the conversion of the northern Goths, in the possession of the royal family of Gothland. His Royal Highness, the Duke of Gothland, retained it always in his own private custody, and when he decided to exhibit it to the public, placed it here with his own hand. It was immediately sealed up in such a manner--"

Unluckily at this point Summers Minor, whose attention had somewhat strayed from the religious wars of the ninth century, caught sight of a short length of wire appearing in a broken patch in the wall. He precipitated himself at it, calling out, "I say, does that connect?"

It was evident that it did connect, for no sooner had the boy given it a twitch than the whole room went black, as if they had all been struck blind, and an instant afterward they heard the dull crash of the closing door.

"Well, you've done it now," said Symon, in his tranquil fashion. Then after a pause he added, "I suppose they'll miss us sooner or later, and no doubt they can get it open; but it may take some little time."

There was a silence, and then the unconquerable Stinks observed:

"Rotten that I had to leave my electric torch."

"I think," said his uncle, with restraint, "that we are sufficiently convinced of your interest in electricity."

Then after a pause he remarked, more amiably: "I suppose if I regretted any of my own impedimenta, it would be the pipe. Though, as a matter of fact, it's not much fun smoking in the dark. Everything seems different in the dark."

"Everything is different in the dark," said a third voice, that of the man who called himself a magician. It was a very musical voice, and rather in contrast with his sinister and swarthy visage, which was now invisible. "Perhaps you don't know how terrible a truth that is. All you see are pictures made by the sun, faces and furniture and flowers and trees. The things themselves may be quite strange to you. Something else may be standing now where you saw a table or a chair. The face of your friend may be quite different in the dark."

A short, indescribable noise broke the stillness. Twyford started for a second, and then said, sharply:

"Really, I don't think it's a suitable occasion for trying to frighten a child."

"Who's a child?" cried the indignant Summers, with a voice that had a crow, but also something of a crack in it.

"And who's a funk, either? Not me."

"I will be silent, then," said the other voice out of the darkness. "But silence also makes and unmake."

The required silence remained unbroken for a long time until at last the clergyman said to Symon in a low voice:

"I suppose it's all right about air?"

"Oh, yes," replied the other aloud; "there's a fireplace and a chimney in the office just by the door."

A bound and the noise of a falling chair told them that the irrepressible rising generation had once more thrown itself across the room. They heard the ejaculation: "A chimney! Why, I'll be--" and the rest was lost in muffled, but exultant, cries.

The uncle called repeatedly and vainly, groped his way at last to the opening, and, peering up it, caught a glimpse of a disk of daylight, which seemed to suggest that the fugitive had vanished in safety. Making his way back to the group by the glass case, he fell over the fallen chair and took a moment to collect himself again. He had opened his mouth to speak to Symon, when he stopped, and suddenly found himself blinking in the full shock of the white light, and looking over the other man's shoulder, he saw that the door was standing open.

"So they've got at us at last," he observed to Symon.

The man in the black robe was leaning against the wall some yards away, with a smile carved on his face.

"Here comes Colonel Morris," went on Twyford, still speaking to Symon. "One of us will have to tell him how the light went out. Will you?"

But Symon still said nothing. He was standing as still as a statue, and looking steadily at the black velvet behind the glass screen. He was looking at the black velvet because there was nothing else to look at. St. Paul's Penny was gone.

Colonel Morris entered the room with two new visitors; presumably two new sightseers delayed by the accident.
The foremost was a tall, fair, rather languid-looking man with a bald brow and a high-bridged nose; his companion was a younger man with light, curly hair and frank, and even innocent, eyes. Symon scarcely seemed to hear the newcomers; it seemed almost as if he had not realized that the return of the light revealed his brooding attitude. Then he started in a guilty fashion, and when he saw the elder of the two strangers, his pale face seemed to turn a shade paler.

"Why it's Horne Fisher!" and then after a pause he said in a low voice, "I'm in the devil of a hole, Fisher."

"There does seem a bit of a mystery to be cleared up," observed the gentleman so addressed.

"It will never be cleared up," said the pale Symon. "If anybody could clear it up, you could. But nobody could."

"I rather think I could," said another voice from outside the group, and they turned in surprise to realize that the man in the black robe had spoken again.

"You!" said the colonel, sharply. "And how do you propose to play the detective?"

"I do not propose to play the detective," answered the other, in a clear voice like a bell. "I propose to play the magician. One of the magicians you show up in India, Colonel."

No one spoke for a moment, and then Horne Fisher surprised everybody by saying, "Well, let's go upstairs, and this gentleman can have a try."

He stopped Symon, who had an automatic finger on the button, saying: "No, leave all the lights on. It's a sort of safeguard."

"The thing can't be taken away now," said Symon, bitterly.

"It can be put back," replied Fisher.

Twyford had already run upstairs for news of his vanishing nephew, and he received news of him in a way that at once puzzled and reassured him. On the floor above lay one of those large paper darts which boys throw at each other when the schoolmaster is out of the room. It had evidently been thrown in at the window, and on being unfolded displayed a scrawl of bad handwriting which ran: "Dear Uncle; I am all right. Meet you at the hotel later on," and then the signature.

Insensibly comforted by this, the clergyman found his thoughts reverting voluntarily to his favorite relic, which came a good second in his sympathies to his favorite nephew, and before he knew where he was he found himself encircled by the group discussing its loss, and more or less carried away on the current of their excitement. But an undercurrent of query continued to run in his mind, as to what had really happened to the boy, and what was the boy's exact definition of being all right.

Meanwhile Horne Fisher had considerably puzzled everybody with his new tone and attitude. He had talked to the colonel about the military and mechanical arrangements, and displayed a remarkable knowledge both of the details of discipline and the technicalities of electricity. He had talked to the clergyman, and shown an equally surprising knowledge of the religious and historical interests involved in the relic. He had talked to the man who called himself a magician, and not only surprised but scandalized the company by an equally sympathetic familiarity with the most fantastic forms of Oriental occultism and psychic experiment. And in this last and least respectable line of inquiry he was evidently prepared to go farthest; he openly encouraged the magician, and was plainly prepared to follow the wildest ways of investigation in which that magus might lead him.

"How would you begin now?" he inquired, with an anxious politeness that reduced the colonel to a congestion of rage.

"It is all a question of a force; of establishing communications for a force," replied that adept, affably, ignoring some military mutterings about the police force. "It is what you in the West used to call animal magnetism, but it is much more than that. I had better not say how much more. As to setting about it, the usual method is to throw some susceptible person into a trance, which serves as a sort of bridge or cord of communication, by which the force beyond can give him, as it were, an electric shock, and awaken his higher senses. It opens the sleeping eye of the mind."

"I'm susceptible," said Fisher, either with simplicity or with a baffling irony. "Why not open my mind's eye for me? My friend Harold March here will tell you I sometimes see things, even in the dark."

"Nobody sees anything except in the dark," said the magician.

Heavy clouds of sunset were closing round the wooden hut, enormous clouds, of which only the corners could be seen in the little window, like purple horns and tails, almost as if some huge monsters were prowling round the place. But the purple was already deepening to dark gray; it would soon be night.

"Do not light the lamp," said the magus with quiet authority, arresting a movement in that direction. "I told you before that things happen only in the dark."

How such a topsy-turvy scene ever came to be tolerated in the colonel's office, of all places, was afterward a puzzle in the memory of many, including the colonel. They recalled it like a sort of nightmare, like something they could not control. Perhaps there was really a magnetism about the mesmerist; perhaps there was even more
magnetism about the man mesmerized. Anyhow, the man was being mesmerized, for Horne Fisher had collapsed into a chair with his long limbs loose and sprawling and his eyes staring at vacancy; and the other man was mesmerizing him, making sweeping movements with his darkly draped arms as if with black wings. The colonel had passed the point of explosion, and he dimly realized that eccentric aristocrats are allowed their fling. He comforted himself with the knowledge that he had already sent for the police, who would break up any such masquerade, and with lighting a cigar, the red end of which, in the gathering darkness, glowed with protest.

"Yes, I see pockets," the man in the trance was saying. "I see many pockets, but they are all empty. No; I see one pocket that is not empty."

There was a faint stir in the stillness, and the magician said, "Can you see what is in the pocket?"

"Yes," answered the other; "there are two bright things. I think they are two bits of steel. One of the pieces of steel is bent or crooked."

"Have they been used in the removal of the relic from downstairs?"

"Yes."

There was another pause and the inquirer added, "Do you see anything of the relic itself?"

"I see something shining on the floor, like the shadow or the ghost of it. It is over there in the corner beyond the desk."

There was a movement of men turning and then a sudden stillness, as of their stiffening, for over in the corner on the wooden floor there was really a round spot of pale light. It was the only spot of light in the room. The cigar had gone out.

"It points the way," came the voice of the oracle. "The spirits are pointing the way to penitence, and urging the thief to restitution. I can see nothing more." His voice trailed off into a silence that lasted solidly for many minutes, like the long silence below when the theft had been committed. Then it was broken by the ring of metal on the floor, and the sound of something spinning and falling like a tossed halfpenny.

"Light the lamp!" cried Fisher in a loud and even jovial voice, leaping to his feet with far less languor than usual.

"I must be going now, but I should like to see it before I go. Why, I came on purpose to see it."

The lamp was lit, and he did see it, for St. Paul's Penny was lying on the floor at his feet.

"Oh, as for that," explained Fisher, when he was entertaining March and Twyford at lunch about a month later, "I merely wanted to play with the magician at his own game."

"I thought you meant to catch him in his own trap," said Twyford. "I can't make head or tail of anything yet, but to my mind he was always the suspect. I don't think he was necessarily a thief in the vulgar sense. The police always seem to think that silver is stolen for the sake of silver, but a thing like that might well be stolen out of some religious mania. A runaway monk turned mystic might well want it for some mystical purpose."

"No," replied Fisher, "the runaway monk is not a thief. At any rate he is not the thief. And he's not altogether a liar, either. He said one true thing at least that night."

"And what was that?" inquired March.

"He said it was all magnetism. As a matter of fact, it was done by means of a magnet." Then, seeing they still looked puzzled, he added, "It was that toy magnet belonging to your nephew, Mr. Twyford."

"But I don't understand," objected March. "If it was done with the schoolboy's magnet, I suppose it was done by the schoolboy."

"Well," replied Fisher, reflectively, "it rather depends which schoolboy."

"What on earth do you mean?"

"The soul of a schoolboy is a curious thing," Fisher continued, in a meditative manner. "It can survive a great many things besides climbing out of a chimney. A man can grow gray in great campaigns, and still have the soul of a schoolboy. A man can return with a great reputation from India and be put in charge of a great public treasure, and still have the soul of a schoolboy, waiting to be awakened by an accident. And it is ten times more so when to the schoolboy you add the skeptic, who is generally a sort of stunted schoolboy. You said just now that things might be done by religious mania. Have you ever heard of irreligious mania? I assure you it exists very violently, especially in men who like showing up magicians in India. But here the skeptic had the temptation of showing up a much more tremendous sham nearer home."

A light came into Harold March's eyes as he suddenly saw, as if afar off, the wider implication of the suggestion. But Twyford was still wrestling with one problem at a time.

"Do you really mean," he said, "that Colonel Morris took the relic?"

"He was the only person who could use the magnet," replied Fisher. "In fact, your obliging nephew left him a number of things he could use. He had a ball of string, and an instrument for making a hole in the wooden floor--I made a little play with that hole in the floor in my trance, by the way; with the lights left on below, it shone like a new shilling." Twyford suddenly bounded on his chair. "But in that case," he cried, in a new and altered voice, "why
then of course-- You said a piece of steel--?

"I said there were two pieces of steel," said Fisher. "The bent piece of steel was the boy's magnet. The other was the relic in the glass case."

"But that is silver," answered the archaeologist, in a voice now almost unrecognizable.

"Oh," replied Fisher, soothingly, "I dare say it was painted with silver a little."

There was a heavy silence, and at last Harold March said, "But where is the real relic?"

"Where it has been for five years," replied Horne Fisher, "in the possession of a mad millionaire named Vandam, in Nebraska. There was a playful little photograph about him in a society paper the other day, mentioning his delusion, and saying he was always being taken in about relics."

Harold March frowned at the tablecloth; then, after an interval, he said: "I think I understand your notion of how the thing was actually done; according to that, Morris just made a hole and fished it up with a magnet at the end of a string. Such a monkey trick looks like mere madness, but I suppose he was mad, partly with the boredom of watching over what he felt was a fraud, though he couldn't prove it. Then came a chance to prove it, to himself at least, and he had what he called 'fun' with it. Yes, I think I see a lot of details now. But it's just the whole thing that knocks me. How did it all come to be like that?"

Fisher was looking at him with level lids and an immovable manner.

"Every precaution was taken," he said. "The Duke carried the relic on his own person, and locked it up in the case with his own hands."

March was silent; but Twyford stammered. "I don't understand you. You give me the creeps. Why don't you speak plainer?"

"If I spoke plainer you would understand me less," said Horne Fisher.

"All the same I should try," said March, still without lifting his head.

"Oh, very well," replied Fisher, with a sigh; "the plain truth is, of course, that it's a bad business. Everybody knows it's a bad business who knows anything about it. But it's always happening, and in one way one can hardly blame them. They get stuck on to a foreign princess that's as stiff as a Dutch doll, and they have their fling. In this case it was a pretty big fling."

The face of the Rev. Thomas Twyford certainly suggested that he was a little out of his depth in the seas of truth, but as the other went on speaking vaguely the old gentleman's features sharpened and set.

"If it were some decent morganatic affair I wouldn't say; but he must have been a fool to throw away thousands on a woman like that. At the end it was sheer blackmail; but it's something that the old ass didn't get it out of the taxpayers. He could only get it out of the Yank, and there you are."

The Rev. Thomas Twyford had risen to his feet.

"Well, I'm glad my nephew had nothing to do with it," he said. "And if that's what the world is like, I hope he will never have anything to do with it."

"I hope not," answered Horne Fisher. "No one knows so well as I do that one can have far too much to do with it."

For Summers Minor had indeed nothing to do with it; and it is part of his higher significance that he has really nothing to do with the story, or with any such stories. The boy went like a bullet through the tangle of this tale of crooked politics and crazy mockery and came out on the other side, pursuing his own unspoiled purposes. From the top of the chimney he climbed he had caught sight of a new omnibus, whose color and name he had never known, as a naturalist might see a new bird or a botanist a new flower. And he had been sufficiently enraptured in rushing after it, and riding away upon that fairy ship.

IV. THE BOTTOMLESS WELL

In an oasis, or green island, in the red and yellow seas of sand that stretch beyond Europe toward the sunrise, there can be found a rather fantastic contrast, which is none the less typical of such a place, since international treaties have made it an outpost of the British occupation. The site is famous among archaeologists for something that is hardly a monument, but merely a hole in the ground. But it is a round shaft, like that of a well, and probably a part of some great irrigation works of remote and disputed date, perhaps more ancient than anything in that ancient land. There is a green fringe of palm and prickly pear round the black mouth of the well; but nothing of the upper masonry remains except two bulky and battered stones standing like the pillars of a gateway of nowhere, in which some of the more transcendental archaeologists, in certain moods at moonrise or sunset, think they can trace the faint lines of figures or features of more than Babylonian monstrosity; while the more rationalistic archaeologists, in the more rational hours of daylight, see nothing but two shapeless rocks. It may have been noticed, however, that all Englishmen are not archaeologists. Many of those assembled in such a place for official and military purposes have hobbies other than archaeology. And it is a solemn fact that the English in this Eastern exile have contrived to make a small golf links out of the green scrub and sand; with a comfortable clubhouse at one end of it and this primeval
monument at the other. They did not actually use this archaic abyss as a bunker, because it was by tradition unfathomable, and even for practical purposes unfathomed. Any sporting projectile sent into it might be counted most literally as a lost ball. But they often sauntered round it in their interludes of talking and smoking cigarettes, and one of them had just come down from the clubhouse to find another gazing somewhat moodily into the well.

Both the Englishmen wore light clothes and white pith helmets and puggreys, but there, for the most part, their resemblance ended. And they both almost simultaneously said the same word, but they said it on two totally different notes of the voice.

"Have you heard the news?" asked the man from the club. "Splendid."

"Splendid," replied the man by the well. But the first man pronounced the word as a young man might say it about a woman, and the second as an old man might say it about the weather, not without sincerity, but certainly without fervor.

And in this the tone of the two men was sufficiently typical of them. The first, who was a certain Captain Boyle, was of a bold and boyish type, dark, and with a sort of native heat in his face that did not belong to the atmosphere of the East, but rather to the ardors and ambitions of the West. The other was an older man and certainly an older resident, a civilian official--Horne Fisher; and his drooping eyelids and drooping light mustache expressed all the paradox of the Englishman in the East. He was much too hot to be anything but cool.

Neither of them thought it necessary to mention what it was that was splendid. That would indeed have been superfluous conversation about something that everybody knew. The striking victory over a menacing combination of Turks and Arabs in the north, won by troops under the command of Lord Hastings, the veteran of so many striking victories, was already spread by the newspapers all over the Empire, let alone to this small garrison so near to the battlefield.

"Now, no other nation in the world could have done a thing like that," cried Captain Boyle, emphatically.

Horne Fisher was still looking silently into the well; a moment later he answered: "We certainly have the art of unmaking mistakes. That's where the poor old Prussians went wrong. They could only make mistakes and stick to them. There is really a certain talent in unmaking a mistake."

"What do you mean," asked Boyle, "what mistakes?"

"Well, everybody knows it looked like biting off more than he could chew," replied Horne Fisher. It was a peculiarity of Mr. Fisher that he always said that everybody knew things which about one person in two million was ever allowed to hear of. "And it was certainly jolly lucky that Travers turned up so well in the nick of time. Odd how often the right thing's been done for us by the second in command, even when a great man was first in command. Like Colborne at Waterloo."

"It ought to add a whole province to the Empire," observed the other.

"Well, I suppose the Zimmermes would have insisted on it as far as the canal," observed Fisher, thoughtfully, "though everybody knows adding provinces doesn't always pay much nowadays."

Captain Boyle frowned in a slightly puzzled fashion. Being cloudily conscious of never having heard of the Zimmermes in his life, he could only remark, stolidly:

"Well, one can't be a Little Englander."

Horne Fisher smiled, and he had a pleasant smile.

"Every man out here is a Little Engasier," he said. "He wishes he were back in Little England."

"I don't know what you're talking about, I'm afraid," said the younger man, rather suspiciously. "One would think you didn't really admire Hastings or--or--anything."

"I admire him no end," replied Fisher. "He's by far the best man for this post; he understands the Moslems and can do anything with them. That's why I'm all against pushing Travers against him, merely because of this last affair."

"I really don't understand what you're driving at," said the other, frankly.

"Perhaps it isn't worth understanding," answered Fisher, lightly, "and, anyhow, we needn't talk politics. Do you know the Arab legend about that well?"

"I'm afraid I don't know much about Arab legends," said Boyle, rather stiffly.

"That's rather a mistake," replied Fisher, "especially from your point of view. Lord Hastings himself is an Arab legend. That is perhaps the very greatest thing he really is. If his reputation went it would weaken us all over Asia and Africa. Well, the story about that hole in the ground, that goes down nobody knows where, has always fascinated me, rather. It's Mohammedan in form now, but I shouldn't wonder if the tale is a long way older than Mohammed. It's all about somebody they call the Sultan Aladdin, not our friend of the lamp, of course, but rather like him in having to do with genii or giants or something of that sort. They say he commanded the giants to build him a sort of pagoda, rising higher and higher above all the stars. The Utmost for the Highest, as the people said when they built the Tower of Babel. But the builders of the Tower of Babel were quite modest and domestic people,
like mice, compared with old Aladdin. They only wanted a tower that would reach heaven—a mere trifle. He wanted a tower that would pass heaven and rise above it, and go on rising for ever and ever. And Allah cast him down to earth with a thunderbolt, which sank into the earth, boring a hole deeper and deeper, till it made a well that was without a bottom as the tower was to have been without a top. And down that inverted tower of darkness the soul of the proud Sultan is falling forever and ever."

"What a queer chap you are," said Boyle. "You talk as if a fellow could believe those fables."

"Perhaps I believe the moral and not the fable," answered Fisher. "But here comes Lady Hastings. You know her, I think."

The clubhouse on the golf links was used, of course, for many other purposes besides that of golf. It was the only social center of the garrison beside the strictly military headquarters; it had a billiard room and a bar, and even an excellent reference library for those officers who were so perverse as to take their profession seriously. Among these was the great general himself, whose head of silver and face of bronze, like that of a brazen eagle, were often to be found bent over the charts and folios of the library. The great Lord Hastings believed in science and study, as in other severe ideals of life, and had given much paternal advice on the point to young Boyle, whose appearances in that place of research were rather more intermittent. It was from one of these snatches of study that the young man had just come out through the glass doors of the library on to the golf links. But, above all, the club was so appointed as to serve the social conveniences of ladies at least as much as gentlemen, and Lady Hastings was able to play the queen in such a society almost as much as in her own ballroom. She was eminently calculated and, as some said, eminently inclined to play such a part. She was much younger than her husband, an attractive and sometimes dangerously attractive lady; and Mr. Horne Fisher looked after her a little sardonically as she swept away with the young soldier. Then his rather dreary eye strayed to the green and prickly growths round the well, growths of that curious cactus formation in which one thick leaf grows directly out of the other without stalk or twig. It gave his fanciful mind a sinister feeling of a blind growth without shape or purpose. A flower or shrub in the West grows to the blossom which is its crown, and is content. But this was as if hands could grow out of hands or legs grow out of legs in a nightmare. "Always adding a province to the Empire," he said, with a smile, and then added, more sadly, "but I doubt if I was right, after all!"

A strong but genial voice broke in on his meditations and he looked up and smiled, seeing the face of an old friend. The voice was, indeed, rather more genial than the face, which was at the first glance decidedly grim. It was a typically legal face, with angular jaws and heavy, grizzled eyebrows; and it belonged to an eminently legal character, though he was now attached in a semimilitary capacity to the police of that wild district. Cuthbert Grayne was perhaps more of a criminologist than either a lawyer or a policeman, but in his more barbarous surroundings he had proved successful in turning himself into a practical combination of all three. The discovery of a whole series of strange Oriental crimes stood to his credit. But as few people were acquainted with, or attracted to, such a hobby or branch of knowledge, his intellectual life was somewhat solitary. Among the few exceptions was Horne Fisher, who had a curious capacity for talking to almost anybody about almost anything.

"Studying botany, or is it archaeology?" inquired Grayne. "I shall never come to the end of your interests, Fisher. I should say that what you don't know isn't worth knowing."

"You are wrong," replied Fisher, with a very unusual abruptness, and even bitterness. "It's what I do know that isn't worth knowing. All the seamy side of things, all the secret reasons and rotten motives and bribery and blackmail they call politics. I needn't be so proud of having been down all these sewers that I should brag about it to the little boys in the street."

"What do you mean? What's the matter with you?" asked his friend. "I never knew you taken like this before."

"I'm ashamed of myself," replied Fisher. "I've just been throwing cold water on the enthusiasms of a boy."

"Even that explanation is hardly exhaustive," observed the criminal expert.

"Damned newspaper nonsense the enthusiasms were, of course," continued Fisher, "but I ought to know that at that age illusions can be ideals. And they're better than the reality, anyhow. But there is one very ugly responsibility about jolting a young man out of the rut of the most rotten ideal."

"And what may that be?" inquired his friend.

"It's very apt to set him off with the same energy in a much worse direction," answered Fisher; "a pretty endless sort of direction, a bottomless pit as deep as the bottomless well."

Fisher did not see his friend until a fortnight later, when he found himself in the garden at the back of the clubhouse on the opposite side from the links, a garden heavily colored and scented with sweet semitropical plants in the glow of a desert sunset. Two other men were with him, the third being the now celebrated second in command, familiar to everybody as Tom Travers, a lean, dark man, who looked older than his years, with a furrow in his brow and something morose about the very shape of his black mustache. They had just been served with black coffee by the Arab now officiating as the temporary servant of the club, though he was a figure already familiar, and
even famous, as the old servant of the general. He went by the name of Said, and was notable among other Semites for that unnatural length of his yellow face and height of his narrow forehead which is sometimes seen among them, and gave an irrational impression of something sinister, in spite of his agreeable smile.

"I never feel as if I could quite trust that fellow," said Grayne, when the man had gone away. "It's very unjust, I take it, for he was certainly devoted to Hastings, and saved his life, they say. But Arabs are often like that, loyal to one man. I can't help feeling he might cut anybody else's throat, and even do it treacherously."

"Well," said Travers, with a rather sour smile, "so long as he leaves Hastings alone the world won't mind much."

There was a rather embarrassing silence, full of memories of the great battle, and then Horne Fisher said, quietly: "The newspapers aren't the world, Tom. Don't you worry about them. Everybody in your world knows the truth well enough."

"I think we'd better not talk about the general just now," remarked Grayne, "for he's just coming out of the club."

"He's not coming here," said Fisher. "He's only seeing his wife to the car."

As he spoke, indeed, the lady came out on the steps of the club, followed by her husband, who then went swiftly in front of her to open the garden gate. As he did so she turned back and spoke for a moment to a solitary man still sitting in a cane chair in the shadow of the doorway, the only man left in the deserted club save for the three that lingered in the garden. Fisher peered for a moment into the shadow, and saw that it was Captain Boyle.

The next moment, rather to their surprise, the general reappeared and, remounting the steps, spoke a word or two to Boyle in his turn. Then he signaled to Said, who hurried up with two cups of coffee, and the two men re-entered the club, each carrying his cup in his hand. The next moment a gleam of white light in the growing darkness showed that the electric lamps had been turned on in the library beyond.

"Coffee and scientific researches," said Travers, grimly. "All the luxuries of learning and theoretical research. Well, I must be going, for I have my work to do as well." And he got up rather stiffly, saluted his companions, and strode away into the dusk.

"I only hope Boyle is sticking to scientific researches," said Horne Fisher. "I'm not very comfortable about him myself. But let's talk about something else."

They talked about something else longer than they probably imagined, until the tropical night had come and a splendid moon painted the whole scene with silver; but before it was bright enough to see by Fisher had already noted that the lights in the library had been abruptly extinguished. He waited for the two men to come out by the garden entrance, but nobody came.

"They must have gone for a stroll on the links," he said.

"Very possibly," replied Grayne. "It's going to be a beautiful night."

A moment or two after he had spoken they heard a voice hailing them out of the shadow of the clubhouse, and were astonished to perceive Travers hurrying toward them, calling out as he came:

"I shall want your help, you fellows," he cried. "There's something pretty bad out on the links."

They found themselves plunging through the club smoking room and the library beyond, in complete darkness, mental as well as material. But Horne Fisher, in spite of his affectation of indifference, was a person of a curious and almost transcendental sensibility to atmospheres, and he already felt the presence of something more than an accident. He collided with a piece of furniture in the library, and almost shuddered with the shock, for the thing moved as he could never have fancied a piece of furniture moving. It seemed to move like a living thing, yielding and yet striking back. The next moment Grayne had turned on the lights, and he saw he had only stumbled against one of the revolving bookstands that had swung round and struck him; but his involuntary recoil had revealed to him his own subconscious sense of something mysterious and monstrous. There were several of these revolving bookcases standing here and there about the library; on one of them stood the two cups of coffee, and on another a large open book. It was Budge's book on Egyptian hieroglyphics, with colored plates of strange birds and gods, and even as he rushed past, he was conscious of something odd about the fact that this, and not any work of military science, should be open in that place at that moment. He was even conscious of the gap in the well-lined bookshelf from which it had been taken, and it seemed almost to gape at him in an ugly fashion, like a gap in the teeth of some sinister face.

A run brought them in a few minutes to the other side of the ground in front of the bottomless well, and a few yards from it, in a moonlight almost as broad as daylight, they saw what they had come to see.

The great Lord Hastings lay prone on his face, in a posture in which there was a touch of something strange and stiff, with one elbow erect above his body, the arm being doubled, and his big, bony hand clutching the rank and ragged grass. A few feet away was Boyle, almost as motionless, but supported on his hands and knees, and staring at the body. It might have been no more than shock and accident; but there was something ungainly and unnatural about the quadrupedal posture and the gaping face. It was as if his reason had fled from him. Behind, there was nothing but the clear blue southern sky, and the beginning of the desert, except for the two great broken stones in
front of the well. And it was in such a light and atmosphere that men could fancy they traced in them enormous and
evil faces, looking down.

Horne Fisher stooped and touched the strong hand that was still clutching the grass, and it was as cold as a stone.
He knelt by the body and was busy for a moment applying other tests; then he rose again, and said, with a sort of
confident despair:

"Lord Hastings is dead."

There was a stony silence, and then Travers remarked, gruffly: "This is your department, Grayne; I will leave
you to question Captain Boyle. I can make no sense of what he says."

Boyle had pulled himself together and risen to his feet, but his face still wore an awful expression, making it like
a new mask or the face of another man.

"I was looking at the well," he said, "and when I turned he had fallen down."

Grayne's face was very dark. "As you say, this is my affair," he said. "I must first ask you to help me carry him
to the library and let me examine things thoroughly."

When they had deposited the body in the library, Grayne turned to Fisher and said, in a voice that had recovered
its fullness and confidence, "I am going to lock myself in and make a thorough examination first. I look to you to
keep in touch with the others and make a preliminary examination of Boyle. I will talk to him later. And just
telephone to headquarters for a policeman, and let him come here at once and stand by till I want him."

Without more words the great criminal investigator went into the lighted library, shutting the door behind him,
and Fisher, without replying, turned and began to talk quietly to Travers. "It is curious," he said, "that the thing
should happen just in front of that place."

"It would certainly be very curious," replied Travers, "if the place played any part in it."

"I think," replied Fisher, "that the part it didn't play is more curious still."

And with these apparently meaningless words he turned to the shaken Boyle and, taking his arm, began to walk
him up and down in the moonlight, talking in low tones.

Dawn had begun to break abrupt and white when Cuthbert Grayne turned out the lights in the library and came
out on to the links. Fisher was lounging about alone, in his listless fashion; but the police messenger for whom he
had sent was standing at attention in the background.

"I sent Boyle off with Travers," observed Fisher, carelessly; "he'll look after him, and he'd better have some
sleep, anyhow."

"Did you get anything out of him?" asked Grayne. "Did he tell you what he and Hastings were doing?"

"Yes," answered Fisher, "he gave me a pretty clear account, after all. He said that after Lady Hastings went off
in the car the general asked him to take coffee with him in the library and look up a point about local antiquities. He
himself was beginning to look for Budge's book in one of the revolving bookstands when the general found it in one
of the bookshelves on the wall. After looking at some of the plates they went out, it would seem, rather abruptly, on
to the links, and walked toward the old well; and while Boyle was looking into it he heard a thud behind him, and
turned round to find the general lying as we found him. He himself dropped on his knees to examine the body, and
then was paralyzed with a sort of terror and could not come nearer to it or touch it. But I think very little of that;
people caught in a real shock of surprise are sometimes found in the queerest postures."

Grayne wore a grim smile of attention, and said, after a short silence:

"Well, he hasn't told you many lies. It's really a credibly clear and consistent account of what happened, with
everything of importance left out."

"Have you discovered anything in there?" asked Fisher.

"I have discovered everything," answered Grayne.

Fisher maintained a somewhat gloomy silence, as the other resumed his explanation in quiet and assured tones.

"You were quite right, Fisher, when you said that young fellow was in danger of going down dark ways toward
the pit. Whether or no, as you fancied, the jolt you gave to his view of the general had anything to do with it, he has
not been treating the general well for some time. It's an unpleasant business, and I don't want to dwell on it; but it's
pretty plain that his wife was not treating him well, either. I don't know how far it went, but it went as far as
concealment, anyhow; for when Lady Hastings spoke to Boyle it was to tell him she had hidden a note in the Budge
book in the library. The general overheard, or came somehow to know, and he went straight to the book and found
it. He confronted Boyle with it, and they had a scene, of course. And Boyle was confronted with something else; he
was confronted with an awful alternative, in which the life of one old man meant ruin and his death meant triumph
and even happiness."

"Well," observed Fisher, at last, "I don't blame him for not telling you the woman's part of the story. But how do
you know about the letter?"

"I found it on the general's body," answered Grayne, "but I found worse things than that. The body had stiffened
in the way rather peculiar to poisons of a certain Asiatic sort. Then I examined the coffee cups, and I knew enough
chemistry to find poison in the dregs of one of them. Now, the General went straight to the bookcase, leaving his
cup of coffee on the bookstand in the middle of the room. While his back was turned, and Boyle was pretending to
examine the bookstand, he was left alone with the coffee cup. The poison takes about ten minutes to act, and ten
minutes' walk would bring them to the bottomless well."

"Yes," remarked Fisher, "and what about the bottomless well?"
"What has the bottomless well got to do with it?" asked his friend.
"It has nothing to do with it," replied Fisher. "That is what I find utterly confounding and incredible."
"And why should that particular hole in the ground have anything to do with it?"
"It is a particular hole in your case," said Fisher. "But I won't insist on that just now. By the way, there is another
thing I ought to tell you. I said I sent Boyle away in charge of Travers. It would be just as true to say I sent Travers
in charge of Boyle."
"You don't mean to say you suspect Tom Travers?" cried the other.
"He was a deal bitterer against the general than Boyle ever was," observed Horne Fisher, with a curious
indifference.
"Man, you're not saying what you mean," cried Grayne. "I tell you I found the poison in one of the coffee cups."
"There was always Said, of course," added Fisher, "either for hatred or hire. We agreed he was capable of almost
anything."
"And we agreed he was incapable of hurting his master," retorted Grayne.
"Well, well," said Fisher, amiably, "I dare say you are right; but I should just like to have a look at the library
and the coffee cups."
He passed inside, while Grayne turned to the policeman in attendance and handed him a scribbled note, to be
telegraphed from headquarters. The man saluted and hurried off; and Grayne, following his friend into the library,
found him beside the bookstand in the middle of the room, on which were the empty cups.
"This is where Boyle looked for Budge, or pretended to look for him, according to your account," he said.
As Fisher spoke he bent down in a half-crouching attitude, to look at the volumes in the low, revolving shelf, for
the whole bookstand was not much higher than an ordinary table. The next moment he sprang up as if he had been
stung.
"Oh, my God!" he cried.
Very few people, if any, had ever seen Mr. Horne Fisher behave as he behaved just then. He flashed a glance at
the door, saw that the open window was nearer, went out of it with a flying leap, as if over a hurdle, and went racing
across the turf, in the track of the disappearing policeman. Grayne, who stood staring after him, soon saw his tall,
loose figure, returning, restored to all its normal limnips and air of leisure. He was fanning himself slowly with a
piece of paper, the telegram he had so violently intercepted.
"Lucky I stopped that," he observed. "We must keep this affair as quiet as death. Hastings must die of apoplexy
or heart disease."
"What on earth is the trouble?" demanded the other investigator.
"The trouble is," said Fisher, "that in a few days we should have had a very agreeable alternative--of hanging an
innocent man or knocking the British Empire to hell."
"Do you mean to say," asked Grayne, "that this infernal crime is not to be punished?"
Fisher looked at him steadily.
"It is already punished," he said.
After a moment's pause he went on. "You reconstructed the crime with admirable skill, old chap, and nearly all
you said was true. Two men with two coffee cups did go into the library and did put their cups on the bookstand and
did go together to the well, and one of them was a murderer and had put poison in the other's cup. But it was not
done while Boyle was looking at the revolving bookcase. He did look at it, though, searching for the Budge book
with the note in it, but I fancy that Hastings had already moved it to the shelves on the wall. It was part of that grim
game that he should find it first.
"Now, how does a man search a revolving bookcase? He does not generally hop all round it in a squatting
attitude, like a frog. He simply gives it a touch and makes it revolve."
He was frowning at the floor as he spoke, and there was a light under his heavy lids that was not often seen
there. The mysticism that was buried deep under all the cynicism of his experience was awake and moving in the
depths. His voice took unexpected turns and inflections, almost as if two men were speaking.
"That was what Boyle did; he barely touched the thing, and it went round as easily as the world goes round. Yes,
very much as the world goes round, for the hand that turned it was not his. God, who turns the wheel of all the stars,
touched that wheel and brought it full circle, that His dreadful justice might return."
"I am beginning," said Grayne, slowly, "to have some hazy and horrible idea of what you mean."

"It is very simple," said Fisher, "when Boyle straightened himself from his stooping posture, something had happened which he had not noticed, which his enemy had not noticed, which nobody had noticed. The two coffee cups had exactly changed places."

The rocky face of Grayne seemed to have sustained a shock in silence; not a line of it altered, but his voice when it came was unexpectedly weakened.

"I see what you mean," he said, "and, as you say, the less said about it the better. It was not the lover who tried to get rid of the husband, but--the other thing. And a tale like that about a man like that would ruin us here. Had you any guess of this at the start?"

"The bottomless well, as I told you," answered Fisher, quietly; "that was what stumped me from the start. Not because it had anything to do with it, because it had nothing to do with it."

He paused a moment, as if choosing an approach, and then went on: "When a man knows his enemy will be dead in ten minutes, and takes him to the edge of an unfathomable pit, he means to throw his body into it. What else should he do? A born fool would have the sense to do it, and Boyle is not a born fool. Well, why did not Boyle do it? The more I thought of it the more I suspected there was some mistake in the murder, so to speak. Somebody had taken someone there to throw him in, and yet he was not thrown in. I had already an ugly, unformed idea of some substitution or reversal of parts; then I stooped to turn the bookstand myself, by accident, and I instantly knew everything, for I saw the two cups revolve once more, like moons in the sky."

After a pause, Cuthbert Grayne said, "And what are we to say to the newspapers?"

"My friend, Harold March, is coming along from Cairo to-day," said Fisher. "He is a very brilliant and successful journalist. But for all that he's a thoroughly honorable man, so you must not tell him the truth."

Half an hour later Fisher was again walking to and fro in front of the clubhouse, with Captain Boyle, the latter by this time with a very buffeted and bewildered air; perhaps a sadder and a wiser man.

"What about me, then?" he was saying. "Am I cleared? Am I not going to be cleared?"

"I believe and hope," answered Fisher, "that you are not going to be suspected. But you are certainly not going to be cleared. There must be no suspicion against him, and therefore no suspicion against you. Any suspicion against him, let alone such a story against him, would knock us endways from Malta to Mandalay. He was a hero as well as a holy terror among the Moslems. Indeed, you might almost call him a Moslem hero in the English service. Of course he got on with them partly because of his own little dose of Eastern blood; he got it from his mother, the dancer from Damascus; everybody knows that."

"Oh," repeated Boyle, mechanically, staring at him with round eyes, "everybody knows that."

"I dare say there was a touch of it in his jealousy and ferocious vengeance," went on Fisher. "But, for all that, the crime would ruin us among the Arabs, all the more because it was something like a crime against hospitality. It's been hateful for you and it's pretty horrid for me. But there are some things that damned well can't be done, and while I'm alive that's one of them."

"What do you mean?" asked Boyle, glancing at him curiously. "Why should you, of all people, be so passionate about it?"

Horne Fisher looked at the young man with a baffling expression.

"I suppose," he said, "it's because I'm a Little Englander."

"I can never make out what you mean by that sort of thing," answered Boyle, doubtfully.

"Do you think England is so little as all that?" said Fisher, with a warmth in his cold voice, "that it can't hold a man across a few thousand miles. You lectured me with a lot of ideal patriotism, my young friend; but it's practical patriotism now for you and me, and with no lies to help it. You talked as if everything always went right with us all over the world, in a triumphant cresendo culminating in Hastings. I tell you everything has gone wrong with us here, except Hastings. He was the one name we had left to conjure with, and that mustn't go as well, no, by God! It's bad enough that a gang of infernal Jews should plant us here, where there's no earthly English interest to serve, and all hell beating up against us, simply because Nosey Zimmern has lent money to half the Cabinet. It's bad enough that an old pawnbroker from Bagdad should make us fight his battles; we can't fight with our right hand cut off. Our one score was Hastings and his victory, which was really somebody else's victory. Tom Travers has to suffer, and so have you."

Then, after a moment's silence, he pointed toward the bottomless well and said, in a quieter tone:

"I told you that I didn't believe in the philosophy of the Tower of Aladdin. I don't believe in the Empire growing until it reaches the sky; I don't believe in the Union Jack going up and up eternally like the Tower. But if you think I am going to let the Union Jack go down and down eternally, like the bottomless well, down into the blackness of the bottomless pit, down in defeat and derision, amid the jeers of the very Jews who have sucked us dry--no I won't, and that's flat; not if the Chancellor were blackmailed by twenty millionaires with their gutter rags, not if the Prime
v. THE FAD OF THE FISHERMAN

A thing can sometimes be too extraordinary to be remembered. If it is clean out of the course of things, and has apparently no causes and no consequences, subsequent events do not recall it, and it remains only a subconscious thing, to be stirred by some accident long after. It drifts apart like a forgotten dream; and it was in the hour of many dreams, at daybreak and very soon after the end of dark, that such a strange sight was given to a man sculling a boat down a river in the West country. The man was awake; indeed, he considered himself rather wide awake, being the political journalist, Harold March, on his way to interview various political celebrities in their country seats. But the thing he saw was so inconsequent that it might have been imaginary. It simply slipped past his mind and was lost in later and utterly different events; nor did he even recover the memory till he had long afterward discovered the meaning.

Pale mists of morning lay on the fields and the rushes along one margin of the river; along the other side ran a wall of tawny brick almost overhanging the water. He had shipped his oars and was drifting for a moment with the stream, when he turned his head and saw that the monotony of the long brick wall was broken by a bridge; rather an elegant eighteenth-century sort of bridge with little columns of white stone turning gray. There had been floods and the river still stood very high, with dwarfish trees waist deep in it, and rather a narrow arc of white dawn gleamed under the curve of the bridge.

As his own boat went under the dark archway he saw another boat coming toward him, rowed by a man as solitary as himself. His posture prevented much being seen of him, but as he neared the bridge he stood up in the boat and turned round. He was already so close to the dark entry, however, that his whole figure was black against the morning light, and March could see nothing of his face except the end of two long whiskers or mustaches that gave something sinister to the silhouette, like horns in the wrong place. Even these details March would never have noticed but for what happened in the same instant. As the man came under the low bridge he made a leap at it and hung, with his legs dangling, letting the boat float away from under him. March had a momentary vision of two black kicking legs; then of one black kicking leg; and then of nothing except the eddying stream and the long perspective of the wall. But whenever he thought of it again, long afterward, when he understood the story in which it figured, it was always fixed in that one fantastic shape—as if those wild legs were a grotesque graven ornament of the bridge itself, in the manner of a gargoyle. At the moment he merely passed, staring, down the stream. He could see no flying figure on the bridge, so it must have already fled; but he was half conscious of some faint significance in the fact that among the trees round the bridgehead opposite the wall he saw a lamp-post; and, beside the lamp-post, the broad blue back of an unconscious policeman.

Even before reaching the shrine of his political pilgrimage he had many other things to think of besides the odd incident of the bridge; for the management of a boat by a solitary man was not always easy even on such a solitary stream. And indeed it was only by an unforeseen accident that he was solitary. The boat had been purchased and the whole expedition planned in conjunction with a friend, who had at the last moment been forced to alter all his arrangements. Harold March was to have traveled with his friend Horne Fisher on that inland voyage to Willowood Place, where the Prime Minister was a guest at the moment. More and more people were hearing of Harold March, for his striking political articles were opening to him the doors of larger and larger salons; but he had never met the Prime Minister yet. Scarcely anybody among the general public had ever heard of Horne Fisher; but he had known the Prime Minister all his life. For these reasons, had the two taken the projected journey together, March might have been slightly disposed to hasten it and Fisher vaguely content to lengthen it out. For Fisher was one of those people who are born knowing the Prime Minister. The knowledge seemed to have no very exhilarant effect, and in his case bore some resemblance to being born tired. But he was distinctly annoyed to receive, just as he was doing a little light packing of fishing tackle and cigars for the journey, a telegram from Willowood asking him to come down at once by train, as the Prime Minister had to leave that night. Fisher knew that his friend the journalist could not possibly start till the next day, and he liked his friend the journalist, and had looked forward to a few days on the river. He did not particularly like or dislike the Prime Minister, but he intensely disliked the alternative of a few hours in the train. Nevertheless, he accepted Prime Ministers as he accepted railway trains—as part of a system which he, at least, was not the revolutionist sent on earth to destroy. So he telephoned to March, asking him, with many apologetic curses and faint damns, to take the boat down the river as arranged, that they might meet at
Willowood by the time settled; then he went outside and hailed a taxicab to take him to the railway station. There he paused at the bookstall to add to his light luggage a number of cheap murder stories, which he read with great pleasure, and without any premonition that he was about to walk into as strange a story in real life.

A little before sunset he arrived, with his light suitcase in hand, before the gate of the long riverside gardens of Willowood Place, one of the smaller seats of Sir Isaac Hook, the master of much shipping and many newspapers. He entered by the gate giving on the road, at the opposite side to the river, but there was a mixed quality in all that watery landscape which perpetually reminded a traveler that the river was near. White gleams of water would shine suddenly like swords or spears in the green thickets. And even in the garden itself, divided into courts and curtained with hedges and high garden trees, there hung everywhere in the air the music of water. The first of the green courts which he entered appeared to be a somewhat neglected croquet lawn, in which was a solitary young man playing croquet against himself. Yet he was not an enthusiast for the game, or even for the garden; and his sallow but well-featured face looked rather sullen than otherwise. He was only one of those young men who cannot support the burden of consciousness unless they are doing something, and whose conceptions of doing something are limited to a game of some kind. He was dark and well dressed in a light holiday fashion, and Fisher recognized him at once as a young man named James Bullen, called, for some unknown reason, Bunker. He was the nephew of Sir Isaac; but, what was much more important at the moment, he was also the private secretary of the Prime Minister.

"Hullo, Bunker!" observed Horne Fisher. "You're the sort of man I wanted to see. Has your chief come down yet?"

"He's only staying for dinner," replied Bullen, with his eye on the yellow ball. "He's got a great speech tomorrow at Birmingham and he's going straight through to-night. He's motoring himself there; driving the car, I mean. It's the one thing he's really proud of."

"You mean you're staying here with your uncle, like a good boy?" replied Fisher. "But what will the Chief do at Birmingham without the epigrams whispered to him by his brilliant secretary?"

"Don't you start ragging me," said the young man called Bunker. "I'm only too glad not to go trailing after him. He doesn't know a thing about maps or money or hotels or anything, and I have to dance about like a courier. As for my uncle, as I'm supposed to come into the estate, it's only decent to be here sometimes."

"Very proper," replied the other. "Well, I shall see you later on," and, crossing the lawn, he passed out through a gap in the hedge.

He was walking across the lawn toward the landing stage on the river, and still felt all around him, under the dome of golden evening, an Old World savor and reverberation in that riverhaunted garden. The next square of turf which he crossed seemed at first sight quite deserted, till he saw in the twilight of trees in one corner of it a hammock and in the hammock a man, reading a newspaper and swinging one leg over the edge of the net.

Him also he hailed by name, and the man slipped to the ground and strolled forward. It seemed fated that he should feel something of the past in the accidents of that place, for the figure might well have been an early-Victorian ghost revisiting the ghosts of the croquet hoops and mallets. It was the figure of an elderly man with long whiskers that looked almost fantastic, and a quaint and careful cut of collar and cravat. Having been a fashionable dandy forty years ago, he had managed to preserve the dandyism while ignoring the fashions. A white top-hat lay beside the Morning Post in the hammock behind him. This was the Duke of Westmoreland, the relic of a family really some centuries old; and the antiquity was not heraldry but history. Nobody knew better than Fisher how rare such noblemen are in fact, and how numerous in fiction. But whether the duke owed the general respect he enjoyed to the genuineness of his pedigree or to the fact that he owned a vast amount of very valuable property was a point about which Mr. Fisher's opinion might have been more interesting to discover.

"You were looking so comfortable," said Fisher, "that I thought you must be one of the servants. I'm looking for somebody to take this bag of mine; I haven't brought a man down, as I came away in a hurry."

"Nor have I, for that matter," replied the duke, with some pride. "I never do. If there's one animal alive I loathe it's a valet. I learned to dress myself at an early age and was supposed to do it decently. I may be in my second childhood, but I've not go so far as being dressed like a child."

"The Prime Minister hasn't brought a valet; he's brought a secretary instead," observed Fisher. "Devilish inferior job. Didn't I hear that Harker was down here?"

"He's over there on the landing stage," replied the duke, indifferently, and resumed the study of the Morning Post.

Fisher made his way beyond the last green wall of the garden on to a sort of towing path looking on the river and a wooden island opposite. There, indeed, he saw a lean, dark figure with a stoop almost like that of a vulture, a posture well known in the law courts as that of Sir John Harker, the Attorney-General. His face was lined with headwork, for alone among the three idlers in the garden he was a man who had made his own way; and round his bald brow and hollow temples clung dull red hair, quite flat, like plates of copper.
"I haven't seen my host yet," said Horne Fisher, in a slightly more serious tone than he had used to the others, "but I suppose I shall meet him at dinner."

"You can see him now; but you can't meet him," answered Harker.

He nodded his head toward one end of the island opposite, and, looking steadily in the same direction, the other guest could see the dome of a bald head and the top of a fishing rod, both equally motionless, rising out of the tall undergrowth against the background of the stream beyond. The fisherman seemed to be seated against the stump of a tree and facing toward the other bank, so that his face could not be seen, but the shape of his head was unmistakable.

"He doesn't like to be disturbed when he's fishing," continued Harker. "It's a sort of fad of his to eat nothing but fish, and he's very proud of catching his own. Of course he's all for simplicity, like so many of these millionaires. He likes to come in saying he's worked for his daily bread like a laborer."

"Does he explain how he blows all the glass and stuffs all the upholstery," asked Fisher, "and makes all the silver forks, and grows all the grapes and peaches, and designs all the patterns on the carpets? I've always heard he was a busy man."

"I don't think he mentioned it," answered the lawyer. "What is the meaning of this social satire?"

"Well, I am a trifle tired," said Fisher, "of the Simple Life and the Strenuous Life as lived by our little set. We're all really dependent in nearly everything, and we all make a fuss about being independent in something. The Prime Minister prides himself on doing without a chauffeur, but he can't do without a factotum and Jack-of-all-trades; and poor old Bunker has to play the part of a universal genius, which God knows he was never meant for. The duke prides himself on doing without a valet, but, for all that, he must give a lot of people an infernal lot of trouble to collect such extraordinary old clothes as he wears. He must have them looked up in the British Museum or excavated out of the tombs. That white hat alone must require a sort of expedition fitted out to find it, like the North Pole. And here we have old Hook pretending to produce his own fish when he couldn't produce his own fish knives or fish forks to eat it with. He may be simple about simple things like food, but you bet he's luxurious about luxurious things, especially little things. I don't include you; you've worked too hard to enjoy playing at work."

"I sometimes think," said Harker, "that you conceal a horrid secret of being useful sometimes. Haven't you come down here to see Number One before he goes on to Birmingham?"

Horne Fisher answered, in a lower voice: "Yes; and I hope to be lucky enough to catch him before dinner. He's got to see Sir Isaac about something just afterward."

"Hullo!" exclaimed Harker. "Sir Isaac's finished his fishing. I know he prides himself on getting up at sunrise and going in at sunset."

The old man on the island had indeed risen to his feet, facing round and showing a bush of gray beard with rather small, sunken features, but fierce eyebrows and keen, choleric eyes. Carefully carrying his fishing tackle, he was already making his way back to the mainland across a bridge of flat stepping-stones a little way down the shallow stream; then he veered round, coming toward his guests and civilly saluting them. There were several fish in his basket and he was in a good temper.

"Yes," he said, acknowledging Fisher's polite expression of surprise, "I get up before anybody else in the house, I think. The early bird catches the worm."

"Unfortunately," said Harker, "it is the early fish that catches the worm." "But the early man catches the fish," replied the old man, gruffly. "But from what I hear, Sir Isaac, you are the late man, too," interposed Fisher. "You must do with very little sleep."

"I never had much time for sleeping," answered Hook, "and I shall have to be the late man to-night, anyhow. The Prime Minister wants to have a talk, he tells me, and, all things considered, I think we'd better be dressing for dinner."

Dinner passed off that evening without a word of politics and little enough but ceremonial trifles. The Prime Minister, Lord Merivale, who was a long, slim man with curly gray hair, was gravely complimentary to his host about his success as a fisherman and the skill and patience he displayed; the conversation flowed like the shallow stream through the stepping-stones.

"It wants patience to wait for them, no doubt," said Sir Isaac, "and skill to play them, but I'm generally pretty lucky at it."

"Does a big fish ever break the line and get away?" inquired the politician, with respectful interest. "Not the sort of line I use," answered Hook, with satisfaction. "I rather specialize in tackle, as a matter of fact. If he were strong enough to do that, he'd be strong enough to pull me into the river."

"A great loss to the community," said the Prime Minister, bowing.

Fisher had listened to all these futilities with inward impatience, waiting for his own opportunity, and when the
host rose he sprang to his feet with an alertness he rarely showed. He managed to catch Lord Merivale before Sir Isaac bore him off for the final interview. He had only a few words to say, but he wanted to get them said.

He said, in a low voice as he opened the door for the Premier, "I have seen Montmirail; he says that unless we protest immediately on behalf of Denmark, Sweden will certainly seize the ports."

Lord Merivale nodded. "I'm just going to hear what Hook has to say about it," he said.

"I imagine," said Fisher, with a faint smile, "that there is very little doubt what he will say about it."

Merivale did not answer, but lounged gracefully toward the library, whither his host had already preceded him. The rest drifted toward the billiard room, Fisher merely remarking to the lawyer: "They won't be long. We know they're practically in agreement."

"Hook entirely supports the Prime Minister," assented Harker.

"Or the Prime Minister entirely supports Hook," said Horne Fisher, and began idly to knock the balls about on the billiard table.

Horne Fisher came down next morning in a late and leisurely fashion, as was his reprehensible habit; he had evidently no appetite for catching worms. But the other guests seemed to have felt a similar indifference, and they helped themselves to breakfast from the sideboard at intervals during the hours verging upon lunch. So that it was not many hours later when the first sensation of that strange day came upon them. It came in the form of a young man with light hair and a candid expression, who came sculling down the river and disembarked at the landing stage. It was, in fact, no other than Mr. Harold March, whose journey had begun far away up the river in the earliest hours of that day. He arrived late in the afternoon, having stopped for tea in a large riverside town, and he had a pink evening paper sticking out of his pocket. He fell on the riverside garden like a quiet and well-behaved thunderbolt, but he was a thunderbolt without knowing it.

The first exchange of salutations and introductions was commonplace enough, and consisted, indeed, of the inevitable repetition of excuses for the eccentric seclusion of the host. He had gone fishing again, of course, and must not be disturbed till the appointed hour, though he sat within a stone's throw of where they stood.

"You see it's his only hobby," observed Harker, apologetically, "and, after all, it's his own house; and he's very hospitable in other ways."

"I'm rather afraid," said Fisher, in a lower voice, "that it's becoming more of a mania than a hobby. I know how it is when a man of that age begins to collect things, if it's only collecting those rotten little river fish. You remember Talbot's uncle with his toothpicks, and poor old Buzzy and the waste of cigar ashes. Hook has done a lot of big things in his time--the great deal in the Swedish timber trade and the Peace Conference at Chicago--but I doubt whether he cares now for any of those big things as he cares for those little fish."

"Oh, come, come," protested the Attorney-General. "You'll make Mr. March think he has come to call on a lunatic. Believe me, Hook only does it for fun, like any other sport, only he's of the kind that takes his fun sadly. But I bet if there were big news about timber or shipping, he would drop his fun and his fish all right."

"Well, I wonder," said Horne Fisher, looking sleepily at the island in the river.

"By the way, is there any news of anything?" asked Harker of Harold March. "I see you've got an evening paper; one of those enterprising evening papers that come out in the morning."

"The beginning of Lord Merivale's Birmingham speech," replied March, handing him the paper. "It's only a paragraph, but it seems to me rather good."

Harker took the paper, flapped and refolded it, and looked at the "Stop Press" news. It was, as March had said, only a paragraph. But it was a paragraph that had a peculiar effect on Sir John Harker. His lowering brows lifted with a flicker and his eyes blinked, and for a moment his leathery jaw was loosened. He looked in some odd fashion like a very old man. Then, hardening his voice and handing the paper to Fisher without a tremor, he simply said:

"Well, here's a chance for the bet. You've got your big news to disturb the old man's fishing."

Horne Fisher was looking at the paper, and over his more languid and less expressive features a change also seemed to pass. Even that little paragraph had two or three large headlines, and his eye encountered, "Sensational Warning to Sweden," and, "We Shall Protest."

"What the devil--" he said, and his words softened first to a whisper and then a whistle.

"We must tell old Hook at once, or he'll never forgive us," said Harker. "He'll probably want to see Number One instantly, though it may be too late now. I'm going across to him at once. I bet I'll make him forget his fish, anyhow." And, turning his back, he made his way hurriedly along the riverside to the causeway of flat stones.

March was staring at Fisher, in amazement at the effect his pink paper had produced.

"What does it all mean?" he cried. "I always supposed we should protest in defense of the Danish ports, for their sakes and our own. What is all this botheration about Sir Isaac and the rest of you? Do you think it bad news?"

"Bad news!" repeated Fisher, with a sort of soft emphasis beyond expression.

"Is it as bad as all that?" asked his friend, at last.
"As bad as all that?" repeated Fisher. "Why of course it's as good as it can be. It's great news. It's glorious news! That's where the devil of it comes in, to knock us all silly. It's admirable. It's inestimable. It is also quite incredible."

He gazed again at the gray and green colors of the island and the river, and his rather dreary eye traveled slowly round to the hedges and the lawns.

"I felt this garden was a sort of dream," he said, "and I suppose I must be dreaming. But there is grass growing and water moving; and something impossible has happened."

Even as he spoke the dark figure with a stoop like a vulture appeared in the gap of the hedge just above him.

"You have won your bet," said Harker, in a harsh and almost croaking voice. "The old fool cares for nothing but fishing. He cursed me and told me he would talk no politics."

"I thought it might be so," said Fisher, modestly. "What are you going to do next?"

"I shall use the old idiot's telephone, anyhow," replied the lawyer. "I must find out exactly what has happened. I've got to speak for the Government myself to-morrow." And he hurried away toward the house.

In the silence that followed, a very bewildering silence so far as March was concerned, they saw the quaint figure of the Duke of Westmoreland, with his white hat and whiskers, approaching them across the garden. Fisher instantly stepped toward him with the pink paper in his hand, and, with a few words, pointed out the apocalyptic paragraph. The duke, who had been walking slowly, stood quite still, and for some seconds he looked like a tailor's dummy standing and staring outside some antiquated shop. Then March heard his voice, and it was high and almost hysterical:

"But he must see it; he must be made to understand. It cannot have been put to him properly." Then, with a certain recovery of fullness and even pomposity in the voice, "I shall go and tell him myself."

Among the queer incidents of that afternoon, March always remembered something almost comical about the clear picture of the old gentleman in his wonderful white hat carefully stepping from stone to stone across the river, like a figure crossing the traffic in Piccadilly. Then he disappeared behind the trees of the island, and March and Fisher turned to meet the Attorney-General, who was coming out of the house with a visage of grim assurance.

"Everybody is saying," he said, "that the Prime Minister has made the greatest speech of his life. Peroration and loud and prolonged cheers. Corrupt financiers and heroic peasants. We will not desert Denmark again."

Fisher nodded and turned away toward the towing path, where he saw the duke returning with a rather dazed expression. In answer to questions he said, in a husky and confidential voice:

"I really think our poor friend cannot be himself. He refused to listen; he--ah--suggested that I might frighten the fish."

A keen ear might have detected a murmur from Mr. Fisher on the subject of a white hat, but Sir John Harker struck it more decisively:

"Fisher was quite right. I didn't believe it myself, but it's quite clear that the old fellow is fixed on this fishing notion by now. If the house caught fire behind him he would hardly move till sunset."

Fisher had continued his stroll toward the higher embanked ground of the towing path, and he now swept a long and searching gaze, not toward the island, but toward the distant wooded heights that were the walls of the valley. An evening sky as clear as that of the previous day was settling down all over the dim landscape, but toward the west it was now red rather than gold; there was scarcely any sound but the monotonous music of the river. Then came the sound of a half-stifled exclamation from Horne Fisher, and Harold March looked up at him in wonder.

"You spoke of bad news," said Fisher. "Well, there is really bad news now. I am afraid this is a bad business."

"What bad news do you mean?" asked his friend, conscious of something strange and sinister in his voice.

"The sun has set," answered Fisher.

He went on with the air of one conscious of having said something fatal. "We must get somebody to go across whom he will really listen to. He may be mad, but there's method in his madness. There nearly always is method in madness. It's what drives men mad, being methodical. And he never goes on sitting there after sunset, with the whole place getting dark. Where's his nephew? I believe he's really fond of his nephew."

"Look!" cried March, abruptly. "Why, he's been across already. There he is coming back."

And, looking up the river once more, they saw, dark against the sunset reflections, the figure of James Bullen stepping hastily and rather clumsily from stone to stone. Once he slipped on a stone with a slight splash. When he rejoined the group on the bank his olive face was unnaturally pale.

The other four men had already gathered on the same spot and almost simultaneously were calling out to him, "What does he say now?"

"Nothing. He says--nothing."

Fisher looked at the young man steadily for a moment; then he started from his immobility and, making a motion to March to follow him, himself strode down to the river crossing. In a few moments they were on the little beaten track that ran round the wooded island, to the other side of it where the fisherman sat. Then they stood and looked at
him, without a word.

Sir Isaac Hook was still sitting propped up against the stump of the tree, and that for the best of reasons. A length of his own infallible fishing line was twisted and tightened twice round his throat and then twice round the wooden prop behind him. The leading investigator ran forward and touched the fisherman's hand, and it was as cold as a fish.

"The sun has set," said Horne Fisher, in the same terrible tones, "and he will never see it rise again."

Ten minutes afterward the five men, shaken by such a shock, were again together in the garden, looking at one another with white but watchful faces. The lawyer seemed the most alert of the group; he was articulate if somewhat abrupt.

"We must leave the body as it is and telephone for the police," he said. "I think my own authority will stretch to examining the servants and the poor fellow's papers, to see if there is anything that concerns them. Of course, none of you gentlemen must leave this place."

Perhaps there was something in his rapid and rigorous legality that suggested the closing of a net or trap. Anyhow, young Bullen suddenly broke down, or perhaps blew up, for his voice was like an explosion in the silent garden.

"I never touched him," he cried. "I swear I had nothing to do with it!"

"Who said you had?" demanded Harker, with a hard eye. "Why do you cry out before you're hurt?"

"Because you all look at me like that," cried the young man, angrily. "Do you think I don't know you're always talking about my damned debts and expectations?"

Rather to March's surprise, Fisher had drawn away from this first collision, leading the duke with him to another part of the garden. When he was out of earshot of the others he said, with a curious simplicity of manner:

"Westmoreland, I am going straight to the point."

"Well?" said the other, staring at him stolidly.

"You have a motive for killing him," said Fisher.

The duke continued to stare, but he seemed unable to speak.

"I hope you had a motive for killing him," continued Fisher, mildly. "You see, it's rather a curious situation. If you have a motive for murdering, you probably didn't murder. But if you hadn't any motive, why, then perhaps, you did."

"What on earth are you talking about?" demanded the duke, violently.

"It's quite simple," said Fisher. "When you went across he was either alive or dead. If he was alive, it might be you who killed him, or why should you have held your tongue about his death? But if he was dead, and you had a reason for killing him, you might have held your tongue for fear of being accused." Then after a silence he added, abstractedly: "Cyprus is a beautiful place, I believe. Romantic scenery and romantic people. Very intoxicating for a young man."

The duke suddenly clenched his hands and said, thickly, "Well, I had a motive."

"Then you're all right," said Fisher, holding out his hand with an air of huge relief. "I was pretty sure you wouldn't really do it; you had a fright when you saw it done, as was only natural. Like a bad dream come true, wasn't it?"

While this curious conversation was passing, Harker had gone into the house, disregarding the demonstrations of the sulky nephew, and came back presently with a new air of animation and a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"I've telephoned for the police," he said, stopping to speak to Fisher, "but I think I've done most of their work for them. I believe I've found out the truth. There's a paper here--" He stopped, for Fisher was looking at him with a singular expression; and it was Fisher who spoke next:

"Are there any papers that are not there, I wonder? I mean that are not there now?" After a pause he added: "Let us have the cards on the table. When you went through his papers in such a hurry, Harker, weren't you looking for something to--to make sure it shouldn't be found?"

Harker did not turn a red hair on his hard head, but he looked at the other out of the corners of his eyes.

"And I suppose," went on Fisher, smoothly, "that is why you, too, told us lies about having found Hook alive. You knew there was something to show that you might have killed him, and you didn't dare tell us he was killed. But, believe me, it's much better to be honest now."

Harker's haggard face suddenly lit up as if with infernal flames.

"Honest," he cried, "it's not so damned fine of you fellows to be honest. You're all born with silver spoons in your mouths, and then you swagger about with everlasting virtue because you haven't got other people's spoons in your pockets. But I was born in a Pimlico lodging house and I had to make my spoon, and there'd be plenty to say I only spoiled a horn or an honest man. And if a struggling man stagers a bit over the line in his youth, in the lower parts of the law which are pretty dingy, anyhow, there's always some old vampire to hang on to him all his life for
"Guatemalan Golcondas, wasn't it?" said Fisher, sympathetically.

Harker suddenly shuddered. Then he said, "I believe you must know everything, like God Almighty."

"I know too much," said Horne Fisher, "and all the wrong things."

The other three men were drawing nearer to them, but before they came too near, Harker said, in a voice that had recovered all its firmness:

"Yes, I did destroy a paper, but I really did find a paper, too; and I believe that it clears us all."

"Very well," said Fisher, in a louder and more cheerful tone; "let us all have the benefit of it."

"On the very top of Sir Isaac's papers," explained Harker, "there was a threatening letter from a man named Hugo. It threatens to kill our unfortunate friend very much in the way that he was actually killed. It is a wild letter, full of taunts; you can see it for yourselves; but it makes a particular point of poor Hook's habit of fishing from the island. Above all, the man professes to be writing from a boat. And, since we alone went across to him," and he smiled in a rather ugly fashion, "the crime must have been committed by a man passing in a boat."

"Why, dear me!" cried the duke, with something almost amounting to animation. "Why, I remember the man called Hugo quite well! He was a sort of body servant and bodyguard of Sir Isaac. You see, Sir Isaac was in some fear of assault. He was--he was not very popular with several people. Hugo was discharged after some row or other; but I remember him well. He was a great big Hungarian fellow with great mustaches that stood out on each side of his face."

A door opened in the darkness of Harold March's memory, or, rather, oblivion, and showed a shining landscape, like that of a lost dream. It was rather a waterscape than a landscape, a thing of flooded meadows and low trees and the dark archway of a bridge. And for one instant he saw again the man with mustaches like dark horns leap up on to the bridge and disappear.

"Good heavens!" he cried. "Why, I met the murderer this morning!"

Horne Fisher and Harold March had their day on the river, after all, for the little group broke up when the police arrived. They declared that the coincidence of March's evidence had cleared the whole company, and clinched the case against the flying Hugo. Whether that Hungarian fugitive would ever be caught appeared to Horne Fisher to be highly doubtful; nor can it be pretended that he displayed any very demoniac detective energy in the matter as he leaned back in the boat cushions, smoking, and watching the swaying reeds slide past.

"It was a very good notion to hop up on to the bridge," he said. "An empty boat means very little; he hasn't been seen to land on either bank, and he's walked off the bridge without walking on to it, so to speak. He's got twenty-four hours' start; his mustaches will disappear, and then he will disappear. I think there is every hope of his escape."

"Hope?" repeated March, and stopped sculling for an instant.

"Yes, hope," repeated the other. "To begin with, I'm not going to be exactly consumed with Corsican revenge because somebody has killed Hook. Perhaps you may guess by this time what Hook was. A damned blood-sucking blackmailer was that simple, strenuous, self-made captain of industry. He had secrets against nearly everybody; one against poor old Westmoreland about an early marriage in Cyprus that might have put the duchess in a queer position; and one against Harker about some fluster with his client's money when he was a young solicitor. That's why they went to pieces when they found him murdered, of course. They felt as if they'd done it in a dream. But I admit I have another reason for not wanting our Hungarian friend actually hanged for the murder."

"And what is that?" asked his friend.

"Only that he didn't commit the murder," answered Fisher.

Harold March laid down the oars and let the boat drift for a moment.

"Do you know, I was half expecting something like that," he said. "It was quite irrational, but it was hanging about in the atmosphere, like thunder in the air."

"On the contrary, it's finding Hugo guilty that's irrational," replied Fisher. "Don't you see that they're condemning him for the very reason for which they acquit everybody else? Harker and Westmoreland were silent because they found him murdered, and knew there were papers that made them look like the murderers. Well, so did Hugo find him murdered, and so did Hugo know there was a paper that would make him look like the murderer. He had written it himself the day before."

"But in that case," said March, frowning, "at what sort of unearthly hour in the morning was the murder really committed? It was barely daylight when I met him at the bridge, and that's some way above the island."

"The answer is very simple," replied Fisher. "The crime was not committed in the morning. The crime was not committed on the island."

March stared at the shining water without replying, but Fisher resumed like one who had been asked a question:

"Every intelligent murder involves taking advantage of some one uncommon feature in a common situation. The
feature here was the fancy of old Hook for being the first man up every morning, his fixed routine as an angler, and his annoyance at being disturbed. The murderer strangled him in his own house after dinner on the night before, carried his corpse, with all his fishing tackle, across the stream in the dead of night, tied him to the tree, and left him there under the stars. It was a dead man who sat fishing there all day. Then the murderer went back to the house, or, rather, to the garage, and went off in his motor car. The murderer drove his own motor car."

Fisher glanced at his friend's face and went on. "You look horrified, and the thing is horrible. But other things are horrible, too. If some obscure man had been hag-ridden by a blackmailer and had his family life ruined, you wouldn't think the murder of his persecutor the most inexcusable of murders. Is it any worse when a whole great nation is set free as well as a family? By this warning to Sweden we shall probably prevent war and not precipitate it, and save many thousand lives rather more valuable than the life of that viper. Oh, I'm not talking sophistry or seriously justifying the thing, but the slavery that held him and his country was a thousand times less justifiable. If I'd really been sharp I should have guessed it from his smooth, deadly smiling at dinner that night. Do you remember that silly talk about how old Isaac could always play his fish? In a pretty hellish sense he was a fisher of men."

"I remember," he said, "and about how a big fish might break the line and get away."

VI. THE HOLE IN THE WALL

Two men, the one an architect and the other an archaeologist, met on the steps of the great house at Prior's Park; and their host, Lord Bulmer, in his breezy way, thought it natural to introduce them. It must be confessed that he was hazy as well as breezy, and had no very clear connection in his mind, beyond the sense that an architect and an archaeologist begin with the same series of letters. The world must remain in a reverent doubt as to whether he would, on the same principles, have presented a diplomatist to a dipsomaniac or a ratiocinator to a rat catcher. He might have seen in his eyes something of that shining sleep that is called vision; and his yellow hair, while not affectedly long, was unaffectedly untidy. It was a manifest if melancholy truth that the architect was an artist. But his dreaminess, he would sometimes surprise his friends with arts and even sports apart from his ordinary life, like memories of some previous existence. On this occasion, nevertheless, he hastened to disclaim any authority on the other man's hobby.

"I mustn't appear on false pretences," he said, with a smile. "I hardly even know what an archaeologist is, except
that a rather rusty remnant of Greek suggests that he is a man who studies old things."

"Yes," replied Haddow, grimly. "An archaeologist is a man who studies old things and finds they are new."

Crane looked at him steadily for a moment and then smiled again.

"Dare one suggest," he said, "that some of the things we have been talking about are among the old things that turn out not to be old?"

His companion also was silent for a moment, and the smile on his rugged face was fainter as he replied, quietly: "The wall round the park is really old. The one gate in it is Gothic, and I cannot find any trace of destruction or restoration. But the house and the estate generally—well the romantic ideas read into these things are often rather recent romances, things almost like fashionable novels. For instance, the very name of this place, Prior's Park, makes everybody think of it as a moonlit mediaeval abbey; I dare say the spiritualists by this time have discovered the ghost of a monk there. But, according to the only authoritative study of the matter I can find, the place was simply called Prior's as any rural place is called Podger's. It was the house of a Mr. Prior, a farmhouse, probably, that stood here at some time or other and was a local landmark. Oh, there are a great many examples of the same thing, here and everywhere else. This suburb of ours used to be a village, and because some of the people slurred the name and pronounced it Holliwell, many a minor poet indulged in fancies about a Holy Well, with spells and fairies and all the rest of it, filling the suburban drawing-rooms with the Celtic twilight. Whereas anyone acquainted with the facts knows that 'Hollinwall' simply means 'the hole in the wall,' and probably referred to some quite trivial accident. That's what I mean when I say that we don't so much find old things as we find new ones."

Crane seemed to have grown somewhat inattentive to the little lecture on antiquities and novelties, and the cause of his restlessness was soon apparent, and indeed approaching. Lord Bulmer's sister, Juliet Bray, was coming slowly across the lawn, accompanied by one gentleman and followed by two others. The young architect was in the illogical condition of mind in which he preferred three to one.

The man walking with the lady was no other than the eminent Prince Borodino, who was at least as famous as a distinguished diplomatist ought to be, in the interests of what is called secret diplomacy. He had been paying a round of visits at various English country houses, and exactly what he was doing for diplomacy at Prior's Park was as much a secret as any diplomatist could desire. The obvious thing to say of his appearance was that he would have been extremely handsome if he had not been entirely bald. But, indeed, that would itself be a rather bald way of putting it. Fantastic as it sounds, it would fit the case better to say that people would have been surprised to see hair growing on him; as surprised as if they had found hair growing on the bust of a Roman emperor. His tall figure was buttoned up in a tight-waisted fashion that rather accentuated his potential bulk, and he wore a red flower in his buttonhole. Of the two men walking behind one was also bald, but in a more partial and also a more premature fashion, for his drooping mustache was still yellow, and if his eyes were somewhat heavy it was with languor and not with age. It was Horne Fisher, and he was talking as easily and idly about everything as he always did. His companion was a more striking, and even more sinister, figure, and he had the added importance of being Lord Bulmer's oldest and most intimate friend. He was generally known with a severe simplicity as Mr. Brain; but it was understood that he had been a judge and police official in India, and that he had enemies, who had represented his measures against crime as themselves almost criminal. He was a brown skeleton of a man with dark, deep, sunken eyes and a black mustache that hid the meaning of his mouth. Though he had the look of one wasted by some tropical disease, his movements were much more alert than those of his lounging companion.

"It's all settled," announced the lady, with great animation, when they came within hailing distance. "You've all got to put on masquerade things and very likely skates as well, though the prince says they don't go with it; but we don't care about that. It's freezing already, and we don't often get such a chance in England."

"Even in India we don't exactly skate all the year round," observed Mr. Brain.

"And even Italy is not primarily associated with ice," said the Italian.

"Italy is primarily associated with ices," remarked Mr. Horne Fisher. "I mean with ice cream men. Most people in this country imagine that Italy is entirely populated with ice cream men and organ grinders. There certainly are a lot of them; perhaps they're an invading army in disguise."

"How do you know they are not the secret emissaries of our diplomacy?" asked the prince, with a slightly scornful smile. "An army of organ grinders might pick up hints, and their monkeys might pick up all sort of things."

"The organs are organized in fact," said the flippant Mr. Fisher. "Well, I've known it pretty cold before now in Italy and even in India, up on the Himalayan slopes. The ice on our own little round pond will be quite cozy by comparison."

Juliet Bray was an attractive lady with dark hair and eyebrows and dancing eyes, and there was a geniality and even generosity in her rather imperious ways. In most matters she could command her brother, though that nobleman, like many other men of vague ideas, was not without a touch of the bully when he was at bay. She could certainly command her guests, even to the extent of decking out the most respectable and reluctant of them with her
mediaeval masquerade. And it really seemed as if she could command the elements also, like a witch. For the weather steadily hardened and sharpened; that night the ice of the lake, glimmering in the moonlight, was like a marble floor, and they had begun to dance and skate on it before it was dark.

Prior's Park, or, more properly, the surrounding district of Holinwall, was a country seat that had become a suburb; having once had only a dependent village at its doors, it now found outside all its doors the signals of the expansion of London. Mr. Haddow, who was engaged in historical researches both in the library and the locality, could find little assistance in the latter. He had already realized, from the documents, that Prior's Park had originally been something like Prior's Farm, named after some local figure, but the new social conditions were all against his tracing the story by its traditions. Had any of the real rustics remained, he would probably have found some lingering legend of Mr. Prior, however remote he might be. But the new nomadic population of clerks and artisans, constantly shifting their homes from one suburb to another, or their children from one school to another, could have no corporate continuity. They had all that forgetfulness of history that goes everywhere with the extension of education.

Nevertheless, when he came out of the library next morning and saw the wintry trees standing round the frozen pond like a black forest, he felt he might well have been far in the depths of the country. The old wall running round that inclosure itself still entirely rural and romantic, and one could easily imagine that the depths of that dark forest faded away indefinitely into distant vales and hills. The gray and black and silver of the wintry wood were all the more severe or somber as a contrast to the colored carnival groups that already stood on and around the frozen pool. For the house party had already flung themselves impatiently into fancy dress, and the lawyer, with his neat black suit and red hair, was the only modern figure among them.

"Aren't you going to dress up?" asked Juliet, indignantly shaking at him a horned and towering blue headdress of the fourteenth century which framed her face very becomingly, fantastic as it was. "Everybody here has to be in the Middle Ages. Even Mr. Brain has put on a sort of brown dressing gown and says he's a monk; and Mr. Fisher got hold of some old potato sacks in the kitchen and sewed them together; he's supposed to be a monk, too. As to the prince, he's perfectly glorious, in great crimson robes as a cardinal. He looks as if he could poison everybody. You simply must be something."

"I will be something later in the day," he replied. "At present I am nothing but an antiquary and an attorney. I have to see your brother presently, about some legal business and also some local investigations he asked me to make. I must look a little like a steward when I give an account of my stewardship."

"Oh, but my brother has dressed up!" cried the girl. "Very much so. No end, if I may say so. Why he's bearing down on you now in all his glory."

The noble lord was indeed marching toward them in a magnificent sixteenth-century costume of purple and gold, with a gold-hilted sword and a plumed cap, and manners to match. Indeed, there was something more than his usual expansiveness of bodily action in his appearance at that moment. It almost seemed, so to speak, that the plumes on his hat had gone to his head. He flapped his great, gold-lined cloak like the wings of a fairy king in a pantomime; he even drew his sword with a flourish and waved it about as he did his walking stick. In the light of after events there seemed to be something monstrous and ominous about that exuberance, something of the spirit that is called fey. At the time it merely crossed a few people's minds that he might possibly be drunk.

As he strode toward his sister the first figure he passed was that of Leonard Crane, clad in Lincoln green, with the horn and baldric and sword appropriate to Robin Hood; for he was standing nearest to the lady, where, indeed, he might have been found during a disproportionate part of the time. He had displayed one of his buried talents in the matter of skating, and now that the skating was over seemed disposed to prolong the partnership. The boisterous Bulmer playfully made a pass at him with his drawn sword, going forward with the lunge in the proper fencing fashion, and making a somewhat too familiar Shakespearean quotation about a rodent and a Venetian coin.

Probably in Crane also there was a subdued excitement just then; anyhow, in one flash he had drawn his own sword and parried; and then suddenly, to the surprise of everyone, Bulmer's weapon seemed to spring out of his hand into the air and rolled away on the ringing ice.

"Well, I never!" said the lady, as if with justifiable indignation. "You never told me you could fence, too."

Bulmer put up his sword with an air rather bewildered than annoyed, which increased the impression of something irresponsible in his mood at the moment; then he turned rather abruptly to his lawyer, saying:

"We can settle up about the estate after dinner; I've missed nearly all the skating as it is, and I doubt if the ice will hold till to-morrow night. I think I shall get up early and have a spin by myself."

"You won't be disturbed with my company," said Horne Fisher, in his weary fashion. "If I have to begin the day with ice, in the American fashion, I prefer it in smaller quantities. But no early hours for me in December. The early bird catches the cold."

"Oh, I shan't die of catching a cold," answered Bulmer, and laughed.
A considerable group of the skating party had consisted of the guests staying at the house, and the rest had tailed off in twos and threes some time before most of the guests began to retire for the night. Neighbors, always invited to Prior's Park on such occasions, went back to their own houses in motors or on foot; the legal and archeological gentleman had returned to the Inns of Court by a late train, to get a paper called for during his consultation with his client; and most of the other guests were drifting and lingering at various stages on their way up to bed. Horne Fisher, as if to deprive himself of any excuse for his refusal of early rising, had been the first to retire to his room; but, sleepy as he looked, he could not sleep. He had picked up from a table the book of antiquarian topography, in which Haddow had found his first hints about the origin of the local name, and, being a man with a quiet and quaint capacity for being interested in anything, he began to read it steadily, making notes now and then of details on which his previous reading left him with a certain doubt about his present conclusions. His room was the one nearest to the lake in the center of the woods, and was therefore the quietest, and none of the last echoes of the evening's festivity could reach him. He had followed carefully the argument which established the derivation from Mr. Prior's farm and the hole in the wall, and disposed of any fashionable fancy about monks and magic wells, when he began to be conscious of a noise audible in the frozen silence of the night. It was not a particularly loud noise, but it seemed to consist of a series of thuds or heavy blows, such as might be struck on a wooden door by a man seeking to enter. They were followed by something like a faint creak or crack, as if the obstacle had either been opened or had given way. He opened his own bedroom door and listened, but as he heard talk and laughter all over the lower floors, he had no reason to fear that a summons would be neglected or the house left without protection. He went to his open window, looking out over the frozen pond and the moonlit statue in the middle of their circle of darkling woods, and listened again. But silence had returned to that silent place, and, after straining his ears for a considerable time, he could hear nothing but the solitary hoot of a distant departing train. Then he reminded himself how many nameless noises can be heard by the wakeful during the most ordinary night, and shrugging his shoulders, went wearily to bed.

He awoke suddenly and sat up in bed with his ears filled, as with thunder, with the throbbing echoes of a rending cry. He remained rigid for a moment, and then sprang out of bed, throwing on the loose gown of sacking he had worn all day. He went first to the window, which was open, but covered with a thick curtain, so that his room was still completely dark; but when he tossed the curtain aside and put his head out, he saw that a gray and silver daybreak had already appeared behind the black woods that surrounded the little lake, and that was all that he did see. Though the sound had certainly come in through the open window from this direction, the whole scene was still and empty under the morning light as under the moonlight. Then the long, rather lackadaisical hand he had laid on a window sill gripped it tighter, as if to master a tremor, and his peering blue eyes grew bleak with fear. It may seem that his emotion was exaggerated and needless, considering the effort of common sense by which he had conquered his nervousness about the noise on the previous night. But that had been a very different sort of noise. It might have been made by half a hundred things, from the chopping of wood to the breaking of bottles. There was only one thing in nature from which could come the sound that echoed through the dark house at daybreak. It was the awful articulate voice of man; and it was something worse, for he knew what man.

He knew also that it had been a shout for help. It seemed to him that he had heard the very word; but the word, short as it was, had been swallowed up, as if the man had been stifled or snatched away even as he spoke. Only the mocking reverberations of it remained even in his memory, but he had no doubt of the original voice. He had no doubt that the great bull's voice of Francis Bray, Baron Bulmer, had been heard for the last time between the darkness and the lifting dawn.

How long he stood there he never knew, but he was startled into life by the first living thing that he saw stirring in that half-frozen landscape. Along the path beside the lake, and immediately under his window, a figure was walking slowly and softly, but with great composure—a stately figure in robes of a splendid scarlet; it was the Italian prince, still in his cardinal's costume. Most of the company had indeed lived in their costumes for the last day or two, and Fisher himself had assumed his frock of sacking as a convenient dressing gown; but there seemed, nevertheless, something unusually finished and formal, in the way of an early bird, about this magnificent red cockatoo. It was as if the early bird had been up all night.

"What is the matter?" he called, sharply, leaning out of the window, and the Italian turned up his great yellow face like a mask of brass.

"We had better discuss it downstairs," said Prince Borodino.

Fisher ran downstairs, and encountered the great, red-robed figure entering the doorway and blocking the entrance with his bulk.

"Did you hear that cry?" demanded Fisher.

"I heard a noise and I came out," answered the diplomatist, and his face was too dark in the shadow for its
"It was Bulmer's voice," insisted Fisher. "I'll swear it was Bulmer's voice."
"Did you know him well?" asked the other.

The question seemed irrelevant, though it was not illogical, and Fisher could only answer in a random fashion that he knew Lord Bulmer only slightly.

"Nobody seems to have known him well," continued the Italian, in level tones. "Nobody except that man Brain. Brain is rather older than Bulmer, but I fancy they shared a good many secrets."

Fisher moved abruptly, as if waking from a momentary trance, and said, in a new and more vigorous voice, "But look here, hadn't we better get outside and see if anything has happened."

"The ice seems to be thawing," said the other, almost with indifference.

When they emerged from the house, dark stains and stars in the gray field of ice did indeed indicate that the frost was breaking up, as their host had prophesied the day before, and the very memory of yesterday brought back the mystery of to-day.

"He knew there would be a thaw," observed the prince. "He went out skating quite early on purpose. Did he call out because he landed in the water, do you think?"

Fisher looked puzzled. "Bulmer was the last man to bellow like that because he got his boots wet. And that's all he could do here; the water would hardly come up to the calf of a man of his size. You can see the flat weeds on the floor of the lake, as if it were through a thin pane of glass. No, if Bulmer had only broken the ice he wouldn't have said much at the moment, though possibly a good deal afterward. We should have found him stamping and damning up and down this path, and calling for clean boots."

"Let us hope we shall find him as happily employed," remarked the diplomatist. "In that case the voice must have come out of the wood."

"I'll swear it didn't come out of the house," said Fisher; and the two disappeared together into the twilight of wintry trees.

The plantation stood dark against the fiery colors of sunrise, a black fringe having that feathery appearance which makes trees when they are bare the very reverse of rugged. Hours and hours afterward, when the same dense, but delicate, margin was dark against the greenish colors opposite the sunset, the search thus begun at sunrise had not come to an end. By successive stages, and to slowly gathering groups of the company, it became apparent that the most extraordinary of all gaps had appeared in the party; the guests could find no trace of their host anywhere. The servants reported that his bed had been slept in and his skates and his fancy costume were gone, as if he had risen early for the purpose he had himself avowed. But from the top of the house to the bottom, from the walls round the park to the pond in the center, there was no trace of Lord Bulmer, dead or alive. Horne Fisher realized that a chilling premonition had already prevented him from expecting to find the man alive. But his bald brow was wrinkled over an entirely new and unnatural problem, in not finding the man at all.

He considered the possibility of Bulmer having gone off of his own accord, for some reason; but after fully weighing it he finally dismissed it. It was inconsistent with the unmistakable voice heard at daybreak, and with many other practical obstacles. There was only one gateway in the ancient and lofty wall round the small park; the lodge keeper kept it locked till late in the morning, and the lodge keeper had seen no one pass. Fisher was fairly sure that he had before him a mathematical problem in an inclosed space. His instinct had been from the first so attuned to the tragedy that it would have been almost a relief to him to find the corpse. He would have been grieved, but not horrified, to come on the nobleman's body dangling from one of his own trees as from a gibbet, or floating in his own pool like a pallid weed. What horrified him was to find nothing.

He soon become conscious that he was not alone even in his most individual and isolated experiments. He often found a figure following him like his shadow, in silent and almost secret clearings in the plantation or outlying nooks and corners of the old wall. The dark-mustached mouth was as mute as the deep eyes were mobile, darting incessantly hither and thither, but it was clear that Brain of the Indian police had taken up the trail like an old hunter after a tiger. Seeing that he was the only personal friend of the vanished man, this seemed natural enough, and Fisher resolved to deal frankly with him.

"This silence is rather a social strain," he said. "May I break the ice by talking about the weather?--which, by the way, has already broken the ice. I know that breaking the ice might be a rather melancholy metaphor in this case."

"I don't think so," replied Brain, shortly. "I don't fancy the ice had much to do with it. I don't see how it could."

"What would you propose doing?" asked Fisher.

"Well, we've sent for the authorities, of course, but I hope to find something out before they come," replied the Anglo-Indian. "I can't say I have much hope from police methods in this country. Too much red tape, habeas corpus and that sort of thing. What we want is to see that nobody bolts; the nearest we could get to it would be to collect the company and count them, so to speak. Nobody's left lately, except that lawyer who was poking about for
"Oh, he's out of it; he left last night," answered the other. "Eight hours after Bulmer's chauffeur saw his lawyer off by the train I heard Bulmer's own voice as plain as I hear yours now."

"I suppose you don't believe in spirits?" said the man from India. After a pause he added: "There's somebody else I should like to find, before we go after a fellow with an alibi in the Inner Temple. What's become of that fellow in green—the architect dressed up as a forester? I haven't seen him about."

Mr. Brain managed to secure his assembly of all the distracted company before the arrival of the police. But when he first began to comment once more on the young architect's delay in putting in an appearance, he found himself in the presence of a minor mystery, and a psychological development of an entirely unexpected kind.

Juliet Bray had confronted the catastrophe of her brother's disappearance with a somber stoicism in which there was, perhaps, more paralysis than pain; but when the other question came to the surface she was both agitated and angry.

"We don't want to jump to any conclusions about anybody," Brain was saying in his staccato style. "But we should like to know a little more about Mr. Crane. Nobody seems to know much about him, or where he comes from. And it seems a sort of coincidence that yesterday he actually crossed swords with poor Bulmer, and could have stuck him, too, since he showed himself the better swordsman. Of course, that may be an accident and couldn't possibly be called a case against anybody; but then we haven't the means to make a real case against anybody. Till the police come we are only a pack of very amateur sleuthhounds."

"And I think you're a pack of snobs," said Juliet. "Because Mr. Crane is a genius who's made his own way, you try to suggest he's a murderer without daring to say so. Because he wore a toy sword and happened to know how to use it, you want us to believe he used it like a bloodthirsty maniac for no reason in the world. And because he could have hit my brother and didn't, you deduce that he did. That's the sort of way you argue. And as for his having disappeared, you're wrong in that as you are in everything else, for here he comes."

And, indeed, the green figure of the fictitious Robin Hood slowly detached itself from the gray background of the trees, and came toward them as she spoke.

He approached the group slowly, but with composure; but he was decidedly pale, and the eyes of Brain and Fisher had already taken in one detail of the green-clad figure more clearly than all the rest. The horn still swung from his baldrick, but the sword was gone.

Rather to the surprise of the company, Brain did not follow up the question thus suggested; but, while retaining an air of leading the inquiry, had also an appearance of changing the subject.

"Now we're all assembled," he observed, quietly, "there is a question I want to ask to begin with. Did anybody here actually see Lord Bulmer this morning?"

Leonard Crane turned his pale face round the circle of faces till he came to Juliet's; then he compressed his lips a little and said:

"Yes, I saw him."

"Was he alive and well?" asked Brain, quickly. "How was he dressed?"

"He appeared exceedingly well," replied Crane, with a curious intonation. "He was dressed as he was yesterday, in that purple costume copied from the portrait of his ancestor in the sixteenth century. He had his skates in his hand."

"And his sword at his side, I suppose," added the questioner. "Where is your own sword, Mr. Crane?"

"I threw it away."

In the singular silence that ensued, the train of thought in many minds became involuntarily a series of colored pictures.

They had grown used to their fanciful garments looking more gay and gorgeous against the dark gray and streaky silver of the forest, so that the moving figures glowed like stained-glass saints walking. The effect had been more fitting because so many of them had idly parodied pontifical or monastic dress. But the most arresting attitude that remained in their memories had been anything but merely monastic; that of the moment when the figure in bright green and the other in vivid violet had for a moment made a silver cross of their crossing swords. Even when it was a jest it had been something of a drama; and it was a strange and sinister thought that in the gray daybreak the same figures in the same posture might have been repeated as a tragedy.

"Did you quarrel with him?" asked Brain, suddenly.

"Yes," replied the immovable man in green. "Or he quarreled with me."

"Why did he quarrel with you?" asked the investigator; and Leonard Crane made no reply.

Horne Fisher, curiously enough, had only given half his attention to this crucial cross-examination. His heavy-lidded eyes had languidly followed the figure of Prince Borodino, who at this stage had strolled away toward the fringe of the wood; and, after a pause, as of meditation, had disappeared into the darkness of the trees.
He was recalled from his irrelevance by the voice of Juliet Bray, which rang out with an altogether new note of decision:

"If that is the difficulty, it had best be cleared up. I am engaged to Mr. Crane, and when we told my brother he did not approve of it; that is all."

Neither Brain nor Fisher exhibited any surprise, but the former added, quietly:

"Except, I suppose, that he and your brother went off into the wood to discuss it, where Mr. Crane mislaid his sword, not to mention his companion."

"And may I ask," inquired Crane, with a certain flicker of mockery passing over his pallid features, "what I am supposed to have done with either of them? Let us adopt the cheerful thesis that I am a murderer; it has yet to be shown that I am a magician. If I ran your unfortunate friend through the body, what did I do with the body? Did I have it carried away by seven flying dragons, or was it merely a trifling matter of turning it into a milk-white hind?"

"It is no occasion for sneering," said the Anglo-Indian judge, with abrupt authority. "It doesn't make it look better for you that you can joke about the loss."

Fisher's dreamy, and even dreary, eye was still on the edge of the wood behind, and he became conscious of masses of dark red, like a stormy sunset cloud, glowing through the gray network of the thin trees, and the prince in his cardinal's robes reemerged on to the pathway. Brain had had half a notion that the prince might have gone to look for the lost rapier. But when he reappeared he was carrying in his hand, not a sword, but an ax.

The incongruity between the masquerade and the mystery had created a curious psychological atmosphere. At first they had all felt horribly ashamed at being caught in the foolish disguises of a festival, by an event that had only too much the character of a funeral. Many of them would have already gone back and dressed in clothes that were more funereal or at least more formal. But somehow at the moment this seemed like a second masquerade, more artificial and frivolous than the first. And as they reconciled themselves to their ridiculous trappings, a curious sensation had come over some of them, notably over the more sensitive, like Crane and Fisher and Juliet, but in some degree over everybody except the practical Mr. Brain. It was almost as if they were the ghosts of their own ancestors haunting that dark wood and dismal lake, and playing some old part that they only half remembered. The movements of those colored figures seemed to mean something that had been settled long before, like a silent heraldry. Acts, attitudes, external objects, were accepted as an allegory even without the key; and they knew when a crisis had come, when they did not know what it was. And somehow they knew subconsciously that the whole tale had taken a new and terrible turn, when they saw the prince stand in the gap of the gaunt trees, in his robes of angry crimson and with his lowering face of bronze, bearing in his hand a new shape of death. They could not have named a reason, but the two swords seemed indeed to have become toy swords and the whole tale of them broken and tossed away like a toy. Borodino looked like the Old World headsman, clad in terrible red, and carrying the ax for the execution of the criminal. And the criminal was not Crane.

Mr. Brain of the Indian police was glaring at the new object, and it was a moment or two before he spoke, harshly and almost hoarsely.

"What are you doing with that?" he asked. "Seems to be a woodman's chopper."

"A natural association of ideas," observed Horne Fisher. "If you meet a cat in a wood you think it's a wildcat, though it may have just strolled from the drawing-room sofa. As a matter of fact, I happen to know that is not the woodman's chopper. It's the kitchen chopper, or meat ax, or something like that, that somebody has thrown away in the wood. I saw it in the kitchen myself when I was getting the potato sacks with which I reconstructed a mediaeval hermit."

"All the same, it is not without interest," remarked the prince, holding out the instrument to Fisher, who took it and examined it carefully. "A butcher's cleaver that has done butcher's work."

"It was certainly the instrument of the crime," assented Fisher, in a low voice. Brain was staring at the dull blue gleam of the ax head with fierce and fascinated eyes. "I don't understand you," he said. "There is no--there are no marks on it."

"It has shed no blood," answered Fisher, "but for all that it has committed a crime. This is as near as the criminal came to the crime when he committed it."

"What do you mean?"

"He was not there when he did it," explained Fisher. "It's a poor sort of murderer who can't murder people when he isn't there."

"You seem to be talking merely for the sake of mystification," said Brain. "If you have any practical advice to give you might as well make it intelligible."

"The only practical advice I can suggest," said Fisher, thoughtfully, "is a little research into local topography and nomenclature. They say there used to be a Mr. Prior, who had a farm in this neighborhood. I think some details about the domestic life of the late Mr. Prior would throw a light on this terrible business."
"And you have nothing more immediate than your topography to offer," said Brain, with a sneer, "to help me avenge my friend?"

"Well," said Fisher, "I should find out the truth about the Hole in the Wall."

* * *

That night, at the close of a stormy twilight and under a strong west wind that followed the breaking of the frost, Leonard Crane was wending his way in a wild rotatory walk round and round the high, continuous wall that inclosed the little wood. He was driven by a desperate idea of solving for himself the riddle that had clouded his reputation and already even threatened his liberty. The police authorities, now in charge of the inquiry, had not arrested him, but he knew well enough that if he tried to move far afield he would be instantly arrested. Horne Fisher's fragmentary hints, though he had refused to expand them as yet, had stirred the artistic temperament of the architect to a sort of wild analysis, and he was resolved to read the hieroglyph upside down and every way until it made sense. If it was something connected with a hole in the wall he would find the hole in the wall; but, as a matter of fact, he was unable to find the faintest crack in the wall. His professional knowledge told him that the masonry was all of one workmanship and one date, and, except for the regular entrance, which threw no light on the mystery, he found nothing suggesting any sort of hiding place or means of escape. Walking a narrow path between the winding wall and the wild eastward bend and sweep of the gray and feathery trees, seeing shifting gleams of a lost sunset winking almost like lightning as the clouds of tempest scudded across the sky and mingling with the first faint blue light from a slowly strengthened moon behind him, he began to feel his head going round as his heels were going round and round the blind recurrent barrier. He had thoughts on the border of thought; fancies about a fourth dimension which was itself a hole to hide anything, of seeing everything from a new angle out of a new window in the senses; or of some mystical light and transparency, like the new rays of chemistry, in which he could see Bulmer's body, horrible and glaring, floating in a lurid halo over the woods and the wall. He was haunted also with the hint, which somehow seemed to be equally horrifying, that it all had something to do with Mr. Prior. There seemed even to be something creepy in the fact that he was always respectfully referred to as Mr. Prior, and that it was in the domestic life of the dead farmer that he had been bidden to seek the seed of these dreadful things. As a matter of fact, he had found that no local inquiries had revealed anything at all about the Prior family.

The moonlight had broadened and brightened, the wind had driven off the clouds and itself died fitfully away, when he came round again to the artificial lake in front of the house. For some reason it looked a very artificial lake; indeed, the whole scene was like a classical landscape with a touch of Watteau; the Palladian facade of the house pale in the moon, and the same silver touching the very pagan and naked marble nymph in the middle of the pond. Rather to his surprise, he found another figure there beside the statue, sitting almost equally motionless; and the same silver pencil traced the wrinkled brow and patient face of Horne Fisher, still dressed as a hermit and apparently practicing something of the solitude of a hermit. Nevertheless, he looked up at Leonard Crane and smiled, almost as if he had expected him.

"Look here," said Crane, planting himself in front of him, "can you tell me anything about this business?"

"I shall soon have to tell everybody everything about it," replied Fisher, "but I've no objection to telling you something first. But, to begin with, will you tell me something? What really happened when you met Bulmer this morning? You did throw away your sword, but you didn't kill him."

"I didn't kill him because I threw away my sword," said the other. "I did it on purpose--or I'm not sure what might have happened."

After a pause he went on, quietly: "The late Lord Bulmer was a very breezy gentleman, extremely breezy. He was very genial with his inferiors, and would have his lawyer and his architect staying in his house for all sorts of holidays and amusements. But there was another side to him, which they found out when they tried to be his equals. When I told him that his sister and I were engaged, something happened which I simply can't and won't describe. It seemed to me like some monstrous upheaval of madness. But I suppose the truth is painfully simple. There is such a thing as the coarseness of a gentleman. And it is the most horrible thing in humanity."

"I know," said Fisher. "The Renaissance nobles of the Tudor time were like that."

"It is odd that you should say that," Crane went on. "For while we were talking there came on me a curious feeling that we were repeating some scene of the past, and that I was really some outlaw, found in the woods like Robin Hood, and that he had really stepped in all his plumes and purple out of the picture frame of the ancestral portrait. Anyhow, he was the man in possession, and he neither feared God nor regarded man. I defied him, of course, and walked away. I might really have killed him if I had not walked away."

"Yes," said Fisher, nodding, "his ancestor was in possession and he was in possession, and this is the end of the story. It all fits in."

"Fits in with what?" cried his companion, with sudden impatience. "I can't make head or tail of it. You tell me to look for the secret in the hole in the wall, but I can't find any hole in the wall."
"There isn't any," said Fisher. "That's the secret." After reflecting a moment, he added: "Unless you call it a hole in the wall of the world. Look here; I'll tell you if you like, but I'm afraid it involves an introduction. You've got to understand one of the tricks of the modern mind, a tendency that most people obey without noticing it. In the village or suburb outside there's an inn with the sign of St. George and the Dragon. Now suppose I went about telling everybody that this was only a corruption of King George and the Dragoon. Scores of people would believe it, without any inquiry, from a vague feeling that it's probable because it's prosaic. It turns something romantic and legendary into something recent and ordinary. And that somehow makes it sound rational, though it is unsupported by reason. Of course some people would have the sense to remember having seen St. George in old Italian pictures and French romances, but a good many wouldn't think about it at all. They would just swallow the skepticism because it was skepticism. Modern intelligence won't accept anything on authority. But it will accept anything without authority. That's exactly what has happened here.

When some critic or other chose to say that Prior's Park was not a priory, but was named after some quite modern man named Prior, nobody really tested the theory at all. It never occurred to anybody repeating the story to ask if there _was_ any Mr. Prior, if anybody had ever seen him or heard of him. As a matter of fact, it was a priory, and shared the fate of most priories—that is, the Tudor gentleman with the plumes simply stole it by brute force and turned it into his own private house; he did worse things, as you shall hear. But the point here is that this is how the trick works, and the trick works in the same way in the other part of the tale. The name of this district is printed Holinwall in all the best maps produced by the scholars; and they allude lightly, not without a smile, to the fact that it was pronounced Holiwell by the most ignorant and old-fashioned of the poor. But it is spelled wrong and pronounced right."

"Do you mean to say," asked Crane, quickly, "that there really was a well?"

"There is a well," said Fisher, "and the truth lies at the bottom of it."

As he spoke he stretched out his hand and pointed toward the sheet of water in front of him.

"The well is under that water somewhere," he said, "and this is not the first tragedy connected with it. The founder of this house did something which his fellow ruffians very seldom did; something that had to be hushed up even in the anarchy of the pillage of the monasteries. The well was connected with the miracles of some saint, and the last prior that guarded it was something like a saint himself; certainly he was something very like a martyr. He defied the new owner and dared him to pollute the place, till the noble, in a fury, stabbed him and flung his body into the well, whither, after four hundred years, it has been followed by an heir of the usurper, clad in the same purple and walking the world with the same pride."

"But how did it happen," demanded Crane, "that for the first time Bulmer fell in at that particular spot?"

"Because the ice was only loosened at that particular spot, by the only man who knew it," answered Horne Fisher. "It was cracked deliberately, with the kitchen chopper, at that special place; and I myself heard the hammering and did not understand it. The place had been covered with an artificial lake, if only because the whole truth had to be covered with an artificial legend. But don't you see that it is exactly what those pagan nobles would have done, to desecrate it with a sort of heathen goddess, as the Roman Emperor built a temple to Venus on the Holy Sepulchre. But the truth could still be traced out, by any scholarly man determined to trace it. And this man was determined to trace it."

"What man?" asked the other, with a shadow of the answer in his mind.

"The only man who has an alibi," replied Fisher. "James Haddow, the antiquarian lawyer, left the night before the fatality, but he left that black star of death on the ice. He left abruptly, having previously proposed to stay; probably, I think, after an ugly scene with Bulmer, at their legal interview. As you know yourself, Bulmer could make a man feel pretty murderous, and I rather fancy the lawyer had himself irregularities to confess, and was in danger of exposure by his client. But it's my reading of human nature that a man will cheat in his trade, but not in his hobby. Haddow may have been a dishonest lawyer, but he couldn't help being an honest antiquary. When he got on the track of the truth about the Holy Well he had to follow it up; he was not to be bamboozled with newspaper anecdotes about Mr. Prior and a hole in the wall; he found out everything, even to the exact location of the well, and he was rewarded, if being a successful assassin can be regarded as a reward."

"And how did you get on the track of all this hidden history?" asked the young architect.

A cloud came across the brow of Horne Fisher. "I knew only too much about it already," he said, "and, after all, it's shameful for me to be speaking lightly of poor Bulmer, who has paid his penalty; but the rest of us haven't. I dare say every cigar I smoke and every liqueur I drink comes directly or indirectly from the harrying of the holy places and the persecution of the poor. After all, it needs very little poking about in the past to find that hole in the wall, that great breach in the defenses of English history. It lies just under the surface of a thin sheet of sham information and instruction, just as the black and blood-stained well lies just under that floor of shallow water and flat weeds. Oh, the ice is thin, but it bears; it is strong enough to support us when we dress up as monks and dance on it, in
mockery of the dear, quaint old Middle Ages. They told me I must put on fancy dress; so I did put on fancy dress, according to my own taste and fancy. I put on the only costume I think fit for a man who has inherited the position of a gentleman, and yet has not entirely lost the feelings of one."

In answer to a look of inquiry, he rose with a sweeping and downward gesture.

"Sackcloth," he said; "and I would wear the ashes as well if they would stay on my bald head."

VII. THE TEMPLE OF SILENCE

Harold March and the few who cultivated the friendship of Horne Fisher, especially if they saw something of him in his own social setting, were conscious of a certain solitude in his very sociability. They seemed to be always meeting his relations and never meeting his family. Perhaps it would be truer to say that they saw much of his family and nothing of his home. His cousins and connections ramified like a labyrinth all over the governing class of Great Britain, and he seemed to be on good, or at least on good-humored, terms with most of them. For Horne Fisher was remarkable for a curious impersonal information and interest touching all sorts of topics, so that one could sometimes fancy that his culture, like his colorless, fair mustache and pale, drooping features, had the neutral nature of a chameleon. Anyhow, he could always get on with viceroys and Cabinet Ministers and all the great men responsible for great departments, and talk to each of them on his own subject, on the branch of study with which he was most seriously concerned. Thus he could converse with the Minister for War about silkworms, with the Minister of Education about detective stories, with the Minister of Labor about Limoges enamel, and with the Minister of Missions and Moral Progress (if that be his correct title) about the pantomime boys of the last four decades. And as the first was his first cousin, the second his second cousin, the third his brother-in-law, and the fourth his uncle by marriage, this conversational versatility certainly served in one sense to create a happy family. But March never seemed to get a glimpse of that domestic interior to which men of the middle classes are accustomed in their friendships, and which is indeed the foundation of friendship and love and everything else in any sane and stable society. He wondered whether Horne Fisher was both an orphan and an only child.

It was, therefore, with something like a start that he found that Fisher had a brother, much more prosperous and powerful than himself, though hardly, March thought, so entertaining. Sir Henry Harland Fisher, with half the alphabet after his name, was something at the Foreign Office far more tremendous than the Foreign Secretary. Apparently, it ran in the family, after all; for it seemed there was another brother, Ashton Fisher, in India, rather more tremendous than the Viceroy. Sir Henry Fisher was a heavier, but handsomer edition of his brother, with a brow equally bald, but much more smooth. He was very courteous, but a shade patronizing, not only to March, but even, as March fancied, to Horne Fisher as well. The latter gentleman, who had many intuitions about the half-formed thoughts of others, glanced at the topic himself as they came away from the great house in Berkeley Square.

"Why, don't you know," he observed quietly, "that I am the fool of the family?"

"It must be a clever family," said Harold March, with a smile.

"Very gracefully expressed," replied Fisher; "that is the best of having a literary training. Well, perhaps it is an exaggeration to say I am the fool of the family. It's enough to say I am the failure of the family."

"It seems queer to me that you should fail especially," remarked the journalist. "As they say in the examinations, what did you fail in?"

"Politics," replied his friend. "I stood for Parliament when I was quite a young man and got in by an enormous majority, with loud cheers and chairing round the town. Since then, of course, I've been rather under a cloud."

"I'm afraid I don't quite understand the 'of course,'" answered March, laughing.

"That part of it isn't worth understanding," said Fisher. "But as a matter of fact, old chap, the other part of it was rather odd and interesting. Quite a detective story in its way, as well as the first lesson I had in what modern politics are made of. If you like, I'll tell you all about it." And the following, recast in a less allusive and conversational manner, is the story that he told.

Nobody privileged of late years to meet Sir Henry Harland Fisher would believe that he had ever been called Harry. But, indeed, he had been boyish enough when a boy, and that serenity which shone on him through life, and which now took the form of gravity, had once taken the form of gayety. His friends would have said that he was all the more ripe in his maturity for having been young in his youth. His enemies would have said that he was still light minded, but no longer light hearted. But in any case, the whole of the story Horne Fisher had to tell arose out of the accident which had made young Harry Fisher private secretary to Lord Saltoun. Hence his later connection with the Foreign Office, which had, indeed, come to him as a sort of legacy from his lordship when that great man was the power behind the throne. This is not the place to say much about Saltoun, little as was known of him and much as there was worth knowing. England has had at least three or four such secret statesmen. An aristocratic polity produces every now and then an aristocrat who is also an accident, a man of intellectual independence and insight, a Napoleon born in the purple. His vast work was mostly invisible, and very little could be got out of him in private life except a crusty and rather cynical sense of humor. But it was certainly the accident of his presence at a family.
dinner of the Fishers, and the unexpected opinion he expressed, which turned what might have been a dinner-table joke into a sort of small sensational novel.

Save for Lord Saltoun, it was a family party of Fishers, for the only other distinguished stranger had just departed after dinner, leaving the rest to their coffee and cigars. This had been a figure of some interest—a young Cambridge man named Eric Hughes who was the rising hope of the party of Reform, to which the Fisher family, along with their friend Saltoun, had long been at least formally attached. The personality of Hughes was substantially summed up in the fact that he talked eloquently and earnestly through the whole dinner, but left immediately after to be in time for an appointment. All his actions had something at once ambitious and conscientious; he drank no wine, but was slightly intoxicated with words. And his face and phrases were on the front page of all the newspapers just then, because he was contesting the safe seat of Sir Francis Verner in the great by-election in the west. Everybody was talking about the powerful speech against squirarchy which he had just delivered; even in the Fisher circle everybody talked about it except Horne Fisher himself who sat in a corner, lowering over the fire.

"We jolly well have to thank him for putting some new life into the old party," Ashton Fisher was saying. "This campaign against the old squires just hits the degree of democracy there is in this county. This act for extending county council control is practically his bill; so you may say he's in the government even before he's in the House."

"One's easier than the other," said Harry, carelessly. "I bet the squire's a bigger pot than the county council in that county. Verner is pretty well rooted; all these rural places are what you call reactionary. Damning aristocrats won't alter it."

"He damns them rather well," observed Ashton. "We never had a better meeting than the one in Barkington, which generally goes Constitutional. And when he said, 'Sir Francis may boast of blue blood; let us show we have red blood,' and went on to talk about manhood and liberty, the room simply rose at him."

"Speaks very well," said Lord Saltoun, gruffly, making his only contribution to the conversation so far.

Then the almost equally silent Horne Fisher suddenly spoke, without taking his brooding eyes off the fire.

"What I can't understand," he said, "is why nobody is ever slanged for the real reason."

"Hullo!" remarked Harry, humorously, "you beginning to take notice?"

"Well, take Verner," continued Horne Fisher. "If we want to attack Verner, why not attack him? Why compliment him on being a romantic reactionary aristocrat? Who is Verner? Where does he come from? His name sounds old, but I never heard of it before, as the man said of the Crucifixion. Why talk about his blue blood? His blood may be gamboge yellow with green spots, for all anybody knows. All we know is that the old squire, Hawker, somehow ran through his money (and his second wife's, I suppose, for she was rich enough), and sold the estate to a man named Verner. What did he make his money in? Oil? Army contracts?"

"I don't know," said Saltoun, looking at him thoughtfully.

"First thing I ever knew you didn't know," cried the exuberant Harry.

"And there's more, besides," went on Horne Fisher, who seemed to have suddenly found his tongue. "If we want country people to vote for us, why don't we get somebody with some notion about the country? We don't talk to people in Threadneedle Street about nothing but turnips and pigsties. Why do we talk to people in Somerset about nothing but slums and socialism? Why don't we give the squire's land to the squire's tenants, instead of dragging in the county council?"

"Three acres and a cow," cried Harry, emitting what the Parliamentary reports call an ironical cheer.

"Yes," replied his brother, stubbornly. "Don't you think agricultural laborers would rather have three acres and a cow than three acres of printed forms and a committee? Why doesn't somebody start a yeoman party in politics, appealing to the old traditions of the small landowner? And why don't they attack men like Verner for what they are, which is something about as old and traditional as an American oil trust?"

"You'd better lead the yeoman party yourself," laughed Harry. "Don't you think it would be a joke, Lord Saltoun, to see my brother and his merry men, with their bows and bills, marching down to Somerset all in Lincoln green instead of Lincoln and Bennet hats?"

"No," answered Old Saltoun, "I don't think it would be a joke. I think it would be an exceedingly serious and sensible idea."

"Well, I'm jiggered!" cried Harry Fisher, staring at him. "I said just now it was the first fact you didn't know, and I should say this is the first joke you didn't see."

"I've seen a good many things in my time," said the old man, in his rather sour fashion. "I've told a good many lies in my time, too, and perhaps I've got rather sick of them. But there are lies and lies, for all that. Gentlemen used to lie just as schoolboys lie, because they hung together and partly to help one another out. But I'm damned if I can see why we should lie for these cosmopolitan cads who only help themselves. They're not backing us up any more; they're simply crowding us out. If a man like your brother likes to go into Parliament as a yeoman or a gentleman or
a Jacobite or an Ancient Briton, I should say it would be a jolly good thing."

In the rather startled silence that followed Horne Fisher sprang to his feet and all his dreary manner dropped off him.

"I'm ready to do it to-morrow," he cried. "I suppose none of you fellows would back me up."

Then Harry Fisher showed the finer side of his impetuosity. He made a sudden movement as if to shake hands.

"You're a sport," he said, "and I'll back you up, if nobody else will. But we can all back you up, can't we? I see what Lord Saltoun means, and, of course, he's right. He's always right."

"So I will go down to Somerset," said Horne Fisher.

"Yes, it is on the way to Westminster," said Lord Saltoun, with a smile.

And so it happened that Horne Fisher arrived some days later at the little station of a rather remote market town in the west, accompanied by a light suitcase and a lively brother. It must not be supposed, however, that the brother's cheerful tone consisted entirely of chaff. He supported the new candidate with hope as well as hilarity; and at the back of his boisterous partnership there was an increasing sympathy and encouragement. Harry Fisher had always had an affection for his more quiet and eccentric brother, and was now coming more and more to have a respect for him. As the campaign proceeded the respect increased to ardent admiration. For Harry was still young, and could feel the sort of enthusiasm for his captain in electioneering that a schoolboy can feel for his captain in cricket.

Nor was the admiration undeserved. As the new three-cornered contest developed it became apparent to others besides his devoted kinsman that there was more in Horne Fisher than had ever met the eye. It was clear that his outbreak by the family fireside had been but the culmination of a long course of brooding and studying on the question. The talent he retained through life for studying his subject, and even somebody else's subject, had long been concentrated on this idea of championing a new peasantry against a new plutocracy. He spoke to a crowd with eloquence and replied to an individual with humor, two political arts that seemed to come to him naturally. He certainly knew much more about rural problems than either Hughes, the Reform candidate, or Verner, the Constitutional candidate. And he probed those problems with a human curiosity, and went below the surface in a way that neither of them dreamed of doing. He soon became the voice of popular feelings that are never found in the popular press. New angles of criticism, arguments that had never before been uttered by an educated voice, tests and comparisons that had been made only in dialect by men drinking in the little local public houses, crafts half forgotten that had come down by sign of hand and tongue from remote ages when their fathers were free--all this created a curious and double excitement. It startled the well informed by being a new and fantastic idea they had never encountered. It startled the ignorant by being an old and familiar idea they never thought to have seen revived. Men saw things in a new light, and knew not even whether it was the sunset or the dawn.

Practical grievances were there to make the movement formidable. As Fisher went to and fro among the cottages and country inns, it was borne in on him without difficulty that Sir Francis Verner was a very bad landlord. Nor was the story of his acquisition of the land any more ancient and dignified than he had supposed; the story was well known in the county and in most respects was obvious enough. Hawker, the old squire, had been a loose, unsatisfactory sort of person, had been on bad terms with his first wife (who died, as some said, of neglect), and had then married a flashy South American Jewess with a fortune. But he must have worked his way through this fortune also with marvelous rapidity, for he had been compelled to sell the estate to Verner and had gone to live in South America, possibly on his wife's estates. But Fisher noticed that the laxity of the old squire was far less hated than the efficiency of the new squire. Verner's history seemed to be full of smart bargains and financial flutters that left other people short of money and temper. But though he heard a great deal about Verner, there was one thing that continually eluded him; something that nobody knew, that even Saltoun had not known. He could not find out how comparisons that had been made only in dialect by men drinking in the little local public houses, crafts half forgotten that had come down by sign of hand and tongue from remote ages when their fathers were free--all this created a curious and double excitement. It startled the well informed by being a new and fantastic idea they had never encountered. It startled the ignorant by being an old and familiar idea they never thought to have seen revived. Men saw things in a new light, and knew not even whether it was the sunset or the dawn.

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"He must have kept it specially dark," said Horne Fisher to himself. "It must be something he's really ashamed of. Hang it all! what _is_ a man ashamed of nowadays?"

And as he pondered on the possibilities they grew darker and more distorted in his mind; he thought vaguely of things remote and repulsive, strange forms of slavery or sorcery, and then of ugly things yet more unnatural but nearer home. The figure of Verner seemed to be blackened and transfigured in his imagination, and to stand against varied backgrounds and strange skies.

As he strode up a village street, brooding thus, his eyes encountered a complete contrast in the face of his other rival, the Reform candidate. Eric Hughes, with his blown blond hair and eager undergraduate face, was just getting into his motor car and saying a few final words to his agent, a sturdy, grizzled man named Gryce. Eric Hughes waved his hand in a friendly fashion; but Gryce eyed him with some hostility. Eric Hughes was a young man with genuine political enthusiasms, but he knew that political opponents are people with whom one may have to dine any day. But Mr. Gryce was a grim little local Radical, a champion of the chapel, and one of those happy people whose work is also their hobby. He turned his back as the motor car drove away, and walked briskly up the sunlit high
street of the little town, whistling, with political papers sticking out of his pocket.

Fisher looked pensively after the resolute figure for a moment, and then, as if by an impulse, began to follow it. Through the busy market place, amid the baskets and barrows of market day, under the painted wooden sign of the Green Dragon, up a dark side entry, under an arch, and through a tangle of crooked cobbled streets the two threaded their way, the square, strutting figure in front and the lean, lounging figure behind him, like his shadow in the sunshine. At length they came to a brown brick house with a brass plate, on which was Mr. Gryce's name, and that individual turned and beheld his pursuer with a stare.

"Could I have a word with you, sir?" asked Horne Fisher, politely. The agent stared still more, but assented civilly, and led the other into an office littered with leaflets and hung all round with highly colored posters which linked the name of Hughes with all the higher interests of humanity.

"Mr. Horne Fisher, I believe," said Mr. Gryce. "Much honored by the call, of course. Can't pretend to congratulate you on entering the contest, I'm afraid; you won't expect that. Here we've been keeping the old flag flying for freedom and reform, and you come in and break the battle line."

For Mr. Elijah Gryce abounded in military metaphors and in denunciations of militarism. He was a square-jawed, blunt-featured man with a pugnacious cock of the eyebrow. He had been pickled in the politics of that countryside from boyhood, he knew everybody's secrets, and electioneering was the romance of his life.

"I suppose you think I'm devoured with ambition," said Horne Fisher, in his rather listless voice, "aiming at a dictatorship and all that. Well, I think I can clear myself of the charge of mere selfish ambition. I only want certain things done. I don't want to do them. I very seldom want to do anything. And I've come here to say that I'm quite willing to retire from the contest if you can convince me that we really want to do the same thing."

The agent of the Reform party looked at him with an odd and slightly puzzled expression, and before he could reply, Fisher went on in the same level tones:

"You'd hardly believe it, but I keep a conscience concealed about me; and I am in doubt about several things. For instance, we both want to turn Verner out of Parliament, but what weapon are we to use? I've heard a lot of gossip against him, but is it right to act on mere gossip? Just as I want to be fair to you, so I want to be fair to him. If some of the things I've heard are true he ought to be turned out of Parliament and every other club in London. But I don't want to turn him out of Parliament if they aren't true."

At this point the light of battle sprang into Mr. Gryce's eyes and he became voluble, not to say violent. He, at any rate, had no doubt that the stories were true; he could testify, to his own knowledge, that they were true. Verner was not only a hard landlord, but a mean landlord, a robber as well as a rackrenter; any gentleman would be justified in hounding him out. He had cheated old Wilkins out of his freehold by a trick fit for a pickpocket; he had driven old Mother Biddle to the workhouse; he had stretched the law against Long Adam, the poacher, till all the magistrates were ashamed of him.

"So if you'll serve under the old banner," concluded Mr. Gryce, more genially, "and turn out a swindling tyrant like that, I'm sure you'll never regret it."

"And if that is the truth," said Horne Fisher, "are you going to tell it?"

"What do you mean? Tell the truth?" demanded Gryce.

"I mean you are going to tell the truth as you have just told it," replied Fisher. "You are going to placard this town with the wickedness done to old Wilkins. You are going to fill the newspapers with the infamous story of Mrs. Biddle. You are going to denounce Verner from a public platform, naming him for what he did and naming the poacher he did it to. And you're going to find out by what trade this man made the money with which he bought the estate; and when you know the truth, as I said before, of course you are going to tell it. Upon those terms I come under the old flag, as you call it, and haul down my little pennon."

The agent was eying him with a curious expression, surly but not entirely unsympathetic. "Well," he said, slowly, "you have to do these things in a regular way, you know, or people don't understand. I've had a lot of experience, and I'm afraid what you say wouldn't do. People understand slanging squires in a general way, but those personalities aren't considered fair play. Looks like hitting below the belt."

"Old Wilkins hasn't got a belt, I suppose," replied Horne Fisher. "Verner can hit him anyhow, and nobody must say a word. It's evidently very important to have a belt. But apparently you have to be rather high up in society to have one. Possibly," he added, thoughtfully--"possibly the explanation of the phrase 'a belted earl,' the meaning of which has always escaped me."

"I mean those personalities won't do," returned Gryce, frowning at the table.

"And Mother Biddle and Long Adam, the poacher, are not personalities," said Fisher, "and suppose we mustn't ask how Verner made all the money that enabled him to become--a personality."

Gryce was still looking at him under lowering brows, but the singular light in his eyes had brightened. At last he said, in another and much quieter voice:
"Look here, sir. I like you, if you don't mind my saying so. I think you are really on the side of the people and I'm sure you're a brave man. A lot braver than you know, perhaps. We daren't touch what you propose with a barge pole; and so far from wanting you in the old party, we'd rather you ran your own risk by yourself. But because I like you and respect your pluck, I'll do you a good turn before we part. I don't want you to waste time barking up the wrong tree. You talk about how the new squire got the money to buy, and the ruin of the old squire, and all the rest of it. Well, I'll give you a hint about that, a hint about something precious few people know."

"I am very grateful," said Fisher, gravely. "What is it?"

"It's in two words," said the other. "The new squire was quite poor when he bought. The old squire was quite rich when he sold."

Horne Fisher looked at him thoughtfully as he turned away abruptly and busied himself with the papers on his desk. Then Fisher uttered a short phrase of thanks and farewell, and went out into the street, still very thoughtful.

His reflection seemed to end in resolution, and, falling into a more rapid stride, he passed out of the little town along a road leading toward the gate of the great park, the country seat of Sir Francis Verner. A glitter of sunlight made the early winter more like a late autumn, and the dark woods were touched here and there with red and golden leaves, like the last rays of a lost sunset. From a higher part of the road he had seen the long, classical facade of the great house with its many windows, almost immediately beneath him, but when the road ran down under the wall of the estate, topped with towering trees behind, he realized that it was half a mile round to the lodge gates. After walking for a few minutes along the lane, however, he came to a place where the wall had cracked and was in process of repair. As it was, there was a great gap in the gray masonry that looked at first as black as a cavern and only showed at a second glance the twilight of the twinkling trees. There was something fascinating about that unexpected gate, like the opening of a fairy tale.

Horne Fisher had in him something of the aristocrat, which is very near to the anarchist. It was characteristic of him that he turned into this dark and irregular entry as casually as into his own front door, merely thinking that it would be a short cut to the house. He made his way through the dim wood for some distance and with some difficulty, until there began to shine through the trees a level light, in lines of silver, which he did not at first understand. The next moment he had come out into the daylight at the top of a steep bank, at the bottom of which a path ran round the rim of a large ornamental lake. The sheet of water which he had seen shimmering through the trees was of considerable extent, but was walled in on every side with woods which were not only dark, but decidedly dismal. At one end of the path was a classical statue of some nameless nymph, and at the other end it was flanked by two classical urns; but the marble was weather-stained and streaked with green and gray. A hundred other signs, smaller but more significant, told him that he had come on some outlying corner of the grounds neglected and seldom visited. In the middle of the lake was what appeared to be an island, and on the island what appeared to be meant for a classical temple, not open like a temple of the winds, but with a blank wall between its Doric pillars. We may say it only seemed like an island, because a second glance revealed a low causeway of flat stones running up to it from the shore and turning it into a peninsula. And certainly it only seemed like a temple, for nobody knew better than Horne Fisher that no god had ever dwelt in that shrine.

"That's what makes all this classical landscape gardening so desolate," he said to himself. "More desolate than Stonehenge or the Pyramids. We don't believe in Egyptian mythology, but the Egyptians did; and I suppose even the Druids believed in Druidism. But the eighteenth-century gentleman who built these temples didn't believe in Venus or Mercury any more than we do; that's why the reflection of those pale pillars in the lake is truly only the shadow of a shade. They were men of the age of Reason; they, who filled their gardens with these stone nymphs, had less hope than any men in all history of really meeting a nymph in the forest."

His monologue stopped abruptly with a sharp noise like a thundercrack that rolled in dreary echoes round the dismal mere. He knew at once what it was--somebody had fired off a gun. But as to the meaning of it he was momentarily staggered, and strange thoughts thronged into his mind. The next moment he laughed; for he saw lying a little way along the path below him the dead bird that the shot had brought down.

At the same moment, however, he saw something else, which interested him more. A ring of dense trees ran round the back of the island temple, framing the facade of it in dark foliage, and he could have sworn he saw a stir as of something moving among the leaves. The next moment his suspicion was confirmed, for a rather ragged figure came from under the shadow of the temple and began to move along the causeway that led to the bank. Even at that distance the figure was conspicuous by its great height and Fisher could see that the man carried a gun under his arm. There came back into his memory at once the name Long Adam, the poacher.

With a rapid sense of strategy he sometimes showed, Fisher sprang from the bank and raced round the lake to the head of the little pier of stones. If once a man reached the mainland he could easily vanish into the woods. But when Fisher began to advance along the stones toward the island, the man was cornered in a blind alley and could only back toward the temple. Putting his broad shoulders against it, he stood as if at bay; he was a comparatively young
man, with fine lines in his lean face and figure and a mop of ragged red hair. The look in his eyes might well have been disquieting to anyone left alone with him on an island in the middle of a lake.

"Good morning," said Horne Fisher, pleasantly. "I thought at first you were a murderer. But it seems unlikely, somehow, that the partridge rushed between us and died for love of me, like the heroines in the romances; so I suppose you are a poacher."

"I suppose you would call me a poacher," answered the man; and his voice was something of a surprise coming from such a scarecrow; it had that hard fastidiousness to be found in those who have made a fight for their own refinement among rough surroundings. "I consider I have a perfect right to shoot game in this place. But I am well aware that people of your sort take me for a thief, and I suppose you will try to land me in jail."

"There are preliminary difficulties," replied Fisher. "To begin with, the mistake is flattering, but I am not a gamekeeper. Still less am I three gamekeepers, who would be, I imagine, about your fighting weight. But I confess I have another reason for not wanting to jail you."

"And what is that?" asked the other.

"Only that I quite agree with you," answered Fisher. "I don't exactly say you have a right to poach, but I never could see that it was as wrong as being a thief. It seems to me against the whole normal notion of property that a man should own something because it flies across his garden. He might as well own the wind, or think he could write his name on a morning cloud. Besides, if we want poor people to respect property we must give them some property to respect. You ought to have land of your own; and I'm going to give you some if I can."

"Going to give me some land!" repeated Long Adam.

"I apologize for addressing you as if you were a public meeting," said Fisher, "but I am an entirely new kind of public man who says the same thing in public and in private. I've said this to a hundred huge meetings throughout the country, and I say it to you on this queer little island in this dismal pond. I would cut up a big estate like this into small estates for everybody, even for poachers. I would do in England as they did in Ireland--buy the big men out, if possible; get them out, anyhow. A man like you ought to have a little place of his own. I don't say you could keep pheasants, but you might keep chickens."

The man stiffened suddenly and he seemed at once to blanch and flame at the promise as if it were a threat.

"Chickens!" he repeated, with a passion of contempt.

"Why do you object?" asked the placid candidate. "Because keeping hens is rather a mild amusement for a poacher? What about poaching eggs?"

"Because I am not a poacher," cried Adam, in a rending voice that rang round the hollow shrines and urns like the echoes of his gun. "Because the partridge lying dead over there is my partridge. Because the land you are standing on is my land. Because my own land was only taken from me by a crime, and a worse crime than poaching. This has been a single estate for hundreds and hundreds of years, and if you or any meddlesome mountebank comes here and talks of cutting it up like a cake, if I ever hear a word more of you and your leveling lies--"

"You seem to be a rather turbulent public," observed Horne Fisher, "but do go on. What will happen if I try to divide this estate decently among decent people?"

The poacher had recovered a grim composure as he replied. "There will be no partridge to rush in between."

With that he turned his back, evidently resolved to say no more, and walked past the temple to the extreme end of the islet, where he stood staring into the water. Fisher followed him, but, when his repeated questions evoked no answer, turned back toward the shore. In doing so he took a second and closer look at the artificial temple, and noted some curious things about it. Most of these theatrical things were as thin as theatrical scenery, and he expected the classic shrine to be a shallow thing, a mere shell or mask. But there was some substantial bulk of it behind, buried in the trees, which had a gray, labyrinthian look, like serpents of stone, and lifted a load of leafy towers to the sky. But what arrested Fisher's eye was that in this bulk of gray-white stone behind there was a single door with great, rusty bolts outside; the bolts, however, were not shot across so as to secure it. Then he walked round the small building, and found no other opening except one small grating like a ventilator, high up in the wall. He retraced his steps thoughtfully along the causeway to the banks of the lake, and sat down on the stone steps between the two sculptured funeral urns. Then he lit a cigarette and smoked it in ruminant manner; eventually he took out a notebook and wrote down various phrases, numbering and renumbering them till they stood in the following order: (1) Squire Hawker disliked his first wife. (2) He married his second wife for her money. (3) Long Adam says the estate is really his. (4) Long Adam hangs round the island temple, which looks like a prison. (5) Squire Hawker was not poor when he gave up the estate. (6) Verner was poor when he got the estate."

He gazed at these notes with a gravity which gradually turned to a hard smile, threw away his cigarette, and resumed his search for a short cut to the great house. He soon picked up the path which, winding among clipped hedges and flower beds, brought him in front of its long Palladian facade. It had the usual appearance of being, not a private house, but a sort of public building sent into exile in the provinces.
He first found himself in the presence of the butler, who really looked much older than the building, for the architecture was dated as Georgian; but the man's face, under a highly unnatural brown wig, was wrinkled with what might have been centuries. Only his prominent eyes were alive and alert, as if with protest. Fisher glanced at him, and then stopped and said:

"Excuse me. Weren't you with the late squire, Mr. Hawker?"

"Yes, sir," said the man, gravely. "Usher is my name. What can I do for you?"

"Only take me into Sir Francis Verner," replied the visitor.

Sir Francis Verner was sitting in an easy chair beside a small table in a large room hung with tapestries. On the table were a small flask and glass, with the green glimmer of a liqueur and a cup of black coffee. He was clad in a quiet gray suit with a moderately harmonious purple tie; but Fisher saw something about the turn of his fair mustache and the lie of his flat hair—it suddenly revealed that his name was Franz Werner.

"You are Mr. Horne Fisher," he said. "Won't you sit down?"

"No, thank you," replied Fisher. "I fear this is not a friendly occasion, and I shall remain standing. Possibly you know that I am already standing—standing for Parliament, in fact—"

"I am aware we are political opponents," replied Verner, raising his eyebrows. "But I think it would be better if we fought in a sporting spirit; in a spirit of English fair play."

"Much better," assented Fisher. "It would be much better if you were English and very much better if you had ever played fair. But what I've come to say can be said very shortly. I don't quite know how we stand with the law about that old Hawker story, but my chief object is to prevent England being entirely ruled by people like you. So whatever the law would say, I will say no more if you will retire from the election at once."

"You are evidently a lunatic," said Sir Francis. "If you are," said Horne Fisher, in a rather hazy manner. "I am subject to dreams, especially day-dreams. Sometimes what is happening to me grows vivid in a curious double way, as if it had happened before. Have you ever had that mystical feeling that things have happened before?"

"I hope you are a harmless lunatic," said Verner.

But Fisher was still staring in an absent fashion at the golden gigantic figures and traceries of brown and red in the tapestries on the walls; then he looked again at Verner and resumed: "I have a feeling that this interview has happened before, here in this tapestried room, and we are two ghosts revisiting a haunted chamber. But it was Squire Hawker who sat where you sit and it was you who stood where I stand." He paused a moment and then added, with simplicity, "I suppose I am a blackmailer, too."

"If you are," said Sir Francis, "I promise you you shall go to jail." But his face had a shade on it that looked like the reflection of the green wine gleaming on the table. Horne Fisher regarded him steadily and answered, quietly enough:

"Blackmailers do not always go to jail. Sometimes they go to Parliament. But, though Parliament is rotten enough already, you shall not go there if I can help it. I am not so criminal as you were in bargaining with crime. You made a squire give up his country seat. I only ask you to give up your Parliamentary seat."

Sir Francis Verner sprang to his feet and looked about for one of the bell ropes of the old-fashioned, curtained room.

"Where is Usher?" he cried, with a livid face.

"And who is Usher?" said Fisher, softly. "I wonder how much Usher knows of the truth."

Verner's hand fell from the bell rope and, after standing for a moment with rolling eyes, he strode abruptly from the room. Fisher went by the other door, by which he had entered, and, seeing no sign of Usher, let himself out and betook himself again toward the town.

That night he put an electric torch in his pocket and set out alone in the darkness to add the last links to his argument. There was much that he did not know yet; but he thought he knew where he could find the knowledge. The night closed dark and stormy and the black gap in the wall looked blacker than ever; the wood seemed to have grown thicker and darker in a day. If the deserted lake with its black woods and gray urns and images looked desolate even by daylight, under the night and the growing storm it seemed still more like the pool of Acheron in the land of lost souls. As he stepped carefully along the jetty stones he seemed to be traveling farther and farther into the abyss of night, and to have left behind him the last points from which it would be possible to signal to the land of the living. The lake seemed to have grown larger than a sea, but a sea of black and slimy waters that slept with abominable serenity, as if they had washed out the world. There was so much of this nightmare sense of extension and expansion that he was strangely surprised to come to his desert island so soon. But he knew it for a place of inhuman silence and solitude; and he felt as if he had been walking for years.

Nerving himself to a more normal mood, he paused under one of the dark dragon trees that branched out above him, and, taking out his torch, turned in the direction of the door at the back of the temple. It was unbolted as before,
and the thought stirred faintly in him that it was slightly open, though only by a crack. The more he thought of it, however, the more certain he grew that this was but one of the common illusions of light coming from a different angle. He studied in a more scientific spirit the details of the door, with its rusty bolts and hinges, when he became conscious of something very near him—indeed, nearly above his head. Something was dangling from the tree that was not a broken branch. For some seconds he stood as still as a stone, and as cold. What he saw above him were the legs of a man hanging, presumably a dead man hanged. But the next moment he knew better. The man was literally alive and kicking; and an instant after he had dropped to the ground and turned on the intruder. Simultaneously three or four other trees seemed to come to life in the same fashion. Five or six other figures had fallen on their feet from these unnatural nests. It was as if the place were an island of monkeys. But a moment after they had made a stampede toward him, and when they laid their hands on him he knew that they were men.

With the electric torch in his hand he struck the foremost of them so furiously in the face that the man stumbled and rolled over on the slimy grass; but the torch was broken and extinguished, leaving everything in a denser obscurity. He flung another man flat against the temple wall, so that he slid to the ground; but a third and fourth carried Fisher off his feet and began to bear him, struggling, toward the doorway. Even in the bewilderment of the battle he was conscious that the door was standing open. Somebody was summoning the roughs from inside.

The moment they were within they hurled him upon a sort of bench or bed with violence, but no damage; for the settee, or whatever it was, seemed to be comfortably cushioned for his reception. Their violence had in it a great element of haste, and before he could rise they had all rushed for the door to escape. Whatever bandits they were that infested this desert island, they were obviously uneasy about their job and very anxious to be quit of it. He had the flying fancy that regular criminals would hardly be in such a panic. The next moment the great door crashed to and he could hear the bolts shriek as they shot into their place, and the feet of the retreating men scampering and stumbling along the causeway. But rapidly as it happened, it did not happen before Fisher had done something that he wanted to do. Unable to rise from his sprawling attitude in that flash of time, he had shot out one of his long legs and hooked it round the ankle of the last man disappearing through the door. The man swayed and toppled over inside the prison chamber, and the door closed between him and his fleeing companions. Clearly they were in too much haste to realize that they had left one of their company behind.

The man sprang to his feet again and hammered and kicked furiously at the door. Fisher's sense of humor began to recover from the struggle and he sat up on his sofa with something of his native nonchalance. But as he listened to the captive captor beating on the door of the prison, a new and curious reflection came to him.

The natural course for a man thus wishing to attract his friends' attention would be to call out, to shout as well as kick. This man was making as much noise as he could with his feet and hands, but not a sound came from his throat. Why couldn't he speak? At first he thought the man might be gagged, which was manifestly absurd. Then his fancy fell back on the ugly idea that the man was dumb. He hardly knew why it was so ugly an idea, but it affected his imagination in a dark and disproportionate fashion. There seemed to be something creepy about the idea of being left in a dark room with a deaf mute. It was almost as if such a defect were a deformity. It was almost as if it went with other and worse deformities. It was as if the shape he could not trace in the darkness were some shape that should not see the sun.

Then he had a flash of sanity and also of insight. The explanation was very simple, but rather interesting. Obviously the man did not use his voice because he did not wish his voice to be recognized. He hoped to escape from that dark place before Fisher found out who he was. And who was he? One thing at least was clear. He was one or other of the four or five men with whom Fisher had already talked in these parts, and in the development of that strange story.

"Now I wonder who you are," he said, aloud, with all his old lazy urbanity. "I suppose it's no use trying to throttle you in order to find out; it would be displeasing to pass the night with a corpse. Besides I might be the corpse. I've got no matches and I've smashed my torch, so I can only speculate. Who could you be, now? Let us think."

The man thus genially addressed had desisted from drumming on the door and retreated sullenly into a corner as Fisher continued to address him in a flowing monologue.

"Probably you are the poacher who says he isn't a poacher. He says he's a landed proprietor; but he will permit me to inform him that, whatever he is, he's a fool. What hope can there ever be of a free peasantry in England if the peasants themselves are such snobs as to want to be gentlemen? How can we make a democracy with no democrats? As it is, you want to be a landlord and so you consent to be a criminal. And in that, you know, you are rather like somebody else. And, now I think of it, perhaps you are somebody else."

There was a silence broken by breathing from the corner and the murmur of the rising storm, that came in through the small grating above the man's head. Horne Fisher continued:

"Are you only a servant, perhaps, that rather sinister old servant who was butler to Hawker and Verner? If so,
you are certainly the only link between the two periods. But if so, why do you degrade yourself to serve this dirty
foreigner, when you at least saw the last of a genuine national gentry? People like you are generally at least patriotic.
Doesn't England mean anything to you, Mr. Usher? All of which eloquence is possibly wasted, as perhaps you are
not Mr. Usher.

"More likely you are Verner himself; and it's no good wasting eloquence to make you ashamed of yourself. Nor
is it any good to curse you for corrupting England; nor are you the right person to curse. It is the English who
deserve to be cursed, and are cursed, because they allowed such vermin to crawl into the high places of their heroes
and their kings. I won't dwell on the idea that you're Verner, or the throttling might begin, after all. Is there anyone
else you could be? Surely you're not some servant of the other rival organization. I can't believe you're Gryce, the
agent; and yet Gryce had a spark of the fanatic in his eye, too; and men will do extraordinary things in these paltry
feuds of politics. Or if not the servant, is it the... No, I can't believe it... not the red blood of manhood and liberty
... not the democratic ideal..."

He sprang up in excitement, and at the same moment a growl of thunder came through the grating beyond. The
storm had broken, and with it a new light broke on his mind. There was something else that might happen in a
moment.

"Do you know what that means?" he cried. "It means that God himself may hold a candle to show me your
infernal face."

Then next moment came a crash of thunder; but before the thunder a white light had filled the whole room for a
single split second.

Fisher had seen two things in front of him. One was the black-and-white pattern of the iron grating against the
sky; the other was the face in the corner. It was the face of his brother.

Nothing came from Horne Fisher's lips except a Christian name, which was followed by a silence more dreadful
than the dark. At last the other figure stirred and sprang up, and the voice of Harry Fisher was heard for the first
time in that horrible room.

"You've seen me, I suppose," he said, "and we may as well have a light now. You could have turned it on at any
time, if you'd found the switch."

He pressed a button in the wall and all the details of that room sprang into something stronger than daylight.
Indeed, the details were so unexpected that for a moment they turned the captive's rocking mind from the last
personal revelation. The room, so far from being a dungeon cell, was more like a drawing-room, even a lady's
drawing-room, except for some boxes of cigars and bottles of wine that were stacked with books and magazines on a
side table. A second glance showed him that the more masculine fittings were quite recent, and that the more
feminine background was quite old. His eye caught a strip of faded tapestry, which startled him into speech, to the
momentary oblivion of bigger matters.

"This place was furnished from the great house," he said.

"Yes," replied the other, "and I think you know why."

"I think I do," said Horne Fisher, "and before I go on to more extraordinary things I will, say what I think. Squire
Hawker played both the bigamist and the bandit. His first wife was not dead when he married the Jewess; she was
imprisoned on this island. She bore him a child here, who now haunts his birthplace under the name of Long Adam.
A bankruptcy company promoter named Werner discovered the secret and blackmailed the squire into surrendering
the estate. That's all quite clear and very easy. And now let me go on to something more difficult. And that is for you
to explain what the devil you are doing kidnapping your born brother."

After a pause Henry Fisher answered:

"I suppose you didn't expect to see me," he said. "But, after all, what could you expect?"

"I'm afraid I don't follow," said Horne Fisher.

"I mean what else could you expect, after making such a muck of it?" said his brother, sulkily. "We all thought
you were so clever. How could we know you were going to be—well, really, such a rotten failure?"

"This is rather curious," said the candidate, frowning. "Without vanity, I was not under the impression that my
candidature was a failure. All the big meetings were successful and crowds of people have promised me votes."

"I should jolly well think they had," said Henry, grimly. "You've made a landslide with your confounded acres
and a cow, and Verner can hardly get a vote anywhere. Oh, it's too rotten for anything!"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"Why, you lunatic," cried Henry, in tones of ringing sincerity, "you don't suppose you were meant to _win_ the
seat, did you? Oh, it's too childish! I tell you Verner's got to get in. Of course he's got to get in. He's to have the
Exchequer next session, and there's the Egyptian loan and Lord knows what else. We only wanted you to split the
Reform vote because accidents might happen after Hughes had made a score at Barkington."

"I see," said Fisher, "and you, I think, are a pillar and ornament of the Reform party. As you say, I am not
clever."

The appeal to party loyalty fell on deaf ears; for the pillar of Reform was brooding on other things. At last he said, in a more troubled voice:

"I didn't want you to catch me; I knew it would be a shock. But I tell you what, you never would have caught me if I hadn't come here myself, to see they didn't ill treat you and to make sure everything was as comfortable as it could be." There was even a sort of break in his voice as he added, "I got those cigars because I knew you liked them."

Emotions are queer things, and the idiocy of this concession suddenly softened Horne Fisher like an unfathomable pathos.

"Never mind, old chap," he said; "we'll say no more about it. I'll admit that you're really as kind-hearted and affectionate a scoundrel and hypocrite as ever sold himself to ruin his country. There, I can't say handsomer than that. Thank you for the cigars, old man. I'll have one if you don't mind."

By the time that Horne Fisher had ended his telling of this story to Harold March they had come out into one of the public parks and taken a seat on a rise of ground overlooking wide green spaces under a blue and empty sky; and there was something incongruous in the words with which the narration ended.

"I have been in that room ever since," said Horne Fisher. "I am in it now. I won the election, but I never went to the House. My life has been a life in that little room on that lonely island. Plenty of books and cigars and luxuries, plenty of knowledge and interest and information, but never a voice out of that tomb to reach the world outside. I shall probably die there." And he smiled as he looked across the vast green park to the gray horizon.

VIII. THE VENGEANCE OF THE STATUE

It was on the sunny veranda of a seaside hotel, overlooking a pattern of flower beds and a strip of blue sea, that Horne Fisher and Harold March had their final explanation, which might be called an explosion.

Harold March had come to the little table and sat down at it with a subdued excitement smoldering in his somewhat cloudy and dreamy blue eyes. In the newspapers which he tossed from him on to the table there was enough to explain some if not all of his emotion. Public affairs in every department had reached a crisis. The government which had stood so long that men were used to it, as they are used to a hereditary despotism, had begun to be accused of blunders and even of financial abuses. Some said that the experiment of attempting to establish a peasantry in the west of England, on the lines of an early fancy of Horne Fisher's, had resulted in nothing but dangerous quarrels with more industrial neighbors. There had been particular complaints of the ill treatment of harmless foreigners, chiefly Asiatics, who happened to be employed in the new scientific works constructed on the coast. Indeed, the new Power which had arisen in Siberia, backed by Japan and other powerful allies, was inclined to take the matter up in the interests of its exiled subjects; and there had been wild talk about ambassadors and ultimatums. But something much more serious, in its personal interest for March himself, seemed to fill his meeting with his friend with a mixture of embarrassment and indignation.

Perhaps it increased his annoyance that there was a certain unusual liveliness about the usually languid figure of Fisher. The ordinary image of him in March's mind was that of a pallid and bald-browed gentleman, who seemed to be prematurely old as well as prematurely bald. He was remembered as a man who expressed the opinions of a pessimist in the language of a lounger. Even now March could not be certain whether the change was merely a sort of masquerade of sunshine, or that effect of clear colors and clean-cut outlines that is always visible on the parade of a marine resort, relieved against the blue dado of the sea. But Fisher had a flower in his buttonhole, and his friend could have sworn he carried his cane with something almost like the swagger of a fighter. With such clouds gathering over England, the pessimist seemed to be the only man who carried his own sunshine.

"Look here," said Harold March, abruptly, "you've been no end of a friend to me, and I never was so proud of a friendship before; but there's something I must get off my chest. The more I found out, the less I understood how you could stand it. And I tell you I'm going to stand it no longer."

Horne Fisher gazed across at him gravely and attentively, but rather as if he were a long way off.

"You know I always liked you," said Fisher, quietly, "but I also respect you, which is not always the same thing. You may possibly guess that I like a good many people I don't respect. Perhaps it is my tragedy, perhaps it is my fault. But you are very different, and I promise you this: that I will never try to keep you as somebody to be liked, at the price of your not being respected."

"I know you are magnanimous," said March after a silence, "and you tolerate and perpetuate everything that is mean." Then after another silence he added: "Do you remember when we first met, when you were fishing in that brook in the affair of the target? And do you remember you said that, after all, it might do no harm if I could blow the whole tangle of this society to hell with dynamite."

"Yes, and what of that?" asked Fisher.

"Only that I'm going to blow it to hell with dynamite," said Harold March, "and I think it right to give you fair
warning. For a long time I didn't believe things were as bad as you said they were. But I never felt as if I could have
bottled up what you knew, supposing you really knew it. Well, the long and the short of it is that I've got a
conscience; and now, at last, I've also got a chance. I've been put in charge of a big independent paper, with a free
hand, and we're going to open a cannonade on corruption."

"That will be—Attwood, I suppose," said Fisher, reflectively. "Timber merchant. Knows a lot about China."

"He knows a lot about England," said March, doggedly, "and now I know it, too, we're not going to hush it up
any longer. The people of this country have a right to know how they're ruled—or, rather, ruined. The Chanceller is
in the pocket of the money lenders and has to do as he is told; otherwise he's bankrupt, and a bad sort of bankruptcy,
too, with nothing but cards and actresses behind it. The Prime Minister was in the petrol-contract business; and deep
in it, too. The Foreign Minister is a wreck of drink and drugs. When you say that plainly about a man who may send
thousands of Englishmen to die for nothing, you're called personal. If a poor engine driver gets drunk and sends
thirty or forty people to death, nobody complains of the exposure being personal. The engine driver is not a person."

"I quite agree with you," said Fisher, calmly. "You are perfectly right."

"If you agree with us, why the devil don't you act with us?" demanded his friend. "If you think it's right, why
don't you do what's right? It's awful to think of a man of your abilities simply blocking the road to reform."

"We have often talked about that," replied Fisher, with the same composure. "The Prime Minister is my father's
friend. The Foreign Minister married my sister. The Chancellor of the Exchequer is my first cousin. I mention the
genealogy in some detail just now for a particular reason. The truth is I have a curious kind of cheerfulness at the
moment. It isn't altogether the sun and the sea, sir. I am enjoying an emotion that is entirely new to me; a happy
sensation I never remember having had before."

"What the devil do you mean?"

"I am feeling proud of my family," said Horne Fisher.

Harold March stared at him with round blue eyes, and seemed too much mystified even to ask a question. Fisher
leaned back in his chair in his lazy fashion, and smiled as he continued.

"Look here, my dear fellow. Let me ask a question in turn. You imply that I have always known these things
about my unfortunate kinsmen. So I have. Do you suppose that Attwood hasn't always known them? Do you
suppose he hasn't always known you as an honest man who would say these things when he got a chance? Why does
Attwood unmuzzle you like a dog at this moment, after all these years? I know why he does; I know a good many
things, far too many things. And therefore, as I have the honor to remark, I am proud of my family at last."

"But why?" repeated March, rather feebly.

"I am proud of the Chancellor because he gambled and the Foreign Minister because he drank and the Prime
Minister because he took a commission on a contract," said Fisher, firmly. "I am proud of them because they did
these things, and can be denounced for them, and know they can be denounced for them, and are standing firm for
all that. I take off my hat to them because they are defying blackmail, and refusing to smash their country to save
themselves. I salute them as if they were going to die on the battlefield."

After a pause he continued: "And it will be a battlefield, too, and not a metaphorical one. We have yielded to
foreign financiers so long that now it is war or ruin, Even the people, even the country people, are beginning to
suspect that they are being ruined. That is the meaning of the regrettable incidents in the newspapers."

"The meaning of the outrages on Orientals?" asked March.

"The meaning of the outrages on Orientals," replied Fisher, "is that the financiers have introduced Chinese labor
into this country with the deliberate intention of reducing workmen and peasants to starvation. Our unhappy
politicians have made concession after concession; and now they are asking concessions which amount to our
ordering a massacre of our own poor. If we do not fight now we shall never fight again. They will have put England
in an economic position of starving in a week. But we are going to fight now; I shouldn't wonder if there were an
ultimatum in a week and an invasion in a fortnight. All the past corruption and cowardice is hampering us, of
course; the West country is pretty stormy and doubtful even in a military sense; and the Irish regiments there, that
are supposed to support us by the new treaty, are pretty well in mutiny; for, of course, this infernal coolie capitalism
is being pushed in Ireland, too. But it's to stop now; and if the government message of reassurance gets through to
them in time, they may turn up after all by the time the enemy lands. For my poor old gang is going to stand to its
hand, and we're going to open a cannonade on corruption."

"Good God!" cried March, "shall we never get to the bottom of your mines and countermines?"

After a silence Fisher answered in a lower voice, looking his friend in the eyes.
"Did you think there was nothing but evil at the bottom of them?" he asked, gently. "Did you think I had found nothing but filth in the deep seas into which fate has thrown me? Believe me, you never know the best about men till you know the worst about them. It does not dispose of their strange human souls to know that they were exhibited to the world as impossibly impeccable wax works, who never looked after a woman or knew the meaning of a bribe.

Even in a palace, life can be lived well; and even in a Parliament, life can be lived with occasional efforts to live it well. I tell you it is as true of these rich fools and rascals as it is true of every poor footpad and pickpocket; that only God knows how good they have tried to be. God alone knows what the conscience can survive, or how a man who has lost his honor will still try to save his soul."

There was another silence, and March sat staring at the table and Fisher at the sea. Then Fisher suddenly sprang to his feet and caught up his hat and stick with all his new alertness and even pugnacity.

"Look here, old fellow," he cried, "let us make a bargain. Before you open your campaign for Attwood come down and stay with us for one week, to hear what we're really doing. I mean with the Faithful Few, formerly known as the Old Gang, occasionally to be described as the Low Lot. There are really only five of us that are quite fixed, and organizing the national defense; and we're living like a garrison in a sort of broken-down hotel in Kent. Come and see what we're really doing and what there is to be done, and do us justice. And after that, with unalterable love and affection for you, publish and be damned."

Thus it came about that in the last week before war, when events moved most rapidly, Harold March found himself one of a sort of small house party of the people he was proposing to denounce. They were living simply enough, for people with their tastes, in an old brown-brick inn faced with ivy and surrounded by rather dismal gardens. At the back of the building the garden ran up very steeply to a road along the ridge above; and a zigzag path scaled the slope in sharp angles, turning to and fro amid evergreens so somber that they might rather be called everblack. Here and there up the slope were statues having all the cold monstrosity of such minor ornaments of the eighteenth century; and a whole row of them ran as on a terrace along the last bank at the bottom, opposite the back door. This detail fixed itself first in March's mind merely because it figured in the first conversation he had with one of the cabinet ministers.

The cabinet ministers were rather older than he had expected to find them. The Prime Minister no longer looked like a boy, though he still looked a little like a baby. But it was one of those old and venerable babies, and the baby had soft gray hair. Everything about him was soft, to his speech and his way of walking; but over and above that his chief function seemed to be sleep. People left alone with him got so used to his eyes being closed that they were almost startled when they realized in the stillness that the eyes were wide open, and even watching. One thing at least would always make the old gentleman open his eyes. The one thing he really cared for in this world was his hobby of armored weapons, especially Eastern weapons, and he would talk for hours about Damascus blades and Arab swordmanship. Lord James Herries, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was a short, dark, sturdy man with a very sallow face and a very sullen manner, which contrasted with the gorgeous flower in his buttonhole and his festive trick of being always slightly overdressed. It was something of a euphemism to call him a well-known man about town. There was perhaps more mystery in the question of how a man who lived for pleasure seemed to get so little pleasure out of it. Sir David Archer, the Foreign Secretary, was the only one of them who was a self-made man, and the only one of them who looked like an aristocrat. He was tall and thin and very handsome, with a grizzled beard; his gray hair was very curly, and even rose in front in two rebellious ringlets that seemed to the fanciful to tremble like the antennae of some giant insect, or to stir sympathetically with the restless tufted eyebrows over his rather haggard eyes. For the Foreign Secretary made no secret of his somewhat nervous condition, whatever might be the cause of it.

"Do you know that mood when one could scream because a mat is crooked?" he said to March, as they walked up and down in the back garden below the line of dingy statues. "Women get into it when they've worked too hard; and I've been working pretty hard lately, of course. It drives me mad when Herries will wear his hat a little crooked--habit of looking like a gay dog. Sometime I swear I'll knock it off. That statue of Britannia over there isn't quite big enough for people with their tastes, in an old brown-brick inn faced with ivy and surrounded by rather dismal gardens. At the back of the building the garden ran up very steeply to a road along the ridge above; and a zigzag path scaled the slope in sharp angles, turning to and fro amid evergreens so somber that they might rather be called everblack. Here and there up the slope were statues having all the cold monstrosity of such minor ornaments of the eighteenth century; and a whole row of them ran as on a terrace along the last bank at the bottom, opposite the back door. This detail fixed itself first in March's mind merely because it figured in the first conversation he had with one of the cabinet ministers.

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They paced the path for a few moments in silence and then he continued. "It's odd those little things seem specially big when there are bigger things to worry about. We'd better go in and do some work."

Horne Fisher evidently allowed for all the neurotic possibilities of Archer and the dissipated habits of Herries; and whatever his faith in their present firmness, did not unduly tax their time and attention, even in the case of the Prime Minister. He had got the consent of the latter finally to the committing of the important documents, with the orders to the Western armies, to the care of a less conspicuous and more solid person--an uncle of his named Horne Hewitt, a rather colorless country squire who had been a good soldier, and was the military adviser of the
committee. He was charged with expediting the government pledge, along with the concerted military plans, to the 
half-mutinous command in the west; and the still more urgent task of seeing that it did not fall into the hands of the 
enemy, who might appear at any moment from the east. Over and above this military official, the only other person 
present was a police official, a certain Doctor Prince, originally a police surgeon and now a distinguished detective, 
sent to be a bodyguard to the group. He was a square-faced man with big spectacles and a grimace that expressed the 
tention of keeping his mouth shut. Nobody else shared their captivity except the hotel proprietor, a crusty Kentish 
man with a crab-apple face, one or two of his servants, and another servant privately attached to Lord James Herries. 
He was a young Scotchman named Campbell, who looked much more distinguished than his bilious-looking master, 
having chestnut hair and a long saturnine face with large but fine features. He was probably the one really efficient 
person in the house.

After about four days of the informal council, March had come to feel a sort of grotesque sublimity about these 
dubious figures, defiant in the twilight of danger, as if they were hunchbacks and cripples left alone to defend a 
town. All were working hard; and he himself looked up from writing a page of memoranda in a private room to see 
Horne Fisher standing in the doorway, accoutered as if for travel. He fancied that Fisher looked a little pale; and 
after a moment that gentleman shut the door behind him and said, quietly:

"Well, the worst has happened. Or nearly the worst."

"The enemy has landed," cried March, and sprang erect out of his chair.

"Oh, I knew the enemy would land," said Fisher, with composure. "Yes, he's landed; but that's not the worst that 
could happen. The worst is that there's a leak of some sort, even from this fortress of ours. It's been a bit of a shock 
to me, I can tell you; though I suppose it's illogical. After all, I was full of admiration at finding three honest men in 
politics. I ought not to be full of astonishment if I find only two."

He ruminated a moment and then said, in such a fashion that March could hardly tell if he were changing the 
subject or no:

"It's hard at first to believe that a fellow like Herries, who had pickled himself in vice like vinegar, can have any 
scruple left. But about that I've noticed a curious thing. Patriotism is not the first virtue. Patriotism rots into 
Prussianism when you pretend it is the first virtue. But patriotism is sometimes the last virtue. A man will swindle or 
seduce who will not sell his country. But who knows?"

"But what is to be done?" cried March, indignantly.

"My uncle has the papers safe enough," replied Fisher, "and is sending them west to-night; but somebody is 
trying to get at them from outside, I fear with the assistance of somebody inside. All I can do at present is to try to 
head off the man outside; and I must get away now and do it. I shall be back in about twenty-four hours. While I'm 
away I want you to keep an eye on these people and find out what you can. Au revoir." He vanished down the stairs; 
and from the window March could see him mount a motor cycle and trail away toward the neighboring town.

On the following morning, March was sitting in the window seat of the old inn parlor, which was oak-paneled 
and ordinarily rather dark; but on that occasion it was full of the white light of a curiously clear morning--the moon 
had shone brilliantly for the last two or three nights. He was himself somewhat in shadow in the corner of the 
window seat; and Lord James Herries, coming in hastily from the garden behind, did not see him. Lord James 
clutched the back of a chair, as if to steady himself, and, sitting down abruptly at the table, littered with the last 
meal, poured himself out a tumbler of brandy and drank it. He sat with his back to March, but his yellow face 
appeared in a round mirror beyond and the tinge of it was like that of some horrible malady. As March moved he 
started violently and faced round.

"My God!" he cried, "have you seen what's outside?"

"Outside?" repeated the other, glancing over his shoulder at the garden.

"Oh, go and look for yourself," cried Herries in a sort of fury. "Hewitt's murdered and his papers stolen, that's 
all."

He turned his back again and sat down with a thud; his square shoulders were shaking. Harold March darted out 
of the doorway into the back garden with its steep slope of statues.

The first thing he saw was Doctor Prince, the detective, peering through his spectacles at something on the 
ground; and Lord James Herries, coming in hastily from the garden behind, did not see him. Lord James 
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The first thing he saw was Doctor Prince, the detective, peering through his spectacles at something on the 
ground; and the second was the thing he was peering at. Even after the sensational news he had heard inside, the sight 
was something of a sensation.

The monstrous stone image of Britannia was lying prone and face downward on the garden path; and there stuck 
at random from underneath it, like the legs of a smashed fly, an arm clad in a white shirt sleeve and a leg clad in 
a khaki trouser, and hair of the unmistakable sandy gray that belonged to Horne Fisher's unfortunate uncle. There 
were pools of blood and the limbs were quite stiff in death.

"Couldn't this have been an accident?" said March, finding words at last.

"Look for yourself, I say," repeated the harsh voice of Herries, who had followed him with restless movements
out of the door. "The papers are gone, I tell you. The fellow tore the coat off the corpse and cut the papers out of the inner pocket. There's the coat over there on the bank, with the great slash in it."

"But wait a minute," said the detective, Prince, quietly. "In that case there seems to be something of a mystery. A murderer might somehow have managed to throw the statue down on him, as he seems to have done. But I bet he couldn't easily have lifted it up again. I've tried; and I'm sure it would want three men at least. Yet we must suppose, on that theory, that the murderer first knocked him down as he walked past, using the statue as a stone club, then lifted it up again, took him out and deprived him of his coat, then put him back again in the posture of death and neatly replaced the statue. I tell you it's physically impossible. And how else could he have unclothed a man covered with that stone monument? It's worse than the conjurer's trick, when a man shuffles a coat off with his wrists tied."

"Could he have thrown down the statue after he'd stripped the corpse?" asked March.

"And why?" asked Prince, sharply. "If he'd killed his man and got his papers, he'd be away like the wind. He wouldn't potter about in a garden excavating the pedestals of statues. Besides--Hullo, who's that up there?"

High on the ridge above them, drawn in dark thin lines against the sky, was a figure looking so long and lean as to be almost spidery. The dark silhouette of the head showed two small tufts like horns; and they could almost have sworn that the horns moved.

"Archer!" shouted Herries, with sudden passion, and called to him with curses to come down. The figure drew back at the first cry, with an agitated movement so abrupt as almost to be called an antic. The next moment the man seemed to reconsider and collect himself, and began to come down the zigzag garden path, but with obvious reluctance, his feet falling in slower and slower rhythm. Through March's mind were throbbing the phrases that this man himself had used, about going mad in the middle of the night and wrecking the stone figure. Just so, he could fancy, the maniac who had done such a thing might climb the crest of the hill, in that feverish dancing fashion, and look down on the wreck he had made. But the wreck he had made here was not only a wreck of stone.

When the man emerged at last on to the garden path, with the full light on his face and figure, he was walking slowly indeed, but easily, and with no appearance of fear.

"This is a terrible thing," he said. "I saw it from above; I was taking a stroll along the ridge."

"Do you mean that you saw the murder?" demanded March, "or the accident? I mean did you see the statue fall?"

"No," said Archer, "I mean I saw the statue fallen."

Prince seemed to be paying but little attention; his eye was riveted on an object lying on the path a yard or two from the corpse. It seemed to be a rusty iron bar bent crooked at one end.

"One thing I don't understand," he said, "is all this blood. The poor fellow's skull isn't smashed; most likely his neck is broken; but blood seems to have spouted as if all his arteries were severed. I was wondering if some other instrument . . . that iron thing, for instance; but I don't see that even that is sharp enough. I suppose nobody knows what it is."

"I know what it is," said Archer in his deep but somewhat shaky voice. "I've seen it in my nightmares. It was the iron clamp or prop on the pedestal, stuck on to keep the wretched image upright when it began to wobble, I suppose. Anyhow, it was always stuck in the stonework there; and I suppose it came out when the thing collapsed."

Doctor Prince nodded, but he continued to look down at the pools of blood and the bar of iron.

"I'm certain there's something more underneath all this," he said at last. "Perhaps something more underneath the statue. I have a huge sort of hunch that there is. We are four men now and between us we can lift that great tombstone there."

They all bent their strength to the business; there was a silence save for heavy breathing; and then, after an instant of the tottering and staggering of eight legs, the great carven column of rock was rolled away, and the body lying in its shirt and trousers was fully revealed. The spectacles of Doctor Prince seemed almost to enlarge with a restrained radiance like great eyes; for other things were revealed also. One was that the unfortunate Hewitt had a deep gash across the jugular, which the triumphant doctor instantly identified as having been made with a sharp steel edge like a razor. The other was that immediately under the bank lay littered three shining scraps of steel, each nearly a foot long, one pointed and another fitted into a gorgeously jeweled hilt or handle. It was evidently a sort of long Oriental knife, long enough to be called a sword, but with a curious wavy edge; and there was a touch or two of blood on the point.

"I should have expected more blood, hardly on the point," observed Doctor Prince, thoughtfully, "but this is certainly the instrument. The slash was certainly made with a weapon shaped like this, and probably the slashing of the pocket as well. I suppose the brute threw in the statue, by way of giving him a public funeral."

March did not answer; he was mesmerized by the strange stones that glittered on the strange sword hilt; and their possible significance was broadening upon him like a dreadful dawn. It was a curious Asiatic weapon. He knew what name was connected in his memory with curious Asiatic weapons. Lord James spoke his secret thought for him, and yet it startled him like an irrelevance.
"Where is the Prime Minister?" Herries had cried, suddenly, and somehow like the bark of a dog at some discovery.

Doctor Prince turned on him his goggles and his grim face; and it was grimmer than ever.

"I cannot find him anywhere," he said. "I looked for him at once, as soon as I found the papers were gone. That servant of yours, Campbell, made a most efficient search, but there are no traces."

There was a long silence, at the end of which Herries uttered another cry, but upon an entirely new note.

"Well, you needn't look for him any longer," he said, "for here he comes, along with your friend Fisher. They look as if they'd been for a little walking tour."

The two figures approaching up the path were indeed those of Fisher, splashed with the mire of travel and carrying a scratch like that of a bramble across one side of his bald forehead, and of the great and gray-haired statesman who looked like a baby and was interested in Eastern swords and swordsmanship. But beyond this bodily recognition, March could make neither head nor tail of their presence or demeanor, which seemed to give a final touch of nonsense to the whole nightmare. The more closely he watched them, as they stood listening to the revelations of the detective, the more puzzled he was by their attitude--Fisher seemed grieved by the death of his uncle, but hardly shocked at it; the older man seemed almost openly thinking about something else, and neither had anything to suggest about a further pursuit of the fugitive spy and murderer, in spite of the prodigious importance of the documents he had stolen. When the detective had gone off to busy himself with that department of the business, to telephone and write his report, when Herries had gone back, probably to the brandy bottle, and the Prime Minister had blandly sauntered away toward a comfortable armchair in another part of the garden, Horne Fisher spoke directly to Harold March.

"My friend," he said, "I want you to come with me at once; there is no one else I can trust so much as that. The journey will take us most of the day, and the chief business cannot be done till nightfall. So we can talk things over thoroughly on the way. But I want you to be with me; for I rather think it is my hour."

March and Fisher both had motor bicycles; and the first half of their day's journey consisted in coasting eastward amid the unconversational noise of those uncomfortable engines. But when they came out beyond Canterbury into the flats of eastern Kent, Fisher stopped at a pleasant little public house beside a sleepy stream; and they sat down to eat and to drink and to speak almost for the first time. It was a brilliant afternoon, birds were singing in the wood behind, and the sun shone full on their ale bench and table; but the face of Fisher in the strong sunlight had a gravity never seen on it before.

"Before we go any farther," he said, "there is something you ought to know. You and I have seen some mysterious things and got to the bottom of them before now; and it's only right that you should get to the bottom of this one. But in dealing with the death of my uncle I must begin at the other end from where our old detective yarns began. I will give you the steps of deduction presently, if you want to listen to them; but I did not reach the truth of this by steps of deduction. I will first of all tell you the truth itself, because I knew the truth from the first. The other cases I approached from the outside, but in this case I was inside. I myself was the very core and center of everything."

Something in the speaker's pendent eyelids and grave gray eyes suddenly shook March to his foundations; and he cried, distractedly, "I don't understand!" as men do when they fear that they do understand. There was no sound for a space but the happy chatter of the birds, and then Horne Fisher said, calmly:

"It was I who killed my uncle. If you particularly want more, it was I who stole the state papers from him."

"Fisher!" cried his friend in a strangled voice.

"Let me tell you the whole thing before we part," continued the other, "and let me put it, for the sake of clearness, as we used to put our old problems. Now there are two things that are puzzling people about that problem, aren't there? The first is how the murderer managed to slip off the dead man's coat, when he was already pinned to the ground with that stone incubus. The other, which is much smaller and less puzzling, is the fact of the sword that cut his throat being slightly stained at the point, instead of a good deal more stained at the edge. Well, I can dispose of the first question easily. Horne Hewitt took off his own coat before he was killed. I might say he took off his coat to be killed."

"Do you call that an explanation?" exclaimed March. "The words seem more meaningless, than the facts."

"Well, let us go on to the other facts," continued Fisher, equably. "The reason that particular sword is not stained at the edge with Hewitt's blood is that it was not used to kill Hewitt."

"But the doctor," protested March, "declared distinctly that the wound was made by that particular sword."

"I beg your pardon," replied Fisher. "He did not declare that it was made by that particular sword. He declared it was made by a sword of that particular pattern."

"But it was quite a queer and exceptional pattern," argued March; "surely it is far too fantastic a coincidence to imagine--"
"It was a fantastic coincidence," reflected Horne Fisher. "It's extraordinary what coincidences do sometimes occur. By the oddest chance in the world, by one chance in a million, it so happened that another sword of exactly the same shape was in the same garden at the same time. It may be partly explained, by the fact that I brought them both into the garden myself . . . come, my dear fellow; surely you can see now what it means. Put those two things together; there were two duplicate swords and he took off his coat for himself. It may assist your speculations to recall the fact that I am not exactly an assassin."

"A duel!" exclaimed March, recovering himself. "Of course I ought to have thought of that. But who was the spy who stole the papers?"

"My uncle was the spy who stole the papers," replied Fisher, "or who tried to steal the papers when I stopped him—in the only way I could. The papers, that should have gone west to reassure our friends and give them the plans for repelling the invasion, would in a few hours have been in the hands of the invader. What could I do? To have denounced one of our friends at this moment would have been to play into the hands of your friend Attwood, and all the party of panic and slavery. Besides, it may be that a man over forty has a subconscious desire to die as he has lived, and that I wanted, in a sense, to carry my secrets to the grave. Perhaps a hobby hardens with age; and my hobby has been silence. Perhaps I feel that I have killed my mother's brother, but I have saved my mother's name. Anyhow, I chose a time when I knew you were all asleep, and he was walking alone in the garden. I saw all the stone statues standing in the moonlight; and I myself was like one of those stone statues walking. In a voice that was not my own, I told him of his treason and demanded the papers; and when he refused, I forced him to take one of the two swords. The swords were among some specimens sent down here for the Prime Minister's inspection; he is a collector, you know; they were the only equal weapons I could find. To cut an ugly tale short, we fought there on the path in front of the Britannia statue; he was a man of great strength, but I had somewhat the advantage in skill. His sword grazed my forehead almost at the moment when mine sank into the joint in his neck. He fell against the statue, like Caesar against Pompey's, hanging on to the iron rail; his sword was already broken. When I saw the blood from that deadly wound, everything else went from me; I dropped my sword and ran as if to lift him up. As I bent toward him something happened too quick for me to follow. I do not know whether the iron bar was rotted with rust and came away in his hand, or whether he rent it out of the rock with his apelike strength; but the thing was in his hand, and with his dying energies he swung it over my head, as I knelt there unarmed beside him. I looked up wildly to avoid the blow, and saw above us the great bulk of Britannia leaning outward like the figurehead of a ship. The next instant I saw it was leaning an inch or two more than usual, and all the skies with their outstanding stars seemed to be leaning with it. For the third second it was as if the skies fell; and in the fourth I was standing in the quiet garden, looking down on that flat ruin of stone and bone at which you were looking to-day. He had plucked out the last prop that held up the British goddess, and she had fallen and crushed the traitor in her fall. I turned and darted for the coat which I knew to contain the package, ripped it up with my sword, and raced away up the garden path to where my motor bike was waiting on the road above. I had every reason for haste; but I fled without looking back at the statue and the body; and I think the thing I fled from was the sight of that appalling allegory.

"Then I did the rest of what I had to do. All through the night and into the daybreak and the daylight I went humming through the villages and markets of South England like a traveling bullet, till I came to the headquarters in the West where the trouble was. I was just in time. I was able to placard the place, so to speak, with the news that the government had not betrayed them, and that they would find supports if they would push eastward against the enemy. There's no time to tell you all that happened; but I tell you it was the day of my life. A triumph like a torchlight procession, with torchlights that might have been firebrands. The mutinies simmered down; the men of Somerset and the western counties came pouring into the market places; the men who died with Arthur and stood firm with Alfred. The Irish regiments rallied to them, after a scene like a riot, and marched eastward out of the town singing Fenian songs. There was all that is not understood, about the dark laughter of that people, in the delight with which, even when marching with the English to the defense of England, they shouted at the top of their voices, 'High upon the gallows tree stood the noble-hearted three . . . With England's cruel cord about them cast.' However, the chorus was 'God save Ireland,' and we could all have sung that just then, in one sense or another.

"But there was another side to my mission. I carried the plans of the defense; and to a great extent, luckily, the plans of the invasion also. I won't worry you with strategics; but we knew where the enemy had pushed forward the great battery that covered all his movements; and though our friends from the West could hardly arrive in time to intercept the main movement, they might get within long artillery range of the battery and shell it, if they only knew exactly where it was. They could hardly tell that unless somebody round about here sent up some sort of signal. But, somehow, I rather fancy that somebody will."

With that he got up from the table, and they remounted their machines and went eastward into the advancing twilight of evening. The levels of the landscape were repeated in flat strips of floating cloud and the last colors of day clung to the circle of the horizon. Receding farther and farther behind them was the semicircle of the last hills;
and it was quite suddenly that they saw afar off the dim line of the sea. It was not a strip of bright blue as they had seen it from the sunny veranda, but of a sinister and smoky violet, a tint that seemed ominous and dark. Here Horne Fisher dismounted once more.

"We must walk the rest of the way," he said, "and the last bit of all I must walk alone."

He bent down and began to unstrap something from his bicycle. It was something that had puzzled his companion all the way in spite of what held him to more interesting riddles; it appeared to be several lengths of pole strapped together and wrapped up in paper. Fisher took it under his arm and began to pick his way across the turf. The ground was growing more tumbled and irregular and he was walking toward a mass of thickets and small woods; night grew darker every moment. "We must not talk any more," said Fisher. "I shall whisper to you when you are to halt. Don't try to follow me then, for it will only spoil the show; one man can barely crawl safely to the spot, and two would certainly be caught."

"I would follow you anywhere," replied March, "but I would halt, too, if that is better."

"I know you would," said his friend in a low voice. "Perhaps you're the only man I ever quite trusted in this world."

A few paces farther on they came to the end of a great ridge or mound looking monstrous against the dim sky; and Fisher stopped with a gesture. He caught his companion's hand and wrung it with a violent tenderness, and then darted forward into the darkness. March could faintly see his figure crawling along under the shadow of the ridge, then he lost sight of it, and then he saw it again standing on another mound two hundred yards away. Beside him stood a singular erection made apparently of two rods. He bent over it and there was the flare of a light; all March's schoolboy memories woke in him, and he knew what it was. It was the stand of a rocket. The confused, incongruous memories still possessed him up to the very moment of a fierce but familiar sound; and an instant after the rocket left its perch and went up into endless space like a starry arrow aimed at the stars. March thought suddenly of the signs of the last days and knew he was looking at the apocalyptic meteor of something like a Day of judgment.

Far up in the infinite heavens the rocket drooped and sprang into scarlet stars. For a moment the whole landscape out to the sea and back to the crest of the wooded hills was like a lake of ruby light, of a red strangely rich and glorious, as if the world were steeped in wine rather than blood, or the earth were an earthly paradise, over which paused forever the sanguine moment of morning.

"God save England!" cried Fisher, with a tongue like the peal of a trumpet. "And now it is for God to save."

As darkness sank again over land and sea, there came another sound; far away in the passes of the hills behind them the guns spoke like the baying of great hounds. Something that was not a rocket, that came not hissing but screaming, went over Harold March's head and expanded beyond the mound into light and deafening din, staggering the brain with unbearable brutalities of noise. Another came, and then another, and the world was full of uproar and volcanic vapor and chaotic light. The artillery of the West country and the Irish had located the great enemy battery, and were pounding it to pieces.

In the mad excitement of that moment March peered through the storm, looking again for the long lean figure that stood beside the stand of the rocket. Then another flash lit up the whole ridge. The figure was not there.

Before the fires of the rocket had faded from the sky, long before the first gun had sounded from the distant hills, a splutter of rifle fire had flashed and flickered all around from the hidden trenches of the enemy. Something lay in the shadow at the foot of the ridge, as stiff as the stick of the fallen rocket; and the man who knew too much knew what is worth knowing.
The Man Who Was Thursday

A cloud was on the mind of men, and wailing went the weather, Yea, a sick cloud upon the soul when we were boys together. Science announced nonentity and art admired decay; The world was old and ended: but you and I were gay; Round us in antic order their crippled vices came-- Lust that had lost its laughter, fear that had lost its shame. Like the white lock of Whistler, that lit our aimless gloom, Men showed their own white feather as proudly as a plume. Life was a fly that faded, and death a drone that stung; The world was very old indeed when you and I were young. They twisted even decent sin to shapes not to be named: Men were ashamed of honour; but we were not ashamed. Weak if we were and foolish, not thus we failed, not thus; When that black Baal blocked the heavens he had no hymns from us Children we were--our forts of sand were even as weak as eve, High as they went we piled them up to break that bitter sea. Fools as we were in motley, all jangling and absurd, When all church bells were silent our cap and beds were heard.

Not all unhelped we held the fort, our tiny flags unfurled; Some giants laboured in that cloud to lift it from the world. I find again the book we found, I feel the hour that flings Far out of fish-shaped Paumanok some cry of cleaner things; And the Green Carnation withered, as in forest fires that pass, Roared in the wind of all the world ten million leaves of grass; Or sane and sweet and sudden as a bird sings in the rain-- Truth out of Tusitala spoke and pleasure out of pain. Yea, cool and clear and sudden as a bird sings in the grey, Dunedin to Samoa spoke, and darkness unto day. But we were young; we lived to see God break their bitter charms. God and the good Republic come riding back in arms: We have seen the City of Mansoul, even as it rocked, relieved-- Blessed are they who did not see, but being blind, believed.

This is a tale of those old fears, even of those emptied hells, And none but you shall understand the true thing that it tells-- Of what colossal gods of shame could cow men and yet crash, Of what huge devils hid the stars, yet fell at a pistol flash. The doubts that were so plain to chase, so dreadful to withstand-- Oh, who shall understand but you; yea, who shall understand? The doubts that drove us through the night as we two talked amain, And day had broken on the streets e'er it broke upon the brain. Between us, by the peace of God, such truth can now be told; Yea, there is strength in striking root and good in growing old. We have found common things at last and marriage and a creed, And I may safely write it now, and you may safely read.

G. K. C.

CHAPTER I

THE TWO POETS OF SAFFRON PARK

THE suburb of Saffron Park lay on the sunset side of London, as red and ragged as a cloud of sunset. It was built of a bright brick throughout; its sky-line was fantastic, and even its ground plan was wild. It had been the outburst of a speculative builder, faintly tinged with art, who called its architecture sometimes Elizabethan and sometimes Queen Anne, apparently under the impression that the two sovereigns were identical. It was described with some justice as an artistic colony, though it never in any definable way produced any art. But although its pretensions to be an intellectual centre were a little vague, its pretensions to be a pleasant place were quite indisputable. The stranger who looked for the first time at the quaint red houses could only think how very oddly shaped the people must be who could fit in to them. Nor when he met the people was he disappointed in this respect. The place was not only pleasant, but perfect, if once he could regard it not as a deception but rather as a dream. Even if the people were not "artists," the whole was nevertheless artistic. That young man with the long, auburn hair and the impudent face--that young man was not really a poet; but surely he was a poem. That old gentleman with the wild, white beard and the wild, white hat--that venerable humbug was not really a philosopher; but at least he was the cause of philosophy in others. That scientific gentleman with the bald, egg-like head and the bare, bird-like neck had no real right to the airs of science that he assumed. He had not discovered anything new in biology; but what biological creature could he have discovered more singular than himself? Thus, and thus only, the whole place had properly to be regarded; it had to be considered not so much as a workshop for artists, but as a frail but finished work of art. A man who stepped into its social atmosphere felt as if he had stepped into a written comedy.

More especially this attractive unreality fell upon it about nightfall, when the extravagant roofs were dark against the afterglow and the whole insanile village seemed as separate as a drifting cloud. This again was more strongly true of the many nights of local festivity, when the little gardens were often illuminated, and the big Chinese lanterns glowed in the dwarfish trees like some fierce and monstrous fruit. And this was strongest of all on one particular evening, still vaguely remembered in the locality, of which the auburn-haired poet was the hero. It was not by any
means the only evening of which he was the hero. On many nights those passing by his little back garden might hear his high, didactic voice laying down the law to men and particularly to women. The attitude of women in such cases was indeed one of the paradoxes of the place. Most of the women were of the kind vaguely called emancipated, and professed some protest against male supremacy. Yet these new women would always pay to a man the extravagant compliment which no ordinary woman ever pays to him, that of listening while he is talking. And Mr. Lucian Gregory, the red-haired poet, was really (in some sense) a man worth listening to, even if one only laughed at the end of it. He put the old cant of the lawlessness of art and the art of lawlessness with a certain impudent freshness which gave at least a momentary pleasure. He was helped in some degree by the arresting oddity of his appearance, which he worked, as the phrase goes, for all it was worth. His dark red hair parted in the middle was literally like a woman’s, and curved into the slow curls of a virgin in a pre-Raphaelite picture. From within this almost saintly oval, however, his face projected suddenly broad and brutal, the chin carried forward with a look of cockney contempt. This combination at once tickled and terrified the nerves of a neurotic population. He seemed like a walking blasphemy, a blend of the angel and the ape.

This particular evening, if it is remembered for nothing else, will be remembered in that place for its strange sunset. It looked like the end of the world. All the heaven seemed covered with a quite vivid and palpable plumage; you could only say that the sky was full of feathers, and of feathers that almost brushed the face. Across the great part of the dome they were grey, with the strangest tints of violet and mauve and an unnatural pink or pale green; but towards the west the whole grew past description, transparent and passionate, and the last red-hot plumes of it covered up the sun like something too good to be seen. The whole was so close about the earth, as to express nothing but a violent secrecy. The very empyrean seemed to be a secret. It expressed that splendid smallness which is the soul of local patriotism. The very sky seemed small.

I say that there are some inhabitants who may remember the evening if only by that oppressive sky. There are others who may remember it because it marked the first appearance in the place of the second poet of Saffron Park. For a long time the red-haired revolutionary had reigned without a rival; it was upon the night of the sunset that his solitude suddenly ended. The new poet, who introduced himself by the name of Gabriel Syme was a very mild-looking mortal, with a fair, pointed beard and faint, yellow hair. But an impression grew that he was less meek than he looked. He signalised his entrance by differing with the established poet, Gregory, upon the whole nature of poetry. He said that he (Syme) was poet of law, a poet of order; nay, he said he was a poet of respectability. So all the Saffron Parkers looked at him as if he had that moment fallen out of that impossible sky.

In fact, Mr. Lucian Gregory, the anarchic poet, connected the two events.

"It may well be," he said, in his sudden lyrical manner, "it may well be on such a night of clouds and cruel colours that there is brought forth upon the earth such a portent as a respectable poet. You say you are a poet of law; I say you are a contradiction in terms. I only wonder there were not comets and earthquakes on the night you appeared in this garden."

The man with the meek blue eyes and the pale, pointed beard endured these thunders with a certain submissive solemnity. The third party of the group, Gregory’s sister Rosamond, who had her brother’s braids of red hair, but a kindlier face underneath them, laughed with such mixture of admiration and disapproval as she gave commonly to the family oracle.

Gregory resumed in high oratorical good humour.

"An artist is identical with an anarchist," he cried. "You might transpose the words anywhere. An anarchist is an artist. The man who throws a bomb is an artist, because he prefers a great moment to everything. He sees how much more valuable is one burst of blazing light, one peal of perfect thunder, than the mere common bodies of a few shapeless policemen. An artist disregards all governments, abolishes all conventions. The poet delights in disorder only. If it were not so, the most poetical thing in the world would be the Underground Railway."

"So it is," said Mr. Syme.

"Nonsense!" said Gregory, who was very rational when anyone else attempted paradox. "Why do all the clerks and navvies in the railway trains look so sad and tired, so very sad and tired? I will tell you. It is because they know that the train is going right. It is because they know that whatever place they have taken a ticket for that place they will reach. It is because after they have passed Sloane Square they know that the next station must be Victoria, and nothing but Victoria. Oh, their wild rapture! oh, their eyes like stars and their souls again in Eden, if the next station were unaccountably Baker Street!"

"It is you who are unpoetical," replied the poet Syme. "If what you say of clerks is true, they can only be as prosaic as your poetry. The rare, strange thing is to hit the mark; the gross, obvious thing is to miss it. We feel it is epical when man with one wild arrow strikes a distant bird. Is it not also epical when man with one wild engine strikes a distant station? Chaos is dull; because in chaos the train might indeed go anywhere, to Baker Street or to Bagdad. But man is a magician, and his whole magic is in this, that he does say Victoria, and lo! it is Victoria. No,
take your books of mere poetry and prose; let me read a time table, with tears of pride. Take your Byron, who
commemorates the defeats of man; give me Bradshaw, who commemorates his victories. Give me Bradshaw, I say!"

"Must you go?" inquired Gregory sarcastically.

"I tell you," went on Syme with passion, "that every time a train comes in I feel that it has broken past batteries
of besiegers, and that man has won a battle against chaos. You say contemptuously that when one has left Sloane
Square one must come to Victoria. I say that one might do a thousand things instead, and that whenever I really
come there I have the sense of hairbreadth escape. And when I hear the guard shout out the word 'Victoria,' it is not
an unmeaning word. It is to me the cry of a herald announcing conquest. It is to me indeed 'Victoria'; it is the victory
of Adam."

Gregory wagged his heavy, red head with a slow and sad smile.

"And even then," he said, "we poets always ask the question, 'And what is Victoria now that you have got there?'
You think Victoria is like the New Jerusalem. We know that the New Jerusalem will only be like Victoria. Yes, the
poet will be discontented even in the streets of heaven. The poet is always in revolt."

"There again," said Syme irritably, "what is there poetical about being in revolt? You might as well say that it is
poetical to be sea-sick. Being sick is a revolt. Both being sick and being rebellious may be the wholesome thing on
certain desperate occasions; but I'm hanged if I can see why they are poetical. Revolt in the abstract is--revolting. It's
mere vomiting."

The girl winced for a flash at the unpleasant word, but Syme was too hot to heed her.

"It is things going right," he cried, "that is poetical! Our digestions, for instance, going sacredly and silently
right, that is the foundation of all poetry. Yes, the most poetical thing, more poetical than the flowers, more poetical
than the stars--the most poetical thing in the world is not being sick."

"Really," said Gregory superciliously, "the examples you choose--"

"I beg your pardon," said Syme grimly, "I forgot we had abolished all conventions."

For the first time a red patch appeared on Gregory's forehead.

"You don't expect me," he said, "to revolutionise society on this lawn?"

Syme looked straight into his eyes and smiled sweetly.

"No, I don't," he said; "but I suppose that if you were serious about your anarchism, that is exactly what you
would do."

Gregory's big bull's eyes blinked suddenly like those of an angry lion, and one could almost fancy that his red
mane rose.

"Don't you think, then," he said in a dangerous voice, "that I am serious about my anarchism?"

"I beg your pardon?" said Syme.

"Am I not serious about my anarchism?" cried Gregory, with knotted fists.

"My dear fellow!" said Syme, and strolled away.

With surprise, but with a curious pleasure, he found Rosamond Gregory still in his company.

"Mr. Syme," she said, "do the people who talk like you and my brother often mean what they say? Do you mean
what you say now?"

Syme smiled.

"Do you?" he asked.

"What do you mean?" asked the girl, with grave eyes.

"My dear Miss Gregory," said Syme gently, "there are many kinds of sincerity and insincerity. When you say
'thank you' for the salt, do you mean what you say? No. When you say 'the world is round,' do you mean what you
say? No. It is true, but you don't mean it. Now, sometimes a man like your brother really finds a thing he does mean.
It may be only a half-truth, quarter-truth, tenth-truth; but then he says more than he means--from sheer force of
meaning it."

She was looking at him from under level brows; her face was grave and open, and there had fallen upon it the
shadow of that unreasoning responsibility which is at the bottom of the most frivolous woman, the maternal watch
which is as old as the world.

"Is he really an anarchist, then?" she asked.

"Only in that sense I speak of," replied Syme; "or if you prefer it, in that nonsense."

She drew her broad brows together and said abruptly--

"He wouldn't really use--bombs or that sort of thing?"

Syme broke into a great laugh, that seemed too large for his slight and somewhat dandified figure.

"Good Lord, no!" he said, "that has to be done anonymously."

And at that the corners of her own mouth broke into a smile, and she thought with a simultaneous pleasure of
Gregory's absurdity and of his safety.
Syme strolled with her to a seat in the corner of the garden, and continued to pour out his opinions. For he was a sincere man, and in spite of his superficial airs and graces, at root a humble one. And it is always the humble man who talks too much; the proud man watches himself too closely. He defended respectability with violence and exaggeration. He grew passionate in his praise of tidiness and propriety. All the time there was a smell of lilac all round him. Once he heard very faintly in some distant street a barrel-organ begin to play, and it seemed to him that his heroic words were moving to a tiny tune from under or beyond the world.

He stared and talked at the girl's red hair and amused face for what seemed to be a few minutes; and then, feeling that the groups in such a place should mix, rose to his feet. To his astonishment, he discovered the whole garden empty. Everyone had gone long ago, and he went himself with a rather hurried apology. He left with a sense of champagne in his head, which he could not afterwards explain. In the wild events which were to follow this girl had no part at all; he never saw her again until all his tale was over. And yet, in some indescribable way, she kept recurring like a motive in music through all his mad adventures afterwards, and the glory of her strange hair ran like a red thread through those dark and ill-drawn tapestries of the night. For what followed was so improbable, that it might well have been a dream.

When Syme went out into the starlit street, he found it for the moment empty. Then he realised (in some odd way) that the silence was rather a living silence than a dead one. Directly outside the door stood a street lamp, whose gleam gilded the leaves of the tree that bent out over the fence behind him. About a foot from the lamp-post stood a figure almost as rigid and motionless as the lamp-post itself. The tall hat and long frock coat were black; the face, in an abrupt shadow, was almost as dark. Only a fringe of fiery hair against the light, and also something aggressive in the attitude, proclaimed that it was the poet Gregory. He had something of the look of a masked bravo waiting sword in hand for his foe.

He made a sort of doubtful salute, which Syme somewhat more formally returned.

"I was waiting for you," said Gregory. "Might I have a moment's conversation?"

"Certainly. About what?" asked Syme in a sort of weak wonder.

Gregory struck out with his stick at the lamp-post, and then at the tree. "About this and this," he cried; "about order and anarchy. There is your precious order, that lean, iron lamp, ugly and barren; and there is anarchy, rich, living, reproducing itself—there is anarchy, splendid in green and gold."

"All the same," replied Syme patiently, "just at present you only see the tree by the light of the lamp. I wonder when you would ever see the lamp by the light of the tree." Then after a pause he said, "But may I ask if you have been standing out here in the dark only to resume our little argument?"

"No," cried out Gregory, in a voice that rang down the street, "I did not stand here to resume our argument, but to end it for ever."

The silence fell again, and Syme, though he understood nothing, listened instinctively for something serious. Gregory began in a smooth voice and with a rather bewildering smile.

"Mr. Syme," he said, "this evening you succeeded in doing something rather remarkable. You did something to me that no man born of woman has ever succeeded in doing before."

"Indeed!"

"Now I remember," resumed Gregory reflectively, "one other person succeeded in doing it. The captain of a penny steamer (if I remember correctly) at Southend. You have irritated me."

"I am very sorry," replied Syme with gravity.

"I am afraid my fury and your insult are too shocking to be wiped out even with an apology," said Gregory very calmly. "No duel could wipe it out. If I struck you dead I could not wipe it out. There is only one way by which that insult can be erased, and that way I choose. I am going, at the possible sacrifice of my life and honour, to prove to you that you were wrong in what you said."

"In what I said?"

"You said I was not serious about being an anarchist."

"There are degrees of seriousness," replied Syme. "I have never doubted that you were perfectly sincere in this sense, that you thought what you said well worth saying, that you thought a paradox might wake men up to a neglected truth."

Gregory stared at him steadily and painfully.

"And in no other sense," he asked, "you think me serious? You think me a flaneur who lets fall occasional truths. You do not think that in a deeper, a more deadly sense, I am serious."

Syme struck his stick violently on the stones of the road.

"Serious!" he cried. "Good Lord! is this street serious? Are these damned Chinese lanterns serious? Is the whole caboodle serious? One comes here and talks a pack of bosh, and perhaps some sense as well, but I should think very little of a man who didn't keep something in the background of his life that was more serious than all this talking--
something more serious, whether it was religion or only drink."

"Very well," said Gregory, his face darkening, "you shall see something more serious than either drink or
religion."

Syme stood waiting with his usual air of mildness until Gregory again opened his lips.

"You spoke just now of having a religion. Is it really true that you have one?"

"Oh," said Syme with a beaming smile, "we are all Catholics now."

"Then may I ask you to swear by whatever gods or saints your religion involves that you will not reveal what I
am now going to tell you to any son of Adam, and especially not to the police? Will you swear that! If you will take
upon yourself this awful abnegation if any agitations you will consent to burden your soul with a vow that you should never make
and a knowledge you should never dream about, I will promise you in return--"

"You will promise me in return?" inquired Syme, as the other paused.

"I will promise you a very entertaining evening." Syme suddenly took off his hat.

"Your offer," he said, "is far too idiotic to be declined. You say that a poet is always an anarchist. I disagree; but
I hope at least that he is always a sportsman. Permit me, here and now, to swear as a Christian, and promise as a
good comrade and a fellow-artist, that I will not report anything of this, whatever it is, to the police. And now, in the
name of Colney Hatch, what is it?"

"I think," said Gregory, with placid irrelevancy, "that we will call a cab."

He gave two long whistles, and a hansom came rattling down the road. The two got into it in silence. Gregory
gave through the trap the address of an obscure public-house on the Chiswick bank of the river. The cab whisked
itself away again, and in it these two fantasticks quitted their fantastic town.

CHAPTER II
THE SECRET OF GABRIEL SYME

The cab pulled up before a particularly dreary and greasy beershop, into which Gregory rapidly conducted his
companion. They seated themselves in a close and dim sort of bar-parlour, at a stained wooden table with one
wooden leg. The room was so small and dark, that very little could be seen of the attendant who was summoned,
beyond a vague and dark impression of something bulky and bearded.

"Will you take a little supper?" asked Gregory politely. "The pate de foie gras is not good here, but I can
recommend the game."

Syme received the remark with stolidity, imagining it to be a joke. Accepting the vein of humour, he said, with a
well-bred indifference--

"Oh, bring me some lobster mayonnaise."

To his indescribable astonishment, the man only said "Certainly, sir!" and went away apparently to get it.

"What will you drink?" resumed Gregory, with the same careless yet apologetic air. "I shall only have a crepe de
menthe myself; I have dined. But the champagne can really be trusted. Do let me start you with a half-bottle of
Pommery at least?"

"Thank you!" said the motionless Syme. "You are very good."

His further attempts at conversation, somewhat disorganised in themselves, were cut short finally as by a
thunderbolt by the actual appearance of the lobster. Syme tasted it, and found it particularly good. Then he suddenly
began to eat with great rapidity and appetite.

"Excuse me if I enjoy myself rather obviously!" he said to Gregory, smiling. "I don't often have the luck to have
a dream like this. It is new to me for a nightmare to lead to a lobster. It is commonly the other way."

"You are not asleep, I assure you," said Gregory. "You are, on the contrary, close to the most actual and rousing
moment of your existence. Ah, here comes your champagne! I admit that there may be a slight disproportion, let us
say, between the inner arrangements of this excellent hotel and its simple and unpretentious exterior. But that is all
our modesty. We are the most modest men that ever lived on earth."

"And who are we?" asked Syme, emptying his champagne glass.

"It is quite simple," replied Gregory. "We are the serious anarchists, in whom you do not believe."

"Oh!" said Syme shortly. "You do yourselves well in drinks."

"Yes, we are serious about everything," answered Gregory.

Then after a pause he added--

"If in a few moments this table begins to turn round a little, don't put it down to your inroads into the
champagne. I don't wish you to do yourself an injustice."

"Well, if I am not drunk, I am mad," replied Syme with perfect calm; "but I trust I can behave like a gentleman
in either condition. May I smoke?"

"Certainly!" said Gregory, producing a cigar-case. "Try one of mine."

Syme took the cigar, clipped the end off with a cigar-cutter out of his waistcoat pocket, put it in his mouth, lit it
slowly, and let out a long cloud of smoke. It is not a little to his credit that he performed these rites with so much
composure, for almost before he had begun them the table at which he sat had begun to revolve, first slowly, and
then rapidly, as if at an insane seance.

"You must not mind it," said Gregory; "it's a kind of screw."

"Quite so," said Syme placidly, "a kind of screw. How simple that is!"

The next moment the smoke of his cigar, which had been wavering across the room in snaky twists, went
straight up as if from a factory chimney, and the two, with their chairs and table, shot down through the floor as if
the earth had swallowed them. They went rattling down a kind of roaring chimney as rapidly as a lift cut loose, and
they came with an abrupt bump to the bottom. But when Gregory threw open a pair of doors and let in a red
subterranean light, Syme was still smoking with one leg thrown over the other, and had not turned a yellow hair.

Gregory led him down a low, vaulted passage, at the end of which was the red light. It was an enormous crimson
lantern, nearly as big as a fireplace, fixed over a small but heavy iron door. In the door there was a sort of hatchway
or grating, and on this Gregory struck five times. A heavy voice with a foreign accent asked him who he was. To
this he gave the more or less unexpected reply, "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain." The heavy hinges began to move; it was
obviously some kind of password.

Inside the doorway the passage gleamed as if it were lined with a network of steel. On a second glance, Syme
saw that the glittering pattern was really made up of ranks and ranks of rifles and revolvers, closely packed or
interlocked.

"I must ask you to forgive me all these formalities," said Gregory; "we have to be very strict here."

"Oh, don't apologise," said Syme. "I know your passion for law and order," and he stepped into the passage lined
with the steel weapons. With his long, fair hair and rather foppish frock-coat, he looked a singularly frail and
fanciful figure as he walked down that shining avenue of death.

They passed through several such passages, and came out at last into a queer steel chamber with curved walls,
almost spherical in shape, but presenting, with its tiers of benches, something of the appearance of a scientific
lecture-theatre. There were no rifles or pistols in this apartment, but round the walls of it were hung more dubious
and dreadful shapes, things that looked like the bulbs of iron plants, or the eggs of iron birds. They were bombs, and
the very room itself seemed like the inside of a bomb. Syme knocked his cigar ash off against the wall, and went in.

"And now, my dear Mr. Syme," said Gregory, throwing himself in an expansive manner on the bench under the
largest bomb, "now we are quite cosy, so let us talk properly. Now no human words can give you any notion of why
I brought you here. It was one of those quite arbitrary emotions, like jumping off a cliff or falling in love. Suffice it
to say that you were an inexpressibly irritating fellow, and, to do you justice, you are still. I would break twenty
oaths of secrecy for the pleasure of taking you down a peg. That way you have of lighting a cigar would make a
priest break the seal of confession. Well, you said that you were quite certain I was not a serious anarchist. Does this
place strike you as being serious?"

"It does seem to have a moral under all its gaiety," assented Syme; "but may I ask you two questions? You need
not fear to give me information, because, as you remember, you very wisely extorted from me a promise not to tell
the police, a promise I shall certainly keep. So it is in mere curiosity that I make my queries. First of all, what is it
really all about? What is it you object to? You want to abolish Government?"

"To abolish God!" said Gregory, opening the eyes of a fanatic. "We do not only want to upset a few despotisms
and police regulations; that sort of anarchism does exist, but it is a mere branch of the Nonconformists. We dig
deeper and we blow you higher. We wish to deny all those arbitrary distinctions of vice and virtue, honour and
treachery, upon which mere rebels base themselves. The silly sentimentalists of the French Revolution talked of the
Rights of Man! We hate Rights as we hate Wrongs. We have abolished Right and Wrong."

"And Right and Left," said Syme with a simple eagerness, "I hope you will abolish them too. They are much
more troublesome to me."

"You spoke of a second question," snapped Gregory.

"With pleasure," resumed Syme. "In all your present acts and surroundings there is a scientific attempt at
secrecy. I have an aunt who lived over a shop, but this is the first time I have found people living from preference
under a public-house. You have a heavy iron door. You cannot pass it without submitting to the humiliation of
calling yourself Mr. Chamberlain. You surround yourself with steel instruments which make the place, if I may say
so, more impressive than homelike. May I ask why, after taking all this trouble to barricade yourselves in the bowels
of the earth, you then parade your whole secret by talking about anarchism to every silly woman in Saffron Park?"

Gregory smiled.

"The answer is simple," he said. "I told you I was a serious anarchist, and you did not believe me. Nor do they
believe me. Unless I took them into this infernal room they would not believe me."

Syme smoked thoughtfully, and looked at him with interest. Gregory went on.
"The history of the thing might amuse you," he said. "When first I became one of the New Anarchists I tried all kinds of respectable disguises. I dressed up as a bishop. I read up all about bishops in our anarchist pamphlets, in Superstition the Vampire and Priests of Prey. I certainly understood from them that bishops are strange and terrible old men keeping a cruel secret from mankind. I was misinformed. When on my first appearing in episcopal gaiters in a drawing-room I cried out in a voice of thunder, 'Down! down! presumptuous human reason!' they found out in some way that I was not a bishop at all. I was nabbed at once. Then I made up as a millionaire; but I defended Capital with so much intelligence that a fool could see that I was quite poor. Then I tried being a major. Now I am a humanitarian myself, but I have, I hope, enough intellectual breadth to understand the position of those who, like Nietzsche, admire violence—the proud, mad war of Nature and all that, you know. I threw myself into the major. I drew my sword and waved it constantly. I called out 'Blood!' abstractedly, like a man calling for wine. I often said, 'Let the weak perish; it is the Law.' Well, well, it seems majors don't do this. I was nabbed again. At last I went in despair to the President of the Central Anarchist Council, who is the greatest man in Europe."

"What is his name?" asked Syme.

"You would not know it," answered Gregory. "That is his greatness. Caesar and Napoleon put all their genius into being heard of, and they were heard of. He puts all his genius into not being heard of, and he is not heard of. But you cannot be for five minutes in the room with him without feeling that Caesar and Napoleon would have been children in his hands."

He was silent and even pale for a moment, and then resumed—

"But whenever he gives advice it is always something as startling as an epigram, and yet as practical as the Bank of England. I said to him, 'What disguise will hide me from the world? What can I find more respectable than bishops and majors?' He looked at me with his large but indecipherable face. 'You want a safe disguise, do you? You want a dress which will guarantee you harmless; a dress in which no one would ever look for a bomb?' I nodded. He suddenly lifted his lion's voice. 'Why, then, dress up as an anarchist, you fool!' he roared so that the room shook. 'Nobody will ever expect you to do anything dangerous then.' And he turned his broad back on me without another word. I took his advice, and have never regretted it. I preached blood and murder to those women day and night, and—by God!—they would let me wheel their perambulators."

Syme sat watching him with some respect in his large, blue eyes.

"You took me in," he said. "It is really a smart dodge."

Then after a pause he added—

"What do you call this tremendous President of yours?"

"We generally call him Sunday," replied Gregory with simplicity. "You see, there are seven members of the Central Anarchist Council, and they are named after days of the week. He is called Sunday, by some of his admirers Bloody Sunday. It is curious you should mention the matter, because the very night you have dropped in (if I may so express it) is the night on which our London branch, which assembles in this room, has to elect its own deputy to fill a vacancy in the Council. The gentleman who has for some time past played, with propriety and general applause, the difficult part of Thursday, has died quite suddenly. Consequently, we have called a meeting this very evening to elect a successor."

He got to his feet and strolled across the room with a sort of smiling embarrassment.

"I feel somehow as if you were my mother, Syme," he continued casually. "I feel that I can confide anything to you, as you have promised to tell nobody. In fact, I will confide to you something that I would not say in so many words to the anarchists who will be coming to the room in about ten minutes. We shall, of course, go through a form of election; but I don't mind telling you that it is practically certain what the result will be." He looked down for a moment modestly. "It is almost a settled thing that I am to be Thursday."

"My dear fellow," said Syme heartily, "I congratulate you. A great career!"

Gregory smiled in deprecation, and walked across the room, talking rapidly.

"As a matter of fact, everything is ready for me on this table," he said, "and the ceremony will probably be the shortest possible."

Syme also strolled across to the table, and found lying across it a walking-stick, which turned out on examination to be a sword-stick, a large Colt's revolver, a sandwich case, and a formidable flask of brandy. Over the chair, beside the table, was thrown a heavy-looking cape or cloak.

"I have only to get the form of election finished," continued Gregory with animation, "then I snatch up this cloak and stick, stuff these other things into my pocket, step out of a door in this cavern, which opens on the river, where there is a steam-tug already waiting for me, and then—then—oh, the wild joy of being Thursday!" And he clasped his hands.

Syme, who had sat down once more with his usual insolent languor, got to his feet with an unusual air of hesitation.
"Why is it," he asked vaguely, "that I think you are quite a decent fellow? Why do I positively like you, Gregory?" He paused a moment, and then added with a sort of fresh curiosity, "Is it because you are such an ass?"

There was a thoughtful silence again, and then he cried out--

"Well, damn it all! this is the funniest situation I have ever been in in my life, and I am going to act accordingly. Gregory, I gave you a promise before I came into this place. That promise I would keep under red-hot pincers. Would you give me, for my own safety, a little promise of the same kind?"

"A promise?" asked Gregory, wondering.

"Yes," said Syme very seriously, "a promise. I swore before God that I would not tell your secret to the police. Will you swear by Humanity, or whatever beastly thing you believe in, that you will not tell my secret to the anarchists?"

"Your secret?" asked the staring Gregory. "Have you got a secret?"

"Yes," said Syme, "I have a secret. Then after a pause, "Will you swear?"

Gregory glared at him gravely for a few moments, and then said abruptly--

"You must have bewitched me, but I feel a furious curiosity about you. Yes, I will swear not to tell the anarchists anything you tell me. But look sharp, for they will be here in a couple of minutes."

Syme rose slowly to his feet and thrust his long, white hands into his long, grey trousers' pockets. Almost as he did so there came five knocks on the outer grating, proclaiming the arrival of the first of the conspirators.

"Well," said Syme slowly, "I don't know how to tell you the truth more shortly than by saying that your expedient of dressing up as an aimless poet is not confined to you or your President. We have known the dodge for some time at Scotland Yard."

Gregory tried to spring up straight, but he swayed thrice.

"What do you say?" he asked in an inhuman voice.

"Yes," said Syme simply, "I am a police detective. But I think I hear your friends coming."

From the doorway there came a murmur of "Mr. Joseph Chamberlain." It was repeated twice and thrice, and then thirty times, and the crowd of Joseph Chamberlains (a solemn thought) could be heard trampling down the corridor.

CHAPTER III
THE MAN WHO WAS THURSDAY

Before one of the fresh faces could appear at the doorway, Gregory's stunned surprise had fallen from him. He was beside the table with a bound, and a noise in his throat like a wild beast. He caught up the Colt's revolver and took aim at Syme. Syme did not flinch, but he put up a pale and polite hand.

"Don't be such a silly man," he said, with the effeminate dignity of a curate. "Don't you see it's not necessary? Don't you see that we're both in the same boat? Yes, and jolly sea-sick."

Gregory could not speak, but he could not fire either, and he looked his question.

"Don't you see we've checkmated each other?" cried Syme. "I can't tell the police you are an anarchist. You can't tell the anarchists I'm a policeman. I can only watch you, knowing what you are; you can only watch me, knowing what I am. In short, it's a lonely, intellectual duel, my head against yours. I'm a policeman deprived of the help of the police. You, my poor fellow, are an anarchist deprived of the help of that law and organisation which is so essential to anarchy. The one solitary difference is in your favour. You are not surrounded by inquisitive policemen; I am surrounded by inquisitive anarchists. I cannot betray you, but I might betray myself. Come, come! wait and see me betray myself. I shall do it so nicely."

Gregory put the pistol slowly down, still staring at Syme as if he were a sea-monster.

"I don't believe in immortality," he said at last, "but if, after all this, you were to break your word, God would make a hell only for you, to howl in for ever."

"I shall not break my word," said Syme sternly, "nor will you break yours. Here are your friends."

The mass of the anarchists entered the room heavily, with a slouching and somewhat weary gait; but one little man, with a black beard and glasses--a man somewhat of the type of Mr. Tim Healy--detached himself, and bustled forward with some papers in his hand.

"Comrade Gregory," he said, "I suppose this man is a delegate?"

Gregory, taken by surprise, looked down and muttered the name of Syme; but Syme replied almost pertly--

"I am glad to see that your gate is well enough guarded to make it hard for anyone to be here who was not a delegate."

The brow of the little man with the black beard was, however, still contracted with something like suspicion.

"What branch do you represent?" he asked sharply.

"I should hardly call it a branch," said Syme, laughing; "I should call it at the very least a root."

"What do you mean?"

"The fact is," said Syme serenely, "the truth is I am a Sabbatarian. I have been specially sent here to see that you
show a due observance of Sunday.”

The little man dropped one of his papers, and a flicker of fear went over all the faces of the group. Evidently the awful President, whose name was Sunday, did sometimes send down such irregular ambassadors to such branch meetings.

“Well, comrade,” said the man with the papers after a pause, “I suppose we’d better give you a seat in the meeting?”

“If you ask my advice as a friend,” said Syme with severe benevolence, “I think you’d better.”

When Gregory heard the dangerous dialogue end, with a sudden safety for his rival, he rose abruptly and paced the floor in painful thought. He was, indeed, in an agony of diplomacy. It was clear that Syme’s inspired impudence was likely to bring him out of all merely accidental dilemmas. Little was to be hoped from them. He could not himself betray Syme, partly from honour, but partly also because, if he betrayed him and for some reason failed to destroy him, the Syme who escaped would be a Syme freed from all obligation of secrecy, a Syme who would simply walk to the nearest police station. After all, it was only one night’s discussion, and only one detective who would know of it. He would let out as little as possible of their plans that night, and then let Syme go, and chance it.

He strode across to the group of anarchists, which was already distributing itself along the benches.

“I think it is time we began,” he said; “the steam-tug is waiting on the river already. I move that Comrade Buttons takes the chair.”

This being approved by a show of hands, the little man with the papers slipped into the presidential seat.

“Comrades,” he began, as sharp as a pistol-shot, “our meeting tonight is important, though it need not be long. This branch has always had the honour of electing Thursdays for the Central European Council. We have elected many and splendid Thursdays. We all lament the sad decease of the heroic worker who occupied the post until last week. As you know, his services to the cause were considerable. He organised the great dynamite coup of Brighton which, under happier circumstances, ought to have killed everybody on the pier. As you also know, his death was as self-denying as his life, for he died through his faith in a hygienic mixture of chalk and water as a substitute for milk, which beverage he regarded as barbaric, and as involving cruelty to the cow. Cruelty, or anything approaching cruelty, revolted him always. But it is not to acclaim his virtues that we are met, but for a harder task. It is difficult to praise his qualities, but it is more difficult to replace them. Upon you, comrades, it devolves this evening to choose out of the company present the man who shall be Thursday. If any comrade suggests a name I will put it to the vote. If no comrade suggests a name, I can only tell myself that that dear dynamiter, who is gone from us, has carried into the unknowable abysses the last secret of his virtue and his innocence.”

There was a stir of almost inaudible applause, such as is sometimes heard in church. Then a large old man, with a long and venerable white beard, perhaps the only real working-man present, rose lumberingly and said--

“I move that Comrade Gregory be elected Thursday,” and sat lumberingly down again.

“Does anyone second?” asked the chairman.

A little man with a velvet coat and pointed beard seconded.

“Before I put the matter to the vote,” said the chairman, “I will call on Comrade Gregory to make a statement.”

Gregory rose amid a great rumble of applause. His face was deadly pale, so that by contrast his queer red hair looked almost scarlet. But he was smiling and altogether at ease. He had made up his mind, and he saw his best policy quite plain in front of him like a white road. His best chance was to make a softened and ambiguous speech, such as would leave on the detective’s mind the impression that the anarchist brotherhood was a very mild affair after all. He believed in his own literary power, his capacity for suggesting fine shades and picking perfect words. He thought that with care he could succeed, in spite of all the people around him, in conveying an impression of the institution, subtly and delicately false. Syme had once thought that anarchists, under all their bravado, were only playing the fool. Could he not now, in the hour of peril, make Syme think so again?

“Comrades,” began Gregory, in a low but penetrating voice, “it is not necessary for me to tell you what is my policy, for it is your policy also. Our belief has been slandered, it has been disfigured, it has been utterly confused and concealed, but it has never been altered. Those who talk about anarchism and its dangers go everywhere and anywhere to get their information, except to us, except to the fountain head. They learn about anarchists from sixpenny novels; they learn about anarchists from tradesmen’s newspapers; they learn about anarchists from Ally Sloper’s Half-Holiday and the Sporting Times. They never learn about anarchists from anarchists. We have no chance of denying the mountainous slanders which are heaped upon our heads from one end of Europe to another. The man who has always heard that we are walking plagues has never heard our reply. I know that he will not hear it tonight, though my passion were to rend the roof. For it is deep, deep under the earth that the persecuted are permitted to assemble, as the Christians assembled in the Catacombs. But if, by some incredible accident, there were here tonight a man who all his life had thus immensely misunderstood us, I would put this question to him: ‘When those Christians met in those Catacombs, what sort of moral reputation had they in the streets above? What tales
were told of their atrocities by one educated Roman to another? Suppose (I would say to him), ‘suppose that we are only repeating that still mysterious paradox of history. Suppose we seem as shocking as the Christians because we are really as harmless as the Christians. Suppose we seem as mad as the Christians because we are really as meek.’"

The applause that had greeted the opening sentences had been gradually growing fainter, and at the last word it stopped suddenly. In the abrupt silence, the man with the velvet jacket said, in a high, squeaky voice—

"I'm not meek!"

"Comrade Witherspoon tells us," resumed Gregory, "that he is not meek. Ah, how little he knows himself! His words are, indeed, extravagant; his appearance is ferocious, and even (to an ordinary taste) unattractive. But only the eye of a friendship as deep and delicate as mine can perceive the deep foundation of solid meekness which lies at the base of him, too deep even for himself to see. I repeat, we are the true early Christians, only that we come too late. We are simple, as they revere simple—look at Comrade Witherspoon. We are modest, as they were modest—look at me. We are merciful—"

"No, no!" called out Mr. Witherspoon with the velvet jacket.

"I say we are merciful," repeated Gregory furiously, "as the early Christians were merciful. Yet this did not prevent their being accused of eating human flesh. We do not eat human flesh—"

"Shame!" cried Witherspoon. "Why not?"

"Comrade Witherspoon," said Gregory, with a feverish gaiety, "is anxious to know why nobody eats him (laughter). In our society, at any rate, which loves him sincerely, which is founded upon love—""

"No, no!" said Witherspoon, "down with love."

"Which is founded upon love," repeated Gregory, grinding his teeth, "there will be no difficulty about the aims which we shall pursue as a body, or which I should pursue were I chosen as the representative of that body. Superbly careless of the slanders that represent us as assassins and enemies of human society, we shall pursue with moral courage and quiet intellectual pressure, the permanent ideals of brotherhood and simplicity."

Gregory resumed his seat and passed his hand across his forehead. The silence was sudden and awkward, but the chairman rose like an automaton, and said in a colourless voice—

"Does anyone oppose the election of Comrade Gregory?"

The assembly seemed vague and sub-consciously disappointed, and Comrade Witherspoon moved restlessly on his seat and muttered in his thick beard. By the sheer rush of routine, however, the motion would have been put and carried. But as the chairman was opening his mouth to put it, Syme sprang to his feet and said in a small and quiet voice—

"Yes, Mr. Chairman, I oppose."

The most effective fact in oratory is an unexpected change in the voice. Mr. Gabriel Syme evidently understood oratory. Having said these first formal words in a moderated tone and with a brief simplicity, he made his next word ring and volley in the vault as if one of the guns had gone off.

"Comrades!" he cried, in a voice that made every man jump out of his boots, "have we come here for this? Do we live underground like rats in order to listen to talk like this? This is talk we might listen to while eating buns at a Sunday School treat. Do we line these walls with weapons and bar that door with death lest anyone should come and hear Comrade Gregory saying to us, 'Be good, and you will be happy,' 'Honesty is the best policy,' and 'Virtue is its own reward'? There was not a word in Comrade Gregory's address to which a curate could not have listened with pleasure (hear, hear). But I am not a curate (loud cheers), and I did not listen to it with pleasure (renewed cheers). The man who is fitted to make a good curate is not fitted to make a resolute, forcible, and efficient Thursday (hear, hear)."

"Comrade Gregory has told us, in only too apologetic a tone, that we are not the enemies of society. But I say that we are the enemies of society, and so much the worse for society. We are the enemies of society, for society is the enemy of humanity, its oldest and its most pitiless enemy (hear, hear). Comrade Gregory has told us (apologetically again) that we are not murderers. There I agree. We are not murderers, we are executioners (cheers)."

Ever since Syme had risen Gregory had sat staring at him, his face idiotic with astonishment. Now in the pause his lips of clay parted, and he said, with an automatic and lifeless distinctness—

"You damnable hypocrite!"

Syme looked straight into those frightful eyes with his own pale blue ones, and said with dignity—

"Comrade Gregory accuses me of hypocrisy. He knows as well as I do that I am keeping all my engagements and doing nothing but my duty. I do not mince words. I do not pretend to. I say that Comrade Gregory is unfit to be Thursday for all his amiable qualities. He is unfit to be Thursday because of his amiable qualities. We do not want the Supreme Council of Anarchy infected with a maudlin mercy (hear, hear). This is no time for ceremonial politeness, neither is it a time for ceremonial modesty. I set myself against Comrade Gregory as I would set myself against all the Governments of Europe, because the anarchist who has given himself to anarchy has forgotten
modesty as much as he has forgotten pride (cheers). I am not a man at all. I am a cause (renewed cheers). I set myself against Comrade Gregory as impersonally and as calmly as I should choose one pistol rather than another out of that rack upon the wall; and I say that rather than have Gregory and his milk-and-water methods on the Supreme Council, I would offer myself for election--"

His sentence was drowned in a deafening cataract of applause. The faces, that had grown fiercer and fiercer with approval as his tirade grew more and more uncompromising, were now distorted with grins of anticipation or cloven with delighted cries. At the moment when he announced himself as ready to stand for the post of Thursday, a roar of excitement and assent broke forth, and became uncontrollable, and at the same moment Gregory sprang to his feet, with foam upon his mouth, and shouted against the shouting.

"Stop, you blasted madmen!" he cried, at the top of a voice that tore his throat. "Stop, you--"

But louder than Gregory's shouting and louder than the roar of the room came the voice of Syme, still speaking in a peal of pitiless thunder--

"I do not go to the Council to rebut that slander that calls us murderers; I go to earn it (loud and prolonged cheering). To the priest who says these men are the enemies of religion, to the judge who says these men are the enemies of law, to the fat parliamentarian who says these men are the enemies of order and public decency, to all these I will reply, 'You are false kings, but you are true prophets. I am come to destroy you, and to fulfil your prophecies.'"

The heavy clamour gradually died away, but before it had ceased Witherspoon had jumped to his feet, his hair and beard all on end, and had said--

"I move, as an amendment, that Comrade Syme be appointed to the post."

"Stop all this, I tell you!" cried Gregory, with frantic face and hands. "Stop it, it is all--"

The voice of the chairman clove his speech with a cold accent.

"Does anyone second this amendment?" he said. A tall, tired man, with melancholy eyes and an American chin beard, was observed on the back bench to be slowly rising to his feet. Gregory had been screaming for some time past; now there was a change in his accent, more shocking than any scream. "I end all this!" he said, in a voice as heavy as stone.

"This man cannot be elected. He is a--"

"Yes," said Syme, quite motionless, "what is he?" Gregory's mouth worked twice without sound; then slowly the blood began to crawl back into his dead face. "He is a man quite inexperienced in our work," he said, and sat down abruptly.

Before he had done so, the long, lean man with the American beard was again upon his feet, and was repeating in a high American monotone--

"I beg to second the election of Comrade Syme."

"The amendment will, as usual, be put first," said Mr. Buttons, the chairman, with mechanical rapidity.

"The question is that Comrade Syme--"

Gregory had again sprung to his feet, panting and passionate.

"Comrades," he cried out, "I am not a madman."

"Oh, oh!" said Mr. Witherspoon.

"I am not a madman," reiterated Gregory, with a frightful sincerity which for a moment staggered the room, "but I give you a counsel which you can call mad if you like. No, I will not call it a counsel, for I can give you no reason for it. I will call it a command. Call it a mad command, but act upon it. Strike, but hear me! Kill me, but obey me! Do not elect this man." Truth is so terrible, even in fetters, that for a moment Syme's slender and insane victory swayed like a reed. But you could not have guessed it from Syme's bleak blue eyes. He merely began--

"Comrade Gregory commands--"

Then the spell was snapped, and one anarchist called out to Gregory--

"Who are you? You are not Sunday"; and another anarchist added in a heavier voice, "And you are not Thursday."

"Comrades," cried Gregory, in a voice like that of a martyr who in an ecstasy of pain has passed beyond pain, "it is nothing to me whether you detest me as a tyrant or detest me as a slave. If you will not take my command, accept my degradation. I kneel to you. I throw myself at your feet. I implore you. Do not elect this man."

"Comrade Gregory," said the chairman after a painful pause, "this is really not quite dignified."

For the first time in the proceedings there was for a few seconds a real silence. Then Gregory fell back in his seat, a pale wreck of a man, and the chairman repeated, like a piece of clock-work suddenly started again--

"The question is that Comrade Syme be elected to the post of Thursday on the General Council."

The roar rose like the sea, the hands rose like a forest, and three minutes afterwards Mr. Gabriel Syme, of the Secret Police Service, was elected to the post of Thursday on the General Council of the Anarchists of Europe.
Everyone in the room seemed to feel the tug waiting on the river, the sword-stick and the revolver, waiting on the table. The instant the election was ended and irrevocable, and Syme had received the paper proving his election, they all sprang to their feet, and the fiery groups moved and mixed in the room. Syme found himself, somehow or other, face to face with Gregory, who still regarded him with a stare of stunned hatred. They were silent for many minutes.

"You are a devil!" said Gregory at last.
"And you are a gentleman," said Syme with gravity.
"It was you that entrapped me," began Gregory, shaking from head to foot, "entrapped me into--"
"Talk sense," said Syme shortly. "Into what sort of devils' parliament have you entrapped me, if it comes to that? You made me swear before I made you. Perhaps we are both doing what we think right. But what we think right is so damned different that there can be nothing between us in the way of concession. There is nothing possible between us but honour and death," and he pulled the great cloak about his shoulders and picked up the flask from the table.

"The boat is quite ready," said Mr. Buttons, bustling up. "Be good enough to step this way."
With a gesture that revealed the shop-walker, he led Syme down a short, iron-bound passage, the still agonised Gregory following feverishly at their heels. At the end of the passage was a door, which Buttons opened sharply, showing a sudden blue and silver picture of the moonlit river, that looked like a scene in a theatre. Close to the opening lay a dark, dwarfish steam-launch, like a baby dragon with one red eye.
Almost in the act of stepping on board, Gabriel Syme turned to the gaping Gregory.
"You have kept your word," he said gently, with his face in shadow. "You are a man of honour, and I thank you. You have kept it even down to a small particular. There was one special thing you promised me at the beginning of the affair, and which you have certainly given me by the end of it."
"What do you mean?" cried the chaotic Gregory. "What did I promise you?"
A very entertaining evening," said Syme, and he made a military salute with the sword-stick as the steamboat slid away.

CHAPTER IV
THE TALE OF A DETECTIVE

GABRIEL SYME was not merely a detective who pretended to be a poet; he was really a poet who had become a detective. Nor was his hatred of anarchy hypocritical. He was one of those who are driven early in life into too conservative an attitude by the bewildering folly of most revolutionists. He had not attained it by any tame tradition. His respectability was spontaneous and sudden, a rebellion against rebellion. He came of a family of cranks, in which all the oldest people had all the newest notions. One of his uncles always walked about without a hat, and another had made an unsuccessful attempt to walk about with a hat and nothing else. His father cultivated art and self-realisation; his mother went in for simplicity and hygiene. Hence the child, during his tenderer years, was wholly unacquainted with any drink between the extremes of absinth and cocoa, of both of which he had a healthy dislike. The more his mother preached a more than Puritan abstinence the more did his father expand into a more than pagan latitude; and by the time the former had come to enforcing vegetarianism, the latter had pretty well reached the point of defending cannibalism.

Being surrounded with every conceivable kind of revolt from infancy, Gabriel had to revolt into something, so he revolted into the only thing left--sanity. But there was just enough in him of the blood of these fanatics to make even his protest for common sense a little too fierce to be sensible. His hatred of modern lawlessness had been crowned also by an accident. It happened that he was walking in a side street at the instant of a dynamite outrage. He had been blind and deaf for a moment, and then seen, the smoke clearing, the broken windows and the bleeding faces. After that he went about as usual--quiet, courteous, rather gentle; but there was a spot on his mind that was not sane. He did not regard anarchists, as most of us do, as a handful of morbid men, combining ignorance with intellectualism. He regarded them as a huge and pitiless peril, like a Chinese invasion.

He poured perpetually into newspapers and their waste-paper baskets a torrent of tales, verses and violent articles, warning men of this deluge of barbaric denial. But he seemed to be getting no nearer his enemy, and, what was worse, no nearer a living. As he paced the Thames embankment, bitterly biting a cheap cigar and brooding on the advance of Anarchy, there was no anarchist with a bomb in his pocket so savage or so solitary as he. Indeed, he always felt that Government stood alone and desperate, with its back to the wall. He was too quixotic to have cared for it otherwise.

He walked on the Embankment once under a dark red sunset. The red river reflected the red sky, and they both reflected his anger. The sky, indeed, was so swarthy, and the light on the river relatively so lurid, that the water almost seemed of fiercer flame than the sunset it mirrored. It looked like a stream of literal fire winding under the vast caverns of a subterranean country.
Syme was shabby in those days. He wore an old-fashioned black chimney-pot hat; he was wrapped in a yet more old-fashioned cloak, black and ragged; and the combination gave him the look of the early villains in Dickens and Bulwer Lytton. Also his yellow beard and hair were more unkempt and leonine than when they appeared long afterwards, cut and pointed, on the lawns of Saffron Park. A long, lean, black cigar, bought in Soho for twopence, stood out from between his tightened teeth, and altogether he looked a very satisfactory specimen of the anarchists upon whom he had vowed a holy war. Perhaps this was why a policeman on the Embankment spoke to him, and said "Good evening."

Syme, at a crisis of his morbid fears for humanity, seemed stung by the mere stolidity of the automatic official, a mere bulk of blue in the twilight.

"A good evening is it?" he said sharply. "You fellows would call the end of the world a good evening. Look at that bloody red sun and that bloody river! I tell you that if that were literally human blood, spilt and shining, you would still be standing here as solid as ever, looking out for some poor harmless tramp whom you could move on. You policemen are cruel to the poor, but I could forgive you even your cruelty if it were not for your calm."

"If we are calm," replied the policeman, "it is the calm of organised resistance."

"Eh?" said Syme, staring.

"The soldier must be calm in the thick of the battle," pursued the policeman. "The composure of an army is the anger of a nation."

"Good God, the Board Schools!" said Syme. "Is this undenominational education?"

"No," said the policeman sadly, "I never had any of those advantages. The Board Schools came after my time. What education I had was very rough and old-fashioned, I am afraid."

"Where did you have it?" asked Syme, wonderig.

"Oh, at Harrow," said the policeman.

The class sympathies which, false as they are, are the truest things in so many men, broke out of Syme before he could control them.

"But, good Lord, man," he said, "you oughtn't to be a policeman!"

The policeman sighed and shook his head.

"I know," he said solemnly, "I know I am not worthy."

"But why did you join the police?" asked Syme with rude curiosity.

"For much the same reason that you abused the police," replied the other. "I found that there was a special opening in the service for those whose fears for humanity were concerned rather with the aberrations of the scientific intellect than with the normal and excusable, though excessive, outbreaks of the human will. I trust I make myself clear."

"If you mean that you make your opinion clear," said Syme, "I suppose you do. But as for making yourself clear, it is the last thing you do. How comes a man like you to be talking philosophy in a blue helmet on the Thames embankment?"

"You have evidently not heard of the latest development in our police system," replied the other. "I am not surprised at it. We are keeping it rather dark from the educated class, because that class contains most of our enemies. But you seem to be exactly in the right frame of mind. I think you might almost join us."

"Join you in what?" asked Syme.

"I will tell you," said the policeman slowly. "This is the situation: The head of one of our departments, one of the most celebrated detectives in Europe, has long been of opinion that a purely intellectual conspiracy would soon threaten the very existence of civilisation. He is certain that the scientific and artistic worlds are silently bound in a crusade against the Family and the State. He has, therefore, formed a special corps of policemen, policemen who are also philosophers. It is their business to watch the beginnings of this conspiracy, not merely in a criminal but in a controversial sense. I am a democrat myself, and I am fully aware of the value of the ordinary man in matters of ordinary valour or virtue. But it would obviously be undesirable to employ the common policeman in an investigation which is also a heresy hunt."

Syme's eyes were bright with a sympathetic curiosity.

"What do you do, then?" he said.

"The work of the philosophical policeman," replied the man in blue, "is at once bolder and more subtle than that of the ordinary detective. The ordinary detective goes to pot-houses to arrest thieves; we go to artistic tea-parties to detect pessimists. The ordinary detective discovers from a ledger or a diary that a crime has been committed. We discover from a book of sonnets that a crime will be committed. We have to trace the origin of those dreadful thoughts that drive men on at last to intellectual fanaticism and intellectual crime. We were only just in time to prevent the assassination at Hartle pool, and that was entirely due to the fact that our Mr. Wilks (a smart young fellow) thoroughly understood a triolet."
"Do you mean," asked Syme, "that there is really as much connection between crime and the modern intellect as all that?"

"You are not sufficiently democratic," answered the policeman, "but you were right when you said just now that our ordinary treatment of the poor criminal was a pretty brutal business. I tell you I am sometimes sick of my trade when I see how perpetually it means merely a war upon the ignorant and the desperate. But this new movement of ours is a very different affair. We deny the snobbish English assumption that the uneducated are the dangerous criminals. We remember the Roman Emperors. We remember the great poisoning princes of the Renaissance. We say that the dangerous criminal is the educated criminal. We say that the most dangerous criminal now is the entirely lawless modern philosopher. Compared to him, burglars and bigamists are essentially moral men; my heart goes out to them. They accept the essential ideal of man; they merely seek it wrongly. Thieves respect property. They merely wish the property to become their property that they may more perfectly respect it. But philosophers dislike property as property; they wish to destroy the very idea of personal possession. Bigamists respect marriage, or they would not go through the highly ceremonial and even ritualistic formality of bigamy. But philosophers despise marriage as marriage. Murderers respect human life; they merely wish to attain a greater fulness of human life in themselves by the sacrifice of what seems to them to be lesser lives. But philosophers hate life itself, their own as much as other people's."

Syme struck his hands together.

"How true that is," he cried. "I have felt it from my boyhood, but never could state the verbal antithesis. The common criminal is a bad man, but at least he is, as it were, a conditional good man. He says that if only a certain obstacle be removed--say a wealthy uncle--he is then prepared to accept the universe and to praise God. He is a reformation, but not an anarchist. He wishes to cleanse the edifice, but not to destroy it. But the evil philosopher is not trying to alter things, but to annihilate them. Yes, the modern world has retained all those parts of police work which are really oppressive and ignominious, the harrying of the poor, the spying upon the unfortunate. It has given up its more dignified work, the punishment of powerful traitors in the State and powerful heresiarchs in the Church. The moderns say we must not punish heretics. My only doubt is whether we have a right to punish anybody else."

"But this is absurd!" cried the policeman, clasping his hands with an excitement uncommon in persons of his figure and costume, "but it is intolerable! I don't know what you're doing, but you're wasting your life. You must, you shall, join our special army against anarchy. Their armies are on our frontiers. Their bolt is ready to fall. A moment more, and you may lose the glory of working with us, perhaps the glory of dying with the last heroes of the world."

"It is a chance not to be missed, certainly," assented Syme, "but still I do not quite understand. I know as well as anybody that the modern world is full of lawless little men and mad little movements. But, beastly as they are, they generally have the one merit of disagreeing with each other. How can you talk of their leading one army or hurling one bolt. What is this anarchy?"

"Do not confuse it," replied the constable, "with those chance dynamite outbreaks from Russia or from Ireland, which are really the outbreaks of oppressed, if mistaken, men. This is a vast philosophic movement, consisting of an outer and an inner ring. You might even call the outer ring the laity and the inner ring the priesthood. I prefer to call the outer ring the innocent section, the inner ring the supremely guilty section. The outer ring--the main mass of their supporters--are merely anarchists; that is, men who believe that rules and formulas have destroyed human happiness. They believe that all the evil results of human crime are the results of the system that has called it crime. They do not believe that the crime creates the punishment. They believe that the punishment has created the crime. But this is absurd! They believe that if a man seduced seven women he would naturally walk away as blameless as the flowers of spring. They believe that if a man picked a pocket he would naturally feel exquisitely good. These I call the innocent section."

"Oh!" said Syme.

"Naturally, therefore, these people talk about 'a happy time coming'; 'the paradise of the future'; 'mankind freed from the bondage of vice and the bondage of virtue,' and so on. And so also the men of the inner circle speak--the sacred priesthood. They also speak to applauding crowds of the happiness of the future, and of mankind freed at last. But in their mouths--and the policeman lowered his voice--"in their mouths these happy phrases have a horrible meaning. They are under no illusions; they are too intellectual to think that man upon this earth can ever be quite free of original sin and the struggle. And they mean death. When they say that mankind shall be free at last, they mean death. When they talk of a paradise without right or wrong, they mean the grave. They have but two objects, to destroy first humanity and then themselves. That is why they throw bombs instead of firing pistols. The innocent rank and file are disappointed because the bomb has not killed the king; but the high-priesthood are happy because it has killed somebody."

"How can I join you?" asked Syme, with a sort of passion.
"I know for a fact that there is a vacancy at the moment," said the policeman, "as I have the honour to be somewhat in the confidence of the chief of whom I have spoken. You should really come and see him. Or rather, I should not say see him, nobody ever sees him; but you can talk to him if you like."

"Telephone?" inquired Syme, with interest.

"No," said the policeman placidly, "he has a fancy for always sitting in a pitch-dark room. He says it makes his thoughts brighter. Do come along."

Somewhat dazed and considerably excited, Syme allowed himself to be led to a side-door in the long row of buildings of Scotland Yard. Almost before he knew what he was doing, he had been passed through the hands of about four intermediate officials, and was suddenly shown into a room, the abrupt blackness of which startled him like a blaze of light. It was not the ordinary darkness, in which forms can be faintly traced; it was like going suddenly stone-blind.

"Are you the new recruit?" asked a heavy voice.

And in some strange way, though there was not the shadow of a shape in the gloom, Syme knew two things: first, that it came from a man of massive stature; and second, that the man had his back to him.

"Are you the new recruit?" said the invisible chief, who seemed to have heard all about it. "All right. You are engaged."

Syme, quite swept off his feet, made a feeble fight against this irrevocable phrase.

"I really have no experience," he began.

"No one has any experience," said the other, "of the Battle of Armageddon."

"But I am really unfit--"

"You are willing, that is enough," said the unknown.

"Well, really," said Syme, "I don't know any profession of which mere willingness is the final test."

"I do," said the other--"martyrs. I am condemning you to death. Good day."

Thus it was that when Gabriel Syme came out again into the crimson light of evening, in his shabby black hat and shabby, lawless cloak, he came out a member of the New Detective Corps for the frustration of the great conspiracy. Acting under the advice of his friend the policeman (who was professionally inclined to neatness), he trimmed his hair and beard, bought a good hat, clad himself in an exquisite summer suit of light blue-grey, with a pale yellow flower in the button-hole, and, in short, became that elegant and rather insupportable person whom Gregory had first encountered in the little garden of Saffron Park. Before he finally left the police premises his friend provided him with a small blue card, on which was written, "The Last Crusade," and a number, the sign of his official authority. He put this carefully in his upper waistcoat pocket, lit a cigarette, and went forth to track and fight the enemy in all the drawing-rooms of London. Where his adventure ultimately led him we have already seen. At about half-past one on a February night he found himself steaming in a small tug up the silent Thames, armed with swordstick and revolver, the duly elected Thursday of the Central Council of Anarchists.

When Syme stepped out on to the steam-tug he had a singular sensation of stepping out into something entirely new; not merely into the landscape of a new land, but even into the landscape of a new planet. This was mainly due to the insane yet solid decision of that evening, though partly also to an entire change in the weather and the sky since he entered the little tavern some two hours before. Every trace of the passionate plumage of the cloudy sunset had been swept away, and a naked moon stood in a naked sky. The moon was so strong and full that (by a paradox often to be noticed) it seemed like a weaker sun. It gave, not the sense of bright moonshine, but rather of a dead daylight.

Over the whole landscape lay a luminous and unnatural discoloration, as of that disastrous twilight which Milton spoke of as shed by the sun in eclipse; so that Syme fell easily into his first thought, that he was actually on some other and emptier planet, which circled round some sadder star. But the more he felt this glittering desolation in the moonlit land, the more he began to chivalric folly glowed in the night like a great fire. Even the common things he carried with him—the food and the brandy and the loaded pistol—took on exactly that concrete and material poetry which a child feels when he takes a gun upon a journey or a bun with him to bed. The sword-stick and the brandy-flask, though in themselves only the tools of morbid conspirators, became the expressions of his own more healthy romance. The sword-stick became almost the sword of chivalry, and the brandy the wine of the stirrup-cup. For even the most dehumanised modern fantasies depend on some older and simpler figure; the adventures may be mad, but the adventurer must be sane. The dragon without St. George would not even be grotesque. So this inhuman landscape was only imaginative by the presence of a man really human. To Syme's exaggerative mind the bright, bleak houses and terraces by the Thames looked as empty as the mountains of the moon. But even the moon is only poetical because there is a man in the moon.

The tug was worked by two men, and with much toil went comparatively slowly. The clear moon that had lit up Chiswick had gone down by the time that they passed Battersea, and when they came under the enormous bulk of
Westminster day had already begun to break. It broke like the splitting of great bars of lead, showing bars of silver; and these had brightened like white fire when the tug, changing its onward course, turned inward to a large landing stage rather beyond Charing Cross.

The great stones of the Embankment seemed equally dark and gigantic as Syme looked up at them. They were big and black against the huge white dawn. They made him feel that he was landing on the colossal steps of some Egyptian palace; and, indeed, the thing suited his mood, for he was, in his own mind, mounting to attack the solid thrones of horrible and heathen kings. He leapt out of the boat on to one slimy step, and stood, a dark and slender figure, amid the enormous masonry. The two men in the tug put her off again and turned up stream. They had never spoken a word.

CHAPTER V
THE FEAST OF FEAR

At first the large stone stair seemed to Syme as deserted as a pyramid; but before he reached the top he had realised that there was a man leaning over the parapet of the Embankment and looking out across the river. As a figure he was quite conventional, clad in a silk hat and frock-coat of the more formal type of fashion; he had a red flower in his buttonhole. As Syme drew nearer to him step by step, he did not even move a hair; and Syme could come close enough to notice even in the dim, pale morning light that his face was long, pale and intellectual, and ended in a small triangular tuft of dark beard at the very point of the chin, all else being clean-shaven. This scrap of hair almost seemed a mere oversight; the rest of the face was of the type that is best shaven--clear-cut, ascetic, and in its way noble. Syme drew closer and closer, noting all this, and still the figure did not stir.

At first an instinct had told Syme that this was the man whom he was meant to meet. Then, seeing that the man made no sign, he had concluded that he was not. And now again he had come back to a certainty that the man had something to do with his mad adventure. For the man remained more still than would have been natural if a stranger had come so close. He was as motionless as a wax-work, and got on the nerves somewhat in the same way. Syme looked again and again at the pale, dignified and delicate face, and the face still looked blankly across the river. Then he took out of his pocket the note from Buttons proving his election, and put it before that sad and beautiful face. Then the man smiled, and his smile was a shock, for it was all on one side, going up in the right cheek and down in the left.

There was nothing, rationally speaking, to scare anyone about this. Many people have this nervous trick of a crooked smile, and in many it is even attractive. But in all Syme's circumstances, with the dark dawn and the deadly errand and the loneliness on the great dripping stones, there was something unnerving in it.

There was the silent river and the silent man, a man of even classic face. And there was the last nightmare touch that his smile suddenly went wrong.

The spasm of smile was instantaneous, and the man's face dropped at once into its harmonious melancholy. He spoke without further explanation or inquiry, like a man speaking to an old colleague.
"If we walk up towards Leicester Square," he said, "we shall just be in time for breakfast. Sunday always insists on an early breakfast. Have you had any sleep?"

"No," said Syme.
"Nor have I," answered the man in an ordinary tone. "I shall try to get to bed after breakfast."
He spoke with casual civility, but in an utterly dead voice that contradicted the fanaticism of his face. It seemed almost as if all friendly words were to him lifeless conveniences, and that his only life was hate. After a pause the man spoke again.
"Of course, the Secretary of the branch told you everything that can be told. But the one thing that can never be told is the last notion of the President, for his notions grow like a tropical forest. So in case you don't know, I'd better tell you that he is carrying out his notion of concealing ourselves by not concealing ourselves to the most extraordinary lengths just now. Originally, of course, we met in a cell underground, just as your branch does. Then Sunday made us take a private room at an ordinary restaurant. He said that if you didn't seem to be hiding nobody hunted you out. Well, he is the only man on earth, I know; but sometimes I really think that his huge brain is going a little mad in its old age. For now we flaunt ourselves before the public. We have our breakfast on a balcony--on a balcony, if you please--overlooking Leicester Square."

"And what do the people say?" asked Syme.
"It's quite simple what they say," answered his guide.
"They say we are a lot of jolly gentlemen who pretend they are anarchists."
"It seems to me a very clever idea," said Syme.
"Clever! God blast your impudence! Clever!" cried out the other in a sudden, shrill voice which was as startling and discordant as his crooked smile. "When you've seen Sunday for a split second you'll leave off calling him clever."
With this they emerged out of a narrow street, and saw the early sunlight filling Leicester Square. It will never be known, I suppose, why this square itself should look so alien and in some ways so continental. It will never be known whether it was the foreign look that attracted the foreigners or the foreigners who gave it the foreign look. But on this particular morning the effect seemed singularly bright and clear. Between the open square and the sunlit leaves and the statue and the Saracenic outlines of the Alhambra, it looked the replica of some French or even Spanish public place. And this effect increased in Syme the sensation, which in many shapes he had had through the whole adventure, the eerie sensation of having strayed into a new world. As a fact, he had bought bad cigars round Leicester Square ever since he was a boy. But as he turned that corner, and saw the trees and the Moorish cupolas, he could have sworn that he was turning into an unknown Place de something or other in some foreign town.

At one corner of the square there projected a kind of angle of a prosperous but quiet hotel, the bulk of which belonged to a street behind. In the wall there was one large French window, probably the window of a large coffee-room; and outside this window, almost literally overhanging the square, was a formidably buttressed balcony, big enough to contain a dining-table. In fact, it did contain a dining-table, or more strictly a breakfast-table; and round the breakfast-table, glowing in the sunlight and evident to the street, were a group of noisy and talkative men, all dressed in the insolence of fashion, with white waistcoats and expensive button-holes. Some of their jokes could almost be heard across the square. Then the grave Secretary gave his unnatural smile, and Syme knew that this boisterous breakfast party was the secret conclave of the European Dynamiters.

Then, as Syme continued to stare at them, he saw something that he had not seen before. He had not seen it literally because it was too large to see. At the nearest end of the balcony, blocking up a great part of the perspective, was the back of a great mountain of a man. When Syme had seen him, his first thought was that the weight of him must break down the balcony of stone. His vastness did not lie only in the fact that he was abnormally tall and quite incredibly fat. This man was planned enormously in his original proportions, like a statue carved deliberately as colossal. His head, crowned with white hair, as seen from behind looked bigger than a head ought to be. The ears that stood out from it looked larger than human ears. He was enlarged terribly to scale; and this sense of size was so staggering, that when Syme saw him all the other figures seemed quite suddenly to dwindle and become dwarfish. They were still sitting there as before with their flowers and frock-coats, but now it looked as if the big man was entertaining five children to tea.

As Syme and the guide approached the side door of the hotel, a waiter came out smiling with every tooth in his head.

"The gentlemen are up there, sare," he said. "They do talk and they do laugh at what they talk. They do say they will throw bombs at ze king."

And the waiter hurried away with a napkin over his arm, much pleased with the singular frivolity of the gentlemen upstairs.

The two men mounted the stairs in silence.

Syme had never thought of asking whether the monstrous man who almost filled and broke the balcony was the great President of whom the others stood in awe. He knew it was so, with an unaccountable but instantaneous certainty. Syme, indeed, was one of those men who are open to all the more nameless psychological influences in a degree a little dangerous to mental health. Utterly devoid of fear in physical dangers, he was a great deal too sensitive to the smell of spiritual evil. Twice already that night little unmeaning things had peeped out at him almost pruriently, and given him a sense of drawing nearer and nearer to the head-quarters of hell. And this sense became overpowering as he drew nearer to the great President.

The form it took was a childish and yet hateful fancy. As he walked across the inner room towards the balcony, the large face of Sunday grew larger and larger; and Syme was gripped with a fear that when he was quite close the face would be too big to be possible, and that he would scream aloud. He remembered that as a child he would not look at the mask of Memnon in the British Museum, because it was a face, and so large.

By an effort, braver than that of leaping over a cliff, he went to an empty seat at the breakfast-table and sat down. The men greeted him with good-humoured raillery as if they had always known him. He sobered himself a little by looking at their conventional coats and solid, shining coffee-pot; then he looked again at Sunday. His face was very large, but it was still possible to humanity.

In the presence of the President the whole company looked sufficiently commonplace; nothing about them caught the eye at first, except that by the President's caprice they had been dressed up with a festive respectability, which gave the meal the look of a wedding breakfast. One man indeed stood out at even a superficial glance. He at least was the common or garden Dynamiter. He wore, indeed, the high white collar and satin tie that were the uniform of the occasion; but out of this collar there sprang a head quite unmanageable and quite unmistakable, a bewildering bush of brown hair and beard that almost obscured the eyes like those of a Skye terrier. But the eyes did look out of the tangle, and they were the sad eyes of some Russian serf. The effect of this figure was not terrible like
that of the President, but it had every diablerie that can come from the utterly grotesque. If out of that stiff tie and collar there had come abruptly the head of a cat or a dog, it could not have been a more idiotic contrast.

The man's name, it seemed, was Gogol; he was a Pole, and in this circle of days he was called Tuesday. His soul and speech were incurably tragic; he could not force himself to play the prosperous and frivolous part demanded of him by President Sunday. And, indeed, when Syme came in the President, with that daring disregard of public suspicion which was his policy, it was actually chaffing Gogol upon his inability to assume conventional graces.

"Our friend Tuesday," said the President in a deep voice at once of quietude and volume, "our friend Tuesday doesn't seem to grasp the idea. He dresses up like a gentleman, but he seems to be too great a soul to behave like one. He insists on the ways of the stage conspirator. Now if a gentleman goes about London in a top hat and a frock-coat, no one need know that he is an anarchist. But if a gentleman puts on a top hat and a frock-coat, and then goes about on his hands and knees--well, he may attract attention. That's what Brother Gogol does. He goes about on his hands and knees with such inexhaustible diplomacy, that by this time he finds it quite difficult to walk upright."

"I am not good at concealment," said Gogol sulkily, with a thick foreign accent; "I am not ashamed of the cause."

"Yes you are, my boy, and so is the cause of you," said the President good-naturedly. "You hide as much as anybody; but you can't do it, you see, you're such an ass! You try to combine two inconsistent methods. When a householder finds a man under his bed, he will probably pause to note the circumstance. But if he finds a man under his bed in a top hat, you will agree with me, my dear Tuesday, that he is not likely even to forget it. Now when you were found under Admiral Biffin's bed--"

"I am not good at deception," said Tuesday gloomily, flushing.

"Right, my boy, right," said the President with a ponderous heartiness, "you aren't good at anything."

While this stream of conversation continued, Syme was looking more steadily at the men around him. As he did so, he gradually felt all his sense of something spiritually queer return.

He had thought at first that they were all of common stature and costume, with the evident exception of the hairy Gogol. But as he looked at the others, he began to see in each of them exactly what he had seen in the man by the river, a demonic detail somewhere. That lop-sided laugh, which would suddenly disfigure the fine face of his original guide, was typical of all these types. Each man had something about him, perceived perhaps at the tenth or twentieth glance, which was not normal, and which seemed hardly human. The only metaphor he could think of was this, that they all looked as men of fashion and presence would look, with the additional twist given in a false and curved mirror.

Only the individual examples will express this half-concealed eccentricity. Syme's original cicerone bore the title of Monday; he was the Secretary of the Council, and his twisted smile was regarded with more terror than anything, except the President's horrible, happy laughter. But now that Syme had more space and light to observe him, there were other touches. His fine face was so emaciated, that Syme thought it must be wasted with some disease; yet somehow the very distress of his dark eyes denied this. It was no physical ill that troubled him. His eyes were alive with intellectual torture, as if pure thought was pain.

He was typical of each of the tribe; each man was subtly and differently wrong. Next to him sat Tuesday, the tousle-headed Gogol, a man more obviously mad. Next was Wednesday, a certain Marquis de St. Eustache, a sufficiently characteristic figure. The first few glances found nothing unusual about him, except that he was the only man at table who wore the fashionable clothes as if they were really his own. He had a black French beard cut square and a black English frock-coat cut even squarer. But Syme, sensitive to such things, felt somehow that the man carried a rich atmosphere with him, a rich atmosphere that suffocated. It reminded one irrationally of drowsy odours and of drying lamps in the darker poems of Byron and Poe. With this went a sense of his being clad, not in lighter colours, but in softer materials; his black seemed richer and warmer than the black shades about him, as if it were compounded of profound colour. His black coat looked as if it were only black by being too dense a purple. His black beard looked as if it were only black by being too deep a blue. And in the gloom and thickness of the beard his dark red mouth showed sensual and scornful. Whatever he was he was not a Frenchman; he might be a Jew; he might be something deeper yet in the dark heart of the East. In the bright coloured Persian tiles and pictures showing tyrants hunting, you may see just those almond eyes, those blue-black beards, those cruel, crimson lips.

Then came Syme, and next a very old man, Professor de Worms, who still kept the chair of Friday, though every day it was expected that his death would leave it empty. Save for his intellect, he was in the last dissolution of senile decay. His face was as grey as his long grey beard, his forehead was lifted and fixed finally in a furrow of mild despair. In no other case, not even that of Gogol, did the bridegroom brilliancy of the morning dress express a more painful contrast. For the red flower in his button-hole showed up against a face that was literally discoloured like lead; the whole hideous effect was as if some drunken dandies had put their clothes upon a corpse. When he rose or sat down, which was with long labour and peril, something worse was expressed than mere weakness, something
indefinably connected with the horror of the whole scene. It did not express decrepitude merely, but corruption. Another hateful fancy crossed Syme's quivering mind. He could not help thinking that whenever the man moved a leg or arm might fall off.

Right at the end sat the man called Saturday, the simplest and the most baffling of all. He was a short, square man with a dark, square face clean-shaven, a medical practitioner going by the name of Bull. He had that combination of savoir-faire with a sort of well-groomed coarseness which is not uncommon in young doctors. He carried his fine clothes with confidence rather than ease, and he mostly wore a set smile. There was nothing whatever odd about him, except that he wore a pair of dark, almost opaque spectacles. It may have been merely a crescendo of nervous fancy that had gone before, but those black discs were dreadful to Syme; they reminded him of half-remembered ugly tales, of some story about pennies being put on the eyes of the dead. Syme's eye always caught the black glasses and the blind grin. Had the dying Professor worn them, or even the pale Secretary, they would have been appropriate. But on the younger and grosser man they seemed only an enigma. They took away the key of the face. You could not tell what his smile or his gravity meant. Partly from this, and partly because he had a vulgar virility wanting in most of the others it seemed to Syme that he might be the wickedest of all those wicked men. Syme even had the thought that his eyes might be covered up because they were too frightful to see.

CHAPTER VI
THE EXPOSURE

SUCH were the six men who had sworn to destroy the world. Again and again Syme strove to pull together his common sense in their presence. Sometimes he saw for an instant that these notions were subjective, that he was only looking at ordinary men, one of whom was old, another nervous, another short-sighted. The sense of an unnatural symbolism always settled back on him again. Each figure seemed to be, somehow, on the borderland of things, just as their theory was on the borderland of thought. He knew that each one of these men stood at the extreme end, so to speak, of some wild road of reasoning. He could only fancy, as in some old-world fable, that if a man went westward to the end of the world he would find something—say a tree—that was more or less than a tree, a tree possessed by a spirit; and that if he went east to the end of the world he would find something else that was not wholly itself—a tower, perhaps, of which the very shape was wicked. So these figures seemed to stand up, violent and unaccountable, against an ultimate horizon, visions from the verge. The ends of the earth were closing in.

Talk had been going on steadily as he took in the scene; and not the least of the contrasts of that bewildering breakfast-table was the contrast between the easy and unobtrusive tone of talk and its terrible purport. They were deep in the discussion of an actual and immediate plot. The waiter downstairs had spoken quite correctly when he said that they were talking about bombs and kings. Only three days afterwards the Czar was to meet the President of the French Republic in Paris, and over their bacon and eggs upon their sunny balcony these beaming gentlemen had decided how both should die. Even the instrument was chosen; the black-bearded Marquis, it appeared, was to carry the bomb.

Ordinarily speaking, the proximity of this positive and objective crime would have sobered Syme, and cured him of all his merely mystical tremors. He would have thought of nothing but the need of saving at least two human bodies from being ripped in pieces with iron and roaring gas. But the truth was that by this time he had begun to feel a third kind of fear, more piercing and practical than either his moral revulsion or his social responsibility. Very simply, he had no fear to spare for the French President or the Czar; he had begun to fear for himself. Most of the talkers took little heed of him, debating now with their faces closer together, and almost uniformly grave, save when for an instant the smile of the Secretary ran aslant across his face as the jagged lightning runs aslant across the sky. But there was one persistent thing which first troubled Syme and at last terrified him. The President was always looking at him, steadily, and with a great and baffling interest. The enormous man was quite quiet, but his blue eyes stood out of his head. And they were always fixed on Syme.

Syme felt moved to spring up and leap over the balcony. When the President's eyes were on him he felt as if he were made of glass. He had hardly the shred of a doubt that in some silent and extraordinary way Sunday had found out that he was a spy. He looked over the edge of the balcony, and saw a policeman, standing abstractedly just beneath, staring at the bright railings and the sunlit trees.

Then there fell upon him the great temptation that was to torment him for many days. In the presence of these powerful and repulsive men, who were the princes of anarchy, he had almost forgotten the frail and fanciful figure of the poet Gregory, the mere aesthete of anarchism. He even thought of him now with an old kindness, as if they had played together when children. But he remembered that he was still tied to Gregory by a great promise. He had promised never to do the very thing that he now felt himself almost in the act of doing. He had promised not to jump over that balcony and speak to that policeman. He took his cold hand off the cold stone balustrade. His soul swayed in a vertigo of moral indecision. He had only to snap the thread of a rash vow made to a villainous society, and all his life could be as open and sunny as the square beneath him. He had, on the other hand, only to keep his antiquated
honour, and be delivered inch by inch into the power of this great enemy of mankind, whose very intellect was a torture-chamber. Whenever he looked down into the square he saw the comfortable policeman, a pillar of common sense and common order. Whenever he looked back at the breakfast-table he saw the President still quietly studying him with big, unbearable eyes.

In all the torrent of his thought there were two thoughts that never crossed his mind. First, it never occurred to him to doubt that the President and his Council could crush him if he continued to stand alone. The place might be public, the project might seem impossible. But Sunday was not the man who would carry himself thus easily without having, somehow or somewhere, set open his iron trap. Either by anonymous poison or sudden street accident, by hypnotism or by fire from hell, Sunday could certainly strike him. If he defied the man he was probably dead, either struck stiff there in his chair or long afterwards as by an innocent ailment. If he called in the police promptly, arrested everyone, told all, and set against them the whole energy of England, he would probably escape; certainly not otherwise. They were a balconyful of gentlemen overlooking a bright and busy square; but he felt no more safe with them than if they had been a boatful of armed pirates overlooking an empty sea.

There was a second thought that never came to him. It never occurred to him to be spiritually won over to the enemy. Many moderns, inured to a weak worship of intellect and force, might have wavered in their allegiance under this oppression of a great personality. They might have called Sunday the super-man. If any such creature be conceivable, he looked, indeed, somewhat like it, with his earth-shaking abstraction, as of a stone statue walking. He might have been called something above man, with his large plans, which were too obvious to be detected, with his large face, which was too frank to be understood. But this was a kind of modern meanness to which Syme could not sink even in his extreme morbidity. Like any man, he was coward enough to fear great force; but he was not quite coward enough to admire it.

The men were eating as they talked, and even in this they were typical. Dr. Bull and the Marquis ate casually and conventionally of the best things on the table—cold pheasant or Strasbourg pie. But the Secretary was a vegetarian, and he spoke earnestly of the projected murder over half a raw tomato and three quarters of a glass of tepid water. The old Professor had such slops as suggested a sickening second childhood. And even in this President Sunday preserved his curious predominance of mere mass. For he ate like twenty men; he ate incredibly, with a frightful freshness of appetite, so that it was like watching a sausage factory. Yet continually, when he had swallowed a dozen crumpets or drunk a quart of coffee, he would be found with his great head on one side staring at Syme.

"I have often wondered," said the Marquis, taking a great bite out of a slice of bread and jam, "whether it wouldn't be better for me to do it with a knife. Most of the best things have been brought off with a knife. And it would be a new emotion to get a knife into a French President and wriggle it round."

"You are wrong," said the Secretary, drawing his black brows together. "The knife was merely the expression of the old personal quarrel with a personal tyrant. Dynamite is not only our best tool, but our best symbol. It is as perfect a symbol of us as is incense of the prayers of the Christians. It expands; it only destroys because it broadens; even so, thought only destroys because it broadens. A man's brain is a bomb," he cried out, loosening suddenly his strange passion and striking his own skull with violence. "My brain feels like a bomb, night and day. It must expand! It must expand! A man's brain must expand, if it breaks up the universe."

"I don't want the universe broken up just yet," drawled the Marquis. "I want to do a lot of beastly things before I die. I thought of one yesterday in bed."

"No, if the only end of the thing is nothing," said Dr. Bull with his sphinx-like smile, "it hardly seems worth doing."

The old Professor was staring at the ceiling with dull eyes.

"Every man knows in his heart," he said, "that nothing is worth doing."

There was a singular silence, and then the Secretary said--

"We are wandering, however, from the point. The only question is how Wednesday is to strike the blow. I take it we should all agree with the original notion of a bomb. As to the actual arrangements, I should suggest that tomorrow morning he should go first of all to--"

The speech was broken off short under a vast shadow. President Sunday had risen to his feet, seeming to fill the sky above them.

"Before we discuss that," he said in a small, quiet voice, "let us go into a private room. I have something very particular to say."

Syme stood up before any of the others. The instant of choice had come at last, the pistol was at his head. On the pavement before he could hear the policeman idly stir and stamp, for the morning, though bright, was cold.

A barrel-organ in the street suddenly sprang with a jerk into a jovial tune. Syme stood up taut, as if it had been a bugle before the battle. He found himself filled with a supernatural courage that came from nowhere. That jingling music seemed full of the vivacity, the vulgarity, and the irrational valour of the poor, who in all those unclean streets
were all clinging to the decencies and the charities of Christendom. His youthful prank of being a policeman had faded from his mind; he did not think of himself as the representative of the corps of gentlemen turned into fancy constables, or of the old eccentric who lived in the dark room. But he did feel himself as the ambassador of all these common and kindly people in the street, who every day marched into battle to the music of the barrel-organ. And this high pride in being human had lifted him unaccountably to an infinite height above the monstrous men around him. For an instant, at least, he looked down upon all their sprawling eccentricities from the starry pinnacle of the commonplace. He felt towards them all that unconscious and elementary superiority that a brave man feels over powerful beasts or a wise man over powerful errors. He knew that he had neither the intellectual nor the physical strength of President Sunday; but in that moment he minded it no more than the fact that he had not the muscles of a tiger or a horn on his nose like a rhinoceros. All was swallowed up in an ultimate certainty that the President was wrong and that the barrel-organ was right. There clanged in his mind that unanswerable and terrible truism in the song of Roland--

"Pagens ont tort et Chretiens ont droit."

which in the old nasal French has the clang and groan of great iron. This liberation of his spirit from the load of his weakness went with a quite clear decision to embrace death. If the people of the barrel-organ could keep their old-world obligations, so could he. This very pride in keeping his word was that he was keeping it to miscreants. It was his last triumph over these lunatics to go down into their dark room and die for something that they could not even understand. The barrel-organ seemed to give the marching tune with the energy and the mingled noises of a whole orchestra; and he could hear deep and rolling, under all the trumpets of the pride of life, the drums of the pride of death.

The conspirators were already filing through the open window and into the rooms behind. Syme went last, outwardly calm, but with all his brain and body throbbing with romantic rhythm. The President led them down an irregular side stair, such as might be used by servants, and into a dim, cold, empty room, with a table and benches, like an abandoned boardroom. When they were all in, he closed and locked the door.

The first to speak was Gogol, the irreconcilable, who seemed bursting with inarticulate grievance.

"Zso! Zso!" he cried, with an obscure excitement, his heavy Polish accent becoming almost impenetrable. "You zay you nod 'ide. You zay you show himselves. It is all nuzzinks. Ven you vant talk importance you run yourselves in a dark box!"

The President seemed to take the foreigner's incoherent satire with entire good humour.

"You can't get hold of it yet, Gogol," he said in a fatherly way. "When once they have heard us talking nonsense on that balcony they will not care where we go afterwards. If we had come here first, we should have had the whole staff at the keyhole. You don't seem to know anything about mankind."

"I die for zem," cried the Pole in thick excitement, "and I slay zare oppressors. I care not for these games of gonzealment. I would zmite ze tyrant in ze open square."

"I see, I see," said the President, nodding kindly as he seated himself at the top of a long table. "You die for mankind first, and then you get up and smite their oppressors. So that's all right. And now may I ask you to control your beautiful sentiments, and sit down with the other gentlemen at this table. For the first time this morning something intelligent is going to be said."

Syme, with the perturbed promptitude he had shown since the original summons, sat down first. Gogol sat down last, grubbing in his brown beard about gombromise. No one except Syme seemed to have any notion of the blow that was about to fall. As for him, he had merely the feeling of a man mounting the scaffold with the intention, at any rate, of making a good speech.

"Comrades," said the President, suddenly rising, "we have spun out this farce long enough. I have called you down here to tell you something so simple and shocking that even the waiters upstairs (long inured to our levities) might hear some new seriousness in my voice. Comrades, we were discussing plans and naming places. I propose, before saying anything else, that those plans and places should not be voted by this meeting, but should be left wholly in the control of some one reliable member. I suggest Comrade Saturday, Dr. Bull."

They all stared at him; then they all started in their seats, for the next words, though not loud, had a living and sensational emphasis. Sunday struck the table.

"Not one word more about the plans and places must be said at this meeting. Not one tiny detail more about what we mean to do must be mentioned in this company."

Sunday had spent his life in astonishing his followers; but it seemed as if he had never really astonished them until now. They all moved feverishly in their seats, except Syme. He sat stiff in his, with his hand in his pocket, and on the handle of his loaded revolver. When the attack on him came he would sell his life dear. He would find out at least if the President was mortal.

Sunday went on smoothly--
"You will probably understand that there is only one possible motive for forbidding free speech at this festival of freedom. Strangers overhearing us matters nothing. They assume that we are joking. But what would matter, even unto death, is this, that there should be one actually among us who is not of us, who knows our grave purpose, but does not share it, who--"

The Secretary screamed out suddenly like a woman.
"It can't be!" he cried, leaping. "There can't--"

The President flapped his large flat hand on the table like the fin of some huge fish.
"Yes," he said slowly, "there is a spy in this room. There is a traitor at this table. I will waste no more words. His name--"

Syme half rose from his seat, his finger firm on the trigger.

"His name is Gogol," said the President. "He is that hairy humbug over there who pretends to be a Pole."

Gogol sprang to his feet, a pistol in each hand. With the same flash three men sprang at his throat. Even the Professor made an effort to rise. But Syme saw little of the scene, for he was blinded with a beneficent darkness; he had sunk down into his seat shuddering, in a palsy of passionate relief.

CHAPTER VII
THE UNACCOUNTABLE CONDUCT OF PROFESSOR DE WORMS

"Sit down!" said Sunday in a voice that he used once or twice in his life, a voice that made men drop drawn swords.

The three who had risen fell away from Gogol, and that equivocal person himself resumed his seat.

"Well, my man," said the President briskly, addressing him as one addresses a total stranger, "will you oblige me by putting your hand in your upper waistcoat pocket and showing me what you have there?"

The alleged Pole was a little pale under his tangle of dark hair, but he put two fingers into the pocket with apparent coolness and pulled out a blue strip of card. When Syme saw it lying on the table, he woke up again to the world outside him. For although the card lay at the other extreme of the table, and he could read nothing of the inscription on it, it bore a startling resemblance to the blue card in his own pocket, the card which had been given to him when he joined the anti-anarchist constabulary.

"Pathetic Slav," said the President, "tragic child of Poland, are you prepared in the presence of that card to deny that you are in this company--shall we say de trop?"

"Right oh!" said the late Gogol. It made everyone jump to hear a clear, commercial and somewhat cockney voice coming out of that forest of foreign hair. It was irrational, as if a Chinaman had suddenly spoken with a Scotch accent.

"I gather that you fully understand your position," said Sunday.

"You bet," answered the Pole. "I see it's a fair cop. All I say is, I don't believe any Pole could have imitated my accent like I did his."

"I concede the point," said Sunday. "I believe your own accent to be inimitable, though I shall practise it in my bath. Do you mind leaving your beard with your card?"

"Not a bit," answered Gogol; and with one finger he ripped off the whole of his shaggy head-covering, emerging with thin red hair and a pale, pert face. "It was hot," he added.

"I will do you the justice to say," said Sunday, not without a sort of brutal admiration, "that you seem to have kept pretty cool under it. Now listen to me. I like you. The consequence is that it would annoy me for just about two and a half minutes if I heard that you had died in torments. Well, if you ever tell the police or any human soul about us, I shall have that two and a half minutes of discomfort. On your discomfort I will not dwell. Good day. Mind the step."

The red-haired detective who had masqueraded as Gogol rose to his feet without a word, and walked out of the room with an air of perfect nonchalance. Yet the astonished Syme was able to realise that this ease was suddenly assumed; for there was a slight stumble outside the door, which showed that the departing detective had not minded the step.

"Time is flying," said the President in his gayest manner, after glancing at his watch, which like everything about him seemed bigger than it ought to be. "I must go off at once; I have to take the chair at a Humanitarian meeting."

The Secretary turned to him with working eyebrows.

"Would it not be better," he said a little sharply, "to discuss further the details of our project, now that the spy has left us?"

"No, I think not," said the President with a yawn like an unobtrusive earthquake. "Leave it as it is. Let Saturday settle it. I must be off. Breakfast here next Sunday."

But the late loud scenes had whipped up the almost naked nerves of the Secretary. He was one of those men who are conscientious even in crime.
"I must protest, President, that the thing is irregular," he said. "It is a fundamental rule of our society that all plans shall be debated in full council. Of course, I fully appreciate your forethought when in the actual presence of a traitor--"

"Secretary," said the President seriously, "if you'd take your head home and boil it for a turnip it might be useful. I can't say. But it might."

The Secretary reared back in a kind of equine anger.

"I really fail to understand--" he began in high offense.

"That's it, that's it," said the President, nodding a great many times. "That's where you fail right enough. You fail to understand. Why, you dancing donkey," he roared, rising, "you didn't want to be overheard by a spy, didn't you? How do you know you aren't overheard now?"

And with these words he shouldered his way out of the room, shaking with incomprehensible scorn.

Four of the men left behind gaped after him without any apparent glimmering of his meaning. Syme alone had even a glimmering, and such as the last words of the President meant anything, they meant that he had not after all passed unsuspected. They meant that while Sunday could not denounce him like Gogol, he still could not trust him like the others.

The other four got to their feet grumbling more or less, and betook themselves elsewhere to find lunch, for it was already well past midday. The Professor went last, very slowly and painfully. Syme sat long after the rest had gone, revolving his strange position. He had escaped a thunderbolt, but he was still under a cloud. At last he rose and made his way out of the hotel into Leicester Square. The bright, cold day had grown increasingly colder, and when he came out into the street he was surprised by a few flakes of snow. While he still carried the sword-stick and the rest of Gregory's portable luggage, he had thrown the cloak down and left it somewhere, perhaps on the steam-tug, perhaps on the balcony. Hoping, therefore, that the snow-shower might be slight, he stepped back out of the street for a moment and stood up under the doorway of a small and greasy hair-dresser's shop, the front window of which was empty, except for a sickly wax lady in evening dress.

Snow, however, began to thicken and fall fast; and Syme, having found one glance at the wax lady quite sufficient to depress his spirits, stared out instead into the white and empty street. He was considerably astonished to see, standing quite still outside the shop and staring into the window, a man. His top hat was loaded with snow like the hat of Father Christmas, the white drift was rising round his boots and ankles; but it seemed as if nothing could tear him away from the contemplation of the colourless wax doll in dirty evening dress. That any human being should stand in such weather looking into such a shop was a matter of sufficient wonder to Syme; but his idle wonder turned suddenly into a personal shock; for he realised that the man standing there was the paralytic old Professor de Worms. It scarcely seemed the place for a person of his years and infirmities.

Syme was ready to believe anything about the perversions of this dehumanized brotherhood; but even he could not believe that the Professor had fallen in love with that particular wax lady. He could only suppose that the man's malady (whatever it was) involved some momentary fits of rigidity or trance. He was not inclined, however, to feel in this case any very compassionate concern. On the contrary, he rather congratulated himself that the Professor's stroke and his elaborate and limping walk would make it easy to escape from him and leave him miles behind. For Syme thirsted first and last to get clear of the whole poisonous atmosphere, if only for an hour. Then he could collect his thoughts, formulate his policy, and decide finally whether he should or should not keep faith with Gregory.

He strolled away through the dancing snow, turned up two or three streets, down through two or three others, and entered a small Soho restaurant for lunch. He partook reflectively of four small and quaint courses, drank half a bottle of red wine, and ended up over black coffee and a black cigar, still thinking. He had taken his seat in the upper room of the restaurant, which was full of the chink of knives and the chatter of foreigners. He remembered that in old days he had imagined that all these harmless and kindly aliens were anarchists. He shuddered, remembering the real thing. But even the shudder had the delightful shame of escape. The wine, the common food, the familiar place, the faces of natural and talkative men, made him almost feel as if the Council of the Seven Days had been a bad dream; and although he knew it was nevertheless an objective reality, it was at least a distant one. Tall houses and populous streets lay between him and his last sight of the shameful seven; he was free in free London, and drinking wine among the free. With a somewhat easier action, he took his hat and stick and strolled down the stair into the shop below.

When he entered that lower room he stood stricken and rooted to the spot. At a small table, close up to the blank window and the white street of snow, sat the old anarchist Professor over a glass of milk, with his lifted livid face and pendent eyelids. For an instant Syme stood as rigid as the stick he leant upon. Then with a gesture as of blind hurry, he brushed past the Professor, dashing open the door and slamming it behind him, and stood outside in the snow.

"Can that old corpse be following me?" he asked himself, biting his yellow moustache. "I stopped too long up in
that room, so that even such leaden feet could catch me up. One comfort is, with a little brisk walking I can put a
man like that as far away as Timbuctoo. Or am I too fanciful? Was he really following me? Surely Sunday would
not be such a fool as to send a lame man?"

He set off at a smart pace, twisting and whirling his stick, in the direction of Covent Garden. As he crossed the
great market the snow increased, growing blinding and bewildering as the afternoon began to darken. The snow-
flakes tormented him like a swarm of silver bees. Getting into his eyes and beard, they added their unremitting
futility to his already irritated nerves; and by the time that he had come at a swinging pace to the beginning of Fleet
Street, he lost patience, and finding a Sunday teashop, turned into it to take shelter. He ordered another cup of black
coffee as an excuse. Scarcely had he done so, when Professor de Worms hobbled heavily into the shop, sat down
with difficulty and ordered a glass of milk.

Syme's walking-stick had fallen from his hand with a greatclang, which confessed the concealed steel. But the
Professor did not look round. Syme, who was commonly a cool character, was literally gaping as a rustic gapes at a
conjuring trick. He had seen no cab following; he had heard no wheels outside the shop; to all mortal appearances
the man had come on foot. But the old man could only walk like a snail, and Syme had walked like the wind. He
started up and snatched his stick, half crazy with the contradiction in mere arithmetic, and swung out of the swinging
doors, leaving his coffee untasted. An omnibus going to the Bank went rattling by with an unusual rapidity. He had a
violent run of a hundred yards to reach it; but he managed to spring, swaying upon the splash-board and, pausing for
an instant to pant, he climbed on to the top. When he had been seated for about half a minute, he heard behind him a
sort of heavy and asthmatic breathing.

Turning sharply, he saw rising gradually higher and higher up the omnibus steps a top hat soiled and dripping
with snow, and under the shadow of its brim the short-sighted face and shaky shoulders of Professor de Worms. He
let himself into a seat with characteristic care, and wrapped himself up to the chin in the mackintosh rug.

Every movement of the old man's tottering figure and vague hands, every uncertain gesture and panic-stricken
pause, seemed to put it beyond question that he was helpless, that he was in the last imbecility of the body. He
moved by inches, he let himself down with little gasps of caution. And yet, unless the philosophical entities called
time and space have no vestige even of a practical existence, it appeared quite unquestionable that he had run after
the omnibus.

Syme sprang erect upon the rocking car, and after staring wildly at the wintry sky, that grew gloomier every
moment, he ran down the steps. He had repressed an elemental impulse to leap over the side.

Too bewildered to look back or to reason, he rushed into one of the little courts at the side of Fleet Street as a
rabbit rushes into a hole. He had a vague idea, if this incompressible old Jack-in-the-box was really pursuing him,
that in that labyrinth of little streets he could soon throw him off the scent. He dived in and out of those crooked
lanes, which were more like cracks than thoroughfares; and by the time that he had completed about twenty alternate
angles and described an unthinkable polygon, he paused to listen for any sound of pursuit. There was none; there
could not in any case have been much, for the little streets were thick with the soundless snow. Somewhere behind
Red Lion Court, however, he noticed a place where some energetic citizen had cleared away the snow for a space of
about twenty yards, leaving the wet, glistening cobble-stones. He thought little of this as he passed it, only plunging
into yet another arm of the maze. But when a few hundred yards farther on he stood still again to listen, his heart
stood still also, for he heard from that space of rugged stones the clinking crutch and labouring feet of the infernal
cripple.

The sky above was loaded with the clouds of snow, leaving London in a darkness and oppression premature for
that hour of the evening. On each side of Syme the walls of the alley were blind and featureless; there was no little
window or any kind of eve. He felt a new impulse to break out of this hive of houses, and to get once more into the
open and lamp-lit street. Yet he rambled and dodged for a long time before he struck the main thoroughfare. When
he did so, he struck it much farther up than he had fancied. He came out into what seemed quite unquestionable that he had run after
the omnibus.

At first he was startled to find these great roads so empty, as if a pestilence had swept through the city. Then he
told himself that some degree of emptiness was natural; first because the snow-storm was even dangerously deep,
and secondly because it was Sunday. And at the very word Sunday he bit his lip; the word was henceforth for hire
like some indecent pun. Under the white fog of snow high up in the heaven the whole atmosphere of the city was
turned to a very queer kind of green twilight, as of men under the sea. The sealed and sullen sunset behind the dark
dome of St. Paul's had in it smoky and sinister colours--colours of sickly green, dead red or decaying bronze, that
were just bright enough to emphasise the solid whiteness of the snow. But right up against these dreary colours rose
the black bulk of the cathedral; and upon the top of the cathedral was a random splash and great stain of snow, still
clinging as to an Alpine peak. It had fallen accidentally, but just so fallen as to half drape the dome from its very
topmost point, and to pick out in perfect silver the great orb and the cross. When Syme saw it he suddenly
straightened himself, and made with his sword-stick an involuntary salute.

He knew that that evil figure, his shadow, was creeping quickly or slowly behind him, and he did not care.

It seemed a symbol of human faith and valour that while the skies were darkening that high place of the earth was bright. The devils might have captured heaven, but they had not yet captured the cross. He had a new impulse to tear out the secret of this dancing, jumping and pursuing paralytic; and at the entrance of the court as it opened upon the Circus he turned, stick in hand, to face his pursuer.

Professor de Worms came slowly round the corner of the irregular alley behind him, his unnatural form outlined against a lonely gas-lamp, irresistibly recalling that very imaginative figure in the nursery rhymes, "the crooked man who went a crooked mile." He really looked as if he had been twisted out of shape by the tortuous streets he had been threading. He came nearer and nearer, the lamplight shining on his lifted spectacles, his lifted, patient face. Syme waited for him as St. George waited for the dragon, as a man waits for a final explanation or for death. And the old Professor came right up to him and passed him like a total stranger, without even a blink of his mournful eyelids.

There was something in this silent and unexpected innocence that left Syme in a final fury. The man's colourless face and manner seemed to assert that the whole following had been an accident. Syme was galvanised with an energy that was something between bitterness and a burst of boyish derision. He made a wild gesture as if to knock the old man's hat off, called out something like "Catch me if you can," and went racing away across the white, open Circus. Concealment was impossible now; and looking back over his shoulder, he could see the black figure of the old gentleman coming after him with long, swinging strides like a man winning a mile race. But the head upon that bounding body was still pale, grave and professional, like the head of a lecturer upon the body of a harlequin.

This outrageous chase sped across Ludgate Circus, up Ludgate Hill, round St. Paul's Cathedral, along Cheapside, Syme remembering all the nightmares he had ever known. Then Syme broke away towards the river, and ended almost down by the docks. He saw the yellow panes of a low, lighted public-house, flung himself into it and ordered beer. It was a foul tavern, sprinkled with foreign sailors, a place where opium might be smoked or knives drawn.

A moment later Professor de Worms entered the place, sat down carefully, and asked for a glass of milk.

CHAPTER VIII
THE PROFESSOR EXPLOANS

When Gabriel Syme found himself finally established in a chair, and opposite to him, fixed and final also, the lifted eyebrows and leaden eyelids of the Professor, his fears fully returned. This incomprehensible man from the fierce council, after all, had certainly pursued him. If the man had one character as a paralytic and another character as a pursuer, the antithesis might make him more interesting, but scarcely more soothing. It would be a very small comfort that he could not find the Professor out, if by some serious accident the Professor should find him out. He emptied a whole pewter pot of ale before the professor had touched his milk.

One possibility, however, kept him hopeful and yet helpless. It was just possible that this escapade signified something other than even a slight suspicion of him. Perhaps it was some regular form or sign. Perhaps the foolish scamper was some sort of friendly signal that he ought to have understood. Perhaps it was a ritual. Perhaps the new Thursday was always chased along Cheapside, as the new Lord Mayor is always escorted along it. He was just selecting a tentative inquiry, when the old Professor opposite suddenly and simply cut him short. Before Syme could ask the first diplomatic question, the old anarchist had asked suddenly, without any sort of preparation--

"Are you a policeman?"

Whatever else Syme had expected, he had never expected anything so brutal and actual as this. Even his great presence of mind could only manage a reply with an air of rather blundering jocularity.

"A policeman?" he said, laughing vaguely. "Whatever made you think of a policeman in connection with me?"

"The process was simple enough," answered the Professor patiently. "I thought you looked like a policeman. I think so now."

"Did I take a policeman's hat by mistake out of the restaurant?" asked Syme, smiling wildly. "Have I by any chance got a number stuck on to me somewhere? Have my boots got that watchful look? Why must I be a policeman? Do, do let me be a postman."

The old Professor shook his head with a gravity that gave no hope, but Syme ran on with a feverish irony.

"But perhaps I misunderstood the delicacies of your German philosophy. Perhaps policeman is a relative term. In an evolutionary sense, sir, the ape fades so gradually into the policeman, that I myself can never detect the shade. The monkey is only the policeman that may be. Perhaps a maiden lady on Clapham Common is only the policeman that might have been. I don't mind being the policeman that might have been. I don't mind being anything in German thought."

"Are you in the police service?" said the old man, ignoring all Syme's improvised and desperate raillery. "Are you a detective?"
Syme's heart turned to stone, but his face never changed. 
"Your suggestion is ridiculous," he began. "Why on earth--"

The old man struck his palsied hand passionately on the rickety table, nearly breaking it.

"Did you hear me ask a plain question, you pattering spy?" he shrieked in a high, crazy voice. "Are you, or are you not, a police detective?"

"No!" answered Syme, like a man standing on the hangman's drop.

"You swear it," said the old man, leaning across to him, his dead face becoming as it were loathsomely alive.

"You swear it! You swear it! If you swear falsely, will you be damned? Will you be sure that the devil dances at your funeral? Will you see that the nightmare sits on your grave? Will there really be no mistake? You are an anarchist, you are a dynamiter! Above all, you are not in any sense a detective? You are not in the British police?"

He leant his angular elbow far across the table, and put up his large loose hand like a flap to his ear.

"I am not in the British police," said Syme with insane calm.

Professor de Worms fell back in his chair with a curious air of kindly collapse.

"That's a pity," he said, "because I am."

Syme sprang up straight, sending back the bench behind him with a crash.

"Because you are what?" he said thickly. "Because you are what?"

"I am a policeman," said the Professor with his first broad smile and beaming through his spectacles. "But as you think policeman only a relative term, of course I have nothing to do with you. I am in the British police force; but as you tell me you are not in the British police force, I can only say that I met you in a dynamiters' club. I suppose I ought to arrest you." And with these words he laid on the table before Syme an exact facsimile of the blue card which Syme had in his own waistcoat pocket, the symbol of his power from the police.

Syme had for a flash the sensation that the cosmos had turned exactly upside down, that all trees were growing downwards and that all stars were under his feet. Then came slowly the opposite conviction. For the last twenty-four hours the cosmos had really been upside down, but now the capsized universe had come right side up again. This devil from whom he had been fleeing all day was only an elder brother of his own house, who on the other side of the table lay back and laughed at him. He did not for the moment ask any questions of detail; he only knew the happy and silly fact that this shadow, which had pursued him with an intolerable oppression of peril, was only the shadow of a friend trying to catch him up. He knew simultaneously that he was a fool and a free man. For with any recovery from morbidity there must go a certain healthy humiliation. There comes a certain point in such conditions when only three things are possible: first a perpetuation of Satanic pride, secondly tears, and third laughter. Syme's egotism held hard to the first course for a few seconds, and then suddenly adopted the third. Taking his own blue police ticket from his own waist coat pocket, he tossed it on to the table; then he flung his head back until his spike of yellow beard almost pointed at the ceiling, and shouted with a barbaric laughter.

Even in that close den, perpetually filled with the din of knives, plates, cans, clamorous voices, sudden struggles and stampedes, there was something Homeric in Syme's mirth which made many half-drunken men look round.

"What yer laughing at, guv'nor?" asked one wondering labourer from the docks.

"At myself," answered Syme, and went on again into the agony of his ecstatic reaction.

"Pull yourself together," said the Professor, "or you'll get hysterical. Have some more beer. I'll join you."

"You haven't drunk your milk," said Syme.

"My milk!" said the other, in tones of withering and unfathomable contempt, "my milk! Do you think I'd look at the beastly stuff when I'm out of sight of the bloody anarchists? We're all Christians in this room, though perhaps," he added, glancing around at the reeling crowd, "not strict ones. Finish my milk? Great blazes! yes, I'll finish it right enough!" and he knocked the tumbler off the table, making a crash of glass and a splash of silver fluid.

Syme was staring at him with a happy curiosity.

"I understand now," he cried; "of course, you're not an old man at all."

"I can't take my face off here," replied Professor de Worms. "It's rather an elaborate make-up. As to whether I'm an old man, that's not for me to say. I was thirty-eight last birthday."

"Yes, but I mean," said Syme impatiently, "there's nothing the matter with you."

"Yes," answered the other dispassionately. "I am subject to colds."

Syme's laughter at all this had about it a wild weakness of relief. He laughed at the idea of the paralytic Professor being really a young actor dressed up as if for the foot-lights. But he felt that he would have laughed as loudly if a pepperpot had fallen over.

The false Professor drank and wiped his false beard.

"Did you know," he asked, "that that man Gogol was one of us?"

"I? No, I didn't know it," answered Syme in some surprise. "But didn't you?"

"I knew no more than the dead," replied the man who called himself de Worms. "I thought the President was
talking about me, and I rattled in my boots."

"And I thought he was talking about me," said Syme, with his rather reckless laughter. "I had my hand on my revolver all the time."

"So had I," said the Professor grimly; "so had Gogol evidently."

Syme struck the table with an exclamation.

"Why, there were three of us there!" he cried. "Three out of seven is a fighting number. If we had only known that we were three!"

The face of Professor de Worms darkened, and he did not look up.

"We were three," he said. "If we had been three hundred we could still have done nothing."

"Not if we were three hundred against four?" asked Syme, jeering rather boisterously.

"No," said the Professor with sobriety, "not if we were three hundred against Sunday."

And the mere name struck Syme cold and serious; his laughter had died in his heart before it could die on his lips. The face of the unforgettable President sprang into his mind as startling as a coloured photograph, and he remarked this difference between Sunday and all his satellites, that their faces, however fierce or sinister, became gradually blurred by memory like other human faces, whereas Sunday's seemed almost to grow more actual during absence, as if a man's painted portrait should slowly come alive.

They were both silent for a measure of moments, and then Syme's speech came with a rush, like the sudden foaming of champagne.

"Professor," he cried, "it is intolerable. Are you afraid of this man?"

The Professor lifted his heavy lids, and gazed at Syme with large, wide-open, blue eyes of an almost ethereal honesty.

"Yes, I am," he said mildly. "So are you."

Syme was dumb for an instant. Then he rose to his feet erect, like an insulted man, and thrust the chair away from him.

"Yes," he said in a voice indescribable, "you are right. I am afraid of him. Therefore I swear by God that I will seek out this man whom I fear until I find him, and strike him on the mouth. If heaven were his throne and the earth his footstool, I swear that I would pull him down."

"How?" asked the staring Professor. "Why?"

"Because I am afraid of him," said Syme; "and no man should leave in the universe anything of which he is afraid."

De Worms blinked at him with a sort of blind wonder. He made an effort to speak, but Syme went on in a low voice, but with an undercurrent of inhuman exaltation--

"Who would condescend to strike down the mere things that he does not fear? Who would debase himself to be merely brave, like any common prizefighter? Who would stoop to be fearless--like a tree? Fight the thing that you fear. You remember the old tale of the English clergyman who gave the last rites to the brigand of Sicily, and how on his death-bed the great robber said, 'I can give you no money, but I can give you advice for a lifetime: your thumb on the blade, and strike upwards.' So I say to you, strike upwards, if you strike at the stars."

The other looked at the ceiling, one of the tricks of his pose.

"Sunday is a fixed star," he said.

"You shall see him a falling star," said Syme, and put on his hat.

The decision of his gesture drew the Professor vaguely to his feet.

"Have you any idea," he asked, with a sort of benevolent bewilderment, "exactly where you are going?"

"Yes," replied Syme shortly, "I am going to prevent this bomb being thrown in Paris."

"Have you any conception how?" inquired the other.

"No," said Syme with equal decision.

"You remember, of course," resumed the soi-disant de Worms, pulling his beard and looking out of the window, "that when we broke up rather hurriedly the whole arrangements for the atrocity were left in the private hands of the Marquis and Dr. Bull. The Marquis is by this time probably crossing the Channel. But where he will go and what he will do it is doubtful whether even the President knows; certainly we don't know. The only man who does know is Dr. Bull."

"Confound it!" cried Syme. "And we don't know where he is."

"Yes," said the other in his curious, absent-minded way, "I know where he is myself."

"Will you tell me?" asked Syme with eager eyes.

"I will take you there," said the Professor, and took down his own hat from a peg.

Syme stood looking at him with a sort of rigid excitement.

"What do you mean?" he asked sharply. "Will you join me? Will you take the risk?"
"Young man," said the Professor pleasantly, "I am amused to observe that you think I am a coward. As to that I will say only one word, and that shall be entirely in the manner of your own philosophical rhetoric. You think that it is possible to pull down the President. I know that it is impossible, and I am going to try it," and opening the tavern door, which let in a blast of bitter air, they went out together into the dark streets by the docks.

Most of the snow was melted or trampled to mud, but here and there a clot of it still showed grey rather than white in the gloom. The small streets were sloppy and full of pools, which reflected the flaming lamps irregularly, and by accident, like fragments of some other and fallen world. Syme felt almost dazed as he stepped through this growing confusion of lights and shadows; but his companion walked on with a certain briskness, towards where, at the end of the street, an inch or two of the lamplit river looked like a bar of flame.

"Where are you going?" Syme inquired.

"Just now," answered the Professor, "I am going just round the corner to see whether Dr. Bull has gone to bed. He is hygienic, and retires early."

"Dr. Bull!" exclaimed Syme. "Does he live round the corner?"

"No," answered his friend. "As a matter of fact he lives some way off, on the other side of the river, but we can tell from here whether he has gone to bed."

Turning the corner as he spoke, and facing the dim river, flecked with flame, he pointed with his stick to the other bank. On the Surrey side at this point there ran out into the Thames, seeming almost to overhang it, a bulk and cluster of those tall tenements, dotted with lighted windows, and rising like factory chimneys to an almost insane height. Their special poise and position made one block of buildings especially look like a Tower of Babel with a hundred eyes. Syme had never seen any of the sky-scraping buildings in America, so he could only think of the buildings in a dream.

Even as he stared, the highest light in this innumerably lighted turret abruptly went out, as if this black Argus had winked at him with one of his innumerable eyes.

Professor de Worms swung round on his heel, and struck his stick against his boot.

"We are too late," he said, "the hygienic Doctor has gone to bed."

"What do you mean?" asked Syme. "Does he live over there, then?"

"Yes," said de Worms, "behind that particular window which you can't see. Come along and get some dinner. We must call on him tomorrow morning."

Without further parley, he led the way through several by-ways until they came out into the flare and clamour of the East India Dock Road. The Professor, who seemed to know his way about the neighbourhood, proceeded to a place where the line of lighted shops fell back into a sort of abrupt twilight and quiet, in which an old white inn, all out of repair, stood back some twenty feet from the road.

"You can find good English inns left by accident everywhere, like fossils," explained the Professor. "I once found a decent place in the West End."

"I suppose," said Syme, smiling, "that this is the corresponding decent place in the East End?"

"It is," said the Professor reverently, and went in.

In that place they dined and slept, both very thoroughly. The beans and bacon, which these unaccountable people cooked well, the astonishing emergence of Burgundy from their cellars, crowned Syme's sense of a new comradeship and comfort. Through all this ordeal his root horror had been isolation, and there are no words to express the abyss between isolation and having one ally. It may be conceded to the mathematicians that four is twice two. But two is not twice one; two is two thousand times one. That is why, in spite of a hundred disadvantages, the world will always return to monogamy.

Syme was able to pour out for the first time the whole of his outrageous tale, from the time when Gregory had taken him to the little tavern by the river. He did it idly and amply, in a luxuriant monologue, as a man speaks with very old friends. On his side, also, the man who had impersonated Professor de Worms was not less communicative. His own story was almost as silly as Syme's.

"That's a good get-up of yours," said Syme, draining a glass of Macon; "a lot better than old Gogol's. Even at the start I thought he was a bit too hairy."

"A difference of artistic theory," replied the Professor pensively. "Gogol was an idealist. He made up as the abstract or platonic ideal of an anarchist. But I am a realist. I am a portrait painter. But, indeed, to say that I am a portrait painter is an inadequate expression. I am a portrait."

"I don't understand you," said Syme.

"I am a portrait," repeated the Professor. "I am a portrait of the celebrated Professor de Worms, who is, I believe, in Naples."

"You mean you are made up like him," said Syme. "But doesn't he know that you are taking his nose in vain?"

"He knows it right enough," replied his friend cheerfully.
"Then why doesn't he denounce you?"
"I have denounced him," answered the Professor.
"Do explain yourself," said Syme.

"With pleasure, if you don't mind hearing my story," replied the eminent foreign philosopher. "I am by profession an actor, and my name is Wilks. When I was on the stage I mixed with all sorts of Bohemian and blackguard company. Sometimes I touched the edge of the turf, sometimes the riff-raff of the arts, and occasionally the political refugee. In some den of exiled dreamers I was introduced to the great German Nihilist philosopher, Professor de Worms. I did not gather much about him beyond his appearance, which was very disgusting, and which I studied carefully. I understood that he had proved that the destructive principle in the universe was God; hence he insisted on the need for a furious and incessant energy, rending all things in pieces. Energy, he said, was the All. He was lame, shortsighted, and partially paralytic. When I met him I was in a frivolous mood, and I disliked him so much that I resolved to imitate him. If I had been a draughtsman I would have drawn a caricature. I was only an actor, I could only act a caricature. I made myself up into what was meant for a wild exaggeration of the old Professor's dirty old self. When I went into the room full of his supporters I expected to be received with a roar of laughter, or (if they were too far gone) with a roar of indignation at the insult. I cannot describe the surprise I felt when my entrance was received with a respectful silence, followed (when I had first opened my lips) with a murmur of admiration. The curse of the perfect artist had fallen upon me. I had been too subtle, I had been too true. They thought I really was the great Nihilist Professor. I was a healthy-minded young man at the time, and I confess that it was a blow. Before I could fully recover, however, two or three of these admirers ran up to me radiating indignation, and told me that a public insult had been put upon me in the next room. I inquired its nature. It seemed that an impertinent fellow had dressed himself up as a preposterous parody of myself. I had drunk more champagne than was good for me, and in a flash of folly I decided to see the situation through. Consequently it was to meet the glare of the company and my own lifted eyebrows and freezing eyes that the real Professor came into the room.

"I need hardly say there was a collision. The pessimists all round me looked anxiously from one Professor to the other Professor to see which was really the more feeble. But I won. An old man in poor health, like my rival, could not be expected to be so impressively feeble as a young actor in the prime of life. You see, he really had paralysis, and working within this definite limitation, he couldn't be so jolly paralytic as I was. Then he tried to blast my claims intellectually. I countered that by a very simple dodge. Whenever he said something that nobody but he could understand, I replied with something which I could not even understand myself. 'I don't fancy,' he said, 'that you could have worked out the principle that evolution is only negation, since there inheres in it the introduction of lacuna, which are an essential of differentiation.' I replied quite scornfully, 'You read all that up in Pinckwerts; the notion that involution functioned eugenically was exposed long ago by Glumpe.' It is unnecessary for me to say that there never were such people as Pinckwerts and Glumpe. But the people all round (rather to my surprise) seemed to remember them quite well, and the Professor, finding that the learned and mysterious method left him rather at the mercy of an enemy slightly deficient in scruples, fell back upon a more popular form of wit. 'I see,' he sneered, 'you prevail like the false pig in Aesop.' 'And you fail,' I answered, smiling, 'like the hedgehog in Montaigne.' Need I say that there is no hedgehog in Montaigne? 'Your claptrap comes off,' he said; 'so would your beard.' I had no intelligent answer to this, which was quite true and rather witty. But I laughed heartily, answered, 'Like the Pantheist's boots,' at random, and turned on my heel with all the honours of victory. The real Professor was thrown out, but not with violence, though one man tried very patiently to pull off his nose. He is now, I believe, received everywhere in Europe as a delightful impostor. His apparent earnestness and anger, you see, make him all the more entertaining."

"Well," said Syme, "I can understand your putting on his dirty old beard for a night's practical joke, but I don't understand your never taking it off again."

"That is the rest of the story," said the impersonator. "When I myself left the company, followed by reverent applause, I went limping down the dark street, hoping that I should soon be far enough away to be able to walk like a human being. To my astonishment, as I was turning the corner, I felt a touch on the shoulder, and turning, found myself under the shadow of an enormous policeman. He told me I was wanted. I struck a sort of paralytic attitude, and cried in a high German accent, 'Yes, I am wanted--by the oppressed of the world. You are arresting me on the charge of being the great anarchist, Professor de Worms.' The policeman impassively consulted a paper in his hand, 'No, sir,' he said civilly, 'at least, not exactly, sir. I am arresting you on the charge of not being the celebrated anarchist, Professor de Worms.' This charge, if it was criminal at all, was certainly the lighter of the two, and I went along with the man, doubtful, but not greatly dismayed. I was shown into a number of rooms, and eventually into the presence of a police officer, who explained that a serious campaign had been opened against the centres of anxiety, and that this, my successful masquerade, might be of considerable value to the public safety. He offered me a good salary and this little blue card. Though our conversation was short, he struck me as a man of very massive common
sense and humour; but I cannot tell you much about him personally, because--"

Syme laid down his knife and fork.

"I know," he said, "because you talked to him in a dark room."

Professor de Worms nodded and drained his glass.

CHAPTER IX
THE MAN IN SPECTACLES

"BURGUNDY is a jolly thing," said the Professor sadly, as he set his glass down.

"You don't look as if it were," said Syme; "you drink it as if it were medicine."

"You must excuse my manner," said the Professor dismally, "my position is rather a curious one. Inside I am really bursting with boyish merriment; but I acted the paralytic Professor so well, that now I can't leave off. So that when I am among friends, and have no need at all to disguise myself, I still can't help speaking slow and wrinkling my forehead--just as if it were my forehead. I can be quite happy, you understand, but only in a paralytic sort of way. The most buoyant exclamations leap up in my heart, but they come out of my mouth quite different. You should hear me say, 'Buck up, old cock!' It would bring tears to your eyes."

"It does," said Syme; "but I cannot help thinking that apart from all that you are really a bit worried."

The Professor started a little and looked at him steadily.

"You are a very clever fellow," he said, "it is a pleasure to work with you. Yes, I have rather a heavy cloud in my head. There is a great problem to face," and he sank his bald brow in his two hands.

Then he said in a low voice--

"Can you play the piano?"

"Yes," said Syme in simple wonder, "I'm supposed to have a good touch."

Then, as the other did not speak, he added--

"I trust the great cloud is lifted."

After a long silence, the Professor said out of the cavernous shadow of his hands--

"It would have done just as well if you could work a typewriter."

"Thank you," said Syme, "you flatter me."

"Listen to me," said the other, "and remember whom we have to see tomorrow. You and I are going tomorrow to attempt something which is very much more dangerous than trying to steal the Crown Jewels out of the Tower. We are trying to steal a secret from a very sharp, very strong, and very wicked man. I believe there is no man, except the President, of course, who is so seriously startling and formidable as that little grinning fellow in goggles. He has not perhaps the white-hot enthusiasm unto death, the mad martyrdom for anarchy, which marks the Secretary. But then that very fanaticism in the Secretary has a human pathos, and is almost a redeeming trait. But the little Doctor has a brutal sanity that is more shocking than the Secretary's disease. Don't you notice his detestable virility. He bounces like an india-rubber ball. Depend on it, Sunday was not asleep (I wonder if he ever sleeps?) when he locked up all the plans of this outrage in the round, black head of Dr. Bull."

"And you think," said Syme, "that this unique monster will be soothed if I play the piano to him?"

"Don't be an ass," said his mentor. "I mentioned the piano because it gives one quick and independent fingers. Syme, if we are to go through this interview and come out sane or alive, we must have some code of signals between us that this brute will not see. I have made a rough alphabetical cypher corresponding to the five fingers--like this, see," and he rippled with his fingers on the wooden table--"B A D, bad, a word we may frequently require."

Syme poured himself out another glass of wine, and began to study the scheme. He was abnormally quick with his brains at puzzles, and with his hands at conjuring, and it did not take him long to learn how he might convey simple messages by what would seem to be idle taps upon a table or knee. But wine and companionship had always the effect of inspiring him to a farcical ingenuity, and the Professor soon found himself struggling with the too vast energy of the new language, as it passed through the heated brain of Syme.

"We must have several word-signs," said Syme seriously--"words that we are likely to want, fine shades of meaning. My favourite word is 'coeval'. What's yours?"

"Do stop playing the goat," said the Professor plaintively. "You don't know how serious this is."

"'Lush' too," said Syme, shaking his head sagaciously, 'we must have 'lush'--word applied to grass, don't you know?"

"Do you imagine," asked the Professor furiously, "that we are going to talk to Dr. Bull about grass?"

"There are several ways in which the subject could be approached," said Syme reflectively, "and the word introduced without appearing forced. We might say, 'Dr. Bull, as a revolutionist, you remember that a tyrant once advised us to eat grass; and indeed many of us, looking on the fresh lush grass of summer'"

"Do you understand," said the other, "that this is a tragedy?"

"Perfectly," replied Syme; "always be comic in a tragedy. What the deuce else can you do? I wish this language
of yours had a wider scope. I suppose we could not extend it from the fingers to the toes? That would involve pulling off our boots and socks during the conversation, which however unobtrusively performed—"

"Syme," said his friend with a stern simplicity, "go to bed!"

Syme, however, sat up in bed for a considerable time mastering the new code. He was awakened next morning while the east was still sealed with darkness, and found his grey-bearded ally standing like a ghost beside his bed.

Syme sat up in bed blinking; then slowly collected his thoughts, threw off the bed-clothes, and stood up. It seemed to him in some curious way that all the safety and sociability of the night before fell with the bedclothes off him, and he stood up in an air of cold danger. He still felt an entire trust and loyalty towards his companion; but it was the trust between two men going to the scaffold.

"Well," said Syme with a forced cheerfulness as he pulled on his trousers, "I dreamt of that alphabet of yours. Did it take you long to make it up?"

The Professor made no answer, but gazed in front of him with eyes the colour of a wintry sea; so Syme repeated his question.

"I say, did it take you long to invent all this? I'm considered good at these things, and it was a good hour's grind. Did you learn it all on the spot?"

The Professor was silent; his eyes were wide open, and he wore a fixed but very small smile.

"How long did it take you?"

The Professor did not move.

"Confound you, can't you answer?" called out Syme, in a sudden anger that had something like fear underneath.

Whether or no the Professor could answer, he did not.

Syme stood staring back at the stiff face like parchment and the blank, blue eyes. His first thought was that the Professor had gone mad, but his second thought was more frightful. After all, what did he know about this queer creature whom he had heedlessly accepted as a friend? What did he know, except that the man had been at the anarchist breakfast and had told him a ridiculous tale? How improbable it was that there should be another friend there beside Gogol! Was this man's silence a sensational way of declaring war? Was this adamantine stare after all only the awful sneer of some threefold traitor, who had turned for the last time? He stood and strained his ears in this heartless silence. He almost fancied he could hear dynamiters come to capture him shifting softly in the corridor outside.

Then his eye strayed downwards, and he burst out laughing. Though the Professor himself stood there as voiceless as a statue, his five dumb fingers were dancing alive upon the dead table. Syme watched the twinkling movements of the talking hand, and read clearly the message--

"I will only talk like this. We must get used to it."

He rapped out the answer with the impatience of relief--

"All right. Let's get out to breakfast."

They took their hats and sticks in silence; but as Syme took his sword-stick, he held it hard.

They paused for a few minutes only to stuff down coffee and coarse thick sandwiches at a coffee stall, and then made their way across the river, which under the grey and growing light looked as desolate as Acheron. They reached the bottom of the huge block of buildings which they had seen from across the river, and began in silence to mount the naked and numberless stone steps, only pausing now and then to make short remarks on the rail of the banisters. At about every other flight they passed a window; each window showed them a pale and tragic dawn lifting itself laboriously over London. From each the innumerable roofs of slate looked like the leaden surges of a grey, troubled sea after rain. Syme was increasingly conscious that his new adventure had somehow a quality of cold sanity worse than the wild adventures of the past. Last night, for instance, the tall tenements had seemed to him like a tower in a dream. As he now went up the weary and perpetual steps, he was daunted and bewildered by their almost infinite series. But it was not the hot horror of a dream or of anything that might be exaggeration or delusion. Their infinity was more like the empty infinity of arithmetic, something unthinkable, yet necessary to thought. Or it was like the stunning statements of astronomy about the distance of the fixed stars. He was ascending the house of reason, a thing more hideous than unreason itself.

By the time they reached Dr. Bull's landing, a last window showed them a harsh, white dawn edged with banks of a kind of coarse red, more like red clay than red cloud. And when they entered Dr. Bull's bare garret it was full of light.

Syme had been haunted by a half historic memory in connection with these empty rooms and that austere daybreak. The moment he saw the garret and Dr. Bull sitting writing at a table, he remembered what the memory was—the French Revolution. There should have been the black outline of a guillotine against that heavy red and white of the morning. Dr. Bull was in his white shirt and black breeches only; his cropped, dark head might well have just come out of its wig; he might have been Marat or a more slipshod Robespierre.
Yet when he was seen properly, the French fancy fell away. The Jacobins were idealists; there was about this man a murderous materialism. His position gave him a somewhat new appearance. The strong, white light of morning coming from one side creating sharp shadows, made him seem both more pale and more angular than he had looked at the breakfast on the balcony. Thus the two black glasses that encased his eyes might really have been black cavities in his skull, making him look like a death's-head. And, indeed, if ever Death himself sat writing at a wooden table, it might have been he.

He looked up and smiled brightly enough as the men came in, and rose with the resilient rapidity of which the Professor had spoken. He set chairs for both of them, and going to a peg behind the door, proceeded to put on a coat and waistcoat of rough, dark tweed; he buttoned it up neatly, and came back to sit down at his table.

The quiet good humour of his manner left his two opponents helpless. It was with some momentary difficulty that the Professor broke silence and began, "I'm sorry to disturb you so early, comrade," said he, with a careful resumption of the slow de Worms manner. "You have no doubt made all the arrangements for the Paris affair?" Then he added with infinite slowness, "We have information which renders intolerable anything in the nature of a moment's delay."

Dr. Bull smiled again, but continued to gaze on them without speaking. The Professor resumed, a pause before each weary word--

"Please do not think me excessively abrupt; but I advise you to alter those plans, or if it is too late for that, to follow your agent with all the support you can get for him. Comrade Syme and I have had an experience which it would take more time to recount than we can afford, if we are to act on it. I will, however, relate the occurrence in detail, even at the risk of losing time, if you really feel that it is essential to the understanding of the problem we have to discuss."

He was spinning out his sentences, making them intolerably long and lingering, in the hope of maddening the practical little Doctor into an explosion of impatience which might show his hand. But the little Doctor continued only to stare and smile, and the monologue was uphill work. Syme began to feel a new sickness and despair. The Doctor's smile and silence were not at all like the cataleptic stare and horrible silence which he had confronted in the Professor half an hour before. About the Professor's makeup and all his antics there was always something merely grotesque, like a gollywog. Syme remembered those wild woes of yesterday as one remembers being afraid of Bogy in childhood. But here was daylight; here was a healthy, square-shouldered man in tweeds, not odd save for the accident of his ugly spectacles, not glaring or grinning at all, but smiling steadily and not saying a word. The whole had a sense of unbearable reality. Under the increasing sunlight the colours of the Doctor's complexion, the pattern of his tweeds, grew and expanded outrageously, as such things grow too important in a realistic novel. But his smile was quite slight, the pose of his head polite; the only uncanny thing was his silence.

"As I say," resumed the Professor, like a man toiling through heavy sand, "the incident that has occurred to us and has led us to ask for information about the Marquis, is one which you may think it better to have narrated; but as it came in the way of Comrade Syme rather than me--"

His words he seemed to be dragging out like words in an anthem; but Syme, who was watching, saw his long fingers rattle quickly on the edge of the crazy table. He read the message, "You must go on. This devil has sucked me dry!"

Syme plunged into the breach with that bravado of improvisation which always came to him when he was alarmed.

"Yes, the thing really happened to me," he said hastily. "I had the good fortune to fall into conversation with a detective who took me, thanks to my hat, for a respectable person. Wishing to clinch my reputation for respectability, I took him and made him very drunk at the Savoy. Under this influence he became friendly, and told me in so many words that within a day or two they hope to arrest the Marquis in France.

"So unless you or I can get on his track--"

The Doctor was still smiling in the most friendly way, and his protected eyes were still impenetrable. The Professor signalled to Syme that he would resume his explanation, and he began again with the same elaborate calm.

"Syme immediately brought this information to me, and we came here together to see what use you would be inclined to make of it. It seems to me unquestionably urgent that--"

All this time Syme had been staring at the Doctor almost as steadily as the Doctor stared at the Professor, but quite without the smile. The nerves of both comrades-in-arms were near snapping under that strain of motionless amiability, when Syme suddenly leant forward and idly tapped the edge of the table. His message to his ally ran, "I have an intuition."

The Professor, with scarcely a pause in his monologue, signalled back, "Then sit on it."

Syme telegraphed, "It is quite extraordinary."

The other answered, "Extraordinary rot!"
Syme said, "I am a poet."
The other retorted, "You are a dead man."

Syme had gone quite red up to his yellow hair, and his eyes were burning feverishly. As he said he had an intuition, and it had risen to a sort of lightheaded certainty. Resuming his symbolic taps, he signalled to his friend, "You scarcely realise how poetic my intuition is. It has that sudden quality we sometimes feel in the coming of spring."

He then studied the answer on his friend's fingers. The answer was, "Go to hell!"

The Professor then resumed his merely verbal monologue addressed to the Doctor.

"Perhaps I should rather say," said Syme on his fingers, "that it resembles that sudden smell of the sea which may be found in the heart of lush woods."

His companion disdained to reply.

"Or yet again," tapped Syme, "it is positive, as is the passionate red hair of a beautiful woman."

The Professor was continuing his speech, but in the middle of it Syme decided to act. He leant across the table, and said in a voice that could not be neglected--

"Dr. Bull!"

The Doctor's sleek and smiling head did not move, but they could have sworn that under his dark glasses his eyes darted towards Syme.

"Dr. Bull," said Syme, in a voice peculiarly precise and courteous, "would you do me a small favour? Would you be so kind as to take off your spectacles?"

The Professor swung round on his seat, and stared at Syme with a sort of frozen fury of astonishment. Syme, like a man who has thrown his life and fortune on the table, leaned forward with a fiery face. The Doctor did not move.

For a few seconds there was a silence in which one could hear a pin drop, split once by the single hoot of a distant steamer on the Thames. Then Dr. Bull rose slowly, still smiling, and took off his spectacles.

Syme sprang to his feet, stepping backwards a little, like a chemical lecturer from a successful explosion. His eyes were like stars, and for an instant he could only point without speaking.

The Professor had also started to his feet, forgetful of his supposed paralysis. He leant on the back of the chair and stared doubtfully at Dr. Bull, as if the Doctor had been turned into a toad before his eyes. And indeed it was almost as great a transformation scene.

The two detectives saw sitting in the chair before them a very boyish-looking young man, with very frank and happy hazel eyes, an open expression, cockney clothes like those of a city clerk, and an unquestionable breath about him of being very good and rather commonplace. The smile was still there, but it might have been the first smile of a baby.

"I knew I was a poet," cried Syme in a sort of ecstasy. "I knew my intuition was as infallible as the Pope. It was the spectacles that did it! It was all the spectacles. Given those beastly black eyes, and all the rest of him his health and his jolly looks, made him a live devil among dead ones."

"It certainly does make a queer difference," said the Professor shakily. "But as regards the project of Dr. Bull--"

"Project be damned!" roared Syme, beside himself. "Look at him! Look at his face, look at his collar, look at his blessed boots! You don't suppose, do you, that that thing's an anarchist?"

"Syme!" cried the other in an apprehensive agony.

"Why, by God," said Syme, "I'll take the risk of that myself! Dr. Bull, I am a police officer. There's my card," and he flung down the blue card upon the table.

The Professor still feared that all was lost; but he was loyal. He pulled out his own official card and put it beside his friend's. Then the third man burst out laughing, and for the first time that morning they heard his voice.

"I'm awfully glad you chaps have come so early," he said, with a sort of schoolboy flippancy, "for we can all start for France together. Yes, I'm in the force right enough," and he flicked a blue card towards them lightly as a matter of form.

Clapping a brisk bowler on his head and resuming his goblin glasses, the Doctor moved so quickly towards the door, that the others instinctively followed him. Syme seemed a little distraint, and as he passed under the doorway he suddenly struck his stick on the stone passage so that it rang.

"But Lord God Almighty," he cried out, "if this is all right, there were more damned detectives than there were damned dynamiters at the damned Council!"

"We might have fought easily," said Bull; "we were four against three."

The Professor was descending the stairs, but his voice came up from below.

"No," said the voice, "we were not four against three--we were not so lucky. We were four against One."

The others went down the stairs in silence.

The young man called Bull, with an innocent courtesy characteristic of him, insisted on going last until they
reached the street; but there his own robust rapidity asserted itself unconsciously, and he walked quickly on ahead towards a railway inquiry office, talking to the others over his shoulder.

"It is jolly to get some pals," he said. "I've been half dead with the jumps, being quite alone. I nearly flung my arms round Gogol and embraced him, which would have been imprudent. I hope you won't despise me for having been in a blue funk."

"All the blue devils in blue hell," said Syme, "contributed to my blue funk! But the worst devil was you and your infernal goggles."

The young man laughed delightedly.

"Wasn't it a rag?" he said. "Such a simple idea--not my own. I haven't got the brains. You see, I wanted to go into the detective service, especially the anti-dynamite business. But for that purpose they wanted someone to dress up as a dynamiter; and they all swore by blazes that I could never look like a dynamiter. They said my very walk was respectable, and that seen from behind I looked like the British Constitution. They said I looked too healthy and too optimistic, and too reliable and benevolent; they called me all sorts of names at Scotland Yard. They said that if I had been a criminal, I might have made my fortune by looking so like an honest man; but as I had the misfortune to be an honest man, there was not even the remotest chance of my assisting them by ever looking like a criminal. But as last I was brought before some old josser who was high up in the force, and who seemed to have no end of a head on his shoulders. And there the others all talked hopelessly. One asked whether a bushy beard would hide my nice smile; another said that if they blacked my face I might look like a negro anarchist; but this old chap chipped in with a most extraordinary remark. 'A pair of smoked spectacles will do it,' he said positively. 'Look at him now; he looks like an angelic office boy. Put him on a pair of smoked spectacles, and children will scream at the sight of him.' And so it was, by George! When once my eyes were covered, all the rest, smile and big shoulders and short hair, made me look a perfect little devil. As I say, it was simple enough when it was done, like miracles; but that wasn't the really miraculous part of it. There was one really staggering thing about the business, and my head still turns at it."

"What was that?" asked Syme.

"I'll tell you," answered the man in spectacles. "This big pot in the police who sized me up so that he knew how the goggles would go with my hair and socks--by God, he never saw me at all!"

Syme's eyes suddenly flashed on him.

"How was that?" he asked. "I thought you talked to him."

"So I did," said Bull brightly; "but we talked in a pitch-dark room like a coalcellar. There, you would never have guessed that."

"I could not have conceived it," said Syme gravely.

"It is indeed a new idea," said the Professor.

Their new ally was in practical matters a whirlwind. At the inquiry office he asked with businesslike brevity about the trains for Dover. Having got his information, he bundled the company into a cab, and put them and himself inside a railway carriage before they had properly realised the breathless process. They were already on the Calais boat before conversation flowed freely.

"I had already arranged," he explained, "to go to France for my lunch; but I am delighted to have someone to lunch with me. You see, I had to send that beast, the Marquis, over with his bomb, because the President had his eye on me, though God knows how. I'll tell you the story some day. It was perfectly choking. Whenever I tried to slip out of it I saw the President somewhere, smiling out of the bow-window of a club, or taking off his hat to me from the top of an omnibus. I tell you, you can say what you like, that fellow sold himself to the devil; he can be in six places at once."

"So you sent the Marquis off, I understand," asked the Professor. "Was it long ago? Shall we be in time to catch him?"

"Yes," answered the new guide, "I've timed it all. He'll still be at Calais when we arrive."

"But when we do catch him at Calais," said the Professor, "what are we going to do?"

At this question the countenance of Dr. Bull fell for the first time. He reflected a little, and then said--

"Theoretically, I suppose, we ought to call the police."

"Not I," said Syme. "Theoretically I ought to drown myself first. I promised a poor fellow, who was a real modern pessimist, on my word of honour not to tell the police. I'm no hand at casuistry, but I can't break my word to a modern pessimist. It's like breaking one's word to a child."

"I'm in the same boat," said the Professor. "I tried to tell the police and I couldn't, because of some silly oath I took. You see, when I was an actor I was a sort of all-round beast. Perjury or treason is the only crime I haven't committed. If I did that I shouldn't know the difference between right and wrong."

"I've been through all that," said Dr. Bull, "and I've made up my mind. I gave my promise to the Secretary--you know him, man who smiles upside down. My friends, that man is the most utterly unhappy man that was ever
human. It may be his digestion, or his conscience, or his nerves, or his philosophy of the universe, but he's damned, he's in hell! Well, I can't turn on a man like that, and hunt him down. It's like whipping a leper. I may be mad, but that's how I feel; and there's jolly well the end of it."

"I don't think you're mad," said Syme. "I knew you would decide like that when first you--"

"Eh?" said Dr. Bull.

"When first you took off your spectacles."

Dr. Bull smiled a little, and strolled across the deck to look at the sunlit sea. Then he strolled back again, kicking his heels carelessly, and a companionable silence fell between the three men.

"Well," said Syme, "it seems that we have all the same kind of morality or immorality, so we had better face the fact that comes of it."

"Yes," assented the Professor, "you're quite right; and we must hurry up, for I can see the Grey Nose standing out from France."

"The fact that comes of it," said Syme seriously, "is this, that we three are alone on this planet. Gogol has gone, God knows where; perhaps the President has smashed him like a fly. On the Council we are three men against three, like the Romans who held the bridge. But we are worse off than that, first because they can appeal to their organization and we cannot appeal to ours, and second because--"

"Because one of those other three men," said the Professor, "is not a man."

Syme nodded and was silent for a second or two, then he said--

"My idea is this. We must do something to keep the Marquis in Calais till tomorrow midday. I have turned over twenty schemes in my head. We cannot denounce him as a dynamiter; that is agreed. We cannot get him detained on some trivial charge, for we should have to appear; he knows us, and he would smell a rat. We cannot pretend to keep him on anarchist business; he might swallow much in that way, but not the notion of stopping in Calais while the Czar went safely through Paris. We might try to kidnap him, and lock him up ourselves; but he is a well-known man here. He has a whole bodyguard of friends; he is very strong and brave, and the event is doubtful. The only thing I can see to do is actually to take advantage of the very things that are in the Marquis's favour. I am going to profit by the fact that he is a highly respected nobleman. I am going to profit by the fact that he has many friends and moves in the best society."

"What the devil are you talking about?" asked the Professor.

"The Symes are first mentioned in the fourteenth century," said Syme; "but there is a tradition that one of them rode behind Bruce at Bannockburn. Since 1350 the tree is quite clear."

"He's gone off his head," said the little Doctor, staring.

"Our bearings," continued Syme calmly, "are 'argent a chevron gules charged with three cross crosslets of the field.' The motto varies."

The Professor seized Syme roughly by the waistcoat.

"We are just inshore," he said. "Are you seasick or joking in the wrong place?"

"My remarks are almost painfully practical," answered Syme, in an unhurried manner. "The house of St. Eustache also is very ancient. The Marquis cannot deny that he is a gentleman. He cannot deny that I am a gentleman. And in order to put the matter of my social position quite beyond a doubt, I propose at the earliest opportunity to knock his hat off. But here we are in the harbour."

They went on shore under the strong sun in a sort of daze. Syme, who had now taken the lead as Bull had taken it in London, led them along a kind of marine parade until he came to some cafes, embowered in a bulk of greenery and overlooking the sea. As he went before them his step was slightly swaggering, and he swung his stick like a sword. He was making apparently for the extreme end of the line of cafes, but he stopped abruptly. With a sharp gesture he motioned them to silence, but he pointed with one gloved finger to a cafe table under a bank of flowering foliage at which sat the Marquis de St. Eustache, his teeth shining in his thick, black beard, and his bold, brown face shadowed by a light yellow straw hat and outlined against the violet sea.

CHAPTER X
THE DUEL

SYME sat down at a cafe table with his companions, his blue eyes sparkling like the bright sea below, and ordered a bottle of Saumur with a pleased impatience. He was for some reason in a condition of curious hilarity. His spirits were already unnaturally high; they rose as the Saumur sank, and in half an hour his talk was a torrent of nonsense. He professed to be making out a plan of the conversation which was going to ensue between himself and the deadly Marquis. He jotted it down wildly with a pencil. It was arranged like a printed catechism, with questions and answers, and was delivered with an extraordinary rapidity of utterance.

"I shall approach. Before taking off his hat, I shall take off my own. I shall say, 'The Marquis de Saint Eustache, I believe.' He will say, 'The celebrated Mr. Syme, I presume.' He will say in the most exquisite French, 'How are
you?' I shall reply in the most exquisite Cockney, 'Oh, just the Syme--'"

"Oh, shut it," said the man in spectacles. "Pull yourself together, and chuck away that bit of paper. What are you really going to do?"

"But it was a lovely catechism," said Syme pathetically. "Do let me read it you. It has only forty-three questions and answers, and some of the Marquis's answers are wonderfully witty. I like to be just to my enemy."

"But what's the good of it all?" asked Dr. Bull in exasperation.

"It leads up to my challenge, don't you see," said Syme, beaming. "When the Marquis has given the thirty-ninth reply, which runs--"

"Has it by any chance occurred to you," asked the Professor, with a ponderous simplicity, "that the Marquis may not say all the forty-three things you have put down for him? In that case, I understand, your own epigrams may appear somewhat more forced."

Syme struck the table with a radiant face.

"Why, how true that is," he said, "and I never thought of it. Sir, you have an intellect beyond the common. You will make a name."

"Oh, you're as drunk as an owl!" said the Doctor.

"It only remains," continued Syme quite unperturbed, "to adopt some other method of breaking the ice (if I may so express it) between myself and the man I wish to kill. And since the course of a dialogue cannot be predicted by one of its parties alone (as you have pointed out with such recondite acumen), the only thing to be done, I suppose, is for the one party, as far as possible, to do all the dialogue by himself. And so I will, by George!" And he stood up suddenly, his yellow hair blowing in the slight sea breeze.

A band was playing in a cafe chantant hidden somewhere among the trees, and a woman had just stopped singing. On Syme's heated head the bray of the brass band seemed like the jar and jingle of that barrel-organ in Leicester Square, to the tune of which he had once stood up to die. He looked across to the little table where the Marquis sat. The man had two companions now, solemn Frenchmen in frock-coats and silk hats, one of them with the red rosette of the Legion of Honour, evidently people of a solid social position. Besides these black, cylindrical costumes, the Marquis, in his loose straw hat and light spring clothes, looked Bohemian and even barbaric; but he looked the Marquis. Indeed, one might say that he looked the king, with his animal elegance, his scornful eyes, and his proud head lifted against the purple sea. But he was no Christian king, at any rate; he was, rather, some swarthy despot, half Greek, half Asiatic, who in the days when slavery seemed natural looked down on the Mediterranean, on his galley and his groaning slaves. Just so, Syme thought, would the brown-gold face of such a tyrant have shown against the dark green olives and the burning blue.

"Are you going to address the meeting?" asked the Professor peevishly, seeing that Syme still stood up without moving.

Syme drained his last glass of sparkling wine.

"I am," he said, pointing across to the Marquis and his companions, "that meeting. That meeting displeases me. I am going to pull that meeting's great ugly, mahogany-coloured nose."

He stepped across swiftly, if not quite steadily. The Marquis, seeing him, arched his black Assyrian eyebrows in surprise, but smiled politely.

"You are Mr. Syme, I think," he said.

Syme bowed.

"And you are the Marquis de Saint Eustache," he said gracefully. "Permit me to pull your nose."

He leant over to do so, but the Marquis started backwards, upsetting his chair, and the two men in top hats held Syme back by the shoulders.

"This man has insulted me!" said Syme, with gestures of explanation.

"Insulted you?" cried the gentleman with the red rosette, "when?"

"Oh, just now," said Syme recklessly. "He insulted my mother."

"Insulted your mother!" exclaimed the gentleman incredulously.

"Well, anyhow," said Syme, conceding a point, "my aunt."

"But how can the Marquis have insulted your aunt just now?" said the second gentleman with some legitimate wonder. "He has been sitting here all the time."

"Ah, it was what he said!" said Syme darkly.

"I said nothing at all," said the Marquis, "except something about the band. I only said that I liked Wagner played well."

"It was an allusion to my family," said Syme firmly. "My aunt played Wagner badly. It was a painful subject. We are always being insulted about it."

"This seems most extraordinary," said the gentleman who was decore, looking doubtfully at the Marquis.
"Oh, I assure you," said Syme earnestly, "the whole of your conversation was simply packed with sinister allusions to my aunt's weaknesses."

"This is nonsense!" said the second gentleman. "I for one have said nothing for half an hour except that I liked the singing of that girl with black hair."

"Well, there you are again!" said Syme indignantly. "My aunt's was red."

"It seems to me," said the other, "that you are simply seeking a pretext to insult the Marquis."

"By George!" said Syme, facing round and looking at him, "what a clever chap you are!"

The Marquis started up with eyes flaming like a tiger's.

"Seeking a quarrel with me!" he cried. "Seeking a fight with me! By God! there was never a man who had to seek long. These gentlemen will perhaps act for me. There are still four hours of daylight. Let us fight this evening."

Syme bowed with a quite beautiful graciousness.

"Marquis," he said, "your action is worthy of your fame and blood. Permit me to consult for a moment with the gentlemen in whose hands I shall place myself."

In three long strides he rejoined his companions, and they, who had seen his champagne-inspired attack and listened to his idiotic explanations, were quite startled at the look of him. For now that he came back to them he was quite sober, a little pale, and he spoke in a low voice of passionate practicality.

"I have done it," he said hoarsely. "I have fixed a fight on the beast. But look here, and listen carefully. There is no time for talk. You are my seconds, and everything must come from you. Now you must insist, and insist absolutely, on the duel coming off after seven tomorrow, so as to give me the chance of preventing him from catching the 7.45 for Paris. If he misses that he misses his crime. He can't refuse to meet you on such a small point of time and place. But this is what he will do. He will choose a field somewhere near a wayside station, where he can pick up the train. He is a very good swordsman, and he will trust to killing me in time to catch it. But I can fence well too, and I think I can keep him in play, at any rate, until the train is lost. Then perhaps he may kill me to console his feelings. You understand? Very well then, let me introduce you to some charming friends of mine," and leading them quickly across the parade, he presented them to the Marquis's seconds by two very aristocratic names of which they had not previously heard.

Syme was subject to spasms of singular common sense, not otherwise a part of his character. They were (as he said of his impulse about the spectacles) poetic intuitions, and they sometimes rose to the exaltation of prophecy.

He had correctly calculated in this case the policy of his opponent. When the Marquis was informed by his seconds that Syme could only fight in the morning, he must fully have realised that an obstacle had suddenly arisen between him and his bomb-throwing business in the capital. Naturally he could not explain this objection to his friends, so he chose the course which Syme had predicted. He induced his seconds to settle on a small meadow not far from the railway, and he trusted to the fatality of the first engagement.

When he came down very coolly to the field of honour, no one could have guessed that he had any anxiety about a journey; his hands were in his pockets, his straw hat on the back of his head, his handsome face brazen in the sun. But it might have struck a stranger as odd that there appeared in his train, not only his seconds carrying the sword-case, but two of his servants carrying a portmanteau and a luncheon basket.

Early as was the hour, the sun soaked everything in warmth, and Syme was vaguely surprised to see so many spring flowers burning gold and silver in the tall grass in which the whole company stood almost knee-deep.

With the exception of the Marquis, all the men were in sombre and solemn morning-dress, with hats like black chimney-pots; the little Doctor especially, with the addition of his black spectacles, looked like an undertaker in a farce. Syme could not help feeling a comic contrast between this funereal church parade of apparel and the rich and glistening meadow, growing wild flowers everywhere. But, indeed, this comic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the black hats was but a symbol of the tragic contrast between the yellow blossoms and the black business. On his right was a little wood; far away to his left lay the long curve of the railway line, which he was, so to speak, guarding from the Marquis, whose goal and escape it was. In front of him, behind the black group of his opponents, he could see, like a tinted cloud, a small almond bush in flower against the faint line of the sea.

The member of the Legion of Honour, whose name it seemed was Colonel Ducroix, approached the Professor and Dr. Bull with great politeness, and suggested that the play should terminate with the first considerable hurt.

Dr. Bull, however, having been carefully coached by Syme upon this point of policy, insisted, with great dignity and in very bad French, that it should continue until one of the combatants was disabled. Syme had made up his mind that he could avoid disabling the Marquis and prevent the Marquis from disabling him for at least twenty minutes. In twenty minutes the Paris train would have gone by.

"To a man of the well-known skill and valour of Monsieur de St. Eustache," said the Professor solemnly, "it must be a matter of indifference which method is adopted, and our principal has strong reasons for demanding the longer encounter, reasons the delicacy of which prevent me from being explicit, but for the just and honourable
made what should have been a bloody scar on the Marquis's cheek. But there was no scar.

Afterwards he felt his point enter the man's neck below the jaw. It came out clean. Half mad, he thrust again, and

sword. For this purpose, he aimed less at the Marquis's body, and more at his throat and head. A minute and a half

to constantly look away at the railway line, almost as if he feared the train more than the pointed steel. Syme, on the

side, fought fiercely but still carefully, in an intellectual fury, eager to solve the riddle of his own bloodless

curiosity. The Marquis was probably, in a general sense, a better fencer than he, as he had surmised at the beginning,

himself capable. Once his enemy's point ran along his wrist, leaving a slight streak of blood, but it either was not

clear as glass, and he was parrying his enemy's point with a kind of clockwork skill of which he had hardly supposed

him to be such a terrible fighter, and that probably his last hour had come.

He felt a strange and vivid value in all the earth around him, in the grass under his feet; he felt the love of life in

all living things. He could almost fancy that he heard the grass growing; he could almost fancy that even as he stood

fresh flowers were springing up and breaking into blossom in the meadow--flowers blood red and burning gold and

blue, fulfilling the whole pageant of the spring. And whenever his eyes strayed for a flash from the calm, staring,

hypnotic eyes of the Marquis, they saw the little tuft of almond tree against the sky-line. He had the feeling that if by

some miracle he escaped he would be ready to sit for ever before that almond tree, desiring nothing else in the

world.

But while earth and sky and everything had the living beauty of a thing lost, the other half of his head was as

clear as glass, and he was parrying his enemy's point with a kind of clockwork skill of which he had hardly supposed

himself capable. Once his enemy's point ran along his wrist, leaving a slight streak of blood, but it either was not

noticed or was tacitly ignored. Every now and then he riposted, and once or twice he could almost fancy that he felt

his point go home, but as there was no blood on blade or shirt he supposed he was mistaken. Then came an

interruption and a change.

At the risk of losing all, the Marquis, interrupting his quiet stare, flashed one glance over his shoulder at the line

of railway on his right. Then he turned on Syme a face transfigured to that of a fiend, and began to fight as if with

twenty weapons. The attack came so fast and furious, that the one shining sword seemed a shower of shining arrows.

Syme had no chance to look at the railway; but also he had no need. He could guess the reason of the Marquis's

fear in the line of fight with drawn swords also, but still sombre in their dark frock-coats and hats. The principals

saluted. The Colonel said quietly, "Engage!" and the two blades touched and tingled.

When the jar of the joined iron ran up Syme's arm, all the fantastic fears that have been the subject of this story

fell from him like dreams from a man waking up in bed. He remembered them clearly and in order as mere delusions of

the nerves--how the fear of the Professor had been the fear of the tyrannic accidents of nightmare, and how the fear of the Doctor had been the fear of the airless vacuum of science. The first was the old fear that any

miracle might happen, the second the more hopeless modern fear that no miracle can ever happen. But he saw that

these fears were fancies, for he found himself in the presence of the great fact of the fear of death, with its coarse

and pitiless common sense. He felt like a man who had dreamed all night of falling over precipices, and had woke

up on the morning when he was to be hanged. For as soon as he had seen the sunlight run down the channel of his

foe's foreshortened blade, and as soon as he had felt the two tongues of steel touch, vibrating like two living things,

he knew that his enemy was a terrible fighter, and that probably his last hour had come.

Both combatants had thrown off their coats and waistcoats, and stood sword in hand. The seconds stood on each

side of the line of fight with drawn swords also, but still sombre in their dark frock-coats and hats. The principals

saluted. The Colonel said quietly, "Engage!" and the two blades touched and tingled.

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all living things. He could almost fancy that he heard the grass growing; he could almost fancy that even as he stood

fresh flowers were springing up and breaking into blossom in the meadow--flowers blood red and burning gold and

blue, fulfilling the whole pageant of the spring. And whenever his eyes strayed for a flash from the calm, staring,

hypnotic eyes of the Marquis, they saw the little tuft of almond tree against the sky-line. He had the feeling that if by

some miracle he escaped he would be ready to sit for ever before that almond tree, desiring nothing else in the

world.

But while earth and sky and everything had the living beauty of a thing lost, the other half of his head was as

clear as glass, and he was parrying his enemy's point with a kind of clockwork skill of which he had hardly supposed

himself capable. Once his enemy's point ran along his wrist, leaving a slight streak of blood, but it either was not

noticed or was tacitly ignored. Every now and then he riposted, and once or twice he could almost fancy that he felt

his point go home, but as there was no blood on blade or shirt he supposed he was mistaken. Then came an

interruption and a change.

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of railway on his right. Then he turned on Syme a face transfigured to that of a fiend, and began to fight as if with

twenty weapons. The attack came so fast and furious, that the one shining sword seemed a shower of shining arrows.

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twenty weapons. The attack came so fast and furious, that the one shining sword seemed a shower of shining arrows.

Syme had no chance to look at the railway; but also he had no need. He could guess the reason of the Marquis's

sudden madness of battle--the Paris train was in sight.

But the Marquis's morbid energy over-reached itself. Twice Syme, parrying, knocked his opponent's point far

out of the fighting circle; and the third time his riposte was so rapid, that there was no doubt about the hit this time.

Syme's sword actually bent under the weight of the Marquis's body, which it had pierced.

Syme was as certain that he had stuck his blade into his enemy as a gardener that he has stuck his spade into the

ground. Yet the Marquis sprang back from the stroke without a stagger, and Syme stood staring at his own sword-

point like an idiot. There was no blood on it at all.

There was an instant of rigid silence, and then Syme in his turn fell furiously on the other, filled with a flaming

curiosity. The Marquis was probably, in a general sense, a better fencer than he, as he had surmised at the beginning,

but at the moment the Marquis seemed distraught and at a disadvantage. He fought wildly and even weakly, and he

constantly looked away at the railway line, almost as if he feared the train more than the pointed steel. Syme, on the

other hand, fought fiercely but still carefully, in an intellectual fury, eager to solve the riddle of his own bloodless

sword. For this purpose, he aimed less at the Marquis's body, and more at his throat and head. A minute and a half

afterwards he felt his point enter the man's neck below the jaw. It came out clean. Half mad, he thrust again, and

made what should have been a bloody scar on the Marquis's cheek. But there was no scar.

For one moment the heaven of Syme again grew black with supernatural terrors. Surely the man had a charmed
life. But this new spiritual dread was a more awful thing than had been the mere spiritual topsy-turvydom symbolised by the paralytic who pursued him. The Professor was only a goblin; this man was a devil—perhaps he was the Devil! Anyhow, this was certain, that three times had a human sword been driven into him and made no mark. When Syme had that thought he drew himself up, and all that was good in him sang high up in the air as a high wind sings in the trees. He thought of all the human things in his story—of the Chinese lanterns in Saffron Park, of the girl's red hair in the garden, of the honest, beer-swilling sailors down by the dock, of his loyal companions standing by. Perhaps he had been chosen as a champion of all these fresh and kindly things to cross swords with the enemy of all creation. "After all," he said to himself, "I am more than a devil; I am a man. I can do the one thing which Satan himself cannot do— I can die," and as the word went through his head, he heard a faint and far-off hoot, which would soon be the roar of the Paris train.

He fell to fighting again with a supernatural levity, like a Mohammedan panting for Paradise. As the train came nearer and nearer he fancied he could see people putting up the floral arches in Paris; he joined in the growing noise and the glory of the great Republic whose gate he was guarding against Hell. His thoughts rose higher and higher with the rising roar of the train, which ended, as if proudly, in a long and piercing whistle. The train stopped.

Suddenly, to the astonishment of everyone the Marquis sprang back quite out of sword reach and threw down his sword. The leap was wonderful, and not the less wonderful because Syme had plunged his sword a moment before into the man's thigh.

"Stop!" said the Marquis in a voice that compelled a momentary obedience. "I want to say something."

"What is the matter?" asked Colonel Ducroix, staring. "Has there been foul play?"

"There has been foul play somewhere," said Dr. Bull, who was a little pale. "Our principal has wounded the Marquis four times at least, and he is none the worse."

The Marquis put up his hand with a curious air of ghastly patience.

"Please let me speak," he said. "It is rather important. Mr. Syme," he continued, turning to his opponent, "we are fighting today, if I remember right, because you expressed a wish (which I thought irrational) to pull my nose. Would you oblige me by pulling my nose now as quickly as possible? I have to catch a train."

"I protest that this is most irregular," said Dr. Bull indignantly.

"It is certainly somewhat opposed to precedent," said Colonel Ducroix, looking wistfully at his principal. "There is, I think, one case on record (Captain Bellegarde and the Baron Zumpt) in which the weapons were changed in the middle of the encounter at the request of one of the combatants. But one can hardly call one's nose a weapon."

"Will you or will you not pull my nose?" said the Marquis in exasperation. "Come, come, Mr. Syme! You wanted to do it, do it! You can have no conception of how important it is to me. Don't be so selfish! Pull my nose at once, when I ask you!" and he bent slightly forward with a fascinating smile. The Paris train, panting and groaning, had grated into a little station behind the neighbouring hill.

Syme had the feeling he had more than once had in these adventures—the sense that a horrible and sublime wave lifted to heaven was just toppling over. Walking in a world he half understood, he took two paces forward and seized the Roman nose of this remarkable nobleman. He pulled it hard, and it came off in his hand.

He stood for some seconds with a foolish solemnity, with the pasteboard proboscis still between his fingers, looking at it, while the sun and the clouds and the wooded hills looked down upon this imbecile scene.

The Marquis broke the silence in a loud and cheerful voice.

"If anyone has any use for my left eyebrow," he said, "he can have it. Colonel Ducroix, do accept my left eyebrow! It's the kind of thing that might come in useful any day," and he gravely tore off one of his swarthy Assyrian brows, bringing about half his brown forehead with it, and politely offered it to the Colonel, who stood crimson and speechless with rage.

"If I had known," he spluttered, "that I was acting for a poltroon who pads himself to fight—"

"Oh, I know! I know!" said the Marquis, recklessly throwing various parts of himself right and left about the field. "You are making a mistake; but it can't be explained just now. I tell you the train has come into the station!"

"Yes," said Dr. Bull fiercely, "and the train shall go out of the station. It shall go out without you. We know well enough for what devil's work—"

The mysterious Marquis lifted his hands with a desperate gesture. He was a strange scarecrow standing there in the sun with half his old face peeled off, and half another face glaring and grinning from underneath.

"Will you drive me mad?" he cried. "The train—"

"You shall not go by the train," said Syme firmly, and grasped his sword.

The wild figure turned towards Syme, and seemed to be gathering itself for a sublime effort before speaking.

"You great fat, blasted, blear-eyed, blundering, thundering, brainless, Godforsaken, doddering, damned fool!" he said without taking breath. "You great silly, pink-faced, towheaded turnip! You—"

"You shall not go by this train," repeated Syme.
"And why the infernal blazes," roared the other, "should I want to go by the train?"
"We know all," said the Professor sternly. "You are going to Paris to throw a bomb!"
"Going to Jericho to throw a Jabberwock!" cried the other, tearing his hair, which came off easily.
"Have you all got softening of the brain, that you don't realise what I am? Did you really think I wanted to catch
that train? Twenty Paris trains might go by for me. Damn Paris trains!"
"Then what did you care about?" began the Professor.
"What did I care about? I didn't care about catching the train; I cared about whether the train caught me, and
now, by God! it has caught me."
"I regret to inform you," said Syme with restraint, "that your remarks convey no impression to my mind. Perhaps
if you were to remove the remains of your original forehead and some portion of what was once your chin, your
meaning would become clearer. Mental lucidity fulfils itself in many ways. What do you mean by saying that the
train has caught you? It may be my literary fancy, but somehow I feel that it ought to mean something."
"It means everything," said the other, "and the end of everything. Sunday has us now in the hollow of his hand."
"Us!" repeated the Professor, as if stupefied. "What do you mean by 'us'?"
"The police, of course!" said the Marquis, and tore off his scalp and half his face.

The head which emerged was the blonde, well brushed, smooth-haired head which is common in the English
constabulary, but the face was terribly pale.

"I am Inspector Ratcliffe," he said, with a sort of haste that verged on harshness. "My name is pretty well known
to the police, and I can see well enough that you belong to them. But if there is any doubt about my position, I have
a card" and he began to pull a blue card from his pocket.

The Professor gave a tired gesture.
"Oh, don't show it us," he said wearily; "we've got enough of them to equip a paper-chase."

The little man named Bull, had, like many men who seem to be of a mere vivacious vulgarity, sudden
movements of good taste. Here he certainly saved the situation. In the midst of this staggering transformation scene
he stepped forward with all the gravity and responsibility of a second, and addressed the two seconds of the
Marquis.

"Gentlemen," he said, "we all owe you a serious apology; but I assure you that you have not been made the
victims of such a low joke as you imagine, or indeed of anything undignified in a man of honour. You have not
wasted your time; you have helped to save the world. We are not buffoons, but very desperate men at war with a
vast conspiracy. A secret society of anarchists is hunting us like hares; not such unfortunate madmen as may here or
there throw a bomb through starvation or German philosophy, but a rich and powerful and fanatical church, a church
of eastern pessimism, which holds it holy to destroy mankind like vermin. How hard they hunt us you can gather
from the fact that we are driven to such disguises as those for which I apologise, and to such pranks as this one by
which you suffer."

The younger second of the Marquis, a short man with a black moustache, bowed politely, and said--
"Of course, I accept the apology; but you will in your turn forgive me if I decline to follow you further into your
difficulties, and permit myself to say good morning! The sight of an acquaintance and distinguished fellow-
townsmen coming to pieces in the open air is unusual, and, upon the whole, sufficient for one day. Colonel Ducroix,
I would in no way influence your actions, but if you feel with me that our present society is a little abnormal, I am
now going to walk back to the town."

Colonel Ducroix moved mechanically, but then tugged abruptly at his white moustache and broke out--
"No, by George! I won't. If these gentlemen are really in a mess with a lot of low wreckers like that, I'll see them
through it. I have fought for France, and it is hard if I can't fight for civilization."

Dr. Bull took off his hat and waved it, cheering as at a public meeting.
"Don't make too much noise," said Inspector Ratcliffe, "Sunday may hear you."
"Sunday!" cried Bull, and dropped his hat.
"Yes," retorted Ratcliffe, "he may be with them."
"With whom?" asked Syme.
"With the people out of that train," said the other.

"What you say seems utterly wild," began Syme. "Why, as a matter of fact--But, my God," he cried out
suddenly, like a man who sees an explosion a long way off, "by God! if this is true the whole bally lot of us on the
Anarchist Council were against anarchy! Every born man was a detective except the President and his personal
secretary. What can it mean?"

"Mean!" said the new policeman with incredible violence. "It means that we are struck dead! Don't you know
Sunday? Don't you know that his jokes are always so big and simple that one has never thought of them? Can you
think of anything more like Sunday than this, that he should put all his powerful enemies on the Supreme Council,
and then take care that it was not supreme? I tell you he has bought every trust, he has control of every railway line—especially of that railway line!” and he pointed a shaking finger towards the small wayside station. "The whole movement was controlled by him; half the world was ready to rise for him. But there were just five people, perhaps, who would have resisted him . . . and the old devil put them on the Supreme Council, to waste their time in watching each other. Idiots that we are, he planned the whole of our idiocies! Sunday knew that the Professor would chase Syme through London, and that Syme would fight me in France. And he was combining great masses of capital, and seizing great lines of telegraphy, while we five idiots were running after each other like a lot of confounded babies playing blind man's buff."

"Well?" asked Syme with a sort of steadiness.

"Well," replied the other with sudden serenity, "he has found us playing blind man's buff today in a field of great rustic beauty and extreme solitude. He has probably captured the world; it only remains to him to capture this field and all the fools in it. And since you really want to know what was my objection to the arrival of that train, I will tell you. My objection was that Sunday or his Secretary has just this moment got out of it."

Syme uttered an involuntary cry, and they all turned their eyes towards the far-off station. It was quite true that a considerable bulk of people seemed to be moving in their direction. But they were too distant to be distinguished in any way.

"It was a habit of the late Marquis de St. Eustache," said the new policeman, producing a leather case, "always to carry a pair of opera glasses. Either the President or the Secretary is coming after us with that mob. They have caught us in a nice quiet place where we are under no temptations to break our oaths by calling the police. Dr. Bull, I have a suspicion that you will see better through these than through your own highly decorative spectacles."

He handed the field-glasses to the Doctor, who immediately took off his spectacles and put the apparatus to his eyes.

"It cannot be as bad as you say," said the Professor, somewhat shaken. "There are a good number of them certainly, but they may easily be ordinary tourists."

"Do ordinary tourists," asked Bull, with the field-glasses to his eyes, "wear black masks half-way down the face?"

Syme almost tore the glasses out of his hand, and looked through them. Most men in the advancing mob really looked ordinary enough; but it was quite true that two or three of the leaders in front wore black half-masks almost down to their mouths. This disguise is very complete, especially at such a distance, and Syme found it impossible to conclude anything from the clean-shaven jaws and chins of the men talking in the front. But presently as they talked they all smiled and one of them smiled on one side.

CHAPTER XI

THE CRIMINALS CHASE THE POLICE

SYME put the field-glasses from his eyes with an almost ghastly relief.

"The President is not with them, anyhow," he said, and wiped his forehead.

"But surely they are right away on the horizon," said the bewildered Colonel, blinking and but half recovered from Bull's hasty though polite explanation. "Could you possibly know your President among all those people?"

"Could I know a white elephant among all those people!" answered Syme somewhat irritably. "As you very truly say, they are on the horizon; but if he were walking with them . . . by God! I believe this ground would shake."

After an instant's pause the new man called Ratcliffe said with gloomy decision--

"Of course the President isn't with them. I wish to Gemini he were. Much more likely the President is riding in triumph through Paris, or sitting on the ruins of St. Paul's Cathedral."

"This is absurd!" said Syme. "Something may have happened in our absence; but he cannot have carried the world with a rush like that. It is quite true," he added, frowning dubiously at the distant fields that lay towards the little station, "it is certainly true that there seems to be a crowd coming this way; but they are not all the army that you make out."

"Oh, they," said the new detective contemptuously; "no they are not a very valuable force. But let me tell you frankly that they are precisely calculated to our value—we are not much, my boy, in Sunday's universe. He has got hold of all the cables and telegraphs himself. But to kill the Supreme Council he regards as a trivial matter, like a post card; it may be left to his private secretary," and he spat on the grass.

Then he turned to the others and said somewhat austerely--

"There is a great deal to be said for death; but if anyone has any preference for the other alternative, I strongly advise him to walk after me."

With these words, he turned his broad back and strode with silent energy towards the wood. The others gave one glance over their shoulders, and saw that the dark cloud of men had detached itself from the station and was moving with a mysterious discipline across the plain. They saw already, even with the naked eye, black blots on the foremost faces, which marked the masks they wore. They turned and followed their leader, who had already struck
the wood, and disappeared among the twinkling trees.

The sun on the grass was dry and hot. So in plunging into the wood they had a cool shock of shadow, as of
divers who plunge into a dim pool. The inside of the wood was full of shattered sunlight and shaken shadows. They
made a sort of shuddering veil, almost recalling the dizziness of a cinematograph. Even the solid figures walking
with him Syme could hardly see for the patterns of sun and shade that danced upon them. Now a man's head was lit
as with a light of Rembrandt, leaving all else obliterated; now again he had strong and staring white hands with the
face of a negro. The ex-Marquis had pulled the old straw hat over his eyes, and the black shade of the brim cut his
face so squarely in two that it seemed to be wearing one of the black half-masks of their pursuers. The fancy tinted
Syme's overwhelming sense of wonder. Was he wearing a mask? Was anyone wearing a mask? Was anyone
anything? This wood of witchery, in which men's faces turned black and white by turns, in which their figures first
swelled into sunlight and then faded into formless night, this mere chaos of chiaroscuro (after the clear daylight
outside), seemed to Syme a perfect symbol of the world in which he had been moving for three days, this world
where men took off their beards and their spectacles and their noses, and turned into other people. That tragic self-
confidence which he had felt when he believed that the Marquis was a devil had strangely disappeared now that he
knew that the Marquis was a friend. He felt almost inclined to ask after all these bewilderments what was a friend
and what an enemy. Was there anything that was apart from what it seemed? The Marquis had taken off his nose
and turned out to be a detective. Might he not just as well take off his head and turn out to be a hobgoblin? Was not
everything, after all, like this bewildering woodland, this dance of dark and light? Everything only a glimpse, the
glimpse always unforeseen, and always forgotten. For Gabriel Syme had found in the heart of that sun-splashed
wood what many modern painters had found there. He had found the thing which the modern people call
Impressionism, which is another name for that final scepticism which can find no floor to the universe.

As a man in an evil dream strains himself to scream and wake, Syme strove with a sudden effort to fling off this
last and worst of his fancies. With two impatient strides he overtook the man in the Marquis's straw hat, the man
whom he had come to address as Ratcliffe. In a voice exaggeratively loud and cheerful, he broke the bottomless
silence and made conversation.

"May I ask," he said, "where on earth we are all going to?"

So genuine had been the doubts of his soul, that he was quite glad to hear his companion speak in an easy,
human voice.

"We must get down through the town of Lancy to the sea," he said. "I think that part of the country is least likely
to be with them."

"What can you mean by all this?" cried Syme. "They can't be running the real world in that way. Surely not
many working men are anarchists, and surely if they were, mere mobs could not beat modern armies and police."

"Mere mobs!" repeated his new friend with a snort of scorn. "So you talk about mobs and the working classes as
if they were the question. You've got that eternal idiotic idea that if anarchy came it would come from the poor. Why
should it? The poor have been rebels, but they have never been anarchists; they have more interest than anyone else
in there being some decent government. The poor man really has a stake in the country. The rich man hasn't; he can
go away to New Guinea in a yacht. The poor have sometimes objected to being governed badly; the rich have
always objected to being governed at all. Aristocrats were always anarchists, as you can see from the barons' wars."

"As a lecture on English history for the little ones," said Syme, "this is all very nice; but I have not yet grasped
its application."

"Its application is," said his informant, "that most of old Sunday's right-hand men are South African and
American millionaires. That is why he has got hold of all the communications; and that is why the last four
champions of the anti-anarchist police force are running through a wood like rabbits."

"Millionaires I can understand," said Syme thoughtfully, "they are nearly all mad. But getting hold of a few
wicked old gentlemen with hobbies is one thing; getting hold of great Christian nations is another. I would bet the
nose off my face (forgive the allusion) that Sunday would stand perfectly helpless before the task of converting any
ordinary healthy person anywhere."

"Well," said the other, "it rather depends what sort of person you mean."

"Well, for instance," said Syme, "he could never convert that person," and he pointed straight in front of him.

They had come to an open space of sunlight, which seemed to express to Syme the final return of his own good
sense; and in the middle of this forest clearing was a figure that might well stand for that common sense in an almost
awful actuality. Burnt by the sun and stained with perspiration, and grave with the bottomless gravity of small
necessary toils, a heavy French peasant was cutting wood with a hatchet. His cart stood a few yards off, already half
full of timber; and the horse that cropped the grass was, like his master, valorous but not desperate; like his master,
he was even prosperous, but yet was almost sad. The man was a Norman, taller than the average of the French and
very angular; and his swarthy figure stood dark against a square of sunlight, almost like some allegoric figure of
labour frescoed on a ground of gold.

"Mr. Syme is saying," called out Ratcliffe to the French Colonel, "that this man, at least, will never be an anarchist."

"Mr. Syme is right enough there," answered Colonel Ducroix, laughing, "if only for the reason that he has plenty of property to defend. But I forgot that in your country you are not used to peasants being wealthy."

"He looks poor," said Dr. Bull doubtfully.

"Quite so," said the Colonel; "that is why he is rich."

"I have an idea," called out Dr. Bull suddenly; "how much would he take to give us a lift in his cart? Those dogs are all on foot, and we could soon leave them behind."

"Oh, give him anything!" said Syme eagerly. "I have piles of money on me."

"That will never do," said the Colonel; "he will never have any respect for you unless you drive a bargain."

"Oh, if he haggles!" began Bull impatiently.

"He haggles because he is a free man," said the other. "You do not understand; he would not see the meaning of generosity. He is not being tipped."

And even while they seemed to hear the heavy feet of their strange pursuers behind them, they had to stand and stamp while the French Colonel talked to the French wood-cutter with all the leisurely badinage and bickering of market-day. At the end of the four minutes, however, they saw that the Colonel was right, for the wood-cutter entered into their plans, not with the vague servility of a tout too-well paid, but with the seriousness of a solicitor who had been paid the proper fee. He told them that the best thing they could do was to make their way down to the little inn on the hills above Lancy, where the innkeeper, an old soldier who had become devout in his latter years, would be certain to sympathise with them, and even to take risks in their support. The whole company, therefore, piled themselves on top of the stacks of wood, and went rocking in the rude cart down the other and steeper side of the woodland. Heavy and ramshackle as was the vehicle, it was driven quickly enough, and they soon had the exhilarating impression of distancing altogether those, whoever they were, who were hunting them. For, after all, the riddle as to where the anarchists had got all these followers was still unsolved. One man's presence had sufficed for them; they had fled at the first sight of the deformed smile of the Secretary. Syme every now and then looked back over his shoulder at the army on their track.

As the wood grew first thinner and then smaller with distance, he could see the sunlit slopes beyond it and above it; and across these was still moving the square black mob like one monstrous beetle. In the very strong sunlight and with his own very strong eyes, which were almost telescopic, Syme could see this mass of men quite plainly. He could see them as separate human figures; but he was increasingly surprised by the way in which they moved as one man. They seemed to be dressed in dark clothes and plain hats, like any common crowd out of the streets; but they did not spread and sprawl and trail by various lines to the attack, as would be natural in an ordinary mob. They moved with a sort of dreadful and wicked woodenness, like a staring army of automatons.

Syme pointed this out to Ratcliffe.

"Yes," replied the policeman, "that's discipline. That's Sunday. He is perhaps five hundred miles off, but the fear of him is on all of them, like the finger of God. Yes, they are walking regularly; and you bet your boots that they are talking regularly, yes, and thinking regularly. But the one important thing for us is that they are disappearing regularly."

Syme nodded. It was true that the black patch of the pursuing men was growing smaller and smaller as the peasant belaboured his horse.

The level of the sunlit landscape, though flat as a whole, fell away on the farther side of the wood in billows of heavy slope towards the sea, in a way not unlike the lower slopes of the Sussex downs. The only difference was that in Sussex the road would have been broken and angular like a little brook, but here the white French road fell sheer in front of them like a waterfall. Down this direct descent the cart clattered at a considerable angle, and in a few minutes, the road growing yet steeper, they saw below them the little harbour of Lancy and a great blue arc of the sea. The travelling cloud of their enemies had wholly disappeared from the horizon.

The horse and cart took a sharp turn round a clump of elms, and the horse's nose nearly struck the face of an old gentleman who was sitting on the benches outside the little cafe of "Le Soleil d'Or." The peasant grunted an apology, and got down from his seat. The others also descended one by one, and spoke to the old gentleman with fragmentary phrases of courtesy, for it was quite evident from his expansive manner that he was the owner of the little tavern.

He was a white-haired, apple-faced old boy, with sleepy eyes and a grey moustache; stout, sedentary, and very innocent, of a type that may often be found in France, but is still commoner in Catholic Germany. Everything about him, his pipe, his pot of beer, his flowers, and his beehive, suggested an ancestral peace; only when his visitors looked up as they entered the inn-parlour, they saw the sword upon the wall.

The Colonel, who greeted the innkeeper as an old friend, passed rapidly into the inn-parlour, and sat down
ordering some ritual refreshment. The military decision of his action interested Syme, who sat next to him, and he took the opportunity when the old innkeeper had gone out of satisfying his curiosity.

"May I ask you, Colonel," he said in a low voice, "why we have come here?"

Colonel Ducroix smiled behind his bristly white mustache.

"For two reasons, sir," he said; "and I will give first, not the most important, but the most utilitarian. We came here because this is the only place within twenty miles in which we can get horses."

"Horses!" repeated Syme, looking up quickly.

"Yes," replied the other; "if you people are really to distance your enemies it is horses or nothing for you, unless of course you have bicycles and motor-cars in your pocket."

"And where do you advise us to make for?" asked Syme doubtfully.

"Beyond question," replied the Colonel, "you had better make all haste to the police station beyond the town. My friend, whom I seconded under somewhat deceptive circumstances, seems to me to exaggerate very much the possibilities of a general rising; but even he would hardly maintain, I suppose, that you were not safe with the gendarmes."

Syme nodded gravely; then he said abruptly--

"And your other reason for coming here?"

"My other reason for coming here," said Ducroix soberly, "is that it is just as well to see a good man or two when one is possibly near to death."

Syme looked up at the wall, and saw a crudely-painted and pathetic religious picture. Then he said--

"You are right," and then almost immediately afterwards, "Has anyone seen about the horses?"

"Yes," answered Ducroix, "you may be quite certain that I gave orders the moment I came in. Those enemies of yours gave no impression of hurry, but they were really moving wonderfully fast, like a well-trained army. I had no idea that the anarchists had so much discipline. You have not a moment to waste."

Almost as he spoke, the old innkeeper with the blue eyes and white hair came ambling into the room, and announced that six horses were saddled outside.

By Ducroix's advice the five others equipped themselves with some portable form of food and wine, and keeping their duelling swords as the only weapons available, they clattered away down the steep, white road. The two servants, who had carried the Marquis's luggage when he was a marquis, were left behind to drink at the cafe by common consent, and not at all against their own inclination.

By this time the afternoon sun was slanting westward, and by its rays Syme could see the sturdy figure of the old innkeeper growing smaller and smaller, but still standing and looking after them quite silently, the sunshine in his silver hair. Syme had a fixed, superstitious fancy, left in his mind by the chance phrase of the Colonel, that this was indeed, perhaps, the last honest stranger whom he should ever see upon the earth.

He was still looking at this dwindling figure, which stood as a mere grey blot touched with a white flame against the great green wall of the steep down behind him. And as he stared over the top of the down behind the innkeeper, there appeared an army of black-clad and marching men. They seemed to hang above the good man and his house like a black cloud of locusts. The horses had been saddled none too soon.

CHAPTER XII
THE EARTH IN ANARCHY

URGING the horses to a gallop, without respect to the rather rugged descent of the road, the horsemen soon regained their advantage over the men on the march, and at last the bulk of the first buildings of Lancy cut off the sight of their pursuers. Nevertheless, the ride had been a long one, and by the time they reached the real town the west was warming with the colour and quality of sunset. The Colonel suggested that, before making finally for the police station, they should make the effort, in passing, to attach to themselves one more individual who might be useful.

"Four out of the five rich men in this town," he said, "are common swindlers. I suppose the proportion is pretty equal all over the world. The fifth is a friend of mine, and a very fine fellow; and what is even more important from our point of view, he owns a motor-car."

"I am afraid," said the Professor in his mirthful way, looking back along the white road on which the black, crawling patch might appear at any moment, "I am afraid we have hardly time for afternoon calls."

"Doctor Renard's house is only three minutes off," said the Colonel.

"Our danger," said Dr. Bull, "is not two minutes off."

"Yes," said Syme, "if we ride on fast we must leave them behind, for they are on foot."

"He has a motor-car," said the Colonel.

"But we may not get it," said Bull.

"Yes, he is quite on your side."
"But he might be out."

"Hold your tongue," said Syme suddenly. "What is that noise?"

For a second they all sat as still as equestrian statues, and for a second—for two or three or four seconds—heaven and earth seemed equally still. Then all their ears, in an agony of attention, heard along the road that indescribable thrill and throb that means only one thing—horses!

The Colonel's face had an instantaneous change, as if lightning had struck it, and yet left it scatheless. "They have done us," he said, with brief military irony. "Prepare to receive cavalry!"

"Where can they have got the horses?" asked Syme, as he mechanically urged his steed to a canter.

The Colonel was silent for a little, then he said in a strained voice—

"I was speaking with strict accuracy when I said that the 'Soleil d'Or' was the only place where one can get horses within twenty miles."

"No!" said Syme violently, "I don't believe he'd do it. Not with all that white hair."

"He may have been forced," said the Colonel gently. "They must be at least a hundred strong, for which reason we are all going to see my friend Renard, who has a motor-car."

With these words he swung his horse suddenly round a street corner, and went down the street with such thundering speed, that the others, though already well at the gallop, had difficulty in following the flying tail of his horse.

Dr. Renard inhabited a high and comfortable house at the top of a steep street, so that when the riders alighted at his door they could once more see the solid green ridge of the hill, with the white road across it, standing up above all the roofs of the town. They breathed again to see that the road as yet was clear, and they rang the bell.

Dr. Renard was a beaming, brown-bearded man, a good example of that silent but very busy professional class which France has preserved even more perfectly than England. When the matter was explained to him he pooh-poohed the panic of the ex-Marquis altogether; he said, with the solid French scepticism, that there was no conceivable probability of a general anarchist rising. "Anarchy," he said, shrugging his shoulders, "it is childishness!"

"Et ca," cried out the Colonel suddenly, pointing over the other's shoulder, "and that is childishness, isn't it?"

They all looked round, and saw a curve of black cavalry come sweeping over the top of the hill with all the energy of Attila. Swiftly as they rode, however, the whole rank still kept well together, and they could see the black vizards of the first line as level as a line of uniforms. But although the main black square was the same, though travelling faster, there was now one sensational difference which they could see clearly upon the slope of the hill, as if upon a slanted map. The bulk of the riders were in one block; but one rider flew far ahead of the column, and with frantic movements of hand and heel urged his horse faster and faster, so that one might have fancied that he was not the pursuer but the pursued. But even at that great distance they could see something so fanatical, so unquestionable in his figure, that they knew it was the Secretary himself. "I am sorry to cut short a cultured discussion," said the Colonel, "but can you lend me your motor-car now, in two minutes?"

"I have a suspicion that you are all mad," said Dr. Renard, smiling sociably; "but God forbid that madness should in any way interrupt friendship. Let us go round to the garage."

Dr. Renard was a mild man with monstrous wealth; his rooms were like the Musee de Cluny, and he had three motor-cars. These, however, he seemed to use very sparingly, having the simple tastes of the French middle class, and when his impatient friends came to examine them, it took them some time to assure themselves that one of them even could be made to work. This with some difficulty they brought round into the street before the Doctor's house. When they came out of the dim garage they were startled to find that twilight had already fallen with the abruptness of night in the tropics. Either they had been longer in the place than they imagined, or some unusual canopy of cloud had gathered over the town. They looked down the steep streets, and seemed to see a slight mist coming up from the sea.

"It is now or never," said Dr. Bull. "I hear horses."

"No," corrected the Professor, "a horse."

And as they listened, it was evident that the noise, rapidly coming nearer on the rattling stones, was not the noise of the whole cavalcade but that of the one horseman, who had left it far behind—the insane Secretary.

Syme's family, like most of those who end in the simple life, had once owned a motor, and he knew all about them. He had leapt at once into the chauffeur's seat, and with flushed face was wrenching and tugging at the disused machinery. He bent his strength upon one handle, and then said quite quietly—

"I am afraid it's no go."

As he spoke, there swept round the corner a man rigid on his rushing horse, with the rush and rigidity of an arrow. He had a smile that thrust out his chin as if it were dislocated. He swept alongside of the stationary car, into which its company had crowded, and laid his hand on the front. It was the Secretary, and his mouth went quite
straight in the solemnity of triumph.

Syme was leaning hard upon the steering wheel, and there was no sound but the rumble of the other pursuers riding into the town. Then there came quite suddenly a scream of scraping iron, and the car leapt forward. It plucked the Secretary clean out of his saddle, as a knife is whipped out of its sheath, trailed him kicking terribly for twenty yards, and left him flung flat upon the road far in front of his frightened horse. As the car took the corner of the street with a splendid curve, they could just see the other anarchists filling the street and raising their fallen leader.

"I can't understand why it has grown so dark," said the Professor at last in a low voice.

"Going to be a storm, I think," said Dr. Bull. "I say, it's a pity we haven't got a light on this car, if only to see by."

"We have," said the Colonel, and from the floor of the car he fished up a heavy, old-fashioned, carved iron lantern with a light inside it. It was obviously an antique, and it would seem as if its original use had been in some way semi-religious, for there was a rude moulding of a cross upon one of its sides.

"Where on earth did you get that?" asked the Professor.

"I got it where I got the car," answered the Colonel, chuckling, "from my best friend. While our friend here was fighting with the steering wheel, I ran up the front steps of the house and spoke to Renard, who was standing in his own porch, you will remember. 'I suppose,' I said, 'there's no time to get a lamp.' He looked up, blinking amiably at the beautiful arched ceiling of his own front hall. From this was suspended, by chains of exquisite ironwork, this lantern, one of the hundred treasures of his treasure house. By sheer force he tore the lamp out of his own ceiling, shattering the painted panels, and bringing down two blue vases with his violence. Then he handed me the iron lantern, and I put it in the car. Was I not right when I said that Dr. Renard was worth knowing?"

"You were," said Syme seriously, and hung the heavy lantern over the front. There was a certain allegory of their whole position in the contrast between the modern automobile and its strange ecclesiastical lamp. Hitherto they had passed through the quietest part of the town, meeting at most one or two pedestrians, who could give them no hint of the peace or the hostility of the place. Now, however, the windows in the houses began one by one to be lit up, giving a greater sense of habitation and humanity. Dr. Bull turned to the new detective who had led their flight, and permitted himself one of his natural and friendly smiles.

"These lights make one feel more cheerful."

Inspector Ratcliffe drew his brows together.

"There is only one set of lights that make me more cheerful," he said, "and they are those lights of the police station which I can see beyond the town. Please God we may be there in ten minutes."

Then all Bull's boiling good sense and optimism broke suddenly out of him.

"Oh, this is all raving nonsense!" he cried. "If you really think that ordinary people in ordinary houses are anarchists, you must be madder than an anarchist yourself. If we turned and fought these fellows, the whole town would fight for us."

"You still believe that," asked the Colonel incredulously.

"You will all believe it soon," said the other with a hopeless calm.

There was a puzzled pause for some little time, and then the Colonel began again abruptly--

"No, I can't believe it. The thing is nonsense. The plain people of a peaceable French town--"

He was cut short by a bang and a blaze of light, which seemed close to his eyes. As the car sped on it left a floating patch of white smoke behind it, and Syme had heard a shot shriek past his ear.

"My God!" said the Colonel, "someone has shot at us."

"It need not interrupt conversation," said the gloomy Ratcliffe. "Pray resume your remarks, Colonel. You were talking, I think, about the plain people of a peaceable French town."

The staring Colonel was long past minding satire. He rolled his eyes all round the street.

"It is extraordinary," he said, "most extraordinary."
"A fastidious person," said Syme, "might even call it unpleasant. However, I suppose those lights out in the field beyond this street are the Gendarmerie. We shall soon get there."

"No," said Inspector Ratcliffe, "we shall never get there."

He had been standing up and looking keenly ahead of him. Now he sat down and smoothed his sleek hair with a weary gesture.

"What do you mean?" asked Bull sharply.

"I mean that we shall never get there," said the pessimist placidly. "They have two rows of armed men across the road already; I can see them from here. The town is in arms, as I said it was. I can only wallow in the exquisite comfort of my own exactitude."

And Ratcliffe sat down comfortably in the car and lit a cigarette, but the others rose excitedly and stared down the road. Syme had slowed down the car as their plans became doubtful, and he brought it finally to a standstill just at the corner of a side street that ran down very steeply to the sea.

The town was mostly in shadow, but the sun had not sunk; wherever its level light could break through, it painted everything a burning gold. Up this side street the last sunset light shone as sharp and narrow as the shaft of artificial light at the theatre. It struck the car of the five friends, and lit it like a burning chariot. But the rest of the street, especially the two ends of it, was in the deepest twilight, and for some seconds they could see nothing. Then Syme, whose eyes were the keenest, broke into a little bitter whistle, and said

"It is quite true. There is a crowd or an army or some such thing across the end of that street."

"Well, if there is," said Bull impatiently, "it must be something else--a sham fight or the mayor's birthday or something. I cannot and will not believe that plain, jolly people in a place like this walk about with dynamite in their pockets. Get on a bit, Syme, and let us look at them."

The car crawled about a hundred yards farther, and then they were all startled by Dr. Bull breaking into a high crow of laughter.

"Why, you silly mugs!" he cried, "what did I tell you. That crowd's as law-abiding as a cow, and if it weren't, it's on our side."

"How do you know?" asked the professor, staring.

"You blind bat," cried Bull, "don't you see who is leading them?"

They peered again, and then the Colonel, with a catch in his voice, cried out--

"Why, it's Renard!"

There was, indeed, a rank of dim figures running across the road, and they could not be clearly seen; but far enough in front to catch the accident of the evening light was stalking up and down the unmistakable Dr. Renard, in a white hat, stroking his long brown beard, and holding a revolver in his left hand.

"What a fool I've been!" exclaimed the Colonel. "Of course, the dear old boy has turned out to help us."

Dr. Bull was bubbling over with laughter, swinging the sword in his hand as carelessly as a cane. He jumped out of the car and ran across the intervening space, calling out--

"Dr. Renard! Dr. Renard!"

An instant after Syme thought his own eyes had gone mad in his head. For the philanthropic Dr. Renard had deliberately raised his revolver and fired twice at Bull, so that the shots rang down the road.

Almost at the same second as the puff of white cloud went up from this atrocious explosion a long puff of white cloud went up also from the cigarette of the cynical Ratcliffe. Like all the rest he turned a little pale, but he smiled. Dr. Bull, at whom the bullets had been fired, just missing his scalp, stood quite still in the middle of the road without a sign of fear, and then turned very slowly and crawled back to the car, and climbed in with two holes through his hat.

"Well," said the cigarette smoker slowly, "what do you think now?"

"I think," said Dr. Bull with precision, "that I am lying in bed at No. 217 Peabody Buildings, and that I shall soon wake up with a jump; or, if that's not it, I think that I am sitting in a small cushioned cell in Hanwell, and that the doctor can't make much of my case. But if you want to know what I don't think, I'll tell you. I don't think what you think. I don't think, and I never shall think, that the mass of ordinary men are a pack of dirty modern thinkers. No, sir, I'm a democrat, and I still don't believe that Sunday could convert one average navvy or counter-jumper. No, I may be mad, but humanity isn't."

Syme turned his bright blue eyes on Bull with an earnestness which he did not commonly make clear.

"You are a very fine fellow," he said. "You can believe in a sanity which is not merely your sanity. And you're right enough about humanity, about peasants and people like that jolly old innkeeper. But you're not right about Renard. I suspected him from the first. He's rationalistic, and, what's worse, he's rich. When duty and religion are really destroyed, it will be by the rich."

"They are really destroyed now," said the man with a cigarette, and rose with his hands in his pockets. "The
devils are coming on!"

The men in the motor-car looked anxiously in the direction of his dreamy gaze, and they saw that the whole regiment at the end of the road was advancing upon them, Dr. Renard marching furiously in front, his beard flying in the breeze.

The Colonel sprang out of the car with an intolerant exclamation.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "the thing is incredible. It must be a practical joke. If you knew Renard as I do--it's like calling Queen Victoria a dynamiter. If you had got the man's character into your head--"

"Dr. Bull," said Syme sardonically, "has at least got it into his hat."

"I tell you it can't be!" cried the Colonel, stamping.

"Renard shall explain it. He shall explain it to me," and he strode forward.

"Don't be in such a hurry," drawled the smoker. "He will very soon explain it to all of us."

But the impatient Colonel was already out of earshot, advancing towards the advancing enemy. The excited Dr. Renard lifted his pistol again, but perceiving his opponent, hesitated, and the Colonel came face to face with him with frantic gestures of remonstrance.

"It is no good," said Syme. "He will never get anything out of that old heathen. I vote we drive bang through the thick of them, bang as the bullets went through Bull's hat. We may all be killed, but we must kill a tidy number of them."

"I won't 'ave it," said Dr. Bull, growing more vulgar in the sincerity of his virtue. "The poor chaps may be making a mistake. Give the Colonel a chance."

"Shall we go back, then?" asked the Professor.

"No," said Ratcliffe in a cold voice, "the street behind us is held too. In fact, I seem to see there another friend of yours, Syme."

Syme spun round smartly, and stared backwards at the track which they had travelled. He saw an irregular body of horsemen gathering and galloping towards them in the gloom. He saw above the foremost saddle the silver gleam of a sword, and then as it grew nearer the silver gleam of an old man's hair. The next moment, with shattering violence, he had swung the motor round and sent it dashing down the steep side street to the sea, like a man that desired only to die.

"What the devil is up?" cried the Professor, seizing his arm.

"The morning star has fallen!" said Syme, as his own car went down the darkness like a falling star.

The others did not understand his words, but when they looked back at the street above they saw the hostile cavalry coming round the corner and down the slopes after them; and foremost of all rode the good innkeeper, flushed with the fiery innocence of the evening light.

"The world is insane!" said the Professor, and buried his face in his hands.

"No," said Dr. Bull in adamantine humility, "it is I."

"What are we going to do?" asked the Professor.

"At this moment," said Syme, with a scientific detachment, "I think we are going to smash into a lamppost."

The next instant the automobile had come with a catastrophic jar against an iron object. The instant after that four men had crawled out from under a chaos of metal, and a tall lean lamp-post that had stood up straight on the edge of the marine parade stood out, bent and twisted, like the branch of a broken tree.

"Well, we smashed something," said the Professor, with a faint smile. "That's some comfort."

"You're becoming an anarchist," said Syme, dusting his clothes with his instinct of daintiness.

"Everyone is," said Ratcliffe.

As they spoke, the white-haired horseman and his followers came thundering from above, and almost at the same moment a dark string of men ran shouting along the sea-front. Syme snatched a sword, and took it in his teeth; he stuck two others under his arm-pits, took a fourth in his left hand and the lantern in his right, and leapt off the high parade on to the beach below.

The others leapt after him, with a common acceptance of such decisive action, leaving the debris and the gathering mob above them.

"We have one more chance," said Syme, taking the steel out of his mouth. "Whatever all this pandemonium means, I suppose the police station will help us. We can't get there, for they hold the way. But there's a pier or breakwater runs out into the sea just here, which we could defend longer than anything else, like Horatius and his bridge. We must defend it till the Gendarmerie turn out. Keep after me."

They followed him as he went crunching down the beach, and in a second or two their boots broke not on the sea gravel, but on broad, flat stones. They marched down a long, low jetty, running out in one arm into the dim, boiling sea, and when they came to the end of it they felt that they had come to the end of their story. They turned and faced the town.
That town was transfigured with uproar. All along the high parade from which they had just descended was a
dark and roaring stream of humanity, with tossing arms and fiery faces, groping and glaring towards them. The long
dark line was dotted with torches and lanterns; but even where no flame lit up a furious face, they could see in the
farthest figure, in the most shadowy gesture, an organised hate. It was clear that they were the accursed of all men,
and they knew not why.

Two or three men, looking little and black like monkeys, leapt over the edge as they had done and dropped on to
the beach. These came ploughing down the deep sand, shouting horribly, and strove to wade into the sea at random.
The example was followed, and the whole black mass of men began to run and drip over the edge like black treacle.

Foremost among the men on the beach Syme saw the peasant who had driven their cart. He splashed into the surf
on a huge cart-horse, and shook his axe at them.

"The peasant!" cried Syme. "They have not risen since the Middle Ages."

"Even if the police do come now," said the Professor mournfully, "they can do nothing with this mob."

"Nonsense!" said Bull desperately; "there must be some people left in the town who are human."

"No," said the hopeless Inspector, "the human being will soon be extinct. We are the last of mankind."

"It may be," said the Professor absently. Then he added in his dreamy voice, "What is all that at the end of the
'Dunciad'?"

'Nor public flame; nor private, dares to shine; Nor human light is left, nor glimpse divine! Lo! thy dread Empire,
Chaos, is restored; Light dies before thine uncreating word: Thy hand, great Anarch, lets the curtain fall; And
universal darkness buries all.'"

"Stop!" cried Bull suddenly, "the gendarmes are out."

The low lights of the police station were indeed blotted and broken with hurrying figures, and they heard through
the darkness the clash and jingle of a disciplined cavalry.

"They are charging the mob!" cried Bull in ecstasy or alarm.

"No," said Syme, "they are formed along the parade."

"They have unslung their carbines," cried Bull dancing with excitement.

"Yes," said Ratcliffe, "and they are going to fire on us."

As he spoke there came a long crackle of musketry, and bullets seemed to hop like hailstones on the stones in
front of them.

"The gendarmes have joined them!" cried the Professor, and struck his forehead.

"I am in the padded cell," said Bull solidly.

There was a long silence, and then Ratcliffe said, looking out over the swollen sea, all a sort of grey purple--

"What does it matter who is mad or who is sane? We shall all be dead soon."

Syme turned to him and said--

"You are quite hopeless, then?"

Mr. Ratcliffe kept a stony silence; then at last he said quietly--

"No; oddly enough I am not quite hopeless. There is one insane little hope that I cannot get out of my mind. The
power of this whole planet is against us, yet I cannot help wondering whether this one silly little hope is hopeless
yet."

"In what or whom is your hope?" asked Syme with curiosity.

"In a man I never saw," said the other, looking at the leaden sea.

"I know what you mean," said Syme in a low voice, "the man in the dark room. But Sunday must have killed
him by now."

"Perhaps," said the other steadily; "but if so, he was the only man whom Sunday found it hard to kill."

"I heard what you said," said the Professor, with his back turned. "I also am holding hard on to the thing I never
saw."

All of a sudden Syme, who was standing as if blind with introspective thought, swung round and cried out, like a
man waking from sleep--

"Where is the Colonel? I thought he was with us!"

"The Colonel! Yes," cried Bull, "where on earth is the Colonel?"

"He went to speak to Renard," said the Professor.

"We cannot leave him among all those beasts," cried Syme. "Let us die like gentlemen if--"

"Do not pity the Colonel," said Ratcliffe, with a pale sneer. "He is extremely comfortable. He is--"

"No! no! no!" cried Syme in a kind of frenzy, "not the Colonel too! I will never believe it!"

"Will you believe your eyes?" asked the other, and pointed to the beach.

Many of their pursuers had waded into the water shaking their fists, but the sea was rough, and they could not
reach the pier. Two or three figures, however, stood on the beginning of the stone footway, and seemed to be
cautiously advancing down it. The glare of a chance lantern lit up the faces of the two foremost. One face wore a black half-mask, and under it the mouth was twisting about in such a madness of nerves that the black tuft of beard wriggled round and round like a restless, living thing. The other was the red face and white moustache of Colonel Ducroix. They were in earnest consultation.

"Yes, he is gone too," said the Professor, and sat down on a stone. "Everything's gone. I'm gone! I can't trust my own bodily machinery. I feel as if my own hand might fly up and strike me."

"When my hand flies up," said Syme, "it will strike somebody else," and he strode along the pier towards the Colonel, the sword in one hand and the lantern in the other.

As if to destroy the last hope or doubt, the Colonel, who saw him coming, pointed his revolver at him and fired. The shot missed Syme, but struck his sword, breaking it short at the hilt. Syme rushed on, and swung the iron lantern above his head.

"Judas before Herod!" he said, and struck the Colonel down upon the stones. Then he turned to the Secretary, whose frightful mouth was almost foaming now, and held the lamp high with so rigid and arresting a gesture, that the man was, as it were, frozen for a moment, and forced to hear.

"Do you see this lantern?" cried Syme in a terrible voice. "Do you see the cross carved on it, and the flame inside? You did not make it. You did not light it. Better men than you, men who could believe and obey, twisted the entrails of iron and preserved the legend of fire. There is not a street you walk on, there is not a thread you wear, that was not made as this lantern was, by denying your philosophy of dirt and rats. You can make nothing. You can only destroy. You will destroy mankind; you will destroy the world. Let that suffice you. Yet this one old Christian lantern you shall not destroy. It shall go where your empire of apes will never have the wit to find it."

He struck the Secretary once with the lantern so that he staggered; and then, whirling it twice round his head, sent it flying far out to sea, where it flared like a roaring rocket and fell.

"Swords!" shouted Syme, turning his flaming face to the three behind him. "Let us charge these dogs, for our time has come to die."

His three companions came after him sword in hand. Syme's sword was broken, but he rent a bludgeon from the fist of a fisherman, flinging him down. In a moment they would have flung themselves upon the face of the mob and perished, when an interruption came. The Secretary, ever since Syme's speech, had stood with his hand to his stricken head as if dazed; now he suddenly pulled off his black mask.

The pale face thus peeled in the lamplight revealed not so much rage as astonishment. He put up his hand with an anxious authority.

"There is some mistake," he said. "Mr. Syme, I hardly think you understand your position. I arrest you in the name of the law."

"Of the law?" said Syme, and dropped his stick.

"Certainly!" said the Secretary. "I am a detective from Scotland Yard," and he took a small blue card from his pocket.

"And what do you suppose we are?" asked the Professor, and threw up his arms.

"You," said the Secretary stiffly, "are, as I know for a fact, members of the Supreme Anarchist Council. Disguised as one of you, I--"

Dr. Bull tossed his sword into the sea.

"There never was any Supreme Anarchist Council," he said. "We were all a lot of silly policemen looking at each other. And all these nice people who have been peppering us with shot thought we were the dynamiters. I knew I couldn't be wrong about the mob," he said, beaming over the enormous multitude, which stretched away to the distance on both sides. "Vulgar people are never mad. I'm vulgar myself, and I know. I am now going on shore to stand a drink to everybody here."

CHAPTER XIII

THE PURSUIT OF THE PRESIDENT

NEXT morning five bewildered but hilarious people took the boat for Dover. The poor old Colonel might have had some cause to complain, having been first forced to fight for two factions that didn't exist, and then knocked down with an iron lantern. But he was a magnanimous old gentleman, and being much relieved that neither party had anything to do with dynamite, he saw them off on the pier with great geniality.

The five reconciled detectives had a hundred details to explain to each other. The Secretary had to tell Syme how they had come to wear masks originally in order to approach the supposed enemy as fellow-conspirators;

Syme had to explain how they had fled with such swiftness through a civilised country. But above all these matters of detail which could be explained, rose the central mountain of the matter that they could not explain. What did it all mean? If they were all harmless officers, what was Sunday? If he had not seized the world, what on earth had he been up to? Inspector Ratcliffe was still gloomy about this.
"I can't make head or tail of old Sunday's little game any more than you can," he said. "But whatever else Sunday is, he isn't a blameless citizen. Damn it! do you remember his face?"

"I grant you," answered Syme, "that I have never been able to forget it."

"Well," said the Secretary, "I suppose we can find out soon, for tomorrow we have our next general meeting. You will excuse me," he said, with a rather ghastly smile, "for being well acquainted with my secretarial duties."

"I suppose you are right," said the Professor reflectively. "I suppose we might find it out from him; but I confess that I should feel a bit afraid of asking Sunday who he really is."

"Why," asked the Secretary, "for fear of bombs?"

"No," said the Professor, "for fear he might tell me."

"Let us have some drinks," said Dr. Bull, after a silence.

Throughout their whole journey by boat and train they were highly convivial, but they instinctively kept together. Dr. Bull, who had always been the optimist of the party, endeavoured to persuade the other four that the whole company could take the same hansom cab from Victoria; but this was overruled, and they went in a four-wheeler, with Dr. Bull on the box, singing. They finished their journey at an hotel in Piccadilly Circus, so as to be close to the early breakfast next morning in Leicester Square. Yet even then the adventures of the day were not entirely over. Dr. Bull, discontented with the general proposal to go to bed, had strolled out of the hotel at about eleven to see and taste some of the beauties of London. Twenty minutes afterwards, however, he came back and made quite a clamour in the hall. Syme, who tried at first to soothe him, was forced at last to listen to his communication with quite new attention.

"I tell you I've seen him!" said Dr. Bull, with thick emphasis.

"Whom?" asked Syme quickly. "Not the President?"

"Not so bad as that," said Dr. Bull, with unnecessary laughter, "not so bad as that. I've got him here."

"Got whom here?" asked Syme impatiently.

"Hairy man," said the other lucidly, "man that used to be hairy man--Gogol. Here he is," and he pulled forward by a reluctant elbow the identical young man who five days before had marched out of the Council with thin red hair and a pale face, the first of all the sham anarchists who had been exposed.

"Why do you worry with me?" he cried. "You have expelled me as a spy."

"We are all spies!" whispered Syme.

"We're all spies!" shouted Dr. Bull. "Come and have a drink."

Next morning the battalion of the reunited six marched solidly towards the hotel in Leicester Square.

"This is more cheerful," said Dr. Bull; "we are six men going to ask one man what he means."

"I think it is a bit queerer than that," said Syme. "I think it is six men going to ask one man what they mean."

They turned in silence into the Square, and though the hotel was in the opposite corner, they saw at once the little balcony and a figure that looked too big for it. He was sitting alone with bent head, poring over a newspaper. But all his councillors, who had come to vote him down, crossed that Square as if they were watched out of heaven by a hundred eyes.

They had disputed much upon their policy, about whether they should leave the unmasked Gogol without and begin diplomatically, or whether they should bring him in and blow up the gunpowder at once. The influence of Syme and Bull prevailed for the latter course, though the Secretary to the last asked them why they attacked Sunday so rashly.

"My reason is quite simple," said Syme. "I attack him rashly because I am afraid of him."

They followed Syme up the dark stair in silence, and they all came out simultaneously into the broad sunlight of the morning and the broad sunlight of Sunday's smile.

"Delightful!" he said. "So pleased to see you all. What an exquisite day it is. Is the Czar dead?"

The Secretary, who happened to be foremost, drew himself together for a dignified outburst.

"No, sir," he said sternly "there has been no massacre. I bring you news of no such disgusting spectacles."

"Disgusting spectacles?" repeated the President, with a bright, inquiring smile. "You mean Dr. Bull's spectacles?"

The Secretary choked for a moment, and the President went on with a sort of smooth appeal--

"Of course, we all have our opinions and even our eyes, but really to call them disgusting before the man himself--"

Dr. Bull tore off his spectacles and broke them on the table.

"My spectacles are blackguardly," he said, "but I'm not. Look at my face."

"I dare say it's the sort of face that grows on one," said the President, "in fact, it grows on you; and who am I to quarrel with the wild fruits upon the Tree of Life? I dare say it will grow on me some day."

"We have no time for tomfoolery," said the Secretary, breaking in savagely. "We have come to know what all
disappeared in the noisy distance talking to the astonished fireman with explanatory gestures.

Sunday had bounded out of his cab, sprung at the fire-engine, caught it, slung himself on to it, and was seen as he roar announcing the fire-engine, which in a few seconds went by like a brazen thunderbolt. But quick as it went by, Traffic of every kind was swerving to right or left or stopping, for down the long road was coming the unmistakable they swept round into the Edgware Road. And here there occurred what seemed to the allies a providential stoppage.

"What does the old maniac mean?" asked Bull, staring at the words. "What does yours say, Syme?"

"What about Martin Tupper now?"

"No one would regret anything in the nature of an interference by the Archdeacon more than I. I trust it will not come to that. But, for the last time, where are your goloshes? The thing is too bad, especially after what uncle said."

Candidates,\" murmured Sunday, "are only required to answer eight out of the seventeen questions on the paper. As far as I can make out, you want me to tell you what I am, and what you are, and what this table is, and what this Council is, and what this world is for all I know. Well, I will go so far as to rend the veil of one mystery. If you want to know what you are, you are a set of highly well-intentioned young jackasses."

"And you,\" said Syme, leaning forward, "what are you?"

"I? What am I?\" roared the President, and he rose slowly to an incredible height, like some enormous wave about to arch above them and break. "You want to know what I am, do you? Bull, you are a man of science. Grub in the roots of those trees and find out the truth about them. Syme, you are a poet. Stare at those morning clouds. But I tell you this, that you will have found out the truth of the last tree and the top-most cloud before the truth about me. You will understand the sea, and I shall be still a riddle; you shall know what the stars are, and not know what I am. Since the beginning of the world all men have hunted me like a wolf--kings and sages, and poets and lawgivers, all the churches, and all the philosophies. But I have never been caught yet, and the skies will fall in the time I turn to bay. I have given them a good run for their money, and I will now."

Before one of them could move, the monstrous man had swung himself like some huge  ourang-outang over the balustrade of the balcony. Yet before he dropped he pulled himself up again as on a horizontal bar, and thrusting his great chin over the edge of the balcony, said solemnly--

"There's one thing I'll tell you though about who I am. I am the man in the dark room, who made you all policemen."

With that he fell from the balcony, bouncing on the stones below like a great ball of india-rubber, and went bounding off towards the corner of the Alhambra, where he hailed a hansom-cab and sprang inside it. The six detectives had been standing thunderstruck and livid in the light of his last assertion; but when he disappeared into the cab, Syme's practical senses returned to him, and leaping over the balcony so recklessly as almost to break his legs, he called another cab.

He and Bull sprang into the cab together, the Professor and the Inspector into another, while the Secretary and the late Gogol scrambled into a third just in time to pursue the flying Syme, who was pursuing the flying President. Sunday led them a wild chase towards the north-west, his cabman, evidently under the influence of more than common inducements, urging the horse at breakneck speed. But Syme was in no mood for delicacies, and he stood up in his own cab shouting, "Stop thief!" until crowds ran along beside his cab, and policemen began to stop and ask questions. All this had its influence upon the President's cabman, who began to look dubious, and to slow down to a trot. He opened the trap to talk reasonably to his fare, and in so doing let the long whip droop over the front of the cab. Sunday leant forward, seized it, and jerked it violently out of the man's hand. Then standing up in front of the cab himself, he lashed the horse and roared aloud, so that they went down the streets like a flying storm. Through street after street and square after square went whirling this preposterous vehicle, in which the fare was urging the horse and the driver trying desperately to stop it. The other three cabs came after it (if the phrase be permissible of a cab) like panting hounds. Shops and streets shot by like rattling arrows.

At the highest ecstasy of speed, Sunday turned round on the splashboard where he stood, and sticking his great grinning head out of the cab, with white hair whistling in the wind, he made a horrible face at his pursuers, like some colossal urchin. Then raising his right hand swiftly, he flung a ball of paper in Syme's face and vanished. Syme grinned head out of the cab, with white hair whistling in the wind, he made a horrible face at his pursuers, like some

"After him!" howled Syme. "He can't go astray now. There's no mistaking a fire-engine."
The three cabmen, who had been stunned for a moment, whipped up their horses and slightly decreased the distance between themselves and their disappearing prey. The President acknowledged this proximity by coming to the back of the car, bowing repeatedly, kissing his hand, and finally flinging a neatly-folded note into the bosom of Inspector Ratcliffe. When that gentleman opened it, not without impatience, he found it contained the words:--

"Fly at once. The truth about your trouser-stretchers is known.--A FRIEND."

The fire-engine had struck still farther to the north, into a region that they did not recognise; and as it ran by a line of high railings shadowed with trees, the six friends were startled, but somewhat relieved, to see the President leap from the fire-engine, though whether through another whim or the increasing protest of his entertainers they could not see. Before the three cabs, however, could reach up to the spot, he had gone up the high railings like a huge grey cat, tossed himself over, and vanished in a darkness of leaves.

Syme with a furious gesture stopped his cab, jumped out, and sprang also to the escalade. When he had one leg over the fence and his friends were following, he turned a face on them which shone quite pale in the shadow.

"What place can this be?" he asked. "Can it be the old devil's house? I've heard he has a house in North London."

"All the better," said the Secretary grimly, planting a foot in a foothold, "we shall find him at home."

"No, but it isn't that," said Syme, knitting his brows. "I hear the most horrible noises, like devils laughing and sneezing and blowing their devilish noses!"

"His dogs barking, of course," said the Secretary.

"Why not say his black-beetles barking!" said Syme furiously, "snails barking! geraniums barking! Did you ever hear a dog bark like that?"

He held up his hand, and there came out of the thicket a long growling roar that seemed to get under the skin and freeze the flesh--a low thrilling roar that made a throbbing in the air all about them.

"The dogs of Sunday would be no ordinary dogs," said Gogol, and shuddered.

Syme had jumped down on the other side, but he still stood listening impatiently.

"Well, listen to that," he said, "is that a dog--anybody's dog?"

There broke upon their ear a hoarse screaming as of things protesting and clamouring in sudden pain; and then, far off like an echo, what sounded like a long nasal trumpet.

"Well, his house ought to be hell!" said the Secretary; "and if it is hell, I'm going in!" and he sprang over the tall railings almost with one swing.

The others followed. They broke through a tangle of plants and shrubs, and came out on an open path. Nothing was in sight, but Dr. Bull suddenly struck his hands together.

"Why, you asses," he cried, "it's the Zoo!"

As they were looking round wildly for any trace of their wild quarry, a keeper in uniform came running along the path with a man in plain clothes.

"Has it come this way?" gasped the keeper.

"Has what?" asked Syme.

"The elephant!" cried the keeper. "An elephant has gone mad and run away!"

"He has run away with an old gentleman," said the other stranger breathlessly, "a poor old gentleman with white hair!"

"What sort of old gentleman?" asked Syme, with great curiosity.

"A very large and fat old gentleman in light grey clothes," said the keeper eagerly.

"Well," said Syme, "if he's that particular kind of old gentleman, if you're quite sure that he's a large and fat old gentleman in grey clothes, you may take my word for it that the elephant has not run away with him. He has run away with the elephant. The elephant is not made by God that could run away with him if he did not consent to the elopement. And, by thunder, there he is!"

There was no doubt about it this time. Clean across the space of grass, about two hundred yards away, with a crown screaming and scampering vainly at his heels, went a huge grey elephant at an awful stride, with his trunk thrown out as rigid as a ship's bowsprit, and trumpeting like the trumpet of doom. On the back of the bellowing and plunging animal sat President Sunday with all the placidity of a sultan, but goading the animal to a furious speed with some sharp object in his hand.

"Stop him!" screamed the populace. "He'll be out of the gate!"

"Stop a landslide!" said the keeper. "He is out of the gate!"

And even as he spoke, a final crash and roar of terror announced that the great grey elephant had broken out of the gates of the Zoological Gardens, and was careening down Albany Street like a new and swift sort of omnibus.

"Great Lord!" cried Bull, "I never knew an elephant could go so fast. Well, it must be hansom-cabs again if we are to keep him in sight."

As they raced along to the gate out of which the elephant had vanished, Syme felt a glaring panorama of the
strange animals in the cages which they passed. Afterwards he thought it queer that he should have seen them so
clearly. He remembered especially seeing pelicans, with their preposterous, pendant throats. He wondered why the
pelican was the symbol of charity, except it was that it wanted a good deal of charity to admire a pelican. He
remembered a hornbill, which was simply a huge yellow beak with a small bird tied on behind it. The whole gave
him a sensation, the vividness of which he could not explain, that Nature was always making quite mysterious jokes.
Sunday had told them that they would understand him when they had understood the stars. He wondered whether
even the archangels understood the hornbill.

The six unhappy detectives flung themselves into cabs and followed the elephant sharing the terror which he
spread through the long stretch of the streets. This time Sunday did not turn round, but offered them the solid stretch
of his unconscious back, which maddened them, if possible, more than his previous mockeries. Just before they
came to Baker Street, however, he was seen to throw something far up into the air, as a boy does a ball meaning to
catch it again. But at their rate of racing it fell far behind, just by the cab containing Gogol; and in faint hope of a
clue or for some impulse unexplainable, he stopped his cab so as to pick it up. It was addressed to himself, and was
quite a bulky parcel. On examination, however, its bulk was found to consist of thirty-three pieces of paper of no
value wrapped one round the other. When the last covering was torn away it reduced itself to a small slip of paper,
on which was written:--

"The word, I fancy, should be 'pink'."

The man once known as Gogol said nothing, but the movements of his hands and feet were like those of a man
urging a horse to renewed efforts.

Through street after street, through district after district, went the prodigy of the flying elephant, calling crowds
to every window, and driving the traffic left and right. And still through all this insane publicity the three cabs toiled
after it, until they came to be regarded as part of a procession, and perhaps the advertisement of a circus. They went
at such a rate that distances were shortened beyond belief, and Syme saw the Albert Hall in Kensington when he
thought that he was still in Paddington. The animal's pace was even more fast and free through the empty,
 aristocratic streets of South Kensington, and he finally headed towards that part of the sky-line where the enormous
Wheel of Earl's Court stood up in the sky. The wheel grew larger and larger, till it filled heaven like the wheel of
stars.

The beast outstripped the cabs. They lost him round several corners, and when they came to one of the gates of
the Earl's Court Exhibition they found themselves finally blocked. In front of them was an enormous crowd; in the
midst of it was an enormous elephant, heaving and shuddering as such shapeless creatures do. But the President had
disappeared.

"Where has he gone to?" asked Syme, slipping to the ground.

"Gentleman rushed into the Exhibition, sir!" said an official in a dazed manner. Then he added in an injured
voice: "Funny gentleman, sir. Asked me to hold his horse, and gave me this."

He held out with distaste a piece of folded paper, addressed: "To the Secretary of the Central Anarchist Council."

The Secretary, raging, rent it open, and found written inside it:--

"When the herring runs a mile, Let the Secretary smile; When the herring tries to fly, Let the Secretary die.
Rustic Proverb."

"Why the eternal crikey," began the Secretary, "did you let the man in? Do people commonly come to you
Exhibition riding on mad elephants? Do--""

"Look!" shouted Syme suddenly. "Look over there!"

"Look at what?" asked the Secretary savagely.

"Look at the captive balloon!" said Syme, and pointed in a frenzy.

"Why the blazes should I look at a captive balloon?" demanded the Secretary. "What is there queer about a
captive balloon?"

"Nothing," said Syme, "except that it isn't captive!"

They all turned their eyes to where the balloon swung and swelled above the Exhibition on a string, like a child's
balloon. A second afterwards the string came in two just under the car, and the balloon, broken loose, floated away
with the freedom of a soap bubble.

"Ten thousand devils!" shrieked the Secretary. "He's got into it!" and he shook his fists at the sky.

The balloon, borne by some chance wind, came right above them, and they could see the great white head of the
President peering over the side and looking benevolently down on them.

"God bless my soul!" said the Professor with the elderly manner that he could never disconnect from his
bleached beard and parchment face. "God bless my soul! I seemed to fancy that something fell on the top of my
hat!"

He put up a trembling hand and took from that shelf a piece of twisted paper, which he opened absently only to
find it inscribed with a true lover's knot and, the words:--
"Your beauty has not left me indifferent.--From LITTLE SNOWDROP."
There was a short silence, and then Syme said, biting his beard--
"I'm not beaten yet. The blasted thing must come down somewhere. Let's follow it!"

CHAPTER XIV
THE SIX PHILOSOPHERS
ACROSS green fields, and breaking through blooming hedges, toiled six draggled detectives, about five miles out of London. The optimist of the party had at first proposed that they should follow the balloon across South England in hansom-cabs. But he was ultimately convinced of the persistent refusal of the balloon to follow the roads, and the still more persistent refusal of the cabmen to follow the balloon. Consequently the tireless though exasperated travellers broke through black thickets and ploughed through ploughed fields till each was turned into a figure too outrageous to be mistaken for a tramp. Those green hills of Surrey saw the final collapse and tragedy of the admirable light grey suit in which Syme had set out from Saffron Park. His silk hat was broken over his nose by a swinging bough, his coat-tails were torn to the shoulder by arresting thorns, the clay of England was splashed up to his collar; but he still carried his yellow beard forward with a silent and furious determination, and his eyes were still fixed on that floating ball of gas, which in the full flush of sunset seemed coloured like a sunset cloud.
"After all," he said, "it is very beautiful!"
"It is singularly and strangely beautiful!" said the Professor. "I wish the beastly gas-bag would burst!"
"No," said Dr. Bull, "I hope it won't. It might hurt the old boy."
"Hurt him!" said the vindictive Professor, "hurt him! Not as much as I'd hurt him if I could get up with him. Little Snowdrop!"
"I don't want him hurt, somehow," said Dr. Bull.
"What!" cried the Secretary bitterly. "Do you believe all that tale about his being our man in the dark room? Sunday would say he was anybody."
"I don't know whether I believe it or not," said Dr. Bull. "But it isn't that that I mean. I can't wish old Sunday's balloon to burst because--"
"Well," said Syme impatiently, "because?"
"Well, because he's so jolly like a balloon himself," said Dr. Bull desperately. "I don't understand a word of all that idea of his being the same man who gave us all our blue cards. It seems to make everything nonsense. But I don't care who knows it, I always had a sympathy for old Sunday himself, wicked as he was. Just as if he was a great bouncing baby. How can I explain what my queer sympathy was? It didn't prevent my fighting him like hell! Shall I make it clear if I say that I liked him because he was so fat?"
"You will not," said the Secretary.
"I've got it now," cried Bull, "it was because he was so fat and so light. Just like a balloon. We always think of fat people as heavy, but he could have danced against a sylph. I see now what I mean. Moderate strength is shown in violence, supreme strength is shown in levity. It was like the old speculations--what would happen if an elephant could leap up in the sky like a grasshopper?"
"Our elephant," said Syme, looking upwards, "has leapt into the sky like a grasshopper."
"And somehow," concluded Bull, "that's why I can't help liking old Sunday. No, it's not an admiration of force, or any silly thing like that. There is a kind of gaiety in the thing, as if he were bursting with some good news. Haven't you sometimes felt it on a spring day? You know Nature plays tricks, but somehow that day proves they are good-natured tricks. I never read the Bible myself, but that part they laugh at is literal truth, 'Why leap ye, ye high hills?' The hills do leap--at least, they try to. . . . Why do I like Sunday? . . . how can I tell you? . . . because he's such a Bounder."
There was a long silence, and then the Secretary said in a curious, strained voice--
"You do not know Sunday at all. Perhaps it is because you are better than I, and do not know hell. I was a fierce fellow, and a trifle morbid from the first. The man who sits in darkness, and who chose us all, chose me because I had all the crazy look of a conspirator--because my smile went crooked, and my eyes were gloomy, even when I smiled. But there must have been something in me that answered to the nerves in all these anarchic men. For when I first saw Sunday he expressed to me, not your airy vitality, but something both gross and sad in the Nature of Things. I found him smoking in a twilight room, a room with brown blind down, infinitely more depressing than the genial darkness in which our master lives. He sat there on a bench, a huge heap of a man, dark and out of shape. He listened to all my words without speaking or even stirring. I poured out my most passionate appeals, and asked my most eloquent questions. Then, after a long silence, the Thing began to shake, and I thought it was shaken by some secret malady. It shook like a loathsome and living jelly. It reminded me of everything I had ever read about the base bodies that are the origin of life--the deep sea lumps and protoplasm. It seemed like the final form of matter, the
most shapeless and the most shameful. I could only tell myself, from its shudderings, that it was something at least that such a monster could be miserable. And then it broke upon me that the bestial mountain was shaking with a lonely laughter, and the laughter was at me. Do you ask me to forgive him that? It is no small thing to be laughed at by something at once lower and stronger than oneself."

"Surely you fellows are exaggerating wildly," cut in the clear voice of Inspector Ratcliffe. "President Sunday is a terrible fellow for one's intellect, but he is not such a Barnum's freak physically as you make out. He received me in an ordinary office, in a grey check coat, in broad daylight. He talked to me in an ordinary way. But I'll tell you what is a trifle creepy about Sunday. His room is neat, his clothes are neat, everything seems in order; but he's absent-minded. Sometimes his great bright eyes go quite blind. For hours he forgets that you are there. Now absent-mindedness is just a bit too awful in a bad man. We think of a wicked man as vigilant. We can't think of a wicked man who is honestly and sincerely dreamy, because we daren't think of a wicked man alone with himself. An absentminded man means a good-natured man. It means a man who, if he happens to see you, will apologise. But how will you bear an absentminded man who, if he happens to see you, will kill you? That is what tries the nerves, abstraction combined with cruelty. Men have felt it sometimes when they went through wild forests, and felt that the animals there were at once innocent and pitiless. They might ignore or slay. How would you like to pass ten mortal hours in a parlour with an absentminded tiger?"

"And what do you think of Sunday, Gogol?" asked Syme.

"I don't think of Sunday on principle," said Gogol simply, "any more than I stare at the sun at noonday."

"Well, that is a point of view," said Syme thoughtfully. "What do you say, Professor?"

The Professor was walking with bent head and trailing stick, and he did not answer at all.

"Wake up, Professor!" said Syme genially. "Tell us what you think of Sunday."

The Professor spoke at last very slowly.

"I think something," he said, "that I cannot say clearly. Or, rather, I think something that I cannot even think clearly. But it is something like this. My early life, as you know, was a bit too large and loose."

"Well, when I saw Sunday's face I thought it was too large-- everybody does, but I also thought it was too loose. The face was so big, that one couldn't focus it or make it a face at all. The eye was so far away from the nose, that it wasn't an eye. The mouth was so much by itself, that one had to think of it by itself. The whole thing is too hard to explain."

He paused for a little, still trailing his stick, and then went on--

"But put it this way. Walking up a road at night, I have seen a lamp and a lighted window and a cloud make together a most complete and unmistakable face. If anyone in heaven has that face I shall know him again. Yet when I walked a little farther I found that there was no face, that the window was ten yards away, the lamp ten hundred yards, the cloud beyond the world. Well, Sunday's face escaped me; it ran away to right and left, as such chance pictures run away. And so his face has made me, somehow, doubt whether there are any faces. I don't know whether your face, Bull, is a face or a combination in perspective. Perhaps one black disc of your beastly glasses is quite close and another fifty miles away. Oh, the doubts of a materialist are not worth a dump. Sunday has taught me the last and the worst doubts, the doubts of a spiritualist. I am a Buddhist, I suppose; and Buddhism is not a creed, it is a doubt. My poor dear Bull, I do not believe that you really have a face. I have not faith enough to believe in matter."

Syme's eyes were still fixed upon the errant orb, which, reddened in the evening light, looked like some rosier and more innocent world.

"Have you noticed an odd thing," he said, "about all your descriptions? Each man of you finds Sunday quite different, yet each man of you can only find one thing to compare him to--the universe itself. Bull finds him like the earth in spring, Gogol like the sun at noonday. The Secretary is reminded of the shapeless protoplasm, and the Inspector of the carelessness of virgin forests. The Professor says he is like a changing landscape. This is queer, but it is queerer still that I also have had my odd notion about the President, and I also find that I think of Sunday as I think of the whole world."

"Get on a little faster, Syme," said Bull; "never mind the balloon."

"When I first saw Sunday," said Syme slowly, "I only saw his back; and when I saw his back, I knew he was the worst man in the world. His neck and shoulders were brutal, like those of some apish god. His head had a stoop that was hardly human, like the stoop of an ox. In fact, I had at once the revolting fancy that this was not a man at all, but a beast dressed up in men's clothes."

"Get on," said Dr. Bull.

"And then the queer thing happened. I had seen his back from the street, as he sat in the balcony. Then I entered the hotel, and coming round the other side of him, saw his face in the sunlight. His face frightened me, as it did everyone; but not because it was brutal, not because it was evil. On the contrary, it frightened me because it was so beautiful, because it was so good."
"Syme," exclaimed the Secretary, "are you ill?"

"It was like the face of some ancient archangel, judging justly after heroic wars. There was laughter in the eyes, and in the mouth honour and sorrow. There was the same white hair, the same great, grey-clad shoulders that I had seen from behind. But when I saw him from behind I was certain he was an animal, and when I saw him in front I knew he was a god."

"Pan," said the Professor dreamily, "was a god and an animal."

"Then, and again and always," went on Syme like a man talking to himself, "that has been for me the mystery of Sunday, and it is also the mystery of the world. When I see the horrible back, I am sure the noble face is but a mask. When I see the face but for an instant, I know the back is only a jest. Bad is so bad, that we cannot but think good an accident; good is so good, that we feel certain that evil could be explained. But the whole came to a kind of crest yesterday when I raced Sunday for the cab, and was just behind him all the way."

"Had you time for thinking then?" asked Ratcliffe.

"Time," replied Syme, "for one outrageous thought. I was suddenly possessed with the idea that the blind, blank back of his head really was his face--an awful, eyeless face staring at me! And I fancied that the figure running in front of me was really a figure running backwards, and dancing as he ran."

"Horrible!" said Dr. Bull, and shuddered.

"Horrible is not the word," said Syme. "It was exactly the worst instant of my life. And yet ten minutes afterwards, when he put his head out of the cab and made a grimace like a gargoyle, I knew that he was only like a father playing hide-and-seek with his children."

"It is a long game," said the Secretary, and frowned at his broken boots.

"Listen to me," cried Syme with extraordinary emphasis. "Shall I tell you the secret of the whole world? It is that we have only known the back of the world. We see everything from behind, and it looks brutal. That is not a tree, but the back of a tree. That is not a cloud, but the back of a cloud. Cannot you see that everything is stooping and hiding a face? If we could only get round in front--"

"Look!" cried out Bull clamorously, "the balloon is coming down!"

There was no need to cry out to Syme, who had never taken his eyes off it. He saw the great luminous globe suddenly stagger in the sky, right itself, and then sink slowly behind the trees like a setting sun.

The man called Gogol, who had hardly spoken through all their weary travels, suddenly threw up his hands like a lost spirit.

"He is dead!" he cried. "And now I know he was my friend--my friend in the dark!"

"Dead!" snorted the Secretary. "You will not find him dead easily. If he has been tipped out of the car, we shall find him rolling as a colt rolls in a field, kicking his legs for fun."

"Clashing his hoofs," said the Professor. "The colts do, and so did Pan."

"Pan again!" said Dr. Bull irritated. "You seem to think Pan is everything."

"So he is," said the Professor, "in Greek. He means everything."

"Don't forget," said the Secretary, looking down, "that he also means Panic."

Syme had stood without hearing any of the exclamations.

"It fell over there," he said shortly. "Let us follow it!"

Then he added with an indescribable gesture--

"Oh, if he has cheated us all by getting killed! It would be like one of his larks."

He strode off towards the distant trees with a new energy, his rags and ribbons fluttering in the wind. The others followed him in a more footsore and dubious manner. And almost at the same moment all six men realised that they were not alone in the little field.

Across the square of turf a tall man was advancing towards them, leaning on a strange long staff like a sceptre. He was clad in a fine but old-fashioned suit with knee-breeches; its colour was that shade between blue, violet and grey which can be seen in certain shadows of the woodland. His hair was whitish grey, and at the first glance, taken along with his knee-breeches, looked as if it was powdered. His advance was very quiet; but for the silver frost upon his head, he might have been one to the shadows of the wood.

"Gentlemen," he said, "my master has a carriage waiting for you in the road just by."

"Who is your master?" asked Syme, standing quite still.

"I was told you knew his name," said the man respectfully.

There was a silence, and then the Secretary said--

"Where is this carriage?"

"It has been waiting only a few moments," said the stranger. "My master has only just come home."

Syme looked left and right upon the patch of green field in which he found himself. The hedges were ordinary hedges, the trees seemed ordinary trees; yet he felt like a man entrapped in fairyland.
He looked the mysterious ambassador up and down, but he could discover nothing except that the man's coat was the exact colour of the purple shadows, and that the man's face was the exact colour of the red and brown and golden sky.

"Show us the place," Syme said briefly, and without a word the man in the violet coat turned his back and walked towards a gap in the hedge, which let in suddenly the light of a white road.

As the six wanderers broke out upon this thoroughfare, they saw the white road blocked by what looked like a long row of carriages, such a row of carriages as might close the approach to some house in Park Lane. Along the side of these carriages stood a rank of splendid servants, all dressed in the grey-blue uniform, and all having a certain quality of stateliness and freedom which would not commonly belong to the servants of a gentleman, but rather to the officials and ambassadors of a great king. There were no less than six carriages waiting, one for each of the tattered and miserable band. All the attendants (as if in court-dress) wore swords, and as each man crawled into his carriage they drew them, and saluted with a sudden blaze of steel.

"What can it all mean?" asked Bull of Syme as they separated. "Is this another joke of Sunday's?"

"I don't know," said Syme as he sank wearily back in the cushions of his carriage; "but if it is, it's one of the jokes you talk about. It's a good-natured one."

The six adventurers had passed through many adventures, but not one had carried them so utterly off their feet as this last adventure of comfort. They had all become inured to things going roughly; but things suddenly going smoothly swamped them. They could not even feebly imagine what the carriages were; it was enough for them to know that they were carriages, and carriages with cushions. They could not conceive who the old man was who had led them; but it was quite enough that he had certainly led them to the carriages.

Syme drove through a drifting darkness of trees in utter abandonment. It was typical of him that while he had carried his bearded chin forward fiercely so long as anything could be done, when the whole business was taken out of his hands he fell back on the cushions in a frank collapse.

Very gradually and very vaguely he realised into what rich roads the carriage was carrying him. He saw that they passed the stone gates of what might have been a park, that they began gradually to climb a hill which, while wooded on both sides, was somewhat more orderly than a forest. Then there began to grow upon him, as upon a man slowly waking from a healthy sleep, a pleasure in everything. He felt that the hedges were what hedges should be, living walls; that a hedge is like a human army, disciplined, but all the more alive. He saw high elms behind the hedges, and vaguely thought how happy boys would be climbing there. Then his carriage took a turn of the path, and he saw suddenly and quietly, like a long, low, sunset cloud, a long, low house, mellow in the mild light of sunset. All the six friends compared notes afterwards and quarrelled; but they all agreed that in some unaccountable way the place reminded them of their boyhood. It was either this elm-top or that crooked path, it was either this scrap of orchard or that shape of a window; but each man of them declared that he could remember this place before he could remember his mother.

When the carriages eventually rolled up to a large, low, cavernous gateway, another man in the same uniform, but wearing a silver star on the grey breast of his coat, came out to meet them. This impressive person said to the bewildered Syme--

"Refreshments are provided for you in your room."

Syme, under the influence of the same mesmeric sleep of amazement, went up the large oaken stairs after the respectful attendant. He entered a splendid suite of apartments that seemed to be designed specially for him. He walked up to a long mirror with the ordinary instinct of his class, to pull his tie straight or to smooth his hair; and there he saw the frightful figure that he was--blood running down his face from where the bough had struck him, his hair standing out like yellow rags of rank grass, his clothes torn into long, wavering tatters. At once the whole enigma sprang up, simply as the question of how he had got there, and how he was to get out again. Exactly at the same moment a man in blue, who had been appointed as his valet, said very solemnly--

"I have put out your clothes, sir."

"Clothes!" said Syme sardonically. "I have no clothes except these," and he lifted two long strips of his frock-coat in fascinating festoons, and made a movement as if to twirl like a ballet girl.

"My master asks me to say," said the attendant, "that there is a fancy dress ball tonight, and that he desires you to put on the costume that I have laid out. Meanwhile, sir, there is a bottle of Burgundy and some cold pheasant, which he hopes you will not refuse, as it is some hours before supper."

"Cold pheasant is a good thing," said Syme reflectively, "and Burgundy is a spanking good thing. But really I do not want either of them so much as I want to know what the devil all this means, and what sort of costume you have got laid out for me. Where is it?"

The servant lifted off a kind of ottoman a long peacock-blue drapery, rather of the nature of a domino, on the front of which was emblazoned a large golden sun, and which was splashed here and there with flaming stars and
"You're to be dressed as Thursday, sir," said the valet somewhat affably.
"Dressed as Thursday!" said Syme in meditation. "It doesn't sound a warm costume."
"Oh, yes, sir," said the other eagerly, "the Thursday costume is quite warm, sir. It fastens up to the chin."
"Well, I don't understand anything," said Syme, sighing. "I have been used so long to uncomfortable adventures that comfortable adventures knock me out. Still, I may be allowed to ask why I should be particularly like Thursday in a green frock spotted all over with the sun and moon. Those orbs, I think, shine on other days. I once saw the moon on Tuesday, I remember."
"Beg pardon, sir," said the valet, "Bible also provided for you," and with a respectful and rigid finger he pointed out a passage in the first chapter of Genesis. Syme read it wondermg. It was that in which the fourth day of the week is associated with the creation of the sun and moon. Here, however, they reckoned from a Christian Sunday.
"This is getting wilder and wilder," said Syme, as he sat down in a chair. "Who are these people who provide cold pheasant and Burgundy, and green clothes and Bibles? Do they provide everything?"
"Yes, sir, everything," said the attendant gravely. "Shall I help you on with your costume?"
"Oh, hitch the bally thing on!" said Syme impatiently.

But though he affected to despise the mummeries, he felt a curious freedom and naturalness in his movements as the blue and gold garment fell about him; and when he found that he had to wear a sword, it stirred a boyish dream. As he passed out of the room he flung the folds across his shoulder with a gesture, his sword stood out at an angle, and he had all the swagger of a troubadour. For these disguises did not disguise, but reveal.

CHAPTER XV
THE ACCUSER

As Syme strode along the corridor he saw the Secretary standing at the top of a great flight of stairs. The man had never looked so noble. He was draped in a long robe of starless black, down the centre of which fell a band or broad stripe of pure white, like a single shaft of light. The whole looked like some very severe ecclesiastical vestment. There was no need for Syme to search his memory or the Bible in order to remember that the first day of creation marked the mere creation of light out of darkness. The vestment itself would alone have suggested the symbol; and Syme felt also how perfectly this pattern of pure white and black expressed the soul of the pale and austere Secretary, with his inhuman veracity and his cold frenzy, which made him so easily make war on the anarchists, and yet so easily pass for one of them. Syme was scarcely surprised to notice that, amid all the ease and hospitality of their new surroundings, this man's eyes were still stern. No smell of ale or orchards could make the Secretary cease to ask a reasonable question.

If Syme had been able to see himself, he would have realised that he, too, seemed to be for the first time himself and no one else. For if the Secretary stood for that philosopher who loves the original and formless light, Syme was a type of the poet who seeks always to make the light in special shapes, to split it up into sun and star. The philosopher may sometimes love the infinite; the poet always loves the finite. For him the great moment is not the creation of light, but the creation of the sun and moon.

As they descended the broad stairs together they overtook Ratcliffe, who was clad in spring green like a huntsman, and the pattern upon whose garment was a green tangle of trees. For he stood for that third day on which the earth and green things were made, and his square, sensible face, with its not unfriendly cynicism, seemed appropriate enough to it.

They were led out of another broad and low gateway into a very large old English garden, full of torches and bonfires, by the broken light of which a vast carnival of people were dancing in motley dress. Syme seemed to see every shape in Nature imitated in some crazy costume. There was a man dressed as a windmill with enormous sails, a man dressed as an elephant, a man dressed as a balloon; the two last, together, seemed to keep the thread of their farcical adventures. Syme even saw, with a queer thrill, one dancer dressed like an enormous hornbill, with a beak twice as big as himself--the queer bird which had fixed itself on his fancy while he was rushing down the long road at the Zoological Gardens. There were a thousand other such objects, however. There was a dancing lamp-post, a dancing apple tree, a dancing ship. One would have thought that the untamable tune of some mad musician had set all the common objects of field and street dancing an eternal jig. And long afterwards, when Syme was middle-aged and at rest, he could never see one of those particular objects--a lamppost, or an apple tree, or a windmill-- without thinking that it was a strayed reveler from that revel of masquerade.

On one side of this lawn, alive with dancers, was a sort of green bank, like the terrace in such old-fashioned gardens.

Along this, in a kind of crescent, stood seven great chairs, the thrones of the seven days. Gogol and Dr. Bull were already in their seats; the Professor was just mounting to his. Gogol, or Tuesday, had his simplicity well symbolised by a dress designed upon the division of the waters, a dress that separated upon his forehead and fell to
his feet, grey and silver, like a sheet of rain. The Professor, whose day was that on which the birds and fishes—the
eruder forms of life—were created, had a dress of dim purple, over which sprawledoggle-eyed fishes and outrageous
tropical birds, the union in him of unfathomable fancy and of doubt. Dr. Bull, the last day of Creation, wore a coat
covered with heraldic animals in red and gold, and on his crest a man rampant. He lay back in his chair with a broad
smile, the picture of an optimist in his element.

One by one the wanderers ascended the bank and sat in their strange seats. As each of them sat down a roar of
enthusiasm rose from the carnival, such as that with which crowds receive kings. Cups were clashed and torches
shaken, and feathered hats flung in the air. The men for whom these thrones were reserved were men crowned with
some extraordinary laurels. But the central chair was empty.

Syme was on the left hand of it and the Secretary on the right. The Secretary looked across the empty throne at
Syme, and said, compressing his lips—

"We do not know yet that he is not dead in a field."

Almost as Syme heard the words, he saw on the sea of human faces in front of him a frightful and beautiful
alteration, as if heaven had opened behind his head. But Sunday had only passed silently along the front like a
shadow, and had sat in the central seat. He was draped plainly, in a pure and terrible white, and his hair was like a
silver flame on his forehead.

For a long time—it seemed for hours—that huge masquerade of mankind swayed and stamped in front of them to
marching and exultant music. Every couple dancing seemed a separate romance; it might be a fairy dancing with a
pillar-box, or a peasant girl dancing with the moon; but in each case it was, somehow, as absurd as Alice in
Wonderland, yet as grave and kind as a love story. At last, however, the thick crowd began to thin itself. Couples
strolled away into the garden-walks, or began to drift towards that end of the building where stood smoking, in huge
pots like fish-kettles, some hot and scented mixtures of old ale or wine. Above all these, upon a sort of black
framework on the roof of the house, roared in its iron basket a gigantic bonfire, which lit up the land for miles. It
flung the homely effect of firelight over the face of vast forests of grey or brown, and it seemed to fill with warmth
even the emptiness of upper night. Yet this also, after a time, was allowed to grow fainter; the dim groups gathered
more and more round the great cauldrons, or passed, laughing and clattering, into the inner passages of that ancient
house. Soon there were only some ten loiterers in the garden; soon only four. Finally the last stray merry-maker ran
into the house whooping to his companions. The fire faded, and the slow, strong stars came out. And the seven
strange men were left alone, like seven stone statues on their chairs of stone. Not one of them had spoken a word.

They seemed in no haste to do so, but heard in silence the hum of insects and the distant song of one bird. Then
Sunday spoke, but so dreamily that he might have been continuing a conversation rather than beginning one.

"We will eat and drink later," he said. "Let us remain together a little, we who have loved each other so sadly,
and have fought so long. I seem to remember only centuries of heroic war, in which you were always heroes—epic
on epic, iliad on iliad, and you always brothers in arms. Whether it was but recently (for time is nothing), or at the
beginning of the world, I sent you out to war. I sat in the darkness, where there is not any created thing, and to you I
was only a voice commanding valour and an unnatural virtue. You heard the voice in the dark, and you never heard
it again. The sun in heaven denied it, the earth and sky denied it, all human wisdom denied it. And when I met you
in the daylight I denied it myself."

Syme stirred sharply in his seat, but otherwise there was silence, and the incomprehensible went on.

"But you were men. You did not forget your secret honour, though the whole cosmos turned an engine of torture
to tear it out of you. I knew how near you were to hell. I know how you, Thursday, crossed swords with King Satan,
and how you, Wednesday, named me in the hour without hope."

There was complete silence in the starlit garden, and then the black-browed Secretary, implacable, turned in his
chair towards Sunday, and said in a harsh voice—

"Who and what are you?"

"I am the Sabbath," said the other without moving. "I am the peace of God."

The Secretary started up, and stood crushing his costly robe in his hand.

"I know what you mean," he cried, "and it is exactly that that I cannot forgive you. I know you are contentment,
optimism, what do they call the thing, an ultimate reconciliation. Well, I am not reconciled. If you were the man in
the dark room, why were you also Sunday, an offense to the sunlight? If you were from the first our father and our
friend, why were you also our greatest enemy? We wept, we fled in terror; the iron entered into our souls—and you
are the peace of God! Oh, I can forgive God His anger, though it destroyed nations; but I cannot forgive Him His
peace."

Sunday answered not a word, but very slowly he turned his face of stone upon Syme as if asking a question.

"No," said Syme, "I do not feel fierce like that. I am grateful to you, not only for wine and hospitality here, but
for many a fine scamper and free fight. But I should like to know. My soul and heart are as happy and quiet as
this old garden, but my reason is still crying out. I should like to know."
Sunday looked at Ratcliffe, whose clear voice said--
"It seems so silly that you should have been on both sides and fought yourself."
Bull said--
"I understand nothing, but I am happy. In fact, I am going to sleep."
"I am not happy," said the Professor with his head in his hands, "because I do not understand. You let me stray a little too near to hell."
And then Gogol said, with the absolute simplicity of a child--
"I wish I knew why I was hurt so much."
Still Sunday said nothing, but only sat with his mighty chin upon his hand, and gazed at the distance. Then at last he said--
"I have heard your complaints in order. And here, I think, comes another to complain, and we will hear him also."
The falling fire in the great cresset threw a last long gleam, like a bar of burning gold, across the dim grass. Against this fiery band was outlined in utter black the advancing legs of a black-clad figure. He seemed to have a fine close suit with knee-breeches such as that which was worn by the servants of the house, only that it was not blue, but of this absolute sable. He had, like the servants, a kind of sword by his side. It was only when he had come quite close to the crescent of the seven and flung up his face to look at them, that Syme saw, with thunder-struck clearness, that the face was the broad, almost ape-like face of his old friend Gregory, with its rank red hair and its insulting smile.
"Gregory!" gasped Syme, half-rising from his seat. "Why, this is the real anarchist!"
"Yes," said Gregory, with a great and dangerous restraint, "I am the real anarchist."
"Now there was a day," murmured Bull, who seemed really to have fallen asleep, "when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them."
"You are right," said Gregory, and gazed all round. "I am a destroyer. I would destroy the world if I could."
A sense of a pathos far under the earth stirred up in Syme, and he spoke brokenly and without sequence.
"Oh, most unhappy man," he cried, "try to be happy! You have red hair like your sister."
"My red hair, like red flames, shall burn up the world," said Gregory. "I thought I hated everything more than common men can hate anything; but I find that I do not hate everything so much as I hate you!"
"I never hated you," said Syme very sadly.
Then out of this unintelligible creature the last thunders broke.
"You!" he cried. "You never hated because you never lived. I know what you are all of you, from first to last--you are the people in power! You are the police--the great fat, smiling men in blue and buttons! You are the Law, and you have never been broken. But is there a free soul alive that does not long to break you, only because you have never been broken? We in revolt talk all kind of nonsense doubtless about this crime or that crime of the Government. It is all folly! The only crime of the Government is that it governs. The unpardonable sin of the supreme power is that it is supreme. I do not curse you for being cruel. I do not curse you (though I might) for being kind. I curse you for being safe! You sit in your chairs of stone, and have never come down from them. You are the seven angels of heaven, and you have had no troubles. Oh, I could forgive you everything, you that rule all mankind, if I could feel for once that you had suffered for one hour a real agony such as I--"
Syme sprang to his feet, shaking from head to foot.
"I see everything," he cried, "everything that there is. Why does each thing on the earth war against each other thing? Why does each small thing in the world have to fight against the world itself? Why does a fly have to fight the whole universe? Why does a dandelion have to fight the whole universe? For the same reason that I had to be alone in the dreadful Council of the Days. So that each thing that obeys law may have the glory and isolation of the anarchist. So that each man fighting for order may be as brave and good a man as the dynamiter. So that the real lie of Satan may be flung back in the face of this blasphemer, so that by tears and torture we may earn the right to say to this man, 'You lie!' No agonies can be too great to buy the right to say to this accuser, 'We also have suffered.'"
"It is not true that we have never been broken. We have been broken upon the wheel. It is not true that we have never descended from these thrones. We have descended into hell. We were complaining of unforgettable miseries even at the very moment when this man entered insolently to accuse us of happiness. I repel the slander; we have not been happy. I can answer for every one of the great guards of Law whom he has accused. At least--"
He had turned his eyes so as to see suddenly the great face of Sunday, which wore a strange smile.
"Have you," he cried in a dreadful voice, "have you ever suffered?"
As he gazed, the great face grew to an awful size, grew larger than the colossal mask of Memnon, which had made him scream as a child. It grew larger and larger, filling the whole sky; then everything went black. Only in the
blackness before it entirely destroyed his brain he seemed to hear a distant voice saying a commonplace text that he had heard somewhere, "Can ye drink of the cup that I drink of?"

* * *

When men in books awake from a vision, they commonly find themselves in some place in which they might have fallen asleep; they yawn in a chair, or lift themselves with bruised limbs from a field. Syme's experience was something much more psychologically strange if there was indeed anything unreal, in the earthly sense, about the things he had gone through. For while he could always remember afterwards that he had swooned before the face of Sunday, he could not remember having ever come to at all. He could only remember that gradually and naturally he knew that he was and had been walking along a country lane with an easy and conversational companion. That companion had been a part of his recent drama; it was the red-haired poet Gregory. They were walking like old friends, and were in the middle of a conversation about some triviality. But Syme could only feel an unnatural buoyancy in his body and a crystal simplicity in his mind that seemed to be superior to everything that he said or did. He felt he was in possession of some impossible good news, which made every other thing a triviality, but an adorable triviality.

Dawn was breaking over everything in colours at once clear and timid; as if Nature made a first attempt at yellow and a first attempt at rose. A breeze blew so clean and sweet, that one could not think that it blew from the sky; it blew rather through some hole in the sky. Syme felt a simple surprise when he saw rising all round him on both sides of the road the red, irregular buildings of Saffron Park. He had no idea that he had walked so near London. He walked by instinct along one white road, on which early birds hopped and sang, and found himself outside a fenced garden. There he saw the sister of Gregory, the girl with the gold-red hair, cutting lilac before breakfast, with the great unconscious gravity of a girl.

Go to Start
Riddle of the Sands (1903)

by Erskine Childers

Contents:
1 The Letter | 2 The 'Dulcibella' | 3 Davies | 4 Retrospect | 5 Wanted, a North Wind | 6 Schlei Fiord | 7 The Missing Page | 8 The Theory | 9 I Sign Articles | 10 His Chance | 11 The Pathfinders | 12 My Initiation | 13 The Meaning of our Work | 14 The First Night in the Islands | 15 Bensersiel | 16 Commander von Brüning | 17 Clearing the Air | 18 Imperial Escort | 19 The Rubicon | 20 The Little Drab Book | 21 Blindfold to Memmert | 22 The Quartette | 23 A Change of Tactics | 24 Finesse | 25 I Double Back | 26 The Seven Siels | 27 The Luck of the Stowaway | 28 We Achieve our Double Aim | Epilogue | Postscript

Preface

A WORD about the origin and authorship of this book.

In October last (1902), my friend 'Carruthers' visited me in my chambers, and, under a provisional pledge of secrecy, told me frankly the whole of the adventure described in these pages. Till then I had only known as much as the rest of his friends, namely, that he had recently undergone experiences during a yachting cruise with a certain Mr 'Davies' which had left a deep mark on his character and habits.

At the end of his narrative—which, from its bearing on studies and speculations of my own, as well as from its intrinsic interest and racy delivery, made a very deep impression on me—he added that the important facts discovered in the course of the cruise had, without a moment's delay, been communicated to the proper authorities, who, after some dignified incredulity, due in part, perhaps, to the pitiful inadequacy of their own secret service, had, he believed, made use of them, to avert a great national danger. I say 'he believed', for though it was beyond question that the danger was averted for the time, it was doubtful whether they had stirred a foot to combat it, the secret discovered being of such a nature that mere suspicion of it on this side was likely to destroy its efficacy.

There, however that may be, the matter rested for a while, as, for personal reasons which will be manifest to the reader, he and Mr 'Davies' expressly wished it to rest.

But events were driving them to reconsider their decision. These seemed to show that the information wrung with such peril and labour from the German Government, and transmitted so promptly to our own, had had none but the most transitory influence on our policy. Forced to the conclusion that the national security was really being neglected, the two friends now had a mind to make their story public; and it was about this that 'Carruthers' wished for my advice. The great drawback was that an Englishman, bearing an honoured name, was disgracefully implicated, and that unless infinite delicacy were used, innocent persons, and, especially, a young lady, would suffer pain and indignity, if his identity were known. Indeed, troublesome rumours, containing a grain of truth and a mass of falsehood, were already afloat.

After weighing both sides of the question, I gave my vote emphatically for publication. The personal drawbacks could, I thought, with tact be neutralized; while, from the public point of view, nothing but good could come from submitting the case to the common sense of the country at large. Publication, there-fore, was agreed upon, and the next point was the form it should take 'Carruthers', with the concurrence of Mr 'Davies', was for a bald exposition of the essential facts, stripped of their warm human envelope. I was strongly against this course, first, because it would aggravate instead of allaying the rumours that were current; secondly, because in such a form the narrative would not carry conviction, and would thus defeat its own end. The persons and the events were indissolubly connected; to evade, abridge, suppress, would be to convey to the reader the idea of a concocted hoax. Indeed, I took bolder ground still, urging that the story should be made as explicit and circumstantial as possible, frankly and honestly for the purpose of entertaining and so of attracting a wide circle of readers. Even anonymity was undesirable. Nevertheless, certain precautions were imperatively needed.

To cut the matter short, they asked for my assistance and received it at once. It was arranged that I should edit the book; that 'Carruthers' should give his diary and recount to me in fuller detail and from his own point of view all the phases of the 'quest', as they used to call it; that Mr 'Davies' should meet me with his charts and maps and do the same; and that the whole story should be written, as from the mouth of the former, with its humours and errors, its light and its dark side, just as it happened; with the following few limitations. The year it belongs to is disguised; the names of persons are throughout fictitious; and, at my instance, certain slight liberties have been taken to conceal the identity of the English characters.

Remember, also that these persons are living now in the midst of us, and if you find one topic touched on with a light and hesitating pen, do not blame the Editor, who, whether they are known or not, would rather say too little than say a word that might savour of impertinence.

E. C.
March 1903

NOTE
The maps and charts are based on British and German Admiralty charts, with irrelevant details omitted.

1 The Letter

I HAVE read of men who, when forced by their calling to live for long periods in utter solitude—save for a few black faces—have made it a rule to dress regularly for dinner in order to maintain their self-respect and prevent a relapse into barbarism. It was in some such spirit, with an added touch of self-consciousness, that, at seven o'clock in the evening of 23rd September in a recent year, I was making my evening toilet in my chambers in Pall Mall. I thought the date and the place justified the parallel; to my advantage even; for the obscure Burmese administrator might well be a man of blunted sensibilities and coarse fibre, and at least he is alone with nature, while I—well, a young man of condition and fashion, who knows the right people, belongs to the right clubs, has a safe, possibly a brilliant, future in the Foreign Office—may be excused for a sense of complacent martyrdom, when, with his keen appreciation of the social calendar, he is doomed to the outer solitude of London in September. I say 'martyrdom', but in fact the case was infinitely worse. For to feel oneself a martyr, as everybody knows, is a pleasurable thing, and the true tragedy of my position was that I had passed that stage. I had enjoyed what sweets it had to offer in ever dwindling degree since the middle of August, when ties were still fresh and sympathy abundant. I had been conscious that I was missed at Morven Lodge party. Lady Ashleigh herself had said so in the kindest possible manner, when she wrote to acknowledge the letter in which I explained, with an effectively austere reserve of language, that circumstances compelled me to remain at my office. 'We know how busy you must be just now', she wrote, 'and I do hope you won't overwork; we shall _all_ miss you very much.' Friend after friend 'got away' to sport and fresh air, with promises to write and chaffing condolences, and as each deserted the sinking ship, I took a grim delight in my misery, positively almost enjoying the first week or two after my world had been finally dissipated to the four bracing winds of heaven.

I began to take a spurious interest in the remaining five millions, and wrote several clever letters in a vein of cheap satire, indirectly suggesting the pathos of my position, but indicating that I was broad-minded enough to find intellectual entertainment in the scenes, persons, and habits of London in the dead season. I even did rational things at the instigation of others. For, though I should have liked total isolation best, I, of course, found that there was a sediment of unfortunate like myself, who, unlike me, viewed the situation in a most prosaic light. There were river excursions, and so on, after office-hours; but I dislike the river at any time for its noisy vulgarity, and most of all at this season. So I dropped out of the fresh air brigade and declined H—'s offer to share a riverside cottage and run up to town in the mornings. I did spend one or two week-ends with the Catesbys in Kent; but I was not inconsolable when they let their house and went abroad, for I found that such partial compensations did not suit me. Neither did the taste for satirical observation last. A passing thirst, which I dare say many have shared, for adventures of the fascinating kind described in the New Arabian Nights led me on a few evenings into some shady haunts in Soho and farther eastward; but was finally quenched one sultry Saturday night after an hour's immersion in the reeking atmosphere of a low music-hall in Ratcliffe Highway, where I sat next a portly female who suffered from the heat, and at frequent intervals refreshed herself and an infant from a bottle of tepid stout.

By the first week in September I had abandoned all palliatives, and had settled into the dismal but dignified routine of office, club, and chambers. And now came the most cruel trial, for the hideous truth dawned on me that the world I found so indispensable could after all dispense with me. It was all very well for Lady Ashleigh to assure me that I was deeply missed; but a letter from F—, who was one of the party, written 'in haste, just starting to shoot', and coming as a tardy reply to one of my cleverest, made me aware that the house party had suffered little from my absence, and that few sighs were wasted on me, even in the quarter which I had assumed to have been discreetly alluded to by the underlined _all_ in Lady Ashleigh's 'we shall _all_ miss you'. A thrust which smarted more, if it bit less deeply, came from my cousin Nesta, who wrote: 'It's horrid for you to have to be baking in London now; but, after all, it must be a great pleasure to you' (malicious little wretch!) 'to have such interesting and important work to do.' Here was a nemesis for an innocent illusion I had been accustomed to foster in the minds of my relations and acquaintances, especially in the breasts of the trustful and admiring maidens whom I had taken down to dinner in the last two seasons; a fiction which I had almost reached the point of believing in myself. For the plain truth was that my work was neither interesting nor important, and consisted chiefly at present in smoking cigarettes, in saying that Mr So-and-So was away and would be back about 1st October, in being absent for lunch from twelve till two, and in my spare moments making _précis_ of—the less confidential consular reports, and squeezing the results into cast-iron schedules. The reason of my detention was not a cloud on the international horizon—though I may say in passing that there was such a cloud—but a caprice on the part of a remote and mighty personage, the effect of which, ramifying downwards, had dislocated the carefully-laid holiday plans of the humble juniors, and in my own small case had upset the arrangement between myself and K—, who positively liked the dog-days in Whitehall.
Only one thing was needed to fill my cup of bitterness, and this it was that specially occupied me as I dressed for dinner this evening. Two days more in this dead and fermenting city and my slavery would be at an end. Yes, but--irony of ironies!--I had nowhere to go to! The Morven Lodge party was breaking up. A dreadful rumour as to an engagement which had been one of its accursed fruits tormented me with the fresh certainty that I had not been missed, and bred in me that most desolating brand of cynicism which is produced by defeat through insignificance. Invitations for a later date, which I had declined in July with a gratifying sense of being much in request, now rose up spectrally to taunt me. There was at least one which I could easily have revived, but neither in this case nor in any other had there been any renewal of pressure, and there are moments when the difference between proposing oneself and surrendering as a prize to one of several eagerly competing hostesses seems too crushing to be contemplated. My own people were at Aix for my father's gout; to join them was __a pis aller__ whose banality was repellent. Besides, they would be leaving soon for our home in Yorkshire, and I was not a prophet in my own country. In short, I was at the extremity of depression.

The usual preliminary scuffle on the staircase prepared me for the knock and entry of Withers. (One of the things which had for some time ceased to amuse me was the laxity of manners, proper to the season, among the servants of the big block of chambers where I lived.) Withers demurely handed me a letter bearing a German post-mark and marked 'Urgent'. I had just finished dressing, and was collecting my money and gloves. A momentary thrill of curiosity broke upon my depression as I sat down to open it. A comber on the reverse of the envelope bore the blotted legend: 'Very sorry, but there's one other thing--a pair of rigging screws from Carey and Neilson's, size 1 3/8, __galvanized__.’ Here it is:

  Yacht 'Dulcibella,'
  Flensburg, Schleswig-Holstein, 21st Sept._

DEAR CARRUTHERS,—I daresay you'll be surprised at hearing from me, as it's ages since we met. It is more than likely, too, that what I'm going to suggest won't suit you, for I know nothing of your plans, and if you're in town at all you're probably just getting into harness again and can't get away. So I merely write on the offchance to ask if you would care to come out here and join me in a little yachting, and, I hope, duck shooting. I know you're keen on shooting, and I sort of remember that you have done some yachting too, though I rather forget about that. This part of the Baltic--the Schleswig fiords--is a splendid cruising-ground--Al scenery--and there ought to be plenty of duck about soon, if it gets cold enough. I came out here _via_ Holland and the Frisian Islands, starting early in August. My pals have had to leave me, and I'm badly in want of another, as I don't want to lay up yet for a bit. I needn't say how glad I should be if you could come. If you can, send me a wire to the P.O. here. Flushing and on by Hamburg will be your best route, I think. I'm having a few repairs done here, and will have them ready sharp by the time your train arrives. Bring your gun and a good lot of No. 4's; and would you mind calling at Lancaster's and asking for mine, and bringing it too? Bring some oilskins. Better get the eleven-shilling sort, jacket and trousers--not the 'yachting' brand; and if you paint your gear. I know you speak German like a native, and that will be a great help. Forgive this hail of directions, but I've a sort of feeling that I'm in luck and that you'll come. Anyway, I hope you and the F.O. both flourish. Good-bye.

Yours ever, ARTHUR H. DAVIES.

Would you mind bringing me out a _prismatic compass_, and a pound of Raven Mixture.

This letter marked an epoch for me; but I little suspected the fact as I crumpled it into my pocket and started languidly on the _voie douloureuse_ which I nightly followed to the club. In Pall Mall there were no dignified greetings to be exchanged now with well-groomed acquaintances. The only people to be seen were some late stragglers from the park, with a perambulator and some hot and dusty children lagging fretfully behind; some rustic sightseers draining the last dregs of the daylight in an effort to make out from their guide-books which of these reverend piles was upon; a policeman and a builder's cart. Of course the club was a strange one, both of my own being closed for cleaning, a coincidence expressly planned by Providence for my inconvenience. The few occupants seem odd and oddly dressed, and you wonder how they got there. The particular weekly that you want is you are 'permitted to make use of' on these occasions always irritates with its strangeness and discomfort. The few

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Delighted; please bring a No. 3 Rippingille stove'--a perplexing and ominous direction, which somehow chilled me to Davies, P.O., Flensburg. 'Thanks; expect me 9.34 p.m. 26th'; which produced, three hours later, a reply: and rods in the close season). Bradshaw'--(an extraordinary book, Bradshaw, turned to from habit, even when least wanted, as men fondle guns now, just in time for the best driving and the early pheasants. The heat's been shocking out there. Carter, bring me a greeting was 'Hullo, Carruthers, you here? Thought you had got away long ago. Lucky devil, though, to be going other drawbacks which I counted and treasured as proofs of my desperate condition, if I _were_ to go. It needed against such an uncomfortable way of seeing it, with the season so late, the company so unattractive, and all the ended in success I had forgotten the task set him, and was wondering whether the prospect of seeing something of still friends in Dresden and Berlin. Flensburg recalled the Danish war of '64, and by the time Carter's researches had whatever I had done or not done since. Its people, history, progress, and future had interested me intensely, and I hadWith most of the map and what it suggested I was tolerably familiar, for I had not wasted my year in Germany, might have saved him, but it was good for Carter to have something to do; and his patient ignorance was amusing. It was an admirable excuse, when I reached my office that day, for a resigned study of the Continental Bradshaw, and an order to Carter to unroll a great creaking wall-map of Germany and find me Flensburg. The latter labour I...
in spite of its subject matter.

Indeed, my resolution was continually faltering. It faltered when I turned out my gun in the evening and thought of the grouse it ought to have accounted for. It faltered again when I contemplated the miscellaneous list of commissions, sown broadcast through Davies's letter, to fulfil which seemed to make me a willing tool where my chosen rôle was that of an embittered exile, or at least a condescending ally. However, I faced the commissions manfully, after leaving the office.

At Lancaster's I inquired for his gun, was received coolly, and had to pay a heavy bill, which it seemed to have incurred, before it was handed over. Having ordered the gun and No. 4's to be sent to my chambers, I bought the Raven mixture with that peculiar sense of injury which the prospect of smuggling in another's behalf always entails; and wondered where in the world Carey and Neilson's was, a firm which Davies spoke of as though it were as well known as the Bank of England or the Stores, instead of specializing in 'rigging-screws', whatever they might be. They sounded important, though, and it would be only polite to unearth them. I connected them with the 'few repairs' and awoke new misgivings. At the Stores I asked for a No. 3 Rippingille stove, and was confronted with a formidable and hideous piece of ironmongery, which burned petroleum in two capacious tanks, horribly prophetic of a smell of warm oil. I paid for this miserably, convinced of its grim efficiency, but speculating as to the domestic conditions which caused it to be sent for as an afterthought by telegram. I also asked about rigging-screws in the yachting department, but learnt that they were not kept in stock; that Carey and Neilson's would certainly have them, and that their shop was in the Minories, in the far east, meaning a journey nearly as long as to Flensburg, and twice as tiresome. They would be shut by the time I got there, so after this exhausting round of duty I went home in a cab, omitted dressing for dinner (an epoch in itself), ordered a chop up from the basement kitchen, and spent the rest of the evening packing and writing, with the methodical gloom of a man setting his affairs in order for the last time.

The last of those airless nights passed. The astonished Withers saw me breakfasting at eight, and at 9.30 I was vacantly examining rigging-screws with what wits were left me after a sulphurous ride in the Underground to Aldgate. I laid great stress on the 3/8's, and the galvanism, and took them on trust, ignorant as to their functions. For the eleven-shilling oilskins I was referred to a villainous den in a back street, which the shopman said they always recommended, and where a dirty and bejewelled Hebrew chaffered with me (beginning at 18s.) over two reeking orange slabs distantly resembling moieties of the human figure. Their odour made me close prematurely for 14s., and I hurried back (for I was due there at eleven) to my office with my two disreputable brown-paper parcels, one of which made itself so noticeable in the close official air that Carter attentively asked if I would like to have it sent to my chambers, and K--was inquisitive to bluntness about it and my movements. But I did not care to enlighten K--, whose comments I knew would be provocingly envious or wounding to my pride in some way.

I remembered, later on, the prismatic compass, and wired to the Minories to have one sent at once, feeling rather relieved that I was not present there to be cross-examined as to size and make.

The reply was, 'Not stocked; try surveying-instrument maker'--a reply both puzzling and reassuring, for Davies's request for a compass had given me more uneasiness than anything, while, to find that what he wanted turned out to be a surveying-instrument, was a no less perplexing discovery. That day I made my last précis and handed over my schedules--Procrustean beds, where unwilling facts were stretched and tortured--and said good-bye to my temporary chief, genial and lenient M--, who wished me a jolly holiday with all sincerity.

At seven I was watching a cab packed with my personal luggage and the collection of unwieldy and incongruous packages that my shopping had drawn down on me. Two deviations after that wretched prismatic compass--which I obtained in the end secondhand, _faute de mieux_, near Victoria, at one of those showy shops which look like jewellers' and are really pawnbrokers'--nearly caused me to miss my train. But at 8.30 I had shaken off the dust of London from my feet, and at 10.30 I was, as I have announced, pacing the deck of a Flushing steamer, adrift on this fatal holiday in the far Baltic.

An air from the west, cooled by a midday thunderstorm, followed the steamer as she slid through the calm channels of the Thames estuary, passed the cordon of scintillating lightships that watch over the sea-roads to the imperial city like pickets round a sleeping army, and slipped out into the dark spaces of the North Sea. Stars were bright, summer scents from the Kent cliffs mingled coyly with vulgar steamer-smells; the summer weather held Immutably. Nature, for her part, seemed resolved to be no party to my penance, but to be imperturbably bent on shedding mild ridicule over my wrongs. An irresistible sense of peace and detachment, combined with that delicious physical awakening that pulses through the nerve-sick townsman when city airs and bald routine are left behind him, combined to provide me, however thankless a subject, with a solid background of resignation. Stowing this safely away, I could calculate my intentions with cold egotism. If the weather held I might pass a not intolerable fortnight away, I could easily excuse myself from the pursuit of the problematical ducks; the wintry logic of facts would, in any case, decide him to lay up his yacht, for he could scarcely think of sailing home at such a season. I could then take a chance lying ready of spending a few weeks in Dresden or
elsewhere. I settled this programme comfortably and then turned in.

From Flushing eastward to Hamburg, then northward to Flensburg, I cut short the next day's sultry story. Past dyke and windmill and still canals, on to blazing stubbles and roaring towns; at the last, after dusk, through a quiet level region where the train pottered from one lazy little station to another, and at ten o'clock I found myself, stiff and stuffy, on the platform at Flensburg, exchanging greetings with Davies.

'It's awfully good of you to come.'

'Not at all; it's very good of you to ask me.'

We were both of us ill at ease. Even in the dim gaslight he clashed on my notions of a yachtsman—no cool white ducks or neat blue serge; and where was the snowy crowned yachting cap, that precious charm that so easily converts a landsman into a dashing mariner? Conscious that this impressive uniform, in high perfection, was lying ready in my portmanteau, I felt oddly guilty. He wore an old Norfolk jacket, muddy brown shoes, grey flannel trousers (or had they been white?), and an ordinary tweed cap. The hand he gave me was horned, and appeared to be stained with paint; the other one, which carried a parcel, had a bandage on it which would have borne renewal. There was an instant of mutual inspection. I thought he gave me a shy, hurried scrutiny as though to test past conjectures, with something of anxiety in it, and perhaps (save the mark!) a tinge of admiration. The face was familiar, and yet not familiar; the pleasant blue eyes, open, clean-cut features, unintellectual forehead were the same; so were the brisk and impulsive movements; there was some change; but the moment of awkward hesitation was over and the light was bad; and, while strolling down the platform for my luggage, we chatted with constraint about trivial things.

'By the way,' he suddenly said, laughing, 'I'm afraid I'm not fit to be seen; but it's so late it doesn't matter. I've been painting hard all day, and just got it finished. I only hope we shall have some wind to-morrow—it's been hopelessly calm lately. I say, you've brought a good deal of stuff,' he concluded, as my belongings began to collect.

Here was a reward for my submissive exertions in the far east!

'You gave me a good many commissions!'

'Oh, I didn't mean those things,' he said, absently. 'Thanks for bringing them, by the way. That's the stove, I suppose; cartridges, this one, by the weight. You got the rigging-screws all right, I hope? They're not really necessary, of course' (I nodded vacantly, and felt a little hurt); 'but they're simpler than lanyards, and you can't get them here. It's that portmanteau,' he said, slowly, measuring it with a doubtful eye. 'Never mind! we'll try. You couldn't do with the Gladstone only, I suppose? You see, the dinghy--h'm, and there's the hatchway, too—he was lost in thought. 'Anyhow, we'll try. I'm afraid there are no cabs; but it's quite near, and the porter'll help.'

Sickening forebodings crept over me, while Davies shouldered my Gladstone and clutched at the parcels.

'Aren't your men here?' I asked, faintly.

'Men?' He looked confused. 'Oh, perhaps I ought to have told you, I never have any paid hands; it's quite a small boat, you know—I hope you didn't expect luxury. I've managed her single-handed for some time. A man would be no use, and a horrible nuisance.' He revealed these appalling truths with a cheerful assurance, which did nothing to hide a naive apprehension of their effect on me. There was a check in our mobilization.

'It's rather late to go on board, isn't it?' I said, in a wooden voice. Someone was turning out the gaslights, and the porter yawned ostentatiously. 'I think I'd rather sleep at an hotel to-night.' A strained pause.

'Oh, of course you can do that, if you like,' said Davies, in transparent distress of mind. 'But it seems hardly worth while to cart this stuff all the way to an hotel (I believe they're all on the other side of the harbour), and back again to the boat to-morrow. She's quite comfortable, and you're sure to sleep well, as you're tired.'

'We can leave the things here,' I argued feebly, 'and walk over with my bag.'

'Oh, I shall have to go aboard anyhow,' he rejoined; 'I'd never sleep on shore.'

He seemed to be clinging timidly, but desperately, to some diplomatic end. A story despair was invading me and paralysing resistance. Better face the worst and be done with it.

'Come on,' I said, grimly.

Heavily loaded, we stumbled over railway lines and rubble heaps, and came on the harbour. Davies led the way to a stairway, whose weedy steps disappeared below in gloom.

'If you'll get into the dinghy,' he said, all briskness now, 'I'll pass the things down.'

I descended gingerly, holding as a guide a sodden painter which ended in a small boat, and conscious that I was collecting slime on cuffs and trousers.

'Hold up!' shouted Davies, cheerfully, as I sat down suddenly near the bottom, with one foot in the water.

I climbed wretchedly into the dinghy and awaited events.

'Now float her up close under the quay wall, and make fast to the ring down there,' came down from above, followed by the slack of the sodden painter, which knocked my cap off as it fell. 'All fast? Any knot'll do,' I heard, as I grappled with this loathsome task, and then a big, dark object loomed overhead and was lowered into the dinghy. It
was my portmanteau, and, placed athwart, exactly filled all the space amidships. 'Does it fit?' was the anxious inquiry from aloft.

'Beautifully.'

'Capital!' Scratching at the greasy wall to keep the dinghy close to it, I received in succession our stores, and stowed the cargo as best I could, while the dinghy sank lower and lower in the water, and its precarious superstructure grew higher.

'Catch!' was the final direction from above, and a damp soft parcel hit me in the chest. 'Be careful of that, it's meat. Now back to the stairs!' I painfully acquiesced, and Davies appeared.

'It's a bit of a load, and she's rather deep; but I _think_ we shall manage,' he reflected. 'You sit right aft, and I'll row.'

I was too far gone for curiosity as to how this monstrous pyramid was to be rowed, or even for surmises as to its foundering by the way. I crawled to my appointed seat, and Davies extricated the buried sculls by a series of tugs, which shook the whole structure, and made us roll alarmingly. How he stowed himself into rowing posture I have not the least idea, but eventually we were moving sluggishly out into the open water, his head just visible in the bows. We had started from what appeared to be the head of a narrow loch, and were leaving behind us the lights of a big town. A long frontage of lamp-lit quays was on our left, with here and there the vague hull of a steamer alongside. We passed the last of the lights and came out into a broader stretch of water, when a light breeze was blowing and dark hills could be seen on either shore.

'I'm lying a little way down the fiord, you see,' said Davies. 'I hate to be too near a town, and I found a carpenter handy here--There she is! I wonder how you'll like her!'

I roused myself. We were entering a little cove encircled by trees, and approaching a light which flickered in the rigging of a small vessel, whose outline gradually defined itself.

'Keep her off,' said Davies, as we drew alongside.

OTE

In a moment he had jumped on deck, tied the painter, and was round at my end.

'You hand them up,' he ordered, 'and I'll take them.'

It was a laborious task, with the one relief that it was not far to hand them - a doubtful compensation, for other reasons distantly shaping themselves. When the stack was transferred to the deck I followed it, tripping over the flabby meat parcel, which was already showing ghastly signs of disintegration under the dew. Hazily there floated through my mind my last embarkation on a yacht; my faultless attire, the trim gig and obsequious sailors, the accommodation ladder flashing with varnish and brass in the August sun; the orderly, snowy decks and basket chairs under the awning aft. What a contrast with this sordid midnight scramble, over damp meat and littered packing-cases! The bitterest touch of all was a growing sense of inferiority and ignorance which I had never before been allowed to feel in my experience of yachts.

CKQUOTEDavies awoke from another reverie over my portmanteau to say, cheerily: 'I'll just show you round down below first, and then we'll stow things away and get to bed.'

He dived down a companion ladder, and I followed cautiously. A complex odour of paraffin, past cookery, tobacco, and tar saluted my nostrils.

'Mind your head,' said Davies, striking a match and lighting a candle, while I groped into the cabin. 'You'd better sit down; it's easier to look round.'

There might well have been sarcasm in this piece of advice, for I must have cut a ridiculous figure, peering awkwardly and suspiciously round, with shoulders and head bent to avoid the ceiling, which seemed in the half-light to be even nearer the floor than it was.

'You see,' were Davies's reassuring words, 'there's plenty of room to _sit_ upright' (which was strictly true; but I am not very tall, and he is short). 'Some people make a point of head-room, but I never mind much about it. That's the centre-board case,' he explained, as, in stretching my legs out, my knee came into contact with a sharp edge.

I had not seen this devilish obstruction, as it was hidden beneath the table, which indeed rested on it at one end. It appeared to be a long, low triangle, running lengthways with the boat and dividing the naturally limited space into two.

'You see, she's a flat-bottomed boat, drawing very little water without the plate; that's why there's so little headroom. For deep water you lower the plate; so, in one way or another, you can go practically anywhere.'

I was not nautical enough to draw any very definite conclusions from this, but what I did draw were not promising. The latter sentences were spoken from the forecastle, whither Davies had crept through a low sliding door, like that of a rabbit-hutch, and was already busy with a kettle over a stove which I made out to be a battered
and disreputable twin brother of the No. 3 Rippingille.

'It'll be boiling soon,' he remarked, 'and we'll have some grog.'

My eyes were used to the light now, and I took in the rest of my surroundings, which may be very simply described. Two long cushion-covered seats flanked the cabin, bounded at the after end by cupboards, one of which was cut low to form a sort of miniature sideboard, with glasses hung in a rack above it. The deck overhead was very low at each side but rose shoulder high for a space in the middle, where a 'coach-house roof' with a skylight gave additional cabin space. Just outside the door was a fold-up washing-stand. On either wall were long net-racks holding a medley of flags, charts, caps, cigar-boxes, banks of yam, and such like. Across the forward bulkhead was a bookshelf crammed to overflowing with volumes of all sizes, many upside down and some coverless. Below this were a pipe-rack, an aneroid, and a clock with a hearty tick. All the woodwork was painted white, and to a less jaundiced eye than mine the interior might have had an enticing look of snugness. Some Kodak prints were nailed roughly on the after bulkhead, and just over the doorway was the photograph of a young girl.

'That's my sister,' said Davies, who had emerged and saw me looking at it. 'Now, let's get the stuff down.' He ran up the ladder, and soon my portmanteau blackened the hatchway, and a great straining and squeezing began. 'I was afraid it was too big,' came down; 'I'm sorry, but you'll have to unpack on deck--we may be able to squish it down when it's empty.'

Then the wearisome tail of packages began to form a fresh stack in the cramped space at my feet, and my back ached with stooping and moiling in unfamiliar places. Davies came down, and with unconcealed pride introduced me to the sleeping cabin (he called the other one 'the saloon'). Another candle was lit and showed two short and narrow berths with blankets, but no sign of sheets; beneath these were drawers, one set of which Davies made me master of, evidently thinking them a princely allowance of space for my wardrobe.

'You can chuck your things down the skylight on to your berth as you unpack them,' he remarked. 'By the way, I doubt if there's room for all you've got. I suppose you couldn't manage--'

'No, I couldn't,' I said shortly.

The absurdity of argument struck me; two men, doubled up like monkeys, cannot argue.

'If you'll go out I shall be able to get out too,' I added. He seemed miserable at this ghost of an altercation, but I pushed past, mounted the ladder, and in the expiring moonlight unstrapped that accursed portmanteau and, brimming over with irritation, groped among its contents, sorting some into the skylight with the same feeling that nothing mattered much now, and it was best to be done with it; repacking the rest with guilty stealth ere Davies should discover their character, and strapping up the whole again. Then I sat down upon my white elephant and shivered, for the chill of autumn was in the air. It suddenly struck me that if it had been raining things might have been worse still. The notion made me look round. The little cove was still as glass; stars above and stars below; a few white cottages glimmering at one point on the shore; in the west the lights of Flensburg; to the east the fiord broadening into unknown gloom. From Davies toiling below there were muffled sounds of wrenching, pushing, and hammering, punctuated occasionally by a heavy splash as something shot up from the hatchway and fell into the water.

How it came about I do not know. Whether it was something pathetic in the look I had last seen on his face--a look which I associated for no reason whatever with his bandaged hand; whether it was one of those instants of clear vision in which our separate selves are seen divided, the baser from the better, and I saw my silly egotism in contrast with a simple generous nature; whether it was an impalpable air of mystery which pervaded the whole enterprise and refused to be dissipated by its most mortifying and vulgarizing incidents--a mystery dimly connected with my companion's obvious consciousness of having misled me into joining him; whether it was only the stars and the cool air rousing atrophied instincts of youth and spirits; probably, indeed, it was all these influences, cemented into strength by a ruthless sense of humour which whispered that I was in danger of making a mere commonplace fool of myself in spite of all my laboured calculations; but whatever it was, in a flash my mood changed. The crown of martyrdom disappeared, the wounded vanity healed; that precious fund of fictitious resignation drained away, but left no void. There was left a fashionable and dishevelled young man sitting in the dew and in the dark on a ridiculous portmanteau which dwarfed the yacht that was to carry it; a youth acutely sensible of ignorance in a strange and strenuous atmosphere; still feeling sore and victimized; but withal sanely ashamed and sanely resolved to enjoy himself. I anticipate; for though the change was radical its full growth was slow. But in any case it was here and now that it took its birth.

'Grog's ready!' came from below. Bunching myself for the descent I found to my astonishment that all trace of litter had miraculously vanished, and a cosy neatness reigned. Glasses and lemons were on the table, and a fragrant smell of punch had deadened previous odours. I showed little emotion at these amenities, but enough to give intense relief to Davies, who delightedly showed me his devices for storage, praising the 'roominess' of his floating den.

'There's your stove, you see,' he ended; 'I've chucked the old one overboard.' It was a weakness of his, I should say...
here, to rejoice in throwing things overboard on the flimsiest pretexts. I afterwards suspected that the new stove had not been 'really necessary' any more than the rigging-screws, but was an excuse for gratifying this curious taste.

We smoked and chatted for a little, and then came the problem of going to bed. After much bumping of knuckles and head, and many giddy writhings, I mastered it, and lay between the rough blankets. Davies, moving swiftly and deftly, was soon in his.

'It's quite comfortable, isn't it?' he said, as he blew out the light from where he lay, with an accuracy which must have been the fruit of long practice.

I felt prickly all over, and there was a damp patch on the pillow, which was soon explained by a heavy drop of moisture falling on my forehead.

'I suppose the deck's not leaking?' I said, as mildly as I could. 'I'm awfully sorry,' said Davies, earnestly, tumbling out of his bunk. 'It must be the heavy dew. I did a lot of caulking yesterday, but I suppose I missed that place. I'll run up and square it with an oilskin.'

'What's wrong with your hand?' I asked, sleepily, on his return, for gratitude reminded me of that bandage.

'Nothing much; I strained it the other day,' was the reply; and then the seemingly inconsequent remark: 'I'm glad you brought that prismatic compass. It's not really necessary, of course; but' (muffled by blankets) 'it may come in useful.'

3 Davies

I DOZED but fitfully, with a fretful sense of sore elbows and neck and many a draughty hiatus among the blankets. It was broad daylight before I had reached the stage of torpor in which such slumber merges. That was finally broken by the descent through the skylight of a torrent of water. I started up, bumped my head hard against the decks, and blinked leaden-eyed upwards.

'Sorry! I'm scrubbing decks. Come up and bathe. Slept well?' I heard a voice saying from aloft.

'Fairly well,' I growled, stepping out into a pool of water on the oilcloth. Thence I stumbled up the ladder, dived overboard, and buried bad dreams, stiffness, frownsiness, and tormented nerves in the loveliest fiord of the lovely Baltic. A short and furious swim and I was back again, searching for a means of ascent up the smooth black side, which, low as it was, was slippery and unsympathetic. Davies, in a loose canvas shirt, with the sleeves tucked up, and flannels rolled up to the knee, hung over me with a rope's end, and chatted unconcernedly about the easiness of the job when you know how, adjing me to mind the paint, and talking about an accommodation ladder he had once had, but had thrown overboard because it was so horribly in the way. When I arrived, my knees and elbows were picked out in black paint, to his consternation. Nevertheless, as I plied the towel, I knew that I had left in those limpid depths yet another crust of discontent and self-conceit.

As I dressed into flannels and blazer, I looked round the deck, and with an unskilled and doubtful eye took in all that the darkness had hitherto hidden. She seemed very small (in point of fact she was seven tons), something over thirty feet in length and nine in beam, a size very suitable to week-ends in the Solent, for such as liked that sort of thing; but that she should have come from Dover to the Baltic suggested a world of physical endeavour of which I had never dreamed. I passed to the aesthetic side. Smartness and beauty were essential to yachts, in my mind, but with the best resolves to be pleased I found little encouragement here. The hull seemed too low, and the mainmast too high; the cabin roof looked clumsy, and the skylights saddened the eye with dull iron and plebeian graining. What brass there was, on the tiller-head and elsewhere, was tarnished with sickly green. The decks had none of that creamy purity which Cowes expects, but were rough and grey, and showed tarry exhalations round the seams and rusty stains near the bows. The ropes and rigging were in mourning when contrasted with the delicate buff manilla so satisfying to the artistic eye as seen against the blue of a June sky at Southsea. Nor was the whole effect bettered by many signs of recent refitting. An impression of paint, varnish, and carpentry was in the air; a gaudy new burgee fluttered aloft; there seemed to be a new rope or two, especially round the diminutive mizzen-mast, which itself looked altogether new. But all this only emphasized the general plainness, reminding one of a respectable woman of the working-classes trying to dress above her station, and soon likely to give it up.

That the _ensemble_ was businesslike and solid even my untrained eye could see. Many of the deck fittings seemed disproportionately substantial. The anchor-chain looked contemptuous of its charge; the binnacle with its compass was of a size and prominence almost comically impressive, and was, moreover the only piece of brass which was burnished and showed traces of reverent care. Two huge coils of stout and dingy warp lay just abaft the mainmast, and summed up the weather-beaten aspect of the little ship. I should add here that in the distant past she had been a lifeboat, and had been clumsily converted into a yacht by the addition of a counter, deck, and the necessary spars. She was built, as all lifeboats are, diagonally, of two skins of teak, and thus had immense strength, though, in the matter of looks, all a hybrid's failings.

Hunger and 'Tea's made!' from below brought me down to the cabin, where I found breakfast laid out on the table over the centre-board case, with Davies earnestly presiding, rather flushed as to the face, and sooty as to the
it was unconfessed, stole in on me with the suspicion that, little as I deserved it, the patient fates were offering me a
congenial men to know, I had made some big mistakes--how many, I wondered? A relief, scarcely less deep because
on every lineament. A deep misgiving stirred me that, clever as I thought myself, nicely perceptive of the right and
detached earnestness, which had partly amused and chiefly annoyed me hitherto, seemed now to be lost in a
in the firm lines of the chin; an older and deeper look in the eyes. Those odd transitions from bright mobility to
but the scales were falling from my eyes, and I saw others. I saw strength to obstinacy and courage to recklessness,
from the deck of a 

Southampton Water.

as vaguely and unconcernedly about his adventurous cruise as though it were all a protracted afternoon on

fiord through I knew not what of difficulty and danger, with no apparent motive in her single occupant, who talked

scrubby little craft of doubtful build and distressing plainness, which yet had smelt her persistent way to this distant

a 'fine steam yacht', or even on 'a powerful modern schooner', as the yacht agents advertise, but from the deck of a

peculiar charm engendered by the association of quiet pastoral country and a homely human atmosphere with a

folds of hill far away hinted at spaces of distant sea of which this was but a secluded inlet. Everywhere was that

the contours of hills, some clear, some dreamy and distant. Lastly, a single glimpse of water shining between the

presence of some great manor house. Behind us, Flensburg was settling into haze. Ahead, the scene was shut in by

pleasing to the eye. Spacious pastures led up by slow degrees to ordered clusters of wood, which hinted at the

farms dotted the prospect. The other shore, which I could just see, framed between the gunwale and the mainsail, as

I sat leaning against the hatchway, and sadly missing a deck-chair, was lower and lonelier, though prosperous and

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green spaces and rich woods on the lower slopes; a little white town was opening up in one place, and scattered

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folds of hill far away hinted at spaces of distant sea of which this was but a secluded inlet. Everywhere was that
peculiar charm engendered by the association of quiet pastoral country and a homely human atmosphere with a
branch of the great ocean that bathes all the shores of our globe.

There was another charm in the scene, due to the way in which I was viewing it--not as a pampered passenger on
a 'fine steam yacht', or even on 'a powerful modern schooner', as the yacht agents advertise, but from the deck of a
scrubby little craft of doubtful build and distressing plainness, which yet had smelt her persistent way to this distant
fiord through I knew not what of difficulty and danger, with no apparent motive in her single occupant, who talked

as vaguely and unconcernedly about his adventurous cruise as though it were all a protracted afternoon on
Southampton Water.

I glanced round at Davies. He had dropped the chart and was sitting, or rather half lying, on the deck with one
bronzed arm over the tiller, gazing fixedly ahead, with just an occasional glance around and aloft. He still seemed
absorbed in himself, and for a moment or two I studied his face with an attention I had never, since I had known
him, given it. I had always thought it commonplace, as I had thought him commonplace, so far as I had thought at
all about either. It had always rather irritated me by an excess of candour and boyishness. These qualities it had kept,
but the scales were falling from my eyes, and I saw others. I saw strength to obstinacy and courage to recklessness,
in the firm lines of the chin; an older and deeper look in the eyes. Those odd transitions from bright mobility to
detached earnestness, which had partly amused and chiefly annoyed me hitherto, seemed now to be lost in a
sensitive reserve, not cold or egotistic, but strangely winning from its paradoxical frankness. Sincerity was stamped
on every lineament. A deep misgiving stirred me that, clever as I thought myself, nicely perceptive of the right and
congenial men to know, I had made some big mistakes--how many, I wondered? A relief, scarcely less deep because
it was unconfessed, stole in on me with the suspicion that, little as I deserved it, the patient fates were offering me a
golden chance of repairing at least one. And yet, I mused, the patient fates have crooked methods, besides a certain mischievous humour, for it was Davies who had asked me out—though now he scarcely seemed to need me—almost tricked me into coming out, for he might have known I was not suited to such a life; yet trickery and Davies sounded an odd conjunction.

Probably it was the growing discomfort of my attitude which produced this backsliding. My night's rest and the 'ascent from the bath' had, in fact, done little to prepare me for contact with sharp edges and hard surfaces. But Davies had suddenly come to himself, and with an 'I say, are you comfortable? Have something to sit on?' jerked the helm a little to windward, felt it like a pulse for a moment, with a rapid look to windward, and dived below, whence he returned with a couple of cushions, which he threw to me. I felt perversely resentful of these luxuries, and asked:

'Can't I be of any use?'

'Oh, don't you bother,' he answered. 'I expect you're tired. Aren't we having a splendid sail? That must be Ekken on the port bow,' peering under the sail, 'where the trees run in. I say, do you mind looking at the chart?' He tossed it over to me. I spread it out painfully, for it curled up like a watch-spring at the least slackening of pressure. I was not familiar with charts, and this sudden trust reposed in me, after a good deal of neglect, made me nervous.

'You see Flensburg, don't you?' he said. 'That's where we are,' dabbing with a long reach at an indefinite space on the crowded sheet. 'Now which side of that buoy off the point do we pass?'

I had scarcely taken in which was land and which was water, much less the significance of the buoy, when he resumed:

'Never mind; I'm pretty sure it's all deep water about here. I expect that marks the fair-way for steamers. In a minute or two we were passing the buoy in question, on the wrong side I am pretty certain, for weeds and sand came suddenly into view below us with uncomfortable distinctness. But all Davies said was:

'There's never any sea here, and the plate's not down,' a dark utterance which I pondered doubtfully. 'The best of these Schleswig waters,' he went on, is that a boat of this size can go almost anywhere. There's no navigation required. Why--' At this moment a faint scraping was felt, rather than heard, beneath us.

'Aren't we aground?' I asked, with great calmness.

'Oh, she'll blow over,' he replied, wincing a little.

She 'blew over', but the episode caused a little naive vexation in Davies. I relate it as a good instance of one of his minor peculiarities. He was utterly without that didactic pedantry which yachting has a fatal tendency to engender in men who profess it. He had tossed me the chart without a thought that I was an ignoramus, to whom it would be Greek, and who would provide him with an admirable subject to drill and lecture, just as his neglect of me throughout the morning had been merely habitual and unconscious independence. In the second place, master of his métier, as I knew him afterwards to be, resourceful, skilful, and alert, he was liable to lapse into a certain amateurish vagueness, half irritating and half amusing. I think truly that both these peculiarities came from the same source, a hatred of any sort of affectation. To the same source I traced the fact that he and his yacht observed none of the superficial etiquette of yachts and yachtsmen, that she never, for instance, flew a national ensign, and he never wore a 'yachting suit'.

We rounded a low green point which I had scarcely noticed before.

'We must jibe,' said Davies: 'just take the helm, will you?' and, without waiting for my co-operation, he began hauling in the mainsheet with great vigour. I had rude notions of steering, but jibing is a delicate operation. No yachtsman will be surprised to hear that the boom saw its opportunity and swung over with a mighty crash, with the mainsheet entangled round me and the tiller.

'Jibed all standing,' was his sorrowful comment. 'You're not used to her yet. She's very quick on the helm.'

'Where am I to steer for?' I asked, wildly.

'Oh, don't trouble, I'll take her now,' he replied, wincing a little.

I felt it was time to make my position clear. 'I'm an utter duffer at sailing,' I began. 'You'll have a lot to teach me, or one of these days I shall be wrecking you. You see, there's always been a crew--'Crew!'--with sovereign contempt--'why, the whole fun of the thing is to do everything oneself.'

'Well, I've felt in the way the whole morning.'

'I'm awfully sorry!' His dismay and repentance were comical. 'Why, it's just the other way; you may be all the use in the world.' He became absent.

We were following the inward trend of a small bay towards a cleft in the low shore.

'That's Ekken Sound,' said Davies; 'let's look into it,' and a minute or two later we were drifting through a dainty little strait, with a peep of open water at the end of it. Cottages bordered either side. some overhanging the very water, some connecting with it by a rickety wooden staircase or a miniature landing-stage. Creepers and roses rioted over the walls and tiny porches. For a space on one side, a rude quay, with small smacks floating off it, spoke of some minute commercial interests; a very small tea-garden, with neglected-looking bowers and leaf-strewn tables,
hinted at some equally minute tripping interest. A pervading hue of mingled bronze and rose came partly from the weather-mellowed woodwork of the cottages and stages, and partly from the creepers and the trees behind, where autumn's subtle fingers were already at work. Down this exquisite sea-lane we glided till it ended in a broad mere, where our sails, which had been shivering and complaining, filled into contented silence.

'Ready about!' said Davies, callously. 'We must get out of this again.' And round we swung.

'Why not anchor and stop here?' I protested; for a view of tantalizing loveliness was unfolding itself.

'Oh, we've seen all there is to be seen, and we must take this breeze while we've got it.' It was always torture to Davies to feel a good breeze running to waste while he was inactive at anchor or on shore. The 'shore' to him was an inferior element, merely serving as a useful annexe to the water—a source of necessary supplies.

'Let's have lunch,' he pursued, as we resumed our way down the fiord. A vision of iced drinks, tempting salads, white napery, and an attentive steward mocked me with past recollections.

'You'll find a tongue,' said the voice of doom, 'in the starboard sofa-locker; beer under the floor in the bilge. I'll see her round that buoy, if you wouldn't mind beginning.' I obeyed with a bad grace, but the close air and cramped posture must have benumbed my faculties, for I opened the port-side locker, reached down, and grasped a sticky body, which turned out to be a pot of varnish. Recoiling wretchedly, I tried the opposite one, combating the embarrassing heel of the boat and the obstructive edges of the centre-board case. A medley of damp tins of varied sizes showed in the gloom, exuding a mouldy odour. Faded legends on dissolving paper, like the remnants of old posters on a disused hoarding, spoke of soups, curries, beefs, potted meats, and other hidden delicacies. I picked out a tongue, re-imprisoned the odour, and explored for beer. It was true, I supposed, that bilge didn't hurt it, as I tugged at the plank on my hands and knees, but I should have myself preferred a more accessible and less humid wine-cellar than the cavities among slimy ballast from which I dug the bottles. I regarded my hard-won and ill-favoured pledges of a meal with giddiness and discouragement.

'How are you getting on?' shouted Davies; 'the tin-opener's hanging up on the bulkhead; the plates and knives are in the cupboard.'

I doggedly pursued my functions. The plates and knives met me half-way, for, being on the weather side, and thus having a downward slant, its contents, when I slipped the latch, slid affectionately into my bosom, and overflowed with a clatter and jingle on to the floor.

'That often happens,' I heard from above. 'Never mind! There are no breakables. I'm coming down to help.' And down he came, leaving the Dulcibella to her own devices.

'I think I'll go on deck,' I said. 'Why in the world couldn't you lunch comfortably at Ekken and save this infernal pandemonium of a picnic? Where's the yacht going to meanwhile? And how are we to lunch on that slanting table? I'm covered with varnish and mud, and ankle-deep in crockery. There goes the beer!'

'You shouldn't have stood it on the table with this list on,' said Davies, with intense composure, 'but it won't do any harm; it'll drain into the bilge' (ashes to ashes, dust to dust, I thought). 'You go on deck now, and I'll finish getting ready.' I regretted my explosion, though wrung from me under great provocation.

'Keep her straight on as she's going,' said Davies, as I clambered up out of the chaos, brushing the dust off my trousers and varnishing the ladder with my hands. I unlashed the helm and kept her as she was going.

We had rounded a sharp bend in the fiord, and were sailing up a broad and straight reach which every moment disclosed new beauties, sights fair enough to be balm to the angriest spirit. A red-roofed hamlet was on our left, on the right an ivied ruin, close to the water, where some contemplative cattle stood knee-deep. The view ahead was a white strand which fringed both shores, and to it fell wooded slopes, interrupted here and there by low sandstone cliffs of warm red colouring, and now and again by a dingle with cracks of greensward.

I forgot petty squalors and enjoyed things—the coy tremble of the tiller and the backwash of air from the dingy mainsail, and, with a somewhat chastened rapture, the lunch which Davies brought up to me and solicitously watched me eat.

Later, as the wind sank to lazy airs, he became busy with a larger topsail and jib; but I was content to doze away the afternoon, drenching brain and body in the sweet and novel foreign atmosphere, and dreamily watching the fringe of glen cliff and cool white sand as they passed ever more slowly by.

4 Retrospect

'Wake up!' I rubbed my eyes and wondered where I was; stretched myself painfully, too, for even the cushions had not given me a true bed of roses. It was dusk, and the yacht was stationary in glassy water, coloured by the last after-glow. A roofing of thin upper-cloud had spread over most of the sky, and a subtle smell of rain was in the air. We seemed to be in the middle of the fiord, whose shores looked distant and steep in the gathering darkness. Close ahead they faded away suddenly, and the sight lost itself in a grey void. The stillness was absolute.

'We can't get to Sonderburg to-night,' said Davies.

'What's to be done then?' I asked, collecting my senses.
'Oh! we'll anchor anywhere here, we're just at the mouth of the fiord; I'll tow her inshore if you'll steer in that direction.' He pointed vaguely at a blur of trees and cliff. Then he jumped into the dinghy, cast off the painter, and, after snatching at the slack of a rope, began towing the reluctant yacht by short jerks of the sculls. The menacing aspect of that grey void, combined with a natural preference for getting to some definite place at night, combined to depress my spirits afresh. In my sleep I had dreamt of Morven Lodge, of heather tea-parties after glorious slaughters of grouse, of salmon leaping in amber pools--and now--

'Just take a cast of the lead, will you?' came Davies's voice above the splash of the sculls.

'Where is it?' I shouted back.

'Never mind - we're close enough now; let--Can you manage to let go the anchor?'

I hurried forward and picked impotently at the bonds of the sleeping monster. But Davies was aboard again, and stirred him with a deft touch or two, till he crashed into the water with a grinding of chain.

'We shall do well here,' said he.

'Isn't this rather an open anchorage?' I suggested.

'It's only open from that quarter,' he replied. 'If it comes on to blow from there we shall have to clear out; but I think it's only rain. Let's stow the sails.'

Another whirlwind of activity, in which I joined as effectively as I could, oppressed by the prospect of having to clear out--who knows whither?--at midnight. But Davies's _sang froid_ was infectious, I suppose, and the little den below, bright-lit and soon fragrant with cookery, pleaded insistently for affection. Yachting in this singular style was hungry work, I found. Steak tastes none the worse for having been wrapped in newspaper, and the slight traces of the day's news disappear with frying in onions and potato-chips. Davies was indeed on his mettle for this, his first dinner to his guest; for he produced with stealthy pride, not from the dishonoured grave of the beer, but from some more hallowed recess, a bottle of German champagne, from which we drank success to the Dulciabella.

'I wish you would tell me all about your cruise from England,' I asked. 'You must have had some exciting adventures. Here are the charts; let's go over them.'

'We must wash up first,' he replied, and I was tactfully introduced to one of his very few 'standing orders', that tobacco should not burn, nor post-prandial chat begin, until that distasteful process had ended. 'It would never get done otherwise,' he sagely opined. But when we were finally settled with cigars, a variety of which, culled from many ports--German, Dutch, and Belgian--Davies kept in a battered old box in the net-rack, the promised talk hung fire.

'I'm no good at description,' he complained; 'and there's really very little to tell. We left Dover--Morrison and I--on 6th August; made a good passage to Ostend.'

'You had some fun there, I suppose?' I put in, thinking of--well, of Ostend in August.

'Fun! A filthy hole I call it; we had to stop a couple of days, as we fouled a buoy coming in and carried away the bobstay; we lay in a dirty little tidal dock, and there was nothing to do on shore.'

'Well, what next?'

'We had a splendid sail to the East Scheldt, but then, like fools, decided to go through Holland by canal and river. It was good fun enough navigating the estuary--the tides and banks there are appalling--but farther inland it was a wretched business, nothing but paying lock-dues, bumping against schuyts, and towing down stinking canals. Never a peaceful night like this--always moored by some quay or tow-path, with people passing and boys. Heavens! shall I ever forget those boys! A perfect murrain of them infests Holland; they seem to have nothing in the world to do but throw stones and mud at foreign yachts.'

'They want a Herod, with some statesmanlike views on infanticide.'

'By Jove! yes; but the fact is that you want a crew for that pottering inland work; they can smack the boys and keep an eye on the sculls. A boat like this should stick to the sea, or out-of-the-way places on the coast. Well, after Amsterdam.'

'You've skipped a good deal, haven't you?' I interrupted.

'Oh! have I? Well, let me see, we went by Dordrecht to Rotterdam; nothing to see there, and swarms of tugs buzzing about and shaving one's bows every second. On by the Vecht river to Amsterdam, and thence--Lord, what a relief it was!--out into the North Sea again. The weather had been still and steamy; but it broke up finely now, and we had a rattling three-reef sail to the Zuyder Zee.'

He reached up to the bookshelf for what looked like an ancient ledger, and turned over the leaves.

'Is that your log?' I asked. 'I should like to have a look at it.'

'Oh! you'd find it dull reading--if you could read it at all; it's just short notes about winds and bearings, and so on.' He was turning some leaves over rapidly. 'Now, why don't you keep a log of what we do? I can't describe things, and you can.'

'I've half a mind to try,' I said.
'We want another chart now,' and he pulled down a second yet more stained and frayed than the first. 'We had a splendid time then exploring the Zuyder Zee, its northern part at least, and round those islands which bound it on the north. Those are the Frisian Islands, and they stretch for 120 miles or so eastward. You see, the first two of them, Texel and Vlieland, shut in the Zuyder Zee, and the rest border the Dutch and German coasts.' [...See Map A...]

'What's all this?' I said, running my finger over some dotted patches which covered much of the chart. The latter was becoming unintelligible; clean-cut coasts and neat regiments of little figures had given place to a confusion of winding and intersecting lines and bald spaces.

'All _sand,_' said Davies, enthusiastically. 'You can't think what a splendid sailing-ground it is. You can explore for days without seeing a soul. These are the channels, you see; they're very badly charted. This chart was almost useless, but it made it all the more fun. No towns or harbours, just a village or two on the islands, if you wanted stores.'

'They look rather desolate,' I said.

'Desolate's no word for it; they're really only gigantic sand-banks themselves.'

'Wasn't all this rather dangerous?' I asked.

'Not a bit; you see, that's where our shallow draught and flat bottom came in--we could go anywhere, and it didn't matter running around--she's perfect for that sort of work; and she doesn't really _look_ bad either, does she?' he asked, rather wistfully. I suppose I hesitated, for he said, abruptly:

'Anyway, I don't go in for looks.'

He had leaned back, and I detected traces of incipient absentmindedness. His cigar, which he had lately been lighting and relighting feverishly--a habit of his when excited--seemed now to have expired for good.

'About running around,' I persisted; 'surely that's apt to be dangerous?'

He sat up and felt round for a match.

'Not the least, if you know where you can run risks and where you can't; anyway, you can't possibly help it. That chart may look simple to you'--('simple!' I thought)--'but at half flood all those banks are covered; the islands and coasts are scarcely visible, they are so low, and everything looks the same.' This graphic description of a 'splendid cruising-ground' took away my breath. 'Of course there _is_ risk sometimes--choosing an anchorage requires care. You can generally get a nice berth under the lee of a bank, but the tides run strong in the channels, and if there's a gale blowing--'

'Didn't you ever take a pilot?' I interrupted.

'Pilot? Why, the whole point of the thing'--he stopped short--'I did take one once, later on,' he resumed, with an odd smile, which faded at once.

'Oh! he ran me ashore, of course. Served me right. I wonder what the weather's doing'; he rose, glanced at the aneroid, the clock, and the half-closed skylight with a curious circular movement, and went a step or two up the companion-ladder, where he remained for several minutes with head and shoulders in the open air.

There was no sound of wind outside, but the Dulcibella had begun to move in her sleep, as it were, rolling drowsily to some taint send of the sea, with an occasional short jump, like the start of an uneasy dreamer.

'What does it look like?' I called from my sofa. I had to repeat the question.

'Rain coming,' said Davies, returning, 'and possibly wind; but we're safe enough here. It's coming from the sou'-west; shall we turn in?'

'We haven't finished your cruise yet,' I said. 'Light a pipe and tell me the rest.'

'All right,' he agreed, with more readiness than I expected.

'After Terschelling--here it is, the third island from the west--I pottered along eastward.' [...See Map A...]

'I?'

'Oh! I forgot. Morrison had to leave me there. I missed him badly. but I hoped at that time to get--to join me. I could manage all right single-handed, but for that sort of work two are much better than one. The plate's beastly heavy; in fact, I had to give up using it for fear of a smash.'

'After Terschelling?' I jogged his memory.

'Well, I followed the Dutch islands, Ameland, Schiermonnikoog, Rottum (outlandish names, aren't they?), sometimes outside them, sometimes inside. It was a bit lonely, but grand sport and very interesting. The charts were shocking, but I worried out most of the channels.'

'I suppose those waters are only used by small local craft?' I put in; that would account for inaccuracies.' Did Davies think that Admiralties had time to waste on smoothing the road for such quixotic little craft as his, in all its inquisitive ramblings? But he fired up.

'That's all very well,' he said, 'but think what folly it is. However, that's a long story, and will bore you. To cut matters short, for we ought to be turning in, I got to Borkum--that's the first of the _German_ islands.' He pointed at
a round bare lozenge lying in the midst of a welter of sandbanks. 'Rottum--this queer little one--it has only one house on it--is the most easterly Dutch island, and the mainland of Holland ends _here_, opposite it, at the Ems River'--indicating a dismal cavity in the coast, sown with names suggestive of mud, and wrecks, and dreariness.

'What date was this?' I asked.

'About the ninth of this month.'

'Why, that's only a fortnight before you wired to me! You were pretty quick getting to Flensburg. Wait a bit, we want another chart. Is this the next?'

'Yes; but we scarcely need it. I only went a little way farther on--to Norderney, in fact, the third German island--then I decided to go straight for the Baltic. I had always had an idea of getting there, as Knight did in the Falcon. So I made a passage of it to the Eider River, _there_ on the West Schleswig coast, took the river and canal through to Kiel on the Baltic, and from there made another passage up north to Flensburg. I was a week there, and then you came, and here we are. And now let's turn in. We'll have a fine sail to-morrow!' He ended with rather forced vivacity, and briskly rolled up the chart. The reluctance he had shown from the first to talk about his cruise had been for a brief space forgotten in his enthusiasm about a portion of it, but had returned markedly in this bald conclusion. I felt sure that there was more in it than mere disinclination to spin nautical yarns in the 'hardy Corinthian' style, which can be so offensive in amateur yachtsmen; and I thought I guessed the explanation. His voyage single-handed to the Baltic from the Frisian Islands had been a foolhardy enterprise, with perilous incidents, which, rather than make light of, he would not refer to at all. Probably he was ashamed of his recklessness and wished to ignore it with me, an inexperienced acquaintance not yet enamoured of the Dulcibella's way of life, whom both courtesy and interest demanded that he should inspire with confidence. I liked him all the better as I came to this conclusion, but I was tempted to persist a little.

'I slept the whole afternoon,' I said; 'and, to tell the truth, I rather dread the idea of going to bed, it's so tiring. Look here, you've rushed over that last part like an express train. That passage to the Schleswig coast--the Eider River, did you say?--was a longish one, wasn't it?'

'Well, you see what it was; about seventy miles, I suppose, direct.' He spoke low, bending down to sweep up some cigar ashes on the floor.

'Direct?' I insinuated. 'Then you put in somewhere?'

'I stopped once, anchored for the night; oh, that's nothing of a sail with a fair wind. By Jove! I've forgotten to caulk that seam over your bunk, and it's going to rain. I must do it now. You turn in.'

He disappeared. My curiosity, never very consuming, was banished by concern as to the open seam; for the prospect of a big drop, remorseless and regular as Fate, falling on my forehead throughout the night, as in the torture-chamber of the Inquisition, was alarming enough to recall me wholly to the immediate future. So I went to bed, finding on the whole that I had made progress in the exercise, though still far from being the trained contortionist that the occasion called for. Hammering ceased, and Davies reappeared just as I was stretched on the rack--tucked up in my bunk, I mean.

'I say,' he said, when he was settled in his, and darkness reigned, 'do you think you'll like this sort of thing?'

'If there are many places about here as beautiful as this,' I replied, 'I think I shall. But I should like to land now and then and have a walk. Of course, a great deal depends on the weather, doesn't it? I hope this rain (drops had begun to patter overhead) doesn't mean that the summer's over for good.'

'Oh, you can sail just the same,' said Davies, 'unless it's very bad. There's plenty of sheltered water. There's bound to be a change soon. But then there are the ducks. The colder and stormier it is, the better for them.'

I had forgotten the ducks and the cold, and, suddenly presented as a shooting-box in inclement weather, the Dulcibella lost ground in my estimation, which she had latterly gained.

'I'm fond of shooting,' I said, 'but I'm afraid I'm only a fair-weather yachtsman, and I should much prefer sun and scenery.'

'Scenery,' he repeated, reflectively. 'I say, you must have thought it a queer taste of mine to cruise about on that outlandish Frisian coast. How would you like that sort of thing?'

'If there are many places about here as beautiful as this,' I replied, 'I think I shall. But I should like to land now and then and have a walk. Of course, a great deal depends on the weather, doesn't it? I hope this rain (drops had begun to patter overhead) doesn't mean that the summer's over for good.'

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'I should loathe it,' I answered, promptly, with a clear conscience. 'Weren't you delighted yourself to get to the Baltic? It must be a wonderful contrast to what you described. Did you ever see another yacht there?'

'Only one,' he answered. 'Good night!'

'Good night!'

5 Wanted, a North Wind

NOTHING disturbed my rest that night, so adaptable is youth and so masterful is nature. At times I was remotely aware of a threshing of rain and a humming of wind, with a nervous kicking of the little hull, and at one moment I dreamt I saw an apparition by candle-light of Davies, clad in pyjamas and huge top-boots, grasping a misty lantern of gigantic proportions. But the apparition mounted the ladder and disappeared, and I passed to other
dreams.

A blast in my ear, like the voice of fifty trombones, galvanized me into full consciousness. The musician, smiling and tousled, was at my bedside, raising a foghorn to his lips with deadly intention. 'It's a way we have in the Dulcibella,' he said, as I started up on one elbow. 'I didn't startle you much, did I?' he added.

'Well, I like the mattinata better than the cold douche,' I answered, thinking of yesterday.

'Fine day and magnificent breeze!' he answered. My sensations this morning were vastly livelier than those of yesterday at the same hour. My limbs were supple again and my head clear. Not even the searching wind could mar the ecstasy of that plunge down to smooth, seductive sand, where I buried greedy fingers and looked through a medium blue, with that translucent blue, fairy-faint and angel-pure, that you see in perfection only in the heart of ice. Up again to sun, wind, and the forest whispers from the shore; down just once more to see the uncouth anchor stabbing the sand's soft bosom with one rusty fang, deaf and inert to the Dulcibella's puny efforts to drag him from his prey. Back, holding by the cable as a rusty clue from heaven to earth, up to that bourgeois little maiden's bows; back to breakfast, with an appetite not to be blunted by condensed milk and somewhat passe' bread. An hour later we had dressed the Dulcibella for the road, and were foaming into the grey void of yesterday, now a noble expanse of wind-whipped blue, half surrounded by distant hills, their every outline vivid in the rain-washed air.

I cannot pretend that I really enjoyed this first sail into the open, though I was keenly anxious to do so. I felt the thrill of those forward leaps, heard that persuasive song the foam sings under the lee-bow, saw the flashing harmonies of sea and sky; but sensuous perception was deadened by nervousness. The yacht looked smaller than ever outside the quiet fiord. The song of the foam seemed very near, the wave crests aft very high. The novice in sailing clings desperately to the thoughts of sailors--effective, prudent persons, with a typical jargon and a typical dress, versed in local currents and winds. I could not help missing this professional element. Davies, as he sat grasping his beloved tiller, looked strikingly efficient in his way, and supremely at home in his surroundings; but he looked the amateur through and through, as with one hand, and (it seemed) one eye, he wrestled with a spray-splashed chart half unrolled on the deck beside him. All his casual ways returned to me--his casual talk and that last adventurous voyage to the Baltic, and the suspicions his reticence had aroused.

'Do you see a monument anywhere?' he said, all at once and, before I could answer; 'We must take another reef.' He let go of the tiller and relit his pipe, while the yacht rounded sharply to, and in a twinkling was tossing head to head with the waves while he shortened sail and puffed his pipe. An hour later the narrow vista of Als Sound was visible, with quiet old Sonderburg sunning itself on the island shore, amid the Dybbol heights towering above--the Dybbol of bloody memory; scene of the last desperate stand of the Danes in '64, ere the Prussians wrested the two fair provinces from them.

'It's early to anchor, and I hate towns,' said Davies, as one section of a lumbering pontoon bridge opened to give us passage. But I was firm on the need for a walk, and got my way on condition that I bought stores as well, and returned in time to admit of further advance to a 'quiet anchorage'. Never did I step on the solid earth with stranger feelings, partly due to relief from confinement, partly to that sense of independence in travelling, which, for those who go down to the sea in small ships, can make the foulest coal-port in Northumbria seem attractive. And here I had fascinating Sonderburg, with its broad-eaved houses of carved woodwork, each fresh with cleansing, yet reverend with age; its fair-haired Viking-like men, and rosy, plain-faced women, with their bullet foreheads and large mouths; Sonderburg still Danish to the core under its Teuton veneer. Crossing the bridge I climbed the Dybbol--dotted with memorials of that heroic defence--and thence could see the wee form and gossamer rigging of the Dulcibella on the silver ribbon of the Sound. and was reminded by the sight that there were stores to be bought. So I hurried down again to the old quarter and bargained over eggs and bread with a dear old lady, pink as a _débutante_, made a patriotic pretence of not understanding German, amid called in her strapping son, whose few words of English, being chiefly nautical slang picked up on a British trawler, were peculiarly useless for the purpose. Davies had tea ready when I came aboard again, and, drinking it on deck, we proceeded up the sheltered Sound, which, in spite of its imposing name, was no bigger than an inland river, only the hosts of rainbow jelly-fish reminding us that we were threading a highway of ocean. There is no rise and fall of tide in these regions to disfigure the shore with mud. Here was a shelving gravel bank; there a bed of whispering rushes; there again young birch trees growing to the very brink, each wearing a stocking of bright moss and setting its foot firmly in among golden leaves amid scarlet fungus.

Davies was preoccupied, but he lighted up when I talked of the Danish war. 'Germany's a thundering great nation,' he said; 'I wonder if we shall ever fight her.' A little incident that happened after we anchored deepened the impression left by this conversation. We crept at dusk into a shaded back-water, where our keel almost touched the gravel bed. Opposite us on the Alsen shore there showed, clean-cut against the sky, the spire of a little monument
'I wonder what that is,' I said. It was scarcely a minute's row in the dinghy, and when the anchor was down we sculled over to it. A bank of loam led to gorse and bramble. Pushing aside some branches we came to a slender Gothic memorial in grey stone, inscribed with bas-reliefs of battle scenes, showing Prussians forcing a landing in boats and Danes resisting with savage tenacity. In the failing light we spelt out an inscription: 'Den bei dem Meeres-Uebergange und der Eroberung von Alsen am 29. Juni 1864 heldenmüthig gefallenen zum ehrenden Gedächtniss.' 'To the honoured memory of those who died heroically at the invasion and storming of Alsen.' I knew the German passion for commemoration; I had seen similar memorials on Alsatan battlefields, and several on the Dybbbol only that afternoon; but there was something in the scene, the hour, and the circumstances, which made this one seem singularly touching. As for Davies, I scarcely recognized him; his eyes flashed and filled with tears as he glanced from the inscription to the path we had followed and the water beyond. 'It was a landing in boats, I suppose,' he said, half to himself. 'I wonder they managed it. What does _heldenmüthig_ mean?'--'Heroically.'--Heldenmüthig gefallenen,' he repeated, under his breath, lingering on each syllable. He was like a schoolboy reading of Waterloo.

Our conversation at dinner turned naturally on war, and in naval warfare I found I had come upon Davies's literary hobby. I had not hitherto paid attention to the medley on our bookshelf, but I now saw that, besides a Nautical Almanack and some dilapidated Sailing Directions, there were several books on the cruises of small yachts, and also some big volumes crushed in anyhow or lying on the top. Squinting painfully at them I saw Mahan's Life of Nelson, Brassey's Naval Annual, and others.

'It's a tremendously interesting subject,' said Davies, pulling down (in two pieces) a volume of Mahan's Influence of Sea Power.

Dinner flagged (and froze) while he illustrated a point by reference to the much-thumbed pages. He was very keen, and not very articulate. I knew just enough to be an intelligent listener, and, though hungry, was delighted to hear him talk.

'I'm not boring you, am I?' he said, suddenly.

'I should think not,' I protested. 'But you might just have a look at the chops.'

They had indeed been crying aloud for notice for some minutes, and drew candid attention to their neglect when they appeared. The diversion they caused put Davies out of vein. I tried to revive the subject, but he was reserved and diffident.

The untidy bookshelf reminded me of the logbook, and when Davies had retired with the crockery to the forecastle, I pulled the ledger down and turned over the leaves. It was a mass of short entries, with cryptic abbreviations, winds, tides, weather, and courses appearing to predominate. The voyage from Dover to Ostend was dismissed in two lines: 'Under way 7 p.m., wind W.S.W. moderate; West Hinder 5 a.m., outside all banks Ostend 11 a.m.' The Scheldt had a couple of pages very technical and _staccato_ in style. bland Holland was given a contemptuous summary, with some half-hearted allusions to windmills, and so on, and a caustic word or two about boys, paint, and canal smells.

At Amsterdam technicalities began again, and a brisker tone pervaded the entries, which became progressively fuller as the writer cruised on the Frisian coast. He was clearly in better spirits, for here and there were quaint and diffident.

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The untidy bookshelf reminded me of the logbook, and when Davies had retired with the crockery to the forecastle, I pulled the ledger down and turned over the leaves. It was a mass of short entries, with cryptic abbreviations, winds, tides, weather, and courses appearing to predominate. The voyage from Dover to Ostend was dismissed in two lines: 'Under way 7 p.m., wind W.S.W. moderate; West Hinder 5 a.m., outside all banks Ostend 11 a.m.' The Scheldt had a couple of pages very technical and _staccato_ in style. bland Holland was given a contemptuous summary, with some half-hearted allusions to windmills, and so on, and a caustic word or two about boys, paint, and canal smells.

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It was not easy reading, and I turned the leaves rapidly. I was curious, too, to see the latter part. I came to a point where the rain of little sentences, patterning out like small shot, ceased abruptly. It was at the end of 9th September. That day, with its 'kedging' and 'boom-dodging', was filled in with the usual detail. The log then leapt over three days, and went on: '_13th. Sept._--Wind W.N.W. fresh. Decided to go to Baltic. Sailed 4 a.m. Quick passage E. S. to mouth of Weser. Anchored for night under Hohenhörn Sand. _14th Sept._--Nil. 15th Sept._--Under way at 4 a.m.' The Scheldt had a couple of pages very technical and _staccato_ in style. bland Holland was given a contemptuous summary, with some half-hearted allusions to windmills, and so on, and a caustic word or two about boys, paint, and canal smells.

At Amsterdam technicalities began again, and a brisker tone pervaded the entries, which became progressively fuller as the writer cruised on the Frisian coast. He was clearly in better spirits, for here and there were quaint and
touch a sensitive place and fail. Delicacy shrank from seeing him compelled either to amplify a deception or blunder out a confession—he was too easy a prey; and, after all, the matter was of small moment. I returned the book to the shelf, the only definite result of its perusal being to recall my promise to keep a diary myself, and I then and there dedicated a notebook to the purpose.

We were just lighting our cigars when we heard voices and the splash of oars, followed by a bump against the hull which made Davies wince, as violations of his paint always did. 'Guten Abend; wo fahren Sie bin?' greeted us as we climbed on deck. It turned out to be some jovial fishermen returning to their smack from a visit to Sonderburg. A short dialogue proved to them that we were mad Englishmen in bitter need of charity.

'Come to Satrup,' they said; 'all the smacks are there, round the point. There is good punch in the inn.'

Nothing loth, we followed in the dinghy, skirted a bend of the Sound, and opened up the lights of a village, with some smacks at anchor in front of it. We were escorted to the inn, and introduced to a formidable beverage, called coffee-punch, and a smoke-wreathed circle of smacksmen, who talked German out of courtesy, but were Danish in all else. Davies was at once at home with them, to a degree, indeed, that I envied. His German was of the crudest kind, _bizarre_ in vocabulary and comical in accent; but the freemasonry of the sea, or some charm of his own, gave intuition to both him and his hearers. I cut a poor figure in this nautical gathering, though Davies, who persistently referred to me as 'meiner Freund', tried hard to represent me as a kindred spirit and to include me in the general talk.

I was detected at once as an uninteresting hybrid. Davies, who sometimes appealed to me for a word, was deep in talk over anchorages and ducks, especially, as I well remember now, about the chance of sport in a certain _Schlei Fiord_. I fell into utter neglect, till rescued by a taciturn person in spectacles and a very high cap, who appeared to be the only landsman present. After silently puffing smoke in my direction for some time, he asked me if I was married, and if not, when I proposed to be. After this inquisition he abandoned me.

It was eleven before we left this hospitable inn, escorted by the whole party to the dinghy. Our friends of the smack insisted on our sharing their boat out of pure good-fellowship—for there was not nearly room for us—and would not let us go till a bucket of fresh-caught fish had been emptied into her bottom. After much shaking of scaly hands, we sculled back to the Dulcibella, where she slept in a bed of tremulous stars.

Davies sniffed the wind and scanned the tree-tops, where light gusts were toying with the leaves.

'Sou'-west still,' he said, 'and more rain coming. But it's bound to shift into the north.'

'Will that be a good wind for us?'

'It depends where we go,' he said, slowly. 'I was asking those fellows about duck-shooting. They seemed to think the best place would be Schlei Fiord. That's about fifteen miles south of Sonderburg, on the way to Kiel. They said there was a pilot chap living at the mouth who would tell us all about it. They weren't very encouraging though. We should want a north wind for that.'

'I don't care where we go,' I said, to my own surprise.

'Don't you really?' he rejoined, with sudden warmth. Then, with a slight change of voice. 'You mean it's all very jolly about here?'

Of course I meant that. Before we went below we both looked for a moment at the little grey memorial; its slender fretted arch outlined in tender lights and darks above the hollow on the Alsen shore. The night was that of 27th September, the third I had spent on the Dulcibella.

6 Schlei Fiord

I MAKE no apology for having described these early days in some detail. It is no wonder that their trivialities are as vividly before me as the colours of earth and sea in this enchanting corner of the world. For every trifle, sordid or picturesque, was relevant; every scrap of talk a link; every passing mood critical for good or ill. So slight indeed were the determining causes that changed my autumn holiday into an undertaking the most momentous I have ever approached.

Two days more preceded the change. On the first, the southwesterly wind still holding, we sallied forth into Augustenburg Fiord, 'to practise smartness in a heavy thresh,' as Davies put it. It was the day of dedication for those disgusting oilskins, immured in whose stiff and odorous angles, I felt distressfully cumbersome; a day of proof indeed for me, for heavy squalls swept incessantly over the loch, and Davies, at my own request, gave me no rest. Backwards and forwards we tacked, blustering into coves and out again, reefing and unreefing, now stung with rain, now warmed with sun, but never with time to breathe or think.

I wrestled with intractable ropes, slaves if they could be subdued, tyrants if they got the upper hand; creeping, craning, straining, I made the painful round of the deck, while Davies, hatless and tranquil, directed my blundering movements.

'Now take the helm and try steering in a hard breeze to windward. It's the finest sport on earth.'

So I grappled with the niceties of that delicate craft;smarting eyes, chafed hands, and dazed brain all pressed into the service, whilst Davies, taming the ropes the while, shouted into my ear the subtle mysteries of the art; that
fidgeting ripple in the luff of the mainsail, and the distant rattle from the hungry jib—signs that they are starved of wind and must be given more; the heavy list and wallow of the hull, the feel of the wind on your cheek instead of your nose, the broader angle of the burgee at the masthead—signs that they have too much, and that she is sagging recreantly to leeward instead of fighting to windward. He taught me the tactics for meeting squalls, and the way to press your advantage when they are defeated—the iron hand in the velvet glove that the wilful tiller needs if you are to gain your ends with it; the exact set of the sheets necessary to get the easiest and swiftest play of the hull—all these things and many more I struggled to apprehend, careless for the moment as to whether they were worth knowing, but doggedly set on knowing them. Needless to say, I had no eyes for beauty. The wooded inlets we dived into gave a brief respite from wind and spindrift, but called into use the lead and the centre-board tackle—two new and cumbersome complexities. Davies's passion for intricate navigation had to be sated even in these secure and tideless waters.

'Let's get in as near as we can—you stand by the lead,' was his formula; so I made false casts, tripped up in the slack, sent rivers of water up my sleeves, and committed all the other _gaucheries_ that beginners in the art commit, while the sand showed whiter beneath the keel, till Davies regretfully drew off and shouted: 'Ready about, centre-plate down,' and I dashed down to the trappings of that diabolical contrivance, the only part of the Dulcibella's equipment that I hated fiercely to the last. It had an odious habit when lowered of spouting jets of water through its chain-lead on to the cabin floor. One of my duties was to gag it with cotton-waste, but even then its choking gurgle was a most uncomfortable sound in your dining-room. In a minute the creek would be behind us and we would be thumping our stem into the short hollow waves of the fiord, and lurching through spray and rain for some point on the opposite shore. Of our destination and objects, if we had any, I knew nothing. At the northern end of the fiord, just before we turned, Davies had turned dreamy in the most exasperating way, for I was steering at the time and in mortal need of sympathetic guidance, if I was to avoid a sudden jibe. As though continuing aloud some internal debate, he held a onesided argument to the effect that it was no use going farther north. Ducks, weather, and charts figured in it, but I did not follow the pros and cons. I only know that we suddenly turned and began to 'battle' south again. At sunset we were back once more in the same quiet pool among the trees and fields of Als Sound, a wondrous peace succeeding the turmoil. Bruised and sodden, I was extricating myself from my oily prison, and later was tasting (though not nearly yet in its perfection) the unique exultation that follows such a day, when, glowing all over, deliciously tired and pleasantly sore, you eat what seems ambrosia, be it only tinned beef; and drink nectar, be it only distilled from terrestrial hops or coffee berries, and inhale as culminating luxury balmy fumes which even the happy Homeric gods knew naught of.

On the following morning, the 30th, a joyous shout of 'Nor'-west wind' sent me shivering on deck, in the small hours, to handle rain-stiff canvas and cutting chain. It was a cloudy, unsettled day, but still enough after yesterday's boisterous ordeal. We retraced our way past Sonderburg, and thence sailed for a faint line of pale green on the far south-western horizon. It was during this passage that an incident occurred, which, slight as it was, opened my eyes to much.

A flight of wild duck crossed our bows at some little distance, a wedge-shaped phalanx of craning necks and flapping wings. I happened to be steering while Davies verified our course below; but I called him up at once, and a discussion began about our chances of sport. Davies was gloomy over them.

'Those fellows at Satrup were rather doubtful,' he said. 'There are plenty of ducks, but I made out that it's not easy for strangers to get shooting. The whole country's so very civilized; it's not _wild_ enough, is it?'

He looked at me. I had no very clear opinion. It was anything but wild in one sense, but there seemed to be wild enough spots for ducks. The shore we were passing appeared to be bordered by lonely marshes, though a spacious champaign showed behind. If it were not for the beautiful places we had seen, and my growing taste for our way of seeing them, his disappointing vagueness would have nettled me more than it did. For, after all, he had brought me out loaded with sporting equipment under a promise of shooting.

'Bad weather is what we want for ducks,' he said; 'but I'm afraid we're in the wrong place for them. Now, if it was the North Sea, among those Frisian islands—' His tone was timid and interrogative, and I felt at once that he was sounding me as to some unpalatable plan whose nature began to dawn on me.

He stammered on through a sentence or two about 'wildness' and 'nobody to interfere with you,' and then I broke in: 'You surely don't want to leave the Baltic?'

'Why not?' said he, staring into the compass.

'Hang it, man!' I returned, tartly, 'here we are in October, the summer over, and the weather gone to pieces. We're alone in a cockle-shell boat, at a time when every other yacht of our size is laying up for the winter. Luckily, we seem to have struck an ideal cruising-ground, with a wide choice of safe fiords and a good prospect of ducks, if we choose to take a little trouble about them. You can't mean to waste time and run risks' (I thought of the tom leaf in the log-book) 'in a long voyage to those forbidding haunts of yours in the North Sea.'
'It's not very long,' said Davies, doggedly. 'Part of it's canal, and the rest is quite safe if you're careful. There's plenty of sheltered water, and it's not really necessary--'

'What's it all for?' I interrupted, impatiently. 'We haven't _tried_ for shooting here yet. You've no notion, have you, of getting the boat back to England this autumn?'

'England?' he muttered. 'Oh, I don't much care.' Again his vagueness jarred on me; there seemed to be some bar between us, invisible and insurmountable. And, after all, what was I doing here? Roughing it in a shabby little yacht, utterly out of my element, with a man who, a week ago, was nothing to me, and who now was a tiresome enigma. Like swift poison the old morbid mood in which I left London spread through me. All I had learnt and seen slipped away; what I had suffered remained. I was on the point of saying something which might have put a precipitate end to our cruise, but he anticipated me.

'I'm awfully sorry,' he broke out, 'for being such a selfish brute. I don't know what I was thinking about. You're a brick to join me in this sort of life, and I'm afraid I'm an infernally bad host. Of course this is just the place to cruise. I forgot about the scenery, and all that. Let's ask about the ducks here. As you say, we're sure to get sport if we worry and push a bit. We must be nearly there now--yes, there's the entrance. Take the helm, will you?'

He sprang up the mast like a monkey, and gazed over the land from the cross-trees. I looked up at my enigma and thanked Providence I had not spoken; for no one could have resisted his frank outburst of good nature. Yet it occurred to me that, considering the conditions of our life, our intimacy was strangely slow in growth. I had no clue yet as to where his idiosyncrasies began and his self ended, and he, I surmised, was in the same stage towards me. Otherwise I should have pressed him further now, for I felt convinced that there was some mystery in his behaviour which I had not yet accounted for. However, light was soon to break.

I could see no sign of the entrance he had spoken of, and no wonder, for it is only eighty yards wide, though it leads to a fiord thirty miles long. All at once we were jolting in a tumble of sea, and the channel grudgingly disclosed itself, stealing between marshes and meadows and then broadening to a mere, as at Ekken. We anchored close to the mouth, and not far from a group of vessels of a type that afterwards grew very familiar to me. They were sailing-barges, something like those that ply in the Thames, bluff-bowed, high-stemmed craft of about fifty tons, ketch-rigged, and fitted with lee-boards, very light spars, and a long ttip-tilted bowsprit. (For the future I shall call them 'galliots'.) Otherwise the only sign of life was a solitary white house--the pilot's house, the chart told us--close to the northern point of entrance. After tea we called on the pilot. Patriarchally installed before a roaring stove, in the company of a buxom bustling daughter-in-law and some rosy grandchildren, we found a rotund and rubicund person, who greeted us with a hoarse roar of welcome in German, which instantly changed, when he saw us, to the funniest broken English, spoken with intense relish and pride. We explained ourselves and our mission as well as we could through the hospitable interruptions caused by beer and the strains of a huge musical box, which had been set going in honour of our arrival. Needless to say, I was read like a book at once, and fell into the part of listener.

'Yes, yes,' he said, 'all right. There is plenty ducks, but first we will drink a glass beer; then we will shift your ship, captain--she lies not good there.' (Davies started up in a panic, but was waved back to his beer.) 'Then we will drink together another glass beer; then we will talk of ducks--no, then we will kill ducks--that is better. Then we will have plenty glasses beer.'

This was an unexpected climax, and promised well for our prospects. And the programme was fully carried out. After the beer our host was packed briskly by his daughter into an armour of woollen gaiters, coats, and mufflers, topped with a worsted helmet, which left nothing of his face visible but a pair of twinkling eyes. Thus equipped, he led the way out of doors, and roared for Hans and his gun, till a great gawky youth, with high cheek-bones and a downy beard, came out from the yard and sheepishly shook our hands.

Together we repaired to the quay, where the pilot stood, looking like a genial ball of worsted, and bawled hoarse directions while we shifted the Dulcibella to a berth on the farther shore close to the other vessels. We returned with our guns, and the interval for refreshments followed. It was just dusk when we sailed out again, crossed a stretch of bog-land, and took up strategic posts round a stagnating pond. Hans had been sent to drive, and the result was a fine mallard and three ducks. It was true that all fell to the pilot's gun, perhaps owing to Hans' filial instinct and his parent's canny egotism in choosing his own lair, or perhaps it was chance; but the shooting-party was none the less a triumphal success. It was celebrated with beer and music as before, while the pilot, an infant on each podgy knee, discoiled exuberantly on the glories of his country and the Elysian content of his life. 'There is plenty beer, plenty ducks, plenty meat, plenty money, plenty ducks,' summed up his survey.

It may have been fancy, but Davies, though he had fits and starts of vivacity, seemed very inattentive, considering that we were sitting at the feet of so expansive an oracle. It was I who elicited most of the practical information--details of time, weather, and likely places for shooting, with some shrewd hints as to the kind of people to conciliate. Whatever he thought of me, I warmed with sympathy towards the pilot, for he assumed that we had done with cruising for the year, and thought us mad enough as it was to have been afloat so long, and madder still to
intend living on 'so little a ship' when we could live on land with beer and music handy. I was tempted to raise the North Sea question, just to watch Davies under the thunder of rebukes which would follow. But I refrained from a wish to be tender with him, now that all was going so well. The Frisian Islands were an extravagant absurdity now. I did not even refer to them as we pulled back to the Dulcibella, after swearing eternal friendship with the good pilot and his family.

Davies and I turned in good friends that night--or rather I should say that I turned in, for I left him sucking an empty pipe and aimlessly fingering a volume of Mahan; and once when I woke in the night I felt somehow that his bunk was empty and that he was there in the dark cabin, dreaming.

7 The Missing Page
I WOKE (on 1st October) with that dispiriting sensation that a hitch has occurred in a settled plan. It was explained when I went on deck, and I found the Dulcibella wrapped in a fog, silent, clammy, nothing visible from her decks but the ghostly hull of a galliot at anchor near us. She must have brought up there in the night, for there had been nothing so close the evening before; and I remembered that my sleep had been broken once by sounds of rumbling chain and gruff voices.

'This looks pretty hopeless for to-day,' I said, with a shiver, to Davies, who was laying the breakfast.

'Well, we can't do anything till this fog lifts,' he answered, with a good deal of resignation. Breakfast was a cheerless meal. The damp penetrated to the very cabin, whose roof and walls wept a fine dew. I had dreaded a bath, and yet missed it, and the ghastly light made the tablecloth look dirtier than it naturally was, and all the accessories more sordid. Something had gone wrong with the bacon, and the lack of egg-cups was not in the least humorous.

Davies was just beginning, in his summary way, to tumble the things together for washing up, when there was a sound of a step on deck, two sea-boots appeared on the ladder, and, before we could wonder who the visitor was, a little man in oilskins and a sou'-wester was stooping towards us in the cabin door, smiling affectionately at Davies out of a round grizzled beard.

'Well met, captain,' he said, quietly, in German. 'Where are you bound to this time?'

'Bartels!' exclaimed Davies, jumping up. The two stooping figures, young and old, beamed at one another like father and son.

'Where have you come from? Have some coffee. How's the Johannes? Was that you that came in last night? I'm delighted to see you!' (I spare the reader his uncouth lingo.) The little man was dragged in and seated on the opposite sofa to me.

'I took my apples to Kappeln,' he said, sedately, 'and now I sail to Kiel, and so to Hamburg, where my wife and children are. It is my last voyage of the year. You are no longer alone, captain, I see.' He had taken off his dripping sou'-wester and was bowing ceremoniously towards me.

'Oh, I quite forgot!' said Davies, who had been kneeling on one knee in the low doorway, absorbed in his visitor. 'This is '_meiner Freund_,' Herr Carruthers. Carruthers, this is my friend, Schiffer Bartels, of the galliot Johannes.'

Was I never to be at an end of the puzzles which Davies presented to me? All the impulsive heartiness died out of his voice and manner as he uttered the last few words, and there he was, nervously glancing from the visitor to me, like one who, against his will or from tactlessness, has introduced two persons who he knows will disagree.

There was a pause while he fumbled with the cups, poured some cold coffee out and pondered over it as though it were a chemical experiment. Then he muttered something about boiling some more water, and took refuge in the forecastle. I was ill at ease with seafaring men, but this mild little person was easy ground for a beginner. Besides, when he took off his oilskin coat he reminded me less of a sailor than of a homely draper of some country town, with his clean turned-down collar and neatly fitting frieze jacket. We exchanged some polite platitudes about the fog and his voyage last night from Kappeln, which appeared to be a town some fifteen miles up the fiord.

Davies joined in from the forecastle with an excess of warmth which almost took the words out of my mouth. We exhausted the subject very soon, and then my _vis-à-vis_ smiled paternally at me, as he had done at Davies, and said, confidentially:

'It is good that the captain is no more alone. He is a fine young man--Heaven, what a fine young man! I love him as my son--but he is too brave, too reckless. It is good for him to have a friend.'

I nodded and laughed, though in reality I was very far from being amused.

'Where was it you met?' I asked.

'In an ugly place, and in ugly weather,' he answered, gravely, but with a twinkle of fun in his eye. 'But has he not told you?' he added, with ponderous slyness. 'I came just in time. No! what am I saying? He is brave as a lion and quick as a cat. I think he cannot drown; but still it was an ugly place and ugly--'"

'What are you talking about, Bartels?' interrupted Davies, emerging noisily with a boiling kettle.

I answered the question. 'I was just asking your friend how it was you made his acquaintance.'
'Oh, he helped me out of a bit of a mess in the North Sea, didn't you, Bartels?' he said.

'It was nothing,' said Bartels. 'But the North Sea is no place for your little boat, captain. So I have told you many times. How did you like Flensburg? A fine town, is it not? Did you find Herr Krank, the carpenter? I see you have placed a little mizzen-mast. The rudder was nothing much, but it was well that it held to the Eider. But she is strong and good, your little ship, and--Heaven!--she had need be so.' He chuckled, and shook his head at Davies as at a wayward child.

'This is all the conversation that I need record. For my part I merely waited for its end, determined on my course, which was to know the truth once and for all, and make an end of these distracting mystifications. Davies pied his friend with coffee, and kept up the talk gallantly; but affectionate as he was, his manner plainly showed that he wanted to be alone with me.

The gist of the little skipper's talk was a parental warning that, though we were well enough here in the 'Ost-See', it was time for little boats to be looking for winter quarters. That he himself was going by the Kiel Canal to Hamburg to spend a cosy winter as a decent citizen at his warm fireside, and that we should follow his example. He ended with an invitation to us to visit him on the Johannes, and with suave farewells disappeared into the fog. Davies saw him into his boat, returned without wasting a moment, and sat down on the sofa opposite me.

'What did he mean?' I asked.

'I'll tell you,' said Davies, 'I'll tell you the whole thing. As far as you're concerned it's partly a confession. Last night I had made up my mind to say nothing, but when Bartels turned up I knew it must all come out. It's been fearfully on my mind, and perhaps you'll be able to help me. But it's for you to decide.'

'Fire away!' I said.

'You know what I was saying about the Frisian Islands the other day? A thing happened there which I never told you, when you were asking about my cruise.'

'It began near Norderney,' I put in.

'How did you guess that?' he asked.

'You're a bad hand at duplicity,' I replied. 'Go on.'

'Well, you're quite right, it was there, on 9th September. I told you the sort of thing I was doing at that time, but I don't think I said that I made inquiries from one or two people about duck-shooting, and had been told by some fishermen at Borkum that there was a big sailing-yacht in those waters, whose owner, a German of the name of Dollmann, shot a good deal, and might give me some tips. Well, I found this yacht one evening, knowing it must be her from the description I had. She was what is called a "barge-yacht", of fifty or sixty tons, built for shallow water on the lines of a Dutch galliot, with lee-boards and those queer round bows and square stern. She's something like those galliots anchored near us now. You sometimes see the same sort of yacht in English waters, only there they copy the Thames barges. She looked a clipper of her sort, and very smart; varnished all over and shining like gold. I came on her about sunset, after a long day of exploring round the Ems estuary. She was lying in--'

'Wait a bit, let's have the chart,' I interrupted.

Davies found it and spread it on the table between us, first pushing back the cloth and the breakfast things to one end, where they lay in a slovenly litter. This was one of the only two occasions on which I ever saw him postpone the rite of washing up, and it spoke volumes for the urgency of the matter in hand.

'Here it is,' said Davies _[See Map A]_, and I looked with a new and strange interest at the long string of slender islands, the parallel line of coast, and the confusion of shoals, banks, and channels which lay between. 'Here's Norderney, you see. By the way, there's a harbour there at the west end of the island, the only real harbour on the whole line of islands, Dutch or German, except at Terschelling. There's quite a big town there, too, a watering place, where Germans go for sea-bathing in the summer. Well, the Medusa, that was her name, was lying in the Riff Gat roadstead, flying the German ensign, and I anchored for the night pretty near her. I meant to visit her owner later on, but I very nearly changed my mind, as I always feel rather a fool on smart yachts, and my German isn't very good. However, I thought I might as well; so, after dinner, when it was dark, I sculled over in the dinghy, hailed a sailor on deck, said who I was, and asked if I could see the owner. The sailor was a surly sort of chap, and there was a good long delay while I waited on deck, feeling more and more uncomfortable. Presently a steward came up and showed me down the companion and into the saloon, which, after _this_ looked--well, horribly gorgeous--you know what I mean, plush lounges, silk cushions, and that sort of thing. Dinner seemed to be just over, and wine and fruit were on the table. Herr Dollmann was there at his coffee. I introduced myself somehow--'

'Stop a moment,' I said; 'what was he like?'

'Oh, a tall, thin chap, in evening dress; about fifty I suppose, with greyish hair and a short beard. I'm not good at describing people. He had a high, bulging forehead, and there was something about him--but I think I'd better tell you the bare facts first. I can't say he seemed pleased to see me, and he couldn't speak English, and, in fact, I felt infernally awkward. Still, I had an object in coming, and as I was there I thought I might as well gain it.'
The notion of Davies in his Norfolk jacket and rusty flannels haranguing a frigid German in evening dress in a 'gorgeous' saloon tickled my fancy greatly.

'He seemed very much astonished to see me; had evidently seen the Dulcibella arrive, and had wondered what she was. I began as soon as I could about the ducks, but he shut me up at once, said I could do nothing hereabouts. I put it down to sportsman's jealousy--you know what that is. But I saw I had come to the wrong shop, and was just going to back out and end this unpleasant interview, when he thawed a bit, offered me some wine, and began talking in quite a friendly way, taking a great interest in my cruise and my plans for the future. In the end we sat up quite late, though I never felt really at my ease. He seemed to be taking stock of me all the time, as though I were some new animal.' (How I sympathized with that German!) 'We parted civilly enough, and I rowed back and turned in, meaning to potter on eastwards early next day.

'But I was knocked up at dawn by a sailor with a message from Dollmann asking if he could come to breakfast with me. I was rather flabbergasted, but didn't like to be rude, so I said, "Yes." Well, he came, and I returned the call--and--well, the end of it was that I stayed at anchor there for three days.' This was rather abrupt.

'How did you spend the time?' I asked. Stopping three days anywhere was an unusual event for him, as I knew from his log.

'Oh, I lunched or dined with him once or twice--with _them_, I ought to say,' he added, hurriedly. 'His daughter was with him. She didn't appear the evening I first called.'

'And what was she like?' I asked, promptly, before he could hurry on.

'Oh, she seemed a very nice girl,' was the guarded reply, delivered with particular unconcern, 'and--the end of it was that I and the Medusa sailed away in company. I must tell you how it came about, just in a few words for the present.

'It was his suggestion. He said he had to sail to Hamburg, and proposed that I should go with him in the Dulcibella as far as the Elbe, and then, if I liked, I could take the ship canal at Brunsbüttel through to Kiel and the Baltic. I had no very fixed plans of my own, though I had meant to go on exploring eastwards between the islands and the coast, and so reach the Elbe in a much slower way. He dissuaded me from this, sticking to it that I should have no chance of ducks, and urging other reasons. Anyway, we settled to sail in company direct to Cuxhaven, in the Elbe. With a fair wind and an early start it should be only one day's sail of about sixty miles.

'The plan only came to a head on the evening of the third day, 12th September.

'I told you, I think, that the weather had broken after a long spell of heat. That very day it had been blowing pretty hard from the west, and the glass was falling still. I said, of course, that I couldn't go with him if the weather was too bad, but he prophesied a good day, said it was an easy sail, and altogether put me on my mettle. You can guess how it was. Perhaps I had talked about single-handed cruising as though it were easier than it was, though I never meant it in a boasting way, for I hate that sort of thing, and besides there__no danger if you're careful--'"

'Oh, go on,' I said.

'Anyway, we went next morning at six. It was a dirty-looking day, wind W.N.W., but his sails were going up and mine followed. I took two reefs in, and we sailed out into the open and steered E.N.E. along the coast for the Outer Elbe Lightship about fifty knots off. Here it all is, you see.' (He showed me the course on the chart.) 'The trip was nothing for his boat, of course, a safe, powerful old tub, forging through the sea as steady as a house. I kept up with her easily at first. My hands were pretty full, for there was a hard wind on my quarter and a troublesome sea; but as long as nothing worse came I knew I should be all right, though I also knew that I was a fool to have come.

'All went well till we were off Wangeroog, the last of the islands--_here_--and then it began to blow really hard. I had half a mind to chuck it and cut into the Jade River, _down there_, but I hadn't the face to, so I hove to and took in my last reef.' (Simple words, simply uttered; but I had seen the operation in calm water and shuddered at the present picture.) 'We had been about level till then, but with my shortened canvas I fell behind. Not that that mattered in the least. I knew my course, had read up my tides, and, thick as the weather was, I had no doubt of being able to pick up the lightship. No change of plan was possible now. The Weser estuary was on my starboard hand, but the whole place was a lee-shore and a mass of unknown banks--just look at them. I ran on, the Dulcibella doing her level best, but we had some narrow shaves of being pooped. I was about _here_, say six miles south-west of the lightship. _[See Chart A]_ when I suddenly saw that the Medusa had hove to right ahead, as though waiting till I came up. She wore round again on the course as I drew level, and we were alongside for a bit. Dollmann lashed the wheel, leaned over her quarter, and shouted, very slowly and distinctly so that I could understand; "Follow me--sea too bad for you outside--short cut through sands--save six miles."

'It was taking me all my time to manage the tiller, but I knew what he meant at once, for I had been over the chart carefully the night before. _[See Map A]_ You see, the whole bay between Wangeroog and the Elbe is encumbered with sand. A great jagged chunk of it runs out from Cuxhaven in a north-westerly direction for fifteen miles or so, ending in a pointed spit, called the _Scharhorn_. To reach the Elbe from the west you have to go right
outside this, round the lightship, which is off the Scharhorn, and double back. Of course, that's what all big vessels do. But, as you see, these sands are intersected here and there by channels, very shallow and winding, exactly like those behind the Frisian Islands. Now look at this one, which cuts right through the big chunk of sand and comes out near Cuxhaven. The _Telte_ [See Chart A] it's called. It's miles wide, you see, at the entrance, but later on it is split into two by the Hohenhörn bank: then it gets shallow and very complicated, and ends in a mere tidal driblet with another name. It's just the sort of channel I should like to worry into on a fine day or with an off-shore wind. Alone, in thick weather and a heavy sea, it would have been folly to attempt it, except as a desperate resource. But, as I said I knew at once that Dollmann was proposing to run for it and guide me in.

'I didn't like the idea, because I like doing things for myself, and, silly as it sounds, I believe I resented being told the sea was too bad for me. which it certainly was. Yet the short cut did save several miles and a devil of a tumble off the Scharhorn, where two tides meet. I had complete faith in Dollmann, and I suppose I decided that I should be a fool not to take a good chance. I hesitated. I know; but in the end I nodded, and held up my arm as she forged ahead again. Soon after, she shifted her course and I followed. You asked me once if I ever took a pilot. That was the only time.'

He spoke with bitter gravity, flung himself back, and felt his dramatic pause, but it certainly was one. I had just a glimpse of still another Davies—a Davies five years older throbbing with deep emotions, scorn, passion, and stubborn purpose; a being above my plane, of sterner stuff, wider scope. Intense as my interest had become, I waited almost timidly while he mechanically rammed tobacco into his pipe and struck ineffectual matches. I felt that whatever the riddle to be solved, it was no mean one. He repressed himself with an effort, half rose, and made his circular glance at the clock, barometer, and skylight, and then resumed.

'We soon came to what I knew must be the beginning of the Telte channel. All around you could hear the breakers on the sands, though it was too thick to see them yet. As the water shoaled, the sea, of course, got shorter and steeper. There was more wind—a whole gale I should say.

'I kept dead in the wake of the Medusa, but to my disgust I found she was gaining on me very fast. Of course I had taken for granted, when he said he would lead me in, that he would slow down and keep close to me. He could easily have done so by getting his men up to check his sheets or drop his peak. Instead of that he was busting on for all he was worth. Once, in a rain-squall, I lost sight of him altogether; got him faintly again, but had enough to do with my own tiller not to want to be peering through the scud after a runaway pilot. I was all right so far, but we were fast approaching the worst part of the whole passage, where the Hohenhörn bank blocks the road, and the channel divides. I don't know what it looks like to you on the chart—perhaps fairly simple, because you can follow the twists of the channels, as on a ground-plan; but a stranger coming to a place like that (where there are no buoys, mind you) can tell nothing certain by the eye—unless perhaps at dead low water, when the banks are high and dry, and in very clear weather—he must trust to the lead and the compass, and feel his way step by step. I knew perfectly well that what I should soon see would be a wall of surf stretching right across and on both sides. To _feel_ one's way in that sort of weather is impossible. You must _know_ your way, or else have a pilot. I had one, but he was playing his own game.

'With a second hand on board to steer while I conned I should have felt less of an ass. As it was, I knew I ought to be facing the music in the offing, and cursed myself for having broken my rule and gone blundering into this confounded short cut. It was giving myself away, doing just the very thing that you can't do in single-handed sailing.

'By the time I realized the danger it was far too late to turn and hammer out to the open. I was deep in the bottle-neck bight of the sands, jammed on a lee shore, and a strong flood tide sweeping me on. That tide, by the way, gave just the ghost of a chance. I had the hours in my head, and knew it was about two-thirds flood, with two hours more of rising water. That meant the banks would be all covering when I reached them, and harder than ever to locate; but it also meant that I _might_ float right over the worst of them if I hit off a lucky place.' Davies thumped the table in disgust. 'Pah! It makes me sick to think of having to trust to an accident like that, like a lubberly cockney out for a boozey Bank Holiday sail. Well, just as I foresaw, the wall of surf appeared clean across the horizon, and curling back to shut me in, booming like thunder. When I last saw the Medusa she seemed to be charging it like a horse at a fence, and I took a rough bearing of her position by a hurried glance at the compass. At that very moment I _thought_ she seemed to luff and show some of her broadside; but a squall blotted her out and gave me hell with the tiller. After that she was lost in the white mist that hung over the line of breakers. I kept on my bearing as well as I could, but I was already out of the channel. I knew that by the look of the water, and as we neared the bank I saw it was all awash and without the vestige of an opening. I wasn't going to chuck her on to it without an effort; so, more by instinct than with any particular hope, I put the helm down, meaning to work her along the edge on the chance of spotting a way over. She was buried at once by the beam sea, and the jib flew to blazes; but the reefed stays'l stood, she recovered gamely, and I held on, though I knew it could only be for a few minutes, as the centre-plate was up, and she made frightful leeway towards the bank.
'I was half-blinded by scud, but suddenly I noticed what looked like a gap, behind a spit which curled out right ahead. I luffed still more to clear this spit, but she couldn't weather it. Before you could say knife she was driving across it, bumped heavily, bucked forward again, bumped again, and—rippled on in deeper water! I can't describe the next few minutes. I was in some sort of channel, but a very narrow one, and the sea broke everywhere. I hadn't proper command either; for the rudder had crocked up somehow at the last bump. I was like a drunken man running for his life down a dark alley, barking himself at every corner. It couldn't last long, and finally we went crash on to something and stopped there, grinding and banging. So ended that little trip under a pilot.

'Well, it was like this—there was really no danger'—I opened my eyes at the characteristic phrase. 'I mean, that lucky stumble into a channel was my salvation. Since then I had struggled through a mile of sands, all of which lay behind me like a breakwater against the gale. They were covered, of course, and seething like soapsuds; but the force of the sea was deadened. The Dulce was bumping, but not too heavily. It was nearing high tide, and at half ebb she would be high and dry.

'In the ordinary way I should have run out a kedge with the dinghy, and at the next high water sailed farther in and anchored where I could lie afloat. The trouble was now that my hand was hurt and my dinghy stoved in, not to mention the rudder business. It was the first bump on the outer edge that did the damage. There was a heavy swell there, and when we struck, the dinghy, which was towing astern, came home on her painter and down with a crash on the yacht's weather quarter. I stuck out one hand to ward it off and got it nipped on the gunwale. She was badly stoved in and useless, so I couldn't run out the kedge—this was Greek to me, but I let him go on—'and for the present my hand was too painful even to stow the boom and sails, which were whipping and racketing about anyhow. There was the rudder, too, to be mended; and we were several miles from the nearest land. Of course, if the wind fell, it was all easy enough; but if it held or increased it was a poor look-out. There's a limit to strain of that sort—and other things might have happened.

'In fact, it was precious lucky that Bartels turned up. His galliot was at anchor a mile away, up a branch of the channel. In a clear between squalls he saw us, and, like a brick, rowed his boat out—'he and his boy, and a devil of a pull they must have had. I was glad enough to see them—no, that's not true; I was in such a fury of disgust and shame that I believe I should have been idiot enough to say I didn't want help, if he hadn't just nipped on board and started work. He's a terror to work, that little mouse of a chap. In half an hour he had stowed the sails, unshackled the big anchor, run out fifty fathoms of warp, and hauled her off there and then into deep water. Then they towed her up the channel—it was dead to leeward and an easy job—and berthed her near their own vessel. It was dark by that time, so I gave them a drink, and said good-night. It blew a howling gale that night, but the place was safe enough, with good ground-tackle.

'The whole affair was over; and after supper I thought hard about it all.'

8 The Theory

DAVIES leaned back and gave a deep sigh, as though he still felt the relief from some tension. I did the same, and felt the same relief. The chart, freed from the pressure of our fingers, rolled up with a flip, as though to say, 'What do you think of that?' I have straightened out his sentences a little, for in the excitement of his story they had grown more and more jerky and elliptical.

'What about Dollmann?' I asked.

'Of course,' said Davies, 'what about him? I didn't get at much that night. It was all so sudden. The only thing I could have sworn to from the first was that he had purposely left me in the lurch that day. I pieced out the rest in the next few days, which I'll just finish with as shortly as I can. Bartels came aboard next morning, and though it was blowing hard still we managed to shift the Dulcisella to a place where she dried safely at the mid-day low water, and we could get at her rudder. The lower screw-plate on the stern post had wrenched out, and we botched it up roughly as a make-shift. There were other little breakages, but nothing to matter, and the loss of the jib was nothing, as I had two spare ones. The dinghy was past repair just then, and I lashed it on deck.

'It turned out that Bartels was carrying apples from Bremen to Kappeln (in this fiord), and had run into that channel in the sands for shelter from the weather. To-day he was bound for the Eider River, whence, as I told you, you can get through (by river and canal) into the Baltic. Of course the Elbe route, by the new Kaiser Wilhelm Ship Canal, is the shortest. The Eider route is the old one, but he hoped to get rid of some of his apples at Tönning, the town at its mouth. Both routes touch the Baltic at Kiel. As you know, I had been running for the Elbe, but yesterday's muck-up put me off, and I changed my mind—'I'll tell you why presently—and decided to sail to the Eider along with the Johannes and get through that way. It cleared from the east next day, and I raced him there, winning hands down, left him at Tönning, and in three days was in the Baltic. It was just a week after I ran ashore that I wired to you. You see, I had come to the conclusion that that chap was a spy...

'In the end it came out quite quietly and suddenly, and left me in profound amazement. 'I wired to you—that chap was a spy.' It was the close association of these two ideas that hit me hardest at the moment. For a second I was back
in the dreary splendour of the London club-room, spelling out that crabbed scrawl from Davies, and fastidiously criticizing its proposal in the light of a holiday. Holiday! What was to be its issue? Chilling and opaque as the fog that filtered through the skylight there flooded my imagination a mist of doubt and fear.

'A spy!' I repeated blankly. 'What do you mean? Why did you wire to me? A spy of what--of whom?'

'I'll tell you how I worked it out,' said Davies. 'I don't think "spy" is the right word; but I mean something pretty bad.

'He purposely put me ashore. I don't think I'm suspicious by nature, but I know something about boats and the sea. I know he could have kept close to me if he had chosen, and I saw the whole place at low water when we left those sands on the second hand. Look at the chart again. Here's the Hohenhörn bank that I showed you as blocking the road. _[See Chart A]_. It's in two pieces--first the west and then the east. You see the Telte channel dividing into two branches and curving round it. Both branches are broad and deep, as channels go in those waters. Now, in sailing in I was nowhere near either of them. When I last saw Dollmann he must have been steering straight for the bank itself, at a point somewhere _here_, quite a mile from the northern arm of the channel, and two from the southern. I followed by compass, as you know, and found nothing but breakers ahead. How did I get through? That's where the luck came in. I spoke of only two channels, that is, _round_ the bank--one to the north, the other to the south. But look closely and you'll see that right through the centre of the West Hohenhörn runs another, a very narrow and winding one, so small that I hadn't even noticed it the night before, when I was going over the chart. That was the one I stumbled into in that tailor's fashion, as I was grooping along the edge of the surf in a desperate effort to gain time. I bolted down it blindly, came out into this strip of open water, crossed that aimlessly, and brought up on the edge of the _East_ Hohenhörn, _here_. It was more than I deserved. I can see now that it was a hundred to one in favour of my striking on a bad place outside, where I should have gone to pieces in three minutes.'

'And how did Dollmann go?' I asked.

'It's as clear as possible,' Davies answered. 'He doubled back into the northern channel when he had misled me enough. Do you remember my saying that when I last saw him I _thought_ he had luffed and showed his broadside? I had another bit of luck in that. He was luffing towards the north--so it struck me through the blur--and when I in my turn came up to the bank, and had to turn one way or the other to avoid it, I think I should naturally have turned north too, as he had done. In that case I should have been done for, for I should have had a mile of the bank to skirt before reaching the north channel, and should have driven ashore long before I got there. But as a matter of fact I turned south.'

'Why?'

'Couldn't help it. I was running on the starboard tack--boom over to port; to turn north would have meant a jibe, and as things were I couldn't risk one. It was blowing like fits; if anything had carried away I should have been on shore in a jiffy. I scarcely thought about it at all, but put the helm down and turned her south. Though I knew nothing about it, that little central channel was now on my port hand, distant about two cables. The whole thing was luck from beginning to end.'

Helped by pluck, I thought to myself, as I tried with my landsman's fancy to conjure up that perilous scene. As to the truth of the affair, the chart and Davies's version were easy enough to follow, but I felt only half convinced. The 'spy', as Davies strangely called his pilot, might have honestly mistaken the course himself, outstripped his convoy inadvertently, and escaped disaster as narrowly as she did. I suggested this on the spur of the moment, but Davies was impatient.

'Wait till you hear the whole thing,' he said. 'I must go back to when I first met him. I told you that on that first evening he began by being as rude as a bear and as cold as stone, and then became suddenly friendly. I can see now that in the talk that followed he was pumping me hard. It was an easy game to play, for I hadn't seen a gentleman since Morrison left me, I was tremendously keen about my voyage, and I thought the chap was a good sportsman, even if he was a bit dark about the ducks. I talked quite freely--at least, as freely as I could with my bad German--about my last fortnight's sailing; how I had been smelling out all the channels in and out of the islands, how interested I had been in the whole business, puzzling out the effect of the winds on the tides, the set of the currents, and so on. I talked about my difficulties, too; the changes in the buoys, the prehistoric rottenness of the English charts. He drew me out as much as he could, and in the light of what followed I can see the point of scores of his questions.

The next day and the next I saw a good deal of him, and the same thing went on. And then there were my plans for the future. My idea was, as I told you, to go on exploring the German coast just as I had the Dutch. His idea--Heavens, how plainly I see it now!--was to choke me off, get me to clear out altogether from that part of the coast. That was why he said there were no ducks. That was why he cracked up the Baltic as a cruising-ground and shooting-ground. And that was why he broached and stuck to that plan of sailing in company direct to the Elbe. It was to _see_ me clear.
'He improved on that.'

'Yes, but after that, it's guess-work. I mean that I can't tell when he first decided to go one better and drown me. He couldn't count for certain on bad weather, though he held my nose to it when it came. But, granted that he wanted to get rid of me altogether, he got a magnificent chance on that trip to the Elbe lightship. I expect it struck him suddenly, and he acted on the impulse. Left to myself I was all right; but the short cut was a grand idea of his. Everything was in its favour--wind, sea, sand, tide. He thinks I'm dead.'

'But the crew?' I said; 'what about the crew?'

'That's another thing. When he first hove to, waiting for me, of course they were on deck (two of them, I think) hauling at sheets. But by the time I had drawn taff rail the Medusa had worn round again on her course, and no one was on deck but Dollmann at the wheel. No one overheard what he said.'

'Wouldn't they have seen you again?'

'Very likely not; the weather was very thick, and the Dulce is very small.'

The incongruity of the whole business was striking me. Why should anyone want to kill Davies, and why should Davies, the soul of modesty and simplicity, imagine that anyone wanted to kill him? He must have cogent reasons, for he was the last man to give way to a morbid fancy.

'Go on,' I said. What was his motive? A German finds an Englishman exploring a bit of German coast, determines to stop him, and even to get rid of him. It looks so far as if you were thought to be the spy.

Davies winced. '_But he's not a German_,' he said, hotly. 'He's an Englishman.'

'An Englishman?'

'Yes, I'm sure of it. Not that I've much to go on. He professed to know very little English, and never spoke it, except a word or two now and then to help me out of a sentence; and as to his German, he seemed to me to speak it like a native; but, of course, I'm no judge.' Davies sighed. 'That's where I wanted someone like you. You would have spotted him at once, if he wasn't German. I go more by a--what do you call it?--a--'

'General impression,' I suggested.

'Yes, that's what I mean. It was something in his looks and manner; you know how different we are from foreigners. And it wasn't only himself, it was the way he talked--I mean about cruising and the sea, especially. It's true he let me do most of the talking; but, all the same--how can I explain it? I felt we understood one another, in a way that two foreigners wouldn't.

He pretended to think me a bit crazy for coming so far in a small boat, but I could swear he knew as much about the game as I did; for lots of little questions he asked had the right ring in them. Mind you, all this is an afterthought. I should never have bothered about it--I'm not cut out for a Sherlock Holmes--if it hadn't been for what followed.

'It's rather vague,' I said. 'Have you no more definite reason for thinking him English?'

'There were one or two things rather more definite,' said Davies, slowly. 'You know when he hove to and hailed me, proposing the short cut, I told you roughly what he said. I forget the exact words, but "abschneiden" came in--"durch Watten" and "abschneiden" (they call the banks "watts", you know); they were simple words, and he shouted them loud, so as to carry through the wind. I understood what he meant, but, as I told you, I hesitated before consenting. I suppose he thought I didn't understand, for just as he was drawing ahead again he pointed to the south'ard, and then shouted through his hands as a trumpet "Verstehen Sie? short-cut through sands; follow me!" the last two sentences in downright English. I can hear those words now, and I'll swear they were in his native tongue. Of course I thought nothing of it at the time. I was quite aware that he knew a few English words, though he had always mis-pronounced them; an easy trick when your hearer suspects nothing. But I needn't say that just then I was observant of trifles. I don't pretend to be able to unravel a plot and steer a small boat before a heavy sea at the same moment.'

'And if he was piloting you into the next world he could afford to commit himself before you parted! Was there anything else? By the way, how did the daughter strike you? Did she look English too?'

'Two men cannot discuss a woman freely without a deep foundation of intimacy, and, until this day, the subject had never arisen between us in any form. It was the last that was likely to, for I could have divined that Davies would have met it with an armour of reserve. He was busy putting on this armour now; yet I could not help feeling a little brutal as I saw how badly he jointed his clumsy suit of mail. Our ages were the same, but I laugh now to think how old and _blasé_ I felt as the flush warmed his brown skin, and he slowly propounded the verdict, 'Yes, I think she did.'

'She_talked nothing but German, I suppose?'

'Oh, of course.'

'Did you see much of her?'

'A good deal.'

'Was she--,' (how frame it?) 'Did she want you to sail to the Elbe with them?'
‘She seemed to,’ admitted Davies, reluctantly, clutching at his ally, the match-box. ‘But, hang it, don’t dream that she knew what was coming,’ he added, with sudden fire.

I pondered and wondered, shrinking from further inquisition, easy as it would have been with so truthful a victim, and banishing all thought of ill-timed chaff. There was a cross-current in this strange affair, whose depth and strength I was beginning to gauge with increasing seriousness. I did not know my man yet, and I did not know myself. A conviction that events in the near future would force us into complete mutual confidence withheld me from pressing him too far. I returned to the main question; who was Dollmann, and what was his motive? Davies struggled out of his armour.

‘I’m convinced,’ he said, ‘that he’s an Englishman in German service. He must be in German service, for he had evidently been in those waters a long time, and knew every inch of them; of course, it’s a very lonely part of the world, but he has a house on Norderney Island; and he, and all about him, must be well known to a certain number of people. One of his friends I happened to meet; what do you think he was? A naval officer. It was on the afternoon of the third day, and we were having coffee on the deck of the Medusa, and talking about next day’s trip, when a little launch came buzzing up from seaward, drew alongside, and this chap I’m speaking of came on board, shook hands with Dollmann, and stared hard at me. Dollmann introduced us, calling him Commander von Brüning, in command of the torpedo gunboat Blitz. He pointed towards Norderney, and I saw her—a low, grey rat of a vessel—anchored in the Roads about two miles away. It turned out that she was doing the work of fishery guardship on that part of the coast.

‘I must say I took to him at once. He looked a real good sort, and a splendid officer, too—just the sort of chap I should have liked to be. You know I always wanted—but that’s an old story, and can wait. I had some talk with him, and we got on capitally as far as we went, but that wasn’t far, for I left pretty soon, guessing that they wanted to be alone.’

‘_Were_ they alone then?’ I asked, innocently.

‘Oh, Fräulein Dollmann was there, of course,’ explained Davies, feeling for his armour again.

‘Did he seem to know them well?’ I pursued, inconsequently.

‘Oh, yes, very well.’

Scenting a faint clue, I felt the need of feminine weapons for my sensitive antagonist. But the opportunity passed.

‘That was the last I saw of him,’ he said. ‘We sailed, as I told you, at daybreak next morning. Now, have you got any idea what I’m driving at?’

‘A rough idea,’ I answered. ‘Go ahead.’

Davies sat up to the table, unrolled the chart with a vigorous sweep of his two hands, and took up his parable with new zest.

‘I start with two certainties,’ he said. ‘One is that I was “moved on” from that coast, because I was too inquisitive. The other is that Dollmann is at some devil’s work there which is worth finding out. Now’—he paused in a gasping effort to be logical and articulate. ‘Now—well, look at the chart. No, better still, look first at this map of Germany. It’s on a small scale, and you can see the whole thing.’ He snatched down a pocket-map from the shelf and unfolded it. _[See Map A]_. ‘Here’s this huge empire, stretching half over central Europe—an empire growing like wildfire, I believe, in people, and wealth, and everything. They’ve licked the French, and the Austrians, and are the greatest military power in Europe. I wish I knew more about all that, but what I’m concerned with is their sea-power. It’s a new thing with them, but it’s going strong, and that Emperor of theirs is running it for all it’s worth. He’s a splendid chap, and anyone can see he’s right. They’ve got no colonies to speak of, and _must_ have them, like us. They can’t get them and keep them, and they can’t protect their huge commerce without naval strength. The command of the sea is _the_ thing nowadays, isn’t it? I say, don’t think these are my ideas,’ he added, naively. ‘It’s all out of Mahan and those fellows. Well, the Germans have got a small fleet at present, but it’s a thundering good one, and they’re building hard. There’s the—and the—.’ He broke off into a digression on armaments and speeds in which I could not follow him. He seemed to know every ship by heart. I had to recall him to the point. ‘Well, think of Germany as a new sea-power,’ he resumed. ‘The next thing is, what is her coast-line? It’s a very queer one, as you know, split clean in two by Denmark, most of it lying east of that and looking on the Baltic, which is practically an inland sea, with its entrance blocked by Danish islands. It was to evade that block that William built the ship canal from Kiel to the Elbe, but that could be easily smashed in war-time. The most important bit of coast-line is that which lies _west_ of Denmark and looks on the North Sea. It’s there that Germany gets her head out into the open, so to speak. It’s there that she fronts us and France, the two great sea-powers of Western Europe, and it’s there that her greatest ports are and her richest commerce.

‘Now it must strike you at once that it’s ridiculously short compared with the huge country behind it. From Borkum to the Elbe, as the crow flies, is only seventy miles. Add to that the west coast of Schleswig, say 120 miles.
Total, say, two hundred. Compare that with the seaboard of France and England. Doesn't it stand to reason that every inch of it is important? Now what _sort_ of coast is it? Even on this small map you can see at once, by all those wavy lines, shoals and sand everywhere, blocking nine-tenths of the land altogether, and doing their best to block the other tenth where the great rivers run in. Now let's take it bit by bit. You see it divides itself into three. Beginning from the west the _first piece_ is from Borkum to Wangeroog--fifty odd miles. What's that like? A string of sandy islands backed by sand; the Ems river at the western end, on the Dutch border, leading to Emden--not much of a place. Otherwise, no coast towns at all. _Second piece_: a deep sort of bay consisting of the three great estuaries--the Jade, the Weser, and the Elbe--leading to Wilhelmshaven (their North Sea naval base), Bremen, and Hamburg. Total breadth of bay twenty odd miles only; sandbanks littered about all through it. _Third piece_: the Schleswig coast, hopelessly fenced in behind a six to eight mile fringe of sand. No big towns; one moderate river, the Eider. Let's leave that third piece aside. I may be wrong, but, in thinking this business out, I've pegged away chiefly at the other two, the seventy-mile stretch from Borkum to the Elbe--half of it estuaries, and half islands. It was there that I found the Medusa, and it's that stretch that, thanks to him, I missed exploring.

I made an obvious conjecture. 'I suppose there are forts and coast defences? Perhaps he thought you would see too much. By the way, he saw your naval books, of course?'

'Exactly. Of course that was my first idea; but it can't be that. It doesn't explain things in the least. To begin with, there _are_ no forts and can be none in that first division, where the islands are. There might be something on Borkum to defend the Ems; but it's very unlikely, and, anyway, I had passed Borkum and was at Norderney. There's nothing else to defend. Of course it's different in the second division, where the big rivers are. There are probably hosts of forts and mines round Wilhelmshaven and Bremerhaven, and at Cuxhaven just at the mouth of the Elbe. Not that I should ever dream of bothering about them; every steamer that goes in would see as much as me. Personally, I much prefer to stay on board, and don't often go on shore. And, good Heavens!' (Davies leant back and laughed joyously) 'do I _look_ like that kind of spy?'

I figured to myself one of those romantic gentlemen that one reads of in sixpenny magazines, with a Kodak in his tie-pin, a sketch-book in the lining of his coat, and a selection of disguises in his hand luggage. Little disposed for merriment as I was, I could not help smiling, too.

'About this coast,' resumed Davies. 'In the event of war it seems to me that every inch of it would be important, _sand and all_. Take the big estuaries first, which, of course, might be attacked or blockaded by an enemy. At first sight you would say that their main channels were the only things that mattered. Now, in time of peace there's no secrecy about the navigation of these. They're buoyed and lighted like streets, open to the whole world, and taking an immense traffic; well charted, too, as millions of pounds in commerce depend on them. But now look at the sands they run through, intersected, as I showed you, by threads of channels, tidal for the most part, and probably only known to smacks and shallow coasters, like that galliot of Bartels.

'It strikes me that in a war a lot might depend on these, both in defence and attack, for there's plenty of water in them at the right tide for patrol-boats and small torpedo craft, though I an see they take a lot of knowing. Now, say _we_ were at war with Germany--both sides could use them as lines between the three estuaries; and to take our own case, a small torpedo-boat (not a destroyer, mind you) could on a dark night cut clean through from the Jade to the Elbe and play the deuce with the shipping there. But the trouble is that I doubt if there's a soul in our fleet who knows those channels. _We_ haven't coasters there; and, as to yachts, it's a most unlikely game for an English yacht to play at; but it does so happen that I have a fancy for that sort of thing and would have explored those channels in the ordinary course.' I began to see his drift.

'Now for the islands. I was rather stumped there at first, I grant, because, though there are lashings of sand behind them, and the same sort of intersecting channels, yet there seems nothing important to guard or attack.

'Why shouldn't a stranger ramble as he pleases through them? Still Dollmann had his headquarters there, and I was sure that had some meaning. Then it struck me that the same point held good, for that strip of Frisian coast adjoins the estuaries, and would also form a splendid base for raiding midgets, which could travel unseen right through from the Ems to the Jade, and so to the Elbe, as by a covered way between a line of forts.

'Now here again it's an unknown land to us. Plenty of local galliots travel it, but strangers never, I should say. Perhaps at he most an occasional foreign yacht gropes in at one of the gaps between the islands for shelter from bad weather, and is precious lucky to get in safe. Once again, it was my fad to like such places, and Dollmann cleared me out. He's not a German, but he's in with Germans, and naval Germans too. He's established on that coast, and knows it by heart. And he tried to drown me. Now what do you think?' He gazed at me long and anxiously.

9 I Sign Articles

IT was not an easy question to answer, for the affair was utterly outside all my experience; its background the sea, and its actual scene a region of the sea of which I was blankly ignorant. There were other difficulties that I could see perhaps better than Davies, an enthusiast with hobbies, who had been brooding in solitude over his dangerous
adventure. Yet both narrative and theory (which have lost, I fear, in interpretation to the reader) had strongly affected me; his forcible roughnesses, tricks of manner, sudden bursts of ardour, sudden retreats into shyness, making up a charm I cannot render. I found myself continually trying to see the man through the boy, to distinguish sober judgement from the hot-headed vagaries of youth. Not that I dreamed for a moment of dismissing the story of his wreck as an hallucination. His clear blue eyes and sane simplicity throw ridicule on such treatment.

Evidently, too, he wanted my help, a matter that might well have influenced my opinion on the facts, had he been other than he was. But it would have taken a 'finished and finite clod' to resist the attraction of the man and the enterprise; and I take no credit whatever for deciding to follow him, right or wrong. So, when I stated my difficulties, I knew very well that we should go.

'There are two main points that I don't understand,' I said. 'First, you've never explained why an _Englishman_ should be watching those waters and ejecting intruders; secondly, your theory doesn't supply sufficient motive. There may be much in what you say about the navigation of those channels, but it's not enough. You say he wanted to drown you--a big charge, requiring a big motive to support it. But I don't deny that you've got a strong case.'

Davies lighted up. 'I'm willing to take a good deal for granted--until we find out more.'

He jumped up, and did a thing I never saw him do before or since--bumped his head against the cabin roof.

'You mean that you'll come?' he exclaimed. 'Why, I hadn't even asked you! Yes, I want to go back and clear up the whole thing. I know now that I want to; telling it all to you has been such an immense relief. And a lot depended on you, too, and that's why I've been feeling such an absolute hypocrite. I say, how can I apologize?'

'Don't worry about me; I've had a splendid time. And I'll come right enough; but I should like to know exactly what you--'

'No; but wait till I just make a clean breast of it--about you, I mean. You see, I came to the conclusion that I could do nothing alone; not that two are really necessary for managing the boat in the ordinary way, but for this sort of job you _do_ want two; besides, I can't speak German properly, and I'm a dull chap all round. If my theory, as you call it, is right, it's a case for sharp wits, if ever there was one; so I thought of you. You're clever, and I knew you had lived in Germany and knew German, and I knew,' he added, with a little awkwardness, 'that you had done a good deal of yachting; but of course I ought to have told you what you were in for--roughing it in a small boat with no crew. I felt ashamed of myself when you wired back so promptly, and when you came--er--' Davies stammered and hesitated in the humane resolve not to wound my feelings. 'Of course I couldn't help noticing that it wasn't what you expected,' was the delicate summary he arrived at. 'But you took it splendidly,' he hastened to add. 'Only, somehow, I couldn't bring myself to talk about the plan. It was good enough of you to come out at all, without bothering you with hare-brained schemes. Beside, I wasn't even sure of myself. It's a tangled business. There were reasons, there are reasons still'--he looked nervously at me--'which--well, which make it a tangled business.' I had thought a confidence was coming, and was disappointed. 'I was in an idiotic state of uncertainty,' he hurried on; 'but the plan grew on me more and more, when I saw how you were taking to the life and beginning to enjoy yourself. All that about the ducks on the Frisian coast was humbug; part of a stupid idea of decoying you there and gaining the plan grew on me more and more, when I saw how you were taking to the life and beginning to enjoy yourself.

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'It's not like that,' said Davies, indignantly. 'Anyone who likes can sail about there and explore those waters. I say, you don't really think it's like that, do you?
'I don't think you're likely to do anything dishonourable,' I hastened to explain. 'I grant you the sea's public property in your sense. I only mean that developments are possible, which you don't reckon on. There _must_ be more to find out than the mere navigation of those channels, and if that's so, mightn't we come to be genuine spies ourselves?'

'And, after all, hang it!' exclaimed Davies, 'if it comes to that, why shouldn't we? I look at it like this. The man's an Englishman, and if he's in with Germany he's a traitor to us, and we as Englishmen have a right to expose him. If we can't do it without spying we've a right to spy, at our own risk--'

'There's a stronger argument than that. He tried to take your life.'

'I don't care a rap about that. I'm not such an ass as to thirst for revenge and all that, like some chap in a shilling shocker. But it makes me wild to think of that fellow masquerading as a German, and up to who knows what mischief--mischief enough to make him want to get rid of _any_ one. I'm keen about the sea, and I think they're apt to be a bit slack at home,' he continued inconsequently. 'Those Admiralty chaps want waking up. Anyway, as far as I'm concerned, it's quite natural that I should look him up again.'

'Quite,' I agreed; 'you parted friends, and they may be delighted to see you. You'll have plenty to talk about.'

'I--I'm,' said Davies, withered into silence by the 'they'. 'Hullo! I say, do you know it's three o'clock? How the time has gone! And, by Jove! I believe the fog's lifting.'

I returned, with a shock, to the present, to the weeping walls, the discoloured deal table, the ghastly breakfast litter--all the visible symbols of the life I had pledged myself to. Disillusionment was making rapid headway when Davies returned, and said, with energy:

'What do you say to starting for Kiel at once? The fog's going, and there's a breeze from the sou'-west.'

'Now?' I protested. 'Why, it'll mean sailing all night, won't it?'

'Oh, no,' said Davies. 'Not with luck.'

'Why, it's dark at seven!'

'Yes, but it's only twenty-five miles. I know it's not exactly a fair wind, but we shall lie closehauled most of the way. The glass is falling, and we ought to take this chance.'

To argue about winds with Davies was hopeless, and the upshot was that we started lunchless. A pale sun was flickering out of masses of racing vapour, and through delicate vistas between them the fair land of Schleswig now revealed and now withdrew her pretty face, as though smiling _adieux_ to her faithless courtiers.

The clank of our chain brought up Bartels to the deck of the Johannes, rubbing his eyes and pulling round his throat a grey shawl, which gave him a comical likeness to a lodging-house landlady receiving the milk in morning _déshabillé._

'We're off, Bartels,' said Davies, without looking up from his work. 'See you at Kiel, I hope.'

'You are always in a hurry, captain,' bleated the old man, shaking his head. 'You should wait till to-morrow. The sky is not good, and it will be dark before you are off Eckenförde.'

Davies laughed, and very soon his mentor's sad little figure was lost in haze.

That was a curious evening. Dusk soon fell, and the devil made a determined effort to unman me; first, with the scrambled tea which was the tardy substitute for an orderly lunch, then with the new and nauseous duty of filling the side-lights, which meant squatting in the fo'c'sle to inhale paraffin and dabble in lamp-black; lastly, with an all-round attack on my nerves as the night fell on our frail little vessel, pitching on her precarious way through driving mist. In a sense I think I went through the same sort of mental crisis as when I sat upon my portmanteau at Flensburg. The main issue was not seriously in question, for I had signed on in the Dulcibella for good or ill; but in doing so I had outrun myself, and still wanted an outlook, a mood suited to the enterprise, proof against petty discouragements. Not for the first time a sense of the ludicrous came to my assistance, as I saw myself fretting in London under my burden of self-imposed woes, nicely weighing that insidious invitation, and stepping finally into the snare with the dignity due to my importance; kidnapped as neatly as ever a peaceful clerk was kidnapped by a lawless press-gang, and, in the end, finding as the arch-conspirator a guileless and warm-hearted friend, who called me clever, lodged me in a cell, and blandly invited me to talk German to the purpose, as he was aiming at a little secret service on the high seas. Close in the train of Humour came Romance, veiling her face, but I knew it was the rustle of her robes that I heard in the foam beneath me; I knew that it was she who handed me the cup of sparkling wine and bade me drink and be merry. Strange to me though it was, I knew the taste when it touched my lips. It was not that bastard concoction I had tasted in the pseudo-Bohemias of Soho; it was not the showy but insipid beverage I should have drunk my fill of at Morven Lodge; it was the purest of her pure vintages, instilling the ancient inspiration which, under many guises, quickens thousands of better brains than mine, but whose essence is always the same; the gay pursuit of a perilous quest. Then and there I tried to clinch the matter and keep that mood. In the main I think I succeeded, though I had many lapses.

For the present my veins tingled with the draught. The wind humming into the mainsail, the ghostly wave-crests
riding up out of the void, whispered a low thrilling chorus in praise of adventure. Potent indeed must the spell have been, for, in reality, that first night sail teemed with terrors for me. It is true that it began well, for the haze dispersed, as Davies had prophesied, and Bulk Point Lighthouse guided us safely to the mouth of Kiel Fiord. It was during this stage that, crouching together aft, our pipe-bowls glowing sympathetically, we returned to the problem before us; for we had shot out on our quest with volcanic precipitation, leaving much to be discussed. I gleaned a few more facts, though I dispelled no doubts. Davies had only seen the Dollmanns on their yacht, where father and daughter were living for the time. Their villa at Norderney, and their home life there, were unknown to him, though he had landed once at the harbour himself. Further, he had heard vaguely of a stepmother, absent at Hamburg. They were to have joined her on their arrival at that city, which, be it noted, stands a long way up the Elbe, forty miles and more above Cuxhaven, the town at the mouth.

The exact arrangement made on the day before the fatal voyage was that the two yachts should meet in the evening at Cuxhaven and proceed up the river together. Then, in the ordinary course, Davies would have parted company at Brunsbüttel (fifteen miles up), which is the western terminus of the ship canal to the Baltic. Such at least had been his original intention; but, putting two and two together, I gathered that latterly, and perhaps unconfessed to himself, his resolve had weakened, and that he would have followed the Medusa to Hamburg, or indeed the end of the world, impelled by the same motive that, contrary to all his tastes and principles, had induced him to abandon his life in the islands and undertake the voyage at all. But on that point he was im movably reticent, and all I could conclude was that the strange cross-current connected with Dollmann's daughter had given him cruel pain and had clouded his judgement to distraction, but that he now was prepared to forget or ignore it, and steer a settled course.

The facts I elicited raised several important questions. Was it not known by this time that he and his yacht had survived? Davies was convinced that it was not. 'He may have waited at Cuxhaven, or inquired at the lock at Brunsbüttel,' he said. 'But there was no need, for I tell you the thing was a certainty. If I had struck and _stuck_ _on_ that outer bank, as it was a hundred to one I should do, the yacht would have broken up in three minutes. Bartels would never have seen me, and couldn't have got to me if he had. No one would have seen me. And nothing whatever has happened since to show that they know I'm alive.'

'They,' I suggested. 'Who are "they"? Who are our adversaries?' If Dollmann were an accredited agent of the German Admiralty--But, no, it was incredible that the murder of a young Englishman should be connived at in modern days by a friendly and civilized government! Yet, if he were not such an agent, the whole theory fell to the ground.

'I believe,' said Davies, 'that Dollmann did it off his own bat, and beyond that I can't see. And I don't know that it matters at present. Alive or dead we're doing nothing wrong, and have nothing to be ashamed of.'

'I think it matters a good deal,' I objected. 'Who will be interested in our resurrection, and how are we to go to work, openly or secretly? I suppose we shall keep out of the way as much as we can?'

'As for keeping out of the way,' said Davies, jerkily, as he peered to windward under the foresail, 'we _must_ pass the ship canal; that's a public highway, where anyone can see you. After that there won't be much difficulty. Wait till you see the place!' He gave a low, contented laugh, which would have frozen my marrow yesterday. 'By the way, that reminds me,' he added; 'we must stop at Kiel for the inside of a day and lay in a lot of stores. We want to be independent of the shore.' I said nothing. Independence of the shore in a seven-tonner in October! What an end to aim at!

About nine o'clock we weathered the point, entered Kiel Fiord, and began a dead beat to windward of seven miles to the head of it where Kiel lies. Hitherto, save for the latent qualms concerning my total helplessness if anything happened to Davies, interest and excitement had upheld me well. My alarms only began when I thought them nearly over. Davies had frequently urged me to turn in and sleep, and I went so far as to go below and coil myself up on the lee sofa with my pencil and diary. Suddenly there was a flapping and rattling on deck, and I began to slide on to the floor. 'What's happened?' I cried, in a panic, for there was Davies stooping in at the cabin door. 'Nothing,' he said, chafing his hands for warmth; 'I'm only going about. Hand me the glasses, will you? There's a steamer ahead. I say, if you really don't want to turn in, you might make some soup. Just let's look at the chart.' He studied it with maddening deliberation, while I wondered how near the steamer was, and what the yacht was doing meanwhile.

'I suppose it's not really necessary for anyone to be at the helm?' I remarked.

'Oh, she's all right for a minute,' he said, without looking up. 'Two--one and a half--one--lights in line sou'-west by west--got a match?' He expended two, and tumbled upstairs again.

'You don't want me, do you?' I shouted after him.

'No, but come up when you've put the kettle on. It's a pretty beat up the fiord. Lovely breeze.'

His legs disappeared. A sort of buoyant fatalism possessed me as I finished my notes and pored over the stove. It upheld me, too, when I went on deck and watched the 'pretty beat', whose prettiness was mainly due to the crowd of
fog-bound shipping--steamers, smacks, and sailing-vessels--now once more on the move in the confined fairway of
the fiord, their baleful eyes of red, green, or yellow, opening and shutting, brightening and fading; while shore-lights
and anchor-lights added to my bewilderment, and a throbbing of screws filled the air like the distant roar of London
streets. In fact, every time we spun round for our dart across the fiord I felt like a rustic matron gathering her skirts
for the transit of the Strand on a busy night. Davies, however, was the street arab who zigzags under the horses' feet
unscathed; and all the time he discoursed placidly on the simplicity and safety of night-sailing if only you are
careful, obeying rules, and burnt good lights. As we were nearing the hot glow in the sky that denoted Kiel we
passed a huge scintillating bulk moored in mid-stream. 'Warships,' he murmured, ecstatically.

At one o'clock we anchored off the town.

10 His Chance
'I SAY, Davies,' I said, 'how long do you think this trip will last? I've only got a month's leave.'

We were standing at slanting desks in the Kiel post-office, Davies scratching diligently at his letter-card, and I
staring feebly at mine.

'By Jove!' said Davies, with a start of dismay; 'that's only three weeks more; I never thought of that. You couldn't
manage to get an extension, could you?'

'I can write to the chief,' I admitted; 'but where's the answer to come to? We're better without an address, I
suppose.'

'There's Cuxhaven,' reflected Davies; 'but that's too near, and there's--but we don't want to be tied down to
landing anywhere. I tell you what: say "Post Office, Norderney", just your name, not the yacht's. We _may_ get
there and be able to call for letters.' The casual character of our adventure never struck me more strongly than then.

'Is that what _you're_ doing?' I asked.

'Oh, I shan't be having important letters like you.'

'But what are you saying?'

'Oh, just that we're having a splendid cruise, and are on our way home.'

The notion tickled me, and I said the same in my home letter, adding that we were looking for a friend of
Davies's who would be able to show us some sport. I wrote a line, too, to my chief (unaware of the gravity of the
step I was taking) saying it was possible that I might have to apply for longer leave, as I had important business to
transact in Germany, and asking him kindly to write to the same address. Then we shouldered our parcels and
resumed our business.

Two full dinghy-loads of Stores we ferried to the Dulcibella, chief among which were two immense cans of
petroleum, constituting our reserves of heat and light, and a sack of flour. There were spare ropes and blocks, too;
German charts of excellent quality; cigars and many weird brands of sausage and tinned meats, besides a miscellany
of oddments, some of which only served in the end to slake my companion's craving for jettison. Clothes were my
own chief care, for, freely as I had purged it at Flensburg, my wardrobe was still very unsuitable, and I had already
irretrievably damaged two faultless pairs of white flannels. ('We shall be able to throw them overboard,' said Davies,
hopefully.) So I bought a great pair of seaboots of the country, felt-lined and wooden-soled, and both of us got a
number of rough woollen garments (as worn by the local fishermen), breeches, jerseys, helmets, gloves; all of a
colour chosen to harmonize with paraffin stains and anchor mud.

The same evening we were taking our last look at the Baltic, sailing past warships and groups of idle yachts
battened down for their winter's sleep; while the noble shores of the fiord, with its villas embowered in copper
foliage, grew dark and dim above us.

We rounded the last headland, steered for a galaxy of coloured lights, tumbled down our sails, and came to under
the colossal gates of the Holtenau lock. That these would open to such an infinitesimal suppliant seemed
inconceivable. But open they did, with ponderous majesty, and our tiny hull was lost in the womb of a lock designed
to float the largest battleships. I thought of Boulter's on a hot August Sunday, and wondered if I really was the same
peevish dandy who had jostled and sweltered there with the noisy cockney throng a month ago. There was a blaze of
electricity overhead, but utter silence till a solitary cloaked figure hailed us and called for the captain. Davies ran up
a ladder, disappeared with the cloaked figure, and returned crumpling a paper into his pocket. It lies before me now,
and sets forth, under the stamp of the Königliches Zollamt, that, in consideration of the sum of ten marks for dues
and four for tonnage, an imperial tug would tow the vessel Dulcibella (master A. H. Davies) through the Kaiser
Wilhelm Canal from Holtenau to Brunsbüttel. Magnificent condescension! I blush when I look at this yellow
document and remember the stately courtesy of the great lock gates; for the sleepy officials of the Königliches
Zollamt little knew what an insidious little viper they were admitting into the imperial bosom at the light toll of
fourteen shillings.

'Seems cheap,' said Davies, joining me, 'doesn't it? They've a regular tariff on tonnage, same for yachts as for
liners. We start at four to-morrow with a lot of other boats. I wonder if Bartels is here.'
The same silence reigned, but invisible forces were at work. The inner gates opened and we prised ourselves through into a capacious basin, where lay moored side by side a flotilla of sailing vessels of various sizes. Having made fast alongside a vacant space of quay, we had our dinner, and then strolled out with cigars to look for the Johannes. We found her wedged among a stack of galliots, and her skipper sitting primly below before a blazing stove, reading his Bible through spectacles. He produced a bottle of schnapps and some very small and hard pears, while Davies twisted him mercilessly about his false predictions.

'The sky was not good,' was all he said, beaming indulgently at his incorrigible young friend.

Before parting for the night it was arranged that next morning we should lash alongside the Johannes when the flotilla was marshalled for the tow through the canal.

'Karl shall steer for us both,' he said, 'and we will stay warm in the cabin.'

The scheme was carried out, not without much confusion and loss of paint, in the small hours of a dark and drizzling morning. Boisterous little tugs sorted us into parties, and half lost under the massive bulwarks of the Johannes we were carried off into a black inane. If any doubt remained as to the significance of our change of cruising-grounds, dawn dispelled it. View there was none from the deck of the Dulcibella; it was only by standing on the mainboom that you could see over the embankments to the vast plain of Holstein, grey and monotonous under a pall of mist. The soft scenery of the Schleswig coast was a baseless dream of the past, and a cold penetrating rain added the last touch of dramatic completeness to the staging of the new act.

For two days we travelled slowly up the mighty waterway that is the strategic link between the two seas of Germany. Broad and straight, massively embanked, lit by electricity at night till it is lighter than many a great London street; traversed by great war vessels, rich merchantmen, and humble coasters alike, it is a symbol of the new and mighty force which, controlled by the genius of statesmen and engineers, is thrusting the empire irresistibly forward to the goal of maritime greatness.

'Isn't it splendid?' said Davies. 'He's a fine fellow, that emperor.'

Karl was the shock-headed, stout-limbed boy of about sixteen, who constituted the whole crew of the Johannes, and was as dirty as his master was clean. I felt a certain envious reverence for this unprepossessing youth, seeing in him a much more efficient counterpart of myself; but how he and his little master ever managed to work their ungainly vessel was a miracle I never understood. Phlegmatically impervious to rain and cold, he steered the Johannes down the long grey reaches in the wake of the tug, while we and Bartels held snug gatherings down below, sometimes in his cabin, sometimes in ours. The heating arrangements of the latter began to be a subject of serious concern. We finally did the only logical thing, and brought the kitchen-range into the parlour, fixing the Rippingille stove on the forward end of the cabin table, where it could warm as well as cook for us. As an ornament it was monstrous, and the taint of oil which it introduced was a disgusting drawback; but, after all, the great thing—as Davies said—is to be comfortable, and after that to be clean.

Davies held long consultations with Bartels, who was thoroughly at home in the navigation of the sands we were bound for, his own boat being a type of the very craft which ply in them. I shall not forget the moment when it first dawned on him that his young friend's curiosity was practical; for he had thought that our goal was his own beloved Hamburg, queen of cities, a place to see and die.

'It is too late,' he wailed. 'You do not know the Nord See as I do.'

'Oh, nonsense, Bartels, it's quite safe.'

'Safe! And have I not found you fast on Hohenhörn, in a storm, with your rudder broken? God was good to you then, my son.'

'Yes, but it wasn't my f—' Davies checked himself. 'We're going home. There's nothing in that.' Bartels became sadly resigned.

'It is good that you have a friend,' was his last word on the subject; but all the same he always glanced at me with a rather doubtful eye. As to Davies and myself, our friendship developed quickly on certain limited lines, the chief obstacle, as I well know now, being his reluctance to talk about the personal side of our quest.

On the other hand, I spoke about my own life and interests, with an unsparing discernment, of which I should have been incapable a month ago, and in return I gained the key to his own character. It was devotion to the sea, wedded to a fire of pent-up patriotism struggling incessantly for an outlet in strenuous physical expression; a humanity, born of acute sensitiveness to his own limitations, only adding fuel to the flame. I learnt for the first time now that in early youth he had failed for the navy, the first of several failures in his career. 'And I can't settle down to anything else,' he said. 'I read no end about it, and yet I am a useless outsider. All I've been able to do is to potter about in small boats; but it's all been _wasted_ till this chance came. I'm afraid you'll not understand how I feel about it; but at last, for once in a way, I see a chance of being useful.'

'There ought to be chances for chaps like you,' I said, 'without the accident of a job such as this.'

'Oh, as long as I get it, what matter? But I know what you mean. There must be hundreds of chaps like me--I
know a good many myself—who know our coasts like a book—shoals, creeks, tides, rocks; there's nothing in it, it's only practice. They ought to make some use of us as a naval reserve. They tried to once, but it fizzled out, and nobody really cares. And what's the result? Using every man of what reserves we've got, there's about enough to man the fleet on a war footing, and no more. They've tinkered with fishermen, and merchant sailors, and yachting hands, but everyone of them ought to be got hold of; and the colonies, too. Is there the ghost of a doubt that if war broke out there'd be wild appeals for volunteers, aimless cadging, hurry, confusion, waste? My own idea is that we ought to go much further, and train every able-bodied man for a couple of years as a sailor. Army? Oh, I suppose you'd have to give them the choice. Not that I know or care much about the Army, though to listen to people talk you'd think it really mattered as the Navy matters. We're a maritime nation—we've grown by the sea and live by it; if we lose command of it we starve. We're unique in that way, just as our huge empire, only linked by the sea, is unique. And yet, read Brassey, Dilke, and those "Naval Annuals", and see what mountains of apathy and conceit have had to be tackled. It's not the people's fault. We've been safe so long, and grown so rich, that we've forgotten what we owe it to. But there's no excuse for those blockheads of statesmen, as they call themselves, who are paid to see things as they are. They have to go to an American to learn their A B C, and it's only when kicked and punched by civilian agitators, a mere handful of men who get sneered at for their pains, that they wake up, do some work, point proudly to it, and go to sleep again, till they get another kick. By Jove! we want a man like this Kaiser, who doesn't wait to be kicked, but works like a nigger for his country, and sees ahead.'

'We're improving, aren't we?'

'Oh, of course, we are! But it's a constant uphill fight; and we aren't ready. They talk of a two-power standard—'

He plunged away into regions where space forbids me to follow him. This is only a sample of many similar conversations that we afterwards held, always culminating in the burning question of Germany. Far from including me and the Foreign Office among his targets for vague invective, he had a profound respect for my sagacity and experience as a member of that institution; a respect which embarrassed me not a little when I thought of my _précis_ writing and cigarette-smoking, my dancing, and my dining. But I did know something of Germany, and could satisfy his tireless questioning with a certain authority. He used to listen rapt while I described her marvellous awakening in the last generation, under the strength and wisdom of her rulers; her intense patriotic ardour; her seething industrial activity, and, most potent of all, the forces that are moulding modern Europe, her dream of a colonial empire, entailing her transformation from a land-power to a sea-power. Impregnably based on vast territorial resources which we cannot molest, the dim instincts of her people, not merely directed but anticipated by the genius of her ruling house, our great trade rivals of the present, our great naval rival of the future, she grows, and strengthens, and waits, an ever more formidable factor in the future of our delicate network of empire, sensitive as gossamer to external shocks, and radiating from an island whose commerce is its life, and which depends even for its daily ration of bread on the free passage of the seas.

'And we aren't ready for her,' Davies would say; 'we don't look her way. We have no naval base in the North Sea, and no North Sea Fleet. Our best battleships are too deep in draught for North Sea work. And, to crown all, we were asses enough to give her Heligoland, which commands her North Sea coast. And supposing she collars Holland; isn't there some talk of that?'

That would lead me to describe the swollen ambitions of the Pan-Germanic party, and its ceaseless intrigues to promote the absorption of Austria, Switzerland, and—a direct and flagrant menace to ourselves—of Holland.

'I don't blame them,' said Davies, who, for all his patriotism, had not a particle of racial spleen in his composition. 'I don't blame them; their Rhine ceases to be German just when it begins to be most valuable. The mouth is Dutch, and would give them magnificent ports just opposite British shores. We can't talk about conquest and grabbing. We've collared a fine share of the world, and they've every right to be jealous. Let them hate us, and say so; it'll teach us to buck up; and that's what really matters.'

In these talks there occurred a singular contact of minds. It was very well for me to spin sonorous generalities, but I had never till now dreamed of being so vulgar as to translate them into practice. I had always detested the meddlesome alarmist, who veils ignorance under noisiness, and for ever wails his chant of lugubrious pessimism. To be thrown with Davies was to receive a shock of enlightenment; for here, at least, was a specimen of the breed who could satisfy his tireless questioning with a certain authority. He used to listen rapt while I described her marvellous awakening in the last generation, under the strength and wisdom of her rulers; her intense patriotic ardour; her seething industrial activity, and, most potent of all, the forces that are moulding modern Europe, her dream of a colonial empire, entailing her transformation from a land-power to a sea-power. Impregnably based on vast territorial resources which we cannot molest, the dim instincts of her people, not merely directed but anticipated by the genius of her ruling house, our great trade rivals of the present, our great naval rival of the future, she grows, and strengthens, and waits, an ever more formidable factor in the future of our delicate network of empire, sensitive as gossamer to external shocks, and radiating from an island whose commerce is its life, and which depends even for its daily ration of bread on the free passage of the seas.
In our talk about policy and strategy we were Bismarcks and Rodneys, wielding nations and navies; and, indeed, I have no doubt that our fancy took extravagant flights sometimes. In plain fact we were merely two young gentlemen in a seven-ton pleasure boat, with a taste for amateur hydrography and police duty combined. Not that Davies ever doubted. Once set on the road he gripped his purpose with child-like faith and tenacity. It was his 'chance'.

11 The Pathfinders

IN the late afternoon of the second day our flotilla reached the Elbe at Brunsbüttel and ranged up in the inner basin, while a big liner, whimpering like a fretful baby, was tenderly nursed into the lock. During the delay Davies left me in charge, and bolted off with an oil-can and a milk-jug. An official in uniform was passing along the quay from vessel to vessel counter-signing papers. I went up to meet him with our receipt for dues, which he signed carelessly. Then he paused and muttered '_Dooltzhibella,'_ scratching his head, 'that was the name. English?' he asked.

'Yes.'

'Little _lust-cutter_, that is so; there was an inquiry for you.'

'Whom from?'

'A friend of yours from a big barge-yacht.'

'Oh, I know; she went on to Hamburg, I suppose?'

'No such luck, captain; she was outward bound.'

'What did the man mean? He seemed to be vastly amused by something.'

'When was this--about three weeks ago?' I asked, indifferently.

'Three weeks? It was the day before yesterday. What a pity to miss him by so little!' He chuckled and winked.

'Did he leave any message?' I asked.

'It was a lady who inquired,' whispered the fellow, sniggering. 'Oh, really,' I said, beginning to feel highly absurd, but keenly curious. And she inquired about the Dulcibella?'

'Herrgott! she was difficult to satisfy! Stood over me while I searched the books. "A very little one," she kept saying, and "Are you sure all the names are here?" I saw her into her kleine Boot, and she rowed away in the rain. No, she left no message. It was dirty weather for a young fräulein to be out alone in. Ach! she was safe enough, though. To see her crossing the ebb in a chop of tide was a treat.'

'And the yacht went on down the river? Where was she bound to?'

'How do I know? Bremen, Wilhelmshaven, Emden - somewhere in the North Sea; too far for you.'

'I don't know about that,' said I, bravely.

'Ach! you will not follow in _that_? Are not you bound to Hamburg?'

'We can change our plans. It seems a pity to have missed them.'

'Think twice, captain, there are plenty of pretty girls in Hamburg. But you English will do anything. Well, viel Glück!'

He moved on, chuckling, to the next boat. Davies soon returned with his cans and an armful of dark, rye loaves, just in time, for, the liner being through, the flotilla was already beginning to jostle into the lock and Bartels was growing impatient.

'They'll last ten days,' he said, as we followed the throng, still clinging like a barnacle to the side of the Johannes. We spent the few minutes while the lock was emptied in a farewell talk to Bartels. Karl had hitched their main halyards on to the windlass and was grinding at it in an _acharnement_ of industry, his shock head jerking and his grubby face perspiring. Then the lock gates opened; and so, in a Babel of shouting, whining of blocks, and creaking of spars, our whole company was split out into the dingy bosom of the Elbe. The Johannes gathered way under wind and tide and headed for midstream. A last shake of the hand, and Bartels reluctantly slipped the head-rope and we drifted apart. 'Gute Reise! Gute Reise!' It was no time for regretful gazing, for the flood-tide was sweeping us up and out, and it was not until we had set the foresail, edged into a shallow bight, and let go our anchor, that we had leisure to think of him again; but by that time his and the other craft were shades in the murky east.

We swung close to a _glacis_ of smooth blue mud which sloped up to a weed-grown dyke; behind lay the same flat country, colourless, humid; and opposite us, two miles away, scarcely visible in the deepening twilight, ran the outline of a similar shore. Between rolled the turgid Elbe. 'The Styx flowing through Tartarus,' I thought to myself, recalling some of our Baltic anchorages.

I told my news to Davies as soon as the anchor was down, instinctively leaving the sex of the inquirer to the last, as my informant had done.

'The Medusa called yesterday?' he interrupted. 'And outward bound? That's a rum thing. Why didn't he inquire when he was going _up_?'

'It was a lady,' and I drily retailed the official's story, very busy with a deck-broom the while. 'We're all square
now, aren't we?' I ended. 'I'll go below and light the stove.'

Davies had been engaged in fixing up the riding-light. When I last saw him he was still so engaged, but motionless, the lantern under his left arm. and his right hand grasping the forestay and the half-knotted lanyard; his eyes staring fixedly down the river, a strange look in his face, half exultant, half perplexed. When he joined me and spoke he seemed to be concluding a difficult argument.

'Anyway, it proves,' he said, 'that the Medusa has gone back to Norderney. That's the main thing.'

'Probably,' I agreed, 'but let's sum up all we know. First, it's certain that nobody we've met as yet has any suspicion of _us_.' 'I told you he did it off his own bat,' threw in Davies. 'Or, secondly, of _him_. If he's what you think it's not known here.'

'I can't help that.'

'Thirdly, he inquires for you on his way _back_ from Hamburg, three weeks after the event. It doesn't look as if he thought he had disposed of you--it doesn't look as if he had _meant_ to dispose of you. He sends his daughter, too--a curious proceeding under the circumstances. Perhaps it's all a mistake.'

'It's not a mistake,' said Davies, half to himself. 'But _did_ he send her? He'd have sent one of his men. He can't be on board at all.'

This was a new light.

'What do you mean?' I asked.

'He must have left the yacht when he got to Hamburg; some other devil's work, I suppose. She's being sailed back now, and passing here--'

'Oh, I see! It's a private supplementary inquiry.'

'That's a long name to call it.'

'Would the girl sail back alone with the crew?'

'She's used to the sea--and perhaps she isn't alone. There was that stepmother--But it doesn't make a ha'porth of difference to our plans: we'll start on the ebb to-morrow morning.'

We were busier than usual that night, reckoning stores, tidying lockers, and securing movables. 'We must economize,' said Davies, for all the world as though we were castaways on a raft. 'It's a wretched thing to have to land somewhere to buy oil,' was a favourite observation of his.

Before getting to sleep I was made to recognize a new factor in the conditions of navigation, now that the tideless Baltic was left behind us. A strong current was sluicing past our sides, and at the eleventh hour I was turned out, clad in pyjamas and oilskins (a horrible combination), to assist in running out a kedge or spare anchor.

'What's kedging-off?' I asked, when we were tucked up again. 'Oh, it's when you run aground; you have to--but you'll soon learn all about it.' I steeled my heart for the morrow.

So behold us, then, at eight o'clock on 5th October, standing down the river towards the field of our first labours. It is fifteen miles to the mouth; drab, dreary miles like the dullest reaches of the lower Thames; but scenery was of no concern to us, and a south-westerly breeze blowing out of a grey sky kept us constantly on the verge of reefing. The tide as it gathered strength swept us down with a force attested by the speed with which buoys came in sight, nodded above us and passed, each boiling in its eddy of dirty foam. I scarcely noticed at first--so calm was the water, and so regular were the buoys, like milestones along a road--that the northern line of coast was rapidly receding and that the 'river' was coming to be but a belt of deep water skirting a vast estuary, three--seven--ten miles broad, till it merged in open sea.

'Why, we're at sea!' I suddenly exclaimed, 'after an hour's sailing!'

'Just discovered that?' said Davies, laughing.

'You said it was fifteen miles,' I complained.

'So it is, till we reach this coast at Cuxhaven; but I suppose you may say we're at sea; of course that's all sand over there to starboard. Look! some of it's showing already.'

He pointed into the north. Looking more attentively I noticed that outside the line of buoys patches of the surface heaved and worked; in one or two places streaks and circles of white were forming; in the midst of one such circle a sleek mauve hump had risen, like the back of a sleeping whale. I saw that an old spell was enthralling Davies as his eye travelled away to the blank horizon. He scanned it all with a critical eagerness, too, as one who looks for a new meaning in an old friend's face. Something of his zest was communicated to me, and stilled the shuddering thrill that had seized me. The protecting land was still a comforting neighbour; but our severance with it came quickly. The tide whirled us down, and our straining canvas aiding it, we were soon off Cuxhaven, which crouched so low behind its mighty dyke, that of some of its houses only the chimneys were visible. Then, a mile or so on, the shore sharpened to a point like a claw, where the innocent dyke became a long, low fort, with some great guns peeping over; then of a sudden it ceased, retreating into the far south in a dim perspective of groins and dunes.

We spun out into the open and leant heavily over to the now unobstructed wind. The yacht rose and sank to a
little swell, but my first impression was one of wonder at the calmness of the sea, for the wind blew fresh and free
from horizon to horizon.

'Why, it's all sand _there_ now, and we're under the lee of it,' said Davies, with an enthusiastic sweep of his hand
over the sea on our left, or port, hand. 'That's our hunting ground.'

'What are we going to do?' I inquired.

'Pick up Sticker's Gat,' was the reply. 'It ought to be near Buoy K.'

A red buoy with a huge K on it soon came into view. Davies peered over to port.

'Just pull up the centre-board, will you?' he remarked abstractedly, adding, 'and hand me up the glasses as you re
down there.'

'Never mind the glasses. I've got it now; come to the main-sheet,' was the next remark.

He put down the helm and headed the yacht straight for the troubled and discoloured expanse which covered the
submerged sands. A 'sleeping whale', with a light surf splashing on it, was right in our path.

'Stand by the lead, will you?' said Davies, politely. 'I'll manage the sheets, it's a dead beat in. Ready about!'

The wind was in our teeth now, and for a crowded half-hour we wormed ourselves forward by ever-shortening
tacks into the sinuous recesses of a channel which threaded the shallows westward. I knelt in a tangle of line, and,
under the hazy impression that something very critical was going on, plied the lead furiously, bumping and
splashing myself, and shouting out the depths, which lessened steadily, with a great sense of the importance of my
function. Davies never seemed to listen, but tacked on imperturbably, juggling with the tiller, the sheets, and the
chart, in a way that made one giddy to look at. For all our zeal we seemed to be making very slow progress.

'It's no use, tide's too strong; we must chance it,' he said at last.

'Chance what?' I wondered to myself. Our tacks suddenly began to grow longer, and the depths, which I
registered, shallower. All went well for some time though, and we made better progress. Then came a longer reach
than usual.

'Two and a half--two--one and a half--only five feet,' I gasped, reproachfully. The water was growing thick
and frothy.

'It doesn't matter if we do,' said Davies, thinking aloud. 'There's an eddy here, and it's a pity to waste it--ready
about! Back the jib!'

But it was too late. The yacht answered but faintly to the helm, stopped, and heeled heavily over, wallowing and
grinding. Davies had the mainsail down in a twinkling; it half smothered me as I crouched on the lee-side among my
tangled skeins of line, scared and helpless. I crawled out from the folds, and saw him standing by the mast in a
reverie.

'It's not much use,' he said, 'on a falling tide, but we'll try kedging-off. Pay that warp out while I run out the
kedge.'

Like lightning he had cast off the dinghy's painter, tumbled the kedge-anchor and himself into the dinghy, pulled
out fifty yards into the deeper water, and heaved out the anchor.

'Now haul,' he shouted.

I hauled, beginning to see what kedging-off meant.

'Steady on! Don't sweat yourself,' said Davies, jumping aboard again.

'It's coming,' I spluttered, triumphantly.

'The warp is, the yacht isn't; you're dragging the anchor home. Never mind, she'll lie well here. Let's have lunch.'

The yacht was motionless, and the water round her visibly lower. Petulant waves slapped against her sides, but,
scattered as my senses were, I realized that there was no vestige of danger. Round us the whole face of the waters
was changing from moment to moment, whitening in some places, yellowing in others, where breadths of sand
began to be exposed. Close on our right the channel we had left began to look like a turbid little river; and I
understood why our progress had been so slow when I saw its current racing back to meet the Elbe. Davies was
already below, laying out a more than usually elaborate lunch, in high content of mind.

'Lies quiet, doesn't she?' he remarked. 'If you _do_ want a sit-down lunch, there's nothing like running aground
for it. And, anyhow, we're as handy for work here as anywhere else. You'll see.'

Like most landsmen I had a wholesome prejudice against running aground', so that my mentor's turn for breezy
paradox was at first rather exasperating. After lunch the large-scale chart of the estuaries was brought down, and we
pered over it together, mapping out work for the next few days. There is no need to tire the general reader with its
intricacies, nor is there space to reproduce it for the benefit of the instructed reader. For both classes the general map
should be sufficient, taken with the large-scale fragment _[See Chart A]_ which gives a fair example of the region in
detail. It will be seen that the three broad fairways of the Jade, Weser, and Elbe split up the sands into two main
groups. The westernmost of these is symmetrical in outline, an acute-angled triangle, very like a sharp steel-shod
pike, if you imagine the peninsula from which it springs to be the wooden haft. The other is a huge congeries of
banks, its base resting on the Hanover coast, two of its sides tolerably clean and even, and the third, that facing the
north-west, ribboned and lacerated by the fury of the sea, which has eaten out deep cavities and struck hungry
tentacles far into the interior. The whole resembles an inverted E, or, better still, a rude fork, on whose three deadly
prongs, the Scharhorn Reef, the Knecht Sand, and the Tegeler Flat, as on the no less deadly point of the pike, many a
good ship splinters herself in northerly gales. Following this simile, the Hohenhörn bank, where Davies was
wrecked, is one of those that lie between the upper and middle prongs.

Our business was to explore the Pike and the Fork and the channels which ramify through them. I use the general
word 'channel', but in fact they differ widely in character, and are called in German by various names: Balje, Gat,
Loch, Diep, Rinne. For my purpose I need only divide them into two sorts - those which have water in them at all
states of the tide, and those which have not, which dry off, that is, either wholly or partly at low-tide.

Davies explained that the latter would take most learning, and were to be our chief concern, because they were
the 'through-routes'-- the connecting links between the estuaries. You can always detect them on the chart by rows of
little Y-shaped strokes denoting 'booms', that is to say, poles or saplings fixed in the sand to mark the passage. The
strokes, of course, are only conventional signs, and do not correspond in the least to individual 'booms', which are
far too numerous and complex to be indicated accurately on a chart, even of the largest scale. The same applies to
the course of the channels themselves, whose minor meanderings cannot be reproduced.

It was on the edge of one of these tidal swatchways that the yacht was now lying. It is called Sticker's Gat, and
you cannot miss it _[See Chart A]_ if you carry your eye westward along our course from Cuxhaven. It was, so
Davies told me, the last and most intricate stage of the 'short cut' which the Medusa had taken on that memorable
day--a stage he himself had never reached. Discussion ended, we went on deck, Davies arming himself with a
notebook, binoculars, and the prismatic compass, whose use--to map the angles of the channels--was at last
apparent. This is what I saw when we emerged.

12 My Initiation

THE yacht lay with a very slight heel (thanks to a pair of small bilge-keels on her bottom) in a sort of trough she
had dug for herself, so that she was still ringed with a few inches of water, as it were with a moat.

For miles in every direction lay a desert of sand. To the north it touched the horizon, and was only broken by the
blue dot of Neuerk Island and its lighthouse. To the east it seemed also to stretch to infinity, but the smoke of a
steamer were where it was pierced by the stream of the Elbe. To the south it ran up to the pencil-line of the
Hanover shore. Only to the west was its outline broken by any vestiges of the sea it had risen from. There it was astir
with crawling white filaments, knotted confusedly at one spot in the north-west, whence came a sibilant murmur like
the hissing of many snakes. Desert as I call it, it was not entirely featureless. Its colour varied from light fawn, where
the highest levels had dried in the wind, to brown or deep violet, where it was still wet, and slate-grey where patches
of mud soiled its clean bosom. Here and there were pools of water, smitten into ripples by the impotent wind; here
and there it was speckled by shells and seaweed. And close to us, beginning to bend away towards that hissing knot
in the north-west, wound our poor little channel, mercilessly exposed as a stagnant, muddy ditch with scarcely a foot
of water, not deep enough to hide our small kedge-anchor, which perked up one fluke in impudent mockery. The
dull, hard sky, the wind moaning in the rigging as though crying in despair for a prey that had escaped it, made the
scene inexpressibly forlorn.

Davies scanned it with gusto for a moment, climbed to a point of vantage on the boom, and swept his glasses to
and fro along the course of the channel.

'Fairly well boomed,' he said, meditatively, 'but one or two are very much out. By Jove! that's a tricky bend
there.' He took a bearing with the compass, made a note or two, and sprang with a vigorous leap down on to the
sand.

This, I may say, was the only way of 'going ashore' that he really liked. We raced off as fast as our clumsy sea-
boots would let us, and followed up the course of our channel to the west, reconnoitring the road we should have
to follow when the tide rose.

'The only way to learn a place like this,' he shouted, 'is to see it at low water. The banks are dry then, and the
channels are plain. Look at that boom'--he stopped and pointed contemptuously--'it's all out of place. I suppose the
channel's shifted there. It's just at an important bend too. If you took it as a guide when the water was up you'd run
aground.'

'Which would be very useful,' I observed.

'Oh, hang it!' he laughed, 'we're exploring. I want to be able to run through this channel without a mistake. We
will, next time.' He stopped, and plied compass and notebook. Then we raced on till the next halt was called.

'Look,' he said, the channel's getting deeper, it was nearly dry a moment ago; see the current in it now? That's the
flood tide coming up--from the _west_, mind you; that is, from the Weser side. That shows we're past the
watershed.'
waves grew longer and steeper, for the channels, though still tortuous, now begin to be broad and deep. the open sea, growing dark green as the depths increased; a dour, threatening sea, showing its white fangs. The shaped cavity between the upper and middle prongs. This I knew from the chart. My unaided eye saw nothing but which form the base of the Fork, and were entering the labyrinth of detached banks which obstruct the funnel-and the false lagoon had lain, I should have felt utterly lost. We had crossed the high and relatively level sands their tops, and were being engulfed altogether by the rising water. When we came to the point where they ceased, booms were on our right; but they were broken reeds, giving no hint as to the breadth of the channel. A few had lost If you run aground with the plate down you deserve to be drowned.' I now saw how valuable our walk had been. The know the way here, and she'll make less leeway; but we shall generally have to do without it always on a falling tide. a strong current, but the trend of the passage was now more to the north-west, so that we could hold our course without tacking, and consequently could stem the tide. 'Give her just a foot of the centre-plate,' said Davies. 'We...
use soon. We must feel the edge of the sands till we pick up more booms.'

'Where are we going to anchor for the night?' I asked.

'Under the Hohenhörn,' said Davies, 'for auld lang syne!'

Partly by sight and mostly by touch we crept round the outermost alley of the hidden maze till a new clump of booms appeared, meaningless to me, but analysed by him into two groups. One we followed for some distance, and then struck finally away and began another beat to windward.

Dusk was falling. The Hanover coast-line, never very distinct, had utterly vanished; an ominous heave of swell was under-running the short sea. I ceased to attend to Davies imparting instruction on his beloved hobby, and sought to stifle in hard manual labour the dread that had been latent in me all day at the prospect of our first anchorage at sea.

'Sound, like blazes now!' he said at last. I came to a fathom and a half. 'That's the bank,' he said; 'we'll give it a bit of a berth and then let go.'

'Let go now!' was the order after a minute, and the chain ran out with a long-drawn moan. The Dulcibella snubbed up to it and jauntily faced the North Sea and the growing night.

'There we are!' said Davies, as we finished stowing the mainsail, 'safe and snug in four fathoms in a magnificent sand-harbour, with no one to bother us and the whole of it to ourselves. No dues, no stinks, no traffic, no worries of any sort. It's better than a Baltic cove even, less beastly civilization about. We're seven miles from the nearest coast, and five even from Neuerk--look, they're lighting up.' There was a tiny spark in the east.

'I suppose it's all right,' I said, 'but I'd rather see a solid breakwater somewhere; it's a dirty-looking night, and I don't like this swell.'

'The swell's nothing,' said Davies; 'it's only a stray drain from outside. As for breakwaters, you've got them all round you, only they're hidden. Ahead and to starboard is the West Hohenhörn, curling round to the sou'-west for all the world like a stone pier. You can hear the surf battering on its outside over to the north. That's where I was nearly wrecked that day, and the little channel I stumbled into must be quite near us somewhere. Half a mile away--to port there--is the East Hohenhörn, where I brought up, after dashing across this lake we're in. Another mile astern is the main body of the sands, the top prong of your fork. So you see we're shut in--practically. Surely you remember the chart? Why, it's--'

'Oh, confound the chart!' I broke out, finding this flow of plausible comfort too dismally suggestive for my nerves. 'Look _at_ it, man! Supposing anything happens--supposing it blows a gale! But it's no good shivering here and staring at the view. I'm going below.'

'There was a mauvais quart d'heure below, during which, I am ashamed to say, I forgot the quest.

'Which soup do you feel inclined for?' said Davies, timidly, after a black silence of some minutes.

'That simple remark, more eloquent of security than a thousand technical arguments, saved the situation.

'I say, Davies,' I said, 'I'm a white-livered cur at the best, and you mustn't spare me. But you're not like any yachtsman I ever met before, or any sailor of any sort. You're so casual and quiet in the extraordinary things you do. I believe I should like you better if you let fly a volley of deep-sea oaths sometimes, or threatened to put me in irons.'

'Davies opened wide eyes, and said it was all his fault for forgetting that I was not as used to such anchorages as he was. 'And, by the way,' he added, 'as to its blowing a gale, I shouldn't wonder if it did; the glass is falling hard; but it can't hurt us. You see, even at high water the drift of the sea--'

'Oh, for Heaven's sake, don't begin again. You'll prove soon that we're safer here than in an hotel. Let's have dinner, and a thundering good one!'

Dinner ran a smooth course, but just as coffee was being brewed the hull, from pitching regularly, began to roll.

'I knew she would,' said Davies. 'I was going to warn you, only--the ebb has set in against the wind. It's quite safe--'

'I thought you said it would get calmer when the tide fell?'

'So it will, but it may seem rougher. Tides are queer things,' he added, as though in defence of some not very respectable acquaintances.

He busied himself with his logbook, swaying easily to the motion of the boat; and I for my part tried to write up my diary, but I could not fix my attention. Every loose article in the boat became audibly restless. Cans clinked, cupboards rattled, lockers uttered hollow groans. Small things sidled out of dark hiding-places, and danced grotesque drunken figures on the floor, like goblins in a haunted glade. The mast whined dolorously at every heel, and the centre-board hiccupped and choked. Overhead another horde of demons seemed to have been let loose. The deck and mast were conductors which magnified every sound and made the tap-tap of every rope's end resemble the blows of a hammer, and the slapping of the halyards against the mast the rattle of a Maxim gun. The whole tumult beat time to a rhythmical chorus which became maddening.
'We might turn in now,' said Davies; 'it's half-past ten.'

'What, sleep through this?' I exclaimed. 'I can't stand this, I must _do_ something. Can't we go for another walk?'

I spoke in bitter, half-delirious jest.

'Of course we can,' said Davies, 'if you don't mind a bit of a tumble in the dinghy.'

I reconsidered my rash suggestion, but it was too late now to turn back, and some desperate expedient was necessary. I found myself on deck, gripping a backstay and looking giddily down and then up at the dinghy, as it bobbed like a cork in the trough of the sea alongside, while Davies settled the sculls and rowlocks.

'Jump!' he shouted, and before I could gather my wits and clutch the sides we were adrift in the night, reeling from hollow to hollow of the steep curling waves. Davies nursed our walnut-shell tenderly over their crests, edging her slantwise across their course. He used very little exertion, relying on the tide to carry us to our goal. Suddenly the motion ceased. A dark slope loomed up out of the night, and the dinghy rested softly in a shallow eddy.

'The West Hohenhörn,' said Davies. We jumped out and sank into soft mud, hauled up the dinghy a foot or two, then mounted the bank and were on hard, wet sand. The wind leapt on us, and choked our voices.

'Let's find my channel,' bawled Davies. 'This way. Keep Neuerk light right astern of you.'

We set off with a long, stooping stride in the teeth of the wind, and straight towards the roar of the breakers on the farther side of the sand. A line of Matthew Arnold's, 'The naked shingles of the world,' was running in my head. 'Seven miles from land,' I thought, 'scuttling like sea-birds on a transient islet of sand, encircled by rushing tides and hammered by ocean, at midnight in a rising gale--cut off even from our one dubious refuge.' It was the time, if ever, to conquer weakness. A mad gaiety surged through me as I drank the wind and pressed forward. It seemed but a minute or two and Davies clutched me.

'Look out!' he shouted. 'It's my channel.'

The ground sloped down, and a rushing river glistened before us. We struck off at a tangent and followed its course to the north, stumbling in muddy rifts, slipping on seaweed, beginning to be blinded by a fine salt spray, and deafened by the thunder of the ocean surf. The river broadened, whitened, roughened. gathered itself for the shock, was shattered, and dissolved in milky gloom. We wheeled away to the right, and splashed into yeasty froth. I turned my back to the wind, scooped the brine out of my eyes, faced back and saw that our path was barred by a welter of surf. Davies's voice was in my ear and his arm was pointing seaward.

'This--is--about where--I--bumped first--worse then nor'-west wind--this--is--nothing. Let's--go--right--round.'

We galloped away with the wind behind us, skirting the line of surf. I lost all account of time and direction. Another sea barred our road, became another river as we slanted along its shore. Again we were in the teeth of that intoxicating wind. Then a point of light was swaying and flickering away to the left, and now we were checking and circling. I stumbled against something sharp--the dinghy's gunwale. So we had completed the circuit of our fugitive domain, that dream-island--nightmare island as I always remember it.

'You must scull, too,' said Davies. 'It's blowing hard now. Keep her nose _up_ a little--all you know!'

We lurched along, my scull sometimes buried to the thwart, sometimes striking at the bubbles of a wave top. Davies, in the bows, said 'Pull!' or 'Steady!' at intervals. I heard the scud smacking against his oilskin back. Then a wan, yellow light glanced over the waves. 'Easy! Let her come!' and the bowsprit of the Dulcibella, swollen to spectral proportions, was stabbing the darkness above me. 'Back a bit! Two good strokes. Ship your scull! Now jump!' I clawed at the tossing hull and landed in a heap. Davies followed with the painter, and the dinghy swept astern.

'She's riding beautifully now,' said he, when he had secured the painter. 'There'll be no rolling on the flood, and it's nearly low water.'

'I don't think I should have cared, however much she had rolled. I was finally cured of funk.

It was well that I was, for to be pitched out of your bunk on to wet oil-cloth is a disheartening beginning to a day. This happened about eight o'clock. The yacht was pitching violently, and I crawled on all fours into the cabin, where Davies was setting out breakfast on the floor.

'I let you sleep on,' he said; 'we can't do anything till the water falls. We should never get the anchor up in this sea. Come and have a look round. It's clearing now,' he went on, when we were crouching low on deck, gripping cleats for safety. 'Wind's veered to nor'-west. It's been blowing a full gale, and the sea is at its worst now--near high water. You'll never see worse than this.'

I was prepared for what I saw--the stormy sea for leagues around, and a chaos of breakers where our dream-island had stood--and took it quietly, even with a sort of elation. The Dulcibella faced the storm as doggedly as ever, plunging her bowsprit into the sea and flinging green water over her bows. A wave of confidence and affection for her welled through me. I had been used to resent the weight and bulk of her unwieldy anchor and cable, but I saw their use now; varnish, paint, spotless decks, and snowy sails were foppish absurdities of a hateful past.

'What can we do to-day?' I asked.
'We must keep well inside the banks and be precious careful wherever there's a swell. It's rampant in here, you see, in spite of the barrier of sand. But there's plenty we can do farther back.'

We breakfasted in horrible discomfort; then smoked and talked till the roar of the breakers dwindled. At the first sign of bare sand we got under way, under mizen and head-sails only, and I learned how to sail a reluctant anchor out of the ground. Pivoting round, we scudded east before the wind, over the ground we had traversed the evening before, while an archipelago of new banks slowly shouldered up above the fast weakening waves. We trod delicately among and around them, sounding and observing; heaving to where space permitted, and sometimes using the dinghy. I began to see where the risks lay in this sort of navigation. Wherever the ocean swell penetrated, or the wind blew straight down a long deep channel, we had to be very cautious and leave good margins. 'That's the sort of place you mustn't ground on,' Davies used to say.

In the end we traversed the Steil Sand again, but by a different swatchway, and anchored, after an arduous day, in a notch on its eastern limit, just clear of the swell that rolled in from the turbulent estuary of the Elbe. The night was fair, and when the tide receded we lay perfectly still, the fresh wind only sending a lip-lip of ripples against our sides.

13 The Meaning of our Work

NOTHING happened during the next ten days to disturb us at our work. During every hour of daylight and many of darkness, sailing or anchored, aground or afloat, in rain and shine, wind and calm, we studied the bed of the estuaries, and practised ourselves in threading the network of channels; holding no communication with the land and rarely approaching it. It was a life of toil, exposure, and peril; a struggle against odds, too; for wild autumnal weather was the rule, with the wind backing and veering between the south-west and north-west, and only for two placid days blowing gently from the east, the safe quarter for this region. Its force and direction determined each fresh choice of ground. If it was high and northerly we explored the inner fastnesses; in moderate intervals the exterior fringes, darting when surprised into whatever lair was most convenient.

Sometimes we were tramping vast solitudes of sand, sometimes scudding across ephemeral tracts of shallow sea. Again, we were creeping gingerly round the deeper arteries that surround the Great Knecht, examining their convulsions as it were the veins of a living tissue, and the circulation of the tide throbbing through them like blood. Again, we would be staggering through the tide-rips and overfalls that infest the open fairway of the Weser on our passage between the Fork and the Pike. On one of our fine days I saw the scene of Davies's original adventure by daylight with the banks dry and the channels manifest. The reader has seen it on the chart, and can, up to a point, form his opinion; I can only add that I realized by ocular proof that no more fatal trap could have been devised for an innocent stranger; for approaching it from the north-west under the easiest conditions it was hard enough to verify our true course. In a period so full of new excitements it is not easy for me to say when we were hardest put to it, especially as it was a rule with Davies never to admit that we were in any danger at all. But I think that our ugliest experience was on the 10th. when, owing to some minute miscalculation, we stranded in a dangerous spot. Mere stranding, of course, was all in the day's work; the constantly recurring question being when and where to court or risk it. This time we were so situated that when the rising tide came again we were on a lee shore, broadside on to a gale of wind which was sending a nasty sea--with a three-mile drift to give it force--down Robin's Balje, which is one of the deeper arteries I spoke of above, and now lay dead to windward of us. The climax came about ten o'clock at night. 'We can do nothing till she floats,' said Davies; and I can see him now quietly smoking and splicing a chafed warp while he explained that her double skin of teak fitted her to stand anything in reason. She certainly had a terrific test that night, for the bottom was hard, unyielding sand, on which she rose and fell with convulsive vehemence. The last half-hour was for me one of almost intolerable tension. I spent it on deck unable to bear the suspense below. Sheets of driven sea flew bodily over the hull, and a score of times I thought she must succumb as she shivered to the blows of her keel on the sand. But those stout skins knit by honest labour stood the trial. One final thud and she wrenched herself bodily free, found her anchor, and rode clear.

On the whole I think we made few mistakes. Davies had a supreme aptitude for the work. Every hour, sometimes every minute, brought its problem, and his resource never failed. The stiffer it was the cooler he became. He had, too, that intuition which is independent of acquired skill, and is at the root of all genius; which, to take cases analogous to his own, is the last quality of the perfect guide or scout. I believe he could _smell_ sand where he could not see or touch it.

As for me, the sea has never been my element, and never will be; nevertheless, I hardened to the life, grew salt, tough, and tolerably alert. As a soldier learns more in a week of war than in years of parades and pipeclay, so, cut off from all distractions, moving from bivouac to precarious bivouac, and depending, to some extent, for my life on my muscles and wits, I rapidly learnt my work and gained a certain dexterity. I knew my ropes in the dark, could beat economically to windward through squalls, take bearings, and estimate the interaction of wind and tide.

We were generally in solitude, but occasionally we met galliots like the Johannes tacking through the sands, and
once or twice we found a fleet of such boats anchored in a gut, waiting for water. Their draught, loaded, was from six to seven feet, our own only four, without our centre-plate, but we took their mean draught as the standard of all our observations. That is, we set ourselves to ascertain when and how a vessel drawing six and a half feet could navigate the sands.

A word more as to our motive. It was Davies's conviction, as I have said, that the whole region would in war be an ideal hunting-ground for small free-lance marauders, and I began to know he was right; for look at the three sea-roads through the sands to Hamburg, Bremen, Wilhelmshaven, and the heart of commercial Germany. They are like highways piercing a mountainous district by defiles, where a handful of desperate men can arrest an army.

Follow the parallel of a war on land. People your mountains with a daring and resourceful race, who possess an intimate knowledge of every track and bridle-path, who operate in small bands, travel light, and move rapidly. See what an immense advantage such guerillas possess over an enemy which clings to beaten tracks, moves in large bodies, slowly, and does not 'know the country'. See how they can not only inflict disasters on a foe who vastly outnumbers them in strength, but can prolong a semi-passive resistance long after all decisive battles have been fought. See, too, how the strong invader can only conquer his elusive antagonists by learning their methods, studying the country, and matching them in mobility and cunning. The parallel must not be pressed too far; but that this sort of warfare will have its counterpart on the sea is a truth which cannot be questioned.

Davies in his enthusiasm set no limits to its importance. The small boat in shallow waters played a mighty rôle in his vision of a naval war, a part that would grow in importance as the war developed and reach its height in the final stages.

'The heavy battle fleets are all very well,' he used to say, 'but if the sides are well matched there might be nothing left of them after a few months of war. They might destroy one another mutually, leaving as nominal conqueror an admiral with scarcely a battleship to bless himself with. It's then that the true struggle will set in; and it's then that anything that will float will be pressed into the service, and anybody who can steer a boat, knows his waters, and doesn't care the toss of a coin for his life, will have magnificent opportunities. It cuts both ways. What small boats can do in these waters is plain enough; but take our own case. Say we're beaten on the high seas by a coalition. There's then a risk of starvation or invasion. It's all rot what they talk about instant surrender. We can live on half rations, recuperate, and build; but we must have time. Meanwhile our coast and ports are in danger, for the millions we sink in forts and mines won't carry us far. They're fixed--pure passive defence. What you want is _boats_--mosquitoes with stings--swarms of them--patrol-boats, scout-boats, torpedo-boats; intelligent irregulars manned by local men, with a pretty free hand to play their own game. And what a splendid game to play! There are places very like this over there--nothing half so good, but similar--the Mersey estuary, the Dee, the Severn, the Wash, and, best of all, the Thames, with all the Kent, Essex, and Suffolk banks round it. But as for defending our coasts in the way I mean--we've nothing ready--nothing whatsoever! We don't even build or use small torpedo-boats. These fast "destroyers" are no good for _this_ work--too long and unmanageable, and most of them too deep. What you want is something strong and simple, of light draught, and with only a spar-torpedo, if it came to that. Tugs, launches, small yachts--anything would do at a pinch, for success would depend on intelligence, not on brute force or complicated mechanism. They'd get wiped out often, but what matter? There'd be no lack of the right sort of men for them if the thing was _organized_. But where are the men?

'Or, suppose we have the best of it on the high seas, and have to attack or blockade a coast like this, which is sand from end to end. You can't improve people who are at home in such waters. The navy chaps don't learn it, though, by Jove! they're the most magnificent service in the world--in pluck, and nerve, and everything else. They'll _try_ anything, and often do the impossible. But their boats are deep, and they get little practice in this sort of thing.'

Davies never pushed home his argument here; but I know that it was the passionate wish of his heart, somehow and somewhere, to get a chance of turning his knowledge of this coast to practical account in the war that he felt was bound to come, to play that 'splendid game' in this, the most fascinating field for it.

I can do no more than sketch his views. Hearing them as I did, with the very splash of the surf and the bubble of the tides in my ears, they made a profound impression on me, and gave me the very zeal for our work he, by temperament, possessed.

But as the days passed and nothing occurred to disturb us, I felt more and more strongly that, as regards our quest, we were on the wrong tack. We found nothing suspicious, nothing that suggested a really adequate motive for Dollmann's treachery. I became impatient, and was for pushing on more quickly westward. Davies still clung to his theory, but the same feeling influenced him.

'It's something to do with these channels in the sand,' he persisted, 'but I'm afraid, as you say, we haven't got at the heart of the mystery. Nobody seems to care a rap what we do. We haven't done the estuaries as well as I should like, but we'd better push on to the islands. It's exactly the same sort of work, and just as important, I believe. We're bound to get a clue soon.'
There was also the question of time, for me at least. I was due to be back in London, unless I obtained an extension, on the 28th, and our present rate of progress was slow. But I cannot conscientiously say that I made a serious point of this. If there was any value in our enterprise at all, official duty pales beside it. The machinery of State would not suffer from my absence; excuses would have to be made, and the results braved.

All the time our sturdy little craft grew shabbier and more weather-worn, the varnish thinner, the decks greyer, the sails dingier, and the cabin roof more murky where stove-fumes stained it. But the only beauty she ever possessed, that of perfect fitness for her functions, remained. With nothing to compare her to she became a home to me. My joints adapted themselves to her crabbed limits, my tastes and habits to her plain domestic economy.

But oil and water were running low, and the time had come for us to be forced to land and renew our stock.

14 The First Night in the Islands

A LOW line of sandhills, pink and fawn in the setting sun, at one end of them a little white village huddled round the base of a massive four-square lighthouse--such was Wangeroog, the easternmost of the Frisian Islands, as I saw it on the evening of 15th October. We had decided to make it our first landing-place; and since it possesses no harbour, and is hedged by a mile of sand at low water, we had run in on the rising tide till the yacht grounded, in order to save ourselves as much labour as possible in the carriage to and fro of the heavy water-breakers and oil-cans which we had to replenish. In faint outline three miles to the south of us was the flat plain of Friesland, broken only by some trees, a windmill or two, and a church spire. Between, the shallow expanse of sea was already beginning to shrink away into lagoons, chief among which was the narrow passage by which we had approached from the east. This continued its course west, directly parallel to the island, and in it, at a distance of half a mile from us, three galliots lay at anchor.

Before supper was over the yacht was high and dry, and when we had eaten, Davies loaded himself with cans and breakers. I was for taking my share, but he induced me to stay aboard; for I was dead tired after an unusually long and trying day, which had begun at 2 a.m., when, using a precious instalment of east wind, we had started on a complete passage of the sands from the Elbe to the Jade. It was a barely possible feat for a boat of our low speed to perform in only two tides; and though we just succeeded, it was only by dint of tireless vigilance and severe physical strain.

'Yacht ahoy!' a little louder this time. A pause, which hung on the forestay. My prowler, I understood, had struck a match and was reading the name on the stern.

Surely it was darker than before? There had been a little glow from the riding-light reflected on to the skylight, but I was too drowsy to attend to it, and it went out. I lit my cigar stump again, and tried to keep awake by thinking. It was the first time I and Davies had been separated for so long; yet so sudden presentiment that on this first night of the second stage of our labours something would happen. All at once I heard a sound outside, a splashing footstep as of a man stepping in a puddle. I was wide awake in an instant, but never thought of shouting 'Is that you, Davies?' for I knew in a flash that it was not he. It was the slip of a stealthy strong, guttural voice called in German, 'Yacht ahoy!' I kept silence. 'Yacht ahoy!' a little louder this time. A pause, and then a vibration of the hull as boots scraped on it and hands grasped the gunwale. My visitor was on deck. I gently rose and peered aft through the skylight. A glimmer of light, reflected from below, was wavered over the mizzen-mast and bumpkin; it had nothing to do with the riding-light, which hung on the forestay. My prowler, I understood, had struck a match and was reading the name on the stern. How much farther would his curiosity carry him? The match went out, and footsteps were audible again. Then a strong, guttural voice called in German, 'Yacht ahoy!' I kept silence. 'Yacht ahoy!' a little louder this time. A pause, and then a vibration of the hull as boots scraped on it and hands grasped the gunwale. My visitor was on deck. I bobbled down, sat on the sofa, and I heard him moving along the deck, quickly and confidently, first forward to the bows, where he stopped, then back to the companion amidships. Inside the cabin it was pitch dark, but I heard his boots on the ladder, feeling for the steps. In another moment he would be in the doorway lighting his second match. Surely it was darker than before? There had been a little glow from the riding-lamp reflected on to the skylight, but it had disappeared. I looked up, realized, and made a fool of myself. In a few seconds more I should have seen my visitor face to face, perhaps had an interview: but I was new to this sort of work and lost my head. All I thought of was Davies's last words, and saw him astray on the sands, with no light to guide him back, the tide rising, and a heavy load. I started up involuntarily, bumped against the table, and set the stove jingling. A long step and a grab at the ladder, but just too late! I grasped something damp and greasy, there was tugging and hard breathing, and I was left clasping a big sea-boot, whose owner I heard jump on to the sand and run. I scrambled out, vaulted overboard, and followed blindly by the sound. He had doubled round the bows of the yacht, and I did the same, ducked under
the bowsprit, forgetting the bobstay, and fell violently on my head, with all the wind knocked out of me by a wire rope and block, whose strength and bulk was one of the glories of the Dulcibella. I struggled on as soon as I got some breath, but my invisible quarry was far ahead. I pulled off my heavy boots, carried them, and ran in my stockings, promptly cutting my foot on some cockle-shells. Pursuit was hopeless, and a final stumble over a bit of driftwood sent me sprawling with agony in my toes.

Limping back, I decided that I had made a very poor beginning as an active adventurer. I had gained nothing, and lost a great deal of breath and skin, and did not even know for certain where I was. The yacht's light was extinguished, and, even with Wangeroog Lighthouse to guide me, I found it no easy matter to find her. She had no anchor out, if the tide rose. And how was Davies to find her? After much feeble circling I took to lying flat at intervals in the hopes of seeing her silhouetted against the starry sky. This plan succeeded at last, and with relief and humility I hoisted her, relit the riding-light, and carried off the kedge anchor. The strange boot lay at the foot of the ladder, but it told no tales when I examined it. It was eleven o'clock, past low water. Davies was cutting it fine if he was to get aboard without the dinghy's help. But eventually he reappeared in the most prosaic way, exhausted with his heavy load, but full of talk about his visit ashore. He began while we were still on deck.

'Look here, we ought to have settled more about what we're to say when we're asked questions. I chose a quiet-looking shop, but it turned out to be a sort of inn, where they were drinking pink gin—all very friendly, as usual, and I found myself under a fire of questions. I said we were on our way back to England. There was the usual rot about the smallness of the boat, etc. It struck me that we should want some other pretence for going so slow and stopping to explore, so I had to bring in the ducks, though goodness knows we don't want to waste time over _them_. The subject wasn't quite a success. They said it was too early—jealous, I suppose; but then two fellows spoke up, and asked to be taken on to help. Said they would bring their punt; without local help we should do no good. All true enough, no doubt, but what a nuisance they'd be. I got out of it—'

'It's just as well you did,' I interposed. 'We shall never be able to leave the boat by herself. I believe we're watched,' and I related my experience.

'H'm! It's a pity you didn't see who it was. Confound that bob-stay!' (his tactful way of reflecting on my clumsiness); 'which way did he run?' I pointed vaguely into the west. 'Not towards the island? I wonder if it's one of those galliots. There are three anchored in the channel over there; you can see their lights. You didn't hear a boat pulling off?'

I explained that I had been a miserable failure as a detective.

'You've done jolly well, I think,' said Davies. 'If you had shouted when you first heard him we should know less still. And we've got a boot, which may come in useful. Anchor out all right? Let's get below.'

We smoked and talked till the new flood, lapping softly round the Dulcibella, raised her without a jar.

Of course, I argued, there might be nothing in it. The visitor might have been a commonplace thief; an apparently deserted yacht was a tempting bait. Davies scouted this possibility from the first.

'They're not like that in Germany,' he said. 'In Holland, if you like, they'll do anything. And I don't like that turning out of the lantern to gain time, if we were away.'

Nor did I. In spite of my blundering in details, I welcomed the incident as the first concrete proof that the object of our quest was no mare's nest. The next point was what was the visitor's object? If to search, what would he have found?

'The charts, of course, with all our corrections and notes, and the log. They'd give us away,' was Davies's instant conclusion. Not having his faith in the channel theory, I was lukewarm about his precious charts.

'After all, we're doing nothing wrong, as you've often said yourself,' I said.

Still, as a true index to our mode of life they were the only things on board that could possibly compromise us or suggest that we were anything more than eccentric young Englishmen cruising for sport (witness the duck guns) and pleasure. We had two sets of charts, German and English. The former we decided to use in practice, and to hide, together with the log, if occasion demanded. My diary, I resolved, should never leave my person. Then there were the naval books. Davies scanned them with a look I knew well.

'There are too many of them,' he said, in the tone of a cook fixing the fate of superfluous kittens. 'Let's throw them overboard. They're very old anyhow, and I know them by heart.'

'Well, not here!' I protested, for he was laying greedy hands on the shelf; 'they'll be found at low water. In fact, I should leave them as they are. You had them when you were here before, and Dollmann knows you had them. If you return without them, it will look queer.' They were spared.

The English charts, being relatively useless, though more suitable to our _rôle_ as English yachtsmen, were to be left in evidence, as shining proofs of our innocence. It was all delightfully casual, I could not help thinking. A seven-ton yacht does not abound in (dry) hiding-places, and we were helpless against a drastic search. If there _were_ secrets on this coast to guard, and we were suspected as spies, there was nothing to prevent an official visit and
warning. There need be no prowlers scuttling off when alarmed, unless indeed it was thought wisest to let well alone, if we _were_ harmless, and not to arouse suspicions where there were none. Here we lost ourselves in conjecture. Whose agent was the prowler? If Dollmann’s, did Dollmann know now that the Dulcibella was safe, and back in the region he had expelled her from? If so, was he likely to return to the policy of violence? We found ourselves both glancing at the duck guns strung up under the racks, and then we both laughed and looked foolish. ‘A war of wits, and not of duck guns,’ I opined. ‘Let’s look at the chart.’

The reader is already familiar with the general aspect of this singular region, and I need only remind him that the mainland is that district of Prussia which is known as East Friesland. It is a _[See Map B]_ short, flat-topped peninsula, bounded on the west by the Ems estuary and beyond that by Holland, and on the east by the Jade estuary; a low-lying country, containing great tracts of marsh and heath, and few towns of any size; on the north side none. Seven islands lie off the coast. All, except Borkum, which is round, are attenuated strips, slightly crescent-shaped, rarely more than a mile broad, and tapering at the ends; in length averaging about six miles, from Norderney and Juist, which are seven and nine respectively, to little Baltrum, which is only two and a half.

Of the shoal spaces which lie between them and the mainland, two-thirds dry at low-water, and the remaining third becomes a system of lagoons whose distribution is controlled by the natural drift of the North Sea as it forces its way through the intervals between the islands. Each of these intervals resembles the bar of a river, and is obstructed by dangerous banks, over which the sea pours at every tide scooping out a deep pool. This fans out and ramifies to east and west as the pent-up current frees itself, encircles the islands, and spreads over the intervening flats. But the farther it penetrates the less coursing force it has, and as a result no island is girt completely by a low-water channel. About midway at the back of each of them is a ‘watershed’, only covered for five or six hours out of the twelve. A boat, even of the lightest draught, navigating behind the islands must choose its moment for passing these. As to navigability, the North Sea Pilot sums up the matter in these dry terms: ‘The channels dividing these islands from each other and the shore afford to the small craft of the country the means of communication between the Ems and the Jade, to which description of vessels only they are available.’ The islands are dismissed with a brief note or two about beacons and lights.

The more I looked at the chart the more puzzled I became. The islands were evidently mere sandbanks. With a cluster of houses and a church on each, the only hint of animation in their desolate _ensemble_ being the occasional word ‘Bade-strand’, suggesting that they were visited in the summer months by a handful of townsfolk for the sea-bathing. Norderney, of course, was conspicuous in this respect; but even its town, which I know by repute as a gay and fashionable watering-place, would be dead and empty for some months in the year, and could have no commercial importance. No man could do anything on the mainland coast—a monotonous line of dyke punctuated at intervals by an infinitesimal village. Glancing idly at the names of these villages, I noticed that they most of them ended in siel—a repulsive termination, that seemed appropriate to the whole region. There were Carolinensiel, Bensersiel, etc. Siel means either a sewer or a sluice, the latter probably in this case, for I noticed that each village stood at the outlet of a little stream which evidently carried off the drainage of the lowlands behind. A sluice, or lock, would be necessary at the mouth, for at high tide the land is below the level of the sea. Looking next at the sands outside, I noticed that across them and towards each outlet a line of booms was marked, showing that there was some sort of tidal approach to the village, evidently formed by the scour of the little stream.

‘Are we going to explore those?’ I asked Davies.

‘I don’t see the use,’ he answered; ‘they only lead to those potty little places. I suppose local galliots use them.’

‘How about your torpedo-boats and patrol-boats?’

‘They _might_ at certain tides. But I can’t see what value they’d be, unless as a refuge for a German boat in the last resort. They lead to no harbours. Wait! There’s a little notch in the dyke at Neuharlingersiel and Dornumersiel, which may mean some sort of a quay arrangement, but what’s the use of that?’

‘We may as well visit one or two, I suppose?’

‘I suppose so; but we don’t want to be playing round villages. There’s heaps of really important work to do, farther out.’

‘Well, what _do_ you make of this coast?’

Davies had nothing but the same old theory, but he urged it with a force and keenness that impressed me more deeply than ever.

‘Look at those islands!’ he said. ‘They’re clearly the old line of coast, hammered into breaches by the sea. The space behind them is like an immense tidal harbour, thirty miles by five, and they screen it impenetrably. It’s absolutely _made_ for shallow war-boats under skilled pilotage. They can nip in and out of the gaps, and dodge about from end to end. On one side is the Ems, on the other the big estuaries. It’s a perfect base for torpedo-craft.’

I agreed (and agree still), but still I shrugged my shoulders.

‘We go on exploring, then, in the same way?’
'Yes; keeping a sharp look-out, though. Remember, we shall always be in sight of land now.'

'What's the glass doing?'

'Higher than for a long time. I hope it won't bring fog. I know this district is famous for fogs, and fine weather at this time of the year is bad for them anywhere. I would rather it blew, if it wasn't for exploring those gaps, where an on-shore wind would be nasty. Six-thirty to-morrow; not later. I think I'll sleep in the saloon for the future, after what happened to-night.'

15 Bensersiel

[For this chapter see Map B.]

The decisive incidents of our cruise were now fast approaching. Looking back on the steps that led to them, and anxious that the reader should be wholly with us in our point of view, I think I cannot do better than give extracts from my diary of the next three days:

'The 16th October. (up at 6.30, yacht high and dry). Of the three galliots out at anchor in the channel yesterday, only one is left ... I took my turn with the breakers this morning and walked to Wangeroog, whose village I found half lost in sand drifts, which are planted with tufts of marram-grass in mathematical rows, to give stability and prevent a catastrophe like that at Pompeii. A friendly grocer told me all there is to know, which is little. The islands are what we thought them--barren for the most part, with a small fishing population, and a scanty accession of summer visitors for bathing. The season is over now, and business slack for him. There is still, however, a little trade with the mainland in galliots and lighters, a few of which come from the "siels" on the mainland. "Had these harbours?" I asked. "Mud-holes!" he replied, with a contemptuous laugh. (He is a settler in these wilds, not a native.) Said he had heard of schemes for improving them, so as to develop the islands as health-resorts, but thought it was only a wild speculation.

'A heavy tramp back to the yacht, nearly crushed by impedimenta. While Davies made yet another trip, I stalked some birds with a gun, and obtained what resembled a specimen of the smallest variety of jack-snipe, and small at that; but I made a great noise, which I hope persuaded somebody of the purity of our motives.

'We weighed anchor at one o'clock, and in passing the anchored galliot took a good look at her. Kormoran was on her stern; otherwise she was just like a hundred others. Nobody was on deck.

'We spent the whole afternoon till dark exploring the Harle, or gap between Wangeroog and Spiekeroog; the sea breaking heavily on the banks outside ... Fine as the day was, the scene from the offing was desolate to the last degree. The naked spots of the two islands are hideous in their sterility: melancholy bits of wreck-wood their only relief, save for one or two grotesque beacons, and, most _bizarre_ of all, a great church-tower, standing actually _in_ the water, on the north side of Wangeroog, a striking witness to the encroachment of the sea. On the mainland, which was barely visible, there was one very prominent landmark, a spire, which from the chart we took to be that of _Esens_, a town four miles inland.

'The days are growing short. Sunset is soon after five, and an hour later it is too dark to see booms and buoys distinctly. The tides also are awkward just now.

'(I exclude all the technicalities that I can, but the reader should take note that the tide-table is very important henceforward.)

'High-water at morning and evening is between five and six--just at twilight. For the night, we groped with the lead into the Muschel Balge, the tributary channel which laps round the inside of Spiekeroog, and lay in two fathoms, clear of the outer swell, but rolling a little when the ebb set in strong against the wind.

'A galliot passed us, going west, just as we were stowing sails; too dark to see her name. Later, we saw her anchor-light higher up our channel.

'The great event of the day has been the sighting of a small German gunboat, steaming slowly west along the coast. That was about half-past four, when we were sounding along the Harle.

'Davies identified her at once as the Blitz, Commander von Brüning's gunboat. We wondered if he recognized the Dulcibella, but, anyway, she seemed to take no notice of us and steamed slowly on. We quite expected to fall in with her when we came to the islands, but the actual sight of her has excited us a good deal. She is an ugly, cranky little vessel, painted grey, with one funnel. Davis is contemptuous about her low freeboard forward; says he would rather go to sea in the Dulce. He has her dimensions and armament (learnt from Brassey) at his fingers' ends: one hundred and forty feet by twenty-five, one 4.9 gun, one 3.4, and four maxims--an old type. Just going to bed; a bitterly cold night.

'The 17th October. Glass falling heavily this morning, to our great disgust. Wind back in the SW and much warmer. Starting at _5.30_ we tacked on the tide over the "water-shed" behind Spiekeroog. So did the galliot we had seen last night, but we again missed identifying her, as she weighed anchor before we came up to her berth. Davies, however,
The channel looked too shallow still. We lowered half the centre-board and kept her just holding her own to windward, booms, but even under mizzen and foresail only we travelled too fast, and had to heave to outside them, for the morning’s walk. Shoal water all the way and a hollow sea breaking everywhere. We soon made out the Bensersiel.

We’ll try for Bensersiel. Can’t trust to a warp and kedge out here.”

against the emergency of having to slip our cable and run. For the same reason the end of the chain was not made permanently fast below.

found him cool and characteristic.

sense to hoist the reefed foresail at once. Davies had her in hand in no time, and was steering south-west. Going aft I snap below, and saw the last of it disappear. The yacht fell off the wind, and drifted astern. I shouted, and had the hawse-pipe and overboard. I tried to stop it with my foot, stumbled at a heavy plunge of the yacht, heard something out. But now my first heave on the winch-lever started it slipping, and in an instant it was whizzing out of the loose. There was then only one turn of the chain round the drum, enough in ordinary weather to prevent it running shower that had come on, and forgetting the tremendous strain on the cable, I cast the slack off the bitts and left it settled the question. Thirty out of our forty fathoms of chain were out. Confused by the motion and a blinding sleet-behind the Jans sand, and not risking Bensersiel. A blunder of mine, when I went to the winch to get up anchor, for it was blowing a hurricane in a few minutes. We must go to leeward, and Davies was for running farther in well drift for wind and sea. We had to clear out sharp, to set the mizzen. It was out of the question to beat to windward, and only a yard or two from that accursed boom, which is perched on the very summit, as a lure to the unwary. It is going to blow hard too, though that is no great matter, as we are sheltered by banks on the sou’-west and nor’-west sides, the likely quarters. We hope to float at _6.15_ to-morrow morning, but to make sure of being able to get her off, we have been transferring some ballast to the dinghy, by way of lightening the yacht—a horrid business handling the pigs of lead, heavy, greasy, and black. The saloon is an inferno, the deck like a collier’s, and ourselves like sweeps.

The anchors are laid out, and there is nothing more to be done.

18th Oct._--Half a gale from the sou’-west when we turned out, but it helped us to float off safely at six. The dinghy was very nearly swamped with the weight of lead in it, and getting the ballast back into the yacht was the toughest job of all. We got the dinghy alongside, and Davies jumped in (nearly sinking it for good), balanced himself, fended off, and, whenever he got a chance, attached the pigs one by one on to a bight of rope, secured to the peak halyards, on which I hoisted from the deck. It was touch and go for a few minutes, and then easier.

It was nine before we had finished replacing the pigs in the hold, a filthy but delicate operation, as they fit like a puzzle, and if one is out of place the floor-boards won’t shut down. Coming on deck after it, we saw to our surprise the Blitz, lying at anchor in the Schill Balje, inside Spiekeroog, about a mile and a half off. She must have entered the Otzumer Ee at high-water for shelter from the gale: a neat bit of work for a vessel of her size, as Davies says she draws nine-foot-ten, and there can’t be more than twelve on the bar at high-water neaps. Several smacks had run in too, and there were two galliots farther up our channel, but we couldn’t make out if the Kormoran was one.

When the banks uncovered we lay more quietly, so landed and took a long, tempestuous walk over the Rute, with compass and notebooks. Returning at two, we found the glass tumbling down almost visibly.

I suggested running for Bensersiel, one of the mainland villages south-west of us, on the evening flood, as it seemed just the right opportunity, if we were to visit one of those “siels” at all. Davies was very lukewarm, but events overcame him. At 3.30 a black, ragged cloud, appearing to trail into the very sea, brought up a terrific squall. This passed, and there was a deathly pause of ten minutes while the whole sky eddied as with smoke-wreaths. Then an icy puff struck us from the north-west, rapidly veering till it reached north-east; there it settled and grew harder every moment.

“Sou’-west to north-east—only the worst sort do that,” said Davies.

The shift to the east changed the whole situation (as shifts often have before), making the Rute Fiats a lee shore, while to windward lay the deep lagoons of the Otzumer Ee, bounded indeed by Spiekeroog, but still offering a big drift for wind and sea. We had to clear out sharp, to set the mizzen. It was out of the question to beat to windward, for it was blowing a hurricane in a few minutes. We must go to leeward, and Davies was for running farther in well behind the Jans sand, and not risking Bensersiel. A blunder of mine, when I went to the winch to get up anchor, settled the question. Thirty out of our forty fathoms of chain were out. Confused by the motion and a blinding sleet-shower that had come on, and forgetting the tremendous strain on the cable, I cast the slack off the bits and left it loose. There was then only one turn of the chain round the drum, enough in ordinary weather to prevent it running out. But now my first heave on the winch-lever started it slipping, and in an instant it was whizzing out of the hawse-pipe and overboard. I tried to stop it with my foot, stumbled at a heavy plunge of the yacht, heard something snap below, and saw the last of it disappear. The yacht fell off the wind, and drifted astern. I shouted, and had the sense to hoist the reefed foresail at once. Davies had her in hand in no time, and was steering south-west. Going aft I found him cool and characteristic.

“Doesn’t matter,” he said; “anchor’s buoyed. (Ever since leaving the Elbe we had had a buoy-line on our anchor against the emergency of having to slip our cable and run. For the same reason the end of the chain was not made permanently fast below.)

“We’ll come back to-morrow and get it. Can’t now. Should have had to slip it anyhow; wind and sea too strong. We’ll try for Bensersiel. Can’t trust to a warp and kedge out here.”

An exciting run it was, across country, so to speak, over an unboomed watershed; but we had bearings from our morning’s walk. Shoal water all the way and a hollow sea breaking everywhere. We soon made out the Bensersiel booms, but even under mizzen and foresail only we travelled too fast, and had to heave to outside them, for the channel looked too shallow still. We lowered half the centre-board and kept her just holding her own to windward,
through a most trying period. In the end had to run for it sooner than we meant, as we were sagging to leeward in spite of all, and the light was failing. Bore up at _5.15_, and raced up the channel with the booms on our left scarcely visible in the surf and rising water. Davies stood forward, signalling--port, starboard, or steady--with his arms, while I wrestled with the helm, flung from side to side and flogged by wave-tops. Suddenly found a sort of dyke on our right just covering with sea. The shore appeared through scud, and men on a quay shouting. Davies brandished his left arm furiously; I ported hard, and we were in smoother water. A few seconds more and we were whizzling through a slit between two wood jetties. Inside a small square harbour showed, but there was no room to round up properly and no time to lower sails. Davies just threw the kedge over, and it just got a grip in time to check our momentum and save our bowsprit from the quayside. A man threw us a rope and we brought up alongside, rather bewildered.

Not more so than the natives, who seemed to think we had dropped from the sky. They were very friendly, with an undercurrent of disappointment, having expected salvage work outside, I think. All showed embarrassing helpfulness in stowing sails, etc. We were rescued by a fussy person in uniform and spectacles, who swept them aside and announced himself as the customhouse officer (fancy such a thing in this absurd mud-hole!), marched down into the cabin, which was in a fearful mess and wringing wet, and producing ink, pen, and a huge printed form, wanted to know our cargo, our crew, our last port, our destination, our food, stores, and everything. No cargo (pleasure); captain, Davies; crew, me; last port, Brunsbüttel; destination, England. What spirits had we? Whisky, produced. What salt? Tin of Cerebos, produced, and a damp deposit in a saucer. What coffee? etc. Lockers searched, guns fingered, bunks rifled. Meanwhile the German charts and the log, the damning clues to our purpose, were in full evidence, crying for notice which they did not get. (We had forgotten our precautions in the hurry of our start from the Rute.) When the huge form was as full as he could make it, he suddenly became human, talkative, amid thirst; and, when we treated him, patronizing. It seemed to dawn on him that, under our rough clothes and crust of brine and grime, we were two mad and wealthy aristocrats, worthy _protégés_ of a high official. He insisted on our bringing our cushions to dry at his house, and to get rid of him we consented, for we were wet, hungry, and longing to change and wash. He talked himself away at last, and we hid the log and charts; but he returned, in the postmaster's uniform this time before we had finished supper, and haled us and our cushions up through dark and mud to his cottage near the quay. To reach it we crossed a small bridge spanning what seemed to be a small river with sluice-gates, just as we had thought.

He showed his prizes to his wife, who was quite flustered by the distinguished strangers, and received the cushions with awe; and next we were carried off to the Gasthaus and exhibited to the village circle, where we talked ducks and weather. (Nobody takes us seriously; I never felt less like a conspirator.) Our friend, who is a feather-headed chatterbox, is enormously important about his ridiculous little port, whose principal customer seems to be the Langeoog post-boat, a galliot running to and fro according to tide. A few lighters also come down the stream with bricks and produce from the interior, and are towed to the islands. The harbour has from five to seven feet in it for two hours out of twelve! Herr Schenkel talked us back to the yacht, which we found resting on the mud--and here we are. Davies pretends there are harbour smells, and says he won't be able to sleep; is already worrying about fresh milk to-morrow!

16 Commander von Brüning

TO RESUME my story in narrative form.

I was awakened at ten o'clock on the 19th, after a long and delicious sleep, by Davies's voice outside, talking his unmistakable German. Looking out, in my pyjamas, I saw him on the quay above in conversation with a man in a long mackintosh coat and a gold-laced navy cap. He had a close-trimmed auburn beard, a keen, handsome face, and an animated manner. It was raining in a raw air.

They saw me, and Davies said: 'Hullo, Carruthers! Here's Commander von Brüning--that's "meiner Freund" Carruthers.' (Davies was deplorably weak in terminations.)

The commander smiled broadly at me, and I inclined an uncombed head, while, for a moment, the quest was a dream, and I myself felt unutterably squalid and foolish. I ducked down, heard them parting, and Davies came aboard.

'We're to meet him at the inn for a talk at twelve,' he said.

His news was that the Blitz's steam-cutter had come in on the morning tide, and he had met von Brüning when marketing at the inn. Secondly, the Kormoran had also come in, and was moored close by. It was as clear as a dream, and I myself felt unutterably squalid and foolish. I ducked down, heard them parting, and Davies came aboard.

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His news was that the Blitz's steam-cutter had come in on the morning tide, and he had met von Brüning when marketing at the inn. Secondly, the Kormoran had also come in, and was moored close by. It was as clear as possible, therefore, that the latter had watched us, and was in touch with the Blitz, and that both had seized the opportunity of our being cooped up in Bensersiel to take further stock of us. What had passed hitherto? Nothing much. Von Brüning had greeted Davies with cordial surprise, and said he had wondered yesterday if it was the
Dulcibella that he had seen anchored behind Langeoog. Davies had explained that we had left the Baltic and were on our way home; taking the shelter of the islands.

'Supposing he comes on board and asks to see our log?' I said.

'Pull it out,' said Davies, 'It's rot, this hiding, after all. I say. I rather funk this interview; what are we to say? It's not in my line.'

We resolved abruptly on an important change of plan, replaced the log and charts in the rack as the first logical step. They contained nothing but bearings, courses, and the bare data of navigation. To Davies they were hard-won secrets of vital import, to be lied for, however hard and distasteful lying was. I was cooler as to their value, but in any case the same thing was now in both our minds. There would be great difficulties in the coming interview if we tried to be too clever and conceal the fact that we had been exploring. We did not know how much von Brüning knew. When had our surveillance by the Kormoran begun? Apparently at Wangeroog, but possibly in the estuaries, where we had not fired a shot at duck. Perhaps he knew even more--Dollmann's treachery, Davies's escape, and our subsequent movements--we could not tell. On the other hand, exploration was known to be a fad of Davies's, and in September he had made no secret of it.

It was safer to be consistent now. After breakfast we determined to find out something about the Kormoran, which lay on the mud at the other side of the harbour, and accordingly addressed ourselves to two mighty sailors, whose jerseys bore the legend 'Post', and who towered conspicuous among a row of stolid Frisians on the quay, all gazing gravely down at us as at a curious bit of marine bric-à-brac. The twins (for such they proved to be) were most benignant giants, and asked us aboard the post-boat galliot for a chat. It was easy to bring the talk naturally round to the point we wished, and we soon gained some most interesting information, delivered in the broadest Frisian, but intelligible enough. They called the Kormoran a Memmert boat, or 'wreck-works' boat. It seemed that off the western end of Juist, the island lying west of Norderney, there lay the bones of a French war-vessel, wrecked ages ago. She carried bullion which has never been recovered, in spite of many efforts. A salvage company was trying for it now, and had works on Memmert, an adjacent sand-bank. 'That is Herr Grimm, the overseer himself,' they said, pointing to the bridge above the sluice-gates. (I call him 'Grimm' because it describes him exactly.) A man in a pilot jacket and peaked cap was leaning over the parapet.

'What's he doing here?' I asked.

They answered that he was often up and down the coast, work on the wreck being impossible in rough weather. They supposed he was bringing cargo in his galliot from Wilhelmshaven, all the company's plant and stores coming from that port. He was a local man from Aurich; an ex-tug skipper.

We discussed this information while walking out over the sands to see the channel at low water.

'Did you hear anything about this in September?' I asked.

'Not a word. I didn't go to Juist. I would have, probably, if I hadn't met Dollmann.'

What in the world did it mean? How did it affect our plans?

'Look at his boots if we pass him,' was all Davies had to suggest.

The channel was now a ditch, with a trickle in it, running north by east, roughly, and edged by a dyke of withies for the first quarter of a mile. It was still blowing fresh from the north-east, and we saw that exit was impossible in such a wind.

So back to the village, a paltry, bleak little place. We passed friend Grimm on the bridge; a dark, clean-shaven, saturnine man, wearing shoes. Approaching the inn:

'We haven't settled quite enough, have we?' said Davies. 'What about our future plans?'

'Heaven knows, we haven't,' I said. 'But I don't see how we can. We must see how things go. It's past twelve, and it won't do to be late.'

'Well, I leave it to you.'

'All right, I'll do my best. All you've got to do is to be yourself and tell one lie, if need be, about the trick Dollmann played you.'

The next scene: von Brüning, Davies, and I, sitting over coffee and Kummel at a table in a dingy inn-parlour overlooking the harbour and the sea, Davies with a full box of matches on the table before him. The commander gave us a hearty welcome, and I am bound to say I liked him at once, as Davies had done; but I feared him, too, for he had honest eyes, but abominably clever ones.

I had impressed on Davies to talk and question as freely and naturally as though nothing uncommon had happened since he last saw von Brüning on the deck of the Medusa. He must ask about Dollmann--the mutual friend--at the outset, and, if questioned about that voyage in his company to the Elbe, must lie like a trooper as to the danger he had been in. This was the one clear and essential necessity, where much was difficult. Davies did his duty with precipitation, and blushed when he put his question, in a way that horrified me, till I remembered that his embarrassment was due, and would be ascribed, to another cause.
'Herr Dollmann is away still, I think,' said von Brüning. (So Davies had been right at Brunsbüttel.) 'Were you thinking of looking him up again?' he added.

'Yes,' said Davies, shortly.

'Well, I'm sure he's away. But his yacht is back, I believe--and Fräulein Dollmann, I suppose.'

'Hm!' said Davies; 'she's a very fine boat that.'

Our host smiled, gazing thoughtfully at Davies, who was miserable. I saw a chance, and took it mercilessly.

'We can call on Fräulein Dollmann, at least, Davies,' I said, with a meaning smile at von Brüning.

'Hm!', said Davies; 'will he be back soon, do you think?'

The commander had begun to light a cigar, and took his time in answering. 'Probably,' he said, after some puffing, 'he's never away very long. But you've seen them later than I have. Didn't you sail to the Elbe together the day after I saw you last?'

'Oh, part of the way,' said Davies, with great negligence. 'I haven't seen him since. He got there first; outsailed me.'

'Gave you the slip, in fact?'

'Of course he beat me; I was close-reefed. Besides--'

'Oh, I remember; there was a heavy blow--a devil of a heavy blow. I thought of you that day. How did you manage?'

'Oh, it was a fair wind; it wasn't far, you see.'

'Grosse Gott! In _that_. ' He nodded towards the window whence the Dulcibella's taper mast could be seen pointing demurely heavenwards.

'She's a splendid sea-boat,' said Davies, indignantly.

'A thousand pardons!' said von Brüning, laughing.

'Don't shake my faith in her,' I put in. 'I've got to get to England in her.'

'Heaven forbid; I was only thinking that there must have been some sea round the Scharhorn that day; a tame affair, no doubt, Herr Davies?'

'Scharhorn?' said Davies, who did not catch the idiom in the latter sentence. 'Oh, we didn't go that way. We cut through the sands--by the Telte.'

'The Telte! In a north-west gale!' The commander started, ceased to smile, and only stared. (It was genuine surprise; I could swear it. He had heard nothing of this before.)

'Herr Dollmann knew the way,' said Davies, doggedly. 'He kindly offered to pilot me through, and I wouldn't have gone otherwise.' There was an awkward little pause.

'He led you well, it seems?' said von Brüning.

'Yes; there's a nasty surf there, though, isn't there? But it saves six miles--and the Scharhorn. Not that I saved distance. I was fool enough to run aground.'

'Ah!' said the other, with interest.

'It didn't matter, because I was well inside then. Those sands are difficult at high water. We've come back that way, you know.'

'(And we run aground every day,) I remarked, with resignation.)

'Is that where the Medusa gave you the slip?' asked von Brüning, still studying Davies with a strange look, which I strove anxiously to analyze.

'She wouldn't have noticed,' said Davies. 'It was very thick and squally--and she had got some way ahead. There was no need for her to stop, anyway. I got off all right; the tide was rising still. But, of course, I anchored there for the night.'

'Where?'

'Inside there, under the Hohenhörn,' said Davies, simply.

'Under the _what_?'

'The Hohenhörn.'

'Go on--didn't they wait for you at Cuxhaven?'

'I don't know; I didn't go that way.' The commander looked more and more puzzled.

'Not by the ship canal, I mean. I changed my mind about it, because the next day the wind was easterly. It would have been a dead beat across the sands to Cuxhaven, while it was a fair wind straight out to the Eider River. So I sailed there, and reached the Baltic that way. It was all the same.'

'There was another pause.

'Well done, Davies,' I thought. He had told his story well, using no subtlety. I knew it was exactly how he would have told it to anyone else, if he had not had irrefutable proof of foul play.

The commander laughed, suddenly and heartily.
'Another liqueur?' he said. Then, to me: 'Upon my word, your friend amuses me. It's impossible to make him spin a yarn. I expect he had a bad time of it.'

'That's nothing to him,' I said; 'he prefers it. He anchored me the other day behind the Hohenhörn in a gale of wind; said it was safer than a harbour, and more sanitary.'

'I wonder he brought you here last night. It was a fair wind for England; and not very far.'

'There was no pilot to follow, you see.'

'With a charming daughter--no.'

Davies frowned and glared at me. I was merciful and changed the subject.

'Besides,' I said, 'we've left our anchor and chain out there.' And I made confession of my sin.

'Well, as it's buoyed, I should advise you to pick it up as soon as you can,' said von Brüning, carelessly; 'or someone else will.'

'Yes, by Jove! Carruthers,' said Davies, eagerly, 'we must get out on this next tide.'

'Oh, there's no hurry,' I said, partly from policy, partly because the ease of the shore was on me. To sit on a chair upright is something of a luxury, however good the cause in which you have crouched like a monkey over a table at the level of your knees, with a reeking oil-stove at your ear.

'They're honest enough about here, aren't they?' I added. While the words were on my lips I remembered the midnight visitor at Wangeroog, and guessed that von Brüning was leading up to a test. Grimm (if he was the visitor) would have told him of his narrow escape from detection, and reticence on our part would show we suspected something. I could have kicked myself, but it was not too late. I took the bull by the horns, and, before the commander could answer, added:

'By Jove! Davies, I forgot about that fellow at Wangeroog. The anchor might be stolen, as he says.'

Davies looked blank, but von Brüning had turned to me.

'We never dreamed there would be thieves among these islands,' I said, 'but the other night I nearly caught a fellow in the act. He thought the yacht was empty.'

I described the affair in detail, and with what humour I could. Our host was amused, and apologetic for the islanders.

'They're excellent folk,' he said, 'but they're born with predatory instincts. Their fathers made their living out of wrecks on this coast, and the children inherit a weakness for plunder. When Wangeroog lighthouse was built they petitioned the Government for compensation, in perfect good faith. The coast is well lighted now, and windfalls are rare, but the sight of a stranded yacht, with the owners ashore, would inflame the old passion; and, depend upon it, someone has seen that anchor-buoy.'

The word 'wrecks' had set me tingling. Was it another test? Impossible to say; but audacity was safer than reserve, and might save trouble in the future.

'Isn't there the wreck of a treasure-ship somewhere farther west?' I asked. 'We heard of it at Wangeroog' (my first inaccuracy). 'They said a company was exploiting it.'

'Quite right,' said the commander, without a sign of embarrassment. 'I don't wonder you heard of it. It's one of the few things folk have to talk about in these parts. It lies on Juister Riff, a shoal off Juist. _[see Map B]_. She was a French frigate, the Corinne, bound from Hamburg to Havre in 1811, when Napoleon held Hamburg as tight as Paris. She carried a million and a half in gold bars, and was insured in Hamburg; foundered in four fathoms, broke up, and there lies the treasure.'

'Never been raised?'

'No. The underwriters failed and went bankrupt, and the wreck came into the hands of your English Lloyd's. It remained their property till '75, but they never got at the bullion. In fact, for fifty years it was never scratched at, and its very position grew doubtful, for the sand swallowed every stick. The rights passed through various hands, and in '86 were held by an enterprising Swedish company, which brought modern appliances, dived, dredged, and dug, fished up a lot of timber and bric-à-brac, and then broke. Since then, two Hamburg firms have tackled the job and lost their capital. Scores of lives have been spent over it, all told, and probably a million of money. Still there are the bars, somewhere.'

'And what's been done now?'

'Well, recently a small local company was formed. It has a depot at Memmert, and is working with a good deal of perseverance. An engineer from Bremen was the principal mover, and a few men from Norderney and Emden subscribed the capital. By the way, our friend Dollmann is largely interested in it.'

Out of the corner of my eye I saw Davies's tell-tale face growing troubled with inward questionings.

'We mustn't get back to him,' I said, laughing. 'It's not fair to my friend. But all this is very interesting. Will they ever get those bars?'

'Ah! that's the point,' said von Brüning, with a mysterious twinkle. 'It's an undertaking of immense difficulty; for
the wreck is wholly disintegrated, and the gold, being the heaviest part of it, has, of course, sunk the deepest. Dredging is useless after a certain point; and the divers have to make excavations in the sand, and shore them up as best they can. Every gale nullifies half their labour, and weather like this of the last fortnight plays the mischief with the work. Only this morning I met the overseer, who happens to be ashore here. He was as black as thunder over prospects.'

'Well, it's a romantic speculation,' I said. 'They deserve a return for their money.'

'I hope they'll get it,' said the commander. 'The fact is, I hold a few shares myself.'

'Oh, I hope I haven't been asking indiscreet questions?'

'Oh, dear no; all the world knows what I've told you. But you'll understand that one has to be reticent as to results in such a case. It's a big stake, and the _title is none too sound._ There has been litigation over it. Not that I worry much about my investment; for I shan't lose much by it at the worst. But it gives one an interest in this abominable coast. I go and see how they're getting on sometimes, when I'm down that way.'

'It _is_ an abominable coast,' I agreed, heartily, 'though you won't get Davies to agree.'

'It's a magnificent place for sailing,' said Davies, looking wistfully out over the storm-speckled grey of the North Sea. He underwent some more chaff, and the talk passed to our cruising adventures in the Baltic and the estuaries. Von Brüning cross-examined us with the most charming urbanity and skill. Nothing he asked could cause us the slightest offence; and a responsive frankness was our only possible course. So, date after date, and incident after incident, were elicited in the most natural way. As we talked I was astonished to find how little there was that was worth concealing, and heartily thankful that we had decided on candour. My fluency gave me the lead, and Davies followed me; but his own personality was really our tower of strength. I realized that as I watched the play of his eager features, and heard him struggle for expression on his favourite hobby; all his pet phrases translated crudely into the most excruciating German. He was convincing, because he was himself.

'Are there many like you in England?' asked von Brüning once.

'Like me? Of course--lots,' said Davies.

'In Germany; they play at yachting over here--on shore half the time, drinking and loafing; paid crews, clean hands, white trousers; laid up in the middle of September.'

'We haven't seen many yachts about, said Davies, politely.

'Vermy nature, I vowed the Germans were right, and, not without a secret zest, drew a lurid picture of the horrors of crewless cruising, and the drudgery that my remorseless skipper inflicted on me. It was delightful to see Davies wincing when I described my first night at Flensburg, for I had my revenge at last, and did not spare him. He bore up gallantly under my jesting, but I knew very well by his manner that he had not forgiven me my banter about the 'charming daughter'.

'You speak German well,' said von Brüning.

'I have lived in Germany,' said I.

'Studying for a profession, I suppose?'

'Yes,' said I, thinking ahead. 'Civil Service,' was my prepared answer to the next question, but again (morbidly, perhaps) I saw a pitfall. That letter from my chief awaiting me at Norderney? My name was known, and we were watched. It might be opened. Lord, how casual we have been!

'May I ask what?'

'The Foreign Office.' It sounded suspicious, but there it was. 'Indeed--in the Government service? When do you have to be back?'

That was how the question of our future intentions was raised, prematurely by me; for two conflicting theories were clashing in my brain. But the contents of the letter dogged me now, and 'when at a loss, tell the truth', was an axiom I was finding sound. So I answered, 'Pretty soon, in about a week. But I'm expecting a letter at Norderney, which may give me an extension. Davies said it was a good address to give,' I added, smiling.

'Naturally,' said von Brüning, dryly; the joke had apparently ceased to amuse him. 'But you haven't much time then, have you?' he added, 'unless you leave your skipper in the lurch. It's a long way to England, and the season is late for yachts.'

I felt myself being hurried.

'Oh, you don't understand,' I explained; '_he's_ in no hurry. He's a man of leisure; aren't you, Davies?'

'What?' said Davies.

I translated my cruel question.

'Yes,' said Davies, with simple pathos.

'If I have to leave him I shan't be missed--as an able seaman, at least. He'll just potter on down the islands, running aground and kedging-off, and arrive about Christmas.'

'Or take the first fair gale to Dover,' laughed the commander.
'Or that. So, you see, we're in no hurry: and we never make plans. And as for a passage to England straight, I'm not such a coward as I was at first, but I draw the line at that.'

'You're a curious pair of shipmates; what's your point of view, Herr Davies?'

'I like this coast,' said Davies. 'And--we want to shoot some ducks.' He was nervous, and forgot himself. I had already satirized our sporting armament and exploits, and hoped the subject was disposed of. Ducks were pretexts, and might lead to complications. I particularly wanted a free hand.

'As to wild fowl,' said our friend, 'I would like to give you gentlemen some advice. There are plenty to be got, now that autumn weather has set in (you wouldn't have got a shot in September, Herr Davies; I remember your asking about them when I saw you last). And even now it's early for amateurs. In hard winter weather a child can pick them up; but they're wild still, and want crafty hunting. You want a local punt, and above all a local man (you could stow him in your fo'c'sle), and to go to work seriously. Now, if you really wish for sport, I could help you. I could get you a trustworthy--'

'Oh, it's too good of you,' stammered Davies, in a more unhappy accent than usual. 'We can easily find one for ourselves. A man at Wangeroog offered--'

'Oh, did he?' interrupted von Brüning, laughing. 'I'm not surprised. You don't know the Frieslanders. They're guileless, as I said, but they cling to their little perquisites.' (I translated to Davies.) 'They've been cheated out of wrecks, and they're all the more sensitive about ducks, which are more lucrative than fish. A stranger is a poacher. Your man would have made slight errors as to time and place.'

'You said they were odd in their manner, didn't you, Davies?' I put in. 'Look here, this is very kind of Commander von Brüning; but hadn't we better be certain of my plans before settling down to shoot? Let's push on direct to Norderney and get that letter of mine, and then decide. But we shan't see you again, I suppose, commander?'

'Why not? I am cruising westwards, and shall probably call at Norderney. Come aboard if you're there, won't you? I should like to show you the Blitz.'

'Thanks, very much,' said Davies, uneasily.

'Thanks, very much,' said I, as heartily as I could.

Our party broke up soon after this.

'Well, gentlemen, I must take leave of you,' said our friend. 'I have to drive to Esens. I shall be going back to the Blitz on the evening tide, but you'll be busy then with your own boat.'

'It had been a puzzling interview, but the greatest puzzle was still to come. As we went towards the door, von Brüning made a sign to me. We let Davies pass out and remained standing.

'One word in confidence with you, Herr Carruthers,' he said, speaking low. 'You won't think me officious, I hope. I only speak out of pure friendliness to you as strangers, foreigners, and young. You I take to have discretion, or I should not have said a word. Still, I will add this. We know very little of Herr Dollmann, of his origin, his antecedents. He is half a Swede, I believe, certainly not a Prussian; came to Norderney three years ago, appears to be rich, and has joined in various commercial undertakings. Little scope about here? Oh, there is more enterprise than you think--development of bathing resorts, you know, speculation in land on these islands. Sharp practice? Oh, no! he's perfectly straight in that way. But he's a queer fellow, of eccentric habits, and--and, well, as I say, little is known of him. That's all, just a warning. Come along.'

I saw that to press him further was useless.

'Thanks; I'll remember,' I said.

'And look here,' he added, as we walked down the passage, 'if you take my advice, you'll omit that visit to the Medusa altogether.' He gave me a steady look, smiling gravely.

'How much do you know, and what do you mean?' were the questions that throbbed in my thoughts; but I could not utter them, so I said nothing and felt very young.

Outside we joined Davies, who was knitting his brow over prospects.

'It just comes of going into places like this,' he said to me. 'We may be stuck here for days. Too much wind to
tow out with the dinghy, and too narrow a channel to beat in.'

Von Brüning was ready with a new proposal.

'Why didn't I think of it before?' he said. 'I'll tow you out in my launch. Be ready at 6.30; we shall have water
enough then. My men will send you a warp.'

It was impossible to refuse, but a sense of being personally conducted again oppressed me; and the last hope of a
bed in the inn vanished. Davies was none too effusive either. A tug meant a pilot, and he had had enough of them.

'He objects to towage on principle,' I said.

'Just like him!' laughed the other. 'That's settled, then!' A dogcart was standing before the inn door in readiness
for von Brüning. I was curious about Esens and his business there. Esens, he said, was the principal town of the
district, four miles inland.

'I have to go there,' he volunteered, 'about a poaching case--a Dutchman trawling inside our limits. That's my
work, you know--police duty.'

Had the words a deeper meaning?

'Do you ever catch an Englishman?' I asked, recklessly. 'Oh, very rarely; your countrymen don't come so far as
this--except on pleasure.' He bowed to us each and smiled.

'Not much of that to be got in Bensersiel,' I laughed. 'I'm afraid you'll have a dull afternoon. Look here. I know
you can't leave your boat altogether, and it's no use asking Herr Davies; but will you drive into Esens with me and
see a Frisian town--for what it's worth? You're getting a dismal impression of Friesland.' I excused myself, said I
would stop with Davies we would walk out over the sands and prospect for the evening', sail.

'Well, good-bye then,' he said, 'till the evening. Be ready for the warp at 6.30.'

He jumped up, and the cart rattled off through the mud, crossed the bridge, and disappeared into the dreary
hinterland.

17 Clearing the Air

'HAS he gone to get the police, do you think?' said Davies, grimly.

'I don't think so,' said I. 'Let's go aboard before that customs fellow buttonholes us,'

A diminished row of stolid Frisians still ruminated over the Dulcibella. Friend Grimm was visible smoking on
his forecastle. We went on board in silence.

'First of all, where exactly is Memmert?' I said.

Davies pulled down the chart, said 'There,' and flung himself at full length on a sofa.

The reader can see Memmert for himself. South of Juist, _[see Map B]_ abutting on the Ems delta, lies an
extensive sandbank called Nordland, whose extreme western rim remains uncovered at the highest tides; the effect
being to leave a C-shaped island, a mere paring of sand like a boomerang, nearly two miles long. but only 150 yards
or so broad, of curiously symmetrical outline, except at one spot, where it bulges to the width of a quarter of a mile.
On the English chart its nakedness was absolute, save for a beacon at the south; but the German chart marked a
building at the point where the bulge occurs. This was evidently the depot. 'Fancy living there!' I thought, for the
very name struck cold. No wonder Grimm was grim; and no wonder he was used to seek change of air. But the
advantages of the site were obvious. It was remarkably isolated, even in a region where isolation is the rule; yet it
was conveniently near the wreck, which, as we had heard, lay two miles out on the Juister Reef. Lastly, it was
clearly accessible at any state of the tide, for the six-fathom channel of the Ems estuary runs hard up to it on the
south, and thence sends off an eastward branch which closely borders the southern horn, thus offering an anchorage
at once handy, deep, and sheltered from seaward gales.

Such was Memmert, as I saw it on the chart, taking in its features mechanically, for while Davies lay there
heedless and taciturn, a pretence of interest was useless. I knew perfectly well what was between us, but I did not
see why I should make the first move; for I had a grievance too, an old one. So I sat back on my sofa and jotted
down in my notebook the heads of our conversation at the inn while it was fresh in my memory, and strove to draw
conclusions. But the silence continuing and becoming absurd, I threw my pride to the winds, and my notebook on
the table.

'I say, Davies,' I said, 'I'm awfully sorry I chaffed you about Fräulein Dollmann.' (No answer.) 'Didn't you see I
couldn't help it?'

'I wish to Heaven we had never come in here,' he said, in a hard voice; 'it comes of landing _ever_._' (I couldn't
help smiling at this, but he wasn't looking at me.) 'Here we are, given away, moved on, taken in charge, arranged for
like Cook's tourists. I couldn't follow your game--too infernally deep for me, but--' That stung me.

'Look here,' I said, 'I did my best. It was you that muddled it. Why did you harp on ducks?

'We could have got out of that. Why did you harp on everything idiotic--your letter, the Foreign office, the
Kormoran, the wreck, the--?'

'You're utterly unreasonable. Didn't you see what traps there were? I was driven the way I went. We started
unprepared, and we're jolly well out of it.'

Davies drove on blindly. 'It was bad enough telling all about the channels and exploring--'

'Why, you agreed to that yourself!'

'I gave in to you. We can't explore any more now.

'There's the wreck, though.'

'Oh, hang the wreck! It's all a blind, or he wouldn't have made so much of it. There are all these channels to be--'

'Oh, hang the channels! I know we wanted a free hand, but we've got to go to Norderney some time, and if Dollmann's away--'

'Why did you harp on Miss Dollmann?' said Davies.

We had worked round, through idle recrimination, to the real point of departure. I knew Davies was not himself, and would not return to himself till the heart of the matter was reached.

'Look here,' I said, 'you brought me out here to help you, because, as you say, I was clever, talked German, and-- liked yachting (I couldn't resist adding this). But directly you really _want_ me you turn round and go for me.'

'Oh, I didn't mean all that, really,' said Davies; 'I'm sorry--I was worried.'

'I know; but it's your own fault. You haven't been fair with me. There's a complication in this business that you've never talked about. I've never pressed you because I thought you would confide in me. You--'

'I know I haven't,' said Davies.

'Well, you see the result. Our hand was forced. To have said nothing about Dollmann was folly--to have said he tried to wreck you was equal folly. The story we agreed on was the best and safest, and you told it splendidly. But for two reasons I had to harp on the daughter--one because your manner when they were mentioned was so confused as to imperil our whole position. Two, because your story, though the safest, was, at the best, suspicious. Even on your own showing Dollmann treated you badly--discourteously, say: though you pretended not to have seen it. You want a motive to neutralize that, and induce you to revisit him in a friendly way. I supplied it, or rather I only encouraged von Brüning to supply it.'

'Why revisit him, after all?' said Davies.

'Oh, come--'

'But don't you see what a hideous fix you've put me in? How caddish I feel about it?'

I did see, and I felt a cad myself, as his full distress came home to me. But I felt, too, that, whosesoever the fault, we had drifted into a ridiculous situation, and were like characters in one of those tiresome plays where misunderstandings are manufactured and so carefully sustained that the audience are too bored to wait for the _dénouement._ You can do that on the stage; but we wanted our _dénouement._

'I'm very sorry,' I said, 'but I wish you had told me all about it. Won't you now? Just the bare, matter-of-fact truth. I hate sentiment, and so do you.'

'I find it very difficult to tell people things,' said Davies, 'things like this.' I waited. 'I did like her--very much.' Our eyes met for a second, in which all was said that need be said, as between two of our phlegmatic race. 'And she's--separate from him. That was the reason of all my indecisions.' he hurried on. 'I only told you half at Schlei. I know I ought to have been open, and asked your advice. But I let it slide. I've been hoping all along that we might find what we want and win the game without coming to close quarters again.'

I no longer wondered at his devotion to the channel theory, since, built on conviction, it was thus doubly fortified.

'Yet you always knew what might happen,' I said. 'At Schlei you spoke of "settling with" Dollmann.'

'I know. When I thought of him I was mad. I made myself forget the other part.'

'Which recurred at Brunsbüttel?' I thought of the news we had there.

'Yes.'

'Davies, we must have no more secrets. I'm going to speak out. Are you sure you've not misunderstood her? You say--and I'm willing to assume it--that Dollmann's a traitor and a murderer.'

'Oh, hang the murder part!' said Davies, impatiently. 'What does _that_ matter?'

'Well, traitor. Very good; but in that case I suspect his daughter. No! let me go on. She was useful, to say the least. She encouraged you--you've told me that--to make that passage with them.'

'Stop, Carruthers,' said Davies, firmly. 'I know you mean kindly; but it's no use. I believe in her.'

I thought for a moment.

'In that case,' I said, 'I've something to propose. When we get out of this place let's sail straight away to England.'

'(There, Commander von Brüning,' I thought, 'you never can say I neglected your advice.)'

'No!' exclaimed Davies, starting up and facing me. 'I'm hanged if we will. Think what's at stake. Think of that traitor--plotting with Germans. My God!'

'Very good,' I said. 'I'm with you for going on. But let's face facts. We _must_ scotch Dollmann. We can't do so
without hurting _her_.

'Can't we _possibly_?'

'Of course not; be sensible, man. Face that. Next point; it's absurd to hope that we need not revisit them--it's ten
to one that we must, if we're to succeed. His attempt on you is the whole foundation of our suspicions. And we don't
even know for certain who he _is_ yet. We're committed, I know, to going straight to Norderney now; but even if we
weren't, should we do any good by exploring and prying? It's very doubtful. We know we're watched, if not
suspected, and that disposes of nine-tenths of our power. The channels? Yes, but is it likely they'll let us learn them
by heart, if they're of such vital importance, even if we are thought to be _bona fide_ yachtsmen? And, seriously,
apart from their value in war, which I don't deny, are they at the root of this business? But we'll talk about that in a
moment. The point now is, what shall we do if we meet the Dollmanns?'

Beads of sweat stood on Davies's brow. I felt like a torturer, but it could not be helped. 'Tax him with having
wrecked you? Our quest would be at an end! We must be friendly. You must tell the story you told to-day, and
chance his believing it. If he does, so much the better; if he doesn't, he won't dare say so, and we still have chances.
We gain time, and have a tremendous hold on him--_if_ we're friendly.' Davies winced. I gave another turn to the
screw. 'Friendly with them _both_, of course. You were before, you know; you liked her very much--you must seem
to still.'

'Oh, stop your infernal logic.'

'Shall we chuck it and go to England?' I asked again, as an inquisitor might say, 'Have you had enough?' No
answer. I went on: 'To make it easier, you _do_ like her still.' I had roused my victim at last.

'What the devil do you mean, Carruthers? That I'm to trade on my liking for her--on her innocence, to--good
God! what _do_ you mean?'

'No, no, not that. I'm not such a cad, or such a fool, or so ignorant of you. If she knows nothing of her father's
character and likes you--and you like her--and you are what you are--oh Heavens! man, face it, realize it! But what I
mean is this: is she, _can_ she be, what you think? Imagine his position if we're right about him; the vilest creature
on God's earth--a disgraceful past to have been driven to this--in the pay of Germany. I want to spare you misery. I
was going to add: 'And if you're on your guard, to increase our chances.' But the utter futility of such suggestions
silenced me. What a plan I had foreshadowed! An enticing plan and a fair one, too, as against such adversaries;
turning this baffling cross-current to advantage as many a time we had worked eddies of an adverse tide in these
difficult seas. But Davies was Davies, and there was an end of it; his faith and simplicity shamed me. And the pity of
it, the cruelty of it, was that his very qualities were his last torture, raising to the acutest pitch the conflict between
love and patriotism. Remember that the latter was his dominant life-motive, and that here and now was his chance--
if you would gauge the bitterness of that conflict.

It was in its last throes now. His elbows were on the table, and his twitching hands pressed on his forehead. He
took them away.

'Of course we must go on. It can't be helped, that's all.'

'And you believe in her?'

'I'll remember what you've said. There may be some way out. And--I'd rather not talk about that any more. What
about the wreck?'

Further argument was futile. Davies by an effort seemed to sweep the subject from his thoughts, and I did my
best to do the same. At any rate the air was cleared--we were friends; and it only remained to grapple with the main
problem in the light of the morning's interview.

Every word that I could recollect of that critical conversation I reviewed with Davies, who had imperfectly
understood what he had not been directly concerned in; and, as I did so, I began to see with what cleverness each
succeeding sentence of von Brüning's was designed to suit both of two contingencies. If we were innocent travellers,
he was the genial host, communicative and helpful. If we were spies, his tactics had been equally applicable. He had
outdone us in apparent candour, hiding nothing which he knew we would discover for ourselves, and contriving at
the same time both to gain knowledge and control of our movements, and to convey us warnings, which would only
be understood if we were guilty, that we were playing an idle and perilous game, and had better desist. But in one
respect we had had the advantage, and that was in the version Davies had given of his stranding on the Hohenhörn.
Inscrutable as our questioner was, he let it appear not only that the incident was new to him, but that he conjectured
at its sinister significance. A little cross-examination on detail would have been fatal to Davies's version; but that
was where our strength lay; he dared not cross-examine for fear of suggesting to Davies suspicions which he might
never have felt. Indeed, I thought I detected that fear underlying his whole attitude towards us, and it strengthened a
conviction which had been growing in me since Grimm's furtive midnight visit, that the secret of this coast was of so
important and delicate a nature that rather than attract attention to it at all, overt action against intruders would be
taken only in the last resort, and on irrefragable proofs of guilty intention.
Now for our clues. I had come away with two, each the germ of a distinct theory, and both obscured by the prevailing ambiguity. Now, however, as we thumbed the chart and I gave full rein to my fancy, one of them, the idea of Memmert, gained precision and vigour every moment. True, such information as we had about the French wreck and his own connection with it was placed most readily at our disposal by von Brüning; but I took it to be information calculated only to forestall suspicion, since he was aware that we already associated him with Dollmann, possibly also with Grimm, and it was only likely that in the ordinary course we should learn that the trio were jointly concerned in Memmert. So much for the facts; as for the construction he wished us to put on them, I felt sure it was absolutely false. He wished to give us the impression that the buried treasure itself was at the root of any mystery we might have scented. I do not know if the reader fully appreciated that astute suggestion—the hint that secrecy as to results was necessary owing both to the great sum at stake and the flaw in the title, which he had been careful to inform us had passed through British hands. What he meant to imply was, 'Don't be surprised if you have midnight visitors; Englishmen prowling along this coast are suspected of being Lloyd's agents.' An ingenious insinuation, which, at the time it was made, had caused me to contemplate a new and much more commonplace solution of our enigma than had ever occurred to us; but it was only a passing doubt, and I dismissed it altogether now.

The fact was, it either explained everything or nothing. As long as we held to our fundamental assumption—that Davies had been decoyed into a death-trap in September—it explained nothing. It was too fantastic to suppose that the exigencies of a commercial speculation would lead to such extremities as that. We were not in the South Sea Islands; nor were we the puppets of a romance. We were in Europe, dealing not only with a Dollmann, but with an officer of the German Imperial Navy, who would scarcely be connected with a commercial enterprise which could conceivably be reduced to forwarding its objects in such a fashion. It was shocking enough to find him in relations with such a scoundrel at all, but it was explicable if the motive were imperial—not so if it were financial. No; to accept the suggestion we must declare the whole quest a mare's nest from beginning to end; the attempt on Davies a delusion of his own fancy, the whole structure we had built on it, baseless.

'Well,' I can hear the reader saying, 'why not? You, at any rate, were always a little sceptical.'

Granted; yet I can truthfully say I scarcely faltered for a moment. Much had happened since Schlei Fiord. I had seen the mechanism of the death-trap; I had lived with Davies for a stormy fortnight, every hour of which had increased my reliance on his seamanship, and also, therefore, on his account of an event which depended largely for its correct interpretation on a balanced nautical judgement. Finally, I had been unconsciously realizing, and knew from his mouth to-day, that he had exercised and acted on that judgement in the teeth of personal considerations, which his loyal nature made overwhelming in their force.

What, then, was the meaning of Memmert? At the outset it riveted my attention on the Ems estuary, whose mouth it adjoins. We had always rather neglected the Ems in our calculations; with some excuse, too, for at first sight its importance bears no proportion to that of the three greater estuaries. The latter bear vessels of the largest tonnage and deepest draught to the very quays of Hamburg, Bremerhaven, and the naval dockyard of Wilhelmshaven; while two of them, the Elbe and the Weser, arc commerce carriers on the vastest scale for the whole empire. The Ems, on the other hand, only serves towns of the second class. A glance at the chart explains this. You see a most imposing estuary on a grander scale than any of the other three taken singly, with a length of thirty miles and a frontage on the North Sea of ten miles. or one-seventieth, roughly, of the whole seaboard; encumbered by outlying shoals, and blocked in the centre by the island of Borkum, but presenting two fine deep-water channels to the incoming vessel. These roll superbly through enormous sheets of sand, unite and approach the mainland in one stately stream three miles in breadth. But then comes a sad falling off. The navigable fairway shoals and shrinks, middle grounds obstruct it, and shelving foreshores persistently deny it that easy access to the land that alone can create great seaboard cities. All the ports of the Ems are tidal; the harbour of Delfzyl, on the Dutch side, dries at low water, and Emden, the principal German port, can only be reached by a lock and a mile of canal.

But this depreciation is only relative. Judged on its merits, and not by the standard of the Elbe, it is a very important river. Emden is a flourishing and growing port. For shallow craft the stream is navigable far into the interior, where, aided by tributaries and allied canals (notably the connection with the Rhine at Dortmund, then approaching completion), it taps the resources of a great area. Strategically there was still less reason for underrating it. It is one of the great maritime gates of Germany; and it is the westernmost gate, the nearest to Great Britain and France. contiguous to Holland. Its great forked delta presents two yawning breaches in that singular rampart of islets and shoals which masks the German seaboard—a seaboard itself so short in proportion to the empire's bulk, that, as Davies used to say, 'every inch of it must be important.' Warships could force these breaches, and so threaten the mainland at one of its few vulnerable points. Quay accommodation is no object to such visitors; intricate navigation no deterrent. Even the heaviest battleships could approach within striking distance of the land, while cruisers and military transports could penetrate to the level of Emden itself. Emden, as Davies had often pointed out, is connected
by canal with Wilhelmshaven on the Jade, a strategic canal, designed to carry gunboats as well as merchandise.

Now Memmert was part of the outer rampart; its tapering sickle of sand directly commanded the eastern breach; it _must_ be connected with the defence of this breach. No more admirable base could be imagined; self-contained and isolated, yet sheltered, accessible—better than Juist and Borkum. And supposing it were desired to shroud the nature of the work in absolute secrecy, what a pretext lay to hand in the wreck and its buried bullion, which lay in the offing opposite the fairway!

On Memmert was the depot for the salvage operations. Salvage work, with its dredging and diving, offered precisely the disguise that was needed. It was submarine, and so are some of the most important defences of ports, mines, and dirigible torpedoes. All the details of the story were suggestive: the 'small local company'; the 'engineer from Bremen' (who, I wondered, was he?); the few shares held by von Brüning, enough to explain his visits; the stores and gear coming from Wilhelmshaven, a naval dockyard.

Try as I would I could not stir Davies's imagination as mine was stirred. He was bent on only seeing the objections, which, of course, were numerous enough. Could secrecy be ensured under pretext of salvaging a wreck? It must be a secret shared by many--divers, crews of tugs, employees of all sorts. I answered that trade secrets are often preserved under no less difficult conditions, and why not imperial secrets?

'Why the Ems and not the Elbe?' he asked.

'Perhaps,' I replied, 'the Elbe, too, holds similar mysteries.' Neuwerk Island might, for all we knew, be another Memmert; when cruising in that region we had had no eyes for such things, absorbed in a preconceived theory of our own. Besides, we must not take ourselves too seriously. We were amateurs, not experts in coast defence, and on such vague grounds to fastidiously reject a clue which went so far as this one was to quarrel with our luck. There was a disheartening corollary to this latter argument that in my new-born zeal I shut my eyes to. As amateurs, were we capable of using our clue and gaining exact knowledge of the defences in question? Davies, I knew, felt this strongly, and I think it accounted for his lukewarm view of Memmert more than he was aware. He clung more obstinately than ever to his 'channel theory', conscious that it offered the one sort of opportunity of which with his peculiar gifts he was able to take advantage. He admitted, however, that it was under a cloud at present, for if knowledge of the coastwise navigation were a crime in itself we should scarcely be sitting here now. 'It's something to do with it, anyhow!' he persisted.

18 Imperial Escort

MEMMERT gripped me, then, to the exclusion of a rival notion which had given me no little perplexity during the conversation with von Brüning. His reiterated advice that we should lose no time in picking up our anchor and chain had ended by giving me the idea that he was anxious to get us away from Bensersiel and the mainland. At first I had taken the advice partly as a test of our veracity (as I gave the reader to understand), and partly as an indirect method of lulling any suspicions which Grimm's midnight visit may have caused. Then it struck me that this might be over-subtlety on my part, and the idea recurred when the question of our future plans cropped up, and hampered me in deciding on a course. It returned again when von Brüning offered to tow us out in the evening. It was in my mind when I questioned him as to his business ashore, for it occurred to me that perhaps his landing here was not solely due to a wish to inspect the crew of the Dulcibella. Then came his perfectly frank explanation (with its sinister _double entente_ for us), coupled with an invitation to me to accompany him to Esens. But, on the principle of _'tinieo Danaos'_ etc., I instantly smelt a ruse, not that I dreamt that I was to be decoyed into captivity; but if there was anything here which we two might discover in the few hours left to us, it was an ingenious plan to remove the most observant of the two till the hour of departure.

Davies scorned them, and I had felt only a faint curiosity in these insignificant hamlets, influenced, I am afraid, chiefly by a hankering after _terra firma_ which the pitiless rigour of his training had been unable to cure.

But it was imprudent to neglect the slightest chance. It was three o'clock, and I think both our brains were beginning to be addled with thinking in close confinement. I suggested that we should finish our council of war, and chain had ended by giving me the idea that he was anxious to get us away from Bensersiel and the mainland. At first I had taken the advice partly as a test of our veracity (as I gave the reader to understand), and partly as an indirect method of lulling any suspicions which Grimm's midnight visit may have caused. Then it struck me that this might be over-subtlety on my part, and the idea recurred when the question of our future plans cropped up, and hampered me in deciding on a course. It returned again when von Brüning offered to tow us out in the evening. It was in my mind when I questioned him as to his business ashore, for it occurred to me that perhaps his landing here was not solely due to a wish to inspect the crew of the Dulcibella. Then came his perfectly frank explanation (with its sinister _double entente_ for us), coupled with an invitation to me to accompany him to Esens. But, on the principle of _'tinieo Danaos'_ etc., I instantly smelt a ruse, not that I dreamt that I was to be decoyed into captivity; but if there was anything here which we two might discover in the few hours left to us, it was an ingenious plan to remove the most observant of the two till the hour of departure.

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But it was imprudent to neglect the slightest chance. It was three o'clock, and I think both our brains were beginning to be addled with thinking in close confinement. I suggested that we should finish our council of war in the open, and we both donned oilskins and turned out. The sky had hardened and banked into an even canopy of lead, and the wind drove before it a fine cold rain. You could hear the murmur of the rising flood on the sands outside, but the harbour was high above it still, and the Dulcibella and the other boats squatted low in a bed of black slime. Native interest seemed to be at last assuaged, for not a soul was visible on the bank (I cannot call it a quay); but the top of a black sou'wester with a feather of smoke curling round it showed above the forehatch of the Kormoran.

'I wish I could get a look at your cargo, my friend,' I thought to myself.

We gazed at Bensersiel in silence.

'There can't be anything _here_?' I said.

'What _can_ there be?' said Davies.

'What about that dyke?' I said, with a sudden inspiration.
From the bank we could see all along the coast-line, which is dyked continuously, as I have already said. The dyke was here a substantial brick-faced embankment, very similar, though on a smaller scale, to that which had bordered the Elbe near Cuxhaven, and over whose summit we had seen the snouts of guns.

'I say, Davies,' I said, 'do you think this coast could be invaded? Along here, I mean, behind these islands?'

Davies shook his head. 'I've thought of that,' he said. 'There's nothing in it. It's just the very last place on earth where a landing would be possible. No transport could get nearer than where the Blitz is lying, four miles out.'

'Well, you say every inch of this coast is important?'

'Yes, but it's the _water_ I mean.'

'Well, I want to see that dyke. Let's walk along it.'

My mushroom theory died directly I set foot on it. It was the most innocent structure in the world—like a thousand others in Essex and Holland—topped by a narrow path, where we walked in single file with arms akimbo to keep our balance in the gusts of wind. Below us lay the sands on one side and rank fens on the other, interspersed with squares of pasture ringed in with ditches. After half a mile we dropped down and came back by a short circuit inland, following a mazy path—which was mostly right angles and minute plank bridges, till we came to the Esens road. We crossed this and soon after found our way barred by the stream I spoke of. This involved a _détour_ to the bridge in the village, and a stealthy avoidance of the post-office, for dread of its garrulous occupant. Then we followed the dyke in the other direction, and ended by a circuit over the sands, which were fast being covered by the tide, and so back to the yacht.

Nobody appeared to have taken the slightest notice of our movements.

As we walked we had tackled the last question, 'What are we to do?' and found very little to say on it. We were to leave to-night (unless the Esens police appeared on the scene), and were committed to sailing direct to Norderney, as the only alternative to duck shooting under the espionage of a 'trustworthy' nominee of von Brüning's. Beyond that—vagueness and difficulty of every sort.

At Norderney I should be fettered by my letter. If it seemed to have been opened and it ordered my return, I was limited to a week, or must risk suspicion by staying. Dollmann was away (according to von Brüning), 'would probably be back soon'; but how soon? Beyond Norderney lay Memmert. How to probe its secret? The ardour it had roused in me was giving way to a mortifying sense of impotence. The sight of the Kormoran, with her crew preparing for sea, was a pointed comment on my diplomacy, and most of all on my ridiculous survey of the dykes. When all was said and done we were _protégé_ of von Brüning, and dogged by Grimm. Was it likely they would let us succeed?

The tide was swirling into the harbour in whorls of chocolate froth, and as it rose all Bensersiel, dominated as before by Herr Schenkel, straggled down to the quay to watch the movements of shipping during the transient but momentous hour when the mud-hole was a seaport. The captain's steam-cutter was already afloat, and her sailors busy with sidelights and engines. When it became known that we, too, were to sail, and under such distinguished escort, the excitement intensified.

Again our friend of the customs was spreading out papers to sign, while a throng of helpful Frisians, headed by the twin giants of the post-boat, thronged our decks and made us ready for sea in their own confused fashion. Again we were carried up to the inn and overwhelmed with advice, and warnings, and farewell toasts. Then back again to the twin giants of the post-boat, thronged our decks and made us ready for sea in their own confused fashion. Again our friend of the customs was spreading out papers to sign, while a throng of helpful Frisians, headed by the twin giants of the post-boat, thronged our decks and made us ready for sea in their own confused fashion. Again we were carried up to the inn and overwhelmed with advice, and warnings, and farewell toasts. Then back again to

'Stow that mainsail, you won't want it,' he said. 'I'll tow you right out to Spiekeroog. It's your only anchorage for the night in this wind—under the island, near the Blitz, and that would mean a dead beat for you in the dark.'

The fact was so true, and the offer so timely, that Davies's faint protests were swept aside in a torrent of ridicule.

'And now I think of it,' the commander ended, 'I'll make the trip with you, if I may. It'll be pleasant and drier.'

We all three boarded the Dulcibella, and then the end came. Our tow-robe was attached, and at half-past six the little launch jumped into the collar, and amidst a demonstration that could not have been more hearty if we had been ambassadors on a visit to a friendly power, we sidled out through the jetties.

It took us more than an hour to cover the five miles to Spiekeroog, for the Dulcibella was a heavy load in the stiff head wind, and Davies, though he said nothing, showed undisguised distrust of our tug's capacities. He at once left the helm to me and flung himself on the gear, not resting till every rope was ready to hand, the mainsail reefed, the binnacle lighted, and all ready for setting sail or anchoring at a moment's notice. Our guest watched these precautions with infinite amusement. He was in the highest and most mischiefous humour, rainning banter on Davies and mock sympathy on me, laughing at our huge compass, heaving the lead himself, startling us with imaginary soundings, and doubting if his men were sober. I offered entertainment and warmth below, but he declined on the ground that Davies would be tempted to cut the tow-rope and make us pass the night on a safe sandbank. Davies took the raillery unmoved. His work done, he took the tiller and sat bareheaded, intent on the launch, the course, the
details, and chances of the present. I brought up cigars and we settled ourselves facing him, our backs to the wind and spray. And so we made the rest of the passage, von Brüning cuddled against me and the cabin-hatch, alternately shouting a jest to Davies and talking to me in a light and charming vein, with just that shade of patronage that the disparity in our ages warranted, about my time in Germany, places, people, and books I knew, and about life, especially young men's life, in England, a country he had never visited, but hoped to; I responding as well as I could, striving to make his mood, acquit myself like a man, draw zest instead of humiliation from the irony of our position, but scarcely able to make headway against a numbing sense of defeat and incapacity. A queer thought was haunting me, too, that such skill and judgement as I possessed was slipping from me as we left the land and faced again the rigours of this exacting sea. Davies, I very well knew, was under exactly the opposite spell—a spell which even the reproach of the tow-rope could not annul. His face, in the glow of the binnacle, was beginning to wear that same look of contentment and resolve that I had seen on it that night we had sailed to Kiel from Schlei Fiord. Heaven knows he had more cause for worry than I—a casual comrade in an adventure which was peculiarly his, which meant everything on earth to him; but there he was, washing away perplexity in the salt wind, drawing counsel and confidence from the unfailing source of all his inspirations—the sea.

'Looks happy, doesn't he?' said the captain once. I grunted that he did, ashamed to find how irritated the remark made me.

'Oye,' I said. 'But I should like to see her. What is she like?'

'Dangerous.' I could well believe it.

The hull of the Blitz loomed up, and a minute later our kedge was splashing overboard and the launch was backing alongside.

'Good-night, gentlemen,' said our passenger. 'You're safe enough here, and you can run across in ten minutes in the morning and pick up your anchor, if it's there still. Then you've a fair wind west—to England if you like. If you decide to stay a little longer in these parts, and I'm in reach, count on me to help you, to sport or anything else.'

We thanked him, shook hands, and he was gone.

'He's a thundering good chap, anyhow,' said Davies; and I heartily agreed.

The narrow vigilant life began again at once. We were 'safe enough' in a sense, but a warp and a twenty-pound anchor were poor security if the wind backed or increased. Plans for contingencies had to be made, and deck-watches kept till midnight, when the weather seemed to improve, and stars appeared. The glass was rising, so we turned in and slept under the very wing, so to speak, of the Imperial Government.

'Davies,' I said, when we were settled in our bunks, 'it's only a day's sail to Norderney, isn't it?'

'With a fair wind, less, if we go outside the islands direct.'

'Well, it's settled that we do that to-morrow?'

'I suppose so. We've got to get the anchor first. Good-night.'

19 The Rubicon

It was a cold, vaporous dawn, the glass rising, and the wind fallen to a light air still from the north-east. Our creased and sodden sails scarcely answered to it as we crept across the oily swell to Langeoog. 'Fogs and calms,' Davies prophesied. The Blitz was astir when we passed her, and soon after steamed out to sea. Once over the bar, she turned westward and was lost to view in the haze. I should be sorry to have to explain how we found that tiny anchor-buoy, on the expressionless waste of grey. I only know that I hove the lead incessantly while Davies conned, till at last he was grabbing overside with the boat-hook, and there was the buoy on deck. The cable was soon following it, and finally the rusty monster himself, more loathsome than usual, after his long sojourn in the slime.

'That's all right,' said Davies. 'Now we can go anywhere.'

'Well, it's Norderney, isn't it? We've settled that.'

'Yes, I suppose we have. I was wondering whether it wouldn't be shortest to go inside the Langeoog after all.'

'Surely not,' I urged. 'The tide's ebbing now, and the light's bad; it's new ground, with a "watershed" to cross, and we're safe to get aground.'

'All right—outside. Ready about.' We swung lazily round and headed for the open sea. I record the fact, but in truth Davies might have taken me where he liked, for no land was visible, only a couple of ghostly booms.

'It seems a pity to miss over that channel,' said Davies with a sigh; 'just when the Kormoran can't watch us.' (We had not seen her at all this morning.)

I set myself to the lead again, averse to reopening a barren argument. Grimm had done his work for the present, I felt certain, and was on his way by the shortest road to Norderney and Memmert.

We were soon outside and heading west, our boom squared away and the island sand-dunes just apparent under our lee. Then the breeze died to the merest draught, and left us rolling inert in a long swell.
impatience to get on I saw fatality in this failure of wind, after a fortnight of unprofitable meanderings, when we had generally had too much of it, and always enough for our purpose. I tried to read below, but the vile squirting of the centre-board drove me up.

'Can't we go any faster?' I burst out once. I felt that there ought to be a pyramid of gauzy canvas aloft, spinnakers, flying jibs, and what not.

'I don't go in for speed,' said Davies, shortly. He loyally did his best to 'shove her' along, but puffs and calms were the rule all day, and it was only by towing in the dinghy for two hours in the afternoon that we covered the length of Langeoog, and crept before dark to an anchorage behind Baltrum, its slug-shaped neighbour on the west. Strictly, I believe, we should have kept the sea all night; but I had not the grit to suggest that course, and Davies was only too glad of an excuse for threading the shoals of the Accumer Ee on a rising tide. The atmosphere had been slowly clearing as the day wore on; but we had scarcely anchored ten minutes before a blanket of white fog, rolling in from seaward, swallowed us up. Davies was already afield in the dinghy, and I had to guide him back with a foghorn, whose music roused hosts of sea birds from the surrounding flats, and brought them wheeling and complaining round us, a weird invisible chorus to my mournful solo.

The fog hung heavy still at daybreak on the 20th, but dispersed partially under a catspaw from the south about eight o'clock, in time for us to traverse the boomed channel behind Baltrum, before the tide left the watershed.

'We shan't get far to-day,' said Davies, with philosophy. 'And this sort of thing may go on for any time. It's a regular autumn anti-cyclone--glass thirty point five and steady. That gale was the last of a stormy equinox.'

We took the inside route as a matter of course to-day. It was now the shortest to Norderney harbour, and scarcely less intricate than the Wichter Ee, which appeared to be almost totally blocked by banks, and is, in fact, the most impassable of all these outlets to the North Sea. But, as I say, this sort of navigation, always puzzling to me, was utterly bewildering in hazy weather. Any attempt at orientation made me giddy. So I slaved at the lead, varying my labour with a fierce bout of kedge-work when we grounded somewhere. I had two rests before two o'clock, one of an hour, when we ran into a patch of windless fog; another of a few moments, when Davies said, 'There's Norderney!' and I saw, surmounting a long slope of weedy sand, still wet with the receding sea, a cluster of sandhills exactly like a hundred others I had seen of late, but fraught with a new and unique interest.

The usual formula, 'What have you got now?' checked my reverie, and 'Helm's a-lee,' ended it for the time. We tacked on (for the wind had headed us) in very shoal water.

Suddenly Davies said: 'Is that a boat ahead?'

'Do you mean that galliot?' I asked. I could plainly distinguish one of those familiar craft about half a mile away, just within the limit of vision.

'The Kormoran, do you think?' I added. Davies said nothing, but grew inattentive to his work. ' Barely four;' from me passed unnoticed, and we touched once, but swung off under some play of the current. Then came abruptly, 'Stand by the anchor. Let go,' and we brought up in mid-stream of the narrow creek we were following. I triced up the main-tack, and stowed the headsails unaided. When I had done Davies was still gazing to windward through his binoculars, and, to my astonishment, I noticed that his hands were trembling violently. I had never seen this happen before, even at moments when a false turn of the wrist meant death on a surf-battered bank.

'What is it?' I asked; 'are you cold?'

'No, it's _hers_--the one she always sails. She's come to meet m--us.'

Through the glasses the white scrap became a graceful little sail, squared away for the light following breeze. An angle of the creek hid the hull, then it glided into view. Someone was sitting aft steering, man or woman I could not say, for the sail hid most of the figure. For full two minutes--two long, pregnant minutes--we watched it in silence. The damp air was fogging the lenses, but I kept them to my eyes; for I did not want to look at Davies. At last I heard him draw a deep breath, straighten himself up, and give one of his characteristic 'h'ms'. Then he turned briskly aft, cast off the dinghy's painter, and pulled her up alongside.

'You come too,' he said, jumping in, and fixing the rowlocks. (His hands were steady again.) I laughed, and shoved the dinghy off.

'I'd rather you did,' he said, defiantly.

'I'd rather stay. I'll tidy up, and put the kettle on.' Davies had taken a half stroke, but paused.

'She oughtn't to come aboard.' he said.
'She might like to,' I suggested. 'Chilly day, long way from home, common courtesy--,' 

'Carruthers,' said Davies, 'if she comes aboard, please remember that she's outside this business. There are no 
clues to be got from _her_.'

A little lecture which would have nettled me more if I had not been exultantly telling myself that, once and for 
all, for good or ill, the Rubicon was passed.

'It's your affair this time,' I said; 'run it as you please.'

He sculled away with vigorous strokes. 'Just as he is,' I thought to myself: bare head, beaded with fog-dew, 
anient oilskin coat (only one button); grey jersey; grey woollen trousers (like a deep-sea fisherman's) stuffed into 
long boots. A vision of his antitype, the Cowes Philanderer, crossed me for a second. As to his face--well, I could 
only judge by it, and marvel, that he was gripping his dilemma by either horn, as firmly as he gripped his sculls.

I watched the two boats converging. They would meet in the natural course about three hundred yards away, but 
a hitch occurred. First, the sail-boat checked and slewed; 'aground,' I concluded. The row-boat leapt forward still; 
then checked, too. From both a great splashing of sculls floated across the still air, then silence. The summit of the 
watershed, a physical Rubicon, prosaic and slimy, had still to be crossed, it seemed. But it could be evaded. Both 
boats headed for the northern side of the creek: two figures were out on the brink, hauling on two painters. Then 
Davies was striding over the sand, and a girl--I could see her now--was coming to meet him. And then I thought it 
was time to go below and tidy up.

Nothing on earth could have made the Dulcibella's saloon a worthy reception-room for a lady. I could only use 
hurried efforts to make it look its best by plying a bunch of cotton-waste and a floor-brush; by pitching into racks 
and lockers the litter of pipes, charts, oddments of apparel, and so on, that had a way of collecting afresh, however 
recently we had tidied up; by neatly arranging our demoralized library, and by lighting the stove and veiling the 
table under a clean white cloth.

I suppose about twenty minutes had elapsed, and I was scrubbing fruitlessly at the smoky patch on the ceiling, 
when I heard the sound of oars and voices outside. I threw the cotton-waste into the fo'c'sle, made an onslaught on 
my hands, and then mounted the companion ladder. Our own dinghy was just rounding up alongside, Davies 
sculling in the bows, facing him in the stern a young girl in a grey tam-o'-shanter, loose waterproof jacket and dark 
serge skirt, the latter, to be frigidly accurate, disclosing a pair of workman-like rubber boots which, _mutatis 
mutandis,_ were very like those Davies was wearing. Her hair, like his, was spangled with moisture. and her rose- 
brown skin struck a note of delicious colour against the sullen Stygian background.

'There he is,' said Davies. Never did his 'meiner Freund, Carruthers,' sound so pleasantly in my ears; never so 
disconcertingly the 'Fräulein Dollmann' that followed it. Every syllable of the four was a lie. Two honest English eyes 
were looking up into mine; an honest English hand--is this insular nonsense? Perhaps so, but I stick to it--a brown, 
firm hand--no, not so very small, my sentimental reader--was clasping mine. Of course I had strong reasons, apart 
from the racial instinct, for thinking her to be English, but I believe that if I had had none at all I should at any rate 
have congratulated Germany on a clever bit of plagiarism. By her voice, when she spoke, I knew that she must have 
talked German habitually from childhood; diction and accent were faultless, at least to my English ear; but the native 
constitutional ring was wanting.

She came on board. There was a hollow discussion first about time and weather, but it ended as we all in our 
hearts wished it to end. None of us uttered our real scruples. Mine, indeed, were too new and rudimentary to be 
worth uttering, so I said common-sense things about tea and warmth; but I began to think about my compact with 
Davies.

'Just for a few minutes, then,' she said.

I held out my hand and swung her up. She gazed round the deck and rigging with profound interest--a breathless, 
hungry interest--touching to see.

'You've seen her before, haven't you?' I said.

'I've not been on board before,' she answered.

This struck me in passing as odd; but then I had only too few details from Davies about his days at Norderney in 
September.

'Of course, _that_ is what puzzled me,' she exclaimed, suddenly, pointing to the mizzen. 'I knew there was 
something different.'

Davies had belayed the painter, and now had to explain the origin of the mizzen. This was a cumbrous process, 
and his hearer's attention soon wandered from the subject and became centred in him--his was already more than 
half in her--and the result was a golden opportunity for the discerning onlooker. It was very brief, but I made the 
most of it; buried deep a few regrets, did a little heartfelt penance, told myself I had been a cynical fool not to have 
foreseen this, and faced the new situation with a sinking heart; I am not ashamed to admit that, for I was fond of 
Davies, and I was keen about the quest.
She had never been a guilty agent in that attempt on Davies. Had she been an unconscious tool or only an unwilling one? If the latter, did she know the secret we were seeking? In the last degree unlikely, I decided. But, true to the compact, whose importance I now fully appreciated, I flung aside my diplomatic weapons, recoiling, as strongly, or nearly as strongly, let us say, from any effort direct or indirect to gain information from such a source. It was not our fault if by her own conversation and behaviour she gave us some idea of how matters stood. Davies already knew more than I did.

We spent a few minutes on deck while she asked eager questions about our build and gear and seaworthiness, with a quaint mixture of professional acumen and personal curiosity.

'How did you manage alone that day?' she asked Davies, suddenly.

'Oh, it was quite safe,' was the reply. 'But it's much better to have a friend.'

She looked at me; and--well, I would have died for Davies there and then.

'Father said you would be safe,' she remarked, with decision--a slight excess of decision, I thought. And at that turned to some rope or block and pursued her questioning. She found the compass impressive, and the trappings of that hateful centre-board had a peculiar fascination for her. Was this the way we did it in England? was her constant query.

Yet, in spite of a superficial freedom, we were all shy and constrained. The descent below was a welcome diversion, for we should have been less than human if we had not extracted some spontaneous fun from the humours of the saloon. I went down first to see about the tea, leaving them struggling for mutual comprehension over the theory of an English lifeboat. They soon followed, and I can see her now stooping in at the doorway, treading delicately, like a kitten, past the obstructive centre-board to a place on the starboard sofa, then taking in her surroundings with a timid rapture that broke into delight at all the primitive arrangements and dingy amenities of our den. She explored the cavernous recesses of the Rippingille, fingered the duck-guns and the miscellany in the racks, and peeped into the fo'c'sle with dainty awe. Everything was a source of merriment, from our cramped attitudes to the painful deficiency of spoons and the 'yachtiness' (there is no other word to describe it) of the bread, which had been bought at Bensersiel, and had suffered from incarceration and the climate. This fact came out, and led to some questions, while we waited for the water to boil, about the gale and our visit there. The topic, a pregnant one for us, appeared to have no special significance to her. At the mention of von Brüning she showed no emotion of any sort; on the contrary, she went out of her way, from an innocent motive that anyone could have guessed, to show that she could talk about him with dispassionate detachment.

'He came to see us when you were here last, didn't he?' she said to Davies. 'He often comes. He goes with father to Memmert sometimes. You know about Memmert? They are diving for money out of an old wreck.'

Yes, we had heard about it.

'Of course you have. Father is a director of the company, and Commander von Brüning takes great interest in it; they took me down in a diving-bell once.'

I murmured, 'Indeed!' and Davies sawed laboriously at the bread. She must have misconstrued our sheepish silence, for she stopped and drew herself up with just a touch of momentary hauteur, utterly lost on Davies. I could have laughed aloud at this transient little comedy of errors.

'Did you see any gold?' said Davies at last, with husky solemnity. Something had to be said or we should defeat our own end; but I let him say it. He had not my faith in Memmert.

'No, only mud and timber--oh, I forgot--'

'You mustn't betray the company's secrets,' I said, laughing; 'Commander von Brüning wouldn't tell us a word about the gold.' ('There's self-denial!' I said to myself.)

'Oh, I don't think it matters much,' she answered, laughing too. 'You are only visitors.'

'That's all,' I remarked, demurely. 'Just passing travellers.'

'You will stop at Norderney?' she said, with naive anxiety. 'Herr Davies said--'

I looked to Davies; it was his affair. Fair and square came his answer, in blunt dog-German.

'Yes, of course, we shall. I should like to see your father again.'

Up to this moment I had been doubtful of his final decision; for ever since our explanation at Bensersiel I had had the feeling that I was holding his nose to a very cruel grindstone. This straight word, clear and direct, beyond anything I had hoped for, brought me to my senses and showed me that his mind had been working far in advance of mine; and more, shaping a double purpose that I had never dreamt of.

'My father?' said Fräulein Dollmann; 'yes, I am sure he will be very glad to see you. There was no conviction in her tone, and her eyes were distant and troubled.

'He's not at home now, is he?' I asked.

'How did you know?' (a little maidenly confusion). 'Oh, Commander von Brüning.'

I might have added that it had been clear as daylight all along that this visit was in the nature of an escapade of
which her father might not approve. I tried to say 'I won't tell,' without words, and may have succeeded.

'I told Mr Davies when we first met,' she went on. 'I expect him back very soon—to-morrow in fact; he wrote from Amsterdam. He left me at Hamburg and has been away since. Of course, he will not know your yacht is back again. I think he expected Mr Davies would stay in the Baltic, as the season was so late. But—but I am sure he will be glad to see you.'

'Is the Medusa in harbour?' said Davies.

'Yes; but we are not living on her now. We are at our villa in the Schwannallée—my stepmother and I, that is.' She added some details, and Davies gravely pencilled down the address on a leaf of the log-book; a formality which somehow seemed to regularize the present position.

'We shall be at Norderney to-morrow,' he said.

Meanwhile the kettle was boiling merrily, and I made the tea—cocoa, I should say, for the menu was changed in deference to our visitor's tastes. 'This _is_ fun!' she said. And by common consent we abandoned ourselves, three youthful, hungry mariners, to the enjoyment of this impromptu picnic. Such a chance might never occur again—_carpamus diem._

But the banquet was never celebrated. As at Belshazzar's feast, there was a writing on the wall; no supernatural inscription, but just a printed name; an English surname with title and initials, in cheap gilt lettering on the back of an old book; a silent, sneering witness of our snug party. The catastrophe came and passed so suddenly that at the time I had scarcely even an inkling of what caused it; but I know now that this is how it happened. Our visitor was sitting at the forward end of the starboard sofa, close to the bulkhead. Davies and I were opposite her. Across the bulkhead, on a level with our heads, ran the bookshelf, whose contents, remember, I had carefully straightened only half an hour ago, little dreaming of the consequence. Some trifle, probably the logbook which Davies had reached down from the shelf, called her attention to the rest of our library. While busied with the cocoa I heard her spelling out some titles, fingering leaves, and twitting Davies with the little care he took of his books. Suddenly there was a silence which made me look up, to see a startled and pitiful change in her. She was staring at Davies with wide eyes and parted lips, a burning flush mounting on her forehead, and such an expression on her face as a sleep-walker might wear, who wakes in fear he knows not where.

Half her mind was far away, labouring to construe some hideous dream of the past; half was in the present, cringing before some sickening reality. She remained so for perhaps ten seconds, and then—plucky girl that she was—she mastered herself, looked deliberately round and up with a circular glance, strangely in the manner of Davies himself, and spoke. How late it was, she must be going—her boat was not safe. At the same time she rose to go, or rather slid herself along the sofa, for rising was impossible. We sat like mannerless louts, in blank amazement. Davies at the outset had said, 'What's the matter?' in plain English, and then relapsed into stupefaction. I recovered myself the first, and protested in some awkward fashion about the cocoa, the time, the absence of fog. In trying to answer, her self-possession broke down, poor child, and her retreat became a blind flight, like that of a wounded animal, while every sordid circumstance seemed to accentuate her panic.

She tilted the corner of the table in leaving the sofa and spilt cocoa over her skirt; she knocked her head with painful force against the sharp lintel of the doorway, and stumbled on the steps of the ladder. I was close behind, but when I reached the deck she was already on the counter hauling up the dinghy. She had even jumped in and laid hands on the sculls before any check came in her precipitate movements. Now there occurred to her the patent fact that the dinghy was ours, and that someone must accompany her to bring it back.

'Davies will row you over,' I said.

'Oh no, thank you,' she stammered. 'If you will be so kind, Herr Carruthers. It is your turn. No, I mean, I want—'

'Go on,' said Davies to me in English.

I stepped into the dinghy and motioned to take the sculls from her. She seemed not to see me, and pushed off while Davies handed down her jacket, which she had left in the cabin. Neither of us tried to better the situation by conventional apologies. It was left to her, at the last moment, to make a show of excusing herself, an attempt so brave and yet so wretchedly lame that I tingled all over with hot shame. She only made matters worse, and Davies interrupted her.

'_Auf Wiedersehen_,' he said, simply.

She shook her head, did not even offer her hand, and pulled away; Davies turned sharp round and went below.

There was now no muddy Rubicon to obstruct us, for the tide had risen a good deal, and the sands were covering. I offered again to take the sculls, but she took no notice and rowed on, so that I was a silent passenger on the stem seat till we reached her boat, a spruce little yacht's gig, built to the native model, with a spoon-bow and tiny lee-boards. It was already afloat, but riding quite safely to a rope and a little grapnel, which she proceeded to haul in.

'It was quite safe after all, you see,' I said.

'Yes, but I could not stay. Herr Carruthers, I want to say something to you.' (I knew it was coming; von
'I made a mistake just now; it is no use your calling on us to-morrow.'

'Why not?'

'You will not see my father.'

'I thought you said he was coming back?'

'Yes, by the morning steamer; but he will be very busy.'

'We can wait. We have several days to spare, and we have to call for letters anyhow.'

'You must not delay on our account. The weather is very fine at last. It would be a pity to lose a chance of a smooth voyage to England. The season--'

'We have no fixed plans. Davies wants to get some shooting.'

'My father will be much occupied.'

'We can see you.'

I insisted on being obtuse, for though this fencing with an unstrung girl was hateful work, the quest was at stake. We were going to Norderney, come what might, and sooner or later we must see Dollmann. It was no use promising not to. I had given no pledge to von Brüning, and I would give none to her. The only alternative was to violate the compact (which the present fiasco had surely weakened), speak out, and try and make an ally of her. Against her own father? I shrank from the responsibility and counted the cost of failure--certain failure, to judge by her conduct. She began to hoist her lugsail in a dazed, shiftless fashion, while our two boats drifted slowly to leeward.

'Father might not like it,' she said, so low and from such tremulous lips that I scarcely caught her words. 'He does not like foreigners much. I am afraid ... he did not want to see Herr Davies again.'

'But I thought--'

'It was wrong of me to come aboard--I suddenly remembered; but I could not tell Herr Davies.'

'I see,' I answered. 'I will tell him.'

'Yes, that he must not come near us.'

'He will understand. I know he will be very sorry, but,' I added, firmly, 'you can trust him implicitly to do the right thing.' And how I prayed that this would content her! Thank Heaven, it did.

'Yes,' she said, 'I am afraid I did not say good-bye to him. You will do so?' She gave me her hand.

'One thing more,' I added, holding it, 'nothing had better be said about this meeting?'

'No, no, nothing. It must never be known.'

I let go the gig's gunwale and watched her tighten her sheet and make a tack or two to windward. Then I rowed back to the Dulcibella as hard as I could.

20 The Little Drab Book

I FOUND Davies at the cabin table, surrounded with a litter of books. The shelf was empty, and its contents were tossed about among the cups and on the floor. We both spoke together.

'Well, what was it?'

'Well, what did she say?'

I gave way, and told my story briefly. He listened in silence, drumming on the table with a book which he held.

'It's not good-bye,' he said. 'But I don't wonder; look here!' and he held out to me a small volume, whose appearance was quite familiar to me, if its contents were less so. As I noted in an early chapter, Davies's library, excluding tide-tables, 'pilots', etc., was limited to two classes of books, those on naval warfare, and those on his own hobby, cruising in small yachts. He had six or seven of the latter, including Knight's Falcon in the Baltic, Cowper's Sailing Tours, Macmullen's Down Channel, and other less-known stories of adventurous travel. I had scarcely done more than look into some of them at off-moments, for our life had left no leisure for reading. This particular volume was--no, I had better not describe it too fully; but I will say that it was old and unpretentious, bound in cheap cloth of a rather antiquated style, with a title which showed it to be a guide for yachtsmen to a certain British estuary. A white label partly scratched away bore the legend '3d.' I had glanced at it once or twice with no special interest.

'Well?' I said, turning over some yellow pages.

'Dollmann!' cried Davies. 'Dollmann wrote it.' I turned to the title-page, and read: 'By Lieut. X--, R.N.' The name itself conveyed nothing to me, but I began to understand. Davies went on: The name's on the back, too--and I'm certain it's the last she looked at.'

'But how do you know?'

'And there's the man himself. Ass that I am not to have seen it before! Look at the frontispiece.'

It was a sorry piece of illustration of the old-fashioned sort, lacking definition and finish, but effective notwithstanding; for it was evidently the reproduction, though a cheap and imperfect process, of a photograph. It represented a small yacht at anchor below some woods, with the owner standing on deck in his shirt sleeves: a well-knit, powerful man, young, of middle height, clean shaved. There appeared to be nothing remarkable about the face; the portrait being on too small a scale, and the expression, such as it was, being of the fixed 'photographic' character.
'How do you know him? You said he was fifty, with a greyish beard.'

'By the shape of his head; that hasn't changed. Look how it widens at the top, and then flattens—sort of wedge shaped—with a high, steep forehead; you'd hardly notice it in that (the points were not very noticeable, but I saw what Davies meant). The height and figure are right, too; and the dates are about right. Look at the bottom.'

Underneath the picture was the name of a yacht and a date. The publisher's date on the title-page was the same.

'Sixteen years ago,' said Davies. 'He looks thirty odd in that, doesn't he? And fifty now.'

'Let's work the thing out. Sixteen years ago he was still an Englishman, an officer in Her Majesty's Navy. Now he's a German. At some time between this and then, I suppose, he came to grief—disgrace, flight, exile. When did it happen?'

'They've been here three years; von Brüning said so.'

'It was long before that. She has talked German from a child. What's her age, do you think—nineteen or twenty?'

'About that.'

'Say she was four when this book was published. The crash must have come not long after.'

'And they've been hiding in Germany since.'

'Is this a well-known book?'

'I never saw another copy; picked this up on a second-hand bookstall for threepence.'

'She looked at it, you say?'

'Yes, I'm certain of it.'

'Was she never on board you in September?'

'No; I asked them both, but Dollmann made excuses.'

'But _he—he_ came on board? You told me so.'

'Once; he asked himself to breakfast on the first day. By Jove! yes; you mean he saw the book?'

'It explains a good deal.'

'It explains everything.'

We fell into deep reflexion for a minute or two.

'Do you really mean _everything_?' I said. 'In that case let's sail straight away and forget the whole affair. He's only some poor devil with a past, whose secret you stumbled on, and, half mad with fear, he tried to silence you. But you don't want revenge, so it's no business of ours. We can ruin him if we like; but is it worth it?'

'You don't mean a word you're saying,' said Davies, 'though I know why you say it; and many thanks, old chap. I didn't mean "everything". He's plotting with Germans, or why did Grimm spy on us, and von Brüning cross-examine us? We've got to find out what he's at, as well as who he is. And as to her—what do you think of her now?'

I made my _amende_ heartily. 'Innocent and ignorant,' was my verdict. 'Ignorant, that is, of her father's treasonable machinations; but aware, clearly, that they were English refugees with a past to hide.' I said other things, but they do not matter. 'Only,' I concluded, 'it makes the dilemma infinitely worse.'

'There's no dilemma at all,' said Davies. 'You said at Bensersiel that we couldn't hurt him without hurting her. Well, all I can say is, we've _got_ to. The time to cut and run, if ever, was when we sighted her dinghy. I had a baddish minute then.'

'She's given us a clue or two after all.'

'It wasn't our fault. To refuse to have her on board would have been to give our show away; and the very fact that she's given us clues decides the matter. She mustn't suffer for it.'

'What will she do?'

'Stick to her father, I suppose.'

'And what shall we do?'

'I don't know yet; how can I know? It depends,' said Davies, slowly. 'But the point is, that we have two objects, equally important—yes, equally, by Jove!--to scotch him, and save her.'

There was a pause.

'That's rather a large order,' I observed. 'Do you realize that at this very moment we have probably gained the first object? If we went home now, walked into the Admiralty and laid our facts before them, what would be the result?'

'The Admiralty!' said Davies, with ineffable scorn.

'Well, Scotland Yard, too, then. Both of them want our man, I dare say. It would be strange if between them they couldn't dislodge him, and, incidentally, either discover what's going on here or draw such attention to this bit of coast as to make further secrecy impossible.'

'It's out of the question to let her betray her father, and then run away! Besides, we don't know enough, and they mightn't believe us. It's a cowardly course, however you look at it.'

'Oh! that settles it,' I answered, hastily. 'Now I want to go back over the facts. When did you first see her?'
'That first morning.'
'She wasn't in the saloon the night before?'
'No; and he didn't mention her.'
'You would have gone away next morning if he hadn't called?'
'Yes; I told you so.'
'He allowed her to persuade you to make that voyage with them?'
'I suppose so.'
'But he sent her below when the pilotage was going on?'
'Of course.'
'She said just now, "Father said you would be safe." What had you been saying to her?'
'It was when I met her on the sand. (By the way, it wasn't a chance meeting; she had been making inquiries and heard about us from a skipper who had seen the yacht near Wangeroog, and she had been down this way before.) She asked at once about that day, and began apologizing, rather awkwardly, you know, for their rudeness in not having waited for me at Cuxhaven. Her father found he must get on to Hamburg at once.'
'But you didn't go to Cuxhaven; you told her that? What exactly _did_ you tell her? This is important.'
'I was in a fearful fix, not knowing what _he_ had told her. So I said something vague, and then she asked the very question von Brüning did, "Wasn't there a _schrecklich_ sea round the Scharhorn?"'
'She didn't know you took the short cut, then?'
'No; he hadn't dared to tell her.'
'She knew that _they_ took it?'
'Yes. He couldn't possibly have hidden that. She would have known by the look of the sea from the portholes, the shorter time, etc.'
'But when the Medusa hove to and he shouted to you to follow him--didn't she understand what was happening?'
'No, evidently not. Mind you, she couldn't possibly have heard what we said, in that weather, from below. I couldn't cross-question her, but it was clear enough what she thought; namely, that he had hove to for exactly the opposite reason, to say _he_ was taking the short cut, and that I wasn't to attempt to follow him.'
'That's why she laid stress on _waiting_ for you at Cuxhaven?'
'Of course; mine would have been the longer passage.'
'She had no notion of foul play?'
'None--that I could see. After all, there I was, alive and well.'
'But she was remorseful for having induced you to sail at all that day, and for not having waited to see you arrived safely.'
'That's about it.'
'Now what did you say about Cuxhaven?'
'Nothing. I let her understand that I went there, and, not finding them, went on to the Baltic by the Eider river, having changed my mind about the ship canal.'
'Now, what about her voyage back from Hamburg? Was she alone?
'No; the stepmother joined her.'
'Did she say she had inquired about you at Brunsbüttel?'
'No; I suppose she didn't like to. And there was no need, because my taking the Eider explained it.'
'I reflected. 'You're sure she hadn't a notion that you took the short cut?''
'Quite sure; but she may guess it now. She guessed foul play by seeing that book.'
'Of course she did; but I was thinking of something else. There are two stories afloat now--yours to von Brüning, the true one, that you followed the Medusa to the short cut; and Dollmann's to her, that you went round the Scharhorn. That's evidently his version of the affair--the version he would have given if you had been drowned and inquiries were ever made; the version he would have sworn his crew to if they discovered the truth.'
'But he must drop that yarn when he knows I'm alive and back again.'
'Yes; but meanwhile, supposing von Brüning sees him _before_ he knows you're back again, and wants to find out the truth about that incident. If I were von Brüning I should say, "By the way, what's become of that young Englishman you decoyed away to the Baltic?" Dollmann would give his version, and von Brüning, having heard ours, would know he was lying, and had tried to drown you.'
'Does it matter? He must know already that Dollmann's a scoundrel.'
'So we've been supposing; but we may be wrong. We're still in the dark as to Dollmann's position towards these Germans. They may not even know he's English, or they may know that and not know his real name and past. What effect your story will have on their relations with him we can't forecast. But I'm clear about one thing, that it's our paramount interest to maintain the _status quo_ as long as we can, to minimize the danger you ran that day, and act
as witnesses in his defence. We can't do that if his story and yours don't tally. The discrepancy will not only damn him (that may be immaterial), but it will throw doubt on us.'

'Why?'

'Because if the short cut was so dangerous that he dared not own to having led you to it, it was dangerous enough to make you suspect foul play; the very supposition we want to avoid. We want to be thought mere travellers, with no scores to wipe out, and no secrets to pry after.'

'Well, what do you propose?'

'Hitherto I believe we stand fairly well. Let's assume we hoodwinked von Brüning at Bensersiel, and base our policy on that assumption. It follows that we must show Dollmann at the earliest possible moment that you _have_ come back, and give him time to revise his tactics before he commits himself. Now--'

'But _she'll_ tell him we're back,' interrupted Davies.

'I don't think so. We've just agreed to keep this afternoon's episode a secret. She expects never to see us again.'

'Now, he comes to-morrow by the morning boat, she said. What did that mean? Boat from where?'

'I know. From Norddeich on the mainland opposite. There's a railway there from Norden, and a steam ferry crosses to the island.'

'At what time?'

'Your Bradshaw will tell us--here it is: "Winter Service, 8.30 a.m., due at 9.5."

'Let's get away at once.'

We had a tussle with the tide at first, but once over the watershed the channel improved, and the haze lightened gradually. A lighthouse appeared among the sand-dunes on the island shore, and before darkness fell we dimly saw the spires and roofs of a town, and two long black piers stretching out southwards. We were scarcely a mile away when we lost our wind altogether, and had to anchor. Determined to reach our destination that night we waited till the ebb stream made, and then towed the yacht with the dinghy. In the course of this a fog dropped on us suddenly, just as it had yesterday. I was towing at the time, and, of course, stopped short; but Davies shouted to me from the tiller to go on, that he could manage with the lead and compass. And the end of it was that, at about nine o'clock, we anchored safely in the five-fathom roadstead, close to the eastern pier, as a short reconnaissance proved to us. It had been a little masterpiece of adroit seamanship.

There was utter stillness till our chain rattled down, when a muffled shout came from the direction of the pier, and soon we heard a boat groping out to us. It was a polite but sleepy portoffice, who asked in a perfunctory way for our particulars, and when he heard them, remembered the Dulcibella's previous visit.

'Where are you bound to?' he asked.

'England--sooner or later,' said Davies.

The man laughed derisively. 'Not this year;' he said; 'there will be fogs for another week; it is always so, and then storms. Better leave your yawl here. Dues will be only sixpence a month for you.'

'I'll think about it,' said Davies. 'Good-night.'

The man vanished like a ghost in the thick night.

'Is the post-office open?' I called after him.

'No; eight to-morrow,' came back out of the fog.

We were too excited to sup in comfort, or sleep in peace, or to do anything but plan and speculate. Never till this night had we talked with absolute mutual confidence, for Davies broke down the last barriers of reserve and let me see his whole mind. He loved this girl and he loved his country, two simple passions which for the time absorbed his whole moral capacity. There was no room left for casuistry. To weigh one passion against the other, with the discordant voices of honour and expediency dinning in his ears, had too long involved him in fruitless torture. Both were right; neither could be surrendered. If the facts showed them irreconcilable, _tant pis pour les faits._ A way must be found to satisfy both or neither.

I should have been a spiritless dog if I had not risen to his mood. But in truth his cutting of the knot was at this juncture exactly what appealed to me. I, too, was tired of vicarious casuistry, and the fascination of our enterprise, intensified by the discovery of that afternoon, had never been so strong in me. Not to be insincere, I cannot pretend that I viewed the situation with his single mind. My philosophy when I left London was of a very worldly sort, and no one can change his temperament in three weeks. I plainly said as much to Davies, and indeed took perverse satisfaction in stating with brutal emphasis some social truths which bore on this attachment of his to the daughter of an outlaw. Truths I call them, but I uttered them more by rote than by conviction, and he heard them unmoved. And meanwhile I snatched recklessly at his own solution. If it imparted into our adventure a strain of crazy chivalry more suited to knights-errant of the Middle Ages than to sober modern youths--well, thank Heaven, I was not too sober, and still young enough to snatch at that fancy with an ardour of imagination, if not of character; perhaps, too, of character, for Galahads are not so common but that ordinary folk must needs draw courage from their example and
put something of a blind trust in their tenfold strength.

To reduce a romantic ideal to a working plan is a very difficult thing.

'We shall have to argue backwards,' I said. 'What is to be the final stage? Because that must govern the others.'

There was only one answer--to get Dollmann, secrets and all, daughter and all, away from Germany altogether. So only could we satisfy the double aim we had set before us. What a joy it is, when beset with doubts, to find a bed-rock necessity, however unattainable! We fastened on this one and reasoned back from it. The first lesson was that, however many and strong were the enemies we had to contend with, our sole overt fee must be Dollmann. The issue of the struggle must be known only to ourselves and him. If we won, and found out 'what he was at', we must at all costs conceal our success from his German friends, and detach him from them before he was compromised. (You will remark that to blithely accept this limitation showed a very sanguine spirit in us.) The next question, how to find out what he was at, was a deal more thorny. If it had not been for the discovery of Dollmann's identity, we should have found it as hard a nut to crack as ever. But this discovery was illuminating. It threw into relief two methods of action which hitherto we had been hazily seeking to combine, seesawing between one and the other, each of us influenced at different times by different motives. One was to rely on independent research; the other to extort the secret from Dollmann direct, by craft or threats. The moral of to-day was to abandon the first and embrace the second.

The prospects of independent research were not a whit better than before. There were only two theories in the field, the channel theory and the Memmert theory. The former languished for lack of corroboration; the latter also appeared to be weakened. To Fräulein Dollmann the wreck-works were evidently what they purported to be, and nothing more. This fact in itself was unimportant, for it was clear as crystal that she was no party to her father's treacherous intrigues, if he was engaged in such. But if Memmert was his sphere for them, it was disconcerting to find her so familiar with that sphere, lightly talking of a descent in a diving-bell--hinting, too, that the mystery as to results was only for local consumption. Nevertheless, the charm of Memmert as the place we had traced Grimm to, and as the only tangible clue we had obtained, was still very great. The really cogent objection was the insuperable difficulty, known and watched as we were, of learning its significance. If there was anything important to see there we should never be allowed to see it, while by trying and failing we risked everything. It was on this point that the last of all misunderstandings between me and Davies was dissipated. At Bensersiel he had been influenced more than he owned by my arguments about Memmert; but at that time (as I hinted) he was biased by a radical prejudice. The channel theory had become a sort of religion with him, promising double salvation--not only avoidance of the Dollmanns, but success in the quest by methods in which he was past master. To have to desert it and resort to spying on naval defences was an idea he dreaded and distrusted. It was not the morality of the course that bothered him. He was far too clear-headed to blink at the essential fact that at heart we were spies on a foreign power in time of peace, or to salve his conscience by specious distinctions as to our mode of operation. The foreign power to him was Dollmann, a traitor. There was his final justification, fearlessly adopted and held to the last. It was rather that, knowing his own limitations, his whole nature shrank from the sort of action entailed by the Memmert theory. And there was strong common sense in his antipathy.

So much for independent research.

On the other hand the road was now clear for the other method. Davies no longer feared to face the imbroglio at Norderney; and that day fortune had given us a new and potent weapon against Dollmann; precisely how potent we could not tell, for we had only a glimpse of his past, and his exact relations with the Government were unknown to us. But we knew who he was. Using this knowledge with address, could we not wring the rest from him? Feel our way, of course, be guided by his own conduct, but in the end strike hard and stake everything on the stroke? Such at any rate was our scheme to-night. Later, tossing in my bunk, I be-thought me of the little drab book, lit a candle, and fetched it. A preface explained that it had been written during a spell of two months' leave from naval duty, and expressed a hope that it might be of service to Corinthian sailors. The style was unadorned, but scholarly and pithy. There was no change in the weather--still the same stringent cold, with a high barometer, and only fickle flaws of air; but the morning was gloriously clear, except for a wreath or two of mist curling like smoke from the sea, and an attenuated belt of opaque fog on the northern horizon. The harbour lay open before us, and very commodious and civilized it looked, enclosed between two long piers which ran quite half a mile out from the land to the road-stead (Riff-Gat by name) where we lay. A stranger might have taken it for a deep and spacious haven; but this, of course, was an illusion, due to the high water. Davies knew that three-quarters of it was mud, the remainder being a dredged-out channel along the western pier. A couple of tugs, a dredger, and a

21 Blindfold to Memmert

'HERE she comes,' said Davies. It was nine o'clock on the next day, 22nd October, and we were on deck waiting for the arrival of the steamer from Norddeich. There was no change in the weather--still the same stringent cold, with a high barometer, and only fickle flaws of air; but the morning was gloriously clear, except for a wreath or two of mist curling like smoke from the sea, and an attenuated belt of opaque fog on the northern horizon. The harbour lay open before us, and very commodious and civilized it looked, enclosed between two long piers which ran quite half a mile out from the land to the road-stead (Riff-Gat by name) where we lay. A stranger might have taken it for a deep and spacious haven; but this, of course, was an illusion, due to the high water. Davies knew that three-quarters of it was mud, the remainder being a dredged-out channel along the western pier. A couple of tugs, a dredger, and a
ferry packet with steam up, were moored on that side—a small stack of galliots on the other. Beyond these was another vessel, a galliot in build, but radiant as a queen among sluts; her varnished sides and spars flashing orange in the sun. These, and her snow-white sail-covers and the twinkle of brass and gun-metal, proclaimed her to be a yacht. I had already studied her through the glasses and read on her stern Medusa. A couple of sailors were swabbing her decks; you could hear the slush of the water and the scratching of the deck-brooms. '_They_ can see us anyway,' Davies had said.

For that matter all the world could see us—certainly the incoming steamer must; for we lay as near to the pier as safety permitted, abreast of the berth she would occupy, as we knew by a gangway and a knot of sailors.

A packet boat, not bigger than a big tug, was approaching from the south.

'Remember, we're not supposed to know he's coming,' I said; 'let's go below.' Besides the skylight, our 'coach-house' cabin top had little oblong side windows. We wiped clean those on the port side and watched events from them, kneeling on the sofa.

The steamer backed her paddles, flinging out a wash that set us rolling to our scuppers. There seemed to be very few passengers aboard, but all of them were gazing at the Dulcibella while the packet was warped alongside. On the forward deck there were some market-women with baskets, a postman, and a weedy youth who might be an hotel waiter; on the after-deck, standing close together, were two men in ulsters and soft felt hats.

'There he is!' said Davies, in a tense whisper; 'the tall one.' But the tall one turned abruptly as Davies spoke and strode away behind the deck-house, leaving me just a lightning impression of a grey beard and a steep tanned forehead, behind a cloud of cigar smoke. It was perverse of me, but, to tell the truth, I hardly missed him, so occupied was I by the short one, who remained leaning on the rail, thoughtfully contemplating the Dulcibella through gold-rimmed pince-nez: a sallow, wizened old fellow, beetlebrowed, with a bush of grizzled moustache and a jet-black tuft of beard on his chin. The most remarkable feature was the nose, which was broad and flat, merging almost imperceptibly in the wrinkled cheeks. Lightly beaked at the nether extremity, it drooped towards an enormous cigar which was pointing at us like a gun just discharged. He looked wise as Satan, and you would say he was smiling inwardly.

'Who's that?' I whispered to Davies. (There was no need to talk in whispers, but we did so instinctively.)

'Can't think,' said Davies. 'Hullo! she's backing off, and they've not landed.'

Some parcels and mail-bags had been thrown up, and the weedy waiter and two market-women had gone up the gangway, which was now being hauled up, and were standing on the quay. I think one or two other persons had first come aboard unnoticed by us, but at the last moment a man we had not seen before jumped down to the forward deck. 'Grimm!' we both ejaculated at once.

The steamer whistled sharply, circled backwards into the road-stead, and then steamed away. The pier soon hid her, but her smoke showed she was steering towards the North Sea.

'What does this mean?' I asked.

'There must be some other quay to stop at nearer the town,' said Davies. 'Let's go ashore and get your letters.'

We had made a long and painful toilette that morning, and felt quite shy of one another as we sculled towards the pier, in much-creased blue suits, conventional collars, and brown boots. It was the first time for two years that I had seen Davies in anything approaching a respectable garb; but a fashionable watering-place, even in the dead season, exacts respect; and, besides, we had friends to visit.

We tied up the dinghy to an iron ladder, and on the pier found our inquisitor of the night before smoking in the doorway of a shed marked 'Harbour Master'. After some civilities we inquired about the steamer. The answer was that it was Saturday, and she had, therefore, gone on to Juist. Did we want a good hotel? The 'Vier Jahreszeiten' was still open, etc.

'Juist, by Jove!' said Davies, as we walked on. 'Why are those three going to Juist?'

'I should have thought it was pretty clear. They're on their way to Memmert.'

Davies agreed, and we both looked longingly westward at a straw-coloured streak on the sea.

'Is it some meeting, do you think?' said Davies.

'Looks like it. We shall probably find the Kormoran here, wind-bound.'

And find her we did soon after, the outermost of the stack of galliots, on the farther side of the harbour. Two men, whose faces we took a good look at, were sitting on her hatch, mending a sail.

Flooded with sun, yet still as the grave, the town was like a dead butterfly for whom the healing rays had come too late. We crossed some deserted public gardens commanded by a gorgeous casino, its porticos heaped with chairs and tables; so past kiosques and cafés, great white hotels with boarded windows, bazaars and booths, and all the stale lees of vulgar frivolity, to the post-office, which at least was alive. I received a packet of letters and purchased a local time-table, from which we learned that the steamer sailed daily to Borkum via Norderney, touching three times a week at Juist (weather permitting). On the return journey to-day it was due at Norderney at 7.30 p.m. Then I
inquired the way to the 'Vier Jahreszeiten'. 'For whatever your principles,

Davies,' I said, 'we are going to have the best breakfast money can buy! We've got the whole day before us.'

The 'Four Seasons' Hotel was on the esplanade facing the northern beach. Living up to its name, it announced on
an illuminated sign-board, 'Inclusive terms for winter visitors; special attention to invalids, etc.' Here in a great glass
restaurant, with the unruffled blue of ocean spread out before us, we ate the king of breakfasts, dismissed the waiter,
and over long and fragrant Havanas examined my mail at leisure.

'What a waste of good diplomacy!' was my first thought, for nothing had been tampered with, so far as we could
judge from the minutest scrutiny, directed, of course, in particular to the franked official letters (for to my surprise
there were two) from Whitehall.

The first in order of date (6th Oct.) ran: 'Dear Carruthers.--Take another week by all means.--Yours, etc.'

The second (marked 'urgent') had been sent to my home address and forwarded. It was dated 15th October, and
cancelled the previous letter, requesting me to return to London without delay--'I am sorry to abridge your holiday,
but we are very busy, and, at present, short-handed.--Yours, etc.' There was a dry postscript to the effect that another
time I was to be good enough to leave more regular and definite information as to my whereabouts when absent.

'I'm afraid I never got this!' I said, handing it to Davies.

'You won't go, will you?' said he, looking, nevertheless, with unconcealed awe at the great man's handwriting
under the haughty official crest. Meanwhile I discovered an endorsement on a corner of the envelope: 'Don't worry;
it's only the chief's fuss.--M--' I promptly tore up the envelope. There are domestic mysteries which it would be
indecent and disloyal to reveal, even to one's best friend. The rest of my letters need no remark; I smiled over some
and blushed over others--all were voices from a life which was infinitely far away. Davies, meanwhile, was deep in
the foreign intelligence of a newspaper, spelling it out line by line, and referring impatiently to me for the meaning
of words.

'Hullo!' he said, suddenly; 'same old game! Hear that siren?' A curtain of fog had grown on the northern horizon
and was drawing shorewards slowly but surely.

'It doesn't matter, does it?' I said.

'Well, we must get back to the yacht. We can't leave her alone in the fog.'

There was some marketing to be done on the way back, and in the course of looking for the shops we wanted we
came on the Schwannalée and noted its position. Before we reached the harbour the fog was on us, charging up the
streets in dense masses. Happily a tramline led right up to the pier-head, or we should have lost our way and wasted
time, which, in the event, was of priceless value. Presently we stumbled up against the Harbour Office, which was
our landmark for the steps where we had tied up the dinghy. The same official appeared and good-naturedly held the
painter while we handed in our parcels. He wanted to know why we had left the flesh-pots of the 'Vier Jahreszeiten'.
To look after our yacht, of course. There was no need, he objected; there would be no traffic moving while the fog
lasted, and the fog, having come on at that hour, had come to stay. If it did clear he would keep an eye on the yacht
for us. We thanked him, but thought we would go aboard.

'You'll have a job to find her now,' he said.

The distance was eighty yards at the most, but we had to use a scientific method, the same one, in fact, that
Davies had used last night in the approach to the eastern pier.

'Row straight out at right angles to the pier,' he said now. I did so, Davies sounding with his scull between the
strokes. He found the bottom after twenty yards, that being the width of the dredged-out channel at this point. Then
we turned to the right, and moved gently forward, keeping touch with the edge of the mud-bank (for all the world
like blind men tapping along a kerbstone) and taking short excursions from it, till the Dulcibella hove in view.

'That's partly luck,' Davies commented; 'we ought to have had the compass as well.'

We exchanged shouts with the man on the pier to show we had arrived.

'It's very good practice, that sort of thing,' said Davies, when we had disembarked.

'You've got a sixth sense,' I observed. 'How far could you go like that?'

'Don't know. Let's have another try. I can't sit still all day. Let's explore this channel.'

''Why not go to Memmert?' I said, in fun.

'To Memmert?' said Davies, slowly; 'by Jove! that's an idea!'

'Good Heavens, man! I was joking. Why, it's ten mortal miles.'

'More,' said Davies, absently. 'It's not so much the distance--what's the time? Ten fifteen; quarter ebb--What am I
talking about? We made our plans last night.'

But seeing him, to my amazement, serious, I was stung by the splendour of the idea I had awakened. Confidence
in his skill was second nature to me. I swept straight on to the logic of the thing, the greatness, the completeness of
the opportunity, if by a miracle it could be seized and used. Something was going on at Memmert to-day; our men
had gone there; here were we, ten miles away, in a smothering, blinding fog. It was known we were here--Dollmann and Grimm knew it; the crew of the Medusa knew it; the crew of the Kormoran knew it; the man on the pier, whether he cared or not, knew it. But none of them knew Davies as I knew him. Would anyone dream for an instant--?

'Stop a second,' said Davies; 'give me two minutes.' He whipped out the German chart. 'Where exactly should we go?' ('Exactly!' The word tickled me hugely.)

'To the depot, of course; it's our only chance.'

'Listen then--there are two routes: the outside one by the open sea, right round Juist, and doubling south--the simplest, but the longest; the depot's at the south point of Memmert, and Memmert's nearly two miles long.' _[See Chart B]_

'How far would that way be?'

'Sixteen miles good. And we should have to row in a breaking swell most of the way, close to land.'

'Out of the question; it's too public, too, if it clears. The steamer went that way, and will come back that way. We must go inside over the sands. Am I dreaming, though? Can you possibly find the way?'

'I shouldn't wonder. But I don't believe you see the hitch. It's the _time_ and the falling tide. High water was about 8.15: it's now 10.15, and all those sands are drying off. We must cross the See-Gat and strike that boomed channel, the Memmert Balje; strike it, freeze on to it--can't cut off an inch--and pass that "watershed" you see there before it's too late. It's an infernally bad one, I can see. Not even a dinghy will cross it for an hour each side of low water.'

'Well, how far is the "watershed"?'

'Good Lord! What are we talking for? Change, man, change! Talk while we're changing.' (He began flinging off his shore clothes, and I did the same.) 'It's at least five miles to the end of it; six, allowing for bends; hour and a half hard pulling; two, allowing for checks. Are you fit? You'll have to pull the most. Then there are six or seven more miles--easier ones. And then--What are we to do when we get there?'

'Leave that to me,' I said. 'You get me there.'

'Supposing it clears?'

'After we get there? Bad; but we must risk that. If it clears on the way there it doesn't matter by this route; we shall be miles from land.'

'What about getting back?'

'We shall have a rising tide, anyway. If the fog lasts--can you manage in a fog _and_ dark?'

'The dark makes it no more difficult, if we've a light to see the compass and chart by. You trim the binnacle lamp--no, the riding-light. Now give me the scissors, and don't speak a word for ten minutes. Meanwhile, think it out, and load the dinghy--(by Jove! though, don't make a sound)--some grub and whisky, the boat-compass, lead, riding-light, matches, _small_ boat-hook, grapnel and line.'

'Foghorn?'

'Yes, and the whistle too.'

'A gun?'

'What for?'

'We're after ducks.'

'All right. And muffle the rowlocks with cotton-waste.'

I left Davies absorbed in the charts, and softly went about my own functions. In ten minutes he was on the ladder, beckoning.

'I've done,' he whispered. 'Now _shall_ we go?'

'I've thought it out. Yes,' I answered.

'This was only roughly true, for I could not have stated in words all the pros and cons that I had balanced. It was an impulse that drove me forward; but an impulse founded on reason, with just a tinge, perhaps, of superstition; for the quest had begun in a fog and might fitly end in one.

'It was twenty-five minutes to eleven when we noiselessly pushed off. 'Let her drift,' whispered Davies, 'the ebb'll carry her past the pier.'

'We slid by the Dulcibella, and she disappeared. Then we sat without speech or movement for about five minutes, while the gurgle of tide through piles approached and passed. The dinghy appeared to be motionless, just as a balloon in the clouds may appear to its occupants to be motionless, though urged by a current of air. In reality we were driving out of the Riff-Gat into the See-Gat. The dinghy swayed to a light swell.'

'Now, pull,' said Davies, under his breath; 'keep it long and steady, above all steady--both arms with equal force.'

I was on the bow-thwart; he _vis-à-vis_ to me on the stern seat, his left hand behind him on the tiller, his right forefinger on a small square of paper which lay on his knees; this was a section cut out from the big German chart.
On the midship-thwart between us lay the compass and a watch. Between these three objects—compass, watch, and chart—his eyes darted constantly, never looking up or out, save occasionally for a sharp glance over the side at the flying bubbles, to see if I was sustaining a regular speed. My duty was to be his automaton, the human equivalent of a marine engine whose revolutions can be counted and used as data by the navigator. My arms must be regular as twin pistons; the energy that drove them as controllable as steam. It was a hard ideal to reach, for the complex mortal tends to rely on all the senses God has given him, so unfitting himself for mechanical exactitude when a sense (eyesight, in my case) fails him. At first it was constantly 'left' or 'right' from Davies, accompanied by a bubbling from the rudder.

'This won't do, too much helm,' said Davies, without looking up. 'Keep your stroke, but listen to me. Can you see the compass card?'

'When I come forward.'

'Take your time, and don't get flurried, but each time you come forward have a good look at it. The course is south-west half-west. You take the opposite, north-east half-east, and keep her stern on that. It'll be rough, but it'll save some helm, and give me a hand free if I want it.'

I did as he said, not without effort, and our progress gradually became smoother, till he had no need to speak at all. The only sound now was one like the gentle simmer of a saucepan away to port—the lisp of surf I knew it to be—and the muffled grunt of the rowlocks. I broke the silence once to say 'It's very shallow.' I had touched sand with my right scull.

'Don't talk,' said Davies.

About half an hour passed, and then he added sounding to his other occupations. 'Plump' went the lead at regular intervals, and he steered with his hip while pulling in the line. Very little of it went out at first, then less still. Again I struck bottom, and, glancing aside, saw weeds. Suddenly he got a deep cast, and the dinghy, freed from the slight drag which shallow water always inflicts on a small boat, leapt buoyantly forward. At the same time, I knew by boils on the smooth surface that we were in a strong tideway.

'The Buse Tief,' muttered Davies. 'Row hard now, and steady as a clock.'

For a hundred yards or more I bent to my sculls and made her fly. Davies was getting six fathom casts, till, just as suddenly as it had deepened, the water shoaled—ten feet, six, three, one—the dinghy grounded.

'Good!' said Davies. 'Back her off! Pull your right only.' The dinghy spun round with her bow to N.N.W. 'Both arms together! Don't you worry about the compass now; just pull, and listen for orders. There's a tricky bit coming.'

He put aside the chart, kicked the lead under the seat, and, kneeling on the dripping coils of line, sounded continuously with the butt-end of the boat-hook, a stumpy little implement, notched at intervals of a foot, and often before used for the same purpose. All at once I was aware that a check had come, for the dinghy swerved and doubled like a hound ranging after scent.

'Stop her,' he said, suddenly, 'and throw out the grapnel.'

I obeyed and we brought up, swinging to a slight current, whose direction Davies verified by the compass. Then for half a minute he gave himself up to concentrated thought. What struck me most about him was that he never for a moment strained his eyes through the fog; a useless exercise (for five yards or so was the radius of our vision) which, however, I could not help indulging in, while I rested. He made up his mind, and we were off again, straight and swift as an arrow this time, and in water deeper than the boat-hook. I could see by his face that he was taking some bold expedient whose issue hung in the balance ... Again we touched mud, and the artist's joy of achievement shone in his eyes. Backing away, we headed west. and for the first time he began to gaze into the fog.

'There's one!' he snapped at last. 'Easy all!' A boom, one of the usual upright saplings, glided out of the mist. He caught hold of it, and we brought up.

'Rest for three minutes now,' he said. 'We're in fairly good time.' It was 11.10. I ate some biscuits and took a nip of whisky while Davies prepared for the next stage.

We had reached the eastern outlet of Memmert Balje, the channel which runs east and west behind Juist Island, direct to the south point of Memmert. How we had reached it was incomprehensible to me at the time, but the reader will understand by comparing my narrative with the dotted line on the chart. I add this brief explanation, that Davies's method had been to cross the channel called the Buse Tief, and strike the other side of it at a point well south of the outlet of the Memmert Balje (in view of the northward set of the ebb-tide), and then to drop back north and feel his way to the outlet. The check was caused by a deep indentation in the Itzendorf Flat; a cul-de-sac, with a wide mouth, which Davies was very near mistaking for the Balje itself. We had no time to skirt dents so deep as that; hence the dash across its mouth with the chance of missing the upper lip altogether, and of either being carried out to sea (for the slightest error was cumulative) or straying fruitlessly along the edge.

The next three miles were the most critical of all. They included the 'watershed', whose length and depth were doubtful; they included, too, the crux of the whole passage, a spot where the channel forks, our own branch
continuing west, and another branch diverging from it north-westward. We must row against time, and yet we must negotiate that crux. Add to this that the current was against us till the watershed was crossed; that the tide was just at its most baffling stage, too low to allow us to risk short cuts, and too high to give definition to the banks of the channel; and that the compass was no aid whatever for the minor bends. 'Time's up,' said Davies, and on we went. I was hugging the comfortable thought that we should now have booms on our starboard for the whole distance; on our starboard, I say, for experience had taught us that all channels running parallel with the coast and islands were uniformly boomed on the northern side. Anyone less confident than Davies would have succumbed to the temptation of slavishly relying on these marks, creeping from one to the other, and wasting precious time. But Davies knew our friend the 'boom' and his eccentricities too well; and preferred to trust to his sense of touch, which no fog in the world could impair. If we happened to sight one, well and good, we should know which side of the channel we were on. But even this contingent advantage he deliberately sacrificed after a short distance, for he crossed over to the south or unboomed side and steered and sounded along it, using the Itzendorf Flat as his handrail, so to speak. He was compelled to do this, he told me afterwards, in view of the crux, where the converging lines of booms would have involved us in irremediable confusion. Our branch was the southern one, and it followed that we must use the southern bank, and defer obtaining any help from booms until sure we were past that critical spot.

For an hour we were at the extreme strain, I of physical exertion, he of mental. I could not get into a steady swing, for little checks were constant. My right scull was for ever skidding on mud or weeds, and the backward suck of shoal water clogged our progress. Once we were both of us out in the slime tugging at the dinghy's sides; then in again, blundering on. I found the fog bemusing, lost all idea of time and space, and felt like a senseless marionette kicking and jerking to a mad music without tune or time. The misty form of Davies as he sat with his right arm swinging rhythmically forward and back, was a clockwork figure as mad as myself, but didactic and gibbering in his madness. Then the boat-hook he wielded with a circular sweep began to take grotesque shapes in my heated fancy; now it was the antenna of a groping insect, now the crank of a cripple's self-propelled perambulator, now the alpenstock of a lunatic mountaineer, who sits in his chair and climbs and climbs to some phantom 'watershed'. At the back of such mind as was left me lodged two insistent thoughts: 'we must hurry on,' 'we are going wrong.' As to the latter, take a link-boy through a London fog and you will experience the same thing: he always goes the way you think is wrong. 'We're rowing _back_!' I remember shouting to Davies once, having become aware that it was now my left scull which splashed against obstructions. 'Rubbish,' said Davies. 'I've crossed over'; and I relapsed.

By degrees I returned to sanity, thanks to improved conditions. It is an ill wind that blows nobody good, and the state of the tide, though it threatened us with total failure, had the compensating advantage that the lower it fell the more constricted and defined became our channel; till the time came when the compass and boat-hook were alike unnecessary, because our hand-rail, the muddy brink of the channel, was visible to the eye, close to us; on our right hand always now, for the crux was far behind, and the northern side was now our guide. All that remained was to press on with might and main ere the bed of the creek dried.

What a race it was! Homeric, in effect; a struggle of men with gods, for what were the gods but forces of nature personified? If the God of the Falling Tide did not figure in the Olympian circle he is none the less a mighty divinity. Davies left his post. and rowed stroke. Under our united efforts the dinghy advanced in strenuous leaps, hurling miniature-rollers on the bank beside us. My palms, seasoned as they were, were smarting with watery blisters. The pace was too hot for my strength and breath.

'I must have a rest,' I gasped.

'Well, I think we're over it,' said Davies.

We stopped the dinghy dead, and he stabbed over the side with the boat-hook. It passed gently astern of us, and even my bewildered brain took in the meaning of that.

'Three feet and the current with us. _Well_ over it,' he said. 'I'll paddle on while you rest and feed.'

It was a few minutes past one and we still, as he calculated. had eight miles before us, allowing for bends.

'But it's a mere question of muscle,' he said.

I took his word for it, and munched at tongue and biscuits. As for muscle, we were both in hard condition. He was fresh, and what distress I felt was mainly due to spasmodic exertion culminating in that desperate spurt. As for the fog, it had more than once shown a faint tendency to lift, growing thinner and more luminous, in the manner of mists, always to settle down again, heavy as a quilt.

Note the spot marked 'second rest' (approximately correct. Davies says) and the course of the channel from that point westward. You will see it broadening and deepening to the dimensions of a great river, and finally merging in the estuary of the Ems. Note, too, that its northern boundary, the edge of the now uncovered Nordland Sand, leads, with one interruption (_marked A_), direct to Memmert, and is boomed throughout. You will then understand why Davies made so light of the rest of his problem. Compared with the feats he had performed, it was child's play, for he always had that visible margin to keep touch with if he chose, or to return to in case of doubt. As a matter of fact-
observe our dotted line—he made two daring departures from it, the first purely to save time, the second partly to save time and partly to avoid the very awkward spot marked A, where a creek with booms and a little delta of its own interrupts the even bank. During the first of these departures—the shortest but most brilliant—he let me do the rowing, and devoted himself to the niceties of the course; during the second, and through both the intermediate stages, he rowed himself, with occasional pauses to inspect the chart. We fell into a long, measured stroke, and covered the miles rapidly, scarcely exchanging a single word till, at the end of a long pull through vacancy, Davies said suddenly:

'Now where are we to land?'

A sandbank was looming over us crowned by a lonely boom.

'Where are we?'

'A quarter of a mile from Memmert.'

'What time is it?'

'Nearly three.'

22 The Quartette

HIS _tour de force_ was achieved, and for the moment something like collapse set in.

'What in the world have we come here for?' he muttered; 'I feel a bit giddy.'

I made him drink some whisky, which revived him; and then, speaking in whispers, we settled certain points.

I alone was to land. Davies demurred to this out of loyalty, but common sense, coinciding with a strong aversion of his own, settled the matter. Two were more liable to detection than one. I spoke the language well, and if challenged could cover my retreat with a gruff word or two; in my woollen overalls, sea-boots, oilskin coat, with a sou'-wester pulled well over my eyes, I should pass in a fog for a Frisian. Davies must mind the dinghy; but how was I to regain it? I hoped to do so without help, by using the edge of the sand; but if he heard a long whistle he was to blow the foghorn.

'Take the pocket-compass,' he said. 'Never budge from the shore without using it, and lay it on the ground for steadiness. Take this scrap of chart, too—it may come in useful; but you can't miss the depot, it looks to be close to the shore. How long will you be?'

'How long have I got?'

'The young flood's making—has been for nearly an hour—that bank (he measured it with his eye) will be covering in an hour and a half.'

'That ought to be enough.'

'Don't run it too fine. It's steep here, but it may shelve farther on. If you have to wade you'll never find me, and you'll make a deuce of a row. Got your watch, matches, knife? No knife? Take mine; never go anywhere without a knife.' (It was his seaman's idea of efficiency.)

'Wait a bit, we must settle a place to meet at in case I'm late and can't reach you here.'

'Don't be late. We've got to get back to the yacht before we're missed.'

'But I may have to hide and wait till dark—the fog may clear.'

'We were fools to come, I believe,' said Davies, gloomily. 'There _are_ no meeting-places in a place like this. Here's the best I can see on the chart—a big triangular beacon marked on the very point of Memmert. You'll pass it.'

'All right. I'm off.'

'Good luck,' said Davies, faintly.

I stepped out, climbed a miry glacis of five or six feet, reached hard wet sand, and strode away with the sluggish ripple of the Balje on my left hand. A curtain dropped between me and Davies, and I was alone—alone, but how I thrilled to feel the firm sand rustle under my boots; to know that it led to dry land, where, whatever befell, I could give my wits full play. I clove the fog briskly.

Good Heavens! what was that? I stopped short and listened. From over the water on my left there rang out, dulled by fog, but distinct to the ear, three double strokes on a bell or gong. I looked at my watch.

'Ship at anchor,' I said to myself. 'Six bells in the afternoon watch.' I knew the Balje was here a deep roadstead, where a vessel entering the Eastern Ems might very well anchor to ride out a fog.

I was just stepping forward when another sound followed from the same quarter, a bugle-call this time. Then I understood—only men-of-war sound bugles—the Blitz was here then; and very natural, too, I thought, and strode on. The sand was growing drier, the water farther beneath me; then came a thin black ribbon of weed—high-water mark.

A few cautious steps to the right and I touched tufts of marram grass. It was Memmert. I pulled out the chart and refreshed my memory. No! there could be no mistake; keep the sea on my left and I must go right. I followed the ribbon of weed, keeping it just in view, but walking on the verge of the grass for the sake of silence. All at once I almost tripped over a massive iron bar; others, a rusty network of them, grew into being above and around me, like
The arms of a ghostly polyp.

'What infernal spider's web is this?' I thought, and stumbled clear. I had strayed into the base of a gigantic tripod, its gaunt legs stayed and cross-stayed, its apex lost in fog; the beacon, I remembered. A hundred yards farther and I was down on my knees again, listening with might and main; for several little sounds were in the air--voices, the rasp of a boat's keel, the whistling of a tune. These were straight ahead. More to the left, seaward, that is, I had aural evidence of the presence of a steamboat--a small one, for the hiss of escaping steam was low down. On my right front I as yet heard nothing, but the depot must be there.

I prepared to strike away from my base, and laid the compass on the ground--NW. roughly I made the course. ('South-east--south-east for coming back,' I repeated inwardly, like a child learning a lesson.) Then of my two allies I abandoned one, the beach, and threw myself wholly on the fog.

'Play the game,' I said to myself. 'Nobody expects you; nobody will recognize you.'

I advanced in rapid stages of ten yards or so, while grass disappeared and soft sand took its place, pitted everywhere with footmarks. I trod carefully, for obstructions began to show themselves--an anchor, a heap of rusty cable; then a boat bottom upwards, and, lying on it, a foul old meerschaum pipe. I paused here and strained my ears, for there were sounds in many directions; the same whistling (behind me now), heavy footsteps in front, and somewhere beyond--fifty yards away, I reckoned--a buzz of guttural conversation; from the same quarter there drifted to my nostrils the acrid odour of coarse tobacco. Then a door banged.

I put the compass in my pocket (thinking 'south-east, southeast'), placed the pipe between my teeth (ugh! the rank savour of it!) rammed my sou'-wester hard down, and slouched on in the direction of the door that had banged. A voice in front called, 'Karl Schicker'; a nearer voice, that of the man whose footsteps I had heard approaching, took it up and called 'Karl Schicker': I, too, took it up, and, turning my back, called 'Karl Schicker' as gruffly and gutturally as I could. The footsteps passed quite close to me, and glancing over my shoulder I saw a young man passing, dressed very like me, but wearing a sealskin cap instead of a sou'-wester. As he walked he seemed to be counting coins in his palm. A hail came back from the beach and the whistling stopped.

I now became aware that I was on a beaten track. These meetings were hazardous, so I inclined aside, but not without misgivings, for the path led towards the buzz of talk and the banging door, and these were my only guides to the depot. Suddenly, and much before I expected it, I knew rather than saw that a wall was in front of me; now it was visible, the side of a low building of corrugated iron. A pause to reconnoitre was absolutely necessary; but the knot of talkers might have heard my footsteps, and I must at all costs not suggest the groping of a stranger. I lit a match--two--and sucked heavily (as I had seen navvies do) at my pipe, studying the trend of the wall by reference to the sounds. There was a stale dottle wedged in the bowl, and loathsome fumes resulted. Just then the same door banged again; another name, which I forget, was called out. I decided that I was at the end of a rectangular building which I pictured as like an Aldershot 'hut', and that the door I heard was round the corner to my left. A knot of men must be gathered there, entering it by turns. Having expectorated noisily, I followed the tin wall to my right, and turning a corner strolled leisurely on, passing signs of domesticity, a washtub, a water-butt, then a tiled approach to an open door. I now was aware of the corner of a second building, also of zinc, parallel to the first, but taller, for I could only just see the eave. I was just going to turn off to this as a more promising field for exploration, when I heard a window open ahead of me in my original building.

I am afraid I am getting obscure, so I append a rough sketch of the scene, as I partly saw and chiefly imagined it.

It was window (A) that I heard open. From it I could just distinguish through the fog a hand protrude, and throw something out--cigar-end? The hand, a clean one with a gold signet-ring, rested for an instant afterwards on the sash, then closed the window.

{graphic Sketch here}

My geography was clear now in one respect. That window belonged to the same room as the hanging door (B); for I distinctly heard the latter open and shut again, opposite me on the other side of the building. It struck me that it might be interesting to see into that room. 'Play the game,' I reminded myself, and retreated a few yards back on tiptoe, then turned and sauntered coolly past the window, puffing my villainous pipe and taking a long deliberate look into the interior as I passed--the more deliberate that at the first instant I realized that nobody inside was disturbing himself about me. As I had expected (in view of the fog and the time) there was artificial light within. My mental photograph was as follows: a small room with varnished deal walls and furnished like an office; in the far right-hand corner a counting-house desk, Grimm sitting at it on a high stool, side-face to me, counting money; opposite him in an awkward attitude a burly fellow in seaman's dress holding a diver's helmet. In the middle of the room a deal table, and on it something big and black. Lolling on chairs near it, their backs to me and their faces turned towards the desk and the diver, two men--von Brüning and an older man with a bald yellow head (Dollmann's companion on the steamer, beyond a doubt). On another chair, with its back actually tilted against the window, Dollmann.
Such were the principal features of the scene; for details I had to make another inspection. Stooping low, I crept back, quiet as a cat, till I was beneath the window, and, as I calculated, directly behind Dollmann's chair. Then with great caution I raised my head. There was only one pair of eyes in the room that I feared in the least, and that was Grimm's, who sat in profile to me, farthest away. I instantly put Dollmann's back between Grimm and me, and then made my scrutiny. As I made it, I could feel a cold sweat distilling on my forehead and tickling my spine; not from fear or excitement, but from pure ignominy. For beyond all doubt I was present at the meeting of a _bona-fide_ salvage company. It was pay-day, and the directors appeared to be taking stock of work done; that was all.

Over the door was an old engraving of a two-decker under full sail; pinned on the wall a chart and the plan of a ship. Relics of the wrecked frigate abounded. On a shelf above the stove was a small pyramid of encrusted cannonballs, and supported on nails at odd places on the walls were corroded old pistols, and what I took to be the remains of a sextant. In a corner of the floor sat a hoary little carronade, carriage and all. None of these things affected me so much as a pile of lumber on the floor, not firewood but unmistakable wreck-wood, black as bog-oak, still caked in places with the mud of ages. Nor was it the mere sight of this lumber that dumbfounded me. It was the fact that a fragment of it, a balk of curved timber garnished with some massive bolts, lay on the table, and was evidently an object of earnest interest. The diver had turned and was arguing with gestures over it; von Brüning and Grimm were pressing another view. The diver shook his head frequently, finally shrugged his shoulders, made a salutation, and left the room. Their movements had kept me ducking my head pretty frequently, but I now grew almost reckless as to whether I was seen or not. All the weaknesses of my theory crowded on me--the arguments Davies had used at Bensersiel; Fräulein Dollmann's thoughtless talk; the ease (comparatively) with which I had reached this spot, not a barrier to cross or a lock to force; the publicity of their passage to Memmert by Dollmann, his friend, and Grimm; and now this glimpse of business-like routine. In a few moments I sank from depth to depth of scepticism. Where were my mines, torpedoes, and submarine boats, and where my imperial conspirators? Was gold after all at the bottom of this sordid mystery? Dollmann after all a commonplace criminal? The ladder of proof I had mounted tottered and shook beneath me. 'Don't be a fool,' said the faint voice of reason. 'There are your four men. Wait.'

Two more _employés_ came into the room in quick succession and received wages; one looking like a fireman, the other of a superior type, the skipper of a tug, say. There was another discussion with this latter over the balk of wreck-wood, and this man, too, shrugged his shoulders. His departure appeared to end the meeting. Grimm shut up a ledger, and I shrink down on my knees, for a general shifting of chairs began. At the same time, from the other side of the building, I heard my knot of men retreating beachwards, spitting and chatting as they went. Presently someone walked across the room towards my window. I sidled away on all fours, rose and flattened myself erect against the wall, a sickening despondency on me; my intention to slink away south-east as soon as the coast was clear. But the sound that came next pricked me like an electric shock; it was the tinkle and scrape of curtain-rings.

Quick as thought I was back in my old position, to find my view barred by a cretonne curtain. It was in one piece, with no chink for my benefit, but it did not hang straight, bulging towards me under the pressure of something--human shoulders by the shape. Dollmann, I concluded, was still in his old place. I now was exasperated to find that I could scarcely hear a word that was said, not even by pressing my ear against the glass. It was not that the speakers were of set purpose hushing their voices--they used an ordinary tone for intimate discussion--but the glass and curtain deadened the actual words. Still, I was soon able to distinguish general characteristics. Von Brüning's voice--the only one I had ever heard before--I recognized at once: he was on the left of the table, and Dollmann's I knew from his position. The third was a harsh croak, belonging to the old gentleman whom, for convenience, I shall prematurely begin to call Herr Böhme. It was too old a voice to be Grimm's; besides, it had the ring of authority, and was dealing at the moment in sharp interrogations. Three of its sentences I caught in their entirety. 'When was that?' 'They went no farther?' and 'Too long; out of the question.' Dollmann's voice, though nearest to me, was the least audible of all. It was a dogged monotone, and what was that odd movement of the curtain at his back? Yes, his hands were behind him clutching and kneading a fold of the cretonne. 'You are feeling uncomfortable, my friend,' was my comment. Suddenly he threw back his head--I saw the dent of it--and spoke up so that I could not miss a word. 'Very well, sir, you shall see them at supper to-night; I will ask them both.'

(You will not be surprised to learn that I instantly looked at my watch--though it takes long to write what I have described--but the time was only a quarter to four.) He added something about the fog, and his chair creaked. Ducking promptly I heard the curtain-rings jar, and: 'Thick as ever.'

'Your report, Herr Dollmann,' said Böhme, curtly. Dollmann left the window and moved his chair up to the table; the other two drew in theirs and settled themselves.

"Chatham," said Dollmann, as if announcing a heading. It was an easy word to catch, rapped out sharp, and you can imagine how it startled me. 'That's where you've been for the last month!' I said to myself. A map crackled and I knew they were bending over it, while Dollmann explained something. But now my exasperation became acute, for
not a syllable more reached me. Squatting back on my heels, I cast about for expedients. Should I steal round and try
the door? Too dangerous. Climb to the roof and listen down the stove-pipe? Too noisy, and generally hopeless. I
tried for a downward purchase on the upper half of the window, which was of the simple sort in two sections,
working vertically. No use; it resisted gentle pressure, would start with a sudden jar if I forced it. I pulled out
Davies's knife and worked the point of the blade between sash and frame to give it play--no result; but the knife was
a nautical one, with a marlin-spike as well as a big blade.

Just now the door within opened and shut again, and I heard steps approaching round the corner to my right.
I had the presence of mind not to lose a moment, but moved silently away (blessing the deep Frisian sand) round the
corner of the big parallel building. Someone whom I could not see walked past till his boots clattered on tiles, next
resounded on boards. 'Grimm in his living-room,' I inferred. The precious minutes ebbed away--five, ten, fifteen.
Had he gone for good? I dared not return otherwise. Eighteen--he was coming out! This time I stole forward boldly
when the man had just passed, dimly saw a figure, and clearly enough the glint of a white paper he was holding. He
made his circuit and re-entered the room.

Here I felt and conquered a relapse to scepticism. 'If this is an important conclave why don't they set guards?'
Answer, the only possible one, 'Because they stand alone. Their _employés_ like _everyone_ we had met hitherto,
know nothing. The real object of this salvage company (a poor speculation, I opined) is solely to afford a pretext for
the conclave.' 'Why the curtain, even?' 'Because there are maps, stupid!'

I was back again at the window, but as impotent as ever against that even stream of low confidential talk. But I
would not give up. Fate and the fog had brought me here, the one solitary soul perhaps who by the chain of
circumstances had both the will and the opportunity to wrest their secret from these four men.

The marlin-spike! Where the lower half of the window met the sill it sank into a shallow groove. I thrust the
point of the spike down into the interstice between sash and frame and heaved with a slowly increasing force, which
I could regulate to the fraction of an ounce, on this powerful lever. The sash gave, with the faintest possible protest,
and by imperceptible degrees I lifted it to the top of the groove, and the least bit above it, say half an inch in all; but
it made an appreciable difference to the sounds within, as when you remove your foot from a piano's soft pedal. I
could do no more, for there was no further fulcrum for the spike, and I dared not gamble away what I had won by
using my hands.

Hope sank again when I placed my cheek on the damp sill, and my ear to the chink. My men were close round
the table referring to papers which I heard rustle. Dollmann's 'report' was evidently over, and I rarely heard his
voice; Grimm's occasionally, von Brüning's and Böhme's frequently; but, as before, it was the latter only that I could
ever count on for an intelligible word. For, unfortunately, the villains of the piece plotted without any regard to
dramatic fitness or to my interests. Immersed in a subject with which they were all familiar, they were allusive,
elliptic, and persistently technical. Many of the words I did catch were unknown to me. The rest were, for the most
part, either letters of the alphabet or statistical figures, of depth, distance, and, once or twice, of time. The letters of
the alphabet recurred often, and seemed, as far as I could make out, to represent the key to the cipher. The numbers
clustering round them were mostly very small, with decimals. What maddened me most was the scarcity of plain
nouns.

To report what I heard to the reader would be impossible; so chaotic was most of it that it left no impression on
my own memory. All I can do is to tell him what fragments stuck, and what nebulous classification I involved. The
letters ran from A to G, and my best continuous chance came when Böhme, reading rapidly from a paper, I think,
went through the letters, backwards, from G, adding remarks to each; thus: 'G. . . completed.' 'F. . . bad. . . 1.3
(metres?) . . . 2.5 (kilometres?) .' 'E . . thirty-two. . . 1.2.' 'D . . 3 weeks. . . thirty.' 'C. . . . . and soon.

Another time he went through this list again, only naming each letter himself, and receiving laconic answers
from Grimm--answers which seemed to be numbers, but I could not be sure. For minutes together I caught nothing
but the scratching of pens and inarticulate mutterings. But out of the muck-heap I picked five pearls--four sibilant
nouns and a name that I knew before. The nouns were 'Schlepp-boote' (tugs); 'Wassertiefe' (depth of water);
'Eisenbahn' (railway); ' (pilots). The name, also sibilant and thus easier to hear, was 'Esens'.

Two or three times I had to stand back and ease my cramped neck, and on each occasion I looked at my watch,
for I was listening against time, just as we had rowed against time. We were going to be asked to supper, and must
be back aboard the yacht in time to receive the invitation. The fog still brooded heavily and the light, always bad,
was growing worse. How would they get back? How had they come from Juist? Could we forestall them?
Questions of time, tide, distance--just the odious sort of sums I was unfit to cope with--were distracting my attention
when it should have been wholly elsewhere. 4.20--4.25--now it was past 4.30 when Davies said the bank would
cover. I should have to make for the beacon; but it was fatally near that steamboat path, etc., and I still at intervals
heard voices from there. It must have been about 4.35 when there was another shifting of chairs within. Then
someone rose, collected papers, and went out; someone else, _without_ rising (therefore Grimm), followed him.
There was silence in the room for a minute, and after that, for the first time, I heard some plain colloquial German, with no accompaniment of scratching or rustling. 'I must wait for this,' I thought, and waited.

'He insists on coming,' said Böhme.

'Ach!' (an ejaculation of surprise and protest from von Brüning).

'I said the _25th_.'

'Why?'

'The tide serves well. The night-train, of course. Tell Grimm to be ready--' (An inaudible question from von Brüning.) 'No, any weather.' A laugh from von Brüning and some words I could not catch.

'Only one, with half a load.'

'...meet?'

'At the station.'

'So--how's the fog?'

This appeared to be really the end. Both men rose and steps came towards the window. I leapt aside as I heard it thrown up, and covered by the noise backed into safety. Von Brüning called 'Grimm!' and that, and the open window, decided me that my line of advance was now too dangerous to retreat by. The only alternative was to make a circuit round the bigger of the two buildings--and an interminable circuit it seemed--and all the while I knew my compass-course 'south-east' was growing nugatory. I passed a padlocked door, two corners, and faced the void of fog. Out came the compass, and I steadied myself for the sum. 'South-east before--I'm farther to the eastward now--east will about do'; and off I went, with an error of four whole points, over tussocks and deep sand. The beach seemed much farther off than I had thought, and I began to get alarmed, puzzled over the compass several times, and finally realized that I had lost my way. I had the sense not to make matters worse by trying to find it again, and, as the lesser of two evils, blew my whistle, softly at first, then louder. The bray of a foghorn sounded right _behind_ me. I whistled again and then ran for my life, the horn sounding at intervals. In three or four minutes I was on the beach and in the dinghy.

23 A Change of Tactics

We pushed off without a word, and paddled out of sight of the beach. A voice was approaching, hailed us. 'Hail back,' whispered Davies; 'pretend we're a galliot.'

'Ho-a,' I shouted. 'where am I?'

'Off Memmert,' came back. 'Where are you bound?'

'Delfzyl,' whispered Davies.

'Delf-zyl,' I bawled.

A sentence ending with 'anchor' was returned.

'The flood's tearing east,' whispered Davies; 'sit still.'

We heard no more, and, after a few minutes' drifting 'What luck?' said Davies.

'One or two clues, and an invitation to supper.'

The clues I left till later; the invitation was the thing, and I explained its urgency.

'How will _they_ get back?' said Davies; 'if the fog lasts the steamer's sure to be late.'

'We can count for nothing,' I answered. 'There was some little steamboat off the depot, and the fog may lift. Which is our quickest way?'

'At this tide, a bee-line to Norderney by compass; we shall have water over all the banks.'

He had all his preparations made, the lamp lit in advance, the compass in position, and we started at once; he at the bow-oar, where he had better control over the boat's nose; lamp and compass on the floor between us. Twilight thickened into darkness--a choking, pasty darkness--and still we sped unalteringly over that trackless waste, sitting and swinging in our little pool of stifled orange light. To drown fatigue and suspense I conned over my clues, and tried to carve into my memory every fugitive word I had overheard.

'What are there seven of round here?' I called back to Davies once (thinking of A to G). 'Sorry,' I added, for no answer came.

'I see a star,' was my next word, after a long interval. 'Now it's gone. There it is again! Right aft!'

'That's Borkum light,' said Davies, presently; 'the fog's lifting.' A keen wind from the west struck our faces, and as swiftly as it had come the fog rolled away from us, in one mighty mass, stripping clean and pure the starry dome of heaven, still bright with the western after-glow, and beginning to redden in the east to the rising moon. Norderney light was flashing ahead, and Davies could take his tired eyes from the pool of light.

'Damn!' was all he uttered in the way of gratitude for this mercy, and I felt very much the same; for in a fog Davies in a dinghy was a match for a steamer; in a clear he lost his handicap.

It was a quarter to seven. 'An hour'll do it, if we buck up,' he pronounced, after taking a rough bearing with the two lights. He pointed out a star to me, which we were to keep exactly astern, and again I applied to their labour my
achiing back and smarting palms.

'What did you say about seven of something?' said Davies.

'What are there seven of hereabouts?'

'Islands, of course,' said Davies. 'Is that the clue?'

'Maybe.'

Then followed the most singular of all our confabulations. Two memories are better than one, and the sooner I carved the cipher into his memory as well as mine the better record we should have. So, with rigid economy of breath, I snapped out all my story, and answered his breathless questions. It saved me from being mesmerized by the star, and both of us from the consciousness of over-fatigue.

'Spying at Chatham, the blackguard?' he hissed.

'What do you make of it?' I asked.

'Nothing about battleships, mines, forts?' he said.

'No.'

'Nothing about the Ems, Emden, Wilhelmshaven?'

'No.'

'Nothing about transports?'

'No.'

'I believe--I was right--after all--something to do--with the channels--behind islands.'

And so that outworn creed took a new lease of life; though for my part the words that clashed with it were those that had sunk the deepest.

'Esens,' I protested; 'that town behind Bensersiel.'

'Wassertiefe, Lotsen, Schleppboote,' spluttered Davies.

'Kilometre--Eisenbahn,' from me, and so on.

I should earn the just execration of the reader if I continued to report such a dialogue. Suffice to say that we realized very soon that the substance of the plot was still a riddle. On the other hand, there was fresh scent, abundance of it; and the question was already taking shape--were we to follow it up or revert to last night's decision and strike with what weapons we had? It was a pressing question, too, the last of many--was there to be no end to the emergencies of this crowded day?--pressing for reasons I could not define, while convinced that we must be ready with an answer by supper-time to-night.

Meantime, we were nearing Norderney; the See-Gat was crossed, and with the last of the flood tide fair beneath us, and the red light on the west pier burning ahead, we began insensibly to relax our efforts. But I dared not rest, for I was at that point of exhaustion when mechanical movement was my only hope.

'Light astern,' I said, thickly. 'Two--white and red.'

'Steamer,' said Davies; 'going south though.'

'Three now.'

A neat triangle of gems--topaz, ruby, and emerald--hung steady behind us.

'Turned east,' said Davies. 'Buck up--steamer from Juist. No, by Jove! too small. What is it?'

On we laboured, while the gems waxed in brilliancy as the steamer overhauled us.

'Easy,' said Davies, 'I seem to know those lights--the Blitz's launch--don't let's be caught rowing like madmen in a muck sweat. Paddle inshore a bit.' He was right, and, as in a dream, I saw hurrying and palpitating up the same little pinnacle that had towed us out of Bensersiel.

'We're done for now,' I remember thinking, for the guilt of the runaway was strong in me; and an old remark of von Brüning's about 'police' was in my ears. But she was level with and past us before I could sink far into despair.

'Three of them behind the hood,' said Davies: 'what are we to do?'

'Follow,' I answered, and essayed a feeble stroke, but the blade scattered over the surface.

'Let's waif about for a bit,' said Davies. 'We're late anyhow. If they go to the yacht they'll think we're ashore.'

'Our shore clothes--lying about.'

'Are you up to talking?'

'No; but we must. The least suspicion'll do for us now.'

'Give me your scull, old chap, and put on your coat.'

He extinguished the lantern, lit a pipe, and then rowed slowly on, while I sat on a slack heap in the stern and devoted my last resources of will to the emancipation of the spirit from the tired flesh.

In ten minutes or so we were rounding the pier, and there was the yacht's top-mast against the sky. I saw, too, that the launch was alongside of her, and told Davies so. Then I lit a cigarette, and made a lamentable effort to whistle. Davies followed suit, and emitted a strange melody which I took to be 'Home, Sweet Home,' but he has not the slightest ear for music.
'Why, they're on board, I believe,' said I; 'the cabin's lighted. Ahoy there! I shouted as we came up. 'Who's that?'

'Good evening, sir,' said a sailor, who was fending off the yacht with a boat-hook. 'It's Commander von Brüning's launch. I think the gentlemen want to see you.'

Before we could answer, an exclamation of: 'Why, here they are!' came from the deck of the Dulcibella, and the dim form of von Brüning himself emerged from the companion-way. There was something of a scuffle down below, which the commander nearly succeeded in drowning by the breeziness of his greeting. Meanwhile, the ladder creaked under fresh weight, and Dollmann appeared.

'Is that you, Herr Davies?' he said.

'Hullo! Herr Dollmann,' said Davies; 'how are you?'

I must explain that we had floated up between the yacht and the launch, whose sailors had passed her a little aside in order to give us room. Her starboard side-light was just behind and above us, pouring its green rays obliquely over the deck of the Dulcibella, while we and the dinghy were in deep shadow between. The most studied calculation could not have secured us more favourable conditions for a moment which I had always dreaded—the meeting of Davies and Dollmann. The former, having shortened his sculls, just sat where he was, half turned towards the yacht and looking up at his enemy. No lineament of his own face could have been visible to the latter, while those pitiless green rays—you know their ravaging effect on the human physiognomy—struck full on Dollmann's face. It was my first fair view of it at close quarters, and, secure in my background of gloom, I feasted with a luxury of superstitious abhorrence on the livid smiling mask that for a few moments stooped peering down towards Davies. One of the caprices of the crude light was to obliterate, or at any rate so penetrate, beard and moustache, as to reveal in outline lips and chin, the features in which defects of character are most surely betrayed, especially when your victim smiles. Accuse me, if you will, of stooping to melodramatic embroidery; object that my own prejudiced fancy contributed to the result; but I can, nevertheless, never efface the impression of malignant perfidy amid base passion, exaggerated to caricature, that I received in those few instants. Another caprice of the light was to identify the man with the portrait of him when younger and clean-shaven, in the frontispiece of his own book; and another still, the most repulsively whimsical of all, was to call forth a strong resemblance to the sweet young girl who had been with us yesterday.

Enough! I shall never offend again in this way. In reality I am much more inclined to laugh than shudder over this meeting; for meanwhile the third of our self-invited guests had with stertorous puffing risen to the stage, for all the world like a demon out of a trap-door, specially when he entered the zone of that unearthly light. And there they stood in a row, like delinquents at judgement, while we, the true culprits, had only passively to accept explanations. Of course these were plausible enough. Dollmann having seen the yacht in port that morning had called on his return from Memmert to ask us to supper. Finding no one aboard, and concluding we were ashore, he had meant to leave a note for Davies in the cabin. Finding no one aboard, and concluding we were ashore, he had meant to leave a note for Davies in the cabin. His friend, Herr Böhme, _'the distinguished engineer',_ was anxious to see over the little vessel that had come so far, and he knew that Davies would not mind the intrusion. Not at all, said Davies; would not they stop and have drinks? No, but would we come to supper at Dollmann's villa? With pleasure, said Davies, but we had to change first. Up to this point we had been masters of the situation; but here von Brüning, who alone of the three appeared to be entirely at his ease, made the _retour offensif._

'Where have you been?' he asked.

'Oh, rowing about since the fog cleared,' said Davies.

I suppose he thought that evasion would pass muster, but as he spoke, I noticed to my horror that a stray beam of light was playing on the bunch of white cotton-waste that adorned one of the rowlocks: for we had forgotten to remove these tell-tale appendages. So I added: 'After ducks again'; and, lifting one of the guns, let the light flash on its barrel. To my own ears my voice sounded husky and distant.

'Always ducks,' laughed von Brüning. 'No luck, I suppose?'

'No,' said Davies; 'but it ought to be a good time after sunset--''

'What, with a rising tide and the banks covered?'

'We saw some,' said Davies, sullenly.

'I tell you what, my zealous young sportsmen, you're rash to leave your boat at anchor here after dark without a light. I came aboard to find your lamp and set it.'

'Oh, thanks,' said Davies; 'we took it with us.'

'To see to shoot by?'

We laughed uncomfortably, and Davies compassed a wonderful German phrase to the effect that 'it might come in useful'. Happily the matter went no farther, for the position was a strained one at the best, and would not bear lengthening. The launch went alongside, and the invaders evacuated British soil, looking, for all von Brüning's flippant nonchalance, a rather crestfallen party. So much so, that, acute as was my anxiety, I took courage to whisper to Davies, while the transhipment of Herr Böhme was proceeding: 'Ask Dollmann to stay while we dress.'
‘Why?’ he whispered.

‘Go on.’

‘I say, Herr Dollmann,’ said Davies, ‘won't you stay on board with us while we dress? There's a lot to tell you, and--and we can follow on with you when we're ready.’

Dollmann had not yet stepped into the launch. ‘With pleasure,’ he said; but there followed an ominous silence, broken by von Brüning.

‘Oh, come along, Dollmann, and let them alone,’ he said brusquely. ‘You'll be horribly in the way down there, and we shall never get any supper if you keep them yarning.’

‘And it's now a quarter-past eight o'clock,’ grumbled Herr Böhme from his corner behind the hood. Dollmann submitted, and excused himself, and the launch steamed away.

‘I think I twig,’ said Davies, as he helped, almost hoisted, me aboard. ‘Rather risky though--eh?’

‘I knew they'd object--only wanted to make sure.’

The cabin was just as we had left it, our shore clothes lying in disorder on the bunks, a locker or two half open.

‘Well, I wonder what they did down here,’ said Davies.

For my part I went straight to the bookshelf.

‘Does anything strike you about this?’ I asked, kneeling on the sofa.

‘Logbook's shifted,’ said Davies. ‘I'll swear it was at the end before.’

‘That doesn't matter. Anything else?’

‘By Jove!--where's Dollmann's book?’

‘It's here all right, but not where it should be.’ I had been reading it, you remember, overnight, and in the morning had replaced it in full view among the other books. I now found it behind them, in a wrenched attitude, which showed that someone who had no time to spare had pushed it roughly inwards.

‘What do you make of that?’ said Davies.

He produced long drinks, and we allowed ourselves ten minutes of absolute rest, stretched at full length on the sofas.

‘They don't trust Dollmann,’ I said. ‘I spotted that at Memmert even.’

‘How?’

‘First, when they were talking about you and me. He was on his defence, and in a deuce of a funk, too. Böhme was pressing him hard. Again, at the end, when he left the room followed by Grimm, who I'm certain was sent to watch him. It was while he was away that the other two arranged that rendezvous for the night of the _25th._ And again just now, when you asked him to stay. I believe it's working out as I thought it would. Von Brüning, and through him Böhme (who is the 'engineer from Bremen'), know the story of that short cut and suspect that it was an attempt on your life. Dollmann daren't confess to that, because, morality apart, it could only have been prompted by extreme necessity--that is, by the knowledge that you were really dangerous, and not merely an inquisitive stranger. Now we know his motive; but they don't yet. The position of that book proves it.’

‘He shoved it in?’

‘To prevent them seeing it. There's no earthly reason why _they_ should have hidden it.’

‘Then we're getting on,’ said Davies. ‘That shows they know his real name, or why should he shove the book in? But they don't know he wrote a book, and that I have a copy.’

‘At any rate he _thinks_ they don't; we can't say more than that.’

‘And what does he think about me--and you?’

‘That's the point. Ten to one he's in tortures of doubt, and would give a fortune to have five minutes' talk alone with you to see how the land lies and get your version of the short cut incident. But they won't let him. They want to watch him in our company and us in his; you see it's an interesting reunion for you and him.’

‘Well, let's get into these beastly clothes for it,’ groaned Davis. ‘I shall have a plunge overboard.’

‘Something drastic was required, and I followed his example, curious as the hour was for bathing.

‘I believe I know what happened just now,’ said I, as we plied rough towels in the warmth below. ‘They steamed up and found nobody on board. “I'll leave a note,” says Dollmann. “No independent communications,” say they (or think they), “we'll come too, and take the chance of inspecting this hornets' nest.” Down they go, and Dollmann, who knows what to look for first, sees that damning bit of evidence staring him in the face. They look casually at the shelf among other things--examine the logbook, say--and he manages to push his own book out of sight. But he couldn't replace it when the interruption came. The action would have attracted attention _then_, and Böhme made him leave the cabin in advance, you know.’

‘This is all very well,’ said Davies, pausing in his toilet, ‘but do they guess how we've spent the day? By Jove, Carruthers, that chart with the square cut out; there it is on the rack!’

‘We must chance it, and bluff for all we're worth,’ I said. The fact was that Davies could not be brought to realize
that he had done anything very remarkable that day; yet those fourteen sinuous miles traversed blindfold, to say
nothing of the return journey and my own exploits, made up an achievement audacious and improbable enough to
out-distance suspicion. Nevertheless, von Brüning's banter had been disquieting, and if an inkling of our expedition
had crossed his mind or theirs, there were ways of testing us which it would require all our effrontery to defeat.

'What are you looking for?' said Davies. I was at the collar and stud stage, but had broken off to study the time-
table which we had bought that morning.

'Somebody insists on coming by the night train to somewhere, on the _25th_,' I reminded him. 'Böhme, von
Brüning, and Grimm are to meet the Somebody.'

'Where?'

'At a railway station! I don't know where. They seemed to take it for granted. But it must be somewhere on the
sea, because Böhme said, "the tide serves."'

'It may be anywhere from Emden to Hamburg.' _[See Map B]_

'Ho, there's a limit; it's probably somewhere near. Grimm was to come, and he's at Memmert.'

'Here's the map... Emden and Norddeich are the only coast stations till you get to Wilhelmshaven--no, to
Carolinensiel; but those are a long way east.'

'And Emden's a long way south. Say Norddeich then; but according to this there's no train there after _6.15_
p.m.; that's hardly "night". When's high tide on the 25th?'

'Let's see--8.30 here to-night--Norddeich'll be the same. Somewhere between 10.30 and 11 on the 25th.'

'There's a train at Emden at 9.22 from Leer and the south, and one at 10.50 from the north.'

'Are you counting on another fog?' said Davies, mockingly.

'No; but I want to know what our plans are.'

'Can't we wait till this cursed inspection's over?'

'No, we can't; we should come to grief.' This was no barren truism, for I was ready with a plan of my own,
though reluctant to broach it to Davies.

Meanwhile, ready or not, we had to start. The cabin we left as it was, changing nothing and hiding nothing; the
 safest course to take, we thought, in spite of the risk of further search. But, as usual, I transferred my diary to my
breast-pocket, and made sure that the two official letters from England were safe in a compartment of it.

'What do you propose?' I asked, when we were in the dinghy again.

'It's a case of "as you were",' said Davies. 'To-day's trip was a chance we shall never get again. We must go back
to last night's decision--tell them that we're going to stay on here for a bit. Shooting, I suppose we shall have to say.'

'And courting?' I suggested.

'Well, they know all about that. And then we must watch for a chance of tackling Dollmann privately. Not to-
night, because we want time to consider those clues of yours.'

"Consider"? I said: 'that's putting it mildly.'

'We were at the ladder, and what a languid stiffness oppressed me I did not know till I touched its freezing rungs,
each one of which seared my sore palms like red-hot iron.

The overdue steamer was just arriving as we set foot on the quay. 'And yet, by Jove! why not to-night?' pursued
Davies, beginning to stride up the pier at a pace I could not imitate.

'Steady on,' I protested; 'and, look here, I disagree altogether. I believe to-day has doubled our chances, but
unless we alter our tactics it has doubled our risks. We've involved ourselves in too tangled a web. I don't like this
inspection, and I fear that foxy old Böhme who prompted it. The mere fact of their inviting us shows that we stand
badly; for it runs in the teeth of Brüning's warning at Bensersiel, and smells uncommonly like arrest. There's a rift
between Dollmann and the others, but it's a ticklish matter to drive our wedge in; as to _to-night_, hopeless; they're
on the watch, and won't give us a chance. And after all, do we know enough? We don't know why he fled from
England and turned German. It may have been an extraditable crime, but it may not. Supposing he defies us? There's
the girl, you see--she ties our hands, and if he once gets wind of that, and trades on our weakness, the game's up.'

'What are you driving at?'

'We want to detach him from Germany, but he'll probably go to any lengths rather than abandon his position
here. His attempt on you is the measure of his interest in it. Now, is to-day to be wasted?' We were passing through
the public gardens, and I dropped on to a seat for a moment's rest, crackling dead leaves under me. Davies remained
standing, and pecked at the gravel with his toe.

'We have got two valuable clues,' I went on; 'that rendezvous on the 25th is one, and the name Esens is the other.
We may consider them to eternity; I vote we act on them.'

'How?' said Davies. 'We're under a searchlight here; and if we're caught--'

'Your plan--ugh!--it's as risky as mine, and more so,' I replied, rising with a jerk, for a spasm of cramp took me.
'We must separate,' I added, as we walked on. 'We want, at one stroke, to prove to them that we're harmless, and to
get a fresh start. I go back to London.'

'To London!' said Davies. We were passing under an arc lamp, and, for the dismay his face showed, I might have said Kamchatka.

'Well, after all, it's where I ought to be at this moment,' I observed.

'Yes, I forgot. And me?'

'You can't get on without me, so you lay up the yacht here--taking your time.'

'While you?'

'After making inquiries about Dollmann's past I double back as somebody else, and follow up the clues.'

'You'll have to be quick,' said Davies, abstractedly.

'I can just do it in time for the 25th.'

'When you say "making inquiries",' he continued, looking straight before him, 'I hope you don't mean setting other people on his track?'

'He's fair game!' I could not help saying; for there were moments when I chafed under this scrupulous fidelity to our self-denying ordinance.

'He's our game, or nobody's,' said Davies, sharply.

'Oh, I'll keep the secret,' I rejoined.

'Let's stick together,' he broke out. 'I shall make a muck of it without you. And how are we to communicate--meet?'

'Somehow--that can wait. I know it's a leap in the dark, but there's safety in darkness.'

'Carruthers! what are we talking about? If they have the ghost of a notion where we have been to-day, you give us away by packing off to London. They'll think we know their secret and are clearing out to make use of it. _That_ means arrest, if you like!'

'Pessimist! Haven't I written proof of good faith in my pocket--official letters of recall, received to-day? It's one deception the less, you see; for those letters _may_ have been opened; skilfully done it's impossible to detect. When in doubt, tell the truth!'

'It's a rum thing how often it pays in this spying business,' said Davies, thoughtfully.

We had been tramping through deserted streets under the glare of electricity, I with my leaden shuffle, he with the purposeful forward stoop and swinging arms that always marked his gait ashore.

'Well, what's it to be?' I said. 'Here's the Schwannalleé.'

'I don't like it,' said he; 'but I trust your judgement.'

We turned slowly down, running over a few last points where prior agreement was essential. As we stood at the very gate of the villa: 'Don't commit yourself to dates,' I said; 'say nothing that will prevent you from being here at least a week hence with the yacht still afloat.' And my final word, as we waited at the door for the bell to be answered, was: 'Don't mind what _I_ say. If things look queer we may have to lighten the ship.'

'Lighten?' whispered Davies; 'oh, I hope I shan't bosh it.'

'I hope I shan't get cramp,' I muttered between my teeth.

It will be remembered that Davies had never been to the villa before.

24 Finesse

THE door of a room on the ground floor was opened to us by a man-servant. As we entered the rattle of a piano stopped, and a hot wave of mingled scent and cigar smoke struck my nostrils. The first thing I noticed over Davies's shoulder, as he preceded me into the room, was a woman - the source of the perfume I decided--turning round from the piano as he passed it and staring him up and down with a disdainful familiarity that I at once hotly resented. She was in evening dress, pronounced in cut and colour; had a certain exuberant beauty, not wholly ascribable to nature, and a notable lack of breeding. Another glance showed me Dollmann putting down a liqueur glass of brandy, and rising from a low chair with something of a start; and another, von Brüning, lying back in a corner of a sofa, smoking; on the same sofa, _vis-à-vis_ to him, was--yes, of course it was--Clara Dollmann; but how their surroundings alter people, I caught myself thinking. For the rest, I was aware that the room was furnished with ostentation, and was stuffy with stove-engendered warmth. Davies steered a straight course for Dollmann, and shook his hand with businesslike resolution. Then he tacked across to the sofa, abandoning me in the face of the enemy.

'Mr--?' said Dollmann.

'Carruthers,' I answered, distinctly. 'I was with Davies in the boat just now, but I don't think he introduced me. And now he has forgotten again,' I added, dryly, turning towards Davies, who, having presented himself to Fräulein Dollmann, was looking feebly from her to von Brüning, the picture of tongue-tied awkwardness. (The commander nodded to me and stretched himself with a yawn.)

'Von Brüning told me about you,' said Dollmann, ignoring my illusion, 'but I was not quite sure of the name. No; it was not an occasion for formalities, was it?' He gave a sudden, mirthless laugh. I thought him flushed and...
excitable: yet, seen in a normal light, he was in some respects a pleasant surprise, the remarkable conformation of
the head giving an impression of intellectual power and restless, almost insanely restless, energy.

'What need?' I said. 'I have heard so much about you from Davies--and Commander von Brüning--that we seem
to be old friends already.'

He shot a doubtful look at me, and a diversion came from the piano.

'And now, for Heaven's sake,' cried the lady of the perfume, 'let us join Herr Böhme at supper!'

'Let me present you to my wife,' said Dollmann.

So this was the stepmother; unmistakably German, I may add. I made my bow, and underwent much the same
sort of frank scrutiny as Davies, only that it was rather more favourable to me, and ended in a carmine smile.

There was a general movement and further introductions. Davies was led to the stepmother, and I found myself
confronting the daughter with quickened pulses, and a sudden sense of added complexity in the issues. I had, of
course, made up my mind to ignore our meeting of yesterday, and had assumed that she would do the same. And she
did ignore it--we met as utter strangers; nor did I venture (for other eyes were upon us) to transmit any sign of
intelligence to her. But the next moment I was wondering if I had not fallen into a trap. She had promised not to tell,
but under what circumstances? I saw the scene again; the misty flats, the spruce little sail-boat and its sweet young
mistress, fresh as a dewy flower, but blanched and demoralized by a horrid fear, appealing to my honour so to act
that we three should never meet again, promising to be silent, but as much in her own interest as ours, and under that
implied condition which I had only equivocally refused. The condition was violated, not by her fault or ours, but
violated. She was free to help her father against us, and was she helping him? What troubled me was the change in
her; that she--how can I express it without offence?--was less in discord with her surroundings than she should have
been; that in dress, pose and manner (as we exchanged some trivialities) she was too near reflecting the style of the
other woman; that, in fact, she in some sort realized my original conception of her, so brutally avowed to Davies, so
signally, as I had thought, falsified. In the sick perplexity that this discovery caused me I dare say I looked as foolish
as Davies had done, and more so, for the close heat of the room and its tainted atmosphere, succeeding so abruptly
to the wholesome nip of the outside air, were giving me a faintness which this moral check lessened my power to
combat. Von Brüning's face wore a sneering smile that I winced under; and, turning, I found another pair of eyes
fixed on me, those of Herr Böhme, whose squat figure had appeared at a pair of folding doors leading to an
adjoining room. Napkin in hand, he was taking in the scene before him with fat benevolence, but exceeding
shrewdness. I instantly noticed a faint red weal relieving the ivory of his bald head; and I had suffered too often in
the same quarter myself to mistake its origin, namely, our cabin doorway.

'This is the other young explorer, Böhme,' said von Brüning. 'Herr Davies kidnapped him a month ago, and
bullied and starved him into submission; they'll drown together yet. I believe his sufferings have been terrible.'

'His sufferings are over,' I retorted. 'I've mutinied--deserted--haven't I, Davies?' I caught Davies gazing with
solemn _gaucherie_ at Miss Dollmann.

'Oh, what?' he stammered. I explained in English. 'Oh, yes, Carruthers has to go home,' he said, in his vile lingo.

No one spoke for a moment, and even von Brüning had no persiflage ready.

'Well, are we never going to have supper?' said madame, impatiently; and with that we all moved towards the
folding doors. There had been little formality in the proceedings so far, and there was less still in the supper-room.
Böhme resumed his repast with appetite, and the rest of us sat down apparently at random, though an underlying
method was discernible. As it worked out, Dollmann was at one end of the small table, with Davies on his right and
Böhme on his left; Frau Dollmann at the other, with me on her right and von Brüning on her left. The seventh
personage, Fräulein Dollmann, was between the commander and Davies on the side opposite to me. No servants
appeared, and we waited on ourselves. I have a vague recollection of various excellent dishes, and a distinct one of
abundance of wine. Someone filled me a glass of champagne, and I confess that I drained it with honest avidity,
blessing the craftsman who coaxed forth the essence, the fruit that harboured it, the sun that warmed it.

'Why are you going so suddenly?' said von Brüning to me across the table.

'Didn't I tell you we had to call here for letters? I got mine this morning, and among others a summons back to
work. Of course I must obey.' (I found myself speaking in a frigid silence.) 'The annoying thing was that there were
two letters, and if I had only come here two days sooner I should have only got the first, which gave me an
extension.'

'You are very conscientious. How will they know?'

'Ah, but the second's rather urgent.'

'There was another uncomfortable silence, broken by Dollmann.

'By the way, Herr Davies,' he began, 'I ought to apologize to you for--'

'This was no business of mine, and the less interest I took in it the better; so I turned to Frau Dollmann and
abused the fog.'
'Have you been in the harbour all day?' she asked, 'then how was it you did not visit us? Was Herr Davies so shy?' (Curiosity or malice?)

'Quite the contrary; but I was,' I answered coldly; 'you see, we knew Herr Dollmann was away, and we really only called here to get my letters; besides, we did not know your address.' I looked at Clara and found her talking gaily to von Brüning, deaf seemingly to our little dialogue.

'Anyone would have told you it,' said madame, raising her eyebrows.

'I dare say; but directly after breakfast the fog came on, and--well, one cannot leave a yacht alone in a fog,' I said, with professional solidity.

Von Brüning pricked up his ears at this. 'I'll be hanged if that was _your_ maxim,' he laughed; 'you're too fond of the shore!' I sent him a glance of protest, as though to say: 'What's the use of your warning if you won't let me act on it?' For, of course, my excuses were meant chiefly for his consumption, and Fräulein Dollmann's. That the lady I addressed them to found them unpalatable was not my fault.

'Then you sat in your wretched little cabin all day?' she persisted.

'All day,' I said, brazenly; 'it was the safest thing to do.' And I looked again at Fräulein Dollmann, frankly and squarely. Our eyes met, and she dropped hers instantly, but not before I had learnt something; for if ever I saw misery under a mask it was on her face. No; she had not told.

I think I puzzled the stepmother, who shrugged her white shoulders, and said in that case she wondered we had dared to leave our precious boat and come to supper. If we knew Frisian fogs as well as she did--Oh, I explained, we were not so nervous as that; and as for supper on shore, if she only knew what a Spartan life we led--

'Oh, for mercy's sake, don't tell me about it!' she cried, with a grimace; 'I hate the mention of yachts. When I think of that dreadful Medusa coming from Hamburg--' I sympathized with half my attention, keeping one strained ear open for developments on my right. Davies, I knew, was in the thick of it, and none too happy under Böhme's eye, but working manfully. 'My fault--'sudden squall'--'quite safe,' were some of the phrases I caught; while I was aware, to my alarm, that he was actually drawing a diagram of something with bread-crumbs and table-knives. The subject seemed to gutter out to an awkward end, and suddenly Böhme, who was my right-hand neighbour, turned to me. 'You are starting for England to-morrow morning?' he said.

'Yes,' I answered; 'there is a steamer at 8.15, I believe.'

'That is good. We shall be companions.'

'Are you going to England, too, sir?' I asked, with hot misgivings.

'No, no! I am going to Bremen; but we shall travel together as far as--you go by Amsterdam, I suppose?--as far as Leer, then. That will be very pleasant.' I fancied there was a ghoulish gusto in his tone.

'Very,' I assented. 'You are making a short stay here, then?'

'As long as usual. I visit the work at Memmert once a month or so, spend a night with my friend Dollmann and his charming family' (he leer'd round him), 'and return.'

Whether I was right or wrong in my next step I shall never know, but obeying a strong instinct, 'Memmert,' I said; 'do tell me more about Memmert. We heard a good deal about it from Commander von Brüning; but--'

'He was discreet, I expect,' said Böhme.

'He left off at the most interesting part.'

'What's that about me?' joined in von Brüning.

'I was saying that we're dying to know more about Memmert, aren't we, Davies?'

'Oh, I don't know,' said Davies, evidently aghast at my temerity; but I did not mind that. If he roughed my suit, so much the better; I intended to rough his.

'You gave us plenty of history, commander, but you did not bring it up to date.' The triple alliance laughed, Dollmann boisterously.

'Well,' said von Brüning; 'I gave you very good reasons, and you acquiesced.'

'And now he is trying to pump me,' said Böhme, with his rasping chuckle.

'Wait a bit, sir; I have an excuse. The commander was not only mysterious but inaccurate. I appeal to you, Herr Dollmann, for it was _apropos_ of you. When we fell in with him at Bensersiel, Davies asked him if you were at home, and he said "No." When would you be back? Probably soon; _but_ he did not know when _._'

'Oh, he said that?' said Dollmann.

'Well, only three days later we arrive at Norderney, and find you have returned that very day, but have gone to Memmert. Again (by the way) the mysterious Memmert! But more than ever mysterious now, for in the evening, not only you and Herr Böhme--'

'What penetration!' laughed von Brüning.

'But also Commander von Brüning, pay us a visit in _his_ launch, all coming from Memmert!'
'And you infer?' said von Brüning.

'Why, that you must have known at Bensersiel--only three days ago--exactly when Herr Dollmann was coming back, having an appointment at Memmert with him for to-day.'

'Which I wished to conceal from you?'

'Yes, and that's why I'm so inquisitive; it's entirely your own fault.'

'So it seems,' said he, 'with mock humility; 'but fill your glass and go on, young man. Why should I want to deceive you?'

'That's just what I want to know. Come, confess now; wasn't there something important afoot to-day at Memmert? Something to do with the gold? You were inspecting it, sorting it, weighing it? Or I know! You were transporting it secretly to the mainland?'

'Not a very good day for that! But softly, Herr Carruthers; no fishing for admissions. Who said we had found any gold?'

'Well, have you? There!'

'That's better! Nothing like candour, my young investigator. But I am afraid, having no authority, I cannot assist you at all. Better try Herr Böhme again. I'm only a casual onlooker.'

'With shares.'

'Ah! you remember that? (He remembers everything!) With a few shares, then; but with no expert knowledge. Now, Böhme is the consulting engineer. Rescue me, Böhme.'

'I cannot disclaim expert knowledge,' said Böhme, with humorous gravity; 'but I disclaim responsibility. Now, Herr Dollmann is chairman of the company.'

'And I,' said Dollmann, with a noisy laugh, 'must fall back on the shareholders, whose interests I have to guard. One can't be too careful in these confidential matters.'

'Here's one who gives his consent,' I said. 'Can't he represent the rest?'

'Extorted by torture,' said von Brüning. 'I retract.'

'Don't mind them, Herr Carruthers,' cried Frau Dollmann, 'they are making fun of you; but I will give you a hint; no woman can keep a secret--'

'Ah!' I cried, triumphantly, 'you have been there?'

'I? Not I; I detest the sea! But Clara has.' Everyone looked at Clara, who in her turn looked in naive bewilderment from me to her father.

'Indeed?' I said, more soberly, 'but perhaps she is not a free agent.'

'Perfectly free!' said Dollmann.

'I have only been there once, some time ago,' said she, 'and I saw no gold at all.'

'Guarded,' I observed. 'I beg your pardon; I mean that perhaps you only saw what you were allowed to see. And, in any case, the fräulein has no expert knowledge and no responsibility, and, perhaps, no shares. Her province is to be charming, not to hold financial secrets.'

'I have done my best to help you,' said the stepmother.

'They're all against us, Davies.'

'Oh, chuck it, Carruthers!' said Davies, in English.

'He's insatiable,' said von Brüning, and there was a pause; clearly, they meant to elicit more.

'Well, I shall draw my own conclusions,' I said.

'This is interesting,' said von Brüning, 'in what sense?'

'It begins to dawn on me that you made fools of us at Bensersiel. Don't you remember, Davies, what an interest he took in all our doings? I wonder if he feared our exploring propensities might possibly lead us to Memmert?'

'Upon my word, this is the blackest ingratitude. I thought I made myself particularly agreeable to you.'

'Yes, indeed; especially about the duck shooting! How useful your local man would have been--both to us and to you!'

'Go on,' said the commander, imperturbably.

'Wait a moment; I'm thinking it out.' And thinking it out I was in deadly earnest, for all my levity, as I pressed my hand on my burning forehead and asked myself where I was to stop in this seductive but perilous fraud. To carry it too far was to court complete exposure; to stop too soon was equally compromising.

'What is he talking about, and why go on with this ridiculous mystery?' said Frau Dollmann.

'I was thinking about this supper party, and the way it came about,' I pursued, slowly.

'Nothing to complain of, I hope?' said Dollmann.

'Of course not! Impromptu parties are always the pleasantest, and this one was delightfully impromptu. Now I bet you I know its origin! Didn't you discuss us at Memmert? And didn't one of you suggest--'One would almost think you had been there,' said Dollmann. 'You may thank your vile climate that we weren't,' I retorted, laughing.
'But, as I was saying, didn't one of you suggest—which of you? Well, I'm sure it wasn't the commander--'

'Why not?' said Böhme.

'It's difficult to explain—an intuition, say—I am sure he stood up for us; and I don't think it was Herr Dollmann, because he knows Davies already, and he's always on the spot; and, in short I'll swear it was Herr Böhme, who is leaving early to-morrow. and had never seen either of us. It was you, sir, who proposed that we should be asked to supper to-night—for inspection?'

'Inspection?' said Böhme; 'what an extraordinary idea!'

'You can't deny it, though! And one thing more; in the harbour just now—no—this is going too far; I shall mortally offend you.' I gave way to hearty laughter.

'Come, let's have it. Your hallucinations are diverting.'

'If you insist; but this is rather a delicate matter. You know we were a little surprised to find you _all_ on board; and you, Herr Böhme, did you always take such a deep interest in small yachts? I am afraid that it was at a certain sacrifice of comfort that you _inspected_ ours!' And I glanced at the token he bore of his encounter with our lintel. There was a burst of pent-up merriment. in which Dollmann took the loudest share.

'I warned you, Böhme,' he said.

The engineer took the joke in the best possible part. 'We owe you apologies,' he conceded.

'Don't mention it,' said Davies.

'He_ doesn't mind,' I said; 'I'm the injured one. I'm sure you never suspected Davies, who could?' (Who indeed? I was on firm ground there.)

'The point is, what did you take _me_ for?'

'Perhaps we take you for it still,' said von Brüning.

'Oho! Still suspicious? Don't drive me to extremities.'

'What extremities?'

'When I get back to London I shall go to Lloyd's! I haven't forgotten that flaw in the title.' There was an impressive silence.

'Gentlemen,' said Dollmann, with exaggerated solemnity, 'we must come to terms with this formidable young man. What do you say?'

'Take me to Memmert,' I exclaimed. 'Those are my terms!'

'Take you to Memmert? But I thought you were starting for England to-morrow?'

'I ought to; but I'll stay for that.'

'You said it was urgent. Your conscience is very elastic.'

'That's my affair. Will you take me to Memmert?'

'What do you say, gentlemen?' Böhme nodded. 'I think we owe some reparation. Under promise of absolute secrecy, then?'

'Of course, now that you trust me. But you'll show me everything—honour bright—wreck, depot, and all?'

'Everything; if you don't object to a diver's dress.'

'Victory!' I cried, in triumph. 'We've won our point, Davies. And now, gentlemen, I don't mind saying that as far as I am concerned the joke's at an end; and, in spite of your kind offer, I must start for England to-morrow' under the good Herr Böhme's wing. And in case my elastic conscience troubles you (for I see you think me a weather-cock) here are the letters received this morning, establishing my identity as a humble but respectable clerk in the British Civil Service, summoned away from his holiday by a tyrannical superior.' (I pulled out my letters and tossed them to Dollmann.) 'Ah, you don't read English easily, perhaps? I dare say Herr Böhme does.'

Leaving Böhme to study dates, post-marks, and contents to his heart's content, and unobserved, I turned to sympathize with my fair neighbour, who complained that her head was going round; and no wonder. But at this juncture, and very much to my surprise, Davies struck in.

'I should like to go to Memmert,' he said.

'You?' said von Brüning. 'Now I'm surprised at that.'

'But you won't be staying here either, Davies,' I objected.

'Yes, I shall,' said Davies. 'Why, I told you I should. If you leave me in the lurch like this I must have time to look round.'

'You needn't pretend that you cannot sail alone,' said von Brüning.

'It's much more fun with two; I think I shall write for another friend. Meanwhile, I should like to see Memmert.'

'That's only an excuse, I'm afraid,' said I.

'I want to shoot ducks too,' pursued Davies, reddening. 'I always have wanted to; and you promised to help in that, commander.'
'You can't get out of it now,' I laughed.

'Certainly not,' said he, unmoved; 'but, honestly, I should advise Herr Davies, if he is ever going to get home this season, to make the best of this fine weather.'

'It's too fine,' said Davies; 'I prefer wind. If I cannot get a friend I think I shall stop cruising, leave the yacht here, and come back for her next year.

There was some mute telegraphy between the allies.

'You can leave her in my charge,' said Dollmann, 'and start with your friend to-morrow.'

'Thanks; but there is no hurry,' said Davies, growing redder than ever. 'I like Norderney--and we might have another sail in your dinghy, fräulein,' he blurted out.

'Thank you,' she said, in that low dry voice I had heard yesterday; 'but I think I shall not be sailing again--it is getting too cold.'

'Oh, no!' said Davies, 'it's splendid.' But she had turned to von Brüning, and took no notice.

'Well, send me a report about Memmert, Davies,' I laughed, with the idea of drawing attention from his rebuff. But Davies, having once delivered his soul, seemed to have lost his shyness, and only gazed at his neighbour with the placid, dogged expression that I knew so well. That was the end of those delicate topics; and conviviality grew apace.

I am not indifferent at any time to good wine and good cheer, nor was it for lack of pressing that I drank as sparingly as I was able, and pretended to a greater elation than I felt. Nor certainly was it from any fine scruples as to the character of the gentleman whose hospitality we were receiving--scruples which I knew affected Davies, who ate little and drank nothing. In any case he was adamant in such matters, and I verily believe would at any time have preferred our own little paraffin-flavoured messes to the best dinner in the world. It was a very wholesome caution that warned me not to abuse the finest brain tonic ever invented by the wit of man. I had finessed Memmert, as one finesses a low card when holding a higher; but I had too much respect for our adversaries to trade on any fancied security we had won thereby. They had allowed me to win the trick, but I credited them with a better knowledge of my hand than they chose to show. On the other hand I hugged the axiom that in all conflicts it is just as fatal to underrate the difficulties of your enemy as to overrate your own. Their chief one--and it multiplied a thousandfold the excitement of the contest--was, I felt sure, the fear of striking in error; of using a sledge-hammer to break a nut. In breaking it they risked publicity, and publicity, I felt convinced, was death to their secret. So, even supposing they had detected the finess, and guessed that we had in fact got wind of imperial designs; yet, even so, I counted on immunity so long as they thought we were on the wrong scent, with Memmert, and Memmert alone, as the source of our suspicions.

Had it been necessary I was prepared to encourage such a view, admitting that the cloth von Brüning wore had made his connexion with Memmert curious, and had suggested to Davies, for I should have put it on him, with his naval enthusiasms, that the wreck-works were really naval-defence works. If they went farther, and suspected that we had tried to go to Memmert that very day, the position was worse, but not desperate; for the fear that they would take the final step and suppose that we had actually got there and overhead their talk, I flatly refused to entertain, until I should find myself under arrest.

Precisely how near we came to it I shall never rightly know; but I have good reason to believe that we trembled on the verge. The main issue was fully enough for me, and it was only in passing flashes that I followed the play of the warring under-currents. And yet, looking back on the scene, I would warrant there was no party of seven in Europe that evening where a student of human documents would have found so rich a field, such noble and ignoble ambitions, such base and holy fears, aye, and such pitiful agonies of the spirit. Roughly divided though we were into separate camps, no two of us were wholly at one. Each wore a mask in the grand imposture; excepting, I am inclined to think, the lady on my left, who, outside her own well-being, which she cultivated without reserve, had, as far as I could see, but one axe to grind--the intimacy of von Brüning and her stepdaughter--and ground it openly.

Not even Böhme and von Brüning were wholly at one; and as moral distances are reckoned, Davies and I were leagues apart. Sitting between Dollmann and Dollmann's daughter, the living and breathing symbols of the two polar passions he had sworn to harmonize, he kept an equilibrium which, though his aims were nominally mine, I could not attain to. For me the man was the central figure; if I had attention to spare it was on him that I bestowed it; groping disgustfully after his hidden springs of action, noting the evidences of great gifts squandered and prostituted; questioning where he was most vulnerable; whom he feared most, us or his colleagues; whether he was open to remorse or shame; or whether he meditated further crime. The girl was incidental. After the first shock of surprise I had soon enough discovered that she, like the rest, had assumed a disguise; for she was far too innocent to sustain the deception; and yesterday was fresh in my memory. I was forced to continue turning her assumed character to account; but it would be pharisaical in me to say that I rose to any moral heights in her regard--wine and excitement had deadened my better nature to that extent. I thought she looked prettier than ever, and, as time passed,
I fell into a cynical carelessness about her. This glimpse of her home life, and the desperate expedients to which she was driven (whether by compulsion or from her own regard for Davies) to repel and dismiss him, did not strike me as they might have done as the crowning argument in favour of the course we had adopted the night before, that of compassing our end without noise and scandal, disarming Dollmann, but aiding him to escape from the allies he had betrayed. To Davies, the man, if not a pure abstraction, was at most a noxious vermin to be trampled on for the public good; while the girl, in her blackguardly surroundings, and with her sinister future, had become the very source of his impulse.

And the other players? Böhme was _my_ abstraction, the fortress whose foundations we were sapping, the embodiment of that systematized force which is congenital to the German people. In von Brüning, the personal factor was uppermost. Callous as I was this evening, I could not help wondering occasionally, as he talked and laughed with Clara Dollmann, what in his innermost thoughts, knowing her father, he felt and meant. It is a point I cannot and would not pursue, and, thank Heaven, it does not matter now; yet, with fuller knowledge of the facts, and, I trust, a mellower judgement, I often return to the same debate, and, by I know not what illogical bypaths, always arrive at the same conclusion, that I liked the man and like him still.

We behaved as sportsmen in the matter of time, giving them over two hours to make up their minds about us. It was only when tobacco smoke and heat brought back my faintness, and a twinge of cramp warned me that human strength has limits, that I rose and said we must go; that I had to make an early start to-morrow. I am hazy about the farewells, but I think that Dollmann was the most cordial, to me at any rate, and I augured good therefrom. Böhme said he should see me again. Von Brüning, though bound for the harbour also, considered it was far too early to be going yet, and said good-bye.

'You want to talk us over,' I remember saying, with the last flicker of gaiety I could muster.

We were in the streets again, under a silver, breathless night; dizzily footing the greasy ladder again; in the cabin again, where I collapsed on a sofa just as I was, and slept such a deep and stringent sleep that the men of the Blitz's launch might have handcuffed and trussed and carried me away, without incommoding me in the least.

25 I Double Back

'GOOD-BYE, old chap,' called Davies.

'Good-bye,' the whistle blew and the ferry-steamer forged ahead, leaving Davies on the quay, bareheaded and wearing his old Norfolk jacket and stained grey flannels, as at our first meeting in Flensburg station. There was no bandaged hand this time, but he looked pinched and depressed; his eyes had black circles round them; and again I felt that same indefinable pathos in him.

'Your friend is in low spirits,' said Böhme, who was installed on a seat beside me, voluminously caped and rugged against the biting air. It was a still, sunless day.

'So am I,' I grunted, and it was the literal truth. I was only half awake, felt unwashed and dissipated, heavy in head and limbs. But for Davies I should never have been where I was. It was he who had patiently coaxed me out of my bunk, packed my bag, fed me with tea and an omelette (to which I believe he had devoted peculiarly tender care), and generally mothered me for departure. While I swallowed my second cup he was brushing the mould and smoothing the dents from my felt hat, which had been entombed for a month in the sail-locker; working at it with a remorseful concern in his face. The only initiative I am conscious of having shown was in the matter of my bag. 'Put in my sea clothes, oils, and all,' I had said; 'I may want them again.' Davies did not badger or complain, but only timidly asked me how we were to meet and communicate, a question on which my mind was an absolute blank.

'Look out for me about the 26th,' I suggested feebly.

Before we left the cabin he gave me a scrap of pencilled paper and saw that it went safely into my pocket-book. 'Look at it in the train,' he said.

Unable to cope with Böhme, I paced the deck aimlessly as we swung round the See-Gat into the Buse Tief, trying to identify the point where we crossed it yesterday blindfold. But the tide was full, and the waters blank for miles round till they merged in haze. Soon I drifted down into the saloon, and crouching over a stove pulled out that scrap of paper. In a crabbed, boyish hand, and much besmudged with tobacco ashes, I found the following notes:

(1) _Your journey_. [See Maps A and B.] Norddeich 8.58, Emden 10.32, Leer 11.16 (Böhme changes for Bremen), Rheine 1.8 (change), Amsterdam 7.17 p.m. Leave again _via_ Hook 8.52, London 9 am.

(2) The coast-station—_their_ rendezvous—query is it Norden? (You pass it 9.13)—there is a tidal creek up to it. High-water there on 25th, say 10.30 to 11 p.m. It cannot be Norddeich, which I find has a dredged-out low-water channel for the steamer, so tide 'serves' would not apply.

(3) _Your other clews_ (tugs, pilots, depths, railway, Esens, seven of something). Query; Scheme of defence by land and sea for North Sea Coast?
Sea.--7 islands, 7 channels between (counting West Ems), very small depths (what you said) in most of them. Tugs and pilots for patrol work behind islands, as I always said. Querry; Rendezvous is for inspecting channels.

Land.--Look at railway (map in ulster pocket) running in a loop all round Friesland, a few miles from coast. Querry: To be used as line of communication for army corps. Troops could be quickly sent to any threatened point. 

_Esens_ the base? It is in top centre of loop. Von Brooning dished us fairly over that at Bensersiel.

Chatham.--D. was spying after our naval plans for war with Germany. 

Von Brooning runs naval part over here.

Where does Burmer come in? Querry--you go to Breman and find out about him?

I nodded stupidly over this document--so stupidly that I found myself wondering whether Burmer was a place or a person. Then I dozed, to wake with a violent start and find the paper on the floor. Panic-stricken, I hid it away, and went on deck, when I found we were close to Norddeich, running up to the bleakest of bleak jetties thrown out from the dyke-bound polders of the mainland. Böhme and I landed together, and he was at my elbow as I asked for a ticket for Amsterdam, and was given one as far as Rheine, a junction near the Dutch frontier. He was ensconced in an opposite corner to me in the railway carriage, looking like an Indian idol. 'Where do you come in?' I pondered, dreamily. Too sleepy to talk, I could only blink at him, sitting bolt upright with my arms folded over my precious pocket-book. Finally, I gave up the struggle, buttoned my ulster tightly up, and turning my back upon him with an apology, lay down to sleep, the precious pocket nethermost. He was at liberty to rifle my bag if he chose, and I dare say he did. I cannot say, for from this point till Rheine, for the best part of four hours, that is, I had only two lucid intervals.

The first was at Emden, where we both had to change. Here, as we pushed our way down the crowded platform, Böhme, after being greeted respectfully by several persons, was at last buttonholed without means of escape by an obsequious gentleman, whose description is of no moment, but whose conversation is. It was about a canal; what canal I did not gather, though, from a name dropped, I afterwards identified it as one in course of construction as a feeder to the Ems. The point is that the subject was canals. At the moment it was seed dropped in unreceptive soil, but it germinated later. I passed on, mingling with the crowd, and was soon asleep again in another carriage where Böhme this time did not follow me.

The second occasion was at Leer, where I heard myself called by name, and woke to find him at the window. He had to change trains, and had come to say good-bye. 'Don't forget to go to Lloyd's,' he grated in my ear. I expect it was a wan smile that I returned, for I was at a very low ebb, and my fortress looked sarcastically impregnable. But the sapper was free; 'free' was my last conscious thought.

Even after Rheine, where I changed for the last time, a brutish drowsiness enchained me, and the afternoon was well advanced before my faculties began to revive.

The train crept like a snail from station to station. I might, so a fellow-passenger told me, have waited three hours at Rheine for an express which would have brought me to Amsterdam at about the same time; or, if I had chosen to break the journey farther back, two hours at either Emden or Leer would still have enabled me to catch the said express at Rheine. These alternatives had escaped Davies, and, I surmised, had been suppressed by Böhme, who doubtless did not want me behind him, free either to double back or to follow him to Bremen.

The pace, then, was execrable, and there were delays; we were behind time at Hengelo, thirty minutes late at Apeldoorn; so that I might well have grown nervous about my connexions at Amsterdam, which were in some jeopardy. But as I battled out of my lethargy and began to take account of our position and prospects, quite a different thought at the outset affected me. Anxiety to reach London was swamped in reluctance to quit Germany, so that I found myself grudging every mile that I placed between me and the frontier. It was the old question of urgency. To-day was the 23rd. The visit to London meant a minimum absence of forty-eight hours, counting from Amsterdam; that is to say, that by travelling for two nights and one day, and devoting the other day to investigating Dollmann's past, it was humanly possible for me to be back on the Frisian coast on the evening of the 25th. Yes, I could be at Norden, if that was the 'rendezvous', at 7 p.m. But what a scramble! No margin for delays, no physical respite. Some pests take a deal of raking up--other persons may be affected; men are cautious, they trip you up with red tape; or the man who knows is out at lunch--a protracted lunch; or in the country--a protracted week-end. Will you see Mr So-and-so, or leave a note? Oh! I know those public departments--from the inside! And the Admiralty! ... I saw myself baffled and racing back the same night to Germany, with two days wasted, arriving, good for nothing, at Norden, with no leisure to reconnoitre my ground; to be baffled again there, probably, for you cannot always count on fogs (as Davies said). Esens was another clue, and 'to follow Burmer'--there was something in that notion. But I wanted time, and had I time? How long could Davies maintain himself at Norderney? Not so very long, from what I remembered of last night. And was he even safe there? A feverish dream recurred to me--a dream of
Davies in a diving-dress; of a regrettable hitch in the air-supply--Stop, that was nonsense! ... Let us be sane. What matter if he had to go? What matter if I took my time in London? Then with a flood of shame I saw Davies's wistful face on the quay, heard his grim ejaculation: 'He's our game or no one's'; and my own sullen 'Oh, I'll keep the secret!' London was utterly impossible. If I found my informant, what credentials had I, what claim to confidences? None, unless I told the whole story. Why, my mere presence in Whitehall would imperil the secret; for, once on my native heath, I should be recognized--possibly hailed to judgement; at the best should escape in a cloud of rumour--'last heard of at Norderney;' 'only this morning was raising Cain at the Admiralty about a mythical lieutenant.' No! Back to Friesland, was the word. One night's rest--I must have that--between sheets, on a feather bed; one long, luxurious night, and then back refreshed to Friesland, to finish our work in our own way, and with none but our own weapons.

Having reached this resolve, I was nearly putting it into instant execution, by alighting at Amersfoort, but thought better of it. I had a transformation to effect before I returned North, and the more populous centre I made it in the less it was likely to attract notice. Besides, I had in my mind's eye a perfect bed in a perfect hostelry hard by the Amstel River. It was an economy in the end.

So, at half-past eight I was sipping my coffee in the aforesaid hostelry, with a London newspaper before me, which was unusually interesting, and some German journals, which, 'in hate of a wrong not theirs', were one and all seething with rancorous Anglophobia. At nine I was in the Jewish quarter, striking bargains in an infamous marine shop-shop. At half-past nine I was despatching this unscrupulous telegram to my chief--'Very sorry, could not call Norderney; hope extension all right; please write to Hôtel du Louvre, Paris.' At ten I was in the perfect bed, rapturously flinging my limbs abroad in its glorious redundancies. And at 8.28 on the following morning, with a novel chilliness about the upper lip, and a vast excess of strength and spirits, I was sitting in a third-class carriage, bound for Germany, and dressed as a young seaman, in a pea-jacket, peaked cap, and comforter.

The transition had not been difficult. I had shaved off my moustache and breakfasted hastily in my bedroom, ready equipped for a journey in my ulster and cloth cap. I had dismissed the hotel porter at the station, and left my bag at the cloak-room, after taking out of it an ember bundle and substituting the ulster. The ember bundle, which consisted of my oileens, and within them my sea-boots and a few other garments and necessaries, the whole tied up with a length of tarry rope, was now in the rack above me, and (with a stout stick) represented my luggage. Every article in it--I shudder at their origin--was in strict keeping with my humble _métier_, for I knew they were liable to search at the frontier custom-house; but there was a Baedeker of Northern Germany in my jacket pocket.

For the nonce, if questions were asked, I was an English seaman, going to Emden to join a ship, with a ticket as far as the frontier. Beyond that a definite scheme of action had still to be thought out. One thing, however, was sure. I was determined to be at Norden to-morrow night, the 25th. A word about Norden, which is a small town seven miles south of Norddeich. When hurriedly scanning the map for coast stations in the cabin yesterday, I had not thought of Norden, because it did not appear to be on the coast, but Davies had noticed it while I slept, and I now saw that his pencilled hint was a shrewd one. The creek he spoke of, though barely visible on the map, flowed into the Ems Estuary in a south-westerly direction. The 'night train' tallied to perfection, for high tide in the creek would be, as Davies estimated, between 10.30 and 11 p.m. on the night of the 25th; and the time-table showed that the only night train arriving at Norden was one from the south at 10.46 p.m. This looked promising.

So far good; but how was I to spend the intervening time? Should I act on Davies's 'query' and go to Bremen after Böhme? I soon dismissed that idea. It was one to act upon if others failed; for the present it meant another scramble. Bremen is six hours from Norden by rail. I should spend a disproportionate amount of my limited time in trains, and I should want a different disguise. Besides, I had already learnt something fresh about Böhme; for the seed dropped at Emden Station yesterday had come to life. A submarine engineer I knew him to be before; I now thought better of it. I had a transformation to effect before I returned North, and the more populous centre I made it in the less it was likely to attract notice. Besides, I had in my mind's eye a perfect bed in a perfect hostelry hard by the Amstel River. It was an economy in the end.

And at Esens?...
a word of her came into the document. I smiled to see his undying faith in the 'channel theory' reconciled at the
eleventh hour, with new data touching the neglected 'land'.

The result was certainly interesting, but it left me cold. That there existed in the German archives some such
scheme of defence for the North Sea coast was very likely indeed. The seven islands, with their seven shallow
channels (though, by the way, two of them, the twin branches of the Ems, are by no means so shallow), were a very
fair conjecture, and fitted in admirably with the channel theory, whose intrinsic merits I had always recognized; my
constant objection having been that it did not go nearly far enough to account for our treatment. The ring of railway
round the peninsula, with Esens at the apex, was suggestive, too; but the same objection applied. Every country with
a maritime frontier has, I suppose, secret plans of mobilization for its defence, but they are not such as could be
discovered by passing travellers, not such as would warrant stealthy searches, or require for their elaboration so
recondite a meeting-place as Memmert. Dollmann was another weak point; Dollmann in England, spying. All
countries, Germany included, have spies in their service, dirty though necessary tools; but Dollmann in such
intimate association with the principal plotters on this side; Dollmann rich, influential, a power in local affairs--it
was clear he was no ordinary spy.

And here I detected a hesitation in Davies's rough sketch, a reluctance, as it were, to pursue a clue to its logical
end. He spoke of a German scheme of coast defence, and in the next breath of Dollmann spying for English plans in
the event of war with Germany, and there he left the matter; but what sort of plans? Obviously (if he was on the
right track) plans of attack on the German coast as opposed to those of strategy on the high seas. But what sort of an
attack? Obviously again, if his railway-ring meant anything, an attack by invasion on that remote and desolate
littoral which he had so often himself declared to be impregnable secure behind its web of sands and shallows. My
mind went back to my question at Bensersiel, 'Can this coast be invaded?' to his denial and our fruitless survey of
the dykes and polders. Was he now reverting to a fancy we had both rejected, while shrinking from giving it explicit
utterance? The doubt was tantalizing.

A brief digression here about the phases of my journey. At Rheine 1 changed trains, turned due north and
became a German seaman. There was little risk in a defective accent--sailors are so polyglott; while an English sailor
straying about Esens might excite curiosity. Yesterday I had paid no heed to the landscape; to-day I neglected
nothing that could conceivably supply a hint.

From Rheine to Emden we descended the valley of the Ems; at first through a land of thriving towns and fat
pastures, degenerating farther north to spaces of heathy bog and moorland--a sad country, but looking at its best,
such as that was, for I should mention here that the weather, which in the early morning had been as cold and misty
as ever, grew steadily milder and brighter as the day advanced; while my newspaper stated that the glass was falling
and the anticyclone giving way to pressure from the Atlantic.

At Emden, where we entered Friesland proper, the train crossed a big canal, and for the twentieth time that day
(for we had passed numbers of them in Holland, and not a few in Germany), I said to myself, 'Canals, canals. Where
does Böhme come in?' It was dusk, but light enough to see an unfamiliar craft, a torpedo-boat in fact, moored to
stakes at one side. In a moment I remembered that page in the North Sea Pilot where the Ems-Jade Canal is referred
to as deep enough to carry gun-boats, and as used for that strategic purpose between Wilhelmshaven and Emden,
along the base, that is, of the Frisian peninsula. I asked a peasant opposite; yes, that was the Ems-Jade Canal. Had
Davies forgotten it? It would have greatly strengthened his halting sketch.

At the bookstall at Emden I bought a pocket ordnance map [There is. of course, no space to reproduce this, but
here and henceforward the reader is referred to Map B.] of Friesland, on a much larger scale than anything I had
used before, and when I was unobserved studied the course of the canal, with an impatience which, alas! quickly
cooled. From Emden northwards I used the same map to aid my eyesight, and with its help saw in the gathering
gloom more heaths and bogs once a great glimmering lake, and at intervals cultivated tracts; a watery land as ever;
pools, streams and countless drains and ditches. Extensive woods were marked also, but farther inland. We passed
Norden at seven, just dark. I looked out for the creek, and sure enough, we crossed it just before entering the station.
Its bed was nearly dry, and I distinguished barges lying aground in it. This being the junction for Esens, I had to wait
three-quarters of an hour, and then turned east through the uttermost northern wilds, stopping at occasional village
stations and keeping five or six miles from the sea. It was during this stage, in a wretchedly lit compartment, and
alone for the most part, that I finally assembled all my threads and tried to weave them into a cable whose core
should be Esens; 'a town', so Baedeker said, 'of 3,500 inhabitants, the centre of a rich agricultural district. Fine spire.'

Esens is four miles inland from Bensersiel. I reviewed every circumstance of that day at Bensersiel, and boiled
to think how von Brüning had tricked me. He had driven to Esens himself, and read me so well that he actually
offered to take me with him, and I had refused from excess of cleverness. Stay, though; if I had happened to accept
he would have taken very good care that I saw nothing important. The secret, therefore, was not writ large on the
walls of Esens. Was it connected with Bensersiel too, or the country between? I searched the ordnance map again,
standing up to get a better light and less jolting. There was the road northwards from Esens to Bensersiel, passing through dotts and cheese-board squares, the former meaning fen, the latter fields, so the reference said. Something else, too, immediately caught my eye, and that was a stream running to Bensersiel. I knew it at once for the muddy stream or drain we had seen at the harbour, issuing through the sluice or _siel_ from which Bensersiel took its name. But it arrested my attention now because it looked more prominent than I should have expected. Charts are apt to ignore the geography of the mainland, except in so far as it offers sea-marks to mariners. On the chart this stream had been shown as a rough little corkscrew, like a sucking-pig's tail. On the ordnance map it was marked with a dark blue line, was labelled 'Benser Tief', and was given a more resolute course; bends became angles, and there were what appeared to be artificial straightnesses at certain points. One of the threads in my skein, the canal thread, tingled sympathetically, like a wire charged with current. Standing astraddle on both seats, with the map close to the lamp, I greedily followed the course of the 'tief' southward. It inclined away from the road to Esens and passed the town about a mile to the west, diving underneath the railway. Soon after it took angular tacks to the eastward, and joined another blue line trending south-east, and lettered 'Esens--Wittmund _Canal_.' This canal, however, came to an abrupt end halfway to Wittmund, a neighbouring town.

For the first time that day there came to me a sense of genuine inspiration. Those shallow depths and short distances, fractions of metres and kilometres, which I had overheard from Böhme's lips at Memmert, and which Davies had attributed to the outside channels--did they refer to a canal? I remembered seeing barges in Bensersiel harbour. I remembered conversations with the natives in the inn, scraps of the post-master's pompous loquacity, talks of growing trade, of bricks and grain passing from the interior to the islands: from another source--was it the grocer of Wangeroog?--of expansion of business in the islands themselves as bathing resorts; from another source again--von Brüning himself, surely--of Dollmann's personal activity in the development of the islands. In obscure connexion with these things, I saw the torpedo-boat in the Ems-Jade Canal.

It was between Dornum and Esens that these ideas came, and I was still absorbed in them when the train drew up, just upon nine o'clock, at my destination, and after ten minutes' walk, along with a handful of other passengers, I found myself in the quiet cobbled streets of Esens, with the great church steeple, that we had so often seen from the sea, soaring above me in the moonlight.

26 The Seven Siels

SELECTING the very humblest _Gasthaus_ I could discover, I laid down my bundle and called for beer, bread, and _Wurst._ The landlord, as I had expected, spoke the Frisian dialect, so that though he was rather difficult to understand, he had no doubts about the purity of my own German high accent. He was a worthy fellow, and hospitably interested: 'Did I want a bed?' 'No; I was going on to Bensersiel,' I said, 'to sleep there, and take the morning _Postschiff_ to Langeoog Island.' (I had not forgotten our friends the twin giants and their functions.) 'I was not an islander myself,' he asked. 'No, but I had a married sister there; had just returned from a year's voyaging, and was going to visit her.' 'By the way,' I asked, 'how are they getting on with the Benser Tief?' My friend shrugged his shoulders; it was finished, he believed. 'And the connexion to Wittmund?' 'Under construction still.' 'Langeoog would be going ahead then?' 'Oh! he supposed so, but he did not believe in these new-fangled schemes.' 'But it was good for trade, I supposed?' Esens would benefit in sending goods by the "tief"--what was the traffic, by the way? 'Oh, a few more barge-loads than before of bricks, timber, coals, etc., but it would come to nothing _he_ knew: _Aktiengesellschaften_ (companies) were an invention of the devil. A few speculators got them up and made money themselves out of land and contracts, while the shareholders they had hoodwinked starved.' 'There's something in that,' I conceded to this bigoted old conservative; 'my sister at Langeoog rents her lodging-house from a man named Dollmann; they say he owns a heap of land about. I saw his yacht once--pink velvet and electric light inside. They say--'

'That's the name,' said mine host, 'that's one of them--some sort of foreigner, I've heard; runs a salvage concern, too, _Juist_ way.'

'Well, he won't get any of my savings!' I laughed, and soon after took my leave, and inquired from a passer-by the road to Dornum. 'Follow the railway,' I was told.

With a warm wind in my face from the south-west, fleecy clouds and a half-moon overhead, I set out, not for Bensersiel but for Benser Tief, which I knew must cross the road to Dornum somewhere. A mile or so of cobbled causeway flanked with ditches and willows, and running cheek by jowl with the railway track; then a bridge, and below me the 'Tief'; which was, in fact, a small canal. A rutty track left the road, and sloped down to it one side; a rough sidings left the railway, and sloped down to it on the other.

I lit a pipe and sat on the parapet for a little. No one was stirring, so with great circumspection I began to reconnoitre the left bank to the north. The sidings entered a fenced enclosure by a locked gate--a gate I could have easily climbed, but I judged it wiser to go round by the bridge again and look across. The enclosure was a small coal-store, nothing more; there were gaunt heaps of coal glittering in the moonlight; a barge half loaded lying
alongside, and a deserted office building. I skulked along a sandy towpath in solitude. Fens and field were round me, as the map had said; willows and osier-beds; the dim forms of cattle; the low melody of wind roaming unfettered over a plain; once or twice the flutter and quack of a startled wild-duck.

Presently I came to a farmhouse, dark and silent; opposite it, in the canal, a couple of empty barges. I climbed into one of these, and sounded with my stick on the off-side—barely three feet; and the torpedo-boat melted out of my speculations. The stream, I observed also, was only just wide enough for two barges to pass with comfort. Other farms I saw, or thought I saw, and a few more barges lying in side-cuts linked by culverts to the canal, but nothing noteworthy; and mindful that I had to explore the Wittmund side of the railway too, I turned back, already a trifle damped in spirits, but still keenly expectant.

Passing under the road and railway, I again followed the tow-path, which, after half a mite, plunged into woods, then entered a clearing and another fenced enclosure; a timber-yard by the look of it. This time I stripped from the waist downward, waded over, dressed again, and climbed the paling. (There was a cottage standing back, but its occupants evidently slept.) I was in a timber-yard, by the stacks of wood and the steam saw-mill; but something more than a timber-yard, for as I warily advanced under the shadow of the trees at the edge of the clearing I came to a long tin shed which strangely reminded me of Memmert, and below it, nearer the canal, loomed a dark skeleton framework, which proved to be a half-built vessel on stocks. Close by was a similar object, only nearly completed—a barge. A paved slipway led to the water here, and the canal broadened to a siding or back-water in which lay seven or eight more barges in tiers. I scaled another paling and went on, walking, I should think, three miles by the side of the canal, till the question of bed and ulterior plans brought me to a halt. It was past midnight, and I was adding little to my information. I had encountered a brick-field, but soon after that there was increasing proof that the canal was as yet little used for traffic. In grew narrower, and there were many signs of recent labour for its improvement. In one place a dammed-off deviation was being excavated, evidently to abridge an impossible bend. The path had become atrocious, and my boots were heavy with clay. Bearing in mind the abruptly-ending blue line on the map, I considered it useless to go farther, and retraced my steps, trying to concoct a story which would satisfy an irritable Esens inn-keeper that it was a respectable wayfarer, and not a tramp or a lunatic, who knocked him up at half-past one or thereabouts.

But a much more practical resource occurred to me as I approached the timber-yard; for lodging, free and accessible, lay there ready to hand. I boarded one of the empty barges in the backwater, and surveyed my quarters for the night. It was of a similar pattern to all the others I had seen; a lighter, strictly, in the sense that it had no means of self-propulsion, and no separate quarters for a crew, the whole interior of the hull being free for cargo. At both bow and stern there were ten feet or so of deck, garnished with bitts and bollards. The rest was an open well, flanked by waterways of substantial breadth; the whole of stout construction and, for a humble lighter, of well-proportioned and even graceful design, with a marked forward sheer, and, as I had observed in the specimen on the stocks, easy lines at the stern. In short, it was apparent, even to an ignorant landsman like myself, that she was designed not merely for canal work but for rough water; and well she might be, for, though the few miles of sea she had to cross in order to reach the islands were both shallow and sheltered, I knew from experience what a vicious surf they could be whipped into by a sudden gale. It must not be supposed that I dwelt on this matter. On limited lines I was making progress, but the wings of imagination still drooped nervelessly at my sides. Otherwise I perhaps should have examined this lighter more particularly, instead of regarding it mainly as a convenient hiding-place. Under the stern-deck was stored a massive roll of tarpaulin, a corner of which made an excellent blanket, and my bundle a good pillow. It was a descent from the luxury of last night; but a spy, I reflected philosophically, cannot expect a feather bed two nights running, and this one was at any rate airier and roomier than the coffin-like bunk of the Dulcibella, and not so very much harder.

When snugly ensconced, I studied the map by intermittent match-light. It had been dawning on me in the last half-hour that this canal was only one of several; that in concentrating myself on Esens and Bensersiel, I had forgotten that there were other villages ending in siel, also furnished on the chart with corkscrew streams; and, moreover, that Böhme's statistics of depth and distance had been marshalled in seven categories, A to G. The very first match brought full recollection as to the villages. The suffix _siel_ repeated itself all round the coast-line. Five miles eastward of Bensersiel was Neuharlingersiel, and farther on Carolinensiel. Four miles westward was Dornumersiel; and farther on Nessmersiel and Hilgenriedersiel. That was six on the north coast of the peninsula alone. On the west coast, facing the Ems, there was only one, Greetsiel, a good way south of Norden. But on the east, facing the Jade, there were no less than eight, at very close intervals. A moment's thought and I disregarded this latter group; they had nothing to do with Esens, nor had they any imaginable _raison d'être_ as veins for commerce; differing markedly in this respect from the group of six on the north coast, whose outlook was the chain of islands, and whose inland centre, almost exactly, was Esens. I still wanted one to make seven, and as a working hypothesis added the solitary Greetsiel. At all seven villages streams debouched, as at Bensersiel. From all seven points of issue
dotted lines were marked seaward, intersecting the great tidal sands and leading towards the islands. And on the mainland behind the whole sevenfold system ran the loop of railway. But there were manifold minor points of difference. No stream boasted so deep and decisive a blue lintel as did Benser Tief; none penetrated so far into the Hinterland. They varied in length and sinuosity. Two, those belonging to Hilgenriedersiel and Greetsiel, appeared not to reach the railway at all. On the other hand, Carolinensiel, opposite Wangeroog Island, had a branch line all to itself.

Match after match waxed and waned as I puzzled over the mystic seven. In the end I puzzled myself to sleep, with the one fixed idea that to-morrow, on my way back to Norden, I must see more of these budding canals, if such they were. My dreams that night were of a mighty chain of redoubts and masked batteries couching _perdus_ among the sand-dunes of desolate islets; built, coral-like, by infinitely slow and secret labour; fed by lethal cargoes borne in lighters and in charge of stealthy mutes who, one and all, bore the likeness of Grimm. I was up and away at daylight (the weather mild and showery), meeting some navvies on my way back to the road, who gave me good morning and a stare. On the bridge I halted and fell into torments of indecision. There was so much to do and so little time to do it in. The whole problem seemed to have been multiplied by seven, and the total again doubled and redoubled—seven blue lines on land, seven dotted lines on the sea, seven islands in the offing. Once I was near deciding to put my pretext into practice, and cross to Langeoog; but that meant missing the rendezvous, and I was loth to do that.

At any rate, I wanted breakfast badly; and the best way to get it, and at the same time to open new ground, was to walk to Dornum. Then I should find a blue line called the _Neues Tief_ leading to Dornumersiel, on the coast. That explored, I could pass on to Nesse, where there was another blue line to Nessmersiel. All this was on the way to Norden, and I should have the railway constantly at my back, to carry me there in the evening. The last train (my time-table told me) was one reaching Norden at 7.15 p.m. I could catch this at Hage Station at 7.5.

A brisk walk of six miles brought me, ravenously hungry, to Dornum. Road and railway had clung together all the time, and about half-way had been joined on the left by a third companion in the shape of a puny stream which I knew from the map to be the upper portion of Neues Tief. Wriggling and doubling like an eel, choked with sedges and reeds, it had no pretensions to being navigable. At length it looped away into the fens out of sight, only to reappear again close to Dornum in a much more dignified guise.

There was no siding where the railway crossed it, but at the town itself, which it skirted on the east, a towpath began, and a piled wharf had been recently constructed. Going on to this was a red-brick building with the look of a warehouse, roofless as yet, and with workmen on its scaffolds. It sharpened the edge of my appetite.

If I had been wise I should have been content with a snack bought at a counter, but a thirst for hot coffee and clues induced me to repeat the experiment of Esens and seek a primitive beer-house. I was less lucky on this occasion. The house I chose was obscure enough, but its proprietor was no simple Frisian, but an ill-looking rascal with shifty eyes and a debauched complexion, who showed a most unwelcome curiosity in his customer. As a last fatality, he wore a peaked cap like my own, and turned out to be an ex-sailor. I should have fled at the sight of him had I had the chance, but I was attended to first by a slatternly girl who, I am sure, called him up to view me. To explain my muddy boots and trousers I said I had walked from Esens, and from that I found myself involved in a tangle of impromptu lies. Floundering down an old groove, I placed my sister this time on Baltrum Island, and said I was going to Dornumersiel (which is opposite Baltrum) to cross from there. As this was drawing a bow at a venture, I dared not assume local knowledge, and spoke of the visit as my first. Dornumersiel was a lucky shot; there _was_ a ferry-galliot from there to Baltrum; but he knew, or pretended to know, Baltrum, and had not heard of my sister. I grew the more nervous in that I saw from the first that he took me to be of better condition than most merchant seamen; and, to make matters worse, I was imprudent enough in pleading haste to pull out from an inner pocket my gold watch with the chain and seals attached. He told me there was no hurry, that I should miss the tide at Dornumersiel, and then fell to pressing strong waters on me, and asking questions whose insinuating grossness gave me the key to his biography: He must have been at one stage in his career a dock-side crimp, one of those foul sharks who prey on discharged seamen, and as often as not are ex-seamen themselves, versed in the weaknesses of the tribe. He was now keeping his hand in with me, who, unhappily, purported to belong to the very class he was used to victimize, and, moreover, had a gold watch, and, doubtless, a full purse. Nothing more ridiculously inopportune could have befallen me, or more dangerous; for his class are as cosmopolitan as waiters and _concierges_ with as facile a gift for language and as unerring a scent for nationality. Sure enough, the fellow recognized mine, and positively challenged me with it in fairly fluent English with a Yankee twang. Encumbered with the mythical sister, of course I stuck to my lie, said I had been on an English ship so long that I had picked up the accent, and also gave him some words in broken English. At the same time I showed I thought him an impertinent nuisance, paid my score and walked out—quit of him? Not a bit of it! He insisted on showing me the way to Dornumersiel, and followed me down the street. Perceiving that he was in liquor, in spite of the early hour, I dared not risk a quarrelsome scene with a man who already knew so much about me, and might at any moment elicet
more. So I melted, and humoured him; treated him in a ginshop in the hope of giving him the slip--a disastrous resource, which was made a precedent for further potations elsewhere. I would gladly draw a veil over our scandalous progress through peaceable Dornum, of the terrors I experienced when he introduced me as his friend, and as his English friend, and of the abasement I felt, too, as, linked arm in arm, we trod the three miles of road coastwards. It was my malicious whim that we should talk English; a fortunate whim, as it turned out, because I knew no fo'c'sle German, but had a smattering of fo'c'sle English, gathered from Cutcliffe Hyne and Kipling. With these I extemporized a disreputable hybrid, mostly consisting of oaths and blasphemies, and so yawned of imaginary voyages. Of course he knew every port in the world, but happily was none too critical, owing to repeated _schnappsen._

Nevertheless, it was a deplorable _contretemps_ from every point of view. I was wasting my time, for the road took a different direction to the Neues Tief, so that I had not even the advantage of inspecting the canal and only met with it when we reached the sea. Here it split into two mouths, both furnished with locks, and emptying into two little mud-hole harbours, replicas of Bensersiel, each owning its cluster of houses. I made straight for the _Gasthaus_ at Dornumersiel, primed my companion well, and asked him to wait while I saw about a boat in the harbour; but, needless to say, I never rejoined him. I just took a cursory look at the left-hand harbour, saw a lighter locking through (for the tide was high), and then walked as fast as my legs would carry me to the outermost dyke, mounted it, and strode along the sea westwards in the teeth of a smart shower of rain, full of deep apprehensions as to the stir and gossip my disappearance might cause if my odious crimp was sober enough to discover it. As soon as I deemed it safe, I dropped on to the sand and ran till I could run no more. Then I sat on my bundle with my back to the dyke in partial shelter from the rain, watching the sea recede from the flats and dwindle into slender meres, and the laden clouds fly weeping over the islands till those pale shapes were lost in mist.

The barge I had seen locking through was creeping across towards Langeoog behind a tug and a wisp of smoke.

No more exploration by daylight! That was my first resolve, for I felt as if the country must be ringing with reports of an Englishman in disguise. I must remain in hiding till dusk, then regain the railway and slink into that train to Norden. Now directly I began to resign myself to temporary inaction, and to centre my thoughts on the rendezvous, a new doubt assailed me. Nothing had seemed more certain yesterday than that Norden was the scene of the rendezvous, but that was before the seven _siels_ had come into prominence. The name Norden now sounded naked and unconvincing. As I wondered why, it suddenly occurred to me that _all_ the stations along this northern line, though farther inland than Norden, were equally 'coast stations', in the sense that they were in touch with harbours (of a sort) on the coast. Norden had its tidal creek, but Esens and Dornum had their 'tiefs' or canals. Fool that I had been to put such a narrow and literal construction on the phrase 'the tide serves!' Which was it more likely that my conspirators would visit--Norden, whose intrusion into our theories was purely hypothetical, or one of these _siels_, to whose sevenfold systems all my latest observations gave such transcendent significance?

There was only one answer; and it filled me with profound discouragement. Seven possible rendezvous!--eight, counting Norden. Which to make for? Out came the time-table and map, and with them hope. The case was not so bad after all; it demanded no immediate change of plan, though it imported grave uncertainties and risks. Norden was still the objective, but mainly as a railway junction, only remotely as a seaport. Though the possible rendezvous were eight, the possible stations were reduced to five--Norden, Hage, Dornum, Esens, Wittmund--all on one single line. Trains from east to west along this line were negligible, because there were none that could be called night trains, the latest being the one I had this morning fixed on to bring me to Norden, where it arrived at 7.15. Of trains from west to east there was only one that need be considered, the same one that I had travelled by last night, leaving Norden at 7.43 and reaching Esens at 8.50, and Wittmund at 9.13. This train, as the reader who was with me in it knows, was in correspondence with another from Emden and the south, and also, I now found, with services from Hanover, Bremen, and Berlin. He will also remember that I had to wait three-quarters of an hour at Norden, from 7 to 7.43.

The platform at Norden Junction, therefore, between 7.15, when I should arrive at it _from_ the east, and 7.43 when Böhme and his unknown friend should leave it _for_ the east; there, and in that half-hour, was my opportunity for recognizing and shadowing two at least of the conspirators. I must take the train they took, and alight where they alighted. If I could not find them at all I should be thrown back on the rejected view that Norden itself was the rendezvous, and should wait there till 10.46.

In the meantime it was all very well to resolve on inaction till dusk; but after an hour's rest, damp clothes and feet, and the absence of pursuers, tempted me to take the field again. Avoiding roads and villages as long as it was light, I cut across country south-westwards--a dismal and laborious journey, with oozy fens and knee-deep drains to course, with circuits to be made to pass clear of peasants, and many furtive crouchings behind dykes and willows. What little I learnt was in harmony with previous explorations, for my track cut at right angles the line of the Harke Tief, the stream issuing at Nessmersiel. It, too, was in the nature of a canal, but only in embryo at the point I touched
it, south of Nesse. Works on a deviation were in progress, and in a short digression down stream I sighted another lighter-building yard. As for Hilgenriedersiel, the fourth of the seven, I had no time to see anything of it at all. At seven o'clock I was at Hage Station, very tired, wet, and footsore, after covering nearly twenty miles all told since I left my bed in the lighter.

From here to Norden it was a run in the train of ten minutes, which I spent in eating some rye bread and smoked eel, and in scraping the mud off my boots and trousers. Fatigue vanished when the train drew up at the station, and the momentous twenty-eight minutes began to run their course. Having donned a bulky muffler and turned up the collar of my pea-jacket, I crossed over immediately to the up-platform, walked boldly to the booking-office, and at once sighted--von Brüning--yes, von Brüning in mufti; but there was no mistaking his tall athletic figure, pleasant features, and neat brown beard. He was just leaving the window, gathering up a ticket and some coins. I joined a queue of three or four persons who were waiting their turn, flattened myself between them and the partition till I heard him walk out. Not having heard what station he had booked for, I took a fourth-class ticket to Wittmund, which covered all chances. Then, with my chin buried in my muffler, I sought the darkest corner of the ill-lit combination of bar and waiting-room where, by the tiresome custom in Germany, would-be travellers are penned till their train is ready. Von Brüning I perceived sitting in another corner, with his hat over his eyes and a cigar between his lips. A boy brought me a tankard of tawny Munich beer, and, sipping it, I watched. People passed in and out, but nobody spoke to the sailor in mufti. When a quarter of an hour elapsed, a platform door opened, and a raucous voice shouted: 'Hage, Dornum, Esens, Wittmund!' A knot of passengers jostled out to the platform, showing their tickets. I was slow over my beer, and was last of the knot, with von Brüning immediately ahead of me, so close that his cigar smoke curled into my face. I looked over his shoulder at the ticket he showed, missed the name, but caught a muted double sibilant from the official who checked it; ran over the stations in my head, and pounced on _Esens._ That was as much I wanted to know for the present; so I made my way to a fourth-class compartment, and lost sight of my quarry, not venturing, till the last door had banged, to look out of the window. When I did so two late arrivals were hurrying up to a carriage--one tall, one of middle height; both in cloaks and comforters. Their features I could not distinguish, but certainly neither of them was Böhme. They had not come through the waiting-room door, but, plainly, from the dark end of the platform, where they had been waiting. A guard, with some surly remonstrances, shut them in, and the train started.

Esens--the name had not surprised me; it fulfilled a presentiment that had been growing in strength all the afternoon. For the last time I referred to the map, pulpy and blurred with the day's exposure, and tried to etch it into my brain. I marked the road to Bensersiel, and how it converged by degrees on the Benser Tief until they met at the sea. 'The tide serves!' Longing for Davies to help me, I reckoned, by the aid of my diary, that high tide at Bensersiel would be about eleven, and for two hours, I remembered (say from ten to twelve to-night), there were from five to six feet of water in the harbour.

We should reach Esens at 8.50. Would they drive, as von Brüning had done a week ago? I tightened my belt, stamped my mud-burdened boots, and thanked God for the Munich beer. Whither were they going from Bensersiel, and in what; and how was I to follow them? These were nebulous questions, but I was in fettle for anything; boat-stealing was a bagatelle. Fortune, I thought, smiled; Romance beckoned; even the sea looked kind. Ay, and I do not know but that Imagination was already beginning to unstiffen and flutter those nerveless wings.

27 The Luck of the Stowaway

AT Esens Station I reversed my Norden tactics, jumped out smartly, and got to the door of egress first of all, gave up my ticket, and hung about the gate of the station under cover of darkness. Fortune smiled still; there was no vehicle in waiting at all, and there were only half a dozen passengers. Two of these were the cloaked gentlemen who had been so nearly left behind at Norden, and another was von Brüning. The latter walked well in advance of the first pair, but at the gate on to the high road the three showed a common purpose, in that, unlike the rest, who turned towards Esens town, they turned southwards; much to my perplexity, for this was the contrary direction to their train is ready. Von Brüning I perceived sitting in another corner, with his hat over his eyes and a cigar between his lips. A boy brought me a tankard of tawny Munich beer, and, sipping it, I watched. People passed in and out, but nobody spoke to the sailor in mufti. When a quarter of an hour elapsed, a platform door opened, and a raucous voice shouted: 'Hage, Dornum, Esens, Wittmund!' A knot of passengers jostled out to the platform, showing their tickets. I was slow over my beer, and was last of the knot, with von Brüning immediately ahead of me, so close that his cigar smoke curled into my face. I looked over his shoulder at the ticket he showed, missed the name, but caught a muted double sibilant from the official who checked it; ran over the stations in my head, and pounced on _Esens._ That was as much I wanted to know for the present; so I made my way to a fourth-class compartment, and lost sight of my quarry, not venturing, till the last door had banged, to look out of the window. When I did so two late arrivals were hurrying up to a carriage--one tall, one of middle height; both in cloaks and comforters. Their features I could not distinguish, but certainly neither of them was Böhme. They had not come through the waiting-room door, but, plainly, from the dark end of the platform, where they had been waiting. A guard, with some surly remonstrances, shut them in, and the train started.

Esens--the name had not surprised me; it fulfilled a presentiment that had been growing in strength all the afternoon. For the last time I referred to the map, pulpy and blurred with the day's exposure, and tried to etch it into my brain. I marked the road to Bensersiel, and how it converged by degrees on the Benser Tief until they met at the sea. 'The tide serves!' Longing for Davies to help me, I reckoned, by the aid of my diary, that high tide at Bensersiel would be about eleven, and for two hours, I remembered (say from ten to twelve to-night), there were from five to six feet of water in the harbour.

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I took my bearings collectedly, placed one foot on the path, thought better of it, and turned back towards Esens. I
knew without reference to the map that that path would bring them to the Benser Tief at a point somewhere near the timber-yard. In a fog I might have followed them there; as it was, the night was none too dark, and I had my strength to husband; and stamped on my memory were the words 'the tide serves'. I judged it a wiser use of time and sinew to anticipate them at Bensersiel by the shortest road, leaving them to reach it by way of the devious Tief, to examine which was, I felt convinced, one of their objects.

It was nine o'clock of a fresh wild night, a halo round the beclouded moon. I passed through quiet Esens, and in an hour I was close to Bensersiel, and could hear the sea. In the rooted idea that I should find Grimm on the outskirts, awaiting visitors, I left the road short of the village, and made a circuit to the harbour by way of the seawall. The lower windows of the inn shed a warm glow into the night, and within I could see the village circle gathered over cards, and dominated as of old by the assertive little postmaster, whose high-pitched, excitable voice I could clearly distinguish, as he sat with his cap on the back of his head and a 'feine schnapps' at his elbow. The harbour itself looked exactly the same as I remembered it a week ago. The post-boat lay in her old berth at the eastern jetty, her mainsail set and her twin giants spitting over the rail. I hailed them boldly from the shore (without showing them who I was), and was told they were starting for Langeoog in a few minutes; the wind was off-shore, the mails aboard, and the water just high enough. 'Did I want a passage?' 'No, I thought I would wait.' Positive that my party could never have got here so soon, I nevertheless kept an eye on the galliot till she let go her stern-rope and slid away. One contingency was eliminated. Some loiterers dispersed, and all port business appeared to be ended for the night.

Three-quarters of an hour of strained suspense ensued. Most of it I spent on my knees in a dark angle between the dyke and the western jetty, whence I had a strategic survey of the basin; but I was driven at times to relieve inaction by sallies which increased in audacity. I scouted on the road beyond the bridge, hovered round the lock, and peered in at the inn parlour; but nowhere could I see a trace of Grimm. I examined every floating object in the harbour (they were very few), dropped on to two lighters and pried under tarpaulins, boarded a deserted tug and two or three clumsy rowboats tied up to a mooring-post. Only one of these had the look of readiness, the rest being devoid of oars and rowlocks; a discouraging state of things for a prospective boat-lifter. It was the sight of these rowboats that suggested a last and most distracting possibility, namely, that the boat in waiting, if boat there were, might be not in the harbour at all, but somewhere on the sands outside the dyke, where, at this high state of the tide, it would have water and to spare. Back to the dyke then; but as I peered seaward on the way, contingencies evaporated and a solid fact supervened, for I saw the lights of a steamboat approaching the harbour mouth. I had barely time to gain my coign of vantage before she had swept in between the piers, and with a fitful swizzling of her screw was turning and backing down to a berth just ahead of one of the lighters, and not fifty feet from my hiding-place. A deck-hand jumped ashore with a rope, while the man at the wheel gave gruff directions. The vessel was a small tug, and the man at the wheel disclosed his identity when, having rung off his engines, he jumped ashore also, looked at his watch in the beam of the sidelight, and walked towards the village. It was Grimm, by the height and build--Grimm clad in a long tarpaulin coat and a sou'wester. I watched him cross the shaft of light from the inn window and disappear in the direction of the canal.

Another sailor now appeared and helped his fellow to tie up the tug. The two together then went aft and began to set about some job whose nature I could not determine. To emerge was perilous, so I set about a job of my own, tearing open my bundle and pulling an oilskin jacket and trousers over my clothes, and discarding my peaked cap set about some job whose nature I could not determine. To emerge was perilous, so I set about a job of my own, tearing open my bundle and pulling an oilskin jacket and trousers over my clothes, and discarding my peaked cap.

It was something of a gymnastic masterpiece, since I was lying--or, rather, standing aslant--on the rough seawall, with crannies of brick for foothold and the water plashing below me; but then I had not lived in the Dulcibella for nothing. My chain of thought, I fancy, was this--the tug is to carry my party; I cannot shadow a tug in a rowboat, yet I intend to shadow my party; I must therefore go with them in the tug, and the first and soundest step is to mimic her crew. But the next step was a hard matter, for the crew having finished their job sat side by side on the bulwarks and lit their pipes. However, a little pantomime soon occurred, as amusing as it was inspiriting. They seemed to consult together, looking from the tug to the inn and from the inn to the tug. One of them walked a few paces inwards and beckoned to the other, who in his turn called something down the engine-room skyline, and then joined his mate in a scuttle to the inn. Even while I watched the pantomime I was sliding off my boots, and it had not been consummated a second before I had them in my arms and was tripping over the mud in my stocking feet. A dozen noiseless steps and I was over the bulwarks between the wheel and the smoke-stack, casting about for a hiding-place. The conventional stowaway hides in the hold, but there was only a stokehold here, occupied moreover; nor was there an empty apple-barrel, such as Jim of Treasure Island found so useful. As far as I could see--and I dared not venture far for fear of the skylight--the surface of the deck offered nothing secure. But on the farther or starboard side, rather abaft the beam, there was a small boat in davits, swung outboard, to which common sense, and perhaps a
vague prescience of its after utility, pointed irresistibly. In any case, discrimination was out of place, so I mounted
the bulwark and gently entered my refuge. The tackles creaked a trifle, oars and seats impeded me; but well before
the thirsty truants had returned I was settled on the floor boards between two thwarts, so placed that I could, if
necessary, peep over the gunwale.

The two sailors returned at a run, and very soon after voices approached, and I recognized that of Herr Schenk
tattering volubly. He and Grimm boarded the tug and went down a companion-way aft, near which, as I peeped
over, I saw a second skylight, no bigger than the Dulcibella's, illuminated from below. Then I heard a cork drawn,
and the kiss of glasses, and in a minute or two they re-emerged. It was apparent that Herr Schenkel was inclined
to stay and make merry, and that Grimm was anxious to get rid of him, and none too courteous in showing it. The
former urged that to-morrow's tide would do, the latter gave orders to cast off, and at length observed with an angry
oath that the water was falling, and he must start; and, to clinch matters, with a curt good-night, he went to the wheel
and rang up his engines. Herr Schenkland and strutted off in high dudgeon, while the tug's screw began to
revolve. We had only glided a few yards on when the engines stopped, a short blast of the whistle sounded, and,
before I had had time to recast the future, I heard a scurry of footsteps from the direction of the dyke, first on the
bank, next on the deck. The last of these new arrivals panted audibly as he got aboard and dropped on the planks
with an unelastic thud.

Her complement made up, the tug left the harbour, but not alone. While slowly gathering way the hull checked
all at once with a sharp jerk, recovered, and increased its speed. We had something in tow--what? The lighter, of
course, that had been lying astern of us.

Now I knew what was in that lighter, because I had been to see, half an hour ago. It was no lethal cargo, but coal,
common household coal; not a full load of it, I remembered--just a good-sized mound amidships, trimmed with
battens fore and aft to prevent shifting. 'Well,' thought I, 'this is intelligible enough. Grimm was ostensibly there to
call for a load of coal for Memmert. But does that mean we are going to Memmert?' At the same time I recalled a
phrase overheard at the depot, 'Only one--half a load.' Why half a load?

For some few minutes there was a good deal of movement on deck, and of orders shouted by Grimm and
answered by a voice from far astern on the lighter. Presently, however, the tug warmed to her work, the hull vibrated
with energy, and an ordered peace reigned on board. I also realized that having issued from the boomed channel we
had turned westward, for the wind, which had been blowing us fair, now blew strongly over the port beam.

I peeped out of my eyrie and was satisfied in a moment that as long as I made no noise, and observed proper
prudence, I was perfectly safe _until the boat was wanted_. There were no deck lamps; the two skylights diffused
but a sickly radiance, and I was abait the side-lights. I was abait the wheel also, though thrillingly near it in point of
distance--about twelve feet, I should say; and Grimm was steering. The wheel, I should mention here, was raised, as
you often see them, on a sort of pulpit, approached by two or three steps and fenced by a breasthigh arc of boarding.
Only one of the crew was visible, and he was acting as look-out in the extreme bows, the rays of the masthead
lights--for a second had been hoisted in sign of towage--glistening on his oilskin back. The other man, I concluded,
was steering the lighter, which I could dimly locate by the pale foam at her bow.

And the passengers? They were all together aft, three of them, leaning over the taffrail, with their backs turned to
me. One was short and stout--Böhme unquestionably; the panting and the thud on the planks had prepared me for
that, though where he had sprung from I did not know. Two were tall, and one of these must be von Brüning. There
ought to be four, I reckoned; but three were all I could see. And what of the third? It must be he who 'insists on
coming', the unknown superior at whose instance and for whose behoof this secret expedition had been planned.
And who could he be? Many times, needless to say, I had asked myself that question, but never till now, when I had
found the rendezvous and joined the expedition, did it become one of burning import.

'Any weather' was another of those stored-up phrases that were _apropos._ It was a dirty, squally night, not very
cold, for the wind still hung in the S.S.W.--an off-shore wind on this coast, causing no appreciable sea on the shoal
spaces we were traversing. In the matter of our bearings, I set myself doggedly to overcome that paralysing
perplexity, always induced in me by night or fog in these intricate waters; and, by screwing round and round,
succeeded so far as to discover and identify two flashing lights--one alternately red and white, far and faint astern;
the other right ahead and rather stronger, giving white flashes only. The first and least familiar was, I made out, from
the lighthouse on Wangeroog; the second, well known to me as our beacon star in the race from Memmert, was the
light on the centre of Norderney Island, about ten miles away.

I had no accurate idea of the time, for I could not see my watch, but I thought we must have started about a
quarter past eleven. We were travelling fast, the funnel belching out smoke and the bow-wave curling high; for the
tug appeared to be a powerful little craft, and her load was comparatively light.

So much for the general situation. As for my own predicament, I was in no mood to brood on the hazards of this
mad adventure, a hundredfold more hazardous than my fog-smothered eavesdropping at Memmert. The crisis, I
knew, had come, and the reckless impudence that had brought me here must serve me still and extricate me. Fortune loves rough wooing. I backed my luck and watched.

The behaviour of the passengers struck me as odd. They remained in a row at the taffrail, gazing astern like regretful emigrants, and sometimes, gesticulating and pointing. Now no vestige of the low land was visible, so I was driven to the conclusion that it was the lighter they were discussing; and I date my awakening from the moment that I realized this. But the thread broke prematurely; for the passengers took to pacing the deck, and I had to lie low. When next I was able to raise my head they were round Grimm at the wheel, engaged, as far as I could discover from their gestures, in an argument about our course and the time, for Grimm looked at his watch by the light of a hand-lantern.

We were heading north, and I knew by the swell that we must be near the Accumer Ee, the gap between Langeoog and Baltrum. Were we going out to open sea? It came over me with a rush that we _must_ if we were to drop this lighter at Memmert. Had I been Davies I should have been quicker to seize certain rigid conditions of this cruise, which no human power could modify. We had left after high tide. The water therefore was falling everywhere; and the tributary channels in rear of the islands were slowly growing impassable. It was quite thirty miles to Memmert, with three watersheds to pass; behind Baltrum, Norderney, and Juist. A skipper with nerve and perfect confidence might take us over one of these in the dark, but most of the run would infallibly have to be made outside. I now better understood the protests of Herr Schenkel to Grimm. Never once had we seen a lighter in tow in the open sea, though plenty behind the barrier of islands; indeed it was the very existence of the sheltered byways that created such traffic as there was. It was only Grimm's _métier_ and the incubus of the lighter that had suggested Memmert as our destination at all, and I began to doubt it now. That tricky hoop of sand had befuddled us before.

At this moment, and as if to corroborate my thought, the telegraph rang and the tug slowed down. I effaced myself and heard Grimm shouting to the man on the lighter to starboard his helm, and to the look-out to come aft. The next order froze my very marrow; it was 'lower away'. Someone was at the davits of my boat fingering the tackles; the forward fall-rope actually slipped in the block and tilted the boat a fraction. I was just wondering how far it was to swim to Langeoog, when a strong, imperious voice (unknown to me) rang out, 'No, no! We don't want the boat. The swell's nothing; we can jump! Can't we, Böhme?' The speaker ended with a jovial laugh. 'Mercy!' thought I, 'are _they_ going to swim to Langeoog?' but I also gasped for relief. The tug rolled lifelessly in the swell for a little, and footsteps retreated aft. There were cries of 'Achtung!' and some laughter, one big bump and a good deal of grinding; and on we moved again, taking the strain of the tow-rope gingerly, and then full-speed ahead. The passengers, it seemed, preferred the lighter to the tug for cruising in; coal-dust and exposure to clean planks and a warm cuddly. When silence reigned again I peeped out. Grimm was at the wheel still, impassively twirling the spokes, with a glance over his shoulder at his precious freight. And, after all, we _were_ going outside.

Close on the port hand lay a black foam-girt shape, the east of spit Baltrum. It fused with the night, while we swung slowly round to windward over the troubled bar. Now we were in the spacious deeps of the North Sea; and feeling it too in increase of swell and volleys of spray.

At this point evolutions began. Grimm gave the wheel up to the look-out, and himself went to the taffrail, whence he roared back orders of 'Port!' or 'Starboard!' in response to signals from the lighter. We made one complete circle, steering on each point of the wind in succession, after that worked straight out to sea till the water was a good deal rougher, and back again at a tangent, till in earshot of the surf on the island beach. There the manoeuvres, which were clearly in the nature of a trial trip, ended. and we hove to, to transship our passengers. They, when they came aboard, went straight below, and Grimm, having steadied the tug on a settled course and entrusted the wheel to the sailor again, stripped off his dripping oilskin coat, threw it down on the cabin skylight, and followed them. The course he had set was about west, with Norderney light a couple of points off the port bow. The course for Memmert? Possibly; but I cared not, for my mind was far from Memmert to-night. It was the course for England too._ Yes, I understood at last. I was assisting at an experimental rehearsal of a great scene, to be enacted, perhaps, in the near future—a scene when multitudes of seagoing lighters, carrying full loads of soldiers, not half loads of coals, should issue simultaneously, in seven ordered fleets, from seven shallow outlets, and, under escort of the Imperial Navy, traverse the North Sea and throw themselves bodily upon English shores.

Indulgent reader, you may be pleased to say that I have been very obtuse; and yet, with humility, I protest against that verdict. Remember that, recent as arc the events I am describing, it is only since they happened that the possibility of an invasion of England by Germany has become a topic of public discussion. Davies and I had never—I was going to say had never considered it; but that would not be accurate, for we had glanced at it once or twice; and if any single incident in his or our joint cruise had provided a semblance of confirmation, he, at any rate, would have kindled to that spark. But you will see how perversely from first to last circumstances drove us deeper and deeper into the wrong groove, till the idea became inveterate that the secret we were seeking was one of defence and not offence. Hence a complete mental somersault was required, and, as an amateur, I found it difficult; the more so
that the method of invasion, as I darkly comprehended it now, was of such a strange and unprecedented character; for orthodox invasions start from big ports and involve a fleet of ocean transports, while none of our clues pointed that way. To neglect obvious methods, to draw on the obscure resources of an obscure strip of coast, to improve and exploit a quantity of insignificant streams and tidal outlets, and thence, screened by the islands, to despatch an armada of light-draught barges, capable of flinging themselves on a correspondingly obscure and therefore unexpected portion of the enemy's coast; that was a conception so daring, aye, and so quixotic in some of its aspects, that even now I was half incredulous. Yet it must be the true one. Bit by bit the fragments of the puzzle fell into order till a coherent whole was adumbrated. [The reader will find the whole matter dealt with in the Epilogue.]

The tug surged on into the night; a squall of rain leapt upon us and swept hissing astern. Baltrum vanished and the strands of Norderney beamed under transient moonlight. Drunk with triumph, I cuddled in my rocking cradle and ransacked every unvisited chamber of the memory, tossing out their dusty contents, to make a joyous bonfire of some, and to see the residue take life and meaning in the light of the great revelation.

My reverie was of things, not persons; of vast national issues rather than of the poignant human interests so closely linked with them. But on a sudden I was recalled, with a shock, to myself, Davies, and the present.

We were changing our course, as I knew by variations in the whirl of draughts which whistled about me. I heard Grimm afoot again, and, choosing my moment, surveyed the scene. Broad on the port-beam were the garish lights of Norderney town and promenade, and the tug, I perceived, was drawing in to enter the See-Gat. _[See Chart B._

Round she came, hustling through the broken water of the bar, till her nose was south and the wind was on the starboard bow. Not a mile from me were the villa and the yacht, and the three persons of the drama--three, that is, if Davies were safe.

Were we to land at Norderney harbour? Heavens, what a magnificent climax!--if only I could rise to it. My work here was done. At a stroke to rejoin Davies and be free to consummate our designs!

A desperate idea of cutting the davit-tackles--I blush to think of the stupidity--was rejected as soon as it was born, and instead, I endeavoured to imagine our approach to the pier. My boat hung on the starboard side; that would be the side away from the quay, and the tide would be low. I could swarm down the davits during the stir of arrival, drop into the sea and swim the few yards across the dredged-out channel, wade through the mud to within a short distance of the Dulcibella, and swim the rest. I rubbed the salt out of my eyes and wriggled my cramped legs ... Hullo! why was Grimm leaving the helm again? Back he went to the cabin, leaving the sailor at the helm. . . We ought to be turning to port now; but no--on we went, south, for the mainland.

Though one plan was frustrated, the longing to get to Davies, once implanted, waxed apace.

Our destination was at last beyond dispute. _[See Chart._]_ The channel we were in was the same that we had cut across on our blind voyage to Memmert, and the same my ferry-steamer had followed two days ago. It was a _cul-de-sac_ leading to one place only, the landing stage at Norddeich. The only place on the whole coast, now I came to think of it, where the tug could land at this tide. There the quay would be on the starboard side, and I saw myself tied to my eyrie while the passengers landed and the tug and lighter turned back for Memmert; at Memmert, dawn, and discovery.

There was some way out--some way out, I repeated to myself; some way to reap the fruit of Davies's long tutelage in the lore of this strange region. What would _he_ do?

For answer there came the familiar _frou-frou_ of gentle surf on drying sands. The swell was dying away, the channel narrowing; dusky and weird on the starboard hand stretched leagues of new-risen sand. Two men only were on deck; the moon was quenched under the vanguard clouds of a fresh squall.

A madcap scheme danced before me. The time, I _must_ know the time! Crouching low and cloaking the flame with my jacket I struck a match; 2.30 a.m.--the tide had been ebbing for about three hours and a half. Low water about five; they would be aground till 7.30. Danger to life? None. Flares and rescuers? Not likely, with 'him who insists' on board; besides, no one could come, there being no danger. I should have a fair wind and a fair tide for _my_ trip. Grimm's coat was on the skylight; we were both clean shaved.

The helmsman gazed ahead, intent on his difficult course, and the wind howled to perfection. I knelt up and examined one of the davit-tackles. There was nothing remarkable about it, a double and a single block (like our own peak halyards), the lower one hooked into a ring in the boat, the hauling part made fast to a cleat on the davit itself. Something there must be to give lateral support or the boat would have racketed abroad in the roll outside. The support, I found, consisted of two lanyards spliced to the davits and rove through holes in the keel. These I leaned over and cut with my pocket-knife; the result being a barely perceptible swaying of the boat, for the tug was under the lee of sands and on an even keel. Then I left my hiding-place, climbing out of the stern sheets by the after-davit, and preparing every successive motion with exquisite tenderness, till I stood on the deck. In another moment I was on deck; the moon was quenched under the vanguard clouds of a fresh squall.

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As soon as I was up to the engine-room skylight (that is to say, well ahead of the cabin roof) I assumed a natural step, went up to the pulpit and touched the helmsman on the arm, as I had seen Grimm do. The man stepped aside, grunting something about a light, and I took the wheel from him. Grimm was a man of few words, so I just jogged his satellite, and pointed forward. He went off like a lamb to his customary place in the bows, not having dreamt—why should he?—of examining me, but in him I had instantly recognized one of the crew of the Kormoran.

My ruse developed in all its delicious simplicity. We were, I estimated, about half-way to Norddeich, in the Buse Tief, a channel of a navigable breadth, at the utmost of two hundred yards at this period of the tide. Two faint lights, one above the other, twinkled far ahead. What they meant I neither knew nor cared, since the only use I put them to was to test the effect of the wheel, for this was the first time I had ever tasted the sweets of command on a steamboat. A few cautious essays taught me the rudiments, and nothing could hinder the catastrophe now.

I edged over to starboard— that was the side I had selected—and again a little more, till the glistening back of the look-out gave a slight movement; but he was a well-drilled minion, with implicit trust in the ‘old man’. Now, hard over! and spoke by spoke I gave her the full pressure of the helm. The look-out shouted a warning, and I raised my arm in calm acknowledgement. A cry came from the lighter, and I remember I was just thinking ‘What the dickens’ll happen to her?’ when the end came; a _euthanasia_ so mild and gradual (for the sands are fringed with mud) that the disaster was on us before I was aware of it. There was just the tiniest premonitory shuddering as our keel clove the buttery medium, a cascade of ripples from either beam, and the wheel jammed to rigidity in my hands, as the tug nestled up to her resting-place.

In the scene of panic that followed, it is safe to say that I was the only soul on board who acted with methodical tranquillity. The look-out flew astern like an arrow, bawling to the lighter. Grimm, with the passengers tumbling up after him, was on deck in an instant, storming and cursing; flung himself on the wheel which I had respectfully abandoned, jangled the telegraph, and wrenched at the spokes. The tug listed over under the force of the tide; wind, darkness, and rain aggravated the confusion.

For my part, I stepped back behind the smoke stack, threw off my robe of office, and made for the boat. Long and bitter experience of running aground had told me that that was sure to be wanted. On the way I cannoned into one of the passengers and pressed him into my service; incidentally seeing his face, and verifying an old conjecture. It was one who, in Germany, has a better right to insist than anyone else.

As we reached the davits there was a report like a pistol-shot from the port-side—the tow-rope parting, I believe, as the lighter with her shallower draught swung on past the tug. Fresh tumult arose, in which I heard: 'Lower the boat,' from Grimm; but the order was already executed. My ally the Passenger and I had each cast off a tackle, and slacked away with a run; that done, I promptly clutched the wire guy to steady myself, and tumbled in. (It was not far to tumble, for the tug listed heavily to starboard; think of our course, and the set of the ebb stream, and you will see why.) The forward fall unhooked sweetly; but the after one lost play. 'Slack away,' I called, peremptorily, and felt for my knife. My helper above obeyed; the hook yielded; I filliped away the loose tackle, and the boat floated away.

28 We Achieve our Double Aim

WHEN, exactly, the atmosphere of misunderstanding on the stranded tug was dissipated, I do not know, for by the time I had fitted the rowlocks and shipped sculls, tide and wind had caught me, and were sweeping me merrily back on the road to Norderney, whose lights twinkled through the scud in the north. With my first few strokes I made towards the lighter—which I could see sagging helplessly to leeward—but as soon as I thought I was out of sight of the tug, I pulled round and worked out my own salvation. There was an outburst of shouting which soon died away. Full speed. on a falling tide! They were pinned there for five hours sure. It was impossible to miss the way, and with my stout allies heaving me forward, I made short work of the two-mile passage. There was a sharp tussle at the last, where the Riff-Gat poured its stream across my path, and then I was craning over my shoulder, God knows with what tense anxiety, for the low hull and taper mast of the Dulcibella, Not there! No, not where I had left her. I pulled furiously up the harbour past a sleeping ferry-steamer and—praise Heaven!—came on her warped alongside the jetty.

'Who's that?' came from below, as I stepped on board.

'Hush! it's me.' And Davies and I were pawing one another in the dark of the cabin.

'Are you all right, old chap?' said he.

'Yes; are you? A match! What's the time? Quick!'

'Good Heavens, Carruthers, what the blazes have you done to yourself?' (I suspect I cut a pretty figure after my two days' outing.)

'Ten past three. It's the invasion of England! Is Dollmann at the villa?'

'Invasion?'

'Is Dollmann at the villa?'
'Yes.'
'Is the Medusa afloat?'
'No, on the mud.'
'The devil! Are we afloat?'
'I think so still, but they made me shift.'
'Think! Track her out! Pole her out! Cut those warps!'
For a few strenuous minutes we toiled at the sweeps till the Dulcibella was berthed ahead of the steamer, in deeper water. Meanwhile I had whispered a few facts.
'How soon can you get under way?' I asked.
'Ten minutes.'
'When's daylight?'
'Sunrise about seven, first dawn about five. Where are we bound?'
'Holland, or England.'
'Are they invading it now?' said Davies, calmly.
'No, only rehearsing!' I laughed, wildly.
'Then we can wait.'
'We can wait exactly an hour and a half. Come ashore and knock up Dollmann; we must denounce him, and get them both aboard; it's now or never. Holy Saints! man, not as you are! (He was in pyjamas.) 'Sea clothes!'
While he put on Christian attire, I resumed my facts and sketched a plan. 'Are you watched?' I asked.
'I think so; by the Kormoran's men.'
'Is the Kormoran here?'
'Yes.'
'The men?'
'Not to-night. Grimm called for them in that tug. I was watching. And, Carruthers. the Blitz is here.'
'Where?'
'In the roads outside--didn't you see her?'
'Wasn't looking. Her skipper's safe anyway; so's Böhme, so's the Tertium Quid, and so are the Kormoran's men. The coast's clear--it's now or never.'
Once more we were traversing the long jetty and the silent streets, rain driving at our backs. We trod on air, I think; I remember no fatigue. Davies sometimes broke into a little run, muttering 'scoundrel' to himself.
'I was right--only upside down,' he murmured more than once. 'Always really right--those channels are the key to the whole concern. Chatham, our only eastern base--no North Sea base or squadron--they'd land at one of those God-forsaken flats off the Crouch and Blackwater.'
'It seems a wild scheme,' I observed.
'Wild? In a way. So is _any_ invasion. But it's thorough; it's German. No other country could do it. It's all dawning on me--by Jove! It will be at the _Wash_--much the nearest, and as sandy as this side.'
'How's Dollmann been?' I asked.
'Polite, but queer and jumpy. It's too long a story.'
'Clara?'

'She's all right. By Jove! Carruthers--never mind.'
We found a night-bell at the villa door and rang it lustily. A window aloft opened, and 'A message from Commander von Brüning--urgent,' I called up.
The window shut, and soon after the hall was lighted and the door opened by Dollmann in a dressing-gown.
'Good morning, Lieutenant X--,' I said, in English. 'Stop, we're friends, you fool!' as the door was flung nearly to.
It opened very slowly again, and we walked in.
'Silence!' he hissed. The sweat stood on his steep forehead and a hectic flush on either cheek, but there was a smile--what a smile!--on his lips. Motioning us to tread noiselessly (a vain ideal for me), he led the way to the sitting-room we knew, switched on the light, and faced us.
'Well?' he said, in English, still smiling.
I consulted my watch, and I may say that if my hand was an index to my general appearance, I must have looked the most abject ruffian under heaven.
'We probably understand one another,' I said, 'and to explain is to lose time. We sail for Holland, or perhaps England, at five at the latest, and we want the pleasure of your company. We promise you immunity--on certain conditions, which can wait. We have only two berths, so that we can only accommodate Miss Clara besides yourself.' He smiled on through this terse harangue, but the smile froze, as though beneath it raged some crucial
debate. Suddenly he laughed (a low, ironical laugh).

'You fools,' he said, 'you confounded meddlesome young idiots; I thought I had done with you. Promise me immunity? Give me till five? By God, I'll give you five minutes to be off to England and be damned to you, or else to be locked up for spies! What the devil do you take me for?'

'A traitor in German service,' said Davies, none too firmly, 'We were both taken aback by this slashing attack.

'A tr--? You pig-headed young marplots! I'm in _British_ service! You're wrecking the work of years--and on the very threshold of success.'

For an instant Davies and I looked at one another in stupefaction. He lied--I could swear he lied; but how make sure?

'Why did you try to wreck Davies?' said I, mechanically.

'Pshaw! They made me clear him out. I knew he was safe, and safe he is.'

There was only one thing for it--a last finesse, to put him to the proof.

'Very well,' I said, after a moment or two, 'we'll clear out--silence, Davies!--as it appears we have acted in error; but it's right to tell you that we know everything.'

'Not so loud, curse you! What do you know?'

'I was taking notes at Memmert the other night.'

'Impossible!'

'Thanks to Davies. Under difficulties, of course, but I heard quite enough. You were reporting your English tour-Chatham, you know, and the English scheme of attack, a mythical one, no doubt, as you're on the right side! Böhme and the rest were dealing with the German scheme of defence A to G--I heard it all--the seven islands and the seven channels between them (Davies knows every one of them by heart); and then on land, the ring of railway, Esens the centre, the army corps to mobilize and entrench--all nugatory, wasted, ha! ha!--as you're on the rights--'

'Not so loud, you fiend of mischief!' He turned his back, and made an irresolute pace or two towards the door, his hands kneading the folds of his dressing-gown as they had kneaded the curtain at Memmert. Twice he began a question and twice broke off. 'I congratulate you, gentlemen,' he said, finally, and with more composure, facing us again, 'you have done marvels in your misplaced zeal; but you have compromised me too much already. I shall have to have you arrested--purely for form's sake--'

'Thank you,' I broke in. 'We have wasted five minutes, and time presses. We sail at five, and--purely for form's sake--would rather have you with us.'

'What do you mean?' he snarled.

'I had the advantage of _you_ at Memmert, in spite of acoustic obstacles. Your friends made an appointment behind your back, and I, in my misplaced zeal, have taken some trouble to attend it; so that I've had a working demonstration on another matter, the invasion of England from the seven _siels._' (Davies nudged me.) 'No, I should let that pistol alone; and no, I wouldn't ring the bell. You can arrest us if you like, but the secret's in safe hands.'

'You lie!' He was right there; but he could not know it.

'Do you suppose I haven't taken that precaution? But no names are mentioned.' He gave a sort of groan, sank into a chair, and seemed to age and grizzle before our very eyes.

'What did you say about immunity, and Clara?' he muttered. 'We're friends--we're friends!' burst out Davies, with a gulp in his voice. 'We want to help you both.' (Through a sudden mist that filmed my eyes I saw him impetuously walk over and lay his hand on the other's shoulder.) 'Those chaps are on our track and yours. Come with us. Wake her, tell her. It'll be too late soon.'

X-- shrank from his touch. 'Tell her? I can't tell her. You tell her, boy.' He was huddling back into his chair.

Davies turned to me.

'Where's her room?' I said, sharply.

'Above this one.'

'Go up, Carruthers,' said Davies.

'Not I--I shall frighten her into a fit.'

'I don't like to.'

'Nonsense, man! We'll both go then.'

'Don't make a noise,' said a dazed voice. We left that huddled figure and stole upstairs--thickly carpeted stairs, luckily. The door we wanted was half open, and the room behind it lighted. On the threshold stood a slim white figure, bare-footed;barethroated.

'What is it, father?' she called in a whisper. 'Whom have you been talking to?' I pushed Davies forward, but he hung back.

'Hush, don't be frightened,' I said, 'it's I, Carruthers, and Davies--and Davies. May we come in, just for one moment?"
I gently widened the opening of the door, while she stepped back and put one hand to her throat.

'Please come to your father,' I said. 'We are going to take you both to England in the Dulcibella--now, at once.'

She had heard me, but her eyes wandered to Davies.

'I understand not,' she faltered, trembling and cowering in such touching bewilderment that I could not bear to look at her.

'For God's sake, say something, Davies,' I muttered.

'Clara!' said Davies, 'will you not trust us?'

I heard a little gasp from her. There was a flutter of lace and cambric and she was in his arms, sobbing like a tired child, her little white feet between his great clumsy sea-boots--her rose-brown cheek on his rough jersey.

'It's past four, old chap,' I remarked, brutally. 'I'm going down to him again. No packing to speak of, mind. They must be out of this in half an hour.' I stumbled awkwardly on the stairs (again that tiresome film!) and found him stuffing some papers pell-mell into the stove. There were only slumbering embers in it, but he did not seem to notice that. 'You must be dressed in half an hour,' I said, furtively pocketing a pistol which lay on the table.

'Have you told her? Take her to England, you two boys. I think I'll stay.' He sank into a chair again.

'Nonsense, she won't go without you. You must, for her sake--in half an hour, too.'

I prefer to pass that half-hour lightly over. Davies left before me to prepare the yacht for sea, and I had to bear the brunt of what followed, including (as a mere episode) a scene with the step-mother, the memory of which rankles in me yet. After all, she was a sensible woman.

As for the other two, the girl when I saw her next, in her short boating skirt and tam-o'-shanter, was a miracle of coolness and pluck. But for her 1 should never have got him away. And ah! how good it was to be out in the wholesome rain again, hurrying to the harbour with my two charges, hurrying them down the greasy ladder to that frail atom of English soil, their first guerdon of home and safety.

Our flight from the harbour was unmolested, unnoticed. Only the first ghastly evidences of dawn were mingling with the strangled moonlight, as we tacked round the pier-head and headed close-reefed down the Riff-Gat on the lees of the ebb-tide. We had to pass under the very quarter of the Blitz, so Davies said; for, of course, he alone was on deck till we reached the open sea. Day was breaking then. It was dead low water, and, far away to the south, between dun swathes of sand, I thought I saw--but probably it was only a fancy--two black stranded specks. Rail awash, and decks streaming, we took the outer swell and clawed close-hauled under the lee of Juist, westward, hurrying westward.

'Up the Ems on the flood, and to Dutch Delfzyl,' I urged. No, thought Davies; it was too near Germany, and there was a tidal cut through from Buse Tief. Better to dodge in behind Rottum Island. So on we pressed, past Memmert, over the Juister Reef and the Corinne's buried millions, across the two broad and yeasty mouths of the Ems, till Rottum, a wee lonesome wafer of an islet, the first of the Dutch archipelago, was close on the weather-bow.

'We must get in behind that,' said Davies, 'then we shall be safe; I think I know the way, but get the next chart; and then take a rest, old chap. Clara and I can manage.' (She had been on deck most of the time, as capable a hand as you could wish for, better far than I in my present state of exhaustion.) I crawled along the slippery sloping planks and went below.

'Where are we?' cried Dollmann, starting up from the lee sofa, where he seemed to have been lying in a sort of trance. A book, his own book, slipped from his knees, and I saw the frontispiece lying on the floor in a pool of oil; for the stove had gone adrift, and the saloon was in a wretched state of squalor and litter.

'Off Rottum,' I said, and knelt up to find the chart. There was a look in his eyes that I suppose I ought to have understood, but I can scarcely blame myself, for the accumulated strain, not only of the last three days and nights, but of the whole arduous month of my cruise with Davies, was beginning to tell on me, now that safety and success were at hand. I handed up the chart through the companion, and then crept into the reeling fo'c'sle and lay down on the spare sail-bags, with the thunder and thump of the seas around and above me.

I must quote Davies for the event that happened now; for by the time I had responded to the alarm and climbed up through the fore-hatch, the whole tragedy was over and done with.

'X-- came up the companion,' he says, 'soon after you went down. He held on by the runner, and stared to windward at Rottum, as though he knew the place quite well. And then he came towards us, moving so unsteadily that I gave Clara the tiller, and went to help him. I tried to make him go down again, but he wouldn't, and came aft.

"Give me the helm," he said, half to himself. "Sea's too bad outside--there's a short cut here."

"Thanks," I said, "I know this one." (I don't think I meant to be sarcastic.) He said nothing, and settled himself on the counter behind us, safe enough, with his feet against the lee-rail, and then, to my astonishment, began to talk over my shoulder jolly sensibly about the course, pointing out a buoy which is wrong on the chart (as I knew), and telling me it was wrong, and so on. Well, we came to the bar of the Schild, and had to turn south for that twisty bit of beating between Rottum and Bosch Flat. Clara was at the jib-sheet, I had the chart and the tiller (you know how
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which would suffice) in a state of high efficiency, but a useless weapon, as against us, unless transported over seas.

Germany is pre-eminently fitted to undertake an invasion of Great Britain. She has a great army (a mere fraction of

Two root principles pervade it: perfect organization; perfect secrecy. Under the first head come some general

considerations. The writer (who is intimately conversant with conditions on both sides of the North Sea) argued that

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whole. She knows the art of giving a brain to a machine, of transmitting power to the uttermost cog-wheel, and at

the same time of concentrating responsibility in a supreme centre. She has a small navy, but very effective for its

purpose, built, trained, and manned on methodical principles, for defined ends, and backed by an inexhaustible

reserve of men from her maritime conscription. She studies and practises co-operation between her army and navy.

Her hands are free for offence in home waters, since she has no distant network of coveted colonies and
dependencies on which to dissipate her defensive energies. Finally, she is, compared with ourselves, economically

independent, having commercial access through her land frontiers to the whole of Europe. She has little to lose and

much to gain.

The writer pauses here to contrast our own situation, and I summarize his points. We have a small army,
dispersed over the whole globe, and administered on a gravely defective system. We have no settled theory of
national defence, and no competent authority whose business it is to give us one. The matter is still at the stage of
civilian controversy. Co-operation between the army and navy is not studied and practised; much less do there exist
any plans, worthy of the name, for the repulse of an invasion, or any readiness worth considering for the prompt
equipment and direction of our home forces to meet a sudden emergency. We have a great and, in many respects, a
magnificent navy, but not great enough for the interests it insures, and with equally defective institutions; not built
or manned methodically, having an utterly inadequate reserve of men, all classes of which would be absorbed at the
very outset, without a vestige of preparation for the enrolment of volunteers; distracted by the multiplicity of its
functions in guarding our colossal empire and commerce, and conspicuously lacking a brain, not merely for the
smooth control of its own unwieldy mechanism, but for the study of rival aims and systems. We have no North Sea
naval base, no North Sea Fleet, and no North Sea policy. Lastly, we stand in a highly dangerous economical
position.

The writer then deals with the method of invasion, and rejects the obvious one at once, that of sending forth a
fleet of transports from one or more of the North Sea ports. He combats especially the idea of making Emden (the
nearest to our shores) the port of departure. I mention this because, since his own scheme was adopted, it is
instructive to note that Emden had been used (with caution) as a red herring by the inspired German press, when the
subject was mentioned at all, and industriously dragged across the trail. His objections to the North Sea ports apply,
he remarks, in reality to all schemes of invasion, whether the conditions be favourable or not. One is that secrecy is
rendered impossible—and secrecy is vital. The collection of the transports would be known in England weeks before
the hour was ripe for striking; for all large ports are cosmopolitan and swarm with potential spies. In Germany's
case, moreover, suitable ships are none too plentiful, and the number required would entail a large deduction from
her mercantile marine. The other reason concerns the actual landing. This must take place on an open part of the east
coast of England. No other objective is even considered. Now the difficulty of transshipping and landing troops by
boats from transports anchored in deep water, in a safe, swift, and orderly fashion, on an open beach, is enormous.
The most hastily improvised resistance might cause a humiliating disaster. Yet the first stage is the most important
of all. It is imperative that the invaders should seize and promptly intrench a pre-arranged line of country, to serve as
an initial base. This once done, they can use other resources; they can bring up transports, land cavalry and heavy
guns, pour in stores, and advance. But unless this is done, they are impotent, be their sea-communications never so
secure.

The only logical alternative is then propounded: to despatch an army of infantry with the lightest type of field-
guns in big sea-going lighters, towed by powerful but shallow-draught tugs, under escort of a powerful composite
squadron of warships; and to fling the flotilla, at high tide, if possible, straight upon the shore.

Such an expedition could be prepared in absolute secrecy, by turning to account the natural features of the
German coast. No great port was to be concerned in any way. All that was required was sufficient depth of water to
float the lighters and tugs; and this is supplied by seven insignificant streams, issuing from the Frisian littoral, and
already furnished with small harbours and sluice-gates, with one exception, namely, the tidal creek at Norden; for
this, it appeared, was one of the chosen seven, and not, as 'Carruthers' supposed, Hilgenriedersiel, which, if you
remember, he had no time to visit, and which has, in fact, no stream of any value at all, and no harbour. All of these
streams would have to be improved, deepened, and generally canalized; ostensibly with a commercial end, for
purposes of traffic with the islands, which are growing health resorts during a limited summer season.

The whole expedition would be organized under seven distinct sub-divisions—not too great a number in view of
its cumbrous character. Seawards, the whole of the coast is veiled by the fringe of islands and the zone of shoals.
Landwards, the loop of railway round the Frisian peninsula would form the line of communication in rear of the
seven streams. Esens was to be the local centre of administration when the scheme grew to maturity, but not till
then. Every detail for the movement of troops under the seven different heads was to be arranged for with secrecy
and exactitude many months in advance, and from headquarters at Berlin. It was not expected that nothing would
leak out, but care was to be taken that anything that did do so should be attributed to defensive measures—a standing
feature in German mobilization being the establishment of a corps of observation along the Frisian coast; in fact, the
same precautions were to be taken in the preliminary work on the spot. There, four men only (it was calculated)
need be in full possession of the secret. One was to represent the Imperial Navy (a post filled by our friend von
Brüning). Another (Böhme) was to superintend the six canals and the construction of the lighters. The functions of
the third were twofold. He was to organize what I may call the local labour—that is, the helpers required for
embarkation, the crews of the tugs, and, most important of all, the service of pilots for the navigation of the seven
flotillas through the corresponding channels to the open sea. He must be a local man, thoroughly acquainted with the
coast, of a social standing not much above the average of villagers and fishermen, and he must be ready when the
time was ripe with lists of the right men for the right duties, lists to which the conscription authorities could when
required, give instant legal effect. His other function was to police the coast for spies, and to report anything
suspicious to von Brüning, who would never be far away. On the whole I think that they found the grim Grimm a
jewel for their purpose.

As fourth personage, the writer designates himself, the promoter of the scheme, the indispensable link between
the two nations. He undertakes to furnish reliable information as to the disposition of troops in England, as to the
hydrography of the coast selected for the landing, as to the supplies available in its vicinity, and the strategic points
to be seized. He proposes to be guide-in-chief to the expedition during transit. And in the meantime (when not
otherwise employed) he was to reside at Norderney, in close touch with the other three, and controlling the
commercial undertakings which were to throw dust in the eyes of the curious. [Memmert, by the way, is not
mentioned in this memorandum.]

He speaks of the place ‘selected for the landing’, and proceeds to consider this question in detail. I cannot follow
him in his review, deeply interesting though it is, and shall say at once that he reduces possible landing-places to
two, the flats on the Essex coast between Foulness and Brightlingsea, and the Wash— with a decided preference for
the latter. Assuming that the enemy, if they got wind of an invasion at all, would expect transports to be employed,
he chooses the sort of spot which they would be least likely to defend, and which, nevertheless, was suitable to the
character of the flotillas, and similar to the region they started from. There is such a spot on the Lincolnshire coast,
on the north side of the Wash, [See Map A] known as East Holland. It is low-lying land, dyked against the sea,
and bordered like Frisia with sand-flats which dry off at low water. It is easy of access from the east, by way of
Boston Deeps, a deep-water channel formed by a detached bank, called the Long Sand, lying parallel to the shore for
ten miles. This bank makes a natural breakwater against the swell from the east (the only quarter to be feared); and
the Deeps behind it, where there is an average depth of thirty-four feet at low-water, would form an excellent
roadstead for the covering squadron, whose guns would command the shore within easy range. It is noted in passing
that this is just the case where German first-class battleships would have an advantage over British ships of the same
calibre. The latter are of just too high a draught to navigate such waters without peril, if, indeed, they could enter
this roadstead at all, for there is a bar at the mouth of it with only thirty-one feet at high water, spring tides. The
former, built as they were with a view to manoeuvring in the North Sea, are just within the margin of safety. East
Holland is within easy striking distance of the manufacturing districts, a vigorous raid on which is, the writer urges,
the true policy of an invader. He reports positively that there exist (in a proper military sense) no preparations
whatever to meet such an attack. East Holland is also the nearest point on the British shores to Germany, excepting
the coast of Norfolk; much nearer, indeed, than the Essex flats alluded to, and reached by a simple deep-sea passage,
without any dangerous region to navigate, like the mouth of the Channel and the estuary of the Thames from
Harwich westwards. The distance is 240 sea-miles, west by south roughly, from Borkum Island, and 280 from
Wangeroog. The time estimated for transit after the flotillas had been assembled outside the islands is from thirty to
thirty-four hours.

Embarkation is the next topic. This could and must be effected in one tide. At the six _siels_ there was a mean
period of two and a half hours in every twelve, during which the water was high enough. At Norden a rather longer
time was available. But this should be amply sufficient if the machinery were in good working order and were
punctually set in motion. High water occurs approximately at the same time at all seven outlets, the difference
between the two farthest apart, Carolinensiel and Greetsiel, being only half an hour.

Lastly, the special risks attendant on such an expedition are dispassionately weighed. X--, though keenly anxious
to recommend his scheme, writes in no blindly sanguine spirit. There are no modern precedents for any invasion in
the least degree comparable to that of England by Germany. Any such attempt will be a hazardous experiment. But
he argues that the advantages of his method outweigh the risks, and that most of the risks themselves would attach
equally to any other method. Whatever skill in prediction was used, bad weather might overtake the expedition. Yes;
but if transports were used transhipment into boats for landing would in bad weather be fraught with the same and a
greater peril. But transports could stand off and wait. Delay is fatal in any case; unswerving promptitude is the
essence of such an enterprise. The lighters would be in danger of foundering? Beside the point; if the end is worth
gaining the risks must be faced. Soldiers' lives are sacrificed in tens of thousands on battlefields. The flotilla would
be demoralized during transit by the assault of a few torpedo-boats? Granted; but the same would apply to a fleet of
transports, with the added certainty that one lucky shot would send to the bottom ten times the number of soldiers,
with less hope of rescue. In both cases reliance must be placed on the efficiency and vigilance of the escort. It is
admitted, however, in a passage which might well make my two adventurers glow with triumph, that if by any
mischance the British discovered what was afoot in good time, and were able to send over a swarm of light-draught
boats, which could elude the German warships and get amongst the flotillas while they were still in process of
leaving the siels; it is admitted that in that case the expedition was doomed. But it is held that such an event was not
to be feared. Reckless pluck is abundant in the British Navy, but expert knowledge of the tides and shoals in these
waters is utterly lacking. The British charts are of no value, and there is no evidence (he reports) that the subject has been studied in any way by the British Admiralty. Let me remark here, that I believe Mr 'Davies's' views, as expressed in the earlier chapters, when they were still among the great estuaries, are all absolutely sound. The 'channel theory', though it only bore indirectly on the grand issue before them, was true, and should be laid to heart, or I should not have wasted space on it.

One word more, in conclusion. There is an axiom, much in fashion now, that there is no fear of an invasion of the British Isles, because if we lose command of the sea, we can be starved--a cheaper and surer way of reducing us to submission. It is a loose, valueless axiom, but by sheer repetition it is becoming an article of faith. It implies that 'command of the sea' is a thing to be won or lost definitely; that we may have it to-day and lose it for ever to-morrow. On the contrary, the chances are that in anything like an even struggle the command of the sea will hang in the balance for an indefinite time. And even against great odds, it would probably be impossible for our enemies so to bar the avenues of our commerce, so to blockade the ports of our extensive coast-line, and so to overcome the interest which neutrals will have in supplying us, as to bring us to our knees in less than two years, during which time we can be recuperating and rebuilding from our unique internal resources, and endeavouring to regain command.

No; the better axiom is that nothing short of a successful invasion could finally compel us to make peace. Our hearts are stout, we hope; but facts are facts; and a successful raid, such as that here sketched, if you will think out its consequences, must appal the stoutest heart. It was checkmated, but others may be conceived. In any case, we know the way in which they look at these things in Germany.

Postscript (March 1903)

It so happens that while this book was in the press a number of measures have been taken by the Government to counteract some of the very weaknesses and dangers which are alluded to above. A Committee of National Defence has been set up, and the welcome given to it was a truly extraordinary comment on the apathy and confusion which it is designed to supplant. A site on the Forth has been selected for a new North Sea naval base--an excellent if tardy decision; for ten years or so must elapse before the existing anchorage becomes in any sense a 'base'. A North Sea fleet has also been created--another good measure; but it should be remembered that its ships are not modern, or in the least capable of meeting the principal Gem-man squadrons under the circumstances supposed above.

Lastly, a Manning Committee has (among other matters) reported vaguely in favour of a Volunteer Reserve. There is no means of knowing what this recommendation will lead to; let us hope not to the fiasco of the last badly conceived experiment. Is it not becoming patent that the time has come for training all Englishmen systematically either for the sea or for the rifle?
IT was 2 p.m. on the afternoon of May 7, 1915. The Lusitania had been struck by two torpedoes in succession and was sinking rapidly, while the boats were being launched with all possible speed. The women and children were being lined up awaiting their turn. Some still clung desperately to husbands and fathers; others clutched their children closely to their breasts. One girl stood alone, slightly apart from the rest. She was quite young, not more than eighteen. She did not seem afraid, and her grave, steadfast eyes looked straight ahead.

"I beg your pardon."

A man's voice beside her made her start and turn. She had noticed the speaker more than once amongst the first-class passengers. There had been a hint of mystery about him which had appealed to her imagination. He spoke to no one. If anyone spoke to him he was quick to rebuff the overture. Also he had a nervous way of looking over his shoulder with a swift, suspicious glance.

She noticed now that he was greatly agitated. There were beads of perspiration on his brow. He was evidently in a state of overmastering fear. And yet he did not strike her as the kind of man who would be afraid to meet death!

"Yes?" Her grave eyes met his inquiringly.

He stood looking at her with a kind of desperate irresolution.

"It must be!" he muttered to himself. "Yes--it is the only way." Then aloud he said abruptly: "You are an American?"

"Yes."

"A patriotic one?"

The girl flushed.

"I guess you've no right to ask such a thing! Of course I am!"

"Don't be offended. You wouldn't be if you knew how much there was at stake. But I've got to trust some one--and it must be a woman."

"Why?"

"Because of 'women and children first.' " He looked round and lowered his voice. "I'm carrying papers--vitaly important papers. They may make all the difference to the Allies in the war. You understand? These papers have GOT to be saved! They've more chance with you than with me. Will you take them?"

The girl held out her hand.

"Wait--I must warn you. There may be a risk--if I've been followed. I don't think I have, but one never knows. If so, there will be danger. Have you the nerve to go through with it?"

The girl smiled.

"I'll go through with it all right. And I'm real proud to be chosen! What am I to do with them afterwards?"

"Watch the newspapers! I'll advertise in the personal column of the Times, beginning 'Shipmate.' At the end of three days if there's nothing--well, you'll know I'm down and out. Then take the packet to the American Embassy, and deliver it into the Ambassador's own hands. Is that clear?"

"Quite clear."

"Then be ready--I'm going to say good-bye." He took her hand in his. "Good-bye. Good luck to you," he said in a louder tone.

Her hand closed on the oilskin packet that had lain in his palm.

The Lusitania settled with a more decided list to starboard. In answer to a quick command, the girl went forward to take her place in the boat.

CHAPTER I -- THE YOUNG ADVENTURERS, LTD.

"TOMMY, old thing!"

"Tuppence, old bean!"

The two young people greeted each other affectionately, and momentarily blocked the Dover Street Tube exit in doing so. The adjective "old" was misleading. Their united ages would certainly not have totalled forty-five.

"Not seen you for simply centuries," continued the young man. "Where are you off to? Come and chew a bun with me. We're getting a bit unpopular here--blocking the gangway as it were. Let's get out of it."

The girl assenting, they started walking down Dover Street towards Piccadilly.

"Now then," said Tommy, "where shall we go?"
The very faint anxiety which underlay his tone did not escape the astute ears of Miss Prudence Cowley, known to her intimate friends for some mysterious reason as "Tuppence." She pounced at once.

"Tommy, you're stony!"
"Not a bit of it," declared Tommy unconvincingly. "Rolling in cash."
"You always were a shocking liar," said Tuppence severely, "though you did once persuade Sister Greenbank that the doctor had ordered you beer as a tonic, but forgotten to write it on the chart. Do you remember?"

Tommy chuckled.
"I should think I did! Wasn't the old cat in a rage when she found out? Not that she was a bad sort really, old Mother Greenbank! Good old hospital--demobbed like everything else, I suppose?"

Tuppence sighed.
"Yes. You too?"
Tommy nodded.
"Two months ago."
"Gratuity?" hinted Tuppence.
"Spent."
"Oh, Tommy!"
"No, old thing, not in riotous dissipation. No such luck! The cost of living--ordinary plain, or garden living nowadays is, I assure you, if you do not know----"
"My dear child," interrupted Tuppence, "there is nothing I do NOT know about the cost of living. Here we are at Lyons', and we will each of us pay for our own. That's it!" And Tuppence led the way upstairs.

The place was full, and they wandered about looking for a table, catching odds and ends of conversation as they did so.

"And--do you know, she sat down and CRIED when I told her she couldn't have the flat after all." "It was simply a BARGAIN, my dear! Just like the one Mabel Lewis brought from Paris----"
"Funny scraps one does overhear," murmured Tommy. "I passed two Johnnies in the street to-day talking about some one called Jane Finn. Did you ever hear such a name?"

But at that moment two elderly ladies rose and collected parcels, and Tuppence deftly ensconced herself in one of the vacant seats.

Tommy ordered tea and buns. Tuppence ordered tea and buttered toast.
"And mind the tea comes in separate teapots," she added severely.

Tommy sat down opposite her. His bared head revealed a shock of exquisitely slicked-back red hair. His face was pleasantly ugly--nondescript, yet unmistakably the face of a gentleman and a sportsman. His brown suit was well cut, but perilously near the end of its tether.

They were an essentially modern-looking couple as they sat there. Tuppence had no claim to beauty, but there was character and charm in the elfin lines of her little face, with its determined chin and large, wide-apart grey eyes that looked mistily out from under straight, black brows. She wore a small bright green toque over her black bobbed hair, and her extremely short and rather shabby skirt revealed a pair of uncommonly dainty ankles. Her appearance presented a valiant attempt at smartness.

The tea came at last, and Tuppence, rousing herself from a fit of meditation, poured it out.
"Now then," said Tommy, taking a large bite of bun, "let's get up-to-date. Remember, I haven't seen you since that time in hospital in 1916."
"Very well." Tuppence helped herself liberally to buttered toast. "Abridged biography of Miss Prudence Cowley, fifth daughter of Archdeacon Cowley of Little Missendell, Suffolk. Miss Cowley left the delights (and drudgeries) of her home life early in the war and came up to London, where she entered an officers' hospital. First month: Washed up six hundred and forty-eight plates every day. Second month: Promoted to drying aforesaid plates. Third month: Promoted to peeling potatoes. Fourth month: Promoted to cutting bread and butter. Fifth month: Promoted one floor up to duties of wardmaid with mop and pail. Sixth month: Promoted to waiting at table. Seventh month: Pleasing appearance and nice manners so striking that am promoted to waiting on the Sisters! Eighth month: Slight check in career. Sister Bond ate Sister Westhaven's egg! Grand row! Wardmaid clearly to blame! Inattention in such important matters cannot be too highly censured. Mop and pail again! How are the mighty fallen! Ninth month: Promoted to sweeping out wards, where I found a friend of my childhood in Lieutenant Thomas Beresford (bow, Tommy!), whom I had not seen for five long years. The meeting was affecting! Tenth month: Reproved by matron for visiting the pictures in company with one of the patients, namely: the aforementioned Lieutenant Thomas Beresford. Eleventh and twelfth months: Parlourmaid duties resumed with entire success. At the end of the year left hospital in a blaze of glory. After that, the talented Miss Cowley drove successively a trade delivery van, a motor-lorry and a general! The last was the pleasantest. He was quite a young general!"
"What brighter was that?" inquired Tommy. "Perfectly sickening the way those brass hats drove from the War Office to the Savoy, and from the Savoy to the War Office!"

"I've forgotten his name now," confessed Tuppence. "To resume, that was in a way the apex of my career. I next entered a Government office. We had several very enjoyable tea parties. I had intended to become a land girl, a postwoman, and a bus conductress by way of rounding off my career--but the Armistice intervened! I clung to the office with the true limpet touch for many long months, but, alas, I was combed out at last. Since then I've been looking for a job. Now then--your turn."

"There's not so much promotion in mine," said Tommy regretfully, "and a great deal less variety. I went out to France again, as you know. Then they sent me to Mesopotamia, and I got wounded for the second time, and went into hospital out there. Then I got stuck in Egypt till the Armistice happened, kicked my heels there some time longer, and, as I told you, finally got demobbed. And, for ten long, weary months I've been job hunting! There aren't any jobs! And, if there were, they wouldn't give 'em to me. What good am I? What do I know about business? Nothing."

Tuppence nodded gloomily.
"What about the colonies?" she suggested.
Tommy shook his head.
"I shouldn't like the colonies--and I'm perfectly certain they wouldn't like me!"
"Rich relations?"
Again Tommy shook his head.
"Oh, Tommy, not even a great-aunt?"
"I've got an old uncle who's more or less rolling, but he's no good."
"Why not?"
"Wanted to adopt me once. I refused."
"I think I remember hearing about it," said Tuppence slowly. "You refused because of your mother----"
Tommy flushed.
"Yes, it would have been a bit rough on the mater. As you know, I was all she had. Old boy hated her--wanted to get me away from her. Just a bit of spite."
"Your mother's dead, isn't she?" said Tuppence gently.
Tommy nodded.
Tuppence's large grey eyes looked misty.
"You're a good sort, Tommy. I always knew it."
"Rot!" said Tommy hastily. "Well, that's my position. I'm just about desperate."
"So am I! I've hung out as long as I could. I've touted round. I've answered advertisements. I've tried every mortal blessed thing. I've screwed and saved and pinched! But it's no good. I shall have to go home!"
"Don't you want to?"
"Of course I don't want to! What's the good of being sentimental? Father's a dear--I'm awfully fond of him--but you've no idea how I worry him! He has that delightful early Victorian view that short skirts and smoking are immoral. You can imagine what a thorn in the flesh I am to him! He just heaved a sigh of relief when the war took me off. You see, there are seven of us at home. It's awful! All housework and mothers' meetings! I have always been the changeling. I don't want to go back, but--oh, Tommy, what else is there to do?"

Tommy shook his head sadly. There was a silence, and then Tuppence burst out:
"Money, money, money! I think about money morning, noon and night! I dare say it's mercenary of me, but there it is!"

"Same here," agreed Tommy with feeling.
"I've thought over every imaginable way of getting it too," continued Tuppence. "There are only three! To be left it, to marry it, or to make it. First is ruled out. I haven't got any rich elderly relatives. Any relatives I have are in homes for decayed gentlewomen! I always help old ladies over crossings, and pick up parcels for old gentlemen, in case they should turn out to be eccentric millionaires. But not one of them has ever asked me my name--and quite a lot never said 'Thank you.'"

There was a pause.
"Of course," resumed Tuppence, "marriage is my best chance. I made up my mind to marry money when I was quite young. Any thinking girl would! I'm not sentimental, you know." She paused. "Come now, you can't say I'm sentimental," she added sharply.
"Certainly not," agreed Tommy hastily. "No one would ever think of sentiment in connection with you."
"That's not very polite," replied Tuppence. "But I dare say you mean it all right. Well, there it is! I'm ready and willing--but I never meet any rich men! All the boys I know are about as hard up as I am."
"What about the general?" inquired Tommy.

"I fancy he keeps a bicycle shop in time of peace," explained Tuppence. "No, there it is! Now you could marry a rich girl."

"I'm like you. I don't know any."

"That doesn't matter. You can always get to know one. Now, if I see a man in a fur coat come out of the Ritz I can't rush up to him and say: 'Look here, you're rich. I'd like to know you.'"

"Do you suggest that I should do that to a similarly garbed female?"

"Don't be silly. You tread on her foot, or pick up her handkerchief, or something like that. If she thinks you want to know her she's flattered, and will manage it for you somehow."

"You overrate my manly charms," murmured Tommy.

"On the other hand," proceeded Tuppence, "my millionaire would probably run for his life! No--marriage is fraught with difficulties. Remains--to MAKE money!"

"We've tried that, and failed," Tommy reminded her.

"We've tried all the orthodox ways, yes. But suppose we try the unorthodox. Tommy, let's be adventurers!"

"Certainly," replied Tommy cheerfully. "How do we begin?"

"That's the difficulty. If we could make ourselves known, people might hire us to commit crimes for them."

"Delightful," commented Tommy. "Especially coming from a clergyman's daughter!"

"The moral guilt," Tuppence pointed out, "would be theirs--not mine. You must admit that there's a difference between stealing a diamond necklace for yourself and being hired to steal it."

"There wouldn't be the least difference if you were caught!"

"Perhaps not. But I shouldn't be caught. I'm so clever."

"Modesty always was your besetting sin," remarked Tommy.

"Don't rag. Look here, Tommy, shall we really? Shall we form a business partnership?"

"Form a company for the stealing of diamond necklaces?"

"That was only an illustration. Let's have a--what do you call it in book-keeping?"

"Don't know. Never did any."

"I have--but I always got mixed up, and used to put credit entries on the debit side, and vice versa--so they fired me out. Oh, I know--a joint venture! It struck me as such a romantic phrase to come across in the middle of musty old figures. It's got an Elizabethan flavour about it--makes one think of galleons and doubloons. A joint venture!"

"Trading under the name of the Young Adventurers, Ltd.? Is that your idea, Tuppence?"

"It's all very well to laugh, but I feel there might be something in it."

"How do you propose to get in touch with your would-be employers?"

"Advertisement," replied Tuppence promptly. "Have you got a bit of paper and a pencil? Men usually seem to have. Just like we have hairpins and powder-puffs."

Tommy handed over a rather shabby green notebook, and Tuppence began writing busily.

"Shall we begin: 'Young officer, twice wounded in the war--'"

"Certainly not."

"Oh, very well, my dear boy. But I can assure you that that sort of thing might touch the heart of an elderly spinster, and she might adopt you, and then there would be no need for you to be a young adventurer at all."

"I don't want to be adopted."

"I forgot you had a prejudice against it. I was only ragging you! The papers are full up to the brim with that type of thing. Now listen--how's this? 'Two young adventurers for hire. Willing to do anything, go anywhere. Pay must be good.' (We might as well make that clear from the start.) Then we might add: 'No reasonable offer refused'--like flats and furniture."

"I should think any offer we get in answer to that would be a pretty UNreasonable one!"

"Tommy! You're a genius! That's ever so much more chic. 'No unreasonable offer refused--if pay is good.' How's that?"

"I shouldn't mention pay again. It looks rather eager."

"It couldn't look as eager as I feel! But perhaps you are right. Now I'll read it straight through. 'Two young adventurers for hire. Willing to do anything, go anywhere. Pay must be good. No unreasonable offer refused.' How would that strike you if you read it?"

"It would strike me as either being a hoax, or else written by a lunatic."

"It's not half so insane as a thing I read this morning beginning 'Petunia' and signed 'Best Boy.' " She tore out the leaf and handed it to Tommy. "There you are. Times, I think. Reply to Box so-and-so. I expect it will be about five shillings. Here's half a crown for my share."

Tommy was holding the paper thoughtfully. His face burned a deeper red.
"Shall we really try it?" he said at last. "Shall we, Tuppence? Just for the fun of the thing?"
"Tommy, you're a sport! I knew you would be! Let's drink to success." She poured some cold dregs of tea into the two cups.
"Here's to our joint venture, and may it prosper!"
"The Young Adventurers, Ltd." responded Tommy.
They put down the cups and laughed rather uncertainly. Tuppence rose.
"I must return to my palatial suite at the hostel."
"Perhaps it is time I strolled round to the Ritz," agreed Tommy with a grin. "Where shall we meet? And when?"
"Twelve o'clock to-morrow. Piccadilly Tube station. Will that suit you?"
"My time is my own," replied Mr. Beresford magnificently.
"So long, then."
"Good-bye, old thing."
The two young people went off in opposite directions. Tuppence's hostel was situated in what was charitably called Southern Belgravia. For reasons of economy she did not take a bus.
She was half-way across St. James's Park, when a man's voice behind her made her start.
"Excuse me," it said. "But may I speak to you for a moment?"
CHAPTER II -- MR. WHITTINGTON'S OFFER
TUPPENCE turned sharply, but the words hovering on the tip of her tongue remained unspoken, for the man's appearance and manner did not bear out her first and most natural assumption. She hesitated. As if he read her thoughts, the man said quickly:
"I can assure you I mean no disrespect."
Tuppence believed him. Although she disliked and distrusted him instinctively, she was inclined to acquit him of the particular motive which she had at first attributed to him. She looked him up and down. He was a big man, clean shaven, with a heavy jowl. His eyes were small and cunning, and shifted their glance under her direct gaze.
"Well, what is it?" she asked.
The man smiled.
"I happened to overhear part of your conversation with the young gentleman in Lyons'."
"Well--what of it?"
"Nothing--except that I think I may be of some use to you."
Another inference forced itself into Tuppence's mind:
"You followed me here?"
"I took that liberty."
"And in what way do you think you could be of use to me?"
The man took a card from his pocket and handed it to her with a bow.
Tuppence took it and scrutinized it carefully. It bore the inscription, "Mr. Edward Whittington." Below the name were the words "Esthonia Glassware Co.," and the address of a city office. Mr. Whittington spoke again:
"If you will call upon me to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock, I will lay the details of my proposition before you."
"At eleven o'clock?" said Tuppence doubtfully.
"At eleven o'clock."
Tuppence made up her mind.
"Very well. I'll be there."
"Thank you. Good evening."
He raised his hat with a flourish, and walked away. Tuppence remained for some minutes gazing after him. Then she gave a curious movement of her shoulders, rather as a terrier shakes himself.
"The adventures have begun," she murmured to herself. "What does he want me to do, I wonder? There's something about you, Mr. Whittington, that I don't like at all. But, on the other hand, I'm not the least bit afraid of you. And as I've said before, and shall doubtless say again, little Tuppence can look after herself, thank you!"
And with a short, sharp nod of her head she walked briskly onward. As a result of further meditations, however, she turned aside from the direct route and entered a post office. There she pondered for some moments, a telegraph form in her hand. The thought of a possible five shillings spent unnecessarily spurred her to action, and she decided to risk the waste of ninepence.
Disdaining the spiky pen and thick, black treacle which a beneficent Government had provided, Tuppence drew out Tommy's pencil which she had retained and wrote rapidly: "Don't put in advertisement. Will explain to-morrow." She addressed it to Tommy at his club, from which in one short month he would have to resign, unless a kindly fortune permitted him to renew his subscription.
"It may catch him," she murmured. "Anyway, it's worth trying."

After handing it over the counter she set out briskly for home, stopping at a baker's to buy three penny-worth of new buns.

Later, in her tiny cubicle at the top of the house she munched buns and reflected on the future. What was the Esthonia Glassware Co., and what earthly need could it have for her services? A pleasurable thrill of excitement made Tuppence tingle. At any rate, the country vicarage had retreated into the background again. The morrow held possibilities.

It was a long time before Tuppence went to sleep that night, and, when at length she did, she dreamed that Mr. Whittington had set her to washing up a pile of Esthonia Glassware, which bore an unaccountable resemblance to hospital plates!

It wanted some five minutes to eleven when Tuppence reached the block of buildings in which the offices of the Esthonia Glassware Co. were situated. To arrive before the time would look over-eager. So Tuppence decided to walk to the end of the street and back again. She did so. On the stroke of eleven she plunged into the recesses of the building. The Esthonia Glassware Co. was on the top floor. There was a lift, but Tuppence chose to walk up.

Slightly out of breath, she came to a halt outside the ground glass door with the legend painted across it "Esthonia Glassware Co."

Tuppence knocked. In response to a voice from within, she turned the handle and walked into a small rather dirty outer office.

A middle-aged clerk got down from a high stool at a desk near the window and came towards her inquiringly.

"I have an appointment with Mr. Whittington," said Tuppence.

"Will you come this way, please." He crossed to a partition door with "Private" on it, knocked, then opened the door and stood aside to let her pass in.

Mr. Whittington was seated behind a large desk covered with papers. Tuppence felt her previous judgment confirmed. There was something wrong about Mr. Whittington. The combination of his sleek prosperity and his shifty eye was not attractive.

He looked up and nodded.

"So you've turned up all right? That's good. Sit down, will you?"

Tuppence sat down on the chair facing him. She looked particularly small and demure this morning. She sat there meekly with downcast eyes whilst Mr. Whittington sorted and rustled amongst his papers. Finally he pushed them away, and leaned over the desk.

"Now, my dear young lady, let us come to business." His large face broadened into a smile. "You want work? Well, I have work to offer you. What should you say now to L100 down, and all expenses paid?" Mr. Whittington leaned back in his chair, and thrust his thumbs into the arm-holes of his waistcoat.

Tuppence eyed him warily.

"And the nature of the work?" she demanded.

"Nominal--purely nominal. A pleasant trip, that is all."

"Where to?"

Mr. Whittington smiled again.

"Paris."

"Oh!" said Tuppence thoughtfully. To herself she said: "Of course, if father heard that he would have a fit! But somehow I don't see Mr. Whittington in the role of the gay deceiver."

"Yes," continued Whittington. "What could be more delightful? To put the clock back a few years--a very few, I am sure--and re-enter one of those charming pensionnats de jeunes filles with which Paris abounds----"

Tuppence interrupted him.

"A pensionnat?"

"Exactly. Madame Colombier's in the Avenue de Neuilly."

Tuppence knew the name well. Nothing could have been more select. She had had several American friends there. She was more than ever puzzled.

"You want me to go to Madame Colombier's? For how long?"

"That depends. Possibly three months."

"And that is all? There are no other conditions?"

"None whatever. You would, of course, go in the character of my ward, and you would hold no communication with your friends. I should have to request absolute secrecy for the time being. By the way, you are English, are you not?"

"Yes."

"Yet you speak with a slight American accent?"
"My great pal in hospital was a little American girl. I dare say I picked it up from her. I can soon get out of it again."

"On the contrary, it might be simpler for you to pass as an American. Details about your past life in England might be more difficult to sustain. Yes, I think that would be decidedly better. Then----"

"One moment, Mr. Whittington! You seem to be taking my consent for granted."

Whittington looked surprised.

"Surely you are not thinking of refusing? I can assure you that Madame Colombier's is a most high-class and orthodox establishment. And the terms are most liberal."

"Exactly," said Tuppence. "That's just it. The terms are almost too liberal, Mr. Whittington. I cannot see any way in which I can be worth that amount of money to you."

"No?" said Whittington softly. "Well, I will tell you. I could doubtless obtain some one else for very much less. What I am willing to pay for is a young lady with sufficient intelligence and presence of mind to sustain her part well, and also one who will have sufficient discretion not to ask too many questions."

Tuppence smiled a little. She felt that Whittington had scored.

"There's another thing. So far there has been no mention of Mr. Beresford. Where does he come in?"

"Mr. Beresford?"

"My partner," said Tuppence with dignity. "You saw us together yesterday."

"Ah, yes. But I'm afraid we shan't require his services."

"Then it's off!" Tuppence rose. "It's both or neither. Sorry--but that's how it is. Good morning, Mr. Whittington."

"Wait a minute. Let us see if something can't be managed. Sit down again, Miss----" He paused interrogatively.

Tuppence's conscience gave her a passing twinge as she remembered the archdeacon. She seized hurriedly on the first name that came into her head.

"Jane Finn," she said hastily; and then paused open-mouthed at the effect of those two simple words.

All the geniality had faded out of Whittington's face. It was purple with rage, and the veins stood out on the forehead. And behind it all there lurked a sort of incredulous dismay. He leaned forward and hissed savagely:

"So that's your little game, is it?"

Tuppence, though utterly taken aback, nevertheless kept her head. She had not the faintest comprehension of his meaning, but she was naturally quick-witted, and felt it imperative to "keep her end up" as she phrased it.

Whittington went on:

"Been playing with me, have you, all the time, like a cat and mouse? Knew all the time what I wanted you for, but kept up the comedy. Is that it, eh?" He was cooling down. The red colour was ebbing out of his face. He eyed her keenly. "Who's been blabbing? Rita?"

Tuppence shook her head. She was doubtful as to how long she could sustain this illusion, but she realized the importance of not dragging an unknown Rita into it.

"No," she replied with perfect truth. "Rita knows nothing about me."

His eyes still bored into her like gimlets.

"How much do you know?" he shot out.

"Very little indeed," answered Tuppence, and was pleased to note that Whittington's uneasiness was augmented instead of allayed. To have boasted that she knew a lot might have raised doubts in his mind.

"Anyway," snarled Whittington, "you knew enough to come in here and plump out that name."

"It might be my own name," Tuppence pointed out.

"It's likely, isn't it, then there would be two girls with a name like that?"

"Or I might just have hit upon it by chance," continued Tuppence, intoxicated with the success of truthfulness.

Mr. Whittington brought his fist down upon the desk with a bang.

"Quit fooling! How much do you know? And how much do you want?"

The last five words took Tuppence's fancy mightily, especially after a meagre breakfast and a supper of buns the night before. Her present part was of the adventuress rather than the adventurous order, but she did not deny its possibilities. She sat up and smiled with the air of one who has the situation thoroughly well in hand.

"My dear Mr. Whittington," she said, "let us by all means lay our cards upon the table. And pray do not be so angry. You heard me say yesterday that I proposed to live by my wits. It seems to me that I have now proved I have some wits to live by! I admit I have knowledge of a certain name, but perhaps my knowledge ends there."

"Yes--and perhaps it doesn't," snarled Whittington.

"You insist on misjudging me," said Tuppence, and sighed gently.

"As I said once before," said Whittington angrily, "quit fooling, and come to the point. You can't play the innocent with me. You know a great deal more than you're willing to admit."

Tuppence paused a moment to admire her own ingenuity, and then said softly:
"I shouldn't like to contradict you, Mr. Whittington."
"So we come to the usual question--how much?"

Tuppence was in a dilemma. So far she had fooled Whittington with complete success, but to mention a palpably impossible sum might awaken his suspicions. An idea flashed across her brain.
"Suppose we say a little something down, and a fuller discussion of the matter later?"
Whittington gave her an ugly glance.
"Blackmail, eh?"

Tuppence smiled sweetly.
"Oh no! Shall we say payment of services in advance?"
Whittington grunted.
"You see," explained Tuppence still sweetly, "I'm so very fond of money!"

"You're about the limit, that's what you are," growled Whittington, with a sort of unwilling admiration. "You took me in all right. Thought you were quite a meek little kid with just enough brains for my purpose."
"Life," moralized Tuppence, "is full of surprises."

"All the same," continued Whittington, "some one's been talking. You say it isn't Rita. Was it----? Oh, come in."
The clerk followed his discreet knock into the room, and laid a paper at his master's elbow.
"Telephone message just come for you, sir."
Whittington snatched it up and read it. A frown gathered on his brow.
"That'll do, Brown. You can go."

The clerk withdrew, closing the door behind him. Whittington turned to Tuppence.
"Come to-morrow at the same time. I'm busy now. Here's fifty to go on with."

He rapidly sorted out some notes, and pushed them across the table to Tuppence, then stood up, obviously impatient for her to go.

The girl counted the notes in a businesslike manner, secured them in her handbag, and rose.
"Good morning, Mr. Whittington," she said politely. "At least, au revoir, I should say."


Tuppence sped lightly down the stairs. A wild elation possessed her. A neighbouring clock showed the time to be five minutes to twelve.

"Let's give Tommy a surprise!" murmured Tuppence, and hailed a taxi.

The cab drew up outside the tube station. Tommy was just within the entrance. His eyes opened to their fullest extent as he hurried forward to assist Tuppence to alight. She smiled at him affectionately, and remarked in a slightly affected voice:
"Pay the thing, will you, old bean? I've got nothing smaller than a five-pound note!"

CHAPTER III -- A SET BACK

THE moment was not quite so triumphant as it ought to have been. To begin with, the resources of Tommy's pockets were somewhat limited. In the end the fare was managed, the lady recollecting a plebeian twopence, and the driver, still holding the varied assortment of coins in his hand, was prevailed upon to move on, which he did after one last hoarse demand as to what the gentleman thought he was giving him?

"I think you've given him too much, Tommy," said Tuppence innocently. "I fancy he wants to give some of it back."

It was possibly this remark which induced the driver to move away.

"Well," said Mr. Beresford, at length able to relieve his feelings, "what the--dickens, did you want to take a taxi for?"
"I was afraid I might be late and keep you waiting," said Tuppence gently.

"Afraid--you--might--be--late! Oh, Lord, I give it up!" said Mr. Beresford.

"And really and truly," continued Tuppence, opening her eyes very wide, "I haven't got anything smaller than a five-pound note."

"You did that part of it very well, old bean, but all the same the fellow wasn't taken in--not for a moment!"

"No," said Tuppence thoughtfully, "he didn't believe it. That's the curious part about speaking the truth. No one does believe it. I found that out this morning. Now let's go to lunch. How about the Savoy?"

Tommy grinned.
"How about the Ritz?"

"On second thoughts, I prefer the Piccadilly. It's nearer. We shan't have to take another taxi. Come along."

"Is this a new brand of humour? Or is your brain really unhinged?" inquired Tommy.

"Your last supposition is the correct one. I have come into money, and the shock has been too much for me! For
that particular form of mental trouble an eminent physician recommends unlimited Hors d'oeuvre, Lobster a l'americane, Chicken Newberg, and Peche Melba! Let's go and get them!

"Tuppence, old girl, what has really come over you?"

"Oh, unbelieving one!" Tuppence wrenched open her bag. "Look here, and here, and here!"

"Great Jehosaphat! My dear girl, don't wave Fishers aloft like that!"

"They're not Fishers. They're five times better than Fishers, and this one's ten times better!"

Tommy groaned.

"I must have been drinking unawares! Am I dreaming, Tuppence, or do I really behold a large quantity of five-pound notes being waved about in a dangerous fashion?"

"Even so, O King! Now, will you come and have lunch?"

"I'll come anywhere. But what have you been doing? Holding up a bank?"

"All in good time. What an awful place Piccadilly Circus is. There's a huge bus bearing down on us. It would be too terrible if they killed the five-pound notes!"

"Grill room?" inquired Tommy, as they reached the opposite pavement in safety.

"The other's more expensive," demurred Tuppence.

"That's mere wicked wanton extravagance. Come on below."

"Are you sure I can get all the things I want there?"

"That extremely unwholesome menu you were outlining just now? Of course you can--or as much as is good for you, anyway."

"And now tell me," said Tommy, unable to restrain his pent-up curiosity any longer, as they sat in state surrounded by the many hors d'oeuvre of Tuppence's dreams.

Miss Cowley told him.

"And the curious part of it is," she ended, "that I really did invent the name of Jane Finn! I didn't want to give my own because of poor father--in case I should get mixed up in anything shady."

"Perhaps that's so," said Tommy slowly. "But you didn't invent it."

"What?"

"No. I told it to you. Don't you remember, I said yesterday I'd overheard two people talking about a female called Jane Finn? That's what brought the name into your mind so pat."

"So you did. I remember now. How extraordinary----" Tuppence tailed off into silence. Suddenly she aroused herself. "Tommy!"

"Yes?"

"What were they like, the two men you passed?"

Tommy frowned in an effort at remembrance.

"One was a big fat sort of chap. Clean shaven, I think--and dark."

"That's him," cried Tuppence, in an ungrammatical squeal. "That's Whittington! What was the other man like?"

"I can't remember. I didn't notice him particularly. It was really the outlandish name that caught my attention."

"And people say that coincidences don't happen!" Tuppence tackled her Peche Melba happily.

But Tommy had become serious.

"Look here, Tuppence, old girl, what is this going to lead to?"

"More money," replied his companion.

"I know that. You've only got one idea in your head, Tommy. What I mean is, what about the next step? How are you going to keep the game up?"

"Oh!" Tuppence laid down her spoon. "You're right, Tommy, it is a bit of a poser."

"After all, you know, you can't bluff him forever. You're sure to slip up sooner or later. And, anyway, I'm not at all sure that it isn't actionable--blackmail, you know."

"Nonsense. Blackmail is saying you'll tell unless you are given money. Now, there's nothing I could tell, because I don't really know anything."

"Hm," said Tommy doubtfully. "Well, anyway, what ARE we going to do? Whittington was in a hurry to get rid of you this morning, but next time he'll want to know something more before he parts with his money. He'll want to know how much YOU know, and where you got your information from, and a lot of other things that you can't cope with. What are you going to do about it?"

Tuppence frowned severely.

"We must think. Order some Turkish coffee, Tommy. Stimulating to the brain. Oh, dear, what a lot I have eaten!"

"You have made rather a hog of yourself! So have I for that matter, but I flatter myself that my choice of dishes was more judicious than yours. Two coffees." (This was to the waiter.) "One Turkish, one French."
Tuppence sipped her coffee with a deeply reflective air, and snubbed Tommy when he spoke to her.

"Be quiet. I'm thinking."

"Shades of Pelmanism!" said Tommy, and relapsed into silence.

"There!" said Tuppence at last. "I've got a plan. Obviously what we've got to do is to find out more about it all."

Tommy applauded.

"Don't jeer. We can only find out through Whittington. We must discover where he lives, what he does--sleuth him, in fact! Now I can't do it, because he knows me, but he only saw you for a minute or two in Lyons'. He's not likely to recognize you. After all, one young man is much like another."

"I repudiate that remark utterly. I'm sure my pleasing features and distinguished appearance would single me out from any crowd."

"My plan is this," Tuppence went on calmly, "I'll go alone to-morrow. I'll put him off again like I did to-day. It doesn't matter if I don't get any more money at once. Fifty pounds ought to last us a few days."

"Or even longer!"

"You'll hang about outside. When I come out I shan't speak to you in case he's watching. But I'll take up my stand somewhere near, and when he comes out of the building I'll drop a handkerchief or something, and off you go!"

"Off I go where?"

"Follow him, of course, silly! What do you think of the idea?"

"Sort of thing one reads about in books. I somehow feel that in real life one will feel a bit of an ass standing in the street for hours with nothing to do. People will wonder what I'm up to."

"Not in the city. Every one's in such a hurry. Probably no one will even notice you at all."

"That's the second time you've made that sort of remark. Never mind, I forgive you. Anyway, it will be rather a lark. What are you doing this afternoon?"

"Well," said Tuppence meditatively. "I HAD thought of hats! Or perhaps silk stockings! Or perhaps----"

"Hold hard," admonished Tommy. "There's a limit to fifty pounds! But let's do dinner and a show to-night at all events."

"Rather."

The day passed pleasantly. The evening even more so. Two of the five-pound notes were now irretrievably dead.

They met by arrangement the following morning and proceeded citywards. Tommy remained on the opposite side of the road while Tuppence plunged into the building.

Tommy strolled slowly down to the end of the street, then back again. Just as he came abreast of the building, Tuppence darted across the road.

"Tommy!"

"Yes. What's up?"

"The place is shut. I can't make anyone hear."

"That's odd."

"Isn't it? Come up with me, and let's try again."

Tommy followed her. As they passed the third floor landing a young clerk came out of an office. He hesitated a moment, then addressed himself to Tuppence.

"Were you wanting the Esthonia Glassware?"

"Yes, please."

"It's closed down. Since yesterday afternoon. Company being wound up, they say. Not that I've ever heard of it myself. But anyway the office is to let."

"Th--thank you," faltered Tuppence. "I suppose you don't know Mr. Whittington's address?"

"Afraid I don't. They left rather suddenly."

"Thank you very much," said Tommy. "Come on, Tuppence."

They descended to the street again where they gazed at one another blankly.

"That's torn it," said Tommy at length.

"And I never suspected it," wailed Tuppence.

"Cheer up, old thing, it can't be helped."

"Can't it, though!" Tuppence's little chin shot out defiantly. "Do you think this is the end? If so, you're wrong. It's just the beginning!"

"The beginning of what?"

"Of our adventure! Tommy, don't you see, if they are scared enough to run away like this, it shows that there must be a lot in this Jane Finn business! Well, we'll get to the bottom of it. We'll run them down! We'll be sleuths in earnest!"
"Yes, but there's no one left to sleuth."
"No, that's why we'll have to start all over again. Lend me that bit of pencil. Thanks. Wait a minute--don't interrupt. There!" Tuppence handed back the pencil, and surveyed the piece of paper on which she had written with a satisfied eye:
"What's that?"
"Advertisement."
"You're not going to put that thing in after all?"
"No, it's a different one." She handed him the slip of paper.
Tommy read the words on it aloud:
"WANTED, any information respecting Jane Finn. Apply Y.A."

CHAPTER IV -- WHO IS JANE FINN?

The next day passed slowly. It was necessary to curtail expenditure. Carefully husbanded, forty pounds will last a long time. Luckily the weather was fine, and "walking is cheap," dictated Tuppence. An outlying picture house provided them with recreation for the evening.

The day of disillusionment had been a Wednesday. On Thursday the advertisement had duly appeared. On Friday letters might be expected to arrive at Tommy's rooms.

He had been bound by an honourable promise not to open any such letters if they did arrive, but to repair to the National Gallery, where his colleague would meet him at ten o'clock.

Tuppence was first at the rendezvous. She ensconced herself on a red velvet seat, and gazed at the Turners with unseeing eyes until she saw the familiar figure enter the room.

"Well?"
"Well," returned Mr. Beresford provokingly. "Which is your favourite picture?"
"Don't be a wretch. Aren't there ANY answers?"
Tommy shook his head with a deep and somewhat overacted melancholy.

"I didn't want to disappoint you, old thing, by telling you right off. It's too bad. Good money wasted." He sighed. "Still, there it is. The advertisement has appeared, and--there are only two answers!"
"Tommy, you devil!" almost screamed Tuppence. "Give them to me. How could you be so mean!"
"Your language, Tuppence, your language! They're very particular at the National Gallery. Government show, you know. And do remember, as I have pointed out to you before, that as a clergyman's daughter----"
"I ought to be on the stage!" finished Tuppence with a snap.

"That is not what I intended to say. But if you are sure that you have enjoyed to the full the reaction of joy after despair with which I have kindly provided you free of charge, let us get down to our mail, as the saying goes."

Tuppence snatched the two precious envelopes from him unceremoniously, and scrutinized them carefully.
"Thick paper, this one. It looks rich. We'll keep it to the last and open the other first."
"Right you are. One, two, three, go!"
Tuppence's little thumb ripped open the envelope, and she extracted the contents.

"DEAR SIR,
Referring to your advertisement in this morning's paper, I may be able to be of some use to you. Perhaps you could call and see me at the above address at eleven o'clock to-morrow morning. "Yours truly, "A. CARTER."

"27 Carshalton Gardens," said Tuppence, referring to the address. "That's Gloucester Road way. Plenty of time to get there if we tube."

"The following," said Tommy, "is the plan of campaign. It is my turn to assume the offensive. Ushered into the presence of Mr. Carter, he and I wish each other good morning as is customary. He then says: 'Please take a seat, Mr.--er?' To which I reply promptly and significantly: 'Edward Whittington!' whereupon Mr. Carter turns purple in the face and gasps out: 'How much?' Pocketing the usual fee of fifty pounds, I rejoin you in the road outside, and we proceed to the next address and repeat the performance."

"Don't be absurd, Tommy. Now for the other letter. Oh, this is from the Ritz!"

"A hundred pounds instead of fifty!"
"I'll read it:
"DEAR SIR,
"Re your advertisement, I should be glad if you would call round somewhere about lunch-time. "Yours truly, "JULIUS P. HERSHEIMMER."
"Ha!" said Tommy. "Do I smell a Boche? Or only an American millionaire of unfortunate ancestry? At all events we'll call at lunch-time. It's a good time--frequently leads to free food for two."

Tuppence nodded assent.
"Now for Carter. We'll have to hurry."
Carshalton Terrace proved to be an unimpeachable row of what Tuppence called "ladylike looking houses." They rang the bell at No. 27, and a neat maid answered the door. She looked so respectable that Tuppence's heart sank. Upon Tommy's request for Mr. Carter, she showed them into a small study on the ground floor where she left them. Hardly a minute elapsed, however, before the door opened, and a tall man with a lean hawklike face and a tired manner entered the room.

"Mr. Y. A.?" he said, and smiled. His smile was distinctly attractive. "Do sit down, both of you."

They obeyed. He himself took a chair opposite to Tuppence and smiled at her encouragingly. There was something in the quality of his smile that made the girl's usual readiness desert her.

As he did not seem inclined to open the conversation, Tuppence was forced to begin.

"We wanted to know--that is, would you be so kind as to tell us anything you know about Jane Finn?"

"Jane Finn? Ah!" Mr. Carter appeared to reflect. "Well, the question is, what do you know about her?"

Tuppence drew herself up.

"I don't see that that's got anything to do with it."

"No? But it has, you know, really it has." He smiled again in his tired way, and continued reflectively. "So that brings us down to it again. What do you know about Jane Finn?"

"Come now," he continued, as Tuppence remained silent. "You must know SOMETHING to have advertised as you did?" He leaned forward a little, his weary voice held a hint of persuasiveness. "Suppose you tell me . . ."

There was something very magnetic about Mr. Carter's personality. Tuppence seemed to shake herself free of it with an effort, as she said:

"We couldn't do that, could we, Tommy?"

But to her surprise, her companion did not back her up. His eyes were fixed on Mr. Carter, and his tone when he spoke held an unusual note of deference.

"I dare say the little we know won't be any good to you, sir. But such as it is, you're welcome to it."

"Tommy!" cried out Tuppence in surprise.

Mr. Carter slewed round in his chair. His eyes asked a question.

Tommy nodded.

"Yes, sir, I recognized you at once. Saw you in France when I was with the Intelligence. As soon as you came into the room, I knew----"

Mr. Carter held up his hand.

"No names, please. I'm known as Mr. Carter here. It's my cousin's house, by the way. She's willing to lend it to me sometimes when it's a case of working on strictly unofficial lines. Well, now"--he looked from one to the other--"who's going to tell me the story?"

"Fire ahead, Tuppence," directed Tommy. "It's your yarn."

"Yes, little lady, out with it."

And obediently Tuppence did out with it, telling the whole story from the forming of the Young Adventurers, Ltd., downwards.

Mr. Carter listened in silence with a resumption of his tired manner. Now and then he passed his hand across his lips as though to hide a smile. When she had finished he nodded gravely.

"Not much. But suggestive. Quite suggestive. If you'll excuse my saying so, you're a curious young couple. I don't know--you might succeed where others have failed . . . I believe in luck, you know--always have...."

He paused a moment, and then went on.

"Well, how about it? You're out for adventure. How would you like to work for me? All quite unofficial, you know. Expenses paid, and a moderate screw?"

Tuppence gazed at him, her lips parted, her eyes growing wider and wider.

"What should we have to do?" she breathed.

Mr. Carter smiled.

"Just go on with what you're doing now. FIND JANE FINN."

"Yes, but--who IS Jane Finn?"

Mr. Carter nodded gravely.

"Yes, you're entitled to know that, I think."

He leaned back in his chair, crossed his legs, brought the tips of his fingers together, and began in a low monotone:

"Secret diplomacy (which, by the way, is nearly always bad policy!) does not concern you. It will be sufficient to say that in the early days of 1915 a certain document came into being. It was the draft of a secret agreement--treaty--call it what you like. It was drawn up ready for signature by the various representatives, and drawn up in America--at that time a neutral country. It was dispatched to England by a special messenger selected for that purpose, a young
fellow called Danvers. It was hoped that the whole affair had been kept so secret that nothing would have leaked out. That kind of hope is usually disappointed. Somebody always talks!

"Danvers sailed for England on the Lusitania. He carried the precious papers in an oilskin packet which he wore next his skin. It was on that particular voyage that the Lusitania was torpedoed and sunk. Danvers was among the list of those missing. Eventually his body was washed ashore, and identified beyond any possible doubt. But the oilskin packet was missing!

"The question was, had it been taken from him, or had he himself passed it on into another's keeping? There were a few incidents that strengthened the possibility of the latter theory. After the torpedo struck the ship, in the few moments during the launching of the boats, Danvers was seen speaking to a young American girl. No one actually saw him pass anything to her, but he might have done so. It seems to me quite likely that he entrusted the papers to this girl, believing that she, as a woman, had a greater chance of bringing them safely to shore.

"But if so, where was the girl, and what had she done with the papers? By later advice from America it seemed likely that Danvers had been closely shadowed on the way over. Was this girl in league with his enemies? Or had she, in her turn, been shadowed and either tricked or forced into handing over the precious packet?

"We set to work to trace her out. It proved unexpectedly difficult. Her name was Jane Finn, and it duly appeared among the list of the survivors, but the girl herself seemed to have vanished completely. Inquiries into her antecedents did little to help us. She was an orphan, and had been what we should call over here a pupil teacher in a small school out West. Her passport had been made out for Paris, where she was going to join the staff of a hospital. She had offered her services voluntarily, and after some correspondence they had been accepted. Having seen her name in the list of the saved from the Lusitania, the staff of the hospital were naturally very surprised at her not arriving to take up her billet, and at not hearing from her in any way.

"Well, every effort was made to trace the young lady—but all in vain. We tracked her across Ireland, but nothing could be heard of her after she set foot in England. No use was made of the draft treaty—as might very easily have been done—and we therefore came to the conclusion that Danvers had, after all, destroyed it. The war entered on another phase, the diplomatic aspect changed accordingly, and the treaty was never redrafted. Rumours as to its existence were emphatically denied. The disappearance of Jane Finn was forgotten and the whole affair was lost in oblivion."

Mr. Carter paused, and Tuppence broke in impatiently:

"But why has it all cropped up again? The war's over."

A hint of alertness came into Mr. Carter's manner.

"Because it seems that the papers were not destroyed after all, and that they might be resurrected to-day with a new and deadly significance."

Tuppence stared. Mr. Carter nodded.

"Yes, five years ago, that draft treaty was a weapon in our hands; to-day it is a weapon against us. It was a gigantic blunder. If its terms were made public, it would mean disaster.... It might possibly bring about another war—not with Germany this time! That is an extreme possibility, and I do not believe in its likelihood myself, but that document undoubtedly implicates a number of our statesmen whom we cannot afford to have discredited in any way at the present moment. As a party cry for Labour it would be irresistible, and a Labour Government at this juncture would, in my opinion, be a grave disability for British trade, but that is a mere nothing to the REAL danger."

He paused, and then said quietly:

"You may perhaps have heard or read that there is Bolshevist influence at work behind the present Labour unrest?"

Tuppence nodded.

"That is the truth. Bolshevist gold is pouring into this country for the specific purpose of procuring a Revolution. And there is a little man, a man whose real name is unknown to us, who is working in the dark for his own ends. The Bolshevists are behind the Labour unrest—but this man is BEHIND THE BOLSHEVIKS. Who is he? We do not know. He is always spoken of by the unassuming title of 'Mr. Brown.' But one thing is certain, he is the master criminal of this age. He controls a marvellous organization. Most of the Peace propaganda during the war was originated and financed by him. His spies are everywhere."

"A naturalized German?" asked Tommy.

"On the contrary, I have every reason to believe he is an Englishman. He was pro-German, as he would have been pro-Boer. What he seeks to attain we do not know—probably supreme power for himself, of a kind unique in history. We have no clue as to his real personality. It is reported that even his own followers are ignorant of it. Where we have come across his tracks, he has always played a secondary part. Somebody else assumes the chief role. But afterwards we always find that there has been some nonentity, a servant or a clerk, who has remained in the background unnoticed, and that the elusive Mr. Brown has escaped us once more."
"Oh!" Tuppence jumped. "I wonder----"  
"Yes?"
"I remember in Mr. Whittington's office. The clerk--he called him Brown. You don't think----"  
Carter nodded thoughtfully.  
"Very likely. A curious point is that the name is usually mentioned. An idiosyncrasy of genius. Can you describe him at all?"
"I really didn't notice. He was quite ordinary--just like anyone else."  
Mr. Carter sighed in his tired manner.  
"That is the invariable description of Mr. Brown! Brought a telephone message to the man Whittington, did he? Notice a telephone in the outer office?"
Tuppence thought.  
"No, I don't think I did."
"Exactly. That 'message' was Mr. Brown's way of giving an order to his subordinate. He overheard the whole conversation of course. Was it after that that Whittington handed you over the money, and told you to come the following day?"
Tuppence nodded.  
"Yes, undoubtedly the hand of Mr. Brown!" Mr. Carter paused. "Well, there it is, you see what you are pitting yourselves against? Possibly the finest criminal brain of the age. I don't quite like it, you know. You're such young things, both of you. I shouldn't like anything to happen to you."
"It won't," Tuppence assured him positively.  
"I'll look after her, sir," said Tommy.  
"And I'll look after YOU," retorted Tuppence, resenting the manly assertion.  
"Well, then, look after each other," said Mr. Carter, smiling. "Now let's get back to business. There's something mysterious about this draft treaty that we haven't fathomed yet. We've been threatened with it--in plain and unmistakable terms. The Revolutionary element as good as declare that it's in their hands, and that they intend to produce it at a given moment. On the other hand, they are clearly at fault about many of its provisions. The Government consider it as mere bluff on their part, and, rightly or wrongly, have stuck to the policy of absolute denial. I'm not so sure. There have been hints, discreet allusions, that seem to indicate that the menace is a real one. The position is much as though they had got hold of an incriminating document, but couldn't read it because it was in cipher--but we know that the draft treaty wasn't in cipher--couldn't be in the nature of things--so that won't wash. But there's SOMETHING. Of course, Jane Finn may be dead for all we know--but I don't think so. The curious thing is that THEY'RE TRYING TO GET INFORMATION ABOUT THE GIRL FROM US"
"What?"
"Yes. One or two little things have cropped up. And your story, little lady, confirms my idea. They know we're looking for Jane Finn. Well, they'll produce a Jane Finn of their own--say at a pensionnat in Paris." Tuppence gasped, and Mr. Carter smiled. "No one knows in the least what she looks like, so that's all right. She's primed with a trumped-up tale, and her real business is to get as much information as possible out of us. See the idea?"
"Then you think--" Tuppence paused to grasp the supposition fully--"that it WAS as Jane Finn that they wanted me to go to Paris?"
Mr. Carter smiled more wraithily than ever.  
"I believe in coincidences, you know," he said.  
CHAPTER V -- MR. JULIUS P. HERSHEIMMER  
"WELL," said Tuppence, recovering herself, "it really seems as though it were meant to be."  
Carter nodded.  
"I know what you mean. I'm superstitious myself. Luck, and all that sort of thing. Fate seems to have chosen you out to be mixed up in this."
Tommy indulged in a chuckle.  
"My word! I don't wonder Whittington got the wind up when Tuppence plumped out that name! I should have myself. But look here, sir, we're taking up an awful lot of your time. Have you any tips to give us before we clear out?"
"I think not. My experts, working in stereotyped ways, have failed. You will bring imagination and an open mind to the task. Don't be discouraged if that too does not succeed. For one thing there is a likelihood of the pace being forced."
Tuppence frowned uncomprehendingly.  
"When you had that interview with Whittington, they had time before them. I have information that the big coup was planned for early in the new year. But the Government is contemplating legislative action which will deal
effectually with the strike menace. They'll get wind of it soon, if they haven't already, and it's possible that that may bring things to a head. I hope it will myself. The less time they have to mature their plans the better. I'm just warning you that you haven't much time before you, and that you needn't be cast down if you fail. It's not an easy proposition anyway. That's all."

Tuppence rose.

"I think we ought to be businesslike. What exactly can we count upon you for, Mr. Carter?" Mr. Carter's lips twitched slightly, but he replied succinctly: "Funds within reason, detailed information on any point, and NO OFFICIAL RECOGNITION. I mean that if you get yourselves into trouble with the police, I can't officially help you out of it. You're on your own."

Tuppence nodded sagely.

"I quite understand that. I'll write out a list of the things I want to know when I've had time to think. Now--about money----"

"Yes, Miss Tuppence. Do you want to say how much?"

"Not exactly. We've got plenty to go with for the present, but when we want more-----"

"It will be waiting for you."

"Yes, but--I'm sure I don't want to be rude about the Government if you've got anything to do with it, but you know one really has the devil of a time getting anything out of it! And if we have to fill up a blue form and send it in, and then, after three months, they send us a green one, and so on--well, that won't be much use, will it?"

Mr. Carter laughed outright.

"Don't worry, Miss Tuppence. You will send a personal demand to me here, and the money, in notes, shall be sent by return of post. As to salary, shall we say at the rate of three hundred a year? And an equal sum for Mr. Beresford, of course."

Tuppence beamed upon him.

"How lovely. You are kind. I do love money! I'll keep beautiful accounts of our expenses all debit and credit, and the balance on the right side, and red line drawn sideways with the totals the same at the bottom. I really know how to do it when I think."

"I'm sure you do. Well, good-bye, and good luck to you both."

He shook hands with them, and in another minute they were descending the steps of 27 Carshalton Terrace with their heads in a whirl.

"Tommy! Tell me at once, who is 'Mr. Carter'?

Tommy murmured a name in her ear.

"Oh!" said Tuppence, impressed.

"And I can tell you, old bean, he's IT!"

"Oh!" said Tuppence again. Then she added reflectively,

"I like him, don't you? He looks so awfully tired and bored, and yet you feel that underneath he's just like steel, all keen and flashing. Ooh!" She gave a skip. "Pinch me, Tommy, do pinch me. I can't believe it's real!"

Mr. Beresford obliged.

"Ow! That's enough! Yes, we're not dreaming. We've got a job!"

"And what a job! The joint venture has really begun."

"It's more respectable than I thought it would be," said Tuppence thoughtfully.

"Luckily I haven't got your craving for crime! What time is it? Let's have lunch--oh!"

The same thought sprang to the minds of each. Tommy voiced it first.

"Julius P. Hersheimmer!"

"We never told Mr. Carter about hearing from him."

"Well, there wasn't much to tell--not till we've seen him. Come on, we'd better take a taxi."

"Now who's being extravagant?"

"All expenses paid, remember. Hop in."

"At any rate, we shall make a better effect arriving this way," said Tuppence, leaning back luxuriously. "I'm sure blackmailers never arrive in busses!"

"We've ceased being blackmailers," Tommy pointed out.

"I'm not sure I have," said Tuppence darkly.

On inquiring for Mr. Hersheimmer, they were at once taken up to his suite. An impatient voice cried "Come in" in answer to the page-boy's knock, and the lad stood aside to let them pass in.

Mr. Julius P. Hersheimmer was a great deal younger than either Tommy or Tuppence had pictured him. The girl put him down as thirty-five. He was of middle height, and squarely built to match his jaw. His face was pugnacious but pleasant. No one could have mistaken him for anything but an American, though he spoke with very little
accent.
"Get my note? Sit down and tell me right away all you know about my cousin."
"Your cousin?"
"Sure thing, Jane Finn."
"Is she your cousin?"
"My father and her mother were brother and sister," explained Mr. Hersheimmer meticulously.
"Oh!" cried Tuppence. "Then you know where she is?"
"No!" Mr. Hersheimmer brought down his fist with a bang on the table. "I'm darned if I do! Don't you?"
"We advertised to receive information, not to give it," said Tuppence severely.
"I guess I know that. I can read. But I thought maybe it was her back history you were after, and that you'd know where she was now?"
"Well, we wouldn't mind hearing her back history," said Tuppence guardedly.
But Mr. Hersheimmer seemed to grow suddenly suspicious.
"See here," he declared. "This isn't Sicily! No demanding ransom or threatening to crop her ears if I refuse. These are the British Isles, so quit the funny business, or I'll just sing out for that beautiful big British policeman I see out there in Piccadilly."
Tommy hastened to explain.
"We haven't kidnapped your cousin. On the contrary, we're trying to find her. We're employed to do so."
Mr. Hersheimmer leant back in his chair.
"Put me wise," he said succinctly.
Tommy fell in with this demand in so far as he gave him a guarded version of the disappearance of Jane Finn, and of the possibility of her having been mixed up unawares in "some political show." He alluded to Tuppence and himself as "private inquiry agents" commissioned to find her, and added that they would therefore be glad of any details Mr. Hersheimmer could give them.
That gentleman nodded approval.
"I guess that's all right. I was just a mite hasty. But London gets my goat! I only know little old New York. Just trot out your questions and I'll answer."
For the moment this paralysed the Young Adventurers, but Tuppence, recovering herself, plunged boldly into the breach with a reminiscence culled from detective fiction.
"When did you last see the dece--your cousin, I mean?"
"Never seen her," responded Mr. Hersheimmer.
"What?" demanded Tommy, astonished.
Hersheimmer turned to him.
"No, sir. As I said before, my father and her mother were brother and sister, just as you might be"--Tommy did not correct this view of their relationship--"but they didn't always get on together. And when my aunt made up her mind to marry Amos Finn, who was a poor school teacher out West, my father was just mad! Said if he made his pile, as he seemed in a fair way to do, she'd never see a cent of it. Well, the upshot was that Aunt Jane went out West and we never heard from her again.
"The old man DID pile it up. He went into oil, and he went into steel, and he played a bit with railroads, and I can tell you he made Wall Street sit up!" He paused. "Then he died--last fall--and I got the dollars. Well, would you believe it, my conscience got busy! Kept knocking me up and saying: What about your Aunt Jane, way out West? It worried me some. You see, I figured it out that Amos Finn would never make good. He wasn't the sort. End of it was, I hired a man to hunt her down. Result, she was dead, and Amos Finn was dead, but they'd left a daughter--Jane--who'd been torpedoed in the Lusitania on her way to Paris. She was saved all right, but they didn't seem able to hear of her over this side. I guessed they weren't hustling any, so I thought I'd come along over, and speed things up. I phoned Scotland Yard and the Admiralty first thing. The Admiralty rather choked me off, but Scotland Yard were very civil--said they would make inquiries, even sent a man round this morning to get her photograph. I'm off to Paris to-morrow, just to see what the Prefecture is doing. I guess if I go to and fro hustling them, they ought to get busy!"
The energy of Mr. Hersheimmer was tremendous. They bowed before it.
"But say now," he ended, "you're not after her for anything? Contempt of court, or something British? A proud-spirited young American girl might find your rules and regulations in war time rather irksome, and get up against it. If that's the case, and there's such a thing as graft in this country, I'll buy her off."
Tuppence reassured him.
"That's good. Then we can work together. What about some lunch? Shall we have it up here, or go down to the restaurant?"
Tuppence expressed a preference for the latter, and Julius bowed to her decision.

Oysters had just given place to Sole Colbert when a card was brought to Hersheimmer.

"Inspector Japp, C.I.D. Scotland Yard again. Another man this time. What does he expect I can tell him that I
didn't tell the first chap? I hope they haven't lost that photograph. That Western photographer's place was burned
down and all his negatives destroyed--this is the only copy in existence. I got it from the principal of the college
there."

An unformulated dread swept over Tuppence.

"You--you don't know the name of the man who came this morning?"

"Yes, I do. No, I don't. Half a second. It was on his card. Oh, I know! Inspector Brown. Quiet, unassuming sort
of chap."

CHAPTER VI -- A PLAN OF CAMPAIGN

A veil might with profit be drawn over the events of the next half-hour. Suffice it to say that no such person as
"Inspector Brown" was known to Scotland Yard. The photograph of Jane Finn, which would have been of the
utmost value to the police in tracing her, was lost beyond recovery. Once again "Mr. Brown" had triumphed.

The immediate result of this set back was to effect a rapprochement between Julius Hersheimmer and the Young
Adventurers. All barriers went down with a crash, and Tommy and Tuppence felt they had known the young
American all their lives. They abandoned the discreet reticence of "private inquiry agents," and revealed to him the
whole history of the joint venture, whereat the young man declared himself "tickled to death."

He turned to Tuppence at the close of the narration.

"I've always had a kind of idea that English girls were just a mite moss-grown. Old-fashioned and sweet, you
know, but scared to move round without a footman or a maiden aunt. I guess I'm a bit behind the times!"

The upshot of these confidential relations was that Tommy and Tuppence took up their abode forthwith at the
Ritz, in order, as Tuppence put it, to keep in touch with Jane Finn's only living relation. "And put like that," she
added confidentially to Tommy, "nobody could boggle at the expense!"

Nobody did, which was the great thing.

"And now," said the young lady on the morning after their installation, "to work!"

Mr. Beresford put down the Daily Mail, which he was reading, and applauded with somewhat unnecessary
vigour. He was politely requested by his colleague not to be an ass.

"Dash it all, Tommy, we've got to DO something for our money."

Tommy sighed.

"Yes, I fear even the dear old Government will not support us at the Ritz in idleness for ever."

"Therefore, as I said before, we must DO something."

"Well," said Tommy, picking up the Daily Mail again, "DO it. I shan't stop you."

"You see," continued Tuppence. "I've been thinking----"

She was interrupted by a fresh bout of applause.

"It's all very well for you to sit there being funny, Tommy. It would do you no harm to do a little brain work
too."

"My union, Tuppence, my union! It does not permit me to work before 11 a.m."

"Tommy, do you want something thrown at you? It is absolutely essential that we should without delay map out
a plan of campaign."

"Hear, hear!"

"Well, let's do it."

Tommy laid his paper finally aside. "There's something of the simplicity of the truly great mind about you,
Tuppence. Fire ahead. I'm listening."

"To begin with," said Tuppence, "what have we to go upon?"

"Absolutely nothing," said Tommy cheerily.

"Wrong!" Tuppence wagged an energetic finger. "We have two distinct clues."

"What are they?"

"First clue, we know one of the gang."

"Whittington?"

"Yes. I'd recognize him anywhere."

"Hum," said Tommy doubtfully, "I don't call that much of a clue. You don't know where to look for him, and it's
about a thousand to one against your running against him by accident."

"I'm not so sure about that," replied Tuppence thoughtfully. "I've often noticed that once coincidences start
happening they go on happening in the most extraordinary way. I dare say it's some natural law that we haven't
found out. Still, as you say, we can't rely on that. But there ARE places in London where simply every one is bound
to turn up sooner or later. Piccadilly Circus, for instance. One of my ideas was to take up my stand there every day with a tray of flags."

"What about meals?" inquired the practical Tommy.

"How like a man! What does mere food matter?"

"That's all very well. You've just had a thundering good breakfast. No one's got a better appetite than you have, Tuppence, and by tea-time you'd be eating the flags, pins and all. But, honestly, I don't think much of the idea. Whittington mayn't be in London at all."

"That's true. Anyway, I think clue No. 2 is more promising."

"Let's hear it."

"It's nothing much. Only a Christian name--Rita. Whittington mentioned it that day."

"Are you proposing a third advertisement: Wanted, female crook, answering to the name of Rita?"

"I am not. I propose to reason in a logical manner. That man, Danvers, was shadowed on the way over, wasn't he? And it's more likely to have been a woman than a man----"

"I don't see that at all."

"I am absolutely certain that it would be a woman, and a good-looking one," replied Tuppence calmly.

"On these technical points I bow to your decision," murmured Mr. Beresford.

"Now, obviously this woman, whoever she was, was saved."

"How do you make that out?"

"If she wasn't, how would they have known Jane Finn had got the papers?"

"Correct. Proceed, O Sherlock!"

"Now there's just a chance, I admit it's only a chance, that this woman may have been 'Rita.' "

"And if so?"

"If so, we've got to hunt through the survivors of the Lusitania till we find her."

"Then the first thing is to get a list of the survivors."

"I've got it. I wrote a long list of things I wanted to know, and sent it to Mr. Carter. I got his reply this morning, and among other things it encloses the official statement of those saved from the Lusitania. How's that for clever little Tuppence?"

"Full marks for industry, zero for modesty. But the great point is, is there a 'Rita' on the list?"

"That's just what I don't know," confessed Tuppence.

"Don't know?"

"Yes. Look here." Together they bent over the list. "You see, very few Christian names are given. They're nearly all Mrs. or Miss."

Tommy nodded.

"That complicates matters," he murmured thoughtfully.

Tuppence gave her characteristic "terrier" shake.

"We'll just got to get down to it, that's all. We'll start with the London area. Just note down the addresses of any of the females who live in London or roundabout, while I put on my hat."

Five minutes later the young couple emerged into Piccadilly, and a few seconds later a taxi was bearing them to The Laurels, Glendower Road, N.7, the residence of Mrs. Edgar Keith, whose name figured first in a list of seven reposing in Tommy's pocket-book.

The Laurels was a dilapidated house, standing back from the road with a few grimy bushes to support the fiction of a front garden. Tommy paid off the taxi, and accompanied Tuppence to the front door bell. As she was about to ring it, he arrested her hand.

"What are you going to say?"

"What am I going to say? Why, I shall say--Oh dear, I don't know. It's very awkward."

"I thought as much," said Tommy with satisfaction. "How like a woman! No foresight! Now just stand aside, and see how easily the mere male deals with the situation." He pressed the bell. Tuppence withdrew to a suitable spot.

A slatternly looking servant, with an extremely dirty face and a pair of eyes that did not match, answered the door.

Tommy had produced a notebook and pencil.

"Good morning," he said briskly and cheerfully. "From the Hampstead Borough Council. The new Voting Register. Mrs. Edgar Keith lives here, does she not?"

"Yaas," said the servant.

"Christian name?" asked Tommy, his pencil poised.

"Missus's? Eleanor Jane."

"Eleanor," spelt Tommy. "Any sons or daughters over twenty-one?"
"Naow."
"Thank you." Tommy closed the notebook with a brisk snap. "Good morning."
The servant volunteered her first remark:
"I thought perhaps as you'd come about the gas," she observed cryptically, and shut the door.
Tommy rejoined his accomplice.
"You see, Tuppence," he observed. "Child's play to the masculine mind."
"I don't mind admitting that for once you've scored handsomely. I should never have thought of that."
"Good wheeze, wasn't it? And we can repeat it ad lib."
Lunch-time found the young couple attacking a steak and chips in an obscure hostelry with avidity. They had collected a Gladys Mary and a Marjorie, been baffled by one change of address, and had been forced to listen to a long lecture on universal suffrage from a vivacious American lady whose Christian name had proved to be Sadie.
"Ah!" said Tommy, imbibing a long draught of beer, "I feel better. Where's the next draw?"
The notebook lay on the table between them. Tuppence picked it up.
"Mrs. Vandemeyer," she read, "20 South Audley Mansions. Miss Wheeler, 43 Clapington Road, Battersea. She's a lady's maid, as far as I remember, so probably won't be there, and, anyway, she's not likely."
"Then the Mayfair lady is clearly indicated as the first port of call."
"Tommy, I'm getting discouraged."
"Buck up, old bean. We always knew it was an outside chance. And, anyway, we're only starting. If we draw a blank in London, there's a fine tour of England, Ireland and Scotland before us."
"True," said Tuppence, her flagging spirits reviving. "And all expenses paid! But, oh, Tommy, I do like things to happen quickly. So far, adventure has succeeded adventure, but this morning has been dull as dull."
"You must stifle this longing for vulgar sensation, Tuppence. Remember that if Mr. Brown is all he is reported to be, it's a wonder that he has not ere now done us to death. That's a good sentence, quite a literary flavour about it."
"You're really more conceited than I am--with less excuse! Ahem! But it certainly is queer that Mr. Brown has not yet wreaked vengeance upon us. (You see, I can do it too.) We pass on our way unscathed."
"Perhaps he doesn't think us worth bothering about," suggested the young man simply.
Tuppence received the remark with great disfavour.
"How horrid you are, Tommy. Just as though we didn't count."
"Sorry, Tuppence. What I meant was that we work like moles in the dark, and that he has no suspicion of our nefarious schemes. Ha ha!"
"Ha ha!" echoed Tuppence approvingly, as she rose.
South Audley Mansions was an imposing-looking block of flats just off Park Lane. No. 20 was on the second floor.
Tommy had by this time the glibness born of practice. He rattled off the formula to the elderly woman, looking more like a housekeeper than a servant, who opened the door to him.
"Christian name?"
"Margaret."
Tommy spelt it, but the other interrupted him.
"No, G U E."
"Oh, Marguerite; French way, I see." He paused, then plunged boldly. "We had her down as Rita Vandemeyer, but I suppose that's incorrect?"
"She's mostly called that, sir, but Marguerite's her name."
"Thank you. That's all. Good morning."
Hardly able to contain his excitement, Tommy hurried down the stairs. Tuppence was waiting at the angle of the turn.
"You heard?"
"Yes. Oh, TOMMY!"
Tommy squeezed her arm sympathetically.
"I know, old thing. I feel the same."
"It's--it's so lovely to think of things--and then for them really to happen!" cried Tuppence enthusiastically.
Her hand was still in Tommy's. They had reached the entrance hall. There were footsteps on the stairs above them, and voices.
Suddenly, to Tommy's complete surprise, Tuppence dragged him into the little space by the side of the lift where the shadow was deepest.
"What the--"
"Hush!"
Two men came down the stairs and passed out through the entrance. Tuppence's hand closed tighter on Tommy's arm.

"Quick--follow them. I daren't. He might recognize me. I don't know who the other man is, but the bigger of the two was Whittington."

CHAPTER VII -- THE HOUSE IN SOHO

WHITTINGTON and his companion were walking at a good pace. Tommy started in pursuit at once, and was in time to see them turn the corner of the street. His vigorous strides soon enabled him to gain upon them, and by the time he, in his turn, reached the corner the distance between them was sensibly lessened. The small Mayfair streets were comparatively deserted, and he judged it wise to content himself with keeping them in sight.

The sport was a new one to him. Though familiar with the technicalities from a course of novel reading, he had never before attempted to "follow" anyone, and it appeared to him at once that, in actual practice, the proceeding was fraught with difficulties. Supposing, for instance, that they should suddenly hail a taxi? In books, you simply leapt into another, promised the driver a sovereign--or its modern equivalent--and there you were. In actual fact, Tommy foresaw that it was extremely likely there would be no second taxi. Therefore he would have to run. What happened in actual fact to a young man who ran incessantly and persistently through the London streets? In a main road he might hope to create the illusion that he was merely running for a bus. But in these obscure aristocratic byways he could not but feel that an officious policeman might stop him to explain matters.

At this juncture in his thoughts a taxi with flag erect turned the corner of the street ahead. Tommy held his breath. Would they hail it?

He drew a sigh of relief as they allowed it to pass unchallenged. Their course was a zigzag one designed to bring them as quickly as possible to Oxford Street. When at length they turned into it, proceeding in an easterly direction, Tommy slightly increased his pace. Little by little he gained upon them. On the crowded pavement there was little chance of his attracting their notice, and he was anxious if possible to catch a word or two of their conversation. In this he was completely foiled; they spoke low and the din of the traffic drowned their voices effectually.

Just before the Bond Street Tube station they crossed the road, Tommy, unperceived, faithfully at their heels, and entered the big Lyons'. There they went up to the first floor, and sat at a small table in the window. It was late, and the place was thinning out. Tommy took a seat at the table next to them, sitting directly behind Whittington in case of recognition. On the other hand, he had a full view of the second man and studied him attentively. He was fair, with a weak, unpleasant face, and Tommy put him down as being either a Russian or a Pole. He was probably about fifty years of age, his shoulders cringed a little as he talked, and his eyes, small and crafty, shifted uneasingly.

Having already lunched heartily, Tommy contented himself with ordering a Welsh rarebit and a cup of coffee. Whittington ordered a substantial lunch for himself and his companion; then, as the waitress withdrew, he moved his chair a little closer to the table and began to talk earnestly in a low voice. The other man joined in. Listen as he would, Tommy could only catch a word here and there; but the gist of it seemed to be some directions or orders which the big man was impressing on his companion, and with which the latter seemed from time to time to disagree. Whittington addressed the other as Boris.

Tommy caught the word "Ireland" several times, also "propaganda," but of Jane Finn there was no mention. Suddenly, in a lull in the clatter of the room, he got one phrase entire. Whittington was speaking. "Ah, but you don't know Flossie. She's a marvel. An archbishop would swear she was his own mother. She gets the voice right every time, and that's really the principal thing."

Tommy did not hear Boris's reply, but in response to it Whittington said something that sounded like: "Of course--only in an emergency...."

Then he lost the thread again. But presently the phrases became distinct again whether because the other two had insensibly raised their voices, or because Tommy's ears were getting more attuned, he could not tell. But two words certainly had a most stimulating effect upon the listener. They were uttered by Boris and they were: "Mr. Brown."

Whittington seemed to remonstrate with him, but he merely laughed.

"Why not, my friend? It is a name most respectable--most common. Did he not choose it for that reason? Ah, I should like to meet him--Mr. Brown."

"Bah!" retorted the other. "That is children's talk--a fable for the police. Do you know what I say to myself sometimes? That he is a fable invented by the Inner Ring, a bogy to frighten us with. It might be so."

"And it might not."

"I wonder ... or is it indeed true that he is with us and amongst us, unknown to all but a chosen few? If so, he keeps his secret well. And the idea is a good one, yes. We never know. We look at each other--ONE OF US IS MR.
BROWN--which? He commands--but also he serves. Among us--in the midst of us. And no one knows which he is...."

With an effort the Russian shook off the vagary of his fancy. He looked at his watch.
"Yes," said Whittington. "We might as well go."

He called the waitress and asked for his bill. Tommy did likewise, and a few moments later was following the two men down the stairs.

Outside, Whittington hailed a taxi, and directed the driver to go to Waterloo.

Taxis were plentiful here, and before Whittington's had driven off another was drawing up to the curb in obedience to Tommy's peremptory hand.

"Follow that other taxi," directed the young man. "Don't lose it."

The elderly chauffeur showed no interest. He merely grunted and jerked down his flag. The drive was uneventful. Tommy's taxi came to rest at the departure platform just after Whittington's. Tommy was behind him at the booking-office. He took a first-class single ticket to Bournemouth, Tommy did the same. As he emerged, Boris remarked, glancing up at the clock: "You are early. You have nearly half an hour."

Boris's words had aroused a new train of thought in Tommy's mind. Clearly Whittington was making the journey alone, while the other remained in London. Therefore he was left with a choice as to which he would follow. Obviously, he could not follow both of them unless----Like Boris, he glanced up at the clock, and then to the announcement board of the trains. The Bournemouth train left at 3.30. It was now ten past. Whittington and Boris were walking up and down by the bookstall. He gave one doubtful look at them, then hurried into an adjacent telephone box. He dared not waste time in trying to get hold of Tuppence. In all probability she was still in the neighbourhood of South Audley Mansions. But there remained another ally. He rang up the Ritz and asked for Julius Hersheimmer. There was a click and a buzz. Oh, if only the young American was in his room! There was another click, and then "Hello" in unmistakable accents came over the wire.

"That you, Hersheimmer? Beresford speaking. I'm at Waterloo. I've followed Whittington and another man here. No time to explain. Whittington's off to Bournemouth by the 3.30. Can you get there by then?"

The reply was reassuring.
"Sure. I'll hustle."

The telephone rang off. Tommy put back the receiver with a sigh of relief. His opinion of Julius's power of hustling was high. He felt instinctively that the American would arrive in time.

Whittington and Boris were still where he had left them. If Boris remained to see his friend off, all was well. Then Tommy fingered his pocket thoughtfully. In spite of the carte blanche assured to him, he had not yet acquired the habit of going about with any considerable sum of money on him. The taking of the first-class ticket to Bournemouth had left him with only a few shillings in his pocket. It was to be hoped that Julius would arrive better provided.

In the meantime, the minutes were creeping by: 3.15, 3.20, 3.25, 3.27. Supposing Julius did not get there in time. 3.29.... Doors were banging. Tommy felt cold waves of despair pass over him. Then a hand fell on his shoulder.

"Here I am, son. Your British traffic beats description! Put me wise to the crooks right away."

"That's Whittington--there, getting in now, that big dark man. The other is the foreign chap he's talking to."

"I'm on to them. Which of the two is my bird?"

Tommy had thought out this question.
"Got any money with you?"

Julius shook his head, and Tommy's face fell.
"I guess I haven't more than three or four hundred dollars with me at the moment," explained the American.

Tommy gave a faint whoop of relief.
"Oh, Lord, you millionaires! You don't talk the same language! Climb aboard the lugger. Here's your ticket. Whittington's your man."

"Me for Whittington!" said Julius darkly. The train was just starting as he swung himself aboard. "So long, Tommy." The train slid out of the station.

Tommy drew a deep breath. The man Boris was coming along the platform towards him. Tommy allowed him to pass and then took up the chase once more.

From Waterloo Boris took the tube as far as Piccadilly Circus. Then he walked up Shaftesbury Avenue, finally turning off into the maze of mean streets round Soho. Tommy followed him at a judicious distance.

They reached at length a small dilapidated square. The houses there had a sinister air in the midst of their dirt and decay. Boris looked round, and Tommy drew back into the shelter of a friendly porch. The place was almost deserted. It was a cul-de-sac, and consequently no traffic passed that way. The stealthy way the other had looked round stimulated Tommy's imagination. From the shelter of the doorway he watched him go up the steps of a
particularly evil-looking house and rap sharply, with a peculiar rhythm, on the door. It was opened promptly, he said a word or two to the doorkeeper, then passed inside. The door was shut to again.

It was at this juncture that Tommy lost his head. What he ought to have done, what any sane man would have done, was to remain patiently where he was and wait for his man to come out again. What he did do was entirely foreign to the sober common sense which was, as a rule, his leading characteristic. Something, as he expressed it, seemed to snap in his brain. Without a moment's pause for reflection he, too, went up the steps, and reproduced as far as he was able the peculiar knock.

The door swung open with the same promptness as before. A villainous-faced man with close-cropped hair stood in the doorway.

"Well?" he grunted.

It was at that moment that the full realization of his folly began to come home to Tommy. But he dared not hesitate. He seized at the first words that came into his mind.

"Mr. Brown?" he said.

To his surprise the man stood aside.

"Upstairs," he said, jerking his thumb over his shoulder, "second door on your left."

CHAPTER VIII -- THE ADVENTURES OF TOMMY

TAKEN aback though he was by the man's words, Tommy did not hesitate. If audacity had successfully carried him so far, it was to be hoped it would carry him yet farther. He quietly passed into the house and mounted the ramshackle staircase. Everything in the house was filthy beyond words. The grimy paper, of a pattern now indistinguishable, hung in loose festoons from the wall. In every angle was a grey mass of cobweb.

Tommy proceeded leisurely. By the time he reached the bend of the staircase, he had heard the man below disappear into a back room. Clearly no suspicion attached to him as yet. To come to the house and ask for "Mr. Brown" appeared indeed to be a reasonable and natural proceeding.

At the top of the stairs Tommy halted to consider his next move. In front of him ran a narrow passage, with doors opening on either side of it. From the one nearest him on the left came a low murmur of voices. It was this room which he had been directed to enter. But what held his glance fascinated was a small recess immediately on his right, half concealed by a torn velvet curtain. It was directly opposite the left-handed door and, owing to its angle, it also commanded a good view of the upper part of the staircase. As a hiding-place for one or, at a pinch, two men, it was ideal, being about two feet deep and three feet wide. It attracted Tommy mightily. He thought things over in his usual slow and steady way, deciding that the mention of "Mr. Brown" was not a request for an individual, but in all probability a password used by the gang. His lucky use of it had gained him admission. So far he had aroused no suspicion. But he must decide quickly on his next step.

Suppose he were boldly to enter the room on the left of the passage. Would the mere fact of his having been admitted to the house be sufficient? Perhaps a further password would be required, or, at any rate, some proof of identity. The doorkeeper clearly did not know all the members of the gang by sight, but it might be different upstairs. On the whole it seemed to him that luck had served him very well so far, but that there was such a thing as trusting it too far. To enter that room was a colossal risk. He could not hope to sustain his part indefinitely; sooner or later he was almost bound to betray himself, and then he would have thrown away a vital chance in mere foolhardiness.

A repetition of the signal knock sounded on the door below, and Tommy, his mind made up, slipped quickly into the recess, and cautiously drew the curtain farther across so that it shielded him completely from sight. There were several rents and slits in the ancient material which afforded him a good view. He would watch events, and any time he chose could, after all, join the assembly, modelling his behaviour on that of the new arrival.

The man who came up the staircase with a furtive, soft-footed tread was quite unknown to Tommy. He was obviously of the very dregs of society. The low beetling brows, and the criminal jaw, the bestiality of the whole countenance were new to the young man, though he was a type that Scotland Yard would have recognized at a glance.

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The man passed the recess, breathing heavily as he went. He stopped at the door opposite, and gave a repetition of the signal knock. A voice inside called out something, and the man opened the door and passed in, affording Tommy a momentary glimpse of the room inside. He thought there must be about four or five people seated round a long table that took up most of the space, but his attention was caught and held by a tall man with close-cropped hair and a short, pointed, naval-looking beard, who sat at the head of the table with papers in front of him. As the newcomer entered he glanced up, and with a correct, but curiously precise enunciation, which attracted Tommy's notice, he asked:

"Your number, comrade?"

"Fourteen, gov'nor," replied the other hoarsely.
"Correct."

The door shut again.

"If that isn't a Hun, I'm a Dutchman!" said Tommy to himself. "And running the show darned systematically too-as they always do. Lucky I didn't roll in. I'd have given the wrong number, and there would have been the deuce to pay. No, this is the place for me. Hullo, here's another knock."

This visitor proved to be of an entirely different type to the last. Tommy recognized in him an Irish Sinn Feiner. Certainly Mr. Brown's organization was a far-reaching concern. The common criminal, the well-bred Irish gentleman, the pale Russian, and the efficient German master of the ceremonies! Truly a strange and sinister gathering! Who was this man who held in his finger these curiously variegated links of an unknown chain?

In this case, the procedure was exactly the same. The signal knock, the demand for a number, and the reply "Correct."

Two knocks followed in quick succession on the door below. The first man was quite unknown to Tommy, who put him down as a city clerk. A quiet, intelligent-looking man, rather shabbily dressed. The second was of the working classes, and his face was vaguely familiar to the young man.

Three minutes later came another, a man of commanding appearance, exquisitely dressed, and evidently well born. His face, again, was not unknown to the watcher, though he could not for the moment put a name to it.

After his arrival there was a long wait. In fact Tommy concluded that the gathering was now complete, and was just cautiously creeping out from his hiding-place, when another knock sent him scuttling back to cover.

This last-comer came up the stairs so quietly that he was almost abreast of Tommy before the young man had realized his presence.

He was a small man, very pale, with a gentle almost womanish air. The angle of the cheek-bones hinted at his Slavonic ancestry, otherwise there was nothing to indicate his nationality. As he passed the recess, he turned his head slowly. The strange light eyes seemed to burn through the curtain; Tommy could hardly believe that the man did not know he was there and in spite of himself he shivered. He was no more fanciful than the majority of young Englishmen, but he could not rid himself of the impression that some unusually potent force emanated from the man. The creature reminded him of a venomous snake.

A moment later his impression was proved correct. The new-comer knocked on the door as all had done, but his reception was very different. The bearded man rose to his feet, and all the others followed suit. The German came forward and shook hands. His heels clicked together.

"We are honoured," he said. "We are greatly honoured. I much feared that it would be impossible."

The other answered in a low voice that had a kind of hiss in it:

"There were difficulties. It will not be possible again, I fear. But one meeting is essential--to define my policy. I can do nothing without--Mr. Brown. He is here?"

The change in the German's voice was audible as he replied with slight hesitation:

"We have received a message. It is impossible for him to be present in person." He stopped, giving a curious impression of having left the sentence unfinished.

A very slow smile overspread the face of the other. He looked round at a circle of uneasy faces.

"Ah! I understand. I have read of his methods. He works in the dark and trusts no one. But, all the same, it is possible that he is among us now...." He looked round him again, and again that expression of fear swept over the group. Each man seemed eyeing his neighbour doubtfully.

The Russian tapped his cheek.

"So be it. Let us proceed."

The German seemed to pull himself together. He indicated the place he had been occupying at the head of the table. The Russian demurred, but the other insisted.

"It is the only possible place," he said, "for--Number One. Perhaps Number Fourteen will shut the door?"

In another moment Tommy was once more confronting bare wooden panels, and the voices within had sunk once more to a mere undistinguishable murmur. Tommy became restive. The conversation he had overheard had stimulated his curiosity. He felt that, by hook or by crook, he must hear more.

There was no sound from below, and it did not seem likely that the doorkeeper would come upstairs. After listening intently for a minute or two, he put his head round the curtain. The passage was deserted. Tommy bent down and removed his shoes, then, leaving them behind the curtain, he walked gingerly out on his stockinged feet, and kneeling down by the closed door he laid his ear cautiously to the crack. To his intense annoyance he could distinguish little more; just a chance word here and there if a voice was raised, which merely served to whet his curiosity still farther.

He eyed the handle of the door tentatively. Could he turn it by degrees so gently and imperceptibly that those in the room would notice nothing? He decided that with great care it could be done. Very slowly, a fraction of an inch
at a time, he moved it round, holding his breath in his excessive care. A little more—a little more still—would it never be finished? Ah! at last it would turn no farther.

He stayed so for a minute or two, then drew a deep breath, and pressed it ever so slightly inward. The door did not budge. Tommy was annoyed. If he had to use too much force, it would almost certainly creak. He waited until the voices rose a little, then he tried again. Still nothing happened. He increased the pressure. Had the beastly thing stuck? Finally, in desperation, he pushed with all his might. But the door remained firm, and at last the truth dawned upon him. It was locked or bolted on the inside.

For a moment or two Tommy's indignation got the better of him.
"Well, I'm damned!" he said. "What a dirty trick!"

As his indignation cooled, he prepared to face the situation. Clearly the first thing to be done was to restore the handle to its original position. If he let it go suddenly, the men inside would be almost certain to notice it, so, with the same infinite pains, he reversed his former tactics. All went well, and with a sigh of relief the young man rose to his feet. There was a certain bulldog tenacity about Tommy that made him slow to admit defeat. Checkmated for the moment, he was far from abandoning the conflict. He still intended to hear what was going on in the locked room. As one plan had failed, he must hunt about for another.

He looked round him. A little farther along the passage on the left was a second door. He slipped silently along to it. He listened for a moment or two, then tried the handle. It yielded, and he slipped inside.

The room, which was untenanted, was furnished as a bedroom. Like everything else in the house, the furniture was falling to pieces, and the dirt was, if anything, more abundant.

But what interested Tommy was the thing he had hoped to find, a communicating door between the two rooms, up on the left by the window. Carefully closing the door into the passage behind him, he stepped across to the other and examined it closely. The bolt was shot across it. It was very rusty, and had clearly not been used for some time. By gently wriggling it to and fro, Tommy managed to draw it back without making too much noise. Then he repeated his former manoeuvres with the handle—this time with complete success. The door swung open—a crack, a mere fraction, but enough for Tommy to hear what went on. There was a velvet portiere on the inside of this door which prevented him from seeing, but he was able to recognize the voices with a reasonable amount of accuracy.

The Sinn Feiner was speaking. His rich Irish voice was unmistakable:
"That's all very well. But more money is essential. No money—no results!"

Another voice which Tommy rather thought was that of Boris replied:
"Will you guarantee that there ARE results?"

"In a month from now—sooner or later as you wish—I will guarantee you such a reign of terror in Ireland as shall shake the British Empire to its foundations."

There was a pause, and then came the soft, sibilant accents of Number One:
"Good! You shall have the money. Boris, you will see to that."

Boris asked a question:
"Via the Irish Americans, and Mr. Potter as usual?"

"I guess that'll be all right!" said a new voice, with a transatlantic intonation, "though I'd like to point out, here and now, that things are getting a mite difficult. There's not the sympathy there was, and a growing disposition to let the Irish settle their own affairs without interference from America."

Tommy felt that Boris had shrugged his shoulders as he answered:
"Does that matter, since the money only nominally comes from the States?"

"The chief difficulty is the landing of the ammunition," said the Sinn Feiner. "The money is conveyed in easily enough--thanks to our colleague here."

Another voice, which Tommy fancied was that of the tall, commanding-looking man whose face had seemed familiar to him, said:
"Think of the feelings of Belfast if they could hear you!"

"That is settled, then," said the sibilant tones. "Now, in the matter of the loan to an English newspaper, you have arranged the details satisfactorily, Boris?"

"I think so."

"That is good. An official denial from Moscow will be forthcoming if necessary."

There was a pause, and then the clear voice of the German broke the silence:
"I am directed by--Mr. Brown, to place the summaries of the reports from the different unions before you. That of the miners is most satisfactory. We must hold back the railways. There may be trouble with the A.S.E."

For a long time there was a silence, broken only by the rustle of papers and an occasional word of explanation from the German. Then Tommy heard the light tap-tap of fingers, drumming on the table.
"And--the date, my friend?" said Number One.
"The 29th."
The Russian seemed to consider:
"That is rather soon."
"I know. But it was settled by the principal Labour leaders, and we cannot seem to interfere too much. They
must believe it to be entirely their own show."
The Russian laughed softly, as though amused.
"Yes, yes," he said. "That is true. They must have no inkling that we are using them for our own ends. They are
honest men--and that is their value to us. It is curious--but you cannot make a revolution without honest men. The
instinct of the populace is infallible." He paused, and then repeated, as though the phrase pleased him: "Every
revolution has had its honest men. They are soon disposed of afterwards."
There was a sinister note in his voice.
The German resumed:
"Clymes must go. He is too far-seeing. Number Fourteen will see to that."
There was a hoarse murmur.
"That's all right, gov'nor." And then after a moment or two: "Suppose I'm nabbed."
"You will have the best legal talent to defend you," replied the German quietly. "But in any case you will wear
gloves fitted with the finger-prints of a notorious housebreaker. You have little to fear."
"Oh, I ain't afraid, gov'nor. All for the good of the cause. The streets is going to run with blood, so they say." He
spoke with a grim relish. "Dreams of it, sometimes, I does. And diamonds and pearls rolling about in the gutter for
anyone to pick up!"
Tommy heard a chair shifted. Then Number One spoke:
"Then all is arranged. We are assured of success?"
"I--think so." But the German spoke with less than his usual confidence.
Number One's voice held suddenly a dangerous quality:
"What has gone wrong?"
"Nothing; but----"
"But what?"
"The Labour leaders. Without them, as you say, we can do nothing. If they do not declare a general strike on the
29th----"
"Why should they not?"
"As you've said, they're honest. And, in spite of everything we've done to discredit the Government in their eyes,
I'm not sure that they haven't got a sneaking faith and belief in it."
"But----"
"I know. They abuse it unceasingly. But, on the whole, public opinion swings to the side of the Government. They
will not go against it."
Again the Russian's fingers drummed on the table.
"To the point, my friend. I was given to understand that there was a certain document in existence which assured
success."
"That is so. If that document were placed before the leaders, the result would be immediate. They would publish
it broadcast throughout England, and declare for the revolution without a moment's hesitation. The Government
would be broken finally and completely."
"Then what more do you want?"
"The document itself," said the German bluntly.
"Ah! It is not in your possession? But you know where it is?"
"No."
"Does anyone know where it is?"
"One person--perhaps. And we are not sure of that even."
"Who is this person?"
"A girl."
Tommy held his breath.
"A girl?" The Russian's voice rose contemptuously. "And you have not made her speak? In Russia we have ways
of making a girl talk."
"This case is different," said the German sullenly.
"How--different?" He paused a moment, then went on: "Where is the girl now?"
"The girl?"
"Yes."
"She is----"

But Tommy heard no more. A crashing blow descended on his head, and all was darkness.

CHAPTER IX -- TUPPENCE ENTERS DOMESTIC SERVICE

WHEN Tommy set forth on the trail of the two men, it took all Tuppence's self-command to refrain from accompanying him. However, she contained herself as best she might, consoled by the reflection that her reasoning had been justified by events. The two men had undoubtedly come from the second floor flat, and that one slender thread of the name "Rita" had set the Young Adventurers once more upon the track of the abductors of Jane Finn.

The question was what to do next? Tuppence hated letting the grass grow under her feet. Tommy was amply employed, and debarred from joining him in the chase, the girl felt at a loose end. She retraced her steps to the entrance hall of the mansions. It was now tenanted by a small lift-boy, who was polishing brass fittings, and whistling the latest air with a good deal of vigour and a reasonable amount of accuracy.

He glanced round at Tuppence's entry. There was a certain amount of the gamin element in the girl, at all events she invariably got on well with small boys. A sympathetic bond seemed instantly to be formed. She reflected that an ally in the enemy's camp, so to speak, was not to be despised.

"Well, William," she remarked cheerfully, in the best approved hospital-early-morning style, "getting a good shine up?"

The boy grinned responsively.

"Albert, miss," he corrected.

"Albert be it," said Tuppence. She glanced mysteriously round the hall. The effect was purposely a broad one in case Albert should miss it. She leaned towards the boy and dropped her voice: "I want a word with you, Albert."

Albert ceased operations on the fittings and opened his mouth slightly.

"Look! Do you know what this is?" With a dramatic gesture she flung back the left side of her coat and exposed a small enamelled badge. It was extremely unlikely that Albert would have any knowledge of it--indeed, it would have been fatal for Tuppence's plans, since the badge in question was the device of a local training corps originated by the archdeacon in the early days of the war. Its presence in Tuppence's coat was due to the fact that she had used it for pinning in some flowers a day or two before. But Tuppence had sharp eyes, and had noted the corner of a threepenny detective novel protruding from Albert's pocket, and the immediate enlargement of his eyes told her that her tactics were good, and that the fish would rise to the bait.

"American Detective Force!" she hissed.

Albert fell for it.

"Lord!" he murmured ecstatically.

Tuppence nodded at him with the air of one who has established a thorough understanding.

"Know who I'm after?" she inquired genially.

Albert, still round-eyed, demanded breathlessly:

"One of the flats?"

Tuppence nodded and jerked a thumb up the stairs.

"No. 20. Calls herself Vandemeyer. Vandemeyer! Ha! ha!"

Albert's hand stole to his pocket.

"A crook?" he queried eagerly.

"A crook? I should say so. Ready Rita they call her in the States."

"Ready Rita," repeated Albert deliriously. "Oh, ain't it just like the pictures!"

It was. Tuppence was a great frequenter of the kinema.

"Annie always said as how she was a bad lot," continued the boy.

"Who's Annie?" inquired Tuppence idly.

" 'Ouse-parlourmaid. She's leaving to-day. Many's the time Annie's said to me: 'Mark my words, Albert, I wouldn't wonder if the police was to come after her one of these days.' Just like that. But she's a stunner to look at, ain't she?"

"She's some peach," allowed Tuppence carelessly. "Finds it useful in her lay-out, you bet. Has she been wearing any of the emeralds, by the way?"

"Emeralds? Them's the green stones, isn't they?"

Tuppence nodded.

"That's what we're after her for. You know old man Rysdale?"

Albert shook his head.

"Peter B. Rysdale, the oil king?"

"It seems sort of familiar to me."

"The sparklers belonged to him. Finest collection of emeralds in the world. Worth a million dollars!"
"Lumme!" came ecstatically from Albert. "It sounds more like the pictures every minute."
Tuppence smiled, gratified at the success of her efforts.
"We haven't exactly proved it yet. But we're after her. And"--she produced a long-drawn-out wink--"I guess she won't get away with the goods this time."
Albert uttered another ejaculation indicative of delight.
"Mind you, sonny, not a word of this," said Tuppence suddenly. "I guess I ought'n't to have put you wise, but in the States we know a real smart lad when we see one."
"I'll not breathe a word," protested Albert eagerly. "Ain't there anything I could do? A bit of shadowing, maybe, or such like?"
Tuppence affected to consider, then shook her head.
"Not at the moment, but I'll bear you in mind, son. What's this about the girl you say is leaving?"
"Annie? Regular turn up, they 'ad. As Annie said, servants is some one nowadays, and to be treated accordingly, and, what with her passing the word round, she won't find it so easy to get another."
"Won't she?" said Tuppence thoughtfully. "I wonder----"
An idea was dawning in her brain. She thought a minute or two, then tapped Albert on the shoulder.
"See here, son, my brain's got busy. How would it be if you mentioned that you'd got a young cousin, or a friend of yours had, that might suit the place. You get me?"
"I'm there," said Albert instantly. "You leave it to me, miss, and I'll fix the whole thing up in two ticks."
"Some lad!" commented Tuppence, with a nod of approval. "You might say that the young woman could come in right away. You let me know, and if it's O.K. I'll be round to-morrow at eleven o'clock."
"Where am I to let you know to?"
"Ritz," replied Tuppence laconically. "Name of Cowley."
Albert eyed her enviously.
"It must be a good job, this tec business."
"It sure is," drawled Tuppence, "especially when old man Rysdale backs the bill. But don't fret, son. If this goes well, you shall come in on the ground floor."
With which promise she took leave of her new ally, and walked briskly away from South Audley Mansions, well pleased with her morning's work.

But there was no time to be lost. She went straight back to the Ritz and wrote a few brief words to Mr. Carter. Having dispatched this, and Tommy not having yet returned--which did not surprise her--she started off on a shopping expedition which, with an interval for tea and assorted creamy cakes, occupied her until well after six o'clock, and she returned to the hotel jaded, but satisfied with her purchases. Starting with a cheap clothing store, and passing through one or two second-hand establishments, she had finished the day at a well-known hairdresser's. Now, in the seclusion of her bedroom, she unwrapped that final purchase. Five minutes later she smiled contentedly at her reflection in the glass. With an actress's pencil she had slightly altered the line of her eyebrows, and that, taken in conjunction with the new luxuriant growth of fair hair above, so changed her appearance that she felt confident that even if she came face to face with Whittington he would not recognize her. She would wear elevators in her shoes, and the cap and apron would be an even more valuable disguise. From hospital experience she knew only too well that a nurse out of uniform is frequently unrecognized by her patients.

"Yes," said Tuppence aloud, nodding at the pert reflection in the glass, "you'll do." She then resumed her normal appearance.

Dinner was a solitary meal. Tuppence was rather surprised at Tommy's non-return. Julius, too, was absent--but that to the girl's mind was more easily explained. His "hustling" activities were not confined to London, and his abrupt appearances and disappearances were fully accepted by the Young Adventurers as part of the day's work. It was quite on the cards that Julius P. Hersheimmer had left for Constantinople at a moment's notice if he fancied that a clue to his cousin's disappearance was to be found there. The energetic young man had succeeded in making the lives of several Scotland Yard men unbearable to them, and the telephone girls at the Admiralty had learned to know and dread the familiar "Hullo!" He had spent three hours in Paris hustling the Prefecture, and had returned from there imbued with the idea, possibly inspired by a weary French official, that the true clue to the mystery was to be found in Ireland.

"I dare say he's dashed off there now," thought Tuppence. "All very well, but this is very dull for ME! Here I am bursting with news, and absolutely no one to tell it to! Tommy might have wired, or something. I wonder where he is. Anyway, he can't have 'lost the trail' as they say. That reminds me----" And Miss Cowley broke off in her meditations, and summoned a small boy.

Ten minutes later the lady was ensconced comfortably on her bed, smoking cigarettes and deep in the perusal of Garnaby Williams, the Boy Detective, which, with other threepenny works of lurid fiction, she had sent out to
purchase. She felt, and rightly, that before the strain of attempting further intercourse with Albert, it would be as well to fortify herself with a good supply of local colour.

The morning brought a note from Mr. Carter:

"DEAR MISS TUPPENCE,

"You have made a splendid start, and I congratulate you. I feel, though, that I should like to point out to you once more the risks you are running, especially if you pursue the course you indicate. Those people are absolutely desperate and incapable of either mercy or pity. I feel that you probably underestimate the danger, and therefore warn you again that I can promise you no protection. You have given us valuable information, and if you choose to withdraw now no one could blame you. At any rate, think the matter over well before you decide.

"If, in spite of my warnings, you make up your mind to go through with it, you will find everything arranged. You have lived for two years with Miss Dufferin, The Parsonage, Llanelly, and Mrs. Vandemeyer can apply to her for a reference.

"May I be permitted a word or two of advice? Stick as near to the truth as possible—it minimizes the danger of 'slips.' I suggest that you should represent yourself to be what you are, a former V.A.D., who has chosen domestic service as a profession. There are many such at the present time. That explains away any incongruities of voice or manner which otherwise might awaken suspicion.

"Whichever way you decide, good luck to you. "Your sincere friend, "MR. CARTER."

Tuppence's spirits rose mercurially. Mr. Carter's warnings passed unheeded. The young lady had far too much confidence in herself to pay any heed to them.

With some reluctance she abandoned the interesting part she had sketched out for herself. Although she had no doubts of her own powers to sustain a role indefinitely, she had too much common sense not to recognize the force of Mr. Carter's arguments.

There was still no word or message from Tommy, but the morning post brought a somewhat dirty postcard with the words: "It's O.K." scrawled upon it.

At ten-thirty Tuppence surveyed with pride a slightly battered tin trunk containing her new possessions. It was artistically corded. It was with a slight blush that she rang the bell and ordered it to be placed in a taxi. She drove to Paddington, and left the box in the cloak room. She then repaired with a handbag to the fastnesses of the ladies' waiting-room. Ten minutes later a metamorphosed Tuppence walked demurely out of the station and entered a bus.

It was a few minutes past eleven when Tuppence again entered the hall of South Audley Mansions. Albert was on the look-out, attending to his duties in a somewhat desultory fashion. He did not immediately recognize Tuppence. When he did, his admiration was unbounded.

"Blest if I'd have known you! That rig-out's top-hole."

"Glad you like it, Albert," replied Tuppence modestly. "By the way, am I your cousin, or am I not?"

"Your voice too," cried the delighted boy. "It's as English as anything! No, I said as a friend of mine knew a young gal. Annie wasn't best pleased. She's stopped on till to-day--to oblige, SHE said, but really it's so as to put you against the place."

"Nice girl," said Tuppence.

Albert suspected no irony.

"She's style about her, and keeps her silver a treat--but, my word, ain't she got a temper. Are you going up now, miss? Step inside the lift. No. 20 did you say?" And he winked.

Tuppence quelled him with a stern glance, and stepped inside.

As she rang the bell of No. 20 she was conscious of Albert's eyes slowly descending beneath the level of the floor.

A smart young woman opened the door.

"I've come about the place," said Tuppence.

"It's a rotten place," said the young woman without hesitation. "Regular old cat--always interfering. Accused me of tampering with her letters. Me! The flap was half undone anyway. There's never anything in the waste-paper basket--she burns everything. She's a wrong 'un, that's what she is. Swell clothes, but no class. Cook knows something about her--but she won't tell--scared to death of her. And suspicious! She's on to you in a minute if you as much as speak to a fellow. I can tell you----"

But what more Annie could tell, Tuppence was never destined to learn, for at that moment a clear voice with a peculiarly steely ring to it called:

"Annie!"

The smart young woman jumped as if she had been shot.

"Yes, ma'am."

"Who are you talking to?"
"It's a young woman about the situation, ma'am."
"Show her in then. At once."
"Yes, ma'am."

Tuppence was ushered into a room on the right of the long passage. A woman was standing by the fireplace. She was no longer in her first youth, and the beauty she undeniably possessed was hardened and coarsened. In her youth she must have been dazzling. Her pale gold hair, owing a slight assistance to art, was coiled low on her neck, her eyes, of a piercing electric blue, seemed to possess a faculty of boring into the very soul of the person she was looking at. Her exquisite figure was enhanced by a wonderful gown of indigo charmeuse. And yet, despite her swaying grace, and the almost ethereal beauty of her face, you felt instinctively the presence of something hard and menacing, a kind of metallic strength that found expression in the tones of her voice and in that gimlet-like quality of her eyes.

For the first time Tuppence felt afraid. She had not feared Whittington, but this woman was different. As if fascinated, she watched the long cruel line of the red curving mouth, and again she felt that sensation of panic pass over her. Her usual self-confidence deserted her. Vaguely she felt that deceiving this woman would be very different to deceiving Whittington. Mr. Carter's warning recurred to her mind. Here, indeed, she might expect no mercy.

Fighting down that instinct of panic which urged her to turn tail and run without further delay, Tuppence returned the lady's gaze firmly and respectfully.

As though that first scrutiny had been satisfactory, Mrs. Vandemeyer motioned to a chair.
"You can sit down. How did you hear I wanted a house-parlourmaid?"
"Through a friend who knows the lift boy here. He thought the place might suit me."

Again that basilisk glance seemed to pierce her through.
"You speak like an educated girl?"

Glibly enough, Tuppence ran through her imaginary career on the lines suggested by Mr. Carter. It seemed to her, as she did so, that the tension of Mrs. Vandemeyer's attitude relaxed.
"I see," she remarked at length. "Is there anyone I can write to for a reference?"
"I lived last with a Miss Dufferin, The Parsonage, Llanelly. I was with her two years."

"And then you thought you would get more money by coming to London, I suppose? Well, it doesn't matter to me. I will give you L50--L60--whatever you want. You can come in at once?"
"Yes, ma'am. To-day, if you like. My box is at Paddington."
"Go and fetch it in a taxi, then. It's an easy place. I am out a good deal. By the way, what's your name?"
"Prudence Cooper, ma'am."

"Very well, Prudence. Go away and fetch your box. I shall be out to lunch. The cook will show you where everything is."
"Thank you, ma'am."

Tuppence withdrew. The smart Annie was not in evidence. In the hall below a magnificent hall porter had relegated Albert to the background. Tuppence did not even glance at him as she passed meekly out.

The adventure had begun, but she felt less elated than she had done earlier in the morning. It crossed her mind that if the unknown Jane Finn had fallen into the hands of Mrs. Vandemeyer, it was likely to have gone hard with her.

CHAPTER X -- ENTER SIR JAMES PEEL EDGERTON

TUPPENCE betrayed no awkwardness in her new duties. The daughters of the archdeacon were well grounded in household tasks. They were also experts in training a "raw girl," the inevitable result being that the raw girl, once trained, departed elsewhere where her newly acquired knowledge commanded a more substantial remuneration than the archdeacon's meagre purse allowed.

Tuppence had therefore very little fear of proving inefficient. Mrs. Vandemeyer's cook puzzled her. She evidently went in deadly terror of her mistress. The girl thought it probable that the other woman had some hold over her. For the rest, she cooked like a chef, as Tuppence had an opportunity of judging that evening. Mrs. Vandemeyer was expecting a guest to dinner, and Tuppence accordingly laid the beautifully polished table for two. She was a little exercised in her own mind as to this visitor. It was highly possible that it might prove to be Whittington. Although she felt fairly confident that he would not recognize her, yet she would have been better pleased had the guest proved to be a total stranger. However, there was nothing for it but to hope for the best.

At a few minutes past eight the front door bell rang, and Tuppence went to answer it with some inward trepidation. She was relieved to see that the visitor was the second of the two men whom Tommy had taken upon himself to follow.

He gave his name as Count Stepanov. Tuppence announced him, and Mrs. Vandemeyer rose from her seat on a low divan with a quick murmur of pleasure.
"It is delightful to see you, Boris Ivanovitch," she said.
"And you, madame!" He bowed low over her hand.
Tuppence returned to the kitchen.
"Count Stepanov, or some such," she remarked, and affecting a frank and unvarnished curiosity: "Who's he?"
"A Russian gentleman, I believe."
"Come here much?"
"Once in a while. What d'you want to know for?"
"Fancied he might be sweet on the missus, that's all," explained the girl, adding with an appearance of sulkiness:
"How do you take one up!"

"I'm not quite easy in my mind about the souffle," explained the other.
"You know something," thought Tuppence to herself, but aloud she only said: "Going to dish up now? Right-o."

Whilst waiting at table, Tuppence listened closely to all that was said. She remembered that this was one of the men Tommy was shadowing when she had last seen him. Already, although she would hardly admit it, she was becoming uneasy about her partner. Where was he? Why had no word of any kind come from him? She had arranged before leaving the Ritz to have all letters or messages sent on at once by special messenger to a small stationer's shop near at hand where Albert was to call in frequently. True, it was only yesterday morning that she had parted from Tommy, and she told herself that any anxiety on his behalf would be absurd. Still, it was strange that he had sent no word of any kind.

But, listen as she might, the conversation presented no clue. Boris and Mrs. Vandemeyer talked on purely indifferent subjects: plays they had seen, new dances, and the latest society gossip. After dinner they repaired to the small boudoir where Mrs. Vandemeyer, stretched on the divan, looked more wickedly beautiful than ever. Tuppence brought in the coffee and liqueurs and unwillingly retired. As she did so, she heard Boris say:

"New, isn't she?"
"She came in to-day. The other was a fiend. This girl seems all right. She waits well."
Tuppence lingered a moment longer by the door which she had carefully neglected to close, and heard him say:
"Quite safe, I suppose?"
"Really, Boris, you are absurdly suspicious. I believe she's the cousin of the hall porter, or something of the kind. And nobody even dreams that I have any connection with our--mutual friend, Mr. Brown."
"For heaven's sake, be careful, Rita. That door isn't shut."
"Well, shut it then," laughed the woman.
Tuppence removed herself speedily.
She dared not absent herself longer from the back premises, but she cleared away and washed up with a breathless speed acquired in hospital. Then she slipped quietly back to the boudoir door. The cook, more leisurely, was still busy in the kitchen and, if she missed the other, would only suppose her to be turning down the beds.

Alas! The conversation inside was being carried on in too low a tone to permit of her hearing anything of it. She dared not reopen the door, however gently. Mrs. Vandemeyer was sitting almost facing it, and Tuppence respected her mistress's lynx-eyed powers of observation.

Nevertheless, she felt she would give a good deal to overhear what was going on. Possibly, if anything unforeseen had happened, she might get news of Tommy. For some moments she reflected desperately, then her face brightened. She went quickly along the passage to Mrs. Vandemeyer's bedroom, which had long French windows leading on to a balcony that ran the length of the flat. Slipping quickly through the window, Tuppence crept noiselessly along till she reached the boudoir window. As she had thought it stood a little ajar, and the voices within were plainly audible.

Tuppence listened attentively, but there was no mention of anything that could be twisted to apply to Tommy. Mrs. Vandemeyer and the Russian seemed to be at variance over some matter, and finally the latter exclaimed bitterly:

"With your persistent recklessness, you will end by ruining us!"
"Bah!" laughed the woman. "Notoriety of the right kind is the best way of disarming suspicion. You will realize that one of these days--perhaps sooner than you think!"

"In the meantime, you are going about everywhere with Peel Edgerton. Not only is he, perhaps, the most celebrated K.C. in England, but his special hobby is criminology! It is madness!"
"I know that his eloquence has saved untold men from the gallows," said Mrs. Vandemeyer calmly. "What of it? I may need his assistance in that line myself some day. If so, how fortunate to have such a friend at court--or perhaps it would be more to the point to say IN court."

Boris got up and began striding up and down. He was very excited.
"You are a clever woman, Rita; but you are also a fool! Be guided by me, and give up Peel Edgerton."
Mrs. Vandemeyer shook her head gently.
"I think not."
"You refuse?" There was an ugly ring in the Russian's voice.  
"I do."
"Then, by Heaven," snarled the Russian, "we will see----" But Mrs. Vandemeyer also rose to her feet, her eyes 
flashing.  
"You forget, Boris," she said.  "I am accountable to no one. I take my orders only from--Mr. Brown." 
The other threw up his hands in despair.  
"You are impossible," he muttered.  "Impossible! Already it may be too late. They say Peel Edgerton can 
SMELL a criminal! How do we know what is at the bottom of his sudden interest in you? Perhaps even now his 
suspicions are aroused. He guesses----" 

Mrs. Vandemeyer eyed him scornfully.  
"Reassure yourself, my dear Boris. He suspects nothing. With less than your usual chivalry, you seem to forget 
that I am commonly accounted a beautiful woman. I assure you that is all that interests Peel Edgerton."

Boris shook his head doubtfully.  
"He has studied crime as no other man in this kingdom has studied it. Do you fancy that you can deceive him?"

Mrs. Vandemeyer's eyes narrowed.  
"If he is all that you say--it would amuse me to try!"

"Good heavens, Rita----"

"Besides," added Mrs. Vandemeyer, "he is extremely rich. I am not one who despises money. The 'sinews of 
war,' you know, Boris!"

"Money--money! That is always the danger with you, Rita. I believe you would sell your soul for money. I 
believe----" He paused, then in a low, sinister voice he said slowly: "Sometimes I believe that you would sell--us!"

Mrs. Vandemeyer smiled and shrugged her shoulders.  
"The price, at any rate, would have to be enormous," she said lightly.  "It would be beyond the power of anyone 
but a millionaire to pay."

"Ah!" snarled the Russian.  "You see, I was right!"

"My dear Boris, can you not take a joke?"

"Was it a joke?"

"Of course."

"Then all I can say is that your ideas of humour are peculiar, my dear Rita."

Mrs. Vandemeyer smiled.  
"Let us not quarrel, Boris. Touch the bell. We will have some drinks."

Tuppence beat a hasty retreat. She paused a moment to survey herself in Mrs. Vandemeyer's long glass, and be 
sure that nothing was amiss with her appearance. Then she answered the bell demurely. 

The conversation that she had overheard, although interesting in that it proved beyond doubt the complicity of 
both Rita and Boris, threw very little light on the present preoccupations. The name of Jane Finn had not even 
been mentioned. 

The following morning a few brief words with Albert informed her that nothing was waiting for her at the 
stationer's. It seemed incredible that Tommy, if all was well with him, should not send any word to her. A cold hand 
seemed to close round her heart.... Supposing ... She choked her fears down bravely. It was no good worrying. But 
she leapt at a chance offered her by Mrs. Vandemeyer.

"What day do you usually go out, Prudence?"

"Friday's my usual day, ma'am."

Mrs. Vandemeyer lifted her eyebrows.  
"And to-day is Friday! But I suppose you hardly wish to go out to-day, as you only came yesterday."

"I was thinking of asking you if I might, ma'am."

Mrs. Vandemeyer looked at her a minute longer, and then smiled.  
"I wish Count Stepanov could hear you. He made a suggestion about you last night." Her smile broadened, 
catlike.  "Your request is very--typical. I am satisfied. You do not understand all this--but you can go out to-day. It 
makes no difference to me, as I shall not be dining at home."

"Thank you, ma'am."

Tuppence felt a sensation of relief once she was out of the other's presence. Once again she admitted to herself 
that she was afraid, horribly afraid, of the beautiful woman with the cruel eyes.  

In the midst of a final desultory polishing of her silver, Tuppence was disturbed by the ringing of the front door 
bell, and went to answer it. This time the visitor was neither Whittington nor Boris, but a man of striking
appearance.

Just a shade over average height, he nevertheless conveyed the impression of a big man. His face, clean-shaven and exquisitely mobile, was stamped with an expression of power and force far beyond the ordinary. Magnetism seemed to radiate from him.

Tuppence was undecided for the moment whether to put him down as an actor or a lawyer, but her doubts were soon solved as he gave her his name: Sir James Peel Edgerton.

She looked at him with renewed interest. This, then, was the famous K.C. whose name was familiar all over England. She had heard it said that he might one day be Prime Minister. He was known to have refused office in the interests of his profession, preferring to remain a simple Member for a Scotch constituency.

Tuppence went back to her pantry thoughtfully. The great man had impressed her. She understood Boris’s agitation. Peel Edgerton would not be an easy man to deceive.

In about a quarter of an hour the bell rang, and Tuppence repaired to the hall to show the visitor out. He had given her a piercing glance before. Now, as she handed him his hat and stick, she was conscious of his eyes raking her through. As she opened the door and stood aside to let him pass out, he stopped in the doorway.

"Not been doing this long, eh?"

Tuppence raised her eyes, astonished. She read in his glance kindliness, and something else more difficult to fathom.

He nodded as though she had answered.

"V.A.D. and hard up, I suppose?"

"Did Mrs. Vandemeyer tell you that?" asked Tuppence suspiciously.

"No, child. The look of you told me. Good place here?"

"Very good, thank you, sir."

"Ah, but there are plenty of good places nowadays. And a change does no harm sometimes."

"Do you mean—-?" began Tuppence.

But Sir James was already on the topmost stair. He looked back with his kindly, shrewd glance.

"Just a hint," he said. "That’s all."

Tuppence went back to the pantry more thoughtful than ever.

CHAPTER XI -- JULIUS TELLS A STORY

DRESSED appropriately, Tuppence duly sallied forth for her "afternoon out." Albert was in temporary abeyance, but Tuppence went herself to the stationer's to make quite sure that nothing had come for her. Satisfied on this point, she made her way to the Ritz. On inquiry she learnt that Tommy had not yet returned. It was the answer she had expected, but it was another nail in the coffin of her hopes. She resolved to appeal to Mr. Carter, telling him when and where Tommy had started on his quest, and asking him to do something to trace him. The prospect of his aid revived her mercurial spirits, and she next inquired for Julius Hersheimer. The reply she got was to the effect that he had returned about half an hour ago, but had gone out immediately.

Tuppence's spirits revived still more. It would be something to see Julius. Perhaps he could devise some plan for finding out what had become of Tommy. She wrote her note to Mr. Carter in Julius's sitting-room, and was just addressing the envelope when the door burst open.

"What the hell----" began Julius, but checked himself abruptly. "I beg your pardon, Miss Tuppence. Those fools down at the office would have it that Beresford wasn't here any longer--hadn't been here since Wednesday. Is that so?"

Tuppence nodded.

"You don't know where he is?" she asked faintly.

"I? How should I know? I haven't had one damned word from him, though I wired him yesterday morning."

"I expect your wire's at the office unopened."

"But where is he?"

"I don't know. I hoped you might."

"I tell you I haven't had one damned word from him since we parted at the depot on Wednesday."

"What depot?"

"Waterloo. Your London and South Western road."

"Waterloo?" frowned Tuppence.

"Why, yes. Didn't he tell you?"

"I haven't seen him either," replied Tuppence impatiently. "Go on about Waterloo. What were you doing there?"

"He gave me a call. Over the phone. Told me to get a move on, and hustle. Said he was trailing two crooks."

"Oh!" said Tuppence, her eyes opening. "I see. Go on."

"I hurried along right away. Beresford was there. He pointed out the crooks. The big one was mine, the guy you
bluffed. Tommy shoved a ticket into my hand and told me to get aboard the cars. He was going to sleuth the other crook. "I thought for sure you'd know all this."

"Julius," said Tuppence firmly, "stop walking up and down. It makes me giddy. Sit down in that armchair, and tell me the whole story with as few fancy turns of speech as possible."

Mr. Hersheimer obeyed.

"Sure," he said. "Where shall I begin?"

"Where you left off. At Waterloo."

"Well," began Julius, "I got into one of your dear old-fashioned first-class British compartments. The train was just off. First thing I knew a guard came along and informed me mightily politely that I wasn't in a smoking-carriage. I handed him out half a dollar, and that settled that. I did a bit of prospecting along the corridor to the next coach. Whittington was there right enough. When I saw the skunk, with his big sleek fat face, and thought of poor little Jane in his clutches, I felt real mad that I hadn't got a gun with me. I'd have tickled him up some.

"We got to Bournemouth all right. Whittington took a cab and gave the name of an hotel. I did likewise, and we drove up within three minutes of each other. He hired a room, and I hired one too. So far it was all plain sailing. He hadn't the remotest notion that anyone was on to him. Well, he just sat around in the hotel lounge, reading the papers and so on, till it was time for dinner. He didn't hurry any over that either.

"I began to think that there was nothing doing, that he'd just come on the trip for his health, but I remembered that he hadn't changed for dinner, though it was by way of being a slap-up hotel, so it seemed likely enough that he'd be going out on his real business afterwards.

"Sure enough, about nine o'clock, so he did. Took a car across the town--mighty pretty place by the way, I guess I'll take Jane there for a spell when I find her--and then paid it off and struck out along those pine-woods on the top of the cliff. I was there too, you understand. We walked, maybe, for half an hour. There's a lot of villas all the way along, but by degrees they seemed to get more and more thinned out, and in the end we got to one that seemed the last of the bunch. Big house it was, with a lot of piny grounds around it.

"It was a pretty black night, and the carriage drive up to the house was dark as pitch. I could hear him ahead, though I couldn't see him. I had to walk carefully in case he might get on to it that he was being followed. I turned a curve and I was just in time to see him ring the bell and get admitted to the house. I just stopped where I was. It was beginning to rain, and I was soon pretty near soaked through. Also, it was almighthy cold.

"Whittington didn't come out again, and by and by I got kind of restive, and began to mouch around. All the ground floor windows were shuttered tight, but upstairs, on the first floor (it was a two-storied house) I noticed a window with a light burning and the curtains not drawn.

"Now, just opposite to that window, there was a tree growing. It was about thirty foot away from the house, maybe, and I sort of got it into my head that, if I climbed up that tree, I'd very likely be able to see into that room. Of course, I knew there was no reason why Whittington should be in that room rather than in any other--less reason, in fact, for the betting would be on his being in one of the reception-rooms downstairs. But I guess I'd got the hump from standing so long in the rain, and anything seemed better than going on doing nothing. So I started up.

"It wasn't so easy, by a long chalk! The rain had made the boughs mighty slippery, and it was all I could do to keep a foothold, but bit by bit I managed it, until at last there I was level with the window.

"But then I was disappointed. I was too far to the left. I couldn't see any sides into the room. A bit of curtain, and a yard of wallpaper was all I could command. Well, that wasn't any manner of good to me, but just as I was going to give it up, and climb down ignominiously, some one inside moved and threw his shadow on my little bit of wall--and, by gum, it was Whittington!

"After that, my blood was up. I'd just got to get a look into that room. It was up to me to figure out how. I noticed that there was a long branch running out from the tree in the right direction. If I could only swarm about half-way along it, the proposition would be solved. But it was mighty uncertain whether it would bear my weight. I decided I'd just got to risk that, and I started. Very cautiously, inch by inch, I crawled along. The bough creaked and swayed in a nasty fashion, and it didn't do to think of the drop below, but at last I got safely to where I wanted to be.

"The room was medium-sized, furnished in a kind of bare hygienic way. There was a table with a lamp on it in the middle of the room, and sitting at that table, facing towards me, was Whittington right enough. He was talking to a woman dressed as a hospital nurse. She was sitting with her back to me, so I couldn't see her face. Although the blinds were up, the window itself was shut, so I couldn't catch a word of what they said. Whittington seemed to be doing all the talking, and the nurse just listened. Now and then she nodded, and sometimes she'd shake her head, as though she were answering questions. He seemed very emphatic--once or twice he beat with his fist on the table. The rain had stopped now, and the sky was clearing in that sudden way it does.

"Presently, he seemed to get to the end of what he was saying. He got up, and so did she. He looked towards the window and asked something--I guess it was whether it was raining. Anyway, she came right across and looked out.
Just then the moon came out from behind the clouds. I was scared the woman would catch sight of me, for I was full in the moonlight. I tried to move back a bit. The jerk I gave was too much for that rotten old branch. With an almighty crash, down it came, and Julius P. Hersheimmer with it!"

"Oh, Julius," breathed Tuppence, "how exciting! Go on."

"Well, luckily for me, I pitched down into a good soft bed of earth--but it put me out of action for the time, sure enough. The next thing I knew, I was lying in bed with a hospital nurse (not Whittington's one) on one side of me, and a little black-bearded man with gold glasses, and medical man written all over him, on the other. He rubbed his hands together, and raised his eyebrows as I stared at him. 'Ah!' he said. 'So our young friend is coming round again. Capital. Capital.'

"I did the usual stunt. Said: 'What's happened?' And 'Where am I?' But I knew the answer to the last well enough. There's no moss growing on my brain. 'I think that'll do for the present, sister,' said the little man, and the nurse left the room in a sort of brisk well-trained way. But I caught her handing me out a look of deep curiosity as she passed through the door.

"That look of hers gave me an idea. 'Now then, doc,' I said, and tried to sit up in bed, but my right foot gave me a nasty twinge as I did so. 'A slight sprain,' explained the doctor. 'Nothing serious. You'll be about again in a couple of days.'"

"I noticed you walked lame," interpolated Tuppence.

Julius nodded, and continued:

"How did it happen?" I asked again. He replied dryly. 'You fell, with a considerable portion of one of my trees, into one of my newly planted flower-beds.'

"I liked the man. He seemed to have a sense of humour. I felt sure that he, at least, was plumb straight. 'Sure, doc,' I said, I'm sorry about the tree, and I guess the new bulbs will be on me. But perhaps you'd like to know what I was doing in your garden?' 'I think the facts do call for an explanation,' he replied. 'Well, to begin with, I wasn't after the spoons."

"He smiled. 'My first theory. But I soon altered my mind. By the way, you are an American, are you not?' I told him my name. 'And you?' 'I am Dr. Hall, and this, as you doubtless know, is my private nursing home.'

"I didn't know, but I wasn't going to put him wise. I was just thankful for the information. I liked the man, and I felt he was straight, but I wasn't going to give him the whole story. For one thing he probably wouldn't have believed it.

"I made up my mind in a flash. 'Why, doctor,' I said, 'I guess I feel an almighty fool, but I owe it to you to let you know that it wasn't the Bill Sikes business I was up to.' Then I went on and mumbled out something about a girl. I trotted out the stern guardian business, and a nervous breakdown, and finally explained that I had fancied I recognized her among the patients at the home, hence my nocturnal adventures. I guess it was just the kind of story he was expecting. 'Quite a romance,' he said genially, when I'd finished. 'Now, doc,' I went on, 'will you be frank with me? Have you here now, or have you had here at any time, a young girl called Jane Finn?' He repeated the name thoughtfully. 'Jane Finn?' he said. 'No.'

"I was chagrined, and I guess I showed it. 'You are sure?' 'Quite sure, Mr. Hersheimmer. It is an uncommon name, and I should not have been likely to forget it.'

"Well, that was flat. It laid me out for a space. I'd kind of hoped my search was at an end. 'That's that,' I said at last. 'Now, there's another matter. When I was hugging that damned branch I thought I recognized an old friend of mine talking to one of your nurses.' I purposely didn't mention any name because, of course, Whittington might be calling himself something quite different down here, but the doctor answered at once. 'Mr. Whittington, perhaps?' 'That's the fellow,' I replied. 'What's he doing down here? Don't tell me HIS nerves are out of order?' Dr. Hall laughed. 'No. He came down to see one of my nurses, Nurse Edith, who is a niece of his. 'Why, fancy that! I exclaimed. 'Is he still here?' 'No, he went back to town almost immediately.' 'What a pity!' I ejaculated. 'But perhaps I could speak to his niece--Nurse Edith, did you say her name was?'

"But the doctor shook his head. 'I'm afraid that, too, is impossible. Nurse Edith left with a patient to-night also. 'I seem to be real unlucky,' I remarked. 'Have you Mr. Whittington's address in town? I guess I'd like to look him up when I get back.' 'I don't know his address. I can write to Nurse Edith for it if you like.' I thanked him. 'Don't say who it is wants it. I'd like to give him a little surprise.'

"That was about all I could do for the moment. Of course, if the girl was really Whittington's niece, she might be too cute to fall into the trap, but it was worth trying. Next thing I did was to write out a wire to Beresford saying where I was, and that I was laid up with a sprained foot, and telling him to come down if he wasn't busy. I had to be guarded in what I said. However, I didn't hear from him, and my foot soon got all right. It was only ricked, not really sprained, so to-day I said good-bye to the little doctor chap, asked him to send me word if he heard from Nurse Edith, and came right away back to town. Say, Miss Tuppence, you're looking mighty pale!"
"It's Tommy," said Tuppence. "What can have happened to him?"

"Buck up, I guess he's all right really. Why shouldn't he be? See here, it was a foreign-looking guy he went off after. Maybe they've gone abroad—to Poland, or something like that?"

Tuppence shook her head.

"He couldn't without passports and things. Besides I've seen that man, Boris Something, since. He dined with Mrs. Vandemeyer last night."

"Mrs. Who?"

"I forgot. Of course you don't know all that."

"I'm listening," said Julius, and gave vent to his favourite expression. "Put me wise."

Tuppence thereupon related the events of the last two days. Julius's astonishment and admiration were unbounded.

"Bully for you! Fancy you a menial. It just tickles me to death!" Then he added seriously: "But say now, I don't like it, Miss Tuppence, I sure don't. You're just as plucky as they make 'em, but I wish you'd keep right out of this. These crooks we're up against would as soon croak a girl as a man any day."

"Do you think I'm afraid?" said Tuppence indignantly, valiantly repressing memories of the steely glitter in Mrs. Vandemeyer's eyes.

"I said before you were darned plucky. But that doesn't alter facts."

"Oh, bother ME!" said Tuppence impatiently. "Let's think about what can have happened to Tommy. I've written to Mr. Carter about it," she added, and told him the gist of her letter.

Julius nodded gravely.

"I guess that's good as far as it goes. But it's for us to get busy and do something."

"What can we do?" asked Tuppence, her spirits rising.

"I guess we'd better get on the track of Boris. You say he's been to your place. Is he likely to come again?"

"He might. I really don't know."

"I see. Well, I guess I'd better buy a car, a slap-up one, dress as a chauffeur and hang about outside. Then if Boris comes, you could make some kind of signal, and I'd trail him. How's that?"

"Splendid, but he mightn't come for weeks."

"We'll have to chance that. I'm glad you like the plan." He rose.

"Where are you going?"

"To buy the car, of course," replied Julius, surprised. "What make do you like? I guess you'll do some riding in it before we've finished."

"Oh," said Tuppence faintly, "I LIKE Rolls-Royces, but-----"

"Sure," agreed Julius. "What you say goes. I'll get one."

"But you can't at once," cried Tuppence. "People wait ages sometimes."

"Little Julius doesn't," affirmed Mr. Hersheimer. "Don't you worry any. I'll be round in the car in half an hour."

Tuppence got up.

"You're awfully good, Julius. But I can't help feeling that it's rather a forlorn hope. I'm really pinning my faith to Mr. Carter."

"Then I shouldn't."

"Why?"

"Just an idea of mine."

"Oh; but he must do something. There's no one else. By the way, I forgot to tell you of a queer thing that happened this morning."

And she narrated her encounter with Sir James Peel Edgerton. Julius was interested.

"What did the guy mean, do you think?" he asked.

"I don't quite know," said Tuppence meditatively. "But I think that, in an ambiguous, legal, without prejudish lawyer's way, he was trying to warn me."

"Why should he?"

"I don't know," confessed Tuppence. "But he looked kind, and simply awfully clever. I wouldn't mind going to him and telling him everything."

Somewhat to her surprise, Julius negatived the idea sharply.

"See here," he said, "we don't want any lawyers mixed up in this. That guy couldn't help us any."

"Well, I believe he could," reiterated Tuppence obstinately.

"Don't you think it. So long. I'll be back in half an hour."

Thirty-five minutes had elapsed when Julius returned. He took Tuppence by the arm, and walked her to the window.
"There she is."
"Oh!" said Tuppence with a note of reverence in her voice, as she gazed down at the enormous car.
"She's some pace-maker, I can tell you," said Julius complacently.
"How did you get it?" gasped Tuppence.
"She was just being sent home to some bigwig."
"Well?"
"I went round to his house," said Julius. "I said that I reckoned a car like that was worth every penny of twenty thousand dollars. Then I told him that it was worth just about fifty thousand dollars to me if he'd get out."
"Well?" said Tuppence, intoxicated.
"Well," returned Julius, "he got out, that's all.

CHAPTER XII -- A FRIEND IN NEED

FRIDAY and Saturday passed uneventfully. Tuppence had received a brief answer to her appeal from Mr. Carter. In it he pointed out that the Young Adventurers had undertaken the work at their own risk, and had been fully warned of the dangers. If anything had happened to Tommy he regretted it deeply, but he could do nothing.

This was cold comfort. Somehow, without Tommy, all the savour went out of the adventure, and, for the first time, Tuppence felt doubtful of success. While they had been together she had never questioned it for a minute. Although she was accustomed to take the lead, and to pride herself on her quick-wittedness, in reality she had relied upon Tommy more than she realized at the time. There was something so eminently sober and clear-headed about him, his common sense and soundness of vision were so unvarying, that without him Tuppence felt much like a rudderless ship. It was curious that Julius, who was undoubtedly much cleverer than Tommy, did not give her the same feeling of support. She had accused Tommy of being a pessimist, and it is certain that he always saw the disadvantages and difficulties which she herself was optimistically given to overlooking, but nevertheless she had really relied a good deal on his judgment. He might be slow, but he was very sure.

It seemed to the girl that, for the first time, she realized the sinister character of the mission they had undertaken so lightheartedly. It had begun like a page of romance. Now, shorn of its glamour, it seemed to be turning to grim reality. Tommy—that was all that mattered. Many times in the day Tuppence blinked the tears out of her eyes resolutely. "Little fool," she would apostrophize herself, "don't snivel. Of course you're fond of him. You've known him all your life. But there's no need to be sentimental about it."

In the meantime, nothing more was seen of Boris. He did not come to the flat, and Julius and the car waited in vain. Tuppence gave herself over to new meditations. Whilst admitting the truth of Julius's objections, she had nevertheless not entirely relinquished the idea of appealing to Sir James Peel Edgerton. Indeed, she had gone so far as to look up his address in the Red Book. Had he meant to warn her that day? If so, why? Surely she was at least entitled to demand an explanation. He had looked at her so kindly. Perhaps he might tell them something concerning Mrs. Vandemeyer which might lead to a clue to Tommy's whereabouts.

Anyway, Tuppence decided, with her usual shake of the shoulders, it was worth trying, and try it she would. Sunday was her afternoon out. She would meet Julius, persuade him to her point of view, and they would beard the lion in his den.

When the day arrived Julius needed a considerable amount of persuading, but Tuppence held firm. "It can do no harm," was what she always came back to. In the end Julius gave in, and they proceeded in the car to Carlton House Terrace.

The door was opened by an irreproachable butler. Tuppence felt a little nervous. After all, perhaps it WAS colossal cheek on her part. She had decided not to ask if Sir James was "at home," but to adopt a more personal attitude.

"Will you ask Sir James if I can see him for a few minutes? I have an important message for him."
The butler retired, returning a moment or two later.
"Sir James will see you. Will you step this way?"
He ushered them into a room at the back of the house, furnished as a library. The collection of books was a magnificent one, and Tuppence noticed that all one wall was devoted to works on crime and criminology. There were several deep-padded leather arm-chairs, and an old-fashioned open hearth. In the window was a big roll-top desk strewn with papers at which the master of the house was sitting.

He rose as they entered.

"You have a message for me? Ah!"--he recognized Tuppence with a smile--"it's you, is it? Brought a message from Mrs. Vandemeyer, I suppose?"
"Not exactly," said Tuppence. "In fact, I'm afraid I only said that to be quite sure of getting in. Oh, by the way, this is Mr. Hersheimer, Sir James Peel Edgerton."
"Pleased to meet you," said the American, shooting out a hand.
"Won't you both sit down?" asked Sir James. He drew forward two chairs.

"Sir James," said Tuppence, plunging boldly, "I dare say you will think it is most awful cheek of me coming here like this. Because, of course, it's nothing whatever to do with you, and then you're a very important person, and of course Tommy and I are very unimportant." She paused for breath.

"Tommy?" queried Sir James, looking across at the American.

"No, that's Julius," explained Tuppence. "I'm rather nervous, and that makes me tell it badly. What I really want to know is what you meant by what you said to me the other day? Did you mean to warn me against Mrs. Vandemeyer? You did, didn't you?"

"My dear young lady, as far as I recollect I only mentioned that there were equally good situations to be obtained elsewhere."

"Yes, I know. But it was a hint, wasn't it?"

"Well, perhaps it was," admitted Sir James gravely.

"Well, I want to know more. I want to know just WHY you gave me a hint."

Sir James smiled at her earnestness.

"Suppose the lady brings a libel action against me for defamation of character?"

"Of course," said Tuppence. "I know lawyers are always dreadfully careful. But can't we say 'without prejudice' first, and then say just what we want to."

"Well," said Sir James, still smiling, "without prejudice, then, if I had a young sister forced to earn her living, I should not like to see her in Mrs. Vandemeyer's service. I felt it incumbent on me just to give you a hint. It is no place for a young and inexperienced girl. That is all I can tell you."

"I see," said Tuppence thoughtfully. "Thank you very much. But I'm not REALLY inexperienced, you know. I knew perfectly that she was a bad lot when I went there--as a matter of fact that's WHY I went----" She broke off, seeing some bewilderment on the lawyer's face, and went on: "I think perhaps I'd better tell you the whole story, Sir James. I've a sort of feeling that you'd know in a minute if I didn't tell the truth, and so you might as well know all about it from the beginning. What do you think, Julius?"

"As you're bent on it, I'd go right ahead with the facts," replied the American, who had so far sat in silence.

"Yes, tell me all about it," said Sir James. "I want to know who Tommy is."

Thus encouraged Tuppence plunged into her tale, and the lawyer listened with close attention.

"Very interesting," he said, when she finished. "A great deal of what you tell me, child, is already known to me. I've had certain theories of my own about this Jane Finn. You've done extraordinarily well so far, but it's rather too bad of--what do you know him as?--Mr. Carter to pitchfork you two young things into an affair of this kind. By the way, where did Mr. Hersheimmer come in originally? You didn't make that clear?"

Julius answered for himself.

"I'm Jane's first cousin," he explained, returning the lawyer's keen gaze.

"Ah!"

"Oh, Sir James," broke out Tuppence, "what do you think has become of Tommy?"

"H'm." The lawyer rose, and paced slowly up and down. "When you arrived, young lady, I was just packing up my traps. Going to Scotland by the night train for a few days' fishing. But there are different kinds of fishing. I've a good mind to stay, and see if we can't get on the track of that young chap."

"Oh!" Tuppence clasped her hands ecstatically.

"All the same, as I said before, it's too bad of--of Carter to set you two babies on a job like this. Now, don't get offended, Miss--er----"


"Well, Miss Tuppence, then, as I'm certainly going to be a friend. Don't be offended because I think you're young. Youth is a failing only too easily outgrown. Now, about this young Tommy of yours----"

"Yes." Tuppence clasped her hands.

"Frankly, things look bad for him. He's been butting in somewhere where he wasn't wanted. Not a doubt of it. But don't give up hope."

"And you really will help us? There, Julius! He didn't want me to come," she added by way of explanation.

"H'm," said the lawyer, favouring Julius with another keen glance. "And why was that?"

"I reckoned it would be no good worrying you with a petty little business like this."

"I see." He paused a moment. "This petty little business, as you call it, bears directly on a very big business, bigger perhaps than either you or Miss Tuppence know. If this boy is alive, he may have very valuable information to give us. Therefore, we must find him."

"Yes, but how?" cried Tuppence. "I've tried to think of everything."

Sir James smiled.
"And yet there's one person quite near at hand who in all probability knows where he is, or at all events where he is likely to be."

"Who is that?" asked Tuppence, puzzled.

"Mrs. Vandemeyer."

"Yes, but she'd never tell us."

"Ah, that is where I come in. I think it quite likely that I shall be able to make Mrs. Vandemeyer tell me what I want to know."

"How?" demanded Tuppence, opening her eyes very wide.

"Oh, just by asking her questions," replied Sir James easily. "That's the way we do it, you know."

He tapped with his finger on the table, and Tuppence felt again the intense power that radiated from the man.

"And if she won't tell?" asked Julius suddenly.

"I think she will. I have one or two powerful levers. Still, in that unlikely event, there is always the possibility of bribery."

"Sure. And that's where I come in!" cried Julius, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang. "You can count on me, if necessary, for one million dollars. Yes, sir, one million dollars!"

Sir James sat down and subjected Julius to a long scrutiny.

"Mr. Hersheimmer," he said at last, "that is a very large sum."

"I guess it'll have to be. These aren't the kind of folk to offer sixpence to."

"At the present rate of exchange it amounts to considerably over two hundred and fifty thousand pounds."

"That's so. Maybe you think I'm talking through my hat, but I can deliver the goods all right, with enough over to spare for your fee."

Sir James flushed slightly.

"There is no question of a fee, Mr. Hersheimmer. I am not a private detective."

"Sorry. I guess I was just a mite hasty, but I've been feeling bad about this money question. I wanted to offer a big reward for news of Jane some days ago, but your crusted institution of Scotland Yard advised me against it. Said it was undesirable."

"They were probably right," said Sir James dryly.

"But it's all O.K. about Julius," put in Tuppence. "He's not pulling your leg. He's got simply pots of money."

"The old man piled it up in style," explained Julius. "Now, let's get down to it. What's your idea?"

Sir James considered for a moment or two.

"There is no time to be lost. The sooner we strike the better." He turned to Tuppence. "Is Mrs. Vandemeyer dining out to-night, do you know?"

"Yes, I think so, but she will not be out late. Otherwise, she would have taken the latchkey."

"Good. I will call upon her about ten o'clock. What time are you supposed to return?"

"About nine-thirty or ten, but I could go back earlier."

"You must not do that on any account. It might arouse suspicion if you did not stay out till the usual time. Back by nine-thirty. I will arrive at ten. Mr. Hersheimmer will wait below in a taxi perhaps."

"He's got a new Rolls-Royce car," said Tuppence with vicarious pride.

"Even better. If I succeed in obtaining the address from her, we can go there at once, taking Mrs. Vandemeyer with us if necessary. You understand?"

"Yes." Tuppence rose to her feet with a skip of delight. "Oh, I feel so much better!"

"Don't build on it too much, Miss Tuppence. Go easy."

Julius turned to the lawyer.

"Say, then. I'll call for you in the car round about nine-thirty. Is that right?"

"Perhaps that will be the best plan. It would be unnecessary to have two cars waiting about. Now, Miss Tuppence, my advice to you is to go and have a good dinner, a REALLY good one, mind. And don't think ahead more than you can help."

He shook hands with them both, and a moment later they were outside.

"Isn't he a duck?" inquired Tuppence ecstatically, as she skipped down the steps. "Oh, Julius, isn't he just a duck?"

"Well, I allow he seems to be the goods all right. And I was wrong about its being useless to go to him. Say, shall we go right away back to the Ritz?"

"I must walk a bit, I think. I feel so excited. Drop me in the park, will you? Unless you'd like to come too?"

"I want to get some petrol," he explained. "And send off a cable or two."

"All right. I'll meet you at the Ritz at seven. We'll have to dine upstairs. I can't show myself in these glad rags."

"Sure. I'll get Felix help me choose the menu. He's some head waiter, that. So long."
Tuppence walked briskly along towards the Serpentine, first glancing at her watch. It was nearly six o'clock. She remembered that she had had no tea, but felt too excited to be conscious of hunger. She walked as far as Kensington Gardens and then slowly retraced her steps, feeling infinitely better for the fresh air and exercise. It was not so easy to follow Sir James's advice, and put the possible events of the evening out of her head. As she drew nearer and nearer to Hyde Park corner, the temptation to return to South Audley Mansions was almost irresistible.

At any rate, she decided, it would do no harm just to go and LOOK at the building. Perhaps, then, she could resign herself to waiting patiently for ten o'clock.

South Audley Mansions looked exactly the same as usual. What Tuppence had expected she hardly knew, but the sight of its red brick stolidity slightly assuaged the growing and entirely unreasonable uneasiness that possessed her. She was just turning away when she heard a piercing whistle, and the faithful Albert came running from the building to join her.

Tuppence frowned. It was no part of the programme to have attention called to her presence in the neighbourhood, but Albert was purple with suppressed excitement.

"I say, miss, she's a-going!"
"Who's going?" demanded Tuppence sharply.
"The crook. Ready Rita. Mrs. Vandemeyer. She's a-packing up, and she's just sent down word for me to get her a taxi."
"What?" Tuppence clutched his arm.
"It's the truth, miss. I thought maybe as you didn't know about it."
"Albert," cried Tuppence, "you're a brick. If it hadn't been for you we'd have lost her."

At any rate, she decided, it would do no harm just to go and LOOK at the building. Perhaps, then, she could resign herself to waiting patiently for ten o'clock.

"The crook. Ready Rita. Mrs. Vandemeyer. She's a-packing up, and she's just sent down word for me to get her a taxi."

Albert flushed with pleasure at this tribute.

"There's no time to lose," said Tuppence, crossing the road. "I've got to stop her. At all costs I must keep her here until----" She broke off. "Albert, there's a telephone here, isn't there?"

The boy shook his head.

"The flats mostly have their own, miss. But there's a box just round the corner."

"Go to it then, at once, and ring up the Ritz Hotel. Ask for Mr. Hersheimmer, and when you get him tell him to get Sir James and come on at once, as Mrs. Vandemeyer is trying to hook it. If you can't get him, ring up Sir James Peel Edgerton, you'll find his number in the book, and tell him what's happening. You won't forget the names, will you?"

Albert repeated them glibly. "You trust to me, miss, it'll be all right. But what about you? Aren't you afraid to trust yourself with her?"

"No, no, that's all right. BUT GO AND TELEPHONE. Be quick."

Drawing a long breath, Tuppence entered the Mansions and ran up to the door of No. 20. How she was to detain Mrs. Vandemeyer until the two men arrived, she did not know, but somehow or other it had to be done, and she must accomplish the task single-handed. What had occasioned this precipitate departure? Did Mrs. Vandemeyer suspect her?

Speculations were idle. Tuppence pressed the bell firmly. She might learn something from the cook.

Nothing happened and, after waiting some minutes, Tuppence pressed the bell again, keeping her finger on the button for some little while. At last she heard footsteps inside, and a moment later Mrs. Vandemeyer herself opened the door. She lifted her eyebrows at the sight of the girl.

"You?"

"I had a touch of toothache, ma'am," said Tuppence glibly. "So thought it better to come home and have a quiet evening."

Mrs. Vandemeyer said nothing, but she drew back and let Tuppence pass into the hall.

"How unfortunate for you," she said coldly. "You had better go to bed."

"Oh, I shall be all right in the kitchen, ma'am. Cook will----"

"Cook is out," said Mrs. Vandemeyer, in a rather disagreeable tone. "I sent her out. So you see you had better go to bed."

Suddenly Tuppence felt afraid. There was a ring in Mrs. Vandemeyer's voice that she did not like at all. Also, the other woman was slowly edging her up the passage. Tuppence turned at bay.

"I don't want----"

Then, in a flash, a rim of cold steel touched her temple, and Mrs. Vandemeyer's voice rose cold and menacing:

"You damned little fool! Do you think I don't know? No, don't answer. If you struggle or cry out, I'll shoot you like a dog."

The rim of steel pressed a little harder against the girl's temple.

"Now then, march," went on Mrs. Vandemeyer. "This way--into my room. In a minute, when I've done with you,
you'll go to bed as I told you to. And you'll sleep—oh yes, my little spy, you'll sleep all right!"

There was a sort of hideous geniality in the last words which Tuppence did not at all like. For the moment there was nothing to be done, and she walked obediently into Mrs. Vandemeyer's bedroom. The pistol never left her forehead. The room was in a state of wild disorder, clothes were flung about right and left, a suit-case and a hat box, half-packed, stood in the middle of the floor.

Tuppence pulled herself together with an effort. Her voice shook a little, but she spoke out bravely.

"Come now," she said. "This is nonsense. You can't shoot me. Why, every one in the building would hear the report."

"I'd risk that," said Mrs. Vandemeyer cheerfully. "But, as long as you don't sing out for help, you're all right—and I don't think you will. You're a clever girl. You deceived ME all right. I hadn't a suspicion of you! So I've no doubt that you understand perfectly well that this is where I'm on top and you're underneath. Now then—sit on the bed. Put your hands above your head, and if you value your life don't move them."

Tuppence obeyed passively. Her good sense told her that there was nothing else to do but accept the situation. If she shrieked for help there was very little chance of anyone hearing her, whereas there was probably quite a good chance of Mrs. Vandemeyer's shooting her. In the meantime, every minute of delay gained was valuable.

Mrs. Vandemeyer laid down the revolver on the edge of the washstand within reach of her hand, and, still eyeing Tuppence like a lynx in case the girl should attempt to move, she took a little stoppered bottle from its place on the marble and poured some of its contents into a glass which she filled up with water.

"What's that?" asked Tuppence sharply.

"Something to make you sleep soundly."

Tuppence paled a little.

"Are you going to poison me?" she asked in a whisper.

"Perhaps," said Mrs. Vandemeyer, smiling agreeably.

"Then I shan't drink it," said Tuppence firmly. "I'd much rather be shot. At any rate that would make a row, and some one might hear it. But I won't be killed off quietly like a lamb."

Mrs. Vandemeyer stamped her foot.

"Don't be a little fool! Do you really think I want a hue and cry for murder out after me? If you've any sense at all, you'll realize that poisoning you wouldn't suit my book at all. It's a sleeping draught, that's all. You'll wake up tomorrow morning none the worse. I simply don't want the bother of tying you up and gagging you. That's the alternative—and you won't like it, I can tell you! I can be very rough if I choose. So drink this down like a good girl, and you'll be none the worse for it."

In her heart of hearts Tuppence believed her. The arguments she had adduced rang true. It was a simple and effective method of getting her out of the way for the time being. Nevertheless, the girl did not take kindly to the idea of being tamely put to sleep without as much as one bid for freedom. She felt that once Mrs. Vandemeyer gave them the slip, the last hope of finding Tommy would be gone.

Tuppence was quick in her mental processes. All these reflections passed through her mind in a flash, and she saw where a chance, a very problematical chance, lay, and she determined to risk all in one supreme effort.

Accordingly, she lurched suddenly off the bed and fell on her knees before Mrs. Vandemeyer, clutching her skirts frantically.

"I don't believe it," she moaned. "It's poison—I know it's poison. Oh, don't make me drink it"—her voice rose to a shriek—"don't make me drink it!"

Mrs. Vandemeyer, glass in hand, looked down with a curling lip at this sudden collapse.

"Get up, you little idiot! Don't go on drivelling there. How you ever had the nerve to play your part as you did I can't think." She stamped her foot. "Get up, I say."

But Tuppence continued to cling and sob, interjecting her sobs with incoherent appeals for mercy. Every minute gained was to the good. Moreover, as she grovelled, she moved imperceptibly nearer to her objective.

Mrs. Vandemeyer gave a sharp impatient exclamation, and jerked the girl to her knees.

"Drink it at once!" Imperiously she pressed the glass to the girl's lips.

Tuppence gave one last despairing moan.

"You swear it won't hurt me?" she temporized.

"Of course it won't hurt you. Don't be a fool."

"Will you swear it?"

"Yes, yes," said the other impatiently. "I swear it."

Tuppence raised a trembling left hand to the glass.

"Very well." Her mouth opened meekly.

Mrs. Vandemeyer gave a sigh of relief, off her guard for the moment. Then, quick as a flash, Tuppence jerked
the glass upward as hard as she could. The fluid in it splashed into Mrs. Vandemeyer's face, and during her momentary gasp, Tuppence's right hand shot out and grasped the revolver where it lay on the edge of the washstand. The next moment she had sprung back a pace, and the revolver pointed straight at Mrs. Vandemeyer's heart, with no unsteadiness in the hand that held it.

In the moment of victory, Tuppence betrayed a somewhat unsportsmanlike triumph.

"Now who's on top and who's underneath?" she crowed.

The other's face was convulsed with rage. For a minute Tuppence thought she was going to spring upon her, which would have placed the girl in an unpleasant dilemma, since she meant to draw the line at actually letting off the revolver. However, with an effort Mrs. Vandemeyer controlled herself, and at last a slow evil smile crept over her face.

"Not a fool, then, after all! You did that well, girl. But you shall pay for it--oh, yes, you shall pay for it! I have a long memory!"

"I'm surprised you should have been gulped so easily," said Tuppence scornfully. "Did you really think I was the kind of girl to roll about on the floor and whine for mercy?"

"You may do--some day!" said the other significantly.

The cold malignity of her manner sent an unpleasant chill down Tuppence's spine, but she was not going to give in to it.

"Supposing we sit down," she said pleasantly. "Our present attitude is a little melodramatic. No--not on the bed. Draw a chair up to the table, that's right. Now I'll sit opposite you with the revolver in front of me--just in case of accidents. Splendid. Now, let's talk."

"What about?" said Mrs. Vandemeyer sullenly.

Tuppence eyed her thoughtfully for a minute. She was remembering several things. Boris's words, "I believe you would sell--us!" and her answer, "The price would have to be enormous," given lightly, it was true, yet might not there be a substratum of truth in it? Long ago, had not Whittington asked: "Who's been blabbing? Rita?" Would Rita Vandemeyer prove to be the weak spot in the armour of Mr. Brown?

Keeping her eyes fixed steadily on the other's face, Tuppence replied quietly:

"Money----"

Mrs. Vandemeyer started. Clearly, the reply was unexpected.

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. You said just now that you had a long memory. A long memory isn't half as useful as a long purse! I dare say it relieves your feelings a good deal to plan out all sorts of dreadful things to do to me, but is that PRACTICAL? Revenge is very unsatisfactory. Every one always says so. But money"--Tuppence warmed to her pet creed--"well, there's nothing unsatisfactory about money, is there?"

"Do you think," said Mrs. Vandemeyer scornfully, "that I am the kind of woman to sell my friends?"

"Yes," said Tuppence promptly. "If the price was big enough."

"A paltry hundred pounds or so!"

"No," said Tuppence. "I should suggest--a hundred thousand!"

Her economical spirit did not permit her to mention the whole million dollars suggested by Julius. A flush crept over Mrs. Vandemeyer's face.

"What did you say?" she asked, her fingers playing nervously with a brooch on her breast. In that moment Tuppence knew that the fish was hooked, and for the first time she felt a horror of her own money-loving spirit. It gave her a dreadful sense of kinship to the woman fronting her.

"A hundred thousand pounds," repeated Tuppence.

The light died out of Mrs. Vandemeyer's eyes. She leaned back in her chair.

"Bah!" she said. "You haven't got it."

"No," admitted Tuppence, "I haven't--but I know some one who has."

"Who?"

"A friend of mine."

"Must be a millionaire," remarked Mrs. Vandemeyer unbelievingly.

"As a matter of fact he is. He's an American. He'll pay you that without a murmur. You can take it from me that it's a perfectly genuine proposition."

Mrs. Vandemeyer sat up again.

"I'm inclined to believe you," she said slowly.

There was silence between them for some time, then Mrs. Vandemeyer looked up.

"What does he want to know, this friend of yours?"

Tuppence went through a momentary struggle, but it was Julius's money, and his interests must come first.
"He wants to know where Jane Finn is," she said boldly.
Mrs. Vandemeyer showed no surprise.
"I'm not sure where she is at the present moment," she replied.
"But you could find out?"
"Oh, yes," returned Mrs. Vandemeyer carelessly. "There would be no difficulty about that."
"Then"--Tuppence's voice shook a little--"there's a boy, a friend of mine. I'm afraid something's happened to him, through your pal Boris."
"What's his name?"
"Tommy Beresford."
"Never heard of him. But I'll ask Boris. He'll tell me anything he knows."
"Thank you." Tuppence felt a terrific rise in her spirits. It impelled her to more audacious efforts. "There's one thing more."
"Well?"
Tuppence leaned forward and lowered her voice.
"WHO IS MR. BROWN?"
Her quick eyes saw the sudden paling of the beautiful face. With an effort Mrs. Vandemeyer pulled herself together and tried to resume her former manner. But the attempt was a mere parody.
She shrugged her shoulders.
"You can't have learnt much about us if you don't know that NOBODY KNOWS WHO MR. BROWN IS...."
"You do," said Tuppence quietly.
Again the colour deserted the other's face.
"What makes you think that?"
"I don't know," said the girl truthfully. "But I'm sure."
Mrs. Vandemeyer stared in front of her for a long time.
"Yes," she said hoarsely, at last, "I know. I was beautiful, you see--very beautiful--"
"You are still," said Tuppence with admiration.
Mrs. Vandemeyer shook her head. There was a strange gleam in her electric-blue eyes.
"Not beautiful enough," she said in a soft dangerous voice. "Not--beautiful--enough! And sometimes, lately, I've been afraid... It's dangerous to know too much!" She leaned forward across the table. "Swear that my name shan't be brought into it--that no one shall ever know."
"I swear it. And, once's he caught, you'll be out of danger."
A terrified look swept across Mrs. Vandemeyer's face.
"Shall I? Shall I ever be?" She clutched Tuppence's arm. "You're sure about the money?"
"Quite sure."
"When shall I have it? There must be no delay."
"This friend of mine will be here presently. He may have to send cables, or something like that. But there won't be any delay--he's a terrific hustler."
A resolute look settled on Mrs. Vandemeyer's face.
"I'll do it. It's a great sum of money, and besides"--she gave a curious smile--"it is not--wise to throw over a woman like me!"
For a moment or two, she remained smiling, and lightly tapping her fingers on the table. Suddenly she started, and her face blanched.
"What was that?"
"I heard nothing."
Mrs. Vandemeyer gazed round her fearfully.
"If there should be some one listening----"
"Nonsense. Who could there be?"
"Even the walls might have ears," whispered the other. "I tell you I'm frightened. You don't know him!"
"Think of the hundred thousand pounds," said Tuppence soothingly.
Mrs. Vandemeyer passed her tongue over her dried lips.
"You don't know him," she reiterated hoarsely. "He's--ah!"
With a shriek of terror she sprang to her feet. Her outstretched hand pointed over Tuppence's head. Then she swayed to the ground in a dead faint.
Tuppence looked round to see what had startled her.
In the doorway were Sir James Peel Edgerton and Julius Hersheimmer.
CHAPTER XIII -- THE VIGIL
SIR James brushed past Julius and hurriedly bent over the fallen woman.
"Heart," he said sharply. "Seeing us so suddenly must have given her a shock. Brandy--and quickly, or she'll slip through our fingers."

Julius hurried to the washstand.
"Not there," said Tuppence over her shoulder. "In the tantalus in the dining-room. Second door down the passage."

Between them Sir James and Tuppence lifted Mrs. Vandemeyer and carried her to the bed. There they dashed water on her face, but with no result. The lawyer fingered her pulse.
"Touch and go," he muttered. "I wish that young fellow would hurry up with the brandy."

At that moment Julius re-entered the room, carrying a glass half full of the spirit which he handed to Sir James. While Tuppence lifted her head the lawyer tried to force a little of the spirit between her closed lips. Finally the woman opened her eyes feebly. Tuppence held the glass to her lips.
"Drink this."

Mrs. Vandemeyer complied. The brandy brought the colour back to her white cheeks, and revived her in a marvellous fashion. She tried to sit up--then fell back with a groan, her hand to her side.
"It's my heart," she whispered. "I mustn't talk."

She lay back with closed eyes.

Sir James kept his finger on her wrist a minute longer, then withdrew it with a nod.
"She'll do now."

All three moved away, and stood together talking in low voices. One and all were conscious of a certain feeling of anticlimax. Clearly any scheme for cross-questioning the lady was out of the question for the moment. For the time being they were baffled, and could do nothing.

Tuppence related how Mrs. Vandemeyer had declared herself willing to disclose the identity of Mr. Brown, and how she had consented to discover and reveal to them the whereabouts of Jane Finn. Julius was congratulatory.

"That's all right, Miss Tuppence. Splendid! I guess that hundred thousand pounds will look just as good in the morning to the lady as it did over night. There's nothing to worry over. She won't speak without the cash anyway, you bet!"

There was certainly a good deal of common sense in this, and Tuppence felt a little comforted.
"What you say is true," said Sir James meditatively. "I must confess, however, that I cannot help wishing we had not interrupted at the minute we did. Still, it cannot be helped, it is only a matter of waiting until the morning."

He looked across at the inert figure on the bed. Mrs. Vandemeyer lay perfectly passive with closed eyes. He shook his head.
"Well," said Tuppence, with an attempt at cheerfulness, "we must wait until the morning, that's all. But I don't think we ought to leave the flat."

"What about leaving that bright boy of yours on guard?"
"Albert? And suppose she came round again and hooked it. Albert couldn't stop her."
"I guess she won't want to make tracks away from the dollars."
"She might. She seemed very frightened of Mr. Brown."
"What? Real plumb scared of him?"
"Yes. She looked round and said even walls had ears."
"Maybe she meant a dictaphone," said Julius with interest.
"Miss Tuppence is right," said Sir James quietly. "We must not leave the flat--if only for Mrs. Vandemeyer's sake."

Julius stared at him.
"You think he'd get after her? Between now and to-morrow morning. How could he know, even?"
"You forget your own suggestion of a dictaphone," said Sir James dryly. "We have a very formidable adversary. I believe, if we exercise all due care, that there is a very good chance of his being delivered into our hands. But we must neglect no precaution. We have an important witness, but she must be safeguarded. I would suggest that Miss Tuppence should go to bed, and that you and I, Mr. Hersheimer, should share the vigil."

Tuppence was about to protest, but happening to glance at the bed she saw Mrs. Vandemeyer, her eyes half-open, with such an expression of mingled fear and malevolence on her face that it quite froze the words on her lips.

For a moment she wondered whether the faint and the heart attack had been a gigantic sham, but remembering the deadly pallor she could hardly credit the supposition. As she looked the expression disappeared as by magic, and Mrs. Vandemeyer lay inert and motionless as before. For a moment the girl fancied she must have dreamt it. But she determined nevertheless to be on the alert.
"Well," said Julius, "I guess we'd better make a move out of here any way."
The others fell in with his suggestion. Sir James again felt Mrs. Vandemeyer's pulse.
"Perfectly satisfactory," he said in a low voice to Tuppence. "She'll be absolutely all right after a night's rest."
The girl hesitated a moment by the bed. The intensity of the expression she had surprised had impressed her powerfully. Mrs. Vandemeyer lifted her lids. She seemed to be struggling to speak. Tuppence bent over her.
"Don't--leave-----" she seemed unable to proceed, murmuring something that sounded like "sleepy." Then she tried again.
Tuppence bent lower still. It was only a breath.
"Mr.--Brown----" The voice stopped.
But the half-closed eyes seemed still to send an agonized message.
Moved by a sudden impulse, the girl said quickly:
"I shan't leave the flat. I shall sit up all night."
A flash of relief showed before the lids descended once more. Apparently Mrs. Vandemeyer slept. But her words had awakened a new uneasiness in Tuppence. What had she meant by that low murmur: "Mr. Brown?" Tuppence caught herself nervously looking over her shoulder. The big wardrobe loomed up in a sinister fashion before her eyes. Plenty of room for a man to hide in that.... Half-ashamed of herself, Tuppence pulled it open and looked inside. No one--of course! She stooped down and looked under the bed. There was no other possible hiding-place.
Tuppence gave her familiar shake of the shoulders. It was absurd, this giving way to nerves! Slowly she went out of the room. Julius and Sir James were talking in a low voice. Sir James turned to her.
"Lock the door on the outside, please, Miss Tuppence, and take out the key. There must be no chance of anyone entering that room."
The gravity of his manner impressed them, and Tuppence felt less ashamed of her attack of "nerves."
"Say," remarked Julius suddenly, "there's Tuppence's bright boy. I guess I'd better go down and ease his young mind. That's some lad, Tuppence."
"How did you get in, by the way?" asked Tuppence suddenly. "I forgot to ask."
"Well, Albert got me on the phone all right. I ran round for Sir James here, and we came right on. The boy was on the look out for us, and was just a mite worried about what might have happened to you. He'd been listening outside the door of the flat, but couldn't hear anything. Anyhow he suggested sending us up in the coal lift instead of ringing the bell. And sure enough we landed in the scullery and came right along to find you. Albert's still below, and must be just hopping mad by this time." With which Julius departed abruptly.
"Now then, Miss Tuppence," said Sir James, "you know this place better than I do. Where do you suggest we should take up our quarters?"
Tuppence considered for a moment or two.
"I think Mrs. Vandemeyer's boudoir would be the most comfortable," she said at last, and led the way there.
Sir James looked round approvingly.
"This will do very well, and now, my dear young lady, do go to bed and get some sleep."
Tuppence shook her head resolutely.
"I couldn't, thank you, Sir James. I should dream of Mr. Brown all night!"
"But you'll be so tired, child."
"No, I shan't. I'd rather stay up--really."
The lawyer gave in.
Julius reappeared some minutes later, having reassured Albert and rewarded him lavishly for his services. Having in his turn failed to persuade Tuppence to go to bed, he said decisively:
"At any rate, you've got to have something to eat right away. Where's the larder?"
Tuppence directed him, and he returned in a few minutes with a cold pie and three plates.
After a hearty meal, the girl felt inclined to pooh-pooh her fancies of half an hour before. The power of the money bribe could not fail.
"And now, Miss Tuppence," said Sir James, "we want to hear your adventures."
"That's so," agreed Julius.
Tuppence narrated her adventures with some complacence. Julius occasionally interjected an admiring "Bully." Sir James said nothing until she had finished, when his quiet "well done, Miss Tuppence," made her flush with pleasure.
"There's one thing I don't get clearly," said Julius. "What put her up to clearing out?"
"I don't know," confessed Tuppence.
Sir James stroked his chin thoughtfully.
"The room was in great disorder. That looks as though her flight was unpremeditated. Almost as though she got a sudden warning to go from some one."
"Mr. Brown, I suppose," said Julius scoffingly.  
The lawyer looked at him deliberately for a minute or two.  
"Why not?" he said. "Remember, you yourself have once been worsted by him."
Julius flushed with vexation.  
"I feel just mad when I think of how I handed out Jane's photograph to him like a lamb. Gee, if I ever lay hands on it again, I'll freeze on to it like--like hell!"
"That contingency is likely to be a remote one," said the other dryly.  
"I guess you're right," said Julius frankly. "And, in any case, it's the original I'm out after. Where do you think she can be, Sir James?"
The lawyer shook his head.  
"Impossible to say. But I've a very good idea where she has been."
"You have? Where?"
Sir James smiled.  
"At the scene of your nocturnal adventures, the Bournemouth nursing home."
"There? Impossible. I asked."
"No, my dear sir, you asked if anyone of the name of Jane Finn had been there. Now, if the girl had been placed there it would almost certainly be under an assumed name."
"Bully for you," cried Julius. "I never thought of that!"
"It was fairly obvious," said the other.  
"Perhaps the doctor's in it too," suggested Tuppence.  
Julius shook his head.  
"I don't think so. I took to him at once. No, I'm pretty sure Dr. Hall's all right."
"Hall, did you say?" asked Sir James. "That is curious--really very curious."
"Why?" demanded Tuppence.  
"Because I happened to meet him this morning. I've known him slightly on and off for some years, and this morning I ran across him in the street. Staying at the Metropole, he told me." He turned to Julius. "Didn't he tell you he was coming up to town?"
Julius shook his head.  
"Curious," mused Sir James. "You did not mention his name this afternoon, or I would have suggested your going to him for further information with my card as introduction."
"I guess I'm a mutt," said Julius with unusual humility. "I ought to have thought of the false name stunt."
"How could you think of anything after falling out of that tree?" cried Tuppence. "I'm sure anyone else would have been killed right off."
"Well, I guess it doesn't matter now, anyway," said Julius. "We've got Mrs. Vandemeyer on a string, and that's all we need."
"Yes," said Tuppence, but there was a lack of assurance in her voice.  
A silence settled down over the party. Little by little the magic of the night began to gain a hold on them. There were sudden creaks of the furniture, imperceptible rustlings in the curtains. Suddenly Tuppence sprang up with a cry.  
"I can't help it. I know Mr. Brown's somewhere in the flat! I can FEEL him."
"Sure, Tuppence, how could he be? This door's open into the hall. No one could have come in by the front door without our seeing and hearing him."
"I can't help it. I FEEL he's here!"
She looked appealingly at Sir James, who replied gravely:  
"With due deference to your feelings, Miss Tuppence (and mine as well for that matter), I do not see how it is humanly possible for anyone to be in the flat without our knowledge."
The girl was a little comforted by his wards.  
"Sitting up at night is always rather jumpy," she confessed.  
"Yes," said Sir James. "We are in the condition of people holding a seance. Perhaps if a medium were present we might get some marvellous results."
"Do you believe in spiritualism?" asked Tuppence, opening her eyes wide.  
The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.  
"There is some truth in it, without a doubt. But most of the testimony would not pass muster in the witness-box."
The hours drew on. With the first faint glimmerings of dawn, Sir James drew aside the curtains. They beheld, what few Londoners see, the slow rising of the sun over the sleeping city. Somehow, with the coming of the light, the dreads and fancies of the past night seemed absurd. Tuppence's spirits revived to the normal.
"Hooray!" she said. "It's going to be a gorgeous day. And we shall find Tommy. And Jane Finn. And everything
will be lovely. I shall ask Mr. Carter if I can't be made a Dame!"

At seven o'clock Tuppence volunteered to go and make some tea. She returned with a tray, containing the teapot
and four cups.

"Who's the other cup for?" inquired Julius.
"The prisoner, of course. I suppose we might call her that?"
"Taking her tea seems a kind of anticlimax to last night," said Julius thoughtfully.
"Yes, it does," admitted Tuppence. "But, anyway, here goes. Perhaps you'd both come, too, in case she springs
on me, or anything. You see, we don't know what mood she'll wake up in."

Sir James and Julius accompanied her to the door.
"Where's the key? Oh, of course, I've got it myself."
She put it in the lock, and turned it, then paused.
"Supposing, after all, she's escaped?" she murmured in a whisper.
"Plumb impossible," replied Julius reassuringly.
But Sir James said nothing.

Tuppence drew a long breath and entered. She heaved a sigh of relief as she saw that Mrs. Vandemeyer was
lying on the bed.
"Good morning," she remarked cheerfully. "I've brought you some tea."

Mrs. Vandemeyer did not reply. Tuppence put down the cup on the table by the bed and went across to draw up
the blinds. When she turned, Mrs. Vandemeyer still lay without a movement. With a sudden fear clutching at her
heart, Tuppence ran to the bed. The hand she lifted was cold as ice.... Mrs. Vandemeyer would never speak now....

Her cry brought the others. A very few minutes sufficed. Mrs. Vandemeyer was dead--must have been dead
some hours. She had evidently died in her sleep.
"If that isn't the cruellest luck," cried Julius in despair.
The lawyer was calmer, but there was a curious gleam in his eyes.
"If it is luck," he replied.
"You don't think--but, say, that's plumb impossible--no one could have got in."
"No," admitted the lawyer. "I don't see how they could. And yet--she is on the point of betraying Mr. Brown,
and--she dies. Is it only chance?"
"But how---
"Yes, HOW! That is what we must find out." He stood there silently, gently stroking his chin. "We must find
out," he said quietly, and Tuppence felt that if she was Mr. Brown she would not like the tone of those simple words.

Julius's glance went to the window.
"The window's open," he remarked. "Do you think----"

Tuppence shook her head.
"The balcony only goes along as far as the boudoir. We were there."
"He might have slipped out----" suggested Julius.
But Sir James interrupted him.
"Mr. Brown's methods are not so crude. In the meantime we must send for a doctor, but before we do so, is there
anything in this room that might be of value to us?"

Hastily, the three searched. A charred mass in the grate indicated that Mrs. Vandemeyer had been burning papers
on the eve of her flight. Nothing of importance remained, though they searched the other rooms as well.
"There's that," said Tuppence suddenly, pointing to a small, old-fashioned safe let into the wall. "It's for
jewellery, I believe, but there might be something else in it."
The key was in the lock, and Julius swung open the door, and searched inside. He was some time over the task.
"Well," said Tuppence impatiently.
There was a pause before Julius answered, then he withdrew his head and shut to the door.
"Nothing," he said.

In five minutes a brisk young doctor arrived, hastily summoned. He was deferential to Sir James, whom he
recognized.
"Heart failure, or possibly an overdose of some sleeping-draught." He sniffed. "Rather an odour of chloral in the
air."

Tuppence remembered the glass she had upset. A new thought drove her to the washstand. She found the little
bottle from which Mrs. Vandemeyer had poured a few drops.
It had been three parts full. Now--IT WAS EMPTY.
CHAPTER XIV -- A CONSULTATION
NOTHING was more surprising and bewildering to Tuppence than the ease and simplicity with which everything was arranged, owing to Sir James's skilful handling. The doctor accepted quite readily the theory that Mrs. Vandemeyer had accidentally taken an overdose of chloral. He doubted whether an inquest would be necessary. If so, he would let Sir James know. He understood that Mrs. Vandemeyer was on the eve of departure for abroad, and that the servants had already left? Sir James and his young friends had been paying a call upon her, when she was suddenly stricken down and they had spent the night in the flat, not liking to leave her alone. Did they know of any relatives? They did not, but Sir James referred him to Mrs. Vandemeyer's solicitor.

Shortly afterwards a nurse arrived to take charge, and the other left the ill-omened building.

"And what now?" asked Julius, with a gesture of despair. "I guess we're down and out for good."

Sir James stroked his chin thoughtfully.

"No," he said quietly. "There is still the chance that Dr. Hall may be able to tell us something."

"Gee! I'd forgotten him."

"The chance is slight, but it must not be neglected. I think I told you that he is staying at the Metropole. I should suggest that we call upon him there as soon as possible. Shall we say after a bath and breakfast?"

It was arranged that Tuppence and Julius should return to the Ritz, and call for Sir James in the car. This programme was faithfully carried out, and a little after eleven they drew up before the Metropole. They asked for Dr. Hall, and a page-boy went in search of him. In a few minutes the little doctor came hurrying towards them.

"Can you spare us a few minutes, Dr. Hall?" said Sir James pleasantly. "Let me introduce you to Miss Cowley. Mr. Hersheimmer, I think, you already know."

A quizzical gleam came into the doctor's eye as he shook hands with Julius.

"Ah, yes, my young friend of the tree episode! Ankle all right, eh?"

"I guess it's cured owing to your skilful treatment, doc."

"And the heart trouble? Ha ha!"

"Still searching," said Julius briefly.

"To come to the point, can we have a word with you in private?" asked Sir James.

"Certainly. I think there is a room here where we shall be quite undisturbed."

He led the way, and the others followed him. They sat down, and the doctor looked inquiringly at Sir James.

"Dr. Hall, I am very anxious to find a certain young lady for the purpose of obtaining a statement from her. I have reason to believe that she has been at one time or another in your establishment at Bournemouth. I hope I am transgressing no professional etiquette in questioning you on the subject?"

"I suppose it is a matter of testimony?"

Sir James hesitated a moment, then he replied:

"Yes."

"I shall be pleased to give you any information in my power. What is the young lady's name? Mr. Hersheimmer asked me, I remember----" He half turned to Julius.

"The name," said Sir James bluntly, "is really immaterial. She would be almost certainly sent to you under an assumed one. But I should like to know if you are acquainted with a Mrs. Vandemeyer?"

"Mrs. Vandemeyer, of 20 South Audley Mansions? I know her slightly."

"You are not aware of what has happened?"

"What do you mean?"

"You do not know that Mrs. Vandemeyer is dead?"

"Dear, dear, I had no idea of it! When did it happen?"

"She took an overdose of chloral last night."

"Purposely?"

"Accidentally, it is believed. I should not like to say myself. Anyway, she was found dead this morning."

"Very sad. A singularly handsome woman. I presume she was a friend of yours, since you are acquainted with all these details."

"I am acquainted with the details because--well, it was I who found her dead."

"Indeed," said the doctor, starting.

"Yes," said Sir James, and stroked his chin reflectively.

"This is very sad news, but you will excuse me if I say that I do not see how it bears on the subject of your inquiry?"

"It bears on it in this way, is it not a fact that Mrs. Vandemeyer committed a young relative of hers to your charge?"

Julius leaned forward eagerly.

"That is the case," said the doctor quietly.
"Under the name of----?"
"Janet Vandemeyer. I understood her to be a niece of Mrs. Vandemeyer's."
"And she came to you?"
"As far as I can remember in June or July of 1915."
"Was she a mental case?"
"She is perfectly sane, if that is what you mean. I understood from Mrs. Vandemeyer that the girl had been with her on the Lusitania when that ill-fated ship was sunk, and had suffered a severe shock in consequence."
"We're on the right track, I think?" Sir James looked round.
"As I said before, I'm a mutt!" returned Julius.
The doctor looked at them all curiously.
"You spoke of wanting a statement from her," he said. "Supposing she is not able to give one?"
"What? You have just said that she is perfectly sane."
"So she is. Nevertheless, if you want a statement from her concerning any events prior to May 7, 1915, she will not be able to give it to you."
They looked at the little man, stupefied. He nodded cheerfully.
"It's a pity," he said. "A great pity, especially as I gather, Sir James, that the matter is important. But there it is, she can tell you nothing."
"But why, man? Darn it all, why?"
The little man shifted his benevolent glance to the excited young American.
"Because Janet Vandemeyer is suffering from a complete loss of memory."
"WHAT?"
"Quite so. An interesting case, a very interesting case. Not so uncommon, really, as you would think. There are several very well known parallels. It's the first case of the kind that I've had under my own personal observation, and I must admit that I've found it of absorbing interest." There was something rather ghoulish in the little man's satisfaction.
"And she remembers nothing," said Sir James slowly.
"Nothing prior to May 7, 1915. After that date her memory is as good as yours or mine."
"Then the first thing she remembers?"
"Is landing with the survivors. Everything before that is a blank. She did not know her own name, or where she had come from, or where she was. She couldn't even speak her own tongue."
"But surely all this is most unusual?" put in Julius.
"No, my dear sir. Quite normal under the circumstances. Severe shock to the nervous system. Loss of memory proceeds nearly always on the same lines. I suggested a specialist, of course. There's a very good man in Paris--makes a study of these cases--but Mrs. Vandemeyer opposed the idea of publicity that might result from such a course."
"I can imagine she would," said Sir James grimly.
"I fell in with her views. There is a certain notoriety given to these cases. And the girl was very young--nineteen, I believe. It seemed a pity that her infirmity should be talked about--might damage her prospects. Besides, there is no special treatment to pursue in such cases. It is really a matter of waiting."
"Waiting?"
"Yes, sooner or later, the memory will return--as suddenly as it went. But in all probability the girl will have entirely forgotten the intervening period, and will take up life where she left off--at the sinking of the Lusitania."
"And when do you expect this to happen?"
The doctor shrugged his shoulders.
"Ah, that I cannot say. Sometimes it is a matter of months, sometimes it has been known to be as long as twenty years! Sometimes another shock does the trick. One restores what the other took away."
"Another shock, eh?" said Julius thoughtfully.
"Exactly. There was a case in Colorado--" The little man's voice trailed on, voluble, mildly enthusiastic. Julius did not seem to be listening. He had relapsed into his own thoughts and was frowning. Suddenly he came out of his brown study, and hit the table such a resounding bang with his fist that every one jumped, the doctor most of all.
"I've got it! I guess, doc, I'd like your medical opinion on the plan I'm about to outline. Say Jane was to cross the herring pond again, and the same thing was to happen. The submarine, the sinking ship, every one to take to the boats--and so on. Wouldn't that do the trick? Wouldn't it give a mighty big bump to her subconscious self, or whatever the jargon is, and start it functioning again right away?"
"A very interesting speculation, Mr. Hersheimer. In my own opinion, it would be successful. It is unfortunate
that there is no chance of the conditions repeating themselves as you suggest."
"Not by nature, perhaps, doc. But I'm talking about art."
"Art?"
"Why, yes. What's the difficulty? Hire a liner----"
"A liner!" murmured Dr. Hall faintly.
"Hire some passengers, hire a submarine--that's the only difficulty, I guess. Governments are apt to be a bit hidebound over their engines of war. They won't sell to the firstcomer. Still, I guess that can be got over. Ever heard of the word 'graft,' sir? Well, graft gets there every time! I reckon that we shan't really need to fire a torpedo. If every one hustles round and screams loud enough that the ship is sinking, it ought to be enough for an innocent young girl like Jane. By the time she's got a life-belt on her, and is being hustled into a boat, with a well-drilled lot of artistes doing the hysterical stunt on deck, why--she ought to be right back where she was in May, 1915. How's that for the bare outline?"

Dr. Hall looked at Julius. Everything that he was for the moment incapable of saying was eloquent in that look.
"No," said Julius, in answer to it, "I'm not crazy. The thing's perfectly possible. It's done every day in the States for the movies. Haven't you seen trains in collision on the screen? What's the difference between buying up a train and buying up a liner? Get the properties and you can go right ahead!"

Dr. Hall found his voice.
"But the expense, my dear sir." His voice rose. "The expense! It will be COLOSSAL!"
"Money doesn't worry me any," explained Julius simply.
Dr. Hall turned an appealing face to Sir James, who smiled slightly.
"Mr. Hersheimmer is very well off--very well off indeed."

The doctor's glance came back to Julius with a new and subtle quality in it. This was no longer an eccentric young fellow with a habit of falling off trees. The doctor's eyes held the deference accorded to a really rich man.
"Very remarkable plan. Very remarkable," he murmured. "The movies--of course! Your American word for the kinema. Very interesting. I fear we are perhaps a little behind the times over here in our methods. And you really mean to carry out this remarkable plan of yours."
"You bet your bottom dollar I do."

The doctor believed him--which was a tribute to his nationality. If an Englishman had suggested such a thing, he would have had grave doubts as to his sanity.
"I cannot guarantee a cure," he pointed out. "Perhaps I ought to make that quite clear."
"Sure, that's all right," said Julius. "You just trot out Jane, and leave the rest to me."
"Jane?"
"Miss Janet Vandemeyer, then. Can we get on the long distance to your place right away, and ask them to send her up; or shall I run down and fetch her in my car?"

The doctor stared.
"I beg your pardon, Mr. Hersheimmer. I thought you understood."
"Understood what?"
"That Miss Vandemeyer is no longer under my care."

CHAPTER XV -- TUPPENCE RECEIVES A PROPOSAL

JULIUS sprang up.
"What?"
"I thought you were aware of that."
"When did she leave?"
"Let me see. To-day is Monday, is it not? It must have been last Wednesday--why, surely--yes, it was the same evening that you--er--fell out of my tree."
"That evening? Before, or after?"
"Let me see--oh yes, afterwards. A very urgent message arrived from Mrs. Vandemeyer. The young lady and the nurse who was in charge of her left by the night train."

Julius sank back again into his chair.
"Nurse Edith--left with a patient--I remember," he muttered. "My God, to have been so near!"

Dr. Hall looked bewildered.
"I don't understand. Is the young lady not with her aunt, after all?"

Tuppence shook her head. She was about to speak when a warning glance from Sir James made her hold her tongue. The lawyer rose.
"I'm much obliged to you, Hall. We're very grateful for all you've told us. I'm afraid we're now in the position of having to track Miss Vandemeyer anew. What about the nurse who accompanied her; I suppose you don't know
where she is?"

The doctor shook his head.

"We've not heard from her, as it happens. I understood she was to remain with Miss Vandemeyer for a while. But what can have happened? Surely the girl has not been kidnapped."

"That remains to be seen," said Sir James gravely.

The other hesitated.

"You do not think I ought to go to the police?"

"No, no. In all probability the young lady is with other relations."

The doctor was not completely satisfied, but he saw that Sir James was determined to say no more, and realized that to try and extract more information from the famous K.C. would be mere waste of labour. Accordingly, he wished them goodbye, and they left the hotel. For a few minutes they stood by the car talking.

"How maddening," cried Tuppence. "To think that Julius must have been actually under the same roof with her for a few hours."

"I was a darned idiot," muttered Julius gloomily.

"You couldn't know," Tuppence consoled him. "Could he?" She appealed to Sir James.

"I should advise you not to worry," said the latter kindly. "No use crying over spilt milk, you know."

"The great thing is what to do next," added Tuppence the practical.

Sir James shrugged his shoulders.

"You might advertise for the nurse who accompanied the girl. That is the only course I can suggest, and I must confess I do not hope for much result. Otherwise there is nothing to be done."

"Nothing?" said Tuppence blankly. "And--Tommy?"

"We must hope for the best," said Sir James. "Oh yes, we must go on hoping."

But over her downcast head his eyes met Julius's, and almost imperceptibly he shook his head. Julius understood. The lawyer considered the case hopeless. The young American's face grew grave. Sir James took Tuppence's hand.

"You must let me know if anything further comes to light. Letters will always be forwarded."

Tuppence stared at him blankly.

"You are going away?"

"I told you. Don't you remember? To Scotland."

"Yes, but I thought----" The girl hesitated.

Sir James shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear young lady, I can do nothing more, I fear. Our clues have all ended in thin air. You can take my word for it that there is nothing more to be done. If anything should arise, I shall be glad to advise you in any way I can."

His words gave Tuppence an extraordinarily desolate feeling.

"I suppose you're right," she said. "Anyway, thank you very much for trying to help us. Good-bye."

Julius was bending over the car. A momentary pity came into Sir James's keen eyes, as he gazed into the girl's downcast face.

"Don't be too disconsolate, Miss Tuppence," he said in a low voice. "Remember, holiday-time isn't always all playtime. One sometimes manages to put in some work as well."

Something in his tone made Tuppence glance up sharply. He shook his head with a smile.

"No, I shan't say any more. Great mistake to say too much. Remember that. Never tell all you know--not even to the person you know best. Understand? Good-bye."

He strode away. Tuppence stared after him. She was beginning to understand Sir James's methods. Once before he had thrown her a hint in the same careless fashion. Was this a hint? What exactly lay behind those last brief words? Did he mean that, after all, he had not abandoned the case; that, secretly, he would be working on it still while----

Her meditations were interrupted by Julius, who adjured her to "get right in."

"You're looking kind of thoughtful," he remarked as they started off. "Did the old guy say anything more?"

Tuppence opened her mouth impulsively, and then shut it again. Sir James's words sounded in her ears: "Never tell all you know--not even to the person you know best." And like a flash there came into her mind another memory. Julius before the safe in the flat, her own question and the pause before his reply, "Nothing." Was there really nothing? Or had he found something he wished to keep to himself? If he could make a reservation, so could she.

"Nothing particular," she replied.

She felt rather than saw Julius throw a sideways glance at her.

"Say, shall we go for a spin in the park?"
"If you like."

For a while they ran on under the trees in silence. It was a beautiful day. The keen rush through the air brought a new exhilaration to Tuppence.

"Say, Miss Tuppence, do you think I'm ever going to find Jane?"

Julius spoke in a discouraged voice. The mood was so alien to him that Tuppence turned and stared at him in surprise. He nodded.

"That's so. I'm getting down and out over the business. Sir James to-day hadn't got any hope at all, I could see that. I don't like him--we don't gee together somehow--but he's pretty cute, and I guess he wouldn't quit if there was any chance of success--now, would he?"

Tuppence felt rather uncomfortable, but clinging to her belief that Julius also had withheld something from her, she remained firm.

"He suggested advertising for the nurse," she reminded him.

"Yes, with a 'forlorn hope' flavour to his voice! No--I'm about fed up. I've half a mind to go back to the States right away."

"Oh no!" cried Tuppence. "We've got to find Tommy."

"I sure forgot Beresford," said Julius contritely. "That's so. We must find him. But after--well, I've been daydreaming ever since I started on this trip--and these dreams are rotten poor business. I'm quit of them. Say, Miss Tuppence, there's something I'd like to ask you."

"Yes?"

"You and Beresford. What about it?"

"I don't understand you," replied Tuppence with dignity, adding rather inconsequently: "And, anyway, you're wrong!"

"Not got a sort of kindly feeling for one another?"

"Certainly not," said Tuppence with warmth. "Tommy and I are friends--nothing more."

"I guess every pair of lovers has said that sometime or another," observed Julius.

"Nonsense!" snapped Tuppence. "Do I look the sort of girl that's always falling in love with every man she meets?"

"You do not. You look the sort of girl that's mighty often getting fallen in love with!"

"Oh!" said Tuppence, rather taken aback. "That's a compliment, I suppose?"

"Sure. Now let's get down to this. Supposing we never find Beresford and--and----"

"All right--say it! I can face facts. Supposing he's--dead! Well?"

"And all this business fiddles out. What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," said Tuppence forlornly.

"You'll be darned lonesome, you poor kid."

"I shall be all right," snapped Tuppence with her usual resentment of any kind of pity.

"What about marriage?" inquired Julius. "Got any views on the subject?"

"I intend to marry, of course," replied Tuppence. "That is, if"--she paused, knew a momentary longing to draw back, and then stuck to her guns bravely--"I can find some one rich enough to make it worth my while. That's frank, isn't it? I dare say you despise me for it."

"I never despise business instinct," said Julius. "What particular figure have you in mind?"

"Figure?" asked Tuppence, puzzled. "Do you mean tall or short?"

"No. Sum--income."

"Oh, I--I haven't quite worked that out."

"What about me?"

"You?"

"Sure thing."

"Oh, I couldn't!"

"Why not?"

"I tell you I couldn't."

"Again, why not?"

"It would seem so unfair."

"I don't see anything unfair about it. I call your bluff, that's all. I admire you immensely, Miss Tuppence, more than any girl I've ever met. You're so darned plucky. I'd just love to give you a real, rattling good time. Say the word, and we'll run round right away to some high-class jeweller, and fix up the ring business."

"I can't," gasped Tuppence.

"Because of Beresford?"
"No, no, NO!"
"Well then?"
Tuppence merely continued to shake her head violently.
"You can't reasonably expect more dollars than I've got."
"Oh, it isn't that," gasped Tuppence with an almost hysterical laugh. "But thanking you very much, and all that, I think I'd better say no."
"I'd be obliged if you'd do me the favour to think it over until to-morrow."
"It's no use."
"Still, I guess we'll leave it like that."
"Very well," said Tuppence meekly.

Neither of them spoke again until they reached the Ritz.

Tuppence went upstairs to her room. She felt morally battered to the ground after her conflict with Julius's vigorous personality. Sitting down in front of the glass, she stared at her own reflection for some minutes.
"Fool," murmured Tuppence at length, making a grimace. "Little fool. Everything you want--everything you've ever hoped for, and you go and bleat out 'no' like an idiotic little sheep. It's your one chance. Why don't you take it? Grab it? Snatch at it? What more do you want?"

As if in answer to her own question, her eyes fell on a small snapshot of Tommy that stood on her dressing-table in a shabby frame. For a moment she struggled for self-control, and then abandoning all presence, she held it to her lips and burst into a fit of sobbing.

"Oh, Tommy, Tommy," she cried, "I do love you so--and I may never see you again...."

At the end of five minutes Tuppence sat up, blew her nose, and pushed back her hair.
"That's that," she observed sternly. "Let's look facts in the face. I seem to have fallen in love--with an idiot of a boy who probably doesn't care two straws about me." Here she paused. "Anyway," she resumed, as though arguing with an unseen opponent, "I don't KNOW that he does. He'd never have dared to say so. I've always jumped on sentiment--and here I am being more sentimental than anybody. What idiots girls are! I've always thought so. I suppose I shall sleep with his photograph under my pillow, and dream about him all night. It's dreadful to feel you've been false to your principles."

Tuppence shook her head sadly, as she reviewed her backsliding.

"I don't know what to say to Julius, I'm sure. Oh, what a fool I feel! I'll have to say SOMETHING--he's so American and thorough, he'll insist upon having a reason. I wonder if he did find anything in that safe----"

Tuppence's meditations went off on another tack. She reviewed the events of last night carefully and persistently. Somehow, they seemed bound up with Sir James's enigmatical words....

Suddenly she gave a great start--the colour faded out of her face. Her eyes, fascinated, gazed in front of her, the pupils dilated.

"Impossible," she murmured. "Impossible! I must be going mad even to think of such a thing...."

Monstrous--yet it explained everything....

After a moment's reflection she sat down and wrote a note, weighing each word as she did so. Finally she nodded her head as though satisfied, and slipped it into an envelope which she addressed to Julius. She went down the passage to his sitting-room and knocked at the door. As she had expected, the room was empty. She left the note on the table.

A small page-boy was waiting outside her own door when she returned to it.

"Telegram for you, miss."

Tuppence took it from the salver, and tore it open carelessly. Then she gave a cry. The telegram was from Tommy!

CHAPTER XVI -- FURTHER ADVENTURES OF TOMMY

FROM a darkness punctuated with throbbing stabs of fire, Tommy dragged his senses slowly back to life. When he at last opened his eyes, he was conscious of nothing but an excruciating pain through his temples. He was vaguely aware of unfamiliar surroundings. Where was he? What had happened? He blinked feebly. This was not his bedroom at the Ritz. And what the devil was the matter with his head?

"Damn!" said Tommy, and tried to sit up. He had remembered. He was in that sinister house in Soho. He uttered a groan and fell back. Through his almost-closed lids he reconnoitred carefully.

"He is coming to," remarked a voice very near Tommy's ear. He recognized it at once for that of the bearded and efficient German, and lay artistically inert. He felt that it would be a pity to come round too soon; and until the pain in his head became a little less acute, he felt quite incapable of collecting his wits. Painfully he tried to puzzle out what had happened. Obviously somebody must have crept up behind him as he listened and struck him down with a blow on the head. They knew him now for a spy, and would in all probability give him short shrift. Undoubtedly he
was in a tight place. Nobody knew where he was, therefore he need expect no outside assistance, and must depend solely on his own wits.

"Well, here goes," murmured Tommy to himself, and repeated his former remark.

"Damn!" he observed, and this time succeeded in sitting up.

In a minute the German stepped forward and placed a glass to his lips, with the brief command "Drink." Tommy obeyed. The potency of the draught made him choke, but it cleared his brain in a marvellous manner.

He was lying on a couch in the room in which the meeting had been held. On one side of him was the German, on the other the villainous-faced doorkeeper who had let him in. The others were grouped together at a little distance away. But Tommy missed one face. The man known as Number One was no longer of the company.

"Feel better?" asked the German, as he removed the empty glass.

"Yes, thanks," returned Tommy cheerfully.

"Ah, my young friend, it is lucky for you your skull is so thick. The good Conrad struck hard." He indicated the evil-faced doorkeeper by a nod. The man grinned.

Tommy twisted his head round with an effort.

"Oh," he said, "so you're Conrad, are you? It strikes me the thickness of my skull was lucky for you too. When I look at you I feel it's almost a pity I've enabled you to cheat the hangman."

The man snarled, and the bearded man said quietly:

"He would have run no risk of that."

"Just as you like," replied Tommy. "I know it's the fashion to run down the police. I rather believe in them myself."

His manner was nonchalant to the last degree. Tommy Beresford was one of those young Englishmen not distinguished by any special intellectual ability, but who are emphatically at their best in what is known as a "tight place." Their natural diffidence and caution fall from them like a glove. Tommy realized perfectly that in his own wits lay the only chance of escape, and behind his casual manner he was racking his brains furiously.

The cold accents of the German took up the conversation:

"Have you anything to say before you are put to death as a spy?"

"Simply lots of things," replied Tommy with the same urbanity as before.

"Do you deny that you were listening at that door?"

"I do not. I must really apologize--but your conversation was so interesting that it overcame my scruples."

"How did you get in?"

"Dear old Conrad here." Tommy smiled deprecatingly at him. "I hesitate to suggest pensioning off a faithful servant, but you really ought to have a better watchdog."

Conrad snarled impotently, and said sullenly, as the man with the beard swung round upon him:

"He gave the word. How was I to know?"

"Yes," Tommy chimed in. "How was he to know? Don't blame the poor fellow. His hasty action has given me the pleasure of seeing you all face to face."

He fancied that his words caused some discomposure among the group, but the watchful German stilled it with a wave of his hand.

"Dead men tell no tales," he said evenly.

"Ah," said Tommy, "but I'm not dead yet!"

"You soon will be, my young friend," said the German.

An assenting murmur came from the others.

"I think not," he said firmly. "I should have a great objection to dying."

He had got them puzzled, he saw that by the look on his captor's face.

"Can you give us any reason why we should not put you to death?" asked the German.

"Several," replied Tommy. "Look here, you've been asking me a lot of questions. Let me ask you one for a change. Why didn't you kill me off at once before I regained consciousness?"

The German hesitated, and Tommy seized his advantage.

"Because you didn't know how much I knew--and where I obtained that knowledge. If you kill me now, you never will know."

But here the emotions of Boris became too much for him. He stepped forward waving his arms.

"You hell-hound of a spy," he screamed. "We will give you short shrift. Kill him! Kill him!"

There was a roar of applause.

"You hear?" said the German, his eyes on Tommy. "What have you to say to that?"

"Say?" Tommy shrugged his shoulders. "Pack of fools. Let them ask themselves a few questions. How did I get
into this place? Remember what dear old Conrad said--WITH YOUR OWN PASSWORD, wasn't it? How did I get
hold of that? You don't suppose I came up those steps haphazard and said the first thing that came into my head?"

Tommy was pleased with the concluding words of this speech. His only regret was that Tuppence was not
present to appreciate its full flavour.

"That is true," said the working man suddenly. "Comrades, we have been betrayed!"
An ugly murmur arose. Tommy smiled at them encouragingly.
"That's better. How can you hope to make a success of any job if you don't use your brains?"
"You will tell us who has betrayed us," said the German. "But that shall not save you--oh, no! You shall tell us
all that you know. Boris, here, knows pretty ways of making people speak!"
"Bah!" said Tommy scornfully, fighting down a singularly unpleasant feeling in the pit of his stomach. "You will
neither torture me nor kill me."
"And why not?" asked Boris.
"Because you'd kill the goose that lays the golden eggs," replied Tommy quietly.
There was a momentary pause. It seemed as though Tommy's persistent assurance was at last conquering. They
were no longer completely sure of themselves. The man in the shabby clothes stared at Tommy searchingly.

"He's bluffing you, Boris," he said quietly.
Tommy hated him. Had the man seen through him?

The German, with an effort, turned roughly to Tommy.
"What do you mean?"
"What do you think I mean?" parried Tommy, searching desperately in his own mind.
Suddenly Boris stepped forward, and shook his fist in Tommy's face.
"Speak, you swine of an Englishman--speak!"
"Don't get so excited, my good fellow," said Tommy calmly. "That's the worst of you foreigners. You can't keep
calm. Now, I ask you, do I look as though I thought there were the least chance of your killing me?"

He looked confidently round, and was glad they could not hear the persistent beating of his heart which gave the
lie to his words.

"No," admitted Boris at last sullenly, "you do not."
"Thank God, he's not a mind reader," thought Tommy. Aloud he pursued his advantage:
"And why am I so confident? Because I know something that puts me in a position to propose a bargain."
"A bargain?" The bearded man took him up sharply.
"Yes--a bargain. My life and liberty against----" He paused.
"Against what?"
The group pressed forward. You could have heard a pin drop.
Slowly Tommy spoke.
"The papers that Danvers brought over from America in the Lusitania."
The effect of his words was electrical. Every one was on his feet. The German waved them back. He leaned over
Tommy, his face purple with excitement.

"Himmel! You have got them, then?"
With magnificent calm Tommy shook his head.
"You know where they are?" persisted the German.
Again Tommy shook his head. "Not in the least."
"Then--then----" angry and baffled, the words failed him.
Tommy looked round. He saw anger and bewilderment on every face, but his calm assurance had done its work-
-no one doubted but that something lay behind his words.
"I don't know where the papers are--but I believe that I can find them. I have a theory----"
"Pah!"
Tommy raised his hand, and silenced the clamours of disgust.
"I call it a theory--but I'm pretty sure of my facts--facts that are known to no one but myself. In any case what do
you lose? If I can produce the papers--you give me my life and liberty in exchange. Is it a bargain?"

"And if we refuse?" said the German quietly.
Tommy lay back on the couch.
"The 29th," he said thoughtfully, "is less than a fortnight ahead----"
For a moment the German hesitated. Then he made a sign to Conrad.
"Take him into the other room."
For five minutes, Tommy sat on the bed in the dingy room next door. His heart was beating violently. He had
risked all on this throw. How would they decide? And all the while that this agonized questioning went on within
him, he talked flippantly to Conrad, enraging the cross-grained doorkeeper to the point of homicidal mania. At last the door opened, and the German called imperiously to Conrad to return.

"Let's hope the judge hasn't put his black cap on," remarked Tommy frivolously. "That's right, Conrad, march me in. The prisoner is at the bar, gentlemen."

The German was seated once more behind the table. He motioned to Tommy to sit down opposite to him.

"We accept," he said harshly, "on terms. The papers must be delivered to us before you go free."

"Idiot!" said Tommy amiably. "How do you think I can look for them if you keep me tied by the leg here?"

"What do you expect, then?"

"I must have liberty to go about the business in my own way."

The German laughed.

"Do you think we are little children to let you walk out of here leaving us a pretty story full of promises?"

"No," said Tommy thoughtfully. "Though infinitely simpler for me, I did not really think you would agree to that plan. Very well, we must arrange a compromise. How would it be if you attached little Conrad here to my person. He's a faithful fellow, and very ready with the fist."

"We prefer," said the German coldly, "that you should remain here. One of our number will carry out your instructions minutely. If the operations are complicated, he will return to you with a report and you can instruct him further."

"You're tying my hands," complained Tommy. "It's a very delicate affair, and the other fellow will miff it up as likely as not, and then where shall I be? I don't believe one of you has got an ounce of tact."

The German rapped the table.

"Those are our terms. Otherwise, death!"

Tommy leaned back wearily.

"I like your style. Curt, but attractive. So be it, then. But one thing is essential, I must see the girl."

"What girl?"

"Jane Finn, of course."

The other looked at him curiously for some minutes, then he said slowly, and as though choosing his words with care:

"Do you not know that she can tell you nothing?"

"Tommy's heart beat a little faster. Would he succeed in coming face to face with the girl he was seeking?"

"I shall not ask her to tell me anything," he said quietly. "Not in so many words, that is."

"Then why see her?"

"To watch her face when I ask her one question," he replied at last.

Again there was a look in the German's eyes that Tommy did not quite understand.

"She will not be able to answer your question."

"That does not matter. I shall have seen her face when I ask it."

"And you think that will tell you anything?" He gave a short disagreeable laugh. More than ever, Tommy felt that there was a factor somewhere that he did not understand. The German looked at him searchingly. "I wonder whether, after all, you know as much as we think?" he said softly.

Tommy felt his ascendancy less sure than a moment before. His hold had slipped a little. But he was puzzled. What had he said wrong? He spoke out on the impulse of the moment.

"There may be things that you know which I do not. I have not pretended to be aware of all the details of your show. But equally I've got something up my sleeve that you don't know about. And that's where I mean to score. Danvers was a damned clever fellow----" He broke off as if he had said too much.

But the German's face had lightened a little.

"Danvers," he murmured. "I see----" He paused a minute, then waved to Conrad. "Take him away. Upstairs--you know."

"Wait a minute," said Tommy. "What about the girl?"

"That may perhaps be arranged."

"It must be."

"We will see about it. Only one person can decide that."

"Who?" asked Tommy. But he knew the answer.

"Mr. Brown----"

"Shall I see him?"

"Perhaps."

"Come," said Conrad harshly.
Tommy rose obediently. Outside the door his gaoler motioned to him to mount the stairs. He himself followed close behind. On the floor above Conrad opened a door and Tommy passed into a small room. Conrad lit a hissing gas burner and went out. Tommy heard the sound of the key being turned in the lock.

He set to work to examine his prison. It was a smaller room than the one downstairs, and there was something peculiarly airless about the atmosphere of it. Then he realized that there was no window. He walked round it. The walls were filthily dirty, as everywhere else. Four pictures hung crookedly on the wall representing scenes from Faust. Marguerite with her box of jewels, the church scene, Siebel and his flowers, and Faust and Mephistopheles. The latter brought Tommy's mind back to Mr. Brown again. In this sealed and closed chamber, with its close-fitting heavy door, he felt cut off from the world, and the sinister power of the arch-criminal seemed more real. Shout as he would, no one could ever hear him. The place was a living tomb....

With an effort Tommy pulled himself together. He sank on to the bed and gave himself up to reflection. His head ached badly; also, he was hungry. The silence of the place was dispiriting.

"Anyway," said Tommy, trying to cheer himself, "I shall see the chief--the mysterious Mr. Brown and with a bit of luck in bluffing I shall see the mysterious Jane Finn also. After that----"

After that Tommy was forced to admit the prospect looked dreary.

CHAPTER XVII -- ANNETTE

The troubles of the future, however, soon faded before the troubles of the present. And of these, the most immediate and pressing was that of hunger. Tommy had a healthy and vigorous appetite. The steak and chips partaken of for lunch seemed now to belong to another decade. He regretfully recognized the fact that he would not make a success of a hunger strike.

He prowled aimlessly about his prison. Once or twice he discarded dignity, and pounded on the door. But nobody answered the summons.

"Hang it all!" said Tommy indignantly. "They can't mean to starve me to death." A new-born fear passed through his mind that this might, perhaps, be one of those "pretty ways" of making a prisoner speak, which had been attributed to Boris. But on reflection he dismissed the idea.

"It's that sour faced brute Conrad," he decided. "That's a fellow I shall enjoy getting even with one of these days. This is just a bit of spite on his part. I'm certain of it."

Further meditations induced in him the feeling that it would be extremely pleasant to bring something down with a whack on Conrad's egg-shaped head. Tommy stroked his own head tenderly, and gave himself up to the pleasures of imagination. Finally a bright idea flashed across his brain. Why not convert imagination into reality? Conrad was undoubtedly the tenant of the house. The others, with the possible exception of the bearded German, merely used it as a rendezvous. Therefore, why not wait in ambush for Conrad behind the door, and when he entered bring down a chair, or one of the decrepit pictures, smartly on to his head. One would, of course, be careful not to hit too hard. And then--and then, simply walk out! If he met anyone on the way down, well----Tommy brightened at the thought of an encounter with his fists. Such an affair was infinitely more in his line than the verbal encounter of this afternoon. Intoxicated by his plan, Tommy gently unhooked the picture of the Devil and Faust, and settled himself in position. His hopes were high. The plan seemed to him simple but excellent.

Time went on, but Conrad did not appear. Night and day were the same in this prison room, but Tommy's wrist-watch, which enjoyed a certain degree of accuracy, informed him that it was nine o'clock in the evening. Tommy reflected gloomily that if supper did not arrive soon it would be a question of waiting for breakfast. At ten o'clock hope deserted him, and he flung himself on the bed to seek consolation in sleep. In five minutes his woes were forgotten.

The sound of the key turning in the lock awoke him from his slumbers. Not belonging to the type of hero who is famous for awaking in full possession of his faculties, Tommy merely blinked at the ceiling and wondered vaguely where he was. Then he remembered, and looked at his watch. It was eight o'clock.

"It's either early morning tea or breakfast," deduced the young man, "and pray God it's the latter!"

The door swung open. Too late, Tommy remembered his scheme of obliterating the unprepossessing Conrad. A moment later he was glad that he had, for it was not Conrad who entered, but a girl. She carried a tray which she set down on the table.

In the feeble light of the gas burner Tommy blinked at her. He decided at once that she was one of the most beautiful girls he had ever seen. Her hair was a full rich brown, with sudden glints of gold in it as though there were imprisoned sunbeams struggling in its depths. There was a wild-rose quality about her face. Her eyes, set wide apart, were hazel, a golden hazel that again recalled a memory of sunbeams.

A delirious thought shot through Tommy's mind.

"Are you Jane Finn?" he asked breathlessly.

The girl shook her head wonderingly.
"My name is Annette, monsieur."
She spoke in a soft, broken English.
"Oh!" said Tommy, rather taken aback. "Francaise?" he hazarded.
"Oui, monsieur. Monsieur parle francais?"
"Not for any length of time," said Tommy. "What's that? Breakfast?"
The girl nodded. Tommy dropped off the bed and came and inspected the contents of the tray. It consisted of a loaf, some margarine, and a jug of coffee.
"The living is not equal to the Ritz," he observed with a sigh. "But for what we are at last about to receive the Lord has made me truly thankful. Amen."
He drew up a chair, and the girl turned away to the door.
"Wait a sec," cried Tommy. "There are lots of things I want to ask you, Annette. What are you doing in this house? Don't tell me you're Conrad's niece, or daughter, or anything, because I can't believe it."
"I do the SERVICE, monsieur. I am not related to anybody."
"I see," said Tommy. "You know what I asked you just now. Have you ever heard that name?"
"I have heard people speak of Jane Finn, I think."
"You don't know where she is?"
Annette shook her head.
"I see," said Tommy. "You know what I asked you just now. Have you ever heard that name?"
"I have heard people speak of Jane Finn, I think."
"You don't know where she is?"
Annette shook her head.
"She's not in this house, for instance?"
"Oh no, monsieur. I must go now--they will be waiting for me."
She hurried out. The key turned in the lock.
"I wonder who 'they' are," mused Tommy, as he continued to make inroads on the loaf. "With a bit of luck, that girl might help me to get out of here. She doesn't look like one of the gang."
At one o'clock Annette reappeared with another tray, but this time Conrad accompanied her.
"Good morning," said Tommy amiably. "You have NOT used Pear's soap, I see."
Conrad growled threateningly.
"No light repartee, have you, old bean? There, there, we can't always have brains as well as beauty. What have we for lunch? Stew? How did I know? Elementary, my dear Watson--the smell of onions is unmistakable."
"Talk away," grunted the man. "It's little enough time you'll have to talk in, maybe."
The remark was unpleasant in its suggestion, but Tommy ignored it. He sat down at the table.
"Retire, varlet," he said, with a wave of his hand. "Prate not to thy betters."
That evening Tommy sat on the bed, and cogitated deeply. Would Conrad again accompany the girl? If he did not, should he risk trying to make an ally of her? He decided that he must leave no stone unturned. His position was desperate.
At eight o'clock the familiar sound of the key turning made him spring to his feet. The girl was alone.
"Shut the door," he commanded. "I want to speak to you." She obeyed.
"Look here, Annette, I want you to help me get out of this." She shook her head.
"Impossible. There are three of them on the floor below."
"Oh!" Tommy was secretly grateful for the information. "But you would help me if you could?"
"No, monsieur."
"Why not?"
The girl hesitated.
"I think--they are my own people. You have spied upon them. They are quite right to keep you here."
"They're a bad lot, Annette. If you'll help me, I'll take you away from the lot of them. And you'd probably get a good whack of money."
But the girl merely shook her head.
"I dare not, monsieur; I am afraid of them."
She turned away.
"Wouldn't you do anything to help another girl?" cried Tommy. "She's about your age too. Won't you save her from their clutches?"
"You mean Jane Finn?"
"Yes."
"It is her you came here to look for? Yes?"
"That's it."
The girl looked at him, then passed her hand across her forehead.
"Jane Finn. Always I hear that name. It is familiar."
Tommy came forward eagerly.
"You must know SOMETHING about her?"

But the girl turned away abruptly.

"I know nothing--only the name." She walked towards the door. Suddenly she uttered a cry. Tommy stared. She had caught sight of the picture he had laid against the wall the night before. For a moment he caught a look of terror in her eyes. As inexplicably it changed to relief. Then abruptly she went out of the room. Tommy could make nothing of it. Did she fancy that he had meant to attack her with it? Surely not. He rehung the picture on the wall thoughtfully.

Three more days went by in dreary inaction. Tommy felt the strain telling on his nerves. He saw no one but Conrad and Annette, and the girl had become dumb. She spoke only in monosyllables. A kind of dark suspicion smouldered in her eyes. Tommy felt that if this solitary confinement went on much longer he would go mad. He gathered from Conrad that they were waiting for orders from "Mr. Brown." Perhaps, thought Tommy, he was abroad or away, and they were obliged to wait for his return.

But the evening of the third day brought a rude awakening.

It was barely seven o'clock when he heard the tramp of footsteps outside in the passage. In another minute the door was flung open. Conrad entered. With him was the evil-looking Number 14. Tommy's heart sank at the sight of them.

"Evenin', gov'nor," said the man with a leer. "Got those ropes, mate?"

The silent Conrad produced a length of fine cord. The next minute Number 14's hands, horribly dexterous, were winding the cord round his limbs, while Conrad held him down.

"What the devil----?" began Tommy.

But the slow, speechless grin of the silent Conrad froze the words on his lips.

Number 14 proceeded deftly with his task. In another minute Tommy was a mere helpless bundle. Then at last Conrad spoke:

"Thought you'd bluffed us, did you? With what you knew, and what you didn't know. Bargained with us! And all the time it was bluff! Bluff! You know less than a kitten. But your number's up now all right, you b----swine."

Tommy lay silent. There was nothing to say. He had failed. Somehow or other the omnipotent Mr. Brown had seen through his pretensions. Suddenly a thought occurred to him.

"A very good speech, Conrad," he said approvingly. "But wherefore the bonds and fetters? Why not let this kind gentleman here cut my throat without delay?"

"Garn," said Number 14 unexpectedly. "Think we're as green as to do you in here, and have the police nosing round? Not 'alf! We've ordered the carriage for your lordship to-morrow mornin', but in the meantime we're not taking any chances, see!"

"Nothing," said Tommy, "could be plainer than your words--unless it was your face."

"Stow it," said Number 14.

"With pleasure," replied Tommy. "You're making a sad mistake--but yours will be the loss."

"You don't kid us that way again," said Number 14. "Talking as though you were still at the blooming Ritz, aren't you?"

Tommy made no reply. He was engaged in wondering how Mr. Brown had discovered his identity. He decided that Tuppence, in the throes of anxiety, had gone to the police, and that his disappearance having been made public the gang had not been slow to put two and two together.

The two men departed and the door slammed. Tommy was left to his meditations. They were not pleasant ones.

About an hour had passed when he heard the key softly turned, and the door opened. It was Annette. Tommy's heart beat a little faster. He had forgotten the girl. Was it possible that she had come to his help?

Suddenly he heard Conrad's voice:

"Come out of it, Annette. He doesn't want any supper to-night."

"Oui, oui, je sais bien. But I must take the other tray. We need the things on it."

"Well, hurry up," growled Conrad.

"Le beau petit monsieur," cried Annette, pausing by the bed in the darkness. "You have tied him up well, hein? He is like a trussed chicken!" The frank amusement in her tone jarred on the boy; but at that moment, to his amazement, he felt her hand running lightly over his bonds, and something small and cold was pressed into the palm
of his hand.
"Come on, Annette."
"Mais me voila."

The door shut. Tommy heard Conrad say:
"Lock it and give me the key."

The footsteps died away. Tommy lay petrified with amazement. The object Annette had thrust into his hand was a small penknife, the blade open. From the way she had studiously avoided looking at him, and her action with the light, he came to the conclusion that the room was overlooked. There must be a peep-hole somewhere in the walls. Remembering how guarded she had always been in her manner, he saw that he had probably been under observation all the time. Had he said anything to give himself away? Hardly. He had revealed a wish to escape and a desire to find Jane Finn, but nothing that could have given a clue to his own identity. True, his question to Annette had proved that he was personally unacquainted with Jane Finn, but he had never pretended otherwise. The question now was, did Annette really know more? Were her denials intended primarily for the listeners? On that point he could come to no conclusion.

But there was a more vital question that drove out all others. Could he, bound as he was, manage to cut his bonds? He essayed cautiously to rub the open blade up and down on the cord that bound his two wrists together. It was an awkward business, and drew a smothered "Ow" of pain from him as the knife cut into his wrist. But slowly and doggedly he went on sawing to and fro. He cut the flesh badly, but at last he felt the cord slacken. With his hands free, the rest was easy. Five minutes later he stood upright with some difficulty, owing to the cramp in his limbs. His first care was to bind up his bleeding wrist. Then he sat on the edge of the bed to think. Conrad had taken the key of the door, so he would perform have to wait until the two men returned to fetch him. But when they did . . . Tommy smiled! Moving with infinite caution in the dark room, he found and unhooked the famous picture. He felt an economical pleasure that his first plan would not be wasted. There was now nothing to do but to wait. He waited.

The night passed slowly. Tommy lived through an eternity of hours, but at last he heard footsteps. He stood upright, drew a deep breath, and clutched the picture firmly.

The door opened. A faint light streamed in from outside. Conrad went straight towards the gas to light it. Tommy deeply regretted that it was he who had entered first. It would have been pleasant to get even with Conrad. Number 14 followed. As he stepped across the threshold, Tommy brought the picture down with terrific force on his head. Number 14 went down amidst a stupendous crash of broken glass. In a minute Tommy had slipped out and pulled to the door. The key was in the lock. He turned it and withdrew it just as Conrad hurled himself against the door from the inside with a volley of curses.

For a moment Tommy hesitated. There was the sound of some one stirring on the floor below. Then the German's voice came up the stairs.
"Gott im Himmel! Conrad, what is it?"

Tommy felt a small hand thrust into his. Beside him stood Annette. She pointed up a rickety ladder that apparently led to some attics.
"Quick--up here!" She dragged him after her up the ladder. In another moment they were standing in a dusty garret littered with lumber. Tommy looked round.
"This won't do. It's a regular trap. There's no way out."
"Hush! Wait." The girl put her finger to her lips. She crept to the top of the ladder and listened.

The banging and beating on the door was terrific. The German and another were trying to force the door in.

Annette explained in a whisper:
"They will think you are still inside. They cannot hear what Conrad says. The door is too thick."
"I thought you could hear what went on in the room?"
"There is a peep-hole into the next room. It was clever of you to guess. But they will not think of that--they are only anxious to get in."
"Yes--but look here-----"
"Leave it to me." She bent down. To his amazement, Tommy saw that she was fastening the end of a long piece of string to the handle of a big cracked jug. She arranged it carefully, then turned to Tommy.
"Have you the key of the door?"
"Yes."
"Give it to me."
He handed it to her.
"I am going down. Do you think you can go halfway, and then swing yourself down BEHIND the ladder, so that they will not see you?"
Tommy nodded.
"There's a big cupboard in the shadow of the landing. Stand behind it. Take the end of this string in your hand. When I've let the others out--PULL!"

Before he had time to ask her anything more, she had flitted lightly down the ladder and was in the midst of the group with a loud cry:
"Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu! Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?"
The German turned on her with an oath.
"Get out of this. Go to your room!"

Very cautiously Tommy swung himself down the back of the ladder. So long as they did not turn round ... all was well. He crouched behind the cupboard. They were still between him and the stairs.
"AH!" Annette appeared to stumble over something. She stooped. "Mon Dieu, voila la clef!"
The German snatched it from her. He unlocked the door. Conrad stumbled out, swearing.
"Where is he? Have you got him?"
"We have seen no one," said the German sharply. His face paled. "Who do you mean?"
Conrad gave vent to another oath.
"He's got away."
"Impossible. He would have passed us."

At that moment, with an ecstatic smile Tommy pulled the string. A crash of crockery came from the attic above. In a trice the men were pushing each other up the rickety ladder and had disappeared into the darkness above.

Quick as a flash Tommy leapt from his hiding-place and dashed down the stairs, pulling the girl with him. There was no one in the hall. He fumbled over the bolts and chain. At last they yielded, the door swung open. He turned. Annette had disappeared.

Tommy stood spell-bound. Had she run upstairs again? What madness possessed her! He fumed with impatience, but he stood his ground. He would not go without her.

And suddenly there was an outcry overhead, an exclamation from the German, and then Annette's voice, clear and high:
"Ma foi, he has escaped! And quickly! Who would have thought it?"
Tommy still stood rooted to the ground. Was that a command to him to go? He fancied it was.
And then, louder still, the words floated down to him:
"This is a terrible house. I want to go back to Marguerite. To Marguerite. TO MARGUERITE!"

Tommy had run back to the stairs. She wanted him to go and leave her. But why? At all costs he must try and get her away with him. Then his heart sank. Conrad was leaping down the stairs, uttering a savage cry at the sight of him. After him came the others.

Tommy stopped Conrad's rush with a straight blow with his fist. It caught the other on the point of the jaw and he fell like a log. The second man tripped over his body and fell. From higher up the staircase there was a flash, and a bullet grazed Tommy's ear. He realized that it would be good for his health to get out of this house as soon as possible. As regards Annette he could do nothing. He had got even with Conrad, which was one satisfaction. The blow had been a good one.

He leapt for the door, slamming it behind him. The square was deserted. In front of the house was a baker's van. Evidently he was to have been taken out of London in that, and his body found many miles from the house in Soho. The driver jumped to the pavement and tried to bar Tommy's way. Again Tommy's fist shot out, and the driver sprawled on the pavement.

Tommy took to his heels and ran--none too soon. The front door opened and a hail of bullets followed him. Fortunately none of them hit him. He turned the corner of the square.
"There's one thing," he thought to himself, "they can't go on shooting. They'll have the police after them if they do. I wonder they dared to there."

He heard the footsteps of his pursuers behind him, and redoubled his own pace. Once he got out of these byways he would be safe. There would be a policeman about somewhere--not that he really wanted to invoke the aid of the police if he could possibly do without it. It meant explanations, and general awkwardness. In another moment he had reason to bless his luck. He stumbled over a prostrate figure, which started up with a yell of alarm and dashed off down the street. Tommy drew back into a doorway. In a minute he had the pleasure of seeing his two pursuers, of whom the German was one, industriously tracking down the red herring!

Tommy sat down quietly on the doorstep and allowed a few moments to elapse while he recovered his breath. Then he strolled gently in the opposite direction. He glanced at his watch. It was a little after half-past five. It was rapidly growing light. At the next corner he passed a policeman. The policeman cast a suspicious eye on him. Tommy felt slightly offended. Then, passing his hand over his face, he laughed. He had not shaved or washed for
three days! What a guy he must look.

He betook himself without more ado to a Turkish Bath establishment which he knew to be open all night. He emerged into the busy daylight feeling himself once more, and able to make plans.

First of all, he must have a square meal. He had eaten nothing since midday yesterday. He turned into an A.B.C. shop and ordered eggs and bacon and coffee. Whilst he ate, he read a morning paper propped up in front of him. Suddenly he stiffened. There was a long article on Kramenin, who was described as the "man behind Bolshevism" in Russia, and who had just arrived in London--some thought as an unofficial envoy. His career was sketched lightly, and it was firmly asserted that he, and not the figurehead leaders, had been the author of the Russian Revolution.

In the centre of the page was his portrait.

"So that's who Number 1 is," said Tommy with his mouth full of eggs and bacon. "Not a doubt about it, I must push on."

He paid for his breakfast, and betook himself to Whitehall. There he sent up his name, and the message that it was urgent. A few minutes later he was in the presence of the man who did not here go by the name of "Mr. Carter." There was a frown on his face.

"Look here, you've no business to come asking for me in this way. I thought that was distinctly understood?"

"It was, sir. But I judged it important to lose no time."

And as briefly and succinctly as possible he detailed the experiences of the last few days.

Half-way through, Mr. Carter interrupted him to give a few cryptic orders through the telephone. All traces of displeasure had now left his face. He nodded energetically when Tommy had finished.

"Quite right. Every moment's of value. Fear we shall be too late anyway. They wouldn't wait. Would clear out at once. Still, they may have left something behind them that will be a clue. You say you've recognized Number 1 to be Kramenin? That's important. We want something against him badly to prevent the Cabinet falling on his neck too freely. What about the others? You say two faces were familiar to you? One's a Labour man, you think? Just look through these photos, and see if you can spot him."

A minute later, Tommy held one up. Mr. Carter exhibited some surprise.

"Ah, Westway! Shouldn't have thought it. Poses as being moderate. As for the other fellow, I think I can give a good guess." He handed another photograph to Tommy, and smiled at the other's exclamation. "I'm right, then. Who is he? Irishman. Prominent Unionist M.P. All a blind, of course. We've suspected it--but couldn't get any proof. Yes, you've done very well, young man. The 29th, you say, is the date. That gives us very little time--very little time indeed."

"But----" Tommy hesitated.

Mr. Carter read his thoughts.

"We can deal with the General Strike menace, I think. It's a toss-up--but we've got a sporting chance! But if that draft treaty turns up--we're done. England will be plunged in anarchy. Ah, what's that? The car? Come on, Beresford, we'll go and have a look at this house of yours."

Two constables were on duty in front of the house in Soho. An inspector reported to Mr. Carter in a low voice.

The latter turned to Tommy.

"The birds have flown--as we thought. We might as well go over it."

Going over the deserted house seemed to Tommy to partake of the character of a dream. Everything was just as it had been. The prison room with the crooked pictures, the broken jug in the attic, the meeting room with its long table. But nowhere was there a trace of papers. Everything of that kind had either been destroyed or taken away. And there was no sign of Annette.

"What you tell me about the girl puzzled me," said Mr. Carter. "You believe that she deliberately went back?"

"It would seem so, sir. She ran upstairs while I was getting the door open."

"H'm, she must belong to the gang, then; but, being a woman, didn't feel like standing by to see a personable young man killed. But evidently she's in with them, or she wouldn't have gone back."

"I can't believe she's really one of them, sir. She--seemed so different----"

"Good-looking, I suppose?" said Mr. Carter with a smile that made Tommy flush to the roots of his hair. He admitted Annette's beauty rather shamefacedly.

"By the way," observed Mr. Carter, "have you shown yourself to Miss Tuppence yet? She's been bombarding me with letters about you."

"Tuppence? I was afraid she might get a bit rattled. Did she go to the police?"

Mr. Carter shook his head.

"Then I wonder how they twigged me."

Mr. Carter looked inquiringly at him, and Tommy explained. The other nodded thoughtfully.

"True, that's rather a curious point. Unless the mention of the Ritz was an accidental remark?"
"It might have been, sir. But they must have found out about me suddenly in some way."
"Well," said Mr. Carter, looking round him, "there's nothing more to be done here. What about some lunch with me?"
"Thanks awfully, sir. But I think I'd better get back and rout out Tuppence."
"Of course. Give her my kind regards and tell her not to believe you're killed too readily next time."
Tommy grinned.
"I take a lot of killing, sir."
"So I perceive," said Mr. Carter dryly. "Well, good-bye. Remember you're a marked man now, and take reasonable care of yourself."
"Thank you, sir."
Hailing a taxi briskly Tommy stepped in, and was swiftly borne to the Ritz' dwelling the while on the pleasurable anticipation of startling Tuppence.
"Wonder what she's been up to. Dogging 'Rita' most likely. By the way, I suppose that's who Annette meant by Marguerite. I didn't get it at the time." The thought saddened him a little, for it seemed to prove that Mrs. Vandemeyer and the girl were on intimate terms.
The taxi drew up at the Ritz. Tommy burst into its sacred portals eagerly, but his enthusiasm received a check. He was informed that Miss Cowley had gone out a quarter of an hour ago.

CHAPTER XVIII -- THE TELEGRAM

BAFFLED for the moment, Tommy strolled into the restaurant, and ordered a meal of surpassing excellence. His four days' imprisonment had taught him anew to value good food.

He was in the middle of conveying a particularly choice morsel of Sole a la Jeanette to his mouth, when he caught sight of Julius entering the room. Tommy waved a menu cheerfully, and succeeded in attracting the other's attention. At the sight of Tommy, Julius's eyes seemed as though they would pop out of his head. He strode across, and pump-handled Tommy's hand with what seemed to the latter quite unnecessary vigour.
"Holy snakes!" he ejaculated. "Is it really you?"
"Of course it is. Why shouldn't it be?"
"Why shouldn't it be? Say, man, don't you know you've been given up for dead? I guess we'd have had a solemn requiem for you in another few days."
"Who thought I was dead?" demanded Tommy.
"Tuppence."
"She remembered the proverb about the good dying young, I suppose. There must be a certain amount of original sin in me to have survived. Where is Tuppence, by the way?"
"Isn't she here?"
"No, the fellows at the office said she'd just gone out."
"Gone shopping, I guess. I dropped her here in the car about an hour ago. But, say, can't you shed that British calm of yours, and get down to it? What on God's earth have you been doing all this time?"
"If you're feeding here," replied Tommy, "order now. It's going to be a long story."
Julius drew up a chair to the opposite side of the table, summoned a hovering waiter, and dictated his wishes. Then he turned to Tommy.
"Fire ahead. I guess you've had some few adventures."
"One or two," replied Tommy modestly, and plunged into his recital.
Julius listened spellbound. Half the dishes that were placed before him he forgot to eat. At the end he heaved a long sigh.
"Bully for you. Reads like a dime novel!"
"And now for the home front," said Tommy, stretching out his hand for a peach.
"We-el," drawled Julius, "I don't mind admitting we've had some adventures too."
He, in his turn, assumed the role of narrator. Beginning with his unsuccessful reconnoitring at Bournemouth, he passed on to his return to London, the buying of the car, the growing anxieties of Tuppence, the call upon Sir James, and the sensational occurrences of the previous night.
"But who killed her?" asked Tommy. "I don't quite understand."
"The doctor kidded himself she took it herself," replied Julius dryly.
"And Sir James? What did he think?"
"Being a legal luminary, he is likewise a human oyster," replied Julius. "I should say he 'reserved judgment.' "
He went on to detail the events of the morning.
"Lost her memory, eh?" said Tommy with interest. "By Jove, that explains why they looked at me so queerly when I spoke of questioning her. Bit of a slip on my part, that! But it wasn't the sort of thing a fellow would be likely
"They didn't give you any sort of hint as to where Jane was?"

"Not a word. I'm a bit of an ass, as you know. I ought to have got more out of them somehow."

"I guess you're lucky to be here at all. That bluff of yours was the goods all right. How you ever came to think of it all so pat beats me to a frazzle!"

"I was in such a funk I had to think of something," said Tommy simply.

"I believe not. At least they call it heart failure induced by an overdose, or some such claptrap. It's all right. We don't want to be worried with an inquest. But I guess Tuppence and I and even the highbrow Sir James have all got the same idea."

"Mr. Brown?" hazarded Tommy.

"Sure thing."

"All the same," he said thoughtfully, "Mr. Brown hasn't got wings. I don't see how he got in and out."

"How about some high-class thought transference stunt? Some magnetic influence that irresistibly impelled Mrs. Vandemeyer to commit suicide?"

"Good, Julius. Distinctly good. Especially the phraseology. But it leaves me cold. I yearn for a real Mr. Brown of flesh and blood. I think the gifted young detectives must get to work, study the entrances and exits, and tap the bumps on their foreheads until the solution of the mystery dawns on them. Let's go round to the scene of the crime. I wish we could get hold of Tuppence. The Ritz would enjoy the spectacle of the glad reunion."

Inquiry at the office revealed the fact that Tuppence had not yet returned.

"All the same, I guess I'll have a look round upstairs," said Julius. "She might be in my sitting-room." He disappeared.

Suddenly a diminutive boy spoke at Tommy's elbow:

"The young lady--she's gone away by train, I think, sir," he murmured shyly.

"What?" Tommy wheeled round upon him.

"When did she ask for an A.B.C. and a Bradshaw?"

"When I took her the telegram, sir."

"A telegram?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was that?"

"About half-past twelve, sir."

"Tell me exactly what happened."

The small boy drew a long breath.

"I took up a telegram to No. 891--the lady was there. She opened it and gave a gasp, and then she said, very jolly like: 'Bring me up a Bradshaw, and an A.B.C., and look sharp, Henry.' My name isn't Henry, but----"

"Never mind your name," said Tommy impatiently. "Go on."

"Yes, sir. I brought them, and she told me to wait, and looked up something. And then she looks up at the clock, and 'Hurry up,' she says. 'Tell them to get me a taxi,' and she begins a-shoving on of her hat in front of the glass, and she was down in two ticks, almost as quick as I was, and I seed her going down the steps and into the taxi, and I heard her call out what I told you."

The small boy stopped and replenished his lungs. Tommy continued to stare at him. At that moment Julius rejoined him. He held an open letter in his hand.

"I say, Hersheimmer"--Tommy turned to him--"Tuppence has gone off sleuthing on her own."

"Shucks!"

"Yes, she has. She went off in a taxi to Charing Cross in the deuce of a hurry after getting a telegram."

Almost unconsciously, he held out his hand for the letter, but Julius folded it up and placed it in his pocket. He
seemed a trifle embarrassed.

"I guess this is nothing to do with it. It's about something else--something I asked her that she was to let me know about."

"Oh!" Tommy looked puzzled, and seemed waiting for more.

"See here," said Julius suddenly, "I'd better put you wise. I asked Miss Tuppence to marry me this morning."

"Oh!" said Tommy mechanically. He felt dazed. Julius's words were totally unexpected. For the moment they benumbed his brain.

"I'd like to tell you," continued Julius, "that before I suggested anything of the kind to Miss Tuppence, I made it clear that I didn't want to butt in in any way between her and you----"

Tommy roused himself.

"That's all right," he said quickly. "Tuppence and I have been pals for years. Nothing more." He lit a cigarette with a hand that shook ever so little. "That's quite all right. Tuppence always said that she was looking out for----"

He stopped abruptly, his face crimsoning, but Julius was in no way discomposed.

"Oh, I guess it'll be the dollars that'll do the trick. Miss Tuppence put me wise to that right away. There's no humbug about her. We ought to gee along together very well."

Tommy looked at him curiously for a minute, as though he were about to speak, then changed his mind and said nothing. Tuppence and Julius! Well, why not? Had she not lamented the fact that she knew no rich men? Had she not openly avowed her intention of marrying for money if she ever had the chance? Her meeting with the young American millionaire had given her the chance--and it was unlikely she would be slow to avail herself of it. She was out for money. She had always said so. Why blame her because she had been true to her creed?

Nevertheless, Tommy did blame her. He was filled with a passionate and utterly illogical resentment. It was all very well to SAY things like that--but a REAL girl would never marry for money. Tuppence was utterly cold-blooded and selfish, and he would be delighted if he never saw her again! And it was a rotten world!

Julius's voice broke in on these meditations.

"Yes, we ought to get along together very well. I've heard that a girl always refuses you once--a sort of convention."

Tommy caught his arm.

"Refuses? Did you say REFUSES?"

"Sure thing. Didn't I tell you that? She just rapped out a 'no' without any kind of reason to it. The eternal feminine, the Huns call it, I've heard. But she'll come round right enough. Likely enough, I hustled her some----"

But Tommy interrupted regardless of decorum.

"What did she say in that note?" he demanded fiercely.

The obliging Julius handed it to him.

"There's no earthly clue in it as to where she's gone," he assured Tommy. "But you might as well see for yourself if you don't believe me."

The note, in Tuppence's well-known schoolboy writing, ran as follows:

"DEAR JULIUS,

'It's always better to have things in black and white. I don't feel I can be bothered to think of marriage until Tommy is found. Let's leave it till then. Yours affectionately, 'TUPPENCE."

Tommy handed it back, his eyes shining. His feelings had undergone a sharp reaction. He now felt that Tuppence was all that was noble and disinterested. Had she not refused Julius without hesitation? True, the note betokened signs of weakening, but he could excuse that. It read almost like a bribe to Julius to spur him on in his efforts to find Tommy, but he supposed she had not really meant it that way. Darling Tuppence, there was not a girl in the world to touch her! When he saw her----His thoughts were brought up with a sudden jerk.

"As you say," he remarked, pulling himself together, "there's not a hint here as to what she's up to. Hi--Henry!"

The small boy came obediently. Tommy produced five shillings.

"One thing more. Do you remember what the young lady did with the telegram?"

Henry gasped and spoke.

"She crumpled it up into a ball and threw it into the grate, and made a sort of noise like 'Whoop!' sir."

"Very graphic, Henry," said Tommy. "Here's your five shillings. Come on, Julius. We must find that telegram."

They hurried upstairs. Tuppence had left the key in her door. The room was as she had left it. In the fireplace was a crumpled ball of orange and white. Tommy disentangled it and smoothed out the telegram.

"Come at once, Moat House, Ebury, Yorkshire, great developments--TOMMY."

They looked at each other in stupefaction. Julius spoke first:

"You didn't send it?"

"Of course not. What does it mean?"
"I guess it means the worst," said Julius quietly. "They've got her."

"WHAT?"

"Sure thing! They signed your name, and she fell into the trap like a lamb."

"My God! What shall we do?"

"Get busy, and go after her! Right now! There's no time to waste. It's almighty luck that she didn't take the wire with her. If she had we'd probably never have traced her. But we've got to hustle. Where's that Bradshaw?"

The energy of Julius was infectious. Left to himself, Tommy would probably have sat down to think things out for a good half-hour before he decided on a plan of action. But with Julius Hersheimmer about, hustling was inevitable.

After a few muttered imprecations he handed the Bradshaw to Tommy as being more conversant with its mysteries. Tommy abandoned it in favour of an A.B.C.

"Here we are. Ebury, Yorks. From King's Cross. Or St. Pancras. (Boy must have made a mistake. It was King's Cross, not CHARING Cross.) 12.50, that's the train she went by. 2.10, that's gone. 3.20 is the next--and a damned slow train too."

"What about the car?"

Tommy shook his head.

"Send it up if you like, but we'd better stick to the train. The great thing is to keep calm."

Julius groaned.

"That's so. But it gets my goat to think of that innocent young girl in danger!"

Tommy nodded abstractedly. He was thinking. In a moment or two, he said:

"I say, Julius, what do they want her for, anyway?"

"Eh? I don't get you?"

"What I mean is that I don't think it's their game to do her any harm," explained Tommy, puckering his brow with the strain of his mental processes. "She's a hostage, that's what she is. She's in no immediate danger, because if we tumble on to anything, she'd be damned useful to them. As long as they've got her, they've got the whip hand of us. See?"

"Sure thing," said Julius thoughtfully. "That's so."

"Besides," added Tommy, as an afterthought, "I've great faith in Tuppence."

The journey was wearisome, with many stops, and crowded carriages. They had to change twice, once at Doncaster, once at a small junction. Ebury was a deserted station with a solitary porter, to whom Tommy addressed himself:

"Can you tell me the way to the Moat House?"

"The Moat House? It's a tidy step from here. The big house near the sea, you mean?"

Tommy assented brazenly. After listening to the porter's meticulous but perplexing directions, they prepared to leave the station. It was beginning to rain, and they turned up the collars of their coats as they trudged through the slush of the road. Suddenly Tommy halted.

"Wait a moment." He ran back to the station and tackled the porter anew.

"Look here, do you remember a young lady who arrived by an earlier train, the 12.50 from London? She'd probably ask you the way to the Moat House."

He described Tuppence as well as he could, but the porter shook his head. Several people had arrived by the train in question. He could not call to mind one young lady in particular. But he was quite certain that no one had asked him the way to the Moat House.

Julius rejoined Julius, and explained. Depression was settling on him like a leaden weight. He felt convinced that their quest was going to be unsuccessful. The enemy had over three hours' start. Three hours was more than enough for Mr. Brown. He would not ignore the possibility of the telegram having been found.

The way seemed endless. Once they took the wrong turning and went nearly half a mile out of their direction. It was past seven o'clock when a small boy told them that "t' Moat House" was just past the next corner.

A rusty iron gate swinging dismally on its hinges! An overgrown drive thick with leaves. There was something about the place that struck a chill to both their hearts. They went up the deserted drive. The leaves deadened their footsteps. The daylight was almost gone. It was like walking in a world of ghosts. Overhead the branches flapped and creaked with a mournful note. Occasionally a sodden leaf drifted silently down, startling them with its cold touch on their cheek.

A turn of the drive brought them in sight of the house. That, too, seemed empty and deserted. The shutters were closed, the steps up to the door overgrown with moss. Was it indeed to this desolate spot that Tuppence had been decoyed? It seemed hard to believe that a human footstep had passed this way for months.

Julius jerked the rusty bell handle. A jangling peal rang discordantly, echoing through the emptiness within. No
one came. They rang again and again—but there was no sign of life. Then they walked completely round the house. Everywhere silence, and shuttered windows. If they could believe the evidence of their eyes the place was empty.

"Nothing doing," said Julius.

They retraced their steps slowly to the gate.

"There must be a village handy," continued the young American. "We'd better make inquiries there. They'll know something about the place, and whether there's been anyone there lately."

"Yes, that's not a bad idea."

Proceeding up the road, they soon came to a little hamlet. On the outskirts of it, they met a workman swinging his bag of tools, and Tommy stopped him with a question.

"The Moat House? It's empty. Been empty for years. Mrs. Sweeny's got the key if you want to go over it—next to the post office."

Tommy thanked him. They soon found the post office, which was also a sweet and general fancy shop, and knocked at the door of the cottage next to it. A clean, wholesome-looking woman opened it. She readily produced the key of the Moat House.

"Though I doubt if it's the kind of place to suit you, sir. In a terrible state of repair. Ceilings leaking and all. 'Twould need a lot of money spent on it."

"Thanks," said Tommy cheerily. "I dare say it'll be a washout, but houses are scarce nowadays."

"That they are," declared the woman heartily. "My daughter and son-in-law have been looking for a decent cottage for I don't know how long. It's all the war. Upset things terribly, it has. But excuse me, sir, it'll be too dark for you to see much of the house. Hadn't you better wait until to-morrow?"

"That's all right. We'll have a look around this evening, anyway. We'd have been here before only we lost our way. What's the best place to stay at for the night round here?"

Mrs. Sweeny looked doubtful.

"There's the Yorkshire Arms, but it's not much of a place for gentlemen like you."

"Oh, it will do very well. Thanks. By the way, you've not had a young lady here asking for this key to-day?"

The woman shook her head.

"No one's been over the place for a long time."

"Thanks very much."

They retraced their steps to the Moat House. As the front door swung back on its hinges, protesting loudly, Julius struck a match and examined the floor carefully. Then he shook his head.

"I'd swear no one's passed this way. Look at the dust. Thick. Not a sign of a footmark."

They wandered round the deserted house. Everywhere the same tale. Thick layers of dust apparently undisturbed.

"This gets me," said Julius. "I don't believe Tuppence was ever in this house."

"She must have been."

Julius shook his head without replying.

"We'll go over it again to-morrow," said Tommy. "Perhaps we'll see more in the daylight."

On the morrow they took up the search once more, and were reluctantly forced to the conclusion that the house had not been invaded for some considerable time. They might have left the village altogether but for a fortunate discovery of Tommy's. As they were retracing their steps to the gate, he gave a sudden cry, and stooping, picked something up from among the leaves, and held it out to Julius. It was a small gold brooch.

"That's Tuppence's!"

"Are you sure?"

"Absolutely. I've often seen her wear it."

Julius drew a deep breath.

"I guess that settles it. She came as far as here, anyway. We'll make that pub our head-quarters, and raise hell round here until we find her. Somebody MUST have seen her."

Forthwith the campaign began. Tommy and Julius worked separately and together, but the result was the same. Nobody answering to Tuppence's description had been seen in the vicinity. They were baffled—but not discouraged. Finally they altered their tactics. Tuppence had certainly not remained long in the neighbourhood of the Moat House. That pointed to her having been overcome and carried away in a car. They renewed inquiries. Had anyone seen a car standing somewhere near the Moat House that day? Again they met with no success.

Julius wired to town for his own car, and they scoured the neighbourhood daily with unflagging zeal. A grey limousine on which they had set high hopes was traced to Harrogate, and turned out to be the property of a highly respectable maiden lady!

Each day saw them set out on a new quest. Julius was like a hound on the leash. He followed up the slenderest
clue. Every car that had passed through the village on the fateful day was tracked down. He forced his way into country properties and submitted the owners of the motors to a searching cross-examination. His apologies were as thorough as his methods, and seldom failed in disarming the indignation of his victims; but, as day succeeded day, they were no nearer to discovering Tuppence's whereabouts. So well had the abduction been planned that the girl seemed literally to have vanished into thin air.

And another preoccupation was weighing on Tommy's mind.

"Do you know how long we've been here?" he asked one morning as they sat facing each other at breakfast. "A week! We're no nearer to finding Tuppence, and NEXT SUNDAY IS THE 29TH!"

"Shucks!" said Julius thoughtfully. "I'd almost forgotten about the 29th. I've been thinking of nothing but Tuppence."

"So have I. At least, I hadn't forgotten about the 29th, but it didn't seem to matter a damn in comparison to finding Tuppence. But to-day's the 23rd, and time's getting short. If we're ever going to get hold of her at all, we must do it before the 29th--her life won't be worth an hour's purchase afterwards. The hostage game will be played out by then. I'm beginning to feel that we've made a big mistake in the way we've set about this. We've wasted time and we're no forrader."

"I'm with you there. We've been a couple of mutts, who've bitten off a bigger bit than they can chew. I'm going to quit fooling right away!"

"What do you mean?"

"I'll tell you. I'm going to do what we ought to have done a week ago. I'm going right back to London to put the case in the hands of your British police. We fancied ourselves as sleuths. Sleuths! It was a piece of damn-fool foolishness! I'm through! I've had enough of it. Scotland Yard for me!"

"You're right," said Tommy slowly. "I wish to God we'd gone there right away."

"Better late than never. We've been like a couple of babes playing 'Here we go round the Mulberry Bush.' Now I'm going right along to Scotland Yard to ask them to take me by the hand and show me the way I should go. I guess the professional always scores over the amateur in the end. Are you coming along with me?"

Tommy shook his head.

"What's the good? One of us is enough. I might as well stay here and nose round a bit longer. Something MIGHT turn up. One never knows."

"Sure thing. Well, so long. I'll be back in a couple of shakes with a few inspectors along. I shall tell them to pick out their brightest and best."

But the course of events was not to follow the plan Julius had laid down. Later in the day Tommy received a wire:

"Join me Manchester Midland Hotel. Important news--JULIUS."

At 7:30 that night Tommy alighted from a slow cross-country train. Julius was on the platform.

"Thought you'd come by this train if you weren't out when my wire arrived."

Tommy grasped him by the arm.

"What is it? Is Tuppence found?"

Julius shook his head.

"No. But I found this waiting in London. Just arrived."

He handed the telegraph form to the other. Tommy's eyes opened as he read:

"Jane Finn found. Come Manchester Midland Hotel immediately--PEEL EDGERTON."

Julius took the form back and folded it up.

"Queer," he said thoughtfully. "I thought that lawyer chap had quit!"

CHAPTER XIX -- JANE FINN

"MY train got in half an hour ago," explained Julius, as he led the way out of the station. "I reckoned you'd come by this before I left London, and wired accordingly to Sir James. He's booked rooms for us, and will be round to dine at eight."

"What made you think he'd ceased to take any interest in the case?" asked Tommy curiously.

"What he said," replied Julius dryly. "The old bird's as close as an oyster! Like all the darned lot of them, he wasn't going to commit himself till he was sure he could deliver the goods."

"I wonder," said Tommy thoughtfully.

Julius turned on him.

"You wonder what?"

"Whether that was his real reason."

"Sure. You bet your life it was."

Tommy shook his head unconvinced.
Sir James arrived punctually at eight o'clock, and Julius introduced Tommy. Sir James shook hands with him warmly.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Beresford. I have heard so much about you from Miss Tuppence"--he smiled involuntarily--"that it really seems as though I already know you quite well."

"Thank you, sir," said Tommy with his cheerful grin. He scanned the great lawyer eagerly. Like Tuppence, he felt the magnetism of the other's personality. He was reminded of Mr. Carter. The two men, totally unlike so far as physical resemblance went, produced a similar effect. Beneath the weary manner of the one and the professional reserve of the other, lay the same quality of mind, keen-edged like a rapier.

In the meantime he was conscious of Sir James's close scrutiny. When the lawyer dropped his eyes the young man had the feeling that the other had read him through and through like an open book. He could not but wonder what the final judgment was, but there was little chance of learning that. Sir James took in everything, but gave out only what he chose. A proof of that occurred almost at once.

Immediately the first greetings were over Julius broke out into a flood of eager questions. How had Sir James managed to track the girl? Why had he not let them know that he was still working on the case? And so on.

Sir James stroked his chin and smiled. At last he said:

"Just so, just so. Well, she's found. And that's the great thing, isn't it? Eh! Come now, that's the great thing?"

"Sure it is. But just how did you strike her trail? Miss Tuppence and I thought you'd quit for good and all."

"Ah!" The lawyer shot a lightning glance at him, then resumed operations on his chin. "You thought that, did you? Did you really? H'm, dear me."

"But I guess I can take it we were wrong," pursued Julius.

"Well, I don't know that I should go so far as to say that. But it's certainly fortunate for all parties that we've managed to find the young lady."

"But where is she?" demanded Julius, his thoughts flying off on another tack. "I thought you'd be sure to bring her along?"

"That would hardly be possible," said Sir James gravely.

"Why?"

"Because the young lady was knocked down in a street accident, and has sustained slight injuries to the head. She was taken to the infirmary, and on recovering consciousness gave her name as Jane Finn. When--ah!--I heard that, I arranged for her to be removed to the house of a doctor--a friend of mine, and wired at once for you. She relapsed into unconsciousness and has not spoken since."

"She's not seriously hurt?"

"Oh, a bruise and a cut or two; really, from a medical point of view, absurdly slight injuries to have produced such a condition. Her state is probably to be attributed to the mental shock consequent on recovering her memory."

"It's come back?" cried Julius excitedly.

Sir James tapped the table rather impatiently.

"Undoubtedly, Mr. Hersheimmer, since she was able to give her real name. I thought you had appreciated that point."

"And you just happened to be on the spot," said Tommy. "Seems quite like a fairy tale."

But Sir James was far too wary to be drawn.

"Coincidences are curious things," he said dryly.

Nevertheless Tommy was now certain of what he had before only suspected. Sir James's presence in Manchester was not accidental. Far from abandoning the case, as Julius supposed, he had by some means of his own successfully run the missing girl to earth. The only thing that puzzled Tommy was the reason for all this secrecy. He concluded that it was a foible of the legal mind.

Julius was speaking.

"After dinner," he announced, "I shall go right away and see Jane."

"That will be impossible, I fear," said Sir James. "It is very unlikely they would allow her to see visitors at this time of night. I should suggest to-morrow morning about ten o'clock."

Julius flushed. There was something in Sir James which always stirred him to antagonism. It was a conflict of two masterful personalities.

"All the same, I reckon I'll go round there to-night and see if I can't ginger them up to break through their silly rules."

"It will be quite useless, Mr. Hersheimmer."

The words came out like the crack of a pistol, and Tommy looked up with a start. Julius was nervous and excited. The hand with which he raised his glass to his lips shook slightly, but his eyes held Sir James's defiantly. For a moment the hostility between the two seemed likely to burst into flame, but in the end Julius lowered his eyes,
"For the moment, I reckon you're the boss."

"Thank you," said the other. "We will say ten o'clock then?" With consummate ease of manner he turned to Tommy. "I must confess, Mr. Beresford, that it was something of a surprise to me to see you here this evening. The last I heard of you was that your friends were in grave anxiety on your behalf. Nothing had been heard of you for some days, and Miss Tuppence was inclined to think you had got into difficulties."

"I had, sir!" Tommy grinned reminiscently. "I was never in a tighter place in my life."

Helped out by questions from Sir James, he gave an abbreviated account of his adventures. The lawyer looked at him with renewed interest as he brought the tale to a close.

"You got yourself out of a tight place very well," he said gravely. "I congratulate you. You displayed a great deal of ingenuity and carried your part through well."

Tommy blushed, his face assuming a prawnlike hue at the praise.

"I couldn't have got away but for the girl, sir."

"No." Sir James smiled a little. "It was lucky for you she happened to--er--take a fancy to you." Tommy appeared about to protest, but Sir James went on. "There's no doubt about her being one of the gang, I suppose?"

"I'm afraid not, sir. I thought perhaps they were keeping her there by force, but the way she acted didn't fit in with that. You see, she went back to them when she could have got away."

Sir James nodded thoughtfully.

"What did she say? Something about wanting to be taken to Marguerite?"

"Yes, sir. I suppose she meant Mrs. Vandemeyer."

"She always signed herself Rita Vandemeyer. All her friends spoke of her as Rita. Still, I suppose the girl must have been in the habit of calling her by her full name. And, at the moment she was crying out to her, Mrs. Vandemeyer was either dead or dying! Curious! There are one or two points that strike me as being obscure--their sudden change of attitude towards yourself, for instance. By the way, the house was raided, of course?"

"Yes, sir, but they'd all cleared out."

"Naturally," said Sir James dryly.

"And not a clue left behind."

"I wonder----" The lawyer tapped the table thoughtfully.

Something in his voice made Tommy look up. Would this man's eyes have seen something where theirs had been blind? He spoke impulsively:

"I wish you'd been there, sir, to go over the house!"

"I wish I had," said Sir James quietly. He sat for a moment in silence. Then he looked up. "And since then? What have you been doing?"

For a moment, Tommy stared at him. Then it dawned on him that of course the lawyer did not know.

"I forgot that you didn't know about Tuppence," he said slowly. The sickening anxiety, forgotten for a while in the excitement of knowing Jane Finn was found at last, swept over him again.

The lawyer laid down his knife and fork sharply.

"Has anything happened to Miss Tuppence?" His voice was keen-edged.

"She's disappeared," said Julius.

"When?"

"A week ago."

"How?"

Sir James's questions fairly shot out. Between them Tommy and Julius gave the history of the last week and their futile search.

Sir James went at once to the root of the matter.

"A wire signed with your name? They knew enough of you both for that. They weren't sure of how much you had learnt in that house. Their kidnapping of Miss Tuppence is the counter-move to your escape. If necessary they could seal your lips with a threat of what might happen to her."

Tommy nodded.

"That's just what I thought, sir."

Sir James looked at him keenly. "You had worked that out, had you? Not bad--not at all bad. The curious thing is that they certainly did not know anything about you when they first held you prisoner. You are sure that you did not in any way disclose your identity?"

Tommy shook his head.

"That's so," said Julius with a nod. "Therefore I reckon some one put them wise--and not earlier than Sunday afternoon."
"Yes, but who?"
"That almighty omniscient Mr. Brown, of course!"
There was a faint note of derision in the American's voice which made Sir James look up sharply.
"You don't believe in Mr. Brown, Mr. Hersheimmer?"
"No, sir, I do not," returned the young American with emphasis. "Not as such, that is to say. I reckon it out that he's a figurehead--just a bogy name to frighten the children with. The real head of this business is that Russian chap Kramenin. I guess he's quite capable of running revolutions in three countries at once if he chose! The man Whittington is probably the head of the English branch."
"I disagree with you," said Sir James shortly. "Mr. Brown exists." He turned to Tommy. "Did you happen to notice where that wire was handed in?"
"No, sir, I'm afraid I didn't."
"H'm. Got it with you?"
"It's upstairs, sir, in my kit."
"I'd like to have a look at it sometime. No hurry. You've wasted a week"--Tommy hung his head--"a day or so more is immaterial. We'll deal with Miss Jane Finn first. Afterwards, we'll set to work to rescue Miss Tuppence from bondage. I don't think she's in any immediate danger. That is, so long as they don't know that we've got Jane Finn, and that her memory has returned. We must keep that dark at all costs. You understand?"
The other two assented, and, after making arrangements for meeting on the morrow, the great lawyer took his leave.

At ten o'clock, the two young men were at the appointed spot. Sir James had joined them on the doorstep. He alone appeared unexcited. He introduced them to the doctor.
"Mr. Hersheimmer--Mr. Beresford--Dr. Roylance. How's the patient?"
"Going on well. Evidently no idea of the flight of time. Asked this morning how many had been saved from the Lusitania. Was it in the papers yet? That, of course, was only what was to be expected. She seems to have something on her mind, though."
"I think we can relieve her anxiety. May we go up?"
"Certainly."

Tommy's heart beat sensibly faster as they followed the doctor upstairs. Jane Finn at last! The long-sought, the mysterious, the elusive Jane Finn! How wildly improbable success had seemed! And here in this house, her memory almost miraculously restored, lay the girl who held the future of England in her hands. A half groan broke from Tommy's lips. If only Tuppence could have been at his side to share in the triumphant conclusion of their joint venture! Then he put the thought of Tuppence resolutely aside. His confidence in Sir James was growing. There was a man who would unerringly ferret out Tuppence's whereabouts. In the meantime Jane Finn! And suddenly a dread clutched at his heart. It seemed too easy.... Suppose they should find her dead ... stricken down by the hand of Mr. Brown?

In another minute he was laughing at these melodramatic fancies. The doctor held open the door of a room and they passed in. On the white bed, bandages round her head, lay the girl. Somehow the whole scene seemed unreal. It was so exactly what one expected that it gave the effect of being beautifully staged.

The girl looked from one to the other of them with large wondering eyes. Sir James spoke first.
"Miss Finn," he said, "this is your cousin, Mr. Julius P. Hersheimmer."
A faint flush flitted over the girl's face, as Julius stepped forward and took her hand.
"How do, Cousin Jane?" he said lightly.
But Tommy caught the tremor in his voice.
"Are you really Uncle Hiram's son?" she asked wonderingly.
Her voice, with the slight warmth of the Western accent, had an almost thrilling quality. It seemed vaguely familiar to Tommy, but he thrust the impression aside as impossible.
"Sure thing."
"We used to read about Uncle Hiram in the papers," continued the girl, in her low soft tones. "But I never thought I'd meet you one day. Mother figured it out that Uncle Hiram would never get over being mad with her."
"The old man was like that," admitted Julius. "But I guess the new generation's sort of different. Got no use for the family feud business. First thing I thought about, soon as the war was over, was to come along and hunt you up."
A shadow passed over the girl's face.
"They've been telling me things--dreadful things--that my memory went, and that there are years I shall never know about--years lost out of my life."
"You didn't realize that yourself?"
The girl's eyes opened wide.
"Why, no. It seems to me as though it were no time since we were being hustled into those boats. I can see it all
now." She closed her eyes with a shudder.

Julius looked across at Sir James, who nodded.

"Don't worry any. It isn't worth it. Now, see here, Jane, there's something we want to know about. There was a
man aboard that boat with some mighty important papers on him, and the big guns in this country have got a notion
that he passed on the goods to you. Is that so?"

The girl hesitated, her glance shifting to the other two. Julius understood.

"Mr. Beresford is commissioned by the British Government to get those papers back. Sir James Peel Edgerton is
an English Member of Parliament, and might be a big gun in the Cabinet if he liked. It's owing to him that we've
ferreted you out at last. So you can go right ahead and tell us the whole story. Did Danvers give you the papers?"

"Yes. He said they'd have a better chance with me, because they would save the women and children first."

"Just as we thought," said Sir James.

"He said they were very important—that they might make all the difference to the Allies. But, if it's all so long
ago, and the war's over, what does it matter now?"

"I guess history repeats itself, Jane. First there was a great hue and cry over those papers, then it all died down,
and now the whole caboodle's started all over again—for rather different reasons. Then you can hand them over to us
right away?"

"But I can't."

"What?"

"I haven't got them."

"You--haven't--got them?" Julius punctuated the words with little pauses.

"No--I hid them."

"You hid them?"

"Yes. I got uneasy. People seemed to be watching me. It scared me—badly." She put her hand to her head. "It's
almost the last thing I remember before waking up in the hospital...."

"Go on," said Sir James, in his quiet penetrating tones. "What do you remember?"

She turned to him obediently.

"It was at Holyhead. I came that way—I don't remember why...."

"That doesn't matter. Go on."

"In the confusion on the quay I slipped away. Nobody saw me. I took a car. Told the man to drive me out of the
town. I watched when we got on the open road. No other car was following us. I saw a path at the side of the road. I
told the man to wait."

She paused, then went on. "The path led to the cliff, and down to the sea between big yellow gorse bushes—they
were like golden flames. I looked round. There wasn't a soul in sight. But just level with my head there was a hole in
the rock. It was quite small—I could only just get my hand in, but it went a long way back. I took the oilskin packet
from round my neck and shoved it right in as far as I could. Then I tore off a bit of gorse—My! but it did prick—and
plugged the hole with it so that you'd never guess there was a crevice of any kind there. Then I marked the place
carefully in my own mind, so that I'd find it again. There was a queer boulder in the path just there—for all the world
like a dog sitting up begging. Then I went back to the road. The car was waiting, and I drove back. I just caught the
train. I was a bit ashamed of myself for fancying things maybe, but, by and by, I saw the man opposite me wink at a
woman who was sitting next to me, and I felt scared again, and was glad the papers were safe. I went out in the
corridor to get a little air. I thought I'd slip into another carriage. But the woman called me back, said I'd dropped
something, and when I stooped to look, something seemed to hit me—here." She placed her hand to the back of her
head. "I don't remember anything more until I woke up in the hospital."

There was a pause.

"Thank you, Miss Finn." It was Sir James who spoke. "I hope we have not tired you?"

"Oh, that's all right. My head aches a little, but otherwise I feel fine."

Julius stepped forward and took her hand again.

"So long, Cousin Jane. I'm going to get busy after those papers, but I'll be back in two shakes of a dog's tail, and
I'll tote you up to London and give you the time of your young life before we go back to the States! I mean it—so
hurry up and get well."

CHAPTER XX -- TOO LATE

In the street they held an informal council of war. Sir James had drawn a watch from his pocket. "The boat train
to Holyhead stops at Chester at 12.14. If you start at once I think you can catch the connection."

Tommy looked up, puzzled.

"Is there any need to hurry, sir? To-day is only the 24th."
"I guess it's always well to get up early in the morning," said Julius, before the lawyer had time to reply. "We'll make tracks for the depot right away."

A little frown had settled on Sir James's brow.

"I wish I could come with you. I am due to speak at a meeting at two o'clock. It is unfortunate."

The reluctance in his tone was very evident. It was clear, on the other hand, that Julius was easily disposed to put up with the loss of the other's company.

"I guess there's nothing complicated about this deal," he remarked. "Just a game of hide-and-seek, that's all."

"I hope so," said Sir James.

"Sure thing. What else could it be?"

"You are still young, Mr. Hersheimmer. At my age you will probably have learnt one lesson. 'Never underestimate your adversary.'"

The gravity of his tone impressed Tommy, but had little effect upon Julius.

"You think Mr. Brown might come along and take a hand? If he does, I'm ready for him." He slapped his pocket. "I carry a gun. Little Willie here travels round with me everywhere." He produced a murderous-looking automatic, and tapped it affectionately before returning it to its home. "But he won't be needed this trip. There's nobody to put Mr. Brown wise."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders.

"There was nobody to put Mr. Brown wise to the fact that Mrs. Vandemeyer meant to betray him. Nevertheless, MRS. VANDEMEYER DIED WITHOUT SPEAKING."

Julius was silenced for once, and Sir James added on a lighter note:

"I only want to put you on your guard. Good-bye, and good luck. Take no unnecessary risks once the papers are in your hands. If there is any reason to believe that you have been shadowed, destroy them at once. Good luck to you. The game is in your hands now." He shook hands with them both.

Ten minutes later the two young men were seated in a first-class carriage en route for Chester.

For a long time neither of them spoke. When at length Julius broke the silence, it was with a totally unexpected remark.

"Say," he observed thoughtfully, "did you ever make a darned fool of yourself over a girl's face?"

Tommy, after a moment's astonishment, searched his mind.

"Can't say I have," he replied at last. "Not that I can recollect, anyhow. Why?"

"Because for the last two months I've been making a sentimental idiot of myself over Jane! First moment I clapped eyes on her photograph my heart did all the usual stunts you read about in novels. I guess I'm ashamed to admit it, but I came over here determined to find her and fix it all up, and take her back as Mrs. Julius P. Hersheimmer!"

"Oh!" said Tommy, amazed.

Julius uncrossed his legs brusquely and continued:

"Just shows what an almighty fool a man can make of himself! One look at the girl in the flesh, and I was cured!"

Feeling more tongue-tied than ever, Tommy ejaculated "Oh!" again.

"No disparagement to Jane, mind you," continued the other. "She's a real nice girl, and some fellow will fall in love with her right away."

"I thought her a very good-looking girl," said Tommy, finding his tongue.

"Sure she is. But she's not like her photograph one bit. At least I suppose she is in a way--must be--because I recognized her right off. If I'd seen her in a crowd I'd have said 'There's a girl whose face I know' right away without any hesitation. But there was something about that photo"--Julius shook his head, and heaved a sigh--"I guess romance is a mighty queer thing!"

"It must be," said Tommy coldly, "if you can come over here in love with one girl, and propose to another within a fortnight."

Julius had the grace to look discomposed.

"Well, you see, I'd got a sort of tired feeling that I'd never find Jane--and that it was all plumb foolishness anyway. And then--oh, well, the French, for instance, are much more sensible in the way they look at things. They keep romance and marriage apart----"

Tommy flushed.

"Well, I'm damned! If that's----" Julius hastened to interrupt.

"Say now, don't be hasty. I don't mean what you mean. I take it Americans have a higher opinion of morality than you have even. What I meant was that the French set about marriage in a businesslike way--find two people
who are suited to one another, look after the money affairs, and see the whole thing practically, and in a businesslike spirit.

"If you ask me," said Tommy, "we're all too damned businesslike nowadays. We're always saying, 'Will it pay?' The men are bad enough, and the girls are worse!"

"Cool down, son. Don't get so heated."

"I feel heated," said Tommy.

Julius looked at him and judged it wise to say no more.

However, Tommy had plenty of time to cool down before they reached Holyhead, and the cheerful grin had returned to his countenance as they alighted at their destination.

After consultation, and with the aid of a road map, they were fairly well agreed as to direction, so were able to hire a taxi without more ado and drive out on the road leading to Treaddur Bay. They instructed the man to go slowly, and watched narrowly so as not to miss the path. They came to it not long after leaving the town, and Tommy stopped the car promptly, asked in a casual tone whether the path led down to the sea, and hearing it did paid off the man in handsome style.

A moment later the taxi was slowly chugging back to Holyhead. Tommy and Julius watched it out of sight, and then turned to the narrow path.

"It's the right one, I suppose?" asked Tommy doubtfully. "There must be simply heaps along here."

"Sure it is. Look at the gorse. Remember what Jane said?"

Tommy looked at the swelling hedges of golden blossom which bordered the path on either side, and was convinced.

They went down in single file, Julius leading. Twice Tommy turned his head uneasily. Julius looked back.

"What is it?"

"I don't know. I've got the wind up somehow. Keep fancying there's some one following us."

"Can't be," said Julius positively. "We'd see him."

Tommy had to admit that this was true. Nevertheless, his sense of uneasiness deepened. In spite of himself he believed in the omniscience of the enemy.

"I rather wish that fellow would come along," said Julius. He patted his pocket. "Little William here is just aching for exercise!"

"Do you always carry it--him--with you?" inquired Tommy with burning curiosity.

"Most always. I guess you never know what might turn up."

Tommy kept a respectful silence. He was impressed by little William. It seemed to remove the menace of Mr. Brown farther away.

The path was now running along the side of the cliff, parallel to the sea. Suddenly Julius came to such an abrupt halt that Tommy cannoned into him.

"What's up?" he inquired.

"Look there. If that doesn't beat the band!"

Tommy looked. Standing out half obstructing the path was a huge boulder which certainly bore a fanciful resemblance to a "begging" terrier.

"Well," said Tommy, refusing to share Julius's emotion, "it's what we expected to see, isn't it?"

Julius looked at him sadly and shook his head.

"British phlegm! Sure we expected it--but it kind of rattles me, all the same, to see it sitting there just where we expected to find it!"

Tommy, whose calm was, perhaps, more assumed than natural, moved his feet impatiently.

"Push on. What about the hole?"

They scanned the cliff-side narrowly. Tommy heard himself saying idiotically:

"The gorse won't be there after all these years."

And Julius replied solemnly:

"I guess you're right."

Tommy suddenly pointed with a shaking hand.

"What about that crevice there?"

Julius replied in an awestricken voice:

"That's it--for sure."

They looked at each other.

"When I was in France," said Tommy reminiscently, "whenever my batman failed to call me, he always said that he had come over queer. I never believed it. But whether he felt it or not, there IS such a sensation. I've got it now! Badly!"
He looked at the rock with a kind of agonized passion.

"Damn it!" he cried. "It's impossible! Five years! Think of it! Bird's-nesting boys, picnic parties, thousands of people passing! It can't be there! It's a hundred to one against its being there! It's against all reason!"

Indeed, he felt it to be impossible--more, perhaps, because he could not believe in his own success where so many others had failed. The thing was too easy, therefore it could not be. The hole would be empty.

Julius looked at him with a widening smile.

"I guess you're rattled now all right," he drawled with some enjoyment. "Well, here goes!" He thrust his hand into the crevice, and made a slight grimace. "It's a tight fit. Jane's hand must be a few sizes smaller than mine. I don't feel anything--no--say, what's this? Gee whiz!" And with a flourish he waved aloft a small discoloured packet. "It's the goods all right. Sewn up in oilskin. Hold it while I get my penknife."

The unbelievable had happened. Tommy held the precious packet tenderly between his hands. They had succeeded!

"It's queer," he murmured idly, "you'd think the stitches would have rotted. They look just as good as new."

They cut them carefully and ripped away the oilskin. Inside was a small folded sheet of paper. With trembling fingers they unfolded it. The sheet was blank! They stared at each other, puzzled.

"A dummy?" hazarded Julius. "Was Danvers just a decoy?"

Tommy shook his head. That solution did not satisfy him. Suddenly his face cleared.

"I've got it! SYMPATHETIC INK!"

"You think so?"

"Worth trying anyhow. Heat usually does the trick. Get some sticks. We'll make a fire."

In a few minutes the little fire of twigs and leaves was blazing merrily. Tommy held the sheet of paper near the glow. The paper curled a little with the heat. Nothing more.

Suddenly Julius grasped his arm, and pointed to where characters were appearing in a faint brown colour.

"Gee whiz! You've got it! Say, that idea of yours was great. It never occurred to me."

Tommy held the paper in position some minutes longer until he judged the heat had done its work. Then he withdrew it. A moment later he uttered a cry.

Across the sheet in neat brown printing ran the words: WITH THE COMPLIMENTS OF MR. BROWN.

CHAPTER XXI -- TOMMY MAKES A DISCOVERY

FOR a moment or two they stood staring at each other stupidly, dazed with the shock. Somehow, inexplicably, Mr. Brown had forestalled them. Tommy accepted defeat quietly. Not so Julius.

"How in tarnation did he get ahead of us? That's what beats me!" he ended up.

"It accounts for the stitches being new. We might have guessed...."

"Never mind the darned stitches. How did he get ahead of us? We hustled all we knew. It's downright impossible for anyone to get here quicker than we did. And, anyway, how did he know? Do you reckon there was a dictaphone in Jane's room? I guess there must have been."

But Tommy's common sense pointed out objections.

"No one could have known beforehand that she was going to be in that house--much less that particular room."

"That's so," admitted Julius. "Then one of the nurses was a crook and listened at the door. How's that?"

"I don't see that it matters anyway," said Tommy wearily. "He may have found out some months ago, and removed the papers, then----No, by Jove, that won't wash! They'd have been published at once."

"Sure thing they would! No, some one's got ahead of us to-day by an hour or so. But how they did it gets my goat."

"I wish that chap Peel Edgerton had been with us," said Tommy thoughtfully.

"Why?" Julius stared. "The mischief was done when we came."

"Yes----" Tommy hesitated. He could not explain his own feeling--the illogical idea that the K.C.'s presence would somehow have averted the catastrophe. He reverted to his former point of view. "It's no good arguing about how it was done. The game's up. We've failed. There's only one thing for me to do."

"What's that?"

"Get back to London as soon as possible. Mr. Carter must be warned. It's only a matter of hours now before the blow falls. But, at any rate, he ought to know the worst."

The duty was an unpleasant one, but Tommy had no intention of shirking it. He must report his failure to Mr. Carter. After that his work was done. He took the midnight mail to London. Julius elected to stay the night at Holyhead.

Half an hour after arrival, haggard and pale, Tommy stood before his chief.

"I've come to report, sir. I've failed--failed badly."
Mr. Carter eyed him sharply.
"You mean that the treaty—"
"Is in the hands of Mr. Brown, sir."
"Ah!" said Mr. Carter quietly. The expression on his face did not change, but Tommy caught the flicker of despair in his eyes. It convinced him as nothing else had done that the outlook was hopeless.
"Well," said Mr. Carter after a minute or two, "we mustn't sag at the knees, I suppose. I'm glad to know definitely. We must do what we can."
Through Tommy's mind flashed the assurance: "It's hopeless, and he knows it's hopeless!"
The other looked up at him.
"Don't take it to heart, lad," he said kindly. "You did your best. You were up against one of the biggest brains of the century. And you came very near success. Remember that."
"Thank you, sir. It's awfully decent of you."
"I blame myself. I have been blaming myself ever since I heard this other news."
Something in his tone attracted Tommy's attention. A new fear gripped at his heart.
"Is there--something more, sir?"
"I'm afraid so," said Mr. Carter gravely. He stretched out his hand to a sheet on the table.
"Tuppence----?" faltered Tommy.
"Read for yourself."
The typewritten words danced before his eyes. The description of a green toque, a coat with a handkerchief in the pocket marked P.L.C. He looked an agonized question at Mr. Carter. The latter replied to it:
"Washed up on the Yorkshire coast--near Ebury. I'm afraid--it looks very much like foul play."
"My God!" gasped Tommy. "TUPPENCE! Those devils--I'll never rest till I've got even with them! I'll hunt them down! I'll----"
The pity on Mr. Carter's face stopped him.
"I know what you feel like, my poor boy. But it's no good. You'll waste your strength uselessly. It may sound harsh, but my advice to you is: Cut your losses. Time's merciful. You'll forget."
"Forget Tuppence? Never!"
Mr. Carter shook his head.
"So you think now. Well, it won't bear thinking of--that brave little girl! I'm sorry about the whole business--confoundedly sorry."
Tommy came to himself with a start.
"I'm taking up your time, sir," he said with an effort. "There's no need for you to blame yourself. I dare say we were a couple of young fools to take on such a job. You warned us all right. But I wish to God I'd been the one to get it in the neck. Good-bye, sir."

Back at the Ritz, Tommy packed up his few belongings mechanically, his thoughts far away. He was still bewildered by the introduction of tragedy into his cheerful commonplace existence. What fun they had had together, he and Tuppence! And now—oh, he couldn't believe it—it couldn't be true! TUPPENCE—DEAD! Little Tuppence, brimming over with life! It was a dream, a horrible dream. Nothing more.

They brought him a note, a few kind words of sympathy from Peel Edgerton, who had read the news in the paper. (There had been a large headline: EX-V.A.D. FEARED DROWNED.) The letter ended with the offer of a post on a ranch in the Argentine, where Sir James had considerable interests.
"Kind old beggar," muttered Tommy, as he flung it aside.
The door opened, and Julius burst in with his usual violence. He held an open newspaper in his hand.
"Say, what's all this? They seem to have got some fool idea about Tuppence."
"It's true," said Tommy quietly.
"You mean they've done her in?"
Tommy nodded.
"I suppose when they got the treaty she—wasn't any good to them any longer, and they were afraid to let her go."
"Well, I'm darned!" said Julius. "Little Tuppence. She sure was the pluckiest little girl----"
But suddenly something seemed to crack in Tommy's brain. He rose to his feet.
"Oh, get out! You don't really care, damn you! You asked her to marry you in your rotten cold-blooded way, but I LOVED her. I'd have given the soul out of my body to save her from harm. I'd have stood by without a word and let her marry you, because you could have given her the sort of time she ought to have had, and I was only a poor devil without a penny to bless himself with. But it wouldn't have been because I didn't care!"
"See here," began Julius temperately.
"Oh, go to the devil! I can't stand your coming here and talking about 'little Tuppence.' Go and look after your
cousin. Tuppence is my girl! I've always loved her, from the time we played together as kids. We grew up and it was just the same. I shall never forget when I was in hospital, and she came in in that ridiculous cap and apron! It was like a miracle to see the girl I loved turn up in a nurse's kit——"

But Julius interrupted him.

"A nurse's kit! Gee whiz! I must be going to Colney Hatch! I could swear I've seen Jane in a nurse's cap too. And that's plumb impossible! No, by gum, I've got it! It was her I saw talking to Whittington at that nursing home in Bournemouth. She wasn't a patient there! She was a nurse!"

"I dare say," said Tommy angrily, "she's probably been in with them from the start. I shouldn't wonder if she stole those papers from Danvers to begin with."

"I'm damned if she did!" shouted Julius. "She's my cousin, and as patriotic a girl as ever stepped."

"I don't care a damn what she is, but get out of here!" retorted Tommy also at the top of his voice.

The young men were on the point of coming to blows. But suddenly, with an almost magical abruptness, Julius's anger abated.

"All right, son," he said quietly, "I'm going. I don't blame you any for what you've been saying. It's mighty lucky you did say it. I've been the most almighty blithering darned idiot that it's possible to imagine. Calm down"--Tommy had made an impatient gesture--"I'm going right away now--going to the London and North Western Railway depot, if you want to know."

"I don't care a damn where you're going," growled Tommy.

As the door closed behind Julius, he returned to his suit-case.

"That's the lot," he murmured, and rang the bell.

"Yes, sir. Going away, sir?"

"I'm going to the devil," said Tommy, regardless of the menial's feelings.

That functionary, however, merely replied respectfully:

"Yes, sir. Shall I call a taxi?"

Tommy nodded.

Where was he going? He hadn't the faintest idea. Beyond a fixed determination to get even with Mr. Brown he had no plans. He re-read Sir James's letter, and shook his head. Tuppence must be avenged. Still, it was kind of the old fellow.

"Better answer it, I suppose." He went across to the writing-table. With the usual perversity of bedroom stationery, there were innumerable envelopes and no paper. He rang. No one came. Tommy fumed at the delay. Then he remembered that there was a good supply in Julius's sitting-room. The American had announced his immediate departure, there would be no fear of running up against him. Besides, he wouldn't mind if he did. He was beginning to be rather ashamed of the things he had said. Old Julius had taken them jolly well. He'd apologize if he found him there.

But the room was deserted. Tommy walked across to the writing-table, and opened the middle drawer. A photograph, carelessly thrust in face upwards, caught his eye. For a moment he stood rooted to the ground. Then he took it out, shut the drawer, walked slowly over to an arm-chair, and sat down still staring at the photograph in his hand.

What on earth was a photograph of the French girl Annette doing in Julius Hersheimmer's writing-table?
than I am. The way I reason is this: as a last chance they'll let Jane Finn escape in the hope that she's been shamming this memory stunt, and that once she thinks she's free she'll go right away to the cache. Of course it's an awful risk for them to take, because she knows all about them--but they're pretty desperate to get hold of that treaty. BUT IF THEY KNOW THAT THE PAPERS HAVE BEEN RECOVERED BY US, neither of those two girls' lives will be worth an hour's purchase. I must try and get hold of Tuppence before Jane escapes.

"I want a repeat of that telegram that was sent to Tuppence at the Ritz. Sir James Peel Edgerton said you would be able to manage that for me. He's frightfully clever.

"One last thing--please have that house in Soho watched day and night. "Yours, etc., "THOMAS BERESFORD."

The Prime Minister looked up.

"The enclosure?"

Mr. Carter smiled dryly.

"In the vaults of the Bank. I am taking no chances."

"You don't think"--the Prime Minister hesitated a minute--"that it would be better to open it now? Surely we ought to secure the document, that is, provided the young man's guess turns out to be correct, at once. We can keep the fact of having done so quite secret." 

"Can we? I'm not so sure. There are spies all round us. Once it's known I wouldn't give that"--he snapped his fingers--"for the life of those two girls. No, the boy trusted me, and I shan't let him down."

"Well, well, we must leave it at that, then. What's he like, this lad?"

"Outwardly, he's an ordinary clean-limbed, rather block-headed young Englishman. Slow in his mental processes. On the other hand, it's quite impossible to lead him astray through his imagination. He hasn't got any--so he's difficult to deceive. He worries things out slowly, and once he's got hold of anything he doesn't let go. The little lady's quite different. More intuition and less common sense. They make a pretty pair working together. Pace and stamina."

"He seems confident," mused the Prime Minister.

"Yes, and that's what gives me hope. He's the kind of diffident youth who would have to be VERY sure before he ventured an opinion at all."

A half smile came to the other's lips.

"And it is this--boy who will defeat the master criminal of our time?"

"This--boy, as you say! But I sometimes fancy I see a shadow behind."

"You mean?"

"Peel Edgerton."

"Peel Edgerton?" said the Prime Minister in astonishment.

"Yes. I see his hand in THIS." He struck the open letter. "He's there--working in the dark, silently, unobtrusively. I've always felt that if anyone was to run Mr. Brown to earth, Peel Edgerton would be the man. I tell you he's on the case now, but doesn't want it known. By the way, I got rather an odd request from him the other day."

"Yes?"

"He sent me a cutting from some American paper. It referred to a man's body found near the docks in New York about three weeks ago. He asked me to collect any information on the subject I could."

"Well?"

Carter shrugged his shoulders.

"I couldn't get much. Young fellow about thirty-five--poorly dressed--face very badly disfigured. He was never identified."

"And you fancy that the two matters are connected in some way?"

"Somehow I do. I may be wrong, of course."

There was a pause, then Mr. Carter continued:

"I asked him to come round here. Not that we'll get anything out of him he doesn't want to tell. His legal instincts are too strong. But there's no doubt he can throw light on one or two obscure points in young Beresford's letter. Ah, here he is!"

The two men rose to greet the new-comer. A half whimsical thought flashed across the Premier's mind. "My successor, perhaps!"

"We've had a letter from young Beresford," said Mr. Carter, coming to the point at once. "You've seen him, I suppose?"

"You suppose wrong," said the lawyer.

"Oh!" Mr. Carter was a little nonplussed.

Sir James smiled, and stroked his chin.
"He rang me up," he volunteered.

"Would you have any objection to telling us exactly what passed between you?"

"Not at all. He thanked me for a certain letter which I had written to him—as a matter of fact, I had offered him a job. Then he reminded me of something I had said to him at Manchester respecting that bogus telegram which lured Miss Cowley away. I asked him if anything untoward had occurred. He said it had—that in a drawer in Mr. Hersheimmer's room he had discovered a photograph." The lawyer paused, then continued: "I asked him if the photograph bore the name and address of a Californian photographer. He replied: 'You're on to it, sir. It had.' Then he went on to tell me something I DIDN'T know. The original of that photograph was the French girl, Annette, who saved his life."

"What?"

"Exactly. I asked the young man with some curiosity what he had done with the photograph. He replied that he had put it back where he found it." The lawyer paused again. "That was good, you know—distinctly good. He can use his brains, that young fellow. I congratulated him. The discovery was a providential one. Of course, from the moment that the girl in Manchester was proved to be a plant everything was altered. Young Beresford saw that for himself without my having to tell it him. But he felt he couldn't trust his judgment on the subject of Miss Cowley. Did I think she was alive? I told him, duly weighing the evidence, that there was a very decided chance in favour of it. That brought us back to the telegram."

"Yes?"

"I advised him to apply to you for a copy of the original wire. It had occurred to me as probable that, after Miss Cowley flung it on the floor, certain words might have been erased and altered with the express intention of setting searchers on a false trail."

Carter nodded. He took a sheet from his pocket, and read aloud:

"Come at once, Astley Priors, Gatehouse, Kent. Great developments—TOMMY."

"Very simple," said Sir James, "and very ingenious. Just a few words to alter, and the thing was done. And the one important clue they overlooked."

"What was that?"

"The page-boy's statement that Miss Cowley drove to Charing Cross. They were so sure of themselves that they took it for granted he had made a mistake."

"Then young Beresford is now?"

"At Gatehouse, Kent, unless I am much mistaken."

Mr. Carter looked at him curiously.

"I rather wonder you're not there too, Peel Edgerton?"

"Ah, I'm busy on a case."

"I thought you were on your holiday?"

"Oh, I've not been briefed. Perhaps it would be more correct to say I'm preparing a case. Any more facts about that American chap for me?"

"I'm afraid not. Is it important to find out who he was?"

"Oh, I know who he was," said Sir James easily. "I can't prove it yet—but I know."

The other two asked no questions. They had an instinct that it would be mere waste of breath.

"But what I don't understand," said the Prime-Minister suddenly, "is how that photograph came to be in Mr. Hersheimmer's drawer?"

"Perhaps it never left it," suggested the lawyer gently.

"But the bogus inspector? Inspector Brown?"

"Ah!" said Sir James thoughtfully. He rose to his feet. "I mustn't keep you. Go on with the affairs of the nation. I must get back to—my case."

Two days later Julius Hersheimmer returned from Manchester. A note from Tommy lay on his table:

"DEAR HERSHEYIMMER,

"Sorry I lost my temper. In case I don't see you again, good-bye. I've been offered a job in the Argentine, and might as well take it. Yours, "TOMMY BERESFORD."

A peculiar smile lingered for a moment on Julius's face. He threw the letter into the waste-paper basket.

"The darned fool!" he murmured.

CHAPTER XXIII -- A RACE AGAINST TIME

AFTER ringing up Sir James, Tommy's next procedure was to make a call at South Audley Mansions. He found Albert discharging his professional duties, and introduced himself without more ado as a friend of Tuppen's. Albert un bent immediately.

"Things has been very quiet here lately," he said wistfully. "Hope the young lady's keeping well, sir?"
"That's just the point, Albert. She's disappeared."
"You don't mean as the crooks have got her?"
"They have."
"In the Underworld?"
"No, dash it all, in this world!"
"It's a h'expression, sir," explained Albert. "At the pictures the crooks always have a restaurant in the Underworld. But do you think as they've done her in, sir?"
"I hope not. By the way, have you by any chance an aunt, a cousin, a grandmother, or any other suitable female relation who might be represented as being likely to kick the bucket?"

A delighted grin spread slowly over Albert's countenance.
"I'm on, sir. My poor aunt what lives in the country has been mortal bad for a long time, and she's asking for me with her dying breath."

Tommy nodded approval.
"Can you report this in the proper quarter and meet me at Charing Cross in an hour's time?"
"I'll be there, sir. You can count on me."

As Tommy had judged, the faithful Albert proved an invaluable ally. The two took up their quarters at the inn in Gatehouse. To Albert fell the task of collecting information. There was no difficulty about it.

Astley Priors was the property of a Dr. Adams. The doctor no longer practiced, had retired, the landlord believed, but he took a few private patients--here the good fellow tapped his forehead knowingly--"balmy ones! You understand!" The doctor was a popular figure in the village, subscribed freely to all the local sports--"a very pleasant, affable gentleman." Been there long? Oh, a matter of ten years or so--might be longer. Scientific gentleman, he was. Professors and people often came down from town to see him. Anyway, it was a gay house, always visitors.

In the face of all this volubility, Tommy felt doubts. Was it possible that this genial, well-known figure could be in reality a dangerous criminal? His life seemed so open and aboveboard. No hint of sinister doings. Suppose it was all a gigantic mistake? Tommy felt a cold chill at the thought.

Then he remembered the private patients--"balmy ones." He inquired carefully if there was a young lady amongst them, describing Tuppence. But nothing much seemed to be known about the patients--they were seldom seen outside the grounds. A guarded description of Annette also failed to provoke recognition.

Astley Priors was a pleasant red-brick edifice, surrounded by well-wooded grounds which effectually shielded the house from observation from the road.

On the first evening Tommy, accompanied by Albert, explored the grounds. Owing to Albert's insistence they dragged themselves along painfully on their stomachs, thereby producing a great deal more noise than if they had stood upright. In any case, these precautions were totally unnecessary. The grounds, like those of any other private house after nightfall, seemed untenanted. Tommy had imagined a possible fierce watchdog. Albert's fancy ran to a puma, or a tame cobra. But they reached a shrubbery near the house quite unmolested.

The blinds of the dining-room window were up. There was a large company assembled round the table. The port was passing from hand to hand. It seemed a normal, pleasant company. Through the open window scraps of conversation floated out disjointedly on the night air. It was a heated discussion on county cricket!

Again Tommy felt that cold chill of uncertainty. It seemed impossible to believe that these people were other than they seemed. Had he been fooled once more? The fair-bearded, spectacled gentleman who sat at the head of the table looked singularly honest and normal.

Tommy slept badly that night. The following morning the indefatigable Albert, having cemented an alliance with the greengrocer's boy, took the latter's place and ingratiated himself with the cook at Malthouse. He returned with the information that she was undoubtedly "one of the crooks." He inquired carefully if there was a young lady amongst them, describing Tuppence. But nothing much seemed to be known about the patients--they were seldom seen outside the grounds. A guarded description of Annette also failed to provoke recognition.

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Tommy slept badly that night. The following morning the indefatigable Albert, having cemented an alliance with the greengrocer's boy, took the latter's place and ingratiated himself with the cook at Malthouse. He returned with the information that she was undoubtedly "one of the crooks," but Tommy mistrusted the vividness of his imagination. Questioned, he could adduce nothing in support of his statement except his own opinion that she wasn't the usual kind. You could see that at a glance.

The substitution being repeated (much to the pecuniary advantage of the real greengrocer's boy) on the following day, Albert brought back the first piece of hopeful news. There WAS a French young lady staying in the house. Tommy put his doubts aside. Here was confirmation of his theory. But time pressed. To-day was the 27th. The 29th was the much-talked-of "Labour Day," about which all sorts of rumours were running riot. Newspapers were getting agitated. Sensational hints of a Labour coup d'etat were freely reported. The Government said nothing. It knew and was prepared. There were rumours of dissension among the Labour leaders. They were not of one mind. The more far-seeing among them realized that what they proposed might well be a death-blow to the England that at heart they loved. They shrank from the starvation and misery a general strike would entail, and were willing to meet the Government half-way. But behind them were subtle, insistent forces at work, urging the memories of old wrongs,
deprecating the weakness of half-and-half measures, fomenting misunderstandings.

Tommy felt that, thanks to Mr. Carter, he understood the position fairly accurately. With the fatal document in the hands of Mr. Brown, public opinion would swing to the side of the Labour extremists and revolutionists. Failing that, the battle was an even chance. The Government with a loyal army and police force behind them might win—but at a cost of great suffering. But Tommy nourished another and a preposterous dream. With Mr. Brown unmasked and captured he believed, rightly or wrongly, that the whole organization would crumble ignominiously and instantaneously. The strange permeating influence of the unseen chief held it together. Without him, Tommy believed an instant panic would set in; and, the honest men left to themselves, an eleventh-hour reconciliation would be possible.

"This is a one-man show," said Tommy to himself. "The thing to do is to get hold of the man."

It was partly in furtherance of this ambitious design that he had requested Mr. Carter not to open the sealed envelope. The draft treaty was Tommy's bait. Every now and then he was aghast at his own presumption. How dared he think that he had discovered what so many wiser and clever men had overlooked? Nevertheless, he stuck tenaciously to his idea.

That evening he and Albert once more penetrated the grounds of Astley Priors. Tommy's ambition was somehow or other to gain admission to the house itself. As they approached cautiously, Tommy gave a sudden gasp.

On the second floor window some one standing between the window and the light in the room threw a silhouette on the blind. It was one Tommy would have recognized anywhere! Tuppence was in that house!

He clutched Albert by the shoulder.

"Stay here! When I begin to sing, watch that window."

He retreated hastily to a position on the main drive, and began in a deep roar, coupled with an unsteady gait, the following ditty:

I am a Soldier A jolly British Soldier; You can see that I'm a Soldier by my feet . . .

It had been a favourite on the gramophone in Tuppence's hospital days. He did not doubt but that she would recognize it and draw her own conclusions. Tommy had not a note of music in his voice, but his lungs were excellent. The noise he produced was terrific.

Presently an unimpeachable butler, accompanied by an equally unimpeachable footman, issued from the front door. The butler remonstrated with him. Tommy continued to sing, addressing the butler affectionately as "dear old whiskers." The footman took him by one arm, the butler by the other. They ran him down the drive, and neatly out of the gate. The butler threatened him with the police if he intruded again. It was beautifully done—soberly and with perfect decorum. Anyone would have sworn that the butler was a real butler, the footman a real footman—only, as it happened, the butler was Whittington!

Tommy retired to the inn and waited for Albert's return. At last that worthy made his appearance.

"Well?" cried Tommy eagerly.

"It's all right. While they was a-running of you out the window opened, and something was chucked out." He handed a scrap of paper to Tommy. "It was wrapped round a letterweight."

On the paper were scrawled three words: "To-morrow--same time."

"Good egg!" cried Tommy. "We're getting going."

"I wrote a message on a piece of paper, wrapped it round a stone, and chucked it through the window," continued Albert breathlessly.

"Your zeal will be the undoing of us, Albert. What did you say?"

"Said we was a-staying at the inn. If she could get away, to come there and croak like a frog."

"She'll know that's you," said Tommy with a sigh of relief. "Your imagination runs away with you, you know, Albert. Why, you wouldn't recognize a frog croaking if you heard it."

Albert looked rather crest-fallen.

"Cheer up," said Tommy. "No harm done. That butler's an old friend of mine—I bet he knew who I was, though he didn't let on. It's not their game to show suspicion. That's why we've found it fairly plain sailing. They don't want to discourage me altogether. On the other hand, they don't want to make it too easy. I'm a pawn in their game, Albert, that's what I am. You see, if the spider lets the fly walk out too easily, the fly might suspect it was a put-up job. Hence the usefulness of that promising youth, Mr. T. Beresford, who's blundered in just at the right moment for them. But later, Mr. T. Beresford had better look out!"

Tommy retired for the night in a state of some elation. He had elaborated a careful plan for the following evening. He felt sure that the inhabitants of Astley Priors would not interfere with him up to a certain point. It was after that that Tommy proposed to give them a surprise.

About twelve o'clock, however, his calm was rudely shaken. He was told that some one was demanding him in
the bar. The applicant proved to be a rude-looking carter well coated with mud.

"Well, my good fellow, what is it?" asked Tommy.

"Might this be for you, sir?" The carter held out a very dirty folded note, on the outside of which was written:
"Take this to the gentleman at the inn near Astley Priors. He will give you ten shillings."

The handwriting was Tuppence's. Tommy appreciated her quick-wittedness in realizing that he might be staying at the inn under an assumed name. He snatched at it.

"That's all right."
The man withheld it.

"What about my ten shillings?"

Tommy hastily produced a ten-shilling note, and the man relinquished his find. Tommy unfastened it.

"DEAR TOMMY,

"I knew it was you last night. Don't go this evening. They'll be lying in wait for you. They're taking us away this morning. I heard something about Wales--Holyhead, I think. I'll drop this on the road if I get a chance. Annette told me how you'd escaped. Buck up. "Yours, "TWOPENCE."

Tommy raised a shout for Albert before he had even finished perusing this characteristic epistle.

"Pack my bag! We're off!"

"Yes, sir." The boots of Albert could be heard racing upstairs. Holyhead? Did that mean that, after all----Tommy was puzzled. He read on slowly.

The boots of Albert continued to be active on the floor above.

Suddenly a second shout came from below.

"Albert! I'm a damned fool! Unpack that bag!"

"Yes, sir."

Tommy smoothed out the note thoughtfully.

"Yes, a damned fool," he said softly. "But so's some one else! And at last I know who it is!"

CHAPTER XXIV -- JULIUS TAKES A HAND

IN his suite at Claridge's, Kramenin reclined on a couch and dictated to his secretary in sibilant Russian.

Presently the telephone at the secretary's elbow purred, and he took up the receiver, spoke for a minute or two, then turned to his employer.

"Some one below is asking for you."

"Who is it?"

"He gives the name of Mr. Julius P. Hersheimmer."

"Hersheimmer," repeated Kramenin thoughtfully. "I have heard that name before."

"His father was one of the steel kings of America," explained the secretary, whose business it was to know everything. "This young man must be a millionaire several times over."

The other's eyes narrowed appreciatively.

"You had better go down and see him, Ivan. Find out what he wants."

The secretary obeyed, closing the door noiselessly behind him. In a few minutes he returned.

"He declines to state his business--says it is entirely private and personal, and that he must see you."

"A millionaire several times over," mumbled Kramenin. "Bring him up, my dear Ivan."

The secretary left the room once more, and returned escorting Julius.

"Monsieur Kramenin?" said the latter abruptly.

The Russian, studying him attentively with his pale venomous eyes, bowed.

"Pleased to meet you," said the American. "I've got some very important business I'd like to talk over with you, if I can see you alone." He looked pointedly at the other.

"My secretary, Monsieur Grieber, from whom I have no secrets."

"That may be so--but I have," said Julius dryly. "So I'd be obliged if you'd tell him to scoot."

"Ivan," said the Russian softly, "perhaps you would not mind retiring into the next room----"

"The next room won't do," interrupted Julius. "I know these ducal suites--and I want this one plumb empty except for you and me. Send him round to a store to buy a penn'orth of peanuts."

Though not particularly enjoying the American's free and easy manner of speech, Kramenin was devoured by curiosity. "Will your business take long to state?"

"Might be an all night job if you caught on."

"Very good, Ivan. I shall not require you again this evening. Go to the theatre--take a night off."

"Thank you, your excellency."

The secretary bowed and departed.

Julius stood at the door watching his retreat. Finally, with a satisfied sigh, he closed it, and came back to his
position in the centre of the room.

"Now, Mr. Hersheimmer, perhaps you will be so kind as to come to the point?"

"I guess that won't take a minute," drawled Julius. Then, with an abrupt change of manner: "Hands up--or I shoot!"

For a moment Kramenin stared blindly into the big automatic, then, with almost comical haste, he flung up his hands above his head. In that instant Julius had taken his measure. The man he had to deal with was an abject physical coward--the rest would be easy.

"This is an outrage," cried the Russian in a high hysterical voice. "An outrage! Do you mean to kill me?"

"Not if you keep your voice down. Don't go edging sideways towards that bell. That's better."

"What do you want? Do nothing rashly. Remember my life is of the utmost value to my country. I may have been maligned----"

"I reckon," said Julius, "that the man who let daylight into you would be doing humanity a good turn. But you needn't worry any. I'm not proposing to kill you this trip--that is, if you're reasonable."

The Russian quailed before the stern menace in the other's eyes. He passed his tongue over his dry lips.

"What do you want? Money?"

"No. I want Jane Finn."

"Jane Finn? I--never heard of her!"

"You're a darned liar! You know perfectly who I mean."

"I tell you I've never heard of the girl."

"And I tell you," retorted Julius, "that Little Willie here is just hopping mad to go off!"

The Russian wilted visibly.

"You wouldn't dare----"

"Oh, yes, I would, son!"

Kramenin must have recognized something in the voice that carried conviction, for he said sullenly:

"Well? Granted I do know who you mean--what of it?"

"You will tell me now--right here--where she is to be found."

Kramenin shook his head.

"I daren't."

"Why not?"

"I daren't. You ask an impossibility."

"Afraid, eh? Of whom? Mr. Brown? Ah, that tickles you up! There is such a person, then? I doubted it. And the mere mention of him scares you stiff!"

"I have seen him," said the Russian slowly. "Spoken to him face to face. I did not know it until afterwards. He was one of a crowd. I should not know him again. Who is he really? I do not know. But I know this--he is a man to fear."

"He'll never know," said Julius.

"He knows everything--and his vengeance is swift. Even I--Kramenin!--would not be exempt!"

"Then you won't do as I ask you?"

"You ask an impossibility."

"Sure that's a pity for you," said Julius cheerfully. "But the world in general will benefit." He raised the revolver."

"Stop," shrieked the Russian. "You cannot mean to shoot me?"

"Of course I do. I've always heard you Revolutionists held life cheap, but it seems there's a difference when it's your own life in question. I gave you just one chance of saving your dirty skin, and that you wouldn't take!"

"They would kill me!"

"Well," said Julius pleasantly, "it's up to you. But I'll just say this. Little Willie here is a dead cert, and if I was you I'd take a sporting chance with Mr. Brown!"

"You will hang if you shoot me," muttered the Russian irresolutely.

"No, stranger, that's where you're wrong. You forget the dollars. A big crowd of solicitors will get busy, and they'll get some high-brow doctors on the job, and the end of it all will be that they'll say my brain was unhinged. I shall spend a few months in a quiet sanatorium, my mental health will improve, the doctors will declare me sane again, and all will end happily for little Julius. I guess I can bear a few months' retirement in order to rid the world of you, but don't you kid yourself I'll hang for it!"

The Russian believed him. Corrupt himself, he believed implicitly in the power of money. He had read of American murder trials running much on the lines indicated by Julius. He had bought and sold justice himself. This virile young American, with the significant drawling voice, had the whip hand of him.

"I'm going to count five," continued Julius, "and I guess, if you let me get past four, you needn't worry any about
Mr. Brown. Maybe he'll send some flowers to the funeral, but YOU won't smell them! Are you ready? I'll begin.

One--two three--four----"

The Russian interrupted with a shriek:
"Do not shoot. I will do all you wish."

Julius lowered the revolver.
"I thought you'd hear sense. Where is the girl?"
"At Gatehouse, in Kent. Astley Priors, the place is called."
"Is she a prisoner there?"
"She's not allowed to leave the house--though it's safe enough really. The little fool has lost her memory, curse her!"

"That's been annoying for you and your friends, I reckon. What about the other girl, the one you decoyed away over a week ago?"
"She's there too," said the Russian sullenly.
"That's good," said Julius. "Isn't it all panning out beautifully? And a lovely night for the run!"
"What run?" demanded Kramenin, with a stare.
"Down to Gatehouse, sure. I hope you're fond of motoring?"
"What do you mean? I refuse to go."

"Now don't get mad. You must see I'm not such a kid as to leave you here. You'd ring up your friends on that telephone first thing! Ah!" He observed the fall on the other's face. "You see, you'd got it all fixed. No, sir, you're coming along with me. This your bedroom next door here? Walk right in. Little Willie and I will come behind. Put on a thick coat, that's right. Fur lined? And you a Socialist! Now we're ready. We walk downstairs and out through the hall to where my car's waiting. And don't you forget I've got you covered every inch of the way. I can shoot just as well through my coat pocket. One word, or a glance even, at one of those liveried menials, and there'll sure be a strange face in the Sulphur and Brimstone Works!"

Together they descended the stairs, and passed out to the waiting car. The Russian was shaking with rage. The hotel servants surrounded them. A cry hovered on his lips, but at the last minute his nerve failed him. The American was a man of his word.

When they reached the car, Julius breathed a sigh of relief. The danger-zone was passed. Fear had successfully hypnotized the man by his side.

"Get in," he ordered. Then as he caught the other's sidelong glance, "No, the chauffeur won't help you any. Naval man. Was on a submarine in Russia when the Revolution broke out. A brother of his was murdered by your people. George!"

"Yes, sir?" The chauffeur turned his head.
"This gentleman is a Russian Bolshevik. We don't want to shoot him, but it may be necessary. You understand?"
"Perfectly, sir."
"I want to go to Gatehouse in Kent. Know the road at all?"
"Yes, sir, it will be about an hour and a half's run."
"Make it an hour. I'm in a hurry."
"I'll do my best, sir." The car shot forward through the traffic.

Julius ensconced himself comfortably by the side of his victim. He kept his hand in the pocket of his coat, but his manner was urbane to the last degree.

"There was a man I shot once in Arizona----" he began cheerfully.

At the end of the hour's run the unfortunate Kramenin was more dead than alive. In succession to the anecdote of the Arizona man, there had been a tough from 'Frisco, and an episode in the Rockies. Julius's narrative style, if not strictly accurate, was picturesque!

Slowing down, the chauffeur called over his shoulder that they were just coming into Gatehouse. Julius bade the Russian direct them. His plan was to drive straight up to the house. There Kramenin was to ask for the two girls. Julius explained to him that Little Willie would not be tolerant of failure. Kramenin, by this time, was as putty in the other's hands. The terrific pace they had come had still further unmanned him. He had given himself up for dead at every corner.

The car swept up the drive, and stopped before the porch. The chauffeur looked round for orders.
"Turn the car first, George. Then ring the bell, and get back to your place. Keep the engine going, and be ready to scoot like hell when I give the word."
"Very good, sir."

The front door was opened by the butler. Kramenin felt the muzzle of the revolver pressed against his ribs.
"Now," hissed Julius. "And be careful."
The Russian beckoned. His lips were white, and his voice was not very steady:
"It is I--Kramenin! Bring down the girl at once! There is no time to lose!"
Whittington had come down the steps. He uttered an exclamation of astonishment at seeing the other.
"You! What's up? Surely you know the plan-----"
Kramenin interrupted him, using the words that have created many unnecessary panics:
"We have been betrayed! Plans must be abandoned. We must save our own skins. The girl! And at once! It's our only chance."
Whittington hesitated, but for hardly a moment.
"You have orders--from HIM?"
"Naturally! Should I be here otherwise? Hurry! There is no time to be lost. The other little fool had better come too."

Whittington turned and ran back into the house. The agonizing minutes went by. Then--two figures hastily huddled in cloaks appeared on the steps and were hustled into the car. The smaller of the two was inclined to resist and Whittington shoved her in unceremoniously. Julius leaned forward, and in doing so the light from the open door lit up his face. Another man on the steps behind Whittington gave a startled exclamation. Concealment was at an end.

"Get a move on, George," shouted Julius.
The chauffeur slipped in his clutch, and with a bound the car started.
The man on the steps uttered an oath. His hand went to his pocket. There was a flash and a report. The bullet just missed the taller girl by an inch.
"Get down, Jane," cried Julius. "Flat on the bottom of the car." He thrust her sharply forward, then standing up, he took careful aim and fired.
"Have you hit him?" cried Tuppence eagerly.
"Sure," replied Julius. "He isn't killed, though. Skunks like that take a lot of killing. Are you all right, Tuppence?"
"Of course I am. Where's Tommy? And who's this?" She indicated the shivering Kramenin.
"Tommy's making tracks for the Argentine. I guess he thought you'd turned up your toes. Steady through the gate, George! That's right. It'll take 'em at least five minutes to get busy after us. They'll use the telephone, I guess, so look out for snares ahead--and don't take the direct route. Who's this, did you say, Tuppence? Let me present Monsieur Kramenin. I persuaded him to come on the trip for his health."

The Russian remained mute, still livid with terror.
"But what made them let us go?" demanded Tuppence suspiciously.
"I reckon Monsieur Kramenin here asked them so prettily they just couldn't refuse!"
This was too much for the Russian. He burst out vehemently:
"Curse you--curse you! They know now that I betrayed them. My life won't be safe for an hour in this country."
"That's so," assented Julius. "I'd advise you to make tracks for Russia right away."
"Let me go, then," cried the other. "I have done what you asked. Why do you still keep me with you?"
"Not for the pleasure of your company. I guess you can get right off now if you want to. I thought you'd rather I toolled you back to London."
"You may never reach London," snarled the other. "Let me go here and now."
"Sure thing. Pull up, George. The gentleman's not making the return trip. If I ever come to Russia, Monsieur Kramenin, I shall expect a rousing welcome, and----"

But before Julius had finished his speech, and before the car had finally halted, the Russian had swung himself out and disappeared into the night.
"Just a mite impatient to leave us," commented Julius, as the car gathered way again. "And no idea of saying good-bye politely to the ladies. Say, Jane, you can get up on the seat now."
For the first time the girl spoke.
"How did you 'persuade' him?" she asked.
Julius tapped his revolver.
"Little Willie here takes the credit!"
"Splendid!" cried the girl. The colour surged into her face, her eyes looked admiringly at Julius.
"Annette and I didn't know what was going to happen to us," said Tuppence. "Old Whittington hurried us off. We thought it was lambs to the slaughter."
"Annette," said Julius. "Is that what you call her?"
His mind seemed to be trying to adjust itself to a new idea.
"It's her name," said Tuppence, opening her eyes very wide.
"Shucks!" retorted Julius. "She may think it's her name, because her memory's gone, poor kid. But it's the one real and original Jane Finn we've got here."

"What?" cried Tuppence.

But she was interrupted. With an angry spurt, a bullet embedded itself in the upholstery of the car just behind her head.

"Down with you," cried Julius. "It's an ambush. These guys have got busy pretty quickly. Push her a bit, George."

The car fairly leapt forward. Three more shots rang out, but went happily wide. Julius, upright, leant over the back of the car.

"Nothing to shoot at," he announced gloomily. "But I guess there'll be another little picnic soon. Ah!"

He raised his hand to his cheek.

"You are hurt?" said Annette quickly.

"Only a scratch."

The girl sprang to her feet.

"Let me out! Let me out, I say! Stop the car. It is me they're after. I'm the one they want. You shall not lose your lives because of me. Let me go." She was fumbling with the fastenings of the door.

Julius took her by both arms, and looked at her. She had spoken with no trace of foreign accent.

"Sit down, kid," he said gently. "I guess there's nothing wrong with your memory. Been fooling them all the time, eh?"

The girl looked at him, nodded, and then suddenly burst into tears. Julius patted her on the shoulder.

"There, there--just you sit tight. We're not going to let you quit."

Through her sobs the girl said indistinctly:

"You're from home. I can tell by your voice. It makes me home-sick."

"Sure I'm from home. I'm your cousin--Julius Hersheimmer. I came over to Europe on purpose to find you--and a pretty dance you've led me."

The car slackened speed. George spoke over his shoulder:

"Cross-roads here, sir. I'm not sure of the way."

The car slowed down till it hardly moved. As it did so a figure climbed suddenly over the back, and plunged head first into the midst of them.

"Sorry," said Tommy, extricating himself.

A mass of confused exclamations greeted him. He replied to them severally:

"Was in the bushes by the drive. Hung on behind. Couldn't let you know before at the pace you were going. It was all I could do to hang on. Now then, you girls, get out!"

"Get out?"

"Yes. There's a station just up that road. Train due in three minutes. You'll catch it if you hurry."

"What the devil are you driving at?" demanded Julius. "Do you think you can fool them by leaving the car?"

"You and I aren't going to leave the car. Only the girls."

"You're crazed, Beresford. Stark staring mad! You can't let those girls go off alone. It'll be the end of it if you do."

Tommy turned to Tuppence.

"Get out at once, Tuppence. Take her with you, and do just as I say. No one will do you any harm. You're safe. Take the train to London. Go straight to Sir James Peel Edgerton. Mr. Carter lives out of town, but you'll be safe with him."

"Darn you!" cried Julius. "You're mad. Jane, you stay where you are."

With a sudden swift movement, Tommy snatched the revolver from Julius's hand, and levelled it at him.

"Now will you believe I'm in earnest? Get out, both of you, and do as I say--or I'll shoot!"

Tuppence sprang out, dragging the unwilling Jane after her.

"Come on, it's all right. If Tommy's sure--he's sure. Be quick. We'll miss the train."

They started running.

Julius's pent-up rage burst forth.

"What the hell----"

Tommy interrupted him.

"Dry up! I want a few words with you, Mr. Julius Hersheimmer."

CHAPTER

XXV

JANE'S STORY
HER arm through Jane's, dragging her along, Tuppence reached the station. Her quick ears caught the sound of
the approaching train.
"Hurry up," she panted, "or we'll miss it."
They arrived on the platform just as the train came to a standstill. Tuppence opened the door of an empty first-
class compartment, and the two girls sank down breathless on the padded seats.
A man looked in, then passed on to the next carriage. Jane started nervously. Her eyes dilated with terror. She
looked questioningly at Tuppence.
"Is he one of them, do you think?" she breathed.
Tuppence shook her head.
"No, no. It's all right." She took Jane's hand in hers. "Tommy wouldn't have told us to do this unless he was sure
we'd be all right."
"But he doesn't know them as I do!" The girl shivered. "You can't understand. Five years! Five long years!
Sometimes I thought I should go mad."
"Never mind. It's all over."
"Is it?"
The train was moving now, speeding through the night at a gradually increasing rate. Suddenly Jane Finn started
up.
"What was that? I thought I saw a face--looking in through the window."
"No, there's nothing. See." Tuppence went to the window, and lifting the strap let the pane down.
"You're sure?"
"Quite sure."
The other seemed to feel some excuse was necessary:
"I guess I'm acting like a frightened rabbit, but I can't help it. If they caught me now they'd----" Her eyes opened
wide and staring.
"DON'T!" implored Tuppence. "Lie back, and DON'T THINK. You can be quite sure that Tommy wouldn't have
said it was safe if it wasn't."
"My cousin didn't think so. He didn't want us to do this."
"No," said Tuppence, rather embarrassed.
"What are you thinking of?" said Jane sharply.
"Why?"
"Your voice was so--queer!"
"I WAS thinking of something," confessed Tuppence. "But I don't want to tell you--not now. I may be wrong,
but I don't think so. It's just an idea that came into my head a long time ago. Tommy's got it too--I'm almost sure he
has. But don't YOU worry--there'll be time enough for that later. And it mayn't be so at all! Do what I tell you--lie
back and don't think of anything."
"I'll try." The long lashes drooped over the hazel eyes.
Tuppence, for her part, sat bolt upright--much in the attitude of a watchful terrier on guard. In spite of herself she
was nervous. Her eyes flashed continually from one window to the other. She noted the exact position of the
communication cord. What it was that she feared, she would have been hard put to it to say. But in her own mind
she was far from feeling the confidence displayed in her words. Not that she disbelieved in Tommy, but occasionally
she was shaken with doubts as to whether anyone so simple and honest as he was could ever be a match for the
fiendish subtlety of the arch-criminal.
If they once reached Sir James Peel Edgerton in safety, all would be well. But would they reach him? Would not
the silent forces of Mr. Brown already be assembling against them? Even that last picture of Tommy, revolver in
hand, failed to comfort her. By now he might be overpowered, borne down by sheer force of numbers.... Tuppence
mapped out her plan of campaign.
As the train at length drew slowly into Charing Cross, Jane Finn sat up with a start.
"Have we arrived? I never thought we should!"
"Oh, I thought we'd get to London all right. If there's going to be any fun, now is when it will begin. Quick, get
out. We'll nip into a taxi."
In another minute they were passing the barrier, had paid the necessary fares, and were stepping into a taxi.
"King's Cross," directed Tuppence. Then she gave a jump. A man looked in at the window, just as they started.
She was almost certain it was the same man who had got into the carriage next to them. She had a horrible feeling of
being slowly hemmed in on every side.
"You see," she explained to Jane, "if they think we're going to Sir James, this will put them off the scent. Now
they'll imagine we're going to Mr. Carter. His country place is north of London somewhere."
Crossing Holborn there was a block, and the taxi was held up. This was what Tuppence had been waiting for.
"Quick," she whispered. "Open the right-hand door!"

The two girls stepped out into the traffic. Two minutes later they were seated in another taxi and were retracing their steps, this time direct to Carlton House Terrace.

"There," said Tuppence, with great satisfaction, "this ought to do them. I can't help thinking that I'm really rather clever! How that other taxi man will swear! But I took his number, and I'll send him a postal order to-morrow, so that he won't lose by it if he happens to be genuine. What's this thing swerving----Oh!"

There was a grinding noise and a bump. Another taxi had collided with them.

In a flash Tuppence was out on the pavement. A policeman was approaching. Before he arrived Tuppence had handed the driver five shillings, and she and Jane had merged themselves in the crowd.

"It's only a step or two now," said Tuppence breathlessly. The accident had taken place in Trafalgar Square.
"Do you think the collision was an accident, or done deliberately?"
"I don't know. It might have been either."

Hand-in-hand, the two girls hurried along.

"It may be my fancy," said Tuppence suddenly, "but I feel as though there was some one behind us."

"Hurry!" murmured the other. "Oh, hurry!"

They were now at the corner of Carlton House Terrace, and their spirits lightened. Suddenly a large and apparently intoxicated man barred their way.

"Good evening, ladies," he hiccupped. "Whither away so fast?"

"Let us pass, please," said Tuppence imperiously.

"Just a word with your pretty friend here." He stretched out an unsteady hand, and clutched Jane by the shoulder. Tuppence heard other footsteps behind. She did not pause to ascertain whether they were friends or foes. Lowering her head, she repeated a manoeuvre of childish days, and butted their aggressor full in the capacious middle. The success of these unsportsmanlike tactics was immediate. The man sat down abruptly on the pavement. Tuppence and Jane took to their heels. The house they sought was some way down. Other footsteps echoed behind them. Their breath was coming in choking gasps as they reached Sir James's door. Tuppence seized the bell and Jane the knocker.

The man who had stopped them reached the foot of the steps. For a moment he hesitated, and as he did so the door opened. They fell into the hall together. Sir James came forward from the library door.

"Hullo! What's this?"

He stepped forward, and put his arm round Jane as she swayed uncertainly. He half carried her into the library, and laid her on the leather couch. From a tantalus on the table he poured out a few drops of brandy, and forced her to drink them. With a sigh she sat up, her eyes still wild and frightened.

"It's all right. Don't be afraid, my child. You're quite safe."

Her breath came more normally, and the colour was returning to her cheeks. Sir James looked at Tuppence quizzically.

"So you're not dead, Miss Tuppence, any more than that Tommy boy of yours was!"

"The Young Adventurers take a lot of killing," boasted Tuppence.

"So it seems," said Sir James dryly. "Am I right in thinking that the joint venture has ended in success, and that this"--he turned to the girl on the couch--"is Miss Jane Finn?"

Jane sat up.

"Yes," she said quietly, "I am Jane Finn. I have a lot to tell you."

"When you are stronger----" 

"No--now!" Her voice rose a little. "I shall feel safer when I have told everything."

"As you please," said the lawyer.

He sat down in one of the big arm-chairs facing the couch. In a low voice Jane began her story.

"I came over on the Lusitania to take up a post in Paris. I was fearfully keen about the war, and just dying to help somehow or other. I had been studying French, and my teacher said they were wanting help in a hospital in Paris, so I wrote and offered my services, and they were accepted. I hadn't got any folk of my own, so it made it easy to arrange things.

"When the Lusitania was torpedoed, a man came up to me. I'd noticed him more than once--and I'd figured it out in my own mind that he was afraid of somebody or something. He asked me if I was a patriotic American, and told me he was carrying papers which were just life or death to the Allies. He asked me to take charge of them. I was to watch for an advertisement in the Times. If it didn't appear, I was to take them to the American Ambassador. "Most of what followed seems like a nightmare still. I see it in my dreams sometimes.... I'll hurry over that part. Mr. Danvers had told me to watch out. He might have been shadowed from New York, but he didn't think so. At
first I had no suspicions, but on the boat to Holyhead I began to get uneasy. There was one woman who had been very keen to look after me, and chum up with me generally—a Mrs. Vandemeyer. At first I'd been only grateful to her for being so kind to me; but all the time I felt there was something about her I didn't like, and on the Irish boat I saw her talking to some queer-looking men, and from the way they looked I saw that they were talking about me. I remembered that she'd been quite near me on the Lusitania when Mr. Danvers gave me the packet, and before that she'd tried to talk to him once or twice. I began to get scared, but I didn't quite see what to do.

"I had a wild idea of stopping at Holyhead, and not going on to London that day, but I soon saw that that would be plumb foolishness. The only thing was to act as though I'd noticed nothing, and hope for the best. I couldn't see how they could get me if I was on my guard. One thing I'd done already as a precaution—ripped open the oilskin packet and substituted blank paper, and then sewn it up again. So, if anyone did manage to rob me of it, it wouldn't matter.

"What to do with the real thing worried me no end. Finally I opened it out flat—there were only two sheets—and laid it between two of the advertisement pages of a magazine. I stuck the two pages together round the edge with some gum off an envelope. I carried the magazine carelessly stuffed into the pocket of my ulster.

"At Holyhead I tried to get into a carriage with people that looked all right, but in a queer way there seemed to be a crowd round me shoving and pushing me just the way I didn't want to go. There was something uncanny and frightening about it. In the end I found myself in a carriage with Mrs. Vandemeyer after all. I went out into the corridor, but all the other carriages were full, so I had to go back and sit down. I consoled myself with the thought that there were other people in the carriage—there was quite a nice-looking man and his wife sitting just opposite. So I felt almost happy about it until just outside London. I had leaned back and closed my eyes. I guess they thought I was asleep, but my eyes weren't quite shut, and suddenly I saw the nice-looking man get something out of his bag and hand it to Mrs. Vandemeyer, and as he did so he WINKED....

"I can't tell you how that wink sort of froze me through and through. My only thought was to get out in the corridor as quick as ever I could. I got up, trying to look natural and easy. Perhaps they saw something—I don't know—but suddenly Mrs. Vandemeyer said 'Now,' and flung something over my nose and mouth as I tried to scream. At the same moment I felt a terrific blow on the back of my head...."

She shuddered. Sir James murmured something sympathetically. In a minute she resumed:

"I don't know how long it was before I came back to consciousness. I felt very ill and sick. I was lying on a dirty bed. There was a screen round it, but I could hear two people talking in the room. Mrs. Vandemeyer was one of them. I tried to listen, but at first I couldn't take much in. When at last I did begin to grasp what was going on—I was just terrified! I wonder I didn't scream right out there and then.

"They hadn't found the papers. They'd got the oilskin packet with the blanks, and they were just mad! They didn't know whether I'd changed the papers, or whether Danvers had been carrying a dummy message, while the real one was sent another way. They spoke of"—she closed her eyes—"torturing me to find out!

"I'd never known what fear—really sickening fear—was before! Once they came to look at me. I shut my eyes and pretended to be still unconscious, but I was afraid they'd hear the beating of my heart. However, they went away again. I began thinking madly. What could I do? I knew I wouldn't be able to stand up against torture very long.

"Suddenly something put the thought of loss of memory into my head. The subject had always interested me, and I'd read an awful lot about it. I had the whole thing at my finger-tips. If only I could succeed in carrying the bluff through, it might save me. I said a prayer, and drew a long breath. Then I opened my eyes and started babbling in FRENCH!

"Mrs. Vandemeyer came round the screen at once. Her face was so wicked I nearly died, but I smiled up at her doubtfully, and asked her in French where I was.

"It puzzled her, I could see. She called the man she had been talking to. He stood by the screen with his face in shadow. He spoke to me in French. His voice was very ordinary and quiet, but somehow, I don't know why, he scared me worse than the woman. I felt he'd seen right through me, but I went on playing my part. I asked again where I was, and then went on that there was something I MUST remember—MUST remember—only for the moment it was all gone. I worked myself up to be more and more distressed. He asked me my name. I said I didn't know—that I couldn't remember anything at all.

"Suddenly he caught my wrist, and began twisting it. The pain was awful. I screamed. He went on. I screamed and screamed, but I managed to shriek out things in French. I don't know how long I could have gone on, but luckily I fainted. The last thing I heard was his voice saying: 'That's not bluff! Anyway, a kid of her age wouldn't know enough.' I guess he forgot American girls are older for their age than English ones, and take more interest in scientific subjects.

"When I came to, Mrs. Vandemeyer was sweet as honey to me. She'd had her orders, I guess. She spoke to me in French—told me I'd had a shock and been very ill. I should be better soon. I pretended to be rather dazed—murmured
something about the 'doctor' having hurt my wrist. She looked relieved when I said that.

"By and by she went out of the room altogether. I was suspicious still, and lay quite quiet for some time. In the end, however, I got up and walked round the room, examining it. I thought that even if anyone WAS watching me from somewhere, it would seem natural enough under the circumstances. It was a squalid, dirty place. There were no windows, which seemed queer. I guessed the door would be locked, but I didn't try it. There were some battered old pictures on the walls, representing scenes from Faust."

Jane's two listeners gave a simultaneous "Ah!" The girl nodded.

"Yes--it was the place in Soho where Mr. Beresford was imprisoned. Of course, at the time I didn't even know if I was in London. One thing was worrying me dreadfully, but my heart gave a great throb of relief when I saw my ulster lying carelessly over the back of a chair. AND THE MAGAZINE WAS STILL ROLLED UP IN THE POCKET!

"If only I could be certain that I was not being overlooked! I looked carefully round the walls. There didn't seem to be a peep-hole of any kind--nevertheless I felt kind of sure there must be. All of a sudden I sat down on the edge of the table, and put my face in my hands, sobbing out a 'Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!' I've got very sharp ears. I distinctly heard the rustle of a dress, and slight creak. That was enough for me. I was being watched!

"I lay down on the bed again, and by and by Mrs. Vandemeyer brought me some supper. She was still sweet as they make them. I guess she'd been told to win my confidence. Presently she produced the oilskin packet, and asked me if I recognized it, watching me like a lynx all the time.

"I took it and turned it over in a puzzled sort of way. Then I shook my head. I said that I felt I OUGHT to remember something about it, that it was just as though it was all coming back, and then, before I could get hold of it, it went again. Then she told me that I was her niece, and that I was to call her 'Aunt Rita.' I did obediently, and she told me not to worry--my memory would soon come back.

"That was an awful night. I'd made my plan whilst I was waiting for her. The papers were safe so far, but I couldn't take the risk of leaving them there any longer. They might throw that magazine away any minute. I lay awake waiting until I judged it must be about two o'clock in the morning. Then I got up as softly as I could, and felt in the dark along the left-hand wall. Very gently, I unhooked one of the pictures from its nail--Marguerite with her casket of jewels. I crept over to my coat and took out the magazine, and an odd envelope or two that I had shoved in. Then I went to the washstand, and damped the brown paper at the back of the picture all round. Presently I was able to pull it away. I had already torn out the two stuck-together pages from the magazine, and now I slipped them with their precious enclosure between the picture and its brown paper backing. A little gum from the envelopes helped me to stick the latter up again. No one would dream the picture had ever been tampered with. I rehung it on the wall, put the magazine back in my coat pocket, and crept back to bed. I was pleased with my hiding-place. They'd never think of pulling to pieces one of their own pictures. I hoped that they'd come to the conclusion that Danvers had been carrying a dummy all along, and that, in the end, they'd let me go.

"As a matter of fact, I guess that's what they did think at first, and, in a way, it was dangerous for me. I learnt afterwards that they nearly did away with me then and there--there was never much chance of their 'letting me go'--but the first man, who was the boss, preferred to keep me alive on the chance of my having hidden them, and being able to tell where if I recovered my memory. They watched me constantly for weeks. Sometimes they'd ask me questions by the hour--I guess there was nothing they didn't know about the third degree!--but somehow I managed to hold my own. The strain of it was awful, though . . .

"They took me back to Ireland, and over every step of the Journey again, in case I'd hidden it somewhere en route. Mrs. Vandemeyer and another woman never left me for a moment. They spoke of me as a young relative of Mrs. Vandemeyer's whose mind was affected by the shock of the Lusitania. There was no one I could appeal to for help without giving myself away to THEM, and if I risked it and failed--and Mrs. Vandemeyer looked so rich, and so beautifully dressed, that I felt convinced they'd take her word against mine, and think it was part of my mental trouble to think myself 'persecuted'--I felt that the horrors in store for me would be too awful once they knew I'd been only shamming."

Sir James nodded comprehendingly.

"Mrs. Vandemeyer was a woman of great personality. With that and her social position she would have had little difficulty in imposing her point of view in preference to yours. Your sensational accusations against her would not easily have found credence."

"That's what I thought. It ended in my being sent to a sanatorium at Bournemouth. I couldn't make up my mind at first whether it was a sham affair or genuine. A hospital nurse had charge of me. I was a special patient. She seemed so nice and normal that at last I determined to confide in her. A merciful providence just saved me in time from falling into the trap. My door happened to be ajar, and I heard her talking to some one in the passage. SHE WAS ONE OF THEM! They still fancied it might be a bluff on my part, and she was put in charge of me to make
sure! After that, my nerve went completely. I dared trust nobody.

"I think I almost hypnotized myself. After a while, I almost forgot that I was really Jane Finn. I was so bent on playing the part of Janet Vandemeyer that my nerves began to play me tricks. I became really ill--for months I sank into a sort of stupor. I felt sure I should die soon, and that nothing really mattered. A sane person shut up in a lunatic asylum often ends by becoming insane, they say, I guess I was like that. Playing my part had become second nature to me, I wasn't even unhappy in the end--just apathetic. Nothing seemed to matter. And the years went on.

"And then suddenly things seemed to change. Mrs. Vandemeyer came down from London. She and the doctor asked me questions, experimented with various treatments. There was some talk of sending me to a specialist in Paris. In the end, they did not dare risk it. I overheard something that seemed to show that other people--friends--were looking for me. I learnt later that the nurse who had looked after me went to Paris, and consulted a specialist, representing herself to be me. He put her through some searching tests, and exposed her loss of memory to be fraudulent; but she had taken a note of his methods and reproduced them on me. I dare say I couldn't have deceived the specialist for a minute--a man who has made a lifelong study of a thing is unique--but I managed once again to hold my own with them. The fact that I'd not thought of myself as Jane Finn for so long made it easier.

"One night I was whisked off to London at a moment's notice. They took me back to the house in Soho. Once I got away from the sanatorium I felt different--as though something in me that had been buried for a long time was waking up again.

"They sent me in to wait on Mr. Beresford. (Of course I didn't know his name then.) I was suspicious--I thought it was another trap. But he looked so honest, I could hardly believe it. However, I was careful in all I said, for I knew we could be overheard. There's a small hole, high up in the wall.

"But on the Sunday afternoon a message was brought to the house. They were all very disturbed. Without their knowing, I listened. Word had come that he was to be killed. I needn't tell the next part, because you know it. I thought I'd have time to rush up and get the papers from their hiding-place, but I was caught. So I screamed out that he was escaping, and I said I wanted to go back to Marguerite. I shouted the name three times very loud. I knew the others would think I meant Mrs. Vandemeyer, but I hoped it might make Mr. Beresford think of the picture. He'd unhooked one the first day--that's what made me hesitate to trust him."

She paused.

"Then the papers," said Sir James slowly, "are still at the back of the picture in that room."

"Yes." The girl had sunk back on the sofa exhausted with the strain of the long story.

Sir James rose to his feet. He looked at his watch.

"Come," he said, "we must go at once."

"To-night?" queried Tuppence, surprised.

"To-morrow may be too late," said Sir James gravely. "Besides, by going to-night we have the chance of capturing that great man and super-criminal--Mr. Brown!"

There was dead silence, and Sir James continued:

"You have been followed here--not a doubt of it. When we leave the house we shall be followed again, but not molested, FOR IT IS MR. BROWN'S PLAN THAT WE ARE TO LEAD HIM. But the Soho house is under police supervision night and day. There are several men watching it. When we enter that house, Mr. Brown will not draw back--he will risk all, on the chance of obtaining the spark to fire his mine. And he fancies the risk not great--since he will enter in the guise of a friend!"

Tuppence flushed, then opened her mouth impulsively.

"But there's something you don't know--that we haven't told you." Her eyes dwelt on Jane in perplexity.

"What is that?" asked the other sharply. "No hesitations, Miss Tuppence. We need to be sure of our going."

But Tuppence, for once, seemed tongue-tied.

"It's so difficult--you see, if I'm wrong--oh, it would be dreadful." She made a grimace at the unconscious Jane. "Never forgive me," she observed cryptically.

"You want me to help you out, eh?"

"Yes, please. YOU know who Mr. Brown is, don't you?"

"Yes," said Sir James gravely. "At last I do."

"At last?" queried Tuppence doubtfully. "Oh, but I thought----" She paused.

"You thought correctly, Miss Tuppence. I have been morally certain of his identity for some time--ever since the night of Mrs. Vandemeyer's mysterious death."

"Ah!" breathed Tuppence.

"For there we are up against the logic of facts. There are only two solutions. Either the chloral was administered by her own hand, which theory I reject utterly, or else----"
"Or else it was administered in the brandy you gave her. Only three people touched that brandy--you, Miss Tuppence, I myself, and one other--Mr. Julius Hersheimmer!"

Jane Finn stirred and sat up, regarding the speaker with wide astonished eyes.

"At first, the thing seemed utterly impossible. Mr. Hersheimmer, as the son of a prominent millionaire, was a well-known figure in America. It seemed utterly impossible that he and Mr. Brown could be one and the same. But you cannot escape from the logic of facts. Since the thing was so--it must be accepted. Remember Mrs. Vandemeyer's sudden and inexplicable agitation. Another proof, if proof was needed.

"I took an early opportunity of giving you a hint. From some words of Mr. Hersheimmer's at Manchester, I gathered that you had understood and acted on that hint. Then I set to work to prove the impossible possible. Mr. Beresford rang me up and told me, what I had already suspected, that the photograph of Miss Jane Finn had never really been out of Mr. Hersheimmer's possession----"

But the girl interrupted. Springing to her feet, she cried out angrily:

"What do you mean? What are you trying to suggest? That Mr. Brown is JULIUS? Julius--my own cousin!"

"No, Miss Finn," said Sir James unexpectedly. "Not your cousin. The man who calls himself Julius Hersheimmer is no relation to you whatsoever.

CHAPTER XXVI -- MR. BROWN

SIR James's words came like a bomb-shell. Both girls looked equally puzzled. The lawyer went across to his desk, and returned with a small newspaper cutting, which he handed to Jane. Tuppence read it over her shoulder. Mr. Carter would have recognized it. It referred to the mysterious man found dead in New York.

"As I was saying to Miss Tuppence," resumed the lawyer, "I set to work to prove the impossible possible. The great stumbling-block was the undeniable fact that Julius Hersheimmer was not an assumed name. When I came across this paragraph my problem was solved. Julius Hersheimmer set out to discover what had become of his cousin. He went out West, where he obtained news of her and her photograph to aid him in his search. On the eve of his departure from New York he was set upon and murdered. His body was dressed in shabby clothes, and the face disfigured to prevent identification. Mr. Brown took his place. He sailed immediately for England. None of the real Hersheimmer's friends or intimates saw him before he sailed--though indeed it would hardly have mattered if they had, the impersonation was so perfect. Since then he had been hand and glove with those sworn to hunt him down. Every secret of theirs has been known to him. Only once did he come near disaster. Mrs. Vandemeyer knew his secret. It was no part of his plan that that huge bribe should ever be offered to her. But for Miss Tuppence's fortunate change of plan, she would have been far away from the flat when we arrived there. Exposure stared him in the face. He took a desperate step, trusting in his assumed character to avert suspicion. He nearly succeeded--but not quite."

"I can't believe it," murmured Jane. "He seemed so splendid."

"The real Julius Hersheimmer WAS a splendid fellow! And Mr. Brown is a consummate actor. But ask Miss Tuppence if she also has not had her suspicions."

Jane turned mutely to Tuppence. The latter nodded.

"I didn't want to say it, Jane--I knew it would hurt you. And, after all, I couldn't be sure. I still don't understand why, if he's Mr. Brown, he rescued us."

"Was it Julius Hersheimmer who helped you to escape?"

Tuppence recounted to Sir James the exciting events of the evening, ending up: "But I can't see WHY!"

"Can't you? I can. So can young Beresford, by his actions. As a last hope Jane Finn was to be allowed to escape--and the escape must be managed so that she harbours no suspicions of its being a put-up job. They're not averse to young Beresford's being in the neighbourhood, and, if necessary, communicating with you. They'll take care to get him out of the way at the right minute. Then Julius Hersheimmer dashes up and rescues you in true melodramatic style. Bullets fly--but don't hit anybody. What would have happened next? You would have driven straight to the house in Soho and secured the document which Miss Finn would probably have entrusted to her cousin's keeping. Or, if he conducted the search, he would have pretended to find the hiding-place already rifled. He would have had a dozen ways of dealing with the situation, but the result would have been the same. And I rather fancy some accident would have happened to both of you. You see, you know rather an inconvenient amount. That's a rough outline. I admit I was caught napping; but somebody else wasn't."

"Tommy," said Tuppence softly.

"Yes. Evidently when the right moment came to get rid of him--he was too sharp for them. All the same, I'm not too easy in my mind about him."

"Why?"

"Because Julius Hersheimmer is Mr. Brown," said Sir James dryly. "And it takes more than one man and a revolver to hold up Mr. Brown...."

Tuppence paled a little.
"What can we do?"
"Nothing until we've been to the house in Soho. If Beresford has still got the upper hand, there's nothing to fear. If otherwise, our enemy will come to find us, and he will not find us unprepared!" From a drawer in the desk, he took a service revolver, and placed it in his coat pocket.
"Now we're ready. I know better than even to suggest going without you, Miss Tuppence----"
"I should think so indeed!"
"But I do suggest that Miss Finn should remain here. She will be perfectly safe, and I am afraid she is absolutely worn out with all she has been through."
But to Tuppence's surprise Jane shook her head.
"No. I guess I'm going too. Those papers were my trust. I must go through with this business to the end. I'm heaps better now anyway."
Sir James's car was ordered round. During the short drive Tuppence's heart beat tumultuously. In spite of momentary qualms of uneasiness respecting Tommy, she could not but feel exultation. They were going to win!
The car drew up at the corner of the square and they got out. Sir James went up to a plain-clothes man who was on duty with several others, and spoke to him. Then he rejoined the girls.
"No one has gone into the house so far. It is being watched at the back as well, so they are quite sure of that. Anyone who attempts to enter after we have done so will be arrested immediately. Shall we go in?"
A policeman produced a key. They all knew Sir James well. They had also had orders respecting Tuppence. Only the third member of the party was unknown to them. The three entered the house, pulling the door to behind them. Slowly they mounted the rickety stairs. At the top was the ragged curtain hiding the recess where Tommy had hidden that day. Tuppence had heard the story from Jane in her character of "Annette." She looked at the tattered velvet with interest. Even now she could almost swear it moved—as though some one was behind it. So strong was the illusion that she almost fancied she could make out the outline of a form.... Supposing Mr. Brown—Julius—was there waiting....
Impossible of course! Yet she almost went back to put the curtain aside and make sure....
Now they were entering the prison room. No place for anyone to hide here, thought Tuppence, with a sigh of relief, then chided herself indignantly. She must not give way to this foolish fancying—this curious insistent feeling that MR. BROWN WAS IN THE HOUSE.... Hark! what was that? A stealthy footstep on the stairs? There WAS some one in the house! Absurd! She was becoming hysterical.
Jane had gone straight to the picture of Marguerite. She unhooked it with a steady hand. The dust lay thick upon it, and festoons of cobwebs lay between it and the wall. Sir James handed her a pocket-knife, and she ripped away the brown paper from the back.... The advertisement page of a magazine fell out. Jane picked it up. Holding apart the frayed inner edges she extracted two thin sheets covered with writing!
No dummy this time! The real thing!
"We've got it," said Tuppence. "At last...."
The moment was almost breathless in its emotion. Forgotten the faint creakings, the imagined noises of a minute ago. None of them had eyes for anything but what Jane held in her hand.
Sir James took it, and scrutinized it attentively.
"Yes," he said quietly, "this is the ill-fated draft treaty!"
"We've succeeded," said Tuppence. There was awe and an almost wondering unbelieving in her voice.
Sir James echoed her words as he folded the paper carefully and put it away in his pocket-book, then he looked curiously round the dingy room.
"It was here that our young friend was confined for so long, was it not?" he said. "A truly sinister room. You notice the absence of windows, and the thickness of the close-fitting door. Whatever took place here would never be heard by the outside world."
Tuppence shivered. His words woke a vague alarm in her. What if there WAS some one concealed in the house? Some one who might bar that door on them, and leave them to die like rats in a trap? Then she realized the absurdity of her thought. The house was surrounded by police who, if they failed to reappear, would not hesitate to break in and make a thorough search. She smiled at her own foolishness—then looked up with a start to find Sir James watching her. He gave her an emphatic little nod.
"Quite right, Miss Tuppence. You scent danger. So do I. So does Miss Finn."
"Yes," admitted Jane. "It's absurd—but I can't help it."
Sir James nodded again.
"You feel—as we all feel—THE PRESENCE OF MR. BROWN. Yes"—as Tuppence made a movement—"not a doubt of it—MR. BROWN IS HERE...."
"In this house?"
"In this room.... You don't understand? I AM MR. BROWN...."

Stupefied, unbelieving, they stared at him. The very lines of his face had changed. It was a different man who stood before them. He smiled a cruel smile.

"Neither of you will leave this room alive! You said just now we had succeeded. I have succeeded! The draft treaty is mine." His smile grew wider as he looked at Tuppence. "Shall I tell you how it will be? Sooner or later the police will break in, and they will find three victims of Mr. Brown--three, not two, you understand, but fortunately the third will not be dead, only wounded, and will be able to describe the attack with a wealth of detail! The treaty? It is in the hands of Mr. Brown. So no one will think of searching the pockets of Sir James Peel Edgerton!"

He turned to Jane.

"You outwitted me. I make my acknowledgments. But you will not do it again."

There was a faint sound behind him, but, intoxicated with success, he did not turn his head.

He slipped his hand into his pocket.

"Checkmate to the Young Adventurers," he said, and slowly raised the big automatic.

But, even as he did so, he felt himself seized from behind in a grip of iron. The revolver was wrenched from his hand, and the voice of Julius Hersheimmer said drawlingly:

"I guess you're caught redhanded with the goods upon you."

The blood rushed to the K.C.'s face, but his self-control was marvellous, as he looked from one to the other of his two captors. He looked longest at Tommy.

"You," he said beneath his breath. "YOU! I might have known."

Seeing that he was disposed to offer no resistance, their grip slackened. Quick as a flash his left hand, the hand which bore the big signet ring, was raised to his lips....

" 'Ave, Caesar! te morituri salutant," he said, still looking at Tommy.

Then his face changed, and with a long convulsive shudder he fell forward in a crumpled heap, whilst an odour of bitter almonds filled the air.

CHAPTER XXVII -- A SUPPER PARTY AT THE SAVOY

THE supper party given by Mr. Julius Hersheimmer to a few friends on the evening of the 30th will long be remembered in catering circles. It took place in a private room, and Mr. Hersheimmer's orders were brief and forcible. He gave carte blanche--and when a millionaire gives carte blanche he usually gets it!

Every delicacy out of season was duly provided. Waiters carried bottles of ancient and royal vintage with loving care. The floral decorations defied the seasons, and fruits of the earth as far apart as May and November found themselves miraculously side by side. The list of guests was small and select. The American Ambassador, Mr. Carter, who had taken the liberty, he said, of bringing an old friend, Sir William Beresford, with him, Archdeacon Cowley, Dr. Hall, those two youthful adventurers, Miss Prudence Cowley and Mr. Thomas Beresford, and last, but not least, as guest of honour, Miss Jane Finn.

Julius had spared no pains to make Jane's appearance a success. A mysterious knock had brought Tuppence to the door of the apartment she was sharing with the American girl. It was Julius. In his hand he held a cheque.

"Say, Tuppence," he began, "will you do me a good turn? Take this, and get Jane regularly togged up for this evening. You're all coming to supper with me at the Savoy. See? Spare no expense. You get me?"

"Sure thing," mimicked Tuppence. "We shall enjoy ourselves. It will be a pleasure dressing Jane. She's the loveliest thing I've ever seen."

"That's so," agreed Mr. Hersheimmer fervently.

His fervour brought a momentary twinkle to Tuppence's eye.

"By the way, Julius," she remarked demurely, "I--haven't given you my answer yet."

"Answer?" said Julius. His face paled.

"You know--when you asked me to--marry you," faltered Tuppence, her eyes downcast in the true manner of the early Victorian heroine, "and wouldn't take no for an answer. I've thought it well over----"

"Yes?" said Julius. The perspiration stood on his forehead.

Tuppence relented suddenly.

"You great idiot!" she said. "What on earth induced you to do it? I could see at the time you didn't care a twopenny dip for me!"

"Not at all. I had--and still have--the highest sentiments of esteem and respect--and admiration for you----"

"H'm!" said Tuppence. "Those are the kind of sentiments that very soon go to the wall when the other sentiment comes along! Don't they, old thing?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Julius stiffly, but a large and burning blush overspread his countenance.

"Shucks!" retorted Tuppence. She laughed, and closed the door, reopening it to add with dignity: "Morally, I shall always consider I have been jilted!"
"What was it?" asked Jane as Tuppence rejoined her.

"Julius."

"What did he want?"

"Really, I think, he wanted to see you, but I wasn't going to let him. Not until to-night, when you're going to burst upon everyone like King Solomon in his glory! Come on! WE'RE GOING TO SHOP!"

To most people the 29th, the much-heralded "Labour Day," had passed much as any other day. Speeches were made in the Park and Trafalgar Square. Straggling processions, singing the Red Flag, wandered through the streets in a more or less aimless manner. Newspapers which had hinted at a general strike, and the inauguration of a reign of terror, were forced to hide their diminished heads. The bolder and more astute among them sought to prove that peace had been effected by following their counsels. In the Sunday papers a brief notice of the sudden death of Sir James Peel Edgerton, the famous K.C., had appeared. Monday's paper dealt appreciatively with the dead man's career. The exact manner of his sudden death was never made public.

Tommy had been right in his forecast of the situation. It had been a one-man show. Deprived of their chief, the organization fell to pieces. Kramenin had made a precipitate return to Russia, leaving England early on Sunday morning. The gang had fled from Astley Priors in a panic, leaving behind, in their haste, various damaging documents which compromised them hopelessly. With these proofs of conspiracy in their hands, aided further by a small brown diary taken from the pocket of the dead man which had contained a full and damning resume of the whole plot, the Government had called an eleventh-hour conference. The Labour leaders were forced to recognize that they had been used as a cat's paw. Certain concessions were made by the Government, and were eagerly accepted. It was to be Peace, not War!

But the Cabinet knew by how narrow a margin they had escaped utter disaster. And burnt in on Mr. Carter's brain was the strange scene which had taken place in the house in Soho the night before.

He had entered the squalid room to find that great man, the friend of a lifetime, dead--betrayed out of his own mouth. From the dead man's pocket-book he had retrieved the ill-omened draft treaty, and then and there, in the presence of the other three, it had been reduced to ashes.... England was saved!

And now, on the evening of the 30th, in a private room at the Savoy, Mr. Julius P. Hersheimmer was receiving his guests.

Mr. Carter was the first to arrive. With him was a choleric-looking old gentleman, at sight of whom Tommy flushed up to the roots of his hair. He came forward.

"Ha!" said the old gentleman, surveying him apoplectically. "So you're my nephew, are you? Not much to look at--but you've done good work, it seems. Your mother must have brought you up well after all. Shall we let bygones be bygones, eh? You're my heir, you know; and in future I propose to make you an allowance--and you can look upon Chalmers Park as your home."

"Thank you, sir, it's awfully decent of you."

"Where's this young lady I've been hearing such a lot about?"

Tommy introduced Tuppence.

"Ha!" said Sir William, eyeing her. "Girls aren't what they used to be in my young days."

"Yes, they are," said Tuppence. "Their clothes are different, perhaps, but they themselves are just the same."

"Well, perhaps you're right. Minxes then--minxes now!"

"That's it," said Tuppence. "I'm a frightful minx myself."

"I believe you," said the old gentleman, chuckling, and pinched her ear in high good-humour. Most young women were terrified of the "old bear," as they termed him. Tuppence's pertness delighted the old misogynist.

Then came the timid archdeacon, a little bewildered by the company in which he found himself, glad that his daughter was considered to have distinguished herself, but unable to help glancing at her from time to time with nervous apprehension. But Tuppence behaved admirably. She forbore to cross her legs, set a guard upon her tongue, and steadfastly refused to smoke.

Dr. Hall came next, and he was followed by the American Ambassador.

"We might as well sit down," said Julius, when he had introduced all his guests to each other. "Tuppence, will you----"

He indicated the place of honour with a wave of his hand.

But Tuppence shook her head.

"No--that's Jane's place! When one thinks of how she's held out all these years, she ought to be made the queen of the feast to-night."

Julius flung her a grateful glance, and Jane came forward shyly to the allotted seat. Beautiful as she had seemed before, it was as nothing to the loveliness that now went fully adorned. Tuppence had performed her part faithfully. The model gown supplied by a famous dressmaker had been entitled "A tiger lily." It was all golds and reds and
browns, and out of it rose the pure column of the girl's white throat, and the bronze masses of hair that crowned her lovely head. There was admiration in every eye, as she took her seat.

Soon the supper party was in full swing, and with one accord Tommy was called upon for a full and complete explanation.

"You've been too damned close about the whole business," Julius accused him. "You let on to me that you were off to the Argentine--though I guess you had your reasons for that. The idea of both you and Tuppence casting me for the part of Mr. Brown just tickles me to death!"

"The idea was not original to them," said Mr. Carter gravely. "It was suggested, and the poison very carefully instilled, by a past-master in the art. The paragraph in the New York paper suggested the plan to him, and by means of it he wove a web that nearly enmeshed you fatally."

"I never liked him," said Julius. "I felt from the first that there was something wrong about him, and I always suspected that it was he who silenced Mrs. Vandemeyer so appositely. But it wasn't till I heard that the order for Tommy's execution came right on the heels of our interview with him that Sunday that I began to tumble to the fact that he was the big bug himself."

"I never suspected it at all," lamented Tuppence. "I've always thought I was so much cleverer than Tommy--but he's undoubtedly scored over me handsomely."

Julius agreed.

"Tommy's been the goods this trip! And, instead of sitting there as dumb as a fish, let him banish his blushes, and tell us all about it."

"Hear! hear!"

"There's nothing to tell," said Tommy, acutely uncomfortable. "I was an awful mug--right up to the time I found that photograph of Annette, and realized that she was Jane Finn. Then I remembered how persistently she had shouted out that word 'Marguerite'--and I thought of the pictures, and--well, that's that. Then of course I went over the whole thing to see where I'd made an ass of myself."

"Go on," said Mr. Carter, as Tommy showed signs of taking refuge in silence once more.

"That business about Mrs. Vandemeyer had worried me when Julius told me about it. On the face of it, it seemed that he or Sir James must have done the trick. But I didn't know which. Finding that photograph in the drawer, after that story of how it had been got from him by Inspector Brown, made me suspect Julius. Then I remembered that it was Sir James who had discovered the false Jane Finn. In the end, I couldn't make up my mind--and just decided to take no chances either way. I left a note for Julius, in case he was Mr. Brown, saying I was off to the Argentine, and I dropped Sir James's letter with the offer of the job by the desk so that he would see it was a genuine stunt. Then I wrote my letter to Mr. Carter and rang up Sir James. Taking him into my confidence would be the best thing either way, so I told him everything except where I believed the papers to be hidden. The way he helped me to get on the track of Tuppence and Annette almost disarmed me, but not quite. I kept my mind open between the two of them. And then I got a bogus note from Tuppence--and I knew!"

"But how?"

Tommy took the note in question from his pocket and passed it round the table.

"It's her handwriting all right, but I knew it wasn't from her because of the signature. She'd never spell her name 'Twopence,' but anyone who'd never seen it might quite easily do so. Julius HAD seen it--he showed me a note of hers to him once--but SIR JAMES HADN'T! After that everything was plain sailing. I sent off Albert post-haste to Mr. Carter. I pretended to go away, but doubled back again. When Julius came bursting up in his car, I felt it wasn't part of Mr. Brown's plan--and that there would probably be trouble. Unless Sir James was actually caught in the act, so to speak, I knew Mr. Carter would never believe it of him on my bare word----"

"I didn't," interposed Mr. Carter ruefully.

"That's why I sent the girls off to Sir James. I was sure they'd fetch up at the house in Soho sooner or later. I threatened Julius with the revolver, because I wanted Tuppence to repeat that to Sir James, so that he wouldn't worry about us. The moment the girls were out of sight I told Julius to drive like hell for London, and as we went along I told him the whole story. We got to the Soho house in plenty of time and met Mr. Carter outside. After arranging things with him we went in and hid behind the curtain in the recess. The policemen had orders to say, if they were asked, that no one had gone into the house. That's all."

And Tommy came to an abrupt halt.

There was silence for a moment.

"By the way," said Julius suddenly, "you're all wrong about that photograph of Jane. It WAS taken from me, but I found it again."

"Where?" cried Tuppence.

"In that little safe on the wall in Mrs. Vandemeyer's bedroom."
"I knew you found something," said Tuppence reproachfully. "To tell you the truth, that's what started me off suspecting you. Why didn't you say?"

"I guess I was a mite suspicious too. It had been got away from me once, and I determined I wouldn't let on I'd got it until a photographer had made a dozen copies of it!"

"We all kept back something or other," said Tuppence thoughtfully. "I suppose secret service work makes you like that!"

In the pause that ensued, Mr. Carter took from his pocket a small shabby brown book.

"Beresford has just said that I would not have believed Sir James Peel Edgerton to be guilty unless, so to speak, he was caught in the act. That is so. Indeed, not until I read the entries in this little book could I bring myself fully to credit the amazing truth. This book will pass into the possession of Scotland Yard, but it will never be publicly exhibited. Sir James's long association with the law would make it undesirable. But to you, who know the truth, I propose to read certain passages which will throw some light on the extraordinary mentality of this great man."

He opened the book, and turned the thin pages.

"... It is madness to keep this book. I know that. It is documentary evidence against me. But I have never shrunk from taking risks. And I feel an urgent need for self-expression.... The book will only be taken from my dead body...."

"... From an early age I realized that I had exceptional abilities. Only a fool underestimates his capabilities. My brain power was greatly above the average. I know that I was born to succeed. My appearance was the only thing against me. I was quiet and insignificant--utterly nondescript...."

"... When I was a boy I heard a famous murder trial. I was deeply impressed by the power and eloquence of the counsel for the defence. For the first time I entertained the idea of taking my talents to that particular market.... Then I studied the criminal in the dock.... The man was a fool--he had been incredibly, unbelievably stupid. Even the eloquence of his counsel was hardly likely to save him. I felt an immeasurable contempt for him.... Then it occurred to me that the criminal standard was a low one. It was the wasters, the failures, the general riff-raff of civilization who drifted into crime.... Strange that men of brains had never realized its extraordinary opportunities.... I played with the idea.... What a magnificent field--what unlimited possibilities! It made my brain reel...."

"... I read standard works on crime and criminals. They all confirmed my opinion. Degeneracy, disease--never the deliberate embracing of a career by a far-seeing man. Then I considered. Supposing my utmost ambitions were realized--that I was called to the bar, and rose to the height of my profession? That I entered politics--say, even, that I became Prime Minister of England? What then? Was that power? Hampered at every turn by my colleagues, fettered by the democratic system of which I should be the mere figurehead! No--the power I dreamed of was absolute! An autocrat! A dictator! And such power could only be obtained by working outside the law. To play on the weaknesses of human nature, then on the weaknesses of nations--to get together and control a vast organization, and finally to overthrow the existing order, and rule! The thought intoxicated me...."

"... I saw that I must lead two lives. A man like myself is bound to attract notice. I must have a successful career which would mask my true activities.... Also I must cultivate a personality. I modelled myself upon famous K.C.'s. I reproduced their mannerisms, their magnetism. If I had chosen to be an actor, I should have been the greatest actor living! No disguises--no grease paint--no false beards! Personality! I put it on like a glove! When I shed it, I was myself, quiet, unobtrusive, a man like every other man. I called myself Mr. Brown. There are hundreds of men called Brown--there are hundreds of men looking just like me...."

"... I succeeded in my false career. I was bound to succeed. I shall succeed in the other. A man like me cannot fail...."

"... I have been reading a life of Napoleon. He and I have much in common...."

"... I make a practice of defending criminals. A man should look after his own people...."

"... Once or twice I have felt afraid. The first time was in Italy. There was a dinner given. Professor D----, the great alienist, was present. The talk fell on insanity. He said, 'A great many men are mad, and no one knows it. They do not know it themselves.' I do not understand why he looked at me when he said that. His glance was strange.... I did not like it...."

"... The war has disturbed me.... I thought it would further my plans. The Germans are so efficient. Their spy system, too, was excellent. The streets are full of these boys in khaki. All empty-headed young fools.... Yet I do not know.... They won the war.... It disturbs me...."

"... My plans are going well.... A girl butted in--I do not think she really knew anything.... But we must give up the Esthonia.... No risks now...."

"... All goes well. The loss of memory is vexing. It cannot be a fake. No girl could deceive ME! ..."

"... The 29th.... That is very soon...." Mr. Carter paused.

"I will not read the details of the coup that was planned. But there are just two small entries that refer to the three
of you. In the light of what happened they are interesting.

"... By inducing the girl to come to me of her own accord, I have succeeded in disarming her. But she has
intuitive flashes that might be dangerous.... She must be got out of the way.... I can do nothing with the American.
He suspects and dislikes me. But he cannot know. I fancy my armour is impregnable.... Sometimes I fear I have
underestimated the other boy. He is not clever, but it is hard to blind his eyes to facts...."

Mr. Carter shut the book.
"A great man," he said. "Genius, or insanity, who can say?"
There was silence.
Then Mr. Carter rose to his feet.
"I will give you a toast. The Joint Venture which has so amply justified itself by success!"
It was drunk with acclamation.
"There's something more we want to hear," continued Mr. Carter. He looked at the American Ambassador. "I
SPEAK FOR YOU ALSO, I KNOW. WE'LL ASK MISS JANE FINN TO TELL US THE STORY THAT ONLY MISS TUPTENCE HAS HEARD SO FAR--
BUT BEFORE WE DO SO WE'LL DRINK HER HEALTH. THE HEALTH OF ONE OF THE BRAVEST OF AMERICA'S DAUGHTERS, TO WHOM IS DUE
THE THANKS AND GRATITUDE OF TWO GREAT COUNTRIES!"

CHAPTER XXVIII -- AND AFTER

"THAT was a mighty good toast, Jane," said Mr. Hersheimmer, as he and his cousin were being driven back in
the Rolls-Royce to the Ritz.
"The one to the joint venture?"
"No--the one to you. There isn't another girl in the world who could have carried it through as you did. You were
just wonderful!"

Jane shook her head.
"I don't feel wonderful. At heart I'm just tired and lonesome--and longing for my own country."

"That brings me to something I wanted to say. I heard the Ambassador telling you his wife hoped you would
come to them at the Embassy right away. That's good enough, but I've got another plan. Jane--I want you to marry
me! Don't get scared and say no at once. You can't love me right away, of course, that's impossible. But I've loved
you from the very moment I set eyes on your photo--and now I've seen you I'm simply crazy about you! If you'll
only marry me, I won't worry you any--you shall take your own time. Maybe you'll never come to love me, and if
that's the case I'll manage to set you free. But I want the right to look after you, and take care of you."

"That's what I want," said the girl wistfully. "Some one who'll be good to me. Oh, you don't know how lonesome
I feel!"

"Sure thing I do. Then I guess that's all fixed up, and I'll see the archbishop about a special license to-morrow morning."

"Oh, Julius!"

"Well, I don't want to hustle you any, Jane, but there's no sense in waiting about. Don't be scared--I shan't expect
you to love me all at once."

But a small hand was slipped into his.
"I love you now, Julius," said Jane Finn. "I loved you that first moment in the car when the bullet grazed your
cheek...."

Five minutes later Jane murmured softly:
"I don't know London very well, Julius, but is it such a very long way from the Savoy to the Ritz?"

"It depends how you go," explained Julius unblushingly. "We're going by way of Regent's Park!"

"Oh, Julius--what will the chauffeur think?"

"At the wages I pay him, he knows better than to do any independent thinking. Why, Jane, the only reason I had
the supper at the Savoy was so that I could drive you home. I didn't see how I was ever going to get hold of you
alone. You and Tuppence have been sticking together like Siamese twins. I guess another day of it would have
driven me and Beresford stark staring mad!"

"Oh. Is he----?"

"Of course he is. Head over ears."

"I thought so," said Jane thoughtfully.

"Why?"

"From all the things Tuppence didn't say!"

"There you have me beat," said Mr. Hersheimmer. But Jane only laughed.

In the meantime, the Young Adventurers were sitting bolt upright, very stiff and ill at ease, in a taxi which, with
a singular lack of originality, was also returning to the Ritz via Regent's Park.

A terrible constraint seemed to have settled down between them. Without quite knowing what had happened,
everything seemed changed. They were tongue-tied--paralysed. All the old camaraderie was gone.

Tuppence could think of nothing to say.

Tommy was equally afflicted.

They sat very straight and forbore to look at each other.

At last Tuppence made a desperate effort.

"Rather fun, wasn't it?"

"Rather."

Another silence.

"I like Julius," essayed Tuppence again.

Tommy was suddenly galvanized into life.

"You're not going to marry him, do you hear?" he said dictatorially. "I forbid it."

"Oh!" said Tuppence meekly.

"Absolutely, you understand."

"He doesn't want to marry me--he really only asked me out of kindness."

"That's not very likely," scoffed Tommy.

"It's quite true. He's head over ears in love with Jane. I expect he's proposing to her now."

"She'll do for him very nicely," said Tommy condescendingly.

"Don't you think she's the most lovely creature you've ever seen?"

"Oh, I dare say."

"But I suppose you prefer sterling worth," said Tuppence demurely.

"I--oh, dash it all, Tuppence, you know!"

"I like your uncle, Tommy," said Tuppence, hastily creating a diversion. "By the way, what are you going to do, accept Mr. Carter's offer of a Government job, or accept Julius's invitation and take a richly remunerated post in America on his ranch?"

"I shall stick to the old ship, I think, though it's awfully good of Hersheimer. But I feel you'd be more at home in London."

"I don't see where I come in."

"I do," said Tommy positively.

Tuppence stole a glance at him sideways.

"There's the money, too," she observed thoughtfully.

"What money?"

"We're going to get a cheque each. Mr. Carter told me so."

"Did you ask how much?" inquired Tommy sarcastically.

"Yes," said Tuppence triumphantly. "But I shan't tell you."

"Tuppence, you are the limit!"

"It has been fun, hasn't it, Tommy? I do hope we shall have lots more adventures."

"You're insatiable, Tuppence. I've had quite enough adventures for the present."

"Well, shopping is almost as good," said Tuppence dreamily.

"Think of buying old furniture, and bright carpets, and futurist silk curtains, and a polished dining-table, and a divan with lots of cushions."

"Hold hard," said Tommy. "What's all this for?"

"Possibly a house--but I think a flat."

"Whose flat?"

"You think I mind saying it, but I don't in the least! OURS, so there!"

"You darling!" cried Tommy, his arms tightly round her. "I was determined to make you say it. I owe you something for the relentless way you've squashed me whenever I've tried to be sentimental."

Tuppence raised her face to his. The taxi proceeded on its course round the north side of Regent's Park.

"You haven't really proposed now," pointed out Tuppence. "Not what our grandmothers would call a proposal. But after listening to a rotten one like Julius's, I'm inclined to let you off."

"You won't be able to get out of marrying me, so don't you think it."

"What fun it will be," responded Tuppence. "Marriage is called all sorts of things, a haven, and a refuge, and a crowning glory, and a state of bondage, and lots more. But do you know what I think it is?"

"What?"

"A sport!"

"And a damned good sport too," said Tommy.
Go to Start
THE MYSTERIOUS AFFAIR AT STYLES

CHAPTER I.
I GO TO STYLES

The intense interest aroused in the public by what was known at the time as "The Styles Case" has now somewhat subsided. Nevertheless, in view of the world-wide notoriety which attended it, I have been asked, both by my friend Poirot and the family themselves, to write an account of the whole story. This, we trust, will effectually silence the sensational rumours which still persist.

I will therefore briefly set down the circumstances which led to my being connected with the affair.

I had been invalided home from the Front; and, after spending some months in a rather depressing Convalescent Home, was given a month's sick leave. Having no near relations or friends, I was trying to make up my mind what to do, when I ran across John Cavendish. I had seen very little of him for some years. Indeed, I had never known him particularly well. He was a good fifteen years my senior, for one thing, though he hardly looked his forty-five years. As a boy, though, I had often stayed at Styles, his mother's place in Essex.

We had a good yarn about old times, and it ended in his inviting me down to Styles to spend my leave there.

"The mater will be delighted to see you again--after all those years," he added.

"Your mother keeps well?" I asked.

"Oh, yes. I suppose you know that she has married again?"

I am afraid I showed my surprise rather plainly. Mrs. Cavendish, who had married John's father when he was a widower with two sons, had been a handsome woman of middle-age as I remembered her. She certainly could not be a day less than seventy now. I recalled her as an energetic, autocratic personality, somewhat inclined to charitable and social notoriety, with a fondness for opening bazaars and playing the Lady Bountiful. She was a most generous woman, and possessed a considerable fortune of her own.

Their country-place, Styles Court, had been purchased by Mr. Cavendish early in their married life. He had been completely under his wife's ascendancy, so much so that, on dying, he left the place to her for her lifetime, as well as the larger part of his income; an arrangement that was distinctly unfair to his two sons. Their step-mother, however, had always been most generous to them; indeed, they were so young at the time of their father's remarriage that they always thought of her as their own mother.

Lawrence, the younger, had been a delicate youth. He had qualified as a doctor but early relinquished the profession of medicine, and lived at home while pursuing literary ambitions; though his verses never had any marked success.

John practiced for some time as a barrister, but had finally settled down to the more congenial life of a country squire. He had married two years ago, and had taken his wife to live at Styles, though I entertained a shrewd suspicion that he would have preferred his mother to increase his allowance, which would have enabled him to have a home of his own. Mrs. Cavendish, however, was a lady who liked to make her own plans, and expected other people to fall in with them, and in this case she certainly had the whip hand, namely: the purse strings.

John noticed my surprise at the news of his mother's remarriage and smiled rather ruefully.

"Rotten little bounder too!" he said savagely. "I can tell you, Hastings, it's making life jolly difficult for us. As for Evie--you remember Evie?"

"No."

"Oh, I suppose she was after your time. She's the mater's factotum, companion, Jack of all trades! A great sport--old Evie! Not precisely young and beautiful, but as game as they make them."

"You were going to say----?"

"Oh, this fellow! He turned up from nowhere, on the pretext of being a second cousin or something of Evie's, though she didn't seem particularly keen to acknowledge the relationship. The fellow is an absolute outsider, anyone can see that. He's got a great black beard, and wears patent leather boots in all weathers! But the mater cottoned to him at once, took him on as secretary--you know how she's always running a hundred societies?"

I nodded.

"Well, of course the war has turned the hundreds into thousands. No doubt the fellow was very useful to her. But you could have knocked us all down with a feather when, three months ago, she suddenly announced that she and Alfred were engaged! The fellow must be at least twenty years younger than she is! It's simply bare-faced fortune hunting; but there you are--she is her own mistress, and she's married him."

"It must be a difficult situation for you all."
"Difficult! It's damnable!"

Thus it came about that, three days later, I descended from the train at Styles St. Mary, an absurd little station, with no apparent reason for existence, perched up in the midst of green fields and country lanes. John Cavendish was waiting on the platform, and piloted me out to the car.

"Got a drop or two of petrol still, you see," he remarked. "Mainly owing to the mater's activities."

The village of Styles St. Mary was situated about two miles from the little station, and Styles Court lay a mile the other side of it. It was still, warm day in early July. As one looked out over the flat Essex country, lying so green and peaceful under the afternoon sun, it seemed almost impossible to believe that, not so very far away, a great war was running its appointed course. I felt I had suddenly strayed into another world. As we turned in at the lodge gates, John said:

"I'm afraid you'll find it very quiet down here, Hastings."

"My dear fellow, that's just what I want."

"Oh, it's pleasant enough if you want to lead the idle life. I drill with the volunteers twice a week, and lend a hand at the farms. My wife works regularly 'on the land'. She is up at five every morning to milk, and keeps at it steadily until lunchtime. It's a jolly good life taking it all round--if it weren't for that fellow Alfred Inglethorp!" He checked the car suddenly, and glanced at his watch. "I wonder if we've time to pick up Cynthia. No, she'll have started from the hospital by now."

"Cynthia! That's not your wife?"

"No, Cynthia is a protegee of my mother's, the daughter of an old schoolfellow of hers, who married a rascally solicitor. He came a cropper, and the girl was left an orphan and penniless. My mother came to the rescue, and Cynthia has been with us nearly two years now. She works in the Red Cross Hospital at Tadminster, seven miles away."

As he spoke the last words, we drew up in front of the fine old house. A lady in a stout tweed skirt, who was bending over a flower bed, straightened herself at our approach.

"Hullo, Evie, here's our wounded hero! Mr. Hastings--Miss Howard."

Miss Howard shook hands with a hearty, almost painful, grip. I had an impression of very blue eyes in a sunburnt face. She was a pleasant-looking woman of about forty, with a deep voice, almost manly in its stentorian tones, and had a large sensible square body, with feet to match--these last encased in good thick boots. Her conversation, I soon found, was couched in the telegraphic style.


"I'm sure I shall be only too delighted to make myself useful," I responded.

"Don't say it. Never does. Wish you hadn't later."

"You're a cynic, Evie," said John, laughing. "Where's tea to-day--inside or out?"

"Out. Too fine a day to be cooped up in the house."

"Come on then, you've done enough gardening for to-day. 'The labourer is worthy of his hire', you know. Come and be refreshed."

"Well," said Miss Howard, drawing off her gardening gloves, "I'm inclined to agree with you."

She led the way round the house to where tea was spread under the shade of a large sycamore.

A figure rose from one of the basket chairs, and came a few steps to meet us.

"My wife, Hastings," said John.

I shall never forget my first sight of Mary Cavendish. Her tall, slender form, outlined against the bright light; the vivid sense of slumbering fire that seemed to find expression only in those wonderful tawny eyes of hers, remarkable eyes, different from any other woman's that I have ever known; the intense power of stillness she possessed, which nevertheless conveyed the impression of a wild untamed spirit in an exquisitely civilised body--all these things are burnt into my memory. I shall never forget them.

She greeted me with a few words of pleasant welcome in a low clear voice, and I sank into a basket chair feeling distinctly glad that I had accepted John's invitation. Mrs. Cavendish gave me some tea, and her few quiet remarks heightened my first impression of her as a thoroughly fascinating woman. An appreciative listener is always stimulating, and I described, in a humorous manner, certain incidents of my Convalescent Home, in a way which, I flatter myself, greatly amused my hostess. John, of course, good fellow though he is, could hardly be called a brilliant conversationalist.

At that moment a well remembered voice floated through the open French window near at hand:

"Then you'll write to the Princess after tea, Alfred? I'll write to Lady Tadminster for the second day, myself. Or shall we wait until we hear from the Princess? In case of a refusal, Lady Tadminster might open it the first day, and Mrs. Crosbie the second. Then there's the Duchess--about the school fete."

There was the murmur of a man's voice, and then Mrs. Inglethorp's rose in reply:
"Yes, certainly. After tea will do quite well. You are so thoughtful, Alfred dear."

The French window swung open a little wider, and a handsome white-haired old lady, with a somewhat masterful cast of features, stepped out of it on to the lawn. A man followed her, a suggestion of deference in his manner.

Mrs. Inglethorp greeted me with effusion.
"Why, if it isn't too delightful to see you again, Mr. Hastings, after all these years. Alfred, darling, Mr. Hastings-my husband."

I looked with some curiosity at "Alfred darling". He certainly struck a rather alien note. I did not wonder at John objecting to his beard. It was one of the longest and blackest I have ever seen. He wore gold-rimmed pince-nez, and had a curious impassivity of feature. It struck me that he might look natural on a stage, but was strangely out of place in real life. His voice was rather deep and unctuous. He placed a wooden hand in mine and said:
"This is a pleasure, Mr. Hastings." Then, turning to his wife: "Emily dearest, I think that cushion is a little damp."

She beamed fondly on him, as he substituted another with every demonstration of the tenderest care. Strange infatuation of an otherwise sensible woman!

With the presence of Mr. Inglethorp, a sense of constraint and veiled hostility seemed to settle down upon the company. Miss Howard, in particular, took no pains to conceal her feelings. Mrs. Inglethorp, however, seemed to notice nothing unusual. Her volubility, which I remembered of old, had lost nothing in the intervening years, and she poured out a steady flood of conversation, mainly on the subject of the forthcoming bazaar which she was organizing and which was to take place shortly. Occasionally she referred to her husband over a question of days or dates. His watchful and attentive manner never varied. From the very first I took a firm and rooted dislike to him, and I flatter myself that my first judgments are usually fairly shrewd.

Presently Mrs. Inglethorp turned to give some instructions about letters to Evelyn Howard, and her husband addressed me in his painstaking voice:
"Is soldiering your regular profession, Mr. Hastings?"
"No, before the war I was in Lloyd's."
"And you will return there after it is over?"
"Perhaps. Either that or a fresh start altogether."

Mary Cavendish leant forward.
"What would you really choose as a profession, if you could just consult your inclination?"
"Well, that depends."
"No secret hobby?" she asked. "Tell me--you're drawn to something? Every one is--usually something absurd."
"You'll laugh at me."

She smiled.
"Perhaps."
"Well, I've always had a secret hankering to be a detective!"
"The real thing--Scotland Yard? Or Sherlock Holmes?"
"Oh, Sherlock Holmes by all means. But really, seriously, I am awfully drawn to it. I came across a man in Belgium once, a very famous detective, and he quite inflamed me. He was a marvellous little fellow. He used to say that all good detective work was a mere matter of method. My system is based on his--though of course I have progressed rather further. He was a funny little man, a great dandy, but wonderfully clever."
"Like a good detective story myself," remarked Miss Howard. "Lots of nonsense written, though. Criminal discovered in last chapter. Every one dumbfounded. Real crime--you'd know at once."
"There have been a great number of undiscovered crimes," I argued.
"Don't mean the police, but the people that are right in it. The family. You couldn't really hoodwink them. They'd know."
"Then," I said, much amused, "you think that if you were mixed up in a crime, say a murder, you'd be able to spot the murderer right off?"
"Of course I should. Mightn't be able to prove it to a pack of lawyers. But I'm certain I'd know. I'd feel it in my fingertips if he came near me."
"It might be a 'she,' " I suggested.
"Might. But murder's a violent crime. Associate it more with a man."
"Not in a case of poisoning." Mrs. Cavendish's clear voice startled me. "Dr. Bauerstein was saying yesterday that, owing to the general ignorance of the more uncommon poisons among the medical profession, there were probably countless cases of poisoning quite unsuspected."
"Why, Mary, what a gruesome conversation!" cried Mrs. Inglethorp. "It makes me feel as if a goose were
walking over my grave. Oh, there's Cynthia!"

A young girl in V. A. D. uniform ran lightly across the lawn.

"Why, Cynthia, you are late to-day. This is Mr. Hastings--Miss Murdoch."

Cynthia Murdoch was a fresh-looking young creature, full of life and vigour. She tossed off her little V. A. D. cap, and I admired the great loose waves of her auburn hair, and the smallness and whiteness of the hand she held out to claim her tea. With dark eyes and eyelashes she would have been a beauty.

She flung herself down on the ground beside John, and as I handed her a plate of sandwiches she smiled up at me.

"Sit down here on the grass, do. It's ever so much nicer."

I dropped down obediently.

"You work at Tadminster, don't you, Miss Murdoch?"

She nodded.

"For my sins."

"Do they bully you, then?" I asked, smiling.

"I should like to see them!" cried Cynthia with dignity.

"I have got a cousin who is nursing," I remarked. "And she is terrified of 'Sisters'."

"I don't wonder. Sisters _are_ you know, Mr. Hastings. They simp--ly _are_! You've no idea! But I'm not a nurse, thank heaven, I work in the dispensary."

"How many people do you poison?" I asked, smiling.

Cynthia smiled too.

"Oh, hundreds!" she said.

"Cynthia," called Mrs. Inglethorp, "do you think you could write a few notes for me?"

"Certainly, Aunt Emily."

She jumped up promptly, and something in her manner reminded me that her position was a dependent one, and that Mrs. Inglethorp, kind as she might be in the main, did not allow her to forget it.

My hostess turned to me.

"John will show you your room. Supper is at half-past seven. We have given up late dinner for some time now. Lady Tadminster, our Member's wife--she was the late Lord Abbotsbury's daughter--does the same. She agrees with me that one must set an example of economy. We are quite a war household; nothing is wasted here--every scrap of waste paper, even, is saved and sent away in sacks."

I expressed my appreciation, and John took me into the house and up the broad staircase, which forked right and left half-way to different wings of the building. My room was in the left wing, and looked out over the park.

John left me, and a few minutes later I saw him from my window walking slowly across the grass arm in arm with Cynthia Murdoch. I heard Mrs. Inglethorp call "Cynthia" impatiently, and the girl started and ran back to the house. At the same moment, a man stepped out from the shadow of a tree and walked slowly in the same direction.

He looked about forty, very dark with a melancholy clean-shaven face. Some violent emotion seemed to be mastering him. He looked up at my window as he passed, and I recognized him, though he had changed much in the fifteen years that had elapsed since we last met. It was John's younger brother, Lawrence Cavendish. I wondered what it was that had brought that singular expression to his face.

Then I dismissed him from my mind, and returned to the contemplation of my own affairs.

The evening passed pleasantly enough; and I dreamed that night of that enigmatical woman, Mary Cavendish.
only sunk in a bit. Probably water off a duck’s back, though. I said right out: ‘You’re an old woman, Emily, and
there’s no fool like an old fool. The man’s twenty years younger than you, and don’t you fool yourself as to what he
married you for. Money! Well, don’t let him have too much of it. Farmer Raikes has got a very pretty young wife.
Just ask your Alfred how much time he spends over there.’ She was very angry. Natural! I went on, ‘I’m going to
warn you, whether you like it or not. That man would as soon murder you in your bed as look at you. He’s a bad lot.
You can say what you like to me, but remember what I’ve told you. He’s a bad lot!’"

"What did she say?"

Miss Howard made an extremely expressive grimace.

" ‘Darling Alfred’—‘dearest Alfred’—’wicked calumnies’ —’wicked lies’—‘wicked woman’—to accuse her ‘dear
husband’! The sooner I left her house the better. So I’m off."

"But not now?"

"This minute!"

For a moment we sat and stared at her. Finally John Cavendish, finding his persuasions of no avail, went off to
look up the trains. His wife followed him, murmuring something about persuading Mrs. Inglethorp to think better of
it.

As she left the room, Miss Howard’s face changed. She leant towards me eagerly.

"Mr. Hastings, you’re honest. I can trust you?"

I was a little startled. She laid her hand on my arm, and sank her voice to a whisper.

"Look after her, Mr. Hastings. My poor Emily. They’re a lot of sharks—all of them. Oh, I know what I’m talking
about. There isn’t one of them that’s not hard up and trying to get money out of her. I’ve protected her as much as I
could. Now I’m out of the way, they’ll impose upon her."

"Of course, Miss Howard,” I said, "I’ll do everything I can, but I’m sure you’re excited and overwrought."
She interrupted me by slowly shaking her forefinger.

"Young man, trust me. I’ve lived in the world rather longer than you have. All I ask you is to keep your eyes
open. You’ll see what I mean."

The throb of the motor came through the open window, and Miss Howard rose and moved to the door. John’s
voice sounded outside. With her hand on the handle, she turned her head over her shoulder, and beckoned to me.

"Above all, Mr. Hastings, watch that devil—her husband!"

There was no time for more. Miss Howard was swallowed up in an eager chorus of protests and good-byes. The
Inglethorps did not appear.

As the motor drove away, Mrs. Cavendish suddenly detached herself from the group, and moved across the drive
to the lawn to meet a tall bearded man who had been evidently making for the house. The colour rose in her cheeks
as she held out her hand to him.

"Who is that?” I asked sharply, for instinctively I distrusted the man.

"That’s Dr. Bauerstein," said John shortly.

"And who is Dr. Bauerstein?"

"He’s staying in the village doing a rest cure, after a bad nervous breakdown. He’s a London specialist; a very
clever man—one of the greatest living experts on poisons, I believe."

"And he’s a great friend of Mary’s,” put in Cynthia, the irrepressible.
John Cavendish frowned and changed the subject.

"Come for a stroll, Hastings. This has been a most rotten business. She always had a rough tongue, but there is
no stauncher friend in England than Evelyn Howard."

He took the path through the plantation, and we walked down to the village through the woods which bordered
one side of the estate.

As we passed through one of the gates on our way home again, a pretty young woman of gipsy type coming in
the opposite direction bowed and smiled.

"That’s a pretty girl,” I remarked appreciatively.
John’s face hardened.

"That is Mrs. Raikes."

"The one that Miss Howard----"

"Exactly,” said John, with rather unnecessary abruptness.
I thought of the white-haired old lady in the big house, and that vivid wicked little face that had just smiled into
ours, and a vague chill of foreboding crept over me. I brushed it aside.

"Styles is really a glorious old place,” I said to John.
He nodded rather gloomily.

"Yes, it’s a fine property. It’ll be mine some day—should be mine now by rights, if my father had only made a
decent will. And then I shouldn't be so damned hard up as I am now."
"Hard up, are you?"
"My dear Hastings, I don't mind telling you that I'm at my wit's end for money."
"Couldn't your brother help you?"
"Lawrence? He's gone through every penny he ever had, publishing rotten verses in fancy bindings. No, we're an
impecunious lot. My mother's always been awfully good to us, I must say. That is, up to now. Since her marriage, of
course-----" he broke off, frowning.

For the first time I felt that, with Evelyn Howard, something indefinable had gone from the atmosphere. Her
presence had spelt security. Now that security was removed--and the air seemed rife with suspicion. The sinister
face of Dr. Bauerstein recurred to me unpleasantly. A vague suspicion of every one and everything filled my mind.
Just for a moment I had a premonition of approaching evil.

CHAPTER II.
THE 16TH AND 17TH OF JULY

I had arrived at Styles on the 5th of July. I come now to the events of the 16th and 17th of that month. For the
convenience of the reader I will recapitulate the incidents of those days in as exact a manner as possible. They were
elicited subsequently at the trial by a process of long and tedious cross-examinations.

I received a letter from Evelyn Howard a couple of days after her departure, telling me she was working as a
nurse at the big hospital in Middlingham, a manufacturing town some fifteen miles away, and begging me to let her
know if Mrs. Inglethorp should show any wish to be reconciled.

The only fly in the ointment of my peaceful days was Mrs. Cavendish's extraordinary, and, for my part,
unaccountable preference for the society of Dr. Bauerstein. What she saw in the man I cannot imagine, but she was
always asking him up to the house, and often went off for long expeditions with him. I must confess that I was quite
unable to see his attraction.

The 16th of July fell on a Monday. It was a day of turmoil. The famous bazaar had taken place on Saturday, and
an entertainment, in connection with the same charity, at which Mrs. Inglethorp was to recite a War poem, was to be
held that night. We were all busy during the morning arranging and decorating the Hall in the village where it was to
take place. We had a late luncheon and spent the afternoon resting in the garden. I noticed that John's manner was
somewhat unusual. He seemed very excited and restless.

After tea, Mrs. Inglethorp went to lie down to rest before her efforts in the evening and I challenged Mary
Cavendish to a single at tennis.

About a quarter to seven, Mrs. Inglethorp called us that we should be late as supper was early that night. We had
rather a scramble to get ready in time; and before the meal was over the motor was waiting at the door.

The entertainment was a great success, Mrs. Inglethorp's recitation receiving tremendous applause. There were
also some tableaux in which Cynthia took part. She did not return with us, having been asked to a supper party, and
to remain the night with some friends who had been acting with her in the tableaux.

The following morning, Mrs. Inglethorp stayed in bed to breakfast, as she was rather overtired; but she appeared
in her briskest mood about 12.30, and swept Lawrence and myself off to a luncheon party.

"Such a charming invitation from Mrs. Rolleston. Lady Tadminster's sister, you know. The Rollestons came over
with the Conqueror--one of our oldest families."

Mary had excused herself on the plea of an engagement with Dr. Bauerstein.

We had a pleasant luncheon, and as we drove away Lawrence suggested that we should return by Tadminster,
which was barely a mile out of our way, and pay a visit to Cynthia in her dispensary. Mrs. Inglethorp replied that
this was an excellent idea, but as she had several letters to write she would drop us there, and we could come back
with Cynthia in the pony-trap.

We were detained under suspicion by the hospital porter, until Cynthia appeared to vouch for us, looking very
cool and sweet in her long white overall. She took us up to her sanctum, and introduced us to her fellow dispenser, a
rather awe-inspiring individual, whom Cynthia cheerily addressed as "Nibs."

"What a lot of bottles!" I exclaimed, as my eye travelled round the small room. "Do you really know what's in
them all?"

"Say something original," groaned Cynthia. "Every single person who comes up here says that. We are really
thinking of bestowing a prize on the first individual who does _not_ say: 'What a lot of bottles!' And I know the next
thing you're going to say is: 'How many people have you poisoned?' "

I pleaded guilty with a laugh.

"If you people only knew how fatally easy it is to poison some one by mistake, you wouldn't joke about it. Come
on, let's have tea. We've got all sorts of secret stories in that cupboard. No, Lawrence--that's the poison cupboard.
The big cupboard--that's right."
We had a very cheery tea, and assisted Cynthia to wash up afterwards. We had just put away the last tea-spoon when a knock came at the door. The countenances of Cynthia and Nibs were suddenly petrified into a stern and forbidding expression.

"Come in," said Cynthia, in a sharp professional tone.
A young and rather scared looking nurse appeared with a bottle which she proffered to Nibs, who waved her towards Cynthia with the somewhat enigmatical remark:
"_I_'m not really here to-day."
Cynthia took the bottle and examined it with the severity of a judge.
"This should have been sent up this morning."
"Sister is very sorry. She forgot."
"Sister should read the rules outside the door."
I gathered from the little nurse's expression that there was not the least likelihood of her having the hardihood to retail this message to the dreaded "Sister".
"So now it can't be done until to-morrow," finished Cynthia.
"Don't you think you could possibly let us have it to-night?"
"Well," said Cynthia graciously, "we are very busy, but if we have time it shall be done."
The little nurse withdrew, and Cynthia promptly took a jar from the shelf, refilled the bottle, and placed it on the table outside the door.
I laughed.
"Discipline must be maintained?"
"Exactly. Come out on our little balcony. You can see all the outside wards there."
I followed Cynthia and her friend and they pointed out the different wards to me. Lawrence remained behind, but after a few moments Cynthia called to him over her shoulder to come and join us. Then she looked at her watch.
"Nothing more to do, Nibs?"
"No."
"All right. Then we can lock up and go."
I had seen Lawrence in quite a different light that afternoon. Compared to John, he was an astoundingly difficult person to get to know. He was the opposite of his brother in almost every respect, being unusually shy and reserved. Yet he had a certain charm of manner, and I fancied that, if one really knew him well, one could have a deep affection for him. I had always fancied that his manner to Cynthia was rather constrained, and that she on her side was inclined to be shy of him. But they were both gay enough this afternoon, and chatted together like a couple of children.

As we drove through the village, I remembered that I wanted some stamps, so accordingly we pulled up at the post office.
As I came out again, I cannoned into a little man who was just entering. I drew aside and apologised, when suddenly, with a loud exclamation, he clasped me in his arms and kissed me warmly.
"Mon ami Hastings!" he cried. "It is indeed mon ami Hastings!"
"Poirot!" I exclaimed.
I turned to the pony-trap.
"This is a very pleasant meeting for me, Miss Cynthia. This is my old friend, Monsieur Poirot, whom I have not seen for years."
"Oh, we know Monsieur Poirot," said Cynthia gaily. "But I had no idea he was a friend of yours."
"Yes, indeed," said Poirot seriously. "I know Mademoiselle Cynthia. It is by the charity of that good Mrs. Inglethorp that I am here."
Then, as I looked at him inquiringly: "Yes, my friend, she had kindly extended hospitality to seven of my countrypeople who, alas, are refugees from their native land. We Belgians will always remember her with gratitude."

Poirot was an extraordinary looking little man. He was hardly more than five feet, four inches, but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side. His moustache was very stiff and military. The neatness of his attire was almost incredible. I believe a speck of dust would have caused him more pain than a bullet wound. Yet this quaint dandyfied little man who, I was sorry to see, now limped badly, had been in his time one of the most celebrated members of the Belgian police. As a detective, his flair had been extraordinary, and he had achieved triumphs by unravelling some of the most baffling cases of the day.

He pointed out to me the little house inhabited by him and his fellow Belgians, and I promised to go and see him at an early date. Then he raised his hat with a flourish to Cynthia, and we drove away.
"He's a dear little man," said Cynthia. "I'd no idea you knew him."
"You've been entertaining a celebrity unawares," I replied.
And, for the rest of the way home, I recited to them the various exploits and triumphs of Hercule Poirot.
We arrived back in a very cheerful mood. As we entered the hall, Mrs. Inglethorp came out of her boudoir. She
looked flushed and upset.
"Oh, it's you," she said.
"Is there anything the matter, Aunt Emily?" asked Cynthia.
"Certainly not," said Mrs. Inglethorp sharply. "What should there be?" Then catching sight of Dorcas, the
parlourmaid, going into the dining-room, she called to her to bring some stamps into the boudoir.
"Yes, m'm." The old servant hesitated, then added diffidently: "Don't you think, m'm, you'd better get to bed?
You're looking very tired."
"Perhaps you're right, Dorcas--yes--no--not now. I've some letters I must finish by post-time. Have you lighted
the fire in my room as I told you?"
"Yes, m'm."
"Then I'll go to bed directly after supper."
She went into the boudoir again, and Cynthia stared after her.
"Goodness gracious! I wonder what's up?" she said to Lawrence.
He did not seem to have heard her, for without a word he turned on his heel and went out of the house.
I suggested a quick game of tennis before supper and, Cynthia agreeing, I ran upstairs to fetch my racquet.
Mrs. Cavendish was coming down the stairs. It may have been my fancy, but she, too, was looking odd and
disturbed.
"Had a good walk with Dr. Bauerstein?" I asked, trying to appear as indifferent as I could.
"I didn't go," she replied abruptly. "Where is Mrs. Inglethorp?"
"In the boudoir."
Her hand clenched itself on the banisters, then she seemed to nerve herself for some encounter, and went rapidly
past me down the stairs across the hall to the boudoir, the door of which she shut behind her.
As I ran out to the tennis court a few moments later, I had to pass the open boudoir window, and was unable to
help overhearing the following scrap of dialogue. Mary Cavendish was saying in the voice of a woman desperately
controlling herself:
"Then you won't show it to me?"
To which Mrs. Inglethorp replied:
"My dear Mary, it has nothing to do with that matter."
"Then show it to me."
"I tell you it is not what you imagine. It does not concern you in the least."
To which Mary Cavendish replied, with a rising bitterness:
"Of course, I might have known you would shield him."
Cynthia was waiting for me, and greeted me eagerly with:
"I say! There's been the most awful row! I've got it all out of Dorcas."
"What kind of a row?"
"Between Aunt Emily and _him_. I do hope she's found him out at last!"
"Was Dorcas there, then?"
"Of course not. She 'happened to be near the door'. It was a real old bust-up. I do wish I knew what it was all
about."
I thought of Mrs. Raikes's gipsy face, and Evelyn Howard's warnings, but wisely decided to hold my peace,
whilst Cynthia exhausted every possible hypothesis, and cheerfully hoped, "Aunt Emily will send him away, and
will never speak to him again."
I was anxious to get hold of John, but he was nowhere to be seen. Evidently something very momentous had
occurred that afternoon. I tried to forget the few words I had overheard; but, do what I would, I could not dismiss
them altogether from my mind. What was Mary Cavendish's concern in the matter?
Mr. Inglethorp was in the drawing-room when I came down to supper. His face was impassive as ever, and the
strange unreality of the man struck me afresh.
Mrs. Inglethorp came down last. She still looked agitated, and during the meal there was a somewhat constrained
silence. Inglethorp was unusually quiet. As a rule, he surrounded his wife with little attentions, placing a cushion at
her back, and altogether playing the part of the devoted husband. Immediately after supper, Mrs. Inglethorp retired
to her boudoir again.
"Send my coffee in here, Mary," she called. "I've just five minutes to catch the post."
Cynthia and I went and sat by the open window in the drawing-room. Mary Cavendish brought our coffee to us.
She seemed excited.

"Do you young people want lights, or do you enjoy the twilight?" she asked. "Will you take Mrs. Inglethorp her coffee, Cynthia? I will pour it out."

"Do not trouble, Mary," said Inglethorp. "I will take it to Emily." He poured it out, and went out of the room carrying it carefully.

Lawrence followed him, and Mrs. Cavendish sat down by us.

We three sat for some time in silence. It was a glorious night, hot and still. Mrs. Cavendish fanned herself gently with a palm leaf.

"It's almost too hot," she murmured. "We shall have a thunderstorm."

Alas, that these harmonious moments can never endure! My paradise was rudely shattered by the sound of a well known, and heartily disliked, voice in the hall.

"Dr. Bauerstein!" exclaimed Cynthia. "What a funny time to come."

I glanced jealously at Mary Cavendish, but she seemed quite undisturbed, the delicate pallor of her cheeks did not vary.

In a few moments, Alfred Inglethorp had ushered the doctor in, the latter laughing, and protesting that he was in no fit state for a drawing-room. In truth, he presented a sorry spectacle, being literally plastered with mud.

"What have you been doing, doctor?" cried Mrs. Cavendish.

"I must make my apologies," said the doctor. "I did not really mean to come in, but Mr. Inglethorp insisted."

"Well, Bauerstein, you are in a plight," said John, strolling in from the hall. "Have some coffee, and tell us what you have been up to."

"Thank you, I will." He laughed rather ruefully, as he described how he had discovered a very rare species of fern in an inaccessible place, and in his efforts to obtain it had lost his footing, and slipped ignominiously into a neighbouring pond.

"The sun soon dried me off," he added, "but I'm afraid my appearance is very disreputable."

At this juncture, Mrs. Inglethorp called to Cynthia from the hall, and the girl ran out.

"Just carry up my despatch-case, will you, dear? I'm going to bed."

The door into the hall was a wide one. I had risen when Cynthia did, John was close by me. There were therefore three witnesses who could swear that Mrs. Inglethorp was carrying her coffee, as yet untasted, in her hand.

My evening was utterly and entirely spoilt by the presence of Dr. Bauerstein. It seemed to me the man would never go. He rose at last, however, and I breathed a sigh of relief.

"I'll walk down to the village with you," said Mr. Inglethorp. "I must see our agent over those estate accounts."

He turned to John. "No one need sit up. I will take the latch-key."

CHAPTER III.

THE NIGHT OF THE TRAGEDY

To make this part of my story clear, I append the following plan of the first floor of Styles. The servants' rooms are reached through the door B. They have no communication with the right wing, where the Inglethorps' rooms were situated.

It seemed to be the middle of the night when I was awakened by Lawrence Cavendish. He had a candle in his hand, and the agitation of his face told me at once that something was seriously wrong.

"What's the matter?" I asked, sitting up in bed, and trying to collect my scattered thoughts.

"We are afraid my mother is very ill. She seems to be having some kind of fit. Unfortunately she has locked herself in."

"I'll come at once."

I sprang out of bed; and, pulling on a dressing-gown, followed Lawrence along the passage and the gallery to the right wing of the house.

John Cavendish joined us, and one or two of the servants were standing round in a state of awe-stricken excitement. Lawrence turned to his brother.

"What do you think we had better do?"

Never, I thought, had his indecision of character been more apparent.

John rattled the handle of Mrs. Inglethorp's door violently, but with no effect. It was obviously locked or bolted on the inside. The whole household was aroused by now. The most alarming sounds were audible from the interior of the room. Clearly something must be done.

"Try going through Mr. Inglethorp's room, sir," cried Dorcas. "Oh, the poor mistress!"

Suddenly I realized that Alfred Inglethorp was not with us--that he alone had given no sign of his presence. John opened the door of his room. It was pitch dark, but Lawrence was following with the candle, and by its feeble light we saw that the bed had not been slept in, and that there was no sign of the room having been occupied.
We went straight to the connecting door. That, too, was locked or bolted on the inside. What was to be done?

"Oh, dear, sir," cried Dorcas, wringing her hands, "what ever shall we do?"

"We must try and break the door in, I suppose. It'll be a tough job, though. Here, let one of the maids go down and wake Baily and tell him to go for Dr. Wilkins at once. Now then, we'll have a try at the door. Half a moment, though, isn't there a door into Miss Cynthia's rooms?"

"Yes, sir, but that's always bolted. It's never been undone."

"Well, we might just see."

He ran rapidly down the corridor to Cynthia's room. Mary Cavendish was there, shaking the girl--who must have been an unusually sound sleeper--and trying to wake her.

In a moment or two he was back.

"No good. That's bolted too. We must break in the door. I think this one is a shade less solid than the one in the passage."

We strained and heaved together. The framework of the door was solid, and for a long time it resisted our efforts, but at last we felt it give beneath our weight, and finally, with a resounding crash, it was burst open.

We stumbled in together, Lawrence still holding his candle. Mrs. Inglethorp was lying on the bed, her whole form agitated by violent convulsions, in one of which she must have overturned the table beside her. As we entered, however, her limbs relaxed, and she fell back upon the pillows.

John strode across the room, and lit the gas. Turning to Annie, one of the housemaids, he sent her downstairs to the dining-room for brandy. Then he went across to his mother whilst I unbolted the door that gave on the corridor.

I turned to Lawrence, to suggest that I had better leave them now that there was no further need of my services, but the words were frozen on my lips. Never have I seen such a ghastly look on any man's face. He was white as chalk, the candle he held in his shaking hand was sputtering onto the carpet, and his eyes, petrified with terror, or some such kindred emotion, stared fixedly over my head at a point on the further wall. It was as though he had seen something that turned him to stone. I instinctively followed the direction of his eyes, but I could see nothing unusual. The still feebly flickering ashes in the grate, and the row of prim ornaments on the mantelpiece, were surely harmless enough.

The violence of Mrs. Inglethorp's attack seemed to be passing. She was able to speak in short gasps.

"Better now--very sudden--stupid of me--to lock myself in."

A shadow fell on the bed and, looking up, I saw Mary Cavendish standing near the door with her arm around Cynthia. She seemed to be supporting the girl, who looked utterly dazed and unlike herself. Her face was heavily flushed, and she yawned repeatedly.

"Poor Cynthia is quite frightened," said Mrs. Cavendish in a low clear voice. She herself, I noticed, was dressed in her white land smock. Then it must be later than I thought. I saw that a faint streak of daylight was showing through the curtains of the windows, and that the clock on the mantelpiece pointed to close upon five o'clock.

A strangled cry from the bed startled me. A fresh access of pain seized the unfortunate old lady. The convulsions were of a violence terrible to behold. Everything was confusion. We thronged round her, powerless to help or alleviate. A final convulsion lifted her from the bed, until she appeared to rest upon her head and her heels, with her body arched in an extraordinary manner. In vain Mary and John tried to administer more brandy. The moments flew. Again the body arched itself in that peculiar fashion.

At that moment, Dr. Bauerstein pushed his way authoritatively into the room. For one instant he stopped dead, staring at the figure on the bed, and, at the same instant, Mrs. Inglethorp cried out in a strangled voice, her eyes fixed on the doctor:

"Alfred--Alfred----" Then she fell back motionless on the pillows.

With a stride, the doctor reached the bed, and seizing her arms worked them energetically, applying what I knew to be artificial respiration. He issued a few short sharp orders to the servants. An imperious wave of his hand drove us all to the door. We watched him, fascinated, though I think we all knew in our hearts that it was too late, and that nothing could be done now. I could see by the expression on his face that he himself had little hope.

Finally he abandoned his task, shaking his head gravely. At that moment, we heard footsteps outside, and Dr. Wilkins, Mrs. Inglethorp's own doctor, a portly, fussy little man, came bustling in.

In a few words Dr. Bauerstein explained how he had happened to be passing the lodge gates as the car came out, and had run up to the house, whilst the car went on to fetch Dr. Wilkins. With a faint gesture of the hand, he indicated the figure on the bed.

"Ve--ry sad. Ve--ry sad," murmured Dr. Wilkins. "Poor dear lady. Always did far too much--far too much--against my advice. I warned her. Her heart was far from strong. 'Take it easy,' I said to her. 'Take it--easy'. But no--her zeal for good works was too great. Nature rebelled. Na--ture--re--belled."

Dr. Bauerstein, I noticed, was watching the local doctor narrowly. He still kept his eyes fixed on him as he
"The convulsions were of a peculiar violence, Dr. Wilkins. I am sorry you were not here in time to witness them. They were quite--tetanic in character."

"Ah!" said Dr. Wilkins wisely.

"I should like to speak to you in private," said Dr. Bauerstein. He turned to John. "You do not object?"

"Certainly not."

We all trooped out into the corridor, leaving the two doctors alone, and I heard the key turned in the lock behind us.

We went slowly down the stairs. I was violently excited. I have a certain talent for deduction, and Dr. Bauerstein's manner had started a flock of wild surmises in my mind. Mary Cavendish laid her hand upon my arm.

"What is it? Why did Dr. Bauerstein seem so--peculiar?"

I looked at her.

"Do you know what I think?"

"What?"

"Listen!" I looked round, the others were out of earshot. I lowered my voice to a whisper. "I believe she has been poisoned! I'm certain Dr. Bauerstein suspects it."

"_What_?" She shrank against the wall, the pupils of her eyes dilating wildly. Then, with a sudden cry that startled me, she cried out: "No, no--not that--not that!" And breaking from me, fled up the stairs. I followed her, afraid that she was going to faint. I found her leaning against the bannisters, deadly pale. She waved me away impatiently.

"No, no--leave me. I'd rather be alone. Let me just be quiet for a minute or two. Go down to the others."

I obeyed her reluctantly. John and Lawrence were in the dining-room. I joined them. We were all silent, but I suppose I voiced the thoughts of us all when I at last broke it by saying:

"Where is Mr. Inglethorp?"

John shook his head.

"He's not in the house."

Our eyes met. Where _was_ Alfred Inglethorp? His absence was strange and inexplicable. I remembered Mrs. Inglethorp's dying words. What lay beneath them? What more could she have told us, if she had had time?

At last we heard the doctors descending the stairs. Dr. Wilkins was looking important and excited, and trying to conceal an inward exultation under a manner of decorous calm. Dr. Bauerstein remained in the background, his grave bearded face unchanged. Dr. Wilkins was the spokesman for the two. He addressed himself to John:

"Mr. Cavendish, I should like your consent to a postmortem."

"Is that necessary?" asked John gravely. A spasm of pain crossed his face.

"Absolutely," said Dr. Bauerstein.

"You mean by that----?"

"That neither Dr. Wilkins nor myself could give a death certificate under the circumstances."

John bent his head.

"In that case, I have no alternative but to agree."

"Thank you," said Dr. Wilkins briskly. "We propose that it should take place to-morrow night--or rather to-night. And he glanced at the daylight. "Under the circumstances, I am afraid an inquest can hardly be avoided--these formalities are necessary, but I beg that you won't distress yourselves."

There was a pause, and then Dr. Bauerstein drew two keys from his pocket, and handed them to John.

"These are the keys of the two rooms. I have locked them and, in my opinion, they would be better kept locked for the present."

The doctors then departed.

I had been turning over an idea in my head, and I felt that the moment had now come to broach it. Yet I was a little chary of doing so. John, I knew, had a horror of any kind of publicity, and was an easygoing optimist, who preferred never to meet trouble half-way. It might be difficult to convince him of the soundness of my plan. Lawrence, on the other hand, being less conventional, and having more imagination, I felt I might count upon as an ally. There was no doubt that the moment had come for me to take the lead.

"John," I said, "I am going to ask you something."

"Well?"

"You remember my speaking of my friend Poirot? The Belgian who is here? He has been a most famous detective."

"Yes."

"I want you to let me call him in--to investigate this matter."
"What--now? Before the post-mortem?"
"Yes, time is an advantage if--if--there has been foul play."
"Rubbish!" cried Lawrence angrily. "In my opinion the whole thing is a mare's nest of Bauerstein's! Wilkins hadn't an idea of such a thing, until Bauerstein put it into his head. But, like all specialists, Bauerstein's got a bee in his bonnet. Poisons are his hobby, so of course he sees them everywhere."
I confess that I was surprised by Lawrence's attitude. He was so seldom vehement about anything.
John hesitated.
"I can't feel as you do, Lawrence," he said at last. "I'm inclined to give Hastings a free hand, though I should prefer to wait a bit. We don't want any unnecessary scandal."
"No, no," I cried eagerly, "you need have no fear of that. Poirot is discretion itself."
"Very well, then, have it your own way. I leave it in your hands. Though, if it is as we suspect, it seems a clear enough case. God forgive me if I am wronging him!"
I looked at my watch. It was six o'clock. I determined to lose no time.
Five minutes' delay, however, I allowed myself. I spent it in ransacking the library until I discovered a medical book which gave a description of strychnine poisoning.

CHAPTER IV.
POIROT INVESTIGATES
The house which the Belgians occupied in the village was quite close to the park gates. One could save time by taking a narrow path through the long grass, which cut off the detours of the winding drive. So I, accordingly, went that way. I had nearly reached the lodge, when my attention was arrested by the running figure of a man approaching me. It was Mr. Inglethorp. Where had he been? How did he intend to explain his absence?
He accosted me eagerly.
"My God! This is terrible! My poor wife! I have only just heard."
"Where have you been?" I asked.
"Denby kept me late last night. It was one o'clock before we'd finished. Then I found that I'd forgotten the latch-key after all. I didn't want to arouse the household, so Denby gave me a bed."
"How did you hear the news?" I asked.
"Wilkins knocked Denby up to tell him. My poor Emily! She was so self-sacrificing--such a noble character. She over-taxed her strength."
A wave of revulsion swept over me. What a consummate hypocrite the man was!
"I must hurry on," I said, thankful that he did not ask me whither I was bound.
In a few minutes I was knocking at the door of Leastways Cottage.
Getting no answer, I repeated my summons impatiently. A window above me was cautiously opened, and Poirot himself looked out.
He gave an exclamation of surprise at seeing me. In a few brief words, I explained the tragedy that had occurred, and that I wanted his help.
"Wait, my friend, I will let you in, and you shall recount to me the affair whilst I dress."
In a few moments he had unbarred the door, and I followed him up to his room. There he installed me in a chair, and I related the whole story, keeping back nothing, and omitting no circumstance, however insignificant, whilst he himself made a careful and deliberate toilet.
I told him of my awakening, of Mrs. Inglethorp's dying words, of her husband's absence, of the quarrel the day before, of the scrap of conversation between Mary and her mother-in-law that I had overheard, of the former quarrel between Mrs. Inglethorp and Evelyn Howard, and of the latter's innuendoes.
I was hardly as clear as I could wish. I repeated myself several times, and occasionally had to go back to some detail that I had forgotten. Poirot smiled kindly on me.
"The mind is confused? Is it not so? Take time, mon ami. You are agitated; you are excited--it is but natural. Presently, when we are calm, we will arrange the facts, neatly, each in his proper place. We will examine--and reject. Those of importance we will put on one side; those of no importance, pouf!"--he screwed up his cherub-like face, and puffed comically enough--"blow them away!"
"That's all very well," I objected, "but how are you going to decide what is important, and what isn't? That always seems the difficulty to me."
Poirot shook his head energetically. He was now arranging his moustache with exquisite care.
"Not so. Voyons! One fact leads to another--so we continue. Does the next fit in with that? A merveille! Good! We can proceed. This next little fact--no! Ah, that is curious! There is something missing--a link in the chain that is not there. We examine. We search. And that little curious fact, that possibly paltry little detail that will not tally, we put it here!" He made an extravagant gesture with his hand. "It is significant! It is tremendous!"
"Y--es--"

"Ah!" Poirot shook his forefinger so fiercely at me that I quailed before it. "Beware! Peril to the detective who says: 'It is so small--it does not matter. It will not agree. I will forget it.' That way lies confusion! Everything matters."

"I know. You always told me that. That's why I have gone into all the details of this thing whether they seemed to me relevant or not."

"And I am pleased with you. You have a good memory, and you have given me the facts faithfully. Of the order in which you present them, I say nothing--truly, it is deplorable! But I make allowances--you are upset. To that I attribute the circumstance that you have omitted one fact of paramount importance."

"What is that?" I asked.

"You have not told me if Mrs. Inglethorp ate well last night."

I stared at him. Surely the war had affected the little man's brain. He was carefully engaged in brushing his coat before putting it on, and seemed wholly engrossed in the task.

"I don't remember," I said. "And, anyway, I don't see----"

"You do not see? But it is of the first importance."

"I can't see why," I said, rather nettled. "As far as I can remember, she didn't eat much. She was obviously upset, and it had taken her appetite away. That was only natural."

"Yes," said Poirot thoughtfully, "it was only natural."

He opened a drawer, and took out a small despatch-case, then turned to me.

"Now I am ready. We will proceed to the chateau, and study matters on the spot. Excuse me, mon ami, you dressed in haste, and your tie is on one side. Permit me." With a deft gesture, he rearranged it.

"Ca y est! Now, shall we start?"

We hurried up the village, and turned in at the lodge gates. Poirot stopped for a moment, and gazed sorrowfully over the beautiful expanse of park, still glittering with morning dew.

"So beautiful, so beautiful, and yet, the poor family, plunged in sorrow, prostrated with grief."

He looked at me keenly as he spoke, and I was aware that I reddened under his prolonged gaze.

Was the family prostrated by grief? Was the sorrow at Mrs. Inglethorp's death so great? I realized that there was an emotional lack in the atmosphere. The dead woman had not the gift of commanding love. Her death was a shock and a distress, but she would not be passionately regretted.

Poirot seemed to follow my thoughts. He nodded his head gravely.

"No, you are right," he said, "it is not as though there was a blood tie. She has been kind and generous to these Cavendishes, but she was not their own mother. Blood tells--always remember that--blood tells."

"Poirot," I said, "I wish you would tell me why you wanted to know if Mrs. Inglethorp ate well last night? I have been turning it over in my mind, but I can't see how it has anything to do with the matter?"

He was silent for a minute or two as we walked along, but finally he said:

"I do not mind telling you--though, as you know, it is not my habit to explain until the end is reached. The present contention is that Mrs. Inglethorp died of strychnine poisoning, presumably administered in her coffee."

"Yes?"

"Well, what time was the coffee served?"

"About eight o'clock."

"Therefore she drank it between then and half-past eight--certainly not much later. Well, strychnine is a fairly rapid poison. Its effects would be felt very soon, probably in about an hour. Yet, in Mrs. Inglethorp's case, the symptoms do not manifest themselves until five o'clock the next morning: nine hours! But a heavy meal, taken at about the same time as the poison, might retard its effects, though hardly to that extent. Still, it is a possibility to be taken into account. But, according to you, she ate very little for supper, and yet the symptoms do not develop until early the next morning! Now that is a curious circumstance, my friend. Something may arise at the autopsy to explain it. In the meantime, remember it."

As we neared the house, John came out and met us. His face looked weary and haggard.

"This is a very dreadful business, Monsieur Poirot," he said. "Hastings has explained to you that we are anxious for no publicity?"

"I comprehend perfectly."

"You see, it is only suspicion so far. We have nothing to go upon."

"Precisely. It is a matter of precaution only."

John turned to me, taking out his cigarette-case, and lighting a cigarette as he did so.

"You know that fellow Inglethorp is back?"

"Yes. I met him."
John flung the match into an adjacent flower bed, a proceeding which was too much for Poirot's feelings. He retrieved it, and buried it neatly.

"It's jolly difficult to know how to treat him."

"That difficulty will not exist long," pronounced Poirot quietly.

John looked puzzled, not quite understanding the portent of this cryptic saying. He handed the two keys which Dr. Bauerstein had given him to me.

"Show Monsieur Poirot everything he wants to see."

"The rooms are locked?" asked Poirot.

"Dr. Bauerstein considered it advisable."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

"Then he is very sure. Well, that simplifies matters for us."

We went up together to the room of the tragedy. For convenience I append a plan of the room and the principal articles of furniture in it.

Poirot locked the door on the inside, and proceeded to a minute inspection of the room. He darted from one object to the other with the agility of a grasshopper. I remained by the door, fearing to obliterate any clues. Poirot, however, did not seem grateful to me for my forbearance.

"What have you, my friend," he cried, "that you remain there like--how do you say it?--ah, yes, the stuck pig?"

I explained that I was afraid of obliterating any foot-marks.

"Foot-marks? But what an idea! There has already been practically an army in the room! What foot-marks are we likely to find? No, come here and aid me in my search. I will put down my little case until I need it."

He did so, on the round table by the window, but it was an ill-advised proceeding; for, the top of it being loose, it tilted up, and precipitated the despatch-case on the floor.

"Eh voila une table!" cried Poirot. "Ah, my friend, one may live in a big house and yet have no comfort."

After which piece of moralizing, he resumed his search.

A small purple despatch-case, with a key in the lock, on the writing-table, engaged his attention for some time. He took out the key from the lock, and passed it to me to inspect. I saw nothing peculiar, however. It was an ordinary key of the Yale type, with a bit of twisted wire through the handle.

Next, he examined the framework of the door we had broken in, assuring himself that the bolt had really been shot. Then he went to the door opposite leading into Cynthia's room. That door was also bolted, as I had stated. However, he went to the length of unbolting it, and opening and shutting it several times; this he did with the utmost precaution against making any noise. Suddenly something in the bolt itself seemed to rivet his attention. He examined it carefully, and then, nimbly whipping out a pair of small forceps from his case, he drew out some minute particle which he carefully sealed up in a tiny envelope.

On the chest of drawers there was a tray with a spirit lamp and a small saucepan on it. A small quantity of a dark fluid remained in the saucepan, and an empty cup and saucer that had been drunk out of stood near it.

I wondered how I could have been so unobservant as to overlook this. Here was a clue worth having. Poirot delicately dipped his finger into liquid, and tasted it gingerly. He made a grimace.

"Coco--with--I think--rum in it."

He passed on to the debris on the floor, where the table by the bed had been overturned. A reading-lamp, some books, matches, a bunch of keys, and the crushed fragments of a coffee-cup lay scattered about.

"Ah, this is curious," said Poirot.

"I must confess that I see nothing particularly curious about it."

"You do not? Observe the lamp--the chimney is broken in two places; they lie there as they fell. But see, the coffee-cup is absolutely smashed to powder."

"Well," I said warily, "I suppose some one must have stepped on it."

"Exactly," said Poirot, in an odd voice. "Some one stepped on it."

He rose from his knees, and walked slowly across to the mantelpiece, where he stood abstractedly fingering the ornaments, and straightening them--a trick of his when he was agitated.

"Mon ami," he said, turning to me, "somebody stepped on that cup, grinding it to powder, and the reason they did so was either because it contained strychnine or--which is far more serious--because it did not contain strychnine!"

I made no reply. I was bewildered, but I knew that it was no good asking him to explain. In a moment or two he roused himself, and went on with his investigations. He picked up the bunch of keys from the floor, and twirling them round in his fingers finally selected one, very bright and shining, which he tried in the lock of the purple despatch-case. It fitted, and he opened the box, but after a moment's hesitation, closed and relocked it, and slipped the bunch of keys, as well as the key that had originally stood in the lock, into his own pocket.
"I have no authority to go through these papers. But it should be done--at once!"

He then made a very careful examination of the drawers of the wash-stand. Crossing the room to the left-hand window, a round stain, hardly visible on the dark brown carpet, seemed to interest him particularly. He went down on his knees, examining it minutely--even going so far as to smell it.

Finally, he poured a few drops of the coco into a test tube, sealing it up carefully. His next proceeding was to take out a little notebook.

"We have found in this room," he said, writing busily, "six points of interest. Shall I enumerate them, or will you?"

"Oh, you," I replied hastily.

"Very well, then. One, a coffee-cup that has been ground into powder; two, a despatch-case with a key in the lock; three, a stain on the floor."

"That may have been done some time ago," I interrupted.

"No, for it is still perceptibly damp and smells of coffee. Four, a fragment of some dark green fabric--only a thread or two, but recognizable."

"Ah!" I cried. "That was what you sealed up in the envelope."

"Yes. It may turn out to be a piece of one of Mrs. Inglethorp's own dresses, and quite unimportant. We shall see. Five, _this_!" With a dramatic gesture, he pointed to a large splash of candle grease on the floor by the writing-table. "It must have been done since yesterday, otherwise a good housemaid would have at once removed it with blotting-paper and a hot iron. One of my best hats once--but that is not to the point."

"It was very likely done last night. We were very agitated. Or perhaps Mrs. Inglethorp herself dropped her candle."

"You brought only one candle into the room?"

"Yes. Lawrence Cavendish was carrying it. But he was very upset. He seemed to see something over here"--I indicated the mantelpiece--"that absolutely paralysed him."

"That is interesting," said Poirot quickly. "Yes, it is suggestive"--his eye sweeping the whole length of the wall--"but it was not his candle that made this great patch, for you perceive that this is white grease; whereas Monsieur Lawrence's candle, which is still on the dressing-table, is pink. On the other hand, Mrs. Inglethorp had no candlestick in the room, only a reading-lamp."

"Then," I said, "what do you deduce?"

"To which my friend only made a rather irritating reply, urging me to use my own natural faculties."

"And the sixth point?" I asked. "I suppose it is the sample of coco."

"No," said Poirot thoughtfully. "I might have included that in the six, but I did not. No, the sixth point I will keep to myself for the present."

He looked quickly round the room. "There is nothing more to be done here, I think, unless"--he stared earnestly and long at the dead ashes in the grate. "The fire burns--and it destroys. But by chance--there might be--let us see!"

Deftly, on hands and knees, he began to sort the ashes from the grate into the fender, handling them with the greatest caution. Suddenly, he gave a faint exclamation.

"The forceps, Hastings!"

I quickly handed them to him, and with skill he extracted a small piece of half charred paper.

"There, mon ami!" he cried. "What do you think of that?"

I scrutinized the fragment. This is an exact reproduction of it--

I was puzzled. It was unusually thick, quite unlike ordinary notepaper. Suddenly an idea struck me.

"Poirot!" I cried. "This is a fragment of a will!"

"Exactly."

I looked up at him sharply.

"You are not surprised?"

"No," he said gravely. "I expected it."

I relinquished the piece of paper, and watched him put it away in his case, with the same methodical care that he bestowed on everything. My brain was in a whirl. What was this complication of a will? Who had destroyed it? The person who had left the candle grease on the floor? Obviously. But how had anyone gained admission? All the doors had been bolted on the inside.

"Now, my friend," said Poirot briskly, "we will go. I should like to ask a few questions of the parlourmaid--Dorcas, her name is, is it not?"

We passed through Alfred Inglethorp's room, and Poirot delayed long enough to make a brief but fairly comprehensive examination of it. We went out through that door, locking both it and that of Mrs. Inglethorp's room as before.
I took him down to the boudoir which he had expressed a wish to see, and went myself in search of Dorcas.
When I returned with her, however, the boudoir was empty.
"Poirot," I cried, "where are you?"
"I am here, my friend."
He had stepped outside the French window, and was standing, apparently lost in admiration, before the various shaped flower beds.
"Admirable!" he murmured. "Admirable! What symmetry! Observe that crescent; and those diamonds--their neatness rejoices the eye. The spacing of the plants, also, is perfect. It has been recently done; is it not so?"
"Yes, I believe they were at it yesterday afternoon. But come in--Dorcas is here."
"Eh bien, eh bien! Do not grudge me a moment's satisfaction of the eye."
"Yes, but this affair is more important."
"And how do you know that these fine begonias are not of equal importance?"
I shrugged my shoulders. There was really no arguing with him if he chose to take that line.
"You do not agree? But such things have been. Well, we will come in and interview the brave Dorcas."
Dorcas was standing in the boudoir, her hands folded in front of her, and her grey hair rose in stiff waves under her white cap. She was the very model and picture of a good old-fashioned servant.
In her attitude towards Poirot, she was inclined to be suspicious, but he soon broke down her defences. He drew forward a chair.
"Pray be seated, mademoiselle."
"Thank you, sir."
"You have been with your mistress many years, is it not so?"
"Ten years, sir."
"That is a long time, and very faithful service. You were much attached to her, were you not?"
"She was a very good mistress to me, sir."
"Then you will not object to answering a few questions. I put them to you with Mr. Cavendish's full approval."
"Oh, certainly, sir."
"Then I will begin by asking you about the events of yesterday afternoon. Your mistress had a quarrel?"
"Yes, sir. But I don't know that I ought----" Dorcas hesitated. Poirot looked at her keenly.
"My good Dorcas, it is necessary that I should know every detail of that quarrel as fully as possible. Do not think that you are betraying your mistress's secrets. Your mistress lies dead, and it is necessary that we should know all--if we are to avenge her. Nothing can bring her back to life, but we do hope, if there has been foul play, to bring the murderer to justice."
"Amen to that," said Dorcas fiercely. "And, naming no names, there's _one_ in this house that none of us could ever abide! And an ill day it was when first he _darkened the threshold_."
Poirot waited for her indignation to subside, and then, resuming his business-like tone, he asked:
"Now, as to this quarrel? What is the first you heard of it?"
"Well, sir, I happened to be going along the hall outside yesterday----"
"What time was that?"
"I couldn't say exactly, sir, but it wasn't tea-time by a long way. Perhaps four o'clock--or it may have been a bit later. Well, sir, as I said, I happened to be passing along, when I heard voices very loud and angry in here. I didn't exactly mean to listen, but--well, there it is. I stopped. The door was shut, but the mistress was speaking very sharp and clear, and I heard what she said quite plainly. 'You have lied to me, and deceived me,' she said. I didn't hear what Mr. Inglethorp replied. He spoke a good bit lower than she did--but she answered: 'How dare you? I have kept you and clothed you and fed you! You owe everything to me! And this is how you repay me! By bringing disgrace upon our name!' Again I didn't hear what he said, but she went on: 'Nothing that you can say will make any difference. I see my duty clearly. My mind is made up. You need not think that any fear of publicity, or scandal between husband and wife will deter me.' Then I thought I heard them coming out, so I went off quickly."
"You are sure it was Mr. Inglethorp's voice you heard?"
"Oh, yes, sir, whose else's could it be?"
"Well, what happened next?"
"Later, I came back to the hall; but it was all quiet. At five o'clock, Mrs. Inglethorp rang the bell and told me to bring her a cup of tea--nothing to eat--to the boudoir. She was looking dreadful--so white and upset. 'Dorcas,' she says, 'I've had a great shock.' 'I'm sorry for that, m'm,' I says. 'You'll feel better after a nice hot cup of tea, m'm.' She had something in her hand. I don't know if it was a letter, or just a piece of paper, but it had writing on it, and she kept staring at it, almost as if she couldn't believe what was written there. She whispered to herself, as though she had forgotten I was there: 'These few words--and everything's changed.' And then she says to me: 'Never trust a
man, Dorcas, they're not worth it!' I hurried off, and got her a good strong cup of tea, and she thanked me, and said she'd feel better when she'd drunk it. 'I don't know what to do,' she says. 'Scandal between husband and wife is a dreadful thing, Dorcas. I'd rather hush it up if I could.' Mrs. Cavendish came in just then, so she didn't say any more."

"She still had the letter, or whatever it was, in her hand?" "Yes, sir."
"What would she be likely to do with it afterwards?"
"Well, I don't know, sir, I expect she would lock it up in that purple case of hers."
"Is that where she usually kept important papers?"
"Yes, sir. She brought it down with her every morning, and took it up every night."
"When did she lose the key of it?"
"She missed it yesterday at lunch-time, sir, and told me to look carefully for it. She was very much put out about it."
"But she had a duplicate key?"
"Oh, yes, sir."
Dorcas was looking very curiously at him and, to tell the truth, so was I. What was all this about a lost key? Poirot smiled.

"Never mind, Dorcas, it is my business to know things. Is this the key that was lost?" He drew from his pocket the key that he had found in the lock of the despatch-case upstairs.
Dorcas's eyes looked as though they would pop out of her head.
"That's it, sir, right enough. But where did you find it? I looked everywhere for it."
"Ah, but you see it was not in the same place yesterday as it was to-day. Now, to pass to another subject, had your mistress a dark green dress in her wardrobe?"
Dorcas was rather startled by the unexpected question.
"No, sir."
"Are you quite sure?"
"Oh, yes, sir."
"Has anyone else in the house got a green dress?"
Dorcas reflected.
"Miss Cynthia has a green evening dress."
"Light or dark green?"
"A light green, sir; a sort of chiffon, they call it."
"Ah, that is not what I want. And nobody else has anything green?"
"No, sir—not that I know of."
Poirot's face did not betray a trace of whether he was disappointed or otherwise. He merely remarked:
"Good, we will leave that and pass on. Have you any reason to believe that your mistress was likely to take a sleeping powder last night?"
"Not _last_ night, sir, I know she didn't."
"Why do you know so positively?"
"Because the box was empty. She took the last one two days ago, and she didn't have any more made up."
"You are quite sure of that?"
"Positive, sir."
"Then that is cleared up! By the way, your mistress didn't ask you to sign any paper yesterday?"
"To sign a paper? No, sir."
"When Mr. Hastings and Mr. Lawrence came in yesterday evening, they found your mistress busy writing letters. I suppose you can give me no idea to whom these letters were addressed?"
"I'm afraid I couldn't, sir. I was out in the evening. Perhaps Annie could tell you, though she's a careless girl. Never cleared the coffee-cups away last night. That's what happens when I'm not here to look after things."
Poirot lifted his hand.
"Since they have been left, Dorcas, leave them a little longer, I pray you. I should like to examine them."
"Very well, sir."
"What time did you go out last evening?"
"About six o'clock, sir."
"Thank you, Dorcas, that is all I have to ask you." He rose and strolled to the window. "I have been admiring these flower beds. How many gardeners are employed here, by the way?"
"Only three now, sir. Five, we had, before the war, when it was kept as a gentleman's place should be. I wish you could have seen it then, sir. A fair sight it was. But now there's only old Manning, and young William, and a new-
fashioned woman gardener in breeches and such-like. Ah, these are dreadful times!"
"The good times will come again, Dorcas. At least, we hope so. Now, will you send Annie to me here?"
"Yes, sir. Thank you, sir."
"How did you know that Mrs. Inglethorp took sleeping powders?" I asked, in lively curiosity, as Dorcas left the
room. "And about the lost key and the duplicate?"
"One thing at a time. As to the sleeping powders, I knew by this." He suddenly produced a small cardboard box,
such as chemists use for powders.
"Where did you find it?"
"In the wash-stand drawer in Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom. It was Number Six of my catalogue."
"But I suppose, as the last powder was taken two days ago, it is not of much importance?"
"Probably not, but do you notice anything that strikes you as peculiar about this box?"
I examined it closely.
"No, I can't say that I do."
"Look at the label."
I read the label carefully: "'One powder to be taken at bedtime, if required. Mrs. Inglethorp.' No, I see nothing
unusual."
"Not the fact that there is no chemist's name?"
"Ah!" I exclaimed. "To be sure, that is odd!"
"Have you ever known a chemist to send out a box like that, without his printed name?"
"No, I can't say that I have."
I was becoming quite excited, but Poirot damped my ardour by remarking:
"Yet the explanation is quite simple. So do not intrigue yourself, my friend."
An audible creaking proclaimed the approach of Annie, so I had no time to reply.
Annie was a fine, strapping girl, and was evidently labouring under intense excitement, mingled with a certain
ghoulish enjoyment of the tragedy.
Poirot came to the point at once, with a business-like briskness.
"I sent for you, Annie, because I thought you might be able to tell me something about the letters Mrs. Inglethorp
wrote last night. How many were there? And can you tell me any of the names and addresses?"
Annie considered.
"There were four letters, sir. One was to Miss Howard, and one was to Mr. Wells, the lawyer, and the other two I
don't think I remember, sir--oh, yes, one was to Ross's, the caterers in Tadminster. The other one, I don't remember."
"Think," urged Poirot.
Annie racked her brains in vain.
"I'm sorry, sir, but it's clean gone. I don't think I can have noticed it."
"It does not matter," said Poirot, not betraying any sign of disappointment. "Now I want to ask you about
something else. There is a saucepan in Mrs. Inglethorp's room with some coco in it. Did she have that every night?"
"Yes, sir, it was put in her room every evening, and she warmed it up in the night--whenever she fancied it."
"What was it? Plain coco?"
"Yes, sir, made with milk, with a teaspoonful of sugar, and two teaspoonfuls of rum in it."
"Who took it to her room?"
"I did, sir."
"Always?"
"Yes, sir."
"At what time?"
"When I went to draw the curtains, as a rule, sir."
"Did you bring it straight up from the kitchen then?"
"No, sir, you see there's not much room on the gas stove, so Cook used to make it early, before putting the
vegetables on for supper. Then I used to bring it up, and put it on the table by the swing door, and take it into her
room later."
"The swing door is in the left wing, is it not?"
"Yes, sir."
"And the table, is it on this side of the door, or on the farther--servants' side?"
"It's this side, sir."
"What time did you bring it up last night?"
"About quarter-past seven, I should say, sir."
"And when did you take it into Mrs. Inglethorp's room?"
"When I went to shut up, sir. About eight o'clock. Mrs. Inglethorp came up to bed before I'd finished."
"Then, between 7.15 and 8 o'clock, the coco was standing on the table in the left wing?"
"Yes, sir." Annie had been growing redder and redder in the face, and now she blurted out unexpectedly:
"And if there _was_ salt in it, sir, it wasn't me. I never took the salt near it."
"What makes you think there was salt in it?" asked Poirot.
"Seeing it on the tray, sir."
"You saw some salt on the tray?"
"Yes. Coarse kitchen salt, it looked. I never noticed it when I took the tray up, but when I came to take it into the mistress's room I saw it at once, and I suppose I ought to have taken it down again, and asked Cook to make some fresh. But I was in a hurry, because Dorcas was out, and I thought maybe the coco itself was all right, and the salt had only gone on the tray. So I dusted it off with my apron, and took it in."
I had the utmost difficulty in controlling my excitement. Unknown to herself, Annie had provided us with an important piece of evidence. How she would have gaped if she had realized that her "coarse kitchen salt" was strychnine, one of the most deadly poisons known to mankind. I marvelled at Poirot's calm. His self-control was astonishing. I awaited his next question with impatience, but it disappointed me.
"When you went into Mrs. Inglethorp's room, was the door leading into Miss Cynthia's room bolted?"
"Oh! Yes, sir; it always was. It had never been opened."
"And the door into Mr. Inglethorp's room? Did you notice if that was bolted too?"
Annie hesitated.
"I couldn't rightly say, sir; it was shut but I couldn't say whether it was bolted or not."
"When you finally left the room, did Mrs. Inglethorp bolt the door after you?"
"No, sir, not then, but I expect she did later. She usually did lock it at night. The door into the passage, that is."
"Did you notice any candle grease on the floor when you did the room yesterday?"
"Candle grease? Oh, no, sir. Mrs. Inglethorp didn't have a candle, only a reading-lamp."
"Then, if there had been a large patch of candle grease on the floor, you think you would have been sure to have seen it?"
"Yes, sir, and I would have taken it out with a piece of blotting-paper and a hot iron."
Then Poirot repeated the question he had put to Dorcas:
"Did your mistress ever have a green dress?"
"No, sir."
"Nor a mantle, nor a cape, nor a--how do you call it?--a sports coat?"
"Not green, sir."
"Nor anyone else in the house?"
Annie reflected.
"No, sir."
"You are sure of that?"
"Quite sure."
"Bien! That is all I want to know. Thank you very much."
With a nervous giggle, Annie took herself creakingly out of the room. My pent-up excitement burst forth.
"Poirot," I cried, "I congratulate you! This is a great discovery. Of course it did not take effect until the early morning, since the coco was only drunk in the middle of the night."
"So you think that the coco--mark well what I say, Hastings, the coco--contained strychnine?"
"Of course! That salt on the tray, what else could it have been?"
"It might have been salt," replied Poirot placidly.
I shrugged my shoulders. If he was going to take the matter that way, it was no good arguing with him. The idea crossed my mind, not for the first time, that poor old Poirot was growing old. Privately I thought it lucky that he had associated with him some one of a more receptive type of mind.
Poirot was surveying me with quietly twinkling eyes.
"You are not pleased with me, mon ami?"
"My dear Poirot," I said coldly, "it is not for me to dictate to you. You have a right to your own opinion, just as I have to mine."
"A most admirable sentiment," remarked Poirot, rising briskly to his feet. "Now I have finished with this room. By the way, whose is the smaller desk in the corner?"
"Mr. Inglethorp's."
"Ah!" He tried the roll top tentatively. "Locked. But perhaps one of Mrs. Inglethorp's keys would open it." He tried several, twisting and turning them with a practiced hand, and finally uttering an ejaculation of satisfaction. "Voila! It is not the key, but it will open it at a pinch." He slid back the roll top, and ran a rapid eye over the neatly filed papers. To my surprise, he did not examine them, merely remarking approvingly as he relocked the desk: "Decidedly, he is a man of method, this Mr. Inglethorp!"

A "man of method" was, in Poirot's estimation, the highest praise that could be bestowed on any individual. I felt that my friend was not what he had been as he rambled on disconnectedly:

"There were no stamps in his desk, but there might have been, eh, mon ami? There might have been? Yes"--his eyes wandered round the room--"this boudoir has nothing more to tell us. It did not yield much. Only this." He pulled a crumpled envelope out of his pocket, and tossed it over to me. It was rather a curious document. A plain, dirty looking old envelope with a few words scrawled across it, apparently at random. The following is a facsimile of it.

CHAPTER V.
"IT ISN'T STRYCHNINE, IS IT?"
"Where did you find this?" I asked Poirot, in lively curiosity.
"In the waste-paper basket. You recognise the handwriting?"
"Yes, it is Mrs. Inglethorp's. But what does it mean?"
Poirot shrugged his shoulders.
"I cannot say--but it is suggestive."

A wild idea flashed across me. Was it possible that Mrs. Inglethorp's mind was deranged? Had she some fantastic idea of demoniacal possession? And, if that were so, was it not also possible that she might have taken her own life?

I was about to expound these theories to Poirot, when his own words distracted me.

"Come," he said, "now to examine the coffee-cups!"
"My dear Poirot! What on earth is the good of that, now that we know about the coco?"
"Oh, la la! That miserable coco!" cried Poirot flippantly.
He laughed with apparent enjoyment, raising his arms to heaven in mock despair, in what I could not but consider the worst possible taste.

"And, anyway," I said, with increasing coldness, "as Mrs. Inglethorp took her coffee upstairs with her, I do not see what you expect to find, unless you consider it likely that we shall discover a packet of strychnine on the coffee tray!"
Poirot was sobered at once.
"Come, come, my friend," he said, slipping his arms through mine. "Ne vous fachez pas! Allow me to interest myself in my coffee-cups, and I will respect your coco. There! Is it a bargain?"

He was so quaintly humorous that I was forced to laugh; and we went together to the drawing-room, where the coffee-cups and tray remained undisturbed as we had left them.
Poirot made me recapitulate the scene of the night before, listening very carefully, and verifying the position of the various cups.

"So Mrs. Cavendish stood by the tray--and poured out. Yes. Then she came across to the window where you sat with Mademoiselle Cynthia. Yes. Here are the three cups. And the cup on the mantel-piece, half drunk, that would be Mr. Lawrence Cavendish's. And the one on the tray?"
"John Cavendish's. I saw him put it down there."
"Good. One, two, three, four, five--but where, then, is the cup of Mr. Inglethorp?"
"He does not take coffee."
"Then all are accounted for. One moment, my friend."

With infinite care, he took a drop or two from the grounds in each cup, sealing them up in separate test tubes, tasting each in turn as he did so. His physiognomy underwent a curious change. An expression gathered there that I can only describe as half puzzled, and half relieved.

"Bien!" he said at last. "It is evident! I had an idea--but clearly I was mistaken. Yes, altogether I was mistaken. Yet it is strange. But no matter!"

And, with a characteristic shrug, he dismissed whatever it was that was worrying him from his mind. I could have told him from the beginning that this obsession of his over the coffee was bound to end in a blind alley, but I restrained my tongue. After all, though he was old, Poirot had been a great man in his day.

"Breakfast is ready," said John Cavendish, coming in from the hall. "You will breakfast with us, Monsieur Poirot?"

Poirot acquiesced. I observed John. Already he was almost restored to his normal self. The shock of the events
of the last night had upset him temporarily, but his equable poise soon swung back to the normal. He was a man of very little imagination, in sharp contrast with his brother, who had, perhaps, too much.

Ever since the early hours of the morning, John had been hard at work, sending telegrams--one of the first had gone to Evelyn Howard--writing notices for the papers, and generally occupying himself with the melancholy duties that a death entails.

"May I ask how things are proceeding?" he said. "Do your investigations point to my mother having died a natural death--or--or must we prepare ourselves for the worst?"

"I think, Mr. Cavendish," said Poirot gravely, "that you would do well not to buoy yourself up with any false hopes. Can you tell me the views of the other members of the family?"

"My brother Lawrence is convinced that we are making a fuss over nothing. He says that everything points to its being a simple case of heart failure."

"He does, does he? That is very interesting--very interesting," murmured Poirot softly. "And Mrs. Cavendish?"

A faint cloud passed over John's face.

"I have not the least idea what my wife's views on the subject are."

The answer brought a momentary stiffness in its train. John broke the rather awkward silence by saying with a slight effort:

"I told you, didn't I, that Mr. Inglethorp has returned?"

Poirot bent his head.

"It's an awkward position for all of us. Of course one has to treat him as usual--but, hang it all, one's gorge does rise at sitting down to eat with a possible murderer!"

Poirot nodded sympathetically.

"I quite understand. It is a very difficult situation for you, Mr. Cavendish. I would like to ask you one question. Mr. Inglethorp's reason for not returning last night was, I believe, that he had forgotten the latch-key. Is not that so?"

"Yes."

"I suppose you are quite sure that the latch-key _was_ forgotten--that he did not take it after all?"

"I have no idea. I never thought of looking. We always keep it in the hall drawer. I'll go and see if it's there now."

Poirot held up his hand with a faint smile.

"No, no, Mr. Cavendish, it is too late now. I am certain that you would find it. If Mr. Inglethorp did take it, he has had ample time to replace it by now."

"But do you think--""

"I think nothing. If anyone had chanced to look this morning before his return, and seen it there, it would have been a valuable point in his favour. That is all."

John looked perplexed.

"Do not worry," said Poirot smoothly. "I assure you that you need not let it trouble you. Since you are so kind, let us go and have some breakfast."

Every one was assembled in the dining-room. Under the circumstances, we were naturally not a cheerful party. The reaction after a shock is always trying, and I think we were all suffering from it. Decorum and good breeding naturally enjoined that our demeanour should be much as usual, yet I could not help wondering if this self-control were really a matter of great difficulty. There were no red eyes, no signs of secretly indulged grief. I felt that I was right in my opinion that Dorcas was the person most affected by the personal side of the tragedy.

I pass over Alfred Inglethorp, who acted the bereaved widower in a manner that I felt to be disgusting in its hypocrisy. Did he know that we suspected him, I wondered. Surely he could not be unaware of the fact, conceal it as we would. Did he feel some secret stirring of fear, or was he confident that his crime would go unpunished? Surely the suspicion in the atmosphere must warn him that he was already a marked man.

But did every one suspect him? What about Mrs. Cavendish? I watched her as she sat at the head of the table, graceful, composed, enigmatic. In her soft grey frock, with white ruffles at the wrists falling over her slender hands, she looked very beautiful. When she chose, however, her face could be sphinx-like in its inscrutability. She was very silent, hardly opening her lips, and yet in some queer way I felt that the great strength of her personality was dominating us all.

And little Cynthia? Did she suspect? She looked very tired and ill, I thought. The heaviness and languor of her manner were very marked. I asked her if she were feeling ill, and she answered frankly:

"Yes, I've got the most beastly headache."

"Have another cup of coffee, mademoiselle?" said Poirot solicitously. "It will revive you. It is unparalleled for the mal de tete." He jumped up and took her cup.

"No sugar," said Cynthia, watching him, as he picked up the sugar-tongs.
"No sugar? You abandon it in the war-time, eh?"
"No, I never take it in coffee."
"Sacre!" murmured Poirot to himself, as he brought back the replenished cup.
Only I heard him, and glancing up curiously at the little man I saw that his face was working with suppressed excitement, and his eyes were as green as a cat's. He had heard or seen something that had affected him strongly—but what was it? I do not usually label myself as dense, but I must confess that nothing out of the ordinary had attracted my attention.

In another moment, the door opened and Dorcas appeared.
"Mr. Wells to see you, sir," she said to John.
I remembered the name as being that of the lawyer to whom Mrs. Inglethorp had written the night before.
John rose immediately.
"Show him into my study." Then he turned to us. "My mother's lawyer," he explained. And in a lower voice: "He is also Coroner—you understand. Perhaps you would like to come with me?"

We acquiesced and followed him out of the room. John strode on ahead and I took the opportunity of whispering to Poirot:
"There will be an inquest then?"
Poirot nodded absently. He seemed absorbed in thought; so much so that my curiosity was aroused.
"What is it? You are not attending to what I say."
"It is true, my friend. I am much worried."
"Why?"
"Because Mademoiselle Cynthia does not take sugar in her coffee."
"What? You cannot be serious?"
"But I am most serious. Ah, there is something there that I do not understand. My instinct was right."
"What instinct?"
"The instinct that led me to insist on examining those coffee-cups. Chut! no more now!"

We followed John into his study, and he closed the door behind us.
Mr. Wells was a pleasant man of middle-age, with keen eyes, and the typical lawyer's mouth. John introduced us both, and explained the reason of our presence.
"You will understand, Wells," he added, "that this is all strictly private. We are still hoping that there will turn out to be no need for investigation of any kind."
"Quite so, quite so," said Mr. Wells soothingly. "I wish we could have spared you the pain and publicity of an inquest, but of course it's quite unavoidable in the absence of a doctor's certificate."
"Yes, I suppose so."
"Clever man, Bauerstein. Great authority on toxicology, I believe."
"Indeed," said John with a certain stiffness in his manner. Then he added rather hesitatingly: "Shall we have to appear as witnesses—all of us, I mean?"
"You, of course—and ah—er—Mr. Inglethorp."
A slight pause ensued before the lawyer went on in his soothing manner:
"Any other evidence will be simply confirmatory, a mere matter of form."
"I see."
A faint expression of relief swept over John's face. It puzzled me, for I saw no occasion for it.
"If you know of nothing to the contrary," pursued Mr. Wells, "I had thought of Friday. That will give us plenty of time for the doctor's report. The post-mortem is to take place to-night, I believe?"
"Yes."
"Then that arrangement will suit you?"
"Perfectly."
"I need not tell you, my dear Cavendish, how distressed I am at this most tragic affair."
"Can you give us no help in solving it, monsieur?" interposed Poirot, speaking for the first time since we had entered the room.
"I?"
"Yes, we heard that Mrs. Inglethorp wrote to you last night. You should have received the letter this morning."
"I did, but it contains no information. It is merely a note asking me to call upon her this morning, as she wanted my advice on a matter of great importance."
"She gave you no hint as to what that matter might be?"
"Unfortunately, no."
"That is a pity," said John.
"A great pity," agreed Poirot gravely.

There was silence. Poirot remained lost in thought for a few minutes. Finally he turned to the lawyer again.

"Mr. Wells, there is one thing I should like to ask you—that is, if it is not against professional etiquette. In the event of Mrs. Inglethorp's death, who would inherit her money?"

The lawyer hesitated a moment, and then replied:

"The knowledge will be public property very soon, so if Mr. Cavendish does not object----"

"Not at all," interpolated John.

"I do not see any reason why I should not answer your question. By her last will, dated August of last year, after various unimportant legacies to servants, etc., she gave her entire fortune to her stepson, Mr. John Cavendish."

"Was not that—pardon the question, Mr. Cavendish—rather unfair to her other stepson, Mr. Lawrence Cavendish?"

"No, I do not think so. You see, under the terms of their father's will, while John inherited the property, Lawrence, at his stepmother's death, would come into a considerable sum of money. Mrs. Inglethorp left her money to her elder stepson, knowing that he would have to keep up Styles. It was, to my mind, a very fair and equitable distribution."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully.

"I see. But I am right in saying, am I not, that by your English law that will was automatically revoked when Mrs. Inglethorp remarried?"

Mr. Wells bowed his head.

"As I was about to proceed, Monsieur Poirot, that document is now null and void."

"Hein!" said Poirot. He reflected for a moment, and then asked: "Was Mrs. Inglethorp herself aware of that fact?"

"I do not know. She may have been."

"She was," said John unexpectedly. "We were discussing the matter of wills being revoked by marriage only yesterday."

"Ah! One more question, Mr. Wells. You say 'her last will.' Had Mrs. Inglethorp, then, made several former wills?"

"On an average, she made a new will at least once a year," said Mr. Wells imperturbably. "She was given to changing her mind as to her testamentary dispositions, now benefiting one, now another member of her family."

"Suppose," suggested Poirot, "that, unknown to you, she had made a new will in favour of some one who was not, in any sense of the word, a member of the family—we will say Miss Howard, for instance—would you be surprised?"

"Not in the least."

"Ah!" Poirot seemed to have exhausted his questions.

I drew close to him, while John and the lawyer were debating the question of going through Mrs. Inglethorp's papers.

"Do you think Mrs. Inglethorp made a will leaving all her money to Miss Howard?" I asked in a low voice, with some curiosity.

Poirot smiled.

"No."

"Then why did you ask?"

"Hush!"

John Cavendish had turned to Poirot.

"Will you come with us, Monsieur Poirot? We are going through my mother's papers. Mr. Inglethorp is quite willing to leave it entirely to Mr. Wells and myself."

"Which simplifies matters very much," murmured the lawyer. "As technically, of course, he was entitled----" He did not finish the sentence.

"We will look through the desk in the boudoir first," explained John, "and go up to her bedroom afterwards. She kept her most important papers in a purple despatch-case, which we must look through carefully."

"Yes," said the lawyer, "it is quite possible that there may be a later will than the one in my possession."

"There_is_a later will." It was Poirot who spoke.

"What?" John and the lawyer looked at him startled.

"Or, rather," pursued my friend imperturbably, "there_was_one."

"What do you mean—there was one? Where is it now?"

"Burnt!"

"Burnt?"
"Yes. See here." He took out the charred fragment we had found in the grate in Mrs. Inglethorp's room, and handed it to the lawyer with a brief explanation of when and where he had found it.

"But possibly this is an old will?"

"I do not think so. In fact I am almost certain that it was made no earlier than yesterday afternoon."

"What?" "Impossible!" broke simultaneously from both men.

Poirot turned to John.

"If you will allow me to send for your gardener, I will prove it to you."

"Oh, of course--but I don't see----"

Poirot raised his hand.

"Do as I ask you. Afterwards you shall question as much as you please."

"Very well." He rang the bell.

Dorcas answered it in due course.

"Dorcas, will you tell Manning to come round and speak to me here."

"Yes, sir."

Dorcas withdrew.

We waited in a tense silence. Poirot alone seemed perfectly at his ease, and dusted a forgotten corner of the bookcase.

The clumping of hobnailed boots on the gravel outside proclaimed the approach of Manning. John looked questioningly at Poirot. The latter nodded.

"Come inside, Manning," said John, "I want to speak to you."

Manning came slowly and hesitatingly through the French window, and stood as near it as he could. He held his cap in his hands, twisting it very carefully round and round. His back was much bent, though he was probably not as old as he looked, but his eyes were sharp and intelligent, and belied his slow and rather cautious speech.

"Manning," said John, "this gentleman will put some questions to you which I want you to answer."

"Yes sir," mumbled Manning.

Poirot stepped forward briskly. Manning's eye swept over him with a faint contempt.

"You were planting a bed of begonias round by the south side of the house yesterday afternoon, were you not, Manning?"

"Yes, sir, me and Willum."

"And Mrs. Inglethorp came to the window and called you, did she not?"

"Yes, sir, she did."

"Tell me in your own words exactly what happened after that."

"Well, sir, nothing much. She just told Willum to go on his bicycle down to the village, and bring back a form of will, or such-like--I don't know what exactly--she wrote it down for him."

"Well?"

"Well, he did, sir."

"And what happened next?"

"We went on with the begonias, sir."

"Did not Mrs. Inglethorp call you again?"

"Yes, sir, both me and Willum, she called."

"And then?"

"She made us come right in, and sign our names at the bottom of a long paper--under where she'd signed."

"Did you see anything of what was written above her signature?" asked Poirot sharply.

"No, sir, there was a bit of blotting paper over that part."

"And you signed where she told you?"

"Yes, sir, first me and then Willum."

"What did she do with it afterwards?"

"Well, sir, she slipped it into a long envelope, and put it inside a sort of purple box that was standing on the desk."

"What time was it when she first called you?"

"About four, I should say, sir."

"Not earlier? Couldn't it have been about half-past three?"

"No, I shouldn't say so, sir. It would be more likely to be a bit after four--not before it."

"Thank you, Manning, that will do," said Poirot pleasantly.

The gardener glanced at his master, who nodded, whereupon Manning lifted a finger to his forehead with a low mumble, and backed cautiously out of the window.
We all looked at each other.
"Good heavens!" murmured John. "What an extraordinary coincidence."
"How--a coincidence?"
"That my mother should have made a will on the very day of her death!"
Mr. Wells cleared his throat and remarked drily:
"Are you so sure it is a coincidence, Cavendish?"
"What do you mean?"
"Your mother, you tell me, had a violent quarrel with--some one yesterday afternoon-----"
"What do you mean?" cried John again. There was a tremor in his voice, and he had gone very pale.
"In consequence of that quarrel, your mother very suddenly and hurriedly makes a new will. The contents of that will we shall never know. She told no one of its provisions. This morning, no doubt, she would have consulted me on the subject--but she had no chance. The will disappears, and she takes its secret with her to her grave. Cavendish, I much fear there is no coincidence there. Monsieur Poirot, I am sure you agree with me that the facts are very suggestive."
"Suggestive, or not," interrupted John, "we are most grateful to Monsieur Poirot for elucidating the matter. But for him, we should never have known of this will. I suppose, I may not ask you, monsieur, what first led you to suspect the fact?"
Poirot smiled and answered:
"A scribbled over old envelope, and a freshly planted bed of begonias."
John, I think, would have pressed his questions further, but at that moment the loud purr of a motor was audible, and we all turned to the window as it swept past.
Poirot looked inquiringly at me.
"Miss Howard," I explained.
"Ah, I am glad she has come. There is a woman with a head and a heart too, Hastings. Though the good God gave her no beauty!"
I followed John's example, and went out into the hall, where Miss Howard was endeavouring to extricate herself from the voluminous mass of veils that enveloped her head. As her eyes fell on me, a sudden pang of guilt shot through me. This was the woman who had warned me so earnestly, and to whose warning I had, alas, paid no heed! How soon, and how contemptuously, I had dismissed it from my mind. Now that she had been proved justified in so tragic a manner, I felt ashamed. She had known Alfred Inglethorp only too well. I wondered whether, if she had remained at Styles, the tragedy would have taken place, or would the man have feared her watchful eyes?
I was relieved when she shook me by the hand, with her well remembered painful grip. The eyes that met mine were sad, but not reproachful; that she had been crying bitterly, I could tell by the redness of her eyelids, but her manner was unchanged from its old gruffness.
"Started the moment I got the wire. Just come off night duty. Hired car. Quickest way to get here."
"Have you had anything to eat this morning, Evie?" asked John.
"No."
"I thought not. Come along, breakfast's not cleared away yet, and they'll make you some fresh tea." He turned to me. "Look after her, Hastings, will you? Wells is waiting for me. Oh, here's Monsieur Poirot. He's helping us, you know, Evie."
Miss Howard shook hands with Poirot, but glanced suspiciously over her shoulder at John.
"What do you mean--helping us?"
"Helping us to investigate."
"Nothing to investigate. Have they taken him to prison yet?"
"Taken who to prison?"
"Who? Alfred Inglethorp, of course!"
"My dear Evie, do be careful. Lawrence is of the opinion that my mother died from heart seizure."
"More fool, Lawrence!" retorted Miss Howard. "Of course Alfred Inglethorp murdered poor Emily--as I always told you he would."
"My dear Evie, don't shout so. Whatever we may think or suspect, it is better to say as little as possible for the present. The inquest isn't until Friday."
"Not until fiddlesticks!" The snort Miss Howard gave was truly magnificent. "You're all off your heads. The man will be out of the country by then. If he's any sense, he won't stay here tamely and wait to be hanged."
John Cavendish looked at her helplessly.
"I know what it is," she accused him, "you've been listening to the doctors. Never should. What do they know?
Nothing at all—or just enough to make them dangerous. I ought to know—my own father was a doctor. That little Wilkins is about the greatest fool that even I have ever seen. Heart seizure! Sort of thing he would say. Anyone with any sense could see at once that her husband had poisoned her. I always said he’d murder her in her bed, poor soul. Now he’s done it. And all you can do is to murmur silly things about 'heart seizure' and 'inquest on Friday.' You ought to be ashamed of yourself, John Cavendish."

"What do you want me to do?" asked John, unable to help a faint smile. "Dash it all, Evie, I can't haul him down to the local police station by the scruff of his neck."

"Well, you might do something. Find out how he did it. He's a crafty beggar. Dare say he soaked fly papers. Ask Cook if she's missed any."

It occurred to me very forcibly at that moment that to harbour Miss Howard and Alfred Inglethorp under the same roof, and keep the peace between them, was likely to prove a Herculean task, and I did not envy John. I could see by the expression of his face that he fully appreciated the difficulty of the position. For the moment, he sought refuge in retreat, and left the room precipitately.

Dorcas brought in fresh tea. As she left the room, Poirot came over from the window where he had been standing, and sat down facing Miss Howard.

"Mademoiselle," he said gravely, "I want to ask you something."

"Ask away," said the lady, eyeing him with some disfavour.

"I want to be able to count upon your help."

"I'll help you to hang Alfred with pleasure," she replied gruffly. "Hanging's too good for him. Ought to be drawn and quartered, like in good old times."

"We are at one then," said Poirot, "for I, too, want to hang the criminal."

"Alfred Inglethorp?"

"Him, or another."

"No question of another. Poor Emily was never murdered until _he_ came along. I don't say she wasn't surrounded by sharks—she was. But it was only her purse they were after. Her life was safe enough. But along comes Mr. Alfred Inglethorp—and within two months—hey presto!"

"Believe me, Miss Howard," said Poirot very earnestly, "if Mr. Inglethorp is the man, he shall not escape me. On my honour, I will hang him as high as Haman!"

"That's better," said Miss Howard more enthusiastically.

"But I must ask you to trust me. Now your help may be very valuable to me. I will tell you why. Because, in all this house of mourning, yours are the only eyes that have wept."

Miss Howard blinked, and a new note crept into the gruffness of her voice.

"If you mean that I was fond of her—yes, I was. You know, Emily was a selfish old woman in her way. She was very generous, but she always wanted a return. She never let people forget what she had done for them—and, that way she missed love. Don't think she ever realized it, though, or felt the lack of it. Hope not, anyway. I was on a different footing. I took my stand from the first. 'So many pounds a year I'm worth to you. Well and good. But not a penny piece besides—not a pair of gloves, nor a theatre ticket.' She didn't understand—and I couldn't explain. Anyway, I kept my self-respect. And so, out of the whole bunch, I was the only one who could allow myself to be fond of her. I watched over her. I guarded her from the lot of them, and then a gib-tongued scoundrel comes along, and pooh! all my years of devotion go for nothing."

Poirot nodded sympathetically.

"I understand, mademoiselle, I understand all you feel. It is most natural. You think that we are lukewarm—that we lack fire and energy—but trust me, it is not so."

John stuck his head in at this juncture, and invited us both to come up to Mrs. Inglethorp's room, as he and Mr. Wells had finished looking through the desk in the boudoir.

As we went up the stairs, John looked back to the dining-room door, and lowered his voice confidentially:

"Look here, what's going to happen when these two meet?"

I shook my head helplessly.

"I've told Mary to keep them apart if she can."

"Will she be able to do so?"

"The Lord only knows. There's one thing, Inglethorp himself won't be too keen on meeting her."

"You've got the keys still, haven't you, Poirot?" I asked, as we reached the door of the locked room.

Taking the keys from Poirot, John unlocked it, and we all passed in. The lawyer went straight to the desk, and John followed him.

"My mother kept most of her important papers in this despatch-case, I believe," he said.

Poirot drew out the small bunch of keys.
"Permit me. I locked it, out of precaution, this morning."
"But it's not locked now."
"Impossible!"
"See." And John lifted the lid as he spoke.
"Milles tonnerres!" cried Poirot, dumfounded. "And I--who have both the keys in my pocket!" He flung himself upon the case. Suddenly he stiffened. "En voila une affaire! This lock has been forced."
"What?"
Poirot laid down the case again.
"But who forced it? Why should they? When? But the door was locked?" These exclamations burst from us disjointedly.

Poirot answered them categorically--almost mechanically.
"Who? That is the question. Why? Ah, if I only knew. When? Since I was here an hour ago. As to the door being locked, it is a very ordinary lock. Probably any other of the doorkeys in this passage would fit it."

We stared at one another blankly. Poirot had walked over to the mantel-piece. He was outwardly calm, but I noticed his hands, which from long force of habit were mechanically straightening the spill vases on the mantel-piece, were shaking violently.

"See here, it was like this," he said at last. "There was something in that case--some piece of evidence, slight in itself perhaps, but still enough of a clue to connect the murderer with the crime. It was vital to him that it should be destroyed before it was discovered and its significance appreciated. Therefore, he took the risk, the great risk, of coming in here. Finding the case locked, he was obliged to force it, thus betraying his presence. For him to take that risk, it must have been something of great importance."

"But what was it?"
"Ah!" cried Poirot, with a gesture of anger. "That, I do not know! A document of some kind, without doubt, possibly the scrap of paper Dorcas saw in her hand yesterday afternoon. And I--" his anger burst forth freely--"miserable animal that I am! I guessed nothing! I have behaved like an imbecile! I should never have left that case here. I should have carried it away with me. Ah, triple pig! And now it is gone. It is destroyed--but is it destroyed? Is there not yet a chance--we must leave no stone unturned--"

He rushed like a madman from the room, and I followed him as soon as I had sufficiently recovered my wits.

Mary Cavendish was standing where the staircase branched, staring down into the hall in the direction in which he had disappeared.

"What has happened to your extraordinary little friend, Mr. Hastings? He has just rushed past me like a mad bull."

"He's rather upset about something," I remarked feebly. I really did not know how much Poirot would wish me to disclose. As I saw a faint smile gather on Mrs. Cavendish's expressive mouth, I endeavoured to try and turn the conversation by saying: "They haven't met yet, have they?"

"Who?"
"Mr. Inglethorp and Miss Howard."
She looked at me in rather a disconcerting manner.
"Do you think it would be such a disaster if they did meet?"
"Well, don't you?" I said, rather taken aback.
"No." She was smiling in her quiet way. "I should like to see a good flare up. It would clear the air. At present we are all thinking so much, and saying so little."

"John doesn't think so," I remarked. "He's anxious to keep them apart."
"Oh, John!"
Something in her tone fired me, and I blurted out:
"Old John's an awfully good sort."
She studied me curiously for a minute or two, and then said, to my great surprise:
"You are loyal to your friend. I like you for that."
"Aren't you my friend too?"
"I am a very bad friend."
"Why do you say that?"
"Because it is true. I am charming to my friends one day, and forget all about them the next."
I don't know what impelled me, but I was nettled, and I said foolishly and not in the best of taste:
"Yet you seem to be invariably charming to Dr. Bauerstein!"

Instantly I regretted my words. Her face stiffened. I had the impression of a steel curtain coming down and
blotting out the real woman. Without a word, she turned and went swiftly up the stairs, whilst I stood like an idiot gaping after her.

I was recalled to other matters by a frightful row going on below. I could hear Poirot shouting and expounding. I was vexed to think that my diplomacy had been in vain. The little man appeared to be taking the whole house into his confidence, a proceeding of which I, for one, doubted the wisdom. Once again I could not help regretting that my friend was so prone to lose his head in moments of excitement. I stepped briskly down the stairs. The sight of me calmed Poirot almost immediately. I drew him aside.

"My dear fellow," I said, "is this wise? Surely you don't want the whole house to know of this occurrence? You are actually playing into the criminal’s hands."

"You think so, Hastings?"

"I am sure of it."

"Well, well, my friend, I will be guided by you."

"Good. Although, unfortunately, it is a little too late now."

"Sure."

He looked so crestfallen and abashed that I felt quite sorry, though I still thought my rebuke a just and wise one.

"Well," he said at last, "let us go, mon ami."

"You have finished here?"

"For the moment, yes. You will walk back with me to the village?"

"Willingly."

He picked up his little suit-case, and we went out through the open window in the drawing-room. Cynthia Murdoch was just coming in, and Poirot stood aside to let her pass.

"Excuse me, mademoiselle, one minute."

"Yes?" she turned inquiringly.

"Did you ever make up Mrs. Inglethorp's medicines?"

A slight flush rose in her face, as she answered rather constrainedly:

"No."

"Only her powders?"

The flush deepened as Cynthia replied:

"Oh, yes, I did make up some sleeping powders for her once."

"These?"

Poirot produced the empty box which had contained powders.

She nodded.

"Can you tell me what they were? Sulphonal? Veronal?"

"No, they were bromide powders."

"Ah! Thank you, mademoiselle; good morning."

As we walked briskly away from the house, I glanced at him more than once. I had often before noticed that, if anything excited him, his eyes turned green like a cat's. They were shining like emeralds now.

"My friend," he broke out at last, "I have a little idea, a very strange, and probably utterly impossible idea. And yet—it fits in."

I shrugged my shoulders. I privately thought that Poirot was rather too much given to these fantastic ideas. In this case, surely, the truth was only too plain and apparent.

"So that is the explanation of the blank label on the box," I remarked. "Very simple, as you said. I really wonder that I did not think of it myself."

Poirot did not appear to be listening to me.

"They have made one more discovery, la-bas," he observed, jerking his thumb over his shoulder in the direction of Styles. "Mr. Wells told me as we were going upstairs."

"What was it?"

"Locked up in the desk in the boudoir, they found a will of Mrs. Inglethorp's, dated before her marriage, leaving her fortune to Alfred Inglethorp. It must have been made just at the time they were engaged. It came quite as a surprise to Wells--and to John Cavendish also. It was written on one of those printed will forms, and witnessed by two of the servants—not Dorcas."

"Did Mr. Inglethorp know of it?"

"He says not."

"One might take that with a grain of salt," I remarked sceptically. "All these wills are very confusing. Tell me, how did those scribbled words on the envelope help you to discover that a will was made yesterday afternoon?"

Poirot smiled.
"Mon ami, have you ever, when writing a letter, been arrested by the fact that you did not know how to spell a certain word?"

"Yes, often. I suppose every one has."

"Exactly. And have you not, in such a case, tried the word once or twice on the edge of the blotting-paper, or a spare scrap of paper, to see if it looked right? Well, that is what Mrs. Inglethorp did. You will notice that the word 'possessed' is spelt first with one 's' and subsequently with two--correctly. To make sure, she had further tried it in a sentence, thus: 'I am possessed.' Now, what did that tell me? It told me that Mrs. Inglethorp had been writing the word 'possessed' that afternoon, and, having the fragment of paper found in the grate fresh in my mind, the possibility of a will--(a document almost certain to contain that word)--occurred to me at once. This possibility was confirmed by a further circumstance. In the general confusion, the boudoir had not been swept that morning, and near the desk were several traces of brown mould and earth. The weather had been perfectly fine for some days, and no ordinary boots would have left such a heavy deposit.

"I strolled to the window, and saw at once that the begonia beds had been newly planted. The mould in the beds was exactly similar to that on the floor of the boudoir, and also I learnt from you that they had been planted yesterday afternoon. I was now sure that one, or possibly both of the gardeners--for there were two sets of footprints in the bed--had entered the boudoir, for if Mrs. Inglethorp had merely wished to speak to them she would in all probability have stood at the window, and they would not have come into the room at all. I was now quite convinced that she had made a fresh will, and had called the two gardeners in to witness her signature. Events proved that I was right in my supposition."

"That was very ingenious," I could not help admitting. "I must confess that the conclusions I drew from those few scribbled words were quite erroneous."

He smiled.

"You gave too much rein to your imagination. Imagination is a good servant, and a bad master. The simplest explanation is always the most likely."

"Another point--how did you know that the key of the despatch-case had been lost?"

"I did not know it. It was a guess that turned out to be correct. You observed that it had a piece of twisted wire through the handle. That suggested to me at once that it had possibly been wrenched off a flimsy key-ring. Now, if it had been lost and recovered, Mrs. Inglethorp would at once have replaced it on her bunch; but on her bunch I found what was obviously the duplicate key, very new and bright, which led me to the hypothesis that somebody else had inserted the original key in the lock of the despatch-case."

"Yes," I said, "Alfred Inglethorp, without doubt."

Poirot looked at me curiously.

"You are very sure of his guilt?"

"Well, naturally. Every fresh circumstance seems to establish it more clearly."

"On the contrary," said Poirot quietly, "there are several points in his favour."

"Oh, come now!"

"Yes."

"I see only one."

"And that?"

"That he was not in the house last night."

"'Bad shot!' as you English say! You have chosen the one point that to my mind tells against him."

"How is that?"

"Because if Mr. Inglethorp knew that his wife would be poisoned last night, he would certainly have arranged to be away from the house. His excuse was an obviously trumped up one. That leaves us two possibilities: either he knew what was going to happen or he had a reason of his own for his absence."

"And that reason?" I asked sceptically.

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"How should I know? Discreditable, without doubt. This Mr. Inglethorp, I should say, is somewhat of a scoundrel--but that does not of necessity make him a murderer."

I shook my head, unconvinced.

"We do not agree, eh?" said Poirot. "Well, let us leave it. Time will show which of us is right. Now let us turn to other aspects of the case. What do you make of the fact that all the doors of the bedroom were bolted on the inside?"

"Well----" I considered. "One must look at it logically."

"True."

"I should put it this way. The doors _were_ bolted--our own eyes have told us that--yet the presence of the candle grease on the floor, and the destruction of the will, prove that during the night some one entered the room."

"..."
You agree so far?"

"Perfectly. Put with admirable clearness. Proceed."

"Well," I said, encouraged, "as the person who entered did not do so by the window, nor by miraculous means, it follows that the door must have been opened from inside by Mrs. Inglethorp herself. That strengthens the conviction that the person in question was her husband. She would naturally open the door to her own husband."

Poirot shook his head.

"Why should she? She had bolted the door leading into his room--a most unusual proceeding on her part--she had had a most violent quarrel with him that very afternoon. No, he was the last person she would admit."

"But you agree with me that the door must have been opened by Mrs. Inglethorp herself?"

"There is another possibility. She may have forgotten to bolt the door into the passage when she went to bed, and have got up later, towards morning, and bolted it then."

"Poirot, is that seriously your opinion?"

"No, I do not say it is so, but it might be. Now, to turn to another feature, what do you make of the scrap of conversation you overheard between Mrs. Cavendish and her mother-in-law?"

"I had forgotten that," I said thoughtfully. "That is as enigmatical as ever. It seems incredible that a woman like Mrs. Cavendish, proud and reticent to the last degree, should interfere so violently in what was certainly not her affair."

"Precisely. It was an astonishing thing for a woman of her breeding to do."

"It is certainly curious," I agreed. "Still, it is unimportant, and need not be taken into account."

A groan burst from Poirot.

"What have I always told you? Everything must be taken into account. If the fact will not fit the theory--let the theory go."

"Well, we shall see," I said, nettled.

"Yes, we shall see."

We had reached Leastways Cottage, and Poirot ushered me upstairs to his own room. He offered me one of the tiny Russian cigarettes he himself occasionally smoked. I was amused to notice that he stowed away the used matches most carefully in a little china pot. My momentary annoyance vanished.

Poirot had placed our two chairs in front of the open window which commanded a view of the village street. The fresh air blew in warm and pleasant. It was going to be a hot day.

Suddenly my attention was arrested by a weedy looking young man rushing down the street at a great pace. It was the expression on his face that was extraordinary--a curious mingling of terror and agitation.

"Look, Poirot!" I said.

He leant forward.

"Tiens!" he said. "It is Mr. Mace, from the chemist's shop. He is coming here."

The young man came to a halt before Leastways Cottage, and, after hesitating a moment, pounded vigorously at the door.

"A little minute," cried Poirot from the window. "I come."

Motioning to me to follow him, he ran swiftly down the stairs and opened the door. Mr. Mace began at once.

"Oh, Mr. Poirot, I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but I heard that you'd just come back from the Hall?"

"Yes, we have." The young man moistened his dry lips. His face was working curiously.

"It's all over the village about old Mrs. Inglethorp dying so suddenly. They do say--" he lowered his voice cautiously--"that it's poison?"

I hardly heard what Poirot replied. Something evidently of a non-committal nature. The young man departed, and as he closed the door Poirot's eyes met mine.

"Yes," he said, nodding gravely. "He will have evidence to give at the inquest."

We went slowly upstairs again. I was opening my lips, when Poirot stopped me with a gesture of his hand.

"Not now, not now, mon ami. I have need of reflection. My mind is in some disorder--which is not well."

"For about ten minutes he sat in dead silence, perfectly still, except for several expressive motions of his eyebrows, and all the time his eyes grew steadily greener. At last he heaved a deep sigh."

"It is well. The bad moment has passed. Now all is arranged and classified. One must never permit confusion. The case is not clear yet--no. For it is of the most complicated! It puzzles me. Hercule Poirot! There are
two facts of significance."

"And what are they?"

"The first is the state of the weather yesterday. That is very important."

"But it was a glorious day!" I interrupted. "Poirot, you're pulling my leg!"

"Not at all. The thermometer registered 80 degrees in the shade. Do not forget that, my friend. It is the key to the whole riddle!"

"And the second point?" I asked.

"The important fact that Monsieur Inglethorp wears very peculiar clothes, has a black beard, and uses glasses."

"Poirot, I cannot believe you are serious."

"I am absolutely serious, my friend."

"But this is childish!"

"No, it is very momentous."

"And supposing the Coroner's jury returns a verdict of Wilful Murder against Alfred Inglethorp. What becomes of your theories, then?"

"They would not be shaken because twelve stupid men had happened to make a mistake! But that will not occur. For one thing, a country jury is not anxious to take responsibility upon itself, and Mr. Inglethorp stands practically in the position of local squire. Also, " he added placidly, "I should not allow it!"

"_You_ would not allow it?"

"No."

I looked at the extraordinary little man, divided between annoyance and amusement. He was so tremendously sure of himself. As though he read my thoughts, he nodded gently.

"Oh, yes, mon ami, I would do what I say." He got up and laid his hand on my shoulder. His physiognomy underwent a complete change. Tears came into his eyes. "In all this, you see, I think of that poor Mrs. Inglethorp who is dead. She was not extravagantly loved--no. But she was very good to us Belgians--I owe her a debt."

I endeavoured to interrupt, but Poirot swept on.

"Let me tell you this, Hastings. She would never forgive me if I let Alfred Inglethorp, her husband, be arrested now--when a word from me could save him!"

CHAPTER VI.

THE INQUEST

In the interval before the inquest, Poirot was unfailing in his activity. Twice he was closeted with Mr. Wells. He also took long walks into the country. I rather resented his not taking me into his confidence, the more so as I could not in the least guess what he was driving at.

It occurred to me that he might have been making inquiries at Raikes's farm; so, finding him out when I called at Leastways Cottage on Wednesday evening, I walked over there by the fields, hoping to meet him. But there was no sign of him, and I hesitated to go right up to the farm itself. As I walked away, I met an aged rustic, who leered at me cunningly.

"You'm from the Hall, bain't you?" he asked.

"Yes. I'm looking for a friend of mine whom I thought might have walked this way."

"A little chap? As waves his hands when he talks? One of them Belgies from the village?"

"Yes," I said eagerly. "He has been here, then?"

"Oh, ay, he's been here, right enough. More'n once too. Friend of yours, is he? Ah, you gentlemen from the Hall-you'n a pretty lot!" And he leered more jocosely than ever.

"Why, do the gentlemen from the Hall come here often?" I asked, as carelessly as I could.

He winked at me knowingly.

"_One_ does, mister. Naming no names, mind. And a very liberal gentleman too! Oh, thank you, sir, I'm sure."

I walked on sharply. Evelyn Howard had been right then, and I experienced a sharp twinge of disgust, as I thought of Alfred Inglethorp's liberality with another woman's money. Had that piquant gipsy face been at the bottom of the crime, or was it the baser mainspring of money? Probably a judicious mixture of both.

On one point, Poirot seemed to have a curious obsession. He once or twice observed to me that he thought Dorcas must have made an error in fixing the time of the quarrel. He suggested to her repeatedly that it was 4.30, and not 4 o'clock when she had heard the voices.

But Dorcas was unshaken. Quite an hour, or even more, had elapsed between the time when she had heard the voices and 5 o'clock, when she had taken tea to her mistress.

The inquest was held on Friday at the Stylites Arms in the village. Poirot and I sat together, not being required to give evidence.

The preliminaries were gone through. The jury viewed the body, and John Cavendish gave evidence of
Further questioned, he described his awakening in the early hours of the morning, and the circumstances of his mother's death.

The medical evidence was next taken. There was a breathless hush, and every eye was fixed on the famous London specialist, who was known to be one of the greatest authorities of the day on the subject of toxicology.

In a few brief words, he summed up the result of the post-mortem. Shorn of its medical phraseology and technicalities, it amounted to the fact that Mrs. Inglethorp had met her death as the result of strychnine poisoning. Judging from the quantity recovered, she must have taken not less than three-quarters of a grain of strychnine, but probably one grain or slightly over.

"Is it possible that she could have swallowed the poison by accident?" asked the Coroner.

"I should consider it very unlikely. Strychnine is not used for domestic purposes, as some poisons are, and there are restrictions placed on its sale."

"Does anything in your examination lead you to determine how the poison was administered?"

"No."

"You arrived at Styles before Dr. Wilkins, I believe?"

"That is so. The motor met me just outside the lodge gates, and I hurried there as fast as I could."

"Will you relate to us exactly what happened next?"

"I entered Mrs. Inglethorp's room. She was at that moment in a typical tetanic convulsion. She turned towards me, and gasped out: 'Alfred--Alfred----' "

"Could the strychnine have been administered in Mrs. Inglethorp's after-dinner coffee which was taken to her by her husband?"

"Possibly, but strychnine is a fairly rapid drug in its action. The symptoms appear from one to two hours after it has been swallowed. It is retarded under certain conditions, none of which, however, appear to have been present in this case. I presume Mrs. Inglethorp took the coffee after dinner about eight o'clock, whereas the symptoms did not manifest themselves until the early hours of the morning, which, on the face of it, points to the drug having been taken much later in the evening."

"Mrs. Inglethorp was in the habit of drinking a cup of coco in the middle of the night. Could the strychnine have been administered in that?"

"No, I myself took a sample of the coco remaining in the saucepan and had it analysed. There was no strychnine present."

I heard Poirot chuckle softly beside me.

"How did you know?" I whispered.

"Listen."

"I should say"--the doctor was continuing--"that I would have been considerably surprised at any other result."

"Why?"

"Simply because strychnine has an unusually bitter taste. It can be detected in a solution of 1 in 70,000, and can only be disguised by some strongly flavoured substance. Coco would be quite powerless to mask it."

One of the jury wanted to know if the same objection applied to coffee.

"No. Coffee has a bitter taste of its own which would probably cover the taste of strychnine."

"Then you consider it more likely that the drug was administered in the coffee, but that for some unknown reason its action was delayed."

"Yes, but, the cup being completely smashed, there is no possibility of analyzing its contents."

This concluded Dr. Bauerstein's evidence. Dr. Wilkins corroborated it on all points. Sounded as to the possibility of suicide, he repudiated it utterly. The deceased, he said, suffered from a weak heart, but otherwise enjoyed perfect health, and was of a cheerful and well-balanced disposition. She would be one of the last people to take her own life.

Lawrence Cavendish was next called. His evidence was quite unimportant, being a mere repetition of that of his brother. Just as he was about to step down, he paused, and said rather hesitatingly:

"I should like to make a suggestion if I may?"

He glanced deprecatingly at the Coroner, who replied briskly:

"Certainly, Mr. Cavendish, we are here to arrive at the truth of this matter, and welcome anything that may lead to further elucidation."

"It is just an idea of mine," explained Lawrence. "Of course I may be quite wrong, but it still seems to me that my mother's death might be accounted for by natural means."

"How do you make that out, Mr. Cavendish?"

"My mother, at the time of her death, and for some time before it, was taking a tonic containing strychnine."

"Ah!" said the Coroner.
The jury looked up, interested.
"I believe," continued Lawrence, "that there have been cases where the cumulative effect of a drug, administered for some time, has ended by causing death. Also, is it not possible that she may have taken an overdose of her medicine by accident?"

"This is the first we have heard of the deceased taking strychnine at the time of her death. We are much obliged to you, Mr. Cavendish."

Dr. Wilkins was recalled and ridiculed the idea.
"What Mr. Cavendish suggests is quite impossible. Any doctor would tell you the same. Strychnine is, in a certain sense, a cumulative poison, but it would be quite impossible for it to result in sudden death in this way. There would have to be a long period of chronic symptoms which would at once have attracted my attention. The whole thing is absurd."

"And the second suggestion? That Mrs. Inglethorp may have inadvertently taken an overdose?"
"Three, or even four doses, would not have resulted in death. Mrs. Inglethorp always had an extra large amount of medicine made up at a time, as she dealt with Coot's, the Cash Chemists in Tadminster. She would have had to take very nearly the whole bottle to account for the amount of strychnine found at the post-mortem."

"Then you consider that we may dismiss the tonic as not being in any way instrumental in causing her death?"
"Certainly. The supposition is ridiculous."

The same juryman who had interrupted before here suggested that the chemist who made up the medicine might have committed an error.
"That, of course, is always possible," replied the doctor.

But Dorcas, who was the next witness called, dispelled even that possibility. The medicine had not been newly made up. On the contrary, Mrs. Inglethorp had taken the last dose on the day of her death.

So the question of the tonic was finally abandoned, and the Coroner proceeded with his task. Having elicited from Dorcas how she had been awakened by the violent ringing of her mistress's bell, and had subsequently roused the household, he passed to the subject of the quarrel on the preceding afternoon.

Dorcas's evidence on this point was substantially what Poirot and I had already heard, so I will not repeat it here.

The next witness was Mary Cavendish. She stood very upright, and spoke in a low, clear, and perfectly composed voice. In answer to the Coroner's question, she told how, her alarm clock having aroused her at 4.30 as usual, she was dressing, when she was startled by the sound of something heavy falling.
"That would have been the table by the bed?" commented the Coroner.

"I opened my door," continued Mary, "and listened. In a few minutes a bell rang violently. Dorcas came running down and woke my husband, and we all went to my mother-in-law's room, but it was locked----"

The Coroner interrupted her.
"I really do not think we need trouble you further on that point. We know all that can be known of the subsequent happenings. But I should be obliged if you would tell us all you overheard of the quarrel the day before."
"I?"

There was a faint insolence in her voice. She raised her hand and adjusted the ruffle of lace at her neck, turning her head a little as she did so. And quite spontaneously the thought flashed across my mind: "She is gaining time!"
"Yes, I understand," continued the Coroner deliberately, "that you were sitting reading on the bench just outside the long window of the boudoir. That is so, is it not?"

This was news to me and glancing sideways at Poirot, I fancied that it was news to him as well.

There was the faintest pause, the mere hesitation of a moment, before she answered:
"Yes, that is so."

"And the boudoir window was open, was it not?"

Surely her face grew a little paler as she answered:
"Yes."

"Then you cannot have failed to hear the voices inside, especially as they were raised in anger. In fact, they would be more audible where you were than in the hall."

"Possibly."

"Will you repeat to us what you overheard of the quarrel?"

"I really do not remember hearing anything."

"Do you mean to say you did not hear voices?"

"Oh, yes, I heard the voices, but I did not hear what they said." A faint spot of colour came into her cheek. "I am not in the habit of listening to private conversations."

The Coroner persisted.
"And you remember nothing at all? _Nothing_, Mrs. Cavendish? Not one stray word or phrase to make you
realize that it _was_ a private conversation?"

She paused, and seemed to reflect, still outwardly as calm as ever.

"Yes; I remember. Mrs. Inglethorp said something--I do not remember exactly what--about causing scandal
between husband and wife."

"Ah!" the Coroner leant back satisfied. "That corresponds with what Dorcas heard. But excuse me, Mrs. Cavendish, although you realized it was a private conversation, you did not move away? You remained where you
were?"

I caught the momentary gleam of her tawny eyes as she raised them. I felt certain that at that moment she would
willingly have torn the little lawyer, with his insinuations, into pieces, but she replied quietly enough:

"No. I was very comfortable where I was. I fixed my mind on my book."

"And that is all you can tell us?"

"That is all."

The examination was over, though I doubted if the Coroner was entirely satisfied with it. I think he suspected
that Mary Cavendish could tell more if she chose.

Amy Hill, shop assistant, was next called, and deposed to having sold a will form on the afternoon of the 17th to
William Earl, under-gardener at Styles.

William Earl and Manning succeeded her, and testified to witnessing a document. Manning fixed the time at
about 4.30, William was of the opinion that it was rather earlier.

Cynthia Murdoch came next. She had, however, little to tell. She had known nothing of the tragedy, until
awakened by Mrs. Cavendish.

"You did not hear the table fall?"

"No. I was fast asleep."

The Coroner smiled.

"A good conscience makes a sound sleeper," he observed. "Thank you, Miss Murdoch, that is all."

"Miss Howard."

Miss Howard produced the letter written to her by Mrs. Inglethorp on the evening of the 17th. Poirot and I had,
of course already seen it. It added nothing to our knowledge of the tragedy. The following is a facsimile:

STYLES COURT ESSEX hand written note: July 17th
My dear Evelyn
Can we not bury the hatchet? I have found it hard to forgive the things you said
against my dear husband but I am an old woman & very fond of you
Yours affectionately,
Emily Inglethorpe

It was handed to the jury who scrutinized it attentively.

"I fear it does not help us much," said the Coroner, with a sigh. "There is no mention of any of the events of that
afternoon."

"Plain as a pikestaff to me," said Miss Howard shortly. "It shows clearly enough that my poor old friend had just
found out she'd been made a fool of!"

"It says nothing of the kind in the letter," the Coroner pointed out.

"No, because Emily never could bear to put herself in the wrong. But I know her. She wanted me back. But she
wasn't going to own that I'd been right. She went round about. Most people do. Don't believe in it myself."

Mr. Wells smiled faintly. So, I noticed, did several of the jury. Miss Howard was obviously quite a public
character.

"Anyway, all this tomfoolery is a great waste of time," continued the lady, glancing up and down the jury
disparagingly. "Talk--talk--talk! When all the time we know perfectly well-----"

The Coroner interrupted her in an agony of apprehension:

"Thank you, Miss Howard, that is all."

I fancy he breathed a sigh of relief when she complied.

Then came the sensation of the day. The Coroner called Albert Mace, chemist's assistant.

It was our agitated young man of the pale face. In answer to the Coroner's questions, he explained that he was a
qualified pharmacist, but had only recently come to this particular shop, as the assistant formerly there had just been
called up for the army.

These preliminaries completed, the Coroner proceeded to business.

"Mr. Mace, have you lately sold strychnine to any unauthorized person?"

"Yes, sir."

"When was this?"

"Last Monday night."
"Monday? Not Tuesday?"
"No, sir, Monday, the 16th."
"Will you tell us to whom you sold it?"
You could have heard a pin drop.
"Yes, sir. It was to Mr. Inglethorp."

Every eye turned simultaneously to where Alfred Inglethorp was sitting, impassive and wooden. He started slightly, as the damning words fell from the young man's lips. I half thought he was going to rise from his chair, but he remained seated, although a remarkably well acted expression of astonishment rose on his face.

"You are sure of what you say?" asked the Coroner sternly.
"Quite sure, sir."
"Are you in the habit of selling strychnine indiscriminately over the counter?"
The wretched young man wilted visibly under the Coroner's frown.
"Oh, no, sir--of course not. But, seeing it was Mr. Inglethorp of the Hall, I thought there was no harm in it. He said it was to poison a dog."
Inwardly I sympathized. It was only human nature to endeavour to please "The Hall"--especially when it might result in custom being transferred from Coot's to the local establishment.
"Is it not customary for anyone purchasing poison to sign a book?"
"Yes, sir, Mr. Inglethorp did so."
"Have you got the book here?"
"Yes, sir."

It was produced; and, with a few words of stern censure, the Coroner dismissed the wretched Mr. Mace.

Then, amidst a breathless silence, Alfred Inglethorp was called. Did he realize, I wondered, how closely the halter was being drawn around his neck?

The Coroner went straight to the point.
"On Monday evening last, did you purchase strychnine for the purpose of poisoning a dog?"
Inglethorp replied with perfect calmness:
"No, I did not. There is no dog at Styles, except an outdoor sheepdog, which is in perfect health."
"You deny absolutely having purchased strychnine from Albert Mace on Monday last?"
"I do."
"Do you also deny this?"
The Coroner handed him the register in which his signature was inscribed.
"Certainly I do. The hand-writing is quite different from mine. I will show you."

He took an old envelope out of his pocket, and wrote his name on it, handing it to the jury. It was certainly utterly dissimilar.
"Then what is your explanation of Mr. Mace's statement?"
Alfred Inglethorp replied imperturbably:
"Mr. Mace must have been mistaken."

The Coroner hesitated for a moment, and then said:
"Mr. Inglethorp, as a mere matter of form, would you mind telling us where you were at the time that Mr. Mace positively recognized you as entering the shop to purchase strychnine?"
"If you like to take it that way, yes."
"Be careful, Mr. Inglethorp."
Poirot was fidgeting nervously.
"Sacre!" he murmured. "Does this imbecile of a man _want_ to be arrested?"

Inglethorp was indeed creating a bad impression. His futile denials would not have convinced a child. The Coroner, however, passed briskly to the next point, and Poirot drew a deep breath of relief.

"You had a discussion with your wife on Tuesday afternoon?"

"Pardon me," interrupted Alfred Inglethorp, "you have been misinformed. I had no quarrel with my dear wife. The whole story is absolutely untrue. I was absent from the house the entire afternoon."

"Have you anyone who can testify to that?"

"You have my word," said Inglethorp haughtily.

The Coroner did not trouble to reply.

"There are two witnesses who will swear to having heard your disagreement with Mrs. Inglethorp."

"Those witnesses were mistaken."

I was puzzled. The man spoke with such quiet assurance that I was staggered. I looked at Poirot. There was an expression of exultation on his face which I could not understand. Was he at last convinced of Alfred Inglethorp's guilt?

"Mr. Inglethorp," said the Coroner, "you have heard your wife's dying words repeated here. Can you explain them in any way?"

"Certainly I can."

"You can?"

"It seems to me very simple. The room was dimly lighted. Dr. Bauerstein is much of my height and build, and, like me, wears a beard. In the dim light, and suffering as she was, my poor wife mistook him for me."

"Ah!" murmured Poirot to himself. "But it is an idea, that!"

"You think it is true?" I whispered.

"I do not say that. But it is truly an ingenious supposition."

"You read my wife's last words as an accusation"--Inglethorp was continuing--"they were, on the contrary, an appeal to me."

The Coroner reflected a moment, then he said:

"I believe, Mr. Inglethorp, that you yourself poured out the coffee, and took it to your wife that evening?"

"I poured it out, yes. But I did not take it to her. I meant to do so, but I was told that a friend was at the hall door, so I laid down the coffee on the hall table. When I came through the hall again a few minutes later, it was gone."

This statement might, or might not, be true, but it did not seem to me to improve matters much for Inglethorp. In any case, he had had ample time to introduce the poison.

At that point, Poirot nudged me gently, indicating two men who were sitting together near the door. One was a little, sharp, dark, ferret-faced man, the other was tall and fair.

I questioned Poirot mutely. He put his lips to my ear.

"Do you know who that little man is?"

I shook my head.

"That is Detective Inspector James Japp of Scotland Yard--Jimmy Japp. The other man is from Scotland Yard too. Things are moving quickly, my friend."

I stared at the two men intently. There was certainly nothing of the policeman about them. I should never have suspected them of being official personages.

I was still staring, when I was startled and recalled by the verdict being given:

"Wilful Murder against some person or persons unknown."

CHAPTER VII.

POIROT PAYS HIS DEBTS

As we came out of the Stylites Arms, Poirot drew me aside by a gentle pressure of the arm. I understood his object. He was waiting for the Scotland Yard men.

In a few moments, they emerged, and Poirot at once stepped forward, and accosted the shorter of the two.

"I fear you do not remember me, Inspector Japp."

"Why, if it isn't Mr. Poirot!" cried the Inspector. He turned to the other man. "You've heard me speak of Mr. Poirot? It was in 1904 he and I worked together--the Abercrombie forgery case--you remember, he was run down in Brussels. Ah, those were great days, moosier. Then, do you remember 'Baron' Altara? There was a pretty rogue for you! He eluded the clutches of half the police in Europe. But we nailed him in Antwerp--thanks to Mr. Poirot here."

As these friendly reminiscences were being indulged in, I drew nearer, and was introduced to Detective-Inspector Japp, who, in his turn, introduced us both to his companion, Superintendent Summerhaye.

"I need hardly ask what you are doing here, gentlemen," remarked Poirot.

Japp closed one eye knowingly.
"No, indeed. Pretty clear case I should say."
But Poirot answered gravely:
"There I differ from you."
"Oh, come!" said Summerhaye, opening his lips for the first time. "Surely the whole thing is clear as daylight. The man's caught red-handed. How he could be such a fool beats me!"
But Japp was looking attentively at Poirot.
"Hold your fire, Summerhaye," he remarked jocularly. "Me and Moosier here have met before--and there's no man's judgment I'd sooner take than his. If I'm not greatly mistaken, he's got something up his sleeve. Isn't that so, moosier?"

Poirot smiled.
"I have drawn certain conclusions--yes."
Summerhaye was still looking rather sceptical, but Japp continued his scrutiny of Poirot.
"It's this way," he said, "so far, we've only seen the case from the outside. That's where the Yard's at a disadvantage in a case of this kind, where the murder's only out, so to speak, after the inquest. A lot depends on being on the spot first thing, and that's where Mr. Poirot's had the start of us. We shouldn't have been here as soon as this even, if it hadn't been for the fact that there was a smart doctor on the spot, who gave us the tip through the Coroner. But you've been on the spot from the first, and you may have picked up some little hints. From the evidence at the inquest, Mr. Inglethorp murdered his wife as sure as I stand here, and if anyone but you hinted the contrary I'd laugh in his face. I must say I was surprised the jury didn't bring it in Wilful Murder against him right off. I think they would have, if it hadn't been for the Coroner--he seemed to be holding them back."

"Perhaps, though, you have a warrant for his arrest in your pocket now," suggested Poirot.
A kind of wooden shutter of officialdom came down from Japp's expressive countenance.
"Perhaps I have, and perhaps I haven't," he remarked dryly.

Poirot looked at him thoughtfully.
"I am very anxious, Messieurs, that he should not be arrested."
"I dare say," observed Summerhaye sarcastically.
Japp was regarding Poirot with comical perplexity.
"Can't you go a little further, Mr. Poirot? A wink's as good as a nod--from you. You've been on the spot--and the Yard doesn't want to make any mistakes, you know."

Poirot nodded gravely.
"That is exactly what I thought. Well, I will tell you this. Use your warrant: Arrest Mr. Inglethorp. But it will bring you no kudos--the case against him will be dismissed at once! Comme ca!" And he snapped his fingers expressively.

Japp's face grew grave, though Summerhaye gave an incredulous snort.
As for me, I was literally dumb with astonishment. I could only conclude that Poirot was mad.

Japp had taken out a handkerchief, and was gently dabbing his brow.
"I daren't do it, Mr. Poirot. I'd take your word, but there's others over me who'll be asking what the devil I mean by it. Can't you give me a little more to go on?"

Poirot reflected a moment.
"It can be done," he said at last. "I admit I do not wish it. It forces my hand. I would have preferred to work in the dark just for the present, but what you say is very just--the word of a Belgian policeman, whose day is past, is not enough! And Alfred Inglethorp must not be arrested. That I have sworn, as my friend Hastings here knows. See, then, my good Japp, you go at once to Styles?"

"Well, in about half an hour. We're seeing the Coroner and the doctor first."
"Good. Call for me in passing--the last house in the village. I will go with you. At Styles, Mr. Inglethorp will give you, or if he refuses--as is probable--I will give you such proofs that shall satisfy you that the case against him could not possibly be sustained. Is that a bargain?"

"That's a bargain," said Japp heartily. "And, on behalf of the Yard, I'm much obliged to you, though I'm bound to confess I can't at present see the faintest possible loop-hole in the evidence, but you always were a marvel! So long, then, moosier."

The two detectives strode away, Summerhaye with an incredulous grin on his face.
"Well, my friend," cried Poirot, before I could get in a word, "what do you think? Mon Dieu! I had some warm moments in that court; I did not figure to myself that the man would be so pig-headed as to refuse to say anything at all. Decidedly, it was the policy of an imbecile."

"H'm! There are other explanations besides that of imbecility," I remarked. "For, if the case against him is true, how could he defend himself except by silence?"
"Why, in a thousand ingenious ways," cried Poirot. "See; say that it is I who have committed this murder, I can think of seven most plausible stories! Far more convincing than Mr. Inglethorp's stony denials!"

I could not help laughing.

"My dear Poirot, I am sure you are capable of thinking of seventy! But, seriously, in spite of what I heard you say to the detectives, you surely cannot still believe in the possibility of Alfred Inglethorp's innocence?"

"Why not now as much as before? Nothing has changed."

"But the evidence is so conclusive."

"Yes, too conclusive."

We turned in at the gate of Leastways Cottage, and proceeded up the now familiar stairs.

"Yes, yes, too conclusive," continued Poirot, almost to himself. "Real evidence is usually vague and unsatisfactory. It has to be examined--sifted. But here the whole thing is cut and dried. No, my friend, this evidence has been very cleverly manufactured--so cleverly that it has defeated its own ends."

"How do you make that out?"

"Because, so long as the evidence against him was vague and intangible, it was very hard to disprove. But, in his anxiety, the criminal has drawn the net so closely that one cut will set Inglethorp free."

I was silent. And in a minute or two, Poirot continued:

"Let us look at the matter like this. Here is a man, let us say, who sets out to poison his wife. He has lived by his wits as the saying goes. Presumably, therefore, he has some wits. He is not altogether a fool. Well, how does he set about it? He goes boldly to the village chemist's and purchases strychnine under his own name, with a trumped up story about a dog which is bound to be proved absurd. He does not employ the poison that night. No, he waits until he has had a violent quarrel with her, of which the whole household is cognisant, and which naturally directs their suspicions upon him. He prepares no defence--no shadow of an alibi, yet he knows the chemist's assistant must necessarily come forward with the facts. Bah! do not ask me to believe that any man could be so idiotic! Only a lunatic, who wished to commit suicide by causing himself to be hanged, would act so!"

"Still--I do not see--" I began.

"Neither do I see. I tell you, mon ami, it puzzles me. Me --Hercule Poirot!"

"But if you believe him innocent, how do you explain his buying the strychnine?"

"Very simply. He did _not_ buy it."

"But Mace recognized him!"

"I beg your pardon, he saw a man with a black beard like Mr. Inglethorp's, and wearing glasses like Mr. Inglethorp, and dressed in Mr. Inglethorp's rather noticeable clothes. He could not recognize a man whom he had probably only seen in the distance, since, you remember, he himself had only been in the village a fortnight, and Mrs. Inglethorp dealt principally with Coot's in Tadminster."

"Then you think----"

"Mon ami, do you remember the two points I laid stress upon? Leave the first one for the moment, what was the second?"

"The important fact that Alfred Inglethorp wears peculiar clothes, has a black beard, and uses glasses," I quoted.

"Exactly. Now suppose anyone wished to pass himself off as John or Lawrence Cavendish. Would it be easy?"

"No," I said thoughtfully. "Of course an actor----"

But Poirot cut me short ruthlessly.

"And why would it not be easy? I will tell you, my friend: Because they are both clean-shaven men. To make up successfully as one of these two in broad daylight, it would need an actor of genius, and a certain initial facial resemblance. But in the case of Alfred Inglethorp, all that is changed. His clothes, his beard, the glasses which hide his eyes--those are the salient points about his personal appearance. Now, what is the first instinct of the criminal? To divert suspicion from himself, is it not so? And how can he best do that? By throwing it on some one else. In this instance, there was a man ready to his hand. Everybody was predisposed to believe in Mr. Inglethorp's guilt. It was a foregone conclusion that he would be suspected; but, to make it a sure thing there must be tangible proof--such as the actual buying of the poison, and that, with a man of the peculiar appearance of Mr. Inglethorp, was not difficult. Remember, this young Mace had never actually spoken to Mr. Inglethorp. How should he doubt that the man in his clothes, with his beard and his glasses, was not Alfred Inglethorp?"

"It may be so," I said, fascinated by Poirot's eloquence. "But, if that was the case, why does he not say where he was at six o'clock on Monday evening?"

"Ah, why indeed?" said Poirot, calming down. "If he were arrested, he probably would speak, but I do not want it to come to that. I must make him see the gravity of his position. There is, of course, something discreditable behind his silence. If he did not murder his wife, he is, nevertheless, a scoundrel, and has something of his own to conceal, quite apart from the murder."
"What can it be?" I mused, won over to Poirot's views for the moment, although still retaining a faint conviction that the obvious deduction was the correct one.

"Can you not guess?" asked Poirot, smiling.

"No, can you?"

"Oh, yes, I had a little idea sometime ago--and it has turned out to be correct."

"You never told me," I said reproachfully.

Poirot spread out his hands apologetically.

"Pardon me, mon ami, you were not precisely sympathique." He turned to me earnestly. "Tell me--you see now that he must not be arrested?"

"Perhaps," I said doubtfully, for I was really quite indifferent to the fate of Alfred Inglethorp, and thought that a good fright would do him no harm.

Poirot, who was watching me intently, gave a sigh.

"Come, my friend," he said, changing the subject, "apart from Mr. Inglethorp, how did the evidence at the inquest strike you?"

"Oh, pretty much what I expected."

"Did nothing strike you as peculiar about it?"

My thoughts flew to Mary Cavendish, and I hedged:

"In what way?"

"Well, Mr. Lawrence Cavendish's evidence for instance?"

I was relieved.

"Oh, Lawrence! No, I don't think so. He's always a nervous chap."

"His suggestion that his mother might have been poisoned accidentally by means of the tonic she was taking, that did not strike you as strange--hein?"

"No, I can't say it did. The doctors ridiculed it of course. But it was quite a natural suggestion for a layman to make."

"But Monsieur Lawrence is not a layman. You told me yourself that he had started by studying medicine, and that he had taken his degree."

"Yes, that's true. I never thought of that." I was rather startled. "It is odd."

Poirot nodded.

"From the first, his behaviour has been peculiar. Of all the household, he alone would be likely to recognize the symptoms of strychnine poisoning, and yet we find him the only member of the family to uphold strenuously the theory of death from natural causes. If it had been Monsieur John, I could have understood it. He has no technical knowledge, and is by nature unimaginative. But Monsieur Lawrence--no! And now, to-day, he puts forward a suggestion that he himself must have known was ridiculous. There is food for thought in this, mon ami!"

"It's very confusing," I agreed.

"Then there is Mrs. Cavendish," continued Poirot. "That's another who is not telling all she knows! What do you make of her attitude?"

"I don't know what to make of it. It seems inconceivable that she should be shielding Alfred Inglethorp. Yet that is what it looks like."

Poirot nodded reflectively.

"Yes, it is queer. One thing is certain, she overheard a good deal more of that 'private conversation' than she was willing to admit."

"And yet she is the last person one would accuse of stooping to eavesdrop!"

"Exactly. One thing her evidence _has_ shown me. I made a mistake. Dorcas was quite right. The quarrel did take place earlier in the afternoon, about four o'clock, as she said."

I looked at him curiously. I had never understood his insistence on that point.

"Yes, a good deal that was peculiar came out to-day," continued Poirot. "Dr. Bauerstein, now, what was he doing up and dressed at that hour in the morning? It is astonishing to me that no one commented on the fact."

"He has insomnia, I believe," I said doubtfully.

"Which is a very good, or a very bad explanation," remarked Poirot. "It covers everything, and explains nothing. I shall keep my eye on our clever Dr. Bauerstein."

"Any more faults to find with the evidence?" I inquired satirically.

"Mon ami," replied Poirot gravely, "when you find that people are not telling you the truth--look out! Now, unless I am much mistaken, at the inquest to-day only one--at most, two persons were speaking the truth without reservation or subterfuge."

"Oh, come now, Poirot! I won't cite Lawrence, or Mrs. Cavendish. But there's John--and Miss Howard, surely
they were speaking the truth?"

"Both of them, my friend? One, I grant you, but both----!"

His words gave me an unpleasant shock. Miss Howard's evidence, unimportant as it was, had been given in such a downright straightforward manner that it had never occurred to me to doubt her sincerity. Still, I had a great respect for Poirot's sagacity--except on the occasions when he was what I described to myself as "foolishly pig-headed."

"Do you really think so?" I asked. "Miss Howard had always seemed to me so essentially honest--almost uncomfortably so."

Poirot gave me a curious look, which I could not quite fathom. He seemed to speak, and then checked himself.

"Miss Murdoch too," I continued, "there's nothing untruthful about _her_."

"No. But it was strange that she never heard a sound, sleeping next door; whereas Mrs. Cavendish, in the other wing of the building, distinctly heard the table fall."

"Well, she's young. And she sleeps soundly."

"Ah, yes, indeed! She must be a famous sleeper, that one!"

I did not quite like the tone of his voice, but at that moment a smart knock reached our ears, and looking out of the window we perceived the two detectives waiting for us below.

Poirot seized his hat, gave a ferocious twist to his moustache, and, carefully brushing an imaginary speck of dust from his sleeve, motioned me to precede him down the stairs; there we joined the detectives and set out for Styles.

I think the appearance of the two Scotland Yard men was rather a shock--especially to John, though of course after the verdict, he had realized that it was only a matter of time. Still, the presence of the detectives brought the truth home to him more than anything else could have done.

Poirot had conferred with Japp in a low tone on the way up, and it was the latter functionary who requested that the household, with the exception of the servants, should be assembled together in the drawing-room. I realized the significance of this. It was up to Poirot to make his boast good.

Personally, I was not sanguine. Poirot might have excellent reasons for his belief in Inglethorp's innocence, but a man of the type of Summerhaye would require tangible proofs, and these I doubted if Poirot could supply.

Before very long we had all trooped into the drawing-room, the door of which Japp closed. Poirot politely set chairs for every one. The Scotland Yard men were the cynosure of all eyes. I think that for the first time we realized that the thing was not a bad dream, but a tangible reality. We had read of such things--now we ourselves were actors in the drama. To-morrow the daily papers, all over England, would blazon out the news in staring headlines:

"MYSTERIOUS TRAGEDY IN ESSEX"

"WEALTHY LADY POISONED"

There would be pictures of Styles, snap-shots of "The family leaving the Inquest"--the village photographer had not been idle! All the things that one had read a hundred times--things that happen to other people, not to oneself. And now, in this house, a murder had been committed. In front of us were "the detectives in charge of the case." The well-known glib phraseology passed rapidly through my mind in the interval before Poirot opened the proceedings.

I think every one was a little surprised that it should be he and not one of the official detectives who took the initiative.

"Mesdames and messieurs," said Poirot, bowing as though he were a celebrity about to deliver a lecture, "I have asked you to come here all together, for a certain object. That object, it concerns Mr. Alfred Inglethorp."

Inglethorp was sitting a little by himself--I think, unconsciously, every one had drawn his chair slightly away from him--and he gave a faint start as Poirot pronounced his name.

"Mr. Inglethorp," said Poirot, addressing him directly, "a very dark shadow is resting on this house--the shadow of murder."

Inglethorp shook his head sadly.

"My poor wife," he murmured. "Poor Emily! It is terrible."

"I do not think, monsieur," said Poirot pointedly, "that you quite realize how terrible it may be--for you." And as Inglethorp did not appear to understand, he added: "Mr. Inglethorp, you are standing in very grave danger."

The two detectives fidgeted. I saw the official caution "Anything you say will be used in evidence against you," actually hovering on Summerhaye's lips. Poirot went on.

"Do you understand now, monsieur?"

"No; What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Poirot deliberately, "that you are suspected of poisoning your wife."

A little gasp ran round the circle at this plain speaking.

"Good heavens!" cried Inglethorp, starting up. "What a monstrous idea! _I_--poison my dearest Emily!"

"I do not think"--Poirot watched him narrowly--"that you quite realize the unfavourable nature of your evidence
at the inquest. Mr. Inglethorp, knowing what I have now told you, do you still refuse to say where you were at six o'clock on Monday afternoon?"

With a groan, Alfred Inglethorp sank down again and buried his face in his hands. Poirot approached and stood over him.

"Speak!" he cried menacingly.

With an effort, Inglethorp raised his face from his hands. Then, slowly and deliberately, he shook his head.

"You will not speak?"

"No. I do not believe that anyone could be so monstrous as to accuse me of what you say."

Poirot nodded thoughtfully, like a man whose mind is made up.

"Soit!" he said. "Then I must speak for you."

Alfred Inglethorp sprang up again.

"You? How can you speak? You do not know----" he broke off abruptly.

Poirot turned to face us. "Mesdames and messieurs! I speak! Listen! I, Hercule Poirot, affirm that the man who entered the chemist's shop, and purchased strychnine at six o'clock on Monday last was not Mr. Inglethorp, for at six o'clock on that day Mr. Inglethorp was escorting Mrs. Raikes back to her home from a neighbouring farm. I can produce no less than five witnesses to swear to having seen them together, either at six or just after and, as you may know, the Abbey Farm, Mrs. Raikes's home, is at least two and a half miles distant from the village. There is absolutely no question as to the alibi!"

CHAPTER VIII.
FRESH SUSPICIONS

There was a moment's stupefied silence. Japp, who was the least surprised of any of us, was the first to speak.

"My word," he cried, "you're the goods! And no mistake, Mr. Poirot! These witnesses of yours are all right, I suppose?"

"Voila! I have prepared a list of them--names and addresses. You must see them, of course. But you will find it all right."

"I'm sure of that." Japp lowered his voice. "I'm much obliged to you. A pretty mare's nest arresting him would have been." He turned to Inglethorp. "But, if you'll excuse me, sir, why couldn't you say all this at the inquest?"

"I will tell you why," interrupted Poirot. "There was a certain rumour----"

"A most malicious and utterly untrue one," interrupted Alfred Inglethorp in an agitated voice.

"And Mr. Inglethorp was anxious to have no scandal revived just at present. Am I right?"

"Quite right." Inglethorp nodded. "With my poor Emily not yet buried, can you wonder I was anxious that no more lying rumours should be started."

"Between you and me, sir," remarked Japp, "I'd sooner have any amount of rumours than be arrested for murder. And I venture to think your poor lady would have felt the same. And, if it hadn't been for Mr. Poirot here, arrested you would have been, as sure as eggs is eggs!"

"I was foolish, no doubt," murmured Inglethorp. "But you do not know, inspector, how I have been persecuted and maligned." And he shot a baleful glance at Evelyn Howard.

"Now, sir," said Japp, turning briskly to John, "I should like to see the lady's bedroom, please, and after that I'll have a little chat with the servants. Don't you bother about anything. Mr. Poirot, here, will show me the way."

As they all went out of the room, Poirot turned and made me a sign to follow him upstairs. There he caught me by the arm, and drew me aside.

"Quick, go to the other wing. Stand there--just this side of the baize door. Do not move till I come." Then, turning rapidly, he rejoined the two detectives.

I followed his instructions, taking up my position by the baize door, and wondering what on earth lay behind the request. Why was I to stand in this particular spot on guard? I looked thoughtfully down the corridor in front of me. An idea struck me. With the exception of Cynthia Murdoch's, every one's room was in this left wing. Had that anything to do with it? Was I to report who came or went? I stood faithfully at my post. The minutes passed. Nobody came. Nothing happened.

It must have been quite twenty minutes before Poirot rejoined me.

"You have not stirred?"

"No, I've stuck here like a rock. Nothing's happened."

"Ah!" Was he pleased, or disappointed? "You've seen nothing at all?"

"No."

"But you have probably heard something? A big bump--eh, mon ami?"

"No."

"Is it possible? Ah, but I am vexed with myself! I am not usually clumsy. I made but a slight gesture"--I know
Poirot's gestures—"with the left hand, and over went the table by the bed!"

He looked so childishly vexed and crest-fallen that I hastened to console him.

"Never mind, old chap. What does it matter? Your triumph downstairs excited you. I can tell you, that was a surprise to us all. There must be more in this affair of Inglethorp's with Mrs. Raikes than we thought, to make him hold his tongue so persistently. What are you going to do now? Where are the Scotland Yard fellows?"

"Gone down to interview the servants. I showed them all our exhibits. I am disappointed in Japp. He has no method!"

"Hullo!" I said, looking out of the window. "Here's Dr. Bauerstein. I believe you're right about that man, Poirot. I don't like him."

"He is clever," observed Poirot meditatively.

"Oh, clever as the devil! I must say I was overjoyed to see him in the plight he was in on Tuesday. You never saw such a spectacle!" And I described the doctor's adventure. "He looked a regular scarecrow! Plastered with mud from head to foot."

"You saw him, then?"

"Yes. Of course, he didn't want to come in--it was just after dinner--but Mr. Inglethorp insisted."

"What?" Poirot caught me violently by the shoulders. "Was Dr. Bauerstein here on Tuesday evening? Here? And you never told me? Why did you not tell me? Why? Why?"

He appeared to be in an absolute frenzy.

"My dear Poirot," I expostulated, "I never thought it would interest you. I didn't know it was of any importance."

"Importance? It is of the first importance! So Dr. Bauerstein was here on Tuesday night--the night of the murder. Hastings, do you not see? That alters everything--everything!"

I had never seen him so upset. Loosening his hold of me, he mechanically straightened a pair of candlesticks, still murmuring to himself: "Yes, that alters everything--everything."

Suddenly he seemed to come to a decision.

"Allons!" he said. "We must act at once. Where is Mr. Cavendish?"

John was in the smoking-room. Poirot went straight to him.

"Mr. Cavendish, I have some important business in Tadminster. A new clue. May I take your motor?"

"Why, of course. Do you mean at once?"

"If you please."

John rang the bell, and ordered round the car. In another ten minutes, we were racing down the park and along the high road to Tadminster.

"Now, Poirot," I remarked resignedly, "perhaps you will tell me what all this is about?"

"Well, mon ami, a good deal you can guess for yourself. Of course you realize that, now Mr. Inglethorp is out of it, the whole position is greatly changed. We are face to face with an entirely new problem. We know now that there is one person who did not buy the poison. We have cleared away the manufactured clues. Now for the real ones. I have ascertained that anyone in the household, with the exception of Mrs. Cavendish, who was playing tennis with you, could have personated Mr. Inglethorp on Monday evening. In the same way, we have his statement that he put the coffee down in the hall. No one took much notice of that at the inquest--but now it has a very different significance. We must find out who did take that coffee to Mrs. Inglethorp eventually, or who passed through the hall whilst it was standing there. From your account, there are only two people whom we can positively say did not go near the coffee--Mrs. Cavendish, and Mademoiselle Cynthia."

"Yes, that is so." I felt an inexpressible lightening of the heart. Mary Cavendish could certainly not rest under suspicion.

"In clearing Alfred Inglethorp," continued Poirot, "I have been obliged to show my hand sooner than I intended. As long as I might be thought to be pursuing him, the criminal would be off his guard. Now, he will be doubly careful. Yes--doubly careful." He turned to me abruptly. "Tell me, Hastings, you yourself--have you no suspicions of anybody?"

I hesitated. To tell the truth, an idea, wild and extravagant in itself, had once or twice that morning flashed through my brain. I had rejected it as absurd, nevertheless it persisted.

"You couldn't call it a suspicion," I murmured. "It's so utterly foolish."

"Come now," urged Poirot encouragingly. "Do not fear. Speak your mind. You should always pay attention to your instincts."

"Well then," I blurted out, "it's absurd--but I suspect Miss Howard of not telling all she knows!"

"Miss Howard?"

"Yes--you'll laugh at me----"

"Not at all. Why should I?"
"I can't help feeling," I continued blunderingly; "that we've rather left her out of the possible suspects, simply on
the strength of her having been away from the place. But, after all, she was only fifteen miles away. A car would do
it in half an hour. Can we say positively that she was away from Styles on the night of the murder?"

"Yes, my friend," said Poirot unexpectedly, "we can. One of my first actions was to ring up the hospital where
she was working."
"Well?"
"Well, I learnt that Miss Howard had been on afternoon duty on Tuesday, and that--a convoy coming in
unexpectedly--she had kindly offered to remain on night duty, which offer was gratefully accepted. That disposes of
that."

"Oh!" I said, rather nonplussed. "Really," I continued, "it's her extraordinary vehemence against Inglethorp that
started me off suspecting her. I can't help feeling she'd do anything against him. And I had an idea she might know
something about the destroying of the will. She might have burnt the new one, mistaking it for the earlier one in his
favour. She is so terribly bitter against him."

"You consider her vehemence unnatural?"
"Y--es. She is so very violent. I wondered really whether she is quite sane on that point."
Poirot shook his head energetically.

"No, no, you are on a wrong tack there. There is nothing weak-minded or degenerate about Miss Howard. She is
an excellent specimen of well-balanced English beef and brawn. She is sanity itself."

"Yet her hatred of Inglethorp seems almost a mania. My idea was--a very ridiculous one, no doubt--that she had
intended to poison him--and that, in some way, Mrs. Inglethorp got hold of it by mistake. But I don't at all see how it
could have been done. The whole thing is absurd and ridiculous to the last degree."

"Still you are right in one thing. It is always wise to suspect everybody until you can prove logically, and to your
own satisfaction, that they are innocent. Now, what reasons are there against Miss Howard's having deliberately
poisoned Mrs. Inglethorp?"

"Why, she was devoted to her!" I exclaimed.
"Tcha! Tcha!" cried Poirot irritably. "You argue like a child. If Miss Howard were capable of poisoning the old
lady, she would be quite equally capable of simulating devotion. No, we must look elsewhere. You are perfectly
correct in your assumption that her vehemence against Alfred Inglethorp is too violent to be natural; but you are
quite wrong in the deduction you draw from it. I have drawn my own deductions, which I believe to be correct, but I
will not speak of them at present."

"That in no possible way could Mrs. Inglethorp's death benefit Miss Howard. Now there is no murder without a
motive."

"Could not Mrs. Inglethorp have made a will in her favour?" Poirot shook his head.
"But you yourself suggested that possibility to Mr. Wells?"
Poirot smiled.

"That was for a reason. I did not want to mention the name of the person who was actually in my mind. Miss
Howard occupied very much the same position, so I used her name instead.

"Still, Mrs. Inglethorp might have done so. Why, that will, made on the afternoon of her death may----"

"But Poirot's shake of the head was so energetic that I stopped.

"No, my friend. I have certain little ideas of my own about that will. But I can tell you this much--it was not in
Miss Howard's favour."

I accepted his assurance, though I did not really see how he could be so positive about the matter.

"Well," I said, with a sigh, "we will acquit Miss Howard, then. It is partly your fault that I ever came to suspect
her. It was what you said about her evidence at the inquest that set me off."
Poirot looked puzzled.

"What did I say about her evidence at the inquest?"
"Don't you remember? When I cited her and John Cavendish as being above suspicion?"
"Oh--ah--yes." He seemed a little confused, but recovered himself. "By the way, Hastings, there is something I
want you to do for me."
"Certainly. What is it?"

"Next time you happen to be alone with Lawrence Cavendish, I want you to say this to him. 'I have a message
for you, from Poirot. He says: 'Find the extra coffee-cup, and you can rest in peace!' 'Nothing more. Nothing less.'
" 'Find the extra coffee-cup, and you can rest in peace.' Is that right?" I asked, much mystified.
"Excellent."
"But what does it mean?"
"Ah, that I will leave you to find out. You have access to the facts. Just say that to him, and see what he says."
"Very well--but it's all extremely mysterious."

We were running into Tadminster now, and Poirot directed the car to the "Analytical Chemist."
Poirot hopped down briskly, and went inside. In a few minutes he was back again.
"There," he said. "That is all my business."
"What were you doing there?" I asked, in lively curiosity.
"I left something to be analysed."
"Yes, but what?"
"The sample of coco I took from the saucepan in the bedroom."
"But that has already been tested!" I cried, stupefied. "Dr. Bauerstein had it tested, and you yourself laughed at the possibility of there being strychnine in it."
"I know Dr. Bauerstein had it tested," replied Poirot quietly.
"Well, then?"
"Well, I have a fancy for having it analysed again, that is all."

And not another word on the subject could I drag out of him.

This proceeding of Poirot's, in respect of the coco, puzzled me intensely. I could see neither rhyme nor reason in it. However, my confidence in him, which at one time had rather waned, was fully restored since his belief in Alfred Inglethorp's innocence had been so triumphantly vindicated.

The funeral of Mrs. Inglethorp took place the following day, and on Monday, as I came down to a late breakfast, John drew me aside, and informed me that Mr. Inglethorp was leaving that morning, to take up his quarters at the Stylites Arms until he should have completed his plans.

"And really it's a great relief to think he's going, Hastings," continued my honest friend. "It was bad enough before, when we thought he'd done it, but I'm hanged if it isn't worse now, when we all feel guilty for having been so down on the fellow. The fact is, we've treated him abominably. Of course, things did look black against him. I don't see how anyone could blame us for jumping to the conclusions we did. Still, there it is, we were in the wrong, and now there's a beastly feeling that one ought to make amends; which is difficult, when one doesn't like the fellow a bit better than one did before. The whole thing's damned awkward! And I'm thankful he's had the tact to take himself off. It's a good thing Styles wasn't the mater's to leave to him. Couldn't bear to think of the fellow lording it here. He's welcome to her money."

"You'll be able to keep up the place all right?" I asked.
"Oh, yes. There are the death duties, of course, but half my father's money goes with the place, and Lawrence will stay with us for the present, so there is his share as well. We shall be pinched at first, of course, because, as I once told you, I am in a bit of a hole financially myself. Still, the Johnnies will wait now."

In the general relief at Inglethorp's approaching departure, we had the most genial breakfast we had experienced since the tragedy. Cynthia, whose young spirits were naturally buoyant, was looking quite her pretty self again, and we all, with the exception of Lawrence, who seemed unalterably gloomy and nervous, were quietly cheerful, at the opening of a new and hopeful future.

The papers, of course, had been full of the tragedy. Glaring headlines, sandwiched biographies of every member of the household, subtle innuendoes, the usual familiar tag about the police having a clue. Nothing was spared us. It was a slack time. The war was momentarily inactive, and the newspapers seized with avidity on this crime in fashionable life: "The Mysterious Affair at Styles" was the topic of the moment.

Naturally it was very annoying for the Cavendishes. The house was constantly besieged by reporters, who were consistently denied admission, but who continued to haunt the village and the grounds, where they lay in wait with cameras, for any unwary members of the household. We all lived in a blast of publicity. The Scotland Yard men came and went, examining, questioning, lynx-eyed and reserved of tongue. Towards what end they were working, we did not know. Had they any clue, or would the whole thing remain in the category of undiscovered crimes?

After breakfast, Dorcas came up to me rather mysteriously, and asked if she might have a few words with me.
"Certainly. What is it, Dorcas?"
"Well, it's just this, sir. You'll be seeing the Belgian gentleman to-day perhaps?" I nodded. "Well, sir, you know how he asked me so particular if the mistress, or anyone else, had a green dress?"
"Yes, yes. You have found one?" My interest was aroused.

"No, not that, sir. But since then I've remembered what the young gentlemen"--John and Lawrence were still the "young gentlemen" to Dorcas--"call the 'dressing-up box.' It's up in the front attic, sir. A great chest, full of old clothes and fancy dresses, and what not. And it came to me sudden like that there might be a green dress amongst
them. So, if you'd tell the Belgian gentleman----"

"I will tell him, Dorcas," I promised.

"Thank you very much, sir. A very nice gentleman he is, sir. And quite a different class from them two
detectives from London, what goes prying about, and asking questions. I don't hold with foreigners as a rule, but
from what the newspapers say I make out as how these brave Belges isn't the ordinary run of foreigners, and
certainly he's a most polite spoken gentleman."

Dear old Dorcas! As she stood there, with her honest face upturned to mine, I thought what a fine specimen she
was of the old-fashioned servant that is so fast dying out.

I thought I might as well go down to the village at once, and look up Poirot; but I met him half-way, coming up
to the house, and at once gave him Dorcas's message.

"Ah, the brave Dorcas! We will look at the chest, although--but no matter--we will examine it all the same."

We entered the house by one of the windows. There was no one in the hall, and we went straight up to the attic.

Sure enough, there was the chest, a fine old piece, all studded with brass nails, and full to overflowing with
every imaginable type of garment.

Poirot bundled everything out on the floor with scant ceremony. There were one or two green fabrics of varying
shades; but Poirot shook his head over them all. He seemed somewhat apathetic in the search, as though he expected
no great results from it. Suddenly he gave an exclamation.

"What is it?"

"Look!"

The chest was nearly empty, and there, reposing right at the bottom, was a magnificent black beard.

"Oho!" said Poirot. "Oho!" He turned it over in his hands, examining it closely. "New," he remarked. "Yes, quite
new."

After a moment's hesitation, he replaced it in the chest, heaped all the other things on top of it as before, and
made his way briskly downstairs. He went straight to the pantry, where we found Dorcas busily polishing her silver.

Poirot wished her good morning with Gallic politeness, and went on:

"We have been looking through that chest, Dorcas. I am much obliged to you for mentioning it. There is, indeed,
a fine collection there. Are they often used, may I ask?"

"Well, sir, not very often nowadays, though from time to time we do have what the young gentlemen call 'a
dress-up night.' And very funny it is sometimes, sir. Mr. Lawrence, he's wonderful. Most comic! I shall never forget
the night he came down as the Char of Persia, I think he called it--a sort of Eastern King it was. He had the big paper
knife in his hand, and 'Mind, Dorcas,' he says, 'you'll have to be very respectful. This is my specially sharpened
scimitar, and it's off with your head if I'm at all displeased with you!' Miss Cynthia, she was what they call an
Apache, or some such name--a Frenchified sort of cut-throat, I take it to be. A real sight she looked. You'd never
have believed a pretty young lady like that could have made herself into such a ruffian. Nobody would have known
her."

"These evenings must have been great fun," said Poirot genially. "I suppose Mr. Lawrence wore that fine black
beard in the chest upstairs, when he was Shah of Persia?"

"He did have a beard, sir," replied Dorcas, smiling. "And well I know it, for he borrowed two skeins of my black
wool to make it with! And I'm sure it looked wonderfully natural at a distance. I didn't know as there was a beard up
there at all. It must have been got quite lately, I think. There was a red wig, I know, but nothing else in the way of
hair. Burnt corks they use mostly--though 'tis messy getting it off again. Miss Cynthia was a nigger once, and, oh,
the trouble she had."

"So Dorcas knows nothing about that black beard," said Poirot thoughtfully, as we walked out into the hall
again.

"Do you think it is _the_ one?" I whispered eagerly.

Poirot nodded.

"I do. You notice it had been trimmed?"

"No."

"Yes. It was cut exactly the shape of Mr. Inglethorp's, and I found one or two snipped hairs. Hastings, this affair
is very deep."

"Who put it in the chest, I wonder?"

"Some one with a good deal of intelligence," remarked Poirot dryly. "You realize that he chose the one place in
the house to hide it where its presence would not be remarked? Yes, he is intelligent. But we must be more
intelligent. We must be so intelligent that he does not suspect us of being intelligent at all."

I acquiesced.

"There, mon ami, you will be of great assistance to me."
I was pleased with the compliment. There had been times when I hardly thought that Poirot appreciated me at my true worth.

"Yes," he continued, staring at me thoughtfully, "you will be invaluable."

This was naturally gratifying, but Poirot's next words were not so welcome.

"I must have an ally in the house," he observed reflectively.

"You have me," I protested.

"True, but you are not sufficient."

I was hurt, and showed it. Poirot hurried to explain himself.

"You do not quite take my meaning. You are known to be working with me. I want somebody who is not associated with us in any way."

"Oh, I see. How about John?"

"No, I think not."

"The dear fellow isn't perhaps very bright," I said thoughtfully.

"Here comes Miss Howard," said Poirot suddenly. "She is the very person. But I am in her black books, since I cleared Mr. Inglethorp. Still, we can but try."

With a nod that was barely civil, Miss Howard assented to Poirot's request for a few minutes' conversation. We went into the little morning-room, and Poirot closed the door.

"Well, Monsieur Poirot," said Miss Howard impatiently, "what is it? Out with it. I'm busy."

"Do you remember, mademoiselle, that I once asked you to help me?"

"Yes, I do." The lady nodded. "And I told you I'd help you with pleasure--to hang Alfred Inglethorp."

"Ah!" Poirot studied her seriously. "Miss Howard, I will ask you one question. I beg of you to reply to it truthfully."

"Never tell lies," replied Miss Howard.

"It is this. Do you still believe that Mrs. Inglethorp was poisoned by her husband?"

"What do you mean?" she asked sharply. "You needn't think your pretty explanations influence me in the slightest. I'll admit that it wasn't he who bought strychnine at the chemist's shop. What of that? I dare say he soaked fly paper, as I told you at the beginning."

"That is arsenic--not strychnine," said Poirot mildly.

"What does that matter? Arsenic would put poor Emily out of the way just as well as strychnine. If I'm convinced he did it, it doesn't matter a jot to me _how_ he did it."

"Exactly. _If_ you are convinced he did it," said Poirot quietly. "I will put my question in another form. Did you ever in your heart of hearts believe that Mrs. Inglethorp was poisoned by her husband?"

"Good heavens!" cried Miss Howard. "Haven't I always told you the man is a villain? Haven't I always hated him like poison?"

"Exactly," said Poirot. "That bears out my little idea entirely."

"What little idea?"

"Miss Howard, do you remember a conversation that took place on the day of my friend's arrival here? He repeated it to me, and there is a sentence of yours that has impressed me very much. Do you remember affirming that if a crime had been committed, and anyone you loved had been murdered, you felt certain that you would know by instinct who the criminal was, even if you were quite unable to prove it?"

"Yes, I remember saying that. I believe it too. I suppose you think it nonsense?"

"Not at all."

"And yet you will pay no attention to my instinct against Alfred Inglethorp."

"No," said Poirot curtly. "Because your instinct is not against Mr. Inglethorp."

"What?"

"No. You wish to believe he committed the crime. You believe him capable of committing it. But your instinct tells you he did not commit it. It tells you more--shall I go on?"

She was staring at him, fascinated, and made a slight affirmative movement of the hand.

"Shall I tell you why you have been so vehement against Mr. Inglethorp? It is because you have been trying to believe what you wish to believe. It is because you are trying to drown and stifle your instinct, which tells you another name--the--"

"No, no, no!" cried Miss Howard wildly, flinging up her hands. "Don't say it! Oh, don't say it! It isn't true! It can't be true. I don't know what put such a wild--such a dreadful--idea into my head!"

"I am right, am I not?" asked Poirot.

"Yes, yes; you must be a wizard to have guessed. But it can't be so--it's too monstrous, too impossible. It must be Alfred Inglethorp."
Poirot shook his head gravely.

"Don't ask me about it," continued Miss Howard, "because I shan't tell you. I won't admit it, even to myself. I must be mad to think of such a thing."

Poirot nodded, as if satisfied.

"I will ask you nothing. It is enough for me that it is as I thought. And I--I, too, have an instinct. We are working together towards a common end."

"Don't ask me to help you, because I won't. I wouldn't lift a finger to--to--" She faltered.

"You will help me in spite of yourself. I ask you nothing--but you will be my ally. You will not be able to help yourself. You will do the only thing that I want of you."

"And that is?"

"You will watch!"

Evelyn Howard bowed her head.

"Yes, I can't help doing that. I am always watching--always hoping I shall be proved wrong."

"If we are wrong, well and good," said Poirot. "No one will be more pleased than I shall. But, if we are right? If we are right, Miss Howard, on whose side are you then?"

"I don't know, I don't know----"

"Come now."

"It could be hushed up."

"There must be no hushing up."

"But Emily herself----" She broke off.

"Miss Howard," said Poirot gravely, "this is unworthy of you."

Suddenly she took her face from her hands.

"Yes," she said quietly, "that was not Evelyn Howard who spoke!" She flung her head up proudly. "This is Evelyn Howard! And she is on the side of Justice! Let the cost be what it may." And with these words, she walked firmly out of the room.

"There," said Poirot, looking after her, "goes a very valuable ally. That woman, Hastings, has got brains as well as a heart."

I did not reply.

"Instinct is a marvellous thing," mused Poirot. "It can neither be explained nor ignored."

"You and Miss Howard seem to know what you are talking about," I observed coldly. "Perhaps you don't realize that I am still in the dark."

"Really? Is that so, mon ami?"

"Yes. Enlighten me, will you?"

Poirot studied me attentively for a moment or two. Then, to my intense surprise, he shook his head decidedly.

"No, my friend."

"Oh, look here, why not?"

"Two is enough for a secret."

"Well, I think it is very unfair to keep back facts from me."

"I am not keeping back facts. Every fact that I know is in your possession. You can draw your own deductions from them. This time it is a question of ideas."

"Still, it would be interesting to know."

Poirot looked at me very earnestly, and again shook his head.

"You see," he said sadly, "you have no instincts."

"It was intelligence you were requiring just now," I pointed out.

"The two often go together," said Poirot enigmatically.

The remark seemed so utterly irrelevant that I did not even take the trouble to answer it. But I decided that if I made any interesting and important discoveries--as no doubt I should--I would keep them to myself, and surprise Poirot with the ultimate result.

There are times when it is one's duty to assert oneself.

CHAPTER IX
DR. BAUERSTEIN

I HAD had no opportunity as yet of passing on Poirot's message to Lawrence. But now, as I strolled out on the lawn, still nursing a grudge against my friend's high-handedness, I saw Lawrence on the croquet lawn, aimlessly knocking a couple of very ancient balls about, with a still more ancient mallet.

It struck me that it would be a good opportunity to deliver my message. Otherwise, Poirot himself might relieve me of it. It was true that I did not quite gather its purport, but I flattered myself that by Lawrence's reply, and
perhaps a little skillful cross-examination on my part, I should soon perceive its significance. Accordingly I accosted him.

"I've been looking for you," I remarked untruthfully.
"Have you?"
"Yes. The truth is, I've got a message for you--from Poirot."
"Yes?"
"He told me to wait until I was alone with you," I said, dropping my voice significantly, and watching him intently out of the corner of my eye. I have always been rather good at what is called, I believe, creating an atmosphere.
"Well?"
There was no change of expression in the dark melancholic face. Had he any idea of what I was about to say?
"This is the message." I dropped my voice still lower. "Find the extra coffee-cup, and you can rest in peace."
"What on earth does he mean?" Lawrence stared at me in quite unaffected astonishment.
"Don't you know?"
"Not in the least. Do you?"
I was compelled to shake my head.
"What extra coffee-cup?"
"I don't know."
"He'd better ask Dorcas, or one of the maids, if he wants to know about coffee-cups. It's their business, not mine. I don't know anything about the coffee-cups, except that we've got some that are never used, which are a perfect dream! Old Worcester. You're not a connoisseur, are you, Hastings?"
I shook my head.
"You miss a lot. A really perfect bit of old china--it's pure delight to handle it, or even to look at it."
"Well, what am I to tell Poirot?"
"Tell him I don't know what he's talking about. It's double Dutch to me."
"All right."
I was moving off towards the house again when he suddenly called me back.
"I say, what was the end of that message? Say it over again, will you?"
" 'Find the extra coffee-cup, and you can rest in peace.' Are you sure you don't know what it means?" I asked him earnestly.

He shook his head.
"No," he said musingly, "I don't. I--I wish I did."

The boom of the gong sounded from the house, and we went in together. Poirot had been asked by John to remain to lunch, and was already seated at the table.

By tacit consent, all mention of the tragedy was barred. We conversed on the war, and other outside topics. But after the cheese and biscuits had been handed round, and Dorcas had left the room, Poirot suddenly leant forward to Mrs. Cavendish.
"Pardon me, madame, for recalling unpleasant memories, but I have a little idea--Poirot's "little ideas" were becoming a perfect byword--"and would like to ask one or two questions."
"Of me? Certainly."
"You are too amiable, madame. What I want to ask is this: the door leading into Mrs. Inglethorp's room from that of Mademoiselle Cynthia, it was bolted, you say?"
"Certainly it was bolted," replied Mary Cavendish, rather surprised. "I said so at the inquest."
"Bolted?"
"Yes." She looked perplexed.
"I mean," explained Poirot, "you are sure it was bolted, and not merely locked?"
"Oh, I see what you mean. No, I don't know. I said bolted, meaning that it was fastened, and I could not open it, but I believe all the doors were found bolted on the inside."
"Still, as far as you are concerned, the door might equally well have been locked?"
"Oh, yes."
"You yourself did not happen to notice, madame, when you entered Mrs. Inglethorp's room, whether that door was bolted or not?"
"I--I believe it was."
"But you did not see it?"
"No. I--never looked."
"But I did," interrupted Lawrence suddenly. "I happened to notice that it _was_ bolted."
"Ah, that settles it." And Poirot looked crestfallen.
I could not help rejoicing that, for once, one of his "little ideas" had come to naught.
After lunch Poirot begged me to accompany him home. I consented rather stiffly.
"You are annoyed, is it not so?" he asked anxiously, as we walked through the park.
"Not at all," I said coldly.
"That is well. That lifts a great load from my mind."
This was not quite what I had intended. I had hoped that he would have observed the stiffness of my manner.
Still, the fervour of his words went towards the appeasing of my just displeasure. I thawed.
"I gave Lawrence your message," I said.
"And what did he say? He was entirely puzzled?"
"Yes. I am quite sure he had no idea of what you meant."
I had expected Poirot to be disappointed; but, to my surprise, he replied that that was as he had thought, and that he was very glad. My pride forbade me to ask any questions.
Poirot switched off on another tack.
"Mademoiselle Cynthia was not at lunch to-day? How was that?"
"She is at the hospital again. She resumed work to-day."
"Ah, she is an industrious little demoiselle. And pretty too. She is like pictures I have seen in Italy. I would rather like to see that dispensary of hers. Do you think she would show it to me?"
"I am sure she would be delighted. It's an interesting little place."
"Does she go there every day?"
"She has all Wednesdays off, and comes back to lunch on Saturdays. Those are her only times off."
"I will remember. Women are doing great work nowadays, and Mademoiselle Cynthia is clever--oh, yes, she has brains, that little one."
"Yes. I believe she has passed quite a stiff exam."
"Without doubt. After all, it is very responsible work. I suppose they have very strong poisons there?"
"Yes, she showed them to us. They are kept locked up in a little cupboard. I believe they have to be very careful. They always take out the key before leaving the room."
"Indeed. It is near the window, this cupboard?"
"No, right the other side of the room. Why?"
Poirot shrugged his shoulders.
"I wondered. That is all. Will you come in?"
We had reached the cottage.
"No. I think I'll be getting back. I shall go round the long way through the woods."
The woods round Styles were very beautiful. After the walk across the open park, it was pleasant to saunter lazily through the cool glades. There was hardly a breath of wind, the very chirp of the birds was faint and subdued.
I strolled on a little way, and finally flung myself down at the foot of a grand old beech-tree. My thoughts of mankind were kindly and charitable. I even forgave Poirot for his absurd secrecy. In fact, I was at peace with the world. Then I yawned.
I thought about the crime, and it struck me as being very unreal and far off.
I yawned again.
Probably, I thought, it really never happened. Of course, it was all a bad dream. The truth of the matter was that it was Lawrence who had murdered Alfred Inglethorp with a croquet mallet. But it was absurd of John to make such a fuss about it, and to go shouting out: "I tell you I won't have it!"
I woke up with a start.
At once I realized that I was in a very awkward predicament. For, about twelve feet away from me, John and Mary Cavendish were standing facing each other, and they were evidently quarrelling. And, quite as evidently, they were unaware of my vicinity, for before I could move or speak John repeated the words which had aroused me from my dream.
"I tell you, Mary, I won't have it."
Mary's voice came, cool and liquid:
"Have _you_ any right to criticize my actions?"
"It will be the talk of the village! My mother was only buried on Saturday, and here you are gadding about with the fellow."
"Oh," she shrugged her shoulders, "if it is only village gossip that you mind!"
"But it isn't. I've had enough of the fellow hanging about. He's a Polish Jew, anyway."
"A tinge of Jewish blood is not a bad thing. It leavens the"--she looked at him--"stolid stupidity of the ordinary
Englishman."

Fire in her eyes, ice in her voice. I did not wonder that the blood rose to John's face in a crimson tide.

"Mary!"
"Well?" Her tone did not change.
The pleading died out of his voice.
"Am I to understand that you will continue to see Bauerstein against my express wishes?"
"If I choose."
"You defy me?"
"No, but I deny your right to criticize my actions. Have _you_ no friends of whom I should disapprove?"

John fell back a pace. The colour ebbed slowly from his face.
"What do you mean?" he said, in an unsteady voice.
"You see!" said Mary quietly. "You _do_ see, don't you, that _you_ have no right to dictate to _me_ as to the choice of my friends?"

John glanced at her pleadingly, a stricken look on his face.
"No right? Have I _no_ right, Mary?" he said unsteadily. He stretched out his hands. "Mary----"

For a moment, I thought she wavered. A softer expression came over her face, then suddenly she turned almost fiercely away.
"None!"

She was walking away when John sprang after her, and caught her by the arm.
"Mary"--his voice was very quiet now--"are you in love with this fellow Bauerstein?"

She hesitated, and suddenly there swept across her face a strange expression, old as the hills, yet with something eternally young about it. So might some Egyptian sphinx have smiled.

She freed herself quietly from his arm, and spoke over her shoulder.
"Perhaps," she said; and then swiftly passed out of the little glade, leaving John standing there as though he had been turned to stone.

Rather ostentatiously, I stepped forward, crackling some dead branches with my feet as I did so. John turned. Luckily, he took it for granted that I had only just come upon the scene.

"Hullo, Hastings. Have you seen the little fellow safely back to his cottage? Quaint little chap! Is he any good, though, really?"

"He was considered one of the finest detectives of his day."
"Oh, well, I suppose there must be something in it, then. What a rotten world it is, though!"
"You find it so?" I asked.

"Good Lord, yes! There's this terrible business to start with. Scotland Yard men in and out of the house like a jack-in-the-box! Never know where they won't turn up next. Screaming headlines in every paper in the country--damn all journalists, I say! Do you know there was a whole crowd staring in at the lodge gates this morning. Sort of Madame Tussaud's chamber of horrors business that can be seen for nothing. Pretty thick, isn't it?"

"Cheer up, John!" I said soothingly. "It can't last for ever."
"Can't it, though? It can last long enough for us never to be able to hold up our heads again."
"No, no, you're getting morbid on the subject."
"Enough to make a man morbid, to be stalked by beastly journalists and stared at by gaping moon-faced idiots, wherever he goes! But there's worse than that."

"What?"

John lowered his voice:
"Have you ever thought, Hastings--it's a nightmare to me--who did it? I can't help feeling sometimes it must have been an accident. Because--because--who could have done it? Now Inglethorp's out of the way, there's no one else; no one, I mean, except--one of us."

Yes, indeed, that was nightmare enough for any man! One of us? Yes, surely it must be so, unless-----

A new idea suggested itself to my mind. Rapidly, I considered it. The light increased. Poirot's mysterious doings, his hints--they all fitted in. Fool that I was not to have thought of this possibility before, and what a relief for us all.

"No, John," I said, "it isn't one of us. How could it be?"
"I know, but, still, who else is there?"
"Can't you guess?"
"No."

I looked cautiously round, and lowered my voice.
"Dr. Bauerstein!" I whispered.
"Impossible!"
"Not at all."
"But what earthly interest could he have in my mother's death?"
"That I don't see," I confessed, "but I'll tell you this: Poirot thinks so."
"Poirot? Does he? How do you know?"
I told him of Poirot's intense excitement on hearing that Dr. Bauerstein had been at Styles on the fatal night, and added:
"He said twice: 'That alters everything.' And I've been thinking. You know Inglethorp said he had put down the coffee in the hall? Well, it was just then that Bauerstein arrived. Isn't it possible that, as Inglethorp brought him through the hall, the doctor dropped something into the coffee in passing?"
"H'm," said John. "It would have been very risky."
"Yes, but it was possible."
"And then, how could he know it was her coffee? No, old fellow, I don't think that will wash."
But I had remembered something else.
"You're quite right. That wasn't how it was done. Listen." And I then told him of the coco sample which Poirot had taken to be analysed.
John interrupted just as I had done.
"But, look here, Bauerstein had had it analysed already?"
"Yes, yes, that's the point. I didn't see it either until now. Don't you understand? Bauerstein had it analysed—that's just it! If Bauerstein's the murderer, nothing could be simpler than for him to substitute some ordinary coco for his sample, and send that to be tested. And of course they would find no strychnine! But no one would dream of suspecting Bauerstein, or think of taking another sample—except Poirot," I added, with belated recognition.
"Yes, but what about the bitter taste that coco won't disguise?"
"Well, we've only his word for that. And there are other possibilities. He's admittedly one of the world's greatest toxicologists——"
"One of the world's greatest what? Say it again."
"He knows more about poisons than almost anybody," I explained. "Well, my idea is, that perhaps he's found some way of making strychnine tasteless. Or it may not have been strychnine at all, but some obscure drug no one has ever heard of, which produces the same symptoms."
"H'm, yes, that might be," said John. "But look here, how could he have got at the coco? That wasn't downstairs?"
"No, it wasn't," I admitted reluctantly.
And then, suddenly, a dreadful possibility flashed through my mind. I hoped and prayed it would not occur to John also. I glanced sideways at him. He was frowning perplexedly, and I drew a deep breath of relief, for the terrible thought that had flashed across my mind was this: that Dr. Bauerstein might have had an accomplice.
Yet surely it could not be! Surely no woman as beautiful as Mary Cavendish could be a murderess. Yet beautiful women had been known to poison.
And suddenly I remembered that first conversation at tea on the day of my arrival, and the gleam in her eyes as she had said that poison was a woman's weapon. How agitated she had been on that fatal Tuesday evening! Had Mrs. Inglethorp discovered something between her and Bauerstein, and threatened to tell her husband? Was it to stop that denunciation that the crime had been committed?
Then I remembered that enigmatical conversation between Poirot and Evelyn Howard. Was this what they had meant? Was this the monstrous possibility that Evelyn had tried not to believe?
Yes, it all fitted in.
No wonder Miss Howard had suggested "hushing it up." Now I understood that unfinished sentence of hers: "Emily herself——" And in my heart I agreed with her. Would not Mrs. Inglethorp have preferred to go unavenged rather than have such terrible dishonour fall upon the name of Cavendish.
"There's another thing," said John suddenly, and the unexpected sound of his voice made me start guiltily.
"Something which makes me doubt if what you say can be true."
"What's that?" I asked, thankful that he had gone away from the subject of how the poison could have been introduced into the coco.
"Why, the fact that Bauerstein demanded a post-mortem. He needn't have done so. Little Wilkins would have been quite content to let it go at heart disease."
"Yes," I said doubtfully. "But we don't know. Perhaps he thought it safer in the long run. Some one might have talked afterwards. Then the Home Office might have ordered exhumation. The whole thing would have come out, then, and he would have been in an awkward position, for no one would have believed that a man of his reputation could have been deceived into calling it heart disease."
"Yes, that's possible," admitted John. "Still," he added, "I'm blest if I can see what his motive could have been." I trembled.

"Look here," I said, "I may be altogether wrong. And, remember, all this is in confidence."

"Oh, of course--that goes without saying."

We had walked, as we talked, and now we passed through the little gate into the garden. Voices rose near at hand, for tea was spread out under the sycamore-tree, as it had been on the day of my arrival.

Cynthia was back from the hospital, and I placed my chair beside her, and told her of Poirot's wish to visit the dispensary.

"Of course! I'd love him to see it. He'd better come to tea there one day. I must fix it up with him. He's such a dear little man! But he _is_ funny. He made me take the brooch out of my tie the other day, and put it in again, because he said it wasn't straight."

I laughed.

"It's quite a mania with him."

"Yes, isn't it?"

We were silent for a minute or two, and then, glancing in the direction of Mary Cavendish, and dropping her voice, Cynthia said:

"Mr. Hastings."

"Yes?"

"After tea, I want to talk to you."

Her glance at Mary had set me thinking. I fancied that between these two there existed very little sympathy. For the first time, it occurred to me to wonder about the girl's future. Mrs. Inglethorp had made no provisions of any kind for her, but I imagined that John and Mary would probably insist on her making her home with them--at any rate until the end of the war. John, I knew, was very fond of her, and would be sorry to let her go.

John, who had gone into the house, now reappeared. His good-natured face wore an unaccustomed frown of anger.

"Confound those detectives! I can't think what they're after! They've been in every room in the house--turning things inside out, and upside down. It really is too bad! I suppose they took advantage of our all being out. I shall go for that fellow Japp, when I next see him!"

"Lot of Paul Prys," grunted Miss Howard.

Lawrence opined that they had to make a show of doing something.

Mary Cavendish said nothing.

After tea, I invited Cynthia to come for a walk, and we sauntered off into the woods together.

"Well?" I inquired, as soon as we were protected from prying eyes by the leafy screen.

With a sigh, Cynthia flung herself down, and tossed off her hat. The sunlight, piercing through the branches, turned the auburn of her hair to quivering gold.

"Mr. Hastings--you are always so kind, and you know such a lot."

It struck me at this moment that Cynthia was really a very charming girl! Much more charming than Mary, who never said things of that kind.

"Well?" I asked benignantly, as she hesitated.

"I want to ask your advice. What shall I do?"

"Do?"

"Yes. You see, Aunt Emily always told me I should be provided for. I suppose she forgot, or didn't think she was likely to die--anyway, I am _not_ provided for! And I don't know what to do. Do you think I ought to go away from here at once?"

"Good heavens, no! They don't want to part with you, I'm sure."

Cynthia hesitated a moment, plucking up the grass with her tiny hands. Then she said: "Mrs. Cavendish does. She hates me."

"Hates you?" I cried, astonished.

Cynthia nodded.

"Yes. I don't know why, but she can't bear me; and _he_ can't, either."

"There I know you're wrong," I said warmly. "On the contrary, John is very fond of you."

"Oh, yes--_John_. I meant Lawrence. Not, of course, that I care whether Lawrence hates me or not. Still, it's rather horrid when no one loves you, isn't it?"

"But they do, Cynthia dear," I said earnestly. "I'm sure you are mistaken. Look, there is John--and Miss Howard----"

Cynthia nodded rather gloomily. "Yes, John likes me, I think, and of course Evie, for all her gruff ways,
wouldn't be unkind to a fly. But Lawrence never speaks to me if he can help it, and Mary can hardly bring herself to be civil to me. She wants Evie to stay on, is begging her to, but she doesn't want me, and--and--I don't know what to do." Suddenly the poor child burst out crying.

I don't know what possessed me. Her beauty, perhaps, as she sat there, with the sunlight glinting down on her head; perhaps the sense of relief at encountering someone who so obviously could have no connection with the tragedy; perhaps honest pity for her youth and loneliness. Anyway, I leant forward, and taking her little hand, I said awkwardly:

"Marry me, Cynthia."

Unwittingly, I had hit upon a sovereign remedy for her tears. She sat up at once, drew her hand away, and said, with some asperity:

"Don't be silly!"

I was a little annoyed.

"I'm not being silly. I am asking you to do me the honour of becoming my wife."

To my intense surprise, Cynthia burst out laughing, and called me a "funny dear."

"It's perfectly sweet of you," she said, "but you know you don't want to!"

"Yes, I do. I've got--"

"Never mind what you've got. You don't really want to--and I don't either."

"Well, of course, that settles it," I said stiffly. "But I don't see anything to laugh at. There's nothing funny about a proposal."

"No, indeed," said Cynthia. "Somebody might accept you next time. Good-bye, you've cheered me up very much."

And, with a final uncontrollable burst of merriment, she vanished through the trees.

Thinking over the interview, it struck me as being profoundly unsatisfactory.

It occurred to me suddenly that I would go down to the village, and look up Bauerstein. Somebody ought to be keeping an eye on the fellow. At the same time, it would be wise to allay any suspicions he might have as to his being suspected. I remembered how Poirot had relied on my diplomacy. Accordingly, I went to the little house with the "Apartments" card inserted in the window, where I knew he lodged, and tapped on the door.

An old woman came and opened it.

"Good afternoon," I said pleasantly. "Is Dr. Bauerstein in?"

She stared at me.

"Haven't you heard?"

"Heard what?"

"About him."

"What about him?"

"He's took."

"Took? Dead?"

"No, took by the perlice."

"By the police!" I gasped. "Do you mean they've arrested him?"

"Yes, that's it, and--"

I waited to hear no more, but tore up the village to find Poirot.

CHAPTER X.
THE ARREST

To my extreme annoyance, Poirot was not in, and the old Belgian who answered my knock informed me that he believed he had gone to London.

I was dumbfounded. What on earth could Poirot be doing in London! Was it a sudden decision on his part, or had he already made up his mind when he parted from me a few hours earlier?

I retraced my steps to Styles in some annoyance. With Poirot away, I was uncertain how to act. Had he foreseen this arrest? Had he not, in all probability, been the cause of it? Those questions I could not resolve. But in the meantime what was I to do? Should I announce the arrest openly at Styles, or not? Though I did not acknowledge it to myself, the thought of Mary Cavendish was weighing on me. Would it not be a terrible shock to her? For the moment, I set aside utterly any suspicions of her. She could not be implicated—otherwise I should have heard some hint of it.

Of course, there was no possibility of being able permanently to conceal Dr. Bauerstein's arrest from her. It would be announced in every newspaper on the morrow. Still, I shrank from blurt ing it out. If only Poirot had been accessible, I could have asked his advice. What possessed him to go posting off to London in this unaccountable way?
In spite of myself, my opinion of his sagacity was immeasurably heightened. I would never have dreamt of suspecting the doctor, had not Poirot put it into my head. Yes, decidedly, the little man was clever.

After some reflecting, I decided to take John into my confidence, and leave him to make the matter public or not, as he thought fit.

He gave vent to a prodigious whistle, as I imparted the news.

"Great Scot! You _were_ right, then. I couldn't believe it at the time."

"No, it is astonishing until you get used to the idea, and see how it makes everything fit in. Now, what are we to do? Of course, it will be generally known to-morrow."

John reflected.

"Never mind," he said at last, "we won't say anything at present. There is no need. As you say, it will be known soon enough."

But to my intense surprise, on getting down early the next morning, and eagerly opening the newspapers, there was not a word about the arrest! There was a column of mere padding about "The Styles Poisoning Case," but nothing further. It was rather inexplicable, but I supposed that, for some reason or other, Japp wished to keep it out of the papers. It worried me just a little, for it suggested the possibility that there might be further arrests to come.

After breakfast, I decided to go down to the village, and see if Poirot had returned yet; but, before I could start, a well-known face blocked one of the windows, and the well-known voice said:

"Bon jour, mon ami!"

"Poirot," I exclaimed, with relief, and seizing him by both hands, I dragged him into the room. "I was never so glad to see anyone. Listen, I have said nothing to anybody but John. Is that right?"

"My friend," replied Poirot, "I do not know what you are talking about."

"Dr. Bauerstein's arrest, of course," I answered impatiently.

"Is Bauerstein arrested, then?"

"Did you not know it?"

"Not the least in the world." But, pausing a moment, he added: "Still, it does not surprise me. After all, we are only four miles from the coast."

"The coast?" I asked, puzzled. "What has that got to do with it?"

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"Surely, it is obvious!"

"Not to me. No doubt I am very dense, but I cannot see what the proximity of the coast has got to do with the murder of Mrs. Inglethorp."

"Nothing at all, of course," replied Poirot, smiling. "But we were speaking of the arrest of Dr. Bauerstein."

"Well, he is arrested for the murder of Mrs. Inglethorp-----"

"What?" cried Poirot, in apparently lively astonishment. "Dr. Bauerstein arrested for the murder of Mrs. Inglethorp?"

"Yes."

"Impossible! That would be too good a farce! Who told you that, my friend?"

"Well, no one exactly told me," I confessed. "But he is arrested."

"Oh, yes, very likely. But for espionage, mon ami."

"Espionage?" I gasped.

"Precisely."

"Not for poisoning Mrs. Inglethorp?"

"Not unless our friend Japp has taken leave of his senses," replied Poirot placidly.

"But--but I thought you thought so too?"

Poirot gave me one look, which conveyed a wondering pity, and his full sense of the utter absurdity of such an idea.

"Do you mean to say," I asked, slowly adapting myself to the new idea, "that Dr. Bauerstein is a spy?"

Poirot nodded.

"Have you never suspected it?"

"It never entered my head."

"It did not strike you as peculiar that a famous London doctor should bury himself in a little village like this, and should be in the habit of walking about at all hours of the night, fully dressed?"

"No," I confessed, "I never thought of such a thing."

"He is, of course, a German by birth," said Poirot thoughtfully, "though he has practiced so long in this country that nobody thinks of him as anything but an Englishman. He was naturalized about fifteen years ago. A very clever man--a Jew, of course."

"The blackguard!" I cried indignantly.
"Not at all. He is, on the contrary, a patriot. Think what he stands to lose. I admire the man myself."
But I could not look at it in Poirot's philosophical way.
"And this is the man with whom Mrs. Cavendish has been wandering about all over the country!" I cried indignantly.
"Yes. I should fancy he had found her very useful," remarked Poirot. "So long as gossip busied itself in coupling their names together, any other vagaries of the doctor's passed unobserved."
"Then you think he never really cared for her?" I asked eagerly--rather too eagerly, perhaps, under the circumstances.
"That, of course, I cannot say, but--shall I tell you my own private opinion, Hastings?"
"Yes."
"Well, it is this: that Mrs. Cavendish does not care, and never has cared one little jot about Dr. Bauerstein!"
"Do you really think so?" I could not disguise my pleasure.
"I am quite sure of it. And I will tell you why."
"Yes?"
"Because she cares for some one else, mon ami."
"Oh!" What did he mean? In spite of myself, an agreeable warmth spread over me. I am not a vain man where women are concerned, but I remembered certain evidences, too lightly thought of at the time, perhaps, but which certainly seemed to indicate----

My pleasing thoughts were interrupted by the sudden entrance of Miss Howard. She glanced round hastily to make sure there was no one else in the room, and quickly produced an old sheet of brown paper. This she handed to Poirot, murmuring as she did so the cryptic words:
"On top of the wardrobe." Then she hurriedly left the room.

Poirot unfolded the sheet of paper eagerly, and uttered an exclamation of satisfaction. He spread it out on the table.

"Come here, Hastings. Now tell me, what is that initial--J. or L.?"
It was a medium sized sheet of paper, rather dusty, as though it had lain by for some time. But it was the label that was attracting Poirot's attention. At the top, it bore the printed stamp of Messrs. Parkson's, the well-known theatrical costumiers, and it was addressed to "--(the debatable initial) Cavendish, Esq., Styles Court, Styles St. Mary, Essex."
"It might be T., or it might be L.," I said, after studying the thing for a minute or two. "It certainly isn't a J."
"Good," replied Poirot, folding up the paper again. "I, also, am of your way of thinking. It is an L., depend upon it!"
"Where did it come from?" I asked curiously. "Is it important?"
"Moderately so. It confirms a surmise of mine. Having deduced its existence, I set Miss Howard to search for it, and, as you see, she has been successful."
"What did she mean by 'On the top of the wardrobe'?"
"She meant," replied Poirot promptly, "that she found it on top of a wardrobe."
"A funny place for a piece of brown paper," I mused.
"Not at all. The top of a wardrobe is an excellent place for brown paper and cardboard boxes. I have kept them there myself. Neatly arranged, there is nothing to offend the eye."
"Poirot," I asked earnestly, "have you made up your mind about this crime?"
"Yes--that is to say, I believe I know how it was committed." "Ah!"
"Unfortunately, I have no proof beyond my surmise, unless----" With sudden energy, he caught me by the arm, and whirled me down the hall, calling out in French in his excitement: "Mademoiselle Dorcas, Mademoiselle Dorcas, un moment, s'il vous plait!"

Dorcas, quite flurried by the noise, came hurrying out of the pantry.
"My good Dorcas, I have an idea--a little idea--if it should prove justified, what magnificent chance! Tell me, on Monday, not Tuesday, Dorcas, but Monday, the day before the tragedy, did anything go wrong with Mrs. Inglethorp's bell?"
Dorcas looked very surprised.
"Yes, sir, now you mention it, it did; though I don't know how you came to hear of it. A mouse, or some such, must have nibbled the wire through. The man came and put it right on Tuesday morning."
With a long drawn exclamation of ecstasy, Poirot led the way back to the morning-room.
"See you, one should not ask for outside proof--no, reason should be enough. But the flesh is weak, it is
consolation to find that one is on the right track. Ah, my friend, I am like a giant refreshed. I run! I leap!"

And, in very truth, run and leap he did, gambolling wildly down the stretch of lawn outside the long window.

"What is your remarkable little friend doing?" asked a voice behind me, and I turned to find Mary Cavendish at my elbow. She smiled, and so did I. "What is it all about?"

"Really, I can't tell you. He asked Dorcas some question about a bell, and appeared so delighted with her answer that he is capering about as you see!"

Mary laughed.

"How ridiculous! He's going out of the gate. Isn't he coming back to-day?"

"I don't know. I've given up trying to guess what he'll do next."

"Is he quite mad, Mr. Hastings?"

"I honestly don't know. Sometimes, I feel sure he is as mad as a hatter; and then, just as he is at his maddest, I find there is method in his madness."

"I see."

In spite of her laugh, Mary was looking thoughtful this morning. She seemed grave, almost sad.

It occurred to me that it would be a good opportunity to tackle her on the subject of Cynthia. I began rather tactfully, I thought, but I had not gone far before she stopped me authoritatively.

"You are an excellent advocate, I have no doubt, Mr. Hastings, but in this case your talents are quite thrown away. Cynthia will run no risk of encountering any unkindness from me."

I began to stammer feebly that I hoped she hadn't thought--But again she stopped me, and her words were so unexpected that they quite drove Cynthia, and her troubles, out of my mind.

"Mr. Hastings," she said, "do you think I and my husband are happy together?"

I was considerably taken aback, and murmured something about it's not being my business to think anything of the sort.

"Well," she said quietly, "whether it is your business or not, I will tell you that we are _not_ happy."

I said nothing, for I saw that she had not finished.

She began slowly, walking up and down the room, her head a little bent, and that slim, supple figure of hers swaying gently as she walked. She stopped suddenly, and looked up at me.

"You don't know anything about me, do you?" she asked. "Where I come from, who I was before I married John--anything, in fact? Well, I will tell you. I will make a father confessor of you. You are kind, I think--yes, I am sure you are kind."

Somehow, I was not quite as elated as I might have been. I remembered that Cynthia had begun her confidences in much the same way. Besides, a father confessor should be elderly, it is not at all the role for a young man.

"My father was English," said Mrs. Cavendish, "but my mother was a Russian."

"Ah," I said, "now I understand--"

"Understand what?"

"A hint of something foreign--different--that there has always been about you."

"My mother was very beautiful, I believe. I don't know, because I never saw her. She died when I was quite a little child. I believe there was some tragedy connected with her death--she took an overdose of some sleeping draught by mistake. However that may be, my father was broken-hearted. Shortly afterwards, he went into the Consular Service. Everywhere he went, I went with him. When I was twenty-three, I had been nearly all over the world. It was a splendid life--I loved it."

There was a smile on her face, and her head was thrown back. She seemed living in the memory of those old glad days.

"Then my father died. He left me very badly off. I had to go and live with some old aunts in Yorkshire." She shuddered. "You will understand me when I say that it was a deadly life for a girl brought up as I had been. The narrowness, the deadly monotony of it, almost drove me mad." She paused a minute, and added in a different tone: "And then I met John Cavendish."

"Yes?"

"You can imagine that, from my aunts' point of view, it was a very good match for me. But I can honestly say it was not this fact which weighed with me. No, he was simply a way of escape from the insufferable monotony of my life."

I said nothing, and after a moment, she went on:

"Don't misunderstand me. I was quite honest with him. I told him, what was true, that I liked him very much, that I hoped to come to like him more, but that I was not in any way what the world calls 'in love' with him. He declared that that satisfied him, and so--we were married."

She waited a long time, a little frown had gathered on her forehead. She seemed to be looking back earnestly
into those past days.

"I think--I am sure--he cared for me at first. But I suppose we were not well matched. Almost at once, we drifted apart. He--it is not a pleasing thing for my pride, but it is the truth--tired of me very soon." I must have made some murmur of dissent, for she went on quickly: "Oh, yes, he did! Not that it matters now--now that we've come to the parting of the ways."

"What do you mean?"

She answered quietly:

"I mean that I am not going to remain at Styles."

"You and John are not going to live here?"

"John may live here, but I shall not."

"You are going to leave him?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

She paused a long time, and said at last: "Perhaps--because I want to be--free!"

And, as she spoke, I had a sudden vision of broad spaces, virgin tracts of forests, untrodden lands--and a realization of what freedom would mean to such a nature as Mary Cavendish. I seemed to see her for a moment as she was, a proud wild creature, as untamed by civilization as some shy bird of the hills. A little cry broke from her lips:

"You don't know, you don't know, how this hateful place has been prison to me!"

"I understand," I said, "but--but don't do anything rash."

"Oh, rash!" Her voice mocked at my prudence.

Then suddenly I said a thing I could have bitten out my tongue for:

"You know that Dr. Bauerstein has been arrested?"

An instant coldness passed like a mask over her face, blotting out all expression.

"John was so kind as to break that to me this morning."

"Well, what do you think?" I asked feebly.

"Of what?"

"Of the arrest?"

"What should I think? Apparently he is a German spy; so the gardener had told John."

Her face and voice were absolutely cold and expressionless. Did she care, or did she not?

She moved away a step or two, and fingered one of the flower vases.

"These are quite dead. I must do them again. Would you mind moving--thank you, Mr. Hastings." And she walked quietly past me out of the window, with a cool little nod of dismissal.

No, surely she could not care for Bauerstein. No woman could act her part with that icy unconcern.

Poirot did not make his appearance the following morning, and there was no sign of the Scotland Yard men.

But, at lunch-time, there arrived a new piece of evidence--or rather lack of evidence. We had vainly tried to trace the fourth letter, which Mrs. Inglethorp had written on the evening preceding her death. Our efforts having been in vain, we had abandoned the matter, hoping that it might turn up of itself one day. And this is just what did happen, in the shape of a communication, which arrived by the second post from a firm of French music publishers, acknowledging Mrs. Inglethorp's cheque, and regretting they had been unable to trace a certain series of Russian folksongs. So the last hope of solving the mystery, by means of Mrs. Inglethorp's correspondence on the fatal evening, had to be abandoned.

Just before tea, I strolled down to tell Poirot of the new disappointment, but found, to my annoyance, that he was once more out.

"Gone to London again?"

"Oh, no, monsieur, he has but taken the train to Tadminster. 'To see a young lady's dispensary,' he said."

"Silly ass!" I ejaculated. "I told him Wednesday was the one day she wasn't there! Well, tell him to look us up to-morrow morning, will you?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

But, on the following day, no sign of Poirot. I was getting angry. He was really treating us in the most cavalier fashion.

After lunch, Lawrence drew me aside, and asked if I was going down to see him.

"No, I don't think I shall. He can come up here if he wants to see us."

"Oh!" Lawrence looked indeterminate. Something unusually nervous and excited in his manner roused my curiosity.
"What is it?" I asked. "I could go if there's anything special."

"It's nothing much, but--well, if you are going, will you tell him--" he dropped his voice to a whisper--"I think I've found the extra coffee-cup!"

I had almost forgotten that enigmatical message of Poirot's, but now my curiosity was aroused afresh.

Lawrence would say no more, so I decided that I would descend from my high horse, and once more seek out Poirot at Leastways Cottage.

This time I was received with a smile. Monsieur Poirot was within. Would I mount? I mounted accordingly.

Poirot was sitting by the table, his head buried in his hands. He sprang up at my entrance.

"What is it?" I asked solicitously. "You are not ill, I trust?"

"No, no, not ill. But I decide an affair of great moment."

"Whether to catch the criminal or not?" I asked facetiously.

But, to my great surprise, Poirot nodded gravely.

" 'To speak or not to speak,' as your so great Shakespeare says, 'that is the question.' "

I did not trouble to correct the quotation.

"You are not serious, Poirot?"

"I am of the most serious. For the most serious of all things hangs in the balance."

"And that is?"

"A woman's happiness, mon ami," he said gravely.

I did not quite know what to say.

"The moment has come," said Poirot thoughtfully, "and I do not know what to do. For, see you, it is a big stake for which I play. No one but I, Hercule Poirot, would attempt it!" And he tapped himself proudly on the breast.

After pausing a few minutes respectfully, so as not to spoil his effect, I gave him Lawrence's message.

"Aha!" he cried. "So he has found the extra coffee-cup. That is good. He has more intelligence than would appear, this long-faced Monsieur Lawrence of yours!"

I did not myself think very highly of Lawrence's intelligence; but I forebore to contradict Poirot, and gently took him to task for forgetting my instructions as to which were Cynthia's days off.

"It is true. I have the head of a sieve. However, the other young lady was most kind. She was sorry for my disappointment, and showed me everything in the kindest way."

"Oh, well, that's all right, then, and you must go to tea with Cynthia another day."

I told him about the letter.

"I am sorry for that," he said. "I always had hopes of that letter. But no, it was not to be. This affair must all be unravelled from within." He tapped his forehead. "These little grey cells. It is 'up to them'--as you say over here."

Then, suddenly, he asked: "Are you a judge of finger-marks, my friend?"

"No," I said, rather surprised, "I know that there are no two finger-marks alike, but that's as far as my science goes."

"Exactly."

He unlocked a little drawer, and took out some photographs which he laid on the table.

"I have numbered them, 1, 2, 3. Will you describe them to me?"

I studied the proofs attentively.

"All greatly magnified, I see. No. 1, I should say, are a man's finger-prints; thumb and first finger. No. 2 are a lady's; they are much smaller, and quite different in every way. No. 3"--I paused for some time--"there seem to be a lot of confused finger-marks, but here, very distinctly, are No. 1's."

"Overlapping the others?"

"Yes."

"You recognize them beyond fail?"

"Oh, yes; they are identical."

Poirot nodded, and gently taking the photographs from me locked them up again.

"I suppose," I said, "that as usual, you are not going to explain?"

"On the contrary. No. 1 were the finger-prints of Monsieur Lawrence. No. 2 were those of Mademoiselle Cynthia. They are not important. I merely obtained them for comparison. No. 3 is a little more complicated."

"Yes?"

"It is, as you see, highly magnified. You may have noticed a sort of blur extending all across the picture. I will not describe to you the special apparatus, dusting powder, etc., which I used. It is a well-known process to the police, and by means of it you can obtain a photograph of the finger-prints of any object in a very short space of time. Well, my friend, you have seen the finger-marks--it remains to tell you the particular object on which they had been left."
"Go on--I am really excited."

"Eh bien! Photo No. 3 represents the highly magnified surface of a tiny bottle in the top poison cupboard of the dispensary in the Red Cross Hospital at Tadminster--which sounds like the house that Jack built!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "But what were Lawrence Cavendish's finger-marks doing on it? He never went near the poison cupboard the day we were there!"

"Oh, yes, he did!"

"Impossible! We were all together the whole time."

Poirot shook his head.

"No, my friend, there was a moment when you were not all together. There was a moment when you could not have been all together, or it would not have been necessary to call to Monsieur Lawrence to come and join you on the balcony."

"I'd forgotten that," I admitted. "But it was only for a moment."

"Long enough."

"Long enough for what?"

Poirot's smile became rather enigmatical.

"Long enough for a gentleman who had once studied medicine to gratify a very natural interest and curiosity."

Our eyes met. Poirot's were pleasantly vague. He got up and hummed a little tune. I watched him suspiciously.

"Poirot," I said, "what was in this particular little bottle?"

Poirot looked out of the window.

"Hydro-chloride of strychnine," he said, over his shoulder, continuing to hum.

"Good heavens!" I said it quite quietly. I was not surprised. I had expected that answer.

"They use the pure hydro-chloride of strychnine very little-- only occasionally for pills. It is the official solution, Liq. Strychnine Hydro-clor. that is used in most medicines. That is why the finger-marks have remained undisturbed since then."

"How did you manage to take this photograph?"

"I dropped my hat from the balcony," explained Poirot simply. "Visitors were not permitted below at that hour, so, in spite of my many apologies, Mademoiselle Cynthia's colleague had to go down and fetch it for me."

"Then you knew what you were going to find?"

"No, not at all. I merely realized that it was possible, from your story, for Monsieur Lawrence to go to the poison cupboard. The possibility had to be confirmed, or eliminated."

"Poirot," I said, "your gaiety does not deceive me. This is a very important discovery."

"I do not know," said Poirot. "But one thing does strike me. No doubt it has struck you too."

"What is that?"

"Why, that there is altogether too much strychnine about this case. This is the third time we run up against it. There was strychnine in Mrs. Inglethorp's tonic. There is the strychnine sold across the counter at Styles St. Mary by Mace. Now we have more strychnine, handled by one of the household. It is confusing; and, as you know, I do not like confusion."

Before I could reply, one of the other Belgians opened the door and stuck his head in.

"There is a lady below, asking for Mr Hastings."

"A lady?"

I jumped up. Poirot followed me down the narrow stairs. Mary Cavendish was standing in the doorway.

"I have been visiting an old woman in the village," she explained, "and as Lawrence told me you were with Monsieur Poirot I thought I would call for you."

"Alas, madame," said Poirot, "I thought you had come to honour me with a visit!"

"I will some day, if you ask me," she promised him, smiling.

"That is well. If you should need a father confessor, madame"--she started ever so slightly--"remember, Papa Poirot is always at your service."

She stared at him for a few minutes, as though seeking to read some deeper meaning into his words. Then she turned abruptly away.

"Come, will you not walk back with us too, Monsieur Poirot?"

"Enchanted, madame."

All the way to Styles, Mary talked fast and feverishly. It struck me that in some way she was nervous of Poirot's eyes.

The weather had broken, and the sharp wind was almost autumnal in its shrewishness. Mary shivered a little, and buttoned her black sports coat closer. The wind through the trees made a mournful noise, like some great giant sighing.
We walked up to the great door of Styles, and at once the knowledge came to us that something was wrong. Dorcas came running out to meet us. She was crying and wringing her hands. I was aware of other servants huddled together in the background, all eyes and ears.

"Oh, m'am! Oh, m'am! I don't know how to tell you--"

"What is it, Dorcas?" I asked impatiently. "Tell us at once."

"It's those wicked detectives. They've arrested him--they've arrested Mr. Cavendish!"

"Arrested Lawrence?" I gasped.

I saw a strange look come into Dorcas's eyes.

"No, sir. Not Mr. Lawrence--Mr. John."

Behind me, with a wild cry, Mary Cavendish fell heavily against me, and as I turned to catch her I met the quiet triumph in Poirot's eyes.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CASE FOR THE PROSECUTION

The trial of John Cavendish for the murder of his stepmother took place two months later.

Of the intervening weeks I will say little, but my admiration and sympathy went out unfeignedly to Mary Cavendish. She ranged herself passionately on her husband's side, scorning the mere idea of his guilt, and fought for him tooth and nail.

I expressed my admiration to Poirot, and he nodded thoughtfully.

"Yes, she is of those women who show at their best in adversity. It brings out all that is sweetest and truest in them. Her pride and her jealousy have--"

"Jealousy?" I queried.

"Yes. Have you not realized that she is an unusually jealous woman? As I was saying, her pride and jealousy have been laid aside. She thinks of nothing but her husband, and the terrible fate that is hanging over him."

He spoke very feelingly, and I looked at him earnestly, remembering that last afternoon, when he had been deliberating whether or not to speak. With his tenderness for "a woman's happiness," I felt glad that the decision had been taken out of his hands.

"Even now," I said, "I can hardly believe it. You see, up to the very last minute, I thought it was Lawrence!"

Poirot grinned.

"I know you did."

"But John! My old friend John!"

"Every murderer is probably somebody's old friend," observed Poirot philosophically. "You cannot mix up sentiment and reason."

"I must say I think you might have given me a hint."

"Perhaps, mon ami, I did not do so, just because he _was_ your old friend."

I was rather disconcerted by this, remembering how I had busily passed on to John what I believed to be Poirot's views concerning Bauerstein. He, by the way, had been acquitted of the charge brought against him. Nevertheless, although he had been too clever for them this time, and the charge of espionage could not be brought home to him, his wings were pretty well clipped for the future.

I asked Poirot whether he thought John would be condemned. To my intense surprise, he replied that, on the contrary, he was extremely likely to be acquitted.

"But, Poirot--" I protested.

"Oh, my friend, have I not said to you all along that I have no proofs. It is one thing to know that a man is guilty, it is quite another matter to prove him so. And, in this case, there is terribly little evidence. That is the whole trouble. I, Hercule Poirot, know, but I lack the last link in my chain. And unless I can find that missing link--" He shook his head gravely.

"When did you first suspect John Cavendish?" I asked, after a minute or two.

"Did you not suspect him at all?"

"No, indeed."

"Not after that fragment of conversation you overheard between Mrs. Cavendish and her mother-in-law, and her subsequent lack of frankness at the inquest?"

"No."

"Did you not put two and two together, and reflect that if it was not Alfred Inglethorp who was quarrelling with his wife--and you remember, he strenuously denied it at the inquest--it must be either Lawrence or John. Now, if it was Lawrence, Mary Cavendish's conduct was just as inexplicable. But if, on the other hand, it was John, the whole thing was explained quite naturally."

"So," I cried, a light breaking in upon me, "it was John who quarrelled with his mother that afternoon?"
"Exactly."
"And you have known this all along?"
"Certainly. Mrs. Cavendish's behaviour could only be explained that way."
"And yet you say he may be acquitted?"

Poirot shrugged his shoulders.

"Certainly I do. At the police court proceedings, we shall hear the case for the prosecution, but in all probability his solicitors will advise him to reserve his defence. That will be sprung upon us at the trial. And--ah, by the way, I have a word of caution to give you, my friend. I must not appear in the case."

"What?"

"No. Officially, I have nothing to do with it. Until I have found that last link in my chain, I must remain behind the scenes. Mrs. Cavendish must think I am working for her husband, not against him."

"I say, that's playing it a bit low down," I protested.

"Not at all. We have to deal with a most clever and unscrupulous man, and we must use any means in our power--otherwise he will slip through our fingers. That is why I have been careful to remain in the background. All the discoveries have been made by Japp, and Japp will take all the credit. If I am called upon to give evidence at all"--he smiled broadly--"it will probably be as a witness for the defence."

I could hardly believe my ears.

"It is quite en regle," continued Poirot. "Strangely enough, I can give evidence that will demolish one contention of the prosecution."

"Which one?"

"The one that relates to the destruction of the will. John Cavendish did not destroy that will."

Poirot was a true prophet. I will not go into the details of the police court proceedings, as it involves many tiresome repetitions. I will merely state baldly that John Cavendish reserved his defence, and was duly committed for trial.

September found us all in London. Mary took a house in Kensington, Poirot being included in the family party. I myself had been given a job at the War Office, so was able to see them continually.

As the weeks went by, the state of Poirot's nerves grew worse and worse. That "last link" he talked about was still lacking. Privately, I hoped it might remain so, for what happiness could there be for Mary, if John were not acquitted?

On September 15th John Cavendish appeared in the dock at the Old Bailey, charged with "The Wilful Murder of Emily Agnes Inglethorp," and pleaded "Not Guilty."

Sir Ernest Heavywether, the famous K. C., had been engaged to defend him.

Mr. Philips, K. C., opened the case for the Crown.

The murder, he said, was a most premeditated and cold-blooded one. It was neither more nor less than the deliberate poisoning of a fond and trusting woman by the stepson to whom she had been more than a mother. Ever since his boyhood, she had supported him. He and his wife had lived at Styles Court in every luxury, surrounded by her care and attention. She had been their kind and generous benefactress.

He proposed to call witnesses to show how the prisoner, a profligate and spendthrift, had been at the end of his financial tether, and had also been carrying on an intrigue with a certain Mrs. Raikes, a neighbouring farmer's wife. This having come to his stepmother's ears, she taxed him with it on the afternoon before her death, and a quarrel ensued, part of which was overheard. On the previous day, the prisoner had purchased strychnine at the village chemist's shop, wearing a disguise by means of which he hoped to throw the onus of the crime upon another man--to wit, Mrs. Inglethorp's husband, of whom he had been bitterly jealous. Luckily for Mr. Inglethorp, he had been able to produce an unimpeachable alibi.

On the afternoon of July 17th, continued Counsel, immediately after the quarrel with her son, Mrs. Inglethorp made a new will. This will was found destroyed in the grate of her bedroom the following morning, but evidence had come to light which showed that it had been drawn up in favour of her husband. Deceased had already made a will in his favour before her marriage, but--and Mr. Philips wagged an expressive forefinger--the prisoner was not aware of that. What had induced the deceased to make a fresh will, with the old one still extant, he could not say. She was an old lady, and might possibly have forgotten the former one; or--this seemed to him more likely--she may have had an idea that it was revoked by her marriage, as there had been some conversation on the subject. Ladies were not always very well versed in legal knowledge. She had, about a year before, executed a will in favour of the prisoner. He would call evidence to show that it was the prisoner who ultimately handed his stepmother her coffee on the fatal night. Later in the evening, he had sought admission to her room, on which occasion, no doubt, he found an opportunity of destroying the will which, as far as he knew, would render the one in his favour valid.

The prisoner had been arrested in consequence of the discovery, in his room, by Detective Inspector Japp--a
most brilliant officer--of the identical phial of strychnine which had been sold at the village chemist's to the supposed Mr. Inglethorp on the day before the murder. It would be for the jury to decide whether or not these damming facts constituted an overwhelming proof of the prisoner's guilt.

And, subtly implying that a jury which did not so decide, was quite unthinkable, Mr. Philips sat down and wiped his forehead.

The first witnesses for the prosecution were mostly those who had been called at the inquest, the medical evidence being again taken first.

Sir Ernest Heavywether, who was famous all over England for the unscrupulous manner in which he bullied witnesses, only asked two questions.

"I take it, Dr. Bauerstein, that strychnine, as a drug, acts quickly?"
"Yes."
"And that you are unable to account for the delay in this case?"
"Yes."
"Thank you."

Mr. Mace identified the phial handed him by Counsel as that sold by him to "Mr. Inglethorp." Pressed, he admitted that he only knew Mr. Inglethorp by sight. He had never spoken to him. The witness was not cross-examined.

Alfred Inglethorp was called, and denied having purchased the poison. He also denied having quarrelled with his wife. Various witnesses testified to the accuracy of these statements.

The gardeners' evidence, as to the witnessing of the will was taken, and then Dorcas was called.

Dorcas, faithful to her "young gentlemen," denied strenuously that it could have been John's voice she heard, and resolutely declared, in the teeth of everything, that it was Mr. Inglethorp who had been in the boudoir with her mistress. A rather wistful smile passed across the face of the prisoner in the dock. He knew only too well how useless her gallant defiance was, since it was not the object of the defence to deny this point. Mrs. Cavendish, of course, could not be called upon to give evidence against her husband.

After various questions on other matters, Mr. Philips asked:
"In the month of June last, do you remember a parcel arriving for Mr. Lawrence Cavendish from Parkson's?"
Dorcas shook her head.
"I don't remember, sir. It may have done, but Mr. Lawrence was away from home part of June."
"In the event of a parcel arriving for him whilst he was away, what would be done with it?"
"It would either be put in his room or sent on after him."
"By you?"

"No, sir, I should leave it on the hall table. It would be Miss Howard who would attend to anything like that."
Evelyn Howard was called and, after being examined on other points, was questioned as to the parcel.

"Don't remember. Lots of parcels come. Can't remember one special one."
"You do not know if it was sent after Mr. Lawrence Cavendish to Wales, or whether it was put in his room?"
"Don't think it was sent after him. Should have remembered it if it was."
"Supposing a parcel arrived addressed to Mr. Lawrence Cavendish, and afterwards it disappeared, should you remark its absence?"

"No, don't think so. I should think some one had taken charge of it."
"I believe, Miss Howard, that it was you who found this sheet of brown paper?" He held up the same dusty piece which Poirot and I had examined in the morning-room at Styles.

"Yes, I did."
"How did you come to look for it?"
"The Belgian detective who was employed on the case asked me to search for it."
"Where did you eventually discover it?"
"On the top of--of--a wardrobe."
"On top of the prisoner's wardrobe?"
"I--I believe so."
"Did you not find it yourself?"
"Yes."
"Then you must know where you found it?"
"Yes, it was on the prisoner's wardrobe."
"That is better."

An assistant from Parkson's, Theatrical Costumiers, testified that on June 29th, they had supplied a black beard to Mr. L. Cavendish, as requested. It was ordered by letter, and a postal order was enclosed. No, they had not kept
the letter. All transactions were entered in their books. They had sent the beard, as directed, to "L. Cavendish, Esq., Styles Court."

Sir Ernest Heavywether rose ponderously.
"Where was the letter written from?"
"From Styles Court."
"The same address to which you sent the parcel?"
"Yes."
"And the letter came from there?"
"Yes."

Like a beast of prey, Heavywether fell upon him:
"How do you know?"
"I--I don't understand."
"How do you know that letter came from Styles? Did you notice the postmark?"
"No--but--"
"Ah, you did _not_ notice the postmark! And yet you affirm so confidently that it came from Styles. It might, in fact, have been any postmark?"
"Y--es."

"In fact, the letter, though written on stamped notepaper, might have been posted from anywhere? From Wales, for instance?"

The witness admitted that such might be the case, and Sir Ernest signified that he was satisfied.

Elizabeth Wells, second housemaid at Styles, stated that after she had gone to bed she remembered that she had bolted the front door, instead of leaving it on the latch as Mr. Inglethorp had requested. She had accordingly gone downstairs again to rectify her error. Hearing a slight noise in the West wing, she had peeped along the passage, and had seen Mr. John Cavendish knocking at Mrs. Inglethorp's door.

Sir Ernest Heavywether made short work of her, and under his unmerciful bullying she contradicted herself hopelessly, and Sir Ernest sat down again with a satisfied smile on his face.

With the evidence of Annie, as to the candle grease on the floor, and as to seeing the prisoner take the coffee into the boudoir, the proceedings were adjourned until the following day.

As we went home, Mary Cavendish spoke bitterly against the prosecuting counsel.
"That hateful man! What a net he has drawn around my poor John! How he twisted every little fact until he made it seem what it wasn't!"
"Well," I said consolingly, "it will be the other way about to-morrow."
"Yes," she said meditatively; then suddenly dropped her voice. "Mr. Hastings, you do not think--surely it could not have been Lawrence--Oh, no, that could not be!"

But I myself was puzzled, and as soon as I was alone with Poirot I asked him what he thought Sir Ernest was driving at.

"Ah!" said Poirot appreciatively. "He is a clever man, that Sir Ernest."

"Do you think he believes Lawrence guilty?"

"I do not think he believes or cares anything! No, what he is trying for is to create such confusion in the minds of the jury that they are divided in their opinion as to which brother did it. He is endeavouring to make out that there is quite as much evidence against Lawrence as against John--and I am not at all sure that he will not succeed."

Detective-inspector Japp was the first witness called when the trial was reopened, and gave his evidence succinctly and briefly. After relating the earlier events, he proceeded:

"Acting on information received, Superintendent Summerhay and myself searched the prisoner's room, during his temporary absence from the house. In his chest of drawers, hidden beneath some underclothing, we found: first, a pair of gold-rimmed pince-nez similar to those worn by Mr. Inglethorp"--these were exhibited--"secondly, this phial."

The phial was that already recognized by the chemist's assistant, a tiny bottle of blue glass, containing a few grains of a white crystalline powder, and labelled: "Strychnine Hydrochloride. POISON."

A fresh piece of evidence discovered by the detectives since the police court proceedings was a long, almost new piece of blotting-paper. It had been found in Mrs. Inglethorp's cheque book, and on being reversed at a mirror, showed clearly the words: "... erything of which I die possessed I leave to my beloved husband Alfred Ing ..." This placed beyond question the fact that the destroyed will had been in favour of the deceased lady's husband. Japp then produced the charred fragment of paper recovered from the grate, and this, with the discovery of the beard in the attic, completed his evidence.

But Sir Ernest's cross-examination was yet to come.
"What day was it when you searched the prisoner's room?"
"Tuesday, the 24th of July."
"Exactly a week after the tragedy?"
"Yes."
"You found these two objects, you say, in the chest of drawers. Was the drawer unlocked?"
"Yes."
"Does it not strike you as unlikely that a man who had committed a crime should keep the evidence of it in an unlocked drawer for anyone to find?"
"He might have stowed them there in a hurry."
"But you have just said it was a whole week since the crime. He would have had ample time to remove them and destroy them."
"Perhaps."
"There is no perhaps about it. Would he, or would he not have had plenty of time to remove and destroy them?"
"Yes."
"Was the pile of underclothes under which the things were hidden heavy or light?"
"Heavyish."
"In other words, it was winter underclothing. Obviously, the prisoner would not be likely to go to that drawer?"
"Perhaps not."
"Kindly answer my question. Would the prisoner, in the hottest week of a hot summer, be likely to go to a drawer containing winter underclothing. Yes, or no?"
"No."
"In that case, is it not possible that the articles in question might have been put there by a third person, and that the prisoner was quite unaware of their presence?"
"I should not think it likely."
"But it is possible?"
"Yes."
"That is all."

More evidence followed. Evidence as to the financial difficulties in which the prisoner had found himself at the end of July. Evidence as to his intrigue with Mrs. Raikes--poor Mary, that must have been bitter hearing for a woman of her pride. Evelyn Howard had been right in her facts, though her animosity against Alfred Inglethorp had caused her to jump to the conclusion that he was the person concerned.

Lawrence Cavendish was then put into the box. In a low voice, in answer to Mr. Philips' questions, he denied having ordered anything from Parkson's in June. In fact, on June 29th, he had been staying away, in Wales.

Instantly, Sir Ernest's chin was shooting pugnaciously forward.
"You deny having ordered a black beard from Parkson's on June 29th?"
"I do."
"Ah! In the event of anything happening to your brother, who will inherit Styles Court?"
The brutality of the question called a flush to Lawrence's pale face. The judge gave vent to a faint murmur of disapprobation, and the prisoner in the dock leant forward angrily.

Heavywether cared nothing for his client's anger.
"Answer my question, if you please."
"I suppose," said Lawrence quietly, "that I should."
"What do you mean by you 'suppose'? Your brother has no children. You _would_ inherit it, wouldn't you?"
"Yes."
"Ah, that's better," said Heavywether, with ferocious geniality. "And you'd inherit a good slice of money too, wouldn't you?"
"Really, Sir Ernest," protested the judge, "these questions are not relevant."
Sir Ernest bowed, and having shot his arrow proceeded.
"On Tuesday, the 17th July, you went, I believe, with another guest, to visit the dispensary at the Red Cross Hospital in Tadminster?"
"Yes."
"Did you--while you happened to be alone for a few seconds--unlock the poison cupboard, and examine some of the bottles?"
"I--I--may have done so."
"I put it to you that you did do so?"
"Yes."
Sir Ernest fairly shot the next question at him.
"Did you examine one bottle in particular?"
"No, I do not think so."
"Be careful, Mr. Cavendish. I am referring to a little bottle of Hydro-chloride of Strychnine."

Lawrence was turning a sickly greenish colour.
"N--o--I am sure I didn't."
"Then how do you account for the fact that you left the unmistakable impress of your finger-prints on it?"

The bullying manner was highly efficacious with a nervous disposition.
"I--I suppose I must have taken up the bottle."
"I suppose so too! Did you abstract any of the contents of the bottle?"
"Certainly not."
"Then why did you take it up?"
"I once studied to be a doctor. Such things naturally interest me."
"Ah! So poisons 'naturally interest' you, do they? Still, you waited to be alone before gratifying that 'interest' of yours?"
"That was pure chance. If the others had been there, I should have done just the same."
"Still, as it happens, the others were not there?"
"No, but----"
"In fact, during the whole afternoon, you were only alone for a couple of minutes, and it happened--I say, it happened--to be during those two minutes that you displayed your 'natural interest' in Hydro-chloride of Strychnine?"

Lawrence stammered pitifully.
"I--I----"

With a satisfied and expressive countenance, Sir Ernest observed:
"I have nothing more to ask you, Mr. Cavendish."

This bit of cross-examination had caused great excitement in court. The heads of the many fashionably attired women present were busily laid together, and their whispers became so loud that the judge angrily threatened to have the court cleared if there was not immediate silence.

There was little more evidence. The hand-writing experts were called upon for their opinion of the signature of "Alfred Inglethorp" in the chemist's poison register. They all declared unanimously that it was certainly not his hand-writing, and gave it as their view that it might be that of the prisoner disguised. Cross-examined, they admitted that it might be the prisoner's hand-writing cleverly counterfeited.

Sir Ernest Heavywether's speech in opening the case for the defence was not a long one, but it was backed by the full force of his emphatic manner. Never, he said, in the course of his long experience, had he known a charge of murder rest on slighter evidence. Not only was it entirely circumstantial, but the greater part of it was practically unproved. Let them take the testimony they had heard and sift it impartially. The strychnine had been found in a drawer in the prisoner's room. That drawer was an unlocked one, as he had pointed out, and he submitted that there was no evidence to prove that it was the prisoner who had concealed the poison there. It was, in fact, a wicked and malicious attempt on the part of some third person to fix the crime on the prisoner. The prosecution had been unable to produce a shred of evidence in support of their contention that it was the prisoner who ordered the black beard from Parkson's. The quarrel which had taken place between prisoner and his stepmother was freely admitted, but both it and his financial embarrassments had been grossly exaggerated.

His learned friend--Sir Ernest nodded carelessly at Mr. Philips--had stated that if the prisoner were an innocent man, he would have come forward at the inquest to explain that it was he, and not Mr. Inglethorp, who had been the participator in the quarrel. He thought the facts had been misrepresented. What had actually occurred was this. The prisoner, returning to the house on Tuesday evening, had been authoritatively told that there had been a violent quarrel between Mr. and Mrs. Inglethorp. No suspicion had entered the prisoner's head that anyone could possibly have mistaken his voice for that of Mr. Inglethorp. He naturally concluded that his stepmother had had two quarrels.

The prosecution averred that on Monday, July 16th, the prisoner had entered the chemist's shop in the village, disguised as Mr. Inglethorp. The prisoner, on the contrary, was at that time at a lonely spot called Marston's Spinney, where he had been summoned by an anonymous note, couched in blackmailing terms, and threatening to reveal certain matters to his wife unless he complied with its demands. The prisoner had, accordingly, gone to the appointed spot, and after waiting there vainly for half an hour had returned home. Unfortunately, he had met with no one on the way there or back who could vouch for the truth of his story, but luckily he had kept the note, and it would be produced as evidence.

As for the statement relating to the destruction of the will, the prisoner had formerly practiced at the Bar, and
was perfectly well aware that the will made in his favour a year before was automatically revoked by his stepmother's remarriage. He would call evidence to show who did destroy the will, and it was possible that that might open up quite a new view of the case.

Finally, he would point out to the jury that there was evidence against other people besides John Cavendish. He would direct their attention to the fact that the evidence against Mr. Lawrence Cavendish was quite as strong, if not stronger than that against his brother.

He would now call the prisoner.

John acquitted himself well in the witness-box. Under Sir Ernest's skilful handling, he told his tale credibly and well. The anonymous note received by him was produced, and handed to the jury to examine. The readiness with which he admitted his financial difficulties, and the disagreement with his stepmother, lent value to his denials.

At the close of his examination, he paused, and said:

"I should like to make one thing clear. I utterly reject and disapprove of Sir Ernest Heavywether's insinuations against my brother. My brother, I am convinced, had no more to do with the crime than I have."

Sir Ernest merely smiled, and noted with a sharp eye that John's protest had produced a very favourable impression on the jury.

Then the cross-examination began.

"I understand you to say that it never entered your head that the witnesses at the inquest could possibly have mistaken your voice for that of Mr. Inglethorp. Is not that very surprising?"

"No, I don't think so. I was told there had been a quarrel between my mother and Mr. Inglethorp, and it never occurred to me that such was not really the case."

"Not when the servant Dorcas repeated certain fragments of the conversation--fragments which you must have recognized?"

"I did not recognize them."

"Your memory must be unusually short!"

"No, but we were both angry, and, I think, said more than we meant. I paid very little attention to my mother's actual words."

Mr. Philips' incredulous sniff was a triumph of forensic skill. He passed on to the subject of the note.

"You have produced this note very opportunely. Tell me, is there nothing familiar about the hand-writing of it?"

"Not that I know of."

"Do you not think that it bears a marked resemblance to your own hand-writing--carelessly disguised?"

"No, I do not think so."

"I put it to you that it is your own hand-writing!"

"No."

"I put it to you that, anxious to prove an alibi, you conceived the idea of a fictitious and rather incredible appointment, and wrote this note yourself in order to bear out your statement!"

"No."

"Is it not a fact that, at the time you claim to have been waiting about at a solitary and unfrequented spot, you were really in the chemist's shop in Styles St. Mary, where you purchased strychnine in the name of Alfred Inglethorp?"

"No, that is a lie."

"I put it to you that, wearing a suit of Mr. Inglethorp's clothes, with a black beard trimmed to resemble his, you were there--and signed the register in his name!"

"That is absolutely untrue."

"Then I will leave the remarkable similarity of hand-writing between the note, the register, and your own, to the consideration of the jury," said Mr. Philips, and sat down with the air of a man who has done his duty, but who was nevertheless horrified by such deliberate perjury.

After this, as it was growing late, the case was adjourned till Monday.

Poirot, I noticed, was looking profoundly discouraged. He had that little frown between the eyes that I knew so well.

"What is it, Poirot?" I inquired.

"Ah, mon ami, things are going badly, badly."

In spite of myself, my heart gave a leap of relief. Evidently there was a likelihood of John Cavendish being acquitted.

When we reached the house, my little friend waved aside Mary's offer of tea.

"No, I thank you, madame. I will mount to my room."

I followed him. Still frowning, he went across to the desk and took out a small pack of patience cards. Then he
drew up a chair to the table, and, to my utter amazement, began solemnly to build card houses!

My jaw dropped involuntarily, and he said at once:

"No, mon ami, I am not in my second childhood! I steady my nerves, that is all. This employment requires precision of the fingers. With precision of the fingers goes precision of the brain. And never have I needed that more than now!"

"What is the trouble?" I asked.

With a great thump on the table, Poirot demolished his carefully built up edifice.

"It is this, mon ami! That I can build card houses seven stories high, but I cannot"--thump--"find"--thump--"that last link of which I spoke to you."

I could not quite tell what to say, so I held my peace, and he began slowly building up the cards again, speaking in jerks as he did so.

"It is done--so! By placing--one card--on another--with mathematical--precision!"

I watched the card house rising under his hands, story by story. He never hesitated or faltered. It was really almost like a conjuring trick.

"What a steady hand you've got," I remarked. "I believe I've only seen your hand shake once."

"On an occasion when I was enraged, without doubt," observed Poirot, with great placidity.

"Yes indeed! You were in a towering rage. Do you remember? It was when you discovered that the lock of the despatch-case in Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom had been forced. You stood by the mantel-piece, twiddling the things on it in your usual fashion, and your hand shook like a leaf! I must say----"

But I stopped suddenly. For Poirot, uttering a hoarse and inarticulate cry, again annihilated his masterpiece of cards, and putting his hands over his eyes swayed backwards and forwards, apparently suffering the keenest agony.

"Good heavens, Poirot!" I cried. "What is the matter? Are you taken ill?"

"No, no," he gasped. "It is--it is--that I have an idea!"

"Oh!" I exclaimed, much relieved. "One of your 'little ideas'?"

"Ah, ma foi, no!" replied Poirot frankly. "This time it is an idea gigantic! Stupendous! And you--_you_, my friend, have given it to me!"

Suddenly clasping me in his arms, he kissed me warmly on both cheeks, and before I had recovered from my surprise ran headlong from the room.

Mary Cavendish entered at that moment.

"What is the matter with Monsieur Poirot? He rushed past me crying out: 'A garage! For the love of Heaven, direct me to a garage, madame!' And, before I could answer, he had dashed out into the street."

I hurried to the window. True enough, there he was, tearing down the street, hatless, and gesticulating as he went. I turned to Mary with a gesture of despair.

"He'll be stopped by a policeman in another minute. There he goes, round the corner!"

Our eyes met, and we stared helplessly at one another.

"What can be the matter?"

I shook my head.

"I don't know. He was building card houses, when suddenly he said he had an idea, and rushed off as you saw."

"Well," said Mary, "I expect he will be back before dinner."

But night fell, and Poirot had not returned.

CHAPTER XII

THE LAST LINK

POIROT'S abrupt departure had intrigued us all greatly. Sunday morning wore away, and still he did not reappear. But about three o'clock a ferocious and prolonged hooting outside drove us to the window, to see Poirot alighting from a car, accompanied by Japp and Summerhay. The little man was transformed. He radiated an absurd complacency. He bowed with exaggerated respect to Mary Cavendish.

"Madame, I have your permission to hold a little reunion in the salon? It is necessary for every one to attend."

Mary smiled sadly.

"You know, Monsieur Poirot, that you have carte blanche in every way."

"You are too amiable, madame."

Still beaming, Poirot marshalled us all into the drawing-room, bringing forward chairs as he did so.

"Miss Howard--here. Mademoiselle Cynthia. Monsieur Lawrence. The good Dorcas. And Annie. Bien! We must delay our proceedings a few minutes until Mr. Inglethorp arrives. I have sent him a note."

Miss Howard rose immediately from her seat.

"If that man comes into the house, I leave it!"

"No, no!" Poirot went up to her and pleaded in a low voice.
Finally Miss Howard consented to return to her chair. A few minutes later Alfred Inglethorp entered the room.

The company once assembled, Poirot rose from his seat with the air of a popular lecturer, and bowed politely to his audience.

"Messieurs, mesdames, as you all know, I was called in by Monsieur John Cavendish to investigate this case. I at once examined the bedroom of the deceased which, by the advice of the doctors, had been kept locked, and was consequently exactly as it had been when the tragedy occurred. I found: first, a fragment of green material; second, a stain on the carpet near the window, still damp; thirdly, an empty box of bromide powders.

"To take the fragment of green material first, I found it caught in the bolt of the communicating door between that room and the adjoining one occupied by Mademoiselle Cynthia. I handed the fragment over to the police who did not consider it of much importance. Nor did they recognize it for what it was--a piece torn from a green land armlet."

There was a little stir of excitement.

"Now there was only one person at Styles who worked on the land--Mrs. Cavendish. Therefore it must have been Mrs. Cavendish who entered the deceased's room through the door communicating with Mademoiselle Cynthia's room."

"But that door was bolted on the inside!" I cried.

"When I examined the room, yes. But in the first place we have only her word for it, since it was she who tried that particular door and reported it fastened. In the ensuing confusion she would have had ample opportunity to shoot the bolt across. I took an early opportunity of verifying my conjectures. To begin with, the fragment corresponds exactly with a tear in Mrs. Cavendish's armlet. Also, at the inquest, Mrs. Cavendish declared that she had heard, from her own room, the fall of the table by the bed. I took an early opportunity of testing that statement by stationing my friend Monsieur Hastings in the left wing of the building, just outside Mrs. Cavendish's door. I myself, in company with the police, went to the deceased's room, and whilst there I, apparently accidentally, knocked over the table in question, but found that, as I had expected, Monsieur Hastings had heard no sound at all. This confirmed my belief that Mrs. Cavendish was not speaking the truth when she declared that she had been dressing in her room at the time of the tragedy. In fact, I was convinced that, far from having been in her own room, Mrs. Cavendish was actually in the deceased's room when the alarm was given."

I shot a quick glance at Mary. She was very pale, but smiling.

"I proceeded to reason on that assumption. Mrs. Cavendish is in her mother-in-law's room. We will say that she is seeking for something and has not yet found it. Suddenly Mrs. Inglethorp awakens and is seized with an alarming paroxysm. She flings out her arm, overturning the bed table, and then pulls desperately at the bell. Mrs. Cavendish, startled, drops her candle, scattering the grease on the carpet. She picks it up, and retreats quickly to Mademoiselle Cynthia's room, closing the door behind her. She hurries out into the passage, for the servants must not find her where she is. But it is too late! Already footsteps are echoing along the gallery which connects the two wings. What can she do? Quick as thought, she hurries back to the young girl's room, and starts shaking her awake. The hastily aroused household come trooping down the passage. They are all busily battering at Mrs. Inglethorp's door. It occurs to nobody that Mrs. Cavendish has not arrived with the rest, but--and this is significant--I can find no one who saw her come from the other wing. He looked at Mary Cavendish. "Am I right, madame?"

She bowed her head.

"Quite right, monsieur. You understand that, if I had thought I would do my husband any good by revealing these facts, I would have done so. But it did not seem to me to bear upon the question of his guilt or innocence."

"In a sense, that is correct, madame. But it cleared my mind of many misconceptions, and left me free to see other facts in their true significance."

"The will!" cried Lawrence. "Then it was you, Mary, who destroyed the will?"

She shook her head, and Poirot shook his also.

"No," he said quietly. "There is only one person who could possibly have destroyed that will--Mrs. Inglethorp herself!"

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. "She had only made it out that very afternoon!"

"Nevertheless, mon ami, it was Mrs. Inglethorp. Because, in no other way can you account for the fact that, on one of the hottest days of the year, Mrs. Inglethorp ordered a fire to be lighted in her room."

I gave a gasp. What idiots we had been never to think of that fire as being incongruous! Poirot was continuing:

"The temperature on that day, messieurs, was 80 degrees in the shade. Yet Mrs. Inglethorp ordered a fire! Why? Because she wished to destroy something, and could think of no other way. You will remember that, in consequence of the War economics practiced at Styles, no waste paper was thrown away. There was therefore no means of destroying a thick document such as a will. The moment I heard of a fire being lighted in Mrs. Inglethorp's room, I leaped to the conclusion that it was to destroy some important document--possibly a will. So the discovery of the
charred fragment in the grate was no surprise to me. I did not, of course, know at the time that the will in question had only been made this afternoon, and I will admit that, when I learnt that fact, I fell into a grievous error. I came to the conclusion that Mrs. Inglethorp's determination to destroy her will arose as a direct consequence of the quarrel she had that afternoon, and that therefore the quarrel took place after, and not before the making of the will.

"Here, as we know, I was wrong, and I was forced to abandon that idea. I faced the problem from a new standpoint. Now, at 4 o'clock, Dorcas overheard her mistress saying angrily: 'You need not think that any fear of publicity, or scandal between husband and wife will deter me.' I conjectured, and conjectured rightly, that these words were addressed, not to her husband, but to Mr. John Cavendish. At 5 o'clock, an hour later, she uses almost the same words, but the standpoint is different. She admits to Dorcas, 'I don't know what to do; scandal between husband and wife is a dreadful thing.' At 4 o'clock she has been angry, but completely mistress of herself. At 5 o'clock she is in violent distress, and speaks of having had a great shock.

"Looking at the matter psychologically, I drew one deduction which I was convinced was correct. The second 'scandal' she spoke of was not the same as the first--and it concerned herself!

"Let us reconstruct. At 4 o'clock, Mrs. Inglethorp quarrels with her son, and threatens to denounce him to his wife--who, by the way, overheard the greater part of the conversation. At 4.30, Mrs. Inglethorp, in consequence of a conversation on the validity of wills, makes a will in favour of her husband, which the two gardeners witness. At 5 o'clock, Dorcas finds her mistress in a state of considerable agitation, with a slip of paper--'a letter,' Dorcas thinks--in her hand, and it is then that she orders the fire in her room to be lighted. Presumably, then, between 4.30 and 5 o'clock, something has occurred to occasion a complete revolution of feeling, since she is now as anxious to destroy the will, as she was before to make it. What was that something?

"As far as we know, she was quite alone during that half-hour. Nobody entered or left that boudoir. What then occasioned this sudden change of sentiment?

"One can only guess, but I believe my guess to be correct. Mrs. Inglethorp had no stamps in her desk. We know this, because later she asked Dorcas to bring her some. Now in the opposite corner of the room stood her husband's desk--locked. She was anxious to find some stamps, and, according to my theory, she tried her own keys in the desk. That one of them fitted I know. She therefore opened the desk, and in searching for the stamps she came across something else--that slip of paper which Dorcas saw in her hand, and which assuredly was never meant for Mrs. Inglethorp's eyes. On the other hand, Mrs. Cavendish believed that the slip of paper to which her mother-in-law clung so tenaciously was a written proof of her own husband's infidelity. She demanded it from Mrs. Inglethorp who assured her, quite truly, that it had nothing to do with that matter. Mrs. Cavendish did not believe her. She thought that Mrs. Inglethorp was shielding her stepson. Now Mrs. Cavendish is a very resolute woman, and, behind her mask of reserve, she was madly jealous of her husband. She determined to get hold of that paper at all costs, and in this resolution chance came to her aid. She happened to pick up the key of Mrs. Inglethorp's despatch-case, which had been lost that morning. She knew that her mother-in-law invariably kept all important papers in this particular case.

"Mrs. Cavendish, therefore, made her plans as only a woman driven desperate through jealousy could have done. Some time in the evening she unbolted the door leading into Mademoiselle Cynthia's room. Possibly she applied oil to the hinges, for I found that it opened quite noiselessly when I tried it. She put off her project until the early hours of the morning as being safer, since the servants were accustomed to hearing her move about her room at that time. She dressed completely in her land kit, and made her way quietly through Mademoiselle Cynthia's room into that of Mrs. Inglethorp."

He paused a moment, and Cynthia interrupted:
"But I should have woken up if anyone had come through my room?"
"Not if you were drugged, mademoiselle."
"Drugged?"
"Mais, oui!"
"You remember"--he addressed us collectively again--"that through all the tumult and noise next door Mademoiselle Cynthia slept. That admitted of two possibilities. Either her sleep was feigned--which I did not believe--or her unconsciousness was indeed by artificial means.

"With this latter idea in my mind, I examined all the coffee-cups most carefully, remembering that it was Mrs. Cavendish who had brought Mademoiselle Cynthia her coffee the night before. I took a sample from each cup, and had them analysed--with no result. I had counted the cups carefully, in the event of one having been removed. Six persons had taken coffee, and six cups were duly found. I had to confess myself mistaken.

"Then I discovered that I had been guilty of a very grave oversight. Coffee had been brought in for seven persons, not six, for Dr. Bauerstein had been there that evening. This changed the face of the whole affair, for there was now one cup missing. The servants noticed nothing, since Annie, the housemaid, who took in the coffee,
brought in seven cups, not knowing that Mr. Inglethorp never drank it, whereas Dorcas, who cleared them away the following morning, found six as usual—or strictly speaking she found five, the sixth being the one found broken in Mrs. Inglethorp's room.

"I was confident that the missing cup was that of Mademoiselle Cynthia. I had an additional reason for that belief in the fact that all the cups found contained sugar, which Mademoiselle Cynthia never took in her coffee. My attention was attracted by the story of Annie about some 'salt' on the tray of coco which she took every night to Mrs. Inglethorp's room. I accordingly secured a sample of that coco, and sent it to be analysed."

"But that had already been done by Dr. Bauerstein," said Lawrence quickly.

"Not exactly. The analyst was asked by him to report whether strychnine was, or was not, present. He did not have it tested, as I did, for a narcotic."

"For a narcotic?"

"Yes. Here is the analyst's report. Mrs. Cavendish administered a safe, but effectual, narcotic to both Mrs. Inglethorp and Mademoiselle Cynthia. And it is possible that she had a mauvais quart d'heure in consequence! Imagine her feelings when her mother-in-law is suddenly taken ill and dies, and immediately after she hears the word 'Poison!' She has believed that the sleeping draught she administered was perfectly harmless, but there is no doubt that for one terrible moment she must have feared that Mrs. Inglethorp's death lay at her door. She is seized with panic, and under its influence she hurries downstairs, and quickly drops the coffee-cup and saucer used by Mademoiselle Cynthia into a large brass vase, where it is discovered later by Monsieur Lawrence. The remains of the coco she dare not touch. Too many eyes are upon her. Guess at her relief when strychnine is mentioned, and she discovers that after all the tragedy is not her doing.

"We are now able to account for the symptoms of strychnine poisoning being so long in making their appearance. A narcotic taken with strychnine will delay the action of the poison for some hours."

Poirot paused. Mary looked up at him, the colour slowly rising in her face.

"All you have said is quite true, Monsieur Poirot. It was the most awful hour of my life. I shall never forget it. But you are wonderful. I understand now—"

"What?" The cry of surprise was universal.

"What I meant when I told you that you could safely confess to Papa Poirot, eh? But you would not trust me."

"I see everything now," said Lawrence. "The drugged coco, taken on top of the poisoned coffee, amply accounts for the delay."

"Exactly. But was the coffee poisoned, or was it not? We come to a little difficulty here, since Mrs. Inglethorp never drank it."

"What?" The cry of surprise was universal.

"No. You will remember my speaking of a stain on the carpet in Mrs. Inglethorp's room? There were some peculiar points about that stain. It was still damp, it exhaled a strong odour of coffee, and imbedded in the nap of the carpet I found some little splinters of china. What had happened was plain to me, for not two minutes before I had placed my little case on the table near the window, and the table, tilting up, had deposited it upon the floor on precisely the identical spot. In exactly the same way, Mrs. Inglethorp had laid down her cup of coffee on reaching her room the night before, and the treacherous table had played her the same trick.

"What happened next is mere guess work on my part, but I should say that Mrs. Inglethorp picked up the broken cup and placed it on the table by the bed. Feeling in need of a stimulant of some kind, she heated up her coco, and drank it off then and there. Now we are faced with a new problem. We know the coco contained no strychnine. The coffee was never drunk. Yet the strychnine must have been administered between seven and nine o'clock that evening. What third medium was there—a medium so suitable for disguising the taste of strychnine that it is extraordinary no one has thought of it?" Poirot looked round the room, and then answered himself impressively.

"Her medicine!"

"Do you mean that the murderer introduced the strychnine into her tonic?" I cried.

"There was no need to introduce it. It was already there—in the mixture. The strychnine that killed Mrs. Inglethorp was the identical strychnine prescribed by Dr. Wilkins. To make that clear to you, I will read you an extract from a book on dispensing which I found in the Dispensary of the Red Cross Hospital at Tadminster:

"'The following prescription has become famous in text books: Strychninae Sulph . . . . . . gr.I Potass Bromide . . . . . . 3vi Aqua ad . . . . . . 3vii Fiatt Mistura

This solution deposits in a few hours the greater part of the strychnine salt as an insoluble bromide in transparent crystals. A lady in England lost her life by taking a similar mixture: the precipitated strychnine collected at the bottom, and in taking the last dose she swallowed nearly all of it!"

"Now there was, of course, no bromide in Dr. Wilkins' prescription, but you will remember that I mentioned an empty box of bromide powders. One or two of those powders introduced into the full bottle of medicine would effectually precipitate the strychnine, as the book describes, and cause it to be taken in the last dose. You will learn
later that the person who usually poured out Mrs. Inglethorp's medicine was always extremely careful not to shake
the bottle, but to leave the sediment at the bottom of it undisturbed.

"Throughout the case, there have been evidences that the tragedy was intended to take place on Monday evening.
On that day, Mrs. Inglethorp's bell wire was neatly cut, and on Monday evening Mademoiselle Cynthia was
spending the night with friends, so that Mrs. Inglethorp would have been quite alone in the right wing, completely
shut off from help of any kind, and would have died, in all probability, before medical aid could have been
summoned. But in her hurry to be in time for the village entertainment Mrs. Inglethorp forgot to take her medicine,
and the next day she lunched away from home, so that the last—and fatal—dose was actually taken twenty-four hours
later than had been anticipated by the murderer; and it is owing to that delay that the final proof—the last link of the
chain—is now in my hands."

Amid breathless excitement, he held out three thin strips of paper.
"A letter in the murderer's own hand-writing, mes amis! Had it been a little clearer in its terms, it is possible that
Mrs. Inglethorp, warned in time, would have escaped. As it was, she realized her danger, but not the manner of it."

In the deathly silence, Poirot pieced together the slips of paper and, clearing his throat, read:
"Dearest Evelyn:
'You will be anxious at hearing nothing. It is all right—only it will be to-night instead of last night. You
understand. There's a good time coming once the old woman is dead and out of the way. No one can possibly bring
home the crime to me. That idea of yours about the bromides was a stroke of genius! But we must be very
circumspect. A false step—--'

"Here, my friends, the letter breaks off. Doubtless the writer was interrupted; but there can be no question as to
his identity. We all know this hand-writing and----"

A howl that was almost a scream broke the silence.
"You devil! How did you get it?"
A chair was overturned. Poirot skipped nimbly aside. A quick movement on his part, and his assailant fell with a

"Messieurs, mesdames," said Poirot, with a flourish, "let me introduce you to the murderer, Mr. Alfred
Inglethorp!"

CHAPTER XIII.
POIROT EXPLAINS

"Poirot, you old villain," I said, "I've half a mind to strangle you! What do you mean by deceiving me as you
have done?"

We were sitting in the library. Several hectic days lay behind us. In the room below, John and Mary were
together once more, while Alfred Inglethorp and Miss Howard were in custody. Now at last, I had Poirot to myself,
and could relieve my still burning curiosity.

Poirot did not answer me for a moment, but at last he said:
"I did not deceive you, mon ami. At most, I permitted you to deceive yourself."
"Yes, but why?"
"Well, it is difficult to explain. You see, my friend, you have a nature so honest, and a countenance so
transparent, that—enfin, to conceal your feelings is impossible! If I had told you my ideas, the very first time you
saw Mr. Alfred Inglethorp that astute gentleman would have—in your so expressive idiom—'smelt a rat'! And then,
bon jour to our chances of catching him!"
"I think that I have more diplomacy than you give me credit for."
"My friend," besought Poirot, "I implore you, do not enrage yourself! Your help has been of the most invaluable.
It is but the extremely beautiful nature that you have, which made me pause."
"Well," I grumbled, a little mollified. "I still think you might have given me a hint."
"But I did, my friend. Several hints. You would not take them. Think now, did I ever say to you that I believed
John Cavendish guilty? Did I not, on the contrary, tell you that he would almost certainly be acquitted?"
"Yes, but—--"
"And did I not immediately afterwards speak of the difficulty of bringing the murderer to justice? Was it not
plain to you that I was speaking of two entirely different persons?"
"No," I said, "it was not plain to me!"
"Then again," continued Poirot, "at the beginning, did I not repeat to you several times that I didn't want Mr.
Inglethorp arrested _now_? That should have conveyed something to you."
"Do you mean to say you suspected him as long ago as that?"
"Yes. To begin with, whoever else might benefit by Mrs. Inglethorp's death, her husband would benefit the most.
There was no getting away from that. When I went up to Styles with you that first day, I had no idea as to how the
crime had been committed, but from what I knew of Mr. Inglethorp I fancied that it would be very hard to find anything to connect him with it. When I arrived at the chateau, I realized at once that it was Mrs. Inglethorp who had burnt the will; and there, by the way, you cannot complain, my friend, for I tried my best to force on you the significance of that bedroom fire in midsummer."

"Yes, yes," I said impatiently. "Go on."

"Well, my friend, as I say, my views as to Mr. Inglethorp's guilt were very much shaken. There was, in fact, so much evidence against him that I was inclined to believe that he had not done it."

"When did you change your mind?"

"When I found that the more efforts I made to clear him, the more efforts he made to get himself arrested. Then, when I discovered that Inglethorp had nothing to do with Mrs. Raikes and that in fact it was John Cavendish who was interested in that quarter, I was quite sure."

"But why?"

"Simply this. If it had been Inglethorp who was carrying on an intrigue with Mrs. Raikes, his silence was perfectly comprehensible. But, when I discovered that it was known all over the village that it was John who was attracted by the farmer's pretty wife, his silence bore quite a different interpretation. It was nonsense to pretend that he was afraid of the scandal, as no possible scandal could attach to him. This attitude of his gave me furiously to think, and I was slowly forced to the conclusion that Alfred Inglethorp wanted to be arrested. Eh bien! from that moment, I was equally determined that he should not be arrested."

"Wait a minute. I don't see why he wished to be arrested?"

"Because, mon ami, it is the law of your country that a man once acquitted can never be tried again for the same offence. Aha! but it was clever--his idea! Assuredly, he is a man of method. See here, he knew that in his position he was bound to be suspected, so he conceived the exceedingly clever idea of preparing a lot of manufactured evidence against himself. He wished to be arrested. He would then produce his irreproachable alibi--and, hey presto, he was safe for life!"

"But I still don't see how he managed to prove his alibi, and yet go to the chemist's shop?"

Poirot stared at me in surprise.

"Is it possible? My poor friend! You have not yet realized that it was Miss Howard who went to the chemist's shop?"

"Miss Howard?"

"But, certainly. Who else? It was most easy for her. She is of a good height, her voice is deep and manly; moreover, remember, she and Inglethorp are cousins, and there is a distinct resemblance between them, especially in their gait and bearing. It was simplicity itself. They are a clever pair!"

"I am still a little fogged as to how exactly the bromide business was done," I remarked.

"Bon! I will reconstruct for you as far as possible. I am inclined to think that Miss Howard was the master mind in that affair. You remember her once mentioning that her father was a doctor? Possibly she dispensed his medicines for him, or she may have taken the idea from one of the many books lying about when Mademoiselle Cynthia was studying for her exam. Anyway, she was familiar with the fact that the addition of a bromide to a mixture containing strychnine would cause the precipitation of the latter. Probably the idea came to her quite suddenly. Mrs. Inglethorp had a box of bromide powders, which she occasionally took at night. What could be easier than quietly to dissolve one or more of those powders in Mrs. Inglethorp's large sized bottle of medicine when it came from Coot's? The risk is practically nil. The tragedy will not take place until nearly a fortnight later. If anyone has seen either of them touching the medicine, they will have forgotten it by that time. Miss Howard will have engineered her quarrel, and departed from the house. The lapse of time, and her absence, will defeat all suspicion. Yes, it was a clever idea! If they had left it alone, it is possible the crime might never have been brought home to them. But they were not satisfied. They tried to be too clever--and that was their undoing."

Poirot puffed at his tiny cigarette, his eyes fixed on the ceiling.

"They arranged a plan to throw suspicion on John Cavendish, by buying strychnine at the village chemist's, and signing the register in his hand-writing."

"On Monday Mrs. Inglethorp will take the last dose of her medicine. On Monday, therefore, at six o'clock, Alfred Inglethorp arranges to be seen by a number of people at a spot far removed from the village. Miss Howard has previously made up a cock and bull story about him and Mrs. Raikes to account for his holding his tongue afterwards. At six o'clock, Miss Howard, disguised as Alfred Inglethorp, enters the chemist's shop, with her story about a dog, obtains the strychnine, and writes the name of Alfred Inglethorp in John's handwriting, which she had previously studied carefully."

"But, as it will never do if John, too, can prove an alibi, she writes him an anonymous note--still copying his hand-writing --which takes him to a remote spot where it is exceedingly unlikely that anyone will see him.
"So far, all goes well. Miss Howard goes back to Middlingham. Alfred Inglethorp returns to Styles. There is nothing that can compromise him in any way, since it is Miss Howard who has the strychnine, which, after all, is only wanted as a blind to throw suspicion on John Cavendish.

"But now a hitch occurs. Mrs. Inglethorp does not take her medicine that night. The broken bell, Cynthia's absence-- arranged by Inglethorp through his wife--all these are wasted. And then--he makes his slip.

"Mrs. Inglethorp is out, and he sits down to write to his accomplice, who, he fears, may be in a panic at the nonsuccess of their plan. It is probable that Mrs. Inglethorp returned earlier than he expected. Caught in the act, and somewhat flurried he hastily shuts and locks his desk. He fears that if he remains in the room he may have to open it again, and that Mrs. Inglethorp might catch sight of the letter before he could snatch it up. So he goes out and walks in the woods, little dreaming that Mrs. Inglethorp will open his desk, and discover the incriminating document.

"But this, as we know, is what happened. Mrs. Inglethorp reads it, and becomes aware of the perfidy of her husband and Evelyn Howard, though, unfortunately, the sentence about the bromides conveys no warning to her mind. She knows that she is in danger--but is ignorant of where the danger lies. She decides to say nothing to her husband, but sits down and writes to her solicitor, asking him to come on the morrow, and she also determines to destroy immediately the will which she has just made. She keeps the fatal letter."

"It was to discover that letter, then, that her husband forced the lock of the despatch-case?"

"Yes, and from the enormous risk he ran we can see how fully he realized its importance. That letter excepted, there was absolutely nothing to connect him with the crime."

"There's only one thing I can't make out, why didn't he destroy it at once when he got hold of it?"

"Because he did not dare take the biggest risk of all--that of keeping it on his own person."

"I don't understand."

"Look at it from his point of view. I have discovered that there were only five short minutes in which he could have taken it--the five minutes immediately before our own arrival on the scene, for before that time Annie was brushing the stairs, and would have seen anyone who passed going to the right wing. Figure to yourself the scene! He enters the room, unlocking the door by means of one of the other doorkeys--they were all much alike. He hurries to the despatch-case--it is locked, and the keys are nowhere to be seen. That is a terrible blow to him, for it means that his presence in the room cannot be concealed as he had hoped. But he sees clearly that everything must be risked for the sake of that damning piece of evidence. Quickly, he forces the lock with a penknife, and turns over the papers until he finds what he is looking for.

"But now a fresh dilemma arises: he dare not keep that piece of paper on him. He may be seen leaving the room--he may be searched. If the paper is found on him, it is certain doom. Probably, at this minute, too, he hears the sounds below of Mr. Wells and John leaving the boudoir. He must act quickly. Where can he hide this terrible slip of paper? The contents of the waste-paper-basket are kept and in any case, are sure to be examined. There are no means of destroying it; and he dare not keep it. He looks round, and he sees--what do you think, mon ami?"

I shook my head.

"In a moment, he has torn the letter into long thin strips, and rolling them up into spills he thrusts them hurriedly in amongst the other spills in the vase on the mantle-piece."

I uttered an exclamation.

"No one would think of looking there," Poirot continued. "And he will be able, at his leisure, to come back and destroy this solitary piece of evidence against him."

"Then, all the time, it was in the spill vase in Mrs. Inglethorp's bedroom, under our very noses?" I cried.

Poirot nodded.

"Yes, my friend. That is where I discovered my 'last link,' and I owe that very fortunate discovery to you."

"To me?"

"Yes. Do you remember telling me that my hand shook as I was straightening the ornaments on the mantelpiece?"

"Yes, but I don't see----"

"No, but I saw. Do you know, my friend, I remembered that earlier in the morning, when we had been there together, I had straightened all the objects on the mantel-piece. And, if they were already straightened, there would be no need to straighten them again, unless, in the meantime, some one else had touched them."

"Dear me," I murmured, "so that is the explanation of your extraordinary behaviour. You rushed down to Styles, and found it still there?"

"Yes, and it was a race for time."

"But I still can't understand why Inglethorp was such a fool as to leave it there when he had plenty of opportunity to destroy it."

"Ah, but he had no opportunity. I saw to that."
"You?"
"Yes. Do you remember reproving me for taking the household into my confidence on the subject?"
"Yes."

"Well, my friend, I saw there was just one chance. I was not sure then if Inglethorp was the criminal or not, but if he was I reasoned that he would not have the paper on him, but would have hidden it somewhere, and by enlisting the sympathy of the household I could effectually prevent his destroying it. He was already under suspicion, and by making the matter public I secured the services of about ten amateur detectives, who would be watching him unceasingly, and being himself aware of their watchfulness he would not dare seek further to destroy the document. He was therefore forced to depart from the house, leaving it in the spill vase."

"But surely Miss Howard had ample opportunities of aiding him."

"Yes, but Miss Howard did not know of the paper's existence. In accordance with their prearranged plan, she never spoke to Alfred Inglethorp. They were supposed to be deadly enemies, and until John Cavendish was safely convicted they neither of them dared risk a meeting. Of course I had a watch kept on Mr. Inglethorp, hoping that sooner or later he would lead me to the hiding-place. But he was too clever to take any chances. The paper was safe where it was; since no one had thought of looking there in the first week, it was not likely they would do so afterwards. But for your lucky remark, we might never have been able to bring him to justice."

"I understand that now; but when did you first begin to suspect Miss Howard?"
"When I discovered that she had told a lie at the inquest about the letter she had received from Mrs. Inglethorp."
"Why, what was there to lie about?"
"You saw that letter? Do you recall its general appearance?"
"Yes--more or less."

"You will recollect, then, that Mrs. Inglethorp wrote a very distinctive hand, and left large clear spaces between her words. But if you look at the date at the top of the letter you will notice that 'July 17th' is quite different in this respect. Do you see what I mean?"

"No," I confessed, "I don't."

"You do not see that that letter was not written on the 17th, but on the 7th--the day after Miss Howard's departure? The '1' was written in before the '7' to turn it into the '17th'."

"But why?"

"That is exactly what I asked myself. Why does Miss Howard suppress the letter written on the 17th, and produce this faked one instead? Because she did not wish to show the letter of the 17th. Why, again? And at once a suspicion dawned in my mind. You will remember my saying that it was wise to beware of people who were not telling you the truth."

"And yet," I cried indignantly, "after that, you gave me two reasons why Miss Howard could not have committed the crime!"

"And very good reasons too," replied Poirot. "For a long time they were a stumbling-block to me until I remembered a very significant fact: that she and Alfred Inglethorp were cousins. She could not have committed the crime single-handed, but the reasons against that did not debar her from being an accomplice. And, then, there was that rather over-vehement hatred of hers! It concealed a very opposite emotion. There was, undoubtedly, a tie of passion between them long before he came to Styles. They had already arranged their infamous plot--that he should marry this rich, but rather foolish old lady, induce her to make a will leaving her money to him, and then gain their ends by a very cleverly conceived crime. If all had gone as they planned, they would probably have left England, and lived together on their poor victim's money."

"They are a very astute and unscrupulous pair. While suspicion was to be directed against him, she would be making quiet preparations for a very different denouement. She arrives from Middlingham with all the compromising items in her possession. No suspicion attaches to her. No notice is paid to her coming and going in the house. She hides the strychnine and glasses in John's room. She puts the beard in the attic. She will see to it that sooner or later they are duly discovered."

"I don't quite see why they tried to fix the blame on John," I remarked. "It would have been much easier for them to bring the crime home to Lawrence."

"Yes, but that was mere chance. All the evidence against him arose out of pure accident. It must, in fact, have been distinctly annoying to the pair of schemers."

"His manner was unfortunate," I observed thoughtfully.
"Yes, You realize, of course, what was at the back of that?"
"No."

"You did not understand that he believed Mademoiselle Cynthia guilty of the crime?"
"No," I exclaimed, astonished. "Impossible!"
"Not at all. I myself nearly had the same idea. It was in my mind when I asked Mr. Wells that first question about the will. Then there were the bromide powders which she had made up, and her clever male impersonations, as Dorcas recounted them to us. There was really more evidence against her than anyone else."

"You are joking, Poirot!"

"No. Shall I tell you what made Monsieur Lawrence turn so pale when he first entered his mother's room on the fatal night? It was because, whilst his mother lay there, obviously poisoned, he saw, over your shoulder, that the door into Mademoiselle Cynthia's room was unbolted."

"But he declared that he saw it bolted!" I cried.

"Exactly," said Poirot dryly. "And that was just what confirmed my suspicion that it was not. He was shielding Mademoiselle Cynthia."

"But why should he shield her?"

"Because he is in love with her."

I laughed.

"There, Poirot, you are quite wrong! I happen to know for a fact that, far from being in love with her, he positively dislikes her."

"Who told you that, mon ami?"

"Cynthia herself."

"La pauvre petite! And she was concerned?"

"She said that she did not mind at all."

"Then she certainly did mind very much," remarked Poirot. "They are like that--les femmes!"

"What you say about Lawrence is a great surprise to me," I said.

"But why? It was most obvious. Did not Monsieur Lawrence make the sour face every time Mademoiselle Cynthia spoke and laughed with his brother? He had taken it into his long head that Mademoiselle Cynthia was in love with Monsieur John. When he entered his mother's room, and saw her obviously poisoned, he jumped to the conclusion that Mademoiselle Cynthia knew something about the matter. He was nearly driven desperate. First he crushed the coffee-cup to powder under his feet, remembering that she had gone up with his mother the night before, and he determined that there should be no chance of testing its contents. Thenceforward, he strenuously, and quite uselessly, upheld the theory of 'Death from natural causes'."

"And what about the 'extra coffee-cup'?"

"I was fairly certain that it was Mrs. Cavendish who had hidden it, but I had to make sure. Monsieur Lawrence did not know at all what I meant; but, on reflection, he came to the conclusion that if he could find an extra coffee-cup anywhere his lady love would be cleared of suspicion. And he was perfectly right."

"One thing more. What did Mrs. Inglethorp mean by her dying words?"

"They were, of course, an accusation against her husband."

"Dear me, Poirot," I said with a sigh, "I think you have explained everything. I am glad it has all ended so happily. Even John and his wife are reconciled."

"Thanks to me."

"How do you mean--thanks to you?"

"My dear friend, do you not realize that it was simply and solely the trial which has brought them together again? That John Cavendish still loved his wife, I was convinced. Also, that she was equally in love with him. But they had drifted very far apart. It all arose from a misunderstanding. She married him without love. He knew it. He is a sensitive man in his way, he would not force himself upon her if she did not want him. And, as he withdrew, her love awoke. But they are both unusually proud, and their pride held them inexorably apart. He drifted into an entanglement with Mrs. Raikes, and she deliberately cultivated the friendship of Dr. Bauerstein. Do you remember the day of John Cavendish's arrest, when you found me deliberating over a big decision?"

"Yes, I quite understood your distress."

"Pardon me, mon ami, but you did not understand it in the least. I was trying to decide whether or not I would clear John Cavendish at once. I could have cleared him--though it might have meant a failure to convict the real criminals. They were entirely in the dark as to my real attitude up to the very last moment--which partly accounts for my success."

"Do you mean that you could have saved John Cavendish from being brought to trial?"

"Yes, my friend. But I eventually decided in favour of 'a woman's happiness'. Nothing but the great danger through which they have passed could have brought these two proud souls together again."

I looked at Poirot in silent amazement. The colossal cheek of the little man! Who on earth but Poirot would have thought of a trial for murder as a restorer of conjugal happiness!

"I perceive your thoughts, mon ami," said Poirot, smiling at me. "No one but Hercule Poirot would have
attempted such a thing! And you are wrong in condemning it. The happiness of one man and one woman is the
greatest thing in all the world."

His words took me back to earlier events. I remembered Mary as she lay white and exhausted on the sofa,
listening, listening. There had come the sound of the bell below. She had started up. Poirot had opened the door, and
meeting her agonized eyes had nodded gently. "Yes, madame," he said. "I have brought him back to you." He had
stood aside, and as I went out I had seen the look in Mary's eyes, as John Cavendish had caught his wife in his arms.

"Perhaps you are right, Poirot," I said gently. "Yes, it is the greatest thing in the world."

Suddenly, there was a tap at the door, and Cynthia peeped in.

"I--I only----"

"Come in," I said, springing up.
She came in, but did not sit down.
"I--only wanted to tell you something----"

"Yes?"
Cynthia fidgeted with a little tassel for some moments, then, suddenly exclaiming: "You dears!" kissed first me
and then Poirot, and rushed out of the room again.

"What on earth does this mean?" I asked, surprised.
It was very nice to be kissed by Cynthia, but the publicity of the salute rather impaired the pleasure.

"It means that she has discovered Monsieur Lawrence does not dislike her as much as she thought," replied
Poirot philosophically.

"But----"
"Here he is."
Lawrence at that moment passed the door.

"Eh! Monsieur Lawrence," called Poirot. "We must congratulate you, is it not so?"
Lawrence blushed, and then smiled awkwardly. A man in love is a sorry spectacle. Now Cynthia had looked
charming.

I sighed.

"What is it, mon ami?"

"Nothing," I said sadly. "They are two delightful women!"

"And neither of them is for you?" finished Poirot. "Never mind. Console yourself, my friend. We may hunt
together again, who knows? And then----"

THE END
The Dream Woman

A Mystery in Four Narratives

by Wilkie Collins

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THE FIRST NARRATIVE
INTRODUCTORY STATEMENT OF THE FACTS BY PERCY FAIRBANK

I

"Hullo, there! Hostler! Hullo-o-o!"

"My dear! why don't you look for the bell?"

"I have looked--there is no bell."

"And nobody in the yard. How very extraordinary! Call again, dear."

"Hostler! Hullo, there! Hostler-r-r!"

My second call echoes through empty space, and rouses nobody--produces, in short, no visible result. I am at the end of my resources--I don't know what to say or what to do next. Here I stand in the solitary inn yard of a strange town, with two horses to hold, and a lady to take care of. By way of adding to my responsibilities, it so happens that one of the horses is dead lame, and that the lady is my wife.

Who am I?--you will ask.

There is plenty of time to answer the question. Nothing happens; and nobody appears to receive us. Let me introduce myself and my wife.

I am Percy Fairbank--English gentleman--age (let us say) forty--no profession--moderate politics--middle height--fair complexion--easy character--plenty of money.

My wife is a French lady. She was Mademoiselle Clotilde Delorge--when I was first presented to her at her father's house in France. I fell in love with her--I really don't know why. It might have been because I was perfectly idle, and had nothing else to do at the time. Or it might have been because all my friends said she was the very last woman whom I ought to think of marrying. On the surface, I must own, there is nothing in common between Mrs. Fairbank and me. She is tall; she is dark; she is nervous, excitable, romantic; in all her opinions she proceeds to extremes. What could such a woman see in me? what could I see in her? I know no more than you do. In some mysterious manner we exactly suit each other. We have been man and wife for ten years, and our only regret is, that we have no children. I don't know what you may think; I call that--upon the whole--a happy marriage.

So much for ourselves. The next question is--what has brought us into the inn yard? and why am I obliged to turn groom, and hold the horses?

We live for the most part in France--at the country house in which my wife and I first met. Occasionally, by way of variety, we pay visits to my friends in England. We are paying one of those visits now. Our host is an old college friend of mine, possessed of a fine estate in Somersethshire; and we have arrived at his house--called Farleigh Hall--toward the close of the hunting season.

On the day of which I am now writing--destined to be a memorable day in our calendar--the hounds meet at Farleigh Hall. Mrs. Fairbank and I are mounted on two of the best horses in my friend's stables. We are quite unworthy of that distinction; for we know nothing and care nothing about hunting. On the other hand, we delight in riding, and we enjoy the breezy Spring morning and the fair and fertile English landscape surrounding us on every side. While the hunt prospers, we follow the hunt. But when a check occurs--when time passes and patience is sorely tried; when the bewildered dogs run hither and thither, and strong language falls from the lips of exasperated sportsmen--we fail to take any further interest in the proceedings. We turn our horses' heads in the direction of a grassy lane, delightfully shaded by trees. We trot merrily along the lane, and find ourselves on an open common. We gallop across the common, and follow the windings of a second lane. We cross a brook, we pass through a village, we emerge into pastoral solitude among the hills. The horses toss their heads, and neigh to each other, and enjoy it as much as we do. The hunt is forgotten. We are as happy as a couple of children; we are actually singing a French song--when in one moment our merriment comes to an end. My wife's horse sets one of his forefeet on a loose stone, and stumbles. His rider's ready hand saves him from falling. But, at the first attempt he makes to go on, the sad truth shows itself--a tendon is strained; the horse is lame.

What is to be done? We are strangers in a lonely part of the country. Look where we may, we see no signs of a
human habitation. There is nothing for it but to take the bridle road up the hill, and try what we can discover on the other side. I transfer the saddles, and mount my wife on my own horse. He is not used to carry a lady; he misses the familiar pressure of a man's legs on either side of him; he fidgets, and starts, and kicks up the dust. I follow on foot, at a respectful distance from his heels, leading the lame horse. Is there a more miserable object on the face of creation than a lame horse? I have seen lame men and lame dogs who were cheerful creatures; but I never yet saw a lame horse who didn't look heartbroken over his own misfortune.

For half an hour my wife capers and curvets sideways along the bridle road. I trudge on behind her; and the brokenhorse halts behind _me_. Hard by the top of the hill, our melancholy procession passes a Somersetshire peasant at work in a field. I summon the man to approach us; and the man looks at me stolidly, from the middle of the field, without stirring a step. I ask at the top of my voice how far it is to Farleigh Hall. The Somersetshire peasant answers at the top of _his_ voice:

"Vourteen mile. Gi' oi a drap o' zyder."

I translate (for my wife's benefit) from the Somersetshire language into the English language. We are fourteen miles from Farleigh Hall; and our friend in the field desires to be rewarded, for giving us that information, with a drop of cider. There is the peasant, painted by himself! Quite a bit of character, my dear! Quite a bit of character!

Mrs. Fairbank doesn't view the study of agricultural human nature with my relish. Her fidgety horse will not allow her a moment's repose; she is beginning to lose her temper.

"We can't go fourteen miles in this way," she says. "Where is the nearest inn? Ask that brute in the field!"

I take a shilling from my pocket and hold it up in the sun. The shilling exercises magnetic virtues. The shilling draws the peasant slowly toward me from the middle of the field. I inform him that we want to put up the horses and to hire a carriage to take us back to Farleigh Hall. Where can we do that? The peasant answers (with his eye on the shilling):

"At Oonderbridge, to be zure." (At Underbridge, to be sure.)

"Is it far to Underbridge?"

The peasant repeats, "Var to Oonderbridge?"--and laughs at the question. "Hoo-hoo-hoo!" (Underbridge is evidently close by--if we could only find it.) "Will you show us the way, my man?" "Will you gi' oi a drap of zyder?" I courteously bend my head, and point to the shilling. The agricultural intelligence exerts itself. The peasant joins our melancholy procession. My wife is a fine woman, but he never once looks at my wife--and, more extraordinary still, he never even looks at the horses. His eyes are with his mind--and his mind is on the shilling.

We reach the top of the hill--and, behold on the other side, nestling in a valley, the shrine of our pilgrimage, the town of Underbridge! Here our guide claims his shilling, and leaves us to find out the inn for ourselves. I am constitutionally a polite man. I say "Good morning" at parting. The guide looks at me with the shilling between his teeth to make sure that it is a good one. "Marnin!" he says savagely--and turns his back on us, as if we had offended him. A curious product, this, of the growth of civilization. If I didn't see a church spire at Underbridge, I might suppose that we had lost ourselves on a savage island.

II

Arriving at the town, we had no difficulty in finding the inn. The town is composed of one desolate street; and midway in that street stands the inn--an ancient stone building sadly out of repair. The painting on the sign-board is obliterated. The shutters over the long range of front windows are all closed. A cock and his hens are the only living creatures at the door. Plainly, this is one of the old inns of the stage-coach period, ruined by the railway. We pass through the open arched doorway, and find no one to welcome us. We advance into the stable yard behind; I assist my wife to dismount--and there we are in the position already disclosed to view at the opening of this narrative. No bell to ring. No human creature to answer when I call. I stand helpless, with the bridles of the horses in my hand. Mrs. Fairbank saunters gracefully down the length of the yard and does--what all women do, when they find themselves in a strange place. She opens every door as she passes it, and peeps in. On my side, I have just recovered my breath, I am on the point of shouting for the hostler for the third and last time, when I hear Mrs. Fairbank suddenly call to me:

"Percy! come here!"

Her voice is eager and agitated. She has opened a last door at the end of the yard, and has started back from some sight which has suddenly met her view. I hitch the horses' bridles on a rusty nail in the wall near me, and join my wife. She has turned pale, and catches me nervously by the arm.

"Good heavens!" she cries; "look at that!"

I look--and what do I see? I see a dingy little stable, containing two stalls. In one stall a horse is munching his corn. In the other a man is lying asleep on the litter.

A worn, withered, woebegone man in a hostler's dress. His hollow wrinkled cheeks, his scanty grizzled hair, his dry yellow skin, tell their own tale of past sorrow or suffering. There is an ominous frown on his eyebrows--there is
a painful nervous contraction on the side of his mouth. I hear him breathing convulsively when I first look in; he
shudders and sighs in his sleep. It is not a pleasant sight to see, and I turn round instinctively to the bright sunlight in
the yard. My wife turns me back again in the direction of the stable door.

"Wait!" she says. "Wait! he may do it again."

"Do what again?"

"He was talking in his sleep, Percy, when I first looked in. He was dreaming some dreadful dream. Hush! he's
beginning again."

I look and listen. The man stirs on his miserable bed. The man speaks in a quick, fierce whisper through his
clenched teeth. "Wake up! Wake up, there! Murder!"

There is an interval of silence. He moves one lean arm slowly until it rests over his throat; he shudders, and turns
on his straw; he raises his arm from his throat, and feebly stretches it out; his hand clutches at the straw on the side
ward which he has turned; he seems to fancy that he is grasping at the edge of something. I see his lips begin to
move again; I step softly into the stable; my wife follows me, with her hand fast clasped in mine. We both bend over
him. He is talking once more in his sleep--strange talk, mad talk, this time.

"Light gray eyes" (we hear him say), "and a droop in the left eyelid--flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it--
all right, mother! fair, white arms with a down on them--little, lady's hand, with a reddish look round the fingernails-
the knife--the cursed knife--first on one side, then on the other--aha, you she-devil! where is the knife?"

He stops and grows restless on a sudden. We see him writhing on the straw. He throws up both his hands and
gasps hysterically for breath. His eyes open suddenly. For a moment they look at nothing, with a vacant glitter in
them--then they close again in deeper sleep. Is he dreaming still? Yes; but the dream seems to have taken a new
course. When he speaks next, the tone is altered; the words are few--sadly and imploringly repeated over and over
again. "Say you love me! I am so fond of _you_... Say you love me! say you love me!" He sinks into deeper and
deeper sleep, faintly repeating those words. They die away on his lips. He speaks no more.

By this time Mrs. Fairbank has got over her terror; she is devoured by curiosity now. The miserable creature on
the straw has appealed to the imaginative side of her character. Her illimitable appetite for romance hungers and
thirsts for more. She shakes me impatiently by the arm.

"Do you hear? There is a woman at the bottom of it, Percy! There is love and murder in it, Percy! Where are the
people of the inn? Go into the yard, and call to them again."

My wife belongs, on her mother's side, to the South of France. The South of France breeds fine women with hot
temperaments. I say no more. Married men will understand my position. Single men may need to be told that there are
occasions when we must not only love and honor--we must also obey--our wives.

I turn to the door to obey _my_ wife, and find myself confronted by a stranger who has stolen on us unawares.

"Good morning, sir," says the rosy old man. "I'm a little hard of hearing. Was it you that was a-calling just now
in the yard?"

Before I can answer, my wife interposes. She insists (in a shrill voice, adapted to our host's hardness of hearing)
on knowing who that unfortunate person is sleeping on the straw. "Where does he come from? Why does he say
such dreadful things in his sleep? Is he married or single? Did he ever fall in love with a murderess? What sort of a
looking woman was she? Did she really stab him or not? In short, dear Mr. Landlord, tell us the whole story!"

Dear Mr. Landlord waits drowsily until Mrs. Fairbank has quite done--then delivers himself of his reply as
follows:

"His name's Francis Raven. He's an Independent Methodist. He was forty-five year old last birthday. And he's
my hostler. That's his story."

My wife's hot southern temper finds its way to her foot, and expresses itself by a stamp on the stable yard.

The landlord turns himself sleepily round, and looks at the horses. "A fine pair of horses, them two in the yard.
Do you want to put 'em in my stables?" I reply in the affirmative by a nod. The landlord, bent on making himself
agreeable to my wife, addresses her once more. "I'm a-going to wake Francis Raven. He's an Independent Methodist.
He was forty-five year old last birthday. And he's my hostler. That's his story."

Having issued this second edition of his interesting narrative, the landlord enters the stable. We follow him to
see how he will wake Francis Raven, and what will happen upon that. The stable broom stands in a corner; the
landlord takes it--advances toward the sleeping hostler--and coolly stirs the man up with a broom as if he was a wild
beast in a cage. Francis Raven starts to his feet with a cry of terror--looks at us wildly, with a horrid glare of
suspicion in his eyes--recovers himself the next moment--and suddenly changes into a decent, quiet, respectable
serving-man.
"I beg your pardon, ma'am. I beg your pardon, sir."

The tone and manner in which he makes his apologies are both above his apparent station in life. I begin to catch the infection of Mrs. Fairbank's interest in this man. We both follow him out into the yard to see what he will do with the horses. The manner in which he lifts the injured leg of the lame horse tells me at once that he understands his business. Quickly and quietly, he leads the animal into an empty stable; quickly and quietly, he gets a bucket of hot water, and puts the lame horse's leg into it. "The warm water will reduce the swelling, sir. I will bandage the leg afterwards." All that he does is done intelligently; all that he says, he says to the purpose.

Nothing wild, nothing strange about him now. Is this the same man whom we heard talking in his sleep?--the same man who woke with that cry of terror and that horrid suspicion in his eyes? I determine to try him with one or two questions.

III

"Not much to do here," I say to the hostler.
"Very little to do, sir," the hostler replies.
"Anybody staying in the house?"
"The house is quite empty, sir."
"I thought you were all dead. I could make nobody hear me."
"The landlord is very deaf, sir, and the waiter is out on an errand."
"Yes; and _you_ were fast asleep in the stable. Do you often take a nap in the daytime?"

The worn face of the hostler faintly flushes. His eyes look away from my eyes for the first time. Mrs. Fairbank furtively pinches my arm. Are we on the eve of a discovery at last? I repeat my question. The man has no civil alternative but to give me an answer. The answer is given in these words:

"I was tired out, sir. You wouldn't have found me asleep in the daytime but for that."
"Tired out, eh? You had been hard at work, I suppose?"
"No, sir."
"What was it, then?"

He hesitates again, and answers unwillingly, "I was up all night."
"Up all night? Anything going on in the town?"
"Nothing going on, sir."
"Anybody ill?"
"Nobody ill, sir."

That reply is the last. Try as I may, I can extract nothing more from him. He turns away and busies himself in attending to the horse's leg. I leave the stable to speak to the landlord about the carriage which is to take us back to Farleigh Hall. Mrs. Fairbank remains with the hostler, and favors me with a look at parting. The look says plainly, "I mean to find out why he was up all night. Leave him to Me." The ordering of the carriage is easily accomplished. The inn possesses one horse and one chaise. The landlord has a story to tell of the horse, and a story to tell of the chaise. They resemble the story of Francis Raven--with this exception, that the horse and chaise belong to no religious persuasion. "The horse will be nine year old next birthday. I've had the shay for four-and-twenty year. Mr. Max, of Underbridge, he bred the horse; and Mr. Pooley, of Yeovil, he built the shay. It's my horse and my shay. And that's _their_ story!" Having relieved his mind of these details, the landlord proceeds to put the harness on the horse. By way of assisting him, I drag the chaise into the yard. Just as our preparations are completed, Mrs. Fairbank appears. A moment or two later the hostler follows her out. He has bandaged the horse's leg, and is now ready to drive us to Farleigh Hall. I observe signs of agitation in his face and manner, which suggest that my wife has found her way into his confidence. I put the question to her privately in a corner of the yard. "Well? Have you found out why Francis Raven was up all night?"

Mrs. Fairbank has an eye to dramatic effect. Instead of answering plainly, Yes or No, she suspends the interest and excites the audience by putting a question on her side.

"What is the day of the month, dear?"
"The day of the month is the first of March."
"The first of March, Percy, is Francis Raven's birthday."

I try to look as if I was interested--and don't succeed.
"Francis was born," Mrs. Fairbank proceeds gravely, "at two o'clock in the morning."

I begin to wonder whether my wife's intellect is going the way of the landlord's intellect. "Is that all?" I ask.
"It is _not_ all," Mrs. Fairbank answers. "Francis Raven sits up on the morning of his birthday because he is afraid to go to bed."

"And why is he afraid to go to bed?"
"Because he is in peril of his life."
"On his birthday?"
"On his birthday. At two o'clock in the morning. As regularly as the birthday comes round."

There she stops. Has she discovered no more than that? No more thus far. I begin to feel really interested by this time. I ask eagerly what it means? Mrs. Fairbank points mysteriously to the chaise— with Francis Raven (hitherto our hostler, now our coachman) waiting for us to get in. The chaise has a seat for two in front, and a seat for one behind. My wife casts a warning look at me, and places herself on the seat in front.

The necessary consequence of this arrangement is that Mrs. Fairbank sits by the side of the driver during a journey of two hours and more. Need I state the result? It would be an insult to your intelligence to state the result. Let me offer you my place in the chaise. And let Francis Raven tell his terrible story in his own words.

THE SECOND NARRATIVE
THE HOSTLER'S STORY.--TOLD BY HIMSELF
IV

It is now ten years ago since I got my first warning of the great trouble of my life in the Vision of a Dream.

I shall be better able to tell you about it if you will please suppose yourselves to be drinking tea along with us in our little cottage in Cambridgeshire, ten years since.

The time was the close of day, and there were three of us at the table, namely, my mother, myself, and my mother's sister, Mrs. Chance. These two were Scotchwomen by birth, and both were widows. There was no other resemblance between them that I can call to mind. My mother had lived all her life in England, and had no more of the Scotch brogue on her tongue than I have. My aunt Chance had never been out of Scotland until she came to keep house with my mother after her husband's death. And when _she_ opened her lips you heard broad Scotch, I can tell you, if you ever heard it yet!

As it fell out, there was a matter of some consequence in debate among us that evening. It was this: whether I should do well or not to take a long journey on foot the next morning.

Now the next morning happened to be the day before my birthday; and the purpose of the journey was to offer myself for a situation as groom at a great house in the neighboring county to ours. The place was reported as likely to fall vacant in about three weeks' time. I was as well fitted to fill it as any other man. In the prosperous days of our family, my father had been manager of a training stable, and he had kept me employed among the horses from my boyhood upward. Please to excuse my troubling you with these small matters. They all fit into my story farther on, as you will soon find out. My poor mother was dead against my leaving home on the morrow.

"You can never walk all the way there and all the way back again by to-morrow night," she says. "The end of it will be that you will sleep away from home on your birthday. You have never done that yet, Francis, since your father's death, I don't like your doing it now. Wait a day longer, my son--only one day."

For my own part, I was weary of being idle, and I couldn't abide the notion of delay. Even one day might make all the difference. Some other man might take time by the forelock, and get the place.

"Consider how long I have been out of work," I says, "and don't ask me to put off the journey. I won't fail you, mother. I'll get back by to-morrow night, if I have to pay my last sixpence for a lift in a cart."

My mother shook her head. "I don't like it, Francie,--I don't like it!" There was no moving her from that view. We argued and argued, until we were both at a deadlock. It ended in our agreeing to refer the difference between us to my mother's sister, Mrs. Chance.

While we were trying hard to convince each other, my aunt Chance sat as dumb as a fish, stirring her tea and thinking her own thoughts. When we made our appeal to her, she seemed as it were to wake up. "Ye baith refer it to my puir judgment?" she says, in her broad Scotch. We both answered Yes. Upon that my aunt Chance first cleared the tea-table, and then pulled out from the pocket of her gown a pack of cards.

Don't run away, if you please, with the notion that this was done lightly, with a view to amuse my mother and me. My aunt Chance seriously believed that she could look into the future by telling fortunes on the cards. She did nothing herself without first consulting the cards. She could give no more serious proof of her interest in my welfare than the proof which she was offering now. I don't say it profanely; I only mention the fact—the cards had, in some incomprehensible way, got themselves jumbled up together with her religious convictions. You meet with people nowadays who believe in spirits working by way of tables and chairs. On the same principle (if there _is_ any principle in it) my aunt Chance believed in Providence working by way of the cards.

"Whether _you_ are right, Francie, or your mither—whether ye will do weel or ill, the morrow, to go or stay--the cairds will tell it. We are a' in the hands of Proavidence. The cairds will tell it."

Hearing this, my mother turned her head aside, with something of a sour look in her face. Her sister's notions about the cards were little better than flat blasphemy to her mind. But she kept her opinion to herself. My aunt Chance, to own the truth, had inherited, through her late husband, a pension of thirty pounds a year. This was an important contribution to our housekeeping, and we poor relations were bound to treat her with a certain respect. As
for myself, if my poor father never did anything else for me before he fell into difficulties, he gave me a good education, and raised me (thank God) above superstitions of all sorts. However, a very little amused me in those days; and I waited to have my fortune told, as patiently as if I believed in it too!

My aunt began her hocus pocus by throwing out all the cards in the pack under seven. She shuffled the rest with her left hand for luck; and then she gave them to me to cut. "Wi' yer left hand, Francie. Mind that! Pet your trust in Proavidence--but dinna forget that your luck in yer left hand!" A long and roundabout shifting of the cards followed, reducing them in number until there were just fifteen of them left, laid out neatly before my aunt in a half circle. The card which happened to lie outermost, at the right-hand end of the circle, was, according to rule in such cases, the card chosen to represent Me. By way of being appropriate to my situation as a poor groom out of employment, the card was--the King of Diamonds.

"I tak' up the King o' Diamants," says my aunt. "I count seven cairds fra' richt to left; and I humbly ask a blessing on what follows." My aunt shut her eyes as if she was saying grace before meat, and held up to me the seventh card. I called the seventh card--the Queen of Spades. My aunt opened her eyes again in a hurry, and cast a sly look my way. "The Queen o' Spades means a dairk woman. Ye'll be thinking in secret, Francie, of a dairk woman?"

When a man has been out of work for more than three months, his mind isn't troubled much with thinking of women--light or dark. I was thinking of the groom's place at the great house, and I tried to say so. My aunt Chance wouldn't listen. She treated my interpretation with contempt. "Hoot-toot! there's the caird in your hand! If ye're no thinking of her the day, ye'll be thinking of her the morrow. Where's the harm of thinking of a dairk woman! I was ance a dairk woman myself, before my hair was gray. Haud yer peace, Francie, and watch the cairds."

I watched the cards as I was told. There were seven left on the table. My aunt removed two from one end of the row and two from the other, and desired me to call the two outermost of the three cards now left on the table. I called the Ace of Clubs and the Ten of Diamonds. My aunt Chance lifted her eyes to the ceiling with a look of devout gratitude which sorely tried my mother's patience. The Ace of Clubs and the Ten of Diamonds, taken together, signified--first, good news (evidently the news of the groom's place); secondly, a journey that lay before me (pointing plainly to my journey to-morrow!); thirdly and lastly, a sum of money (probably the groom's wages!) waiting to find its way into my pockets. Having told my fortune in these encouraging terms, my aunt declined to carry the experiment any further. "Eh, lad! it's a clean tempting o' Proavidence to ask mair o' the cairds than the cairds have tauld us noo. Gae yer ways to-morrow to the great hoose. A dairk woman will meet ye at the gate; and she'll have a hand in getting ye the groom's place, wi' a' the gratifications and pairquisites appertaining to the same. And, mebbe, when yer poaket's full o' money, ye'll no' be forgetting yer aunt Chance, maintaining her ain unblemished widowhood--wi' Proavidence assisting--on thratty punds a year!"

I promised to remember my aunt Chance (who had the defect, by the way, of being a terribly greedy person after money) on the next happy occasion when my poor empty pockets were to be filled at last. This done, I looked at my mother. She had agreed to take her sister for umpire between us, and her sister had given it in my favor. She raised no more objections. Silently, she got on her feet, and kissed me, and sighed bitterly--and so left the room. My aunt Chance shook her head. "I doubt, Francie, yer puir mither has but a heathen notion of the vairtue of the cairds!"

By daylight the next morning I set forth on my journey. I looked back at the cottage as I opened the garden gate. At one window was my mother, with her handkerchief to her eyes. At the other stood my aunt Chance, holding up the Queen of Spades by way of encouraging me at starting. I waved my hands to both of them in token of farewell, and stepped out briskly into the road. It was then the last day of February. Be pleased to remember, in connection with this, that the first of March was the day, and two o'clock in the morning the hour of my birth.

Now you know how I came to leave home. The next thing to tell is, what happened on the journey.

I reached the great house in reasonably good time considering the distance. At the very first trial of it, the prophecy of the cards turned out to be wrong. The person who met me at the lodge gate was not a dark woman--in fact, not a woman at all--but a boy. He directed me on the way to the servants' offices; and there again the cards were all wrong. I encountered, not one woman, but three--and not one of the three was dark. I have stated that I am not superstitious, and I have told the truth. But I must own that I did feel a certain fluttering at the heart when I made my bow to the steward, and told him what business had brought me to the house. His answer completed the discomfiture of aunt Chance's fortune-telling. My ill-luck still pursued me. That very morning another man had applied for the groom's place, and had got it.
cheese. Just as it was getting toward dark, the rain came on and the wind began to rise; and I found myself, to make matters worse, in a part of the country with which I was entirely unacquainted, though I guessed myself to be some fifteen miles from home. The first house I found to inquire at, was a lonely roadside inn, standing on the outskirts of a thick wood. Solitary as the place looked, it was welcome to a lost man who was also hungry, thirsty, footsore, and wet. The landlord was civil and respectable-looking; and the price he asked for a bed was reasonable enough. I was grieved to disappoint my mother. But there was no conveyance to be had, and I could go no farther afoot that night. My weariness fairly forced me to stop at the inn.

I may say for myself that I am a temperate man. My supper simply consisted of some rashers of bacon, a slice of home-made bread, and a pint of ale. I did not go to bed immediately after this moderate meal, but sat up with the landlord, talking about my bad prospects and my long run of ill-luck, and diverging from these topics to the subjects of horse-flesh and racing. Nothing was said, either by myself, my host, or the few laborers who strayed into the tap-room, which could, in the slightest degree, excite my mind, or set my fancy—which is only a small fancy at the best of times—playing tricks with my common sense.

At a little after eleven the house was closed. I went round with the landlord, and held the candle while the doors and lower windows were being secured. I noticed with surprise the strength of the bolts, bars, and iron-sheathed shutters.

"You see, we are rather lonely here," said the landlord. "We never have had any attempts to break in yet, but it's always as well to be on the safe side. When nobody is sleeping here, I am the only man in the house. My wife and daughter are timid, and the servant girl takes after her missuses. Another glass of ale, before you turn in?—No!—Well, how such a sober man as you comes to be out of a place is more than I can understand for one. Here's where you're to sleep. You're the only lodger to-night, and I think you'll say my missus has done her best to make you comfortable. You're quite sure you won't have another glass of ale?—Very well. Good night."

It was half-past eleven by the clock in the passage as we went upstairs to the bedroom. The window looked out on the wood at the back of the house.

I locked my door, set my candle on the chest of drawers, and wearily got me ready for bed. The bleak wind was still blowing, and the solemn, surging moan of it in the wood was very dreary to hear through the night silence. Feeling strangely wakeful, I resolved to keep the candle alight until I began to grow sleepy. The truth is, I was not quite myself. I was depressed in mind by my disappointment of the morning; and I was worn out in body by my long walk. Between the two, I own I couldn't face the prospect of lying awake in the darkness, listening to the dismal moan of the wind in the wood.

Sleep stole on me before I was aware of it; my eyes closed, and I fell off to rest, without having so much as thought of extinguishing the candle.

The next thing that I remember was a faint shivering that ran through me from head to foot, and a dreadful sinking pain at my heart, such as I had never felt before. The shivering only disturbed my slumbers—the pain woke me instantly. In one moment I passed from a state of sleep to a state of wakefulness—my eyes wide open—my mind clear on a sudden as if by a miracle. The candle had burned down nearly to the last morsel of tallow, but the unsnuffed wick had just fallen off, and the light was, for the moment, fair and full.

Between the foot of the bed and the closet door, I saw a person in my room. The person was a woman, standing looking at me, with a knife in her hand. It does no credit to my courage to confess it—but the truth is the truth. I was struck speechless with terror. There I lay with my eyes on the woman; there the woman stood (with the knife in her hand) with _her_ eyes on _me_.

She said not a word as we stared each other in the face; but she moved after a little—moved slowly toward the left-hand side of the bed.

The light fell full on her face. A fair, fine woman, with yellowish flaxen hair, and light gray eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. I noticed these things and fixed them in my mind, before she was quite round at the side of the bed. Without saying a word; without any change in the stony stillness of her face; without any noise following her footfall, she came closer and closer; stopped at the bed-head; and lifted the knife to stab me. I laid my arm over my throat to save it; but, as I saw the blow coming, I threw my hand across the bed to the right side, and jerked my body over that way, just as the knife came down, like lightning, within a hair's breadth of my shoulder.

My eyes fixed on her arm and her hand—she gave me time to look at them as she slowly drew the knife out of the bed. A white, well-shaped arm, with a pretty down lying lightly over the fair skin. A delicate lady's hand, with a pink flush round the finger nails.

She drew the knife out, and passed back again slowly to the foot of the bed; she stopped there for a moment looking at me; then she came on without saying a word; without any change in the stony stillness of her face; without any noise following her footfall—came on to the side of the bed where I now lay.

Getting near me, she lifted the knife again, and I drew myself away to the left side. She struck, as before right
into the mattress, with a swift downward action of her arm; and she missed me, as before; by a hair's breadth. This time my eyes wandered from her to the knife. It was like the large clasp knives which laboring men use to cut their bread and bacon with. Her delicate little fingers did not hide more than two thirds of the handle; I noticed that it was made of buckhorn, clean and shining as the blade was, and looking like new.

For the second time she drew the knife out of the bed, and suddenly hid it away in the wide sleeve of her gown. That done, she stopped by the bedside watching me. For an instant I saw her standing in that position--then the wick of the spent candle fell over into the socket. The flame dwindled to a little blue point, and the room grew dark.

A moment, or less, if possible, passed so--and then the wick flared up, smokily, for the last time. My eyes were still looking for her over the right-hand side of the bed when the last flash of light came. Look as I might, I could see nothing. The woman with the knife was gone.

I began to get back to myself again. I could feel my heart beating; I could hear the woeful moaning of the wind in the wood; I could leap up in bed, and give the alarm before she escaped from the house. "Murder! Wake up there! Murder!"

Nobody answered to the alarm. I rose and groped my way through the darkness to the door of the room. By that way she must have got in. By that way she must have gone out.

The door of the room was fast locked, exactly as I had left it on going to bed! I looked at the window. Fast locked too!

Hearing a voice outside, I opened the door. There was the landlord, coming toward me along the passage, with his burning candle in one hand, and his gun in the other.

"What is it?" he says, looking at me in no very friendly way.

I could only answer in a whisper, "A woman, with a knife in her hand. In my room. A fair, yellow-haired woman. She jabbed at me with the knife, twice over."

He lifted his candle, and looked at me steadily from head to foot. "She seems to have missed you--twice over."

"I dodged the knife as it came down. It struck the bed each time. Go in, and see."

The landlord took his candle into the bedroom immediately. In less than a minute he came out again into the passage in a violent passion.

"The devil fly away with you and your woman with the knife! There isn't a mark in the bedclothes anywhere. What do you mean by coming into a man's place and frightening his family out of their wits by a dream?"

A dream? The woman who had tried to stab me, not a living human being like myself? I began to shake and shiver. The horrors got hold of me at the bare thought of it.

"I'll leave the house," I said. "Better be out on the road in the rain and dark, than back in that room, after what I've seen in it. Lend me the light to get my clothes by, and tell me what I'm to pay."

The landlord led the way back with his light into the bedroom. "Pay?" says he. "You'll find your score on the slate when you go downstairs. I wouldn't have taken you in for all the money you've got about you, if I had known your dreaming, screeching ways beforehand. Look at the bed--where's the cut of a knife in it? Look at the window--is the lock bursted? Look at the door (which I heard you fasten yourself)--is it broke in? A murdering woman with a knife in my house! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

My eyes followed his hand as it pointed first to the bed--then to the window--then to the door. There was no gainsaying it. The bed sheet was as sound as on the day it was made. The window was fast. The door hung on its hinges as steady as ever. I huddled my clothes on without speaking. We went downstairs together. I looked at the clock in the bar-room. The time was twenty minutes past two in the morning. I paid my bill, and the landlord let me out. The rain had ceased; but the night was dark, and the wind was bleaker than ever. Little did the darkness, or the cold, or the doubt about the way home matter to me. My mind was away from all these things. My mind was fixed on the vision in the bedroom. What had I seen trying to murder me? The creature of a dream? Or that other creature from the world beyond the grave, whom men call ghost? I could make nothing of it as I walked along in the night; I had made nothing of it by midday--when I stood at last, after many times missing my road, on the doorstep of home.

VI

My mother came out alone to welcome me back. There were no secrets between us two. I told her all that had happened, just as I have told it to you. She kept silence till I had done. And then she put a question to me.

"What time was it, Francis, when you saw the Woman in your Dream?"

I had looked at the clock when I left the inn, and I had noticed that the hands pointed to twenty minutes past two. Allowing for the time consumed in speaking to the landlord, and in getting on my clothes, I answered that I must have first seen the Woman at two o'clock in the morning. In other words, I had not only seen her on my birthday, but at the hour of my birth.

My mother still kept silence. Lost in her own thoughts, she took me by the hand, and led me into the parlor. Her writing-desk was on the table by the fireplace. She opened it, and signed to me to take a chair by her side.
"My son! your memory is a bad one, and mine is fast failing me. Tell me again what the Woman looked like. I want her to be as well known to both of us, years hence, as she is now."

I obeyed; wondering what strange fancy might be working in her mind. I spoke; and she wrote the words as they fell from my lips:

"Light gray eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. Flaxen hair, with a golden-yellow streak in it. White arms, with a down upon them. Little, lady's hands, with a rosy-red look about the finger nails."

"Did you notice how she was dressed, Francis?"

"No, mother."

"Did you notice the knife?"

"Yes. A large clasp knife, with a buckhorn handle, as good as new."

My mother added the description of the knife. Also the year, month, day of the week, and hour of the day when the Dream-Woman appeared to me at the inn. That done, she locked up the paper in her desk.

"Not a word, Francis, to your aunt. Not a word to any living soul. Keep your Dream a secret between you and me."

The weeks passed, and the months passed. My mother never returned to the subject again. As for me, time, which wears out all things, wore out my remembrance of the Dream. Little by little, the image of the Woman grew dimmer and dimmer. Little by little, she faded out of my mind.

VII

The story of the warning is now told. Judge for yourself if it was a true warning or a false, when you hear what happened to me on my next birthday.

In the Summer time of the year, the Wheel of Fortune turned the right way for me at last. I was smoking my pipe one day, near an old stone quarry at the entrance to our village, when a carriage accident happened, which gave a new turn, as it were, to my lot in life. It was an accident of the commonest kind--not worth mentioning at any length. A lady driving herself; a runaway horse; a cowardly man-servant in attendance, frightened out of his wits; and the stone quarry too near to be agreeable--that is what I saw, all in a few moments, between two whiffs of my pipe. I stopped the horse at the edge of the quarry, and got myself a little hurt by the shaft of the chaise. But that didn't matter. The lady declared I had saved her life; and her husband, coming with her to our cottage the next day, took me into his service then and there. The lady happened to be of a dark complexion; and it may amuse you to hear that my aunt Chance instantly pitched on that circumstance as a means of saving the credit of the cards. Here was the promise of the Queen of Spades performed to the very letter, by means of "a dark woman," just as my aunt had told me. "In the time to come, Francis, beware o' pettin' yer ain blinded intairpretation on the cairds. Ye're ower ready, I trow, to murmur under dispensation of Proavidence that ye canna fathom--like the Eesraelites of auld. I'll say nae mair to ye. Mebbe when the mony's powering into yer poakets, ye'll no forget yer aunt Chance, left like a sparrow on the housetop, wi' a sma' annuitee o' thratty punds a year."

I remained in my situation (at the West-end of London) until the Spring of the New Year. About that time, my master's health failed. The doctors ordered him away to foreign parts, and the establishment was broken up. But the turn in my luck still held good. When I left my place, I left it--thanks to the generosity of my kind master--with a yearly allowance granted to me, in remembrance of the day when I had saved my mistress's life. For the future, I could go back to service or not, as I pleased; my little income was enough to support my mother and myself.

My master and mistress left England toward the end of February. Certain matters of business to do for them detained me in London until the last day of the month. I was only able to leave for our village by the evening train, to keep my birthday with my mother as usual. It was bedtime when I got to the cottage; and I was sorry to find that she was far from well. To make matters worse, she had finished her bottle of medicine on the previous day, and had omitted to get it replenished, as the doctor had strictly directed. He dispensed his own medicines, and I offered to go and knock him up. She refused to let me do this; and, after giving me my supper, sent me away to my bed.

I fell asleep for a little, and woke again. My mother's bed-chamber was next to mine. I heard my aunt Chance's heavy footsteps going to and fro in the room, and, suspecting something wrong, knocked at the door. My mother's pains had returned upon her; there was a serious necessity for relieving her sufferings as speedily as possible, I put on my clothes, and ran off, with the medicine bottle in my hand, to the other end of the village, where the doctor lived. The church clock chimed the quarter to two on my birthday just as I reached his house. One ring of the night bell brought him to his bedroom window to speak to me. He told me to wait, and he would let me in at the surgery door. I noticed, while I was waiting, that the night was wonderfully fair and warm for the time of year. The old stone quarry where the carriage accident had happened was within view. The moon in the clear heavens lit it up almost as bright as day.

In a minute or two the doctor let me into the surgery. I closed the door, noticing that he had left his room very lightly clad. He kindly pardoned my mother's neglect of his directions, and set to work at once at compounding the
medicine. We were both intent on the bottle; he filling it, and I holding the light—when we heard the surgery door suddenly opened from the street.

VIII

Who could possibly be up and about in our quiet village at the second hour of the morning?

The person who opened the door appeared within range of the light of the candle. To complete our amazement, the person proved to be a woman! She walked up to the counter, and standing side by side with me, lifted her veil. At the moment when she showed her face, I heard the church clock strike two. She was a stranger to me, and a stranger to the doctor. She was also, beyond all comparison, the most beautiful woman I have ever seen in my life.

"I saw the light under the door," she said. "I want some medicine."

She spoke quite composedly, as if there was nothing at all extraordinary in her being out in the village at two in the morning, and following me into the surgery to ask for medicine! The doctor stared at her as if he suspected his own eyes of deceiving him. "Who are you?" he asked. "How do you come to be wandering about at this time in the morning?"

She paid no heed to his questions. She only told him coolly what she wanted. "I have got a bad toothache. I want a bottle of laudanum."

The doctor recovered himself when she asked for the laudanum. He was on his own ground, you know, when it came to a matter of laudanum; and he spoke to her smartly enough this time.

"Oh, you have got the toothache, have you? Let me look at the tooth."

She shook her head, and laid a two-shilling piece on the counter. "I won't trouble you to look at the tooth," she said. "There is the money. Let me have the laudanum, if you please."

The doctor put the two-shilling piece back again in her hand. "I don't sell laudanum to strangers," he answered. "If you are in any distress of body or mind, that is another matter. I shall be glad to help you."

She put the money back in her pocket. "You can't help me," she said, as quietly as ever. "Good morning."

With that, she opened the surgery door to go out again into the street. So far, I had not spoken a word on my side. I had stood with the candle in my hand (not knowing I was holding it)—with my eyes fixed on her, with my mind fixed on her like a man bewitched. Her looks betrayed, even more plainly than her words, her resolution, in one way or another, to destroy herself. When she opened the door, in my alarm at what might happen I found the use of my tongue.

"Stop!" I cried out. "Wait for me. I want to speak to you before you go away." She lifted her eyes with a look of careless surprise and a mocking smile on her lips.

"What can _you_ have to say to me?" She stopped, and laughed to herself. "Why not?" she said. "I have got nothing to do, and nowhere to go." She turned back a step, and nodded to me. "You're a strange man—I think I'll humor you—I'll wait outside." The door of the surgery closed on her. She was gone.

I am ashamed to own what happened next. The only excuse for me is that I was really and truly a man bewitched. I turned me round to follow her out, without once thinking of my mother. The doctor stopped me.

"Don't forget the medicine," he said. "And if you will take my advice, don't trouble yourself about that woman. Rouse up the constable. It's his business to look after her—not yours."

I held out my hand for the medicine in silence: I was afraid I should fail in respect if I trusted myself to answer him. He must have seen, as I saw, that she wanted the laudanum to poison herself. He had, to my mind, taken a very heartless view of the matter. I just thanked him when he gave me the medicine—and went out.

She was waiting for me as she had promised; walking slowly to and fro—a tall, graceful, solitary figure in the bright moonbeams. They shed over her fair complexion, her bright golden hair, her large gray eyes, just the light that suited them best. She looked hardly mortal when she first turned to speak to me.

"Well?" she said. "And what do you want?"

In spite of my pride, or my shyness, or my better sense—whichever it might me—all my heart went out to her in a moment. I caught hold of her by the hands, and owned what was in my thoughts, as freely as if I had known her for half a lifetime.

"You mean to destroy yourself," I said. "And I mean to prevent you from doing it. If I follow you about all night, I'll prevent you from doing it."

She laughed. "You saw yourself that he wouldn't sell me the laudanum. Do you really care whether I live or die?" She squeezed my hands gently as she put the question: her eyes searched mine with a languid, lingering look in them that ran through me like fire. My voice died away on my lips; I couldn't answer her.

She understood, without my answering. "You have given me a fancy for living, by speaking kindly to me," she said. "Kindness has a wonderful effect on women, and dogs, and other domestic animals. It is only men who are superior to kindness. Make your mind easy—I promise to take as much care of myself as if I was the happiest woman living! Don't let me keep you here, out of your bed. Which way are you going?"
Miserable wretch that I was, I had forgotten my mother--with the medicine in my hand! "I am going home," I said. "Where are you staying? At the inn?"

She laughed her bitter laugh, and pointed to the stone quarry. "There is my inn for to-night," she said. "When I got tired of walking about, I rested there."

We walked on together, on my way home. I took the liberty of asking her if she had any friends.

"I thought I had one friend left," she said, "or you would never have met me in this place. It turns out I was wrong. My friend's door was closed in my face some hours since; my friend's servants threatened me with the police. I had nowhere else to go, after trying my luck in your neighborhood; and nothing left but my two-shilling piece and these rags on my back. What respectable innkeeper would take _me_ into his house? I walked about, wondering how I could find my way out of the world without disfiguring myself, and without suffering much pain. You have no river in these parts. I didn't see my way out of the world, till I heard you ringing at the doctor's house. I got a glimpse at the bottles in the surgery, when he let you in, and I thought of the laudanum directly. What were you doing there? Who is that medicine for? Your wife?"

"I am not married!"

She laughed again. "Not married! If I was a little better dressed there might be a chance for ME. Where do you live? Here?"

We had arrived, by this time, at my mother's door. She held out her hand to say good-by. Houseless and homeless as she was, she never asked me to give her a shelter for the night. It was my proposal that she should rest, under my roof, unknown to my mother and my aunt. Our kitchen was built out at the back of the cottage: she might remain there unseen and unheard until the household was astir in the morning. I led her into the kitchen, and set a chair for her by the dying embers of the fire. I dare say I was to blame--shamefully to blame, if you like. I only wonder what _you_ would have done in my place. On your word of honor as a man, would _you_ have let that beautiful creature wander back to the shelter of the stone quarry like a stray dog? God help the woman who is foolish enough to trust and love you, if you would have done that!

I left her by the fire, and went to my mother's room.

IX

If you have ever felt the heartache, you will know what I suffered in secret when my mother took my hand, and said, "I am sorry, Francis, that your night's rest has been disturbed through _me_." I gave her the medicine; and I waited by her till the pains abated. My aunt Chance went back to her bed; and my mother and I were left alone. I noticed that her writing-desk, moved from its customary place, was on the bed by her side. She saw me looking at it. "This is your birthday, Francis," she said. "Have you anything to tell me?" I had so completely forgotten my Dream, that I had no notion of what was passing in her mind when she said those words. For a moment there was a guilty fear in me that she suspected something. I turned away my face, and said, "No, mother; I have nothing to tell." She signed to me to stoop down over the pillow and kiss her. "God bless you, my love!" she said; "and many happy returns of the day." She patted my hand, and closed her weary eyes, and, little by little, fell off peaceably into sleep.

I stole downstairs again. I think the good influence of my mother must have followed me down. At any rate, this is true: I stopped with my hand on the closed kitchen door, and said to myself: "Suppose I leave the house, and leave the village, without seeing her or speaking to her more?"

Should I really have fled from temptation in this way, if I had been left to myself to decide? Who can tell? As things were, I was not left to decide. While my doubt was in my mind, she heard me, and opened the kitchen door. My eyes and her eyes met. That ended it.

We were together, unsuspected and undisturbed, for the next two hours. Time enough for her to reveal the secret of her wasted life. Time enough for her to take possession of me as her own, to do with me as she liked. It is needless to dwell here on the misfortunes which had brought her low; they are misfortunes too common to interest anybody.

Her name was Alicia Warlock. She had been born and bred a lady. She had lost her station, her character, and her friends. Virtue shuddered at the sight of her; and Vice had got her for the rest of her days. Shocking and common, as I told you. It made no difference to _her_. Is there anything so very wonderful in that? Just remember who I was. Among the honest women in my own station in life, where could I have found the like of _her_? Could _they_ walk as she walked? and look as she looked? When _they_ gave me a kiss, did their lips linger over it as hers did? Had _they_ her skin, her laugh, her foot, her hand, her touch? _She_ never had a speck of dirt on her: I tell you her flesh was a perfume. When she embraced me, her arms folded round me like the wings of angels; and her smile covered me softly with its light like the sun in heaven. I leave you to laugh at me, or to cry over me, just as your temper may incline. I am not trying to excuse myself--I am trying to explain. You are gentle-folks; what dazzled and maddened _me_, is everyday experience to _you_. Fallen or not, angel or devil, it came to this--she was a lady; and I was a groom.
Before the house was astir, I got her away (by the workmen's train) to a large manufacturing town in our parts. Here--with my savings in money to help her--she could get her outfit of decent clothes and her lodging among strangers who asked no questions so long as they were paid. Here--now on one pretense and now on another--I could visit her, and we could both plan together what our future lives were to be. I need not tell you that I stood pledged to make her my wife. A man in my station always marries a woman of her sort.

Do you wonder if I was happy at this time? I should have been perfectly happy but for one little drawback. It was this: I was never quite at my ease in the presence of my promised wife.

I don't mean that I was shy with her, or suspicious of her, or ashamed of her. The uneasiness I am speaking of was caused by a faint doubt in my mind whether I had not seen her somewhere, before the morning when we met at the doctor's house. Over and over again, I found myself wondering whether her face did not remind me of some other face--_what_ other I never could tell. This strange feeling, this one question that could never be answered, vexed me to a degree that you would hardly credit. It came between us at the strangest times--oftenest, however, at night, when the candles were lit. You have known what it is to try and remember a forgotten name--and to fail, search as you may, to find it in your mind. That was my case. I failed to find my lost face, just as you failed to find your lost name.

In three weeks we had talked matters over, and had arranged how I was to make a clean breast of it at home. By Alicia's advice, I was to describe her as having been one of my fellow servants during the time I was employed under my kind master and mistress in London. There was no fear now of my mother taking any harm from the shock of a great surprise. Her health had improved during the three weeks' interval. On the first evening when she was able to take her old place at tea time, I summoned my courage, and told her I was going to be married. The poor soul flung her arms round my neck, and burst out crying for joy. "Oh, Francis!" she says, "I am so glad you will have somebody to comfort you and care for you when I am gone!" As for my aunt Chance, you can anticipate what _she_ did, without being told. Ah, me! If there had really been any prophetic virtue in the cards, what a terrible warning they might have given us that night! It was arranged that I was to bring my promised wife to dinner at the cottage on the next day.

I own I was proud of Alicia when I led her into our little parlor at the appointed time. She had never, to my mind, looked so beautiful as she looked that day. I never noticed any other woman's dress--I noticed hers as carefully as if I had been a woman myself! She wore a black silk gown, with plain collar and cuffs, and a modest lavender-colored bonnet, with one white rose in it placed at the side. My mother, dressed in her Sunday best, rose up, all in a flutter, to welcome her daughter-in-law that was to be. She walked forward a few steps, half smiling, half in tears--she looked Alicia full in the face--and suddenly stood still. Her cheeks turned white in an instant; her eyes stared in horror; her hands dropped helplessly at her sides. She staggered back, and fell into the arms of my aunt, standing behind her. It was no swoon--she kept her senses. Her eyes turned slowly from Alicia to me. "Francis," she said, "does that woman's face remind you of nothing?".

Before I could answer, she pointed to her writing-desk on the table at the fireside. "Bring it!" she cried, "bring it!".

At the same moment I felt Alicia's hand on my shoulder, and saw Alicia's face red with anger--and no wonder! "What does this mean?" she asked. "Does your mother want to insult me?".

I said a few words to quiet her; what they were I don't remember--I was so confused and astonished at the time. Before I had done, I heard my mother behind me.

My aunt had fetched her desk. She had opened it; she had taken a paper from it. Step by step, helping herself along by the wall, she came nearer and nearer, with the paper in her hand. She looked at the paper--she looked in Alicia's face--she lifted the long, loose sleeve of her gown, and examined her hand and arm. I saw fear suddenly take the place of anger in Alicia's eyes. She shook herself free of my mother's grasp. "Mad!" she said to herself, "and Francis never told me!" With those words she ran out of the room.

I was hastening out after her, when my mother signed to me to stop. She read the words written on the paper. While they fell slowly, one by one, from her lips, she pointed toward the open door.

"Light gray eyes, with a droop in the left eyelid. Flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it. White arms, with a down upon them. Little, lady's hand, with a rosy-red look about the finger nails. The Dream Woman, Francis! The Dream Woman!"

Something darkened the parlor window as those words were spoken. I looked sidelong at the shadow. Alicia Warlock had come back! She was peering in at us over the low window blind. There was the fatal face which had first looked at me in the bedroom of the lonely inn. There, resting on the window blind, was the lovely little hand which had held the murderous knife. I _had_ seen her before we met in the village. The Dream Woman! The Dream Woman!
I expect nobody to approve of what I have next to tell of myself. In three weeks from the day when my mother had identified her with the Woman of the Dream, I took Alicia Warlock to church, and made her my wife. I was a man bewitched. Again and again I say it--I was a man bewitched!

During the interval before my marriage, our little household at the cottage was broken up. My mother and my aunt quarreled. My mother, believing in the Dream, entreated me to break off my engagement. My aunt, believing in the cards, urged me to marry.

This difference of opinion produced a dispute between them, in the course of which my aunt Chance--quite unconscious of having any superstitious feelings of her own--actually set out the cards which prophesied happiness to me in my married life, and asked my mother how anybody but "a blinded heathen could be fule enough, after seeing those cairds, to believe in a dream!" This was, naturally, too much for my mother's patience; hard words followed on either side; Mrs. Chance returned in dudgeon to her friends in Scotland. She left me a written statement of my future prospects, as revealed by the cards, and with it an address at which a post-office order would reach her.

"The day was not that far off," she remarked, "when Francie might remember what he owed to his aunt Chance, maintaining her ain unbleemished widowhood on thratty pundis a year."

Having refused to give her sanction to my marriage, my mother also refused to be present at the wedding, or to visit Alicia afterwards. There was no anger at the bottom of this conduct on her part. Believing as she did in this Dream, she was simply in mortal fear of my wife. I understood this, and I made allowances for her. Not a cross word passed between us. My one happy remembrance now--though I did disobey her in the matter of my marriage--is this: I loved and respected my good mother to the last.

As for my wife, she expressed no regret at the estrangement between her mother-in-law and herself. By common consent, we never spoke on that subject. We settled in the manufacturing town which I have already mentioned, and we kept a lodging-house. My kind master, at my request, granted me a lump sum in place of my annuity. This put us into a good house, decently furnished. For a while things went well enough. I may describe myself at this time of my life as a happy man.

My misfortunes began with a return of the complaint with which my mother had already suffered. The doctor confessed, when I asked him the question, that there was danger to be dreaded this time. Naturally, after hearing this, I was a good deal away at the cottage. Naturally also, I left the business of looking after the house, in my absence, to my wife. Little by little, I found her beginning to alter toward me. While my back was turned, she formed acquaintances with people of the doubtful and dissipated sort. One day, I observed something in her manner which forced the suspicion on me that she had been drinking. Before the week was out, my suspicion was a certainty. From keeping company with drunkards, she had grown to be a drunkard herself.

I did all a man could do to reclaim her. Quite useless! She had never really returned the love I felt for her: I had no influence; I could do nothing. My mother, hearing of this last worse trouble, resolved to try what her influence could do. Ill as she was, I found her one day dressed to go out.

"I am not long for this world, Francis," she said. "I shall not feel easy on my deathbed, unless I have done my best to the last to make you happy. I mean to put my own fears and my own feelings out of the question, and go with you to your wife, and try what I can do to reclaim her. Take me home with you, Francis. Let me do all I can to help my son, before it is too late."

How could I disobey her? We took the railway to the town: it was only half an hour's ride. By one o'clock in the afternoon we reached my house. It was our dinner hour, and Alicia was in the kitchen. I was able to take my mother quietly into the parlor and then to prepare my wife for the visit. She had drunk but little at that early hour; and, luckily, the devil in her was tamed for the time.

She followed me into the parlor, and the meeting passed off better than I had ventured to forecast; with this one drawback, that my mother--though she tried hard to control herself--shrank from looking my wife in the face when she spoke to her. It was a relief to me when Alicia began to prepare the table for dinner.

She laid the cloth, brought in the bread tray, and cut some slices for us from the loaf. Then she returned to the kitchen. At that moment, while I was still anxiously watching my mother, I was startled by seeing the same ghastly change pass over her face which had altered it in the morning when Alicia and she first met. Before I could say a word, she started up with a look of horror.

"Take me back!--home, home again, Francis! Come with me, and never go back more!"

I was afraid to ask for an explanation; I could only sign her to be silent, and help her quickly to the door. As we passed the bread tray on the table, she stopped and pointed to it.

"Did you see what your wife cut your bread with?" she asked.

"No, mother; I was not noticing. What was it?"

"Look!"
I did look. A new clasp knife, with a buckhorn handle, lay with the loaf in the bread tray. I stretched out my hand to possess myself of it. At the same moment, there was a noise in the kitchen, and my mother caught me by the arm.

"The knife of the Dream! Francis, I'm faint with fear--take me away before she comes back!"

I couldn't speak to comfort or even to answer her. Superior as I was to superstition, the discovery of the knife staggered me. In silence, I helped my mother out of the house; and took her home. I held out my hand to say good-by. She tried to stop me.

"Don't go back, Francis! don't go back!"

"I must get the knife, mother. I must go back by the next train." I held to that resolution. By the next train I went back.

XII

My wife had, of course, discovered our secret departure from the house. She had been drinking. She was in a fury of passion. The dinner in the kitchen was flung under the grate; the cloth was off the parlor table. Where was the knife?

I was foolish enough to ask for it. She refused to give it to me. In the course of the dispute between us which followed, I discovered that there was a horrible story attached to the knife. It had been used in a murder--years since--and had been so skillfully hidden that the authorities had been unable to produce it at the trial. By help of some of her disreputable friends, my wife had been able to purchase this relic of a bygone crime. Her perverted nature set some horrid unacknowledged value on the knife. Seeing there was no hope of getting it by fair means, I determined to search for it, later in the day, in secret. The search was unsuccessful. Night came on, and I left the house to walk about the streets. You will understand what a broken man I was by this time, when I tell you I was afraid to sleep in the same room with her!

Three weeks passed. Still she refused to give up the knife; and still that fear of sleeping in the same room with her possessed me. I walked about at night, or dozed in the parlor, or sat watching by my mother's bedside. Before the end of the first week in the new month, the worst misfortune of all befell me--my mother died. It wanted then but a short time to my birthday. She had longed to live till that day. I was present at her death. Her last words in this world were addressed to me. "Don't go back, my son--don't go back!"

I was obliged to go back, if it was only to watch my wife. In the last days of my mother's illness she had spitefully added a sting to my grief by declaring she would assert her right to attend the funeral. In spite of all that I could do or say, she held to her word. On the day appointed for the burial she forced herself, inflamed and shameless with drink, into my presence, and swore she would walk in the funeral procession to my mother's grave.

This last insult--after all I had gone through already--was more than I could endure. It maddened me. Try to make allowances for a man beside himself. I struck her.

The instant the blow was dealt, I repented it. She crouched down, silent, in a corner of the room, and eyed me steadily. It was a look that cooled my hot blood in an instant. There was no time now to think of making atonement. I could only risk the worst, and make sure of her till the funeral was over. I locked her into her bedroom.

When I came back, after laying my mother in the grave, I found her sitting by the bedside, very much altered in look and bearing, with a bundle on her lap. She faced me quietly; she spoke with a curious stillness in her voice--strangely and unnaturally composed in look and manner.

"No man has ever struck me yet," she said. "My husband shall have no second opportunity. Set the door open, and let me go."

She passed me, and left the room. I saw her walk away up the street. Was she gone for good?

All that night I watched and waited. No footstep came near the house. The next night, overcome with fatigue, I lay down on the bed in my clothes, with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning. My slumber was not disturbed. The third night, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth, passed, and nothing happened. I lay down on the seventh night, still suspicious of something happening; still in my clothes; still with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning.

My rest was disturbed. I awoke twice, without any sensation of uneasiness. The third time, that horrid shivering of the night at the lonely inn, that awful sinking pain at the heart, came back again, and roused me in an instant. My eyes turned to the left-hand side of the bed. And there stood, looking at me--

The Dream Woman again? No! My wife. The living woman, with the face of the Dream--in the attitude of the Dream--the fair arm up; the knife clasped in the delicate white hand.

I sprang upon her on the instant; but not quickly enough to stop her from hiding the knife. Without a word from me, without a cry from her, I pinioned her in a chair. With one hand I felt up her sleeve; and there, where the Dream Woman had hidden the knife, my wife had hidden it--the knife with the buckhorn handle, that looked like new.

What I felt when I made that discovery I could not realize at the time, and I can't describe now. I took one steady look at her with the knife in my hand. "You meant to kill me?" I said.
"Yes," she answered; "I meant to kill you." She crossed her arms over her bosom, and stared me coolly in the face. "I shall do it yet," she said. "With that knife."

I don't know what possessed me--I swear to you I am no coward; and yet I acted like a coward. The horrors got hold of me. I couldn't look at her--I couldn't speak to her. I left her (with the knife in my hand), and went out into the night.

There was a bleak wind abroad, and the smell of rain was in the air. The church clocks chimed the quarter as I walked beyond the last house in the town. I asked the first policeman I met what hour that was, of which the quarter past had just struck.

The man looked at his watch, and answered, "Two o'clock." Two in the morning. What day of the month was this day that had just begun? I reckoned it up from the date of my mother's funeral. The horrid parallel between the dream and the reality was complete--it was my birthday!

Had I escaped, the mortal peril which the dream foretold? or had I only received a second warning? As that doubt crossed my mind I stopped on my way out of the town. The air had revived me--I felt in some degree like my own self again. After a little thinking, I began to see plainly the mistake I had made in leaving my wife free to go where she liked and to do as she pleased.

I turned instantly, and made my way back to the house. It was still dark. I had left the candle burning in the bedchamber. When I looked up to the window of the room now, there was no light in it. I advanced to the house door. On going away, I remembered to have closed it; on trying it now, I found it open.

I waited outside, never losing sight of the house till daylight. Then I ventured indoors--listened, and heard nothing--looked into the kitchen, scullery, parlor, and found nothing--went up at last into the bedroom. It was empty.

A picklock lay on the floor, which told me how she had gained entrance in the night. And that was the one trace I could find of the Dream Woman.

XIII

I waited in the house till the town was astir for the day, and then I went to consult a lawyer. In the confused state of my mind at the time, I had one clear notion of what I meant to do: I was determined to sell my house and leave the neighborhood. There were obstacles in the way which I had not counted on. I was told I had creditors to satisfy before I could leave--I, who had given my wife the money to pay my bills regularly every week! Inquiry showed that she had embezzled every farthing of the money I had intrusted to her. I had no choice but to pay over again.

Placed in this awkward position, my first duty was to set things right, with the help of my lawyer. During my forced sojourn in the town I did two foolish things. And, as a consequence that followed, I heard once more, and heard for the last time, of my wife.

In the first place, having got possession of the knife, I was rash enough to keep it in my pocket. In the second place, having something of importance to say to my lawyer, at a late hour of the evening, I went to his house after dark--alone and on foot. I got there safely enough. Returning, I was seized on from behind by two men, dragged down a passage and robbed--not only of the little money I had about me, but also of the knife. It was the lawyer's opinion (as it was mine) that the thieves were among the disreputable acquaintances formed by my wife, and that they had attacked me at her instigation. To confirm this view I received a letter the next day, without date or address, written in Alicia's hand. The first line informed me that the knife was back again in her possession. The second line reminded me of the day when I struck her. The third line warned me that she would wash out the stain of that blow in my blood, and repeated the words, "I shall do it with the knife!"

These things happened a year ago. The law laid hands on the men who had robbed me; but from that time to this, the law has failed completely to find a trace of my wife.

My story is told. When I had paid the creditors and paid the legal expenses, I had barely five pounds left out of the sale of my house; and I had the world to begin over again. Some months since--drifting here and there--I found my way to Underbridge. The landlord of the inn had known something of my father's family in times past. He gave me (all he had to give) my food, and shelter in the yard. Except on market days, there is nothing to do. In the coming winter the inn is to be shut up, and I shall have to shift for myself. My old master would help me if I applied to him--but I don't like to apply: he has done more for me already than I deserve. Besides, in another year who knows but my troubles may all be at an end? Next winter will bring me nigh to my next birthday, and my next birthday may be the day of my death. Yes! it's true I sat up all last night; and I heard two in the morning strike: and nothing happened. Still, allowing for that, the time to come is a time I don't trust. My wife has got the knife--my wife is looking for me. I am above superstition, mind! I don't say I believe in dreams; I only say, Alicia Warlock is looking for me. It is possible I may be wrong. It is possible I may be right. Who can tell?

THE THIRD NARRATIVE
THE STORY CONTINUED BY PERCY FAIRBANK
XIV
We took leave of Francis Raven at the door of Farleigh Hall, with the understanding that he might expect to hear from us again.

The same night Mrs. Fairbank and I had a discussion in the sanctuary of our own room. The topic was "The Hostler's Story"; and the question in dispute between us turned on the measure of charitable duty that we owed to the hostler himself.

The view I took of the man's narrative was of the purely matter-of-fact kind. Francis Raven had, in my opinion, brooded over the misty connection between his strange dream and his vile wife, until his mind was in a state of partial delusion on that subject. I was quite willing to help him with a trifle of money, and to recommend him to the kindness of my lawyer, if he was really in any danger and wanted advice. There my idea of my duty toward this afflicted person began and ended.

Confronted with this sensible view of the matter, Mrs. Fairbank's romantic temperament rushed, as usual, into extremes. "I should no more think of losing sight of Francis Raven when his next birthday comes round," says my wife, "than I should think of laying down a good story with the last chapters unread. I am positively determined, Percy, to take him back with us when we return to France, in the capacity of groom. What does one man more or less among the horses matter to people as rich as we are?" In this strain the partner of my joys and sorrows ran on, perfectly impenetrable to everything that I could say on the side of common sense. Need I tell my married brethren how it ended? Of course I allowed my wife to irritate me, and spoke to her sharply.

Of course my wife turned her face away indignantly on the conjugal pillow, and burst into tears. Of course upon that, "Mr." made his excuses, and "Mrs." had her own way.

Before the week was out we rode over to Underbridge, and duly offered to Francis Raven a place in our service as supernumerary groom.

At first the poor fellow seemed hardly able to realize his own extraordinary good fortune. Recovering himself, he expressed his gratitude modestly and becomingly. Mrs. Fairbank's ready sympathies overflowed, as usual, at her lips. She talked to him about our home in France, as if the worn, gray-headed hostler had been a child. "Such a dear old house, Francis; and such pretty gardens! Stables! Stables ten times as big as your stables here--quite a choice of rooms for you. You must learn the name of our house--Maison Rouge. Our nearest town is Metz. We are within a walk of the beautiful River Moselle. And when we want a change we have only to take the railway to the frontier, and find ourselves in Germany."

Listening, so far, with a very bewildered face, Francis started and changed color when my wife reached the end of her last sentence. "Germany?" he repeated.

"Yes. Does Germany remind you of anything?"
"The hostler's eyes looked down sadly on the ground. "Germany reminds me of my wife," he replied.

"Indeed! How?"
"She once told me she had lived in Germany--long before I knew her--in the time when she was a young girl."

"Was she living with relations or friends?"

"She was living as governess in a foreign family."

"In what part of Germany?"

"I don't remember, ma'am. I doubt if she told me."

"Did she tell you the name of the family?"

"Yes, ma'am. It was a foreign name, and it has slipped my memory long since. The head of the family was a wine grower in a large way of business--I remember that."

"Did you hear what sort of wine he grew? There are wine growers in our neighborhood. Was it Moselle wine?"

"I couldn't say, ma'am, I doubt if I ever heard."

There the conversation dropped. We engaged to communicate with Francis Raven before we left England, and took our leave. I had made arrangements to pay our round of visits to English friends, and to return to Maison Rouge in the summer. On the eve of departure, certain difficulties in connection with the management of some landed property of mine in Ireland obliged us to alter our plans. Instead of getting back to our house in France in the Summer, we only returned a week or two before Christmas. Francis Raven accompanied us, and was duly established, in the nominal capacity of stable keeper, among the servants at Maison Rouge.

Before long, some of the objections to taking him into our employment, which I had foreseen and had vainly mentioned to my wife, forced themselves on our attention in no very agreeable form. Francis Raven failed (as I had feared he would) to get on smoothly with his fellow-servants They were all French; and not one of them understood English. Francis, on his side, was equally ignorant of French. His reserved manners, his melancholy temperament, his solitary ways--all told against him. Our servants called him "the English Bear." He grew widely known in the neighborhood under his nickname. Quarrels took place, ending once or twice in blows. It became plain, even to Mrs. Fairbank herself, that some wise change must be made. While we were still considering what the change was to be,
the unfortunate hostler was thrown on our hands for some time to come by an accident in the stables. Still pursued by his proverbial ill-luck, the poor wretch's leg was broken by a kick from a horse.

He was attended to by our own surgeon, in his comfortable bedroom at the stables. As the date of his birthday drew near, he was still confined to his bed.

Physically speaking, he was doing very well. Morally speaking, the surgeon was not satisfied. Francis Raven was suffering under some mysterious mental disturbance, which interfered seriously with his rest at night. Hearing this, I thought it my duty to tell the medical attendant what was preying on the patient's mind. As a practical man, he shared my opinion that the hostler was in a state of delusion on the subject of his Wife and his Dream. "Curable delusion, in my opinion," the surgeon added, "if the experiment could be fairly tried."

"How can it be tried?" I asked. Instead of replying, the surgeon put a question to me, on his side.

"Do you happen to know," he said, "that this year is Leap Year?"

"Mrs. Fairbank reminded me of it yesterday," I answered. "Otherwise I might _not_ have known it."

"Do you think Francis Raven knows that this year is Leap Year?"

(I began to see dimly what my friend was driving at.)

"It depends," I answered, "on whether he has got an English almanac. Suppose he has _not_ got the almanac--what then?"

"In that case," pursued the surgeon, "Francis Raven is innocent of all suspicion that there is a twenty-ninth day in February this year. As a necessary consequence--what will he do? He will anticipate the appearance of the Woman with the Knife, at two in the morning of the twenty-ninth of February, instead of the first of March. Let him suffer all his superstitious terrors on the wrong day. Leave him, on the day that is really his birthday, to pass a perfectly quiet night, and to be as sound asleep as other people at two in the morning. And then, when he wakes comfortably in time for his breakfast, shame him out of his delusion by telling him the truth."

I agreed to try the experiment. Leaving the surgeon to caution Mrs. Fairbank on the subject of Leap Year, I went to the stables to see Mr. Raven.

XV

The poor fellow was full of forebodings of the fate in store for him on the ominous first of March. He eagerly entreated me to order one of the men servants to sit up with him on the birthday morning. In granting his request, I asked him to tell me on which day of the week his birthday fell. He reckoned the days on his fingers; and proved his innocence of all suspicion that it was Leap Year, by fixing on the twenty-ninth of February, in the full persuasion that it was the first of March. Pledged to try the surgeon's experiment, I left his error uncorrected, of course. In so doing, I took my first step blindfold toward the last act in the drama of the Hostler's Dream.

The next day brought with it a little domestic difficulty, which indirectly and strangely associated itself with the coming end.

My wife received a letter, inviting us to assist in celebrating the "Silver Wedding" of two worthy German neighbors of ours--Mr. and Mrs. Beldheimer. Mr. Beldheimer was a large wine grower on the banks of the Moselle. His house was situated on the frontier line of France and Germany; and the distance from our house was sufficiently considerable to make it necessary for us to sleep under our host's roof. Under these circumstances, if we accepted the invitation, a comparison of dates showed that we should be away from home on the morning of the first of March. Mrs. Fairbank--holding to her absurd resolution to see with her own eyes what might, or might not, happen to Francis Raven on his birthday--flatly declined to leave Maison Rouge. "It's easy to send an excuse," she said, in her off-hand manner.

I failed, for my part, to see any easy way out of the difficulty. The celebration of a "Silver Wedding" in Germany is the celebration of twenty-five years of happy married life; and the host's claim upon the consideration of his friends on such an occasion is something in the nature of a royal "command." After considerable discussion, finding my wife's obstinacy invincible, and feeling that the absence of both of us from the festival would certainly offend our friends, I left Mrs. Fairbank to make her excuses for herself, and directed her to accept the invitation so far as I was concerned. In so doing, I took my second step, blindfold, toward the last act in the drama of the Hostler's Dream.

A week elapsed; the last days of February were at hand. Another domestic difficulty happened; and, again, this event also proved to be strangely associated with the coming end.

My head groom at the stables was one Joseph Rigobert. He was an ill-conditioned fellow, inordinately vain of his personal appearance, and by no means scrupulous in his conduct with women. His one virtue consisted of his fondness for horses, and in the care he took of the animals under his charge. In a word, he was too good a groom to be easily replaced, or he would have quittd my service long since. On the occasion of which I am now writing, he was reported to me by my steward as growing idle and disorderly in his habits. The principal offense alleged against him was, that he had been seen that day in the city of Metz, in the company of a woman (supposed to be an
Englishwoman), whom he was entertaining at a tavern, when he ought to have been on his way back to Maison Rouge. The man's defense was that "the lady" (as he called her) was an English stranger, unacquainted with the ways of the place, and that he had only shown her where she could obtain some refreshments at her own request. I administered the necessary reprimand, without troubling myself to inquire further into the matter. In failing to do this, I took my third step, blindfold, toward the last act in the drama of the Hostler's Dream.

On the evening of the twenty-eighth, I informed the servants at the stables that one of them must watch through the night by the Englishman's bedside. Joseph Rigobert immediately volunteered for the duty—as a means, no doubt, of winning his way back to my favor. I accepted his proposal.

That day the surgeon dined with us. Toward midnight he and I left the smoking room, and repaired to Francis Raven's bedside. Rigobert was at his post, with no very agreeable expression on his face. The Frenchman and the Englishman had evidently not got on well together so far. Francis Raven lay helpless on his bed, waiting silently for two in the morning and the Dream Woman.

"I have come, Francis, to bid you good night," I said, cheerfully. "To-morrow morning I shall look in at breakfast time, before I leave home on a journey."

"Thank you for all your kindness, sir. You will not see me alive to-morrow morning. She will find me this time. Mark my words—she will find me this time."

"My good fellow! she couldn't find you in England. How in the world is she to find you in France?"

"It's borne in on my mind, sir, that she will find me here. At two in the morning on my birthday I shall see her again, and see her for the last time."

"Do you mean that she will kill you?"

"I mean that, sir, she will kill me—with the knife."

"And with Rigobert in the room to protect you?"

"I am a doomed man. Fifty Rigoberts couldn't protect me."

"And you wanted somebody to sit up with you?"

"Mere weakness, sir. I don't like to be left alone on my deathbed."

I looked at the surgeon. If he had encouraged me, I should certainly, out of sheer compassion, have confessed to Francis Raven the trick that we were playing him. The surgeon held to his experiment; the surgeon's face plainly said—"No."

The next day (the twenty-ninth of February) was the day of the "Silver Wedding." The first thing in the morning, I went to Francis Raven's room. Rigobert met me at the door.

"How has he passed the night?" I asked.

"Saying his prayers, and looking for ghosts," Rigobert answered. "A lunatic asylum is the only proper place for him."

I approached the bedside. "Well, Francis, here you are, safe and sound, in spite of what you said to me last night."

His eyes rested on mine with a vacant, wondering look.

"I don't understand it," he said.

"Did you see anything of your wife when the clock struck two?"

"No, sir."

"Did anything happen?"

"Nothing happened, sir."

"Doesn't this satisfy you that you were wrong?"

His eyes still kept their vacant, wondering look. He only repeated the words he had spoken already: "I don't understand it."

I made a last attempt to cheer him. "Come, come, Francis! keep a good heart. You will be out of bed in a fortnight."

He shook his head on the pillow. "There's something wrong," he said. "I don't expect you to believe me, sir. I only say there's something wrong—and time will show it."

I left the room. Half an hour later I started for Mr. Beldheimer's house; leaving the arrangements for the morning of the first of March in the hands of the doctor and my wife.

XVI

The one thing which principally struck me when I joined the guests at the "Silver Wedding" is also the one thing which it is necessary to mention here. On this joyful occasion a noticeable lady present was out of spirits. That lady was no other than the heroine of the festival, the mistress of the house!

In the course of the evening I spoke to Mr. Beldheimer's eldest son on the subject of his mother. As an old friend of the family, I had a claim on his confidence which the young man willingly recognized.
"We have had a very disagreeable matter to deal with," he said; "and my mother has not recovered the painful impression left on her mind. Many years since, when my sisters were children, we had an English governess in the house. She left us, as we then understood, to be married. We heard no more of her until a week or ten days since, when my mother received a letter, in which our ex-governess described herself as being in a condition of great poverty and distress. After much hesitation she had ventured--at the suggestion of a lady who had been kind to her--to write to her former employers, and to appeal to their remembrance of old times. You know my mother: she is not only the most kind-hearted, but the most innocent of women--it is impossible to persuade her of the wickedness that there is in the world. She replied by return of post, inviting the governess to come here and see her, and enclosing the money for her traveling expenses. When my father came home, and heard what had been done, he wrote at once to his agent in London to make inquiries, inclosing the address on the governess' letter. Before he could receive the agent's reply the governess arrived. She produced the worst possible impression on his mind. The agent's letter, arriving a few days later, confirmed his suspicions. Since we had lost sight of her, the woman had led a most disreputable life. My father spoke to her privately: he offered--on condition of her leaving the house--a sum of money to take her back to England. If she refused, the alternative would be an appeal to the authorities and a public scandal. She accepted the money, and left the house. On her way back to England she appears to have stopped at Metz. You will understand what sort of woman she is when I tell you that she was seen the other day in a tavern, with your handsome groom, Joseph Rigobert."

While my informant was relating these circumstances, my memory was at work. I recalled what Francis Raven had vaguely told us of his wife's experience in former days as governess in a German family. A suspicion of the truth suddenly flashed across my mind. "What was the woman's name?" I asked.

Mr. Beldheimer's son answered: "Alicia Warlock."

I had but one idea when I heard that reply--to get back to my house without a moment's needless delay. It was then ten o'clock at night--the last train to Metz had left long since. I arranged with my young friend--after duly informing him of the circumstances--that I should go by the first train in the morning, instead of staying to breakfast with the other guests who slept in the house.

At intervals during the night I wondered uneasily how things were going on at Maison Rouge. Again and again the same question occurred to me, on my journey home in the early morning--the morning of the first of March. As the event proved, but one person in my house knew what really happened at the stables on Francis Raven's birthday. Let Joseph Rigobert take my place as narrator, and tell the story of the end to You--as he told it, in times past, to his lawyer and to Me.

FOURTH (AND LAST) NARRATIVE
STATEMENT OF JOSEPH RIGOBERT: ADDRESSED TO THE ADVOCATE WHO DEFENDED HIM AT HIS TRIAL

Respected Sir,--On the twenty-seventh of February I was sent, on business connected with the stables at Maison Rouge, to the city of Metz. On the public promenade I met a magnificent woman. Complexion, blond. Nationality, English. We mutually admired each other; we fell into conversation. (She spoke French perfectly--with the English accent.) I offered refreshment; my proposal was accepted. We had a long and interesting interview--we discovered that we were made for each other. So far, Who is to blame?

Is it my fault that I am a handsome man--universally agreeable as such to the fair sex? Is it a criminal offense to be accessible to the amiable weakness of love? I ask again, Who is to blame? Clearly, nature. Not the beautiful lady--not my humble self.

To resume. The most hard-hearted person living will understand that two beings made for each other could not possibly part without an appointment to meet again.

I made arrangements for the accommodation of the lady in the village near Maison Rouge. She consented to honor me with her company at supper, in my apartment at the stables, on the night of the twenty-ninth. The time fixed on was the time when the other servants were accustomed to retire--eleven o'clock.

Among the grooms attached to the stables was an Englishman, laid up with a broken leg. His name was Francis. His manners were repulsive; he was ignorant of the French language. In the kitchen he went by the nickname of the "English Bear." Strange to say, he was a great favorite with my master and my mistress. They even humored certain superstitious terrors to which this repulsive person was subject--terrors into the nature of which I, as an advanced freethinker, never thought it worth my while to inquire.

On the evening of the twenty-eighth the Englishman, being a prey to the terrors which I have mentioned, requested that one of his fellow servants might sit up with him for that night only. The wish that he expressed was backed by Mr. Fairbank's authority. Having already incurred my master's displeasure--in what way, a proper sense of my own dignity forbids me to relate--I volunteered to watch by the bedside of the English Bear. My object was to satisfy Mr. Fairbank that I bore no malice, on my side, after what had occurred between us. The wretched
Englishman passed a night of delirium. Not understanding his barbarous language, I could only gather from his gesture that he was in deadly fear of some fancied apparition at his bedside. From time to time, when this madman disturbed my slumbers, I quieted him by swearing at him. This is the shortest and best way of dealing with persons in his condition.

On the morning of the twenty-ninth, Mr. Fairbank left us on a journey. Later in the day, to my unspeakable disgust, I found that I had not done with the Englishman yet. In Mr. Fairbank's absence, Mrs. Fairbank took an incomprehensible interest in the question of my delirious fellow servant's repose at night. Again, one or the other of us was to watch at his bedside, and report it, if anything happened. Expecting my fair friend to supper, it was necessary to make sure that the other servants at the stables would be safe in their beds that night. Accordingly, I volunteered once more to be the man who kept watch. Mrs. Fairbank complimented me on my humanity. I possess great command over my feelings. I accepted the compliment without a blush.

Twice, after nightfall, my mistress and the doctor (the last staying in the house in Mr. Fairbank's absence) came to make inquiries. Once _before_ the arrival of my fair friend—and once _after_. On the second occasion (my apartment being next door to the Englishman's) I was obliged to hide my charming guest in the harness room. She consented, with angelic resignation, to immolate her dignity to the servile necessities of my position. A more amiable woman (so far) I never met with!

After the second visit I was left free. It was then close on midnight. Up to that time there was nothing in the behavior of the mad Englishman to reward Mrs. Fairbank and the doctor for presenting themselves at his bedside. He lay half awake, half asleep, with an odd wondering kind of look in his face. My mistress at parting warned me to be particularly watchful of him toward two in the morning. The doctor (in case anything happened) left me a large hand bell to ring, which could easily be heard at the house.

Restored to the society of my fair friend, I spread the supper table. A pate, a sausage, and a few bottles of generous Moselle wine, composed our simple meal. When persons adore each other, the intoxicating illusion of Love transforms the simplest meal into a banquet. With immeasurable capacities for enjoyment, we sat down to table. At the very moment when I placed my fascinating companion in a chair, the infamous Englishman in the next room took that occasion, of all others, to become restless and noisy once more. He struck with his stick on the floor; he cried out, in a delirious access of terror, "Rigobert! Rigobert!"

The sound of that lamentable voice, suddenly assailing our ears, terrified my fair friend. She lost all her charming color in an instant. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed. "Who is that in the next room?"

"A mad Englishman."
"An Englishman?"
"Compose yourself, my angel. I will quiet him."

The lamentable voice called out on me again, "Rigobert! Rigobert!"

My fair friend caught me by the arm. "Who is he?" she cried. "What is his name?"

Something in her face struck me as she put that question. A spasm of jealousy shook me to the soul. "You know him?" I said.

"His name!" she vehemently repeated; "his name!"

"Francis," I answered.

"Francis—_what_?"

I shrugged my shoulders. I could neither remember nor pronounce the barbarous English surname. I could only tell her it began with an "R."

She dropped back into the chair. Was she going to faint? No: she recovered, and more than recovered, her lost color. Her eyes flashed superbly. What did it mean? Profoundly as I understand women in general, I was puzzled by _this_ woman!

"You know him?" I repeated.

She laughed at me. "What nonsense! How should I know him? Go and quiet the wretch."

My looking-glass was near. One glance at it satisfied me that no woman in her senses could prefer the Englishman to Me. I recovered my self-respect. I hastened to the Englishman's bedside.

The moment I appeared he pointed eagerly toward my room. He overwhelmed me with a torrent of words in his own language. I made out, from his gestures and his looks, that he had, in some incomprehensible manner, discovered the presence of my guest; and, stranger still, that he was scared by the idea of a person in my room. I endeavored to compose him on the system which I have already mentioned—that is to say, I swore at him in _my_ language. The result not proving satisfactory, I own I shook my fist in his face, and left the bedchamber.

Returning to my fair friend, I found her walking backward and forward in a state of excitement wonderful to behold. She had not waited for me to fill her glass—she had begun the generous Moselle in my absence. I prevailed on her with difficulty to place herself at the table. Nothing would induce her to eat. "My appetite is gone," she said.
"Give me wine."

The generous Moselle deserves its name--delicate on the palate, with prodigious "body." The strength of this fine wine produced no stupefying effect on my remarkable guest. It appeared to strengthen and exhilarate her--nothing more. She always spoke in the same low tone, and always, turn the conversation as I might, brought it back with the same dexterity to the subject of the Englishman in the next room. In any other woman this persistency would have offended me. My lovely guest was irresistible; I answered her questions with the docility of a child. She possessed all the amusing eccentricity of her nation. When I told her of the accident which confined the Englishman to his bed, she sprang to her feet. An extraordinary smile irradiated her countenance. She said, "Show me the horse who broke the Englishman's leg! I must see that horse!" I took her to the stables. She kissed the horse--on my word of honor, she kissed the horse! That struck me. I said, "You _do_ know the man; and he has wronged you in some way." No! she would not admit it, even then. "I kiss all beautiful animals," she said. "Haven't I kissed _you_?" With that charming explanation of her conduct, she ran back up the stairs. I only remained behind to lock the stable door again. When I rejoined her, I made a startling discovery. I caught her coming out of the Englishman's room.

"I was just going downstairs again to call you," she said. "The man in there is getting noisy once more."

The mad Englishman's voice assailed our ears once again. "Rigobert! Rigobert!"

He was a frightful object to look at when I saw him this time. His eyes were staring wildly; the perspiration was pouring over his face. In a panic of terror he clasped his hands; he pointed up to heaven. By every sign and gesture that a man can make, he entreated me not to leave him again. I really could not help smiling. The idea of my staying with _him_ and leaving my fair friend by herself in the next room!

I turned to the door. When the mad wretch saw me leaving him he burst out into a screech of despair--so shrill that I feared it might awaken the sleeping servants.

My presence of mind in emergencies is proverbial among those who know me. I tore open the cupboard in which he kept his linen--seized a handful of his handkerchiefs--gagged him with one of them, and secured his hands with the others. There was now no danger of his alarming the servants. After tying the last knot, I looked up.

The door between the Englishman's room and mine was open. My fair friend was standing on the threshold--watching _him_ as he lay helpless on the bed; watching _me_ as I tied the last knot.

"What are you doing there?" I asked. "Why did you open the door?"

She stepped up to me, and whispered her answer in my ear, with her eyes all the time upon the man on the bed:

"I heard him scream."

"Well?"

"I thought you had killed him."

I drew back from her in horror. The suspicion of me which her words implied was sufficiently detestable in itself. But her manner when she uttered the words was more revolting still. It so powerfully affected me that I started back from that beautiful creature as I might have recoiled from a reptile crawling over my flesh.

Before I had recovered myself sufficiently to reply, my nerves were assailed by another shock. I suddenly heard my mistress's voice calling to me from the stable yard.

There was no time to think--there was only time to act. The one thing needed was to keep Mrs. Fairbank from ascending the stairs, and discovering--not my lady guest only--but the Englishman also, gagged and bound on his bed. I instantly hurried to the yard. As I ran down the stairs I heard the stable clock strike the quarter to two in the morning.

My mistress was eager and agitated. The doctor (in attendance on her) was smiling to himself, like a man amused at his own thoughts.

"Is Francis awake or asleep?" Mrs. Fairbank inquired.

"He has been a little restless, madam. But he is now quiet again. If he is not disturbed" (I added those words to prevent her from ascending the stairs), "he will soon fall off into a quiet sleep."

"Has nothing happened since I was here last?"

"Nothing, madam."

The doctor lifted his eyebrows with a comical look of distress. "Alas, alas, Mrs. Fairbank!" he said. "Nothing has happened! The days of romance are over!"

"It is not two o'clock yet," my mistress answered, a little irritably.

The smell of the stables was strong on the morning air. She put her handkerchief to her nose and led the way out of the yard by the north entrance--the entrance communicating with the gardens and the house. I was ordered to follow her, along with the doctor. Once out of the smell of the stables she began to question me again. She was unwilling to believe that nothing had occurred in her absence. I invented the best answers I could think of on the spur of the moment; and the doctor stood by laughing. So the minutes passed till the clock struck two. Upon that, Mrs. Fairbank announced her intention of personally visiting the Englishman in his room. To my great relief, the
doctor interfered to stop her from doing this.

"You have heard that Francis is just falling asleep," he said. "If you enter his room you may disturb him. It is essential to the success of my experiment that he should have a good night's rest, and that he should own it himself, before I tell him the truth. I must request, madam, that you will not disturb the man. Rigobert will ring the alarm bell if anything happens."

My mistress was unwilling to yield. For the next five minutes, at least, there was a warm discussion between the two. In the end Mrs. Fairbank was obliged to give way—for the time. "In half an hour," she said, "Francis will either be sound asleep, or awake again. In half an hour I shall come back." She took the doctor's arm. They returned together to the house.

Left by myself, with half an hour before me, I resolved to take the Englishwoman back to the village—then, returning to the stables, to remove the gag and the bindings from Francis, and to let him screech to his heart's content. What would his alarming the whole establishment matter to _me_ after I had got rid of the compromising presence of my guest?

Returning to the yard I heard a sound like the creaking of an open door on its hinges. The gate of the north entrance I had just closed with my own hand. I went round to the west entrance, at the back of the stables. It opened on a field crossed by two footpaths in Mr. Fairbank's grounds. The nearest footpath led to the village. The other led to the highroad and the river.

Arriving at the west entrance I found the door open—swinging to and fro slowly in the fresh morning breeze. I had myself locked and bolted that door after admitting my fair friend at eleven o'clock. A vague dread of something wrong stole its way into my mind. I hurried back to the stables.

I looked into my own room. It was empty. I went to the harness room. Not a sign of the woman was there. I returned to my room, and approached the door of the Englishman's bedchamber. Was it possible that she had remained there during my absence? An unaccountable reluctance to open the door made me hesitate, with my hand on the lock. I listened. There was not a sound inside. I called softly. There was no answer. I drew back a step, still hesitating. I noticed something dark moving slowly in the crevice between the bottom of the door and the boarded floor. Snatching up the candle from the table, I held it low, and looked. The dark, slowly moving object was a stream of blood!

That horrid sight roused me. I opened the door. The Englishman lay on his bed—alone in the room. He was stabbed in two places—in the throat and in the heart. The weapon was left in the second wound. It was a knife of English manufacture, with a handle of buckhorn as good as new.

I instantly gave the alarm. Witnesses can speak to what followed. It is monstrous to suppose that I am guilty of the murder. I admit that I am capable of committing follies: but I shrink from the bare idea of a crime. Besides, I had no motive for killing the man. The woman murdered him in my absence. The woman escaped by the west entrance while I was talking to my mistress. I have no more to say. I swear to you what I have here written is a true statement of all that happened on the morning of the first of March.

Accept, sir, the assurance of my sentiments of profound gratitude and respect.

JOSEPH RIGOBERT.

LAST LINES.—ADDED BY PERCY FAIRBANK

Tried for the murder of Francis Raven, Joseph Rigobert was found Not Guilty; the papers of the assassinated man presented ample evidence of the deadly animosity felt toward him by his wife.

The investigations pursued on the morning when the crime was committed showed that the murderess, after leaving the stable, had taken the footpath which led to the river. The river was dragged—without result. It remains doubtful to this day whether she died by drowning or not. The one thing certain is—that Alicia Warlock was never seen again.

So—beginning in mystery, ending in mystery—the Dream Woman passes from your view. Ghost; demon; or living human creature—say for yourselves which she is. Or, knowing what unfathomed wonders are around you, what unfathomed wonders are _in_ you, let the wise words of the greatest of all poets be explanation enough:

"We are such stuff As dreams are made of, and our little life Is rounded with, a sleep."

Go to Start
The Haunted Hotel: A Mystery of Modern Venice

by Wilkie Collins (1824-1889)

The First Part

In the year 1860, the reputation of Doctor Wybrow as a London physician reached its highest point. It was reported on good authority that he was in receipt of one of the largest incomes derived from the practice of medicine in modern times.

One afternoon, towards the close of the London season, the Doctor had just taken his luncheon after a specially hard morning's work in his consulting-room, and with a formidable list of visits to patients at their own houses to fill up the rest of his day-- when the servant announced that a lady wished to speak to him.

'Who is she?' the Doctor asked. 'A stranger?'

'Yes, sir.'

'I see no strangers out of consulting-hours. Tell her what the hours are, and send her away.'

'I have told her, sir.'

'Well?'

'And she won't go.'

'Won't go? The Doctor smiled as he repeated the words. He was a humourist in his way; and there was an absurd side to the situation which rather amused him. 'Has this obstinate lady given you her name?' he inquired.

'No, sir. She refused to give any name--she said she wouldn't keep you five minutes, and the matter was too important to wait till to-morrow. There she is in the consulting-room; and how to get her out again is more than I know.'

Doctor Wybrow considered for a moment. His knowledge of women (professionally speaking) rested on the ripe experience of more than thirty years; he had met with them in all their varieties-- especially the variety which knows nothing of the value of time, and never hesitates at sheltering itself behind the privileges of its sex. A glance at his watch informed him that he must soon begin his rounds among the patients who were waiting for him at their own houses. He decided forthwith on taking the only wise course that was open under the circumstances. In other words, he decided on taking to flight.

'Is the carriage at the door?' he asked.

'Yes, sir.'

'Very well. Open the house-door for me without making any noise, and leave the lady in undisturbed possession of the consulting-room. When she gets tired of waiting, you know what to tell her. If she asks when I am expected to return, say that I dine at my club, and spend the evening at the theatre. Now then, softly, Thomas! If your shoes creak, I am a lost man.'

He noiselessly led the way into the hall, followed by the servant on tip-toe.

Did the lady in the consulting-room suspect him? or did Thomas's shoes creak, and was her sense of hearing unusually keen? Whatever the explanation may be, the event that actually happened was beyond all doubt. Exactly as Doctor Wybrow passed his consulting-room, the door opened--the lady appeared on the threshold-- and laid her hand on his arm.

'I entreat you, sir, not to go away without letting me speak to you first.'

The accent was foreign; the tone was low and firm. Her fingers closed gently, and yet resolutely, on the Doctor's arm.

Neither her language nor her action had the slightest effect in inclining him to grant her request. The influence that instantly stopped him, on the way to his carriage, was the silent influence of her face. The startling contrast between the corpse-like pallor of her complexion and the overpowering life and light, the glittering metallic brightness in her large black eyes, held him literally spell-bound. She was dressed in dark colours, with perfect taste; she was of middle height, and (apparently) of middle age--say a year or two over thirty. Her lower features--the nose, mouth, and chin--possessed the fineness and delicacy of form which is oftener seen among women of foreign races than among women of English birth. She was unquestionably a handsome person--with the one serious drawback of her ghastly complexion, and with the less noticeable defect of a total want of tenderness in the
expression of her eyes. Apart from his first emotion of surprise, the feeling she produced in the Doctor may be 
described as an overpowering feeling of professional curiosity. The case might prove to be something entirely new 
in his professional experience. 'It looks like it,' he thought; 'and it's worth waiting for.' 

She perceived that she she had produced a strong impression of some kind upon him, and dropped her hold on 
his arm. 

'You have comforted many miserable women in your time,' she said. 'Comfort one more, to-day.' 

Without waiting to be answered, she led the way back into the room. 

The Doctor followed her, and closed the door. He placed her in the patients' chair, opposite the windows. Even 
in London the sun, on that summer afternoon, was dazzlingly bright. The radiant light flowed in on her. Her eyes 
met it unflinchingly, with the steely steadiness of the eyes of an eagle. The smooth pallor of her unwrinkled skin 
looked more fearfully white than ever. For the first time, for many a long year past, the Doctor felt his pulse quicken 
its beat in the presence of a patient. 

Having possessed herself of his attention, she appeared, strangely enough, to have nothing to say to him. A 
curious apathy seemed to have taken possession of this resolute woman. Forced to speak first, the Doctor merely 
inquired, in the conventional phrase, what he could do for her. 

The sound of his voice seemed to rouse her. Still looking straight at the light, she said abruptly: 'I have a painful 
question to ask.' 

'What is it?' 

Her eyes travelled slowly from the window to the Doctor's face. Without the slightest outward appearance of 
agitation, she put the 'painful question' in these extraordinary words: 

'I want to know, if you please, whether I am in danger of going mad?' 

Some men might have been amused, and some might have been alarmed. Doctor Wybrow was only conscious of 
a sense of disappointment. Was this the rare case that he had anticipated, judging rashly by appearances? Was the 
new patient only a hypochondriacal woman, whose malady was a disordered stomach and whose misfortune was a 
weak brain? 'Why do you come to me?' he asked sharply. 'Why don't you consult a doctor whose special 
employment is the treatment of the insane?' 

She had her answer ready on the instant. 

'I don't go to a doctor of that sort,' she said, 'for the very reason that he is a specialist: he has the fatal habit of 
judging everybody by lines and rules of his own laying down. I come to you, because my case is outside of all lines 
and rules, and because you are famous in your profession for the discovery of mysteries in disease. Are you 
satisfied?'

He was more than satisfied--his first idea had been the right idea, after all. Besides, she was correctly informed 
as to his professional position. The capacity which had raised him to fame and fortune was his capacity (unrivalled 
among his brethren) for the discovery of remote disease. 

'I am at your disposal,' he answered. 'Let me try if I can find out what is the matter with you.' 

He put his medical questions. They were promptly and plainly answered; and they led to no other conclusion 
than that the strange lady was, mentally and physically, in excellent health. Not satisfied with questions, he carefully 
examined the great organs of life. Neither his hand nor his stethoscope could discover anything that was amiss. With 
the admirable patience and devotion to his art which had distinguished him from the time when he was a student, he 
still subjected her to one test after another. The result was always the same. Not only was there no tendency to brain 
disease-- there was not even a perceptible derangement of the nervous system. 'I can find nothing the matter with 
you,' he said. 'I can't even account for the extraordinary pallor of your complexion. You completely puzzle me.' 

'The pallor of my complexion is nothing,' she answered a little impatiently. 'In my early life I had a narrow 
escape from death by poisoning. I have never had a complexion since--and my skin is so delicate, I cannot paint 
without producing a hideous rash. But that is of no importance. I wanted your opinion given positively. I believed in 
you, and you have disappointed me.' Her head dropped on her breast. 'And so it ends!' she said to herself bitterly. 

The Doctor's sympathies were touched. Perhaps it might be more correct to say that his professional pride was a 
little hurt. 'It may end in the right way yet,' he remarked, 'if you choose to help me.' 

She clasped her hands in her lap. 'That is true!' she said eagerly. 'I begin to believe in you again.' 

'Speak plainly,' she said. 'How can I help you?'

'Plainly, madam, you come to me as an enigma, and you leave me to make the right guess by the unaided efforts 
of my art. My art will do much, but not all. For example, something must have occurred-- something quite 
unconnected with the state of your bodily health-- to frighten you about yourself, or you would never have come 
here to consult me. Is that true?'

She looked up again with flashing eyes, 'Very well. You can't expect me to find out the moral cause which has alarmed you. I can positively discover that there is no physical cause of alarm; and (unless you admit me to your confidence) I can do no more.'
She rose, and took a turn in the room. 'Suppose I tell you?' she said. 'But, mind, I shall mention no names!'
'There is no need to mention names. The facts are all I want.'
'The facts are nothing,' she rejoined. 'I have only my own impressions to confess—and you will very likely think me a fanciful fool when you hear what they are. No matter. I will do my best to content you—I will begin with the facts that you want. Take my word for it, they won't do much to help you.'
She sat down again. In the plainest possible words, she began the strangest and wildest confession that had ever reached the Doctor's ears.
CHAPTER II
'It is one fact, sir, that I am a widow,' she said. 'It is another fact, that I am going to be married again.'
There she paused, and smiled at some thought that occurred to her. Doctor Wybrow was not favourably impressed by her smile—there was something at once sad and cruel in it. It came slowly, and it went away suddenly. He began to doubt whether he had been wise in acting on his first impression. His mind reverted to the commonplace patients and the discoverable maladies that were waiting for him, with a certain tender regret.
The lady went on.
'My approaching marriage,' she said, 'has one embarrassing circumstance connected with it. The gentleman whose wife I am to be, was engaged to another lady when he happened to meet with me, abroad: that lady, mind, being of his own blood and family, related to him as his cousin. I have innocently robbed her of her lover, and destroyed her prospects in life. Innocently, I say—because he told me nothing of his engagement until after I had accepted him. When we next met in England—and when there was danger, no doubt, of the affair coming to my knowledge—he told me the truth. I was naturally indignant. He had his excuse ready; he showed me a letter from the lady herself, releasing him from his engagement. A more noble, a more high-minded letter, I never read in my life. I cried over it—I who have no tears in me for sorrows of my own! If the letter had left him any hope of being forgiven, I would have positively refused to marry him. But the firmness of it—without anger, without a word of reproach, with heartfelt wishes even for his happiness—the firmness of it, I say, left him no hope. He appealed to my compassion; he appealed to his love for me. You know what women are. I too was soft-hearted—I said, Very well: yes! In a week more (I tremble as I think of it) we are to be married.'
She did really tremble—she was obliged to pause and compose herself, before she could go on. The Doctor, waiting for more facts, began to fear that he stood committed to a long story. 'Forgive me for reminding you that I have suffering persons waiting to see me,' he said. 'The sooner you can come to the point, the better for my patients and for me.'
The strange smile—at once so sad and so cruel—showed itself again on the lady's lips. 'Every word I have said is to the point,' she answered. 'You will see it yourself in a moment more.'
She resumed her narrative.
'Yesterday—you need fear no long story, sir; only yesterday— I was among the visitors at one of your English luncheon parties. A lady, a perfect stranger to me, came in late—after we had left the table, and had retired to the drawing-room. She happened to take a chair near me; and we were presented to each other. I knew her by name, as she knew me. It was the woman whom I had robbed of her lover, the woman who had written the noble letter. Now listen! You were impatient with me for not interesting you in what I said just now. I said it to satisfy your mind that I had no enmity of feeling towards the lady, on my side. I admired her, I felt for her—I had no cause to reproach myself. This is very important, as you will presently see. On her side, I have reason to be assured that the circumstances had been truly explained to her, and that she understood I was in no way to blame. Now, knowing all these necessary things as you do, explain to me, if you can, why, when I rose and met that woman's eyes looking at me, I turned cold from head to foot, and shuddered, and shivered, and knew what a deadly panic of fear was, for the first time in my life.'
The Doctor began to feel interested at last.
'Was there anything remarkable in the lady's personal appearance?' he asked.
'Nothing whatever!' was the vehement reply. 'Here is the true description of her:—The ordinary English lady; the clear cold blue eyes, the fine rosy complexion, the inanimately polite manner, the large good-humoured mouth, the too plump cheeks and chin: these, and nothing more.'
'Was there anything in her expression, when you first looked at her, that took you by surprise?'
'There was natural curiosity to see the woman who had been preferred to her; and perhaps some astonishment also, not to see a more engaging and more beautiful person; both those feelings restrained within the limits of good breeding, and both not lasting for more than a few moments—so far as I could see. I say, "so far," because the horrible agitation that she communicated to me disturbed my judgment. If I could have got to the door, I would have run out of the room, she frightened me so! I was not even able to stand up—I sank back in my chair; I stared horror-struck at the calm blue eyes that were only looking at me with a gentle surprise. To say they affected me like the
eyes of a serpent is to say nothing. I felt her soul in them, looking into mine—looking, if such a thing can be, unconsciously to her own mortal self. I tell you my impression, in all its horror and in all its folly! That woman is destined (without knowing it herself) to be the evil genius of my life. Her innocent eyes saw hidden capabilities of wickedness in me that I was not aware of myself, until I felt them stirring under her look. If I commit faults in my life to come—if I am even guilty of crimes—she will bring the retribution, without (as I firmly believe) any conscious exercise of her own will. In one indescribable moment I felt all this—and I suppose my face showed it. The good artless creature was inspired by a sort of gentle alarm for me. "I am afraid the heat of the room is too much for you; will you try my smelling bottle?" I heard her say those kind words; and I remember nothing else—I fainted. When I recovered my senses, the company had all gone; only the lady of the house was with me. For the moment I could say nothing to her; the dreadful impression that I have tried to describe to you came back to me with the coming back of my life. As soon I could speak, I implored her to tell me the whole truth about the woman whom I had supplanted. You see, I had a faint hope that her good character might not really be deserved, that her noble letter was a skilful piece of hypocrisy—in short, that she secretly hated me, and was cunning enough to hide it. No! the lady had been her friend from her girlhood, was as familiar with her as if they had been sisters—knew her positively to be as good, as innocent, as incapable of hating anybody, as the greatest saint that ever lived. My one last hope, that I had only felt an ordinary forewarning of danger in the presence of an ordinary enemy, was a hope destroyed for ever. There was one more effort I could make, and I made it. I went next to the man whom I am to marry. I implored him to release me from my promise. He refused. I declared I would break my engagement. He showed me letters from his sisters, letters from his brothers, and his dear friends—all entreating him to think again before he made me his wife; all repeating reports of me in Paris, Vienna, and London, which are so many vile lies. "If you refuse to marry me," he said, "you admit that these reports are true—you admit that you are afraid to face society in the character of my wife." What could I answer? There was no contradicting him—he was plainly right: if I persisted in my refusal, the utter destruction of my reputation would be the result. I consented to let the wedding take place as we had arranged it—and left him. The night has passed. I am here, with my fixed conviction—that innocent woman is ordained to have a fatal influence over my life. I am here with my one question to put, to the one man who can answer it. For the last time, sir, what am I—a demon who has seen the avenging angel? or only a poor mad woman, misled by the delusion of a deranged mind?"  
  
Doctor Wybrow rose from his chair, determined to close the interview.  
He was strongly and painfully impressed by what he had heard. The longer he had listened to her, the more irresistibly the conviction of the woman's wickedness had forced itself on him. He tried vainly to think of her as a person to be pitied—a person with a morbidly sensitive imagination, conscious of the capacities for evil which lie dormant in us all, and striving earnestly to open her heart to the counter-influence of her own better nature; the effort was beyond him. A perverse instinct in him said, as if in words, Beware how you believe in her!  
'I have already given you my opinion,' he said. 'There is no sign of your intellect being deranged, or being likely to be deranged, that medical science can discover—as I understand it. As for the impressions you have confided to me, I can only say that yours is a case (as I venture to think) for spiritual rather than for medical advice. Of one thing be assured: what you have said to me in this room shall not pass out of it. Your confession is safe in my keeping.'  
She heard him, with a certain dogged resignation, to the end.  
'Is that all?' she asked.  
'That is all,' he answered.  
She put a little paper packet of money on the table. 'Thank you, sir. There is your fee.'  
With those words she rose. Her wild black eyes looked upward, with an expression of despair so defiant and so horrible in its silent agony that the Doctor turned away his head, unable to endure the sight of it. The bare idea of taking anything from her—not money only, but anything even that she had touched—suddenly revolted him. Still without looking at her, he said, 'Take it back; I don't want my fee.'  
She neither heeded nor heard him. Still looking upward, she said slowly to herself, 'Let the end come. I have done with the struggle: I submit.'  
She drew her veil over her face, bowed to the Doctor, and left the room.  
He rang the bell, and followed her into the hall. As the servant closed the door on her, a sudden impulse of curiosity—utterly unworthy of him, and at the same time utterly irresistible—sprang up in the Doctor's mind. Blushing like a boy, he said to the servant, 'Follow her home, and find out her name.' For one moment the man looked at his master, doubting if his own ears had not deceived him. Doctor Wybrow looked back at him in silence. The submissive servant knew what that silence meant—he took his hat and hurried into the street.  
The Doctor went back to the consulting-room. A sudden revulsion of feeling swept over his mind. Had the woman left an infection of wickedness in the house, and had he caught it? What devil had possessed him to degrade himself in the eyes of his own servant? He had behaved infamously—he had asked an honest man, a man who had
served him faithfully for years, to turn spy! Stung by the bare thought of it, he ran out into the hall again, and opened the door. The servant had disappeared; it was too late to call him back. But one refuge from his contempt for himself was now open to him-- the refuge of work. He got into his carriage and went his rounds among his patients.

If the famous physician could have shaken his own reputation, he would have done it that afternoon. Never before had he made himself so little welcome at the bedside. Never before had he put off until to-morrow the prescription which ought to have been written, the opinion which ought to have been given, to-day. He went home earlier than usual--utterly dissatisfied with himself.

The servant had returned. Dr. Wybrow was ashamed to question him. The man reported the result of his errand, without waiting to be asked.

'The lady's name is the Countess Narona. She lives at--'

Without waiting to hear where she lived, the Doctor acknowledged the all-important discovery of her name by a silent bend of the head, and entered his consulting-room. The fee that he had vainly refused still lay in its little white paper covering on the table. He sealed it up in an envelope; addressed it to the 'Poor-box' of the nearest police-court; and, calling the servant in, directed him to take it to the magistrate the next morning. Faithful to his duties, the servant waited to ask the customary question, 'Do you dine at home to-day, sir?'

After a moment's hesitation he said, 'No: I shall dine at the club.'

The most easily deteriorated of all the moral qualities is the quality called 'conscience.' In one state of a man's mind, his conscience is the severest judge that can pass sentence on him. In another state, he and his conscience are on the best possible terms with each other in the comfortable capacity of accomplices. When Doctor Wybrow left his house for the second time, he did not even attempt to conceal from himself that his sole object, in dining at the club, was to hear what the world said of the Countess Narona.

CHAPTER III

There was a time when a man in search of the pleasures of gossip sought the society of ladies. The man knows better now. He goes to the smoking-room of his club.

Doctor Wybrow lit his cigar, and looked round him at his brethren in social conclave assembled. The room was well filled; but the flow of talk was still languid. The Doctor innocently applied the stimulant that was wanted. When he inquired if anybody knew the Countess Narona, he was answered by something like a shout of astonishment. Never (the conclave agreed) had such an absurd question been asked before! Every human creature, with the slightest claim to a place in society, knew the Countess Narona. An adventuress with a European reputation of the blackest possible colour-- such was the general description of the woman with the deathlike complexion and the glittering eyes.

Descending to particulars, each member of the club contributed his own little stock of scandal to the memoirs of the Countess. It was doubtful whether she was really, what she called herself, a Dalmatian lady. It was doubtful whether she had ever been married to the Count whose widow she assumed to be. It was doubtful whether the man who accompanied her in her travels (under the name of Baron Rivar, and in the character of her brother) was her brother at all. Report pointed to the Baron as a gambler at every 'table' on the Continent. Report whispered that his so-called sister had narrowly escaped being implicated in a famous trial for poisoning at Vienna--that she had been known at Milan as a spy in the interests of Austria--that her 'apartment' in Paris had been denounced to the police as nothing less than a private gambling-house-- and that her present appearance in England was the natural result of the discovery. Only one member of the assembly in the smoking-room took the part of this much-abused woman, and declared that her character had been most cruelly and most unjustly assailed. But as the man was a lawyer, his interference went for nothing: it was naturally attributed to the spirit of contradiction inherent in his profession. He was asked derisively what he thought of the circumstances under which the Countess had become engaged to be married; and he made the characteristic answer, that he thought the circumstances highly creditable to both parties, and that he looked on the lady's future husband as a most enviable man.

Hearing this, the Doctor raised another shout of astonishment by inquiring the name of the gentleman whom the Countess was about to marry.

His friends in the smoking-room decided unanimously that the celebrated physician must be a second 'Rip-van-Winkle,' and that he had just awakened from a supernatural sleep of twenty years. It was all very well to say that he was devoted to his profession, and that he had neither time nor inclination to pick up fragments of gossip at dinner-parties and balls. A man who did not know that the Countess Narona had borrowed money at Homburg of no less a person than Lord Montbarry, and had then deluded him into making her a proposal of marriage, was a man who had probably never heard of Lord Montbarry himself. The younger members of the club, humouring the joke, sent a waiter for the 'Peerage'; and read aloud the memoir of the nobleman in question, for the Doctor's benefit-- with illustrative morsels of information interpolated by themselves.

1 Herbert John Westwick. First Baron Montbarry, of Montbarry, King's County, Ireland. Created a Peer for
distinguished military services in India. Born, 1812. Forty-eight years old, Doctor, at the present time. Not married. Will be married next week, Doctor, to the delightful creature we have been talking about. Heir presumptive, his lordship's next brother, Stephen Robert, married to Ella, youngest daughter of the Reverend Silas Marden, Rector of Runnigate, and has issue, three daughters. Younger brothers of his lordship, Francis and Henry, unmarried. Sisters of his lordship, Lady Barville, married to Sir Theodore Barville, Bart.; and Anne, widow of the late Peter Norbury, Esq., of Norbury Cross. Bear his lordship's relations well in mind, Doctor. Three brothers Westwick, Stephen, Francis, and Henry; and two sisters, Lady Barville and Mrs. Norbury. Not one of the five will be present at the marriage; and not one of the five will leave a stone unturned to stop it, if the Countess will only give them a chance. Add to these hostile members of the family another offended relative not mentioned in the 'Peerage,' a young lady--'

A sudden outburst of protest in more than one part of the room stopped the coming disclosure, and released the Doctor from further persecution.

'Don't mention the poor girl's name; it's too bad to make a joke of that part of the business; she has behaved nobly under shameful provocation; there is but one excuse for Montbarry—he is either a madman or a fool.' In these terms the protest expressed itself on all sides. Speaking confidentially to his next neighbour, the Doctor discovered that the lady referred to was already known to him (through the Countess's confession) as the lady deserted by Lord Montbarry. Her name was Agnes Lockwood. She was described as being the superior of the Countess in personal attraction, and as being also by some years the younger woman of the two. Making all allowance for the follies that men committed every day in their relations with women, Montbarry's delusion was still the most monstrous delusion on record. In this expression of opinion every man present agreed—the lawyer even included. Not one of them could call to mind the innumerable instances in which the sexual influence has proved irresistible in the persons of women without even the pretension to beauty. The very members of the club whom the Countess (in spite of her personal disadvantages) could have most easily fascinated, if she had thought it worth her while, were the members who wondered most loudly at Montbarry's choice of a wife.

While the topic of the Countess's marriage was still the one topic of conversation, a member of the club entered the smoking-room whose appearance instantly produced a dead silence. Doctor Wybrow's next neighbour whispered to him, 'Montbarry's brother--Henry Westwick!'

The new-comer looked round him slowly, with a bitter smile.

'You are all talking of my brother,' he said. 'Don't mind me. Not one of you can despise him more heartily than I do. Go on, gentlemen—go on!'

But one man present took the speaker at his word. That man was the lawyer who had already undertaken the defence of the Countess.

'I stand alone in my opinion,' he said, 'and I am not ashamed of repeating it in anybody's hearing. I consider the Countess Narona to be a cruelly-treated woman. Why shouldn't she be Lord Montbarry's wife? Who can say she has a mercenary motive in marrying him?'

Montbarry's brother turned sharply on the speaker. 'I say it!' he answered.

'The reply might have shaken some men. The lawyer stood on his ground as firmly as ever.

'I believe I am right,' he rejoined, 'in stating that his lordship's income is not more than sufficient to support his station in life; also that it is an income derived almost entirely from landed property in Ireland, every acre of which is entailed.'

Montbarry's brother made a sign, admitting that he had no objection to offer so far.

'If his lordship dies first,' the lawyer proceeded, 'I have been informed that the only provision he can make for his widow consists in a rent-charge on the property of no more than four hundred a year. His retiring pension and allowances, it is well known, die with him. Four hundred a year is therefore all that he can leave to the Countess, if he leaves her a widow.'

'Four hundred a year is not all,' was the reply to this. 'My brother has insured his life for ten thousand pounds; and he has settled the whole of it on the Countess, in the event of his death.'

This announcement produced a strong sensation. Men looked at each other, and repeated the three startling words, 'Ten thousand pounds!' Driven fairly to the wall, the lawyer made a last effort to defend his position.

'May I ask who made that settlement a condition of the marriage?' he said. 'Surely it was not the Countess herself?'

Henry Westwick answered, 'it was the Countess's brother'; and added, 'which comes to the same thing.'

After that, there was no more to be said—so long, at least, as Montbarry's brother was present. The talk flowed into other channels; and the Doctor went home.

But his morbid curiosity about the Countess was not set at rest yet. In his leisure moments he found himself wondering whether Lord Montbarry's family would succeed in stopping the marriage after all. And more than this, he was conscious of a growing desire to see the infatuated man himself. Every day during the brief interval before
the wedding, he looked in at the club, on the chance of hearing some news. Nothing had happened, so far as the club knew. The Countess's position was secure; Montbarry's resolution to be her husband was unshaken. They were both Roman Catholics, and they were to be married at the chapel in Spanish Place. So much the Doctor discovered about them—and no more.

On the day of the wedding, after a feeble struggle with himself, he actually sacrificed his patients and their guineas, and slipped away secretly to see the marriage. To the end of his life, he was angry with anybody who reminded him of what he had done on that day!

The wedding was strictly private. A close carriage stood at the church door; a few people, mostly of the lower class, and mostly old women, were scattered about the interior of the building. Here and there Doctor Wybrow detected the faces of some of his brethren of the club, attracted by curiosity, like himself. Four persons only stood before the altar—the bride and bridesmaid and their two witnesses. One of these last was an elderly woman, who might have been the Countess's companion or maid; the other was undoubtedly her brother, Baron Rivar. The bridal party (the bride herself included) wore their ordinary morning costume. Lord Montbarry, personally viewed, was a middle-aged military man of the ordinary type: nothing in the least remarkable distinguished him either in face or figure. Baron Rivar, again, in his way was another conventional representative of another well-known type. One sees his finely-pointed moustache, his bold eyes, his crisply-curling hair, and his dashing carriage of the head, repeated hundreds of times over on the Boulevards of Paris. The only noteworthy point about him was of the negative sort—he was not in the least like his sister. Even the officiating priest was only a harmless, humble-looking old man, who went through his duties resignedly, and felt visible rheumatic difficulties every time he bent his knees. The one remarkable person, the Countess herself, only raised her veil at the beginning of the ceremony, and presented nothing in her plain dress that was worth a second look. Never, on the face of it, was there a less interesting and less romantic marriage than this. From time to time the Doctor glanced round at the door or up at the galleries, vaguely anticipating the appearance of some protesting stranger, in possession of some terrible secret, commissioned to forbid the progress of the service. Nothing in the shape of an event occurred—nothing extraordinary, nothing dramatic. Bound fast together as man and wife, the two disappeared, followed by their witnesses, to sign the registers; and still Doctor Wybrow waited, and still he cherished the obstinate hope that something worth seeing must certainly happen yet.

The interval passed, and the married couple, returning to the church, walked together down the nave to the door. Doctor Wybrow drew back as they approached. To his confusion and surprise, the Countess discovered him. He heard her say to her husband, 'One moment; I see a friend.' Lord Montbarry bowed and waited. She stepped up to the Doctor, took his hand, and wrung it hard. He felt her overpowering black eyes looking at him through her veil. 'One step more, you see, on the way to the end!' She whispered those strange words, and returned to her husband. Before the Doctor could recover himself and follow her, Lord and Lady Montbarry had stepped into their carriage, and had driven away.

Outside the church door stood the three or four members of the club who, like Doctor Wybrow, had watched the ceremony out of curiosity. Near them was the bride's brother, waiting alone. He was evidently bent on seeing the man whom his sister had spoken to, in broad daylight. His bold eyes rested on the Doctor's face, with a momentary flash of suspicion in them. The cloud suddenly cleared away; the Baron smiled with charming courtesy, lifted his hat to his sister's friend, and walked off.

The members constituted themselves into a club conclave on the church steps. They began with the Baron. 'Damned ill-looking rascal!' They went on with Montbarry. 'Is he going to take that horrid woman with him to Ireland?' 'Not he! he can't face the tenantry; they know about Agnes Lockwood.' 'Well, but where is he going?' 'To Scotland.' 'Does she like that?' 'It's only for a fortnight; they come back to London, and go abroad.' 'And they will never return to England, eh?' "Who can tell? Did you see how she looked at Montbarry, when she had to lift her veil at the beginning of the service? In his place, I should have bolted. Did you see her, Doctor?' By this time, Doctor Wybrow had remembered his patients, and had heard enough of the club gossip. He followed the example of Baron Rivar, and walked off.

'One step more, you see, on the way to the end,' he repeated to himself, on his way home. 'What end?'

CHAPTER IV

On the day of the marriage Agnes Lockwood sat alone in the little drawing-room of her London lodgings, burning the letters which had been written to her by Montbarry in the bygone time.

The Countess's maliciously smart description of her, addressed to Doctor Wybrow, had not even hinted at the charm that most distinguished Agnes--the artless expression of goodness and purity which instantly attracted everyone who approached her. She looked by many years younger than she really was. With her fair complexion and her shy manner, it seemed only natural to speak of her as 'a girl,' although she was now really advancing towards thirty years of age. She lived alone with an old nurse devoted to her, on a modest little income which was
just enough to support the two. There were none of the ordinary signs of grief in her face, as she slowly tore the letters of her false lover in two, and threw the pieces into the small fire which had been lit to consume them. Unhappily for herself, she was one of those women who feel too deeply to find relief in tears. Pale and quiet, with cold trembling fingers, she destroyed the letters one by one without daring to read them again. She had torn the last of the series, and was still shrinking from throwing it after the rest into the swiftly destroying flame, when the old nurse came in, and asked if she would see ‘Master Henry,’ meaning that youngest member of the Westwick family, who had publicly declared his contempt for his brother in the smoking-room of the club.

Agnes hesitated. A faint tinge of colour stole over her face.

There had been a long past time when Henry Westwick had owned that he loved her. She had made her confession to him, acknowledging that her heart was given to his eldest brother. He had submitted to his disappointment; and they had met thenceforth as cousins and friends. Never before had she associated the idea of him with embarrassing recollections. But now, on the very day when his brother's marriage to another woman had consummated his brother's treason towards her, there was something vaguely repellent in the prospect of seeing him. The old nurse (who remembered them both in their cradles) observed her hesitation; and sympathising of course with the man, put in a timely word for Henry. ‘He says, he's going away, my dear; and he only wants to shake hands, and say good-bye.’ This plain statement of the case had its effect. Agnes decided on receiving her cousin.

He entered the room so rapidly that he surprised her in the act of throwing the fragments of Montbarry's last letter into the fire. She hurriedly spoke first.

‘You are leaving London very suddenly, Henry. Is it business? or pleasure?’

Instead of answering her, he pointed to the flaming letter, and to some black ashes of burnt paper lying lightly in the lower part of the fireplace.

‘Are you burning letters?’

‘Yes.’

‘His letters?’

‘Yes.’

He took her hand gently. ‘I had no idea I was intruding on you, at a time when you must wish to be alone. Forgive me, Agnes--I shall see you when I return.’

She signed to him, with a faint smile, to take a chair.

‘We have known one another since we were children,’ she said. ‘Why should I feel a foolish pride about myself in your presence? why should I have any secrets from you? I sent back all your brother's gifts to me some time ago. I have been advised to do more, to keep nothing that can remind me of him--in short, to burn his letters. I have taken the advice; but I own I shrank a little from destroying the last of the letters. No--not because it was the last, but because it had this in it.’ She opened her hand, and showed him a lock of Montbarry's hair, tied with a morsel of golden cord. ‘Well! well! let it go with the rest.’

She dropped it into the flame. For a while, she stood with her back to Henry, leaning on the mantel-piece, and looking into the fire. He took the chair to which she had pointed, with a strange contradiction of expression in his face: the tears were in his eyes, while the brows above were knit close in an angry frown. He muttered to himself, ‘Damn him!’

She rallied her courage, and looked at him again when she spoke. ‘Well, Henry, and why are you going away?’

‘I am out of spirits, Agnes, and I want a change.’

She paused before she spoke again. His face told her plainly that he was thinking of her when he made that reply. She was grateful to him, but her mind was not with him: her mind was still with the man who had deserted her. She turned round again to the fire.

‘Is it true,’ she asked, after a long silence, ‘that they have been married to-day?’

He answered ungraciously in the one necessary word:--‘Yes.’

‘Did you go to the church?’

He resented the question with an expression of indignant surprise. ‘Go to the church?’ he repeated. ‘I would as soon go to--’ He checked himself there. ‘How can you ask?’ he added in lower tones. ‘I have never spoken to Montbarry, I have not even seen him, since he treated you like the scoundrel and the fool that he is.’

She looked at him suddenly, without saying a word. He understood her, and begged her pardon. But he was still angry. ‘The reckoning comes to some men,’ he said, ‘even in this world. He will live to rue the day when he married that woman!’

Agnes took a chair by his side, and looked at him with a gentle surprise.

‘Is it quite reasonable to be so angry with her, because your brother preferred her to me?’ she asked.

Henry turned on her sharply.‘Do you defend the Countess, of all the people in the world?’

‘Why not?’ Agnes answered. ‘I know nothing against her. On the only occasion when we met, she appeared to be
a singularly timid, nervous person, looking dreadfully ill; and being indeed so ill that she fainted under the heat of my room. Why should we not do her justice? We know that she was innocent of any intention to wrong me; we know that she was not aware of my engagement--'

Henry lifted his hand impatiently, and stopped her. 'There is such a thing as being too just and too forgiving!' he interposed. 'I can't bear to hear you talk in that patient way, after the scandalously cruel manner in which you have been treated. Try to forget them both, Agnes. I wish to God I could help you to do it!'

Agnes laid her hand on his arm. 'You are very good to me, Henry; but you don't quite understand me. I was thinking of myself and my trouble in quite a different way, when you came in. I was wondering whether anything which has so entirely filled my heart, and so absorbed all that is best and truest in me, as my feeling for your brother, can really pass away as if it had never existed. I have destroyed the last visible things that remind me of him. In this world I shall see him no more. But is the tie that once bound us, completely broken? Am I as entirely parted from the good and evil fortune of his life as if we had never met and never loved? What do you think, Henry? I can hardly believe it.

'If you could bring the retribution on him that he has deserved,' Henry Westwick answered sternly, 'I might be inclined to agree with you.'

As that reply passed his lips, the old nurse appeared again at the door, announcing another visitor.

'I'm sorry to disturb you, my dear. But here is little Mrs. Ferrari wanting to know when she may say a few words to you.'

Agnes turned to Henry, before she replied. 'You remember Emily Bidwell, my favourite pupil years ago at the village school, and afterwards my maid? She left me, to marry an Italian courier, named Ferrari--and I am afraid it has not turned out very well. Do you mind my having her in here for a minute or two?'

Henry rose to take his leave. 'I should be glad to see Emily again at any other time,' he said. 'But it is best that I should go now. My mind is disturbed, Agnes; I might say things to you, if I stayed here any longer, which--which are better not said now. I shall cross the Channel by the mail to-night, and see how a few weeks' change will help me.' He took her hand. 'Is there anything in the world that I can do for you?' he asked very earnestly. She thanked him, and tried to release her hand. He held it with a tremulous lingering grasp. 'God bless you, Agnes!' he said in faltering tones, with his eyes on the ground. Her face flushed again, and the next instant turned paler than ever; she knew his heart as well as he knew it himself-- she was too distressed to speak. He lifted her hand to his lips, kissed it fervently, and, without looking at her again, left the room. The nurse hobbled after him to the head of the stairs: she had not forgotten the time when the younger brother had been the unsuccessful rival of the elder for the hand of Agnes. 'Don't be down-hearted, Master Henry,' whispered the old woman, with the unscrupulous common sense of persons in the lower rank of life. 'Try her again, when you come back!'

Left alone for a few moments, Agnes took a turn in the room, trying to compose herself. She paused before a little water-colour drawing on the wall, which had belonged to her mother: it was her own portrait when she was a child. 'How much happier we should be,' she thought to herself sadly, 'if we never grew up!'

The courier's wife was shown in--a little meek melancholy woman, with white eyelashes, and watery eyes, who curtseyed deferentially and was troubled with a small chronic cough. Agnes shook hands with her kindly. 'Well, Emily, what can I do for you?'

The courier's wife made rather a strange answer: 'I'm afraid to tell you, Miss.'

'Is it such a very difficult favour to grant? Sit down, and let me hear how you are going on. Perhaps the petition will slip out while we are talking. How does your husband behave to you?'

Emily's light grey eyes looked more watery than ever. She shook her head and sighed resignedly. 'I have no positive complaint to make against him, Miss. But I'm afraid he doesn't care about me; and he seems to take no interest in his home-- I may almost say he's tired of his home. It might be better for both of us, Miss, if he went travelling for a while-- not to mention the money, which is beginning to be wanted sadly.' She put her handkerchief to her eyes, and sighed again more resignedly than ever.

'I don't quite understand,' said Agnes. 'I thought your husband had an engagement to take some ladies to Switzerland and Italy?'

'That was his ill-luck, Miss. One of the ladies fell ill-- and the others wouldn't go without her. They paid him a month's salary as compensation. But they had engaged him for the autumn and winter-- and the loss is serious.'

'I am sorry to hear it, Emily. Let us hope he will soon have another chance.'

'It's not his turn, Miss, to be recommended when the next applications come to the couriers' office. You see, there are so many of them out of employment just now. If he could be privately recommended--' She stopped, and left the unfinished sentence to speak for itself.

Agnes understood her directly. 'You want my recommendation,' she rejoined. 'Why couldn't you say so at once?'

Emily blushed. 'It would be such a chance for my husband,' she answered confusedly. 'A letter, inquiring for a
good courier (a six months' engagement, Miss!) came to the office this morning. It's another man's turn to be chosen--and the secretary will recommend him. If my husband could only send his testimonials by the same post--with just a word in your name, Miss--it might turn the scale, as they say. A private recommendation between gentlefolks goes so far.' She stopped again, and sighed again, and looked down at the carpet, as if she had some private reason for feeling a little ashamed of herself.

Agnes began to be rather weary of the persistent tone of mystery in which her visitor spoke. 'If you want my interest with any friend of mine,' she said, 'why can't you tell me the name?'

The courier's wife began to cry. 'I'm ashamed to tell you, Miss.'

For the first time, Agnes spoke sharply. 'Nonsense, Emily! Tell me the name directly--or drop the subject--whichever you like best.'

Emily made a last desperate effort. She wrung her handkerchief hard in her lap, and let off the name as if she had been letting off a loaded gun:--'Lord Montbarry!'

Agnes rose and looked at her.

'You have disappointed me,' she said very quietly, but with a look which the courier's wife had never seen in her face before. 'Knowing what you know, you ought to be aware that it is impossible for me to communicate with Lord Montbarry. I always supposed you had some delicacy of feeling. I am sorry to find that I have been mistaken.'

Weak as she was, Emily had spirit enough to feel the reproof. She walked in her meek noiseless way to the door. 'I beg your pardon, Miss. I am not quite so bad as you think me. But I beg your pardon, all the same.'

She opened the door. Agnes called her back. There was something in the woman's apology that appealed irresistibly to her just and generous nature. 'Come,' she said; 'we must not part in this way. Let me not misunderstand you. What is it that you expected me to do?'

Emily was wise enough to answer this time without any reserve. 'My husband will send his testimonials, Miss, to Lord Montbarry in Scotland. I only wanted you to let him say in his letter that his wife has been known to you since she was a child, and that you feel some little interest in his welfare on that account. I don't ask it now, Miss. You have made me understand that I was wrong.'

Had she really been wrong? Past remembrances, as well as present troubles, pleaded powerfully with Agnes for the courier's wife. 'It seems only a small favour to ask,' she said, speaking under the impulse of kindness which was the strongest impulse in her nature. 'But I am not sure that I ought to allow my name to be mentioned in your husband's letter. Let me hear again exactly what he wishes to say.' Emily repeated the words--and then offered one of those suggestions, which have a special value of their own to persons unaccustomed to the use of their pens. 'Suppose you try, Miss, how it looks in writing?' Childish as the idea was, Agnes tried the experiment. 'If I let you mention me,' she said, 'we must at least decide what you are to say.' She wrote the words in the briefest and plainest form:--'I venture to state that my wife has been known from her childhood to Miss Agnes Lockwood, who feels some little interest in my welfare on that account.' Reduced to this one sentence, there was surely nothing in the reference to her name which implied that Agnes had permitted it, or that she was even aware of it. After a last struggle with herself, she handed the written paper to Emily. 'Your husband must copy it exactly, without altering anything,' she stipulated. 'On that condition, I grant your request.' Emily was not only thankful--she was really touched. Agnes hurried the little woman out of the room. 'Don't give me time to repent and take it back again,' she said. Emily vanished.

'Is the tie that once bound us completely broken? Am I as entirely parted from the good and evil fortune of his life as if we had never met and never loved?' Agnes looked at the clock on the mantel-piece. Not ten minutes since, those serious questions had been on her lips. It almost shocked her to think of the common-place manner in which they had already met with their reply. The mail of that night would appeal once more to Montbarry's remembrance of her--in the choice of a servant.

Two days later, the post brought a few grateful lines from Emily. Her husband had got the place. Ferrari was engaged, for six months certain, as Lord Montbarry's courier.

THE SECOND PART

CHAPTER V

After only one week of travelling in Scotland, my lord and my lady returned unexpectedly to London. Introduced to the mountains and lakes of the Highlands, her ladyship positively declined to improve her acquaintance with them. When she was asked for her reason, she answered with a Roman brevity, 'I have seen Switzerland.'

For a week more, the newly-married couple remained in London, in the strictest retirement. On one day in that week the nurse returned in a state of most uncustomary excitement from an errand on which Agnes had sent her. Passing the door of a fashionable dentist, she had met Lord Montbarry himself just leaving the house. The good woman's report described him, with malicious pleasure, as looking wretchedly ill. 'His cheeks are getting hollow, my
certainly not. I am Lady Montbarry; and I can positively assure you that Ferrari was treated with the greatest
courtesy inquired if any person had offended Ferrari, or quarrelled with him. The lady answered, 'To my knowledge,
even leaving an address at which his monthly salary (then due to him) could be paid. Amazed at this reply, the
convenient. She at once informed him that Ferrari had left the palace, without assigning any reason, and without
other than Lady Montbarry herself.
was waiting for him to try that way next), he found a pale woman with magnificent dark eyes, who proved to be no
had gone round to a side entrance opening on one of the narrow lanes of Venice. Here, standing at the door (as if she
had gone to pay him a visit. Ringing at the door that opened on the canal, and failing to make anyone hear him, he
Lady Montbarry, at one of the old Venetian palaces which they had hired for a term. Being a friend of Ferrari, he
narrative, when she was at last able to speak connectedly, entirely confirmed the nurse's report of it.
Westwick laughed. The wiser children took it seriously, and promised to let Agnes know.
was given. Agnes thankfully accepted it. For three happy months she lived under the roof of her friend. The girls
their playfellow, and the only stranger you will meet is the governess, whom I answer for your liking beforehand.
Pack up your things, and I will call for you to-morrow on my way to the train.' In those hearty terms the invitation
was given. Agnes thankfully accepted it. For three happy months she lived under the roof of her friend. The girls
hung round her in tears at her departure; the youngest of them wanted to go back with Agnes to London. Half in jest,
half in earnest, she said to her old friend at parting, 'If your governess leaves you, keep the place open for me.' Mrs.
Westwick laughed. The wiser children took it seriously, and promised to let Agnes know.
On the very day when Miss Lockwood returned to London, she was recalled to those associations with the past
which she was most anxious to forget. After the first kissings and greetings were over, the old nurse (who had been
left in charge at the lodgings) had some startling information to communicate, derived from the courier's wife.
'Here has been little Mrs. Ferrari, my dear, in a dreadful state of mind, inquiring when you would be back. Her
husband has left Lord Montbarry, without a word of warning--and nobody knows what has become of him.'
Agnes looked at her in astonishment. 'Are you sure of what you are saying?' she asked.
The nurse was quite sure. 'Why, Lord bless you! the news comes from the couriers' office in Golden Square--
from the secretary, Miss Agnes, the secretary himself!' Hearing this, Agnes began to feel alarmed as well as
surprised. It was still early in the evening. She at once sent a message to Mrs. Ferrari, to say that she had returned.
In an hour more the courier's wife appeared, in a state of agitation which it was not easy to control. Her
narrative, when she was at last able to speak connectedly, entirely confirmed the nurse's report of it.
After hearing from her husband with tolerable regularity from Paris, Rome, and Venice, Emily had twice written
to him afterwards-- and had received no reply. Feeling uneasy, she had gone to the office in Golden Square, to
inquire if he had been heard of there. The post of the morning had brought a letter to the secretary from a courier
then at Venice. It contained startling news of Ferrari. His wife had been allowed to take a copy of it, which she now
handed to Agnes to read.
The writer stated that he had recently arrived in Venice. He had previously heard that Ferrari was with Lord and
Lady Montbarry, at one of the old Venetian palaces which they had hired for a term. Being a friend of Ferrari, he
had gone to pay him a visit. Ringing at the door that opened on the canal, and failing to make anyone hear him, he
had gone round to a side entrance opening on one of the narrow lanes of Venice. Here, standing at the door (as if she
was waiting for him to try that way next), he found a pale woman with magnificent dark eyes, who proved to be no
other than Lady Montbarry herself.
She asked, in Italian, what he wanted. He answered that he wanted to see the courier Ferrari, if it was quite
convenient. She at once informed him that Ferrari had left the palace, without assigning any reason, and without
even leaving an address at which his monthly salary (then due to him) could be paid. Amazed at this reply, the
courier inquired if any person had offended Ferrari, or quarrelled with him. The lady answered, 'To my knowledge,
certainly not. I am Lady Montbarry; and I can positively assure you that Ferrari was treated with the greatest
kindness in this house. We are as much astonished as you are at his extraordinary disappearance. If you should hear
of him, pray let us know, so that we may at least pay him the money which is due.'

After one or two more questions (quite readily answered) relating to the date and the time of day at which Ferrari
had left the palace, the courier took his leave.

He at once entered on the necessary investigations--without the slightest result so far as Ferrari was concerned.
Nobody had seen him. Nobody appeared to have been taken into his confidence. Nobody knew anything (that is to
say, anything of the slightest importance) even about persons so distinguished as Lord and Lady Montbarry. It was
reported that her ladyship's English maid had left her, before the disappearance of Ferrari, to return to her relatives
in her own country, and that Lady Montbarry had taken no steps to supply her place. His lordship was described as
being in delicate health. He lived in the strictest retirement--nobody was admitted to him, not even his own countrypmen. A stupid old woman was discovered who did the housework at the palace, arriving in the morning and
going away again at night. She had never seen the lost courier-- she had never even seen Lord Montbarry, who was
then confined to his room. Her ladyship, 'a most gracious and adorable mistress,' was in constant attendance on her
noble husband. There was no other servant then in the house (so far as the old woman knew) but herself. The meals
were sent in from a restaurant. My lord, it was said, disliked strangers. My lord's brother-in-law, the Baron, was
generally shut up in a remote part of the palace, occupied (the gracious mistress said) with experiments in chemistry.
The experiments sometimes made a nasty smell. A doctor had latterly been called in to his lordship--an Italian
doctor, long resident in Venice. Inquiries being addressed to this gentleman (a physician of undoubted capacity and
respectability), it turned out that he also had never seen Ferrari, having been summoned to the palace (as his
memorandum book showed) at a date subsequent to the courier's disappearance. The doctor described Lord
Montbarry's malady as bronchitis. So far, there was no reason to feel any anxiety, though the attack was a sharp one.
If alarming symptoms should appear, he had arranged with her ladyship to call in another physician. For the rest, it
was impossible to speak too highly of my lady; night and day, she was at her lord's bedside.

With these particulars began and ended the discoveries made by Ferrari's courier-friend. The police were on the
look-out for the lost man-- and that was the only hope which could be held forth for the present, to Ferrari's wife.

'What do you think of it, Miss?' the poor woman asked eagerly. 'What would you advise me to do?'

Agnes was at a loss how to answer her; it was an effort even to listen to what Emily was saying. The references
in the courier's letter to Montbarry--the report of his illness, the melancholy picture of his secluded life--had
reopened the old wound. She was not even thinking of the lost Ferrari; her mind was at Venice, by the sick man's
bedside.

'I hardly know what to say,' she answered. 'I have had no experience in serious matters of this kind.'

'Do you think it would help you, Miss, if you read my husband's letters to me? There are only three of them--
they won't take long to read.'

Agnes compassionately read the letters.

They were not written in a very tender tone. 'Dear Emily,' and 'Yours affectionately'-- these conventional phrases,
were the only phrases of endearment which they contained. In the first letter, Lord Montbarry was not very
favourably spoken of:--'We leave Paris to-morrow. I don't much like my lord. He is proud and cold, and, between
ourselves, stingy in money matters. I have had to dispute such trifles as a few centimes in the hotel bill; and twice
already, some sharp remarks have passed between the newly-married couple, in consequence of her ladyship's
freedom in purchasing pretty tempting things at the shops in Paris. 'I can't afford it; you must keep to your
allowance.' She has had to hear those words already. For my part, I like her. She has the nice, easy foreign manners-
she talks to me as if I was a human being like herself.'

The second letter was dated from Rome.

'My lord's caprices' (Ferrari wrote) 'have kept us perpetually on the move. He is becoming incurably restless. I
suspect he is uneasy in his mind. Painful recollections, I should say--I find him constantly reading old letters, when
her ladyship is not present. We were to have stopped at Genoa, but he hurried us on. The same thing at Florence.
Here, at Rome, my lady insists on resting. Her brother has met us at this place. There has been a quarrel already (the
lady's maid tells me) between my lord and the Baron. The latter wanted to borrow money of the former. His lordship
refused in language which offended Baron Rivar. My lady pacified them, and made them shake hands.'

The third, and last letter, was from Venice.

'More of my lord's economy! Instead of staying at the hotel, we have hired a damp, mouldy, rambling old palace.
My lady insists on having the best suites of rooms wherever we go--and the palace comes cheaper for a two months'
term. My lord tried to get it for longer; he says the quiet of Venice is good for his nerves. But a foreign speculator
has secured the palace, and is going to turn it into an hotel. The Baron is still with us, and there have been more
disagreements about money matters. I don't like the Baron-- and I don't find the attractions of my lady grow on me.
She was much nicer before the Baron joined us. My lord is a punctual paymaster; it's a matter of honour with him;
he hates parting with his money, but he does it because he has given his word. I receive my salary regularly at the end of each month—not a franc extra, though I have done many things which are not part of a courier's proper work. Fancy the Baron trying to borrow money of me! he is an inveterate gambler. I didn't believe it when my lady's maid first told me so—but I have seen enough since to satisfy me that she was right. I have seen other things besides, which—well! which don’t increase my respect for my lady and the Baron. The maid says she means to give warning to leave. She is a respectable British female, and doesn't take things quite so easily as I do. It is a dull life here. No going into company—not company at home—not a creature sees my lord—not even the consul, or the banker. When he goes out, he goes alone, and generally towards nightfall. Indoors, he shuts himself up in his own room with his books, and sees as little of his wife and the Baron as possible. I fancy things are coming to a crisis here. If my lord's suspicions are once awakened, the consequences will be terrible. Under certain provocations, the noble Montbarry is a man who would stick at nothing. However, the pay is good—and I can't afford to talk of leaving the place, like my lady's maid.'

Agnes handed back the letters—so suggestive of the penalty paid already for his own infatuation by the man who had deserted her!—with feelings of shame and distress, which made her no fit counsellor for the helpless woman who depended on her advice.

'The one thing I can suggest,' she said, after first speaking some kind words of comfort and hope, 'is that we should consult a person of greater experience than ours. Suppose I write and ask my lawyer (who is also my friend and trustee) to come and advise us to-morrow after his business hours?'

Emily eagerly and gratefully accepted the suggestion. An hour was arranged for the meeting on the next day; the correspondence was left under the care of Agnes; and the courier's wife took her leave.

Weary and heartsick, Agnes lay down on the sofa, to rest and compose herself. The careful nurse brought in a reviving cup of tea. Her quaint gossip about herself and her occupations while Agnes had been away, acted as a relief to her mistress's overburdened mind. They were still talking quietly, when they were startled by a loud knock at the house door. Hurried footsteps ascended the stairs. The door of the sitting-room was thrown open violently; the courier's wife rushed in like a mad woman. 'He's dead! They've murdered him!' Those wild words were all she could say. She dropped on her knees at the foot of the sofa—held out her hand with something clasped in it—and fell back in a swoon.

The nurse, signing to Agnes to open the window, took the necessary measures to restore the fainting woman. 'What's this?' she exclaimed. 'Here's a letter in her hand. See what it is, Miss.'

The open envelope was addressed (evidently in a feigned hand-writing) to 'Mrs. Ferrari.' The post-mark was 'Venice.' The contents of the envelope were a sheet of foreign note-paper, and a folded enclosure.

On the note-paper, one line only was written. It was again in a feigned handwriting, and it contained these words:

'To console you for the loss of your husband'

Agnes opened the enclosure next.

It was a Bank of England note for a thousand pounds.

CHAPTER VI

The next day, the friend and legal adviser of Agnes Lockwood, Mr. Troy, called on her by appointment in the evening.

Mrs. Ferrari—still persisting in the conviction of her husband's death—had sufficiently recovered to be present at the consultation. Assisted by Agnes, she told the lawyer the little that was known relating to Ferrari's disappearance, and then produced the correspondence connected with that event. Mr. Troy read (first) the three letters addressed by Ferrari to his wife; (secondly) the letter written by Ferrari's courier-friend, describing his visit to the palace and his interview with Lady Montbarry; and (thirdly) the one line of anonymous writing which had accompanied the extraordinary gift of a thousand pounds to Ferrari's wife.

Well known, at a later period, as the lawyer who acted for Lady Lydiard, in the case of theft, generally described as the case of 'My Lady's Money,' Mr. Troy was not only a man of learning and experience in his profession—he was also a man who had seen something of society at home and abroad. He possessed a keen eye for character, a quaint humour, and a kindly nature which had not been deteriorated even by a lawyer's professional experience of mankind. With all these personal advantages, it is a question, nevertheless, whether he was the fittest adviser whom Agnes could have chosen under the circumstances. Little Mrs. Ferrari, with many domestic merits, was an essentially commonplace woman. Mr. Troy was the last person living who was likely to attract her sympathies—he was the exact opposite of a commonplace man.

'She looks very ill, poor thing!' In these words the lawyer opened the business of the evening, referring to Mrs. Ferrari as unceremoniously as if she had been out of the room.

'She has suffered a terrible shock,' Agnes answered.
Mr. Troy turned to Mrs. Ferrari, and looked at her again, with the interest due to the victim of a shock. He drummed absently with his fingers on the table. At last he spoke to her.

'My good lady, you don't really believe that your husband is dead?'

Mrs. Ferrari put her handkerchief to her eyes. The word 'dead' was ineffectual to express her feelings. 'Murdered!' she said sternly, behind her handkerchief.

'Why? And by whom?' Mr. Troy asked.

Mrs. Ferrari seemed to have some difficulty in answering. 'You have read my husband's letters, sir,' she began. 'I believe he discovered--' She got as far as that, and there she stopped.

'What did he discover?'

There are limits to human patience--even the patience of a bereaved wife. This cool question irritated Mrs. Ferrari into expressing herself plainly at last.

'He discovered Lady Montbarry and the Baron!' she answered, with a burst of hysterical vehemence. 'The Baron is no more that vile woman's brother than I am. The wickedness of those two wretches came to my poor dear husband's knowledge. The lady's maid left her place on account of it. If Ferrari had gone away too, he would have been alive at this moment. They have killed him. I say they have killed him, to prevent it from getting to Lord Montbarry's ears.' So, in short sharp sentences, and in louder and louder accents, Mrs. Ferrari stated her opinion of the case.

Still keeping his own view in reserve, Mr. Troy listened with an expression of satirical approval.

'Very strongly stated, Mrs. Ferrari,' he said. 'You build up your sentences well; you clinch your conclusions in a workmanlike manner. If you had been a man, you would have made a good lawyer-- you would have taken juries by the scruff of their necks. Complete the case, my good lady--complete the case. Tell us next who sent you this letter, enclosing the bank-note. The "two wretches" who murdered Mr. Ferrari would hardly put their hands in their pockets and send you a thousand pounds. Who is it--eh? I see the post-mark on the letter is "Venice." Have you any friend in that interesting city, with a large heart, and a purse to correspond, who has been let into the secret and who wishes to console you anonymously?'

It was not easy to reply to this. Mrs. Ferrari began to feel the first inward approaches of something like hatred towards Mr. Troy. 'I don't understand you, sir,' she answered. 'I don't think this is a joking matter.'

Agnes interfered, for the first time. She drew her chair a little nearer to her legal counsellor and friend.

'What is the most probable explanation, in your opinion?' she asked.

'I shall offend Mrs. Ferrari if I tell you,' Mr. Troy answered.

'No, sir, you won't!' cried Mrs. Ferrari, hating Mr. Troy undisguisedly by this time.

The lawyer leaned back in his chair. 'Very well,' he said, in his most good-humoured manner. 'Let's have it out. Observe, madam, I don't dispute your view of the position of affairs at the palace in Venice. You have your husband's letters to justify you; and you have also the significant fact that Lady Montbarry's maid did really leave the house. We will say, then, that Lord Montbarry has presumably been made the victim of a foul wrong-- that Mr. Ferrari was the first to find it out--and that the guilty persons had reason to fear, not only that he would acquaint Lord Montbarry with his discovery, but that he would be a principal witness against them if the scandal was made public in a court of law. Now mark! Admitting all this, I draw a totally different conclusion from the conclusion at which you have arrived. Here is your husband left in this miserable household of three, under very awkward circumstances for him. What does he do? But for the bank-note and the written message sent to you with it, I should say that he had wisely withdrawn himself from association with a disgraceful discovery and exposure, by taking secretly to flight. The money modifies this view--unfavourably so far as Mr. Ferrari is concerned. I still believe he is keeping out of the way. But I now say he is paid for keeping out of the way--and that bank-note there on the table is the price of his absence, sent by the guilty persons to his wife.'

Mrs. Ferrari's watery grey eyes brightened suddenly; Mrs. Ferrari's dull drab-coloured complexion became enlivened by a glow of brilliant red.

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Mrs. Ferrari's watery grey eyes brightened suddenly; Mrs. Ferrari's dull drab-coloured complexion became enlivened by a glow of brilliant red.
that I respect you for speaking so warmly in his defence. At the same time, remember, that I am bound, in such a serious matter as this, to tell you what is really in my mind. I can have no intention of offending you, seeing that I am a total stranger to you and to Mr. Ferrari. A thousand pounds is a large sum of money; and a poor man may excusably be tempted by it to do nothing worse than to keep out of the way for a while. My only interest, acting on your behalf, is to get at the truth. If you will give me time, I see no reason to despair of finding your husband yet.'

Ferrari's wife listened, without being convinced: her narrow little mind, filled to its extreme capacity by her unfavourable opinion of Mr. Troy, had no room left for the process of correcting its first impression. 'I am much obliged to you, sir;' was all she said. Her eyes were more communicative--her eyes added, in their language, 'You may say what you please; I will never forgive you to my dying day.'

Mr. Troy gave it up. He composedly wheeled his chair around, put his hands in his pockets, and looked out of window.

After an interval of silence, the drawing-room door was opened.

Mr. Troy wheeled round again briskly to the table, expecting to see Agnes. To his surprise there appeared, in her place, a perfect stranger to him-- a gentleman, in the prime of life, with a marked expression of pain and embarrassment on his handsome face. He looked at Mr. Troy, and bowed gravely.

'I am so unfortunate as to have brought news to Miss Agnes Lockwood which has greatly distressed her,' he said. 'She has retired to her room. I am requested to make her excuses, and to speak to you in her place.'

Having introduced himself in those terms, he noticed Mrs. Ferrari, and held out his hand to her kindly. 'It is some years since we last met, Emily,' he said. 'I am afraid you have almost forgotten the "Master Henry" of old times.' Emily, in some little confusion, made her acknowledgments, and begged to know if she could be of any use to Miss Lockwood. 'The old nurse is with her,' Henry answered; 'they will be better left together.' He turned once more to Mr. Troy. 'I ought to tell you,' he said, 'that my name is Henry Westwick. I am the younger brother of the late Lord Montbarry.'

'The late Lord Montbarry!' Mr. Troy exclaimed.

'My brother died at Venice yesterday evening. There is the telegram.' With that startling answer, he handed the paper to Mr. Troy.

The message was in these words:

'Lady Montbarry, Venice. To Stephen Robert Westwick, Newbury's Hotel, London. It is useless to take the journey. Lord Montbarry died of bronchitis, at 8.40 this evening. All needful details by post.'

'Was this expected, sir?' the lawyer asked.

'I cannot say that it has taken us entirely by surprise, Henry answered. 'My brother Stephen (who is now the head of the family) received a telegram three days since, informing him that alarming symptoms had declared themselves, and that a second physician had been called in. He telegraphed back to say that he had left Ireland for London, on his way to Venice, and to direct that any further message might be sent to his hotel. The reply came in a second telegram. It announced that Lord Montbarry was in a state of insensibility, and that, in his brief intervals of consciousness, he recognised nobody. My brother was advised to wait in London for later information. The third telegram is now in your hands. That is all I know, up to the present time.'

Happening to look at the courier's wife, Mr. Troy was struck by the expression of blank fear which showed itself in the woman's face.

'Mrs. Ferrari,' he said, 'have you heard what Mr. Westwick has just told me?'

'Every word of it, sir.'

'Have you any questions to ask?'

'No, sir.'

'You seem to be alarmed,' the lawyer persisted. 'Is it still about your husband?'

'I shall never see my husband again, sir. I have thought so all along, as you know. I feel sure of it now.'

'Sure of it, after what you have just heard?'

'Yes, sir.'

'Can you tell me why?'

'No, sir. It's a feeling I have. I can't tell why.'

'Oh, a feeling?' Mr. Troy repeated, in a tone of compassionate contempt. 'When it comes to feelings, my good soul!--' He left the sentence unfinished, and rose to take his leave of Mr. Westwick. The truth is, he began to feel puzzled himself, and he did not choose to let Mrs. Ferrari see it. 'Accept the expression of my sympathy, sir;' he said to Mr. Westwick politely. 'I wish you good evening.'

Henry turned to Mrs. Ferrari as the lawyer closed the door. 'I have heard of your trouble, Emily, from Miss Lockwood. Is there anything I can do to help you?'

'Nothing, sir, thank you. Perhaps, I had better go home after what has happened? I will call to-morrow, and see if
I can be of any use to Miss Agnes. I am very sorry for her.' She stole away, with her formal curtsey, her noiseless step, and her obstinate resolution to take the gloomiest view of her husband's case.

Henry Westwick looked round him in the solitude of the little drawing-room. There was nothing to keep him in the house, and yet he lingered in it. It was something to be even near Agnes--to see the things belonging to her that were scattered about the room. There, in the corner, was her chair, with her embroidery on the work-table by its side. On the little easel near the window was her last drawing, not quite finished yet. The book she had been reading lay on the sofa, with her tiny pencil-case in it to mark the place at which she had left off. One after another, he looked at the objects that reminded him of the woman whom he loved--took them up tenderly-- and laid them down again with a sigh. Ah, how far, how unattainably far from him, she was still! 'She will never forget Montbarry,' he thought to himself as he took up his hat to go. 'Not one of us feels his death as she feels it. Miserable, miserable wretch--how she loved him!' 

In the street, as Henry closed the house-door, he was stopped by a passing acquaintance--a wearisome inquisitive man--doubly unwelcome to him, at that moment. 'Sad news, Westwick, this about your brother. Rather an unexpected death, wasn't it? We never heard at the club that Montbarry's lungs were weak. What will the insurance offices do?'

Henry started; he had never thought of his brother's life insurance. What could the offices do but pay? A death by bronchitis, certified by two physicians, was surely the least disputable of all deaths. 'I wish you hadn't put that question into my head!' he broke out irritably. 'Ah!' said his friend, 'you think the widow will get the money? So do I! so do I!'

CHAPTER VII

Some days later, the insurance offices (two in number) received the formal announcement of Lord Montbarry's death, from her ladyship's London solicitors. The sum insured in each office was five thousand pounds--on which one year's premium only had been paid. In the face of such a pecuniary emergency as this, the Directors thought it desirable to consider their position. The medical advisers of the two offices, who had recommended the insurance of Lord Montbarry's life, were called into council over their own reports. The result excited some interest among persons connected with the business of life insurance. Without absolutely declining to pay the money, the two offices (acting in concert) decided on sending a commission of inquiry to Venice, 'for the purpose of obtaining further information.'

Mr. Troy received the earliest intelligence of what was going on. He wrote at once to communicate his news to Agnes; adding, what he considered to be a valuable hint, in these words:

'You are intimately acquainted, I know, with Lady Barville, the late Lord Montbarry's eldest sister. The solicitors employed by her husband are also the solicitors to one of the two insurance offices. There may possibly be something in the report of the commission of inquiry touching on Ferrari's disappearance. Ordinary persons would not be permitted, of course, to see such a document. But a sister of the late lord is so near a relative as to be an exception to general rules. If Sir Theodore Barville puts it on that footing, the lawyers, even if they do not allow his wife to look at the report, will at least answer any discreet questions she may ask referring to it. Let me hear what you think of this suggestion, at your earliest convenience.'

The reply was received by return of post. Agnes declined to avail herself of Mr. Troy's proposal.

'You are intimately acquainted, I know, with Lady Barville, the late Lord Montbarry's eldest sister. The solicitors employed by her husband are also the solicitors to one of the two insurance offices. There may possibly be something in the report of the commission of inquiry touching on Ferrari's disappearance. Ordinary persons would not be permitted, of course, to see such a document. But a sister of the late lord is so near a relative as to be an exception to general rules. If Sir Theodore Barville puts it on that footing, the lawyers, even if they do not allow his wife to look at the report, will at least answer any discreet questions she may ask referring to it. Let me hear what you think of this suggestion, at your earliest convenience.'

The reply was received by return of post. Agnes declined to avail herself of Mr. Troy's proposal.

'My interference, innocent as it was,' she wrote, 'has already been productive of such deplorable results, that I cannot and dare not stir any further in the case of Ferrari. If I had not consented to let that unfortunate man refer to me by name, the late Lord Montbarry would never have engaged him, and his wife would have been spared the misery and suspense from which she is suffering now. I would not even look at the report to which you allude if it was placed in my hands--I have heard more than enough already of that hideous life in the palace at Venice. If Mrs. Ferrari chooses to address herself to Lady Barville (with your assistance), that is of course quite another thing. But, even in this case, I must make it a positive condition that my name shall not be mentioned. Forgive me, dear Mr. Troy! I am very unhappy, and very unreasonable--but I am only a woman, and you must not expect too much from me.'

Foiled in this direction, the lawyer next advised making the attempt to discover the present address of Lady Montbarry's English maid. This excellent suggestion had one drawback: it could only be carried out by spending money--and there was no money to spend. Mrs. Ferrari shrank from the bare idea of making any use of the thousand-pound note. It had been deposited in the safe keeping of a bank. If it was even mentioned in her hearing, she shuddered and referred to it, with melodramatic fervour, as 'my husband's blood-money!'

So, under stress of circumstances, the attempt to solve the mystery of Ferrari's disappearance was suspended for a while.

It was the last month of the year 1860. The commission of inquiry was already at work; having begun its investigations on December 6. On the 10th, the term for which the late Lord Montbarry had hired the Venetian
palace, expired. News by telegram reached the insurance offices that Lady Montbarry had been advised by her lawyers to leave for London with as little delay as possible. Baron Rivar, it was believed, would accompany her to England, but would not remain in that country, unless his services were absolutely required by her ladyship. The Baron, 'well known as an enthusiastic student of chemistry,' had heard of certain recent discoveries in connection with that science in the United States, and was anxious to investigate them personally.

These items of news, collected by Mr. Troy, were duly communicated to Mrs. Ferrari, whose anxiety about her husband made her a frequent, a too frequent, visitor at the lawyer's office. She attempted to relate what she had heard to her good friend and protectress. Agnes steadily refused to listen, and positively forbade any further conversation relating to Lord Montbarry's wife, now that Lord Montbarry was no more. 'You have Mr. Troy to advise you,' she said; 'and you are welcome to what little money I can spare, if money is wanted. All I ask in return is that you will not distress me. I am trying to separate myself from remembrances--her voice faltered; she paused to control herself--from remembrances,' she resumed, 'which are sadder than ever since I have heard of Lord Montbarry's death. Help me by your silence to recover my spirits, if I can. Let me hear nothing more, until I can rejoice with you that your husband is found.'

Time advanced to the 13th of the month; and more information of the interesting sort reached Mr. Troy. The labours of the insurance commission had come to an end--the report had been received from Venice on that day.

**CHAPTER VIII**

On the 14th the Directors and their legal advisers met for the reading of the report, with closed doors. These were the terms in which the Commissioners related the results of their inquiry: 'Private and confidential.

'We have the honour to inform our Directors that we arrived in Venice on December 6, 1860. On the same day we proceeded to the palace inhabited by Lord Montbarry at the time of his last illness and death.

'Ve were received with all possible courtesy by Lady Montbarry's brother, Baron Rivar. "My sister was her husband's only attendant throughout his illness," the Baron informed us. "She is overwhelmed by grief and fatigue--or she would have been here to receive you personally. What are your wishes, gentlemen? and what can I do for you in her ladyship's place?"

'Ve are it our instructions, we answered that the death and burial of Lord Montbarry abroad made it desirable to obtain more complete information relating to his illness, and to the circumstances which had attended it, than could be conveyed in writing. We explained that the law provided for the lapse of a certain interval of time before the payment of the sum assured, and we expressed our wish to conduct the inquiry with the most respectful consideration for her ladyship's feelings, and for the convenience of any other members of the family inhabiting the house.

'To this the Baron replied, "I am the only member of the family living here, and I and the palace are entirely at your disposal." From first to last we found this gentleman perfectly straightforward, and most amiably willing to assist us.

'Ve with the one exception of her ladyship's room, we went over the whole of the palace the same day. It is an immense place only partially furnished. The first floor and part of the second floor were the portions of it that had been inhabited by Lord Montbarry and the members of the household. We saw the bedchamber, at one extremity of the palace, in which his lordship died, and the small room communicating with it, which he used as a study. Next to this was a large apartment or hall, the doors of which he habitually kept locked, his object being (as we were informed) to pursue his studies uninterruptedly in perfect solitude. On the other side of the large hall were the bedchamber occupied by her ladyship, and the dressing-room in which the maid slept previous to her departure for England. Beyond these were the dining and reception rooms, opening into an ante-chamber, which gave access to the grand staircase of the palace.

'The only inhabited rooms on the second floor were the sitting-room and bedroom occupied by Baron Rivar, and another room at some distance from it, which had been the bedroom of the courier Ferrari.

'The rooms on the third floor and on the basement were completely unfurnished, and in a condition of great neglect. We inquired if there was anything to be seen below the basement-- and we were at once informed that there were vaults beneath, which we were at perfect liberty to visit.

'Ve went down, so as to leave no part of the palace unexplored. The vaults were, it was believed, used as dungeons in the old times-- say, some centuries since. Air and light were only partially admitted to these dismal places by two long shafts of winding construction, which communicated with the back yard of the palace, and the openings of which, high above the ground, were protected by iron gratings. The stone stairs leading down into the vaults could be closed at will by a heavy trap-door in the back hall, which we found open. The Baron himself led the way down the stairs. We remarked that it might be awkward if that trap-door fell down and closed the opening behind us. The Baron smiled at the idea. "Don't be alarmed, gentlemen," he said; "the door is safe. I had an interest in seeing to it myself, when we first inhabited the palace. My favourite study is the study of experimental chemistry-
Lord Montbarry had been out of order for some time past—nervous and irritable. He first complained of having taken cold on November 13 last; he passed a wakeful and feverish night, and remained in bed the next day. Her ladyship proposed sending for medical advice. He refused to allow her to do this, saying that he could quite easily be his own doctor in such a trifling matter as a cold. Some hot lemonade was made at his request, with a view to producing perspiration. Lord Montbarry's maid having left her at that time, the courier Ferrari (then the only servant in the house) went out to buy the lemons. Her ladyship made the drink with her own hands. It was successful in producing perspiration. Lady Montbarry's maid having left her at that time, the courier Ferrari (then the only servant in the house) went out to buy the lemons. Her ladyship made the drink with her own hands. It was successful in producing perspiration. Lord Montbarry had some hours of sleep afterwards. Later in the day, having need of

- and my workshop, since we have been in Venice, is down here.'

'These last words explained a curious smell in the vaults, which we noticed the moment we entered them. We can only describe the smell by saying that it was of a twofold sort—faintly aromatic, as it were, in its first effect, but with some after-odour very sickening in our nostrils. The Baron's furnaces and retorts, and other things, were all there to speak for themselves, together with some packages of chemicals, having the name and address of the person who had supplied them plainly visible on their labels. "Not a pleasant place for study," Baron Rivar observed, "but my sister is timid. She has a horror of chemical smells and explosions-- and she has banished me to these lower regions, so that my experiments may neither be smelt nor heard." He held out his hands, on which we had noticed that he wore gloves in the house. "Accidents will happen sometimes," he said, "no matter how careful a man may be. I burnt my hands severely in trying a new combination the other day, and they are only recovering now."

'We mention these otherwise unimportant incidents, in order to show that our exploration of the palace was not impeded by any attempt at concealment. We were even admitted to her ladyship's own room-- on a subsequent occasion, when she went out to take the air. Our instructions recommended us to examine his lordship's residence, because the extreme privacy of his life at Venice, and the remarkable departure of the only two servants in the house, might have some suspicious connection with the nature of his death. We found nothing to justify suspicion.

'As to his lordship's retired way of life, we have conversed on the subject with the consul and the banker—the only two strangers who held any communication with him. He called once at the bank to obtain money on his letter of credit, and excused himself from accepting an invitation to visit the banker at his private residence, on the ground of delicate health. His lordship wrote to the same effect on sending his card to the consul, to excuse himself from personally returning that gentleman's visit to the palace. We have seen the letter, and we beg to offer the following copy of it. "Many years passed in India have injured my constitution. I have ceased to go into society; the one occupation of my life now is the study of Oriental literature. The air of Italy is better for me than the air of England, or I should never have left home. Pray accept the apologies of a student and an invalid. The active part of my life is at an end." The self-seclusion of his lordship seems to us to be explained in these brief lines. We have not, however, on that account spared our inquiries in other directions. Nothing to excite a suspicion of anything wrong has come to our knowledge.

'As to the departure of the lady's maid, we have seen the woman's receipt for her wages, in which it is expressly stated that she left Lady Montbarry's service because she disliked the Continent, and wished to get back to her own country. This is not an uncommon result of taking English servants to foreign parts. Lady Montbarry has informed us that she abstained from engaging another maid in consequence of the extreme dislike which his lordship expressed to having strangers in the house, in the state of his health at that time.

'The disappearance of the courier Ferrari is, in itself, unquestionably a suspicious circumstance. Neither her ladyship nor the Baron can explain it; and no investigation that we could make has thrown the smallest light on this event, or has justified us in associating it, directly or indirectly, with the object of our inquiry. We have even gone the length of examining the portmanteau which Ferrari left behind him. It contains nothing but clothes and linen—no money, and not even a scrap of paper in the pockets of the clothes. The portmanteau remains in charge of the police.

'We have also found opportunities of speaking privately to the old woman who attends to the rooms occupied by her ladyship and the Baron. She was recommended to fill this situation by the keeper of the restaurant who has supplied the meals to the family throughout the period of their residence at the palace. Her character is most favourably spoken of. Unfortunately, her limited intelligence makes her of no value as a witness. We were patient and careful in questioning her, and we found her perfectly willing to answer us; but we could elicit nothing which is worth including in the present report.

'On the second day of our inquiries, we had the honour of an interview with Lady Montbarry. Her ladyship looked miserably worn and ill, and seemed to be quite at a loss to understand what we wanted with her. Baron Rivar, who introduced us, explained the nature of our errand in Venice, and took pains to assure her that it was a purely formal duty on which we were engaged. Having satisfied her ladyship on this point, he discreetly left the room.

'The questions which we addressed to Lady Montbarry related mainly, of course, to his lordship's illness. The answers, given with great nervousness of manner, but without the slightest appearance of reserve, informed us of the facts that follow:

'Lord Montbarry had been out of order for some time past—nervous and irritable. He first complained of having taken cold on November 13 last; he passed a wakeful and feverish night, and remained in bed the next day. Her ladyship proposed sending for medical advice. He refused to allow her to do this, saying that he could quite easily be his own doctor in such a trifling matter as a cold. Some hot lemonade was made at his request, with a view to producing perspiration. Lady Montbarry's maid having left her at that time, the courier Ferrari (then the only servant in the house) went out to buy the lemons. Her ladyship made the drink with her own hands. It was successful in producing perspiration—and Lord Montbarry had some hours of sleep afterwards. Later in the day, having need of
Ferrari's services, Lady Montbarry rang for him. The bell was not answered. Baron Rivar searched for the man, in the palace and out of it, in vain. From that time forth not a trace of Ferrari could be discovered. This happened on November 14.

"On the night of the 14th, the feverish symptoms accompanying his lordship's cold returned. They were in part perhaps attributable to the annoyance and alarm caused by Ferrari's mysterious disappearance. It had been impossible to conceal the circumstance, as his lordship rang repeatedly for the courier; insisting that the man should relieve Lady Montbarry and the Baron by taking their places during the night at his bedside.

"On the 15th (the day on which the old woman first came to do the housework), his lordship complained of sore throat, and of a feeling of oppression on the chest. On this day, and again on the 16th, her ladyship and the Baron entreated him to see a doctor. He still refused. "I don't want strange faces about me; my cold will run its course, in spite of the doctor,"-- that was his answer. On the 17th he was so much worse that it was decided to send for medical help whether he liked it or not. Baron Rivar, after inquiry at the consul's, secured the services of Doctor Bruno, well known as an eminent physician in Venice; with the additional recommendation of having resided in England, and having made himself acquainted with English forms of medical practice.

"Thus far our account of his lordship's illness has been derived from statements made by Lady Montbarry. The narrative will now be most fitly continued in the language of the doctor's own report, herewith subjoined.

"My medical diary informs me that I first saw the English Lord Montbarry, on November 17. He was suffering from a sharp attack of bronchitis. Some precious time had been lost, through his obstinate objection to the presence of a medical man at his bedside. Generally speaking, he appeared to be in a delicate state of health. His nervous system was out of order--he was at once timid and contradictory. When I spoke to him in English, he answered in Italian; and when I tried him in Italian, he went back to English. It mattered little--the malady had already made such progress that he could only speak a few words at a time, and those in a whisper.

"I at once applied the necessary remedies. Copies of my prescriptions (with translation into English) accompany the present statement, and are left to speak for themselves.

"For the next three days I was in constant attendance on my patient. He answered to the remedies employed--improving slowly, but decidedly. I could conscientiously assure Lady Montbarry that no danger was to be apprehended thus far. She was indeed a most devoted wife. I vainly endeavoured to induce her to accept the services of a competent nurse; she would allow nobody to attend on her husband but herself. Night and day this estimable woman was at his bedside. In her brief intervals of repose, her brother watched the sick man in her place. This brother was, I must say, very good company, in the intervals when we had time for a little talk. He dabbled in chemistry, down in the horrid under-water vaults of the palace; and he wanted to show me some of his experiments. I have enough of chemistry in writing prescriptions--and I declined. He took it quite good-humouredly.

"I am straying away from my subject. Let me return to the sick lord.

"Up to the 20th, then, things went well enough. I was quite unprepared for the disastrous change that showed itself, when I paid Lord Montbarry my morning visit on the 21st. He had relapsed, and seriously relapsed. Examining him to discover the cause, I found symptoms of pneumonia--that is to say, in unmedical language, inflammation of the substance of the lungs. He breathed with difficulty, and was only partially able to relieve himself by coughing. I made the strictest inquiries, and was assured that his medicine had been administered as carefully as usual, and that he had not been exposed to any changes of temperature. It was with great reluctance that I added to Lady Montbarry's distress; but I felt bound, when she suggested a consultation with another physician, to own that I too thought there was really need for it.

"Her ladyship instructed me to spare no expense, and to get the best medical opinion in Italy. The best opinion was happily within our reach. The first and foremost of Italian physicians is Torello of Padua. I sent a special messenger for the great man. He arrived on the evening of the 21st, and confirmed my opinion that pneumonia had set in, and that our patient's life was in danger. I told him what my treatment of the case had been, and he approved of it in every particular. He made some valuable suggestions, and (at Lady Montbarry's express request) he consented to defer his return to Padua until the following morning.

"We both saw the patient at intervals in the course of the night. The disease, steadily advancing, set our utmost resistance at defiance. In the morning Doctor Torello took his leave. 'I can be of no further use,' he said to me. 'The man is past all help--and he ought to know it.'

"Later in the day I warned my lord, as gently as I could, that his time had come. I am informed that there are serious reasons for my stating what passed between us on this occasion, in detail, and without any reserve. I comply with the request.

"Lord Montbarry received the intelligence of his approaching death with becoming composure, but with a certain doubt. He signed to me to put my ear to his mouth. He whispered faintly, 'Are you sure?' It was no time to deceive him; I said, 'Positively sure.' He waited a little, gasping for breath, and then he whispered again, 'Feel under
my pillow.' I found under his pillow a letter, sealed and stamped, ready for the post. His next words were just audible and no more--'Post it yourself.' I answered, of course, that I would do so--and I did post the letter with my own hand. I looked at the address. It was directed to a lady in London. The street I cannot remember. The name I can perfectly recall: it was an Italian name--'Mrs. Ferrari.'

"That night my lord nearly died of asphyxia. I got him through it for the time; and his eyes showed that he understood me when I told him, the next morning, that I had posted the letter. This was his last effort of consciousness. When I saw him again he was sunk in apathy. He lingered in a state of insensibility, supported by stimulants, until the 25th, and died (unconscious to the last) on the evening of that day.

"As to the cause of his death, it seems (if I may be excused for saying so) simply absurd to ask the question. Bronchitis, terminating in pneumonia--there is no more doubt that this, and this only, was the malady of which he expired, than that two and two make four. Doctor Torello's own note of the case is added here to a duplicate of my certificate, in order (as I am informed) to satisfy some English offices in which his lordship's life was insured. The English offices must have been founded by that celebrated saint and doubter, mentioned in the New Testament, whose name was Thomas!"

'Doctor Bruno's evidence ends here.

'Reverting for a moment to our inquiries addressed to Lady Montbarry, we have to report that she can give us no information on the subject of the letter which the doctor posted at Lord Montbarry's request. When his lordship wrote it? what it contained? why he kept it a secret from Lady Montbarry (and from the Baron also); and why he should write at all to the wife of his courier? these are questions to which we find it simply impossible to obtain any replies. It seems even useless to say that the matter is open to suspicion. Suspicion implies conjecture of some kind--and the letter under my lord's pillow baffles all conjecture. Application to Mrs. Ferrari may perhaps clear up the mystery. Her residence in London will be easily discovered at the Italian Couriers' Office, Golden Square.

'Having arrived at the close of the present report, we have now to draw your attention to the conclusion which is justified by the results of our investigation.

'The plain question before our Directors and ourselves appears to be this: Has the inquiry revealed any extraordinary circumstances which render the death of Lord Montbarry open to suspicion? The inquiry has revealed extraordinary circumstances beyond all doubt--such as the disappearance of Ferrari, the remarkable absence of the customary establishment of servants in the house, and the mysterious letter which his lordship asked the doctor to post. But where is the proof that any one of these circumstances is associated--suspiciously and directly associated--with the only event which concerns us, the event of Lord Montbarry's death? In the absence of any such proof, and in the face of the evidence of two eminent physicians, it is impossible to dispute the statement on the certificate that his lordship died a natural death. We are bound, therefore, to report, that there are no valid grounds for refusing the payment of the sum for which the late Lord Montbarry's life was assured.

'We shall send these lines to you by the post of to-morrow, December 10; leaving time to receive your further instructions (if any), in reply to our telegram of this evening announcing the conclusion of the inquiry.'

CHAPTER IX

'Now, my good creature, whatever you have to say to me, out with it at once! I don't want to hurry you needlessly; but these are business hours, and I have other people's affairs to attend to besides yours.'

Addressing Ferrari's wife, with his usual blunt good-humour, in these terms, Mr. Troy registered the lapse of time by a glance at the watch on his desk, and then waited to hear what his client had to say to him.

'It's something more, sir, about the letter with the thousand-pound note,' Mrs. Ferrari began. 'I have found out who sent it to me.'

Mr. Troy started. 'This is news indeed!' he said. 'Who sent you the letter?'

'Lord Montbary sent it, sir.'

It was not easy to take Mr. Troy by surprise. But Mrs. Ferrari threw him completely off his balance. For a while he could only look at her in silent surprise. 'Nonsense!' he said, as soon as he had recovered himself. 'There is some mistake-- it can't be!'

'There is no mistake,' Mrs. Ferrari rejoined, in her most positive manner. 'Two gentlemen from the insurance offices called on me this morning, to see the letter. They were completely puzzled--especially when they heard of the bank-note inside. But they know who sent the letter. His lordship's doctor in Venice posted it at his lordship's request. Go to the gentlemen yourself, sir, if you don't believe me. They were polite enough to ask if I could account for Lord Montbary's writing to me and sending me the money. I gave them my opinion directly-- I said it was like his lordship's kindness.'

'Like his lordship's kindness?' Mr. Troy repeated, in blank amazement.

'Yes, sir! Lord Montbary knew me, like all the other members of his family, when I was at school on the estate in Ireland. If he could have done it, he would have protected my poor dear husband. But he was helpless himself in
the hands of my lady and the Baron-- and the only kind thing he could do was to provide for me in my widowhood, like the true nobleman he was!

'1 A very pretty explanation!' said Mr. Troy. 'What did your visitors from the insurance offices think of it?''

'They asked if I had any proof of my husband's death.'

'And what did you say?'

'I said, 'I give you better than proof, gentlemen; I give you my positive opinion.'''

'That satisfied them, of course?''

'They didn't say so in words, sir. They looked at each other-- and wished me good-morning.'

'Well, Mrs. Ferrari, unless you have some more extraordinary news for me, I think I shall wish you good-morning too. I can take a note of your information (very startling information, I own); and, in the absence of proof, I can do no more.'

'I can provide you with proof, sir--if that is all you want,' said Mrs. Ferrari, with great dignity. 'I only wish to know, first, whether the law justifies me in doing it. You may have seen in the fashionable intelligence of the newspapers, that Lady Montbarry has arrived in London, at Newbury's Hotel. I propose to go and see her.'

'The deuce you do! May I ask for what purpose?'

Mrs. Ferrari answered in a mysterious whisper. 'For the purpose of catching her in a trap! I shan't send in my name--I shall announce myself as a person on business, and the first words I say to her will be these: 'I come, my lady, to acknowledge the receipt of the money sent to Ferrari's widow.' Ah! you may well start, Mr. Troy! It almost takes you off your guard, doesn't it? Make your mind easy, sir; I shall find the proof that everybody asks me for in her guilty face. Let her only change colour by the shadow of a shade--let her eyes only drop for half an instant-- I shall discover her! The one thing I want to know is, does the law permit it?'

'The law permits it,' Mr. Troy answered gravely; 'but whether her ladyship will permit it, is quite another question. Have you really courage enough, Mrs. Ferrari, to carry out this notable scheme of yours? You have been described to me, by Miss Lockwood, as rather a nervous, timid sort of person--and, if I may trust my own observation, I should say you justify the description.'

'If you had lived in the country, sir, instead of living in London,' Mrs. Ferrari replied, 'you would sometimes have seen even a sheep turn on a dog. I am far from saying that I am a bold woman-- quite the reverse. But when I stand in that wretch's presence, and think of my murdered husband, the one of us two who is likely to be frightened is not me. I am going there now, sir. You shall hear how it ends. I wish you good-morning.'

With those brave words the courier's wife gathered her mantle about her, and walked out of the room.

Mr. Troy smiled--not satirically, but compassionately. 'The little simpleton!' he thought to himself. 'If half of what they say of Lady Montbarry is true, Mrs. Ferrari and her trap have but a poor prospect before them. I wonder how it will end?'

All Mr. Troy's experience failed to forewarn him of how it did end.

CHAPTER X

In the mean time, Mrs. Ferrari held to her resolution. She went straight from Mr. Troy's office to Newbury's Hotel.

Lady Montbarry was at home, and alone. But the authorities of the hotel hesitated to disturb her when they found that the visitor declined to mention her name. Her ladyship's new maid happened to cross the hall while the matter was still in debate. She was a Frenchwoman, and, on being appealed to, she settled the question in the swift, easy, rational French way. 'Madame's appearance was perfectly respectable. Madame might have reasons for not mentioning her name which Miladi might approve. In any case, there being no orders forbidding the introduction of a strange lady, the matter clearly rested between Madame and Miladi. Would Madame, therefore, be good enough to follow Miladi's maid up the stairs?'

In spite of her resolution, Mrs. Ferrari's heart beat as if it would burst out of her bosom, when her conductress led her into an ante-room, and knocked at a door opening into a room beyond. But it is remarkable that persons of sensitively-nervous organisation are the very persons who are capable of forcing themselves (apparently by the exercise of a spasmodic effort of will) into the performance of acts of the most audacious courage. A low, grave voice from the inner room said, 'Come in.' The maid, opening the door, announced, 'A person to see you, Miladi, on business,' and immediately retired. In the one instant while these events passed, timid little Mrs. Ferrari mastered her own throbbing heart; stepped over the threshold, conscious of her clammy hands, dry lips, and burning head; and stood in the presence of Lord Montbarry's widow, to all outward appearance as supremely self-possessed as her ladyship herself.

It was still early in the afternoon, but the light in the room was dim. The blinds were drawn down. Lady Montbarry sat with her back to the windows, as if even the subdued daylight were disagreeable to her. She had altered sadly for the worse in her personal appearance, since the memorable day when Doctor Wybrow had seen her
in his consulting-room. Her beauty was gone--her face had fallen away to mere skin and bone; the contrast between
her ghastly complexion and her steely glittering black eyes was more startling than ever. Robed in dismal black,
relieved only by the brilliant whiteness of her widow's cap--reclining in a panther-like suppleness of attitude on a
little green sofa--she looked at the stranger who had intruded on her, with a moment's languid curiosity, then
dropped her eyes again to the hand-screen which she held between her face and the fire. 'I don't know you,' she said.
'What do you want with me?'

Mrs. Ferrari tried to answer. Her first burst of courage had already worn itself out. The bold words that she had
determined to speak were living words still in her mind, but they died on her lips.

There was a moment of silence. Lady Montbarry looked round again at the speechless stranger. 'Are you deaf?'
she asked. There was another pause. Lady Montbarry quietly looked back again at the screen, and put another
question. 'Do you want money?'

'Money!' That one word roused the sinking spirit of the courier's wife. She recovered her courage; she found her
voice. 'Look at me, my lady, if you please,' she said, with a sudden outbreak of audacity.

Lady Montbarry looked round for the third time. The fatal words passed Mrs. Ferrari's lips.

'I come, my lady, to acknowledge the receipt of the money sent to Ferrari's widow.'

Lady Montbarry's glittering black eyes rested with steady attention on the woman who had addressed her in
those terms. Not the faintest expression of confusion or alarm, not even a momentary flutter of interest stirred the
deadly stillness of her face. She reposed as quietly, she held the screen as composedly, as ever. The test had been
tried, and had utterly failed.

There was another silence. Lady Montbarry considered with herself. The smile that came slowly and went away
suddenly--the smile at once so sad and so cruel--showed itself on her thin lips. She lifted her screen, and pointed
with it to a seat at the farther end of the room. 'Be so good as to take that chair,' she said.

Helpless under her first bewildering sense of failure--not knowing what to say or what to do next--Mrs. Ferrari
mechanically obeyed. Lady Montbarry, rising on the sofa for the first time, watched her with undisguised scrutiny as
she crossed the room--then sank back into a reclining position once more. 'No,' she said to herself, 'the woman walks
steadily; she is not intoxicated--the only other possibility is that she may be mad.'

She had spoken loud enough to be heard. Stung by the insult, Mrs. Ferrari instantly answered her: 'I am no more
drunken or mad than you are!'

'No?' said Lady Montbarry. 'Then you are only insolent? The ignorant English mind (I have observed) is apt to
be insolent in the exercise of unrestrained English liberty. This is very noticeable to us foreigners among you people
in the streets. Of course I can't be insolent to you, in return. I hardly know what to say to you. My maid was
imprudent in admitting you so easily to my room. I suppose your respectable appearance misled her. I wonder who
you are? You mentioned the name of a courier who left us very strangely. Was he married by any chance? Are you
his wife? And do you know where he is?'

Mrs. Ferrari's indignation burst its way through all restraints. She advanced to the sofa; she feared nothing, in the
fervour and rage of her reply.

'I am his widow--and you know it, you wicked woman! Ah! it was an evil hour when Miss Lockwood
recommended my husband to be his lordship's courier--!'

Before she could add another word, Lady Montbarry sprang from the sofa with the Stealthy suddenness of a cat--
seized her by both shoulders-- and shook her with the strength and frenzy of a madwoman. 'You lie! you lie! you
lie!' She dropped her hold at the third repetition of the accusation, and threw up her hands wildly with a gesture of
despair. 'Oh, Jesu Maria! is it possible?' she cried. 'Can the courier have come to me through that woman?' She
turned like lightning on Mrs. Ferrari, and stopped her as she was escaping from the room. 'Stay here, you fool--stay
here, and answer me! If you cry out, as sure as the heavens are above you, I'll strangle you with my own hands. Sit
down again--and fear nothing. Wretch! It is I who am frightened-- frightened out of my senses. Confess that you
lied, when you used Miss Lockwood's name just now! No! I don't believe you on your oath; I will believe nobody
but Miss Lockwood herself. Where does she live? Tell me that, you noxious stinging little insect--and you may go.'
Terrified as she was, Mrs. Ferrari hesitated. Lady Montbarry lifted her hands threateningly, with the long, lean,
yellow-white fingers outspread and crooked at the tips. Mrs. Ferrari shrank at the sight of them, and gave the
address. Lady Montbarry pointed contemptuously to the door--then changed her mind. 'No! not yet! you will tell
Miss Lockwood what has happened, and she may refuse to see me. I will go there at once, and you shall go with me.
As far as the house-- not inside of it. Sit down again. I am going to ring for my maid. Turn your back to the door--
your cowardly face is not fit to be seen!'

She rang the bell. The maid appeared.

'My cloak and bonnet--instantly!'

The maid produced the cloak and bonnet from the bedroom.
'A cab at the door--before I can count ten!' The maid vanished. Lady Montbarry surveyed herself in the glass, and wheeled round again, with her cat-like suddenness, to Mrs. Ferrari.

'I look more than half dead already, don't I?' she said with a grim outburst of irony. 'Give me your arm.' She took Mrs. Ferrari's arm, and left the room. 'You have nothing to fear, so long as you obey,' she whispered, on the way downstairs. 'You leave me at Miss Lockwood's door, and never see me again.'

In the hall they were met by the landlady of the hotel. Lady Montbarry graciously presented her companion. 'My good friend Mrs. Ferrari; I am so glad to have seen her.' The landlady accompanied them to the door. The cab was waiting. 'Get in first, good Mrs. Ferrari,' said her ladyship; 'and tell the man where to go.'

They were driven away. Lady Montbarry's variable humour changed again. With a low groan of misery, she threw herself back in the cab. Lost in her own dark thoughts, as careless of the woman whom she had bent to her iron will as if no such person sat by her side, she preserved a sinister silence, until they reached the house where Miss Lockwood lodged. In an instant, she roused herself to action. She opened the door of the cab, and closed it again on Mrs. Ferrari, before the driver could get off his box.

'Take that lady a mile farther on her way home!' she said, as she paid the man his fare. The next moment she had knocked at the house-door. 'Is Miss Lockwood at home?' 'Yes, ma'am.' She stepped over the threshold--the door closed on her.

'Which way, ma'am?' asked the driver of the cab.

Mrs. Ferrari put her hand to her head, and tried to collect her thoughts. Could she leave her friend and benefactress helpless at Lady Montbarry's mercy? She was still vainly endeavouring to decide on the course that she ought to follow--when a gentleman, stopping at Miss Lockwood's door, happened to look towards the cab-window, and saw her.

'Are you going to call on Miss Agnes too?' he asked.

It was Henry Westwick. Mrs. Ferrari clasped her hands in gratitude as she recognised him.

'Go in, sir!' she cried. 'Go in, directly. That dreadful woman is with Miss Agnes. Go and protect her!'

'What woman?' Henry asked.

The answer literally struck him speechless. With amazement and indignation in his face, he looked at Mrs. Ferrari as she pronounced the hated name of 'Lady Montbarry.' 'I'll see to it,' was all he said. He knocked at the house-door; and he too, in his turn, was let in.

CHAPTER XI

'Lady Montbarry, Miss.'

Agnes was writing a letter, when the servant astonished her by announcing the visitor's name. Her first impulse was to refuse to see the woman who had intruded on her. But Lady Montbarry had taken care to follow close on the servant's heels. Before Agnes could speak, she had entered the room.

'I beg to apologise for my intrusion, Miss Lockwood. I have a question to ask you, in which I am very much interested. No one can answer me but yourself.' In low hesitating tones, with her glittering black eyes bent modestly on the ground, Lady Montbarry opened the interview in those words.

Without answering, Agnes pointed to a chair. She could do this, and, for the time, she could do no more. All that she had read of the hidden and sinister life in the palace at Venice; all that she had heard of Montbarry's melancholy death and burial in a foreign land; all that she knew of the mystery of Ferrari's disappearance, rushed into her mind, when the black-robed figure confronted her, standing just inside the door. The strange conduct of Lady Montbarry added a new perplexity to the doubts and misgivings that troubled her. There stood the adventuress whose character had left its mark on society all over Europe--the Fury who had terrified Mrs. Ferrari at the hotel--inconceivably transformed into a timid, shrinking woman! Lady Montbarry had not once ventured to look at Agnes, since she had made her way into the room. Advancing to take the chair that had been pointed out to her, she hesitated, put her hand on the rail to support herself, and still remained standing. 'Please give me a moment to compose myself;' she said faintly. Her head sank on her bosom: she stood before Agnes like a conscious culprit before a merciless judge.

The silence that followed was, literally, the silence of fear on both sides. In the midst of it, the door was opened once more--and Henry Westwick appeared.

He looked at Lady Montbarry with a moment's steady attention--bowed to her with formal politeness--and passed on in silence. At the sight of her husband's brother, the sinking spirit of the woman sprang to life again. Her drooping figure became erect. Her eyes met Westwick's look, brightly defiant. She returned his bow with an icy smile of contempt.

Henry crossed the room to Agnes.

'Is Lady Montbarry here by your invitation?' he asked quietly.

'No.'
'Do you wish to see her?'

'It is very painful to me to see her.'

He turned and looked at his sister-in-law. 'Do you hear that?' he asked coldly.

'I hear it,' she answered, more coldly still.

'Your visit is, to say the least of it, ill-timed.'

'Your interference is, to say the least of it, out of place.'

With that retort, Lady Montbarry approached Agnes. The presence of Henry Westwick seemed at once to relieve and embolden her. 'Permit me to ask my question, Miss Lockwood,' she said, with graceful courtesy. 'It is nothing to embarrass you. When the courier Ferrari applied to my late husband for employment, did you--' Her resolution failed her, before she could say more. She sank trembling into the nearest chair, and, after a moment's struggle, composed herself again. 'Did you permit Ferrari,' she resumed, 'to make sure of being chosen for our courier by using your name?'

Agnes did not reply with her customary directness. Trifling as it was, the reference to Montbarry, proceeding from that woman of all others, confused and agitated her.

'I have known Ferrari's wife for many years,' she began. 'And I take an interest--'

Lady Montbarry abruptly lifted her hands with a gesture of entreaty. 'Ah, Miss Lockwood, don't waste time by talking of his wife! Answer my plain question, plainly!'

'Let me answer her,' Henry whispered. 'I will undertake to speak plainly enough.'

Agnes refused by a gesture. Lady Montbarry's interruption had roused her sense of what was due to herself. She resumed her reply in plainer terms.

'When Ferrari wrote to the late Lord Montbarry,' she said, 'he did certainly mention my name.'

Even now, she had innocently failed to see the object which her visitor had in view. Lady Montbarry's impatience became ungovernable. She started to her feet, and advanced to Agnes. 'Was it with your knowledge and permission that Ferrari used your name?' she asked. 'The whole soul of my question is in that. For God's sake answer me--Yes, or No!'

'Yes.'

That one word struck Lady Montbarry as a blow might have struck her. The fierce life that had animated her face the instant before, faded out of it suddenly, and left her like a woman turned to stone. She stood, mechanically confronting Agnes, with a stillness so wrapt and perfect that not even the breath she drew was perceptible to the two persons who were looking at her.

Henry spoke to her roughly. 'Rouse yourself,' he said. 'You have received your answer.'

She looked round at him. 'I have received my Sentence,' she rejoined-- and turned slowly to leave the room.

To Henry's astonishment, Agnes stopped her. 'Wait a moment, Lady Montbarry. I have something to ask on my side. You have spoken of Ferrari. I wish to speak of him too.'

Lady Montbarry bent her head in silence. Her hand trembled as she took out her handkerchief, and passed it over her forehead. Agnes detected the trembling, and shrank back a step. 'Is the subject painful to you?' she asked timidly.

Still silent, Lady Montbarry invited her by a wave of the hand to go on. Henry approached, attentively watching his sister-in-law. Agnes went on.

'No trace of Ferrari has been discovered in England,' she said. 'Have you any news of him? And will you tell me (if you have heard anything), in mercy to his wife?'

Lady Montbarry's thin lips suddenly relaxed into their sad and cruel smile.

'Why do you ask me about the lost courier?' she said. 'You will know what has become of him, Miss Lockwood, when the time is ripe for it.'

Agnes started. 'I don't understand you,' she said. 'How shall I know? Will some one tell me?'

'Some one will tell you.'

Henry could keep silence no longer. 'Perhaps, your ladyship may be the person?' he interrupted with ironical politeness.

She answered him with contemptuous ease. 'You may be right, Mr. Westwick. One day or another, I may be the person who tells Miss Lockwood what has become of Ferrari, if--' She stopped; with her eyes fixed on Agnes.

'If what?' Henry asked.

'If Miss Lockwood forces me to it.'

Agnes listened in astonishment. 'Force you to it?' she repeated. 'How can I do that? Do you mean to say my will is stronger than yours?'

'Do you mean to say that the candle doesn't burn the moth, when the moth flies into it?' Lady Montbarry rejoined. 'Have you ever heard of such a thing as the fascination of terror? I am drawn to you by a fascination of terror. I have no right to visit you, I have no wish to visit you: you are my enemy. For the first time in my life,
against my own will, I submit to my enemy. See! I am waiting because you told me to wait--and the fear of you (I swear it!) creeps through me while I stand here. Oh, don't let me excite your curiosity or your pity! Follow the example of Mr. Westwick. Be hard and brutal and unforgiving, like him. Grant me my release. Tell me to go.'

The frank and simple nature of Agnes could discover but one intelligible meaning in this strange outbreak.

'You are mistaken in thinking me your enemy,' she said. 'The wrong you did me when you gave your hand to Lord Montbarry was not intentionally done. I forgave you my sufferings in his lifetime. I forgive you even more freely now that he has gone.'

Henry heard her with mingled emotions of admiration and distress. 'Say no more!' he exclaimed. 'You are too good to her; she is not worthy of it.'

The interruption passed unheeded by Lady Montbarry. The simple words in which Agnes had replied seemed to have absorbed the whole attention of this strangely-changeable woman. As she listened, her face settled slowly into an expression of hard and tearless sorrow. There was a marked change in her voice when she spoke next. It expressed that last worst resignation which has done with hope.

'You good innocent creature,' she said, 'what does your amiable forgiveness matter? What are your poor little wrongs, in the reckoning for greater wrongs which is demanded of me? I am not trying to frighten you, I am only miserable about myself. Do you know what it is to have a firm presentiment of calamity that is coming to you--and yet to hope that your own positive conviction will not prove true? When I first met you, before my marriage, and first felt your influence over me, I had that hope. It was a starveling sort of hope that lived a lingering life in me until to-day. You struck it dead, when you answered my question about Ferrari.'

'How have I destroyed your hopes?' Agnes asked. 'What connection is there between my permitting Ferrari to use my name to Lord Montbarry, and the strange and dreadful things you are saying to me now?'

'The time is near, Miss Lockwood, when you will discover that for yourself. In the mean while, you shall know what my fear of you is, in the plainest words I can find. On the day when I took your hero from you and blighted your life--I am firmly persuaded of it!--you were made the instrument of the retribution that my sins of many years had deserved. Oh, such things have happened before to-day! One person has, before now, been the means of innocently ripening the growth of evil in another. You have done that already--and you have more to do yet. You have still to bring me to the day of discovery, and to the punishment that is my doom. We shall meet again--here in England, or there in Venice where my husband died--and meet for the last time.'

In spite of her better sense, in spite of her natural superiority to superstitions of all kinds, Agnes was impressed by the terrible earnestness with which those words were spoken. She turned pale as she looked at Henry. 'Do you understand her?' she asked.

'Nothing is easier than to understand her,' he replied contemptuously. 'She knows what has become of Ferrari; and she is confusing you in a cloud of nonsense, because she daren't own the truth. Let her go!'

If a dog had been under one of the chairs, and had barked, Lady Montbarry could not have proceeded more impenetrably with the last words she had to say to Agnes.

'Advise your interesting Mrs. Ferrari to wait a little longer,' she said. 'You will know what has become of her husband, and you will tell her. There will be nothing to alarm you. Some trifling event will bring us together the next time--as trifling, I dare say, as the engagement of Ferrari. Sad nonsense, Mr. Westwick, is it not? But you make allowances for women; we all talk nonsense. Good morning, Miss Lockwood.'

She opened the door--suddenly, as if she was afraid of being called back for the second time--and left them.

CHAPTER XII

'Do you think she is mad?' Agnes asked.

'I think she is simply wicked. False, superstitious, inveterately cruel--but not mad. I believe her main motive in coming here was to enjoy the luxury of frightening you.'

'She has frightened me. I am ashamed to own it--but so it is.'

Henry looked at her, hesitated for a moment, and seated himself on the sofa by her side.

'I am very anxious about you, Agnes,' he said. 'But for the fortunate chance which led me to call here to-day--who knows what that vile woman might not have said or done, if she had found you alone? My dear, you are leading a sadly unprotected solitary life. I don't like to think of it; I want to see it changed--especially after what has happened to-day. No! no! it is useless to tell me that you have your old nurse. She is too old; she is not in your rank of life--there is no sufficient protection in the companionship of such a person for a lady in your position. Don't mistake me, Agnes! what I say, I say in the sincerity of my devotion to you.' He paused, and took her hand. She made a feeble effort to withdraw it--and yielded. 'Will the day never come,' he pleaded, 'when the privilege of protecting you may be mine? when you will be the pride and joy of my life, as long as my life lasts?' He pressed her hand gently. She made no reply. The colour came and went on her face; her eyes were turned away from him. 'Have I been so unhappy as to offend you?' he asked.
She answered that--she said, almost in a whisper, 'No.'

'Have I distressed you?'

'You have made me think of the sad days that are gone.' She said no more; she only tried to withdraw her hand from his for the second time. He still held it; he lifted it to his lips.

'Can I never make you think of other days than those--of the happier days to come? Or, if you must think of the time that is passed, can you not look back to the time when I first loved you?'

She sighed as he put the question. 'Spare me, Henry,' she answered sadly. 'Say no more!'

The colour again rose in her cheeks; her hand trembled in his. She looked lovely, with her eyes cast down and her bosom heaving gently. At that moment he would have given everything he had in the world to take her in his arms and kiss her. Some mysterious sympathy, passing from his hand to hers, seemed to tell her what was in his mind. She snatched her hand away, and suddenly looked up at him. The tears were in her eyes. She said nothing; she let her eyes speak for her. They warned him--without anger, without unkindness--but still they warned him to press her no further that day.

'Only tell me that I am forgiven,' he said, as he rose from the sofa.

'Yes,' she answered quietly, 'you are forgiven.'

'I have not lowered myself in your estimation, Agnes?'

'Oh, no!'

'Do you wish me to leave you?'

She rose, in her turn, from the sofa, and walked to her writing-table before she replied. The unfinished letter which she had been writing when Lady Montbarry interrupted her, lay open on the blotting-book. As she looked at the letter, and then looked at Henry, the smile that charmed everybody showed itself in her face.

'You must not go just yet,' she said: 'I have something to tell you. I hardly know how to express it. The shortest way perhaps will be to let you find it out for yourself. You have been speaking of my lonely unprotected life here. It is not a very happy life, Henry--I own that.' She paused, observing the growing anxiety of his expression as he looked at her, with a shy satisfaction that perplexed him. 'Do you know that I have anticipated your idea?' she went on. 'I am going to make a great change in my life--if your brother Stephen and his wife will only consent to it.' She opened the desk of the writing-table while she spoke, took a letter out, and handed it to Henry.

He received it from her mechanically. Vague doubts, which he hardly understood himself, kept him silent. It was impossible that the 'change in her life' of which she had spoken could mean that she was about to be married--and yet he was conscious of a perfectly unreasonable reluctance to open the letter. Their eyes met; she smiled again.

'Look at the address,' she said. 'You ought to know the handwriting--but I dare say you don't.'

He looked at the address. It was in the large, irregular, uncertain writing of a child. He opened the letter instantly.

'Dear Aunt Agnes,--Our governess is going away. She has had money left to her, and a house of her own. We have had cake and wine to drink her health. You promised to be our governess if we wanted another. We want you. Mamma knows nothing about this. Please come before Mamma can get another governess. Your loving Lucy, who writes this. Clara and Blanche have tried to write too. But they are too young to do it. They blot the paper.'

'Your eldest niece,' Agnes explained, as Henry looked at her in amazement. 'The children used to call me aunt when I was staying with their mother in Ireland, in the autumn. The three girls were my inseparable companions--they are the most charming children I know. It is quite true that I offered to be their governess, just before you came.'

'Not seriously!' Henry exclaimed.

Agnes placed her unfinished letter in his hand. Enough of it had been written to show that she did seriously propose to enter the household of Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Westwick as governess to their children! Henry's bewilderment was not to be expressed in words.

'They won't believe you are in earnest,' he said.

'Why not?' Agnes asked quietly.

'You are my brother Stephen's cousin; you are his wife's old friend.'

'All the more reason, Henry, for trusting me with the charge of their children.'

'But you are their equal; you are not obliged to get your living by teaching. There is something absurd in your entering their service as a governess!'

'What is there absurd in it? The children love me; the mother loves me; the father has shown me innumerable instances of his true friendship and regard. I am the very woman for the place--and, as to my education, I must have completely forgotten it indeed, if I am not fit to teach three children the eldest of whom is only eleven years old. You say I am their equal. Are there no other women who serve as governesses, and who are the equals of the
persons whom they serve? Besides, I don’t know that I am their equal. Have I not heard that your brother Stephen
was the next heir to the title? Will he not be the new lord? Never mind answering me! We won’t dispute whether I
am right or wrong in turning governess— we will wait the event. I am weary of my lonely useless existence here, and
eager to make my life more happy and more useful, in the household of all others in which I should like most to
have a place. If you will look again, you will see that I have these personal considerations still to urge before I finish
my letter. You don’t know your brother and his wife as well as I do, if you doubt their answer. I believe they have
courage enough and heart enough to say Yes.’

Henry submitted without being convinced.

He was a man who disliked all eccentric departures from custom and routine; and he felt especially suspicious of
the change proposed in the life of Agnes. With new interests to occupy her mind, she might be less favourably
disposed to listen to him, on the next occasion when he urged his suit. The influence of the ‘lonely useless existence’
of which she complained, was distinctly an influence in his favour. While her heart was empty, her heart was
accessible. But with his nieces in full possession of it, the clouds of doubt overshadowed his prospects. He knew the
sex well enough to keep these purely selfish perplexities to himself. The waiting policy was especially the policy
to pursue with a woman as sensitive as Agnes. If he once offended her delicacy he was lost. For the moment he wisely
controlled himself and changed the subject.

‘My little niece’s letter has had an effect,’ he said, ‘which the child never contemplated in writing it. She has just
reminded me of one of the objects that I had in calling on you to-day.’

Agnes looked at the child’s letter. ‘How does Lucy do that?’ she asked.

‘Lucy’s governess is not the only lucky person who has had money left her,’ Henry answered. ‘Is your old nurse
in the house?’

‘You don’t mean to say that nurse has got a legacy?’

‘She has got a hundred pounds. Send for her, Agnes, while I show you the letter.’

He took a handful of letters from his pocket, and looked through them, while Agnes rang the bell. Returning to
him, she noticed a printed letter among the rest, which lay open on the table. It was a ‘prospectus,’ and the title of it
was ‘Palace Hotel Company of Venice (Limited).’ The two words, ‘Palace’ and ‘Venice,’ instantly recalled her mind
to the unwelcome visit of Lady Montbarry. ‘What is that?’ she asked, pointing to the title.

Henry suspended his search, and glanced at the prospectus. ‘A really promising speculation,’ he said. ‘Large
hotels always pay well, if they are well managed. I know the man who is appointed to be manager of this hotel when
it is opened to the public; and I have such entire confidence in him that I have become one of the shareholders of the
Company.’

The reply did not appear to satisfy Agnes. ‘Why is the hotel called the “Palace Hotel”?’ she inquired.

Henry looked at her, and at once penetrated her motive for asking the question. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘it is the palace that
Montbarry hired at Venice; and it has been purchased by the Company to be changed into an hotel.’

Agnes turned away in silence, and took a chair at the farther end of the room. Henry had disappointed her. His
income as a younger son stood in need, as she well knew, of all the additions that he could make to it by successful
speculation. But she was unreasonable enough, nevertheless, to disapprove of his attempting to make money already
out of the house in which his brother had died. Incapable of understanding this purely sentimental view of a plain
matter of business, Henry returned to his papers, in some perplexity at the sudden change in the manner of Agnes
towards him. Just as he found the letter of which he was in search, the nurse made her appearance. He glanced at
Agnes, expecting that she would speak first. She never even looked up when the nurse came in. It was left to Henry
to tell the old woman why the bell had summoned her to the drawing-room.

‘Well, nurse,’ he said, ‘you have had a windfall of luck. You have had a legacy left you of a hundred pounds.’

The nurse showed no outward signs of exultation. She waited a little to get the announcement of the legacy well
settled in her mind—and then she said quietly, ‘Master Henry, who gives me that money, if you please?’

‘My late brother, Lord Montbarry, gives it to you.’ (Agnes instantly looked up, interested in the matter for the
first time. Henry went on.) ‘His will leaves legacies to the surviving old servants of the family. There is a letter from
his lawyers, authorising you to apply to them for the money.’

In every class of society, gratitude is the rarest of all human virtues. In the nurse’s class it is extremely rare. Her
opinion of the man who had deceived and deserted her mistress remained the same opinion still, perfectly
undisturbed by the passing circumstance of the legacy.

‘I wonder who reminded my lord of the old servants?’ she said. ‘He would never have heart enough to remember
them himself!’

Agnes suddenly interposed. Nature, always abhorring monotony, institutes reserves of temper as elements in the
composition of the gentlest women living. Even Agnes could, on rare occasions, be angry. The nurse’s view of
Montbarry’s character seemed to have provoked her beyond endurance.
'If you have any sense of shame in you,' she broke out, 'you ought to be ashamed of what you have just said! Your ingratitude disgusts me. I leave you to speak with her, Henry--you won't mind it! With this significant intimation that he too had dropped out of his customary place in her good opinion, she left the room.

The nurse received the smart reproof administered to her with every appearance of feeling rather amused by it than not. When the door had closed, this female philosopher winked at Henry.

'There's a power of obstinacy in young women,' she remarked. 'Miss Agnes wouldn't give my lord up as a bad one, even when he jilted her. And now she's sweet on him after he's dead. Say a word against him, and she fires up as you see. All obstinacy! It will wear out with time. Stick to her, Master Henry--stick to her!'

'She doesn't seem to have offended you,' said Henry.

'She?' the nurse repeated in amazement--'she offend me? I like her in her tantrums; it reminds me of her when she was a baby. Lord bless you! when I go to bid her good-night, she'll give me a big kiss, poor dear--and say, Nurse, I didn't mean it! About this money, Master Henry? If I was younger I should spend it in dress and jewellery. But I'm too old for that. What shall I do with my legacy when I have got it?'

'Put it out at interest,' Henry suggested. 'Get so much a year for it, you know.' 'How much shall I get?' the nurse asked.

'If you put your hundred pounds into the Funds, you will get between three and four pounds a year.'

The nurse shook her head. 'Three or four pounds a year? That won't do! I want more than that. Look here, Master Henry. I don't care about this bit of money--I never did like the man who has left it to me, though he was your brother. If I lost it all to-morrow, I shouldn't break my heart; I'm well enough off, as it is, for the rest of my days. They say you're a speculator. Put me in for a good thing, there's a dear! Neck-or-nothing--and that for the Funds!' She snapped her fingers to express her contempt for security of investment at three per cent.

Henry produced the prospectus of the Venetian Hotel Company. 'You're a funny old woman,' he said. 'There, you dashing speculator--there is neck-or-nothing for you! You must keep it a secret from Miss Agnes, mind. I'm not at all sure that she would approve of my helping you to this investment.'

The nurse took out her spectacles. 'Six per cent. guaranteed,' she read; 'and the Directors have every reason to believe that ten per cent., or more, will be ultimately realised to the shareholders by the hotel.' 'Put me into that, Master Henry! And, wherever you go, for Heaven's sake recommend the hotel to your friends!' So the nurse, following Henry's mercenary example, had her pecuniary interest, too, in the house in which Lord Montbarry had died.

Three days passed before Henry was able to visit Agnes again. In that time, the little cloud between them had entirely passed away. Agnes received him with even more than her customary kindness. She was in better spirits than usual. Her letter to Mrs. Stephen Westwick had been answered by return of post; and her proposal had been joyfully accepted, with one modification. She was to visit the Westwicks for a month--and, if she really liked teaching the children, she was then to be governess, aunt, and cousin, all in one--and was only to go away in an event which her friends in Ireland persisted in contemplating, the event of her marriage.

'You see I was right,' she said to Henry.

He was still incredulous. 'Are you really going?' he asked.

'I am going next week.'

'When shall I see you again?'

'You know you are always welcome at your brother's house. You can see me when you like.' She held out her hand. 'Pardon me for leaving you--I am beginning to pack up already.'

Henry tried to kiss her at parting. She drew back directly.

'Why not? I am your cousin,' he said.

'I don't like it,' she answered.

Henry looked at her, and submitted. Her refusal to grant him his privilege as a cousin was a good sign--it was indirectly an act of encouragement to him in the character of her lover.

On the first day in the new week, Agnes left London on her way to Ireland. As the event proved, this was not destined to be the end of her journey. The way to Ireland was only the first stage on a roundabout road--the road that led to the palace at Venice.

THE THIRD PART

CHAPTER XIII

In the spring of the year 1861, Agnes was established at the country-seat of her two friends--now promoted (on the death of the first lord, without offspring) to be the new Lord and Lady Montbarry. The old nurse was not separated from her mistress. A place, suited to her time of life, had been found for her in the pleasant Irish household. She was perfectly happy in her new sphere; and she spent her first half-year's dividend from the Venice Hotel Company, with characteristic prodigality, in presents for the children.
Early in the year, also, the Directors of the life insurance offices submitted to circumstances, and paid the ten thousand pounds. Immediately afterwards, the widow of the first Lord Montbarry (otherwise, the dowager Lady Montbarry) left England, with Baron Rivar, for the United States. The Baron's object was announced, in the scientific columns of the newspapers, to be investigation into the present state of experimental chemistry in the great American republic. His sister informed inquiring friends that she accompanied him, in the hope of finding consolation in change of scene after the bereavement that had fallen on her. Hearing this news from Henry Westwick (then paying a visit at his brother's house), Agnes was conscious of a certain sense of relief. 'With the Atlantic between us,' she said, 'surely I have done with that terrible woman now!'

 Barely a week passed after those words had been spoken, before an event happened which reminded Agnes of 'the terrible woman' once more.

 On that day, Henry's engagements had obliged him to return to London. He had ventured, on the morning of his departure, to press his suit once more on Agnes; and the children, as he had anticipated, proved to be innocent obstacles in the way of his success. On the other hand, he had privately secured a firm ally in his sister-in-law. 'Have a little patience,' the new Lady Montbarry had said, 'and leave me to turn the influence of the children in the right direction. If they can persuade her to listen to you-- they shall!'

 The two ladies had accompanied Henry, and some other guests who went away at the same time, to the railway station, and had just driven back to the house, when the servant announced that 'a person of the name of Rolland was waiting to see her ladyship.'

 'Is it a woman?'

 'Yes, my lady.'

 Young Lady Montbarry turned to Agnes.

 'This is the very person,' she said, 'whom your lawyer thought likely to help him, when he was trying to trace the lost courier.'

 'You don't mean the English maid who was with Lady Montbarry at Venice?'

 'My dear! don't speak of Montbarry's horrid widow by the name which is my name now. Stephen and I have arranged to call her by her foreign title, before she was married. I am "Lady Montbarry," and she is "the Countess." In that way there will be no confusion.-- Yes, Mrs. Rolland was in my service before she became the Countess's maid. She was a perfectly trustworthy person, with one defect that obliged me to send her away--a sullen temper which led to perpetual complaints of her in the servants' hall. Would you like to see her?'

 Agnes accepted the proposal, in the faint hope of getting some information for the courier's wife. The complete defeat of every attempt to trace the lost man had been accepted as final by Mrs. Ferrari. She had deliberately arrayed herself in widow's mourning; and was earning her livelihood in an employment which the unwearied kindness of Agnes had procured for her in London. The last chance of penetrating the mystery of Ferrari's disappearance seemed to rest now on what Ferrari's former fellow-servant might be able to tell. With highly-wrought expectations, Agnes followed her friend into the room in which Mrs. Rolland was waiting.

 A tall bony woman, in the autumn of life, with sunken eyes and iron-grey hair, rose stiffly from her chair, and saluted the ladies with stern submission as they opened the door. A person of unblemished character, evidently--but not without visible drawbacks. Big bushy eyebrows, an awfully deep and solemn voice, a harsh unbending manner, a complete absence in her figure of the undulating lines characteristic of the sex, presented Virtue in this excellent person under its least alluring aspect. Strangers, on a first introduction to her, were accustomed to wonder why she was not a man.

 'Are you pretty well, Mrs. Rolland?'

 'I am as well as I can expect to be, my lady, at my time of life.'

 'Is there anything I can do for you?'

 'Your ladyship can do me a great favour, if you will please speak to my character while I was in your service. I am offered a place, to wait on an invalid lady who has lately come to live in this neighbourhood.'

 'Ah, yes--I have heard of her. A Mrs. Carbury, with a very pretty niece I am told. But, Mrs. Rolland, you left my service some time ago. Mrs. Carbury will surely expect you to refer to the last mistress by whom you were employed.'

 A flash of virtuous indignation irradiated Mrs. Rolland's sunken eyes. She coughed before she answered, as if her 'last mistress' stuck in her throat.

 'I have explained to Mrs. Carbury, my lady, that the person I last served-- I really cannot give her her title in your ladyship's presence!-- has left England for America. Mrs. Carbury knows that I quitted the person of my own free will, and knows why, and approves of my conduct so far. A word from your ladyship will be amply sufficient to get me the situation.'

 'Very well, Mrs. Rolland, I have no objection to be your reference, under the circumstances. Mrs. Carbury will
find me at home to-morrow until two o'clock.'

'Mrs. Carbury is not well enough to leave the house, my lady. Her niece, Miss Haldane, will call and make the inquiries, if your ladyship has no objection.'

'I have not the least objection. The pretty niece carries her own welcome with her. Wait a minute, Mrs. Rolland. This lady is Miss Lockwood--my husband's cousin, and my friend. She is anxious to speak to you about the courier who was in the late Lord Montbarry's service at Venice.'

Mrs. Rolland's bushy eyebrows frowned in stern disapproval of the new topic of conversation. 'I regret to hear it, my lady,' was all she said.

'Perhaps you have not been informed of what happened after you left Venice?' Agnes ventured to add. 'Ferrari left the palace secretly; and he has never been heard of since.'

Mrs. Rolland mysteriously closed her eyes--as if to exclude some vision of the lost courier which was of a nature to disturb a respectable woman. 'Nothing that Mr. Ferrari could do would surprise me,' she replied in her deepest bass tones.

'You speak rather harshly of him,' said Agnes.

'Mrs. Rolland suddenly opened her eyes again. 'I speak harshly of nobody without reason,' she said. 'Mr. Ferrari behaved to me, Miss Lockwood, as no man living has ever behaved--before or since.'

'What did he do?''

'Mrs. Rolland answered, with a stony stare of horror:--

'He took liberties with me.'

Young Lady Montbarry suddenly turned aside, and put her handkerchief over her mouth in convulsions of suppressed laughter.

'Mrs. Rolland went on, with a grim enjoyment of the bewilderment which her reply had produced in Agnes: 'And when I insisted on an apology, Miss, he had the audacity to say that the life at the palace was dull, and he didn't know how else to amuse himself!'

'I am afraid I have hardly made myself understood,' said Agnes. 'I am not speaking to you out of any interest in Ferrari. Are you aware that he is married?''

'I pity his wife,' said Mrs. Rolland.

'She is naturally in great grief about him,' Agnes proceeded.

'She ought to thank God she is rid of him,' Mrs. Rolland interposed.

Agnes still persisted. 'I have known Mrs. Ferrari from her childhood, and I am sincerely anxious to help her in this matter. Did you notice anything, while you were at Venice, that would account for her husband's extraordinary disappearance? On what sort of terms, for instance, did he live with his master and mistress?''

'On terms of familiarity with his mistress,' said Mrs. Rolland, 'which were simply sickening to a respectable English servant. She used to encourage him to talk to her about all his affairs--how he got on with his wife, and how pressed he was for money, and such like--just as if they were equals. Contemptible--that's what I call it.'

'And his master?''

'My lord used to live shut up with his studies and his sorrows,' Mrs. Rolland answered, with a hard solemnity expressive of respect for his lordship's memory. Mr. Ferrari got his money when it was due; and he cared for nothing else. "If I could afford it, I would leave the place too; but I can't afford it." Those were the last words he said to me, on the morning when I left the palace. I made no reply. After what had happened (on that other occasion) I was naturally not on speaking terms with Mr. Ferrari.'

'Can you really tell me nothing which will throw any light on this matter?''

'Nothing,' said Mrs. Rolland, with an undisguised relish of the disappointment that she was inflicting.

'There was another member of the family at Venice,' Agnes resumed, determined to sift the question to the bottom while she had the chance. 'There was Baron Rivar.'

Mrs. Rolland lifted her large hands, covered with rusty black gloves, in mute protest against the introduction of Baron Rivar as a subject of inquiry. 'Are you aware, Miss,' she began, 'that I left my place in consequence of what I observed--?''

Agnes stopped her there. 'I only wanted to ask,' she explained, 'if anything was said or done by Baron Rivar which might account for Ferrari's strange conduct.'

'Nothing that I know of,' said Mrs. Rolland. 'The Baron and Mr. Ferrari (if I may use such an expression) were "birds of a feather," so far as I could see--I mean, one was as unprincipled as the other. I am a just woman; and I will give you an example. Only the day before I left, I heard the Baron say (through the open door of his room while I was passing along the corridor), "Ferrari, I want a thousand pounds. What would you do for a thousand pounds?" And I heard Mr. Ferrari answer, "Anything, sir, as long as I was not found out." And then they both burst out laughing. I heard no more than that. Judge for yourself, Miss.'
Agnes reflected for a moment. A thousand pounds was the sum that had been sent to Mrs. Ferrari in the anonymous letter. Was that enclosure in any way connected, as a result, with the conversation between the Baron and Ferrari? It was useless to press any more inquiries on Mrs. Rolland. She could give no further information which was of the slightest importance to the object in view. There was no alternative but to grant her dismissal. One more effort had been made to find a trace of the lost man, and once again the effort had failed.

They were a family party at the dinner-table that day. The only guest left in the house was a nephew of the new Lord Montbarry--the eldest son of his sister, Lady Barrville. Lady Montbarry could not resist telling the story of the first (and last) attack made on the virtue of Mrs. Rolland, with a comically-exact imitation of Mrs. Rolland's deep and dismal voice. Being asked by her husband what was the object which had brought that formidable person to the house, she naturally mentioned the expected visit of Miss Haldane. Arthur Barville, unusually silent and pre-occupied so far, suddenly struck into the conversation with a burst of enthusiasm. 'Miss Haldane is the most charming girl in all Ireland!' he said. 'I caught sight of her yesterday, over the wall of her garden, as I was riding by. What time is she coming to-morrow? Before two? I'll look into the drawing-room by accident--I am dying to be introduced to her!'

Agnes was amused by his enthusiasm. 'Are you in love with Miss Haldane already?' she asked.

Arthur answered gravely, 'It's no joking matter. I have been all day at the garden wall, waiting to see her again! It depends on Miss Haldane to make me the happiest or the wretchedest man living.'

'You foolish boy! How can you talk such nonsense?'

He was talking nonsense undoubtedly. But, if Agnes had only known it, he was doing something more than that. He was innocently leading her another stage nearer on the way to Venice.

CHAPTER XIV

As the summer months advanced, the transformation of the Venetian palace into the modern hotel proceeded rapidly towards completion.

The outside of the building, with its fine Palladian front looking on the canal, was wisely left unaltered. Inside, as a matter of necessity, the rooms were almost rebuilt--so far at least as the size and the arrangement of them were concerned. The vast saloons were partitioned off into 'apartments' containing three or four rooms each. The broad corridors in the upper regions afforded spare space enough for rows of little bedchambers, devoted to servants and to travellers with limited means. Nothing was spared but the solid floors and the finely-carved ceilings. These last, in excellent preservation as to workmanship, merely required cleaning, and regilding here and there, to add greatly to the beauty and importance of the best rooms in the hotel. The only exception to the complete re-organization of the interior was at one extremity of the edifice, on the first and second floors. Here there happened, in each case, to be rooms of such comparatively moderate size, and so attractively decorated, that the architect suggested leaving them as they were. It was afterwards discovered that these were no other than the apartments formerly occupied by Lord Montbarry (on the first floor), and by Baron Rivar (on the second). The room in which Montbarry had died was still fitted up as a bedroom, and was now distinguished as Number Fourteen. The room above it, in which the Baron had slept, took its place on the hotel-register as Number Thirty-Eight. With the ornaments on the walls and ceilings cleaned and brightened up, and with the heavy old-fashioned beds, chairs, and tables replaced by bright, pretty, and luxurious modern furniture, these two promised to be at once the most attractive and the most comfortable bedchambers in the hotel. As for the once-desolate and disused ground floor of the building, it was now transformed, by means of splendid dining-rooms, reception-rooms, billiard-rooms, and smoking-rooms, into a palace by itself. Even the dungeon-like vaults beneath, now lighted and ventilated on the most approved modern plan, had been turned as if by magic into kitchens, servants' offices, ice-rooms, and wine cellars, worthy of the splendour of the grandest hotel in Italy, in the now bygone period of seventeen years since.

Passing from the lapse of the summer months at Venice, to the lapse of the summer months in Ireland, it is next to be recorded that Mrs. Rolland obtained the situation of attendant on the invalid Mrs. Carbury; and that the fair Miss Haldane, like a female Caesar, came, saw, and conquered, on her first day's visit to the new Lord Montbarry's house.

The ladies were as loud in her praises as Arthur Barville himself. Lord Montbarry declared that she was the only perfectly pretty woman he had ever seen, who was really unconscious of her own attractions. The old nurse said she looked as if she had just stepped out of a picture, and wanted nothing but a gilt frame round her to make her complete. Miss Haldane, on her side, returned from her first visit to the Montbarrys charmed with her new acquaintances. Later on the same day, Arthur called with an offering of fruit and flowers for Mrs. Carbury, and with instructions to ask if she was well enough to receive Lord and Lady Montbarry and Miss Lockwood on the morrow. In a week's time, the two households were on the friendliest terms. Mrs. Carbury, confined to the sofa by a spinal malady, had been hitherto dependent on her niece for one of the few pleasures she could enjoy, the pleasure of having the best new novels read to her as they came out. Discovering this, Arthur volunteered to relieve Miss...
Haldane, at intervals, in the office of reader. He was clever at mechanical contrivances of all sorts, and he introduced improvements in Mrs. Carbury's couch, and in the means of conveying her from the bedchamber to the drawing-room, which alleviated the poor lady's sufferings and brightened her gloomy life. With these claims on the gratitude of the aunt, aided by the personal advantages which he unquestionably possessed, Arthur advanced rapidly in the favour of the charming niece. She was, it is needless to say, perfectly well aware that he was in love with her, while he was himself modestly reticent on the subject--so far as words went. But she was not equally quick in penetrating the nature of her own feelings towards Arthur. Watching the two young people with keen powers of observation, necessarily concentrated on them by the complete seclusion of her life, the invalid lady discovered signs of roused sensibility in Miss Haldane, when Arthur was present, which had never yet shown themselves in her social relations with other admirers eager to pay their addresses to her. Having drawn her own conclusions in private, Mrs. Carbury took the first favourable opportunity (in Arthur's interests) of putting them to the test.

'I don't know what I shall do,' she said one day, 'when Arthur goes away.'

Miss Haldane looked up quickly from her work. 'Surely he is not going to leave us!' she exclaimed.

'My dear! he has already stayed at his uncle's house a month longer than he intended. His father and mother naturally expect to see him at home again.'

Miss Haldane met this difficulty with a suggestion, which could only have proceeded from a judgment already disturbed by the ravages of the tender passion. 'Why can't his father and mother go and see him at Lord Montbarry's?' she asked. 'Sir Theodore's place is only thirty miles away, and Lady Barville is Lord Montbarry's sister. They needn't stand on ceremony.'

'They may have other engagements,' Mrs. Carbury remarked.

'My dear aunt, we don't know that! Suppose you ask Arthur?'

'Suppose you ask him?'

Miss Haldane bent her head again over her work. Suddenly as it was done, her aunt had seen her face--and her face betrayed her.

When Arthur came the next day, Mrs. Carbury said a word to him in private, while her niece was in the garden. The last new novel lay neglected on the table. Arthur followed Miss Haldane into the garden. The next day he wrote home, enclosing in his letter a photograph of Miss Haldane. Before the end of the week, Sir Theodore and Lady Barville arrived at Lord Montbarry's, and formed their own judgment of the fidelity of the portrait. They had themselves married early in life--and, strange to say, they did not object on principle to the early marriages of other people. The question of age being thus disposed of, the course of true love had no other obstacles to encounter. Miss Haldane was an only child, and was possessed of an ample fortune. Arthur's career at the university had been creditable, but certainly not brilliant enough to present his withdrawal in the light of a disaster. As Sir Theodore's eldest son, his position was already made for him. He was two-and-twenty years of age; and the young lady was eighteen. There was really no producible reason for keeping the lovers waiting, and no excuse for deferring the wedding-day beyond the first week in September. In the interval, while the bride and bridegroom would be necessarily absent on the inevitable tour abroad, a sister of Mrs. Carbury volunteered to stay with her during the temporary separation from her niece. On the conclusion of the honeymoon, the young couple were to return to Ireland, and were to establish themselves in Mrs. Carbury's spacious and comfortable house.

These arrangements were decided upon early in the month of August. About the same date, the last alterations in the old palace at Venice were completed. The rooms were dried by steam; the cellars were stocked; the manager collected round him his army of skilled servants; and the new hotel was advertised all over Europe to open in October.

CHAPTER XV
(MISS AGNES LOCKWOOD TO MRS. FERRARI)

'I promised to give you some account, dear Emily, of the marriage of Mr. Arthur Barville and Miss Haldane. It took place ten days since. But I have had so many things to look after in the absence of the master and mistress of this house, that I am only able to write to you to-day.

'The invitations to the wedding were limited to members of the families on either side, in consideration of the ill health of Miss Haldane's aunt. On the side of the Montbarry family, there were present, besides Lord and Lady Montbarry, Sir Theodore and Lady Barville; Mrs. Norbury (whom you may remember as his lordship's second sister); and Mr. Francis Westwick, and Mr. Henry Westwick. The three children and I attended the ceremony as bridesmaids. We were joined by two young ladies, cousins of the bride and very agreeable girls. Our dresses were white, trimmed with green in honour of Ireland; and we each had a handsome gold bracelet given to us as a present from the bridegroom. If you add to the persons whom I have already mentioned, the elder members of Mrs. Carbury's family, and the old servants in both houses--privileged to drink the healths of the married pair at the lower end of the room--you will have the list of the company at the wedding-breakfast complete.'
'The weather was perfect, and the ceremony (with music) was beautifully performed. As for the bride, no words can describe how lovely she looked, or how well she went through it all. We were very merry at the breakfast, and the speeches went off on the whole quite well enough. The last speech, before the party broke up, was made by Mr. Henry Westwick, and was the best of all. He offered a happy suggestion, at the end, which has produced a very unexpected change in my life here.

'As well as I remember, he concluded in these words:--"On one point, we are all agreed--we are sorry that the parting hour is near, and we should be glad to meet again. Why should we not meet again? This is the autumn time of the year; we are most of us leaving home for the holidays. What do you say (if you have no engagements that will prevent it) to joining our young married friends before the close of their tour, and renewing the social success of this delightful breakfast by another festival in honour of the honeymoon? The bride and bridegroom are going to Germany and the Tyrol, on their way to Italy. I propose that we allow them a month to themselves, and that we arrange to meet them afterwards in the North of Italy--say at Venice."

'This proposal was received with great applause, which was changed into shouts of laughter by no less a person than my dear old nurse. The moment Mr. Westwick pronounced the word "Venice," she started up among the servants at the lower end of the room, and called out at the top of her voice, "Go to our hotel, ladies and gentlemen! We get six per cent. on our money already; and if you will only crowd the place and call for the best of everything, it will be ten per cent in our pockets in no time. Ask Master Henry!"

'Appealed to in this irresistible manner, Mr. Westwick had no choice but to explain that he was concerned as a shareholder in a new Hotel Company at Venice, and that he had invested a small sum of money for the nurse (not very considerably, as I think) in the speculation. Hearing this, the company, by way of humouring the joke, drank a new toast:--Success to the nurse's hotel, and a speedy rise in the dividend!

'When the conversation returned in due time to the more serious question of the proposed meeting at Venice, difficulties began to present themselves, caused of course by invitations for the autumn which many of the guests had already accepted. Only two members of Mrs. Carbury's family were at liberty to keep the proposed appointment. On our side we were more at leisure to do as we pleased. Mr. Henry Westwick decided to go to Venice in advance of the test, to test the accommodation of the new hotel on the opening day. Mrs. Norbury and Mr. Francis Westwick volunteered to follow him; and, after some persuasion, Lord and Lady Montbarry consented to a species of compromise. His lordship could not conveniently spare time enough for the journey to Venice, but he and Lady Montbarry arranged to accompany Mrs. Norbury and Mr. Francis Westwick as far on their way to Italy as Paris. Five days since, they took their departure to meet their travelling companions in London; leaving me here in charge of the three dear children. They begged hard, of course, to be taken with papa and mamma. But it was thought better not to interrupt the progress of their education, and not to expose them (especially the two younger girls) to the fatigues of travelling.

'I have had a charming letter from the bride, this morning, dated Cologne. You cannot think how artlessly and prettily she assures me of her happiness. Some people, as they say in Ireland, are born to good luck--and I think Arthur Barville is one of them.

'When you next write, I hope to hear that you are in better health and spirits, and that you continue to like your employment. Believe me, sincerely your friend,--A. L.'

'Agnes had just closed and directed her letter, when the eldest of her three pupils entered the room with the startling announcement that Lord Montbarry's travelling-servant had arrived from Paris! Alarmed by the idea that some misfortune had happened, she ran out to meet the man in the hall. Her face told him how seriously he had frightened her, before she could speak. 'There's nothing wrong, Miss,' he hastened to say. 'My lord and my lady are enjoying themselves at Paris. They only want you and the young ladies to be with them.' Saying these amazing words, he handed to Agnes a letter from Lady Montbarry.

'Dear Agnes,' (she read), 'I am so charmed with the delightful change in my life--it is six years, remember, since I last travelled on the Continent--that I have exerted all my fascinations to persuade Lord Montbarry to go on to Venice. And, what is more to the purpose, I have actually succeeded! He has just gone to his room to write the necessary letters of excuse in time for the post to England. May you have as good a husband, my dear, when your time comes! In the mean while, the one thing wanting now to make my happiness complete, is to have you and the darling children with us. Montbarry is just as miserable without them as I am--though he doesn't confess it so freely. You will have no difficulties to trouble you. Louis will deliver these hurried lines, and will take care of you on the journey to Paris. Kiss the children for me a thousand times--and never mind their education for the present! Pack up instantly, my dear, and I will be fonder of you than ever. Your affectionate friend, Adela Montbarry.'

'Agnes folded up the letter; and, feeling the need of composing herself, took refuge for a few minutes in her own room.

Her first natural sensations of surprise and excitement at the prospect of going to Venice were succeeded by
impressions of a less agreeable kind. With the recovery of her customary composure came the unwelcome remembrance of the parting words spoken to her by Montbarry's widow:--'We shall meet again--here in England, or there in Venice where my husband died--and meet for the last time.'

It was an odd coincidence, to say the least of it, that the march of events should be unexpectedly taking Agnes to Venice, after those words had been spoken! Was the woman of the mysterious warnings and the wild black eyes still thousands of miles away in America? Or was the march of events taking her unexpectedly, too, on the journey to Venice? Agnes started out of her chair, ashamed of even the momentary concession to superstition which was implied by the mere presence of such questions as these in her mind.

She rang the bell, and sent for her little pupils, and announced their approaching departure to the household. The noisy delight of the children, the inspiring effort of packing up in a hurry, roused all her energies. She dismissed her own absurd misgivings from consideration, with the contempt that they deserved. She worked as only women can work, when their hearts are in what they do. The travellers reached Dublin that day, in time for the boat to England. Two days later, they were with Lord and Lady Montbarry at Paris.

THE FOURTH PART
CHAPTER XVI

It was only the twentieth of September, when Agnes and the children reached Paris. Mrs. Norbury and her brother Francis had then already started on their journey to Italy—at least three weeks before the date at which the new hotel was to open for the reception of travellers.

The person answerable for this premature departure was Francis Westwick.

Like his younger brother Henry, he had increased his pecuniary resources by his own enterprise and ingenuity; with this difference, that his speculations were connected with the Arts. He had made money, in the first instance, by a weekly newspaper; and he had then invested his profits in a London theatre. This latter enterprise, admirably conducted, had been rewarded by the public with steady and liberal encouragement. Pondering over a new form of theatrical attraction for the coming winter season, Francis had determined to revive the languid public taste for the ballet by means of an entertainment of his own invention, combining dramatic interest with dancing. He was now, accordingly, in search of the best dancer (possessed of the indispensable personal attractions) who was to be found in the theatres of the Continent. Hearing from his foreign correspondents of two women who had made successful first appearances, one at Milan and one at Florence, he had arranged to visit those cities, and to judge of the merits of the dancers for himself, before he joined the bride and bridegroom. His widowed sister, having friends at Florence whom she was anxious to see, readily accompanied him. The Montbarrys remained at Paris, until it was time to present themselves at the family meeting in Venice. Henry found them still in the French capital, when he arrived from London on his way to the opening of the new hotel.

Against Lady Montbarry's advice, he took the opportunity of renewing his addresses to Agnes. He could hardly have chosen a more unpropitious time for pleading his cause with her. The gaieties of Paris (quite incomprehensibly to herself as well as to everyone about her) had a depressing effect on her spirits. She had no illness to complain of; she shared willingly in the ever-varying succession of amusements offered to strangers by the ingenuity of the liveliest people in the world—but nothing roused her: she remained persistently dull and weary through it all. In this frame of mind and body, she was in no humour to receive Henry's ill-timed addresses with favour, or even with patience: she plainly and positively refused to listen to him. 'Why do you remind me of what I have suffered?' she asked petulantly. 'Don't you see that it has left its mark on me for life?'

'I thought I knew something of women by this time,' Henry said, appealing privately to Lady Montbarry for consolation. 'But Agnes completely puzzles me. It is a year since Montbarry's death; and she remains as devoted to his memory as if he had died faithful to her—she still feels the loss of him, as none of us feel it!'

'She is the truest woman that ever breathed the breath of life,' Lady Montbarry answered. 'Remember that, and you will understand her. Can such a woman as Agnes give her love or refuse it, according to circumstances? Because the man was unworthy of her, was he less the man of her choice? The truest and best friend to him (little as he deserved it) in his lifetime, she naturally remains the truest and best friend to his memory now. If you really love her, wait; and trust to your two best friends—time and to me. There is my advice; let your own experience decide whether it is not the best advice that I can offer. Resume your journey to Venice to-morrow; and when you take leave of Agnes, speak to her as cordially as if nothing had happened.'

Henry wisely followed this advice. Thoroughly understanding him, Agnes made the leave-taking friendly and pleasant on her side. When he stopped at the door for a last look at her, she hurriedly turned her head so that her face was hidden from him. Was that a good sign? Lady Montbarry, accompanying Henry down the stairs, said, 'Yes, decidedly! Write when you get to Venice. We shall wait here to receive letters from Arthur and his wife, and we shall time our departure for Italy accordingly.'

A week passed, and no letter came from Henry. Some days later, a telegram was received from him. It was
despatched from Milan, instead of from Venice; and it brought this strange message:--'I have left the hotel. Will return on the arrival of Arthur and his wife. Address, meanwhile, Albergo Reale, Milan.'

Preferring Venice before all other cities of Europe, and having arranged to remain there until the family meeting took place, what unexpected event had led Henry to alter his plans? and why did he state the bare fact, without adding a word of explanation? Let the narrative follow him--and find the answer to those questions at Venice.

CHAPTER XVII

The Palace Hotel, appealing for encouragement mainly to English and American travellers, celebrated the opening of its doors, as a matter of course, by the giving of a grand banquet, and the delivery of a long succession of speeches.

Delayed on his journey, Henry Westwick only reached Venice in time to join the guests over their coffee and cigars. Observing the splendour of the reception rooms, and taking note especially of the artful mixture of comfort and luxury in the bedchambers, he began to share the old nurse's view of the future, and to contemplate seriously the coming dividend of ten per cent. The hotel was beginning well, at all events. So much interest in the enterprise had been aroused, at home and abroad, by profuse advertising, that the whole accommodation of the building had been secured by travellers of all nations for the opening night. Henry only obtained one of the small rooms on the upper floor, by a lucky accident--the absence of the gentleman who had written to engage it. He was quite satisfied, and was on his way to bed, when another accident altered his prospects for the night, and moved him into another and a better room.

Ascending on his way to the higher regions as far as the first floor of the hotel, Henry's attention was attracted by an angry voice protesting, in a strong New England accent, against one of the greatest hardships that can be inflicted on a citizen of the United States--the hardship of sending him to bed without gas in his room.

The Americans are not only the most hospitable people to be found on the face of the earth--they are (under certain conditions) the most patient and good-tempered people as well. But they are human; and the limit of American endurance is found in the obsolete institution of a bedroom candle. The American traveller, in the present case, declined to believe that his bedroom was in a complete finished state without a gas-burner. The manager pointed to the fine antique decorations (renewed and regilt) on the walls and the ceiling, and explained that the emanations of burning gas-light would certainly spoil them in the course of a few months. To this the traveller replied that it was possible, but that he did not understand decorations. A bedroom with gas in it was what he was used to, was what he wanted, and was what he was determined to have. The compliant manager volunteered to ask some other gentleman, housed on the inferior upper storey (which was lit throughout with gas), to change rooms. Hearing this, and being quite willing to exchange a small bedchamber for a large one, Henry volunteered to be the other gentleman. The excellent American shook hands with him on the spot. 'You are a cultured person, sir,' he said; 'and you will no doubt understand the decorations.'

Henry looked at the number of the room on the door as he opened it. The number was Fourteen.

Tired and sleepy, he naturally anticipated a good night's rest. In the thoroughly healthy state of his nervous system, he slept as well in a bed abroad as in a bed at home. Without the slightest assignable reason, however, his just expectations were disappointed. The luxurious bed, the well-ventilated room, the delicious tranquillity of Venice by night, all were in favour of his sleeping well. He never slept at all. An indescribable sense of depression and discomfort kept him waking through darkness and daylight alike. He went down to the coffee-room as soon as the hotel was astir, and ordered some breakfast. Another unaccountable change in himself appeared with the appearance of the meal. He was absolutely without appetite. An excellent omelette, and cutlets cooked to perfection, he sent away untasted--he, whose appetite never failed him, whose digestion was still equal to any demands on it! The day was bright and fine. He sent for a gondola, and was rowed to the Lido.

Out on the airy Lagoon, he felt like a new man. He had not left the hotel ten minutes before he was fast asleep in the gondola. Waking, on reaching the landing-place, he crossed the Lido, and enjoyed a morning's swim in the Adriatic. There was only a poor restaurant on the island, in those days; but his appetite was now ready for anything; he ate whatever was offered to him, like a famished man. He could hardly believe, when he reflected on it, that he had sent away untasted his excellent breakfast at the hotel.

Returning to Venice, he spent the rest of the day in the picture-galleries and the churches. Towards six o'clock his gondola took him back, with another fine appetite, to meet some travelling acquaintances with whom he had engaged to dine at the table d'hote.

The dinner was deservedly rewarded with the highest approval by every guest in the hotel but one. To Henry's astonishment, the appetite with which he had entered the house mysteriously and completely left him when he sat down to table. He could drink some wine, but he could literally eat nothing. 'What in the world is the matter with you?' his travelling acquaintances asked. He could honestly answer, 'I know no more than you do.'

When night came, he gave his comfortable and beautiful bedroom another trial. The result of the second
experiment was a repetition of the result of the first. Again he felt the all-pervading sense of depression and discomfort. Again he passed a sleepless night. And once more, when he tried to eat his breakfast, his appetite completely failed him.

This personal experience of the new hotel was too extraordinary to be passed over in silence. Henry mentioned it to his friends in the public room, in the hearing of the manager. The manager, naturally zealous in defence of the hotel, was a little hurt at the implied reflection cast on Number Fourteen. He invited the travellers present to judge for themselves whether Mr. Westwick's bedroom was to blame for Mr. Westwick's sleepless nights; and he especially appealed to a grey-headed gentleman, a guest at the breakfast-table of an English traveller, to take the lead in the investigation. 'This is Doctor Bruno, our first physician in Venice,' he explained. 'I appeal to him to say if there are any unhealthy influences in Mr. Westwick's room.'

Introduced to Number Fourteen, the doctor looked round him with a certain appearance of interest which was noticed by everyone present. 'The last time I was in this room,' he said, 'was on a melancholy occasion. It was before the palace was changed into an hotel. I was in professional attendance on an English nobleman who died here.' One of the persons present inquired the name of the nobleman. Doctor Bruno answered (without the slightest suspicion that he was speaking before a brother of the dead man), 'Lord Montbarry.'

Henry quietly left the room, without saying a word to anybody.

He was not, in any sense of the term, a superstitious man. But he felt, nevertheless, an insurmountable reluctance to remaining in the hotel. He decided on leaving Venice. To ask for another room would be, as he could plainly see, an offence in the eyes of the manager. To remove to another hotel, would be to openly abandon an establishment in the success of which he had a pecuniary interest. Leaving a note for Arthur Barville, on his arrival in Venice, in which he merely mentioned that he had gone to look at the Italian lakes, and that a line addressed to his hotel at Milan would bring him back again, he took the afternoon train to Padua-- and dined with his usual appetite, and slept as well as ever that night.

The next day, a gentleman and his wife (perfect strangers to the Montbarry family), returning to England by way of Venice, arrived at the hotel and occupied Number Fourteen.

Still mindful of the slur that had been cast on one of his best bedchambers, the manager took occasion to ask the travellers the next morning how they liked their room. They left him to judge for himself how well they were satisfied, by remaining a day longer in Venice than they had originally planned to do, solely for the purpose of enjoying the excellent accommodation offered to them by the new hotel. 'We have met with nothing like it in Italy,' they said; 'you may rely on our recommending you to all our friends.'

On the day when Number Fourteen was again vacant, an English lady travelling alone with her maid arrived at the hotel, saw the room, and at once engaged it.

The lady was Mrs. Norbury. She had left Francis Westwick at Milan, occupied in negotiating for the appearance at his theatre of the new dancer at the Scala. Not having heard to the contrary, Mrs. Norbury supposed that Arthur Barville and his wife had already arrived at Venice. She was more interested in meeting the young married couple than in awaiting the result of the hard bargaining which delayed the engagement of the new dancer; and she volunteered to make her brother's apologies, if his theatrical business caused him to be late in keeping his appointment at the honeymoon festival.

Mrs. Norbury's experience of Number Fourteen differed entirely from her brother Henry's experience of the room.

Failing asleep as readily as usual, her repose was disturbed by a succession of frightful dreams; the central figure in every one of them being the figure of her dead brother, the first Lord Montbarry. She saw him starving in a loathsome prison; she saw him pursued by assassins, and dying under their knives; she saw him drowning in immeasurable depths of dark water; she saw him in a bed on fire, burning to death in the flames; she saw him tempted by a shadowy creature to drink, and dying of the poisonous draught. The reiterated horror of these dreams had such an effect on her that she rose with the dawn of day, afraid to trust herself again in bed. In the old times, she had been noted in the family as the one member of it who lived on affectionate terms with Montbarry. His other sister and his brothers were constantly quarrelling with him. Even his mother owned that her eldest son was of all her children the child whom she least liked. Sensible and resolute woman as she was, Mrs. Norbury shuddered with terror as she sat at the window of her room, watching the sunrise, and thinking of her dreams.

She made the first excuse that occurred to her, when her maid came in at the usual hour, and noticed how ill she looked. The woman was of so superstitious a temperament that it would have been in the last degree indiscreet to trust her with the truth. Mrs. Norbury merely remarked that she had not found the bed quite to her liking, on account of the large size of it. She was accustomed at home, as her maid knew, to sleep in a small bed. Informed of this objection later in the day, the manager regretted that he could only offer to the lady the choice of one other bedchamber, numbered Thirty-eight, and situated immediately over the bedchamber which she desired to leave.
Mrs. Norbury accepted the proposed change of quarters. She was now about to pass her second night in the room occupied in the old days of the palace by Baron Rivar.

Once more, she fell asleep as usual. And, once more, the frightful dreams of the first night terrified her, following each other in the same succession. This time her nerves, already shaken, were not equal to the renewed torture of terror inflicted on them. She threw on her dressing-gown, and rushed out of her room in the middle of the night. The porter, alarmed by the banging of the door, met her hurrying headlong down the stairs, in search of the first human being she could find to keep her company. Considerably surprised at this last new manifestation of the famous 'English eccentricity,' the man looked at the hotel register, and led the lady upstairs again to the room occupied by her maid. The maid was not asleep, and, more wonderful still, was not even undressed. She received her mistress quietly. When they were alone, and when Mrs. Norbury had, as a matter of necessity, taken her attendant into her confidence, the woman made a very strange reply.

'I have been asking about the hotel, at the servants' supper to-night,' she said. 'The valet of one of the gentlemen staying here has heard that the late Lord Montbarry was the last person who lived in the palace, before it was made into an hotel. The room he died in, ma'am, was the room you slept in last night. Your room tonight is the room just above it. I said nothing for fear of frightening you. For my own part, I have passed the night as you see, keeping my light on, and reading my Bible. In my opinion, no member of your family can hope to be happy or comfortable in this house.'

'What do you mean?'

'Please to let me explain myself, ma'am. When Mr. Henry Westwick was here (I have this from the valet, too) he occupied the room his brother died in (without knowing it), like you. For two nights he never closed his eyes. Without any reason for it (the valet heard him tell the gentlemen in the coffee-room) he could not sleep; he felt so low and so wretched in himself. And what is more, when daytime came, he couldn't even eat while he was under this roof. You may laugh at me, ma'am--but even a servant may draw her own conclusions. It's my conclusion that something happened to my lord, which we none of us know about, when he died in this house. His ghost walks in torment until he can tell it--and the living persons related to him are the persons who feel he is near them. Those persons may yet see him in the time to come. Don't, pray don't stay any longer in this dreadful place! I wouldn't stay another night here myself--no, not for anything that could be offered me!'

Mrs. Norbury at once set her servant's mind at ease on this last point.

'I don't think about it as you do,' she said gravely. 'But I should like to speak to my brother of what has happened. We will go back to Milan.'

Some hours necessarily elapsed before they could leave the hotel, by the first train in the forenoon.

In that interval, Mrs. Norbury's maid found an opportunity of confidentially informing the valet of what had passed between her mistress and herself. The valet had other friends to whom he related the circumstances in his turn. In due course of time, the narrative, passing from mouth to mouth, reached the ears of the manager. He instantly saw that the credit of the hotel was in danger, unless something was done to retrieve the character of the room numbered Fourteen. English travellers, well acquainted with the peerage of their native country, informed him that Henry Westwick and Mrs. Norbury were by no means the only members of the Montbarry family. Curiosity might bring more of them to the hotel, after hearing what had happened. The manager's ingenuity easily hit on the obvious means of misleading them, in this case. The numbers of all the rooms were enamelled in blue, on white china plates, screwed to the doors. He ordered a new plate to be prepared, bearing the number, '13 A'; and he kept the room empty, after its tenant for the time being had gone away, until the plate was ready. He then re-numbered the room; placing the removed Number Fourteen on the door of his own room (on the second floor), which, not being to let, had not previously been numbered at all. By this device, Number Fourteen disappeared at once and for ever from the books of the hotel, as the number of a bedroom to let.

Having warned the servants to beware of gossiping with travellers, on the subject of the changed numbers, under penalty of being dismissed, the manager composed his mind with the reflection that he had done his duty to his employers. 'Now,' he thought to himself, with an excusable sense of triumph, 'let the whole family come here if they like! The hotel is a match for them.'

CHAPTER XVIII

Before the end of the week, the manager found himself in relations with 'the family' once more. A telegram from Milan announced that Mr. Francis Westwick would arrive in Venice on the next day; and would be obliged if Number Fourteen, on the first floor, could be reserved for him, in the event of its being vacant at the time.

The manager paused to consider, before he issued his directions.

The re-numbered room had been last let to a French gentleman. It would be occupied on the day of Mr. Francis Westwick's arrival, but it would be empty again on the day after. Would it be well to reserve the room for the special occupation of Mr. Francis? and when he had passed the night unsuspiciously and comfortably in 'No. 13 A,' to ask
him in the presence of witnesses how he liked his bedchamber? In this case, if the reputation of the room happened
to be called in question again, the answer would vindicate it, on the evidence of a member of the very family which
had first given Number Fourteen a bad name. After a little reflection, the manager decided on trying the experiment,
directed that '13 A' should be reserved accordingly.

On the next day, Francis Westwick arrived in excellent spirits.

He had signed agreements with the most popular dancer in Italy; he had transferred the charge of Mrs. Norbury
to his brother Henry, who had joined him in Milan; and he was now at full liberty to amuse himself by testing in
every possible way the extraordinary influence exercised over his relatives by the new hotel. When his brother and
sister first told him what their experience had been, he instantly declared that he would go to Venice in the interest
of his theatre. The circumstances related to him contained invaluable hints for a ghost-drama. The title occurred to
him in the railway: 'The Haunted Hotel.' Post that in red letters six feet high, on a black ground, all over London--
and trust the excitable public to crowd into the theatre!

Received with the politest attention by the manager, Francis met with a disappointment on entering the hotel.
'Some mistake, sir. No such room on the first floor as Number Fourteen. The room bearing that number is on the
second floor, and has been occupied by me, from the day when the hotel opened. Perhaps you meant number 13 A,
on the first floor? It will be at your service to-morrow-- a charming room. In the mean time, we will do the best we
can for you, to-night.'

A man who is the successful manager of a theatre is probably the last man in the civilized universe who is
capable of being impressed with favourable opinions of his fellow-creatures. Francis privately set the manager down
as a humbug, and the story about the numbering of the rooms as a lie.

On the day of his arrival, he dined by himself in the restaurant, before the hour of the table d'hote, for the express
purpose of questioning the waiter, without being overheard by anybody. The answer led him to the conclusion that
'13 A' occupied the situation in the hotel which had been described by his brother and sister as the situation of '14.'
He asked next for the Visitors' List; and found that the French gentleman who then occupied '13 A,' was the
proprietor of a theatre in Paris, personally well known to him. Was the gentleman then in the hotel? He had gone
out, but would certainly return for the table d'hote. When the public dinner was over, Francis entered the room, and
was welcomed by his Parisian colleague, literally, with open arms. 'Come and have a cigar in my room,' said the
friendly Frenchman. 'I want to hear whether you have really engaged that woman at Milan or not.' In this easy way,
Francis found his opportunity of comparing the interior of the room with the description which he had heard of it at
Milan.

Arriving at the door, the Frenchman bethought himself of his travelling companion. 'My scene-painter is here
with me,' he said, 'on the look-out for materials. An excellent fellow, who will take it as a kindness if we ask him to
join us. I'll tell the porter to send him up when he comes in.' He handed the key of his room to Francis. 'I will be
back in a minute. It's at the end of the corridor-- 13 A.'

Francis entered the room alone. There were the decorations on the walls and the ceiling, exactly as they had been
described to him! He had just time to perceive this at a glance, before his attention was diverted to himself and his
own sensations, by a grotesquely disagreeable occurrence which took him completely by surprise.

He became conscious of a mysteriously offensive odour in the room, entirely new in his experience of revolting
smells. It was composed (if such a thing could be) of two mingling exhalations, which were separately-discoverable
exhalations nevertheless. This strange blending of odours consisted of something faintly and unpleasantly aromatic,
mixed with another underlying smell, so unutterably sickening that he threw open the window, and put his head out
into the fresh air, unable to endure the horribly infected atmosphere for a moment longer.

The French proprietor joined his English friend, with his cigar already lit. He started back in dismay at a sight
terrible to his countrymen in general--the sight of an open window. 'You English people are perfectly mad on the
subject of fresh air!' he exclaimed. 'We shall catch our deaths of cold.

'Horrible!' Francis muttered behind his handkerchief. 'I never smelt anything like it in my life!'

Francis turned, and looked at him in astonishment. 'Are you really not aware of the smell there is in the room?'
he asked.

'Smell!' repeated his brother-manager. 'I smell my own good cigar. Try one yourself. And for Heaven's sake shut
the window!'

Francis declined the cigar by a sign. 'Forgive me,' he said. 'I will leave you to close the window. I feel faint and
giddy-- I had better go out.' He put his handkerchief over his nose and mouth, and crossed the room to the door.

The Frenchman followed the movements of Francis, in such a state of bewilderment that he actually forgot to
seize the opportunity of shutting out the fresh air. 'Is it so nasty as that?' he asked, with a broad stare of amazement.

'Horrible!' Francis muttered behind his handkerchief. 'I never smelt anything like it in my life!'

There was a knock at the door. The scene-painter appeared. His employer instantly asked him if he smelt
anything.
'I smell your cigar. Delicious! Give me one directly!'

'Wait a minute. Besides my cigar, do you smell anything else--vile, abominable, overpowering, indescribable, never-never-never-smelt before?'

The scene-painter appeared to be puzzled by the vehement energy of the language addressed to him. 'The room is as fresh and sweet as a room can be,' he answered. As he spoke, he looked back with astonishment at Francis Westwick, standing outside in the corridor, and eyeing the interior of the bedchamber with an expression of undisguised disgust.

The Parisian director approached his English colleague, and looked at him with grave and anxious scrutiny. 'You see, my friend, here are two of us, with as good noses as yours, who smell nothing. If you want evidence from more noses, look there!' He pointed to two little English girls, at play in the corridor. 'The door of my room is wide open--and you know how fast a smell can travel. Now listen, while I appeal to these innocent noses, in the language of their own dismal island. My little loves, do you sniff a nasty smell here--ha?' The children burst out laughing, and answered emphatically, 'No.' 'My good Westwick,' the Frenchman resumed, in his own language, 'the conclusion is surely plain? There is something wrong, very wrong, with your own nose. I recommend you to see a medical man.'

Having given that advice, he returned to his room, and shut out the horrid fresh air with a loud exclamation of relief. Francis left the hotel, by the lanes that led to the Square of St. Mark. The night-breeze soon revived him. He was able to light a cigar, and to think quietly over what had happened.

CHAPTER XIX

Avoiding the crowd under the colonnades, Francis walked slowly up and down the noble open space of the square, bathed in the light of the rising moon.

Without being aware of it himself, he was a thorough materialist. The strange effect produced on him by the room--following on the other strange effects produced on the other relatives of his dead brother--exercised no perplexing influence over the mind of this sensible man. 'Perhaps,' he reflected, 'my temperament is more imaginative than I supposed it to be--and this is a trick played on me by my own fancy? Or, perhaps, my friend is right; something is physically amiss with me? I don't feel ill, certainly. But that is no safe criterion sometimes. I am not going to sleep in that abominable room to-night--I can well wait till to-morrow to decide whether I shall speak to a doctor or not. In the mean time, the hotel doesn't seem likely to supply me with the subject of a piece. A terrible smell from an invisible ghost is a perfectly new idea. But it has one drawback. If I realise it on the stage, I shall drive the audience out of the theatre.'

As his strong common sense arrived at this facetious conclusion, he became aware of a lady, dressed entirely in black, who was observing him with marked attention. 'Am I right in supposing you to be Mr. Francis Westwick?' the lady asked, at the moment when he looked at her.

'That is my name, madam. May I inquire to whom I have the honour of speaking?'

'We have only met once,' she answered a little evasively, 'when your late brother introduced me to the members of his family. I wonder if you have quite forgotten my big black eyes and my hideous complexion?' She lifted her veil as she spoke, and turned so that the moonlight rested on her face.

Francis recognised at a glance the woman of all others whom he most cordially disliked--the widow of his dead brother, the first Lord Montbarry. He frowned as he looked at her. His experience on the stage, gathered at innumerable rehearsals with actresses who had sorely tried his temper, had accustomed him to speak roughly to women who were distasteful to him. 'I remember you,' he said. 'I thought you were in America!'

She took no notice of his ungracious tone and manner; she simply stopped him when he lifted his hat, and turned to leave her.

'Let me walk with you for a few minutes,' she quietly replied. 'I have something to say to you.'

He showed her his cigar. 'I am smoking,' he said.

'I don't mind smoking.'

After that, there was nothing to be done (short of downright brutality) but to yield. He did it with the worst possible grace. 'Well?' he resumed. 'What do you want of me?'

'You shall hear directly, Mr. Westwick. Let me first tell you what my position is. I am alone in the world. To the loss of my husband has now been added another bereavement, the loss of my companion in America, my brother--Baron Rivar.'

The reputation of the Baron, and the doubt which scandal had thrown on his assumed relationship to the Countess, were well known to Francis. 'Shot in a gambling-saloon?' he asked brutally.

'The question is a perfectly natural one on your part,' she said, with the impenetrably ironical manner which she could assume on certain occasions. 'As a native of horse-racing England, you belong to a nation of gamblers. My brother died no extraordinary death, Mr. Westwick. He sank, with many other unfortunate people, under a fever
prevalent in a Western city which we happened to visit. The calamity of his loss made the United States unendurable to me. I left by the first steamer that sailed from New York—a French vessel which brought me to Havre. I continued my lonely journey to the South of France. And then I went on to Venice.

'What does all this matter to me?' Francis thought to himself. She paused, evidently expecting him to say something. 'So you have come to Venice?' he said carelessly. 'Why?'

'Because I couldn't help it,' she answered.

Francis looked at her with cynical curiosity. 'That sounds odd,' he remarked. 'Why couldn't you help it?'

'Women are accustomed to act on impulse,' she explained. 'Suppose we say that an impulse has directed my journey? And yet, this is the last place in the world that I wish to find myself in. Associations that I detest are connected with it in my mind. If I had a will of my own, I would never see it again. I hate Venice. As you see, however, I am here. When did you meet with such an unreasonable woman before? Never, I am sure!' She stopped, eyed him for a moment, and suddenly altered her tone. 'When is Miss Agnes Lockwood expected to be in Venice?' she asked.

It was not easy to throw Francis off his balance, but that extraordinary question did it. 'How the devil did you know that Miss Lockwood was coming to Venice?' he exclaimed. She laughed—a bitter mocking laugh. 'Say, I guessed it!'

Something in her tone, or perhaps something in the audacious defiance of her eyes as they rested on him, roused the quick temper that was in Francis Warwick. 'Lady Montbarry—!' he began.

'Stop there!' she interposed. 'Your brother Stephen's wife calls herself Lady Montbarry now. I share my title with no woman. Call me by my name before I committed the fatal mistake of marrying your brother. Address me, if you please, as Countess Narona.'

'Countess Narona,' Francis resumed, 'if your object in claiming my acquaintance is to mystify me, you have come to the wrong man. Speak plainly, or permit me to wish you good evening.'

'If your object is to keep Miss Lockwood's arrival in Venice a secret,' she retorted, 'speak plainly, Mr. Westwick, on your side, and say so.'

Her intention was evidently to irritate him; and she succeeded. 'Nonsense!' he broke out petulantly. 'My brother's travelling arrangements are secrets to nobody. He brings Miss Lockwood here, with Lady Montbarry and the children. As you seem so well informed, perhaps you know why she is coming to Venice?'

The Countess had suddenly become grave and thoughtful. She made no reply. The two strangely associated companions, having reached one extremity of the square, were now standing before the church of St. Mark. The moonlight was bright enough to show the architecture of the grand cathedral in its wonderful variety of detail. Even the pigeons of St. Mark were visible, in dark closely packed rows, roosting in the archways of the great entrance doors.

'I never saw the old church look so beautiful by moonlight,' the Countess said quietly; speaking, not to Francis, but to herself. 'Good-bye, St. Mark's by moonlight! I shall not see you again.'

She turned away from the church, and saw Francis listening to her with wondering looks. 'No,' she resumed, placidly picking up the lost thread of the conversation, 'I don't know why Miss Lockwood is coming here, I only know that we are to meet in Venice.'

'By previous appointment?'

'By Destiny,' she answered, with her head on her breast, and her eyes on the ground. Francis burst out laughing. 'Or, if you like it better,' she instantly resumed, 'by what fools call Chance.' Francis answered easily, out of the depths of his strong common sense. 'Chance seems to be taking a queer way of bringing the meeting about,' he said. 'We have all arranged to meet at the Palace Hotel. How is it that your name is not on the Visitors' List? Destiny ought to have brought you to the Palace Hotel too.'

She abruptly pulled down her veil. 'Destiny may do that yet!' she said. 'The Palace Hotel?' she repeated, speaking once more to herself. 'The old hell, transformed into the new purgatory. The place itself! Jesu Maria! the place itself!' She paused and laid her hand on her companion's arm. 'Perhaps Miss Lockwood is not going there with the rest of you?' she burst out with sudden eagerness. 'Are you positively sure she will be at the hotel?'

'Positively! Haven't I told you that Miss Lockwood travels with Lord and Lady Montbarry, and don't you know that she is a member of the family? You will have to move, Countess, to our hotel.'

She was perfectly impenetrable to the bantering tone in which he spoke. 'Yes,' she said faintly, 'I shall have to move to your hotel.' Her hand was still on his arm—he could feel her shivering from head to foot while she spoke. Heartily as he disliked and distrusted her, the common instinct of humanity obliged him to ask if she felt cold.

'Yes,' she said. 'Cold and faint.'

'Cold and faint, Countess, on such a night as this?'

'The night has nothing to do with it, Mr. Westwick. How do you suppose the criminal feels on the scaffold, while
the hangman is putting the rope around his neck? Cold and faint, too, I should think. Excuse my grim fancy. You see, Destiny has got the rope round my neck-- and I feel it.'

She looked about her. They were at that moment close to the famous cafe known as 'Florian's.' 'Take me in there,' she said; 'I must have something to revive me. You had better not hesitate. You are interested in reviving me. I have not said what I wanted to say to you yet. It's business, and it's connected with your theatre.'

Wondering inwardly what she could possibly want with his theatre, Francis reluctantly yielded to the necessities of the situation, and took her into the cafe. He found a quiet corner in which they could take their places without attracting notice. 'What will you have?' he inquired resignedly. She gave her own orders to the waiter, without troubling him to speak for her.

'Maraschino. And a pot of tea.'

The waiter stared; Francis stared. The tea was a novelty (in connection with maraschino) to both of them. Careless whether she surprised them or not, she instructed the waiter, when her directions had been complied with, to pour a large wine-glass-full of the liqueur into a tumbler, and to fill it up from the teapot. 'I can't do it for myself,' she remarked, 'my hand trembles so.' She drank the strange mixture eagerly, hot as it was. 'Maraschino punch-- will you taste some of it?'' she said. 'I inherit the discovery of this drink. When your English Queen Caroline was on the Continent, my mother was attached to her Court. That much injured Royal Person invented, in her happier hours, maraschino punch. Fondly attached to her gracious mistress, my mother shared her tastes. And I, in my turn, learnt from my mother. Now, Mr. Westwick, suppose I tell you what my business is. You are manager of a theatre. Do you want a new play?'

'I always want a new play--provided it's a good one.'

'And you pay, if it's a good one?'

'I pay liberally--in my own interests.'

'If I write the play, will you read it?'

Francis hesitated. 'What has put writing a play into your head?' he asked.

'Mere accident,' she answered. 'I had once occasion to tell my late brother of a visit which I paid to Miss Lockwood, when I was last in England. He took no interest at what happened at the interview, but something struck him in my way of relating it. He said, "You describe what passed between you and the lady with the point and contrast of good stage dialogue. You have the dramatic instinct-- try if you can write a play. You might make money." That put it into my head.'

Those last words seemed to startle Francis. 'Surely you don't want money!' he exclaimed.

'I always want money. My tastes are expensive. I have nothing but my poor little four hundred a year--and the wreck that is left of the other money: about two hundred pounds in circular notes-- no more.'

Francis knew that she was referring to the ten thousand pounds paid by the insurance offices. 'All those thousands gone already!' he exclaimed.

'She blew a little puff of air over her fingers. 'Gone like that!' she answered coolly.

'Baron Rivar?'

'She looked at him with a flash of anger in her hard black eyes.

'My affairs are my own secret, Mr. Westwick. I have made you a proposal--and you have not answered me yet. Don't say No, without thinking first. Remember what a life mine has been. I have seen more of the world than most people, playwrights included. I have had strange adventures; I have heard remarkable stories; I have observed; I have remembered. Are there no materials, here in my head, for writing a play--if the opportunity is granted to me?'

She waited a moment, and suddenly repeated her strange question about Agnes.

'When is Miss Lockwood expected to be in Venice?'

'What has that to do with your new play, Countess?'

The Countess appeared to feel some difficulty in giving that question its fit reply. She mixed another tumbler full of maraschino punch, and drank one good half of it before she spoke again.

'It has everything to do with my new play,' was all she said. 'Answer me.' Francis answered her.

'Miss Lockwood may be here in a week. Or, for all I know to the contrary, sooner than that.'

'Very well. If I am a living woman and a free woman in a week's time-- or if I am in possession of my senses in a week's time (don't interrupt me; I know what I am talking about)--I shall have a sketch or outline of my play ready, as a specimen of what I can do. Once again, will you read it?'

'I will certainly read it. But, Countess, I don't understand--'

She held up her hand for silence, and finished the second tumbler of maraschino punch.

'I am a living enigma--and you want to know the right reading of me,' she said. 'Here is the reading, as your English phrase goes, in a nutshell. There is a foolish idea in the minds of many persons that the natives of the warm climates are imaginative people. There never was a greater mistake. You will find no such unimaginative people
anywhere as you find in Italy, Spain, Greece, and the other Southern countries. To anything fanciful, to anything spiritual, their minds are deaf and blind by nature. Now and then, in the course of centuries, a great genius springs up among them; and he is the exception which proves the rule. Now see! I, though I am no genius--I am, in my little way (as I suppose), an exception too. To my sorrow, I have some of that imagination which is so common among the English and the Germans--so rare among the Italians, the Spaniards, and the rest of them! And what is the result? I think it has become a disease in me. I am filled with presentiments which make this wicked life of mine one long terror to me. It doesn't matter, just now, what they are. Enough that they absolutely govern me—they drive me over land and sea at their own horrible will; they are in me, and torturing me, at this moment! Why don't I resist them? Ha! but I do resist them. I am trying (with the help of the good punch) to resist them now. At intervals I cultivate the difficult virtue of common sense. Sometimes, sound sense makes a hopeful woman of me. At one time, I had the hope that what seemed reality to me was only mad delusion, after all--I even asked the question of an English doctor! At other times, other sensible doubts of myself beset me. Never mind dwelling on them now--it always ends in the old terrors and superstitions taking possession of me again. In a week's time, I shall know whether Destiny does indeed decide my future for me, or whether I decide it for myself. In the last case, my resolution is to absorb this self-tormenting fancy of mine in the occupation that I have told you of already. Do you understand me a little better now? And, our business being settled, dear Mr. Westwick, shall we get out of this hot room into the nice cool air again?

They rose to leave the cafe. Francis privately concluded that the maraschino punch offered the only discoverable explanation of what the Countess had said to him.

CHAPTER XX

'Shall I see you again?' she asked, as she held out her hand to take leave. 'It is quite understood between us, I suppose, about the play?'

Francis recalled his extraordinary experience of that evening in the re-numbered room. 'My stay in Venice is uncertain,' he replied. 'If you have anything more to say about this dramatic venture of yours, it may be as well to say it now. Have you decided on a subject already? I know the public taste in England better than you do--I might save you some waste of time and trouble, if you have not chosen your subject wisely.'

'I don't care what subject I write about, so long as I write,' she answered carelessly. 'If you have got a subject in your head, give it to me. I answer for the characters and the dialogue.'

'You answer for the characters and the dialogue,' Francis repeated. 'That's a bold way of speaking for a beginner! I wonder if I should shake your sublime confidence in yourself, if I suggested the most ticklish subject to handle which is known to the stage? What do you say, Countess, to entering the lists with Shakespeare, and trying a drama with a ghost in it? A true story, mind! founded on events in this very city in which you and I are interested.'

She caught him by the arm, and drew him away from the crowded colonnade into the solitary middle space of the square. 'Now tell me!' she said eagerly. 'Here, where nobody is near us. How am I interested in it? How? how?'

Still holding his arm, she shook him in her impatience to hear the coming disclosure. For a moment he hesitated. Thus far, amused by her ignorant belief in herself, he had merely spoken in jest. Now, for the first time, impressed by her irresistible earnestness, he began to consider what he was about from a more serious point of view. With her knowledge of all that had passed in the old palace, before its transformation into an hotel, it was surely possible that she might suggest some explanation of what had happened to his brother, and sister, and himself. Or, failing to do this, she might accidentally reveal some event in her own experience which, acting as a hint to a competent dramatist, might prove to be the making of a play. The prosperity of his theatre was his one serious object in life. 'I may be on the trace of another "Corsican Brothers,"' he thought. 'A new piece of that sort would be ten thousand pounds in my pocket, at least.'

With these motives (worthy of the single-hearted devotion to dramatic business which made Francis a successful manager) he related, without further hesitation, what his own experience had been, and what the experience of his relatives had been, in the haunted hotel. He even described the outbreak of superstitious terror which had escaped Mrs. Norbury's ignorant maid. 'Sad stuff, if you look at it reasonably,' he remarked. 'But there is something dramatic in the notion of the ghostly influence making itself felt by the relations in succession, as they one after another enter the fatal room--until the one chosen relative comes who will see the Unearthly Creature, and know the terrible truth. Material for a play, Countess--first-rate material for a play!'

There he paused. She neither moved nor spoke. He stooped and looked closer at her.

'What impression had he produced? It was an impression which his utmost ingenuity had failed to anticipate. She stood by his side--just as she had stood before Agnes when her question about Ferrari was plainly answered at last--like a woman turned to stone. Her eyes were vacant and rigid; all the life in her face had faded out of it. Francis took her by the hand. Her hand was as cold as the pavement that they were standing on. He asked her if she was ill.

Not a muscle in her moved. She might as well have spoken to the dead.
'Surely,' he said, 'you are not foolish enough to take what I have been telling you seriously?'
Her lips moved slowly. As it seemed, she was making an effort to speak to him.
'Louder,' he said. 'I can't hear you.'
She struggled to recover possession of herself. A faint light began to soften the dull cold stare of her eyes. In a moment more she spoke so that he could hear her.
'I never thought of the other world,' she murmured, in low dull tones, like a woman talking in her sleep.
Her mind had gone back to the day of her last memorable interview with Agnes; she was slowly recalling the confession that had escaped her, the warning words which she had spoken at that past time. Necessarily incapable of understanding this, Francis looked at her in perplexity. She went on in the same dull vacant tone, steadily following out her own train of thought, with her heedless eyes on his face, and her wandering mind far away from him.
'I said some trifling event would bring us together the next time. I was wrong. No trifling event will bring us together. I said I might be the person who told her what had become of Ferrari, if she forced me to it. Shall I feel some other influence than hers? Will he force me to it? When she sees him, shall I see him too?'
Her head sank a little; her heavy eyelids dropped slowly; she heaved a long low weary sigh. Francis put her arm in his, and made an attempt to rouse her.
'Come, Countess, you are weary and over-wrought. We have had enough talking to-night. Let me see you safe back to your hotel. Is it far from here?'
She started when he moved, and obliged her to move with him, as if he had suddenly awakened her out of a deep sleep.
'Not far,' she said faintly. 'The old hotel on the quay. My mind's in a strange state; I have forgotten the name.'
'Danieli's?'
'Yes!'
He led her on slowly. She accompanied him in silence as far as the end of the Piazzetta. There, when the full view of the moonlit Lagoon revealed itself, she stopped him as he turned towards the Riva degli Schiavoni. 'I have something to ask you. I want to wait and think.'
She recovered her lost idea, after a long pause.
'Are you going to sleep in the room to-night?' she asked.
He told her that another traveller was in possession of the room that night. 'But the manager has reserved it for me to-morrow,' he added, 'if I wish to have it.'
'No,' she said. 'You must give it up.'
'To whom?'
'To me!'
He started. 'After what I have told you, do you really wish to sleep in that room to-morrow night?'
'I must sleep in it.'
'Are you not afraid?'
'I am horribly afraid.'
'So I should have thought, after what I have observed in you to-night. Why should you take the room? You are not obliged to occupy it, unless you like.'
'I was not obliged to go to Venice, when I left America,' she answered. 'And yet I came here. I must take the room, and keep the room, until--' She broke off at those words. 'Never mind the rest,' she said. 'It doesn't interest you.'
It was useless to dispute with her. Francis changed the subject. 'We can do nothing to-night,' he said. 'I will call on you to-morrow morning, and hear what you think of it then.'
They moved on again to the hotel. As they approached the door, Francis asked if she was staying in Venice under her own name.
She shook her head. 'As your brother's widow, I am known here. As Countess Narona, I am known here. I want to be unknown, this time, to strangers in Venice; I am travelling under a common English name.' She hesitated, and stood still. 'What has come to me?' she muttered to herself. 'Some things I remember; and some I forget. I forgot Danieli's--and now I forget my English name.' She drew him hurriedly into the hall of the hotel, on the wall of which hung a list of visitors' names. Running her finger slowly down the list, she pointed to the English name that she had assumed:--'Mrs. James.'
'Remember that when you call to-morrow,' she said. 'My head is heavy. Good night.'
Francis went back to his own hotel, wondering what the events of the next day would bring forth. A new turn in his affairs had taken place in his absence. As he crossed the hall, he was requested by one of the servants to walk into the private office. The manager was waiting there with a gravely pre-occupied manner, as if he had something serious to say. He regretted to hear that Mr. Francis Westwick had, like other members of the family, discovered
serious sources of discomfort in the new hotel. He had been informed in strict confidence of Mr. Westwick's extraordinary objection to the atmosphere of the bedroom upstairs. Without presuming to discuss the matter, he must beg to be excused from reserving the room for Mr. Westwick after what had happened.

Francis answered sharply, a little ruffled by the tone in which the manager had spoken to him. 'I might, very possibly, have declined to sleep in the room, if you had reserved it,' he said. 'Do you wish me to leave the hotel?'

The manager saw the error that he had committed, and hastened to repair it. 'Certainly not, sir! We will do our best to make you comfortable while you stay with us. I beg your pardon, if I have said anything to offend you. The reputation of an establishment like this is a matter of very serious importance. May I hope that you will do us the great favour to say nothing about what has happened upstairs? The two French gentlemen have kindly promised to keep it a secret.'

This apology left Francis no polite alternative but to grant the manager's request. 'There is an end to the Countess's wild scheme,' he thought to himself, as he retired for the night. 'So much the better for the Countess!'

He rose late the next morning. Inquiring for his Parisian friends, he was informed that both the French gentlemen had left for Milan. As he crossed the hall, on his way to the restaurant, he noticed the head porter chalking the numbers of the rooms on some articles of luggage which were waiting to go upstairs. One trunk attracted his attention by the extraordinary number of old travelling labels left on it. The porter was marking it at the moment—and the number was, '13 A.' Francis instantly looked at the card fastened on the lid. It bore the common English name, 'Mrs. James!' He at once inquired about the lady. She had arrived early that morning, and she was then in the Reading Room. Looking into the room, he discovered a lady in it alone. Advancing a little nearer, he found himself face to face with the Countess.

She was seated in a dark corner, with her head down and her arms crossed over her bosom. 'Yes,' she said, in a tone of weary impatience, before Francis could speak to her. 'I thought it best not to wait for you--I determined to get here before anybody else could take the room.'

'Have you taken it for long?' Francis asked.

'You told me Miss Lockwood would be here in a week's time. I have taken it for a week.'

'What has Miss Lockwood to do with it?'

'She has everything to do with it--she must sleep in the room. I shall give the room up to her when she comes here.'

Francis began to understand the superstitious purpose that she had in view. 'Are you (an educated woman) really of the same opinion as my sister's maid!' he exclaimed. 'Assuming your absurd superstition to be a serious thing, you are taking the wrong means to prove it true. If I and my brother and sister have seen nothing, how should Agnes Lockwood discover what was not revealed to us? She is only distantly related to the Montbarrys--she is only our cousin.'

'She was nearer to the heart of the Montbarry who is dead than any of you,' the Countess answered sternly. 'To the last day of his life, my miserable husband repented his desertion of her. She will see what none of you have seen--she shall have the room.'

Francis listened, utterly at a loss to account for the motives that animated her. 'I don't see what interest you have in trying this extraordinary experiment,' he said.

'It is my interest not to try it! It is my interest to fly from Venice, and never set eyes on Agnes Lockwood or any of your family again!'

'What prevents you from doing that?'

She started to her feet and looked at him wildly. 'I know no more what prevents me than you do!' she burst out. 'Some will that is stronger than mine drives me on to my destruction, in spite of my own self!' She suddenly sat down again, and waved her hand to him to go. 'Leave me,' she said. 'Leave me to my thoughts.'

Francis left her, firmly persuaded by this time that she was out of her senses. For the rest of the day, he saw nothing of her. The night, so far as he knew, passed quietly. The next morning he breakfasted early, determining to wait in the restaurant for the appearance of the Countess. She came in and ordered her breakfast quietly, looking dull and worn and self-absorbed, as she had looked when he last saw her. He hastened to her table, and asked if anything had happened in the night.

'Nothing,' she answered.

'You have rested as well as usual?'

'Quite as well as usual. Have you had any letters this morning? Have you heard when she is coming?'

'I have had no letters. Are you really going to stay here? Has your experience of last night not altered the opinion which you expressed to me yesterday?'

'Not in the least.'

The momentary gleam of animation which had crossed her face when she questioned him about Agnes, died out.
of it again when he answered her. She looked, she spoke, she ate her breakfast, with a vacant resignation, like a woman who had done with hopes, done with interests, done with everything but the mechanical movements and instincts of life.

Francis went out, on the customary travellers' pilgrimage to the shrines of Titian and Tintoret. After some hours of absence, he found a letter waiting for him when he got back to the hotel. It was written by his brother Henry, and it recommended him to return to Milan immediately. The proprietor of a French theatre, recently arrived from Venice, was trying to induce the famous dancer whom Francis had engaged to break faith with him and accept a higher salary.

Having made this startling announcement, Henry proceeded to inform his brother that Lord and Lady Montbarry, with Agnes and the children, would arrive in Venice in three days more. 'They know nothing of our adventures at the hotel,' Henry wrote; 'and they have telegraphed to the manager for the accommodation that they want. There would be something absurdly superstitious in our giving them a warning which would frighten the ladies and children out of the best hotel in Venice. We shall be a strong party this time--too strong a party for ghosts! I shall meet the travellers on their arrival, of course, and try my luck again at what you call the Haunted Hotel. Arthur Barville and his wife have already got as far on their way as Trent; and two of the lady's relations have arranged to accompany them on the journey to Venice.'

Naturally indignant at the conduct of his Parisian colleague, Francis made his preparations for returning to Milan by the train of that day.

On his way out, he asked the manager if his brother's telegram had been received. The telegram had arrived, and, to the surprise of Francis, the rooms were already reserved. 'I thought you would refuse to let any more of the family into the house,' he said satirically. The manager answered (with the due dash of respect) in the same tone. 'Number 13 A is safe, sir, in the occupation of a stranger. I am the servant of the Company; and I dare not turn money out of the hotel.'

Hearing this, Francis said good-bye--and said nothing more. He was ashamed to acknowledge it to himself, but he felt an irresistible curiosity to know what would happen when Agnes arrived at the hotel. Besides, 'Mrs. James' had reposed a confidence in him. He got into his gondola, respecting the confidence of 'Mrs. James.'

Towards evening on the third day, Lord Montbarry and his travelling companions arrived, punctual to their appointment.

'Mrs. James,' sitting at the window of her room watching for them, saw the new Lord land from the gondola first. He handed his wife to the steps. The three children were next committed to his care. Last of all, Agnes appeared in the little black doorway of the gondola cabin, and, taking Lord Montbarry's hand, passed in her turn to the steps. She wore no veil. As she ascended to the door of the hotel, the Countess (eyeing her through an opera-glass) noticed that she paused to look at the outside of the building, and that her face was very pale.

CHAPTER XXI

Lord and Lady Montbarry were received by the housekeeper; the manager being absent for a day or two on business connected with the affairs of the hotel.

The rooms reserved for the travellers on the first floor were three in number; consisting of two bedrooms opening into each other, and communicating on the left with a drawing-room. Complete so far, the arrangements proved to be less satisfactory in reference to the third bedroom required for Agnes and for the eldest daughter of Lord Montbarry, who usually slept with her on their travels. The bed-chamber on the right of the drawing-room was already occupied by an English widow lady. Other bedchambers at the other end of the corridor were also let in every case. There was accordingly no alternative but to place at the disposal of Agnes a comfortable room on the second floor. Lady Montbarry vainly complained of this separation of one of the members of her travelling party from the rest. The housekeeper politely hinted that it was impossible for her to ask other travellers to give up their rooms. She could only express her regret, and assure Miss Lockwood that her bed-chamber on the second floor was one of the best rooms in that part of the hotel.

On the retirement of the housekeeper, Lady Montbarry noticed that Agnes had seated herself apart, feeling apparently no interest in the question of the bedrooms. Was she ill? No; she felt a little unnerved by the railway journey, and that was all. Hearing this, Lord Montbarry proposed that she should go out with him, and try the experiment of half an hour's walk in the cool evening air. Agnes gladly accepted the suggestion. They directed their steps towards the square of St. Mark, so as to enjoy the breeze blowing over the lagoon. It was the first visit of Agnes to Venice. The fascination of the wonderful city of the waters exerted its full influence over her sensitive nature. The proposed half-hour of the walk had passed away, and was fast expanding to half an hour more, before Lord Montbarry could persuade his companion to remember that dinner was waiting for them. As they returned, passing under the colonnade, neither of them noticed a lady in deep mourning, loitering in the open space of the square. She started as she recognised Agnes walking with the new Lord Montbarry-- hesitated for a moment--and
then followed them, at a discreet distance, back to the hotel.

Lady Montbarry received Agnes in high spirits—-with news of an event which had happened in her absence.

She had not left the hotel more than ten minutes, before a little note in pencil was brought to Lady Montbarry by the housekeeper. The writer proved to be no less a person than the widow lady who occupied the room on the other side of the drawing-room, which her ladyship had vainly hoped to secure for Agnes. Writing under the name of Mrs. James, the polite widow explained that she had heard from the housekeeper of the disappointment experienced by Lady Montbarry in the matter of the rooms. Mrs. James was quite alone; and as long as her bed-chamber was airy and comfortable, it mattered nothing to her whether she slept on the first or the second floor of the house. She had accordingly much pleasure in proposing to change rooms with Miss Lockwood. Her luggage had already been removed, and Miss Lockwood had only to take possession of the room (Number 13 A), which was now entirely at her disposal.

'I immediately proposed to see Mrs. James,' Lady Montbarry continued, 'and to thank her personally for her extreme kindness. But I was informed that she had gone out, without leaving word at what hour she might be expected to return. I have written a little note of thanks, saying that we hope to have the pleasure of personally expressing our sense of Mrs. James's courtesy to-morrow. In the mean time, Agnes, I have ordered your boxes to be removed downstairs. Go!—and judge for yourself, my dear, if that good lady has not given up to you the prettiest room in the house!'

With those words, Lady Montbarry left Miss Lockwood to make a hasty toilet for dinner.

The new room at once produced a favourable impression on Agnes. The large window, opening into a balcony, commanded an admirable view of the canal. The decorations on the walls and ceiling were skilfully copied from the exquisitely graceful designs of Raphael in the Vatican. The massive wardrobe possessed compartments of unusual size, in which double the number of dresses that Agnes possessed might have been conveniently hung at full length. In the inner corner of the room, near the head of the bedstead, there was a recess which had been turned into a little dressing-room, and which opened by a second door on the inferior staircase of the hotel, commonly used by the servants. Noticing these aspects of the room at a glance, Agnes made the necessary change in her dress, as quickly as possible. On her way back to the drawing-room she was addressed by a chambermaid in the corridor who asked for her key. 'I will put your room tidy for the night, Miss,' the woman said, 'and I will then bring the key back to you in the drawing-room.'

While the chambermaid was at her work, a solitary lady, loitering about the corridor of the second storey, was watching her over the bannisters. After a while, the maid appeared, with her pail in her hand, leaving the room by way of the dressing-room and the back stairs. As she passed out of sight, the lady on the second floor (no other, it is needless to add, than the Countess herself) ran swiftly down the stairs, entered the bed-chamber by the principal door, and hid herself in the empty side compartment of the wardrobe. The chambermaid returned, completed her work, locked the door of the dressing-room on the inner side, locked the principal entrance-door on leaving the room, and returned the key to Agnes in the drawing-room.

The travellers were just sitting down to their late dinner, when one of the children noticed that Agnes was not wearing her watch. Had she left it in her bed-chamber in the hurry of changing her dress? She rose from the table at once in search of her watch; Lady Montbarry advising her, as she went out, to see to the security of her bed-chamber, in the event of there being thieves in the house. Agnes found her watch, forgotten on the toilet table, as she had anticipated. Before leaving the room again she acted on Lady Montbarry's advice, and tried the key in the lock of the dressing-room door. It was properly secured. She left the bed-chamber, locking the main door behind her.

Immediately on her departure, the Countess, oppressed by the confined air in the wardrobe, ventured on stepping out of her hiding place into the empty room.

Entering the dressing-room, she listened at the door, until the silence outside informed her that the corridor was empty. Upon this, she unlocked the door, and, passing out, closed it again softly; leaving it to all appearance (when viewed on the inner side) as carefully secured as Agnes had seen it when she tried the key in the lock with her own hand.

While the Montbarsys were still at dinner, Henry Westwick joined them, arriving from Milan.

When he entered the room, and again when he advanced to shake hands with her, Agnes was conscious of a latent feeling which secretly reciprocated Henry's unconcealed pleasure on meeting her again. For a moment only, she returned his look; and in that moment her own observation told her that she had silently encouraged him to hope. She saw it in the sudden glow of happiness which overspread his face; and she confusedly took refuge in the usual conventional inquiries relating to the relatives whom he had left at Milan.

Taking his place at the table, Henry gave a most amusing account of the position of his brother Francis between the mercenary opera-dancer on one side, and the unscrupulous manager of the French theatre on the other. Matters had proceeded to such extremities, that the law had been called on to interfere, and had decided the dispute in favour
of Francis. On winning the victory the English manager had at once left Milan, recalled to London by the affairs of
his theatre. He was accompanied on the journey back, as he had been accompanied on the journey out, by his sister.
Resolved, after passing two nights of terror in the Venetian hotel, never to enter it again, Mrs. Norbury asked to be
excused from appearing at the family festival, on the ground of ill-health. At her age, travelling fatigued her, and she
was glad to take advantage of her brother's escort to return to England.

While the talk at the dinner-table flowed easily onward, the evening-time advanced to night--and it became
necessary to think of sending the children to bed.

As Agnes rose to leave the room, accompanied by the eldest girl, she observed with surprise that Henry's manner
suddenly changed. He looked serious and pre-occupied; and when his niece wished him good night, he abruptly said
to her, 'Marian, I want to know what part of the hotel you sleep in?' Marian, puzzled by the question, answered that
she was going to sleep, as usual, with 'Aunt Agnes.' Not satisfied with that reply, Henry next inquired whether the
bedroom was near the rooms occupied by the other members of the travelling party. Answering for the child, and
wondering what Henry's object could possibly be, Agnes mentioned the polite sacrifice made to her convenience by
Mrs. James. 'Thanks to that lady's kindness,' she said, 'Marian and I are only on the other side of the drawing-room.'
Henry made no remark; he looked incomprehensibly discontented as he opened the door for Agnes and her
companion to pass out. After wishing them good night, he waited in the corridor until he saw them enter the fatal
corner-room--and then he called abruptly to his brother, 'Come out, Stephen, and let us smoke!'

As soon as the two brothers were at liberty to speak together privately, Henry explained the motive which had
led to his strange inquiries about the bedrooms. Francis had informed him of the meeting with the Countess at
Venice, and of all that had followed it; and Henry now carefully repeated the narrative to his brother in all its details.
'I am not satisfied,' he added, 'about that woman's purpose in giving up her room. Without alarming the ladies by
telling them what I have just told you, can you not warn Agnes to be careful in securing her door?'

Lord Montbarry replied, that the warning had been already given by his wife, and that Agnes might be trusted to
take good care of herself and her little bed-fellow. For the rest, he looked upon the story of the Countess and her
superstitions as a piece of theatrical exaggeration, amusing enough in itself, but unworthy of a moment's serious
attention.

While the gentlemen were absent from the hotel, the room which had been already associated with so many
startling circumstances, became the scene of another strange event in which Lady Montbarry's eldest child was
concerned.

Little Marian had been got ready for bed as usual, and had (so far) taken hardly any notice of the new room. As
she knelt down to say her prayers, she happened to look up at that part of the ceiling above her which was just over
the head of the bed. The next instant she alarmed Agnes, by starting to her feet with a cry of terror, and pointing to a
small brown spot on one of the white panelled spaces of the carved ceiling. 'It's a spot of blood!' the child exclaimed.
'Take me away! I won't sleep here!'

Seeing plainly that it would be useless to reason with her while she was in the room, Agnes hurriedly wrapped
Marian in a dressing-gown, and carried her back to her mother in the drawing-room. Here, the ladies did their best to
soothe and reassure the trembling girl. The effort proved to be useless; the impression that had been produced on the
young and sensitive mind was not to be removed by persuasion. Marian could give no explanation of the panic of
terror that had seized her. She was quite unable to say why the spot on the ceiling looked like the colour of a spot of
blood. She only knew that she should die of terror if she saw it again. Under these circumstances, but one alternative
was left. It was arranged that the child should pass the night in the room occupied by her two younger sisters and the
nurse.

In half an hour more, Marian was peacefully asleep with her arm around her sister's neck. Lady Montbarry went
back with Agnes to her room to see the spot on the ceiling which had so strangely frightened the child. It was so
small as to be only just perceptible, and it had in all probability been caused by the carelessness of a workman, or by
a dripping from water accidentally spilt on the floor of the room above.

'I really cannot understand why Marian should place such a shocking interpretation on such a trifling thing,'
Lady Montbarry remarked.

'I suspect the nurse is in some way answerable for what has happened,' Agnes suggested. 'She may quite possibly
have been telling Marian some tragic nursery story which has left its mischievous impression behind it. Persons in
her position are sadly ignorant of the danger of exciting a child's imagination. You had better caution the nurse to-

Lady Montbarry looked round the room with admiration. 'Is it not prettily decorated?' she said. 'I suppose,
Agnes, you don't mind sleeping here by yourself?'

Agnes laughed. 'I feel so tired,' she replied, 'that I was thinking of bidding you good-night, instead of going back
to the drawing-room.'
Lady Montbarry turned towards the door. 'I see your jewel-case on the table,' she resumed. 'Don't forget to lock the other door there, in the dressing-room.'

'I have already seen to it, and tried the key myself,' said Agnes. 'Can I be of any use to you before I go to bed?'

'No, my dear, thank you; I feel sleepy enough to follow your example. Good night, Agnes--and pleasant dreams on your first night in Venice.'

CHAPTER XXII

Having closed and secured the door on Lady Montbarry's departure, Agnes put on her dressing-gown, and, turning to her open boxes, began the business of unpacking. In the hurry of making her toilet for dinner, she had taken the first dress that lay uppermost in the trunk, and had thrown her travelling costume on the bed. She now opened the doors of the wardrobe for the first time, and began to hang her dresses on the hooks in the large compartment on one side.

After a few minutes only of this occupation, she grew weary of it, and decided on leaving the trunks as they were, until the next morning. The oppressive south wind, which had blown throughout the day, still prevailed at night. The atmosphere of the room felt close; Agnes threw a shawl over her head and shoulders, and, opening the window, stepped into the balcony to look at the view.

The night was heavy and overcast: nothing could be distinctly seen. The canal beneath the window looked like a black gulf; the opposite houses were barely visible as a row of shadows, dimly relieved against the starless and moonless sky. At long intervals, the warning cry of a belated gondolier was just audible, as he turned the corner of a distant canal, and called to invisible boats which might be approaching him in the darkness. Now and then, the nearer dip of an oar in the water told of the viewless passage of other gondolas bringing guests back to the hotel. Excepting these rare sounds, the mysterious night-silence of Venice was literally the silence of the grave.

Leaning on the parapet of the balcony, Agnes looked vacantly into the black void beneath. Her thoughts reverted to the miserable man who had broken his pledged faith to her, and who had died in that house. Some change seemed to have come over her since her arrival in Venice; some new influence appeared to be at work. For the first time in her experience of herself, compassion and regret were not the only emotions aroused in her by the remembrance of the dead Montbarry. A keen sense of the wrong that she had suffered, never yet felt by that gentle and forgiving nature, was felt by it now. She found herself thinking of the bygone days of her humiliation almost as harshly as Henry Westwick had thought of them-- she who had rebuked him the last time he had spoken slightingly of his brother in her presence! A sudden fear and doubt of herself, startled her physically as well as morally. She turned from the shadowy abyss of the dark water as if the mystery and the gloom of it had been answerable for the emotions which had taken her by surprise. Abruptly closing the window, she threw aside her shawl, and lit the candles on the mantelpiece, impelled by a sudden craving for light in the solitude of her room.

The cheering brightness round her, contrasting with the black gloom outside, restored her spirits. She felt herself enjoying the light like a child!

Would it be well (she asked herself) to get ready for bed? No! The sense of drowsy fatigue that she had felt half an hour since was gone. She returned to the dull employment of unpacking her boxes. After a few minutes only, the occupation became irksome to her once more. She sat down by the table, and took up a guide-book. 'Suppose I inform myself,' she thought, 'on the subject of Venice?'

Her attention wandered from the book, before she had turned the first page of it.

The image of Henry Westwick was the presiding image in her memory now. Recalling the minutest incidents and details of the evening, she could think of nothing which presented him under other than a favourable and interesting aspect. She smiled to herself softly, her colour rose by fine gradations, as she felt the full luxury of dwelling on the perfect truth and modesty of his devotion to her. Was the depression of spirits from which she had suffered so persistently on her travels attributable, by any chance, to their long separation from each other--embittered perhaps by her own vain regret when she remembered her harsh reception of him in Paris? Suddenly conscious of this bold question, and of the self-abandonment which it implied, she returned mechanically to her book, distrusting the unrestrained liberty of her own thoughts. What lurking temptations to forbidden tenderness find their hiding-places in a woman's dressing-gown, when she is alone in her room at night? With her heart in the tomb of the dead Montbarry, could Agnes even think of another man, and think of love? How shameful! how unworthy of her! For the second time, she tried to interest herself in the guide-book-- and once more she tried in vain. Throwing the book aside, she turned desperately to the one resource that was left, to her luggage--resolved to fatigue herself without mercy, until she was weary enough and sleepy enough to find a safe refuge in bed.

For some little time, she persisted in the monotonous occupation of transferring her clothes from her trunk to the wardrobe. The large clock in the hall, striking mid-night, reminded her that it was getting late. She sat down for a moment in an arm-chair by the bedside, to rest.

The silence in the house now caught her attention, and held it-- held it disagreeably. Was everybody in bed and
asleep but herself? Surely it was time for her to follow the general example? With a certain irritable nervous haste, she rose again and undressed herself. 'I have lost two hours of rest,' she thought, frowning at the reflection of herself in the glass, as she arranged her hair for the night. 'I shall be good for nothing to-morrow!'

She lit the night-light, and extinguished the candles-- with one exception, which she removed to a little table, placed on the side of the bed opposite to the side occupied by the arm-chair. Having put her travelling-box of matches and the guide-book near the candle, in case she might be sleepless and might want to read, she blew out the light, and laid her head on the pillow.

The curtains of the bed were looped back to let the air pass freely over her. Lying on her left side, with her face turned away from the table, she could see the arm-chair by the dim night-light. It had a chintz covering--representing large bunches of roses scattered over a pale green ground. She tried to weary herself into drowsiness by counting over and over again the bunches of roses that were visible from her point of view. Twice her attention was distracted from the counting, by sounds outside-- by the clock chiming the half-hour past twelve; and then again, by the fall of a pair of boots on the upper floor, thrown out to be cleaned, with that barbarous disregard of the comfort of others which is observable in humanity when it inhabits an hotel. In the silence that followed these passing disturbances, Agnes went on counting the roses on the arm-chair, more and more slowly. Before long, she confused herself in the figures--tried to begin counting again-- thought she would wait a little first--felt her eyelids drooping, and her head reclining lower and lower on the pillow--sighed faintly-- and sank into sleep.

How long that first sleep lasted, she never knew. She could only remember, in the after-time, that she woke instantly.

Every faculty and perception in her passed the boundary line between insensibility and consciousness, so to speak, at a leap. Without knowing why, she sat up suddenly in the bed, listening for she knew not what. Her head was in a whirl; her heart beat furiously, without any assignable cause. But one trivial event had happened during the interval while she had been asleep. The night-light had gone out; and the room, as a matter of course, was in total darkness.

She felt for the match-box, and paused after finding it. A vague sense of confusion was still in her mind. She was in no hurry to light the match. The pause in the darkness was, for the moment, agreeable to her.

In the quieter flow of her thoughts during this interval, she could ask herself the natural question:--What cause had awakened her so suddenly, and had so strangely shaken her nerves? Had it been the influence of a dream? She had not dreamed at all--or, to speak more correctly, she had no waking remembrance of having dreamed. The mystery was beyond her fathoming: the darkness began to oppress her. She struck the match on the box, and lit her candle.

As the welcome light diffused itself over the room, she turned from the table and looked towards the other side of the bed.

In the moment when she turned, the chill of a sudden terror gripped her round the heart, as with the clasp of an icy hand.

There--in the chair at the bedside--there, suddenly revealed under the flow of light from the candle, was the figure of a woman, reclining. Her head lay back over the chair. Her face, turned up to the ceiling, had the eyes closed, as if she was wrapped in a deep sleep.

The shock of the discovery held Agnes speechless and helpless. Her first conscious action, when she was in some degree mistress of herself again, was to lean over the bed, and to look closer at the woman who had so incomprehensibly stolen into her room in the dead of night. One glance was enough: she started back with a cry of amazement. The person in the chair was no other than the widow of the dead Montbarry--the woman who had warned her that they were to meet again, and that the place might be Venice!

Her courage returned to her, stung into action by the natural sense of indignation which the presence of the Countess provoked.

'Wake up!' she called out. 'How dare you come here? How did you get in? Leave the room--or I will call for help!'

She raised her voice at the last words. It produced no effect. Leaning farther over the bed, she boldly took the Countess by the shoulder and shook her. Not even this effort succeeded in rousing the sleeping woman. She still lay back in the chair, possessed by a torpor like the torpor of death--insensible to sound, insensible to touch. Was she really sleeping? Or had she fainted?

Agnes looked closer at her. She had not fainted. Her breathing was audible, rising and falling in deep heavy gasps. At intervals she ground her teeth savagely. Beads of perspiration stood thickly on her forehead. Her clenched hands rose and fell slowly from time to time on her lap. Was she in the agony of a dream? or was she spiritually conscious of something hidden in the room?
The doubt involved in that last question was unendurable. Agnes determined to rouse the servants who kept watch in the hotel at night.

The bell-handle was fixed to the wall, on the side of the bed by which the table stood.

She raised herself from the crouching position which she had assumed in looking close at the Countess; and, turning towards the other side of the bed, stretched out her hand to the bell. At the same instant, she stopped and looked upward. Her hand fell helplessly at her side. She shuddered, and sank back on the pillow.

What had she seen?

She had seen another intruder in her room.

Midway between her face and the ceiling, there hovered a human head--severed at the neck, like a head struck from the body by the guillotine.

Nothing visible, nothing audible, had given her any intelligible warning of its appearance. Silently and suddenly, the head had taken its place above her. No supernatural change had passed over the room, or was perceptible in it now. The dumbly-tortured figure in the chair; the broad window opposite the foot of the bed, with the black night beyond it; the candle burning on the table--these, and all other objects in the room, remained unaltered. One object more, unutterably horrid, had been added to the rest. That was the only change--no more, no less.

By the yellow candlelight she saw the head distinctly, hovering in mid-air above her. She looked at it steadfastly, spell-bound by the terror that held her.

The flesh of the face was gone. The shrivelled skin was darkened in hue, like the skin of an Egyptian mummy--except at the neck. There it was of a lighter colour; there it showed spots and splashes of the hue of that brown spot on the ceiling, which the child's fanciful terror had distorted into the likeness of a spot of blood. Thin remains of a discoloured moustache and whiskers, hanging over the upper lip, and over the hollows where the cheeks had once been, made the head just recognisable as the head of a man. Over all the features death and time had done their obliterating work. The eyelids were closed. The hair on the skull, discoloured like the hair on the face, had been burnt away in places. The bluish lips, parted in a fixed grin, showed the double row of teeth. By slow degrees, the hovering head (perfectly still when she first saw it) began to descend towards Agnes as she lay beneath. By slow degrees, that strange doubly-blended odour, which the Commissioners had discovered in the vaults of the old palace--which had sickened Francis Westwick in the bed-chamber of the new hotel--spread its fetid exhalations over the room. Downward and downward the hideous apparition made its slow progress, until it stopped close over Agnes--stopped, and turned slowly, so that the face of it confronted the upturned face of the woman in the chair.

There was a pause. Then, a supernatural movement disturbed the rigid repose of the dead face.

The closed eyelids opened slowly. The eyes revealed themselves, bright with the glassy film of death--and fixed their dreadful look on the woman in the chair.

Agnes saw that look; saw the eyelids of the living woman open slowly like the eyelids of the dead; saw her rise, as if in obedience to some silent command--and saw no more.

Her next conscious impression was of the sunlight pouring in at the window; of the friendly presence of Lady Montbarry at the bedside; and of the children's wondering faces peeping in at the door.

CHAPTER XXIII

'...You have some influence over Agnes. Try what you can do, Henry, to make her take a sensible view of the matter. There is really nothing to make a fuss about. My wife's maid knocked at her door early in the morning, with the customary cup of tea. Getting no answer, she went round to the dressing-room--found the door on that side unlocked--and discovered Agnes on the bed in a fainting fit. With my wife's help, they brought her to herself again; and she told the extraordinary story which I have just repeated to you. You must have seen for yourself that she has been over-fatigued, poor thing, by our long railway journeys: her nerves are out of order--and discovered Agnes on the bed in a fainting fit. With my wife's help, they brought her to herself again; and she told the extraordinary story which I have just repeated to you. You must have seen for yourself that she has been over-fatigued, poor thing, by our long railway journeys: her nerves are out of order--and discovered Agnes on the bed in a fainting fit. With my wife's help, they brought her to herself again; and she told the extraordinary story which I have just repeated to you. You must have seen for yourself that she has been over-fatigued, poor thing, by our long railway journeys: her nerves are out of order--and discovered Agnes on the bed in a fainting fit. With my wife's help, they brought her to herself again; and she told the extraordinary story which I have just repeated to you. You must have seen for yourself that she has been over-fatigued, poor thing, by our long railway journeys: her nerves are out of order--and discovered Agnes on the bed in a fainting fit.'
'I am that friend, Agnes,' Henry answered quietly, 'and you know it.'
'You really believe that I am not deluded by a dream?'
'I know that you are not deluded--in one particular, at least.'
'In what particular?'
'In what you have said of the Countess. It is perfectly true--'
Agnes stopped him there. 'Why do I only hear this morning that the Countess and Mrs. James are one and the same person?' she asked distrustfully. 'Why was I not told of it last night?'
'You forget that you had accepted the exchange of rooms before I reached Venice,' Henry replied. 'I felt strongly tempted to tell you, even then--but your sleeping arrangements for the night were all made; I should only have inconvenienced and alarmed you. I waited till the morning, after hearing from my brother that you had yourself seen to your security from any intrusion. How that intrusion was accomplished it is impossible to say. I can only declare that the Countess's presence by your bedside last night was no dream of yours. On her own authority I can testify that it was a reality.'
'On her own authority?' Agnes repeated eagerly. 'Have you seen her this morning?'
'I have seen her not ten minutes since.'
'What was she doing?'
'She was busily engaged in writing. I could not even get her to look at me until I thought of mentioning your name.'
'She remembered me, of course?'
'She remembered you with some difficulty. Finding that she wouldn't answer me on any other terms, I questioned her as if I had come direct from you. Then she spoke. She not only admitted that she had the same superstitious motive for placing you in that room which she had acknowledged to Francis--she even owned that she had been by your bedside, watching through the night, "to see what you saw," as she expressed it. Hearing this, I tried to persuade her to tell me how she got into the room. Unluckily, her manuscript on the table caught her eye; she returned to her writing. "The Baron wants money," she said; "I must get on with my play." What she saw or dreamed while she was in your room last night, it is at present impossible to discover. But judging by my brother's account of her, as well as by what I remember of her myself, some recent influence has been at work which has produced a marked change in this wretched woman for the worse. Her mind (since last night, perhaps) is partially deranged. One proof of it is that she spoke to me of the Baron as if he were still a living man. When Francis saw her, she declared that the Baron was dead, which is the truth. The United States Consul at Milan showed us the announcement of the death in an American newspaper. So far as I can see, such sense as she still possesses seems to be entirely absorbed in one absurd idea--the idea of writing a play for Francis to bring out at his theatre. He admits that he encouraged her to hope she might get money in this way. I think he did wrong. Don't you agree with me?'
Without heeding the question, Agnes rose abruptly from her chair.
'Do me one more kindness, Henry,' she said. 'Take me to the Countess at once.'
Henry hesitated. 'Are you composed enough to see her, after the shock that you have suffered?' he asked.
She trembled, the flush on her face died away, and left it deadly pale. But she held to her resolution. 'You have heard of what I saw last night?' she said faintly.
'Don't speak of it!' Henry interposed. 'Don't uselessly agitate yourself.'
'I must speak! My mind is full of horrid questions about it. I know I can't identify it--and yet I ask myself over and over again, in whose likeness did it appear? Was it in the likeness of Ferrari? or was it--?' she stopped, shuddering. 'The Countess knows, I must see the Countess!' she resumed vehemently. 'Whether my courage fails me or not, I must make the attempt. Take me to her before I have time to feel afraid of it!'
Henry looked at her anxiously. 'If you are really sure of your own resolution,' he said, 'I agree with you--the sooner you see her the better. You remember how strangely she talked of your influence over her, when she forced her way into your room in London?'
'I remember it perfectly. Why do you ask?'
'For this reason. In the present state of her mind, I doubt if she will be much longer capable of realizing her wild idea of you as the avenging angel who is to bring her to a reckoning for her evil deeds. It may be well to try what your influence can do while she is still capable of feeling it.'
He waited to hear what Agnes would say. She took his arm and led him in silence to the door.
They ascended to the second floor, and, after knocking, entered the Countess's room.
She was still busily engaged in writing. When she looked up from the paper, and saw Agnes, a vacant expression of doubt was the only expression in her wild black eyes. After a few moments, the lost remembrances and associations appeared to return slowly to her mind. The pen dropped from her hand. Haggard and trembling, she looked closer at Agnes, and recognised her at last. 'Has the time come already?' she said in low awe-struck tones.
'Give me a little longer respite, I haven't done my writing yet!' She dropped on her knees, and held out her clasped hands entreatingly. Agnes was far from having recovered, after the shock that she had suffered in the night: her nerves were far from being equal to the strain that was now laid on them. She was so startled by the change in the Countess, that she was at a loss what to say or to do next. Henry was obliged to speak to her. 'Put your questions while you have the chance,' he said, lowering his voice. 'See! the vacant look is coming over her face again.'

Agnes tried to rally her courage. 'You were in my room last night--' she began. Before she could add a word more, the Countess lifted her hands, and wrung them above her head with a low moan of horror. Agnes shrank back, and turned as if to leave the room. Henry stopped her, and whispered to her to try again. She obeyed him after an effort. 'I slept last night in the room that you gave up to me,' she resumed. 'I saw--'

The Countess suddenly rose to her feet. 'No more of that,' she cried. 'Oh, Jesu Maria! do you think I want to be told what you saw? Do you think I don't know what it means for you and for me? Decide for yourself, Miss. Examine your own mind. Are you well assured that the day of reckoning has come at last? Are you ready to follow me back, through the crimes of the past, to the secrets of the dead?'

She returned again to the writing-table, without waiting to be answered. Her eyes flashed; she looked like her old self once more as she spoke. It was only for a moment. The old ardour and impetuosity were nearly worn out. Her head sank; she sighed heavily as she unlocked a desk which stood on the table. Opening a drawer in the desk, she took out a leaf of vellum, covered with faded writing. Some ragged ends of silken thread were still attached to the leaf, as if it had been torn out of a book.

'Can you read Italian?' she asked, handing the leaf to Agnes.

Agnes answered silently by an inclination of her head.

'The leaf,' the Countess proceeded, 'once belonged to a book in the old library of the palace, while this building was still a palace. By whom it was torn out you have no need to know. For what purpose it was torn out you may discover for yourself, if you will. Read it first--at the fifth line from the top of the page.'

Agnes felt the serious necessity of composing herself. 'Give me a chair,' she said to Henry; 'and I will do my best.' He placed himself behind her chair so that he could look over her shoulder and help her to understand the writing on the leaf. Rendered into English, it ran as follows:-:

I have now completed my literary survey of the first floor of the palace. At the desire of my noble and gracious patron, the lord of this glorious edifice, I next ascend to the second floor, and continue my catalogue or description of the pictures, decorations, and other treasures of art therein contained. Let me begin with the corner room at the western extremity of the palace, called the Room of the Caryatides, from the statues which support the mantel-piece. This work is of comparatively recent execution: it dates from the eighteenth century only, and reveals the corrupt taste of the period in every part of it. Still, there is a certain interest which attaches to the mantel-piece: it conceals a cleverly constructed hiding-place, between the floor of the room and the ceiling of the room beneath, which was made during the last evil days of the Inquisition in Venice, and which is reported to have saved an ancestor of my gracious lord pursued by that terrible tribunal. The machinery of this curious place of concealment has been kept in good order by the present lord, as a species of curiosity. He condescended to show me the method of working it. Approaching the two Caryatides, rest your hand on the forehead (midway between the eyebrows) of the figure which is on your left as you stand opposite to the fireplace, then press the head inwards as if you were pushing it against the wall behind. By doing this, you set in motion the hidden machinery in the wall which turns the hearthstone on a pivot, and discloses the hollow place below. There is room enough in it for a man to lie easily at full length. The method of closing the cavity again is equally simple. Place both your hands on the temples of the hearthstone on a pivot, and the hearthstone will revolve into its proper position again.

'You need read no farther,' said the Countess. 'Be careful to remember what you have read.' She put back the page of vellum in her writing-desk, locked it, and led the way to the door.

'Come!' she said; 'and see what the mocking Frenchman called "The beginning of the end."'

Agnes was barely able to rise from her chair; she trembled from head to foot. Henry gave her his arm to support her. 'Fear nothing,' he whispered; 'I shall be with you.'

The Countess proceeded along the westward corridor, and stopped at the door numbered Thirty-eight. This was the room which had been inhabited by Baron Rivar in the old days of the palace: it was situated immediately over the bedchamber in which Agnes had passed the night. For the last two days the room had been empty. The absence of luggage in it, when they opened the door, showed that it had not yet been let.

'You see?' said the Countess, pointing to the carved figure at the fire-place; 'and you know what to do. Have I deserved that you should temper justice with mercy?' she went on in lower tones. 'Give me a few hours more to myself. The Baron wants money-- I must get on with my play.'

She smiled vacantly, and imitated the action of writing with her right hand as she pronounced the last words. The
effort of concentrating her weakened mind on other and less familiar topics than the constant want of money in the
Baron's lifetime, and the vague prospect of gain from the still unfinished play, had evidently exhausted her poor
reserves of strength. When her request had been granted, she addressed no expressions of gratitude to Agnes; she
only said, 'Feel no fear, miss, of my attempting to escape you. Where you are, there I must be till the end comes.'

Her eyes wandered round the room with a last weary and stupefied look. She returned to her writing with slow
and feeble steps, like the steps of an old woman.

CHAPTER XXIV

Henry and Agnes were left alone in the Room of the Caryatides.

The person who had written the description of the palace-- probably a poor author or artist--had correctly pointed
out the defects of the mantel-piece. Bad taste, exhibiting itself on the most costly and splendid scale, was visible in
every part of the work. It was nevertheless greatly admired by ignorant travellers of all classes; partly on account of
its imposing size, and partly on account of the number of variously-coloured marbles which the sculptor had
contrived to introduce into his design. Photographs of the mantel-piece were exhibited in the public rooms, and
found a ready sale among English and American visitors to the hotel.

Henry led Agnes to the figure on the left, as they stood facing the empty fire-place. 'Shall I try the experiment,'
he asked, 'or will you?' She abruptly drew her arm away from him, and turned back to the door. 'I can't even look at
it,' she said. 'That merciless marble face frightens me!'

Henry put his hand on the forehead of the figure. 'What is there to alarm you, my dear, in this conventionally
classical face?' he asked jestingly. Before he could press the head inwards, Agnes hurriedly opened the door. 'Wait
till I am out of the room!' she cried. 'The bare idea of what you may find there horrifies me!' She looked back into
the room as she crossed the threshold. 'I won't leave you altogether,' she said, 'I will wait outside.'

She closed the door. Left by himself, Henry lifted his hand once more to the marble forehead of the figure.

For the second time, he was checked on the point of setting the machinery of the hiding-place in motion. On this
occasion, the interruption came from an outbreak of friendly voices in the corridor. A woman's voice exclaimed,
'Dearest Agnes, how glad I am to see you again!' A man's voice followed, offering to introduce some friend to 'Miss
Lockwood.' A third voice (which Henry recognised as the voice of the manager of the hotel) became audible next,
directing the housekeeper to show the ladies and gentlemen the vacant apartments at the other end of the corridor. 'If
more accommodation is wanted,' the manager went on, 'I have a charming room to let here.' He opened the door as
he spoke, and found himself face to face with Henry Westwick.

'This is indeed an agreeable surprise, sir!' said the manager cheerfully. 'You are admiring our famous chimney-
piece, I see. May I ask, Mr. Westwick, how you find yourself in the hotel, this time? Have the supernatural
influences affected your appetite again?

'The supernatural influences have spared me, this time,' Henry answered. 'Perhaps you may yet find that they
have affected some other member of the family.' He spoke gravely, resenting the familiar tone in which the manager
had referred to his previous visit to the hotel. 'Have you just returned?' he asked, by way of changing the topic.

'Just this minute, sir. I had the honour of travelling in the same train with friends of yours who have arrived at
the hotel-- Mr. and Mrs. Arthur Barville, and their travelling companions. Miss Lockwood is with them, looking at
the rooms. They will be here before long, if they find it convenient to have an extra room at their disposal.'

This announcement decided Henry on exploring the hiding-place, before the interruption occurred. It had
crossed his mind, when Agnes left him, that he ought perhaps to have a witness, in the not very probable event of
some alarming discovery taking place. The too-familiar manager, suspecting nothing, was there at his disposal. He
turned again to the Caryan figure, maliciously resolving to make the manager his witness.

'I am delighted to hear that our friends have arrived at last,' he said. 'Before I shake hands with them, let me ask
you a question about this queer work of art here. I see photographs of it downstairs. Are they for sale?'

'Certainly, Mr. Westwick!'

'Do you think the chimney-piece is as solid as it looks?' Henry proceeded. 'When you came in, I was just
wondering whether this figure here had not accidentally got loosened from the wall behind it.' He laid his hand on
the marble forehead, for the third time. 'To my eye, it looks a little out of the perpendicular. I almost fancied I could
jog the head just now, when I touched it.' He pressed the head inwards as he said those words.

A sound of jarring iron was instantly audible behind the wall. The solid hearthstone in front of the fire-place
turned slowly at the feet of the two men, and disclosed a dark cavity below. At the same moment, the strange and
sickening combination of odours, hitherto associated with the vaults of the old palace and with the bed-chamber
beneath, now floated up from the open recess, and filled the room.

The manager started back. 'Good God, Mr. Westwick!' he exclaimed, 'what does this mean?'

Remembering, not only what his brother Francis had felt in the room beneath, but what the experience of Agnes
had been on the previous night, Henry was determined to be on his guard. 'I am as much surprised as you are,' was
his only reply.

'Wait for me one moment, sir,' said the manager. 'I must stop the ladies and gentlemen outside from coming in.'

He hurried away—not forgetting to close the door after him. Henry opened the window, and waited there breathing the purer air. Vague apprehensions of the next discovery to come, filled his mind for the first time. He was doubly resolved, now, not to stir a step in the investigation without a witness.

The manager returned with a wax taper in his hand, which he lighted as soon as he entered the room.

'We need fear no interruption now,' he said. 'Be so kind, Mr. Westwick, as to hold the light. It is my business to find out what this extraordinary discovery means.'

Henry held the taper. Looking into the cavity, by the dim and flickering light, they both detected a dark object at the bottom of it. 'I think I can reach the thing,' the manager remarked, 'if I lie down, and put my hand into the hole.'

He knelt on the floor—and hesitated. 'Might I ask you, sir, to give me my gloves?' he said. 'They are in my hat, on the chair behind you.'

Henry gave him the gloves. 'I don't know what I may be going to take hold of,' the manager explained, smiling rather uneasily as he put on his right glove.

He stretched himself at full length on the floor, and passed his right arm into the cavity. 'I can't say exactly what I have got hold of,' he said. 'But I have got it.'

Half raising himself, he drew his hand out.

The next instant, he started to his feet with a shriek of terror. A human head dropped from his nerveless grasp on the floor, and rolled to Henry's feet. It was the hideous head that Agnes had seen hovering above her, in the vision of the night!

The two men looked at each other, both struck speechless by the same emotion of horror. The manager was the first to control himself. 'See to the door, for God's sake!' he said. 'Some of the people outside may have heard me.'

Henry moved mechanically to the door.

Even when he had his hand on the key, ready to turn it in the lock in case of necessity, he still looked back at the appalling object on the floor. There was no possibility of identifying those decayed and distorted features with any living creature whom he had seen—and, yet, he was conscious of feeling a vague and awful doubt which shook him to the soul. The questions which had tortured the mind of Agnes, were now his questions too. He asked himself, 'In whose likeness might I have recognised it before the decay set in? The likeness of Ferrari? or the likeness of--?' He paused trembling, as Agnes had paused trembling before him. Agnes! The name, of all women's names the dearest to him, was a terror to him now! What was he to say to her? What might be the consequence if he trusted her with the terrible truth?

No footsteps approached the door; no voices were audible outside. The travellers were still occupied in the rooms at the eastern end of the corridor.

In the brief interval that had passed, the manager had sufficiently recovered himself to be able to think once more of the first and foremost interests of his life—the interests of the hotel. He approached Henry anxiously.

'If this frightful discovery becomes known,' he said, 'the closing of the hotel and the ruin of the Company will be the inevitable results. I feel sure that I can trust your discretion, sir, so far?'

'You can certainly trust me,' Henry answered. 'But surely discretion has its limits,' he added, 'after such a discovery as we have made?'

The manager understood that the duty which they owed to the community, as honest and law-abiding men, was the duty to which Henry now referred. 'I will at once find the means,' he said, 'of conveying the remains privately out of the house, and I will myself place them in the care of the police authorities. Will you leave the room with me? or do you not object to keep watch here, and help me when I return?'

While he was speaking, the voices of the travellers made themselves heard again at the end of the corridor. Henry instantly consented to wait in the room. He shrank from facing the inevitable meeting with Agnes if he showed himself in the corridor at that moment.

The manager hastened his departure, in the hope of escaping notice. He was discovered by his guests before he could reach the head of the stairs. Henry heard the voices plainly as he turned the key. While the terrible drama of discovery was in progress on one side of the door, trivial questions about the amusements of Venice, and facetious discussions on the relative merits of French and Italian cookery, were proceeding on the other. Little by little, the sound of the talking grew fainter. The visitors, having arranged their plans of amusement for the day, were on their way out of the hotel. In a minute or two, there was silence once more.

Henry turned to the window, thinking to relieve his mind by looking at the bright view over the canal. He soon grew wearied of the familiar scene. The morbid fascination which seems to be exercised by all horrible sights, drew him back again to the ghastly object on the floor.

Dream or reality, how had Agnes survived the sight of it? As the question passed through his mind, he noticed
for the first time something lying on the floor near the head. Looking closer, he perceived a thin little plate of gold, with three false teeth attached to it, which had apparently dropped out (loosened by the shock) when the manager let the head fall on the floor.

The importance of this discovery, and the necessity of not too readily communicating it to others, instantly struck Henry. Here surely was a chance—if any chance remained—of identifying the shocking relic of humanity which lay before him, the dumb witness of a crime! Acting on this idea, he took possession of the teeth, purposing to use them as a last means of inquiry when other attempts at investigation had been tried and had failed.

He went back again to the window: the solitude of the room began to weigh on his spirits. As he looked out again at the view, there was a soft knock at the door. He hastened to open it—and checked himself in the act. A doubt occurred to him. Was it the manager who had knocked? He called out, 'Who is there?'

The voice of Agnes answered him. 'Have you anything to tell me, Henry?'

He was hardly able to reply. 'Not just now,' he said, confusedly. 'Forgive me if I don't open the door. I will speak to you a little later.'

The sweet voice made itself heard again, pleading with him piteously. 'Don't leave me alone, Henry! I can't go back to the happy people downstairs.'

How could he resist that appeal? He heard her sigh—he heard the rustling of her dress as she moved away in despair. The very thing that he had shrunk from doing but a few minutes since was the thing that he did now! He joined Agnes in the corridor. She turned as she heard him, and pointed, trembling, in the direction of the closed room. 'Is it so terrible as that?' she asked faintly.

He put his arm round her to support her. A thought came to him as he looked at her, waiting in doubt and fear for his reply. 'You shall know what I have discovered,' he said, 'if you will first put on your hat and cloak, and come out with me.'

She was naturally surprised. 'Can you tell me your object in going out?' she asked.

He owned what his object was unreservedly. 'I want, before all things,' he said, 'to satisfy your mind and mine, on the subject of Montbarry's death. I am going to take you to the doctor who attended him in his illness, and to the consul who followed him to the grave.'

Her eyes rested on Henry gratefully. 'Oh, how well you understand me!' she said. The manager joined them at the same moment, on his way up the stairs. Henry gave him the key of the room, and then called to the servants in the hall to have a gondola ready at the steps. 'Are you leaving the hotel?' the manager asked. 'In search of evidence,' Henry whispered, pointing to the key. 'If the authorities want me, I shall be back in an hour.'

CHAPTER XXV

The day had advanced to evening. Lord Montbarry and the bridal party had gone to the Opera. Agnes alone, pleading the excuse of fatigue, remained at the hotel. Having kept up appearances by accompanying his friends to the theatre, Henry Westwick slipped away after the first act, and joined Agnes in the drawing-room.

'Have you thought of what I said to you earlier in the day?' he asked, taking a chair at her side. 'Do you agree with me that the one dreadful doubt which oppressed us both is at least set at rest?'

Agnes shook her head sadly. 'I wish I could agree with you, Henry— I wish I could honestly say that my mind is at ease.'

The answer would have discouraged most men. Henry's patience (where Agnes was concerned) was equal to any demands on it.

'If you will only look back at the events of the day,' he said, 'you must surely admit that we have not been completely baffled. Remember how Dr. Bruno disposed of our doubts:—"After thirty years of medical practice, do you think I am likely to mistake the symptoms of death by bronchitis?" If ever there was an unanswerable question, there it is! Was the consul's testimony doubtful in any part of it? He called at the palace to offer his services, after hearing of Lord Montbarry's death; he arrived at the time when the coffin was in the house; he himself saw the corpse placed in it, and the lid screwed down. The evidence of the priest is equally beyond dispute. He remained in the room with the coffin, reciting the prayers for the dead, until the funeral left the palace. Bear all these statements in mind, Agnes; and how can you deny that the question of Montbarry's death and burial is a question set at rest? We have really but one doubt left: we have still to ask ourselves whether the remains which I discovered are the remains of the lost courier, or not. There is the case, as I understand it. Have I stated it fairly?'

Agnes could not deny that he had stated it fairly.

"Then what prevents you from experiencing the same sense of relief that I feel?" Henry asked.

'What I saw last night prevents me,' Agnes answered. 'When we spoke of this subject, after our inquiries were over, you reproached me with taking what you called the superstitious view. I don't quite admit that—but I do acknowledge that I should find the superstitious view intelligible if I heard it expressed by some other person. Remembering what your brother and I once were to each other in the bygone time, I can understand the apparition
making itself visible to me, to claim the mercy of Christian burial, and the vengeance due to a crime. I can even perceive some faint possibility of truth in the explanation which you described as the mesmeric theory— that what I saw might be the result of magnetic influence communicated to me, as I lay between the remains of the murdered husband above me and the guilty wife suffering the tortures of remorse at my bedside. But what I do not understand is, that I should have passed through that dreadful ordeal; having no previous knowledge of the murdered man in his lifetime, or only knowing him (if you suppose that I saw the apparition of Ferrari) through the interest which I took in his wife. I can't dispute your reasoning, Henry. But I feel in my heart of hearts that you are deceived. Nothing will shake my belief that we are still as far from having discovered the dreadful truth as ever.'

Henry made no further attempt to dispute with her. She had impressed him with a certain reluctant respect for her own opinion, in spite of himself.

'Have you thought of any better way of arriving at the truth?' he asked. 'Who is to help us? No doubt there is the Countess, who has the clue to the mystery in her own hands. But, in the present state of her mind, is her testimony to be trusted—even if she were willing to speak? Judging by my own experience, I should say decidedly not.'

'You don't mean that you have seen her again?' Agnes eagerly interposed.

'Yes. I disturbed her once more over her endless writing; and I insisted on her speaking out plainly.'

'Then you told her what you found when you opened the hiding-place?'

'Of course I did!' Henry replied. 'I said that I held her responsible for the discovery, though I had not mentioned her connection with it to the authorities as yet. She went on with her writing as if I had spoken in an unknown tongue! I was equally obstinate, on my side. I told her plainly that the head had been placed under the care of the police, and that the manager and I had signed our declarations and given our evidence. She paid not the slightest heed to me. By way of tempting her to speak, I added that the whole investigation was to be kept a secret, and that she might depend on my discretion. For the moment I thought I had succeeded. She looked up from her writing with a passing flash of curiosity, and said, "What are they going to do with it?"—meaning, I suppose, the head. I answered that it was to be privately buried, after photographs of it had first been taken. I even went the length of communicating the opinion of the surgeon consulted, that some chemical means of arresting decomposition had been used and had only partially succeeded—and I asked her point-blank if the surgeon was right? The trap was not a bad one—but it completely failed. She said in the coolest manner, "Now you are here, I should like to consult you about my play; I am at a loss for some new incidents." Mind! there was nothing satirical in this. She was really eager to read her wonderful work to me—evidently supposing that I took a special interest in such things, because my brother is the manager of a theatre! I left her, making the first excuse that occurred to me. So far as I am concerned, I can do nothing with her. But it is possible that your influence may succeed with her again, as it has succeeded already. Will you make the attempt, to satisfy your own mind? She is still upstairs; and I am quite ready to accompany you.'

Agnes shuddered at the bare suggestion of another interview with the Countess.

'I can't! I daren't!' she exclaimed. 'After what has happened in that horrible room, she is more repellent to me than ever. Don't ask me to do it, Henry! Feel my hand—you have turned me as cold as death only with talking of it!'

She was not exaggerating the terror that possessed her. Henry hastened to change the subject.

'Let us talk of something more interesting,' he said. 'I have a question to ask you about yourself. Am I right in believing that the sooner you get away from Venice the happier you will be?'

'Right?' she repeated excitedly. 'You are more than right! No words can say how I long to be away from this horrible place. But you know how I am situated—you heard what Lord Montbarry said at dinner-time?'

'Suppose he has altered his plans, since dinner-time?' Henry suggested.

Agnes looked surprised. 'I thought he had received letters from England which obliged him to leave Venice to-morrow,' she said.

'Quite true,' Henry admitted. 'He had arranged to start for England to-morrow, and to leave you and Lady Montbarry and the children to enjoy your holiday in Venice, under my care. Circumstances have occurred, however, which have forced him to alter his plans. He must take you all back with him to-morrow because I am not able to assume the charge of you. I am obliged to give up my holiday in Italy, and return to England too.'

Agnes looked at him in some little perplexity: she was not quite sure whether she understood him or not.

'Are you really obliged to go back?' she asked.

Henry smiled as he answered her. 'Keep the secret,' he said, 'or Montbarry will never forgive me!'

She read the rest in his face. 'Oh!' she exclaimed, blushing brightly, 'you have not given up your pleasant holiday in Italy on my account?'

'I shall go back with you to England, Agnes. That will be holiday enough for me.'

She took his hand in an irrepressible outburst of gratitude. 'How good you are to me!' she murmured tenderly.

'What should I have done in the troubles that have come to me, without your sympathy? I can't tell you, Henry, how
She tried impulsively to lift his hand to her lips. He gently stopped her. 'Agnes,' he said, 'are you beginning to understand how truly I love you?'

That simple question found its own way to her heart. She owned the whole truth, without saying a word. She looked at him— and then looked away again.

He drew her nearer to him. 'My own darling!' he whispered— and kissed her. Softly and tremulously, the sweet lips lingered, and touched his lips in return. Then her head drooped. She put her arms round his neck, and hid her face on his bosom. They spoke no more.

The charmed silence had lasted but a little while, when it was mercilessly broken by a knock at the door.

Agnes started to her feet. She placed herself at the piano; the instrument being opposite to the door, it was impossible, when she seated herself on the music-stool, for any person entering the room to see her face. Henry called out irritably, 'Come in.'

The door was not opened. The person on the other side of it asked a strange question.

'Is Mr. Henry Westwick alone?'

Agnes instantly recognised the voice of the Countess. She hurried to a second door, which communicated with one of the bedrooms. 'Don't let her come near me!' she whispered nervously. 'Good night, Henry! good night!'

If Henry could, by an effort of will, have transported the Countess to the uttermost ends of the earth, he would have made the effort without remorse. As it was, he only repeated, more irritably than ever, 'Come in!'

She entered the room slowly with her everlasting manuscript in her hand. Her step was unsteady; a dark flush appeared on her face, in place of its customary pallor; her eyes were bloodshot and widely dilated. In approaching Henry, she showed a strange incapability of calculating her distances—she struck against the table near which he happened to be sitting. When she spoke, her articulation was confused, and her pronunciation of some of the longer words was hardly intelligible. Most men would have suspected her of being under the influence of some intoxicating liquor. Henry took a truer view— he said, as he placed a chair for her, 'Countess, I am afraid you have been working too hard: you look as if you wanted rest.'

She put her hand to her head. 'My invention has gone,' she said. 'I can't write my fourth act. It's all a blank— all a blank!'

Henry advised her to wait till the next day. 'Go to bed,' he suggested; and try to sleep.'

She waved her hand impatiently. 'I must finish the play,' she answered. 'I only want a hint from you. You must know something about plays. Your brother has got a theatre. You must often have heard him talk about fourth and fifth acts— you must have seen rehearsals, and all the rest of it.' She abruptly thrust the manuscript into Henry's hand. 'I can't read it to you,' she said; 'I feel giddy when I look at my own writing. Just run your eye over it, there's a good fellow— and give me a hint.'

Henry glanced at the manuscript. He happened to look at the list of the persons of the drama. As he read the list he started and turned abruptly to the Countess, intending to ask her for some explanation. The words were suspended on his lips. It was but too plainly useless to speak to her. Her head lay back on the rail of the chair. She seemed to be half asleep already. The flush on her face had deepened: she looked like a woman who was in danger of having a fit.

He rang the bell, and directed the man who answered it to send one of the chambermaids upstairs. His voice seemed to partially rouse the Countess; she opened her eyes in a slow drowsy way. 'Have you read it?' she asked.

Henry advised taking her upstairs first, and then asking the manager's opinion. There was great difficulty in persuading her to rise, and accept the support of the chambermaid's arm. It was only by reiterated promises to read the play that night, and to make the fourth act in the morning, that Henry prevailed on the Countess to return to her room.

Left to himself, he began to feel a certain languid curiosity in relation to the manuscript. He looked over the pages, reading a line here and a line there. Suddenly he changed colour as he read— and looked up from the manuscript like a man bewildered. 'Good God! what does this mean?' he said to himself.

His eyes turned nervously to the door by which Agnes had left him. She might return to the drawing-room, she might want to see what the Countess had written. He looked back again at the passage which had startled him— considered with himself for a moment— and, snatching up the unfinished play, suddenly and softly left the room.

CHAPTER XXVI
Entering his own room on the upper floor, Henry placed the manuscript on his table, open at the first leaf. His nerves were unquestionably shaken; his hand trembled as he turned the pages, he started at chance noises on the staircase of the hotel.

The scenario, or outline, of the Countess's play began with no formal prefatory phrases. She presented herself and her work with the easy familiarity of an old friend.

'Allow me, dear Mr. Francis Westwick, to introduce to you the persons in my proposed Play. Behold them, arranged symmetrically in a line.


'I don't trouble myself, you see, to invest fictitious family names. My characters are sufficiently distinguished by their social titles, and by the striking contrast which they present one with another.

The First Act opens--

'No! Before I open the First Act, I must announce, injustice to myself, that this Play is entirely the work of my own invention. I scorn to borrow from actual events; and, what is more extraordinary still, I have not stolen one of my ideas from the Modern French drama. As the manager of an English theatre, you will naturally refuse to believe this. It doesn't matter. Nothing matters--except the opening of my first act.

'We are at Homburg, in the famous Salon d'Or, at the height of the season. The Countess (exquisitely dressed) is seated at the green table. Strangers of all nations are standing behind the players, venturing their money or only looking on. My Lord is among the strangers. He is struck by the Countess's personal appearance, in which beauties and defects are fantastically mingled in the most attractive manner. He watches the Countess's game, and places his money where he sees her deposit her own little stake. She looks round at him, and says, "Don't trust to my colour; I have been unlucky the whole evening. Place your stake on the other colour, and you may have a chance of winning."

My Lord (a true Englishman) blushes, bows, and obeys. The Countess proves to be a prophet. She loses again. My Lord wins twice the sum that he has risked.

'The Countess rises from the table. She has no more money, and she offers my Lord her chair.

'Instead of taking it, he politely places his winnings in her hand, and begs her to accept the loan as a favour to himself. The Countess stakes again, and loses again. My Lord smiles superbly, and presses a second loan on her. From that moment her luck turns. She wins, and wins largely. Her brother, the Baron, trying his fortune in another room, hears of what is going on, and joins my Lord and the Countess.

'Pay attention, if you please, to the Baron. He is delineated as a remarkable and interesting character.

'This noble person has begun life with a single-minded devotion to the science of experimental chemistry, very surprising in a young and handsome man with a brilliant future before him. A profound knowledge of the occult sciences has persuaded the Baron that it is possible to solve the famous problem called the 'Philosopher's Stone.' His own pecuniary resources have long since been exhausted by his costly experiments. His sister has next supplied him with the small fortune at her disposal: reserving only the family jewels, placed in the charge of her banker and friend at Frankfort. The Countess's fortune also being swallowed up, the Baron has in a fatal moment sought for new supplies at the gaming table. He proves, at starting on his perilous career, to be a favourite of fortune; wins largely, and, alas! profanes his noble enthusiasm for science by yielding his soul to the all-debasing passion of the gamester.

'At the period of the Play, the Baron's good fortune has deserted him. He sees his way to a crowning experiment in the fatal search after the secret of transmuting the baser elements into gold. But how is he to pay the preliminary expenses? Destiny, like a mocking echo, answers, How?

'Will his sister's winnings (with my Lord's money) prove large enough to help him? Eager for this result, he gives the Countess his advice how to play. From that disastrous moment the infection of his own adverse fortune spreads to his sister. She loses again, and again--loses to the last farthing.

'The amiable and wealthy Lord offers a third loan; but the scrupulous Countess positively refuses to take it. On leaving the table, she presents her brother to my Lord. The gentlemen fall into pleasant talk. My Lord asks leave to pay his respects to the Countess, the next morning, at her hotel. The Baron hospitably invites him to breakfast. My Lord accepts, with a last admiring glance at the Countess which does not escape her brother's observation, and takes his leave for the night.

'Alone with his sister, the Baron speaks out plainly. "Our affairs," he says, "are in a desperate condition, and must find a desperate remedy. Wait for me here, while I make inquiries about my Lord. You have evidently produced a strong impression on him. If we can turn that impression into money, no matter at what sacrifice, the thing must be done."

'The Countess now occupies the stage alone, and indulges in a soliloquy which develops her character.

'It is at once a dangerous and attractive character. Immense capacities for good are implanted in her nature, side by side with equally remarkable capacities for evil. It rests with circumstances to develop either the one or the other. Being a person who produces a sensation wherever she goes, this noble lady is naturally made the subject of all sorts
of scandalous reports. To one of these reports (which falsely and abominably points to the Baron as her lover instead of her brother) she now refers with just indignation. She has just expressed her desire to leave Homburg, as the place in which the vile calumny first took its rise, when the Baron returns, overhears her last words, and says to her, "Yes, leave Homburg by all means; provided you leave it in the character of my Lord's betrothed wife!"

'The Countess is startled and shocked. She protests that she does not reciprocate my Lord's admiration for her. She even goes the length of refusing to see him again. The Baron answers, "I must positively have command of money. Take your choice, between marrying my Lord's income, in the interest of my grand discovery--or leave me to sell myself and my title to the first rich woman of low degree who is ready to buy me."

'The Countess listens in surprise and dismay. Is it possible that the Baron is in earnest? He is horribly in earnest. "The woman who will buy me," he says, "is in the next room to us at this moment. She is the wealthy widow of a Jewish usurer. She has the money I want to reach the solution of the great problem. I have only to be that woman's husband, and to make myself master of untold millions of gold. Take five minutes to consider what I have said to you, and tell me on my return which of us is to marry for the money I want, you or I."

'As he turns away, the Countess stops him.

'All the noblest sentiments in her nature are exalted to the highest pitch. "Where is the true woman," she exclaims, "who wants time to consummate the sacrifice of herself, when the man to whom she is devoted demands it? She does not want five minutes--she does not want five seconds--she holds out her hand to him, and she says, Sacrifice me on the altar of your glory! Take as stepping-stones on the way to your triumph, my love, my liberty, and my life!"

'On this grand situation the curtain falls. Judging by my first act, Mr. Westwick, tell me truly, and don't be afraid of turning my head:--Am I not capable of writing a good play?'

Henry paused between the First and Second Acts; reflecting, not on the merits of the play, but on the strange resemblance which the incidents so far presented to the incidents that had attended the disastrous marriage of the first Lord Montbarry.

Was it possible that the Countess, in the present condition of her mind, supposed herself to be exercising her invention when she was only exercising her memory?

The question involved considerations too serious to be made the subject of a hasty decision. Reserving his opinion, Henry turned the page, and devoted himself to the reading of the next act. The manuscript proceeded as follows:--

'The Second Act opens at Venice. An interval of four months has elapsed since the date of the scene at the gambling table. The action now takes place in the reception-room of one of the Venetian palaces.

'The Baron is discovered, alone, on the stage. He reverts to the events which have happened since the close of the First Act. The Countess has sacrificed herself; the mercenary marriage has taken place--but not without obstacles, caused by difference of opinion on the question of marriage settlements.

'Private inquiries, instituted in England, have informed the Baron that my Lord's income is derived chiefly from what is called entailed property. In case of accidents, he is surely bound to do something for his bride? Let him, for example, insure his life, for a sum proposed by the Baron, and let him so settle the money that his widow shall have it, if he dies first.

'My Lord hesitates. The Baron wastes no time in useless discussion. "Let us by all means" (he says) "consider the marriage as broken off." My Lord shifts his ground, and pleads for a smaller sum than the sum proposed. The Baron briefly replies, "I never bargain." My lord is in love; the natural result follows--he gives way.

'So far, the Baron has no cause to complain. But my Lord's turn comes, when the marriage has been celebrated, and when the honeymoon is over. The Baron has joined the married pair at a palace which they have hired in Venice. He is still bent on solving the problem of the "Philosopher's Stone." His laboratory is set up in the vaults beneath the palace--so that smells from chemical experiments may not incommode the Countess, in the higher regions of the house. The one obstacle in the way of his grand discovery is, as usual, the want of money. His position at the present time has become truly critical. He owes debts of honour to gentlemen in his own rank of life, which must positively be paid; and he proposes, in his own friendly manner, to borrow the money of my Lord. My Lord positively refuses, in the rudest terms. The Baron applies to his sister to exercise her conjugal influence. She can only answer that her noble husband (being no longer distractedly in love with her) now appears in his true character, as one of the meanest men living. The sacrifice of the marriage has been made, and has already proved useless.

'Such is the state of affairs at the opening of the Second Act.

'The entrance of the Countess suddenly disturbs the Baron's reflections. She is in a state bordering on frenzy. Incoherent expressions of rage burst from her lips: it is some time before she can sufficiently control herself to speak plainly. She has been doubly insulted--first, by a menial person in her employment; secondly, by her husband. Her
maid, an Englishwoman, has declared that she will serve the Countess no longer. She will give up her wages, and return at once to England. Being asked her reason for this strange proceeding, she insolently hints that the Countess's service is no service for an honest woman, since the Baron has entered the house. The Countess does, what any lady in her position would do; she indignantly dismisses the wretch on the spot.

"My Lord, hearing his wife's voice raised in anger, leaves the study in which he is accustomed to shut himself up over his books, and asks what this disturbance means. The Countess informs him of the outrageous language and conduct of her maid. My Lord not only declares his entire approval of the woman's conduct, but expresses his own abominable doubts of his wife's fidelity in language of such horrible brutality that no lady could pollute her lips by repeating it. "If I had been a man," the Countess says, "and if I had had a weapon in my hand, I would have struck him dead at my feet!"

The Baron, listening silently so far, now speaks. "Permit me to finish the sentence for you," he says. "You would have struck your husband dead at your feet; and by that rash act, you would have deprived yourself of the insurance money settled on the widow-- the very money which is wanted to relieve your brother from the unendurable pecuniary position which he now occupies!"

The Countess gravely reminds the Baron that this is no joking matter. After what my Lord has said to her, she has little doubt that he will communicate his infamous suspicions to his lawyers in England. If nothing is done to prevent it, she may be divorced and disgraced, and thrown on the world, with no resource but the sale of her jewels to keep her from starving.

At this moment, the Courier who has been engaged to travel with my Lord from England crosses the stage with a letter to take to the post. The Countess stops him, and asks to look at the address on the letter. She takes it from him for a moment, and shows it to her brother. The handwriting is my Lord's; and the letter is directed to his lawyers in London.

The Courier proceeds to the post-office. The Baron and the Countess look at each other in silence. No words are needed. They thoroughly understand the position in which they are placed; they clearly see the terrible remedy for it. What is the plain alternative before them? Disgrace and ruin—or, my Lord's death and the insurance money!

The Baron walks backwards and forwards in great agitation, talking to himself. The Countess hears fragments of what he is saying. He speaks of my Lord's constitution, probably weakened in India—of a cold which my Lord has caught two or three days since—of the remarkable manner in which such slight things as colds sometimes end in serious illness and death.

He observes that the Countess is listening to him, and asks if she has anything to propose. She is a woman who, with many defects, has the great merit of speaking out. "Is there no such thing as a serious illness," she asks, "corked up in one of those bottles of yours in the vaults downstairs?"

The Baron answers by gravely shaking his head. What is he afraid of?—a possible examination of the body after death? No: he can set any post-mortem examination at defiance. It is the process of administering the poison that he dreads. A man so distinguished as my Lord cannot be taken seriously ill without medical attendance. Where there is a Doctor, there is always danger of discovery. Then, again, there is the Courier, faithful to my Lord as long as my Lord pays him. Even if the Doctor sees nothing suspicious, the Courier may discover something. The poison, to do its work with the necessary secrecy, must be repeatedly administered in graduated doses. One trifling miscalculation or mistake may rouse suspicion. The insurance offices may hear of it, and may refuse to pay the money. As things are, the Baron will not risk it, and will not allow his sister to risk it in his place.

"My Lord himself is the next character who appears. He has repeatedly rung for the Courier, and the bell has not been answered. "What does this insolence mean?"

The Countess (speaking with quiet dignity—for why should her infamous husband have the satisfaction of knowing how deeply he has wounded her?) reminds my Lord that the Courier has gone to the post. My Lord asks suspiciously if she has looked at the letter. The Countess informs him coldly that she has no curiosity about his letters. Referring to the cold from which he is suffering, she inquires if he thinks of consulting a medical man. My Lord answers roughly that he is quite old enough to be capable of doctoring himself.

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As he makes this reply, the Courier appears, returning from the post. My Lord gives him orders to go out again and buy some lemons. He proposes to try hot lemonade as a means of inducing perspiration in bed. In that way he has formerly cured colds, and in that way he will cure the cold from which he is suffering now.

The Courier obeys in silence. Judging by appearances, he goes very reluctantly on this second errand.

My Lord turns to the Baron (who has thus far taken no part in the conversation) and asks him, in a sneering tone, how much longer he proposes to prolong his stay in Venice. The Baron answers quietly, "Let us speak plainly to one another, my Lord. If you wish me to leave your house, you have only to say the word, and I go." My Lord turns to his wife, and asks if she can support the calamity of her brother's absence—laying a grossly insulting emphasis on the word "brother." The Countess preserves her impenetrable composure; nothing in her betrays the
deadly hatred with which she regards the titled ruffian who has insulted her. "You are master in this house, my Lord," is all she says. "Do as you please."

"My Lord looks at his wife; looks at the Baron--and suddenly alters his tone. Does he perceive in the composure of the Countess and her brother something lurking under the surface that threatens him? This is at least certain, he makes a clumsy apology for the language that he has used. (Abject wretch!)

"My Lord's excuses are interrupted by the return of the Courier with the lemons and hot water.

The Countess observes for the first time that the man looks ill. His hands tremble as he places the tray on the table. My Lord orders his Courier to follow him, and make the lemonade in the bedroom. The Countess remarks that the Courier seems hardly capable of obeying his orders. Hearing this, the man admits that he is ill. He, too, is suffering from a cold; he has been kept waiting in a draught at the shop where he bought the lemons; he feels alternately hot and cold, and he begs permission to lie down for a little while on his bed.

Feeling her humanity appealed to, the Countess volunteers to make the lemonade herself. My Lord takes the Courier by the arm, leads him aside, and whispers these words to him: "Watch her, and see that she puts nothing into the lemonade; then bring it to me with your own hands; and, then, go to bed, if you like."

Without a word more to his wife, or to the Baron, my Lord leaves the room.

The Countess makes the lemonade, and the Courier takes it to his master.

Returning, on the way to his own room, he is so weak, and feels, he says, so giddy, that he is obliged to support himself by the backs of the chairs as he passes them. The Baron, always considerate to persons of low degree, offers his arm. "I am afraid, my poor fellow," he says, "that you are really ill." The Courier makes this extraordinary answer: "It's all over with me, Sir; I have caught my death."

The Countess is naturally startled. "You are not an old man," she says, trying to rouse the Courier's spirits. "At your age, catching cold doesn't surely mean catching your death?" The Courier fixes his eyes despairingly on the Countess.

"My lungs are weak, my Lady," he says; "I have already had two attacks of bronchitis. The second time, a great physician joined my own doctor in attendance on me. He considered my recovery almost in the light of a miracle. Take care of yourself," he said. "If you have a third attack of bronchitis, as certainly as two and two make four, you will be a dead man. I feel the same inward shivering, my Lady, that I felt on those two former occasions--and I tell you again, I have caught my death in Venice."

Speaking some comforting words, the Baron leads him to his room. The Countess is left alone on the stage.

"Ah! my poor fellow," she says, "if you could only change constitutions with my Lord, what a happy result would follow for the Baron and for me! If you could only get cured of a trumpery cold with a little hot lemonade, and if he could only catch his death in your place--!"

She suddenly pauses--considers for a while--and springs to her feet, with a cry of triumphant surprise: the wonderful, the unparalleled idea has crossed her mind like a flash of lightning. Make the two men change names and places--and the deed is done! Where are the obstacles? Remove my Lord (by fair means or foul) from his room; and keep him secretly prisoner in the palace, to live or die as future necessity may determine. Place the Courier in the vacant bed, and call in the doctor to see him--ill, in my Lord's character, and (if he dies) dying under my Lord's name!"

The manuscript dropped from Henry's hands. A sickening sense of horror overpowered him. The question which had occurred to his mind at the close of the First Act of the Play assumed a new and terrible interest now. As far as the scene of the Countess's soliloquy, the incidents of the Second Act had reflected the events of his late brother's life as faithfully as the incidents of the First Act. Was the monstrous plot, revealed in the lines which he had just read, the offspring of the Countess's morbid imagination? or had she, in this case also, deluded herself with the idea that she was inventing when she was really writing under the influence of her own guilty remembrances of the past? If the latter interpretation were the true one, he had just read the narrative of the contemplated murder of his brother, planned in cold blood by a woman who was at that moment inhabiting the same house with him. While, to make the fatality complete, Agnes herself had innocently provided the conspirators with the one man who was fitted to be the passive agent of their crime.

Even the bare doubt that it might be so was more than he could endure. He left his room; resolved to force the truth out of the Countess, or to denounce her before the authorities as a murderess at large.

Arrived at her door, he was met by a person just leaving the room. The person was the manager. He was hardly recognisable; he looked and spoke like a man in a state of desperation.

"Oh, go in, if you like!" he said to Henry. 'Mark this, sir! I am not a superstitious man; but I do begin to believe that crimes carry their own curse with them. This hotel is under a curse. What happens in the morning? We discover a crime committed in the old days of the palace. The night comes, and brings another dreadful event with it--a death;
a sudden and shocking death, in the house. Go in, and see for yourself! I shall resign my situation, Mr. Westwick: I can't contend with the fatalities that pursue me here!'

Henry entered the room.

The Countess was stretched on her bed. The doctor on one side, and the chambermaid on the other, were standing looking at her. From time to time, she drew a heavy stertorous breath, like a person oppressed in sleeping. 'Is she likely to die?' Henry asked.

'She is dead,' the doctor answered. 'Dead of the rupture of a blood-vessel on the brain. Those sounds that you hear are purely mechanical-- they may go on for hours.'

Henry looked at the chambermaid. She had little to tell. The Countess had refused to go to bed, and had placed herself at her desk to proceed with her writing. Finding it useless to remonstrate with her, the maid had left the room to speak to the manager. In the shortest possible time, the doctor was summoned to the hotel, and found the Countess dead on the floor. There was this to tell-- and no more.

Looking at the writing-table as he went out, Henry saw the sheet of paper on which the Countess had traced her last lines of writing. The characters were almost illegible. Henry could just distinguish the words, 'First Act,' and 'Persons of the Drama.' The lost wretch had been thinking of her Play to the last, and had begun it all over again!

CHAPTER XXVII

Henry returned to his room.

His first impulse was to throw aside the manuscript, and never to look at it again. The one chance of relieving his mind from the dreadful uncertainty that oppressed it, by obtaining positive evidence of the truth, was a chance annihilated by the Countess's death. What good purpose could be served, what relief could he anticipate, if he read more?

He walked up and down the room. After an interval, his thoughts took a new direction; the question of the manuscript presented itself under another point of view. Thus far, his reading had only informed him that the conspiracy had been planned. How did he know that the plan had been put in execution?

The manuscript lay just before him on the floor. He hesitated; then picked it up; and, returning to the table, read on as follows, from the point at which he had left off.

'While the Countess is still absorbed in the bold yet simple combination of circumstances which she has discovered, the Baron returns. He takes a serious view of the case of the Courier; it may be necessary, he thinks, to send for medical advice. No servant is left in the palace, now the English maid has taken her departure. The Baron himself must fetch the doctor, if the doctor is really needed.

"Let us have medical help, by all means," his sister replies. "But wait and hear something that I have to say to you first." She then electrifies the Baron by communicating her idea to him. What danger of discovery have they to dread? My Lord's life in Venice has been a life of absolute seclusion: nobody but his banker knows him, even by personal appearance. He has presented his letter of credit as a perfect stranger; and he and his banker have never seen each other since that first visit. He has given no parties, and gone to no parties. On the few occasions when he has hired a gondola or taken a walk, he has always been alone. Thanks to the atrocious suspicion which makes him ashamed of being seen with his wife, he has led the very life which makes the proposed enterprise easy of accomplishment.

The cautious Baron listens--but gives no positive opinion, as yet. "See what you can do with the Courier," he says; "and I will decide when I hear the result. One valuable hint I may give you before you go. Your man is easily tempted by money--if you only offer him enough. The other day, I asked him, in jest, what he would do for a thousand pounds. He answered, 'Anything.' Bear that in mind; and offer your highest bid without bargaining."

The scene changes to the Courier's room, and shows the poor wretch with a photographic portrait of his wife in his hand, crying. The Countess enters.

'She wisely begins by sympathising with her contemplated accomplice. He is duly grateful; he confides his sorrows to his gracious mistress. Now that he believes himself to be on his death-bed, he feels remorse for his neglectful treatment of his wife. He could resign himself to die; but despair overpowers him when he remembers that he has saved no money, and that he will leave his widow, without resources, to the mercy of the world.

'On this hint, the Countess speaks. "Suppose you were asked to do a perfectly easy thing," she says; "and suppose you were rewarded for doing it by a present of a thousand pounds, as a legacy for your widow?"

The Courier raises himself on his pillow, and looks at the Countess with an expression of incredulous surprise. She can hardly be cruel enough (he thinks) to joke with a man in his miserable plight. Will she say plainly what this perfectly easy thing is, the doing of which will meet with such a magnificent reward?

The Countess answers that question by confiding her project to the Courier, without the slightest reserve.

'Some minutes of silence follow when she has done. The Courier is not weak enough yet to speak without stopping to think first. Still keeping his eyes on the Countess, he makes a quaintly insolent remark on what he has
just heard. "I have not hitherto been a religious man; but I feel myself on the way to it. Since your ladyship has
spoken to me, I believe in the Devil." It is the Countess's interest to see the humorous side of this confession of faith.
She takes no offence. She only says, "I will give you half an hour by yourself, to think over my proposal. You are in
danger of death. Decide, in your wife's interests, whether you will die worth nothing, or die worth a thousand
pounds."

'Left alone, the Courier seriously considers his position-- and decides. He rises with difficulty; writes a few lines
on a leaf taken from his pocket-book; and, with slow and faltering steps, leaves the room.

'The Countess, returning at the expiration of the half-hour's interval, finds the room empty. While she is
wondering, the Courier opens the door. What has he been doing out of his bed? He answers, "I have been protecting
my own life, my lady, on the bare chance that I may recover from the bronchitis for the third time. If you or the
Baron attempts to make me come out of this world, or to deprive me of my thousand pounds reward, I shall tell the doctor
where he will find a few lines of writing, which describe your ladyship's plot. I may not have strength enough, in the
case supposed, to betray you by making a complete confession with my own lips; but I can employ my last breath to
speak the half-dozen words which will tell the doctor where he is to look. Those words, it is needless to add, will be
addressed to your Ladyship, if I find your engagements towards me faithfully kept."

'With this audacious preface, he proceeds to state the conditions on which he will play his part in the conspiracy,
and die (if he does die) worth a thousand pounds.

'Either the Countess or the Baron are to taste the food and drink brought to his bedside, in his presence, and even
the medicines which the doctor may prescribe for him. As for the promised sum of money, it is to be produced in
one bank-note, folded in a sheet of paper, on which a line is to be written, dictated by the Courier. The two
enclosures are then to be sealed up in an envelope, addressed to his wife, and stamped ready for the post. This done,
the letter is to be placed under his pillow; the Baron or the Countess being at liberty to satisfy themselves, day by
day, at their own time, that the letter remains in its place, with the seal unbroken, as long as the doctor has any hope
of his patient's recovery. The last stipulation follows. The Courier has a conscience; and with a view to keeping it
easy, insists that he shall be left in ignorance of that part of the plot which relates to the sequestration of my Lord.
Not that he cares particularly what becomes of his miserly master-- but he does dislike taking other people's
responsibilities on his own shoulders.

'These conditions being agreed to, the Countess calls in the Baron, who has been waiting events in the next
room.

'He is informed that the Courier has yielded to temptation; but he is still too cautious to make any compromising
remarks. Keeping his back turned on the bed, he shows a bottle to the Countess. It is labelled "Chloroform." She
understands that my Lord is to be removed from his room in a convenient state of insensibility. In what part of the
palace is he to be hidden? As they open the door to go out, the Countess whispers that question to the Baron. The
Baron whispers back, "In the vaults!" The curtain falls.'

CHAPTER XXVIII
So the Second Act ended.

Turning to the Third Act, Henry looked wearily at the pages as he let them slip through his fingers. Both in mind
and body, he began to feel the need of repose.

In one important respect, the later portion of the manuscript differed from the pages which he had just been
reading. Signs of an overwrought brain showed themselves, here and there, as the outline of the play approached its
end. The handwriting grew worse and worse. Some of the longer sentences were left unfinished. In the exchange of
dialogue, questions and answers were not always attributed respectively to the right speaker. At certain intervals the
writer's failing intelligence seemed to recover itself for a while; only to relapse again, and to lose the thread of the
narrative more hopelessly than ever.

After reading one or two of the more coherent passages Henry recoiled from the ever-darkening horror of the
story. He closed the manuscript, heartsick and exhausted, and threw himself on his bed to rest. The door opened
almost at the same moment. Lord Montbarry entered the room.

'We have just returned from the Opera,' he said; 'and we have heard the news of that miserable woman's death.
They say you spoke to her in her last moments; and I want to hear how it happened.'

'You shall hear how it happened,' Henry answered; 'and more than that. You are now the head of the family,
Stephen; and I feel bound, in the position which oppresses me, to leave you to decide what ought to be done.'

With those introductory words, he told his brother how the Countess's play had come into his hands. 'Read the
first few pages,' he said. 'I am anxious to know whether the same impression is produced on both of us.'

Before Lord Montbarry had got half-way through the First Act, he stopped, and looked at his brother. 'What does
she mean by boasting of this as her own invention?' he asked. 'Was she too crazy to remember that these things
really happened?'
This was enough for Henry: the same impression had been produced on both of them. 'You will do as you please,' he said. 'But if you will be guided by me, spare yourself the reading of those pages to come, which describe our brother's terrible expiation of his heartless marriage.'

'Have you read it all, Henry?'

'Not all. I shrank from reading some of the latter part of it. Neither you nor I saw much of our elder brother after we left school; and, for my part, I felt, and never scrupled to express my feeling, that he behaved infamously to Agnes. But when I read that unconscious confession of the murderous conspiracy to which he fell a victim, I remembered, with something like remorse, that the same mother bore us. I have felt for him to-night, what I am ashamed to think I never felt for him before.'

Lord Montbarry took his brother's hand.

'You are a good fellow, Henry,' he said; 'but are you quite sure that you have not been needlessly distressing yourself? Because some of this crazy creature's writing accidentally tells what we know to be the truth, does it follow that all the rest is to be relied on to the end?'

'There is no possible doubt of it,' Henry replied.

'No possible doubt?' his brother repeated. 'I shall go on with my reading, Henry--and see what justification there may be for that confident conclusion of yours.'

He read on steadily, until he had reached the end of the Second Act. Then he looked up.

'Do you really believe that the mutilated remains which you discovered this morning are the remains of our brother?' he asked. 'And do you believe it on such evidence as this?'

Henry answered silently by a sign in the affirmative.

Lord Montbarry checked himself--evidently on the point of entering an indignant protest.

'Do you really believe that you have not read the later scenes of the piece,' he said, 'Don't be childish, Henry! If you persist in pinning your faith on such stuff as this, the least you can do is to make yourself thoroughly acquainted with it. Will you read the Third Act? No? Then I shall read it to you.'

He turned to the Third Act, and ran over those fragmentary passages which were clearly enough written and expressed to be intelligible to the mind of a stranger.

'Here is a scene in the vaults of the palace;' he began. 'The victim of the conspiracy is sleeping on his miserable bed; and the Baron and the Countess are considering the position in which they stand. The Countess (as well as I can make it out) has raised the money that is wanted by borrowing on the security of her jewels at Frankfort; and the Courier upstairs is still declared by the Doctor to have a chance of recovery. What are the conspirators to do, if the man does recover? The cautious Baron suggests setting the prisoner free. If he ventures to appeal to the law, it is easy to declare that he is subject to insane delusion, and to call his own wife as witness. On the other hand, if the Courier dies, how is the sequestrated and unknown nobleman to be put out of the way? Passively, by letting him starve in his prison? No: the Baron is a man of refined tastes; he dislikes needless cruelty. The active policy remains--say, assassination by the knife of a hired bravo? The Baron objects to trusting an accomplice; also to spending money on anyone but himself. Shall they drop their prisoner into the canal? The Baron declines to trust water; water will show him on the surface. Shall they set his bed on fire? An excellent idea; but the smoke might be seen. No: the circumstances being now entirely altered, poisoning him presents the easiest way out of it. He has simply become a superfluous person. The cheapest poison will do.--Is it possible, Henry, that you believe this consultation really took place?'

Henry made no reply. The succession of the questions that had just been read to him, exactly followed the succession of the dreams that had terrified Mrs. Norbury, on the two nights which she had passed in the hotel. It was useless to point out this coincidence to his brother. He only said, 'Go on."

Lord Montbarry turned the pages until he came to the next intelligible passage.

'Here,' he proceeded, 'is a double scene on the stage--so far as I can understand the sketch of it. The Doctor is upstairs, innocently writing his certificate of my Lord's decease, by the dead Courier's bedside. Down in the vaults, the Baron stands by the corpse of the poisoned lord, preparing the strong chemical acids which are to reduce it to a heap of ashes--Surely, it is not worth while to trouble ourselves with deciphering such melodramatic horrors as these? Let us get on! let us get on!'

He turned the leaves again; attempting vainly to discover the meaning of the confused scenes that followed. On the last page but one, he found the last intelligible sentences.

'The Third Act seems to be divided,' he said, 'into two Parts or Tableaux. I think I can read the writing at the beginning of the Second Part. The Baron and the Countess open the scene. The Baron's hands are mysteriously concealed by gloves. He has reduced the body to ashes by his own system of cremation, with the exception of the head--'

Henry interrupted his brother there. 'Don't read any more!' he exclaimed.
'Let us do the Countess justice,' Lord Montbarry persisted. 'There are not half a dozen lines more that I can make out! The accidental breaking of his jar of acid has burnt the Baron's hands severely. He is still unable to proceed to the destruction of the head--and the Countess is woman enough (with all her wickedness) to shrink from attempting to take his place--when the first news is received of the coming arrival of the commission of inquiry despatched by the insurance offices. The Baron feels no alarm. Inquire as the commission may, it is the natural death of the Courier (in my Lord's character) that they are blindly investigating. The head not being destroyed, the obvious alternative is to hide it-- and the Baron is equal to the occasion. His studies in the old library have informed him of a safe place of concealment in the palace. The Countess may recoil from handling the acids and watching the process of cremation; but she can surely sprinkle a little disinfecting powder--'

'No more!' Henry reiterated. 'No more!'

'There is no more that can be read, my dear fellow. The last page looks like sheer delirium. She may well have told you that her invention had failed her!'

'Face the truth honestly, Stephen, and say her memory.'

Lord Montbarry rose from the table at which he had been sitting, and looked at his brother with pitying eyes.

'Your nerves are out of order, Henry,' he said. 'And no wonder, after that frightful discovery under the hearth-stone. We won't dispute about it; we will wait a day or two until you are quite yourself again. In the meantime, let us understand each other on one point at least. You leave the question of what is to be done with these pages of writing to me, as the head of the family?'

'I do.'

Lord Montbarry quietly took up the manuscript, and threw it into the fire. 'Let this rubbish be of some use,' he said, holding the pages down with the poker. 'The room is getting chilly-- the Countess's play will set some of these charred logs flaming again.' He waited a little at the fire-place, and returned to his brother. 'Now, Henry, I have a last word to say, and then I have done. I am ready to admit that you have stumbled, by an unlucky chance, on the proof of a crime committed in the old days of the palace, nobody knows how long ago. With that one concession, I dispute everything else. Rather than agree in the opinion you have formed, I won't believe anything that has happened. The supernatural influences that some of us felt when we first slept in this hotel-- your loss of appetite, our sister's dreadful dreams, the smell that overpowered Francis, and the head that appeared to Agnes--I declare them all to be sheer delusions! I believe in nothing, nothing, nothing!' He opened the door to go out, and looked back into the room. 'Yes,' he resumed, 'there is one thing I believe in. My wife has committed a breach of confidence--I believe Agnes will marry you. Good night, Henry. We leave Venice the first thing to-morrow morning.

So Lord Montbarry disposed of the mystery of The Haunted Hotel.

POSTSCRIPT

A last chance of deciding the difference of opinion between the two brothers remained in Henry's possession. He had his own idea of the use to which he might put the false teeth as a means of inquiry when he and his fellow-travellers returned to England.

The only surviving depositary of the domestic history of the family in past years, was Agnes Lockwood's old nurse. Henry took his first opportunity of trying to revive her personal recollections of the deceased Lord Montbarry. But the nurse had never forgiven the great man of the family for his desertion of Agnes; she flatly refused to consult her memory. 'Even the bare sight of my lord, when I last saw him in London,' said the old woman, 'made my finger-nails itch to set their mark on his face. I was sent on an errand by Miss Agnes; and I met him coming out of his dentist's door--and, thank God, that's the last I ever saw of him!'

Thanks to the nurse's quick temper and quaint way of expressing herself, the object of Henry's inquiries was gained already! He ventured on asking if she had noticed the situation of the house. She had noticed, and still remembered the situation-- did Master Henry suppose she had lost the use of her senses, because she happened to be nigh on eighty years old? The same day, he took the false teeth to the dentist, and set all further doubt (if doubt had still been possible) at rest for ever. The teeth had been made for the first Lord Montbarry.

Henry never revealed the existence of this last link in the chain of discovery to any living creature, his brother Stephen included. He carried his terrible secret with him to the grave.

There was one other event in the memorable past on which he preserved the same compassionate silence. Little Mrs. Ferrari never knew that her husband had been--not, as she supposed, the Countess's victim-- but the Countess's accomplice. She still believed that the late Lord Montbarry had sent her the thousand-pound note, and still recoiled from making use of a present which she persisted in declaring had 'the stain of her husband's blood on it.' Agnes, with the widow's entire approval, took the money to the Children's Hospital; and spent it in adding to the number of the beds.

In the spring of the new year, the marriage took place. At the special request of Agnes, the members of the family were the only persons present at the ceremony. There was no wedding breakfast-- and the honeymoon was
spent in the retirement of a cottage on the banks of the Thames.

During the last few days of the residence of the newly married couple by the riverside, Lady Montbarry's children were invited to enjoy a day's play in the garden. The eldest girl overheard (and reported to her mother) a little conjugal dialogue which touched on the topic of The Haunted Hotel.

'Henry, I want you to give me a kiss.'
'There it is, my dear.'
'Now I am your wife, may I speak to you about something?'
'What is it?'
'Something that happened the day before we left Venice. You saw the Countess, during the last hours of her life. Won't you tell me whether she made any confession to you?'
'No conscious confession, Agnes--and therefore no confession that I need distress you by repeating.'
'Did she say nothing about what she saw or heard, on that dreadful night in my room?'
'Nothing. We only know that her mind never recovered the terror of it.'

Agnes was not quite satisfied. The subject troubled her. Even her own brief intercourse with her miserable rival of other days suggested questions that perplexed her. She remembered the Countess's prediction. 'You have to bring me to the day of discovery, and to the punishment that is my doom.' Had the prediction simply faded, like other mortal prophecies?-- or had it been fulfilled on the terrible night when she had seen the apparition, and when she had innocently tempted the Countess to watch her in her room?

Let it, however, be recorded, among the other virtues of Mrs. Henry Westwick, that she never again attempted to persuade her husband into betraying his secrets. Other men's wives, hearing of this extraordinary conduct (and being trained in the modern school of morals and manners), naturally regarded her with compassionate contempt. They spoke of Agnes, from that time forth, as 'rather an old-fashioned person.'

Is that all?
That is all.
Is there no explanation of the mystery of The Haunted Hotel?
Ask yourself if there is any explanation of the mystery of your own life and death.--Farewell.
"I SAY NO."

by WILKIE COLLINS

Book The First--At School: I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VII | VIII | IX | X | XI
Book The Second--In London: XII | XIII | XIV | XV | XVI | XVII | XVIII | XIX | XX | XXI | XXII | XXIII | XXIV | XXV | XXVI | XXVII | XXVIII | XXIX | XXX | XXXI
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Postscript

BOOK THE FIRST--AT SCHOOL.

CHAPTER I.

THE SMUGGLED SUPPER.

Outside the bedroom the night was black and still.

The small rain fell too softly to be heard in the garden; not a leaf stirred in the airless calm; the watch-dog was asleep, the cats were indoors; far or near, under the murky heaven, not a sound was stirring.

Inside the bedroom the night was black and still.

Miss Ladd knew her business as a schoolmistress too well to allow night-lights; and Miss Ladd's young ladies were supposed to be fast asleep, in accordance with the rules of the house. Only at intervals the silence was faintly disturbed, when the restless turning of one of the girls in her bed betrayed itself by a gentle rustling between the sheets. In the long intervals of stillness, not even the softly audible breathing of young creatures asleep was to be heard.

The first sound that told of life and movement revealed the mechanical movement of the clock. Speaking from the lower regions, the tongue of Father Time told the hour before midnight.

A soft voice rose wearily near the door of the room. It counted the strokes of the clock--and reminded one of the girls of the lapse of time.

"Emily! eleven o'clock."

There was no reply. After an interval the weary voice tried again, in louder tones:

"Emily!"

A girl, whose bed was at the inner end of the room, sighed under the heavy heat of the night--and said, in peremptory tones, "Is that Cecilia?"

"Yes."

"What do you want?"

"I'm getting hungry, Emily. Is the new girl asleep?"

The new girl answered promptly and spitefully, "No, she isn't."

Having a private object of their own in view, the five wise virgins of Miss Ladd's first class had waited an hour, in wakeful anticipation of the falling asleep of the stranger--and it had ended in this way! A ripple of laughter ran round the room. The new girl, mortified and offended, entered her protest in plain words.

"You are treating me shamefully! You all distrust me, because I am a stranger."

"Say we don't understand you," Emily answered, speaking for her schoolfellows; "and you will be nearer the truth."

"Who expected you to understand me, when I only came here to-day? I have told you already my name is Francine de Sor. If want to know more, I'm nineteen years old, and I come from the West Indies."

Emily still took the lead. "Why do you come here?" she asked. "Who ever heard of a girl joining a new school just before the holidays? You are nineteen years old, are you? I'm a year younger than you--and I have finished my education. The next big girl in the room is a year younger than me--and she has finished her education. What can you possibly have left to learn at your age?"

"Everything!" cried the stranger from the West Indies, with an outburst of tears. "I'm a poor ignorant creature. Your education ought to have taught you to pity me instead of making fun of me. I hate you all. For shame, for shame!"
Some of the girls laughed. One of them—the hungry girl who had counted the strokes of the clock—took Francine's part.

"Never mind their laughing, Miss de Sor. You are quite right, you have good reason to complain of us."

Miss de Sor dried her eyes. "Thank you—whomever you are," she answered briskly.

"My name is Cecilia Wyvil," the other proceeded. "It was not, perhaps, quite nice of you to say you hated us all. At the same time we have forgotten our good breeding—and the least we can do is to beg your pardon."

This expression of generous sentiment appeared to have an irritating effect on the peremptory young person who took the lead in the room. Perhaps she disapproved of free trade in generous sentiment.

"I can tell you one thing, Cecilia," she said; "you shan't beat ME in generosity. Strike a light, one of you, and lay the blame on me if Miss Ladd finds us out. I mean to shake hands with the new girl—and how can I do it in the dark? Miss de Sor, my name's Brown, and I'm queen of the bedroom. I— not Cecilia—offer our apologies if we have offended you. Cecilia is my dearest friend, but I don't allow her to take the lead in the room. Oh, what a lovely nightgown!"

The sudden flow of candle-light had revealed Francine, sitting up in her bed, and displaying such treasures of real lace over her bosom that the queen lost all sense of royal dignity in irrepressible admiration. "Seven and sixpence," Emily remarked, looking at her own night-gown and despising it. One after another, the girls yielded to the attraction of the wonderful lace. Slim and plump, fair and dark, they circled round the new pupil in their flowing white robes, and arrived by common consent at one and the same conclusion: "How rich her father must be!"

Favored by fortune in the matter of money, was this enviable person possessed of beauty as well?

In the disposition of the beds, Miss de Sor was placed between Cecilia on the right hand, and Emily on the left. If, by some fantastic turn of events, a man—say in the interests of propriety, a married doctor, with Miss Ladd to look after him—had been permitted to enter the room, and had been asked what he thought of the girls when he came out, he would not even have mentioned Francine. Blind to the beauties of the expensive night-gown, he would have noticed her long upper lip, her obstinate chin, her sallow complexion, her eyes placed too close together—and would have turned his attention to her nearest neighbors. On one side his languid interest would have been instantly roused by Cecilia's glowing auburn hair, her exquisitely pure skin, and her tender blue eyes. On the other, he would have discovered a bright little creature, who would have fascinated and perplexed him at one and the same time. If he had been questioned about her by a stranger, he would have been at a loss to say positively whether she was dark or light: he would have remembered how her eyes had held him, but he would not have known of what color they were. And yet, she would have remained a vivid picture in his memory when other impressions, derived at the same time, had vanished. "There was one little witch among them, who was worth all the rest put together; and I can't tell you why. They called her Emily. If I wasn't a married man—" There he would have thought of his wife, and would have sighed and said no more.

While the girls were still admiring Francine, the clock struck the half-hour past eleven.

Cecilia stole on tiptoe to the door—looked out, and listened—closed the door again—and addressed the meeting with the irresistible charm of her sweet voice and her persuasive smile.

"Are none of you hungry yet?" she inquired. "The teachers are safe in their rooms; we have set ourselves right with Francine. Why keep the supper waiting under Emily's bed?"

Such reasoning as this, with such personal attractions to recommend it, admitted of but one reply. The queen waved her hand graciously, and said, "Pull it out."

Is a lovely girl—whose face possesses the crowning charm of expression, whose slightest movement reveals the supple symmetry of her figure—less lovely because she is blessed with a good appetite, and is not ashamed to acknowledge it? With a grace all her own, Cecilia dived under the bed, and produced a basket of jam tarts, a basket of fruit and sweetmeats, a basket of sparkling lemonade, and a superb cake—all paid for by general subscriptions, and smuggled into the room by kind connivance of the servants. On this occasion, the feast was especially plentiful and expensive, in commemoration not only of the arrival of the Midsummer holidays, but of the coming freedom of Miss Ladd's two leading young ladies. With widely different destinies before them, Emily and Cecilia had completed their school life, and were now to go out into the world.

The contrast in the characters of the two girls showed itself, even in such a trifle as the preparations for supper.

Gentle Cecilia, sitting on the floor surrounded by good things, left it to the ingenuity of others to decide whether the baskets should be all emptied at once, or handed round from bed to bed, one at a time. In the meanwhile, her lovely blue eyes rested tenderly on the tarts.

Emily's commanding spirit seized on the reins of government, and employed each of her schoolfellows in the occupation which she was fittest to undertake. "Miss de Sor, let me look at your hand. Ah! I thought so. You have got the thickest wrist among us; you shall draw the corks. If you let the lemonade pop, not a drop of it goes down your throat. Effie, Annis, Priscilla, you are three notoriously lazy girls; it's doing you a true kindness to set you to..."
work. Effie, clear the toilet-table for supper; away with the combs, the brushes, and the looking-glass. Annis, tear
the leaves out of your book of exercises, and set them out for plates. No! I'll unpack; nobody touches the baskets but
me. Priscilla, you have the prettiest ears in the room. You shall act as sentinel, my dear, and listen at the door.
Cecilia, when you have done devouring those tarts with your eyes, take that pair of scissors (Miss de Sor, allow me
to apologize for the mean manner in which this school is carried on; the knives and forks are counted and locked up
every night)--I say take that pair of scissors, Cecilia, and carve the cake, and don't keep the largest bit for yourself.

Are we all ready? Very well. Now take example by me. Talk as much as you like, so long as you don't talk too loud.
There is one other thing before we begin. The men always propose toasts on these occasions; let's be like the men.
Can any of you make a speech? Ah, it falls on me as usual. I propose the first toast. Down with all schools and
teachers--especially the new teacher, who came this half year. Oh, mercy, how it stings!" The fixed gas in
the lemonade took the orator, at that moment, by the throat, and effectually checked the flow of her eloquence. It made
no difference to the girls. Excepting the ease of feeble stomachs, who cares for eloquence in the presence of a
supper-table? There were no feeble stomachs in that bedroom. With what inexhaustible energy Miss Ladd's young
ladies ate and drank! How merrily they enjoyed the delightful privilege of talking nonsense! And--alas! alas!--how
vainly they tried, in after life, to renew the once unalloyed enjoyment of tarts and lemonade!

In the unintelligible scheme of creation, there appears to be no human happiness--not even the happiness of
schoolgirls--which is ever complete. Just as it was drawing to a close, the enjoyment of the feast was interrupted by
an alarm from the sentinel at the door.

Put out the candle!" Priscilla whispered "Somebody on the stairs."

CHAPTER II.

BIOGRAPHY IN THE BEDROOM.
The candle was instantly extinguished. In discreet silence the girls stole back to their beds, and listened.

As an aid to the vigilance of the sentinel, the door had been left ajar. Through the narrow opening, a creaking of
the broad wooden stairs of the old house became audible. In another moment there was silence. An interval passed,
and the creaking was heard again. This time, the sound was distant and diminishing. On a sudden it stopped. The
midnight silence was disturbed no more.

What did this mean?

Had one among the many persons in authority under Miss Ladd's roof heard the girls talking, and ascended the
stairs to surprise them in the act of violating one of the rules of the house? So far, such a proceeding was by no
means uncommon. But was it within the limits of probability that a teacher should alter her opinion of her own duty
half-way up the stairs, and deliberately go back to her own room again? The bare idea of such a thing was absurd on
the face of it. What more rational explanation could ingenuity discover on the spur of the moment?

Francine was the first to offer a suggestion. She shook and shivered in her bed, and said, "For heaven's sake,
light the candle again! It's a Ghost."

"Clear away the supper, you fools, before the ghost can report us to Miss Ladd."

With this excellent advice Emily checked the rising panic. The door was closed, the candle was lit; all traces of
the supper disappeared. For five minutes more they listened again. No sound came from the stairs; no teacher, or
ghost of a teacher, appeared at the door.

Having eaten her supper, Cecilia's immediate anxieties were at an end; she was at leisure to exert her intelligence
for the benefit of her schoolfellows. In her gentle ingratiating way, she offered a composing suggestion. "When we
heard the creaking, I don't believe there was anybody on the stairs. In these old houses there are always strange
noises at night--and they say the stairs here were made more than two hundred years since."

The girls looked at each other with a sense of relief--but they waited to hear the opinion of the queen. Emily, as
usual, justified the confidence placed in her. She discovered an ingenious method of putting Cecilia's suggestion to
the test.

"Let's go on talking," she said. "If Cecilia is right, the teachers are all asleep, and we have nothing to fear from
them. If she's wrong, we shall sooner or later see one of them at the door. Don't be alarmed, Miss de Sor. Catching
us talking at night, in this school, only means a reprimand. Catching us with a light, ends in punishment. Blow out
the candle."

Francine's belief in the ghost was too sincerely superstitious to be shaken: she started up in bed. "Oh, don't leave
me in the dark! I'll take the punishment, if we are found out."

"On your sacred word of honor?" Emily stipulated.

"Yes--yes."

The queen's sense of humor was tickled.

"There's something funny," she remarked, addressing her subjects, "in a big girl like this coming to a new school
and beginning with a punishment. May I ask if you are a foreigner, Miss de Sor?"
"My papa is a Spanish gentleman," Francine answered, with dignity.
"And your mamma?"
"My mamma is English."
"And you have always lived in the West Indies?"
"I have always lived in the Island of St. Domingo."

Emily checked off on her fingers the different points thus far discovered in the character of Mr. de Sor's daughter. "She's ignorant, and superstitious, and foreign, and rich. My dear (forgive the familiarity), you are an interesting girl--and we must really know more of you. Entertain the bedroom. What have you been about all your life? And what in the name of wonder, brings you here? Before you begin I insist on one condition, in the name of all the young ladies in the room. No useful information about the West Indies!"

Francine disappointed her audience.

She was ready enough to make herself an object of interest to her companions; but she was not possessed of the capacity to arrange events in their proper order, necessary to the recital of the simplest narrative. Emily was obliged to help her, by means of questions. In one respect, the result justified the trouble taken to obtain it. A sufficient reason was discovered for the extraordinary appearance of a new pupil, on the day before the school closed for the holidays.

Mr. de Sor's elder brother had left him an estate in St. Domingo, and a fortune in money as well; on the one easy condition that he continued to reside in the island. The question of expense being now beneath the notice of the family, Francine had been sent to England, especially recommended to Miss Ladd as a young lady with grand prospects, sorely in need of a fashionable education. The voyage had been so timed, by the advice of the schoolmistress, as to make the holidays a means of obtaining this object privately. Francine was to be taken to Brighton, where excellent masters could be obtained to assist Miss Ladd. With six weeks before her, she might in some degree make up for lost time; and, when the school opened again, she would avoid the mortification of being put down in the lowest class, along with the children.

The examination of Miss de Sor having produced these results was pursued no further. Her character now appeared in a new, and not very attractive, light. She audaciously took to herself the whole credit of telling her story:
"I think it's my turn now," she said, "to be interested and amused. May I ask you to begin, Miss Emily? All I know of you at present is, that your family name is Brown."

Emily held up her hand for silence.

Was the mysterious creaking on the stairs making itself heard once more? No. The sound that had caught Emily's quick ear came from the beds, on the opposite side of the room, occupied by the three lazy girls. With no new alarm to disturb them, Effie, Annis, and Priscilla had yielded to the composing influences of a good supper and a warm night. They were fast asleep--and the stoutest of the three (softly, as became a young lady) was snoring!

The unblemished reputation of the bedroom was dear to Emily, in her capacity of queen. She felt herself humiliated in the presence of the new pupil.
"If that fat girl ever gets a lover," she said indignantly, "I shall consider it my duty to warn the poor man before he marries her. Her ridiculous name is Euphemia. I have christened her (far more appropriately) Boiled Veal. No color in her hair, no color in her eyes, no color in her complexion. In short, no flavor in Euphemia. You naturally object to snoring. Pardon me if I turn my back on you--I am going to throw my slipper at her."

The soft voice of Cecilia--suspiciously drowsy in tone--interposed in the interests of mercy.
"She can't help it, poor thing; and she really isn't loud enough to disturb us."

"She won't disturb you, at any rate! Rouse yourself, Cecilia. We are wide awake on this side of the room--and Francine says it's our turn to amuse her."

A low murmur, dying away gently in a sigh, was the only answer. Sweet Cecilia had yielded to the somnolent influences of the supper and the night. The soft infection of repose seemed to be in some danger of communicating itself to Francine. Her large mouth opened luxuriously in a long-continued yawn.
"Good-night!" said Emily.

Miss de Sor became wide awake in an instant.
"No," she said positively; "you are quite mistaken if you think I am going to sleep. Please exert yourself, Miss Emily--I am waiting to be interested."

Emily appeared to be unwilling to exert herself. She preferred talking of the weather.
"Isn't the wind rising?" she said.

There could be no doubt of it. The leaves in the garden were beginning to rustle, and the pattering of the rain sounded on the windows.

Francine (as her straight chin proclaimed to all students of physiognomy) was an obstinate girl. Determined to carry her point she tried Emily's own system on Emily herself--she put questions.
"Have you been long at this school?"
"More than three years."
"Have you got any brothers and sisters?"
"I am the only child."
"Are your father and mother alive?"
Emily suddenly raised herself in bed.
"Wait a minute," she said; "I think I hear it again."
"The creaking on the stairs?"
"Yes."

Either she was mistaken, or the change for the worse in the weather made it not easy to hear slight noises in the house. The wind was still rising. The passage of it through the great trees in the garden began to sound like the fall of waves on a distant beach. It drove the rain—a heavy downpour by this time—rattling against the windows.

"Almost a storm, isn't it?" Emily said
Francine's last question had not been answered yet. She took the earliest opportunity of repeating it:
"Never mind the weather," she said. "Tell me about your father and mother. Are they both alive?"
Emily's reply only related to one of her parents.
"My mother died before I was old enough to feel my loss."
"And your father?"
Emily referred to another relative—her father's sister. "Since I have grown up," she proceeded, "my good aunt has been a second mother to me. My story is, in one respect, the reverse of yours. You are unexpectedly rich; and I am unexpectedly poor. My aunt's fortune was to have been my fortune, if I outlived her. She has been ruined by the failure of a bank. In her old age, she must live on an income of two hundred a year—and I must get my own living when I leave school."

"Surely your father can help you?" Francine persisted.
"His property is landed property." Her voice faltered, as she referred to him, even in that indirect manner. "It is entailed; his nearest male relative inherits it."

The delicacy which is easily discouraged was not one of the weaknesses in the nature of Francine.
"Do I understand that your father is dead?" she asked.

Our thick-skinned fellow-creatures have the rest of us at their mercy: only give them time, and they carry their point in the end. In sad subdued tones—telling of deeply-rooted reserves of feeling, seldom revealed to strangers—Emily yielded at last.
"Yes," she said, "my father is dead."
"Long ago?"

"Some people might think it long ago. I was very fond of my father. It's nearly four years since he died, and my heart still aches when I think of him. I'm not easily depressed by troubles, Miss de Sor. But his death was sudden—he was in his grave when I first heard of it—and—Oh, he was so good to me; he was so good to me!"

The gay high-spirited little creature who took the lead among them all—who was the life and soul of the school—hid her face in her hands, and burst out crying.

Startled and—to do her justice—ashamed, Francine attempted to make excuses. Emily's generous nature passed over the cruel persistency that had tortured her. "No no; I have nothing to forgive. It isn't your fault. Other girls have not mothers and brothers and sisters—and get reconciled to such a loss as mine. Don't make excuses."

"Yes, but I want you to know that I feel for you," Francine insisted, without the slightest approach to sympathy in face, voice, or manner. "When my uncle died, and left us all the money, papa was much shocked. He trusted to time to help him."

"Time has been long about it with me, Francine. I am afraid there is something perverse in my nature; the hope of meeting again in a better world seems so faint and so far away. No more of it now! Let us talk of that good creature who is asleep on the other side of you. Did I tell you that I must earn my own bread when I leave school? Well, Cecilia has written home and found an employment for me. Not a situation as governess—something quite out of the common way. You shall hear all about it."

In the brief interval that had passed, the weather had begun to change again. The wind was as high as ever; but to judge by the lessening patter on the windows the rain was passing away.

Emily began.
She was too grateful to her friend and school-fellow, and too deeply interested in her story, to notice the air of indifference with which Francine settled herself on her pillow to hear the praises of Cecilia. The most beautiful girl in the school was not an object of interest to a young lady with an obstinate chin and unfortunately-placed eyes. Pouring warm from the speaker's heart the story ran smoothly on, to the monotonous accompaniment of the moaning
wind. By fine degrees Francine's eyes closed, opened and closed again. Toward the latter part of the narrative Emily's memory became, for the moment only, confused between two events. She stopped to consider--noticed Francine's silence, in an interval when she might have said a word of encouragement--and looked closer at her. Miss de Sor was asleep.

"She might have told me she was tired," Emily said to herself quietly. "Well! the best thing I can do is to put out the light and follow her example."

As she took up the extinguisher, the bedroom door was suddenly opened from the outer side. A tall woman, robed in a black dressing-gown, stood on the threshold, looking at Emily.

CHAPTER III.

THE LATE MR. BROWN.

The woman's lean, long-fingered hand pointed to the candle.

"Don't put it out." Saying those words, she looked round the room, and satisfied herself that the other girls were asleep.

Emily laid down the extinguisher. "You mean to report us, of course," she said. "I am the only one awake, Miss Jethro; lay the blame on me."

"I have no intention of reporting you. But I have something to say."

She paused, and pushed her thick black hair (already streaked with gray) back from her temples. Her eyes, large and dark and dim, rested on Emily with a sorrowful interest. "When your young friends wake to-morrow morning," she went on, "you can tell them that the new teacher, whom nobody likes, has left the school."

For once, even quick-witted Emily was bewildered. "Going away," she said, "when you have only been here since Easter!"

Miss Jethro advanced, not noticing Emily's expression of surprise. "I am not very strong at the best of times," she continued, "may I sit down on your bed?" Remarkable on other occasions for her cold composure, her voice trembled as she made that request--a strange request surely, when there were chairs at her disposal.

Emily made room for her with the dazed look of a girl in a dream. "I beg your pardon, Miss Jethro, one of the things I can't endure is being puzzled. If you don't mean to report us, why did you come in and catch me with the light?"

Miss Jethro's explanation was far from relieving the perplexity which her conduct had caused.

"I have been mean enough," she answered, "to listen at the door, and I heard you talking of your father. I want to hear more about him. That is why I came in."

"You knew my father!" Emily exclaimed.

"I believe I knew him. But his name is so common--there are so many thousands of 'James Browns' in England--that I am in fear of making a mistake. I heard you say that he died nearly four years since. Can you mention any particulars which might help to enlighten me? If you think I am taking a liberty--"

Emily stopped her. "I would help you if I could," she said. "But I was in poor health at the time; and I was staying with friends far away in Scotland, to try change of air. The news of my father's death brought on a relapse. Weeks passed before I was strong enough to travel--weeks and weeks before I saw his grave! I can only tell you what I know from my aunt. He died of heart-complaint."

Miss Jethro started.

Emily looked at her for the first time, with eyes that betrayed a feeling of distrust. "What have I said to startle you?" she asked.

"Nothing! I am nervous in stormy weather--don't notice me." She went on abruptly with her inquiries. "Will you tell me the date of your father's death?"

"The date was the thirtieth of September, nearly four years since."

She waited, after that reply.

Miss Jethro was silent.

"And this," Emily continued, "is the thirtieth of June, eighteen hundred and eighty-one. You can now judge for yourself. Did you know my father?"

Miss Jethro answered mechanically, using the same words.

"I did know your father."

Emily's feeling of distrust was not set at rest. "I never heard him speak of you," she said.

In her younger days the teacher must have been a handsome woman. Her grandly-formed features still suggested the idea of imperial beauty--perhaps Jewish in its origin. When Emily said, "I never heard him speak of you," the color flew into her pallid cheeks: her dim eyes became alive again with a momentary light. She left her seat on the bed, and, turning away, mastered the emotion that shook her.

"How hot the night is!" she said: and sighed, and resumed the subject with a steady countenance. "I am not
surprised that your father never mentioned me--to you." She spoke quietly, but her face was paler than ever. She sat
down again on the bed. "Is there anything I can do for you," she asked, "before I go away? Oh, I only mean some
trifling service that would lay you under no obligation, and would not oblige you to keep up your acquaintance with
me."

Her eyes--the dim black eyes that must once have been irresistibly beautiful--looked at Emily so sadly that the
generous girl reproached herself for having doubted her father's friend. "Are you thinking of him," she said gently,
"when you ask if you can be of service to me?"

Miss Jethro made no direct reply. "You were fond of your father?" she added, in a whisper. "You told your
schoolfellow that your heart still aches when you speak of him."

"I only told her the truth," Emily answered simply.

Miss Jethro shuddered--on that hot night!--shuddered as if a chill had struck her.

Emily held out her hand; the kind feeling that had been roused in her glittered prettily in her eyes. "I am afraid I
have not done you justice," she said. "Will you forgive me and shake hands?"

Miss Jethro rose, and drew back. "Look at the light!" she exclaimed.

The candle was all burned out. Emily still offered her hand--and still Miss Jethro refused to see it.

"There is just light enough left," she said, "to show me my way to the door. Good-night--and good-by."

Emily caught at her dress, and stopped her. "Why won't you shake hands with me?" she asked.

The wick of the candle fell over in the socket, and left them in the dark. Emily resolutely held the teacher's dress.

With or without light, she was still bent on making Miss Jethro explain herself.

They had throughout spoken in guarded tones, fearing to disturb the sleeping girls. The sudden darkness had its
inevitable effect. Their voices sank to whispers now. "My father's friend," Emily pleaded, "is surely my friend?"

"Drop the subject."

"Why?"

"You can never be my friend."

"Why not?"

"Let me go!"

Emily's sense of self-respect forbade her to persist any longer. "I beg your pardon for having kept you here
against your will," she said--and dropped her hold on the dress.

Miss Jethro instantly yielded on her side. "I am sorry to have been obstinate," she answered. "If you do despise
me, it is after all no more than I have deserved." Her hot breath beat on Emily's face: the unhappy woman must have
bent over the bed as she made her confession. "I am not a fit person for you to associate with."

"I don't believe it!"

Miss Jethro sighed bitterly. "Young and warm hearted--I was once like you!" She controlled that outburst of
despair. Her next words were spoken in steadier tones. "You will have it--you shall have it!" she said. "Some one (in
this house or out of it; I don't know which) has betrayed me to the mistress of the school. A wretch in my situation
suspects everybody, and worse still, does it without reason or excuse. I heard you girls talking when you ought to
have been asleep. You all dislike me. How did I know it mightn't be one of you? Absurd, to a person with a well-
balanced mind! I went halfway up the stairs, and felt ashamed of myself, and went back to my room. If I could only
have got some rest! Ah, well, it was not to be done. My own vile suspicions kept me awake; I left my bed again.

You know what I heard on the other side of that door, and why I was interested in hearing it. Your father never told
me he had a daughter. 'Miss Brown,' at this school, was any 'Miss Brown,' to me. I had no idea of who you really
were until to-night. Your father never mentioned me--to you."

"I'm wandering. What does all this matter to you? Miss Ladd has been merciful; she lets me go
without exposing me. You can guess what has happened. No? Not even yet? Is it innocence or kindness that makes
you so slow to understand? My dear, I have obtained admission to this respectable house by means of false
references, and I have been discovered. Now you know why you must not be the friend of such a woman as I am!
Once more, good-night--and good-by."

Emily shrank from that miserable farewell.

"Bid me good-night," she said, "but don't bid me good-by. Let me see you again."

"Never!"

The sound of the softly-closed door was just audible in the darkness. She had spoken--she had gone--never to be
seen by Emily again.

Miserable, interesting, unfathomable creature--the problem that night of Emily's waking thoughts: the phantom
of her dreams. "Bad? or good?" she asked herself. "False; for she listened at the door. True; for she told me the tale
of her own disgrace. A friend of my father; and she never knew that he had a daughter. Refined, accomplished, lady-
like; and she stoops to use a false reference. Who is to reconcile such contradictions as these?"

Dawn looked in at the window--dawn of the memorable day which was, for Emily, the beginning of a new life.
The years were before her; and the years in their course reveal baffling mysteries of life and death.

CHAPTER IV.
MISS LADD'S DRAWING-MASTER.

Francine was awakened the next morning by one of the housemaids, bringing up her breakfast on a tray. Astonished at this concession to laziness, in an institution devoted to the practice of all virtues, she looked round. The bedroom was deserted.

"The other young ladies are as busy as bees, miss," the housemaid explained. "They were up and dressed two hours ago: and the breakfast has been cleared away long since. It's Miss Emily's fault. She wouldn't allow them to wake you; she said you could be of no possible use downstairs, and you had better be treated like a visitor. Miss Cecilia was so distressed at your missing your breakfast that she spoke to the housekeeper, and I was sent up to you. Please to excuse it if the tea's cold. This is Grand Day, and we are all topsy-turvy in consequence."

Inquiring what "Grand Day" meant, and why it produced this extraordinary result in a ladies' school, Francine discovered that the first day of the vacation was devoted to the distribution of prizes, in the presence of parents, guardians and friends. An Entertainment was added, comprising those merciless tests of human endurance called Recitations; light refreshments and musical performances being distributed at intervals, to encourage the exhausted audience. The local newspaper sent a reporter to describe the proceedings, and some of Miss Ladd's young ladies enjoyed the intoxicating luxury of seeing their names in print.

"It begins at three o'clock," the housemaid went on, "and, what with practicing and rehearsing, and ornamenting the schoolroom, there's a hubbub fit to make a person's head spin. Besides which," said the girl, lowering her voice, and approaching a little nearer to Francine, "we have all been taken by surprise. The first thing in the morning Miss Jethro left us, without saying good-by to anybody."

"Who is Miss Jethro?"

"The new teacher, miss. We none of us liked her, and we all suspect there's something wrong. Miss Ladd and the clergyman had a long talk together yesterday (in private, you know), and they sent for Miss Jethro—which looks bad, doesn't it? Is there anything more I can do for you, miss? It's a beautiful day after the rain. If I was you, I should go and enjoy myself in the garden."

Having finished her breakfast, Francine decided on profiting by this sensible suggestion.

The servant who showed her the way to the garden was not favorably impressed by the new pupil: Francine's temper asserted itself a little too plainly in her face. To a girl possessing a high opinion of her own importance it was not very agreeable to feel herself excluded, as an illiterate stranger, from the one absorbing interest of her schoolfellows. "Will the time ever come," she wondered bitterly, "when I shall win a prize, and sing and play before all the company? How I should enjoy making the girls envy me!"

A broad lawn, overshadowed at one end by fine old trees—flower beds and shrubberies, and winding paths prettily and invitingly laid out—made the garden a welcome refuge on that fine summer morning. The novelty of the scene, after her experience in the West Indies, the delicious breezes cooled by the rain of the night, exerted their cheering influence even on the sullen disposition of Francine. She smiled, in spite of herself, as she followed the pleasant paths, and heard the birds singing their summer songs over her head.

Wandering among the trees, which occupied a considerable extent of ground, she passed into an open space beyond, and discovered an old fish-pond, overgrown by aquatic plants. Dribblets of water trickled from a dilapidated fountain in the middle. On the further side of the pond the ground sloped downward toward the south, and revealed, over a low paling, a pretty view of a village and its church, backed by fir woods mounting the heathy sides of a range of hills beyond. A fanciful little wooden building, imitating the form of a Swiss cottage, was placed so as to command the prospect. Near it, in the shadow of the building, stood a rustic chair and table—with a color-box on one, and a portfolio on the other. Fluttering over the grass, at the mercy of the capricious breeze, was a neglected sheet of drawing-paper. Francine ran round the pond, and picked up the paper just as it was on the point of being tilted into the water. It contained a sketch in water colors of the village and the woods, and Francine had looked at the view itself with indifference—the picture of the view interested her. Ordinary visitors to Galleries of Art, which admit students, show the same strange perversity. The work of the copyist commands their whole attention; they take no interest in the original picture.

Looking up from the sketch, Francine was startled. She discovered a man, at the window of the Swiss summer-house, watching her.

"When you have done with that drawing," he said quietly, "please let me have it back again."

He was tall and thin and dark. His finely-shaped intelligent face—hidden, as to the lower part of it, by a curly black beard—would have been absolutely handsome, even in the eyes of a schoolgirl, but for the deep furrows that marked it prematurely between the eyebrows, and at the sides of the mouth. In the same way, an underlying mockery impaired the attraction of his otherwise refined and gentle manner. Among his fellow-creatures, children
and dogs were the only critics who appreciated his merits without discovering the defects which lessened the favorable appreciation of him by men and women. He dressed neatly, but his morning coat was badly made, and his picturesque felt hat was too old. In short, there seemed to be no good quality about him which was not perversely associated with a drawback of some kind. He was one of those harmless and luckless men, possessed of excellent qualities, who fail nevertheless to achieve popularity in their social sphere.

Francine handed his sketch to him, through the window; doubtful whether the words that he had addressed to her were spoken in jest or in earnest.

"I only presumed to touch your drawing," she said, "because it was in danger."

"What danger?" he inquired.

Francine pointed to the pond. "If I had not been in time to pick it up, it would have been blown into the water."

"Do you think it was worth picking up?"

Putting that question, he looked first at the sketch--then at the view which it represented--then back again at the sketch. The corners of his mouth turned upward with a humorous expression of scorn. "Madam Nature," he said, "I beg your pardon." With those words, he composedly tore his work of art into small pieces, and scattered them out of the window.

"What a pity!" said Francine.

He joined her on the ground outside the cottage. "Why is it a pity?" he asked.

"Such a nice drawing."

"It isn't a nice drawing."

"You're not very polite, sir."

He looked at her--and sighed as if he pitied so young a woman for having a temper so ready to take offense. In his flattest contradictions he always preserved the character of a politely-positive man.

"Put it in plain words, miss," he replied. "I have offended the predominant sense in your nature--your sense of self-esteem. You don't like to be told, even indirectly, that you know nothing of Art. In these days, everybody knows everything--and thinks nothing worth knowing after all. But beware how you presume on an appearance of indifference, which is nothing but conceit in disguise. The ruling passion of civilized humanity is, Conceit. You may try the regard of your dearest friend in any other way, and be forgiven. Ruffle the smooth surface of your friend's self-esteem--and there will be an acknowledged coolness between you which will last for life. Excuse me for giving you the benefit of my trumpery experience. This sort of smart talk is my form of conceit. Can I be of use to you in some better way? Are you looking for one of our young ladies?"

Francine began to feel a certain reluctant interest in him when he spoke of "our young ladies." She asked if he belonged to the school.

The corners of his mouth turned up again. "I'm one of the masters," he said. "Are you going to belong to the school, too?"

Francine bent her head, with a gravity and condescension intended to keep him at his proper distance. Far from being discouraged, he permitted his curiosity to take additional liberties. "Are you to have the misfortune of being one of my pupils?" he asked.

"I don't know who you are."

"You won't be much wiser when you do know. My name is Alban Morris."

Francine corrected herself. "I mean, I don't know what you teach."

Alban Morris pointed to the fragments of his sketch from Nature. "I am a bad artist," he said. "Some bad artists become Royal Academicians. Some take to drink. Some get a pension. And some--I am one of them--find refuge in schools. Drawing is an 'Extra' at this school. Will you take my advice? Spare your good father's pocket; say you don't want to learn to draw."

He was so gravely in earnest that Francine burst out laughing. "You are a strange man," she said.

"Wrong again, miss. I am only an unhappy man."

The furrows in his face deepened, the latent humor died out of his eyes. He turned to the summer-house window, and took up a pipe and tobacco pouch, left on the ledge.

"I lost my only friend last year," he said. "Since the death of my dog, my pipe is the one companion I have left. Naturally I am not allowed to enjoy the honest fellow's society in the presence of ladies. They have their own taste in perfumes. Their clothes and their letters reek with the foetid secretion of the musk deer. The clean vegetable smell of tobacco is unendurable to them. Allow me to retire--and let me thank you for the trouble you took to save my drawing."

The tone of indifference in which he expressed his gratitude piqued Francine. She resented it by drawing her own conclusion from what he had said of the ladies and the musk deer. "I was wrong in admiring your drawing," she remarked; "and wrong again in thinking you a strange man. Am I wrong, for the third time, in believing that you
dislike women?"

"I am sorry to say you are right," Alban Morris answered gravely.

"Is there not even one exception?"

The instant the words passed her lips, she saw that there was some secretly sensitive feeling in him which she had hurt. His black brows gathered into a frown, his piercing eyes looked at her with angry surprise. It was over in a moment. He raised his shabby hat, and made her a bow.

"There is a sore place still left in me," he said; "and you have innocently hit it. Good-morning."

Before she could speak again, he had turned the corner of the summer-house, and was lost to view in a shrubbery on the westward side of the grounds.

CHAPTER V.

DISCOVERIES IN THE GARDEN.

Left by herself, Miss de Sor turned back again by way of the trees.

So far, her interview with the drawing-master had helped to pass the time. Some girls might have found it no easy task to arrive at a true view of the character of Alban Morris. Francine's essentially superficial observation set him down as "a little mad," and left him there, judged and dismissed to her own entire satisfaction.

Arriving at the lawn, she discovered Emily pacing backward and forward, with her head down and her hands behind her, deep in thought. Francine's high opinion of herself would have carried her past any of the other girls, unless they had made special advances to her. She stopped and looked at Emily.

It is the sad fate of little women in general to grow too fat and to be born with short legs. Emily's slim finely-strung figure spoke for itself as to the first of these misfortunes, and asserted its happy freedom from the second, if she only walked across a room. Nature had built her, from head to foot, on a skeleton-scaffolding in perfect proportion. Tall or short matters little to the result, in women who possess the first and foremost advantage of beginning well in their bones. When they live to old age, they often astonish thoughtless men, who walk behind them in the street. "I give you my honor, she was as easy and upright as a young girl; and when you got in front of her and looked—white hair, and seventy years of age."

Francine approached Emily, moved by a rare impulse in her nature—the impulse to be sociable. "You look out of spirits," she began. "Surely you don't regret leaving school?"

In her present mood, Emily took the opportunity (in the popular phrase) of snubbing Francine. "You have guessed wrong; I do regret," she answered. "I have found in Cecilia my dearest friend at school. And school brought with it the change in my life which has helped me to bear the loss of my father. If you must know what I was thinking of just now, I was thinking of my aunt. She has not answered my last letter—and I'm beginning to be afraid she is ill."

"I'm very sorry," said Francine.

"Why? You don't know my aunt; and you have only known me since yesterday afternoon. Why are you sorry?"

Francine remained silent. Without realizing it, she was beginning to feel the dominant influence that Emily exercised over the weaker natures that came in contact with her. To find herself irresistibly attracted by a stranger at a new school—an unfortunate little creature, whose destiny was to earn her own living—filled the narrow mind of Miss de Sor with perplexity. Having waited in vain for a reply, Emily turned away, and resumed the train of thought which her schoolfellow had interrupted.

By an association of ideas, of which she was not herself aware, she now passed from thinking of her aunt to thinking of Miss Jethro. The interview of the previous night had dwelt on her mind at intervals, in the hours of the new day.

Acting on instinct rather than on reason, she had kept that remarkable incident in her school life a secret from every one. No discoveries had been made by other persons. In speaking to her staff of teachers, Miss Ladd had alluded to the affair in the most cautious terms. "Circumstances of a private nature have obliged the lady to retire from my school. When we meet after the holidays, another teacher will be in her place." There, Miss Ladd's explanation had begun and ended. Inquiries addressed to the servants had led to no result. Miss Jethro's luggage was to be forwarded to the London terminus of the railway—and Miss Jethro herself had baffled investigation by leaving the school on foot. Emily's interest in the lost teacher was not the transitory interest of curiosity; her father's mysterious friend was a person whom she honestly desired to see again. Perplexed by the difficulty of finding a means of tracing Miss Jethro, she reached the shady limit of the trees, and turned to walk back again. Approaching the place at which she and Francine had met, an idea occurred to her. It was just possible that Miss Jethro might not be unknown to her aunt.

Still meditating on the cold reception that she had encountered, and still feeling the influence which mastered her in spite of herself, Francine interpreted Emily's return as an implied expression of regret. She advanced with a constrained smile, and spoke first.
"How are the young ladies getting on in the schoolroom?" she asked, by way of renewing the conversation. Emily's face assumed a look of surprise which said plainly, Can't you take a hint and leave me to myself? Francine was constitutionally impenetrable to reproof of this sort; her thick skin was not even tickled. "Why are you not helping them," she went on; "you who have the clearest head among us and take the lead in everything?"

It may be a humiliating confession to make, yet it is surely true that we are all accessible to flattery. Different tastes appreciate different methods of burning incense--but the perfume is more or less agreeable to all varieties of noses. Francine's method had its tranquilizing effect on Emily. She answered indulgently, "Miss de Sor, I have nothing to do with it."

"Nothing to do with it? No prizes to win before you leave school?"

"I won all the prizes years ago."

"But there are recitations. Surely you recite?"

Harmless words in themselves, pursuing the same smooth course of flattery as before--but with what a different result! Emily's face reddened with anger the moment they were spoken. Having already irritated Alban Morris, unlucky Francine, by a second mischievous interposition of accident, had succeeded in making Emily smart next.

"Who has told you," she burst out; "I insist on knowing!"

"Nobody has told you anything!" Francine declared piteously.

"Nobody has told you how I have been insulted?"

"No, indeed! Oh, Miss Brown, who could insult you?"

In a man, the sense of injury does sometimes submit to the discipline of silence. In a woman--never. Suddenly reminded of her past wrongs (by the pardonable error of a polite schoolfellow), Emily committed the startling inconsistency of appealing to the sympathies of Francine!

"Would you believe it? I have been forbidden to recite--I, the head girl of the school. Oh, not to-day! It happened a month ago--when we were all in consultation, making our arrangements. Miss Ladd asked me if I had decided on a piece to recite. I said, 'I have not only decided, I have learned the piece.' 'And what may it be?' 'The dagger-scene in Macbeth.' There was a howl--I can call it by no other name--a howl of indignation. A man's soliloquy, and, worse still, a murdering man's soliloquy, recited by one of Miss Ladd's young ladies, before an audience of parents and guardians! That was the tone they took with me. I was as firm as a rock. The dagger-scene or nothing. The result is--nothing! An insult to Shakespeare, and an insult to Me. I felt it--I feel it still. I was prepared for any sacrifice in the cause of the drama. If Miss Ladd had met me in a proper spirit, do you know what I would have done? I would have played Macbeth in costume. Just hear me, and judge for yourself. I begin with a dreadful vacancy in my eyes, and a hollow moaning in my voice: 'Is this a dagger that I see before me--?'"

Reciting with her face toward the trees, Emily started, dropped the character of Macbeth, and instantly became herself again: herself, with a rising color and an angry brightening of the eyes. "Excuse me, I can't trust my memory: I must get the play." With that abrupt apology, she walked away rapidly in the direction of the house.

In some surprise, Francine turned, and looked at the trees. She discovered--in full retreat, on his side--the eccentric drawing-master, Alban Morris.

Did he, too, admire the dagger-scene? And was he modestly desirous of hearing it recited, without showing himself? In that case, why should Emily (whose besetting weakness was certainly not want of confidence in her own resources) leave the garden the moment she caught sight of him? Francine consulted her instincts. She had just arrived at a conclusion which expressed itself outwardly by a malicious smile, when gentle Cecilia appeared on the lawn--a lovable object in a broad straw hat and a white dress, with a nosegay in her bosom--smiling, and fanning herself.

"It's so hot in the schoolroom," she said, "and some of the girls, poor things, are so ill-tempered at rehearsal--I have made my escape. I hope you got your breakfast, Miss de Sor. What have you been doing here, all by yourself?"

"I have been making an interesting discovery," Francine replied.

"An interesting discovery in our garden? What can it be?"

"The drawing-master, my dear, is in love with Emily. Perhaps she doesn't care about him. Or, perhaps, I have been an innocent obstacle in the way of an appointment between them."

Cecilia had breakfasted to her heart's content on her favorite dish--buttered eggs. She was in such good spirits that she was inclined to be coquettish, even when there was no man present to fascinate. "We are not allowed to talk about love in this school," she said--and hid her face behind her fan. "Besides, if it came to Miss Ladd's ears, poor Mr. Morris might lose his situation."

"But isn't it true?" asked Francine.

"It may be true, my dear; but nobody knows. Emily hasn't breathed a word about it to any of us. And Mr. Morris keeps his own secret. Now and then we catch him looking at her--and we draw our own conclusions."

"Did you meet Emily on your way here?"
"Yes, and she passed without speaking to me."

"Thinking perhaps of Mr. Morris."

Cecilia shook her head. "Thinking, Francine, of the new life before her--and regretting, I am afraid, that she ever confided her hopes and wishes to me. Did she tell you last night what her prospects are when she leaves school?"

"She told me you had been very kind in helping her. I daresay I should have heard more, if I had not fallen asleep. What is she going to do?"

"To live in a dull house, far away in the north," Cecilia answered; "with only old people in it. She will have to write and translate for a great scholar, who is studying mysterious inscriptions--hieroglyphics, I think they are called--found among the ruins of Central America. It's really no laughing matter, Francine! Emily made a joke of it, too. 'I'll take anything but a situation as a governess,' she said; 'the children who have Me to teach them would be to be pitied indeed!' She begged and prayed me to help her to get an honest living. What could I do? I could only write home to papa. He is a member of Parliament: and everybody who wants a place seems to think he is bound to find it for them. As it happened, he had heard from an old friend of his (a certain Sir Jervis Redwood), who was in search of a secretary. Being in favor of letting the women compete for employment with the men, Sir Jervis was willing to try, what he calls, 'a female.' Isn't that a horrid way of speaking of us? and Miss Ladd says it's ungrammatical, besides. Papa had written back to say he knew of no lady whom he could recommend. When he got my letter speaking of Emily, he kindly wrote again. In the interval, Sir Jervis had received two applications for the vacant place. They were both from old ladies--and he declined to employ them."

"Because they were old," Francine suggested maliciously.

"You shall hear him give his own reasons, my dear. Papa sent me an extract from his letter. It made me rather angry; and (perhaps for that reason) I think I can repeat it word for word:--'We are four old people in this house, and we don't want a fifth. Let us have a young one to cheer us. If your daughter's friend likes the terms, and is not encumbered with a sweetheart, I will send for her when the school breaks up at midsummer.' Coarse and selfish--isn't it? However, Emily didn't agree with me, when I showed her the extract. She accepted the place, very much to her aunt's surprise and regret, when that excellent person heard of it. Now that the time has come (though Emily won't acknowledge it), I believe she secretly shrinks, poor dear, from the prospect."

"Very likely," Francine agreed--without even a pretense of sympathy. "But tell me, who are the four old people?"

"First, Sir Jervis himself--seventy, last birthday. Next, his unmarried sister--nearly eighty. Next, his man-servant, Mr. Rook--well past sixty. And last, his man-servant's wife, who considers herself young, being only a little over forty. That is the household. Mrs. Rook is coming to-day to attend Emily on the journey to the North; and I am not at all sure that Emily will like her."

"A disagreeable woman, I suppose?"

"No--not exactly that. Rather odd and flighty. The fact is, Mrs. Rook has had her troubles; and perhaps they have a little unsettled her. She and her husband used to keep the village inn, close to our park: we know all about them at home. I am sure I pity these poor people. What are you looking at, Francine?"

Feeling no sort of interest in Mr. and Mrs. Rook, Francine was studying her schoolfellow's lovely face in search of defects. She had already discovered that Cecilia's eyes were placed too widely apart, and that her chin wanted size and character.

"I was admiring your complexion, dear," she answered coolly. "Well, and why do you pity the Rooks?"

Simple Cecilia smiled, and went on with her story.

"They are obliged to go out to service in their old age, through a misfortune for which they are in no way to blame. Their customers deserted the inn, and Mr. Rook became bankrupt. The inn got what they call a bad name--in a very dreadful way. There was a murder committed in the house."

"A murder?" cried Francine. "Oh, this is exciting! You provoking girl, why didn't you tell me about it before?"

"I didn't think of it," said Cecilia placidly.

"Do go on! Were you at home when it happened?"

"I was at school."

"You saw the newspapers, I suppose?"

"Miss Ladd doesn't allow us to read newspapers. I did hear of it, however, in letters from home. Not that there was much in the letters. They said it was too horrible to be described. The poor murdered gentleman--"

Francine was unaffectedly shocked. "A gentleman!" she exclaimed. "How dreadful!"

"The poor man was a stranger in our part of the country," Cecilia resumed; "and the police were puzzled about the motive for a murder. His pocketbook was missing; but his watch and his rings were found on the body. I remember the initials on his linen because they were the same as my mother's initial before she was married--'J. B.' Really, Francine, that's all I know about it."
"Surely you know whether the murderer was discovered?"
"Oh, yes--of course I know that! The government offered a reward; and clever people were sent from London to help the county police. Nothing came of it. The murderer has never been discovered, from that time to this."
"When did it happen?"
"It happened in the autumn."
"The autumn of last year?"
"No! no! Nearly four years since."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE WAY TO THE VILLAGE.

Alban Morris--discovered by Emily in concealment among the trees--was not content with retiring to another part of the grounds. He pursued his retreat, careless in what direction it might take him, to a footpath across the fields, which led to the highroad and the railway station.

Miss Ladd's drawing-master was in that state of nervous irritability which seeks relief in rapidity of motion. Public opinion in the neighborhood (especially public opinion among the women) had long since decided that his manners were offensive, and his temper incurably bad. The men who happened to pass him on the footpath said "Good-morning" grudgingly. The women took no notice of him--with one exception. She was young and saucy, and seeing him walking at the top of his speed on the way to the railway station, she called after him, "Don't be in a hurry, sir! You're in plenty of time for the London train."

To her astonishment he suddenly stopped. His reputation for rudeness was so well established that she moved away to a safe distance, before she ventured to look at him again. He took no notice of her--he seemed to be considering with himself. The frolicsome young woman had done him a service: she had suggested an idea.

"Suppose I go to London?" he thought. "Why not?--the school is breaking up for the holidays--and she is going away like the rest of them." He looked round in the direction of the schoolhouse. "If I go back to wish her good-by, she will keep out of my way, and part with me at the last moment like a stranger. After my experience of women, to be in love again--in love with a girl who is young enough to be my daughter--what a fool, what a driveling, degraded fool I must be!"

Hot tears rose in his eyes. He dashed them away savagely, and went on again faster than ever--resolved to pack up at once at his lodgings in the village, and to take his departure by the next train.

At the point where the footpath led into the road, he came to a standstill for the second time.

The cause was once more a person of the sex associated in his mind with a bitter sense of injury. On this occasion the person was only a miserable little child, crying over the fragments of a broken jug.

Alban Morris looked at her with his grimly humorous smile. "So you've broken a jug?" he remarked.
"And spilt father's beer," the child answered. Her frail little body shook with terror. "Mother'll beat me when I go home," she said.
"What does mother do when you bring the jug back safe and sound?" Alban asked.
"Gives me bren-butter."
"Very well. Now listen to me. Mother shall give you bread and butter again this time."
The child stared at him with the tears suspended in her eyes. He went on talking to her as seriously as ever.
"You understand what I have just said to you?"
"Yes, sir."
"Have you got a pocket-handkerchief?"
"No, sir."
"Then dry your eyes with mine."

He tossed his handkerchief to her with one hand, and picked up a fragment of the broken jug with the other. "This will do for a pattern," he said to himself. The child stared at the handkerchief--stared at Alban--took courage--and rubbed vigorously at her eyes. The instinct, which is worth all the reason that ever pretended to enlighten mankind--the instinct that never deceives--told this little ignorant creature that she had found a friend. She returned the handkerchief in grave silence. Alban took her up in his arms.

"Your eyes are dry, and your face is fit to be seen," he said. "Will you give me a kiss?" The child gave him a resolute kiss, with a smack in it. "Now come and get another jug," he said, as he put her down. Her red round eyes opened wide in alarm. "Have you got money enough?" she asked. Alban slapped his pocket. "Yes, I have," he answered. "That's a good thing," said the child; "come along."

They went together hand in hand to the village, and bought the new jug, and had it filled at the beer-shop. The thirsty father was at the upper end of the fields, where they were making a drain. Alban carried the jug until they were within sight of the laborer. "You haven't far to go," he said. "Mind you don't drop it again--What's the matter now?"
"I'm frightened."

"Why?"

"Oh, give me the jug."

She almost snatched it out of his hand. If she let the precious minutes slip away, there might be another beating in store for her at the drain: her father was not of an indulgent disposition when his children were late in bringing his beer. On the point of hurrying away, without a word of farewell, she remembered the laws of politeness as taught at the infant school--and dropped her little curtsey--and said, "Thank you, sir." That bitter sense of injury was still in Alban's mind as he looked after her. "What a pity she should grow up to be a woman!" he said to himself.

The adventure of the broken jug had delayed his return to his lodgings by more than half an hour. When he reached the road once more, the cheap up-train from the North had stopped at the station. He heard the ringing of the bell as it resumed the journey to London.

One of the passengers (judging by the handbag that she carried) had not stopped at the village.

As she advanced toward him along the road, he remarked that she was a small wiry active woman--dressed in bright colors, combined with a deplorable want of taste. Her aquiline nose seemed to be her most striking feature as she came nearer. It might have been fairly proportioned to the rest of her face, in her younger days, before her cheeks had lost flesh and roundness. Being probably near-sighted, she kept her eyes half-closed; there were cunning little wrinkles at the corners of them. In spite of appearances, she was unwilling to present any outward acknowledgment of the march of time. Her hair was palpably dyed--her hat was jauntily set on her head, and ornamented with a gay feather. She walked with a light tripping step, swinging her bag, and holding her head up smartly. Her manner, like her dress, said as plainly as words could speak, "No matter how long I may have lived, I mean to be young and charming to the end of my days." To Alban's surprise she stopped and addressed him.

"Oh, I beg your pardon. Could you tell me if I am in the right road to Miss Ladd's school?"

She spoke with nervous rapidity of articulation, and with a singularly unpleasant smile. It parted her thin lips just widely enough to show her suspiciously beautiful teeth; and it opened her keen gray eyes in the strangest manner. The higher lid rose so as to disclose, for a moment, the upper part of the eyeball, and to give her the appearance--not of a woman bent on making herself agreeable, but of a woman staring in a panic of terror. Careless to conceal the unfavorable impression that she had produced on him, Alban answered roughly, "Straight on," and tried to pass her.

She stopped him with a peremptory gesture. "I have treated you politely," she said, "and how do you treat me in return? Well! I am not surprised. Men are all brutes by nature--and you are a man. 'Straight on?'' she repeated contemptuously; "I should like to know how far that helps a person in a strange place. Perhaps you know no more where Miss Ladd's school is than I do? or, perhaps, you don't care to take the trouble of addressing me? Just what I should have expected from a person of your sex! Good-morning."

Alban felt the reproof; she had appealed to his most readily-impressible sense--his sense of humor. He rather enjoyed seeing his own prejudice against women grotesquely reflected in this flighty stranger's prejudice against men. As the best excuse for himself that he could make, he gave her all the information that she could possibly want--then tried again to pass on--and again in vain. He had recovered his place in her estimation: she had not done with him yet.

"You know all about the way there," she said "I wonder whether you know anything about the school?"

No change in her voice, no change in her manner, betrayed any special motive for putting this question. Alban was on the point of suggesting that she should go on to the school, and make her inquiries there--when he happened to notice her eyes. She had hitherto looked him straight in the face. She now looked down on the road. It was a trifling change; in all probability it meant nothing--and yet, merely because it was a change, it roused his curiosity. "I ought to know something about the school," he answered. "I am one of the masters."

"Then you're just the man I want. May I ask your name?"

"Alban Morris."

"Thank you. I am Mrs. Rook. I presume you have heard of Sir Jervis Redwood?"

"No."

"Bless my soul! You are a scholar, of course--and you have never heard of one of your own trade. Very extraordinary. You see, I am Sir Jervis's housekeeper; and I am sent here to take one of your young ladies back with me to our place. Don't interrupt me! Don't be a brute again! Sir Jervis is not of a communicative disposition. At least, not to me. A man--that explains it--a man! He is always poring over his books and writings; and Miss Redwood, at her great age, is in bed half the day. Not a thing do I know about this new inmate of ours, except that I am to take her back with me. You would feel some curiosity yourself in my place, wouldn't you? Now do tell me. What sort of girl is Miss Emily Brown?"

The name that he was perpetually thinking of--on this woman's lips! Alban looked at her.

"Well," said Mrs. Rook, "am I to have no answer? Ah, you want leading. So like a man again! Is she pretty?"
Still examining the housekeeper with mingled feelings of interest and distrust, Alban answered ungraciously:
"Yes."
"Good-tempered?"
Alban again said "Yes."
"So much about herself," Mrs. Rook remarked. "About her family now?" She shifted her bag restlessly from one hand to another. "Perhaps you can tell me if Miss Emily's father--" she suddenly corrected herself--"if Miss Emily's parents are living?"
"I don't know."
"You mean you won't tell me."
"I mean exactly what I have said."
"Oh, it doesn't matter," Mrs. Rook rejoined; "I shall find out at the school. The first turning to the left, I think you said--across the fields?"
He was too deeply interested in Emily to let the housekeeper go without putting a question on his side:
"Is Sir Jervis Redwood one of Miss Emily's old friends?" he asked.
"He? What put that into your head? He has never even seen Miss Emily. She's going to our house--ah, the women are getting the upper hand now, and serve the men right, I say!--she's going to our house to be Sir Jervis's secretary. You would like to have the place yourself, wouldn't you? You would like to keep a poor girl from getting her own living? Oh, you may look as fierce as you please--the time's gone by when a man could frighten me. I like her Christian name. I call Emily a nice name enough. But 'Brown'? Good-morning, Mr. Morris; you and I are not cursed with such a contemptibly common name as that! 'Brown'? Oh, Lord!"
She tossed her head scornfully, and walked away, humming a tune.
Alban stood rooted to the spot. The effort of his later life had been to conceal the hopeless passion which had mastered him in spite of himself. Knowing nothing from Emily—who at once pitied and avoided him—of her family circumstances or of her future plans, he had shrunk from making inquiries of others, in the fear that they, too, might find out his secret, and that their contempt might be added to the contempt which he felt for himself. In this position, and with these obstacles in his way, the announcement of Emily's proposed journey—under the care of a stranger, to fill an employment in the house of a stranger—not only took him by surprise, but inspired him with a strong feeling of distrust. He looked after Sir Jervis Redwood's flighty housekeeper, completely forgetting the purpose which had brought him thus far on the way to his lodgings. Before Mrs. Rook was out of sight, Alban Morris was following her back to the school.
CHAPTER VII.
"COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE."
Miss De Sor and Miss Wyvil were still sitting together under the trees, talking of the murder at the inn.
"And is that really all you can tell me?" said Francine.
"That is all," Cecilia answered.
"Is there no love in it?"
"None that I know of."
"It's the most uninteresting murder that ever was committed. What shall we do with ourselves? I'm tired of being here in the garden. When do the performances in the schoolroom begin?"
"Not for two hours yet."
Francine yawned. "And what part do you take in it?" she asked.
"No part, my dear. I tried once—only to sing a simple little song. When I found myself standing before all the company and saw rows of ladies and gentlemen waiting for me to begin, I was so frightened that Miss Ladd had to make an apology for me. I didn't get over it for the rest of the day. For the first time in my life, I had no appetite for my dinner. Horrible!" said Cecilia, shuddering over the remembrance of it. "I do assure you, I thought I was going to die."
Perfectly unimpressed by this harrowing narrative, Francine turned her head lazily toward the house. The door was thrown open at the same moment. A lithe little person rapidly descended the steps that led to the lawn.
"It's Emily come back again," said Francine.
"And she seems to be rather in a hurry," Cecilia remarked.
Francine's satirical smile showed itself for a moment. Did this appearance of hurry in Emily's movements denote impatience to resume the recital of "the dagger-scene"? She had no book in her hand; she never even looked toward Francine. Sorrow became plainly visible in her face as she approached the two girls.
Cecilia rose in alarm. She had been the first person to whom Emily had confided her domestic anxieties. "Bad news from your aunt?" she asked.
"No, my dear; no news at all." Emily put her arms tenderly round her friend's neck. "The time has come,
Cecilia," she said. "We must wish each other good-by."

"Is Mrs. Rook here already?"

"It's you, dear, who are going," Emily answered sadly. "They have sent the governess to fetch you. Miss Ladd is too busy in the schoolroom to see her--and she has told me all about it. Don't be alarmed. There is no bad news from home. Your plans are altered; that's all."

"Altered?" Cecilia repeated. "In what way?"

"In a very agreeable way--you are going to travel. Your father wishes you to be in London, in time for the evening mail to France."

Cecilia guessed what had happened. "My sister is not getting well," she said, "and the doctors are sending her to the Continent."

"To the baths at St. Moritz," Emily added. "There is only one difficulty in the way; and you can remove it. Your sister has the good old governess to take care of her, and the courier to relieve her of all trouble on the journey. They were to have started yesterday. You know how fond Julia is of you. At the last moment, she won't hear of going away, unless you go too. The rooms are waiting at St. Moritz; and your father is annoyed (the governess says) by the delay that has taken place already."

She paused. Cecilia was silent. "Surely you don't hesitate?" Emily said.

"I am too happy to go wherever Julia goes," Cecilia answered warmly; "I was thinking of you, dear." Her tender nature, shrinking from the hard necessities of life, shrank from the cruelly-close prospect of parting. "I thought we were to have had some hours together yet," she said. "Why are we hurried in this way? There is no second train to London, from our station, till late in the afternoon."

"There is the express," Emily reminded her; "and there is time to catch it, if you drive at once to the town." She took Cecilia's hand and pressed it to her bosom. "Thank you again and again, dear, for all you have done for me. Whether we meet again or not, as long as I live I shall love you. Don't cry!" She made a faint attempt to resume her customary gayety, for Cecilia's sake. "Try to be as hard-hearted as I am. Think of your sister--don't think of me. Only kiss me."

Cecilia's tears fell fast. "Oh, my love, I am so anxious about you! I am so afraid that you will not be happy with that selfish old man--in that dreary house. Give it up, Emily! I have got plenty of money for both of us; come abroad with me. Why not? You always got on well with Julia, when you came to see us in the holidays. Oh, my darling! my darling! What shall I do without you?"

All that longed for love in Emily's nature had clung round her school-friend since her father's death. Turning deadly pale under the struggle to control herself, she made the effort--and bore the pain of it without letting a cry or a tear escape her. "Our ways in life lie far apart," she said gently. "There is the hope of meeting again, dear--if there is nothing more."

The clasp of Cecilia's arm tightened round her. She tried to release herself; but her resolution had reached its limits. Her hands dropped, trembling. She could still try to speak cheerfully, and that was all.

"There is not the least reason, Cecilia, to be anxious about my prospects. I mean to be Sir Jervis Redwood's favorite before I have been a week in his service."

She stopped, and pointed to the house. The governess was approaching them. "One more kiss, darling. We shall not forget the happy hours we have spent together; we shall constantly write to each other." She broke down at last. "Oh, Cecilia! Cecilia! leave me for God's sake--I can't bear it any longer!"

The governess parted them. Emily dropped into the chair that her friend had left. Even her hopeful nature sank under the burden of life at that moment.

A hard voice, speaking close at her side, startled her.

"Would you rather be Me," the voice asked, "without a creature to care for you?"

Emily raised her head. Francine, the unnoticed witness of the parting interview, was standing by her, idly picking the leaves from a rose which had dropped out of Cecilia's nosegay.

Had she felt her own isolated position? She had felt it resentfully.

Emily looked at her, with a heart softened by sorrow. There was no answering kindness in the eyes of Miss de Sor--there was only a dogged endurance, sad to see in a creature so young.

"You and Cecilia are going to write to each other," she said. "I suppose there is some comfort in that. When I left the island they were glad to get rid of me. They said, 'Telegraph when you are safe at Miss Ladd's school.' You see, we are so rich, the expense of telegraphing to the West Indies is nothing to us. Besides, a telegram has an advantage over a letter--it doesn't take long to read. I daresay I shall write home. But they are in no hurry; and I am in no hurry. The school's breaking up; you are going your way, and I am going mine--and who cares what becomes of me? Only an ugly old schoolmistress, who is paid for caring. I wonder why I am saying all this? Because I like you? I don't know that I like you any better than you like me. When I wanted to be friends with you, you treated me coolly; I
don't want to force myself on you. I don't particularly care about you. May I write to you from Brighton?"

Under all this bitterness—the first exhibition of Francine's temper, at its worst, which had taken place since she joined the school—Emily saw, or thought she saw, distress that was too proud, or too shy, to show itself. "How can you ask the question?" she answered cordially.

Francine was incapable of meeting the sympathy offered to her, even half way. "Never mind how," she said. "Yes or no is all I want from you."

"Oh, Francine! Francine! what are you made of! Flesh and blood? or stone and iron? Write to me of course—and I will write back again."

"Thank you. Are you going to stay here under the trees?"

"Yes."

"All by yourself?"

"All by myself."

"With nothing to do?"

"I can think of Cecilia."

Francine eyed her with steady attention for a moment.

"Didn't you tell me last night that you were very poor?" she asked.

"I did."

"So poor that you are obliged to earn your own living?"

"Yes."

Francine looked at her again.

"I daresay you won't believe me," she said. "I wish I was you."

She turned away irritably, and walked back to the house.

Were there really longings for kindness and love under the surface of this girl's perverse nature? Or was there nothing to be hoped from a better knowledge of her?—In place of tender remembrances of Cecilia, these were the perplexing and unwelcome thoughts which the more potent personality of Francine forced upon Emily's mind.

She rose impatiently, and looked at her watch. When would it be her turn to leave the school, and begin the new life?

Still undecided what to do next, her interest was excited by the appearance of one of the servants on the lawn. The woman approached her, and presented a visiting-card; bearing on it the name of Sir Jervis Redwood. Beneath the name, there was a line written in pencil: "Mrs. Rook, to wait on Miss Emily Brown." The way to the new life was open before her at last!

Looking again at the commonplace announcement contained in the line of writing, she was not quite satisfied. Was it claiming a deference toward herself, to which she was not entitled, to expect a letter either from Sir Jervis, or from Miss Redwood; giving her some information as to the journey which she was about to undertake, and expressing with some little politeness the wish to make her comfortable in her future home? At any rate, her employer had done her one service: he had reminded her that her station in life was not what it had been in the days when her father was living, and when her aunt was in affluent circumstances.

She looked up from the card. The servant had gone. Alban Morris was waiting at a little distance—waiting silently until she noticed him.

CHAPTER VIII.

MASTER AND PUPIL.

Emily's impulse was to avoid the drawing-master for the second time. The moment afterward, a kinder feeling prevailed. The farewell interview with Cecilia had left influences which pleaded for Alban Morris. It was the day of parting good wishes and general separations: he had only perhaps come to say good-by. She advanced to offer her hand, when he stopped her by pointing to Sir Jervis Redwood's card.

"May I say a word, Miss Emily, about that woman?" he asked

"Do you mean Mrs. Rook?"

"Yes. You know, of course, why she comes here?"

"She comes here by appointment, to take me to Sir Jervis Redwood's house. Are you acquainted with her?"

"She is a perfect stranger to me. I met her by accident on her way here. If Mrs. Rook had been content with asking me to direct her to the school, I should not be troubling you at this moment. But she forced her conversation on me. And she said something which I think you ought to know. Have you heard of Sir Jervis Redwood's housekeeper before to-day?"

"I have only heard what my friend—Miss Cecilia Wyvil—has told me."

"Did Miss Cecilia tell you that Mrs. Rook was acquainted with your father or with any members of your family?"
"Certainly not!"
Alban reflected. "It was natural enough," he resumed, "that Mrs. Rook should feel some curiosity about You. What reason had she for putting a question to me about your father--and putting it in a very strange manner?"

Emily's interest was instantly excited. She led the way back to the seats in the shade. "Tell me, Mr. Morris, exactly what the woman said." As she spoke, she signed to him to be seated.

Alban observed the natural grace of her action when she set him the example of taking a chair, and the little heightening of her color caused by anxiety to hear what he had still to tell her. Forgetting the restraint that he had hitherto imposed on himself, he enjoyed the luxury of silently admiring her. Her manner betrayed none of the conscious confusion which would have shown itself, if her heart had been secretly inclined toward him. She saw the man looking at her. In simple perplexity she looked at the man.

"Are you hesitating on my account?" she asked. "Did Mrs. Rook say something of my father which I mustn't hear?"

"No, no! nothing of the sort!"

"You seem to be confused."

Her innocent indifference tried his patience sorely. His memory went back to the past time--recalled the ill-placed passion of his youth, and the cruel injury inflicted on him--his pride was roused. Was he making himself ridiculous? The vehement throbbing of his heart almost suffocated him. And there she sat, wondering at his odd behavior. "Even this girl is as cold-blooded as the rest of her sex!" That angry thought gave him back his self-control. He made his excuses with the easy politeness of a man of the world.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Emily; I was considering how to put what I have to say in the fewest and plainest words. Let me try if I can do it. If Mrs. Rook had merely asked me whether your father and mother were living, I should have attributed the question to the commonplace curiosity of a gossiping woman, and have thought no more of it. What she actually did say was this: 'Perhaps you can tell me if Miss Emily's father--' There she checked herself, and suddenly altered the question in this way: 'If Miss Emily's parents are living?' I may be making mountains out of molehills; but I thought at the time (and think still) that she had some special interest in inquiring after your father, and, not wishing me to notice it for reasons of her own, changed the form of the question so as to include your mother. Does this strike you as a far-fetched conclusion?"

"Whatever it may be," Emily said, "it is my conclusion, too. How did you answer her?"

"Quite easily. I could give her no information--and I said so."

"Let me offer you the information, Mr. Morris, before we say anything more. I have lost both my parents."

Alban's momentary outbreak of irritability was at an end. He was earnest and yet gentle, again; he forgave her for not understanding how dear and how delightful to him she was. "Will it distress you," he said, "if I ask how long it is since your father died?"

"Nearly four years," she replied. "He was the most generous of men; Mrs. Rook's interest in him may surely have been a grateful interest. He may have been kind to her in past years--and she may remember him thankfully. Don't you think so?"

Alban was unable to agree with her. "If Mrs. Rook's interest in your father was the harmless interest that you have suggested," he said, "why should she have checked herself in that unaccountable manner, when she first asked me if he was living? The more I think of it now, the less sure I feel that she knows anything at all of your family history. It may help me to decide, if you will tell me at what time the death of your mother took place."

"So long ago," Emily replied, "that I can't even remember her death. I was an infant at the time."

"And yet Mrs. Rook asked me if your 'parents' were living! One of two things," Alban concluded. "Either there is some mystery in this matter, which we cannot hope to penetrate at present--or Mrs. Rook may have been speaking at random; on the chance of discovering whether you are related to some 'Mr. Brown' whom she once knew."

"Besides," Emily added, "it's only fair to remember what a common family name mine is, and how easily people may make mistakes. I should like to know if my dear lost father was really in her mind when she spoke to you. Do you think I could find it out?"

"If Mrs. Rook has any reasons for concealment, I believe you would have no chance of finding it out--unless, indeed, you could take her by surprise."

"In what way, Mr. Morris?"

"Only one way occurs to me just now," he said. "Do you happen to have a miniature or a photograph of your father?"

Emily held out a handsome locket, with a monogram in diamonds, attached to her watch chain. "I have his photograph here," she rejoined; "given to me by my dear old aunt, in the days of her prosperity. Shall I show it to Mrs. Rook?"

"Yes--if she happens, by good luck, to offer you an opportunity."
Impatient to try the experiment, Emily rose as he spoke. "I mustn't keep Mrs. Rook waiting," she said.

Alban stopped her, on the point of leaving him. The confusion and hesitation which she had already noticed began to show themselves in his manner once more.

"Miss Emily, may I ask you a favor before you go? I am only one of the masters employed in the school; but I don't think--let me say, I hope I am not guilty of presumption--if I offer to be of some small service to one of my pupils--"

There his embarrassment mastered him. He despised himself not only for yielding to his own weakness, but for faltering like a fool in the expression of a simple request. The next words died away on his lips.

This time, Emily understood him.

The subtle penetration which had long since led her to the discovery of his secret--overpowered, thus far, by the absorbing interest of the moment--now recovered its activity. In an instant, she remembered that Alban's motive for cautioning her, in her coming intercourse with Mrs. Rook, was not the merely friendly motive which might have actuated him, in the case of one of the other girls. At the same time, her quickness of apprehension warned her not to risk encouraging this persistent lover, by betraying any embarrassment on her side. He was evidently anxious to be present (in her interests) at the interview with Mrs. Rook. Why not? Could he reproach her with raising false hope, if she accepted his services, under circumstances of doubt and difficulty which he had himself been the first to point out? He could do nothing of the sort. Without waiting until he had recovered himself, she answered him (to all appearances) as composedly as if he had spoken to her in the plainest terms.

"After all that you have told me," she said, "I shall indeed feel obliged if you will be present when I see Mrs. Rook."

The eager brightening of his eyes, the flush of happiness that made him look young on a sudden, were signs not to be mistaken. The sooner they were in the presence of a third person (Emily privately concluded) the better it might be for both of them. She led the way rapidly to the house.

CHAPTER IX.

MRS. ROOK AND THE LOCKET.

As mistress of a prosperous school, bearing a widely-extended reputation, Miss Ladd prided herself on the liberality of her household arrangements. At breakfast and dinner, not only the solid comforts but the elegant luxuries of the table, were set before the young ladies "Other schools may, and no doubt do, offer to pupils the affectionate care to which they have been accustomed under the parents' roof," Miss Ladd used to say. "At my school, that care extends to their meals, and provides them with a cuisine which, I flatter myself, equals the most successful efforts of the cooks at home." Fathers, mothers, and friends, when they paid visits to this excellent lady, brought away with them the most gratifying recollections of her hospitality. The men, in particular, seldom failed to recognize in their hostess the rarest virtue that a single lady can possess--the virtue of putting wine on the table which may be gratefully remembered by her guests the next morning.

An agreeable surprise awaited Mrs. Rook when she entered the house of bountiful Miss Ladd.

Luncheon was ready for Sir Jervis Redwood's confidential emissary in the waiting-room. Detained at the final rehearsals of music and recitation, Miss Ladd was worthily represented by cold chicken and ham, a fruit tart, and a pint decanter of generous sherry. "Your mistress is a perfect lady!" Mrs. Rook said to the servant, with a burst of enthusiasm. "I can carve for myself, thank you; and I don't care how long Miss Emily keeps me waiting."

As they ascended the steps leading into the house, Alban asked Emily if he might look again at her locket.

"Shall I open it for you?" she suggested.

"No: I only want to look at the outside of it."

He examined the side on which the monogram appeared, inlaid with diamonds. An inscription was engraved beneath.

"May I read it?" he said.

"Certainly!"

The inscription ran thus: "In loving memory of my father. Died 30th September, 1877."

"Can you arrange the locket," Alban asked, "so that the side on which the diamonds appear hangs outward?"

She understood him. The diamonds might attract Mrs. Rook's notice; and in that case, she might ask to see the locket of her own accord. "You are beginning to be of use to me, already," Emily said, as they turned into the corridor which led to the waiting-room.

They found Sir Jervis's housekeeper luxuriously recumbent in the easiest chair in the room.

Of the eatable part of the lunch some relics were yet left. In the pint decanter of sherry, not a drop remained. The genial influence of the wine (hastened by the hot weather) was visible in Mrs. Rook's flushed face, and in a special development of her ugly smile. Her widening lips stretched to new lengths; and the white upper line of her eyeballs were more freely and horribly visible than ever.
"And this is the dear young lady?" she said, lifting her hands in over-acted admiration. At the first greetings, Alban perceived that the impression produced was, in Emily's case as in his case, instantly unfavorable.

The servant came in to clear the table. Emily stepped aside for a minute to give some directions about her luggage. In that interval Mrs. Rook's cunning little eyes turned on Alban with an expression of malicious scrutiny.

"You were walking the other way," she whispered, "when I met you." She stopped, and glanced over her shoulder at Emily. "I see what attraction has brought you back to the school. Steal your way into that poor little fool's heart; and then make her miserable for the rest of her life!--No need, miss, to hurry," she said, shifting the polite side of her toward Emily, who returned at the moment. "The visits of the trains to your station here are like the visits of the angels described by the poet, 'few and far between.' Please excuse the quotation. You wouldn't think it to look at me--I'm a great reader."

"Is it a long journey to Sir Jervis Redwood's house?" Emily asked, at a loss what else to say to a woman who was already becoming unendurable to her.

Mrs. Rook looked at the journey from an oppressively cheerful point of view.

"Oh, Miss Emily, you shan't feel the time hang heavy in my company. I can converse on a variety of topics, and if there is one thing more than another that I like, it's amusing a pretty young lady. You think me a strange creature, don't you? It's only my high spirits. Nothing strange about me--unless it's my queer Christian name. You look a little dull, my dear. Shall I begin amusing you before we are on the railway? Shall I tell you how I came by my queer name?"

Thus far, Alban had controlled himself. This last specimen of the housekeeper's audacious familiarity reached the limits of his endurance.

"We don't care to know how you came by your name," he said.

"Rude," Mrs. Rook remarked, composedly. "But nothing surprises me, coming from a man."

She turned to Emily. "My father and mother were a wicked married couple," she continued, "before I was born. They 'got religion,' as the saying is, at a Methodist meeting in a field. When I came into the world--I don't know how you feel, miss; I protest against being brought into the world without asking my leave first--my mother was determined to dedicate me to piety, before I was out of my long clothes. What name do you suppose she had me christened by? She chose it, or made it, herself--the name of 'Righteous!' Righteous Rook! Was there ever a poor baby degraded by such a ridiculous name before? It's needless to say, when I write letters, I sign R. Rook--and leave people to think it's Rosamond, or Rosabelle, or something sweetly pretty of that kind. You should have seen my husband's face when he first heard that his sweetheart's name was 'Righteous!' He was on the point of kissing me, and he stopped. I daresay he felt sick. Perfectly natural under the circumstances."

Alban tried to stop her again. "What time does the train go?" he asked.

Emily entreated him to restrain himself, by a look. Mrs. Rook was still too inveterately amiable to take offense. She opened her traveling-bag briskly, and placed a railway guide in Alban's hands.

"I've heard that the women do the men's work in foreign parts," she said. "But this is England; and I am an Englishwoman. Find out when the train goes, my dear sir, for yourself."

Alban at once consulted the guide. If there proved to be no immediate need of starting for the station, he was determined that Emily should not be condemned to pass the interval in the housekeeper's company. In the meantime, Mrs. Rook was as eager as ever to show her dear young lady what an amusing companion she could be.

"Talking of husbands," she resumed, "don't make the mistake, my dear, that I committed. Beware of letting anybody persuade you to marry an old man. Mr. Rook is old enough to be my father. I bear with him. Of course, I bear with him. At the same time, I have not (as the poet says) 'passed through the ordeal unscathed.' My spirit--I have long since ceased to believe in anything of the sort: I only use the word for want of a better--my spirit, I say, has become embittered. I was once a pious young woman; I do assure you I was nearly as good as my name. Don't let me shock you; I have lost faith and hope; I have become--what's the last new name for a free-thinker? Oh, I keep up with the times, thanks to old Miss Redwood! She takes in the newspapers, and makes me read them to her. What is the new name? Something ending in ic. Bombastic? No, Agnostic?--that's it! I have become an Agnostic. The inevitable result of marrying an old man; if there's any blame it rests on my husband."

"There's more than an hour yet before the train starts," Alban interposed. "I am sure, Miss Emily, you would find it pleasanter to wait in the garden."

"Not at all a bad notion," Mrs. Rook declared. "Here's a man who can make himself useful, for once. Let's go into the garden."

She rose, and led the way to the door. Alban seized the opportunity of whispering to Emily.

"Did you notice the empty decanter, when we first came in? That horrid woman is drunk."

Emily pointed significantly to the locket. "Don't let her go. The garden will distract her attention: keep her near me here."
Mrs. Rook gayly opened the door. "Take me to the flower-beds," she said. "I believe in nothing--but I adore flowers."

Mrs. Rook waited at the door, with her eye on Emily. "What do you say, miss?"
"I think we shall be more comfortable if we stay where we are."
"Whatever pleases you, my dear, pleases me." With this reply, the compliant housekeeper--as amiable as ever on the surface--returned to her chair.

Would she notice the locket as she sat down? Emily turned toward the window, so as to let the light fall on the diamonds.

No: Mrs. Rook was absorbed, at the moment, in her own reflections. Miss Emily, having prevented her from seeing the garden, she was maliciously bent on disappointing Miss Emily in return. Sir Jervis's secretary (being young) took a hopeful view no doubt of her future prospects. Mrs. Rook decided on darkening that view in a mischievously-suggestive manner, peculiar to herself.

"You will naturally feel some curiosity about your new home," she began, "and I haven't said a word about it yet. How very thoughtless of me! Inside and out, dear Miss Emily, our house is just a little dull. I say our house, and why not--when the management of it is all thrown on me. We are built of stone; and we are much too long, and are not half high enough. Our situation is on the coldest side of the county, away in the west. We are close to the Cheviot hills; and if you fancy there is anything to see when you look out of window, except sheep, you will find yourself woefully mistaken. As for walks, if you go out on one side of the house you may, or may not, be gored by cattle. On the other side, if the darkness overtakes you, you may, or may not, tumble down a deserted lead mine. But the company, inside the house, makes amends for it all," Mrs. Rook proceeded, enjoying the expression of dismay which was beginning to show itself on Emily's face. "Plenty of excitement for you, my dear, in our small family. Sir Jervis will introduce you to plaster casts of hideous Indian idols; he will keep you writing for him, without mercy, from morning to night; and when he does let you go, old Miss Redwood will find she can't sleep, and will send for the pretty young lady-secretary to read to her. My husband I am sure you will like. He is a respectable man, and bears the highest character. Next to the idols, he's the most hideous object in the house. If you are good enough to encourage him, I don't say that he won't amuse you; he will tell you, for instance, he never in his life hated any human being as he hates his wife. By the way, I must not forget--in the interests of truth, you know--to mention one drawback that does exist in our domestic circle. One of these days we shall have our brains blown out or our throats cut. Sir Jervis's mother left him ten thousand pounds' worth of precious stones all contained in a little cabinet with drawers. He won't let the banker take care of his jewels; he won't sell them; he won't even wear one of the rings on his finger, or one of the pins at his breast. He keeps his cabinet on his dressing-room table; and he says, 'I like to gloat over my jewels, every night, before I go to bed.' Ten thousand pounds' worth of diamonds, rubies, emeralds, sapphires, and what not--at the mercy of the first robber who happens to hear of them. Oh, my dear, he would have no choice, I do assure you, but to use his pistols. We shouldn't quietly submit to be robbed. Sir Jervis inherits the spirit of his ancestors. My husband has the temper of a game cock. I myself, in defense of the property of my employers, am capable of becoming a perfect fiend. And we none of us understand the use of firearms!"

While she was in full enjoyment of this last aggravation of the horrors of the prospect, Emily tried another change of position--and, this time, with success. Greedy admiration suddenly opened Mrs. Rook's little eyes to their utmost width. "My heart alive, miss, what do I see at your watch-chain? How they sparkle! Might I ask for a closer view?"

Emily's fingers trembled; but she succeeded in detaching the locket from the chain. Alban handed it to Mrs. Rook.

She began by admiring the diamonds--with a certain reserve. "Nothing like so large as Sir Jervis's diamonds; but choice specimens no doubt. Might I ask what the value--?"

She stopped. The inscription had attracted her notice: she began to read it aloud: "In loving memory of my father. Died--"

Her face instantly became rigid. The next words were suspended on her lips.

Alban seized the chance of making her betray herself--under pretense of helping her. "Perhaps you find the figures not easy to read," he said. "The date is 'thirtieth September, eighteen hundred and seventy-seven'--nearly four years since."

Not a word, not a movement, escaped Mrs. Rook. She held the locket before her as she had held it from the first. Alban looked at Emily. Her eyes were riveted on the housekeeper: she was barely capable of preserving the appearance of composure. Seeing the necessity of acting for her, he at once said the words which she was unable to say for herself.

"Perhaps, Mrs. Rook, you would like to look at the portrait?" he suggested. "Shall I open the locket for you?"

Without speaking, without looking up, she handed the locket to Alban.
He opened it, and offered it to her. She neither accepted nor refused it: her hands remained hanging over the arms of the chair. He put the locket on her lap.

The portrait produced no marked effect on Mrs. Rook. Had the date prepared her to see it? She sat looking at it—still without moving: still without saying a word. Alban had no mercy on her. "That is the portrait of Miss Emily's father," he said. "Does it represent the same Mr. Brown whom you had in your mind when you asked me if Miss Emily's father was still living?"

That question roused her. She looked up, on the instant; she answered loudly and insolently: 'No!"

"And yet," Alban persisted, "you broke down in reading the inscription: and considering what talkative woman you are, the portrait has had a strange effect on you—to say the least of it."

She eyed him steadily while he was speaking—and turned to Emily when he had done. "You mentioned the heat just now, miss. The heat has overcome me; I shall soon get right again."

The insolent futility of that excuse irritated Emily into answering her. "You will get right again perhaps all the sooner," she said, "if we trouble you with no more questions, and leave you to recover by yourself."

The first change of expression which relaxed the iron tensity of the housekeeper’s face showed itself when she heard that reply. At last there was a feeling in Mrs. Rook which openly declared itself—a feeling of impatience to see Alban and Emily leave the room.

They left her, without a word more.

CHAPTER X.

GUESSES AT THE TRUTH.

"What are we to do next? Oh, Mr. Morris, you must have seen all sorts of people in your time—you know human nature, and I don't. Help me with a word of advice!"

Emily forgot that he was in love with her—forgot everything, but the effect produced by the locket on Mrs. Rook, and the vaguely alarming conclusion to which it pointed. In the fervor of her anxiety she took Alban's arm as familiarly as if he had been her brother. He was gentle, he was considerate; he tried earnestly to compose her. "We can do nothing to any good purpose," he said, "unless we begin by thinking quietly. Pardon me for saying so—you are needlessly exciting yourself."

There was a reason for her excitement, of which he was necessarily ignorant. Her memory of the night interview with Miss Jethro had inevitably intensified the suspicion inspired by the conduct of Mrs. Rook. In less than twenty-four hours, Emily had seen two women shrinking from secret remembrances of her father—which might well be guilty remembrances—innocently excited by herself! How had they injured him? Of what infamy, on their parts, did his beloved and stainless memory remind them? Who could fathom the mystery of it? "What does it mean?" she cried, looking wildly in Alban's compassionate face. "You must have formed some idea of your own. What does it mean?"

"Come, and sit down, Miss Emily. We will try if we can find out what it means, together."

They returned to the shady solitude under the trees. Away, in front of the house, the distant grating of carriage wheels told of the arrival of Miss Ladd's guests, and of the speedy beginning of the ceremonies of the day.

"We must help each other," Alban resumed.

"When we first spoke of Mrs. Rook, you mentioned Miss Cecilia Wyvil as a person who knew something about her. Have you any objection to tell me what you may have heard in that way?"

In complying with his request Emily necessarily repeated what Cecilia had told Francine, when the two girls had met that morning in the garden.

Alban now knew how Emily had obtained employment as Sir Jervis's secretary; how Mr. and Mrs. Rook had been previously known to Cecilia's father as respectable people keeping an inn in his own neighborhood; and, finally, how they had been obliged to begin life again in domestic service, because the terrible event of a murder had given the inn a bad name, and had driven away the customers on whose encouragement their business depended.

Listening in silence, Alban remained silent when Emily's narrative had come to an end.

"Have you nothing to say to me?" she asked.

"I am thinking over what I have just heard," he answered.

Emily noticed a certain formality in his tone and manner, which disagreeably surprised her. He seemed to have made his reply as a mere concession to politeness, while he was thinking of something else which really interested him.

"Have I disappointed you in any way?" she asked.

"On the contrary, you have interested me. I want to be quite sure that I remember exactly what you have said. You mentioned, I think, that your friendship with Miss Cecilia Wyvil began here, at the school?"

"Yes."

"And in speaking of the murder at the village inn, you told me that the crime was committed—I have forgotten
how long ago?"

His manner still suggested that he was idly talking about what she had told him, while some more important subject for reflection was in possession of his mind.

"I don't know that I said anything about the time that had passed since the crime was committed," she answered, sharply. "What does the murder matter to us? I think Cecilia told me it happened about four years since. Excuse me for noticing it, Mr. Morris—you seem to have some interests of your own to occupy your attention. Why couldn't you say so plainly when we came out here? I should not have asked you to help me, in that case. Since my poor father's death, I have been used to fight through my troubles by myself."

She rose, and looked at him proudly. The next moment her eyes filled with tears.

In spite of her resistance, Alban took her hand. "Dear Miss Emily," he said, "you distress me: you have not done me justice. Your interests only are in my mind."

Answering her in those terms, he had not spoken as frankly as usual. He had only told her a part of the truth.

Hearing that the woman whom they had just left had been landlady of an inn, and that a murder had been committed under her roof, he was led to ask himself if any explanation might be found, in these circumstances, of the otherwise incomprehensible effect produced on Mrs. Rook by the inscription on the locket.

In the pursuit of this inquiry there had arisen in his mind a monstrous suspicion, which pointed to Mrs. Rook. It impelled him to ascertain the date at which the murder had been committed, and (if the discovery encouraged further investigation) to find out next the manner in which Mr. Brown had died.

Thus far, what progress had he made? He had discovered that the date of Mr. Brown's death, inscribed on the locket, and the date of the crime committed at the inn, approached each other nearly enough to justify further investigation.

In the meantime, had he succeeded in keeping his object concealed from Emily? He had perfectly succeeded. Hearing him declare that her interests only had occupied his mind, the poor girl innocently entreated him to forgive her little outbreak of temper. "If you have any more questions to ask me, Mr. Morris, pray go on. I promise never to think unjustly of you again."

He went on with an uneasy conscience—for it seemed cruel to deceive her, even in the interests of truth—but still he went on.

"Suppose we assume that this woman had injured your father in some way," he said. "Am I right in believing that it was in his character to forgive injuries?"

"Entirely right."

"In that case, his death may have left Mrs. Rook in a position to be called to account, by those who owe a duty to his memory—I mean the surviving members of his family."

"There are but two of us, Mr. Morris. My aunt and myself."

"There are his executors."

"My aunt is his only executor."

"Your father's sister—I presume?"

"Yes."

"He may have left instructions with her, which might be of the greatest use to us."

"I will write to-day, and find out," Emily replied. "I had already planned to consult my aunt," she added, thinking again of Miss Jethro.

"If your aunt has not received any positive instructions," Alban continued, "she may remember some allusion to Mrs. Rook, on your father's part, at the time of his last illness—"

Emily stopped him. "You don't know how my dear father died," she said. "He was struck down—apparently in perfect health—by disease of the heart."

"Struck down in his own house?"

"Yes—in his own house."

Those words closed Alban's lips. The investigation so carefully and so delicately conducted had failed to serve any useful purpose. He had now ascertained the manner of Mr. Brown's death and the place of Mr. Brown's death—and he was as far from confirming his suspicions of Mrs. Rook as ever.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DRAWING-MASTER'S CONFESSION.

"Is there nothing else you can suggest?" Emily asked.

"Nothing—at present."

"If my aunt fails us, have we no other hope?"

"I have hope in Mrs. Rook," Alban answered. "I see I surprise you; but I really mean what I say. Sir Jervis's housekeeper is an excitable woman, and she is fond of wine. There is always a weak side in the character of such a
person as that. If we wait for our chance, and turn it to the right use when it comes, we may yet succeed in making her betray herself."

Emily listened to him in bewilderment.

"You talk as if I was sure of your help in the future," she said. "Have you forgotten that I leave school to-day, never to return? In half an hour more, I shall be condemned to a long journey in the company of that horrible creature--with a life to look forward to, in the same house with her, among strangers! A miserable prospect, and a hard trial of a girl's courage--is it not, Mr. Morris?"

"You will at least have one person, Miss Emily, who will try with all his heart and soul to encourage you."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," said Alban, quietly, "that the Midsummer vacation begins to-day; and that the drawing-master is going to spend his holidays in the North."

Emily jumped up from her chair. "You!" she exclaimed. "You are going to Northumberland? With me?"

"Why not?" Alban asked. "The railway is open to all travelers alike, if they have money enough to buy a ticket."

"Mr. Morris! what can you be thinking of? Indeed, indeed, I am not ungrateful. I know you mean kindly--you are a good, generous man. But do remember how completely a girl, in my position, is at the mercy of appearances. You, traveling in the same carriage with me! and that woman putting her own vile interpretation on it, and degrading me in Sir Jervis Redwood's estimation, on the day when I enter his house! Oh, it's worse than thoughtless--it's madness, downright madness."

"You are quite right," Alban gravely agreed, "it is madness. I lost whatever little reason I once possessed, Miss Emily, on the day when I first met you out walking with the young ladies of the school."

Emily turned away in significant silence. Alban followed her.

"You promised just now," he said, "never to think unjustly of me again. I respect and admire you far too sincerely to take a base advantage of this occasion--the only occasion on which I have been permitted to speak with you alone. Wait a little before you condemn a man whom you don't understand. I will say nothing to annoy you--I only ask leave to explain myself. Will you take your chair again?"

She returned unwillingly to her seat. "It can only end," she thought, sadly, "in my disappointing him!"

"I have had the worst possible opinion of women for years past," Alban resumed; "and the only reason I can give for it condemns me out of my own mouth. I have been infamously treated by one woman; and my wounded self-esteem has meanly revenged itself by reviling the whole sex. Wait a little, Miss Emily. My fault has received its fit punishment. I have been thoroughly humiliated--and you have done it."

"Mr. Morris!"

"Take no offense, pray, where no offense is meant. Some few years since it was the great misfortune of my life to meet with a Jilt. You know what I mean?"

"Yes."

"She was my equal by birth (I am a younger son of a country squire), and my superior in rank. I can honestly tell you that I was foolish enough to love her with all my heart and soul. She never allowed me to doubt--I may say this without conceit, remembering the miserable end of it--that my feeling for her was returned. Her father and mother (excellent people) approved of the contemplated marriage. She accepted my presents; she allowed all the customary preparations for a wedding to proceed to completion; she had not even mercy enough, or shame enough, to prevent me from publicly degrading myself by waiting for her at the altar, in the presence of a large congregation. The minutes passed--and no bride appeared. The clergyman, waiting like me, was requested to return to the vestry. I was invited to follow him. You foresee the end of the story, of course? She had run away with another man. But can you guess who the man was? Her groom!"

Emily's face reddened with indignation. "She suffered for it? Oh, Mr. Morris, surely she suffered for it?"

"Not at all. She had money enough to reward the groom for marrying her; and she let herself down easily to her husband's level. It was a suitable marriage in every respect. When I last heard of them, they were regularly in the habit of getting drunk together. I am afraid I have disgusted you? We will drop the subject, and resume my precious autobiography at a later date. One shivery day in the autumn of last year, you young ladies went out with Miss Ladd for a walk. When you were all trotting back again, under your umbrellas, did you (in particular) notice an ill-tempered fellow standing in the road, and getting a good look at you, on the high footpath above him?"

Emily smiled, in spite of herself. "I don't remember it," she said.

"You wore a brown jacket which fitted you as if you had been born in it--and you had the smartest little straw hat I ever saw on a woman's head. It was the first time I ever noticed such things. I think I could paint a portrait of the boots you wore (mud included), from memory alone. That was the impression you produced on me. After believing, honestly believing, that love was one of the lost illusions of my life--after feeling, honestly feeling, that I would as soon look at the devil as look at a woman--there was the state of mind to which retribution had reduced
me; using for his instrument Miss Emily Brown. Oh, don't be afraid of what I may say next! In your presence, and out of your presence, I am man enough to be ashamed of my own folly. I am resisting your influence over me at this moment, with the strongest of all resolutions--the resolution of despair. Let's look at the humorous side of the story again. What do you think I did when the regiment of young ladies had passed by me?"

Emily declined to guess.

"I followed you back to the school; and, on pretense of having a daughter to educate, I got one of Miss Ladd's prospectuses from the porter at the lodge gate. I was in your neighborhood, you must know, on a sketching tour. I went back to my inn, and seriously considered what had happened to me. The result of my cogitations was that I went abroad. Only for a change--not at all because I was trying to weaken the impression you had produced on me! After a while I returned to England. Only because I was tired of traveling--not at all because your influence drew me back! Another interval passed; and luck turned my way, for a wonder. The drawing-master's place became vacant here. Miss Ladd advertised; I produced my testimonials; and took the situation. Only because the salary was a welcome certainty to a poor man--not at all because the new position brought me into personal association with Miss Emily Brown! Do you begin to see why I have troubled you with all this talk about myself? Apply the contemptible system of self-delusion which my confession has revealed, to that holiday arrangement for a tour in the north which has astonished and annoyed you. I am going to travel this afternoon by your train. Only because I feel an intelligent longing to see the northernmost county of England--not at all because I won't let you trust yourself alone with Mrs. Rook! Not at all because I won't leave you to enter Sir Jervis Redwood's service without a friend within reach in case you want him! Mad? Oh, yes--perfectly mad. But, tell me this: What do all sensible people do when they find themselves in the company of a lunatic? They humor him. Let me take your ticket and see your luggage labeled: I only ask leave to be your traveling servant. If you are proud--I shall like you all the better, if you are--pay me wages, and keep me in my proper place in that way.

Some girls, addressed with this reckless intermingling of jest and earnest, would have felt confused, and some would have felt flattered. With a good-tempered resolution, which never passed the limits of modesty and refinement, Emily met Alban Morris on his own ground.

"You have said you respect me," she began; "I am going to prove that I believe you. The least I can do is not to misinterpret you, on my side. Am I to understand, Mr. Morris--you won't think the worse of me, I hope, if I speak plainly--am I to understand that you are in love with me?"

"Yes, Miss Emily--if you please."

He had answered with the quaint gravity which was peculiar to him; but he was already conscious of a sense of discouragement. Her composure was a bad sign--from his point of view.

"My time will come, I daresay," she proceeded. "At present I know nothing of love, by experience; I only know what some of my schoolfellows talk about in secret. Judging by what they tell me, a girl blushes when her lover pleads with her to favor his addresses. Am I blushing?"

"Must I speak plainly, too?" Alban asked.

"If you have no objection," she answered, as composedly as if she had been addressing her grandfather.

"Then, Miss Emily, I must say--you are not blushing."

She went on. "Another token of love--as I am informed--is to tremble. Am I trembling?"

"No."

"Am I too confused to look at you?"

"No."

"Do I walk away with dignity--and then stop, and steal a timid glance at my lover, over my shoulder?"

"I wish you did!"

"A plain answer, Mr. Morris! Yes or No."

"No--of course."

"In one last word, do I give you any sort of encouragement to try again?"

"In one last word, I have made a fool of myself--and you have taken the kindest possible way of telling me so."

This time, she made no attempt to reply in his own tone. The good-humored gayety of her manner disappeared. She was in earnest--truly, sadly in earnest--when she said her next words.

"Is it not best, in your own interests, that we should bid each other good-by?" she asked. "In the time to come--when you only remember how kind you once were to me--we may look forward to meeting again. After all that you have suffered, so bitterly and so undeservedly, don't, pray don't, make me feel that another woman has behaved cruelly to you, and that I--so grieved to distress you--am that heartless creature!"

Never in her life had she been so irresistibly charming as she was at that moment. Her sweet nature showed all its innocent pity for him in her face.

He saw it--he felt it--he was not unworthy of it. In silence, he lifted her hand to his lips. He turned pale as he
kissed it.

"Say that you agree with me?" she pleaded.

"I obey you."

As he answered, he pointed to the lawn at their feet. "Look," he said, "at that dead leaf which the air is wafting over the grass. Is it possible that such sympathy as you feel for Me, such love as I feel for You, can waste, wither, and fall to the ground like that leaf? I leave you, Emily--with the firm conviction that there is a time of fulfillment to come in our two lives. Happen what may in the interval--I trust the future."

The words had barely passed his lips when the voice of one of the servants reached them from the house. "Miss Emily, are you in the garden?"

Emily stepped out into the sunshine. The servant hurried to meet her, and placed a telegram in her hand. She looked at it with a sudden misgiving. In her small experience, a telegram was associated with the communication of bad news. She conquered her hesitation--opened it--read it. The color left her face; she shuddered. The telegram dropped on the grass.

"Read it," she said, faintly, as Alban picked it up.
He read these words: "Come to London directly. Miss Letitia is dangerously ill."

"Your aunt?" he asked.

"Yes--my aunt."

BOOK THE SECOND--IN LONDON.

CHAPTER XII.

MRS. ELLMOTHER.

The metropolis of Great Britain is, in certain respects, like no other metropolis on the face of the earth. In the population that throngs the streets, the extremes of Wealth and the extremes of Poverty meet, as they meet nowhere else. In the streets themselves, the glory and the shame of architecture--the mansion and the hovel--are neighbors in situation, as they are neighbors nowhere else. London, in its social aspect, is the city of contrasts.

Toward the close of evening Emily left the railway terminus for the place of residence in which loss of fortune had compelled her aunt to take refuge. As she approached her destination, the cab passed--by merely crossing a road--from a spacious and beautiful Park, with its surrounding houses topped by statues and cupolas, to a row of cottages, hard by a stinking ditch miscalled a canal. The city of contrasts: north and south, east and west, the city of social contrasts.

Emily stopped the cab before the garden gate of a cottage, at the further end of the row. The bell was answered by the one servant now in her aunt's employ--Miss Letitia's maid.

Personally, this good creature was one of the ill-fated women whose appearance suggests that Nature intended to make men of them and altered her mind at the last moment. Miss Letitia's maid was tall and gaunt and awkward. The first impression produced by her face was an impression of bones. They rose high on her forehead; they projected on her cheeks; and they reached their boldest development in her jaws. In the cavernous eyes of this unfortunate person rigid obstinacy and rigid goodness looked out together, with equal severity, on all her fellow-creatures alike. Her mistress (whom she had served for a quarter of a century and more) called her "Bony." She accepted this cruelly appropriate nick-name as a mark of affectionate familiarity which honored a servant. No other person was allowed to take liberties with her: to every one but her mistress she was known as Mrs. Ellmother.

"How is my aunt?" Emily asked.

"Bad."

"Why have I not heard of her illness before?"

"Because she's too fond of you to let you be distressed about her. 'Don't tell Emily'; those were her orders, as long as she kept her senses."

"Kept her senses? Good heavens! what do you mean?"

"Fever--that's what I mean."

"I must see her directly; I am not afraid of infection."

"There's no infection to be afraid of. But you mustn't see her, for all that."

"I insist on seeing her."

"Miss Emily, I am disappointing you for your own good. Don't you know me well enough to trust me by this time?"

"I do trust you."

"Then leave my mistress to me--and go and make yourself comfortable in your own room."

Emily's answer was a positive refusal. Mrs. Ellmother, driven to her last resources, raised a new obstacle.

"It's not to be done, I tell you! How can you see Miss Letitia when she can't bear the light in her room? Do you know what color her eyes are? Red, poor soul--red as a boiled lobster."
With every word the woman uttered, Emily's perplexity and distress increased.
"You told me my aunt's illness was fever," she said--"and now you speak of some complaint in her eyes. Stand out of the way, if you please, and let me go to her."

Mrs. Ellmother, still keeping her place, looked through the open door.
"Here's the doctor," she announced. "It seems I can't satisfy you; ask him what's the matter. Come in, doctor." She threw open the door of the parlor, and introduced Emily. "This is the mistress's niece, sir. Please try if you can keep her quiet. I can't." She placed chairs with the hospitable politeness of the old school--and returned to her post at Miss Letitia's bedside.

Doctor Allday was an elderly man, with a cool manner and a ruddy complexion--thoroughly acclimatized to the atmosphere of pain and grief in which it was his destiny to live. He spoke to Emily (without any undue familiarity) as if he had been accustomed to see her for the greater part of her life.

"That's a curious woman," he said, when Mrs. Ellmother closed the door; "the most headstrong person, I think, I ever met with. But devoted to her mistress, and, making allowance for her awkwardness, not a bad nurse. I am afraid I can't give you an encouraging report of your aunt. The rheumatic fever (aggravated by the situation of this house--built on clay, you know, and close to stagnant water) has been latterly complicated by delirium."

"Is that a bad sign, sir?"

"The worst possible sign; it shows that the disease has affected the heart. Yes: she is suffering from inflammation of the eyes, but that is an unimportant symptom. We can keep the pain under by means of cooling lotions and a dark room. I've often heard her speak of you--especially since the illness assumed a serious character. What did you say? Will she know you, when you go into her room? This is about the time when the delirium usually sets in. I'll see if there's a quiet interval.'

He opened the door--and came back again.

"By the way," he resumed, "I ought perhaps to explain how it was that I took the liberty of sending you that telegram. Mrs. Ellmother refused to inform you of her mistress's serious illness. That circumstance, according to my view of it, laid the responsibility on the doctor's shoulders. The form taken by your aunt's delirium--I mean the apparent tendency of the words that escape her in that state--seems to excite some incomprehensible feeling in the mind of her crabbed servant. She wouldn't even let me go into the bedroom, if she could possibly help it. Did Mrs. Ellmother give you a warm welcome when you came here?"

"Far from it. My arrival seemed to annoy her."

"Ah--just what I expected. These faithful old servants always end by presuming on their fidelity. Did you ever hear what a witty poet--I forget his name: he lived to be ninety--said of the man who had been his valet for more than half a century? 'For thirty years he was the best of servants; and for thirty years he has been the hardest of masters.' Quite true--I might say the same of my housekeeper. Rather a good story, isn't it?"

The story was completely thrown away on Emily; but one subject interested her now. "My poor aunt has always been fond of me," she said. "Perhaps she might know me, when she recognizes nobody else."

"Not very likely," the doctor answered. "But there's no laying down any rule in cases of this kind. I have sometimes observed that circumstances which have produced a strong impression on patients, when they are in a state of health, give a certain direction to the wandering of their minds, when they are in a state of fever. You will say, 'I am not a circumstance; I don't see how this encourages me to hope'--and you will be quite right. Instead of talking of my medical experience, I shall do better to look at Miss Letitia, and let you know the result. You have got other relations, I suppose? No? Very distressing--very distressing."

Who has not suffered as Emily suffered, when she was left alone? Are there not moments--if we dare to confess the truth--when poor humanity loses its hold on the consolations of religion and the hope of immortality, and feels the cruelty of creation that bids us live, on the condition that we die, and leads the first warm beginnings of love, with merciless certainty, to the cold conclusion of the grave?

"She's quiet, for the time being," Dr. Allday announced, on his return. "Remember, please, that she can't see you in the inflamed state of her eyes, and don't disturb the bed-curtains. The sooner you go to her the better, perhaps--if you have anything to say which depends on her recognizing your voice. I'll call to-morrow morning. Very distressing," he repeated, taking his hat and making his bow--"Very distressing."

Emily crossed the narrow little passage which separated the two rooms, and opened the bed-chamber door. Mrs. Ellmother met her on the threshold. "No," said the obstinate old servant, "you can't come in."

The faint voice of Miss Letitia made itself heard, calling Mrs. Ellmother by her familiar nick-name.
"Bony, who is it?"
"Never mind."
"Who is it?"
"Miss Emily, if you must know."
"Oh! poor dear, why does she come here? Who told her I was ill?"
"The doctor told her."
"Don't come in, Emily. It will only distress you--and it will do me no good. God bless you, my love. Don't come in."
"There!" said Mrs. Ellmother. "Do you hear that? Go back to the sitting-room."
Thus far, the hard necessity of controlling herself had kept Emily silent. She was now able to speak without tears. "Remember the old times, aunt," she pleaded, gently. "Don't keep me out of your room, when I have come here to nurse you!"
"I'm her nurse. Go back to the sitting-room," Mrs. Ellmother repeated.
True love lasts while life lasts. The dying woman relented.
"Bony! Bony! I can't be unkind to Emily. Let her in."
Mrs. Ellmother still insisted on having her way.
"You're contradicting your own orders," she said to her mistress. "You don't know how soon you may begin wandering in your mind again. Think, Miss Letitia--think."
This remonstrance was received in silence. Mrs. Ellmother's great gaunt figure still blocked up the doorway.
"If you force me to it," Emily said, quietly, "I must go to the doctor, and ask him to interfere."
"Do you mean that?" Mrs. Ellmother said, quietly, on her side.
"I do mean it," was the answer.
The old servant suddenly submitted--with a look which took Emily by surprise. She had expected to see anger; the face that now confronted her was a face subdued by sorrow and fear.
"I wash my hands of it," Mrs. Ellmother said. "Go in--and take the consequences."
CHAPTER XIII.
MISS LETITIA.
Emily entered the room. The door was immediately closed on her from the outer side. Mrs. Ellmother's heavy steps were heard retreating along the passage. Then the banging of the door that led into the kitchen shook the flimsily-built cottage. Then, there was silence.
The dim light of a lamp hidden away in a corner and screened by a dingy green shade, just revealed the closely-curtained bed, and the table near it bearing medicine-bottles and glasses. The only objects on the chimney-piece were a clock that had been stopped in mercy to the sufferer's irritable nerves, and an open case containing a machine for pouring drops into the eyes. The smell of fumigating pastilles hung heavily on the air. To Emily's excited imagination, the silence was like the silence of death. She approached the bed trembling. "Won't you speak to me, aunt?"
"Is that you, Emily? Who let you come in?"
"You said I might come in, dear. Are you thirsty? I see some lemonade on the table. Shall I give it to you?"
"No! If you open the bed-curtains, you let in the light. My poor eyes! Why are you here, my dear? Why are you not at the school?"
"It's holiday-time, aunt. Besides, I have left school for good."
"Left school?" Miss Letitia's memory made an effort, as she repeated those words. "You were going somewhere when you left school," she said, "and Cecilia Wyvil had something to do with it. Oh, my love, how cruel of you to go away to a stranger, when you might live here with me!" She paused--her sense of what she had herself just said began to grow confused. "What stranger?" she asked abruptly. "Was it a man? What name? Oh, my mind! Has death got hold of my mind before my body?"
"Hush! hush! I'll tell you the name. Sir Jervis Redwood."
"I don't know him. I don't want to know him. Do you think he means to send for you. Perhaps he has sent for you. I won't allow it! You shan't go!"
"Don't excite yourself, dear! I have refused to go; I mean to stay here with you."
The fevered brain held to its last idea. "Has he sent for you?" she said again, louder than before. Emily replied once more, in terms carefully chosen with the one purpose of pacifying her. The attempt proved to be useless, and worse--it seemed to make her suspicious. "I won't be deceived!" she said; "I mean to know all about it. He did send for you. Whom did he send?"
"His housekeeper."
"What name?" The tone in which she put the question told of excitement that was rising to its climax. "Don't you know that I'm curious about names?" she burst out. "Why do you provoke me? Who is it?"
"Nobody you know, or need care about, dear aunt. Mrs. Rook."
Instantly on the utterance of that name, there followed an unexpected result. Silence ensued.
Emily waited--hesitated--advanced, to part the curtains, and look in at her aunt. She was stopped by a dreadful
sound of laughter—the cheerless laughter that is heard among the mad. It suddenly ended in a dreary sigh.

Afraid to look in, she spoke, hardly knowing what she said. "Is there anything you wish for? Shall I call—?"

Miss Letitia's voice interrupted her. Dull, low, rapidly muttering, it was unlike, shockingly unlike, the familiar voice of her aunt. It said strange words.

"Mrs. Rook? What does Mrs. Rook matter? Or her husband either? Bony, Bony, you're frightened about nothing. Where's the danger of those two people turning up? Do you know how many miles away the village is? Oh, you fool—a hundred miles and more. Never mind the coroner, the coroner must keep in his own district—and the jury too. A risky deception? I call it a pious fraud. And I have a tender conscience, and a cultivated mind. The newspaper? How is our newspaper to find its way to her, I should like to know? You poor old Bony! Upon my word you do me good—you make me laugh."

The cheerless laughter broke out again—and died away again drearily in a sigh.

Accustomed to decide rapidly in the ordinary emergencies of her life, Emily felt herself painfully embarrassed by the position in which she was now placed.

After what she had already heard, could she reconcile it to her sense of duty to her aunt to remain any longer in the room?

In the hopeless self-betrayal of delirium, Miss Letitia had revealed some act of concealment, committed in her past life, and confided to her faithful old servant. Under these circumstances, had Emily made any discoveries which convicted her of taking a base advantage of her position at the bedside? Most assuredly not! The nature of the act of concealment; the causes that had led to it; the person (or persons) affected by it—these were mysteries which left her entirely in the dark. She had found out that her aunt was acquainted with Mrs. Rook, and that was literally all she knew.

Blameless, so far, in the line of conduct that she had pursued, might she still remain in the bed-chamber—on this distinct understanding with herself: that she would instantly return to the sitting-room if she heard anything which could suggest a doubt of Miss Letitia's claim to her affection and respect? After some hesitation, she decided on leaving it to her conscience to answer that question. Does conscience ever say, No—when inclination says, Yes?

Emily's conscience sided with her reluctance to leave her aunt.

Throughout the time occupied by these reflections, the silence had remained unbroken. Emily began to feel uneasy. She timidly put her hand through the curtains, and took Miss Letitia's hand. The contact with the burning skin startled her. She turned away to the door, to call the servant—when the sound of her aunt's voice hurried her back to the bed.

"Are you there, Bony?" the voice asked.

Was her mind getting clear again? Emily tried the experiment of making a plain reply. "Your niece is with you," she said. "Shall I call the servant?"

Miss Letitia's mind was still far away from Emily, and from the present time.

"The servant?" she repeated. "All the servants but you, Bony, have been sent away. London's the place for us. No gossiping servants and no curious neighbors in London. Bury the horrid truth in London. No gossiping servants and no curious neighbors in London. Bury the horrid truth in London. Ah, you may well say I look anxious and wretched. I hate deception—and yet, it must be done. Why do you waste time in talking? Why don't you find out where the vile woman lives? Only let me get at her—and I'll make Sara ashamed of herself."

Emily's heart beat fast when she heard the woman's name. "Sara" (as she and her school-fellows knew) was the baptismal name of Miss Jethro. Had her aunt alluded to the disgraced teacher, or to some other woman?

She waited eagerly to hear more. There was nothing to be heard. At this most interesting moment, the silence remained undisturbed.

In the fervor of her anxiety to set her doubts at rest, Emily's faith in her own good resolutions began to waver. The temptation to say something which might set her aunt talking again was too strong to be resisted—if she remained at the bedside. Despairing of herself she rose and turned to the door. In the moment that passed while she crossed the room the very words occurred to her that would suit her purpose. Her cheeks were hot with shame—she hesitated—she looked back at the bed—the words passed her lips.

"Sara is only one of the woman's names," she said. "Do you like her other name?"

The rapidly-muttering tones broke out again instantly—but not in answer to Emily. The sound of a voice had encouraged Miss Letitia to pursue her own confused train of thought, and had stimulated the fast-failing capacity of speech to exert itself once more.

"No! no! He's too cunning for you, and too cunning for me. He doesn't leave letters about; he destroys them all. Did I say he was too cunning for us? It's false. We are too cunning for him. Who found the morsels of his letter in the basket? Who stuck them together? Ah, we know! Don't read it, Bony. 'Dear Miss Jethro'—don't read it again. 'Miss Jethro' in his letter; and 'Sara,' when he talks to himself in the garden. Oh, who would have believed it of him, if we hadn't seen and heard it ourselves!"
There was no more doubt now.

But who was the man, so bitterly and so regretfully alluded to?

No: this time Emily held firmly by the resolution which bound her to respect the helpless position of her aunt. The speediest way of summoning Mrs. Ellmother would be to ring the bell. As she touched the handle a faint cry of suffering from the bed called her back.

"Oh, so thirsty!" murmured the failing voice--so thirsty!"

She parted the curtains. The shrouded lamplight just showed her the green shade over Miss Letitia's eyes--the hollow cheeks below it--the arms laid helplessly on the bed-clothes. "Oh, aunt, don't you know my voice? Don't you know Emily? Let me kiss you, dear!" Useless to plead with her; useless to kiss her; she only reiterated the words, "So thirsty! so thirsty!" Emily raised the poor tortured body with a patient caution which spared it pain, and put the glass to her aunt's lips. She drank the lemonade to the last drop. Refreshed for the moment, she spoke again--spoke to the visionary servant of her delirious fancy, while she rested in Emily's arms.

"For God's sake, take care how you answer if she questions you. If she knew what we know! Are men ever ashamed? Ha! the vile woman! the vile woman!"

Her voice, sinking gradually, dropped to a whisper. The next few words that escaped her were muttered inarticulately. Little by little, the false energy of fever was wearing itself out. She lay silent and still. To look at her now was to look at the image of death. Once more, Emily kissed her--closed the curtains--and rang the bell. Mrs. Ellmother failed to appear. Emily left the room to call her.

Arrived at the top of the kitchen stairs, she noted a slight change. The door below, which she had heard banged on first entering her aunt's room, now stood open. She called to Mrs. Ellmother. A strange voice answered her. Its accent was soft and courteous; presenting the strongest imaginable contrast to the harsh tones of Miss Letitia's crabbed old maid.

"Is there anything I can do for you, miss?"

The person making this polite inquiry appeared at the foot of the stairs--a plump and comely woman of middle age. She looked up at the young lady with a pleasant smile.

"I beg your pardon," Emily said; "I had no intention of disturbing you. I called to Mrs. Ellmother."

The stranger advanced a little way up the stairs, and answered, "Mrs. Ellmother is not here."

"Do you expect her back soon?"

"Excuse me, miss--I don't expect her back at all."

"Do you mean to say that she has left the house?"

"Yes, miss. She has left the house."

CHAPTER XIV.

MRS. MOSEY.

Emily's first act--after the discovery of Mrs. Ellmother's incomprehensible disappearance--was to invite the new servant to follow her into the sitting-room.

"Can you explain this?" she began.

"No, miss."

"May I ask if you have come here by Mrs. Ellmother's invitation?"

"By Mrs. Ellmother's request, miss."

"Can you tell me how she came to make the request?"

"With pleasure, miss. Perhaps--as you find me here, a stranger to yourself, in place of the customary servant--I ought to begin by giving you a reference."

"And, perhaps (if you will be so kind), by mentioning your name," Emily added.

"Thank you for reminding me, miss. My name is Elizabeth Mosey. I am well known to the gentleman who attends Miss Letitia. Dr. Allday will speak to my character and also to my experience as a nurse. If it would be in any way satisfactory to give you a second reference--"

"Quite needless, Mrs. Mosey."

"Permit me to thank you again, miss. I was at home this evening, when Mrs. Ellmother called at my lodgings. Says she, 'I have come here, Elizabeth, to ask a favor of you for old friendship's sake.' Says I, 'My dear, pray command me, whatever it may be.' If this seems rather a hasty answer to make, before I knew what the favor was, might I ask you to bear in mind that Mrs. Ellmother put it to me 'for old friendship's sake'--alluding to my late husband, and to the business which we carried on at that time? Through no fault of ours, we got into difficulties. Persons whom we had trusted proved unworthy. Not to trouble you further, I may say at once, we should have been ruined, if our old friend Mrs. Ellmother had not come forward, and trusted us with the savings of her lifetime. The money was all paid back again, before my husband's death. But I don't consider--and, I think you won't consider--that the obligation was paid back too. Prudent or not prudent, there is nothing Mrs. Ellmother can ask of me that I
am not willing to do. If I have put myself in an awkward situation (and I don't deny that it looks so) this is the only excuse, miss, that I can make for my conduct."

Mrs. Mosey was too fluent, and too fond of hearing the sound of her own eminently persuasive voice. Making allowance for these little drawbacks, the impression that she produced was decidedly favorable; and, however rashly she might have acted, her motive was beyond reproach. Having said some kind words to this effect, Emily led her back to the main interest of her narrative.

"Did Mrs. Ellmother give no reason for leaving my aunt, at such a time as this?" she asked.

"The very words I said to her, miss."

"And what did she say, by way of reply?"

"She burst out crying—a thing I have never known her to do before, in an experience of twenty years."

"And she really asked you to take her place here, at a moment's notice?"

"That was just what she did," Mrs. Mosey answered. "I had no need to tell her I was astonished; my lips spoke for me, no doubt. She's a hard woman in speech and manner, I admit. But there's more feeling in her than you would suppose. 'If you are the good friend I take you for,' she says, 'don't ask me for reasons; I am doing what is forced on me, and doing it with a heavy heart.' In my place, miss, would you have insisted on her explaining herself, after that? The one thing I naturally wanted to know was, if I could speak to some lady, in the position of mistress here, before I ventured to intrude. Mrs. Ellmother understood that it was her duty to help me in this particular. Your poor aunt being out of the question she mentioned you."

"How did she speak of me? In an angry way?"

"No, indeed—quite the contrary. She says, 'You will find Miss Emily at the cottage. She is Miss Letitia's niece. Everybody likes her—and everybody is right.'"

"She really said that?"

"Those were her words. And, what is more, she gave me a message for you at parting. 'If Miss Emily is surprised' (that was how she put it) 'give her my duty and good wishes; and tell her to remember what I said, when she took my place at her aunt's bedside. I don't presume to inquire what this means,' said Mrs. Mosey respectfully, ready to hear what it meant, if Emily would only be so good as to tell her. "I deliver the message, miss, as it was delivered to me. After which, Mrs. Ellmother went her way, and I went mine."

"Do you know where she went?"

"No, miss."

"Have you nothing more to tell me?"

"Nothing more; except that she gave me my directions, of course, about the nursing. I took them down in writing—and you will find them in their proper place, with the prescriptions and the medicines."

Acting at once on this hint, Emily led the way to her aunt's room.

Miss Letitia was silent, when the new nurse softly parted the curtains—looked in—and drew them together again. Consulting her watch, Mrs. Mosey compared her written directions with the medicine-bottles on the table, and set one apart to be used at the appointed time. "Nothing, so far, to alarm us," she whispered. "You look sadly pale and tired, miss. Might I advise you to rest a little?"

"If there is any change, Mrs. Mosey—either for the better or the worse—of course you will let me know?"

"Certainly, miss."

Emily returned to the sitting-room: not to rest (after all that she had heard), but to think.

Amid much that was unintelligible, certain plain conclusions presented themselves to her mind.

After what the doctor had already said to Emily, on the subject of delirium generally, Mrs. Ellmother's proceedings became intelligible: they proved that she knew by experience the perilous course taken by her mistress's wandering thoughts, when they expressed themselves in words. This explained the concealment of Miss Letitia's illness from her niece, as well as the reiterated efforts of the old servant to prevent Emily from entering the bedroom.

But the event which had just happened—that is to say, Mrs. Ellmother's sudden departure from the cottage—was not only of serious importance in itself, but pointed to a startling conclusion.

The faithful maid had left the mistress, whom she had loved and served, sinking under a fatal illness—and had put another woman in her place, careless of what that woman might discover by listening at the bedside—rather than confront Emily after she had been within hearing of her aunt while the brain of the suffering woman was deranged by fever. There was the state of the case, in plain words.

In what frame of mind had Mrs. Ellmother adopted this desperate course of action?

To use her own expression, she had deserted Miss Letitia "with a heavy heart." To judge by her own language addressed to Mrs. Mosey, she had left Emily to the mercy of a stranger—animated, nevertheless, by sincere feelings of attachment and respect. That her fears had taken for granted suspicion which Emily had not felt, and discoveries which Emily had (as yet) not made, in no way modified the serious nature of the inference which her conduct
justified. The disclosure which this woman dreaded—who could doubt it now?—directly threatened Emily's peace of mind. There was no disguising it: the innocent niece was associated with an act of deception, which had been, until that day, the undetected secret of the aunt and the aunt's maid.

In this conclusion, and in this only, was to be found the rational explanation of Mrs. Ellmother's choice—placed between the alternatives of submitting to discovery by Emily, or of leaving the house.

Poor Miss Letitia's writing-table stood near the window of the sitting-room. Shrinking from the further pursuit of thoughts which might end in disposing her mind to distrust of her dying aunt, Emily looked round in search of some employment sufficiently interesting to absorb her attention. The writing-table reminded her that she owed a letter to Cecilia. That helpful friend had surely the first claim to know why she had failed to keep her engagement with Sir Jervis Redwood.

After mentioning the telegram which had followed Mrs. Rook's arrival at the school, Emily's letter proceeded in these terms:

"As soon as I had in some degree recovered myself, I informed Mrs. Rook of my aunt's serious illness.

"Although she carefully confined herself to commonplace expressions of sympathy, I could see that it was equally a relief to both of us to feel that we were prevented from being traveling companions. Don't suppose that I have taken a capricious dislike to Mrs. Rook—or that you are in any way to blame for the unfavorable impression which she has produced on me. I will make this plain when we meet. In the meanwhile, I need only tell you that I gave her a letter of explanation to present to Sir Jervis Redwood. I also informed him of my address in London: adding a request that he would forward your letter, in case you have written to me before you receive these lines.

"Kind Mr. Alban Morris accompanied me to the railway-station, and arranged with the guard to take special care of me on the journey to London. We used to think him rather a heartless man. We were quite wrong. I don't know what his plans are for spending the summer holidays. Go where he may, I remember his kindness; my best wishes go with him.

"My dear, I must not sadden your enjoyment of your pleasant visit to the Engadine, by writing at any length of the sorrow that I am suffering. You know how I love my aunt, and how gratefully I have always felt her motherly goodness to me. The doctor does not conceal the truth. At her age, there is no hope: my father's last-left relation, my one dearest friend, is dying.

"No! I must not forget that I have another friend—I must find some comfort in thinking of you.

"I do so long in my solitude for a letter from my dear Cecilia. Nobody comes to see me, when I most want sympathy; I am a stranger in this vast city. The members of my mother's family are settled in Australia: they have not even written to me, in all the long years that have passed since her death. You remember how cheerfully I used to look forward to my new life, on leaving school? Good-by, my darling. While I can see your sweet face, in my thoughts, I don't despair—dark as it looks now—of the future that is before me."

Emily had closed and addressed her letter, and was just rising from her chair, when she heard the voice of the new nurse at the door.

CHAPTER XV

EMILY.

"May I say a word?" Mrs. Mosey inquired. She entered the room—pale and trembling. Seeing that ominous change, Emily dropped back into her chair.

"Dead?" she said faintly.

Mrs. Mosey looked at her in vacant surprise.

"I wish to say, miss, that your aunt has frightened me."

Even that vague allusion was enough for Emily.

"You need say no more," she replied. "I know but too well how my aunt's mind is affected by the fever."

Confused and frightened as she was, Mrs. Mosey still found relief in her customary flow of words.

"Many and many a person have I nursed in fever," she announced. "Many and many a person have I heard say strange things. Never yet, miss, in all my experience—!

"Don't tell me of it!" Emily interposed.

"Oh, but I must tell you! In your own interests, Miss Emily—in your own interests. I won't be inhuman enough to leave you alone in the house to-night; but if this delirium goes on, I must ask you to get another nurse. Shocking suspicions are lying in wait for me in that bedroom, as it were. I can't resist them as I ought, if I go back again, and hear your aunt saying what she has been saying for the last half hour and more. Mrs. Ellmother has expected impossibilities of me; and Mrs. Ellmother must take the consequences. I don't say she didn't warn me—speaking, you will please to understand, in the strictest confidence. 'Elizabeth,' she says, 'you know how wildly people talk in Miss Letitia's present condition. Pay no heed to it,' she says. 'Let it go in at one ear and out at the other,' she says. 'If Miss Emily asks questions—you know nothing about it. If she's frightened—you know nothing about it. If she bursts into
fits of crying that are dreadful to see, pity her, poor thing, but take no notice.' All very well, and sounds like speaking out, doesn't it? Nothing of the sort! Mrs. Ellmother warns me to expect this, that, and the other. But there is one horrid thing (which I heard, mind, over and over again at your aunt's bedside) that she does not prepare me for; and that horrid thing is--Murder!"

At that last word, Mrs. Mosey dropped her voice to a whisper--and waited to see what effect she had produced.

Sorely tried already by the cruel perplexities of her position, Emily's courage failed to resist the first sensation of horror, aroused in her by the climax of the nurse's hysterical narrative. Encouraged by her silence, Mrs. Mosey went on. She lifted one hand with theatrical solemnity--and luxuriously terrified herself with her own horrors.

"An inn, Miss Emily; a lonely inn, somewhere in the country; and a comfortless room at the inn, with a makeshift bed at one end of it, and a makeshift bed at the other--I give you my word of honor, that was how your aunt put it. She spoke of two men next; two men asleep (you understand) in the two beds. I think she called them 'gentlemen'; but I can't be sure, and I wouldn't deceive you--you know I wouldn't deceive you, for the world. Miss Letitia muttered and mumbled, poor soul. I own I was getting tired of listening--when she burst out plain again, in that one horrid word--Oh, miss, don't be impatient! don't interrupt me!"

Emily did interrupt, nevertheless. In some degree at least she had recovered herself. "No more of it!" she said--"I won't hear a word more."

But Mrs. Mosey was too resolutely bent on asserting her own importance, by making the most of the alarm that she had suffered, to be repressed by any ordinary method of remonstrance. Without paying the slightest attention to what Emily had said, she went on again more loudly and more excitably than ever.

"Listen, miss--listen! The dreadful part of it is to come; you haven't heard about the two gentlemen yet. One of them was murdered--what do you think of that!--and the other (I heard your aunt say it, in so many words) committed the crime. Did Miss Letitia fancy she was addressing a lot of people when you were nursing her? She called out, like a person making public proclamation, when I was in her room. 'Whoever you are, good people' (she says), 'a hundred pounds reward, if you find the runaway murderer. Search everywhere for a poor weak womanish creature, with rings on his little white hands. There's nothing about him like a man, except his voice--a fine round voice. You'll know him, my friends--the wretch, the monster--you'll know him by his voice.' That was how she put it; I tell you again, that was how she put it. Did you hear her scream? Ah, my dear young lady, so much the better for you! 'O the horrid murder' (she says)--'hush it up!' I'll take my Bible oath before the magistrate," cried Mrs. Mosey, starting out of her chair, "your aunt said, 'Hush it up!'"

Emily crossed the room. The energy of her character was roused at last. She seized the foolish woman by the shoulders, forced her back in the chair, and looked her straight in the face without uttering a word.

For the moment, Mrs. Mosey was petrified. She had fully expected--having reached the end of her terrible story--to find Emily at her feet, entreating her not to carry out her intention of leaving the cottage the next morning; and she had determined, after her sense of her own importance had been sufficiently flattered, to grant the prayer of the helpless young lady. Those were her anticipations--and how had they been fulfilled? She had been treated like a mad woman in a state of revolt!

"How dare you assault me?" she asked piteously. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself. God knows I meant well."

"You are not the first person," Emily answered, quietly releasing her, "who has done wrong with the best intentions."

"I did my duty, miss, when I told you what your aunt said."

"You forgot your duty when you listened to what my aunt said."

"Allow me to explain myself."

"No: not a word more on that subject shall pass between us. Remain here, if you please; I have something to suggest in your own interests. Wait, and compose yourself."

The purpose which had taken a foremost place in Emily's mind rested on the firm foundation of her love and pity for her aunt.

Now that she had regained the power to think, she felt a hateful doubt pressed on her by Mrs. Mosey's disclosures. Having taken for granted that there was a foundation in truth for what she herself had heard in her aunt's room, could she reasonably resist the conclusion that there must be a foundation in truth for what Mrs. Mosey had heard, under similar circumstances?

There was but one way of escaping from this dilemma--and Emily deliberately took it. She turned her back on her own convictions; and persuaded herself that she had been in the wrong, when she had attached importance to anything that her aunt had said, under the influence of delirium. Having adopted this conclusion, she resolved to face the prospect of a night's solitude by the death-bed--rather than permit Mrs. Mosey to have a second opportunity of drawing her own inferences from what she might hear in Miss Letitia's room.
"Do you mean to keep me waiting much longer, miss?"

"Not a moment longer, now you are composed again," Emily answered. "I have been thinking of what has happened; and I fail to see any necessity for putting off your departure until the doctor comes to-morrow morning. There is really no objection to your leaving me to-night."

"I beg your pardon, miss; there is an objection. I have already told you I can't reconcile it to my conscience to leave you here by yourself. I am not an inhuman woman," said Mrs. Mosey, putting her handkerchief to her eyes--smitten with pity for herself.

Emily tried the effect of a conciliatory reply. "I am grateful for your kindness in offering to stay with me," she said.

"Very good of you, I'm sure," Mrs. Mosey answered ironically. "But for all that, you persist in sending me away."

"I persist in thinking that there is no necessity for my keeping you here until to-morrow."

"Oh, have it your own way! I am not reduced to forcing my company on anybody."

Mrs. Mosey put her handkerchief in her pocket, and asserted her dignity. With head erect and slowly-marching steps she walked out of the room. Emily was left in the cottage, alone with her dying aunt.

Chapter XVI.

Miss Jethro.

A fortnight after the disappearance of Mrs. Ellmother, and the dismissal of Mrs. Mosey, Doctor Allday entered his consulting-room, punctual to the hour at which he was accustomed to receive patients.

An occasional wrinkling of his eyebrows, accompanied by an intermittent restlessness in his movements, appeared to indicate some disturbance of this worthy man's professional composure. His mind was indeed not at ease. Even the inexcitable old doctor had felt the attraction which had already conquered three such dissimilar people as Alban Morris, Cecilia Wyvil, and Francine de Sor. He was thinking of Emily.

A ring at the door-bell announced the arrival of the first patient.

The servant introduced a tall lady, dressed simply and elegantly in dark apparel. Noticeable features, of a Jewish cast--worn and haggard, but still preserving their grandeur of form--were visible through her veil. She moved with grace and dignity; and she stated her object in consulting Doctor Allday with the ease of a well-bred woman.

"I come to ask your opinion, sir, on the state of my heart," she said; "and I am recommended by a patient, who has consulted you with advantage to herself." She placed a card on the doctor's writing-desk, and added: "I have become acquainted with the lady, by being one of the lodgers in her house."

The doctor recognized the name--and the usual proceedings ensued. After careful examination, he arrived at a favorable conclusion. "I may tell you at once," he said--"there is no reason to be alarmed about the state of your heart."

"I have never felt any alarm about myself," she answered quietly. "A sudden death is an easy death. If one's affairs are settled, it seems, on that account, to be the death to prefer. My object was to settle my affairs--such as they are--if you had considered my life to be in danger. "Is there nothing the matter with me?"

"I don't say that," the doctor replied. "The action of your heart is very feeble. Take the medicine that I shall prescribe; pay a little more attention to eating and drinking than ladies usually do; don't run upstairs, and don't fatigue yourself by violent exercise--and I see no reason why you shouldn't live to be an old woman."

"God forbid!" the lady said to herself. She turned away, and looked out of the window with a bitter smile.

Doctor Allday wrote his prescription. "Are you likely to make a long stay in London?" he asked.

"I am here for a little while only. Do you wish to see me again?"

"I should like to see you once more, before you go away--if you can make it convenient. What name shall I put on the prescription?"

"Miss Jethro."

"A remarkable name," the doctor said, in his matter-of-fact way.

Miss Jethro's bitter smile showed itself again.

Without otherwise noticing what Doctor Allday had said, she laid the consultation fee on the table. At the same moment, the footman appeared with a letter. "From Miss Emily Brown," he said. "No answer required."

He held the door open as he delivered the message, seeing that Miss Jethro was about to leave the room. She dismissed him by a gesture; and, returning to the table, pointed to the letter.

"Was your correspondent lately a pupil at Miss Ladd's school?" she inquired.

"My correspondent has just left Miss Ladd," the doctor answered. "Are you a friend of hers?"

"I am acquainted with her."

"You would be doing the poor child a kindness, if you would go and see her. She has no friends in London."

"Pardon me--she has an aunt."
"Her aunt died a week since."

"Are there no other relations?"

"None. A melancholy state of things, isn't it? She would have been absolutely alone in the house, if I had not sent one of my women servants to stay with her for the present. Did you know her father?"

Miss Jethro passed over the question, as if she had not heard it. "Has the young lady dismissed her aunt's servants?" she asked.

"Her aunt kept but one servant, ma'am. The woman has spared Miss Emily the trouble of dismissing her." He briefly alluded to Mrs. Ellmother's desertion of her mistress. "I can't explain it," he said when he had done. "Can you?"

"What makes you think, sir, that I can help you? I have never even heard of the servant--and the mistress was a stranger to me."

At Doctor Allday's age a man is not easily discouraged by reproof, even when it is administered by a handsome woman. "I thought you might have known Miss Emily's father," he persisted.

Miss Jethro rose, and wished him good-morning. "I must not occupy any more of your valuable time," she said. "Suppose you wait a minute?" the doctor suggested.

Impenetrable as ever, he rang the bell. "Any patients in the waiting-room?" he inquired. "You see I have time to spare," he resumed, when the man had replied in the negative. "I take an interest in this poor girl; and I thought--"

"If you think that I take an interest in her, too," Miss Jethro interposed, "you are perfectly right--I knew her father," she added abruptly; the allusion to Emily having apparently reminded her of the question which she had hitherto declined to notice.

"In that case," Doctor Allday proceeded, "I want a word of advice. Won't you sit down?"

She took a chair in silence. An irregular movement in the lower part of her veil seemed to indicate that she was breathing with difficulty. The doctor observed her with close attention. "Let me see my prescription again," he said. Having added an ingredient, he handed it back with a word of explanation. "Your nerves are more out of order than I supposed. The hardest disease to cure that I know of is--worry."

The hint could hardly have been plainer; but it was lost on Miss Jethro. Whatever her troubles might be, her medical adviser was not made acquainted with them. Quietly folding up the prescription, she reminded him that he had proposed to ask her advice.

"In what way can I be of service to you?" she inquired.

"I am afraid I must try your patience," the doctor acknowledged, "if I am to answer that question plainly."

With these prefatory words, he described the events that had followed Mrs. Mosey's appearance at the cottage. "I am only doing justice to this foolish woman," he continued, "when I tell you that she came here, after she had left Miss Emily, and did her best to set matters right. I went to the poor girl directly--and I felt it my duty, after looking at her aunt, not to leave her alone for that night. When I got home the next morning, whom do you think I found waiting for me? Mrs. Ellmother!"

He stopped--in the expectation that Miss Jethro would express some surprise. Not a word passed her lips.

"Mrs. Ellmother's object was to ask how her mistress was going on," the doctor proceeded. "Every day while Miss Letitia still lived, she came here to make the same inquiry--without a word of explanation. On the day of the funeral, there she was at the church, dressed in deep mourning; and, as I can personally testify, crying bitterly. When the ceremony was over--can you believe it?--she slipped away before Miss Emily or I could speak to her. We have seen nothing more of her, and heard nothing more, from that time to this."

He stopped again, the silent lady still listening without making any remark.

"Have you no opinion to express?" the doctor asked bluntly.

"I am waiting," Miss Jethro answered.

"Waiting--for what?"

"I haven't heard yet, why you want my advice."

Doctor Allday's observation of humanity had hitherto reckoned want of caution among the deficient moral qualities in the natures of women. He set down Miss Jethro as a remarkable exception to a general rule.

"I want you to advise me as to the right course to take with Miss Emily," he said. "She has assured me she attaches no serious importance to her aunt's wanderings, when the poor old lady's fever was at its worst. I don't doubt that she speaks the truth--but I have my own reasons for being afraid that she is deceiving herself. Will you bear this in mind?"

"Yes--if it's necessary."

"In plain words, Miss Jethro, you think I am still wandering from the point. I have got to the point. Yesterday, Miss Emily told me that she hoped to be soon composed enough to examine the papers left by her aunt."

Miss Jethro suddenly turned in her chair, and looked at Doctor Allday.
"Are you beginning to feel interested?" the doctor asked mischievously.
She neither acknowledged nor denied it. "Go on"—was all she said.
"I don't know how you feel," he proceeded; "I am afraid of the discoveries which she may make; and I am
strongly tempted to advise her to leave the proposed examination to her aunt's lawyer. Is there anything in your
knowledge of Miss Emily's late father, which tells you that I am right?"
"Before I reply," said Miss Jethro, "it may not be amiss to let the young lady speak for herself."
"How is she to do that?" the doctor asked.
Miss Jethro pointed to the writing table. "Look there," she said. "You have not yet opened Miss Emily's letter."

CHAPTER XVII.
DOCTOR ALLDAY.

Absorbed in the effort to overcome his patient's reserve, the doctor had forgotten Emily's letter. He opened it
immediately.

After reading the first sentence, he looked up with an expression of annoyance. "She has begun the examination
of the papers already," he said.
"Then I can be of no further use to you," Miss Jethro rejoined. She made a second attempt to leave the room.
Doctor Allday turned to the next page of the letter. "Stop!" he cried. "She has found something—and here it is."
He held up a small printed Handbill, which had been placed between the first and second pages. "Suppose you
look at it?" he said.

"Whether I am interested in it or not?" Miss Jethro asked.
"You may be interested in what Miss Emily says about it in her letter."
"Do you propose to show me her letter?"
"I propose to read it to you."
Miss Jethro took the Handbill without further objection. It was expressed in these words:

"MURDER. 100 POUNDS REWARD.--Whereas a murder was committed on the thirtieth September, 1877, at
the Hand-in-Hand Inn, in the village of Zeeland, Hampshire, the above reward will be paid to any person or persons
whose exertions shall lead to the arrest and conviction of the suspected murderer. Name not known. Supposed age,
between twenty and thirty years. A well-made man, of small stature. Fair complexion, delicate features, clear blue
eyes. Hair light, and cut rather short. Clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half-whiskers. Small, white,
well-shaped hands. Wore valuable rings on the two last fingers of the left hand. Dressed neatly in a dark-gray tourist-suit.
Carried a knapsack, as if on a pedestrian excursion. Remarkably good voice, smooth, full, and persuasive.
Ingratiating manners. Apply to the Chief Inspector, Metropolitan Police Office, London."

Miss Jethro laid aside the Handbill without any visible appearance of agitation. The doctor took up Emily's
letter, and read as follows:

"You will be as much relieved as I was, my kind friend, when you look at the paper inclosed. I found it loose in a
blank book, with cuttings from newspapers, and odd announcements of lost property and other curious things (all
huddled together between the leaves), which my aunt no doubt intended to set in order and fix in their proper places.
She must have been thinking of her book, poor soul, in her last illness. Here is the origin of those 'terrible words'
which frightened stupid Mrs. Mosey! Is it not encouraging to have discovered such a confirmation of my opinion as
this? I feel a new interest in looking over the papers that still remain to be examined—"

Before he could get to the end of the sentence Miss Jethro's agitation broke through her reserve.
"Do what you proposed to do!" she burst out vehemently. "Stop her at once from carrying her examination any
further! If she hesitates, insist on it!"

At last Doctor Allday had triumphed! "It has been a long time coming," he remarked, in his cool way; "and it's
all the more welcome on that account. You dread the discoveries she may make, Miss Jethro, as I do. And you know
what those discoveries may be."

"What I do know, or don't know, is of no importance." she answered sharply.

"Excuse me, it is of very serious importance. I have no authority over this poor girl—I am not even an old friend.
You tell me to insist. Help me to declare honestly that I know of circumstances which justify me; and I may insist to
some purpose."

Miss Jethro lifted her veil for the first time, and eyed him searchingly.

"I believe I can trust you," she said. "Now listen! The one consideration on which I consent to open my lips, is
consideration for Miss Emily's tranquillity. Promise me absolute secrecy, on your word of honor."

He gave the promise.

"I want to know one thing, first," Miss Jethro proceeded. "Did she tell you—as she once told me—that her father
had died of heart-complaint?"

"Yes."
"Did you put any questions to her?"
"I asked how long ago it was."
"And she told you?"
"She told me."
"You wish to know, Doctor Allday, what discoveries Miss Emily may yet make, among her aunt's papers. Judge for yourself, when I tell you that she has been deceived about her father's death."
"Do you mean that he is still living?"
"I mean that she has been deceived--purposely deceived--about the manner of his death."
"Who was the wretch who did it?"
"You are wronging the dead, sir! The truth can only have been concealed out of the purest motives of love and pity. I don't desire to disguise the conclusion at which I have arrived after what I have heard from yourself. The person responsible must be Miss Emily's aunt--and the old servant must have been in her confidence. Remember! You are bound in honor not to repeat to any living creature what I have just said."

The doctor followed Miss Jethro to the door. "You have not yet told me," he said, "how her father died."
"I have no more to tell you."
With those words she left him.

He rang for his servant. To wait until the hour at which he was accustomed to go out, might be to leave Emily's peace of mind at the mercy of an accident. "I am going to the cottage," he said. "If anybody wants me, I shall be back in a quarter of an hour."

On the point of leaving the house, he remembered that Emily would probably expect him to return the Handbill. As he took it up, the first lines caught his eye: he read the date at which the murder had been committed, for the second time. On a sudden the ruddy color left his face.

"Good God!" he cried, "her father was murdered--and that woman was concerned in it."

Following the impulse that urged him, he secured the Handbill in his pocketbook--snatched up the card which his patient had presented as her introduction--and instantly left the house. He called the first cab that passed him, and drove to Miss Jethro's lodgings.

"Gone"--was the servant's answer when he inquired for her. He insisted on speaking to the landlady. "Hardly ten minutes have passed," he said, "since she left my house."

"Hardly ten minutes have passed," the landlady replied, "since that message was brought here by a boy."

The message had been evidently written in great haste: "I am unexpectedly obliged to leave London. A bank note is inclosed in payment of my debt to you. I will send for my luggage."

The doctor withdrew.

"Unexpectedly obliged to leave London," he repeated, as he got into the cab again. "Her flight condemns her: not a doubt of it now. As fast as you can!" he shouted to the man; directing him to drive to Emily's cottage.

CHAPTER XVIII.
MISS LADD.

Arriving at the cottage, Doctor Allday discovered a gentleman, who was just closing the garden gate behind him.

"Has Miss Emily had a visitor?" he inquired, when the servant admitted him.

"The gentleman left a letter for Miss Emily, sir."

"Did he ask to see her?"

"He asked after Miss Letitia's health. When he heard that she was dead, he seemed to be startled, and went away immediately."

"Did he give his name?"

"No, sir."

The doctor found Emily absorbed over her letter. His anxiety to forestall any possible discovery of the deception which had concealed the terrible story of her father's death, kept Doctor Allday's vigilance on the watch. He doubted the gentleman who had abstained from giving his name; he even distrusted the other unknown person who had written to Emily.

She looked up. Her face relieved him of his misgivings, before she could speak.

"At last, I have heard from my dearest friend," she said. "You remember what I told you about Cecilia? Here is a letter--a long delightful letter--from the Engadine, left at the door by some gentleman unknown. I was questioning the servant when you rang the bell."

"You may question me, if you prefer it. I arrived just as the gentleman was shutting your garden gate."

"Oh, tell me! what was he like?"

"Tall, and thin, and dark. Wore a vile republican-looking felt hat. Had nasty ill-tempered wrinkles between his eyebrows. The sort of man I distrust by instinct."
"Why?"
"Because he doesn't shave."
"Do you mean that he wore a beard?"
"Yes; a curly black beard."
Emily clasped her hands in amazement. "Can it be Alban Morris?" she exclaimed.
The doctor looked at her with a sardonic smile; he thought it likely that he had discovered her sweetheart.
"Who is Mr. Alban Morris?" he asked.
"The drawing-master at Miss Ladd's school."
Doctor Allday dropped the subject: masters at ladies' schools were not persons who interested him. He returned to the purpose which had brought him to the cottage—and produced the Handbill that had been sent to him in Emily's letter.
"I suppose you want to have it back again?" he said.
She took it from him, and looked at it with interest.
"Isn't it strange," she suggested, "that the murderer should have escaped, with such a careful description of him as this circulated all over England?"
She read the description to the doctor.
"Name not known. Supposed age, between twenty-five and thirty years. A well-made man, of small stature. Fair complexion, delicate features, clear blue eyes. Hair light, and cut rather short. Clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half-whiskers. Small, white, well-shaped hands. Wore valuable rings on the two last fingers of the left hand. Dressed neatly—"
"That part of the description is useless," the doctor remarked; "he would change his clothes."
"But could he change his voice?" Emily objected. "Listen to this: 'Remarkably good voice, smooth, full, and persuasive.' And here again! 'Ingratiating manners.' Perhaps you will say he could put on an appearance of rudeness?"
"I will say this, my dear. He would be able to disguise himself so effectually that ninety-nine people out of a hundred would fail to identify him, either by his voice or his manner."
"How?"
"Look back at the description: 'Hair cut rather short, clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half-whiskers.' The wretch was safe from pursuit; he had ample time at his disposal—don't you see how he could completely alter the appearance of his head and face? No more, my dear, of this disagreeable subject! Let us get to something interesting. Have you found anything else among your aunt's papers?"
"I have met with a great disappointment," Emily replied. "Did I tell you how I discovered the Handbill?"
"No."
"I found it, with the scrap-book and the newspaper cuttings, under a collection of empty boxes and bottles, in a drawer of the washhand-stand. And I naturally expected to make far more interesting discoveries in this room. My search was over in five minutes. Nothing in the cabinet there, in the corner, but a few books and some china. Nothing in the writing-desk, on that side-table, but a packet of note-paper and some sealing-wax. Nothing here, in the drawers, but tradesmen's receipts, materials for knitting, and old photographs. She must have destroyed all her papers, poor dear, before her last illness; and the Handbill and the other things can only have escaped, because they were left in a place which she never thought of examining. Isn't it provoking?"
With a mind inexpressibly relieved, good Doctor Allday asked permission to return to his patients: leaving Emily to devote herself to her friend's letter.
On his way out, he noticed that the door of the bed-chamber on the opposite side of the passage stood open. Since Miss Letitia's death the room had not been used. Well within view stood the washhand-stand to which Emily had alluded. The doctor advanced to the house door—reflected—hesitated—and looked toward the empty room.
It had struck him that there might be a second drawer which Emily had overlooked. Would he be justified in setting this doubt at rest? If he passed over ordinary scruples it would not be without excuse. Miss Letitia had spoken to him of her affairs, and had asked him to act (in Emily's interest) as co-executor with her lawyer. The rapid progress of the illness had made it impossible for her to execute the necessary codicil. But the doctor had been morally (if not legally) taken into her confidence—and, for that reason, he decided that he had a right in this serious matter to satisfy his own mind.
A glance was enough to show him that no second drawer had been overlooked.
There was no other discovery to detain the doctor. The wardrobe only contained the poor old lady's clothes; the one cupboard was open and empty. On the point of leaving the room, he went back to the washhand-stand. While he had the opportunity, it might not be amiss to make sure that Emily had thoroughly examined those old boxes and bottles, which she had alluded to with some little contempt.
The drawer was of considerable length. When he tried to pull it completely out from the grooves in which it ran, it resisted him. In his present frame of mind, this was a suspicious circumstance in itself. He cleared away the litter so as to make room for the introduction of his hand and arm into the drawer. In another moment his fingers touched a piece of paper, jammed between the inner end of the drawer and the bottom of the flat surface of the washhand-stand. With a little care, he succeeded in extricating the paper. Only pausing to satisfy himself that there was nothing else to be found, and to close the drawer after replacing its contents, he left the cottage.

The cab was waiting for him. On the drive back to his own house, he opened the crumpled paper. It proved to be a letter addressed to Miss Letitia; and it was signed by no less a person than Emily's schoolmistress. Looking back from the end to the beginning, Doctor Allday discovered, in the first sentence, the name of--Miss Jethro.

But for the interview of that morning with his patient he might have doubted the propriety of making himself further acquainted with the letter. As things were, he read it without hesitation.

"DEAR MADAM--I cannot but regard it as providential circumstance that your niece, in writing to you from my house, should have mentioned, among other events of her school life, the arrival of my new teacher, Miss Jethro.

"To say that I was surprised is to express very inadequately what I felt when I read your letter, informing me confidentially that I had employed a woman who was unworthy to associate with the young persons placed under my care. It is impossible for me to suppose that a lady in your position, and possessed of your high principles, would make such a serious accusation as this, without unanswerable reasons for doing so. At the same time I cannot, consistently with my duty as a Christian, suffer my opinion of Miss Jethro to be in any way modified, until proofs are laid before me which it is impossible to dispute.

"Placing the same confidence in your discretion, which you have placed in mine, I now inclose the references and testimonials which Miss Jethro submitted to me, when she presented herself to fill the vacant situation in my school.

"I earnestly request you to lose no time in instituting the confidential inquiries which you have volunteered to make. Whatever the result may be, pray return to me the inclosures which I have trusted to your care, and believe me, dear madam, in much suspense and anxiety, sincerely yours,

AMELIA LADD."

It is needless to describe, at any length, the impression which these lines produced on the doctor. If he had heard what Emily had heard at the time of her aunt's last illness, he would have called to mind Miss Letitia's betrayal of her interest in some man unknown, whom she believed to have been beguiled by Miss Jethro--and he would have perceived that the vindictive hatred, thus produced, must have inspired the letter of denunciation which the schoolmistress had acknowledged. He would also have inferred that Miss Letitia's inquiries had proved her accusation to be well founded--if he had known of the new teacher's sudden dismissal from the school. As things were, he was merely confirmed in his bad opinion of Miss Jethro; and he was induced, on reflection, to keep his discovery to himself.

"If poor Miss Emily saw the old lady exhibited in the character of an informer," he thought, "what a blow would be struck at her innocent respect for the memory of her aunt!"

CHAPTER XIX.
SIR JERVIS REDWOOD.

In the meantime, Emily, left by herself, had her own correspondence to occupy her attention. Besides the letter from Cecilia (directed to the care of Sir Jervis Redwood), she had received some lines addressed to her by Sir Jervis himself. The two inclosures had been secured in a sealed envelope, directed to the cottage.

If Alban Morris had been indeed the person trusted as messenger by Sir Jervis, the conclusion that followed filled Emily with overpowering emotions of curiosity and surprise.

Having no longer the motive of serving and protecting her, Alban must, nevertheless, have taken the journey to Northumberland. He must have gained Sir Jervis Redwood's favor and confidence--and he might even have been a guest at the baronet's country seat--when Cecilia's letter arrived. What did it mean?

Emily looked back at her experience of her last day at school, and recalled her consultation with Alban on the subject of Mrs. Rook. Was he still bent on clearing up his suspicions of Sir Jervis's housekeeper? And, with that end in view, had he followed the woman, on her return to her master's place of abode?

Suddenly, almost irritably, Emily snatched up Sir Jervis's letter. Before the doctor had come in, she had glanced at it, and had thrown it aside in her impatience to read what Cecilia had written. In her present altered frame of mind, she was inclined to think that Sir Jervis might be the more interesting correspondent of the two.

On returning to his letter, she was disappointed at the outset.

In the first place, his handwriting was so abominably bad that she was obliged to guess at his meaning. In the second place, he never hinted at the circumstances under which Cecilia's letter had been confided to the gentleman who had left it at her door.
She would once more have treated the baronet's communication with contempt--but for the discovery that it contained an offer of employment in London, addressed to herself.

Sir Jervis had necessarily been obliged to engage another secretary in Emily's absence. But he was still in want of a person to serve his literary interests in London. He had reason to believe that discoveries made by modern travelers in Central America had been reported from time to time by the English press; and he wished copies to be taken of any notices of this sort which might be found, on referring to the files of newspapers kept in the reading-room of the British Museum. If Emily considered herself capable of contributing in this way to the completeness of his great work on "the ruined cities," she had only to apply to his bookseller in London, who would pay her the customary remuneration and give her every assistance of which she might stand in need. The bookseller's name and address followed (with nothing legible but the two words "Bond Street"), and there was an end of Sir Jervis's proposal.

Emily laid it aside, deferring her answer until she had read Cecilia's letter.

CHAPTER XX.

THE REVEREND MILES MIRABEL.

"I am making a little excursion from the Engadine, my dearest of all dear friends. Two charming fellow-travelers take care of me; and we may perhaps get as far as the Lake of Como.

"My sister (already much improved in health) remains at St. Moritz with the old governess. The moment I know what exact course we are going to take, I shall write to Julia to forward any letters which arrive in my absence. My life, in this earthly paradise, will be only complete when I hear from my darling Emily.

"In the meantime, we are staying for the night at some interesting place, the name of which I have unaccountably forgotten; and here I am in my room, writing to you at last--dying to know if Sir Jervis has yet thrown himself at your feet, and offered to make you Lady Redwood with magnificent settlements.

"But you are waiting to hear who my new friends are. My dear, one of them is, next to yourself, the most delightful creature in existence. Society knows her as Lady Janeaway. I love her already, by her Christian name; she is my friend Doris. And she reciprocates my sentiments.

"You will now understand that union of sympathies made us acquainted with each other.

"If there is anything in me to be proud of, I think it must be my admirable appetite. And, if I have a passion, the name of it is Pastry. Here again, Lady Doris reciprocates my sentiments. We sit next to each other at the table d'hote.

"Good heavens, I have forgotten her husband! They have been married rather more than a month. Did I tell you that she is just two years older than I am?

"I declare I am forgetting him again! He is Lord Janeaway. Such a quiet modest man, and so easily amused. He carries with him everywhere a dirty little tin case, with air holes in the cover. He goes softly poking about among bushes and brambles, and under rocks, and behind old wooden houses. When he has caught some hideous insect that makes one shudder, he blushes with pleasure, and looks at his wife and me, and says, with the prettiest lisp: 'This is what I call enjoying the day.' To see the manner in which he obeys Her is, between ourselves, to feel proud of being a woman.

"Where was I? Oh, at the table d'hote.

"Never, Emily--I say it with a solemn sense of the claims of truth--never have I eaten such an infamous, abominable, maddeningly bad dinner, as the dinner they gave us on our first day at the hotel. I ask you if I am not patient; I appeal to your own recollection of occasions when I have exhibited extraordinary self-control. My dear, I held out until they brought the pastry round. I took one bite, and committed the most shocking offense against good manners at table that you can imagine. My handkerchief, my poor innocent handkerchief, received the horrid--please suppose the rest. My hair stands on end, when I think of it. Our neighbors at the table saw me. The coarse men laughed. The sweet young bride, sincerely feeling for me, said, 'Will you allow me to shake hands? I did exactly what you have done the day before yesterday.' Such was the beginning of my friendship with Lady Doris Janeaway.

"We are two resolute women--I mean that she is resolute, and that I follow her--and we have asserted our right of dining to our own satisfaction, by means of an interview with the chief cook.

"This interesting person is an ex-Zouave in the French army. Instead of making excuses, he confessed that the barbarous tastes of the English and American visitors had so discouraged him, that he had lost all pride and pleasure in the exercise of his art. As an example of what he meant, he mentioned his experience of two young Englishmen who could speak no foreign language. The waiters reported that they objected to their breakfasts, and especially to the eggs. Thereupon (to translate the Frenchman's own way of putting it) he exhausted himself in exquisite preparations of eggs. Eggs a la tripe, au gratin, a l'Aurore, a la Dauphine, a la Poulette, a la Tartare, a la Venitiennne, a la Bordelaise, and so on, and so on. Still the two young gentlemen were not satisfied. The ex-Zouave, infuriated; wounded in his honor, disgraced as a professor, insisted on an explanation. What, in heaven's name, did they want for breakfast? They wanted boiled eggs; and a fish which they called a Bloaterre. It was impossible, he said, to
express his contempt for the English idea of a breakfast, in the presence of ladies. You know how a cat expresses herself in the presence of a dog--and you will understand the allusion. Oh, Emily, what dinners we have had, in our own room, since we spoke to that noble cook!

"Have I any more news to send you? Are you interested, my dear, in eloquent young clergymen?

"On our first appearance at the public table we noticed a remarkable air of depression among the ladies. Had some adventurous gentleman tried to climb a mountain, and failed? Had disastrous political news arrived from England; a defeat of the Conservatives, for instance? Had a revolution in the fashions broken out in Paris, and had all our best dresses become of no earthly value to us? I applied for information to the only lady present who shone on the company with a cheerful face--my friend Doris, of course. "'What day was yesterday?' she asked.

"'Sunday,' I answered.

"'Of all melancholy Sundays,' she continued, the most melancholy in the calendar. Mr. Miles Mirabel preached his farewell sermon, in our temporary chapel upstairs.'

"And you have not recovered it yet?"

"'We are all heart-broken, Miss Wyvil.'

"'This naturally interested me. I asked what sort of sermons Mr. Mirabel preached. Lady Janeaway said: 'Come up to our room after dinner. The subject is too distressing to be discussed in public.'

"She began by making me personally acquainted with the reverend gentleman--that is to say, she showed me the photographic portraits of him. They were two in number. One only presented his face. The other exhibited him at full length, adorned in his surplice. Every lady in the congregation had received the two photographs as a farewell present. 'My portraits,' Lady Doris remarked, 'are the only complete specimens. The others have been irretrievably ruined by tears.'

"You will now expect a personal description of this fascinating man. What the photographs failed to tell me, my friend was so kind as to complete from the resources of her own experience. Here is the result presented to the best of my ability.

"He is young--not yet thirty years of age. His complexion is fair; his features are delicate, his eyes are clear blue. He has pretty hands, and rings prettier still. And such a voice, and such manners! You will say there are plenty of pet Parsons who answer to this description. Wait a little--I have kept his chief distinction till the last. His beautiful light hair flows in profusion over his shoulders; and his glossy beard waves, at apostolic length, down to the lower buttons of his waistcoat.

"What do you think of the Reverend Miles Mirabel now?

"The life and adventures of our charming young clergyman, bear eloquent testimony to the saintly patience of his disposition, under trials which would have overwhelmed an ordinary man. (Lady Doris, please notice, quotes in this place the language of his admirers; and I report Lady Doris.)

"He has been clerk in a lawyer's office--unjustly dismissed. He has given readings from Shakespeare--infamously neglected. He has been secretary to a promenade concert company--deceived by a penniless manager. He has been employed in negotiations for making foreign railways--repudiated by an unprincipled Government. He has been translator to a publishing house--declared incapable by envious newspapers and reviews. He has taken refuge in dramatic criticism--dismissed by a corrupt editor. Through all these means of purification for the priestly career, he passed at last into the one sphere that was worthy of him: he entered the Church, under the protection of influential friends. Oh, happy change! From that moment his labors have been blessed. Twice already he has been presented with silver tea-pots filled with sovereigns. Go where he may, precious sympathies environ him; and domestic affection places his knife and fork at innumerable family tables. After a continental career, which will leave undying recollections, he is now recalled to England--at the suggestion of a person of distinction in the Church, who prefers a mild climate. It will now be his valued privilege to represent an absent rector in a country living; remote from cities, secluded in pastoral solitude, among simple breeders of sheep. May the shepherd prove worthy of the flock!

"Here again, my dear, I must give the merit where the merit is due. This memoir of Mr. Mirabel is not of my writing. It formed part of his farewell sermon, preserved in the memory of Lady Doris--and it shows (once more in the language of his admirers) that the truest humility may be found in the character of the most gifted man.

"Let me only add, that you will have opportunities of seeing and hearing this popular preacher, when circumstances permit him to address congregations in the large towns. I am at the end of my news; and I begin to feel--after this long, long letter--that it is time to go to bed. Need I say that I have often spoken of you to Doris, and that she entreats you to be her friend as well as mine, when we meet again in England?

"Good-by, darling, for the present. With fondest love, Your CECILIA."

"P.S.--I have formed a new habit. In case of feeling hungry in the night, I keep a box of chocolate under the pillow. You have no idea what a comfort it is. If I ever meet with the man who fulfills my ideal, I shall make it a
condition of the marriage settlement, that I am to have chocolate under the pillow."

CHAPTER XXI

POLLY AND SALLY.

Without a care to trouble her; abroad or at home, finding inexhaustible varieties of amusement; seeing new places, making new acquaintances—what a disheartening contrast did Cecilia's happy life present to the life of her friend! Who, in Emily's position, could have read that joyously-written letter from Switzerland, and not have lost heart and faith, for the moment at least, as the inevitable result?

A buoyant temperment is of all moral qualities the most precious, in this respect; it is the one force in us—when virtuous resolution proves insufficient—which resists by instinct the stealthy approaches of despair. "I shall only cry," Emily thought, "if I stay at home; better go out."

Observant persons, accustomed to frequent the London parks, can hardly have failed to notice the number of solitary strangers sadly endeavoring to vary their lives by taking a walk. They linger about the flower-beds; they sit for hours on the benches; they look with patient curiosity at other people who have companions; they notice ladies on horseback and children at play, with submissive interest; some of the men find company in a pipe, without appearing to enjoy it; some of the women find a substitute for dinner, in little dry biscuits wrapped in crumpled scraps of paper; they are not sociable; they are hardly ever seen to make acquaintance with each other; perhaps they are shame-faced, or proud, or sullen; perhaps they despair of others, being accustomed to despair of themselves; perhaps they have their reasons for never venturing to encounter curiosity, or their vices which dread detection, or their virtues which suffer hardship with the resignation that is sufficient for itself. The one thing certain is, that these unfortunate people resist discovery. We know that they are strangers in London—and we know no more.

And Emily was one of them.

Among the other forlorn wanderers in the Parks, there appeared latterly a trim little figure in black (with the face protected from notice behind a crape veil), which was beginning to be familiar, day after day, to nursemaids and children, and to rouse curiosity among harmless solitaries meditating on benches, and idle vagabonds strolling over the grass. The woman-servant, whom the considerate doctor had provided, was the one person in Emily's absence left to take care of the house. There was no other creature who could be a companion to the friendless girl. Mrs. Ellmother had never shown herself again since the funeral. Mrs. Mosey could not forget that she had been (no matter how politely) requested to withdraw. To whom could Emily say, "Let us go out for a walk?" She had communicated the news of her aunt's death to Miss Ladd, at Brighton; and had heard from Francine. The worthy schoolmistress had written to her with the truest kindness. "Choose your own time, my poor child, and come and stay with me at Brighton; the sooner the better." Emily shrank—not from accepting the invitation—but from encountering Francine. The hard West Indian heiress looked harder than ever with a pen in her hand. Her letter announced that she was "getting on wretchedly with her studies (which she hated); she found the masters appointed to instruct her ugly and disagreeable (and loathed the sight of them); she had taken a dislike to Miss Ladd (and time only confirmed that unfavorable impression); Brighton was always the same; the sea was always the same; the drives were always the same. Francine felt a presiment that she should do something desperate, unless Emily joined her, and made Brighton endurable behind the horrid schoolmistress's back." Solitude in London was a privilege and a pleasure, viewed as the alternative to such companionship as this.

Emily wrote gratefully to Miss Ladd, and asked to be excused.

Other days had passed drearily since that time; but the one day that had brought with it Cecilia's letter set past happiness and present sorrow together so vividly and so cruelly that Emily's courage sank. She had forced back the tears, in her lonely home; she had gone out to seek consolation and encouragement under the sunny sky—to find comfort for her sore heart in the radiant summer beauty of flowers and grass, in the sweet breathing of the air, in the happy heavenward soaring of the birds. No! Mother Nature is stepmother to the sick at heart. Soon, too soon, she could hardly see where she went. Again and again she resolutely cleared her eyes, under the shelter of her veil, when passing strangers noticed her; and again and again the tears found their way back. Oh, if the girls at the school were to see her now—the girls who used to say in their moments of sadness, "Let us go to Emily and be cheered"—would they know her again? She sat down to rest and recover herself on the nearest bench. It was unoccupied. No passing footsteps were audible on the remote path to which she had strayed. Solitude at home! Solitude in the Park! Where was Cecilia at that moment? In Italy, among the lake s and mountains, happy in the company of her light-hearted friend.

The lonely interval passed, and persons came near. Two sisters, girls like herself, stopped to rest on the bench.

They were full of their own interests; they hardly looked at the stranger in mourning garments. The younger sister was to be married, and the elder was to be bridesmaid. They talked of their dresses and their presents; they compared the dashing bridegroom of one with the timid lover of the other; they laughed over their own small sallies of wit, over their joyous dreams of the future, over their opinions of the guests invited to the wedding. Too joyfully
restless to remain inactive any longer, they jumped up again from the seat. One of them said, "Polly, I'm too happy!" and danced as she walked away. The other cried, "Sally, for shame!" and laughed, as if she had hit on the most irresistible joke that ever was made.

Emily rose and went home.

By some mysterious influence which she was unable to trace, the boisterous merriment of the two girls had roused in her a sense of revolt against the life that she was leading. Change, speedy change, to some occupation that would force her to exert herself, presented the one promise of brighter days that she could see. To feel this was to be inevitably reminded of Sir Jervis Redwood. Here was a man, who had never seen her, transformed by the incomprehensible operation of Chance into the friend of whom she stood in need—the friend who pointed the way to a new world of action, the busy world of readers in the library of the Museum.

Early in the new week, Emily had accepted Sir Jervis's proposal, and had so interested the bookseller to whom she had been directed to apply, that he took it on himself to modify the arbitrary instructions of his employer.

"The old gentleman has no mercy on himself, and no mercy on others," he explained, "where his literary labors are concerned. You must spare yourself, Miss Emily. It is not only absurd, it's cruel, to expect you to ransack old newspapers for discoveries in Yucatan, from the time when Stephens published his 'Travels in Central America'—nearly forty years since! Begin with back numbers published within a few years—say five years from the present date—and let us see what your search over that interval will bring forth."

Accepting this friendly advice, Emily began with the newspaper-volume dating from New Year's Day, 1876.

The first hour of her search strengthened the sincere sense of gratitude with which she remembered the bookseller's kindness. To keep her attention steadily fixed on the one subject that interested her employer, and to resist the temptation to read those miscellaneous items of news which especially interest women, put her patience and resolution to a merciless test. Happily for herself, her neighbors on either side were no idlers. To see them so absorbed over their work that they never once looked at her, after the first moment when she took her place between them, was to find exactly the example of which she stood most in need. As the hours wore on, she pursued her weary way, down one column and up another, resigned at least (if not quite reconciled yet) to her task. Her labors ended, for the day, with such encouragement as she might derive from the conviction of having, thus far, honestly pursued a useless search.

News was waiting for her when she reached home, which raised her sinking spirits.

On leaving the cottage that morning she had given certain instructions, relating to the modest stranger who had taken charge of her correspondence—in case of his paying a second visit, during her absence at the Museum. The first words spoken by the servant, on opening the door, informed her that the unknown gentleman had called again.

This time he had boldly left his card. There was the welcome name that she had expected to see--Alban Morris.

CHAPTER XXII.

ALBAN MORRIS.

Having looked at the card, Emily put her first question to the servant.

"Did you tell Mr. Morris what your orders were?" she asked.

"Yes, miss; I said I was to have shown him in, if you had been at home. Perhaps I did wrong; I told him what you told me when you went out this morning--I said you had gone to read at the Museum."

"What makes you think you did wrong?"

"Well, miss, he didn't say anything, but he looked upset."

"Do you mean that he looked angry?"

The servant shook her head. "Not exactly angry--puzzled and put out."

"Did he leave any message?"

"He said he would call later, if you would be so good as to receive him."

In half an hour more, Alban and Emily were together again. The light fell full on her face as she rose to receive him.

"Oh, how you have suffered!"

The words escaped him before he could restrain himself. He looked at her with the tender sympathy, so precious to women, which she had not seen in the face of any human creature since the loss of her aunt. Even the good doctor's efforts to console her had been efforts of professional routine—the inevitable result of his life-long familiarity with sorrow and death. While Alban's eyes rested on her, Emily felt her tears rising. In the fear that he might misinterpret her reception of him, she made an effort to speak with some appearance of composure.

"I lead a lonely life," she said; "and I can well understand that my face shows it. You are one of my very few friends, Mr. Morris"—the tears rose again; it discouraged her to see him standing irresolute, with his hat in his hand, fearful of intruding on her. "Indeed, indeed, you are welcome," she said, very earnestly.

In those sad days her heart was easily touched. She gave him her hand for the second time. He held it gently for
a moment. Every day since they had parted she had been in his thoughts; she had become dearer to him than ever.

He was too deeply affected to trust himself to answer. That silence pleaded for him as nothing had pleaded for him
yet. In her secret self she remembered with wonder how she had received his confession in the school garden. It was
a little hard on him, surely, to have forbidden him even to hope.

Conscious of her own weakness—even while giving way to it—she felt the necessity of turning his attention from
herself. In some confusion, she pointed to a chair at her side, and spoke of his first visit, when he had left her letters
at the door. Having confided to him all that she had discovered, and all that she had guessed, on that occasion, it was
by an easy transition that she alluded next to the motive for his journey to the North.

"I thought it might be suspicion of Mrs. Rook," she said. "Was I mistaken?"

"No; you were right."

"They were serious suspicions, I suppose?"

"Certainly! I should not otherwise have devoted my holiday-time to clearing them up."

"May I know what they were?"

"I am sorry to disappoint you," he began.

"But you would rather not answer my question," she interposed.

"I would rather hear you tell me if you have made any other guess."

"One more, Mr. Morris. I guessed that you had become acquainted with Sir Jervis Redwood."

"For the second time, Miss Emily, you have arrived at a sound conclusion. My one hope of finding opportunities
for observing Sir Jervis's housekeeper depended on my chance of gaining admission to Sir Jervis's house."

"How did you succeed? Perhaps you provided yourself with a letter of introduction?"

"I knew nobody who could introduce me," Alban replied. "As the event proved, a letter would have been
needless. Sir Jervis introduced himself—and, more wonderful still, he invited me to his house at our first interview."

"Sir Jervis introduced himself?" Emily repeated, in amazement. "From Cecilia's description of him, I should
have thought he was the last person in the world to do that!"

Alban smiled. "And you would like to know how it happened?" he suggested.

"The very favor I was going to ask of you," she replied.

Instead of at once complying with her wishes, he paused—hesitated—and made a strange request. "Will you
forgive my rudeness, if I ask leave to walk up and down the room while I talk? I am a restless man. Walking up and
down helps me to express myself freely."

Her face brightened for the first time. "How like You that is!" she exclaimed.

Alban looked at her with surprise and delight. She had betrayed an interest in studying his character, which he
appreciated at its full value. "I should never have dared to hope," he said, "that you knew me so well already."

"You are forgetting your story," she reminded him.

He moved to the opposite side of the room, where there were fewer impediments in the shape of furniture. With
his head down, and his hands crossed behind him, he paced to and fro. Habit made him express himself in his usual
quaint way—but he became embarrassed as he went on. Was he disturbed by his recollections? or by the fear of
taking Emily into his confidence too freely?

"Different people have different ways of telling a story," he said. "Mine is the methodical way—I begin at the
beginning. We will start, if you please, in the railway—we will proceed in a one-horse chaise—and we will stop at a
village, situated in a hole. It was the nearest place to Sir Jervis's house, and it was therefore my destination. I picked
out the biggest of the cottages—I mean the huts—and asked the woman at the door if she had a bed to let. She
evidently thought me either mad or drunk. I wasted no time in persuasion; the right person to plead my cause was
asleep in her arms. I began by admiring the baby; and I ended by taking the baby's portrait. From that moment I
became a member of the family—the member who had his own way. Besides the room occupied by the husband and
wife, there was a sort of kennel in which the husband's brother slept. He was dismissed (with five shillings of mine
to comfort him) to find shelter somewhere else; and I was promoted to the vacant place. It is my misfortune to be
tall. When I went to bed, I slept with my head on the pillow, and my feet out of the window. Very cool and pleasant
in summer weather. The next morning, I set my trap for Sir Jervis."

"Your trap?" Emily repeated, wondering what he meant.

"I went out to sketch from Nature," Alban continued. "Can anybody (with or without a title, I don't care), living
in a lonely country house, see a stranger hard at work with a color-box and brushes, and not stop to look at what he
is doing? Three days passed, and nothing happened. I was quite patient; the grand open country all round me offered
lessons of inestimable value in what we call aerial perspective. On the fourth day, I was absorbed over the hardest of
all hard tasks in landscape art, studying the clouds straight from Nature. The magnificent moorland silence was
suddenly profaned by a man's voice, speaking (or rather croaking) behind me. 'The worst curse of human life,' the
voice said, 'is the detestable necessity of taking exercise. I hate losing my time; I hate fine scenery; I hate fresh air; I
hate a pony. Go on, you brute!' Being too deeply engaged with the clouds to look round, I had supposed this pretty speech to be addressed to some second person. Nothing of the sort; the croaking voice had a habit of speaking to itself. In a minute more, there came within my range of view a solitary old man, mounted on a rough pony."

"Was it Sir Jervis?"

Alban hesitated.

"It looked more like the popular notion of the devil," he said.

"Oh, Mr. Morris!"

"I give you my first impression, Miss Emily, for what it is worth. He had his high-peaked hat in his hand, to keep his head cool. His wavy iron-gray hair looked like hair standing on end; his bushy eyebrows curled upward toward his narrow temples; his horrid old globular eyes stared with a wicked brightness; his pointed beard hid his chin; he was covered from his throat to his ankles in a loose black garment, something between a coat and a cloak; and, to complete him, he had a club foot. I don't doubt that Sir Jervis Redwood is the earthly alias which he finds convenient—but I stick to that first impression which appeared to surprise you. 'Ha! an artist; you seem to be the sort of man I want!' In those terms he introduced himself. Observe, if you please, that my trap caught him the moment he came my way. Who wouldn't be an artist?"

"Did he take a liking to you?" Emily inquired.

"Not he! I don't believe he ever took a liking to anybody in his life."

"Then how did you get your invitation to his house?"

"That's the amusing part of it, Miss Emily. Give me a little breathing time, and you shall hear."

CHAPTER XXIII.

MISS REDWOOD.

"I got invited to Sir Jervis's house," Alban resumed, "by treating the old savage as unceremoniously as he had treated me. That's an idle trade of yours,' he said, looking at my sketch. 'Other ignorant people have made the same remark,' I answered. He rode away, as if he was not used to be spoken to in that manner, and then thought better of it, and came back. 'Do you understand wood engraving?' he asked. 'Yes.' 'And etching?' 'I have practiced etching myself.' 'Are you a Royal Academician?' 'I'm a drawing-master at a ladies' school.' 'Whose school?' 'Miss Ladd's.' 'Damn it, you know the girl who ought to have been my secretary.' I am not quite sure whether you will take it as a compliment—Sir Jervis appeared to view you in the light of a reference to my respectability. At any rate, he went on with his questions. 'How long do you stop in these parts?' 'I haven't made up my mind.' 'Look here; I want to consult you—are you listening?' 'No; I'm sketching.' He burst into a horrid scream. I asked if he felt himself taken ill. 'Ill?' he said—'I'm laughing.' It was a diabolical laugh, in one syllable—not 'ha! ha! ha!' only 'ha!'—and it made him look wonderfully like that eminent person, whom I persist in thinking he resembles. 'You're an impudent dog,' he said; 'where are you living?' He was so delighted when he heard of my uncomfortable position in the kennel-bedroom, that he offered his hospitality on the spot. 'I can't go to you in such a pigstye as that,' he said; 'you must come to me. What's your name?' 'Alban Morris; what's yours?' 'Jervis Redwood. Pack up your traps when you've done your job, and come and try my kennel. There it is, in a corner of your drawing, and devilish like, too.' I packed up my traps, and I tried his kennel. And now you have had enough of Sir Jervis Redwood."

"Not half enough!" Emily answered. "Your story leaves off just at the interesting moment. I want you to take me to Sir Jervis's house."

"And I want you, Miss Emily, to take me to the British Museum. Don't let me startle you! When I called here earlier in the day, I was told that you had gone to the reading-room. Is your reading a secret?"

His manner, when he made that reply, suggested to Emily that there was some foregone conclusion in his mind, which he was putting to the test. She answered without alluding to the impression which he had produced on her.

"My reading is no secret. I am only consulting old newspapers."

"And going back from that time," he asked eagerly; "to earlier dates still?"

"No—just the contrary—advancing from 'seventy-six' to the present time."

He suddenly turned pale—and tried to hide his face from her by looking out of the window. For a moment, his agitation deprived him of his presence of mind. In that moment, she saw that she had alarmed him.

"What have I said to frighten you?" she asked.

He tried to assume a tone of commonplace gallantry. "There are limits even to your power over me," he replied. "Whatever else you may do, you can never frighten me. Are you searching those old newspapers with any particular
object in view?"

"Yes."

"May I know what it is?"

"May I know why I frightened you?"

He began to walk up and down the room again--then checked himself abruptly, and appealed to her mercy.

"Don't be hard on me," he pleaded. "I am so fond of you--oh, forgive me! I only mean that it distresses me to have any concealments from you. If I could open my whole heart at this moment, I should be a happier man."

She understood him and believed him. "My curiosity shall never embarrass you again," she answered warmly. "I won't even remember that I wanted to hear how you got on in Sir Jervis's house."

His gratitude seized the opportunity of taking her harmlessly into his confidence. "As Sir Jervis's guest," he said, "my experience is at your service. Only tell me how I can interest you."

She replied, with some hesitation, "I should like to know what happened when you first saw Mrs. Rook." To her surprise and relief, he at once complied with her wishes.

"We met," he said, "on the evening when I first entered the house. Sir Jervis took me into the dining-room--and there sat Miss Redwood, with a large black cat on her lap. Older than her brother, taller than her brother, leaner than her brother--with strange stony eyes, and a skin like parchment--she looked (if I may speak in contradictions) like a living corpse. I was presented, and the corpse revived. The last lingering relics of former good breeding showed themselves faintly in her brow and in her smile. You will hear more of Miss Redwood presently. In the meanwhile, Sir Jervis made me reward his hospitality by professional advice. He wished me to decide whether the artists whom he had employed to illustrate his wonderful book had cheated him by overcharges and bad work--and Mrs. Rook was sent to fetch the engravings from his study upstairs. You remember her petrified appearance, when she first read the inscription on your locket? The same result followed when she found herself face to face with me. I saluted her civilly--she was deaf and blind to my politeness. Her master snatched the illustrations out of her hand, and told her to leave the room. She stood stockstill, staring helplessly. Sir Jervis looked round at his sister; and I followed his example. Miss Redwood was observing the housekeeper too attentively to notice anything else; her brother was obliged to speak to her. 'Try Rook with the bell,' he said. Miss Redwood took a fine old bronze hand-bell from the table at her side, and rang it. At the shrill silvery sound of the bell, Mrs. Rook put her hand to her head as if the ringing had hurt her--turned instantly, and left us. 'Nobody can manage Rook but my sister,' Sir Jervis explained; 'Rook is crazy.' Miss Redwood differed with him. 'No!' she said. Only one word, but there were volumes of contradiction in it. Sir Jervis looked at me slyly; meaning, perhaps, that he thought his sister crazy too. The dinner was brought in at the same moment, and my attention was diverted to Mrs. Rook's husband."

"What was he like?" Emily asked.

"I really can't tell you; he was one of those essentially commonplace persons, whom one never looks at a second time. His dress was shabby, his head was bald, and his hands shook when he waited on us at table--and that is all I remember. Sir Jervis and I feasted on salt fish, mutton, and beer. Miss Redwood had cold broth, with a wine-glass full of rum poured into it by Mr. Rook. 'She's got no stomach,' her brother informed me; 'hot things come up again ten minutes after they have gone down her throat; she lives on that beastly mixture, and calls it broth-grog!' Miss Redwood sipped her elixir of life, and occasionally looked at me with an appearance of interest which I was at a loss to understand. Dinner being over, she rang her antique bell. The shabby old man-servant answered her call. 'Where's your wife?' she inquired. 'Ill, miss.' She took Mr. Rook's arm to go out, and stopped as she passed me. 'Come to my room, if you please, sir, to-morrow at two o'clock,' she said. Sir Jervis explained again: 'She's all to pieces in the morning' (he invariably called his sister 'She'); 'and gets patched up toward the middle of the day. Death has forgotten her, that's about the truth of it.' He lighted his pipe and pondered over the hieroglyphics found among the ruined cities of Yucatan; I lighted my pipe, and read the only book I could find in the dining-room--a dreadful record of shipwrecks and disasters at sea. When the room was full of tobacco-smoke we fell asleep in our chairs--and when we awoke again we got up and went to bed. There is the true story of my first evening at Redwood Hall."

Emily begged him to go on. "You have interested me in Miss Redwood," she said. "You kept your appointment, of course?"

"I kept my appointment in no very pleasant humor. Encouraged by my favorable report of the illustrations which he had submitted to my judgment, Sir Jervis proposed to make me useful to him in a new capacity. 'You have nothing particular to do,' he said, 'suppose you clean my pictures?' I gave him one of my black looks, and made no other reply. My interview with his sister tried my powers of self-command in another way. Miss Redwood declared her purpose in sending for me the moment I entered the room. Without any preliminary remarks--speaking slowly and emphatically, in a wonderfully strong voice for a woman of her age--she said, 'I have a favor to ask of you, sir. I want you to tell me what Mrs. Rook has done.' I was so staggered that I stared at her like a fool. She went on: 'I suspected Mrs. Rook, sir, of having guilty remembrances on her conscience before she had been a week in our
service. Can you imagine my astonishment when I heard that Miss Redwood's view of Mrs. Rook was my view? Finding that I still said nothing, the old lady entered into details: 'We arranged, sir,' (she persisted in calling me 'sir,' with the formal politeness of the old school) -- 'we arranged, sir, that Mrs. Rook and her husband should occupy the bedroom next to mine, so that I might have her near me in case of my being taken ill in the night. She looked at the door between the two rooms--suspicious! She asked if there was any objection to her changing to another room--suspicious! suspicious! Pray take a seat, sir, and tell me which Mrs. Rook is guilty of--theft or murder?' "

"What a dreadful old woman!" Emily exclaimed. "How did you answer her?"

"I told her, with perfect truth, that I knew nothing of Mrs. Rook's secrets. Miss Redwood's humor took a satirical turn. 'Allow me to ask, sir, whether your eyes were shut, when our housekeeper found herself unexpectedly in your presence?' I referred the old lady to her brother's opinion. 'Sir Jervis believes Mrs. Rook to be crazy,' I reminded her. 'Do you refuse to trust me, sir?' 'I have no information to give you, madam.' She waved her skinny old hand in the direction of the door. I made my bow, and retired. She called me back. 'Old women used to be prophets, sir, in the bygone time,' she said. 'I will venture on a prediction. You will be the means of depriving us of the services of Mr. and Mrs. Rook. If you will be so good as to stay here a day or two longer you will hear that those two people have given us notice to quit. It will be her doing, mind--he is a mere cypher. I wish you good-morning.' Will you believe me, when I tell you that the prophecy was fulfilled?"

"Do you mean that they actually left the house?"

"They would certainly have left the house," Alban answered, "if Sir Jervis had not insisted on receiving the customary month's warning. He asserted his resolution by locking up the old husband in the pantry. His sister's suspicions never entered his head; the housekeeper's conduct (he said) simply proved that she was, what he had always considered her to be, crazy. 'A capital servant, in spite of that drawback,' he remarked; 'and you will see, I shall bring her to her senses.' The impression produced on me was naturally of a very different kind. While I was still uncertain how to entrap Mrs. Rook into confirming my suspicions, she herself had saved me the trouble. She had placed her own guilty interpretation on my appearance in the house--I had driven her away!"

Emily remained true to her resolution not to let her curiosity embarrass Alban again. But the unexpressed question was in her thoughts--"Of what guilt does he suspect Mrs. Rook? And, when he first felt his suspicions, was my father in his mind?"

Alban proceeded.

"I had only to consider next, whether I could hope to make any further discoveries, if I continued to be Sir Jervis's guest. The object of my journey had been gained; and I had no desire to be employed as picture-cleaner. Miss Redwood assisted me in arriving at a decision. I was sent for to speak to her again. The success of her prophecy had raised her spirits. She asked, with ironical humility, if I proposed to honor them by still remaining their guest, after the disturbance that I had provoked. I answered that I proposed to leave by the first train the next morning. 'Will it be convenient for you to travel to some place at a good distance from this part of the world?' she asked. I had my own reasons for going to London, and said so. 'Will you mention that to my brother this evening, just before we sit down to dinner?' she continued. 'And will you tell him plainly that you have no intention of returning to the North? I shall make use of Mrs. Rook's arm, as usual, to help me downstairs--and I will take care that she hears what you say. Without venturing on another prophecy, I will only hint to you that I have my own idea of what will happen; and I should like you to see for yourself, sir, whether my anticipations are realized.' Need I tell you that this strange old woman proved to be right once more? Mr. Rook was released; Mrs. Rook made humble apologies, and laid the whole blame on her husband's temper: and Sir Jervis bade me remark that his method had succeeded in bringing the housekeeper to her senses. Such were the results produced by the announcement of my departure for London--purposely made in Mrs. Rook's hearing. Do you agree with me, that my journey to Northumberland has not been taken in vain?"

Once more, Emily felt the necessity of controlling herself.

Alban had said that he had "reasons of his own for going to London." Could she venture to ask him what those reasons were? She could only persist in restraining her curiosity, and conclude that he would have mentioned his motive, if it had been (as she had at one time supposed) connected with herself. It was a wise decision. No earthly consideration would have induced Alban to answer her, if she had put the question to him.

All doubt of the correctness of his own first impression was now at an end; he was convinced that Mrs. Rook had been an accomplice in the crime committed, in 1877, at the village inn. His object in traveling to London was to consult the newspaper narrative of the murder. He, too, had been one of the readers at the Museum--had examined the back numbers of the newspaper--and had arrived at the conclusion that Emily's father had been the victim of the crime. Unless he found means to prevent it, her course of reading would take her from the year 1876 to the year 1877, and under that date, she would see the fatal report, heading the top of a column, and printed in conspicuous type.
In the meanwhile Emily had broken the silence, before it could lead to embarrassing results, by asking if Alban had seen Mrs. Rook again, on the morning when he left Sir Jervis's house.

"There was nothing to be gained by seeing her," Alban replied. "Now that she and her husband had decided to remain at Redwood Hall, I knew where to find her in case of necessity. As it happened I saw nobody, on the morning of my departure, but Sir Jervis himself. He still held to his idea of having his pictures cleaned for nothing. 'If you can't do it yourself,' he said, 'couldn't you teach my secretary?' He described the lady whom he had engaged in your place as a 'nasty middle-aged woman with a perpetual cold in her head.' At the same time (he remarked) he was a friend to the women, 'because he got them cheap.' I declined to teach the unfortunate secretary the art of picture-cleaning. Finding me determined, Sir Jervis was quite ready to say good-by. But he made use of me to the last. He employed me as postman and saved a stamp. The letter addressed to you arrived at breakfast-time. Sir Jervis said, 'You are going to London; suppose you take it with you?"

"Did he tell you that there was a letter of his own inclosed in the envelope?"

"No. When he gave me the envelope it was already sealed."

Emily at once handed to him Sir Jervis's letter. "That will tell you who employs me at the Museum, and what my work is," she said.

He looked through the letter, and at once offered--eagerly offered--to help her.

"I have been a student in the reading-room at intervals, for years past," he said. "Let me assist you, and I shall have something to do in my holiday time." He was so anxious to be of use that he interrupted her before she could thank him. "Let us take alternate years," he suggested. "Did you not tell me you were searching the newspapers published in eighteen hundred and seventy-six?"

"Yes."

"Very well. I will take the next year. You will take the year after. And so on."

"You are very kind," she answered--"but I should like to propose an improvement on your plan."

"What improvement?" he asked, rather sharply.

"If you will leave the five years, from 'seventy-six to 'eighty-one, entirely to me," she resumed, "and take the next five years, reckoning backward from 'seventy-six, you will help me to better purpose. Sir Jervis expects me to look for reports of Central American Explorations, through the newspapers of the last forty years; and I have taken the liberty of limiting the heavy task imposed on me. When I report my progress to my employer, I should like to say that I have got through ten years of the examination, instead of five. Do you see any objection to the arrangement I propose?"

He proved to be obstinate--incomprehensibly obstinate.

'Let us try my plan to begin with," he insisted. "While you are looking through 'seventy-six, let me be at work on 'seventy-seven. If you still prefer your own arrangement, after that, I will follow your suggestion with pleasure. Is it agreed?"

Her acute perception--enlightened by his tone as well as by his words--detected something under the surface already.

"It isn't agreed until I understand you a little better," she quietly replied. "I fancy you have some object of your own in view."

She spoke with her usual directness of look and manner. He was evidently disconcerted. "What makes you think so?" he asked.

"My own experience of myself makes me think so," she answered. "If I had some object to gain, I should persist in carrying it out--like you."

"Does that mean, Miss Emily, that you refuse to give way?"

"No, Mr. Morris. I have made myself disagreeable, but I know when to stop. I trust you--and submit."

If he had been less deeply interested in the accomplishment of his merciful design, he might have viewed Emily's sudden submission with some distrust. As it was, his eagerness to prevent her from discovering the narrative of the murder hurried him into an act of indiscretion. He made an excuse to leave her immediately, in the fear that she might change her mind.

"I have inexcusably prolonged my visit," he said. "If I presume on your kindness in this way, how can I hope that you will receive me again? We meet to-morrow in the reading-room."

He hastened away, as if he was afraid to let her say a word in reply.

Emily reflected.

"Is there something he doesn't want me to see, in the news of the year 'seventy-seven?' The one explanation which suggested itself to her mind assumed that form of expression--and the one method of satisfying her curiosity that seemed likely to succeed, was to search the volume which Alban had reserved for his own reading.

For two days they pursued their task together, seated at opposite desks. On the third day Emily was absent.
Was she ill?
She was at the library in the City, consulting the file of The Times for the year 1877.

CHAPTER XXIV.
MR. ROOK.
Emily's first day in the City library proved to be a day wasted.

She began reading the back numbers of the newspaper at haphazard, without any definite idea of what she was looking for. Conscious of the error into which her own impatience had led her, she was at a loss how to retrace the false step that she had taken. But two alternatives presented themselves: either to abandon the hope of making any discovery—or to attempt to penetrate Alban's motives by means of pure guesswork, pursued in the dark.

How was the problem to be solved? This serious question troubled her all through the evening, and kept her awake when she went to bed. In despair of her capacity to remove the obstacle that stood in her way, she decided on resuming her regular work at the Museum--turned her pillow to get at the cool side of it--and made up her mind to go asleep.

In the case of the wiser animals, the Person submits to Sleep. It is only the superior human being who tries the hopeless experiment of making Sleep submit to the Person. Wakeful on the warm side of the pillow, Emily remained wakeful on the cool side--thinking again and again of the interview with Alban which had ended so strangely.

Little by little, her mind passed the limits which had restrained it thus far. Alban's conduct in keeping his secret, in the matter of the newspapers, now began to associate itself with Alban's conduct in keeping that other secret, which concealed from her his suspicions of Mrs. Rook.

She started up in bed as the next possibility occurred to her.

In speaking of the disaster which had compelled Mr. and Mrs. Rook to close the inn, Cecilia had alluded to an inquest held on the body of the murdered man. Had the inquest been mentioned in the newspapers, at the time? And had Alban seen something in the report, which concerned Mrs. Rook?

Led by the new light that had fallen on her, Emily returned to the library the next morning with a definite idea of what she had to look for. Incapable of giving exact dates, Cecilia had informed her that the crime was committed "in the autumn." The month to choose, in beginning her examination, was therefore the month of August.

No discovery rewarded her. She tried September, next--with the same unsatisfactory results. On Monday the first of October she met with some encouragement at last. At the top of a column appeared a telegraphic summary of all that was then known of the crime. In the number for the Wednesday following, she found a full report of the proceedings at the inquest.

Passing over the preliminary remarks, Emily read the evidence with the closest attention.

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The jury having viewed the body, and having visited an outhouse in which the murder had been committed, the first witness called was Mr. Benjamin Rook, landlord of the Hand-in-Hand inn.

On the evening of Sunday, September 30th, 1877, two gentlemen presented themselves at Mr. Rook's house, under circumstances which especially excited his attention.

The youngest of the two was short, and of fair complexion. He carried a knapsack, like a gentleman on a pedestrian excursion; his manners were pleasant; and he was decidedly good-looking. His companion, older, taller, and darker--and a finer man altogether--leaned on his arm and seemed to be exhausted. In every respect they were singularly unlike each other. The younger stranger (excepting little half-whiskers) was clean shaved. The elder wore his whole beard. Not knowing their names, the landlord distinguished them, at the coroner's suggestion, as the fair gentleman, and the dark gentleman.

It was raining when the two arrived at the inn. There were signs in the heavens of a stormy night.
On accosting the landlord, the fair gentleman volunteered the following statement:
Approaching the village, he had been startled by seeing the dark gentleman (a total stranger to him) stretched prostrate on the grass at the roadside--so far as he could judge, in a swoon. Having a flask with brandy in it, he revived the fainting man, and led him to the inn.

This statement was confirmed by a laborer, who was on his way to the village at the time.

The dark gentleman endeavored to explain what had happened to him. He had, as he supposed, allowed too long a time to pass (after an early breakfast that morning), without taking food: he could only attribute the fainting fit to that cause. He was not liable to fainting fits. What purpose (if any) had brought him into the neighborhood of Zeeland, he did not state. He had no intention of remaining at the inn, except for refreshment; and he asked for a carriage to take him to the railway station.

The fair gentleman, seeing the signs of bad weather, desired to remain in Mr. Rook's house for the night, and proposed to resume his walking tour the next day.

Excepting the case of supper, which could be easily provided, the landlord had no choice but to disappoint both
his guests. In his small way of business, none of his customers wanted to hire a carriage—even if he could have afforded to keep one. As for beds, the few rooms which the inn contained were all engaged; including even the room occupied by himself and his wife. An exhibition of agricultural implements had been opened in the neighborhood, only two days since; and a public competition between rival machines was to be decided on the coming Monday. Not only was the Hand-in-Hand inn crowded, but even the accommodation offered by the nearest town had proved barely sufficient to meet the public demand.

The gentlemen looked at each other and agreed that there was no help for it but to hurry the supper, and walk to the railway station—a distance of between five and six miles—in time to catch the last train.

While the meal was being prepared, the rain held off for a while. The dark man asked his way to the post-office and went out by himself.

He came back in about ten minutes, and sat down afterward to supper with his companion. Neither the landlord, nor any other person in the public room, noticed any change in him on his return. He was a grave, quiet sort of person, and (unlike the other one) not much of a talker.

As the darkness came on, the rain fell again heavily; and the heavens were black.

A flash of lightning startled the gentlemen when they went to the window to look out: the thunderstorm began. It was simply impossible that two strangers to the neighborhood could find their way to the station, through storm and darkness, in time to catch the train. With or without bedrooms, they must remain at the inn for the night. Having already given up their own room to their lodgers, the landlord and landlady had no other place to sleep in than the kitchen. Next to the kitchen, and communicating with it by a door, was an outhouse; used, partly as a scullery, partly as a lumber-room. There was an old truckle-bed among the lumber, on which one of the gentlemen might rest. A mattress on the floor could be provided for the other. After adding a table and a basin, for the purposes of the toilet, the accommodation which Mr. Rook was able to offer came to an end.

The travelers agreed to occupy this makeshift bed-chamber.

The thunderstorm passed away; but the rain continued to fall heavily. Soon after eleven the guests at the inn retired for the night. There was some little discussion between the two travelers, as to which of them should take possession of the truckle-bed. It was put an end to by the fair gentleman, in his own pleasant way. He proposed to "toss up for it"—and he lost. The dark gentleman went to bed first; the fair gentleman followed, after waiting a while. Mr. Rook took his knapsack into the outhouse; and arranged on the table his appliances for the toilet—contained in a leather roll, and including a razor—ready for use in the morning.

Having previously barred the second door of the outhouse, which led into the yard, Mr. Rook fastened the other door, the lock and bolts of which were on the side of the kitchen. He then secured the house door, and the shutters over the lower windows. Returning to the kitchen, he noticed that the time was ten minutes short of midnight. Soon afterward, he and his wife went to bed.

Nothing happened to disturb Mr. and Mrs. Rook during the night.

At a quarter to seven the next morning, he got up; his wife being still asleep. He had been instructed to wake the gentlemen early; and he knocked at their door. Receiving no answer, after repeatedly knocking, he opened the door and stepped into the outhouse.

At this point in his evidence, the witness's recollections appeared to overpow er him. "Give me a moment, gentlemen," he said to the jury. "I have had a dreadful fright; and I don't believe I shall get over it for the rest of my life."

The coroner helped him by a question: "What did you see when you opened the door?"

Mr. Rook answered: "I saw the dark man stretched out on his bed—dead, with a frightful wound in his throat. I saw an open razor, stained with smears of blood, at his side."

"Did you notice the door, leading into the yard?"

"It was wide open, sir. When I was able to look round me, the other traveler—I mean the man with the fair complexion, who carried the knapsack—was nowhere to be seen."

"What did you do, after making these discoveries?"

"I closed the yard door. Then I locked the other door, and put the key in my pocket. After that I roused the servant, and sent him to the constable—who lived near to us—while I ran for the doctor, whose house was at the other end of our village. The doctor sent his groom, on horseback, to the police-office in the town. When I returned to the inn, the constable was there—and he and the police took the matter into their own hands."

"You have nothing more to tell us?"

"Nothing more."

CHAPTER XXV

"J. B."

Mr. Rook having completed his evidence, the police authorities were the next witnesses examined.
They had not found the slightest trace of any attempt to break into the house in the night. The murdered man's gold watch and chain were discovered under his pillow. On examining his clothes the money was found in his purse, and the gold studs and sleeve buttons were left in his shirt. But his pocketbook (seen by witnesses who had not yet been examined) was missing. The search for visiting cards and letters had proved to be fruitless. Only the initials, "J. B.," were marked on his linen. He had brought no luggage with him to the inn. Nothing could be found which led to the discovery of his name or of the purpose which had taken him into that part of the country.

The police examined the outhouse next, in search of circumstantial evidence against the missing man.

He must have carried away his knapsack, when he took to flight, but he had been (probably) in too great a hurry to look for his razor—or perhaps too terrified to touch it, if it had attracted his notice. The leather roll, and the other articles used for his toilet, had been taken away. Mr. Rook identified the blood-stained razor. He had noticed overnight the name of the Belgian city, "Liege," engraved on it.

The yard was the next place inspected. Foot-steps were found on the muddy earth up to the wall. But the road on the other side had been recently mended with stones, and the trace of the fugitive was lost. Casts had been taken of the footsteps; and no other means of discovery had been left untried. The authorities in London had also been communicated with by telegraph.

The doctor being called, described a personal peculiarity, which he had noticed at the post-mortem examination, and which might lead to the identification of the murdered man.

As to the cause of death, the witness said it could be stated in two words. The internal jugular vein had been cut through, with such violence, judging by the appearances, that the wound could not have been inflicted, in the act of suicide, by the hand of the deceased person. No other injuries, and no sign of disease, was found on the body. The one cause of death had been Hemorrhage; and the one peculiarity which called for notice had been discovered in the mouth. Two of the front teeth, in the upper jaw, were false. They had been so admirably made to resemble the natural teeth on either side of them, in form and color, that the witness had only hit on the discovery by accidentally touching the inner side of the gum with one of his fingers.

The landlady was examined, when the doctor had retired. Mrs. Rook was able, in answering questions put to her, to give important information, in reference to the missing pocketbook.

Before retiring to rest, the two gentlemen had paid the bill--intending to leave the inn the first thing in the morning. The traveler with the knapsack paid his share in money. The other unfortunate gentleman looked into his purse, and found only a shilling and a sixpence in it. He asked Mrs. Rook if she could change a bank-note. She told him it could be done, provided the note was for no considerable sum of money. Upon that he opened his pocketbook (which the witness described minutely) and turned out the contents on the table. After searching among many Bank of England notes, some in one pocket of the book and some in another, he found a note of the value of five pounds. He thereupon settled his bill, and received the change from Mrs. Rook--her husband being in another part of the room, attending to the guests. She noticed a letter in an envelope, and a few cards which looked (to her judgment) like visiting cards, among the bank-notes which he had turned out on the table. When she returned to him with the change, he had just put them back, and was closing the pocketbook. She saw him place it in one of the breast pockets of his coat.

The fellow-traveler who had accompanied him to the inn was present all the time, sitting on the opposite side of the table. He made a remark when he saw the notes produced. He said, "Put all that money back--don't tempt a poor man like me!" It was said laughing, as if by way of a joke.

Mrs. Rook had observed nothing more that night; had slept as soundly as usual; and had been awakened when her husband knocked at the outhouse door, according to instructions received from the gentlemen, overnight.

Three of the guests in the public room corroborated Mrs. Rook's evidence. They were respectable persons, well and widely known in that part of Hampshire. Besides these, there were two strangers staying in the house. They referred the coroner to their employers--eminent manufacturers at Sheffield and Wolverhampton--whose testimony spoke for itself.

The last witness called was a grocer in the village, who kept the post-office.

On the evening of the 30th, a dark gentleman, wearing his beard, knocked at the door, and asked for a letter addressed to "J. B., Post-office, Zeeland." The letter had arrived by that morning's post; but, being Sunday evening, the grocer requested that application might be made for it the next morning. The stranger said the letter contained news, which it was of importance to him to receive without delay. Upon this, the grocer made an exception to customary rules and gave him the letter. He read it by the light of the lamp in the passage. It must have been short, for the reading was done in a moment. He seemed to think over it for a while; and then he turned round to go out. There was nothing to notice in his look or in his manner. The witness offered a remark on the weather; and the gentleman said, "Yes, it looks like a bad night"--and so went away.

The postmaster's evidence was of importance in one respect: it suggested the motive which had brought the
deceased to Zeeland. The letter addressed to "J. B." was, in all probability, the letter seen by Mrs. Rook among the contents of the pocketbook, spread out on the table.

The inquiry being, so far, at an end, the inquest was adjourned--on the chance of obtaining additional evidence, when the reported proceedings were read by the public.

. . . . . . . .

Consulting a later number of the newspaper Emily discovered that the deceased person had been identified by a witness from London.

Henry Forth, gentleman's valet, being examined, made the following statement:

He had read the medical evidence contained in the report of the inquest; and, believing that he could identify the deceased, had been sent by his present master to assist the object of the inquiry. Ten days since, being then out of place, he had answered an advertisement. The next day, he was instructed to call at Tracey's Hotel, London, at six o'clock in the evening, and to ask for Mr. James Brown. Arriving at the hotel he saw the gentleman for a few minutes only. Mr. Brown had a friend with him. After glancing over the valet's references, he said, "I haven't time enough to speak to you this evening. Call here to-morrow morning at nine o'clock." The gentleman who was present laughed, and said, "You won't be up!" Mr. Brown answered, "That won't matter; the man can come to my bedroom, and let me see how he understands his duties, on trial." At nine the next morning, Mr. Brown was reported to be still in bed; and the witness was informed of the number of the room. He knocked at the door. A drowsy voice inside said something, which he interpreted as meaning "Come in." He went in. The toilet-table was on his left hand, and the bed (with the lower curtain drawn) was on his right. He saw on the table a tumbler with a little water in it, and with two false teeth in the water. Mr. Brown started up in bed--looked at him furiously--abused him for daring to enter the room--and shouted to him to "get out." The witness, not accustomed to be treated in that way, felt naturally indignant, and at once withdrew--but not before he had plainly seen the vacant place which the false teeth had been made to fill. Perhaps Mr. Brown had forgotten that he had left his teeth on the table. Or perhaps he (the valet) had misunderstood what had been said to him when he knocked at the door. Either way, it seemed to be plain enough that the gentleman resented the discovery of his false teeth by a stranger.

Having concluded his statement the witness proceeded to identify the remains of the deceased.

He at once recognized the gentleman named James Brown, whom he had twice seen--once in the evening, and again the next morning--at Tracey's Hotel. In answer to further inquiries, he declared that he knew nothing of the family, or of the place of residence, of the deceased. He complained to the proprietor of the hotel of the rude treatment that he had received, and asked if Mr. Tracey knew anything of Mr. James Brown. Mr. Tracey knew nothing of him. On consulting the hotel book it was found that he had given notice to leave, that afternoon.

Before returning to London, the witness produced references which gave him an excellent character. He also left the address of the master who had engaged him three days since.

The last precaution adopted was to have the face of the corpse photographed, before the coffin was closed. On the same day the jury agreed on their verdict: "Willful murder against some person unknown."

. . . . . . . .

Two days later, Emily found a last allusion to the crime--extracted from the columns of the South Hampshire Gazette.

A relative of the deceased, seeing the report of the adjourned inquest, had appeared (accompanied by a medical gentleman); had seen the photograph; and had declared the identification by Henry Forth to be correct.

Among other particulars, now communicated for the first time, it was stated that the late Mr. James Brown had been unreasonably sensitive on the subject of his false teeth, and that the one member of his family who knew of his wearing them was the relative who now claimed his remains.

The claim having been established to the satisfaction of the authorities, the corpse was removed by railroad the same day. No further light had been thrown on the murder. The Handbill offering the reward, and describing the suspected man, had failed to prove of any assistance to the investigations of the police.

From that date, no further notice of the crime committed at the Hand-in-Hand inn appeared in the public journals.

. . . . . . . .

Emily closed the volume which she had been consulting, and thankfully acknowledged the services of the librarian.

The new reader had excited this gentleman's interest. Noticing how carefully she examined the numbers of the old newspaper, he looked at her, from time to time, wondering whether it was good news or bad of which she was in search. She read steadily and continuously; but she never rewarded his curiosity by any outward sign of the impression that had been produced on her. When she left the room there was nothing to remark in her manner; she looked quietly thoughtful--and that was all.
The librarian smiled--amused by his own folly. Because a stranger's appearance had attracted him, he had taken it for granted that circumstances of romantic interest must be connected with her visit to the library. Far from misleading him, as he supposed, his fancy might have been employed to better purpose, if it had taken a higher flight still--and had associated Emily with the fateful gloom of tragedy, in place of the brighter interest of romance.

There, among the ordinary readers of the day, was a dutiful and affectionate daughter following the dreadful story of the death of her father by murder, and believing it to be the story of a stranger--because she loved and trusted the person whose short-sighted mercy had deceived her. That very discovery, the dread of which had shaken the good doctor's firm nerves, had forced Alban to exclude from his confidence the woman whom he loved, and had driven the faithful old servant from the bedside of her dying mistress--that very discovery Emily had now made, with a face which never changed color, and a heart which beat at ease. Was the deception that had won this cruel victory over truth destined still to triumph in the days which were to come? Yes--if the life of earth is a foretaste of the life of hell. No--if a lie is a lie, be the merciful motive for the falsehood what it may. No--if all deceit contains in it the seed of retribution, to be ripened inexorably in the lapse of time.

CHAPTER XXVI.
MOTHER EVE.

The servant received Emily, on her return from the library, with a sly smile. "Here he is again, miss, waiting to see you."

She opened the parlor door, and revealed Alban Morris, as restless as ever, walking up and down the room.

"When I missed you at the Museum, I was afraid you might be ill," he said. "Ought I to have gone away, when my anxiety was relieved? Shall I go away now?"

"You must take a chair, Mr. Morris, and hear what I have to say for myself. When you left me after your last visit, I suppose I felt the force of example. At any rate I, like you, had my suspicions. I have been trying to confirm them--and I have failed."

He paused, with the chair in his hand. "Suspicions of Me?" he asked.

"Certainly! Can you guess how I have been employed for the last two days? No--not even your ingenuity can do that. I have been hard at work, in another reading-room, consulting the same back numbers of the same newspaper, which you have been examining at the British Museum. There is my confession--and now we will have some tea."

She moved to the fireplace, to ring the bell, and failed to see the effect produced on Alban by those lightly-uttered words. The common phrase is the only phrase that can describe it. He was thunderstruck.

"Yes," she resumed, "I have read the report of the inquest. If I know nothing else, I know that the murder at Zeeland can't be the discovery which you are bent on keeping from me. Don't be alarmed for the preservation of your secret! I am too much discouraged to try again."

The servant interrupted them by answering the bell; Alban once more escaped detection. Emily gave her orders with an approach to the old gayety of her school days. "Tea, as soon as possible--and let us have the new cake. Are you too much of a man, Mr. Morris, to like cake?"

In this state of agitation, he was unreasonably irritated by that playful question. "There is one thing I like better than cake," he said; "and that one thing is a plain explanation."

His tone puzzled her. "Have I said anything to offend you?" she asked. "Surely you can make allowance for a girl's curiosity? Oh, you shall have your explanation--and, what is more, you shall have it without reserve!"

She was as good as her word. What she had thought, and what she had planned, when he left her after his last visit, was frankly and fully told. "If you wonder how I discovered the library," she went on, "I must refer you to my aunt's lawyer. He lives in the City--and I wrote to him to help me. I don't consider that my time has been wasted. Mr. Morris, we owe an apology to Mrs. Rook."

Alban's astonishment, when he heard this, forced its way to expression in words. "What can you possibly mean?" he asked.

The tea was brought in before Emily could reply. She filled the cups, and sighed as she looked at the cake. "If Cecilia was here, how she would enjoy it!" With that complimentary tribute to her friend, she handed a slice to Alban. He never even noticed it.

"We have both of us behaved most unkindly to Mrs. Rook," she resumed. "I can excuse your not seeing it; for I should not have seen it either, but for the newspaper. While I was reading, I had an opportunity of thinking over what we said and did, when the poor woman's behavior so needlessly offended us. I was too excited to think, at the time--and, besides, I had been upset, only the night before, by what Miss Jethro said to me."

Alban started. "What has Miss Jethro to do with it?" he asked.

"Nothing at all," Emily answered. "She spoke to me of her own private affairs. A long story--and you wouldn't be interested in it. Let me finish what I had to say. Mrs. Rook was naturally reminded of the murder, when she heard that my name was Brown; and she must certainly have been struck--as I was--by the coincidence of my father's
death taking place at the same time when his unfortunate namesake was killed. Doesn't this sufficiently account for her agitation when she looked at the locket? We first took her by surprise: and then we suspected her of Heaven knows what, because the poor creature didn't happen to have her wits about her, and to remember at the right moment what a very common name 'James Brown' is. Don't you see it as I do?"

"I see that you have arrived at a remarkable change of opinion, since we spoke of the subject in the garden at school."

"In my place, you would have changed your opinion too. I shall write to Mrs. Rook by tomorrow's post."

Alban heard her with dismay. "Pray be guided by my advice!" he said earnestly. "Pray don't write that letter!"

"Why not?"

It was too late to recall the words which he had rashly allowed to escape him. How could he reply?

To own that he had not only read what Emily had read, but had carefully copied the whole narrative and considered it at his leisure, appeared to be simply impossible after what he had now heard. Her peace of mind depended absolutely on his discretion. In this serious emergency, silence was a mercy, and silence was a lie. If he remained silent, might the mercy be trusted to atone for the lie? He was too fond of Emily to decide that question fairly, on its own merits. In other words, he shrank from the terrible responsibility of telling her the truth.

"Isn't the imprudence of writing to such a person as Mrs. Rook plain enough to speak for itself?" he suggested cautiously.

"Not to me."

She made that reply rather obstinately. Alban seemed (in her view) to be trying to prevent her from atoning for an act of injustice. Besides, he despised her cake. "I want to know why you object," she said; taking back the neglected slice, and eating it herself.

"I object," Alban answered, "because Mrs. Rook is a coarse presuming woman. She may pervert your letter to some use of her own, which you may have reason to regret."

"Is that all?"

"Isn't it enough?"

"It may be enough for you. When I have done a person an injury, and wish to make an apology, I don't think it necessary to inquire whether the person's manners happen to be vulgar or not."

Alban's patience was still equal to any demands that she could make on it. "I can only offer you advice which is honestly intended for your own good," he gently replied.

"You would have more influence over me, Mr. Morris, if you were a little readier to take me into your confidence. Besides, I daresay I am wrong--but I don't like following advice which is given to me in the dark."

It was impossible to offend him. "Very naturally," he said; "I don't blame you."

Her color deepened, and her voice rose. Alban's patient adherence to his own view--so courteously and considerately urged--was beginning to try her temper. "In plain words," she rejoined, "I am to believe that you can't be mistaken in your judgment of another person."

There was a ring at the door of the cottage while she was speaking. But she was too warmly interested in confuting Alban to notice it.

He was quite willing to be confuted. Even when she lost her temper, she was still interesting to him. "I don't expect you to think me infallible," he said. "Perhaps you will remember that I have had some experience. I am unfortunately older than you are."

"Oh if wisdom comes with age," she smartly reminded him, "your friend Miss Redwood is old enough to be your mother--and she suspected Mrs. Rook of murder, because the poor woman looked at a door, and disliked being in the next room to a fidgety old maid."

Alban's manner changed: he shrank from that chance allusion to doubts and fears which he dare not acknowledge. "Let us talk of something else," he said.

She looked at him with a saucy smile. "Have I driven you into a corner at last? And is that your way of getting out of it?"

Even his endurance failed. "Are you trying to provoke me?" he asked. "Are you no better than other women? I wouldn't have believed it of you, Emily."

"Emily?" She repeated the name in a tone of surprise, which reminded him that he had addressed her with familiarity at a most inappropriate time--the time when they were on the point of a quarrel. He felt the implied reproach too keenly to be able to answer her with composure.

"I think of Emily--I love Emily--my one hope is that Emily may love me. Oh, my dear, is there no excuse if I forget to call you 'Miss' when you distress me?"

All that was tender and true in her nature secretly took his part. She would have followed that better impulse, if she had only been calm enough to understand her momentary silence, and to give her time. But the temper of a gentle
and generous man, once roused, is slow to subside. Alban abruptly left his chair. "I had better go!" he said.

"As you please," she answered. "Whether you go, Mr. Morris, or whether you stay, I shall write to Mrs. Rook."

The ring at the bell was followed by the appearance of a visitor. Doctor Allday opened the door, just in time to hear Emily's last words. Her vehemence seemed to amuse him.

"Who is Mrs. Rook?" he asked.

"A most respectable person," Emily answered indignantly; "housekeeper to Sir Jervis Redwood. You needn't sneer at her, Doctor Allday! She has not always been in service--she was landlady of the inn at Zeeland."

The doctor, about to put his hat on a chair, paused. The inn at Zeeland reminded him of the Handbill, and of the visit of Miss Jethro.

"Why are you so hot over it?" he inquired.

"Because I detest prejudice!" With this assertion of liberal feeling she pointed to Alban, standing quietly apart at the further end of the room. "There is the most prejudiced man living--he hates Mrs. Rook. Would you like to be introduced to him? You're a philosopher; you may do him some good. Doctor Allday--Mr. Alban Morris."

The doctor recognized the man, with the felt hat and the objectionable beard, whose personal appearance had not impressed him favorably.

Although they may hesitate to acknowledge it, there are respectable Englishmen still left, who regard a felt hat and a beard as symbols of republican disaffection to the altar and the throne. Doctor Allday's manner might have expressed this curious form of patriotic feeling, but for the associations which Emily had revived. In his present frame of mind, he was outwardly courteous, because he was inwardly suspicious. Mrs. Rook had been described to him as formerly landlady of the inn at Zeeland. Were there reasons for Mr. Morris's hostile feeling toward this woman which might be referable to the crime committed in her house that might threaten Emily's tranquillity if they were made known? It would not be amiss to see a little more of Mr. Morris, on the first convenient occasion.

"I am glad to make your acquaintance, sir."

"You are very kind, Doctor Allday."

The exchange of polite conventionalities having been accomplished, Alban approached Emily to take his leave, with mingled feelings of regret and anxiety--regret for having allowed himself to speak harshly; anxiety to part with her in kindness.

"Will you forgive me for differing from you?" It was all he could venture to say, in the presence of a stranger.

"Oh, yes!" she said quietly.

"Will you think again, before you decide?"

"Certainly, Mr. Morris. But it won't alter my opinion, if I do."

The doctor, hearing what passed between them, frowned. On what subject had they been differing? And what opinion did Emily decline to alter?

Alban gave it up. He took her hand gently. "Shall I see you at the Museum, to-morrow?" he asked.

She was politely indifferent to the last. "Yes--unless something happens to keep me at home."

The doctor's eyebrows still expressed disapproval. For what object was the meeting proposed? And why at a museum?

"Good-afternoon, Doctor Allday."

"Good-afternoon, sir."

For a moment after Alban's departure, the doctor stood irresolute. Arriving suddenly at a decision, he snatched up his hat, and turned to Emily in a hurry.

"I bring you news, my dear, which will surprise you. Who do you think has just left my house? Mrs. Ellmother! Don't interrupt me. She has made up her mind to go out to service again. Tired of leading an idle life--that's her own account of it--and asks me to act as her reference."

"Did you consent?"

"Consent! If I act as her reference, I shall be asked how she came to leave her last place. A nice dilemma! Either I must own that she deserted her mistress on her deathbed--or tell a lie. When I put it to her in that way, she walked out of the house in dead silence. If she applies to you next, receive her as I did--or decline to see her, which would be better still."

"Why am I to decline to see her?"

"In consequence of her behavior to your aunt, to be sure! No: I have said all I wanted to say--and I have no time to spare for answering idle questions. Good-by."

Socially-speaking, doctors try the patience of their nearest and dearest friends, in this respect--they are almost always in a hurry. Doctor Allday's precipitate departure did not tend to soothe Emily's irritated nerves. She began to find excuses for Mrs. Ellmother in a spirit of pure contradiction. The old servant's behavior might admit of justification: a friendly welcome might persuade her to explain herself. "If she applies to me," Emily determined, "I
shall certainly receive her."

Having arrived at this resolution, her mind reverted to Alban.

Some of the sharp things she had said to him, subjected to after-reflection in solitude, failed to justify themselves. Her better sense began to reproach her. She tried to silence that unwelcome monitor by laying the blame on Alban. Why had he been so patient and so good? What harm was there in his calling her "Emily"? If he had told her to call him by his Christian name, she might have done it. How noble he looked, when he got up to go away; he was actually handsome! Women may say what they please and write what they please: their natural instinct is to find their master in a man—especially when they like him. Sinking lower and lower in her own estimation, Emily tried to turn the current of her thoughts in another direction. She took up a book—opened it, looked into it, threw it across the room.

If Alban had returned at that moment, resolved on a reconciliation—if he had said, "My dear, I want to see you like yourself again; will you give me a kiss, and make it up"—would he have left her crying, when he went away? She was crying now.

CHAPTER XXVII.
MENTOR AND TELEMACHUS.

If Emily's eyes could have followed Alban as her thoughts were following him, she would have seen him stop before he reached the end of the road in which the cottage stood. His heart was full of tenderness and sorrow: the longing to return to her was more than he could resist. It would be easy to wait, within view of the gate, until the doctor's visit came to an end. He had just decided to go back and keep watch—when he heard rapid footsteps approaching. There (devil take him!) was the doctor himself.

"I have something to say to you, Mr. Morris. Which way are you walking?"

"Any way," Alban answered—not very graciously.

"Then let us take the turning that leads to my house. It's not customary for strangers, especially when they happen to be Englishmen, to place confidence in each other. Let me set the example of violating that rule. I want to speak to you about Miss Emily. May I take your arm? Thank you. At my age, girls in general—unless they are my patients—are not objects of interest to me. But that girl at the cottage—I daresay I am in my dotage—I tell you, sir, she has bewitched me! Upon my soul, I could hardly be more anxious about her, if I was her father. And, mind, I am not an affectionate man by nature. Are you anxious about her too?"

"Yes."

"In what way?"

"In what way are you anxious, Doctor Allday?"

The doctor smiled grimly.

"You don't trust me? Well, I have promised to set the example. Keep your mask on, sir—mine is off, come what may of it. But, observe: if you repeat what I am going to say—"

Alban would hear no more. "Whatever you may say, Doctor Allday, is trusted to my honor. If you doubt my honor, be so good as to let go my arm—I am not walking your way."

The doctor's hand tightened its grasp. "That little flourish of temper, my dear sir, is all I want to set me at my ease. I feel I have got hold of the right man. Now answer me this. Have you ever heard of a person named Miss Jethro?"

Alban suddenly came to a standstill.

"All right!" said the doctor. "I couldn't have wished for a more satisfactory reply."

"Wait a minute," Alban interposed. "I know Miss Jethro as a teacher at Miss Ladd's school, who left her situation suddenly—and I know no more."

The doctor's peculiar smile made its appearance again.

"Speaking in the vulgar tone," he said, "you seem to be in a hurry to wash your hands of Miss Jethro."

"I have no reason to feel any interest in her," Alban replied.

"Don't be too sure of that, my friend. I have something to tell you which may alter your opinion. That ex-teacher at the school, sir, knows how the late Mr. Brown met his death, and how his daughter has been deceived about it."

Alban listened with surprise—and with some little doubt, which he thought it wise not to acknowledge.

"The report of the inquest alludes to a 'relative' who claimed the body," he said. "Was that 'relative' the person who deceived Miss Emily? And was the person her aunt?"

"I must leave you to take your own view," Doctor Allday replied. "A promise binds me not to repeat the information that I have received. Setting that aside, we have the same object in view—and we must take care not to get in each other's way. Here is my house. Let us go in, and make a clean breast of it on both sides."

Established in the safe seclusion of his study, the doctor set the example of confession in these plain terms:

"We only differ in opinion on one point," he said. "We both think it likely (from our experience of the women)
that the suspected murderer had an accomplice. I say the guilty person is Miss Jethro. You say--Mrs. Rook."

"When you have read my copy of the report," Alban answered, "I think you will arrive at my conclusion. Mrs. Rook might have entered the outhouse in which the two men slept, at any time during the night, while her husband was asleep. The jury believed her when she declared that she never woke till the morning. I don't."

"I am open to conviction, Mr. Morris. Now about the future. Do you mean to go on with your inquiries?"

"Even if I had no other motive than mere curiosity," Alban answered, "I think I should go on. But I have a more urgent purpose in view. All that I have done thus far, has been done in Emily's interests. My object, from the first, has been to preserve her from any association--in the past or in the future--with the woman whom I believe to have been concerned in her father's death. As I have already told you, she is innocently doing all she can, poor thing, to put obstacles in my way."

"Yes, yes," said the doctor; "she means to write to Mrs. Rook--and you have nearly quarreled about it. Trust me to take that matter in hand. I don't regard it as serious. But I am mortally afraid of what you are doing in Emily's interests. I wish you would give it up."

"Why?"

"Because I see a danger. I don't deny that Emily is as innocent of suspicion as ever. But the chances, next time, may be against us. How do you know to what lengths your curiosity may lead you? Or on what shocking discoveries you may not blunder with the best intentions? Some unforeseen accident may open her eyes to the truth, before you can prevent it. I seem to surprise you?"

"You do, indeed, surprise me."

"In the old story, my dear sir, Mentor sometimes surprised Telemachus. I am Mentor--without being, I hope, quite so long-winded as that respectable philosopher. Let me put it in two words. Emily's happiness is precious to you. Take care you are not made the means of wrecking it! Will you consent to a sacrifice, for her sake?"

"I will do anything for her sake."

"Will you give up your inquiries?"

"From this moment I have done with them!"

"Mr. Morris, you are the best friend she has."

"The next best friend to you, doctor."

In that fond persuasion they now parted--too eagerly devoted to Emily to look at the prospect before them in its least hopeful aspect. Both clever men, neither one nor the other asked himself if any human resistance has ever yet obstructed the progress of truth--when truth has once begun to force its way to the light.

For the second time Alban stopped, on his way home. The longing to be reconciled with Emily was not to be resisted. He returned to the cottage, only to find disappointment waiting for him. The servant reported that her young mistress had gone to bed with a bad headache.

Alban waited a day, in the hope that Emily might write to him. No letter arrived. He repeated his visit the next morning. Fortune was still against him. He returned to the cottage, only to find disappointment waiting for him. The servant reported that her young mistress had gone to bed with a bad headache.

Alban waited a day, in the hope that Emily might write to him. No letter arrived. He repeated his visit the next morning. Fortune was still against him. On this occasion, Emily was engaged.

"Engaged with a visitor?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. A young lady named Miss de Sor."

Where had he heard that name before? He remembered immediately that he had heard it at the school. Miss de Sor was the unattractive new pupil, whom the girls called Francine. Alban looked at the parlor window as he left the cottage. It was of serious importance that he should set himself right with Emily. "And mere gossip," he thought contemptuously, "stands in my way!"

If he had been less absorbed in his own interests, he might have remembered that mere gossip is not always to be despised. It has worked fatal mischief in its time.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

FRANCINE.

"You're surprised to see me, of course?" Saluting Emily in those terms, Francine looked round the parlor with an air of satirical curiosity. "Dear me, what a little place to live in!"

"What brings you to London?" Emily inquired.

"You ought to know, my dear, without asking. Why did I try to make friends with you at school? And why have I been trying ever since? Because I hate you--I mean because I can't resist you--no! I mean because I hate myself for liking you. Oh, never mind my reasons. I insisted on going to London with Miss Ladd--when that horrid woman announced that she had an appointment with her lawyer. I said, 'I want to see Emily.' 'Emily doesn't like you.' 'I don't care whether she likes me or not; I want to see her.' That's the way we snap at each other, and that's how I always carry my point. Here I am, till my duenna finishes her business and fetches me. What a prospect for You! Have you got any cold meat in the house? I'm not a glutton, like Cecilia--but I'm afraid I shall want some lunch."

"Don't talk in that way, Francine!"
"Do you mean to say you're glad to see me?"
"If you were only a little less hard and bitter, I should always be glad to see you."
"You darling! (excuse my impetuosity). What are you looking at? My new dress? Do you envy me?"
"No; I admire the color--that's all."
Francine rose, and shook out her dress, and showed it from every point of view. "See how it's made: Paris, of course! Money, my dear; money will do anything--except making one learn one's lessons."
"Are you not getting on any better, Francine?"
"Worse, my sweet friend--worse. One of the masters, I am happy to say, has flatly refused to teach me any longer. 'Pupils without brains I am accustomed to,' he said in his broken English; 'but a pupil with no heart is beyond my endurance.' Ha! ha! the mouldy old refugee has an eye for character, though. No heart--there I am, described in two words."
"And proud of it," Emily remarked.
"Yes--proud of it. Stop! let me do myself justice. You consider tears a sign that one has some heart, don't you? I was very near crying last Sunday. A popular preacher did it; no less a person that Mr. Mirabel--you look as if you had heard of him."
"I have heard of him from Cecilia."
"Is she at Brighton? Then there's one fool more in a fashionable watering place. Oh, she's in Switzerland, is she? I don't care where she is; I only care about Mr. Mirabel. We all heard he was at Brighton for his health, and was going to preach. Didn't we cram the church! As to describing him, I give it up. He is the only little man I ever admired--hair as long as mine, and the sort of beard you see in pictures. I wish I had his fair complexion and his white hands. We were all in love with him--or with his voice, which was it?--when he began to read the commandments. I wish I could imitate him when he came to the fifth commandment. He began in his deepest bass voice: 'Honor thy father--' He stopped and looked up to heaven as if he saw the rest of it there. He went on with a tremendous emphasis on the next word. 'And thy mother,' he said (as if that was quite a different thing) in a tearful, fluty, quivering voice which was a compliment to mothers in itself. We all felt it, mothers or not. But the great sensation was when he got into the pulpit. The manner in which he dropped on his knees, and hid his face in his hands, and showed his beautiful rings was, as a young lady said behind me, simply seraphic. We understood his celebrity, from that moment--I wonder whether I can remember the sermon."
"You needn't attempt it on my account," Emily said.
"My dear, don't be obstinate. Wait till you hear him."
"I am quite content to wait."
"Ah, you're just in the right state of mind to be converted; you're in a fair way to become one of his greatest admirers. They say he is so agreeable in private life; I am dying to know him.--Do I hear a ring at the bell? Is somebody else coming to see you?"
The servant brought in a card and a message.
"The person will call again, miss."
Emily looked at the name written on the card.
"Mrs. Ellmother!" she exclaimed.
"What an extraordinary name!" cried Francine. "Who is she?"
"My aunt's old servant."
"Does she want a situation?"
Emily looked at some lines of writing at the back of the card. Doctor Allday had rightly foreseen events. Rejected by the doctor, Mrs. Ellmother had no alternative but to ask Emily to help her.
"If she is out of place," Francine went on, "she may be just the sort of person I am looking for."
"You?" Emily asked, in astonishment.
Francine refused to explain until she got an answer to her question. "Tell me first," she said, "is Mrs. Ellmother engaged?"
"No; she wants an engagement, and she asks me to be her reference."
"Is she sober, honest, middle-aged, clean, steady, good-tempered, industrious?" Francine rattled on. "Has she all the virtues, and none of the vices? Is she not too good-looking, and has she no male followers? In one terrible word--will she satisfy Miss Ladd?"
"What has Miss Ladd to do with it?"
"How stupid you are, Emily! Do put the woman's card down on the table, and listen to me. Haven't I told you that one of my masters has declined to have anything more to do with me? Doesn't that help you to understand how I get on with the rest of them? I am no longer Miss Ladd's pupil, my dear. Thanks to my laziness and my temper, I am to he raised to the dignity of 'a parlor boarder.' In other words, I am to be a young lady who patronizes the school;
with a room of my own, and a servant of my own. All provided for by a private arrangement between my father and Miss Ladd, before I left the West Indies. My mother was at the bottom of it, I have not the least doubt. You don't appear to understand me."

"I don't, indeed!"

Francine considered a little. "Perhaps they were fond of you at home," she suggested.

"Say they loved me, Francine--and I loved them."

"Ah, my position is just the reverse of yours. Now they have got rid of me, they don't want me back again at home. I know as well what my mother said to my father, as if I had heard her. 'Francine will never get on at school, at her age. Try her, by all means; but make some other arrangement with Miss Ladd in case of a failure--or she will be returned on our hands like a bad shilling.' There is my mother, my anxious, affectionate mother, hit off to a T."

"She is your mother, Francine; don't forget that."

"Oh, no; I won't forget it. My cat is my kitten's mother--there! there! I won't shock your sensibilities. Let us get back to matter of fact. When I begin my new life, Miss Ladd makes one condition. My maid is to be a model of discretion--an elderly woman, not a skittish young person who will only encourage me. I must submit to the elderly woman, or I shall be sent back to the West Indies after all. How long did Mrs. Ellmother live with your aunt?"

"Twenty-five years, and more."

"Good heavens, it's a lifetime! Why isn't this amazing creature living with you, now your aunt is dead? Did you send her away?"

"Certainly not."

"Then why did she go?"

"I don't know."

"Do you mean that she went away without a word of explanation?"

"Yes; that is exactly what I mean."

"When did she go? As soon as your aunt was dead?"

"That doesn't matter, Francine."

"In plain English, you won't tell me? I am all on fire with curiosity--and that's how you put me out! My dear, if you have the slightest regard for me, let us have the woman in here when she comes back for her answer. Somebody must satisfy me. I mean to make Mrs. Ellmother explain herself."

"I don't think you will succeed, Francine."

"Wait a little, and you will see. By-the-by, it is understood that my new position at the school gives me the privilege of accepting invitations. Do you know any nice people to whom you can introduce me?"

"I am the last person in the world who has a chance of helping you," Emily answered. "Excepting good Doctor Allday--" On the point of adding the name of Alban Morris, she checked herself without knowing why, and substituted the name of her school-friend. "And not forgetting Cecilia," she resumed, "I know nobody."

"Cecilia's a fool," Francine remarked gravely; "but now I think of it, she may be worth cultivating. Her father is a member of Parliament--and didn't I hear that he has a fine place in the country? You see, Emily, I may expect to be married (with my money), if I can only get into good society. (Don't suppose I am dependent on my father; my marriage portion is provided for in my uncle's will. Cecilia may really be of some use to me. Why shouldn't I make a friend of her, and get introduced to her father--in the autumn, you know, when the house is full of company? Have you any idea when she is coming back?"

"No."

"Do you think of writing to her?"

"Of course!"

"Give her my kind love; and say I hope she enjoys Switzerland."

"Francine, you are positively shameless! After calling my dearest friend a fool and a glutton, you send her your love for your own selfish ends; and you expect me to help you in deceiving her! I won't do it."

"Keep your temper, my child. We are all selfish, you little goose. The only difference is--some of us own it, and some of us don't. I shall find my own way to Cecilia's good graces quite easily: the way is through her mouth. You mentioned a certain Doctor Allday. Does he give parties? And do the right sort of men go to them? Hush! I think I hear the bell again. Go to the door, and see who it is." Emily waited, without taking any notice of this suggestion. The servant announced that "the person had called again, to know if there was any answer."

"Show her in here," Emily said.

The servant withdrew, and came back again.

"The person doesn't wish to intrude, miss; it will be quite sufficient if you will send a message by me."

Emily crossed the room to the door.
"Come in, Mrs. Ellmother," she said. "You have been too long away already. Pray come in."

CHAPTER XXIX
"BONY."

Mrs. Ellmother reluctantly entered the room.

Since Emily had seen her last, her personal appearance doubly justified the nickname by which her late mistress had distinguished her. The old servant was worn and wasted; her gown hung loose on her angular body; the big bones of her face stood out, more prominently than ever. She took Emily's offered hand doubtfully. "I hope I see you well, miss," she said--with hardly a vestige left of her former firmness of voice and manner.

"I am afraid you have been suffering from illness," Emily answered gently.

"It's the life I'm leading that wears me down; I want work and change."

Making that reply, she looked round, and discovered Francine observing her with undisguised curiosity. "You have got company with you," she said to Emily. "I had better go away, and come back another time."

Francine stopped her before she could open the door. "You mustn't go away; I wish to speak to you."

"About what, miss?"

The eyes of the two women met--one, near the end of her life, concealing under a rugged surface a nature sensitively affectionate and incorruptibly true: the other, young in years, with out the virtues of youth, hard in manner and hard at heart. In silence on either side, they stood face to face; strangers brought together by the force of circumstances, working inexorably toward their hidden end.

Emily introduced Mrs. Ellmother to Francine. "It may be worth your while," she hinted, "to hear what this young lady has to say."

Mrs. Ellmother listened, with little appearance of interest in anything that a stranger might have to say: her eyes rested on the card which contained her written request to Emily. Francine, watching her closely, understood what was passing in her mind. It might be worth while to conciliate the old woman by a little act of attention. Turning to Emily, Francine pointed to the card lying on the table. "You have not attended yet to Mr. Ellmother's request," she said.

Emily at once assured Mrs. Ellmother that the request was granted. "But is it wise," she asked, "to go out to service again, at your age?"

"I have been used to service all my life, Miss Emily--that's one reason. And service may help me to get rid of my own thoughts--that's another. If you can find me a situation somewhere, you will be doing me a good turn."

"Is it useless to suggest that you might come back, and live with me?" Emily ventured to say.

Mrs. Ellmother's head sank on her breast. "Thank you kindly, miss; it is useless."

"Why is it useless?" Francine asked.

Mrs. Ellmother was silent.
"Miss de Sor is speaking to you," Emily reminded her.
"Am I to answer Miss de Sor?"

Attentively observing what passed, and placing her own construction on looks and tones, it suddenly struck Francine that Emily herself might be in Mrs. Ellmother's confidence, and that she might have reasons of her own for assuming ignorance when awkward questions were asked. For the moment at least, Francine decided on keeping her suspicions to herself.

"I may perhaps offer you the employment you want," she said to Mrs. Ellmother. "I am staying at Brighton, for the present, with the lady who was Miss Emily's schoolmistress, and I am in need of a maid. Would you be willing to consider it, if I proposed to engage you?"

"Yes, miss."

"In that case, you can hardly object to the customary inquiry. Why did you leave your last place?"

Mrs. Ellmother appealed to Emily. "Did you tell this young lady how long I remained in my last place?"

M Melancholy remembrances had been revived in Emily by the turn which the talk had now taken. Francine's cat-like patience, stealthily feeling its way to its end, jarred on her nerves. "Yes," she said; "in justice to you, I have mentioned your long term of service."

Mrs. Ellmother addressed Francine. "You know, miss, that I served my late mistress for over twenty-five years. Will you please remember that--and let it be a reason for not asking me why I left my place."

Francine smiled compassionately. "My good creature, you have mentioned the very reason why I should ask. You live five-and-twenty years with your mistress--and then suddenly leave her--and you expect me to pass over this extraordinary proceeding without inquiry. Take a little time to think."

"I want no time to think. What I had in my mind, when I left Miss Letitia, is something which I refuse to explain, miss, to you, or to anybody."

She recovered some of her old firmness, when she made that reply. Francine saw the necessity of yielding--for
the time at least, Emily remained silent, oppressed by remembrance of the doubts and fears which had darkened the last miserable days of her aunt's illness. She began already to regret having made Francine and Mrs. Ellmother known to each other.

"I won't dwell on what appears to be a painful subject, "Francine graciously resumed. "I meant no offense. You are not angry, I hope?"

"Sorry, miss. I might have been angry, at one time. That time is over."

It was said sadly and resignedly: Emily heard the answer. Her heart ached as she looked at the old servant, and thought of the contrast between past and present. With what a hearty welcome this broken woman had been used to receive her in the bygone holiday-time! Her eyes moistened. She felt the merciless persistency of Francine, as if it had been an insult offered to herself. "Give it up!" she said sharply.

"Leave me, my dear, to manage my own business," Francine replied. "About your qualifications?" she continued, turning coolly to Mrs. Ellmother. "Can you dress hair?"

"Yes."

"I ought to tell you," Francine insisted, "that I am very particular about my hair."

"My mistress was very particular about her hair," Mrs. Ellmother answered.

"Are you a good needlewoman?"

"As good as ever I was--with the help of my spectacles."

Francine turned to Emily. "See how well we get on together. We are beginning to understand each other already. I am an odd creature, Mrs. Ellmother. Sometimes, I take sudden likings to persons--I have taken a liking to you. Do you begin to think a little better of me than you did? I hope you will produce the right impression on Miss Ladd; you shall have every assistance that I can give. I will beg Miss Ladd, as a favor to me, not to ask you that one forbidden question."

Poor Mrs. Ellmother, puzzled by the sudden appearance of Francine in the character of an eccentric young lady, the creature of genial impulse, thought it right to express her gratitude for the promised interference in her favor. "That's kind of you, miss," she said.

"No, no, only just. I ought to tell you there's one thing Miss Ladd is strict about--sweethearts. Are you quite sure," Francine inquired jocosely, "that you can answer for yourself, in that particular?"

This effort of humor produced its intended effect. Mrs. Ellmother, thrown off her guard, actually smiled. "Lord, miss, what will you say next!"

"My good soul, I will say something next that is more to the purpose. If Miss Ladd asks me why you have so unaccountably refused to be a servant again in this house, I shall take care to say that it is certainly not out of dislike to Miss Emily."

"You need say nothing of the sort," Emily quietly remarked.

"And still less," Francine proceeded, without noticing the interruption--"still less through any disagreeable remembrances of Miss Emily's aunt."

Mrs. Ellmother saw the trap that had been set for her. "It won't do, miss," she said.

"What won't do?"

"Trying to pump me."

Francine burst out laughing. Emily noticed an artificial ring in her gaiety which suggested that she was exasperated, rather than amused, by the repulse which had baffled her curiosity once more.

Mrs. Ellmother reminded the merry young lady that the proposed arrangement between them had not been concluded yet. "Am I to understand, miss, that you will keep a place open for me in your service?"

"You are to understand," Francine replied sharply, "that I must have Miss Ladd's approval before I can engage you. Suppose you come to Brighton? I will pay your fare, of course."

"Never mind my fare, miss. Will you give up pumping?"

"Make your mind easy. It's quite useless to attempt pumping you. When will you come?"

Mrs. Ellmother pleaded for a little delay. "I'm altering my gowns," she said. "I get thinner and thinner--don't I, Miss Emily? My work won't be done before Thursday."

"Let us say Friday, then," Francine proposed.

"Friday!" Mrs. Ellmother exclaimed. "You forget that Friday is an unlucky day."

"I forgot that, certainly! How can you be so absurdly superstitious."

"You may call it what you like, miss. I have good reason to think as I do. I was married on a Friday--and a bitter bad marriage it turned out to be. Superstitious, indeed! You don't know what my experience has been. My only sister was one of a party of thirteen at dinner; and she died within the year. If we are to get on together nicely, I'll take that journey on Saturday, if you please."

"Anything to satisfy you," Francine agreed; "there is the address. Come in the middle of the day, and we will
give you your dinner. No fear of our being thirteen in number. What will you do, if you have the misfortune to spill
the salt?"

"Take a pinch between my finger and thumb, and throw it over my left shoulder," Mrs. Ellmother answered
gravely. "Good-day, miss."

"Good-day."

Emily followed the departing visitor out to the hall. She had seen and heard enough to decide her on trying to
break off the proposed negotiation—with the one kind purpose of protecting Mrs. Ellmother against the pitiless
curiosity of Francine.

"Do you think you and that young lady are likely to get on well together?" she asked.

"I have told you already, Miss Emily, I want to get away from my own home and my own thoughts; I don't care
where I go, so long as I do that." Having answered in those words, Mrs. Ellmother opened the door, and waited a
while, thinking. "I wonder whether the dead know what is going on in the world they have left?" she said, looking at
Emily. "If they do, there's one among them knows my thoughts, and feels for me. Good-by, miss—and don't think
worse of me than I deserve."

Emily went back to the parlor. The only resource left was to plead with Francine for mercy to Mrs. Ellmother.

"Do you really mean to give it up?" she asked.

"To give up—what? 'Pumping,' as that obstinate old creature calls it?"

Emily persisted. "Don't worry the poor old soul! However strangely she may have left my aunt and me her
motives are kind and good—I am sure of that. Will you let her keep her harmless little secret?"

"Oh, of course!"

"I don't believe you, Francine!"

"Don't you? I am like Cecilia—I am getting hungry. Shall we have some lunch?"

"You hard-hearted creature!"

"Does that mean—no luncheon until I have owned the truth? Suppose you own the truth? I won't tell Mrs.
Ellmother that you have betrayed her."

"For the last time, Francine—I know no more of it than you do. If you persist in taking your own view, you as
good as tell me I lie; and you will oblige me to leave the room."

Even Francine's obstinacy was compelled to give way, so far as appearances went. Still possessed by the
delusion that Emily was deceiving her, she was now animated by a stronger motive than mere curiosity. Her sense of
her own importance imperatively urged her to prove that she was not a person who could be deceived with impunity.

"I beg your pardon," she said with humility. "But I must positively have it out with Mrs. Ellmother. She has been
more than a match for me—my turn next. I mean to get the better of her; and I shall succeed."

"I have already told you, Francine—you will fail."

"My dear, I am a dunce, and I don't deny it. But let me tell you one thing. I haven't lived all my life in the West
Indies, among black servants, without learning something."

"What do you mean?"

"More, my clever friend, than you are likely to guess. In the meantime, don't forget the duties of hospitality.
Ring the bell for luncheon."

CHAPTER XXX.
LADY DORIS.

The arrival of Miss Ladd, some time before she had been expected, interrupted the two girls at a critical moment.
She had hurried over her business in London, eager to pass the rest of the day with her favorite pupil. Emily's
affectionate welcome was, in some degree at least, inspired by a sensation of relief. To feel herself in the embrace of
the warm-hearted schoolmistress was like finding a refuge from Francine.

When the hour of departure arrived, Miss Ladd invited Emily to Brighton for the second time. "On the last
occasion, my dear, you wrote me an excuse; I won't be treated in that way again. If you can't return with us now,
come to-morrow." She added in a whisper, "Otherwise, I shall think you include me in your dislike of Francine."

There was no resisting this. It was arranged that Emily should go to Brighton on the next day.

Left by herself, her thoughts might have reverted to Mrs. Ellmother's doubtful prospects, and to Francine's
strange allusion to her life in the West Indies, but for the arrival of two letters by the afternoon post. The
handwriting on one of them was unknown to her. She had hurried over her business in London, eager to pass the rest of the day with her favorite pupil. Emily's affectionate welcome was, in some degree at least, inspired by a sensation of relief. To feel herself in the embrace of the warm-hearted schoolmistress was like finding a refuge from Francine.

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remarked. "He will sit up late at night, writing his book; and he refuses to take exercise, till headache and giddiness
force him to try the fresh air. As the necessary result, he has broken down at last. It may end in paralysis, or it may
end in death." Reporting this expression of medical opinion, Mrs. Rook's letter glided imperceptibly from respectful
sympathy to modest regard for her own interests in the future. It might be the sad fate of her husband and herself to
be thrown on the world again. If necessity brought them to London, would "kind Miss Emily grant her the honor of
an interview, and favor a poor unlucky woman with a word of advice?"

"She may pervert your letter to some use of her own, which you may have reason to regret." Did Emily
remember Alban's warning words? No: she accepted Mrs. Rook's reply as a gratifying tribute to the justice of her
own opinions.

Having proposed to write to Alban, feeling penitently that she had been in the wrong, she was now readier than
ever to send him a letter, feeling compassionately that she had been in the right. Besides, it was due to the faithful
friend, who was still working for her in the reading room, that he should be informed of Sir Jervis's illness. Whether
the old man lived or whether he died, his literary labors were fatally interrupted in either case; and one of the
consequences would be the termination of her employment at the Museum. Although the second of the two letters
which she had received was addressed to her in Cecilia's handwriting, Emily waited to read it until she had first
written to Alban. "He will come to-morrow," she thought; "and we shall both make apologies. I shall regret that I
was angry with him and he will regret that he was mistaken in his judgment of Mrs. Rook. We shall be as good
friends again as ever."

In this happy frame of mind she opened Cecilia's letter. It was full of good news from first to last.

The invalid sister had made such rapid progress toward recovery that the travelers had arranged to set forth on
their journey back to England in a fortnight. "My one regret," Cecilia added, "is the parting with Lady Doris. She
and her husband are going to Genoa, where they will embark in Lord Janeaway's yacht for a cruise in the
Mediterranean. When we have said that miserable word good-by--oh, Emily, what a hurry I shall be in to get back to
you! Those allusions to your lonely life are so dreadful, my dear, that I have destroyed your letter; it is enough to
break one's heart only to look at it. When once I get to London, there shall be no more solitude for my poor afflicted
friend. Papa will be free from his parliamentary duties in August--and he has promised to have the house full of
delightful people to meet you. Who do you think will be one of our guests? He is illustrious; he is fascinating; he
deserves a line all to himself, thus:

"The Reverend Miles Mirabel!"

"Lady Doris has discovered that the country parsonage, in which this brilliant clergyman submits to exile, is only
twelve miles away from our house. She has written to Mr. Mirabel to introduce me, and to mention the date of my
return. We will have some fun with the popular preacher--we will both fall in love with him together.

"Is there anybody to whom you would like me to send an invitation? Shall we have Mr. Alban Morris? Now I
know how kindly he took care of you at the railway station, your good opinion of him is my opinion. Your letter
also mentions a doctor. Is he nice? and do you think he will let me eat pastry, if we have him too? I am so
overflowing with hospitality (all for your sake) that I am ready to invite anybody, and everybody, to cheer you and
make you happy. Would you like to meet Miss Ladd and the whole school?"

"As to our amusements, make your mind easy.

"I have come to a distinct understanding with Papa that we are to have dances every evening--except when we
try a little concert as a change. Private theatricals are to follow, when we want another change after the dancing and
the music. No early rising; no fixed hour for breakfast; everything that is most exquisitely delicious at dinner--and,
to crown all, your room next to mine, for delightful midnight gossipings, when we ought to be in bed. What do you
say, darling, to the programme?"

"A last piece of news--and I have done.

"I have actually had a proposal of marriage, from a young gentleman who sits opposite me at the table d'hote!
When I tell you that he has white eyelashes, and red hands, and such enormous front teeth that he can't shut his
mouth, you will not need to be told that I refused him. This vindictive person has abused me ever since, in the most
shameful manner. I heard him last night, under my window, trying to set one of his friends against me. 'Keep clear
of her, my dear fellow; she's the most heartless creature living.' The friend took my part; he said, 'I don't agree with
you; the young lady is a person of great sensibility.' 'Nonsense!' says my amiable lover; 'she eats too much--her
sensibility is all stomach.' There's a wretch for you. What a shameful advantage to take of sitting opposite to me at
dinner! Good-by, my love, till we meet soon, and are as happy together as the day is long."

Emily kissed the signature. At that moment of all others, Cecilia was such a refreshing contrast to Francine!

Before putting the letter away, she looked again at that part of it which mentioned Lady Doris's introduction of
Cecilia to Mr. Mirabel. "I don't feel the slightest interest in Mr. Mirabel," she thought, smiling as the idea occurred
to her; "and I need never have known him, but for Lady Doris--who is a perfect stranger to me."
She had just placed the letter in her desk, when a visitor was announced. Doctor Allday presented himself (in a hurry as usual).

"Another patient waiting?" Emily asked mischievously. "No time to spare, again?"

"Not a moment," the old gentleman answered. "Have you heard from Mrs. Ellmother?"

"Yes."

"You don't mean to say you have answered her?"

"I have done better than that, doctor--I have seen her this morning."

"And consented to be her reference, of course?"

"How well you know me!"

Doctor Allday was a philosopher: he kept his temper. "Just what I might have expected," he said. "Eve and the apple! Only forbid a woman to do anything, and she does it directly--because you have forbidden her. I'll try the other way with you now, Miss Emily. There was something else that I wanted to have forbidden."

"What was it?"

"May I make a special request?"

"Certainly."

"Oh, my dear, write to Mrs. Rook! I beg and entreat of you, write to Mrs. Rook!"

Emily's playful manner suddenly disappeared.

Ignoring the doctor's little outbreak of humor, she waited in grave surprise, until it was his pleasure to explain himself.

Doctor Allday, on his side, ignored the ominous change in Emily; he went on as pleasantly as ever. "Mr. Morris and I have had a long talk about you, my dear. Mr. Morris is a capital fellow; I recommend him as a sweetheart. I also back him in the matter of Mrs. Rook.--What's the matter now? You're as red as a rose. Temper again, eh?"

"Hatred of meanness!" Emily answered indignantly. "I despise a man who plots, behind my back, to get another man to help him. Oh, how I have been mistaken in Alban Morris!"

"Oh, how little you know of the best friend you have!" cried the doctor, imitating her. "Girls are all alike; the only man they can understand, is the man who flatters them. Will you oblige me by writing to Mrs. Rook?"

Emily made an attempt to match the doctor, with his own weapons. "Your little joke comes too late," she said satirically. "There is Mrs. Rook's answer. Read it, and--" she checked herself, even in her anger she was incapable of speaking ungenerously to the old man who had so warmly befriended her. "I won't say to you," she resumed, "what I might have said to another person."

"Shall I say it for you?" asked the incorrigible doctor. "Read it, and be ashamed of yourself!--That was what you had in your mind, isn't it? Anything to please you, my dear." He put on his spectacles, read the letter, and handed it back to Emily with an impenetrable countenance. "What do you think of my new spectacles?" he asked, as he took the glasses off his nose. "In the experience of thirty years, I have had three grateful patients." He put the spectacles back in the case. "This comes from the third. Very gratifying--very gratifying."

Emily's sense of humor was not the uppermost sense in her at that moment. She pointed with a peremptory forefinger to Mrs. Rook's letter. "Have you nothing to say about this?"

The doctor had so little to say about it that he was able to express himself in one word:

"Humbug!"

He took his hat--nodded kindly to Emily--and hurried away to feverish pulses waiting to be felt, and to furred tongues that were ashamed to show themselves.

CHAPTER XXXI.

MOIRA.

When Alban presented himself the next morning, the hours of the night had exercised their tranquillizing influence over Emily. She remembered sorrowfully how Doctor Allday had disturbed her belief in the man who loved her; no feeling of irritation remained. Alban noticed that her manner was unusually subdued; she received him with her customary grace, but not with her customary smile.

"Are you not well?" he asked.

"I am a little out of spirits," she replied. "A disappointment--that is all."

He waited a moment, apparently in the expectation that she might tell him what the disappointment was. She remained silent, and she looked away from him. Was he in any way answerable for the depression of spirits to which she alluded? The doubt occurred to him--but he said nothing.

"I suppose you have received my letter?" she resumed.

"I have come here to thank you for your letter."

"It was my duty to tell you of Sir Jervis's illness; I deserve no thanks."

"You have written to me so kindly," Alban reminded her; "you have referred to our difference of opinion, the
last time I was here, so gently and so forgivingly--"

"If I had written a little later," she interposed, "the tone of my letter might have been less agreeable to you. I happened to send it to the post, before I received a visit from a friend of yours--a friend who had something to say to me after consulting with you."

"Do you mean Doctor Allday?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"What you wished him to say. He did his best; he was as obstinate and unfeeling as you could possibly wish him to be; but he was too late. I have written to Mrs. Rook, and I have received a reply." She spoke sadly, not angrily--and pointed to the letter lying on her desk.

Alban understood; he looked at her in despair. "Is that wretched woman doomed to set us at variance every time we meet!" he exclaimed.

Emily silently held out the letter.

He refused to take it. "The wrong you have done me is not to be set right in that way," he said. "You believe the doctor's visit was arranged between us. I never knew that he intended to call on you; I had no interest in sending him here--and I must not interfere again between you and Mrs. Rook."

"I don't understand you."

"You will understand me when I tell you how my conversation with Doctor Allday ended. I have done with interference; I have done with advice. Whatever my doubts may be, all further effort on my part to justify them--all further inquiries, no matter in what direction--are at an end: I made the sacrifice, for your sake. No! I must repeat what you said to me just now; I deserve no thanks. What I have done, has been done in deference to Doctor Allday--against my own convictions; in spite of my own fears. Ridiculous convictions! ridiculous fears! Men with morbid minds are their own tormentors. It doesn't matter how I suffer, so long as you are at ease. I shall never thwart you or vex you again. Have you a better opinion of me now?"

She made the best of all answers--she gave him her hand.

"May I kiss it?" he asked, as timidly as if he had been a boy addressing his first sweetheart.

She was half inclined to laugh, and half inclined to cry. "Yes, if you like," she said softly.

"Will you let me come and see you again?"

"Gladly--when I return to London."

"You are going away?"

"I am going to Brighton this afternoon, to stay with Miss Ladd."

It was hard to lose her, on the happy day when they understood each other at last. An expression of disappointment passed over his face. He rose, and walked restlessly to the window. "Miss Ladd?" he repeated, turning to Emily as if an idea had struck him. "Did I hear, at the school, that Miss de Sor was to spend the holidays under the care of Miss Ladd?"

"Yes."

"The same young lady," he went on, "who paid you a visit yesterday morning?"

"The same."

That haunting distrust of the future, which he had first betrayed and then affected to ridicule, exercised its depressing influence over his better sense. He was unreasonable enough to feel doubtful of Francine, simply because she was a stranger.

"Miss de Sor is a new friend of yours," he said. "Do you like her?"

It was not an easy question to answer--without entering into particulars which Emily's delicacy of feeling warned her to avoid. "I must know a little more of Miss de Sor," she said, "before I can decide."

Alban's misgivings were naturally encouraged by this evasive reply. He began to regret having left the cottage, on the previous day, when he had heard that Emily was engaged. He might have sent in his card, and might have been admitted. It was an opportunity lost of observing Francine. On the morning of her first day at school, when they had accidentally met at the summer house, she had left a disagreeable impression on his mind. Ought he to allow his opinion to be influenced by this circumstance? or ought he to follow Emily's prudent example, and suspend judgment until he knew a little more of Francine?

"Is any day fixed for your return to London?" he asked.

"Not yet," she said; "I hardly know how long my visit will be."

"In little more than a fortnight," he continued, "I shall return to my classes--they will be dreary classes, without you. Miss de Sor goes back to the school with Miss Ladd, I suppose?"

Emily was at a loss to account for the depression in his looks and tones, while he was making these unimportant inquiries. She tried to rouse him by speaking lightly in reply.
"Miss de Sor returns in quite a new character; she is to be a guest instead of a pupil. Do you wish to be better acquainted with her?"

"Yes," he said gravely, "now I know that she is a friend of yours." He returned to his place near her. "A pleasant visit makes the days pass quickly," he resumed. "You may remain at Brighton longer than you anticipate; and we may not meet again for some time to come. If anything happens--"

"Do you mean anything serious?" she asked.

"No, no! I only mean--if I can be of any service. In that case, will you write to me?"

"You know I will!"

She looked at him anxiously. He had completely failed to hide from her the uneasy state of his mind: a man less capable of concealment of feeling never lived. "You are anxious, and out of spirits," she said gently. "Is it my fault?"

"Your fault? oh, don't think that! I have my dull days and my bright days--and just now my barometer is down at dull." His voice faltered, in spite of his efforts to control it; he gave up the struggle, and took his hat to go. "Do you remember, Emily, what I once said to you in the garden at the school? I still believe there is a time of fulfillment to come in our lives." He suddenly checked himself, as if there had been something more in his mind to which he hesitated to give expression--and held out his hand to bid her good-by.

"My memory of what you said in the garden is better than yours," she reminded him. "You said 'Happen what may in the interval, I trust the future.' Do you feel the same trust still?"

He sighed--drew her to him gently--and kissed her on the forehead. Was that his own reply? She was not calm enough to ask him the question: it remained in her thoughts for some time after he had gone.

. . . . . . . .

On the same day Emily was at Brighton.

Francine happened to be alone in the drawing-room. Her first proceeding, when Emily was shown in, was to stop the servant.

"Have you taken my letter to the post?"

"Yes, miss."

"It doesn't matter." She dismissed the servant by a gesture, and burst into such effusive hospitality that she actually insisted on kissing Emily. "Do you know what I have been doing?" she said. "I have been writing to Cecilia--directing to the care of her father, at the House of Commons. I stupidly forgot that you would be able to give me the right address in Switzerland. You don't object, I hope, to my making myself agreeable to our dear, beautiful, greedy girl? It is of such importance to me to surround myself with influential friends--and, of course, I have given her your love. Don't look disgusted! Come, and see your room.--Oh, never mind Miss Ladd. You will see her when she wakes. Ill? Is that sort of old woman ever ill? She's only taking her nap after bathing. Bathing in the sea, at her age! How she must frighten the fishes!"

Having seen her own bed-chamber, Emily was next introduced to the room occupied by Francine.

One object that she noticed in it caused her some little surprise--not unmingled with disgust. She discovered on the toilet-table a coarsely caricatured portrait of Mrs. Ellmother. It was a sketch in pencil--wretchedly drawn; but spitefully successful as a likeness. "I didn't know you were an artist," Emily remarked, with an ironical emphasis on the last word. Francine laughed scornfully--crumpled the drawing up in her hand--and threw it into the waste-paper basket.

"You satirical creature!" she burst out gayly. "If you had lived a dull life at St. Domingo, you would have taken to spoiling paper too. I might really have turned out an artist, if I had been clever and industrious like you. As it was, I learned a little drawing--and got tired of it. I tried modeling in wax--and got tired of it. Who do you think was my teacher? One of our slaves."

"A slave!" Emily exclaimed.

"Yes--a mulatto, if you wish me to be particular; the daughter of an English father and a negro mother. In her young time (at least she said so herself) she was quite a beauty, in her particular style. Her master's favorite: he educated her himself. Besides drawing and painting, and modeling in wax, she could sing and play--all the accomplishments thrown away on a slave! When her owner died, my uncle bought her at the sale of the property."

A word of natural compassion escaped Emily--to Francine's surprise.

"Oh, my dear, you needn't pity her! Sappho (that was her name) fetched a high price, even when she was no longer young. She came to us, by inheritance, with the estates and the rest of it; and took a fancy to me, when she found out I didn't get on well with my father and mother. 'I owe it to my father and mother,' she used to say, 'that I am a slave. When I see affectionate daughters, it wrings my heart.' Sappho was a strange compound. A woman with a white side to her character, and a black side. For weeks together, she would be a civilized being. Then she used to relapse, and become as complete a negress as her mother. At the risk of her life she stole away, on those occasions, into the interior of the island, and looked on, in hiding, at the horrid witchcrafts and idolatries of the blacks; they
would have murdered a half-blood, prying into their ceremonies, if they had discovered her. I followed her once, so far as I dared. The frightful yellings and drummings in the darkness of the forests frightened me. The blacks suspected her, and it came to my ears. I gave her the warning that saved her life (I don't know what I should have done without Sappho to amuse me!); and, from that time, I do believe the curious creature loved me. You see I can speak generously even of a slave!"

"I wonder you didn't bring her with you to England," Emily said.

"In the first place," Francine answered, "she was my father's property, not mine. In the second place, she's dead. Poisoned, as the other half-bloods supposed, by some enemy among the blacks. She said herself, she was under a spell!"

"What did she mean?"

Francine was not interested enough in the subject to explain. "Stupid superstition, my dear. The negro side of Sappho was uppermost when she was dying--there is the explanation. Be off with you! I hear the old woman on the stairs. Meet her before she can come in here. My bedroom is my only refuge from Miss Ladd."

On the morning of the last day in the week, Emily had a little talk in private with her old schoolmistress. Miss Ladd listened to what she had to say of Mrs. Ellmother, and did her best to relieve Emily's anxieties. "I think you are mistaken, my child, in supposing that Francine is in earnest. It is her great fault that she is hardly ever in earnest. You can trust to my discretion; leave the rest to your aunt's old servant and to me."

Mrs. Ellmother arrived, punctual to the appointed time. She was shown into Miss Ladd's own room. Francine--ostentatiously resolved to take no personal part in the affair--went for a walk. Emily waited to hear the result.

After a long interval, Miss Ladd returned to the drawing-room, and announced that she had sanctioned the engagement of Mrs. Ellmother.

"I have considered your wishes, in this respect," she said. "It is arranged that a week's notice, on either side, shall end the term of service, after the first month. I cannot feel justified in doing more than that. Mrs. Ellmother is such a respectable woman; she is so well known to you, and she was so long in your aunt's service, that I am bound to consider the importance of securing a person who is exactly fitted to attend on such a girl as Francine. In one word, I can trust Mrs. Ellmother."

"When does she enter on her service?" Emily inquired.

"On the day after we return to the school," Miss Ladd replied. "You will be glad to see her, I am sure. I will send her here."

"One word more before you go," Emily said.

"Did you ask her why she left my aunt?"

"My dear child, a woman who has been five-and-twenty years in one place is entitled to keep her own secrets. I understand that she had her reasons, and that she doesn't think it necessary to mention them to anybody. Never trust people by halves--especially when they are people like Mrs. Ellmother."

It was too late now to raise any objections. Emily felt relieved, rather than disappointed, on discovering that Mrs. Ellmother was in a hurry to get back to London by the next train. She had found an opportunity of letting her lodgings; and she was eager to conclude the bargain. "You see I couldn't say Yes," she explained, "till I knew whether I was to get this new place or not--and the person wants to go in tonight."

Emily stopped her at the door. "Promise to write and tell me how you get on with Miss de Sor."

"You say that, miss, as if you didn't feel hopeful about me."

"I say it, because I feel interested about you. Promise to write."

Mrs. Ellmother promised, and hastened away. Emily looked after her from the window, as long as she was in view. "I wish I could feel sure of Francine!" she said to herself.

"In what way?" asked the hard voice of Francine, speaking at the door.

It was not in Emily's nature to shrink from a plain reply. She completed her half-formed thought without a moment's hesitation.

"I wish I could feel sure," she answered, "that you will be kind to Mrs. Ellmother."

"Are you afraid I shall make her life one scene of torment?" Francine inquired. "How can I answer for myself? I can't look into the future."

"For once in your life, can you be in earnest?" Emily said.

"For once in your life, can you take a joke?" Francine replied.

Emily said no more. She privately resolved to shorten her visit to Brighton.

BOOK THE THIRD--NETHERWOODS.

CHAPTER XXXII.

IN THE GRAY ROOM.

The house inhabited by Miss Ladd and her pupils had been built, in the early part of the present century, by a
wealthy merchant—proud of his money, and eager to distinguish himself as the owner of the largest country seat in the neighborhood.

After his death, Miss Ladd had taken Netherwoods (as the place was called), finding her own house insufficient for the accommodation of the increasing number of her pupils. A lease was granted to her on moderate terms. Netherwoods failed to attract persons of distinction in search of a country residence. The grounds were beautiful; but no landed property—not even a park—was attached to the house. Excepting the few acres on which the building stood, the surrounding land belonged to a retired naval officer of old family, who resented the attempt of a merchant of low birth to assume the position of a gentleman. No matter what proposals might be made to the admiral, he refused them all. The privilege of shooting was not one of the attractions offered to tenants; the country presented no facilities for hunting; and the only stream in the neighborhood was not preserved. In consequence of these drawbacks, the merchant's representatives had to choose between a proposal to use Netherwoods as a lunatic asylum, or to accept as tenant the respectable mistress of a fashionable and prosperous school. They decided in favor of Miss Ladd.

The contemplated change in Francine's position was accomplished, in that vast house, without inconvenience. There were rooms unoccupied, even when the limit assigned to the number of pupils had been reached. On the reopening of the school, Francine was offered her choice between two rooms on one of the upper stories, and two rooms on the ground floor. She chose these last.

Her sitting-room and bedroom, situated at the back of the house, communicated with each other. The sitting-room, ornamented with a pretty paper of delicate gray, and furnished with curtains of the same color, had been accordingly named, "The Gray Room." It had a French window, which opened on the terrace overlooking the garden and the grounds. Some fine old engravings from the grand landscapes of Claude (part of a collection of prints possessed by Miss Ladd's father) hung on the walls. The carpet was in harmony with the curtains; and the furniture was of light-colored wood, which helped the general effect of subdued brightness that made the charm of the room. "If you are not happy here," Miss Ladd said, "I despair of you." And Francine answered, "Yes, it's very pretty, but I wish it was not so small."

On the twelfth of August the regular routine of the school was resumed. Alban Morris found two strangers in his class, to fill the vacancies left by Emily and Cecilia. Mrs. Ellmother was duly established in her new place. She produced an unfavorable impression in the servants' hall—not (as the handsome chief housemaid explained) because she was ugly and old, but because she was "a person who didn't talk." The prejudice against habitual silence, among the lower order of the people, is almost as inveterate as the prejudice against red hair.

In the evening, on that first day of renewed studies—while the girls were in the grounds, after tea—Francine had at last completed the arrangement of her rooms, and had dismissed Mrs. Ellmother (kept hard at work since the morning) to take a little rest. Standing alone at her window, the West Indian heiress wondered what she had better do next. She glanced at the girls on the lawn, and decided that they were unworthy of serious notice, on the part of a person so specially favored as herself. She turned sidewise, and looked along the length of the terrace. At the far end a tall man was slowly pacing to and fro, with his head down and his hands in his pockets. Francine recognized the rude drawing-master, who had torn up his view of the village, after she had saved it from being blown into the pond. He seemed to be unwilling to accept the invitation—then altered his mind, and followed Francine. She stepped out on the terrace, and called to him. He stopped, and looked up.

"Do you want me?" he called back.

"Of course I do!"

She advanced a little to meet him, and offered encouragement under the form of a hard smile. Although his manners might be unpleasant, he had claims on the indulgence of a young lady, who was at a loss how to employ her idle time. In the first place, he was a man. In the second place, he was not as old as the music-master, or as ugly as the dancing-master. In the third place, he was an admirer of Emily; and the opportunity of trying to shake his allegiance by means of a flirtation, in Emily's absence, was too good an opportunity to be lost.

"Do you remember how rude you were to me, on the day when you were sketching in the summer-house?" Francine asked with snappish playfulness. "I expect you to make yourself agreeable this time—I am going to pay you a compliment."

He waited, with exasperating composure, to hear what the proposed compliment might be. The furrow between his eyebrows looked deeper than ever. There were signs of secret trouble in that dark face, so grimly and so resolutely composed. The school, without Emily, presented the severest trial of endurance that he had encountered, since the day when he had been deserted and disgraced by his affianced wife.

"You are an artist," Francine proceeded, "and therefore a person of taste. I want to have your opinion of my sitting-room. Criticism is invited; pray come in."

He seemed to be unwilling to accept the invitation—then altered his mind, and followed Francine. She had visited Emily; she was perhaps in a fair way to become Emily's friend. He remembered that he had already lost an
opportunity of studying her character, and—if he saw the necessity—of warning Emily not to encourage the advances of Miss de Sor.

"Very pretty," he remarked, looking round the room—without appearing to care for anything in it, except the prints.

Francine was bent on fascinating him. She raised her eyebrows and lifted her hands, in playful remonstrance. "Do remember it's my room," she said, "and take some little interest in it, for my sake!"

"What do you want me to say?" he asked.

"Come and sit down by me." She made room for him on the sofa. Her one favorite aspiration—the longing to excite envy in others—expressed itself in her next words. "Say something pretty," she answered; "say you would like to have such a room as this."

"I should like to have your prints," he remarked. "Will that do?"

"It wouldn't do—from anybody else. Ah, Mr. Morris, I know why you are not as nice as you might be! You are not happy. The school has lost its one attraction, in losing our dear Emily. You feel it—I know you feel it." She assisted this expression of sympathy to produce the right effect by a sigh. "What would I not give to inspire such devotion as yours! I don't envy Emily; I only wish—" She paused in confusion, and opened her fan. "Isn't it pretty?" she said, with an ostentatious appearance of changing the subject. Alban behaved like a monster; he began to talk of the weather.

"I think this is the hottest day we have had," he said; "no wonder you want your fan. Netherwoods is an airless place at this season of the year."

She controlled her temper. "I do indeed feel the heat," she admitted, with a resignation which gently reproved him; "it is so heavy and oppressive here after Brighton. Perhaps my sad life, far away from home and friends, makes me sensitive to trifles. Do you think so, Mr. Morris?"

The merciless man said he thought it was the situation of the house.

"Miss Ladd took the place in the spring," he continued; "and only discovered the one objection to it some months afterward. We are in the highest part of the valley here—but, you see, it's a valley surrounded by hills; and on three sides the hills are near us. All very well in winter; but in summer I have heard of girls in this school so out of health in the relaxing atmosphere that they have been sent home again."

Francine suddenly showed an interest in what he was saying. If he had cared to observe her closely, he might have noticed it.

"Do you mean that the girls were really ill?" she asked.

"No. They slept badly—lost appetite—started at trifling noises. In short, their nerves were out of order."

"Did they get well again at home, in another air?"

"Not a doubt of it," he answered, beginning to get weary of the subject. "May I look at your books?"

Francine's interest in the influence of different atmospheres on health was not exhausted yet. "Do you know where the girls lived when they were at home?" she inquired.

"I know where one of them lived. She was the best pupil I ever had—and I remember she lived in Yorkshire."

She was so weary of the idle curiosity—as it appeared to him—which persisted in asking trifling questions, that he left his seat, and crossed the room. "May I look at your books?"

"Oh, yes!"

The conversation was suspended for a while. The lady thought, "I should like to box his ears!" The gentleman thought, "She's only an inquisitive fool after all!" His examination of her books confirmed him in the delusion that there was really nothing in Francine's character which rendered it necessary to caution Emily against the advances of her new friend. Turning away from the book-case, he made the first excuse that occurred to him for putting an end to the interview.

"I must beg you to let me return to my duties, Miss de Sor. I have to correct the young ladies' drawings, before they begin again to-morrow."

Francine's wounded vanity made a last expiring attempt to steal the heart of Emily's lover.

"You remind me that I have a favor to ask," she said. "I don't attend the other classes—but I should so like to join your class! May I?" She looked up at him with a languishing appearance of entreaty which sorely tried Alban's capacity to keep his face in serious order. He acknowledged the compliment paid to him in studiously commonplace terms, and got a little nearer to the open window. Francine's obstinacy was not conquered yet.

"My education has been sadly neglected," she continued; "but I have had some little instruction in drawing. You will not find me so ignorant as some of the other girls." She waited a little, anticipating a few complimentary words. Alban waited also—in silence. "I shall look forward with pleasure to my lessons under such an artist as yourself," she went on, and waited again, and was disappointed again. "Perhaps," she resumed, "I may become your favorite pupil—Who knows?"
"Who indeed!"

It was not much to say, when he spoke at last--but it was enough to encourage Francine. She called him "dear Mr. Morris"; she pleaded for permission to take her first lesson immediately; she clasped her hands--"Please say Yes!"

"I can't say Yes, till you have complied with the rules."

"Are they your rules?"

Her eyes expressed the readiest submission--in that case. He entirely failed to see it: he said they were Miss Ladd's rules--and wished her good-evening.

She watched him, walking away down the terrace. How was he paid? Did he receive a yearly salary, or did he get a little extra money for each new pupil who took drawing lessons? In this last case, Francine saw her opportunity of being even with him "You brute! Catch me attending your class!"

CHAPTER XXXIII.
RECOLLECTIONS OF ST. DOMINGO.

The night was oppressively hot. Finding it impossible to sleep, Francine lay quietly in her bed, thinking. The subject of her reflections was a person who occupied the humble position of her new servant.

Mrs. Ellmother looked wretchedly ill. Mrs. Ellmother had told Emily that her object, in returning to domestic service, was to try if change would relieve her from the oppression of her own thoughts. Mrs. Ellmother believed in vulgar superstitions which declared Friday to be an unlucky day; and which recommended throwing a pinch over your left shoulder, if you happened to spill the salt.

In themselves, these were trifling recollections. But they assumed a certain importance, derived from the associations which they called forth.

They reminded Francine, by some mental process which she was at a loss to trace, of Sappho the slave, and of her life at St. Domingo.

She struck a light, and unlocked her writing desk. From one of the drawers she took out an old household account-book.

The first page contained some entries, relating to domestic expenses, in her own handwriting. They recalled one of her efforts to occupy her idle time, by relieving her mother of the cares of housekeeping. For a day or two, she had persevered--and then she had ceased to feel any interest in her new employment. The remainder of the book was completely filled up, in a beautifully clear handwriting, beginning on the second page. A title had been found for the manuscript by Francine. She had written at the top of the page: Sappho's Nonsense.

After reading the first few sentences she rapidly turned over the leaves, and stopped at a blank space near the end of the book. Here again she had added a title. This time it implied a compliment to the writer: the page was headed: Sappho's Sense.

She read this latter part of the manuscript with the closest attention.

"I entreat my kind and dear young mistress not to suppose that I believe in witchcraft--after such an education as I have received. When I wrote down, at your biding, all that I had told you by word of mouth, I cannot imagine what delusion possessed me. You say I have a negro side to my character, which I inherit from my mother. Did you mean this, dear mistress, as a joke? I am almost afraid it is sometimes not far off from the truth.

"Let me be careful, however, to avoid leading you into a mistake. It is really true that the man-slave I spoke of did pine and die, after the spell had been cast on him by my witch-mother's image of wax. But I ought also to have told you that circumstances favored the working of the spell: the fatal end was not brought about by supernatural means.

"The poor wretch was not in good health at the time; and our owner had occasion to employ him in the valley of the island far inland. I have been told, and can well believe, that the climate there is different from the climate on the coast--in which the unfortunate slave had been accustomed to live. The overseer wouldn't believe him when he said the valley air would be his death--and the negroes, who might otherwise have helped him, all avoided a man whom they knew to be under a spell.

"This, you see, accounts for what might appear incredible to civilized persons. If you will do me a favor, you will burn this little book, as soon as you have read what I have written here. If my request is not granted, I can only implore you to let no eyes but your own see these pages. My life might be in danger if the blacks knew what I have now told you, in the interests of truth."

Francine closed the book, and locked it up again in her desk. "Now I know," she said to herself, "what reminded me of St. Domingo."

When Francine rang her bell the next morning, so long a time elapsed without producing an answer that she began to think of sending one of the house-servants to make inquiries. Before she could decide, Mrs. Ellmother presented herself, and offered her apologies.
"It's the first time I have overslept myself, miss, since I was a girl. Please to excuse me, it shan't happen again."
"Do you find that the air here makes you drowsy?" Francine asked.

Mrs. Ellmother shook her head. "I didn't get to sleep," she said, "till morning, and so I was too heavy to be up in time. But air has got nothing to do with it. Gentlemoans may have their whims and fancies. All air is the same to people like me."
"You enjoy good health, Mrs. Ellmother?"
"Why not, miss? I have never had a doctor."
"Oh! That's your opinion of doctors, is it?"
"I won't have anything to do with them--if that's what you mean by my opinion," Mrs. Ellmother answered doggedly. "How will you have your hair done?"
"The same as yesterday. Have you seen anything of Miss Emily? She went back to London the day after you left us."
"I haven't been in London. I'm thankful to say my lodgings are let to a good tenant."
"Then where have you lived, while you were waiting to come here?"
"I had only one place to go to, miss; I went to the village where I was born. A friend found a corner for me. Ah, dear heart, it's a pleasant place, there!"
"A place like this?"
"Lord help you! As little like this as chalk is to cheese. A fine big moor, miss, in Cumberland, without a tree in sight--look where you may. Something like a wind, I can tell you, when it takes to blowing there."
"Have you never been in this part of the country?"
"Not! When I left the North, my new mistress took me to Canada. Talk about air! If there was anything in it, the people in that air ought to live to be a hundred. I liked Canada."
"And who was your next mistress?"

Thus far, Mrs. Ellmother had been ready enough to talk. Had she failed to hear what Francine had just said to her? or had she some reason for feeling reluctant to answer? In any case, a spirit of taciturnity took sudden possession of her--she was silent.

Francine (as usual) persisted. "Was your next place in service with Miss Emily's aunt?"
"Yes."
"Did the old lady always live in London?"
"No."
"What part of the country did she live in?"
"Kent."
"Among the hop gardens?"
"No."
"In what other part, then?"
"Isle of Thanet."
"Near the sea coast?"
"Yes."

Even Francine could insist no longer: Mrs. Ellmother's reserve had beaten her--for that day at least. "Go into the hall," she said, "and see if there are any letters for me in the rack."

There was a letter bearing the Swiss postmark. Simple Cecilia was flattered and delighted by the charming manner in which Francine had written to her. She looked forward with impatience to the time when their present acquaintance might ripen into friendship. Would "Dear Miss de Sor" waive all ceremony, and consent to be a guest (later in the autumn) at her father's house? Circumstances connected with her sister's health would delay their return to England for a little while. By the end of the month she hoped to be at home again, and to hear if Francine was disengaged. Her address, in England, was Monksmoor Park, Hants.

Having read the letter, Francine drew a moral from it: "There is great use in a fool, when one knows how to manage her."

Having little appetite for her breakfast, she tried the experiment of a walk on the terrace. Alban Morris was right; the air at Netherwoods, in the summer time, was relaxing. The morning mist still hung over the lowest part of the valley, between the village and the hills beyond. A little exercise produced a feeling of fatigue. Francine returned to her room, and trifled with her tea and toast.

Her next proceeding was to open her writing-desk, and look into the old account-book once more. While it lay open on her lap, she recalled what had passed that morning, between Mrs. Ellmother and herself.

The old woman had been born and bred in the North, on an open moor. She had been removed to the keen air of Canada when she left her birthplace. She had been in service after that, on the breezy eastward coast of Kent. Would
the change to the climate of Netherwoods produce any effect on Mrs. Ellmother? At her age, and with her seasoned constitution, would she feel it as those school-girls had felt it--especially that one among them, who lived in the bracing air of the North, the air of Yorkshire?

Weary of solitary thinking on one subject, Francine returned to the terrace with a vague idea of finding something to amuse her--that is to say, something she could turn into ridicule--if she joined the girls.

The next morning, Mrs. Ellmother answered her mistress's bell without delay. "You have slept better, this time?" Francine said.

"No, miss. When I did get to sleep I was troubled by dreams. Another bad night--and no mistake!"
"I suspect your mind is not quite at ease," Francine suggested.
"Why do you suspect that, if you please?"
"You talked, when I met you at Miss Emily's, of wanting to get away from your own thoughts. Has the change to this place helped you?"
"It hasn't helped me as I expected. Some people's thoughts stick fast."
"Remorseful thoughts?" Francine inquired.
Mrs. Ellmother held up her forefinger, and shook it with a gesture of reproof. "I thought we agreed, miss, that there was to be no pumping."

The business of the toilet proceeded in silence.

A week passed. During an interval in the labors of the school, Miss Ladd knocked at the door of Francine's room.
"I want to speak to you, my dear, about Mrs. Ellmother. Have you noticed that she doesn't seem to be in good health?"
"She looks rather pale, Miss Ladd."
"It's more serious than that, Francine. The servants tell me that she has hardly any appetite. She herself acknowledges that she sleeps badly. I noticed her yesterday evening in the garden, under the schoolroom window. One of the girls dropped a dictionary. She started at that slight noise, as if it terrified her. Her nerves are seriously out of order. Can you prevail upon her to see the doctor?"

Francine hesitated--and made an excuse. "I think she would be much more likely, Miss Ladd, to listen to you. Do you mind speaking to her?"
"Certainly not!"

Mrs. Ellmother was immediately sent for. "What is your pleasure, miss?" she said to Francine.

Miss Ladd interposed. "It is I who wish to speak to you, Mrs. Ellmother. For some days past, I have been sorry to see you looking ill."
"I never was ill in my life, ma'am."

Miss Ladd gently persisted. "I hear that you have lost your appetite."
"I never was a great eater, ma'am."

It was evidently useless to risk any further allusion to Mrs. Ellmother's symptoms. Miss Ladd tried another method of persuasion. "I daresay I may be mistaken," she said; "but I do really feel anxious about you. To set my mind at rest, will you see the doctor?"

"The doctor! Do you think I'm going to begin taking physic, at my time of life? Lord, ma'am! you amuse me--you do indeed!" She burst into a sudden fit of laughter; the hysterical laughter which is on the verge of tears. With a desperate effort, she controlled herself. "Please, don't make a fool of me again," she said--and left the room.

"What do you think now?" Miss Ladd asked.

Francine appeared to be still on her guard.
"I don't know what to think," she said evasively.

Miss Ladd looked at her in silent surprise, and withdrew.

Left by herself, Francine sat with her elbows on the table and her face in her hands, absorbed in thought. After a long interval, she opened her desk--and hesitated. She took a sheet of note-paper--and paused, as if still in doubt.

She snatched up her pen, with a sudden recovery of resolution--and addressed these lines to the wife of her father's agent in London:

"When I was placed under your care, on the night of my arrival from the West Indies, you kindly said I might ask you for any little service which might be within your power. I shall be greatly obliged if you can obtain for me, and send to this place, a supply of artists' modeling wax--sufficient for the production of a small image."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

IN THE DARK.

A week later, Alban Morris happened to be in Miss Ladd's study, with a report to make on the subject of his drawing-class. Mrs. Ellmother interrupted them for a moment. She entered the room to return a book which Francine
had borrowed that morning.

"Has Miss de Sor done with it already?" Miss Ladd asked.

"She won't read it, ma'am. She says the leaves smell of tobacco-smoke."

Miss Ladd turned to Alban, and shook her head with an air of good-humored reproof. "I know who has been reading that book last!" she said.

Alban pleaded guilty, by a look. He was the only master in the school who smoked. As Mrs. Ellmother passed him, on her way out, he noticed the signs of suffering in her wasted face.

"That woman is surely in a bad state of health," he said. "Has she seen the doctor?"

"She flatly refuses to consult the doctor," Miss Ladd replied. "If she were a stranger, I should meet the difficulty by telling Miss de Sor (whose servant she is) that Mrs. Ellmother must be sent home. But I cannot act in that peremptory manner toward a person in whom Emily is interested."

From that moment Mrs. Ellmother became a person in whom Alban was interested. Later in the day, he met her in one of the lower corridors of the house, and spoke to her. "I am afraid the air of this place doesn't agree with you," he said.

Mrs. Ellmother's irritable objection to being told (even indirectly) that she looked ill, expressed itself roughly in reply. "I daresay you mean well, sir--but I don't see how it matters to you whether the place agrees with me or not."

"Wait a minute," Alban answered good-humoredly. "I am not quite a stranger to you."

"How do you make that out, if you please?"

"I know a young lady who has a sincere regard for you."

"You don't mean Miss Emily?"

"Yes, I do. I respect and admire Miss Emily; and I have tried, in my poor way, to be of some little service to her."

Mrs. Ellmother's haggard face instantly softened. "Please to forgive me, sir, for forgetting my manners," she said simply. "I have had my health since the day I was born--and I don't like to be told, in my old age, that a new place doesn't agree with me."

Alban accepted this apology in a manner which at once won the heart of the North-countrywoman. He shook hands with her. "You're one of the right sort," she said; "there are not many of them in this house."

Was she alluding to Francine? Alban tried to make the discovery. Polite circumlocution would be evidently thrown away on Mrs. Ellmother. "Is your new mistress one of the right sort?" he asked bluntly.

The old servant's answer was expressed by a frowning look, followed by a plain question.

"Do you say that, sir, because you like my new mistress?"

"No."

"Please to shake hands again!" She said it--took his hand with a sudden grip that spoke for itself-- and walked away.

Here was an exhibition of character which Alban was just the man to appreciate. "If I had been an old woman," he thought in his dryly humorous way, "I believe I should have been like Mrs. Ellmother. We might have talked of Emily, if she had not left me in such a hurry. When shall I see her again?"

He was destined to see her again, that night--under circumstances which he remembered to the end of his life.

The rules of Netherwoods, in summer time, recalled the young ladies from their evening's recreation in the grounds at nine o'clock. After that hour, Alban was free to smoke his pipe, and to linger among trees and flower-beds before he returned to his hot little rooms in the village. As a relief to the drudgery of teaching the young ladies, he had been using his pencil, when the day's lessons were over, for his own amusement. It was past ten o'clock before he lighted his pipe, and began walking slowly to and fro on the path which led to the summer-house, at the southern limit of the grounds.

In the perfect stillness of the night, the clock of the village church was distinctly audible, striking the hours and the quarters. The moon had not risen; but the mysterious glimmer of starlight trembled on the large open space between the trees and the house.

Alban paused, admiring with an artist's eye the effect of light, so faintly and delicately beautiful, on the broad expanse of the lawn. "Does the man live who could paint that?" he asked himself. His memory recalled the works of the greatest of all landscape painters--the English artists of fifty years since. While recollections of many a noble picture were still passing through his mind, he was startled by the sudden appearance of a bareheaded woman on the terrace steps.

She hurried down to the lawn, staggering as she ran--stopped, and looked back at the house--hastened onward toward the trees--stopped again, looking backward and forward, uncertain which way to turn next--and then advanced once more. He could now hear her heavily gasping for breath. As she came nearer, the starlight showed a panic-stricken face--the face of Mrs. Ellmother.
Alban ran to meet her. She dropped on the grass before he could cross the short distance which separated them. As he raised her in his arms she looked at him wildly, and murmured and muttered in the vain attempt to speak. "Look at me again," he said. "Don't you remember the man who had some talk with you to-day?" She still stared at him vacantly: he tried again. "Don't you remember Miss Emily's friend?"

As the name passed his lips, her mind in some degree recovered its balance. "Yes," she said; "Emily's friend; I'm glad I have met with Emily's friend." She caught at Alban's arm--starting as if her own words had alarmed her. "What am I talking about? Did I say 'Emily'? A servant ought to say 'Miss Emily.' My head swims. Am I going mad?"

Alban led her to one of the garden chairs. "You're only a little frightened," he said. "Rest, and compose yourself."

She looked over her shoulder toward the house. "Not here! I've run away from a she-devil; I want to be out of sight. Further away, Mister--I don't know your name. Tell me your name; I won't trust you, unless you tell me your name!"

"Hush! hush! Call me Alban."

"I never heard of such a name; I won't trust you."

"You won't trust your friend, and Emily's friend? You don't mean that, I'm sure. Call me by my other name--call me 'Morris.'"

"Morris?" she repeated. "Ah, I've heard of people called 'Morris.' Look back! Your eyes are young--do you see her on the terrace?"

"There isn't a living soul to be seen anywhere."

With one hand he raised her as he spoke--and with the other he took up the chair. In a minute more, they were out of sight of the house. He seated her so that she could rest her head against the trunk of a tree.

"What a good fellow!" the poor old creature said, admiring him; "he knows how my head pains me. Don't stand up! You're a tall man. She might see you."

"She can see nothing. Look at the trees behind us. Even the starlight doesn't get through them."

Mrs. Ellmother was not satisfied yet. "You take it coolly," she said. "Do you know who saw us together in the passage to-day? You good Morris, she saw us--she did. Wretch! Cruel, cunning, shameless wretch."

In the shadows that were round them, Alban could just see that she was shaking her clinched fists in the air. He made another attempt to control her. "Don't excite yourself! If she comes into the garden, she might hear you."

The appeal to her fears had its effect.

"That's true," she said, in lowered tones. A sudden distrust of him seized her the next moment. "Who told me I was excited?" she burst out. "It's you who are excited. Deny it if you dare; I begin to suspect you, Mr. Morris; I don't like your conduct. What has become of your pipe? I saw you put your pipe in your coat pocket. You did it when you set me down among the trees where she could see me! You are in league with her--she is coming to meet you here--you know she doesn't like tobacco-smoke. Are you two going to put me in the madhouse?"

She started to her feet. It occurred to Alban that the speediest way of pacifying her might be by means of the pipe. Mere words would exercise no persuasive influence over that bewildered mind. Instant action, of some kind, would be far more likely to have the right effect. He put his pipe and his tobacco pouch into her hands, and so mastered her attention before he spoke.

"Do you know how to fill a man's pipe for him?" he asked.

"Haven't I filled my husband's pipe hundreds of times?" she answered sharply.

"Very well. Now do it for me."

She took her chair again instantly, and filled the pipe. He lighted it, and seated himself on the grass, quietly smoking. "Do you think I'm in league with her now?" he asked, purposely adopting the rough tone of a man in her own rank of life.

She answered him as she might have answered her husband, in the days of her unhappy marriage.

"Oh, don't gird at me, there's a good man! If I've been off my head for a minute or two, please not to notice me. It's cool and quiet here," the poor woman said gratefully. "Bless God for the darkness; there's something comforting in the darkness--along with a good man like you. Give me a word of advice. You are my friend in need. What am I to do? I daren't go back to the house!"

She was quiet enough now, to suggest the hope that she might be able to give Alban some information. "Were you with Miss de Sor," he asked, "before you came out here? What did she do to frighten you?"

There was no answer; Mrs. Ellmother had abruptly risen once more. "Hush!" she whispered. "Don't I hear somebody near us?"

Alban at once went back, along the winding path which they had followed. No creature was visible in the gardens or on the terrace. On returning, he found it impossible to use his eyes to any good purpose in the obscurity
among the trees. He waited a while, listening intently. No sound was audible: there was not even air enough to stir the leaves.

As he returned to the place that he had left, the silence was broken by the chimes of the distant church clock, striking the three-quarters past ten.

Even that familiar sound jarred on Mrs. Ellmother's shattered nerves. In her state of mind and body, she was evidently at the mercy of any false alarm which might be raised by her own fears. Relieved of the feeling of distrust which had thus far troubled him, Alban sat down by her again--opened his match-box to relight his pipe--and changed his mind. Mrs. Ellmother had unconsciously warned him to be cautious.

For the first time, he thought it likely that the heat in the house might induce some of the inmates to try the cooler atmosphere in the grounds. If this happened, and if he continued to smoke, curiosity might tempt them to follow the scent of tobacco hanging on the stagnant air.

"Is there nobody near us?" Mrs. Ellmother asked. "Are you sure?"
"Quite sure. Now tell me, did you really mean it, when you said just now that you wanted my advice?"
"Need you ask that, sir? Who else have I got to help me?"
"I am ready and willing to help you--but I can't do it unless I know first what has passed between you and Miss de Sor. Will you trust me?"
"I will!"
"May I depend on you?"
"Try me!"

CHAPTER XXXV.
THE TREACHERY OF THE PIPE.

Alban took Mrs. Ellmother at her word. "I am going to venture on a guess," he said. "You have been with Miss de Sor to-night."

"Quite true, Mr. Morris."

"I am going to guess again. Did Miss de Sor ask you to stay with her, when you went into her room?"
"That's it! She rang for me, to see how I was getting on with my needlework--and she was what I call hearty, for the first time since I have been in her service. I didn't think badly of her when she first talked of engaging me; and I've had reason to repent of my opinion ever since. Oh, she showed the cloven foot to-night! 'Sit down,' she says; 'I've nothing to read, and I hate work; let's have a little chat.' She's got a glib tongue of her own. All I could do was to say a word now and then to keep her going. She talked and talked till it was time to light the lamp. She was particular in telling me to put the shade over it. We were half in the dark, and half in the light. She trapped me (Lord knows how!) into talking about foreign parts; I mean the place she lived in before they sent her to England. Have you heard that she comes from the West Indies?"
"Yes; I have heard that. Go on."

"Wait a bit, sir. There's something, by your leave, that I want to know. Do you believe in Witchcraft?"
"I know nothing about it. Did Miss de Sor put that question to you?"
"She did."
"And how did you answer?"
"Neither in one way nor the other. I'm in two minds about that matter of Witchcraft. When I was a girl, there was an old woman in our village, who was a sort of show. People came to see her from all the country round--gentlefolks among them. It was her great age that made her famous. More than a hundred years old, sir! One of our neighbors didn't believe in her age, and she heard of it. She cast a spell on his flock. I tell you, she sent a plague on his sheep, the plague of the Bots. The whole flock died; I remember it well. Some said the sheep would have had the Bots anyhow. Some said it was the spell. Which of them was right? How am I to settle it?"
"Did you mention this to Miss de Sor?"
"I was obliged to mention it. Didn't I tell you, just now, that I can't make up my mind about Witchcraft? 'You don't seem to know whether you believe or disbelieve,' she says. It made me look like a fool. I told her I had my reasons, and then I was obliged to give them."
"And what did she do then?"
"She said, 'I've got a better story of Witchcraft than yours.' And she opened a little book, with a lot of writing in it, and began to read. Her story made my flesh creep. It turns me cold, sir, when I think of it now."

He heard her moaning and shuddering. Strongly as his interest was excited, there was a compassionate reluctance in him to ask her to go on. His merciful scruples proved to be needless. The fascination of beauty it is possible to resist. The fascination of horror fastens its fearful hold on us, struggle against it as we may. Mrs. Ellmother repeated what she had heard, in spite of herself.

"It happened in the West Indies," she said; "and the writing of a woman slave was the writing in the little book.
The slave wrote about her mother. Her mother was a black—a Witch in her own country. There was a forest in her own country. The devil taught her Witchcraft in the forest. The serpents and the wild beasts were afraid to touch her. She lived without eating. She was sold for a slave, and sent to the island—an island in the West Indies. An old man lived there; the wickedest man of them all. He filled the black Witch with devilish knowledge. She learned to make the image of wax. The image of wax casts spells. You put pins in the image of wax. At every pin you put, the person under the spell gets nearer and nearer to death. There was a poor black in the island. He offended the Witch. She made his image in wax; she cast spells on him. He couldn't sleep; he couldn't eat; he was such a coward that common noises frightened him. Like Me! Oh, God, like me!"

"Wait a little," Alban interposed. "You are exciting yourself again--wait."

"You're wrong, sir! You think it ended when she finished her story, and shut up her book; there's worse to come than anything you've heard yet. I don't know what I did to offend her. She looked at me and spoke to me, as if I was the dirt under her feet. 'If you're too stupid to understand what I have been reading,' she says, 'get up and go to the glass. Look at yourself, and remember what happened to the slave who was under the spell. You're getting paler and paler, and thinner and thinner; you're pining away just as he did. Shall I tell you why?' She snatched off the shade from the lamp, and put her hand under the table, and brought out an image of wax. My image! She pointed to three pins in it. 'One,' she says, 'for no sleep. One for no appetite. One for broken nerves.' I asked her what I had done to make such a bitter enemy of her. She says, 'Remember what I asked of you when we talked of your being my servant. Choose which you will do? Die by inches' (I swear she said it as I hope to be saved); 'die by inches, or tell me--'"

There--in the full frenzy of the agitation that possessed her--there, Mrs. Ellmother suddenly stopped.

Alban's first impression was that she might have fainted. He looked closer, and could just see her shadowy figure still seated in the chair. He asked if she was ill. No.

"Then why don't you go on?"

"I have done," she answered.

"Do you think you can put me off," he rejoined sternly, "with such an excuse as that? What did Miss de Sor ask you to tell her? You promised to trust me. Be as good as your word."

In the days of her health and strength, she would have set him at defiance. All she could do now was to appeal to his mercy.

"Make some allowance for me," she said. "I have been terribly upset. What has become of my courage? What has broken me down in this way? Spare me, sir."

He refused to listen. "This vile attempt to practice on your fears may be repeated," he reminded her. "More cruel advantage may be taken of the nervous derangement from which you are suffering in the climate of this place. You little know me, if you think I will allow that to go on."

She made a last effort to plead with him. "Oh sir, is this behaving like the good kind man I thought you were? You say you are Miss Emily's friend? Don't press me--for Miss Emily's sake!"

"Emily!" Alban exclaimed. "Is she concerned in this?"

There was a change to tenderness in his voice, which persuaded Mrs. Ellmother that she had found her way to the weak side of him. Her one effort now was to strengthen the impression which she believed herself to have produced. "Miss Emily is concerned in it," she confessed.

"In what way?"

"Never mind in what way."

"But I do mind."

"I tell you, sir, Miss Emily must never know it to her dying day!"

The first suspicion of the truth crossed Alban's mind.

"I understand you at last," he said. "What Miss Emily must never know--is what Miss de Sor wanted you to tell her. Oh, it's useless to contradict me! Her motive in trying to frighten you is as plain to me now as if she had confessed it. Are you sure you didn't betray yourself, when she showed the image of wax?"

"I should have died first!" The reply had hardly escaped her before she regretted it. "What makes you want to be so sure about it?" she said. "It looks as if you knew--"

"I do know."

"What!"

The kindest thing that he could do now was to speak out. "Your secret is no secret to me," he said.

Rage and fear shook her together. For the moment she was like the Mrs. Ellmother of former days. "You lie!" she cried.

"I speak the truth."

"I won't believe you! I daren't believe you!"
"Listen to me. In Emily's interests, listen to me. I have read of the murder at Zeeland--"

"That's nothing! The man was a namesake of her father."

"The man was her father himself. Keep your seat! There is nothing to be alarmed about. I know that Emily is
ignorant of the horrid death that her father died. I know that you and your late mistress have kept the discovery from
her to this day. I know the love and pity which plead your excuse for deceiving her, and the circumstances that
favored the deception. My good creature, Emily's peace of mind is as sacred to me as it is to you! I love her as I love
my own life--and better. Are you calmer, now?"

He heard her crying: it was the best relief that could come to her. After waiting a while to let the tears have their
way, he helped her to rise. There was no more to be said now. The one thing to do was to take her back to the house.

"I can give you a word of advice," he said, "before we part for the night. You must leave Miss de Sor's service at
once. Your health will be a sufficient excuse. Give her warning immediately."

Mrs. Ellmother hung back, when he offered her his arm. The bare prospect of seeing Francine again was
revolting to her. On Alban's assurance that the notice to leave could be given in writing, she made no further
resistance. The village clock struck eleven as they ascended the terrace steps.

A minute later, another person left the grounds by the path which led to the house. Alban's precaution had been
taken too late. The smell of tobacco-smoke had guided Francine, when she was at a loss which way to turn next in
search of Mrs. Ellmother. For the last quarter of an hour she had been listening, hidden among the trees.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

CHANGE OF AIR.

The inmates of Netherwoods rose early, and went to bed early. When Alban and Mrs. Ellmother arrived at the
back door of the house, they found it locked.

The only light visible, along the whole length of the building, glimmered through the Venetian blind of the
window-entrance to Francine's sitting-room. Alban proposed to get admission to the house by that way. In her horror
of again encountering Francine, Mrs. Ellmother positively refused to follow him when he turned away from the
door. "They can't be all asleep yet," she said--and rang the bell.

One person was still out of bed--and that person was the mistress of the house. They recognized her voice in the
customary question: "Who's there?" The door having been opened, good Miss Ladd looked backward and forward
between Alban and Mrs. Ellmother, with the bewildered air of a lady who doubted the evidence of her own eyes.
The next moment, her sense of humor overpowered her. She burst out laughing.

"Close the door, Mr. Morris," she said, "and be so good as to tell me what this means. Have you been giving a
lesson in drawing by starlight?"

Mrs. Ellmother moved, so that the light of the lamp in Miss Ladd's hand fell on her face. "I am faint and giddy,"
she said; "let me go to my bed."

Miss Ladd instantly followed her. "Pray forgive me! I didn't see you were ill, when I spoke," she gently
explained. "What can I do for you?"

"Thank you kindly, ma'am. I want nothing but peace and quiet. I wish you good-night."

Alban followed Miss Ladd to her study, on the front side of the house. He had just mentioned the circumstances
under which he and Mrs. Ellmother had met, when they were interrupted by a tap at the door. Francine had got back
to her room unperceived, by way of the French window. She now presented herself, with an elaborate apology, and
with the nearest approach to a penitent expression of which her face was capable.

"I am ashamed, Miss Ladd, to intrude on you at this time of night. My only excuse is, that I am anxious about
Mrs. Ellmother. I heard you just now in the hall. If she is really ill, I am the unfortunate cause of it."

"In what way, Miss de Sor?"

"I am sorry to say I frightened her--while we were talking in my room--quite unintentionally. She rushed to the
door and ran out. I supposed she had gone to her bedroom; I had no idea she was in the grounds."

In this false statement there was mingled a grain of truth. It was true that Francine believed Mrs. Ellmother to
have taken refuge in her room--for she had examined the room. Finding it empty, and failing to discover the fugitive
in other parts of the house, she had become alarmed, and had tried the grounds next--with the formidable result
which has been already related. Concealing this circumstance, she had lied in such a skillfully artless manner that
Alban (having no suspicion of what had really happened to sharpen his wits) was as completely deceived as Miss
Ladd. Proceeding to further explanation--and remembering that she was in Alban's presence--Francine was careful
to keep herself within the strict limit of truth. Confessing that she had frightened her servant by a description of
sorcery, as it was practiced among the slaves on her father's estate, she only lied again, in declaring that Mrs.
Ellmother had supposed she was in earnest, when she was guilty of no more serious offense than playing a practical
joke.

In this case, Alban was necessarily in a position to detect the falsehood. But it was so evidently in Francine's
interests to present her conduct in the most favorable light, that the discovery failed to excite his suspicion. He waited in silence, while Miss Ladd administered a severe reproof. Francine having left the room, as penitently as she had entered it (with her handkerchief over her tearless eyes), he was at liberty, with certain reserves, to return to what had passed between Mrs. Ellmother and himself.

"The fright which the poor old woman has suffered," he said, "has led to one good result. I have found her ready at last to acknowledge that she is ill, and inclined to believe that the change to Netherwoods has had something to do with it. I have advised her to take the course which you suggested, by leaving this house. Is it possible to dispense with the usual delay, when she gives notice to leave Miss de Sor's service?"

"She need feel no anxiety, poor soul, on that account," Miss Ladd replied. "In any case, I had arranged that a week's notice on either side should be enough. As it is, I will speak to Francine myself. The least she can do, to express her regret, is to place no difficulties in Mrs. Ellmother's way."

The next day was Sunday.

Miss Ladd broke through her rule of attending to secular affairs on week days only; and, after consulting with Mrs. Ellmother, arranged with Francine that her servant should be at liberty to leave Netherwoods (health permitting) on the next day. But one difficulty remained. Mrs. Ellmother was in no condition to take the long journey to her birthplace in Cumberland; and her own lodgings in London had been let.

Under these circumstances, what was the best arrangement that could be made for her? Miss Ladd wisely and kindly wrote to Emily on the subject, and asked for a speedy reply.

Later in the day, Alban was sent for to see Mrs. Ellmother. He found her anxiously waiting to hear what had passed, on the previous night, between Miss Ladd and himself. "Were you careful, sir, to say nothing about Miss Emily?"

"I was especially careful; I never alluded to her in any way."

"Has Miss de Sor spoken to you?"

"I have not given her the opportunity."

"She's an obstinate one--she might try."

"If she does, she shall hear my opinion of her in plain words." The talk between them turned next on Alban's discovery of the secret, of which Mrs. Ellmother had believed herself to be the sole depository since Miss Letitia's death. Without alarming her by any needless allusion to Doctor Allday or to Miss Jethro, he answered her inquiries (so far as he was himself concerned) without reserve. Her curiosity once satisfied, she showed no disposition to pursue the topic. She pointed to Miss Ladd's cat, fast asleep by the side of an empty saucer.

"Is it a sin, Mr. Morris, to wish I was Tom? He doesn't trouble himself about his life that is past or his life that is to come. If I could only empty my saucer and go to sleep, I shouldn't be thinking of the number of people in this world, like myself, who would be better out of it than in it. Miss Ladd has got me my liberty tomorrow; and I don't even know where to go, when I leave this place."

"Suppose you follow Tom's example?" Alban suggested. "Enjoy to-day (in that comfortable chair) and let to-morrow take care of itself."

To-morrow arrived, and justified Alban's system of philosophy. Emily answered Miss Ladd's letter, to excellent purpose, by telegraph.

"I leave London to-day with Cecilia" (the message announced) "for Monksmoor Park, Hants. Will Mrs. Ellmother take care of the cottage in my absence? I shall be away for a month, at least. All is prepared for her if she consents."

Mrs. Ellmother gladly accepted this proposal. In the interval of Emily's absence, she could easily arrange to return to her own lodgings. With words of sincere gratitude she took leave of Miss Ladd; but no persuasion would induce her to say good-by to Francine. "Do me one more kindness, ma'am; don't tell Miss de Sor when I go away." Ignorant of the provocation which had produced this unforgiving temper of mind, Miss Ladd gently remonstrated. "Miss de Sor received my reproof in a penitent spirit; she expresses sincere sorrow for having thoughtlessly frightened you. Both yesterday and to-day she has made kind inquiries after your health. Come! come! don't bear malice--wish her good-by." Mrs. Ellmother's answer was characteristic. "I'll say good-by by telegraph, when I get to London."

Her last words were addressed to Alban. "If you can find a way of doing it, sir, keep those two apart."

"Do you mean Emily and Miss de Sor?"

"Yes."

"What are you afraid of?"

"I don't know."

"Is that quite reasonable, Mrs. Ellmother?"

"I daresay not. I only know that I am afraid."
The pony chaise took her away. Alban's class was not yet ready for him. He waited on the terrace.

Innocent alike of all knowledge of the serious reason for fear which did really exist, Mrs. Ellmother and Alban felt, nevertheless, the same vague distrust of an intimacy between the two girls. Idle, vain, malicious, false--to know that Francine's character presented these faults, without any discoverable merits to set against them, was surely enough to justify a gloomy view of the prospect, if she succeeded in winning the position of Emily's friend. Alban reasoned it out logically in this way--without satisfying himself, and without accounting for the remembrance that haunted him of Mrs. Ellmother's farewell look. "A commonplace man would say we are both in a morbid state of mind," he thought; "and sometimes commonplace men turn out to be right."

He was too deeply preoccupied to notice that he had advanced perilously near Francine's window. She suddenly stepped out of her room, and spoke to him.

"Do you happen to know, Mr. Morris, why Mrs. Ellmother has gone away without bidding me good-by?"

"She was probably afraid, Miss de Sor, that you might make her the victim of another joke."

Francine eyed him steadily. "Have you any particular reason for speaking to me in that way?"

"I am not aware that I have answered you rudely--if that is what you mean."

"That is not what I mean. You seem to have taken a dislike to me. I should be glad to know why."

"I dislike cruelty--and you have behaved cruelly to Mrs. Ellmother."

"Meaning to be cruel?" Francine inquired.

"You know as well as I do, Miss de Sor, that I can't answer that question."

Francine looked at him again "Am I to understand that we are enemies?" she asked.

"You are to understand," he replied, "that a person whom Miss Ladd employs to help her in teaching, cannot always presume to express his sentiments in speaking to the young ladies."

"If that means anything, Mr. Morris, it means that we are enemies."

"It means, Miss de Sor, that I am the drawing-master at this school, and that I am called to my class."

Francine returned to her room, relieved of the only doubt that had troubled her. Plainly no suspicion that she had overheard what passed between Mrs. Ellmother and himself existed in Alban's mind. As to the use to be made of her discovery, she felt no difficulty in deciding to wait, and be guided by events. Her curiosity and her self-esteem had been alike gratified--she had got the better of Mrs. Ellmother at last, and with that triumph she was content. While Emily remained her friend, it would be an act of useless cruelty to disclose the terrible truth. There had certainly been a coolness between them at Brighton. But Francine--still influenced by the magnetic attraction which drew her to Emily--did not conceal from herself that she had offered the provocation, and had been therefore the person to blame. "I can set all that right," she thought, "when we meet at Monksmoor Park." She opened her desk and wrote the shortest and sweetest of letters to Cecilia. "I am entirely at the disposal of my charming friend, on any convenient day--may I add, my dear, the sooner the better?"

CHAPTER XXXVII.

"THE LADY WANTS YOU, SIR."

The pupils of the drawing-class put away their pencils and color-boxes in high good humor: the teacher's vigilant eye for faults had failed him for the first time in their experience. Not one of them had been reproved; they had chattered and giggled and drawn caricatures on the margin of the paper, as freely as if the master had left the room. Alban's wandering attention was indeed beyond the reach of control. His interview with Francine had doubled his sense of responsibility toward Emily--while he was further than ever from seeing how he could interfere, to any useful purpose, in his present position, and with his reasons for writing under reserve.

One of the servants addressed him as he was leaving the schoolroom. The landlady's boy was waiting in the hall, with a message from his lodgings.

"Now then! what is it?" he asked, irritably.

"The lady wants you, sir." With this mysterious answer, the boy presented a visiting card. The name inscribed on it was--"Miss Jethro."

She had arrived by the train, and she was then waiting at Alban's lodgings. "Say I will be with her directly."

Having given the message, he stood for a while, with his hat in his hand--literally lost in astonishment. It was simply impossible to guess at Miss Jethro's object: and yet, with the usual perversity of human nature, he was still wondering what she could possibly want with him, up to the final moment when he opened the door of his sitting-room.

She rose and bowed with the same grace of movement, and the same well-bred composure of manner, which Doctor Allday had noticed when she entered his consulting-room. Her dark melancholy eyes rested on Alban with a look of gentle interest. A faint flush of color animated for a moment the faded beauty of her face--passed away again--and left it paler than before.

"I cannot conceal from myself," she began, "that I am intruding on you under embarrassing circumstances."
"May I ask, Miss Jethro, to what circumstances you allude?"

"You forget, Mr. Morris, that I left Miss Ladd's school, in a manner which justified doubt of me in the minds of strangers."

"Speaking as one of those strangers," Alban replied, "I cannot feel that I had any right to form an opinion, on a matter which only concerned Miss Ladd and yourself."

Miss Jethro bowed gravely. "You encourage me to hope," she said. "I think you will place a favorable construction on my visit when I mention my motive. I ask you to receive me, in the interests of Miss Emily Brown."

Stating her purpose in calling on him in those plain terms, she added to the amazement which Alban already felt, by handing to him—as if she was presenting an introduction—a letter marked, "Private," addressed to her by Doctor Allday.

"I may tell you," she premised, "that I had no idea of troubling you, until Doctor Allday suggested it. I wrote to him in the first instance; and there is his reply. Pray read it."

The letter was dated, "Penzance"; and the doctor wrote, as he spoke, without ceremony.

"MADAM—Your letter has been forwarded to me. I am spending my autumn holiday in the far West of Cornwall. However, if I had been at home, it would have made no difference. I should have begged leave to decline holding any further conversation with you, on the subject of Miss Emily Brown, for the following reasons:

"In the first place, though I cannot doubt your sincere interest in the young lady's welfare, I don't like your mysterious way of showing it. In the second place, when I called at your address in London, after you had left my house, I found that you had taken to flight. I place my own interpretation on this circumstance; but as it is not founded on any knowledge of facts, I merely allude to it, and say no more."

Arrived at that point, Alban offered to return the letter. "Do you really mean me to go on reading it?" he asked.

"Yes," she said quietly.

Alban returned to the letter.

"In the third place, I have good reason to believe that you entered Miss Ladd's school as a teacher, under false pretenses. After that discovery, I tell you plainly I hesitate to attach credit to any statement that you may wish to make. At the same time, I must not permit my prejudices (as you will probably call them) to stand in the way of Miss Emily's interests—supposing them to be really depending on any interference of yours. Miss Ladd's drawing-master, Mr. Alban Morris, is even more devoted to Miss Emily's service than I am. Whatever you might have said to me, you can say to him—with this possible advantage, that he may believe you."

There the letter ended. Alban handed it back in silence.

Miss Jethro pointed to the words, "Mr. Alban Morris is even more devoted to Miss Emily's service than I am."

"Is that true?" she asked.

"Quite true."

"I don't complain, Mr. Morris, of the hard things said of me in that letter; you are at liberty to suppose, if you like, that I deserve them. Attribute it to pride, or attribute it to reluctance to make needless demands on your time—I shall not attempt to defend myself. I leave you to decide whether the woman who has shown you that letter—having something important to say to you—is a person who is mean enough to say it under false pretenses."

"Tell me what I can do for you, Miss Jethro: and be assured, beforehand, that I don't doubt your sincerity."

"My purpose in coming here," she answered, "is to induce you to use your influence over Miss Emily Brown."

"With what object?" Alban asked, interrupting her.

"My object is her own good. Some years since, I happened to become acquainted with a person who has attained some celebrity as a preacher. You have perhaps heard of Mr. Miles Mirabel?"

"I have heard of him."

"I have been in correspondence with him," Miss Jethro proceeded. "He tells me he has been introduced to a young lady, who was formerly one of Miss Ladd's pupils, and who is the daughter of Mr. Wyvil, of Monksmoor Park. He has called on Mr. Wyvil; and he has since received an invitation to stay at Mr. Wyvil's house. The day fixed for the visit is Monday, the fifth of next month."

Alban listened—at a loss to know what interest he was supposed to have in being made acquainted with Mr. Mirabel's engagements. Miss Jethro's next words enlightened him.

"You are perhaps aware," she resumed, "that Miss Emily Brown is Miss Wyvil's intimate friend. She will be one of the guests at Monksmoor Park. If there are any obstacles which you can place in her way—if there is any influence which you can exert, without exciting suspicion of your motive—prevent her, I entreat you, from accepting Miss Wyvil's invitation, until Mr. Mirabel's visit has come to an end."

"Is there anything against Mr. Mirabel?" he asked.

"I say nothing against him."

"Is Miss Emily acquainted with him?"
"No."
"Is he a person with whom it would be disagreeable to her to associate?"
"Quite the contrary."
"And yet you expect me to prevent them from meeting! Be reasonable, Miss Jethro."
"I can only be in earnest, Mr. Morris--more truly, more deeply in earnest than you can suppose. I declare to you that I am speaking in Miss Emily's interests. Do you still refuse to exert yourself for her sake?"
"I am spared the pain of refusal," Alban answered. "The time for interference has gone by. She is, at this moment, on her way to Monksmoor Park."

Miss Jethro attempted to rise--and dropped back into her chair. "Water!" she said faintly. After drinking from the glass to the last drop, she began to revive. Her little traveling-bag was on the floor at her side. She took out a railway guide, and tried to consult it. Her fingers trembled incessantly; she was unable to find the page to which she wished to refer. "Help me," she said, "I must leave this place--by the first train that passes."
"To see Emily?" Alban asked.
"Quite useless! You have said it yourself--the time for interference has gone by. Look at the guide."
"What place shall I look for?"
"Look for Vale Regis."
Alban found the place. The train was due in ten minutes. "Surely you are not fit to travel so soon?" he suggested.
"Fit or not, I must see Mr. Mirabel--I must make the effort to keep them apart by appealing to him."
"With any hope of success?"
"With no hope--and with no interest in the man himself. Still I must try."
"Out of anxiety for Emily's welfare?"
"Out of anxiety for more than that."
"For what?"
"If you can't guess, I daren't tell you."
That strange reply startled Alban. Before he could ask what it meant, Miss Jethro had left him.

In the emergencies of life, a person readier of resource than Alban Morris it would not have been easy to discover. The extraordinary interview that had now come to an end had found its limits. Bewildered and helpless, he stood at the window of his room, and asked himself (as if he had been the weakest man living), "What shall I do?"

BOOK THE FOURTH--THE COUNTRY HOUSE.
CHAPTER XXXVIII.
DANCING.

The windows of the long drawing-room at Monksmoor are all thrown open to the conservatory. Distant masses of plants and flowers, mingled in ever-varying forms of beauty, are touched by the melancholy luster of the rising moon. Nearer to the house, the restful shadows are disturbed at intervals, where streams of light fall over them aslant from the lamps in the room. The fountain is playing. In rivalry with its lighter music, the nightingales are singing their song of ecstasy. Sometimes, the laughter of girls is heard--and, sometimes, the melody of a waltz. The younger guests at Monksmoor are dancing.

Emily and Cecilia are dressed alike in white, with flowers in their hair. Francine rivals them by means of a gorgeous contrast of color, and declares that she is rich with the bright emphasis of diamonds and the soft persuasion of pearls.

Miss Plym (from the rectory) is fat and fair and prosperous: she overflows with good spirits; she has a waist which defies tight-lacing, and she dances joyously on large flat feet. Miss Darnaway (officer's daughter with small means) is the exact opposite of Miss Plym. She is thin and tall and faded--poor soul. Destiny has made it her hard lot in life to fill the place of head-nursemaid at home. In her pensive moments, she thinks of the little brothers and sisters, whose patient servant she is, and wonders who comforts them in their tumbles and tells them stories at bedtime, while she is holiday-making at the pleasant country house.

Tender-hearted Cecilia, remembering how few pleasures this young friend has, and knowing how well she dances, never allows her to be without a partner. There are three invaluable young gentlemen present, who are excellent dancers. Members of different families, they are nevertheless fearfully and wonderfully like each other. They present the same rosy complexions and straw-colored mustachios, the same plump cheeks, vacant eyes and low forehead; and they utter, with the same stolid gravity, the same imbecile small talk. On sofas facing each other sit the two remaining guests, who have not joined the elders at the card-table in another room. They are both men. One of them is drowsy and middle-aged--happy in the possession of large landed property: happier still in a capacity for drinking Mr. Wyvil's famous port-wine without gouty results.

The other gentleman--ah, who is the other? He is the confidential adviser and bosom friend of every young lady in the house. Is it necessary to name the Reverend Miles Mirabel?
There he sits enthroned, with room for a fair admirer on either side of him—the clerical sultan of a platonic harem. His persuasive ministry is felt as well as heard: he has an innocent habit of fondling young persons. One of his arms is even long enough to embrace the circumference of Miss Plym—while the other clasps the rigid silken waist of Francine. "I do it everywhere else," he says innocently, "why not here?" Why not indeed—with that delicate complexion and those beautiful blue eyes; with the glorious golden hair that rests on his shoulders, and the glossy beard that flows over his breast? Familiarities, forbidden to mere men, become privileges and condescensions when an angel enters society—and more especially when that angel has enough of mortality in him to be amusing. Mr. Mirabel, on his social side, is an irresistible companion. He is cheerfulness itself; he takes a favorable view of everything; his sweet temper never differs with anybody. "In my humble way," he confesses, "I like to make the world about me brighter." Laughter (harmlessly produced, observe!) is the element in which he lives and breathes. Miss Darnaway's serious face puts him out; he has laid a bet with Emily—not in money, not even in gloves, only in flowers—that he will make Miss Darnaway laugh; and he has won the wager. Emily's flowers are in his button-hole, peeping through the curly interstices of his beard. "Must you leave me?" he asks tenderly, when there is a dancing man at liberty, and it is Francine's turn to claim him. She leaves her seat not very willingly. For a while, the place is vacant; Miss Plym seizes the opportunity of consulting the ladies' bosom friend.

"Dear Mr. Mirabel, do tell me what you think of Miss de Sor?"

Dear Mr. Mirabel bursts into enthusiasm and makes a charming reply. His large experience of young ladies warns him that they will tell each other what he thinks of them, when they retire for the night; and he is careful on these occasions to say something that will bear repetition.

"I see in Miss de Sor," he declares, "the resolution of a man, tempered by the sweetness of a woman. When that interesting creature marries, her husband will be—shall I use the vulgar word?—henpecked. Dear Miss Plym, he will enjoy it; and he will be quite right too; and, if I am asked to the wedding, I shall say, with heartfelt sincerity, Enviable man!"

In the height of her admiration for Mr. Mirabel's wonderful eye for character, Miss Plym is called away to the piano. Cecilia succeeds to her friend's place—and has her waist taken in charge as a matter of course.

"How do you like Miss Plym?" she asks directly.

Mr. Mirabel smiles, and shows the prettiest little pearly teeth. "I was just thinking of her," he confesses pleasantly; "Miss Plym is so nice and plump, so comforting and domestic—such a perfect clergyman's daughter. You love her, don't you? Is she engaged to be married? In that case—between ourselves, dear Miss Wyvil, a clergyman is obliged to be cautious—I may own that I love her too."

Delicious titillations of flattered self-esteem betray themselves in Cecilia's lovely complexion. She is the chosen confidante of this irresistible man; and she would like to express her sense of obligation. But Mr. Mirabel is a master in the art of putting the right words in the right places; and simple Cecilia distrusts herself and her grammar.

At that moment of embarrassment, a friend leaves the dance, and helps Cecilia out of the difficulty.

Emily approaches the sofa-throne, breathless—followed by her partner, entreating her to give him "one turn more." She is not to be tempted; she means to rest. Cecilia sees an act of mercy, suggested by the presence of the disengaged young man. She seizes his arm, and hurries him off to poor Miss Darnaway; sitting forlorn in a corner, and thinking of the nursery at home. In the meanwhile a circumstance occurs. Mr. Mirabel's all-embracing arm shows itself in a new character, when Emily sits by his side.

It becomes, for the first time, an irresolute arm. It advances a little—and hesitates. Emily at once administers an unexpected check; she insists on preserving a free waist, in her own outspoken language. "No, Mr. Mirabel, keep that for the others. You can't imagine how ridiculous you and the young ladies look, and how absurdly unaware of it you all seem to be." For the first time in his life, the reverend and ready-witted man of the world is at a loss for an answer. Why?

For this simple reason. He too has felt the magnetic attraction of the irresistible little creature whom every one likes. Miss Jethro has been doubly defeated. She has failed to keep them apart; and her unexplained misgivings have not been justified by events: Emily and Mr. Mirabel are good friends already. The brilliant clergyman is poor; his interests in life point to a marriage for money; he has fascinated the heiresses of two rich fathers, Mr. Tyvil and Mr. de Sor—and yet he is conscious of an influence (an alien influence, without a balance at its bankers), which has, in some mysterious way, got between him and his interests.

On Emily's side, the attraction felt is of another nature altogether. Among the merry young people at Monksmoor she is her old happy self again; and she finds in Mr. Mirabel the most agreeable and amusing man whom she has ever met. After those dismal night watches by the bed of her dying aunt, and the dreary weeks of solitude that followed, to live in this new world of luxury and gaiety is like escaping from the darkness of night, and basking in the fall brightness of day. Cecilia declares that she looks, once more, like the joyous queen of the bedroom, in the bygone time at school; and Francine (profaning Shakespeare without knowing it), says, "Emily is herself again!"
"Now that your arm is in its right place, reverend sir," she gayly resumes, "I may admit that there are exceptions to all rules. My waist is at your disposal, in a case of necessity--that is to say, in a case of waltzing."

"The one case of all others," Mirabel answers, with the engaging frankness that has won him so many friends, "which can never happen in my unhappy experience. Waltzing, I blush to own it, means picking me up off the floor, and putting smelling salts to my nostrils. In other words, dear Miss Emily, it is the room that waltzes--not I. I can't look at those whirling couples there, with a steady head. Even the exquisite figure of our young hostess, when it describes flying circles, turns me giddy."

Hearing this allusion to Cecilia, Emily drops to the level of the other girls. She too pays her homage to the Pope of private life. "You promised me your unbiased opinion of Cecilia," she reminds him; "and you haven't given it yet."

The ladies' friend gently remonstrates. "Miss Wyvil's beauty dazzles me. How can I give an unbiased opinion? Besides, I am not thinking of her; I can only think of you."

Emily lifts her eyes, half merrily, half tenderly, and looks at him over the top of her fan. It is her first effort at flirtation. She is tempted to engage in the most interesting of all games to a girl--the game which plays at making love. What has Cecilia told her, in those bedroom gossipings, dear to the hearts of the two friends? Cecilia has whispered, "Mr. Mirabel admires your figure; he calls you 'the Venus of Milo, in a state of perfect abridgment.'"

"You promised me your unbiased opinion of Cecilia," she reminds him; "and you haven't given it yet."
FEIGNING.
The next morning, Mr. Mirabel took two members of the circle at Monksmoor by surprise. One of them was Emily; and one of them was the master of the house.

Seeing Emily alone in the garden before breakfast, he left his room and joined her. "Let me say one word," he pleaded, "before we go to breakfast. I am grieved to think that I was so unfortunate as to offend you, last night."

Emily's look of astonishment answered for her before she could speak. "What can I have said or done," she asked, "to make you think that?"

"Now I breathe again!" he cried, with the boyish gayety of manner which was one of the secrets of his popularity among women. "I really feared that I had spoken thoughtlessly. It is a terrible confession for a clergyman to make--but it is not the less true that I am one of the most indiscreet men living. It is my rock ahead in life that I say the first thing which comes uppermost, without stopping to think. Being well aware of my own defects, I naturally distrust myself."

"Even in the pulpit?" Emily inquired.

He laughed with the readiest appreciation of the satire--although it was directed against himself.

"I like that question," he said; "it tells me we are as good friends again as ever. The fact is, the sight of the congregation, when I get into the pulpit, has the same effect upon me that the sight of the footlights has on an actor. All oratory (though my clerical brethren are shy of confessing it) is acting--without the scenery and the costumes. Did you really mean it, last night, when you said you would like to hear me preach?"

"Indeed, I did."

"How very kind of you. I don't think myself the sermon is worth the sacrifice. (There is another specimen of my indiscreet way of talking!) What I mean is, that you will have to get up early on Sunday morning, and drive twelve miles to the damp and dismal little village, in which I officiate for a man with a rich wife who likes the climate of Italy. My congregation works in the fields all the week, and naturally enough goes to sleep in church on Sunday. I have had to counteract that. Not by preaching! I wouldn't puzzle the poor people with my eloquence for the world. No, no: I tell them little stories out of the Bible--in a nice easy gossiping way. A quarter of an hour is my limit of time; and, I am proud to say, some of them (mostly the women) do to a certain extent keep awake. If you and the other ladies decide to honor me, it is needless to say you shall have one of my grand efforts. What will be the effect on my unfortunate flock remains to be seen. I will have the church brushed up, and luncheon of course at the parsonage. Beans, bacon, and beer--I haven't got anything else in the house. Are you rich? I hope not!"

"I suspect I am quite as poor as you are, Mr. Mirabel."

"I am delighted to hear it. (More of my indiscretion!) Our poverty is another bond between us."

Before he could enlarge on this text, the breakfast bell rang.

He gave Emily his arm, quite satisfied with the result of the morning's talk. In speaking seriously to her on the previous night, he had committed the mistake of speaking too soon. To amend this false step, and to recover his position in Emily's estimation, had been his object in view--and it had been successfully accomplished. At the breakfast-table that morning, the companionable clergyman was more amusing than ever.

The meal being over, the company dispersed as usual--with the one exception of Mirabel. Without any apparent reason, he kept his place at the table. Mr. Wyvil, the most courteous and considerate of men, felt it an attention due to his guest not to leave the room first. All that he could venture to do was a little hint. "Have you any plans for the morning?" he asked.

"I have a plan that depends entirely on yourself," Mirabel answered; "and I am afraid of being as indiscreet as usual, if I mention it. Your charming daughter tells me you play on the violin."

Modest Mr. Wyvil looked confused. "I hope you have not been annoyed," he said; "I practice in a distant room so that nobody may hear me."

"My dear sir, I am eager to hear you! Music is my passion; and the violin is my favorite instrument."

Mr. Wyvil led the way to his room, positively blushing with pleasure. Since the death of his wife he had been sadly in want of a little encouragement. His daughters and his friends were careful--over-careful, as he thought--of intruding on him in his hours of practice. And, sad to say, his daughters and his friends were, from a musical point of view, perfectly right.

Literature has hardly paid sufficient attention to a social phenomenon of a singularly perplexing kind. We hear enough, and more than enough, of persons who successfully cultivate the Arts--of the remarkable manner in which fitness for their vocation shows itself in early life, of the obstacles which family prejudice places in their way, and of the unremitting devotion which has led to the achievement of glorious results.

But how many writers have noticed those other incomprehensible persons, members of families innocent for generations past of practicing Art or caring for Art, who have notwithstanding displayed from their earliest years the irresistible desire to cultivate poetry, painting, or music; who have surmounted obstacles, and endured
disappointments, in the single-hearted resolution to devote their lives to an intellectual pursuit--being absolutely without the capacity which proves the vocation, and justifies the sacrifice. Here are men bent on performing feats of running, without having legs; and women, hopelessly barren, living in constant expectation of large families to the end of their days. The musician is not to be found more completely deprived than Mr. Wyvil of natural capacity for playing on an instrument--and, for twenty years past, it had been the pride and delight of his heart to let no day of his life go by without practicing on the violin.

"I am sure I must be tiring you," he said politely--after having played without mercy for an hour and more.

No: the insatiable amateur had his own purpose to gain, and was not exhausted yet. Mr. Wyvil got up to look for some more music. In that interval desultory conversation naturally took place. Mirabel contrived to give it the necessary direction--the direction of Emily.

"The most delightful girl I have met with for many a long year past!" Mr. Wyvil declared warmly. "I don't wonder at my daughter being so fond of her. She leads a solitary life at home, poor thing; and I am honestly glad to see her spirits reviving in my house."

"An only child?" Mirabel asked.

In the necessary explanation that followed, Emily's isolated position in the world was revealed in few words. But one more discovery--the most important of all--remained to be made. Had she used a figure of speech in saying that she was as poor as Mirabel himself? or had she told him the shocking truth? He put the question with perfect delicacy--but with unerring directness as well.

Mr. Wyvil, quoting his daughter's authority, described Emily's income as falling short even of two hundred a year. Having made that disheartening reply, he opened another music book. "You know this sonata, of course?" he said. The next moment, the violin was under his chin and the performance began.

While Mirabel was, to all appearance, listening with the utmost attention, he was actually endeavoring to reconcile himself to a serious sacrifice of his own inclinations. If he remained much longer in the same house with Emily, the impression that she had produced on him would be certainly strengthened--and he would be guilty of the folly of making an offer of marriage to a woman who was as poor as himself. The one remedy that could be trusted to preserve him from such infatuation as this, was absence. At the end of the week, he had arranged to return to Vale Regis for his Sunday duty; engaging to join his friends again at Monksmoor on the Monday following. That rash promise, there could be no further doubt about it, must not be fulfilled.

He had arrived at this resolution, when the terrible activity of Mr. Wyvil's bow was suspended by the appearance of a third person in the room.

Cecilia's maid was charged with a neat little three-cornered note from her young lady, to be presented to her master. Wondering why his daughter should write to him, Mr. Wyvil opened the note, and was informed of Cecilia's motive in these words:

"DEAREST PAPA--I hear Mr. Mirabel is with you, and as this is a secret, I must write. Emily has received a very strange letter this morning, which puzzles her and alarms me. When you are quite at liberty, we shall be so much obliged if you will tell us how Emily ought to answer it." Mr. Wyvil stopped Mirabel, on the point of trying to escape from the music. "A little domestic matter to attend to," he said. "But we will finish the sonata first."

CHAPTER XL.

CONSULTING.

Out of the music room, and away from his violin, the sound side of Mr. Wyvil's character was free to assert itself. In his public and in his private capacity, he was an eminently sensible man.

As a member of parliament, he set an example which might have been followed with advantage by many of his colleagues. In the first place he abstained from hastening the downfall of representative institutions by asking questions and making speeches. In the second place, he was able to distinguish between the duty that he owed to his party, and the duty that he owed to his country. When the Legislature acted politically--that is to say, when it dealt with foreign complications, or electoral reforms--he followed his leader. When the Legislature acted socially--that is to say, for the good of the people--he followed his conscience. On the last occasion when the great Russian bugbear provoked a division, he voted submissively with his Conservative allies. But, when the question of opening museums and picture galleries on Sundays arrayed the two parties in hostile camps, he broke into open mutiny, and went over to the Liberals. He consented to help in preventing an extension of the franchise; but he refused to be concerned in obstructing the repeal of taxes on knowledge. "I am doubtful in the first case," he said, "but I am sure in the second." He was asked for an explanation: "Doubtful of what? and sure of what?" To the astonishment of his leader, he answered: "The benefit to the people." The same sound sense appeared in the transactions of his private life. Lazy and dishonest servants found that the gentlest of masters had a side to his character which took them by
surprise. And, on certain occasions in the experience of Cecilia and her sister, the most indulgent of fathers proved to be as capable of saying No, as the sternest tyrant who ever ruled a fireside.

Called into council by his daughter and his guest, Mr. Wyvil assisted them by advice which was equally wise and kind—b ut which afterward proved, under the perverse influence of circumstances, to be advice that he had better not have given.

The letter to Emily which Cecilia had recommended to her father's consideration, had come from Netherwoods, and had been written by Alban Morris.

He assured Emily that he had only decided on writing to her, after some hesitation, in the hope of serving interests which he did not himself understand, but which might prove to be interests worthy of consideration, nevertheless. Having stated his motive in these terms, he proceeded to relate what had passed between Miss Jethro and himself. On the subject of Francine, Alban only ventured to add that she had not produced a favorable impression on him, and that he could not think her likely, on further experience, to prove a desirable friend.

On the last leaf were added some lines, which Emily was at no loss how to answer. She had folded back the page, so that no eyes but her own should see how the poor drawing-master finished his letter: "I wish you all possible happiness, my dear, among your new friends; but don't forget the old friend who thinks of you, and dreams of you, and longs to see you again. The little world I live in is a dreary world, Emily, in your absence. Will you write to me now and then, and encourage me to hope?"

Mr. Wyvil smiled, as he looked at the folded page, which hid the signature.

"I suppose I may take it for granted," he said slyly, "that this gentleman really has your interests at heart? May I know who he is?"

Emily answered the last question readily enough. Mr. Wyvil went on with his inquiries. "About the mysterious lady, with the strange name," he proceeded—"do you know anything of her?"

Emily related what she knew; without revealing the true reason for Miss Jethro's departure from Netherwoods. In after years, it was one of her most treasured remembrances, that she had kept secret the melancholy confession which had startled her, on the last night of her life at school.

Mr. Wyvil looked at Alban's letter again. "Do you know how Miss Jethro became acquainted with Mr. Mirabel?" he asked.

"I didn't even know that they were acquainted."

"Do you think it likely—if Mr. Morris had been talking to you instead of writing to you—that he might have said more than he has said in his letter?"

Cecilia had hitherto remained a model of discretion. Seeing Emily hesitate, temptation overcame her. "Not a doubt of it, papa!" she declared confidently.

"Is Cecilia right?" Mr. Wyvil inquired.

Reminded in this way of her influence over Alban, Emily could only make one honest reply. She admitted that Cecilia was right.

Mr. Wyvil thereupon advised her not to express any opinion, until she was in a better position to judge for herself. "When you write to Mr. Morris," he continued, "say that you will wait to tell him what you think of Miss Jethro, until you see him again."

"I have no prospect at present of seeing him again," Emily said.

"You can see Mr. Morris whenever it suits him to come here," Mr. Wyvil replied. "I will write and ask him to visit us, and you can inclose the invitation in your letter."

"Oh, Mr. Wyvil, how good of you!"

"Oh, papa, the very thing I was going to ask you to do!"

The excellent master of Monksmoor looked unaffectedly surprised. "What are you two young ladies making a fuss about?" he said. "Mr. Morris is a gentleman by profession; and—may I venture to say it, Miss Emily?—a valued friend of yours as well. Who has a better claim to be one of my guests?"

Cecilia stopped her father as he was about to leave the room. "I suppose we mustn't ask Mr. Mirabel what he knows of Miss Jethro?" she said.

"My dear, what can you be thinking of? What right have we to question Mr. Mirabel about Miss Jethro?"

"It's so very unsatisfactory, papa. There must be some reason why Emily and Mr. Mirabel ought not to meet—or why should Miss Jethro have been so very earnest about it?"

"Miss Jethro doesn't intend us to know why, Cecilia. It will perhaps come out in time. Wait for time."

Left together, the girls discussed the course which Alban would probably take, on receiving Mr. Wyvil's invitation.

"He will only be too glad," Cecilia asserted, "to have the opportunity of seeing you again."

"I doubt whether he will care about seeing me again, among strangers," Emily replied. "And you forget that there
are obstacles in his way. How is he to leave his class?"

"Quite easily! His class doesn't meet on the Saturday half-holiday. He can be here, if he starts early, in time for
luncheon; and he can stay till Monday or Tuesday."

"Who is to take his place at the school?"

"Miss Ladd, to be sure--if you make a point of it. Write to her, as well as to Mr. Morris."

The letters being written--and the order having been given to prepare a room for the expected guest--Emily and
Cecilia returned to the drawing-room. They found the elders of the party variously engaged--the men with
newspapers, and the ladies with work. Entering the conservatory next, they discovered Cecilia's sister languishing
among the flowers in an easy chair. Constitutional laziness, in some young ladies, assumes an invalid character, and
presents the interesting spectacle of perpetual convalescence. The doctor declared that the baths at St. Moritz had
cured Miss Julia. Miss Julia declined to agree with the doctor.

"Come into the garden with Emily and me," Cecilia said.

"Emily and you don't know what it is to be ill," Julia answered.

The next day was the day of Mirabel's departure. His admirers among the ladies followed him out to the door, at
which Mr. Wyvil's carriage was waiting. Francine threw a nosegay after the departing guest as he got in. "Mind you
come back to us on Monday!" she said. Mirabel bowed and thanked her; but his last look was for Emily, standing
apart from the others at the top of the steps. Francine said nothing; her lips closed convulsively--she turned suddenly
pale.

CHAPTER XLI.

SPEECHIFYING.

On the Monday, a plowboy from Vale Regis arrived at Monksmoor.

In respect of himself, he was a person beneath notice. In respect of his errand, he was sufficiently important to
cast a gloom over the household. The faithless Mirabel had broken his engagement, and the plowboy was the herald
of misfortune who brought his apology. To his great disappointment (he wrote) he was detained by the affairs of his
parish. He could only trust to Mr. Wyvil's indulgence to excuse him, and to communicate his sincere sense of regret
(on scented note paper) to the ladies.

Everybody believed in the affairs of the parish--with the exception of Francine. "Mr. Mirabel has made the best
excuse he could think of for shortening his visit; and I don't wonder at it," she said, looking significantly at Emily.

Emily was playing with one of the dogs; exercising him in the tricks which he had learned. She balanced a
morsel of sugar on his nose--and had no attention to spare for Francine.

Cecilia, as the mistress of the house, felt it her duty to interfere. "That is a strange remark to make," she
answered. "Do you mean to say that we have driven Mr. Mirabel away from us?"

"I accuse nobody," Francine began with spiteful candor.

"Now she's going to accuse everybody!" Emily interposed, addressing herself facetiously to the dog.

"But when girls are bent on fascinating men, whether they like it or not," Francine proceeded, "men have only
one alternative--they must keep out of the way." She looked again at Emily, more pointedly than ever.

Even gentle Cecilia resented this. "Whom do you refer to?" she said sharply.

"My dear!" Emily remonstrated, "need you ask?" She glanced at Francine as she spoke, and then gave the dog
his signal. He tossed up the sugar, and caught it in his mouth. His audience applauded him--and so, for that time, the
skirmish ended.

Among the letters of the next morning's delivery, arrived Alban's reply. Emily's anticipations proved to be
correct. The drawing-master's duties would not permit him to leave Netherwoods; and he, like Mirabel, sent his
apologies. His short letter to Emily contained no further allusion to Miss Jethro; it began and ended on the first page.

Had he been disappointed by the tone of reserve in which Emily had written to him, under Mr. Wyvil's advice?
Or (as Cecilia suggested) had his detention at the school so bitterly disappointed him that he was too disheartened to
write at any length? Emily made no attempt to arrive at a conclusion, either one way or the other. She seemed to be
in depressed spirits; and she spoke superstitiously, for the first time in Cecilia's experience of her.

"I don't like this reappearance of Miss Jethro," she said. "If the mystery about that woman is ever cleared up, it will bring trouble and sorrow to me—and I believe, in his own secret heart, Alban Morris thinks so too."

"Write, and ask him," Cecilia suggested.

"He is so kind and so unwilling to distress me," Emily answered, "that he wouldn't acknowledge it, even if I am right."

In the middle of the week, the course of private life at Monksmoor suffered an interruption—due to the parliamentary position of the master of the house.

The insatiable appetite for making and hearing speeches, which represents one of the marked peculiarities of the English race (including their cousins in the United States), had seized on Mr. Wyvil's constituents. There was to be a political meeting at the market hall, in the neighboring town; and the member was expected to make an oration, passing in review contemporary events at home and abroad. "Pray don't think of accompanying me," the good man said to his guests. "The hall is badly ventilated, and the speeches, including my own, will not be worth hearing."

This humane warning was ungratefully disregarded. The gentlemen were all interested in "the objects of the meeting"; and the ladies were firm in the resolution not to be left at home by themselves. They dressed with a view to the large assembly of spectators before whom they were about to appear; and they outtalked the men on political subjects, all the way to the town.

The most delightful of surprises was in store for them, when they reached the market hall. Among the crowd of ordinary gentlemen, waiting under the portico until the proceedings began, appeared one person of distinction, whose title was "Reverend," and whose name was Mirabel.

Francine was the first to discover him. She darted up the steps and held out her hand.

"This is a pleasure!" she cried. "Have you come here to see—" she was about to say Me, but, observing the strangers round her, altered the word to Us. "Please give me your arm," she whispered, before her young friends had arrived within hearing. "I am so frightened in a crowd!"

She held fast by Mirabel, and kept a jealous watch on him. Was it only her fancy? or did she detect a new charm in his smile when he spoke to Emily?

Before it was possible to decide, the time for the meeting had arrived. Mr. Wyvil's friends were of course accommodated with seats on the platform. Francine, still insisting on her claim to Mirabel's arm, got a chair next to him. As she seated herself, she left him free for a moment. In that moment, the infatuated man took an empty chair on the other side of him, and placed it for Emily. He communicated to that hated rival the information which he ought to have reserved for Francine. "The committee insist," he said, "on my proposing one of the Resolutions. I promise not to bore you; mine shall be the shortest speech delivered at the meeting."

The proceedings began.

Among the earlier speakers not one was inspired by a feeling of mercy for the audience. The chairman revelled in words. The mover and seconder of the first Resolution (not having so much as the ghost of an idea to trouble either of them), poured out language in flowing and overflowing streams, like water from a perpetual spring. The heat exhaled by the crowded audience was already becoming insufferable. Cries of "Sit down!" assailed the orator of the moment. The chairman was obliged to interfere. A man at the back of the hall roared out, "Ventilation!" and broke a window with his stick. He was rewarded with three rounds of cheers; and was ironically invited to mount the platform and take the chair.

Under these embarrassing circumstances, Mirabel rose to speak.

He secured silence, at the outset, by a humorous allusion to the prolix speaker who had preceded him. "Look at the clock, gentlemen," he said; "and limit my speech to an interval of ten minutes." The applause which followed was heard, through the broken window, in the street. The boys among the mob outside intercepted the flow of air by climbing on each other's shoulders and looking in at the meeting, through the gaps left by the shattered glass. Having proposed his Resolution with discreet brevity of speech, Mirabel courted popularity on the plan adopted by the late Lord Palmerston in the House of Commons—he told stories, and made jokes, adapted to the intelligence of the dullest people who were listening to him. The charm of his voice and manner completed his success. Punctually at the tenth minute, he sat down amid cries of "Go on." Francine was the first to take his hand, and to express admiration mutely by pressing it. He returned the pressure—but he looked at the wrong lady—the lady on the other side.

Although she made no complaint, he instantly saw that Emily was overcome by the heat. Her lips were white, and her eyes were closing. "Let me take you out," he said, "or you will faint."

Francine started to her feet to follow them. The lower order of the audience, eager for amusement, put their own humorous construction on the young lady's action. They roared with laughter. "Let the parson and his sweetheart be," they called out; "two's company, miss, and three isn't." Mr. Wyvil interposed his authority and rebuked them. A
lady seated behind Francine interfered to good purpose by giving her a chair, which placed her out of sight of the audience. Order was restored—and the proceedings were resumed.

On the conclusion of the meeting, Mirabel and Emily were found waiting for their friends at the door. Mr. Wyvil innocently added fuel to the fire that was burning in Francine. He insisted that Mirabel should return to Monksmoor, and offered him a seat in the carriage at Emily's side.

Later in the evening, when they all met at dinner, there appeared a change in Miss de Sor which surprised everybody but Mirabel. She was gay and good-humored, and especially amiable and attentive to Emily—who sat opposite to her at the table. "What did you and Mr. Mirabel talk about while you were away from us?" she asked innocently. "Politics?"

Emily readily adopted Francine's friendly tone. "Would you have talked politics, in my place?" she asked gayly.

"In your place, I should have had the most delightful of companions," Francine rejoined; "I wish I had been overcome by the heat too!"

Mirabel—attentively observing her—acknowledged the compliment by a bow, and left Emily to continue the conversation. In perfect good faith she owned to having led Mirabel to talk of himself. She had heard from Cecilia that his early life had been devoted to various occupations, and she was interested in knowing how circumstances had led him into devoting himself to the Church. Francine listened with the outward appearance of implicit belief, and with the inward conviction that Emily was deliberately deceiving her. When the little narrative was at an end, she was more agreeable than ever. She admired Emily's dress, and she rivaled Cecilia in enjoyment of the good things on the table; she entertained Mirabel with humorous anecdotes of the priests at St. Domingo, and was so interested in the manufacture of violins, ancient and modern, that Mr. Wyvil promised to show her his famous collection of instruments, after dinner. Her overflowing amiability included even poor Miss Darnaway and the absent brothers and sisters. She heard with flattering sympathy, how they had been ill and had got well again; what amusing tricks they played, what alarming accidents happened to them, and how remarkably clever they were—"including, I do assure you, dear Miss de Sor, the baby only ten months old." When the ladies rose to retire, Francine was, socially speaking, the heroine of the evening.

While the violins were in course of exhibition, Mirabel found an opportunity of speaking to Emily, unobserved.

"Have you said, or done, anything to offend Miss de Sor?" he asked.

"Nothing whatever!" Emily declared, startled by the question. "What makes you think I have offended her?"

"I have been trying to find a reason for the change in her," Mirabel answered—"especially the change toward yourself."

"Well?"

"Well—she means mischief."

"Mischief of what sort?"

"Of a sort which may expose her to discovery—unless she disarms suspicion at the outset. That is (as I believe) exactly what she has been doing this evening. I needn't warn you to be on your guard."

All the next day Emily was on the watch for events—and nothing happened. Not the slightest appearance of jealousy betrayed itself in Francine. She made no attempt to attract to herself the attentions of Mirabel; and she showed no hostility to Emily, either by word, look, or manner.

The day after, an event occurred at Netherwoods. Alban Morris received an anonymous letter, addressed to him in these terms:

"A certain young lady, in whom you are supposed to be interested, is forgetting you in your absence. If you are not mean enough to allow yourself to be supplanted by another man, join the party at Monksmoor before it is too late."

CHAPTER XLII.

COOKING.

The day after the political meeting was a day of departures, at the pleasant country house.

Miss Darnaway was recalled to the nursery at home. The old squire who did justice to Mr. Wyvil's port-wine went away next, having guests to entertain at his own house. A far more serious loss followed. The three dancing men had engagements which drew them to new spheres of activity in other drawing-rooms. They said, with the same dreary grace of manner, "Very sorry to go"; they drove to the railway, arrayed in the same perfect traveling suits of neutral tint; and they had but one difference of opinion among them—each firmly believed that he was smoking the best cigar to be got in London.

The morning after these departures would have been a dull morning indeed, but for the presence of Mirabel.

When breakfast was over, the invalid Miss Julia established herself on the sofa with a novel. Her father retired to the other end of the house, and profaned the art of music on music's most expressive instrument. Left with Emily,
Cecilia, and Francine, Mirabel made one of his happy suggestions. "We are thrown on our own resources," he said. "Let us distinguish ourselves by inventing some entirely new amusement for the day. You young ladies shall sit in council—and I will be secretary." He turned to Cecilia. "The meeting waits to hear the mistress of the house."

Modest Cecilia appealed to her school friends for help; addressing herself in the first instance (by the secretary's advice) to Francine, as the eldest. They all noticed another change in this variable young person. She was silent and subdued; and she said warily, "I don't care what we do--shall we go out riding?"

The unanswerable objection to riding as a form of amusement, was that it had been more than once tried already. Something clever and surprising was anticipated from Emily when it came to her turn. She, too, disappointed expectation. "Let us sit under the trees," was all that she could suggest, "and ask Mr. Mirabel to tell us a story."

Mirabel laid down his pen and took it on himself to reject this proposal. "Remember," he remonstrated, "that I have an interest in the diversions of the day. You can't expect me to be amused by my own story. I appeal to Miss Wyvil to invent a pleasure which will include the secretary."

Cecilia blushed and looked uneasy. "I think I have got an idea," she announced, after some hesitation. "May I propose that we all go to the keeper's lodge?" There her courage failed her, and she hesitated again.

Mirabel gravely registered the proposal, as far as it went. "What are we to do when we get to the keeper's lodge?" he inquired.

"We are to ask the keeper's wife," Cecilia proceeded, "to lend us her kitchen."

"To lend us her kitchen," Mirabel repeated.

"And what are we to do in the kitchen?"

Cecilia looked down at her pretty hands crossed on her lap, and answered softly, "Cook our own luncheon."

"To cook our own luncheon," Mirabel repeated.

"And what are we to do in the kitchen?"

Here was an entirely new amusement, in the most attractive sense of the words! Here was charming Cecilia's interest in the pleasures of the table so happily inspired, that the grateful meeting offered its tribute of applause—even including Francine. The members of the council were young; their daring digestions contemplated without fear the prospect of eating their own amateur cookery. The one question that troubled them now was what they were to cook.

"I can make an omelet," Cecilia ventured to say.

"If there is any cold chicken to be had," Emily added, "I undertake to follow the omelet with a mayonnaise."

"There are clergymen in the Church of England who are even clever enough to fry potatoes," Mirabel announced—"and I am one of them. What shall we have next? A pudding? Miss de Sor, can you make a pudding?"

Francine exhibited another new side to her character—a diffident and humble side. "I am ashamed to say I don't know how to cook anything," she confessed; "you had better leave me out of it."

But Cecilia was now in her element. Her plan of operations was wide enough even to include Francine. "You shall wash the lettuce, my dear, and stone the olives for Emily's mayonnaise. Don't be discouraged! You shall have a companion; we will send to the rectory for Miss Plym—the very person to chop parsley and shallot for my omelet. Oh, Emily, what a morning we are going to have!" Her lovely blue eyes sparkled with joy; she gave Emily a kiss which Mirabel must have been more or less than man not to have coveted. "I declare," cried Cecilia, completely losing her head, "I'm so excited, I don't know what to do with myself!"

Emily's intimate knowledge of her friend applied the right remedy. "You don't know what to do with yourself?" she repeated. "Have you no sense of duty? Give the cook your orders."

Cecilia instantly recovered her presence of mind. She sat down at the writing-table, and made out a list of eatable productions in the animal and vegetable world, in which every other word was underlined two or three times over. Her serious face was a sight to see, when she rang for the cook, and the two held a privy council in a corner.

On the way to the keeper's lodge, the young mistress of the house headed a procession of servants carrying the raw materials. Francine followed, held in custody by Miss Plym—who took her responsibilities seriously, and clamored for instruction in the art of chopping parsley. Mirabel and Emily were together, far behind; they were the only two members of the company whose minds were not occupied in one way or another by the kitchen.

"This child's play of ours doesn't seem to interest you," Mirabel remarked.

"I am thinking," Emily answered, "of what you said to me about Francine."

"I can say something more," he rejoined. "When I noticed the change in her at dinner, I told you she meant mischief. There is another change to-day, which suggests to my mind that the mischief is done."

"And directed against me?" Emily asked.

Mirabel made no direct reply. It was impossible for him to remind her that she had, no matter how innocently, exposed herself to the jealous hatred of Francine. "Time will tell us, what we don't know now," he replied evasively.

"You seem to have faith in time, Mr. Mirabel."

"The greatest faith. Time is the inveterate enemy of deceit. Sooner or later, every hidden thing is a thing doomed to discovery."
"Without exception?"
"Yes," he answered positively, "without exception."

At that moment Francine stopped and looked back at them. Did she think that Emily and Mirabel had been talking together long enough? Miss Plym—with the parsley still on her mind—advanced to consult Emily's experience. The two walked on together, leaving Mirabel to overtake Francine. He saw, in her first look at him, the effort that it cost her to suppress those emotions which the pride of women is most deeply interested in concealing. Before a word had passed, he regretted that Emily had left them together.

"I wish I had your cheerful disposition," she began, abruptly. "I am out of spirits or out of temper—I don't know which; and I don't know why. Do you ever trouble yourself with thinking of the future?"

"As seldom as possible, Miss de Sor. In such a situation as mine, most people have prospects—I have none."

He spoke gravely, conscious of not feeling at ease on his side. If he had been the most modest man that ever lived, he must have seen in Francine's face that she loved him.

When they had first been presented to each other, she was still under the influence of the meanest instincts in her scheming and selfish nature. She had thought to herself, "With my money to help him, that man's celebrity would do the rest; the best society in England would be glad to receive Mirabel's wife. "As the days passed, strong feeling had taken the place of those contemptible aspirations: Mirabel had unconsciously inspired the one passion which was powerful enough to master Francine—sensual passion. Wild hopes rioted in her. Measureless desires which she had never felt before, united themselves with capacities for wickedness, which had been the horrid growth of a few nights—capacities which suggested even viler attempts to rid herself of a supposed rivalry than slandering Emily by means of an anonymous letter. Without waiting for it to be offered, she took Mirabel's arm, and pressed it to her breast as they slowly walked on. The fear of discovery which had troubled her after she had sent her base letter to the post, vanished at that inspiriting moment. She bent her head near enough to him when he spoke to feel his breath on her face.

"There is a strange similarity," she said softly, "between your position and mine. Is there anything cheering in my prospects? I am far away from home—my father and mother wouldn't care if they never saw me again. People talk about my money! What is the use of money to such a lonely wretch as I am? Suppose I write to London, and ask the lawyer if I may give it all away to some deserving person? Why not to you?"

"My dear Miss de Sor(115,532),(182,562)—!"
"Is there anything wrong, Mr. Mirabel, in wishing that I could make you a prosperous man?"
"You must not even talk of such a thing!"
"How proud you are!" she said submissively.

"Oh, I can't bear to think of you in that miserable village—a position so unworthy of your talents and your claims! And you tell me I must not talk about it. Would you have said that to Emily, if she was as anxious as I am to see you in your right place in the world?"

"I should have answered her exactly as I have answered you."
"She will never embarrass you, Mr. Mirabel, by being as sincere as I am. Emily can keep her own secrets."
"Is she to blame for doing that?"
"It depends on your feeling for her."
"What feeling do you mean?"
"Suppose you heard she was engaged to be married?" Francine suggested.

Mirabel's manner—studiously cold and formal thus far—altered on a sudden. He looked with unconcealed anxiety at Francine. "Do you say that seriously?" he asked.

"I said 'suppose.' I don't exactly know that she is engaged."
"What do you know?"
"Oh, how interested you are in Emily! She is admired by some people. Are you one of them?"

Mirabel's experience of women warned him to try silence as a means of provoking her into speaking plainly. The experiment succeeded: Francine returned to the question that he had put to her, and abruptly answered it.

"You may believe me or not, as you like—I know of a man who is in love with her. He has had his opportunities; and he has made good use of them. Would you like to know who he is?"

"I should like to know anything which you may wish to tell me."
"I am afraid your good opinion of Emily will be shaken," she quietly resumed, "when I tell you that she has encouraged a man who is only drawing-master at a school. At the same time, a person in her circumstances—I mean she has no money—ought not to be very hard to please. Of course she has never spoken to you of Mr. Alban Morris?"
"Not that I remember."

Only four words— but they satisfied Francine.

The one thing wanting to complete the obstacle which she had now placed in Emily's way, was that Alban Morris should enter on the scene. He might hesitate; but, if he was really fond of Emily, the anonymous letter would sooner or later bring him to Monksmoor. In the meantime, her object was gained. She dropped Mirabel's arm.

"Here is the lodge," she said gayly—"I declare Cecilia has got an apron on already! Come, and cook."

CHAPTER XLIII.

SOUNDING.

Mirabel left Francine to enter the lodge by herself. His mind was disturbed: he felt the importance of gaining time for reflection before he and Emily met again.

The keeper's garden was at the back of the lodge. Passing through the wicket-gate, he found a little summer-house at a turn in the path. Nobody was there: he went in and sat down.

At intervals, he had even yet encouraged himself to underrate the true importance of the feeling which Emily had awakened in him. There was an end to all self-deception now. After what Francine had said to him, this shallow and frivolous man no longer resisted the all-absorbing influence of love. He shrank under the one terrible question that forced itself on his mind:— Had that jealous girl spoken the truth?

In what process of investigation could he trust, to set this anxiety at rest? To apply openly to Emily would be to take a liberty, which Emily was the last person in the world to permit. In his recent intercourse with her he had felt more strongly than ever the importance of speaking with reserve. He had been scrupulously careful to take no unfair advantage of his opportunity, when he had removed her from the meeting, and when they had walked together, with hardly a creature to observe them, in the lonely outskirts of the town. Emily's gaiety and good humor had not led him astray: he knew that these were bad signs, viewed in the interests of love. His one hope of touching her deeper sympathies was to wait for the help that might yet come from time and chance. With a bitter sigh, he resigned himself to the necessity of being as agreeable and amusing as ever: it was just possible that he might lure her into alluding to Alban Morris, if he began innocently by making her laugh.

As he rose to return to the lodge, the keeper's little terrier, prowling about the garden, looked into the summer-house. Seeing a stranger, the dog showed his teeth and growled.

Mirabel shrank back against the wall behind him, trembling in every limb. His eyes stared in terror as the dog came nearer: barking in high triumph over the discovery of a frightened man whom he could bully. Mirabel called out for help. A laborer at work in the garden ran to the place—and stopped with a broad grin of amusement at seeing a grown man terrified by a barking dog. "Well," he said to himself, after Mirabel had passed out under protection, "there goes a coward if ever there was one yet!"

Mirabel waited a minute behind the lodge to recover himself. He had been so completely unnerved that his hair was wet with perspiration. While he used his handkerchief, he shuddered at other recollections than the recollection of the dog. "After that night at the inn," he thought, "the least thing frightens me!"

He was received by the young ladies with cries of derisive welcome. "Oh, for shame! for shame! here are the potatoes already cut, and nobody to fry them!"

Mirabel assumed the mask of cheerfulness— with the desperate resolution of an actor, amusing his audience at a time of domestic distress. He astonished the keeper's wife by showing that he really knew how to use her frying-pan. Cecilia's omelet was tough— but the young ladies ate it. Emily's mayonnaise sauce was almost as liquid as water— they swallowed it nevertheless by the help of spoons. The potatoes followed, crisp and dry and delicious— and Mirabel became more popular than ever. "He is the only one of us," Cecilia sadly acknowledged, "who knows how to cook."

When they all left the lodge for a stroll in the park, Francine attached herself to Cecilia and Miss Plym. She resigned Mirabel to Emily—in the happy belief that she had paved the way for a misunderstanding between them.

The merriment at the luncheon table had revived Emily's good spirits. She had a light-hearted remembrance of the failure of her sauce. Mirabel saw her smiling to herself. "May I ask what amuses you?" he said.

"I was thinking of the debt of gratitude that we owe to Mr. Wyvil," she replied. "If he had not persuaded you to return to Monksmoor, we should never have seen the famous Mr. Mirabel with a frying pan in his hand, and never have tasted the only good dish at our luncheon."

Mirabel tried vainly to adopt his companion's easy tone. Now that he was alone with her, the doubts that Francine had aroused shook the prudent resolution at which he had arrived in the garden. He ran the risk, and told Emily plainly why he had returned to Mr. Wyvil's house.

"Although I am sensible of our host's kindness," he answered, "I should have gone back to my parsonage—but for you."

She declined to understand him seriously. "Then the affairs of your parish are neglected—and I am to blame!"
she said.

"Am I the first man who has neglected his duties for your sake?" he asked. "I wonder whether the masters at school had the heart to report you when you neglected your lessons?"

She thought of Alban—and betrayed herself by a heightened color. The moment after, she changed the subject. Mirabel could no longer resist the conclusion that Francine had told him the truth.

"When do you leave us," she inquired.

"To-morrow is Saturday—I must go back as usual.

"And how will your deserted parish receive you?"

He made a desperate effort to be as amusing as usual.

"I am sure of preserving my popularity," he said, "while I have a cask in the cellar, and a few spare sixpences in my pocket. The public spirit of my parishioners asks for nothing but money and beer. Before I went to that wearisome meeting, I told my housekeeper that I was going to make a speech about reform. She didn't know what I meant. I explained that reform might increase the number of British citizens who had the right of voting at elections for parliament. She brightened up directly. 'Ah,' she said, 'I've heard my husband talk about elections. The more there are of them (he says) the more money he'll get for his vote. I'm all for reform.' On my way out of the house, I tried the man who works in my garden on the same subject. He didn't look at the matter from the housekeeper's sanguine point of view. 'I don't deny that parliament once gave me a good dinner for nothing at the public-house,' he admitted. 'But that was years ago—and (you'll excuse me, sir) I hear nothing of another dinner to come. It's a matter of opinion, of course. I don't myself believe in reform.' There are specimens of the state of public spirit in our village!" He paused. Emily was listening—but he had not succeeded in choosing a subject that amused her. He tried a topic more nearly connected with his own interests; the topic of the future. "Our good friend has asked me to prolong my visit, after Sunday's duties are over," he said. "I hope I shall find you here, next week?"

"Will the affairs of your parish allow you to come back?" Emily asked mischievously.

"The affairs of my parish—if you force me to confess it—were only an excuse."

"An excuse for what?"

"An excuse for keeping away from Monksmoor—in the interests of my own tranquillity. The experiment has failed. While you are here, I can't keep away."

She still declined to understand him seriously. "Must I tell you in plain words that flattery is thrown away on me?" she said.

"Flattery is not offered to you," he answered gravely. "I beg your pardon for having led to the mistake by talking of myself." Having appealed to her indulgence by that act of submission, he ventured on another distant allusion to the man whom he hated and feared. "Shall I meet any friends of yours," he resumed, "when I return on Monday?"

"What do you mean?"

"I only meant to ask if Mr. Wyvil expects any new guests?"

As he put the question, Cecilia's voice was heard behind them, calling to Emily. They both turned round. Mr. Wyvil had joined his daughter and her two friends. He advanced to meet Emily.

"I have some news for you that you little expect," he said. "A telegram has just arrived from Netherwoods. Mr. Alban Morris has got leave of absence, and is coming here to-morrow."

CHAPTER XLIV.

COMPETING.

Time at Monksmoor had advanced to the half hour before dinner, on Saturday evening.

Cecilia and Francine, Mr. Wyvil and Mirabel, were loitering in the conservatory. In the drawing-room, Emily had been considerably left alone with Alban. He had missed the early train from Netherwoods; but he had arrived in time to dress for dinner, and to offer the necessary explanations.

If it had been possible for Alban to allude to the anonymous letter, he might have owned that his first impulse had led him to destroy it, and to assert his confidence in Emily by refusing Mr. Wyvil's invitation. But try as he might to forget them, the base words that he had read remained in his memory. Irritating him at the outset, they had ended in rousing his jealousy. Under that delusive influence, he persuaded himself that he had acted, in the first instance, without due consideration. It was surely his interest—it might even be his duty—to go to Mr. Wyvil's house, and judge for himself. After some last wretched moments of hesitation, he had decided on effecting a compromise with his own better sense, by consulting Miss Ladd. That excellent lady did exactly what he had expected her to do. She made arrangements which granted him leave of absence, from the Saturday to the Tuesday following. The excuse which had served him, in telegraphing to Mr. Wyvil, must now be repeated, in accounting for his unexpected appearance to Emily. "I found a person to take charge of my class," he said; "and I gladly availed myself of the opportunity of seeing you again."

After observing him attentively, while he was speaking to her, Emily owned, with her customary frankness, that
she had noticed something in his manner which left her not quite at her ease.

"I wonder," she said, "if there is any foundation for a doubt that has troubled me?" To his unutterable relief, she at once explained what the doubt was. "I am afraid I offended you, in replying to your letter about Miss Jethro."

In this case, Alban could enjoy the luxury of speaking unreservedly. He confessed that Emily's letter had disappointed him.

"I expected you to answer me with less reserve," he replied; "and I began to think I had acted rashly in writing to you at all. When there is a better opportunity, I may have a word to say--" He was apparently interrupted by something that he saw in the conservatory. Looking that way, Emily perceived that Mirabel was the object which had attracted Alban's attention. The vile anonymous letter was in his mind again. Without a preliminary word to prepare Emily, he suddenly changed the subject. "How do you like the clergyman?" he asked.

"Very much indeed," she replied, without the slightest embarrassment. "Mr. Mirabel is clever and agreeable--and not at all spoiled by his success. I am sure," she said innocently, "you will like him too."

Alban's face answered her unmistakably in the negative sense--but Emily's attention was drawn the other way by Francine. She joined them at the moment, on the lookout for any signs of an encouraging result which her treachery might already have produced. Alban had been inclined to suspect her when he had received the letter. He rose and bowed as she approached. Something--he was unable to realize what it was--told him, in the moment when they looked at each other, that his suspicion had hit the mark.

In the conservatory the ever-amiable Mirabel had left his friends for a while in search of flowers for Cecilia. She turned to her father when they were alone, and asked him which of the gentlemen was to take her in to dinner--Mr. Mirabel or Mr. Morris?

"Mr. Morris, of course," he answered. "He is the new guest--and he turns out to be more than the equal, socially-speaking, of our other friend. When I showed him his room, I asked if he was related to a man who bore the same name--a fellow student of mine, years and years ago, at college. He is my friend's younger son; one of a ruined family--but persons of high distinction in their day."

Mirabel returned with the flowers, just as dinner was announced.

"You are to take Emily to-day," Cecilia said to him, leading the way out of the conservatory. As they entered the drawing-room, Alban was just offering his arm to Emily. "Papa gives you to me, Mr. Morris," Cecilia explained pleasantly. Alban hesitated, apparently not understanding the allusion. Mirabel interfered with his best grace: "Mr. Wyvil offers you the honor of taking his daughter to the dining-room." Alban's face darkened ominously, as the elegant little clergyman gave his arm to Emily, and followed Mr. Wyvil and Francine out of the room. Cecilia looked at her silent and surly companion, and almost envied her lazy sister, dining--under cover of a convenient headache--in her own room.

Having already made up his mind that Alban Morris required careful handling, Mirabel waited a little before he led the conversation as usual. Between the soup and the fish, he made an interesting confession, addressed to Emily in the strictest confidence.

"I have taken a fancy to your friend Mr. Morris," he said. "First impressions, in my case, decide everything; I like people or dislike them on impulse. That man appeals to my sympathies. Is he a good talker?"

"I should say Yes," Emily answered prettily, "if you were not present."

Mirabel was not to be beaten, even by a woman, in the art of paying compliments. He looked admiringly at Alban (sitting opposite to him), and said: "Let us listen."

This flattering suggestion not only pleased Emily--it artfully served Mirabel's purpose. That is to say, it secured him an opportunity for observation of what was going on at the other side of the table.

Alban's instincts as a gentleman had led him to control his irritation and to regret that he had suffered it to appear. Anxious to please, he presented himself at his best. Gentle Cecilia forgave and forgot the angry look which had startled her. Mr. Wyvil was delighted with the son of his old friend. Emily felt secretly proud of the good opinions which her admirer was gathering; and Francine saw with pleasure that he was asserting his claim to Emily's preference, in the way of all others which would be most likely to discourage his rival. These various impressions--produced while Alban's enemy was ominously silent--began to suffer an imperceptible change, from the moment when Mirabel decided that his time had come to take the lead. A remark made by Alban offered him the chance for which he had been on the watch. He agreed with the remark; he enlarged on the remark; he was brilliant and familiar, and instructive and amusing--and still it was all due to the remark. Alban's temper was once more severely tried. Mirabel's mischievous object had not escaped his penetration. He did his best to put obstacles in the adversary's way--and was baffled, time after time, with the readiest ingenuity. If he interrupted--the sweet-tempered clergyman submitted, and went on. If he differed--modest Mr. Mirabel said, in the most amiable manner, "I daresay I am wrong," and handled the topic from his opponent's point of view. Never had such a perfect Christian sat before at Mr. Wyvil's table: not a hard word, not an impatient look, escaped him. The longer Alban resisted, the more
surely he lost ground in the general estimation. Cecilia was disappointed; Emily was grieved; Mr. Wyvil's favorable opinion began to waver; Francine was disgusted. When dinner was over, and the carriage was waiting to take the shepherd back to his flock by moonlight, Mirabel's triumph was complete. He had made Alban the innocent means of publicly exhibiting his perfect temper and perfect politeness, under their best and brightest aspect.

So that day ended. Sunday promised to pass quietly, in the absence of Mirabel. The morning came--and it seemed doubtful whether the promise would be fulfilled.

Francine had passed an uneasy night. No such encouraging result as she had anticipated had hitherto followed the appearance of Alban Morris at Monksmoor. He had clumsily allowed Mirabel to improve his position--while he had himself lost ground--in Emily's estimation. If this first disastrous consequence of the meeting between the two men was permitted to repeat itself on future occasions, Emily and Mirabel would be brought more closely together, and Alban himself would be the unhappy cause of it. Francine rose, on the Sunday morning, before the table was laid for breakfast--resolved to try the effect of a timely word of advice.

Her bedroom was situated in the front of the house. The man she was looking for presently passed within her range of view from the window, on his way to take a morning walk in the park. She followed him immediately.

"Good-morning, Mr. Morris."

He raised his hat and bowed--without speaking, and without looking at her.

"We resemble each other in one particular," she proceeded, graciously; "we both like to breathe the fresh air before breakfast."

He said exactly what common politeness obliged him to say, and no more--he said, "Yes."

Some girls might have been discouraged. Francine went on.

"It is no fault of mine, Mr. Morris, that we have not been better friends. For some reason, into which I don't presume to inquire, you seem to distrust me. I really don't know what I have done to deserve it."

"Are you sure of that?" he asked--eying her suddenly and searchingly as he spoke. Her hard face settled into a rigid look; her eyes met his eyes with a stony defiant stare. Now, for the first time, she knew that he suspected her of having written the anonymous letter. Every evil quality in her nature steadily defied him. A hardened old woman could not have sustained the shock of discovery with a more devilish composure than this girl displayed. "Perhaps you will explain yourself," she said.

"I have explained myself," he answered.

"Then I must be content," she rejoined, "to remain in the dark. I had intended, out of my regard for Emily, to suggest that you might--with advantage to yourself, and to interests that are very dear to you--be more careful in your behavior to Mr. Mirabel. Are you disposed to listen to me?"

"Do you wish me to answer that question plainly, Miss de Sor?"

"I insist on your answering it plainly."

"Then I am not disposed to listen to you."

"May I know why? or am I to be left in the dark again?"

"You are to be left, if you please, to your own ingenuity."

Francine looked at him, with a malignant smile. "One of these days, Mr. Morris--I will deserve your confidence in my ingenuity." She said it, and went back to the house.

This was the only element of disturbance that troubled the perfect tranquillity of the day. What Francine had proposed to do, with the one idea of making Alban serve her purpose, was accomplished a few hours later by Emily's influence for good over the man who loved her.

They passed the afternoon together uninterruptedly in the distant solitudes of the park. In the course of conversation Emily found an opportunity of discreetly alluding to Mirabel. "You mustn't be jealous of our clever little friend," she said; "I like him, and admire him; but--"

"But you don't love him?"

She smiled at the eager way in which Alban put the question.

"There is no fear of that," she answered brightly.

"Not even if you discovered that he loves you?"

"Not even then. Are you content at last? Promise me not to be rude to Mr. Mirabel again."

"For his sake?"

"No--for my sake. I don't like to see you place yourself at a disadvantage toward another man; I don't like you to disappoint me."

The happiness of hearing her say those words transfigured him--the manly beauty of his earlier and happier years seemed to have returned to Alban. He took her hand--he was too agitated to speak.

"You are forgetting Mr. Mirabel," she reminded him gently.

"I will be all that is civil and kind to Mr. Mirabel; I will like him and admire him as you do. Oh, Emily, are you a
little, only a very little, fond of me?"
"I don't quite know."
"May I try to find out?"
"How?" she asked.
Her fair cheek was very near to him. The softly-rising color on it said, Answer me here--and he answered.

CHAPTER XLV.
MISCHIEF--MAKING.

On Monday, Mirabel made his appearance--and the demon of discord returned with him.
Alban had employed the earlier part of the day in making a sketch in the park--intended as a little present for Emily. Presenting himself in the drawing-room, when his work was completed, he found Cecilia and Francine alone. He asked where Emily was.

The question had been addressed to Cecilia. Francine answered it.

"Emily mustn't be disturbed," she said.
"Why not?"
"She is with Mr. Mirabel in the rose garden. I saw them talking together--evidently feeling the deepest interest in what they were saying to each other. Don't interrupt them--you will only be in the way."

Cecilia at once protested against this last assertion. "She is trying to make mischief, Mr. Morris--don't believe her. I am sure they will be glad to see you, if you join them in the garden."

Francine rose, and left the room. She turned, and looked at Alban as she opened the door. "Try it," she said--"and you will find I am right."

"Francine sometimes talks in a very ill-natured way," Cecilia gently remarked. "Do you think she means it, Mr. Morris?"

"I had better not offer an opinion," Alban replied.
"Why?"
"I can't speak impartially; I dislike Miss de Sor."

There was a pause. Alban's sense of self-respect forbade him to try the experiment which Francine had maliciously suggested. His thoughts--less easy to restrain--wandered in the direction of the garden. The attempt to make him jealous had failed; but he was conscious, at the same time, that Emily had disappointed him. After what they had said to each other in the park, she ought to have remembered that women are at the mercy of appearances. If Mirabel had something of importance to say to her, she might have avoided exposing herself to Francine's spiteful misconstruction: it would have been easy to arrange with Cecilia that a third person should be present at the interview.

While he was absorbed in these reflections, Cecilia--embarrassed by the silence--was trying to find a topic of conversation. Alban roughly pushed his sketch-book away from him, on the table. Was he displeased with Emily? The same question had occurred to Cecilia at the time of the correspondence, on the subject of Miss Jethro. To recall those letters led her, by natural sequence, to another effort of memory. She was reminded of the person who had been the cause of the correspondence: her interest was revived in the mystery of Miss Jethro.

"Has Emily told you that I have seen your letter?" she asked.
He roused himself with a start. "I beg your pardon. What letter are you thinking of?"
"I was thinking of the letter which mentions Miss Jethro's strange visit. Emily was so puzzled and so surprised that she showed it to me--and we both consulted my father. Have you spoken to Emily about Miss Jethro?"
"I have tried--but she seemed to be unwilling to pursue the subject."
"Have you made any discoveries since you wrote to Emily?"
"No. The mystery is as impenetrable as ever."

As he replied in those terms, Mirabel entered the conservatory from the garden, evidently on his way to the drawing-room.

To see the man, whose introduction to Emily it had been Miss Jethro's mysterious object to prevent--at the very moment when he had been speaking of Miss Jethro herself--was, not only a temptation of curiosity, but a direct incentive (in Emily's own interests) to make an effort at discovery. Alban pursued the conversation with Cecilia, in a tone which was loud enough to be heard in the conservatory.

"The one chance of getting any information that I can see," he proceeded, "is to speak to Mr. Mirabel."
"I shall be only too glad, if I can be of any service to Miss Wyvil and Mr. Morris."

With those obliging words, Mirabel made a dramatic entry, and looked at Cecilia with his irresistible smile. Startled by his sudden appearance, she unconsciously assisted Alban's design. Her silence gave him the opportunity of speaking in her place.

"We were talking," he said quietly to Mirabel, "of a lady with whom you are acquainted."
"Indeed! May I ask the lady's name?"
"Miss Jethro."

Mirabel sustained the shock with extraordinary self-possession—so far as any betrayal by sudden movement was concerned. But his color told the truth: it faded to paleness—it revealed, even to Cecilia's eyes, a man overpowered by fright.

Alban offered him a chair. He refused to take it by a gesture. Alban tried an apology next. "I am afraid I have ignorantly revived some painful associations. Pray excuse me."

The apology roused Mirabel: he felt the necessity of offering some explanation. In timid animals, the one defensive capacity which is always ready for action is cunning. Mirabel was too wily to dispute the inference—the inevitable inference—which any one must have drawn, after seeing the effect on him that the name of Miss Jethro had produced. He admitted that "painful associations" had been revived, and deplored the "nervous sensibility" which had permitted it to be seen.

"No blame can possibly attach to you, my dear sir," he continued, in his most amiable manner. "Will it be indiscreet, on my part, if I ask how you first became acquainted with Miss Jethro?"

"I first became acquainted with her at Miss Ladd's school," Alban answered. "She was, for a short time only, one of the teachers; and she left her situation rather suddenly." He paused—but Mirabel made no remark. "After an interval of a few months," he resumed, "I saw Miss Jethro again. She called on me at my lodgings, near Netherwoods."

"Merely to renew your former acquaintance?"

Mirabel made that inquiry with an eager anxiety for the reply which he was quite unable to conceal. Had he any reason to dread what Miss Jethro might have it in her power to say of him to another person? Alban was in no way pledged to secrecy, and he was determined to leave no means untried of throwing light on Miss Jethro's mysterious warning. He repeated the plain narrative of the interview, which he had communicated by letter to Emily. Mirabel listened without making any remark.

"After what I have told you, can you give me no explanation?" Alban asked.

"I am quite unable, Mr. Morris, to help you."

Was he lying? or speaking, the truth? The impression produced on Alban was that he had spoken the truth.

Women are never so ready as men to resign themselves to the disappointment of their hopes. Cecilia, silently listening up to this time, now ventured to speak—animated by her sisterly interest in Emily. Mirabel continued, after some hesitation. "Can you not tell us," she said to Mirabel, "why Miss Jethro tried to prevent Emily Brown from meeting you here?"

"I know no more of her motive than you do," Mirabel replied.

Alban interposed. "Miss Jethro left me," he said, "with the intention—quite openly expressed—of trying to prevent you from accepting Mr. Wyvil's invitation. Did she make the attempt?"

Mirabel admitted that she had made the attempt. "But," he added, "without mentioning Miss Emily's name. I was asked to postpone my visit, as a favor to herself, because she had her own reasons for wishing it. I had my reasons" (he bowed with gallantry to Cecilia) "for being eager to have the honor of knowing Mr. Wyvil and his daughter; and I refused."

Once more, the doubt arose: was he lying? or speaking the truth? And, once more, Alban could not resist the conclusion that he was speaking the truth.

"There is one thing I should like to know," Mirabel continued, after some hesitation. "Has Miss Emily been informed of this strange affair?"

"Certainly!"

Mirabel seemed to be disposed to continue his inquiries—and suddenly changed his mind. Was he beginning to doubt if Alban had spoken without concealment, in describing Miss Jethro's visit? Was he still afraid of what Miss Jethro might have said of him? In any case, he changed the subject, and made an excuse for leaving the room.

"I am forgetting my errand," he said to Alban. "Miss Emily was anxious to know if you had finished your sketch. I must tell her that you have returned."

He bowed and withdrew.

Alban rose to follow him—and checked himself.

"No," he thought, "I trust Emily!" He sat down again by Cecilia's side.

Mirabel had indeed returned to the rose garden. He found Emily employed as he had left her, in making a crown of roses, to be worn by Cecilia in the evening. But, in one other respect, there was a change. Francine was present.

"Excuse me for sending you on a needless errand," Emily said to Mirabel; "Miss de Sor tells me Mr. Morris has finished his sketch. She left him in the drawing-room—why didn't you bring him here?"

"He was talking with Miss Wyvil."
Mirabel answered absently--with his eyes on Francine. He gave her one of those significant looks, which says to a third person, "Why are you here?" Francine's jealousy declined to understand him. He tried a broader hint, in words.

"Are you going to walk in the garden?" he said.

Francine was impenetrable. "No," she answered, "I am going to stay here with Emily."

Mirabel had no choice but to yield. Imperative anxieties forced him to say, in Francine's presence, what he had hoped to say to Emily privately.

"When I joined Miss Wyvil and Mr. Morris," he began, "what do you think they were doing? They were talking of--Miss Jethro."

Emily dropped the rose-crown on her lap. It was easy to see that she had been disagreeably surprised.

"Mr. Morris has told me the curious story of Miss Jethro's visit," Mirabel continued; "but I am in some doubt whether he has spoken to me without reserve. Perhaps he expressed himself more freely when he spoke to you. Miss Jethro may have said something to him which tended to lower me in your estimation?"

"Certainly not, Mr. Mirabel--so far as I know. If I had heard anything of the kind, I should have thought it my duty to tell you. Will it relieve your anxiety, if I go at once to Mr. Morris, and ask him plainly whether he has concealed anything from you or from me?"

Mirabel gratefully kissed her hand. "Your kindness overpowers me," he said--speaking, for once, with true emotion.

Emily immediately returned to the house. As soon as she was out of sight, Francine approached Mirabel, trembling with suppressed rage.

CHAPTER XLVI.

PRETENDING.

Miss de Sor began cautiously with an apology. "Excuse me, Mr. Mirabel, for reminding you of my presence."

Mr. Mirabel made no reply.

"I beg to say," Francine proceeded, "that I didn't intentionally see you kiss Emily's hand."

Mirabel stood, looking at the roses which Emily had left on her chair, as completely absorbed in his own thoughts as if he had been alone in the garden.

"Am I not even worth notice?" Francine asked. "Ah, I know to whom I am indebted for your neglect!" She took him familiarly by the arm, and burst into a harsh laugh. "Tell me now, in confidence--do you think Emily is fond of you?"

The impression left by Emily's kindness was still fresh in Mirabel's memory: he was in no humor to submit to the jealous resentment of a woman whom he regarded with perfect indifference. Through the varnish of politeness which overlaid his manner, there rose to the surface the underlying insolence, hidden, on all ordinary occasions, from all human eyes. He answered Francine--mercilessly answered her--at last.

"It is the dearest hope of my life that she may be fond of me," he said.

Francine dropped his arm. "And fortune favors your hopes," she added, with an ironical assumption of interest in Mirabel's prospects. "When Mr. Morris leaves us to-morrow, he removes the only obstacle you have to fear. Am I right?"

"No; you are wrong."

"In what way, if you please?"

"In this way. I don't regard Mr. Morris as an obstacle. Emily is too delicate and too kind to hurt his feelings--she is not in love with him. There is no absorbing interest in her mind to divert her thoughts from me. She is idle and happy; she thoroughly enjoys her visit to this house, and I am associated with her enjoyment. There is my chance--!"

He suddenly stopped. Listening to him thus far, unnaturally calm and cold, Francine now showed that she felt the lash of his contempt. A hideous smile passed slowly over her white face. It threatened the vengeance which knows no fear, no pity, no remorse--the vengeance of a jealous woman. Hysterical anger, furious language, Mirabel was prepared for. The smile frightened him.

"Well?" she said scornfully, "why don't you go on?"

A bolder man might still have maintained the audacious position which he had assumed. Mirabel's faint heart shrank from it. He was eager to shelter himself under the first excuse that he could find. His ingenuity, paralyzed by his fears, was unable to invent anything new. He feebly availed himself of the commonplace trick of evasion which he had read of in novels, and seen in action on the stage.

"Is it possible," he asked, with an overacted assumption of surprise, "that you think I am in earnest?"

In the case of any other person, Francine would have instantly seen through that flimsy pretense. But the love which accepts the meanest crumbs of comfort that can be thrown to it--which fawns and grovels and deliberately deceives itself, in its own intensely selfish interests--was the love that burned in Francine's breast. The wretched girl
believed Mirabel with such an ecstatic sense of belief that she trembled in every limb, and dropped into the nearest chair.

"I was in earnest," she said faintly. "Didn't you see it?"

He was perfectly shameless; he denied that he had seen it, in the most positive manner. "Upon my honor, I thought you were mystifying me, and I humored the joke."

She sighed, and looking at him with an expression of tender reproach. "I wonder whether I can believe you," she said softly.

"Indeed you may believe me!" he assured her.

She hesitated—for the pleasure of hesitating. "I don't know. Emily is very much admired by some men. Why not by you?"

"For the best of reasons," he answered "She is poor, and I am poor. Those are facts which speak for themselves."

"Yes--but Emily is bent on attracting you. She would marry you to-morrow, if you asked her. Don't attempt to deny it! Besides, you kissed her hand."

"Oh, Miss de Sor!"

"Don't call me Miss de Sor! Call me Francine. I want to know why you kissed her hand."

He humored her with inexhaustible servility. "Allow me to kiss your hand, Francine!—and let me explain that kissing a lady's hand is only a form of thanking her for her kindness. You must own that Emily—"

She interrupted him for the third time. "Emily?" she repeated. "Are you as familiar as that already? Does she call you Miles, when you are by yourselves? Is there any effort at fascination which this charming creature has left untried? She told you no doubt what a lonely life she leads in her poor little home?"

Even Mirabel felt that he must not permit this to pass.

"She has said nothing to me about herself," he answered. "What I know of her, I know from Mr. Wyvil."

"Oh, indeed! You asked Mr. Wyvil about her family, of course? What did he say?"

"He said she lost her mother when she was a child—and he told me her father had died suddenly, a few years since, of heart complaint."

"Well, and what else?—Never mind now! Here is somebody coming."

The person was only one of the servants. Mirabel felt grateful to the man for interrupting them. Animated by sentiments of a precisely opposite nature, Francine spoke to him sharply.

"What do you want here?"

"A message, miss."

"From whom?"

"From Miss Brown."

"For me?"

"No, miss." He turned to Mirabel. "Miss Brown wishes to speak to you, sir, if you are not engaged."

Francine controlled herself until the man was out of hearing.

"Upon my word, this is too shameless!" she declared indignantly. "Emily can't leave you with me for five minutes, without wanting to see you again. If you go to her after all that you have said to me," she cried, threatening Mirabel with her outstretched hand, "you are the meanest of men!"

He was the meanest of men—he carried out his cowardly submission to the last extremity.

"Only say what you wish me to do," he replied.

Even Francine expected some little resistance from a creature bearing the outward appearance of a man. "Oh, do you really mean it?" she asked "I want you to disappoint Emily. Will you stay here, and let me make your excuses?"

"I will do anything to please you."

Francine gave him a farewell look. Her admiration made a desperate effort to express itself appropriately in words. "You are not a man," she said, "you are an angel!"

Left by himself, Mirabel sat down to rest. He reviewed his own conduct with perfect complacency. "Not one man in a hundred could have managed that she-devil as I have done," he thought. "How shall I explain matters to Emily?"

Considering this question, he looked by chance at the unfinished crown of roses. "The very thing to help me!" he said—and took out his pocketbook, and wrote these lines on a blank page: "I have had a scene of jealousy with Miss de Sor, which is beyond all description. To spare you a similar infliction, I have done violence to my own feelings. Instead of instantly obeying the message which you have so kindly sent to me, I remain here for a little while--entirely for your sake."

Having torn out the page, and twisted it up among the roses, so that only a corner of the paper appeared in view, Mirabel called to a lad who was at work in the garden, and gave him his directions, accompanied by a shilling.

"Take those flowers to the servants' hall, and tell one of the maids to put them in Miss Brown's room. Stop! Which is
the way to the fruit garden?"

The lad gave the necessary directions. Mirabel walked away slowly, with his hands in his pockets. His nerves
had been shaken; he thought a little fruit might refresh him.

CHAPTER XLVII.

DEBATING.

In the meanwhile Emily had been true to her promise to relieve Mirabel's anxieties, on the subject of Miss
Jethro. Entering the drawing-room in search of Alban, she found him talking with Cecilia, and heard her own name
mentioned as she opened the door.

"Here she is at last!" Cecilia exclaimed. "What in the world has kept you all this time in the rose garden?"

"Has Mr. Mirabel been more interesting than usual?" Alban asked gayly. Whatever sense of annoyance he might
have felt in Emily's absence, was forgotten the moment she appeared; all traces of trouble in his face vanished when
they looked at each other.

"You shall judge for yourself," Emily replied with a smile. "Mr. Mirabel has been speaking to me of a relative
who is very dear to him--his sister."

Cecilia was surprised. "Why has he never spoken to us of his sister?" she asked.

"It's a sad subject to speak of, my dear. His sister lives a life of suffering--she has been for years a prisoner in her
room. He writes to her constantly. His letters from Monksmoor have interested her, poor soul. It seems he said
something about me--and she has sent a kind message, inviting me to visit her one of these days. Do you understand
it now, Cecilia?"

"Of course I do! Tell me--is Mr. Mirabel's sister older or younger than he is?"

"Older."

"Is she married?"

"She is a widow."

"Does she live with her brother?" Alban asked.

"Oh, no! She has her own house--far away in Northumberland."

"Is she near Sir Jervis Redwood?"

"I fancy not. Her house is on the coast."

"Any children?" Cecilia inquired.

"No; she is quite alone. Now, Cecilia, I have told you all I know--and I have something to say to Mr. Morris. No,
you needn't leave us; it's a subject in which you are interested. A subject," she repeated, turning to Alban, "which
you may have noticed is not very agreeable to me."

"Miss Jethro?" Alban guessed.

"Yes; Miss Jethro."

Cecilia's curiosity instantly asserted itself.

"We have tried to get Mr. Mirabel to enlighten us, and tried in vain," she said. "You are a favorite. Have you
succeeded?"

"I have made no attempt to succeed," Emily replied. "My only object is to relieve Mr. Mirabel's anxiety, if I can-
-with your help, Mr. Morris."

"In what way can I help you?"

"You mustn't be angry."

"Do I look angry?"

"You look serious. It is a very simple thing. Mr. Mirabel is afraid that Miss Jethro may have said something
disagreeable about him, which you might hesitate to repeat. Is he making himself uneasy without any reason?"

"Without the slightest reason. I have concealed nothing from Mr. Mirabel."

"Thank you for the explanation." She turned to Cecilia. "May I send one of the servants with a message? I may
as well put an end to Mr. Mirabel's suspense."

The man was summoned, and was dispatched with the message. Emily would have done well, after this, if she
had abstained from speaking further of Miss Jethro. But Mirabel's doubts had, unhappily, inspired a similar feeling
of uncertainty in her own mind. She was now disposed to attribute the tone of mystery in Alban's unlucky letter to
some possible concealment suggested by regard for herself. "I wonder whether I have any reason to feel uneasy?"
she said--half in jest, half in earnest.

"Uneasy about what?" Alban inquired.

"About Miss Jethro, of course! Has she said anything of me which your kindness has concealed?"

Alban seemed to be a little hurt by the doubt which her question implied. "Was that your motive," he asked, "for
answering my letter as cautiously as if you had been writing to a stranger?"

"Indeed you are quite wrong!" Emily earnestly assured him. "I was perplexed and startled--and I took Mr.
Wyvil's advice, before I wrote to you. Shall we drop the subject?"

Alban would have willingly dropped the subject--but for that unfortunate allusion to Mr. Wyvil. Emily had unconsciously touched him on a sore place. He had already heard from Cecilia of the consultation over his letter, and had disapproved of it. "I think you were wrong to trouble Mr. Wyvil," he said.

The altered tone of his voice suggested to Emily that he would have spoken more severely, if Cecilia had not been in the room. She thought him needlessly ready to complain of a harmless proceeding--and she too returned to the subject, after having proposed to drop it not a minute since!

"You didn't tell me I was to keep your letter a secret," she replied.

Cecilia made matters worse--with the best intentions. "I'm sure, Mr. Morris, my father was only too glad to give Emily his advice."

Alban remained silent--ungraciously silent as Emily thought, after Mr. Wyvil's kindness to him.

"The thing to regret," she remarked, "is that Mr. Morris allowed Miss Jethro to leave him without explaining herself. In his place, I should have insisted on knowing why she wanted to prevent me from meeting Mr. Mirabel in this house."

Cecilia made another unlucky attempt at judicious interference. This time, she tried a gentle remonstrance.

"Remember, Emily, how Mr. Morris was situated. He could hardly be rude to a lady. And I daresay Miss Jethro had good reasons for not wishing to explain herself."

Francine opened the drawing-room door and heard Cecilia's last words.

"Miss Jethro again!" she exclaimed.

"Where is Mr. Mirabel?" Emily asked. "I sent him a message."

"He regrets to say he is otherwise engaged for the present," Francine replied with spiteful politeness. "Don't let me interrupt the conversation. Who is this Miss Jethro, whose name is on everybody's lips?"

Alban could keep silent no longer. "We have done with the subject," he said sharply.

"Because I am here?"

"Because we have said more than enough about Miss Jethro already."

"Speak for yourself, Mr. Morris," Emily answered, resenting the masterful tone which Alban's interference had assumed. "I have not done with Miss Jethro yet, I can assure you."

"My dear, you don't know where she lives," Cecilia reminded her.

"Leave me to discover it!" Emily answered hotly. "Perhaps Mr. Mirabel knows. I shall ask Mr. Mirabel."

"I thought you would find a reason for returning to Mr. Mirabel," Francine remarked.

Before Emily could reply, one of the maids entered the room with a wreath of roses in her hand.

"Mr. Mirabel sends you these flowers, miss," the woman said, addressing Emily. "The boy told me they were to be taken to your room. I thought it was a mistake, and I have brought them to you here."

Francine, who happened to be nearest to the door, took the roses from the girl on pretense of handing them to Emily. Her jealous vigilance detected the one visible morsel of Mirabel's letter, twisted up with the flowers. Had Emily entrapped him into a secret correspondence with her? "A scrap of waste paper among your roses," she said, crumpling it up in her hand as if she meant to throw it away.

But Emily was too quick for her. She caught Francine by the wrist. "Waste paper or not," she said; "it was among my flowers and it belongs to me."

Francine gave up the letter, with a look which might have startled Emily if she had noticed it. She handed the roses to Cecilia. "I was making a wreath for you to wear this evening, my dear--and I left it in the garden. It's not quite finished yet."

Cecilia was delighted. "How lovely it is!" she exclaimed. "And how very kind of you! I'll finish it myself." She turned away to the conservatory.

"I had no idea I was interfering with a letter," said Francine; watching Emily with fiercely-attentive eyes, while she smoothed out the crumpled paper.

Having read what Mirabel had written to her, Emily looked up, and saw that Alban was on the point of following Cecilia into the conservatory. He had noticed something in Francine's face which he was at a loss to understand, but which made her presence in the room absolutely hateful to him. Emily followed and spoke to him.

"I am going back to the rose garden," she said.

"For any particular purpose?" Alban inquired

"For a purpose which, I am afraid, you won't approve of. I mean to ask Mr. Mirabel if he knows Miss Jethro's address."

"I hope he is as ignorant of it as I am," Alban answered gravely.

"Are we going to quarrel over Miss Jethro, as we once quarreled over Mrs. Rook?" Emily asked--with the readiest recovery of her good humor. "Come! come! I am sure you are as anxious, in your own private mind, to have
this matter cleared up as I am."

"With one difference--that I think of consequences, and you don't." He said it, in his gentlest and kindest manner, and stepped into the conservatory.

"Never mind the consequences," she called after him, "if we can only get at the truth. I hate being deceived!"

"There is no person living who has better reason than you have to say that."

Emily looked round with a start. Alban was out of hearing. It was Francine who had answered her.

"What do you mean?" she said.

Francine hesitated. A ghastly paleness overspread her face.

"Are you ill?" Emily asked.

"No--I am thinking."

After waiting for a moment in silence, Emily moved away toward the door of the drawing-room. Francine suddenly held up her hand.

"Stop!" she cried.

Emily stood still.

"My mind is made up," Francine said.

"Made up--to what?"

"You asked what I meant, just now."

"I did."

"Well, my mind is made up to answer you. Miss Emily Brown, you are leading a sadly frivolous life in this house. I am going to give you something more serious to think about than your flirtation with Mr. Mirabel. Oh, don't be impatient! I am coming to the point. Without knowing it yourself, you have been the victim of deception for years past--cruel deception--wicked deception that puts on the mask of mercy."

"Are you alluding to Miss Jethro?" Emily asked, in astonishment. "I thought you were strangers to each other. Just now, you wanted to know who she was."

"I know nothing about her. I care nothing about her. I am not thinking of Miss Jethro."

"Who are you thinking of?"

"I am thinking," Francine answered, "of your dead father."

CHAPTER XLVIII.
INVESTIGATING.

Having revived his sinking energies in the fruit garden, Mirabel seated himself under the shade of a tree, and reflected on the critical position in which he was placed by Francine's jealousy.

If Miss de Sor continued to be Mr. Wyvil's guest, there seemed to be no other choice before Mirabel than to leave Monksmoor--and to trust to a favorable reply to his sister's invitation for the free enjoyment of Emily's society under another roof. Try as he might, he could arrive at no more satisfactory conclusion than this. In his preoccupied state, time passed quickly. Nearly an hour had elapsed before he rose to return to the house.

Entering the hall, he was startled by a cry of terror in a woman's voice, coming from the upper regions. At the same time Mr. Wyvil, passing along the bedroom corridor after leaving the music-room, was confronted by his daughter, hurrying out of Emily's bedchamber in such a state of alarm that she could hardly speak.

"Gone!" she cried, the moment she saw her father.

Mr. Wyvil took her in his arms and tried to compose her. "Who has gone?" he asked.

"Emily! Oh, papa, Emily has left us! She has heard dreadful news--she told me so herself."

"What news? How did she hear it?"

"I don't know how she heard it. I went back to the drawing-room to show her my roses--""

"Was she alone?"

"Yes! She frightened me--she seemed quite wild. She said, 'Let me be by myself; I shall have to go home.' She kissed me--and ran up to her room. Oh, I am such a fool! Anybody else would have taken care not to lose sight of her."

"How long did you leave her by herself?"

"I can't say. I thought I would go and tell you. And then I got anxious about her, and knocked at her door, and looked into the room. Gone! Gone!"

Mr. Wyvil rang the bell and confided Cecilia to the care of her maid. Mirabel had already joined him in the corridor. They went downstairs together and consulted with Alban. He volunteered to make immediate inquiries at the railway station. Mr. Wyvil followed him, as far as the lodge gate which opened on the highroad--while Mirabel went to a second gate, at the opposite extremity of the park.

Mr. Wyvil obtained the first news of Emily. The lodge keeper had seen her pass him, on her way out of the park, in the greatest haste. He had called after her, "Anything wrong, miss?" and had received no reply. Asked what time
had elapsed since this had happened, he was too confused to be able to answer with any certainty. He knew that she had taken the road which led to the station--and he knew no more.

Mr. Wyvil and Mirabel met again at the house, and instituted an examination of the servants. No further discoveries were made.

The question which occurred to everybody was suggested by the words which Cecilia had repeated to her father. Emily had said she had "heard dreadful news"--how had that news reached her? The one postal delivery at Monksmoor was in the morning. Had any special messenger arrived, with a letter for Emily? The servants were absolutely certain that no such person had entered the house. The one remaining conclusion suggested that somebody must have communicated the evil tidings by word of mouth. But here again no evidence was to be obtained. No visitor had called during the day, and no new guests had arrived. Investigation was completely baffled.

Alban returned from the railway, with news of the fugitive.

He had reached the station, some time after the departure of the London train. The clerk at the office recognized his description of Emily, and stated that she had taken her ticket for London. The station-master had opened the carriage door for her, and had noticed that the young lady appeared to be very much agitated. This information obtained, Alban had dispatched a telegram to Emily--in Cecilia's name: "Pray send us a few words to relieve our anxiety, and let us know if we can be of any service to you."

This was plainly all that could be done--but Cecilia was not satisfied. If her father had permitted it, she would have followed Emily. Alban comforted her. He apologized to Mr. Wyvil for shortening his visit, and announced his intention of traveling to London by the next train. "We may renew our inquiries to some advantage," he added, after hearing what had happened in his absence, "if we can find out who was the last person who saw her, and spoke to her, before your daughter found her alone in the drawing-room. When I went out of the room, I left her with Miss de Sor."

The maid who waited on Miss de Sor was sent for. Francine had been out, by herself, walking in the park. She was then in her room, changing her dress. On hearing of Emily's sudden departure, she had been (as the maid reported) "much shocked and quite at a loss to understand what it meant."

Joining her friends a few minutes later, Francine presented, so far as personal appearance went, a strong contrast to the pale and anxious faces round her. She looked wonderfully well, after her walk. In other respects, she was in perfect harmony with the prevalent feeling. She expressed herself with the utmost propriety; her sympathy moved poor Cecilia to tears.

"I am sure, Miss de Sor, you will try to help us?" Mr. Wyvil began

"With the greatest pleasure," Francine answered.

"How long were you and Miss Emily Brown together, after Mr. Morris left you?"

"Not more than a quarter of an hour, I should think."

"Did anything remarkable occur in the course of conversation?"

"Nothing whatever."

Alban interfered for the first time. "Did you say anything," he asked, "which agitated or offended Miss Brown?"

"That's rather an extraordinary question," Francine remarked.

"Have you no other answer to give?" Alban inquired.

"I answer--No!" she said, with a sudden outburst of anger.

There, the matter dropped. While she spoke in reply to Mr. Wyvil, Francine had confronted him without embarrassment. When Alban interposed, she never looked at him--except when he provoked her to anger. Did she remember that the man who was questioning her, was also the man who had suspected her of writing the anonymous letter? Alban was on his guard against himself, knowing how he disliked her. But the conviction in his own mind was not to be resisted. In some unimaginable way, Francine was associated with Emily's flight from the house.

The answer to the telegram sent from the railway station had not arrived, when Alban took his departure for London. Cecilia's suspense began to grow unendurable: she looked to Mirabel for comfort, and found none. His office was to console, and his capacity for performing that office was notorious among his admirers; but he failed to present himself to advantage, when Mr. Wyvil's lovely daughter had need of his services. He was, in truth, too sincerely anxious and distressed to be capable of commanding his customary resources of ready-made sentiment and fluently-pious philosophy. Emily's influence had awakened the only earnest and true feeling which had ever ennobled the popular preacher's life.

Toward evening, the long-expected telegram was received at last. What could be said, under the circumstances, it said in these words:

"Safe at home--don't be uneasy about me--will write soon."

With that promise they were, for the time, forced to be content.

BOOK THE FIFTH--THE COTTAGE.
CHAPTER XLIX.
EMILY SUFFERS.

Mrs. Ellmother--left in charge of Emily's place of abode, and feeling sensible of her lonely position from time to
time--had just thought of trying the cheering influence of a cup of tea, when she heard a cab draw up at the cottage
gate. A violent ring at the bell followed. She opened the door--and found Emily on the steps. One look at that dear
and familiar face was enough for the old servant.
"God help us," she cried, "what's wrong now?"

Without a word of reply, Emily led the way into the bedchamber which had been the scene of Miss Letitia's
death. Mrs. Ellmother hesitated on the threshold.
"Why do you bring me in here?" she asked.
"Why did you try to keep me out?" Emily answered.
"When did I try to keep you out, miss?"
"When I came home from school, to nurse my aunt. Ah, you remember now! Is it true--I ask you here, where
your old mistress died--is it true that my aunt deceived me about my father's death? And that you knew it?"

There was dead silence. Mrs. Ellmother trembled horribly--her lips dropped apart--her eyes wandered round the
room with a stare of idiotic terror. "Is it her ghost tells you that?" she whispered. "Where is her ghost? The room
whirls round and round, miss--and the air sings in my ears."

Emily sprang forward to support her. She staggered to a chair, and lifted her great bony hands in wild entreaty.
"Don't frighten me," she said. "Stand back."

Emily obeyed her. She dashed the cold sweat off her forehead. "You were talking about your father's death just
now," she burst out, in desperate defiant tones. "Well! we know it and we are sorry for it--your father died
suddenly."

"My father died murdered in the inn at Zeeland! All the long way to London, I have tried to doubt it. Oh, me, I
know it now!"

Answering in those words, she looked toward the bed. Harrowing remembrances of her aunt's delirious self-
betrayal made the room unendurable to her. She ran out. The parlor door was open. Entering the room, she passed
by a portrait of her father, which her aunt had hung on the wall over the fireplace. She threw herself on the sofa and
burst into a passionate fit of crying. "Oh, my father--my dear, gentle, loving father; my first, best, truest friend--
murdered! murdered! Oh, God, where was your justice, where was your mercy, when he died that dreadful death?"

A hand was laid on her shoulder; a voice said to her, "Hush, my child! God knows best."

Emily looked up, and saw that Mrs. Ellmother had followed her. "You poor old soul," she said, suddenly
remembering; "I frightened you in the other room."

"I have got over it, my dear. I am old; and I have lived a hard life. A hard life schools a person. I make no
complaints." She stopped, and began to shudder again. "Will you believe me if I tell you something?" she asked. "I
warned my self-willed mistress. Standing by your father's coffin, I warned her. Hide the truth as you may (I said), a
time will come when our child will know what you are keeping from her now. One or both of us may live to see it. I
am the one who has lived; no refuge in the grave for me. I want to hear about it--there's no fear of frightening or
hurting me now. I want to hear how you found it out. Was it by accident, my dear? or did a person tell you?"

Emily's mind was far away from Mrs. Ellmother. She rose from the sofa, with her hands held fast over her
aching heart.

"The one duty of my life," she said--"I am thinking of the one duty of my life. Look! I am calm now; I am
resigned to my hard lot. Never, never again, can the dear memory of my father be what it was! From this time, it is
the horrid memory of a crime. The crime has gone unpunished; the man has escaped others. He shall not escape
Me." She paused, and looked at Mrs. Ellmother absently. "What did you say just now? You want to hear how I
know what I know? Naturally! naturally! Sit down here--sit down, my old friend, on the sofa with me--and take your
mind back to Netherwoods. Alban Morris--""
example of self-control?

"I want to know, Miss Emily, where Francine de Sor is now?"

"She is at the house in the country, which I have left."

"Where does she go next, if you please? Back to Miss Ladd?"

"I suppose so. What interest have you in knowing where she goes next?"

"I won't interrupt you, miss. It's true that I ran away into the garden. I can guess who followed me. How did she
find her way to me and Mr. Morris, in the dark?"

"The smell of tobacco guided her--she knew who smoked--she had seen him talking to you, on that very day--
she followed the scent--she heard what you two said to each other--and she has repeated it to me. Oh, my old friend,
the malice of a revengeful girl has enlightened me, when you, my nurse--and he, my lover--left me in the dark: it has
told me how my father died!"

"That's said bitterly, miss!"

"Is it said truly?"

"No. It isn't said truly of myself. God knows you would never have been kept in the dark, if your aunt had
listened to me. I begged and prayed--I went down on my knees to her--I warned her, as I told you just now. Must I
tell you what a headstrong woman Miss Letitia was? She insisted. She put the choice before me of leaving her at
once and forever--or giving in. I wouldn't have given in to any other creature on the face of this earth. I am obstinate,
as you have often told me. Well, your aunt's obstinacy beat mine; I was too fond of her to say No. Besides, if you
ask me who was to blame in the first place, I tell you it wasn't your aunt; she was frightened into it."

"Who frightened her?"

"Your godfather--the great London surgeon--he who was visiting in our house at the time."

"Sir Richard?"

"Yes--Sir Richard. He said he wouldn't answer for the consequences, in the delicate state of your health, if we
told you the truth. Ah, he had it all his own way after that. He went with Miss Letitia to the inquest; he won over the
coroner and the newspaper men to his will; he kept your aunt's name out of the papers; he took charge of the coffin;
hired the undertaker and his men, strangers from London; he wrote the certificate--who but he! Everybody was
cap in hand to the famous man!"

"Surely, the servants and the neighbors asked questions?"

"Hundreds of questions! What did that matter to Sir Richard? They were like so many children, in his hands.
And, mind you, the luck helped him. To begin with, there was the common name. Who was to pick out your poor
father among the thousands of James Browns? Then, again, the house and lands went to the male heir, as they called
him--the man your father quarreled with in the bygone time. He brought his own establishment with him. Long
before you got back from the friends you were staying with--don't you remember it?--we had cleared out of the
house; we were miles and miles away; and the old servants were scattered abroad, finding new situations wherever
they could. How could you suspect us? We had nothing to fear in that way; but my conscience pricked me. I made
another attempt to prevail on Miss Letitia, when you had recovered your health. I said, 'There's no fear of a relapse
now; break it to her gently, but tell her the truth.' No! Your aunt was too fond of you. She daunted me with dreadful
fits of crying, when I tried to persuade her. And that wasn't the worst of it. She bade me remember what an excitable
man your father was--she reminded me that the misery of your mother's death laid him low with brain fever--she
said, 'Emily takes after her father; I have heard you say it yourself; she has his constitution, and his sensitive nerves.
Don't you know how she loved him--how she talks of him to this day? Who can tell (if we are not careful) what
dreadful mischief we may do?' That was how my mistress worked on me. I got infected with her fears; it was as if I
had caught an infection of disease. Oh, my dear, blame me if it must be; but don't forget how I have suffered for it
since! I was driven away from my dying mistress, in terror of what she might say, while you were watching at her
bedside. I have lived in fear of what you might ask me--and have longed to go back to you--and have not had the
courage to do it. Look at me now!"

The poor woman tried to take out her handkerchief; her quivering hand helplessly entangled itself in her dress. "I
can't even dry my eyes," she said faintly. "Try to forgive me, miss!"

Emily put her arms round the old nurse's neck. "It is you," she said sadly, "who must forgive me."

For a while they were silent. Through the window that was open to the little garden, came the one sound that
could be heard--the gentle trembling of leaves in the evening wind.

The silence was harshly broken by the bell at the cottage door. They both started.

Emily's heart beat fast. "Who can it be?" she said.

Mrs. Ellmother rose. "Shall I say you can't see anybody?" she asked, before leaving the room.

"Yes! yes!"

Emily heard the door opened--heard low voices in the passage. There was a momentary interval. Then, Mrs.
Ellmother returned. She said nothing. Emily spoke to her.
"Is it a visitor?"
"Yes."
"Have you said I can't see anybody?"
"I couldn't say it."
"Why not?"
"Don't be hard on him, my dear. It's Mr. Alban Morris."

CHAPTER L.
MISS LADD ADVISES.

Mrs. Ellmother sat by the dying embers of the kitchen fire; thinking over the events of the day in perplexity and distress.

She had waited at the cottage door for a friendly word with Alban, after he had left Emily. The stern despair in his face warned her to let him go in silence. She had looked into the parlor next. Pale and cold, Emily lay on the sofa--sunk in helpless depression of body and mind. "Don't speak to me," she whispered; "I am quite worn out." It was but too plain that the view of Alban's conduct which she had already expressed, was the view to which she had adhered at the interview between them. They had parted in grief---perhaps in anger--perhaps forever. Mrs. Ellmother lifted Emily in compassionate silence, and carried her upstairs, and waited by her until she slept.

In the still hours of the night, the thoughts of the faithful old servant--dwelling for a while on past and present--advanced, by slow degrees, to consideration of the doubtful future. Measuring, to the best of her ability, the responsibility which had fallen on her, she felt that it was more than she could bear, or ought to bear, alone. To whom could she look for help?

The gentlefolks at Monksmoor were strangers to her. Doctor Allday was near at hand--but Emily had said, "Don't send for him; he will torment me with questions--and I want to keep my mind quiet, if I can." But one person was left, to whose ever-ready kindness Mrs. Ellmother could appeal--and that person was Miss Ladd.

It would have been easy to ask the help of the good schoolmistress in comforting and advising the favorite pupil whom she loved. But Mrs. Ellmother had another object in view: she was determined that the cold-blooded cruelty of Emily's treacherous friend should not be allowed to triumph with impunity. If an ignorant old woman could do nothing else, she could tell the plain truth, and could leave Miss Ladd to decide whether such a person as Francine deserved to remain under her care.

To feel justified in taking this step was one thing: to put it all clearly in writing was another. After vainly making the attempt overnight, Mrs. Ellmother tore up her letter, and communicated with Miss Ladd by means of a telegraphic message, in the morning. "Miss Emily is in great distress. I must not leave her. I have something besides to say to you which cannot be put into a letter. Will you please come to us?"

Later in the forenoon, Mrs. Ellmother was called to the door by the arrival of a visitor. The personal appearance of the stranger impressed her favorably. He was a handsome little gentleman; his manners were winning, and his voice was singularly pleasant to hear.

"I have come from Mr. Wyvil's house in the country," he said; "and I bring a letter from his daughter. May I take the opportunity of asking if Miss Emily is well?"

"Far from it, sir, I am sorry to say. She is so poorly that she keeps her bed."

At this reply, the visitor's face revealed such sincere sympathy and regret, that Mrs. Ellmother was interested in him: she added a word more. "My mistress has had a hard trial to bear, sir. I hope there is no bad news for her in the young lady's letter?"

"On the contrary, there is news that she will be glad to hear--Miss Wyvil is coming here this evening. Will you excuse my asking if Miss Emily has had medical advice?"

"She won't hear of seeing the doctor, sir. He's a good friend of hers--and he lives close by. I am unfortunately alone in the house. If I could leave her, I would go at once and ask his advice."

"Let me go!" Mirabel eagerly proposed.

Mrs. Ellmother's face brightened. "That's kindly thought of, sir--if you don't mind the trouble."

"My good lady, nothing is a trouble in your young mistress's service. Give me the doctor's name and address--and tell me what to say to him."

"There's one thing you must be careful of," Mrs. Ellmother answered. "He mustn't come here, as if he had been sent for--she would refuse to see him."

Mirabel understood her. "I will not forget to caution him. Kindly tell Miss Emily I called--my name is Mirabel. I will return to-morrow."

He hastened away on his errand--only to find that he had arrived too late. Doctor Allday had left London; called away to a serious case of illness. He was not expected to get back until late in the afternoon. Mirabel left a message,
saying that he would return in the evening.

The next visitor who arrived at the cottage was the trusty friend, in whose generous nature Mrs. Ellmother had wisely placed confidence. Miss Ladd had resolved to answer the telegram in person, the moment she read it.

"If there is bad news," she said, "let me hear it at once. I am not well enough to bear suspense; my busy life at the school is beginning to tell on me."

"There is nothing that need alarm you, ma'am—but there is a great deal to say, before you see Miss Emily. My stupid head turns giddy with thinking of it. I hardly know where to begin."

"Begin with Emily," Miss Ladd suggested.

Mrs. Ellmother took the advice. She described Emily's unexpected arrival on the previous day; and she repeated what had passed between them afterward. Miss Ladd's first impulse, when she had recovered her composure, was to go to Emily without waiting to hear more. Not presuming to stop her, Mrs. Ellmother ventured to put a question "Do you happen to have my telegram about you, ma'am?" Miss Ladd produced it. "Will you please look at the last part of it again?"

Miss Ladd read the words: "I have something besides to say to you which cannot be put into a letter." She at once returned to her chair.

"Does what you have still to tell me refer to any person whom I know?" she said.

"It refers, ma'am, to Miss de Sor. I am afraid I shall distress you."

"What did I say, when I came in?" Miss Ladd asked. "Speak out plainly; and try—it's not easy, I know—but try to begin at the beginning."

Mrs. Ellmother looked back through her memory of past events, and began by alluding to the feeling of curiosity which she had excited in Francine, on the day when Emily had made them known to one another. From this she advanced to the narrative of what had taken place at Netherwoods—to the atrocious attempt to frighten her by means of the image of wax—to the discovery made by Francine in the garden at night—and to the circumstances under which that discovery had been communicated to Emily.

Miss Ladd's face reddened with indignation. "Are you sure of all that you have said?" she asked.

"I am quite sure, ma'am. I hope I have not done wrong," Mrs. Ellmother added simply, "in telling you all this?"

"Wrong?" Miss Ladd repeated warmly. "If that wretched girl has no defense to offer, she is a disgrace to my school—and I owe you a debt of gratitude for showing her to me in her true character. She shall return at once to Netherwoods; and she shall answer me to my entire satisfaction—or leave my house. What cruelty! what duplicity! In all my experience of girls, I have never met with the like of it. Let me go to my dear little Emily—and try to forget what I have heard."

Mrs. Ellmother led the good lady to Emily's room—and, returning to the lower part of the house, went out into the garden. The mental effort that she had made had left its result in an aching head, and in an overpowering sense of depression. "A mouthful of fresh air will revive me," she thought.

The front garden and back garden at the cottage communicated with each other. Walking slowly round and round, Mrs. Ellmother heard footsteps on the road outside, which stopped at the gate. She looked through the grating, and discovered Alban Morris.

"Come in, sir!" she said, rejoiced to see him. He obeyed in silence. The full view of his face shocked Mrs. Ellmother. Never in her experience of the friend who had been so kind to her at Netherwoods, had he looked so old and so haggard as he looked now. "Oh, Mr. Alban, I see how she has distressed you! Don't take her at her word. Keep a good heart, sir—young girls are never long together of the same mind."

Alban gave her his hand. "I mustn't speak about it," he said. "Silence helps me to bear my misfortune as becomes a man. I have had some hard blows in my time: they don't seem to have blunted my sense of feeling as I thought they had. Thank God, she doesn't know how she has made me suffer! I want to ask her pardon for having forgotten myself yesterday. I spoke roughly to her, at one time. No: I won't intrude on her; I have said I am sorry, in writing. Do you mind giving it to her? Good-by—and thank you. I mustn't stay longer; Miss Ladd expects me at Netherwoods."

"Miss Ladd is in the house, sir, at this moment."

"Here, in London!"

"Upstairs, with Miss Emily."

"Upstairs? Is Emily ill?"

"She is getting better, sir. Would you like to see Miss Ladd?"

"I should indeed! I have something to say to her—and time is of importance to me. May I wait in the garden?"

"Why not in the parlor, sir?"

"The parlor reminds me of happier days. In time, I may have courage enough to look at the room again. Not now."
"If she doesn't make it up with that good man," Mrs. Ellmother thought, on her way back to the house, "my nurse-child is what I have never believed her to be yet--she's a fool."

In half an hour more, Miss Ladd joined Alban on the little plot of grass behind the cottage. "I bring Emily's reply to your letter," she said. "Read it, before you speak to me."

Alban read it: "Don't suppose you have offended me--and be assured that I feel gratefully the tone in which your note is written. I try to write forbearingly on my side; I wish I could write acceptably as well. It is not to be done. I am as unable as ever to enter into your motives. You are not my relation; you were under no obligation of secrecy: you heard me speak ignorantly of the murder of my father, as if it had been the murder of a stranger; and yet you kept me--deliberately, cruelly kept me--deceived! The remembrance of it burns me like fire. I cannot--oh, Alban, I cannot restore you to the place in my estimation which you have lost! If you wish to help me to bear my trouble, I entreat you not to write to me again."

Alban offered the letter silently to Miss Ladd. She signed to him to keep it.

"I know what Emily has written," she said; "and I have told her, what I now tell you--she is wrong; in every way, wrong. It is the misfortune of her impetuous nature that she rushes to conclusions--and those conclusions once formed, she holds to them with all the strength of her character. In this matter, she has looked at her side of the question exclusively; she is blind to your side."

"Not willfully!" Alban interposed.

Miss Ladd looked at him with admiration. "You defend Emily?"

"I love her," Alban answered.

Miss Ladd felt for him, as Mrs. Ellmother had felt for him. "Trust to time, Mr. Morris," she resumed. "The danger to be afraid of is--the danger of some headlong action, on her part, in the interval. Who can say what the end may be, if she persists in her present way of thinking? There is something monstrous, in a young girl declaring that it is her duty to pursue a murderer, and to bring him to justice! Don't you see it yourself?"

Alban still defended Emily. "It seems to me to be a natural impulse," he said--"natural, and noble."

"Noble!" Miss Ladd exclaimed.

"Yes--for it grows out of the love which has not died with her father's death."

"Then you encourage her?"

"With my whole heart--if she would give me the opportunity!"

"We won't pursue the subject, Mr. Morris. I am told by Mrs. Ellmother that you have something to say to me. What is it?"

"I have to ask you," Alban replied, "to let me resign my situation at Netherwoods."

Miss Ladd was not only surprised; she was also--a very rare thing with her--inclined to be suspicious. After what he had said to Emily, it occurred to her that Alban might be meditating some desperate project, with the hope of recovering his lost place in her favor.

"Have you heard of some better employment?" she asked.

"I have heard of no employment. My mind is not in a state to give the necessary attention to my pupils."

"Is that your only reason for wishing to leave me?"

"It is one of my reasons."

"The only one which you think it necessary to mention?"

"Yes."

"I shall be sorry to lose you, Mr. Morris."

"Believe me, Miss Ladd, I am not ungrateful for your kindness."

"Will you let me, in all kindness, say something more?" Miss Ladd answered. "I don't intrude on your secrets--I only hope that you have no rash project in view."

"I don't understand you, Miss Ladd."

"Yes, Mr. Morris--you do."

She shook hands with him--and went back to Emily.

CHAPTER LI.

THE DOCTOR SEES.

Alban returned to Netherwoods--to continue his services, until another master could be found to take his place.

By a later train Miss Ladd followed him. Emily was too well aware of the importance of the mistress's presence to the well-being of the school, to permit her to remain at the cottage. It was understood that they were to correspond, and that Emily's room was waiting for her at Netherwoods, whenever she felt inclined to occupy it.

Mrs. Ellmother made the tea, that evening, earlier than usual. Being alone again with Emily, it struck her that she might take advantage of her position to say a word in Alban's favor. She had chosen her time unfortunately. The moment she pronounced the name, Emily checked her by a look, and spoke of another person--that person being
Miss Jethro.

Mrs. Ellmother at once entered her protest, in her own downright way. "Whatever you do," she said, "don't go back to that! What does Miss Jethro matter to you?"

"I am more interested in her than you suppose--I happen to know why she left the school."

"Begging your pardon, miss, that's quite impossible!"

"She left the school," Emily persisted, "for a serious reason. Miss Ladd discovered that she had used false references."

"Good Lord! who told you that?"

"You see I know it. I asked Miss Ladd how she got her information. She was bound by a promise never to mention the person's name. I didn't say it to her--but I may say it to you. I am afraid I have an idea of who the person was."

"No," Mrs. Ellmother obstinately asserted, "you can't possibly know who it was! How should you know?"

"Do you wish me to repeat what I heard in that room opposite, when my aunt was dying?"

"Drop it, Miss Emily! For God's sake, drop it!"

"I can't drop it. It's dreadful to me to have suspicions of my aunt--and no better reason for them than what she said in a state of delirium. Tell me, if you love me, was it her wandering fancy? or was it the truth?"

"As I hope to be saved, Miss Emily, I can only guess as you do--I don't rightly know. My mistress trusted me half way, as it were. I'm afraid I have a rough tongue of my own sometimes. I offended her--and from that time she kept her own counsel. What she did, she did in the dark, so far as I was concerned."

"How did you offend her?"

"I shall be obliged to speak of your father if I tell you how?"

"Speak of him."

"He was not to blame--mind that!" Mrs. Ellmother said earnestly. "If I wasn't certain of what I say now you wouldn't get a word out of me. Good harmless man--there's no denying it--he was in love with Miss Jethro! What's the matter?"

Emily was thinking of her memorable conversation with the disgraced teacher on her last night at school. "Nothing" she answered. "Go on."

"If he had not tried to keep it secret from us," Mrs. Ellmother resumed, "your aunt might never have taken it into her head that he was entangled in a love affair of the shameful sort. I don't deny that I helped her in her inquiries; but it was only because I felt sure from the first that the more she discovered the more certainly my master's innocence would show itself. He used to go away and visit Miss Jethro privately. In the time when your aunt trusted me, we never could find out where. She made that discovery afterward for herself (I can't tell you how long afterward); and she spent money in employing mean wretches to pry into Miss Jethro's past life. She had (if you will excuse me for saying it) an old maid's hatred of the handsome young woman, who lured your father away from home, and set up a secret (in a manner of speaking) between her brother and herself. I won't tell you how we looked at letters and other things which he forgot to leave under lock and key. I will only say there was one bit, in a journal he kept, which made me ashamed of myself. I read it out to Miss Letitia; and I told her in so many words, not to count any more on me. No; I haven't got a copy of the words--I can remember them without a copy. Even if my religion did not forbid me to peril my soul by leading a life of sin with this woman whom I love--that was how it began--the thought of my daughter would keep me pure. No conduct of mine shall ever make me unworthy of my child's affection and respect.' There! I'm making you cry; I won't stay here any longer. All that I had to say has been said. Nobody but Miss Ladd knows for certain whether your aunt was innocent or guilty in the matter of Miss Jethro's disgrace. Please to excuse me; my work's waiting downstairs."

From time to time, as she pursued her domestic labors, Mrs. Ellmother thought of Mirabel. Hours on hours had passed--and the doctor had not appeared. Was he too busy to spare even a few minutes of his time? Or had the handsome little gentleman, after promising so fairly, failed to perform his errand? This last doubt wronged Mirabel. He had engaged to return to the doctor's house; and he kept his word.

Doctor Allday was at home again, and was seeing patients. Introduced in his turn, Mirabel had no reason to complain of his reception. At the same time, after he had stated the object of his visit, something odd began to show itself in the doctor's manner.

He looked at Mirabel with an appearance of uneasy curiosity; and he contrived an excuse for altering the visitor's position in the room, so that the light fell full on Mirabel's face.

"I fancy I must have seen you," the doctor said, "at some former time."

"I am ashamed to say I don't remember it," Mirabel answered.

"Ah, very likely I'm wrong! I'll call on Miss Emily, sir, you may depend on it."

Left in his consulting-room, Doctor Allday failed to ring the bell which summoned the next patient who was
waiting for him. He took his diary from the table drawer, and turned to the daily entries for the past month of July.

Arriving at the fifteenth day of the month, he glanced at the first lines of writing: "A visit from a mysterious lady, calling herself Miss Jethro. Our conference led to some very unexpected results."

No: that was not what he was in search of. He looked a little lower down: and read on regularly, from that point, as follows:

"Called on Miss Emily, in great anxiety about the discoveries which she might make among her aunt's papers. Papers all destroyed, thank God—except the Handbill, offering a reward for discovery of the murderer, which she found in the scrap-book. Gave her back the Handbill. Emily much surprised that the wretch should have escaped, with such a careful description of him circulated everywhere. She read the description aloud to me, in her nice clear voice: 'Supposed age between twenty-five and thirty years. A well-made man of small stature. Fair complexion, delicate features, clear blue eyes. Hair light, and cut rather short. Clean shaven, with the exception of narrow half-whiskers'—and so on. Emily at a loss to understand how the fugitive could disguise himself. Reminded her that he could effectually disguise his head and face (with time to help him) by letting his hair grow long, and cultivating his beard. Emily not convinced, even by this self-evident view of the case. Changed the subject."

The doctor put away his diary, and rang the bell.

"Curious," he thought. "That dandified little clergyman has certainly reminded me of my discussion with Emily, more than two months since. Was it his flowing hair, I wonder? or his splendid beard? Good God! suppose it should turn out—?"

He was interrupted by the appearance of his patient. Other ailing people followed. Doctor Allday's mind was professionally occupied for the rest of the evening.

CHAPTER LII.
"If I could find a friend!"

Shortly after Miss Ladd had taken her departure, a parcel arrived for Emily, bearing the name of a bookseller printed on the label. It was large, and it was heavy. "Reading enough, I should think, to last for a lifetime," Mrs. Ellmother remarked, after carrying the parcel upstairs.

Emily called her back as she was leaving the room. "I want to caution you," she said, "before Miss Wyvil comes. Don't tell her—don't tell anybody—how my father met his death. If other persons are taken into our confidence, they will talk of it. We don't know how near to us the murderer may be. The slightest hint may put him on his guard."

"Oh, miss, are you still thinking of that!"

"I think of nothing else."

"Bad for your mind, Miss Emily—and bad for your body, as your looks show. I wish you would take counsel with some discreet person, before you move in this matter by yourself."

Emily sighed wearily. "In my situation, where is the person whom I can trust?"

"You can trust the good doctor."

"Can I? Perhaps I was wrong when I told you I wouldn't see him. He might be of some use to me."

Mrs. Ellmother made the most of this concession, in the fear that Emily might change her mind. "Doctor Allday may call on you tomorrow," she said.

"Do you mean that you have sent for him?"

"Don't be angry! I did it for the best—and Mr. Mirabel agreed with me."

"Mr. Mirabel! What have you told Mr. Mirabel?"

"Nothing, except that you are ill. When he heard that, he proposed to go for the doctor. He will be here again tomorrow, to ask for news of your health. Will you see him?"

"I don't know yet—I have other things to think of. Bring Miss Wyvil up here when she comes."

"Am I to get the spare room ready for her?"

"No. She is staying with her father at the London house."

Emily made that reply almost with an air of relief. When Cecilia arrived, it was only by an effort that she could show grateful appreciation of the sympathy of her dearest friend. When the visit came to an end, she felt an ungrateful sense of freedom: the restraint was off her mind; she could think again of the one terrible subject that had any interest for her now. Over love, over friendship, over the natural enjoyment of her young life, predominated the blighting resolution which bound her to avenge her father's death. Her dearest remembrances of him—tender remembrances once—now burned in her (to use her own words) like fire. It was no ordinary love that had bound parent and child together in the bygone time. Emily had grown from infancy to girlhood, owing all the brightness of her life—a life without a mother, without brothers, without sisters—to her father alone. To submit to lose this beloved, this only companion, by the cruel stroke of disease was of all trials of resignation the hardest to bear. But to be severed from him by the murderous hand of a man, was more than Emily's fervent nature could passively endure. Before the garden gate had closed on her friend she had returned to her one thought, she was breathing again her one
aspiration. The books that she had ordered, with her own purpose in view—books that might supply her want of experience, and might reveal the perils which beset the course that lay before her—were unpacked and spread out on the table. Hour after hour, when the old servant believed that her mistress was in bed, she was absorbed over biographies in English and French, which related the stratagems by means of which famous policemen had captured the worst criminals of their time. From these, she turned to works of fiction, which found their chief topic of interest in dwelling on the discovery of hidden crime. The night passed, and dawn glimmered through the window—and still she opened book after book with sinking courage—and still she gained nothing but the disheartening conviction of her inability to carry out her own plans. Almost every page that she turned over revealed the immovable obstacles set in her way by her sex and her age. Could she mix with the people, or visit the scenes, familiar to the experience of men (in fact and in fiction), who had traced the homicide to his hiding-place, and had marked him among his harmless fellow-creatures with the brand of Cain? No! A young girl following, or attempting to follow, that career, must reckon with insult and outrage—paying their abominable tribute to her youth and her beauty, at every turn. What proportion would the men who might respect her bear to the men who might make her the object of advances, which it was hardly possible to imagine without shuddering. She crept exhausted to her bed, the most helpless, hopeless creature on the wide surface of the earth—a girl self-devoted to the task of a man.

Careful to perform his promise to Mirabel, without delay, the doctor called on Emily early in the morning—before the hour at which he usually entered his consulting-room.

"Well? What's the matter with the pretty young mistress?" he asked, in his most abrupt manner, when Mrs. Ellmother opened the door. "Is it love? or jealousy? or a new dress with a wrinkle in it?"

"You will hear about it, sir, from Miss Emily herself. I am forbidden to say anything."

"But you mean to say something—for all that?"

"Don't joke, Doctor Allday! The state of things here is a great deal too serious for joking. Make up your mind to be surprised—I say no more."

Before the doctor could ask what this meant, Emily opened the parlor door. "Come in!" she said, impatiently.

Doctor Allday's first greeting was strictly professional. "My dear child, I never expected this," he began. "You are looking wretchedly ill." He attempted to feel her pulse. She drew her hand away from him.

"It's my mind that's ill," she answered. "Feeling my pulse won't cure me of anxiety and distress. I want advice; I want help. Dear old doctor, you have always been a good friend to me—be a better friend than ever now."

"What can I do?"

"Promise you will keep secret what I am going to say to you—and listen, pray listen patiently, till I have done."

Doctor Allday promised, and listened. He had been, in some degree at least, prepared for a surprise—but the disclosure which now burst on him was more than his equanimity could sustain. He looked at Emily in silent dismay. She had surprised and shocked him, not only by what she said, but by what she unconsciously suggested. Was it possible that Mirabel's personal appearance had produced on her the same impression which was present in his own mind? His first impulse, when he was composed enough to speak, urged him to put the question cautiously.

"If you happened to meet with the suspected man," he said, "have you any means of identifying him?"

"None whatever, doctor. If you would only think it over—"

He stopped her there; convinced of the danger of encouraging her, and resolved to act on his conviction.

"I have enough to occupy me in my profession," he said. "Ask your other friend to think it over."

"What other friend?"

"Mr. Alban Morris."

The moment he pronounced the name, he saw that he had touched on some painful association. "Has Mr. Morris refused to help you?" he inquired.

"I have not asked him to help me."

"Why?"

There was no choice (with such a man as Doctor Allday) between offending him or answering him. Emily adopted the last alternative. On this occasion she had no reason to complain of his silence.

"Your view of Mr. Morris's conduct surprises me," he replied—"surprises me more than I can say," he added; remembering that he too was guilty of having kept her in ignorance of the truth, out of regard—mistaken regard, as it now seemed to be—for her peace of mind.

"Be good to me, and pass it over if I am wrong," Emily said: "I can't dispute with you; I can only tell you what I feel. You have always been so kind to me—may I count on your kindness still?"

Doctor Allday relapsed into silence.

"May I at least ask," she went on, "if you know anything of persons—" She paused, discouraged by the cold expression of inquiry in the old man's eyes as he looked at her.

"What persons?" he said.
"Persons whom I suspect."
"Name them."

Emily named the landlady of the inn at Zeeland: she could now place the right interpretation on Mrs. Rook's conduct, when the locket had been put into her hand at Netherwoods. Doctor Allday answered shortly and stiffly: he had never even seen Mrs. Rook. Emily mentioned Miss Jethro next—and saw at once that she had interested him.

"What do you suspect Miss Jethro of doing?" he asked.
"I suspect her of knowing more of my father's death than she is willing to acknowledge," Emily replied.

The doctor's manner altered for the better. "I agree with you," he said frankly. "But I have some knowledge of that lady. I warn you not to waste time and trouble in trying to discover the weak side of Miss Jethro."

"That was not my experience of her at school," Emily rejoined. "At the same time I don't know what may have happened since those days. I may perhaps have lost the place I once held in her regard."

"How?"
"Through my aunt."
"Through your aunt?"

"I hope and trust I am wrong," Emily continued; "but I fear my aunt had something to do with Miss Jethro's dismissal from the school—and in that case Miss Jethro may have found it out." Her eyes, resting on the doctor, suddenly brightened. "You know something about it!" she exclaimed.

He considered a little—whether he should or should not tell her of the letter addressed by Miss Ladd to Miss Letitia, which he had found at the cottage.

"If I could satisfy you that your fears are well founded," he asked, "would the discovery keep you away from Miss Jethro?"

"I should be ashamed to speak to her—even if we met."

"Very well. I can tell you positively, that your aunt was the person who turned Miss Jethro out of the school. When I get home, I will send you a letter that proves it."

Emily's head sank on her breast. "Why do I only hear of this now?"

"Because I had no reason for letting you know of it, before to-day. If I have done nothing else, I have at least succeeded in keeping you and Miss Jethro apart."

Emily looked at him in alarm. He went on without appearing to notice that he had startled her. "I wish to God I could as easily put a stop to the mad project which you are contemplating."

"The mad project?" Emily repeated. "Oh, Doctor Allday. Do you cruelly leave me to myself, at the time of all others, when I am most in need of your sympathy?"

That appeal moved him. He spoke more gently; he pitied, while he condemned her.

"My poor dear child, I should be cruel indeed, if I encouraged you. You are giving yourself up to an enterprise, so shockingly unsuited to a young girl like you, that I declare I contemplate it with horror. Think, I entreat you, think; and let me hear that you have yielded—not to my poor entreaties—but to your own better sense!" His voice faltered; his eyes moistened. "I shall make a fool of myself," he burst out furiously, "if I stay here any longer. Good-by."

He left her.

She walked to the window, and looked out at the fair morning. No one to feel for her—no one to understand her—nothing nearer that could speak to poor mortality of hope and encouragement than the bright heaven, so far away! She turned from the window. "The sun shines on the murderer," she thought, "as it shines on me."

She sat down at the table, and tried to quiet her mind; to think steadily to some good purpose. Of the few friends that she possessed, every one had declared that she was in the wrong. Had they lost the one loved being of all beings on earth, and lost him by the hand of a homicide—and that homicide free? All that was faithful, all that was devoted in the girl's nature, held her to her desperate resolution as with a hand of iron. If she shrank at that miserable moment, it was not from her design—it was from the sense of her own helplessness. "Oh, if I had been a man!" she said to herself. "Oh, if I could find a friend!"

CHAPTER LIII.
THE FRIEND IS FOUND.

Mrs. Ellmother looked into the parlor. "I told you Mr. Mirabel would call again," she announced. "Here he is."

"Has he asked to see me?"
"He leaves it entirely to you."

For a moment, and a moment only, Emily was undecided. "Show him in," she said.

Mirabel's embarrassment was visible the moment he entered the room. For the first time in his life—in the presence of a woman—the popular preacher was shy. He had taken hundreds of fair hands with sympathetic pressure—he who had offered fluent consolation, abroad and at home, to beauty in distress—was conscious of a rising
color, and was absolutely at a loss for words when Emily received him. And yet, though he appeared at
disadvantage—and, worse still, though he was aware of it himself—there was nothing contemptible in his look and
manner. His silence and confusion revealed a change in him which inspired respect. Love had developed this spoiled
darling of foolish congregations, this effeminate pet of drawing-rooms and boudoirs, into the likeness of a Man—and
no woman, in Emily’s position, could have failed to see that it was love which she herself had inspired.

Equally ill at ease, they both took refuge in the commonplace phrases suggested by the occasion. These
exhausted there was a pause. Mirabel alluded to Cecilia, as a means of continuing the conversation.

"Have you seen Miss Wyvil?" he inquired.

"She was here last night; and I expect to see her again to-day before she returns to Monksmoor with her father.
Do you go back with them?"

"Yes—if you do."

"I remain in London."

"Then I remain in London, too."

The strong feeling that was in him had forced its way to expression at last. In happier days—when she had
persistently refused to let him speak to her seriously—she would have been ready with a light-hearted reply. She was
silent now. Mirabel pleaded with her not to misunderstand him, by an honest confession of his motives which
presented him under a new aspect. The easy plausible man, who had hardly ever seemed to be in earnest before—
meant, seriously meant, what he said now.

"May I try to explain myself?" he asked.

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"Pray, don't suppose me capable," Mirabel said earnestly, "of presuming to pay you an idle compliment. I cannot
think of you, alone and in trouble, without feeling anxiety which can only be relieved in one way—I must be near
enough to hear of you, day by day. Not by repeating this visit! Unless you wish it, I will not again cross the
threshold of your door. Mrs. Ellmother will tell me if your mind is more at ease; Mrs. Ellmother will tell me if there
is any new trial of your fortitude. She needn't even mention that I have been speaking to her at the door; and she may
be sure, and you may be sure, that I shall ask no inquisitive questions. I can feel for you in your misfortune, without
wishing to know what that misfortune is. If I can ever be of the smallest use, think of me as your other servant. Say
to Mrs. Ellmother, 'I want him'—and say no more."

Where is the woman who could have resisted such devotion as this—inspired, truly inspired, by herself? Emily's
eyes softened as she answered him.

"You little know how your kindness touches me," she said.

"Don't speak of my kindness until you have put me to the proof," he interposed. "Can a friend (such a friend as I
am, I mean) be of any use?"

"Of the greatest use if I could feel justified in trying you."

"I entreat you to try me!"

"But, Mr. Mirabel, you don't know what I am thinking of."

"I don't want to know."

"I may be wrong. My friends all say I am wrong."

"I don't care what your friends say; I don't care about any earthly thing but your tranquillity. Does your dog ask
whether you are right or wrong? I am your dog. I think of You, and I think of nothing else."

She looked back through the experience of the last few days. Miss Ladd—Mrs. Ellmother—Doctor Allday: not
one of them had felt for her, not one of them had spoken to her, as this man had felt and had spoken. She
remembered the dreadful sense of solitude and helplessness which had wrung her heart, in the interval before
Mirabel came in. Her father himself could hardly have been kinder to her than this friend of a few weeks only. She
looked at him through her tears; she could say nothing that was eloquent, nothing even that was adequate. "You are
very good to me," was her only acknowledgment of all that he had offered. How poor it seemed to be! and yet how
much it meant!

He rose—saying considerately that he would leave her to recover herself, and would wait to hear if he was
wanted.

"No," she said; "I must not let you go. In common gratitude I ought to decide before you leave me, and I do
decide to take you into my confidence." She hesitated; her color rose a little. "I know how unselfishly you offer me
your help," she resumed; "I know you speak to me as a brother might speak to a sister—"

He gently interrupted her. "No," he said; "I can't honestly claim to do that. And—may I venture to remind you?—
you know why."

She started. Her eyes rested on him with a momentary expression of reproach.

"Is it quite fair," she asked, "in my situation, to say that?"
"Would it have been quite fair," he rejoined, "to allow you to deceive yourself? Should I deserve to be taken into your confidence, if I encouraged you to trust me, under false pretenses? Not a word more of those hopes on which the happiness of my life depends shall pass my lips, unless you permit it. In my devotion to your interests, I promise to forget myself. My motives may be misinterpreted; my position may be misunderstood. Ignorant people may take me for that other happier man, who is an object of interest to you--"

"Stop, Mr. Mirabel! The person to whom you refer has no such claim on me as you suppose."

"Dare I say how happy I am to hear it? Will you forgive me?"

"I will forgive you if you say no more."

Their eyes met. Completely overcome by the new hope that she had inspired, Mirabel was unable to answer her. His sensitive nerves trembled under emotion, like the nerves of a woman; his delicate complexion faded away slowly into whiteness. Emily was alarmed—he seemed to be on the point of fainting. She ran to the window to open it more widely.

"Pray don't trouble yourself," he said, "I am easily agitated by any sudden sensation—and I am a little overcome at this moment by my own happiness."

"Let me give you a glass of wine."

"Thank you—I don't need it indeed."

"You really feel better?"

"I feel quite well again—and eager to hear how I can serve you."

"It's a long story, Mr. Mirabel—and a dreadful story."

"Dreadful?"

"Yes! Let me tell you first how you can serve me. I am in search of a man who has done me the cruelest wrong that one human creature can inflict on another. But the chances are all against me—I am only a woman; and I don't know how to take even the first step toward discovery."

"You will know, when I guide you."

He reminded her tenderly of what she might expect from him, and was rewarded by a grateful look. Seeing nothing, suspecting nothing, they advanced together nearer and nearer to the end.

"Once or twice," Emily continued, "I spoke to you of my poor father, when we were at Monksmoor—and I must speak of him again. You could have no interest in inquiring about a stranger—and you cannot have heard how he died."

"Pardon me, I heard from Mr. Wyvil how he died."

"You heard what I had told Mr. Wyvil," Emily said: "I was wrong."

"Wrong!" Mirabel exclaimed, in a tone of courteous surprise. "Was it not a sudden death?"

"It was a sudden death."

"Caused by disease of the heart?"

"Caused by no disease. I have been deceived about my father's death—and I have only discovered it a few days since."

At the impending moment of the frightful shock which she was innocently about to inflict on him, she stopped—doubtful whether it would be best to relate how the discovery had been made, or to pass at once to the result. Mirabel supposed that she had paused to control her agitation. He was so immeasurably far away from the faintest suspicion of what was coming that he exerted his ingenuity, in the hope of sparing her.

"I can anticipate the rest," he said. "Your sad loss has been caused by some fatal accident. Let us change the subject; tell me more of that man whom I must help you to find. It will only distress you to dwell on your father's death."

"Distress me?" she repeated. "His death maddens me!"

"Oh, don't say that!"

"Hear me! hear me! My father died murdered, at Zeeland—and the man you must help me to find is the wretch who killed him."

She started to her feet with a cry of terror. Mirabel dropped from his chair senseless to the floor.

CHAPTER LIV.

THE END OF THE FAINTING FIT.

Emily recovered her presence of mind. She opened the door, so as to make a draught of air in the room, and called for water. Returning to Mirabel, she loosened his cravat. Mrs. Ellmother came in, just in time to prevent her from committing a common error in the treatment of fainting persons, by raising Mirabel's head. The current of air, and the sprinkling of water over his face, soon produced their customary effect. "He'll come round, directly," Mrs. Ellmother remarked. "Your aunt was sometimes taken with these swoons, miss; and I know something about them. He looks a poor weak creature, in spite of his big beard. Has anything frightened him?"
Emily little knew how correctly that chance guess had hit on the truth! "Nothing can possibly have frightened him," she replied; "I am afraid he is in bad health. He turned suddenly pale while we were talking; and I thought he was going to be taken ill; he made light of it, and seemed to recover. Unfortunately, I was right; it was the threatening of a fainting fit--he dropped on the floor a minute afterward."

A sigh fluttered over Mirabel's lips. His eyes opened, looked at Mrs. Ellmother in vacant terror, and closed again. Emily whispered to her to leave the room. The old woman smiled satirically as she opened the door--then looked back, with a sudden change of humor. To see the kind young mistress bending over the feeble little clergyman set her--by some strange association of ideas--thinking of Alban Morris. "Ah," she muttered to herself, on her way out, "I call him a Man!"

There was wine in the sideboard--the wine which Emily had once already offered in vain. Mirabel drank it eagerly, this time. He looked round the room, as if he wished to be sure that they were alone. "Have I fallen to a low place in your estimation?" he asked, smiling faintly. "I am afraid you will think poorly enough of your new ally, after this?"

"I only think you should take more care of your health," Emily replied, with sincere interest in his recovery. "Let me leave you to rest on the sofa."

He refused to remain at the cottage--he asked, with a sudden change to fretfulness, if she would let her servant get him a cab. She ventured to doubt whether he was quite strong enough yet to go away by himself. He reiterated, piteously reiterated, his request. A passing cab was stopped directly. Emily accompanied him to the gate. "I know what to do," he said, in a hurried absent way. "Rest and a little tonic medicine will soon set me right." The clammy coldness of his skin made Emily shudder, as they shook hands. "You won't think the worse of me for this?" he asked.

"How can you imagine such a thing!" she answered warmly. "Will you see me, if I come to-morrow?"

"I shall be anxious to see you."

So they parted. Emily returned to the house, pitying him with all her heart.

BOOK THE SIXTH--HERE AND THERE.

CHAPTER LV.

MIRABEL SEES HIS WAY.

Reaching the hotel at which he was accustomed to stay when he was in London, Mirabel locked the door of his room. He looked at the houses on the opposite side of the street. His mind was in such a state of morbid distrust that he lowered the blind over the window. In solitude and obscurity, the miserable wretch sat down in a corner, and covered his face with his hands, and tried to realize what had happened to him.

Nothing had been said at the fatal interview with Emily, which could have given him the slightest warning of what was to come. Her father's name--absolutely unknown to him when he fled from the inn--had only been communicated to the public by the newspaper reports of the adjourned inquest. At the time when those reports appeared, he was in hiding, under circumstances which prevented him from seeing a newspaper. While the murder was still a subject of conversation, he was in France--far out of the track of English travelers--and he remained on the continent until the summer of eighteen hundred and eighty-one. No exercise of discretion, on his part, could have extricated him from the terrible position in which he was now placed. He stood pledged to Emily to discover the man suspected of the murder of her father; and that man was--himself!

What refuge was left open to him?

If he took to flight, his sudden disappearance would be a suspicious circumstance in itself, and would therefore provoke inquiries which might lead to serious results. Supposing that he overlooked the risk thus presented, would he be capable of enduring a separation from Emily, which might be a separation for life? Even in the first horror of discovering his situation, her influence remained unshaken--the animating spirit of the one manly capacity for resistance which raised him above the reach of his own fears. The only prospect before him which he felt himself to be incapable of contemplating, was the prospect of leaving Emily.

Having arrived at this conclusion, his fears urged him to think of providing for his own safety.

The first precaution to adopt was to separate Emily from friends whose advice might be hostile to his interests--perhaps even subversive of his security. To effect this design, he had need of an ally whom he could trust. That ally was at his disposal, far away in the north.

At the time when Francine's jealousy began to interfere with all freedom of intercourse between Emily and himself at Monksmoor, he had contemplated making arrangements which might enable them to meet at the house of his invalid sister, Mrs. Delvin. He had spoken of her, and of the bodily affliction which confined her to her room, in terms which had already interested Emily. In the present emergency, he decided on returning to the subject, and on hastening the meeting between the two women which he had first suggested at Mr. Wyvil's country seat.
No time was to be lost in carrying out this intention. He wrote to Mrs. Delvin by that day's post; confiding to her, in the first place, the critical position in which he now found himself. This done, he proceeded as follows:

"To your sound judgment, dearest Agatha, it may appear that I am making myself needlessly uneasy about the future. Two persons only know that I am the man who escaped from the inn at Zeeland. You are one of them, and Miss Jethro is the other. On you I can absolutely rely; and, after my experience of her, I ought to feel sure of Miss Jethro. I admit this; but I cannot get over my distrust of Emily's friends. I fear the cunning old doctor; I doubt Mr. Wyvil; I hate Alban Morris.

"Do me a favor, my dear. Invite Emily to be your guest, and so separate her from these friends. The old servant who attends on her will be included in the invitation, of course. Mrs. Ellmother is, as I believe, devoted to the interests of Mr. Alban Morris: she will be well out of the way of doing mischief, while we have her safe in your northern solitude.

"There is no fear that Emily will refuse your invitation.

"In the first place, she is already interested in you. In the second place, I shall consider the small proprieties of social life; and, instead of traveling with her to your house, I shall follow by a later train. In the third place, I am now the chosen adviser in whom she trusts; and what I tell her to do, she will do. It pains me, really and truly pains me, to be compelled to deceive her--but the other alternative is to reveal myself as the wretch of whom she is in search. Was there ever such a situation? And, oh, Agatha, I am so fond of her! If I fail to persuade her to be my wife, I don't care what becomes of me. I used to think disgrace, and death on the scaffold, the most frightful prospect that a man can contemplate. In my present frame of mind, a life without Emily may just as well end in that way as in any other. When we are together in your old sea-beaten tower, do your best, my dear, to incline the heart of this sweet girl toward me. If she remains in London, how do I know that Mr. Morris may not recover the place he has lost in her good opinion? The bare idea of it turns me cold.

"There is one more point on which I must touch, before I can finish my letter.

"When you last wrote, you told me that Sir Jervis Redwood was not expected to live much longer, and that the establishment would be broken up after his death. Can you find out for me what will become, under the circumstances, of Mr. and Mrs. Rook? So far as I am concerned, I don't doubt that the alteration in my personal appearance, which has protected me for years past, may be trusted to preserve me from recognition by these two people. But it is of the utmost importance, remembering the project to which Emily has devoted herself, that she should not meet with Mrs. Rook. They have been already in correspondence; and Mrs. Rook has expressed an intention (if the opportunity offers itself) of calling at the cottage. Another reason, and a pressing reason, for removing Emily from London! We can easily keep the Rooks out of your house; but I own I should feel more at my ease, if I heard that they had left Northumberland."

With that confession, Mrs. Delvin's brother closed his letter.

CHAPTER LVI.

ALBAN SEES HIS WAY.

During the first days of Mirabel's sojourn at his hotel in London, events were in progress at Netherwoods, affecting the interests of the man who was the especial object of his distrust. Not long after Miss Ladd had returned to her school, she heard of an artist who was capable of filling the place to be vacated by Alban Morris. It was then the twenty-third of the month. In four days more the new master would be ready to enter on his duties; and Alban would be at liberty.

On the twenty-fourth, Alban received a telegram which startled him. The person sending the message was Mrs. Ellmother; and the words were: "Meet me at your railway station to-day, at two o'clock."

He found the old woman in the waiting-room; and he met with a rough reception.

"Minutes are precious, Mr. Morris," she said; "you are two minutes late. The next train to London stops here in half an hour--and I must go back by it."

"Good heavens, what brings you here? Is Emily--?"

"Emily is well enough in health--if that's what you mean? As to why I come here, the reason is that it's a deal easier for me (worse luck!) to take this journey than to write a letter. One good turn deserves another. I don't forget how kind you were to me, away there at the school--and I can't, and won't, see what's going on at the cottage, behind your back, without letting you know of it. Oh, you needn't be alarmed about her! I've made an excuse to get away for a few hours--but I haven't left her by herself. Miss Wyvil has come to London again; and Mr. Mirabel spends the best part of his time with her. Excuse me for a moment, will you? I'm so thirsty after the journey, I can hardly speak."

She presented herself at the counter in the waiting-room. "I'll trouble you, young woman, for a glass of ale." She returned to Alban in a better humor. "It's not bad stuff, that! When I have said my say, I'll have a drop more--just to wash the taste of Mr. Mirabel out of my mouth. Wait a bit; I have something to ask you. How much longer are you
obliged to stop here, teaching the girls to draw?"

"I leave Netherwoods in three days more," Alban replied.

"That's all right! You may be in time to bring Miss Emily to her senses, yet."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean—if you don't stop it—she will marry the parson."

"I can't believe it, Mrs. Ellmother! I won't believe it!"

"Ah, it's a comfort to him, poor fellow, to say that! Look here, Mr. Morris; this is how it stands. You're in
disgrace with Miss Emily—and he profits by it. I was fool enough to take a liking to Mr. Mirabel when I first opened
the door to him; I know better now. He got on the blind side of me; and now he has got on the blind side of her.
Shall I tell you how? By doing what you would have done if you had had the chance. He's helping her—or
pretending to help her, I don't know which—to find the man who murdered poor Mr. Brown. After four years! And
when all the police in England (with a reward to encourage them) did their best, and it came to nothing!"

"Never mind that!" Alban said impatiently. "I want to know how Mr. Mirabel is helping her?"

"That's more than I can tell you. You don't suppose they take me into their confidence? All I can do is to pick up
a word, here and there, when fine weather tempts them out into the garden. She tells him to suspect Mrs. Rook, and
to make inquiries after Miss Jethro. And he has his plans; and he writes them down, which is dead against his doing
anything useful, in my opinion. I don't hold with your scribblers. At the same time I wouldn't count too positively, in
your place, on his being likely to fail. That little Mirabel—if it wasn't for his beard, I should believe he was a woman,
and a sickly woman too; he fainted in our house the other day—that little Mirabel is in earnest. Rather than leave
Miss Emily from Saturday to Monday, he has got a parson out of employment to do his Sunday work for him. And,
what's more, he has persuaded her (for some reasons of his own) to leave London next week."

"Is she going back to Monksmoor?"

"Not she! Mr. Mirabel has got a sister, a widow lady; she's a cripple, or something of the sort. Her name is Mrs.
Delvin. She lives far away in the north country, by the sea; and Miss Emily is going to stay with her."

"Are you sure of that?"

"Sure? I've seen the letter."

"Do you mean the letter of invitation?"

"Yes—I do. Miss Emily herself showed it to me. I'm to go with her—'in attendance on my mistress,' as the lady
puts it. This I will say for Mrs. Delvin: her handwriting is a credit to the school that taught her; and the poor
bedridden creature words her invitation so nicely, that I myself couldn't have resisted it—and I'm a hard one, as you
know. You don't seem to heed me, Mr. Morris."

"I beg your pardon, I was thinking."

"Thinking of what—if I may make so bold?"

"Of going back to London with you, instead of waiting till the new master comes to take my place."

"Don't do that, sir! You would do harm instead of good, if you showed yourself at the cottage now. Besides, it
would not be fair to Miss Ladd, to leave her before the other man takes your girls off your hands. Trust me to look
after your interests; and don't go near Miss Emily—and neither you have got something to say
about the murder, which she will be eager to hear. Make some discovery in that direction, Mr. Morris, while the
parson is only trying to do it or pretending to do it—and I'll answer for the result. Look at the clock! In ten minutes
more the train will be here. My memory isn't as good as it was; but I do think I have told you all I had to tell."

"You are the best of good friends!" Alban said warmly.

"Never mind about that, sir. If you want to do a friendly thing in return, tell me if you know what has become of
Miss de Sor."

"She has returned to Netherwoods."

"Aha! Miss Ladd is as good as her word. Would you mind writing to tell me of it, if Miss de Sor leaves the
school again? Good Lord! there she is on the platform with bag and baggage. Don't let her see me, Mr. Morris! If
she comes in here, I shall set the marks of my ten finger-nails on that false face of hers, as sure as I am a Christian
woman."

Alban placed himself at the door, so as to hide Mrs. Ellmother. There indeed was Francine, accompanied by one
of the teachers at the school. She took a seat on the bench outside the booking-office, in a state of sullen
indifference—absorbed in herself—nothing. Urged by ungovernable curiosity, Mrs. Ellmother stole on tiptoe
to Alban's side to look at her. To a person acquainted with the circumstances there could be no possible doubt of
what had happened. Francine had failed to excuse herself, and had been dismissed from Miss Ladd's house.

"I would have traveled to the world's end," Mrs. Ellmother said, "to see that!"

She returned to her place in the waiting-room, perfectly satisfied.

The teacher noticed Alban, on leaving the booking-office after taking the tickets. "I shall be glad," she said,
looking toward Francine, "when I have resigned the charge of that young lady to the person who is to receive her in London."

"Is she to be sent back to her parents?" Alban asked.

"We don't know yet. Miss Ladd will write to St. Domingo by the next mail. In the meantime, her father's agent in London--the same person who pays her allowance--takes care of her until he hears from the West Indies."

"Does she consent to this?"

"She doesn't seem to care what becomes of her. Miss Ladd has given her every opportunity of explaining and excusing herself, and has produced no impression. You can see the state she is in. Our good mistress--always hopeful even in the worst cases, as you know--thinks she is feeling ashamed of herself, and is too proud and self-willed to own it. My own idea is, that some secret disappointment is weighing on her mind. Perhaps I am wrong."

No. Miss Ladd was wrong; and the teacher was right.

The passion of revenge, being essentially selfish in its nature, is of all passions the narrowest in its range of view. In gratifying her jealous hatred of Emily, Francine had correctly foreseen consequences, as they might affect the other object of her enmity--Alban Morris. But she had failed to perceive the imminent danger of another result, which in a calmer frame of mind might not have escaped discovery. In triumphing over Emily and Alban, she had been the indirect means of inflicting on herself the bitterest of all disappointments--she had brought Emily and Mirabel together. The first forewarning of this catastrophe had reached her, on hearing that Mirabel would not return to Monksmoor. Her worst fears had been thereafter confirmed by a letter from Cecilia, which had followed her to Netherwoods. From that moment, she, who had made others wretched, paid the penalty in suffering as keen as any that she had inflicted. Completely prostrated; powerless, through ignorance of his address in London, to make a last appeal to Mirabel; she was literally, as had just been said, careless what became of her. When the train approached, she sprang to her feet--advanced to the edge of the platform--and suddenly drew back, shuddering. The teacher looked in terror at Alban. Had the desperate girl meditated throwing herself under the wheels of the engine? The thought had been in both their minds; but neither of them acknowledged it. Francine stepped quietly into the carriage, when the train drew up, and laid her head back in a corner, and closed her eyes. Mrs. Ellmother took her place in another compartment, and beckoned to Alban to speak to her at the window.

"Where can I see you, when you go to London?" she asked.

"At Doctor Allday's house."

"On what day?"

"On Tuesday next."

CHAPTER LVII.

APPROACHING THE END.

Alban reached London early enough in the afternoon to find the doctor at his luncheon. "Too late to see Mrs. Ellmother," he announced. "Sit down and have something to eat."

"Has she left any message for me?"

"A message, my good friend, that you won't like to hear. She is off with her mistress, this morning, on a visit to Mr. Mirabel's sister."

"Does he go with them?"

"No; he follows by a later train."

"Has Mrs. Ellmother mentioned the address?"

"There it is, in her own handwriting."

Alban read the address:--"Mrs. Delvin, The Clink, Belford, Northumberland."

"Turn to the back of that bit of paper," the doctor said. "Mrs. Ellmother has written something on it."

She had written these words: "No discoveries made by Mr. Mirabel, up to this time. Sir Jervis Redwood is dead. The Rooks are believed to be in Scotland; and Miss Emily, if need be, is to help the parson to find them. No news of Miss Jethro."

"Now you have got your information," Doctor Allday resumed, "let me have a look at you. You're not in a rage: that's a good sign to begin with."

"I am not the less determined," Alban answered.

"To bring Emily to her senses?" the doctor asked.

"To do what Mirabel has not done--and then to let her choose between us."

"Ay? ay? Your good opinion of her hasn't altered, though she has treated you so badly?"

"My good opinion makes allowance for the state of my poor darling's mind, after the shock that has fallen on her," Alban answered quietly. "She is not my Emily now. She will be my Emily yet. I told her I was convinced of it, in the old days at school--and my conviction is as strong as ever. Have you seen her, since I have been away at Netherwoods?"
"Yes; and she is as angry with me as she is with you."
"For the same reason?"
"No, no. I heard enough to warn me to hold my tongue. I refused to help her--that's all. You are a man, and you may run risks which no young girl ought to encounter. Do you remember when I asked you to drop all further inquiries into the murder, for Emily's sake? The circumstances have altered since that time. Can I be of any use?"
"Of the greatest use, if you can give me Miss Jethro's address."
"Oh! You mean to begin in that way, do you?"
"Yes. You know that Miss Jethro visited me at Netherwoods?"
"Go on."
"She showed me your answer to a letter which she had written to you. Have you got that letter?"
Doctor Allday produced it. The address was at a post-office, in a town on the south coast. Looking up when he had copied it, Alban saw the doctor's eyes fixed on him with an oddly-mingled expression: partly of sympathy, partly of hesitation.
"Have you anything to suggest?" he asked.
"You will get nothing out of Miss Jethro," the doctor answered, "unless--" there he stopped.
"Unless, what?"
"Unless you can frighten her."
"How am I to do that?"
After a little reflection, Doctor Allday returned, without any apparent reason, to the subject of his last visit to Emily.
"There was one thing she said, in the course of our talk," he continued, "which struck me as being sensible: possibly (for we are all more or less conceited), because I agreed with her myself. She suspects Miss Jethro of knowing more about that damnable murder than Miss Jethro is willing to acknowledge. If you want to produce the right effect on her--" he looked hard at Alban and checked himself once more.
"Well? what am I to do?"
"Tell her you have an idea of who the murderer is."
"But I have no idea."
"But I have."
"Good God! what do you mean?"
"Don't mistake me! An impression has been produced on my mind--that's all. Call it a freak or fancy; worth trying perhaps as a bold experiment, and worth nothing more. Come a little nearer. My housekeeper is an excellent woman, but I have once or twice caught her rather too near to that door. I think I'll whisper it."
He did whisper it. In breathless wonder, Alban heard of the doubt which had crossed Doctor Allday's mind, on the evening when Mirabel had called at his house.
"You look as if you didn't believe it," the doctor remarked.
"I'm thinking of Emily. For her sake I hope and trust you are wrong. Ought I to go to her at once? I don't know what to do!"
"Find out first, my good fellow, whether I am right or wrong. You can do it, if you will run the risk with Miss Jethro."
Alban recovered himself. His old friend's advice was clearly the right advice to follow. He examined his railway guide, and then looked at his watch. "If I can find Miss Jethro," he answered, "I'll risk it before the day is out."
"Tile doctor accompanied him to the door. "You will write to me, won't you?"
"Without fail. Thank you--and good-by."

BOOK THE SEVENTH--THE CLINK.
CHAPTER LVIII.
A COUNCIL OF TWO.
Early in the last century one of the picturesque race of robbers and murderers, practicing the vices of humanity on the borderlands watered by the river Tweed, built a tower of stone on the coast of Northumberland. He lived joyously in the perpetration of atrocities; and he died penitent, under the direction of his priest. Since that event, he has figured in poems and pictures; and has been greatly admired by modern ladies and gentlemen, whom he would have outraged and robbed if he had been lucky enough to meet with them in the good old times.

His son succeeded him, and failed to profit by the paternal example: that is to say, he made the fatal mistake of fighting for other people instead of fighting for himself.

In the rebellion of Forty-Five, this northern squire sided to serious purpose with Prince Charles and the Highlanders. He lost his head; and his children lost their inheritance. In the lapse of years, the confiscated property fell into the hands of strangers; the last of whom (having a taste for the turf) discovered, in course of time, that he
was in want of money. A retired merchant, named Delvin (originally of French extraction), took a liking to the wild situation, and purchased the tower. His wife—already in failing health—had been ordered by the doctors to live a quiet life by the sea. Her husband’s death left her a rich and lonely widow; by day and night alike, a prisoner in her room; wasted by disease, and having but two interests which reconciled her to life—writing poetry in the intervals of pain, and paying the debts of a reverend brother who succeeded in the pulpit, and prospered nowhere else.

In the later days of its life, the tower had been greatly improved as a place of residence. The contrast was remarkable between the dreary gray outer walls, and the luxuriously furnished rooms inside, rising by two at a time to the lofty eighth story of the building. Among the scattered populace of the country round, the tower was still known by the odd name given to it in the bygone time—“The Clink.” It had been so called (as was supposed) in allusion to the noise made by loose stones, washed backward and forward at certain times of the tide, in hollows of the rock on which the building stood.

On the evening of her arrival at Mrs. Delvin’s retreat, Emily retired at an early hour, fatigued by her long journey. Mirabel had an opportunity of speaking with his sister privately in her own room.

"Send me away, Agatha, if I disturb you,” he said, “and let me know when I can see you in the morning.”

"My dear Miles, have you forgotten that I am never able to sleep in calm weather? My lullaby, for years past, has been the moaning of the great North Sea, under my window. Listen! There is not a sound outside on this peaceful night. It is the right time of the tide, just now—and yet, ‘the clink’ is not to be heard. Is the moon up?"

Mirabel opened the curtains. "The whole sky is one great abyss of black,” he answered. "If I was superstitious, I should think that horrid darkness a bad omen for the future. Are you suffering, Agatha?"

"Not just now. I suppose I look sadly changed for the worse since you saw me last?"

But for the feverish brightness of her eyes, she would have looked like a corpse. Her wrinkled forehead, her hollow cheeks, her white lips told their terrible tale of the suffering of years. The ghastly appearance of her face was heightened by the furnishing of the room. This doomed woman, dying slowly day by day, delighted in bright colors and sumptuous materials. The paper on the walls, the curtains, the carpet presented the hues of the rainbow. She lay on a couch covered with purple silk, under draperies of green velvet to keep her warm. Rich lace hid her scanty hair, turning prematurely gray; brilliant rings glittered on her bony fingers. The room was in a blaze of light from lamps and candles. Even the wine at her side that kept her alive had been decanted into a bottle of lustrous Venetian glass. "My grave is open," she used to say; "and I want all these beautiful things to keep me from looking at it. I should die at once, if I was left in the dark."

Her brother sat by the couch, thinking "Shall I tell you what is in your mind?" she asked.

Mirabel humored the caprice of the moment. "Tell me!" he said.

"You want to know what I think of Emily," she answered. "Your letter told me you were in love; but I didn’t believe your letter. I have always doubted whether you were capable of feeling true love—until I saw Emily. The moment she entered the room, I knew that I had never properly appreciated my brother. You are in love with her, Miles; and you are a better man than I thought you. Does that express my opinion?"

Mirabel took her wasted hand, and kissed it gratefully.

"What a position I am in!" he said. "To love her as I love her; and, if she knew the truth, to be the object of her horror—to be the man whom she would hunt to the scaffold, as an act of duty to the memory of her father!"

"You have left out the worst part of it," Mrs. Delvin reminded him. "You have bound yourself to help her to find the man. Your one hope of persuading her to become your wife rests on your success in finding him. And you are the man. There is your situation! You can’t submit to it. How can you escape from it?"

"You have left out the worst part of it," Mrs. Delvin reminded him. "You have bound yourself to help her to find the man. Your one hope of persuading her to become your wife rests on your success in finding him. And you are the man. There is your situation! You can’t submit to it. How can you escape from it?"

"You are trying to frighten me, Agatha."

"I am trying to encourage you to face your position boldly."

"I am doing my best," Mirabel said, with sullen resignation. "Fortune has favored me so far. I have, really and truly, been unable to satisfy Emily by discovering Miss Jethro. She has left the place at which I saw her last—there is no trace to be found of her—and Emily knows it."

"Don’t forget," Mrs. Delvin replied, "that there is a trace to be found of Mrs. Rook, and that Emily expects you to follow it."

Mirabel shuddered. "I am surrounded by dangers, whichever way I look," he said. "Do what I may, it turns out to be wrong. I was wrong, perhaps, when I brought Emily here."

"No!"

"I could easily make an excuse," Mirabel persisted "and take her back to London."

"And for all you know to the contrary," his wiser sister replied, "Mrs. Rook may go to London; and you may take Emily back in time to receive her at the cottage. In every way you are safer in my old tower. And—don’t forget—you have got my money to help you, if you want it. In my belief, Miles, you will want it."

"You are the dearest and best of sisters! What do you recommend me to do?"
"What you would have been obliged to do," Mrs. Delvin answered, "if you had remained in London. You must go to Redwood Hall tomorrow, as Emily has arranged it. If Mrs. Rook is not there, you must ask for her address in Scotland. If nobody knows the address, you must still bestir yourself in trying to find it. And, when you do fall in with Mrs. Rook--"

"Well?"

"Take care, wherever it may be, that you see her privately."

Mirabel was alarmed. "Don't keep me in suspense," he burst out. "Tell me what you propose."

"Never mind what I propose, to-night. Before I can tell you what I have in my mind, I must know whether Mrs. Rook is in England or Scotland. Bring me that information to-morrow, and I shall have something to say to you. Hark! The wind is rising, the rain is falling. There is a chance of sleep for me--I shall soon hear the sea. Good-night."

"Good-night, dearest--and thank you again, and again!"

CHAPTER LIX.

THE ACCIDENT AT BELFORD.

Early in the morning Mirabel set forth for Redwood Hall, in one of the vehicles which Mrs. Delvin still kept at "The Clink" for the convenience of visitors. He returned soon after noon; having obtained information of the whereabouts of Mrs. Rook and her husband. When they had last been heard of, they were at Lasswade, near Edinburgh. Whether they had, or had not, obtained the situation of which they were in search, neither Miss Redwood nor any one else at the Hall could tell.

In half an hour more, another horse was harnessed, and Mirabel was on his way to the railway station at Belford, to follow Mrs. Rook at Emily's urgent request. Before his departure, he had an interview with his sister.

Mrs. Delvin was rich enough to believe implicitly in the power of money. Her method of extricating her brother from the serious difficulties that beset him, was to make it worth the while of Mr. and Mrs. Rook to leave England. Their passage to America would be secretly paid; and they would take with them a letter of credit addressed to a banker in New York. If Mirabel failed to discover them, after they had sailed, Emily could not blame his want of devotion to her interests. He understood this; but he remained desponding and irresolute, even with the money in his hands. The one person who could rouse his courage and animate his hope, was also the one person who must know nothing of what had passed between his sister and himself. He had no choice but to leave Emily, without being cheered by her bright looks, invigorated by her inspiriting words. Mirabel went away on his doubtful errand with a heavy heart.

"The Clink" was so far from the nearest post town, that the few letters, usually addressed to the tower, were delivered by private arrangement with a messenger. The man's punctuality depended on the convenience of his superiors employed at the office. Sometimes he arrived early, and sometimes he arrived late. On this particular morning he presented himself, at half past one o'clock, with a letter for Emily; and when Mrs. Ellmother smartly reproved him for the delay, he coolly attributed it to the hospitality of friends whom he had met on the road.

The letter, directed to Emily at the cottage, had been forwarded from London by the person left in charge. It addressed her as "Honored Miss." She turned at once to the end--and discovered the signature of Mrs. Rook!

"And Mr. Mirabel has gone," Emily exclaimed, "just when his presence is of the greatest importance to us!"

Shrewd Mrs. Ellmother suggested that it might be as well to read the letter first--and then to form an opinion. Emily read it.

"Lasswade, near Edinburgh, Sept. 26th.

"HONORED MISS--I take up my pen to bespeak your kind sympathy for my husband and myself; two old people thrown on the world again by the death of our excellent master. We are under a month's notice to leave Redwood Hall.

"Hearing of a situation at this place (also that our expenses would be paid if we applied personally), we got leave of absence, and made our application. The lady and her son are either the stingiest people that ever lived--or they have taken a dislike to me and my husband, and they make money a means of getting rid of us easily. Suffice it to say that we have refused to accept starvation wages, and that we are still out of place. It is just possible that you may have heard of something to suit us. So I write at once, knowing that good chances are often lost through needless delay.

"We stop at Belford on our way back, to see some friends of my husband, and we hope to get to Redwood Hall in good time on the 28th. Would you please address me to care of Miss Redwood, in case you know of any good situation for which we could apply. Perhaps we may be driven to try our luck in London. In this case, will you permit me to have the honor of presenting my respects, as I ventured to propose when I wrote to you a little time since.

"I beg to remain, Honored Miss,
"Your humble servant,
"R. ROOK."
Emily handed the letter to Mrs. Ellmother. "Read it," she said, "and tell me what you think."
"I think you had better be careful."
"Careful of Mrs. Rook?"
"Yes--and careful of Mrs. Delvin too."
Emily was astonished. "Are you really speaking seriously?" she said. "Mrs. Delvin is a most interesting person; so patient under her sufferings; so kind, so clever; so interested in all that interests me. I shall take the letter to her at once, and ask her advice."
"Have your own way, miss. I can't tell you why--but I don't like her!"
Mrs. Delvin's devotion to the interests of her guest took even Emily by surprise. After reading Mrs. Rook's letter, she rang the bell on her table in a frenzy of impatience. "My brother must be instantly recalled," she said. "Telegraph to him in your own name, telling him what has happened. He will find the message waiting for him, at the end of his journey."
The groom, summoned by the bell, was ordered to saddle the third and last horse left in the stables; to take the telegram to Belford, and to wait there until the answer arrived.
"How far is it to Redwood Hall?" Emily asked, when the man had received his orders.
"Ten miles," Mrs. Delvin answered.
"How can I get there to-day?"
"My dear, you can't get there."
"Pardon me, Mrs. Delvin, I must get there."
"Pardon me. My brother represents you in this matter. Leave it to my brother."
The tone taken by Mirabel's sister was positive, to say the least of it. Emily thought of what her faithful old servant had said, and began to doubt her own discretion in so readily showing the letter. The mistake--if a mistake it was--had however been committed; and, wrong or right, she was not disposed to occupy the subordinate position which Mrs. Delvin had assigned to her.
"If you will look at Mrs. Rook's letter again," Emily replied, "you will see that I ought to answer it. She supposes I am in London."
"Do you propose to tell Mrs. Rook that you are in this house?" Mrs. Delvin asked.
"Certainly."
"You had better consult my brother, before you take any responsibility on yourself."
Emily kept her temper. "Allow me to remind you," she said, "that Mr. Mirabel is not acquainted with Mrs. Rook--and that I am. If I speak to her personally, I can do much to assist the object of our inquiries, before he returns. She is not an easy woman to deal with--"
"And therefore," Mrs. Delvin interposed, "the sort of person who requires careful handling by a man like my brother--a man of the world."
"The sort of person, as I venture to think," Emily persisted, "whom I ought to see with as little loss of time as possible."
Mrs. Delvin waited a while before she replied. In her condition of health, anxiety was not easy to bear. Mrs. Rook's letter and Emily's obstinacy had seriously irritated her. But, like all persons of ability, she was capable, when there was serious occasion for it, of exerting self-control. She really liked and admired Emily; and, as the elder woman and the hostess, she set an example of forbearance and good humor.
"It is out of my power to send you to Redwood Hall at once," she resumed. "The only one of my three horses now at your disposal is the horse which took my brother to the Hall this morning. A distance, there and back, of twenty miles. You are not in too great a hurry, I am sure, to allow the horse time to rest?"
Emily made her excuses with perfect grace and sincerity. "I had no idea the distance was so great," she confessed. "I will wait, dear Mrs. Delvin, as long as you like."
They parted as good friends as ever--with a certain reserve, nevertheless, on either side. Emily's eager nature was depressed and irritated by the prospect of delay. Mrs. Delvin, on the other hand (devoted to her brother's interests), thought hopefully of obstacles which might present themselves with the lapse of time. The horse might prove to be incapable of further exertion for that day. Or the threatening aspect of the weather might end in a storm.
But the hours passed--and the sky cleared--and the horse was reported to be fit for work again. Fortune was against the lady of the tower; she had no choice but to submit.
Mrs. Delvin had just sent word to Emily that the carriage would be ready for her in ten minutes, when the coachman who had driven Mirabel to Belford returned. He brought news which agreeably surprised both the ladies. Mirabel had reached the station five minutes too late; the coachman had left him waiting the arrival of the next train.
to the North. He would now receive the telegraphic message at Belford, and might return immediately by taking the groom's horse. Mrs. Delvin left it to Emily to decide whether she would proceed by herself to Redwood Hall, or wait for Mirabel's return.

Under the changed circumstances, Emily would have acted ungraciously if she had persisted in holding to her first intention. She consented to wait.

The sea still remained calm. In the stillness of the moorland solitude on the western side of "The Clink," the rapid steps of a horse were heard at some little distance on the highroad.

Emily ran out, followed by careful Mrs. Ellmother, expecting to meet Mirabel.

She was disappointed: it was the groom who had returned. As he pulled up at the house, and dismounted, Emily noticed that the man looked excited.

"Is there anything wrong?" she asked.

"There has been an accident, miss."

"Not to Mr. Mirabel!"

"No, no, miss. An accident to a poor foolish woman, traveling from Lasswade."

Emily looked at Mrs. Ellmother. "It can't be Mrs. Rook!" she said.

"That's the name, miss! She got out before the train had quite stopped, and fell on the platform."

"Was she hurt?"

"Seriously hurt, as I heard. They carried her into a house hard by--and sent for the doctor."

"Was Mr. Mirabel one of the people who helped her?"

"He was on the other side of the platform, miss; waiting for the train from London. I got to the station and gave him the telegram, just as the accident took place. We crossed over to hear more about it. Mr. Mirabel was telling me that he would return to 'The Clink' on my horse--when he heard the woman's name mentioned. Upon that, he changed his mind and went to the house."

"Was he let in?"

"The doctor wouldn't hear of it. He was making his examination; and he said nobody was to be in the room but her husband and the woman of the house."

"Is Mr. Mirabel waiting to see her?"

"Yes, miss. He said he would wait all day, if necessary; and he gave me this bit of a note to take to the mistress."

Emily turned to Mrs. Ellmother. "It's impossible to stay here, not knowing whether Mrs. Rook is going to live or die," she said. "I shall go to Belford--and you will go with me."

The groom interfered. "I beg your pardon, miss. It was Mr. Mirabel's most particular wish that you were not, on any account, to go to Belford."

"Why not?"

"He didn't say."

Emily eyed the note in the man's hand with well-grounded distrust. In all probability, Mirabel's object in writing was to instruct his sister to prevent her guest from going to Belford. The carriage was waiting at the door. With her usual promptness of resolution, Emily decided on taking it for granted that she was free to use as she pleased a carriage which had been already placed at her disposal.

"Tell your mistress," she said to the groom, "that I am going to Belford instead of to Redwood Hall."

In a minute more, she and Mrs. Ellmother were on their way to join Mirabel at the station.

CHAPTER LX.
OUTSIDE THE ROOM.

Emily found Mirabel in the waiting room at Belford. Her sudden appearance might well have amazed him; but his face expressed a more serious emotion than surprise--he looked at her as if she had alarmed him.

"Didn't you get my message?" he asked. "I told the groom I wished you to wait for my return. I sent a note to my sister, in case he made any mistake."

"The man made no mistake," Emily answered. "I was in too great a hurry to be able to speak with Mrs. Delvin. Did you really suppose I could endure the suspense of waiting till you came back? Do you think I can be of no use--I who know Mrs. Rook?"

"They won't let you see her."

"Why not? You seem to be waiting to see her."

"I am waiting for the return of the rector of Belford. He is at Berwick; and he has been sent for at Mrs. Rook's urgent request."

"Is she dying?"

"She is in fear of death--whether rightly or wrongly, I don't know. There is some internal injury from the fall. I hope to see her when the rector returns. As a brother clergyman, I may with perfect propriety ask him to use his
influence in my favor."

"I am glad to find you so eager about it."

"I am always eager in your interests."

"Don't think me ungrateful," Emily replied gently. "I am no stranger to Mrs. Rook; and, if I send in my name, I may be able to see her before the clergyman returns."

She stopped. Mirabel suddenly moved so as to place himself between her and the door. "I must really beg of you to give up that idea," he said; "you don't know what horrid sight you may see--what dreadful agonies of pain this unhappy woman may be suffering."

His manner suggested to Emily that he might be acting under some motive which he was unwilling to acknowledge. "If you have a reason for wishing that I should keep away from Mrs. Rook," she said, "let me hear what it is. Surely we trust each other? I have done my best to set the example, at any rate."

Mirabel seemed to be at a loss for a reply.

While he was hesitating, the station-master passed the door. Emily asked him to direct her to the house in which Mrs. Rook had been received. He led the way to the end of the platform, and pointed to the house. Emily and Mrs. Ellmother immediately left the station. Mirabel accompanied them, still remonstrating, still raising obstacles.

The house door was opened by an old man. He looked reproachfully at Mirabel. "You have been told already," he said, "that no strangers are to see my wife?"

Encouraged by discovering that the man was Mr. Rook, Emily mentioned her name. "Perhaps you may have heard Mrs. Rook speak of me," she added.

"I've heard her speak of you oftentimes."

"What does the doctor say?"

"He thinks she may get over it. She doesn't believe him."

"Will you say that I am anxious to see her, if she feels well enough to receive me?"

Mr. Rook looked at Mrs. Ellmother. "Are there two of you wanting to go upstairs?" he inquired.

"This is my old friend and servant," Emily answered. "She will wait for me down here."

"She can wait in the parlor; the good people of this house are well known to me." He pointed to the parlor door--and then led the way to the first floor. Emily followed him. Mirabel, as obstinate as ever, followed Emily.

Mr. Rook opened a door at the end of the landing; and, turning round to speak to Emily, noticed Mirabel standing behind her. Without making any remarks, the old man pointed significantly down the stairs. His resolution was evidently immovable. Mirabel appealed to Emily to help him.

"She will see me, if you ask her," he said, "Let me wait here?"

The sound of his voice was instantly followed by a cry from the bed-chamber--a cry of terror.

Mr. Rook hurried into the room, and closed the door. In less than a minute, he opened it again, with doubt and horror plainly visible in his face. He stepped up to Mirabel--eyed him with the closest scrutiny--and drew back again with a look of relief.

"She's wrong," he said; "you are not the man."

This strange proceeding startled Emily.

"What man do you mean?"

"What man do you mean?" she asked.

Mr. Rook took no notice of the question. Still looking at Mirabel, he pointed down the stairs once more. With vacant eyes--moving mechanically, like a sleep-walker in his dream--Mirabel silently obeyed. Mr. Rook turned to Emily.

"Are you easily frightened?" he said

"I don't understand you," Emily replied. "Who is going to frighten me? Why did you speak to Mr. Mirabel in that strange way?"

Mr. Rook looked toward the bedroom door. "Maybe you'll hear why, inside there. If I could have my way, you shouldn't see her--but she's not to be reasoned with. A caution, miss. Don't be too ready to believe what my wife may say to you. She's had a fright." He opened the door. "In my belief," he whispered, "she's off her head."

Emily crossed the threshold. Mr. Rook softly closed the door behind her.

CHAPTER LXI.

INSIDE THE ROOM.

A decent elderly woman was seated at the bedside. She rose, and spoke to Emily with a mingling of sorrow and confusion strikingly expressed on her face. "It isn't my fault," she said, "that Mrs. Rook receives you in this manner; I am obliged to humor her."

She drew aside, and showed Mrs. Rook with her head supported by many pillows, and her face strangely hidden from view under a veil. Emily started back in horror. "Is her face injured?" she asked.

Mrs. Rook answered the question herself. Her voice was low and weak; but she still spoke with the same
nervous hurry of articulation which had been remarked by Alban Morris, on the day when she asked him to direct her to Netherwoods.

"Not exactly injured," she explained; "but one's appearance is a matter of some anxiety even on one's death-bed. I am disfigured by a thoughtless use of water, to bring me to when I had my fall--and I can't get at my toilet-things to put myself right again. I don't wish to shock you. Please excuse the veil."

Emily remembered the rouge on her cheeks, and the dye on her hair, when they had first seen each other at the school. Vanity--of all human frailties the longest-lived--still held its firmly-rooted place in this woman's nature; superior to torment of conscience, unassailable by terror of death!

The good woman of the house waited a moment before she left the room. "What shall I say," she asked, "if the clergyman comes?"

Mrs. Rook lifted her hand solemnly "Say," she answered, "that a dying sinner is making atonement for sin. Say this young lady is present, by the decree of an all-wise Providence. No mortal creature must disturb us." Her hand dropped back heavily on the bed. "Are we alone?" she asked.

"We are alone," Emily answered. "What made you scream just before I came in?"

"No! I can't allow you to remind me of that," Mrs. Rook protested. "I must compose myself. Be quiet. Let me think."

Recovering her composure, she also recovered that sense of enjoyment in talking of herself, which was one of the marked peculiarities in her character.

"You will excuse me if I exhibit religion," she resumed. "My dear parents were exemplary people; I was most carefully brought up. Are you pious? Let us hope so."

Emily was once more reminded of the past.

The bygone time returned to her memory--the time when she had accepted Sir Jervis Redwood's offer of employment, and when Mrs. Rook had arrived at the school to be her traveling companion to the North. The wretched creature had entirely forgotten her own loose talk, after she had drunk Miss Ladd's good wine to the last drop in the bottle. As she was boasting now of her piety, so she had boasted then of her lost faith and hope, and had mockingly declared her free-thinking opinions to be the result of her ill-assorted marriage. Forgotten--all forgotten, in this later time of pain and fear. Prostrate under the dread of death, her innermost nature--striped of the concealments of her later life--was revealed to view. The early religious training, at which she had scoffed in the insolence of health and strength, revealed its latent influence--intermitted, but a living influence always from first to last. Mrs. Rook was tenderly mindful of her exemplary parents, and proud of exhibiting religion, on the bed from which she was never to rise again.

"Did I tell you that I am a miserable sinner?" she asked, after an interval of silence.

Emily could endure it no longer. "Say that to the clergyman," she answered--"not to me."

"Oh, but I must say it," Mrs. Rook insisted. "I am a miserable sinner. Let me give you an instance of it," she continued, with a shameless relish of the memory of her own frailties. "I have been a drinker, in my time. Anything was welcome, when the fit was on me, as long as it got into my head. Like other persons in liquor, I sometimes talked of things that had better have been kept secret. We bore that in mind--my old man and I--when we were engaged by Sir Jervis. Miss Redwood wanted to put us in the next bedroom to hers--a risk not to be run. I might have talked of the murder at the inn; and she might have heard me. Please to remark a curious thing. Whatever else I might let out, when I was in my cups, not a word about the pocketbook ever dropped from me. You will ask how I know it. My dear, I should have heard of it from my husband, if I had let that out--and he is as much in the dark as you are. Wonderful are the workings of the human mind, as the poet says; and drink drowns care, as the proverb says. But can drink deliver a person from fear by day, and fear by night? I believe, if I had dropped a word about the pocketbook, it would have sobered me in an instant. Have you any remark to make on this curious circumstance?"

Thus far, Emily had allowed the woman to ramble on, in the hope of getting information which direct inquiry might fail to produce. It was impossible, however, to pass over the allusion to the pocketbook. After giving her time to recover from the exhaustion which her heavy breathing sufficiently revealed, Emily put the question:

"Who did the pocketbook belong to?"

"Wait a little," said Mrs. Rook. "Everything in its right place, is my motto. I mustn't begin with the pocketbook. Why did I begin with it? Do you think this veil on my face confuses me? Suppose I take it off. But you must promise first--solemnly promise you won't look at my face. How can I tell you about the murder (the murder is part of my confession, you know), with this lace tickling my skin? Go away--and stand there with your back to me. Thank you. Now I'll take it off. Ha! the air feels refreshing; I know what I am about. Good heavens, I have forgotten something! I have forgotten him. And after such a fright as he gave me! Did you see him on the landing?"

"Who are you talking of?" Emily asked.

Mrs. Rook's failing voice sank lower still.
"Come closer," she said, "this must be whispered. Who am I talking of?" she repeated. "I am talking of the man who slept in the other bed at the inn; the man who did the deed with his own razor. He was gone when I looked into the outhouse in the gray of the morning. Oh, I have done my duty! I have told Mr. Rook to keep an eye on him downstairs. You haven't an idea how obstinate and stupid my husband is. He says I couldn't know the man, because I didn't see him. Ha! there's such a thing as hearing, when you don't see. I heard--and I knew it again."

Emily turned cold from head to foot.

"What did you know again?" she said.

"His voice," Mrs. Rook answered. "I'll swear to his voice before all the judges in England."

Emily rushed to the bed. She looked at the woman who had said those dreadful words, speechless with horror.

"You're breaking your promise!" cried Mrs. Rook. "You false girl, you're breaking your promise!"

She snatched at the veil, and put it on again. The sight of her face, momentary as it had been, reassured Emily. Her wild eyes, made wilder still by the blurred stains of rouge below them, half washed away--her disheveled hair, with streaks of gray showing through the dye--presented a spectacle which would have been grotesque under other circumstances, but which now reminded Emily of Mr. Rook's last words; warning her not to believe what his wife said, and even declaring his conviction that her intellect was deranged. Emily drew back from the bed, conscious of an overpowering sense of self-reproach. Although it was only for a moment, she had allowed her faith in Mirabel to be shaken by a woman who was out of her mind.

"Try to forgive me," she said. "I didn't willfully break my promise; you frightened me."

Mrs. Rook began to cry. "I was a handsome woman in my time," she murmured. "You would say I was handsome still, if the clumsy fools about me had not spoiled my appearance. Oh, I do feel so weak! Where's my medicine?"

The bottle was on the table. Emily gave her the prescribed dose, and revived her failing strength.

"I am an extraordinary person," she resumed. "My resolution has always been the admiration of every one who knew me. But my mind feels--how shall I express it?--a little vacant. Have mercy on my poor wicked soul! Help me."

"How can I help you?"

"I want to recollect. Something happened in the summer time, when we were talking at Netherwoods. I mean when that impudent master at the school showed his suspicions of me. (Lord! how he frightened me, when he turned up afterward at Sir Jervis's house.) You must have seen yourself he suspected me. How did he show it?"

"He showed you my locket," Emily answered.

"Oh, the horrid reminder of the murder!" Mrs. Rook exclaimed. "I didn't mention it: don't blame me. You poor innocent, I have something dreadful to tell you."

Emily's horror of the woman forced her to speak. "Don't tell me!" she cried. "I know more than you suppose; I know what I was ignorant of when you saw the locket."

Mrs. Rook took offense at the interruption.

"Clever as you are, there's one thing you don't know," she said. "You asked me, just now, who the pocketbook belonged to. It belonged to your father. What's the matter? Are you crying?"

Emily was thinking of her father. The pocketbook was the last present she had given to him--a present on his birthday. "Is it lost?" she asked sadly.

"No; it's not lost. You will hear more of it directly. Dry your eyes, and expect something interesting--I'm going to talk about love. Love, my dear, means myself. Why shouldn't it? I'm not the only nice-looking woman, married to an old man, who has had a lover."

"Wretch! what has that got to do with it?"

"Everything, you rude girl! My lover was like the rest of them; he would bet on race-horses, and he lost. He owned it to me, on the day when your father came to our inn. He said, 'I must find the money--or be off to America, and say good-bye forever.' I was fool enough to be fond of him. It broke my heart to hear him talk in that way. I said, 'If I find the money, and more than the money, will you take me with you wherever you go?' Of course, he said Yes. I suppose you have heard of the inquest held at our old place by the coroner and jury? Oh, what idiots! They believed I was asleep on the night of the murder. I never closed my eyes--I was so miserable, I was so tempted."

"Tempted? What tempted you?"

"Do you think I had any money to spare? Your father's pocketbook tempted me. I had seen him open it, to pay his bill over-night. It was full of bank-notes. Oh, what an overpowering thing love is! Perhaps you have known it yourself."

Emily's indignation once more got the better of her prudence. "Have you no feeling of decency on your deathbed!" she said.

Mrs. Rook forgot her piety; she was ready with an impudent rejoinder. "You hot-headed little woman, your time
will come,” she answered. “But you're right—I am wandering from the point; I am not sufficiently sensible of this solemn occasion. By-the-by, do you notice my language? I inherit correct English from my mother—a cultivated person, who married beneath her. My paternal grandfather was a gentleman. Did I tell you that there came a time, on that dreadful night, when I could stay in bed no longer? The pocketbook—I did nothing but think of that devilish pocketbook, full of bank-notes. My husband was fast asleep all the time. I got a chair and stood on it. I looked into the place where the two men were sleeping, through the glass in the top of the door. Your father was awake; he was walking up and down the room. What do you say? Was he agitated? I didn't notice. I don't know whether the other man was asleep or awake. I saw nothing but the pocketbook stuck under the pillow, half in and half out. Your father kept on walking up and down. I thought to myself, 'I'll wait till he gets tired, and then I'll have another look at the pocketbook.' Where's the wine? The doctor said I might have a glass of wine when I wanted it."

Emily found the wine and gave it to her. She shuddered as she accidentally touched Mrs. Rook's hand. The wine helped the sinking woman.

"I must have got up more than once," she resumed. "And more than once my heart must have failed me. I don't clearly remember what I did, till the gray of the morning came. I think that must have been the last time I looked through the glass in the door."

She began to tremble. She tore the veil off her face. She cried out piteously, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner! Come here," she said to Emily. "Where are you? No! I daren't tell you what I saw; I daren't tell you what I did. When you're pos ses sed by the devil, there's nothing, nothing, nothing you can't do! Where did I find the courage to unlock the door? Where did I find the courage to go in? Any other woman would have lost her senses, when she found blood on her fingers after taking the pocketbook—"

Emily's head swam; her heart beat furiously--she staggered to the door, and opened it to escape from the room.

"I'm guilty of robbing him; but I'm innocent of his blood!" Mrs. Rook called after her wildly. "The deed was done--the yard door was wide open, and the man was gone--when I looked in for the last time. Come back, come back!"

Emily looked round.

"I can't go near you," she said, faintly.

"Come near enough to see this."

She opened her bed-gown at the throat, and drew up a loop of ribbon over her head. 'The pocketbook was attached to the ribbon. She held it out.

"Your father's book," she said. "Won't you take your father's book?"

For a moment, and only for a moment, Emily was repelled by the profanation associated with her birthday gift. Then, the loving remembrance of the dear hands that had so often touched that relic, drew the faithful daughter back to the woman whom she abhorred. Her eyes rested tenderly on the book. Before it had lain in that guilty bosom, it had been her book. The beloved memory was all that was left to her now; the beloved memory consecrated it to her hand. She took the book.

"Open it," said Mrs. Rook.

There were two five-pound bank-notes in it.

"His?" Emily asked.

"No; mine--the little I have been able to save toward restoring what I stole."

"Oh!" Emily cried, "is there some good in this woman, after all?"

"There's no good in the woman!" Mrs. Rook answered desperately. "There's nothing but fear--fear of hell now; fear of the pocketbook in the past time. Twice I tried to destroy it--and twice it came back, to remind me of the duty that I owed to my miserable soul. I tried to throw it into the fire. It struck the bar, and fell back into the fender at my feet. I went out, and cast it into the well. It came back again in the first bucket of water that was drawn up. From that moment, I began to save what I could. Restitution! Atonement! I tell you the book found a tongue--and those were the grand words it dinned in my ears, morning and night." She stooped to fetch her breath--stopped, and struck her bosom. "I hid it here, so that no person should see it, and no person take it from me. Superstition! Oh, yes, superstition! Shall tell you something? You may find yourself superstitious, if you are ever cut to the heart as I was. He left me! The man I had disgraced myself for, deserted me on the day when I gave him the stolen money. He suspected it was stolen; he took care of his own cowardly self--and left me to the hard mercy of the law, if the theft was found out. What do you call that, in the way of punishment? Haven't I suffered? Haven't I made atonement? Be a Christian--say you forgive me."

"I do forgive you."

"Say you will pray for me."

"I will."

"Ah! that comforts me! Now you can go."
Emily looked at her imploringly. "Don't send me away, knowing no more of the murder than I knew when I came here! Is there nothing, really nothing, you can tell me?"

Mrs. Rook pointed to the door.
"Haven't I told you already? Go downstairs, and see the wretch who escaped in the dawn of the morning!"
"Gently, ma'am, gently! You're talking too loud," cried a mocking voice from outside.
"It's only the doctor," said Mrs. Rook. She crossed her hands over her bosom with a deep-drawn sigh. "I want no doctor, now. My peace is made with my Maker. I'm ready for death; I'm fit for Heaven. Go away! go away!"

CHAPTER LXII.
DOWNSTAIRS.

In a moment more, the doctor came in--a brisk, smiling, self-sufficient man--smartly dressed, with a flower in his button-hole. A stifling odor of musk filled the room, as he drew out his handkerchief with a flourish, and wiped his forehead.

"Plenty of hard work in my line, just now," he said. "Hullo, Mrs. Rook! somebody has been allowing you to excite yourself. I heard you, before I opened the door. Have you been encouraging her to talk?" he asked, turning to Emily, and shaking his finger at her with an air of facetious remonstrance.

Incapable of answering him; forgetful of the ordinary restraints of social intercourse--with the one doubt that preserved her belief in Mirabel, eager for confirmation--Emily signed to this stranger to follow her into a corner of the room, out of hearing. She made no excuses: she took no notice of his look of surprise. One hope was all she could feel, one word was all she could say, after that second assertion of Mirabel's guilt. Indicating Mrs. Rook by a glance at the bed, she whispered the word:
"Mad?"

Flippant and familiar, the doctor imitated her; he too looked at the bed.
"No more mad than you are, miss. As I said just now, my patient has been excising herself; I daresay she has talked a little wildly in consequence. Hers isn't a brain to give way, I can tell you. But there's somebody else--"

Emily had fled from the room. He had destroyed her last fragment of belief in Mirabel's innocence. She was on the landing trying to console herself, when the doctor joined her.
"Are you acquainted with the gentleman downstairs?" he asked.
"What gentleman?"
"I haven't heard his name; he looks like a clergyman. If you know him--"
"I do know him. I can't answer questions! My mind--"
"Steady your mind, miss! and take your friend home as soon as you can. He hasn't got Mrs. Rook's hard brain; he's in a state of nervous prostration, which may end badly. Do you know where he lives?"
"He is staying with his sister--Mrs. Delvin."
"Mrs. Delvin! she's a friend and patient of mine. Say I'll look in to-morrow morning, and see what I can do for her brother. In the meantime, get him to bed, and to rest; and don't be afraid of giving him brandy."

The doctor returned to the bedroom. Emily heard Mrs. Ellmother's voice below.
"Are you up there, miss?"
"Yes."

Mrs. Ellmother ascended the stairs. "It was an evil hour," she said, "that you insisted on going to this place. Mr. Mirabel--" The sight of Emily's face suspended the next words on her lips. She took the poor young mistress in her motherly arms. "Oh, my child! what has happened to you?"
"Don't ask me now. Give me your arm--let us go downstairs."
"You won't be startled when you see Mr. Mirabel--will you, my dear? I wouldn't let them disturb you; I said nobody should speak to you but myself. The truth is, Mr. Mirabel has had a dreadful fright. What are you looking for?"
"Is there a garden here? Any place where we can breathe the fresh air?"

There was a courtyard at the back of the house. They found their way to it. A bench was placed against one of the walls. They sat down.
"Shall I wait till you're better before I say any more?" Mrs. Ellmother asked. "No? You want to hear about Mr. Mirabel? My dear, he came into the parlor where I was; and Mr. Rook came in too----and waited, looking at him. Mr. Mirabel sat down in a corner, in a dazed state as I thought. It wasn't for long. He jumped up, and clapped his hand on his heart as if his heart hurt him. 'I must and will know what's going on upstairs,' he says. Mr. Rook pulled him back, and told him to wait till the young lady came down. Mr. Mirabel wouldn't hear of it. 'Your wife's frightening her,' he says; 'your wife's telling her horrible things about me.' He was taken on a sudden with a shivering fit; his eyes rolled, and his teeth chattered. Mr. Rook made matters worse; he lost his temper. 'I'm damned,' he says, 'if I don't begin to think you are the man, after all; I've half a mind to send for the police.' Mr. Mirabel dropped into his chair. His eyes
stared, his mouth fell open. I took hold of his hand. Cold--cold as ice. What it all meant I can't say. Oh, miss, you
know! Let me tell you the rest of it some other time."

Emily insisted on hearing more. "The end!" she cried. "How did it end?"

"I don't know how it might have ended, if the doctor hadn't come in--to pay his visit, you know, upstairs. He said
some learned words. When he came to plain English, he asked if anybody had fright ened the gentleman. I said Mr.
Rook had frightened him. The doctor says to Mr. Rook, 'Mind what you are about. If you fright en him again, you
may have his death to answer for.' That cowed Mr. Rook. He asked what he had better do. 'Give me some brandy for
him first,' says the doctor; 'and then get him home at once.' I found the brandy, and went away to the inn to order the
carriage. Your ears are quicker than mine, miss--do I hear it now?"

They rose, and went to the house door. The carriage was there.

Still cowed by what the doctor had said, Mr. Rook appeared, carefully leading Mirabel out. He had revived
under the action of the stimulant. Passing Emily he raised his eyes to her--trembled--and looked down again. When
Mr. Rook opened the door of the carriage he paused, with one of his feet on the step. A momentary impulse inspired
him with a false courage, and brought a flush into his ghastly face. He turned to Emily.

"May I speak to you?" he asked.

She started back from him. He looked at Mrs. Ellmother. "Tell her I am innocent," he said. The trembling seized
on him again. Mr. Rook was obliged to lift him into the carriage.

Emily caught at Mrs. Ellmother's arm. "You go with him," she said. "I can't."

"How are you to get back, miss?"

She turned away and spoke to the coachman. "I am not very well. I want the fresh air--I'll sit by you."

Mrs. Ellmother remonstrated and protested, in vain. As Emily had determined it should be, so it was.

"Has he said anything?" she asked, when they had arrived at their journey's end.

"He has been like a man frozen up; he hasn't said a word; he hasn't even moved."

"Take him to his sister; and tell her all that you know. Be careful to repeat what the doctor said. I can't face Mrs.
Delvin. Be patient, my good old friend; I have no secrets from you. Only wait till to-morrow; and leave me by
myself to-night."

Alone in her room, Emily opened her writing-case. Searching among the letters in it, she drew out a printed
paper. It was the Handbill describing the man who had escaped from the inn, and offering a reward for the discovery
of him.

At the first line of the personal description of the fugitive, the paper dropped from her hand. Burning tears forced
their way into her eyes. Feeling for her handkerchief, she touched the pocketbook which she had received from Mrs.
Rook. After a little hesitation she took it out. She looked at it. She opened it.

The sight of the bank-notes repelled her; she hid them in one of the pockets of the book. There was a second
pocket which she had not yet examined. She pat her hand into it, and, touching something, drew out a letter.

The envelope (already open) was addressed to "James Brown, Esq., Post Office, Zeeland. "Would it be
inconsistent with her respect for her father's memory to examine the letter? No; a glance would decide whether she
ought to read it or not.

It was without date or address; a startling letter to look at--for it only contained three words:

"I say No."

The words were signed in initials:

"S. J."

In the instant when she read the initials, the name occurred to her.

Sara Jethro.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE DEFENSE OF MIRABEL.

The discovery of the letter gave a new direction to Emily's thoughts--and so, for the time at least, relieved her
mind from the burden that weighed on it. To what question, on her father's part, had "I say No" been Miss Jethro's
brief and stern reply? Neither letter nor envelope offered the slightest hint that might assist inquiry; even the
postmark had been so carelessly impressed that it was illegible.

Emily was still pondering over the three mysterious words, when she was interrupted by Mrs. Ellmother's voice
at the door.

"I must ask you to let me come in, miss; though I know you wished to be left by yourself till to-morrow. Mrs.
Delvin says she must positively see you to-night. It's my belief that she will send for the servants, and have herself
carried in here, if you refuse to do what she asks. You needn't be afraid of seeing Mr. Mirabel."

"Where is he?"

"His sister has given up her bedroom to him," Mrs. Ellmother answered. "She thought of your feelings before
she sent me here--and had the curtains closed between the sitting-room and the bedroom. I suspect my nasty temper misled me, when I took a dislike to Mrs. Delvin. She's a good creature; I'm sorry you didn't go to her as soon as we got back."

"Did she seem to be angry, when she sent you here?"

"Angry! She was crying when I left her."

Emily hesitated no longer.

She noticed a remarkable change in the invalid's sitting-room--so brilliantly lighted on other occasions--the moment she entered it. The lamps were shaded, and the candles were all extinguished. "My eyes don't bear the light so well as usual," Mrs. Delvin said. "Come and sit near me, Emily; I hope to quiet your mind. I should be grieved if you left my house with a wrong impression of me."

Knowing what she knew, suffering as she must have suffered, the quiet kindness of her tone implied an exercise of self-restraint which appealed irresistibly to Emily's sympathies. "Forgive me," she said, "for having done you an injustice. I am ashamed to think that I shrank from seeing you when I returned from Belford."

"I will endeavor to be worthy of your better opinion of me," Mrs. Delvin replied. "In one respect at least, I may claim to have had your best interests at heart--while we were still personally strangers. I tried to prevail on my poor brother to own the truth, when he discovered the terrible position in which he was placed toward you. He was too conscious of the absence of any proof which might induce you to believe him, if he attempted to defend himself--in one word, he was too timid--to take my advice. He has paid the penalty, and I have paid the penalty, of deceiving you."

Emily started. "In what way have you deceived me?" she asked.

"In the way that was forced on us by our own conduct," Mrs. Delvin said. "We have appeared to help you, without really doing so; we calculated on inducing you to marry my brother, and then (when he could speak with the authority of a husband) on prevailing on you to give up all further inquiries. When you insisted on seeing Mrs. Rook, Miles had the money in his hand to bribe her and her husband to leave England."

"Oh, Mrs. Delvin!"

"I don't attempt to excuse myself. I don't expect you to consider how sorely I was tempted to secure the happiness of my brother's life, by marriage with such a woman as yourself. I don't remind you that I knew--when I put obstacles in your way--that you were blindly devoting yourself to the discovery of an innocent man."

Emily heard her with angry surprise. "Innocent?" she repeated. "Mrs. Rook recognized his voice the instant she heard him speak."

Impenetrable to interruption, Mrs. Delvin went on. "But what I do ask," she persisted, "even after our short acquaintance, is this. Do you suspect me of deliberately scheming to make you the wife of a murderer?"

Emily had never viewed the serious question between them in this light. Warmly, generously, she answered the appeal that had been made to her. "Oh, don't think that of me! I know I spoke thoughtlessly and cruelly to you, just now--"

"You spoke impulsively," Mrs. Delvin interposed; "that was all. My one desire before we part--how can I expect you to remain here, after what has happened?--is to tell you the truth. I have no interested object in view; for all hope of your marriage with my brother is now at an end. May I ask if you have heard that he and your father were strangers, when they met at the inn?"

"Yes; I know that."

"If there had been any conversation between them, when they retired to rest, they might have mentioned their names. But your father was preoccupied; and my brother, after a long day's walk, was so tired that he fell asleep as soon as his head was on the pillow. He only woke when the morning dawned. What he saw when he looked toward the opposite bed might have struck with terror the boldest man that ever lived. His first impulse was naturally to alarm the house. When he got on his feet, he saw his own razor--a blood-stained razor on the bed by the side of the corpse. At that discovery, he lost all control over himself. In a panic of terror, he snatched up his knapsack, unfastened the yard door, and fled from the house. Knowing him, as you and I know him, can we wonder at it? Many a man has been hanged for murder, on circumstantial evidence less direct than the evidence against poor Miles. His horror of his own recollections was so overpowering that he forbade me even to mention the inn at Zeeland in my letters, while he was abroad. 'Never tell me (he wrote) who that wretched murdered stranger was, if I only heard of his name, I believe it would haunt me to my dying day. I ought not to trouble you with these details--and yet, I am surely not without excuse. In the absence of any proof, I cannot expect you to believe as I do in my brother's innocence. But I may at least hope to show you that there is some reason for doubt. Will you give him the benefit of that doubt?"

"Willingly!" Emily replied. "Am I right in supposing that you don't despair of proving his innocence, even yet?"

"I don't quite despair. But my hopes have grown fainter and fainter, as the years have gone on. There is a person
associated with his escape from Zeeland; a person named Jethro—"

"You mean Miss Jethro!"
"Yes. Do you know her?"

"I know her--and my father knew her. I have found a letter, addressed to him, which I have no doubt was written by Miss Jethro. It is barely possible that you may understand what it means. Pray look at it."

"I am quite unable to help you," Mrs. Delvin answered, after reading the letter. "All I know of Miss Jethro is that, but for her interposition, my brother might have fallen into the hands of the police. She saved him."

"Knowing him, of course?"
"That is the remarkable part of it: they were perfect strangers to each other."

"But she must have had some motive."

"There is the foundation of my hope for Miles. Miss Jethro declared, when I wrote and put the question to her, that the one motive by which she was actuated was the motive of mercy. I don't believe her. To my mind, it is in the last degree improbable that she would consent to protect a stranger from discovery, who owned to her (as my brother did) that he was a fugitive suspected of murder. She knows something, I am firmly convinced, of that dreadful event at Zeeland--and she has some reason for keeping it secret. Have you any influence over her?"

"Tell me where I can find her."

"I can't tell you. She has removed from the address at which my brother saw her last. He has made every possible inquiry--without result."

As she replied in those discouraging terms, the curtains which divided Mrs. Delvin's bedroom from her sitting-room were drawn aside. An elderly woman-servant approached her mistress's couch.

"Mr. Mirabel is awake, ma'am. He is very low; I can hardly feel his pulse. Shall I give him some more brandy?"

Mrs. Delvin held out her hand to Emily. "Come to me to-morrow morning," she said--and signed to the servant to wheel her couch into the next room. As the curtain closed over them, Emily heard Mirabel's voice. "Where am I?" he said faintly. "Is it all a dream?"

The prospect of his recovery the next morning was gloomy indeed. He had sunk into a state of deplorable weakness, in mind as well as in body. The little memory of events that he still preserved was regarded by him as the memory of a dream. He alluded to Emily, and to his meeting with her unexpectedly. But from that point his recollection failed him. They had talked of something interesting, he said--but he was unable to remember what it was. And they had waited together at a railway station--but for what purpose he could not tell. He sighed and wondered when Emily would marry him--and so fell asleep again, weaker than ever.

Not having any confidence in the doctor at Belford, Mrs. Delvin had sent an urgent message to a physician at Edinburgh, famous for his skill in treating diseases of the nervous system. "I cannot expect him to reach this remote place, without some delay," she said; "I must bear my suspense as well as I can."

"You shall not bear it alone," Emily answered. "I will wait with you till the doctor comes."

Mrs. Delvin lifted her frail wasted hands to Emily's face, drew it a little nearer--and kissed her.

CHAPTER LXIV.

ON THE WAY TO LONDON.

The parting words had been spoken. Emily and her companion were on their way to London.

For some little time, they traveled in silence--alone in the railway carriage. After submitting as long as she could to lay an embargo on the use of her tongue, Mrs. Ellmother started the conversation by means of a question: "Do you think Mr. Mirabel will get over it, miss?"

"It's useless to ask me," Emily said. "Even the great man from Edinburgh is not able to decide yet, whether he will recover or not."

"You have taken me into your confidence, Miss Emily, as you promised--and I have got something in my mind in consequence. May I mention it without giving offense?"

"What is it?"
"I wish you had never taken up with Mr. Mirabel."

Emily was silent. Mrs. Ellmother, having a design of her own to accomplish, ventured to speak more plainly. "I often think of Mr. Alban Morris," she proceeded. "I always did like him, and I always shall."

Emily suddenly pulled down her veil. "Don't speak of him!" she said.

"I didn't mean to offend you."

"You don't offend me. You distress me. Oh, how often I have wished--!" She threw herself back in a corner of the carriage and said no more.

Although not remarkable for the possession of delicate tact, Mrs. Ellmother discovered that the best course she could now follow was a course of silence.

Even at the time when she had most implicitly trusted Mirabel, the fear that she might have acted hastily and
harshly toward Alban had occasionally troubled Emily's mind. The impression produced by later events had not only intensified this feeling, but had presented the motives of that true friend under an entirely new point of view. If she had been left in ignorance of the manner of her father's death—as Alban had designed to leave her; as she would have been left, but for the treachery of Francine—how happily free she would have been from thoughts which it was now a terror to her to recall. She would have parted from Mirabel, when the visit to the pleasant country house had come to an end, remembering him as an amusing acquaintance and nothing more. He would have been spared, and she would have been spared, the shock that had so cruelly assailed them both. What had she gained by Mrs. Rook's detestable confession? The result had been perpetual disturbance of mind provoked by self-torturing speculations on the subject of the murder. If Mirabel was innocent, who was guilty? The false wife, without pity and without shame—or the brutal husband, who looked capable of any enormity? What was her future to be? How was it all to end? In the despair of that bitter moment—seeing her devoted old servant looking at her with kind compassionate eyes—Emily's troubled spirit sought refuge in impetuous self-betrayal; the very betrayal which she had resolved should not escape her, hardly a minute since!

She bent forward out of her corner, and suddenly drew up her veil. "Do you expect to see Mr. Alban Morris, when we get back?" she asked.

"I should like to see him, miss—if you have no objection."

"Tell him I am ashamed of myself! and say I ask his pardon with all my heart!"

"The Lord be praised!" Mrs. Ellmother burst out—and then, when it was too late, remembered the conventional restraints appropriate to the occasion. "Gracious, what a fool I am!" she said to herself. "Beautiful weather, Miss Emily, isn't it?" she continued, in a desperate hurry to change the subject.

Emily reclined again in her corner of the carriage. She smiled, for the first time since she had become Mrs. Delvin's guest at the tower.

BOOK THE LAST—AT HOME AGAIN.
CHAPTER LXV.
CECILIA IN A NEW CHARACTER.

Reaching the cottage at night, Emily found the card of a visitor who had called during the day. It bore the name of "Miss Wyvil," and had a message written on it which strongly excited Emily's curiosity.

"I have seen the telegram which tells your servant that you return to-night. Expect me early to-morrow morning—with news that will deeply interest you."

To what news did Cecilia allude? Emily questioned the woman who had been left in charge of the cottage, and found that she had next to nothing to tell. Miss Wyvil had flushed up, and had looked excited, when she read the telegraphic message—that was all. Emily's impatience was, as usual, not to be concealed. Expert Mrs. Ellmother treated the case in the right way—first with supper, and then with an adjournment to bed. The clock struck twelve, when she put out the young mistress's candle. "Ten hours to pass before Cecilia comes here!" Emily exclaimed. "Not ten minutes," Mrs. Ellmother reminded her, "if you will only go to sleep."

Cecilia arrived before the breakfast-table was cleared; as lovely, as gentle, as affectionate as ever—but looking unusually serious and subdued.

"Out with it at once!" Emily cried. "What have you got to tell me?"

"Perhaps, I had better tell you first," Cecilia said, "that I know what you kept from me when I came here, after you left us at Monksmoor. Don't think, my dear, that I say this by way of complaint. Mr. Alban Morris says you had good reasons for keeping your secret."

"Mr. Alban Morris! Did you get your information from him?"

"Yes. Do I surprise you?"

"More than words can tell!"

"Can you bear another surprise? Mr. Morris has seen Miss Jethro, and has discovered that Mr. Mirabel has been wrongly suspected of a dreadful crime. Our amiable little clergyman is guilty of being a coward—and guilty of nothing else. Are you really quiet enough to read about it?"

She produced some leaves of paper filled with writing. "There," she explained, "is Mr. Morris's own account of all that passed between Miss Jethro and himself."

"But how do you come by it?"

"Mr. Morris gave it to me. He said, 'Show it to Emily as soon as possible; and take care to be with her while she reads it.' There is a reason for this—" Cecilia's voice faltered. On the brink of some explanation, she seemed to recoil from it. "I will tell you by-and-by what the reason is," she said.

Emily looked nervously at the manuscript. "Why doesn't he tell me himself what he has discovered? Is he—" The leaves began to flutter in her trembling fingers—"is he angry with me?"

"Oh, Emily, angry with You! Read what he has written and you shall know why he keeps away."
Emily opened the manuscript.

CHAPTER LXVI.

ALBAN'S NARRATIVE.

"The information which I have obtained from Miss Jethro has been communicated to me, on the condition that I shall not disclose the place of her residence. 'Let me pass out of notice (she said) as completely as if I had passed out of life; I wish to be forgotten by some, and to be unknown by others.' With this one stipulation, she left me free to write the present narrative of what passed at the interview between us. I feel that the discoveries which I have made are too important to the persons interested to be trusted to memory.

1. She Receives Me.

"Finding Miss Jethro's place of abode, with far less difficulty than I had anticipated (thanks to favoring circumstances), I stated plainly the object of my visit. She declined to enter into conversation with me on the subject of the murder at Zeeland.

"I was prepared to meet with this rebuke, and to take the necessary measures for obtaining a more satisfactory reception. 'A person is suspected of having committed the murder,' I said; 'and there is reason to believe that you are in a position to say whether the suspicion is justified or not. Do you refuse to answer me, if I put the question?'

"Miss Jethro asked who the person was.

"I mentioned the name--Mr. Miles Mirabel.

"It is not necessary, and it would certainly be not agreeable to me, to describe the effect which this reply produced on Miss Jethro. After giving her time to compose herself, I entered into certain explanations, in order to convince her at the outset of my good faith. The result justified my anticipations. I was at once admitted to her confidence.

"She said, 'I must not hesitate to do an act of justice to an innocent man. But, in such a serious matter as this, you have a right to judge for yourself whether the person who is now speaking to you is a person whom you can trust. You may believe that I tell the truth about others, if I begin--whatever it may cost me--by telling the truth about myself.'

2. She Speaks of Herself.

"I shall not attempt to place on record the confession of a most unhappy woman. It was the common story of sin bitterly repented, and of vain effort to recover the lost place in social esteem. Too well known a story, surely, to be told again.

"But I may with perfect propriety repeat what Miss Jethro said to me, in allusion to later events in her life which are connected with my own personal experience. She recalled to my memory a visit which she had paid to me at Netherwoods, and a letter addressed to her by Doctor Allday, which I had read at her express request.

"She said, 'You may remember that the letter contained some severe reflections on my conduct. Among other things, the doctor mentions that he called at the lodging I occupied during my visit to London, and found I had taken to flight: also that he had reason to believe I had entered Miss Ladd's service, under false pretenses.'

"I asked if the doctor had wronged her.

"She answered 'No: in one case, he is ignorant; in the other, he is right. On leaving his house, I found myself followed in the street by the man to whom I owe the shame and misery of my past life. My horror of him is not to be described in words. The one way of escaping was offered by an empty cab that passed me. I reached the railway station safely, and went back to my home in the country. Do you blame me?'

"It was impossible to blame her--and I said so.

"She then confessed the deception which she had practiced on Miss Ladd. 'I have a cousin,' she said, 'who was a Miss Jethro like me. Before her marriage she had been employed as a governess. She pitied me; she sympathized with my longing to recover the character that I had lost. With her permission, I made use of the testimonials which she had earned as a teacher--I was betrayed (to this day I don't know by whom)--and I was dismissed from Netherwoods. Now you know that I deceived Miss Ladd, you may reasonably conclude that I am likely to deceive You.'

"I assured her, with perfect sincerity, that I had drawn no such conclusion. Encouraged by my reply, Miss Jethro proceeded as follows.

3. She Speaks of Mirabel.

"Four years ago, I was living near Cowes, in the Isle of Wight--in a cottage which had been taken for me by a gentleman who was the owner of a yacht. We had just returned from a short cruise, and the vessel was under orders to sail for Cherbourg with the next tide.

"While I was walking in my garden, I was startled by the sudden appearance Of a man (evidently a gentleman) who was a perfect stranger to me. He was in a pitiable state of terror, and he implored my protection. In reply to my first inquiries, he mentioned the inn at Zeeland, and the dreadful death of a person unknown to him; whom I
recognized (partly by the description given, and partly by comparison of dates) as Mr. James Brown. I shall say
nothing of the shock inflicted on me: you don't want to know what I felt. What I did (having literally only a minute
left for decision) was to hide the fugitive from discovery, and to exert my influence in his favor with the owner of
the yacht. I saw nothing more of him. He was put on board, as soon as the police were out of sight, and was safely
landed at Cherbourg.'

'I asked what induced her to run the risk of protecting a stranger, who was under suspicion of having committed
a murder.

'She said, 'You shall hear my explanation directly. Let us have done with Mr. Mirabel first. We occasionally
corresponded, during the long absence on the continent; never alluding, at his express request, to the horrible event
at the inn. His last letter reached me, after he had established himself at Vale Regis. Writing of the society in the
neighborhood, he infor med me of his introduction to Miss Wyvil, and of the invitation that he had received to meet
her friend and schoolfellow at Monksmoor. I knew that Miss Emily possessed a Handbill describing personal
peculiarities in Mr. Mirabel, not hidden under the changed appearance of his head and face. If she remembered or
happened to refer to that description, while she was living in the same house with him, there was a possibility at
least of her suspicion being excited. The fear of this took me to you. It was a morbid fear, and, as events turned out,
an unfounded fear: but I was unable to control it. Failing to produce any effect on you, I went to Vale Regis, and
tried (vainly again) to induce Mr. Mirabel to send an excuse to Monksmoor. He, like you, wanted to know what my
motive was. When I tell you that I acted solely in Miss Emily's interests, and that I knew how she had been deceived
about her father's death, need I say why I was afraid to acknowledge my motive?'

'I understood that Miss Jethro might well be afraid of the consequences, if she risked any allusion to Mr.
Brown's horrible death, and if it afterward chanced to reach his daughter's ears. But this state of feeling implied an
extraordinary interest in the preservation of Emily's peace of mind. I asked Miss Jethro how that interest had been
excited?

'She answered, 'I can only satisfy you in one way. I must speak of her father now.'"

Emily looked up from the manuscript. She felt Cecilia's arm tenderly caressing her. She heard Cecilia say, "My
poor dear, there is one last trial of your courage still to come. I am afraid of what you are going to read, when you
turn to the next page. And yet--"

"And yet," Emily replied gently, "it must be done. I have learned my hard lesson of endurance, Cecilia, don't be
afraid."

Emily turned to the next page.

4. She Speaks of the Dead.

"For the first time, Miss Jethro appeared to be at a loss how to proceed. I could see that she was suffering. She
rose, and opening a drawer in her writing table, took a letter from it.

"She said, 'Will you read this? It was written by Miss Emily's father. Perhaps it may say more for me than I can
say for myself?'

"I copy the letter. It was thus expressed:

"'You have declared that our farewell to-day is our farewell forever. For the second time, you have refused to be
my wife; and you have done this, to use your own words, in mercy to Me.

"'In mercy to Me, I implore you to reconsider your decision.

"'If you condemn me to live without you--I feel it, I know it--you condemn me to despair which I have not
fortitude enough to endure. Look at the passages which I have marked for you in the New Testament. Again and
again, I say it; your true repentance has made you worthy of the pardon of God. Are you not worthy of the love,
admiration, and respect of man? Think! oh, Sara, think of what our lives might be, and let them be united for time
and for eternity.

"'I can write no more. A deadly faintness oppresses me. My mind is in a state unknown to me in past years. I am
in such confusion that I sometimes think I hate you. And then I recover from my delusion, and know that man never
loved woman as I love you.

"'You will have time to write to me by this evening's post. I shall stop at Zeeland to-morrow, on my way back,
and ask for a letter at the post office. I forbid explanations and excuses. I forbid heartless allusions to your duty. Let
me have an answer which does not keep me for a moment in suspense.

"'For the last time, I ask you: Do you consent to be my wife? Say, Yes--or say, No.'

"I gave her back the letter--with the one comment on it, which the circumstances permitted me to make:

"'You said No?'

"She bent her head in silence.

"I went on--not willingly, for I would have spared her if it had been possible. I said, 'He died, despairing, by his
own hand--and you knew it'"
"She looked up. 'No! To say that I knew it is too much. To say that I feared it is the truth.'

"Did you love him?"

'She eyed me in stern surprise. 'Have I any right to love? Could I disgrace an honorable man by allowing him to marry me? You look as if you held me responsible for his death.'

"Innocently responsible,' I said.

'She still followed her own train of thought. 'Do you suppose I could for a moment anticipate that he would destroy himself, when I wrote my reply? He was a truly religious man. If he had been in his right mind, he would have shrank from the idea of suicide as from the idea of a crime.'

'On reflection, I was inclined to agree with her. In his terrible position, it was at least possible that the sight of the razor (placed ready, with the other appliances of the toilet, for his fellow-traveler's use) might have fatally tempted a man whose last hope was crushed, whose mind was tortured by despair. I should have been merciless indeed, if I had held Miss Jethro accountable thus far. But I found it hard to sympathize with the course which she had pursued, in permitting Mr. Brown's death to be attributed to murder without a word of protest. 'Why were you silent? I said.'

'She smiled bitterly.

'A woman would have known why, without asking,' she replied. 'A woman would have understood that I shrank from a public confession of my shameful past life. A woman would have remembered what reasons I had for pitying the man who loved me, and for accepting any responsibility rather than associate his memory, before the world, with an unworthy passion for a degraded creature, ending in an act of suicide. Even if I had made that cruel sacrifice, would public opinion have believed such a person as I am—against the evidence of a medical man, and the verdict of a jury? No, Mr. Morris! I said nothing, and I was resolved to say nothing, so long as the choice of alternatives was left to me. On the day when Mr. Mirabel implored me to save him, that choice was no longer mine—and you know what I did. And now again when suspicion (after all the long interval that had passed) has followed and found that innocent man, you know what you have done. What more do you ask of me?" I said.

'She smiled bitterly.

'A woman would have known why, without asking,' she replied. 'A woman would have understood that I shrank from a public confession of my shameful past life. A woman would have remembered what reasons I had for pitying the man who loved me, and for accepting any responsibility rather than associate his memory, before the world, with an unworthy passion for a degraded creature, ending in an act of suicide. Even if I had made that cruel sacrifice, would public opinion have believed such a person as I am—against the evidence of a medical man, and the verdict of a jury? No, Mr. Morris! I said nothing, and I was resolved to say nothing, so long as the choice of alternatives was left to me. On the day when Mr. Mirabel implored me to save him, that choice was no longer mine—and you know what I did. And now again when suspicion (after all the long interval that had passed) has followed and found that innocent man, you know what you have done. What more do you ask of me?"

'Your pardon,' I said, 'for not having understood you—and a last favor. May I repeat what I have heard to the one person of all others who ought to know, and who must know, what you have told me?'

'It was needless to hint more plainly that I was speaking of Emily. Miss Jethro granted my request.

'It shall be as you please,' she answered. 'Sey for me to his daughter, that the grateful remembrance of her is my one refuge from the thoughts that tortured me, when we spoke together on her last night at school. She has made this dead heart of mine feel a reviving breath of life, when I think of her. Never, in our earthly pilgrimage, shall we meet again—I implore her to pity and forget me. Farewell, Mr. Morris; farewell forever.'

'I confess that the tears came into my eyes. When I could see clearly again, I was alone in the room.'

CHAPTER LXVII.

THE TRUE CONSOLATION.

Emily closed the pages which told her that her father had died by his own hand.

Cecilia still held her tenderly embraced. By slow degrees, her head dropped until it rested on her friend's bosom. Silently she suffered. Silently Cecilia bent forward, and kissed her forehead. The sounds that penetrated to the room were not out of harmony with the time. From a distant house the voices of children were just audible, singing the plaintive melody of a hymn; and, now and then, the breeze blew the first faded leaves of autumn against the window. Neither of the girls knew how long the minutes followed each other uneventfully, before there was a change. Emily raised her head, and looked at Cecilia.

'I have one friend left,' she said.

'Not only me, love—oh, I hope not only me!"

'Yes. Only you.'

'I want to say something, Emily; but I am afraid of hurting you.'

'My dear, do you remember what we once read in a book of history at school? It told of the death of a tortured man, in the old time, who was broken on the wheel. He lived through it long enough to say that the agony, after the first stroke of the club, dulled his capacity for feeling pain when the next blows fell. I fancy pain of the mind must follow the same rule. Nothing you can say will hurt me now.'

'I only wanted to ask, Emily, if you were engaged—at one time—to marry Mr. Mirabel. Is it true?"

'False! He pressed me to consent to an engagement—and I said he must not hurry me.'

'What made you say that?'

'I thought of Alban Morris.'

Vainly Cecilia tried to restrain herself. A cry of joy escaped her.

'Are you glad?' Emily asked. 'Why?'

Cecilia made no direct reply. 'May I tell you what you wanted to know, a little while since?' she said. 'You
asked why Mr. Morris left it all to me, instead of speaking to you himself. When I put the same question to him, he
told me to read what he had written. 'Not a shadow of suspicion rests on Mr. Mirabel,' he said. 'Emily is free to
marry him—and free through Me. Can I tell her that? For her sake, and for mine, it must not be. All that I can do is to
leave old remembrances to plead for me. If they fail, I shall know that she will be happier with Mr. Mirabel than
with me.' And you will submit?' I asked. 'Because I love her,' he answered, 'I must submit.' Oh, how pale you are!
Have I distressed you?"
"You have done me good."
"Will you see him?"
Emily pointed to the manuscript. "At such a time as this?" she said.
Cecilia still held to her resolution. "Such a time as this is the right time," she answered. "It is now, when you
most want to be comforted, that you ought to see him. Who can quiet your poor aching heart as he can quiet it?" She
impulsively snatched at the manuscript and threw it out of sight. "I can't bear to look at it," she said. "Emily! if I
have done wrong, will you forgive me? I saw him this morning before I came here. I was afraid of what might
happen—I refused to break the dreadful news to you, unless he was somewhere near us. Your good old servant
knows where to go. Let me send her—"
Mrs. Ellmother herself opened the door, and stood doubtful on the threshold, hysterically sobbing and laughing
at the same time. 'I'm everything that's bad!' the good old creature burst out. "I've been listening—I've been lying—I
said you wanted him. Turn me out of my situation, if you like. I've got him! Here he is!"
In another moment, Emily was in his arms—and they were alone. On his faithful breast the blessed relief of tears
came to her at last: she burst out crying.
"Oh, Alban, can you forgive me?"
He gently raised her head, so that he could see her face.
"My love, let me look at you," he said. "I want to think again of the day when we parted in the garden at school.
Do you remember the one conviction that sustained me? I told you, Emily, there was a time of fulfillment to come in
our two lives; and I have never wholly lost the dear belief. My own darling, the time has come!"
POSTSCRIPT.
GOSSIP IN THE STUDIO.
The winter time had arrived. Alban was clearing his palette, after a hard day's work at the cottage. The servant
announced that tea was ready, and that Miss Ladd was waiting to see him in the next room.
Alban ran in, and received the visitor cordially with both hands. "Welcome back to England! I needn't ask if the
sea-voyage has done you good. You are looking ten years younger than when you went away."
Miss Ladd smiled. "I shall soon be ten years older again, if I go back to Netherwoods," she replied. "I didn't
believe it at the time; but I know better now. Our friend Doctor Allday was right, when he said that my working
days were over. I must give up the school to a younger and stronger successor, and make the best I can in retirement
of what is left of my life. You and Emily may expect to have me as a near neighbor. Where is Emily?"
"Far away in the North."
"In the North! You don't mean that she has gone back to Mrs. Delvin?"
"She has gone back—with Mrs. Ellmother to take care of her—at my express request. You know what Emily is,
when there is an act of mercy to be done. That unhappy man has been sinking (with intervals of partial recovery) for
months past. Mrs. Delvin sent word to us that the end was near, and that the one last wish her brother was able to
express was the wish to see Emily. He had been for some hours unable to speak when my wife arrived. But he knew
her, and smiled faintly. He was just able to lift his hand. She took it, and waited by him, and spoke words of
consolation and kindness from time to time. As the night advanced, he sank into sleep, still holding her hand. They
only knew that he had passed from sleep to death—passed without a movement or a sigh—when his hand turned cold.
Emily remained for a day at the tower to comfort poor Mrs. Delvin—and she comes home, thank God, this evening!"
"I needn't ask if you are happy?" Miss Ladd said.
"Happy? I sing, when I have my bath in the morning. If that isn't happiness (in a man of my age) I don't know
what it is!"
"And how are you getting on?"
"Famously! I have turned portrait painter, since you were sent away for your health. A portrait of Mr. Wyvil is to
decorate the town hall in the place that he represents; and our dear kind-hearted Cecilia has induced a fascinated
mayor and corporation to confide the work to my hands."
"Is there no hope yet of that sweet girl being married?" Miss Ladd asked. "We old maids all believe in marriage,
Mr. Morris—though some of us don't own it."
"There seems to be a chance," Alban answered. "A young lord has turned up at Monksmoor; a handsome
pleasant fellow, and a rising man in politics. He happened to be in the house a few days before Cecilia's birthday;
and he asked my advice about the right present to give her. I said, 'Try something new in Tarts.' When he found I was in earnest, what do you think he did? Sent his steam yacht to Rouen for some of the famous pastry! You should have seen Cecilia, when the young lord offered his delicious gift. If I could paint that smile and those eyes, I should be the greatest artist living. I believe she will marry him. Need I say how rich they will be? We shall not envy them--we are rich too. Everything is comparative. The portrait of Mr. Wyvil will put three hundred pounds in my pocket. I have earned a hundred and twenty more by illustrations, since we have been married. And my wife's income (I like to be particular) is only five shillings and tenpence short of two hundred a year. Moral! we are rich as well as happy."

"Without a thought of the future?" Miss Ladd asked slyly.

"Oh, Doctor Allday has taken the future in hand! He revels in the old-fashioned jokes, which used to be addressed to newly-married people, in his time. 'My dear fellow,' he said the other day, 'you may possibly be under a joyful necessity of sending for the doctor, before we are all a year older. In that case, let it be understood that I am Honorary Physician to the family.' The warm-hearted old man talks of getting me another portrait to do. 'The greatest ass in the medical profession (he informed me) has just been made a baronet; and his admiring friends have decided that he is to be painted at full length, with his bandy legs hidden under a gown, and his great globular eyes staring at the spectator--I'll get you the job.' Shall I tell you what he says of Mrs. Rook's recovery?"

Miss Ladd held up her hands in amazement. "Recovery!" she exclaimed.

"And a most remarkable recovery too," Alban informed her. "It is the first case on record of any person getting over such an injury as she has received. Doctor Allday looked grave when he heard of it. 'I begin to believe in the devil,' he said; 'nobody else could have saved Mrs. Rook.' Other people don't take that view. She has been celebrated in all the medical newspapers--and she has been admitted to come excellent almshouse, to live in comfortable idleness to a green old age. The best of it is that she shakes her head, when her wonderful recovery is mentioned. 'It seems such a pity,' she says; 'I was so fit for heaven.' Mr. Rook having got rid of his wife, is in excellent spirits. He is occupied in looking after an imbecile old gentleman; and, when he is asked if he likes the employment, he winks mysteriously and slaps his pocket. Now, Miss Ladd, I think it's my turn to hear some news. What have you got to tell me?"

"I believe I can match your account of Mrs. Rook," Miss Ladd said. "Do you care to hear what has become of Francine?"

Alban, rattling on hitherto in boyish high spirits, suddenly became serious. "I have no doubt Miss de Sor is doing well," he said sternly. "She is too heartless and wicked not to prosper."

"You are getting like your old cynical self again, Mr. Morris--and you are wrong. I called this morning on the agent who had the care of Francine, when I left England. When I mentioned her name, he showed me a telegram, sent to him by her father. 'There's my authority,' he said, 'for letting her leave my house.' The message was short enough to be easily remembered: 'Anything my daughter likes as long as she doesn't come back to us.' In those cruel terms Mr. de Sor wrote of his own child. The agent was just as unfeeling, in his way. He called her the victim of slighted love and clever proselytizing. 'In plain words,' he said, 'the priest of the Catholic chapel close by has converted her; and she is now a novice in a convent of Carmelite nuns in the West of England. Who could have expected it? Who knows how it may end?'"

As Miss Ladd spoke, the bell rang at the cottage gate. "Here she is!" Alban cried, leading the way into the hall. "Emily has come home."
by Wilkie Collins

PROLOGUE
THE STORMING OF SERINGAPATAM (1799)
Extracted from a Family Paper

I address these lines--written in India--to my relatives in England.

My object is to explain the motive which has induced me to refuse the right hand of friendship to my cousin, John Herncastle. The reserve which I have hitherto maintained in this matter has been misinterpreted by members of my family whose good opinion I cannot consent to forfeit. I request them to suspend their decision until they have read my narrative. And I declare, on my word of honour, that what I am now about to write is, strictly and literally, the truth.

The private difference between my cousin and me took its rise in a great public event in which we were both concerned--the storming of Seringapatam, under General Baird, on the 4th of May, 1799.

In order that the circumstances may be clearly understood, I must revert for a moment to the period before the assault, and to the stories current in our camp of the treasure in jewels and gold stored up in the Palace of Seringapatam.

II

One of the wildest of these stories related to a Yellow Diamond--a famous gem in the native annals of India.

The earliest known traditions describe the stone as having been set in the forehead of the four-handed Indian god who typifies the Moon. Partly from its peculiar colour, partly from a superstition which represented it as feeling the influence of the deity whom it adorned, and growing and lessening in lustre with the waxing and waning of the moon, it first gained the name by which it continues to be known in India to this day--the name of THE MOONSTONE. A similar superstition was once prevalent, as I have heard, in ancient Greece and Rome; not applying, however (as in India), to a diamond devoted to the service of a god, but to a semi-transparent stone of the inferior order of gems, supposed to be affected by the lunar influences--the moon, in this latter case also, giving the name by which the stone is still known to collectors in our own time.

The adventures of the Yellow Diamond begin with the eleventh century of the Christian era.

At that date, the Mohammedan conqueror, Mahmoud of Ghizni, crossed India; seized on the holy city of Somnauth; and stripped of its treasures the famous temple, which had stood for centuries--the shrine of Hindoo pilgrimage, and the wonder of the Eastern world.

Of all the deities worshipped in the temple, the moon-god alone escaped the rapacity of the conquering Mohammedans. Preserved by three Brahmins, the inviolate deity, bearing the Yellow Diamond in its forehead, was removed by night, and was transported to the second of the sacred cities of India--the city of Benares.

Here, in a new shrine--in a hall inlaid with precious stones, under a roof supported by pillars of gold--the moon-god was set up and worshipped. Here, on the night when the shrine was completed, Vishnu the Preserver appeared to the three Brahmins in a dream.

The deity breathed the breath of his divinity on the Diamond in the forehead of the god. And the Brahmins knelt and hid their faces in their robes. The deity commanded that the Moonstone should be watched, from that time forth, by three priests in turn, night and day, to the end of the generations of men. And the Brahmins heard, and bowed before his will. The deity predicted certain disaster to the presumptuous mortal who laid hands on the sacred gem, and to all of his house and name who received it after him. And the Brahmins caused the prophecy to be written over the gates of the shrine in letters of gold.

One age followed another--and still, generation after generation, the successors of the three Brahmins watched their priceless Moonstone, night and day. One age followed another until the first years of the eighteenth Christian century saw the reign of Aurungzebe, Emperor of the Moguls. At his command havoc and rapine were let loose once more among the temples of the worship of Brahmah. The shrine of the four-handed god was polluted by the slaughter of sacred animals; the images of the deities were broken in pieces; and the Moonstone was seized by an
officer of rank in the army of Aurungzebe.

Powerless to recover their lost treasure by open force, the three guardian priests followed and watched it in disguise. The generations succeeded each other; the warrior who had committed the sacrilege perished miserably; the Moonstone passed (carrying its curse with it) from one lawless Mohammedan hand to another; and still, through all chances and changes, the successors of the three guardian priests kept their watch, waiting the day when the will of Vishnu the Preserver should restore to them their sacred gem. Time rolled on from the first to the last years of the eighteenth Christian century. The Diamond fell into the possession of Tippoo, Sultan of Seringapatam, who caused it to be placed as an ornament in the handle of a dagger, and who commanded it to be kept among the choicest treasures of his armoury. Even then--in the palace of the Sultan himself--the three guardian priests still kept their watch in secret. There were three officers of Tippoo's household, strangers to the rest, who had won their master's confidence by conforming, or appearing to conform, to the Mussulman faith; and to those three men report pointed as the three priests in disguise.

III

So, as told in our camp, ran the fanciful story of the Moonstone. It made no serious impression on any of us except my cousin--whose love of the marvellous induced him to believe it. On the night before the assault on Seringapatam, he was absurdly angry with me, and with others, for treating the whole thing as a fable. A foolish wrangle followed; and Herncastle's unlucky temper got the better of him. He declared, in his boastful way, that we should see the Diamond on his finger, if the English army took Seringapatam. The sally was saluted by a roar of laughter, and there, as we all thought that night, the thing ended.

Let me now take you on to the day of the assault. My cousin and I were separated at the outset. I never saw him when we forded the river; when we planted the English flag in the first breach; when we crossed the ditch beyond; and, fighting every inch of our way, entered the town. It was only at dusk, when the place was ours, and after General Baird himself had found the dead body of Tippoo under a heap of the slain, that Herncastle and I met.

We were each attached to a party sent out by the general's orders to prevent the plunder and confusion which followed our conquest. The camp-followers committed deplorable excesses; and, worse still, the soldiers found their way, by a guarded door, into the treasury of the Palace, and loaded themselves with gold and jewels. It was in the court outside the treasury that my cousin and I met, to enforce the laws of discipline on our own soldiers. Herncastle's fiery temper had been, as I could plainly see, exasperated to a kind of frenzy by the terrible slaughter through which we had passed. He was very unfit, in my opinion, to perform the duty that had been entrusted to him.

There was riot and confusion enough in the treasury, but no violence that I saw. The men (if I may use such an expression) disgraced themselves good-humouredly. All sorts of rough jests and catchwords were bandied about among them; and the story of the Diamond turned up again unexpectedly, in the form of a mischievous joke. "Who's got the Moonstone?" was the rallying cry which perpetually caused the plundering, as soon as it was stopped in one place, to break out in another. While I was still vainly trying to establish order, I heard a frightful yelling on the other side of the courtyard, and at once ran towards the cries, in dread of finding some new outbreak of the pillage in that direction.

I got to an open door, and saw the bodies of two Indians (by their dress, as I guessed, officers of the palace) lying across the entrance, dead.

A cry inside hurried me into a room, which appeared to serve as an armoury. A third Indian, mortally wounded, was sinking at the feet of a man whose back was towards me. The man turned at the instant when I came in, and I saw John Herncastle, with a torch in one hand, and a dagger dripping with blood in the other. A stone, set like a pommel, in the end of the dagger's handle, flashed in the torchlight, as he turned on me, like a gleam of fire. The dying Indian sank to his knees, pointed to the dagger in Herncastle's hand, and said, in his native language--"The Moonstone will have its vengeance yet on you and yours!" He spoke those words, and fell dead on the floor.

Before I could stir in the matter, the men who had followed me across the courtyard crowded in. My cousin rushed to meet them, like a madman. "Clear the room!" he shouted to me, "and set a guard on the door!" The men fell back as he threw himself on them with his torch and his dagger. I put two sentinels of my own company, on whom I could rely, to keep the door. Through the remainder of the night, I saw no more of my cousin.

Early in the morning, the plunder still going on, General Baird announced publicly by beat of drum, that any thief detected in the fact, be he whom he might, should be hung. The provost-marshal was in attendance, to prove that the General was in earnest; and in the throng that followed the proclamation, Herncastle and I met again.

"Tell me first," I said, "how the Indian in the armoury met his death, and what those last words meant, when he pointed to the dagger in your hand."

"The Indian met his death, as I suppose, by a mortal wound," said Herncastle. "What his last words meant I
know no more than you do."

I looked at him narrowly. His frenzy of the previous day had all calmed down. I determined to give him another chance.

"Is that all you have to tell me?" I asked.

He answered, "That is all."

I turned my back on him; and we have not spoken since.

IV

I beg it to be understood that what I write here about my cousin (unless some necessity should arise for making it public) is for the information of the family only. Herncastle has said nothing that can justify me in speaking to our commanding officer. He has been taunted more than once about the Diamond, by those who recollect his angry outbreak before the assault; but, as may easily be imagined, his own remembrance of the circumstances under which I surprised him in the armoury has been enough to keep him silent. It is reported that he means to exchange into another regiment, avowedly for the purpose of separating himself from ME.

Whether this be true or not, I cannot prevail upon myself to become his accuser--and I think with good reason. If I made the matter public, I have no evidence but moral evidence to bring forward. I have not only no proof that he killed the two men at the door; I cannot even declare that he killed the third man inside--for I cannot say that my own eyes saw the deed committed. It is true that I heard the dying Indian's words; but if those words were pronounced to be the ravings of delirium, how could I contradict the assertion from my own knowledge? Let our relatives, on either side, form their own opinion on what I have written, and decide for themselves whether the aversion I now feel towards this man is well or ill founded.

Although I attach no sort of credit to the fantastic Indian legend of the gem, I must acknowledge, before I conclude, that I am influenced by a certain superstition of my own in this matter. It is my conviction, or my delusion, no matter which, that crime brings its own fatality with it. I am not only persuaded of Herncastle's guilt; I am even fanciful enough to believe that he will live to regret it, if he keeps the Diamond; and that others will live to regret taking it from him, if he gives the Diamond away.

THE STORY
FIRST PERIOD
THE LOSS OF THE DIAMOND (1848)

The events related by GABRIEL BETTEREDGE, house-steward in the service of JULIA, LADY VERINDER.

CHAPTER I

In the first part of ROBINSON CRUSOE, at page one hundred and twenty-nine, you will find it thus written:

"Now I saw, though too late, the Folly of beginning a Work before we count the Cost, and before we judge rightly of our own Strength to go through with it."

Only yesterday, I opened my ROBINSON CRUSOE at that place. Only this morning (May twenty-first, Eighteen hundred and fifty), came my lady's nephew, Mr. Franklin Blake, and held a short conversation with me, as follows:--

"Betteredge," says Mr. Franklin, "I have been to the lawyer's about some family matters; and, among other things, we have been talking of the loss of the Indian Diamond, in my aunt's house in Yorkshire, two years since. Mr. Bruff thinks as I think, that the whole story ought, in the interests of truth, to be placed on record in writing--and the sooner the better."

Not perceiving his drift yet, and thinking it always desirable for the sake of peace and quietness to be on the lawyer's side, I said I thought so too. Mr. Franklin went on.

"In this matter of the Diamond," he said, "the characters of innocent people have suffered under suspicion already--as you know. The memories of innocent people may suffer, hereafter, for want of a record of the facts to which those who come after us can appeal. There can be no doubt that this strange family story of ours ought to be told. And I think, Betteredge, Mr. Bruff and I together have hit on the right way of telling it."

Very satisfactory to both of them, no doubt. But I failed to see what I myself had to do with it, so far.

"We have certain events to relate," Mr. Franklin proceeded; "and we have certain persons concerned in those events who are capable of relating them. Starting from these plain facts, the idea is that we should all write the story of the Moonstone in turn--as far as our own personal experience extends, and no farther. We must begin by showing how the Diamond first fell into the hands of my uncle Herncastle, when he was serving in India fifty years since. This prefatory narrative I have already got by me in the form of an old family paper, which relates the necessary particulars on the authority of an eye-witness. The next thing to do is to tell how the Diamond found its way into my aunt's house in Yorkshire, two years ago, and how it came to be lost in little more than twelve hours afterwards. Nobody knows as much as you do, Betteredge, about what went on in the house at that time. So you must take the pen in hand, and start the story."
In those terms I was informed of what my personal concern was with the matter of the Diamond. If you are curious to know what course I took under the circumstances, I beg to inform you that I did what you would probably have done in my place. I modestly declined myself to be quite unequal to the task imposed upon me—and I privately felt, all the time, that I was quite clever enough to perform it, if I only gave my own abilities a fair chance. Mr. Franklin, I imagine, must have seen my private sentiments in my face. He declined to believe in my modesty; and he insisted on giving my abilities a fair chance.

Two hours have passed since Mr. Franklin left me. As soon as his back was turned, I went to my writing desk to start the story. There I have sat helpless (in spite of my abilities) ever since; seeing what Robinson Crusoe saw, as quoted above—namely, the folly of beginning a work before we count the cost, and before we judge rightly of our own strength to go through with it. Please to remember, I opened the book by accident, at that bit, only the day before I rashly undertook the business now in hand; and, allow me to ask—if THAT isn't prophecy, what is?

I am not superstitious; I have read a heap of books in my time; I am a scholar in my own way. Though turned seventy, I possess an active memory, and legs to correspond. You are not to take it, if you please, as the saying of an ignorant man, when I express my opinion that such a book as ROBINSON CRUSOE never was written, and never will be written again. I have tried that book for years—generally in combination with a pipe of tobacco—and I have found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad—ROBINSON CRUSOE. When I want advice—ROBINSON CRUSOE. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much—ROBINSON CRUSOE. I have worn out six stout ROBINSON CRUSOES with hard work in my service. On my lady's last birthday she gave me a seventh. I took a drop too much on the strength of it; and ROBINSON CRUSOE put me right again. Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.

Still, this don't look much like starting the story of the Diamond—does it? I seem to be wandering off in search of Lord knows what, Lord knows where. We will take a new sheet of paper, if you please, and begin over again, with my best respects to you.

CHAPTER II

I spoke of my lady a line or two back. Now the Diamond could never have been in our house, where it was lost, if it had not been made a present of to my lady’s daughter; and my lady's daughter would never have been in existence to have the present, if it had not been for my lady who (with pain and travail) produced her into the world. Consequently, if we begin with my lady, we are pretty sure of beginning far enough back. And that, let me tell you, when you have got such a job as mine in hand, is a real comfort at starting.

If you know anything of the fashionable world, you have heard tell of the three beautiful Miss Herncastles. Miss Adelaide; Miss Caroline; and Miss Julia—this last being the youngest and the best of the three sisters, in my opinion; and I had opportunities of judging, as you shall presently see. I went into the service of the old lord, their father (thank God, we have got nothing to do with him, in this business of the Diamond; he had the longest tongue and the shortest temper of any man, high or low, I ever met with)—I say, I went into the service of the old lord, as page-boy in waiting on the three honourable young ladies, at the age of fifteen years. There I lived till Miss Julia married the late Sir John Verinder. An excellent man, who only wanted somebody to manage him; and, between ourselves, he found it my friend in need in all the necessities of this mortal life. When my spirits are bad—ROBINSON CRUSOE. When I want advice—ROBINSON CRUSOE. In past times when my wife plagued me; in present times when I have had a drop too much—ROBINSON CRUSOE. I have worn out six stout ROBINSON CRUSOES with hard work in my service. On my lady's last birthday she gave me a seventh. I took a drop too much on the strength of it; and ROBINSON CRUSOE put me right again. Price four shillings and sixpence, bound in blue, with a picture into the bargain.

Still, this don't look much like starting the story of the Diamond—does it? I seem to be wandering off in search of Lord knows what, Lord knows where. We will take a new sheet of paper, if you please, and begin over again, with my best respects to you.

Well, there I was in clover, you will say. Placed in a position of trust and honour, with a little cottage of my own to live in, with my rounds on the estate to occupy me in the morning, and my accounts in the afternoon, and my pipe and my ROBINSON CRUSOE in the evening—what more could I possibly want to make me happy? Remember what Adam wanted when he was alone in the Garden of Eden; and if you don't blame it in Adam, don't blame it in
me.

The woman I fixed my eye on, was the woman who kept house for me at my cottage. Her name was Selina Goby. I agree with the late William Cobbett about picking a wife. See that she chews her food well and sets her foot down firmly on the ground when she walks, and you're all right. Selina Goby was all right in both these respects, which was one reason for marrying her. I had another reason, likewise, entirely of my own discovering. Selina, being a single woman, made me pay so much a week for her board and services. Selina, being my wife, couldn't charge for her board, and would have to give me her services for nothing. That was the point of view I looked at it from. Economy--with a dash of love. I put it to my mistress, as in duty bound, just as I had put it to myself.

"I have been turning Selina Goby over in my mind," I said, "and I think, my lady, it will be cheaper to marry her than to keep her."

My lady burst out laughing, and said she didn't know which to be most shocked at--my language or my principles. Some joke tickled her, I suppose, of the sort that you can't take unless you are a person of quality. Understanding nothing myself but that I was free to put it next to Selina, I went and put it accordingly. And what did Selina say? Lord! how little you must know of women, if you ask that. Of course she said, Yes.

As my time drew nearer, and there got to be talk of my having a new coat for the ceremony, my mind began to misgive me. I have compared notes with other men as to what they felt while they were in my interesting situation; and they have all acknowledged that, about a week before it happened, they privately wished themselves out of it. I went a trifle further than that myself; I actually rose up, as it were, and tried to get out of it. Not for nothing! I was too just a man to expect she would let me off for nothing. Compensation to the woman when the man gets out of it, is one of the laws of England. In obedience to the laws, and after turning it over carefully in my mind, I offered Selina Goby a feather-bed and fifty shillings to be off the bargain. You will hardly believe it, but it is nevertheless true--she was fool enough to refuse.

After that it was all over with me, of course. I got the new coat as cheap as I could, and I went through all the rest of it as cheap as I could. We were not a happy couple, and not a miserable couple. We were six of one and half-a-dozen of the other. How it was I don't understand, but we always seemed to be getting, with the best of motives, in one another's way. When I wanted to go up-stairs, there was my wife coming down; or when my wife wanted to go down, there was I coming up. That is married life, according to my experience of it.

After five years of misunderstandings on the stairs, it pleased an all-wise Providence to relieve us of each other by taking my wife. I was left with my little girl Penelope, and with no other child. Shortly afterwards Sir John died, and my lady was left with her little girl, Miss Rachel, and no other child. I have written to very poor purpose of my lady, if you require to be told that my little Penelope was taken care of, under my good mistress's own eye, and was sent to school and taught, and made a sharp girl, and promoted, when old enough, to be Miss Rachel's own maid.

As for me, I went on with my business as bailiff year after year up to Christmas 1847, when there came a change in my life. On that day, my lady invited herself to a cup of tea alone with me in my cottage. She remarked that, reckoning from the year when I started as page-boy in the time of the old lord, I had been more than fifty years in her service, and she put into my hands a beautiful waistcoat of wool that she had worked herself, to keep me warm in the bitter winter weather.

I received this magnificent present quite at a loss to find words to thank my mistress with for the honour she had done me. To my great astonishment, it turned out, however, that the waistcoat was not an honour, but a bribe. My lady had discovered that I was getting old before I had discovered it myself, and she had come to my cottage to wheedle me (if I may use such an expression) into giving up my hard out-of-door work as bailiff, and taking my ease for the rest of my days as steward in the house. I made as good a fight of it against the indignity of taking my work as bailiff, and taking my wife. I was left with my little girl Penelope, and with no other child. Shortly afterwards Sir John died, and my lady was left with her little girl, Miss Rachel, and no other child. I have written to very poor purpose of my life, and they have all acknowledged that, about a week before it happened, they privately wished themselves out of it. I ended, after that, in my wiping my eyes, like an old fool, with my new woollen waistcoat, and saying I would think about it.

The perturbation in my mind, in regard to thinking about it, being truly dreadful after my lady had gone away, I applied the remedy which I have never yet found to fail me in cases of doubt and emergency. I smoked a pipe and took a turn at ROBINSON CRUSOE. Before I had occupied myself with that extraordinary book five minutes, I came on a comforting bit (page one hundred and fifty-eight), as follows: "To-day we love, what to-morrow we hate." I saw my way clear directly. To-day I was all for continuing to be farm-bailiff; to-morrow, on the authority of ROBINSON CRUSOE, I should be all the other way. Take myself to-morrow while in to-morrow's humour, and the thing was done. My mind being relieved in this manner, I went to sleep that night in the character of Lady Verinder's farm bailiff, and I woke up the next morning in the character of Lady Verinder's house-steward. All quite comfortable, and all through ROBINSON CRUSOE!

My daughter Penelope has just looked over my shoulder to see what I have done so far. She remarks that it is beautifully written, and every word of it true. But she points out one objection. She says what I have done so far isn't
in the least what I was wanted to do. I am asked to tell the story of the Diamond and, instead of that, I have been telling the story of my own self. Curious, and quite beyond me to account for. I wonder whether the gentlemen who make a business and a living out of writing books, ever find their own selves getting in the way of their subjects, like me? If they do, I can feel for them. In the meantime, here is another false start, and more waste of good writing-paper. What's to be done now? Nothing that I know of, except for you to keep your temper, and for me to begin it all over again for the third time.

CHAPTER III

The question of how I am to start the story properly I have tried to settle in two ways. First, by scratching my head, which led to nothing. Second, by consulting my daughter Penelope, which has resulted in an entirely new idea. Penelope's notion is that I should set down what happened, regularly day by day, beginning with the day when we got the news that Mr. Franklin Blake was expected on a visit to the house. When you come to fix your memory with a date in this way, it is wonderful what your memory will pick up for you upon that compulsion. The only difficulty is to fetch out the dates, in the first place. This Penelope offers to do for me by looking into her own diary, which she was taught to keep when she was at school, and which she has gone on keeping ever since. In answer to an improvement on this notion, devised by myself, namely, that she should tell the story instead of me, out of her own diary, Penelope observes, with a fierce look and a red face, that her journal is for her own private eye, and that no living creature shall ever know what is in it but herself. When I inquire what this means, Penelope says, "Fiddlesticks!" I say, Sweethearts.

Beginning, then, on Penelope's plan, I beg to mention that I was specially called one Wednesday morning into my lady's own sitting-room, the date being the twenty-fourth of May, Eighteen hundred and forty-eight.

"Gabriel," says my lady, "here is news that will surprise you. Franklin Blake has come back from abroad. He has been staying with his father in London, and he is coming to us to-morrow to stop till next month, and keep Rachel's birthday."

If I had had a hat in my hand, nothing but respect would have prevented me from throwing that hat up to the ceiling. I had not seen Mr. Franklin since he was a boy, living along with us in this house. He was, out of all sight (as I remember him), the nicest boy that ever spun a top or broke a window. Miss Rachel, who was present, and to whom I made that remark, observed, in return, that SHE remembered him as the most atrocious tyrant that ever tortured a doll, and the hardest driver of an exhausted little girl in string harness that England could produce. "I burn with indignation, and I ache with fatigue," was the way Miss Rachel summed it up, "when I think of Franklin Blake."

Hearing what I now tell you, you will naturally ask how it was that Mr. Franklin should have passed all the years, from the time when he was a boy to the time when he was a man, out of his own country. I answer, because his father had the misfortune to be next heir to a Dukedom, and not to be able to prove it.

In two words, this was how the thing happened:

My lady's eldest sister married the celebrated Mr. Blake--equally famous for his great riches, and his great suit at law. How many years he went on worrying the tribunals of his country to turn out the Duke in possession, and to put himself in the Duke's place--how many lawyer's purses he filled to bursting, and how many otherwise harmless people he set by the ears together disputing whether he was right or wrong--is more by a great deal than I can reckon up. His wife died, and two of his three children died, before the tribunals could make up their minds to show him the door and take no more of his money. When it was all over, and the Duke in possession was left in possession, Mr. Blake discovered that the only way of being even with his country for the manner in which it had treated him, was not to let his country have the honour of educating his son. "How can I trust my native institutions," was the form in which he put it, "after the way in which my native institutions have behaved to ME?" Add to this, that Mr. Blake disliked all boys, his own included, and you will admit that it could only end in one way. Master Franklin was taken from us in England, and was sent to institutions which his father COULD trust, in that superior country, Germany; Mr. Blake himself, you will observe, remaining snug in England, to improve his fellow-countrymen in the Parliament House, and to publish a statement on the subject of the Duke in possession, which has remained an unfinished statement from that day to this.

There! thank God, that's told! Neither you nor I need trouble our heads any more about Mr. Blake, senior. Leave him to the Dukedom; and let you and I stick to the Diamond.

The Diamond takes us back to Mr. Franklin, who was the innocent means of bringing that unlucky jewel into the house.

Our nice boy didn't forget us after he went abroad. He wrote every now and then; sometimes to my lady, sometimes to Miss Rachel, and sometimes to me. We had had a transaction together, before he left, which consisted in his borrowing of me a ball of string, a four-bladed knife, and seven-and-sixpence in money--the colour of which last I have not seen, and never expect to see again. His letters to me chiefly related to borrowing more. I heard,
however, from my lady, how he got on abroad, as he grew in years and stature. After he had learnt what the institutions of Germany could teach him, he gave the French a turn next, and the Italians a turn after that. They made him among them a sort of universal genius, as well as I could understand it. He wrote a little; he painted a little; he sang and played and composed a little—borrowing, as I suspect, in all these cases, just as he had borrowed from me. His mother's fortune (seven hundred a year) fell to him when he came of age, and ran through him, as it might be through a sieve. The more money he had, the more he wanted; there was a hole in Mr. Franklin's pocket that nothing would sew up. Wherever he went, the lively, easy way of him made him welcome. He lived here, there, and everywhere; his address (as he used to put it himself) being "Post Office, Europe—to be left till called for." Twice over, he made up his mind to come back to England and see us; and twice over (saving your presence), some unmentionable woman stood in the way and stopped him. His third attempt succeeded, as you know already from what my lady told me. On Thursday the twenty-fifth of May, we were to see for the first time what our nice boy had grown to be as a man. He came of good blood; he had a high courage; and he was five-and-twenty years of age, by our reckoning. Now you know as much of Mr. Franklin Blake as I did—before Mr. Franklin Blake came down to our house.

The Thursday was as fine a summer's day as ever you saw: and my lady and Miss Rachel (not expecting Mr. Franklin till dinner-time) drove out to lunch with some friends in the neighbourhood.

When they were gone, I went and had a look at the bedroom which had been got ready for our guest, and saw that all was straight. Then, being butler in my lady's establishment, as well as steward (at my own particular request, mind, and because it vexed me to see anybody but myself in possession of the key of the late Sir John's cellar)—then, I say, I fetched up some of our famous Latour claret, and set it in the warm summer air to take off the chill before dinner. Concluding to set myself in the warm summer air next—seeing that what is good for old claret is equally good for old age—I took up my beehive chair to go out into the back court, when I was stopped by hearing a sound like the soft beating of a drum, on the terrace in front of my lady's residence.

Going round to the terrace, I found three mahogany-coloured Indians, in white linen frocks and trousers, looking up at the house.

The Indians, as I saw on looking closer, had small hand-drums slung in front of them. Behind them stood a little delicate-looking light-haired English boy carrying a bag. I judged the fellows to be strolling conjurors, and the boy with the bag to be carrying the tools of their trade. One of the three, who spoke English and who exhibited, I must own, the most elegant manners, presently informed me that my judgment was right. He requested permission to show his tricks in the presence of the lady of the house.

Now I am not a sour old man. I am generally all for amusement, and the last person in the world to distrust another person because he happens to be a few shades darker than myself. But the best of us have our weaknesses—and my weakness, when I know a family plate-basket to be out on a pantry-table, is to be instantly reminded of that basket by the sight of a strolling stranger whose manners are superior to my own. I accordingly informed the Indian that the lady of the house was out; and I warned him and his party off the premises. He made me a beautiful bow in return; and he and his party went off the premises. On my side, I returned to my beehive chair, and set myself down on the sunny side of the court, and fell (if the truth must be owned), not exactly into a sleep, but into the next best thing to it.

I was roused up by my daughter Penelope running out at me as if the house was on fire. What do you think she wanted? She wanted to have the three Indian jugglers instantly taken up; for this reason, namely, that they knew who was coming from London to visit us, and that they meant some mischief to Mr. Franklin Blake.

Mr. Franklin's name roused me. I opened my eyes, and made my girl explain herself.

It appeared that Penelope had just come from our lodge, where she had been having a gossip with the lodge-keeper's daughter. The two girls had seen the Indians pass out, after I had warned them off, followed by their little boy. Taking it into their heads that the boy was ill-used by the foreigners—for no reason that I could discover, except that he was pretty and delicate-looking—the two girls had stolen along the inner side of the hedge between us and the road, and had watched the proceedings of the foreigners on the outer side. Those proceedings resulted in the performance of the following extraordinary tricks.

They first looked up the road, and down the road, and made sure that they were alone. Then they all three faced about, and stared hard in the direction of our house. Then they jabbered and disputed in their own language, and looked at each other like men in doubt. Then they all turned to their little English boy, as if they expected HIM to help them. And then the chief Indian, who spoke English, said to the boy, "Hold out your hand."

On hearing those dreadful words, my daughter Penelope said she didn't know what prevented her heart from flying straight out of her. I thought privately that it might have been her stays. All I said, however, was, "You make my flesh creep." (NOTA BENE: Women like these little compliments.)

Well, when the Indian said, "Hold out your hand," the boy shrunk back, and shook his head, and said he didn't
like it. The Indian, thereupon, asked him (not at all unkindly), whether he would like to be sent back to London, and left where they had found him, sleeping in an empty basket in a market—a hungry, ragged, and forsaken little boy. This, it seems, ended the difficulty. The little chap unwillingly held out his hand. Upon that, the Indian took a bottle from his bosom, and poured out of it some black stuff, like ink, into the palm of the boy's hand. The Indian—first touching the boy's head, and making signs over it in the air—then said, "Look." The boy became quite stiff, and stood like a statue, looking into the ink in the hollow of his hand.

(So far, it seemed to me to be juggling, accompanied by a foolish waste of ink. I was beginning to feel sleepy again, when Penelope's next words stirred me up.)

The Indians looked up the road and down the road once more—and then the chief Indian said these words to the boy; "See the English gentleman from foreign parts."

The boy said, "I see him."

The Indian said, "Is it on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel to-day?"

The boy said, "It is on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel to-day." The Indian put a second question—after waiting a little first. He said: "Has the English gentleman got It about him?"

The boy answered—also, after waiting a little first—"Yes."

The Indian put a third and last question: "Will the English gentleman come here, as he has promised to come, at the close of day?"

The boy said, "I can't tell."

The Indian asked why.

The boy said, "I am tired. The mist rises in my head, and puzzles me. I can see no more to-day."

With that the catechism ended. The chief Indian said something in his own language to the other two, pointing to the boy, and pointing towards the town, in which (as we afterwards discovered) they were lodged. He then, after making more signs on the boy's head, blew on his forehead, and so woke him up with a start. After that, they all went on their way towards the town, and the girls saw them no more.

Most things they say have a moral, if you only look for it. What was the moral of this?

The moral was, as I thought: First, that the chief juggler had heard Mr. Franklin's arrival talked of among the servants out-of-doors, and saw his way to making a little money by it. Second, that he and his men and boy (with a view to making the said money) meant to hang about till they saw my lady drive home, and then to come back, and foretell Mr. Franklin's arrival by magic. Third, that Penelope had heard them rehearsing their hocus-pocus, like actors rehearsing a play. Fourth, that I should do well to have an eye, that evening, on the plate-basket. Fifth, that Penelope would do well to cool down, and leave me, her father, to doze off again in the sun.

That appeared to me to be the sensible view. If you know anything of the ways of young women, you won't be surprised to hear that Penelope wouldn't take it. The moral of the thing was serious, according to my daughter. She particularly reminded me of the Indian's third question, Has the English gentleman got It about him? "Oh, father!" says Penelope, clasping her hands, "don't joke about this. What does 'It' mean?"

"We'll ask Mr. Franklin, my dear," I said, "if you can wait till Mr. Franklin comes." I winked to show I meant that in joke. Penelope took it quite seriously. My girl's earnestness tickled me. "What on earth should Mr. Franklin know about it?" I inquired. "Ask him," says Penelope. "And see whether HE thinks it a laughing matter, too." With that parting shot, my daughter left me.

I settled it with myself, when she was gone, that I really would ask Mr. Franklin—mainly to set Penelope's mind at rest. What was said between us, when I did ask him, later on that same day, you will find set out fully in its proper place. But as I don't wish to raise your expectations and then disappoint them, I will take leave to warn you here—before we go any further—that you won't find the ghost of a joke in our conversation on the subject of the jugglers. To my great surprise, Mr. Franklin, like Penelope, took the thing seriously. How seriously, you will understand, when I tell you that, in his opinion, "It" meant the Moonstone.

CHAPTER IV

I am truly sorry to detain you over me and my beehive chair. A sleepy old man, in a sunny back yard, is not an interesting object, I am well aware. But things must be put down in their places, as things actually happened—and you must please to jog on a little while longer with me, in expectation of Mr. Franklin Blake's arrival later in the day.

Before I had time to doze off again, after my daughter Penelope had left me, I was disturbed by a rattling of plates and dishes in the servants' hall, which meant that dinner was ready. Taking my own meals in my own sitting-room, I had nothing to do with the servants' dinner, except to wish them a good stomach to it all round, previous to composing myself once more in my chair. I was just stretching my legs, when out bounced another woman on me. Not my daughter again; only Nancy, the kitchen-maid, this time. I was straight in her way out; and I observed, as she asked me to let her by, that she had a sulky face—a thing which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle,
to pass me without inquiry.

"What are you turning your back on your dinner for?" I asked. "What's wrong now, Nancy?"

Nancy tried to push by, without answering; upon which I rose up, and took her by the ear. She is a nice plump young lass, and it is customary with me to adopt that manner of showing that I personally approve of a girl.

"What's wrong now?" I said once more.

"Rosanna's late again for dinner," says Nancy. "And I'm sent to fetch her in. All the hard work falls on my shoulders in this house. Let me alone, Mr. Betteredge!"

The person here mentioned as Rosanna was our second housemaid. Having a kind of pity for our second housemaid (why, you shall presently know), and seeing in Nancy's face, that she would fetch her fellow-servant in with more hard words than might be needful under the circumstances, it struck me that I had nothing particular to do, and that I might as well fetch Rosanna myself; giving her a hint to be punctual in future, which I knew she would take kindly from ME.

"Where is Rosanna?" I inquired.

"At the sands, of course!" says Nancy, with a toss of her head. "She had another of her fainting fits this morning, and she asked to go out and get a breath of fresh air. I have no patience with her!"

"Go back to your dinner, my girl," I said. "I have patience with her, and I'll fetch her in."

Nancy (who has a fine appetite) looked pleased. When she looks pleased, she looks nice. When she looks nice, I chuck her under the chin. It isn't immorality—it's only habit.

Well, I took my stick, and set off for the sands.

No! it won't do to set off yet. I am sorry again to detain you; but you really must hear the story of the sands, and the story of Rosanna—for this reason, that the matter of the Diamond touches them both nearly. How hard I try to get on with my statement without stopping by the way, and how badly I succeed! But, there!—Persons and Things do turn up so vexatiously in this life, and will in a manner insist on being noticed. Let us take it easy, and let us take it short; we shall be in the thick of the mystery soon, I promise you!

Rosanna (to put the Person before the Thing, which is but common politeness) was the only new servant in our house. About four months before the time I am writing of, my lady had been in London, and had gone over a Reformatory, intended to save forlorn women from drifting back into bad ways, after they had got released from prison. The matron, seeing my lady took an interest in the place, pointed out a girl to her, named Rosanna Spearman, and told her a most miserable story, which I haven't the heart to repeat here; for I don't like to be made wretched without any use, and no more do you. The upshot of it was, that Rosanna Spearman had been a thief, and not being of the sort that get up Companies in the City, and rob from thousands, instead of only robbing from one, the law laid hold of her, and the prison and the reformatory followed the lead of the law. The matron's opinion of Rosanna was (in spite of what she had done) that the girl was one in a thousand, and that she only wanted a chance to prove herself worthy of any Christian woman's interest in her. My lady (being a Christian woman, if ever there was one yet) said to the matron, upon that, "Rosanna Spearman shall have her chance, in my service." In a week afterwards, Rosanna Spearman entered this establishment as our second housemaid.

Not a soul was told the girl's story, excepting Miss Rachel and me. My lady, doing me the honour to consult me about most things, consulted me about Rosanna. Having fallen a good deal latterly into the late Sir John's way of always agreeing with my lady, I agreed with her heartily about Rosanna Spearman.

A fairer chance no girl could have had than was given to this poor girl of ours. None of the servants could cast her past life in her teeth, for none of the servants knew what it had been. She had her wages and her privileges, like the rest of them; and every now and then a friendly word from my lady, in private, to encourage her. In return, she showed herself, I am bound to say, well worthy of the kind treatment bestowed upon her. Though far from strong, and troubled occasionally with those fainting-fits already mentioned, she went about her work modestly and uncomplainingly, doing it carefully, and doing it well. But, somehow, she failed to make friends among the other women servants, excepting my daughter Penelope, who was always kind to Rosanna, though never intimate with her.

I hardly know what the girl did to offend them. There was certainly no beauty about her to make the others envious; she was the plainest woman in the house, with the additional misfortune of having one shoulder bigger than the other. What the servants chiefly resented, I think, was her silent tongue and her solitary ways. She read or worked in leisure hours when the rest gossiped. And when it came to her turn to go out, nine times out of ten she quietly put on her bonnet, and had her turn by herself. She never quarrelled, she never took offence; she only kept a certain distance, obstinately and civilly, between the rest of them and herself. Add to this that, plain as she was, there was just a dash of something that wasn't like a housemaid, and that WAS like a lady, about her. It might have been in her voice, or it might have been in her face. All I can say is, that the other women pounced on it like lightning the first day she came into the house, and said (which was most unjust) that Rosanna Spearman gave herself airs.
Having now told the story of Rosanna, I have only to notice one of the many queer ways of this strange girl to get on next to the story of the sands.

Our house is high up on the Yorkshire coast, and close by the sea. We have got beautiful walks all round us, in every direction but one. That one I acknowledge to be a horrid walk. It leads, for a quarter of a mile, through a melancholy plantation of firs, and brings you out between low cliffs on the loneliest and ugliest little bay on all our coast.

The sand-hills here run down to the sea, and end in two spits of rock jutting out opposite each other, till you lose sight of them in the water. One is called the North Spit, and one the South. Between the two, shifting backwards and forwards at certain seasons of the year, lies the most horrible quicksand on the shores of Yorkshire. At the turn of the tide, something goes on in the unknown deeps below, which sets the whole face of the quicksand shivering and trembling in a manner most remarkable to see, and which has given to it, among the people in our parts, the name of the Shivering Sand. A great bank, half a mile out, nigh the mouth of the bay, breaks the force of the main ocean coming in from the offing. Winter and summer, when the tide flows over the quicksand, the sea seems to leave the waves behind it on the bank, and rolls its waters in smoothly with a heave, and covers the sand in silence. A lonesome and a horrid retreat, I can tell you! No boat ever ventures into this bay. No children from our fishing-village, called Cobb's Hole, ever come here to play. The very birds of the air, as it seems to me, give the Shivering Sand a wide berth. That a young woman, with dozens of nice walks to choose from, and company to go with her, if she only said "Come!" should prefer this place, and should sit and work or read in it, all alone, when it's her turn out, I grant you, passes belief. It's true, nevertheless, account for it as you may, that this was Rosanna Spearman's favourite walk, except when she went once or twice to Cobb's Hole, to see the only friend she had in our neighbourhood, of whom more anon. It's also true that I was now setting out for this same place, to fetch the girl in to dinner, which brings us round happily to our former point, and starts us fair again on our way to the sands.

I saw no sign of the girl in the plantation. When I got out, through the sand-hills, on to the beach, there she was, in her little straw bonnet, and her plain grey cloak that she always wore to hide her deformed shoulder as much as might be--there she was, all alone, looking out on the quicksand and the sea.

She started when I came up with her, and turned her head away from me. Not looking me in the face being another of the proceedings, which, as head of the servants, I never allow, on principle, to pass without inquiry--I turned her round my way, and saw that she was crying. My bandanna handkerchief--one of six beauties given to me by my lady--was handy in my pocket. I took it out, and I said to Rosanna, "Come and sit down, my dear, on the slope of the beach along with me. I'll dry your eyes for you first, and then I'll make so bold as to ask what you have been crying about."

When you come to my age, you will find sitting down on the slope of a beach a much longer job than you think it now. By the time I was settled, Rosanna had dried her own eyes with a very inferior handkerchief to mine--cheap cambric. She looked very quiet, and very wretched; but she sat down by me like a good girl, when I told her. When you want to comfort a woman by the shortest way, take her on your knee. I thought of this golden rule. But there! Rosanna wasn't Nancy, and that's the truth of it!

"Now, tell me, my dear," I said, "what are you crying about?"

"About the years that are gone, Mr. Betteredge," says Rosanna quietly. "My past life still comes back to me sometimes."

"Come, come, my girl," I said, "your past life is all sponged out. Why can't you forget it?"

She took me by one of the lappets of my coat. I am a slovenly old man, and a good deal of my meat and drink gets splashed about on my clothes. Sometimes one of the women, and sometimes another, cleans me of my grease. The day before, Rosanna had taken out a spot for me on the lappet of my coat, with a new composition, warranted to remove anything. The grease was gone, but there was a little dull place left on the nap of the cloth where the grease had been. The girl pointed to that place, and shook her head.

"The stain is taken off," she said. "But the place shows, Mr. Betteredge--the place shows!"

A remark which takes a man unawares by means of his own coat is not an easy remark to answer. Something in the girl herself, too, made me particularly sorry for her just then. She had nice brown eyes, plain as she was in other ways--and she looked at me with a sort of respect for my happy old age and my good character, as things for ever out of her own reach, which made my heart heavy for our second housemaid. Not feeling myself able to comfort her, there was only one other thing to do. That thing was--to take her in to dinner.

"Help me up," I said. "You're late for dinner, Rosanna--and I have come to fetch you in."

"You, Mr. Betteredge!" says she.

"They told Nancy to fetch you," I said. "But thought you might like your scolding better, my dear, if it came from me."

Instead of helping me up, the poor thing stole her hand into mine, and gave it a little squeeze. She tried hard to
keep from crying again, and succeeded—for which I respected her. "You're very kind, Mr. Betteredge," she said. "I don't want any dinner to-day—let me bide a little longer here."

"What makes you like to be here?" I asked. "What is it that brings you eternally to this miserable place?"

"Something draws me to it," says the girl, making images with her finger in the sand. "I try to keep away from it, and I can't. Sometimes," says she in a low voice, as if she was frightened at her own fancy, "sometimes, Mr. Betteredge, I think that my grave is waiting for me here."

"There's roast mutton and suet-pudding waiting for you!" says I. "Go in to dinner directly. This is what comes, Rosanna, of thinking on an empty stomach!" I spoke severely, being naturally indignant (at my time of life) to hear a young woman of five-and-twenty talking about her latter end!

She didn't seem to hear me: she put her hand on my shoulder, and kept me where I was, sitting by her side.

"I think the place has laid a spell on me," she said. "I dream of it night after night; I think of it when I sit stitching at my work. You know I am grateful, Mr. Betteredge—you know I try to deserve your kindness, and my lady's confidence in me. But I wonder sometimes whether the life here is too quiet and too good for such a woman as I am, after all I have gone through, Mr. Betteredge—after all I have gone through. It's more lonely to me to be among the other servants, knowing I am not what they are, than it is to be here. My lady doesn't know, the matron at the reformatory doesn't know, what a dreadful reproach honest people are in themselves to a woman like me. Don't scold me, there's a dear good man. I do my work, don't I? Please not to tell my lady I am discontented—I am not. My mind's unquiet, sometimes, that's all." She snatched her hand off my shoulder, and suddenly pointed down to the quicksand. "Look!" she said "Isn't it wonderful? isn't it terrible? I have seen it dozens of times, and it's always as new to me as if I had never seen it before!"

I looked where she pointed. The tide was on the turn, and the horrid sand began to shiver. The broad brown face of it heaved slowly, and then dimpled and quivered all over. "Do you know what it looks like to ME?" says Rosanna, catching me by the shoulder again. "It looks as if it had hundreds of suffocating people under it—all struggling to get to the surface, and all sinking lower and lower in the dreadful deeps! Throw a stone in, Mr. Betteredge! Throw a stone in, and let's see the sand suck it down!"

Here was unwholesome talk! Here was an empty stomach feeding on an unquiet mind! My answer—a pretty sharp one, in the poor girl's own interests, I promise you!—was at my tongue's end, when it was snapped short off on a sudden by a voice among the sand-hills shouting for me by my name. "Betteredge!" cries the voice, "where are you?" "Here!" I shouted out in return, without a notion in my mind of who it was. Rosanna started to her feet, and stood looking towards the voice. I was just thinking of getting on my own legs next, when I was staggered by a sudden by a voice among the sand-hills shouting for me by my name. "Betteredge!" cries the voice, "where are you?"

"Dear old Betteredge!" says he. "I owe you seven-and-sixpence. Now do you know who I am?"

Lord bless us and save us! Here—four good hours before we expected him—was Mr. Franklin Blake!

Before I could say a word, I saw Mr. Franklin, a little surprised to all appearance, look up from me to Rosanna. Following his lead, I looked at the girl too. She was blushing of a deeper red than ever, seemingly at having caught Mr. Franklin's eye; and she turned and left us suddenly, in a confusion quite unaccountable to my mind, without either making her curtsy to the gentleman or saying a word to me. Very unlike her usual self: a civiller and better-behaved servant, in general, you never met with.

"That's an odd girl," says Mr. Franklin. "I wonder what she sees in me to surprise her?"

"I suppose, sir," I answered, drolling on our young gentleman's Continental education, "it's the varnish from foreign parts."

I set down here Mr. Franklin's careless question, and my foolish answer, as a consolation and encouragement to all stupid people—it being, as I have remarked, a great satisfaction to our inferior fellow-creatures to find that their betters are, on occasions, no brighter than they are. Neither Mr. Franklin, with his wonderful foreign training, nor I, with my age, experience, and natural mother-wit, had the ghost of an idea of what Rosanna Spearman's unaccountable behaviour really meant. She was out of our thoughts, poor soul, before we had seen the last flutter of her little grey cloak among the sand-hills. And what of that? you will ask, naturally enough. Read on, good friend, as patiently as you can, and perhaps you will be as sorry for Rosanna Spearman as I was, when I found out the truth.

CHAPTER V
The first thing I did, after we were left together alone, was to make a third attempt to get up from my seat on the sand. Mr. Franklin stopped me.

"There is one advantage about this horrid place," he said; "we have got it all to ourselves. Stay where you are, Betteredge; I have something to say to you."

While he was speaking, I was looking at him, and trying to see something of the boy I remembered, in the man before me. The man put me out. Look as I might, I could see no more of his boy's rosy cheeks than of his boy's trim little jacket. His complexion had got pale: his face, at the lower part was covered, to my great surprise and disappointment, with a curly brown beard and mustachios. He had a lively touch-and-go way with him, very pleasant and engaging, I admit; but nothing to compare with his free-and-easy manners of other times. To make matters worse, he had promised to be tall, and had not kept his promise. He was neat, and slim, and well made; but he wasn't by an inch or two up to the middle height. In short, he baffled me altogether. The years that had passed had left nothing of his old self, except the bright, straightforward look in his eyes. There I found our nice boy again, and there I concluded to stop in my investigation.

"Welcome back to the old place, Mr. Franklin," I said. "All the more welcome, sir, that you have come some hours before we expected you."

"I have a reason for coming before you expected me," answered Mr. Franklin. "I suspect, Betteredge, that I have been followed and watched in London, for the last three or four days; and I have travelled by the morning instead of the afternoon train, because I wanted to give a certain dark-looking stranger the slip."

Those words did more than surprise me. They brought back to my mind, in a flash, the three jugglers, and Penelope's notion that they meant some mischief to Mr. Franklin Blake.

"Who's watching you, sir,—and why?" I inquired.

"Tell me about the three Indians you have had at the house to-day," says Mr. Franklin, without noticing my question. "It's just possible, Betteredge, that my stranger and your three jugglers may turn out to be pieces of the same puzzle."

"How do you come to know about the jugglers, sir?" I asked, putting one question on the top of another, which was bad manners, I own. But you don't expect much from poor human nature—so don't expect much from me.

"I saw Penelope at the house," says Mr. Franklin; "and Penelope told me. Your daughter promised to be a pretty girl, Betteredge, and she has kept her promise. Penelope has got a small ear and a small foot. Did the late Mrs. Betteredge possess those inestimable advantages?"

"The late Mrs. Betteredge possessed a good many defects, sir," says I. "One of them (if you will pardon my mentioning it) was never keeping to the matter in hand. She was more like a fly than a woman: she couldn't settle on anything."

"She would just have suited me," says Mr. Franklin. "I never settle on anything either. Betteredge, your edge is better than ever. Your daughter said as much, when I asked for particulars about the jugglers. 'Father will tell you, sir. He's a wonderful man for his age; and he expresses himself beautifully.' Penelope's own words—blushing divinely. Not even my respect for you prevented me from—never mind; I knew her when she was a child, and she's none the worse for it. Let's be serious. What did the jugglers do?"

I was something dissatisfied with my daughter—not for letting Mr. Franklin kiss her; Mr. Franklin was welcome to THAT—but for forcing me to tell her foolish story at second hand. However, there was no help for it now but to mention the circumstances. Mr. Franklin's merriment all died away as I went on. He sat knitting his eyebrows, and twisting his beard. When I had done, he repeated after me two of the questions which the chief juggler had put to the boy—seemingly for the purpose of fixing them well in his mind.

"Is it on the road to this house, and on no other, that the English gentleman will travel to-day? 'Has the English gentleman got It about him?' I suspect," says Mr. Franklin, pulling a little sealed paper parcel out of his pocket, "that 'It' means THIS. And 'this,' Betteredge, means my uncle Herncastle's famous Diamond."

"Good Lord, sir!" I broke out, "how do you come to be in charge of the wicked Colonel's Diamond?"

"The wicked Colonel's will has left his Diamond as a birthday present to my cousin Rachel," says Mr. Franklin. "And my father, as the wicked Colonel's executor, has given it in charge to me to bring down here."

If the sea, then oozing in smoothly over the Shivering Sand, had been changed into dry land before my own eyes, I doubt if I could have been more surprised than I was when Mr. Franklin spoke those words.

"The Colonel's Diamond left to Miss Rachel!" says I. "And your father, sir, the Colonel's executor! Why, I would have laid any bet you like, Mr. Franklin, that your father wouldn't have touched the Colonel with a pair of tongs!"

"Strong language, Betteredge! What was there against the Colonel. He belonged to your time, not to mine. Tell me what you know about him, and I'll tell you how my father came to be his executor, and more besides. I have made some discoveries in London about my uncle Herncastle and his Diamond, which have rather an ugly look to
my eyes; and I want you to confirm them. You called him the 'wicked Colonel' just now. Search your memory, my old friend, and tell me why."

I saw he was in earnest, and I told him.

Here follows the substance of what I said, written out entirely for your benefit. Pay attention to it, or you will be all abroad, when we get deeper into the story. Clear your mind of the children, or the dinner, or the new bonnet, or what not. Try if you can't forget politics, horses, prices in the City, and grievances at the club. I hope you won't take this freedom on my part amiss; it's only a way I have of appealing to the gentle reader. Lord! haven't I seen you with the greatest authors in your hands, and don't I know how ready your attention is to wander when it's a book that asks for it, instead of a person?

I spoke, a little way back, of my lady's father, the old lord with the short temper and the long tongue. He had five children in all. Two sons to begin with; then, after a long time, his wife broke out breeding again, and the three young ladies came briskly one after the other, as fast as the nature of things would permit; my mistress, as before mentioned, being the youngest and best of the three. Of the two sons, the eldest, Arthur, inherited the title and estates. The second, the Honourable John, got a fine fortune left him by a relative, and went into the army.

It's an ill bird, they say, that fouls its own nest. I look on the noble family of the Herncastles as being my nest; and I shall take it as a favour if I am not expected to enter into particulars on the subject of the Honourable John. He was, I honestly believe, one of the greatest blackguards that ever lived. I can hardly say more or less for him than that. He went into the army, beginning in the Guards. He had to leave the Guards before he was two-and-twenty--never mind why. They are very strict in the army, and they were too strict for the Honourable John. He went out to India to see whether they were equally strict there, and to try a little active service. In the matter of bravery (to give him his due), he was a mixture of bull-dog and game-cock, with a dash of the savage. He was at the taking of Seringapatam. Soon afterwards he changed into another regiment, and, in course of time, changed into a third. In the third he got his last step as lieutenant-colonel, and, getting that, got also a sunstroke, and came home to England.

He came back with a character that closed the doors of all his family against him, my lady (then just married) taking the lead, and declaring (with Sir John's approval, of course) that her brother should never enter any house of hers. There was more than one slur on the Colonel that made people shy of him; but the blot of the Diamond is all I need mention here.

It was said he had got possession of his Indian jewel by means which, bold as he was, he didn't dare acknowledge. He never attempted to sell it--not being in need of money, and not (to give him his due again) making money an object. He never gave it away; he never even showed it to any living soul. Some said he was afraid of its getting him into a difficulty with the military authorities; others (very ignorant indeed of the real nature of the man) said he was afraid, if he showed it, of its costing him his life.

There was perhaps a grain of truth mixed up with this last report. It was false to say that he was afraid; but it was a fact that his life had been twice threatened in India; and it was firmly believed that the Moonstone was at the bottom of it. When he came back to England, and found himselfavoided by everybody, the Moonstone was thought to be at the bottom of it again. The mystery of the Colonel's life got in the Colonel's way, and outlawed him, as you may say, among his own people. The men wouldn't let him into their clubs; the women--more than one--whom he wanted to marry, refused him; friends and relations got too near-sighted to see him in the street.

Some men in this mess would have tried to set themselves right with the world. But to give in, even when he was wrong, and had all society against him, was not the way of the Honourable John. He had kept the Diamond, in flat defiance of assassination, in India. He kept the Diamond, in flat defiance of public opinion, in England. There you have the portrait of the man before you, as in a picture: a character that braved everything; and a face, handsome as it was, that looked possessed by the devil.

We heard different rumours about him from time to time. Sometimes they said he was given up to smoking opium and collecting old books; sometimes he was reported to be trying strange things in chemistry; sometimes he was seen carousing and amusing himself among the lowest people in the lowest slums of London. Anyhow, a solitary, vicious, underground life was the life the Colonel led. Once, and once only, after his return to England, I myself saw him, face to face.

About two years before the time of which I am now writing, and about a year and a half before the time of his death, the Colonel came unexpectedly to my lady's house in London. It was the night of Miss Rachel's birthday, the twenty-first of June; and there was a party in honour of it, as usual. I received a message from the footman to say that a gentleman wanted to see me. Going up into the hall, there I found the Colonel, wasted, and worn, and old, and shabby, and as wild and as wicked as ever.

"Go up to my sister," says he; "and say that I have called to wish my niece many happy returns of the day."

He had made attempts by letter, more than once already, to be reconciled with my lady, for no other purpose, I am firmly persuaded, than to annoy her. But this was the first time he had actually come to the house. I had it on the
tip of my tongue to say that my mistress had a party that night. But the devilish look of him daunted me. I went up-
stairs with his message, and left him, by his own desire, waiting in the hall. The servants stood staring at him, at a
distance, as if he was a walking engine of destruction, loaded with powder and shot, and likely to go off among them
at a moment's notice.

My lady had a dash--no more--of the family temper. "Tell Colonel Herncastle," she said, when I gave her her
brother's message, "that Miss Verinder is engaged, and that I decline to see him." I tried to plead for a civiller answer
than that; knowing the Colonel's constitutional superiority to the restraints which govern gentlemen in general. Quite
useless! The family temper flashed out at me directly. "When I want your advice," says my lady, "you know that I
always ask for it. I don't ask for it now." I went downstairs with the message, of which I took the liberty of
presenting a new and amended edition of my own contriving, as follows: "My lady and Miss Rachel regret that they
are engaged, Colonel; and beg to be excused having the honour of seeing you."

I expected him to break out, even at that polite way of putting it. To my surprise he did nothing of the sort; he
alarmed me by taking the thing with an unnatural quiet. His eyes, of a glittering bright grey, just settled on me for a
moment; and he laughed, not out of himself, like other people, but INTO himself, in a soft, chuckling, horridly
mischievous way. "Thank you, Betteredge," he said. "I shall remember my niece's birthday." With that, he turned on
his heel, and walked out of the house.

The next birthday came round, and we heard he was ill in bed. Six months afterwards--that is to say, six months
before the time I am now writing of--there came a letter from a highly respectable clergyman to my lady. It
communicated two wonderful things in the way of family news. First, that the Colonel had forgiven his sister on his
death-bed. Second, that he had forgiven everybody else, and had made a most edifying end. I have myself (in spite
of the bishops and the clergy) an unfeigned respect for the Church; but I am firmly persuaded, at the same time, that
the devil remained in undisturbed possession of the Honourable John, and that the last abominable act in the life of
that abominable man was (saving your presence) to take the clergyman in!

This was the sum-total of what I had to tell Mr. Franklin. I remarked that he listened more and more eagerly the
longer I went on. Also, that the story of the Colonel being sent away from his sister's door, on the occasion of his
niece's birthday, seemed to strike Mr. Franklin like a shot that had hit the mark. Though he didn't acknowledge it, I
saw that I had made him uneasy, plainly enough, in his face.

"You have said your say, Betteredge," he remarked. "It's my turn now. Before, however, I tell you what
discoveries I have made in London, and how I came to be mixed up in this matter of the Diamond, I want to know one
thing. You look, my old friend, as if you didn't quite understand the object to be answered by this consultation of
ours. Do your looks belie you?"

"No, sir," I said. "My looks, on this occasion at any rate, tell the truth."

"In that case," says Mr. Franklin, "suppose I put you up to my point of view, before we go any further. I see
three very serious questions involved in the Colonel's birthday-gift to my cousin Rachel. Follow me carefully,
Betteredge; and count me off on your fingers, if it will help you," says Mr. Franklin, with a certain pleasure in
showing how clear-headed he could be, which reminded me wonderfully of old times when he was a boy. "Question
the first: Was the Colonel's Diamond the object of a conspiracy in India? Question the second: Has the conspiracy
followed the Colonel's Diamond to England? Question the third: Did the Colonel know the conspiracy followed the
Diamond; and has he purposely left a legacy of trouble and danger to his sister, through the innocent medium of his
sister's child? THAT is what I am driving at, Betteredge. Don't let me frighten you."

It was all very well to say that, but he HAD frightened me.

If he was right, here was our quiet English house suddenly invaded by a devilish Indian Diamond--bringing after
it a conspiracy of living rogues, set loose on us by the vengeance of a dead man. There was our situation as revealed
to me in Mr. Franklin's last words! Who ever heard the like of it--in the nineteenth century, mind; in an age of
progress, and in a country which rejoices in the blessings of the British constitution? Nobody ever heard the like of
it, and, consequently, nobody can be expected to believe it. I shall go on with my story, however, in spite of that.

When you get a sudden alarm, of the sort that I had got now, nine times out of ten the place you feel it in is your
stomach. When you feel it in your stomach, your attention wanders, and you begin to fidget. I fidgeted silently in my
place on the sand. Mr. Franklin noticed me, containing with a perturbed stomach or mind--which you please; they
mean the same thing--and, checking himself just as he was starting with his part of the story, said to me sharply,
"What do you want?"

What did I want? I didn't tell HIM; but I'll tell YOU, in confidence. I wanted a whiff of my pipe, and a turn at
ROBINSON CRUSOE.

CHAPTER VI

Keeping my private sentiments to myself, I respectfully requested Mr. Franklin to go on. Mr. Franklin replied,
"Don't fidget, Betteredge," and went on.
Our young gentleman's first words informed me that his discoveries, concerning the wicked Colonel and the Diamond, had begun with a visit which he had paid (before he came to us) to the family lawyer, at Hampstead. A chance word dropped by Mr. Franklin, when the two were alone, one day, after dinner, revealed that he had been charged by his father with a birthday present to be taken to Miss Rachel. One thing led to another; and it ended in the lawyer mentioning what the present really was, and how the friendly connexion between the late Colonel and Mr. Blake, senior, had taken its rise. The facts here are really so extraordinary, that I doubt if I can trust my own language to do justice to them. I prefer trying to report Mr. Franklin's discoveries, as nearly as may be, in Mr. Franklin's own words.

"You remember the time, Betteredge," he said, "when my father was trying to prove his title to that unlucky Dukedom? Well! that was also the time when my uncle Herncastle returned from India. My father discovered that his brother-in-law was in possession of certain papers which were likely to be of service to him in his lawsuit. He called on the Colonel, on pretence of welcoming him back to England. The Colonel was not to be deluded in that way. 'You want something,' he said, 'or you would never have compromised your reputation by calling on ME.' My father saw that the one chance for him was to show his hand; he admitted, at once, that he wanted the papers. The Colonel asked for a day to consider his answer. His answer came in the shape of a most extraordinary letter, which my friend the lawyer showed me. The Colonel began by saying that he wanted something of my father, and that he begged to propose an exchange of friendly services between them. The fortune of war (that was the expression he used) had placed him in possession of one of the largest Diamonds in the world; and he had reason to believe that neither he nor his precious jewel was safe in any house, in any quarter of the globe, which they occupied together. Under these alarming circumstances, he had determined to place his Diamond in the keeping of another person. That person was not expected to run any risk. He might deposit the precious stone in any place especially guarded and set apart—like a banker's or jeweller's strong-room—for the safe custody of valuables of high price. His main personal responsibility in the matter was to be of the passive kind. He was to undertake either by himself, or by a trustworthy representative—to receive at a prearranged address, on certain prearranged days in every year, a note from the Colonel, simply stating the fact that he was a living man at that date. In the event of the date passing over without the note being received, the Colonel's silence might be taken as a sure token of the Colonel's death by murder. In that case, and in no other, certain sealed instructions relating to the disposal of the Diamond, and deposited with it, were to be opened, and followed implicitly. If my father chose to accept this strange charge, the Colonel's papers were at his disposal in return. That was the letter."

"What did your father do, sir?" I asked.

"Do?" says Mr. Franklin. "I'll tell you what he did. He brought the invaluable faculty, called common sense, to bear on the Colonel's letter. The whole thing, he declared, was simply absurd. Somewhere in his Indian wanderings, the Colonel had picked up with some wretched crystal which he took for a diamond. As for the danger of his being murdered, and the precautions devised to preserve his life and his piece of crystal, this was the nineteenth century, and any man in his senses had only to apply to the police. The Colonel had been a notorious opium-eater for years past; and, if the only way of getting at the valuable papers he possessed was by accepting a matter of opium as a matter of fact, my father was quite willing to take the ridiculous responsibility imposed on him—all the more readily that it involved no trouble to himself. The Diamond and the sealed instructions went into his banker's strong-room, and the Colonel's letters, periodically reporting him a living man, were received and opened by our family lawyer, Mr. Bruff, as my father's representative. No sensible person, in a similar position, could have viewed the matter in any other way. Nothing in this world, Betteredge, is probable unless it appeals to our own trumpery experience; and we only believe in a romance when we see it in a newspaper."

It was plain to me from this, that Mr. Franklin thought his father's notion about the Colonel hasty and wrong.

"What is your own private opinion about the matter, sir?" I asked.

"Let's finish the story of the Colonel first," says Mr. Franklin. "There is a curious want of system, Betteredge, in the English mind; and your question, my old friend, is an instance of it. When we are not occupied in making machinery, we are (mentally speaking) the most slovenly people in the universe."

"So much," I thought to myself, "for a foreign education! He has learned that way of girding at us in France, I suppose."

Mr. Franklin took up the lost thread, and went on.

"My father," he said, "got the papers he wanted, and never saw his brother-in-law again from that time. Year after year, on the prearranged days, the prearranged letter came from the Colonel, and was opened by Mr. Bruff. I have seen the letters, in a heap, all of them written in the same brief, business-like form of words: 'Sir,--This is to certify that I am still a living man. Let the Diamond be. John Herncastle.' That was all he ever wrote, and that came regularly to the day; until some six or eight months since, when the form of the letter varied for the first time. It ran now: 'Sir,--They tell me I am dying. Come to me, and help me to make my will.' Mr. Bruff went, and found him, in
the little suburban villa, surrounded by its own grounds, in which he had lived alone, ever since he had left India. He had dogs, cats, and birds to keep him company; but no human being near him, except the person who came daily to do the house-work, and the doctor at the bedside. The will was a very simple matter. The Colonel had dissipated the greater part of his fortune in his chemical investigations. His will began and ended in three clauses, which he dictated from his bed, in perfect possession of his faculties. The first clause provided for the safe keeping and support of his animals. The second founded a professorship of experimental chemistry at a northern university. The third bequeathed the Moonstone as a birthday present to his niece, on condition that my father would act as executor. My father at first refused to act. On second thoughts, however, he gave way, partly because he was assured that the executorship would involve him in no trouble; partly because Mr. Bruff suggested, in Rachel's interest, that the Diamond might be worth something, after all."

"Did the Colonel give any reason, sir," I inquired, "why he left the Diamond to Miss Rachel?"

"He not only gave the reason—he had the reason written in his will," said Mr. Franklin. "I have got an extract, which you shall see presently. Don't be slovenly-minded, Betteredge! One thing at a time. You have heard about the Colonel's Will; now you must hear what happened after the Colonel's death. It was formally necessary to have the Diamond valued, before the Will could be proved. All the jewellers consulted, at once confirmed the Colonel's assertion that he possessed one of the largest diamonds in the world. The question of accurately valuing it presented some serious difficulties. Its size made it a phenomenon in the diamond market; its colour placed it in a category by itself; and, to add to these elements of uncertainty, there was a defect, in the shape of a flaw, in the very heart of the stone. Even with this last serious draw-back, however, the lowest of the various estimates given was twenty thousand pounds. Conceive my father's astonishment! He had been within a hair's-breadth of refusing to act as executor, and of allowing this magnificent jewel to be lost to the family. The interest he took in the matter now, induced him to open the sealed instructions which had been deposited with the Diamond. Mr. Bruff showed this document to me, with the other papers; and it suggests (to my mind) a clue to the nature of the conspiracy which threatened the Colonel's life."

"Then you do believe, sir," I said, "that there was a conspiracy?"

"Not possessing my father's excellent common sense," answered Mr. Franklin, "I believe the Colonel's life was threatened, exactly as the Colonel said. The sealed instructions, as I think, explain how it was that he died, after all, quietly in his bed. In the event of his death by violence (that is to say, in the absence of the regular letter from him at the appointed date), my father was then directed to send the Moonstone secretly to Amsterdam. It was to be deposited in that city with a famous diamond-cutter, and it was to be cut up into from four to six separate stones. The stones were then to be sold for what they would fetch, and the proceeds were to be applied to the founding of that professorship of experimental chemistry, which the Colonel has since endowed by his Will. Now, Betteredge, exert those sharp wits of yours, and observe the conclusion to which the Colonel's instructions point!"

I instantly exerted my wits. They were of the slovenly English sort; and they consequently muddled it all, until Mr. Franklin took them in hand, and pointed out what they ought to see.

"Remark," says Mr. Franklin, "that the integrity of the Diamond, as a whole stone, is here artfully made dependent on the preservation from violence of the Colonel's life. He is not satisfied with saying to the enemies he dreads, 'Kill me—and you will be no nearer to the Diamond than you are now; it is where you can't get at it—in the guarded strong-room of a bank.' He says instead, 'Kill me—and the Diamond will be the Diamond no longer; its identity will be destroyed.' What does that mean?"

Here I had (as I thought) a flash of the wonderful foreign brightness.

"I know," I said. "It means lowering the value of the stone, and cheating the rogues in that way!"

"Nothing of the sort," says Mr. Franklin. "I have inquired about that. The flawed Diamond, cut up, would actually fetch more than the Diamond as it now is; for this plain reason—that from four to six perfect brilliants might be cut from it, which would be, collectively, worth more money than the large—but imperfect single stone. If robbery for the purpose of gain was at the bottom of the conspiracy, the Colonel's instructions absolutely made the Diamond better worth stealing. More money could have been got for it, and the disposal of it in the diamond market would have been infinitely easier, if it had passed through the hands of the workmen of Amsterdam."

"Lord bless us, sir!" I burst out. "What was the plot, then?"

"A plot organised among the Indians who originally owned the jewel," says Mr. Franklin—"a plot with some old Hindoo superstition at the bottom of it. That is my opinion, confirmed by a family paper which I have about me at this moment."

I saw, now, why the appearance of the three Indian jugglers at our house had presented itself to Mr. Franklin in the light of a circumstance worth noting.

"I don't want to force my opinion on you," Mr. Franklin went on. "The idea of certain chosen servants of an old Hindoo superstition devoting themselves, through all difficulties and dangers, to watching the opportunity of
recovering their sacred gem, appears to me to be perfectly consistent with everything that we know of the patience of Oriental races, and the influence of Oriental religions. But then I am an imaginative man; and the butcher, the baker, and the tax-gatherer, are not the only credible realities in existence to my mind. Let the guess I have made at the truth in this matter go for what it is worth, and let us get on to the only practical question that concerns us. Does the conspiracy against the Moonstone survive the Colonel's death? And did the Colonel know it, when he left the birthday gift to his niece?"

I began to see my lady and Miss Rachel at the end of it all, now. Not a word he said escaped me.

"I was not very willing, when I discovered the story of the Moonstone," said Mr. Franklin, "to be the means of bringing it here. But Mr. Bruff reminded me that somebody must put my cousin's legacy into my cousin's hands—and that I might as well do it as anybody else. After taking the Diamond out of the bank, I fancied I was followed in the streets by a shabby, dark-complexioned man. I went to my father's house to pick up my luggage, and found a letter there, which unexpectedly detained me in London. I went back to the bank with the Diamond, and thought I saw the shabby man again. Taking the Diamond once more out of the bank this morning, I saw the man for the third time, gave him the slip, and started (before he recovered the trace of me) by the morning instead of the afternoon train. Here I am, with the Diamond safe and sound—and what is the first news that meets me? I find that three strolling Indians have been at the house, and that my arrival from London, and something which I am expected to have about me, are two special objects of investigation to them when they believe themselves to be alone. I don't waste time and words on their pouring the ink into the boy's hand, and telling him to look in it for a man at a distance, and for something in that man's pocket. The thing (which I have often seen done in the East) is 'hocus-pocus' in my opinion, as it is in yours. The present question for us to decide is, whether I am wrongly attaching a meaning to a mere accident? or whether we really have evidence of the Indians being on the track of the Moonstone, the moment it is removed from the safe keeping of the bank?"

Neither he nor I seemed to fancy dealing with this part of the inquiry. We looked at each other, and then we looked at the tide, oozing in smoothly, higher and higher, over the Shivering Sand.

"What are you thinking of?" says Mr. Franklin, suddenly.

"I was thinking, sir," I answered, "that I should like to shy the Diamond into the quicksand, and settle the question in THAT way."

"If you have got the value of the stone in your pocket," answered Mr. Franklin, "say so, Betteredge, and in it goes!"

It's curious to note, when your mind's anxious, how very far in the way of relief a very small joke will go. We found a fund of merriment, at the time, in the notion of making away with Miss Rachel's lawful property, and getting Mr. Blake, as executor, into dreadful trouble—though where the merriment was, I am quite at a loss to discover now.

Mr. Franklin was the first to bring the talk back to the talk's proper purpose. He took an envelope out of his pocket, opened it, and handed to me the paper inside.

"Betteredge," he said, "we must face the question of the Colonel's motive in leaving this legacy to his niece, for my aunt's sake. Bear in mind how Lady Verinder treated her brother from the time when he returned to England, to the time when he told you he should remember his niece's birthday. And read that."

He gave me the extract from the Colonel's Will. I have got it by me while I write these words; and I copy it, as follows, for your benefit:

"Thirdly, and lastly, I give and bequeath to my niece, Rachel Verinder, daughter and only child of my sister, Julia Verinder, widow—if her mother, the said Julia Verinder, shall be living on the said Rachel Verinder's next Birthday after my death—the yellow Diamond belonging to me, and known in the East by the name of The Moonstone: subject to this condition, that her mother, the said Julia Verinder, shall be living at the time. And I hereby desire my executor to give my Diamond, either by his own hands or by the hands of some trustworthy representative whom he shall appoint, into the personal possession of my said niece Rachel, on her next birthday after my death, and in the presence, if possible, of my sister, the said Julia Verinder. And I desire that my said sister may be informed, by means of a true copy of this, the third and last clause of my Will, that I give the Diamond to her daughter Rachel, in token of my free forgiveness of the injury which her conduct towards me has been the means of inflicting on my reputation in my lifetime; and especially in proof that I pardon, as becomes a dying man, the insult offered to me as an officer and a gentleman, when her servant, by her orders, closed the door of her house against me, on the occasion of her daughter's birthday."

More words followed these, providing if my lady was dead, or if Miss Rachel was dead, at the time of the testator's decease, for the Diamond being sent to Holland, in accordance with the sealed instructions originally deposited with it. The proceeds of the sale were, in that case, to be added to the money already left by the Will for the professorship of chemistry at the university in the north.

I handed the paper back to Mr. Franklin, sorely troubled what to say to him. Up to that moment, my own opinion
had been (as you know) that the Colonel had died as wickedly as he had lived. I don't say the copy from his Will actually converted me from that opinion: I only say it staggered me.

"Well," says Mr. Franklin, "now you have read the Colonel's own statement, what do you say? In bringing the Moonstone to my aunt's house, am I serving his vengeance blindfold, or am I vindicating him in the character of a penitent and Christian man?"

"It seems hard to say, sir," I answered, "that he died with a horrid revenge in his heart, and a horrid lie on his lips. God alone knows the truth. Don't ask me."

Mr. Franklin sat twisting and turning the extract from the Will in his fingers, as if he expected to squeeze the truth out of it in that manner. He altered quite remarkably, at the same time. From being brisk and bright, he now became, most unaccountably, a slow, solemn, and pondering young man.

"This question has two sides," he said. "An Objective side, and a Subjective side. Which are we to take?"

He had had a German education as well as a French. One of the two had been in undisturbed possession of him (as I supposed) up to this time. And now (as well as I could make out) the other was taking its place. It is one of my rules in life, never to notice what I don't understand. I steered a middle course between the Objective side and the Subjective side. In plain English I stared hard, and said nothing.

"Let's extract the inner meaning of this," says Mr. Franklin. "Why did my uncle leave the Diamond to Rachel? Why didn't he leave it to my aunt?"

"That's not beyond guessing, sir, at any rate," I said. "Colonel Herncastle knew my lady well enough to know that she would have refused to accept any legacy that came to her from HIM."

"How did he know that Rachel might not refuse to accept it, too?"

"Is there any young lady in existence, sir, who could resist the temptation of accepting such a birthday present as The Moonstone?"

"That's the Subjective view," says Mr. Franklin. "It does you great credit, Betteredge, to be able to take the Subjective view. But there's another mystery about the Colonel's legacy which is not accounted for yet. How are we to explain his only giving Rachel her birthday present conditionally on her mother being alive?"

"I don't want to slander a dead man, sir," I answered. "But if he HAS purposely left a legacy of trouble and danger to his sister, by the means of her child, it must be a legacy made conditional on his sister's being alive to feel the vexation of it."

"Oh! That's your interpretation of his motive, is it? The Subjective interpretation again! Have you ever been in Germany, Betteredge?"

"No, sir. What's your interpretation, if you please?"

"I can see," says Mr. Franklin, "that the Colonel's object may, quite possibly, have been--not to benefit his niece, whom he had never even seen--but to prove to his sister that he had died forgiving her, and to prove it very prettily by means of a present made to her child. There is a totally different explanation from yours, Betteredge, taking its rise in a Subjective-Objective point of view. From all I can see, one interpretation is just as likely to be right as the other."

Having brought matters to this pleasant and comforting issue, Mr. Franklin appeared to think that he had completed all that was required of him. He laid down flat on his back on the sand, and asked what was to be done next.

He had been so clever, and clear-headed (before he began to talk the foreign gibberish), and had so completely taken the lead in the business up to the present time, that I was quite unprepared for such a sudden change as he now exhibited in this helpless leaning upon me. It was not till later that I learned--by assistance of Miss Rachel, who was the first to make the discovery--that these puzzling shifts and transformations in Mr. Franklin were due to the effect on him of his foreign training. At the age when we are all of us most apt to take our colouring, in the form of a reflection from the colouring of other people, he had been sent abroad, and had been passed on from one nation to another, before there was time for any one colouring more than another to settle itself on him firmly. As a consequence of this, he had come back with so many different sides to his character, all more or less jarring with each other, that he seemed to pass his life in a state of perpetual contradiction with himself. He could be a busy man, and a lazy man; cloudy in the head, and clear in the head; a model of determination, and a spectacle of helplessness, all together. He had his French side, and his German side, and his Italian side--the original English foundation showing through, every now and then, as much as to say, "Here I am, sorely transmogrified, as you see, but there's something of me left at the bottom of him still." Miss Rachel used to remark that the Italian side of him was uppermost, on those occasions when he unexpectedly gave in, and asked you in his nice sweet-tempered way to take his own responsibilities on your shoulders. You will do him no injustice, I think, if you conclude that the Italian side of him was uppermost now.

"Isn't it your business, sir," I asked, "to know what to do next? Surely it can't be mine?"
Mr. Franklin didn't appear to see the force of my question—not being in a position, at the time, to see anything but the sky over his head.

"I don't want to alarm my aunt without reason," he said. "And I don't want to leave her without what may be a needful warning. If you were in my place, Betteredge, tell me, in one word, what would you do?"

In one word, I told him: "Wait."

"With all my heart," says Mr. Franklin. "How long?"

I proceeded to explain myself.

"As I understand it, sir," I said, "somebody is bound to put this plaguy Diamond into Miss Rachel's hands on her birthday—and you may as well do it as another. Very good. This is the twenty-fifth of May, and the birthday is on the twenty-first of June. We have got close on four weeks before us. Let's wait and see what happens in that time; and let's warn my lady, or not, as the circumstances direct us."

"Perfect, Betteredge, as far as it goes!" says Mr. Franklin. "But between this and the birthday, what's to be done with the Diamond?"

"What your father did with it, to be sure, sir!" I answered. "Your father put it in the safe keeping of a bank in London. You put it in the safe keeping of the bank at Frizinghall." (Frizinghall was our nearest town, and the Bank of England wasn't safer than the bank there.) "If I were you, sir," I added, "I would ride straight away with it to Frizinghall before the ladies come back."

The prospect of doing something—and, what is more, of doing that something on a horse—brought Mr. Franklin up like lightning from the flat of his back. He sprang to his feet, and pulled me up, without ceremony, on to mine.

"Betteredge, you are worth your weight in gold," he said. "Come along, and saddle the best horse in the stables directly."

Here (God bless it!) was the original English foundation of him showing through all the foreign varnish at last! Here was the Master Franklin I remembered, coming out again in the good old way at the prospect of a ride, and reminding me of the good old times! Saddle a horse for him? I would have saddled a dozen horses, if he could only have ridden them all!

We went back to the house in a hurry; we had the fleetest horse in the stables saddled in a hurry; and Mr. Franklin rattled off in a hurry, to lodge the cursed Diamond once more in the strong-room of a bank. When I heard the last of his horse's hoofs on the drive, and when I turned about in the yard and found I was alone again, I felt half inclined to ask myself if I hadn't woke up from a dream.

CHAPTER VII

While I was in this bewildered frame of mind, sorely needing a little quiet time by myself to put me right again, my daughter Penelope got in my way (just as her late mother used to get in my way on the stairs), and instantly summoned me to tell her all that had passed at the conference between Mr. Franklin and me. Under present circumstances, the one thing to be done was to clap the extinguisher upon Penelope's curiosity on the spot. I accordingly replied that Mr. Franklin and I had both talked of foreign politics, till we could talk no longer, and had then mutually fallen asleep in the heat of the sun. Try that sort of answer when your wife or your daughter next worries you with an awkward question at an awkward time, and depend on the natural sweetness of women for kissing and making it up again at the next opportunity.

The afternoon wore on, and my lady and Miss Rachel came back.

Needless to say how astonished they were, when they heard that Mr. Franklin Blake had arrived, and had gone off again on horseback. Needless also to say, that THEY asked awkward questions directly, and that the "foreign politics" and the "falling asleep in the sun" wouldn't serve a second time over with THEM. Being at the end of my invention, I said Mr. Franklin's arrival by the early train was entirely attributable to one of Mr. Franklin's freaks. Being asked, upon that, whether his galloping off again on horseback was another of Mr. Franklin's freaks, I said, "Yes, it was;" and slipped out of it—I think very cleverly—in that way.

Having got over my difficulties with the ladies, I found more difficulties waiting for me when I went back to my own room. In came Penelope—with the natural sweetness of women—to kiss and make it up again; and—with the natural curiosity of women—to ask another question. This time she only wanted me to tell her what was the matter with our second housemaid, Rosanna Spearman.

After leaving Mr. Franklin and me at the Shivering Sand, Rosanna, it appeared, had returned to the house in a very unaccountable state of mind. She had turned (if Penelope was to be believed) all the colours of the rainbow. She had been merry without reason, and sad without reason. In one breath she asked hundreds of questions about Mr. Franklin Blake, and in another breath she had been angry with Penelope for presuming to suppose that a strange gentleman could possess any interest for her. She had been surprised, smiling, and scribbling Mr. Franklin's name inside her workbox. She had been surprised again, crying and looking at her deformed shoulder in the glass. Had she and Mr. Franklin known anything of each other before to-day? Quite impossible! Had they heard anything of each
other? Impossible again! I could speak to Mr. Franklin's astonishment as genuine, when he saw how the girl stared at him. Penelope could speak to the girl's inquisitiveness as genuine, when she asked questions about Mr. Franklin. The conference between us, conducted in this way, was tiresome enough, until my daughter suddenly ended it by bursting out with what I thought the most monstrous supposition I had ever heard in my life.

"Father!" says Penelope, quite seriously, "there's only one explanation of it. Rosanna has fallen in love with Mr. Franklin Blake at first sight!"

You have heard of beautiful young ladies falling in love at first sight, and have thought it natural enough. But a housemaid out of a reformatory, with a plain face and a deformed shoulder, falling in love, at first sight, with a gentleman who comes on a visit to her mistress's house, match me that, in the way of an absurdity, out of any story-book in Christendom, if you can! I laughed till the tears rolled down my cheeks. Penelope resented my merriment, in rather a strange way. "I never knew you cruel before, father," she said, very gently, and went out.

My girl's words fell upon me like a splash of cold water. I was savage with myself, for feeling uneasy in myself the moment she had spoken them--but so it was. We will change the subject, if you please. I am sorry I drifted into writing about it; and not without reason, as you will see when we have gone on together a little longer.

The evening came, and the dressing-bell for dinner rang, before Mr. Franklin returned from Frizinghall. I took his hot water up to his room myself, expecting to hear, after this extraordinary delay, that something had happened. To my great disappointment (and no doubt to yours also), nothing had happened. He had not met with the Indians, either going or returning. He had deposited the Moonstone in the bank--describing it merely as a valuable of great price--and he had got the receipt for it safe in his pocket. I went down-stairs, feeling that this was rather a flat ending, after all our excitement about the Diamond earlier in the day.

How the meeting between Mr. Franklin and his aunt and cousin went off, is more than I can tell you.

I would have given something to have waited at table that day. But, in my position in the household, waiting at dinner (except on high family festivals) was letting down my dignity in the eyes of the other servants—a thing which my lady considered me quite prone enough to do so already, without seeking occasions for it. The news brought to me from the upper regions, that evening, came from Penelope and the footman. Penelope mentioned that she had never known Miss Rachel so particular about the dressing of her hair, and had never seen her look so bright and pretty as she did when she went down to meet Mr. Franklin in the drawing-room. The footman's report was, that the preservation of a respectful composure in the presence of his betters, and the waiting on Mr. Franklin Blake at dinner, were two of the hardest things to reconcile with each other that had ever tried his training in service. Later in the evening, we heard them singing and playing duets, Mr. Franklin piping high, Miss Rachel piping higher, and my lady, on the piano, following them as it were over hedge and ditch, and seeing them safe through it in a manner most wonderful and pleasant to hear through the open windows, on the terrace at night. Later still, I went to Mr. Franklin in the smoking-room, with the soda-water and brandy, and found that Miss Rachel had put the Diamond clean out of his head. "She's the most charming girl I have seen since I came back to England!" was all I could extract from him, when I endeavoured to lead the conversation to more serious things.

Towards midnight, I went round the house to lock up, accompanied by my second in command (Samuel, the footman), as usual. When all the doors were made fast, except the side door that opened on the terrace, I sent Samuel to bed, and stepped out for a breath of fresh air before I too went to bed in my turn.

The night was still and close, and the moon was at the full in the heavens. It was so silent out of doors, that I heard from time to time, very faint and low, the fall of the sea, as the ground-swell heaved it in on the sand-bank near the mouth of our little bay. As the house stood, the terrace side was the dark side; but the broad moonlight showed fair on the gravel walk that ran along the next side to the terrace. Looking this way, after looking up at the sky, I saw the shadow of a person in the moonlight thrown forward from behind the corner of the house.

Being old and sly, I forbore to call out; but being also, unfortunately, old and heavy, my feet betrayed me on the gravel. Before I could steal suddenly round the corner, as I had proposed, I heard lighter feet than mine—and more than one pair of them as I thought—retreating in a hurry. By the time I had got to the corner, the trespassers, whoever they were, had run into the shrubbery at the off side of the walk, and were hidden from sight among the thick trees and bushes in that part of the grounds. From the shrubbery, they could easily make their way, over our fence into the road. If I had been forty years younger, I might have had a chance of catching them before they got clear of our premises. As it was, I went back to set a-going a younger pair of legs than mine. Without disturbing anybody, Samuel and I got a couple of guns, and went all round the house and through the shrubbery. Having made sure that no persons were lurking about anywhere in our grounds, we turned back. Passing over the walk where I had seen the shadow, I now noticed, for the first time, a little bright object, lying on the clean gravel, under the light of the moon. Picking the object up, I discovered it was a small bottle, containing a thick sweet-smelling liquor, as black as ink.

I said nothing to Samuel. But, remembering what Penelope had told me about the jugglers, and the pouring of the little pool of ink into the palm of the boy's hand, I instantly suspected that I had disturbed the three Indians,
lurking about the house, and bent, in their heathenish way, on discovering the whereabouts of the Diamond that night.

CHAPTER VIII

Here, for one moment, I find it necessary to call a halt.

On summoning up my own recollections—and on getting Penelope to help me, by consulting her journal—I find that we may pass pretty rapidly over the interval between Mr. Franklin Blake's arrival and Miss Rachel's birthday. For the greater part of that time the days passed, and brought nothing with them worth recording. With your good leave, then, and with Penelope's help, I shall notice certain dates only in this place; reserving to myself to tell the story day by day, once more, as soon as we get to the time when the business of the Moonstone became the chief business of everybody in our house.

This said, we may now go on again—beginning, of course, with the bottle of sweet-smelling ink which I found on the gravel walk at night.

On the next morning (the morning of the twenty-sixth) I showed Mr. Franklin this article of jugglery, and told him what I have already told you. His opinion was, not only that the Indians had been lurking after about the Diamond, but also that they were actually foolish enough to believe in their own magic—meaning thereby the making of signs on a boy's head, and the pouring of ink into a boy's hand, and then expecting him to see persons and things beyond the reach of human vision. In our country, as well as in the East, Mr. Franklin informed me, there are people who practise this curious hocus-pocus (without the ink, however); and who call it by a French name, signifying something like brightness of sight. "Depend upon it," says Mr. Franklin, "the Indians took it for granted that we should keep the Diamond here; and they brought their clairvoyant boy to show them the way to it, if they succeeded in getting into the house last night."

"Do you think they'll try again, sir?" I asked.

"It depends," says Mr. Franklin, "on what the boy can really do. If he can see the Diamond through the iron safe of the bank at Frizinghall, we shall be troubled with no more visits from the Indians for the present. If he can't, we shall have another chance of catching them in the shrubbery, before many more nights are over our heads."

I waited pretty confidently for that latter chance; but, strange to relate, it never came.

Whether the jugglers heard, in the town, of Mr. Franklin having been seen at the bank, and drew their conclusions accordingly; or whether the boy really did see the Diamond where the Diamond was now lodged (which I, for one, flatly disbelieve); or whether, after all, it was a mere effect of chance, this at any rate is the plain truth—not the ghost of an Indian came near the house again, through the weeks that passed before Miss Rachel's birthday. The jugglers remained in and about the town plying their trade; and Mr. Franklin and I remained waiting to see what might happen, and resolute not to put the rogues on their guard by showing our suspicions of them too soon. With this report of the proceedings on either side, ends all that I have to say about the Indians for the present.

On the twenty-ninth of the month, Miss Rachel and Mr. Franklin hit on a new method of working their way together through the time which might otherwise have hung heavy on their hands. There are reasons for taking particular notice here of the occupation that amused them. You will find it has a bearing on something that is still to come.

Gentlefolks in general have a very awkward rock ahead in life—the rock ahead of their own idleness. Their lives being, for the most part, passed in looking about them for something to do, it is curious to see—especially when their tastes are of what is called the intellectual sort—how often they drift blindfold into some nasty pursuit. Nine times out of ten they take to torturing something, or to spoiling something—and they firmly believe they are improving their minds, when the plain truth is, they are only making a mess in the house. I have seen them [ladies, I am sorry to say, as well as gentlemen] go out, day after day, for example, with empty pill-boxes, and catch newts, and beetles, and spiders, and frogs, and come home and stick pins through the miserable wretches, or cut them up, without a pang of remorse, into little pieces. You see my young master, or my young mistress, poring over one of their spiders' insides with a magnifying-glass; or you meet one of their frogs walking downstairs without his head—and when you wonder what this cruel nastiness means, you are told that it means a taste in my young master or my young mistress for natural history. Sometimes, again, you see them occupied for hours together in spoiling a pretty flower with pointed instruments, out of a stupid curiosity to know what the flower is made of. Is its colour any prettier, or its scent any sweeter, when you DO know? But there! the poor souls must get through the time, you see—they must get through the time. You dabbled in nasty mud, and made pies, when you were a child; and you dabble in nasty science, and dissect spiders, and spoil flowers, when you grow up. In the one case and in the other, the secret of it is, that you have got nothing to think of in your poor empty head, and nothing to do with your poor idle hands. And so it ends in your spoiling canvas with paints, and making a smell in the house; or in keeping tadpoles in a glass box full of dirty water, and turning everybody's stomach in the house; or in chipping off bits of stone here, there, and everywhere, and dropping grit into all the victuals in the house; or in staining your fingers in the pursuit of
photography, and doing justice without mercy on everybody's face in the house. It often falls heavy enough, no doubt, on people who are really obliged to get their living, to be forced to work for the clothes that cover them, the roof that shelters them, and the food that keeps them going. But compare the hardest day's work you ever did with the idleness that splits flowers and pokes its way into spiders' stomachs, and thank your stars that your head has got something it MUST think of, and your hands something that they MUST do.

As for Mr. Franklin and Miss Rachel, they tortured nothing, I am glad to say. They simply confined themselves to making a mess; and all they spoilt, to do them justice, was the panelling of a door.

Mr. Franklin's universal genius, dabbling in everything, dabbled in what he called "decorative painting." He had invented, he informed us, a new mixture to moisten paint with, which he described as a "vehicle." What it was made of, I don't know. What it did, I can tell you in two words—it stank. Miss Rachel being wild to try her hand at the new process, Mr. Franklin sent to London for the materials; mixed them up, with accompaniment of a smell which made the very dogs sneeze when they came into the room; put an apron and a bib over Miss Rachel's gown, and set her to work decorating her own little sitting-room—called, for want of English to name it in, her "boudoir." They began with the inside of the door. Mr. Franklin scraped off all the nice varnish with pumice-stone, and made what he described as a surface to work on. Miss Rachel then covered the surface, under his directions and with his help, with patterns and devices—griffins, birds, flowers, cupids, and such like—copied from designs made by a famous Italian painter, whose name escapes me: the one, I mean, who stocked the world with Virgin Maries, and had a sweetheart at the baker's. Viewed as work, this decoration was slow to do, and dirty to deal with. But our young lady and gentleman never seemed to tire of it. When they were not riding, or seeing company, or taking their meals, or piping their songs, there they were with their heads together, as busy as bees, spoiling the door. Who was the poet who said that Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do? If he had occupied my place in the family, and had seen Miss Rachel with her brush, and Mr. Franklin with his vehicle, he could have written nothing truer of either of them than that.

The next date worthy of notice is Sunday the fourth of June.

On that evening we, in the servants' hall, debated a domestic question for the first time, which, like the decoration of the door, has its bearing on something that is still to come.

Seeing the pleasure which Mr. Franklin and Miss Rachel took in each other's society, and noting what a pretty match they were in all personal respects, we naturally speculated on the chance of their putting their heads together with other objects in view besides the ornamenting of a door. Some of us said there would be a wedding in the house before the summer was over. Others (led by me) admitted it was likely enough Miss Rachel might be married; but we doubted (for reasons which will presently appear) whether her bridegroom would be Mr. Franklin Blake.

That Mr. Franklin was in love, on his side, nobody who saw and heard him could doubt. The difficulty was to fathom Miss Rachel. Let me do myself the honour of making you acquainted with her; after which, I will leave you to fathom for yourself—if you can.

My young lady's eighteenth birthday was the birthday now coming, on the twenty-first of June. If you happen to like dark women (who, I am informed, have gone out of fashion latterly in the gay world), and if you have no particular prejudice in favour of size, I answer for Miss Rachel as one of the prettiest girls your eyes ever looked on. She was small and slim, but all in fine proportion from top to toe. To see her sit down, to see her get up, and specially to see her walk, was enough to satisfy any man in his senses that the graces of her figure (if you will pardon me the expression) were in her flesh and not in her clothes. Her hair was the blackest I ever saw. Her eyes matched her hair. Her nose was not quite large enough, I admit. Her mouth and chin were (to quote Mr. Franklin) morsels for the gods; and her complexion (on the same undeniable authority) was as warm as the sun itself, with this advantage over the sun, that it was always in nice order to look at. Add to the foregoing that she carried her head as upright as a dart, in a dashing, spirited, thoroughbred way—that she had a clear voice, with a ring of the right metal in it, and a smile that began very prettily in her eyes before it got to her lips—and there behold the portrait of her, to the best of my painting, as large as life!

And what about her disposition next? Had this charming creature no faults? She had just as many faults as you have, ma'am—neither more nor less.

To put it seriously, my dear pretty Miss Rachel, possessing a host of graces and attractions, had one defect, which strict impartiality compels me to acknowledge. She was unlike most other girls of her age, in this—that she had ideas of her own, and was stiff-necked enough to set the fashions themselves at defiance, if the fashions didn't suit her views. In trifles, this independence of hers was all well enough; but in matters of importance, it carried her (as my lady thought, and as I thought) too far. She judged for herself, as few women of twice her age judge in general; never asked your advice; never told you beforehand what she was going to do; never came with secrets and confidences to anybody, from her mother downwards. In little things and great, with people she loved, and people she hated (and she did both with equal heartiness), Miss Rachel always went on a way of her own, sufficient for...
herself in the joys and sorrows of her life. Over and over again I have heard my lady say, "Rachel's best friend and Rachel's worst enemy are, one and the other--Rachel herself."

With all her secrecy, and self-will, there was not so much as the shadow of anything false in her. I never remember her breaking her word; I never remember her saying No, and meaning Yes. I can call to mind, in her childhood, more than one occasion when the good little soul took the blame, and suffered the punishment, for some fault committed by a playfellow whom she loved. Nobody ever knew her to confess to it, when the thing was found out, and she was charged with it afterwards. But nobody ever knew her to lie about it, either. She looked you straight in the face, and shook her little saucy head, and said plainly, "I won't tell you!" Punished again for this, she would own to being sorry for saying "won't;" but, bread and water notwithstanding, she never told you. Self-willed--devilish self-willed sometimes--I grant; but the finest creature, nevertheless, that ever walked the ways of this lower world. Perhaps you think you see a certain contradiction here? In that case, a word in your ear. Study your wife closely, for the next four-and-twenty hours. If your good lady doesn't exhibit something in the shape of a contradiction in that time, Heaven help you!--you have married a monster.

I have now brought you acquainted with Miss Rachel, which you will find puts us face to face, next, with the question of that young lady's matrimonial views.

On June the twelfth, an invitation from my mistress was sent to a gentleman in London, to come and help to keep Miss Rachel's birthday. This was the fortunate individual on whom I believed her heart to be privately set! Like Mr. Franklin, he was a cousin of hers. His name was Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

My lady's second sister (don't be alarmed; we are not going very deep into family matters this time)--my lady's second sister, I say, had a disappointment in love; and taking a husband afterwards, on the neck or nothing principle, made what they call a misalliance. There was terrible work in the family when the Honourable Caroline insisted on marrying plain Mr. Ablewhite, the banker at Frizinghall. He was very rich and very respectable, and he begot a prodigious large family--all in his favour, so far. But he had presumed to raise himself from a low station in the world--and that was against him. However, Time and the progress of modern enlightenment put things right; and the mis-alliance passed muster very well. We are all getting liberal now; and (provided you can scratch me, if I scratch you) what do I care, in or out of Parliament, whether you are a Dustman or a Duke? That's the modern way of looking at it--and I keep up with the modern way. The Ablewhites lived in a fine house and grounds, a little out of Frizinghall. Very worthy people, and greatly respected in the neighbourhood. We shall not be much troubled with them in these pages--excepting Mr. Godfrey, who was Mr. Ablewhite's second son, and who must take his proper place here, if you please, for Miss Rachel's sake.

With all his brightness and cleverness and general good qualities, Mr. Franklin's chance of topping Mr. Godfrey in our young lady's estimation was, in my opinion, a very poor chance indeed.

In the first place, Mr. Godfrey was, in point of size, the finest man by far of the two. He stood over six feet high; he had a beautiful red and white colour; a smooth round face, shaved as bare as your hand; and a head of lovely long flaxen hair, falling negligently over the poll of his neck. But why do I try to give you this personal description of him? If you ever subscribed to a Ladies' Charity in London, you know Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite as well as I do. He was a barrister by profession; a ladies' man by temperament; and a good Samaritan by choice. Female benevolence and female destitution could do nothing without him. Maternal societies for rescuing poor women; strong-minded societies for putting poor women into poor men's places, and leaving the men to shift for themselves;--he was vice-president, manager, referee to them all. Wherever there was a table with a committee of ladies sitting round it in council there was Mr. Godfrey at the bottom of the board, keeping the temper of the committee, and leading the dear creatures along the thorny ways of business, hat in hand. I do suppose this was the most accomplished philanthropist (on a small independence) that England ever produced. As a speaker at charitable meetings the like of him for drawing your tears and your money was not easy to find. He was quite a public character. The last time I was in London, my mistress gave me two treats. She sent me to the theatre to see a dancing woman who was all the rage; and she sent me to Exeter Hall to hear Mr. Godfrey. The lady did it, with a band of music. The gentleman did it, with a handkerchief and a glass of water. Crowds at the performance with the legs. Ditto at the performance with the tongue. And with all this, the sweetest tempered person (I allude to Mr. Godfrey)--the simplest and pleasantest and easiest to please--you ever met with. He loved everybody. And everybody loved HIM. What chance had Mr. Franklin--what chance had anybody of average reputation and capacities--against such a man as this?

On the fourteenth, came Mr. Godfrey's answer.

He accepted my mistress's invitation, from the Wednesday of the birthday to the evening of Friday--when his duties to the Ladies' Charities would oblige him to return to town. He also enclosed a copy of verses on what he elegantly called his cousin's "natal day." Miss Rachel, I was informed, joined Mr. Franklin in making fun of the
verses at dinner; and Penelope, who was all on Mr. Franklin's side, asked me, in great triumph, what I thought of that. "Miss Rachel has led you off on a false scent, my dear," I replied; "but MY nose is not so easily mystified. Wait till Mr. Ablewhite's verses are followed by Mr. Ablewhite himself."

My daughter replied, that Mr. Franklin might strike in, and try his luck, before the verses were followed by the poet. In favour of this view, I must acknowledge that Mr. Franklin left no chance untired of winning Miss Rachel's good graces.

Though one of the most inveterate smokers I ever met with, he gave up his cigar, because she said, one day, she hated the stale smell of it in his clothes. He slept so badly, after this effort of self-denial, for want of the composing effect of the tobacco to which he was used, and came down morning after morning looking so haggard and worn, that Miss Rachel herself begged him to take to his cigars again. No! he would take to nothing again that could cause her a moment's annoyance; he would fight it out resolutely, and get back his sleep, sooner or later, by main force of patience in waiting for it. Such devotion as this, you may say (as some of them said downstairs), could never fail of producing the right effect on Miss Rachel--backed up, too, as it was, by the decorating work every day on the door. All very well--but she had a photograph of Mr. Godfrey in her bed-room; represented speaking at a public meeting, with all his hair blown out by the breath of his own eloquence, and his eyes, most lovely, charming the money out of your pockets. What do you say to that? Every morning--as Penelope herself owned to me--there was the man whom the women couldn't do without, looking on, in effigy, while Miss Rachel was having her hair combed. He would be looking on, in reality, before long--that was my opinion of it.

June the sixteenth brought an event which made Mr. Franklin's chance look, to my mind, a worse chance than ever.

A strange gentleman, speaking English with a foreign accent, came that morning to the house, and asked to see Mr. Franklin Blake on business. The business could not possibly have been connected with the Diamond, for these two reasons--first, that Mr. Franklin told me nothing about it; secondly, that he communicated it (when the gentleman had gone, as I suppose) to my lady. She probably hinted something about it next to her daughter. At any rate, Miss Rachel was reported to have said some severe things to Mr. Franklin, at the piano that evening, about the people he had lived among, and the principles he had adopted in foreign parts. The next day, for the first time, nothing was done towards the decoration of the door. I suspect some imprudence of Mr. Franklin's on the Continent--with a woman or a debt at the bottom of it--had followed him to England. But that is all guesswork. In this case, not only Mr. Franklin, but my lady too, for a wonder, left me in the dark.

On the seventeenth, to all appearance, the cloud passed away again. They returned to their decorating work on the door, and seemed to be as good friends as ever. If Penelope was to be believed, Mr. Franklin had seized the opportunity of the reconciliation to make an offer to Miss Rachel, and had neither been accepted nor refused. My girl was sure (from signs and tokens which I need not trouble you with) that her young mistress had fished Mr. Franklin off by declining to believe that he was in earnest, and had then secretly regretted treating him in that way afterwards. Though Penelope was admitted to more familiarity with her young mistress than maids generally are--for the two had been almost brought up together as children--still I knew Miss Rachel's reserved character too well to believe that she would show her mind to anybody in this way. What my daughter told me, on the present occasion, was, as I suspected, more what she wished than what she really knew.

On the nineteenth another event happened. We had the doctor in the house professionally. He was summoned to prescribe for a person whom I have had occasion to present to you in these pages--our second housemaid, Rosanna Spearman.

This poor girl--who had puzzled me, as you know already, at the Shivering Sand--puzzled me more than once again, in the interval time of which I am now writing. Penelope's notion that her fellow-servant was in love with Mr. Franklin (which my daughter, by my orders, kept strictly secret) seemed to be just as absurd as ever. But I must own that what I myself saw, and what my daughter saw also, of our second housemaid's conduct, began to look mysterious, to say the least of it.

For example, the girl constantly put herself in Mr. Franklin's way--very slyly and quietly, but she did it. He took about as much notice of her as he took of the cat; it never seemed to occur to him to waste a look on Rosanna's plain face. The poor thing's appetite, never much, fell away dreadfully; and her eyes in the morning showed plain signs of waking and crying at night. One day Penelope made an awkward discovery, which we hushed up on the spot. She caught Rosanna at Mr. Franklin's dressing-table, secretly removing a rose which Miss Rachel had given him to wear in his button-hole, and putting another rose like it, of her own picking, in its place. She was, after that, once or twice impudent to me, when I gave her a well-meant general hint to be careful in her conduct; and, worse still, she was not over-respectful now, on the few occasions when Miss Rachel accidentally spoke to her.

My lady noticed the change, and asked me what I thought about it. I tried to screen the girl by answering that I thought she was out of health; and it ended in the doctor being sent for, as already mentioned, on the nineteenth. He
said it was her nerves, and doubted if she was fit for service. My lady offered to remove her for change of air to one of our farms, inland. She begged and prayed, with the tears in her eyes, to be let to stop; and, in an evil hour, I advised my lady to try her for a little longer. As the event proved, and as you will soon see, this was the worst advice I could have given. If I could only have looked a little way into the future, I would have taken Rosanna Spearman out of the house, then and there, with my own hand.

On the twentieth, there came a note from Mr. Godfrey. He had arranged to stop at Frizinghall that night, having occasion to consult his father on business. On the afternoon of the next day, he and his two eldest sisters would ride over to us on horseback, in good time before dinner. An elegant little casket in China accompanied the note, presented to Miss Rachel, with her cousin's love and best wishes. Mr. Franklin had only given her a plain locket not worth half the money. My daughter Penelope, nevertheless—such is the obstinacy of women—still backed him to win.

Thanks be to Heaven, we have arrived at the eve of the birthday at last! You will own, I think, that I have got you over the ground this time, without much loitering by the way. Cheer up! I'll ease you with another new chapter here—and, what is more, that chapter shall take you straight into the thick of the story.

CHAPTER IX

June twenty-first, the day of the birthday, was cloudy and unsettled at sunrise, but towards noon it cleared up bravely.

We, in the servants' hall, began this happy anniversary, as usual, by offering our little presents to Miss Rachel, with the regular speech delivered annually by me as the chief. I follow the plan adopted by the Queen in opening Parliament—namely, the plan of saying much the same thing regularly every year. Before it is delivered, my speech (like the Queen's) is looked for as eagerly as if nothing of the kind had ever been heard before. When it is delivered, and turns out not to be the novelty anticipated, though they grumble a little, they look forward hopefully to something newer next year. An easy people to govern, in the Parliament and in the Kitchen—that's the moral of it.

After breakfast, Mr. Franklin and I had a private conference on the subject of the Moonstone—the time having now come for removing it from the bank at Frizinghall, and placing it in Miss Rachel's own hands.

Whether he had been trying to make love to his cousin again, and had got a rebuff—or whether his broken rest, night after night, was aggravating the queer contradictions and uncertainties in his character—I don't know. But certain it is, that Mr. Franklin failed to show himself at his best on the morning of the birthday. He was in twenty different minds about the Diamond in as many minutes. For my part, I stuck fast by the plain facts a we knew them. Nothing had happened to justify us in alarming my lady on the subject of the jewel; and nothing could alter the legal obligation that now lay on Mr. Franklin to put it in his cousin's possession. That was my view of the matter; and, this settled, our young gentleman went back to Miss Rachel.

They consumed the whole morning, and part of the afternoon, in the everlasting business of decorating the door, Penelope standing by to mix the colours, as directed; and my lady, as luncheon time drew near, going in and out of the room, with her handkerchief to her nose (for they used a deal of Mr. Franklin's vehicle that day), and trying vainly to get the two artists away from their work. It was three o'clock before they took off their aprons, and released Penelope (much the worse for the vehicle), and cleaned themselves of their mess. But they had done what they wanted—they had finished the door on the birthday, and proud enough they were of it. The griffins, cupids, and so on, were, I must own, most beautiful to behold; though so many in number, so entangled in flowers and devices, and so topsy-turvied in their actions and attitudes, that you felt them unpleasantly in your head for hours after you had done with the pleasure of looking at them. If I add that Penelope ended her part of the morning's work by being sick over to us on horseback, in good time before dinner. An elegant little casket in China accompanied the note, presented to Miss Rachel, with her cousin's love and best wishes. Mr. Franklin had only given her a plain locket not worth half the money. My daughter Penelope, nevertheless—such is the obstinacy of women—still backed him to win.

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his customary spirits. He kindly shook hands with me as usual, and was most politely glad to see his old friend Betteredge wearing so well. But there was a sort of cloud over him, which I couldn't at all account for; and when I asked how he had found his father in health, he answered rather shortly, "Much as usual." However, the two Miss Ablewhites were cheerful enough for twenty, which more than restored the balance. They were nearly as big as their brother; spanning, yellow-haired, rosy lasses, overflowing with super-abundant flesh and blood; bursting from head to foot with health and spirits. The legs of the poor horses trembled with carrying them; and when they jumped from their saddles (without waiting to be helped), I declare they bounced on the ground as if they were made of india-rubber. Everything the Miss Ablewhites said began with a large O; everything they did was done with a bang; and they giggled and screamed, in season and out of season, on the smallest provocation. Bouncers--that's what I call them.

Under cover of the noise made by the young ladies, I had an opportunity of saying a private word to Mr. Franklin in the hall.

"Have you got the Diamond safe, sir?"

He nodded, and tapped the breast-pocket of his coat.

"Have you seen anything of the Indians?"

"Not a glimpse." With that answer, he asked for my lady, and, hearing she was in the small drawing-room, went there straight. The bell rang, before he had been a minute in the room, and Penelope was sent to tell Miss Rachel that Mr. Franklin Blake wanted to speak to her.

Crossing the hall, about half an hour afterwards, I was brought to a sudden standstill by an outbreak of screams from the small drawing-room. I can't say I was at all alarmed; for I recognised in the screams the favourite large O of the Miss Ablewhites. However, I went in (on pretence of asking for instructions about the dinner) to discover whether anything serious had really happened.

There stood Miss Rachel at the table, like a person fascinated, with the Colonel's unlucky Diamond in her hand. There, on either side of her, knelt the two Bouncers, devouring the jewel with their eyes, and screaming with ecstasy every time it flashed on them in a new light. There, at the opposite side of the table, stood Mr. Godfrey, clapping his hands like a large child, and singing out softly, "Exquisite! exquisite!" There sat Mr. Franklin in a chair by the book-case, tugging at his beard, and looking anxiously towards the window. And there, at the window, stood the object he was contemplating--my lady, having the extract from the Colonel's Will in her hand, and keeping her back turned on the whole of the company.

She faced me, when I asked for my instructions; and I saw the family frown gathering over her eyes, and the family temper twitching at the corners of her mouth.

"Come to my room in half an hour," she answered. "I shall have something to say to you then."

With those words she went out. It was plain enough that she was posed by the same difficulty which had posed Mr. Franklin and me in our conference at the Shivering Sand. Was the legacy of the Moonstone a proof that she had treated her brother with cruel injustice? or was it a proof that he was worse than the worst she had ever thought of him? Serious questions those for my lady to determine, while her daughter, innocent of all knowledge of the Colonel's character, stood there with the Colonel's birthday gift in her hand.

Before I could leave the room in my turn, Miss Rachel, always considerate to the old servant who had been in the house when she was born, stopped me. "Look, Gabriel!" she said, and flashed the jewel before my eyes in a ray of sunlight that poured through the window.

Lord bless us! it WAS a Diamond! As large, or nearly, as a plover's egg! The light that streamed from it was like the light of the harvest moon. When you looked down into the stone, you looked into a yellow deep that drew your eyes into it so that they saw nothing else. It seemed unfathomable; this jewel, that you could hold between your finger and thumb, seemed unfathomable as the heavens themselves. We set it in the sun, and then shut the light out of the room, and it shone awfully out of the depths of its own brightness, with a moony gleam, in the dark. No wonder Miss Rachel was fascinated: no wonder her cousins screamed. The Diamond laid such a hold on ME that I burst out with as large an "O" as the Bouncers themselves. The only one of us who kept his senses was Mr. Godfrey. He put an arm round each of his sister's waists, and, looking compassionately backwards and forwards between the Diamond and me, said, "Carbon Betteredge! mere carbon, my good friend, after all!"

His object, I suppose, was to instruct me. All he did, however, was to remind me of the dinner. I hobbled off to my army of waiters downstairs. As I went out, Mr. Godfrey said, "Dear old Betteredge, I have the truest regard for him!" He was embracing his sisters, and ogling Miss Rachel, while he honoured me with that testimony of affection. Something like a stock of love to draw on THERE! Mr. Franklin was a perfect savage by comparison with him.

At the end of half an hour, I presented myself, as directed, in my lady's room.

What passed between my mistress and me, on this occasion, was, in the main, a repetition of what had passed between Mr. Franklin and me at the Shivering Sand--with this difference, that I took care to keep my own counsel.
about the jugglers, seeing that nothing had happened to justify me in alarming my lady on this head. When I received my dismissal, I could see that she took the blackest view possible of the Colonel's motives, and that she was bent on getting the Moonstone out of her daughter's possession at the first opportunity.

On my way back to my own part of the house, I was encountered by Mr. Franklin. He wanted to know if I had seen anything of his cousin Rachel. I had seen nothing of her. Could I tell him where his cousin Godfrey was? I didn't know; but I began to suspect that cousin Godfrey might not be far away from cousin Rachel. Mr. Franklin's suspicions apparently took the same turn. He tugged hard at his beard, and went and shut himself up in the library with a bang of the door that had a world of meaning in it.

I was interrupted no more in the business of preparing for the birthday dinner till it was time for me to smarten myself up for receiving the company. Just as I had got my white waistcoat on, Penelope presented herself at my toilet, on pretence of brushing what little hair I have got left, and improving the tie of my white cravat. My girl was in high spirits, and I saw she had something to say to me. She gave me a kiss on the top of my bald head, and whispered, "News for you, father! Miss Rachel has refused him."

"Who's 'HIM'?" I asked.

"The ladies' committee-man, father," says Penelope. "A nasty sly fellow! I hate him for trying to supplant Mr. Franklin!"

If I had had breath enough, I should certainly have protested against this indecent way of speaking of an eminent philanthropic character. But my daughter happened to be improving the tie of my cravat at that moment, and the whole strength of her feelings found its way into her fingers. I never was more nearly strangled in my life.

"I saw him take her away alone into the rose-garden," says Penelope. "And I waited behind the holly to see how they came back. They had gone out arm-in-arm, both laughing. They came back, walking separate, as grave as grave could be, and looking straight away from each other in a manner which there was no mistaking. I never was more delighted, father, in my life! There's one woman in the world who can resist Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, at any rate; and, if I was a lady, I should be another!"

Here I should have protested again. But my daughter had got the hair-brush by this time, and the whole strength of her feelings has passed into THAT. If you are bald, you will understand how she sacrificed me. If you are not, skip this bit, and thank God you have got something in the way of a defence between your hair-brush and your head.

"Just on the other side of the holly," Penelope went on, "Mr. Godfrey came to a standstill. 'You prefer,' says he, 'that I should stop here as if nothing had happened?' Miss Rachel turned on him like lightning. 'You have accepted my mother's invitation,' she said; 'and you are here to meet her guests. Unless you wish to make a scandal in the house, you will remain, of course!' She went on a few steps, and then seemed to relent a little. 'Let us forget what has passed, Godfrey,' she said, 'and let us remain cousins still.' She gave him her hand. He kissed it, which I should have considered taking a liberty, and then she left him. He waited a little by himself, with his head down, and his heel grinding a hole slowly in the gravel walk; you never saw a man look more put out in your life. 'Awkward!' he said between his teeth, when he looked up, and went on to the house--very awkward! If that was his opinion of himself, he was quite right. Awkward enough, I'm sure. And the end of it is, father, what I told you all along," cries Penelope, finishing me off with a last scarification, the hottest of all. "Mr. Franklin's the man!"

I got possession of the hair-brush, and opened my lips to administer the reproof which, you will own, my daughter's language and conduct richly deserved.

Before I could say a word, the crash of carriage-wheels outside struck in, and stopped me. The first of the dinner-company had come. Penelope instantly ran off. I put on my coat, and looked in the glass. My head was as red as a lobster; but, in other respects, I was as nicely dressed for the ceremonies of the evening as a man need be. I got into the hall just in time to announce the two first of the guests. You needn't feel particularly interested about them. They were two on the top of the other the rest of the company followed the Ablewhites, till we had the whole tale of them complete. Including the family, they were twenty-four in all. It was a noble sight to see, when they were settled in their places round the dinner-table, and the Rector of Frizinghall (with beautiful elocution) rose and said grace.

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There is no need to worry you with a list of the guests. You will meet none of them a second time--in my part of the story, at any rate--with the exception of two.

Those two sat on either side of Miss Rachel, who, as queen of the day, was naturally the great attraction of the party. On this occasion she was more particularly the centre-point towards which everybody's eyes were directed; for (to my lady's secret annoyance) she wore her wonderful birthday present, which eclipsed all the rest--the Moonstone. It was without any setting when it had been placed in her hands; but that universal genius, Mr. Franklin, had contrived, with the help of his neat fingers and a little bit of silver wire, to fix it as a brooch in the bosom of her white dress. Everybody wondered at the prodigious size and beauty of the Diamond, as a matter of course. But the
only two of the company who said anything out of the common way about it were those two guests I have
mentioned, who sat by Miss Rachel on her right hand and her left.

The guest on her left was Mr. Candy, our doctor at Frizinghall.

This was a pleasant, companionable little man, with the drawback, however, I must own, of being too fond,
in season and out of season, of his joke, and of his plunging in rather a headlong manner into talk with strangers,
without waiting to feel his way first. In society he was constantly making mistakes, and setting people
unintentionally by the ears together. In his medical practice he was a more prudent man; picking up his discretion
(as his enemies said) by a kind of instinct, and proving to be generally right where more carefully conducted doctors
turned out to be wrong.

What HE said about the Diamond to Miss Rachel was said, as usual, by way of a mystification or joke. He
gravely entreated her (in the interests of science) to let him take it home and burn it. "We will first heat it, Miss
Rachel," says the doctor, "to such and such a degree; then we will expose it to a current of air; and, little by little--
puff!--we evaporate the Diamond, and spare you a world of anxiety about the safe keeping of a valuable precious
stone!" My lady, listening with rather a careworn expression on her face, seemed to wish that the doctor had been in
earnest, and that he could have found Miss Rachel zealous enough in the cause of science to sacrifice her birthday
gift.

The other guest, who sat on my young lady's right hand, was an eminent public character--being no other than
the celebrated Indian traveller, Mr. Murthwaite, who, at risk of his life, had penetrated in disguise where no
European had ever set foot before.

This was a long, lean, wiry, brown, silent man. He had a weary look, and a very steady, attentive eye. It was
rumoured that he was tired of the humdrum life among the people in our parts, and longing to go back and wander
off on the tramp again in the wild places of the East. Except what he said to Miss Rachel about her jewel, I doubt if
he spoke six words or drank so much as a single glass of wine, all through the dinner. The Moonstone was the only
object that interested him in the smallest degree. The fame of it seemed to have reached him, in some of those
perilous Indian places where his wanderings had lain. After looking at it silently for so long a time that Miss Rachel
began to get confused, he said to her in his cool immovable way, "If you ever go to India, Miss Verinder, don't take
your uncle's birthday gift with you. A Hindoo diamond is sometimes part of a Hindoo religion. I know a certain city,
and a certain temple in that city, where, dressed as you are now, your life would not be worth five minutes' purchase." Miss Rachel, safe in England, was quite delighted to hear of her danger in India. The Bouncers were
more delighted still; they dropped their knives and forks with a crash, and burst out together vehemently, "O! how
interesting!" My lady fidgeted in her chair, and changed the subject.

As the dinner got on, I became aware, little by little, that this festival was not prospering as other like festivals
had prospered before it.

Looking back at the birthday now, by the light of what happened afterwards, I am half inclined to think that the
cursed Diamond must have cast a blight on the whole company. I plied them well with wine; and being a privileged
character, followed the unpopular dishes round the table, and whispered to the company confidentially, "Please to
change your mind and try it; for I know it will do you good." Nine times out of ten they changed their minds--out of
regard for their old original Betteredge, they were pleased to say--but all to no purpose. There were gaps of silence
in the talk, as the dinner got on, that made me feel personally uncomfortable. When they did use their tongues again,
they used them innocently, in the most unfortunate manner and to the worst possible purpose. Mr. Candy, the doctor,
for instance, said more unlucky things than I ever knew him to say before. Take one sample of the way in which he
went on, and you will understand what I had to put up with at the sideboard, officiating as I was in the character of a
man who had the prosperity of the festival at heart.

One of our ladies present at dinner was worthy Mrs. Threadgall, widow of the late Professor of that name.
Talking of her deceased husband perpetually, this good lady never mentioned to strangers that he WAS deceased.
She thought, I suppose, that every able-bodied adult in England ought to know as much as that. In one of the gaps of
silence, somebody mentioned the dry and rather nasty subject of human anatomy; whereupon good Mrs. Threadgall
straightway brought in her late husband as usual, without mentioning that he was dead. Anatomy she described as
the Professor's favourite recreation in his leisure hours. As ill-luck would have it, Mr. Candy, sitting opposite (who
knew nothing of the deceased gentleman), heard her. Being the most polite of men, he seized the opportunity of
assisting the Professor's anatomical amusements on the spot.

"They have got some remarkably fine skeletons lately at the College of Surgeons," says Mr. Candy, across the
table, in a loud cheerful voice. "I strongly recommend the Professor, ma'am, when he next has an hour to spare, to
pay them a visit."

You might have heard a pin fall. The company (out of respect to the Professor's memory) all sat speechless. I
was behind Mrs. Threadgall at the time, plying her confidentially with a glass of hock. She dropped her head, and
now, for the first time, he knew what it meant. In this way, they kept it going briskly, cut and thrust, till they both of

to find it. Mr. Franklin, keeping the ball up on his side, said he had often heard of the blind leading the blind, and

himself was, constitutionally speaking, groping in the dark after sleep, and that nothing but medicine could help him

in the dark, meant, in his estimation, one and the same thing. Mr. Candy, hitting back smartly, said that Mr Franklin

through a course of medicine immediately. Mr. Franklin replied that a course of medicine, and a course of groping

slept very badly at night. Mr. Candy thereupon told him that his nerves were all out of order and that he ought to go

ridicule of doctors, that he actually put good-humoured little Mr. Candy in a rage.

lost his foreign smoothness; and, getting on the subject of the medical profession, said such downright things in

terrified the company with such outbreaks as these, but, when the English side of him turned up in due course, he

answering, from the Italian point of view: "We have got three things left, sir--Love, Music, and Salad"? He not only

lose our ancient safeguards, Mr. Blake, I beg to ask you, what have we got left?"--what do you say to Mr. Franklin

growing hot, at cheese and salad time, about the spread of democracy in England, burst out as follows: "If we once

mind, evolve out of it the idea of a perfect bull, and produce him? What do you say, when our county member,

aunt of the Vicar of Frizinghall? What do you think, when he shifted to the German side, of his telling the lord of the

admiration go for a man who was not her husband, and putting it in his clear-headed witty French way to the maiden

which I have already alluded--came out, at my lady's hospitable board, in a most bewildering manner.

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he pitched on the wrong subject, or he addressed himself to the wrong person; the end of it being that he offended

informed him, I suspect, of Mr. Godfrey's reception in the rose-garden. But, talk as he might, nine times out of ten

member of our family) who sat next to him. She was one of his committee-women--a spiritually-minded person,

he kept all his talk for the private ear of the lady (a

Mr. Godfrey, though so eloquent in public, declined to exert himself in private. Whether he was sulky, or whether he

was bashful, after his discomfiture in the rose-garden, I can't say. He kept all his talk for the private ear of the lady (a

member of our family) who sat next to him. She was one of his committee-women--a spiritually-minded person,

with a fine show of collar-bone and a pretty taste in champagne; liked it dry, you understand, and plenty of it. Being

close behind these two at the sideboard, I can testify, from what I heard pass between them, that the company lost a

good deal of very improving conversation, which I caught up while drawing the corks, and carving the mutton, and

so forth. What they said about their Charities I didn't hear. When I had time to listen to them, they had got a long

way beyond their women to be confined, and their women to be rescued, and were disputing on serious subjects.

Religion (I understand Mr. Godfrey to say, between the corks and the carving) meant love. And love meant religion.

And earth was heaven a little the worse for wear. And heaven was earth, done up again to look like new. Earth had

some very objectionable people in it; but, to make amends for that, all the women in heaven would be members of a

prodigious committee that never quarrelled, with all the men in attendance on them as ministering angels. Beautiful!

beautiful! But why the mischief did Mr. Godfrey keep it all to his lady and himself?

Mr. Franklin again--surely, you will say, Mr. Franklin stirred the company up into making a pleasant evening of it?

Nothing of the sort! He had quite recovered himself, and he was in wonderful force and spirits, Penelope having

informed him, I suspect, of Mr. Godfrey's reception in the rose-garden. But, talk as he might, nine times out of ten

he pitched on the wrong subject, or he addressed himself to the wrong person; the end of it being that he offended

some, and puzzled all of them. That foreign training of his--those French and German and Italian sides of him, to

which I have already alluded--came out, at my lady's hospitable board, in a most bewildering manner.

What do you think, for instance, of his discussing the lengths to which a married woman might let her

admiration go for a man who was not her husband, and putting it in his clear-headed witty French way to the maiden

aunt of the Vicar of Frizinghall? What do you think, when he shifted to the German side, of his telling the lord of the

manor, while that great authority on cattle was quoting his experience in the breeding of bulls, that experience,

properly understood counted for nothing, and that the proper way to breed bulls was to look deep into your own

mind, evolve out of it the idea of a perfect bull, and produce him? What do you say, when our county member,

growing hot, at cheese and salad time, about the spread of democracy in England, burst out as follows: "If we once

lose our ancient safeguards, Mr. Blake, I beg to ask you, what have we got left?"--what do you say to Mr. Franklin

answering, from the Italian point of view: "We have got three things left, sir--Love, Music, and Salad"? He not only

terrified the company with such outbreaks as these, but, when the English side of him turned up in due course, he

lost his foreign smoothness; and, getting on the subject of the medical profession, said such downright things in

ridicule of doctors, that he actually put good-humoured little Mr. Candy in a rage.

The dispute between them began in Mr. Franklin being led--I forget how--to acknowledge that he had latterly

slept very badly at night. Mr. Candy thereupon told him that his nerves were all out of order and that he ought to go

through a course of medicine immediately. Mr. Franklin replied that a course of medicine, and a course of groping

in the dark, meant, in his estimation, one and the same thing. Mr. Candy, hitting back smartly, said that Mr Franklin

himself was, constitutionally speaking, groping in the dark after sleep, and that nothing but medicine could help him
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Mr. Murthwaite was so interested in what he heard, that he let his cheroot go out.

I speak to you in confidence; you will oblige me, I am sure, by not forgetting that?

interests of Lady Verinder and her daughter, to tell you something which may possibly put the clue into your hands.

and which I am not very willing to speak of out of our own circle. But, after what you have said, I feel bound, in the

private veering about between the different sides of his character, broke the silence as follows:

no ordinary kind to plead for them, in recovery of their caste, when they return to their own country.

tremendous sacrifice to make. There must be some very serious motive at the bottom of it, and some justification of

their caste--first, in crossing the sea; secondly, in disguising themselves as jugglers. In the land they live in that is a

concealing their feelings. There is a mystery about their conduct that I can't explain. They have doubly sacrificed

Brahmins. I charged them with being disguised, and you saw how it told on them, clever as the Hindoo people are in

bad and clumsy imitation of it. Unless, after long experience, I am utterly mistaken, those men are high-caste

of our family of whom I spoke to you just now. Tell him, if you please, what you have just told me.

Mr. Franklin got on one side of Miss Rachel, and I put myself behind her. If our suspicions were right, there she

stood, innocent of all knowledge of the truth, showing the Indians the Diamond in the bosom of her dress!

I can't tell you what tricks they performed, or how they did it. What with the vexation about the dinner, and what

with the provocation of the rogues coming back just in the nick of time to see the jewel with their own eyes, I own I

lost my head. The first thing that I remember noticing was the sudden appearance on the scene of the Indian

traveller, Mr. Murthwaite. Skirting the half-circle in which the gentlefolks stood or sat, he came quietly behind the

jugglers and spoke to them on a sudden in the language of their own country.

If he had pricked them with a bayonet, I doubt if the Indians could have started and turned on him with a more
tigerish quickness than they did, on hearing the first words that passed his lips. The next moment they were bowing

and salaaming to him in their most polite and snaky way. After a few words in the unknown tongue had passed on

either side, Mr. Murthwaite withdrew as quietly as he had approached. The chief Indian, who acted as interpreter,

thereupon wheeled about again towards the gentlefolks. I noticed that the fellow's coffee-coloured face had turned
grey since Mr. Murthwaite had spoken to him. He bowed to my lady, and informed her that the exhibition was over.
The Bouncers, indescribably disappointed, burst out with a loud "O!" directed against Mr. Murthwaite for stopping

the performance. The chief Indian laid his hand humbly on his breast, and said a second time that the juggling was

over. The little boy went round with the hat. The ladies withdrew to the drawing-room; and the gentlemen

( excepting Mr. Franklin and Mr. Murthwaite) returned to their wine. I and the footman followed the Indians, and

saw them safe off the premises.

Going back by way of the shrubbery, I smelt tobacco, and found Mr. Franklin and Mr. Murthwaite (the latter

smoking a cheroot) walking slowly up and down among the trees. Mr. Franklin beckoned to me to join them.

"This," says Mr. Franklin, presenting me to the great traveller, "is Gabriel Betteredge, the old servant and friend

of our family of whom I spoke to you just now. Tell him, if you please, what you have just told me."

Mr. Murthwaite took his cheroot out of his mouth, and leaned, in his weary way, against the trunk of a tree.

"Mr. Betteredge," he began, "those three Indians are no more jugglers than you and I are."

Here was a new surprise! I naturally asked the traveller if he had ever met with the Indians before.

"Never," says Mr. Murthwaite; "but I know what Indian juggling really is. All you have seen to-night is a very

bad and clumsy imitation of it. Unless, after long experience, I am utterly mistaken, those men are high-caste

Brahmins. I charged them with being disguised, and you saw how it told on them, clever as the Hindoo people are in

concealing their feelings. There is a mystery about their conduct that I can't explain. They have doubly sacrificed

their caste--first, in crossing the sea; secondly, in disguising themselves as jugglers. In the land they live in that is a

tremendous sacrifice to make. There must be some very serious motive at the bottom of it, and some justification of

no ordinary kind to plead for them, in recovery of their caste, when they return to their own country."

I was struck dumb. Mr. Murthwaite went on with his cheroot. Mr. Franklin, after what looked to me like a little

private veering about between the different sides of his character, broke the silence as follows:

"I feel some hesitation, Mr. Murthwaite, in troubling you with family matters, in which you can have no interest

and which I am not very willing to speak of out of our own circle. But, after what you have said, I feel bound, in the

interests of Lady Verinder and her daughter, to tell you something which may possibly put the clue into your hands.

I speak to you in confidence; you will oblige me, I am sure, by not forgetting that?"

With this preface, he told the Indian traveller all that he had told me at the Shivering Sand. Even the immovable

Mr. Murthwaite was so interested in what he heard, that he let his cheroot go out.

"Now," says Mr. Franklin, when he had done, "what does your experience say?"
"My experience," answered the traveller, "says that you have had more narrow escapes of your life, Mr. Franklin Blake, than I have had of mine; and that is saying a great deal."

It was Mr. Franklin's turn to be astonished now. "Is it really as serious as that?" he asked.

"In my opinion it is," answered Mr. Murthwaite. "I can't doubt, after what you have told me, that the restoration of the Moonstone to its place on the forehead of the Indian idol, is the motive and the justification of that sacrifice of caste which I alluded to just now. Those men will wait their opportunity with the patience of cats, and will use it with the ferocity of tigers. How you have escaped them I can't imagine," says the eminent traveller, lighting his cheroot again, and staring hard at Mr. Franklin. "You have been carrying the Diamond backwards and forwards, here and in London, and you are still a living man! Let us try and account for it. It was daylight, both times, I suppose, when you took the jewel out of the bank in London?"

"Broad daylight," says Mr. Franklin.

"And plenty of people in the streets?"

"Plenty."

"You settled, of course, to arrive at Lady Verinder's house at a certain time? It's a lonely country between this and the station. Did you keep your appointment?"

"No. I arrived four hours earlier than my appointment."

"I beg to congratulate you on that proceeding! When did you take the Diamond to the bank at the town here?"

"I took it an hour after I had brought it to this house--and three hours before anybody was prepared for seeing me in these parts."

"I beg to congratulate you again! Did you bring it back here alone?"

"No. I happened to ride back with my cousins and the groom."

"I beg to congratulate you for the third time! If you ever feel inclined to travel beyond the civilised limits, Mr. Blake, let me know, and I will go with you. You are a lucky man."

Here I struck in. This sort of thing didn't at all square with my English ideas. "You don't really mean to say, sir," I asked, "that they would have taken Mr. Franklin's life, to get their Diamond, if he had given them the chance?"

"Do you smoke, Mr. Betteredge?" says the traveller.

"Yes, sir."

"Do you care much for the ashes left in your pipe when you empty it?"

"No, sir."

"In the country those men came from, they care just as much about killing a man, as you care about emptying the ashes out of your pipe. If a thousand lives stood between them and the getting back of their Diamond--and if they thought they could destroy those lives without discovery--they would take them all. The sacrifice of caste is a serious thing in India, if you like. The sacrifice of life is nothing at all."

I expressed my opinion upon this, that they were a set of murdering thieves. Mr. Murthwaite expressed HIS opinion that they were a wonderful people. Mr. Franklin, expressing no opinion at all, brought us back to the matter in hand.

"They have seen the Moonstone on Miss Verinder's dress," he said. "What is to be done?"

"What your uncle threatened to do," answered Mr. Murthwaite. "Colonel Herncastle understood the people he had to deal with. Send the Diamond to-morrow (under guard of more than one man) to be cut up at Amsterdam. Make half a dozen diamonds of it, instead of one. There is an end of its sacred identity as The Moonstone--and there is an end of the conspiracy."

Mr. Franklin turned to me. "There is no help for it," he said. "We must speak to Lady Verinder to-morrow."

"What about to-night, sir?" I asked. "Suppose the Indians come back?"

Mr. Murthwaite answered me before Mr. Franklin could speak.

"The Indians won't risk coming back to-night," he said. "The direct way is hardly ever the way they take to anything--let alone a matter like this, in which the slightest mistake might be fatal to their reaching their end."

"But suppose the rogues are bolder than you think, sir?" I persisted.

"In that case," says Mr. Murthwaite, "let the dogs loose. Have you got any big dogs in the yard?"

"Two, sir. A mastiff and a bloodhound."

"They will do. In the present emergency, Mr. Betteredge, the mastiff and the bloodhound have one great merit--they are not likely to be troubled with your scruples about the sanctity of human life."

The strumming of the piano reached us from the drawing-room, as he fired that shot at me. He threw away his cheroot, and took Mr. Franklin's arm, to go back to the ladies. I noticed that the sky was clouding over fast, as I
followed them to the house. Mr. Murthwaite noticed it too. He looked round at me, in his dry, droning way, and said:

"The Indians will want their umbrellas, Mr. Betteredge, to-night!"

It was all very well for HIM to joke. But I was not an eminent traveller--and my way in this world had not led me into playing ducks and drakes with my own life, among thieves and murderers in the outlandish places of the earth. I went into my own little room, and sat down in my chair in a perspiration, and wondered helplessly what was to be done next. In this anxious frame of mind, other men might have ended by working themselves up into a fever; I ended in a different way. I lit my pipe, and took a turn at ROBINSON CRUSOE.

Before I had been at it five minutes, I came to this amazing bit--page one hundred and sixty-one--as follows:

"Fear of Danger is ten thousand times more terrifying than Danger itself, when apparent to the Eyes; and we find the Burthen of Anxiety greater, by much, than the Evil which we are anxious about."

The man who doesn't believe in ROBINSON CRUSOE, after THAT, is a man with a screw loose in his understanding, or a man lost in the mist of his own self-conceit! Argument is thrown away upon him; and pity is better reserved for some person with a livelier faith.

I was far on with my second pipe, and still lost in admiration of that wonderful book, when Penelope (who had been handing round the tea) came in with her report from the drawing-room. She had left the Bouncers singing a duet--words beginning with a large "O," and music to correspond. She had observed that my lady made mistakes in her game of whist for the first time in our experience of her. She had seen the great traveller asleep in a corner. She had overheard Mr. Franklin sharpening his wits on Mr. Godfrey, at the expense of Ladies' Charities in general; and she had noticed that Mr. Godfrey hit him back again rather more smartly than became a gentleman of his benevolent character. She had detected Miss Rachel, apparently engaged in appeasing Mrs. Threadgall by showing her some photographs, and really occupied in stealing looks at Mr. Franklin, which no intelligent lady's maid could misinterpret for a single instant. Finally, she had missed Mr. Candy, the doctor, who had mysteriously disappeared from the drawing-room, and had then mysteriously returned, and entered into conversation with Mr. Godfrey. Upon the whole, things were prospering better than the experience of the dinner gave us any right to expect. If we could only hold on for another hour, old Father Time would bring up their carriages, and relieve us of them altogether.

Everything wears off in this world; and even the comforting effect of ROBINSON CRUSOE wore off, after Penelope left me. I got fidgety again, and resolved on making a survey of the grounds before the rain came. Instead of taking the footman, whose nose was human, and therefore useless in any emergency, I took the bloodhound with me. HIS nose for a stranger was to be depended on. We went all round the premises, and out into the road--and returned as wise as we went, having discovered no such thing as a lurking human creature anywhere.

The arrival of the carriages was the signal for the arrival of the rain. It poured as if it meant to pour all night. With the exception of the doctor, whose gig was waiting for him, the rest of the company went home snugly, under cover, in close carriages. I told Mr. Candy that I was afraid he would get wet through. He told me, in return, that he wondered I had arrived at my time of life, without knowing that a doctor's skin was waterproof. So he drove away in the rain, laughing over his own little joke; and so we got rid of our dinner company.

The next thing to tell is the story of the night.

CHAPTER XI

When the last of the guests had driven away, I went back into the inner hall and found Samuel at the side-table, presiding over the brandy and soda-water. My lady and Miss Rachel came out of the drawing-room, followed by the two gentlemen. Mr. Godfrey had some brandy and soda-water, Mr. Franklin took nothing. He sat down, looking dead tired; the talking on this birthday occasion had, I suppose, been too much for him.

My lady, turning round to wish them good-night, looked hard at the wicked Colonel's legacy shining in her daughter's dress.

"Rachel," she asked, "where are you going to put your Diamond to-night?"

Miss Rachel was in high good spirits, just in that humour for talking nonsense, and perversely persisting in it as if it was sense, which you may sometimes have observed in young girls, when they are highly wrought up, at the end of an exciting day. First, she declared she didn't know where to put the Diamond. Then she said, "on her dressing-table, of course, along with her other things." Then she remembered that the Diamond might take to shining of itself, with its awful moony light in the dark--and that would terrify her in the dead of night. Then she bethought herself of an Indian cabinet which stood in her sitting-room; and instantly made up her mind to put the Indian diamond in the Indian cabinet, for the purpose of permitting two beautiful native productions to admire each other. Having let her little flow of nonsense run on as far as that point, her mother interposed and stopped her.

"My dear! your Indian cabinet has no lock to it," says my lady.

"Good Heavens, mamma!" cried Miss Rachel, "is this an hotel? Are there thieves in the house?"

Without taking notice of this fantastic way of talking, my lady wished the gentlemen good-night. She next turned
to Miss Rachel, and kissed her. "Why not let ME keep the Diamond for you to-night?" she asked.

Miss Rachel received that proposal as she might, ten years since, have received a proposal to part her from a new doll. My lady saw there was no reasoning with her that night. "Come into my room, Rachel, the first thing tomorrow morning," she said. "I shall have something to say to you." With those last words she left us slowly; thinking her own thoughts, and, to all appearance, not best pleased with the way by which they were leading her.

Miss Rachel was the next to say good-night. She shook hands first with Mr. Godfrey, who was standing at the other end of the hall, looking at a picture. Then she turned back to Mr. Franklin, still sitting weary and silent in a corner.

What words passed between them I can't say. But standing near the old oak frame which holds our large looking-glass, I saw her reflected in it, slyly slipping the locket which Mr. Franklin had given to her, out of the bosom of her dress, and showing it to him for a moment, with a smile which certainly meant something out of the common, before she tripped off to bed. This incident staggered me a little in the reliance I had previously felt on my own judgment. I began to think that Penelope might be right about the state of her young lady's affections, after all.

As soon as Miss Rachel left him eyes to see with, Mr. Franklin noticed me. His variable humour, shifting about everything, had shifted about the Indians already.

"Betteredge," he said, "I'm half inclined to think I took Mr. Murthwaite too seriously, when we had that talk in the shrubbery. I wonder whether he has been trying any of his traveller's tales on us? Do you really mean to let the dogs loose?"

"I'll relieve them of their collars, sir," I answered, "and leave them free to take a turn in the night, if they smell a reason for it."

"All right," says Mr. Franklin. "We'll see what is to be done to-morrow. I am not at all disposed to alarm my aunt, Betteredge, without a very pressing reason for it. Good-night."

He looked so worn and pale as he nodded to me, and took his candle to go up-stairs, that I ventured to advise his having a drop of brandy-and-water, by way of night-cap. Mr. Godfrey, walking towards us from the other end of the hall, backed me. He pressed Mr. Franklin, in the friendliest manner, to take something, before he went to bed.

I only note these trifling circumstances, because, after all I had seen and heard, that day, it pleased me to observe that our two gentlemen were on just as good terms as ever. Their warfare of words (heard by Penelope in the drawing-room), and their rivalry for the best place in Miss Rachel's good graces, seemed to have set no serious difference between them. But there! they were both good-tempered, and both men of the world. And there is certainly this merit in people of station, that they are not nearly so quarrelsome among each other as people of no station at all.

Mr. Franklin declined the brandy-and-water, and went up-stairs with Mr. Godfrey, their rooms being next door to each other. On the landing, however, either his cousin persuaded him, or he veered about and changed his mind as usual. "Perhaps I may want it in the night," he called down to me. "Send up some brandy-and-water into my room."

I sent up Samuel with the brandy-and-water; and then went out and unbuckled the dogs' collars. They both lost their heads with astonishment on being set loose at that time of night, and jumped upon me like a couple of puppies! However, the rain soon cooled them down again: they lapped a drop of water each, and crept back into their kennels.

As I went into the house I noticed signs in the sky which betokened a break in the weather for the better. For the present, it still poured heavily, and the ground was in a perfect sop.

Mr. Franklin, and I went all over the house, and shut up as usual. I examined everything myself, and trusted nothing to my deputy on this occasion. All was safe and fast when I rested my old bones in bed, between midnight and one in the morning.

The worries of the day had been a little too much for me, I suppose. At any rate, I had a touch of Mr. Franklin's malady that night. It was sunrise before I fell off at last into a sleep. All the time I lay awake the house was as quiet as the grave. Not a sound stirred but the splash of the rain, and the sighing of the wind among the trees as a breeze sprang up with the morning.

About half-past seven I woke, and opened my window on a fine sunshiny day. The clock had struck eight, and I was just going out to chain up the dogs again, when I heard a sudden whisking of petticoats on the stairs behind me.

I turned about, and there was Penelope flying down after me like mad. "Father!" she screamed, "come up-stairs, for God's sake! THE DIAMOND IS GONE!" "Are you out of your mind?" I asked her.

"Gone!" says Penelope. "Gone, nobody knows how! Come up and see."

She dragged me after her into our young lady's sitting-room, which opened into her bedroom. There, on the threshold of her bedroom door, stood Miss Rachel, almost as white in the face as the white dressing-gown that clothed her. There also stood the two doors of the Indian cabinet, wide open. One, of the drawers inside was pulled out as far as it would go.

"Look!" says Penelope. "I myself saw Miss Rachel put the Diamond into that drawer last night." I went to the
was with no small difficulty I brought them to reason, and chained them up again. The more I turned it over in my mind, the more it seemed, the more I pressed the point, the more implacable grew the dogs' determination. I have seen them come galloping at me round a corner, rolling each other over on the wet grass, in such lively health and spirits that it was with no small difficulty I brought them to reason, and chained them up again. The more I turned it over in my mind, the more implacable grew the dogs' determination.

Mr. Godfrey was the first to come out of his room. All he did when he heard what had happened was to hold up his hands in a state of bewilderment, which didn't say much for his natural strength of mind. Mr. Franklin, whose clear head I had confidently counted on to advise us, seemed to be as helpless as his cousin when he heard the news in his turn. For a wonder, he had had a good night's rest at last; and the unaccustomed luxury of sleep had, as he said himself, apparently stupefied him. However, when he had swallowed his cup of coffee—which he always took, on the foreign plan, some hours before he ate any breakfast—his brains brightened; the clear-headed side of him turned up, and he took the matter in hand, resolutely and cleverly, much as follows:

He first sent for the servants, and told them to leave all the lower doors and windows (with the exception of the front door, which I had opened) exactly as they had been left when we locked up over night. He next proposed to his cousin and to me to make quite sure, before we took any further steps, that the Diamond had not accidentally dropped somewhere out of sight—say at the back of the cabinet, or down behind the table on which the cabinet stood. Having searched in both places, and found nothing—having also questioned Penelope, and discovered from her no more than the little she had already told me—Mr. Franklin suggested next extending our inquiries to Miss Rachel, and sent Penelope to knock at her bed-room door.

My lady answered the knock, and closed the door behind her. The moment after we heard it locked inside by Miss Rachel. My mistress came out among us, looking sorely puzzled and distressed. "The loss of the Diamond seems to have quite overwhelmed Rachel," she said, in reply to Mr. Franklin. "She shrinks, in the strangest manner, from speaking of it, even to ME. It is impossible you can see her for the present." Having added to our perplexities by this account of Miss Rachel, my lady, after a little effort, recovered her usual composure, and acted with her usual decision.

"I suppose there is no help for it?" she said, quietly. "I suppose I have no alternative but to send for the police?"

"And the first thing for the police to do," added Mr. Franklin, catching her up, "is to lay hands on the Indian jugglers who performed here last night."

My lady and Mr. Godfrey (not knowing what Mr. Franklin and I knew) both started, and both looked surprised.

"I can't stop to explain myself now," Mr. Franklin went on. "I can only tell you that the Indians have certainly stolen the Diamond. Give me a letter of introduction," says he, addressing my lady, "to one of the magistrates at Frizinghall—merely telling him that I represent your interests and wishes, and let me ride off with it instantly. Our chance of catching the thieves may depend on our not wasting one unnecessary minute." (Nota bene: Whether it was the French side or the English, the right side of Mr. Franklin seemed to be uppermost now. The only question was, How long would it last?)

He put pen, ink, and paper before his aunt, who (as it appeared to me) wrote the letter he wanted a little unwillingly. If it had been possible to overlook such an event as the loss of a jewel worth twenty thousand pounds, I believe—-with my lady's opinion of her late brother, and her distrust of his birthday-gift—it would have been privately a relief to her to let the thieves get off with the Moonstone scot free.

I went out with Mr. Franklin to the stables, and took the opportunity of asking him how the Indians (whom I suspected, of course, as shrewdly as he did) could possibly have got into the house.

"One of them might have slipped into the hall, in the confusion, when the dinner company were going away," says Mr. Franklin. "The fellow may have been under the sofa while my aunt and Rachel were talking about where the Diamond was to be put for the night. He would only have to wait till the house was quiet, and there it would be in the cabinet, to be had for the taking." With those words, he called to the groom to open the gate, and galloped off.

This seemed certainly to be the only rational explanation. But how had the thief contrived to make his escape from the house? I had found the front door locked and bolted, as I had left it at night, when I went to open it, after getting up. As for the other doors and windows, there they were still, all safe and fast, to speak for themselves. The dogs, too? Suppose the thief had got away by dropping from one of the upper windows, how had he escaped the dogs? Had he come provided for them with drugged meat? As the doubt crossed my mind, the dogs themselves came galloping at me round a corner, rolling each other over on the wet grass, in such lively health and spirits that it was with no small difficulty I brought them to reason, and chained them up again. The more I turned it over in my
mind, the less satisfactory Mr. Franklin's explanation appeared to be.

We had our breakfasts--whatever happens in a house, robbery or murder, it doesn't matter, you must have your breakfast. When we had done, my lady sent for me; and I found myself compelled to tell her all that I had hitherto concealed, relating to the Indians and their plot. Being a woman of a high courage, she soon got over the first startling effect of what I had to communicate. Her mind seemed to be far more perturbed about her daughter than about the heathen rogues and their conspiracy. "You know how odd Rachel is, and how differently she behaves sometimes from other girls," my lady said to me. "But I have never, in all my experience, seen her so strange and so reserved as she is now. The loss of her jewel seems almost to have turned her brain. Who would have thought that horrible Diamond could have laid such a hold on her in so short a time?"

It was certainly strange. Taking toys and trinkets in general, Miss Rachel was nothing like so mad after them as most young girls. Yet there she was, still locked up insconsolably in her bedroom. It is but fair to add that she was not the only one of us in the house who was thrown out of the regular groove. Mr. Godfrey, for instance--though professionally a sort of consoler-general--seemed to be at a loss where to look for his own resources. Having no company to amuse him, and getting no chance of trying what his experience of women in distress could do towards comforting Miss Rachel, he wandered hither and thither about the house and gardens in an aimless uneasy way. He was in two different minds about what it became him to do, after the misfortune that had happened to us. Ought he to relieve the family, in their present situation, of the responsibility of him as a guest, or ought he to stay on the chance that even his humble services might be of some use? He decided ultimately that the last course was perhaps the most customary and considerate course to take, in such a very peculiar case of family distress as this was. Circumstances try the metal a man is really made of. Mr. Godfrey, tried by circumstances, showed himself of weaker metal than I had thought him to be. As for the women-servants excepting Rosanna Spearman, who kept by herself--they took to whispering together in corners, and staring at nothing suspiciously, as is the manner of that weaker half of the human family, when anything extraordinary happens in a house. I myself acknowledge to have been fidgety and ill-tempered. The cursed Moonstone had turned us all upside down.

A little before eleven Mr. Franklin came back. The resolute side of him had, to all appearance, given way, in the interval since his departure, under the stress that had been laid on it. He had left us at a gallop; he came back to us at a walk. When he went away, he was made of iron. When he returned, he was stuffed with cotton, as limp as limp could be.

"Well," says my lady, "are the police coming?"

"Yes," says Mr. Franklin; "they said they would follow me in a fly. Superintendent Seegrave, of your local police force, and two of his men. A mere form! The case is hopeless."

"What! have the Indians escaped, sir?" I asked.

"The poor ill-used Indians have been most unjustly put in prison," says Mr. Franklin. "They are as innocent as the babe unborn. My idea that one of them was hidden in the house has ended, like all the rest of my ideas, in smoke. It's been proved," says Mr. Franklin, dwelling with great relish on his own incapacity, "to be simply impossible."

After astonishing us by announcing this totally new turn in the matter of the Moonstone, our young gentleman, at his aunt's request, took a seat, and explained himself.

It appeared that the resolute side of him had held out as far as Frizinghall. He had put the whole case plainly before the magistrate, and the magistrate had at once sent for the police. The first inquiries instituted about the Indians showed that they had not so much as attempted to leave the town. Further questions addressed to the police, proved that all three had been seen returning to Frizinghall with their boy, on the previous night between ten and eleven--which (regard being had to hours and distances) also proved that they had walked straight back after performing on our terrace. Later still, at midnight, the police, having occasion to search the common lodging-house where they lived, had seen them all three again, and their little boy with them, as usual. Soon after midnight I myself had safely shut up the house. Plainer evidence than this, in favour of the Indians, there could not well be. The magistrate said there was not even a case of suspicion against them so far. But, as it was just possible, when the police came to investigate the matter, that discoveries affecting the jugglers might be made, he would contrive, by committing them as rogues and vagabonds, to keep them at our disposal, under lock and key, for a week. They had ignorantly done something (I forget what) in the town, which barely brought them within the operation of the law. Every human institution (justice included) will stretch a little, if you only pull it the right way. The worthy magistrate was an old friend of my lady's, and the Indians were "committed" for a week, as soon as the court opened that morning.

Such was Mr. Franklin's narrative of events at Frizinghall. The Indian clue to the mystery of the lost jewel was now, to all appearance, a clue that had broken in our hands. If the jugglers were innocent, who, in the name of wonder, had taken the Moonstone out of Miss Rachel's drawer?
Ten minutes later, to our infinite relief; Superintendent Seegrave arrived at the house. He reported passing Mr. Franklin on the terrace, sitting in the sun (I suppose with the Italian side of him uppermost), and warning the police, as they went by, that the investigation was hopeless, before the investigation had begun.

For a family in our situation, the Superintendent of the Frizinghall police was the most comforting officer you could wish to see. Mr. Seegrave was tall and portly, and military in his manners. He had a fine commanding voice, and a mighty resolve eye, and a grand frock-coat which buttoned beautifully up to his leather stock. "I'm the man you want!" was written all over his face; and he ordered his two inferior police men about with a severity which convinced us all that there was no trifling with HIM.

He began by going round the premises, outside and in; the result of that investigation proving to him that no thieves had broken in upon us from outside, and that the robbery, consequently, must have been committed by some person in the house. I leave you to imagine the state the servants were in when this official announcement first reached their ears. The Superintendent decided to begin by examining the boudoir, and, that done, to examine the servants next. At the same time, he posted one of his men on the staircase which led to the servants' bedrooms, with instructions to let nobody in the house pass him, till further orders.

At this latter proceeding, the weaker half of the human family went distracted on the spot. They bounced out of their comers, whisked up-stairs in a body to Miss Rachel's room (Rosanna Spearman being carried away among them this time), burst in on Superintendent Seegrave, and, all looking equally guilty, summoned him to say which of them he suspected, at once.

Mr. Superintendent proved equal to the occasion; he looked at them with his resolute eye, and he cowed them with his military voice.

"Now, then, you women, go down-stairs again, every one of you; I won't have you here. Look!" says Mr. Superintendent, suddenly pointing to a little smear of the decorative painting on Miss Rachel's door, at the outer edge, just under the lock. "Look what mischief the petticoats of some of you have done already. Clear out! clear out!" Rosanna Spearman, who was nearest to him, and nearest to the little smear on the door, set the example of obedience, and slipped off instantly to her work. The rest followed her out. The Superintendent finished his examination of the room, and, making nothing of it, asked me who had first discovered the robbery. My daughter had first discovered it. My daughter was sent for.

Mr. Superintendent proved to be a little too sharp with Penelope at starting. "Now, young woman, attend to me, and mind you speak the truth." Penelope fired up instantly. "I've never been taught to tell lies Mr. Policeman!--and if father can stand there and hear me accused of falsehood and thieving, and my own bed-room shut against me, and my character taken away, which is all a poor girl has left, he's not the good father I take him for!" A timely word from me put Justice and Penelope on a pleasanter footing together. The questions and answers went swimmingly, and ended in nothing worth mentioning. My daughter had seen Miss Rachel put the Diamond in the drawer of the cabinet the last thing at night. She had gone in with Miss Rachel's cup of tea at eight the next morning, and had found the drawer open and empty. Upon that, she had alarmed the house--and there was an end of Penelope's evidence.

Mr. Superintendent next asked to see Miss Rachel herself. Penelope mentioned his request through the door. The answer reached us by the same road: "I have nothing to tell the policeman--I can't see anybody." Our experienced officer looked equally surprised and offended when he heard that reply. I told him my young lady was ill, and begged him to wait a little and see her later. We thereupon went downstairs again, and were met by Mr. Godfrey and Mr. Franklin crossing the hall.

The two gentlemen, being inmates of the house, were summoned to say if they could throw any light on the matter. Neither of them knew anything about it. Had they heard any suspicious noises during the previous night? They had heard nothing but the pattering of the rain. Had I, lying awake longer than either of them, heard nothing either? Nothing! Released from examination, Mr. Franklin, still sticking to the helpless view of our difficulty, whispered to me: "That man will be of no earthly use to us. Superintendent Seegrave is an ass." Released in his turn, Mr. Godfrey whispered to me--"Evidently a most competent person. Betteredge, I have the greatest faith in him!" Many men, many opinions, as one of the ancients said, before my time.

Mr. Superintendent's next proceeding took him back to the "boudoir" again, with my daughter and me at his heels. His object was to discover whether any of the furniture had been moved, during the night, out of its customary place--his previous investigation in the room having, apparently, not gone quite far enough to satisfy his mind on this point.

While we were still poking about among the chairs and tables, the door of the bed-room was suddenly opened. After having denied herself to everybody, Miss Rachel, to our astonishment, walked into the midst of us of her own accord. She took up her garden hat from a chair, and then went straight to Penelope with this question:--

"Mr. Franklin Blake sent you with a message to me this morning?"
"Yes, miss."
"He wished to speak to me, didn't he?"
"Yes, miss."
"Where is he now?"

Hearing voices on the terrace below, I looked out of window, and saw the two gentlemen walking up and down together. Answering for my daughter, I said, "Mr. Franklin is on the terrace, miss."

Without another word, without heeding Mr. Superintendent, who tried to speak to her, pale as death, and wrapped up strangely in her own thoughts, she left the room, and went down to her cousins on the terrace.

It showed a want of due respect, it showed a breach of good manners, on my part, but, for the life of me, I couldn't help looking out of window when Miss Rachel met the gentlemen outside. She went up to Mr. Franklin without appearing to notice Mr. Godfrey, who thereupon drew back and left them by themselves. What she said to Mr. Franklin appeared to be spoken vehemently. It lasted but for a short time, and, judging by what I saw of his face from the window, seemed to astonish him beyond all power of expression. While they were still together, my lady appeared on the terrace. Miss Rachel saw her--said a few last words to Mr. Franklin--and suddenly went back into the house again, before her mother came up with her. My lady surprised herself, and noticing Mr. Franklin's surprise, spoke to him. Mr. Godfrey joined them, and spoke also. Mr. Franklin walked away a little between the two, telling them what had happened I suppose, for they both stopped short, after taking a few steps, like persons struck with amazement. I had just seen as much as this, when the door of the sitting-room was opened violently. Miss Rachel walked swiftly through to her bed-room, wild and angry, with fierce eyes and flaming cheeks. Mr. Superintendent once more attempted to question her. She turned round on him at her bed-room door. "I have not sent for you!" she cried out vehemently. "I don't want you. My Diamond is lost. Neither you nor anybody else will ever find it!" With those words she went in, and locked the door in our faces. Penelope, standing nearest to it, heard her burst out crying the moment she was alone again.

In a rage, one moment; in tears, the next! What did it mean?

I told the Superintendent it meant that Miss Rachel's temper was upset by the loss of her jewel. Being anxious for the honour of the family, it distressed me to see my young lady forget herself--even with a police-officer--and I made the best excuse I could, accordingly. In my own private mind I was more puzzled by Miss Rachel's extraordinary language and conduct than words can tell. Taking what she had said at her bed-room door as a guide to guess by, I could only conclude that she was mortally offended by our sending for the police, and that Mr. Franklin's astonishment on the terrace was caused by her having expressed herself to him (as the person chiefly instrumental in fetching the police) to that effect. If this guess was right, why--having lost her Diamond--should she object to the presence in the house of the very people whose business it was to recover it for her? And how, in Heaven's name, could SHE know that the Moonstone would never be found again?

As things stood, at present, no answer to those questions was to be hoped for from anybody in the house. Mr. Franklin appeared to think it a point of honour to forbear repeating to a servant--even to so old a servant as I was--what Miss Rachel had said to him on the terrace. Mr. Godfrey, who, as a gentleman and a relative, had been probably admitted into Mr. Franklin's confidence, respected that confidence as he was bound to do. My lady, who was also in the secret no doubt, and who alone had access to Miss Rachel, owned openly that she could make nothing of her. "You madden me when you talk of the Diamond!" All her mother's influence failed to extract from her a word more than that.

Here we were, then, at a dead-lock about Miss Rachel--and at a dead-lock about the Moonstone. In the first case, my lady was powerless to help us. In the second (as you shall presently judge), Mr. Seegrave was fast approaching the condition of a superintendent at his wits' end.

Having ferreted about all over the "boudoir," without making any discoveries among the furniture, our experienced officer applied to me to know, whether the servants in general were or were not acquainted with the place in which the Diamond had been put for the night.

"I knew where it was put, sir," I said, "to begin with. Samuel, the footman, knew also--for he was present in the hall, when they were talking about where the Diamond was to be kept that night. My daughter knew, as she has already told you. She or Samuel may have mentioned the thing to the other servants--or the other servants may have heard the talk for themselves, through the side-door of the hall, which might have been open to the back staircase. For all I can tell, everybody in the house may have known where the jewel was, last night."

My answer presenting rather a wide field for Mr. Superintendent's suspicions to range over, he tried to narrow it by asking about the servants' characters next.

I thought directly of Rosanna Spearman. But it was neither my place nor my wish to direct suspicion against a poor girl, whose honesty had been above all doubt as long as I had known her. The matron at the Reformatory had reported her to my lady as a sincerely penitent and thoroughly trustworthy girl. It was the Superintendent's business
to discover reason for suspecting her first--and then, and not till then, it would be my duty to tell him how she came into my lady's service. "All our people have excellent characters," I said. "And all have deserved the trust their mistress has placed in them." After that, there was but one thing left for Mr. Seegrave to do--namely, to set to work, and tackle the servants' characters himself.

One after another, they were examined. One after another, they proved to have nothing to say--and said it (so far as the women were concerned) at great length, and with a very angry sense of the embargo laid on their bed-rooms. The rest of them being sent back to their places downstairs, Penelope was then summoned, and examined separately a second time.

My daughter's little outbreak of temper in the "boudoir," and her readiness to think herself suspected, appeared to have produced an unfavourable impression on Superintendent Seegrave. It seemed also to dwell a little on his mind, that she had been the last person who saw the Diamond at night. When the second questioning was over, my girl came back to me in a frenzy. There was no doubt of it any longer--the police-officer had almost as good as told her she was the thief! I could scarcely believe him (taking Mr. Franklin's view) to be quite such an ass as that. But, though he said nothing, the eye with which he looked at my daughter was not a very pleasant eye to see. I laughed it off with poor Penelope, as something too ridiculous to be treated seriously--which it certainly was. Secretly, I am afraid I was foolish enough to be angry too. It was a little trying--it was, indeed. My girl sat down in a corner, with her apron over her head, quite broken-hearted. Foolish of her, you will say. She might have waited till he openly accused her. Well, being a man of just an equal temper, I admit that. Still Mr. Superintendent might have remembered--never mind what he might have remembered. The devil take him!

The next and last step in the investigation brought matters, as they say, to a crisis. The officer had an interview (at which I was present) with my lady. After informing her that the Diamond must have been taken by somebody in the house, he requested permission for himself and his men to search the servants' rooms and boxes on the spot. My good mistress, like the generous high-bred woman she was, refused to let us be treated like thieves. "I will never consent to make such a return as that," she said, "for all I owe to the faithful servants who are employed in my house."

Mr. Superintendent made his bow, with a look in my direction, which said plainly, "Why employ me, if you are to tie my hands in this way?" As head of the servants, I felt directly that we were bound, in justice to all parties, not to profit by our mistress's generosity. "We gratefully thank your ladyship," I said; "but we ask your permission to do what is right in this matter by giving up our keys. When Gabriel Betteredge sets the example," says I, stopping Superintendent Seegrave at the door, "the rest of the servants will follow, I promise you. There are my keys, to begin with!" My lady took me by the hand, and thanked me with the tears in her eyes. Lord! what would I not have given, at that moment, for the privilege of knocking Superintendent Seegrave down!

As I had promised for them, the other servants followed my lead, sorely against the grain, of course, but all taking the view that I took. The women were a sight to see, while the police-officers were rummaging among their things. The cook looked as if she could grill Mr. Superintendent alive on a furnace, and the other women looked as if they could eat him when he was done.

The search over, and no Diamond or sign of a Diamond being found, of course, anywhere, Superintendent Seegrave retired to my little room to consider with himself what he was to do next. He and his men had now been hours in the house, and had not advanced us one inch towards a discovery of how the Moonstone had been taken, or of whom we were to suspect as the thief.

While the police-officer was still pondering in solitude, I was sent for to see Mr. Franklin in the library. To my unutterable astonishment, just as my hand was on the door, it was suddenly opened from the inside, and out walked Rosanna Spearman!

After the library had been swept and cleaned in the morning, neither first nor second housemaid had any business in that room at any later period of the day. I stopped Rosanna Spearman, and charged her with a breach of domestic discipline on the spot.

"What might you want in the library at this time of day?" I inquired.

"Mr. Franklin Blake dropped one of his rings up-stairs," says Rosanna; "and I have been into the library to give it to him." The girl's face was all in a flush as she made me that answer; and she walked away with a toss of her head and a look of self-importance which I was quite at a loss to account for. The proceedings in the house had doubtless upset all the women-servants more or less; but none of them had gone clean out of their natural characters, as Rosanna, to all appearance, had now gone out of hers.

I found Mr. Franklin writing at the library-table. He asked for a conveyance to the railway station the moment I entered the room. The first sound of his voice informed me that we now had the resolute side of him uppermost once more. The man made of cotton had disappeared; and the man made of iron sat before me again.

"Going to London, sir?" I asked.
"Going to telegraph to London," says Mr. Franklin. "I have convinced my aunt that we must have a cleverer head than Superintendent Seegrave's to help us; and I have got her permission to despatch a telegram to my father. He knows the Chief Commissioner of Police, and the Commissioner can lay his hand on the right man to solve the mystery of the Diamond. Talking of mysteries, by-the-bye," says Mr. Franklin, dropping his voice, "I have another word to say to you before you go to the stables. Don't breathe a word of it to anybody as yet; but either Rosanna Spearman's head is not quite right, or I am afraid she knows more about the Moonstone than she ought to know."

I can hardly tell whether I was more startled or distressed at hearing him say that. If I had been younger, I might have confessed as much to Mr. Franklin. But when you are old, you acquire one excellent habit. In cases where you don't see your way clearly, you hold your tongue.

"She came in here with a ring I dropped in my bed-room," Mr. Franklin went on. "When I had thanked her, of course I expected her to go. Instead of that, she stood opposite to me at the table, looking at me in the oddest manner--half frightened, and half familiar--I couldn't make it out. 'This is a strange thing about the Diamond, sir,' she said, in a curiously sudden, headlong way. I said, 'Yes, it was,' and wondered what was coming next. Upon my honour, Betteredge, I think she must be wrong in the head! She said, 'They will never find the Diamond, sir, will they? No! nor the person who took it--I'll answer for that.' She actually nodded and smiled at me! Before I could ask her what she meant, we heard your step outside. I suppose she was afraid of your catching her here. At any rate, she changed colour, and left the room. What on earth does it mean?"

I could not bring myself to tell him the girl's story, even then. It would have been almost as good as telling him that she was the thief. Besides, even if I had made a clean breast of it, and even supposing she was the thief, the reason why she should let out her secret to Mr. Franklin, of all the people in the world, would have been still as far to seek as ever.

"I can't bear the idea of getting the poor girl into a scrape, merely because she has a flighty way with her, and talks very strangely," Mr. Franklin went on. "And yet if she had said to, the Superintendent what she said to me, fool as he is, I'm afraid---" He stopped there, and left the rest unspoken.

"The best way, sir," I said, "will be for me to say two words privately to my mistress about it at the first opportunity. My lady has a very friendly interest in Rosanna; and the girl may only have been forward and foolish, after all. When there's a mess of any kind in a house, sir, the women-servants like to look at the gloomy side--it gives the poor wretches a kind of importance in their own eyes. If there's anybody ill, trust the women for prophesying that the person will die. If it's a jewel lost, trust them for prophesying that it will never be found again."

This view (which I am bound to say, I thought a probable view myself, on reflection) seemed to relieve Mr. Franklin mightily: he folded up his telegram, and dismissed the subject. On my way to the stables, to order the pony-chaise, I looked in at the servants' hall, where they were at dinner. Rosanna Spearman was not among them. On inquiry, I found that she had been suddenly taken ill, and had gone up-stairs to her own room to lie down.

"Curious! She looked well enough when I saw her last," I remarked.

Penelope followed me out. "Don't talk in that way before the rest of them, father," she said. "You only make them harder on Rosanna than ever. The poor thing is breaking her heart about Mr. Franklin Blake."

Here was another view of the girl's conduct. If it was possible for Penelope to be right, the explanation of Rosanna's strange language and behaviour might have been all in this--that she didn't care what she said, so long as she could surprise Mr. Franklin into speaking to her. Granting that to be the right reading of the riddle, it accounted, perhaps, for her flighty, self-conceited manner when she passed me in the hall. Though he had only said three words, still she had carried her point, and Mr. Franklin had spoken to her.

I saw the pony harnessed myself. In the infernal network of mysteries and uncertainties that now surrounded us, I declare it was a relief to observe how well the buckles and straps understood each other! When you had seen the pony backed into the shafts of the chaise, you had seen something there was no doubt about. And that, let me tell you, was becoming a treat of the rarest kind in our household.

Going round with the chaise to the front door, I found not only Mr. Franklin, but Mr. Godfrey and Superintendent Seegrave also waiting for me on the steps.

Mr. Superintendent's reflections (after failing to find the Diamond in the servants' rooms or boxes) had led him, it appeared, to an entirely new conclusion. Still sticking to his first text, namely, that somebody in the house had stolen the jewel, our experienced officer was now of the opinion that the thief (he was wise enough not to name poor Penelope, whatever he might privately think of her!) had been acting in concert with the Indians; and he accordingly proposed shifting his inquiries to the jugglers in the prison at Frizinghall. Hearing of this new move, Mr. Franklin had volunteered to take the Superintendent back to the town, from which he could telegraph to London as easily as from our station. Mr. Godfrey, still devoutly believing in Mr. Seegrave, and greatly interested in witnessing the examination of the Indians, had begged leave to accompany the officer to Frizinghall. One of the two inferior policemen was to be left at the house, in case anything happened. The other was to go back with the Superintendent
to the town. So the four places in the pony-chaise were just filled.

Before he took the reins to drive off, Mr. Franklin walked me away a few steps out of hearing of the others.

"I will wait to telegraph to London," he said, "till I see what comes of our examination of the Indians. My own conviction is, that this muddle-headed local police-officer is as much in the dark as ever, and is simply trying to gain time. The idea of any of the servants being in league with the Indians is a preposterous absurdity, in my opinion. Keep about the house, Betteredge, till I come back, and try what you can make of Rosanna Spearman. I don't ask you to do anything degrading to your own self-respect, or anything cruel towards the girl. I only ask you to exercise your observation more carefully than usual. We will make as light of it as we can before my aunt--but this is a more important matter than you may suppose."

"It is a matter of twenty thousand pounds, sir," I said, thinking of the value of the Diamond.

"It's a matter of quieting Rachel's mind," answered Mr. Franklin gravely. "I am very uneasy about her."

He left me suddenly; as if he desired to cut short any further talk between us. I thought I understood why. Further talk might have let me into the secret of what Miss Rachel had said to him on the terrace.

So they drove away to Frizinghall. I was ready enough, in the girl's own interest, to have a little talk with Rosanna in private. But the needful opportunity failed to present itself. She only came downstairs again at tea-time. When she did appear, she was flighty and excited, had what they call an hysterical attack, took a dose of sal-volatile by my lady's order, and was sent back to her bed.

The day wore on to its end drearily and miserably enough, I can tell you. Miss Rachel still kept her room, declaring that she was too ill to come down to dinner that day. My lady was in such low spirits about her daughter, that I could not bring myself to make her additionally anxious, by reporting what Rosanna Spearman had said to Mr. Franklin. Penelope persisted in believing that she was to be forthwith tried, sentenced, and transported for theft. The other women took to their Bibles and hymn-books, and looked as sour as verjuice over their reading--a result, which I have observed, in my sphere of life, to follow generally on the performance of acts of piety at unaccustomed periods of the day. As for me, I hadn't even heart enough to open my ROBINSON CRUSOE. I went out into the yard, and, being hard up for a little cheerful society, set my chair by the kennels, and talked to the dogs.

Half an hour before dinner-time, the two gentlemen came back from Frizinghall, having arranged with Superintendent Seegrave that he was to return to us the next day. They had called on Mr. Murchwaite, the Indian traveller, at his present residence, near the town. At Mr. Franklin's request, he had kindly given them the benefit of his knowledge of the language, in dealing with those two, out of the three Indians, who knew nothing of English. The examination, conducted carefully, and at great length, had ended in nothing; not the shadow of a reason being discovered for suspecting the jugglers of having tampered with any of our servants. On reaching that conclusion, Mr. Franklin had sent his telegraphic message to London, and there the matter now rested till to-morrow came.

So much for the history of the day that followed the birthday. Not a glimmer of light had broken in on us, so far. A day or two after, however, the darkness lifted a little. How, and with what result, you shall presently see.

CHAPTER XII

The Thursday night passed, and nothing happened. With the Friday morning came two pieces of news.

Item the first: the baker's man declared he had met Rosanna Spearman, on the previous afternoon, with a thick veil on, walking towards Frizinghall by the foot-path way over the moor. It seemed strange that anybody should be mistaken about Rosanna, whose shoulder marked her out pretty plainly, poor thing--but mistaken the man must have been; for Rosanna, as you know, had been all the Thursday afternoon ill up-stairs in her room.

Item the second came through the postman. Worthy Mr. Candy had said one more of his many unlucky things, when he drove off in the rain on the birthday night, and told me that a doctor's skin was waterproof. In spite of his skin, the wet had got through him. He had caught a chill that night, and was now down with a fever. The last accounts, brought by the postman, represented him to be light-headed--talking nonsense as glibly, poor man, in his delirium as he often talked it in his sober senses. We were all sorry for the little doctor; but Mr. Franklin appeared to regret his illness, chiefly on Miss Rachel's account. From what he said to my lady, while I was in the room at breakfast-time, he appeared to think that Miss Rachel--if the suspense about the Moonstone was not soon set at rest--might stand in urgent need of the best medical advice at our disposal.

Breakfast had not been over long, when a telegram from Mr. Blake, the elder, arrived, in answer to his son. It informed us that he had laid hands (by help of his friend, the Commissioner) on the right man to help us. The name of him was Sergeant Cuff; and the arrival of him from London might be expected by the morning train.

At reading the name of the new police-officer, Mr. Franklin gave a start. It seems that he had heard some curious anecdotes about Sergeant Cuff, from his father's lawyer, during his stay in London.

"I begin to hope we are seeing the end of our anxieties already," he said. "If half the stories I have heard are true, when it comes to unravelling a mystery, there isn't the equal in England of Sergeant Cuff!"

We all got excited and impatient as the time drew near for the appearance of this renowned and capable
character. Superintendent Seegrave, returning to us at his appointed time, and hearing that the Sergeant was expected, instantly shut himself up in a room, with pen, ink, and paper, to make notes of the Report which would be certainly expected from him. I should have liked to have gone to the station myself, to fetch the Sergeant. But my lady's carriage and horses were not to be thought of, even for the celebrated Cuff; and the pony-chaise was required later for Mr. Godfrey. He deeply regretted being obliged to leave his aunt at such an anxious time; and he kindly put off the hour of his departure till as late as the last train, for the purpose of hearing what the clever London police-officer thought of the case. But on Friday night he must be in town, having a Ladies' Charity, in difficulties, waiting to consult him on Saturday morning.

When the time came for the Sergeant's arrival, I went down to the gate to look out for him.

A fly from the railway drove up as I reached the lodge; and out got a grizzled, elderly man, so miserably lean that he looked as if he had not got an ounce of flesh on his bones in any part of him. He was dressed all in decent black, with a white cravat round his neck. His face was as sharp as a hatchet, and the skin of it was as yellow and dry and withered as an autumn leaf. His eyes, of a steely light grey, had a very disconcerting trick, when they encountered your eyes, of looking as if they expected something more from you than you were aware of yourself. His walk was soft; his voice was melancholy; his long lanky fingers were hooked like claws. He might have been a parson, or an undertaker--or anything else you like, except what he really was. A more complete opposite to Superintendent Seegrave than Sergeant Cuff, and a less comforting officer to look at, for a family in distress, I defy you to discover, search where you may.

"Is this Lady Verinder's?" he asked.
"Yes, sir."
"I am Sergeant Cuff."
"This way, sir, if you please."

On our road to the house, I mentioned my name and position in the family, to satisfy him that he might speak to me about the business on which my lady was to employ him. Not a word did he say about the business, however, for all that. He admired the grounds, and remarked that he felt the sea air very brisk and refreshing. I privately wondered, on my side, how the celebrated Cuff had got his reputation. We reached the house, in the temper of two strange dogs, coupled up together for the first time in their lives by the same chain.

Asking for my lady, and hearing that she was in one of the conservatories, we went round to the gardens at the back, and sent a servant to seek her. While we were waiting, Sergeant Cuff looked through the evergreen arch on our left, spied out our rosery, and walked straight in, with the first appearance of anything like interest that he had shown yet. To the gardener's astonishment, and to my disgust, this celebrated policeman proved to be quite a mine of learning on the trumpery subject of rose-gardens.

"Ah, you've got the right exposure here to the south and sou'-west," says the Sergeant, with a wag of his grizzled head, and a streak of pleasure in his melancholy voice. "This is the shape for a rosery--nothing like a circle set in a square. Yes, yes; with walks between all the beds. But they oughtn't to be gravel walks like these. Grass, Mr. Gardener--grass walks between your roses; gravel's too hard for them. That's a sweet pretty bed of white roses and blush roses. They always mix well together, don't they? Here's the white musk rose, Mr. Betteredge--our old English rose holding up its head along with the best and the newest of them. Pretty dear!" says the Sergeant, fondling the Musk Rose with his lanky fingers, and speaking to it as if he was speaking to a child.

This was a nice sort of man to recover Miss Rachel's Diamond, and to find out the thief who stole it!

"You seem to be fond of roses, Sergeant?" I remarked.
"I haven't much time to be fond of anything," says Sergeant Cuff. "But when I _have_ a moment's fondness to bestow, most times, Mr. Betteredge, the roses get it. I began my life among them in my father's nursery garden, and I shall end my life among them, if I can. Yes. One of these days (please God) I shall retire from catching thieves, and try my hand at growing roses. There will be grass walks, Mr. Gardener, between my beds," says the Sergeant, on whose mind the gravel paths of our rosery seemed to dwell unpleasantly.

"It seems an odd taste, sir," I ventured to say, "for a man in your line of life."

"If you will look about you (which most people won't do)," says Sergeant Cuff, "you will see that the nature of a man's tastes is, most times, as opposite as possible to the nature of a man's business. Show me any two things more opposite one from the other than a rose and a thief; and I'll correct my tastes accordingly--if it isn't too late at my time of life. You find the damask rose a goodish stock for most of the tender sorts, don't you, Mr. Gardener? Ah! I thought so. Here's a lady coming. Is it Lady Verinder?"

He had seen her before either I or the gardener had seen her, though we knew which way to look, and he didn't. I began to think him rather a quicker man than he appeared to be at first sight.

The Sergeant's appearance, or the Sergeant's errand--one or both--seemed to cause my lady some little embarrassment. She was, for the first time in all my experience of her, at a loss what to say at an interview with a
stranger. Sergeant Cuff put her at her ease directly. He asked if any other person had been employed about the robbery before we sent for him; and hearing that another person had been called in, and was now in the house, begged leave to speak to him before anything else was done.

My lady led the way back. Before he followed her, the Sergeant relieved his mind on the subject of the gravel walks by a parting word to the gardener. "Get her ladyship to try grass," he said, with a sour look at the paths. "No gravel! no gravel!"

Why Superintendent Seegrave should have appeared to be several sizes smaller than life, on being presented to Sergeant Cuff, I can't undertake to explain. I can only state the fact. They retired together; and remained a weary long time shut up from all mortal intrusion. When they came out, Mr. Superintendent was excited, and Mr. Sergeant was yawning.

"The Sergeant wishes to see Miss Verinder's sitting-room," says Mr. Seegrave, addressing me with great pomp and eagerness. "The Sergeant may have some questions to ask. Attend the Sergeant, if you please!"

While I was being ordered about in this way, I looked at the great Cuff. The great Cuff, on his side, looked at Superintendent Seegrave in that quietly expecting way which I have already noticed. I can't affirm that he was on the watch for his brother officer's speedy appearance in the character of an Ass--I can only say that I strongly suspected it.

I led the way up-stairs. The Sergeant went softly all over the Indian cabinet and all round the "boudoir;" asking questions (occasionally only of Mr. Superintendent, and continually of me), the drift of which I believe to have been equally unintelligible to both of us. In due time, his course brought him to the door, and put him face to face with the decorative painting that you know of. He laid one lean inquiring finger on the small smear, just under the lock, which Superintendent Seegrave had already noticed, when he reproved the women-servants for all crowding together into the room.

"That's a pity," says Sergeant Cuff. "How did it happen?"

He put the question to me. I answered that the women-servants had crowded into the room on the previous morning, and that some of their petticoats had done the mischief, "Superintendent Seegrave ordered them out, sir," I added, "before they did any more harm."

"Right!" says Mr. Superintendent in his military way. "I ordered them out. The petticoats did it, Sergeant--the petticoats did it."

"Did you notice which petticoat did it?" asked Sergeant Cuff, still addressing himself, not to his brother-officer, but to me.

"No, sir."

He turned to Superintendent Seegrave upon that, and said, "You noticed, I suppose?"

Mr. Superintendent looked a little taken aback; but he made the best of it. "I can't charge my memory, Sergeant," he said, "a mere trifle--a mere trifle."

Sergeant Cuff looked at Mr. Seegrave, as he had looked at the gravel walks in the rosery, and gave us, in his melancholy way, the first taste of his quality which we had had yet.

"I made a private inquiry last week, Mr. Superintendent," he said. "At one end of the inquiry there was a murder, and at the other end there was a spot of ink on a table cloth that nobody could account for. In all my experience along the dirtiest ways of this dirty little world, I have never met with such a thing as a trifle yet. Before we go a step further in this business we must see the petticoat that made the smear, and we must know for certain when that paint was wet."

Mr. Superintendent--taking his set-down rather sulkily--asked if he should summon the women. Sergeant Cuff, after considering a minute, sighed, and shook his head.

"No," he said, "we'll take the matter of the paint first. It's a question of Yes or No with the paint--which is short. It's a question of petticoats with the women--which is long. What o'clock was it when the servants were in this room yesterday morning? Eleven o'clock--eh? Is there anybody in the house who knows whether that paint was wet or dry, at eleven yesterday morning?"

"Her ladyship's nephew, Mr. Franklin Blake, knows," I said.

"Is the gentleman in the house?"

Mr. Franklin was as close at hand as could be--waiting for his first chance of being introduced to the great Cuff. In half a minute he was in the room, and was giving his evidence as follows:

"That door, Sergeant," he said, "has been painted by Miss Verinder, under my inspection, with my help, and in a vehicle of my own composition. The vehicle dries whatever colours may be used with it, in twelve hours."

"Do you remember when the smeared bit was done, sir?" asked the Sergeant.

"Perfectly," answered Mr. Franklin. "That was the last morsel of the door to be finished. We wanted to get it done, on Wednesday last--and I myself completed it by three in the afternoon, or soon after."
"To-day is Friday," said Sergeant Cuff, addressing himself to Superintendent Seegrave. "Let us reckon back, sir. At three on the Wednesday afternoon, that bit of the painting was completed. The vehicle dried it in twelve hours--that is to say, dried it by three o'clock on Thursday morning. At eleven on Thursday morning you held your inquiry here. Take three from eleven, and eight remains. That paint had been EIGHT HOURS DRY, Mr. Superintendent, when you supposed that the women-servants' petticoats smeared it."

First knock-down blow for Mr. Seegrave! If he had not suspected poor Penelope, I should have pitied him.

Having settled the question of the paint, Sergeant Cuff, from that moment, gave his brother-officer up as a bad job--and addressed himself to Mr. Franklin, as the more promising assistant of the two.

"It's quite on the cards, sir," he said, "that you have put the clue into our hands."

As the words passed his lips, the bedroom door opened, and Miss Rachel came out among us suddenly. She addressed herself to the Sergeant, without appearing to notice (or to heed) that he was a perfect stranger to her.

"Did you say," she asked, pointing to Mr. Franklin, "that HE had put the clue into your hands?"

("This is Miss Verinder," I whispered, behind the Sergeant.)

"That gentleman, miss," says the Sergeant--with his steely-grey eyes carefully studying my young lady's face--"has possibly put the clue into our hands."

She turned for one moment, and tried to look at Mr. Franklin. I say, tried, for she suddenly looked away again before their eyes met. There seemed to be some strange disturbance in her mind. She coloured up, and then she turned pale again. With the paleness, there came a new look into her face--a look which it startled me to see.

"Having answered your question, miss," says the Sergeant, "I beg leave to make an inquiry in my turn. There is a smear on the painting of your door, here. Do you happen to know when it was done? or who did it?"

Instead of making any reply, Miss Rachel went on with her questions, as if he had not spoken, or as if she had not heard him.

"Are you another police-officer?" she asked.

"I am Sergeant Cuff, miss, of the Detective Police."

"Do you think a young lady's advice worth having?"

"I shall be glad to hear it, miss."

"Do your duty by yourself--and don't allow Mr Franklin Blake to help you!"

She said those words so spitefully, so savagely, with such an extraordinary outbreak of ill-will towards Mr. Franklin, in her voice and in her look, that--though I had known her from a baby, though I loved and honoured her next to my lady herself--I was ashamed of Miss Rachel for the first time in my life.

Sergeant Cuff's immovable eyes never stirred from off her face. "Thank you, miss," he said. "Do you happen to know anything about the smear? Might you have done it by accident yourself?"

"I know nothing about the smear."

With that answer, she turned away, and shut herself up again in her bed-room. This time, I heard her--as Penelope had heard her before--burst out crying as soon as she was alone again.

I couldn't bring myself to look at the Sergeant--I looked at Mr. Franklin, who stood nearest to me. He seemed to be even more sorely distressed at what had passed than I was.

"I told you I was uneasy about her," he said. "And now you see why."

"Miss Verinder appears to be a little out of temper about the loss of her Diamond," remarked the Sergeant. "It's a valuable jewel. Natural enough! natural enough!"

Here was the excuse that I had made for her (when she forgot herself before Superintendent Seegrave, on the previous day) being made for her over again, by a man who couldn't have had MY interest in making it--for he was a perfect stranger! A kind of cold shudder ran through me, which I couldn't account for at the time. I know, now, that I must have got my first suspicion, at that moment, of a new light (and horrid light) having suddenly fallen on the case, in the mind of Sergeant Cuff--purely and entirely in consequence of what he had seen in Miss Rachel, and heard from Miss Rachel, at that first interview between them.

"A young lady's tongue is a privileged member, sir," says the Sergeant to Mr. Franklin. "Let us forget what has passed, and go straight on with this business. Thanks to you, we know when the paint was dry. The next thing to discover is when the paint was last seen without that smear. YOU have got a head on your shoulders--and you understand what I mean."

Mr. Franklin composed himself, and came back with an effort from Miss Rachel to the matter in hand.

"I think I do understand," he said. "The more we narrow the question of time, the more we also narrow the field of inquiry."

"That's it, sir," said the Sergeant. "Did you notice your work here, on the Wednesday afternoon, after you had done it?"
Mr. Franklin shook his head, and answered, "I can't say I did."
"Did you?" inquired Sergeant Cuff, turning to me.
"I can't say I did either, sir."
"Who was the last person in the room, the last thing on Wednesday night?"
"Miss Rachel, I suppose, sir."
Mr. Franklin struck in there, "Or possibly your daughter, Betteredge." He turned to Sergeant Cuff, and explained that my daughter was Miss Verinder's maid.
"Mr. Betteredge, ask your daughter to step up. Stop!" says the Sergeant, taking me away to the window, out of earshot, "Your Superintendent here," he went on, in a whisper, "has made a pretty full report to me of the manner in which he has managed this case. Among other things, he has, by his own confession, set the servants' backs up. It's very important to smooth them down again. Tell your daughter, and tell the rest of them, these two things, with my compliments: First, that I have no evidence before me, yet, that the Diamond has been stolen; I only know that the Diamond has been lost. Second, that my business here with the servants is simply to ask them to lay their heads together and help me to find it."

My experience of the women-servants, when Superintendent Seegrave laid his embargo on their rooms, came in handy here.
"May I make so bold, Sergeant, as to tell the women a third thing?" I asked. "Are they free (with your compliments) to fidget up and downstairs, and whisk in and out of their bed-rooms, if the fit takes them?"
"Perfectly free," said the Sergeant.
"THAT will smooth them down, sir," I remarked, "from the cook to the scullion."
"Go, and do it at once, Mr. Betteredge."
I did it in less than five minutes. There was only one difficulty when I came to the bit about the bed-rooms. It took a pretty stiff exertion of my authority, as chief, to prevent the whole of the female household from following me and Penelope up-stairs, in the character of volunteer witnesses in a burning fever of anxiety to help Sergeant Cuff.

The Sergeant seemed to approve of Penelope. He became a trifle less dreary; and he looked much as he had looked when he noticed the white musk rose in the flower-garden. Here is my daughter's evidence, as drawn off from her by the Sergeant. She gave it, I think, very prettily--but, there! she is my child all over: nothing of her mother in her; Lord bless you, nothing of her mother in her!

Penelope examined: Took a lively interest in the painting on the door, having helped to mix the colours. Noticed the bit of work under the lock, because it was the last bit done. Had seen it, some hours afterwards, without a smear. Had left it, as late as twelve at night, without a smear. Had, at that hour, wished her young lady good night in the bedroom; had heard the clock strike in the "boudoir"; had her hand at the time on the handle of the painted door; knew the paint was wet (having helped to mix the colours, as aforesaid); took particular pains not to touch it; could swear that she held up the skirts of her dress, and that there was no smear on the paint then; could not swear that her dress mightn't have touched it accidentally in going out; remembered the dress she had on, because it was new, a present from Miss Rachel; her father remembered, and could speak to it, too; could, and would, and did fetch it; dress recognised by her father as the dress she wore that night; skirts examined, a long job from the size of them; not the ghost of a paint-stain discovered anywhere. End of Penelope's evidence--and very pretty and convincing, too. Signed, Gabriel Betteredge.

The Sergeant's next proceeding was to question me about any large dogs in the house who might have got into the room, and done the mischief with a whisk of their tails. Hearing that this was impossible, he next sent for a magnifying-glass, and tried how the smear looked, seen that way. No skin-mark (as of a human hand) printed off on the paint. All the signs visible--signs which told that the paint had been smeared by some loose article of somebody's dress touching it in going by. That somebody (putting together Penelope's evidence and Mr. Franklin's evidence) must have been in the room, and done the mischief, between midnight and three o'clock on the Thursday morning.

Having brought his investigation to this point, Sergeant Cuff discovered that such a person as Superintendent Seegrave was still left in the room, upon which he summed up the proceedings for his brother-officer's benefit, as follows:

"This trifle of yours, Mr. Superintendent," says the Sergeant, pointing to the place on the door, "has grown a little in importance since you noticed it last. At the present stage of the inquiry there are, as I take it, three discoveries to make, starting from that smear. Find out (first) whether there is any article of dress in this house with the smear of the paint on it. Find out (second) who that dress belongs to. Find out (third) how the person can account for having been in this room, and smeared the paint, between midnight and three in the morning. If the person can't satisfy you, you haven't far to look for the hand that has got the Diamond. I'll work this by myself, if you please, and detain you no longer--from your regular business in the town. You have got one of your men here, I see. Leave him
here at my disposal, in case I want him—and allow me to wish you good morning.”

Superintendent Seegrave's respect for the Sergeant was great; but his respect for himself was greater still. Hit hard by the celebrated Cuff, he hit back smartly, to the best of his ability, on leaving the room.

"I have abstained from expressing any opinion, so far," says Mr. Superintendent, with his military voice still in good working order. "I have now only one remark to offer on leaving this case in your hands. There IS such a thing, Sergeant, as making a mountain out of a molehill. Good morning."

"There is also such a thing as making nothing out of a molehill, in consequence of your head being too high to see it." Having returned his brother-officer's compliments in those terms, Sergeant Cuff wheeled about, and walked away to the window by himself.

Mr. Franklin and I waited to see what was coming next. The Sergeant stood at the window with his hands in his pockets, looking out, and whistling the tune of "The Last Rose of Summer" softly to himself. Later in the proceedings, I discovered that he only forgot his manners so far as to whistle, when his mind was hard at work, seeing its way inch by inch to its own private ends, on which occasions "The Last Rose of Summer" evidently helped and encouraged him. I suppose it fitted in somehow with his character. It reminded him, you see, of his favourite roses, and, as HE whistled it, it was the most melancholy tune going.

Turning from the window, after a minute or two, the Sergeant walked into the middle of the room, and stopped there, deep in thought, with his eyes on Miss Rachel's bed-room door. After a little he roused himself, nodded his head, as much as to say, "That will do," and, addressing me, asked for ten minutes' conversation with my mistress, at her ladyship's earliest convenience.

Leaving the room with this message, I heard Mr. Franklin ask the Sergeant a question, and stopped to hear the answer also at the threshold of the door.

"Can you guess yet," inquired Mr. Franklin, "who has stolen the Diamond?"

"NOBODY HAS STOLEN THE DIAMOND," answered Sergeant Cuff.

We both started at that extraordinary view of the case, and both earnestly begged him to tell us what he meant. "Wait a little," said the Sergeant. "The pieces of the puzzle are not all put together yet."

CHAPTER XIII

I found my lady in her own sitting room. She started and looked annoyed when I mentioned that Sergeant Cuff wished to speak to her.

"MUST I see him?" she asked. "Can't you represent me, Gabriel?"

I felt at a loss to understand this, and showed it plainly, I suppose, in my face. My lady was so good as to explain herself.

"I am afraid my nerves are a little shaken," she said. "There is something in that police-officer from London which I recoil from--I don't know why. I have a presentiment that he is bringing trouble and misery with him into the house. Very foolish, and very unlike ME--but so it is."

I hardly knew what to say to this. The more I saw of Sergeant Cuff, the better I liked him. My lady rallied a little after having opened her heart to me--being, naturally, a woman of a high courage, as I have already told you. "If I must see him, I must," she said. "But I can't prevail on myself to see him alone. Bring him in, Gabriel, and stay here as long as he stays."

This was the first attack of the megrims that I remembered in my mistress since the time when she was a young girl. I went back to the "boudoir." Mr. Franklin strolled out into the garden, and joined Mr. Godfrey, whose time for departure was now drawing near. Sergeant Cuff and I went straight to my mistress's room.

I declare my lady turned a shade paler at the sight of him! She commanded herself, however, in other respects, and asked the Sergeant if he had any objection to my being present. She was so good as to add, that I was her trusted adviser, as well as her old servant, and that in anything which related to the household I was the person whom it might be most profitable to consult. The Sergeant politely answered that he would take my presence as a favour, having found my experience in that quarter already of some use to him. My lady pointed to two chairs, and we set in for our conference immediately.

"I have already formed an opinion on this case," says Sergeant Cuff, "which I beg your ladyship's permission to keep to myself for the present. My business now is to mention what I have discovered upstairs in Miss Verinder's sitting-room, and what I have decided (with your ladyship's leave) on doing next."

He then went into the matter of the smear on the paint, and stated the conclusions he drew from it—just as he had stated them (only with greater respect of language) to Superintendent Seegrave. "One thing," he said, in conclusion, "is certain. The Diamond is missing out of the drawer in the cabinet. Another thing is next to certain. The marks from the smear on the door must be on some article of dress belonging to somebody in this house. We must discover that article of dress before we go a step further."

"And that discovery," remarked my mistress, "implies, I presume, the discovery of the thief?"
"I beg your ladyship's pardon--I don't say the Diamond is stolen. I only say, at present, that the Diamond is missing. The discovery of the stained dress may lead the way to finding it."

Her ladyship looked at me. "Do you understand this?" she said.

"Sergeant Cuff understands it, my lady," I answered.

"How do you propose to discover the stained dress?" inquired my mistress, addressing herself once more to the Sergeant. "My good servants, who have been with me for years, have, I am ashamed to say, had their boxes and rooms searched already by the other officer. I can't and won't permit them to be insulted in that way a second time!"

(There was a mistress to serve! There was a woman in ten thousand, if you like!)

"That is the very point I was about to put to your ladyship," said the Sergeant. "The other officer has done a world of harm to this inquiry, by letting the servants see that he suspected them. If I give them cause to think themselves suspected a second time, there's no knowing what obstacles they may not throw in my way--the women especially. At the same time, their boxes must be searched again--for this plain reason, that the first investigation only looked for the Diamond, and that the second investigation must look for the stained dress. I quite agree with you, my lady, that the servants' feelings ought to be consulted. But I am equally clear that the servants' wardrobes ought to be searched."

This looked very like a dead-lock. My lady said so, in choicer language than mine.

"I have got a plan to meet the difficulty," said Sergeant Cuff, "if your ladyship will consent to it. I propose explaining the case to the servants."

"The women will think themselves suspected directly, I said, interrupting him.

"The women won't, Mr. Betteredge," answered the Sergeant, "if I can tell them I am going to examine the wardrobes of EVERYBODY--from her ladyship downwards--who slept in the house on Wednesday night. It's a mere formality," he added, with a side look at my mistress; "but the servants will accept it as even dealing between them and their betters; and, instead of hindering the investigation, they will make a point of honour of assisting it."

I saw the truth of that. My lady, after her first surprise was over, saw the truth of it also.

"You are certain the investigation is necessary?" she said.

"It's the shortest way that I can see, my lady, to the end we have in view."

"You are certain the investigation is necessary?" she said.

"It's the shortest way that I can see, my lady, to the end we have in view."

"My mistress rose to ring the bell for her maid. "You shall speak to the servants," she said, "with the keys of my wardrobe in your hand."

Sergeant Cuff stopped her by a very unexpected question.

"Hadn't we better make sure first," he asked, "that the other ladies and gentlemen in the house will consent, too?"

"The only other lady in the house is Miss Verinder," answered my mistress, with a look of surprise. "The only gentlemen are my nephews, Mr. Blake and Mr. Ablewhite. There is not the least fear of a refusal from any of the three."

I reminded my lady here that Mr. Godfrey was going away. As I said the words, Mr. Godfrey himself knocked at the door to say good-bye, and was followed in by Mr. Franklin, who was going with him to the station. My lady explained the difficulty. Mr. Godfrey settled it directly. He called to Samuel, through the window, to take his portmanteau up-stairs again, and he then put the key himself into Sergeant Cuff's hand. "My luggage can follow me to London," he said, "when the inquiry is over." The Sergeant received the key with a becoming apology. "I am sorry to put you to any inconvenience, sir, for a mere formality; but the example of their betters will do wonders in reconciling the servants to this inquiry."

Mr. Godfrey, after taking leave of my lady, in a most sympathising manner, left a farewell message for Miss Rachel, the terms of which made it clear to my mind that he had not taken No for an answer, and that he meant to put the marriage question to her once more, at the next opportunity. Mr. Franklin, on following his cousin out, informed the Sergeant that all his clothes were open to examination, and that nothing he possessed was kept under lock and key. Sergeant Cuff made his best acknowledgments. His views, you will observe, had been met with the utmost readiness by my lady, by Mr. Godfrey, and by Mr. Franklin. There was only Miss. Rachel now wanting to follow their lead, before we called the servants together, and began the search for the stained dress.

My lady's unaccountable objection to the Sergeant seemed to make our conference more distasteful to her than ever, as soon as we were left alone again. "If I send you down Miss Verinder's keys," she said to him, "I presume I shall have done all you want of me for the present?"

"I beg your ladyship's pardon," said Sergeant Cuff. "Before we begin, I should like, if convenient, to have the washing-book. The stained article of dress may be an article of linen. If the search leads to nothing, I want to be able to account next for all the linen in the house, and for all the linen sent to the wash. If there is an article missing, there will be at least a presumption that it has got the paint-stain on it, and that it has been purposely made away with, yesterday or to-day, by the person owning it. Superintendent Seegrave," added the Sergeant, turning to me, "pointed the attention of the women-servants to the smear, when they all crowded into the room on Thursday morning. That
may turn out, Mr. Betteredge, to have been one more of Superintendent Seegrave's many mistakes."

My lady desired me to ring the bell, and order the washing-book. She remained with us until it was produced, in case Sergeant Cuff had any further request to make of her after looking at it.

The washing-book was brought in by Rosanna Spearman. The girl had come down to breakfast that morning miserably pale and haggard, but sufficiently recovered from her illness of the previous day to do her usual work. Sergeant Cuff looked attentively at our second housemaid--at her face, when she came in; at her crooked shoulder, when she went out.

"Have you anything more to say to me?" asked my lady, still as eager as ever to be out of the Sergeant's society.

The great Cuff opened the washing-book, understood it perfectly in half a minute, and shut it up again. "I venture to trouble your ladyship with one last question," he said. "Has the young woman who brought us this book been in your employment as long as the other servants?"

"Why do you ask?" said my lady.
"The last time I saw her," answered the Sergeant, "she was in prison for theft."

After that, there was no help for it, but to tell him the truth. My mistress dwelt strongly on Rosanna's good conduct in her service, and on the high opinion entertained of her by the matron at the reformatory. "You don't suspect her, I hope?" my lady added, in conclusion, very earnestly.

"I have already told your ladyship that I don't suspect any person in the house of thieving--up to the present time."

After that answer, my lady rose to go up-stairs, and ask for Miss Rachel's keys. The Sergeant was before-hand in opening the door for her. He made a very low bow. My lady shuddered as she passed him.

We waited, and waited, and no keys appeared. Sergeant Cuff made no remark to me. He turned his melancholy face to the window; he put his lanky hands into his pockets; and he whistled "The Last Rose of Summer" softly to himself.

At last, Samuel came in, not with the keys, but with a morsel of paper for me. I got at my spectacles, with some fumbling and difficulty, feeling the Sergeant's dismal eyes fixed on me all the time. There were two or three lines on the paper, written in pencil by my lady. They informed me that Miss Rachel flatly refused to have her wardrobe examined. Asked for her reasons, she had burst out crying. Asked again, she had said: "I won't, because I won't. I must yield to force if you use it, but I will yield to nothing else." I understood my lady's disinclination to face Sergeant Cuff with such an answer from her daughter as that. If I had not been too old for the amiable weaknesses of youth, I believe I should have blushed at the notion of facing him myself.

"Any news of Miss Verinder's keys?" asked the Sergeant.
"My young lady refuses to have her wardrobe examined."
"Ah!" said the Sergeant.

His voice was not quite in such a perfect state of discipline as his face. When he said "Ah!" he said it in the tone of a man who had heard something which he expected to hear. He half angered and half frightened me--why, I couldn't tell, but he did it.

"Must the search be given up?" I asked.
"Yes," said the Sergeant, "the search must be given up, because your young lady refuses to submit to it like the rest. We must examine all the wardrobes in the house or none. Send Mr. Ablewhite's portmanteau to London by the next train, and return the washing-book, with my compliments and thanks, to the young woman who brought it in."

He laid the washing-book on the table, and taking out his penknife, began to trim his nails.

"You don't seem to be much disappointed," I said.
"No," said Sergeant Cuff, "I am not much disappointed."

I tried to make him explain himself.

"Why should Miss Rachel put an obstacle in your way?" I inquired. "Isn't it her interest to help you?"

"Wait a little, Mr. Betteredge--wait a little."

Cleverer heads than mine might have seen his drift. Or a person less fond of Miss Rachel than I was, might have seen his drift. My lady's horror of him might (as I have since thought) have meant that she saw his drift (as the scripture says) "in a glass darkly." I didn't see it yet--that's all I know.

"What's to be done next?" I asked.

Sergeant Cuff finished the nail on which he was then at work, looked at it for a moment with a melancholy interest, and put up his penknife.

"Come out into the garden," he said, "and let's have a look at the roses."

CHAPTER XIV

The nearest way to the garden, on going out of my lady's sitting-room, was by the shrubbery path, which you already know of. For the sake of your better understanding of what is now to come, I may add to this, that the
shrubbery path was Mr. Franklin's favourite walk. When he was out in the grounds, and when we failed to find him anywhere else, we generally found him here.

I am afraid I must own that I am rather an obstinate old man. The more firmly Sergeant Cuff kept his thoughts shut up from me, the more firmly I persisted in trying to look in at them. As we turned into the shrubbery path, I attempted to circumvent him in another way.

"As things are now," I said, "if I was in your place, I should be at my wits' end."

"If you were in my place," answered the Sergeant, "you would have formed an opinion--and, as things are now, any doubt you might previously have felt about your own conclusions would be completely set at rest. Never mind for the present what those conclusions are, Mr. Betteredge. I haven't brought you out here to draw me like a badger; I have brought you out here to ask for some information. You might have given it to me no doubt, in the house, instead of out of it. But doors and listeners have a knack of getting together; and, in my line of life, we cultivate a healthy taste for the open air."

Who was to circumvent THIS man? I gave in--and waited as patiently as I could to hear what was coming next.

"We won't enter into your young lady's motives," the Sergeant went on; "we will only say it's a pity she declines to assist me, because, by so doing, she makes this investigation more difficult than it might otherwise have been. We must now try to solve the mystery of the smear on the door--which, you may take my word for it, means the mystery of the Diamond also--in some other way. I have decided to see the servants, and to search their thoughts and actions, Mr. Betteredge, instead of searching their wardrobes. Before I begin, however, I want to ask you a question or two. You are an observant man--did you notice anything strange in any of the servants (making due allowance, of course, for fright and fluster), after the loss of the Diamond was found out? Any particular quarrel among them? Any one of them not in his or her usual spirits? Unexpectedly out of temper, for instance? or unexpectedly taken ill?"

I had just time to think of Rosanna Spearman's sudden illness at yesterday's dinner--but not time to make any answer--when I saw Sergeant Cuff's eyes suddenly turn aside towards the shrubbery; and I heard him say softly to himself, "Hullo!"

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"A touch of the rheumatics in my back," said the Sergeant, in a loud voice, as if he wanted some third person to hear us. "We shall have a change in the weather before long."

A few steps further brought us to the corner of the house. Turning off sharp to the right, we entered on the terrace, and went down, by the steps in the middle, into the garden below. Sergeant Cuff stopped there, in the open space, where we could see round us on every side.

"About that young person, Rosanna Spearman?" he said. "It isn't very likely, with her personal appearance, that she has got a lover. But, for the girl's own sake, I must ask you at once whether SHE has provided herself with a sweetheart, poor wretch, like the rest of them?"

What on earth did he mean, under present circumstances, by putting such a question to me as that? I stared at him, instead of answering him.

"I saw Rosanna Spearman hiding in the shrubbery as we went by," said the Sergeant.

"When you said 'Hullo'?"

"Yes--when I said 'Hullo!' If there's a sweetheart in the case, the hiding doesn't much matter. If there isn't--as things are in this house--the hiding is a highly suspicious circumstance, and it will be my painful duty to act on it accordingly."

What, in God's name, was I to say to him? I knew the shrubbery was Mr. Franklin's favourite walk; I knew he would most likely turn that way when he came back from the station; I knew that Penelope had over and over again caught her fellow-servant hanging about there, and had always declared to me that Rosanna's object was to attract Mr. Franklin's attention. If my daughter was right, she might well have been lying in wait for Mr. Franklin's return when the Sergeant noticed her. I was put between the two difficulties of mentioning Penelope's fanciful notion as if it was mine, or of leaving an unfortunate creature to suffer the consequences, the very serious consequences, of exciting the suspicion of Sergeant Cuff. Out of pure pity for the girl--on my soul and my character, out of pure pity for the girl--I gave the Sergeant the necessary explanations, and told him that Rosanna had been mad enough to set her heart on Mr. Franklin Blake.

Sergeant Cuff never laughed. On the few occasions when anything amused him, he curled up a little at the corners of the lips, nothing more. He curled up now.

"Hadn't you better say she's mad enough to be an ugly girl and only a servant?" he asked. "The falling in love with a gentleman of Mr. Franklin Blake's manners and appearance doesn't seem to me to be the maddest part of her conduct by any means. However, I'm glad the thing is cleared up: it relieves one's mind to have things cleared up. Yes, I'll keep it a secret, Mr. Betteredge. I like to be tender to human infirmity--though I don't get many chances of exercising that virtue in my line of life. You think Mr. Franklin Blake hasn't got a suspicion of the girl's fancy for
him? Ah! he would have found it out fast enough if she had been nice-looking. The ugly women have a bad time of it in this world; let's hope it will be made up to them in another. You have got a nice garden here, and a well-kept lawn. See for yourself how much better the flowers look with grass about them instead of gravel. No, thank you. I won't take a rose. It goes to my heart to break them off the stem. Just as it goes to your heart, you know, when there's something wrong in the servants' hall. Did you notice anything you couldn't account for in any of the servants when the loss of the Diamond was first found out?"

I had got on very fairly well with Sergeant Cuff so far. But the slyness with which he slipped in that last question put me on my guard. In plain English, I didn't at all relish the notion of helping his inquiries, when those inquiries took him (in the capacity of snake in the grass) among my fellow-servants.

"I noticed nothing," I said, "except that we all lost our heads together, myself included."

"Oh," says the Sergeant, "that's all you have to tell me, is it?"

I answered, with (as I flattered myself) an unmoved countenance, "That is all."

Sergeant Cuff's dismal eyes looked me hard in the face.

"Mr. Betteredge," he said, "have you any objection to oblige me by shaking hands? I have taken an extraordinary liking to you."

(Why he should have chosen the exact moment when I was deceiving him to give me that proof of his good opinion, is beyond all comprehension! I felt a little proud--I really did feel a little proud of having been one too many at last for the celebrated Cuff!)

We went back to the house; the Sergeant requesting that I would give him a room to himself, and then send in the servants (the indoor servants only), one after another, in the order of their rank, from first to last.

I showed Sergeant Cuff into my own room, and then called the servants together in the hall. Rosanna Spearman appeared among them, much as usual. She was as quick in her way as the Sergeant in his, and I suspect she had heard what he said to me about the servants in general, just before he discovered her. There she was, at any rate, looking as if she had never heard of such a place as the shrubbery in her life.

I sent them in, one by one, as desired. The cook was the first to enter the Court of Justice, otherwise my room. She remained but a short time. Report, on coming out: "Sergeant Cuff is depressed in his spirits; but Sergeant Cuff is a perfect gentleman." My lady's own maid followed. Remained much longer. Report, on coming out: "If Sergeant Cuff doesn't believe a respectable woman, he might keep his opinion to himself, at any rate!" Penelope went next. Remained only a moment or two. Report, on coming out: "Sergeant Cuff is much to be pitied. He must have been crossed in love, father, when he was a young man." The first housemaid followed Penelope. Remained, like my lady's maid, a long time. Report, on coming out--dead silence, and lips as pale as ashes. Samuel, the footman, followed Rosanna. Remained a minute or two. Report, on coming out: "Whoever blacks Sergeant Cuff's boots ought to be ashamed of himself." Nancy, the kitchen-maid, went last. Remained a minute or two. Report, on coming out: "Sergeant Cuff has a heart; HE doesn't cut jokes, Mr. Betteredge, with a poor hard-working girl."

Going into the Court of Justice, when it was all over, to hear if there were any further commands for me, I found the Sergeant at his old trick--looking out of window, and whistling "The Last Rose of Summer" to himself.

"Any discoveries, sir?" I inquired.

"If Rosanna Spearman asks leave to go out," said the Sergeant, "let the poor thing go; but let me know first."

I might as well have held my tongue about Rosanna and Mr. Franklin! It was plain enough; the unfortunate girl had fallen under Sergeant Cuff's suspicions, in spite of all I could do to prevent it.

"I hope you don't think Rosanna is concerned in the loss of the Diamond?" I ventured to say.

The corners of the Sergeant's melancholy mouth curled up, and he looked hard in my face, just as he had looked in the garden.

"I think I had better not tell you, Mr. Betteredge," he said. "You might lose your head, you know, for the second time."

I began to doubt whether I had been one too many for the celebrated Cuff, after all! It was rather a relief to me that we were interrupted here by a knock at the door, and a message from the cook. Rosanna Spearman HAD asked to go out, for the usual reason, that her head was bad, and she wanted a breath of fresh air. At a sign from the Sergeant, I said, Yes. "Which is the servants' way out?" he asked, when the messenger had gone. I showed him the servants' way out. "Lock the door of your room," says the Sergeant; "and if anybody asks for me, say I'm in there, composing my mind." He curled up again at the corners of the lips, and disappeared.

Left alone, under those circumstances, a devouring curiosity pushed me on to make some discoveries for myself.

It was plain that Sergeant Cuff's suspicions of Rosanna had been roused by something that he had found out at his examination of the servants in my room. Now, the only two servants (excepting Rosanna herself) who had
remained under examination for any length of time, were my lady's own maid and the first housemaid, those two being also the women who had taken the lead in persecuting their unfortunate fellow-servant from the first. Reaching these conclusions, I looked in on them, casually as it might be, in the servants' hall, and, finding tea going forward, instantly invited myself to that meal. (For, NOTA BENE, a drop of tea is to a woman's tongue what a drop of oil is to a wasting lamp.)

My reliance on the tea-pot, as an ally, did not go unrewarded. In less than half an hour I knew as much as the Sergeant himself.

My lady's maid and the housemaid, had, it appeared, neither of them believed in Rosanna's illness of the previous day. These two devils—I ask your pardon; but how else CAN you describe a couple of spiteful women?—had stolen up-stairs, at intervals during the Thursday afternoon; had tried Rosanna's door, and found it locked; had knocked, and not been answered; had listened, and not heard a sound inside. When the girl had come down to tea, and had been sent up, still out of sorts, to bed again, the two devils aforesaid had tried her door once more, and found it locked; had looked at the keyhole, and found it stopped up; had seen a light under the door at midnight, and had heard the crackling of a fire (a fire in a servant's bed-room in the month of June!) at four in the morning. All this they had told Sergeant Cuff, who, in return for their anxiety to enlighten him, had eyed them with sour and suspicious looks, and had shown them plainly that he didn't believe either one or the other. Hence, the unfavourable reports of him which these two women had brought out with them from the examination. Hence, also (without reckoning the influence of the tea-pot), their readiness to let their tongues run to any length on the subject of the Sergeant's ungracious behaviour to them.

Having had some experience of the great Cuff's round-about ways, and having last seen him evidently bent on following Rosanna privately when she went out for her walk, it seemed clear to me that he had thought it unadvisable to let the lady's maid and the housemaid know how materially they had helped him. They were just the sort of women, if he had treated their evidence as trustworthy, to have been puffed up by it, and to have said or done something which would have put Rosanna Spearman on her guard.

I walked out in the fine summer afternoon, very sorry for the poor girl, and very uneasy in my mind at the turn things had taken. Drifting towards the shrubbery, some time later, there I met Mr. Franklin. After returning from seeing his cousin off at the station, he had been with my lady, holding a long conversation with her. She had told him of Miss Rachel's unaccountable refusal to let her wardrobe be examined; and had put him in such low spirits about my young lady that he seemed to shrink from speaking on the subject. The family temper appeared in his face that evening, for the first time in my experience of him.

"Well, Betteredge," he said, "how does the atmosphere of mystery and suspicion in which we are all living now, agree with you? Do you remember that morning when I first came here with the Moonstone? I wish to God we had thrown it into the quicksand!"

After breaking out in that way, he abstained from speaking again until he had composed himself. We walked silently, side by side, for a minute or two, and then he asked me what had become of Sergeant Cuff. It was impossible to put Mr. Franklin off with the excuse of the Sergeant being in my room, composing his mind. I told him exactly what had happened, mentioning particularly what my lady's maid and the house-maid had said about Rosanna Spearman.

Mr. Franklin's clear head saw the turn the Sergeant's suspicions had taken, in the twinkling of an eye.

"Didn't you tell me this morning," he said, "that one of the tradespeople declared he had met Rosanna yesterday, on the footway to Frizinghall, when we supposed her to be ill in her room?"

"Yes, sir."

"If my aunt's maid and the other woman have spoken the truth, you may depend upon it the tradesman did meet her. The girl's attack of illness was a blind to deceive us. She had some guilty reason for going to the town secretly. The paint-stained dress is a dress of hers; and the fire heard crackling in her room at four in the morning was a fire lit to destroy it. Rosanna Spearman has stolen the Diamond. I'll go in directly, and tell my aunt the turn things have taken."

"Not just yet, if you please, sir," said a melancholy voice behind us. We both turned about, and found ourselves face to face with Sergeant Cuff.

"Why not just yet?" asked Mr. Franklin.

"Because, sir, if you tell her ladyship, her ladyship will tell Miss Verinder."

"Suppose she does. What then?" Mr. Franklin said those words with a sudden heat and vehemence, as if the Sergeant had mortally offended him.

"Do you think it's wise, sir," said Sergeant Cuff, quietly, "to put such a question as that to me—at such a time as this?"

There was a moment's silence between them: Mr. Franklin walked close up to the Sergeant. The two looked each
other straight in the face. Mr. Franklin spoke first, dropping his voice as suddenly as he had raised it.

"I suppose you know, Mr. Cuff," he said, "that you are treading on delicate ground?"

"It isn't the first time, by a good many hundreds, that I find myself treading on delicate ground," answered the other, as immovable as ever.

"I am to understand that you forbid me to tell my aunt what has happened?"

"You are to understand, if you please, sir, that I throw up the case, if you tell Lady Verinder, or tell anybody, what has happened, until I give you leave."

That settled it. Mr. Franklin had no choice but to submit. He turned away in anger—and left us.

I had stood there listening to them, all in a tremble; not knowing whom to suspect, or what to think next. In the midst of my confusion, two things, however, were plain to me. First, that my young lady was, in some unaccountable manner, at the bottom of the sharp speeches that had passed between them. Second, that they thoroughly understood each other, without having previously exchanged a word of explanation on either side.

"Mr. Betteredge," says the Sergeant, "you have done a very foolish thing in my absence. You have done a little detective business on your own account. For the future, perhaps you will be so obliging as to do your detective business along with me."

He took me by the arm, and walked me away with him along the road by which he had come. I dare say I had deserved his reproof—but I was not going to help him to set traps for Rosanna Spearman, for all that. Thief or no thief, legal or not legal, I don't care—I pitied her.

"What do you want of me?" I asked, shaking him off, and stopping short.

"Only a little information about the country round here," said the Sergeant. He pointed, as he spoke, to the fir-plantation which led to the Shivering Sand.

"Yes," I said, "there is a path."

"Show it to me."

Side by side, in the grey of the summer evening, Sergeant Cuff and I set forth for the Shivering Sand.

CHAPTER XV

The Sergeant remained silent, thinking his own thoughts, till we entered the plantation of firs which led to the quicksand. There he roused himself, like a man whose mind was made up, and spoke to me again.

"Mr. Betteredge," he said, "as you have honoured me by taking an oar in my boat, and as you may, I think, be of some assistance to me before the evening is out, I see no use in our mystifying one another any longer, and I propose to set you an example of plain speaking on my side. You are determined to give me no information to the prejudice of Rosanna Spearman, because she has been a good girl to YOU, and because you pity her heartily. Those humane considerations do you a world of credit, but they happen in this instance to be humane considerations clean thrown away. Rosanna Spearman is not in the slightest danger of getting into trouble—no, not if I fix her with being concerned in the disappearance of the Diamond, on evidence which is as plain as the nose on your face!"

"Do you mean that my lady won't prosecute?" I asked.

"I mean that your lady CAN'T prosecute," said the Sergeant. "Rosanna Spearman is simply an instrument in the hands of another person, and Rosanna Spearman will be held harmless for that other person's sake."

He spoke like a man in earnest—there was no denying that. Still, I felt something stirring uneasily against him in my mind. "Can't you give that other person a name?" I said.

"Can't you, Mr. Betteredge?"

"No."

Sergeant Cuff stood stock still, and surveyed me with a look of melancholy interest.

"It's always a pleasure to me to be tender towards human infirmity," he said. "I feel particularly tender at the present moment, Mr. Betteredge, towards you. And you, with the same excellent motive, feel particularly tender towards Rosanna Spearman, don't you? Do you happen to know whether she has had a new outfit of linen lately?"

What he meant by slipping in this extraordinary question unawares, I was at a total loss to imagine. Seeing no possible injury to Rosanna if I owned the truth, I answered that the girl had come to us rather sparingly provided with linen, and that my lady, in recompense for her good conduct (I laid a stress on her good conduct), had given her a new outfit not a fortnight since.

"This is a miserable world," says the Sergeant. "Human life, Mr. Betteredge, is a sort of target—misfortune is always firing at it, and always hitting the mark. But for that outfit, we should have discovered a new nightgown or petticoat among Rosanna's things, and have nailed her in that way. You're not at a loss to follow me, are you? You have examined the servants yourself, and you know what discoveries two of them made outside Rosanna's door. Surely you know what the girl was about yesterday, after she was taken ill? You can't guess? Oh dear me, it's as
plain as that strip of light there, at the end of the trees. At eleven, on Thursday morning, Superintendent Seegrave (who is a mass of human infirmity) points out to all the women servants the smear on the door. Rosanna has her own reasons for suspecting her own things; she takes the first opportunity of getting to her room, finds the paint-stain on her night-gown, or petticoat, or what not, shams ill and slips away to the town, gets the materials for making a new petticoat or nightgown, makes it alone in her room on the Thursday night lights a fire (not to destroy it; two of her fellow-servants are prying outside her door, and she knows better than to make a smell of burning, and to have a lot of tinder to get rid of)—lights a fire, I say, to dry and iron the substitute dress after wringing it out, keeps the stained dress hidden (probably ON her), and is at this moment occupied in making away with it, in some convenient place, on that lonely bit of beach ahead of us. I have traced her this evening to your fishing village, and to one particular cottage, which we may possibly have to visit, before we go back. She stopped in the cottage for some time, and she came out with (as I believe) something hidden under her cloak. A cloak (on a woman's back) is an emblem of charity—it covers a multitude of sins. I saw her set off northwards along the coast, after leaving the cottage. Is your sea-shore here considered a fine specimen of marine landscape, Mr. Betteredge?"

I answered, "Yes," as shortly as might be.

"Tastes differ," says Sergeant Cuff. "Looking at it from my point of view, I never saw a marine landscape that I admired less. If you happen to be following another person along your sea-coast, and if that person happens to look round, there isn't a scrap of cover to hide you anywhere. I had to choose between taking Rosanna in custody on suspicion, or leaving her, for the time being, with her little game in her own hands. For reasons which I won't trouble you with, I decided on making any sacrifice rather than give the alarm as soon as to-night to a certain person who shall be nameless between us. I came back to the house to ask you to take me to the north end of the beach by another way. Sand—in respect of its printing off people's footsteps—is one of the best detective officers I know. If we don't meet with Rosanna Spearman by coming round on her in this way, the sand may tell us what she has been at, if the light only lasts long enough. Here IS the sand. If you will excuse my suggesting it—suppose you hold your tongue, and let me go first?"

If there is such a thing known at the doctor's shop as a DETECTIVE-FEVER, that disease had now got fast hold of your humble servant. Sergeant Cuff went on between the hillocks of sand, down to the beach. I followed him (with my heart in my mouth); and waited at a little distance for what was to happen next.

As it turned out, I found myself standing nearly in the same place where Rosanna Spearman and I had been talking together when Mr. Franklin suddenly appeared before us, on arriving at our house from London. While my eyes were watching the Sergeant, my mind wandered away in spite of me to what had passed, on that former occasion, between Rosanna and me. I declare I almost felt the poor thing slip her hand again into mine, and give it a little grateful squeeze to thank me for speaking kindly to her. I declare I almost heard her voice telling me again that she admired less. If you happen to be following another person along your sea-coast, and if that person happens to look round, there isn't a scrap of cover to hide you anywhere. I had to choose between taking Rosanna in custody on suspicion, or leaving her, for the time being, with her little game in her own hands. For reasons which I won't trouble you with, I decided on making any sacrifice rather than give the alarm as soon as to-night to a certain person who shall be nameless between us. I came back to the house to ask you to take me to the north end of the beach by another way. Sand—in respect of its printing off people's footsteps—is one of the best detective officers I know. If we don't meet with Rosanna Spearman by coming round on her in this way, the sand may tell us what she has been at, if the light only lasts long enough. Here IS the sand. If you will excuse my suggesting it—suppose you hold your tongue, and let me go first?"

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The last of the evening light was fading away; and over all the desolate place there hung a still and awful calm. The heave of the main ocean on the great sandbank out in the bay, was a heave that made no sound. The inner sea lay lost and dim, without a breath of wind to stir it. Patches of nasty ooze floated, yellow-white, on the dead surface of the water. Scum and slime shone faintly in certain places, where the last of the light still caught them on the two great spits of rock jutting out, north and south, into the sea. It was now the time of the turn of the tide: and even as I stood there waiting, the broad brown face of the quicksand began to dimple and quiver—the only moving thing in all this hillocks. My spirits fell lower and lower as I thought of these things—and the view of the lonesome little bay, when I looked about to rouse myself, only served to make me feel more uneasy still.

I saw the Sergeant start as the shiver of the sand caught his eye. After looking at it for a minute or so, he turned and came back to me.

"A treacherous place, Mr. Betteredge," he said; "and no signs of Rosanna Spearman anywhere on the beach, look where you may."

He took me down lower on the shore, and I saw for myself that his footsteps and mine were the only footsteps printed off on the sand.

"How does the fishing village bear, standing where we are now?" asked Sergeant Cuff.

"Cobb's Hole," I answered (that being the name of the place), "bears as near as may be, due south."

"I saw the girl this evening, walking northward along the shore, from Cobb's Hole," said the Sergeant. "Consequently, she must have been walking towards this place. Is Cobb's Hole on the other side of that point of land there? And can we get to it—now it's low water—by the beach?"

I answered, "Yes," to both those questions.

"If you'll excuse my suggesting it, we'll step out briskly," said the Sergeant. "I want to find the place where she
left the shore, before it gets dark."

We had walked, I should say, a couple of hundred yards towards Cobb's Hole, when Sergeant Cuff suddenly went down on his knees on the beach, to all appearance seized with a sudden frenzy for saying his prayers.

"There's something to be said for your marine landscape here, after all," remarked the Sergeant. "Here are a woman's footsteps, Mr. Betteredge! Let us call them Rosanna's footsteps, until we find evidence to the contrary that we can't resist. Very confused footsteps, you will please to observe--purposely confused, I should say. Ah, poor soul, she understands the detective virtues of sand as well as I do! But hasn't she been in rather too great a hurry to tread out the marks thoroughly? I think she has. Here's one footstep going FROM Cobb's Hole; and here is another going back to it. Isn't that the toe of her shoe pointing straight to the water's edge? And don't I see two heel-marks further down the beach, close at the water's edge also? I don't want to hurt your feelings, but I'm afraid Rosanna is sly. It looks as if she had determined to get to that place you and I have just come from, without leaving any marks on the sand to trace her by. Shall we say that she walked through the water from this point till she got to that ledge of rocks behind us, and came back the same way, and then took to the beach again where those two heel marks are still left? Yes, we'll say that. It seems to fit in with my notion that she had something under her cloak, when she left the cottage. No! not something to destroy--for, in that case, where would have been the need of all these precautions to prevent my tracing the place at which her walk ended? Something to hide is, I think, the better guess of the two. Perhaps, if we go on to the cottage, we may find out what that something is?"

At this proposal, my detective-fever suddenly cooled. "You don't want me," I said. "What good can I do?"

"The longer I know you, Mr. Betteredge," said the Sergeant, "the more virtues I discover. Modesty--oh dear me, how rare modesty is in this world! and how much of that rarity you possess! If I go alone to the cottage, the people's tongues will be tied at the first question I put to them. If I go with you, I go introduced by a justly respected neighbour, and a flow of conversation is the necessary result. It strikes me in that light; how does it strike you?"

Not having an answer of the needful smartness as ready as I could have wished, I tried to gain time by asking him what cottage he wanted to go to.

On the Sergeant describing the place, I recognised it as a cottage inhabited by a fisherman named Yolland, with his wife and two grown-up children, a son and a daughter. If you will look back, you will find that, in first presenting Rosanna Spearman to your notice, I have described her as occasionally varying her walk to the Shivering Sand, by a visit to some friends of hers at Cobb's Hole. Those friends were the Yollands--respectable, worthy people, a credit to the neighbourhood. Rosanna's acquaintance with them had begun by means of the daughter, who was afflicted with a misshapen foot, and who was known in our parts by the name of Limping Lucy. The two deformed girls had, I suppose, a kind of fellow-feeling for each other. Anyway, the Yollands and Rosanna always appeared to get on together, at the few chances they had of meeting, in a pleasant and friendly manner. The fact of Sergeant Cuff having traced the girl to THEIR cottage, set the matter of my helping his inquiries in quite a new light. Rosanna had merely gone where she was in the habit of going; and to show that she had been in company with the fisherman and his family was as good as to prove that she had been innocently occupied so far, at any rate. It would be doing the girl a service, therefore, instead of an injury, if I allowed myself to be convinced by Sergeant Cuff's logic. I professed myself convinced by it accordingly.

We went on to Cobb's Hole, seeing the footsteps on the sand, as long as the light lasted.

On reaching the cottage, the fisherman and his son proved to be out in the boat; and Limping Lucy, always weak and weak, was resting on her bed up-stairs. Good Mrs. Yolland received us alone in her kitchen. When she heard that Sergeant Cuff was a celebrated character in London, she clapped a bottle of Dutch gin and a couple of clean pipes on the table, and stared as if she could never see enough of him.

I sat quiet in a corner, waiting to hear how the Sergeant would find his way to the subject of Rosanna Spearman. His usual roundabout manner of going to work proved, on this occasion, to be more roundabout than ever. How he managed it is more than I could tell at the time, and more than I can tell now. But this is certain, he began with the Royal Family, the Primitive Methodists, and the price of fish; and he got from that (in his dismal, underground way) to the loss of the Moonstone, the spitefulness of our first house-maid, and the hard behaviour of the women-servants generally towards Rosanna Spearman. Having reached his subject in this fashion, he described himself as making his inquiries about the lost Diamond, partly with a view to find it, and partly for the purpose of clearing Rosanna from the unjust suspicions of her enemies in the house. In about a quarter of an hour from the time when we entered the kitchen, good Mrs. Yolland was persuaded that she was talking to Rosanna's best friend, and was pressing Sergeant Cuff to comfort his stomach and revive his spirits out of the Dutch bottle.

Being firmly persuaded that the Sergeant was wasting his breath to no purpose on Mrs. Yolland, I sat enjoying the talk between them, much as I have sat, in my time, enjoying a stage play. The great Cuff showed a wonderful patience; trying his luck drearily this way and that way, and firing shot after shot, as it were, at random, on the chance of hitting the mark. Everything to Rosanna's credit, nothing to Rosanna's prejudice--that was how it ended,
try as he might; with Mrs. Yolland talking nineteen to the dozen, and placing the most entire confidence in him. His last effort was made, when we had looked at our watches, and had got on our legs previous to taking leave.

"I shall now wish you good-night, ma'am," says the Sergeant. "And I shall only say, at parting, that Rosanna Spearman has a sincere well-wisher in myself, your obedient servant. But, oh dear me! she will never get on in her present place; and my advice to her is--leave it."

"Bless your heart alive! she is GOING to leave it!" cries Mrs. Yolland. (NOTA BENE--I translate Mrs. Yolland out of the Yorkshire language into the English language. When I tell you that the all-accomplished Cuff was every now and then puzzled to understand her until I helped him, you will draw your own conclusions as to what your state of mind would be if I reported her in her native tongue.)

Rosanna Spearman going to leave us! I pricked up my ears at that. It seemed strange, to say the least of it, that she should have given no warning, in the first place, to my lady or to me. A certain doubt came up in my mind whether Sergeant Cuff's last random shot might not have hit the mark. I began to question whether my share in the proceedings was quite as harmless a one as I had thought it. It might be all in the way of the Sergeant's business to mystify an honest woman by wrapping her round in a network of lies but it was my duty to have remembered, as a good Protestant, that the father of lies is the Devil--and that mischief and the Devil are never far apart. Beginning to smell mischief in the air, I tried to take Sergeant Cuff out. He sat down again instantly, and asked for a little drop of comfort out of the Dutch bottle. Mrs Yolland sat down opposite to him, and gave him his nip. I went on to the door, excessively uncomfortable, and said I thought I must bid them good-night--and yet I didn't go.

"So she means to leave?" says the Sergeant. "What is she to do when she does leave? Sad, sad! The poor creature has got no friends in the world, except you and me."

"Ah, but she has thought!" says Mrs. Yolland. "She came in here, as I told you, this evening; and, after sitting and talking a little with my girl Lucy and me she asked to go up-stairs by herself, into Lucy's room. It's the only room in our place where there's pen and ink. 'I want to write a letter to a friend,' she says 'and I can't do it for the prying and peeping of the servants up at the house.' Who the letter was written to I can't tell you: it must have been a mortal long one, judging by the time she stopped up-stairs over it. I offered her a postage-stamp when she came down. She hadn't got the letter in her hand, and she didn't accept the stamp. A little close, poor soul (as you know), about herself and her doings. But a friend she has got somewhere, I can tell you; and to that friend you may depend upon it, she will go."

"Soon?" asked the Sergeant.

"As soon as she can." says Mrs. Yolland.

Here I stepped in again from the door. As chief of my lady's establishment, I couldn't allow this sort of loose talk about a servant of ours going, or not going, to proceed any longer in my presence, without noticing it.

"You must be mistaken about Rosanna Spearman," I said. "If she had been going to leave her present situation, she would have mentioned it, in the first place, to _me_."

"Mistaken?" cries Mrs. Yolland. "Why, only an hour ago she bought some things she wanted for travelling--of my own self, Mr. Betteredge, in this very room. And that reminds me," says the wearisome woman, suddenly beginning to feel in her pocket, "of something I have got it on my mind to say about Rosanna and her money. Are you either of you likely to see her when you go back to the house?"

"I'll take a message to the poor thing, with the greatest pleasure," answered Sergeant Cuff, before I could put in a word edgewise.

Mrs. Yolland produced out of her pocket, a few shillings and sixpences, and counted them out with a most particular and exasperating carefulness in the palm of her hand. She offered the money to the Sergeant, looking mighty loth to part with it all the while.

"Might I ask you to give this back to Rosanna, with my love and respects?" says Mrs. Yolland. "She insisted on paying me for the one or two things she took a fancy to this evening--and money's welcome enough in our house, I don't deny it. Still, I'm not easy in my mind about taking the poor thing's little savings. And to tell you the truth, I don't think my man would like to hear that I had taken Rosanna Spearman's money, when he comes back to-morrow morning from his work. Please say she's heartily welcome to the things she bought of me--as a gift. And don't leave the money on the table," says Mrs. Yolland, putting it down suddenly before the Sergeant, as if it burnt her fingers--"don't, there's a good man! For times are hard, and flesh is weak; and I MIGHT feel tempted to put it back in my pocket again."

"Come along!" I said, "I can't wait any longer: I must go back to the house."

"I'll follow you directly," says Sergeant Cuff.

For the second time, I went to the door; and, for the second time, try as I might, I couldn't cross the threshold.

"It's a delicate matter, ma'am," I heard the Sergeant say, "giving money back. You charged her cheap for the things, I'm sure?"
"Cheap!" says Mrs. Yolland. "Come and judge for yourself."

She took up the candle and led the Sergeant to a corner of the kitchen. For the life of me, I couldn't help following them. Shaken down in the corner was a heap of odds and ends (mostly old metal), which the fisherman had picked up at different times from wrecked ships, and which he hadn't found a market for yet, to his own mind. Mrs. Yolland dived into this rubbish, and brought up an old japanned tin case, with a cover to it, and a hasp to hang it up by--the sort of thing they use, on board ship, for keeping their maps and charts, and such-like, from the wet.

"There!" says she. "When Rosanna came in this evening, she bought the fellow to that. 'It will just do,' she says, 'to put my cuffs and collars in, and keep them from being crumpled in my box.' One and ninepence, Mr. Cuff. As I live by bread, not a halfpenny more!"

"Dirt cheap!" says the Sergeant, with a heavy sigh.

He weighed the case in his hand. I thought I heard a note or two of "The Last Rose of Summer" as he looked at it. There was no doubt now! He had made another discovery to the prejudice of Rosanna Spearman, in the place of all others where I thought her character was safest, and all through me! I leave you to imagine what I felt, and how sincerely I repented having been the medium of introduction between Mrs. Yolland and Sergeant Cuff.

"That will do," I said. "We really must go."

Without paying the least attention to me, Mrs. Yolland took another dive into the rubbish, and came up out of it, this time, with a dog-chain.

"Weigh it in your hand, sir," she said to the Sergeant. "We had three of these; and Rosanna has taken two of them. 'What can you want, my dear, with a couple of dog's chains?' says I. 'If I join them together they'll do round my box nicely,' says she. 'Rope's cheapest,' says I. 'Chain's surest,' says she. 'Who ever heard of a box corded with chain,' says I. 'Oh, Mrs. Yolland, don't make objections!' says she; 'let me have my chains!' A strange girl, Mr. Cuff--good as gold, and kinder than a sister to my Lucy--but always a little strange. There! I humoured her. Three and sixpence. On the word of an honest woman, three and sixpence, Mr. Cuff!"

"Each?" says the Sergeant.

"Both together!" says Mrs. Yolland. "Three and sixpence for the two."

"Given away, ma'am," says the Sergeant, shaking his head. "Clean given away!"

"There's the money," says Mrs. Yolland, getting back sideways to the little heap of silver on the table, as if it drew her in spite of herself. "The tin case and the dog chains were all she bought, and all she took away. One and ninepence and three and sixpence--total, five and three. With my love and respects--and I can't find it in my conscience to take a poor girl's savings, when she may want them herself."

"I can't find it in MY conscience, ma'am, to give the money back," says Sergeant Cuff. "You have as good as made her a present of the things--you have indeed."

"Is that your sincere opinion, sir?" says Mrs. Yolland brightening up wonderfully.

"There can't be a doubt about it," answered the Sergeant. "Ask Mr. Betteredge."

It was no use asking ME. All they got out of ME was, "Good-night."

"Bother the money!" says Mrs. Yolland. With these words, she appeared to lose all command over herself; and, making a sudden snatch at the heap of silver, put it back, holus-bolus, in her pocket. "It upsets one's temper, it does, to see it lying there, and nobody taking it," cries this unreasonable woman, sitting down with a thump, and looking at Sergeant Cuff, as much as to say, "It's in my pocket again now--get it out if you can!"

This time, I not only went to the door, but went fairly out on the road back. Explain it how you may, I felt as if one or both of them had mortally offended me. Before I had taken three steps down the village, I heard the Sergeant behind me.

"Thank you for your introduction, Mr. Betteredge," he said. "I am indebted to the fisherman's wife for an entirely new sensation. Mrs. Yolland has puzzled me."

It was on the tip of my tongue to have given him a sharp answer, for no better reason than this--that I was out of temper with him, because I was out of temper with myself. But when he owned to being puzzled, a comforting doubt crossed my mind whether any great harm had been done after all. I waited in discreet silence to hear more.

"Yes," says the Sergeant, as if he was actually reading my thoughts in the dark. "Instead of putting me on the scent, it may console you to know, Mr. Betteredge (with your interest in Rosanna), that you have been the means of throwing me off. What the girl has done, to-night, is clear enough, of course. She has joined the two chains, and has fastened them to the hasp in the tin case. She has sunk the case, in the water or in the quicksand. She has made the loose end of the chain fast to some place under the rocks, known only to herself. And she will leave the case secure at its anchorage till the present proceedings have come to an end; after which she can privately pull it up again out of its hiding-place, at her own leisure and convenience. All perfectly plain, so far. But," says the Sergeant, with the first tone of impatience in his voice that I had heard yet, "the mystery is--what the devil has she hidden in the tin case?"

I thought to myself, "The Moonstone!" But I only said to Sergeant Cuff, "Can't you guess?"
"It's not the Diamond," says the Sergeant. "The whole experience of my life is at fault, if Rosanna Spearman has got the Diamond."

On hearing those words, the infernal detective-fever began, I suppose, to burn in me again. At any rate, I forgot myself in the interest of guessing this new riddle. I said rashly, "The stained dress!"

Sergeant Cuff stopped short in the dark, and laid his hand on my arm.

"Is anything thrown into that quicksand of yours, ever thrown up on the surface again?" he asked.

"Never," I answered. "Light or heavy whatever goes into the Shivering Sand is sucked down, and seen no more."

"Does Rosanna Spearman know that?"

"She knows it as well as I do."

"Then," says the Sergeant, "what on earth has she got to do but to tie up a bit of stone in the stained dress and throw it into the quicksand? There isn't the shadow of a reason why she should have hidden it--and yet she must have hidden it. Query," says the Sergeant, walking on again, "is the paint-stained dress a petticoat or a night-gown? or is it something else which there is a reason for preserving at any risk? Mr. Betteredge, if nothing occurs to prevent it, I must go to Frizinghall to-morrow, and discover what she bought in the town, when she privately got the materials for making the substitute dress. It's a risk to leave the house, as things are now--but it's a worse risk still to stir another step in this matter in the dark. Excuse my being a little out of temper; I'm degraded in my own estimation--I have let Rosanna Spearman puzzle me."

When we got back, the servants were at supper. The first person we saw in the outer yard was the policeman whom Superintendent Seegrave had left at the Sergeant's disposal. The Sergeant asked if Rosanna Spearman had returned. Yes. When? Nearly an hour since. What had she done? She had gone up-stairs to take off her bonnet and cloak--and she was now at supper quietly with the rest.

Without making any remark, Sergeant Cuff walked on, sinking lower and lower in his own estimation, to the back of the house. Missing the entrance in the dark, he went on (in spite of my calling to him) till he was stopped by a wicket-gate which led into the garden. When I joined him to bring him back by the right way, I found that he was looking up attentively at one particular window, on the bed-room floor, at the back of the house.

Looking up, in my turn, I discovered that the object of his contemplation was the window of Miss Rachel's room, and that lights were passing backwards and forwards there as if something unusual was going on.

"Isn't that Miss Verinder's room?" asked Sergeant Cuff.

I replied that it was, and invited him to go in with me to supper. The Sergeant remained in his place, and said something about enjoying the smell of the garden at night. I left him to his enjoyment. Just as I was turning in at the door, I heard "The Last Rose of Summer" at the wicket-gate. Sergeant Cuff had made another discovery! And my young lady's window was at the bottom of it this time!

The latter reflection took me back again to the Sergeant, with a polite intimation that I could not find it in my heart to leave him by himself. "Is there anything you don't understand up there?" I added, pointing to Miss Rachel's window.

Judging by his voice, Sergeant Cuff had suddenly risen again to the right place in his own estimation. "You are great people for betting in Yorkshire, are you not?" he asked.

"Well?" I said. "Suppose we are?"

"If I was a Yorkshireman," proceeded the Sergeant, taking my arm, "I would lay you an even sovereign, Mr. Betteredge, that your young lady has suddenly resolved to leave the house. If I won on that event, I should offer to lay another sovereign, that the idea has occurred to her within the last hour." The first of the Sergeant's guesses startled me. The second mixed itself up somehow in my head with the report we had heard from the policeman, that Rosanna Spearman had returned from the sands with in the last hour. The two together had a curious effect on me as we went in to supper. I shook off Sergeant Cuff's arm, and, forgetting my manners, pushed by him through the door to make my own inquiries for myself.

Samuel, the footman, was the first person I met in the passage.

"Her ladyship is waiting to see you and Sergeant Cuff," he said, before I could put any questions to him.

"How long has she been waiting?" asked the Sergeant's voice behind me.

"For the last hour, sir."

There it was again! Rosanna had come back; Miss Rachel had taken some resolution out of the common; and my lady had been waiting to see the Sergeant--all within the last hour! It was not pleasant to find these very different persons and things linking themselves together in this way. I went on upstairs, without looking at Sergeant Cuff, or speaking to him. My hand took a sudden fit of trembling as I lifted it to knock at my mistress's door.

"I shouldn't be surprised," whispered the Sergeant over my shoulder, "if a scandal was to burst up in the house to-night. Don't be alarmed! I have put the muzzle on worse family difficulties than this, in my time."

As he said the words I heard my mistress's voice calling to us to come in.
CHAPTER XVI

We found my lady with no light in the room but the reading-lamp. The shade was screwed down so as to overshadow her face. Instead of looking up at us in her usual straightforward way, she sat close at the table, and kept her eyes fixed obstinately on an open book.

"Officer," she said, "is it important to the inquiry you are conducting, to know beforehand if any person now in this house wishes to leave it?"

"Most important, my lady."

"I have to tell you, then, that Miss Verinder proposes going to stay with her aunt, Mrs. Ablewhite, of Frizinghall. She has arranged to leave us the first thing to-morrow morning."

Sergeant Cuff looked at me. I made a step forward to speak to my mistress--and, feeling my heart fail me (if I must own it), took a step back again, and said nothing.

"May I ask your ladyship WHEN Miss Verinder informed you that she was going to her aunt's?" inquired the Sergeant.

"About an hour since," answered my mistress.

Sergeant Cuff looked at me once more. They say old people's hearts are not very easily moved. My heart couldn't have thumped much harder than it did now, if I had been five-and-twenty again!

"I have no claim, my lady," says the Sergeant, "to control Miss Verinder's actions. All I can ask you to do is to put off her departure, if possible, till later in the day. I must go to Frizinghall myself to-morrow morning--and I shall be back by two o'clock, if not before. If Miss Verinder can be kept here till that time, I should wish to say two words to her--unexpectedly--before she goes."

My lady directed me to give the coachman her orders, that the carriage was not to come for Miss Rachel until two o'clock. "Have you more to say?" she asked of the Sergeant, when this had been done.

"Only one thing, your ladyship. If Miss Verinder is surprised at this change in the arrangements, please not to mention Me as being the cause of putting off her journey."

My mistress lifted her head suddenly from her book as if she was going to say something--checked herself by a great effort--and, looking back again at the open page, dismissed us with a sign of her hand.

"That's a wonderful woman," said Sergeant Cuff, when we were out in the hall again. "But for her self-control, the mystery that puzzles you, Mr. Betteredge, would have been at an end to-night."

At those words, the truth rushed at last into my stupid old head. For the moment, I suppose I must have gone clean out of my senses. I seized the Sergeant by the collar of his coat, and pinned him against the wall.

"Damn you!" I cried out, "there's something wrong about Miss Rachel--and you have been hiding it from me all this time!"

Sergeant Cuff looked up at me--flat against the wall--without stirring a hand, or moving a muscle of his melancholy face.

"Ah," he said, "you've guessed it at last."

My hand dropped from his collar, and my head sunk on my breast. Please to remember, as some excuse for my breaking out as I did, that I had served the family for fifty years. Miss Rachel had climbed upon my knees, and pulled my whiskers, many and many a time when she was a child. Miss Rachel, with all her faults, had been, to my mind, the dearest and prettiest and best young mistress that ever an old servant waited on, and loved. I begged Sergeant's Cuff's pardon, but I am afraid I did it with watery eyes, and not in a very becoming way.

"Don't distress yourself, Mr. Betteredge," says the Sergeant, with more kindness than I had any right to expect from him. "In my line of life if we were quick at taking offence, we shouldn't be worth salt to our porridge. If it's any comfort to you, collar me again. You don't in the least know how to do it; but I'll overlook your awkwardness in consideration of your feelings."

He curled up at the corners of his lips, and, in his own dreary way, seemed to think he had delivered himself of a very good joke.

I led him into my own little sitting-room, and closed the door.

"Tell me the truth, Sergeant," I said. "What do you suspect? It's no kindness to hide it from me now."

"I don't suspect," said Sergeant Cuff. "I know."

My unlucky temper began to get the better of me again.

"Do you mean to tell me, in plain English," I said, "that Miss Rachel has stolen her own Diamond?"

"Yes," says the Sergeant; "that is what I mean to tell you, in so many words. Miss Verinder has been in secret possession of the Moonstone from first to last; and she has taken Rosanna Spearman into her confidence, because she has calculated on our suspecting Rosanna Spearman of the theft. There is the whole case in a nutshell. Collar me again, Mr. Betteredge. If it's any vent to your feelings, collar me again."

God help me! my feelings were not to be relieved in that way. "Give me your reasons!" That was all I could say
to him.

"You shall hear my reasons to-morrow," said the Sergeant. "If Miss Verinder refuses to put off her visit to her aunt (which you will find Miss Verinder will do), I shall be obliged to lay the whole case before your mistress to-morrow. And, as I don't know what may come of it, I shall request you to be present, and to hear what passes on both sides. Let the matter rest for to-night. No, Mr. Betteredge, you don't get a word more on the subject of the Moonstone out of me. There is your table spread for supper. That's one of the many human infirmities which I always treat tenderly. If you will ring the bell, I'll say grace. 'For what we are going to receive----"

"I wish you a good appetite to it, Sergeant," I said. "My appetite is gone. I'll wait and see you served, and then I'll ask you to excuse me, if I go away, and try to get the better of this by myself."

I saw him served with the best of everything--and I shouldn't have been sorry if the best of everything had choked him. The head gardener (Mr. Begbie) came in at the same time, with his weekly account. The Sergeant got on the subject of roses and the merits of grass walks and gravel walks immediately. I left the two together, and went out with a heavy heart. This was the first trouble I remember for many a long year which wasn't to be blown off by a whiff of tobacco, and which was even beyond the reach of ROBINSON CRUSOE.

Being restless and miserable, and having no particular room to go to, I took a turn on the terrace, and thought it over in peace and quietness by myself. It doesn't much matter what my thoughts were. I felt wretchedly old, and worn out, and unfit for my place--and began to wonder, for the first time in my life, when it would please God to take me. With all this, I held firm, notwithstanding, to my belief in Miss Rachel. If Sergeant Cuff had been Solomon in all his glory, and had told me that my young lady had mixed herself up in a mean and guilty plot, I should have had but one answer for Solomon, wise as he was, "You don't know her; and I do."

My meditations were interrupted by Samuel. He brought me a written message from my mistress.

Going into the house to get a light to read it by, Samuel remarked that there seemed a change coming in the weather. My troubled mind had prevented me from noticing it before. But, now my attention was roused, I heard the dogs uneasy, and the wind moaning low. Looking up at the sky, I saw the rack of clouds getting blacker and blacker, and hurrying faster and faster over a watery moon. Wild weather coming--Samuel was right, wild weather coming.

The message from my lady informed me, that the magistrate at Frizinghall had written to remind her about the three Indians. Early in the coming week, the rogues must needs be released, and left free to follow their own devices. If we had any more questions to ask them, there was no time to lose. Having forgotten to mention this, when she had last seen Sergeant Cuff, my mistress now desired me to supply the omission. The Indians had gone clean out of my head (as they have, no doubt, gone clean out of yours). I didn't see much use in stirring that subject again. However, I obeyed my orders on the spot, as a matter of course.

I found Sergeant Cuff and the gardener, with a bottle of Scotch whisky between them, head over ears in an argument on the growing of roses. The Sergeant was so deeply interested that he held up his hand, and signed to me not to interrupt the discussion, when I came in. As far as I could understand it, the question between them was, whether the white moss rose did, or did not, require to be budded on the dog-rose to make it grow well. Mr. Begbie said, Yes; and Sergeant Cuff said, No. They appealed to me, as hotly as a couple of boys. Knowing nothing whatever about the growing of roses, I steered a middle course--just as her Majesty's judges do, when the scales of justice bother them by hanging even to a hair. "Gentlemen," I remarked, "there is much to be said on both sides." In the temporary lull produced by that impartial sentence, I laid my lady's written message on the table, under the eyes of Sergeant Cuff.

I had got by this time, as nearly as might be, to hate the Sergeant. But truth compels me to acknowledge that, in respect of readiness of mind, he was a wonderful man.

In half a minute after he had read the message, he had looked back into his memory for Superintendent Seegrave's report; had picked out that part of it in which the Indians were concerned; and was ready with his answer. A certain great traveller, who understood the Indians and their language, had figured in Mr. Seegrave's report, hadn't he? Very well. Did I know the gentleman's name and address? Very well again. Would I write them on the back of Sergeant Cuff's report?

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By that time, I had closed the door on them, and was out of hearing of the rest of the dispute.
In the passage, I met Penelope hanging about, and asked what she was waiting for.

She was waiting for her young lady's bell, when her young lady chose to call her back to go on with the packing for the next day's journey. Further inquiry revealed to me, that Miss Rachel had given it as a reason for wanting to go to her aunt at Frizinghall, that the house was unendurable to her, and that she could bear the odious presence of a policeman under the same roof with herself no longer. On being informed, half an hour since, that her departure would be delayed till two in the afternoon, she had flown into a violent passion. My lady, present at the time, had severely rebuked her, and then (having apparently something to say, which was reserved for her daughter's private ear) had sent Penelope out of the room. My girl was in wretchedly low spirits about the changed state of things in the house. "Nothing goes right, father; nothing is like what it used to be. I feel as if some dreadful misfortune was hanging over us all."

That was my feeling too. But I put a good face on it, before my daughter. Miss Rachel's bell rang while we were talking. Penelope ran up the back stairs to go on with the packing. I went by the other way to the hall, to see what the glass said about the change in the weather.

Just as I approached the swing-door leading into the hall from the servants' offices, it was violently opened from the other side, and Rosanna Spearman ran by me, with a miserable look of pain in her face, and one of her hands pressed hard over her heart, as if the pang was in that quarter. "What's the matter, my girl?" I asked, stopping her. "Are you ill?" "For God's sake, don't speak to me," she answered, and twisted herself out of my hands, and ran on towards the servants' staircase. I called to the cook (who was within hearing) to look after the poor girl. Two other persons proved to be within hearing, as well as the cook. Sergeant Cuff darted softly out of my room, and asked what was the matter. I answered, "Nothing." Mr. Franklin, on the other side, pulled open the swing-door, and beckoning me into the hall, inquired if I had seen anything of Rosanna Spearman.

"She has just passed me, sir, with a very disturbed face, and in a very odd manner."

"I am afraid I am innocently the cause of that disturbance, Betteredge."

"You, sir!"

"I can't explain it," says Mr. Franklin; "but, if the girl IS concerned in the loss of the Diamond, I do really believe she was on the point of confessing everything--to me, of all the people in the world--not two minutes since."

Looking towards the swing-door, as he said those last words, I fancied I saw it opened a little way from the inner side.

Was there anybody listening? The door fell to, before I could get to it. Looking through, the moment after, I thought I saw the tails of Sergeant Cuff's respectable black coat disappearing round the corner of the passage. He knew, as well as I did, that he could expect no more help from me, now that I had discovered the turn which his investigations were really taking. Under those circumstances, it was quite in his character to help himself, and to do it by the underground way.

Not feeling sure that I had really seen the Sergeant--and not desiring to make needless mischief, where, Heaven knows, there was mischief enough going on already--I told Mr. Franklin that I thought one of the dogs had got into the house--and then begged him to describe what had happened between Rosanna and himself.

"Were you passing through the hall, sir?" I asked. "Did you meet her accidentally, when she spoke to you?"

Mr. Franklin pointed to the billiard-table.

"I was knocking the balls about," he said, "and trying to get this miserable business of the Diamond out of my mind. I happened to look up--and there stood Rosanna Spearman at the side of me, like a ghost! Her stealing on me in that way was so strange, that I hardly knew what to do at first. Seeing a very anxious expression in her face, I asked her if she wished to speak to me. She answered, 'Yes, if I dare.' Knowing what suspicion attached to her, I could only put one construction on such language as that. I confess it made me uncomfortable. I had no wish to invite the girl's confidence. At the same time, in the difficulties that now beset us, I could hardly feel justified in refusing to listen to her, if she was really bent on speaking to me. It was an awkward position; and I dare say I got out of it awkwardly enough. I said to her, 'I don't quite understand you. Is there anything you want me to do?' Mind, Betteredge, I didn't speak unkindly! The poor girl can't help being ugly--I felt that, at the time. The cue was still in my hand, and I went on knocking the balls about, to take off the awkwardness of the thing. As it turned out, I only made matters worse still. I'm afraid I mortified her without meaning it! She suddenly turned away. 'He looks at the billiard balls,' I heard her say. 'Anything rather than look at _me_!' Before I could stop her, she had left the hall. I am not quite easy about it, Betteredge. Would you mind telling Rosanna that I meant no unkindness? I have been a little not quite easy about it, Betteredge. Would you mind telling Rosanna that I meant no unkindness? I have been a little

After what had passed between the Sergeant and me, I knew what it was that he had left unspoken as well as he knew it himself.
Nothing but the tracing of the Moonstone to our second housemaid could now raise Miss Rachel above the infamous suspicion that rested on her in the mind of Sergeant Cuff. It was no longer a question of quieting my young lady's nervous excitement; it was a question of proving her innocence. If Rosanna had done nothing to compromise herself, the hope which Mr. Franklin confessed to having felt would have been hard enough on her in all conscience. But this was not the case. She had pretended to be ill, and had gone secretly to Frizinghall. She had been up all night, making something or destroying something, in private. And she had been at the Shivering Sand, that evening, under circumstances which were highly suspicious, to say the least of them. For all these reasons (sorry as I was for Rosanna) I could not but think that Mr. Franklin's way of looking at the matter was neither unnatural nor unreasonable, in Mr. Franklin's position. I said a word to him to that effect.

"Yes, yes!" he said in return. "But there is just a chance—a very poor one, certainly—that Rosanna's conduct may admit of some explanation which we don't see at present. I hate hurting a woman's feelings, Betteredge! Tell the poor creature what I told you to tell her. And if she wants to speak to me—I don't care whether I get into a scrape or not—send her to me in the library." With those kind words he laid down the cue and left me.

Inquiry at the servants' offices informed me that Rosanna had retired to her own room. She had declined all offers of assistance with thanks, and had only asked to be left to rest in quiet. Here, therefore, was an end of any confession on her part (supposing she really had a confession to make) for that night. I reported the result to Mr. Franklin, who, thereupon, left the library, and went up to bed.

I was putting the lights out, and making the windows fast, when Samuel came in with news of the two guests whom I had left in my room.

The argument about the white moss rose had apparently come to an end at last. The gardener had gone home, and Sergeant Cuff was nowhere to be found in the lower regions of the house.

I looked into my room. Quite true—nothing was to be discovered there but a couple of empty tumblers and a strong smell of hot grog. Had the Sergeant gone of his own accord to the bed-chamber that was prepared for him? I went up-stairs to see.

After reaching the second landing, I thought I heard a sound of quiet and regular breathing on my left-hand side. My left-hand side led to the corridor which communicated with Miss Rachel's room. I looked in, and there, coiled up on three chairs placed right across the passage—there, with a red handkerchief tied round his grizzled head, and his respectable black coat rolled up for a pillow, lay and slept Sergeant Cuff!

He woke, instantly and quietly, like a dog, the moment I approached him.

"Good night, Mr. Betteredge," he said. "And mind, if you ever take to growing roses, the white moss rose is all the better for not being budded on the dog-rose, whatever the gardener may say to the contrary!"

"What are you doing here?" I asked. "Why are you not in your proper bed?"

"I am not in my proper bed," answered the Sergeant, "because I am one of the many people in this miserable world who can't earn their money honestly and easily at the same time. There was a coincidence, this evening, between the period of Rosanna Spearman's return from the Sands and the period when Miss Verinder stated her resolution to leave the house. Whatever Rosanna may have hidden, it's clear to my mind that your young lady couldn't go away until she knew that it WAS hidden. The two must have communicated privately once already tonight. If they try to communicate again, when the house is quiet, I want to be in the way, and stop it. Don't blame me for upsetting your sleeping arrangements, Mr. Betteredge—blame the Diamond."

"I wish to God the Diamond had never found its way into this house!" I broke out.

Sergeant Cuff looked with a rueful face at the three chairs on which he had condemned himself to pass the night.

"So do I," he said, gravely.

CHAPTER XVII

Nothing happened in the night; and (I am happy to add) no attempt at communication between Miss Rachel and Rosanna rewarded the vigilance of Sergeant Cuff.

I had expected the Sergeant to set off for Frizinghall the first thing in the morning. He waited about, however, as if he had something else to do first. I left him to his own devices; and going into the grounds shortly after, met Mr. Franklin on his favourite walk by the shrubbery side.

Before we had exchanged two words, the Sergeant unexpectedly joined us. He made up to Mr. Franklin, who received him, I must own, haughtily enough. "Have you anything to say to me?" was all the return he got for politely wishing Mr. Franklin good morning.

"I have something to say to you, sir," answered the Sergeant, "on the subject of the inquiry I am conducting here. You detected the turn that inquiry was really taking, yesterday. Naturally enough, in your position, you are shocked and distressed. Naturally enough, also, you visit your own angry sense of your own family scandal upon Me."

"What do you want?" Mr. Franklin broke in, sharply enough.

"I want to remind you, sir, that I have at any rate, thus far, not been PROVED to be wrong. Bearing that in mind,
be pleased to remember, at the same time, that I am an officer of the law acting here under the sanction of the mistress of the house. Under these circumstances, is it, or is it not, your duty as a good citizen, to assist me with any special information which you may happen to possess?"

"I possess no special information," says Mr. Franklin.

Sergeant Cuff put that answer by him, as if no answer had been made.

"You may save my time, sir, from being wasted on an inquiry at a distance," he went on, "if you choose to understand me and speak out."

"I don't understand you," answered Mr. Franklin; "and I have nothing to say."

"One of the female servants (I won't mention names) spoke to you privately, sir, last night."

Once more Mr. Franklin cut him short; once more Mr. Franklin answered, "I have nothing to say."

Standing by in silence, I thought of the movement in the swing-door on the previous evening, and of the coat-tails which I had seen disappearing down the passage. Sergeant Cuff had, no doubt, just heard enough, before I interrupted him, to make him suspect that Rosanna had relieved her mind by confessing something to Mr. Franklin Blake.

This notion had barely struck me—when who should appear at the end of the shrubbery walk but Rosanna Spearman in her own proper person! She was followed by Penelope, who was evidently trying to make her retrace her steps to the house. Seeing that Mr. Franklin was not alone, Rosanna came to a standstill, evidently in great perplexity what to do next. Penelope waited behind her. Mr. Franklin saw the girls as soon as I saw them. The Sergeant, with his devilish cunning, took on not to have noticed them at all. All this happened in an instant. Before either Mr. Franklin or I could say a word, Sergeant Cuff struck in smoothly, with an appearance of continuing the previous conversation.

"You needn't be afraid of harming the girl, sir," he said to Mr. Franklin, speaking in a loud voice, so that Rosanna might hear him. "On the contrary, I recommend you to honour me with your confidence, if you feel any interest in Rosanna Spearman."

Mr. Franklin instantly took on not to have noticed the girls either. He answered, speaking loudly on his side:

"I take no interest whatever in Rosanna Spearman."

I looked towards the end of the walk. All I saw at the distance was that Rosanna suddenly turned round, the moment Mr. Franklin had spoken. Instead of resisting Penelope, as she had done the moment before, she now let my daughter take her by the arm and lead her back to the house.

The breakfast-bell rang as the two girls disappeared—and even Sergeant Cuff was now obliged to give it up as a bad job! He said to me quietly, "I shall go to Frizinghall, Mr. Betteredge; and I shall be back before two." He went his way without a word more—and for some few hours we were well rid of him.

"You must make it right with Rosanna," Mr. Franklin said to me, when we were alone. "I seem to be fated to say or do something awkward, before that unlucky girl. You must have seen yourself that Sergeant Cuff laid a trap for both of us. If he could confuse ME, or irritate HER into breaking out, either she or I might have said something which would answer his purpose. On the spur of the moment, I saw no better way out of it than the way I took. It stopped the girl from saying anything, and it showed the Sergeant that I saw through him. He was evidently listening, Betteredge, when I was speaking to you last night."

He had done worse than listen, as I privately thought to myself. He had remembered my telling him that the girl was in love with Mr. Franklin; and he had calculated on THAT, when he appealed to Mr. Franklin's interest in Rosanna's hearing.

"As to listening, sir," I remarked (keeping the other point to myself), "we shall all be rowing in the same boat if this sort of thing goes on much longer. Prying, and peeping, and listening are the natural occupations of people situated as we are. In another day or two, Mr. Franklin, we shall all be struck dumb together—for this reason, that we shall all be listening to surprise each other's secrets, and all know it. Excuse my breaking out, sir. The horrid mystery hanging over us in this house gets into my head like liquor, and makes me wild. I won't forget what you have told me. I'll take the first opportunity of making it right with Rosanna Spearman."

"You haven't said anything to her yet about last night, have you?" Mr. Franklin asked.

"No, sir."

"Then say nothing now. I had better not invite the girl's confidence, with the Sergeant on the look-out to surprise us together. My conduct is not very consistent, Betteredge—is it? I see no way out of this business, which isn't dreadful to think of, unless the Diamond is traced to Rosanna. And yet I can't, and won't, help Sergeant Cuff to find the girl out."

Unreasonable enough, no doubt. But it was my state of mind as well. I thoroughly understood him. If you will, for once in your life, remember that you are mortal, perhaps you will thoroughly understand him too.

The state of things, indoors and out, while Sergeant Cuff was on his way to Frizinghall, was briefly this:
Miss Rachel waited for the time when the carriage was to take her to her aunt's, still obstinately shut up in her own room. My lady and Mr. Franklin breakfasted together. After breakfast, Mr. Franklin took one of his sudden resolutions, and went out precipitately to quiet his mind by a long walk. I was the only person who saw him go; and he told me he should be back before the Sergeant returned. The change in the weather, foreshadowed overnight, had come. Heavy rain had been followed soon after dawn, by high wind. It was blowing fresh, as the day got on. But though the clouds threatened more than once, the rain still held off. It was not a bad day for a walk, if you were young and strong, and could breast the great gusts of wind which came sweeping in from the sea.

I attended my lady after breakfast, and assisted her in the settlement of our household accounts. She only once alluded to the matter of the Moonstone, and that was in the way of forbidding any present mention of it between us. "Wait till that man comes back," she said, meaning the Sergeant. "We MUST speak of it then: we are not obliged to speak of it now."

After leaving my mistress, I found Penelope waiting for me in my room.

"I wish, father, you would come and speak to Rosanna," she said. "I am very uneasy about her."

I suspected what was the matter readily enough. But it is a maxim of mine that men (being superior creatures) are bound to improve women—if they can. When a woman wants me to do anything (my daughter, or not, it doesn't matter), I always insist on knowing why. The oftener you make them rummage their own minds for a reason, the more manageable you will find them in all the relations of life. It isn't their fault (poor wretches!) that they act first and think afterwards; it's the fault of the fools who humour them.

Penelope's reason why, on this occasion, may be given in her own words. "I am afraid, father," she said, "Mr. Franklin has hurt Rosanna cruelly, without intending it."

"What took Rosanna into the shrubbery walk?" I asked.

"Her own madness," says Penelope; "I can call it nothing else. She was bent on speaking to Mr. Franklin, this morning, come what might of it. I did my best to stop her; you saw that. If I could only have got her away before she heard those dreadful words——"

"There! there!" I said, "don't lose your head. I can't call to mind that anything happened to alarm Rosanna."

"Nothing to alarm her, father. But Mr. Franklin said he took no interest whatever in her—and, oh, he said it in such a cruel voice!"

"He said it to stop the Sergeant's mouth," I answered.

"I told her that," says Penelope. "But you see, father (though Mr. Franklin isn't to blame), he's been mortifying and disappointing her for weeks and weeks past; and now this comes on the top of it all! She has no right, of course, to expect him to take any interest in her. It's quite monstrous that she should forget herself and her station in that way. But she seems to have lost pride, and proper feeling, and everything. She frightened me, father, when Mr. Franklin said those words. They seemed to turn her into stone. A sudden quiet came over her, and she has gone about her work, ever since, like a woman in a dream."

I began to feel a little uneasy. There was something in the way Penelope put it which silenced my superior sense. I called to mind, now my thoughts were directed that way, what had passed between Mr. Franklin and Rosanna overnight. She looked cut to the heart on that occasion; and now, as ill-luck would have it, she had been unavoidably stung again, poor soul, on the tender place. Sad! sad!—all the more sad because the girl had no reason to justify her, and no right to feel it.

I had promised Mr. Franklin to speak to Rosanna, and this seemed the fittest time for keeping my word.

We found the girl sweeping the corridor outside the bedrooms, pale and composed, and neat as ever in her modest print dress. I noticed a curious dimness and dullness in her eyes—not as if she had been crying but as if she had been looking at something too long. Possibly, it was a misty something raised by her own thoughts. There was certainly no object about her to look at which she had not seen already hundreds on hundreds of times.

"Cheer up, Rosanna!" I said. "You mustn't fret over your own fancies. I have got something to say to you from Mr. Franklin."

I thereupon put the matter in the right view before her, in the friendliest and most comforting words I could find. My principles, in regard to the other sex, are, as you may have noticed, very severe. But somehow or other, when I come face to face with the women, my practice (I own) is not conformable.

"Mr. Franklin is very kind and considerate. Please to thank him." That was all the answer she made me.

My daughter had already noticed that Rosanna went about her work like a woman in a dream. I now added to this observation, that she also listened and spoke like a woman in a dream. I doubted if her mind was in a fit condition to take in what I had said to her.

"Are you quite sure, Rosanna, that you understand me?" I asked.

"Quite sure."

She echoed me, not like a living woman, but like a creature moved by machinery. She went on sweeping all the
time. I took away the broom as gently and as kindly as I could.

"Come, come, my girl!" I said, "this is not like yourself. You have got something on your mind. I'm your friend—and I'll stand your friend, even if you have done wrong. Make a clean breast of it, Rosanna—make a clean breast of it!"

The time had been, when my speaking to her in that way would have brought the tears into her eyes. I could see no change in them now.

"Yes," she said, "I'll make a clean breast of it."

"To my lady?" I asked.

"No."

"To Mr. Franklin?"

"Yes; to Mr. Franklin."

I hardly knew what to say to that. She was in no condition to understand the caution against speaking to him in private, which Mr. Franklin had directed me to give her. Feeling my way, little by little, I only told her Mr. Franklin had gone out for a walk.

"It doesn't matter," she answered. "I shan't trouble Mr. Franklin, to-day."

"Why not speak to my lady?" I said. "The way to relieve your mind is to speak to the merciful and Christian mistress who has always been kind to you."

She looked at me for a moment with a grave and steady attention, as if she was fixing what I said in her mind. Then she took the broom out of my hands and moved off with it slowly, a little way down the corridor.

"No," she said, going on with her sweeping, and speaking to herself; "I know a better way of relieving my mind than that."

"What is it?"

"Please to let me go on with my work."

Penelope followed her, and offered to help her.

She answered, "No. I want to do my work. Thank you, Penelope." She looked round at me. "Thank you, Mr. Betteredge."

There was no moving her—there was nothing more to be said. I signed to Penelope to come away with me. We left her, as we had found her, sweeping the corridor, like a woman in a dream.

"This is a matter for the doctor to look into," I said. "It's beyond me."

My daughter reminded me of Mr. Candy's illness, owing (as you may remember) to the chill he had caught on the night of the dinner-party. His assistant—a certain Mr. Ezra Jennings—was at our disposal, to be sure. But nobody knew much about him in our parts. He had been engaged by Mr. Candy under rather peculiar circumstances; and, right or wrong, we none of us liked him or trusted him. There were other doctors at Frizinghall. But they were strangers to our house; and Penelope doubted, in Rosanna's present state, whether strangers might not do her more harm than good.

I thought of speaking to my lady. But, remembering the heavy weight of anxiety which she already had on her mind, I hesitated to add to all the other vexations this new trouble. Still, there was a necessity for doing something. The girl's state was, to my thinking, downright alarming—and my mistress ought to be informed of it. Unwilling enough, I went to her sitting-room. No one was there. My lady was shut up with Miss Rachel. It was impossible for me to see her till she came out again.

I waited in vain till the clock on the front staircase struck the quarter to two. Five minutes afterwards, I heard my name called, from the drive outside the house. I knew the voice directly. Sergeant Cuff had returned from Frizinghall.

CHAPTER XVIII

Going down to the front door, I met the Sergeant on the steps.

It went against the grain with me, after what had passed between us, to show him that I felt any sort of interest in his proceedings. In spite of myself, however, I felt an interest that there was no resisting. My sense of dignity sank from under me, and out came the words: "What news from Frizinghall?"

"I have seen the Indians," answered Sergeant Cuff. "And I have found out what Rosanna bought privately in the town, on Thursday last. The Indians will be set free on Wednesday in next week. There isn't a doubt on my mind, and there isn't a doubt on Mr. Murchwaite's mind, that they came to this place to steal the Moonstone. Their calculations were all thrown out, of course, by what happened in the house on Wednesday night; and they have no more to do with the actual loss of the jewel than you have. But I can tell you one thing, Mr. Betteredge—if WE don't find the Moonstone, THEY will. You have not heard the last of the three jugglers yet."

Mr. Franklin came back from his walk as the Sergeant said those startling words. Governing his curiosity better than I had governed mine, he passed us without a word, and went on into the house.
As for me, having already dropped my dignity, I determined to have the whole benefit of the sacrifice. "So much for the Indians," I said. "What about Rosanna next?"

Sergeant Cuff shook his head.

"The mystery in that quarter is thicker than ever," he said. "I have traced her to a shop at Frizinghall, kept by a linen draper named Maltby. She bought nothing whatever at any of the other drapers' shops, or at any milliners' or tailors' shops; and she bought nothing at Maltby's but a piece of long cloth. She was very particular in choosing a certain quality. As to quantity, she bought enough to make a nightgown."

"Whose nightgown?" I asked.

"Her own, to be sure. Between twelve and three, on the Thursday morning, she must have slipped down to your young lady's room, to settle the hiding of the Moonstone while all the rest of you were in bed. In going back to her own room, her nightgown must have brushed the wet paint on the door. She couldn't wash out the stain; and she couldn't safely destroy the night-gown without first providing another like it, to make the inventory of her linen complete."

"What proves that it was Rosanna's nightgown?" I objected.

"The material she bought for making the substitute dress," answered the Sergeant. "If it had been Miss Verinder's nightgown, she would have had to buy lace, and frilling, and Lord knows what besides; and she wouldn't have had time to make it in one night. Plain long cloth means a plain servant's nightgown. No, no, Mr. Betteredge--all that is clear enough. The pinch of the question is--why, after having provided the substitute dress, does she hide the smeared nightgown, instead of destroying it? If the girl won't speak out, there is only one way of settling the difficulty. The hiding-place at the Shivering Sand must be searched--and the true state of the case will be discovered there."

"How are you to find the place?" I inquired.

"I am sorry to disappoint you," said the Sergeant--"but that's a secret which I mean to keep to myself."

(Not to irritate your curiosity, as he irritated mine, I may here inform you that he had come back from Frizinghall provided with a search-warrant. His experience in such matters told him that Rosanna was in all probability carrying about her a memorandum of the hiding-place, to guide her, in case she returned to it, under changed circumstances and after a lapse of time. Possessed of this memorandum, the Sergeant would be furnished with all that he could desire.)

"Now, Mr. Betteredge," he went on, "suppose we drop speculation, and get to business. I told Joyce to have an eye on Rosanna. Where is Joyce?"

Joyce was the Frizinghall policeman, who had been left by Superintendent Seegrave at Sergeant Cuff's disposal. The clock struck two, as he put the question; and, punctual to the moment, the carriage came round to take Miss Rachel to her aunt's.

"One thing at a time," said the Sergeant, stopping me as I was about to send in search of Joyce. "I must attend to Miss Verinder first."

As the rain was still threatening, it was the close carriage that had been appointed to take Miss Rachel to Frizinghall. Sergeant Cuff beckoned Samuel to come down to him from the rumble behind.

"You will see a friend of mine waiting among the trees, on this side of the lodge gate," he said. "My friend, without stopping the carriage, will get up into the rumble with you. You have nothing to do but to hold your tongue, and shut your eyes. Otherwise, you will get into trouble."

With that advice, he sent the footman back to his place. What Samuel thought I don't know. It was plain, to my mind, that Miss Rachel was to be privately kept in view from the time when she left our house--if she did leave it. A watch set on my young lady! A spy behind her in the rumble of her mother's carriage! I could have cut my own tongue out for having forgotten myself so far as to speak to Sergeant Cuff.

The first person to come out of the house was my lady. She stood aside, on the top step, posting herself there to see what happened. Not a word did she say, either to the Sergeant or to me. With her lips closed, and her arms folded in the light garden cloak which she had wrapped round her on coming into the air, there she stood, as still as a statue, waiting for her daughter to appear.

In a minute more, Miss Rachel came downstairs--very nicely dressed in some soft yellow stuff, that set off her dark complexion, and clipped her tight (in the form of a jacket) round the waist. She had a smart little straw hat on her head, with a white veil twisted round it. She had primrose-coloured gloves that fitted her hands like a second skin. Her beautiful black hair looked as smooth as satin under her hat. Her little ears were like rosy shells--they had a pearl dangling from each of them. She came swiftly out to us, as straight as a lily on its stem, and as lithe and supple in every movement she made as a young cat. Nothing that I could discover was altered in her pretty face, but her eyes and her lips. Her eyes were brighter and fiercer than I liked to see; and her lips had so completely lost their colour and their smile that I hardly knew them again. She kissed her mother in a hasty and sudden manner on the..."
cheek. She said, "Try to forgive me, mamma"--and then pulled down her veil over her face so vehemently that she tore it. In another moment she had run down the steps, and had rushed into the carriage as if it was a hiding-place.

Sergeant Cuff was just as quick on his side. He put Samuel back, and stood before Miss Rachel, with the open carriage-door in his hand, at the instant when she settled herself in her place.

"What do you want?" says Miss Rachel, from behind her veil.

"I want to say one word to you, miss," answered the Sergeant, "before you go. I can't presume to stop your paying a visit to your aunt. I can only venture to say that your leaving us, as things are now, puts an obstacle in the way of my recovering your Diamond. Please to understand that; and now decide for yourself whether you go or stay."

Miss Rachel never even answered him. "Drive on, James!" she called out to the coachman.

Without another word, the Sergeant shut the carriage-door. Just as he closed it, Mr. Franklin came running down the steps. "Good-bye, Rachel," he said, holding out his hand.

"Drive on!" cried Miss Rachel, louder than ever, and taking no more notice of Mr. Franklin than she had taken of Sergeant Cuff.

Mr. Franklin stepped back thunderstruck, as well he might be. The coachman, not knowing what to do, looked towards my lady, still standing immovable on the top step. My lady, with anger and sorrow and shame all struggling together in her face, made him a sign to start the horses, and then turned back hastily into the house. Mr. Franklin, recovering the use of his speech, called after her, as the carriage drove off, "Aunt! you were quite right. Accept my thanks for all your kindness--and let me go."

My lady turned as though to speak to him. Then, as if distrusting herself, waved her hand kindly. "Let me see you, before you leave us, Franklin," she said, in a broken voice--and went on to her own room.

"Do me a last favour, Betteredge," says Mr. Franklin, turning to me, with the tears in his eyes. "Get me away to the train as soon as you can!"

He too went his way into the house. For the moment, Miss Rachel had completely unmanned him. Judge from that, how fond he must have been of her!

Sergeant Cuff and I were left face to face, at the bottom of the steps. The Sergeant stood with his face set towards a gap in the trees, commanding a view of one of the windings of the drive which led from the house. He had his hands in his pockets, and he was softly whistling "The Last Rose of Summer" to himself.

"There's a time for everything," I said savagely enough. "This isn't a time for whistling."

At that moment, the carriage appeared in the distance, through the gap, on its way to the lodge-gate. There was another man, besides Samuel, plainly visible in the rumble behind.

"All right!" said the Sergeant to himself. He turned round to me. "It's no time for whistling, Mr. Betteredge, as you say. It's time to take this business in hand, now, without sparing anybody. We'll begin with Rosanna Spearman. Where is Joyce?"

We both called for Joyce, and received no answer. I sent one of the stable-boys to look for him.

"You heard what I said to Miss Verinder?" remarked the Sergeant, while we were waiting. "And you saw how she received it? I tell her plainly that her leaving us will be an obstacle in the way of my recovering her Diamond--and she leaves, in the face of that statement! Your young lady has got a travelling companion in her mother's carriage, Mr. Betteredge--and the name of it is, the Moonstone."

I said nothing. I only held on like death to my belief in Miss Rachel.

The stable-boy came back, followed--very unwillingly, as it appeared to me--by Joyce.

"Where is Rosanna Spearman?" asked Sergeant Cuff.

"I can't account for it, sir," Joyce began; "and I am very sorry. But somehow or other----"

"Before I went to Frizinghall," said the Sergeant, cutting him short, "I told you to keep your eyes on Rosanna Spearman, without allowing her to discover that she was being watched. Do you mean to tell me that you have let her give you the slip?"

"I am afraid, sir," says Joyce, beginning to tremble, "that I was perhaps a little TOO careful not to let her discover me. There are such a many passages in the lower parts of this house----"

"How long is it since you missed her?"

"Nigh on an hour since, sir."

"You can go back to your regular business at Frizinghall," said the Sergeant, speaking just as composedly as ever, in his usual quiet and dreary way. "I don't think your talents are at all in our line, Mr. Joyce. Your present form of employment is a trifle beyond you. Good morning."

The man slunk off. I find it very difficult to describe how I was affected by the discovery that Rosanna Spearman was missing. I seemed to be in fifty different minds about it, all at the same time. In that state, I stood staring at Sergeant Cuff--and my powers of language quite failed me.
"No, Mr. Betteredge," said the Sergeant, as if he had discovered the uppermost thought in me, and was picking it out to be answered, before all the rest. "Your young friend, Rosanna, won't slip through my fingers so easy as you think. As long as I know where Miss Verinder is, I have the means at my disposal of tracing Miss Verinder's accomplice. I prevented them from communicating last night. Very good. They will get together at Frizinghall, instead of getting together here. The present inquiry must be simply shifted (rather sooner than I had anticipated) from this house, to the house at which Miss Verinder is visiting. In the meantime, I'm afraid I must trouble you to call the servants together again."

I went round with him to the servants' hall. It is very disgraceful, but it is not the less true, that I had another attack of the detective-fever, when he said those last words. I forgot that I hated Sergeant Cuff. I seized him confidentially by the arm. I said, "For goodness' sake, tell us what you are going to do with the servants now?"

The great Cuff stood stock still, and addressed himself in a kind of melancholy rapture to the empty air.

"If this man," said the Sergeant (apparently meaning me), "only understood the growing of roses he would be the most completely perfect character on the face of creation!" After that strong expression of feeling, he sighed, and put his arm through mine. "This is how it stands," he said, dropping down again to business. "Rosanna has done one of two things. She has either gone direct to Frizinghall (before I can get there), or she has gone first to visit her hiding-place at the Shivering Sand. The first thing to find out is, which of the servants saw the last of her before she left the house."

On instituting this inquiry, it turned out that the last person who had set eyes on Rosanna was Nancy, the kitchenmaid.

Nancy had seen her slip out with a letter in her hand, and stop the butcher's man who had just been delivering some meat at the back door. Nancy had heard her ask the man to post the letter when he got back to Frizinghall. The man had looked at the address, and had said it was a roundabout way of delivering a letter directed to Cobb's Hole, to post it at Frizinghall—and that, moreover, on a Saturday, which would prevent the letter from getting to its destination until Monday morning. Rosanna had answered that the delivery of the letter being delayed till Monday was of no importance. The only thing she wished to be sure of was that the man would do what she told him. The man had promised to do it, and had driven away. Nancy had been called back to her work in the kitchen. And no other person had seen anything afterwards of Rosanna Spearman.

"Well," I asked, when we were alone again.

"Well," says the Sergeant. "I must go to Frizinghall."

"About the letter, sir?"

"Yes. The memorandum of the hiding-place is in that letter. I must see the address at the post-office. If it is the address I suspect, I shall pay our friend, Mrs. Yolland, another visit on Monday next."

I went with the Sergeant to order the pony-chaise. In the stable-yard we got a new light thrown on the missing girl.

CHAPTER XIX

The news of Rosanna's disappearance had, as it appeared, spread among the out-of-door servants. They too had made their inquiries; and they had just laid hands on a quick little imp, nicknamed "Duffy"—who was occasionally employed in weeding the garden, and who had seen Rosanna Spearman as lately as half-an-hour since. Duffy was certain that the girl had passed him in the fir-plantation, not walking, but RUNNING, in the direction of the seashore.

"Does this boy know the coast hereabouts?" asked Sergeant Cuff.

"He has been born and bred on the coast," I answered.

"Duffy!" says the Sergeant, "do you want to earn a shilling? If you do, come along with me. Keep the pony-chaise ready, Mr. Betteredge, till I come back."

He started for the Shivering Sand, at a rate that my legs (though well enough preserved for my time of life) had no hope of matching. Little Duffy, as the way is with the young savages in our parts when they are in high spirits, gave a howl, and trotted off at the Sergeant's heels.

Here again, I find it impossible to give anything like a clear account of the state of my mind in the interval after Sergeant Cuff had left us. A curious and stupefying restlessness got possession of me. I did a dozen different needless things in and out of the house, not one of which I can now remember. I don't even know how long it was after the Sergeant had gone to the sands, when Duffy came running back with a message for me. Sergeant Cuff had given the boy a leaf torn out of his pocket-book, on which was written in pencil, "Send me one of Rosanna Spearman's boots, and be quick about it."

I despatched the first woman-servant I could find to Rosanna's room; and I sent the boy back to say that I myself would follow him with the boot.

This, I am well aware, was not the quickest way to take of obeying the directions which I had received. But I
was resolved to see for myself what new mystification was going on before I trusted Rosanna's boot in the Sergeant's hands. My old notion of screening the girl, if I could, seemed to have come back on me again, at the eleventh hour. This state of feeling (to say nothing of the detective-fever) hurried me off, as soon as I had got the boot, at the nearest approach to a run which a man turned seventy can reasonably hope to make.

As I got near the shore, the clouds gathered black, and the rain came down, drifting in great white sheets of water before the wind. I heard the thunder of the sea on the sand-bank at the mouth of the bay. A little further on, I passed the boy crouching for shelter under the lee of the sand hills. Then I saw the raging sea, and the rollers tumbling in on the sand-bank, and the driven rain sweeping over the waters like a flying garment, and the yellow wilderness of the beach with one solitary black figure standing on it—the figure of Sergeant Cuff.

He waved his hand towards the north, when he first saw me. "Keep on that side!" he shouted. "And come on down here to me!"

I went down to him, choking for breath, with my heart leaping as if it was like to leap out of me. I was past speaking. I had a hundred questions to put to him; and not one of them would pass my lips. His face frightened me. I saw a look in his eyes which was a look of horror. He snatched the boot out of my hand, and set it in a footmark on the sand, bearing south from us as we stood, and pointing straight towards the rocky ledge called the South Spit. The mark was not yet blurred out by the rain—and the girl's boot fitted it to a hair.

The Sergeant pointed to the boot in the footmark, without saying a word.

I caught at his arm, and tried to speak to him, and failed as I had failed when I tried before. He went on, following the footsteps down and down to where the rocks and the sand joined. The South Spit was just awash with the flowing tide; the waters heaved over the hidden face of the Shivering Sand. Now this way and now that, with an obstinate patience that was dreadful to see, Sergeant Cuff tried the boot in the footsteps, and always found it pointing the same way—straight TO the rocks. Hunt as he might, no sign could he find anywhere of the footsteps walking FROM them.

He gave it up at last. Still keeping silence, he looked again at me; and then he looked out at the waters before us, heaving in deeper and deeper over the quicksand. I looked where he looked—and I saw his thought in his face. A dreadful dumb trembling crawled all over me on a sudden. I fell upon my knees on the beach.

"She has been back at the hiding-place," I heard the Sergeant say to himself. "Some fatal accident has happened to her on those rocks."

The girl's altered looks, and words, and actions—the numbed, deadened way in which she listened to me, and spoke to me—when I had found her sweeping the corridor but a few hours since, rose up in my mind, and warned me, even as the Sergeant spoke, that his guess was wide of the dreadful truth. I tried to tell him of the fear that had frozen me up. I tried to say, "The death she has died, Sergeant, was a death of her own seeking." No! the words wouldn't come. The dumb trembling held me in its grip. I couldn't feel the driving rain. I couldn't see the rising tide. As in the vision of a dream, the poor lost creature came back before me. I saw her again as I had seen her in the past time—on the morning when I went to fetch her into the house. I heard her again, telling me that the Shivering Sand would't come. The dumb trembling held me in its grip. I couldn't feel the driving rain. I couldn't see the rising tide. As in the vision of a dream, the poor lost creature came back before me. I saw her again as I had seen her in the past time—on the morning when I went to fetch her into the house. I heard her again, telling me that the Shivering Sand seemed to draw her to it against her will, and wondering whether her grave was waiting for her THERE. The horror of it struck me, in some unfathomable way, through my own child. My girl was just her age. My girl, tried as Rosanna was tried, might have lived that miserable life, and died this dreadful death.

The Sergeant kindly lifted me up, and turned me away from the sight of the place where she had perished.

With that relief, I began to fetch my breath again, and to see things about me, as things really were. Looking towards the sand-hills, I saw the men-servants from out-of-doors, and the fisherman, named Yolland, all running down to us together; and all, having taken the alarm, calling out to know if the girl had been found. In the fewest words, the Sergeant showed them the evidence of the footmarks, and told them that a fatal accident must have happened to her. He then picked out the fisherman from the rest, and put a question to him, turning about again towards the sea: "Tell me," he said. "Could a boat have taken her off, in such weather as this, from those rocks where her footmarks stop?"

The fisherman pointed to the rollers tumbling in on the sand-bank, and to the great waves leaping up in clouds of foam against the headlands on either side of us.

"No boat that ever was built," he answered, "could have got to her through THAT."

Sergeant Cuff looked for the last time at the foot-marks on the sand, which the rain was now fast blurring out.

"There," he said, "is the evidence that she can't have left this place by land. And here," he went on, looking at the fisherman, "is the evidence that she can't have got away by sea." He stopped, and considered for a minute. "She was seen running towards this place, half an hour before I got here from the house," he said to Yolland. "Some time has passed since then. Call it, altogether, an hour ago. How high would the water be, at that time, on this side of the rocks?" He pointed to the south side—otherwise, the side which was not filled up by the quicksand.

"As the tide makes to-day," said the fisherman, "there wouldn't have been water enough to drown a kitten on that
side of the Spit, an hour since."

Sergeant Cuff turned about northward, towards the quicksand.

"How much on this side?" he asked.

"Less still," answered Yolland. "The Shivering Sand would have been just awash, and no more."

The Sergeant turned to me, and said that the accident must have happened on the side of the quicksand. My tongue was loosened at that. "No accident!" I told him. "When she came to this place, she came weary of her life, to end it here."

He started back from me. "How do you know?" he asked. The rest of them crowded round. The Sergeant recovered himself instantly. He put them back from me; he said I was an old man; he said the discovery had shaken me; he said, "Let him alone a little." Then he turned to Yolland, and asked, "Is there any chance of finding her, when the tide ebbs again?" And Yolland answered, "None. What the Sand gets, the Sand keeps for ever." Having said that, the fisherman came a step nearer, and addressed himself to me.

"Mr. Betteredge," he said, "I have a word to say to you about the young woman's death. Four foot out, broadwise, along the side of the Spit, there's a shelf of rock, about half fathom down under the sand. My question is--why didn't she strike that? If she slipped, by accident, from off the Spit, she fell in where there's foothold at the bottom, at a depth that would barely cover her to the waist. She must have waded out, or jumped out, into the Deeps beyond--or she wouldn't be missing now. No accident, sir! The Deeps of the Quicksand have got her. And they have got her by her own act."

After that testimony from a man whose knowledge was to be relied on, the Sergeant was silent. The rest of us, like him, held our peace. With one accord, we all turned back up the slope of the beach.

At the sand-hillocks we were met by the under-groom, running to us from the house. The lad is a good lad, and has an honest respect for me. He handed me a little note, with a decent sorrow in his face. "Penelope sent me with this, Mr. Betteredge," he said. "She found it in Rosanna's room."

It was her last farewell word to the old man who had done his best--thank God, always done his best--to befriend her.

"You have often forgiven me, Mr. Betteredge, in past times. When you next see the Shivering Sand, try to forgive me once more. I have found my grave where my grave was waiting for me. I have lived, and died, sir, grateful for your kindness."

There was no more than that. Little as it was, I hadn't manhood enough to hold up against it. Your tears come easy, when you're young, and beginning the world. Your tears come easy, when you're old, and leaving it. I burst out crying.

Sergeant Cuff took a step nearer to me--meaning kindly, I don't doubt. I shrank back from him. "Don't touch me," I said. "It's the dread of you, that has driven her to it."

"You are wrong, Mr. Betteredge," he answered, quietly. "But there will be time enough to speak of it when we are indoors again."

I followed the rest of them, with the help of the groom's arm. Through the driving rain we went back--to meet the trouble and the terror that were waiting for us at the house.

CHAPTER XX

Those in front had spread the news before us. We found the servants in a state of panic. As we passed my lady's door, it was thrown open violently from the inner side. My mistress came out among us (with Mr. Franklin following, and trying vainly to compose her), quite beside herself with the horror of the thing.

"You are answerable for this!" she cried out, threatening the Sergeant wildly with her hand. "Gabriel! give that wretch his money--and release me from the sight of him!"

The Sergeant was the only one among us who was fit to cope with her--being the only one among us who was in possession of himself.

"I am no more answerable for this distressing calamity, my lady, than you are," he said. "If, in half an hour from this, you still insist on my leaving the house, I will accept your ladyship's dismissal, but not your ladyship's money."

It was spoken very respectfully, but very firmly at the same time--and it had its effect on my mistress as well as on me. She suffered Mr. Franklin to lead her back into the room. As the door closed on the two, the Sergeant, looking about among the women-servants in his observant way, noticed that while all the rest were merely frightened, Penelope was in tears. "When your father has changed his wet clothes," he said to her, "come and speak to us, in your father's room."

Before the half-hour was out, I had got my dry clothes on, and had lent Sergeant Cuff such change of dress as he required. Penelope came in to us to hear what the Sergeant wanted with her. I don't think I ever felt what a good dutiful daughter I had, so strongly as I felt it at that moment. I took her and sat her on my knee and I prayed God bless her. She hid her head on my bosom, and put her arms round my neck--and we waited a little while in silence.
The poor dead girl must have been at the bottom of it, I think, with my daughter and with me. The Sergeant went to
the window, and stood there looking out. I thought it right to thank him for considering us both in this way--and I
did.

People in high life have all the luxuries to themselves--among others, the luxury of indulging their feelings.
People in low life have no such privilege. Necessity, which spares our betters, has no pity on us. We learn to put our
feelings back into ourselves, and to jog on with our duties as patiently as may be. I don't complain of this--I only
notice it. Penelope and I were ready for the Sergeant, as soon as the Sergeant was ready on his side. Asked if she
knew what had led her fellow-servant to destroy herself, my daughter answered (as you will foresee) that it was for
love of Mr. Franklin Blake. Asked next, if she had mentioned this notion of hers to any other person, Penelope
answered, "I have not mentioned it, for Rosanna's sake." I felt it necessary to add a word to this. I said, "And for Mr.
Franklin's sake, my dear, as well. If Rosanna HAS died for love of him, it is not with his knowledge or by his fault.
Let him leave the house to-day, if he does leave it, without the useless pain of knowing the truth." Sergeant Cuff
said, "Quite right," and fell silent again; comparing Penelope's notion (as it seemed to me) with some other notion of
his own which he kept to himself.

At the end of the half-hour, my mistress's bell rang.

On my way to answer it, I met Mr. Franklin coming out of his aunt's sitting-room. He mentioned that her
ladyship was ready to see Sergeant Cuff--in my presence as before--and he added that he himself wanted to say two
words to the Sergeant first. On our way back to my room, he stopped, and looked at the railway time-table in the
hall.

"Are you really going to leave us, sir?" I asked. "Miss Rachel will surely come right again, if you only give her
time?"

"She will come right again," answered Mr. Franklin, "when she hears that I have gone away, and that she will
see me no more."

I thought he spoke in resentment of my young lady's treatment of him. But it was not so. My mistress had
noticed, from the time when the police first came into the house, that the bare mention of him was enough to set
Miss Rachel's temper in a flame. He had been too fond of his cousin to like to confess this to himself, until the truth
had been forced on him, when she drove off to her aunt's. His eyes once opened in that cruel way which you know
of, Mr. Franklin had taken his resolution--the one resolution which a man of any spirit COULD take--to leave the
house.

What he had to say to the Sergeant was spoken in my presence. He described her ladyship as willing to
acknowledge that she had spoken over-hastily. And he asked if Sergeant Cuff would consent--in that case--to accept
his fee, and to leave the matter of the Diamond where the matter stood now. The Sergeant answered, "No, sir. My
fee is paid me for doing my duty. I decline to take it, until my duty is done."

"I don't understand you," says Mr. Franklin.

"I'll explain myself, sir," says the Sergeant. "When I came here, I undertook to throw the necessary light on the
matter of the missing Diamond. I am now ready, and waiting to redeem my pledge. When I have stated the case to
Lady Verinder as the case now stands, and when I have told her plainly what course of action to take for the
recovery of the Moonstone, the responsibility will be off my shoulders. Let her ladyship decide, after that, whether
she does, or does not, allow me to go on. I shall then have done what I undertook to do--and I'll take my fee."

In those words Sergeant Cuff reminded us that, even in the Detective Police, a man may have a reputation to
lose.

The view he took was so plainly the right one, that there was no more to be said. As I rose to conduct him to my
lady's room, he asked if Mr. Franklin wished to be present. Mr. Franklin answered, "Not unless Lady Verinder
desires it." He added, in a whisper to me, as I was following the Sergeant out, "I know what that man is going to say
about Rachel; and I am too fond of her to hear it, and keep my temper. Leave me by myself."

I left him, miserable enough, leaning on the sill of my window, with his face hidden in his hands and Penelope
peeping through the door, longing to comfort him. In Mr. Franklin's place, I should have called her in. When you are
ill-used by one woman, there is great comfort in telling it to another--because, nine times out of ten, the other always
takes your side. Perhaps, when my back was turned, he did call her in? In that case it is only doing my daughter
justice to declare that she would stick at nothing, in the way of comforting Mr. Franklin Blake.

In the meantime, Sergeant Cuff and I proceeded to my lady's room.

At the last conference we had held with her, we had found her not over willing to lift her eyes from the book
which she had on the table. On this occasion there was a change for the better. She met the Sergeant's eye with an
eye that was as steady as his own. The family spirit showed itself in every line of her face; and I knew that Sergeant
Cuff would meet his match, when a woman like my mistress was strung up to hear the worst he could say to her.

CHAPTER XXI
The first words, when we had taken our seats, were spoken by my lady.

"Sergeant Cuff," she said, "there was perhaps some excuse for the inconsiderate manner in which I spoke to you half an hour since. I have no wish, however, to claim that excuse. I say, with perfect sincerity, that I regret it, if I wronged you."

The grace of voice and manner with which she made him that atonement had its due effect on the Sergeant. He requested permission to justify himself--putting his justification as an act of respect to my mistress. It was impossible, he said, that he could be in any way responsible for the calamity, which had shocked us all, for this sufficient reason, that his success in bringing his inquiry to its proper end depended on his neither saying nor doing anything that could alarm Rosanna Spearman. He appealed to me to testify whether he had, or had not, carried that object out. I could, and did, bear witness that he had. And there, as I thought, the matter might have been judiciously left to come to an end.

Sergeant Cuff, however, took it a step further, evidently (as you shall now judge) with the purpose of forcing the most painful of all possible explanations to take place between her ladyship and himself.

"I have heard a motive assigned for the young woman's suicide," said the Sergeant, "which may possibly be the right one. It is a motive quite unconnected with the case which I am conducting here. I am bound to add, however, that my own opinion points the other way. Some unbearable anxiety in connexion with the missing Diamond, has, I believe, driven the poor creature to her own destruction. I don't pretend to know what that unbearable anxiety may have been. But I think (with your ladyship's permission) I can lay my hand on a person who is capable of deciding whether I am right or wrong."

"Is the person now in the house?" my mistress asked, after waiting a little.

"The person has left the house," my lady.

That answer pointed as straight to Miss Rachel as straight could be. A silence dropped on us which I thought would never come to an end. Lord! how the wind howled, and how the rain drove at the window, as I sat there waiting for one or other of them to speak again!

"Be so good as to express yourself plainly," said my lady. "Do you refer to my daughter?"

"I do," said Sergeant Cuff, in so many words.

My mistress had her cheque-book on the table when we entered the room--no doubt to pay the Sergeant his fee. She now put it back in the drawer. It went to my heart to see how her poor hand trembled--the hand that had loaded her old servant with benefits; the hand that, I pray God, may take mine, when my time comes, and I leave my place for ever!

"I had hoped," said my lady, very slowly and quietly, "to have recompensed your services, and to have parted with you without Miss Verinder's name having been openly mentioned between us as it has been mentioned now. My nephew has probably said something of this, before you came into my room?"

"Mr. Blake gave his message, my lady. And I gave Mr. Blake a reason----"

"It is needless to tell me your reason. After what you have just said, you know as well as I do that you have gone too far to go back. I owe it to myself, and I owe it to my good servant and friend here," she said, "if I set the example of speaking boldly, on my side. You suspect Miss Verinder of deceiving us all, by secreting the Diamond for some purpose of her own? Is that true?"

"Quite true, my lady."

"Very well. Now, before you begin, I have to tell you, as Miss Verinder's mother, that she is ABSOLUTELY INCAPABLE of doing what you suppose her to have done. Your knowledge of her character dates from a day or two since. My knowledge of her character dates from the beginning of her life. State your suspicion of her as strongly as you please--it is impossible that you can offend me by doing so. I am sure, beforehand, that (with all your experience) the circumstances have fatally misled you in this case. Mind! I am in possession of no private information. I am as absolutely shut out of my daughter's confidence as you are. My one reason for speaking positively, is the reason you have heard already. I know my child."

She turned to me, and gave me her hand. I kissed it in silence. "You may go on," she said, facing the Sergeant again as steadily as ever.

Sergeant Cuff bowed. My mistress had produced but one effect on him. His hatchet-face softened for a moment,
as if he was sorry for her. As to shaking him in his own conviction, it was plain to see that she had not moved him by a single inch. He settled himself in his chair; and he began his vile attack on Miss Rachel's character in these words:

"I must ask your ladyship," he said, "to look this matter in the face, from my point of view as well as from yours. Will you please to suppose yourself coming down here, in my place, and with my experience? and will you allow me to mention very briefly what that experience has been?"

My mistress signed to him that she would do this. The Sergeant went on:

"For the last twenty years," he said, "I have been largely employed in cases of family scandal, acting in the capacity of confidential man. The one result of my domestic practice which has any bearing on the matter now in hand, is a result which I may state in two words. It is well within my experience, that young ladies of rank and position do occasionally have private debts which they dare not acknowledge to their nearest relatives and friends. Sometimes, the milliner and the jeweller are at the bottom of it. Sometimes, the money is wanted for purposes which I don't suspect in this case, and which I won't shock you by mentioning. Bear in mind what I have said, my lady--and now let us see how events in this house have forced me back on my own experience, whether I liked it or not!"

He considered with himself for a moment, and went on--with a horrid clearness that obliged you to understand him; with an abominable justice that favoured nobody.

"My first information relating to the loss of the Moonstone," said the Sergeant, "came to me from Superintendent Seegrave. He proved to my complete satisfaction that he was perfectly incapable of managing the case. The one thing he said which struck me as worth listening to, was this--that Miss Verinder had declined to be questioned by him, and had spoken to him with a perfectly incomprehensible rudeness and contempt. I thought this curious--but I attributed it mainly to some clumsiness on the Superintendent's part which might have offended the young lady. After that, I put it by in my mind, and applied myself, single-handed, to the case. It ended, as you are aware, in the discovery of the smear on the door, and in Mr. Franklin Blake's evidence satisfying me, that this same smear, and the loss of the Diamond, were pieces of the same puzzle. So far, if I suspected anything, I suspected that the Moonstone had been stolen, and that one of the servants might prove to be the thief. Very good. In this state of things, what happens? Miss Verinder suddenly comes out of her room, and speaks to me. I observe three suspicious appearances in that young lady. She is still violently agitated, though more than four-and-twenty hours have passed since the Diamond was lost. She treats me as she has already treated Superintendent Seegrave. And she is mortally offended with Mr. Franklin Blake. Very good again. Here (I say to myself) is a young lady who has lost a valuable jewel--a young lady, also, as my own eyes and ears inform me, who is of an impetuous temperament. Under these circumstances, and with that character, what does she do? She betrays an incomprehensible resentment against Mr. Blake, Mr. Superintendent, and myself--otherwise, the very three people who have all, in their different ways, been trying to help her to recover her lost jewel. Having brought my inquiry to that point--THEN, my lady, and not till then, I begin to look back into my own mind for my own experience. My own experience explains Miss Verinder's otherwise incomprehensible conduct. It associates her with those other young ladies that I know of. It tells me she has debts she daren't acknowledge, that must be paid. And it sets me asking myself, whether the loss of the Diamond may not mean--that the Diamond must be secretly pledged to pay them. That is the conclusion which my experience draws from plain facts. What does your ladyship's experience say against it?"

"What I have said already," answered my mistress. "The circumstances have misled you."

I said nothing on my side. ROBINSON CRUSOE--God knows how--had got into my muddled old head. If Sergeant Cuff had found himself, at that moment, transported to a desert island, without a man Friday to keep him company, or a ship to take him off--he would have found himself exactly where I wished him to be! (Nota bene:--I am an average good Christian, when you don't push my Christianity too far. And all the rest of you--which is a great comfort--are, in this respect, much the same as I am.)

Sergeant Cuff went on:

"Right or wrong, my lady," he said, "having drawn my conclusion, the next thing to do was to put it to the test. I suggested to your ladyship the examination of all the wardrobes in the house. It was a means of finding the article of dress which had, in all probability, made the smear; and it was a means of putting my conclusion to the test. How did it turn out? Your ladyship consented; Mr. Blake consented; Mr. Ablewhite consented. Miss Verinder alone stopped the whole proceeding by refusing point-blank. That result satisfied me that my view was the right one. If your ladyship and Mr. Betteredge persist in not agreeing with me, you must be blind to what happened before you this very day. In your hearing, I told the young lady that her leaving the house (as things were then) would put an obstacle in the way of my recovering her jewel. You saw yourselves that she drove off in the face of that statement. You saw yourself that, so far from forgiving Mr. Blake for having done more than all the rest of you to put the clue into my hands, she publicly insulted Mr. Blake, on the steps of her mother's house. What do these things mean? If Miss Verinder is not privy to the suppression of the Diamond, what do these things mean?"
This time he looked my way. It was downright frightful to hear him piling up proof after proof against Miss Rachel, and to know, while one was longing to defend her, that there was no disputing the truth of what he said. I am (thank God!) constitutionally superior to reason. This enabled me to hold firm to my lady's view, which was my view also. This roused my spirit, and made me put a bold face on it before Sergeant Cuff. Profit, good friends, I beseech you, by my example. It will save you from many troubles of the vexing sort. Cultivate a superiority to reason, and see how you pare the claws of all the sensible people when they try to scratch you for your own good!

Finding that I made no remark, and that my mistress made no remark, Sergeant Cuff proceeded. Lord! how it did enrage me to notice that he was not in the least put out by our silence!

"There is the case, my lady, as it stands against Miss Verinder alone," he said. "The next thing is to put the case as it stands against Miss Verinder and the deceased Rosanna Spearman taken together. We will go back for a moment, if you please, to your daughter's refusal to let her wardrobe be examined. My mind being made up, after that circumstance, I had two questions to consider next. First, as to the right method of conducting my inquiry. Second, as to whether Miss Verinder had an accomplice among the female servants in the house. After carefully thinking it over, I determined to conduct the inquiry in, what we should call at our office, a highly irregular manner. For this reason: I had a family scandal to deal with, which it was my business to keep within the family limits. The less noise made, and the fewer strangers employed to help me, the better. As to the usual course of taking people in custody on suspicion, going before the magistrate, and all the rest of it--nothing of the sort was to be thought of, when your ladyship's daughter was (as I believed) at the bottom of the whole business. In this case, I felt that a person of Mr. Betteredge's character and position in the house--knowing the servants as he did, and having the honour of the family at heart--would be safer to take as an assistant than any other person whom I could lay my hand on. I should have tried Mr. Blake as well--but for one obstacle in the way. HE saw the drift of my proceedings at a very early date; and, with his interest in Miss Verinder, any mutual understanding was impossible between him and me. I trouble your ladyship with these particulars to show you that I have kept the family secret within the family circle. I am the only outsider who knows it--and my professional existence depends on holding my tongue."

Here I felt that my professional existence depended on not holding my tongue. To be held up before my mistress, in my old age, as a sort of deputy-policeman, was, once again, more than my Christianity was strong enough to bear.

"I beg to inform your ladyship," I said, "that I never, to my knowledge, helped this abominable detective business, in any way, from first to last; and I summon Sergeant Cuff to contradict me, if he dares!"

Having given vent in those words, I felt greatly relieved. Her ladyship honoured me by a little friendly pat on the shoulder. I looked with righteous indignation at the Sergeant, to see what he thought of such a testimony as THAT. The Sergeant looked back like a lamb, and seemed to like me better than ever.

My lady informed him that he might continue his statement. "I understand," she said, "that you have honestly done your best, in what you believe to be my interest. I am ready to hear what you have to say next."

"What I have to say next," answered Sergeant Cuff, "relates to Rosanna Spearman. I recognised the young woman, as your ladyship may remember, when she brought the washing-book into this room. Up to that time I was inclined to doubt whether Miss Verinder had trusted her secret to any one. When I saw Rosanna, I altered my mind. I suspected her at once of being privy to the suppression of the Diamond. The poor creature has met her death by a dreadful end, and I don't want your ladyship to think, now she's gone, that I was unduly hard on her. If this had been a common case of thieving, I should have given Rosanna the benefit of the doubt just as freely as I should have given it to any of the other servants in the house. Our experience of the Reformatory woman is, that when tried in service--and when kindly and judiciously treated--they prove themselves in the majority of cases to be honestly penitent, and honestly worthy of the pains taken with them. But this was not a common case of thieving. It was a case--in my mind--of a deeply planned fraud, with the owner of the Diamond at the bottom of it. Holding this view, the first consideration which naturally presented itself to me, in connection with Rosanna, was this: Would Miss Verinder be satisfied (begging your ladyship's pardon) with leading us all to think that the Moonstone was merely lost? Or would she go a step further, and delude us into believing that the Moonstone was stolen? In the latter event there was Rosanna Spearman--with the character of a thief--ready to her hand; the person of all others to lead your ladyship off, and to lead me off, on a false scent."

Was it possible (I asked myself) that he could put his case against Miss Rachel and Rosanna in a more horrid point of view than this? It WAS possible, as you shall now see.

"I had another reason for suspecting the deceased woman," he said, "which appears to me to have been stronger still. Who would be the very person to help Miss Verinder in raising money privately on the Diamond? Rosanna Spearman. No young lady in Miss Verinder's position could manage such a risky matter as that by herself. A go-between she must have, and who so fit, I ask again, as Rosanna Spearman? Your ladyship's deceased housemaid was at the top of her profession when she was a thief. She had relations, to my certain knowledge, with one of the few men in London (in the money-lending line) who would advance a large sum on such a notable jewel as the..."
Moonstone, without asking awkward questions, or insisting on awkward conditions. Bear this in mind, my lady; and now let me show you how my suspicions have been justified by Rosanna's own acts, and by the plain inferences to be drawn from them."

He thereupon passed the whole of Rosanna's proceedings under review. You are already as well acquainted with those proceedings as I am; and you will understand how unanswerably this part of his report fixed the guilt of being concerned in the disappearance of the Moonstone on the memory of the poor dead girl. Even my mistress was daunted by what he said now. She made him no answer when he had done. It didn't seem to matter to the Sergeant whether he was answered or not. On he went (devil take him!), just as steady as ever.

"Having stated the whole case as I understand it," he said, "I have only to tell your ladyship, now, what I propose to do next. I see two ways of bringing this inquiry successfully to an end. One of those ways I look upon as a certainty. The other, I admit, is a bold experiment, and nothing more. Your ladyship shall decide. Shall we take the certainty first?"

My mistress made him a sign to take his own way, and choose for himself.
"Thank you," said the Sergeant. "We'll begin with the certainty, as your ladyship is so good as to leave it to me. Whether Miss Verinder remains at Frizinghall, or whether she returns here, I propose, in either case, to keep a careful watch on all her proceedings--on the people she sees, on the rides and walks she may take, and on the letters she may write and receive."

"What next?" asked my mistress.
"I shall next," answered the Sergeant, "request your ladyship's leave to introduce into the house, as a servant in the place of Rosanna Spearman, a woman accustomed to private inquiries of this sort, for whose discretion I can answer."

"What next?" repeated my mistress.
"Next," proceeded the Sergeant, "and last, I propose to send one of my brother-officers to make an arrangement with that money-lender in London, whom I mentioned just now as formerly acquainted with Rosanna Spearman--and whose name and address, your ladyship may rely on it, have been communicated by Rosanna to Miss Verinder. I don't deny that the course of action I am now suggesting will cost money, and consume time. But the result is certain. We run a line round the Moonstone, and we draw that line closer and closer till we find it in Miss Verinder's possession, supposing she decides to keep it. If her debts press, and she decides on sending it away, then we have our man ready, and we meet the Moonstone on its arrival in London."

To hear her own daughter made the subject of such a proposal as this, stung my mistress into speaking angrily for the first time.
"Consider your proposal declined, in every particular," she said. "And go on to your other way of bringing the inquiry to an end."

"My other way," said the Sergeant, going on as easy as ever, "is to try that bold experiment to which I have alluded. I think I have formed a pretty correct estimate of Miss Verinder's temperament. She is quite capable (according to my belief) of committing a daring fraud. But she is too hot and impetuous in temper, and too little accustomed to deceit as a habit, to act the hypocrite in small things, and to restrain herself under all provocations. Her feelings, in this case, have repeatedly got beyond her control, at the very time when it was plainly her interest to conceal them. It is on this peculiarity in her character that I now propose to act. I want to give her a great shock suddenly, under circumstances that will touch her to the quick. In plain English, I want to tell Miss Verinder, without a word of warning, of Rosanna's death--on the chance that her own better feelings will hurry her into making a clean breast of it. Does your ladyship accept that alternative?"

My mistress astonished me beyond all power of expression. She answered him on the instant:
"Yes; I do."
"The pony-chaise is ready," said the Sergeant. "I wish your ladyship good morning."
My lady held up her hand, and stopped him at the door.
"My daughter's better feelings shall be appealed to, as you propose," she said. "But I claim the right, as her mother, of putting her to the test myself. You will remain here, if you please; and I will go to Frizinghall."

For once in his life, the great Cuff stood speechless with amazement, like an ordinary man.
My mistress rang the bell, and ordered her water-proof things. It was still pouring with rain; and the close carriage had gone, as you know, with Miss Rachel to Frizinghall. I tried to dissuade her ladyship from facing the severity of the weather. Quite useless! I asked leave to go with her, and hold the umbrella. She wouldn't hear of it. The pony-chaise came round, with the groom in charge. "You may rely on two things," she said to Sergeant Cuff, in the hall. "I will try the experiment on Miss Verinder as boldly as you could try it yourself. And I will inform you of the result, either personally or by letter, before the last train leaves for London to-night."

With that, she stepped into the chaise, and, taking the reins herself, drove off to Frizinghall.
CHAPTER XXII
My mistress having left us, I had leisure to think of Sergeant Cuff. I found him sitting in a snug corner of the hall, consulting his memorandum book, and curling up viciously at the corners of the lips.

"Making notes of the case?" I asked.

"No," said the Sergeant. "Looking to see what my next professional engagement is."

"Oh!" I said. "You think it's all over then, here?"

"I think," answered Sergeant Cuff, "that Lady Verinder is one of the cleverest women in England. I also think a rose much better worth looking at than a diamond. Where is the gardener, Mr. Betteredge?"

There was no getting a word more out of him on the matter of the Moonstone. He had lost all interest in his own inquiry; and he would persist in looking for the gardener. An hour afterwards, I heard them at high words in the conservatory, with the dog-rose once more at the bottom of the dispute.

In the meantime, it was my business to find out whether Mr. Franklin persisted in his resolution to leave us by the afternoon train. After having been informed of the conference in my lady's room, and of how it had ended, he immediately decided on waiting to hear the news from Frizinghall. This very natural alteration in his plans—which, with ordinary people, would have led to nothing in particular—proved, in Mr. Franklin's case, to have one objectionable result. It left him unsettled, with a legacy of idle time on his hands, and, in so doing, it let out all the foreign sides of his character, one on the top of another, like rats out of a bag.

Now as an Italian-Englishman, now as a German-Englishman, and now as a French-Englishman, he drifted in and out of all the sitting-rooms in the house, with nothing to talk of but Miss Rachel's treatment of him; and with nobody to address himself to but me. I found him (for example) in the library, sitting under the map of Modern Italy, and quite unaware of any other method of meeting his troubles, except the method of talking about them. "I have several worthy aspirations, Betteredge; but what am I to do with them now? I am full of dormant good qualities, if Rachel would only have helped me to bring them out!" He was so eloquent in drawing the picture of his own neglected merits, and so pathetic in lamenting over it when it was done, that I felt quite at my wits' end how to console him, when it suddenly occurred to me that here was a case for the wholesome application of a bit of ROBINSON CRUSOE. I hobbled out to my own room, and hobbled back with that immortal book. Nobody in the library! The map of Modern Italy stared at ME; and I stared at the map of Modern Italy.

I tried the drawing-room. There was his handkerchief on the floor, to prove that he had drifted in. And there was the empty room to prove that he had drifted out again.

I tried the dining-room, and discovered Samuel with a biscuit and a glass of sherry, silently investigating the empty air. A minute since, Mr. Franklin had rung furiously for a little light refreshment. On its production, in a violent hurry, by Samuel, Mr. Franklin had vanished before the bell downstairs had quite done ringing with the pull he had given to it.

I tried the morning-room, and found him at last. There he was at the window, drawing hieroglyphics with his finger in the damp on the glass.

"Your sherry is waiting for you, sir," I said to him. I might as well have addressed myself to one of the four walls of the room; he was down in the bottomless deep of his own meditations, past all pulling up. "How do YOU explain Rachel's conduct, Betteredge?" was the only answer I received. Not being ready with the needful reply, I produced ROBINSON CRUSOE, in which I am firmly persuaded some explanation might have been found, if we had only searched long enough for it. Mr. Franklin shut up ROBINSON CRUSOE, and floundered into his German-English gibberish on the spot. "Why not look into it?" he said, as if I had personally objected to looking into it. "Why the devil lose your patience, Betteredge, when patience is all that's wanted to arrive at the truth? Don't interrupt me. Rachel's conduct is perfectly intelligible, if you will only do her the common justice to take the Objective view first, and the Subjective view next, and the Objective-Subjective view to wind up with. What do we know? We know that the loss of the Moonstone, on Thursday morning last, threw her into a state of nervous excitement, from which she has not recovered yet. Do you mean to deny the Objective view, so far? Very well, then—don't interrupt me. Now, being in a state of nervous excitement, how are we to expect that she should behave as she might otherwise have behaved to any of the people about her? Arguing in this way, from within-outwards, what do we reach? We reach the Objective view. I defy you to controvert the Subjective view. Very well then—what follows? Good Heavens! the Objective-Subjective explanation follows, of course! Rachel, properly speaking, is not Rachel, but Somebody Else. Do I mind being cruelly treated by Somebody Else? You are unreasonable enough, Betteredge; but you can hardly accuse me of that. Then how does it end? It ends, in spite of your confounded English narrowness and prejudice, in my being perfectly happy and comfortable. Where's the sherry?"

My head was by this time in such a condition, that I was not quite sure whether it was my own head, or Mr. Franklin's. In this deplorable state, I contrived to do, what I take to have been, three Objective things. I got Mr. Franklin his sherry; I retired to my own room; and I solaced myself with the most composing pipe of tobacco I ever
remember to have smoked in my life.

Don't suppose, however, that I was quit of Mr. Franklin on such easy terms as these. Drifting again, out of the morning-room into the hall, he found his way to the offices next, smelt my pipe, and was instantly reminded that he had been simple enough to give up smoking for Miss Rachel's sake. In the twinkling of an eye, he burst in on me with his cigar-case, and came out strong on the one everlasting subject, in his neat, witty, unbelieving, French way.

"Give me a light, Betteredge. Is it conceivable that a man can have smoked as long as I have without discovering that there is a complete system for the treatment of women at the bottom of his cigar-case? Follow me carefully, and I will prove it in two words. You choose a cigar, you try it, and it disappoints you. What do you do upon that? You throw it away and try another. Now observe the application! You choose a woman, you try her, and she breaks your heart. Fool! take a lesson from your cigar-case. Throw her away, and try another!"

I shook my head at that. Wonderfully clever, I dare say, but my own experience was dead against it. "In the time of the late Mrs. Betteredge," I said, "I felt pretty often inclined to try your philosophy, Mr. Franklin. But the law insists on your smoking your cigar, sir, when you have once chosen it." I pointed that observation with a wink. Mr. Franklin burst out laughing—and we were as merry as crickets, until the next new side of his character turned up in due course. So things went on with my young master and me; and so (while the Sergeant and the gardener were wrangling over the roses) we two spent the interval before the news came back from Frizinghall.

The pony-chaise returned a good half hour before I had ventured to expect it. My lady had decided to remain for the present, at her sister's house. The groom brought two letters from his mistress; one addressed to Mr. Franklin, and the other to me.

Mr. Franklin's letter I sent to him in the library—into which refuge his driftings had now taken him for the second time. My own letter, I read in my own room. A cheque, which dropped out when I opened it, informed me (before I had mastered the contents) that Sergeant Cuff's dismissal from the inquiry after the Moonstone was now a settled thing.

I sent to the conservatory to say that I wished to speak to the Sergeant directly. He appeared, with his mind full of the gardener and the dog-rose, declaring that the equal of Mr. Begbie for obstinacy never had existed yet, and never would exist again. I requested him to dismiss such wretched trifling as this from our conversation, and to give his best attention to a really serious matter. Upon that he exerted himself sufficiently to notice the letter in my hand. "Ah!" he said in a weary way, "you have heard from her ladyship. Have I anything to do with it, Mr. Betteredge?"

"You shall judge for yourself, Sergeant." I thereupon read him the letter (with my best emphasis and discretion), in the following words:

"MY GOOD GABRIEL,—I request that you will inform Sergeant Cuff, that I have performed the promise I made to him; with this result, so far as Rosanna Spearman is concerned. Miss Verinder solemnly declares, that she has never spoken a word in private to Rosanna, since that unhappy woman first entered my house. They never met, even accidentally, on the night when the Diamond was lost; and no communication of any sort whatever took place between them, from the Thursday morning when the alarm was first raised in the house, to this present Saturday afternoon, when Miss Verinder left us. After telling my daughter suddenly, and in so many words, of Rosanna Spearman's suicide—this is what has come of it."

Having reached that point, I looked up, and asked Sergeant Cuff what he thought of the letter, so far?

"I should only offend you if I expressed MY opinion," answered the Sergeant. "Go on, Mr. Betteredge," he said, with the most exasperating resignation, "go on."

When I remembered that this man had had the audacity to complain of our gardener's obstinacy, my tongue itched to "go on" in other words than my mistress's. This time, however, my Christianity held firm. I proceeded steadily with her ladyship's letter:

"Having appealed to Miss Verinder in the manner which the officer thought most desirable, I spoke to her next in the manner which I myself thought most likely to impress her. On two different occasions, before my daughter left my roof, I privately warned her that she was exposing herself to suspicion of the most undeniable and most degrading kind. I have now told her, in the plainest terms, that my apprehensions have been realised.

"Her answer to this, on her own solemn affirmation, is as plain as words can be. In the first place, she owes no money privately to any living creature. In the second place, the Diamond is not now, and never has been, in her possession, since she put it into her cabinet on Wednesday night.

"The confidence which my daughter has placed in me goes no further than this. She maintains an obstinate silence, when I ask her if she can explain the disappearance of the Diamond. She refuses, with tears, when I appeal to her to speak out for my sake. 'The day will come when you will know why I am careless about being suspected, and why I am silent even to you. I have done much to make my mother pity me--nothing to make my mother blush for me.' Those are my daughter's own words.

"After what has passed between the officer and me, I think--stranger as he is--that he should be made acquainted
with what Miss Verinder has said, as well as you. Read my letter to him, and then place in his hands the cheque which I enclose. In resigning all further claim on his services, I have only to say that I am convinced of his honesty and his intelligence; but I am more firmly persuaded than ever, that the circumstances, in this case, have fatally misled him.

There the letter ended. Before presenting the cheque, I asked Sergeant Cuff if he had any remark to make.

"It's no part of my duty, Mr. Betteredge," he answered, "to make remarks on a case, when I have done with it."

I tossed the cheque across the table to him. "Do you believe in THAT part of her ladyship's letter?" I said, indignantly.

The Sergeant looked at the cheque, and lifted up his dismal eyebrows in acknowledgment of her ladyship's liberality.

"This is such a generous estimate of the value of my time," he said, "that I feel bound to make some return for it. I'll bear in mind the amount in this cheque, Mr. Betteredge, when the occasion comes round for remembering it."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Her ladyship has smoothed matters over for the present very cleverly," said the Sergeant. "But THIS family scandal is of the sort that bursts up again when you least expect it. We shall have more detective-business on our hands, sir, before the Moonstone is many months older."

If those words meant anything, and if the manner in which he spoke them meant anything—it came to this. My mistress's letter had proved, to his mind, that Miss Rachel was hardened enough to resist the strongest appeal that could be addressed to her, and that she had deceived her own mother (good God, under what circumstances!) by a series of abominable lies. How other people, in my place, might have replied to the Sergeant, I don't know. I answered what he said in these plain terms:

"Sergeant Cuff, I consider your last observation as an insult to my lady and her daughter!"

"Mr. Betteredge, consider it as a warning to yourself, and you will be nearer the mark."

Hot and angry as I was, the infernal confidence with which he gave me that answer closed my lips.

I walked to the window to compose myself. The rain had given over; and, who should I see in the court-yard, but Mr. Begbie, the gardener, waiting outside to continue the dog-rose controversy with Sergeant Cuff.

"My compliments to the Sergeant," said Mr. Begbie, the moment he set eyes on me. "If he's minded to walk to the station, I'm agreeable to go with him."

"What!" cries the Sergeant, behind me, "are you not convinced yet?"

"The de'il a bit I'm convinced!" answered Mr. Begbie.

"Then I'll walk to the station!" says the Sergeant.

"Then I'll meet you at the gate!" says Mr. Begbie.

I was angry enough, as you know—but how was any man's anger to hold out against such an interruption as this? Sergeant Cuff noticed the change in me, and encouraged it by a word in season. "Come! come!" he said, "why not treat my view of the case as her ladyship treats it? Why not say, the circumstances have fatally misled me?"

To take anything as her ladyship took it was a privilege worth enjoying—even with the disadvantage of its having been offered to me by Sergeant Cuff. I cooled slowly down to my customary level. I regarded any other opinion of Miss Rachel, than my lady's opinion or mine, with a lofty contempt. The only thing I could not do, was to keep off the subject of the Moonstone! My own good sense ought to have warned me, I know, to let the matter rest—but, there! the virtues which distinguish the present generation were not invented in my time. Sergeant Cuff had hit me on the raw, and, though I did look down upon him with contempt, the tender place still tingled for all that. The end of it was that I perversely led him back to the subject of her ladyship's letter. "I am quite satisfied myself," I said. "But never mind that! Go on, as if I was still open to conviction. You think Miss Rachel is not to be believed on her word; and you say we shall hear of the Moonstone again. Back your opinion, Sergeant," I concluded, in an airy way. "Back your opinion."

Instead of taking offence, Sergeant Cuff seized my hand, and shook it till my fingers ached again.

"I declare to heaven," says this strange officer solemnly, "I would take to domestic service to-morrow, Mr. Betteredge, if I had a chance of being employed along with You! To say you are as transparent as a child, sir, is to pay the children a compliment which nine out of ten of them don't deserve. There! there! we won't begin to dispute again. You shall have it out of me on easier terms than that. I won't say a word more about her ladyship, or about Miss Verinder—I'll only turn prophet, for once in a way, and for your sake. I have warned you already that you haven't done with the Moonstone yet. Very well. Now I'll tell you, at parting, of three things which will happen in the future, and which, I believe, will force themselves on your attention, whether you like it or not."

"Go on!" I said, quite unabashed, and just as airy as ever.

"First," said the Sergeant, "you will hear something from the Yollands—when the postman delivers Rosanna's letter at Cobb's Hole, on Monday next."
If he had thrown a bucket of cold water over me, I doubt if I could have felt it much more unpleasantly than I felt those words. Miss Rachel's assertion of her innocence had left Rosanna's conduct--the making the new nightgown, the hiding the smeared nightgown, and all the rest of it--entirely without explanation. And this had never occurred to me, till Sergeant Cuff forced it on my mind all in a moment!

"In the second place," proceeded the Sergeant, "you will hear of the three Indians again. You will hear of them in the neighbourhood, if Miss Rachel remains in the neighbourhood. You will hear of them in London, if Miss Rachel goes to London."

Having lost all interest in the three jugglers, and having thoroughly convinced myself of my young lady's innocence, I took this second prophecy easily enough. "So much for two of the three things that are going to happen," I said. "Now for the third!"

"Third, and last," said Sergeant Cuff, "you will, sooner or later, hear something of that money-lender in London, whom I have twice taken the liberty of mentioning already. Give me your pocket-book, and I'll make a note for you of his name and address--so that there may be no mistake about it if the thing really happens."

He wrote accordingly on a blank leaf--"Mr. Septimus Luker, Middlesex-place, Lambeth, London."

"There," he said, pointing to the address, "are the last words, on the subject of the Moonstone, which I shall trouble you with for the present. Time will show whether I am right or wrong. In the meanwhile, sir, I carry away with me a sincere personal liking for you, which I think does honour to both of us. If we don't meet again before my professional retirement takes place, I hope you will come and see me in a little house near London, which I have got my eye on. There will be grass walks, Mr. Betteredge, I promise you, in my garden. And as for the white moss rose--"

"The de'il a bit ye'll get the white moss rose to grow, unless you bud him on the dogue-rose first," cried a voice at the window.

We both turned round. There was the everlasting Mr. Begbie, too eager for the controversy to wait any longer at the gate. The Sergeant wrung my hand, and darted out into the court-yard, hotter still on his side. "Ask him about the moss rose, when he comes back, and see if I have left him a leg to stand on!" cried the great Cuff, hailing me through the window in his turn. "Gentlemen, both!" I answered, moderating them again as I had moderated them once already.

"In the matter of the moss rose there is a great deal to be said on both sides!" I might as well (as the Irish say) have whistled jigs to a milestone. Away they went together, fighting the battle of the roses without asking or giving quarter on either side. The last I saw of them, Mr. Begbie was shaking his obstinate head, and Sergeant Cuff had got him by the arm like a prisoner in charge. Ah, well! well! I own I couldn't help liking the Sergeant--though I hated him all the time.

Explain that state of mind, if you can. You will soon be rid, now, of me and my contradictions. When I have reported Mr. Franklin's departure, the history of the Saturday's events will be finished at last. And when I have next described certain strange things that happened in the course of the new week, I shall have done my part of the Story, and shall hand over the pen to the person who is appointed to follow my lead. If you are as tired of reading this narrative as I am of writing it--Lord, how we shall enjoy ourselves on both sides a few pages further on!

CHAPTER XXIII

I had kept the pony chaise ready, in case Mr. Franklin persisted in leaving us by the train that night. The appearance of the luggage, followed downstairs by Mr. Franklin himself, informed me plainly enough that he had held firm to a resolution for once in his life.

"So you have really made up your mind, sir?" I said, as we met in the hall. "Why not wait a day or two longer, and give Miss Rachel another chance?"

The foreign varnish appeared to have all worn off Mr. Franklin, now that the time had come for saying goodbye. Instead of replying to me in words, he put the letter which her ladyship had addressed to him into my hand. The greater part of it said over again what had been said already in the other communication received by me. But there was a bit about Miss Rachel added at the end, which will account for the steadiness of Mr. Franklin's determination, if it accounts for nothing else.

"You will wonder, I dare say" (her ladyship wrote), "at my allowing my own daughter to keep me perfectly in the dark. A Diamond worth twenty thousand pounds has been lost--and I am left to infer that the mystery of its disappearance is no mystery to Rachel, and that some incomprehensible obligation of silence has been laid on her, by some person or persons utterly unknown to me, with some object in view at which I cannot even guess. Is it conceivable that I should allow myself to be trifled with in this way? It is quite conceivable, in Rachel's present state. She is in a condition of nervous agitation pitiable to see. I dare not approach the subject of the Moonstone again until time has done something to quiet her. To help this end, I have not hesitated to dismiss the police-officer. The mystery which baffles us, baffles him too. This is not a matter in which any stranger can help us. He adds to
what I have to suffer; and he maddens Rachel if she only hears his name.

"My plans for the future are as well settled as they can be. My present idea is to take Rachel to London--partly to relieve her mind by a complete change, partly to try what may be done by consulting the best medical advice. Can I ask you to meet us in town? My dear Franklin, you, in your way, must imitate my patience, and wait, as I do, for a fitter time. The valuable assistance which you rendered to the inquiry after the lost jewel is still an unpardoned offence, in the present dreadful state of Rachel's mind. Moving blindfold in this matter, you have added to the burden of anxiety which she has had to bear, by innocently threatening her secret with discovery, through your exertions. It is impossible for me to excuse the perversity that holds you responsible for consequences which neither you nor I could imagine or foresee. She is not to be reasoned with--she can only be pitied. I am grieved to have to say it, but for the present, you and Rachel are better apart. The only advice I can offer you is, to give her time."

I handed the letter back, sincerely sorry for Mr. Franklin, for I knew how fond he was of my young lady; and I saw that her mother's account of her had cut him to the heart. "You know the proverb, sir," was all I said to him. "When things are at the worst, they're sure to mend. Things can't be much worse, Mr. Franklin, than they are now."

Mr. Franklin folded up his aunt's letter, without appearing to be much comforted by the remark which I had ventured on addressing to him.

"When I came here from London with that horrible Diamond," he said, "I don't believe there was a happier household in England than this. Look at the household now! Scattered, disunited--the very air of the place poisoned with mystery and suspicion! Do you remember that morning at the Shivering Sand, when we talked about my uncle Herncastle, and his birthday gift? The Moonstone has served the Colonel's vengeance, Betteredge, by means which the Colonel himself never dreamt of!"

With that he shook me by the hand, and went out to the pony chaise.

I followed him down the steps. It was very miserable to see him leaving the old place, where he had spent the happiest years of his life, in this way. Penelope (sadly upset by all that had happened in the house) came round crying, to bid him good-bye. Mr. Franklin kissed her. I waved my hand as much as to say, "You're heartily welcome, sir." Some of the other female servants appeared, peeping after him round the corner. He was one of those men whom the women all like. At the last moment, I stopped the pony chaise, and begged as a favour that he would let us hear from him by letter. He didn't seem to heed what I said--he was looking round from one thing to another, taking a sort of farewell of the old house and grounds. "Tell us where you are going to, sir!" I said, holding on by the chaise, and trying to get at his future plans in that way. Mr. Franklin pulled his hat down suddenly over his eyes. "Going?" says he, echoing the word after me. "I am going to the devil!" The pony started at the word, as if he had felt a Christian horror of it. "God bless you, sir, go where you may!" was all I had time to say, before he was out of sight and hearing. A sweet and pleasant gentleman! With all his faults and follies, a sweet and pleasant gentleman! He left a sad gap behind him, when he left my lady's house.

It was dull and dreary enough, when the long summer evening closed in, on that Saturday night.

I kept my spirits from sinking by sticking fast to my pipe and my ROBINSON CRUSOE. The women (excepting Penelope) beguiled the time by talking of Rosanna's suicide. They were all obstinately of opinion that the poor girl had stolen the Moonstone, and that she had destroyed herself in terror of being found out. My daughter, of course, privately held fast to what she had said all along. Her notion of the motive which was really at the bottom of the suicide failed, oddly enough, just where my young lady's assertion of her innocence failed also. It left Rosanna's secret journey to Frizinghall, and Rosanna's proceedings in the matter of the nightgown entirely unaccounted for. There was no use in pointing this out to Penelope; the objection made about as much impression on her as a shower of rain on a waterproof coat. The truth is, my daughter inherits my superiority to reason--and, in respect to that accomplishment, has got a long way ahead of her own father.

On the next day (Sunday), the close carriage, which had been kept at Mr. Ablewhite's, came back to us empty. The coachman brought a message for me, and written instructions for my lady's own maid and for Penelope.

The written instructions informed me that my mistress had determined to take Miss Rachel to her house in London, on the Monday. The written instructions informed the two maids of the clothing that was wanted, and directed them to meet their mistresses in town at a given hour. Most of the other servants were to follow. My lady had found Miss Rachel so unwilling to return to the house, after what had happened in it, that she had decided on going to London direct from Frizinghall. I was to remain in the country, until further orders, to look after things indoors and out. The servants left with me were to be put on board wages.

Being reminded, by all this, of what Mr. Franklin had said about our being a scattered and disunited household, my mind was led naturally to Mr. Franklin himself. The more I thought of him, the more uneasy I felt about his future proceedings. It ended in my writing, by the Sunday's post, to his father's valet, Mr. Jeffco (whom I had known in former years) to beg he would let me know what Mr. Franklin had settled to do, on arriving in London.

The Sunday evening was, if possible, duller even than the Saturday evening. We ended the day of rest, as
hundreds of thousands of people end it regularly, once a week, in these islands— that is to say, we all anticipated bedtime, and fell asleep in our chairs.

How the Monday affected the rest of the household I don’t know. The Monday gave ME a good shake up. The first of Sergeant Cuff’s prophecies of what was to happen—namely, that I should hear from the Yollands—came true on that day.

I had seen Penelope and my lady’s maid off in the railway with the luggage for London, and was pottering about the grounds, when I heard my name called. Turning round, I found myself face to face with the fisherman’s daughter, Limping Lucy. Bating her lame foot and her leanness (this last a horrid draw-back to a woman, in my opinion), the girl had some pleasing qualities in the eye of a man. A dark, keen, clever face, and a nice clear voice, and a beautiful brown head of hair counted among her merits. A crutch appeared in the list of her misfortunes. And a temper reckoned high in the sum total of her defects.

“Well, my dear,” I said, “what do you want with me?”

“Well, that’s the man you call Franklin Blake?” says the girl, fixing me with a fierce look, as she rested herself on her crutch.

“That’s not a respectful way to speak of any gentleman,” I answered. “If you wish to inquire for my lady’s nephew, you will please to mention him as MR. Franklin Blake.”

She limped a step nearer to me, and looked as if she could have eaten me alive. “MR. Franklin Blake?” she repeated after me. “Murderer Franklin Blake would be a fitter name for him.”

My practice with the late Mrs. Betteredge came in handy here. Whenever a woman tries to put you out of temper, turn the tables, and put HER out of temper instead. They are generally prepared for every effort you can make in your own defence, but that. One word does it as well as a hundred; and one word did it with Limping Lucy. I looked her pleasantly in the face; and I said—”Pooh!”

The girl’s temper flamed out directly. She poised herself on her sound foot, and she took her crutch, and beat it furiously three times on the ground. "He's a murderer! he's a murderer! he's a murderer! He has been the death of Rosanna Spearman!” She screamed that answer out at the top of her voice. One or two of the people at work in the grounds near us looked up—saw it was Limping Lucy—knew what to expect from that quarter—and looked away again.

“He has been the death of Rosanna Spearman?” I repeated. "What makes you say that, Lucy?"

“What do you care? What does any man care? Oh! if she had only thought of the men as I think, she might have been living now!”

“She always thought kindly of ME, poor soul,” I said; “and, to the best of my ability, I always tried to act kindly by HER.”

I spoke those words in as comforting a manner as I could. The truth is, I hadn't the heart to irritate the girl by another of my smart replies. I had only noticed her temper at first. I noticed her wretchedness now—and wretchedness is not uncommonly insolent, you will find, in humble life. My answer melted Limping Lucy. She bent her head down, and laid it on the top of her crutch.

“I loved her,” the girl said softly. “She had lived a miserable life, Mr. Betteredge—vile people had ill-treated her and led her wrong—and it hadn’t spoiled her sweet temper. She was an angel. She might have been happy with me. I had a plan for our going to London together like sisters, and living by our needles. That man came here, and spoilt it all. He bewitched her. Don’t tell me he didn’t mean it, and didn’t know it. He ought to have known it. He ought to have taken pity on her. ‘I can’t live without him—’and, oh, Lucy, he never even looks at me.’ That’s what she said. Cruel, cruel, cruel. I said, ’No man is worth fretting for in that way.’ And she said, ’There are men worth dying for, Lucy, and he is one of them.’ I had saved up a little money. I had settled things with father and mother. I meant to take her away from the mortification she was suffering here. We should have had a little lodging in London, and lived together like sisters. She had a good education, sir, as you know, and she wrote a good hand. She was quick at her needle. I have a good education, and I write a good hand. I am not as quick at my needle as she was— but I could have done. We might have got our living nicely. And, oh! what happens this morning? what happens this morning? Her letter comes and tells me that she has done with the burden of her life. Her letter comes, and bids me good-bye for ever. Where is he?” cries the girl, lifting her head from the crutch, and flaming out again through her tears.

"Where's this gentleman that I mustn't speak of, except with respect? Ha, Mr. Betteredge, the day is not far off when the poor will rise against the rich. I pray Heaven they may begin with HIM. I pray Heaven they may begin with HIM.”

Here was another of your average good Christians, and here was the usual break-down, consequent on that same average Christianity being pushed too far! The parson himself (though I own this is saying a great deal) could hardly have lectured the girl in the state she was in now. All I ventured to do was to keep her to the point—in the hope of something turning up which might be worth hearing.
"What do you want with Mr. Franklin Blake?" I asked.
"I want to see him."
"For anything particular?"
"I have got a letter to give him."
"From Rosanna Spearman?"
"Yes."
"Sent to you in your own letter?"
"Yes."

Was the darkness going to lift? Were all the discoveries that I was dying to make, coming and offering themselves to me of their own accord? I was obliged to wait a moment. Sergeant Cuff had left his infection behind him. Certain signs and tokens, personal to myself, warned me that the detective-fever was beginning to set in again.

"You can't see Mr. Franklin," I said.
"I must, and will, see him."
"He went to London last night."

Limping Lucy looked me hard in the face, and saw that I was speaking the truth. Without a word more, she turned about again instantly towards Cobb's Hole.

"Stop!" I said. "I expect news of Mr. Franklin Blake to-morrow. Give me your letter, and I'll send it on to him by the post."

Limping Lucy steadied herself on her crutch and looked back at me over her shoulder.
"I am to give it from my hands into his hands," she said. "And I am to give it to him in no other way."
"Shall I write, and tell him what you have said?"
"Tell him I hate him. And you will tell him the truth."
"Yes, yes. But about the letter?"
"If he wants the letter, he must come back here, and get it from Me."

With those words she limped off on the way to Cobb's Hole. The detective-fever burnt up all my dignity on the spot. I followed her, and tried to make her talk. All in vain. It was my misfortune to be a man--and Limping Lucy enjoyed disappointing me. Later in the day, I tried my luck with her mother. Good Mrs. Yolland could only cry, and recommend a drop of comfort out of the Dutch bottle. I found the fisherman on the beach. He said it was "a bad job," and went on mending his net. Neither father nor mother knew more than I knew. The one way left to try was the chance, which might come with the morning, of writing to Mr. Franklin Blake.

I leave you to imagine how I watched for the postman on Tuesday morning. He brought me two letters. One, from Penelope (which I had hardly patience enough to read), announced that my lady and Miss Rachel were safely established in London. The other, from Mr. Jeffco, informed me that his master's son had left England already.

On reaching the metropolis, Mr. Franklin had, it appeared, gone straight to his father's residence. He arrived at an awkward time. Mr. Blake, the elder, was up to his eyes in the business of the House of Commons, and was amusing himself at home that night with the favourite parliamentary plaything which they call "a private bill." Mr. Jeffco himself showed Mr. Franklin into his father's study. "My dear Franklin! why do you surprise me in this way? Anything wrong?" "Yes; something wrong with Rachel; I am dreadfully distressed about it." "Grieved to hear it. But I can't listen to you now." "When can you listen?" "My dear boy! I won't deceive you. I can listen at the end of the session, not a moment before. Good-night." "Thank you, sir. Good-night."

Such was the conversation, inside the study, as reported to me by Mr. Jeffco. The conversation outside the study, was shorter still. "Jeffco, see what time the tidal train starts to-morrow morning." "At six-forty, Mr. Franklin." "Have me called at five." "Going abroad, sir?" "Going, Jeffco, wherever the railway chooses to take me."

The next morning Mr. Franklin had started for foreign parts. To what particular place he was bound, nobody (himself included) could presume to guess. We might hear of him next in Europe, Asia, Africa, or America. The chances were as equally divided as possible, in Mr. Jeffco's opinion, among the four quarters of the globe.

This news--by closing up all prospects of my bringing Limping Lucy and Mr. Franklin together--at once stopped any further progress of mine on the way to discovery. Penelope's belief that her fellow-servant had destroyed herself through unrequited love for Mr. Franklin Blake, was confirmed--and that was all. Whether the letter which Rosanna had left to be given to him after her death did, or did not, contain the confession which Mr. Franklin had suspected her of trying to make to him in her life-time, it was impossible to say. It might be only a farewell word, telling nothing but the secret of her unhappy fancy for a person beyond her reach. Or it might own the whole truth about the strange proceedings in which Sergeant Cuff had detected her, from the time when the Moonstone was lost, to the time when she rushed to her own destruction at the Shivering Sand. A sealed letter it had been placed in Limping Lucy's hand, and a sealed letter it remained to me and to every one about the girl, her own parents included. We all
suspected her of having been in the dead woman’s confidence; we all tried to make her speak; we all failed. Now one, and now another, of the servants—still holding to the belief that Rosanna had stolen the Diamond and had hidden it—peered and poked about the rocks to which she had been traced, and peered and poked in vain. The tide ebbed, and the tide flowed; the summer went on, and the autumn came. And the Quicksand, which hid her body, hid her secret too.

The news of Mr. Franklin’s departure from England on the Sunday morning, and the news of my lady’s arrival in London with Miss Rachel on the Monday afternoon, had reached me, as you are aware, by the Tuesday’s post. The Wednesday came, and brought nothing. The Thursday produced a second budget of news from Penelope.

My girl’s letter informed me that some great London doctor had been consulted about her young lady, and had earned a guinea by remarking that she had better be amused. Flower-shows, operas, balls—there was a whole round of gaieties in prospect; and Miss Rachel, to her mother’s astonishment, eagerly took to it all. Mr. Godfrey had called; evidently as sweet as ever on his cousin, in spite of the reception he had met with, when he tried his luck on the occasion of the birthday. To Penelope’s great regret, he had been most graciously received, and had added Miss Rachel’s name to one of his Ladies’ Charities on the spot. My mistress was reported to be out of spirits, and to have held two long interviews with her lawyer. Certain speculations followed, referring to a poor relation of the family—one Miss Clack, whom I have mentioned in my account of the birthday dinner, as sitting next to Mr. Godfrey, and having a pretty taste in champagne. Penelope was astonished to find that Miss Clack had not called yet. She would surely not be long before she fastened herself on my lady as usual—and so forth, and so forth, in the way women have of girding at each other, on and off paper. This would not have been worth mentioning, I admit, but for one reason. I hear you are likely to be turned over to Miss Clack, after parting with me. In that case, just do me the favour of not believing a word she says, if she speaks of your humble servant.

On Friday, nothing happened—except that one of the dogs showed signs of a breaking out behind the ears. I gave him a dose of syrup of buckthorn, and put him on a diet of pot-liquor and vegetables till further orders. Excuse my mentioning this. It has slipped in somehow. Pass it over please. I am fast coming to the end of my offences against your cultivated modern taste. Besides, the dog was a good creature, and deserved a good physic; he did indeed.

Saturday, the last day of the week, is also the last day in my narrative.

The morning’s post brought me a surprise in the shape of a London newspaper. The handwriting on the direction puzzled me. I compared it with the money-lender’s name and address as recorded in my pocket-book, and identified it at once as the writing of Sergeant Cuff.

Looking through the paper eagerly enough, after this discovery, I found an ink-mark drawn round one of the police reports. Here it is, at your service. Read it as I read it, and you will set the right value on the Sergeant’s polite attention in sending me the news of the day:

"LAMBETH—Shortly before the closing of the court, Mr. Septimus Luker, the well-known dealer in ancient gems, carvings, intagli, &c., &c., applied to the sitting magistrate for advice. The applicant stated that he had been annoyed, at intervals throughout the day, by the proceedings of some of those strolling Indians who infest the streets. The persons complained of were three in number. After having been sent away by the police, they had returned again and again, and had attempted to enter the house on pretence of asking for charity. Warned off in the front, they had been discovered again at the back of the premises. Besides the annoyance complained of, Mr. Luker expressed himself as being under some apprehension that robbery might be contemplated. His collection contained many unique gems, both classical and Oriental, of the highest value. He had only the day before been compelled to dismiss a skilled workman in ivory carving from his employment (a native of India, as we understood), on suspicion of attempted theft; and he felt by no means sure that this man and the street jugglers of whom he complained, might not be acting in concert. It might be their object to collect a crowd, and create a disturbance in the street, and, in the confusion thus caused, to obtain access to the house. In reply to the magistrate, Mr. Luker admitted that he had no evidence to produce of any attempt at robbery being in contemplation. He could speak positively to the annoyance and interruption caused by the Indians, but not to anything else. The magistrate remarked that, if the annoyance were repeated, the applicant could summon the Indians to that court, where they might easily be dealt with under the Act. As to the valuables in Mr. Luker’s possession, Mr. Luker himself must take the best measures for their safe custody. He would do well perhaps to communicate with the police, and to adopt such additional precautions as their experience might suggest. The applicant thanked his worship, and withdrew."

One of the wise ancients is reported (I forget on what occasion) as having recommended his fellow-creatures to "look to the end." Looking to the end of these pages of mine, and wondering for some days past how I should manage to write it, I find my plain statement of facts coming to a conclusion, most appropriately, of its own self. We have gone on, in this matter of the Moonstone, from one marvel to another; and here we end with the greatest marvel of all—namely, the accomplishment of Sergeant Cuff’s three predictions in less than a week from the time when he had made them.
After hearing from the Yollands on the Monday, I had now heard of the Indians, and heard of the money-lender, in the news from London—Miss Rachel herself remember, being also in London at the time. You see, I put things at their worst, even when they tell dead against my own view. If you desert me, and side with the Sergeant, on the evidence before you—if the only rational explanation you can see is, that Miss Rachel and Mr. Luker must have got together, and that the Moonstone must be now in pledge in the money-lender's house—I own, I can't blame you for arriving at that conclusion. In the dark, I have brought you thus far. In the dark I am compelled to leave you, with my best respects.

Why compelled? it may be asked. Why not take the persons who have gone along with me, so far, up into those regions of superior enlightenment in which I sit myself?

In answer to this, I can only state that I am acting under orders, and that those orders have been given to me (as I understand) in the interests of truth. I am forbidden to tell more in this narrative than I knew myself at the time. Or, to put it plainer, I am to keep strictly within the limits of my own experience, and am not to inform you of what other persons told me—for the very sufficient reason that you are to have the information from those other persons themselves, at first hand. In this matter of the Moonstone the plan is, not to present reports, but to produce witnesses. I picture to myself a member of the family reading these pages fifty years hence. Lord! what a compliment he will feel it, to be asked to take nothing on hear-say, and to be treated in all respects like a Judge on the bench.

At this place, then, we part—for the present, at least—after long journeying together, with a companionable feeling, I hope, on both sides. The devil's dance of the Indian Diamond has threaded its way to London; and to London you must go after it, leaving me at the country-house. Please to excuse the faults of this composition—my talking so much of myself, and being too familiar, I am afraid, with you. I mean no harm; and I drink most respectfully (having just done dinner) to your health and prosperity, in a tankard of her ladyship's ale. May you find in these leaves of my writing, what ROBINSON CRUSOE found in his experience on the desert island—namely, "something to comfort yourselves from, and to set in the Description of Good and Evil, on the Credit Side of the Account."—Farewell.

THE END OF THE FIRST PERIOD.
SECOND PERIOD
THE DISCOVERY OF THE TRUTH (1848-1849)
The events related in several narratives.
FIRST NARRATIVE
Contributed by MISS CLACK; niece of the late SIR JOHN VERINDER
CHAPTER I
I am indebted to my dear parents (both now in heaven) for having had habits of order and regularity instilled into me at a very early age.

In that happy bygone time, I was taught to keep my hair tidy at all hours of the day and night, and to fold up every article of my clothing carefully, in the same order, on the same chair, in the same place at the foot of the bed, before retiring to rest. An entry of the day's events in my little diary invariably preceded the folding up. The "Evening Hymn" (repeated in bed) invariably followed the folding up. And the sweet sleep of childhood invariably followed the "Evening Hymn."

In later life (alas!) the Hymn has been succeeded by sad and bitter meditations; and the sweet sleep has been but ill exchanged for the broken slumbers which haunt the uneasy pillow of care. On the other hand, I have continued to fold my clothes, and to keep my little diary. The former habit links me to my happy childhood—before papa was ruined. The latter habit—hitherto mainly useful in helping me to discipline the fallen nature which we all inherit from Adam—has unexpectedly proved important to my humble interests in quite another way. It has enabled poor Me to serve the caprice of a wealthy member of the family into which my late uncle married. I am fortunate enough to be useful to Mr. Franklin Blake.

I have been cut off from all news of my relatives by marriage for some time past. When we are isolated and poor, we are not infrequently forgotten. I am now living, for economy's sake, in a little town in Brittany, inhabited by a select circle of serious English friends, and possessed of the inestimable advantages of a Protestant clergyman and a cheap market.

In this retirement—a Patmos amid the howling ocean of popery that surrounds us—a letter from England has reached me at last. I find my insignificant existence suddenly remembered by Mr. Franklin Blake. My wealthy relative—would that I could add my spiritually-wealthy relative!—writes, without even an attempt at disguising that he wants something of me. The whim has seized him to stir up the deplorable scandal of the Moonstone: and I am to help him by writing the account of what I myself witnessed while visiting at Aunt Verinder's house in London. Pecuniary remuneration is offered to me—with the want of feeling peculiar to the rich. I am to re-open wounds that Time has barely closed; I am to recall the most intensely painful remembrances—and this done, I am to feel myself
compensated by a new laceration, in the shape of Mr. Blake's cheque. My nature is weak. It cost me a hard struggle, before Christian humility conquered sinful pride, and self-denial accepted the cheque.

Without my diary, I doubt--pray let me express it in the grossest terms!--if I could have honestly earned my money. With my diary, the poor labourer (who forgives Mr. Blake for insulting her) is worthy of her hire. Nothing escaped me at the time I was visiting dear Aunt Verinder. Everything was entered (thanks to my early training) day by day as it happened; and everything down to the smallest particular, shall be told here. My sacred regard for truth is (thank God) far above my respect for persons. It will be easy for Mr. Blake to suppress what may not prove to be sufficiently flattering in these pages to the person chiefly concerned in them. He has purchased my time, but not even HIS wealth can purchase my conscience too.*

* NOTE. ADDED BY FRANKLIN BLAKE.--Miss Clack may make her mind quite easy on this point. Nothing will be added, altered or removed, in her manuscript, or in any of the other manuscripts which pass through my hands. Whatever opinions any of the writers may express, whatever peculiarities of treatment may mark, and perhaps in a literary sense, disfigure the narratives which I am now collecting, not a line will be tampered with anywhere, from first to last. As genuine documents they are sent to me--and as genuine documents I shall preserve them, endorsed by the attestations of witnesses who can speak to the facts. It only remains to be added that "the person chiefly concerned" in Miss Clack's narrative, is happy enough at the present moment, not only to brave the smartest exercise of Miss Clack's pen, but even to recognise its unquestionable value as an instrument for the exhibition of Miss Clack's character.

My diary informs me, that I was accidentally passing Aunt Verinder's house in Montagu Square, on Monday, 3rd July, 1848.

Seeing the shutters opened, and the blinds drawn up, I felt that it would be an act of polite attention to knock, and make inquiries. The person who answered the door, informed me that my aunt and her daughter (I really cannot call her my cousin!) had arrived from the country a week since, and meditated making some stay in London. I sent up a message at once, declining to disturb them, and only begging to know whether I could be of any use.

The person who answered the door, took my message in insolent silence, and left me standing in the hall. She is the daughter of a heathen old man named Betteredge--long, too long, tolerated in my aunt's family. I sat down in the hall to wait for my answer--and, having always a few tracts in my bag, I selected one which proved to be quite providentially applicable to the person who answered the door. The hall was dirty, and the chair was hard; but the blessed consciousness of returning good for evil raised me quite above any trifling considerations of that kind. The tract was one of a series addressed to young women on the sinfulness of dress. In style it was devoutly familiar. Its title was, "A Word With You On Your Cap-Ribbons."

"My lady is much obliged, and begs you will come and lunch to-morrow at two."

I passed over the manner in which she gave her message, and the dreadful boldness of her look. I thanked this young castaway; and I said, in a tone of Christian interest, "Will you favour me by accepting a tract?"

She looked at the title. "Is it written by a man or a woman, Miss? If it's written by a woman, I had rather not read it on that account. If it's written by a man, I beg to inform him that he knows nothing about it." She handed me back the tract, and opened the door. We must sow the good seed somehow. I waited till the door was shut on me, and slipped the tract into the letter-box. When I had dropped another tract through the area railings, I felt relieved, in some small degree, of a heavy responsibility towards others.

We had a meeting that evening of the Select Committee of the Mothers'-Small-Clothes-Conversion-Society. The object of this excellent Charity is--as all serious people know--to rescue unredeemed fathers' trousers from the pawnbroker, and to prevent their resumption, on the part of the irreclaimable parent, by abridging them immediately to suit the proportions of the innocent son. I was a member, at that time, of the select committee; and I mention the Society here, because my precious and admirable friend, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, was associated with our work of moral and material usefulness. I had expected to see him in the boardroom, on the Monday evening of which I am now writing, and had proposed to tell him, when we met, of dear Aunt Verinder's arrival in London. To my great disappointment he never appeared. On my expressing a feeling of surprise at his absence, my sisters of the Committee all looked up together from their trousers (we had a great pressure of business that night), and asked in amazement, if I had not heard the news. I acknowledged my ignorance, and was then told, for the first time, of an event which forms, so to speak, the starting-point of this narrative. On the previous Friday, two gentlemen--occupying widely-different positions in society--had been the victims of an outrage which had startled all London. One of the gentlemen was Mr. Septimus Luker, of Lambeth. The other was Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

Living in my present isolation, I have no means of introducing the newspaper-account of the outrage into my narrative. I was also deprived, at the time, of the inestimable advantage of hearing the events related by the fervid eloquence of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. All I can do is to state the facts as they were stated, on that Monday evening, to me; proceeding on the plan which I have been taught from infancy to adopt in folding up my clothes. Everything
shall be put neatly, and everything shall be put in its place. These lines are written by a poor weak woman. From a poor weak woman who will be cruel enough to expect more?

The date--thanks to my dear parents, no dictionary that ever was written can be more particular than I am about dates--was Friday, June 30th, 1848.

Early on that memorable day, our gifted Mr. Godfrey happened to be cashing a cheque at a banking-house in Lombard Street. The name of the firm is accidentally blotted in my diary, and my sacred regard for truth forbids me to hazard a guess in a matter of this kind. Fortunately, the name of the firm doesn't matter. What does matter is a circumstance that occurred when Mr. Godfrey had transacted his business. On gaining the door, he encountered a gentleman--a perfect stranger to him--who was accidentally leaving the office exactly at the same time as himself. A momentary contest of politeness ensued between them as to who should be the first to pass through the door of the bank. The stranger insisted on making Mr. Godfrey precede him; Mr. Godfrey said a few civil words; they bowed, and parted in the street.

Thoughtless and superficial people may say, Here is surely a very trumpery little incident related in an absurdly circumstantial manner. Oh, my young friends and fellow-sinners! beware of presuming to exercise your poor carnal reason. Oh, be morally tidy. Let your faith be as your stockings, and your stockings as your faith. Both ever spotless, and both ready to put on at a moment's notice!

I beg a thousand pardons. I have fallen insensibly into my Sunday-school style. Most inappropriate in such a record as this. Let me try to be worldly--let me say that trifles, in this case as in many others, led to terrible results. Merely premising that the polite stranger was Mr. Luker, of Lambeth, we will now follow Mr. Godfrey home to his residence at Kilburn.

He found waiting for him, in the hall, a poorly clad but delicate and interesting-looking little boy. The boy handed him a letter, merely mentioning that he had been entrusted with it by an old lady whom he did not know, and who had given him no instructions to wait for an answer. Such incidents as these were not uncommon in Mr. Godfrey's large experience as a promoter of public charities. He let the boy go, and opened the letter.

The handwriting was entirely unfamiliar to him. It requested his attendance, within an hour's time, at a house in Northumberland Street, Strand, which he had never had occasion to enter before. The object sought was to obtain from the worthy manager certain details on the subject of the Mothers'-Small-Clothes-Conversion-Society, and the information was wanted by an elderly lady who proposed adding largely to the resources of the charity, if her questions were met by satisfactory replies. She mentioned her name, and she added that the shortness of her stay in London prevented her from giving any longer notice to the eminent philanthropist whom she addressed.

Ordinary people might have hesitated before setting aside their own engagements to suit the convenience of a stranger. The Christian Hero never hesitates where good is to be done. Mr. Godfrey instantly turned back, and proceeded to the house in Northumberland Street. A most respectable though somewhat corpulent man answered the door, and, on hearing Mr. Godfrey's name, immediately conducted him into an empty apartment at the back, on the drawing-room floor. He noticed two unusual things on entering the room. One of them was a faint odour of musk and camphor. The other was an ancient Oriental manuscript, richly illuminated with Indian figures and devices, that lay open to inspection on a table.

He was looking at the book, the position of which caused him to stand with his back turned towards the closed folding doors communicating with the front room, when, without the slightest previous noise to warn him, he felt himself suddenly seized round the neck from behind. He had just time to notice that the arm round his neck was naked and of a tawny-brown colour, before his eyes were bandaged, his mouth was gagged, and he was thrown helpless on the floor by (as he judged) two men. A third rifled his pockets, and--if, as a lady, I may venture to use such an expression--searched him, without ceremony, through and through to his skin.

Here I should greatly enjoy saying a few cheering words on the devout confidence which could alone have sustained Mr. Godfrey in an emergency so terrible as this. Perhaps, however, the position and appearance of my admirable friend at the culminating period of the outrage (as above described) are hardly within the proper limits of female discussion. Let me pass over the next few moments, and return to Mr. Godfrey at the time when the odious search of his person had been completed. The outrage had been perpetrated throughout in dead silence. At the end of it some words were exchanged, among the invisible wretches, in a language which he did not understand, but in tones which were plainly expressive (to his cultivated ear) of disappointment and rage. He was suddenly lifted from the ground, placed in a chair, and bound there hand and foot. The next moment he felt the air flowing in from the open door, listened, and concluded that he was alone again in the room.

An interval elapsed, and he heard a sound below like the rustling sound of a woman's dress. It advanced up the stairs, and stopped. A female scream rent the atmosphere of guilt. A man's voice below exclaimed "Hullo!" A man's feet ascended the stairs. Mr. Godfrey felt Christian fingers unfastening his bandage, and extracting his gag. He looked in amazement at two respectable strangers, and faintly articulated, "What does it mean?" The two respectable
strangers looked back, and said, "Exactly the question we were going to ask YOU."

The inevitable explanation followed. No! Let me be scrupulously particular. Sal volatile and water followed, to compose dear Mr. Godfrey's nerves. The explanation came next.

It appeared from the statement of the landlord and landlady of the house (persons of good repute in the neighbourhood), that their first and second floor apartments had been engaged, on the previous day, for a week certain, by a most respectable-looking gentleman—the same who has been already described as answering the door to Mr. Godfrey's knock. The gentleman had paid the week's rent and all the week's extras in advance, stating that the apartments were wanted for three Oriental noblemen, friends of his, who were visiting England for the first time. Early on the morning of the outrage, two of the Oriental strangers, accompanied by their respectable English friend, took possession of the apartments. The third was expected to join them shortly; and the luggage (reported as very bulky) was announced to follow when it had passed through the Custom-house, late in the afternoon. Not more than ten minutes previous to Mr. Godfrey's visit, the third foreigner had arrived. Nothing out of the common had happened, to the knowledge of the landlord and landlady down-stairs, until within the last five minutes—when they had seen the three foreigners, accompanied by their respectable English friend, all leave the house together, walking quietly in the direction of the Strand. Remembering that a visitor had called, and not having seen the visitor also leave the house, the landlady had thought it rather strange that the gentleman should be left by himself up-stairs. After a short discussion with her husband, she had considered it advisable to ascertain whether anything was wrong. The result had followed, as I have already attempted to describe it; and there the explanation of the landlord and the landlady came to an end.

An investigation was next made in the room. Dear Mr. Godfrey's property was found scattered in all directions. When the articles were collected, however, nothing was missing; his watch, chain, purse, keys, pocket-handkerchief, note-book, and all his loose papers had been closely examined, and had then been left unharmed to be resumed by the owner. In the same way, not the smallest morsel of property belonging to the proprietors of the house had been abstracted. The Oriental noblemen had removed their own illuminated manuscript, and had removed nothing else.

What did it mean? Taking the worldly point of view, it appeared to mean that Mr. Godfrey had been the victim of some incomprehensible error, committed by certain unknown men. A dark conspiracy was on foot in the midst of us; and our beloved and innocent friend had been entangled in its meshes. When the Christian hero of a hundred charitable victories plunges into a pitfall that has been dug for him by mistake, oh, what a warning it is to the rest of us to be unceasingly on our guard! How soon may our own evil passions prove to be Oriental noblemen who pounce on us unawares!

I could write pages of affectionate warning on this one theme, but (alas!) I am not permitted to improve—I am condemned to narrate. My wealthy relative's cheque—henceforth, the incubus of my existence—warns me that I have not done with this record of violence yet. We must leave Mr. Godfrey to recover in Northumberland Street, and must follow the proceedings of Mr. Luker at a later period of the day.

After leaving the bank, Mr. Luker had visited various parts of London on business errands. Returning to his own residence, he found a letter waiting for him, which was described as having been left a short time previously by a boy. In this case, as in Mr. Godfrey's case, the handwriting was strange; but the name mentioned was the name of one of Mr. Luker's customers. His correspondent announced (writing in the third person—apparently by the hand of a deputy) that he had been unexpectedly summoned to London. He had just established himself in lodgings in Alfred Place, Tottenham Court Road; and he desired to see Mr. Luker immediately, on the subject of a purchase which he contemplated making. The gentleman was an enthusiastic collector of Oriental antiquities, and had been for many years a liberal patron of the establishment in Lambeth. Oh, when shall we wean ourselves from the worship of Mammon! Mr. Luker called a cab, and drove off instantly to his liberal patron.

Exactly what had happened to Mr. Godfrey in Northumberland Street now happened to Mr. Luker in Alfred Place. Once more the respectable man answered the door, and showed the visitor up-stairs into the back drawing-room. There, again, lay the illuminated manuscript on a table. Mr. Luker's attention was absorbed, as Mr. Godfrey's attention had been absorbed, by this beautiful work of Indian art. He too was aroused from his studies by a tawny naked arm round his throat, by a bandage over his eyes, and by a gag in his mouth. He too was thrown prostrate and abstracted. The Oriental noblemen had removed their own illuminated manuscript, and had removed nothing else.

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The one point of difference between the two cases occurred when the scattered contents of Mr. Luker's pockets were being collected from the floor. His watch and purse were safe, but (less fortunate than Mr. Godfrey) one of the loose papers that he carried about him had been taken away. The paper in question acknowledged the receipt of a valuable
of great price which Mr. Luker had that day left in the care of his bankers. This document would be useless for purposes of fraud, inasmuch as it provided that the valuable should only be given up on the personal application of the owner. As soon as he recovered himself, Mr. Luker hurried to the bank, on the chance that the thieves who had robbed him might ignorantly present themselves with the receipt. Nothing had been seen of them when he arrived at the establishment, and nothing was seen of them afterwards. Their respectable English friend had (in the opinion of the bankers) looked the receipt over before they attempted to make use of it, and had given them the necessary warning in good time.

Information of both outrages was communicated to the police, and the needful investigations were pursued, I believe, with great energy. The authorities held that a robbery had been planned, on insufficient information received by the thieves. They had been plainly not sure whether Mr. Luker had, or had not, trusted the transmission of his precious gem to another person; and poor polite Mr. Godfrey had paid the penalty of having been seen accidentally speaking to him. Add to this, that Mr. Godfrey's absence from our Monday evening meeting had been occasioned by a consultation of the authorities, at which he was requested to assist--and all the explanations required being now given, I may proceed with the simpler story of my own little personal experiences in Montagu Square.

I was punctual to the luncheon hour on Tuesday. Reference to my diary shows this to have been a chequered day--much in it to be devoutly regretted, much in it to be devoutly thankful for.

Dear Aunt Verinder received me with her usual grace and kindness. But I noticed, after a little while, that something was wrong. Certain anxious looks escaped my aunt, all of which took the direction of her daughter. I never see Rachel myself without wondering how it can be that so insignificant-looking a person should be the child of such distinguished parents as Sir John and Lady Verinder. On this occasion, however, she not only disappointed--she really shocked me. There was an absence of all lady-like restraint in her language and manner most painful to see. She was possessed by some feverish excitement which made her distressingly loud when she laughed, and sinfully wasteful and capricious in what she ate and drank at lunch. I felt deeply for her poor mother, even before the true state of the case had been confidentially made known to me.

Luncheon over, my aunt said: "Remember what the doctor told you, Rachel, about quieting yourself with a book after taking your meals."

"I'll go into the library, mamma," she answered. "But if Godfrey calls, mind I am told of it. I am dying for more news of him, after his adventure in Northumberland Street." She kissed her mother on the forehead, and looked my way. "Good-bye, Clack," she said, carelessly. Her insolence roused no angry feeling in me; I only made a private memorandum to pray for her.

When we were left by ourselves, my aunt told me the whole horrible story of the Indian Diamond, which, I am happy to know, it is not necessary to repeat here. She did not conceal from me that she would have preferred keeping silence on the subject. But when her own servants all knew of the loss of the Moonstone, and when some of the circumstances had actually found their way into the newspapers--when strangers were speculating whether there was any connection between what had happened at Lady Verinder's country-house, and what had happened in Northumberland Street and Alfred Place--concealment was not to be thought of; and perfect frankness became a necessity as well as a virtue.

Some persons, hearing what I now heard, would have been probably overwhelmed with astonishment. For my own part, knowing Rachel's spirit to have been essentially unregenerate from her childhood upwards, I was prepared for whatever my aunt could tell me on the subject of her daughter. It might have gone on from bad to worse till it ended in Murder; and I should still have said to myself, The natural result! oh, dear, dear, the natural result! The one thing that DID shock me was the course my aunt had taken under the circumstances. Here surely was a case for a clergyman, if ever there was one yet! Lady Verinder had thought it a case for a physician. All my poor aunt's early life had been passed in her father's godless household. The natural result again! Oh, dear, dear, the natural result again!

"The doctors recommend plenty of exercise and amusement for Rachel, and strongly urge me to keep her mind as much as possible from dwelling on the past," said Lady Verinder.

"Oh, what heathen advice!" I thought to myself. "In this Christian country, what heathen advice!"

My aunt went on, "I do my best to carry out my instructions. But this strange adventure of Godfrey's happens at a most unfortunate time. Rachel has been incessantly restless and excited since she first heard of it. She left me no peace till I had written and asked my nephew Ablewhite to come here. She even feels an interest in the other person who was roughly used--Mr. Luker, or some such name--though the man is, of course, a total stranger to her."

"Your knowledge of the world, dear aunt, is superior to mine," I suggested diffidently. "But there must be a reason surely for this extraordinary conduct on Rachel's part. She is keeping a sinful secret from you and from everybody. May there not be something in these recent events which threatens her secret with discovery?"

"Discovery?" repeated my aunt. "What can you possibly mean? Discovery through Mr. Luker? Discovery
through my nephew?"

As the word passed her lips, a special providence occurred. The servant opened the door, and announced Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Godfrey followed the announcement of his name—as Mr. Godfrey does everything else—exactly at the right time. He was not so close on the servant's heels as to startle us. He was not so far behind as to cause us the double inconvenience of a pause and an open door. It is in the completeness of his daily life that the true Christian appears. This dear man was very complete.

"Go to Miss Verinder," said my aunt, addressing the servant, "and tell her Mr. Ablewhite is here."

We both inquired after his health. We both asked him together whether he felt like himself again, after his terrible adventure of the past week. With perfect tact, he contrived to answer us at the same moment. Lady Verinder had his reply in words. I had his charming smile.

"What," he cried, with infinite tenderness, "have I done to deserve all this sympathy? My dear aunt! my dear Miss Clack! I have merely been mistaken for somebody else. I have only been blindfolded; I have only been strangled; I have only been thrown flat on my back, on a very thin carpet, covering a particularly hard floor. Just think how much worse it might have been! I might have been murdered; I might have been robbed. What have I lost? Nothing but Nervous Force—which the law doesn't recognise as property; so that, strictly speaking, I have lost nothing at all. If I could have had my own way, I would have kept my adventure to myself—I shrink from all this fuss and publicity. But Mr. Luker made HIS injuries public, and my injuries, as the necessary consequence, have been proclaimed in their turn. I have become the property of the newspapers, until the gentle reader gets sick of the subject. I am very sick indeed of it myself. May the gentle reader soon be like me! And how is dear Rachel? Still enjoying the gaieties of London? So glad to hear it! Miss Clack, I need all your indulgence. I am sadly behind-hand with my Committee Work and my dear Ladies. But I really do hope to look in at the Mothers'-Small-Clothes next week. Did you make cheering progress at Monday's Committee? Was the Board hopeful about future prospects? And are we nicely off for Trousers?"

The heavenly gentleness of his smile made his apologies irresistible. The richness of his deep voice added its own indescribable charm to the interesting business question which he had just addressed to me. In truth, we were almost TOO nicely off for Trousers; we were quite overwhelmed by them. I was just about to say so, when the door opened again, and an element of worldly disturbance entered the room, in the person of Miss Verinder.

She approached dear Mr. Godfrey at a most unladylike rate of speed, with her hair shockingly untidy, and her face, what I should call, unbecomingly flushed.

"I am charmed to see you, Godfrey," she said, addressing him, I grieve to add, in the off-hand manner of one young man talking to another. "I wish you had brought Mr. Luker with you. You and he (as long as our present excitement lasts) are the two most interesting men in all London. It's morbid to say this; it's unhealthy; it's all that a well-regulated mind like Miss Clack's most instinctively shudders at. Never mind that. Tell me the whole of the Northumberland Street story directly. I know the newspapers have left some of it out."

Even dear Mr. Godfrey partakes of the fallen nature which we all inherit from Adam—it is a very small share of our human legacy, but, alas! he has it. I confess it grieved me to see him take Rachel's hand in both of his own hands, and lay it softly on the left side of his waistcoat. It was a direct encouragement to her reckless way of talking, and her insolent reference to me.

"Dearest Rachel," he said, in the same voice which had thrilled me when he spoke of our prospects and our trousers, "the newspapers have told you everything—and they have told it much better than I can."

"Godfrey thinks we all make too much of the matter," my aunt remarked. "He has just been saying that he doesn't care to speak of it."

"Why?"

She put the question with a sudden flash in her eyes, and a sudden look up into Mr. Godfrey's face. On his side, he looked down at her with an indulgence so injudicious and so ill-deserved, that I really felt called on to interfere.

"Rachel, darling!" I remonstrated gently, "true greatness and true courage are ever modest."

"You are a very good fellow in your way, Godfrey," she said—-not taking the smallest notice, observe, of me, and still speaking to her cousin as if she was one young man addressing another. "But I am quite sure you are not great; I don't believe you possess any extraordinary courage; and I am firmly persuaded—if you ever had any modesty—that your lady-worshippers relieved you of that virtue a good many years since. You have some private reason for not talking of your adventure in Northumberland Street; and I mean to know it."

"My reason is the simplest imaginable, and the most easily acknowledged," he answered, still bearing with her. "I am tired of the subject."

"You are tired of the subject? My dear Godfrey, I am going to make a remark."
"What is it?"

"You live a great deal too much in the society of women. And you have contracted two very bad habits in consequence. You have learnt to talk nonsense seriously, and you have got into a way of telling fibs for the pleasure of telling them. You can't go straight with your lady-worshippers. I mean to make you go straight with me. Come, and sit down. I am brimful of downright questions; and I expect you to be brimful of downright answers."

She actually dragged him across the room to a chair by the window, where the light would fall on his face. I deeply feel being obliged to report such language, and to describe such conduct. But, hemmed in, as I am, between Mr. Franklin Blake's cheque on one side and my own sacred regard for truth on the other, what am I to do? I looked at my aunt. She sat unmoved; apparently in no way disposed to interfere. I had never noticed this kind of torpor in her before. It was, perhaps, the reaction after the trying time she had had in the country. Not a pleasant symptom to remark, be it what it might, at dear Lady Verinder's age, and with dear Lady Verinder's autumnal exuberance of figure.

In the meantime, Rachel had settled herself at the window with our amiable and forbearing--our too forbearing--Mr. Godfrey. She began the string of questions with which she had threatened him, taking no more notice of her mother, or of myself, than if we had not been in the room.

"Have the police done anything, Godfrey?"

"Nothing whatever."

"It is certain, I suppose, that the three men who laid the trap for you were the same three men who afterwards laid the trap for Mr. Luker?"

"Humanly speaking, my dear Rachel, there can be no doubt of it."

"And not a trace of them has been discovered?"

"Not a trace."

"It is thought--is it not?--that these three men are the three Indians who came to our house in the country."

"Some people think so."

"Do you think so?"

"My dear Rachel, they blindfolded me before I could see their faces. I know nothing whatever of the matter. How can I offer an opinion on it?"

Even the angelic gentleness of Mr. Godfrey was, you see, beginning to give way at last under the persecution inflicted on him. Whether unbridled curiosity, or ungovernable dread, dictated Miss Verinder's questions I do not presume to inquire. I only report that, on Mr. Godfrey's attempting to rise, after giving her the answer just described, she actually took him by the two shoulders, and pushed him back into his chair--Oh, don't say this was immodest! don't even hint that the recklessness of guilty terror could alone account for such conduct as I have described! We must not judge others. My Christian friends, indeed, indeed, indeed, we must not judge others!

She went on with her questions, unabashed. Earnest Biblical students will perhaps be reminded--as I was reminded--of the blinded children of the devil, who went on with their orgies, unabashed, in the time before the Flood.

"I want to know something about Mr. Luker, Godfrey."

"I am again unfortunate, Rachel. No man knows less of Mr. Luker than I do."

"You never saw him before you and he met accidentally at the bank?"

"Never."

"You have seen him since?"

"Yes. We have been examined together, as well as separately, to assist the police."

"Mr. Luker was robbed of a receipt which he had got from his banker's--was he not? What was the receipt for?"

"For a valuable gem which he had placed in the safe keeping of the bank."

"That's what the newspapers say. It may be enough for the general reader; but it is not enough for me. The banker's receipt must have mentioned what the gem was?"

"The banker's receipt, Rachel--as I have heard it described--mentioned nothing of the kind. A valuable gem, belonging to Mr. Luker; deposited by Mr. Luker; sealed with Mr. Luker's seal; and only to be given up on Mr. Luker's personal application. That was the form, and that is all I know about it."

She waited a moment, after he had said that. She looked at her mother, and sighed. She looked back again at Mr. Godfrey, and went on.

"Some of our private affairs, at home," she said, "seem to have got into the newspapers?"

"I grieve to say, it is so."

"And some idle people, perfect strangers to us, are trying to trace a connexion between what happened at our house in Yorkshire and what has happened since, here in London?"

"The public curiosity, in certain quarters, is, I fear, taking that turn."
"The people who say that the three unknown men who ill-used you and Mr. Luker are the three Indians, also say
that the valuable gem---"

There she stopped. She had become gradually, within the last few moments, whiter and whiter in the face. The
extraordinary blackness of her hair made this paleness, by contrast, so ghastly to look at, that we all thought she
would faint, at the moment when she checked herself in the middle of her question. Dear Mr. Godfrey made a
second attempt to leave his chair. My aunt entreated her to say no more. I followed my aunt with a modest medicinal
peace-offering, in the shape of a bottle of salts. We none of us produced the slightest effect on her. "Godfrey, stay
where you are. Mamma, there is not the least reason to be alarmed about me. Clack, you're dying to hear the end of
it--I won't faint, expressly to oblige YOU."

Those were the exact words she used--taken down in my diary the moment I got home. But, oh, don't let us
judge! My Christian friends, don't let us judge!

She turned once more to Mr. Godfrey. With an obstinacy dreadful to see, she went back again to the place
where she had checked herself, and completed her question in these words:

"I spoke to you, a minute since, about what people were saying in certain quarters. Tell me plainly, Godfrey, do
they any of them say that Mr. Luker's valuable gem is--the Moonstone?"

As the name of the Indian Diamond passed her lips, I saw a change come over my admirable friend. His
complexion deepened. He lost the genial suavity of manner which is one of his greatest charms. A noble indignation
inspired his reply.

"They DO say it," he answered. "There are people who don't hesitate to accuse Mr. Luker of telling a falsehood
to serve some private interests of his own. He has over and over again solemnly declared that, until this scandal
assailed him, he had never even heard of the Moonstone. And these vile people reply, without a shadow of proof to
justify them, He has his reasons for concealment; we decline to believe him on his oath. Shameful! shameful!"

Rachel looked at him very strangely--I can't well describe how--while he was speaking. When he had done, she
said, "Considering that Mr. Luker is only a chance acquaintance of yours, you take up his cause, Godfrey, rather
warmly."

My gifted friend made her one of the most truly evangelical answers I ever heard in my life.

"I hope, Rachel, I take up the cause of all oppressed people rather warmly," he said.

The tone in which those words were spoken might have melted a stone. But, oh dear, what is the hardness of
stone? Nothing, compared to the hardness of the unregenerate human heart! She sneered. I blush to record it--she
sneered at him to his face.

"Keep your noble sentiments for your Ladies' Committees, Godfrey. I am certain that the scandal which has
assailed Mr. Luker, has not spared You."

Even my aunt's torpor was roused by those words.

"My dear Rachel," she remonstrated, "you have really no right to say that!"

"I mean no harm, mamma--I mean good. Have a moment's patience with me, and you will see."

She looked back at Mr. Godfrey, with what appeared to be a sudden pity for him. She went the length--the very
unladylike length--of taking him by the hand.

"I am certain," she said, "that I have found out the true reason of your unwillingness to speak of this matter
before my mother and before me. An unlucky accident has associated you in people's minds with Mr. Luker. You
have told me what scandal says of HIM. What does scandal say of you?"

Even at the eleventh hour, dear Mr. Godfrey--always ready to return good for evil--tried to spare her.

"Don't ask me!" he said. "It's better forgotten, Rachel--it is, indeed."

"I WILL hear it!" she cried out, fiercely, at the top of her voice.

"Tell her, Godfrey!" entreated my aunt. "Nothing can do her such harm as your silence is doing now!"

Mr. Godfrey's fine eyes filled with tears. He cast one last appealing look at her--and then he spoke the fatal
words:

"If you will have it, Rachel--scandal says that the Moonstone is in pledge to Mr. Luker, and that I am the man
who has pawned it."

She started to her feet with a scream. She looked backwards and forwards from Mr. Godfrey to my aunt, and
from my aunt to Mr. Godfrey, in such a frantic manner that I really thought she had gone mad.

"Don't speak to me! Don't touch me!" she exclaimed, shrinking back from all of us (I declare like some hunted
animal!) into a corner of the room. "This is my fault! I must set it right. I have sacrificed myself--I had a right to do
that, if I liked. But to let an innocent man be ruined; to keep a secret which destroys his character for life--Oh, good
God, it's too horrible! I can't bear it!"

My aunt half rose from her chair, then suddenly sat down again. She called to me faintly, and pointed to a little
phial in her work-box.
"Quick!" she whispered. "Six drops, in water. Don't let Rachel see."

Under other circumstances, I should have thought this strange. There was no time now to think--there was only time to give the medicine. Dear Mr. Godfrey unconsciously assisted me in concealing what I was about from Rachel, by speaking composing words to her at the other end of the room.

"Indeed, indeed, you exaggerate," I heard him say. "My reputation stands too high to be destroyed by a miserable passing scandal like this. It will be all forgotten in another week. Let us never speak of it again." She was perfectly inaccessible, even to such generosity as this. She went on from bad to worse.

"I must, and will, stop it," she said. "Mamma! hear what I say. Miss Clack! hear what I say. I know the hand that took the Moonstone. I know--" she laid a strong emphasis on the words; she stamp'd her foot in the rage that possessed her--"I KNOW THAT GODFREY ABLEWHITE IS INNOCENT. Take me to the magistrate, Godfrey! Take me to the magistrate, and I will swear it!"

My aunt caught me by the hand, and whispered, "Stand between us for a minute or two. Don't let Rachel see me." I noticed a bluish tinge in her face which alarmed me. She saw I was startled. "The drops will put me right in a minute or two," she said, and so closed her eyes, and waited a little.

While this was going on, I heard dear Mr. Godfrey still gently remonstrating.

"You must not appear publicly in such a thing as this," he said. "YOUR reputation, dearest Rachel, is something too pure and too sacred to be trifled with."

"MY reputation!" She burst out laughing. "Why, I am accused, Godfrey, as well as you. The best detective officer in England declares that I have stolen my own Diamond. Ask him what he thinks--and he will tell you that I have pledged the Moonstone to pay my private debts!" She stopped, ran across the room--and fell on her knees at her mother's feet. "Oh mamma! mamma! mamma! I must be mad--mustn't I?--not to own the truth NOW?" She was too vehement to notice her mother's condition--she was on her feet again, and back with Mr. Godfrey, in an instant.

"I won't let you--I won't let any innocent man--be accused and disgraced through my fault. If you won't take me before the magistrate, draw out a declaration of your innocence on paper, and I will sign it. Do as I tell you, Godfrey, or I'll write it to the newspapers I'll go out, and cry it in the streets!"

We will not say this was the language of remorse--we will say it was the language of hysterics. Indulgent Mr. Godfrey pacified her by taking a sheet of paper, and drawing out the declaration. She signed it in a feverish hurry. "Show it everywhere--don't think of ME," she said, as she gave it to him. "I am afraid, Godfrey, I have not done you justice, hitherto, in my thoughts. You are more unselfish--you are a better man than I believed you to be. Come here when you can, and I will try and repair the wrong I have done you."

She gave him her hand. Alas, for our fallen nature! Alas, for Mr. Godfrey! He not only forgot himself so far as to kiss her hand--he adopted a gentleness of tone in answering her which, in such a case, was little better than a compromise with sin. "I will come, dearest," he said, "on condition that we don't speak of this hateful subject again."

Never had I seen and heard our Christian Hero to less advantage than on this occasion.

Before another word could be said by anybody, a thundering knock at the street door startled us all. I looked through the window, and saw the World, the Flesh, and the Devil waiting before the house--as typified in a carriage and horses, a powdered footman, and three of the most audaciously dressed women I ever beheld in my life.

Rachel started, and composed herself. She crossed the room to her mother.

"They have come to take me to the flower-show," she said. "One word, mamma, before I go. I have not distressed you, have I?"

(Is the bluntness of moral feeling which could ask such a question as that, after what had just happened, to be pitted or condemned? I like to lean towards mercy. Let us pity it.)

The drops had produced their effect. My poor aunt's complexion was like itself again. "No, no, my dear," she said. "Go with our friends, and enjoy yourself."

Her daughter stooped, and kissed her. I had left the window, and was near the door, when Rachel approached it to go out. Another change had come over her--she was in tears. I looked with interest at the momentary softening of that obdurate heart. I felt inclined to say a few earnest words. Alas! my well-meant sympathy only gave offence.

"What do you mean by pitying me?" she asked in a bitter whisper, as she passed to the door. "Don't you see how happy I am? I'm going to the flower-show, Clack; and I've got the prettiest bonnet in London." She completed the hollow mockery of that address by blowing me a kiss--and so left the room.

I wish I could describe in words the compassion I felt for this miserable and misguided girl. But I am almost as poorly provided with words as with money. Permit me to say--my heart bled for her.

Returning to my aunt's chair, I observed dear Mr. Godfrey searching for something softly, here and there, in different parts of the room. Before I could offer to assist him he had found what he wanted. He came back to my aunt and me, with his declaration of innocence in one hand, and with a box of matches in the other.

"Dear aunt, a little conspiracy!" he said. "Dear Miss Clack, a pious fraud which even your high moral rectitude
will excuse! Will you leave Rachel to suppose that I accept the generous self-sacrifice which has signed this paper? And will you kindly bear witness that I destroy it in your presence, before I leave the house?” He kindled a match, and, lighting the paper, laid it to burn in a plate on the table. "Any trifling inconvenience that I may suffer is as nothing," he remarked, "compared with the importance of preserving that pure name from the contaminating contact of the world. There! We have reduced it to a little harmless heap of ashes; and our dear impulsive Rachel will never know what we have done! How do you feel? My precious friends, how do you feel? For my poor part, I am as light-hearted as a boy!"

He beamed on us with his beautiful smile; he held out a hand to my aunt, and a hand to me. I was too deeply affected by his noble conduct to speak. I closed my eyes; I put his hand, in a kind of spiritual self-forgetfulness, to my lips. He murmured a soft remonstrance. Oh the ecstasy, the pure, unearthly ecstasy of that moment! I sat--I hardly know on what--quite lost in my own exalted feelings. When I opened my eyes again, it was like descending from heaven to earth. There was nobody but my aunt in the room. He had gone.

I should like to stop here--I should like to close my narrative with the record of Mr. Godfrey's noble conduct. Unhappily there is more, much more, which the unrelenting pecuniary pressure of Mr. Blake's cheque obliges me to tell. The painful disclosures which were to reveal themselves in my presence, during that Tuesday's visit to Montagu Square, were not at an end yet.

Finding myself alone with Lady Verinder, I turned naturally to the subject of her health; touching delicately on the strange anxiety which she had shown to conceal her indisposition, and the remedy applied to it, from the observation of her daughter.

My aunt's reply greatly surprised me.

"Drusilla," she said (if I have not already mentioned that my Christian name is Drusilla, permit me to mention it now), "you are touching quite innocently, I know--on a very distressing subject."

I rose immediately. Delicacy left me but one alternative--the alternative, after first making my apologies, of taking my leave. Lady Verinder stopped me, and insisted on my sitting down again.

"You have surprised a secret," she said, "which I had confided to my sister Mrs. Ablewhite, and to my lawyer Mr. Bruff, and to no one else. I can trust in their discretion; and I am sure, when I tell you the circumstances, I can trust in yours. Have you any pressing engagement, Drusilla? or is your time your own this afternoon?"

It is needless to say that my time was entirely at my aunt's disposal.

"Keep me company then," she said, "for another hour. I have something to tell you which I believe you will be sorry to hear. And I shall have a service to ask of you afterwards, if you don't object to assist me."

It is again needless to say that, so far from objecting, I was all eagerness to assist her.

"You can wait here," she went on, "till Mr. Bruff comes at five. And you can be one of the witnesses, Drusilla, when I sign my Will."

Her Will! I thought of the drops which I had seen in her work-box. I thought of the bluish tinge which I had noticed in her complexion. A light which was not of this world--a light shining prophetically from an unmade grave--dawned on my mind. My aunt's secret was a secret no longer.

CHAPTER III

Consideration for poor Lady Verinder forbade me even to hint that I had guessed the melancholy truth, before she opened her lips. I waited her pleasure in silence; and, having privately arranged to say a few sustaining words at the first convenient opportunity, felt prepared for any duty that could claim me, no matter how painful it might be.

"I have been seriously ill, Drusilla, for some time past," my aunt began. "And, strange to say, without knowing it myself."

I thought of the thousands and thousands of perishing human creatures who were all at that moment spiritually ill, without knowing it themselves. And I greatly feared that my poor aunt might be one of the number. "Yes, dear," I said, sadly. "Yes."

"I brought Rachel to London, as you know, for medical advice," she went on. "I thought it right to consult two doctors."

Two doctors! And, oh me (in Rachel's state), not one clergyman! "Yes, dear?" I said once more. "Yes?"

"One of the two medical men," proceeded my aunt, "was a stranger to me. The other had been an old friend of my husband's, and had always felt a sincere interest in me for my husband's sake. After prescribing for Rachel, he said he wished to speak to me privately in another room. I expected, of course, to receive some special directions for the management of my daughter's health. To my surprise, he took me gravely by the hand, and said, 'I have been looking at you, Lady Verinder, with a professional as well as a personal interest. You are, I am afraid, far more urgently in need of medical advice than your daughter.' He put some questions to me, which I was at first inclined to treat lightly enough, until I observed that my answers distressed him. It ended in his making an appointment to come and see me, accompanied by a medical friend, on the next day, at an hour when Rachel would not be at home. The
result of that visit--most kindly and gently conveyed to me--satisfied both the physicians that there had been
precious time lost, which could never be regained, and that my case had now passed beyond the reach of their art.
For more than two years I have been suffering under an insidious form of heart disease, which, without any
symptoms to alarm me, has, by little and little, fatally broken me down. I may live for some months, or I may die
before another day has passed over my head--the doctors cannot, and dare not, speak more positively than this. It
would be vain to say, my dear, that I have not had some miserable moments since my real situation has been made
known to me. But I am more resigned than I was, and I am doing my best to set my worldly affairs in order. My one
great anxiety is that Rachel should be kept in ignorance of the truth. If she knew it, she would at once attribute my
broken health to anxiety about the Diamond, and would reproach herself bitterly, poor child, for what is in no sense
her fault. Both the doctors agree that the mischief began two, if not three years since. I am sure you will keep my
secret, Drusilla--for I am sure I see sincere sorrow and sympathy for me in your face."

Sorrow and sympathy! Oh, what Pagan emotions to expect from a Christian Englishwoman anchored firmly on
her faith!

Little did my poor aunt imagine what a gush of devout thankfulness thrilled through me as she approached the
close of her melancholy story. Here was a career of usefulness opened before me! Here was a beloved relative and
perishing fellow-creature, on the eve of the great change, utterly unprepared; and led, providentially led, to reveal
her situation to Me! How can I describe the joy with which I now remembered that the precious clerical friends on
whom I could rely, were to be counted, not by ones or twos, but by tens and twenties. I took my aunt in my arms--
my overflowing tenderness was not to be satisfied, now, with anything less than an embrace. "Oh!" I said to her,
fervently, "the indescribable interest with which you inspire me! Oh! the good I mean to do you, dear, before we
part!" After another word or two of earnest prefatory warning, I gave her her choice of three precious friends, all
plying the work of mercy from morning to night in her own neighbourhood; all equally inexhaustible in exhortation;
all affectionately ready to exercise their gifts at a word from me. Alas! the result was far from encouraging. Poor
Lady Verinder looked puzzled and frightened, and met everything I could say to her with the purely worldly
objection that she was not strong enough to face strangers. I yielded--for the moment only, of course. My large
experience (as Reader and Visitor, under not less, first and last, than fourteen beloved clerical friends) informed me
that this was another case for preparation by books. I possessed a little library of works, all suitable to the present
emergency, all calculated to arouse, convince, prepare, enlighten, and fortify my aunt. "You will read, dear, won't
you?" I said, in my most winning way. "You will read, if I bring you my own precious books? Turned down at all
the right places, aunt. And marked in pencil where you are to stop and ask yourself, 'Does this apply to me?' Even
that simple appeal--so absolutely heathenising is the influence of the world--appeared to startle my aunt. She said, "I
will do what I can, Drusilla, to please you," with a look of surprise, which was at once instructive and terrible to see.
Not a moment was to be lost. The clock on the mantel-piece informed me that I had just time to hurry home; to
provide myself with a first series of selected readings (say a dozen only); and to return in time to meet the lawyer,
and witness Lady Verinder's Will. Promising faithfully to be back by five o'clock, I left the house on my errand of
mercy.

When no interests but my own are involved, I am humbly content to get from place to place by the omnibus.
Permit me to give an idea of my devotion to my aunt's interests by recording that, on this occasion, I committed the
prodigality of taking a cab.

I drove home, selected and marked my first series of readings, and drove back to Montagu Square, with a dozen
works in a carpet-bag, the like of which, I firmly believe, are not to be found in the literature of any other country in
Europe. I paid the cabman exactly his fare. He received it with an oath; upon which I instantly gave him a tract. If I
would do what I can, this abandoned wretch could hardly have exhibited greater consternation. He
jumped up on his box, and, with profane exclamations of dismay, drove off furiously. Quite useless, I am happy to
say! I sowed the good seed, in spite of him, by throwing a second tract in at the window of the cab.

The servant who answered the door--not the person with the cap-ribbons, to my great relief, but the foot-man--
informed me that the doctor had called, and was still shut up with Lady Verinder. Mr. Bruff, the lawyer, had arrived
a minute since and was waiting in the library. I was shown into the library to wait too.

Mr. Bruff looked surprised to see me. He is the family solicitor, and we had met more than once, on previous
occasions, under Lady Verinder's roof. A man, I grieve to say, grown old and grizzled in the service of the world. A
man who, in his hours of business, was the chosen prophet of Law and Mammon; and who, in his hours of leisure,
was equally capable of reading a novel and of tearing up a tract.

"Have you come to stay here, Miss Clack?" he asked, with a look at my carpet-bag.

To reveal the contents of my precious bag to such a person as this would have been simply to invite an outburst
of profanity. I lowered myself to his own level, and mentioned my business in the house.

"My aunt has informed me that she is about to sign her Will," I answered. "She has been so good as to ask me to
be one of the witnesses."

"Aye? aye? Well, Miss Clack, you will do. You are over twenty-one, and you have not the slightest pecuniary interest in Lady Verinder's Will."

Not the slightest pecuniary interest in Lady Verinder's Will. Oh, how thankful I felt when I heard that! If my aunt, possessed of thousands, had remembered poor Me, to whom five pounds is an object—if my name had appeared in the Will, with a little comforting legacy attached to it—my enemies might have doubted the motive which had loaded me with the choicest treasures of my library, and had drawn upon my failing resources for the prodigal expenses of a cab. Not the cruellest scoffer of them all could doubt now. Much better as it was! Oh, surely, surely, much better as it was!

I was aroused from these consoling reflections by the voice of Mr. Bruff. My meditative silence appeared to weigh upon the spirits of this worldling, and to force him, as it were, into talking to me against his own will.

"Well, Miss Clack, what's the last news in the charitable circles? How is your friend Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, after the mauling he got from the rogues in Northumberland Street? Egad! they're telling a pretty story about that charitable gentleman at my club!"

I had passed over the manner in which this person had remarked that I was more than twenty-one, and that I had no pecuniary interest in my aunt's Will. But the tone in which he alluded to dear Mr. Godfrey was too much for my forbearance. Feeling bound, after what had passed in my presence that afternoon, to assert the innocence of my admirable friend, whenever I found it called in question—I own to having also felt bound to include in the accomplishment of this righteous purpose, a stinging castigation in the case of Mr. Bruff.

"I live very much out of the world," I said; "and I don't possess the advantage, sir, of belonging to a club. But I happen to know the story to which you allude; and I also know that a viler falsehood than that story never was told."

"Yes, yes, Miss Clack—you believe in your friend. Natural enough. Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, won't find the world in general quite so easy to convince as a committee of charitable ladies. Appearances are dead against him. He was in the house when the Diamond was lost. And he was the first person in the house to go to London afterwards. Those are ugly circumstances, ma'am, viewed by the light of later events."

I ought, I know, to have set him right before he went any farther. I ought to have told him that he was speaking in ignorance of a testimony to Mr. Godfrey's innocence, offered by the only person who was undeniably competent to speak from a positive knowledge of the subject. Alas! the temptation to lead the lawyer artfully on to his own discomfiture was too much for me. I asked what he meant by "later events"—with an appearance of the utmost innocence.

"By later events, Miss Clack, I mean events in which the Indians are concerned," proceeded Mr. Bruff, getting more and more superior to poor Me, the longer he went on. "What do the Indians do, the moment they are let out of the prison at Frizinghall? They go straight to London, and fix on Mr. Luker. What follows? Mr. Luker feels alarmed. He says, 'I have my suspicions that the 'valuable of great price' is being shifted from one place to another; and they hit on a singularly bold and complete way of clearing those suspicions up. Whom do they seize and search? Not Mr. Luker only—which would be intelligible enough—but Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite as well. Why? Mr. Ablewhite's explanation is, that they acted on blind suspicion, after seeing him accidentally speaking to Mr. Luker. Absurd! Half-a-dozen other people spoke to Mr. Luker that morning. Why were they not followed home too, and decoyed into the trap? No! no! The plain inference is, that Mr. Ablewhite had his private interest in the 'valuable' as well as Mr. Luker, and that the Indians were so uncertain as to which of the two had the disposal of it, that there was no alternative but to search them both. Public opinion says that, Miss Clack. And public opinion, on this occasion, is not easily refuted."

He said those last words, looking so wonderfully wise in his own worldly conceit, that I really (to my shame be it spoken) could not resist leading him a little farther still, before I overwhelmed him with the truth.

"I don't presume to argue with a clever lawyer like you," I said. "But is it quite fair, sir, to Mr. Ablewhite to pass over the opinion of the famous London police officer who investigated this case? Not the shadow of a suspicion rested upon anybody but Miss Verinder, in the mind of Sergeant Cuff."

"Do you mean to tell me, Miss Clack, that you agree with the Sergeant?"

"I judge nobody, sir, and I offer no opinion."

"And I commit both those enormities, ma'am. I judge the Sergeant to have been utterly wrong; and I offer the opinion that, if he had known Rachel's character as I know it, he would have suspected everybody in the house but HER. I admit that she has her faults—she is secret, and self-willed; odd and wild, and unlike other girls of her age. But true as steel, and high-minded and generous to a fault. If the plainest evidence in the world pointed one way, and if nothing but Rachel's word of honour pointed the other, I would take her word before the evidence, lawyer as I am!
Strong language, Miss Clack; but I mean it."

"Would you object to illustrate your meaning, Mr. Bruff, so that I may be sure I understand it? Suppose you found Miss Verinder quite unaccountably interested in what has happened to Mr. Ablewhite and Mr. Luker? Suppose she asked the strangest questions about this dreadful scandal, and displayed the most ungovernable agitation when she found out the turn it was taking?"

"Suppose anything you please, Miss Clack, it wouldn't shake my belief in Rachel Verinder by a hair's-breadth."

"She is so absolutely to be relied on as that?"

"So absolutely to be relied on as that."

"Then permit me to inform you, Mr. Bruff, that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite was in this house not two hours since, and that his entire innocence of all concern in the disappearance of the Moonstone was proclaimed by Miss Verinder herself, in the strongest language I ever heard used by a young lady in my life."

I enjoyed the triumph--the unholy triumph, I fear I must admit--of seeing Mr. Bruff utterly confounded and overthrown by a few plain words from me. He started to his feet, and stared at me in silence. I kept my seat, undisturbed, and related the whole scene as it had occurred. "And what do you say about Mr. Ablewhite now?" I asked, with the utmost possible gentleness, as soon as I had done.

"If Rachel has testified to his innocence, Miss Clack, I don't scruple to say that I believe in his innocence as firmly as you do: I have been misled by appearances, like the rest of the world; and I will make the best atonement I can, by publicly contradicting the scandal which has assailed your friend wherever I meet with it. In the meantime, allow me to congratulate you on the masterly manner in which you have opened the full fire of your batteries on me at the moment when I least expected it. You would have done great things in my profession, ma'am, if you had happened to be a man."

With those words he turned away from me, and began walking irritably up and down the room.

I could see plainly that the new light I had thrown on the subject had greatly surprised and disturbed him. Certain expressions dropped from his lips, as he became more and more absorbed in his own thoughts, which suggested to my mind the abominable view that he had hitherto taken of the mystery of the lost Moonstone. He had not scrupled to suspect dear Mr. Godfrey of the infamy of stealing the Diamond, and to attribute Rachel's conduct to a generous resolution to conceal the crime. On Miss Verinder's own authority--a perfectly unassailable authority, as you are aware, in the estimation of Mr. Bruff--that explanation of the circumstances was now shown to be utterly wrong. The perplexity into which I had plunged this high legal authority was so overwhelming that he was quite unable to conceal it from notice. "What a case!" I heard him say to himself, stopping at the window in his walk, and drumming on the glass with his fingers. "It not only defies explanation, it's even beyond conjecture."

There was nothing in these words which made any reply at all needful, on my part--and yet, I answered them! It seems hardly credible that I should not have been able to let Mr. Bruff alone, even now. It seems almost beyond mere mortal perversity that I should have discovered, in what he had just said, a new opportunity of making myself personally disagreeable to him. But--ah, my friends! nothing is beyond mortal perversity; and anything is credible when our fallen natures get the better of us!

"Pardon me for intruding on your reflections," I said to the unsuspecting Mr. Bruff. "But surely there is a conjecture to make which has not occurred to us yet."

"Maybe, Miss Clack. I own I don't know what it is."

"Before I was so fortunate, sir, as to convince you of Mr. Ablewhite's innocence, you mentioned it as one of the reasons for suspecting him, that he was in the house at the time when the Diamond was lost. Permit me to remind you that Mr. Franklin Blake was also in the house at the time when the Diamond was lost."

The old worldling left the window, took a chair exactly opposite to mine, and looked at me steadily, with a hard and vicious smile.

"You are not so good a lawyer, Miss Clack," he remarked in a meditative manner, "as I supposed. You don't know how to let well alone."

"I am afraid I fail to follow you, Mr. Bruff," I said, modestly.

"It won't do, Miss Clack--it really won't do a second time. Franklin Blake is a prime favourite of mine, as you are well aware. But that doesn't matter. I'll adopt your view, on this occasion, before you have time to turn round on me. You're quite right, ma'am. I have suspected Mr. Ablewhite, on grounds which abstractedly justify suspecting Mr. Blake too. Very good--let's suspect them together. It's quite in his character, we will say, to be capable of stealing the Moonstone. The only question is, whether it was his interest to do so."

"Mr. Franklin Blake's debts," I remarked, "are matters of family notoriety."

"And Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's debts have not arrived at that stage of development yet. Quite true. But there happen to be two difficulties in the way of your theory, Miss Clack. I manage Franklin Blake's affairs, and I beg to inform you that the vast majority of his creditors (knowing his father to be a rich man) are quite content to charge
interest on their debts, and to wait for their money. There is the first difficulty—which is tough enough. You will find
the second tougher still. I have it on the authority of Lady Verinder herself, that her daughter was ready to marry
Franklin Blake, before that infernal Indian Diamond disappeared from the house. She had drawn him on and put him
off again, with the coquetry of a young girl. But she had confessed to her mother that she loved cousin Franklin, and
her mother had trusted cousin Franklin with the secret. So there he was, Miss Clack, with his creditors content to
wait, and with the certain prospect before him of marrying an heiress. By all means consider him a scoundrel; but
tell me, if you please, why he should steal the Moonstone?

"The human heart is unsearchable," I said gently. "Who is to fathom it?"

"In other words, ma'am—though he hadn't the shadow of a reason for taking the Diamond—he might have taken
it, nevertheless, through natural depravity. Very well. Say he did. Why the devil----"

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Bruff. If I hear the devil referred to in that manner, I must leave the room."

"I beg YOUR pardon, Miss Clack—I'll be more careful in my choice of language for the future. All I meant to
ask was this. Why—even supposing he did take the Diamond—should Franklin Blake make himself the most
prominent person in the house in trying to recover it? You may tell me he cunningly did that to divert suspicion from
himself. I answer that he had no need to divert suspicion—because nobody suspected him. He first steals the
Moonstone (without the slightest reason) through natural depravity; and he then acts a part, in relation to the loss
of the jewel, which is not the slightest necessity to act, and which leads to his mortally offending the young lady
who would otherwise have married him. That is the monstrous proposition which you are driven to assert, if you
attempt to associate the disappearance of the Moonstone with Franklin Blake. No, no, Miss Clack! After what has
passed here to-day, between us two, the dead-lock, in this case, is complete. Rachel's own innocence is (as her
mother knows, and as I know) beyond a doubt. Mr. Ablewhite's innocence is equally certain—or Rachel would never
have testified to it. And Franklin Blake's innocence, as you have just seen, unanswerably asserts itself. On the one
hand, we are morally certain of all these things. And, on the other hand, we are equally sure that somebody has
brought the Moonstone to London, and that Mr. Luker, or his banker, is in private possession of it at this moment.
What is the use of my experience, what is the use of any person's experience, in such a case as that? It baffles me; it
baffles you, it baffles everybody."

No—not everybody. It had not baffled Sergeant Cuff. I was about to mention this, with all possible mildness, and
with every necessary protest against being supposed to cast a slur upon Rachel—when the servant came in to say that
the doctor had gone, and that my aunt was waiting to receive us.

This stopped the discussion. Mr. Bruff collected his papers, looking a little exhausted by the demands which our
conversation had made on him. I took up my bag-full of precious publications, feeling as if I could have gone on
talking for hours. We proceeded in silence to Lady Verinder's room.

Permit me to add here, before my narrative advances to other events, that I have not described what passed
between the lawyer and me, without having a definite object in view. I am ordered to include in my contribution to
the shocking story of the Moonstone a plain disclosure, not only of the turn which suspicion took, but even of the
names of the persons on whom suspicion rested, at the time when the Indian Diamond was believed to be in London.
A report of my conversation in the library with Mr. Bruff appeared to me to be exactly what was wanted to answer
this purpose—while, at the same time, it possessed the great moral advantage of rendering a sacrifice of sinful self-
estee essentially necessary on my part. I have been obliged to acknowledge that my fallen nature got the better of
me. In making that humiliating confession, I get the better of my fallen nature. The moral balance is restored; the
spiritual atmosphere feels clear once more. Dear friends, we may go on again.

CHAPTER IV

The signing of the Will was a much shorter matter than I had anticipated. It was hurried over, to my thinking, in
indecent haste. Samuel, the footman, was sent for to act as second witness—and the pen was put at once into my
aunt's hand. I felt strongly urged to say a few appropriate words on this solemn occasion. But Mr. Bruff's manner
convinced me that it was wisest to check the impulse while he was in the room. In less than two minutes it was all
over—and Samuel (unbenefited by what I might have said) had gone downstairs again.

Mr. Bruff folded up the Will, and then looked my way; apparently wondering whether I did or did not mean to
leave him alone with my aunt. I had my mission of mercy to fulfil, and my bag of precious publications ready on my
lap. He might as well have expected to move St. Paul's Cathedral by looking at it, as to move Me. There was one
merit about him (due no doubt to his worldly training) which I have no wish to deny. He was quick at seeing things.
I appeared to produce almost the same impression on him which I had produced on the cabman. HE too uttered a
profane expression, and withdrew in a violent hurry, and left me mistress of the field.

As soon as we were alone, my aunt reclined on the sofa, and then alluded, with some appearance of confusion, to
the subject of her Will.

"I hope you won't think yourself neglected, Drusilla," she said. "I mean to GIVE you your little legacy, my dear,
sleeper, and wanted, or thought she wanted, many things at night. I put a book near the matches on one side, and a
in front. The miniature of my late dear uncle, Sir John, hung on the wall opposite the bed. It seemed to smile at me;
prepared to bear anything. All was silent and solitary--it was the servants' tea-time, I suppose. My aunt's room was
the risk, undoubtedly, of being insulted, if the person with the cap-ribbons happened to be in the upper regions of the
old-fashioned fan was on the chimney-piece. I opened my ninth book at a very special passage, and put the fan in as
the drawing-room opened out of the back drawing-room, from which it was shut off by curtains instead of a door. My aunt's plain
drawing-room, under some unfinished embroidery, which I knew to be of Lady Verinder's working. A third little
bird herself. Some groundsel was strewed on a table which stood immediately under the cage. I put a book among
the breakfast-room I found my aunt's favourite canary singing in his cage. She was always in the habit of feeding the
infidel doctor had recommended. I instantly covered them from sight with two of my own precious publications. In
supposing I had gone, went down-stairs again. On the library table I noticed two of the "amusing books" which the
immediately said good-bye; and, crossing the hall, slipped into the library. Samuel, coming up to let me out, and
The happy thought followed, "Why not do the same for her, poor dear, in every other room that she enters?" I
one, in the shape of another book from my bag, which I left, to surprise my aunt, among the geraniums and roses.
I took a flower?" I said--and got to the window unsuspected, in that way. Instead of taking away a flower, I added
flowers, in boxes and pots. Lady Verinder was extravagantly fond of these perishable treasures, and had a habit of
rising every now and then, and going to look at them and smell them. A new idea flashed across my mind. "Oh! may
flowers, in boxes and pots. Lady Verinder was extravagantly fond of these perishable treasures, and had a habit of
disturbing influence of all others which they most dreaded, was the influence of Miss Clack and her Books. Precisely the same blinded materialism (working treacherously behind my back) now sought to rob me of the only right of property that my poverty could claim--my right of spiritual property in my perishing aunt.
"The doctor tells me," my poor misguided relative went on, "that I am not so well to-day. He forbids me to see any strangers; and he orders me, if I read at all, only to read the lightest and the most amusing books. 'Do nothing, Lady Verinder, to weary your head, or to quicken your pulse'--those were his last words, Drusilla, when he left me to-day."
There was no help for it but to yield again--for the moment only, as before. Any open assertion of the infinitely superior importance of such a ministry as mine, compared with the ministry of the medical man, would only have provoked the doctor to practise on the human weakness of his patient, and to threaten to throw up the case. Happily, there are more ways than one of sowing the good seed, and few persons are better versed in those ways than myself.
"You might feel stronger, dear, in an hour or two," I said. "Or you might wake, to-morrow morning, with a sense of something wanting, and even this unpretending volume might be able to supply it. You will let me leave the book, aunt? The doctor can hardly object to that!"
I slipped it under the sofa cushions, half in, and half out, close by her handkerchief, and her smelling-bottle. Every time her hand searched for either of these, it would touch the book; and, sooner or later (who knows?) the book might touch HER. After making this arrangement, I thought it wise to withdraw. "Let me leave you to repose, dear aunt; I will call again to-morrow." I looked accidentally towards the window as I said that. It was full of flowers, in boxes and pots. Lady Verinder was extravagantly fond of these perishable treasures, and had a habit of rising every now and then, and going to look at them and smell them. A new idea flashed across my mind. "Oh! may I take a flower?" I said--and got to the window unsuspected, in that way. Instead of taking away a flower, I added one, in the shape of another book from my bag, which I left, to surprise my aunt, among the geraniums and roses. The happy thought followed, "Why not do the same for her, poor dear, in every other room that she enters?" I immediately said good-bye; and, crossing the hall, slipped into the library. Samuel, coming up to let me out, and supposing I had gone, went down-stairs again. On the library table I noticed two of the "amusing books" which the infidel doctor had recommended. I instantly covered them from sight with two of my own precious publications. In the breakfast-room I found my aunt's favourite canary singing in his cage. She was always in the habit of feeding the bird herself. Some groundsel was strewed on a table which stood immediately under the cage. I put a book among the groundsel. In the drawing-room I found more cheering opportunities of emptying my bag. My aunt's favourite musical pieces were on the piano. I slipped in two more books among the music. I disposed of another in the back drawing-room, under some unfinished embroidery, which I knew to be of Lady Verinder's working. A third little room opened out of the back drawing-room, from which it was shut off by curtains instead of a door. My aunt's plain old-fashioned fan was on the chimney-piece. I opened my ninth book at a very special passage, and put the fan in as a marker, to keep the place. The question then came, whether I should go higher still, and try the bed-room floor--at the risk, undoubtedly, of being insulted, if the person with the cap-ribbons happened to be in the upper regions of the house, and to find me put. But oh, what of that? It is a poor Christian that is afraid of being insulted. I went upstairs, prepared to bear anything. All was silent and solitary--it was the servants' tea-time, I suppose. My aunt's room was in front. The miniature of my late dear uncle, Sir John, hung on the wall opposite the bed. It seemed to smile at me; it seemed to say, "Drusilla! deposit a book." There were tables on either side of my aunt's bed. She was a bad sleeper, and wanted, or thought she wanted, many things at night. I put a book near the matches on one side, and a

with my own hand."

Here was a golden opportunity! I seized it on the spot. In other words, I instantly opened my bag, and took out
the top publication. It proved to be an early edition--only the twenty-fifth--of the famous anonymous work (believed
to be by precious Miss Bellows), entitled THE SERPENT AT HOME. The design of the book--with which the worldly reader may not be acquainted--is to show how the Evil One lies in wait for us in all the most apparently innocent actions of our daily lives. The chapters best adapted to female perusal are "Satan in the Hair Brush;" "Satan behind the Looking Glass;" "Satan under the Tea Table;" "Satan out of the Window"--and many others.

"Give your attention, dear aunt, to this precious book--and you will give me all I ask." With those words, I
handed it to her open, at a marked passage--one continuous burst of burning eloquence! Subject: Satan among the
Sofa Cushions.

Poor Lady Verinder (reclining thoughtlessly on her own sofa cushions) glanced at the book, and handed it back to
me looking more confused than ever.

"I'm afraid, Drusilla," she said, "I must wait till I am a little better, before I can read that. The doctor----"

The moment she mentioned the doctor's name, I knew what was coming. Over and over again in my past experience among my perishing fellow-creatures, the members of the notoriously infidel profession of Medicine had stepped between me and my mission of mercy--on the miserable pretense that the patient wanted quiet, and that the disturbing influence of all others which they most dreaded, was the influence of Miss Clack and her Books. Precisely the same blinded materialism (working treacherously behind my back) now sought to rob me of the only right of property that my poverty could claim--my right of spiritual property in my perishing aunt.

"The doctor tells me," my poor misguided relative went on, "that I am not so well to-day. He forbids me to see any strangers; and he orders me, if I read at all, only to read the lightest and the most amusing books. 'Do nothing, Lady Verinder, to weary your head, or to quicken your pulse'--those were his last words, Drusilla, when he left me to-day."

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book under the box of chocolate drops on the other. Whether she wanted a light, or whether she wanted a drop, there was a precious publication to meet her eye, or to meet her hand, and to say with silent eloquence, in either case, "Come, try me! try me!" But one book was now left at the bottom of my bag, and but one apartment was still unexplored—the bath-room, which opened out of the bed-room. I peeped in; and the holy inner voice that never deceives, whispered to me, "You have met her, Drusilla, everywhere else; meet her at the bath, and the work is done." I observed a dressing-gown thrown across a chair. It had a pocket in it, and in that pocket I put my last book. Can words express my exquisite sense of duty done, when I had slipped out of the house, unsuspected by any of them, and when I found myself in the street with my empty bag under my arm? Oh, my worldly friends, pursuing the phantom, Pleasure, through the guilty mazes of Dissipation, how easy it is to be happy, if you will only be good!

When I folded up my things that night—when I reflected on the true riches which I had scattered with such a lavish hand, from top to bottom of the house of my wealthy aunt—I declare I felt as free from all anxiety as if I had been a child again. I was so light-hearted that I sang a verse of the Evening Hymn. I was so light-hearted that I fell asleep before I could sing another. Quite like a child again! quite like a child again!

So I passed that blissful night. On rising the next morning, how young I felt! I might add, how young I looked, if I were capable of dwelling on the concerns of my own perishable body. But I am not capable—and I add nothing.

Towards luncheon time—not for the sake of the creature-comforts, but for the certainty of finding dear aunt—I put on my bonnet to go to Montagu Square. Just as I was ready, the maid at the lodgings in which I then lived looked in at the door, and said, "Lady Verinder's servant, to see Miss Clack."

I occupied the parlour-floor, at that period of my residence in London. The front parlour was my sitting-room. Very small, very low in the ceiling, very poorly furnished—but, oh, so neat! I looked into the passage to see which of Lady Verinder's servants had asked for me. It was the young footman, Samuel—a civil fresh-coloured person, with a teachable look and a very obliging manner. I had always felt a spiritual interest in Samuel, and a wish to try him with a few serious words. On this occasion, I invited him into my sitting-room.

He came in, with a large parcel under his arm. When he put the parcel down, it appeared to frighten him. "My lady's love, Miss; and I was to say that you would find a letter inside." Having given that message, the fresh-coloured young footman surprised me by looking as if he would have liked to run away.

I detained him to make a few kind inquiries. Could I see my aunt, if I called in Montagu Square? No; she had gone out for a drive. Miss Rachel had gone with her, and Mr. Ablewhite had taken a seat in the carriage, too. Knowing how sadly dear Mr. Godfrey's charitable work was in arrear, I thought it odd that he should be going out driving, like an idle man. I stopped Samuel at the door, and made a few more kind inquiries. Miss Rachel was going to a ball that night, and Mr. Ablewhite had arranged to come to coffee, and go with her. There was a morning concert advertised for to-morrow, and Samuel was ordered to take places for a large party, including a place for Mr. Ablewhite. "All the tickets may be gone, Miss," said this innocent youth, "if I don't run and get them at once!" He ran as he said the words—and I found myself alone again, with some anxious thoughts to occupy me.

We had a special meeting of the Mothers'-Small-Clothes-Conversion Society that night, summoned expressly with a view to obtaining Mr. Godfrey's advice and assistance. Instead of sustaining our sisterhood, under an overwhelming flow of Trousers which quite prostrated our little community, he had arranged to take coffee in Montagu Square, and to goto a ball afterwards! The afternoon of the next day had been selected for the Festival of the British-Ladies'-Servants'-Sunday-Sweetheart-Supervision Society. Instead of being present, the life and soul of that struggling Institution, he had engaged to make one of a party of worldlings at a morning concert! I asked myself what did it mean? Alas! it meant that our Christian Hero was to reveal himself to me in a new character, and to become associated in my mind with one of the most awful backslidings of modern times.

To return, however, to the history of the passing day. On finding myself alone in my room, I naturally turned my attention to the parcel which appeared to have so strangely intimidated the fresh-coloured young footman. Had my aunt sent me my promised legacy? and had it taken the form of cast-off clothes, or worn-out silver spoons, or unfashionable jewellery, or anything of that sort? Prepared to accept all, and to resent nothing, I opened the parcel—what did it mean? Alas! it meant that our Christian Hero was to reveal himself to me in a new character, and to become associated in my mind with one of the most awful backslidings of modern times.

What was to be done now? With my training and my principles, I never had a moment's doubt.

Once self-supported by conscience, once embarked on a career of manifest usefulness, the true Christian never yields. Neither public nor private influences produce the slightest effect on us, when we have once got our mission. Taxation may be the consequence of a mission; riots may be the consequence of a mission; wars may be the consequence of a mission: we go on with our work, irrespective of every human consideration which moves the world outside us. We are above reason; we are beyond ridicule; we see with nobody's eyes, we hear with nobody's
ears, we feel with nobody's hearts, but our own. Glorious, glorious privilege! And how is it earned? Ah, my friends, you may spare yourselves the useless inquiry! We are the only people who can earn it—and we are the only people who are always right.

In the case of my misguided aunt, the form which pious perseverance was next to take revealed itself to me plainly enough.

Preparation by clerical friends had failed, owing to Lady Verinder's own reluctance. Preparation by books had failed, owing to the doctor's infidel obstinacy. So be it! What was the next thing to try? The next thing to try was—Preparation by Little Notes. In other words, the books themselves having been sent back, select extracts from the books, copied by different hands, and all addressed as letters to my aunt, were, some to be sent by post, and some to be distributed about the house on the plan I had adopted on the previous day. As letters they would excite no suspicion; as letters they would be opened—and, once opened, might be read. Some of them I wrote myself. "Dear aunt, may I ask your attention to a few lines?" &c. "Dear aunt, I was reading last night, and I chanced on the following passage," &c. Other letters were written for me by my valued fellow-workers, the sisterhood at the Mothers'-Small-Clothes. "Dear madam, pardon the interest taken in you by a true, though humble, friend." "Dear madam, may a serious person surprise you by saying a few cheering words?" Using these and other similar forms of courteous appeal, we reintroduced all my precious passages under a form which not even the doctor's watchful materialism could suspect. Before the shades of evening had closed around us, I had a dozen awakening letters for my aunt, instead of a dozen awakening books. Six I made immediate arrangements for sending through the post, and six I kept in my pocket for personal distribution in the house the next day.

Soon after two o'clock I was again on the field of pious conflict, addressing more kind inquiries to Samuel at Lady Verinder's door.

My aunt had had a bad night. She was again in the room in which I had witnessed her Will, resting on the sofa, and trying to get a little sleep.

I said I would wait in the library, on the chance of seeing her. In the fervour of my zeal to distribute the letters, it never occurred to me to inquire about Rachel. The house was quiet, and it was past the hour at which the musical performance began. I took it for granted that she and her party of pleasure-seekers (Mr. Godfrey, alas! included) were all at the concert, and eagerly devoted myself to my good work, while time and opportunity were still at my own disposal.

My aunt's correspondence of the morning—including the six awakening letters which I had posted overnight—was lying unopened on the library table. She had evidently not felt herself equal to dealing with a large mass of letters—and she might be daunted by the number of them, if she entered the library later in the day. I put one of my second set of six letters on the chimney-piece by itself; leaving it to attract her curiosity, by means of its solitary position, apart from the rest. A second letter I put purposely on the floor in the breakfast-room. The first servant who went in after me would conclude that my aunt had dropped it, and would be specially careful to restore it to her. The field thus sown on the basement story, I ran lightly upstairs to scatter my mercies next over the drawing-room floor.

Just as I entered the front room, I heard a double knock at the street-door—a soft, fluttering, considerate little knock. Before I could think of slipping back to the library (in which I was supposed to be waiting), the active young footman was in the hall, answering the door. It mattered little, as I thought. In my aunt's state of health, visitors in general were not admitted. To my horror and amazement, the performer of the soft little knock proved to be an exception to general rules. Samuel's voice below me (after apparently answering some questions which I did not hear) said, unmistakably, "Upstairs, if you please, sir." The next moment I heard footsteps—a man's footsteps—approaching the drawing-room floor. Who could this favoured male visitor possibly be? Almost as soon as I asked myself the question, the answer occurred to me. Who COULD it be but the doctor?

In the case of any other visitor, I should have allowed myself to be discovered in the drawing-room. There would have been nothing out of the common in my having got tired of the library, and having gone upstairs for a change. But my own self-respect stood in the way of my meeting the person who had insulted me by sending me back my books. I slipped into the little third room, which I have mentioned as communicating with the back drawing-room, and dropped the curtains which closed the open doorway. If I only waited there for a minute or two, the usual result in such cases would take place. That is to say, the doctor would be conducted to his patient's room.

I waited a minute or two, and more than a minute or two. I heard the visitor walking restlessly backwards and forwards. I also heard him talking to himself. I even thought I recognised the voice. Had I made a mistake? Was it not the doctor, but somebody else? Mr. Bruff, for instance? No! an unerring instinct told me it was not Mr. Bruff. Whoever he was, he was still talking to himself. I parted the heavy curtains the least little morsel in the world, and listened.

The words I heard were, "I'll do it to-day!" And the voice that spoke them was Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's.

CHAPTER V
My hand dropped from the curtain. But don’t suppose—oh, don’t suppose—that the dreadful embarrassment of my situation was the uppermost idea in my mind! So fervent still was the sisterly interest I felt in Mr. Godfrey, that I never stopped to ask myself why he was not at the concert. No! I thought only of the words—the startling words—which had just fallen from his lips. He would do it to-day. He had said, in a tone of terrible resolution, he would do it to-day. What, oh what, would he do? Something even more deplorably unworthy of him than what he had done already? Would he apostatise from the faith? Would he abandon us at the Mothers’-Small-Clothes? Had we seen the last of his angelic smile in the committee-room? Had we heard the last of his unrivalled eloquence at Exeter Hall? I was so wrought up by the bare idea of such awful eventualities as these in connection with such a man, that I believe I should have rushed from my place of concealment, and implored him in the name of all the Ladies’ Committees in London to explain himself—when I suddenly heard another voice in the room. It penetrated through the curtains; it was loud, it was bold, it was wanting in every female charm. The voice of Rachel Verinder.

"Why have you come up here, Godfrey?" she asked. "Why didn’t you go into the library?"

He laughed softly, and answered, "Miss Clack is in the library."

"Clack in the library!" She instantly seated herself on the ottoman in the back drawing-room. "You are quite right, Godfrey. We had much better stop here."

I had been in a burning fever, a moment since, and in some doubt what to do next. I became extremely cold now, and felt no doubt whatever. To show myself, after what I had heard, was impossible. To retreat—except into the fireplace—was equally out of the question. A martyrdom was before me. In justice to myself, I noiselessly arranged the curtains so that I could both see and hear. And then I met my martyrdom, with the spirit of a primitive Christian.

"Don't sit on the ottoman," the young lady proceeded. "Bring a chair, Godfrey. I like people to be opposite to me when I talk to them."

He took the nearest seat. It was a low chair. He was very tall, and many sizes too large for it. I never saw his legs to such disadvantage before.

"Well?" she went on. "What did you say to them?"

"Just what you said, dear Rachel, to me."

"That mamma was not at all well to-day? And that I didn't quite like leaving her to go to the concert?"

"Those were the words. They were grieved to lose you at the concert, but they quite understood. All sent their love; and all expressed a cheering belief that Lady Verinder's indisposition would soon pass away."

"YOU don't think it's serious, do you, Godfrey?"

"Far from it! In a few days, I feel quite sure, all will be well again."

"I think so too. I was a little frightened at first, but I think so too. It was very kind to go and make my excuses for me to people who are almost strangers to you. But why not have gone with them to the concert? It seems very hard that you should miss the music too."

"Don't say that, Rachel! If you only knew how much happier I am--here, with you!"

He clasped his hands, and looked at her. In the position which he occupied, when he did that, he turned my way. Can words describe how I sickened when I noticed exactly the same pathetic expression on his face, which had charmed me when he was pleading for destitute millions of his fellow-creatures on the platform at Exeter Hall!

"It's hard to get over one's bad habits, Godfrey. But do try to get over the habit of paying compliments--do, to please me."

"I never paid you a compliment, Rachel, in my life. Successful love may sometimes use the language of flattery, I admit. But hopeless love, dearest, always speaks the truth."

He drew his chair close, and took her hand, when he said "hopeless love." There was a momentary silence. He, who thrilled everybody, had doubtless thrilled HER. I thought I now understood the words which had dropped from him when he was alone in the drawing-room, "I'll do it to-day." Alas! the most rigid propriety could hardly have failed to discover that he was doing it now.

"Have you forgotten what we agreed on, Godfrey, when you spoke to me in the country? We agreed that we were to be cousins, and nothing more."

"I break the agreement, Rachel, every time I see you."

"Then don't see me."

"Quite useless! I break the agreement every time I think of you. Oh, Rachel! how kindly you told me, only the other day, that my place in your estimation was a higher place than it had ever been yet! Am I mad to build the hopes I do on those dear words? Am I mad to dream of some future day when your heart may soften to me? Don't tell me so, if I am! Leave me my delusion, dearest! I must have THAT to cherish, and to comfort me, if I have nothing else!"

His voice trembled, and he put his white handkerchief to his eyes. Exeter Hall again! Nothing wanting to complete the parallel but the audience, the cheers, and the glass of water.
Even her obdurate nature was touched. I saw her lean a little nearer to him. I heard a new tone of interest in her next words.

"Are you really sure, Godfrey, that you are so fond of me as that?"

"Sure! You know what I was, Rachel. Let me tell you what I am. I have lost every interest in life, but my interest in you. A transformation has come over me which I can't account for, myself. Would you believe it? My charitable business is an unendurable nuisance to me; and when I see a Ladies' Committee now, I wish myself at the uttermost ends of the earth!"

If the annals of apostasy offer anything comparable to such a declaration as that, I can only say that the case in point is not producible from the stores of my reading. I thought of the Mothers'-Small-Clothes. I thought of the Sunday-Sweetheart-Supervision. I thought of the other Societies, too numerous to mention, all built up on this man as on a tower of strength. I thought of the struggling Female Boards, who, so to speak, drew the breath of their business-life through the nostrils of Mr. Godfrey--of that same Mr. Godfrey who had just reviled our good work as a "nuisance"--and just declared that he wished he was at the uttermost ends of the earth when he found himself in our company! My young female friends will feel encouraged to persevere, when I mention that it tried even My discipline before I could devour my own righteous indignation in silence. At the same time, it is only justice to myself to add, that I didn't lose a syllable of the conversation. Rachel was the next to speak.

"You have made your confession," she said. "I wonder whether it would cure you of your unhappy attachment to me, if I made mine?"

He started. I confess I started too. He thought, and I thought, that she was about to divulge the mystery of the Moonstone.

"Would you think, to look at me," she went on, "that I am the wretchedest girl living? It's true, Godfrey. What greater wretchedness can there be than to live degraded in your own estimation? That is my life now."

"My dear Rachel! it's impossible you can have any reason to speak of yourself in that way!"

"How do you know I have no reason?"

"Can you ask me the question! I know it, because I know you. Your silence, dearest, has never lowered you in the estimation of your true friends. The disappearance of your precious birthday gift may seem strange; your unexplained connection with that event may seem stranger still."

"Are you speaking of the Moonstone, Godfrey----"

"I certainly thought that you referred----"

"I referred to nothing of the sort. I can hear of the loss of the Moonstone, let who will speak of it, without feeling degraded in my own estimation. If the story of the Diamond ever comes to light, it will be known that I accepted a dreadful responsibility; it will be known that I involved myself in the keeping of a miserable secret--but it will be as clear as the sun at noon-day that I did nothing mean! You have misunderstood me, Godfrey. It's my fault for not speaking more plainly. Cost me what it may, I will be plainer now. Suppose you were not in love with me? Suppose you were in love with some other woman?"

"Yes?"

"Suppose you discovered that woman to be utterly unworthy of you? Suppose you were quite convinced that it was a disgrace to you to waste another thought on her? Suppose the bare idea of ever marrying such a person made your face burn, only with thinking of it."

"Yes?"

"And, suppose, in spite of all that--you couldn't tear her from your heart? Suppose the feeling she had roused in you (in the time when you believed in her) was not a feeling to be hidden? Suppose the love this wretch had inspired in you? Oh, how can I find words to say it in! How can I make a MAN understand that a feeling which horrifies me at myself, can be a feeling that fascinates me at the same time? It's the breath of my life, Godfrey, and it's the poison that kills me--both in one! Go away! I must be out of my mind to talk as I am talking now. No! you mustn't leave me--you mustn't carry away a wrong impression. I must say what is to be said in my own defence. Mind this! HE doesn't know--he never will know, what I have told you. I will never see him--I don't care what happens--I will never, never, never see him again! Don't ask me his name! Don't ask me any more! Let's change the subject. Are you doctor enough, Godfrey, to tell me why I feel as if I was stifling for want of breath? Is there a form of hysterics that bursts into words instead of tears? I dare say! What does it matter? You will get over any trouble I have caused you, easily enough now. I have dropped to my right place in your estimation, haven't I? Don't notice me! Don't pity me! For God's sake, go away!"

She turned round on a sudden, and beat her hands wildly on the back of the ottoman. Her head dropped on the cushions; and she burst out crying. Before I had time to feel shocked, at this, I was horror-struck by an entirely unexpected proceeding on the part of Mr. Godfrey. Will it be credited that he fell on his knees at her feet?--on BOTH knees, I solemnly declare! May modesty mention that he put his arms round her next? And may reluctant
admiration acknowledge that he electrified her with two words?

"Noble creature!"

No more than that! But he did it with one of the bursts which have made his fame as a public speaker. She sat, either quite thunderstruck, or quite fascinated--I don't know which--without even making an effort to put his arms back where his arms ought to have been. As for me, my sense of propriety was completely bewildered. I was so painfully uncertain whether it was my first duty to close my eyes, or to stop my ears, that I did neither. I attribute my being still able to hold the curtain in the right position for looking and listening, entirely to suppressed hysterics. In suppressed hysterics, it is admitted, even by the doctors, that one must hold something.

"Yes," he said, with all the fascination of his evangelical voice and manner, "you are a noble creature! A woman who can speak the truth, for the truth's own sake--a woman who will sacrifice her pride, rather than sacrifice an honest man who loves her--is the most priceless of all treasures. When such a woman marries, if her husband only wins her esteem and regard, he wins enough to ennoble his whole life. You have spoken, dearest, of your place in my estimation. Judge what that place is--when I implore you on my knees, to let the cure of your poor wounded heart be my care. Rachel! will you honour me, will you bless me, by being my wife?"

By this time I should certainly have decided on stopping my ears, if Rachel had not encouraged me to keep them open, by answering him in the first sensible words I had ever heard fall from her lips.

"Godfrey!" she said, "you must be mad!"

"I never spoke more reasonably, dearest--in your interests, as well as in mine. Look for a moment to the future. Is your happiness to be sacrificed to a man who has never known how you feel towards him, and whom you are resolved never to see again? Is it not your duty to yourself to forget this ill-fated attachment? and is forgetfulness to be found in the life you are leading now? You have tried that life, and you are wearying of it already. Surround yourself with nobler interests than the wretched interests of the world. A heart that loves and honours you; a home whose peaceful claims and happy duties win gently on you day by day--try the consolation, Rachel, which is to be found THERE! I don't ask for your love--I will be content with your affection and regard. Let the rest be left, confidently left, to your husband's devotion, and to Time that heals even wounds as deep as yours."

She began to yield already. Oh, what a bringing-up she must have had! Oh, how differently I should have acted in her place!

"Don't tempt me, Godfrey," she said; "I am wretched enough and reckless enough as it is. Don't tempt me to be more wretched and more reckless still!"

"One question, Rachel. Have you any personal objection to me?"

"If I always liked you. After what you have just said to me, I should be insensible indeed if I didn't respect and admire you as well."

"Do you know many wives, my dear Rachel, who respect and admire their husbands? And yet they and their husbands get on very well. How many brides go to the altar with hearts that would bear inspection by the men who take them there? And yet it doesn't end unhappily--somehow or other the nuptial establishment jogs on. The truth is, that women try marriage as a Refuge, far more numerous than they are willing to admit; and, what is more, they find that marriage has justified their confidence in it. Look at your own case once again. At your age, and with your attractions, is it possible for you to sentence yourself to a single life? Trust my knowledge of the world--nothing is less possible. It is merely a question of time. You may marry some other man, some years hence. Or you may marry the man, dearest, who is now at your feet, and who prizes your respect and admiration above the love of any other woman on the face of the earth."

"Gently, Godfrey! you are putting something into my head which I never thought of before. You are tempting me with a new prospect, when all my other prospects are closed before me. I tell you again, I am miserable enough and desperate enough, if you say another word, to marry you on your own terms. Take the warning, and go!"

"I won't even rise from my knees, till you have said yes!"

"If I say yes you will repent, and I shall repent, when it is too late!"

"We shall both bless the day, darling, when I pressed, and when you yielded."

"Do you feel as confidently as you speak?"

"You shall judge for yourself. I speak from what I have seen in my own family. Tell me what you think of our household at Frizinghall. Do my father and mother live unhappily together?"

"Far from it--so far as I can see."

"When my mother was a girl, Rachel (it is no secret in the family), she had loved as you love--she had given her heart to a man who was unworthy of her. She married my father, respecting him, admiring him, but nothing more. Your own eyes have seen the result. Is there no encouragement in it for you and for me?"*

* See Betteredge's Narrative, chapter viii.

"You won't hurry me, Godfrey?"
"My time shall be yours."
"You won't ask me for more than I can give?"
"My angel! I only ask you to give me yourself."
"Take me!"

In those two words she accepted him!

He had another burst--a burst of unholy rapture this time. He drew her nearer and nearer to him till her face touched his; and then--No! I really cannot prevail upon myself to carry this shocking disclosure any farther. Let me only say, that I tried to close my eyes before it happened, and that I was just one moment too late. I had calculated, you see, on her resisting. She submitted. To every right-feeling person of my own sex, volumes could say no more.

Even my innocence in such matters began to see its way to the end of the interview now. They understood each other so thoroughly by this time, that I fully expected to see them walk off together, arm in arm, to be married. There appeared, however, judging by Mr. Godfrey's next words, to be one more trifling formality which it was necessary to observe. He seated himself--unforbidden this time--on the ottoman by her side. "Shall I speak to your dear mother?" he asked. "Or will you?"

She declined both alternatives.

"Let my mother hear nothing from either of us, until she is better. I wish it to be kept a secret for the present, Godfrey. Go now, and come back this evening. We have been here alone together quite long enough."

She rose, and in rising, looked for the first time towards the little room in which my martyrdom was going on.

"Who has drawn those curtains?" she exclaimed.

"The room is close enough, as it is, without keeping the air out of it in that way."

She advanced to the curtains. At the moment when she laid her hand on them--at the moment when the discovery of me appeared to be quite inevitable--the voice of the fresh-coloured young footman, on the stairs, suddenly suspended any further proceedings on her side or on mine. It was unmistakably the voice of a man in great alarm.

"Miss Rachel!" he called out, "where are you, Miss Rachel?"

She sprang back from the curtains, and ran to the door.

The footman came just inside the room. His ruddy colour was all gone. He said, "Please to come down-stairs, Miss! My lady has fainted, and we can't bring her to again."

In a moment more I was alone, and free to go down-stairs in my turn, quite unobserved.

Mr. Godfrey passed me in the hall, hurrying out, to fetch the doctor. "Go in, and help them!" he said, pointing to the room. I found Rachel on her knees by the sofa, with her mother's head on her bosom. One look at my aunt's face (knowing what I knew) was enough to warn me of the dreadful truth. I kept my thoughts to myself till the doctor came in. It was not long before he arrived. He began by sending Rachel out of the room--and then he told the rest of us that Lady Verinder was no more. Serious persons, in search of proofs of hardened scepticism, may be interested in hearing that he showed no signs of remorse when he looked at Me.

At a later hour I peeped into the breakfast-room, and the library. My aunt had died without opening one of the letters which I had addressed to her. I was so shocked at this, that it never occurred to me, until some days afterwards, that she had also died without giving me my little legacy.

CHAPTER VI

(1.) "Miss Clack presents her compliments to Mr. Franklin Blake; and, in sending him the fifth chapter of her humble narrative, begs to say that she feels quite unequal to enlarge as she could wish on an event so awful, under the circumstances, as Lady Verinder's death. She has, therefore, attached to her own manuscripts, copious Extracts from precious publications in her possession, all bearing on this terrible subject. And may those Extracts (Miss Clack fervently hopes) sound as the blast of a trumpet in the ears of her respected kinsman, Mr. Franklin Blake."

(2.) "Mr. Franklin Blake presents his compliments to Miss Clack, and begs to thank her for the fifth chapter of her narrative. In returning the extracts sent with it, he will refrain from mentioning any personal objection which he may entertain to this species of literature, and will merely say that the proposed additions to the manuscript are not necessary to the fulfilment of the purpose that he has in view."

(3.) "Miss Clack begs to acknowledge the return of her Extracts. She affectionately reminds Mr. Franklin Blake that she is a Christian, and that it is, therefore, quite impossible for him to offend her. Miss C. persists in feeling the deepest interest in Mr. Blake, and pledges herself, on the first occasion when sickness may lay him low, to offer him the use of her Extracts for the second time. In the meanwhile she would be glad to know, before beginning the final chapters of her narrative, whether she may be permitted to make her humble contribution complete, by availing herself of the light which later discoveries have thrown on the mystery of the Moonstone."

(4.) "Mr. Franklin Blake is sorry to disappoint Miss Clack. He can only repeat the instructions which he had the honour of giving her when she began her narrative. She is requested to limit herself to her own individual experience
of persons and events, as recorded in her diary. Later discoveries she will be good enough to leave to the pens of those persons who can write in the capacity of actual witnesses."

(5.) "Miss Clack is extremely sorry to trouble Mr. Franklin Blake with another letter. Her Extracts have been returned, and the expression of her matured views on the subject of the Moonstone has been forbidden. Miss Clack is painfully conscious that she ought (in the worldly phrase) to feel herself put down. But, no--Miss C. has learnt Perseverance in the School of Adversity. Her object in writing is to know whether Mr. Blake (who prohibits everything else) prohibits the appearance of the present correspondence in Miss Clack's narrative? Some explanation of the position in which Mr. Blake's interference has placed her as an authoress, seems due on the ground of common justice. And Miss Clack, on her side, is most anxious that her letters should be produced to speak for themselves."

(6.) "Mr. Franklin Blake agrees to Miss Clack's proposal, on the understanding that she will kindly consider this intimation of his consent as closing the correspondence between them."

(7.) "Miss Clack feels it an act of Christian duty (before the correspondence closes) to inform Mr. Franklin Blake that his last letter--evidently intended to offend her--has not succeeded in accomplishing the object of the writer. She affectionately requests Mr. Blake to retire to the privacy of his own room, and to consider with himself whether the training which can thus elevate a poor weak woman above the reach of insult, be not worthy of greater admiration than he is now disposed to feel for it. On being favoured with an intimation to that effect, Miss C. solemnly pledges herself to send back the complete series of her Extracts to Mr. Franklin Blake."

[To this letter no answer was received. Comment is needless.
(Signed) DRUSILLA CLACK.]

CHAPTER VII

The foregoing correspondence will sufficiently explain why no choice is left to me but to pass over Lady Verinder's death with the simple announcement of the fact which ends my fifth chapter.

Keeping myself for the future strictly within the limits of my own personal experience, I have next to relate that a month elapsed from the time of my aunt's decease before Rachel Verinder and I met again. That meeting was the occasion of my spending a few days under the same roof with her. In the course of my visit, something happened, relative to her marriage-engagement with Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, which is important enough to require special notice in these pages. When this last of many painful family circumstances has been disclosed, my task will be completed; for I shall then have told all that I know, as an actual (and most unwilling) witness of events.

My aunt's remains were removed from London, and were buried in the little cemetery attached to the church in her own park. I was invited to the funeral with the rest of the family. But it was impossible (with my religious views) to rouse myself in a few days only from the shock which this death had caused me. I was informed, moreover, that the rector of Frizinghall was to read the service. Having myself in past times seen this clerical castaway making one of the players at Lady Verinder's whist-table, I doubt, even if I had been fit to travel, whether I should have felt justified in attending the ceremony.

Lady Verinder's death left her daughter under the care of her brother-in-law, Mr. Ablewhite the elder. He was appointed guardian by the will, until his niece married, or came of age. Under these circumstances, Mr. Godfrey informed his father, I suppose, of the new relation in which he stood towards Rachel. At any rate, in ten days from my aunt's death, the secret of the marriage-engagement was no secret at all within the circle of the family, and the grand question for Mr. Ablewhite senior--another confirmed castaway!--was how to make himself and his authority most agreeable to the wealthy young lady who was going to marry his son.

Rachel gave him some trouble at the outset, about the choice of a place in which she could be prevailed upon to reside. The house in Montagu Square was associated with the calamity of her mother's death. The house in Yorkshire was associated with the scandalous affair of the lost Moonstone. Her guardian's own residence at Frizinghall was open to neither of these objections. But Rachel's presence in it, after her recent bereavement, operated as a check on the gaieties of her cousins, the Miss Ablewhites--and she herself requested that her visit might be deferred to a more favourable opportunity. It ended in a proposal, emanating from old Mr. Ablewhite, to try a furnished house at Brighton. His wife, an invalid daughter, and Rachel were to inhabit it together, and were to expect him to join them later in the season. They would see no society but a few old friends, and they would have his son Godfrey, travelling backwards and forwards by the London train, always at their disposal.

I describe this aimless flitting about from one place of residence to another--this insatiate restlessness of body and appalling stagnation of soul--merely with the view to arriving at results. The event which (under Providence) proved to be the means of bringing Rachel Verinder and myself together again, was no other than the hiring of the house at Brighton.

My Aunt Ablewhite is a large, silent, fair-complexioned woman, with one noteworthy point in her character. From the hour of her birth she has never been known to do anything for herself. She has gone through life, accepting
everybody’s help, and adopting everybody’s opinions. A more hopeless person, in a spiritual point of view, I have never met with—there is absolutely, in this perplexing case, no obstructive material to work upon. Aunt Ablewhite would listen to the Grand Lama of Thibet exactly as she listens to Me, and would reflect his views quite as readily as she reflects mine. She found the furnished house at Brighton by stopping at an hotel in London, composing herself on a sofa, and sending for her son. She discovered the necessary servants by breakfasting in bed one morning (still at the hotel), and giving her maid a holiday on condition that the girl "would begin enjoying herself by fetching Miss Clack." I found her placidly fanning herself in her dressing-gown at eleven o’clock. "Drusilla, dear, I want some servants. You are so clever—please get them for me." I looked round the untidy room. The church-bells were going for a week-day service; they suggested a word of affectionate remonstrance on my part. "Oh, aunt!" I said sadly. "Is THIS worthy of a Christian Englishwoman? Is the passage from time to eternity to be made in THIS manner?" My aunt answered, "I’ll put on my gown, Drusilla, if you will be kind enough to help me." What was to be said after that? I have done wonders with murderesses—I have never advanced an inch with Aunt Ablewhite. "Where is the list," I asked, "of the servants whom you require?" My aunt shook her head; she hadn’t even energy enough to keep the list. "Rachel has got it, dear," she said, "in the next room." I went into the next room, and so saw Rachel again for the first time since we had parted in Montagu Square.

She looked pitifully small and thin in her deep mourning. If I attached any serious importance to such a perishable trifle as personal appearance, I might be inclined to add that hers was one of those unfortunate complexions which always suffer when not relieved by a border of white next the skin. But what are our complexions and our looks? Hindrances and pitfalls, dear girls, which beset us on our way to higher things! Greatly to my surprise, Rachel rose when I entered the room, and came forward to meet me with outstretched hand. "I am glad to see you," she said. "Drusilla, I have been in the habit of speaking very foolishly and very rudely to you, on former occasions. I beg your pardon. I hope you will forgive me."

My face, I suppose, betrayed the astonishment I felt at this. She coloured up for a moment, and then proceeded to explain herself.

"In my poor mother’s lifetime," she went on, "her friends were not always my friends, too. Now I have lost her, my heart turns for comfort to the people she liked. She liked you. Try to be friends with me, Drusilla, if you can."

To any rightly-constituted mind, the motive thus acknowledged was simply shocking. Here in Christian England was a young woman in a state of bereavement, with so little idea of where to look for true comfort, that she actually expected to find it among her mother's friends! Here was a relative of mine, awakened to a sense of her shortcomings towards others, under the influence, not of conviction and duty, but of sentiment and impulse! Most deplorable to think of—but, still, suggestive of something hopeful, to a person of my experience in plying the good work. There could be no harm, I thought, in ascertaining the extent of the change which the loss of her mother had wrought in Rachel’s character. I decided, as a useful test, to probe her on the subject of her marriage-engagement to Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

Having first met her advances with all possible cordiality, I sat by her on the sofa, at her own request. We discussed family affairs and future plans—always excepting that one future plan which was to end in her marriage. Try as I might to turn the conversation that way, she resolutely declined to take the hint. Any open reference to the question, on my part, would have been premature at this early stage of our reconciliation. Besides, I had discovered all I wanted to know. She was no longer the reckless, defiant creature whom I had heard and seen, on the occasion of my martyrdom in Montagu Square. This was, of itself, enough to encourage me to take her future conversion in hand—beginning with a few words of earnest warning directed against the hasty formation of the marriage tie, and so getting on to higher things. Looking at her, now, with this new interest—and calling to mind the headlong suddenness with which she had met Mr. Godfrey’s matrimonial views—I felt the solemn duty of interfering with a fervour which assured me that I should achieve no common results. Rapidity of proceeding was, as I believed, of importance in this case. I went back at once to the question of the servants wanted for the furnished house.

"Where is the list, dear?"

Rachel produced it.

"Cook, kitchen-maid, housemaid, and footman," I read. "My dear Rachel, these servants are only wanted for a term—the term during which your guardian has taken the house. We shall have great difficulty in finding persons of character and capacity to accept a temporary engagement of that sort, if we try in London. Has the house in Brighton been found yet?"

"Yes. Godfrey has taken it; and persons in the house wanted him to hire them as servants. He thought they would hardly do for us, and came back having settled nothing."

"And you have no experience yourself in these matters, Rachel?"

"None whatever."

"And Aunt Ablewhite won’t exert herself?"
"No, poor dear. Don't blame her, Drusilla. I think she is the only really happy woman I have ever met with."

"There are degrees in happiness, darling. We must have a little talk, some day, on that subject. In the meantime I will undertake to meet the difficulty about the servants. Your aunt will write a letter to the people of the house----"

"She will sign a letter, if I write it for her, which comes to the same thing."

"Quite the same thing. I shall get the letter, and I will go to Brighton to-morrow."

"How extremely kind of you! We will join you as soon as you are ready for us. And you will stay, I hope, as my guest. Brighton is so lively; you are sure to enjoy it."

In those words the invitation was given, and the glorious prospect of interference was opened before me.

It was then the middle of the week. By Saturday afternoon the house was ready for them. In that short interval I had sifted, not the characters only, but the religious views as well, of all the disengaged servants who applied to me, and had succeeded in making a selection which my conscience approved. I also discovered, and called on two serious friends of mine, residents in the town, to whom I knew I could confide the pious object which had brought me to Brighton. One of them—a clerical friend—kindly helped me to take sittings for our little party in the church in which he himself ministered. The other—a single lady, like myself—placed the resources of her library (composed throughout of precious publications) entirely at my disposal. I borrowed half-a-dozen works, all carefully chosen with a view to Rachel. When these had been judiciously distributed in the various rooms she would be likely to occupy, I considered that my preparations were complete. Sound doctrine in the servants who waited on her; sound doctrine in the minister who preached to her; sound doctrine in the books that lay on her table—such was the treble welcome which my zeal had prepared for the motherless girl! A heavenly composure filled my mind, on that Saturday afternoon, as I sat at the window waiting the arrival of my relatives. The giddy throng passed and repassed before my eyes. Alas! how many of them felt my exquisite sense of duty done? An awful question. Let us not pursue it.

Between six and seven the travellers arrived. To my indescribable surprise, they were escorted, not by Mr. Godfrey (as I had anticipated), but by the lawyer, Mr. Bruff.

"How do you do, Miss Clack?" he said. "I mean to stay this time."

That reference to the occasion on which I had obliged him to postpone his business to mine, when we were both visiting in Montagu Square, satisfied me that the old worldling had come to Brighton with some object of his own in view. I had prepared quite a little Paradise for my beloved Rachel—and here was the Serpent already!

"Godfrey was very much vexed, Drusilla, not to be able to come with us," said my Aunt Ablewhite. "There was something in the way which kept him in town. Mr. Bruff volunteered to take his place, and make a holiday of it till Monday morning. By-the-by, Mr. Bruff, I'm ordered to take exercise, and I don't like it. That," added Aunt Ablewhite, pointing out of window to an invalid going by in a chair on wheels, drawn by a man, "is my idea of exercise. If it's air you want, you get it in your chair. And if it's fatigue you want, I am sure it's fatigue enough to look at the man."

Rachel stood silent, at a window by herself, with her eyes fixed on the sea.

"Tired, love?" I inquired.

"No. Only a little out of spirits," she answered. "I have often seen the sea, on our Yorkshire coast, with that light on it. And I was thinking, Drusilla, of the days that can never come again."

Mr. Bruff remained to dinner, and stayed through the evening. The more I saw of him, the more certain I felt that he had some private end to serve in coming to Brighton. I watched him carefully. He maintained the same appearance of ease, and talked the same godless gossip, hour after hour, until it was time to take leave. As he shook hands with Rachel, I caught his hard and cunning eyes resting on her for a moment with a peculiar interest and attention. She was plainly concerned in the object that he had in view. He invited himself to luncheon the next day, and then he went away to his hotel.

It was impossible the next morning to get my Aunt Ablewhite out of her dressing-gown in time for church. Her invalid daughter (suffering from nothing, in my opinion, but incurable laziness, inherited from her mother) announced that she meant to remain in bed for the day. Rachel and I went alone together to church. A magnificent invalid daughter (suffering from nothing, in my opinion, but incurable laziness, inherited from her mother) announced that she meant to remain in bed for the day. Rachel and I went alone together to church. A magnificent

"There is only one remedy for a headache," said this horrible old man. "A walk, Miss Rachel, is the thing to cure
you. I am entirely at your service, if you will honour me by accepting my arm."

"With the greatest pleasure. A walk is the very thing I was longing for."

"It's past two," I gently suggested. "And the afternoon service, Rachel, begins at three."

"How can you expect me to go to church again," she asked, petulantly, "with such a headache as mine?"

Mr. Bruff officiously opened the door for her. In another minute more they were both out of the house. I don't know when I have felt the solemn duty of interfering so strongly as I felt it at that moment. But what was to be done? Nothing was to be done but to interfere at the first opportunity, later in the day.

On my return from the afternoon service I found that they had just got back. One look at them told me that the lawyer had said what he wanted to say. I had never before seen Rachel so silent and so thoughtful. I had never before seen Mr. Bruff pay her such devoted attention, and look at her with such marked respect. He had (or pretended that he had) an engagement to dinner that day--and he took an early leave of us all; intending to go back to London by the first train the next morning.

"Are you sure of your own resolution?" he said to Rachel at the door.

"Quite sure," she answered--and so they parted.

The moment his back was turned, Rachel withdrew to her own room. She never appeared at dinner. Her maid (the person with the cap-ribbons) was sent down-stairs to announce that her headache had returned. I ran up to her and made all sorts of sisterly offers through the door. It was locked, and she kept it locked. Plenty of obstructive material to work on here! I felt greatly cheered and stimulated by her locking the door.

When her cup of tea went up to her the next morning, I followed it in. I sat by her bedside and said a few earnest words. She listened with languid civility. I noticed my serious friend's precious publications huddled together on a table in a corner. Had she chanced to look into them?--I asked. Yes--and they had not interested her. Would she allow me to read a few passages of the deepest interest, which had probably escaped her eye? No, not now--she had other things to think of. She gave these answers, with her attention apparently absorbed in folding and refolding the frilling on her nightgown. It was plainly necessary to rouse her by some reference to those worldly interests which she still had at heart.

"Do you know, love," I said, "I had an odd fancy, yesterday, about Mr. Bruff? I thought, when I saw you after your walk with him, that he had been telling you some bad news."

Her fingers dropped from the frilling of her nightgown, and her fierce black eyes flashed at me.

"Quite the contrary!" she said. "It was news I was interested in hearing--and I am deeply indebted to Mr. Bruff for telling me of it."

"Yes?" I said, in a tone of gentle interest.

Her fingers went back to the frilling, and she turned her head sullenly away from me. I had been met in this manner, in the course of plying the good work, hundreds of times. She merely stimulated me to try again. In my dauntless zeal for her welfare, I ran the great risk, and openly alluded to her marriage engagement.

"News you were interested in hearing?" I repeated. "I suppose, my dear Rachel, that must be news of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite?"

She started up in the bed, and turned deadly pale. It was evidently on the tip of her tongue to retort on me with the unbridled insolence of former times. She checked herself--laid her head back on the pillow--considered a minute--and then answered in these remarkable words:

"I SHALL NEVER MARRY MR. GODFREY ABLEWHITE."

It was my turn to start at that.

"What can you possibly mean?" I exclaimed. "The marriage is considered by the whole family as a settled thing!"

"Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite is expected here to-day," she said doggedly. "Wait till he comes--and you will see."

"But my dear Rachel----"

She rang the bell at the head of her bed. The person with the cap-ribbons appeared.

"Penelope! my bath."

Let me give her her due. In the state of my feelings at that moment, I do sincerely believe that she had hit on the only possible way of forcing me to leave the room.

By the mere worldly mind my position towards Rachel might have been viewed as presenting difficulties of no ordinary kind. I had reckoned on leading her to higher things by means of a little earnest exhortation on the subject of her marriage. And now, if she was to be believed, no such event as her marriage was to take place at all. But ah, my friends! a working Christian of my experience (with an evangelising prospect before her) takes broader views than these. Supposing Rachel really broke off the marriage, on which the Ablewhites, father and son, counted as a settled thing, what would be the result? It could only end, if she held firm, in an exchanging of hard words and bitter accusations on both sides. And what would be the effect on Rachel when the stormy interview was over? A salutary
moral depression would be the effect. Her pride would be exhausted, her stubbornness would be exhausted, by the
resolute resistance which it was in her character to make under the circumstances. She would turn for sympathy to
the nearest person who had sympathy to offer. And I was that nearest person—brimful of comfort, charged to
overflowing with seasonable and reviving words. Never had the evangelising prospect looked brighter, to my eyes,
than it looked now.

She came down to breakfast, but she ate nothing, and hardly uttered a word.

After breakfast she wandered listlessly from room to room—then suddenly roused herself, and opened the piano.
The music she selected to play was of the most scandalously profane sort, associated with performances on the stage
which it curdles one's blood to think of. It would have been premature to interfere with her at such a time as this. I
privately ascertained the hour at which Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite was expected, and then I escaped the music by
leaving the house.

Being out alone, I took the opportunity of calling upon my two resident friends. It was an indescribable luxury to
find myself indulging in earnest conversation with serious persons. Infinitely encouraged and refreshed, I turned my
steps back again to the house, in excellent time to await the arrival of our expected visitor. I entered the dining-
room, always empty at that hour of the day, and found myself face to face with Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite!

He made no attempt to fly the place. Quite the contrary. He advanced to meet me with the utmost eagerness.

"Dear Miss Clack, I have been only waiting to see you! Chance set me free of my London engagements to-day
sooner than I had expected, and I have got here, in consequence, earlier than my appointed time."

Not the slightest embarrassment encumbered his explanation, though this was his first meeting with me after the
scene in Montagu Square. He was not aware, it is true, of my having been a witness of that scene. But he knew, on
the other hand, that my attendances at the Mothers' Small-Clothes, and my relations with friends attached to other
charities, must have informed me of his shameless neglect of his Ladies and of his Poor. And yet there he was before
me, in full possession of his charming voice and his irresistible smile!

"Have you seen Rachel yet?" I asked.

He sighed gently, and took me by the hand. I should certainly have snatched my hand away, if the manner in
which he gave his answer had not paralysed me with astonishment.

"I have seen Rachel," he said with perfect tranquillity. "You are aware, dear friend, that she was engaged to me?
Well, she has taken a sudden resolution to break the engagement. Reflection has convinced her that she will best
consult her welfare and mine by retracting a rash promise, and leaving me free to make some happier choice
elsewhere. That is the only reason she will give, and the only answer she will make to every question that I can ask
of her."

"What have you done on your side?" I inquired. "Have you submitted."

"Yes," he said with the most unruffled composure, "I have submitted."

His conduct, under the circumstances, was so utterly inconceivable, that I stood bewildered with my hand in his.
It is a piece of rudeness to stare at anybody, and it is an act of indelicacy to stare at a gentleman. I committed both
those improprieties. And I said, as if in a dream, "What does it mean?"

"Permit me to tell you," he replied. "And suppose we sit down?"

He led me to a chair. I have an indistinct remembrance that he was very affectionate. I don't think he put his arm
round my waist to support me—but I am not sure. I was quite helpless, and his ways with ladies were very endearing.
At any rate, we sat down. I can answer for that, if I can answer for nothing more.

CHAPTER VIII

"I have lost a beautiful girl, an excellent social position, and a handsome income," Mr. Godfrey began; "and I
have submitted to it without a struggle. What can be the motive for such extraordinary conduct as that? My precious
friend, there is no motive."

"No motive?" I repeated.

"Let me appeal, my dear Miss Clack, to your experience of children," he went on. "A child pursues a certain
course of conduct. You are greatly struck by it, and you attempt to get at the motive. The dear little thing is
incapable of telling you its motive. You might as well ask the grass why it grows, or the birds why they sing. Well!
in this matter, I am like the dear little thing—like the grass—like the birds. I don't know why I made a proposal of
marriage to Miss Verinder. I don't know why I have shamefully neglected my dear Ladies. I don't know why I have
apostatised from the Mothers' Small-Clothes. You say to the child, Why have you been naughty? And the little angel
puts its finger into its mouth, and doesn't know. My case exactly, Miss Clack! I couldn't confess it to anybody else. I
feel impelled to confess it to YOU!"

I began to recover myself. A mental problem was involved here. I am deeply interested in mental problems—and
I am not, it is thought, without some skill in solving them.

"Best of friends, exert your intellect, and help me," he proceeded. "Tell me—why does a time come when these
matrimonial proceedings of mine begin to look like something done in a dream? Why does it suddenly occur to me that my true happiness is in helping my dear Ladies, in doing my modest round of useful work, in saying my few earnest words when called on by my Chairman? What do I want with a position? What do I want with an income? I can pay for my bread and cheese, and my nice little lodging, and my two coats a year. What do I want with Miss Verinder? She has told me with her own lips (this, dear lady, is between ourselves) that she loves another man, and that her only idea in marrying me is to try and put that other man out of her head. What a horrid union is this! Oh, dear me, what a horrid union is this! Such are my reflections, Miss Clack, on my way to Brighton. I approach Rachel with the feeling of a criminal who is going to receive his sentence. When I find that she has changed her mind too—when I hear her propose to break the engagement—I experience (there is no sort of doubt about it) a most overpowering sense of relief. A month ago I was pressing her rapturously to my bosom. An hour ago, the happiness of knowing that I shall never press her again, intoxicates me like strong liquor. The thing seems impossible—the thing can't be. And yet there are the facts, as I had the honour of stating them when we first sat down together in these two chairs. I have lost a beautiful girl, an excellent social position, and a handsome income; and I have submitted to it without a struggle. Can you account for it, dear friend? It's quite beyond ME."

His magnificent head sank on his breast, and he gave up his own mental problem in despair.

I was deeply touched. The case (if I may speak as a spiritual physician) was now quite plain to me. It is no uncommon event, in the experience of us all, to see the possessors of exalted ability occasionally humbled to the level of the most poorly-gifted people about them. The object, no doubt, in the wise economy of Providence, is to remind greatness that it is mortal and that the power which has conferred it can also take it away. It was now—to my mind—easy to discern one of these salutary humiliations in the deplorable proceedings on dear Mr. Godfrey's part, of which I had been the unseen witness. And it was equally easy to recognise the welcome reappearance of his own finer nature in the horror with which he recoiled from the idea of a marriage with Rachel, and in the charming eagerness which he showed to return to his Ladies and his Poor.

I put this view before him in a few simple and sisterly words. His joy was beautiful to see. He compared himself, as I went on, to a lost man emerging from the darkness into the light. When I answered for a loving reception of him at the Mothers' Small-Clothes, the grateful heart of our Christian Hero overflowed. He pressed my hands alternately to his lips. Overwhelmed by the exquisite triumph of having got him back among us, I let him do what he liked with my hands. I closed my eyes. I felt my head, in an ecstasy of spiritual self-forgetfulness, sinking on his shoulder. In a moment more I should certainly have swooned away in his arms, but for an interruption from the outer world, which brought me to myself again. A horrid rattling of knives and forks sounded outside the door, and the footman came in to lay the table for luncheon.

Mr. Godfrey started up, and looked at the clock on the mantelpiece. "How time flies with YOU!" he exclaimed. "I shall barely catch the train."

I ventured on asking why he was in such a hurry to get back to town. His answer reminded me of family difficulties that were still to be reconciled, and of family disagreements that were yet to come.

"I have heard from my father," he said. "Business obliges him to leave Frizinghall for London to-day, and he proposes coming on here, either this evening or to-morrow. I must tell him what has happened between Rachel and me. His heart is set on our marriage—there will be great difficulty, I fear, in reconciling him to the breaking-off of the engagement. I must stop him, for all our sakes, from coming here till he is reconciled. Best and dearest of friends, we shall meet again!"

With those words he hurried out. In equal haste on my side, I ran upstairs to compose myself in my own room before meeting Aunt Ablewhite and Rachel at the luncheon-table.

I am well aware—to dwell for a moment yet on the subject of Mr. Godfrey—that the all-profaning opinion of the world has charged him with having his own private reasons for releasing Rachel from her engagement, at the first opportunity she gave him. It has also reached my ears, that his anxiety to recover his place in my estimation has been attributed in certain quarters, to a mercenary eagerness to make his peace (through me) with a venerable committee-woman at the Mothers' Small-Clothes, abundantly blessed with the goods of this world, and a beloved and intimate friend of my own. I only notice these odious slanders for the sake of declaring that they never had a moment's influence on my mind. In obedience to my instructions, I have exhibited the fluctuations in my opinion of our Christian Hero, exactly as I find them recorded in my diary. In justice to myself, let me here add that, once reinstated in his place in my estimation, my gifted friend never lost that place again. I write with the tears in my eyes, burning to say more. But no—I am cruelly limited to my actual experience of persons and things. In less than a month from the time of which I am now writing, events in the money-market (which diminished even my miserable little income) forced me into foreign exile, and left me with nothing but a loving remembrance of Mr. Godfrey which the slander of the world has assailed, and assailed in vain.

Let me dry my eyes, and return to my narrative.
I went downstairs to luncheon, naturally anxious to see how Rachel was affected by her release from her marriage engagement.

It appeared to me—but I own I am a poor authority in such matters—that the recovery of her freedom had set her thinking again of that other man whom she loved, and that she was furious with herself for not being able to control a revulsion of feeling of which she was secretly ashamed. Who was the man? I had my suspicions—but it was needless to waste time in idle speculation. When I had converted her, she would, as a matter of course, have no concealments from Me. I should hear all about the man; I should hear all about the Moonstone. If I had had no higher object in stirring her up to a sense of spiritual things, the motive of relieving her mind of its guilty secrets would have been enough of itself to encourage me to go on.

Aunt Ablewhite took her exercise in the afternoon in an invalid chair. Rachel accompanied her. "I wish I could drag the chair," she broke out, recklessly. "I wish I could fatigue myself till I was ready to drop."

She was in the same humour in the evening. I discovered in one of my friend's precious publications—the Life, Letters, and Labours of Miss Jane Ann Stamper, forty-fourth edition—passages which bore with a marvellous appropriateness on Rachel's present position. Upon my proposing to read them, she went to the piano. Conceive how little she must have known of serious people, if she supposed that my patience was to be exhausted in that way! I kept Miss Jane Ann Stamper by me, and waited for events with the most unfaltering trust in the future.

Old Mr. Ablewhite never made his appearance that night. But I knew the importance which his worldly greed attached to his son's marriage with Miss Verinder—and I felt a positive conviction (do what Mr. Godfrey might to prevent it) that we should see him the next day. With his interference in the matter, the storm on which I had counted would certainly come, and the salutary exhaustion of Rachel's resisting powers would as certainly follow. I am not ignorant that old Mr. Ablewhite has the reputation generally (especially among his inferiors) of being a remarkably good-natured man. According to my observation of him, he deserves his reputation as long as he has his own way, and not a moment longer.

The next day, exactly as I had foreseen, Aunt Ablewhite was as near to being astonished as her nature would permit, by the sudden appearance of her husband. He had barely been a minute in the house, before he was followed, to MY astonishment this time, by an unexpected complication in the shape of Mr. Bruff.

I never remember feeling the presence of the lawyer to be more unwelcome than I felt it at that moment. He looked ready for anything in the way of an obstructive proceeding—capable even of keeping the peace with Rachel for one of the combatants!

"This is a pleasant surprise, sir," said Mr. Ablewhite, addressing himself with his deceptive cordiality to Mr. Bruff. "When I left your office yesterday, I didn't expect to have the honour of seeing you at Brighton to-day."

"I turned over our conversation in my mind, after you had gone," replied Mr. Bruff. "And it occurred to me that I might perhaps be of some use on this occasion. I was just in time to catch the train, and I had no opportunity of discovering the carriage in which you were travelling."

Having given that explanation, he seated himself by Rachel. I retired modestly to a corner—with Miss Jane Ann Stamper on my lap, in case of emergency. My aunt sat at the window; placidly fanning herself as usual. Mr. Ablewhite stood up in the middle of the room, with his bald head much pinker than I had ever seen it yet, and addressed himself in the most affectionate manner to his niece.

"Rachel, my dear," he said, "I have heard some very extraordinary news from Godfrey. And I am here to inquire about it. You have a sitting-room of your own in this house. Will you honour me by showing me the way to it? Will you honour me by showing me the way to it?"

Rachel never moved. Whether she was determined to bring matters to a crisis, or whether she was prompted by some private sign from Mr. Bruff, is more than I can tell. She declined doing old Mr. Ablewhite the honour of conducting him into her sitting-room.

"Whatever you wish to say to me," she answered, "can be said here—in the presence of my relatives, and in the presence" (she looked at Mr. Bruff) "of my mother's trusted old friend."

"Just as you please, my dear," said the amiable Mr. Ablewhite. He took a chair. The rest of them looked at his face—as if they expected it, after seventy years of worldly training, to speak the truth. I looked at the top of his bald head; having noticed on other occasions that the temper which was really in him had a habit of registering itself THERE.

"Some weeks ago," pursued the old gentleman, "my son informed me that Miss Verinder had done him the honour to engage herself to marry him. Is it possible, Rachel, that he can have misinterpreted—or presumed upon—what you really said to him?"

"Certainly not," she replied. "I did engage myself to marry him."

"Very frankly answered!" said Mr. Ablewhite. "And most satisfactory, my dear, so far. In respect to what happened some weeks since, Godfrey has made no mistake. The error is evidently in what he told me yesterday. I begin to see it now. You and he have had a lovers' quarrel—and my foolish son has interpreted it seriously. Ah! I
should have known better than that at his age.”

The fallen nature in Rachel--the mother Eve, so to speak--began to chafe at this.

"Pray let us understand each other, Mr. Ablewhite," she said. "Nothing in the least like a quarrel took place yesterday between your son and me. If he told you that I proposed breaking off our marriage engagement, and that he agreed on his side--he told you the truth."

The self-registering thermometer at the top of Mr. Ablewhite's bald head began to indicate a rise of temper. His face was more amiable than ever--but THERE was the pink at the top of his face, a shade deeper already!

"Come, come, my dear!" he said, in his most soothing manner, "now don't be angry, and don't be hard on poor Godfrey! He has evidently said some unfortunate thing. He was always clumsy from a child--but he means well, Rachel, he means well!"

"Mr. Ablewhite, I have either expressed myself very badly, or you are purposely mistaking me. Once for all, it is a settled thing between your son and myself that we remain, for the rest of our lives, cousins and nothing more. Is that plain enough?"

The tone in which she said those words made it impossible, even for old Mr. Ablewhite, to mistake her any longer. His thermometer went up another degree, and his voice when he next spoke, ceased to be the voice which is appropriate to a notoriously good-natured man.

"I am to understand, then," he said, "that your marriage engagement is broken off?"

"You are to understand that, Mr. Ablewhite, if you please."

"I am also to take it as a matter of fact that the proposal to withdraw from the engagement came, in the first instance, from YOU?"

"It came, in the first instance, from me. And it met, as I have told you, with your son's consent and approval."

"Mr. Bruff interfered for the first time."

"You are not bound to answer that question," he said to Rachel.

Old Mr. Ablewhite fastened on him instantly.

"Don't forget, sir," he said, "that you are a self-invited guest here. Your interference would have come with a better grace if you had waited until it was asked for."

Mr. Bruff took no notice. The smooth varnish on HIS wicked old face never cracked. Rachel thanked him for the advice he had given to her, and then turned to old Mr. Ablewhite--preserving her composure in a manner which (having regard to her age and her sex) was simply awful to see.

"Your son put the same question to me which you have just asked," she said. "I had only one answer for him, and I have only one answer for you. I proposed that we should release each other, because reflection had convinced me that I should best consult his welfare and mine by retracting a rash promise, and leaving him free to make his choice elsewhere."

"What has my son done?" persisted Mr. Ablewhite. "I have a right to know that. What has my son done?"

"You have the only explanation which I think it necessary to give to you, or to him," she answered.

"In plain English, it's your sovereign will and pleasure, Miss Verinder, to jilt my son?"

Rachel was silent for a moment. Sitting close behind her, I heard her sigh. Mr. Bruff took her hand, and gave it a little squeeze. She recovered herself, and answered Mr. Ablewhite as boldly as ever.

"I have exposed myself to worse misconstruction than that," she said. "And I have borne it patiently. The time has gone by, when you could mortify me by calling me a jilt."

She spoke with a bitterness of tone which satisfied me that the scandal of the Moonstone had been in some way recalled to her mind. "I have no more to say," she added, wearily, not addressing the words to anyone in particular, and looking away from us all, out of the window that was nearest to her.

Mr. Ablewhite got upon his feet, and pushed away his chair so violently that it toppled over and fell on the floor.

"I have something more to say on my side," he announced, bringing down the flat of his hand on the table with a bang. "I have to say that if my son doesn't feel this insult, I do!"

Rachel started, and looked at him in sudden surprise.

"Insult?" she repeated. "What do you mean?"

"Insult!" reiterated Mr. Ablewhite. "I know your motive, Miss Verinder, for breaking your promise to my son! I knew it as certainly as if you had confessed it in so many words. Your cursed family pride is insulting Godfrey, as it insulted ME when I married your aunt. Her family--her beggarly family--turned their backs on her for marrying an honest man, who had made his own place and won his own fortune. I had no ancestors. I wasn't descended from a
set of cut-throat scoundrels who lived by robbery and murder. I couldn't point to the time when the Ablewhites
hadn't a shirt to their backs, and couldn't sign their own names. Ha! ha! I wasn't good enough for the Herncastles,
when I married. And now, it comes to the pinch, my son isn't good enough for YOU. I suspected it, all along. You
have got the Herncastle blood in you, my young lady! I suspected it all along."

"A very unworthy suspicion," remarked Mr. Bruff. "I am astonished that you have the courage to acknowledge
it."

Before Mr. Ablewhite could find words to answer in, Rachel spoke in a tone of the most exasperating contempt.
"Surely," she said to the lawyer, "this is beneath notice. If he can think in THAT way, let us leave him to think as
he pleases."

From scarlet, Mr. Ablewhite was now becoming purple. He gasped for breath; he looked backwards and
forwards from Rachel to Mr. Bruff in such a frenzy of rage with both of them that he didn't know which to attack
first. His wife, who had sat impenetrably fanning herself up to this time, began to be alarmed, and attempted, quite
uselessly, to quiet him. I had, throughout this distressing interview, felt more than one inward call to interfere with a
few earnest words, and had controlled myself under a dread of the possible results, very unworthy of a Christian
Englishwoman who looks, not to what is meanly prudent, but to what is morally right. At the point at which matters
had now arrived, I rose superior to all considerations of mere expediency. If I had contemplated interposing any
remonstrance of my own humble devising, I might possibly have still hesitated. But the distressing domestic
emergency which now confronted me, was most marvellously and beautifully provided for in the Correspondence of
Miss Jane Ann Stamper--Letter one thousand and one, on "Peace in Families." I rose in my modest corner, and I
opened my precious book.

"Dear Mr. Ablewhite," I said, "one word!"

When I first attracted the attention of the company by rising, I could see that he was on the point of saying
something rude to me. My sisterly form of address checked him. He stared at me in heathen astonishment.

"As an affectionate well-wisher and friend," I proceeded, "and as one long accustomed to arouse, convince,
prepare, enlighten, and fortify others, permit me to take the most pardonable of all liberties--the liberty of composing
your mind."

He began to recover himself; he was on the point of breaking out--he WOULD have broken out, with anybody
else. But my voice (habitually gentle) possesses a high note or so, in emergencies. In this emergency, I felt
imperatively called upon to have the highest voice of the two.

I held up my precious book before him; I rapped the open page impressively with my forefinger. "Not my
words!" I exclaimed, in a burst of fervent interruption. "Oh, don't suppose that I claim attention for My humble
words! Manna in the wilderness, Mr. Ablewhite! Dew on the parched earth! Words of comfort, words of wisdom,
words of love--the blessed, blessed, blessed words of Miss Jane Ann Stamper!"

I was stopped there by a momentary impediment of the breath. Before I could recover myself, this monster in
human form shouted out furiously,

"Miss Jane Ann Stamper be----!"

It is impossible for me to write the awful word, which is here represented by a blank. I shrieked as it passed his
lips; I flew to my little bag on the side table; I shook out all my tracts; I seized the one particular tract on profane
swearing, entitled, "Hush, for Heaven's Sake!"; I handed it to him with an expression of agonised entreaty. He tore it
in two, and threw it back at me across the table. The rest of them rose in alarm, not knowing what might happen
next. I instantly sat down again in my corner. There had once been an occasion, under somewhat similar
circumstances, when Miss Jane Ann Stamper had been taken by the two shoulders and turned out of a room. I
waited, inspired by HER spirit, for a repetition of HER martyrdom.

But no--it was not to be. His wife was the next person whom he addressed. "Who--who--who," he said,
stammering with rage, "who asked this impudent fanatic into the house? Did you?"

Before Aunt Ablewhite could say a word, Rachel answered for her.

"Miss Clack is here," she said, "as my guest."

Those words had a singular effect on Mr. Ablewhite. They suddenly changed him from a man in a state of red-
hot anger to a man in a state of icy-cold contempt. It was plain to everybody that Rachel had said something--short
and plain as her answer had been--which gave him the upper hand of her at last.

"Oh?" he said. "Miss Clack is here as YOUR guest--in MY house?"

It was Rachel's turn to lose her temper at that. Her colour rose, and her eyes brightened fiercely. She turned to
the lawyer, and, pointing to Mr. Ablewhite, asked haughtily, "What does he mean?"

Mr. Bruff interfered for the third time.

"You appear to forget," he said, addressing Mr. Ablewhite, "that you took this house as Miss Verinder's
guardian, for Miss Verinder's use."
"Not quite so fast," interposed Mr. Ablewhite. "I have a last word to say, which I should have said some time since, if this----" He looked my way, pondering what abominable name he should call me--"if this Rampant Spinster had not interrupted us. I beg to inform you, sir, that, if my son is not good enough to be Miss Verinder's husband, I cannot presume to consider his father good enough to be Miss Verinder's guardian. Understand, if you please, that I refuse to accept the position which is offered to me by Lady Verinder's will. In your legal phrase, I decline to act. This house has necessarily been hired in my name. I take the entire responsibility of it on my shoulders. It is my house. I can keep it, or let it, just as I please. I have no wish to hurry Miss Verinder. On the contrary, I beg her to remove her guest and her luggage, at her own entire convenience." He made a low bow, and walked out of the room.

That was Mr. Ablewhite's revenge on Rachel, for refusing to marry his son!

The instant the door closed, Aunt Ablewhite exhibited a phenomenon which silenced us all. She became endowed with energy enough to cross the room!

"My dear," she said, taking Rachel by the hand, "I should be ashamed of my husband, if I didn't know that it is his temper which has spoken to you, and not himself. You," continued Aunt Ablewhite, turning on me in my corner with another endowment of energy, in her looks this time instead of her limbs--"you are the mischievous person who irritated him. I hope I shall never see you or your tracts again." She went back to Rachel and kissed her. "I beg your pardon, my dear," she said, "in my husband's name. What can I do for you?"

Consistently perverse in everything--capricious and unreasonable in all the actions of her life--Rachel melted into tears at those commonplace words, and returned her aunt's kiss in silence.

"If I may be permitted to answer for Miss Verinder," said Mr. Bruff, "might I ask you, Mrs. Ablewhite, to send Penelope down with her mistress's bonnet and shawl. Leave us ten minutes together," he added, in a lower tone, "and you may rely on my setting matters right, to your satisfaction as well as to Rachel's."

The trust of the family in this man was something wonderful to see. Without a word more, on her side, Aunt Ablewhite left the room.

"Ah!" said Mr. Bruff, looking after her. "The Herncastle blood has its drawbacks, I admit. But there IS something in good breeding after all!"

Having made that purely worldly remark, he looked hard at my corner, as if he expected me to go. My interest in Rachel--an infinitely higher interest than his--riveted me to my chair.

Mr. Bruff gave it up, exactly as he had given it up at Aunt Verinder's, in Montagu Square. He led Rachel to a chair by the window, and spoke to her there.

"My dear young lady," he said, "Mr. Ablewhite's conduct has naturally shocked you, and taken you by surprise. If it was worth while to contest the question with such a man, we might soon show him that he is not to have things all his own way. But it isn't worth while. You were quite right in what you said just now; he is beneath our notice."

He stopped, and looked round at my corner. I sat there quite immovable, with my tracts at my elbow and with Miss Jane Ann Stamper on my lap.

"You know," he resumed, turning back again to Rachel, "that it was part of your poor mother's fine nature always to see the best of the people about her, and never the worst. She named her brother-in-law your guardian because she believed in him, and because she thought it would please her sister. I had never liked Mr. Ablewhite myself, and I induced your mother to let me insert a clause in the will, empowering her executors, in certain events, to consult with me about the appointment of a new guardian. One of those events has happened to-day; and I find myself in a position to end all these dry business details, I hope agreeably, with a message from my wife. Will you honour Mrs. Bruff by becoming her guest? And will you remain under my roof, and be one of my family, until we wise people have laid our heads together, and have settled what is to be done next?"

At those words, I rose to interfere. Mr. Bruff had done exactly what I had dreaded he would do, when he asked Mrs. Ablewhite for Rachel's bonnet and shawl.

Before I could interpose a word, Rachel had accepted his invitation in the warmest terms. If I suffered the arrangement thus made between them to be carried out--if she once passed the threshold of Mr. Bruff's door--farewell to the fondest hope of my life, the hope of bringing my lost sheep back to the fold! The bare idea of such a calamity as this quite overwhelmed me. I cast the miserable trammels of worldly discretion to the winds, and spoke with the fervour that filled me, in the words that came first.

"Stop!" I said--"stop! I must be heard. Mr. Bruff! you are not related to her, and I am. I invite her--I summon the executors to appoint me guardian. Rachel, dearest Rachel, I offer you my modest home; come to London by the next train, love, and share it with me!"

Mr. Bruff said nothing. Rachel looked at me with a cruel astonishment which she made no effort to conceal.

"You are very kind, Drusilla," she said. "I shall hope to visit you whenever I happen to be in London. But I have accepted Mr. Bruff's invitation, and I think it will be best, for the present, if I remain under Mr. Bruff's care."

"Oh, don't say so!" I pleaded. "I can't part with you, Rachel--I can't part with you!"
I tried to fold her in my arms. But she drew back. My fervour did not communicate itself; it only alarmed her.

"Surely," she said, "this is a very unnecessary display of agitation? I don't understand it."

"No more do I," said Mr. Bruff.

Their hardness--their hideous, worldly hardness--revolted me.

"Oh, Rachel! Rachel!" I burst out. "Haven't you seen yet, that my heart yearns to make a Christian of you? Has no inner voice told you that I am trying to do for you, what I was trying to do for your dear mother when death snatched her out of my hands?"

Rachel advanced a step nearer, and looked at me very strangely.

"I don't understand your reference to my mother," she said. "Miss Clack, will you have the goodness to explain yourself?"

Before I could answer, Mr. Bruff came forward, and offering his arm to Rachel, tried to lead her out of the room.

"You had better not pursue the subject, my dear," he said. "And Miss Clack had better not explain herself."

If I had been a stock or a stone, such an interference as this must have roused me into testifying to the truth. I put Mr. Bruff aside indignantly with my own hand, and, in solemn and suitable language, I stated the view with which sound doctrine does not scruple to regard the awful calamity of dying unprepared.

Rachel started back from me--I blush to write--with a scream of horror.

"Come away," she said to Mr. Bruff. "Come away, for God's sake, before that woman can say any more! Oh, think of my poor mother's harmless, useful, beautiful life! You were at the funeral, Mr. Bruff; you saw how everybody loved her; you saw the poor helpless people crying at her grave over the loss of their best friend. And that wretch stands there, and tries to make me doubt that my mother, who was an angel on earth, is an angel in heaven now! Don't stop to talk about it! Come away! It stifles me to breathe the same air with her! It frightens me to feel that we are in the same room together!"

Deaf to all remonstrance, she ran to the door.

At the same moment, her maid entered with her bonnet and shawl. She huddled them on anyhow. "Pack my things," she said, "and bring them to Mr. Bruff's." I attempted to approach her--I was shocked and grieved, but, it is needless to say, not offended. I only wished to say to her, "May your hard heart be softened! I freely forgive you!"

She pulled down her veil, and tore her shawl away from my hand, and, hurrying out, shut the door in my face. I bore the insult with my customary fortitude. I remember it now with my customary superiority to all feeling of offence.

Mr. Bruff had his parting word of mockery for me, before he too hurried out, in his turn.

"You had better not have explained yourself, Miss Clack," he said, and bowed, and left the room.

The person with the cap-ribbons followed.

"It's easy to see who has set them all by the ears together," she said. "I'm only a poor servant--but I declare I'm ashamed of you!" She too went out, and banged the door after her.

I was left alone in the room. Reviled by them all, deserted by them all, I was left alone in the room.

Is there more to be added to this plain statement of facts--to this touching picture of a Christian persecuted by the world? No! my diary reminds me that one more of the many chequered chapters in my life ends here. From that day forth, I never saw Rachel Verinder again. She had my forgiveness at the time when she insulted me. She has had my prayerful good wishes ever since. And when I die--to complete the return on my part of good for evil--she will have the LIFE, LETTERS, AND LABOURS OF MISS JANE ANN STAMPER left her as a legacy by my will.

SECOND NARRATIVE
Contributed by MATHEW BRUFF, Solicitor, of Gray's Inn Square

CHAPTER I

My fair friend, Miss Clack, having laid down the pen, there are two reasons for my taking it up next, in my turn. In the first place, I am in a position to throw the necessary light on certain points of interest which have thus far been left in the dark. Miss Verinder had her own private reason for breaking her marriage engagement--and I was at the bottom of it. Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite had his own private reason for withdrawing all claim to the hand of his charming cousin--and I discovered what it was.

In the second place, it was my good or ill fortune, I hardly know which, to find myself personally involved--at the period of which I am now writing--in the mystery of the Indian Diamond. I had the honour of an interview, at my own office, with an Oriental stranger of distinguished manners, who was no other, unquestionably, than the chief of the three Indians. Add to this, that I met with the celebrated traveller, Mr. Murthwaite, the day afterwards, and that I held a conversation with him on the subject of the Moonstone, which has a very important bearing on later events. And there you have the statement of my claims to fill the position which I occupy in these pages.

The true story of the broken marriage engagement comes first in point of time, and must therefore take the first place in the present narrative. Tracing my way back along the chain of events, from one end to the other, I find it necessary to open the scene, oddly enough as you will think, at the bedside of my excellent client and friend, the late
Sir John Verinder.

Sir John had his share--perhaps rather a large share--of the more harmless and amiable of the weaknesses incidental to humanity. Among these, I may mention as applicable to the matter in hand, an invincible reluctance--so long as he enjoyed his usual good health--to face the responsibility of making his will. Lady Verinder exerted her influence to rouse him to a sense of duty in this matter; and I exerted my influence. He admitted the justice of our views--but he went no further than that, until he found himself afflicted with the illness which ultimately brought him to his grave. Then, I was sent for at last, to take my client's instructions on the subject of his will. They proved to be the simplest instructions I had ever received in the whole of my professional career.

Sir John was dozing, when I entered the room. He roused himself at the sight of me.

"How do you do, Mr. Bruff?" he said. "I sha'n't be very long about this. And then I'll go to sleep again." He looked on with great interest while I collected pens, ink, and paper. "Are you ready?" he asked. I bowed and took a dip of ink, and waited for my instructions.

"I leave everything to my wife," said Sir John. "That's all." He turned round on his pillow, and composed himself to sleep again.

I was obliged to disturb him.

"Am I to understand," I asked, "that you leave the whole of the property, of every sort and description, of which you die possessed, absolutely to Lady Verinder?"

"Yes," said Sir John. "Only, I put it shorter. Why can't you put it shorter, and let me go to sleep again? Everything to my wife. That's my Will."

His property was entirely at his own disposal, and was of two kinds. Property in land (I purposely abstain from using technical language), and property in money. In the majority of cases, I am afraid I should have felt it my duty to my client to ask him to reconsider his Will. In the case of Sir John, I knew Lady Verinder to be, not only worthy of the unreserved trust which her husband had placed in her (all good wives are worthy of that)--but to be also capable of properly administering a trust (which, in my experience of the fair sex, not one in a thousand of them is competent to do). In ten minutes, Sir John's Will was drawn, and executed, and Sir John himself, good man, was finishing his interrupted nap.

Lady Verinder amply justified the confidence which her husband had placed in her. In the first days of her widowhood, she sent for me, and made her Will. The view she took of her position was so thoroughly sound and sensible, that I was relieved of all necessity for advising her. My responsibility began and ended with shaping her instructions into the proper legal form. Before Sir John had been a fortnight in his grave, the future of his daughter had been most wisely and most affectionately provided for.

The Will remained in its fireproof box at my office, through more years than I like to reckon up. It was not till the summer of eighteen hundred and forty-eight that I found occasion to look at it again under very melancholy circumstances.

At the date I have mentioned, the doctors pronounced the sentence on poor Lady Verinder, which was literally a sentence of death. I was the first person whom she informed of her situation; and I found her anxious to go over her Will again with me.

It was impossible to improve the provisions relating to her daughter. But, in the lapse of time, her wishes in regard to certain minor legacies, left to different relatives, had undergone some modification; and it became necessary to add three or four Codicils to the original document. Having done this at once, for fear of accident, I obtained her ladyship's permission to embody her recent instructions in a second Will. My object was to avoid certain inevitable confusions and repetitions which now disfigured the original document, and which, to own the truth, grated sadly on my professional sense of the fitness of things.

The execution of this second Will has been described by Miss Clack, who was so obliging as to witness it. So far as regarded Rachel Verinder's pecuniary interests, it was, word for word, the exact counterpart of the first Will. The only changes introduced related to the appointment of a guardian, and to certain provisions concerning that appointment, which were made under my advice. On Lady Verinder's death, the Will was placed in the hands of my proctor to be "proved" (as the phrase is) in the usual way.

In about three weeks from that time--as well as I can remember--the first warning reached me of something unusual going on under the surface. I happened to be looking in at my friend the proctor's office, and I observed that he received me with an appearance of greater interest than usual.

"I have some news for you," he said. "What do you think I heard at Doctors' Commons this morning? Lady Verinder's Will has been asked for, and examined, already!"

This was news indeed! There was absolutely nothing which could be contested in the Will; and there was nobody I could think of who had the slightest interest in examining it. (I shall perhaps do well if I explain in this place, for the benefit of the few people who don't know it already, that the law allows all Wills to be examined at
Doctors' Commons by anybody who applies, on the payment of a shilling fee.)

"Did you hear who asked for the Will?" I asked.

"Yes; the clerk had no hesitation in telling ME. Mr. Smalley, of the firm of Skipp and Smalley, asked for it. The Will has not been copied yet into the great Folio Registers. So there was no alternative but to depart from the usual course, and to let him see the original document. He looked it over carefully, and made a note in his pocket-book. Have you any idea of what he wanted with it?"

I shook my head. "I shall find out," I answered, "before I am a day older." With that I went back at once to my own office.

If any other firm of solicitors had been concerned in this unaccountable examination of my deceased client's Will, I might have found some difficulty in making the necessary discovery. But I had a hold over Skipp and Smalley which made my course in this matter a comparatively easy one. My common-law clerk (a most competent and excellent man) was a brother of Mr. Smalley's; and, owing to this sort of indirect connection with me, Skipp and Smalley had, for some years past, picked up the crumbs that fell from my table, in the shape of cases brought to my office, which, for various reasons, I did not think it worth while to undertake. My professional patronage was, in this way, of some importance to the firm. I intended, if necessary, to remind them of that patronage, on the present occasion.

The moment I got back I spoke to my clerk; and, after telling him what had happened, I sent him to his brother's office, "with Mr. Bruff's compliments, and he would be glad to know why Messrs. Skipp and Smalley had found it necessary to examine Lady Verinder's will."

This message brought Mr. Smalley back to my office in company with his brother. He acknowledged that he had acted under instructions received from a client. And then he put it to me, whether it would not be a breach of professional confidence on his part to say more.

We had a smart discussion upon that. He was right, no doubt; and I was wrong. The truth is, I was angry and suspicious--and I insisted on knowing more. Worse still, I declined to consider any additional information offered me, as a secret placed in my keeping: I claimed perfect freedom to use my own discretion. Worse even than that, I took an unwarrantable advantage of my position. "Choose, sir," I said to Mr. Smalley, "between the risk of losing your client's business and the risk of losing Mine." Quite indefensible, I admit--an act of tyranny, and nothing less. Like other tyrants, I carried my point. Mr. Smalley chose his alternative, without a moment's hesitation.

He smiled resignedly, and gave up the name of his client:

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

That was enough for me--I wanted to know no more.

Having reached this point in my narrative, it now becomes necessary to place the reader of these lines--so far as Lady Verinder's Will is concerned--on a footing of perfect equality, in respect of information, with myself.

Let me state, then, in the fewest possible words, that Rachel Verinder had nothing but a life-interest in the property. Her mother's excellent sense, and my long experience, had combined to relieve her of all responsibility, and to guard her from all danger of becoming the victim in the future of some needy and unscrupulous man. Neither she, nor her husband (if she married), could raise sixpence, either on the property in land, or on the property in money. They would have the houses in London and in Yorkshire to live in, and they would have the handsome income--and that was all.

When I came to think over what I had discovered, I was sorely perplexed what to do next.

Hardly a week had passed since I had heard (to my surprise and distress) of Miss Verinder's proposed marriage. I had the sincerest admiration and affection for her; and I had been inexpressibly grieved when I heard that she was about to throw herself away on Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. And now, here was the man--whom I had always believed to be a smooth-tongued impostor--justifying the very worst that I had thought of him, and plainly revealing the mercenary object of the marriage, on his side! And what of that?--you may reply--the thing is done every day. Granted, my dear sir. But would you think of it quite as lightly as you do, if the thing was done (let us say) with your own sister?

The first consideration which now naturally occurred to me was this. Would Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite hold to his engagement, after what his lawyer had discovered for him?

It depended entirely on his pecuniary position, of which I knew nothing. If that position was not a desperate one, it would be well worth his while to marry Miss Verinder for her income alone. If, on the other hand, he stood in urgent need of realising a large sum by a given time, then Lady Verinder's Will would exactly meet the case, and would preserve her daughter from falling into a scoundrel's hands.

In the latter event, there would be no need for me to distress Miss Rachel, in the first days of her mourning for her mother, by an immediate revelation of the truth. In the former event, if I remained silent, I should be conniving at a marriage which would make her miserable for life.
My doubts ended in my calling at the hotel in London, at which I knew Mrs. Ablewhite and Miss Verinder to be staying. They informed me that they were going to Brighton the next day, and that an unexpected obstacle prevented Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite from accompanying them. I at once proposed to take his place. While I was only thinking of Rachel Verinder, it was possible to hesitate. When I actually saw her, my mind was made up directly, come what might of it, to tell her the truth.

I found my opportunity, when I was out walking with her, on the day after my arrival.

"May I speak to you," I asked, "about your marriage engagement?"

"Yes," she said, indifferently, "if you have nothing more interesting to talk about."

"Will you forgive an old friend and servant of your family, Miss Rachel, if I venture on asking whether your heart is set on this marriage?"

"I am marrying in despair, Mr. Bruff--on the chance of dropping into some sort of stagnant happiness which may reconcile me to my life."

Strong language! and suggestive of something below the surface, in the shape of a romance. But I had my own object in view, and I declined (as we lawyers say) to pursue the question into its side issues.

"Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite can hardly be of your way of thinking," I said. "His heart must be set on the marriage at any rate?"

"He says so, and I suppose I ought to believe him. He would hardly marry me, after what I have owned to him, unless he was fond of me."

Poor thing! the bare idea of a man marrying her for his own selfish and mercenary ends had never entered her head. The task I had set myself began to look like a harder task than I had bargained for.

"It sounds strangely," I went on, "in my old-fashioned ears----"

"What sounds strangely?" she asked.

"To hear you speak of your future husband as if you were not quite sure of the sincerity of his attachment. Are you conscious of any reason in your own mind for doubting him?"

Her astonishing quickness of perception, detected a change in my voice, or my manner, when I put that question, which warned her that I had been speaking all along with some ulterior object in view. She stopped, and taking her arm out of mine, looked me searchingly in the face.

"Mr. Bruff," she said, "you have something to tell me about Godfrey Ablewhite. Tell it."

I knew her well enough to take her at her word. I told it.

She put her arm again into mine, and walked on with me slowly. I felt her hand tightening its grasp mechanically on my arm, and I saw her getting paler and paler as I went on--but, not a word passed her lips while I was speaking. When I had done, she still kept silence. Her head drooped a little, and she walked by my side, unconscious of my presence, unconscious of everything about her; lost--buried, I might almost say--in her own thoughts.

I made no attempt to disturb her. My experience of her disposition warned me, on this, as on former occasions, to give her time.

The first instinct of girls in general, on being told of anything which interests them, is to ask a multitude of questions, and then to run off, and talk it all over with some favourite friend. Rachel Verinder's first instinct, under similar circumstances, was to shut herself up in her own mind, and to think it over by herself. This absolute self-dependence is a great virtue in a man. In a woman it has a serious drawback of morally separating her from the mass of her sex, and so exposing her to misconstruction by the general opinion. I strongly suspect myself of thinking as the rest of the world think in this matter--except in the case of Rachel Verinder. The self-dependence in her character, was one of its virtues in my estimation; partly, no doubt, because I sincerely admired and liked her; partly, because the view I took of her connexion with the loss of the Moonstone was based on my own special knowledge of her disposition. Badly as appearances might look, in the matter of the Diamond--shocking as it undoubtedly was to know that she was associated in any way with the mystery of an undiscovered theft--I was satisfied nevertheless that she had done nothing unworthy of her, because I was also satisfied that she had not stirred a step in the business, without shutting herself up in her own mind, and thinking it over first.

We had walked on, for nearly a mile I should say before Rachel roused herself. She suddenly looked up at me with a faint reflection of her smile of happier times--the most irresistible smile I have ever seen on a woman's face.

"I owe much already to your kindness," she said. "And I feel more deeply indebted to it now than ever. If you hear any rumours of my marriage when you get back to London contradict them at once, on my authority."

"Have you resolved to break your engagement?" I asked.

"Can you doubt it?" she returned proudly, "after what you have told me!"

"My dear Miss Rachel, you are very young--and you may find more difficulty in withdrawing from your present position than you anticipate. Have you no one--I mean a lady, of course--whom you could consult?"

"No one," she answered.
It distressed me, it did indeed distress me, to hear her say that. She was so young and so lonely—and she bore it so well! The impulse to help her got the better of any sense of my own unfitness which I might have felt under the circumstances; and I stated such ideas on the subject as occurred to me on the spur of the moment, to the best of my ability. I have advised a prodigious number of clients, and have dealt with some exceedingly awkward difficulties, in my time. But this was the first occasion on which I had ever found myself advising a young lady how to obtain her release from a marriage engagement. The suggestion I offered amounted briefly to this. I recommended her to tell Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite—at a private interview, of course—that he had, to her certain knowledge, betrayed the mercenary nature of the motive on his side. She was then to add that their marriage, after what she had discovered, was a simple impossibility—and she was to put it to him, whether he thought it wisest to secure her silence by falling in with her views, or to force her, by opposing them, to make the motive under which she was acting generally known. If he attempted to defend himself, or to deny the facts, she was, in that event, to refer him to ME.

Miss Verinder listened attentively till I had done. She then thanked me very prettily for my advice, but informed me at the same time that it was impossible for her to follow it.

"May I ask," I said, "what objection you see to following it?"
She hesitated—and then met me with a question on her side.

"Suppose you were asked to express your opinion of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's conduct?" she began.
"Yes?"
"What would you call it?"
"I should call it the conduct of a meanly deceitful man."
"Mr. Bruff! I have believed in that man. I have promised to marry that man. How can I tell him he is mean, how can I disgrace him in the eyes of the world after that? I have degraded myself by ever thinking of him as my husband. If I say what you tell me to say to him—I am owning that I have degraded myself to his face. I can't do that. After what has passed between us, I can't do that! The shame of it would be nothing to HIM. But the shame of it would be unendurable to _me_."

Here was another of the marked peculiarities in her character disclosing itself to me without reserve. Here was her sensitive horror of the bare contact with anything mean, blinding her to every consideration of what she owed to herself, hurrying her into a false position which might compromise her in the estimation of all her friends! Up to this time, I had been a little diffident about the propriety of the advice I had given to her. But, after what she had just said, I had no sort of doubt that it was the best advice that could have been offered; and I felt no sort of hesitation in pressing it on her again.

She only shook her head, and repeated her objection in other words.

"He has been intimate enough with me to ask me to be his wife. He has stood high enough in my estimation to obtain my consent. I can't tell him to his face that he is the most contemptible of living creatures, after that!"

"But, my dear Miss Rachel," I remonstrated, "it's equally impossible for you to tell him that you withdraw from your engagement without giving some reason for it."

"I shall say that I have thought it over, and that I am satisfied it will be best for both of us if we part."
"No more than that?"
"No more."
"Have you thought of what he may say, on his side?"
"He may say what he pleases."

It was impossible not to admire her delicacy and her resolution, and it was equally impossible not to feel that she was putting herself in the wrong. I entreated her to consider her own position I reminded her that she would be exposing herself to the most odious misconstruction of her motives. "You can't brave public opinion," I said, "at the command of private feeling."

"I can," she answered. "I have done it already."
"What do you mean?"
"You have forgotten the Moonstone, Mr. Bruff. Have I not braved public opinion, THERE, with my own private reasons for it?"

Her answer silenced me for the moment. It set me trying to trace the explanation of her conduct, at the time of the loss of the Moonstone, out of the strange avowal which had just escaped her. I might perhaps have done it when I was younger. I certainly couldn't do it now.

I tried a last remonstrance before we returned to the house. She was just as immovable as ever. My mind was in a strange conflict of feelings about her when I left her that day. She was obstinate; she was wrong. She was interesting; she was admirable; she was deeply to be pitied. I made her promise to write to me the moment she had any news to send. And I went back to my business in London, with a mind exceedingly ill at ease.

On the evening of my return, before it was possible for me to receive my promised letter, I was surprised by a
visit from Mr. Ablewhite the elder, and was informed that Mr. Godfrey had got his dismissal--AND HAD
ACCEPTED IT--that very day.

With the view I already took of the case, the bare fact stated in the words that I have underlined, revealed Mr.
Godfrey Ablewhite's motive for submission as plainly as if he had acknowledged it himself. He needed a large sum
of money; and he needed it by a given time. Rachel's income, which would have helped him to anything else, would
not help him here; and Rachel had accordingly released herself, without encountering a moment's serious opposition
on his part. If I am told that this is a mere speculation, I ask, in my turn, what other theory will account for his giving
up a marriage which would have maintained him in splendour for the rest of his life?

Any exultation I might otherwise have felt at the lucky turn which things had now taken, was effectually
checked by what passed at my interview with old Mr. Ablewhite.

He came, of course, to know whether I could give him any explanation of Miss Verinder's extraordinary
conduct. It is needless to say that I was quite unable to afford him the information he wanted. The annoyance which
I thus inflicted, following on the irritation produced by a recent interview with his son, threw Mr. Ablewhite off his
guard. Both his looks and his language convinced me that Miss Verinder would find him a merciless man to deal
with, when he joined the ladies at Brighton the next day.

I had a restless night, considering what I ought to do next. How my reflections ended, and how thoroughly well
founded my distrust of Mr. Ablewhite proved to be, are items of information which (as I am told) have already been
put tidily in their proper places, by that exemplary person, Miss Clack. I have only to add--in completion of her
narrative--that Miss Verinder found the quiet and repose which she sadly needed, poor thing, in my house at
Hampstead. She honoured us by making a long stay. My wife and daughters were charmed with her; and, when the
executors decided on the appointment of a new guardian, I feel sincere pride and pleasure in recording that my guest
and my family parted like old friends, on either side.

CHAPTER II

The next thing I have to do, is to present such additional information as I possess on the subject of the
Moonstone, or, to speak more correctly, on the subject of the Indian plot to steal the Diamond. The little that I have
to tell is (as I think I have already said) of some importance, nevertheless, in respect of its bearing very remarkably
on events which are still to come.

About a week or ten days after Miss Verinder had left us, one of my clerks entered the private room at my office,
with a card in his hand, and informed me that a gentleman was below, who wanted to speak to me.

I looked at the card. There was a foreign name written on it, which has escaped my memory. It was followed by
a line written in English at the bottom of the card, which I remember perfectly well:

"Recommended by Mr. Septimus Luker."

The audacity of a person in Mr. Luker's position presuming to recommend anybody to me, took me so
completely by surprise, that I sat silent for the moment, wondering whether my own eyes had not deceived me. The
clerk, observing my bewilderment, favoured me with the result of his own observation of the stranger who was
waiting downstairs.

"He is rather a remarkable-looking man, sir. So dark in the complexion that we all set him down in the office for
an Indian, or something of that sort."

Associating the clerk's idea with the line inscribed on the card in my hand, I thought it possible that the
Moonstone might be at the bottom of Mr. Luker's recommendation, and of the stranger's visit at my office. To the
astonishment of my clerk, I at once decided on granting an interview to the gentleman below.

In justification of the highly unprofessional sacrifice to mere curiosity which I thus made, permit me to remind
anybody who may read these lines, that no living person (in England, at any rate) can claim to have had such an
intimate connexion with the romance of the Indian Diamond as mine has been. I was trusted with the secret of
Colonel Herncastle's plan for escaping assassination. I received the Colonel's letters, periodically reporting himself a
living man. I drew his Will, leaving the Moonstone to Miss Verinder. I persuaded his executor to act, on the chance
that the jewel might prove to be a valuable acquisition to the family. And, lastly, I combated Mr. Franklin Blake's
scruples, and induced him to be the means of transporting the Diamond to Lady Verinder's house. If anyone can
claim a prescriptive right of interest in the Moonstone, and in everything connected with it, I think it is hardly to be
denied that I am the man.

The moment my mysterious client was shown in, I felt an inner conviction that I was in the presence of one of
the three Indians--probably of the chief. He was carefully dressed in European costume. But his swarthy
complexion, his long lithe figure, and his grave and graceful politeness of manner were enough to betray his
Oriental origin to any intelligent eyes that looked at him.

I pointed to a chair, and begged to be informed of the nature of his business with me.

After first apologising--in an excellent selection of English words--for the liberty which he had taken in
disturbing me, the Indian produced a small parcel the outer covering of which was of cloth of gold. Removing this and a second wrapping of some silken fabric, he placed a little box, or casket, on my table, most beautifully and richly inlaid in jewels, on an ebony ground.

"I have come, sir," he said, "to ask you to lend me some money. And I leave this as an assurance to you that my debt will be paid back."

I pointed to his card. "And you apply to me," I rejoined, "at Mr. Luker's recommendation?"

The Indian bowed.

"May I ask how it is that Mr. Luker himself did not advance the money that you require?"

"Mr. Luker informed me, sir, that he had no money to lend."

"And so he recommended you to come to me?"

The Indian, in his turn, pointed to the card. "It is written there," he said.

Briefly answered, and thoroughly to the purpose! If the Moonstone had been in my possession, this Oriental gentleman would have murdered me, I am well aware, without a moment's hesitation. At the same time, and barring that slight drawback, I am bound to testify that he was the perfect model of a client. He might not have respected my life. But he did what none of my own countrymen had ever done, in all my experience of them--he respected my time.

"I am sorry," I said, "that you should have had the trouble of coming to me. Mr. Luker is quite mistaken in sending you here. I am trusted, like other men in my profession, with money to lend. But I never lend it to strangers, and I never lend it on such a security as you have produced."

Far from attempting, as other people would have done, to induce me to relax my own rules, the Indian only made me another bow, and wrapped up his box in its two coverings without a word of protest. He rose--this admirable assassin rose to go, the moment I had answered him!

"Will your condescension towards a stranger, excuse my asking one question," he said, "before I take my leave?"

I bowed on my side. Only one question at parting! The average in my experience was fifty.

"Supposing, sir, it had been possible (and customary) for you to lend me the money," he said, "in what space of time would it have been possible (and customary) for me to pay it back?"

"According to the usual course pursued in this country," I answered, "you would have been entitled to pay the money back (if you liked) in one year's time from the date at which it was first advanced to you."

The Indian made me a last bow, the lowest of all--and suddenly and softly walked out of the room.

It was done in a moment, in a noiseless, supple, cat-like way, which a little startled me, I own. As soon as I was composed enough to think, I arrived at one distinct conclusion in reference to the otherwise incomprehensible visitor who had favoured me with a call.

His face, voice, and manner--while I was in his company--were under such perfect control that they set all scrutiny at defiance. But he had given me one chance of looking under the smooth outer surface of him, for all that. He had not shown the slightest sign of attempting to fix anything that I had said to him in his mind, until I mentioned the time at which it was customary to permit the earliest repayment, on the part of a debtor, of money that had been advanced as a loan. When I gave him that piece of information, he looked me straight in the face, while I was speaking, for the first time. The inference I drew from this was--that he had a special purpose in asking me his last question, and a special interest in hearing my answer to it. The more carefully I reflected on what had passed between us, the more shrewdly I suspected the production of the casket, and the application for the loan, of having been mere formalities, designed to pave the way for the parting inquiry addressed to me.

I had satisfied myself of the correctness of this conclusion--and was trying to get on a step further, and penetrate the Indian's motives next--when a letter was brought to me, which proved to be from no less a person that Mr. Septimus Luker himself. He asked my pardon in terms of sickening servility, and assured me that he could explain matters to my satisfaction, if I would honour him by consenting to a personal interview.

I made another unprofessional sacrifice to mere curiosity. I honoured him by making an appointment at my office, for the next day.

Mr. Luker was, in every respect, such an inferior creature to the Indian--he was so vulgar, so ugly, so cringing, and so prosy--that he is quite unworthy of being reported, at any length, in these pages. The substance of what he had to tell me may be fairly stated as follows:

The day before I had received the visit of the Indian, Mr. Luker had been favoured with a call from that accomplished gentleman. In spite of his European disguise, Mr. Luker had instantly identified his visitor with the chief of the three Indians, who had formerly annoyed him by loitering about his house, and who had left him no alternative but to consult a magistrate. From this startling discovery he had rushed to the conclusion (naturally enough I own) that he must certainly be in the company of one of the three men, who had blindfolded him, gagged him, and robbed him of his banker's receipt. The result was that he became quite paralysed with terror, and that he
firmly believed his last hour had come.

On his side, the Indian preserved the character of a perfect stranger. He produced the little casket, and made exactly the same application which he had afterwards made to me. As the speediest way of getting rid of him, Mr. Luker had at once declared that he had no money. The Indian had thereupon asked to be informed of the best and safest person to apply to for the loan he wanted. Mr. Luker had answered that the best and safest person, in such cases, was usually a respectable solicitor. Asked to name some individual of that character and profession, Mr. Luker had mentioned me—for the one simple reason that, in the extremity of his terror, mine was the first name which occurred to him. "The perspiration was pouring off me like rain, sir," the wretched creature concluded. "I didn't know what I was talking about. And I hope you'll look over it, Mr. Bruff, sir, in consideration of my having been really and truly frightened out of my wits."

I excused the fellow graciously enough. It was the readiest way of releasing myself from the sight of him. Before he left me, I detained him to make one inquiry.

Had the Indian said anything noticeable, at the moment of quitting Mr. Luker's house?

Yes! The Indian had put precisely the same question to Mr. Luker, at parting, which he had put to me; receiving of course, the same answer as the answer which I had given him.

What did it mean? Mr. Luker's explanation gave me no assistance towards solving the problem. My own unaided ingenuity, consulted next, proved quite unequal to grapple with the difficulty. I had a dinner engagement that evening; and I went upstairs, in no very genial frame of mind, little suspecting that the way to my dressing-room and the way to discovery, meant, on this particular occasion, one and the same thing.

CHAPTER III

The prominent personage among the guests at the dinner party I found to be Mr. Murthwaite.

On his appearance in England, after his wanderings, society had been greatly interested in the traveller, as a man who had passed through many dangerous adventures, and who had escaped to tell the tale. He had now announced his intention of returning to the scene of his exploits, and of penetrating into regions left still unexplored. This magnificent indifference to placing his safety in peril for the second time, revived the flagging interest of the worshippers in the hero. The law of chances was clearly against his escaping on this occasion. It is not every day that we can meet an eminent person at dinner, and feel that there is a reasonable prospect of the news of his murder being the news that we hear of him next.

When the gentlemen were left by themselves in the dining-room, I found myself sitting next to Mr. Murthwaite. The guests present being all English, it is needless to say that, as soon as the wholesome check exercised by the presence of the ladies was removed, the conversation turned on politics as a necessary result.

In respect to this all-absorbing national topic, I happen to be one of the most un-English Englishmen living. As a general rule, political talk appears to me to be of all talk the most dreary and the most profitless. Glancing at Mr. Murthwaite, when the bottles had made their first round of the table, I found that he was apparently of my way of thinking. He was doing it very dexterously—with all possible consideration for the feelings of his host—but it is not the less certain that he was composing himself for a nap. It struck me as an experiment worth attempting, to try whether a judicious allusion to the subject of the Moonstone would keep him awake, and, if it did, to see what HE thought of the last new complication in the Indian conspiracy, as revealed in the prosaic precincts of my office.

"If I am not mistaken, Mr. Murthwaite," I began, "you were acquainted with the late Lady Verinder, and you took some interest in the strange succession of events which ended in the loss of the Moonstone?"

The eminent traveller did me the honour of waking up in an instant, and asking me who I was.

I informed him of my professional connection with the Herncastle family, not forgetting the curious position which I had occupied towards the Colonel and his Diamond in the bygone time.

Mr. Murthwaite shifted round in his chair, so as to put the rest of the company behind him (Conservatives and Liberals alike), and concentrated his whole attention on plain Mr. Bruff, of Gray's Inn Square.

"Have you heard anything, lately, of the Indians?" he asked.

"I have every reason to believe," I answered, "that one of them had an interview with me, in my office, yesterday."

Mr. Murthwaite was not an easy man to astonish; but that last answer of mine completely staggered him. I described what had happened to Mr. Luker, and what had happened to myself, exactly as I have described it here. "It is clear that the Indian's parting inquiry had an object," I added. "Why should he be so anxious to know the time at which a borrower of money is usually privileged to pay the money back?"

"Is it possible that you don't see his motive, Mr. Bruff?"

"I am ashamed of my stupidity, Mr. Murthwaite—but I certainly don't see it."

The great traveller became quite interested in sounding the immense vacuity of my dulness to its lowest depths.

"Let me ask you one question," he said. "In what position does the conspiracy to seize the Moonstone now
through the whole of the interval that elapsed before Rachel's birthday?

that they had made no attempt on Lady Verinder's house (in which they must have supposed the Diamond to be)

neighbourhood. All perfectly clear so far. But the Indians being ignorant of the precautions thus taken, how was it

he had lodged the Diamond in the bank at Frizinghall, before the Indians were so much as prepared to see him in the

advanced the time of his arrival in Yorkshire by some hours--and that (thanks to old Betteredge's excellent advice)

doubt, quite as correctly as I do."

in the house who was going to visit Lady Verinder. What actually followed upon that discovery, you remember, no

readily inform them that Mr. Franklin Blake had been to the bank, and that Mr. Franklin Blake was the only person

treat the lower men servants with beer, and to hear the news of the house. These commonplace precautions would

events. Two men would do it. One to follow anybody who went from Mr. Blake's house to the bank. And one to

there you have the explanation of the appearance of the Indians at Frizinghall, disguised as jugglers, and waiting

was taken down to Yorkshire to Lady Verinder's house. The second way would be manifestly the safest way--and

information to obtain. The one difficulty for the Indians would be to decide whether they should make their attempt

the necessary information about persons in the position of Lady Verinder and Mr. Blake, would be perfectly easy

that Mr. Blake the elder, or some person appointed by him, was to place it in her hands. You will agree with me that

described. That copy would inform them that the Moonstone was bequeathed to the daughter of Lady Verinder, and

English advice) after THAT."

I don't want you to count the years. I will only say, it is clear that these present Indians, at their age, must be the

successors of three other Indians (high caste Brahmins all of them, Mr. Bruff, when they left their native country!) who

the Colonel to these shores. Very well. These present men of ours have succeeded to the men who were here before them. If they had only done that, the matter would not have been worth inquiring into. But they have done more. They have succeeded to the organisation which their predecessors established in this country. Don't start! The organisation is a very trumpery affair, according to our ideas, I have no doubt. I should reckon it up as including the command of money; the services, when needed, of that shady sort of Englishman, who lives in the byways of foreign life in London; and, lastly, the secret sympathy of such few men of their own country, and (formerly, at least) of their own religion, as happen to be employed in ministering to some of the multitudinous wants of this great city. Nothing very formidable, as you see! But worth notice at starting, because we may find occasion to refer to this modest little Indian organisation as we go on. Having now cleared the ground, I am going to ask you a question; and I expect your experience to answer it. What was the event which gave the Indians their first chance of seizing the Diamond?"

I understood the allusion to my experience.

"The first chance they got," I replied, "was clearly offered to them by Colonel Herncastle's death. They would be

aware of his death, I suppose, as a matter of course?"

"As a matter of course. And his death, as you say, gave them their first chance. Up to that time the Moonstone

was safe in the strong-room of the bank. You drew the Colonel's Will leaving his jewel to his niece; and the Will

was proved in the usual way. As a lawyer, you can be at no loss to know what course the Indians would take (under

English advice) after THAT."

"They would provide themselves with a copy of the Will from Doctors' Commons," I said.

"Exactly. One or other of those shady Englishmen to whom I have alluded, would get them the copy you have

described. That copy would inform them that the Moonstone was bequeathed to the daughter of Lady Verinder, and

that Mr. Blake the elder, or some person appointed by him, was to place it in her hands. You will agree with me that

the necessary information about persons in the position of Lady Verinder and Mr. Blake, would be perfectly easy

information to obtain. The one difficulty for the Indians would be to decide whether they should make their attempt

on the Diamond when it was in course of removal from the keeping of the bank, or whether they should wait until it

was taken down to Yorkshire to Lady Verinder's house. The second way would be manifestly the safest way--and

there you have the explanation of the appearance of the Indians at Frizinghall, disguised as jugglers, and waiting

their time. In London, it is needless to say, they had their organisation at their disposal to keep them informed of

events. Two men would do it. One to follow anybody who went from Mr. Blake's house to the bank. And one to

treat the lower men servants with beer, and to hear the news of the house. These commonplace precautions would

readily inform them that Mr. Franklin Blake had been to the bank, and that Mr. Franklin Blake was the only person

in the house who was going to visit Lady Verinder. What actually followed upon that discovery, you remember, no

doubt, quite as correctly as I do."

I remembered that Franklin Blake had detected one of the spies, in the street--that he had, in consequence, advanced the time of his arrival in Yorkshire by some hours--and that (thanks to old Betteredge's excellent advice) he had lodged the Diamond in the bank at Frizinghall, before the Indians were so much as prepared to see him in the neighbourhood. All perfectly clear so far. But the Indians being ignorant of the precautions thus taken, how was it that they had made no attempt on Lady Verinder's house (in which they must have supposed the Diamond to be) through the whole of the interval that elapsed before Rachel's birthday?

In putting this difficulty to Mr. Murthwaite, I thought it right to add that I had heard of the little boy, and the
course, to have the letter translated to them. I took a copy in my pocket-book of the original, and of my translation--

written in a foreign language, which they rightly guessed at as Hindustani. Their object in coming to me was, of

oddly at variance with the customary method of directing a letter. On opening it, they had found the contents to be

by one Mrs. Macann, of whom they had hired the lodging in which they lived; and it had been delivered at Mrs.

set free (on a Monday, I think), the governor of the prison came to me with a letter. It had been left for the Indians

itself? The second chance offered itself--as I am in a condition to prove--while they were still in confinement."

chance lost, on the day when they were committed to the prison at Frizinghall. When did the second chance offer

paralysed the next day by their confinement in prison as rogues and vagabonds--you know as well as I do. The first

identity of the gem by having it cut into separate stones. How its extraordinary disappearance that night, made my

worse risk still, in store for Miss Verinder, that I recommended following the Colonel's plan, and destroying the

happened to ride back to Lady Verinder's in the company of other people); and I was so strongly convinced of the

feel so sure about the risk Mr. Franklin Blake had run (they would have certainly attacked him, if he had not

performed the Diamond while it was under the control of Mr. Franklin Blake, who had shown already that he could suspect and

outwit them? Or to wait till the Diamond was at the disposal of a young girl, who would innocently delight in

Diamond while it was under the control of Mr. Franklin Blake, who had shown already that he could suspect and

advice useless, and utterly defeated the Hindoo plot--and how all further action on the part of the Indians was

in store for Miss Verinder, that I recommended following the Colonel's plan, and destroying the

happened to ride back to Lady Verinder's in the company of other people); and I was so strongly convinced of the

warning the magnificent jewel at every possible opportunity? Perhaps you want a proof that my theory is correct?

Take the conduct of the Indians themselves as the proof. They appeared at the house, after waiting all those weeks,

on Miss Verinder's birthday; and they were rewarded for the patient accuracy of their calculations by seeing the

Moonstone in the bosom of her dress! When I heard the story of the Colonel and the Diamond, later in the evening, I

felt so sure about the risk Mr. Franklin Blake had run (they would have certainly attacked him, if he had not

happened to ride back to Lady Verinder's in the company of other people); and I was so strongly convinced of the

worse risk still, in store for Miss Verinder that I recommended following the Colonel's plan, and destroying the

identity of the gem by having it cut into separate stones. How its extraordinary disappearance that night, made my

advice useless, and utterly defeated the Hindoo plot--and how all further action on the part of the Indians was

paralysed the next day by their confinement in prison as rogues and vagabonds--you know as well as I do. The first

act in the conspiracy closes there. Before we go on to the second, may I ask whether I have met your difficulty, with

an explanation which is satisfactory to the mind of a practical man?"

"Not a doubt of it, Mr. Murthwaite! I am waiting, however, with some anxiety, to hear the rational explanation

of the difficulty which I have just had the honour of submitting to you."

Mr. Murthwaite smiled. "It's the easiest difficulty to deal with of all," he said. "Permit me to begin by admitting

your statement of the case as a perfectly correct one. The Indians were undoubtedly not aware of what Mr. Franklin

Blake had done with the Diamond--for we find them making their first mistake, on the first night of Mr. Blake's

arrival at his aunt's house."

"Their first mistake?" I repeated.

"Certainly! The mistake of allowing themselves to be surprised, lurking about the terrace at night, by Gabriel

Betteredge. However, they had the merit of seeing for themselves that they had taken a false step--for, as you say,

again, with plenty of time at their disposal, they never came near the house for weeks afterwards.

"Why, Mr. Murthwaite? That's what I want to know! Why?"

"Because no Indian, Mr. Bruff, ever runs an unnecessary risk. The clause you drew in Colonel Herncastle's Will,

informed them (didn't it?) that the Moonstone was to pass absolutely into Miss Verinder's possession on her

birthday. Very well. Tell me which was the safest course for men in their position? To make their attempt on the

Diamond while it was under the control of Mr. Franklin Blake, who had shown already that he could suspect and

outwit them? Or to wait till the Diamond was at the disposal of a young girl, who would innocently delight in

wearing the magnificent jewel at every possible opportunity? Perhaps you want a proof that my theory is correct?

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happened to ride back to Lady Verinder's in the company of other people); and I was so strongly convinced of the

worse risk still, in store for Miss Verinder that I recommended following the Colonel's plan, and destroying the

identity of the gem by having it cut into separate stones. How its extraordinary disappearance that night, made my

advice useless, and utterly defeated the Hindoo plot--and how all further action on the part of the Indians was

paralysed the next day by their confinement in prison as rogues and vagabonds--you know as well as I do. The first

act in the conspiracy closes there. Before we go on to the second, may I ask whether I have met your difficulty, with

an explanation which is satisfactory to the mind of a practical man?"

It was impossible to deny that he had met my difficulty fairly; thanks to his superior knowledge of the Indian

character--and thanks to his not having had hundreds of other Wills to think of since Colonel Herncastle's time!

"So far, so good," resumed Mr. Murthwaite. "The first chance the Indians had of seizing the Diamond was a

chance lost, on the day when they were committed to the prison at Frizinghall. When did the second chance offer

itself? The second chance offered itself--as I am in a condition to prove--while they were still in confinement."

He took out his pocket-book, and opened it at a particular leaf, before he went on.

"I was staying," he resumed, "with some friends at Frizinghall, at the time. A day or two before the Indians were

set free (on a Monday, I think), the governor of the prison came to me with a letter. It had been left for the Indians

by one Mrs. Macann, of whom they had hired the lodging in which they lived; and it had been delivered at Mrs.

Macann's door, in ordinary course of post, on the previous morning. The prison authorities had noticed that the

postmark was 'Lambeth,' and that the address on the outside, though expressed in correct English, was, in form,

oddly at variance with the customary method of directing a letter. On opening it, they had found the contents to be

written in a foreign language, which they rightly guessed at as Hindustani. Their object in coming to me was, of

course, to have the letter translated to them. I took a copy in my pocket-book of the original, and of my translation--
and there they are at your service."

He handed me the open pocket-book. The address on the letter was the first thing copied. It was all written in one paragraph, without any attempt at punctuation, thus: "To the three Indian men living with the lady called Macann at Frizinghall in Yorkshire." The Hindoo characters followed; and the English translation appeared at the end, expressed in these mysterious words:

"In the name of the Regent of the Night, whose seat is on the Antelope, whose arms embrace the four corners of the earth.

"Brothers, turn your faces to the south, and come to me in the street of many noises, which leads down to the muddy river.

"The reason is this.

"My own eyes have seen it."

There the letter ended, without either date or signature. I handed it back to Mr. Murthwaite, and owned that this curious specimen of Hindoo correspondence rather puzzled me.

"I can explain the first sentence to you," he said; "and the conduct of the Indians themselves will explain the rest. The god of the moon is represented, in the Hindoo mythology, as a four-armed deity, seated on an antelope; and one of his titles is the regent of the night. Here, then, to begin with, is something which looks suspiciously like an indirect reference to the Moonstone. Now, let us see what the Indians did, after the prison authorities had allowed them to receive their letter. On the very day when they were set free they went at once to the railway station, and took their places in the first train that started for London. We all thought it a pity at Frizinghall that their proceedings were not privately watched. But, after Lady Verinder had dismissed the police-officer, and had stopped all further inquiry into the loss of the Diamond, no one else could presume to stir in the matter. The Indians were free to go to London, and to London they went. What was the next news we heard of them, Mr. Bruff?"

"They were annoying Mr. Luker," I answered, "by loitering about the house at Lambeth."

"Did you read the report of Mr. Luker's application to the magistrate?"

"Yes."

"In the course of his statement he referred, if you remember, to a foreign workman in his employment, whom he had just dismissed on suspicion of attempted theft, and whom he also distrusted as possibly acting in collusion with the Indians who had annoyed him. The inference is pretty plain, Mr. Bruff, as to who wrote that letter which puzzled you just now, and as to which of Mr. Luker's Oriental treasures the workman had attempted to steal."

The inference (as I hastened to acknowledge) was too plain to need being pointed out. I had never doubted that the Moonstone had found its way into Mr. Luker's hands, at the time Mr. Murthwaite alluded to. My only question had been, How had the Indians discovered the circumstance? This question (the most difficult to deal with of all, as I had thought) had now received its answer, like the rest. Lawyer as I was, I began to feel that I might trust Mr. Murthwaite to lead me blindfold through the last windings of the labyrinth, along which he had guided me thus far. I paid him the compliment of telling him this, and found my little concession very graciously received.

"You shall give me a piece of information in your turn before we go on," he said. "Somebody must have taken the Moonstone from Yorkshire to London. And somebody must have raised money on it, or it would never have been in Mr. Luker's possession. Has there been any discovery made of who that person was?"

"None that I know of."

"There was a story (was there not?) about Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. I am told he is an eminent philanthropist--which is decidedly against him, to begin with."

I heartily agreed in this with Mr. Murthwaite. At the same time, I felt bound to inform him (without, it is needless to say, mentioning Miss Verinder's name) that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite had been cleared of all suspicion, on evidence which I could answer for as entirely beyond dispute.

"Very well," said Mr. Murthwaite, quietly, "let us leave it to time to clear the matter up. In the meanwhile, Mr. Bruff, we must get back again to the Indians, on your account. Their journey to London simply ended in their becoming the victims of another defeat. The loss of their second chance of seizing the Diamond is mainly attributable, as I think, to the cunning and foresight of Mr. Luker--who doesn't stand at the top of the prosperous and ancient profession of usury for nothing! By the prompt dismissal of the man in his employment, he deprived the Indians of the assistance which their confederate would have rendered them in getting into the house. By the prompt transport of the Moonstone to his banker's, he took the conspirators by surprise before they were prepared with a new plan for robbing him. How the Indians, in this latter case, suspected what he had done, and how they contrived to possess themselves of his banker's receipt, are events too recent to need dwelling on. Let it be enough to say that they know the Moonstone to be once more out of their reach; deposited (under the general description of 'a valuable of great price') in a banker's strong room. Now, Mr. Bruff, what is their third chance of seizing the Diamond? and when will it come?"
As the question passed his lips, I penetrated the motive of the Indian's visit to my office at last!

"I see it!" I exclaimed. "The Indians take it for granted, as we do, that the Moonstone has been pledged; and they want to be certainly informed of the earliest period at which the pledge can be redeemed--because that will be the earliest period at which the Diamond can be removed from the safe keeping of the bank!"

"I told you you would find it out for yourself, Mr. Bruff, if I only gave you a fair chance. In a year from the time when the Moonstone was pledged, the Indians will be on the watch for their third chance. Mr. Luker's own lips have told them how long they will have to wait, and your respectable authority has satisfied them that Mr. Luker has spoken the truth. When do we suppose, at a rough guess, that the Diamond found its way into the money-lender's hands?"

"Towards the end of last June," I answered, "as well as I can reckon it."

"And we are now in the year 'forty-eight. Very good. If the unknown person who has pledged the Moonstone can redeem it in a year, the jewel will be in that person's possession again at the end of June, 'forty-nine. I shall be thousands of miles from England and English news at that date. But it may be worth YOUR while to take a note of it, and to arrange to be in London at the time."

"You think something serious will happen?" I said.

"I think I shall be safer," he answered, "among the fiercest fanatics of Central Asia than I should be if I crossed the door of the bank with the Moonstone in my pocket. The Indians have been defeated twice running, Mr. Bruff. It's my firm belief that they won't be defeated a third time."

Those were the last words he said on the subject. The coffee came in; the guests rose, and dispersed themselves about the room; and we joined the ladies of the dinner-party upstairs.

I made a note of the date, and it may not be amiss if I close my narrative by repeating that note here:

JUNE, 'FORTY-NINE. EXPECT NEWS OF THE INDIANS, TOWARDS THE END OF THE MONTH.

And that done, I hand the pen, which I have now no further claim to use, to the writer who follows me next.

THIRD NARRATIVE
Contributed by FRANKLIN BLAKE
CHAPTER I

In the spring of the year eighteen hundred and forty-nine I was wandering in the East, and had then recently altered the travelling plans which I had laid out some months before, and which I had communicated to my lawyer and my banker in London.

This change made it necessary for me to send one of my servants to obtain my letters and remittances from the English consul in a certain city, which was no longer included as one of my resting-places in my new travelling scheme. The man was to join me again at an appointed place and time. An accident, for which he was not responsible, delayed him on his errand. For a week I and my people waited, encamped on the borders of a desert. At the end of that time the missing man made his appearance, with the money and the letters, at the entrance of my tent.

"I am afraid I bring you bad news, sir," he said, and pointed to one of the letters, which had a mourning border round it, and the address on which was in the handwriting of Mr. Bruff.

I know nothing, in a case of this kind, so unendurable as suspense. The letter with the mourning border was the letter that I opened first.

It informed me that my father was dead, and that I was heir to his great fortune. The wealth which had thus fallen into my hands brought its responsibilities with it, and Mr. Bruff entreated me to lose no time in returning to England.

By daybreak the next morning, I was on my way back to my own country.

The picture presented of me, by my old friend Betteredge, at the time of my departure from England, is (as I think) a little overdrawn. He has, in his own quaint way, interpreted seriously one of his young mistress's many satirical references to my foreign education; and has persuaded himself that he actually saw those French, German, and Italian sides to my character, which my lively cousin only professed to discover in jest, and which never had any real existence, except in our good Betteredge's own brain. But, barring this drawback, I am bound to own that he has stated no more than the truth in representing me as wounded to the heart by Rachel's treatment, and as leaving England in the first keenness of suffering caused by the bitterest disappointment of my life.

I went abroad, resolved--if change and absence could help me--to forget her. It is, I am persuaded, no true view of human nature which denies that change and absence DO help a man under these circumstances; they force his attention away from the exclusive contemplation of his own sorrow. I never forgot her; but the pang of remembrance lost its worst bitterness, little by little, as time, distance, and novelty interposed themselves more and more effectually between Rachel and me.

On the other hand, it is no less certain that, with the act of turning homeward, the remedy which had gained its ground so steadily, began now, just as steadily, to drop back. The nearer I drew to the country which she inhabited,
and to the prospect of seeing her again, the more irresistibly her influence began to recover its hold on me. On leaving England she was the last person in the world whose name I would have suffered to pass my lips. On returning to England, she was the first person I inquired after, when Mr. Bruff and I met again.

I was informed, of course, of all that had happened in my absence; in other words, of all that has been related here in continuation of Betteredge’s narrative—one circumstance only being excepted. Mr. Bruff did not, at that time, feel himself at liberty to inform me of the motives which had privately influenced Rachel and Godfrey Ablewhites in recalling the marriage promise, on either side. I troubled him with no embarrassing questions on this delicate subject. It was relief enough to me, after the jealous disappointment caused by hearing that she had ever contemplated being Godfrey’s wife, to know that reflection had convinced her of acting rashly, and that she had effected her own release from her marriage engagement.

Having heard the story of the past, my next inquiries (still inquiries after Rachel!) advanced naturally to the present time. Under whose care had she been placed after leaving Mr. Bruff’s house? and where was she living now? She was living under the care of a widowed sister of the late Sir John Verinder—one Mrs. Merridew—whom her mother’s executors had requested to act as guardian, and who had accepted the proposal. They were reported to me as getting on together admirably well, and as being now established, for the season, in Mrs. Merridew’s house in Portland Place.

Half an hour after receiving this information, I was on my way to Portland Place—without having had the courage to own it to Mr. Bruff!

The man who answered the door was not sure whether Miss Verinder was at home or not. I sent him upstairs with my card, as the speediest way of setting the question at rest. The man came down again with an impenetrable face, and informed me that Miss Verinder was out.

I might have suspected other people of purposely denying themselves to me. But it was impossible to suspect Rachel. I left word that I would call again at six o’clock that evening.

At six o’clock I was informed for the second time that Miss Verinder was not at home. Had any message been left for me? No message had been left for me. Had Miss Verinder not received my card? The servant begged my pardon—Miss Verinder HAD received it.

The inference was too plain to be resisted. Rachel declined to see me.

On my side, I declined to be treated in this way, without making an attempt, at least, to discover a reason for it. I sent up my name to Mrs. Merridew, and requested her to favour me with a personal interview at any hour which it might be most convenient to her name.

Mrs. Merridew made no difficulty about receiving me at once. I was shown into a comfortable little sitting-room, and found myself in the presence of a comfortable little elderly lady. She was so good as to feel great regret and much surprise, entirely on my account. She was at the same time, however, not in a position to offer me any explanation, or to press Rachel on a matter which appeared to relate to a question of private feeling alone. This was said over and over again, with a polite patience that nothing could tire; and this was all I gained by applying to Mrs. Merridew.

My last chance was to write to Rachel. My servant took a letter to her the next day, with strict instructions to wait for an answer.

The answer came back, literally in one sentence.

"Miss Verinder begs to decline entering into any correspondence with Mr. Franklin Blake."

Fond as I was of her, I felt indignantly the insult offered to me in that reply. Mr. Bruff came in to speak to me on business, before I had recovered possession of myself. I dismissed the business on the spot, and laid the whole case before him. He proved to be as incapable of enlightening me as Mrs. Merridew herself. I asked him if any slander had been spoken of me in Rachel’s hearing. Mr. Bruff was not aware of any slander of which I was the object. Had she referred to me in any way while she was staying under Mr. Bruff’s roof? Never. Had she not so much as asked, during all my long absence, whether I was living or dead? No such question had ever passed her lips. I took out of my pocket-book the letter which poor Lady Verinder had written to me from Frizinghall, on the day when I left her house in Yorkshire. And I pointed Mr. Bruff’s attention to these two sentences in it:

"The valuable assistance which you rendered to the inquiry after the lost jewel is still an unpardoned offence, in the present dreadful state of Rachel’s mind. Moving blindfold in this matter, you have added to the burden of anxiety which she has had to bear, by innocently threatening her secret with discovery through your exertions."

"Is it possible," I asked, "that the feeling towards me which is there described, is as bitter as ever against me now?"

Mr. Bruff looked unaffectedly distressed.

"If you insist on an answer," he said, "I own I can place no other interpretation on her conduct than that."

I rang the bell, and directed my servant to pack my portmanteau, and to send out for a railway guide. Mr. Bruff
asked, in astonishment, what I was going to do.

"I am going to Yorkshire," I answered, "by the next train."

"May I ask for what purpose?"

"Mr. Bruff, the assistance I innocently rendered to the inquiry after the Diamond was an unpardoned offence, in Rachel's mind, nearly a year since; and it remains an unpardoned offence still. I won't accept that position! I am determined to find out the secret of her silence towards her mother, and her enmity towards me. If time, pains, and money can do it, I will lay my hand on the thief who took the Moonstone!"

The worthy old gentleman attempted to remonstrate—to induce me to listen to reason—to do his duty towards me, in short. I was deaf to everything that he could urge. No earthly consideration would, at that moment, have shaken the resolution that was in me.

"I shall take up the inquiry again," I went on, "at the point where I dropped it; and I shall follow it onwards, step by step, till I come to the present time. There are missing links in the evidence, as I left it, which Gabriel Betteredge can supply, and to Gabriel Betteredge I go!"

Towards sunset that evening I stood again on the well-remembered terrace, and looked once more at the peaceful old country house. The gardener was the first person whom I saw in the deserted grounds. He had left Betteredge, an hour since, sunning himself in the customary corner of the back yard. I knew it well; and I said I would go and seek him myself.

I walked round by the familiar paths and passages, and looked in at the open gate of the yard.

There he was--the dear old friend of the happy days that were never to come again--there he was in the old corner, on the old beehive chair, with his pipe in his mouth, and his ROBINSON CRUSOE on his lap, and his two friends, the dogs, dozing on either side of him! In the position in which I stood, my shadow was projected in front of me by the last slanting rays of the sun. Either the dogs saw it, or their keen scent informed them of my approach; they started up with a growl. Starting in his turn, the old man quieted them by a word, and then shaded his failing eyes with his hand, and looked inquiringly at the figure at the gate.

My own eyes were full of tears. I was obliged to wait a moment before I could trust myself to speak to him.

CHAPTER II

"Betteredge!" I said, pointing to the well-remembered book on his knee, "has ROBINSON CRUSOE informed you, this evening, that you might expect to see Franklin Blake?"

"By the lord Harry, Mr. Franklin!" cried the old man, "that's exactly what ROBINSON CRUSOE has done!"

He struggled to his feet with my assistance, and stood for a moment, looking backwards and forwards between ROBINSON CRUSOE and me, apparently at a loss to discover which of us had surprised him most. The verdict ended in favour of the book. Holding it open before him in both hands, he surveyed the wonderful volume with a stare of unutterable anticipation—as if he expected to see Robinson Crusoe himself walk out of the pages, and favour us with a personal interview.

"Here's the bit, Mr. Franklin!" he said, as soon as he had recovered the use of his speech. "As I live by bread, sir, here's the bit I was reading, the moment before you came in! Page one hundred and fifty-six as follows:—'I stood like one Thunderstruck, or as if I had seen an Apparition.' If that isn't as much as to say: 'Expect the sudden appearance of Mr. Franklin Blake'—there's no meaning in the English language!'" said Betteredge, closing the book with a bang, and getting one of his hands free at last to take the hand which I offered him.

I had expected him, naturally enough under the circumstances, to overwhelm me with questions. But no—the hospitable impulse was the uppermost impulse in the old servant's mind, when a member of the family appeared (no matter how!) as a visitor at the house.

"Walk in, Mr. Franklin," he said, opening the door behind him, with his quaint old-fashioned bow. "I'll ask what brings you here afterwards—I must make you comfortable first. There have been sad changes, since you went away. The house is shut up, and the servants are gone. Never mind that! I'll cook your dinner; and the gardener's wife will make your bed—and if there's a bottle of our famous Latour claret left in the cellar, down your throat, Mr. Franklin, that bottle shall go. I bid you welcome, sir! I bid you heartily welcome!" said the poor old fellow, fighting manfully against the gloom of the deserted house, and receiving me with the sociable and courteous attention of the bygone time.

It vexed me to disappoint him. But the house was Rachel's house, now. Could I eat in it, or sleep in it, after what had happened in London? The commonest sense of self-respect forbade me—properly forbade me—to cross the threshold.

I took Betteredge by the arm, and led him out into the garden. There was no help for it. I was obliged to tell him the truth. Between his attachment to Rachel, and his attachment to me, he was sorely puzzled and distressed at the turn things had taken. His opinion, when he expressed it, was given in his usual downright manner, and was agreeably redolent of the most positive philosophy I know—the philosophy of the Betteredge school.
"Miss Rachel has her faults--I've never denied it," he began. "And riding the high horse, now and then, is one of them. She has been trying to ride over you--and you have put up with it. Lord, Mr. Franklin, don't you know women by this time better than that? You have heard me talk of the late Mrs. Betteredge?"

I had heard him talk of the late Mrs. Betteredge pretty often--invariably producing her as his one undeniable example of the inbred frailty and perversity of the other sex. In that capacity he exhibited her now.

"Very well, Mr. Franklin. Now listen to me. Different women have different ways of riding the high horse. The late Mrs. Betteredge took her exercise on that favourite female animal whenever I happened to deny her anything that she had set her heart on. So sure as I came home from my work on these occasions, so sure was my wife to call to me up the kitchen stairs, and to say that, after my brutal treatment of her, she hadn't the heart to cook me my dinner. I put up with it for some time--just as you are putting up with it now from Miss Rachel. At last my patience wore out. I went downstairs, and took Mrs. Betteredge--affectionately, you understand--up in my arms, and carried her, holus-bolus, into the best parlour where she received her company. I said 'That's the right place for you, my dear,' and so went back to the kitchen. I locked myself in, and took off my coat, and turned up my shirt-sleeves, and cooked my own dinner. When it was done, I served it up in my best manner, and enjoyed it most heartily. I had my pipe and my drop of grog afterwards; and then I cleared the table, and washed the crockery, and cleaned the knives and forks, and put the things away, and swept up the hearth. When things were as bright and clean again, as bright and clean could be, I opened the door and let Mrs. Betteredge in. 'I've had my dinner, my dear,' I said; 'and I hope you will find that I have left the kitchen all that your fondest wishes can desire.' For the rest of that woman's life, Mr. Franklin, I never had to cook my dinner again! Moral: You have put up with Miss Rachel in London; don't put up with her in Yorkshire. Come back to the house!"

Quite unanswerable! I could only assure my good friend that even HIS powers of persuasion were, in this case, thrown away on me.

"It's a lovely evening," I said. "I shall walk to Frizinghall, and stay at the hotel, and you must come to-morrow morning and breakfast with me. I have something to say to you."

Betteredge shook his head gravely.

"I am heartily sorry for this," he said. "I had hoped, Mr. Franklin, to hear that things were all smooth and pleasant again between you and Miss Rachel. If you must have your own way, sir," he continued, after a moment's reflection, "there is no need to go to Frizinghall to-night for a bed. It's to be had nearer than that. There's Hotherstone's Farm, barely two miles from here. You can hardly object to THAT on Miss Rachel's account," the old man added sily. "Hotherstone lives, Mr. Franklin, on his own freehold."

I remembered the place the moment Betteredge mentioned it. The farm-house stood in a sheltered inland valley, on the banks of the prettiest stream in that part of Yorkshire: and the farmer had a spare bedroom and parlour, which he was accustomed to let to artists, anglers, and tourists in general. A more agreeable place of abode, during my stay in the neighbourhood, I could not have wished to find.

"Are the rooms to let?" I inquired.

"Mrs. Hotherstone herself, sir, asked for my good word to recommend the rooms, yesterday."

"I'll take them, Betteredge, with the greatest pleasure."

We went back to the yard, in which I had left my travelling-bag. After putting a stick through the handle, and swinging the bag over his shoulder, Betteredge appeared to relapse into the bewilderment which my sudden appearance had caused, when I surprised him in the beehive chair. He looked incredulously at the house, and then he wheeled about, and looked more incredulously still at me.

"I've lived a goodish long time in the world," said this best and dearest of all old servants--"but the like of this, I never did expect to see. There stands the house, and here stands Mr. Franklin Blake--and, Damme, if one of them isn't turning his back on the other, and going to sleep in a lodging!"

He led the way out, wagging his head and growling ominously. "There's only one more miracle that CAN happen," he said to me, over his shoulder. "The next thing you'll do, Mr. Franklin, will be to pay me back that seven-and-sixpence you borrowed of me when you were a boy."

This stroke of sarcasm put him in a better humour with himself and with me. We left the house, and passed through the lodge gates. Once clear of the grounds, the duties of hospitality (in Betteredge's code of morals) ceased, and the privileges of curiosity began.

He dropped back, so as to let me get on a level with him. "Fine evening for a walk, Mr. Franklin," he said, as if we had just accidentally encountered each other at that moment. "Supposing you had gone to the hotel at Frizinghall, sir?"

"Yes?"

"I should have had the honour of breakfasting with you, to-morrow morning."

"Come and breakfast with me at Hotherstone's Farm, instead."
"Much obliged to you for your kindness, Mr. Franklin. But it wasn't exactly breakfast that I was driving at. I think you mentioned that you had something to say to me? If it's no secret, sir," said Betteredge, suddenly abandoning the crooked way, and taking the straight one, "I'm burning to know what's brought you down here, if you please, in this sudden way."

"What brought me here before?" I asked.

"The Moonstone, Mr. Franklin. But what brings you now, sir?"

"The Moonstone again, Betteredge."

The old man suddenly stood still, and looked at me in the grey twilight as if he suspected his own ears of deceiving him.

"If that's a joke, sir," he said, "I'm afraid I'm getting a little dull in my old age. I don't take it."

"It's no joke," I answered. "I have come here to take up the inquiry which was dropped when I left England. I have come here to do what nobody has done yet--to find out who took the Diamond."

"Let the Diamond be, Mr. Franklin! Take my advice, and let the Diamond be! That cursed Indian jewel has misguided everybody who has come near it. Don't waste your money and your temper--in the fine spring time of your life, sir--by meddling with the Moonstone. How can YOU hope to succeed (saving your presence), when Sergeant Cuff himself made a mess of it? Sergeant Cuff!" repeated Betteredge, shaking his forefinger at me sternly. "The greatest policeman in England!"

"My mind is made up, my old friend. Even Sergeant Cuff doesn't daunt me. By-the-bye, I may want to speak to him, sooner or later. Have you heard anything of him lately?"

"The Sergeant won't help you, Mr. Franklin."

"Why not?"

"There has been an event, sir, in the police-circles, since you went away. The great Cuff has retired from business. He has got a little cottage at Dorking; and he's up to his eyes in the growing of roses. I have it in his own handwriting, Mr. Franklin. He has grown the white moss rose, without budding it on the dog-rose first. And Mr. Begbie the gardener is to go to Dorking, and own that the Sergeant has beaten him at last."

"It doesn't much matter," I said. "I must do without Sergeant Cuff's help. And I must trust to you, at starting."

It is likely enough that I spoke rather carelessly.

At any rate, Betteredge seemed to be piqued by something in the reply which I had just made to him. "You might trust to worse than me, Mr. Franklin--I can tell you that," he said a little sharply.

The tone in which he retorted, and a certain disturbance, after he had spoken, which I detected in his manner, suggested to me that he was possessed of some information which he hesitated to communicate.

"I expect you to help me," I said, "in picking up the fragments of evidence which Sergeant Cuff has left behind him. I know you can do that. Can you do no more?"

"What more can you expect from me, sir?" asked Betteredge, with an appearance of the utmost humility.

"I expect more--from what you said just now."

"Mere boasting, Mr. Franklin," returned the old man obstinately. "Some people are born boasters, and they never get over it to their dying day. I'm one of them."

There was only one way to take with him. I appealed to his interest in Rachel, and his interest in me.

"Betteredge, would you be glad to hear that Rachel and I were good friends again?"

"I have served your family, sir, to mighty little purpose, if you doubt it!"

"Do you remember how Rachel treated me, before I left England?"

"As well as if it was yesterday! My lady herself wrote you a letter about it; and you were so good as to show the letter to me. It said that Miss Rachel was mortally offended with you, for the part you had taken in trying to recover her jewel. And neither my lady, nor you, nor anybody else could guess why.

"Quite true, Betteredge! And I come back from my travels, and find her mortally offended with me still. I knew that the Diamond was at the bottom of it, last year, and I know that the Diamond is at the bottom of it now. I have tried to speak to her, and she won't see me. I have tried to write to her, and she won't answer me. How, in Heaven's name, am I to clear the matter up? The chance of searching into the loss of the Moonstone, is the one chance of inquiry that Rachel herself has left me."

Those words evidently put the case before him, as he had not seen it yet. He asked a question which satisfied me that I had shaken him.

"There is no ill-feeling in this, Mr. Franklin, on your side--is there?"

"There was some anger," I answered, "when I left London. But that is all worn out now. I want to make Rachel come to an understanding with me--and I want nothing more."

"You don't feel any fear, sir--supposing you make any discoveries--in regard to what you may find out about Miss Rachel?"
I understood the jealous belief in his young mistress which prompted those words.
"I am as certain of her as you are," I answered. "The fullest disclosure of her secret will reveal nothing that can alter her place in your estimation, or in mine."

Betteredge's last-left scruples vanished at that.
"If I am doing wrong to help you, Mr. Franklin," he exclaimed, "all I can say is--I am as innocent of seeing it as the babe unborn! I can put you on the road to discovery, if you can only go on by yourself. You remember that poor girl of ours--Rosanna Spearman?"
"Of course!"
"You always thought she had some sort of confession in regard to this matter of the Moonstone, which she wanted to make to you?"
"I certainly couldn't account for her strange conduct in any other way."
"You may set that doubt at rest, Mr. Franklin, whenever you please."

It was my turn to come to a standstill now. I tried vainly, in the gathering darkness, to see his face. In the surprise of the moment, I asked a little impatiently what he meant.

"Steady, sir!" proceeded Betteredge. "I mean what I say. Rosanna Spearman left a sealed letter behind her--a letter addressed to YOU."
"Where is it?"
"In the possession of a friend of hers, at Cobb's Hole. You must have heard tell, when you were here last, sir, of Limping Lucy--a lame girl with a crutch."
"The fisherman's daughter?"
"The same, Mr. Franklin."
"Why wasn't the letter forwarded to me?"

"Limping Lucy has a will of her own, sir. She wouldn't give it into any hands but yours. And you had left England before I could write to you."
"Let's go back, Betteredge, and get it at once!"
"Too late, sir, to-night. They're great savers of candles along our coast; and they go to bed early at Cobb's Hole."
"Nonsense! We might get there in half an hour."
"You might, sir. And when you did get there, you would find the door locked. He pointed to a light, glimmering below us; and, at the same moment, I heard through the stillness of the evening the bubbling of a stream. 'There's the Farm, Mr. Franklin! Make yourself comfortable for to-night, and come to me to-morrow morning if you'll be so kind."
"You will go with me to the fisherman's cottage?"
"Yes, sir."
"Early?"
"As early, Mr. Franklin, as you like."

We descended the path that led to the Farm.

CHAPTER III
I have only the most indistinct recollection of what happened at Hotherstone's Farm.
I remember a hearty welcome; a prodigious supper, which would have fed a whole village in the East; a delightfully clean bedroom, with nothing in it to regret but that detestable product of the folly of our fore-fathers--a feather-bed; a restless night, with much kindling of matches, and many lightings of one little candle; and an immense sensation of relief when the sun rose, and there was a prospect of getting up.

It had been arranged over-night with Betteredge, that I was to call for him, on our way to Cobb's Hole, as early as I liked--which, interpreted by my impatience to get possession of the letter, meant as early as I could. Without waiting for breakfast at the Farm, I took a crust of bread in my hand, and set forth, in some doubt whether I should not surprise the excellent Betteredge in his bed. To my great relief he proved to be quite as excited about the coming event as I was. I found him ready, and waiting for me, with his stick in his hand.

"How are you this morning, Betteredge?"
"Very poorly, sir."
"Sorry to hear it. What do you complain of?"
"I complain of a new disease, Mr. Franklin, of my own inventing. I don't want to alarm you, but you're certain to catch it before the morning is out."
"The devil I am!"
"Do you feel an uncomfortable heat at the pit of your stomach, sir? and a nasty thumping at the top of your head? Ah! not yet? It will lay hold of you at Cobb's Hole, Mr. Franklin. I call it the detective-fever; and I first caught it in the company of Sergeant Cuff."
"Aye! aye! and the cure in this instance is to open Rosanna Spearman's letter, I suppose? Come along, and let's get it."

Early as it was, we found the fisherman's wife astir in her kitchen. On my presentation by Betteredge, good Mrs. Yolland performed a social ceremony, strictly reserved (as I afterwards learnt) for strangers of distinction. She put a bottle of Dutch gin and a couple of clean pipes on the table, and opened the conversation by saying, "What news from London, sir?"

Before I could find an answer to this immensely comprehensive question, an apparition advanced towards me, out of a dark corner of the kitchen. A wan, wild, haggard girl, with remarkably beautiful hair, and with a fierce keenness in her eyes, came limping up on a crutch to the table at which I was sitting, and looked at me as if I was an object of mingled interest and horror, which it quite fascinated her to see.

"Mr. Betteredge," she said, without taking her eyes off me, "mention his name again, if you please."

"This gentleman's name," answered Betteredge (with a strong emphasis on GENTLEMAN), "is Mr. Franklin Blake."

The girl turned her back on me, and suddenly left the room. Good Mrs. Yolland—as I believe—made some apologies for her daughter's odd behaviour, and Betteredge (probably) translated them into polite English. I speak of this in complete uncertainty. My attention was absorbed in following the sound of the girl's crutch. Thump-thump, up the wooden stairs; thump-thump across the room above our heads; thump-thump down the stairs again—and there stood the apparition at the open door, with a letter in its hand, beckoning me out!

I left more apologies in course of delivery behind me, and followed this strange creature—limping on before me, faster and faster—down the slope of the beach. She led me behind some boats, out of sight and hearing of the few people in the fishing-village, and then stopped, and faced me for the first time.

"Stand there," she said, "I want to look at you."

There was no mistaking the expression on her face. I inspired her with the strongest emotions of abhorrence and disgust. Let me not be vain enough to say that no woman had ever looked at me in this manner before. I will only venture on the more modest assertion that no woman had ever let me perceive it yet. There is a limit to the length of the inspection which a man can endure, under certain circumstances. I attempted to direct Limping Lucy's attention to some less revolting object than my face.

"I think you have got a letter to give me," I began. "Is it the letter there, in your hand?"

"Say that again," was the only answer I received.

I repeated the words, like a good child learning its lesson.

"No," said the girl, speaking to herself, but keeping her eyes still mercilessly fixed on me. "I can't find out what she saw in his face. I can't guess what she heard in his voice." She suddenly looked away from me, and rested her head wearily on the top of her crutch. "Oh, my poor dear!" she said, in the first soft tones which had fallen from her, in my hearing. "Oh, my lost darling! what could you see in this man?" She lifted her head again fiercely, and looked at me once more. "Can you eat and drink?" she asked.

I did my best to preserve my gravity, and answered, "Yes."

"Can you sleep?"

"Yes."

"When you see a poor girl in service, do you feel no remorse?"

"Certainly not. Why should I?"

She abruptly thrust the letter (as the phrase is) into my face.

"Take it!" she exclaimed furiously. "I never set eyes on you before. God Almighty forbid I should ever set eyes on you again."

With those parting words she limped away from me at the top of her speed. The one interpretation that I could put on her conduct has, no doubt, been anticipated by everybody. I could only suppose that she was mad.

Having reached that inevitable conclusion, I turned to the more interesting object of investigation which was presented to me by Rosanna Spearman's letter. The address was written as follows:—"For Franklin Blake, Esq. To be given into his own hands (and not to be trusted to any one else), by Lucy Yolland."

I broke the seal. The envelope contained a letter: and this, in its turn, contained a slip of paper. I read the letter first:—

"Sir,—If you are curious to know the meaning of my behaviour to you, whilst you were staying in the house of my mistress, Lady Verinder, do what you are told to do in the memorandum enclosed with this—and do it without any person being present to overlook you. Your humble servant,

"ROSANNA SPEARMAN."

I turned to the slip of paper next. Here is the literal copy of it, word for word:

"Memorandum:—To go to the Shivering Sand at the turn of the tide. To walk out on the South Spit, until I get the
South Spit Beacon, and the flagstaff at the Coast-guard station above Cobb's Hole in a line together. To lay down on
the rocks, a stick, or any straight thing to guide my hand, exactly in the line of the beacon and the flagstaff. To take
care, in doing this, that one end of the stick shall be at the edge of the rocks, on the side of them which overlooks the
quicksand. To feel along the stick, among the sea-weed (beginning from the end of the stick which points towards
the beacon), for the Chain. To run my hand along the Chain, when found, until I come to the part of it which
stretches over the edge of the rocks, down into the quicksand. AND THEN TO PULL THE CHAIN."

Just as I had read the last words--underlined in the original--I heard the voice of Betteredge behind me. The
inventor of the detective-fever had completely succumbed to that irresistible malady. "I can't stand it any longer, Mr.
Franklin. What does her letter say? For mercy's sake, sir, tell us, what does her letter say?"

I handed him the letter, and the memorandum. He read the first without appearing to be much interested in it.
But the second--the memorandum--produced a strong impression on him.

"The Sergeant said it!" cried Betteredge. "From first to last, sir, the Sergeant said she had got a memorandum of
the hiding-place. And here it is! Lord save us, Mr. Franklin, here is the secret that puzzled everybody, from the great
Cuff downwards, ready and waiting, as one may say, to show itself to YOU! It's the ebb now, sir, as anybody may
see for themselves. How long will it be till the turn of the tide?" He looked up, and observed a lad at work, at some
little distance from us, mending a net. "Tammie Bright!" he shouted at the top of his voice.

"I hear you!" Tammie shouted back.
"When's the turn of the tide?"
"In an hour's time."
We both looked at our watches.

"We can go round by the coast, Mr. Franklin," said Betteredge; "and get to the quicksand in that way with plenty
of time to spare. What do you say, sir?"

"Come along!"

On our way to the Shivering Sand, I applied to Betteredge to revive my memory of events (as affecting Rosanna
Spearman) at the period of Sergeant Cuff's inquiry. With my old friend's help, I soon had the succession of
circumstances clearly registered in my mind. Rosanna's journey to Frizinghall, when the whole household believed
her to be ill in her own room--Rosanna's mysterious employment of the night-time with her door locked, and her
candle burning till the morning--Rosanna's suspicious purchase of the japanned tin case, and the two dog's chains
from Mrs. Yolland--the Sergeant's positive conviction that Rosanna had hidden something at the Shivering Sand,
and the Sergeant's absolute ignorance as to what that something might be--all these strange results of the abortive
inquiry into the loss of the Moonstone were clearly present to me again, when we reached the quicksand, and walked
out together on the low ledge of rocks called the South Spit.

With Betteredge's help, I soon stood in the right position to see the Beacon and the Coast-guard flagstaff in a line
together. Following the memorandum as our guide, we next laid my stick in the necessary direction, as neatly as we
could, on the uneven surface of the rocks. And then we looked at our watches once more.

It wanted nearly twenty minutes yet of the turn of the tide. I suggested waiting through this interval on the beach,
instead of on the wet and slippery surface of the rocks. Having reached the dry sand, I prepared to sit down; and,
greatly to my surprise, Betteredge prepared to leave me.

"What are you going away for?" I asked.
"Look at the letter again, sir, and you will see."
A glance at the letter reminded me that I was charged, when I made my discovery, to make it alone.

"It's hard enough for me here to leave you, at such a time as this," said Betteredge. "But she died a dreadful death,
poor soul--and I feel a kind of call on me, Mr. Franklin, to humour that fancy of hers. Besides," he added,
confidentially, "there's nothing in the letter against your letting out the secret afterwards. I'll hang about in the fir
plantation, and wait till you pick me up. Don't be longer than you can help, sir. The detective-fever isn't an easy
disease to deal with, under THESE circumstances."

With that parting caution, he left me.

The interval of expectation, short as it was when reckoned by the measure of time, assumed formidable
proportions when reckoned by the measure of suspense. This was one of the occasions on which the invaluable habit
of smoking becomes especially precious and consolatory. I lit a cigar, and sat down on the slope of the beach.

The sunlight poured its unclouded beauty on every object that I could see. The exquisite freshness of the air made
the mere act of living and breathing a luxury. Even the lonely little bay welcomed the morning with a show of
cheerfulness; and the bare wet surface of the quicksand itself, glittering with a golden brightness, hid the horror of
its false brown face under a passing smile. It was the finest day I had seen since my return to England.

The turn of the tide came, before my cigar was finished. I saw the preliminary heaving of the Sand, and then the
awful shiver that crept over its surface--as if some spirit of terror lived and moved and shuddered in the fathomless
deeps beneath. I threw away my cigar, and went back again to the rocks.

My directions in the memorandum instructed me to feel along the line traced by the stick, beginning with the end which was nearest to the beacon.

I advanced, in this manner, more than half way along the stick, without encountering anything but the edges of the rocks. An inch or two further on, however, my patience was rewarded. In a narrow little fissure, just within reach of my forefinger, I felt the chain. Attempting, next, to follow it, by touch, in the direction of the quicksand, I found my progress stopped by a thick growth of seaweed—which had fastened itself into the fissure, no doubt, in the time that had elapsed since Rosanna Spearman had chosen her hiding-place.

It was equally impossible to pull up the seaweed, or to force my hand through it. After marking the spot indicated by the end of the stick which was placed nearest to the quicksand, I determined to pursue the search for the chain on a plan of my own. My idea was to "sound" immediately under the rocks, on the chance of recovering the lost trace of the chain at the point at which it entered the sand. I took up the stick, and knelt down on the brink of the South Spit.

In this position, my face was within a few feet of the surface of the quicksand. The sight of it so near me, still disturbed at intervals by its hideous shivering fit, shook my nerves for the moment. A horrible fancy that the dead woman might appear on the scene of her suicide, to assist my search—an unutterable dread of seeing her rise through the heaving surface of the sand, and point to the place—forced itself into my mind, and turned me cold in the warm sunlight. I own I closed my eyes at the moment when the point of the stick first entered the quicksand.

The instant afterwards, before the stick could have been submerged more than a few inches, I was free from the hold of my own superstitious terror, and was throbbing with excitement from head to foot. Sounding blindfold, at my first attempt—at that first attempt I had sounded right! The stick struck the chain.

Taking a firm hold of the roots of the seaweed with my left hand, I laid myself down over the brink, and felt with my right hand under the overhanging edges of the rock. My right hand found the chain.

I drew it up without the slightest difficulty. And there was the japanned tin case fastened to the end of it.

The action of the water had so rusted the chain, that it was impossible for me to unfasten it from the hasp which attached it to the case. Putting the case between my knees and exerting my utmost strength, I contrived to draw off the cover. Some white substance filled the whole interior when I looked in. I put in my hand, and found it to be linen.

In drawing out the linen, I also drew out a letter crumpled up with it. After looking at the direction, and discovering that it bore my name, I put the letter in my pocket, and completely removed the linen. It came out in a thick roll, moulded, of course, to the shape of the case in which it had been so long confined, and perfectly preserved from any injury by the sea.

I carried the linen to the dry sand of the beach, and there unrolled and smoothed it out. There was no mistake as to it as an article of dress. It was a nightgown.

The uppermost side, when I spread it out, presented to view innumerable folds and creases, and nothing more. I tried the undermost side, next—and instantly discovered the smear of the paint from the door of Rachel's boudoir! My eyes remained riveted on the stain, and my mind took me back at a leap from present to past. The very words of Sergeant Cuff recurred to me, as if the man himself was at my side again, pointing to the unanswerable inference which he drew from the smear on the door.

"Find out whether there is any article of dress in this house with the stain of paint on it. Find out who that dress belongs to. Find out how the person can account for having been in the room, and smeared the paint between midnight and three in the morning. If the person can't satisfy you, you haven't far to look for the hand that took the Diamond."

One after another those words travelled over my memory, repeating themselves again and again with a wearisome, mechanical reiteration. I was roused from what felt like a trance of many hours—from what was really, no doubt, the pause of a few moments only—by a voice calling to me. I looked up, and saw that Betteredge's patience had failed him at last. He was just visible between the sandhills, returning to the beach.

The old man's appearance recalled me, the moment I perceived it, to my sense of present things, and reminded me that the inquiry which I had pursued thus far still remained incomplete. I had discovered the smear on the nightgown. To whom did the nightgown belong?

My first impulse was to consult the letter in my pocket—the letter which I had found in the case.

As I raised my hand to take it out, I remembered that there was a shorter way to discovery than this. The nightgown itself would reveal the truth, for, in all probability, the nightgown was marked with its owner's name. I took it up from the sand, and looked for the mark.

I found the mark, and read—MY OWN NAME.

There were the familiar letters which told me that the nightgown was mine. I looked up from them.
the sun; there were the glittering waters of the bay; there was old Betteredge, advancing nearer and nearer to me. I looked back again at the letters. My own name. Plainly confronting me--my own name.

"If time, pains, and money can do it, I will lay my hand on the thief who took the Moonstone."--I had left London, with those words on my lips. I had penetrated the secret which the quicksand had kept from every other living creature. And, on the unanswerable evidence of the paint-stain, I had discovered Myself as the Thief.

CHAPTER IV

I have not a word to say about my own sensations.

My impression is that the shock inflicted on me completely suspended my thinking and feeling power. I certainly could not have known what I was about when Betteredge joined me--for I have it on his authority that I laughed, when he asked what was the matter, and putting the nightgown into his hands, told him to read the riddle for himself.

Of what was said between us on the beach, I have not the faintest recollection. The first place in which I can now see myself again plainly is the plantation of firs. Betteredge and I are walking back together to the house; and Betteredge is telling me that I shall be able to face it, and he will be able to face it, when we have had a glass of grog.

The scene shifts from the plantation, to Betteredge's little sitting-room. My resolution not to enter Rachel's house is forgotten. I feel gratefully the coolness and shadiness and quiet of the room. I drink the grog (a perfectly new luxury to me, at that time of day), which my good old friend mixes with icy-cold water from the well. Under any other circumstances, the drink would simply stupefy me. As things are, it strings up my nerves. I begin to "face it," as Betteredge has predicted. And Betteredge, on his side, begins to "face it," too.

The picture which I am now presenting of myself, will, I suspect, be thought a very strange one, to say the least of it. Placed in a situation which may, I think, be described as entirely without parallel, what is the first proceeding to which I resort? Do I seclude myself from all human society? Do I set my mind to analyse the abominable impossibility which, nevertheless, confronts me as an undeniable fact? Do I hurry back to London by the first train to consult the highest authorities, and to set a searching inquiry on foot immediately? No. I accept the shelter of a house which I had resolved never to degrade myself by entering again; and I sit, tippling spirits and water in the company of an old servant, at ten o'clock in the morning. Is this the conduct that might have been expected from a man placed in my horrible position? I can only answer that the sight of old Betteredge's familiar face was an inexpressible comfort to me, and that the drinking of old Betteredge's grog helped me, as I believe nothing else would have helped me, in the state of complete bodily and mental prostration into which I had fallen. I can only offer this excuse for myself; and I can only admire that invariable preservation of dignity, and that strictly logical consistency of conduct which distinguish every man and woman who may read these lines, in every emergency of their lives from the cradle to the grave.

"Now, Mr. Franklin, there's one thing certain, at any rate," said Betteredge, throwing the nightgown down on the table between us, and pointing to it as if it was a living creature that could hear him. "HE'S a liar, to begin with."

This comforting view of the matter was not the view that presented itself to my mind.

"I am as innocent of all knowledge of having taken the Diamond as you are," I said. "But there is the witness against me! The paint on the nightgown, and the name on the nightgown are facts."

Betteredge lifted my glass, and put it persuasively into my hand.

"Facts?" he repeated. "Take a drop more grog, Mr. Franklin, and you'll get over the weakness of believing in facts! Foul play, sir!" he continued, dropping his voice confidentially. "That is how I read the riddle. Foul play somewhere--and you and I must find it out. Was there nothing else in the tin case, when you put your hand into it?"

The question instantly reminded me of the letter in my pocket. I took it out, and opened it. It was a letter of many pages, closely written. I looked impatiently for the signature at the end. "Rosanna Spearman."

As I read the name, a sudden remembrance illuminated my mind, and a sudden suspicion rose out of the new light.

"Stop!" I exclaimed. "Rosanna Spearman came to my aunt out of a reformatory? Rosanna Spearman had once been a thief?"

"There's no denying that, Mr. Franklin. What of it now, if you please?"

"What of it now? How do we know she may not have stolen the Diamond after all? How do we know she may not have smeared my nightgown purposely with the paint?"

Betteredge laid his hand on my arm, and stopped me before I could say any more.

"You will be cleared of this, Mr. Franklin, beyond all doubt. But I hope you won't be cleared in THAT way. See what the letter says, sir. In justice to the girl's memory, see what it says."

I felt the earnestness with which he spoke--felt it as a friendly rebuke to me. "You shall form your own judgment on her letter," I said. "I will read it out."
I began--and read these lines:

"Sir--I have something to own to you. A confession which means much misery, may sometimes be made in very few words. This confession can be made in three words. I love you."

The letter dropped from my hand. I looked at Betteredge. "In the name of Heaven," I said, "what does it mean?"

He seemed to shrink from answering the question.

"You and Limping Lucy were alone together this morning, sir," he said. "Did she say nothing about Rosanna Spearman?"

"She never even mentioned Rosanna Spearman's name."

"Please to go back to the letter, Mr. Franklin. I tell you plainly, I can't find it in my heart to distress you, after what you have had to bear already. Let her speak for herself, sir. And get on with your grog. For your own sake, get on with your grog."

I resumed the reading of the letter.

"It would be very disgraceful to me to tell you this, if I was a living woman when you read it. I shall be dead and gone, sir, when you find my letter. It is that which makes me bold. Not even my grave will be left to tell of me. I may own the truth--with the quicksand waiting to hide me when the words are written.

"Besides, you will find your nightgown in my hiding-place, with the smear of the paint on it; and you will want to know how it came to be hidden by me? and why I said nothing to you about it in my life-time? I have only one reason to give. I did these strange things, because I loved you.

"I won't trouble you with much about myself, or my life, before you came to my lady's house. Lady Verinder took me out of a reformatory. I had gone to the reformatory from the prison. I was put in the prison, because I was a thief. I was a thief, because my mother went on the streets when I was quite a little girl. My mother went on the streets, because the gentleman who was my father deserted her. There is no need to tell such a common story as this, at any length. It is told quite often enough in the newspapers.

"Lady Verinder was very kind to me, and Mr. Betteredge was very kind to me. Those two, and the matron at the reformatory, are the only good people I have ever met with in all my life. I might have got on in my place--not happily--but I might have got on, if you had not come visiting. I don't blame you, sir. It's my fault--all my fault.

"Do you remember when you came out on us from among the sand hills, that morning, looking for Mr. Betteredge? You were like a prince in a fairy-story. You were like a lover in a dream. You were the most adorable human creature I had ever seen. Something that felt like the happy life I had never led yet, leapt up in me at the instant I set eyes on you. Don't laugh at this if you can help it. Oh, if I could only make you feel how serious it is to ME!

"I went back to the house, and wrote your name and mine in my work-box, and drew a true lovers' knot under them. Then, some devil--no, I ought to say some good angel--whispered to me, 'Go and look in the glass.' The glass told me--never mind what. I was too foolish to take the warning. I went on getting fonder and fonder of you, just as if I was a lady in your own rank of life, and the most beautiful creature your eyes ever rested on. I tried--oh, dear, how I tried--to get you to look at me. If you had known how I used to cry at night with the misery and the mortification of your never taking any notice of me, you would have pitied me perhaps, and have given me a look now and then to live on.

"If she had been really as pretty as you thought her, I might have borne it better. No; I believe I should have been more spiteful against her still. Suppose you put Miss Rachel into a servant's dress, and took her ornaments off? I don't know what is the use of my writing in this way. It can't be denied that she had a bad figure; she was too thin. But who can tell what the men like? And young ladies may behave in a manner which would cost a servant her place. It's no business of mine. I can't expect you to read my letter, if I write it in this way. But it does stir one up to hear Miss Rachel called pretty, when one knows all the time that it's her dress does it, and her confidence in herself.

"Try not to lose patience with me, sir. I will get on as fast as I can to the time which is sure to interest you--the time when the Diamond was lost.

"But there is one thing which I have got it on my mind to tell you first.

"My life was not a very hard life to bear, while I was a thief. It was only when they had taught me at the reformatory to feel my own degradation, and to try for better things, that the days grew long and weary. Thoughts of the future forced themselves on me now. I felt the dreadful reproach that honest people--even the kindest of honest people--were to me in themselves. A heart-breaking sensation of loneliness kept with me, go where I might, and do what I might, and see what persons I might. It was my duty, I know, to try and get on with my fellow-servants in my
new place. Somehow, I couldn't make friends with them. They looked (or I thought they looked) as if they suspected what I had been. I don't regret, far from it, having been roused to make the effort to be a reformed woman--but, indeed, indeed it was a weary life. You had come across it like a beam of sunshine at first--and then you too failed me. I was mad enough to love you; and I couldn't even attract your notice. There was great misery--there really was great misery in that.

"Now I am coming to what I wanted to tell you. In those days of bitterness, I went two or three times, when it was my turn to go out, to my favourite place--the beach above the Shivering Sand. And I said to myself, 'I think it will end here. When I can bear it no longer, I think it will end here.' You will understand, sir, that the place had laid a kind of spell on me before you came. I had always had a notion that something would happen to me at the quicksand. But I had never looked at it, with the thought of its being the means of my making away with myself, till the time came of which I am now writing. Then I did think that here was a place which would end all my troubles for me in a moment or two--and hide me for ever afterwards.

"This is all I have to say about myself, reckoning from the morning when I first saw you, to the morning when the alarm was raised in the house that the Diamond was lost.

"I was so aggravated by the foolish talk among the women servants, all wondering who was to be suspected first; and I was so angry with you (knowing no better at that time) for the pains you took in hunting for the jewel, and sending for the police, that I kept as much as possible away by myself, until later in the day, when the officer from Frizinghall came to the house.

"Mr. Seegrave began, as you may remember, by setting a guard on the women's bedrooms; and the women all followed him up-stairs in a rage, to know what he meant by the insult he had put on them. I went with the rest, because if I had done anything different from the rest, Mr. Seegrave was the sort of man who would have suspected me directly. We found him in Miss Rachel's room. He told us he wouldn't have a lot of women there; and he pointed to the smear on the painted door, and said some of our petticoats had done the mischief, and sent us all down-stairs again.

"After leaving Miss Rachel's room, I stopped a moment on one of the landings, by myself, to see if I had got the paint-stain by any chance on MY gown. Penelope Betteredge (the only one of the women with whom I was on friendly terms) passed, and noticed what I was about.

"'You needn't trouble yourself, Rosanna,' she said. 'The paint on Miss Rachel's door has been dry for hours. If Mr. Seegrave hadn't set a watch on our bedrooms, I might have told him as much. I don't know what you think--I was never so insulted before in my life!'

"Penelope was a hot-tempered girl. I quieted her, and brought her back to what she had said about the paint on the door having been dry for hours.

"How do you know that?' I asked.

"'I was with Miss Rachel, and Mr. Franklin, all yesterday morning,' Penelope said, 'mixing the colours, while they finished the door. I heard Miss Rachel ask whether the door would be dry that evening, in time for the birthday company to see it. And Mr. Franklin shook his head, and said it wouldn't be dry in less than twelve hours. It was long past luncheon-time--it was three o'clock before they had done. What does your arithmetic say, Rosanna? Mine says the door was dry by three this morning.'

"'Did some of the ladies go up-stairs yesterday evening to see it?' I asked. 'I thought I heard Miss Rachel warning them to keep clear of the door.'

"'None of the ladies made the smear,' Penelope answered. 'I left Miss Rachel in bed at twelve last night. And I noticed the door, and there was nothing wrong with it then.'

"'Oughtn't you to mention this to Mr. Seegrave, Penelope?'

"'I wouldn't say a word to help Mr. Seegrave for anything that could be offered to me!'

"She went to her work, and I went to mine."

"My work, sir, was to make your bed, and to put your room tidy. It was the happiest hour I had in the whole day. I used to kiss the pillow on which your head had rested all night. No matter who has done it since, you have never had your clothes folded as nicely as I folded them for you. Of all the little knick-knacks in your dressing-case, there wasn't one that had so much as a speck on it. You never noticed it, any more than you noticed me. I beg your pardon; I am forgetting myself. I will make haste, and go on again.

"Well, I went in that morning to do my work in your room. There was your nightgown tossed across the bed, just as you had thrown it off. I took it up to fold it--and I saw the stain of the paint from Miss Rachel's door!

"I was so startled by the discovery that I ran out with the nightgown in my hand, and made for the back stairs, and locked myself into my own room, to look at it in a place where nobody could intrude and interrupt me.

"As soon as I got my breath again, I called to mind my talk with Penelope, and I said to myself, 'Here's the proof that he was in Miss Rachel's sitting-room between twelve last night, and three this morning!'"
"I shall not tell you in plain words what was the first suspicion that crossed my mind, when I had made that discovery. You would only be angry—and, if you were angry, you might tear my letter up and read no more of it.

"Let it be enough, if you please, to say only this. After thinking it over to the best of my ability, I made it out that the thing wasn't likely, for a reason that I will tell you. If you had been in Miss Rachel's sitting-room, at that time of night, with Miss Rachel's knowledge (and if you had been foolish enough to forget to take care of the wet door) SHE would have reminded you—SHE would never have let you carry away such a witness against her, as the witness I was looking at now! At the same time, I own I was not completely certain in my own mind that I had proved my own suspicion to be wrong. You will not have forgotten that I have owned to hating Miss Rachel. Try to think, if you can, that there was a little of that hatred in all this. It ended in my determining to keep the nightgown, and to wait, and watch, and see what use I might make of it. At that time, please to remember, not the ghost of an idea entered my head that you had stolen the Diamond."

There, I broke off in the reading of the letter for the second time.

I had read those portions of the miserable woman's confession which related to myself, with unaffected surprise, and, I can honestly add, with sincere distress. I had regretted, truly regretted, the aspersion which I had thoughtlessly cast on her memory, before I had seen a line of her letter. But when I had advanced as far as the passage which is quoted above, I own I felt my mind growing bitterer and bitterlyer against Rosanna Spearman as I went on. "Read the rest for yourself," I said, handing the letter to Betteredge across the table. "If there is anything in it that I must look at, you can tell me as you go on."

"I understand you, Mr. Franklin," he answered. "It's natural, sir, in YOU. And, God help us all!" he added, in a lower tone, "it's no less natural in HER."

I proceed to copy the continuation of the letter from the original, in my own possession:—

"Having determined to keep the nightgown, and to see what use my love, or my revenge (I hardly know which) could turn it to in the future, the next thing to discover was how to keep it without the risk of being found out.

"There was only one way—to make another nightgown exactly like it, before Saturday came, and brought the laundry-woman and her inventory to the house.

"I was afraid to put it off till next day (the Friday); being in doubt lest some accident might happen in the interval. I determined to make the new nightgown on that same day (the Thursday), while I could count, if I played my cards properly, on having my time to myself. The first thing to do (after locking up your nightgown in my drawer) was to go back to your bed-room—not so much to put it to rights (Penelope would have done that for me, if I had asked her) as to find out whether you had smeared off any of the paint-stain from your nightgown, on the bed, or on any piece of furniture in the room.

"I examined everything narrowly, and at last, I found a few streaks of the paint on the inside of your dressing-gown—not the linen dressing-gown you usually wore in that summer season, but a flannel dressing-gown which you had with you also. I suppose you felt chilly after walking to and fro in nothing but your nightdress, and put on the warmest thing you could find. At any rate, there were the stains, just visible, on the inside of the dressing-gown. I easily got rid of these by scraping away the stuff of the flannel. This done, the only proof left against you was the proof locked up in my drawer.

"I had just finished your room when I was sent for to be questioned by Mr. Seegrave, along with the rest of the servants. Next came the examination of all our boxes. And then followed the most extraordinary event of the day—to ME—since I had found the paint on your nightgown. This event came out of the second questioning of Penelope Beteredge by Superintendent Seegrave.

"Penelope returned to us quite beside herself with rage at the manner in which Mr. Seegrave had treated her. He had hinted, beyond the possibility of mistaking him, that he suspected her of being the thief. We were all equally astonished at hearing this, and we all asked, Why?

"Because the Diamond was in Miss Rachel's sitting-room," Penelope answered. "And because I was the last person in the sitting-room at night!"

"Almost before the words had left her lips, I remembered that another person had been in the sitting-room later than Penelope. That person was yourself. My head whirled round, and my thoughts were in dreadful confusion. In the midst of it all, something in my mind whispered to me that the smear on your nightgown might have a meaning entirely different to the meaning which I had given to it up to that time. 'If the last person who was in the room is the person to be suspected,' I thought to myself, 'the thief is not Penelope, but Mr. Franklin Blake!'

"In the case of any other gentleman, I believe I should have been ashamed of suspecting him of theft, almost as soon as the suspicion had passed through my mind.

"But the bare thought that YOU had let yourself down to my level, and that I, in possessing myself of your nightgown, had also possessed myself of the means of shielding you from being discovered, and disgraced for life—I say, sir, the bare thought of this seemed to open such a chance before me of winning your good will, that I passed
hurry you—but would you mind telling me, in one word, whether you see your way out of this dreadful mess yet?"

"Yes, sir?"

"Two to say to you after that."

"Very good, sir. I'll just rest my eyes, and then I'll go on again. In the meantime, Mr. Franklin--I don't want to hurry you—but would you mind telling me, in one word, whether you see your way out of this dreadful mess yet?"

"I see my way back to London," I said, "to consult Mr. Bruff. If he can't help me----"

"Yes, sir?"
"And if the Sergeant won't leave his retirement at Dorking----"

"He won't, Mr. Franklin!"

"Then, Betteredge--as far as I can see now--I am at the end of my resources. After Mr. Bruff and the Sergeant, I don't know of a living creature who can be of the slightest use to me."

As the words passed my lips, some person outside knocked at the door of the room.

Betteredge looked surprised as well as annoyed by the interruption.

"Come in," he called out, irritably, "whoever you are!"

The door opened, and there entered to us, quietly, the most remarkable-looking man that I had ever seen.

Judging him by his figure and his movements, he was still young. Judging him by his face, and comparing him with Betteredge, he looked the elder of the two. His complexion was of a gipsy darkness; his fleshless cheeks had fallen into deep hollows, over which the bone projected like a pent-house. His nose presented the fine shape and modelling so often found among the ancient people of the East, so seldom visible among the newer races of the West. His forehead rose high and straight from the brow. His marks and wrinkles were innumerable. From this strange face, eyes, stranger still, of the softest brown--eyes dreamy and mournful, and deeply sunk in their orbits--looked out at you, and (in my case, at least) took your attention captive at their will. Add to this a quantity of thick closely-curling hair, which, by some freak of Nature, had lost its colour in the most startlingly partial and capricious manner. Over the top of his head it was still of the deep black which was its natural colour. Round the sides of his head--without the slightest gradation of grey to break the force of the extraordinary contrast--it had turned completely white. The line between the two colours preserved no sort of regularity. At one place, the white hair ran up into the black; at another, the black hair ran down into the white. I looked at the man with a curiosity which, I am ashamed to say, I found it quite impossible to control. His soft brown eyes looked back at me gently; and he met my involuntary rudeness in staring at him, with an apology which I was conscious that I had not deserved.

"I beg your pardon," he said. "I had no idea that Mr. Betteredge was engaged." He took a slip of paper from his pocket, and handed it to Betteredge. "The list for next week," he said. His eyes just rested on me again--and he left the room as quietly as he had entered it.

"Who is that?" I asked.

"Mr. Candy's assistant," said Betteredge. "By-the-bye, Mr. Franklin, you will be sorry to hear that the little doctor has never recovered that illness he caught, going home from the birthday dinner. He's pretty well in health; but he lost his memory in the fever, and he has never recovered more than the wreck of it since. The work all falls on his assistant. Not much of it now, except among the poor. THEY can't help themselves, you know. THEY must put up with the man with the piebald hair, and the gipsy complexion--or they would get no doctoring at all."

"You don't seem to like him, Betteredge?"

"Nobody likes him, sir."

"Why is he so unpopular?"

"Well, Mr. Franklin, his appearance is against him, to begin with. And then there's a story that Mr. Candy took him with a very doubtful character. Nobody knows who he is--and he hasn't a friend in the place. How can you expect one to like him, after that?"

"Quite impossible, of course! May I ask what he wanted with you, when he gave you that bit of paper?"

"Only to bring me the weekly list of the sick people about here, sir, who stand in need of a little wine. My lady always had a regular distribution of good sound port and sherry among the infirm poor; and Miss Rachel wishes the custom to be kept up. Times have changed! times have changed! I remember when Mr. Candy himself brought the list to my mistress. Now it's Mr. Candy's assistant who brings the list to me. I'll go on with the letter, if you will allow me, sir," said Betteredge, drawing Rosanna Spearman's confession back to him. "It isn't lively reading, I grant you. But, there! it keeps me from getting sour with thinking of the past." He put on his spectacles, and wagged his head gloomily. "There's a bottom of good sense, Mr. Franklin, in our conduct to our mothers, when they first start us on the journey of life. We are all of us more or less unwilling to be brought into the world. And we are all of us right."

Mr. Candy's assistant had produced too strong an impression on me to be immediately dismissed from my thoughts. I passed over the last unanswerable utterance of the Betteredge philosophy; and returned to the subject of the man with the piebald hair.

"What is his name?" I asked.

"As ugly a name as need be," Betteredge answered gruffly. "Ezra Jennings."

CHAPTER V

Having told me the name of Mr. Candy's assistant, Betteredge appeared to think that we had wasted enough of our time on an insignificant subject. He resumed the perusal of Rosanna Spearman's letter.

On my side, I sat at the window, waiting until he had done. Little by little, the impression produced on me by
Ezra Jennings—it seemed perfectly unaccountable, in such a situation as mine, that any human being should have produced an impression on me at all!—faded from my mind. My thoughts flowed back into their former channel. Once more, I forced myself to look my own incredible position resolutely in the face. Once more, I reviewed in my own mind the course which I had at last summoned composure enough to plan out for the future.

To go back to London that day; to put the whole case before Mr. Bruff; and, last and most important, to obtain (no matter by what means or at what sacrifice) a personal interview with Rachel—this was my plan of action, so far as I was capable of forming it at the time. There was more than an hour still to spare before the train started. And there was the bare chance that Betteredge might discover something in the unread portion of Rosanna Spearman's letter, which it might be useful for me to know before I left the house in which the Diamond had been lost. For that chance I was now waiting.

The letter ended in these terms:

"You have no need to be angry, Mr. Franklin, even if I did feel some little triumph at knowing that I held all your prospects in life in my own hands. Anxieties and fears soon came back to me. With the view Sergeant Cuff took of the loss of the Diamond, he would be sure to end in examining our linen and our dresses. There was no place in my room—there was no place in the house—which I could feel satisfied would be safe from him. How to hide the nightgown so that not even the Sergeant could find it? and how to do that without losing one moment of precious time?—these were not easy questions to answer. My uncertainties ended in my taking a way that may make you laugh. I undressed, and put the nightgown on me. You had worn it—and I had another little moment of pleasure in wearing it after you.

"The next news that reached us in the servants' hall showed that I had not made sure of the nightgown a moment too soon. Sergeant Cuff wanted to see the washing-book.

"I found it, and took it to him in my lady's sitting-room. The Sergeant and I had come across each other more than once in former days. I was certain he would know me again—and I was NOT certain of what he might do when he found me employed as servant in a house in which a valuable jewel had been lost. In this suspense, I felt it would be a relief to me to get the meeting between us over, and to know the worst of it at once.

"He looked at me as if I was a stranger, when I handed him the washing-book; and he was very specially polite in thanking me for bringing it. I thought those were both bad signs. There was no knowing what he might say of me behind my back; there was no knowing how soon I might not find myself taken in custody on suspicion, and searched. It was then time for your return from seeing Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite off by the railway; and I went to your favourite walk in the shrubbery, to try for another chance of speaking to you—the last chance, for all I knew to the contrary, that I might have.

"You never appeared; and, what was worse still, Mr. Betteredge and Sergeant Cuff passed by the place where I was hiding—and the Sergeant saw me.

"I had no choice, after that, but to return to my proper place and my proper work, before more disasters happened to me. Just as I was going to step across the path, you came back from the railway. You were making straight for the shrubbery, when you saw me—I am certain, sir, you saw me—and you turned away as if I had got the plague, and went into the house.*

* NOTE: by Franklin Blake.—The writer is entirely mistaken, poor creature. I never noticed her. My intention was certainly to have taken a turn in the shrubbery. But, remembering at the same moment that my aunt might wish to see me, after my return from the railway, I altered my mind, and went into the house.

"I made the best of my way indoors again, returning by the servants' entrance. There was nobody in the laundry-room at that time; and I sat down there alone. I have told you already of the thoughts which the Shivering Sand put into my head. Those thoughts came back to me now. I wondered in myself which it would be harder to do, if things went on in this manner—to bear Mr. Franklin Blake's indifference to me, or to jump into the quicksand and end it for ever in that way?

"It's useless to ask me to account for my own conduct, at this time. I try—and I can't understand it myself.

"Why didn't I stop you, when you avoided me in that cruel manner? Why didn't I call out, 'Mr. Franklin, I have got something to say to you; it concerns yourself, and you must, and shall, hear it?' You were at my mercy— I had got the whip-hand of you, as they say. And better than that, I had the means (if I could only make you trust me) of being useful to you in the future. Of course, I never supposed that you—a gentleman—had stolen the Diamond for the mere pleasure of stealing it. No. Penelope had heard Miss Rachel, and I had heard Mr. Betteredge, talk about your extravagance and your debts. It was plain enough to me that you had taken the Diamond to sell it, or pledge it, and so to get the money of which you stood in need. Well! I could have told you of a man in London who would have advanced a good large sum on the jewel, and who would have asked no awkward questions about it either.

"Why didn't I speak to you! why didn't I speak to you!

"I wonder whether the risks and difficulties of keeping the nightgown were as much as I could manage, without
having other risks and difficulties added to them? This might have been the case with some women--but how could it be the case with me? In the days when I was a thief, I had run fifty times greater risks, and found my way out of difficulties to which THIS difficulty was mere child's play. I had been apprenticed, as you may say, to frauds and deceptions--some of them on such a grand scale, and managed so cleverly, that they became famous, and appeared in the newspapers. Was such a little thing as the keeping of the nightgown likely to weigh on my spirits, and to set my heart sinking within me, at the time when I ought to have spoken to you? What nonsense to ask the question! The thing couldn't be.

"Where is the use of my dwelling in this way on my own folly? The plain truth is plain enough, surely? Behind your back, I loved you with all my heart and soul. Before your face--there's no denying it--I was frightened of you; frightened of making you angry with me; frightened of what you might say to me (though you HAD taken the Diamond) if I presumed to tell you that I had found it out. I had gone as near to it as I dared when I spoke to you in the library. You had not turned your back on me then. You had not started away from me as if I had got the plague. I tried to provoke myself into feeling angry with you, and to rouse up my courage in that way. No! I couldn't feel anything but the misery and the mortification of it. You're a plain girl; you have got a crooked shoulder; you're only a housemaid--what do you mean by attempting to speak to Me?" You never uttered a word of that, Mr. Franklin; but you said it all to me, nevertheless! Is such madness as this to be accounted for? No. There is nothing to be done but to confess it, and let it be.

"I ask your pardon, once more, for this wandering of my pen. There is no fear of its happening again. I am close at the end now.

"The first person who disturbed me by coming into the empty room was Penelope. She had found out my secret long since, and she had done her best to bring me to my senses--and done it kindly too.

"'Ah!' she said, 'I know why you're sitting here, and fretting, all by yourself. The best thing that can happen for your advantage, Rosanna, will be for Mr. Franklin's visit here to come to an end. It's my belief that he won't be long now before he leaves the house.'

"In all my thoughts of you I had never thought of your going away. I couldn't speak to Penelope. I could only look at her.

"'I've just left Miss Rachel,' Penelope went on. 'And a hard matter I have had of it to put up with her temper. She says the house is unbearable to her with the police in it; and she's determined to speak to my lady this evening, and to go to her Aunt Ablewhite to-morrow. If she does that, Mr. Franklin will be the next to find a reason for going away, you may depend on it!'

"I recovered the use of my tongue at that. 'Do you mean to say Mr. Franklin will go with her?' I asked.

"'Only too gladly, if she would let him; but she won't. HE has been made to feel her temper; HE is in her black books too--and that after having done all he can to help her, poor fellow! No! no! If they don't make it up before to-morrow, you will see Miss Rachel go one way, and Mr. Franklin another. Where he may betake himself to I can't say. But he will never stay here, Rosanna, after Miss Rachel has left us.'

"I managed to master the despair I felt at the prospect of your going away. To own the truth, I saw a little glimpse of hope for myself if there was really a serious disagreement between Miss Rachel and you. 'Do you know,' I asked, 'what the quarrel is between them?'

"'It is all on Miss Rachel's side,' Penelope said. 'And, for anything I know to the contrary, it's all Miss Rachel's temper, and nothing else. I am loth to distress you, Rosanna; but don't run away with the notion that Mr. Franklin is ever likely to quarrel with HER. He's a great deal too fond of her for that!'

"She had only just spoken those cruel words when there came a call to us from Mr. Betteredge. All the indoor servants were to assemble in the hall. And then we were to go in, one by one, and be questioned in Mr. Betteredge's room by Sergeant Cuff.

"It came to my turn to go in, after her ladyship's maid and the upper housemaid had been questioned first. Sergeant Cuff's inquiries--though he wrapped them up very cunningly--soon showed me that those two women (the bitterest enemies I had in the house) had made their discoveries outside my door, on the Tuesday afternoon, and again on the Thursday night. They had told the Sergeant enough to open his eyes to some part of the truth. He rightly believed me to have made a new nightgown secretly, but he wrongly believed the paint-stained nightgown to be mine. I felt satisfied of another thing, from what he said, which it puzzled me to understand. He suspected me, of course, of being concerned in the disappearance of the Diamond. But, at the same time, he let me see--purposely, as I thought--that he did not consider me as the person chiefly answerable for the loss of the jewel. He appeared to think that I had been acting under the direction of somebody else. Who that person might be, I couldn't guess then, and can't guess now.

"In this uncertainty, one thing was plain--that Sergeant Cuff was miles away from knowing the whole truth. You were safe as long as the nightgown was safe--and not a moment longer.
"I quite despair of making you understand the distress and terror which pressed upon me now. It was impossible for me to risk wearing your nightgown any longer. I might find myself taken off, at a moment's notice, to the police court at Frizinghall, to be charged on suspicion, and searched accordingly. While Sergeant Cuff still left me free, I had to choose—and at once—between destroying the nightgown, or hiding it in some safe place, at some safe distance from the house.

"If I had only been a little less fond of you, I think I should have destroyed it. But oh! how could destroy the only thing I had which proved that I had saved you from discovery? If we did come to an explanation together, and if you suspected me of having some bad motive, and denied it all, how could I win upon you to trust me, unless I had the nightgown to produce? Was it wronging you to believe, as I did and do still, that you might hesitate to let a poor girl like me be the sharer of your secret, and your accomplice in the theft which your money-troubles had tempted you to commit? Think of your cold behaviour to me, sir, and you will hardly wonder at my unwillingness to destroy the only claim on your confidence and your gratitude which it was my fortune to possess.

"I determined to hide it; and the place I fixed on was the place I knew best—the Shivering Sand.

"As soon as the questioning was over, I made the first excuse that came into my head, and got leave to go out for a breath of fresh air. I went straight to Cobb's Hole, to Mr. Yolland's cottage. His wife and daughter were the best friends I had. Don't suppose I trusted them with your secret—I have trusted nobody. All I wanted was to write this letter to you, and to have a safe opportunity of taking the nightgown off me. Suspected as I was, I could do neither of those things with any sort of security, at the house.

"And now I have nearly got through my long letter, writing it alone in Lucy Yolland's bedroom. When it is done, I shall go downstairs with the nightgown rolled up, and hidden under my cloak. I shall find the means I want for keeping it safe and dry in its hiding-place, among the litter of old things in Mrs. Yolland's kitchen. And then I shall go to the Shivering Sand—don't be afraid of my letting my footmarks betray me!—and hide the nightgown down in the sand, where no living creature can find it without being first let into the secret by myself.

"And, when that's done, what then?

"Then, Mr. Franklin, I shall have two reasons for making another attempt to say the words to you which I have not said yet. If you leave the house, as Penelope believes you will leave it, and if I haven't spoken to you before that, I shall lose my opportunity forever. That is one reason. Then, again, there is the comforting knowledge—if my speaking does make you angry—that I have got the nightgown ready to plead my cause for me as nothing else can. That is my other reason. If these two together don't harden my heart against the coldness which has hitherto frozen it up (I mean the coldness of your treatment of me), there will be the end of my efforts—and the end of my life.

"Yes. If I miss my next opportunity—if you are as cruel as ever, and if I feel it again as I have felt it already—good-bye to the world which has grudged me the happiness that it gives to others. Good-bye to life, which nothing but a little kindness from you can ever make pleasurable to me again. Don't blame yourself, sir, if it ends in this way. But try—do try—to feel some forgiving sorrow for me! I shall take care that you find out what I have done for you, when I am past telling you of it myself. Will you say something kind of me then—in the same gentle way that you have when you speak to Miss Rachel? If you do that, and if there are such things as ghosts, I believe my ghost will hear it, and tremble with the pleasure of it.

"It's time I left off. I am making myself cry. How am I to see my way to the hiding-place if I let these useless tears come and blind me?

"Besides, why should I look at the gloomy side? Why not believe, while I can, that it will end well after all? I may find you in a good humour to-night—or, if not, I may succeed better to-morrow morning. I sha'n't improve my plain face by fretting—shall I? Who knows but I may have filled all these weary long pages of paper for nothing? They will go, for safety's sake (never mind now for what other reason) into the hiding-place along with the nightgown. It has been hard, hard work writing my letter. Oh! if we only end in understanding each other, how I shall enjoy tearing it up!

"I beg to remain, sir, your true lover and humble servant,

"ROSANNA SPEARMAN."

The reading of the letter was completed by Betteredge in silence. After carefully putting it back in the envelope, he sat thinking, with his head bowed down, and his eyes on the ground.

"Betteredge," I said, "is there any hint to guide me at the end of the letter?"

He looked up slowly, with a heavy sigh.

"There is nothing to guide you, Mr. Franklin," he answered. "If you take my advice you will keep the letter in the cover till these present anxieties of yours have come to an end. It will sorely distress you, whenever you read it. Don't read it now."

I put the letter away in my pocket-book.

A glance back at the sixteenth and seventeenth chapters of Betteredge's Narrative will show that there really was
a reason for my thus sparing myself, at a time when my fortitude had been already cruelly tried. Twice over, the
unhappy woman had made her last attempt to speak to me. And twice over, it had been my misfortune (God knows
how innocently!) to repel the advances she had made to me. On the Friday night, as Betteredge truly describes it, she
had found me alone at the billiard-table. Her manner and language suggested to me and would have suggested to any
man, under the circumstances—that she was about to confess a guilty knowledge of the disappearance of the
Diamond. For her own sake, I had purposely shown no special interest in what was coming; for her own sake, I had
pursued not the billiard-balls, instead of looking at HER—and what had been the result? I had sent her away
from me, wounded to the heart! On the Saturday again—on the day when she must have foreseen, after what
Penelope had told her, that my departure was close at hand—the same fatality still pursued us. She had once more
attempted to meet me in the shrubbery walk, and she had found me there in company with Betteredge and Sergeant
Cuff. In her hearing, the Sergeant, with his own underhand object in view, had appealed to my interest in Rosanna
Spearman. Again for the poor creature's own sake, I had met the police-officer with a flat denial, and had declared—
loudly declared, so that she might hear me too—that I felt "no interest whatever in Rosanna Spearman." At those
words, solely designed to warn her against attempting to gain my private ear, she had turned away and left the place:
cautions of her danger, as I then believed; self-doomed to destruction, as I know now. From that point, I have
already traced the succession of events which led me to the astounding discovery at the quicksand. The retrospect is
now complete. I may leave the miserable story of Rosanna Spearman—to which, even at this distance of time, I
cannot revert without a pang of distress—to suggest for itself all that is here purposely left unsaid. I may pass from
the suicide at the Shivering Sand, with its strange and terrible influence on my present position and future prospects,
to interests which concern the living people of this narrative, and to events which were already paving my way for
the slow and toilsome journey from the darkness to the light.

CHAPTER VI

I walked to the railway station accompanied, it is needless to say, by Gabriel Betteredge. I had the letter in my
pocket, and the nightgown safely packed in a little bag—both to be submitted, before I slept that night, to the
investigation of Mr. Bruff.

We left the house in silence. For the first time in my experience of him, I found old Betteredge in my company
without a word to say to me. Having something to say on my side, I opened the conversation as soon as we were
clear of the lodge gates.

"Before I go to London," I began, "I have two questions to ask you. They relate to myself, and I believe they will
rather surprise you."

"If they will put that poor creature's letter out of my head, Mr. Franklin, they may do anything else they like with
me. Please to begin surprising me, sir, as soon as you can."

"My first question, Betteredge, is this. Was I drunk on the night of Rachel's Birthday?"

"YOU drunk!" exclaimed the old man. "Why it's the great defect of your character, Mr. Franklin that you only
drink with your dinner, and never touch a drop of liquor afterwards!"

"But the birthday was a special occasion. I might have abandoned my regular habits, on that night of all others."

Betteredge considered for a moment.

"You did go out of your habits, sir," he said. "And I'll tell you how. You looked wretchedly ill—and we
persuaded you to have a drop of brandy and water to cheer you up a little."

"I am not used to brandy and water. It is quite possible-----"

"Wait a bit, Mr. Franklin. I knew you were not used, too. I poured you out half a wine-glass-full of our fifty year
old Cognac; and (more shame for me!) I drowned that noble liquor in nigh on a tumbler-full of cold water. A child
couldn't have got drunk on it—let alone a grown man!"

I knew I could depend on his memory, in a matter of this kind. It was plainly impossible that I could have been
intoxicated. I passed on to the second question.

"Before I was sent abroad, Betteredge, you saw a great deal of me when I was a boy? Now tell me plainly, do
you remember anything strange of me, after I had gone to bed at night? Did you ever discover me walking in my
sleep?"

Betteredge stopped, looked at me for a moment, nodded his head, and walked on again.

"I see your drift now, Mr. Franklin!" he said "You're trying to account for how you got the paint on your
nightgown, without knowing it yourself. It won't do, sir. You're miles away still from getting at the truth. Walk in
your sleep? You never did such a thing in your life!"

Here again, I felt that Betteredge must be right. Neither at home nor abroad had my life ever been of the solitary
sort. If I had been a sleep-walker, there were hundreds on hundreds of people who must have discovered me, and
who, in the interest of my own safety, would have warned me of the habit, and have taken precautions to restrain it.

Still, admitting all this, I clung—with an obstinacy which was surely natural and excusable, under the
circumstances—to one or other of the only two explanations that I could see which accounted for the unendurable position in which I then stood. Observing that I was not yet satisfied, Betteredge shrewdly adverted to certain later events in the history of the Moonstone; and scattered both my theories to the wind at once and for ever.

"Let's try it another way, sir," he said. "Keep your own opinion, and see how far it will take you towards finding out the truth. If we are to believe the nightgown—which I don't for one—you not only smeared off the paint from the door, without knowing it, but you also took the Diamond without knowing it. Is that right, so far?"

"Quite right. Go on."

"Very good, sir. We'll say you were drunk, or walking in your sleep, when you took the jewel. That accounts for the night and morning, after the birthday. But how does it account for what has happened since that time? The Diamond has been taken to London, since that time. The Diamond has been pledged to Mr. Luker, since that time. Did you do those two things, without knowing it, too? Were you drunk when I saw you off in the pony-chaise on that Saturday evening? And did you walk in your sleep to Mr. Luker's, when the train had brought you to your journey's end? Excuse me for saying it, Mr. Franklin, but this business has so upset you, that you're not fit yet to judge for yourself. The sooner you lay your head alongside Mr. Bruff's head, the sooner you will see your way out of the dead-lock that has got you now."

We reached the station, with only a minute or two to spare.

I hurriedly gave Betteredge my address in London, so that he might write to me, if necessary; promising, on my side, to inform him of any news which I might have to communicate. This done, and just as I was bidding him farewell, I happened to glance towards the book-and-newspaper stall. There was Mr. Candy's remarkable-looking assistant again, speaking to the keeper of the stall! Our eyes met at the same moment. Ezra Jennings took off his hat to me. I returned the salute, and got into a carriage just as the train started. It was a relief to my mind, I suppose, to dwell on any subject which appeared to be, personally, of no sort of importance to me. At all events, I began the momentous journey back which was to take me to Mr. Bruff, wondering—absurdly enough, I admit—that I should have seen the man with the piebald hair twice in one day!

The hour at which I arrived in London precluded all hope of my finding Mr. Bruff at his place of business. I drove from the railway to his private residence at Hampstead, and disturbed the old lawyer dozing alone in his dining-room, with his favourite pug-dog on his lap, and his bottle of wine at his elbow.

I shall best describe the effect which my story produced on the mind of Mr. Bruff by relating his proceedings when he had heard it to the end. He ordered lights, and strong tea, to be taken into his study; and he sent a message to the ladies of his family, forbidding them to disturb us on any pretence whatever. These preliminaries disposed of, he first examined the nightgown, and then devoted himself to the reading of Rosanna Spearman's letter.

The reading completed, Mr. Bruff addressed me for the first time since we had been shut up together in the seclusion of his own room.

"Franklin Blake," said the old gentleman, "this is a very serious matter, in more respects than one. In my opinion, it concerns Rachel quite as nearly as it concerns you. Her extraordinary conduct is no mystery NOW. She believes you have stolen the Diamond."

I had shrunk from reasoning my own way fairly to that revolting conclusion. But it had forced itself on me, nevertheless. My resolution to obtain a personal interview with Rachel, rested really and truly on the ground just stated by Mr. Bruff.

"The first step to take in this investigation," the lawyer proceeded, "is to appeal to Rachel. She has been silent all this time, from motives which I (who know her character) can readily understand. It is impossible, after what has happened, to submit to that silence any longer. She must be persuaded to tell us, or she must be forced to tell us, on what grounds she bases her belief that you took the Moonstone. The chances are, that the whole of this case, serious as it seems now, will tumble to pieces, if we can only break through Rachel's inveterate reserve, and prevail upon her to speak out."

"That is a very comforting opinion for _me_," I said. "I own I should like to know."

"You would like to know how I can justify it," inter-posed Mr. Bruff. "I can tell you in two minutes. Understand, in the first place, that I look at this matter from a lawyer's point of view. It's a question of evidence, with me. Very well. The evidence breaks down, at the outset, on one important point."

"On what point?"

"You shall hear. I admit that the mark of the name proves the nightgown to be yours. I admit that the mark of the paint proves the nightgown to have made the smear on Rachel's door. But what evidence is there to prove that you are the person who wore it, on the night when the Diamond was lost?"

The objection struck me, all the more forcibly that it reflected an objection which I had felt myself.

"As to this," pursued the lawyer taking up Rosanna Spearman's confession, "I can understand that the letter is a distressing one to YOU. I can understand that you may hesitate to analyse it from a purely impartial point of view.
But I am not in your position. I can bring my professional experience to bear on this document, just as I should bring it to bear on any other. Without alluding to the woman's career as a thief, I will merely remark that her letter proves her to have been an adept at deception, on her own showing; and I argue from that, that I am justified in suspecting her of not having told the whole truth. I won't start any theory, at present, as to what she may or may not have done. I will only say that, if Rachel has suspected you ON THE EVIDENCE OF THE NIGHTGOWN ONLY, the chances are ninety-nine to a hundred that Rosanna Spearman was the person who showed it to her. In that case, there is the woman's letter, confessing that she was jealous of Rachel, confessing that she changed the roses, confessing that she saw a glimpse of hope for herself, in the prospect of a quarrel between Rachel and you. I don't stop to ask who took the Moonstone (as a means to her end, Rosanna Spearman would have taken fifty Moonstones) — I only say that the disappearance of the jewel gave this reclaimed thief who was in love with you, an opportunity of setting you and Rachel at variance for the rest of your lives. She had not decided on destroying herself, THEN, remember; and, having the opportunity, I distinctly assert that it was in her character, and in her position at the time, to take it. What do you say to that?

"Some such suspicion," I answered, "crossed my own mind, as soon as I opened the letter."

"Exactly! And when you had read the letter, you pitied the poor creature, and couldn't find it in your heart to suspect her. Does you credit, my dear sir—does you credit!"

"But suppose it turns out that I did wear the nightgown? What then?"

"I don't see how the fact can be proved," said Mr. Bruff. "But assuming the proof to be possible, the vindication of your innocence would be no easy matter. We won't go into that, now. Let us wait and see whether Rachel hasn't suspected you on the evidence of the nightgown only."

"Good God, how coolly you talk of Rachel suspecting me!" I broke out. "What right has she to suspect Me, on any evidence, of being a thief?"

"A very sensible question, my dear sir. Rather hotly put—but well worth considering for all that. What puzzles you, puzzles me too. Search your memory, and tell me this. Did anything happen while you were staying at the house—not, of course, to shake Rachel's belief in your honour—but, let us say, to shake her belief (no matter with how little reason) in your principles generally?"

I started, in ungovernable agitation, to my feet. The lawyer's question reminded me, for the first time since I had left England, that something HAD happened.

In the eighth chapter of Betteredge's Narrative, an allusion will be found to the arrival of a foreigner and a stranger at my aunt's house, who came to see me on business. The nature of his business was this.

I had been foolish enough (being, as usual, straitened for money at the time) to accept a loan from the keeper of a small restaurant in Paris, to whom I was well known as a customer. A time was settled between us for paying the money back; and when the time came, I found it (as thousands of other honest men have found it) impossible to keep my engagement. I sent the man a bill. My name was unfortunately too well known on such documents: he failed to negotiate it. His affairs had fallen into disorder, in the interval since I had borrowed of him; bankruptcy stared him in the face; and a relative of his, a French lawyer, came to England to find me, and to insist upon the payment of my debt. He was a man of violent temper; and he took the wrong way with me. High words passed on both sides; and my aunt and Rachel were unfortunately in the next room, and heard us. Lady Verinder came in, and insisted on knowing what was the matter. The Frenchman produced his credentials, and declared me to be responsible for the ruin of a poor man, who had trusted in my honour. My aunt instantly paid him the money, and sent him off. She knew me better of course than to take the Frenchman's view of the transaction. But she was shocked at my carelessness, and justly angry with me for placing myself in a position, which, but for her interference, might have become a very disgraceful one. Either her mother told her, or Rachel heard what passed—I can't say which. She took her own romantic, high-flown view of the matter. I was "heartless"; I was "dishonourable"; I had "no principle"; there was "no knowing what I might do next"—in short, she said some of the severest things to me which I had ever heard from a young lady's lips. The breach between us lasted for the whole of the next day. The day after, I succeeded in making my peace, and thought no more of it. Had Rachel reverted to this unlucky accident, at the critical moment when my place in her estimation was again, and far more seriously, assailed? Mr. Bruff, when I had mentioned the circumstances to him, answered the question at once in the affirmative.

"It would have its effect on her mind," he said gravely. "And I wish, for your sake, the thing had not happened. However, we have discovered that there WAS a predisposing influence against you—and there is one uncertainty cleared out of our way, at any rate. I see nothing more that we can do now. Our next step in this inquiry must be the step that takes us to Rachel."

He rose, and began walking thoughtfully up and down the room. Twice, I was on the point of telling him that I had determined on seeing Rachel personally; and twice, having regard to his age and his character, I hesitated to take
him by surprise at an unfavourable moment.

"The grand difficulty is," he resumed, "how to make her show her whole mind in this matter, without reserve. Have you any suggestions to offer?"

"I have made up my mind, Mr. Bruff, to speak to Rachel myself."

"You!" He suddenly stopped in his walk, and looked at me as if he thought I had taken leave of my senses. "You, of all the people in the world!" He abruptly checked himself, and took another turn in the room. "Wait a little," he said. "In cases of this extraordinary kind, the rash way is sometimes the best way." He considered the question for a moment or two, under that new light, and ended boldly by a decision in my favour. "Nothing venture, nothing have," the old gentleman resumed. "You have a chance in your favour which I don't possess--and you shall be the first to try the experiment."

"A chance in my favour?" I repeated, in the greatest surprise.

Mr. Bruff's face softened, for the first time, into a smile.

"This is how it stands," he said. "I tell you fairly, I don't trust your discretion, and I don't trust your temper. But I do trust in Rachel's still preserving, in some remote little corner of her heart, a certain perverse weakness for YOU. Touch that--and trust to the consequences for the fullest disclosures that can flow from a woman's lips! The question is--how are you to see her?"

"She has been a guest of yours at this house," I answered. "May I venture to suggest--if nothing was said about me beforehand--that I might see her here?"

"Cool!" said Mr. Bruff. With that one word of comment on the reply that I had made to him, he took another turn up and down the room.

"In plain English," he said, "my house is to be turned into a trap to catch Rachel; with a bait to tempt her, in the shape of an invitation from my wife and daughters. If you were anybody else but Franklin Blake, and if this matter was one atom less serious than it really is, I should refuse point-blank. As things are, I firmly believe Rachel will live to thank me for turning traitor to her in my old age. Consider me your accomplice. Rachel shall be asked to spend the day here; and you shall receive due notice of it."

"When? To-morrow?"

"To-morrow won't give us time enough to get her answer. Say the day after."

"How shall I hear from you?"

"Stay at home all the morning and expect me to call on you."

I thanked him for the inestimable assistance which he was rendering to me, with the gratitude that I really felt; and, declining a hospitable invitation to sleep that night at Hampstead, returned to my lodgings in London.

Of the day that followed, I have only to say that it was the longest day of my life. Innocent as I knew myself to be, certain as I was that the abominable imputation which rested on me must sooner or later be cleared off, there was nevertheless a sense of self-abasement in my mind which instinctively disinclined me to see any of my friends. We often hear (almost invariably, however, from superficial observers) that guilt can look like innocence. I believe it to be infinitely the truer axiom of the two that innocence can look like guilt. I caused myself to be denied all day, to every visitor who called; and I only ventured out under cover of the night.

The next morning, Mr. Bruff surprised me at the breakfast-table. He handed me a large key, and announced that he felt ashamed of himself for the first time in his life.

"Is she coming?"

"She is coming to-day, to lunch and spend the afternoon with my wife and my girls."

"Are Mrs. Bruff, and your daughters, in the secret?"

"Inevitably. But women, as you may have observed, have no principles. My family don't feel my pangs of conscience. The end being to bring you and Rachel together again, my wife and daughters pass over the means employed to gain it, as composedly as if they were Jesuits."

"I am infinitely obliged to them. What is this key?"

"The key of the gate in my back-garden wall. Be there at three this afternoon. Let yourself into the garden, and make your way in by the conservatory door. Cross the small drawing-room, and open the door in front of you which leads into the music-room. There, you will find Rachel--and find her, alone."

"How can I thank you!"

"I will tell you how. Don't blame me for what happens afterwards."

With those words, he went out.

I had many weary hours still to wait through. To while away the time, I looked at my letters. Among them was a letter from Betteredge.

I opened it eagerly. To my surprise and disappointment, it began with an apology warning me to expect no news of any importance. In the next sentence the everlasting Ezra Jennings appeared again! He had stopped Betteredge on
the way out of the station, and had asked who I was. Informed on this point, he had mentioned having seen me to his master Mr. Candy. Mr. Candy hearing of this, had himself driven over to Betteredge, to express his regret at our having missed each other. He had a reason for wishing particularly to speak to me; and when I was next in the neighbourhood of Frizinghall, he begged I would let him know. Apart from a few characteristic utterances of the Betteredge philosophy, this was the sum and substance of my correspondent's letter. The warm-hearted, faithful old man acknowledged that he had written "mainly for the pleasure of writing to me."

I crumpled up the letter in my pocket, and forgot it the moment after, in the all-absorbing interest of my coming interview with Rachel.

As the clock of Hampstead church struck three, I put Mr. Bruff's key into the lock of the door in the wall. When I first stepped into the garden, and while I was securing the door again on the inner side, I own to having felt a certain guilty doubtfulness about what might happen next. I looked furtively on either side of me; suspicious of the presence of some unexpected witness in some unknown corner of the garden. Nothing appeared, to justify my apprehensions. The walks were, one and all, solitudes; and the birds and the bees were the only witnesses.

I passed through the garden; entered the conservatory; and crossed the small drawing-room. As I laid my hand on the door opposite, I heard a few plaintive chords struck on the piano in the room within. She had often idled over the instrument in this way, when I was staying at her mother's house. I was obliged to wait a little, to steady myself. The past and present rose side by side, at that supreme moment—and the contrast shook me.

After the lapse of a minute, I roused my manhood, and opened the door.

CHAPTER VII

At the moment when I showed myself in the doorway, Rachel rose from the piano.

I closed the door behind me. We confronted each other in silence, with the full length of the room between us. The movement she had made in rising appeared to be the one exertion of which she was capable. All use of every other faculty, bodily or mental, seemed to be merged in the mere act of looking at me.

A fear crossed my mind that I had shown myself too suddenly. I advanced a few steps towards her. I said gently, "Rachel!"

The sound of my voice brought the life back to her limbs, and the colour to her face. She advanced, on her side, still without speaking. Slowly, as if acting under some influence independent of her own will, she came nearer and nearer to me; the warm dusky colour flushing her cheeks, the light of reviving intelligence brightening every instant in her eyes. I forgot the object that had brought me into her presence; I forgot the vile suspicion that rested on my good name; I forgot every consideration, past, present, and future, which I was bound to remember. I saw nothing but the woman I loved coming nearer and nearer to me. She trembled; she stood irresolute. I could resist it no longer—I caught her in my arms, and covered her face with kisses.

There was a moment when I thought the kisses were returned; a moment when it seemed as if she, too might have forgotten. Almost before the idea could shape itself in my mind, her first voluntary action made me feel that she remembered. With a cry which was like a cry of horror—with a strength which I doubt if I could have resisted if I had tried—she thrust me back from her. I saw merciless anger in her eyes; I saw merciless contempt on her lips. She looked me over, from head to foot, as she might have looked at a stranger who had insulted her.

"You coward!" she said. "You mean, miserable, heartless coward!"

Those were her first words! The most unendurable reproach that a woman can address to a man, was the reproach that she picked out to address to Me.

"I remember the time, Rachel," I said, "when you could have told me that I had offended you, in a worthier way than that. I beg your pardon."

Something of the bitterness that I felt may have communicated itself to my voice. At the first words of my reply, her eyes, which had been turned away the moment before, looked back at me unwillingly. She answered in a low tone, with a sullen submission of manner which was quite new in my experience of her.

"Perhaps there is some excuse for me," she said. "After what you have done, is it a manly action, on your part, to find your way to me as you have found it to-day? It seems a cowardly experiment, to try an experiment on my weakness for you. It seems a cowardly surprise, to surprise me into letting you kiss me. But that is only a woman's view. I ought to have known it couldn't be your view. I should have done better if I had controlled myself, and said nothing."

The apology was more unendurable than the insult. The most degraded man living would have felt humiliated by it.

"If my honour was not in your hands," I said, "I would leave you this instant, and never see you again. You have spoken of what I have done. What have I done?"

"What have you done! YOU ask that question of ME?"

"I ask it."
"I have kept your infamy a secret," she answered. "And I have suffered the consequences of concealing it. Have I no claim to be spared the insult of your asking me what you have done? Is ALL sense of gratitude dead in you? You were once a gentleman. You were once dear to my mother, and dearer still to me----"

Her voice failed her. She dropped into a chair, and turned her back on me, and covered her face with her hands.

I waited a little before I trusted myself to say any more. In that moment of silence, I hardly know which I felt most keenly--the sting which her contempt had planted in me, or the proud resolution which shut me out from all community with her distress.

"If you will not speak first," I said, "I must. I have come here with something serious to say to you. Will you do me the common justice of listening while I say it?"

She neither moved, nor answered. I made no second appeal to her; I never advanced an inch nearer to her chair. With a pride which was as obstinate as her pride, I told her of my discovery at the Shivering Sand, and of all that had led to it. The narrative, of necessity, occupied some little time. From beginning to end, she never looked round at me, and she never uttered a word.

I kept my temper. My whole future depended, in all probability, on my not losing possession of myself at that moment. The time had come to put Mr. Bruff's theory to the test. In the breathless interest of trying that experiment, I moved round so as to place myself in front of her.

"I have a question to ask you," I said. "It obliges me to refer again to a painful subject. Did Rosanna Spearman show you the nightgown. Yes, or No?"

She started to her feet; and walked close up to me of her own accord. Her eyes looked me searchingly in the face, as if to read something there which they had never read yet.

"Are you mad?" she asked.

I still restrained myself. I said quietly, "Rachel, will you answer my question?"

She went on, without heeding me.

"Have you some object to gain which I don't understand? Some mean fear about the future, in which I am concerned? They say your father's death has made you a rich man. Have you come here to compensate me for the loss of my Diamond? And have you heart enough left to feel ashamed of your errand? Is THAT the secret of your pretence of innocence, and your story about Rosanna Spearman? Is there a motive of shame at the bottom of all the falsehood, this time?"

I stopped her there. I could control myself no longer.

"You have done me an infamous wrong!" I broke out hotly. "You suspect me of stealing your Diamond. I have a right to know, and I WILL know, the reason why!"

"Suspect you!" she exclaimed, her anger rising with mine. "YOU VILLAIN, I SAW YOU TAKE THE DIAMOND WITH MY OWN EYES!"

The revelation which burst upon me in those words, the overthrow which they instantly accomplished of the whole view of the case on which Mr. Bruff had relied, struck me helpless. Innocent as I was, I stood before her in silence. To her eyes, to any eyes, I must have looked like a man overwhelmed by the discovery of his own guilt.

She drew back from the spectacle of my humiliation and of her triumph. The sudden silence that had fallen upon me seemed to frighten her. "I spared you, at the time," she said. "I would have spared you now, if you had not forced me to speak." She moved away as if to leave the room--and hesitated before she got to the door. "Why did you come here to humble yourself?" she asked. "Why did you come here to humiliate me?" She went on a few steps, and paused once more. "For God's sake, say something!" she exclaimed, passionately. "If you have any mercy left, don't let me degrade myself in this way! Say something--and drive me out of the room!"

I advanced towards her, hardly conscious of what I was doing. I had possibly some confused idea of detaining her until she had told me more. From the moment when I knew that the evidence on which I stood condemned in Rachel's mind, was the evidence of her own eyes, nothing--not even my conviction of my own innocence--was clear to my mind. I took her by the hand; I tried to speak firmly and to the purpose. All I could say was, "Rachel, you once loved me."

She shuddered, and looked away from me. Her hand lay powerless and trembling in mine. "Let go of it," she said faintly.

My touch seemed to have the same effect on her which the sound of my voice had produced when I first entered the room. After she had said the word which called me a coward, after she had made the avowal which branded me as a thief--while her hand lay in mine I was her master still!

I drew her gently back into the middle of the room. I seated her by the side of me. "Rachel," I said, "I can't explain the contradiction in what I am going to tell you. I can only speak the truth as you have spoken it. You saw me--with your own eyes, you saw me take the Diamond. Before God who hears us, I declare that I now know I took it for the first time! Do you doubt me still?"
She had neither heeded nor heard me. "Let go of my hand," she repeated faintly. That was her only answer. Her head sank on my shoulder; and her hand unconsciously closed on mine, at the moment when she asked me to release it.

I refrained from pressing the question. But there my forbearance stopped. My chance of ever holding up my head again among honest men depended on my chance of inducing her to make her disclosure complete. The one hope left for me was the hope that she might have overlooked something in the chain of evidence some mere trifle, perhaps, which might nevertheless, under careful investigation, be made the means of vindicating my innocence in the end. I own I kept possession of her hand. I own I spoke to her with all that I could summon back of the sympathy and confidence of the bygone time.

"I want to ask you something," I said. "I want you to tell me everything that happened, from the time when we wished each other good night, to the time when you saw me take the Diamond."

She lifted her head from my shoulder, and made an effort to release her hand. "Oh, why go back to it!" she said. "Why go back to it!"

"I will tell you why, Rachel. You are the victim, and I am the victim, of some monstrous delusion which has worn the mask of truth. If we look at what happened on the night of your birthday together, we may end in understanding each other yet."

Her head dropped back on my shoulder. The tears gathered in her eyes, and fell slowly over her cheeks. "Oh!" she said, "have I never had that hope? Have I not tried to see it, as you are trying now?"

"You have tried by yourself," I answered. "You have not tried with me to help you."

Those words seemed to awaken in her something of the hope which I felt myself when I uttered them. She replied to my questions with more than docility--she exerted her intelligence; she willingly opened her whole mind to me.

"Let us begin," I said, "with what happened after we had wished each other good night. Did you go to bed? or did you sit up?"

"I went to bed."

"Did you notice the time? Was it late?"

"Not very. About twelve o'clock, I think."

"Did you fall asleep?"

"No. I couldn't sleep that night."

"You were restless?"

"I was thinking of you."

The answer almost unmanned me. Something in the tone, even more than in the words, went straight to my heart. It was only after pausing a little first that I was able to go on.

"Had you any light in your room?" I asked.

"None--until I got up again, and lit my candle."

"How long was that, after you had gone to bed?"

"About an hour after, I think. About one o'clock."

"Did you leave your bedroom?"

"I was going to leave it. I had put on my dressing-gown; and I was going into my sitting-room to get a book----"

"Had you opened your bedroom door?"

"I had just opened it."

"But you had not gone into the sitting-room?"

"No--I was stopped from going into it."

"What stopped you?

"I saw a light, under the door; and I heard footsteps approaching it."

"Were you frightened?"

"Not then. I knew my poor mother was a bad sleeper; and I remembered that she had tried hard, that evening, to persuade me to let her take charge of my Diamond. She was unreasonably anxious about it, as I thought; and I fancied she was coming to me to see if I was in bed, and to speak to me about the Diamond again, if she found that I was up."

"What did you do?"

"I blew out my candle, so that she might think I was in bed. I was unreasonable, on my side--I was determined to keep my Diamond in the place of my own choosing."

"After blowing out the candle, did you go back to bed?"

"I had no time to go back. At the moment when I blew the candle out, the sitting-room door opened, and I saw---"
"You saw?"
"You."
"Dressed as usual?"
"No."
"In my nightgown?"
"In your nightgown--with your bedroom candle in your hand."
"Alone?"
"Alone."
"Could you see my face?"
"Yes."
"Plainly?"
"Quite plainly. The candle in your hand showed it to me."
"Were my eyes open?"
"Yes."
"Did you notice anything strange in them? Anything like a fixed, vacant expression?"
"Nothing of the sort. Your eyes were bright--brighter than usual. You looked about in the room, as if you knew you were where you ought not to be, and as if you were afraid of being found out."
"Did you observe one thing when I came into the room--did you observe how I walked?"
"You walked as you always do. You came in as far as the middle of the room--and then you stopped and looked about you."
"What did you do, on first seeing me?"
"I could do nothing. I was petrified. I couldn't speak, I couldn't call out, I couldn't even move to shut my door."
"Could I see you, where you stood?"
"You might certainly have seen me. But you never looked towards me. It's useless to ask the question. I am sure you never saw me."
"How are you sure?"
"Would you have taken the Diamond? would you have acted as you did afterwards? would you be here now--if you had seen that I was awake and looking at you? Don't make me talk of that part of it! I want to answer you quietly. Help me to keep as calm as I can. Go on to something else."
"She was right--in every way, right. I went on to other things."
"What did I do, after I had got to the middle of the room, and had stopped there?"
"You turned away, and went straight to the corner near the window--where my Indian cabinet stands."
"When I was at the cabinet, my back must have been turned towards you. How did you see what I was doing?"
"When you moved, I moved."
"So as to see what I was about with my hands?"
"There are three glasses in my sitting-room. As you stood there, I saw all that you did, reflected in one of them."
"What did you see?"
"You put your candle on the top of the cabinet. You opened, and shut, one drawer after another, until you came to the drawer in which I had put my Diamond. You looked at the open drawer for a moment. And then you put your hand in, and took the Diamond out."
"How do you know I took the Diamond out?"
"I saw your hand go into the drawer. And I saw the gleam of the stone between your finger and thumb, when you took your hand out."
"Did my hand approach the drawer again--to close it, for instance?"
"No. You had the Diamond in your right hand; and you took the candle from the top of the cabinet with your left hand."
"Did I look about me again, after that?"
"No."
"Did I leave the room immediately?"
"No. You stood quite still, for what seemed a long time. I saw your face sideways in the glass. You looked like a man thinking, and dissatisfied with his own thoughts."
"What happened next?"
"You roused yourself on a sudden, and you went straight out of the room."
"Did I close the door after me?"
"No. You passed out quickly into the passage, and left the door open."
"And then?"
"Then, your light disappeared, and the sound of your steps died away, and I was left alone in the dark."
"Did nothing happen--from that time, to the time when the whole house knew that the Diamond was lost?"
"Nothing."
"Are you sure of that? Might you not have been asleep a part of the time?"
"I never slept. I never went back to my bed. Nothing happened until Penelope came in, at the usual time in the morning."

I dropped her hand, and rose, and took a turn in the room. Every question that I could put had been answered. Every detail that I could desire to know had been placed before me. I had even reverted to the idea of sleep-walking, and the idea of intoxication; and, again, the worthlessness of the one theory and the other had been proved--on the authority, this time, of the witness who had seen me. What was to be said next? what was to be done next? There rose the horrible fact of the Theft--the one visible, tangible object that confronted me, in the midst of the impenetrable darkness which enveloped all besides! Not a glimpse of light to guide me, when I had possessed myself of Rosanna Spearman's secret at the Shivering Sand. And not a glimpse of light now, when I had appealed to Rachel herself, and had heard the hateful story of the night from her own lips.

She was the first, this time, to break the silence.

"Well?" she said, "you have asked, and I have answered. You have made me hope something from all this, because you hoped something from it. What have you to say now?"

The tone in which she spoke warned me that my influence over her was a lost influence once more.

"We were to look at what happened on my birthday night, together," she went on; "and we were then to understand each other. Have we done that?"

She waited pitilessly for my reply. In answering her I committed a fatal error--I let the exasperating helplessness of my situation get the better of my self-control. Rashly and uselessly, I reproached her for the silence which had kept me until that moment in ignorance of the truth.

"If you had spoken when you ought to have spoken," I began; "if you had done me the common justice to explain yourself----"

She broke in on me with a cry of fury. The few words I had said seemed to have lashed her on the instant into a frenzy of rage.

"Explain myself!" she repeated. "Oh! is there another man like this in the world? I spare him, when my heart is breaking; I screen him when my own character is at stake; and HE--of all human beings, HE--turns on me now, and tells me that I ought to have explained myself! After believing in him as I did, after loving him as I did, after thinking of him by day, and dreaming of him by night--he wonders I didn't charge him with his disgrace the first time we met: 'My heart's darling, you are a Thief! My hero whom I love and honour, you have crept into my room under cover of the night, and stolen my Diamond!' That is what I ought to have said. You villain, you mean, mean, mean villain, I would have lost fifty diamonds, rather than see your face lying to me, as I see it lying now!"

I took up my hat. In mercy to HER--yes! I can honestly say it--in mercy to HER, I turned away without a word, and opened the door by which I had entered the room.

She followed, and snatched the door out of my hand; she closed it, and pointed back to the place that I had left.

"No!" she said. "Not yet! It seems that I owe a justification of my conduct to you. You shall stay and hear it. Or you shall stoop to the lowest infamy of all, and force your way out."

It wrung my heart to see her; it wrung my heart to hear her. I answered by a sign--it was all I could do--that I submitted myself to her will.

The crimson flush of anger began to fade out of her face, as I went back, and took my chair in silence. She waited a little, and steadied herself. When she went on, but one sign of feeling was discernible in her. She spoke without looking at me. Her hands were fast clasped in her lap, and her eyes were fixed on the ground.

"I ought to have done you the common justice to explain myself," she said, repeating my own words. "You shall see whether I did try to do you justice, or not. I told you just now that I never slept, and never returned to my bed, after you had left my sitting-room. It's useless to trouble you by dwelling on what I thought--you would not understand my thoughts--I will only tell you what I did, when time enough had passed to help me to recover myself. I refrained from alarming the house, and telling everybody what had happened--as I ought to have done. In spite of what I had seen, I was fond enough of you to believe--no matter what!--any impossibility, rather than admit it to my own mind that you were deliberately a thief. I thought and thought--and I ended in writing to you."

"I never received the letter."

"I know you never received it. Wait a little, and you shall hear why. My letter would have told you nothing openly. It would not have ruined you for life, if it had fallen into some other person's hands. It would only have said--in a manner which you yourself could not possibly have mistaken--that I had reason to know you were in debt, and that it was in my experience and in my mother's experience of you, that you were not very discreet, or very
the frantic perversity of a roused woman--she caught me by the arm, and barred my way out.

with vain repentance and regret. I passed by her, and opened the door for the second time. For the second time--with you could come here, and tell me that I have wronged you!

vileness, there was but one thing more you COULD do. You could come here with a last falsehood on your lips--base silence!) on an innocent man! You fled to the Continent with your plunder the next morning! After all that Diamond to the money-lender in London--I am sure of it! You cast the suspicion of your disgrace (thanks to my believe a word you have said. You stole it--I saw you! You pledged the right! Well! the misunderstanding is at an end. Is the thing set right? No! the thing is just where it was. I don't after the horror of seeing you thieve. You talk as if this was a misunderstanding which a few words might have set you think I should have believed it, as you are denying it now! Do you remember what I said--for I considered it with myself, before I said it. I gave you one opportunity after another of owning the truth. I said--for what you were--for what you are--as base a wretch as ever walked the earth!

just as you have looked at me to-day; just as you are looking at me now! I left you, that morning, knowing you at the return you made, was to look at me with your vile pretence of astonishment, and your false face of innocence--left nothing unsaid that I COULD say--short of actually telling you that I knew you had committed the theft. And all speaking to ME about the loss of the Diamond--the Diamond which you yourself had stolen; the Diamond which was all the time in your own hands! After that proof of your horrible falseness and cunning, I tore up my letter. But even then--even when I was maddened by the searching and questioning of the policeman, whom you had sent in--even then, there was some infatuation in my mind which wouldn't let me give you up. I said to myself, 'He has played his vile farce before everybody else in the house. Let me try if he can play it before me.' Somebody told me you were on the terrace. I went down to the terrace. I forced myself to look at you; I forced myself to speak to you. Have you forgotten what I said?"

I might have answered that I remembered every word of it. But what purpose, at that moment, would the answer have served?

How could I tell her that what she had said had astonished me, had distressed me, had suggested to me that she was in a state of dangerous nervous excitement, had even roused a moment's doubt in my mind whether the loss of the jewel was as much a mystery to her as to the rest of us--but had never once given me so much as a glimpse at the truth? Without the shadow of a proof to produce in vindication of my innocence, how could I persuade her that I knew no more than the veriest stranger could have known of what was really in her thoughts when she spoke to me on the terrace?

"If you had spoken out at the time, you might have left me, Rachel, knowing that you had cruelly wronged an innocent man."

"If I had spoken out before other people," she retorted, with another burst of indignation, "you would have been disgraced for life! If I had spoken out to no ears but yours, you would have denied it, as you are denying it now! Do you think I should have believed you? Would a man hesitate at a lie, who had done what I saw YOU do--who had behaved about it afterwards, as I saw YOU behave? I tell you again, I shrank from the horror of hearing you lie, after the horror of seeing you thieve. You talk as if this was a misunderstanding which a few words might have set right! Well! the misunderstanding is at an end. Is the thing set right? No! the thing is just where it was. I don't believe you NOW! I don't believe you found the nightgown, I don't believe in Rosanna Spearman's letter, I don't believe a word you have said. You stole it--I saw you! You affected to help the police--I saw you! You pledged the Diamond to the money-lender in London--I am sure of it! You cast the suspicion of your disgrace (thanks to my base silence!) on an innocent man! You fled to the Continent with your plunder the next morning! After all that vileness, there was but one thing more you COULD do. You could come here with a last falsehood on your lips--you could come here, and tell me that I have wronged you!"

If I had stayed a moment more, I know not what words might have escaped me which I should have remembered with vain repentance and regret. I passed by her, and opened the door for the second time. For the second time--with the frantic perversity of a roused woman--she caught me by the arm, and barred my way out.
"Let me go, Rachel" I said. "It will be better for both of us. Let me go."

The hysterical passion swelled in her bosom--her quickened convulsive breathing almost beat on my face, as she held me back at the door.

"Why did you come here?" she persisted, desperately. "I ask you again--why did you come here? Are you afraid I shall expose you? Now you are a rich man, now you have got a place in the world, now you may marry the best lady in the land--are you afraid I shall say the words which I have never said yet to anybody but you? I can't say the words! I can't expose you! I am worse, if worse can be, than you are yourself." Sobs and tears burst from her. She struggled with them fiercely; she held me more and more firmly. "I can't tear you out of my heart," she said, "even now! You may trust in the shameful, shameful weakness which can only struggle against you in this way!" She suddenly let go of me--she threw up her hands, and wrung them frantically in the air. "Any other woman living would shrink from the disgrace of touching him!" she exclaimed. "Oh, God! I despise myself even more heartily than I despise HIM!"

The tears were forcing their way into my eyes in spite of me--the horror of it was to be endured no longer.

"You shall know that you have wronged me, yet," I said. "Or you shall never see me again!"

With those words, I left her. She started up from the chair on which she had dropped the moment before: she started up--the noble creature!--and followed me across the outer room, with a last merciful word at parting.

"Franklin!" she said, "I forgive you! Oh, Franklin, Franklin! we shall never meet again. Say you forgive ME!"

I turned, so as to let my face show her that I was past speaking--I turned, and waved my hand, and saw her dimly, as in a vision, through the tears that had conquered me at last.

The next moment, the worst bitterness of it was over. I was out in the garden again. I saw her, and heard her, no more.

CHAPTER VIII

Late that evening, I was surprised at my lodgings by a visit from Mr. Bruff.

There was a noticeable change in the lawyer's manner. It had lost its usual confidence and spirit. He shook hands with me, for the first time in his life, in silence.

"Are you going back to Hampstead?" I asked, by way of saying something.

"I have just left Hampstead," he answered. "I know, Mr. Franklin, that you have got at the truth at last. But, I tell you plainly, if I could have foreseen the price that was to be paid for it, I should have preferred leaving you in the dark."

"You have seen Rachel?"

"I have come here after taking her back to Portland Place; it was impossible to let her return in the carriage by herself. I can hardly hold you responsible--considering that you saw her in my house and by my permission--for the shock that this unlucky interview has inflicted on her. All I can do is to provide against a repetition of the mischief. She is young--she has a resolute spirit--she will get over this, with time and rest to help her. I want to be assured that you will do nothing to hinder her recovery. May I depend on your making no second attempt to see her--except with my sanction and approval?"

"After what she has suffered, and after what I have suffered," I said, "you may rely on me."

"I have your promise?"

"You have my promise."

Mr. Bruff looked relieved. He put down his hat, and drew his chair nearer to mine.

"That's settled!" he said. "Now, about the future--your future, I mean. To my mind, the result of the extraordinary turn which the matter has now taken is briefly this. In the first place, we are sure that Rachel has told you the whole truth, as plainly as words can tell it. In the second place--though we know that there must be some dreadful mistake somewhere--we can hardly blame her for believing you to be guilty, on the evidence of her own senses; backed, as that evidence has been, by circumstances which appear, on the face of them, to tell dead against you."

There I interposed. "I don't blame Rachel," I said. "I only regret that she could not prevail on herself to speak more plainly to me at the time."

"You might as well regret that Rachel is not somebody else," rejoined Mr. Bruff. "And even then, I doubt if a girl of any delicacy, whose heart had been set on marrying you, could have brought herself to charge you to your face with being a thief. Anyhow, it was not in Rachel's nature to do it. In a very different matter to this matter of yours--which placed her, however, in a position not altogether unlike her position towards you--I happen to know that she was influenced by a similar motive to the motive which actuated her conduct in your case. Besides, as she told me herself, on our way to town this evening, if she had spoken plainly, she would no more have believed your denial than she believes it now. What answer can you make to that? There is no answer to be made to it. Come, come, Mr. Franklin! my view of the case has been proved to be all wrong, I admit--but, as things are now, my advice
may be worth having for all that. I tell you plainly, we shall be wasting our time, and cudgelling our brains to no purpose, if we attempt to try back, and unravel this frightful complication from the beginning. Let us close our minds resolutely to all that happened last year at Lady Verinder's country house; and let us look to what we CAN discover in the future, instead of to what we can NOT discover in the past."

"Surely you forget," I said, "that the whole thing is essentially a matter of the past--so far as I am concerned?"

"Answer me this," retorted Mr. Bruff. "Is the Moonstone at the bottom of all the mischief--or is it not?"

"It is--of course."

"Very good. What do we believe was done with the Moonstone, when it was taken to London?"

"It was pledged to Mr. Luker."

"We know that you are not the person who pledged it. Do we know who did?"

"No."

"Where do we believe the Moonstone to be now?"

"Deposited in the keeping of Mr. Luker's bankers."

"Exactly. Now observe. We are already in the month of June. Towards the end of the month (I can't be particular to a day) a year will have elapsed from the time when we believe the jewel to have been pledged. There is a chance--to say the least--that the person who pawned it, may be prepared to redeem it when the year's time has expired. If he redeems it, Mr. Luker must himself--according to the terms of his own arrangement--take the Diamond out of his banker's hands. Under these circumstances, I propose setting a watch at the bank, as the present month draws to an end, and discovering who the person is to whom Mr. Luker restores the Moonstone. Do you see it now?"

I admitted (a little unwillingly) that the idea was a new one, at any rate.

"It's Mr. Murthwaite's idea quite as much as mine," said Mr. Bruff. "It might have never entered my head, but for a conversation we had together some time since. If Mr. Murthwaite is right, the Indians are likely to be on the lookout at the bank, towards the end of the month too--and something serious may come of it. What comes of it doesn't matter to you and me except as it may help us to lay our hands on the mysterious Somebody who pawned the Diamond. That person, you may rely on it, is responsible (I don't pretend to know how) for the position in which you stand at this moment; and that person alone can set you right in Rachel's estimation."

"I can't deny," I said, "that the plan you propose meets the difficulty in a way that is very daring, and very ingenious, and very new. But----"

"But you have an objection to make?"

"Yes. My objection is, that your proposal obliges us to wait."

" Granted. As I reckon the time, it requires you to wait about a fortnight--more or less. Is that so very long?"

"It's a life-time, Mr. Bruff, in such a situation as mine. My existence will be simply unendurable to me, unless I do something towards clearing my character at once."

"Well, well, I understand that. Have you thought yet of what you can do?"

"I have thought of consulting Sergeant Cuff."

"He has retired from the police. It's useless to expect the Sergeant to help you."

"I know where to find him; and I can but try."

"Try," said Mr. Bruff, after a moment's consideration. "The case has assumed such an extraordinary aspect since Sergeant Cuff's time, that you may revive his interest in the inquiry. Try, and let me hear the result. In the meanwhile," he continued, rising, "if you make no discoveries between this, and the end of the month, am I free to try, on my side, what can be done by keeping a lookout at the bank?"

"Certainly," I answered--"unless I relieve you of all necessity for trying the experiment in the interval."

Mr. Bruff smiled, and took up his hat.

"Tell Sergeant Cuff," he rejoined, "that I say the discovery of the truth depends on the discovery of the person who pawned the Diamond. And let me hear what the Sergeant's experience says to that."

So we parted.

Early the next morning, I set forth for the little town of Dorking--the place of Sergeant Cuff's retirement, as indicated to me by Betteredge.

Inquiring at the hotel, I received the necessary directions for finding the Sergeant's cottage. It was approached by a quiet bye-road, a little way out of the town, and it stood snugly in the middle of its own plot of garden ground, protected by a good brick wall at the back and the sides, and by a high quickset hedge in front. The gate, ornamented at the upper part by smartly-painted trellis-work, was locked. After ringing at the bell, I peered through the trellis-work, and saw the great Cuff's favourite flower everywhere; blooming in his garden, clustering over his door, looking in at his windows. Far from the crimes and the mysteries of the great city, the illustrious thief-taker was placidly living out the last Sybarite years of his life, smothered in roses!

A decent elderly woman opened the gate to me, and at once annihilated all the hopes I had built on securing the
assistance of Sergeant Cuff. He had started, only the day before, on a journey to Ireland.

"Has he gone there on business?" I asked.

The woman smiled. "He has only one business now, sir," she said; "and that's roses. Some great man's gardener in Ireland has found out something new in the growing of roses—and Mr. Cuff's away to inquire into it."

"Do you know when he will be back?"

"It's quite uncertain, sir. Mr. Cuff said he should come back directly, or be away some time, just according as he found the new discovery worth nothing, or worth looking into. If you have any message to leave for him, I'll take care, sir, that he gets it."

I gave her my card, having first written on it in pencil: "I have something to say about the Moonstone. Let me hear from you as soon as you get back." That done, there was nothing left but to submit to circumstances, and return to London.

In the irritable condition of my mind, at the time of which I am now writing, the abortive result of my journey to the Sergeant's cottage simply aggravated the restless impulse in me to be doing something. On the day of my return from Dorking, I determined that the next morning should find me bent on a new effort at forcing my way, through all obstacles, from the darkness to the light.

What form was my next experiment to take?

If the excellent Betteredge had been present while I was considering that question, and if he had been let into the secret of my thoughts, he would, no doubt, have declared that the German side of me was, on this occasion, my uppermost side. To speak seriously, it is perhaps possible that my German training was in some degree responsible for the labyrinth of useless speculations in which I now involved myself. For the greater part of the night, I sat smoking, and building up theories, one more profoundly improbable than another. When I did get to sleep, my waking fancies pursued me in dreams. I rose the next morning, with Objective-Subjective and Subjective-Objective inextricably entangled together in my mind; and I began the day which was to witness my next effort at practical action of some kind, by doubting whether I had any sort of right (on purely philosophical grounds) to consider any sort of thing (the Diamond included) as existing at all.

How long I might have remained lost in the mist of my own metaphysics, if I had been left to extricate myself, it is impossible for me to say. As the event proved, accident came to my rescue, and happily delivered me. I happened to wear, that morning, the same coat which I had worn on the day of my interview with Rachel. Searching for something else in one of the pockets, I came upon a crumpled piece of paper, and, taking it out, found Betteredge's forgotten letter in my hand.

It seemed hard on my good old friend to leave him without a reply. I went to my writing-table, and read his letter again.

A letter which has nothing of the slightest importance in it, is not always an easy letter to answer. Betteredge's present effort at corresponding with me came within this category. Mr. Candy's assistant, otherwise Ezra Jennings, had told his master that he had seen me; and Mr. Candy, in his turn, wanted to see me and say something to me, when I was next in the neighbourhood of Frizinghall. What was to be said in answer to that, which would be worth the paper it was written on? I sat idly drawing likenesses from memory of Mr. Candy's remarkable-looking assistant, on the sheet of paper which I had vowed to dedicate to Betteredge—until it suddenly occurred to me that here was the irrepressible Ezra Jennings getting in my way again! I threw a dozen portraits, at least, of the man with the piebald hair (the hair in every case, remarkably like), into the waste-paper basket—and then and there, wrote my answer to Betteredge. It was a perfectly commonplace letter—but it had one excellent effect on me. The effort of writing a few sentences, in plain English, completely cleared my mind of the cloudy nonsense which had filled it since the previous day.

Devoting myself once more to the elucidation of the impenetrable puzzle which my own position presented to me, I now tried to meet the difficulty by investigating it from a plainly practical point of view. The events of the memorable night being still unintelligible to me, I looked a little farther back, and searched my memory of the earlier hours of the birthday for any incident which might prove of some assistance to me in finding the clue.

Had anything happened while Rachel and I were finishing the painted door? or, later, when I rode over to Frizinghall? or afterwards, when I went back with Godfrey Ablewhite and his sisters? or, later again, when I put the Moonstone into Rachel's hands? or, later still, when the company came, and we all assembled round the dinner-table? My memory disposed of that string of questions readily enough, until I came to the last. Looking back at the social event of the birthday dinner, I found myself brought to a standstill at the outset of the inquiry. I was not even capable of accurately remembering the number of the guests who had sat at the same table with me.

To feel myself completely at fault here, and to conclude, thereupon, that the incidents of the dinner might especially repay the trouble of investigating them, formed parts of the same mental process, in my case. I believe other people, in a similar situation, would have reasoned as I did. When the pursuit of our own interests causes us to
become objects of inquiry to ourselves, we are naturally suspicious of what we don’t know. Once in possession of the names of the persons who had been present at the dinner, I resolved—as a means of enriching the deficient resources of my own memory—to appeal to the memory of the rest of the guests; to write down all that they could recollect of the social events of the birthday; and to test the result, thus obtained, by the light of what had happened afterwards, when the company had left the house.

This last and newest of my many contemplated experiments in the art of inquiry—which Betteredge would probably have attributed to the clear-headed, or French, side of me being uppermost for the moment—may fairly claim record here, on its own merits. Unlike as it may seem, I had now actually groped my way to the root of the matter at last. All I wanted was a hint to guide me in the right direction at starting. Before another day had passed over my head, that hint was given me by one of the company who had been present at the birthday feast!

With the plan of proceeding which I now had in view, it was first necessary to possess the complete list of the guests. This I could easily obtain from Gabriel Betteredge. I determined to go back to Yorkshire on that day, and to begin my contemplated investigation the next morning.

It was just too late to start by the train which left London before noon. There was no alternative but to wait, nearly three hours, for the departure of the next train. Was there anything I could do in London, which might usefully occupy this interval of time?

My thoughts went back again obstinately to the birthday dinner.

Though I had forgotten the numbers, and, in many cases, the names of the guests, I remembered readily enough that by far the larger proportion of them came from Frizinghall, or from its neighbourhood. But the larger proportion was not all. Some few of us were not regular residents in the country. I myself was one of the few. Mr. Murthwaite was another. Godfrey Ablewhite was a third. Mr. Bruff—no: I called to mind that business had prevented Mr. Bruff from making one of the party. Had any ladies been present, whose usual residence was in London? I could only remember Miss Clack as coming within this latter category. However, here were three of the guests, at any rate, whom it was clearly advisable for me to see before I left town. I drove off at once to Mr. Bruff’s office; not knowing the addresses of the persons of whom I was in search, and thinking it probable that he might put me in the way of finding them.

Mr. Bruff proved to be too busy to give me more than a minute of his valuable time. In that minute, however, he contrived to dispose—in the most discouraging manner—of all the questions I had to put to him.

In the first place, he considered my newly-discovered method of finding a clue to the mystery as something too purely fanciful to be seriously discussed. In the second, third, and fourth places, Mr. Murthwaite was now on his way back to the scene of his past adventures; Miss Clack had suffered losses, and had settled, from motives of economy, in France; Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite might, or might not, be discoverable somewhere in London. Suppose I inquired at his club? And suppose I excused Mr. Bruff, if he went back to his business and wished me good morning?

The field of inquiry in London, being now so narrowed as only to include the one necessity of discovering Godfrey’s address, I took the lawyer’s hint, and drove to his club.

In the hall, I met with one of the members, who was an old friend of my cousin’s, and who was also an acquaintance of my own. This gentleman, after enlightening me on the subject of Godfrey’s address, told me of two recent events in his life, which were of some importance in themselves, and which had not previously reached my ears.

It appeared that Godfrey, far from being discouraged by Rachel’s withdrawal from her engagement to him had made matrimonial advances soon afterwards to another young lady, reputed to be a great heiress. His suit had prospered, and his marriage had been considered as a settled and certain thing. But, here again, the engagement had been suddenly and unexpectedly broken off—owing, it was said, on this occasion, to a serious difference of opinion between the bridegroom and the lady’s father, on the question of settlements.

As some compensation for this second matrimonial disaster, Godfrey had soon afterwards found himself the object of fond pecuniary remembrance, on the part of one of his many admirers. A rich old lady—highly respected at the Mothers’ Small-Clothes-Conversion-Society, and a great friend of Miss Clack’s (to whom she left nothing but a mourning ring)—had bequeathed to the admirable and meritorious Godfrey a legacy of five thousand pounds. After receiving this handsome addition to his own modest pecuniary resources, he had been heard to say that he felt the necessity of getting a little respite from his charitable labours, and that his doctor prescribed “a run on the Continent, as likely to be productive of much future benefit to his health.” If I wanted to see him, it would be advisable to lose no time in paying my contemplated visit.

I went, then and there, to pay my visit.

The same fatality which had made me just one day too late in calling on Sergeant Cuff, made me again one day too late in calling on Godfrey. He had left London, on the previous morning, by the tidal train, for Dover. He was to
cross to Ostend; and his servant believed he was going on to Brussels. The time of his return was rather uncertain; but I might be sure he would be away at least three months.

I went back to my lodgings a little depressed in spirits. Three of the guests at the birthday dinner—and those three all exceptionally intelligent people—were out of my reach, at the very time when it was most important to be able to communicate with them. My last hopes now rested on Betteredge, and on the friends of the late Lady Verinder whom I might still find living in the neighbourhood of Rachel's country house.

On this occasion, I travelled straight to Frizinghall—the town being now the central point in my field of inquiry. I arrived too late in the evening to be able to communicate with Betteredge. The next morning, I sent a messenger with a letter, requesting him to join me at the hotel, at his earliest convenience.

Having taken the precaution—partly to save time, partly to accommodate Betteredge—of sending my messenger in a fly, I had a reasonable prospect, if no delays occurred, of seeing the old man within less than two hours from the time when I had sent for him. During this interval, I arranged to employ myself in opening my contemplated inquiry, among the guests present at the birthday dinner who were personally known to me, and who were easily within my reach. These were my relatives, the Ablewhites, and Mr. Candy. The doctor had expressed a special wish to see me, and the doctor lived in the next street. So to Mr. Candy I went first.

After what Betteredge had told me, I naturally anticipated finding traces in the doctor's face of the severe illness from which he had suffered. But I was utterly unprepared for such a change as I saw in him when he entered the room and shook hands with me. His eyes were dim; his hair had turned completely grey; his face was wizen; his figure had shrunk. I looked at the once lively, rattlepated, humorous little doctor—associated in my remembrance with the perpetration of incorrigible social indiscretions and innumerable boyish jokes—and I saw nothing left of his former self, but the old tendency to vulgar smartness in his dress. The man was a wreck; but his clothes and his jewellery—in cruel mockery of the change in him—were as gay and as gaudy as ever.

"I have often thought of you, Mr. Blake," he said; "and I am heartily glad to see you again at last. If there is anything I can do for you, pray command my services, sir—pray command my services!"

He said those few commonplace words with needless hurry and eagerness, and with a curiosity to know what had brought me to Yorkshire, which he was perfectly—I might say childishly—in capable of concealing from notice.

With the object that I had in view, I had of course foreseen the necessity of entering into some sort of personal explanation, before I could hope to interest people, mostly strangers to me, in doing their best to assist my inquiry. On the journey to Frizinghall I had arranged what my explanation was to be—and I seized the opportunity now offered to me of trying the effect of it on Mr. Candy.

"I was in Yorkshire, the other day, and I am in Yorkshire again now, on rather a romantic errand," I said. "It is a matter, Mr. Candy, in which the late Lady Verinder's friends all took some interest. You remember the mysterious loss of the Indian Diamond, now nearly a year since? Circumstances have lately happened which lead to the hope that it may yet be found—and I am interesting myself, as one of the family, in recovering it. Among the obstacles in my way, there is the necessity of collecting again all the evidence which was discovered at the time, and more if possible. There are peculiarities in this case which make it desirable to revive my recollection of everything that happened in the house, on the evening of Miss Verinder's birthday. And I venture to appeal to her late mother's friends who were present on that occasion, to lend me the assistance of their memories—"

I had got as far as that in rehearsing my explanatory phrases, when I was suddenly checked by seeing plainly in Mr. Candy's face that my experiment on him was a total failure.

The little doctor sat restlessly picking at the points of his fingers all the time I was speaking. His dim watery eyes were fixed on my face with an expression of vacant and wistful inquiry very painful to see. What he was thinking of, it was impossible to divine. The one thing clearly visible was that I had failed, after the first two or three words, in fixing his attention. The only chance of recalling him to himself appeared to lie in changing the subject. I tried a new topic immediately.

"So much," I said, gaily, "for what brings me to Frizinghall! Now, Mr. Candy, it's your turn. You sent me a message by Gabriel Betteredge—"

He left off picking at his fingers, and suddenly brightened up.

"Yes! yes! yes!" he exclaimed eagerly. "That's it! I sent you a message!"

"And Betteredge duly communicated it by letter," I went on. "You had something to say to me, the next time I was in your neighbourhood. Well, Mr. Candy, here I am!"

"Here you are!" echoed the doctor. "And Betteredge was quite right. I had something to say to you. That was my message. Betteredge is a wonderful man. What a memory! At his age, what a memory!"

He dropped back into silence, and began picking at his fingers again. Recollecting what I had heard from Betteredge about the effect of the fever on his memory, I went on with the conversation, in the hope that I might help him at starting.
"It's a long time since we met," I said. "We last saw each other at the last birthday dinner my poor aunt was ever to give."

"That's it!" cried Mr. Candy. "The birthday dinner!" He started impulsively to his feet, and looked at me. A deep flush suddenly overspread his faded face, and he abruptly sat down again, as if conscious of having betrayed a weakness which he would fain have concealed. It was plain, pitifully plain, that he was aware of his own defect of memory, and that he was bent on hiding it from the observation of his friends.

Thus far he had appealed to my compassion only. But the words he had just said--few as they were--roused my curiosity instantly to the highest pitch. The birthday dinner had already become the one event in the past, at which I looked back with strangely-mixed feelings of hope and distrust. And here was the birthday dinner unmistakably proclaiming itself as the subject on which Mr. Candy had something important to say to me!

I attempted to help him out once more. But, this time, my own interests were at the bottom of my compassionate motive, and they hurried me on a little too abruptly, to the end I had in view.

"It's nearly a year now," I said, "since we sat at that pleasant table. Have you made any memorandum--in your diary, or otherwise--of what you wanted to say to me?"

Mr. Candy understood the suggestion, and showed me that he understood it, as an insult.

"I require no memorandum, Mr. Blake," he said, stiffly enough. "I am not such a very old man, yet--and my memory (thank God) is to be thoroughly depended on!"

It is needless to say that I declined to understand that he was offended with me.

"I wish I could say the same of my memory," I answered. "When I try to think of matters that are a year old, I seldom find my remembrance as vivid as I could wish it to be. Take the dinner at Lady Verinder's, for instance----"

Mr. Candy brightened up again, the moment the allusion passed my lips.

"Ah! the dinner, the dinner at Lady Verinder's!" he exclaimed, more eagerly than ever. "I have got something to say to you about that.

His eyes looked at me again with the painful expression of inquiry, so wistful, so vacant, so miserably helpless to see. He was evidently trying hard, and trying in vain, to recover the lost recollection. "It was a very pleasant dinner," he burst out suddenly, with an air of saying exactly what he wanted to say. "A very pleasant dinner, Mr. Blake, wasn't it?" He nodded and smiled, and appeared to think, poor fellow, that he had succeeded in concealing the total failure of his memory, by a well-timed exertion of his own presence of mind.

It was so distressing that I at once shifted the talk--deeply as I was interested in his recovering the lost remembrance--to topics of local interest.

Here, he got on glibly enough. Trumpery little scandals and quarrels in the town, some of them as much as a month old, appeared to recur to his memory readily. He chattered on, with something of the smooth gossiping fluency of former times. But there were moments, even in the full flow of his talkativeness, when he suddenly hesitated--looked at me for a moment with the vacant inquiry once more in his eyes--controlled himself--and went on again. I submitted patiently to my martyrdom (it is surely nothing less than martyrdom to a man of cosmopolitan sympathies, to absorb in silent resignation the news of a country town?) until the clock on the chimney-piece told me that my visit had been prolonged beyond half an hour. Having now some right to consider the sacrifice as complete, I rose to take leave. As we shook hands, Mr. Candy reverted to the birthday festival of his own accord.

"I am so glad we have met again," he said. "I had it on my mind--I really had it on my mind, Mr. Blake, to speak to you. About the dinner at Lady Verinder's, you know? A pleasant dinner--really a pleasant dinner now, wasn't it?"

On repeating the phrase, he seemed to feel hardly as certain of having prevented me from suspecting his lapse of memory, as he had felt on the first occasion. The wistful look clouded his face again: and, after apparently designing to accompany me to the street door, he suddenly changed his mind, rang the bell for the servant, and remained in the drawing-room.

I went slowly down the doctor's stairs, feeling the disheartening conviction that he really had something to say which it was vitally important to me to hear, and that he was morally incapable of saying it. The effort of remembering that he wanted to speak to me was, but too evidently, the only effort that his enfeebled memory was now able to achieve.

Just as I reached the bottom of the stairs, and had turned a corner on my way to the outer hall, a door opened softly somewhere on the ground floor of the house, and a gentle voice said behind me:--

"I am afraid, sir, you find Mr. Candy sadly changed?"

I turned round, and found myself face to face with Ezra Jennings.

CHAPTER IX

The doctor's pretty housemaid stood waiting for me, with the street door open in her hand. Pouring brightly into the hall, the morning light fell full on the face of Mr. Candy's assistant when I turned, and looked at him.

It was impossible to dispute Betteredge's assertion that the appearance of Ezra Jennings, speaking from a popular
point of view, was against him. His gipsy-complexion, his fleshless cheeks, his gaunt facial bones, his dreamy eyes, his extraordinary parti-coloured hair, the puzzling contradiction between his face and figure which made him look old and young both together—were all more or less calculated to produce an unfavourable impression of him on a stranger's mind. And yet—feeling this as I certainly did—it is not to be denied that Ezra Jennings made some inscrutable appeal to my sympathies, which I found it impossible to resist. While my knowledge of the world warned me to answer the question which he had put, acknowledging that I did indeed find Mr. Candy sadly changed, and then to proceed on my way out of the house—my interest in Ezra Jennings held me rooted to the place, and gave him the opportunity of speaking to me in private about his employer, for which he had been evidently on the watch.

"Are you walking my way, Mr. Jennings?" I said, observing that he held his hat in his hand. "I am going to call on my aunt, Mrs. Ablewhite."

Ezra Jennings replied that he had a patient to see, and that he was walking my way.

We left the house together. I observed that the pretty servant girl—who was all smiles and amiability, when I wished her good morning on my way out—received a modest little message from Ezra Jennings, relating to the time at which he might be expected to return, with pursed-up lips, and with eyes which ostentatiously looked anywhere rather than look in his face. The poor wretch was evidently no favourite in the house. Out of the house, I had Betteredge's word for it that he was unpopular everywhere. "What a life!" I thought to myself, as we descended the doctor's doorsteps.

Having already referred to Mr. Candy's illness on his side, Ezra Jennings now appeared determined to leave it to me to resume the subject. His silence said significantly, "It's your turn now." I, too, had my reasons for referring to the doctor's illness: and I readily accepted the responsibility of speaking first.

"Judging by the change I see in him," I began, "Mr. Candy's illness must have been far more serious that I had supposed?"

"It is almost a miracle," said Ezra Jennings, "that he lived through it."

"Is his memory never any better than I have found it to-day? He has been trying to speak to me----"

"Of something which happened before he was taken ill?" asked the assistant, observing that I hesitated.

"Yes."

"His memory of events, at that past time, is hopelessly enfeebled," said Ezra Jennings. "It is almost to be deplored, poor fellow, that even the wreck of it remains. While he remembers dimly plans that he formed—things, here and there, that he had to say or do before his illness—he is perfectly incapable of recalling what the plans were, or what the thing was that he had to say or do. He is painfully conscious of his own deficiency, and painfully anxious, as you must have seen, to hide it from observation. If he could only have recovered in a complete state of oblivion as to the past, he would have been a happier man. Perhaps we should all be happier," he added, with a sad smile, "if we could but completely forget!"

"There are some events surely in all men's lives," I replied, "the memory of which they would be unwilling entirely to lose?"

"That is, I hope, to be said of most men, Mr. Blake. I am afraid it cannot truly be said of ALL. Have you any reason to suppose that the lost remembrance which Mr. Candy tried to recover—while you were speaking to him just now—was a remembrance which it was important to YOU that he should recall?"

In saying those words, he had touched, of his own accord, on the very point upon which I was anxious to consult him. The interest I felt in this strange man had impelled me, in the first instance, to give him the opportunity of speaking to me; reserving what I might have to say, on my side, in relation to his employer, until I was first satisfied that he was a person in whose delicacy and discretion I could trust. The little that he had said, thus far, had been sufficient to convince me that I was speaking to a gentleman. He had what I may venture to describe as the UNSOUGHT SELF-POSSESSION, which is a sure sign of good breeding, not in England only, but everywhere else in the civilised world. Whatever the object which he had in view, in putting the question that he had just addressed to me, I felt no doubt that I was justified—so far—in answering him without reserve.

"I believe I have a strong interest," I said, "in tracing the lost remembrance which Mr. Candy was unable to recall. May I ask whether you can suggest to me any method by which I might assist his memory?"

Ezra Jennings looked at me, with a sudden flash of interest in his dreamy brown eyes.

"Mr. Candy's memory is beyond the reach of assistance," he said. "I have tried to help it often enough since his recovery, to be able to speak positively on that point."

This disappointed me; and I owned it.

"I confess you led me to hope for a less discouraging answer than that," I said.

Ezra Jennings smiled. "It may not, perhaps, be a final answer, Mr. Blake. It may be possible to trace Mr. Candy's lost recollection, without the necessity of appealing to Mr. Candy himself."

"Indeed? Is it an indiscretion, on my part, to ask how?"
"By no means. My only difficulty in answering your question, is the difficulty of explaining myself. May I trust to your patience, if I refer once more to Mr. Candy's illness: and if I speak of it this time without sparing you certain professional details?"

"Pray go on! You have interested me already in hearing the details."

My eagerness seemed to amuse—perhaps, I might rather say, to please him. He smiled again. We had by this time left the last houses in the town behind us. Ezra Jennings stopped for a moment, and picked some wild flowers from the hedge by the roadside. "How beautiful they are!" he said, simply, showing his little nosegay to me. "And how few people in England seem to admire them as they deserve!"

"You have not always been in England?" I said.

"No. I was born, and partly brought up, in one of our colonies. My father was an Englishman; but my mother--We are straying away from our subject, Mr. Blake; and it is my fault. The truth is, I have associations with these modest little hedgeside flowers—It doesn't matter; we were speaking of Mr. Candy. To Mr. Candy let us return."

Connecting the few words about himself which thus reluctantly escaped him, with the melancholy view of life which led him to place the conditions of human happiness in complete oblivion of the past, I felt satisfied that the story which I had read in his face was, in two particulars at least, the story that it really told. He had suffered as few men suffer; and there was the mixture of some foreign race in his English blood.

"You have heard, I dare say, of the original cause of Mr. Candy's illness?" he resumed. "The night of Lady Verinder's dinner-party was a night of heavy rain. My employer drove home through it in his gig, and reached the house wetted to the skin. He found an urgent message from a patient, waiting for him; and he most unfortunately went at once to visit the sick person, without stopping to change his clothes. I was myself professionally detained, that night, by a case at some distance from Frizinghail. When I got back the next morning, I found Mr. Candy's groom waiting in great alarm to take me to his master's room. By that time the mischief was done; the illness had set in."

"The illness has only been described to me, in general terms, as a fever," I said.

"I can add nothing which will make the description more accurate," answered Ezra Jennings. "From first to last the fever assumed no specific form. I sent at once to two of Mr. Candy's medical friends in the town, both physicians, to come and give me their opinion of the case. They agreed with me that it looked serious; but they both strongly dissented from the view I took of the treatment. We differed entirely in the conclusions which we drew from the patient's pulse. The two doctors, arguing from the rapidity of the beat, declared that a lowering treatment was the only treatment to be adopted. On my side, I admitted the rapidity of the pulse, but I also pointed to its alarming feebleness as indicating an exhausted condition of the system, and as showing a plain necessity for the administration of stimulants. The two doctors were for keeping him on gruel, lemonade, barley-water, and so on. I was for giving him champagne, or brandy, ammonia, and quinine. A serious difference of opinion, as you see! a difference between two physicians of established local repute, and a stranger who was only an assistant in the house. For the first few days, I had no choice but to give way to my elders and betters; the patient steadily sinking all the time. I made a second attempt to appeal to the plain, undeniably plain, evidence of the pulse. Its rapidity was unchecked, and its feebleness had increased. The two doctors took offence at my obstinacy. They said, 'Mr. Jennings, either we manage this case, or you manage it. Which is it to be?' I said, 'Gentlemen, give me five minutes to consider, and that plain question shall have a plain reply.' When the time expired, I was ready with my answer. I said, 'You positively refuse to try the stimulant treatment? They refused in so many words. 'I mean to try it at once, gentlemen.'—Try it, Mr. Jennings, and we withdraw from the case.' I sent down to the cellar for a bottle of champagne; and I administered half a tumbler-full of it to the patient with my own hand. The two physicians took up their hats in silence, and left the house."

"You had assumed a serious responsibility," I said. "In your place, I am afraid I should have shrank from it."

"In my place, Mr. Blake, you would have remembered that Mr. Candy had taken you into his employment, under circumstances which made you his debtor for life. In my place, you would have seen him sinking, hour by hour; and you would have risked anything, rather than let the one man on earth who had befriended you, die before your eyes. Don't suppose that I had no sense of the terrible position in which I had placed myself! There were moments when I felt all the misery of my friendlessness, all the peril of my dreadful responsibility. If I had been a happy man, if I had led a prosperous life, I believe I should have sunk under the task I had imposed on myself. But I had no happy time to look back at, no past peace of mind to force itself into contrast with my present anxiety and suspense—and I held firm to my resolution through it all. I took an interval in the middle of the day, when my patient's condition was at its best, for the repose I needed. For the rest of the four-and-twenty hours, as long as his life was in danger, I never left his bedside. Towards sunset, as usual in such cases, the delirium incidental to the fever came on. It lasted more or less through the night; and then intermitted, at that terrible time in the early morning—from two o'clock to five—when the vital energies even of the healthiest of us are at their lowest. It is then that Death gathers in his human
harvest most abundantly. It was then that Death and I fought our fight over the bed, which should have the man who lay on it. I never hesitated in pursuing the treatment on which I had staked everything. When wine failed, I tried brandy. When the other stimulants lost their influence, I doubled the dose. After an interval of suspense—the like of which I hope to God I shall never feel again—there came a day when the rapidity of the pulse slightly, but appreciably, diminished; and, better still, there came also a change in the beat—an unmistakable change to steadiness and strength. THEN, I knew that I had saved him; and then I own I broke down. I laid the poor fellow's wasted hand back on the bed, and burst out crying. An hysterical relief, Mr. Blake—nothing more! Physiology says, and says truly, that some men are born with female constitutions—and I am one of them!"

He made that bitterly professional apology for his tears, speaking quietly and unaffectedly, as he had spoken throughout. His tone and manner, from beginning to end, showed him to be especially, almost morbidly, anxious not to set himself up as an object of interest to me.

"You may well ask, why I have wearied you with all these details?" he went on. "It is the only way I can see, Mr. Blake, of properly introducing to you what I have to say next. Now you know exactly what my position was, at the time of Mr. Candy's illness, you will the more readily understand the sore need I had of lightening the burden on my mind by giving it, at intervals, some sort of relief. I have had the presumption to occupy my leisure, for some years past, in writing a book, addressed to the members of my profession—a book on the intricate and delicate subject of the brain and the nervous system. My work will probably never be finished; and it will certainly never be published. It has none the less been the friend of many lonely hours; and it helped me to while away the anxious time—the time of waiting, and nothing else—at Mr. Candy's bedside. I told you he was delirious, I think? And I mentioned the time at which his delirium came on?"

"Yes."

"Well, I had reached a section of my book, at that time, which touched on this same question of delirium. I won't trouble you at any length with my theory on the subject—I will confine myself to telling you only what it is your present interest to know. It has often occurred to me in the course of my medical practice, to doubt whether we can justifiably infer—in cases of delirium—that the loss of the faculty of speaking connectedly, implies of necessity the loss of the faculty of thinking connectedly as well. Poor Mr. Candy's illness gave me an opportunity of putting this doubt to the test. I understand the art of writing in shorthand; and I was able to take down the patient's 'wanderings,' exactly as they fell from his lips.—Do you see, Mr. Blake, what I am coming to at last?"

I saw it clearly, and waited with breathless interest to hear more.

"At odds and ends of time," Ezra Jennings went on, "I reproduced my shorthand notes, in the ordinary form of writing—leaving large spaces between the broken phrases, and even the single words, as they had fallen disconnectedly from Mr. Candy's lips. I then treated the result thus obtained, on something like the principle which one adopts in putting together a child's 'puzzle.' It is all confusion to begin with; but it may be all brought into order and shape, if you can only find the right way. Acting on this plan, I filled in each blank space on the paper, with what the words or phrases on either side of it suggested to me as the speaker's meaning; altering over and over again, until my additions followed naturally on the spoken words which came before them, and fitted naturally into the spoken words which came after them. The result was, that I not only occupied in this way many vacant and anxious hours, but that I arrived at something which was (as it seemed to me) a confirmation of the theory that I held. In plainer words, after putting the broken sentences together I found the superior faculty of thinking going on, more or less connectedly, in my patient's mind, while the inferior faculty of expression was in a state of almost complete incapacity and confusion."

"One word!" I interposed eagerly. "Did my name occur in any of his wanderings?"

"You shall hear, Mr. Blake. Among my written proofs of the assertion which I have just advanced—or, I ought to say, among the written experiments, tending to put my assertion to the proof—there IS one, in which your name occurs. For nearly the whole of one night, Mr. Candy's mind was occupied with SOMETHING between himself and you. I have got the broken words, as they dropped from his lips, on one sheet of paper. And I have got the links of my own discovering which connect those words together, on another sheet of paper. The product (as the arithmeticians would say) is an intelligible statement—first, of something actually done in the past; secondly, of something which Mr. Candy contemplated doing in the future, if his illness had not got in the way, and stopped him. The question is whether this does, or does not, represent the lost recollection which he vainly attempted to find when you called on him this morning?"

"Not a doubt of it!" I answered. "Let us go back directly, and look at the papers!"

"Quite impossible, Mr. Blake."

"Why?"

"Put yourself in my position for a moment," said Ezra Jennings. "Would you disclose to another person what had dropped unconsciously from the lips of your suffering patient and your helpless friend, without first knowing that
there was a necessity to justify you in opening your lips?"

I felt that he was unanswerable, here; but I tried to argue the question, nevertheless.

"My conduct in such a delicate matter as you describe," I replied, "would depend greatly on whether the disclosure was of a nature to compromise my friend or not."

"I have disposed of all necessity for considering that side of the question, long since," said Ezra Jennings. "Wherever my notes included anything which Mr. Candy might have wished to keep secret, those notes have been destroyed. My manuscript experiments at my friend's bedside, include nothing, now, which he would have hesitated to communicate to others, if he had recovered the use of his memory. In your case, I have every reason to suppose that my notes contain something which he actually wished to say to you."

"And yet, you hesitate?"

"And yet, I hesitate. Remember the circumstances under which I obtained the information which I possess! Harmless as it is, I cannot prevail upon myself to give it up to you, unless you first satisfy me that there is a reason for doing so. He was so miserably ill, Mr. Blake! and he was so helplessly dependent upon Me! Is it too much to ask, if I request you only to hint to me what your interest is in the lost recollection—or what you believe that lost recollection to be?"

To have answered him with the frankness which his language and his manner both claimed from me, would have been to commit myself to openly acknowledging that I was suspected of the theft of the Diamond. Strongly as Ezra Jennings had intensified the first impulsive interest which I had felt in him, he had not overcome my unconquerable reluctance to disclose the degrading position in which I stood. I took refuge once more in the explanatory phrases with which I had prepared myself to meet the curiosity of strangers.

This time I had no reason to complain of a want of attention on the part of the person to whom I addressed myself. Ezra Jennings listened patiently, even anxiously, until I had done.

"I am sorry to have raised your expectations, Mr. Blake, only to disappoint them," he said. "Throughout the whole period of Mr. Candy's illness, from first to last, not one word about the Diamond escaped his lips. The matter with which I heard him connect your name has, I can assure you, no discoverable relation whatever with the loss or the recovery of Miss Verinder's jewel."

We arrived, as he said those words, at a place where the highway along which we had been walking branched off into two roads. One led to Mr. Ablewhite's house, and the other to a moorland village some two or three miles off. Ezra Jennings stopped at the road which led to the village.

"My way lies in this direction," he said. "I am really and truly sorry, Mr. Blake, that I can be of no use to you."

His voice told me that he spoke sincerely. His soft brown eyes rested on me for a moment with a look of melancholy interest. He bowed, and went, without another word, on his way to the village.

For a minute or more I stood and watched him, walking farther and farther away with what I now firmly believed to be the clue of which I was in search. He turned, after walking on a little way, and looked back. Seeing me still standing at the place where we had parted, he stopped, as if doubting whether I might not wish to speak to him again. There was no time for me to reason out my own situation—to remind myself that I was losing my opportunity, at what might be the turning point of my life, and all to flatter nothing more important than my own self-esteem! There was only time to call him back first, and to think afterwards. I suspect I am one of the rashest of existing men. I called him back—and then I said to myself, "Now there is no help for it. I must tell him the truth!"

He retraced his steps directly. I advanced along the road to meet him.

"Mr. Jennings," I said. "I have not treated you quite fairly. My interest in tracing Mr. Candy's lost recollection is not the interest of recovering the Moonstone. A serious personal matter is at the bottom of my visit to Yorkshire. I have but one excuse for not having dealt frankly with you in this matter. It is more painful to me than I can say, to mention to anybody what my position really is."

Ezra Jennings looked at me with the first appearance of embarrassment which I had seen in him yet.

"I have no right, Mr. Blake, and no wish," he said, "to intrude myself into your private affairs. Allow me to ask your pardon, on my side, for having (most innocently) put you to a painful test."

"You have a perfect right," I rejoined, "to fix the terms on which you feel justified in revealing what you heard at Mr. Candy's bedside. I understand and respect the delicacy which influences you in this matter. How can I expect to be taken into your confidence if I decline to admit you into mine? You ought to know, and you shall know, why I am interested in discovering what Mr. Candy wanted to say to me. If I turn out to be mistaken in my anticipations, and if you prove unable to help me when you are really aware of what I want, I shall trust to your honour to keep my secret—and something tells me that I shall not trust in vain."

"Stop, Mr. Blake. I have a word to say, which must be said before you go any farther." I looked at him in astonishment. The grip of some terrible emotion seemed to have seized him, and shaken him to the soul. His gipsy
complexion had altered to a livid greyish paleness; his eyes had suddenly become wild and glittering; his voice had dropped to a tone—low, stern, and resolute—which I now heard for the first time. The latent resources in the man, for good or for evil—it was hard, at that moment, to say which—leapt up in him and showed themselves to me, with the suddenness of a flash of light.

"Before you place any confidence in me," he went on, "you ought to know, and you MUST know, under what circumstances I have been received into Mr. Candy's house. It won't take long. I don't profess, sir, to tell my story (as the phrase is) to any man. My story will die with me. All I ask, is to be permitted to tell you, what I have told Mr. Candy. If you are still in the mind, when you have heard that, to say what you have proposed to say, you will command my attention and command my services. Shall we walk on?"

The suppressed misery in his face silenced me. I answered his question by a sign. We walked on.

After advancing a few hundred yards, Ezra Jennings stopped at a gap in the rough stone wall which shut off the moor from the road, at this part of it.

"Do you mind resting a little, Mr. Blake?" he asked. "I am not what I was—and some things shake me."

I agreed of course. He led the way through the gap to a patch of turf on the heathy ground, screened by bushes and dwarf trees on the side nearest to the road, and commanding in the opposite direction a grandly desolate view over the broad brown wilderness of the moor. The clouds had gathered, within the last half hour. The light was dull; the distance was dim. The lovely face of Nature met us, soft and still colourless—met us without a smile.

We sat down in silence. Ezra Jennings laid aside his hat, and passed his hand wearily over his forehead, wearily through his startling white and black hair. He tossed his little nosegay of wild flowers away from him, as if the remembrances which it recalled were remembrances which hurt him now.

"Mr. Blake!" he said, suddenly. "You are in bad company. The cloud of a horrible accusation has rested on me for years. I tell you the worst at once. I am a man whose life is a wreck, and whose character is gone."

I attempted to speak. He stopped me.

"No," he said. "Pardon me; not yet. Don't commit yourself to expressions of sympathy which you may afterwards wish to recall. I have mentioned an accusation which has rested on me for years. There are circumstances in connexion with it that tell against me. I cannot bring myself to acknowledge what the accusation is. And I am incapable, perfectly incapable, of proving my innocence. I can only assert my innocence. I assert it, sir, on my oath, as a Christian. It is useless to appeal to my honour as a man."

He paused again. I looked round at him. He never looked at me in return. His whole being seemed to be absorbed in the agony of recollecting, and in the effort to speak.

"There is much that I might say," he went on, "about the merciless treatment of me by my own family, and the merciless enmity to which I have fallen a victim. But the harm is done; the wrong is beyond all remedy. I decline to weary or distress you, sir, if I can help it. At the outset of my career in this country, the vile slander to which I have referred struck me down at once and for ever. I resigned my aspirations in my profession—obscurity was the only hope left for me. I parted with the woman I loved—how could I condemn her to share my disgrace? A medical assistant's place offered itself, in a remote corner of England. I got the place. It promised me peace; it promised me obscurity, as I thought. I was wrong. Evil report, with time and chance to help it, travels patiently, and travels far. The accusation from which I had fled followed me. I got warning of its approach. I was able to leave my situation voluntarily, with the testimonials that I had earned. They got me another situation in another remote district. Time passed again; and again the slander that was death to my character found me out. On this occasion I had no warning. My employer said, 'Mr. Jennings, I have no complaint to make against you; but you must set yourself right, or leave me.' I had but one choice—I left him. It's useless to dwell on what I suffered after that. I am only forty years old now. Look at my face, and let it tell for me the story of some miserable years. It ended in my drifting to this place, and meeting with Mr. Candy. He wanted an assistant. I referred him, on the question of capacity, to my last employer. The question of character remained. I told him what I have told you—and more. I warned him that there were difficulties in the way, even if he believed me. 'Here, as elsewhere,' I said 'I scorn the guilty evasion of living under an assumed name: I am no safer at Frizinghall than at other places from the cloud that follows me, go where I may.' He answered, 'I don't do things by halves—I believe you, and I pity you. If you will risk what may happen, I will risk it too.' God Almighty bless him! He has given me shelter, he has given me employment, he has given me rest of mind—and I have the certain conviction (I have had it for some months past) that nothing will happen now to make him regret it."

"The slander has died out?" I said.

"The slander is as active as ever. But when it follows me here, it will come too late."

"You will have left the place?"

"No, Mr. Blake—I shall be dead. For ten years past I have suffered from an incurable internal complaint. I don't disguise from you that I should have let the agony of it kill me long since, but for one last interest in life, which
makes my existence of some importance to me still. I want to provide for a person--very dear to me--whom I shall never see again. My own little patrimony is hardly sufficient to make her independent of the world. The hope, if I could only live long enough, of increasing it to a certain sum, has impelled me to resist the disease by such palliative means as I could devise. The one effectual palliative in my case, is--opium. To that all-potent and all-merciful drug I am indebted for a respite of many years from my sentence of death. But even the virtues of opium have their limit. The progress of the disease has gradually forced me from the use of opium to the abuse of it. I am feeling the penalty at last. My nervous system is shattered; my nights are nights of horror. The end is not far off now. Let it come--I have not lived and worked in vain. The little sum is nearly made up; and I have the means of completing it, if my last reserves of life fail me sooner than I expect. I hardly know how I have wandered into telling you this. I don't think I am mean enough to appeal to your pity. Perhaps, I fancy you may be all the readier to believe me, if you know that what I have said to you, I have said with the certain knowledge in me that I am a dying man. There is no disguising, Mr. Blake, that you interest me. I have attempted to make my poor friend's loss of memory the means of bettering my acquaintance with you. I have speculated on the chance of your feeling a passing curiosity about what he wanted to say, and of my being able to satisfy it. Is there no excuse for my intruding myself on you? Perhaps there is some excuse. A man who has lived as I have lived has his bitter moments when he ponders over human destiny. You have youth, health, riches, a place in the world, a prospect before you. You, and such as you, show me the sunny side of human life, and reconcile me with the world that I am leaving, before I go. However this talk between us may end, I shall not forget that you have done me a kindness in doing that. It rests with you, sir, to say what you proposed saying, or to wish me good morning.

I had but one answer to make to that appeal. Without a moment's hesitation I told him the truth, as unreservedly as I have told it in these pages.

He started to his feet, and looked at me with breathless eagerness as I approached the leading incident of my story.

"It is certain that I went into the room," I said; "it is certain that I took the Diamond. I can only meet those two plain facts by declaring that, do what I might, I did it without my own knowledge----"

Ezra Jennings caught me excitedly by the arm.

"Stop!" he said. "You have suggested more to me than you suppose. Have you ever been accustomed to the use of opium?"

"I never tasted it in my life."

"Were your nerves out of order, at this time last year? Were you unusually restless and irritable?"

"Yes."

"Did you sleep badly?"

"Wretchedly. Many nights I never slept at all."

"Was the birthday night an exception? Try, and remember. Did you sleep well on that one occasion?"

"I do remember! I slept soundly."

He dropped my arm as suddenly as he had taken it--and looked at me with the air of a man whose mind was relieved of the last doubt that rested on it.

"This is a marked day in your life, and in mine," he said, gravely. "I am absolutely certain, Mr. Blake, of one thing--I have got what Mr. Candy wanted to say to you this morning, in the notes that I took at my patient's bedside. Wait! that is not all. I am firmly persuaded that I can prove you to have been unconscious of what you were about, when you entered the room and took the Diamond. Give me time to think, and time to question you. I believe the vindication of your innocence is in my hands!"

"Explain yourself, for God's sake! What do you mean?"

In the excitement of our colloquy, we had walked on a few steps, beyond the clump of dwarf trees which had hitherto screened us from view. Before Ezra Jennings could answer me, he was hailed from the high road by a man, in great agitation, who had evidently on the look-out for him.

"I am coming," he called back; "I am coming as fast as I can!" He turned to me. "There is an urgent case waiting for me at the village yonder; I ought to have been there half an hour since--I must attend to it at once. Give me two hours from this time, and call at Mr. Candy's again--and I will engage to be ready for you."

"How am I to wait?" I exclaimed, impatiently. "Can't you quiet my mind by a word of explanation before we part?"

"This is far too serious a matter to be explained in a hurry, Mr. Blake. I am not wilfully trying your patience--I should only be adding to your suspense, if I attempted to relieve it as things are now. At Frizinghall, sir, in two hours' time!"

The man on the high road hailed him again. He hurried away, and left me.

CHAPTER X
How the interval of suspense in which I was now condemned might have affected other men in my position, I cannot pretend to say. The influence of the two hours' probation upon my temperament was simply this. I felt physically incapable of remaining still in any one place, and morally incapable of speaking to any one human being, until I had first heard all that Ezra Jennings had to say to me.

In this frame of mind, I not only abandoned my contemplated visit to Mrs. Ablewhite--I even shrank from encountering Gabriel Betteredge himself.

Returning to Frizinghall, I left a note for Betteredge, telling him that I had been unexpectedly called away for a few hours, but that he might certainly expect me to return towards three o'clock in the afternoon. I requested him, in the interval, to order his dinner at the usual hour, and to amuse himself as he pleased. He had, as I well knew, hosts of friends in Frizinghall; and he would be at no loss how to fill up his time until I returned to the hotel.

This done, I made the best of my way out of the town again, and roamed the lonely moorland country which surrounds Frizinghall, until my watch told me that it was time, at last, to return to Mr. Candy's house.

I found Ezra Jennings ready and waiting for me.

He was sitting alone in a bare little room, which communicated by a glazed door with a surgery. Hideous coloured diagrams of the ravages of hideous diseases decorated the barren buff-coloured walls. A book-case filled with dingy medical works, and ornamented at the top with a skull, in place of the customary bust; a large deal table copiously splashed with ink; wooden chairs of the sort that are seen in kitchens and cottages; a threadbare drapery in the middle of the floor; a sink of water, with a basin and waste-pipe roughly let into the wall, horribly suggestive of its connection with surgical operations--comprised the entire furniture of the room. The bees were humming among a few flowers placed in pots outside the window; the birds were singing in the garden, and the faint intermittent jingle of a tuneless piano in some neighbouring house forced itself now and again on the ear. In any other place, these everyday sounds might have spoken pleasantly of the everyday world outside. Here, they came in as intruders on a silence which nothing but human suffering had the privilege to disturb. I looked at the mahogany instrument case, and at the huge roll of lint, occupying places of their own on the book-shelves, and shuddered inwardly as I thought of the sounds, familiar and appropriate to the everyday use of Ezra Jennings' room.

"I make no apology, Mr. Blake, for the place in which I am receiving you," he said. "It is the only room in the house, at this hour of the day, in which we can feel quite sure of being left undisturbed. Here are my papers ready for you; and here are two books to which we may have occasion to refer, before we have done. Bring your chair to the table, and we shall be able to consult them together."

I drew up to the table; and Ezra Jennings handed me his manuscript notes. They consisted of two large folio leaves of paper. One leaf contained writing which only covered the surface at intervals. The other presented writing, in red and black ink, which completely filled the page from top to bottom. In the irritated state of my curiosity, at that moment, I laid aside the second sheet of paper in despair.

"Have some mercy on me!" I said. "Tell me what I am to expect, before I attempt to read this."

"Willingly, Mr. Blake! Do you mind my asking you one or two more questions?"

"Ask me anything you like!"

He looked at me with the sad smile on his lips, and the kindly interest in his soft brown eyes.

"You have already told me," he said, "that you have never--to your knowledge--tasted opium in your life."

"To my knowledge," I repeated.

"You will understand directly why I speak with that reservation. Let us go on. You are not aware of ever having taken opium. At this time, last year, you were suffering from nervous irritation, and you slept wretchedly at night. On the night of the birthday, however, there was an exception to the rule--you slept soundly. Am I right, so far?"

"Quite right!"

"Can you assign any cause for the nervous suffering, and your want of sleep?"

"I can assign no cause. Old Betteredge made a guess at the cause, I remember. But that is hardly worth mentioning."

"Pardon me. Anything is worth mentioning in such a case as this. Betteredge attributed your sleeplessness to something. To what?"

"To my leaving off smoking."

"Had you been an habitual smoker?"

"Yes."

"Did you leave off the habit suddenly?"

"Yes."

"Betteredge was perfectly right, Mr. Blake. When smoking is a habit a man must have no common constitution who can leave it off suddenly without some temporary damage to his nervous system. Your sleepless nights are accounted for, to my mind. My next question refers to Mr. Candy. Do you remember having entered into anything
like a dispute with him--at the birthday dinner, or afterwards--on the subject of his profession?"

The question instantly awakened one of my dormant remembrances in connection with the birthday festival. The foolish wrangle which took place, on that occasion, between Mr. Candy and myself, will be found described at much greater length than it deserves in the tenth chapter of Betteredge's Narrative. The details there presented of the dispute--so little had I thought of it afterwards--entirely failed to recur to my memory. All that I could now recall, and all that I could tell Ezra Jennings was, that I had attacked the art of medicine at the dinner-table with sufficient rashness and sufficient pertinacity to put even Mr. Candy out of temper for the moment. I also remembered that Lady Verinder had interfered to stop the dispute, and that the little doctor and I had "made it up again," as the children say, and had become as good friends as ever, before we shook hands that night.

"There is one thing more," said Ezra Jennings, "which it is very important I should know. Had you any reason for feeling any special anxiety about the Diamond, at this time last year?"

"I had the strongest reasons for feeling anxiety about the Diamond. I knew it to be the object of a conspiracy; and I was warned to take measures for Miss Verinder's protection, as the possessor of the stone."

"Was the safety of the Diamond the subject of conversation between you and any other person, immediately before you retired to rest on the birthday night?"

"It was the subject of a conversation between Lady Verinder and her daughter--"

"Which took place in your hearing?"

"Yes."

Ezra Jennings took up his notes from the table, and placed them in my hands.

"Mr. Blake," he said, "if you read those notes now, by the light which my questions and your answers have thrown on them, you will make two astounding discoveries concerning yourself. You will find--First, that you entered Miss Verinder's sitting-room and took the Diamond, in a state of trance, produced by opium. Secondly, that the opium was given to you by Mr. Candy--without your own knowledge--as a practical refutation of the opinions which you had expressed to him at the birthday dinner."

I sat with the papers in my hand completely stupefied.

"Try and forgive poor Mr. Candy," said the assistant gently. "He has done dreadful mischief, I own; but he has done it innocently. If you will look at the notes, you will see that--but for his illness--he would have returned to Lady Verinder's the morning after the party, and would have acknowledged the trick that he had played you. Miss Verinder would have heard of it, and Miss Verinder would have questioned him--and the truth which has laid hidden for a year would have been discovered in a day."

I began to regain my self-possession. "Mr. Candy is beyond the reach of my resentment," I said angrily. "But the trick that he played me is not the less an act of treachery, for all that. I may forgive, but I shall not forget it."

"Every medical man commits that act of treachery, Mr. Blake, in the course of his practice. The ignorant distrust of opium (in England) is by no means confined to the lower and less cultivated classes. Every doctor in large practice finds himself, every now and then, obliged to deceive his patients, as Mr. Candy deceived you. I don't defend the folly of playing you a trick under the circumstances. I only plead with you for a more accurate and more merciful construction of motives."

"How was it done?" I asked. "Who gave me the laudanum, without my knowing it myself?"

"I am not able to tell you. Nothing relating to that part of the matter dropped from Mr. Candy's lips, all through his illness. Perhaps your own memory may point to the person to be suspected."

"No."

"It is useless, in that case, to pursue the inquiry. The laudanum was secretly given to you in some way. Let us leave it there, and go on to matters of more immediate importance. Read my notes, if you can. Familiarise your mind with what has happened in the past. I have something very bold and very startling to propose to you, which relates to the future."

Those last words roused me.

I looked at the papers, in the order in which Ezra Jennings had placed them in my hands. The paper which contained the smaller quantity of writing was the uppermost of the two. On this, the disconnected words, and fragments of sentences, which had dropped from Mr. Candy in his delirium, appeared as follows:

"... Mr. Franklin Blake ... and agreeable ... down a peg ... medicine ... confesses ... sleep at night ... tell him ... out of order ... medicine ... he tells me ... and groping in the dark mean one and the same thing ... all the company at the dinner-table ... I say ... groping after sleep ... nothing but medicine ... he says ... leading the blind ... know what it means ... witty ... a night's rest in spite of his teeth ... wants sleep ... Lady Verinder's medicine chest ... five-and-twenty minims ... without his knowing it ... to-morrow morning ... Well, Mr. Blake ... medicine to-day ... never ... without it ... out, Mr. Candy ... excellent ... without it ... down on him ... truth ... something besides ... excellent ... dose of laudanum, sir ... bed ... what ... medicine now."
There, the first of the two sheets of paper came to an end. I handed it back to Ezra Jennings.

"That is what you heard at his bedside?" I said.

"Literally and exactly what I heard," he answered--"except that the repetitions are not transferred here from my short-hand notes. He reiterated certain words and phrases a dozen times over, fifty times over, just as he attached more or less importance to the idea which they represented. The repetitions, in this sense, were of some assistance to me in putting together those fragments. Don't suppose," he added, pointing to the second sheet of paper, "that I claim to have reproduced the expressions which Mr. Candy himself would have used if he had been capable of speaking connectedly. I only say that I have penetrated through the obstacle of the disconnected expression, to the thought which was underlying it connectedly all the time. Judge for yourself."

I turned to the second sheet of paper, which I now knew to be the key to the first.

Once more, Mr. Candy's wanderings appeared, copied in black ink; the intervals between the phrases being filled up by Ezra Jennings in red ink. I reproduce the result here, in one plain form; the original language and the interpretation of it coming close enough together in these pages to be easily compared and verified.

"... Mr. Franklin Blake is clever and agreeable, but he wants taking down a peg when he talks of medicine. He confesses that he has been suffering from want of sleep at night. I tell him that his nerves are out of order, and that he ought to take medicine. He tells me that taking medicine and groping in the dark mean one and the same thing. This before all the company at the dinner-table. I say to him, you are groping after sleep, and nothing but medicine can help you to find it. He says to me, I have heard of the blind leading the blind, and now I know what it means. Witty--but I can give him a night's rest in spite of his teeth. He really wants sleep; and Lady Verinder's medicine chest is at my disposal. Give him five-and-twenty minims of laudanum to-night, without his knowing it; and then call to-morrow morning. 'Well, Mr. Blake, will you try a little medicine to-day? You will never sleep without it.'--'There you are out, Mr. Candy: I have had an excellent night's rest without it.' Then, come down on him with the truth! You have had something besides an excellent night's rest; you had a dose of laudanum, sir, before you went to bed. What do you say to the art of medicine, now?"

Admiration of the ingenuity which had woven this smooth and finished texture out of the ravelled skein was naturally the first impression that I felt, on handing the manuscript back to Ezra Jennings. He modestly interrupted the first few words in which my sense of surprise expressed itself, by asking me if the conclusion which he had drawn from his notes was also the conclusion at which my own mind had arrived.

"Do you believe as I believe," he said, "that you were acting under the influence of the laudanum in doing all that you did, on the night of Miss Verinder's birthday, in Lady Verinder's house?"

"I am too ignorant of the influence of laudanum to have an opinion of my own," I answered. "I can only follow your opinion, and feel convinced that you are right."

"Very well. The next question is this. You are convinced; and I am convinced--how are we to carry our conviction to the minds of other people?"

I pointed to the two manuscripts, lying on the table between us. Ezra Jennings shook his head.

"Useless, Mr. Blake! Quite useless, as they stand now for three unanswerable reasons. In the first place, those notes have been taken under circumstances entirely out of the experience of the mass of mankind. Against them, to begin with! In the second place, those notes represent a medical and metaphysical theory. Against them, once more! In the third place, those notes are of my making; there is nothing but my assertion to the contrary, to guarantee that they are not fabrications. Remember what I told you on the moor--and ask yourself what my assertion is worth. No! my notes have but one value, looking to the verdict of the world outside. Your innocence is to be vindicated; and they show how it can be done. We must put our conviction to the proof--and You are the man to prove it!"

"How?" I asked.

He leaned eagerly nearer to me across the table that divided us.

"Are you willing to try a bold experiment?"

"I will do anything to clear myself of the suspicion that rests on me now."

"Will you submit to some personal inconvenience for a time?"

"To any inconvenience, no matter what it may be."

"Will you be guided implicitly by my advice? It may expose you to the ridicule of fools; it may subject you to the remonstrances of friends whose opinions you are bound to respect."

"Tell me what to do!" I broke out impatiently. "And, come what may, I'll do it."

"You shall do this, Mr. Blake," he answered. "You shall steal the Diamond, unconsciously, for the second time, in the presence of witnesses whose testimony is beyond dispute."

I started to my feet. I tried to speak. I could only look at him.

"I believe it CAN be done," he went on. "And it shall be done--if you will only help me. Try to compose yourself--sit down, and hear what I have to say to you. You have resumed the habit of smoking; I have seen that for
myself. How long have you resumed it."

"For nearly a year."

"Do you smoke more or less than you did?"

"More."

"Will you give up the habit again? Suddenly, mind!--as you gave it up before."

I began dimly to see his drift. "I will give it up, from this moment," I answered.

"If the same consequences follow, which followed last June," said Ezra Jennings--"if you suffer once more as you suffered then, from sleepless nights, we shall have gained our first step. We shall have put you back again into something assimilating to your nervous condition on the birthday night. If we can next revive, or nearly revive, the domestic circumstances which surrounded you; and if we can occupy your mind again with the various questions concerning the Diamond which formerly agitated it, we shall have replaced you, as nearly as possible in the same position, physically and morally, in which the opium found you last year. In that case we may fairly hope that a repetition of the dose will lead, in a greater or lesser degree, to a repetition of the result. There is my proposal, expressed in a few hasty words. You shall now see what reasons I have to justify me in making it."

He turned to one of the books at his side, and opened it at a place marked by a small slip of paper.

"Don't suppose that I am going to weary you with a lecture on physiology," he said. "I think myself bound to prove, in justice to both of us, that I am not asking you to try this experiment in deference to any theory of my own devising. Admitted principles, and recognised authorities, justify me in the view that I take. Give me five minutes of your attention; and I will undertake to show you that Science sanctions my proposal, fanciful as it may seem. Here, in the first place, is the physiological principle on which I am acting, stated by no less a person than Dr. Carpenter. Read it for yourself."

He handed me the slip of paper which had marked the place in the book. It contained a few lines of writing, as follows:--

"There seems much ground for the belief, that every sensory impression which has once been recognised by the perceptive consciousness, is registered (so to speak) in the brain, and may be reproduced at some subsequent time, although there may be no consciousness of its existence in the mind during the whole intermediate period." "Is that plain, so far?" asked Ezra Jennings.

"Perfectly plain."

He pushed the open book across the table to me, and pointed to a passage, marked by pencil lines.

"Now," he said, "read that account of a case, which has--as I believe--a direct bearing on your own position, and on the experiment which I am tempting you to try. Observe, Mr. Blake, before you begin, that I am now referring you to one of the greatest of English physiologists. The book in your hand is Doctor Elliotson's HUMAN PHYSIOLOGY; and the case which the doctor cites rests on the well-known authority of Mr. Combe."

The passage pointed out to me was expressed in these terms:--

"Dr. Abel informed me," says Mr. Combe, "of an Irish porter to a warehouse, who forgot, when sober, what he had done when drunk; but, being drunk, again recollected the transactions of his former state of intoxication. On one occasion, being drunk, he had lost a parcel of some value, and in his sober moments could give no account of it. Next time he was intoxicated, he recollected that he had left the parcel at a certain house, and there being no address on it, it had remained there safely, and was got on his calling for it."

"Plain again?" asked Ezra Jennings.

"As plain as need be."

He put back the slip of paper in its place, and closed the book.

"Are you satisfied that I have not spoken without good authority to support me?" he asked. "If not, I have only to go to those bookshelves, and you have only to read the passages which I can point out to you."

"I am quite satisfied," I said, "without reading a word more."

"In that case, we may return to your own personal interest in this matter. I am bound to tell you that there is something to be said against the experiment as well as for it. If we could, this year, exactly reproduce, in your case, the conditions as they existed last year, it is physiologically certain that we should arrive at exactly the same result. But this--there is no denying it--is simply impossible. We can only hope to approximate to the conditions; and if we don't succeed in getting you nearly enough back to what you were, this venture of ours will fail. If we do succeed--and I am myself hopeful of success--you may at least so far repeat your proceedings on the birthday night, as to satisfy any reasonable person that you are guiltless, morally speaking, of the theft of the Diamond. I believe, Mr. Blake, I have now stated the question, on both sides of it, as fairly as I can, within the limits that I have imposed on myself. If there is anything that I have not made clear to you, tell me what it is--and if I can enlighten you, I will."

"All that you have explained to me," I said, "I understand perfectly. But I own I am puzzled on one point, which you have not made clear to me yet."
"What is the point?"
"I don't understand the effect of the laudanum on me. I don't understand my walking down-stairs, and along corridors, and my opening and shutting the drawers of a cabinet, and my going back again to my own room. All these are active proceedings. I thought the influence of opium was first to stupefy you, and then to send you to sleep."

"The common error about opium, Mr. Blake! I am, at this moment, exerting my intelligence (such as it is) in your service, under the influence of a dose of laudanum, some ten times larger than the dose Mr. Candy administered to you. But don't trust to my authority—even on a question which comes within my own personal experience. I anticipated the objection you have just made: and I have again provided myself with independent testimony which will carry its due weight with it in your own mind, and in the minds of your friends."

He handed me the second of the two books which he had by him on the table.

"There," he said, "are the far-famed CONFESSIONS OF AN ENGLISH OPIUM EATER! Take the book away with you, and read it. At the passage which I have marked, you will find that when De Quincey had committed what he calls 'a debauch of opium,' he either went to the gallery at the Opera to enjoy the music, or he wandered about the London markets on Saturday night, and interested himself in observing all the little shifts and bargainings of the poor in providing their Sunday's dinner. So much for the capacity of a man to occupy himself actively, and to move about from place to place under the influence of opium."

"I am answered so far," I said; "but I am not answered yet as to the effect produced by the opium on myself."

"I will try to answer you in a few words," said Ezra Jennings. "The action of opium is comprised, in the majority of cases, in two influences—-a stimulating influence first, and a sedative influence afterwards. Under the stimulating influence, the latest and most vivid impressions left on your mind—-namely, the impressions relating to the Diamond—would be likely, in your morbidly sensitive nervous condition, to become intensified in your brain, and would subordinate to themselves your judgment and your will. Little by little, under this action, any apprehensions about the safety of the Diamond which you might have felt during the day would be liable to develop themselves from the state of doubt to the state of certainty—-would impel you into practical action to preserve the jewel—-would direct your steps, with that motive in view, into the room which you entered—and would guide your hand to the drawers of the cabinet, until you had found the drawer which held the stone. In the spiritualised intoxication of opium, you would do all that. Later, as the sedative action began to gain on the stimulant action, you would slowly become inert and stupefied. Later still you would fall into a deep sleep. When the morning came, and the effect of the opium had been all slept off, you would wake as absolutely ignorant of what you had done in the night as if you had been living at the Antipodes. Have I made it tolerably clear to you so far?"

"You have made it so clear," I said, "that I want you to go farther. You have shown me how I entered the room, and how I came to take the Diamond. But Miss Verinder saw me leave the room again, with the jewel in my hand. Can you trace my proceedings from that moment? Can you guess what I did next?"

"That is the very point I was coming to," he rejoined. "It is a question with me whether the experiment which I propose as a means of vindicating your innocence, may not also be made a means of recovering the lost Diamond as well. When you left Miss Verinder's sitting-room, you went back in all probability to your own room——"

"Yes? and what then?"

"It is possible, Mr. Blake—-I dare not say more—-that your idea of preserving the Diamond led, by a natural sequence, to the idea of hiding the Diamond, and that the place in which you hid it was somewhere in your bedroom. In that event, the case of the Irish porter may be your case. You may remember, under the influence of the second dose of opium, the place in which you hid the Diamond under the influence of the first."

"It was my turn, now, to enlighten Ezra Jennings. I stopped him, before he could say any more.

"You are speculating," I said, "on a result which cannot possibly take place. The Diamond is, at this moment, in London."

He started, and looked at me in great surprise.

"In London?" he repeated. "How did it get to London from Lady Verinder's house?"

"Nobody knows."

"You removed it with your own hand from Miss Verinder's room. How was it taken out of your keeping?"

"I have no idea how it was taken out of my keeping."

"Did you see it, when you woke in the morning?"

"No."

"Has Miss Verinder recovered possession of it?"

"No."
"Mr. Blake! there seems to be something here which wants clearing up. May I ask how you know that the Diamond is, at this moment, in London?"

I had put precisely the same question to Mr. Bruff when I made my first inquiries about the Moonstone, on my return to England. In answering Ezra Jennings, I accordingly repeated what I had myself heard from the lawyer's own lips—and what is already familiar to the readers of these pages.

He showed plainly that he was not satisfied with my reply.

"With all deference to you," he said, "and with all deference to your legal adviser, I maintain the opinion which I expressed just now. It rests, I am well aware, on a mere assumption. Pardon me for reminding you, that your opinion also rests on a mere assumption as well."

The view he took of the matter was entirely new to me. I waited anxiously to hear how he would defend it.

"I assume," pursued Ezra Jennings, "that the influence of the opium—after impelling you to possess yourself of the Diamond, with the purpose of securing its safety—might also impel you, acting under the same influence and the same motive, to hide it somewhere in your own room. YOU assume that the Hindoo conspirators could by no possibility commit a mistake. The Indians went to Mr. Luker's house after the Diamond—and, therefore, in Mr. Luker's possession the Diamond must be! Have you any evidence to prove that the Moonstone was taken to London at all? You can't even guess how, or by whom, it was removed from Lady Verinder's house! Have you any evidence that the jewel was pledged to Mr. Luker? He declares that he never heard of the Moonstone; and his bankers' receipt acknowledges nothing but the deposit of a valuable of great price. The Indians assume that Mr. Luker is lying—and you assume again that the Indians are right. All I say, in differing with you, is—that my view is possible. What more, Mr. Blake, either logically, or legally, can be said for yours?"

It was put strongly; but there was no denying that it was put truly as well.

"I confess you stagger me," I replied. "Do you object to my writing to Mr. Bruff, and telling him what you have said?"

"On the contrary, I shall be glad if you will write to Mr. Bruff. If we consult his experience, we may see the matter under a new light. For the present, let us return to our experiment with the opium. We have decided that you leave off the habit of smoking from this moment."

"From this moment?"

"That is the first step. The next step is to reproduce, as nearly as we can, the domestic circumstances which surrounded you last year."

How was this to be done? Lady Verinder was dead. Rachel and I, so long as the suspicion of theft rested on me, were parted irrevocably. Godfrey Ablewhite was away travelling on the Continent. It was simply impossible to reassemble the people who had inhabited the house, when I had slept in it last. The statement of this objection did not appear to embarrass Ezra Jennings. He attached very little importance, he said, to reassembling the same people—seeing that it would be vain to expect them to reassume the various positions which they had occupied towards me in the past times. On the other hand, he considered it essential to the success of the experiment, that I should see the same objects about me which had surrounded me when I was last in the house.

"Above all things," he said, "you must sleep in the room which you slept in, on the birthday night, and it must be furnished in the same way. The stairs, the corridors, and Miss Verinder's sitting-room, must also be restored to what they were when you saw them last. It is absolutely necessary, Mr. Blake, to replace every article of furniture in that part of the house which may now be put away. The sacrifice of your cigars will be useless, unless we can get Miss Verinder's permission to do that."

"Who is to apply to her for permission?" I asked.

"Is it not possible for you to apply?"

"Quite out of the question. After what has passed between us on the subject of the lost Diamond, I can neither see her, nor write to her, as things are now."

Ezra Jennings paused, and considered for a moment.

"May I ask you a delicate question?" he said.

I signed to him to go on.

"Am I right, Mr. Blake, in fancying (from one or two things which have dropped from you) that you felt no common interest in Miss Verinder, in former times?"

"Quite right."

"Was the feeling returned?"

"It was."

"Do you think Miss Verinder would be likely to feel a strong interest in the attempt to prove your innocence?"

"I am certain of it."

"In that case, I will write to Miss Verinder—if you will give me leave."
"Telling her of the proposal that you have made to me?"
"Telling her of everything that has passed between us to-day."

It is needless to say that I eagerly accepted the service which he had offered to me.

"I shall have time to write by to-day's post," he said, looking at his watch. "Don't forget to lock up your cigars, when you get back to the hotel! I will call to-morrow morning and hear how you have passed the night."

I rose to take leave of him; and attempted to express the grateful sense of his kindness which I really felt.

He pressed my hand gently. "Remember what I told you on the moor," he answered. "If I can do you this little service, Mr. Blake, I shall feel it like a last gleam of sunshine, falling on the evening of a long and clouded day."

We parted. It was then the fifteenth of June. The events of the next ten days—every one of them more or less directly connected with the experiment of which I was the passive object—are all placed on record, exactly as they happened, in the Journal habitually kept by Mr. Candy's assistant. In the pages of Ezra Jennings nothing is concealed, and nothing is forgotten. Let Ezra Jennings tell how the venture with the opium was tried, and how it ended.

FOURTH NARRATIVE
Extracted from the Journal of EZRA JENNINGS

1849.--June 15.... With some interruption from patients, and some interruption from pain, I finished my letter to Miss Verinder in time for to-day's post. I failed to make it as short a letter as I could have wished. But I think I have made it plain. It leaves her entirely mistress of her own decision. If she consents to assist the experiment, she consents of her own free will, and not as a favour to Mr. Franklin Blake or to me.

June 16th.--Rose late, after a dreadful night; the vengeance of yesterday's opium, pursuing me through a series of frightful dreams. At one time I was whirling through empty space with the phantoms of the dead, friends and enemies together. At another, the one beloved face which I shall never see again, rose at my bedside, hideously phosphorescent in the black darkness, and glared and grinned at me. A slight return of the old pain, at the usual time in the early morning, was welcome as a change. It dispelled the visions—and it was bearable because it did that.

My bad night made it late in the morning, before I could get to Mr. Franklin Blake. I found him stretched on the sofa, breakfasting on brandy and soda-water, and a dry biscuit.

"I am beginning, as well as you could possibly wish," he said. "A miserable, restless night; and a total failure of appetite this morning. Exactly what happened last year, when I gave up my cigars. The sooner I am ready for my second dose of laudanum, the better I shall be pleased."

"You shall have it on the earliest possible day," I answered. "In the meantime, we must be as careful of your health as we can. If we allow you to become exhausted, we shall fail in that way. You must get an appetite for your dinner. In other words, you must get a ride or a walk this morning, in the fresh air."

"I will ride, if they can find me a horse here. By-the-by, I wrote to Mr. Bruff, yesterday. Have you written to Miss Verinder?"

"Yes—by last night's post."

"Very good. We shall have some news worth hearing, to tell each other to-morrow. Don't go yet! I have a word to say to you. You appeared to think, yesterday, that our experiment with the opium was not likely to be viewed very favourably by some of my friends. You were quite right. I call old Gabriel Betteredge one of my friends; and you will be amused to hear that he protested strongly when I saw him yesterday. 'You have done a wonderful number of foolish things in the course of your life, Mr. Franklin, but this tops them all!' There is Betteredge's opinion! You will make allowance for his prejudices, I am sure, if you and he happen to meet?"

I left Mr. Blake, to go my rounds among my patients; feeling the better and the happier even for the short interview that I had had with him.

What is the secret of the attraction that there is for me in this man? Does it only mean that I feel the contrast between the frankly kind manner in which he has allowed me to become acquainted with him, and the merciless dislike and distrust with which I am met by other people? Or is there really something in him which answers to the yearning that I have for a little human sympathy—the yearning, which has survived the solitude and persecution of many years; which seems to grow keener and keener, as the time comes nearer and nearer when I shall endure and feel no more? How useless to ask these questions! Mr. Blake has given me a new interest in life. Let that be enough, without seeking to know what the new interest is.

June 17th.--Before breakfast, this morning, Mr. Candy informed me that he was going away for a fortnight, on a visit to a friend in the south of England. He gave me as many special directions, poor fellow, about the patients, as if he still had the large practice which he possessed before he was taken ill. The practice is worth little enough now! Other doctors have superseded HIM; and nobody who can help it will employ me.

It is perhaps fortunate that he is to be away just at this time. He would have been mortified if I had not informed him of the experiment which I am going to try with Mr. Blake. And I hardly know what undesirable results might
not have happened, if I had taken him into my confidence. Better as it is. Unquestionably, better as it is.

The post brought me Miss Verinder's answer, after Mr. Candy had left the house.

A charming letter! It gives me the highest opinion of her. There is no attempt to conceal the interest that she feels in our proceedings. She tells me, in the prettiest manner, that my letter has satisfied her of Mr. Blake's innocence, without the slightest need (so far as she is concerned) of putting my assertion to the proof. She even upbraids herself--most undeservedly, poor thing!--for not having divined at the time what the true solution of the mystery might really be. The motive underlying all this proceeds evidently from something more than a generous eagerness to make atonement for a wrong which she has innocently inflicted on another person. It is plain that she has loved him, throughout the estrangement between them. In more than one place the rapture of discovering that he has deserved to be loved, breaks its way innocently through the stoutest formalities of pen and ink, and even defies the stronger restraint still of writing to a stranger. Is it possible (I ask myself, in reading this delightful letter) that I, of all men in the world, am chosen to be the means of bringing these two young people together again? My own happiness has been trampled under foot; my own love has been torn from me. Shall I live to see a happiness of others, which is of my making--a love renewed, which is of my bringing back? Oh merciful Death, let me see it before your arms enfold me, before your voice whispers to me, "Rest at last!"

There are two requests contained in the letter. One of them prevents me from showing it to Mr. Franklin Blake. I am authorised to tell him that Miss Verinder willingly consents to place her house at our disposal; and, that said, I am desired to add no more.

So far, it is easy to comply with her wishes. But the second request embarrasses me seriously.

Not content with having written to Mr. Betteredge, instructing him to carry out whatever directions I may have to give, Miss Verinder asks leave to assist me, by personally superintending the restoration of her own sitting-room. She only waits a word of reply from me to make the journey to Yorkshire, and to be present as one of the witnesses on the night when the opium is tried for the second time.

Here, again, there is a motive under the surface; and, here again, I fancy that I can find it out.

What she has forbidden me to tell Mr. Franklin Blake, she is (as I interpret it) eager to tell him with her own lips, BEFORE he is put to the test which is to vindicate his character in the eyes of other people. I understand and admire this generous anxiety to acquit him, without waiting until his innocence may, or may not, be proved. It is the atonement that she is longing to make, poor girl, after having innocently and inevitably wronged him. But the thing cannot be done. I have no sort of doubt that the agitation which a meeting between them would produce on both sides--reviving dormant feelings, appealing to old memories, awakening new hopes--would, in their effect on the mind of Mr. Blake, be almost certainly fatal to the success of our experiment. It is hard enough, as things are, to reproduce in him the conditions as they existed, or nearly as they existed, last year. With new interests and new emotions to agitate him, the attempt would be simply useless.

And yet, knowing this, I cannot find it in my heart to disappoint her. I must try if I can discover some new arrangement, before post-time, which will allow me to say Yes to Miss Verinder, without damage to the service which I have bound myself to render to Mr. Franklin Blake.

Two o'clock.--I have just returned from my round of medical visits; having begun, of course, by calling at the hotel.

Mr. Blake's report of the night is the same as before. He has had some intervals of broken sleep, and no more. But he feels it less to-day, having slept after yesterday's dinner. This after-dinner sleep is the result, no doubt, of the ride which I advised him to take. I fear I shall have to curtail his restorative exercise in the fresh air. He must not be too well; he must not be too ill. It is a case (as a sailor would say) of very fine steering.

He has not heard yet from Mr. Bruff. I found him eager to know if I had received any answer from Miss Verinder.

I told him exactly what I was permitted to tell, and no more. It was quite needless to invent excuses for not showing him the letter. He told me bitterly enough, poor fellow, that he understood the delicacy which disinclined me to produce it. "She consents, of course, as a matter of common courtesy and common justice," he said. "But she keeps her own opinion of me, and waits to see the result." I was sorely tempted to hint that he was now wronging her as she had wronged him. On reflection, I shrank from forestalling her in the double luxury of surprising and forgiving him.

My visit was a very short one. After the experience of the other night, I have been compelled once more to give up my dose of opium. As a necessary result, the agony of the disease that is in me has got the upper hand again. I felt the attack coming on, and left abruptly, so as not to alarm or distress him. It only lasted a quarter of an hour this time, and it left me strength enough to go on with my work.

Five o'clock.--I have written my reply to Miss Verinder.

The arrangement I have proposed reconciles the interests on both sides, if she will only consent to it. After first
stating the objections that there are to a meeting between Mr. Blake and herself, before the experiment is tried, I
have suggested that she should so time her journey as to arrive at the house privately, on the evening when we make
the attempt. Travelling by the afternoon train from London, she would delay her arrival until nine o'clock. At that
hour, I have undertaken to see Mr. Blake safely into his bedchamber; and so to leave Miss Verinder free to occupy
her own rooms until the time comes for administering the laudanum. When that has been done, there can be no
objection to her watching the result, with the rest of us. On the next morning, she shall show Mr. Blake (if she likes)
herself in that way that he was acquitted in her estimation, before the question of his innocence was put to the proof.

In that sense, I have written to her. This is all that I can do to-day. To-morrow I must see Mr. Betteredge, and
give the necessary directions for reopening the house.

June 18th.—Late again, in calling on Mr. Franklin Blake. More of that horrible pain in the early morning;
followed, this time, by complete prostration, for some hours. I foresee, in spite of the penalties which it exacts from
me, that I shall have to return to the opium for the hundredth time. If I had only myself to think of, I should prefer
the sharp pains to the frightful dreams. But the physical suffering exhausts me. If I let myself sink, it may end in my
becoming useless to Mr. Blake at the time when he wants me most.

It was nearly one o'clock before I could get to the hotel to-day. The visit, even in my shattered condition, proved
to be a most amusing one—thanks entirely to the presence on the scene of Gabriel Betteredge.

I found him in the room, when I went in. He withdrew to the window and looked out, while I put my first
customary question to my patient. Mr. Blake had slept badly again, and he felt the loss of rest this morning more
than he had felt it yet.

I asked next if he had heard from Mr. Bruff.

A letter had reached him that morning. Mr. Bruff expressed the strongest disapproval of the course which his
friend and client was taking under my advice. It was mischievous—for it excited hopes that might never be realised.
It was quite unintelligible to HIS mind, except that it looked like a piece of trickery, akin to the trickery of
mesmerism, clairvoyance, and the like. It unsettled Miss Verinder's house, and it would end in unsettling Miss
Verinder herself. He had put the case (without mentioning names) to an eminent physician; and the eminent
physician had smiled, had shaken his head, and had said—nothing. On these grounds, Mr. Bruff entered his protest,
and left it there.

My next inquiry related to the subject of the Diamond. Had the lawyer produced any evidence to prove that the
jewel was in London?

No, the lawyer had simply declined to discuss the question. He was himself satisfied that the Moonstone had
been pledged to Mr. Luker. His eminent absent friend, Mr. Murthwaite (whose consummate knowledge of the
Indian character no one could deny), was satisfied also. Under these circumstances, and with the many demands
already made on him, he must decline entering into any disputes on the subject of evidence. Time would show; and
Mr. Bruff was willing to wait for time.

It was quite plain—even if Mr. Blake had not made it plainer still by reporting the substance of the letter, instead
of reading what was actually written—that distrust of me was at the bottom of all this. Having myself foreseen that
result, I was neither mortified nor surprised. I asked Mr. Blake if his friend's protest had shaken him. He answered
emphatically, that it had not produced the slightest effect on his mind. I was free after that to dismiss Mr. Bruff from
consideration—and I did dismiss him accordingly.

A pause in the talk between us, followed—and Gabriel Betteredge came out from his retirement at the window.

"Can you favour me with your attention, sir?" he inquired, addressing himself to me.

"I am quite at your service," I answered.

Betteredge took a chair and seated himself at the table. He produced a huge old-fashioned leather pocket-book,
with a pencil of dimensions to match. Having put on his spectacles, he opened the pocket-book, at a blank page, and
addressed himself to me once more.

"I have lived," said Betteredge, looking at me sternly, "nigh on fifty years in the service of my late lady. I was
page-boy before that, in the service of the old lord, her father. I am now somewhere between seventy and eighty
years of age—never mind exactly where! I am reckoned to have got as pretty a knowledge and experience of the
world as most men. And what does it all end in? It ends, Mr. Ezra Jennings, in a conjuring trick being performed on
Mr. Franklin Blake, by a doctor's assistant with a bottle of laudanum—and by the living jingo, I'm appointed, in my
old age, to be conjurer's boy!"

Mr. Blake burst out laughing. I attempted to speak. Betteredge held up his hand, in token that he had not done
yet.

"Not a word, Mr. Jennings!" he said, "It don't want a word, sir, from you. I have got my principles, thank God. If
an order comes to me, which is own brother to an order come from Bedlam, it don't matter. So long as I get it from
my master or mistress, as the case may be, I obey it. I may have my own opinion, which is also, you will please to
remember, the opinion of Mr. Bruff--the Great Mr. Bruff!" said Betteredge, raising his voice, and shaking his head
at me solemnly. "It don't matter; I withdraw my opinion, for all that. My young lady says, 'Do it.' And I say, 'Miss, it
shall be done.' Here I am, with my book and my pencil--the latter not pointed so well as I could wish, but when
Christians take leave of their senses, who is to expect that pencils will keep their points? Give me your orders, Mr.
Jennings. I'll have them in writing, sir. I'm determined not to be behind 'em, or before 'em, by so much as a hair's
breadth. I'm a blind agent--that's what I am. A blind agent!" repeated Betteredge, with infinite relish of his own
description of himself.

"I am very sorry," I began, "that you and I don't agree----"

"Don't bring ME, into it!" interposed Betteredge. "This is not a matter of agreement, it's a matter of obedience.
Issue your directions, sir--issue your directions!"

Mr. Blake made me a sign to take him at his word. I "issued my directions" as plainly and as gravely as I could.
"I wish certain parts of the house to be reopened," I said, "and to be furnished, exactly as they were furnished at
this time last year."

Betteredge gave his imperfectly-pointed pencil a preliminary lick with his tongue. "Name the parts, Mr.
Jennings!" he said loftily.

"First, the inner hall, leading to the chief staircase."

"First, the inner hall," Betteredge wrote. "Impossible to furnish that, sir, as it was furnished last year--to begin
with."

"Why?"

"Because there was a stuffed buzzard, Mr. Jennings, in the hall last year. When the family left, the buzzard was
put away with the other things. When the buzzard was put away--he burst."

"We will except the buzzard then."

Betteredge took a note of the exception. "'The inner hall to be furnished again, as furnished last year. A burst
buzzard alone excepted.' Please to go on, Mr. Jennings."

"The carpet to be laid down on the stairs, as before."

"'The carpet to be laid down on the stairs, as before.' Sorry to disappoint you, sir. But that can't be done either."

"Why not?"

"Because the man who laid that carpet down is dead, Mr. Jennings--and the like of him for reconciling together a
carpet and a corner, is not to be found in all England, look where you may."

"Very well. We must try the next best man in England."

Betteredge took another note; and I went on issuing my directions.

"Miss Verinder's sitting-room to be restored exactly to what it was last year. Also, the corridor leading from the
sitting-room to the first landing. Also, the second corridor, leading from the second landing to the best bedrooms.
Also, the bedroom occupied last June by Mr. Franklin Blake."

Betteredge's blunt pencil followed me conscientiously, word by word. "Go on, sir," he said, with sardonic
gravity. "There's a deal of writing left in the point of this pencil yet."

I told him that I had no more directions to give. "Sir," said Betteredge, "in that case, I have a point or two to put
on my own behalf." He opened the pocket-book at a new page, and gave the inexhaustible pencil another
preliminary lick.

"I wish to know," he began, "whether I may, or may not, wash my hands----"

"You may decidedly," said Mr. Blake. "I'll ring for the waiter."

"----of certain responsibilities," pursued Betteredge, impenetrably declining to see anybody in the room but
himself and me. "As to Miss Verinder's sitting-room, to begin with. When we took up the carpet last year, Mr.
Jennings, we found a surprising quantity of pins. Am I responsible for putting back the pins?"

"Certainly not."

Betteredge made a note of that concession, on the spot.

"As to the first corridor next," he resumed. "When we moved the ornaments in that part, we moved a statue of a
fat naked child--profanely described in the catalogue of the house as 'Cupid, god of Love.' He had two wings last
year, in the fleshy part of his shoulders. My eye being off him, for the moment, he lost one of them. Am I
responsible for Cupid's wing?"

I made another concession, and Betteredge made another note.

"As to the second corridor," he went on. "There having been nothing in it, last year, but the doors of the rooms
(to every one of which I can swear, if necessary), my mind is easy, I admit, respecting that part of the house only.
But, as to Mr. Franklin's bedroom (if THAT is to be put back to what it was before), I want to know who is
responsible for keeping it in a perpetual state of litter, no matter how often it may be set right--his trousers here, his
towels there, and his French novels everywhere. I say, who is responsible for untidying the tidiness of Mr. Franklin's room, him or me?"

Mr. Blake declared that he would assume the whole responsibility with the greatest pleasure. Betteredge obstinately declined to listen to any solution of the difficulty, without first referring it to my sanction and approval. I accepted Mr. Blake's proposal; and Betteredge made a last entry in the pocket-book to that effect.

"Look in when you like, Mr. Jennings, beginning from to-morrow," he said, getting on his legs. "You will find me at work, with the necessary persons to assist me. I respectfully beg to thank you, sir, for overlooking the case of the stuffed buzzard, and the other case of the Cupid's wing—as also for permitting me to wash my hands of all responsibility in respect of the pins on the carpet, and the litter in Mr. Franklin's room. Speaking as a servant, I am deeply indebted to you. Speaking as a man, I consider you to be a person whose head is full of maggots, and I take up my testimony against your experiment as a delusion and a snare. Don't be afraid, on that account, of my feelings as a man getting in the way of my duty as a servant! You shall be obeyed. The maggots notwithstanding, sir, you shall be obeyed. If it ends in your setting the house on fire, Damme if I send for the engines, unless you ring the bell and order them first!"

With that farewell assurance, he made me a bow, and walked out of the room.

"Do you think we can depend on him?" I asked.

"Implicitly," answered Mr. Blake. "When we go to the house, we shall find nothing neglected, and nothing forgotten."

June 19th.—Another protest against our contemplated proceedings! From a lady this time.

The morning's post brought me two letters. One from Miss Verinder, consenting, in the kindest manner, to the arrangement that I have proposed. The other from the lady under whose care she is living—one Mrs. Merridew.

Mrs. Merridew presents her compliments, and does not pretend to understand the subject on which I have been corresponding with Miss Verinder, in its scientific bearings. Viewed in its social bearings, however, she feels free to pronounce an opinion. I am probably, Mrs. Merridew thinks, not aware that Miss Verinder is barely nineteen years of age. To allow a young lady, at her time of life, to be present (without a "chaperone") in a house full of men among whom a medical experiment is being carried on, is an outrage on propriety which Mrs. Merridew cannot possibly permit. If the matter is allowed to proceed, she will feel it to be her duty—at a serious sacrifice of her own personal convenience—to accompany Miss Verinder to Yorkshire. Under these circumstances, she ventures to request that I will kindly reconsider the subject; seeing that Miss Verinder declines to be guided by any opinion but mine. Her presence cannot possibly be necessary; and a word from me, to that effect, would relieve both Mrs. Merridew and myself of a very unpleasant responsibility.

Translated from polite commonplace into plain English, the meaning of this is, as I take it, that Mrs. Merridew stands in mortal fear of the opinion of the world. She has unfortunately appealed to the very last man in existence who has any reason to regard that opinion with respect. I won't disappoint Miss Verinder; and I won't delay a reconciliation between two young people who love each other, and who have been parted too long already. Translated from plain English into polite commonplace, this means that Mr. Jennings presents his compliments to Mrs. Merridew, and regrets that he cannot feel justified in interfering any farther in the matter.

Mr. Blake's report of himself, this morning, was the same as before. We determined not to disturb Betteredge by overlooking him at the house to-day. To-morrow will be time enough for our first visit of inspection.

June 20th.—Mr. Blake is beginning to feel his continued restlessness at night. The sooner the rooms are refurnished, now, the better.

On our way to the house, this morning, he consulted me, with some nervous impatience and irresolution, about a letter (forwarded to him from London) which he had received from Sergeant Cuff.

The Sergeant writes from Ireland. He acknowledges the receipt (through his housekeeper) of a card and message which Mr. Blake left at his residence near Dorking, and announces his return to England as likely to take place in a week or less. In the meantime, he requests to be favoured with Mr. Blake's reasons for wishing to speak to him (as stated in the message) on the subject of the Moonstone. If Mr. Blake can convict him of having made any serious mistake, in the course of his last year's inquiry concerning the Diamond, he will consider it a duty (after the liberal manner in which he was treated by the late Lady Verinder) to place himself at that gentleman's disposal. If not, he begs permission to remain in his retirement, surrounded by the peaceful horticultural attractions of a country life.

After reading the letter, I had no hesitation in advising Mr. Blake to inform Sergeant Cuff, in reply, of all that had happened since the inquiry was suspended last year, and to leave him to draw his own conclusions from the plain facts.

On second thoughts I also suggested inviting the Sergeant to be present at the experiment, in the event of his returning to England in time to join us. He would be a valuable witness to have, in any case; and, if I proved to be wrong in believing the Diamond to be hidden in Mr. Blake's room, his advice might be of great importance, at a
future stage of the proceedings over which I could exercise no control. This last consideration appeared to decide Mr. Blake. He promised to follow my advice.

The sound of the hammer informed us that the work of re-furnishing was in full progress, as we entered the drive that led to the house.

Betteredge, attired for the occasion in a fisherman’s red cap, and an apron of green baize, met us in the outer hall. The moment he saw me, he pulled out the pocket-book and pencil, and obstinately insisted on taking notes of everything that I said to him. Look where we might, we found, as Mr. Blake had foretold that the work was advancing as rapidly and as intelligently as it was possible to desire. But there was still much to be done in the inner hall, and in Miss Verinder’s room. It seemed doubtful whether the house would be ready for us before the end of the week.

Having congratulated Betteredge on the progress that he had made (he persisted in taking notes every time I opened my lips; declining, at the same time, to pay the slightest attention to anything said by Mr. Blake); and having promised to return for a second visit of inspection in a day or two, we prepared to leave the house, going out by the back way. Before we were clear of the passages downstairs, I was stopped by Betteredge, just as I was passing the door which led into his own room.

"Could I say two words to you in private?" he asked, in a mysterious whisper.

I consented of course. Mr. Blake walked on to wait for me in the garden, while I accompanied Betteredge into his room. I fully anticipated a demand for certain new concessions, following the precedent already established in the cases of the stuffed buzzard, and the Cupid’s wing. To my great surprise, Betteredge laid his hand confidentially on my arm, and put this extraordinary question to me:

"Mr. Jennings, do you happen to be acquainted with ROBINSON CRUSOE?"

I answered that I had read ROBINSON CRUSOE when I was a child.

"Not since then?" inquired Betteredge.

"Not since then."

He fell back a few steps, and looked at me with an expression of compassionate curiosity, tempered by superstitious awe.

"He has not read ROBINSON CRUSOE since he was a child," said Betteredge, speaking to himself—not to me. "Let's try how ROBINSON CRUSOE strikes him now!"

He unlocked a cupboard in a corner, and produced a dirty and dog's-eared book, which exhaled a strong odour of stale tobacco as he turned over the leaves. Having found a passage of which he was apparently in search, he requested me to join him in the corner; still mysteriously confidential, and still speaking under his breath.

"In respect to this hocus-pocus of yours, sir, with the laudanum and Mr. Franklin Blake," he began. "While the workpeople are in the house, my duty as a servant gets the better of my feelings as a man. When the workpeople are gone, my feelings as a man get the better of my duty as a servant. Very good. Last night, Mr. Jennings, it was borne in powerfully on my mind that this new medical enterprise of yours would end badly. If I had yielded to that secret Dictate, I should have put all the furniture away again with my own hand, and have warned the workmen off the premises when they came the next morning."

"I am glad to find, from what I have seen up-stairs," I said, "that you resisted the secret Dictate."

"Resisted isn't the word," answered Betteredge. "Wrestled is the word. I wrestled, sir, between the silent orders in my bosom pulling me one way, and the written orders in my pocket-book pushing me the other, until (saving your presence) I was in a cold sweat. In that dreadful perturbation of mind and laxity of body, to what remedy did I apply? To the remedy, sir, which has never failed me yet for the last thirty years and more--to This Book!"

He hit the book a sounding blow with his open hand, and struck out of it a stronger smell of stale tobacco than ever.

"What did I find here," pursued Betteredge, "at the first page I opened? This awful bit, sir, page one hundred and seventy-eight, as follows--'Upon these, and many like Reflections, I afterwards made it a certain rule with me, That whenever I found those secret Hints or Pressings of my Mind, to doing, or not doing any Thing that presented; or to going this Way, or that Way, I never failed to obey the secret Dictate.' As I live by bread, Mr. Jennings, those were the first words that met my eye, exactly at the time when I myself was setting the secret Dictate at defiance! You don't see anything at all out of the common in that, do you, sir?"

"I see a coincidence--nothing more."

"You don't feel at all shaken, Mr. Jennings, in respect to this medical enterprise of yours?"

"Not the least in the world."

Betteredge stared hard at me, in dead silence. He closed the book with great deliberation; he locked it up again in the cupboard with extraordinary care; he wheeled round, and stared hard at me once more. Then he spoke.

"Sir," he said gravely, "there are great allowances to be made for a man who has not read ROBINSON CRUSOE
since he was a child. I wish you good morning."

He opened his door with a low bow, and left me at liberty to find my own way into the garden. I met Mr. Blake returning to the house.

"You needn't tell me what has happened," he said. "Betteredge has played his last card: he has made another prophetic discovery in ROBINSON CRUSOE. Have you humoured his favourite delusion? No? You have let him see that you don't believe in ROBINSON CRUSOE? Mr. Jennings! you have fallen to the lowest possible place in Betteredge's estimation. Say what you like, and do what you like, for the future. You will find that he won't waste another word on you now."

June 21st.--A short entry must suffice in my journal to-day.

Mr. Blake has had the worst night that he has passed yet. I have been obliged, greatly against my will, to prescribe for him. Men of his sensitive organisation are fortunately quick in feeling the effect of remedial measures. Otherwise, I should be inclined to fear that he will be totally unfit for the experiment when the time comes to try it.

As for myself, after some little remission of my pains for the last two days I had an attack this morning, of which I shall say nothing but that it has decided me to return to the opium. I shall close this book, and take my full dose--five hundred drops.

June 22nd.--Our prospects look better to-day. Mr. Blake's nervous suffering is greatly allayed. He slept a little last night. MY night, thanks to the opium, was the night of a man who is stunned. I can't say that I woke this morning; the fitter expression would be, that I recovered my senses.

We drove to the house to see if the refurnishing was done. It will be completed to-morrow--Saturday. As Mr. Blake foretold, Betteredge raised no further obstacles. From first to last, he was ominously polite, and ominously silent.

My medical enterprise (as Betteredge calls it) must now, inevitably, be delayed until Monday next. Tomorrow evening the workmen will be late in the house. On the next day, the established Sunday tyranny which is one of the institutions of this free country, so times the trains as to make it impossible to ask anybody to travel to us from London. Until Monday comes, there is nothing to be done but to watch Mr. Blake carefully, and to keep him, if possible, in the same state in which I find him to-day.

In the meanwhile, I have prevailed on him to write to Mr. Bruff, making a point of it that he shall be present as one of the witnesses. I especially choose the lawyer, because he is strongly prejudiced against us. If we convince HIM, we place our victory beyond the possibility of dispute.

Mr. Blake has also written to Sergeant Cuff; and I have sent a line to Miss Verinder. With these, and with old Betteredge (who is really a person of importance in the family) we shall have witnesses enough for the purpose--without including Mrs. Merridew, if Mrs. Merridew persists in sacrificing herself to the opinion of the world.

June 23rd.--The vengeance of the opium overtook me again last night. No matter; I must go on with it now till Monday is past and gone.

Mr. Blake is not so well again to-day. At two this morning, he confesses that he opened the drawer in which his cigars are put away. He only succeeded in locking it up again by a violent effort. His next proceeding, in case of temptation, was to throw the key out of window. The waiter brought it in this morning, discovered at the bottom of an empty cistern--such is Fate! I have taken possession of the key until Tuesday next.

June 24th.--Mr. Blake and I took a long drive in an open carriage. We both felt beneficially the blessed influence of the soft summer air. I dined with him at the hotel. To my great relief--for I found him in an over-wrought, over-excited state this morning--he had two hours' sound sleep on the sofa after dinner. If he has another bad night, now--I am not afraid of the consequence.

June 25th, Monday.--The day of the experiment! It is five o'clock in the afternoon. We have just arrived at the house.

The first and foremost question, is the question of Mr. Blake's health.

So far as it is possible for me to judge, he promises (physically speaking) to be quite as susceptible to the action of the opium to-night as he was at this time last year. He is, this afternoon, in a state of nervous sensitiveness which just stops short of nervous irritation. He changes colour readily; his hand is not quite steady; and he starts at chance noises, and at unexpected appearances of persons and things.

These results have all been produced by deprivation of sleep, which is in its turn the nervous consequence of a sudden cessation in the habit of smoking, after that habit has been carried to an extreme. Here are the same causes at work again, which operated last year; and here are, apparently, the same effects. Will the parallel still hold good, when the final test has been tried? The events of the night must decide.

While I write these lines, Mr. Blake is amusing himself at the billiard table in the inner hall, practising different strokes in the game, as he was accustomed to practise them when he was a guest in this house in June last. I have brought my journal here, partly with a view to occupying the idle hours which I am sure to have on my hands
between this and to-morrow morning; partly in the hope that something may happen which it may be worth my while to place on record at the time.

Have I omitted anything, thus far? A glance at yesterday's entry shows me that I have forgotten to note the arrival of the morning's post. Let me set this right before I close these leaves for the present, and join Mr. Blake.

I received a few lines then, yesterday, from Miss Verinder. She has arranged to travel by the afternoon train, as I recommended. Mrs. Merridew has insisted on accompanying her. The note hints that the old lady's generally excellent temper is a little ruffled, and requests all due indulgence for her, in consideration of her age and her habits. I will endeavour, in my relations with Mrs. Merridew, to emulate the moderation which Betteredge displays in his relations with me. He received us to-day, portentously arrayed in his best black suit, and his stiffest white cravat. Whenever he looks my way, he remembers that I have not read ROBINSON CRUSOE since I was a child, and he respectfully pities me.

Yesterday, also, Mr. Blake had the lawyer's answer. Mr. Bruff accepts the invitation--under protest. It is, he thinks, clearly necessary that a gentleman possessed of the average allowance of common sense, should accompany Miss Verinder to the scene of, what we will venture to call, the proposed exhibition. For want of a better escort, Mr. Bruff himself will be that gentleman.--So here is poor Miss Verinder provided with two "chaperones." It is a relief to think that the opinion of the world must surely be satisfied with this!

Nothing has been heard of Sergeant Cuff. He is no doubt still in Ireland. We must not expect to see him to-night. Betteredge has just come in, to say that Mr. Blake has asked for me. I must lay down my pen for the present.

* * * * *

Seven o'clock.--We have been all over the refurnished rooms and staircases again; and we have had a pleasant stroll in the shrubbery, which was Mr. Blake's favourite walk when he was here last. In this way, I hope to revive the old impressions of places and things as vividly as possible in his mind.

We are now going to dine, exactly at the hour at which the birthday dinner was given last year. My object, of course, is a purely medical one in this case. The laudanum must find the process of digestion, as nearly as may be, where the laudanum found it last year.

At a reasonable time after dinner I propose to lead the conversation back again--as inartificially as I can--to the subject of the Diamond, and of the Indian conspiracy to steal it. When I have filled his mind with these topics, I shall have done all that it is in my power to do, before the time comes for giving him the second dose.

* * * * *

Half-past eight.--I have only this moment found an opportunity of attending to the most important duty of all; the duty of looking in the family medicine chest, for the laudanum which Mr. Candy used last year.

Ten minutes since, I caught Betteredge at an unoccupied moment, and told him what I wanted. Without a word of objection, without so much as an attempt to produce his pocket-book, he led the way (making allowances for me at every step) to the store-room in which the medicine chest is kept.

I discovered the bottle, carefully guarded by a glass stopper tied over with leather. The preparation which it contained was, as I had anticipated, the common Tincture of Opium. Finding the bottle still well filled, I have resolved to use it, in preference to employing either of the two preparations with which I had taken care to provide myself, in case of emergency.

The question of the quantity which I am to administer presents certain difficulties. I have thought it over, and have decided on increasing the dose.

My notes inform me that Mr. Candy only administered twenty-minims. This is a small dose to have produced the results which followed--even in the case of a person so sensitive as Mr. Blake. I think it highly probable that Mr. Candy gave more than he supposed himself to have given--knowing, as I do, that he has a keen relish of the pleasures of the table, and that he measured out the laudanum on the birthday, after dinner. In any case, I shall run the risk of enlarging the dose to forty minims. On this occasion, Mr. Blake knows beforehand that he is going to take the laudanum--which is equivalent, physiologically speaking, to his having (unconsciously to himself) a certain capacity in him to resist the effects. If my view is right, a larger quantity is therefore imperatively required, this time, to repeat the results which the smaller quantity produced, last year.

* * * * *

Ten o'clock.--The witnesses, or the company (which shall I call them?) reached the house an hour since.

A little before nine o'clock, I prevailed on Mr. Blake to accompany me to his bedroom; stating, as a reason, that I wished him to look round it, for the last time, in order to make quite sure that nothing had been forgotten in the refurnishing of the room. I had previously arranged with Betteredge, that the bedchamber prepared for Mr. Bruff should be the next room to Mr. Blake's, and that I should be informed of the lawyer's arrival by a knock at the door. Five minutes after the clock in the hall had struck nine, I heard the knock; and, going out immediately, met Mr. Bruff in the corridor.
My personal appearance (as usual) told against me. Mr. Bruff's distrust looked at me plainly enough out of Mr. Bruff's eyes. Being well used to producing this effect on strangers, I did not hesitate a moment in saying what I wanted to say, before the lawyer found his way into Mr. Blake's room.

"You have travelled here, I believe, in company with Mrs. Merridew and Miss Verinder?" I said.

"Yes," answered Mr. Bruff, as drily as might be.

"Miss Verinder has probably told you, that I wish her presence in the house (and Mrs. Merridew's presence of course) to be kept a secret from Mr. Blake, until my experiment on him has been tried first?"

"I know that I am to hold my tongue, sir!" said Mr. Bruff, impatiently. "Being habitually silent on the subject of human folly, I am all the readier to keep my lips closed on this occasion. Does that satisfy you?"

I bowed, and left Betteredge to show him to his room. Betteredge gave me one look at parting, which said, as if in so many words, "You have caught a Tartar, Mr. Jennings--and the name of him is Bruff."

It was next necessary to get the meeting over with the two ladies. I descended the stairs--a little nervously, I confess--on my way to Miss Verinder's sitting-room.

The gardener's wife (charged with looking after the accommodation of the ladies) met me in the first-floor corridor. This excellent woman treats me with an excessive civility which is plainly the offspring of down-right terror. She stares, trembles, and curtseys, whenever I speak to her. On my asking for Miss Verinder, she stared, trembled, and would no doubt have curtseyed next, if Miss Verinder herself had not cut that ceremony short, by suddenly opening her sitting-room door.

"Is that Mr. Jennings?" she asked.

Before I could answer, she came out eagerly to speak to me in the corridor. We met under the light of a lamp on a bracket. At the first sight of me, Miss Verinder stopped, and hesitated. She recovered herself instantly, coloured for a moment--and then, with a charming frankness, offered me her hand.

"I can't treat you like a stranger, Mr. Jennings," she said. "Oh, if you only knew how happy your letters have made me!"

She looked at my ugly wrinkled face, with a bright gratitude so new to me in my experience of my fellow-creatures, that I was at a loss how to answer her. Nothing had prepared me for her kindness and her beauty. The misery of many years has not hardened my heart, thank God. I was as awkward and as shy with her, as if I had been a lad in my teens.

"Where is he now?" she asked, giving free expression to her one dominant interest--the interest in Mr. Blake.

"What is he doing? Has he spoken of me? Is he in good spirits? How does he bear the sight of the house, after what happened in it last year? When are you going to give him the laudanum? May I see you pour it out? I am so interested; I am so excited--I have ten thousand things to say to you, and they all crowd together so that I don't know what to say first. Do you wonder at the interest I take in this?"

"No," I said. "I venture to think that I thoroughly understand it."

She was far above the paltry affectation of being confused. She answered me as she might have answered a brother or a father.

"You have relieved me of indescribable wretchedness; you have given me a new life. How can I be ungrateful enough to have any concealment from you? I love him," she said simply, "I have loved him from first to last--even when I was wronging him in my own thoughts; even when I was saying the hardest and the cruellest words to him. Is there any excuse for me, in that? I hope there is--I am afraid it is the only excuse I have. When to-morrow comes, and he knows that I am in the house, do you think----"

She stopped again, and looked at me very earnestly.

"When to-morrow comes," I said, "I think you have only to tell him what you have just told me."

Her face brightened; she came a step nearer to me. Her fingers trifled nervously with a flower which I had picked in the garden, and which I had put into the button-hole of my coat.

"You have seen a great deal of him lately," she said. "Have you, really and truly, seen THAT?"

"Really and truly," I answered. "I am quite certain of what will happen to-morrow. I wish I could feel as certain of what will happen to-night."

At that point in the conversation, we were interrupted by the appearance of Betteredge with the tea-tray. He gave me another significant look as he passed on into the sitting-room. "Aye! aye! make your hay while the sun shines. The Tartar's upstairs, Mr. Jennings--the Tartar's upstairs!"

We followed him into the room. A little old lady, in a corner, very nicely dressed, and very deeply absorbed over a smart piece of embroidery, dropped her work in her lap, and uttered a faint little scream at the first sight of my gipsy complexion and my piebald hair.

"Mrs. Merridew," said Miss Verinder, "this is Mr. Jennings."

"I beg Mr. Jennings's pardon," said the old lady, looking at Miss Verinder, and speaking at me. "Railway
travelling always makes me nervous. I am endeavouring to quiet my mind by occupying myself as usual. I don't
know whether my embroidery is out of place, on this extraordinary occasion. If it interferes with Mr. Jennings's
medical views, I shall be happy to put it away of course."

I hastened to sanction the presence of the embroidery, exactly as I had sanctioned the absence of the burst
buzzard and the Cupid's wing. Mrs. Merridew made an effort--a grateful effort--to look at my hair. No! it was not to
be done. Mrs. Merridew looked back again at Miss Verinder.

"If Mr. Jennings will permit me," pursued the old lady, "I should like to ask a favour. Mr. Jennings is about to try
a scientific experiment to-night. I used to attend scientific experiments when I was a girl at school. They invariably
ended in an explosion. If Mr. Jennings will be so very kind, I should like to be warned of the explosion this time.
With a view to getting it over, if possible, before I go to bed."

I attempted to assure Mrs. Merridew that an explosion was not included in the programme on this occasion.

"No," said the old lady. "I am much obliged to Mr. Jennings--I am aware that he is only deceiving me for my
own good. I prefer plain dealing. I am quite resigned to the explosion--but I DO want to get it over, if possible,
before I go to bed."

Here the door opened, and Mrs. Merridew uttered another little scream. The advent of the explosion? No: only
the advent of Betteredge.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Jennings," said Betteredge, in his most elaborately confidential manner. "Mr. Franklin
wishes to know where you are. Being under your orders to deceive him, in respect to the presence of my young lady
in the house, I have said I don't know. That you will please to observe, was a lie. Having one foot already in the
grave, sir, the fewer lies you expect me to tell, the more I shall be indebted to you, when my conscience pricks me
and my time comes."

There was not a moment to be wasted on the purely speculative question of Betteredge's conscience. Mr. Blake
might make his appearance in search of me, unless I went to him at once in his own room. Miss Verinder followed
me out into the corridor.

"They seem to be in a conspiracy to persecute you," she said. "What does it mean?"

"Only the protest of the world, Miss Verinder--on a very small scale--against anything that is new."

"What are we to do with Mrs. Merridew?"

"Tell her the explosion will take place at nine to-morrow morning."

"So as to send her to bed?"

"Yes--so as to send her to bed."

Miss Verinder went back to the sitting-room, and I went upstairs to Mr. Blake.

To my surprise I found him alone; restlessly pacing his room, and a little irritated at being left by himself.

"Where is Mr. Bruff?" I asked.

He pointed to the closed door of communication between the two rooms. Mr. Bruff had looked in on him, for a
moment; had attempted to renew his protest against our proceedings; and had once more failed to produce the
smallest impression on Mr. Blake. Upon this, the lawyer had taken refuge in a black leather bag, filled to bursting
with professional papers. "The serious business of life," he admitted, "was sadly out of place on such an occasion as
the present. But the serious business of life must be carried on, for all that. Mr. Blake would perhaps kindly make
allowance for the old-fashioned habits of a practical man. Time was money--and, as for Mr. Jennings, he might
depend on it that Mr. Bruff would be forthcoming when called upon." With that apology, the lawyer had gone back
to his own room, and had immersed himself obstinately in his black bag.

I thought of Mrs. Merridew and her embroidery, and of Betteredge and his conscience. There is a wonderful
sameness in the solid side of the English character--just as there is a wonderful sameness in the solid expression of
the English face.

"When are you going to give me the laudanum?" asked Mr. Blake impatiently.

"You must wait a little longer," I said. "I will stay and keep you company till the time comes."

It was then not ten o'clock. Inquiries which I had made, at various times, of Betteredge and Mr. Blake, had led
me to the conclusion that the dose of laudanum given by Mr. Candy could not possibly have been administered
before eleven. I had accordingly determined not to try the second dose until that time.

We talked a little; but both our minds were preoccupied by the coming ordeal. The conversation soon flagged--
then dropped altogether. Mr. Blake idly turned over the books on his bedroom table. I had taken the precaution of
looking at them, when we first entered the room. THE GUARDIAN; THE TATLER; Richardson's PAMELA;
Mackenzie's MAN OF FEELING; Roscoe's LORENZO DE MEDICI; and Robertson's CHARLES THE FIFTH--all
classical works; all (of course) immeasurably superior to anything produced in later times; and all (from my present
point of view) possessing the one great merit of enchaining nobody's interest, and exciting nobody's brain. I left Mr.
Blake to the composing influence of Standard Literature, and occupied myself in making this entry in my journal.
My watch informs me that it is close on eleven o'clock. I must shut up these leaves once more.

* * * * *

Two o'clock A.M.--The experiment has been tried. With what result, I am now to describe.

At eleven o'clock, I rang the bell for Betteredge, and told Mr. Blake that he might at last prepare himself for bed.

I looked out of the window at the night. It was mild and rainy, resembling, in this respect, the night of the birthday—the twenty-first of June, last year. Without professing to believe in omens, it was at least encouraging to find no direct nervous influences—no stormy or electric perturbations—in the atmosphere. Betteredge joined me at the window, and mysteriously put a little slip of paper into my hand. It contained these lines:

"Mrs. Merridew has gone to bed, on the distinct understanding that the explosion is to take place at nine to-morrow morning, and that I am not to stir out of this part of the house until she comes and sets me free. She has no idea that the chief scene of the experiment is my sitting-room—or she would have remained in it for the whole night! I am alone, and very anxious. Pray let me see you measure out the laudanum; I want to have something to do with it, even in the unimportant character of a mere looker-on.--R.V."

I followed Betteredge out of the room, and told him to remove the medicine-chest into Miss Verinder's sitting-room.

The order appeared to take him completely by surprise. He looked as if he suspected me of some occult medical design on Miss Verinder! "Might I presume to ask," he said, "what my young lady and the medicine-chest have got to do with each other?"

"Stay in the sitting-room, and you will see."

Betteredge appeared to doubt his own unaided capacity to superintend me effectually, on an occasion when a medicine-chest was included in the proceedings.

"Is there any objection, sir?" he asked, "to taking Mr. Bruff into this part of the business?"

"Quite the contrary! I am now going to ask Mr. Bruff to accompany me down-stairs."

Betteredge withdrew to fetch the medicine-chest, without another word. I went back into Mr. Blake's room, and knocked at the door of communication. Mr. Bruff opened it, with his papers in his hand—immersed in Law; impenetrable to Medicine.

"I am sorry to disturb you," I said. "But I am going to prepare the laudanum for Mr. Blake; and I must request you to be present, and to see what I do."

"Yes?" said Mr. Bruff, with nine-tenths of his attention riveted on his papers, and with one-tenth unwillingly accorded to me. "Anything else?"

"I must trouble you to return here with me, and to see me administer the dose."

"Anything else?"

"One thing more. I must put you to the inconvenience of remaining in Mr. Blake's room, and of waiting to see what happens."

"Oh, very good!" said Mr. Bruff. "My room, or Mr. Blake's room—it doesn't matter which; I can go on with my papers anywhere. Unless you object, Mr. Jennings, to my importing THAT amount of common sense into the proceedings?"

Before I could answer, Mr. Blake addressed himself to the lawyer, speaking from his bed.

"Do you really mean to say that you don't feel any interest in what we are going to do?" he asked. "Mr. Bruff, you have no more imagination than a cow!"

"A cow is a very useful animal, Mr. Blake," said the lawyer. With that reply he followed me out of the room, still keeping his papers in his hand.

We found Miss Verinder, pale and agitated, restless pacing her sitting-room from end to end. At a table in a corner stood Betteredge, on guard over the medicine-chest. Mr. Bruff sat down on the first chair that he could find, and (emulating the usefulness of the cow) plunged back again into his papers on the spot.

Miss Verinder drew me aside, and reverted instantly to her one all-absorbing interest—her interest in Mr. Blake.

"How is he now?" she asked. "Is he nervous? is he out of temper? Do you think it will succeed? Are you sure it will do no harm?"

"Quite sure. Come, and see me measure it out."

"One moment! It is past eleven now. How long will it be before anything happens?"

"It is not easy to say. An hour perhaps."

"I suppose the room must be dark, as it was last year?"

"Certainly."

"I shall wait in my bedroom—just as I did before. I shall keep the door a little way open. It was a little way open last year. I will watch the sitting-room door; and the moment it moves, I will blow out my light. It all happened in that way, on my birthday night. And it must all happen again in the same way, musn't it?"
"Are you sure you can control yourself, Miss Verinder?"
"In HIS interests, I can do anything!" she answered fervently.
One look at her face told me that I could trust her. I addressed myself again to Mr. Bruff.
"I must trouble you to put your papers aside for a moment," I said.
"Oh, certainly!" He got up with a start—as if I had disturbed him at a particularly interesting place—and followed me to the medicine-chest. There, deprived of the breathless excitement incidental to the practice of his profession, he looked at Betteredge—and yawned wearily.
Miss Verinder joined me with a glass jug of cold water, which she had taken from a side-table. "Let me pour out the water," she whispered. "I must have a hand in it!"
I measured out the forty minims from the bottle, and poured the laudanum into a medicine glass. "Fill it till it is three parts full," I said, and handed the glass to Miss Verinder. I then directed Betteredge to lock up the medicine chest; informing him that I had done with it now. A look of unutterable relief overspread the old servant's countenance. He had evidently suspected me of a medical design on his young lady!
After adding the water as I had directed, Miss Verinder seized a moment—while Betteredge was locking the chest, and while Mr. Bruff was looking back to his papers—and slyly kissed the rim of the medicine glass. "When you give it to him," said the charming girl, "give it to him on that side!"
I took the piece of crystal which was to represent the Diamond from my pocket, and gave it to her.
"You must have a hand in this, too," I said. "You must put it where you put the Moonstone last year."
She led the way to the Indian cabinet, and put the mock Diamond into the drawer which the real Diamond had occupied on the birthday night. Mr. Bruff witnessed this proceeding, under protest, as he had witnessed everything else. But the strong dramatic interest which the experiment was now assuming, proved (to my great amusement) to be too much for Betteredge's capacity of self restraint. His hand trembled as he held the candle, and he whispered anxiously, "Are you sure, miss, it's the right drawer?"
I led the way out again, with the laudanum and water in my hand. At the door, I stopped to address a last word to Miss Verinder.
"Don't be long in putting out the lights," I said.
"I will put them out at once," she answered. "And I will wait in my bedroom, with only one candle alight."
She closed the sitting-room door behind us. Followed by Mr. Bruff and Betteredge, I went back to Mr. Blake's room.
We found him moving restlessly from side to side of the bed, and wondering irritably whether he was to have the laudanum that night. In the presence of the two witnesses, I gave him the dose, and shook up his pillows, and told him to lie down again quietly and wait.
His bed, provided with light chintz curtains, was placed, with the head against the wall of the room, so as to leave a good open space on either side of it. On one side, I drew the curtains completely—and in the part of the room thus screened from his view, I placed Mr. Bruff and Betteredge, to wait for the result. At the bottom of the bed I half drew the curtains—and placed my own chair at a little distance, so that I might let him see me or not see me, speak to me or not speak to me, just as the circumstances might direct. Having already been informed that he always slept with a light in the room, I placed one of the two lighted candles on a little table at the head of the bed, where the glare of the light would not strike on his eyes. The other candle I gave to Mr. Bruff; the light, in this instance, being subdued by the screen of the chintz curtains. The window was open at the top, so as to ventilate the room. The rain fell softly, the house was quiet. It was twenty minutes past eleven, by my watch, when the preparations were completed, and I took my place on the chair set apart at the bottom of the bed.
Mr. Bruff resumed his papers, with every appearance of being as deeply interested in them as ever. But looking towards him now, I saw certain signs and tokens which told me that the Law was beginning to lose its hold on him at last. The suspended interest of the situation in which we were now placed was slowly asserting its influence even on HIS unimaginative mind. As for Betteredge, consistency of principle and dignity of conduct had become, in his case, mere empty words. He forgot that I was performing a conjuring trick on Mr. Franklin Blake; he forgot that I had upset the house from top to bottom; he forgot that I had not read ROBINSON CRUSOE since I was a child. "For the Lord's sake, sir," he whispered to me, "tell us when it will begin to work."
"Not before midnight," I whispered back. "Say nothing, and sit still."
Betteredge dropped to the lowest depth of familiarity with me, without a struggle to save himself. He answered by a wink!
Looking next towards Mr. Blake, I found him as restless as ever in his bed; fretfully wondering why the influence of the laudanum had not begun to assert itself yet. To tell him, in his present humour, that the more he fidgeted and wondered, the longer he would delay the result for which we were now waiting, would have been simply useless. The wiser course to take was to dismiss the idea of the opium from his mind, by leading him
insensibly to think of something else.

With this view, I encouraged him to talk to me; contriving so to direct the conversation, on my side, as to lead it back again to the subject which had engaged us earlier in the evening--the subject of the Diamond. I took care to revert to those portions of the story of the Moonstone, which related to the transport of it from London to Yorkshire; to the risk which Mr. Blake had run in removing it from the bank at Frizington; and to the unexpected appearance of the Indians at the house, on the evening of the birthday. And I purposely assumed, in referring to these events, to have misunderstood much of what Mr. Blake himself had told me a few hours since. In this way, I set him talking on the subject with which it was now vitally important to fill his mind--without allowing him to suspect that I was making him talk for a purpose. Little by little, he became so interested in putting me right that he forgot to fidget in the bed. His mind was far away from the question of the opium, at the all-important time when his eyes first told me that the opium was beginning to lay its hold on his brain.

I looked at my watch. It wanted five minutes to twelve, when the premonitory symptoms of the working of the laudanum first showed themselves to me.

At this time, no unpractised eyes would have detected any change in him. But, as the minutes of the new morning wore away, the swiftly-subtle progress of the influence began to show itself more plainly. The sublime intoxication of opium gleamed in his eyes; the dew of a stealthy perspiration began to glisten on his face. In five minutes more, the talk which he still kept up with me, failed in coherence. He held steadily to the subject of the Diamond; but he ceased to complete his sentences. A little later, the sentences dropped to single words. Then, there was an interval of silence. Then, he sat up in bed. Then, still busy with the subject of the Diamond, he began to talk again--not to me, but to himself. That change told me that the first stage in the experiment was reached. The stimulant influence of the opium had got him.

The time, now, was twenty-three minutes past twelve. The next half hour, at most, would decide the question of whether he would, or would not, get up from his bed, and leave the room.

In the breathless interest of watching him--in the unutterable triumph of seeing the first result of the experiment declare itself in the manner, and nearly at the time, which I had anticipated--I had utterly forgotten the two companions of my night vigil. Looking towards them now, I saw the Law (as represented by Mr. Bruff's papers) lying unheeded on the floor. Mr. Bruff himself was looking eagerly through a crevice left in the imperfectly-drawn curtains of the bed. And Betteredge, oblivious of all respect for social distinctions, was peeping over Mr. Bruff's shoulder.

They both started back, on finding that I was looking at them, like two boys caught out by their schoolmaster in a fault. I signed to them to take off their boots quietly, as I was taking off mine. If Mr. Blake gave us the chance of following him, it was vitally necessary to follow him without noise.

Ten minutes passed--and nothing happened. Then, he suddenly threw the bed-clothes off him. He put one leg out of bed. He waited.

"I wish I had never taken it out of the bank," he said to himself. "It was safe in the bank."

My heart throbbed fast; the pulses at my temples beat furiously. The doubt about the safety of the Diamond was, once more, the dominant impression in his brain! On that one pivot, the whole success of the experiment turned. The prospect thus suddenly opened before me was too much for my shattered nerves. I was obliged to look away from him--or I should have lost my self-control.

There was another interval of silence.

When I could trust myself to look back at him he was out of his bed, standing erect at the side of it. The pupils of his eyes were now contracted; his eyeballs gleamed in the light of the candle as he moved his head slowly to and fro. He was thinking; he was doubting--he spoke again.

"How do I know?" he said. "The Indians may be hidden in the house."

He stopped, and walked slowly to the other end of the room. He turned--waited--came back to the bed.

"It's not even locked up," he went on. "It's in the drawer of her cabinet. And the drawer doesn't lock."

He sat down on the side of the bed. "Anybody might take it," he said.

He rose again restlessly, and reiterated his first words.

"How do I know? The Indians may be hidden in the house."

He waited again. I drew back behind the half curtain of the bed. He looked about the room, with a vacant glitter in his eyes. It was a breathless moment. There was a pause of some sort. A pause in the action of the opium? a pause in the action of the brain? Who could tell? Everything depended, now, on what he did next.

He laid himself down again on the bed!

A horrible doubt crossed my mind. Was it possible that the sedative action of the opium was making itself felt already? It was not in my experience that it should do this. But what is experience, where opium is concerned? There are probably no two men in existence on whom the drug acts in exactly the same manner. Was some
constitutional peculiarity in him, feeling the influence in some new way? Were we to fail on the very brink of success?

No! He got up again abruptly. "How the devil am I to sleep," he said, "with THIS on my mind?"

He looked at the light, burning on the table at the head of his bed. After a moment, he took the candle in his hand.

I blew out the second candle, burning behind the closed curtains. I drew back, with Mr. Bruff and Betteredge, into the farthest corner by the bed. I signed to them to be silent, as if their lives had depended on it.

We waited--seeing and hearing nothing. We waited, hidden from him by the curtains.

The light which he was holding on the other side of us moved suddenly. The next moment he passed us, swift and noiseless, with the candle in his hand.

He opened the bedroom door, and went out.

We followed him along the corridor. We followed him down the stairs. We followed him along the second corridor. He never looked back; he never hesitated.

He opened the sitting-room door, and went in, leaving it open behind him.

The door was hung (like all the other doors in the house) on large old-fashioned hinges. When it was opened, a crevice was opened between the door and the post. I signed to my two companions to look through this, so as to keep them from showing themselves. I placed myself--outside the door also--on the opposite side. A recess in the wall was at my left hand, in which I could instantly hide myself, if he showed any signs of looking back into the corridor.

He advanced to the middle of the room, with the candle still in his hand: he looked about him--but he never looked back.

I saw the door of Miss Verinder's bedroom, standing ajar. She had put out her light. She controlled herself nobly. The dim white outline of her summer dress was all that I could see. Nobody who had not known it beforehand would have suspected that there was a living creature in the room. She kept back, in the dark: not a word, not a movement escaped her.

It was now ten minutes past one. I heard, through the dead silence, the soft drip of the rain and the tremulous passage of the night air through the trees.

After waiting irresolute, for a minute or more, in the middle of the room, he moved to the corner near the window, where the Indian cabinet stood.

He put his candle on the top of the cabinet. He opened, and shut, one drawer after another, until he came to the drawer in which the mock Diamond was put. He looked into the drawer for a moment. Then he took the mock Diamond out with his right hand. With the other hand, he took the candle from the top of the cabinet.

He walked back a few steps towards the middle of the room, and stood still again.

Thus far, he had exactly repeated what he had done on the birthday night. Would his next proceeding be the same as the proceeding of last year? Would he leave the room? Would he go back now, as I believed he had gone back then, to his bed-chamber? Would he show us what he had done with the Diamond, when he had returned to his own room?

His first action, when he moved once more, proved to be an action which he had not performed, when he was under the influence of the opium for the first time. He put the candle down on a table, and wandered on a little towards the farther end of the room. There was a sofa there. He leaned heavily on the back of it, with his left hand--then roused himself, and returned to the middle of the room. I could now see his eyes. They were getting dull and heavy; the glitter in them was fast dying out.

The suspense of the moment proved too much for Miss Verinder's self-control. She advanced a few steps--then stopped again. Mr. Bruff and Betteredge looked across the open doorway at me for the first time. The prevision of a coming disappointment was impressing itself on their minds as well as on mine.

Still, so long as he stood where he was, there was hope. We waited, in unutterable expectation, to see what would happen next.

The next event was decisive. He let the mock Diamond drop out of his hand.

It fell on the floor, before the doorway--plainly visible to him, and to everyone. He made no effort to pick it up: he looked down at it vacantly, and, as he looked, his head sank on his breast. He staggered--roused himself for an instant--walked back unsteadily to the sofa--and sat down on it. He made a last effort; he tried to rise, and sank back. His head fell on the sofa cushions. It was then twenty-five minutes past one o'clock. Before I had put my watch back in my pocket, he was asleep.

It was all over now. The sedative influence had got him; the experiment was at an end.

I entered the room, telling Mr. Bruff and Betteredge that they might follow me. There was no fear of disturbing him. We were free to move and speak.
"The first thing to settle," I said, "is the question of what we are to do with him. He will probably sleep for the next six or seven hours, at least. It is some distance to carry him back to his own room. When I was younger, I could have done it alone. But my health and strength are not what they were—I am afraid I must ask you to help me."

Before they could answer, Miss Verinder called to me softly. She met me at the door of her room, with a light shawl, and with the counterpane from her own bed.

"Do you mean to watch him while he sleeps?" she asked.

"Yes, I am not sure enough of the action of the opium in his case to be willing to leave him alone."

She handed me the shawl and the counterpane.

"Why should you disturb him?" she whispered. "Make his bed on the sofa. I can shut my door, and keep in my room."

It was infinitely the simplest and the safest way of disposing of him for the night. I mentioned the suggestion to Mr. Bruff and Betteredge—who both approved of my adopting it. In five minutes I had laid him comfortably on the sofa, and had covered him lightly with the counterpane and the shawl. Miss Verinder wished us good night, and closed the door. At my request, we three then drew round the table in the middle of the room, on which the candle was still burning, and on which writing materials were placed.

"Before we separate," I began, "I have a word to say about the experiment which has been tried to-night. Two distinct objects were to be gained by it. The first of these objects was to prove, that Mr. Blake entered this room, and took the Diamond, last year, acting unconsciously and irresponsibly, under the influence of opium. After what you have both seen, are you both satisfied, so far?"

"Yes," they both answered me in the affirmative, without a moment's hesitation.

"The second object," I went on, "was to discover what he did with the Diamond, after he was seen by Miss Verinder to leave her sitting-room with the jewel in his hand, on the birthday night. The gaining of this object depended, of course, on his still continuing exactly to repeat his proceedings of last year. He has failed to do that; and the purpose of the experiment is defeated accordingly. We have only partially reproduced the conditions, and the experiment has been only partially successful in consequence. It is also possible that I may have administered too large a dose of Laudanum. But I myself look upon the first reason that I have given, as the true reason why we have to lament a failure, as well as to rejoice over a success."

After saying those words, I put the writing materials before Mr. Bruff, and asked him if he had any objection—before we separated for the night—to draw out, and sign, a plain statement of what he had seen. He at once took the pen, and produced the statement with the fluent readiness of a practised hand.

"I owe you this," he said, signing the paper, "as some atonement for what passed between us earlier in the evening. I beg your pardon, Mr. Jennings, for having doubted you. You have done Franklin Blake an inestimable service. In our legal phrase, you have proved your case."

Betteredge's apology was characteristic of the man.

"Mr. Jennings," he said, "when you read ROBINSON CRUSOE again (which I strongly recommend you to do), you will find that he never scruples to acknowledge it, when he turns out to have been in the wrong. Please to consider me, sir, as doing what Robinson Crusoe did, on the present occasion." With those words he signed the paper in his turn.

Mr. Bruff took me aside, as we rose from the table.

"One word about the Diamond," he said. "Your theory is that Franklin Blake hid the Moonstone in his room. My theory is, that the Moonstone is in the possession of Mr. Luker's bankers in London. We won't dispute which of us is right. We will only ask, which of us is in a position to put his theory to the test?"

"The test, in my case," I answered, "has been tried to-night, and has failed."

"The test, in my case," rejoined Mr. Bruff, "is still in process of trial. For the last two days I have had a watch set for Mr. Luker at the bank; and I shall cause that watch to be continued until the last day of the month. I know that he must take the Diamond himself out of his bankers' hands—and I am acting on the chance that the person who has pledged the Diamond may force him to do this by redeeming the pledge. In that case I may be able to lay my hand on the person. If I succeed, I clear up the mystery, exactly at the point where the mystery baffles us now! Do you admit that, so far?"

I admitted it readily.

"I am going back to town by the morning train," pursued the lawyer. "I may hear, when I return, that a discovery has been made—and it may be of the greatest importance that I should have Franklin Blake at hand to appeal to, if necessary. I intend to tell him, as soon as he wakes, that he must return with me to London. After all that has
happened, may I trust to your influence to back me?"

"Certainly!" I said.

Mr. Bruff shook hands with me, and left the room. Betteredge followed him out; I went to the sofa to look at Mr. Blake. He had not moved since I had laid him down and made his bed--he lay locked in a deep and quiet sleep.

While I was still looking at him, I heard the bedroom door softly opened. Once more, Miss Verinder appeared on the threshold, in her pretty summer dress.

"Do me a last favour?" she whispered. "Let me watch him with you."

I hesitated--not in the interests of propriety; only in the interest of her night's rest. She came close to me, and took my hand.

"I can't sleep; I can't even sit still, in my own room," she said. "Oh, Mr. Jennings, if you were me, only think how you would long to sit and look at him. Say, yes! Do!"

Is it necessary to mention that I gave way? Surely not!

She drew a chair to the foot of the sofa. She looked at him in a silent ecstasy of happiness, till the tears rose in her eyes. She dried her eyes, and said she would fetch her work. She fetched her work, and never did a single stitch of it. It lay in her lap--she was not even able to look away from him long enough to thread her needle. I thought of my own youth; I thought of the gentle eyes which had once looked love at me. In the heaviness of my heart I turned to my Journal for relief, and wrote in it what is written here.

So we kept our watch together in silence. One of us absorbed in his writing; the other absorbed in her love.

Hour after hour he lay in his deep sleep. The light of the new day grew and grew in the room, and still he never moved.

Towards six o'clock, I felt the warning which told me that my pains were coming back. I was obliged to leave her alone with him for a little while. I said I would go up-stairs, and fetch another pillow for him out of his room. It was not a long attack, this time. In a little while I was able to venture back, and let her see me again.

I found her at the head of the sofa, when I returned. She was just touching his forehead with her lips. I shook my head as soberly as I could, and pointed to her chair. She looked back at me with a bright smile, and a charming colour in her face. "You would have done it," she whispered, "in my place!"

* * * * *

It is just eight o'clock. He is beginning to move for the first time.

Miss Verinder is kneeling by the side of the sofa. She has so placed herself that when his eyes first open, they must open on her face.

Shall I leave them together?

Yes!

* * * * *

Eleven o'clock.--The house is empty again. They have arranged it among themselves; they have all gone to London by the ten o'clock train. My brief dream of happiness is over. I have awakened again to the realities of my friendless and lonely life.

I dare not trust myself to write down, the kind words that have been said to me especially by Miss Verinder and Mr. Blake. Besides, it is needless. Those words will come back to me in my solitary hours, and will help me through what is left of the end of my life. Mr. Blake is to write, and tell me what happens in London. Miss Verinder is to return to Yorkshire in the autumn (for her marriage, no doubt); and I am to take a holiday, and be a guest in the house. Oh me, how I felt, as the grateful happiness looked at me out of her eyes, and the warm pressure of her hand said, "This is your doing!"

My poor patients are waiting for me. Back again, this morning, to the old routine! Back again, to-night, to the dreadful alternative between the opium and the pain!

God be praised for His mercy! I have seen a little sunshine--I have had a happy time.

FIFTH NARRATIVE
The Story Resumed by FRANKLIN BLAKE
CHAPTER I

But few words are needed, on my part, to complete the narrative that has been presented in the Journal of Ezra Jennings.

Of myself, I have only to say that I awoke on the morning of the twenty-sixth, perfectly ignorant of all that I had said and done under the influence of the opium--from the time when the drug first laid its hold on me, to the time when I opened my eyes, in Rachel's sitting-room.

Of what happened after my waking, I do not feel called upon to render an account in detail. Confining myself merely to results, I have to report that Rachel and I thoroughly understood each other, before a single word of explanation had passed on either side. I decline to account, and Rachel declines to account, for the extraordinary
rapidity of our reconciliation. Sir and Madam, look back at the time when you were passionately attached to each other--and you will know what happened, after Ezra Jennings had shut the door of the sitting-room, as well as I know it myself.

I have, however, no objection to add, that we should have been certainly discovered by Mrs. Merridew, but for Rachel's presence of mind. She heard the sound of the old lady's dress in the corridor, and instantly ran out to meet her; I heard Mrs. Merridew say, "What is the matter?" and I heard Rachel answer, "The explosion!" Mrs. Merridew instantly permitted herself to be taken by the arm, and led into the garden, out of the way of the impending shock. On her return to the house, she met me in the hall, and expressed herself as greatly struck by the vast improvement in Science, since the time when she was a girl at school. "Explosions, Mr. Blake, are infinitely milder than they were. I assure you, I barely heard Mr. Jennings's explosion from the garden. And no smell afterwards, that I can detect, now we have come back to the house! I must really apologise to your medical friend. It is only due to him to say that he has managed it beautifully!"

So, after vanquishing Betteredge and Mr. Bruff, Ezra Jennings vanquished Mrs. Merridew herself. There is a great deal of undeveloped liberal feeling in the world, after all!

At breakfast, Mr. Bruff made no secret of his reasons for wishing that I should accompany him to London by the morning train. The watch kept at the bank, and the result which might yet come of it, appealed so irresistibly to Rachel's curiosity, that she at once decided (if Mrs. Merridew had no objection) on accompanying us back to town--so as to be within reach of the earliest news of our proceedings.

Mrs. Merridew proved to be all pliability and indulgence, after the truly considerate manner in which the explosion had conducted itself; and Betteredge was accordingly informed that we were all four to travel back together by the morning train. I fully expected that he would have asked leave to accompany us. But Rachel had wisely provided her faithful old servant with an occupation that interested him. He was charged with completing the refurnishing of the house, and was too full of his domestic responsibilities to feel the "detective-fever" as he might have felt it under other circumstances.

Our one subject of regret, in going to London, was the necessity of parting, more abruptly than we could have wished, with Ezra Jennings. It was impossible to persuade him to accompany us. I could only promise to write to him--and Rachel could only insist on his coming to see her when she returned to Yorkshire. There was every prospect of our meeting again in a few months--and yet there was something very sad in seeing our best and dearest friend left standing alone on the platform, as the train moved out of the station.

On our arrival in London, Mr. Bruff was accosted at the terminus by a small boy, dressed in a jacket and trousers of threadbare black cloth, and personally remarkable in virtue of the extraordinary prominence of his eyes. They projected so far, and they rolled about so loosely, that you wondered uneasily why they remained in their sockets. After listening to the boy, Mr. Bruff asked the ladies whether they would excuse our accompanying them back to Portland Place. I had barely time to promise Rachel that I would return, and tell her everything that had happened, before Mr. Bruff seized me by the arm, and hurried me into a cab. The boy with the ill-secured eyes took his place on the box by the driver, and the driver was directed to go to Lombard Street.

"News from the bank?" I asked, as we started.

"News of Mr. Luker," said Mr. Bruff. "An hour ago, he was seen to leave his house at Lambeth, in a cab, accompanied by two men, who were recognised by my men as police officers in plain clothes. If Mr. Luker's dread of the Indians is at the bottom of this precaution, the inference is plain enough. He is going to take the Diamond out of the bank."

"And we are going to the bank to see what comes of it?"

"Yes--or to hear what has come of it, if it is all over by this time. Did you notice my boy--on the box, there?"

"I noticed his eyes."

Mr. Bruff laughed. "They call the poor little wretch 'Gooseberry' at the office," he said. "I employ him to go on errands--and I only wish my clerks who have nick-named him were as thoroughly to be depended on as he is. Gooseberry is one of the sharpest boys in London, Mr. Blake, in spite of his eyes."

It was twenty minutes to five when we drew up before the bank in Lombard Street. Gooseberry looked longingly at his master, as he opened the cab door.

"Do you want to come in too?" asked Mr. Bruff kindly. "Come in then, and keep at my heels till further orders. He's as quick as lightning," pursued Mr. Bruff, addressing me in a whisper. "Two words will do with Gooseberry, where twenty would be wanted with another boy."

We entered the bank. The outer office--with the long counter, behind which the cashiers sat--was crowded with people; all waiting their turn to take money out, or to pay money in, before the bank closed at five o'clock.

Two men among the crowd approached Mr. Bruff, as soon as he showed himself.

"Well," asked the lawyer. "Have you seen him?"
"He passed us here half an hour since, sir, and went on into the inner office."
"Has he not come out again yet?"
"No, sir."
Mr. Bruff turned to me. "Let us wait," he said.
I looked round among the people about me for the three Indians. Not a sign of them was to be seen anywhere. The only person present with a noticeably dark complexion was a tall man in a pilot coat, and a round hat, who looked like a sailor. Could this be one of them in disguise? Impossible! The man was taller than any of the Indians; and his face, where it was not hidden by a bushy black beard, was twice the breadth of any of their faces at least.
"They must have their spy somewhere," said Mr. Bruff, looking at the dark sailor in his turn. "And he may be the man."
Before he could say more, his coat-tail was respectfully pulled by his attendant sprite with the gooseberry eyes. Mr. Bruff looked where the boy was looking. "Hush!" he said. "Here is Mr. Luker!"
The money-lender came out from the inner regions of the bank, followed by his two guardian policemen in plain clothes.
"Keep your eye on him," whispered Mr. Bruff. "If he passes the Diamond to anybody, he will pass it here."
Without noticing either of us, Mr. Luker slowly made his way to the door--now in the thickest, now in the thinnest part of the crowd. I distinctly saw his hand move, as he passed a short, stout man, respectfully dressed in a suit of sober grey. The man started a little, and looked after him. Mr. Luker moved on slowly through the crowd. At the door his guard placed themselves on either side of him. They were all three followed by one of Mr. Bruff's men--and I saw them no more.
I looked round at the lawyer, and then looked significantly towards the man in the suit of sober grey. "Yes!" whispered Mr. Bruff. "I saw it too!" He turned about, in search of his second man. The second man was nowhere to be seen. He looked behind him for his attendant sprite. Gooseberry had disappeared.
"What the devil does it mean?" said Mr. Bruff angrily. "They have both left us at the very time when we want them most."
It came to the turn of the man in the grey suit to transact his business at the counter. He paid in a cheque--received a receipt for it--and turned to go out.
"What is to be done?" asked Mr. Bruff. "We can't degrade ourselves by following him."
"I can!" I said. "I wouldn't lose sight of that man for ten thousand pounds!"
"In that case," rejoined Mr. Bruff, "I wouldn't lose sight of you, for twice the money. A nice occupation for a man in my position," he muttered to himself, as we followed the stranger out of the bank. "For Heaven's sake don't mention it. I should be ruined if it was known."
The man in the grey suit got into an omnibus, going westward. We got in after him. There were latent reserves of youth still left in Mr. Bruff. I assert it positively--when he took his seat in the omnibus, he blushed!
The man in the grey suit stopped the omnibus, and got out in Oxford Street. We followed him again. He went into a chemist's shop.
Mr. Bruff started. "My chemist!" he exclaimed. "I am afraid we have made a mistake."
We entered the shop. Mr. Bruff and the proprietor exchanged a few words in private. The lawyer joined me again, with a very crestfallen face.
"It's greatly to our credit," he said, as he took my arm, and led me out--"that's one comfort!"
"What is to our credit?" I asked.
"Mr. Blake! you and I are the two worst amateur detectives that ever tried their hands at the trade. The man in the grey suit has been thirty years in the chemist's service. He was sent to the bank to pay money to his master's account--and he knows no more of the Moonstone than the babe unborn."
I asked what was to be done next.
"Come back to my office," said Mr. Bruff. "Gooseberry, and my second man, have evidently followed somebody else. Let us hope that THEY had their eyes about them at any rate!"
When we reached Gray's Inn Square, the second man had arrived there before us. He had been waiting for more than a quarter of an hour.
"Well!" asked Mr. Bruff. "What's your news?"
"I am sorry to say, sir," replied the man, "that I have made a mistake. I could have taken my oath that I saw Mr. Luker pass something to an elderly gentleman, in a light-coloured paletot. The elderly gentleman turns out, sir, to be a most respectable master iron-monger in Eastcheap."
"Where is Gooseberry?" asked Mr. Bruff resignedly.
The man stared. "I don't know, sir. I have seen nothing of him since I left the bank."
Mr. Bruff dismissed the man. "One of two things," he said to me. "Either Gooseberry has run away, or he is
hunting on his own account. What do you say to dining here, on the chance that the boy may come back in an hour or two? I have got some good wine in the cellar, and we can get a chop from the coffee-house."

We dined at Mr. Bruff's chambers. Before the cloth was removed, "a person" was announced as wanting to speak to the lawyer. Was the person Gooseberry? No: only the man who had been employed to follow Mr. Luker when he left the bank.

The report, in this case, presented no feature of the slightest interest. Mr. Luker had gone back to his own house, and had there dismissed his guard. He had not gone out again afterwards. Towards dusk, the shutters had been put up, and the doors had been bolted. The street before the house, and the alley behind the house, had been carefully watched. No signs of the Indians had been visible. No person whatever had been seen loitering about the premises. Having stated these facts, the man waited to know whether there were any further orders. Mr. Bruff dismissed him for the night.

"Do you think Mr. Luker has taken the Moonstone home with him?" I asked.

"Not he," said Mr. Bruff. "He would never have dismissed his two policemen, if he had run the risk of keeping the Diamond in his own house again."

We waited another half-hour for the boy, and waited in vain. It was then time for Mr. Bruff to go to Hampstead, and for me to return to Rachel in Portland Place. I left my card, in charge of the porter at the chambers, with a line written on it to say that I should be at my lodgings at half past ten, that night. The card was to be given to the boy, if the boy came back.

Some men have a knack of keeping appointments; and other men have a knack of missing them. I am one of the other men. Add to this, that I passed the evening at Portland Place, on the same seat with Rachel, in a room forty feet long, with Mrs. Merridew at the further end of it. Does anybody wonder that I got home at half past twelve instead of half past ten? How thoroughly heartless that person must be! And how earnestly I hope I may never make that person's acquaintance!

My servant handed me a morsel of paper when he let me in.

I read, in a neat legal handwriting, these words--"If you please, sir, I am getting sleepy. I will come back to-morrow morning, between nine and ten." Inquiry proved that a boy, with very extraordinary-looking eyes, had called, and presented my card and message, had waited an hour, had done nothing but fall asleep and wake up again, had written a line for me, and had gone home--after gravely informing the servant that "he was fit for nothing unless he got his night's rest."

At nine, the next morning, I was ready for my visitor. At half past nine, I heard steps outside my door. "Come in, Gooseberry!" I called out. "Thank you, sir," answered a grave and melancholy voice. The door opened. I started to my feet, and confronted--Sergeant Cuff.

"I thought I would look in here, Mr. Blake, on the chance of your being in town, before I wrote to Yorkshire," said the Sergeant.

He was as dreary and as lean as ever. His eyes had not lost their old trick (so subtly noticed in Betteredge's NARRATIVE) of "looking as if they expected something more from you than you were aware of yourself." But, so far as dress can alter a man, the great Cuff was changed beyond all recognition. He wore a broad-brimmed white hat, a light shooting jacket, white trousers, and drab gaiters. He carried a stout oak stick. His whole aim and object seemed to be to look as if he had lived in the country all his life. When I complimented him on his Metamorphosis, he declined to take it as a joke. He complained, quite gravely, of the noises and the smells of London. I declare I am far from sure that he did not speak with a slightly rustic accent! I offered him breakfast. The innocent countryman was quite shocked. HIS breakfast hour was half-past six--and HE went to bed with the cocks and hens!

"I only got back from Ireland last night," said the Sergeant, coming round to the practical object of his visit, in his own impenetrable manner. "Before I went to bed, I read your letter, telling me what has happened since my inquiry after the Diamond was suspended last year. There's only one thing to be said about the matter on my side. I completely mistook my case. How any man living was to have seen things in their true light, in such a situation as mine was at the time, I don't profess to know. But that doesn't alter the facts as they stand. I own that I made a mess of it. Not the first mess, Mr. Blake, which has distinguished my professional career! It's only in books that the officers of the detective force are superior to the weakness of making a mistake."

"You have come in the nick of time to recover your reputation," I said.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Blake," rejoined the Sergeant. "Now I have retired from business, I don't care a straw about my reputation. I have done with my reputation, thank God! I am here, sir, in grateful remembrance of the late Lady Verinder's liberality to me. I will go back to my old work--if you want me, and if you will trust me--on that consideration, and on no other. Not a farthing of money is to pass, if you please, from you to me. This is on honour. Now tell me, Mr. Blake, how the case stands since you wrote to me last."

I told him of the experiment with the opium, and of what had occurred afterwards at the bank in Lombard Street.
He was greatly struck by the experiment—it was something entirely new in his experience. And he was particularly interested in the theory of Ezra Jennings, relating to what I had done with the Diamond, after I had left Rachel's sitting-room, on the birthday night.

"I don't hold with Mr. Jennings that you hid the Moonstone," said Sergeant Cuff. "But I agree with him, that you must certainly have taken it back to your own room."

"Well?" I asked. "And what happened then?"

"Have you no suspicion yourself of what happened, sir?"

"None whatever."

"Has Mr. Bruff no suspicion?"

"No more than I have."

Sergeant Cuff rose, and went to my writing-table. He came back with a sealed envelope. It was marked "Private;" it was addressed to me; and it had the Sergeant's signature in the corner.

"I suspected the wrong person, last year," he said: "and I may be suspecting the wrong person now. Wait to open the envelope, Mr. Blake, till you have got at the truth. And then compare the name of the guilty person, with the name that I have written in that sealed letter."

I put the letter into my pocket—and then asked for the Sergeant's opinion of the measures which we had taken at the bank.

"Very well intended, sir," he answered, "and quite the right thing to do. But there was another person who ought to have been looked after besides Mr. Luker."

"The person named in the letter you have just given to me?"

"Yes, Mr. Blake, the person named in the letter. It can't be helped now. I shall have something to propose to you and Mr. Bruff, sir, when the time comes. Let's wait, first, and see if the boy has anything to tell us that is worth hearing."

It was close on ten o'clock, and the boy had not made his appearance. Sergeant Cuff talked of other matters. He asked after his old friend Betteredge, and his old enemy the gardener. In a minute more, he would no doubt have got from this, to the subject of his favourite roses, if my servant had not interrupted us by announcing that the boy was below.

On being brought into the room, Gooseberry stopped at the threshold of the door, and looked distrustfully at the stranger who was in my company. I told the boy to come to me.

"You may speak before this gentleman," I said. "He is here to assist me; and he knows all that has happened. Sergeant Cuff," I added, "this is the boy from Mr. Bruff's office."

In our modern system of civilisation, celebrity (no matter of what kind) is the lever that will move anything. The fame of the great Cuff had even reached the ears of the small Gooseberry. The boy's ill-fixed eyes rolled, when I mentioned the illustrious name, till I thought they really must have dropped on the carpet.

"Come here, my lad," said the Sergeant, "and let's hear what you have got to tell us."

The notice of the great man—the hero of many a famous story in every lawyer's office in London—appeared to fascinate the boy. He placed himself in front of Sergeant Cuff, and put his hands behind him, after the approved fashion of a neophyte who is examined in his catechism.

"What is your name?" said the Sergeant, beginning with the first question in the catechism.

"Octavius Guy," answered the boy. "They call me Gooseberry at the office because of my eyes."

"Octavius Guy, otherwise Gooseberry," pursued the Sergeant, with the utmost gravity, "you were missed at the bank yesterday. What were you about?"

"If you please, sir, I was following a man."

"Who was he?"

"A tall man, sir, with a big black beard, dressed like a sailor."

"I remember the man!" I broke in. "Mr. Bruff and I thought he was a spy employed by the Indians."

Sergeant Cuff did not appear to be much impressed by what Mr. Bruff and I had thought. He went on catechising Gooseberry.

"Well?" he said—"and why did you follow the sailor?"

"If you please, sir, Mr. Bruff wanted to know whether Mr. Luker passed anything to anybody on his way out of the bank. I saw Mr. Luker pass something to the sailor with the black beard."

"Why didn't you tell Mr. Bruff what you saw?"

"I hadn't time to tell anybody, sir, the sailor went out in such a hurry."

"And you ran out after him—eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"Gooseberry," said the Sergeant, patting his head, "you have got something in that small skull of yours—and it
isn't cotton-wool. I am greatly pleased with you, so far."
The boy blushed with pleasure. Sergeant Cuff went on.
"Well? and what did the sailor do, when he got into the street?"
"He called a cab, sir."
"And what did you do?"
"Held on behind, and run after it."

Before the Sergeant could put his next question, another visitor was announced--the head clerk from Mr. Bruff's office.

Feeling the importance of not interrupting Sergeant Cuff's examination of the boy, I received the clerk in another room. He came with bad news of his employer. The agitation and excitement of the last two days had proved too much for Mr. Bruff. He had awoke that morning with an attack of gout; he was confined to his room at Hampstead; and, in the present critical condition of our affairs, he was very uneasy at being compelled to leave me without the advice and assistance of an experienced person. The chief clerk had received orders to hold himself at my disposal, and was willing to do his best to replace Mr. Bruff.

I wrote at once to quiet the old gentleman's mind, by telling him of Sergeant Cuff's visit: adding that Gooseberry was at that moment under examination; and promising to inform Mr. Bruff, either personally, or by letter, of whatever might occur later in the day. Having despatched the clerk to Hampstead with my note, I returned to the room which I had left, and found Sergeant Cuff at the fireplace, in the act of ringing the bell.

"I beg your pardon, Mr. Blake," said the Sergeant. "I was just going to send word by your servant that I wanted to speak to you. There isn't a doubt on my mind that this boy--this most meritorious boy," added the Sergeant, patting Gooseberry on the head, "has followed the right man. Precious time has been lost, sir, through your unfortunately not being at home at half past ten last night. The only thing to do, now, is to send for a cab immediately."

In five minutes more, Sergeant Cuff and I (with Gooseberry on the box to guide the driver) were on our way eastward, towards the City.

"One of these days," said the Sergeant, pointing through the front window of the cab, "that boy will do great things in my late profession. He is the brightest and cleverest little chap I have met with, for many a long year past. You shall hear the substance, Mr. Blake, of what he told me while you were out of the room. You were present, I think, when he mentioned that he held on behind the cab, and ran after it?"

"Yes."

"Well, sir, the cab went from Lombard Street to the Tower Wharf. The sailor with the black beard got out, and spoke to the steward of the Rotterdam steamboat, which was to start next morning. He asked if he could be allowed to go on board at once, and sleep in his berth over-night. The steward said, No. The cabins, and berths, and bedding were all to have a thorough cleaning that evening, and no passenger could be allowed to come on board, before the morning. The sailor turned round, and left the wharf. When he got into the street again, the boy noticed for the first time, a man dressed like a respectable mechanic, walking on the opposite side of the road, and apparently keeping the sailor in view. The sailor stopped at an eating-house in the neighbourhood, and went in. The boy--not being able to make up his mind, at the moment--hung about among some other boys, staring at the good things in the eating-house window. He noticed the mechanic waiting, as he himself was waiting--but still on the opposite side of the street. After a minute, a cab came by slowly, and stopped where the mechanic was standing. The boy could only see plainly one person in the cab, who leaned forward at the window to speak to the mechanic. He described that person, Mr. Blake, without any prompting from me, as having a dark face, like the face of an Indian."

It was plain, by this time, that Mr. Bruff and I had made another mistake. The sailor with the black beard was clearly not a spy in the service of the Indian conspiracy. Was he, by any possibility, the man who had got the Diamond?

"After a little," pursued the Sergeant, "the cab moved on slowly down the street. The mechanic crossed the road, and went into the eating-house. The boy waited outside till he was hungry and tired--and then went into the eating-house, in his turn. He had a shilling in his pocket; and he dined sumptuously, he tells me, on a black-pudding, an eel-pie, and a bottle of ginger-beer. What can a boy not digest? The substance in question has never been found yet."

"What did he see in the eating-house?" I asked.

"Well, Mr. Blake, he saw the sailor reading the newspaper at one table, and the mechanic reading the newspaper at another. It was dusk before the sailor got up, and left the place. He looked about him suspiciously when he got out into the street. The boy--BEING a boy--passed unnoticed. The mechanic had not come out yet. The sailor walked on, looking about him, and apparently not very certain of where he was going next. The mechanic appeared once more, on the opposite side of the road. The sailor went on, till he got to Shore Lane, leading into Lower Thames Street. There he stopped before a public-house, under the sign of 'The Wheel of Fortune,' and, after examining the
place outside, went in. Gooseberry went in too. There were a great many people, mostly of the decent sort, at the bar. 'The Wheel of Fortune' is a very respectable house, Mr. Blake; famous for its porter and pork-pies.

The Sergeant's digressions irritated me. He saw it; and confined himself more strictly to Gooseberry's evidence when he went on.

"The sailor," he resumed, "asked if he could have a bed. The landlord said 'No; they were full.' The barmaid corrected him, and said 'Number Ten was empty.' A waiter was sent for to show the sailor to Number Ten. Just before that, Gooseberry had noticed the mechanic among the people at the bar. Before the waiter had answered the call, the mechanic had vanished. The sailor was taken off to his room. Not knowing what to do next, Gooseberry had the wisdom to wait and see if anything happened. Something did happen. The landlord was called for. Angry voices were heard up-stairs. The mechanic suddenly made his appearance again, collared by the landlord, and exhibiting, to Gooseberry's great surprise, all the signs and tokens of being drunk. The landlord thrust him out at the door, and threatened him with the police if he came back. From the altercation between them, while this was going on, it appeared that the man had been discovered in Number Ten, and had declared with drunken obstinacy that he had taken the room. Gooseberry was so struck by this sudden intoxication of a previously sober person, that he couldn't resist running out after the mechanic into the street. As long as he was in sight of the public-house, the man reeled about in the most disgraceful manner. The moment he turned the corner of the street, he recovered his balance instantly, and became as sober a member of society as you could wish to see. Gooseberry went back to 'The Wheel of Fortune' in a very bewildered state of mind. He waited about again, on the chance of something happening. Nothing happened; and nothing more was to be heard, or seen, of the sailor. Gooseberry decided on going back to the office. Just as he came to this conclusion, who should appear, on the opposite side of the street as usual, but the mechanic again! He looked up at one particular window at the top of the public-house, which was the only one that had a light in it. The light seemed to relieve his mind. He left the place directly. The boy made his way back to Gray's Inn--got your card and message--called--and failed to find you. There you have the state of the case, Mr. Blake, as it stands at the present time."

"What is your own opinion of the case, Sergeant?"

"I think it's serious, sir. Judging by what the boy saw, the Indians are in it, to begin with."

"Yes. And the sailor is evidently the person to whom Mr. Luker passed the Diamond. It seems odd that Mr. Bruff, and I, and the man in Mr. Bruff's employment, should all have been mistaken about who the person was."

"Not at all, Mr. Blake. Considering the risk that person ran, it's likely enough that Mr. Luker purposely misled you, by previous arrangement between them."

"Do you understand the proceedings at the public-house?" I asked. "The man dressed like a mechanic was acting of course in the employment of the Indians. But I am as much puzzled to account for his sudden assumption of drunkenness as Gooseberry himself."

"I think I can give a guess at what it means, sir," said the Sergeant. "If you will reflect, you will see that the man must have had some pretty strict instructions from the Indians. They were far too noticeable themselves to risk being seen at the bank, or in the public-house--they were obliged to trust everything to their deputy. Very good. Their deputy hears a certain number named in the public-house, as the number of the room which the sailor is to have for the night--that being also the room (unless our notion is all wrong) which the Diamond is to have for the night, too. Under those circumstances, the Indians, you may rely on it, would insist on having a description of the room--of its capability of being approached from the outside, and so on. What was the man to do, with such orders as these? Just what he did! He ran up-stairs to get a look at the room, before the sailor was taken into it. He was found there, making his observations--and he shammed drunk, as the easiest way of getting out of the difficulty. That's how I read the riddle. After he was turned out of the public-house, he probably went with his report to the place where his employers were waiting for him. And his employers, no doubt, sent him back to make sure that the sailor was really settled at the public-house till the next morning. As for what happened at 'The Wheel of Fortune,' after the boy left--we ought to have discovered that last night. It's eleven in the morning, now. We must hope for the best, and find out what we can."

In a quarter of an hour more, the cab stopped in Shore Lane, and Gooseberry opened the door for us to get out.

"All right?" asked the Sergeant.

"All right," answered the boy.

The moment we entered 'The Wheel of Fortune'' it was plain even to my inexperienced eyes that there was something wrong in the house.

The only person behind the counter at which the liquors were served, was a bewildered servant girl, perfectly ignorant of the business. One or two customers, waiting for their morning drink, were tapping impatiently on the counter with their money. The bar-maid appeared from the inner regions of the parlour, excited and preoccupied. She answered Sergeant Cuff's inquiry for the landlord, by telling him sharply that her master was up-stairs, and was
not to be bothered by anybody.

"Come along with me, sir," said Sergeant Cuff, coolly leading the way up-stairs, and beckoning to the boy to follow him.

The barmaid called to her master, and warned him that strangers were intruding themselves into the house. On the first floor we were encountered by the Landlord, hurrying down, in a highly irritated state, to see what was the matter.

"Who the devil are you? and what do you want here?" he asked.

"Keep your temper," said the Sergeant, quietly. "I'll tell you who I am to begin with. I am Sergeant Cuff."

The illustrious name instantly produced its effect. The angry landlord threw open the door of a sitting-room, and asked the Sergeant's pardon.

"I am annoyed and out of sorts, sir--that's the truth," he said. "Something unpleasant has happened in the house this morning. A man in my way of business has a deal to upset his temper, Sergeant Cuff."

"Not a doubt of it," said the Sergeant. "I'll come at once, if you will allow me, to what brings us here. This gentleman and I want to trouble you with a few inquiries, on a matter of some interest to both of us."

"Relating to what, sir?" asked the landlord.

"Relating to a dark man, dressed like a sailor, who slept here last night."

"Good God! that's the man who is upsetting the whole house at this moment!" exclaimed the landlord. "Do you, or does this gentleman know anything about him?"

"We can't be certain till we see him," answered the Sergeant.

"See him?" echoed the landlord. "That's the one thing that nobody has been able to do since seven o'clock this morning. That was the time when he left word, last night, that he was to be called. He WAS called--and there was no getting an answer from him, and no opening his door to see what was the matter. They tried again at eight, and they tried again at nine. No use! There was the door still locked--and not a sound to be heard in the room! I have been out this morning--and I only got back a quarter of an hour ago. I have hammered at the door myself--and all to no purpose. The potboy has gone to fetch a carpenter. If you can wait a few minutes, gentlemen, we will have the door opened, and see what it means."

"Was the man drunk last night?" asked Sergeant Cuff.

"Perfectly sober, sir--or I would never have let him sleep in my house."

"Did he pay for his bed beforehand?"

"No."

"Could he leave the room in any way, without going out by the door?"

"The room is a garret," said the landlord. "But there's a trap-door in the ceiling, leading out on to the roof--and a little lower down the street, there's an empty house under repair. Do you think, Sergeant, the blackguard has got off in that way, without paying?"

"A sailor," said Sergeant Cuff, "might have done it--early in the morning, before the street was astir. He would be used to climbing, and his head wouldn't fail him on the roofs of the houses."

As he spoke, the arrival of the carpenter was announced. We all went up-stairs, at once, to the top story. I noticed that the Sergeant was unusually grave, even for him. He also struck me as odd that he told the boy (after having previously encouraged him to follow us), to wait in the room below till we came down again.

The carpenter's hammer and chisel disposed of the resistance of the door in a few minutes. But some article of furniture had been placed against it inside, as a barricade. By pushing at the door, we thrust this obstacle aside, and so got admission to the room. The landlord entered first; the Sergeant second; and I third. The other persons present followed us.

We all looked towards the bed, and all started.

The man had not left the room. He lay, dressed, on the bed--with a white pillow over his face, which completely hid it from view.

"What does that mean?" said the landlord, pointing to the pillow.

Sergeant Cuff led the way to the bed, without answering, and removed the pillow.

The man's swarthy face was placid and still; his black hair and beard were slightly, very slightly, discomposed. His eyes stared wide-open, glassy and vacant, at the ceiling. The filmy look and the fixed expression of them horrified me. I turned away, and went to the open window. The rest of them remained, where Sergeant Cuff remained, at the bed.

"He's in a fit!" I heard the landlord say.

"He's dead," the Sergeant answered. "Send for the nearest doctor, and send for the police."

The waiter was despatched on both errands. Some strange fascination seemed to hold Sergeant Cuff to the bed. Some strange curiosity seemed to keep the rest of them waiting, to see what the Sergeant would do next.
I turned again to the window. The moment afterwards, I felt a soft pull at my coat-tails, and a small voice whispered, "Look here, sir!"

Gooseberry had followed us into the room. His loose eyes rolled frightfully--not in terror, but in exultation. He had made a detective-discovery on his own account. "Look here, sir," he repeated--and led me to a table in the corner of the room.

On the table stood a little wooden box, open, and empty. On one side of the box lay some jewellers' cotton. On the other side, was a torn sheet of white paper, with a seal on it, partly destroyed, and with an inscription in writing, which was still perfectly legible. The inscription was in these words:

"Deposited with Messrs. Bush, Lysaught, and Bush, by Mr. Septimus Luker, of Middlesex Place, Lambeth, a small wooden box, sealed up in this envelope, and containing a valuable of great price. The box, when claimed, to be only given up by Messrs. Bushe and Co. on the personal application of Mr. Luker."

Those lines removed all further doubt, on one point at least. The sailor had been in possession of the Moonstone, when he had left the bank on the previous day.

I felt another pull at my coat-tails. Gooseberry had not done with me yet.

"Robbery!" whispered the boy, pointing, in high delight, to the empty box.

"You were told to wait down-stairs," I said. "Go away!"

"And Murder!" added Gooseberry, pointing, with a keener relish still, to the man on the bed.

There was something so hideous in the boy's enjoyment of the horror of the scene, that I took him by the two shoulders and put him out of the room.

At the moment when I crossed the threshold of the door, I heard Sergeant Cuff's voice, asking where I was. He met me, as I returned into the room, and forced me to go back with him to the bedside.

"Mr. Blake!" he said. "Look at the man's face. It is a face disguised--and here's a proof of it!"

He traced with his finger a thin line of livid white, running backward from the dead man's forehead, between the swarthy complexion, and the slightly-disturbed black hair. "Let's see what is under this," said the Sergeant, suddenly seizing the black hair, with a firm grip of his hand.

My nerves were not strong enough to bear it. I turned away again from the bed.

The first sight that met my eyes, at the other end of the room, was the irrepressible Gooseberry, perched on a chair, and looking with breathless interest, over the heads of his elders, at the Sergeant's proceedings.

"He's pulling off his wig!" whispered Gooseberry, compassionating my position, as the only person in the room who could see nothing.

There was a pause--and then a cry of astonishment among the people round the bed.

"He's pulled off his beard!" cried Gooseberry.

There was another pause--Sergeant Cuff asked for something. The landlord went to the wash-hand-stand, and returned to the bed with a basin of water and a towel.

Gooseberry danced with excitement on the chair. "Come up here, along with me, sir! He's washing off his complexion now!"

The Sergeant suddenly burst his way through the people about him, and came, with horror in his face, straight to the place where I was standing.

"Come back to the bed, sir!" he began. He looked at me closer, and checked himself "No!" he resumed. "Open the sealed letter first--the letter I gave you this morning."

I opened the letter.

"Read the name, Mr. Blake, that I have written inside."

I read the name that he had written. It was GODFREY ABLEWHITE.

"Now," said the Sergeant, "come with me, and look at the man on the bed."

I went with him, and looked at the man on the bed.

GODFREY ABLEWHITE!

SIXTH NARRATIVE

Contributed by SERGEANT CUFF

Dorking, Surrey, July 30th, 1849. To Franklin Blake, Esq. Sir,—I beg to apologise for the delay that has occurred in the production of the Report, with which I engaged to furnish you. I have waited to make it a complete Report; and I have been met, here and there, by obstacles which it was only possible to remove by some little expenditure of patience and time.

The object which I proposed to myself has now, I hope, been attained. You will find, in these pages, answers to the greater part—if not all—of the questions, concerning the late Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, which occurred to your mind when I last had the honour of seeing you.
I propose to tell you—in the first place—what is known of the manner in which your cousin met his death; appending to the statement such inferences and conclusions as we are justified (according to my opinion) in drawing from the facts.

I shall then endeavour—in the second place—to put you in possession of such discoveries as I have made, respecting the proceedings of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite, before, during and after the time, when you and he met as guests at the late Lady Verinder's country-house.

II

As to your cousin's death, then, first.

It appears to be established, beyond any reasonable doubt, that he was killed (while he was asleep, or immediately on his waking) by being smothered with a pillow from his bed—that the persons guilty of murdering him are the three Indians—and that the object contemplated (and achieved) by the crime, was to obtain possession of the diamond, called the Moonstone.

The facts from which this conclusion is drawn, are derived partly from an examination of the room at the tavern; and partly from the evidence obtained at the Coroner's Inquest.

On forcing the door of the room, the deceased gentleman was discovered, dead, with the pillow of the bed over his face. The medical man who examined him, being informed of this circumstance, considered the post-mortem appearances as being perfectly compatible with murder by smothering—that is to say, with murder committed by some person, or persons, pressing the pillow over the nose and mouth of the deceased, until death resulted from congestion of the lungs.

Next, as to the motive for the crime.

A small box, with a sealed paper torn off from it (the paper containing an inscription) was found open, and empty, on a table in the room. Mr. Luker has himself personally identified the box, the seal, and the inscription. He has declared that the box did actually contain the diamond, called the Moonstone; and he has admitted having given the box (thus sealed up) to Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite (then concealed under a disguise), on the afternoon of the twenty-sixth of June last. The fair inference from all this is, that the stealing of the Moonstone was the motive of the crime.

Next, as to the manner in which the crime was committed.

On examination of the room (which is only seven feet high), a trap-door in the ceiling, leading out on to the roof of the house, was discovered open. The short ladder, used for obtaining access to the trap-door (and kept under the bed), was found placed at the opening, so as to enable any person or persons, in the room, to leave it again easily. In the trap-door itself was found a square aperture cut in the wood, apparently with some exceedingly sharp instrument, just behind the bolt which fastened the door on the inner side. In this way, any person from the outside could have drawn back the bolt, and opened the door, and have dropped (or have been noiselessly lowered by an accomplice) into the room—its height, as already observed, being only seven feet. That some person, or persons, must have got admission in this way, appears evident from the fact of the aperture being there. As to the manner in which he (or they) obtained access to the roof of the tavern, it is to be remarked that the third house, lower down in the street, was empty, and under repair—that a long ladder was left by the workmen, leading from the pavement to the top of the house—and that, on returning to their work, on the morning of the 27th, the men found the plank which they had tied to the ladder, to prevent anyone from using it in their absence, removed, and lying on the ground. As to the possibility of ascending by this ladder, passing over the roofs of the houses, passing back, and descending again, unobserved—it is discovered, on the evidence of the night policeman, that he only passes through Shore Lane twice in an hour, when out on his beat. The testimony of the inhabitants also declares, that Shore Lane, after midnight, is one of the quietest and loneliest streets in London. Here again, therefore, it seems fair to infer that—with ordinary caution, and presence of mind—any man, or men, might have ascended by the ladder, and might have descended again, unobserved. Once on the roof of the tavern, it has been proved, by experiment, that a man might cut through the trap-door, while lying down on it, and that in such a position, the parapet in front of the house would conceal him from the view of anyone passing in the street.

Lastly, as to the person, or persons, by whom the crime was committed.

It is known (1) that the Indians had an interest in possessing themselves of the Diamond. (2) It is at least probable that the man looking like an Indian, whom Octavius Guy saw at the window of the cab, speaking to the man dressed like a mechanic, was one of the three Hindoo conspirators. (3) It is certain that this same man dressed like a mechanic, was seen keeping Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite in view, all through the evening of the 26th, and was found in the bedroom (before Mr. Ablewhite was shown into it) under circumstances which lead to the suspicion that he was examining the room. (4) A morsel of torn gold thread was picked up in the bedroom, which persons expert in such matters, declare to be of Indian manufacture, and to be a species of gold thread not known in England. (5) On the morning of the 27th, three men, answering to the description of the three Indians, were observed in Lower
Thames Street, were traced to the Tower Wharf, and were seen to leave London by the steamer bound for Rotterdam.

There is here, moral, if not legal, evidence, that the murder was committed by the Indians.

Whether the man personating a mechanic was, or was not, an accomplice in the crime, it is impossible to say. That he could have committed the murder alone, seems beyond the limits of probability. Acting by himself, he could hardly have smothered Mr. Ablewhite--who was the taller and stronger man of the two--without a struggle taking place, or a cry being heard. A servant girl, sleeping in the next room, heard nothing. The landlord, sleeping in the room below, heard nothing. The whole evidence points to the inference that more than one man was concerned in this crime--and the circumstances, I repeat, morally justify the conclusion that the Indians committed it.

I have only to add, that the verdict at the Coroner's Inquest was Wilful Murder against some person, or persons, unknown. Mr. Ablewhite's family have offered a reward, and no effort has been left untried to discover the guilty persons. The man dressed like a mechanic has eluded all inquiries. The Indians have been traced. As to the prospect of ultimately capturing these last, I shall have a word to say to you on that head, when I reach the end of the present Report.

In the meanwhile, having now written all that is needful on the subject of Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's death, I may pass next to the narrative of his proceedings before, during, and after the time, when you and he met at the late Lady Verinder's house.

III

With regard to the subject now in hand, I may state, at the outset, that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's life had two sides to it.

The side turned up to the public view, presented the spectacle of a gentleman, possessed of considerable reputation as a speaker at charitable meetings, and endowed with administrative abilities, which he placed at the disposal of various Benevolent Societies, mostly of the female sort. The side kept hidden from the general notice, exhibited this same gentleman in the totally different character of a man of pleasure, with a villa in the suburbs which was not taken in his own name, and with a lady in the villa, who was not taken in his own name, either.

My investigations in the villa have shown me several fine pictures and statues; furniture tastefully selected, and admirably made; and a conservatory of the rarest flowers, the match of which it would not be easy to find in all London. My investigation of the lady has resulted in the discovery of jewels which are worthy to take rank with the flowers, and of carriages and horses which have (deservedly) produced a sensation in the Park, among persons well qualified to judge of the build of the one, and the breed of the others.

All this is, so far, common enough. The villa and the lady are such familiar objects in London life, that I ought to apologise for introducing them to notice. But what is not common and not familiar (in my experience), is that all these fine things were not only ordered, but paid for. The pictures, the statues, the flowers, the jewels, the carriages, and the horses--inquiry proved, to my indescribable astonishment, that not a sixpence of debt was owing on any of them. As to the villa, it had been bought, out and out, and settled on the lady.

I might have tried to find the right reading of this riddle, and tried in vain--but for Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's death, which caused an inquiry to be made into the state of his affairs.

The inquiry elicited these facts:--

That Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite was entrusted with the care of a sum of twenty thousand pounds--as one of two Trustees for a young gentleman, who was still a minor in the year eighteen hundred and forty-eight. That the Trust was to lapse, and that the young gentleman was to receive the twenty thousand pounds on the day when he came of age, in the month of February, eighteen hundred and fifty. That, pending the arrival of this period, an income of six hundred pounds was to be paid to him by his two Trustees, half-yearly--at Christmas and Midsummer Day. That this income was regularly paid by the active Trustee, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. That the twenty thousand pounds (from which the income was supposed to be derived) had every farthing of it been sold out of the Funds, at different periods, ending with the end of the year eighteen hundred and forty-seven. That the power of attorney, authorising the bankers to sell out the stock, and the various written orders telling them what amounts to sell out, were formally signed by both the Trustees. That the signature of the second Trustee (a retired army officer, living in the country) was a signature forged, in every case, by the active Trustee--otherwise Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite.

In these facts lies the explanation of Mr. Godfrey's honourable conduct, in paying the debts incurred for the lady and the villa--and (as you will presently see) of more besides.

We may now advance to the date of Miss Verinder's birthday (in the year eighteen hundred and forty-eight)--the twenty-first of June.

On the day before, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite arrived at his father's house, and asked (as I know from Mr. Ablewhite, senior, himself) for a loan of three hundred pounds. Mark the sum; and remember at the same time, that the half-yearly payment to the young gentleman was due on the twenty-fourth of the month. Also, that the whole of
the young gentleman's fortune had been spent by his Trustee, by the end of the year 'forty-seven.

Mr. Ablewhite, senior, refused to lend his son a farthing.

The next day Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite rode over, with you, to Lady Verinder's house. A few hours afterwards, Mr. Godfrey (as you yourself have told me) made a proposal of marriage to Miss Verinder. Here, he saw his way no doubt--if accepted--to the end of all his money anxieties, present and future. But, as events actually turned out, what happened? Miss Verinder refused him.

On the night of the birthday, therefore, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite's pecuniary position was this. He had three hundred pounds to find on the twenty-fourth of the month, and twenty thousand pounds to find in February eighteen hundred and fifty. Failing to raise these sums, at these times, he was a ruined man.

Under those circumstances, what takes place next?

You exasperate Mr. Candy, the doctor, on the sore subject of his profession; and he plays you a practical joke, in return, with a dose of laudanum. He trusts the administration of the dose, prepared in a little phial, to Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite--who has himself confessed the share he had in the matter, under circumstances which shall presently be related to you. Mr. Godfrey is all the readier to enter into the conspiracy, having himself suffered from your sharp tongue in the course of the evening. He joins Betteredge in persuading you to drink a little brandy and water before you go to bed. He privately drops the dose of laudanum into your cold grog. And you drink the mixture.

Let us now shift the scene, if you please to Mr. Luker's house at Lambeth. And allow me to remark, by way of preface, that Mr. Bruff and I, together, have found a means of forcing the money-lender to make a clean breast of it. We have carefully sifted the statement he has addressed to us; and here it is at your service.

IV

Late on the evening of Friday, the twenty-third of June ('forty-eight), Mr. Luker was surprised by a visit from Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. He was more than surprised, when Mr. Godfrey produced the Moonstone. No such Diamond (according to Mr. Luker's experience) was in the possession of any private person in Europe.

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite had two modest proposals to make, in relation to this magnificent gem. First, Would Mr. Luker be so good as to buy it? Secondly, Would Mr. Luker (in default of seeing his way to the purchase) undertake to sell it on commission, and to pay a sum down, on the anticipated result?

Mr. Luker tested the Diamond, weighed the Diamond and estimated the value of the Diamond, before he answered a word. HIS estimate (allowing for the flaw in the stone) was thirty thousand pounds.

Having reached that result, Mr. Luker opened his lips, and put a question: "How did you come by this?" Only six words! But what volumes of meaning in them!

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite began a story. Mr. Luker opened his lips again, and only said three words, this time. "That won't do!"

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite began another story. Mr. Luker wasted no more words on him. He got up, and rang the bell for the servant to show the gentleman out.

Upon this compulsion, Mr. Godfrey made an effort, and came out with a new and amended version of the affair, to the following effect.

After privately slipping the laudanum into your brandy and water, he wished you good night, and went into his own room. It was the next room to yours; and the two had a door of communication between them. On entering his own room Mr. Godfrey (as he supposed) closed his door. His money troubles kept him awake. He sat, in his dressing-gown and slippers, for nearly an hour, thinking over his position. Just as he was preparing to get into bed, he heard you, talking to yourself, in your own room, and going to the door of communication, found that he had not shut it as he supposed.

He looked into your room to see what was the matter. He discovered you with the candle in your hand, just leaving your bed-chamber. He heard you say to yourself, in a voice quite unlike your own voice, "How do I know? The Indians may be hidden in the house."

Up to that time, he had simply supposed himself (in giving you the laudanum) to be helping to make you the victim of a harmless practical joke. It now occurred to him, that the laudanum had taken some effect on you, which had not been foreseen by the doctor, any more than by himself. In the fear of an accident happening he followed you softly to see what you would do.

He followed you to Miss Verinder's sitting-room, and saw you go in. You left the door open. He looked through the crevice thus produced, between the door and the post, before he ventured into the room himself.

In that position, he not only detected you in taking the Diamond out of the drawer--he also detected Miss Verinder, silently watching you from her bedroom, through her open door. His own eyes satisfied him that SHE saw you take the Diamond, too.

Before you left the sitting-room again, you hesitated a little. Mr. Godfrey took advantage of this hesitation to get back again to his bedroom before you came out, and discovered him. He had barely got back, before you got back
too. You saw him (as he supposes) just as he was passing through the door of communication. At any rate, you called to him in a strange, drowsy voice.

He came back to you. You looked at him in a dull sleepy way. You put the Diamond into his hand. You said to him, "Take it back, Godfrey, to your father's bank. It's safe there--it's not safe here." You turned away unsteadily, and put on your dressing-gown. You sat down in the large arm-chair in your room. You said, "I can't take it back to the bank. My head's like lead--and I can't feel my feet under me." Your head sank on the back of the chair--you heaved a heavy sigh--and you fell asleep.

Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite went back, with the Diamond, into his own room. His statement is, that he came to no conclusion, at that time--except that he would wait, and see what happened in the morning.

When the morning came, your language and conduct showed that you were absolutely ignorant of what you had said and done overnight. At the same time, Miss Verinder's language and conduct showed that she was resolved to say nothing (in mercy to you) on her side. If Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite chose to keep the Diamond, he might do so with perfect impunity. The Moonstone stood between him and ruin. He put the Moonstone into his pocket.

This was the story told by your cousin (under pressure of necessity) to Mr. Luker.

Mr. Luker believed the story to be, as to all main essentials, true--on this ground, that Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite was too great a fool to have invented it. Mr. Bruff and I agree with Mr. Luker, in considering this test of the truth of the story to be a perfectly reliable one.

The next question, was the question of what Mr. Luker would do in the matter of the Moonstone. He proposed the following terms, as the only terms on which he would consent to mix himself up with, what was (even in HIS line of business) a doubtful and dangerous transaction.

Mr. Luker would consent to lend Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite the sum of two thousand pounds, on condition that the Moonstone was to be deposited with him as a pledge. If, at the expiration of one year from that date, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite paid three thousand pounds to Mr. Luker, he was to receive back the Diamond, as a pledge redeemed. If he failed to produce the money at the expiration of the year, the pledge (otherwise the Moonstone) was to be considered as forfeited to Mr. Luker--who would, in this latter case, generously make Mr. Godfrey a present of certain promissory notes of his (relating to former dealings) which were then in the money-lender's possession.

It is needless to say, that Mr. Godfrey indignantly refused to listen to these monstrous terms. Mr. Luker thereupon, handed him back the Diamond, and wished him good night.

Your cousin went to the door, and came back again. How was he to be sure that the conversation of that evening would be kept strictly secret between his friend and himself?

Mr. Luker didn't profess to know how. If Mr. Godfrey had accepted his terms, Mr. Godfrey would have made him an accomplice, and might have counted on his silence as on a certainty. As things were, Mr. Luker must be guided by his own interests. If awkward inquiries were made, how could he be expected to compromise himself, for the sake of a man who had declined to deal with him?

Receiving this reply, Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite did, what all animals (human and otherwise) do, when they find themselves caught in a trap. He looked about him in a state of helpless despair. The day of the month, recorded on a neat little card in a box on the money-lender's chimney-piece, happened to attract his eye. It was the twenty-third of June. On the twenty-fourth he had three hundred pounds to pay to the young gentleman for whom he was trustee, and no chance of raising the money, except the chance that Mr. Luker had offered to him. But for this miserable obstacle, he might have taken the Diamond to Amsterdam, and have made a marketable commodity of it, by having it cut up into separate stones. As matters stood, he had no choice but to accept Mr. Luker's terms. After all, he had a year at his disposal, in which to raise the three thousand pounds--and a year is a long time.

Mr. Luker drew out the necessary documents on the spot. When they were signed, he gave Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite two cheques. One, dated June 23rd, for three hundred pounds. Another, dated a week on, for the remaining balance seventeen hundred pounds.

How the Moonstone was trusted to the keeping of Mr Luker's bankers, and how the Indians treated Mr. Luker and Mr. Godfrey (after that had been done) you know already.

The next event in your cousin's life refers again to Miss Verinder. He proposed marriage to her for the second time--and (after having being accepted) he consented, at her request, to consider the marriage as broken off. One of his reasons for making this concession has been penetrated by Mr. Bruff. Miss Verinder had only a life interest in her mother's property--and there was no raising the twenty thousand pounds on THAT.

But you will say, he might have saved the three thousand pounds, to redeem the pledged Diamond, if he had married. He might have done so certainly--supposing neither his wife, nor her guardians and trustees, objected to his anticipating more than half of the income at his disposal, for some unknown purpose, in the first year of his marriage. But even if he got over this obstacle, there was another waiting for him in the background. The lady at the
Villa, had heard of his contemplated marriage. A superb woman, Mr. Blake, of the sort that are not to be trifled with--the sort with the light complexion and the Roman nose. She felt the utmost contempt for Mr. Godfrey Ablewhite. It would be silent contempt, if he made a handsome provision for her. Otherwise, it would be contempt with a tongue to it. Miss Verinder's life interest allowed him no more hope of raising the "provision" than of raising the twenty thousand pounds. He couldn't marry--he really couldn't marry, under all the circumstances.

How he tried his luck again with another lady, and how THAT marriage also broke down on the question of money, you know already. You also know of the legacy of five thousand pounds, left to him shortly afterwards, by one of those many admirers among the soft sex whose good graces this fascinating man had contrived to win. That legacy (as the event has proved) led him to his death.

I have ascertained that when he went abroad, on getting his five thousand pounds, he went to Amsterdam. There he made all the necessary arrangements for having the Diamond cut into separate stones. He came back (in disguise), and redeemed the Moonstone, on the appointed day. A few days were allowed to elapse (as a precaution agreed to by both parties) before the jewel was actually taken out of the bank. If he had got safe with it to Amsterdam, there would have been just time between July 'forty-nine, and February 'fifty (when the young gentleman came of age) to cut the Diamond, and to make a marketable commodity (polished or unpolished) of the separate stones. Judge from this, what motives he had to run the risk which he actually ran. It was "neck or nothing" with him—if ever it was "neck or nothing" with a man yet.

I have only to remind you, before closing this Report, that there is a chance of laying hands on the Indians, and of recovering the Moonstone yet. They are now (there is every reason to believe) on their passage to Bombay, in an East Indiaman. The ship (barring accidents) will touch at no other port on her way out; and the authorities at Bombay (already communicated with by letter, overland) will be prepared to board the vessel, the moment she enters the harbour.

I have the honour to remain, dear sir, your obedient servant, RICHARD CUFF (late sergeant in the Detective Force, Scotland Yard, London).*

* NOTE.--Wherever the Report touches on the events of the birthday, or of the three days that followed it, compare with Betteredge's Narrative, chapters viii. to xiii.

SEVENTH NARRATIVE
In a Letter from MR. CANDY
Frizinghall, Wednesday, September 26th, 1849.—Dear Mr. Franklin Blake, you will anticipate the sad news I have to tell you, on finding your letter to Ezra Jennings returned to you, unopened, in this enclosure. He died in my arms, at sunrise, on Wednesday last.

I am not to blame for having failed to warn you that his end was at hand. He expressly forbade me to write to you. "I am indebted to Mr. Franklin Blake," he said, "for having seen some happy days. Don't distress him, Mr. Candy—don't distress him."

His sufferings, up to the last six hours of his life, were terrible to see. In the intervals of remission, when his mind was clear, I entreated him to tell me of any relatives of his to whom I might write. He asked to be forgiven for refusing anything to me. And then he said—not bitterly—that he would die as he had lived, forgotten and unknown. He maintained that resolution to the last. There is no hope now of making any discoveries concerning him. His story is a blank.

The day before he died, he told me where to find all his papers. I brought them to him on his bed. There was a little bundle of old letters which he put aside. There was his unfinished book. There was his Diary—in many locked volumes. He opened the volume for this year, and tore out, one by one, the pages relating to the time when you and he were together. "Give those," he said, "to Mr. Franklin Blake. In years to come, he may feel an interest in looking back at what is written there." Then he clasped his hands, and prayed God fervently to bless you, and those dear to you. He said he should like to see you again. But the next moment he altered his mind. "No," he answered when I offered to write. "I won't distress him! I won't distress him!"

At his request I next collected the other papers—that is to say, the bundle of letters, the unfinished book and the volumes of the Diary—and enclosed them all in one wrapper, sealed with my own seal. "Promise," he said, "that you will put this into my coffin with your own hand; and that you will see that no other hand touches it afterwards."

I gave him my promise. And the promise has been performed.

He asked me to do one other thing for him—which it cost me a hard struggle to comply with. He said, "Let my grave be forgotten. Give me your word of honour that you will allow no monument of any sort—not even the commonest tombstone—to mark the place of my burial. Let me sleep, nameless. Let me rest, unknown." When I tried to plead with him to alter his resolution, he became for the first, and only time, violently agitated. I could not bear to see it; and I gave way. Nothing but a little grass mound marks the place of his rest. In time, the tombstones will rise round it. And the people who come after us will look and wonder at the nameless grave.
As I have told you, for six hours before his death his sufferings ceased. He dozed a little. I think he dreamed. Once or twice he smiled. A woman's name, as I suppose--the name of "Ella"--was often on his lips at this time. A few minutes before the end he asked me to lift him on his pillow, to see the sun rise through the window. He was very weak. His head fell on my shoulder. He whispered, "It's coming!" Then he said, "Kiss me!" I kissed his forehead. On a sudden he lifted his head. The sunlight touched his face. A beautiful expression, an angelic expression, came over it. He cried out three times, "Peace! peace! peace!" His head sank back again on my shoulder, and the long trouble of his life was at an end.

So he has gone from us. This was, as I think, a great man--though the world never knew him. He had the sweetest temper I have ever met with. The loss of him makes me feel very lonely. Perhaps I have never been quite myself since my illness. Sometimes, I think of giving up my practice, and going away, and trying what some of the foreign baths and waters will do for me.

It is reported here, that you and Miss Verinder are to be married next month. Please to accept my best congratulations.

The pages of my poor friend's Journal are waiting for you at my house--sealed up, with your name on the wrapper. I was afraid to trust them to the post.

My best respects and good wishes attend Miss Verinder. I remain, dear Mr. Franklin Blake, truly yours,

THOMAS CANDY.

EIGHTH NARRATIVE
Contributed by GABRIEL BETTEREDGE

I am the person (as you remember no doubt) who led the way in these pages, and opened the story. I am also the person who is left behind, as it were, to close the story up.

Let nobody suppose that I have any last words to say here concerning the Indian Diamond. I hold that unlucky jewel in abhorrence--and I refer you to other authority than mine, for such news of the Moonstone as you may, at the present time, be expected to receive. My purpose, in this place, is to state a fact in the history of the family, which has been passed over by everybody, and which I won't allow to be disrespectfully smothered up in that way. The fact to which I allude is--the marriage of Miss Rachel and Mr. Franklin Blake. This interesting event took place at our house in Yorkshire, on Tuesday, October ninth, eighteen hundred and forty-nine. I had a new suit of clothes on the occasion. And the married couple went to spend the honeymoon in Scotland.

Family festivals having been rare enough at our house, since my poor mistress's death, I own--on this occasion of the wedding--to having (towards the latter part of the day) taken a drop too much on the strength of it.

If you have ever done the same sort of thing yourself you will understand and feel for me. If you have not, you will very likely say, "Disgusting old man! why does he tell us this?" The reason why is now to come.

Having, then, taken my drop (bless you! you have got your favourite vice, too; only your vice isn't mine, and mine isn't yours), I next applied the one infallible remedy--that remedy being, as you know, ROBINSON CRUSOE. Where I opened that unrivalled book, I can't say. Where the lines of print at last left running into each other, I know, however, perfectly well. It was at page three hundred and eighteen--a domestic bit concerning Robinson Crusoe's marriage, as follows:

"With those Thoughts, I considered my new Engagement, that I had a Wife "--(Observe! so had Mr. Franklin!)--"one Child born"--(Observe again! that might yet be Mr. Franklin's case, too!)--"and my Wife then"--What Robinson Crusoe's wife did, or did not do, "then," I felt no desire to discover. I scored the bit about the Child with my pencil, and put a morsel of paper for a mark to keep the place; "Lie you there," I said, "till the marriage of Mr. Franklin and Miss Rachel is some months older--and then we'll see!"

The months passed (more than I had bargained for), and no occasion presented itself for disturbing that mark in the book. It was not till this present month of November, eighteen hundred and fifty, that Mr. Franklin came into my room, in high good spirits, and said, "Betteredge! I have got some news for you! Something is going to happen in the house, before we are many months older."

"Does it concern the family, sir?" I asked.

"It decidedly concerns the family," says Mr. Franklin. "Has your good lady anything to do with it, if you please, sir?"

"She has a great deal to do with it," says Mr. Franklin, beginning to look a little surprised.

"You needn't say a word more, sir," I answered. "God bless you both! I'm heartily glad to hear it."

Mr. Franklin stared like a person thunderstruck. "May I venture to inquire where you got your information?" he asked. "I only got mine (imparted in the strictest secrecy) five minutes since."

Here was an opportunity of producing ROBINSON CRUSOE! Here was a chance of reading that domestic bit about the child which I had marked on the day of Mr. Franklin's marriage! I read those miraculous words with an emphasis which did them justice, and then I looked him severely in the face. "NOW, sir, do you believe in
ROBINSON CRUSOE?" I asked, with a solemnity, suitable to the occasion.  
"Betteredge!" says Mr. Franklin, with equal solemnity, "I'm convinced at last." He shook hands with me--and I felt that I had converted him.

With the relation of this extraordinary circumstance, my reappearance in these pages comes to an end. Let nobody laugh at the unique anecdote here related. You are welcome to be as merry as you please over everything else I have written. But when I write of ROBINSON CRUSOE, by the Lord it's serious--and I request you to take it accordingly!

When this is said, all is said. Ladies and gentlemen, I make my bow, and shut up the story.

EPILOGUE

THE FINDING OF THE DIAMOND

I

The Statement of SERGEANT CLIFF'S MAN (1849)

On the twenty-seventh of June last, I received instructions from Sergeant Cuff to follow three men; suspected of murder, and described as Indians. They had been seen on the Tower Wharf that morning, embarking on board the steamer bound for Rotterdam.

I left London by a steamer belonging to another company, which sailed on the morning of Thursday the twenty-eighth. Arriving at Rotterdam, I succeeded in finding the commander of the Wednesday's steamer. He informed me that the Indians had certainly been passengers on board his vessel--but as far as Gravesend only. Off that place, one of the three had inquired at what time they would reach Calais. On being informed that the steamer was bound to Rotterdam, the spokesman of the party expressed the greatest surprise and distress at the mistake which he and his two friends had made. They were all willing (he said) to sacrifice their passage money, if the commander of the steamer would only put them ashore. Commiserating their position, as foreigners in a strange land, and knowing no reason for detaining them, the commander signalled for a shore boat, and the three men left the vessel.

This proceeding of the Indians having been plainly resolved on beforehand, as a means of preventing their being traced, I lost no time in returning to England. I left the steamer at Gravesend, and discovered that the Indians had gone from that place to London. Thence, I again traced them as having sailed from Plymouth. Inquiries made at Plymouth proved that they had sailed, forty-eight hours previously, in the BEWLEY CASTLE, East Indiaman, bound direct to Bombay.

On receiving this intelligence, Sergeant Cuff caused the authorities at Bombay to be communicated with, overland--so that the vessel might be boarded by the police immediately on her entering the port. This step having been taken, my connection with the matter came to an end. I have heard nothing more of it since that time.

II

The Statement of THE CAPTAIN (1849)

I am requested by Sergeant Cuff to set in writing certain facts, concerning three men (believed to be Hindoos) who were passengers, last summer, in the ship BEWLEY CASTLE, bound for Bombay direct, under my command.

The Hindoos joined us at Plymouth. On the passage out I heard no complaint of their conduct. They were berthed in the forward part of the vessel. I had but few occasions myself of personally noticing them.

In the latter part of the voyage, we had the misfortune to be calmed for three days and nights, off the coast of India. I have not got the ship's journal to refer to, and I cannot now call to mind the latitude and longitude. As to our position, therefore, I am only able to state generally that the currents drifted us in towards the land, and that when the wind found us again, we reached our port in twenty-four hours afterwards.

The discipline of a ship (as all seafaring persons know) becomes relaxed in a long calm. The discipline of my ship became relaxed. Certain gentlemen among the passengers got some of the smaller boats lowered, and amused themselves by rowing about, and swimming, when the sun at evening time was cool enough to let them divert themselves in that way. The boats when done with ought to have been slung up again in their places. Instead of this they were left moored to the ship's side. What with the heat, and what with the vexation of the weather, neither officers nor men seemed to be in heart for their duty while the calm lasted.

On the third night, nothing unusual was heard or seen by the watch on deck. When the morning came, the smallest of the boats was missing--and the three Hindoos were next reported to be missing, too.

If these men had stolen the boat shortly after dark (which I have no doubt they did), we were near enough to the land to make it vain to send in pursuit of them, when the discovery was made in the morning. I have no doubt they got ashore, in that calm weather (making all due allowance for fatigue and clumsy rowing), before day-break.

On reaching our port I there learnt, for the first time, the reason these passengers had for seizing their opportunity of escaping from the ship. I could only make the same statement to the authorities which I have made here. They considered me to blame for allowing the discipline of the vessel to be relaxed. I have expressed my regret on this score to them, and to my owners.
Since that time, nothing has been heard to my knowledge of the three Hindoos. I have no more to add to what is here written.

III
The Statement of MR. MURTHWAITE (1850)
(In a letter to MR. BRUFF)

Have you any recollection, my dear sir, of a semi-savage person whom you met out at dinner, in London, in the autumn of ‘forty-eight? Permit me to remind you that the person's name was Murthwaite, and that you and he had a long conversation together after dinner. The talk related to an Indian Diamond, called the Moonstone, and to a conspiracy then in existence to get possession of the gem.

Since that time, I have been wandering in Central Asia. Thence I have drifted back to the scene of some of my past adventures in the north and north-west of India. About a fortnight since, I found myself in a certain district or province (but little known to Europeans) called Kattiawar.

Here an adventure befell me, in which (incredible as it may appear) you are personally interested.

In the wild regions of Kattiawar (and how wild they are, you will understand, when I tell you that even the husbandmen plough the land, armed to the teeth), the population is fanatically devoted to the old Hindoo religion--to the ancient worship of Bramah and Vishnu. The few Mahometan families, thinly scattered about the villages in the interior, are afraid to taste meat of any kind. A Mahometan even suspected of killing that sacred animal, the cow, is, as a matter of course, put to death without mercy in these parts by the pious Hindoo neighbours who surround him. To strengthen the religious enthusiasm of the people, two of the most famous shrines of Hindoo pilgrimage are contained within the boundaries of Kattiawar. One of them is Dwarka, the birthplace of the god Krishna. The other is the sacred city of Somnauth--sacked, and destroyed as long since as the eleventh century, by the Mahometan conqueror, Mahmoud of Ghizni.

Finding myself, for the second time, in these romantic regions, I resolved not to leave Kattiawar, without looking once more on the magnificent desolation of Somnauth. At the place where I planned to do this, I was (as nearly as I could calculate it) some three days distant, journeying on foot, from the sacred city.

I had not been long on the road, before I noticed that other people--by twos and threes--appeared to be travelling in the same direction as myself.

To such of these as spoke to me, I gave myself out as a Hindoo-Boodhist, from a distant province, bound on a pilgrimage. It is needless to say that my dress was of the sort to carry out this description. Add, that I know the language as well as I know my own, and that I am lean enough and brown enough to make it no easy matter to detect my European origin--and you will understand that I passed muster with the people readily: not as one of themselves, but as a stranger from a distant part of their own country.

On the second day, the number of Hindoos travelling in my direction had increased to fifties and hundreds. On the third day, the throng had swollen to thousands; all slowly converging to one point--the city of Somnauth.

A trifling service which I was able to render to one of my fellow-pilgrims, during the third day's journey, proved the means of introducing me to certain Hindoos of the higher caste. From these men I learnt that the multitude was on its way to a great religious ceremony, which was to take place on a hill at a little distance from Somnauth. The ceremony was in honour of the god of the Moon; and it was to be held at night.

The crowd detained us as we drew near to the place of celebration. By the time we reached the hill the moon was high in the heaven. My Hindoo friends possessed some special privileges which enabled them to gain access to the shrine. They kindly allowed me to accompany them. When we arrived at the place, we found the shrine hidden from our view by a curtain hung between two magnificent trees. Beneath the trees a flat projection of rock jutted out, and formed a species of natural platform. Below this, I stood, in company with my Hindoo friends.

Looking back down the hill, the view presented the grandest spectacle of Nature and Man, in combination, that I have ever seen. The lower slopes of the eminence melted imperceptibly into a grassy plain, the place of the meeting of three rivers. On one side, the graceful winding of the waters stretched away, now visible, now hidden by trees, as far as the eye could see. On the other, the waveless ocean slept in the calm of the night. People this lovely scene with tens of thousands of human creatures, all dressed in white, stretching down the sides of the hill, overflowing into the plain, and fringing the nearer banks of the winding rivers. Light this halt of the pilgrims by the wild red flames of cressets and torches, streaming up at intervals from every part of the innumerable throng. Imagine the moonlight of the East, pouring in unclouded glory over all--and you will form some idea of the view that met me when I looked forth from the summit of the hill.

A strain of plaintive music, played on stringed instruments, and flutes, recalled my attention to the hidden shrine. I turned, and saw on the rocky platform the figures of three men. In the central figure of the three I recognised the man to whom I had spoken in England, when the Indians appeared on the terrace at Lady Verinder's house. The other two who had been his companions on that occasion were no doubt his companions also on this.
One of the spectators, near whom I was standing, saw me start. In a whisper, he explained to me the apparition of the three figures on the platform of rock.

They were Brahmins (he said) who had forfeited their caste in the service of the god. The god had commanded that their purification should be the purification by pilgrimage. On that night, the three men were to part. In three separate directions, they were to set forth as pilgrims to the shrines of India. Never more were they to look on each other's faces. Never more were they to rest on their wanderings, from the day which witnessed their separation, to the day which witnessed their death.

As those words were whispered to me, the plaintive music ceased. The three men prostrated themselves on the rock, before the curtain which hid the shrine. They rose--they looked on one another--they embraced. Then they descended separately among the people. The people made way for them in dead silence. In three different directions I saw the crowd part, at one and the same moment. Slowly the grand white mass of the people closed together again. The track of the doomed men through the ranks of their fellow mortals was obliterated. We saw them no more.

A new strain of music, loud and jubilant, rose from the hidden shrine. The crowd around me shuddered, and pressed together.

The curtain between the trees was drawn aside, and the shrine was disclosed to view.

There, raised high on a throne--seated on his typical antelope, with his four arms stretching towards the four corners of the earth--there, soared above us, dark and awful in the mystic light of heaven, the god of the Moon. And there, in the forehead of the deity, gleamed the yellow Diamond, whose splendour had last shone on me in England, from the bosom of a woman's dress!

Yes! after the lapse of eight centuries, the Moonstone looks forth once more, over the walls of the sacred city in which its story first began. How it has found its way back to its wild native land--by what accident, or by what crime, the Indians regained possession of their sacred gem, may be in your knowledge, but is not in mine. You have lost sight of it in England, and (if I know anything of this people) you have lost sight of it for ever.

So the years pass, and repeat each other; so the same events revolve in the cycles of time. What will be the next adventures of the Moonstone? Who can tell?

Go to Start
MISS OR MRS.?

by Wilkie Collins

PERSONS OF THE STORY.

Sir Joseph Graybrooke . . . . . . . . . .(Knight)
Richard Turlington . . . . (Of the Levant Trade)
Launcelot Linzie . .(Of the College of Surgeons)
James Dicas. . . . (Of the Roll of Attorneys)
Thomas Wildfang. . . . . (Superannuated Seaman)
Miss Graybrooke. . . . . . (Sir Joseph's Sister)
Natalie. . . . . . (Sir Joseph's Daughter)
Lady Winwood . . . . . . . .(Sir Joseph's Niece)
Amelia} Sophia}. (Lady Winwood's Stepdaughter's) and Dorothea}

Period: THE PRESENT TIME. Place: ENGLAND.

FIRST SCENE

At Sea.

The night had come to an end. The new-born day waited for its quickening light in the silence that is never known on land--the silence before sunrise, in a calm at sea.

Not a breath came from the dead air. Not a ripple stirred on the motionless water. Nothing changed but the softly-growing light; nothing moved but the lazy mist, curling up to meet the sun, its master, on the eastward sea. By fine gradations, the airy veil of morning thinned in substance as it rose--thinned, till there dawned through it in the first rays of sunlight the tall white sails of a Schooner Yacht.

From stem to stern silence possessed the vessel--as silence possessed the sea.

But one living creature was on deck--the man at the helm, dozing peaceably with his arm over the useless tiller. Minute by minute the light grew, and the heat grew with it; and still the helmsman slumbered, the heavy sails hung noiseless, the quiet water lay sleeping against the vessel's sides. The whole orb of the sun was visible above the water-line, when the first sound pierced its way through the morning silence. From far off over the shining white ocean, the cry of a sea-bird reached the yacht on a sudden out of the last airy circles of the waning mist.

The sleeper at the helm woke; looked up at the idle sails, and yawned in sympathy with them; looked out at the sea on either side of him, and shook his head obstinately at the superior obstinacy of the calm.

"Blow, my little breeze!" said the man, whistling the sailor's invocation to the wind softly between his teeth.

"Blow, my little breeze!"

"How's her head?" cried a bold and brassy voice, hailing the deck from the cabin staircase.

"Anywhere you like, master; all round the compass."

The voice was followed by the man. The owner of the yacht appeared on deck.

Behold Richard Turlington, Esq., of the great Levant firm of Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca! Aged eight-and-thirty; standing stiffly and sturdily at a height of not more than five feet six--Mr. Turlington presented to the view of his fellow-creatures a face of the perpendicular order of human architecture. His forehead was a straight line, his upper lip was another, his chin was the straightest and the longest line of all. As he turned his swarthy countenance eastward, and shaded his light gray eyes from the sun, his knotty hand plainly revealed that it had got him his living by its own labor at one time or another in his life. Taken on the whole, this was a man whom it might be easy to respect, but whom it would be hard to love. Better company at the official desk than at the social table. Morally and physically--if the expression may be permitted--a man without a bend in him.

"A calm yesterday," grumbled Richard Turlington, looking with stubborn deliberation all round him. "And a calm to-day. Ha! next season I'll have the vessel fitted with engines. I hate this!"

"Think of the filthy coals, and the infernal vibration, and leave your beautiful schooner as she is. We are out for a holiday. Let the wind and the sea take a holiday too."

Pronouncing those words of remonstrance, a slim, nimble, curly-headed young gentleman joined Richard Turlington on deck, with his clothes under his arm, his towels in his hand, and nothing on him but the night-gown in which he had stepped out of his bed.

"Launcelot Linzie, you have been received on board my vessel in the capacity of medical attendant on Miss
Natalie Graybrooke, at her father's request. Keep your place, if you please. When I want your advice, I'll ask you for it." Answering in those terms, the elder man fixed his colorless gray eyes on the younger with an expression which added plainly, "There won't be room enough in this schooner much longer for me and for you."

Launcelot Linzie had his reasons (apparently) for declining to let his host offend him on any terms whatever.

"Thank you!" he rejoined, in a tone of satirical good humor. "It isn't easy to keep my place on board your vessel. I can't help presuming to enjoy myself as if I was the owner. The life is such a new one--to me! It's so delightfully easy, for instance, to wash yourself here. On shore it's a complicated question of jugs and basins and tubs; one is always in danger of breaking something, or spoiling something. Here you have only to jump out of bed, to run up on deck, and to do this!"

He turned, and scampered to the bows of the vessel. In one instant he was out of his night-gown, in another he was on the bulwark, in a third he was gamboling luxuriously in sixty fathoms of salt-water.

Turlington's eyes followed him with a reluctant, uneasy attention as he swam round the vessel, the only moving object in view. Turlington's mind, steady and slow in all its operations, set him a problem to be solved, on given conditions, as follows:

"Launcelot Linzie is fifteen years younger than I am. Add to that, Launcelot Linzie is Natalie Graybrooke's cousin. Given those two advantages--Query: Has he taken Natalie's fancy?"

Turning that question slowly over and over in his mind, Richard Turlington seated himself in a corner at the stern of the vessel. He was still at work on the problem, when the young surgeon returned to his cabin to put the finishing touches to his toilet. He had not reached the solution when the steward appeared an hour later and said, "Breakfast is ready, sir!"

They were a party of five round the cabin table.

First, Sir Joseph Graybrooke. Inheritor of a handsome fortune made by his father and his grandfather in trade. Mayor, twice elected, of a thriving provincial town. Officially privileged, while holding that dignity, to hand a silver trowel to a royal personage condescending to lay a first stone of a charitable edifice. Knighted, accordingly, in honor of the occasion. Worthy of the honor and worthy of the occasion. A type of his eminently respectable class. Possessed of an amiable, rosy face, and soft, silky white hair. Sound in his principles; tidy in his dress; blessed with moderate politics and a good digestion--a harmless, healthy, spruce, speckless, weak-minded old man.

Secondly, Miss Lavinia Graybrooke, Sir Joseph's maiden sister. Personally, Sir Joseph in petticoats. If you knew one you knew the other.

Thirdly, Miss Natalie Graybrooke--Sir Joseph's only child.

She had inherited the personal appearance and the temperament of her mother--dead many years since. There had been a mixture of Negro blood and French blood in the late Lady Graybrooke's family, settled originally in Martinique. Natalie had her mother's warm dusky color, her mother's superb black hair, and her mother's melting, lazy, lovely brown eyes. At fifteen years of age (dating from her last birthday) she possessed the development of the bosom and limbs which in England is rarely attained before twenty. Everything about the girl--except her little rosy ears--was on a grand Amazonian scale. Her shapely hand was long and large; her supple waist was the waist of a woman. The indolent grace of all her movements had its motive power in an almost masculine firmness of action and profusion of physical resource. This remarkable bodily development was far from being accompanied by any corresponding development of character. Natalie's manner was the gentle, innocent manner of a young girl. She had her father's sweet temper ingrafted on her mother's variable Southern nature. She moved like a goddess, and she laughed like a child. Signs of maturing too rapidly--of outgrowing her strength, as the phrase went--had made their appearance in Sir Joseph's daughter during the spring. The family doctor had suggested a sea-voyage, as a wise manner of employing the fine summer months. Richard Turlington's yacht was placed at her disposal, with Richard Turlington himself included as one of the fixtures of the vessel. With her father and her aunt to keep up round her the atmosphere of home--with Cousin Launcelot (more commonly known as "Launce") to carry out, if necessary, the medical treatment prescribed by superior authority on shore--the lovely invalid embarked on her summer cruise, and sprang up into a new existence in the life-giving breezes of the sea. After two happy months of lazy coasting round the shores of England, all that remained of Natalie's illness was represented by a delicious languor in her eyes, and an utter inability to devote herself to anything which took the shape of a serious occupation. As she sat at the cabin breakfast-table that morning, in her quaintly-made sailing dress of old-fashioned nankeen--her inbred childishness of manner contrasting delightfully with the blooming maturity of her form--the man must have been trebly armed indeed in the modern philosophy who could have denied that the first of a woman's rights is the right of being beautiful; and the foremost of a woman's merits, the merit of being young!

The other two persons present at the table were the two gentlemen who have already appeared on the deck of the yacht.

"Not a breath of wind stirring!" said Richard Turlington. "The weather has got a grudge against us. We have
drifted about four or five miles in the last eight-and-forty hours. You will never take another cruise with me--you
must be longing to get on shore."

He addressed himself to Natalie; plainly eager to make himself agreeable to the young lady--and plainly
unsuccessful in producing any impression on her. She made a civil answer; and looked at her tea-cup, instead of
looking at Richard Turlington.

"You might fancy yourself on shore at this moment," said Launce. "The vessel is as steady as a house, and the
swing-table we are eating our breakfast on is as even as your dining-room table at home."

He too addressed himself to Natalie, but without betraying the anxiety to please her which had been shown by
the other. For all that, _he_ diverted the girl's attention from her tea-cup; and _his_ idea instantly awakened a
responsive idea in Natalie's mind.

"It will be so strange on shore," she said, "to find myself in a room that never turns on one side, and to sit at a
table that never tilts down to my knees at one time, or rises up to my chin at another. How I shall miss the wash of
the water at my ear, and the ring of the bell on deck when I am awake at night on land! No interest there in how the
wind blows, or how the sails are set. No asking your way of the sun, when you are lost, with a little brass instrument
and a morsel of pencil and paper. No delightful wandering wherever the wind takes you, without the worry of
planning beforehand where you are to go. Oh how I shall miss the dear, changeable, inconstant sea! And how sorry I
am I'm not a man and a sailor!"

This to the guest admitted on board on sufferance, and not one word of it addressed, even by chance, to the
owner of the yacht!

Richard Turlington's heavy eyebrows contracted with an unmistakable expression of pain.

"If this calm weather holds," he went on, addressing himself to Sir Joseph, "I am afraid, Graybrooke, I shall not
be able to bring you back to the port we sailed from by the end of the week."

"Whenever you like, Richard," answered the old gentleman, resignedly. "Any time will do for me."

"Any time within reasonable limits, Joseph," said Miss Lavinia, evidently feeling that her brother was conceding
too much. She spoke with Sir Joseph's amiable smile and Sir Joseph's softly-pitched voice. Two twin babies could
hardly have been more like one another.

While these few words were being exchanged among the elders, a private communication was in course of
progress between the two young people under the cabin table. Natalie's smartly-slippered foot felt its way cautiously
inch by inch over the carpet till it touched Launce's boot. Launce, devouring his breakfast, instantly looked up from
his plate, and then, at a second touch from Natalie, looked down again in a violent hurry. After pausing to make sure
that she was not noticed, Natalie took up her knife. Under a perfectly-acted pretense of toying with it absently, in the
character of a young lady absorbed in thought, she began dividing a morsel of ham left on the edge of her plate, into
six tiny pieces. Launce's eye looked in sidelong expectation at the divided and subdivided ham. He was evidently
waiting to see the collection of morsels put to some telegraphic use, previously determined on between his neighbor
and himself.

In the meanwhile the talk proceeded among the other persons at the breakfast-table. Miss Lavinia addressed
herself to Launce.

"Do you know, you careless boy, you gave me a fright this morning? I was sleeping with my cabin window
open, and I was awoke by an awful splash in the water. I called for the stewardess. I declare I thought somebody had
fallen overboard!"

Sir Joseph looked up briskly; his sister had accidentally touched on an old association.

"Talk of falling overboard," he began, "reminds me of an extraordinary adventure--" There Launce broke in, making his apologies.

"Itshan't occur again, Miss Lavinia," he said. "To-morrow morning I'll oil myself all over, and slip into the
water as silently as a seal."

"Of an extraordinary adventure," persisted Sir Joseph, "which happened to me many years ago, when I was a
young man. Lavinia?"

He stopped, and looked interrogatively at his sister. Miss Graybrooke nodded her head responsively, and settled
herself in her chair, as if summoning her attention in anticipation of a coming demand on it. To persons well
acquainted with the brother and sister these proceedings were ominous of an impending narrative, protracted to a
formidable length. The two always told a story in couples, and always differed with each other about the facts, the
sister politely contradicting the brother when it was Sir Joseph's story, and the brother politely contradicting the
sister when it was Miss Lavinia's story. Separated one from the other, and thus relieved of their own habitual
interchange of contradiction, neither of them had ever been known to attempt the relation of the simplest series of
events without breaking down.

"It was five years before I knew you, Richard," proceeded Sir Joseph.
“Six years,” said Miss Graybrooke.

“No, Joseph, I have it down in my diary.”

“Let us waive the point.” (Sir Joseph invariably used this formula as a means of at once conciliating his sister, and getting a fresh start for his story.) “I was cruising off the Mersey in a Liverpool pilot-boat. I had hired the boat in company with a friend of mine, formerly notorious in London society, under the nickname (derived from the peculiar brown color of his whiskers) of ‘Mahogany Dobbs.’”

“The color of his liveries, Joseph, not the color of his whiskers.”

“My dear Lavinia, you are thinking of ‘Sea-green Shaw,’ so called from the extraordinary liveries he adopted for his servants in the year when he was sheriff.”

“I think not, Joseph.”

“I beg your pardon, Lavinia.”

Richard Turlington’s knotty fingers drummed impatiently on the table. He looked toward Natalie. She was idly arranging her little morsels of ham in a pattern on her plate. Launcelot Linzie, still more idly, was looking at the pattern. Seeing what he saw now, Richard solved the problem which had puzzled him on deck. It was simply impossible that Natalie’s fancy could be really taken by such an empty-headed fool as that!

Sir Joseph went on with his story:

“We were some ten or a dozen miles off the mouth of the Mersey—”

“Nautical miles, Joseph.”

“It doesn’t matter, Lavinia.”

“Excuse me, brother, the late great and good Doctor Johnson said accuracy ought always to be studied even in the most trifling things.”

“They were common miles, Lavinia.”

“They were nautical miles, Joseph.”

“Let us waive the point. Mahogany Dobbs and I happened to be below in the cabin, occupied—”

Here Sir Joseph paused (with his amiable smile) to consult his memory. Miss Lavinia waited (with _her_ amiable smile) for the coming opportunity of setting her brother right. At the same moment Natalie laid down her knife and softly touched Launce under the table. When she thus claimed his attention the six pieces of ham were arranged as follows in her plate: Two pieces were placed opposite each other, and four pieces were ranged perpendicularly under them. Launce looked, and twice touched Natalie under the table. Interpreted by the Code agreed on between the two, the signal in the plate meant, “I must see you in private.” And Launce’s double touch answered, “After breakfast.”

Sir Joseph proceeded with his story. Natalie took up her knife again. Another signal coming!

“We were both down in the cabin, occupied in finishing our dinner—”

“Just sitting down to lunch, Joseph.”

“My dear! I ought to know.”

“I only repeat what I heard, brother. The last time you told the story, you and your friend were sitting down to lunch.”

“We won’t particularize, Lavinia. Suppose we say occupied over a meal?”

“If it is of no more importance than that, Joseph, it would be surely better to leave it out altogether.”

“Let us waive the point. Well, we were suddenly alarmed by a shout on deck, ‘Man over-board!’ We both rushed up the cabin stairs, naturally under the impression that one of our crew had fallen into the sea: an impression shared, I ought to add, by the man at the helm, who had given the alarm.”

Sir Joseph paused again. He was approaching one of the great dramatic points in his story, and was naturally anxious to present it as impressively as possible. He considered with himself, with his head a little on one side. Miss Lavinia considered with _herself_, with _her_ head a little on one side. Natalie laid down her knife again, and again touched Launce under the table. This time there were five pieces of ham ranged longitudinally on the plate, with one piece immediately under them at the center of the line. Interpreted by the Code, this signal indicated two ominous words, “Bad news.” Launce looked significantly at the owner of the yacht (meaning of the look, “Is he at the bottom of it?”). Natalie frowned in reply (meaning of the frown, “Yes, he is”). Launce looked down again into the plate. Natalie instantly pushed all the pieces of ham together in a little heap (meaning of the heap, “No more to say”).

“Well?” said Richard Turlington, turning sharply on Sir Joseph. “Get on with your story. What next?”

Thus far he had not troubled himself to show even a decent pretense of interest in his old friend’s perpetually-interrupted narrative. It was only when Sir Joseph had reached his last sentence--intimating that the man overboard might turn out in course of time not to be a man of the pilot-boat’s crew--it was only then that Turlington sat up in his chair, and showed signs of suddenly feeling a strong interest in the progress of the story.
Sir Joseph went on:
"As soon as we got on deck, we saw the man in the water, astern. Our vessel was hove up in the wind, and the
boat was lowered. The master and one of the men took the oars. All told, our crew were seven in number. Two away
in the boat, a third at the helm, and, to my amazement, when I looked round, the other four behind me making our
number complete. At the same moment Mahogany Dobbs, who was looking through a telescope, called out, "Who
the devil can he be? The man is floating on a hen-coop, and we have got nothing of the sort on board this pilot-
boat."

The one person present who happened to notice Richard Turlington's face when those words were pronounced
was Launcelot Linzie. He--and he alone--saw the Levant trader's swarthy complexion fade slowly to a livid ashen
gray; his eyes the while fixing themselves on Sir Joseph Graybrooke with a furtive glare in them like the glare in the
eyes of a wild beast. Apparently conscious that Launce was looking at him--though he never turned his head
Launce's way--he laid his elbow on the table, lifted his arm, and so rested his face on his hand, while the story went
on, as to screen it effectually from the young surgeon's view.

"The man was brought on board," proceeded Sir Joseph, "sure enough, with a hen-coop--on which he had been
found floating. The poor wretch was blue with terror and exposure in the water; he fainted when we lifted him on
deck. When he came to himself he told us a horrible story. He was a sick and destitute foreign seaman, and he had
hidden himself in the hold of an English vessel (bound to a port in his native country) which had sailed from
Liverpool that morning. He had been discovered, and brought before the captain. The captain, a monster in human
form, if ever there was one yet--"

Before the next word of the sentence could pass Sir Joseph's lips, Turlington startled the little party in the cabin
by springing suddenly to his feet.

"The breeze!" he cried; "the breeze at last!"
As he spoke, he wheeled round to the cabin door so as to turn his back on his guests, and hailed the deck.

"Which way is the wind?"
"There is not a breath of wind, sir."

Not the slightest movement in the vessel had been perceptible in the cabin; not a sound had been audible
indicating the rising of the breeze. The owner of the yacht--accustomed to the sea, capable, if necessary, of sailing
his own vessel--had surely committed a strange mistake! He turned again to his friends, and made his apologies with
an excess of polite regret far from characteristic of him at other times and under other circumstances.

"Go on," he said to Sir Joseph, when he had got to the end of his excuses; "I never heard such an interesting
story in my life. Pray go on!"

The request was not an easy one to comply with. Sir Joseph's ideas had been thrown into confusion. Miss
Lavinia's contradictions (held in reserve) had been scattered beyond recall. Both brother and sister were, moreover,
additionally hindered in recovering the control of their own resources by the look and manner of their host. He
alarmed, instead of encouraging the two harmless old people, by fronting them almost fiercely, with his elbows
squared on the table, and his face expressive of a dogged resolution to sit there and listen, if need be, for the rest of
his life. Launce was the person who set Sir Joseph going again. After first looking attentively at Richard, he took his
uncle straight back to the story by means of a question, thus:

"You don't mean to say that the captain of the ship threw the man overboard?"
"That is just what he did, Launce. The poor wretch was too ill to work his passage. The captain declared he
would have no idle foreign vagabond in his ship to eat up the provisions of Englishmen who worked. With his own
hands he cast the hen-coop into the water, and (assisted by one of his sailors) he threw the man after it, and told him
to float back to Liverpool with the evening tide."

"A lie!" cried Turlington, addressing himself, not to Sir Joseph, but to Launce.
"Are you acquainted with the circumstances?" asked Launce, quietly.

"I know nothing about the circumstances. I say, from my own experience, that foreign sailors are even greater
blackguards than English sailors. The man had met with an accident, no doubt. The rest of his story was a lie, and
the object of it was to open Sir Joseph's purse."

Sir Joseph mildly shook his head.
"No lie, Richard. Witnesses proved that the man had spoken the truth."
"Witnesses? Pooh! More liars, you mean."

"I went to the owners of the vessel," pursued Sir Joseph. "I got from them the names of the officers and the crew,
and I waited, leaving the case in the hands of the Liverpool police. The ship was wrecked at the mouth of the
Amazon, but the crew and the cargo were saved. The men belonging to Liverpool came back. They were a bad set, I
grant you. But they were examined separately about the treatment of the foreign sailor, and they all told the same
story. They could give no account of their captain, nor of the sailor who had been his accomplice in the crime,
except that they had not embarked in the ship which brought the rest of the crew to England. Whatever may have
become of the captain since, he certainly never returned to Liverpool."

"Did you find out his name?"

The question was asked by Turlington. Even Sir Joseph, the least observant of men, noticed that it was put with a
perfectly unaccountable irritability of manner.

"Don't be angry, Richard." said the old gentleman. "What is there to be angry about?"

"I don't know what you mean. I'm not angry--I'm only curious. _Did_ you find out who he was?"

"I did. His name was Goward. He was well known at Liverpool as a very clever and a very dangerous man.
Quite young at the time I am speaking of, and a first-rate sailor; famous for taking command of unseaworthy ships
and vagabond crews. Report described him to me as having made considerable sums of money in that way, for a
man in his position; serving firms, you know, with a bad name, and running all sorts of desperate risks. A sad
ruffian, Richard! More than once in trouble, on both sides of the Atlantic, for acts of violence and cruelty. Dead, I
dare say, long since."

"Or possibly," said Launce, "alive, under another name, and thriving in a new way of life, with more desperate
risks in it, of some other sort."

"Are _you_ acquainted with the circumstances?" asked Turlington, retorting Launce's question on him, with a
harsh ring of defiance in his brassy voice.

"What became of the poor foreign sailor, papa?" said Natalie, purposely interrupting Launce before he could
meet the question angrily asked of him, by an angry reply.

"We made a subscription, and spoke to his consul, my dear. He went back to his country, poor fellow,
comfortably enough."

"And there is an end of Sir Joseph's story," said Turlington, rising noisily from his chair. "It's a pity we haven't
got a literary man on board--he would make a novel of it." He looked up at the skylight as he got on his feet. "Here
is the breeze, this time," he exclaimed, "and no mistake!"

It was true. At last the breeze had come. The sails flapped, the main boom swung over with a thump, and the
stagnant water, stirred at last, bubbled merrily past the vessel's sides.

"Come on deck, Natalie, and get some fresh air," said Miss Lavinia, leading the way to the cabin door.

Natalie held up the skirt of her nankeen dress, and exhibited the purple trimming torn away over an extent of
some yards.

"Give me half an hour first, aunt, in my cabin," she said, "to mend this."

Miss Lavinia elevated her venerable eyebrows in amazement.

"You have done nothing but tear your dresses, my dear, since you have been in Mr. Turlington's yacht. Most
extraordinary! I have torn none of mine during the whole cruise."

Natalie's dark color deepened a shade. She laughed, a little uneasily. "I am so awkward on board ship," she
replied, and turned away and shut herself up in her cabin.

Richard Turlington produced his case of cigars.

"Now is the time," he said to Sir Joseph, "for the best cigar of the day--the cigar after breakfast. Come on deck."

"You will join us, Launce?" said Sir Joseph.

"Give me half an hour first over my books," Launce replied. "I mustn't let my medical knowledge get musty at
sea, and I might not feel inclined to study later in the day."

"Quite right, my dear boy, quite right."

Sir Joseph patted his nephew approvingly on the shoulder. Launce turned away on _his_ side, and shut himself
up in his cabin.

The other three ascended together to the deck.

SECOND SCENE.

The Store-Room.

Persons possessed of sluggish livers and tender hearts find two serious drawbacks to the enjoyment of a cruise at
sea. It is exceedingly difficult to get enough walking exercise; and it is next to impossible (where secrecy is an
object) to make love without being found out. Reverting for the moment to the latter difficulty only, life within the
narrow and populous limits of a vessel may be defined as essentially life in public. From morning to night you are in
your neighbor's way, or your neighbor is in your way. As a necessary result of these conditions, the rarest of existing
men may be defined as the man who is capable of stealing a kiss at sea without discovery. An inbred capacity for
stratagem of the finest sort; inexhaustible inventive resources; patience which can flourish under superhuman trials;
presence of mind which can keep its balance victoriously under every possible stress of emergency--these are some
of the qualifications which must accompany Love on a cruise, when Love embarks in the character of a contraband
commodity not duly entered on the papers of the ship.
Having established a Code of Signals which enabled them to communicate privately, while the eyes and ears of others were wide open on every side of them, Natalie and Launce were next confronted by the more serious difficulty of finding a means of meeting together at stolen interviews on board the yacht. Possessing none of those precious moral qualifications already enumerated as the qualifications of an accomplished lover at sea, Launce had proved unequal to grapple with the obstacles in his way. Left to her own inventive resources, Natalie had first suggested the young surgeon's medical studies as Launce's unanswerable excuse for shutting himself up at intervals in the lower regions, and had then hit on the happy idea of tearing her trimmings, and condemning herself to repair her own carelessness, as the all-sufficient reason for similar acts of self-seclusion on her side. In this way the lovers contrived, while the innocent ruling authorities were on deck, to meet privately below them, on the neutral ground of the main cabin; and there, by previous arrangement at the breakfast-table, they were about to meet privately now.

Natalie's door was, as usual on these occasions, the first that opened; for this sound reason, that Natalie's quickness was the quickness to be depended on in case of accident.

She looked up at the sky-light. There were the legs of the two gentlemen and the skirts of her aunt visible (and stationary) on the lee side of the deck. She advanced a few steps and listened. There was a pause in the murmur of the voices above. She looked up again. One pair of legs (not her father's) had disappeared. Without an instant's hesitation, Natalie darted back to her own door, just in time to escape Richard Turlington descending the cabin stairs. All he did was to go to one of the drawers under the main-cabin book-case and to take out a map, ascending again immediately to the deck. Natalie's guilty conscience rushed instantly, nevertheless, to the conclusion that Richard suspected her. When she showed herself for the second time, instead of venturing into the cabin, she called across it in a whisper,

"Launce!"

Launce appeared at his door. He was peremptorily checked before he could cross the threshold.

"Don't stir a step! Richard has been down in the cabin! Richard suspects us!"

"Nonsense! Come out."

"Nothing will induce me, unless you can find some other place than the cabin."

Some other place? How easy to find it on land! How apparently impossible at sea! There was the forecastle (full of men) at one end of the vessel. There was the sail room (full of sails) at the other. There was the ladies' cabin (used as the ladies' dressing-room; inaccessible, in that capacity, to every male human being on board). Was there any disposable inclosed space to be found amidships? On one side there were the sleeping berths of the sailing-master and his mate (impossible to borrow _them_). On the other side was the steward's store-room. Launce considered for a moment. The steward's store-room was just the thing!

"Where are you going?" asked Natalie, as her lover made straight for a closed door at the lower extremity of the main cabin.

"To speak to the steward, darling. Wait one moment, and you will see me again."

Launce opened the store-room door, and discovered, not the steward, but his wife, who occupied the situation of stewardess on board the vessel. The accident was, in this case, a lucky one. Having stolen several kisses at sea, and having been discovered (in every case) either by the steward or his wife, Launce felt no difficulty in prefacing his request to be allowed the use of the room by the plainest allusion to his relations with Natalie. He could count on the silence of the sympathizing authorities in this region of the vessel, having wisely secured them as accomplices by the usual persuasion of the pecuniary sort. Of the two, however, the stewardess, as a woman, was the more likely to lend a ready ear to Launce's entreaties in his present emergency. After a faint show of resistance, she consented, not only to leave the room, but to keep her husband out of it, on the understanding that it was not to be occupied for more than ten minutes. Launce made the signal to Natalie at one door, while the stewardess went out by the other. In a moment more the lovers were united in a private room. Is it necessary to say in what language the proceedings were opened? Surely not! There is an inarticulate language of the lips in use on these occasions in which we are all proficient, though we sometimes forget it in later life. Natalie seated herself on a locker. The tea, sugar, and spices were at her back, a side of bacon swung over her head, and a net full of lemons dangled before her face. It might not be roomy, but it was snug and comfortable.

"Suppose they call for the steward?" she suggested. ("Don't, Launce!")

"Never mind. We shall be safe enough if they do. The steward has only to show himself on deck, and they will suspect nothing."

"Do be quiet, Launce! I have got dreadful news to tell you. And, besides, my aunt will expect to see me with my braid sewn on again."

She had brought her needle and thread with her. Whipping up the skirt of her dress on her knee, she bent forward over it, and set herself industriously to the repair of the torn trimming. In this position her lithe figure showed charmingly its firm yet easy line. The needle, in her dexterous brown fingers, flew through its work. The locker was
a broad one; Launce was able to seat himself partially behind her. In this position who could have resisted the temptation to lift up her great knot of broadly-plaited black hair, and to let the warm, dusky nape of her neck disclose itself to view? Who, looking at it, could fail to revile the senseless modern fashion of dressing the hair, which hides the double beauty of form and color that nestles at the back of a woman's neck? From time to time, as the interview proceeded, Launce's lips emphasized the more important words occurring in his share of the conversation on the soft, fragrant skin which the lifted hair let him see at intervals. In Launce's place, sir, you would have done it too.

"Now, Natalie, what is the news?"
"He has spoken to papa, Launce."
"Richard Turlington?"
"Yes."
"D—n him!"
Natalie started. A curse addressed to the back of your neck, instantly followed by a blessing in the shape of a kiss, is a little trying when you are not prepared for it.

"Don't do that again, Launce! It was while you were on deck smoking, and when I was supposed to be fast asleep. I opened the ventilator in my cabin door, dear, and I heard every word they said. He waited till my aunt was out of the way, and he had got papa all to himself, and then he began it in that horrible, downright voice of his—'Graybrooke! how much longer am I to wait?'"

"Did he say that?"

"No more swearing, Launce! Those were the words. Papa didn't understand them. He only said (poor dear!)—'Bless my soul, Richard, what do you want?' Richard soon explained himself. 'Who could he be waiting for—but Me?' Papa said something about my being so young. Richard stopped his mouth directly. 'Girls were like fruit; some ripened soon, and some ripened late. Some were women at twenty, and some were women at sixteen. It was impossible to look at me, and not see that I was like a new being after my two months at sea,' and so on and so on. Papa behaved like an angel. He still tried to put it off. 'Plenty of time, Richard, plenty of time.' 'Plenty of time for _her_ ' (was the wretch's answer to that); 'but not for _me_. Think of all I have to offer her' (as if I cared for his money!); 'think how long I have looked upon her as growing up to be my wife' (growing up for _him_—monstrous!), 'and don't keep me in a state of uncertainty, which it gets harder and harder for a man in my position to endure!' He was really quite eloquent. His voice trembled. There is no doubt, dear, that he is very, very fond of me."

"And you feel flattered by it, of course?"
"Don't talk nonsense. I feel a little frightened at it, I can tell you."
"Frightened? Did you notice him this morning?"
"I? When?"
"When your father was telling that story about the man overboard."
"I'll tell you directly. How did it all end last night? Did your father make any sort of promise?"
"You know Richard's way; Richard left him no other choice. Papa had to promise before he was allowed to go to bed."
"To let Turlington marry you?"
"Yes; the week after my next birthday."
"The week after next Christmas-day?"
"Yes. Papa is to speak to me as soon as we are at home again, and my married life is to begin with the New Year."

"Are you in earnest, Natalie? Do you really mean to say it has gone as far as that?"
"They have settled everything. The splendid establishment we are to set up, the great income we are to have. I heard papa tell Richard that half his fortune should go to me on my wedding-day. It was sickening to hear how much they made of Money, and how little they thought of Love. What am I to do, Launce?"

"That's easily answered, my darling. In the first place, you are to make up your mind not to marry Richard Turlington—"

"Do talk reasonably. You know I have done all I could. I have told papa that I can think of Richard as a friend, but not as a husband. He only laughs at me, and says, 'Wait a little, and you will alter your opinion, my dear.' You see Richard is everything to him; Richard has always managed his affairs, and has saved him from losing by bad speculations; Richard has known me from the time when I was a child; Richard has a splendid business, and quantities of money. Papa can't even imagine that I can resist Richard. I have tried my aunt; I have told her he is too old for me. All she says is, 'Look at your father; he was much older than your mother, and what a happy marriage theirs was.' Even if I said in so many words, 'I won't marry Richard,' what good would it do to us? Papa is the best
and dearest old man in the world; but oh, he is so fond of money! He believes in nothing else. He would be furious--
yes, kind as he is, he would be furious--if I even hinted that I was fond of _you_. Any man who proposed to marry
me--if he couldn't match the fortune that I should bring him by a fortune of his own--would be a lunatic in papa's
eyes. He wouldn't think it necessary to answer him; he would ring the bell, and have him shown out of the house. I
am exaggerating nothing, Launce; you know I am speaking the truth. There is no hope in the future--that I can see--
for either of us.

"Have you done, Natalie? I have something to say on my side if you have."

"What is it?"

"If things go on as they are going on now, shall I tell you how it will end? It will end in your being Turlington's
wife."

"Never!"

"So you say now; but you don't know what may happen between this and Christmas-day. Natalie, there is only
one way of making sure that you will never marry Richard. Marry _me_."

"Without papa's consent?"

"Without saying a word to anybody till it's done."

"Oh, Launce! Launce!"

"My darling, every word you have said proves there is no other way. Think of it, Natalie, think of it."

There was a pause. Natalie dropped her needle and thread, and hid her face in her hands. "If my poor mother was
only alive," she said; "if I only had an elder sister to advise me, and to take my part."

She was evidently hesitating. Launce took a man's advantage of her indecision. He pressed her without mercy.

"Do you love me?" he whispered, with his lips close to her ear.

"You know I do, dearly."

"Put it out of Richard's power to part us, Natalie."

"Part us? We are cousins: we have known each other since we were both children. Even if he proposed parting
us, papa wouldn't allow it."

"Mark my words, he _will_ propose it. As for your father, Richard has only to lift his finger and your father
obeys him. My love, the happiness of both our lives is at stake." He wound his arm round her, and gently drew her
head back on his bosom. "Other girls have done it, darling," he pleaded, "why shouldn't you?"

The effort to answer him was too much for her. She gave it up. A low sigh fluttered through her lips. She nestled
closer to him, and faintly closed her eyes. The next instant she started up, trembling from head to foot, and looked at
the sky-light. Richard Turlington's voice was suddenly audible on deck exactly above them.

"Graybrooke, I want to say a word to you about Launcelot Linzie."

Natalie's first impulse was to fly to the door. Hearing Launce's name on Richard's lips, she checked herself.
Something in Richard's tone roused in her the curiosity which suspends fear. She waited, with her hand in Launce's
hand.

"If you remember," the brassy voice went on, "I doubted the wisdom of taking him with us on this cruise. You
didn't agree with me, and, at your express request, I gave way. I did wrong. Launcelot Linzie is a very presuming
young man."

Sir Joseph's answer was accompanied by Sir Joseph's mellow laugh.

"My dear Richard! Surely you are a little hard on Launce?"

"You are not an observant man, Graybrooke. I am. I see signs of his presuming with all of us, and especially
with Natalie. I don't like the manner in which he speaks to her and looks at her. He is unduly familiar; he is
insolently confidential. There must be a stop put to it. In my position, my feelings ought to be regarded. I request
you to check the intimacy when we get on shore."

Sir Joseph's next words were spoken more seriously. He expressed his surprise.

"My dear Richard, they are cousins, they have been playmates from childhood. How _can_ you think of
attaching the slightest importance to anything that is said or done by poor Launce?"

There was a good-humored contempt in Sir Joseph's reference to "poor Launce" which jarred on his daughter.
He might almost have been alluding to some harmless domestic animal. Natalie's color deepened. Her hand pressed
Launce's hand gently.

Turlington still persisted.

"I must once more request--seriously request--that you will check this growing intimacy. I don't object to your
asking him to the house when you ask other friends. I only wish you (and expect you) to stop his 'dropping in,' as it
is called, any hour of the day or evening when he may have nothing to do. Is that understood between us?"

"If you make a point of it, Richard, of course it's understood between us."

Launce looked at Natalie, as weak Sir Joseph consented in those words.
"What did I tell you?" he whispered.

Natalie hung her head in silence. There was a pause in the conversation on deck. The two gentlemen walked away slowly toward the forward part of the vessel.

Launce pursued his advantage.

"Your father leaves us no alternative," he said. "The door will be closed against me as soon as we get on shore. If I lose you, Natalie, I don't care what becomes of me. My profession may go to the devil. I have nothing left worth living for."

"Hush! hush! don't talk in that way!"

Launce tried the soothing influence of persuasion once more.

"Hundreds and hundreds of people in our situation have married privately—and have been forgiven afterward," he went on. "I won't ask you to do anything in a hurry. I will be guided entirely by your wishes. All I want to quiet my mind is to know that you are mine. Do, do, do make me feel sure that Richard Turlington can't take you away from me."

"Don't press me, Launce." She dropped on the locker. "See!" she said. "It makes me tremble only to think of it!"

"Who are you afraid of, darling? Not your father, surely?"

"Poor papa! I wonder whether he would be hard on me for the first time in his life?" She stopped; her moistening eyes looked up imploringly in Launce's face. "Don't press me!" she repeated faintly. "You know it's wrong. We should have to confess it—and then what would happen?" She paused again. Her eyes wandered nervously to the deck. Her voice dropped to its lowest tones. "Think of Richard!" she said, and shuddered at the terrors which that name conjured up. Before it was possible to say a quieting word to her, she was again on her feet. Richard's name had suddenly recalled to her memory Launce's mysterious allusion, at the outset of the interview, to the owner of the yacht. "What was that you said about Richard just now?" she asked. "You saw something (or heard something) strange while papa was telling his story. What was it?"

"I noticed Richard's face, Natalie, when your father told us that the man overboard was not one of the pilot-boat's crew. He turned ghastly pale. He looked guilty—"

"Guilty? Of what?"

"He was present—I am certain of it—when the sailor was thrown into the sea. For all I know, he may have been the man who did it."

Natalie started back in horror.

"Oh, Launce! Launce! that is too bad. You may not like Richard—you may treat Richard as your enemy. But to say such a horrible thing of him as that—it's not generous. It's not like _you_."

"If you had seen him, you would have said it too. I mean to make inquiries—in your father's interests as well as in ours. My brother knows one of the Commissioners of Police, and my brother can get it done for me. Turlington has not always been in the Levant trade—I know that already."

"For shame, Launce! for shame!"

The footsteps on deck were audible coming back. Natalie sprung to the door leading into the cabin. Launce stopped her, as she laid her hand on the lock. The footsteps went straight on toward the stern of the vessel. Launce clasped both arms round her. Natalie gave way.

"Don't drive me to despair!" he said. "This is my last opportunity. I don't ask you to say at once that you will marry me, I only ask you to think of it. My darling! my angel! will you think of it?"

As he put the question, they might have heard (if they had not been too completely engrossed in each other to listen) the footsteps returning—one pair of footsteps only this time. Natalie's prolonged absence had begun to surprise her aunt, and had roused a certain vague distrust in Richard's mind. He walked back again along the deck by himself. He looked absent in the main cabin as he passed it. The store-room skylight came next. In his present frame of mind, would he look absent into the store-room too?

"Let me go!" said Natalie.

Launce only answered, "Say yes," and held her as if he would never let her go again.

At the same moment Miss Lavinia's voice rose shrill from the deck calling for Natalie. There was but one way of getting free from him. She said, "I'll think of it."

"Upon that, he kissed her and let her go.

The door had barely closed on her when the lowering face of Richard Turlington appeared on a level with the side of the sky-light, looking down into the store-room at Launce.

"Halloo!" he called out roughly. "What are you doing in the steward's room?"

Launce took up a box of matches on the dresser. "I'm getting a light," he answered readily.

"I allow nobody below, forward of the main cabin, without my leave. The steward has permitted a breach of discipline on board my vessel. The steward will leave my service."

"The steward is not to blame."
"I am the judge of that. Not you."

Launce opened his lips to reply. An outbreak between the two men appeared to be inevitable, when the sailing-master of the yacht joined his employer on deck, and directed Turlington's attention to a question which is never to be trifled with at sea, the question of wind and tide.

The yacht was then in the Bristol Channel, at the entrance to Bideford Bay. The breeze, fast freshening, was also fast changing the direction from which it blew. The favorable tide had barely three hours more to run.

"The wind's shifting, sir," said the sailing-master. "I'm afraid we shan't get around the point this tide, unless we lay her off on the other tack."

Turlington shook his head.

"There are letters waiting for me at Bideford," he said. "We have lost two days in the calm. I must send ashore to the post-office, whether we lose the tide or not."

The vessel held on her course. Off the port of Bideford, the boat was sent ashore to the post-office, the yacht standing off and on, waiting the appearance of the letters. In the shortest time in which it was possible to bring them on board the letters were in Turlington's hands.

The men were hauling the boat up to the davits, the yacht was already heading off from the land, when Turlington startled everybody by one peremptory word—"Stop!"

He had thrust all his letters but one into the pocket of his sailing jacket, without reading them. The one letter which he had opened he held in his closed hand. Rage was in his staring eyes, consternation was on his pale lips.

"Lower the boat!" he shouted; "I must get to London to-night." He stopped Sir Joseph, approaching him with opened mouth. "There's no time for questions and answers. I must get back." He swung himself over the side of the yacht, and addressed the sailing-master from the boat. "Save the tide if you can; if you can't, put them ashore tomorrow at Minehead or Watchet—wherever they like." He beckoned to Sir Joseph to lean over the bulwark, and hear something he had to say in private. "Remember what I told you about Launcelot Linzie!" he whispered fiercely. His parting look was for Natalie. He spoke to her with a strong constraint on himself, as gently as he could. "Don't be alarmed; I shall see you in London." He seated himself in the boat and took the tiller. The last words they heard him say were words urging the men at the oars to lose no time. He was invariably brutal with the men. "Pull, you lazy beggars!" he exclaimed, with an oath. "Pull for your lives!"

THIRD SCENE.
The Money Market.

Let us be serious.—Business!

The new scene plunges us head foremost into the affairs of the Levant trading-house of Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca. What on earth do we know about the Levant Trade? Courage! If we have ever known what it is to want money we are perfectly familiar with the subject at starting. The Levant Trade does occasionally get into difficulties.—Turlington wanted money.

The letter which had been handed to him on board the yacht was from his third partner, Mr. Branca, and was thus expressed:

"A crisis in the trade. All right, so far—except our business with the small foreign firms. Bills to meet from those quarters, (say) forty thousand pounds—and, I fear, no remittances to cover them. Particulars stated in another letter addressed to you at Post-office, Ilfracombe. I am quite broken down with anxiety, and confined to my bed. Pizzituti is still detained at Smyrna. Come back at once."

The same evening Turlington was at his office in Austin Friars, investigating the state of affairs, with his head clerk to help him.

Stated briefly, the business of the firm was of the widely miscellaneous sort. They plied a brisk trade in a vast variety of commodities. Nothing came amiss to them, from Manchester cotton manufactures to Smyrna figs. They had branch houses at Alexandria and Odessa, and correspondents here, there, and everywhere, along the shores of the Mediterranean, and in the ports of the East. These correspondents were the persons alluded to in Mr. Branca's letter as "small foreign firms;" and they had produced the serious financial crisis in the affairs of the great house in Austin Friars, which had hurried Turlington up to London.

Every one of these minor firms claimed and received the privilege of drawing bills on Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca for amounts varying from four to six thousand pounds—on no better security than a verbal understanding that the money to pay the bills should be forwarded before they fell due. Competition, it is needless to say, was at the bottom of this insanely reckless system of trading. The native firms laid it down as a rule that they would decline to transact business with any house in the trade which refused to grant them their privilege. In the ease of Turlington's house, the foreign merchants had drawn their bills on him for sums large in the aggregate, if not large in themselves; had long since turned those bills into cash in their own markets, for their own necessities; and had now left the money which their paper represented to be paid by their London correspondents as it fell due. In some instances,
they had sent nothing but promises and excuses. In others, they had forwarded drafts on firms which had failed already, or which were about to fail, in the crisis. After first exhausting his resources in ready money, Mr. Branca had provided for the more pressing necessities by pledging the credit of the house, so far as he could pledge it without exciting suspicion of the truth. This done, there were actually left, between that time and Christmas, liabilities to be met to the extent of forty thousand pounds, without a farthing in hand to pay that formidable debt.

After working through the night, this was the conclusion at which Richard Turlington arrived, when the rising sun looked in at him through the windows of his private room.

The whole force of the blow had fallen on him. The share of his partners in the business was of the most trifling nature. The capital was his, the risk was his. Personally and privately, he had to find the money, or to confront the one other alternative—ruin.

How was the money to be found?

With his position in the City, he had only to go to the famous money-lending and discounting house of Bulpit Brothers—reported to “turn over” millions in their business every year—and to supply himself at once with the necessary funds. Forty thousand pounds was a trifling transaction to Bulpit Brothers.

Having got the money, how, in the present state of his trade, was the loan to be paid back?

His thoughts reverted to his marriage with Natalie.

"Curious!" he said to himself, recalling his conversation with Sir Joseph on board the yacht. "Graybrooke told me he would give his daughter half his fortune on her marriage. Half Graybrooke's fortune happens to be just forty thousand pounds!" He took a turn in the room. No! It was impossible to apply to Sir Joseph. Once shake Sir Joseph's conviction of his commercial solidity, and the marriage would be certainly deferred—if not absolutely broken off. Sir Joseph's fortune could be made available, in the present emergency, in but one way—he might use it to repay his debt. He had only to make the date at which the loan expired coincide with the date of his marriage, and there was his father-in-law's money at his disposal, or at his wife's disposal—which meant the same thing. "It's well I pressed Graybrooke about the marriage when I did!" he thought. "I can borrow the money at a short date. In three months from this Natalie will be my wife."

He drove to his club to get breakfast, with his mind cleared, for the time being, of all its anxieties but one.

Knowing where he could procure the loan, he was by no means equally sure of being able to find the security on which he could borrow the money. Living up to his income; having no expectations from any living creature; possessing in landed property only some thirty or forty acres in Somersetshire, with a quaint little dwelling, half farm house, half-cottage, attached—he was incapable of providing the needful security from his own personal resources. To appeal to wealthy friends in the City would be to let those friends into the secret of his embarrassments, and to put his credit in peril. He finished his breakfast, and went back to Austin Friars—failing entirely, so far, to see how he was to remove the last obstacle now left in his way.

The doors were open to the public; business had begun. He had not been ten minutes in his room before the shipping-clerk knocked at the door and interrupted him, still absorbed in his own anxious thoughts.

"What is it?" he asked, irritably.

"Duplicate Bills of Lading, sir," answered the clerk, placing the documents on his master's table.

"Found! There was the security on his writing-desk, staring him in the face! He dismissed the clerk and examined the papers.

They contained an account of goods shipped to the London house on board vessels sailing from Smyrna and Odessa, and they were signed by the masters of the ships, who thereby acknowledged the receipt of the goods, and undertook to deliver them safely to the persons owning them, as directed. First copies of these papers had already been placed in the possession of the London house. The duplicates had now followed, in case of accident. Richard Turlington instantly determined to make the duplicates serve as his security, keeping the first copies privately under lock and key, to be used in obtaining possession of the goods at the customary time. The fraud was a fraud in appearance only. The security was a pure formality. His marriage would supply him with the funds needed for repaying the money, and the profits of his business would provide, in course of time, for restoring the dowry of his wife. It was simply a question of preserving his credit by means which were legitimately at his disposal. Within the lax limits of mercantile morality, Richard Turlington had a conscience. He put on his hat and took his false security to the money-lenders, without feeling at all lowered in his own estimation as an honest man.

Bulpit Brothers, long desirous of having such a name as his on their books, received him with open arms. The security (covering the amount borrowed) was accepted as a matter of course. The money was lent, for three months, with a stroke of the pen. Turlington stepped out again into the street, and confronted the City of London in the character of the noblest work of mercantile creation—a solvent man.*

The Fallen Angel, walking invisibly behind, in Richard's shadow, flapped his crippled wings in triumph. From that moment the Fallen Angel had got him.
* It may not be amiss to remind the incredulous reader that a famous firm in the City accepted precisely the same security as that here accepted by Bulpit Brothers, with the same sublime indifference to troubling themselves by making any inquiry about it.

FOURTH SCENE.

Muswell Hill.

The next day Turlington drove to the suburbs, on the chance of finding the Graybrookes at home again. Sir Joseph disliked London, and could not prevail on himself to live any nearer to the metropolis than Muswell Hill. When Natalie wanted a change, and languished for balls, theaters, flower-shows, and the like, she had a room especially reserved for her in the house of Sir Joseph's married sister, Mrs. Sancroft, living in that central deep of the fashionable whirlpool known among mortals as Berkeley Square.

On his way through the streets, Turlington encountered a plain proof that the Graybrookes must have returned. He was passed by Launce, driving, in company with a gentleman, in a cab. The gentleman was Launce's brother, and the two were on their way to the Commissioners of Police to make the necessary arrangements for instituting an inquiry into Turlington's early life.

Arrived at the gate of the villa, the information received only partially fulfilled the visitor's expectations. The family had returned on the previous evening. Sir Joseph and his sister were at home, but Natalie was away again already. She had driven into town to lunch with her aunt. Turlington went into the house.

"Have you lost any money?" Those were the first words uttered by Sir Joseph when he and Richard met again, after the parting on board the yacht.

"Not a farthing. I might have lost seriously, if I had not got back in time to set things straight. Stupidity on the part of my people left in charge--nothing more. It's all right now."

Sir Joseph lifted his eyes, with heartfelt devotion, to the ceiling. "Thank God, Richard!" he said, in tones of the deepest feeling. "Tell Miss Graybrooke Mr. Turlington is here." He turned again to Richard. "Lavinia is like me--Lavinia has been so anxious about you. We have both of us passed a sleepless night." Miss Lavinia came in. Sir Joseph hurried to meet her, and took her affectionately by both hands. "My dear! the best of all good news, Richard has not lost a farthing." Miss Lavinia lifted _her_ eyes to the ceiling with heartfelt devotion, and said, "Thank God, Richard!"--like the echo of her brother's voice; a little late, perhaps, for its reputation as an echo, but accurate to half a note in its perfect repetition of sound.

Turlington asked the question which it had been his one object to put in paying his visit to Muswell Hill.

"Have you spoken to Natalie?"

"This morning," replied Sir Joseph. "An opportunity offered itself after breakfast. I took advantage of it, Richard--you shall hear how."

He settled himself in his chair for one of his interminable stories; he began his opening sentence--and stopped, struck dumb at the first word. There was an unexpected obstacle in the way--his sister was not attending to him; his sister had silenced him at starting. The story touching, this time, on the question of marriage, Miss Lavinia had her woman's interest in seeing full justice done to the subject. She seized on her brother's narrative as on property in her own right.

"Joseph should have told you," she began, addressing herself to Turlington, "that our dear girl was unusually depressed in spirits this morning. Quite in the right frame of mind for a little serious talk about her future life. She ate nothing at breakfast, poor child, but a morsel of dry toast."

"And marmalade," said Sir Joseph, striking in at the first opportunity. The story, on this occasion, being Miss Lavinia's story, the polite contradictions necessary to its successful progress were naturally transferred from the sister to the brother, and became contradictions on Sir Joseph's side.

"No," said Miss Lavinia, gently, "if you _will_ have it, Joseph--jam."

"I beg your pardon," persisted Sir Joseph; "marmalade."

"What _does_ it matter, brother?"

"Sister! the late great and good Doctor Johnson said accuracy ought always to be studied even in the most trifling things."

"You _will_ have your way, Joseph--"(this was the formula--answering to Sir Joseph's 'Let us waive the point'--which Miss Lavinia used, as a means of conciliating her brother, and getting a fresh start for her story). "Well, we took dear Natalie out between us, after breakfast, for a little walk in the grounds. My brother opened the subject with infinite delicacy and tact. 'Circumstances,' he said, 'into which it was not then necessary to enter, made it very desirable, young as she was, to begin to think of her establishment in life.' And then he referred, Richard (so nicely), to your faithful and devoted attachment--"

"Excuse me, Lavinia. I began with Richard's attachment, and then I got on to her establishment in life."

"Excuse _me_, Joseph. You managed it much more delicately than you suppose. You didn't drag Richard in by
the head and shoulders in that way."
"Lavinia! I began with Richard."
"Joseph! your memory deceives you."
Turlington's impatience broke through all restraint.
"How did it end?" he asked. "Did you propose to her that we should be married in the first week of the New Year?"
"Yes!" said Miss Lavinia.
"No!" said Sir Joseph.
The sister looked at the brother with an expression of affectionate surprise. The brother looked at the sister with
a fund of amiable contradiction, expressed in a low bow.
"Do you really mean to deny, Joseph, that you told Natalie we had decided on the first week in the New Year?"
"I deny the New Year, Lavinia. I said early in January."
"You _will_ have your way, Joseph! We were walking in the shrubbery at the time. I had our dear girl's arm in
mine, and I felt it tremble. She suddenly stopped. 'Oh,' she said, 'not so soon!' I said, 'My dear, consider Richard!' She
turned to her father. She said, 'Don't, pray don't press it so soon, papa! I respect Richard; I like Richard as your
true and faithful friend; but I don't love him as I ought to love him if I am to be his wife.' Imagine her talking in that
way! What could she possibly know about it? Of course we both laughed--"
"_you_ laughed, Lavinia."
"_you_ laughed, Joseph."
"Get on, for God's sake!" cried Turlington, striking his hand passionately on the table by which he was sitting.
"Don't madden me by contradicting each other! Did she give way or not?"
Miss Lavinia turned to her brother. "Contradicting each other, Joseph!" she exclaimed, lifting her hands in blank
amazement.
"Contradicting each other!" repeated Sir Joseph, equally astonished on his side. "My dear Richard, what can you
be thinking of? I contradict my sister! We never disagreed in our lives."
"I contradict my brother! We have never had a cross word between us from the time when we were children."
Turlington internally cursed his own irritable temper.
"I beg your pardon--both of you," he said. "I didn't know what I was saying. Make some allowance for me. All
my hopes in life are centered in Natalie; and you have just told me (in her own words, Miss Lavinia) that she doesn't
love. You don't mean any harm, I dare say; but you cut me to the heart."
This confession, and the look that accompanied it, touched the ready sympathies of the two old people in
the right place. The remainder of the story dropped between them by common consent. They vied with each other in
saying the comforting words which would allay their dear Richard's anxiety. How little he knew of young girls. How
could he be so foolish, poor fellow! as to attach any serious importance to what Natalie had said? As if a young
creature in her teens knew the state of her own heart! Protestations and entreaties were matters of course, in such
cases. Tears even might be confidently expected from a right-minded girl. It had all ended exactly as Richard would
have wished it to end. Sir Joseph had said, "My child! this is a matter of experience; love will come when you are
married." And Miss Lavinia had added, "Dear Natalie, if you remembered your poor mother as I remember her, you
would know that your father's experience is to be relied on." In that way they had put it to her; and she had hung her
head and had given--all that maiden modesty could be expected to give--a silent consent. "The wedding-day was
fixed for the first week in the New Year." ("No, Joseph; not January--the New Year."") "And God bless you, Richard!
and may your married life be a long and happy one."
So the average ignorance of human nature, and the average belief in conventional sentiment, complacently
contemplated the sacrifice of one more victim on the all-devouring altar of Marriage! So Sir Joseph and his sister
provided Launcelot Linzie with the one argument which he wanted to convince Natalie: "Choose between making
the misery of your life by marrying _him_, and making the happiness of your life by marrying _me_."
"When shall I see her?" asked Turlington, with Miss Lavinia (in tears which did _her_ credit) in possession of
one of his hands, and Sir Joseph (in tears which did _him_ credit) in possession of the other.
"She will be back to dinner, dear Richard. Stay and dine."
"Thank you. I must go into the City first. I will come back and dine."
With that arrangement in prospect, he left them.
An hour later a telegram arrived from Natalie. She had consented to dine, as well as lunch, in Berkeley Square--
sleeping there that night, and returning the next morning. Her father instantly telegraphed back by the messenger,
insisting on Natalie's return to Muswell Hill that evening, in time to meet Richard Turlington at dinner.
"Quite right, Joseph," said Miss Lavinia, looking over her brother's shoulder, while he wrote the telegram.
"She is showing a disposition to coquet with Richard," rejoined Sir Joseph, with the air of a man who knew
female human nature in its remotest corners. "My telegram, Lavinia, will have its effect."

Sir Joseph was quite right. His telegram _had_ its effect. It not only brought his daughter back to dinner--it produced another result which his prophetic faculty had altogether failed to foresee.

The message reached Berkeley Square at five o'clock in the afternoon. Let us follow the message.

FIFTH SCENE.
The Square.

Between four and five in the afternoon--when the women of the Western regions are in their carriages, and the men are at their clubs--London presents few places more conveniently adapted for purposes of private talk than the solitary garden inclosure of a square.

On the day when Richard Turlington paid his visit to Muswell Hill, two ladies (with a secret between them) unlocked the gate of the railed garden in Berkeley Square. They shut the gate after entering the inclosure, but carefully forbore to lock it as well, and carefully restricted their walk to the westward side of the garden. One of them was Natalie Graybrooke. The other was Mrs. Sancroft's eldest daughter. A certain temporary interest attached, in the estimation of society, to this young lady. She had sold well in the marriage market. In other words, she had recently been raised to the position of Lord Winwood's second wife; his lordship conferring on the bride not only the honors of the peerage, but the additional distinction of being stepmother to his three single daughters, all older than herself. In person, Lady Winwood was little and fair. In character, she was dashing and resolute--a complete contrast to Natalie, and (on that very account) Natalie's bosom friend.

"My dear, one ambitious marriage in the family is quite enough! I have made up my mind that _you_ shall marry the man you love. Don't tell me your courage is failing you--the excuse is contemptible; I decline to receive it. Natalie! the men have a phrase which exactly describes your character. You want back-bone!"

The bonnet of the lady who expressed herself in these peremptory terms barely reached the height of Natalie's shoulder. Natalie might have blown the little airy, light-haired, unsubstantial creature over the railings of the garden if she had taken a good long breath and stooped low enough. But who ever met with a tall woman who had a will of her own? Natalie's languid brown eyes looked softly down in submissive attention from an elevation of five feet seven. Lady Winwood's brisk blue eyes looked brightly up in despotic command from an elevation of four feet eleven (in her shoes).

"You are trifling with Mr. Linzie, my dear. Mr. Linzie is a nice fellow. I like him. I won't have that."

"Louisa!"

"Mr. Turlington has nothing to recommend him. He is not a well-bred old gentleman of exalted rank. He is only an odious brute who happens to have made money. You shall _not_ marry Mr. Turlington. And you _shall_ marry Launcelot Linzie."

"Will you let me speak, Louisa?"

"I will let you answer--nothing more. Didn't you come crying to me this morning? Didn't you say, 'Louisa, they have pronounced sentence on me! I am to be married in the first week of the New Year. Help me out of it, for Heaven's sake!' You said all that, and more. And what did I do when I heard your story?"

"Oh, you were so kind--"

"Kind doesn't half express it. I have committed crimes on your account. I have deceived my husband and my mother. For your sake I got mamma to ask Mr. Linzie to lunch (as _my_ friend!). For your sake I have banished my unoffending husband, not an hour since, to his club. You wretched girl, who arranged a private conference in the library? Who sent Mr. Linzie off to consult his friend in the Temple on the law of clandestine marriage? Who suggested your telegraphing home, and stopping here for the night? Who made an appointment to meet your young man privately in this detestable place in ten minutes' time? I did! I did! I did! All in your interests. All to prevent you from doing what I have done--marrying to please your family instead of to please yourself. (I don't complain, mind, of Lord Winwood, or of his daughters. _He_ is charming; his daughters I shall tame in course of time. You are different. And Mr. Turlington, as I observed before, is a brute.) Very well. Now what do you owe me on your side? You owe it to me at least to know your own mind. You don't know it. You coolly inform me that you daren't run the risk after all, and that you can't face the consequences on second thoughts. I'll tell you what! You don't deserve that nice fellow, who worships the very ground you tread on. You are a bread-and-butter miss. I don't believe you are fond of him!"

"Not fond of him!" Natalie stopped, and clasped her hands in despair of finding language strong enough for the occasion. At the same moment the sound of a closing gate caught her ear. She looked round. Launce had kept his appointment before his time. Launce was in the garden, rapidly approaching them.

"Now for the Law of Clandestine Marriage!" said Lady Winwood. "Mr. Linzie, we will take it sitting." She led the way to one of the benches in the garden, and placed Launce between Natalie and herself. "Well, Chief Conspirator, have you got the License? No? Does it cost too much? Can I lend you the money?"
"It costs perjury, Lady Winwood, in my case," said Launce. "Natalie is not of age. I can only get a License by taking my oath that I marry her with her father's consent." He turned piteously to Natalie. "I couldn't very well do that," he said, in the tone of a man who feels bound to make an apology, "could I?" Natalie shuddered; Lady Winwood shrugged her shoulders.

"In your place a woman wouldn't have hesitated," her ladyship remarked. "But men are so selfish. Well! I suppose there is some other way?"

"Yes, there is another way," said Launce. "But there is a horrid condition attached to it--"

"Something worse than perjury, Mr. Linzie? Murder?"

"I'll tell you directly, Lady Winwood. The marriage comes first. The condition follows. There is only one chance for us. We must be married by banns."

"Banns!" cried Natalie. "Why, banns are publicly proclaimed in church!"

"They needn't be proclaimed in _your_ church, you goose," said Lady Winwood. "And, even if they were, nobody would be the wiser. You may trust implicitly, my dear, in the elocution of an English clergyman!"

"That's just what my friend said," cried Launce. "'Take a lodging near a large parish church, in a remote part of London'--(this is my friend's advice)--'go to the clerk, tell him you want to be married by banns, and say you belong to that parish. As for the lady, in your place I should simplify it. I should say she belonged to the parish too. Give an address, and have some one there to answer questions. How is the clerk to know? He isn't likely to be over-anxious about it--his fee is eighteen-pence. The clerk makes his profit out of you, after you are married. The same rule applies to the parson. He will have your names supplied to him on a strip of paper, with dozens of other names; and he will read them out all together in one inarticulate jumble in church. You will stand at the altar when your time comes, with Brown and Jones, Nokes and Styles, Jack and Gill. All that you will have to do is, to take care that your young lady doesn't fall to Jack, and you to Gill, by mistake--and there you are, married by banns.' My friend's opinion, stated in his own words."

Natalie sighed, and wrung her hands in her lap. "We shall never get through it," she said, despondingly. Lady Winwood took a more cheerful view.

"I see nothing very formidable as yet, my dear. But we have still to hear the end of it. You mentioned a condition just now, Mr. Linzie.

"I am coming to the condition, Lady Winwood. You naturally suppose, as I did, that I put Natalie into a cab, and run away with her from the church door?"

"Certainly. And I throw an old shoe after you for luck, and go home again."

Launce shook his head ominously.

"Natalie must go home again as well!"

Lady Winwood started. "Is that the condition you mentioned just now?" she asked.

"That is the condition. I may marry her without anything serious coming of it. But, if I run away with her afterward, and if you are there, aiding and abetting me, we are guilty of Abduction, and we may stand, side by side, at the bar of the Old Bailey to answer for it!"

Natalie sprang to her feet in horror. Lady Winwood held up one finger warningly, signing to her to let Launce go on.

"Natalie is not yet sixteen years old," Launce proceeded. "She must go straight back to her father's house from the church, and I must wait to run away with her till her next birthday. When she's turned sixteen, she's ripe for elopement--not an hour before. There is the law of Abduction! Despotism in a free country--that's what I call it!"

Natalie sat down again, with an air of relief.

"It's a very comforting law, I think," she said. "It doesn't force one to take the dreadful step of running away from home all at once. It gives one time to consider, and plan, and make up one's mind. I can tell you this, Launce, if I am to be persuaded into marrying you, the law of Abduction is the only thing that will induce me to do it. You ought to thank the law, instead of abusing it."

Launce listened--without conviction.

"It's a pleasant prospect," he said, "to part at the church door, and to treat my own wife on the footing of a young lady who is engaged to marry another gentleman."

"Is it any pleasanter for _me_," retorted Natalie, "to have Richard Turlington courting me, when I am all the time your wife? I shall never be able to do it, I wish I was dead!"

"Come! come!" interposed Lady Winwood. "It's time to be serious. Natalie's birthday, Mr. Linzie, is next Christmas-Day. She will be sixteen--"

"At seven in the morning," said Launce; "I got that out of Sir Joseph. At one minute past seven, Greenwich mean time, we may be off together. I got _that_ out of the lawyer."

"And it isn't an eternity to wait from now till Christmas-day. You get that, by way of completing the list of your
acquisitions, out of _me_. In the mean time, can you, or can you not, manage to meet the difficulties in the way of the marriage?"

"I have settled everything," Launce answered, confidently. "There is not a single difficulty left."

He turned to Natalie, listening to him in amazement, and explained himself. It had struck him that he might appeal--with his purse in his hand, of course--to the interest felt in his affairs by the late stewardess of the yacht. That excellent woman had volunteered to do all that she could to help him. Her husband had obtained situations for his wife and himself on board another yacht--and they were both eager to assist in any conspiracy in which their late merciless master was destined to play the part of victim. When on shore, they lived in a populous London parish, far away from the fashionable district of Berkeley Square, and further yet from the respectable suburb of Muswell Hill. A room in the house could be nominally engaged for Natalie, in the assumed character of the stewardess's niece--the stewardess undertaking to answer any purely formal questions which might be put by the church authorities, and to be present at the marriage ceremony. As for Launce, he would actually, as well as nominally, live in the district close by; and the steward, if needful, would answer for _him_. Natalie might call at her parochial residence occasionally, under the wing of Lady Winwood; gaining leave of absence from Muswell Hill, on the plea of paying one of her customary visits at her aunt's house. The conspiracy, in brief, was arranged in all its details. Nothing was now wanting but the consent of the young lady; obtaining which, Launce would go to the parish church and give the necessary notice of a marriage by banns on the next day. There was the plot. What did the ladies think of it?

Lady Winwood thought it perfect.

Natalie was not so easily satisfied.

"My father has always been so kind to me!" she said. "The one thing I can't get over, Launce, is distressing papa. If he had been hard on me--as some fathers are--I shouldn't mind." She suddenly brightened, as if she saw her position in a new light. "Why should you hurry me?" she asked. "I am going to dine at my aunt's to-day, and you are coming in the evening. Give me time! Wait till to-night."

Launce instantly entered his protest against wasting a moment longer. Lady Winwood opened her lips to support him. They were both silenced at the same moment by the appearance of one of Mrs. Sancroft's servants, opening the gate of the square.

Lady Winwood went forward to meet the man. A suspicion crossed her mind that he might be bringing bad news.

"What do you want?" she asked.

"I beg your pardon, my lady--the housekeeper said you were walking here with Miss Graybrooke. A telegram for Miss Graybrooke."

Lady Winwood took the telegram from the man's hand; dismissed him, and went back with it to Natalie. Natalie opened it nervously. She read the message--and instantly changed. Her cheeks flushed deep; her eyes flashed with indignation. "Even papa can be hard on me, it seems, when Richard asks him!" she exclaimed. She handed the telegram to Launce. Her eyes suddenly filled with tears. "_You_ love me," she said, gently--and stopped. "Marry me!" she added, with a sudden burst of resolution. "I'll risk it!"

As she spoke those words, Lady Winwood read the telegram. It ran thus:

"Sir Joseph Graybrooke, Muswell Hill. To Miss Natalie Graybrooke; Berkeley Square. Come back immediately. You are engaged to dine here with Richard Turlington."

Lady Winwood folded up the telegram with a malicious smile. "Well done, Sir Joseph!" thought her ladyship.

"We might never have persuaded Natalie--but for You!"

SIXTH SCENE.

The Church.

The time is morning; the date is early in the month of November. The place is a church, in a poor and populous parish in the undiscovered regions of London, eastward of the Tower, and hard by the river-side.

A marriage procession of five approaches the altar. The bridegroom is pale, and the bride is frightened. The bride's friend (a resolute-looking little lady) encourages her in whispers. The two respectable persons, apparently man and wife, who complete the procession, seem to be not quite clear as to the position which they occupy at the ceremony. The beadle, as he marshals them before the altar, sees something under the surface in this wedding-party. Marriages in the lower ranks of life are the only marriages celebrated here. Is this a runaway match? The beadle anticipates something out of the common in the shape of a fee.

The clergyman (the junior curate) appears from the vestry in his robes. The clerk takes his place. The clergyman's eye rests with a sudden interest and curiosity on the bride and bridegroom, and on the bride's friend; notices the absence of elderly relatives; remarks, in the two ladies especially, evidences of refinement and breeding entirely unparalleled in his professional experience of brides and brides' friends standing before the altar of that church; questions, silently and quickly, the eye of the clerk, occupied also in observing the strangers with interest.
"Jenkinson" (the clergyman's look asks), "is this all right?" "Sir" (the clerk's look answers), "a marriage by banns; all the formalities have been observed." The clergyman opens his book. The formalities have been observed; his duty lies plainly before him. Attention, Launcelot! Courage, Natalie! The service begins.

Launcelot casts a last furtive look round the church. Will Sir Joseph Graybrooke start up and stop it from one of the empty pews? Is Richard Turlington lurking in the organ-loft, and only waiting till the words of the service appeal to him to prohibit the marriage, or "else hereafter forever to hold his peace?" No. The clergyman proceeds steadily, and nothing happens. Natalie's charming face grows paler and paler, Natalie's heart throbs faster and faster, as the time comes nearer for reading the words which unite them for life. Lady Winwood herself feels an unaccustomed fluttering in the region of the bosom. Her ladyship's thoughts revert, not altogether pleasantly, to her own marriage:

"Ah me! what was I thinking of when I was in this position? Of the bride's beautiful dress, and of Lady Winwood's coming presentation at court!"

The service advances to the words in which they plight their troth. Launcelot has put the ring on her finger. Launcelot has repeated the words after the clergyman. Launcelot has married her! Done! Come what may of it, done!

The service ends. Bridegroom, bride, and witnesses go into the vestry to sign the book. The signing, like the service, is serious. No trifling with the truth is possible here. When it comes to Lady Winwood's turn, Lady Winwood must write her name. She does it, but without her usual grace and decision. She drops her handkerchief. The clerk picks it up for her, and notices that a coronet is embroidered in one corner.

The fees are paid. They leave the vestry. Other couples, when it is over, are talkative and happy. These two are more silent and more embarrassed than ever. Stranger still, while other couples go off with relatives and friends, all socially united in honor of the occasion, these two and their friends part at the church door. The respectable man and his wife go their way on foot. The little lady with the coronet on her handkerchief puts the bride into a cab, gets in herself, and directs the driver to close the door, while the bridegroom is standing on the church steps! The bridegroom's face is clouded, as well it may be. He puts his head in at the window of the cab; he possesses himself of the bride's hand; he speaks in a whisper; he is apparently not to be shaken off. The little lady exerts her authority, separates the clasped hands, pushes the bridegroom away, and cries peremptorily to the driver to go on. The cab starts; the deserted husband drifts desolately anyhow down the street. The clerk, who has seen it all, goes back to the vestry and reports what has happened.

The rector (with his wife on his arm) has just dropped into the vestry on business in passing. He and the curate are talking about the strange marriage. The rector, gravely bent on ascertaining that no blame rests with the church, interrogates, and is satisfied. The rector's wife is not so easy to deal with. She has looked at the signatures in the book. One of the names is familiar to her. She cross-examines the clerk as soon as her husband is done with him.

When she hears of the coronet on the handkerchief she points to the signature of "Louisa Winwood," and says to the rector, "I know who it is! Lord Winwood's second wife. I went to school with his lordship's daughters by his first marriage. We occasionally meet at the Sacred Concerts (on the 'Ladies' Committee'); I shall find an opportunity of speaking to them. One moment, Mr. Jenkinson, I will write down the names before you put away the book. 'Launcelot Linzie,' 'Natalie Graybrooke.' Very pretty names; quite romantic. I do delight in a romance. Good-morning."

She gives the curate a parting smile, and the clerk a parting nod, and sails out of the vestry. Natalie, silently returning in Lady Winwood's company to Muswell Hill; and Launcelot, cursing the law of Abduction as he roams the streets--little think that the ground is already mined under their feet. Richard Turlington may hear of it now, or may hear of it later. The discovery of the marriage depends entirely on a chance meeting between the lord's daughters and the rector's wife.

SEVENTH SCENE.
The Evening Party.
---------------------------------------------------- MR. TURLINGTON,
LADY WINWOOD At Home.
Wednesday, December 15th.--Ten o'clock.----------------------------------------------------

"Dearest Natalie--As the brute insists, the brute must have the invitation which I inclose. Never mind, my child. You and Launcelot are coming to dinner, and I will see that you have your little private opportunities of retirement afterward. All I expect of you in return is, _not_ to look (when you come back) as if your husband had been kissing you. You will certainly let out the secret of those stolen kisses, if you don't take care. At mamma's dinner yesterday, your color (when you came out of the conservatory) was a sight to see. Even your shoulders were red! They are charming shoulders, I know, and men take the strangest fancies sometimes. But, my dear, suppose you wear a chemisette next time, if you haven't authority enough over him to prevent his doing it again!

"Your affectionate LOUISA."

The private history of the days that had passed since the marriage was written in that letter. An additional
chapter--of some importance in its bearing on the future--was contributed by the progress of events at Lady
Winwood's party.

By previous arrangement with Natalie, the Graybrookes (invited to dinner) arrived early. Leaving her husband
and her stepdaughters to entertain Sir Joseph and Miss Lavinia, Lady Winwood took Natalie into her own boudoir,
which communicated by a curtained opening with the drawing-room.

"My dear, you are looking positively haggard this evening. Has anything happened?"

"I am nearly worn out, Louisa. The life I am leading is so unendurable that, if Launce pressed me, I believe I
should consent to run away with him when we leave your house tonight."

"You will do nothing of the sort, if you please. Wait till you are sixteen. I delight in novelty, but the novelty of
appearing at the Old Bailey is beyond my ambition. Is the brute coming to-night?"

"Of course. He insists on following me wherever I go. He lunched at Muswell Hill today. More complaints of
my incomprehensible coldness to him. Another scolding from papa. A furious letter from Launce. If I let Richard
kiss my hand again in his presence, Launce warns me he will knock him down. Oh, the meanness and the guiltiness
of the life I am leading now! I am in the falsest of all false positions, Louisa, and you encouraged me to do it. I
believe Richard Turlington suspects us. The last two times Launce and I tried to get a minute together at my aunt's,
he contrived to put himself in our way. There he was, my dear, with his scowling face, looking as if he longed to kill
Launce. Can you do anything for us tonight? Not on my account. But Launce is so impatient. If he can't say two
words to me alone this evening, he declares he will come to Muswell Hill, and catch me in the garden tomorrow."

"Compose yourself, my dear; he shall say his two words to-night."

"How?"

Lady Winwood pointed through the curtained entrance of the boudoir to the door of the drawing-room. Beyond
the door was the staircase landing. And beyond the landing was a second drawing-room, the smaller of the two.

"There are only three or four people coming to dinner," her ladyship proceeded; "and a few more in the evening.
Being a small party, the small drawing-room will do for us. This drawing-room will not be lighted, and there will be
only my reading-lamp here in the boudoir. I shall give the signal for leaving the dining-room earlier than usual.
Launce will join us before the evening party begins. The moment he appears, send him in here--boldly before your
aunt and all of us."

"For what?"

"For your fan. Leave it there under the sofa-cushion before we go down to dinner. You will sit next to Launce,
and you will give him private instructions not to find the fan. You will get impatient--you will go to find it yourself--
and there you are. Take care of your shoulders, Mrs. Linzie! I have nothing more to say."

The guests asked to dinner began to arrive. Lady Winwood was recalled to her duties as mistress of the house.

It was a pleasant little dinner--with one drawback. It began too late. The ladies only reached the small drawing-
room at ten minutes to ten. Launce was only able to join them as the clock struck.

"Too late!" whispered Natalie. "He will be here directly."

"Nobody comes punctually to an evening party," said Launce. "Don't let us lose a moment. Send me for your
fan."

Natalie opened her lips to say the necessary words. Before she could speak, the servant announced--"Mr.
Turlington."

He came in, with his stiffly-upright shirt collar and his loosely-fitting glossy black clothes. He made his sullen
and clumsy bow to Lady Winwood. And then he did, what he had done dozens of times already--he caught Natalie,
with her eyes still bright and her face still animated (after talking to Launce)--a striking contrast to the cold and
unimpulsive young lady whom he was accustomed to see while Natalie was talking to _him_.

Lord Winwood's daughters were persons of some celebrity in the world of amateur music. Noticing the look that
Turlington cast at Launce, Lady Winwood whispered to Miss Lavinia--who instantly asked the young ladies to sing.
Launce, in obedience to a sign from Natalie, volunteered to find the music-books. It is needless to add that he
pitched on the wrong volume at starting. As he lifted it from the piano to take it back to the stand, there dropped out
from between the leaves a printed letter, looking like a circular. One of the young ladies took it up, and ran her eye
over it, with a start.

"The Sacred Concerts!" she exclaimed.

Her two sisters, standing by, looked at each other guiltily: "What will the Committee say to us? We entirely
forgot the meeting last month."

"Is there a meeting this month?"

They all looked anxiously at the printed letter.

"Yes! The twenty-third of December. Put it down in your book, Amelia." Amelia, then and there, put it down
among the engagements for the latter end of the month. And Natalie's unacknowledged husband placidly looked on.
So did the merciless irony of circumstances make Launce the innocent means of exposing his own secret to discovery. Thanks to his success in laying his hand on the wrong music-book, there would now be a meeting—two good days before the elopement could take place—between the lord's daughters and the rector's wife!

The guests of the evening began to appear by twos and threes. The gentlemen below stairs left the dinner-table, and joined them.

The small drawing-room was pleasantly filled, and no more. Sir Joseph Graybrooke, taking Turlington's hand, led him eagerly to their host. The talk in the dining-room had turned on finance. Lord Winwood was not quite satisfied with some of his foreign investments; and Sir Joseph's "dear Richard" was the very man to give him a little sound advice. The three laid their heads together in a corner. Launce (watching them) slyly pressed Natalie's hand. A renowned "virtuoso" had arrived, and was thundering on the piano. The attention of the guests generally was absorbed in the performance. A fairer chance of sending Launce for the fan could not possibly have offered itself. While the financial discussion was still proceeding, the married lovers were ensconced together alone in the boudoir.

Lady Winwood (privately observant of their absence) kept her eye on the corner, watching Richard Turlington. He was talking earnestly—with his back toward the company. He neither moved nor looked round. It came to Lord Winwood's turn to speak. He preserved the same position, listening. Sir Joseph took up the conversation next. Then his attention wandered—he knew beforehand what Sir Joseph would say. His eyes turned anxiously toward the place in which he had left Natalie. Lord Winwood said a word. His head turned back again toward the corner. Sir Joseph put an objection. He glanced once more over his shoulder—this time at the place in which Launce had been standing. The next moment his host recalled his attention, and made it impossible for him to continue his scrutiny of the room. At the same times two among the evening guests, bound for another party, approached to take leave of the lady of the house. Lady Winwood was obliged to rise, and attend to them. They had something to say to her before they left, and they said it at terrible length, standing so as to intercept her view of the proceedings of the enemy. When she had got rid of them at last, she looked—and behold Lord Winwood and Sir Joseph were the only occupants of the corner!

Delaying one moment, to set the "virtuoso" thundering once more, Lady Winwood slipped out of the room and crossed the landing. At the entrance to the empty drawing-room she heard Turlington's voice, low and threatening, in the boudoir. Jealousy has a Second Sight of its own. He had looked in the right place at starting—and, oh heavens! he had caught them.

Her ladyship's courage was beyond dispute; but she turned pale as she approached the entrance to the boudoir.

There stood Natalie—at once angry and afraid—between the man to whom she was ostensibly engaged, and the man to whom she was actually married. Turlington's rugged face expressed a martyrdom of suppressed fury. Launce—in the act of offering Natalie her fan—smiled, with the cool superiority of a man who knew that he had won his advantage, and who triumphed in knowing it.

"I forbid you to take your fan from that man's hands," said Turlington, speaking to Natalie, and pointing to Launce.

"Isn't it rather too soon to begin 'forbidding'?' asked Lady Winwood, good-humoredly.

"Exactly what I say!" exclaimed Launce. "It seems necessary to remind Mr. Turlington that he is not married to Natalie yet!"

Those last words were spoken in a tone which made both the women tremble inwardly for results. Lady Winwood took the fan from Launce with one hand, and took Natalie's arm with the other.

"There is your fan, my dear," she said, in her easy off-hand manner. "Why do you allow these two barbarous men to keep you here while the great Bootmann is playing the Nightmare Sonata in the next room? Launce! Mr. Turlington! follow me, and learn to be musical directly! You have only to shut your eyes, and you will fancy you hear four modern German composers playing, instead of one, and not the ghost of a melody among all the four." She led the way out with Natalie, and whispered, "Did he catch you?" Natalie whispered back, "I heard him in time. He only caught us looking for the fan." The two men waited behind to have two words together alone in the boudoir.

"This doesn't end here, Mr. Linzie!"

Launce smiled satirically. "For once I agree with you," he answered. "It doesn't end here, as you say."

Lady Winwood stopped, and looked back at them from the drawing-room door. They were keeping her waiting—they had no choice but to follow the mistress of the house.

Arrived in the next room, both Turlington and Launce resumed their places among the guests with the same object in view. As a necessary result of the scene in the boudoir, each had his own special remonstrance to address to Sir Joseph. Even here, Launce was beforehand with Turlington. He was the first to get possession of Sir Joseph's private ear. His complaint took the form of a protest against Turlington's jealousy, and an appeal for a reconsideration of the sentence which excluded him from Muswell Hill. Watching them from a distance, Turlington's suspicious eye detected the appearance of something unduly confidential in the colloquy between the
two. Under cover of the company, he stole behind them and listened.

The great Bootmann had arrived at that part of the Nightmare Sonata in which musical sound, produced principally with the left hand, is made to describe, beyond all possibility of mistake, the rising of the moon in a country church-yard and a dance of Vampires round a maiden's grave. Sir Joseph, having no chance against the Vampires in a whisper, was obliged to raise his voice to make himself audible in answering and comforting Launce. "I sincerely sympathize with you," Turlington heard him say; "and Natalie feels about it as I do. But Richard is an obstacle in our way. We must look to the consequences, my dear boy, supposing Richard found us out." He nodded kindly to his nephew; and, declining to pursue the subject, moved away to another part of the room.

Turlington's jealous distrust, wrought to the highest pitch of irritability for weeks past, instantly associated the words he had just heard with the words spoken by Launce in the boudoir, which had reminded him that he was not married to Natalie yet. Was there treachery at work under the surface? and was the object to persuade weak Sir Joseph to reconsider his daughter's contemplated marriage in a sense favorable to Launce? Turlington's blind suspicion overleaped at a bound all the manifest improbabilities which forbade such a conclusion as this. After an instant's consideration with himself, he decided on keeping his own counsel, and on putting Sir Joseph's good faith then and there to a test which he could rely on as certain to take Natalie's father by surprise.

"Graybrooke!"

Sir Joseph started at the sight of his future son-in-law's face.

"My dear Richard, you are looking very strangely! Is the heat of the room too much for you?"

"Never mind the heat! I have seen enough to-night to justify me in insisting that your daughter and Launcelot Linzie shall meet no more between this and the day of my marriage." Sir Joseph attempted to speak. Turlington declined to give him the opportunity. "Yes! yes! your opinion of Linzie isn't mine, I know. I saw you as thick as thieves together just now." Sir Joseph once more attempted to make himself heard. Wearied by Turlington's perpetual complaints of his daughter and his nephew, he was sufficiently irritated by this time to have reported what Launce had actually said to him if he had been allowed the chance. But Turlington persisted in going on. "I cannot prevent Linzie from being received in this house, and at your sister's," he said; "but I can keep him out of _my_ house in the country, and to the country let us go. I propose a change in the arrangements. Have you any engagement for the Christmas holidays?"

He paused, and fixed his eyes attentively on Sir Joseph. Sir Joseph, looking a little surprised, replied briefly that he had no engagement.

"In that case," resumed Turlington, "I invite you all to Somersetshire, and I propose that the marriage shall take place from my house, and not from yours. Do you refuse?"

"It is contrary to the usual course of proceeding in such cases, Richard," Sir Joseph began.

"Do you refuse?" reiterated Turlington. "I tell you plainly, I shall place a construction of my own upon your motive if you do."

"No, Richard," said Sir Joseph, quietly, "I accept."

Turlington drew back a step in silence. Sir Joseph had turned the tables on him, and had taken _him_ by surprise.

"It will upset several plans, and be strongly objected to by the ladies," proceeded the old gentleman. "But if nothing less will satisfy you, I say, Yes! I shall have occasion, when we meet to-morrow at Muswell Hill, to appeal to your indulgence under circumstances which may greatly astonish you. The least I can do, in the meantime, is to set an example of friendly sympathy and forbearance on my side. No more now, Richard. Hush! the music!"

It was impossible to make him explain himself further that night. Turlington was left to interpret Sir Joseph's mysterious communication with such doubtful aid to success as his own unassisted ingenuity might afford.

The meeting of the next day at Muswell Hill had for its object--as Turlington had already been informed--the drawing of Natalie's marriage-settlement. Was the question of money at the bottom of Sir Joseph's contemplated appeal to his indulgence? He thought of his commercial position. The depression in the Levant trade still continued. Never had his business at any previous time required such constant attention, and repaid that attention with so little profit. The Bills of Lading had been already used by the firm, in the ordinary course of trade, to obtain possession of the goods. The duplicates in the hands of Bulpit Brothers were literally waste paper. Repayment of the loan of forty thousand pounds (with interest) was due in less than a month's time. There was his commercial position! Was it possible that money-loving Sir Joseph had any modification to propose in the matter of his daughter's dowry? The bare dread that it might be so struck him cold. He quitted the house--and forgot to wish Natalie goodnight.

Meanwhile, Launce had left the evening party before him--and Launce also found matter for serious reflection presented to his mind before he slept that night. In other words, he found, on reaching his lodgings, a letter from his brother marked "private." Had the inquiry into the secrets of Turlington's early life--now prolonged over some weeks--led to positive results at last? Launce eagerly opened the letter. It contained a Report and a Summary. He passed at once to the Summary, and read these words:
"If you only want moral evidence to satisfy your own mind, your end is gained. There is, morally, no doubt that Turlington and the sea-captain who cast the foreign sailor overboard to drown are one and the same man. Legally, the matter is beset by difficulties, Turlington having destroyed all provable connection between his present self and his past life. There is only one chance for us. A sailor on board the ship (who was in his master's secrets) is supposed to be still living (under his master's protection). All the black deeds of Turlington's early life are known to this man. He can prove the facts, if we can find him, and make it worth his while to speak. Under what alias he is hidden we do not know. His own name is Thomas Wildfang. If we are to make the attempt to find him, not a moment is to be lost. The expenses may be serious. Let me know whether we are to go on, or whether enough has been done to attain the end you have in view."

Enough had been done—not only to satisfy Launce, but to produce the right effect on Sir Joseph's mind if Sir Joseph proved obdurate when the secret of the marriage was revealed. Launce wrote a line directing the stoppage of the proceedings at the point which they had now reached. "Here is a reason for her not marrying Turlington," he said to himself, as he placed the papers under lock and key. "And if she doesn't marry Turlington," he added, with a lover's logic, "why shouldn't she marry Me?"

EIGHTH SCENE.
The Library.
The next day Sir Joseph Graybrooke, Sir Joseph's lawyer, Mr. Dicas (highly respectable and immensely rich), and Richard Turlington were assembled in the library at Muswell Hill, to discuss the question of Natalie's marriage settlement.

After the usual preliminary phrases had been exchanged, Sir Joseph showed some hesitation in openly approaching the question which the little party of three had met to debate. He avoided his lawyer's eye; and he looked at Turlington rather uneasily.

"Richard," he began at last, "when I spoke to you about your marriage, on board the yacht, I said I would give my daughter—" Either his courage or his breath failed him at that point. He was obliged to wait a moment before he could go on.

"I said I would give my daughter half my fortune on her marriage," he resumed. "Forgive me, Richard. I can't do it!"

Mr. Dicas, waiting for his instructions, laid down his pen and looked at Sir Joseph's son-in-law elect. What would Mr. Turlington say?

He said nothing. Sitting opposite the window, he rose when Sir Joseph spoke, and placed himself at the other side of the table, with his back to the light.

"My eyes are weak this morning," he said, in an unnaturally low tone of voice. "The light hurts them."

He could find no more plausible excuse than that for concealing his face in shadow from the scrutiny of the two men on either side of him. The continuous moral irritation of his unhappy courtship—a courtship which had never advanced beyond the frigid familiarity of kissing Natalie's hand in the presence of others—had physically deteriorated him. Even _his_ hardy nerves began to feel the long strain of suspicion that had been laid unremittingly on them for weeks past. His power of self-control—he knew it himself—was not to be relied on. He could hide his face: he could no longer command it.

"Did you hear what I said, Richard?"
"I heard. Go on."

Sir Joseph proceeded, gathering confidence as he advanced.

"Half my fortune!" he repeated. "It's parting with half my life; it's saying good-by forever to my dearest friend! My money has been such a comfort to me, Richard; such a pleasant occupation for my mind. I know no reading so interesting and so instructive as the reading of one's Banker's Book. To watch the outgoings on one side," said Sir Joseph, with a gentle and pathetic solemnity, "and the incomings on the other—the sad lessening of the balance at one time, and the cheering and delightful growth of it at another—what absorbing reading! The best novel that ever was written isn't to be mentioned in a breath with it. I can not, Richard, I really can _not_, see my nice round balance shrink up to half the figure that I have been used to for a lifetime. It may be weak of me," proceeded Sir Joseph, evidently feeling that it was not weak of him at all, "but we all have our tender place, and my Banker's Book is mine. Besides, it isn't as if you wanted it. If you wanted it, of course—but you don't want it. You are a rich man; you are marrying my dear Natalie for love, not for money. You and she and my grandchildren will have it all at my death. It _can_ make no difference to you to wait a few years till the old man's chair at the fireside is empty. Will you say the fourth part, Richard, instead of the half? Twenty thousand," pleaded Sir Joseph, piteously. "I can bear twenty thousand off. For God's sake don't ask me for more!"

The lips of the lawyer twisted themselves sourly into an ironical smile. He was quite as fond of his money as Sir Joseph. He ought to have felt for his client; but rich men have no sympathy with one another. Mr. Dicas openly
despised Sir Joseph.

There was a pause. The robin-redbreasts in the shrubbery outside must have had prodigious balances at their bankers; they hopped up on the window-sill so fearlessly; they looked in with so little respect at the two rich men. "Don't keep me in suspense, Richard," proceeded Sir Joseph. "Speak out. Is it yes or no?"

Turlington struck his hand excitedly on the table, and burst out on a sudden with the answer which had been so strangely delayed.

"Twenty thousand with all my heart!" he said. "On this condition, Graybrooke, that every farthing of it is settled on Natalie, and on her children after her. Not a half-penny to me!" he cried magnanimously, in his brassiest tones. "Not a half-penny to me!"

Let no man say the rich are heartless. Sir Joseph seized his son-in-law's hand in silence, and burst into tears.

Mr. Dicas, habitually a silent man, uttered the first two words that had escaped him since the business began. "Highly creditable," he said, and took a note of his instructions on the spot.

From that point the business of the settlement flowed smoothly on to its destined end. Sir Joseph explained his views at the fullest length, and the lawyer's pen kept pace with him. Turlington, remaining in his place at the table, restricted himself to a purely passive part in the proceedings. He answered briefly when it was absolutely necessary to speak, and he agreed with the two elders in everything. A man has no attention to place at the disposal of other people when he stands at a crisis in his life. Turlington stood at that crisis, at the trying moment when Sir Joseph's unexpected proposal pressed instantly for a reply. Two merciless alternatives confronted him. Either he must repay the borrowed forty thousand pounds on the day when repayment was due, or he must ask Bulpit Brothers to grant him an extension of time, and so inevitably provoke an examination into the fraudulent security deposited with the firm, which could end in but one way. His last, literally his last chance, after Sir Joseph had diminished the promised dowry by one half, was to adopt the high-minded tone which became his position, and to conceal the truth until he could reveal it to his father-in-law in the privileged character of Natalie's husband. "I owe forty thousand pounds, sir, in a fortnight's time, and I have not got a farthing of my own. Pay for me, or you will see your son-in-law's name in the Bankrupt's List." For his daughter's sake--who could doubt it?--Sir Joseph would produce the money. The one thing needful was to be married in time. If either by accident or treachery Sir Joseph was led into deferring the appointed day, by so much as a fortnight only, the fatal "call" would come, and the firm of Pizzituti, Turlington & Branca would appear in the Gazette.

So he reasoned, standing on the brink of the terrible discovery which was soon to reveal to him that Natalie was the wife of another man.

"Richard!"

"Mr. Turlington!"

He started, and roused his attention to present things. Sir Joseph on one side, and the lawyer on the other, were both appealing to him, and both regarding him with looks of amazement.

"Have you done with the settlement?" he asked.

"My dear Richard, we have done with it long since," replied Sir Joseph. "Have you really not heard what I have been saying for the last quarter of an hour to good Mr. Dicas here? What _can_ you have been thinking of?"

Turlington did not attempt to answer the question. "Am I interested," he asked, "in what you have been saying to Mr. Dicas?"

"You shall judge for yourself," answered Sir Joseph, mysteriously; "I have been giving Mr. Dicas his instructions for making my Will. I wish the Will and the Marriage-Settlement to be executed at the same time. Read the instructions, Mr. Dicas."

Sir Joseph's contemplated Will proved to have two merits--it was simple and it was short. Excepting one or two trifling legacies to distant relatives, he had no one to think of (Miss Lavinia being already provided for) but his daughter and the children who might be born of her marriage. In its various provisions, made with these two main objects in view, the Will followed the precedents established in such cases. It differed in no important respect from the tens of thousands of other wills made under similar circumstances. Sir Joseph's motive in claiming special attention for it still remained unexplained, when Mr. Dicas reached the clause devoted to the appointment of executors and trustees; and announced that this portion of the document was left in blank.

"Sir Joseph Graybrooke, are you prepared to name the persons whom you appoint?" asked the lawyer.

Sir Joseph rose, apparently for the purpose of giving special importance to the terms in which he answered his lawyer's question.

"I appoint," he said, "as sole executor and trustee--Richard Turlington."

It was no easy matter to astonish Mr. Dicas. Sir Joseph's reply absolutely confounded him. He looked across the table at his client and delivered himself on this special occasion of as many as three words. "Are you mad?" he asked.
Sir Joseph's healthy complexion slightly reddened. "I never was in more complete possession of myself, Mr. Dicas, than at this moment."

Mr. Dicas was not to be silenced in that way.

"Are you aware of what you do," persisted the lawyer, "if you appoint Mr. Turlington as sole executor and trustee? You put it in the power of your daughter's husband, sir, to make away with every farthing of your money after your death."

Turlington had hitherto listened with an appearance of interest in the proceedings, which he assumed as an act of politeness. To his view, the future was limited to the date at which Bulpit Brothers had a right to claim the repayment of their loan. The Will was a matter of no earthly importance to him, by comparison with the infinitely superior interest of the Marriage. It was only when the lawyer's brutally plain language forced his attention to it that the question of his pecuniary interest in his father-in-law's death assumed its fit position in his mind.

_His_ color rose; and _he_ too showed that he was offended by what Mr. Dicas had just said.

"Not a word, Richard! Let me speak for you as well as for myself," said Sir Joseph. "For seven years past," he continued, turning to the lawyer, "I have been accustomed to place the most unlimited trust in Richard Turlington. His disinterested advice has enabled me largely to increase my income, without placing a farthing of the principal in jeopardy. On more than one occasion, I have entreated him to make use of my money in his business. He has invariably refused to do so. Even his bitterest enemies, sir, have been obliged to acknowledge that my interests were safe when committed to his care. Am I to begin distrusting him, now that I am about to give him my daughter in marriage? Am I to leave it on record that I doubt him for the first time--when my Will is opened after my death? No! I can confide the management of the fortune which my child will inherit after me to no more competent or more honorable hands than the hands of the man who is to marry her. I maintain my appointment, Mr. Dicas! I persist in placing the whole responsibility under my Will in my son-in-law's care."

Turlington attempted to speak. The lawyer attempted to speak. Sir Joseph--with a certain simple dignity which had its effect on both of them--declined to hear a word on either side. "No, Richard! as long as I am alive this is my business, not yours. No, Mr. Dicas! I understand that it is your business to protest professionally. You have protested. Fill in the blank space as I have told you. Or leave the instructions on the table, and I will send for the nearest solicitor to complete them in your place."

Those words placed the lawyer's position plainly before him. He had no choice but to do as he was bid, or to lose a good client. He did as he was bid, and grimly left the room.

Sir Joseph, with old-fashioned politeness, followed him as far as the hall. Returning to the library to say a few friendly words before finally dismissing the subject of the Will, he found himself seized by the arm, and dragged without ceremony, in Turlington's powerful grasp, to the window.

"Richard!" he exclaimed, "what does this mean?"

"Look!" cried the other, pointing through the window to a grassy walk in the grounds, bounded on either side by shrubberies, and situated at a little distance from the house. "Who is that man?--quick! before we lose sight of him--the man crossing there from one shrubbery to the other?" Sir Joseph failed to recognize the figure before it disappeared. Turlington whispered fiercely, close to his ear--"Launcelot Linzie!"

In perfect good faith Sir Joseph declared that the man could not possibly have been Launce. Turlington's frenzy of jealous suspicion was not to be so easily calmed. He asked significantly for Natalie. She was reported to be walking in the grounds. "I knew it!" he said, with an oath--and hurried out into the grounds to discover the truth for himself.

Some little time elapsed before he came back to the house. He had discovered Natalie--alone. Not a sign of Launce had rewarded his search. For the hundredth time he had offended Natalie. For the hundredth time he was compelled to appeal to the indulgence of her father and her aunt. "It won't happen again," he said, sullenly penitent. "You will find me quite another man when I have got you all at my house in the country. Mind!" he burst out, with a furtive look, which expressed his inveterate distrust of Natalie and of every one about her. "Mind! it's settled that you all come to me in Somersethshire, on Monday next." Sir Joseph answered rather dryly that it was settled. Turlington turned to leave the room--and suddenly came back. "It's understood," he went on, addressing Miss Lavinia, "that the seventh of next month is the date fixed for the marriage. Not a day later!" Miss Lavinia replied, rather dryly on her side, "Of course, Richard; not a day later." He muttered, "All right" and hurriedly left them.

Half an hour afterward Natalie came in, looking a little confused.

"Has he gone?" she asked, whispering to her aunt.

Relieved on this point, she made straight for the library--a room which she rarely entered at that or any other period of the day. Miss Lavinia followed her, curious to know what it meant. Natalie hurried to the window, and waved her handkerchief--evidently making a signal to some one outside. Miss Lavinia instantly joined her, and took her sharply by the hand.
"Is it possible, Natalie?" she asked. "Has Launcelot Linzie really been here, unknown to your father or to me?"

"Where is the harm if he has?" answered Natalie, with a sudden outbreak of temper. "Am I never to see my cousin again, because Mr. Turlington happens to be jealous of him?"

She suddenly turned away her head. The rich color flowed over her face and neck. Miss Lavinia, proceeding sternly with the administration of the necessary reproof, was silenced midway by a new change in her niece's variable temper. Natalie burst into tears. Satisfied with this appearance of sincere contrition, the old lady consented to overlook what had happened; and, for this occasion only, to keep her niece's secret. They would all be in Somersetshire, she remarked, before any more breaches of discipline could be committed. Richard had fortunately made no discoveries; and the matter might safely be trusted, all things considered, to rest where it was.

Miss Lavinia might possibly have taken a less hopeful view of the circumstances, if she had known that one of the men-servants at Muswell Hill was in Richard Turlington's pay, and that this servant had seen Launce leave the grounds by the back-garden gate.

NINTH SCENE.
The Drawing-Room.

"Amelia!"

"Say something."

"Ask him to sit down."

Thus addressing one another in whispers, the three stepdaughters of Lady Winwood stood bewildered in their own drawing-room, helplessly confronting an object which appeared before them on the threshold of the door.

The date was the 23d of December. The time was between two and three in the afternoon. The occasion was the return of the three sisters from the Committee meeting of the Sacred Concerts' Society. And the object was Richard Turlington.

He stood hat in hand at the door, amazed by his reception. "I have come up this morning from Somersetshire," he said. "Haven't you heard? A matter of business at the office has forced me to leave my guests at my house in the country. I return to them to-morrow. When I say my guests, I mean the Graybrookes. Don't you know they are staying with me? Sir Joseph and Miss Lavinia and Natalie?" On the utterance of Natalie's name, the sisters roused themselves. They turned about and regarded each other with looks of dismay. Turlington's patience began to fail him. "Will you be so good as to tell me what all this means?" he said, a little sharply. "Miss Lavinia asked me to call here when she heard I was coming to town. I was to take charge of a pattern for a dress, which she said you would give me. You ought to have received a telegram explaining it all, hours since. Has the message not reached you?"

The leading spirit of the three sisters was Miss Amelia. She was the first who summoned presence of mind enough to give a plain answer to Turlington's plain question.

"We received the telegram this morning," she said. "Something has happened since which has shocked and surprised us. We beg your pardon." She turned to one of her sisters. "Sophia, the pattern is ready in the drawer of that table behind you. Give it to Mr. Turlington."

Sophia produced the packet. Before she handed it to the visitor, she looked at her sister. "Ought we to let Mr. Turlington go," she asked, "as if nothing had happened?"

Amelia considered silently with herself. Dorothea, the third sister (who had not spoken yet), came forward with a suggestion. She proposed, before proceeding further, to inquire whether Lady Winwood was in the house. The idea was instantly adopted. Sophia rang the bell. Amelia put the questions when the servant appeared.

Lady Winwood had left the house for a drive immediately after luncheon. Lord Winwood--inquired for next--had accompanied her ladyship. No message had been left indicating the hour of their return.

The sisters looked at Turlington, uncertain what to say or do next. Miss Amelia addressed him as soon as the servant had left the room.

"Is it possible for you to remain here until either my father or Lady Winwood return?" she asked.

"It is quite impossible. Minutes are of importance to me to-day."

"Will you give us one of your minutes? We want to consider something which we may have to say to you before you go."

Turlington, wondering, took a chair. Miss Amelia put the case before her sisters from the sternly conscientious point of view, at the opposite end of the room.

"We have not found out this abominable deception by any underhand means," she said. "The discovery has been forced upon us, and we stand pledged to nobody to keep the secret. Knowing as we do how cruelly this gentleman has been used, it seems to me that we are bound in honor to open his eyes to the truth. If we remain silent we make ourselves Lady Winwood's accomplices. I, for one--I don't care what may come of it--refuse to do that."

Her sisters agreed with her. The first chance their clever stepmother had given them of asserting their importance against hers was now in their hands. Their jealous hatred of Lady Winwood assumed the mask of Duty--duty toward
an outraged and deceived fellow-creature. Could any earthly motive be purer than that? "Tell him, Amelia!" cried the two young ladies, with the headlong recklessness of the sex which only stops to think when the time for reflection has gone by.

A vague sense of something wrong began to stir uneasily in Turlington's mind. "Don't let me hurry you," he said, "but if you really have anything to tell me--"

Miss Amelia summoned her courage, and began. "We have something very dreadful to tell you," she said, interrupting him. "You have been presented in this house, Mr. Turlington, as a gentleman engaged to marry Lady Winwood's cousin. Miss Natalie Graybrooke." She paused there—at the outset of the disclosure. A sudden change of expression passed over Turlington's face, which daunted her for the moment. "We have hitherto understood," she went on, "that you were to be married to that young lady early in next month."

"Well?"

He could say that one word. Looking at their pale faces, and their eager eyes, he could say no more. "Take care!" whispered Dorothea, in her sister's ear. "Look at him, Amelia! Not too soon."

Amelia went on more carefully. "We have just returned from a musical meeting," she said. "One of the ladies there was an acquaintance, a former school-fellow of ours. She is the wife of the rector of St. Columb Major—a large church, far from this—at the East End of London."

"I know nothing about the woman or the church," interposed Turlington, sternly. "I must beg you to wait a little. I can't tell you what I want to tell you unless I refer to the rector's wife. She knows Lady Winwood by name. And she heard of Lady Winwood recently under very strange circumstances—circumstances connected with a signature in one of the books of the church."

Turlington lost his self-control. "You have got something against my Natalie," he burst out; "I know it by your whispering, I see it in your looks! Say it at once in plain words."

There was no trifling with him now. In plain words Amelia said it.

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There was silence in the room. They could hear the sound of passing footsteps in the street. He stood perfectly still on the spot where they had struck him dumb by the disclosure, supporting himself with his right hand laid on the head of a sofa near him. The sisters drew back horror-struck into the furthest corner of the room. His face turned them cold. Through the mute misery which it had expressed at first, there appeared, slowly forcing its way to view, a look of deadly vengeance which froze them to the soul. They whispered feverishly one to the other, without knowing what they were talking of, without hearing their own voices. One of them said, "Ring the bell!" Another said, "Offer him something, he will faint." The third shuddered, and repeated, over and over again, "Why did we do it? Why did we do it?"

He silenced them on the instant by speaking on his side. He came on slowly, by a step at a time, with the big drops of agony falling slowly over his rugged face. He said, in a hoarse whisper, "Write me down the name of the church—there." He held out his open pocketbook to Amelia while he spoke. She steadied herself, and wrote the address. She tried to say a word to soften him. The word died on her lips. There was a light in his eyes as they looked at her which transfigured his face to something superhuman and devilish. She turned away from him, shuddering.

He put the book back in his pocket, and passed his handkerchief over his face. After a moment of indecision, he suddenly and swiftly stole out of the room, as if he was afraid of their calling somebody in, and stopping him. At the door he turned round for a moment, and said, "You will hear how this ends. I wish you good-morning."

The door closed on him. Left by themselves, they began to realize it. They thought of the consequences when his back was turned and it was too late.

The Graybrookes! Now he knew it, what would become of the Graybrookes? What would he do when he got back? Even at ordinary times—when he was on his best behavior—he was a rough man. What would happen? Oh, good God! what would happen when he and Natalie next stood face to face? It was a lonely house—Natalie had told them about it—no neighbors near; nobody by to interfere but the weak old father and the maiden aunt. Something ought to be done. Some steps ought to be taken to warn them. Advice—who could give advice? Who was the first person who ought to be told of what had happened? Lady Winwood? No! even at that crisis the sisters still shrank from their stepmother—still hated her with the old hatred! Not a word to _her_! _They_ owed no duty to _her_! _Who_ else could they appeal to? To their father? Yes! There was the person to advise them. In the meanwhile, silence toward their stepmother—silence toward every one till their father came back!

They waited and waited. One after another the precious hours, pregnant with the issues of life and death, followed each other on the dial. Lady Winwood returned alone. She had left her husband at the House of Lords.
Dinner-time came, and brought with it a note from his lordship. There was a debate at the House. Lady Winwood and his daughters were not to wait dinner for him.

TENTH SCENE.
Green Anchor Lane.

An hour later than the time at which he had been expected, Richard Turlington appeared at his office in the city. He met beforehand all the inquiries which the marked change in him must otherwise have provoked, by announcing that he was ill. Before he proceeded to business, he asked if anybody was waiting to see him. One of the servants from Muswell Hill was waiting with another parcel for Miss Lavinia, ordered by telegram from the country that morning. Turlington (after ascertaining the servant's name) received the man in his private room. He there heard, for the first time, that Launcelot Linzie had been lurking in the grounds (exactly as he had supposed) on the day when the lawyer took his instructions for the Settlement and the Will.

In two hours more Turlington's work was completed. On leaving the office--as soon as he was out of sight of the door--he turned eastward, instead of taking the way that led to his own house in town. Pursuing his course, he entered the labyrinth of streets which led, in that quarter of East London, to the unsavory neighborhood of the river-side.

By this time his mind was made up. The forecast shadow of meditated crime traveled before him already, as he threaded his way among his fellow-men.

He had been to the vestry of St. Columb Major, and had satisfied himself that he was misled by no false report. There was the entry in the Marriage Register. The one unexplained mystery was the mystery of Launce's conduct in permitting his wife to return to her father's house. Utterly unable to account for this proceeding, Turlington could only accept facts as they were, and determine to make the most of his time, while the woman who had deceived him was still under his roof. A hideous expression crossed his face as he realized the idea that he had got her (unprotected by her husband) in his house. "When Launcelot Linzie _does_ come to claim her," he said to himself, "he shall find I have been even with him." He looked at his watch. Was it possible to save the last train and get back that night? No--the last train had gone. Would she take advantage of his absence to escape? He had little fear of it. She would never have allowed her aunt to send him to Lord Winwood's house, if she had felt the slightest suspicion of his discovering the truth in that quarter. Returning by the first train the next morning, he might feel sure of getting back in time. Meanwhile he had the hours of the night before him. He could give his mind to the serious question that must be settled before he left London--the question of repaying the forty thousand pounds. There was but one way of getting the money now. Sir Joseph had executed his Will; Sir Joseph's death would leave his sole executor and trustee (the lawyer had said it!) master of his fortune. Turlington determined to be master of it in four-and-twenty hours--striking the blow, without risk to himself, by means of another hand. In the face of the probabilities, in the face of the facts, he had now firmly persuaded himself that Sir Joseph was privy to the fraud that had been practiced on him. The Marriage-Settlement, the Will, the presence of the family at his country house--all these he believed to be so many stratagems invented to keep him deceived until the last moment. The truth was in those words which he had overheard between Sir Joseph and Launce--and in Launce's presence (privately encouraged, no doubt) at Muswell Hill. "Her father shall pay me for it doubly: with his purse and with his life." With that thought in his heart, Richard Turlington wound his way through the streets by the river-side, and stopped at a blind alley called Green Anchor Lane, infamous to this day as the chosen resort of the most abandoned wretches whom London can produce.

The policeman at the corner cautioned him as he turned into the alley. "They won't hurt _me_!" he answered, and walked on to a public-house at the bottom of the lane.

The landlord at the door silently recognized him, and led the way in. They crossed a room filled with sailors of all nations drinking; ascended a staircase at the back of the house, and stopped at the door of the room on the second floor. There the landlord spoke for the first time. "He has outrun his allowance, sir, as usual. You will find him with hardly a rag on his back. I doubt if he will last much longer. He had another fit of the horrors last night, and the doctor thinks badly of him." With that introduction he opened the door, and Turlington entered the room.

On the miserable bed lay a gray-headed old man of gigantic stature, with nothing on him but a ragged shirt and a pair of patched, filthy trousers. At the side of the bed, with a bottle of gin on the rickety table between them, sat two hideous leering, painted monsters, wearing the dress of women. The smell of opium was in the room, as well as the smell of spirits. At Turlington's appearance, the old man rose on the bed and welcomed him with greedy eyes and outstretched hand.

"Money, master!" he called out hoarsely. "A crown piece in advance, for the sake of old times!"

Turlington turned to the women without answering, purse in hand.

"His clothes are at the pawnbroker's, of course. How much?"

"Thirty shillings."
"Bring them here, and be quick about it. You will find it worth your while when you come back."
The women took the pawnbroker's tickets from the pockets of the man's trousers and hurried out.
Turlington closed the door, and seated himself by the bedside. He laid his hand familiarly on the giant's mighty
shoulder, looked him full in the face, and said, in a whisper,
"Thomas Wildfang!"
The man started, and drew his huge hairy hand across his eyes, as if in doubt whether he was waking or sleeping.
"It's better than ten years, master, since you called me by my name. If I am Thomas Wildfang, what are you?"
"Your captain, once more."
Thomas Wildfang sat up on the side of the bed, and spoke his next words cautiously in Turlington's ear.
"Another man in the way?"
"Yes."
The giant shook his bald, bestial head dolefully. "Too late. I'm past the job. Look here."
He held up his hand, and showed it trembling incessantly. "I'm an old man," he said, and let his hand drop
heavily again on the bed beside him.
Turlington looked at the door, and whispered back,
"The man is as old as you are. And the money is worth having."
"How much?"
"A hundred pounds."
The eyes of Thomas Wildfang fastened greedily on Turlington's face. "Let's hear," he said. "Softly, captain. Let's
hear."
* * * * * * * * *
When the women came back with the clothes, Turlington had left the room. Their promised reward lay waiting
for them on the table, and Thomas Wildfang was eager to dress himself and be gone. They could get but one answer
from him to every question they put. He had business in hand, which was not to be delayed. They would see him
again in a day or two, with money in his purse. With that assurance he took his cudgel from the corner of the room,
and stalked out swiftly by the back door of the house into the night.

ELEVENTH SCENE.
Outside the House

The evening was chilly, but not cold for the time of year. There was no moon. The stars were out, and the wind
was quiet. Upon the whole, the inhabitants of the little Somersethshire village of Baxdale agreed that it was as fine a
Christmas-eve as they could remember for some years past.

Toward eight in the evening the one small street of the village was empty, except at that part of it which was
occupied by the public-house. For the most part, people gathered round their firesides, with an eye to their suppers,
and watched the process of cooking comfortably indoors. The old bare, gray church, situated at some little distance
from the village, looked a lonelier object than usual in the dim starlight. The vicarage, nestling close under the
shadow of the church-tower, threw no illumination of fire-light or candle-light on the dreary scene. The clergyman's
shutters fitted well, and the clergyman's curtains were closely drawn. The one ray of light that cheered the wintry
darkness streamed from the unguarded window of a lonely house, separated from the vicarage by the whole length
of the church-yard. A man stood at the window, holding back the shutter, and looking out attentively over the dim
void of the burial-ground. The man was Richard Turlington. The room in which he was watching was a room in his
own house.

A momentary spark of light flashed up, as from a kindled match, in the burial-ground. Turlington instantly left
the empty room in which he had been watching. Passing down the back garden of the house, and crossing a narrow
lane at the bottom of it, he opened a gate in a low stone wall beyond, and entered the church-yard. The shadowy
figure of a man of great stature, lurking among the graves, advanced to meet him. Midway in the dark and lonely
place the two stopped and consulted together in whispers. Turlington spoke first.
"Have you taken up your quarters at the public-house in the village?"
"Yes, master."
"Did you find your way, while the daylight lasted, to the deserted malt-house behind my orchard wall?"
"Yes, master."

"Now listen—we have no time to lose. Hide there, behind that monument. Before nine o'clock to-night you will
see me cross the churchyard, as far as this place, with the man you are to wait for. He is going to spend an hour with
the vicar, at the house yonder. I shall stop short here, and say to him, 'You can't miss your way in the dark now—I
will go back.' When I am far enough away from him, I shall blow a call on my whistle. The moment you hear the
call, follow the man, and drop him before he gets out of the church-yard. Have you got your cudgel?"

Thomas Wildfang held up his cudgel. Turlington took him by the arm, and felt it suspiciously.
"You have had an attack of the horrors already," he said. "What does this trembling mean?"

He took a spirit-flask from his pocket as he spoke. Thomas Wildfang snatched it out of his hand, and emptied it at a draught. "All right now, master," he said. Turlington felt his arm once more. It was steadier already. Wildfang brandished his cudgel, and struck a heavy blow with it on one of the turf mounds near them. "Will that drop him, captain?" he asked.

Turlington went on with his instructions.

"Rob him when you have dropped him. Take his money and his jewelry. I want to have the killing of him attributed to robbery as the motive. Make sure before you leave him that he is dead. Then go to the malt-house. There is no fear of your being seen; all the people will be indoors, keeping Christmas-eve. You will find a change of clothes hidden in the malt-house, and an old caldron full of quicklime. Destroy the clothes you have got on, and dress yourself in the other clothes that you find. Follow the cross-road, and when it brings you into the highroad, turn to the left; a four-mile walk will take you to the town of Harminster. Sleep there to-night, and travel to London by the train in the morning. The next day go to my office, see the head clerk, and say, 'I have come to sign my receipt.' Sign it in your own name, and you will receive your hundred pounds. There are your instructions. Do you understand them?"

Wildfang nodded his head in silent token that he understood, and disappeared again among the graves. Turlington went back to the house.

He had advanced midway across the garden, when he was startled by the sound of footsteps in the lane--at that part of it which skirted one of the corners of the house. Hastening forward, he placed himself behind a projection in the wall, so as to see the person pass across the stream of light from the uncovered window of the room that he had left. The stranger was walking rapidly. All Turlington could see as he crossed the field of light was, that his hat was pulled over his eyes, and that he had a thick beard and mustache. Describing the man to the servant on entering the house, he was informed that a stranger with a large beard had been seen about the neighborhood for some days past. The account he had given of himself stated that he was a surveyor, engaged in taking measurements for a new map of that part of the country, shortly to be published.

The guilty mind of Turlington was far from feeling satisfied with the meager description of the stranger thus rendered. He could not be engaged in surveying in the dark. What could he want in the desolate neighborhood of the house and church-yard at that time of night?

The man wanted--what the man found a little lower down the lane, hidden in a dismantled part of the church-yard wall--a letter from a young lady. Read by the light of the pocket-lantern which he carried with him, the letter first congratulated this person on the complete success of his disguise--and then promised that the writer would be ready at her bedroom window for flight the next morning, before the house was astir. The signature was "Natalie," and the person addressed was "Dearest Launce."

In the meanwhile, Turlington barred the window shutters of the room, and looked at his watch. It wanted only a quarter to nine o'clock. He took his dog-whistle from the chimney-piece, and turned his steps at once in the direction of the drawing-room, in which his guests were passing the evening.

TWELFTH SCENE.

Inside the House.

The scene in the drawing-room represented the ideal of domestic comfort. The fire of wood and coal mixed burned brightly; the lamps shed a soft glow of light; the solid shutters and the thick red curtains kept the cold night air on the outer side of two long windows, which opened on the back garden. Snug arm-chairs were placed in every part of the room. In one of them Sir Joseph reclined, fast asleep; in another, Miss Lavinia sat knitting; a third chair, apart from the rest, near a round table in one corner of the room, was occupied by Natalie. Her head was resting on her hand, an unread book lay open on her lap. She looked pale and harassed; anxiety and suspense had worn her down to the shadow of her former self. On entering the room, Turlington purposely closed the door with a bang. Natalie started. Miss Lavinia looked up reproachfully. The object was achieved--Sir Joseph was roused from his sleep.

"If you are going to the vicar's to-night. Graybrooke," said Turlington, "it's time you were off, isn't it?"

Sir Joseph rubbed his eyes, and looked at the clock on the mantel-piece. "Yes, yes, Richard," he answered, drowsily, "I suppose I must go. Where is my hat?"

His sister and his daughter both joined in trying to persuade him to send an excuse instead of groping his way to the vicarage in the dark. Sir Joseph hesitated, as usual. He and the vicar had run up a sudden friendship, on the strength of their common enthusiasm for the old-fashioned game of backgammon. Victorious over his opponent on the previous evening at Turlington's house, Sir Joseph had promised to pass that evening at the vicarage, and give the vicar his revenge. Observing his indecision, Turlington cunningly irritated him by affecting to believe that he was really unwilling to venture out in the dark. "I'll see you safe across the churchyard," he said; "and the vicar's
servant will see you safe back." The tone in which he spoke instantly roused Sir Joseph. "I am not in my second childhood yet, Richard," he replied, testily. "I can find my way by myself." He kissed his daughter on the forehead. "No fear, Natalie. I shall be back in time for the mulled claret. No, Richard, I won't trouble you." He kissed his hand to his sister and went out into the hall for his hat. Turlington following him with a rough apology, and asking as a favor to be permitted to accompany him part of the way only. The ladies, left behind in the drawing-room, heard the apology accepted by kind-hearted Sir Joseph. The two went out together.

"Have you noticed Richard since his return?" asked Miss Lavinia. "I fancy he must have heard bad news in London. He looks as if he had something on his mind."

"I haven't remarked it, aunt."

For the time, no more was said. Miss Lavinia went monotonously on with her knitting. Natalie pursued her own anxious thoughts over the unread pages of the book in her lap. Suddenly the deep silence out of doors and in was broken by a shrill whistle, sounding from the direction of the church-yard. Natalie started with a faint cry of alarm.

Miss Lavinia looked up from her knitting.

"My dear child, your nerves must be sadly out of order. What is there to be frightened at?"

"I am not very well, aunt. It is so still here at night, the slightest noises startle me."

There was another interval of silence. It was past nine o'clock when they heard the back door opened and closed again. Turlington came hurriedly into the drawing-room, as if he had some reason for wishing to rejoin the ladies as soon as possible. To the surprise of both of them, he sat down abruptly in the corner, with his face to the wall, and took up the newspaper, without casting a look at them or uttering a word.

"Is Joseph safe at the vicarage?" asked Miss Lavinia.

"All right." He gave the answer in a short, surly tone, still without looking round.

Miss Lavinia tried him again. "Did you hear a whistle while you were out? It quite startled Natalie in the stillness of this place."

He turned half-way round. "My shepherd, I suppose," he said after a pause--"whistling for his dog." He turned back again and immersed himself in his newspaper.

Miss Lavinia beckoned to her niece and pointed significantly to Turlington. After one reluctant look at him, Natalie laid her head wearily on her aunt's shoulder. "Sleepy, my dear?" whispered the old lady. "Uneasy, aunt--I don't know why," Natalie whispered back. "I would give the world to be in London, and to hear the carriages going by, and the people talking in the street."

Turlington suddenly dropped his newspaper. "What's the secret between you two?" he called out roughly. "What are you whispering about?"

"We wish not to disturb you over your reading, that is all," said Miss Lavinia, coldly. "Has anything happened to vex you, Richard?"

"What the devil makes you think that?"

The old lady was offended, and showed it by saying nothing more. Natalie nestled closer to her aunt. One after another the clock ticked off the minutes with painful distinctness in the stillness of the room. Turlington suddenly threw aside the newspaper and left his corner. "Let's be good friends!" he burst out, with a clumsy assumption of gayety. "This isn't keeping Christmas-eve. Let's talk and be sociable. Dearest Natalie!" He threw his arm roughly round Natalie, and drew her by main force away from her aunt. She turned deadly pale, and struggled to release herself. "I am suffering--I am ill--let me go!" He was deaf to her entreaties. "What! your husband that is to be, treated in this way? Mustn't I have a kiss?--I will!" He held her closer with one hand, and, seizing her head with the other, tried to turn her lips to him. She resisted with the inbred nervous strength which the weakest woman living has in reserve when she is outraged. Half indignant, half terrified, at Turlington's roughness, Miss Lavinia rose to interfere. In a moment more he would have had two women to overpower instead of one, when a noise outside the window suddenly suspended the ignoble struggle.

There was a sound of footsteps on the gravel-walk which ran between the house wall and the garden lawn. It was followed by a tap--a single faint tap, no more--on one of the panes of glass.

They all three stood still. For a moment more nothing was audible. Then there was a heavy shock, as of something falling outside. Then a groan, then another interval of silence--a long silence, interrupted no more.

Turlington's arm dropped from Natalie. She drew back to her aunt. Looking at him instinctively, in the natural expectation that he would take the lead in penetrating the mystery of what had happened outside the window, the two women were thunderstruck to see that he was, to all appearance, even more startled and more helpless than they were. "Richard," said Miss Lavinia, pointing to the window, "there is something wrong out there. See what it is." He stood motionless, as if he had not heard her, his eyes fixed on the window, his face livid with terror.

The silence outside was broken once more; this time by a call for help.

A cry of horror burst from Natalie. The voice outside--rising wildly, then suddenly dying away again--was not
entirely strange to _her_ ears. She tore aside the curtain. With voice and hand she roused her aunt to help her. The two lifted the heavy bar from its socket; they opened the shutters and the window. The cheerful light of the room flowed out over the body of a prostrate man, lying on his face. They turned the man over. Natalie lifted his head.

Her father!

His face was bedabbled with blood. A wound, a frightful wound, was visible on the side of his bare head, high above the ear. He looked at her, his eyes recognized her, before he fainted again in her arms. His hands and his clothes were covered with earth stains. He must have traversed some distance; in that dreadful condition he must have faltered and fallen more than once before he reached the house. His sister wiped the blood from his face. His daughter called on him frantically to forgive her before he died—the harmless, gentle, kind-hearted father, who had never said a hard word to her! The father whom she had deceived!

The terrified servants hurried into the room. Their appearance roused their master from the extraordinary stupor that had seized him. He was at the window before the footman could get there. The two lifted Sir Joseph into the room, and laid him on the sofa. Natalie knelt by him, supporting his head. Miss Lavinia stanched the flowing blood with her handkerchief. The women-servants brought linen and cold water. The man hurried away for the doctor, who lived on the other side of the village. Left alone again with Turlington, Natalie noticed that his eyes were fixed in immovable scrutiny on her father's head. He never said a word. He looked, looked, looked at the wound.

The doctor arrived. Before either the daughter or the sister of the injured man could put the question, Turlington put it—"Will he live or die?"

The doctor's careful finger probed the wound.

"Make your minds easy. A little lower down, or in front, the blow might have been serious. As it is, there is no harm done. Keep him quiet, and he will be all right again in two or three days."

Hearing those welcome words, Natalie and her aunt sank on their knees in silent gratitude. After dressing the wound, the doctor looked round for the master of the house. Turlington, who had been so breathlessly eager but a few minutes since, seemed to have lost all interest in the case now. He stood apart, at the window, looking out toward the church-yard, thinking. The questions which it was the doctor's duty to ask were answered by the ladies. The servants assisted in examining the injured man's clothes: they discovered that his watch and purse were both missing. When it became necessary to carry him upstairs, it was the footman who assisted the doctor. The footman's master, without a word of explanation, walked out bare headed into the back garden, on the search, as the doctor and the servants supposed, for some trace of the robber who had attempted Sir Joseph's life.

His absence was hardly noticed at the time. The difficulty of conveying the wounded man to his room absorbed the attention of all the persons present.

Sir Joseph partially recovered his senses while they were taking him up the steep and narrow stairs. Carefully as they carried the patient, the motion wrung a groan from him before they reached the top. The bedroom corridor, in the rambling, irregularly built house rose and fell on different levels. At the door of the first bedchamber the doctor asked a little anxiously if that was the room. No; there were three more stairs to go down, and a corner to turn, before they could reach it. The first room was Natalie's. She instantly offered it for her father's use. The doctor (seeing that it was the airiest as well as the nearest room) accepted the proposal. Sir Joseph had been laid comfortably in his daughter's bed; the doctor had just left them, with renewed assurances that they need feel no anxiety, when they heard a heavy step below stairs. Turlington had re-entered the house.

(He had been looking, as they had supposed, for the ruffian who had attacked Sir Joseph; with a motive, however, for the search at which it was impossible for other persons to guess. His own safety was now bound up in the safety of Thomas Wildfang. As soon as he was out of sight in the darkness, he made straight for the malt-house. The change of clothes was there untouched; not a trace of his accomplice was to be seen. Where else to look for him it was impossible to tell. Turlington had no alternative but to go back to the house, and ascertain if suspicion had been aroused in his absence.)

He had only to ascend the stairs, and to see, through the open door, that Sir Joseph had been placed in his daughter's room.

"What does this mean?" he asked, roughly.

Before it was possible to answer him the footman appeared with a message. The doctor had come back to the door to say that he would take on himself the necessary duty of informing the constable of what had happened, on his return to the village. Turlington started and changed color. If Wildfang was found by others, and questioned in his employer's absence, serious consequences might follow. "The constable is my business," said Turlington, hurriedly descending the stairs; "I'll go with the doctor." They heard him open the door below, then close it again (as if some sudden thought had struck him), and call to the footman. The house was badly provided with servants' bedrooms. The women-servants only slept indoors. The footman occupied a room over the stables. Natalie and her aunt heard Turlington dismiss the man for the night, an hour earlier than usual at least. His next proceeding was
stranger still. Looking cautiously over the stairs, Natalie saw him lock all the doors on the ground-floor and take out the keys. When he went away, she heard him lock the front door behind him. Incredible as it seemed, there could be no doubt of the fact—the inmates of the house were imprisoned till he came back. What did it mean?

(It meant that Turlington's vengeance still remained to be wreaked on the woman who had deceived him. It meant that Sir Joseph's life still stood between the man who had compassed his death and the money which the man was resolved to have. It meant that Richard Turlington was driven to bay, and that the horror and the peril of the night were not at an end yet.)

Natalie and her aunt looked at each other across the bed on which Sir Joseph lay. He had fallen into a kind of doze; no enlightenment could come to them from _him_. They could only ask each other, with beating hearts and baffled minds, what Richard's conduct meant— they could only feel instinctively that some dreadful discovery was hanging over them. The aunt was the calmer of the two— there was no secret weighing heavily on _her_ conscience. _She_ could feel the consolations of religion. "Our dear one is spared to us, my love," said the old lady, gently. "God has been good to us. We are in his hands. If we know that, we know enough."

As she spoke there was a loud ring at the doorbell. The women-servants crowded into the bedroom in alarm. Strong in numbers, and encouraged by Natalie—who roused herself and led the way—they confronted the risk of opening the window and of venturing out on the balcony which extended along that side of the house. A man was dimly visible below. He called to them in thick, unsteady accents. The servants recognized him: he was the telegraphic messenger from the railway. They went down to speak to him—and returned with a telegram which had been pushed in under the door. The distance from the station was considerable; the messenger had been "keeping Christmas" in more than one beer-shop on his way to the house; and the delivery of the telegram had been delayed for some hours. It was addressed to Natalie. She opened it—looked at it—dropped it—and stood speechless; her lips parted in horror, her eyes staring vacantly straight before her.

Miss Lavinia took the telegram from the floor, and read these lines:

"Lady Winwood, Hertford Street, London. To Natalie Graybrooke, Church Meadows, Baxdale, Somersetshire. Dreadful news. R. T. has discovered your marriage to Launce. The truth has been kept from me till to-day (24th). Instant flight with your husband is your only chance. I do not know his address. You will receive this, I hope and believe, before R. T. can return to Somersetshire. Telegraph back, I entreat you, to say that you are safe. I shall follow my message if I do not hear from you in reasonable time."

Miss Lavinia lifted her gray head, and looked at her niece. "Is this true?" she said—and pointed to the venerable face laid back, white, on the white pillow of the bed. Natalie sank forward as her eyes met the eyes of her aunt. Miss Lavinia saved her from falling insensible on the floor.

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The confession had been made. The words of penitence and the words of pardon had been spoken. The peaceful face of the father still lay hushed in rest. One by one the minutes succeeded each other uneventfully in the deep tranquillity of the night. It was almost a relief when the silence was disturbed once more by another sound outside the house. A pebble was thrown up at the window, and a voice called out cautiously, "Miss Lavinia!"

They recognized the voice of the man-servant, and at once opened the window.

He had something to say to the ladies in private. How could he say it? A domestic circumstance which had been marked by Launce, as favorable to the contemplated elopement, was now noticed by the servant as lending itself readily to effecting the necessary communication with the ladies. The lock of the gardener's tool-house (in the shrubbery close by) was under repair; and the gardener's ladder was accessible to any one who wanted it. At the short height of the balcony from the ground, the ladder was more than long enough for the purpose required. In a few minutes the servant had mounted to the balcony, and could speak to Natalie and her aunt at the window.

"I can't rest quiet," said the man, "I'm off on the sly to see what's going on down in the village. It's hard on ladies like you to be locked in here. Is there anything I can do for either of you?"

Natalie took up Lady Winwood's telegram. "Launce ought to see this," she said to her aunt. "He will be here at daybreak," she added, in a whisper, "if I don't tell him what has happened."

Miss Lavinia turned pale. "If he and Richard meet--" she began. "Tell him!" she added, hurriedly—"tell him before it is too late!"

Natalie wrote a few lines (addressed to Launce in his assumed name at his lodgings in the village) inclosing Lady Winwood's telegram, and entreating him to do nothing rash. When the servant had disappeared with the letter, there was one hope in her mind and in her aunt's mind, which each was ashamed to acknowledge to the other—the hope that Launce would face the very danger that they dreaded for him, and come to the house.

They had not been long alone again, when Sir Joseph drowsily opened his eyes and asked what they were doing in his room. They told him gently that he was ill. He put his hand up to his head, and said they were right, and so dropped off again into slumber. Worn out by the emotions through which they had passed, the two women silently
waited for the march of events. The same stupor of resignation possessed them both. They had secured the door and
the window. They had prayed together. They had kissed the quiet face on the pillow. They had said to each other,
"We will live with him or die with him as God pleases." Miss Lavinia sat by the bedside. Natalie was on a stool at
her feet—with her eyes closed, and her head on her aunt's knee.

Time went on. The clock in the hall had struck—ten or eleven, they were not sure which—when they heard the
signal which warned them of the servant's return from the village. He brought news, and more than news; he brought
a letter from Launce.

Natalie read these lines:

"I shall be with you, dearest, almost as soon as you receive this. The bearer will tell you what has happened in
the village—your note throws a new light on it all. I only remain behind to go to the vicar (who is also the magistrate
here), and declare myself your husband. All disguise must be at an end now. My place is with you and yours. It is
even worse than your worst fears. Turlington was at the bottom of the attack on your father. Judge if you have not
need of your husband's protection after that!—L."

Natalie handed the letter to her aunt, and pointed to the sentence which asserted Turlington's guilty knowledge of
the attempt on Sir Joseph's life. In silent horror the two women looked at each other, recalling what had happened
earlier in the evening, and understanding it now. The servant roused them to a sense of present things, by entering on
the narrative of his discoveries in the village.

The place was all astir when he reached it. An old man—a stranger in Baxdale—had been found lying in the road,
close to the church, in a fit; and the person, in whom had discovered him had been no other than Launce himself. He had,
literally, stumbled over the body of Thomas Wildfang in the dark, on his way back to his lodgings in the village.

"The gentleman gave the alarm, miss," said the servant, describing the event, as it had been related to him, "and
the man—a huge, big old man—was carried to the inn. The landlord identified him; he had taken lodgings at the inn
that day, and the constable found valuable property on him—a purse of money and a gold watch and chain. There
was nothing to show who the money and the watch belonged to. It was only when my master and the doctor got to
the inn that it was known whom he had robbed and tried to murder. All he let out in his wanderings before they
came was that some person had set him on to do it. He called the person 'Captain,' and sometimes 'Captain Goward.'
It was thought—if you could trust the ravings of a madman—that the fit took him while he was putting his hand on
Sir Joseph's heart to feel if it had stopped beating. A sort of vision (as I understand it) must have overpowered him at
the moment. They tell me he raved about the sea bursting into the church yard, and a drowning sailor floating by on
a hen-coop; a sailor who dragged him down to hell by the hair of his head, and such like horrible nonsense, miss. He
was still screeching, at the worst of the fit, when my master and the doctor came into the room. At sight of one or
other of them—it is thought of Mr. Turlington, seeing that he came first—he held his peace on a sudden, and then fell
back in convulsions in the arms of the men who were holding him. The doctor gave it a learned name, signifying
drink-madness, and said the case was hopeless. However, he ordered the room to be cleared of the crowd to see what
he could do. My master was reported to be still with the doctor, waiting to see whether the man lived or died, when I
left the village, miss, with the gentleman's answer to your note. I didn't dare stay to hear how it ended, for fear of
Mr. Turlington's finding me out."

Having reached the end of his narrative, the man looked round restlessly toward the window. It was impossible
to say when his master might not return, and it might be as much as his life was worth to be caught in the house after
he had been locked out of it. He begged permission to open the window, and make his escape back to the stables
while there was still time. As he unbarred the shutter they were startled by a voice hailing them from below. It was
Launce's voice calling to Natalie. The servant disappeared, and Natalie was in Launce's arms before she could
breathe again.

For one delicious moment she let her head lie on his breast; then she suddenly pushed him away from her. "Why
do you come here? He will kill you if he finds you in the house. Where is he?"

Launce knew even less of Turlington's movements than the servant. "Wherever he is, thank God, I am here
before him!" That was all the answer he could give.

Natalie and her aunt heard him in silent dismay. Sir Joseph woke, and recognized Launce before a word more
could be said. "Ah, my dear boy!" he murmured, faintly. "It's pleasant to see you again. How do you come here?" He
was quite satisfied with the first excuse that suggested itself. "We'll talk about it to-morrow," he said, and composed
himself to rest again.

Natalie made a second attempt to persuade Launce to leave the house.

"We don't know what may have happened," she said. "He may have followed you on your way here. He may
have purposely let you enter his house. Leave us while you have the chance."

Miss Lavinia added her persuasions. They were useless. Launce quietly closed the heavy window-shutters, lined
with iron, and put up the bar. Natalie wrung her hands in despair.
"Have you been to the magistrate?" she asked. "Tell us, at least, are you here by his advice? Is he coming to help us?"

Launce hesitated. If he had told the truth, he must have acknowledged that he was there in direct opposition to the magistrate's advice. He answered evasively, "If the vicar doesn't come, the doctor will. I have told him Sir Joseph must be moved. Cheer up, Natalie! The doctor will be here as soon as Turlington."

As the name passed his lips—without a sound outside to prepare them for what was coming—the voice of Turlington himself suddenly penetrated into the room, speaking close behind the window, on the outer side.

"You have broken into my house in the night," said the voice. "And you don't escape _this_ way."

Miss Lavinia sank on her knees. Natalie flew to her father. His eyes were wide open in terror; he moaned, feebly recognizing the voice. The next sound that was heard was the sound made by the removal of the ladder from the balcony. Turlington, having descended by it, had taken it away. Natalie had but too accurately guessed what would happen. The death of the villain's accomplice had freed him from all apprehension in that quarter. He had deliberately dogged Launce's steps, and had deliberately allowed him to put himself in the wrong by effecting a secret entrance into the house.

There was an interval—a horrible interval—and then they heard the front door opened. Without stopping (judging by the absence of sound) to close it again, Turlington rapidly ascended the stairs and tried the locked door.

"Come out, and give yourself up!" he called through the door. "I have got my revolver with me, and I have a right to fire on a man who has broken into my house. If the door isn't opened before I count three, your blood be on your own head. One!"

Launce was armed with nothing but his stick. He advanced, without an instant's hesitation, to give himself up. Natalie threw her arms round him and clasped him fast before he could reach the door.

"Two!" cried the voice outside, as Launce struggled to force her from him. At the same moment his eye turned toward the bed. It was exactly opposite the door—it was straight in the line of fire! Sir Joseph's life (as Turlington had deliberately calculated) was actually in greater danger than Launce's life. He tore himself free, rushed to the bed, and took the old man in his arms to lift him out.

"Three!"

The crash of the report sounded. The bullet came through the door, grazed Launce's left arm, and buried itself in the pillow, at the very place on which Sir Joseph's head had rested the moment before. Launce had saved his father-in-law's life. Turlington had fired his first shot for the money, and had not got it yet.

They were safe in the corner of the room, on the same side as the door—Sir Joseph, helpless as a child, in Launce's arms; the women pale, but admirably calm. They were safe for the moment, when the second bullet (fired at an angle) tore its way through the wall on their right hand.

"I hear you," cried the voice of the miscreant on the other side of the door. "I'll have you yet—through the wall."

There was a pause. They heard his hand sounding the wall, to find out where there was solid wood in the material of which it was built, and where there was plaster only. At that dreadful moment Launce's composure never left him. He laid Sir Joseph softly on the floor, and signed to Natalie and her aunt to lie down by him in silence. Their lives depended now on neither their voices nor their movements telling the murderer where to fire. He chose his place. The barrel of the revolver grated as he laid it against the wall. He touched the hair trigger. A faint _click_ was the only sound that followed. The third barrel had missed fire.

They heard him ask himself, with an oath, "What's wrong with it now?"

There was a pause of silence.

Was he examining the weapon?

Before they could ask themselves the question, the report of the exploding charge burst on their ears. It was instantly followed by a heavy fall. They looked at the opposite wall of the room. No sign of a bullet there or anywhere.

Launce signed to them not to move yet. They waited, and listened. Nothing stirred on the landing outside.

Suddenly there was a disturbance of the silence in the lower regions—a clamor of many voices at the open house door. Had the firing of the revolver been heard at the vicarage? Yes! They recognized the vicar's voice among the others. A moment more, and they heard a general exclamation of horror on the stairs. Launce opened the door of the room. He instantly closed it again before Natalie could follow him.

The dead body of Turlington lay on the landing outside. The charge in the fourth barrel of the revolver had exploded while he was looking at it. The bullet had entered his mouth and killed him on the spot.

**DOCUMENTARY HINTS, IN CONCLUSION.**

First Hint.
(Derived from Lady Winwood's Card-Rack.)

"Sir Joseph Graybrooke and Miss Graybrooke request the honor of Lord and Lady Winwood's company to
dinner, on Wednesday, February 10, at half-past seven o'clock. To meet Mr. and Mrs. Launcelot Linzie on their return."

Second Hint.
(Derived from a recent Money Article in morning Newspaper.)
"We are requested to give the fullest contradiction to unfavorable rumors lately in circulation respecting the firm of Pizzituti, Turlington, and Branca. Some temporary derangement in the machinery of the business was undoubtedly produced in consequence of the sudden death of the lamented managing partner, Mr. Turlington, by the accidental discharge of a revolver which he was examining. Whatever temporary obstacles may have existed are now overcome. We are informed, on good authority, that the well-known house of Messrs. Bulpit Brothers has an interest in the business, and will carry it on until further notice."
We are three quiet, lonely old men, and SHE was a lively, handsome young woman, and we were at our wits' end what to do with her.

A word about ourselves, first of all—a necessary word, to explain the singular situation of our fair young guest.

We are three brothers; and we live in a barbarous, dismal old house called The Glen Tower. Our place of abode stands in a hilly, lonesome district of South Wales. No such thing as a line of railway runs anywhere near us. No gentleman's seat is within an easy drive of us. We are at an unspeakably inconvenient distance from a town, and the village to which we send for our letters is three miles off.

My eldest brother, Owen, was brought up to the Church. All the prime of his life was passed in a populous London parish. For more years than I now like to reckon up, he worked unremittingly, in defiance of failing health and adverse fortune, amid the multitudinous misery of the London poor; and he would, in all probability, have sacrificed his life to his duty long before the present time if The Glen Tower had not come into his possession through two unexpected deaths in the elder and richer branch of our family. This opening to him of a place of rest and refuge saved his life. No man ever drew breath who better deserved the gifts of fortune; for no man, I sincerely believe, more tender of others, more diffident of himself, more gentle, more generous, and more simple-hearted than Owen, ever walked this earth.

My second brother, Morgan, started in life as a doctor, and learned all that his profession could teach him at home and abroad. He realized a moderate independence by his practice, beginning in one of our large northern towns and ending as a physician in London; but, although he was well known and appreciated among his brethren,
he failed to gain that sort of reputation with the public which elevates a man into the position of a great doctor. The ladies never liked him. In the first place, he was ugly (Morgan will excuse me for mentioning this); in the second place, he was an inveterate smoker, and he smelled of tobacco when he felt languid pulses in elegant bedrooms; in the third place, he was the most formidably outspoken teller of the truth as regarded himself, his profession, and his patients, that ever imperiled the social standing of the science of medicine. For these reasons, and for others which it is not necessary to mention, he never pushed his way, as a doctor, into the front ranks, and he never cared to do so. About a year after Owen came into possession of The Glen Tower, Morgan discovered that he had saved as much money for his old age as a sensible man could want; that he was tired of the active pursuit—or, as he termed it, of the dignified quackery of his profession; and that it was only common charity to give his invalid brother a companion who could physic him for nothing, and so prevent him from getting rid of his money in the worst of all possible ways, by wasting it on doctors' bills. In a week after Morgan had arrived at these conclusions, he was settled at The Glen Tower; and from that time, opposite as their characters were, my two elder brothers lived together in their lonely retreat, thoroughly understanding, and, in their very different ways, heartily loving one another.

Many years passed before I, the youngest of the three—christened by the unmelodious name of Griffith—found my way, in my turn, to the dreary old house, and the sheltering quiet of the Welsh hills. My career in life had led me away from my brothers; and even now, when we are all united, I have still ties and interests to connect me with the outer world which neither Owen nor Morgan possess.

I was brought up to the Bar. After my first year's study of the law, I wearied of it, and strayed aside idly into the brighter and more attractive paths of literature. My occasional occupation with my pen was varied by long traveling excursions in all parts of the Continent; year by year my circle of gay friends and acquaintances increased, and I bade fair to sink into the condition of a wandering desultory man, without a fixed purpose in life of any sort, when I was saved by what has saved many another in my situation—an attachment to a good and a sensible woman. By the time I had reached the age of thirty-five, I had done what neither of my brothers had done before me—I had married.

As a single man, my own small independence, aided by what little additions to it I could pick up with my pen, had been sufficient for my wants; but with marriage and its responsibilities came the necessity for serious exertion. I returned to my neglected studies, and grappled resolutely, this time, with the intricate difficulties of the law. I was called to the Bar. My wife's father aided me with his interest, and I started into practice without difficulty and without delay.

For the next twenty years my married life was a scene of happiness and prosperity, on which I now look back with a grateful tenderness that no words of mine can express. The memory of my wife is busy at my heart while I think of those past times. The forgotten tears rise in my eyes again, and trouble the course of my pen while it traces these simple lines.

Let me pass rapidly over the one unspeakable misery of my life; let me try to remember now, as I tried to remember then, that she lived to see our only child—our son, who was so good to her, who is still so good to me—grow up to manhood; that her head lay on my bosom when she died; and that the last frail movement of her hand in this world was the movement that brought it closer to her boy's lips.

I bore the blow—with God's help I bore it, and bear it still. But it struck me away forever from my hold on social life; from the purposes and pursuits, the companions and the pleasures of twenty years, which her presence had sanctioned and made dear to me. If my son George had desired to follow my profession, I should still have struggled against myself, and have kept my place in the world until I had seen him prosperous and settled. But his choice led him to the army; and before his mother's death he had obtained his commission, and had entered on his path in life. No other responsibility remained to claim from me the sacrifice of my old age as a sensible man could want; that he was tired of the active pursuit—or, as he termed it, of the dignified quackery of his profession; and that it was only common charity to give his invalid brother a companion who could physic him for nothing, and so prevent him from getting rid of his money in the worst of all possible ways, by wasting it on doctors' bills. In a week after Morgan had arrived at these conclusions, he was settled at The Glen Tower; and from that time, opposite as their characters were, my two elder brothers lived together in their lonely retreat, thoroughly understanding, and, in their very different ways, heartily loving one another.

How many years have passed since we have all three been united it is not necessary to relate. It will be more to the purpose if I briefly record that we have never been separated since the day which first saw us assembled together in our hillside retreat; that we have never yet wearied of the time, of the place, or of ourselves; and that the influence of solitude on our hearts and minds has not altered them for the worse, for it has not embittered us toward our fellow-creatures, and it has not dried up in us the sources from which harmless occupations and innocent pleasures may flow refreshingly to the last over the waste places of human life. Thus much for our own story, and for the circumstances which have withdrawn us from the world for the rest of our days.

And now imagine us three lonely old men, tall and lean, and white-headed; dressed, more from past habit than from present association, in customary suits of solemn black: Brother Owen, yielding, gentle, and affectionate in
look, voice, and manner; brother Morgan, with a quaint, surface-sourness of address, and a tone of dry sarcasm in his talk, which single him out, on all occasions, as a character in our little circle; brother Griffith forming the link between his two elder companions, capable, at one time, of sympathizing with the quiet, thoughtful tone of Owen's conversation, and ready, at another, to exchange brisk severities on life and manners with Morgan—in short, a pliable, double-sided old lawyer, who stands between the clergyman-brother and the physician-brother with an ear ready for each, and with a heart open to both, share and share together.

Imagine the strange old building in which we live to be really what its name implies—a tower standing in a glen; in past times the fortress of a fighting Welsh chief; in present times a dreary land-lighthouse, built up in many stories of two rooms each, with a little modern lean-to of cottage form tacked on quaintly to one of its sides; the great hill, on whose lowest slope it stands, rising precipitously behind it; a dark, swift-flowing stream in the valley below; hills on hills all round, and no way of approach but by one of the loneliest and wildest crossroads in all South Wales.

Imagine such a place of abode as this, and such inhabitants of it as ourselves, and them picture the descent among us—as of a goddess dropping from the clouds—as of a lively, handsome, fashionable young lady—a bright, gay, butterfly creature, used to flutter away its existence in the broad sunshine of perpetual gayety—a child of the new generation, with all the modern ideas whirling together in her pretty head, and all the modern accomplishments at the tips of her delicate fingers. Imagine such a light-hearted daughter of Eve as this, the spoiled darling of society, the charming spendthrift of Nature's choicest treasures of beauty and youth, suddenly flashing into the dim life of three weary old men—suddenly dropped into the place, of all others, which is least fit for her—suddenly shut out from the world in the lonely quiet of the loneliest home in England. Realize, if it be possible, all that is most whimsical and most anomalous in such a situation as this, and the startling confession contained in the opening sentence of these pages will no longer excite the faintest emotion of surprise. Who can wonder now, when our bright young goddess really descended on us, that I and my brothers were all three at our wits' end what to do with her!

CHAPTER II.
OUR DILEMMA.

Who is the young lady? And how did she find her way into The Glen Tower?

Her name (in relation to which I shall have something more to say a little further on) is Jessie Yelverton. She is an orphan and an only child. Her mother died while she was an infant; her father was my dear and valued friend, Major Yelverton. He lived long enough to celebrate his darling's seventh birthday. When he died he intrusted his authority over her and his responsibility toward her to his brother and to me.

When I was summoned to the reading of the major's will, I knew perfectly well that I should hear myself appointed guardian and executor with his brother; and I had been also made acquainted with my lost friend's wishes as to his daughter's education, and with his intentions as to the disposal of all his property in her favor. My own idea, therefore, was, that the reading of the will would inform me of nothing which I had not known in the testator's conclusion. Toward the end of the document there was a clause inserted which took me entirely by surprise.

After providing for the education of Miss Yelverton under the direction of her guardians, and for her residence, under ordinary circumstances, with the major's sister, Lady Westwick, the clause concluded by saddling the child's future inheritance with this curious condition:

From the period of her leaving school to the period of her reaching the age of twenty-one years, Miss Yelverton was to pass not less than six consecutive weeks out of every year under the roof of one of her two guardians. During the lives of both of them, it was left to her own choice to say which of the two she would prefer to live with. In all other respects the condition was imperative. If she forfeited it, excepting, of course, the case of the deaths of both her guardians, she was only to have a life-interest in the property; if she obeyed it, the money itself was to become her own possession on the day when she completed her twenty-first year.

This clause in the will, as I have said, took me at first by surprise. I remembered how devotedly Lady Westwick had soothed her sister-in-law's death-bed sufferings, and how tenderly she had afterward watched over the welfare of the little motherless child—I remembered the innumerable claims she had established in this way on her brother's confidence in her affection for his orphan daughter, and I was, therefore, naturally amazed at the appearance of a condition in his will which seemed to show a positive distrust of Lady Westwick's undivided influence over the character and conduct of her niece.

A few words from my fellow-guardian, Mr. Richard Yelverton, and a little after-consideration of some of my deceased friend's peculiarities of disposition and feeling, to which I had not hitherto attached sufficient importance, were enough to make me understand the motives by which he had been influenced in providing for the future of his child.

Major Yelverton had raised himself to a position of affluence and eminence from a very humble origin. He was
the son of a small farmer, and it was his pride never to forget this circumstance, never to be ashamed of it, and never to allow the prejudices of society to influence his own settled opinions on social questions in general.

Acting, in all that related to his intercourse with the world, on such principles as these, the major, it is hardly necessary to say, held some strangely heterodox opinions on the modern education of girls, and on the evil influence of society over the characters of women in general. Out of the strength of those opinions, and out of the certainty of his conviction that his sister did not share them, had grown that condition in his will which removed his daughter from the influence of her aunt for six consecutive weeks in every year. Lady Westwick was the most light-hearted, the most generous, the most impulsive of women; capable, when any serious occasion called it forth, of all that was devoted and self-sacrificing, but, at other and ordinary times, constitutionally restless, frivolous, and eager for perpetual gayety. Distrusting the sort of life which he knew his daughter would lead under her aunt's roof, and at the same time gratefully remembering his sister's affectionate devotion toward his dying wife and her helpless infant, Major Yelverton had attempted to make a compromise, which, while it allowed Lady Westwick the close domestic intercourse with her niece that she had earned by innumerable kind offices, should, at the same time, place the young girl for a fixed period of every year of her minority under the corrective care of two such quiet old-fashioned guardians as his brother and myself. Such is the history of the clause in the will. My friend little thought, when he dictated it, of the extraordinary result to which it was one day to lead.

For some years, however, events ran on smoothly enough. Little Jessie was sent to an excellent school, with strict instructions to the mistress to make a good girl of her, and not a fashionable young lady. Although she was reported to be anything but a pattern pupil in respect of attention to her lessons, she became from the first the chosen favorite of every one about her. The very offenses which she committed against the discipline of the school were of the sort which provoke a smile even on the stern countenance of authority itself. One of these quaint freaks of mischief may not inappropriately be mentioned here, inasmuch as it gained her the pretty nickname under which she will be found to appear occasionally in these pages.

On a certain autumn night shortly after the Midsummer vacation, the mistress of the school fancied she saw a light under the door of the bedroom occupied by Jessie and three other girls. It was then close on midnight; and, fearing that some case of sudden illness might have happened, she hastened into the room. On opening the door, she discovered, to her horror and amazement, that all four girls were out of bed--were dressed in brilliantly-fantastic costumes, representing the four grotesque "Queens" of Hearts, Diamonds, Spades, and Clubs, familiar to us all on the pack of cards--and were dancing a quadrille, in which Jessie sustained the character of The Queen of Hearts. The next morning's investigation disclosed that Miss Yelverton had smuggled the dresses into the school, and had amused herself by giving an impromptu fancy ball to her companions, in imitation of an entertainment of the same kind at which she had figured in a "court-card" quadrille at her aunt's country house.

The dresses were instantly confiscated and the necessary punishment promptly administered; but the remembrance of Jessie's extraordinary outrage on bedroom discipline lasted long enough to become one of the traditions of the school, and she and her sister-culprits were thenceforth hailed as the "queens" of the four "suites" by their class-companions whenever the mistress's back was turned, Whatever might have become of the nicknames thus employed in relation to the other three girls, such a mock title as The Queen of Hearts was too appropriately descriptive of the natural charm of Jessie's character, as well as of the adventure in which she had taken the lead, not to rise naturally to the lips of every one who knew her. It followed her to her aunt's house--it came to be as habitually and familiarly connected with her, among her friends of all ages, as if it had been formally inscribed on her baptismal register; and it has stolen its way into these pages because it falls from my pen naturally and inevitably, exactly as it often falls from my lips in real life.

When Jessie left school the first difficulty presented itself--in other words, the necessity arose of fulfilling the conditions of the will. At that time I was already settled at The Glen Tower, and her living six weeks in our dismal solitude and our humdrum society was, as she herself frankly wrote me word, quite out of the question. Fortunately, she had always got on well with her uncle and his family; so she exerted her liberty of choice, and, much to her own relief and to mine also, passed her regular six weeks of probation, year after year, under Mr. Richard Yelverton's roof.

During this period I heard of her regularly, sometimes from my fellow-guardian, sometimes from my son George, who, whenever his military duties allowed him the opportunity, contrived to see her, now at her aunt's house, and now at Mr. Yelverton's. The particulars of her character and conduct, which I gleaned in this way, more than sufficed to convince me that the poor major's plan for the careful training of his daughter's disposition, though plausible enough in theory, was little better than a total failure in practice. Miss Jessie, to use the expressive common phrase, took after her aunt. She was as generous, as impulsive, as light-hearted, as fond of change, and gayety, and fine clothes--in short, as complete and genuine a woman as Lady Westwick herself. It was impossible to reform the "Queen of Hearts," and equally impossible not to love her. Such, in few words, was my fellow-guardian's
report of his experience of our handsome young ward.

So the time passed till the year came of which I am now writing--the ever-memorable year, to England, of the Russian war. It happened that I had heard less than usual at this period, and indeed for many months before it, of Jessie and her proceedings. My son had been ordered out with his regiment to the Crimea in 1854, and had other work in hand now than recording the sayings and doings of a young lady. Mr. Richard Yelverton, who had been hitherto used to write to me with tolerable regularity, seemed now, for some reason that I could not conjecture, to have forgotten my existence. Ultimately I was reminded of my ward by one of George's own letters, in which he asked for news of her; and I wrote at once to Mr. Yelverton. The answer that reached me was written by his wife: he was dangerously ill. The next letter that came informed me of his death. This happened early in the spring of the year 1855.

I am ashamed to confess it, but the change in my own position was the first idea that crossed my mind when I read the news of Mr. Yelverton's death. I was now left sole guardian, and Jessie Yelverton wanted a year still of coming of age.

By the next day's post I wrote to her about the altered state of the relations between us. She was then on the Continent with her aunt, having gone abroad at the very beginning of the year. Consequently, so far as eighteen hundred and fifty-five was concerned, the condition exacted by the will yet remained to be performed. She had still six weeks to pass--her last six weeks, seeing that she was now twenty years old--under the roof of one of her guardians, and I was now the only guardian left.

In due course of time I received my answer, written on rose-colored paper, and expressed throughout in a tone of light, easy, feminine banter, which amused me in spite of myself. Miss Jessie, according to her own account, was hesitating, on receipt of my letter, between two alternatives--the one, of allowing herself to be buried six weeks in The Glen Tower; the other, of breaking the condition, giving up the money, and remaining magnanimously contented with nothing but a life-interest in her father's property. At present she inclined decidedly toward giving up the money and escaping the clutches of "the three horrid old men;" but she would let me know again if she happened to change her mind. And so, with best love, she would beg to remain always affectionately mine, as long as she was well out of my reach.

The summer passed, the autumn came, and I never heard from her again. Under ordinary circumstances, this long silence might have made me feel a little uneasy. But news reached me about this time from the Crimea that my son was wounded--not dangerously, thank God, but still severely enough to be la id up--and all my anxieties were now centered in that direction. By the beginning of September, however, I got better accounts of him, and my mind was made easy enough to let me think of Jessie again. Just as I was considering the necessity of writing once more to my refractory ward, a second letter arrived from her. She had returned at last from abroad, had suddenly changed her mind, suddenly grown sick of society, suddenly become enamored of the pleasures of retirement, and suddenly found out that the three horrid old men were three dear old men, and that six weeks' solitude at The Glen Tower was the luxury, of all others, that she languished for most. As a necessary result of this altered state of things, she would therefore now propose to spend her allotted six weeks with her guardian. We might certainly expect her on the twentieth of September, and she would take the greatest care to fit herself for our society by arriving in the lowest possible spirits, and bringing her own sackcloth and ashes along with her.

The first ordeal to which this alarming letter forced me to submit was the breaking of the news it contained to my two brothers. The disclosure affected them very differently. Poor dear Owen merely turned pale, lifted his weak, thin hands in a panic-stricken manner, and then sat staring at me in speechless and motionless bewilderment. Morgan stood up straight before me, plunged both his hands into his pockets, burst suddenly into the harshest laugh I ever heard from his lips, and told me, with an air of triumph, that it was exactly what he expected.

"What you expected?" I repeated, in astonishment.

"Yes," returned Morgan, with his bitterest emphasis. "It doesn't surprise me in the least. It's the way things go in this world--it's the regular moral see-saw of good and evil--the old story with the old end to it. They were too happy in the garden of Eden--down comes the serpent and turns them out. Solomon was too wise--down comes the Queen of Sheba, and makes a fool of him. We've been too comfortable at The Glen Tower--down comes a woman, and sets us all three by the ears together. All I wonder at is that it hasn't happened before." With those words Morgan resignedly took out his pipe, put on his old felt hat and turned to the door.

"You're not going away before she comes?" exclaimed Owen, piteously. "Don't leave us--please don't leave us!"

"Going!" cried Morgan, with great contempt. "What should I gain by that? When destiny has found a man out, and heated his gridiron for him, he has nothing left to do, that I know of, but to get up and sit on it."

I opened my lips to protest against the implied comparison between a young lady and a hot gridiron, but, before I could speak, Morgan was gone.

"Well," I said to Owen, "we must make the best of it. We must brush up our manners, and set the house tidy, and
amuse her as well as we can. The difficulty is where to put her; and, when that is settled, the next puzzle will be, what to order in to make her comfortable. It's a hard thing, brother, to say what will or what will not please a young lady's taste."

Owen looked absently at me, in greater bewilderment than ever--opened his eyes in perplexed consideration--repeated to himself slowly the word "tastes"--and then helped me with this suggestion:

"Hadn't we better begin, Griffith, by getting her a plum-cake?"

"My dear Owen," I remonstrated, "it is a grown young woman who is coming to see us, not a little girl from school."

"Oh!" said Owen, more confused than before. "Yes--I see; we couldn't do wrong, I suppose--could we?--if we got her a little dog, and a lot of new gowns."

There was, evidently, no more help in the way of advice to be expected from Owen than from Morgan himself. As I came to that conclusion, I saw through the window our old housekeeper on her way, with her basket, to the kitchen-garden, and left the room to ascertain if she could assist us.

To my great dismay, the housekeeper took even a more gloomy view than Morgan of the approaching event. When I had explained all the circumstances to her, she carefully put down her basket, crossed her arms, and said to me in slow, deliberate, mysterious tones:

"You want my advice about what's to be done with this young woman? Well, sir, here's my advice: Don't you trouble your head about her. It won't be no use. Mind, I tell you, it won't be no use."

"What do you mean?"

"You look at this place, sir--it's more like a prison than a house, isn't it? You, look at us as lives in it. We've got (saving your presence) a foot apiece in our graves, haven't we? When you was young yourself, sir, what would you have done if they had shut you up for six weeks in such a place as this, among your grandfathers and grandmothers, with their feet in the grave?"

"I really can't say."

"I can, sir. You'd have run away. She'll run away. Don't you worry your head about her--she'll save you the trouble. I tell you again, she'll run away."

With those ominous words the housekeeper took up her basket, sighed heavily, and left me.

I sat down under a tree quite helpless. Here was the whole responsibility shifted upon my miserable shoulders. Not a lady in the neighborhood to whom I could apply for assistance, and the nearest shop eight miles distant from us. The toughest case I ever had to conduct, when I was at the Bar, was plain sailing compared with the difficulty of receiving our fair guest.

It was absolutely necessary, however, to decide at once where she was to sleep. All the rooms in the tower were of stone--dark, gloomy, and cold even in the summer-time. Impossible to put her in any one of them. The only other alternative was to lodge her in the little modern lean-to, which I have already described as being tacked on to the side of the old building. It contained three cottage-rooms, and they might be made barely habitable for a young lady. But then those rooms were occupied by Morgan. His books were in one, his bed was in another, his pipes and general lumber were in the third. Could I expect him, after the sour similitudes he had used in reference to our expected visitor, to turn out of his habitation and disarrange all his habits for her convenience? The bare idea of proposing the thing to him seemed ridiculous; and yet inexorable necessity left me no choice but to make the hopeless experiment. I walked back to the tower hastily and desperately, to face the worst that might happen before my courage cooled altogether.

On crossing the threshold of the hall door I was stopped, to my great amazement, by a procession of three of the farm-servants, followed by Morgan, all walking after each other, in Indian file, toward the spiral staircase that led to the top of the tower. The first of the servants carried the materials for making a fire; the second bore an inverted arm-chair on his head; the third tottered under a heavy load of books; while Morgan came last, with his canister of tobacco in his hand, his dressing-gown over his shoulders, and his whole collection of pipes hugged up together in a bundle under his arm.

"What on earth does this mean?" I inquired.

"It means taking Time by the forelock," answered Morgan, looking at me with a smile of sour satisfaction. "I've got the start of your young woman, Griffith, and I'm making the most of it."

"But where, in Heaven's name, are you going?" I asked, as the head man of the procession disappeared with his firing up the staircase.

"How high is this tower?" retorted Morgan.

"Seven stories, to be sure," I replied.

"Very good," said my eccentric brother, setting his foot on the first stair, "I'm going up to the seventh."

"You can't," I shouted.
"She can't, you mean," said Morgan, "and that's exactly why I'm going there."
"But the room is not furnished."
"It's out of her reach."
"One of the windows has fallen to pieces."
"It's out of her reach."
"There's a crow's nest in the corner."
"It's out of her reach."

By the time this unanswerable argument had attained its third repetition, Morgan, in his turn, had disappeared up the winding stairs. I knew him too well to attempt any further protest.

Here was my first difficulty smoothed away most unexpectedly; for here were the rooms in the lean-to placed by their owner's free act and deed at my disposal. I wrote on the spot to the one upholsterer of our distant county town to come immediately and survey the premises, and sent off a mounted messenger with the letter. This done, and the necessary order also dispatched to the carpenter and glazier to set them at work on Morgan's sky-parlor in the seventh story, I began to feel, for the first time, as if my scattered wits were coming back to me. By the time the evening had closed in I had hit on no less than three excellent ideas, all providing for the future comfort and amusement of our fair guest. The first idea was to get her a Welsh pony; the second was to hire a piano from the county town; the third was to send for a boxful of novels from London. I must confess I thought these projects for pleasing her very happily conceived, and Owen agreed with me. Morgan, as usual, took the opposite view. He said she would yawn over the novels, turn up her nose at the piano, and fracture her skull with the pony. As for the housekeeper, she stuck to her text as stoutly in the evening as she had stuck to it in the morning. "Piaanner or no piaanner, story-book or no story-book, pony or no pony, you mark my words, sir--that young woman will run away."

Such were the housekeeper's parting words when she wished me good-night.

When the next morning came, and brought with it that terrible waking time which sets a man's hopes and projects before him, the great as well as the small, stripped bare of every illusion, it is not to be concealed that I felt less sanguine of our success in entertaining the coming guest. So far as external preparations were concerned, there seemed, indeed, but little to improve; but apart from these, what had we to offer, in ourselves and our society, to attract her? There lay the knotty point of the question, and there the grand difficulty of finding an answer.

I fall into serious reflection while I am dressing on the pursuits and occupations with which we three brothers have been accustomed, for years past, to beguile the time. Are they at all likely, in the case of any one of us, to interest or amuse her?

My chief occupation, to begin with the youngest, consists, in acting as steward on Owen's property. The routine of my duties has never lost its sober attraction to my tastes, for it has always employed me in watching the best interests of my brother, and of my son also, who is one day to be his heir. But can I expect our fair guest to sympathize with such family concerns as these? Clearly not.

Morgan's pursuit comes next in order of review--a pursuit of a far more ambitious nature than mine. It was always part of my second brother's whimsical, self-contradictory character to view with the profoundest contempt the learned profession by which he gained his livelihood, and he is now occupying the long leisure hours of his old age in composing a voluminous treatise, intended, one of these days, to eject the whole body corporate of doctors from the position which they have usurped in the estimation of their fellow-creatures. This daring work is entitled "An Examination of the Claims of Medicine on the Gratitude of Mankind. Decided in the Negative by a Retired Physician." So far as I can tell, the book is likely to extend to the dimensions of an Encyclopedia; for it is Morgan's plan to treat his comprehensive subject principally from the historical point of view, and to run down all the doctors of antiquity, one after another, in regular succession, from the first of the tribe. When I last heard of his progress he was hard on the heels of Hippocrates, but had no immediate prospect of tripping up his successor, Is this the sort of occupation (I ask myself) in which a modern young lady is likely to feel the slightest interest? Once again, clearly not.

Owen's favorite employment is, in its way, quite as characteristic as Morgan's, and it has the great additional advantage of appealing to a much larger variety of tastes. My eldest brother--great at drawing and painting when he was a lad, always interested in artists and their works in after life--has resumed, in his declining years, the holiday occupation of his schoolboy days. As an amateur landscape-painter, he works with more satisfaction to himself, uses more color, wears out more brushes, and makes a greater smell of paint in his studio than any artist by profession, native or foreign, whom I ever met with. In look, in manner, and in disposition, the gentlest of mankind, Owen, by some singular anomaly in his character, which he seems to have caught from Morgan, glories placidly in the wildest and most frightful range of subjects which his art is capable of representing. Immeasurable ruins, in howling wildernesses, with blood-red sunsets gleaming over them; thunder-clouds rent with lightning, hovering over splitting trees on the verges of awful precipices; hurricanes, shipwrecks, waves, and whirlpools follow each other on his
canvas, without an intervening glimpse of quiet everyday nature to relieve the succession of pictorial horrors. When I see him at his easel, so neat and quiet, so unpretending and modest in himself, with such a composed expression on his attentive face, with such a weak white hand to guide such bold, big brushes, and when I look at the frightful canvassful of terrors which he is serenely aggravating in fierceness and intensity with every successive touch, I find it difficult to realize the connection between my brother and his work, though I see them before me not six inches apart. Will this quaint spectacle possess any humorous attractions for Miss Jessie? Perhaps it may. There is some slight chance that Owen's employment will be lucky enough to interest her.

Thus far my morning cogitations advance doubtfully enough, but they altogether fail in carrying me beyond the narrow circle of The Glen Tower. I try hard, in our visitor's interest, to look into the resources of the little world around us, and I find my efforts rewarded by the prospect of a total blank.

Is there any presentable living soul in the neighborhood whom we can invite to meet her? Not one. There are, as I have already said, no country seats near us; and society in the county town has long since learned to regard us as three misanthropes, strongly suspected, from our monastic way of life and our dismal black costume, of being popish priests in disguise. In other parts of England the clergyman of the parish might help us out of our difficulty; but here in South Wales, and in this latter half of the nineteenth century, we have the old type parson of the days of Fielding still in a state of perfect preservation. Our local clergyman receives a stipend which is too paltry to bear comparison with the wages of an ordinary mechanic. In dress, manners, and tastes he is about on a level with the upper class of agricultural laborer. When attempts have been made by well-meaning gentlefolks to recognize the claims of his profession by asking him to their houses, he has been known, on more than one occasion, to leave his plowman's pair of shoes in the hall, and enter the drawing-room respectfully in his stockings. Where he preaches, miles and miles away from us and from the poor cottage in which he lives, if he sees any of the company in the squire's pew yawn or fidget in their places, he takes it as a hint that they are tired of listening, and closes his sermon instantly at the end of the sentence. Can we ask this most irreverend and unclerical of men to meet a young lady? I doubt, even if we made the attempt, whether we should succeed, by fair means, in getting him beyond the servants' hall.

Dismissing, therefore, all idea of inviting visitors to entertain our guest, and feeling, at the same time, more than doubtful of her chance of discovering any attraction in the sober society of the inmates of the house, I finish my dressing and go down to breakfast, secretly veering round to the housekeeper's opinion that Miss Jessie will really doubt of her chance of discovering any attraction in the sober society of the inmates of the house, I finish my dressing and go down to breakfast, secretly veering round to the housekeeper's opinion that Miss Jessie will really bring matters to an abrupt conclusion by running away. I find Morgan as bitterly resigned to his destiny as ever, and Owen so affectionately anxious to make himself of some use, and so lamentably ignorant of how to begin, that I am driven to disembarrass myself of him at the outset by a stratagem.

I suggest to him that our visitor is sure to be interested in pictures, and that it would be a pretty attention, on his part, to paint her a landscape to hang up in her room. Owen brightens directly, informs me in his softest tones that he is then at work on the Earthquake at Lisbon, and inquires whether I think she would like that subject. I preserve my gravity sufficiently to answer in the affirmative, and my brother retires meekly to his studio, to depict the engulfing of a city and the destruction of a population. Morgan withdraws in his turn to the top of the tower, threatening, when our guest comes, to draw all his meals up to his new residence by means of a basket and string. I am left alone for an hour, and then the upholsterer arrives from the county town.

This worthy man, on being informed of our emergency, sees his way, apparently, to a good stroke of business, and thereupon wins my lasting gratitude by taking, in opposition to every one else, a bright and hopeful view of existing circumstances.

"You'll excuse me, sir," he says, confidentially, when I show him the rooms in the lean-to, "but this is a matter of experience. I'm a family man myself, with grown-up daughters of my own, and the natures of young women are well known to me. Make their rooms comfortable, and you make 'em happy. Surround their lives, sir, with a suitable atmosphere of furniture, and you never hear a word of complaint drop from their lips. Now, with regard to these rooms, for example, sir--you put a neat French bedstead in that corner, with curtains conformable--say a tasty chintz; you put on that bedstead what I will term a sufficiency of bedding; and you top up with a sweet little eider-down quilt, as light as roses, and similar the same in color. You do that, and what follows? You please her eye when she lies down at night, and you please her eye when she gets up in the morning--and you're all right so far, and so is she. I will not dwell, sir, on the toilet-table, nor will I seek to detain you about the glass to show her figure, and the other glass to show her face, because I have the articles in stock, and will be myself answerable for their effect on a lady's mind and person."

He led the way into the next room as he spoke, and arranged its future fittings, and decorations, as he had already planned out the bedroom, with the strictest reference to the connection which experience had shown him to exist between comfortable furniture and female happiness.

Thus far, in my helpless state of mind, the man's confidence had impressed me in spite of myself, and I had
listened to him in superstitious silence. But as he continued to rise, by regular gradations, from one climax of upholstery to another, warning visions of his bill disclosed themselves in the remote background of the scene of luxury and magnificence which my friend was conjuring up. Certain sharp professional instincts of bygone times resumed their influence over me; I began to start doubts and ask questions; and as a necessary consequence the interview between us soon assumed something like a practical form.

Having ascertained what the probable expense of furnishing would amount to and having discovered that the process of transforming the lean-to (allowing for the time required to procure certain articles of rarity from Bristol) would occupy nearly a fortnight, I dismissed the upholsterer with the understanding that I should take a day or two for consideration, and let him know the result. It was then the fifth of September, and our Queen of Hearts was to arrive on the twentieth. The work, therefore, if it was begun on the seventh or eighth, would be begun in time.

In making all my calculations with a reference to the twentieth of September, I relied implicitly, it will be observed, on a young lady's punctuality in keeping an appointment which she had herself made. I can only account for such extraordinary simplicity on my part on the supposition that my wits had become sadly rusted by long seclusion from society. Whether it was referable to this cause or not, my innocent trustfulness was at any rate destined to be practically rebuked before long in the most surprising manner. Little did I suspect, when I parted from the upholsterer on the fifth of the month, what the tenth of the month had in store for me.

On the seventh I made up my mind to have the bedroom furnished at once, and to postpone the question of the sitting-room for a few days longer. Having dispatched the necessary order to that effect, I next wrote to hire the piano and to order the box of novels. This done, I congratulated myself on the forward state of the preparations, and sat down to repose in the atmosphere of my own happy delusions.

On the ninth the wagon arrived with the furniture, and the men set to work on the bedroom. From this moment Morgan retired definitely to the top of the tower, and Owen became too nervous to lay the necessary amount of paint on the Earthquake at Lisbon.

On the tenth the work was proceeding bravely. Toward noon Owen and I strolled to the door to enjoy the fine autumn sunshine. We were sitting lazily on our favorite bench in front of the tower when we were startled by a shout from above us. Looking up directly, we saw Morgan half in and half out of his narrow window in the seventh story, gesticulating violently with the stem of his long meerschaum pipe in the direction of the road below us.

We gazed eagerly in the quarter thus indicated, but our low position prevented us for some time from seeing anything. At last we both discerned an old yellow post-chaise distinctly and indisputably approaching us.

Owen and I looked at one another in panic-stricken silence. It was coming to us—and what did it contain? Do pianos travel in chaises? Are boxes of novels conveyed to their destination by a postilion? We expected the piano and expected the novels, but nothing else—unquestionably nothing else.

The chaise took the turn in the road, passed through the gateless gap in our rough inclosure-wall of loose stone, and rapidly approached us. A bonnet appeared at the window and a hand gayly waved a white handkerchief.

Powers of caprice, confusion, and dismay! It was Jessie Yelverton herself—arriving, without a word of warning, exactly ten days before her time.

CHAPTER III.

OUR QUEEN OF HEARTS.

THE chaise stopped in front of us, and before we had recovered from our bewilderment the gardener had opened the door and let down the steps.

A bright, laughing face, prettily framed round by a black veil passed over the head and tied under the chin—a traveling-dress of a nankeen color, studded with blue buttons and trimmed with white braid—a light brown cloak over it—little neatly-gloved hands, which seized in an instant on one of mine and on one of Owen's—two dark blue eyes, which seemed to look us both through and through in a moment—a clear, full, merrily confident voice—a look and manner gayly and gracefully self-possessed—such were the characteristics of our fair guest which first struck me at the moment when she left the postchaise and possessed herself of my hand.

"Don't begin by scolding me," she said, before I could utter a word of welcome. "There will be time enough for that in the course of the next six weeks. I beg pardon, with all possible humility, for the offense of coming ten days before my time. Don't ask me to account for it, please; if you do, I shall be obliged to confess the truth. My dear sir, the fact is, this is an act of impulse."

She paused, and looked us both in the face with a bright confidence in her own flow of nonsense that was perfectly irresistible.

"I must tell you all about it," she ran on, leading the way to the bench, and inviting us, by a little mock gesture of supplication, to seat ourselves on either side of her. "I feel so guilty till I've told you. Dear me! how nice this is! Here I am quite at home already. Isn't it odd? Well, and how do you think it happened? The morning before yesterday Matilda—there is Matilda, picking up my bonnet from the bottom of that remarkably musty carriage—
Matilda came and woke me as usual, and I hadn't an idea in my head, I assure you, till she began to brush my hair. Can you account for it?--I can't--but she seemed, somehow, to brush a sudden fancy for coming here into my head. When I went down to breakfast, I said to my aunt, 'Darling, I have an irresistible impulse to go to Wales at once, instead of waiting till the twentieth.' She made all the necessary objections, poor dear, and my impulse got stronger and stronger with every one of them. 'I'm quite certain,' I said, 'I shall never go at all if I don't go now.' In that case, says my aunt, 'ring the bell, and have your trunks packed. Your whole future depends on your going; and you terrify me so inexpressibly that I shall be glad to get rid of you.' You may not think it, to look at her--but Matilda is a treasure; and in three hours more I was on the Great Western Railway. I have not the least idea how I got here--except that the men helped me everywhere. They are always such delightful creatures! I have been casting myself, and my maid, and my trunks on their tender mercies at every point in the journey, and their polite attentions exceed all belief. I slept at your horrid little county town last night; and the night before I missed a steamer or a train, I forget which, and slept at Bristol; and that's how I got here. And, now I am here, I ought to give my guardian a kiss--oughtn't I? Shall I call you papa? I think I will. And shall I call _you_ uncle, sir, and give you a kiss too? We shall come to it sooner or later--shan't we?--and we may as well begin at once, I suppose."

Her fresh young lips touched my old withered cheek first, and then Owen's; a soft, momentary shadow of tenderness, that was very pretty and becoming, passing quickly over the sunshine and gayety of her face as she saluted us. The next moment she was on her feet again, inquiring "who the wonderful man was who built The Glen Tower," and wanting to go all over it immediately from top to bottom.

As we took her into the house, I made the necessary apologies for the miserable condition of the lean-to, and assured her that, ten days later, she would have found it perfectly ready to receive her. She whistled into the rooms--looked all round them--whisked out again--declared she had come to live in the old Tower, and not in any modern addition to it, and flatly declined to inhabit the lean-to on any terms whatever. I opened my lips to state certain objections, but she slipped away in an instant and made straight for the Tower staircase.

"Who lives here?" she asked, calling down to us, eagerly, from the first-floor landing.
"I do," said Owen; "but, if you would like me to move out--"
She was away up the second flight before he could say any more. The next sound we heard, as we slowly followed her, was a peremptory drumming against the room door of the second story.

"Anybody here?" we heard her ask through the door.

I called up to her that, under ordinary circumstances, I was there; but that, like Owen, I should be happy to move out--

My polite offer was cut short as my brother's had been. We heard more drumming at the door of the third story. There were two rooms here also--one perfectly empty, the other stocked with odds and ends of dismal, old-fashioned furniture for which we had no use, and grimly ornamented by a life-size basket figure supporting a complete suit of armor in a sadly rusty condition. When Owen and I got to the third-floor landing, the door was open; Miss Jessie had taken possession of the rooms; and we found her on a chair, dusting the man in armor with her cambric pocket-handkerchief.

"I shall live here," she said, looking round at us briskly over her shoulder.

We both remonstrated, but it was quite in vain. She told us that she had an impulse to live with the man in armor, and that she would have her way, or go back immediately in the post-chaise, which we pleased. Finding it impossible to move her, we bargained that she should, at least, allow the new bed and the rest of the comfortable furniture in the lean-to to be moved up into the empty room for her sleeping accommodation. She consented to this condition, protesting, however, to the last against being compelled to sleep in a bed, because it was a modern conventionality, out of all harmony with her place of residence and her friend in armor.

Fortunately for the repose of Morgan, who, under other circumstances, would have discovered on the very first day that his airy retreat was by no means high enough to place him out of Jessie's reach, the idea of settling herself instantly in her new habitation excluded every other idea from the mind of our fair guest. She pinned up the nankeen-colored traveling dress in festoons all round her on the spot; informed us that we were now about to make acquaintance with her in the new character of a woman of business; and darted downstairs in mad high spirits, screaming for Matilda and the trunks like a child for a set of new toys. The wholesome protest of Nature against the artificial restraints of modern life expressed itself in all that she said and in all that she did. She had never known what it was to be happy before, because she had never been allowed, until now, to do anything for herself. She was down on her knees at one moment, blowing the fire, and telling us that she felt like Cinderella; she was up on a table the next, attacking the cobwebs with a long broom, and wishing she had been born a housemaid. As for my unfortunate friend, the upholsterer, he was leveled to the ranks at the first effort he made to assume the command of the domestic forces in the furniture department. She laughed at him, pushed him about, disputed all his conclusions, altered all his arrangements, and ended by ordering half his bedroom furniture to be taken back again, for the one
unanswerable reason that she meant to do without it.

As evening approached, the scene presented by the two rooms became eccentric to a pitch of absurdity which is
quite indescribable. The grim, ancient walls of the bedroom had the liveliest modern dressing-gowns and morning-
wrappers hanging all about them. The man in armor had a collection of smart little boots and shoes dangling by
laces and ribbons round his iron legs. A worm-eaten, steel-clasped casket, dragged out of a corner, frowned on the
upholsterer's brand-new toilet-table, and held a miscellaneous assortment of combs, hairpins, and brushes. Here
stood a gloomy antique chair, the patriarch of its tribe, whose arms of blackened oak embraced a pair of pert, new
deal bonnet-boxes not a fortnight old. There, thrown down lightly on a rugged tapestry table-cover, the long labor of
centuries past, lay the brief, delicate work of a week ago in the shape of silk and muslin dresses turned inside out. In
the midst of all these confusions and contradictions, Miss Jessie ranged to and fro, the active center of the whole
scene of disorder, now singing at the top of her voice, and now declaring in her lighthearted way that one of us must
make up his mind to marry her immediately, as she was determined to settle for the rest of her life at The Glen
Tower.

She followed up that announcement, when we met at dinner, by inquiring if we quite understood by this time
that she had left her "company manners" in London, and that she meant to govern us all at her absolute will and
pleasure, throughout the whole period of her stay. Having thus provided at the outset for the due recognition of her
authority by the household generally and individually having briskly planned out all her own forthcoming
occupations and amusements over the wine and fruit at dessert, and having positively settled, between her first and
second cups of tea, where our connection with them was to begin and where it was to end, she had actually
succeeded, when the time came to separate for the night, in setting us as much at our ease, and in making herself as
completely a necessary part of our household as if she had lived among us for years and years past.

Such was our first day's experience of the formidable guest whose anticipated visit had so sorely and so absurdly
discomposed us all. I could hardly believe that I had actually wasted hours of precious time in worrying myself and
everybody else in the house about the best means of laboriously entertaining a lively, high-spirited girl, who was
perfectly capable, without an effort on her own part or on ours, of entertaining herself.

Having upset every one of our calculations on the first day of her arrival, she next falsified all our predictions
before she had been with us a week. Instead of fracturing her skull with the pony, as Morgan had prophesied, she sat
the sturdy, sure-footed, mischievous little brute as if she were part and parcel of himself. With an old water-proof
cloak of mine on her shoulders, with a broad-flapped Spanish hat of Owen's on her head, with a wild imp of a Welsh
boy following her as guide and groom on a bare-backed pony, and with one of the largest and ugliest cur-dogs in
England (which she had picked up, lost and starved by the wayside) barking at her heels, she scoured the country in
all directions, and came back to dinner, as she herself expressed it, "with the manners of an Amazon, the complexion
of a dairy-maid, and the appetite of a wolf."

On days when incessant rain kept her indoors, she amused herself with a new freak. Making friends everywhere,
as became The Queen of Hearts, she even ingratiated herself with the sour old housekeeper, who had predicted so
obstinately that she was certain to run away. To the amazement of everybody in the house, she spent hours in the
kitchen, learning to make puddings and pies, and trying all sorts of recipes with very varying success, from an
antiquated cookery book which she had discovered at the back of my bookshelves. At other times, when I expected
her to be upstairs, languidly examining her finery, and idly polishing her trinkets, I heard of her in the stables,
feeding the rabbits, and talking to the raven, or found her in the conservatory, fumigating the plants, and half
suffocating the gardener, who was trying to moderate her enthusiasm in the production of smoke.

Instead of finding amusement, as we had expected, in Owen's studio, she puckered up her pretty face in grimaces
disgust at the smell of paint in the room, and declared that the horrors of the Earthquake at Lisbon made her feel
hysterical. Instead of showing a total want of interest in my business occupations on the estate, she destroyed my
dignity as steward by joining me in my rounds on her pony, with her vagabond retinue at her heels. Instead of
devouring the novels I had ordered for her, she left them in the box, and put her feet on it when she felt sleepy after a
hard day's riding. Instead of practicing for hours every evening at the piano, which I had hired with such a firm
conviction of her using it, she showed us tricks on the cards, taught us new games, initiated us into the mystics of
dominoes, challenged us with riddles, an even attempted to stimulate us into acting charades—in short, tried every
evening amusement in the whole category except the amusement of music. Every new aspect of her character was a
new surprise to us, and every fresh occupation that she chose was a fresh contradiction to our previous expectations.
The value of experience as a guide is unquestionable in many of the most important affairs of life; but, speaking for
myself personally, I never understood the utter futility of it, where a woman is concerned, until I was brought into
habits of daily communication with our fair guest.

In her domestic relations with ourselves she showed that exquisite nicety of discrimination in studying our
characters, habits and tastes which comes by instinct with women, and which even the longest practice rarely
Yelverton my wife, which you are guarding perhaps, at this moment, under your own roof— all my happiness depends on making Jessie anticipate my confession from this entreaty? My dear, dear father, all my hopes rest on that one darling treasure guardian. If she is already with you, pray move heaven and earth to keep her at The Glen Tower till I come back. Do not take any share.

Almost ashamed to say, than the great triumph of my countrymen, in which my disabled condition has prevented me from taking any share. The name of the vessel and the time of starting are on the list which I inclose. I have made all my calculations, and, allowing for every possible delay, I find that I shall be with you, at the latest, on the first of November—perhaps some days earlier.

If I can, into few words. The doctor has reported me fit to travel at last, and I leave, thanks to the privilege of a start of the tower, and why he had not appeared to welcome her at the door; had entrapped us into all sorts of damaging admissions, and had thereupon discovered the true state of the case in less than five minutes.

Thus situated in her relations toward ourselves, and thus occupied by country diversions of her own choosing, Miss Jessie passed her time at The Glen Tower, excepting now and then a dull hour in the long evenings, to her guardian's satisfaction— and, all things considered, not without pleasure to herself. Day followed day in calm and smooth succession, and five quiet weeks had elapsed out of the six during which her stay was to last without any remarkable occurrence to distinguish them, when an event happened which personally affected me in a very serious manner, and which suddenly caused our handsome Queen of Hearts to become the object of my deepest anxiety in the present, and of my dearest hopes for the future.

CHAPTER IV.
OUR GRAND PROJECT.

At the end of the fifth week of our guest's stay, among the letters which the morning's post brought to The Glen Tower there was one for me, from my son George, in the Crimea.

The effect which this letter produced in our little circle renders it necessary that I should present it here, to speak for itself.

This is what I read alone in my own room:

"MY DEAREST FATHER—After the great public news of the fall of Sebastopol, have you any ears left for small items of private intelligence from insignificant subaltern officers? Prepare, if you have, for a sudden and a startling announcement. How shall I write the words? How shall I tell you that I am really coming home?"

"I have a private opportunity of sending this letter, and only a short time to write it in; so I must put many things, if I can, into few words. The doctor has reported me fit to travel at last, and I leave, thanks to the privilege of a wounded man, by the next ship. The name of the vessel and the time of starting are on the list which I inclose. I have made all my calculations, and, allowing for every possible delay, I find that I shall be with you, at the latest, on the first of November— perhaps some days earlier.

"I am far too full of my return, and of something else connected with it which is equally dear to me, to say anything about public affairs, more especially as I know that the newspapers must, by this time, have given you plenty of information. Let me fill the rest of this paper with a subject which is very near to my heart— nearer, I am almost ashamed to say, than the great triumph of my countrymen, in which my disabled condition has prevented me from taking any share.

"I gathered from your last letter that Miss Yelverton was to pay you a visit this autumn, in your capacity of her guardian. If she is already with you, pray move heaven and earth to keep her at The Glen Tower till I come back. Do you anticipate my confession from this entreaty? My dear, dear father, all my hopes rest on that one darling treasure which you are guarding perhaps, at this moment, under your own roof— all my happiness depends on making Jessie Yelverton my wife."
"If I did not sincerely believe that you will heartily approve of my choice, I should hardly have ventured on this abrupt confession. Now that I have made it, let me go on and tell you why I have kept my attachment up to this time a secret from every one--even from Jessie herself. (You see I call her by her Christian name already!)

"I should have risked everything, father, and have laid my whole heart open before her more than a year ago, but for the order which sent our regiment out to take its share in this great struggle of the Russian war. No ordinary change in my life would have silenced me on the subject of all others of which I was most anxious to speak; but this change made me think seriously of the future; and out of those thoughts came the resolution which I have kept until this time. For her sake, and for her sake only, I constrained myself to leave the words unspoken which might have made her my promised wife. I resolved to spare her the dreadful suspense of waiting for her betrothed husband till the perils of war might, or might not, give him back to her. I resolved to save her from the bitter grief of my death if a bullet laid me low. I resolved to preserve her from the wretched sacrifice of herself if I came back, as many a brave man will come back from this war, invalidated for life. Leaving her untrammeled by any engagement, unsuspicuous perhaps of my real feelings toward her, I might die, and know that, by keeping silence, I had spared a pang to the heart that was dearest to me. This was the thought that stayed the words on my lips when I left England, uncertain whether I should ever come back. If I had loved her less dearly, if her happiness had been less precious to me, I might have given way under the hard restraint I imposed on myself, and might have spoken selfishly at the last moment.

"And now the time of trial is past; the war is over; and, although I still walk a little lame, I am, thank God, in as good health and in much better spirits than when I left home. Oh, father, if I should lose her now--if I should get no reward for sparing her but the bitterest of all disappointments! Sometimes I am vain enough to think that I made some little impression on her; sometimes I doubt if she has a suspicion of my love. She lives in a gay world--she is the center of perpetual admiration--men with all the qualities to win a woman's heart are perpetually about her--can I, dare I hope? Yes, I must! Only keep her, I entreat you, at The Glen Tower. In that quiet world, in that freedom from frivolities and temptations, she will listen to me as she might listen nowhere else. Keep her, my dearest, kindest father--and, above all things, breathe not a word to her of this letter. I have surely earned the privilege of being the first to open her eyes to the truth. She must know nothing, now that I am coming home, till she knows all from my own lips."

Here the writing hurriedly broke off. I am only giving myself credit for common feeling, I trust, when I confess that what I read deeply affected me. I think I never felt so fond of my boy, and so proud of him, as at the moment when I laid down his letter.

As soon as I could control my spirits, I began to calculate the question of time with a trembling eagerness, which brought back to my mind my own young days of love and hope. My son was to come back, at the latest, on the first of November, and Jessie's allotted six weeks would expire on the twenty-second of October. Ten days too soon! But for the caprice which had brought her to us exactly that number of days before her time she would have been in the house, as a matter of necessity, on George's return.

I searched back in my memory for a conversation that I had held with her a week since on her future plans. Toward the middle of November, her aunt, Lady Westwick, had arranged to go to her house in Paris, and Jessie was, of course, to accompany her--to accompany her into that very circle of the best English and the best French society which contained in it the elements most adverse to George's hopes. Between this time and that she had no special engagement, and she had only settled to write and warn her aunt of her return to London a day or two before she left The Glen Tower.

Under these circumstances, the first, the all-important necessity was to prevail on her to prolong her stay beyond the allotted six weeks by ten days. After the caution to be silent impressed on me (and most naturally, poor boy) in George's letter, I felt that I could only appeal to her on the ordinary ground of hospitality. Would this be sufficient to effect the object?

I was sure that the hours of the morning and the afternoon had, thus far, been fully and happily occupied by her various amusements indoors and out. She was no more weary of her days now than she had been when she first came among us. But I was by no means so certain that she was not tired of her evenings. I had latterly noticed symptoms of weariness after the lamps were lit, and a suspicious regularity in retiring to bed the moment the clock struck ten. If I could provide her with a new amusement for the long evenings, I might leave the days to take care of themselves, and might then make sure (seeing that she had no special engagement in London until the middle of November) of her being sincerely thankful and ready to prolong her stay.

How was this to be done? The piano and the novels had both failed to attract her. What other amusement was there to offer?

It was useless, at present, to ask myself such questions as these. I was too much agitated to think collectedly on the most trifling subjects. I was even too restless to stay in my own room. My son's letter had given me so fresh an

The Glen Tower.
interest in Jessie that I was now as impatient to see her as if we were about to meet for the first time. I wanted to look at her with my new eyes, to listen to her with my new ears, to study her secretly with my new purposes, and my new hopes and fears. To my dismay (for I wanted the very weather itself to favor George's interests), it was raining heavily that morning. I knew, therefore, that I should probably find her in her own sitting-room. When I knocked at her door, with George's letter crumpled up in my hand, with George's hopes in full possession of my heart, it is no exaggeration to say that my nerves were almost as much fluttered, and my ideas almost as much confused, as they were on a certain memorable day in the far past, when I rose, in brand-new wig and gown, to set my future prospects at the bar on the hazard of my first speech.

When I entered the room I found Jessie leaning back languidly in her largest arm-chair, watching the raindrops dripping down the window-pane. The unfortunate box of novels was open by her side, and the books were lying, for the most part, strewn about on the ground at her feet. One volume lay open, back upward, on her lap, and her hands were crossed over it listlessly. To my great dismay, she was yawning--palpably and widely yawning--when I came in.

No sooner did I find myself in her presence than an irresistible anxiety to make some secret discovery of the real state of her feelings toward George took possession of me. After the customary condolences on the imprisonment to which she was subjected by the weather, I said, in as careless a manner as it was possible to assume:

"I have heard from my son this morning. He talks of being ordered home, and tells me I may expect to see him before the end of the year."

I was too cautious to mention the exact date of his return, for in that case she might have detected my motive for asking her to prolong her visit.

"Oh, indeed?" she said. "How very nice. How glad you must be."

I watched her narrowly. The clear, dark blue eyes met mine as openly as ever. The smooth, round cheeks kept their fresh color quite unchanged. The full, good-humored, smiling lips never trembled or altered their expression in the slightest degree. Her light checked silk dress, with its pretty trimming of cherry-colored ribbon, lay quite still over the bosom beneath it. For all the information I could get from her look and manner, we might as well have been a hundred miles apart from each other. Is the best woman in the world little better than a fathomless abyss of duplicity on certain occasions, and where certain feelings of her own are concerned? I would rather not think that; and yet I don't know how to account otherwise for the masterly manner in which Miss Jessie contrived to baffle me.

I was afraid--literally afraid--to broach the subject of prolonging her sojourn with us on a rainy day, so I changed the topic, in despair, to the novels that were scattered about her.

"Can you find nothing there," I asked, "to amuse you this wet morning?"

"There are two or three good novels," she said, carelessly, "but I read them before I left London."

"And the others won't even do for a dull day in the country?" I went on.

"They might do for some people," she answered, "but not for me. I'm rather peculiar, perhaps, in my tastes. I'm sick to death of novels with an earnest purpose. I'm sick to death of outbursts of eloquence, and large-minded philanthropy, and graphic descriptions, and unsparing anatomy of the human heart, and all that sort of thing. Good gracious me! isn't it the original intention or purpose, or whatever you call it, of a work of fiction, to set out distinctly by telling a story? And how many of these books, I should like to know, do that? Why, so far as telling a story is concerned, the greater part of them might as well be sermons as novels. Oh, dear me! what I want is something that seizes hold of my interest, and makes me forget when it is time to dress for dinner--something that keeps me reading, reading, reading, in a breathless state to find out the end. You know what I mean--at least you ought. Why, there was that little chance story you told me yesterday in the garden--don't you remember?--about your strange client, whom you never saw again: I declare it was much more interesting than half these novels, because it was a story. Tell me another about your young days, when you were seeing the world, and meeting with all sorts of remarkable people. Or, no--don't tell it now--keep it till the evening, when we all want something to stir us up. You old people might amuse us young ones out of your own resources oftener than you do. It was very kind of you to get me these books; but, with all respect to them, I would rather have the rummaging of your memory than the rummaging of this box. What's the matter? Are you afraid I have found out the window in your bosom already?"

I had half risen from my chair at her last words, and I felt that my face must have flushed at the same moment. She had started an idea in my mind--the very idea of which I had been in search when I was pondering over the best means of amusing her in the long autumn evenings.

I parried her questions by the best excuses I could offer; changed the conversation for the next five minutes, and then, making a sudden remembrance of business my apology for leaving her, hastily withdrew to devote myself to the new idea in the solitude of my own room.

A little quiet thinking convinced me that I had discovered a means not only of occupying her idle time, but of decoying her into staying on with us, evening by evening, until my son's return. The new project which she had
herself unconsciously suggested involved nothing less than acting forthwith on her own chance hint, and appealing
to her interest and curiosity by the recital of incidents and adventures drawn from my own personal experience and
(if I could get them to help me) from the experience of my brothers as well. Strange people and startling events had
connected themselves with Owen's past life as a clergyman, with Morgan's past life as a doctor, and with my past
life as a lawyer, which offered elements of interest of a strong and striking kind ready to our hands. If these
narratives were written plainly and unpretendingly; if one of them was read every evening, under circumstances that
should pique the curiosity and impress the imagination of our young guest, the very occupation was found for her
weary hours which would gratify her tastes, appeal to her natural interest in the early lives of my brothers and
myself, and lure her insensibly into prolonging her visit by ten days without exciting a suspicion of our real motive
for detaining her.

I sat down at my desk; I hid my face in my hands to keep out all impressions of external and present things; and
I searched back through the mysterious labyrinth of the Past, through the dun, ever-deepening twilight of the years
that were gone.

Slowly, out of the awful shadows, the Ghosts of Memory rose about me. The dead population of a vanished
world came back to life round me, a living man. Men and women whose earthly pilgrimage had ended long since,
returned upon me from the unknown spheres, and fond, familiar voices burst their way back to my ears through the
heavy silence of the grave. Moving by me in the nameless inner light, which no eye saw but mine, the dead
procession of immaterial scenes and beings unrolled its silent length. I saw once more the pleading face of a friend
of early days, with the haunting vision that had tortured him through life by his side again—with the long-forgotten
despair in his eyes which had once touched my heart, and bound me to him, till I had tracked his destiny through its
darkest windings to the end. I saw the figure of an innocent woman passing to and fro in an ancient country house,
with the shadow of a strange suspicion stealing after her wherever she went. I saw a man worn by hardship and old
age, stretched dreaming on the straw of a stable, and muttering in his dream the terrible secret of his life.

Other scenes and persons followed these, less vivid in their revival, but still always recognizable and distinct; a
young girl alone by night, and in peril of her life, in a cottage on a dreary moor—an upper chamber of an inn, with
two beds in it; the curtains of one bed closed, and a man standing by them, waiting, yet dreading to draw them back—
a husband secretly following the first traces of a mystery which his wife's anxious love had fatally hidden from him
since the day when they first met; these, and other visions like them, shadowy reflections of the living beings and
the real events that had been once, peopled the solitude and the emptiness around me. They haunted me still when I
tried to break the chain of thought which my own efforts had wound about my mind; they followed me to and fro in
the room; and they came out with me when I left it. I had lifted the veil from the Past for myself, and I was now to
rest no more till I had lifted it for others.

I went at once to my eldest brother and showed him my son's letter, and told him all that I have written here. His
kind heart was touched as mine had been. He felt for my suspense; he shared my anxiety; he laid aside his own
occupation on the spot.

"Only tell me," he said, "how I can help, and I will give every hour in the day to you and to George."

I had come to him with my mind almost as full of his past life as of my own; I recalled to his memory events in
his experience as a working clergyman in London; I set him looking among papers which he had preserved for half
his lifetime, and the very existence of which he had forgotten long since; I recalled to him the names of persons to
whose necessities he had ministered in his sacred office, and whose stories he had heard from their own lips or
received under their own handwriting. When we parted he was certain of what he was wanted to do, and was
resolute on that very day to begin the work.

I went to Morgan next, and appealed to him as I had already appealed to Owen. It was only part of his odd
character to start all sorts of eccentric objections in reply; to affect a cynical indifference, which he was far from
really and truly feeling; and to indulge in plenty of quaint sarcasm on the subject of Jessie and his nephew George. I
waited till these little surface-ebullitions had all expended themselves, and then pressed my point again with the
earnestness and anxiety that I really felt.

Evidently touched by the manner of my appeal to him more than by the language in which it was
expressed, Morgan took refuge in his customary abruptness, spread out his paper violently on the table, seized his
pen and ink, and told me quite fiercely to give him his work and let him tackle it at once.

I set myself to recall to his memory some very remarkable experiences of his own in his professional days, but
he stopped me before I had half done.

"I understand," he said, taking a savage dip at the ink, "I'm to make her flesh creep, and to frighten her out of her
wits. I'll do it with a vengeance!"

Reserving to myself privately an editorial right of supervision over Morgan's contributions, I returned to my own
room to begin my share—by far the largest one—of the task before us. The stimulus applied to my mind by my son's
letter must have been a strong one indeed, for I had hardly been more than an hour at my desk before I found the old literary facility of my youthful days, when I was a writer for the magazines, returning to me as if by magic. I worked on unremittingly till dinner-time, and then resumed the pen after we had all separated for the night. At two o'clock the next morning I found myself--God help me!--masquerading, as it were, in my own long-lost character of a hard-writing young man, with the old familiar cup of strong tea by my side, and the old familiar wet towel tied round my head.

My review of the progress I had made, when I looked back at my pages of manuscript, yielded all the encouragement I wanted to drive me on. It is only just, however, to add to the record of this first day's attempt, that the literary labor which it involved was by no means of the most trying kind. The great strain on the intellect--the strain of invention--was spared me by my having real characters and events ready to my hand. If I had been called on to create, I should, in all probability, have suffered severely by contrast with the very worst of those unfortunate novelists whom Jessie had so rashly and so thoughtlessly condemned. It is not wonderful that the public should rarely know how to estimate the vast service which is done to them by the production of a good book, seeing that they are, for the most part, utterly ignorant of the immense difficulty of writing even a bad one.

The next day was fine, to my great relief; and our visitor, while we were at work, enjoyed her customary scamper on the pony, and her customary rambles afterward in the neighborhood of the house. Although I had interruptions to contend with on the part of Owen and Morgan, neither of whom possessed my experience in the production of what heavy people call "light literature," and both of whom consequently wanted assistance, still I made great progress, and earned my hours of repose on the evening of the second day.

On that evening I risked the worst, and opened my negotiations for the future with "The Queen of Hearts."

About an hour after the tea had been removed, and when I happened to be left alone in the room with her, I noticed that she rose suddenly and went to the writing-table. My suspicions were aroused directly, and I entered on the dangerous subject by inquiring if she intended to write to her aunt.

"Yes," she said. "I promised to write when the last week came. If you had paid me the compliment of asking me to stay a little longer, I should have returned it by telling you I was sorry to go. As it is, I mean to be sulky and say nothing."

"Wait a minute," I remonstrated. "I was just on the point of begging you to stay when I spoke."

"Were you, indeed?" she returned. "I never believed in coincidences of that sort before, but now, of course, I put the most unlimited faith in them!"

"Will you believe in plain proofs?" I asked, adopting her humor. "How do you think I and my brothers have been employing ourselves all day to-day and all day yesterday? Guess what we have been about."

"Congratulating yourselves in secret on my approaching departure," she answered, tapping her chin saucily with the feather-end of her pen.

I seized the opportunity of astonishing her, and forthwith told her the truth. She started up from the table, and approached me with the eagerness of a child, her eyes sparkling, and her cheeks flushed.

"Do you really mean it?" she said.

I assured her that I was in earnest. She thereupon not only expressed an interest in our undertaking, which was evidently sincere, but, with characteristic impatience, wanted to begin the first evening's reading on that very night. I disappointed her sadly by explaining that we required time to prepare ourselves, and by assuring her that we should not be ready for the next five days. On the sixth day, I added, we should be able to begin, and to go on, without missing an evening, for probably ten days more.

"The next five days?" she replied. "Why, that will just bring us to the end of my six weeks' visit. I suppose you are not setting a trap to catch me? This is not a trick of you three cunning old gentlemen to make me stay on, is it?"

I quailed inwardly as that dangerously close guess at the truth passed her lips.

"You forget," I said, "that the idea only occurred to me after what you said yesterday. If it had struck me earlier, we should have been ready earlier, and then where would your suspicions have been?"

"I am ashamed of having felt them," she said, in her frank, hearty way. "I retract the word 'trap,' and I beg pardon for calling you 'three cunning old gentlemen.' But what am I to say to my aunt?"

She hesitated and smiled. That terribly close guess of hers was not out of her mind yet.

"I rather fancy," she said, slyly, "that the story will turn out to be the best of the whole series."

"Wrong again," I retorted. "I have a plan for letting chance decide which of the stories the first one shall be. They shall be all numbered as they are done; corresponding numbers shall be written inside folded pieces of card
and well mixed together; you shall pick out any one card you like; you shall declare the number written within; and, good or bad, the story that answers to that number shall be the story that is read. Is that fair?"

"Fair!" she exclaimed; "it's better than fair; it makes _me_ of some importance; and I must be more or less than woman not to appreciate that."

"Then you consent to wait patiently for the next five days?"

"As patiently as I can."

"And you engage to decide nothing about writing to your aunt until you have heard the first story?"

"I do," she said, returning to the writing-table. "Behold the proof of it." She raised her hand with theatrical solemnity, and closed the paper-case with an impressive bang.

I leaned back in my chair with my mind at ease for the first time since the receipt of my son's letter.

"Only let George return by the first of November," I thought to myself, "and all the aunts in Christendom shall not prevent Jessie Yelverton from being here to meet him."

**THE TEN DAYS.**

**THE FIRST DAY.**

SHOWERY and unsettled. In spite of the weather, Jessie put on my Mackintosh cloak and rode off over the hills to one of Owen's outlying farms. She was already too impatient to wait quietly for the evening's reading in the house, or to enjoy any amusement less exhilarating than a gallop in the open air.

I was, on my side, as anxious and as uneasy as our guest. Now that the six weeks of her stay had expired--now that the day had really arrived, on the evening of which the first story was to be read, I began to calculate the chances of failure as well as the chances of success. What if my own estimate of the interest of the stories turned out to be a false one? What if some unforeseen accident occurred to delay my son's return beyond ten days?

The arrival of the newspaper had already become an event of the deepest importance to me. Unreasonable as it was to expect any tidings of George at so early a date, I began, nevertheless, on this first of our days of suspense, to look for the name of his ship in the columns of telegraphic news. The mere mechanical act of looking was some relief to my overstrained feelings, although I might have known, and did know, that the search, for the present, could lead to no satisfactory result.

Toward noon I shut myself up with my collection of manuscripts to revise them for the last time. Our exertions had thus far produced but six of the necessary ten stories. As they were only, however, to be read, one by one, on six successive evenings, and as we could therefore count on plenty of leisure in the daytime, I was in no fear of our failing to finish the little series.

Of the six completed stories I had written two, and had found a third in the form of a collection of letters among my papers. Morgan had only written one, and this solitary contribution of his had given me more trouble than both my own put together, in consequence of the perpetual intrusion of my brother's eccentricities in every part of his narrative. The process of removing these quaint turns and frisks of Morgan's humor--which, however amusing they might have been in an essay, were utterly out of place in a story appealing to suspended interest for its effect--certainly tried my patience and my critical faculty (such as it is) more severely than any other part of our literary enterprise which had fallen my share.

Owen's investigations among his papers had supplied us with the two remaining narratives. One was contained in a letter, and the other in the form of a diary, and both had been received by him directly from the writers. Besides these contributions, he had undertaken to help us by some work of his own, and had been engaged for the last four days in molding certain events which had happened within his personal knowledge into the form of a story. His extreme fastidiousness as a writer interfered, however, so seriously with his progress that he was still sadly behindhand, and was likely, though less heavily burdened than Morgan or myself, to be the last to complete his allotted task.

Such was our position, and such the resources at our command, when the first of the Ten Days dawned upon us. Shortly after four in the afternoon I completed my work of revision, numbered the manuscripts from one to six exactly as they happened to lie under my hand, and inclosed them all in a portfolio, covered with purple morocco, which became known from that time by the imposing title of The Purple Volume.

Miss Jessie returned from her expedition just as I was tying the strings of the portfolio, and, womanlike, instantly asked leave to peep inside, which favor I, manlike, positively declined to grant.

As soon as dinner was over our guest retired to array herself in magnificent evening costume. It had been arranged that the readings were to take place in her own sitting-room; and she was so enthusiastically desirous to do honor to the occasion, that she regretted not having brought with her from London the dress in which she had been presented at court the year before, and not having borrowed certain materials for additional splendor which she briefly described as "aunt's diamonds."

Toward eight o'clock we assembled in the sitting-room, and a strangely assorted company we were. At the head
of the table, radiant in silk and jewelry, flowers and furbelows, sat The Queen of Hearts, looking so handsome and so happy that I secretly congratulated my absent son on the excellent taste he had shown in falling in love with her. Round this bright young creature (Owen, at the foot of the table, and Morgan and I on either side) sat her three wrinkled, gray-headed, dingily-attired hosts, and just behind her, in still more inappropriate companionship, towered the spectral figure of the man in armor, which had so unaccountably attracted her on her arrival. This strange scene was lighted up by candles in high and heavy brass sconces. Before Jessie stood a mighty china punch-bowl of the olden time, containing the folded pieces of card, inside which were written the numbers to be drawn, and before Owen reposed the Purple Volume from which one of us was to read. The walls of the room were hung all round with faded tapestry; the clumsy furniture was black with age; and, in spite of the light from the sconces, the lofty ceiling was almost lost in gloom. If Rembrandt could have painted our background, Reynolds our guest, and Hogarth ourselves, the picture of the scene would have been complete.

When the old clock over the tower gateway had chimed eight, I rose to inaugurate the proceedings by requesting Jessie to take one of the pieces of card out of the punch-bowl, and to declare the number.

She laughed; then suddenly became frightened and serious; then looked at me, and said, "It was dreadfully like business;" and then entreated Morgan not to stare at her, or, in the present state of her nerves, she should upset the punch-bowl. At last she summoned resolution enough to take out one of the pieces of card and to unfold it.

"Declare the number, my dear," said Owen.

"Number Four," answered Jessie, making a magnificent courtesy, and beginning to look like herself again.

Owen opened the Purple Volume, searched through the manuscripts, and suddenly changed color. The cause of his discomposure was soon explained. Malicious fate had assigned to the most diffident individual in the company the trying responsibility of leading the way. Number Four was one of the two narratives which Owen had found among his own papers.

"I am almost sorry," began my eldest brother, confusedly, "that it has fallen to my turn to read first. I hardly know which I distrust most, myself or my story."

"Try and fancy you are in the pulpit again," said Morgan, sarcastically. "Gentlemen of your cloth, Owen, seldom seem to distrust themselves or their manuscripts when they get into that position."

"The fact is," continued Owen, mildly impenetrable to his brother's cynical remark, "that the little thing I am going to try and read is hardly a story at all. I am afraid it is only an anecdote. I became possessed of the letter which contains my narrative under these circumstances. At the time when I was a clergyman in London, my church was attended for some months by a lady who was the wife of a large farmer in the country. She had been obliged to come to town, and to remain there for the sake of one of her children, a little boy, who required the best medical advice."

At the words "medical advice" Morgan shook his head and growled to himself contemptuously. Owen went on:

"While she was attending in this way to one child, his share in her love was unexpectedly disputed by another, who came into the world rather before his time. I baptized the baby, and was asked to the little christening party afterward. This was my first introduction to the lady, and I was very favorably impressed by her; not so much on account of her personal appearance, for she was but a little wo man and had no pretensions to beauty, as on account of a certain simplicity, and hearty, downright kindness in her manner, as well as of an excellent frankness and good sense in her conversation. One of the guests present, who saw how she had interested me, and who spoke of her in the highest terms, surprised me by inquiring if I should ever have supposed that quiet, good-humored little woman to be capable of performing an act of courage which would have tried the nerves of the boldest man in England? I naturally enough begged for an explanation; but my neighbor at the table only smiled and said, 'If you can find an opportunity, ask her what happened at The Black Cottage, and you will hear something that will astonish you.' I acted on the hint as soon as I had an opportunity of speaking to her privately. The lady answered that it was too long a story to tell then, and explained, on my suggesting that she should relate it on some future day, that she was about to start for her country home the next morning. 'But,' she was good enough to add, 'as I have been under great obligations to you for many Sundays past, and as you seem interested in this matter, I will employ my first leisure time after my return in telling you by writing, instead of by word of mouth, what really happened to me on one memorable night of my life in The Black Cottage.'

"She faithfully performed her promise. In a fortnight afterward I received from her the narrative which I am now about to read."

BROTHER OWEN'S STORY
OF
THE SIEGE OF THE BLACK COTTAGE.

To begin at the beginning, I must take you back to the time after my mother's death, when my only brother had gone to sea, when my sister was out at service, and when I lived alone with my father in the midst of a moor in the
The moor was covered with great limestone rocks, and intersected here and there by streamlets. The nearest
habitation to ours was situated about a mile and a half off, where a strip of the fertile land stretched out into the
west of England.

The farm-lands stretched down gently into a beautiful rich valley, lying nicely sheltered by the high platform
of the moor. When the ground began to rise again, miles and miles away, it led up to a country house called Holme
Manor, belonging to a gentleman named Knifton. Mr. Knifton had lately married a young lady whom my mother
had nursed, and whose kindness and friendship for me, her foster-sister, I shall remember gratefully to the last day
of my life. These and other slight particulars it is necessary to my story that I should tell you, and it is also necessary
that you should be especially careful to bear them well in mind.

My father was by trade a stone-mason. His cottage stood a mile and a half from the nearest habitation. In all
other directions we were four or five times that distance from neighbors. Being very poor people, this lonely
situation had one great attraction for us—we lived rent free on it. In addition to that advantage, the stones, by shaping
which my father gained his livelihood, lay all about him at his very door, so that he thought his position, solitary as
it was, quite an enviable one. I can hardly say that I agreed with him, though I never complained. I was very fond of
my father, and managed to make the best of my loneliness with the thought of being useful to him. Mrs. Knifton
wished to take me into her service when she married, but I declined, unwillingly enough, for my father's sake. If I
had gone away, he would have had nobody to live with him; and my mother made me promise on her death-bed that
he should never be left to pine away alone in the midst of the bleak moor.

Our cottage, small as it was, was stoutly and snugly built, with stone from the moor as a matter of course. The
walls were lined inside and fenced outside with wood, the gift of Mr. Knifton's father to my father. This double
covering of cracks and crevices, which would have been superfluous in a sheltered position, was absolutely
necessary, in our exposed situation, to keep out the cold winds which, excepting just the summer months, swept over
us continually all the year round. The outside boards, covering our roughly-built stone walls, my father protected
against the wet with pitch and tar. This gave to our little abode a curiously dark, dingy look, especially when it was
seen from a distance; and so it had come to be called in the neighborhood, even before I was born, The Black
Cottage.

I have now related the preliminary particulars which it is desirable that you should know, and may proceed at
once to the pleasanter task of telling you my story.

One cloudy autumn day, when I was rather more than eighteen years old, a herdsman walked over from Moor
Farm with a letter which had been left there for my father. It came from a builder living at our county town, half a
day's journey off, and it invited my father to come to him and give his judgment about an estimate for some
stonework on a very large scale. My father's expenses for loss of time were to be paid, and he was to have his share
of employment afterwards in preparing the stone. He was only too glad, therefore, to obey the directions which the
letter contained, and to prepare at once for his long walk to the county town.

Considering the time at which he received the letter, and the necessity of resting before he attempted to return, it
was impossible for him to avoid being away from home for one night, at least. He proposed to me, in case I disliked
being left alone in the Black Cottage, to lock the door and to take me to Moor Farm to sleep with any one of the
milkmaidens who would give me a share of her bed. I by no means liked the notion of sleeping with a girl whom I did
not know, and I saw no reason to feel afraid of being left alone for only one night; so I declined. No thieves had ever
come near us; our poverty was sufficient protection against them; and of other dangers there were none that even the
most timid person could apprehend. Accordingly, I got my father's dinner, laughing at the notion of my taking
refuge under the protection of a milkmaid at Moor Farm. He started for his walk as soon as he had done, saying he
should try and be back by dinner-time the next day, and leaving me and my cat Polly to take care of the house.

I had cleared the table and brightened up the fire, and had sat down to my work with the cat dozing at my feet,
when I heard the trampling of horses, and, running to the door, saw Mr. and Mrs. Knifton, with their groom behind
them, riding up to the Black Cottage. It was part of the young lady's kindness never to neglect an opportunity of
coming to pay me a friendly visit, and her husband was generally willing to accompany her for his wife's sake. I
made my best courtesy, therefore, with a great deal of pleasure, but with no particular surprise at seeing them. They
dismounted and entered the cottage, laughing and talking in great spirits. I soon heard that they were riding to the
same county town for which my father was bound and that they intended to stay with some friends there for a few
days, and to return home on horseback, as they went out.

I heard this, and I also discovered that they had been having an argument, in jest, about money-matters, as they
rode along to our cottage. Mrs. Knifton had accused her husband of inveterate extravagance, and of never being able
to go out with money in his pocket without spending it all, if he possibly could, before he got home again. Mr.
Knifton had laughingly defended himself by declaring that all his pocket-money went in presents for his wife, and
that, if he spent it lavishly, it was under her sole influence and superintendence.

"We are going to Cliverton now," he said to Mrs. Knifton, naming the county town, and warming himself at our poor fire just as pleasantly as if he had been standing on his own grand hearth. "You will stop to admire every pretty thing in every one of the Cliverton shop-windows; I shall hand you the purse, and you will go in and buy. When we have reached home again, and you have had time to get tired of your purchases, you will clasp your hands in amazement, and declare that you are quite shocked at my habits of inveterate extravagance. I am only the banker who keeps the money; you, my love, are the spendthrift who throws it all away!"

"Am I, sir?" said Mrs. Knifton, with a look of mock indignation. "We will see if I am to be misrepresented in this way with impunity. Bessie, my dear" (turning to me), "you shall judge how far I deserve the character which that unscrupulous man has just given to me. I am the spendthrift, am I? And you are only the banker? Very well. Banker, give me my money at once, if you please!"

Mr. Knifton laughed, and took some gold and silver from his waistcoat pocket.

"No, no," said Mrs. Knifton, "you may want what you have got there for necessary expenses. Is that all the money you have about you? What do I feel here?" and she tapped her husband on the chest, just over the breast-pocket of his coat.

Mr. Knifton laughed again, and produced his pocketbook. His wife snatched it out of his hand, opened it, and drew out some bank-notes, put them back again immediately, and, closing the pocketbook, stepped across the room to my poor mother's little walnut-wood book-case, the only bit of valuable furniture we had in the house.

"What are you going to do there?" asked Mr. Knifton, following his wife.

Mrs. Knifton opened the glass door of the book-case, put the pocketbook in a vacant place on one of the lower shelves, closed and locked the door again, and gave me the key.

"You called me a spendthrift just now," she said. "There is my answer. Not one farthing of that money shall you spend at Cliverton on me. Keep the key in your pocket, Bessie, and, whatever Mr. Knifton may say, on no account let him have it until we call again on our way back. No, sir, I won't trust you with that money in your pocket in the town of Cliverton. I will make sure of your taking it all home again, by leaving it here in more trustworthy hands than yours until we ride back. Bessie, my dear, what do you say to that as a lesson in economy inflicted on a prudent husband by a spendthrift wife?"

She took Mr. Knifton's arm while she spoke, and drew him away to the door. He protested and made some resistance, but she easily carried her point, for he was far too fond of her to have a will of his own in any trifling matter between them. Whatever the men might say, Mr. Knifton was a model husband in the estimation of all the women who knew him.

"You will see us as we come back, Bessie. Till then, you are our banker, and the pocketbook is yours," cried Mrs. Knifton, gayly, at the door. Her husband lifted her into the saddle, mounted himself, and away they both galloped over the moor as wild and happy as a couple of children.

Although my being trusted with money by Mrs. Knifton was no novelty (in her maiden days she always employed me to pay her dress-maker's bills), I did not feel quite easy at having a pocketbook full of bank-notes left by her in my charge. I had no positive apprehensions about the safety of the deposit placed in my hands, but it was one of the odd points in my character then (and I think it is still) to feel an unreasonably strong objection to charging myself with money responsibilities of any kind, even to suit the convenience of my dearest friends. As soon as I was left alone, the very sight of the pocketbook behind the glass door of the book-case began to worry me, and instead of returning to my work, I puzzled my brains about finding a place to lock it up in, where it would not be exposed to the view of any chance passers-by who might stray into the Black Cottage.

This was not an easy matter to compass in a poor house like ours, where we had nothing valuable to put under lock and key. After running over various hiding-places in my mind, I thought of my tea-caddy, a present from Mrs. Knifton, which I always kept out of harm's way in my own bedroom. Most unluckily—as it afterward turned out—instead of taking the pocketbook to the tea-caddy, I went into my room first to take the tea-caddy to the pocketbook. I only acted in this roundabout way from sheer thoughtlessness, and severely enough I was punished for it, as you will acknowledge yourself when you have read a page or two more of my story.

I was just getting the unlucky tea-caddy out of my cupboard, when I heard footsteps in the passage, and, running out immediately, saw two men walk into the kitchen—the room in which I had received Mr. and Mrs. Knifton. I inquired what they wanted sharply enough, and one of them answered immediately that they wanted my father. He turned toward me, of course, as he spoke, and I recognized him as a stone-mason, going among his comrades by the name of Shifty Dick. He bore a very bad character for everything but wrestling, a sport for which the working men of our parts were famous all through the county. Shifty Dick was champion, and he had got his name from some tricks of wrestling, for which he was celebrated. He was a tall, heavy man, with a lowering, scarred face, and huge hairy hands—the last visitor in the whole world that I should have been glad to see under any circumstances. His
were the cheerful crackling of the fire and the steady purring of the cat, as she basked luxuriously in the warm light.

The wind had lulled with the sunset, but the mist was rising, and a heavy rain was beginning to fall. Never did the lonely prospect of the moor look so dreary as it looked to my eyes that evening. Never did I regret any slight thing more sincerely than I then regretted the leaving of Mr. Knifton's pocketbook in my charge. I cannot say that I suffered under any actual alarm, for I felt next to certain that neither Shifty Dick nor Jerry had got a chance of setting eyes on so small a thing as the pocketbook while they were in the kitchen; but there was a kind of vague distrust troubling me—a suspicion of the night—a dislike of being left by myself, which I never remember having experienced before. This feeling so increased after I had closed the door and gone back to the kitchen, that, when I heard the voices of the quarrymen as they passed our cottage on their way home to the village in the valley below Moor Farm, I stepped out into the passage with a momentary notion of telling them how I was situated, and asking them for advice and protection.

I had hardly formed this idea, however, before I dismissed it. None of the quarrymen were intimate friends of mine. I had a nodding acquaintance with them, and believed them to be honest men, as times went. But my own common sense told me that what little knowledge of their characters I had was by no means sufficient to warrant me in admitting them into my confidence in the matter of the pocketbook. I had seen enough of poverty and poor men to know what a terrible temptation a large sum of money is to those whose whole lives are passed in scraping up sixpences by weary hard work. It is one thing to write fine sentiments in books about incorruptible honesty, and another thing to put those sentiments in practice when one day's work is all that a man has to set up in the way of an obstacle between starvation and his own fireside.

The only resource that remained was to carry the pocketbook with me to Moor Farm, and ask permission to pass the night there. But I could not persuade myself that there was any real necessity for taking such a course as this; and, if the truth must be told, my pride revolted at the idea of presenting myself in the character of a coward before the people at the farm. Timidity is thought rather a graceful attraction among ladies, but among poor women it is something to be laughed at. A woman with less spirit of her own than I had, and always shall have, would have considered twice in my situation before she made up her mind to encounter the jokes of plowmen and the jeers of milkmaids. As for me, I had hardly considered about going to the farm before I despised myself for entertaining any such notion. "No, no," thought I, "I am not the woman to walk a mile and a half through rain, and mist, and darkness to tell a whole kitchenful of people that I am afraid. Come what may, here I stop till father gets back."

Having arrived at that valiant resolution, the first thing I did was to lock and bolt the back and front doors, and see to the security of every shutter in the house.

That duty performed, I made a blazing fire, lighted my candle, and sat down to tea, as snug and comfortable as possible. I could hardly believe now, with the light in the room, and the sense of security inspired by the closed doors and shutters, that I had ever felt even the slightest apprehension earlier in the day. I sang as I washed up the tea-things; and even the cat seemed to catch the infection of my good spirits. I never knew the pretty creature so playful as she was that evening.

The tea-things put by, I took up my knitting, and worked away at it so long that I began at last to get drowsy. The fire was so bright and comforting that I could not muster resolution enough to leave it and go to bed. I sat staring lazily into the blaze, with my knitting on my lap—sat till the splashing of the rain outside and the fitful, sullen sobbing of the wind grew fainter and fainter on my ear. The last sounds I heard before I fairly dozed off to sleep were the cheerful crackling of the fire and the steady purring of the cat, as she basked luxuriously in the warm light.

The words were hardly out of my mouth before I repented that my anxiety to get rid of my unwelcome visitors had made me incautious enough to acknowledge that my father would be away from home for the whole night.

Shifty Dick and his companion looked at each other when I unwisely let out the truth, but made no remark except to ask me if I would give them a drop of cider. I answered sharply that I had no cider in the house, having no fear of the consequences of refusing them drink, because I knew that plenty of men were at work within hail, in a neighboring quarry. The two looked at each other again when I denied having any cider to give them; and Jerry (as I am obliged to call him, knowing no other name by which to distinguish the fellow) took off his cap to me once more, and, with a kind of blackguard gentility upon him, said they would have the pleasure of calling the next day, when my father was at home. I said good-afternoon as ungraciously as possible, and, to my great relief, they both left the cottage immediately afterward.

As soon as they were well away, I watched them from the door. They trudged off in the direction of Moor Farm; and, as it was beginning to get dusk, I soon lost sight of them.

Half an hour afterward I looked out again.

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on the hearth. Those were the last sounds before I fell asleep. The sound that woke me was one loud bang at the front door.

I started up, with my heart (as the saying is) in my mouth, with a frightful momentary shuddering at the roots of my hair--I started up breathless, cold and motionless, waiting in the silence I hardly knew for what, doubtful at first whether I had dreamed about the bang at the door, or whether the blow had really been struck on it.

In a minute or less there came a second bang, louder than the first. I ran out into the passage.

"Who's there?"

"Let us in," answered a voice, which I recognised immediately as the voice of Shifty Dick.

"Wait a bit, my dear, and let me explain," said a second voice, in the low, oily, jeering tones of Dick's companion--the wickedly clever little man whom he called Jerry. "You are alone in the house, my pretty little dear. You may crack your sweet voice with screeching, and there's nobody near to hear you. Listen to reason, my love, and let us in. We don't want cider this time--we only want a very neat-looking pocketbook which you happen to have, and your late excellent mother's four silver teaspoons, which you keep so nice and clean on the chimney-piece. If you let us in we won't hurt a hair of your head, my cherub, and we promise to go away the moment we have got what we want, unless you particularly wish us to stop to tea. If you keep us out, we shall be obliged to break into the house and then--"

"And then," burst in Shifty Dick, "we'll _mash_ you!"

"Yes," said Jerry, "we'll mash you, my beauty. But you won't drive us to doing that, will you? You will let us in?"

This long parley gave me time to recover from the effect which the first bang at the door had produced on my nerves. The threats of the two villains would have terrified some women out of their senses, but the only result they produced on _me_ was violent indignation. I had, thank God, a strong spirit of my own, and the cool, contemptuous insolence of the man Jerry effectually roused it.

"You cowardly villains!" I screamed at them through the door. "You think you can frighten me because I am only a poor girl left alone in the house. You ragamuffin thieves, I defy you both! Our bolts are strong, our shutters are thick. I am here to keep my father's house safe, and keep it I will against an army of you!"

You may imagine what a passion I was in when I vaporied and blustered in that way. I heard Jerry laugh and Shifty Dick swear a whole mouthful of oaths. Then there was a dead silence for a minute or two, and then the two ruffians attacked the door.

I rushed into the kitchen and seized the poker, and then heaped wood on the fire, and lighted all the candles I could find; for I felt as though I could keep up my courage better if I had plenty of light. Strange and improbable as it may appear, the next thing that attracted my attention was my poor pussy, crouched up, panic-stricken, in a corner. I was so fond of the little creature that I took her up in my arms and carried her into my bedroom and put her inside my bed. A comical thing to do in a situation of deadly peril, was it not? But it seemed quite natural and proper at the time.

All this while the blows were falling faster and faster on the door. They were dealt, as I conjectured, with heavy stones picked up from the ground outside. Jerry sang at his wicked work, and Shifty Dick swore. As I left the bedroom after putting the cat under cover, I heard the lower panel of the door begin to crack.

I ran into the kitchen and huddled our four silver spoons into my pocket; then took the unlucky book with the bank-notes and put it in the bosom of my dress. I was determined to defend the property confided to my care with my life. Just as I had secured the pocketbook I heard the door splintering, and rushed into the passage again with my heavy kitchen poker lifted in both hands.

I was in time to see the bald head of Jerry, with the ugly-looking knobs on it, pushed into the passage through a great rent in one of the lower panels of the door.

"Get out, you villain, or I'll brain you on the spot!" I screeched, threatening him with the poker.

Mr. Jerry took his head out again much faster than he put it in.

The next thing that came through the rent was a long pitchfork, which they darted at me from the outside, to move me from the door. I struck at it with all my might, and the blow must have jarred the hand of Shifty Dick up to his very shoulder, for I heard him give a roar of rage and pain. Before he could catch at the fork with his other hand I had drawn it inside. By this time even Jerry lost his temper and swore more awfully than Dick himself.

Then there came another minute of respite. I suspected they had gone to get bigger stones, and I dreaded the giving way of the whole door.

Running into the bedroom as this fear beset me, I laid hold of my chest of drawers, dragged it into the passage, and threw it down against the door. On the top of that I heaped my father's big tool chest, three chairs, and a scuttleful of coals; and last, I dragged out the kitchen table and rammed it as hard as I could against the whole barricade. They heard me as they were coming up to the door with fresh stones. Jerry said: "Stop a bit!" and then...
the two consulted together in whispers. I listened eagerly, and just caught these words:

"Let's try it the other way."

Nothing more was said, but I heard their footsteps retreating from the door.

Were they going to besiege the back door now?

I had hardly asked myself that question when I heard their voices at the other side of the house. The back door was smaller than the front, but it had this advantage in the way of strength—it was made of two solid oak boards joined lengthwise, and strengthened inside by heavy cross pieces. It had no bolts like the front door, but was fastened by a bar of iron running across it in a slanting direction, and fitting at either end into the wall.

"They must have the whole cottage down before they can break in at that door!" I thought to myself. And they soon found out as much for themselves. After five minutes of banging at the back door they gave up any further attack in that direction and cast their heavy stones down with curses of fury awful to hear.

I went into the kitchen and dropped on the window-seat to rest for a moment. Suspense and excitement together were beginning to tell upon me. The perspiration broke out thick on my forehead, and I began to feel the bruises I had inflicted on my hands in making the barricade against the front door. I had not lost a particle of my resolution, but I was beginning to lose strength. There was a bottle of rum in the cupboard, which my brother the sailor had left with us the last time he was ashore. I drank a drop of it. Never before or since have I put anything down my throat that did me half so much good as that precious mouthful of rum!

I was still sitting in the window-seat drying my face, when I suddenly heard their voices close behind me. They were feeling the outside of the window against which I was sitting. It was protected, like all the other windows in the cottage, by iron bars. I listened in dreadful suspense for the sound of filing, but nothing of the sort was audible. They had evidently reckoned on frightening me easily into letting them in, and had come unprovided with house-breaking tools of any kind. A fresh burst of oaths informed me that they had recognized the obstacle of the iron bars. I listened breathlessly for some warning of what they were going to do next, but their voices seemed to die away in the distance. They were retreating from the window. Were they also retreating from the house altogether? Had they given up the idea of effecting an entrance in despair?

A long silence followed—a silence which tried my courage even more severely than the tumult of their first attack on the cottage.

Dreadful suspicions now beset me of their being able to accomplish by treachery what they had failed to effect by force. Well as I knew the cottage, I began to doubt whether there might not be ways of cunningly and silently entering it against which I was not provided. The ticking of the clock annoyed me; the crackling of the fire startled me. I looked out twenty times in a minute into the dark corners of the passage, straining my eyes, holding my breath, anticipating the most unlikely events, the most impossible dangers. Had they really gone, or were they still prowling about the house? Oh, what a sum of money I would have given only to have known what they were about in that interval of silence!

I was startled at last out of my suspense in the most awful manner. A shout from one of them reached my ears on a sudden down the kitchen chimney. It was so unexpected and so horrible in the stillness that I screamed for the first time since the attack on the house. My worst forebodings had never suggested to me that the two villains might mount upon the roof.

"Let us in, you she-devil!" roared a voice down the chimney.

There was another pause. The smoke from the wood fire, thin and light as it was in the red state of the embers at that moment, had evidently obliged the man to take his face from the mouth of the chimney. I counted the seconds while he was, as I conjectured, getting his breath again. In less than half a minute there came another shout:

"Let us in, or we'll burn the place down over your head!"

Burn it? Burn what? There was nothing easily combustible but the thatch on the roof; and that had been well soaked by the heavy rain which had now fallen incessantly for more than six hours. Burn the place over my head? How?

While I was still casting about wildly in my mind to discover what possible danger there could be of fire, one of the heavy stones placed on the thatch to keep it from being torn up by high winds came thundering down the chimney. It scattered the live embers on the hearth all over the room. A richly-furnished place, with knickknacks and fine muslin about it, would have been set on fire immediately. Even our bare floor and rough furniture gave out a smell of burning at the first shower of embers which the first stone scattered.

For an instant I stood quite horror-struck before this new proof of the devilish ingenuity of the villains outside. But the dreadful danger I was now in recalled me to my senses immediately. There was a large canful of water in my bedroom, and I ran in at once to fetch it. Before I could get back to the kitchen a second stone had been thrown down the chimney, and the floor was smoldering in several places.

I had wit enough to let the smoldering go on for a moment or two more, and to pour the whole of my canful of
time in my life in a dead swoon. I just mustered strength enough to gasp out a few words, telling him what was the matter, and then fell down at his feet, for the first time half crazed by what I had gone through. If it had so happened that the wind had changed after I had observed its direction early in the evening, I should have gone astray, and have probably perished of fatigue and exposure on the moor. Providentially, it still blew steadily as it had blown for hours past, and I reached the farmhouse with my clothes wet through, and my brain in a high fever. When I made my alarm at the door, they had already removed any part of them.

The murderous hand was still tapping with the knife when I heard a shout from the man Jerry, coming from the neighborhood of my father's stone-shed in the back yard. The hand and knife disappeared instantly. I went to the back door and put my ear to it, and listened.

Both men were now in the shed. I made the most desperate efforts to call to mind what tools and other things were left in it which might be used against me. But my agitation confused me. I could remember nothing except my father's big stone-saw, which was far too heavy and unwieldy to be used on the roof of the cottage. I was still puzzling my brains, and making my head swim to no purpose, when I heard the men dragging something out of the shed. At the same instant that the noise caught my ear, the remembrance flashed across me like lightning of some beams of wood which had lain in the shed for years past. I had hardly time to feel certain that they were removing one of these beams before I heard Shifty Dick say to Jerry.

"Which door?"

"The front," was the answer. "We've cracked it already; we'll have it down now in no time."

Senses less sharpened by danger than mine would have understood but too easily, from these words, that they were about to use the beam as a battering-ram against the door. When that conviction overcame me, I lost courage at last. I felt that the door must come down. No such barricade as I had constructed could support it for more than a few minutes against such shocks as it was now to receive.

"I can do no more to keep the house against them," I said to myself, with my knees knocking together, and the tears at last beginning to wet my cheeks. "I must trust to the night and the thick darkness, and save my life by running for it while there is yet time."

I huddled on my cloak and hood, and had my hand on the bar of the back door, when a piteous mew from the bedroom reminded me of the existence of poor Pussy. I ran in, and huddled the creature up in my apron. Before I was out in the passage again, the first shock from the beam fell on the door.

The upper hinge gave way. The chairs and coal-scuttle, forming the top of my barricade, were hurled, rattling, on to the floor, but the lower hinge of the door, and the chest of drawers and the tool-chest still kept their places.

"One more!" I heard the villains cry--"one more run with the beam, and down it comes!"

Just as they must have been starting for that "one more run," I opened the back door and fled into the night, with the bookful of banknotes in my bosom, the silver spoons in my pocket, and the cat in my arms. I threaded my way easily enough through the familiar obstacles in the backyard, and was out in the pitch darkness of the moor before I heard the second shock, and the crash which told me that the whole door had given way.

In a few minutes they must have discovered the fact of my flight with the pocketbook, for I heard shouts in the distance as if they were running out to pursue me. I kept on at the top of my speed, and the noise soon died away. It was so dark that twenty thieves instead of two would have found it useless to follow me.

How long it was before I reached the farmhouse--the nearest place to which I could fly for refuge--I cannot tell you. I remember that I had just sense enough to keep the wind at my back (having observed in the beginning of the evening that it blew toward Moor Farm), and to go on resolutely through the darkness. In all other respects I was by this time half crazed by what I had gone through. If it had so happened that the wind had changed after I had observed its direction early in the evening, I should have gone astray, and have probably perished of fatigue and exposure on the moor. Providentially, it still blew steadily as it had blown for hours past, and I reached the farmhouse with my clothes wet through, and my brain in a high fever. When I made my alarm at the door, they had all gone to bed but the farmer's eldest son, who was sitting up late over his pipe and newspaper. I just mustered strength enough to gasp out a few words, telling him what was the matter, and then fell down at his feet, for the first time in my life in a dead swoon.
That swoon was followed by a severe illness. When I got strong enough to look about me again, I found myself in one of the farmhouse beds--my father, Mrs. Knifton, and the doctor were all in the room--my cat was asleep at my feet, and the pocketbook that I had saved lay on the table by my side.

There was plenty of news for me to hear as soon as I was fit to listen to it. Shifty Dick and the other rascal had been caught, and were in prison, waiting their trial at the next assizes. Mr. and Mrs. Knifton had been so shocked at the danger I had run--for which they blamed their own want of thoughtfulness in leaving the pocketbook in my care--that they had insisted on my father's removing from our lonely home to a cottage on their land, which we were to inhabit rent free. The bank-notes that I had saved were given to me to buy furniture with, in place of the things that the thieves had broken. These pleasant tidings assisted so greatly in promoting my recovery, that I was soon able to relate to my friends at the farmhouse the particulars that I have written here. They were all surprised and interested, but no one, as I thought, listened to me with such breathless attention as the farmer's eldest son. Mrs. Knifton noticed this too, and began to make jokes about it, in her light-hearted way, as soon as we were alone. I thought little of her jesting at the time; but when I got well, and we went to live at our new home, "the young farmer," as he was called in our parts, constantly came to see us, and constantly managed to meet me out of doors. I had my share of vanity, like other young women, and I began to think of Mrs. Knifton's jokes with some attention. To be brief, the young farmer managed one Sunday--I never could tell how--to lose his way with me in returning from church, and before we found out the right road home again he had asked me to be his wife.

His relations did all they could to keep us asunder and break off the match, thinking a poor stonemason's daughter no fit wife for a prosperous yeoman. But the farmer was too obstinate for them. He had one form of answer to all their objections. "A man, if he is worth the name, marries according to his own notions, and to please himself," he used to say. "My notion is, that when I take a wife I am placing my character and my happiness--the most precious things I have to trust--in one woman's care. The woman I mean to marry had a small charge confided to her care, and showed herself worthy of it at the risk of her life. That is proof enough for me that she is worthy of the greatest charge I can put into her hands. Rank and riches are fine things, but the certainty of getting a good wife is something better still. I'm of age, I know my own mind, and I mean to marry the stone-mason's daughter."

And he did marry me. Whether I proved myself worthy or not of his good opinion is a question which I must leave you to ask my husband. All that I had to relate about myself and my doings is now told. Whatever interest my perilous adventure may excite, ends, I am well aware, with my escape to the farmhouse. I have only ventured on writing these few additional sentences because my marriage is the moral of my story. It has brought me the choicest blessings of happiness and prosperity, and I owe them all to my night-adventure in _The Black Cottage_.

THE SECOND DAY.

A CLEAR, cloudless, bracing autumn morning. I rose gayly, with the pleasant conviction on my mind that our experiment had thus far been successful beyond our hopes.

Short and slight as the first story had been, the result of it on Jessie's mind had proved conclusive. Before I could put the question to her, she declared of her own accord, and with her customary exaggeration, that she had definitely abandoned all idea of writing to her aunt until our collection of narratives was exhausted.

"I am in a fever of curiosity about what is to come," she said, when we all parted for the night; "and, even if I wanted to leave you, I could not possibly go away now, without hearing the stories to the end."

So far, so good. All my anxieties from this time were for George's return. Again to-day I searched the newspapers, and again there were no tidings of the ship.

Miss Jessie occupied the second day by a drive to our county town to make some little purchases. Owen, and Morgan, and I were all hard at work, during her absence, on the stories that still remained to be completed. Owen desponded about ever getting done; Morgan grumbled at what he called the absurd difficulty of writing nonsense. I worked on smoothly and contentedly, stimulated by the success of the first night.

We assembled as before in our guest's sitting-room. As the clock struck eight she drew out the second card. It was Number Two. The lot had fallen on me to read next.

"Although my story is told in the first person," I said, addressing Jessie, "you must not suppose that the events related in this particular case happened to me. They happened to a friend of mine, who naturally described them to me from his own personal point of view. In producing my narrative from the recollection of what he told me some years since, I have supposed myself to be listening to him again, and have therefore written in his character, and, whenever my memory would help me, as nearly as possible in his language also. By this means I hope I have succeeded in giving an air of reality to a story which has truth, at any rate, to recommend it. I must ask you to excuse me if I enter into no details in offering this short explanation. Although the persons concerned in my narrative have ceased to exist, it is necessary to observe all due delicacy toward their memories. Who they were, and how I became acquainted with them, are matters of no moment. The interest of the story, such as it is, stands in no need, in this instance, of any assistance from personal explanations."
With those words I addressed myself to my task, and read as follows:

BROTHER GRIFFITH'S STORY
of
THE FAMILY SECRET.

CHAPTER I.

Was it an Englishman or a Frenchman who first remarked that every family had a skeleton in its cupboard? I am not learned enough to know, but I reverence the observation, whoever made it. It speaks a startling truth through an appropriately grim metaphor—a truth which I have discovered by practical experience. Our family had a skeleton in the cupboard, and the name of it was Uncle George.

I arrived at the knowledge that this skeleton existed, and I traced it to the particular cupboard in which it was hidden, by slow degrees. I was a child when I first began to suspect that there was such a thing, and a grown man when I at last discovered that my suspicions were true.

My father was a doctor, having an excellent practice in a large country town. I have heard that he married against the wishes of his family. They could not object to my mother on the score of birth, breeding, or character—they only disliked her heartily. My grandfather, grandmother, uncles, and aunts all declared that she was a heartless, deceitful woman; all disliked her manners, her opinions, and even the expression of her face—all, with the exception of my father's youngest brother, George.

George was the unlucky member of our family. The rest were all clever; he was slow in capacity. The rest were all remarkably handsome; he was the sort of man that no woman ever looks at twice. The rest succeeded in life; he failed. His profession was the same as my father's, but he never got on when he started in practice for himself. The sick poor, who could not choose, employed him, and liked him. The sick rich, who could—especially the ladies—declined to call him in when they could get anybody else. In experience he gained greatly by his profession; in money and reputation he gained nothing.

There are very few of us, however dull and unattractive we may be to outward appearance, who have not some strong passion, some germ of what is called romance, hidden more or less deeply in our natures. All the passion and romance in the nature of my Uncle George lay in his love and admiration for his brother.

He sincerely worshipped his eldest brother as one of the noblest of human beings. When my father was engaged to be married, and when the rest of the family, as I have already mentioned, did not hesitate to express their unfavorable opinion of the disposition of his chosen wife, Uncle George, who had never ventured on differing with anyone before, to the amazement of everybody, undertook the defense of his future sister-in-law in the most vehement and positive manner. In his estimation, his brother's choice was something sacred and indisputable. The lady might, and did, treat him with unconcealed contempt, laugh at his awkwardness, grow impatient at his stammering—it made no difference to Uncle George. She was to be his brother's wife, and, in virtue of that one great fact, she became, in the estimation of the poor surgeon, a very queen, who, by the laws of the domestic constitution, could do no wrong.

When my father had been married a little while, he took his youngest brother to live with him as his assistant. If Uncle George had been made president of the College of Surgeons, he could not have been prouder and happier than he was in his new position. I am afraid my father never understood the depth of his brother's affection for him. All the hard work fell to George's share: the long journeys at night, the physicking of wearisome poor people, the drunken cases, the revolting cases—all the drudging, dirty business of the surgery, in short, was turned over to him; and day after day, month after month, he struggled through it without a murmur. When his brother and his sister-in-law went out to dine with the county gentry, it never entered his head to feel disappointed at being left unnoticed at home. When the return dinners were given, and he was asked to come in at tea-time, and left to sit unregarded in a corner, it never occurred to him to imagine that he was treated with any want of consideration or respect. He was part of the furniture of the house, and it was the business as well as the pleasure of his life to turn himself to any use to which his brother might please to put him.

So much for what I have heard from others on the subject of my Uncle George. My own personal experience of him is limited to what I remember as a mere child. Let me say something, however, first about my parents, my sister and myself.

My sister was the eldest born and the best loved. I did not come into the world till four years after her birth, and no other child followed me. Caroline, from her earliest days, was the perfection of beauty and health. I was small, weakly, and, if the truth must be told, almost as plain-featured as Uncle George himself. It would be ungracious and undutiful in me to presume to decide whether there was any foundation or not for the dislike that my father's family always felt for my mother. All I can venture to say is, that her children never had any cause to complain of her.

Her passionate affection for my sister, her pride in the child's beauty, I remember well, as also her uniform kindness and indulgence toward me. My personal defects must have been a sore trial to her in secret, but neither she
nor my father ever showed me that they perceived any difference between Caroline and myself. When presents were made to my sister, presents were made to me. When my father and mother caught my sister up in their arms and kissed her they scrupulously gave me my turn afterward. My childish instinct told me that there was a difference in their smiles when they looked at me and looked at her; that the kisses given to Caroline were warmer than the kisses given to me; that the hands which dried her tears in our childish griefs, touched her more gently than the hands which dried mine. But these, and other small signs of preference like them, were such as no parents could be expected to control. I noticed them at the time rather with wonder than with repining. I recall them now without a harsh thought either toward my father or my mother. Both loved me, and both did their duty by me. If I seem to speak constrainedly of them here, it is not on my own account. I can honestly say that, with all my heart and soul.

Even Uncle George, fond as he was of me, was fonder of my beautiful child-sister.

When I used mischievously to pull at his lank, scanty hair, he would gently and laughingly take it out of my hands, but he would let Caroline tug at it till his dim, wandering gray eyes winked and watered again with pain. He used to plunge perilously about the garden, in awkward imitation of the cantering of a horse, while I sat on his shoulders; but he would never proceed at any pace beyond a slow and safe walk when Caroline had a ride in her turn. When he took us out walking, Caroline was always on the side next the wall. When we interrupted him over his dirty work in the surgery, he used to tell me to go and play until he was ready for me; but he would put down his bottles, and clean his clumsy fingers on his coarse apron, and lead Caroline out again, as if she had been the greatest lady in the land. Ah! how he loved her! and, let me be honest and grateful, and add, how he loved me, too!

When I was eight years old and Caroline was twelve, I was separated from home for some time. I had been ailing for many months previously; had got ben efit from being taken to the sea-side, and had shown symptoms of relapsing on being brought home again to the midland county in which we resided. After much consultation, it was at last resolved that I should be sent to live, until my constitution got stronger, with a maiden sister of my mother's, who had a house at a watering-place on the south coast.

I left home, I remember, loaded with presents, rejoicing over the prospect of looking at the sea again, as careless of the future and as happy in the present as any boy could be. Uncle George petitioned for a holiday to take me to the seaside, but he could not be spared from the surgery. He consoled himself and me by promising to make me a magnificent model of a ship.

I have that model before my eyes now while I write. It is dusty with age; the paint on it is cracked; the ropes are tangled; the sails are moth-eaten and yellow. The hull is all out of proportion, and the rig has been smiled at by every nautical friend of mine who has ever looked at it. Yet, worn-out and faulty as it is--inferior to the cheapest miniature vessel nowadays in any toy-shop window--I hardly know a possession of mine in this world that I would not sooner part with than Uncle George's ship.

My life at the sea-side was a very happy one. I remained with my aunt more than a year. My mother often came to see how I was going on, and at first always brought my sister with her; but during the last eight months of my stay Caroline never once appeared. I noticed also, at the same period, a change in my mother's manner. She looked paler and more anxious at each succeeding visit, and always had long conferences in private with my aunt. At last she ceased to come and see us altogether, and only wrote to know how my health was getting on. My father, too, who had at the earlier periods of my absence from home traveled to the sea-side to watch the progress of my recovery as often as his professional engagements would permit, now kept away like my mother. Even Uncle George, who had never been allowed a holiday to come and see me, but who had hitherto often written and begged me to write to him, broke off our correspondence.

I was naturally perplexed and amazed by these changes, and persecuted my aunt to tell me the reason of them. At first she tried to put me off with excuses; then she admitted that there was trouble in our house; and finally she confessed that the trouble was caused by the illness of my sister. When I inquired what that illness was, my aunt said it was useless to attempt to explain it to me. I next applied to the servants. One of them was less cautious than my aunt, and answered my question, but in terms that I could not comprehend. After much explanation, I was made to understand that "something was growing on my sister's neck that would spoil her beauty forever, and perhaps kill her, if it could not be got rid of." How well I remember the shudder of horror that ran through me at the vague idea of this deadly "something"! A fearful, awe-struck curiosity to see what Caroline's illness was with my own eyes troubled my inmost heart, and I begged to be allowed to go home and help to nurse her. The request was, it is almost needless to say, refused.

Weeks passed away, and still I heard nothing, except that my sister continued to be ill. One day I privately wrote a letter to Uncle George, asking him, in my childish way, to come and tell me about Caroline's illness.

I knew where the post-office was, and slipped out in the morning unobserved and dropped my letter in the box. I stole home again by the garden, and climbed in at the window of a back parlor on the ground floor. The room above was my aunt's bedchamber, and the moment I was inside the house I heard moans and loud convulsive sobs
proceeding from it. My aunt was a singularly quiet, composed woman. I could not imagine that the loud sobbing and moaning came from her, and I ran down terrified into the kitchen to ask the servants who was crying so violently in my aunt's room.

I found the housemaid and the cook talking together in whispers with serious faces. They started when they saw me as if I had been a grown-up master who had caught them neglecting their work.

"He's too young to feel it much," I heard one say to the other. "So far as he is concerned, it seems like a mercy that it happened no later."

In a few minutes they had told me the worst. It was indeed my aunt who had been crying in the bedroom. Caroline was dead.

I felt the blow more severely than the servants or anyone else about me supposed. Still I was a child in years, and I had the blessed elasticity of a child's nature. If I had been older I might have been too much absorbed in grief to observe my aunt so closely as I did, when she was composed enough to see me later in the day.

I was not surprised by the swollen state of her eyes, the paleness of her cheeks, or the fresh burst of tears that came from her when she took me in her arms at meeting. But I was both amazed and perplexed by the look of terror that I detected in her face. It was natural enough that she should grieve and weep over my sister's death, but why should she have that frightened look as if some other catastrophe had happened?

I asked if there was any more dreadful news from home besides the news of Caroline's death.

My aunt, said No in a strange, stifled voice, and suddenly turned her face from me. Was my father dead? No. My mother? No. Uncle George? My aunt trembled all over as she said No to that also, and bade me cease asking any more questions. She was not fit to bear them yet she said, and signed to the servant to lead me out of the room.

The next day I was told that I was to go home after the funeral, and was taken out toward evening by the housemaid, partly for a walk, partly to be measured for my mourning clothes. After we had left the tailor's, I persuaded the girl to extend our walk for some distance along the sea-beach, telling her, as we went, every little anecdote connected with my lost sister that came tenderly back to my memory in those first days of sorrow. She was so interested in hearing and I in speaking that we let the sun go down before we thought of turning back.

The evening was cloudy, and it got on from dusk to dark by the time we approached the town again. The housemaid was rather nervous at finding herself alone with me on the beach, and once or twice looked behind her distrustfully as we went on. Suddenly she squeezed my hand hard, and said:

"Let's get up on the cliff as fast as we can."

The words were hardly out of her mouth before I heard footsteps behind me--a man came round quickly to my side, snatched me away from the girl, and, catching me up in his arms without a word, covered my face with kisses. I knew he was crying, because my cheeks were instantly wet with his tears; but it was too dark for me to see who he was, or even how he was dressed. He did not, I should think, hold me half a minute in his arms. The housemaid screamed for help. I was put down gently on the sand, and the strange man instantly disappeared in the darkness.

When this extraordinary adventure was related to my aunt, she seemed at first merely bewildered at hearing of it; but in a moment more there came a change over her face, as if she had suddenly recollected or thought of something. She turned deadly pale, and said, in a hurried way, very unusual with her:

"Never mind; don't talk about it any more. It was only a mischievous trick to frighten you, I dare say. Forget all about it, my dear--forget all about it."

It was easier to give this advice than to make me follow it. For many nights after, I thought of nothing but the strange man who had kissed me and cried over me.

Who could he be? Somebody who loved me very much, and who was very sorry. My childish logic carried me to that length. But when I tried to think over all the grown-up gentlemen who loved me very much, I could never get on, to my own satisfaction, beyond my father and my Uncle George.

CHAPTER II.

I was taken home on the appointed day to suffer the trial--a hard one even at my tender years--of witnessing my mother's passionate grief and my father's mute despair. I remember that the scene of our first meeting after Caroline's death was wisely and considerately shortened by my aunt, who took me out of the room. She seemed to have a confused desire to keep me from leaving her after the door had closed behind us; but I broke away and ran downstairs to the surgery, to go and cry for my lost playmate with the sharer of all our games, Uncle George.

I opened the surgery door and could see nobody. I dried my tears and looked all round the room--it was empty. I ran upstairs again to Uncle George's garret bedroom--he was not there; his cheap hairbrush and old cast-off razor-case that had belonged to my grandfather were not on the dressing-table. Had he got some other bedroom? I went out on the landing and called softly, with an unaccountable terror and sinking at my heart:

"Uncle George!"

Nobody answered; but my aunt came hastily up the garret stairs.
"Hush!" she said. "You must never call that name out here again!"
She stopped suddenly, and looked as if her own words had frightened her.
"Is Uncle George dead?" I asked. My aunt turned red and pale, and stammered.
I did not wait to hear what she said. I brushed past her, down the stairs. My heart was bursting--my flesh felt cold. I ran breathlessly and recklessly into the room where my father and mother had received me. They were both sitting there still. I ran up to them, wringing my hands, and crying out in a passion of tears:
"Is Uncle George dead?"
My mother gave a scream that terrified me into instant silence and stillness. My father looked at her for a moment, rang the bell that summoned the maid, then seized me roughly by the arm and dragged me out of the room.
He took me down into the study, seated himself in his accustomed chair, and put me before him between his knees. His lips were awfully white, and I felt his two hands, as they grasped my shoulders, shaking violently.
"You are never to mention the name of Uncle George again," he said, in a quick, angry, trembling whisper. "Never to me, never to your mother, never to your aunt, never to anybody in this world! Never--never--never!"
The repetition of the word terrified me even more than the suppressed vehemence with which he spoke. He saw that I was frightened, and softened his manner a little before he went on.
"You will never see Uncle George again," he said. "Your mother and I love you dearly; but if you forget what I have told you, you will be sent away from home. Never speak that name again--mind, never! Now kiss me, and go away."
How his lips trembled--and oh, how cold they felt on mine!
I shrunk out of the room the moment he had kissed me, and went and hid myself in the garden.
"Uncle George is gone. I am never to see him any more; I am never to speak of him again"--those were the words I repeated to myself, with indescribable terror and confusion, the moment I was alone. There was something unspeakably horrible to my young mind in this mystery which I was commanded always to respect, and which, so far as I then knew, I could never hope to see revealed. My father, my mother, my aunt, all appeared to be separated from me now by some impassable barrier. Home seemed home no longer with Caroline dead, Uncle George gone, and a forbidden subject of talk perpetually and mysteriously interposing between my parents and me.
Though I never infringed the command my father had given me in his study (his words and looks, and that dreadful scream of my mother's, which seemed to be still ringing in my ears, were more than enough to insure my obedience), I also never lost the secret desire to penetrate the darkness which clouded over the fate of Uncle George.
For two years I remained at home and discovered nothing. If I asked the servants about my uncle, they could only tell me that one morning he disappeared from the house. Of the members of my father's family I could make no inquiries. They lived far away, and never came to see us; and the idea of writing to them, at my age and in my position, was out of the question. My aunt was as unapproachably silent as my father and mother; but I never forgot how her face had altered when she reflected for a moment after hearing of my extraordinary adventure while going home with the servant over the sands at night. The more I thought of that change of countenance in connection with what had occurred on my return to my father's house, the more certain I felt that the stranger who had kissed me and wept over me must have been no other than Uncle George.
At the end of my two years at home I was sent to sea in the merchant navy by my own earnest desire. I had always determined to be a sailor from the time when I first went to stay with my aunt at the sea-side, and I persisted long enough in my resolution to make my parents recognize the necessity of acceding to my wishes.
My new life delighted me, and I remained away on foreign stations more than four years. When I at length returned home, it was to find a new affliction darkening our fireside. My father had died on the very day when I sailed for my return voyage to England.
Absence and change of scene had in no respect weakened my desire to penetrate the mystery of Uncle George's disappearance. My mother's health was so delicate that I hesitated for some time to approach the forbidden subject in her presence. When I at last ventured to refer to it, suggesting to her that any prudent reserve which might have been necessary while I was a child, need no longer be persisted in now that I was growing to be a young man, she fell into a violent fit of trembling, and commanded me to say no more. It had been my father's will, she said, that the reserve to which I referred should be always adopted toward me; he had not authorized her, before he died, to speak more openly; and, now that he was gone, she would not so much as think of acting on her own unaided judgment. My aunt said the same thing in effect when I appealed to her. Determined not to be discouraged even yet, I undertook a journey, ostensibly to pay my respects to my father's family, but with the secret intention of trying what I could learn in that quarter on the subject of Uncle George.
My investigations led to some results, though they were by no means satisfactory. George had always been looked upon with something like contempt by his handsome sisters and his prosperous brothers, and he had not improved his position in the family by his warm advocacy of his brother's cause at the time of my father's marriage.
I found that my uncle's surviving relatives now spoke of him slightingly and carelessly. They assured me that they had never heard from him, and that they knew nothing about him, except that he had gone away to settle, as they supposed, in some foreign place, after having behaved very basely and badly to my father. He had been traced to London, where he had sold out of the funds the small share of money which he had inherited after his father's death, and he had been seen on the deck of a packet bound for France later on the same day. Beyond this nothing was known about him. In what the alleged baseness of his behavior had consisted none of his brothers and sisters could tell me. My father had refused to blame them by going into particulars, not only at the time of his brother's disappearance, but afterward, whenever the subject was mentioned. George had always been the black sheep of the flock, and he must have been conscious of his own baseness, or he would certainly have written to explain and to justify himself.

Such were the particulars which I gleaned during my visit to my father's family. To my mind, they tended rather to deepen than to reveal the mystery. That such a gentle, docile, affectionate creature as Uncle George should have injured the brother he loved by word or deed at any period of their intercourse, seemed incredible; but that he should have been guilty of an act of baseness at the very time when my sister was dying was simply and plainly impossible. And yet there was the incomprehensible fact staring me in the face that the death of Caroline and the disappearance of Uncle George had taken place in the same week! Never did I feel more daunted and bewildered by the family secret than after I had heard all the particulars in connection with it that my father's relatives had to tell me.

I may pass over the events of the next few years of my life briefly enough.

My nautical pursuits filled up all my time, and took me far away from my country and my friends. But, whatever I did, and wherever I went, the memory of Uncle George, and the desire to penetrate the mystery of his disappearance, haunted me like familiar spirits. Often, in the lonely watches of the night at sea, did I recall the dark evening on the beach, the strange man's hurried embrace, the startling sensation of feeling his tears on my cheeks, the disappearance of him before I had breath or self-possession enough to say a word. Often did I think over the inexplicable events that followed, when I had returned, after my sister's funeral, to my father's house; and oftener still did I puzzle my brains vainly, in the attempt to form some plan for inducing my mother or my aunt to disclose the secret which they had hitherto kept from me so perseveringly. My only chance of knowing what had really happened to Uncle George, my only hope of seeing him again, rested with those two near and dear relatives. I despaired of ever getting my mother to speak on the forbidden subject after what had passed between us, but I felt more sanguine about my prospects of ultimately inducing my aunt to relax in her discretion. My anticipations, however, in this direction were not destined to be fulfilled. On my next visit to England I found my aunt prostrated by a paralytic attack, which deprived her of the power of speech. She died soon afterward in my arms, leaving me her sole heir. I searched anxiously among her papers for some reference to the family mystery, but found no clew to guide me. All my mother's letters to her sister at the time of Caroline's illness and death had been destroyed.

CHAPTER III.

MORE years passed; my mother followed my aunt to the grave, and still I was as far as ever from making any discoveries in relation to Uncle George. Shortly after the period of this last affliction my health gave way, and I departed, by my doctor's advice, to try some baths in the south of France.

I traveled slowly to my destination, turning aside from the direct road, and stopping wherever I pleased. One evening, when I was not more than two or three days' journey from the baths to which I was bound, I was struck by the picturesque situation of a little town placed on the brow of a hill at some distance from the main road, and resolved to have a nearer look at the place, with a view to stopping there for the night, if it pleased me. I found the principal inn clean and quiet--ordered my bed there--and, after dinner, strolled out to look at the church. No thought of Uncle George was in my mind when I entered the building; and yet, at that very moment, chance was leading me to the discovery which, for so many years past, I had vainly endeavored to make--the discovery which I had given up as hopeless since the day of my mother's death.

I found nothing worth notice in the church, and was about to leave it again, when I caught a glimpse of a pretty view through a side door, and stopped to admire it.

The churchyard formed the foreground, and below it the hill-side sloped away gently into the plain, over which the sun was setting in full glory. The cure of the church was reading his breviary, walking up and down a gravel-path that parted the rows of graves. In the course of my wanderings I had learned to speak French as fluently as most Englishmen, and when the priest came near me I said a few words in praise of the view, and complimented him on the neatness and prettiness of the churchyard. He answered with great politeness, and we got into conversation together immediately.

As we strolled along the gravel-walk, my attention was attracted by one of the graves standing apart from the rest. The cross at the head of it differed remarkably, in some points of appearance, from the crosses on the other graves. While all the rest had garlands hung on them, this one cross was quite bare; and, more extraordinary still, no
name was inscribed on it.

The priest, observing that I stopped to look at the grave, shook his head and sighed.

"A countryman of yours is buried there," he said. "I was present at his death. He had borne the burden of a great sorrow among us, in this town, for many weary years, and his conduct had taught us to respect and pity him with all our hearts."

"How is it that his name is not inscribed over his grave?" I inquired.

"It was suppressed by his own desire," answered the priest, with some little hesitation. "He confessed to me in his last moments that he had lived here under an assumed name. I asked his real name, and he told it to me, with the particulars of his sad story. He had reasons for desiring to be forgotten after his death. Almost the last words he spoke were, 'Let my name die with me.' Almost the last request he made was that I would keep that name a secret from all the world excepting only one person."

"Some relative, I suppose?" said I.

"Yes—a nephew," said the priest.

The moment the last word was out of his mouth, my heart gave a strange answering bound. I suppose I must have changed color also, for the cure looked at me with sudden attention and interest.

"A nephew," the priest went on, "whom he had loved like his own child. He told me that if this nephew ever traced him to his burial-place, and asked about him, I was free in that case to disclose all I knew. 'I should like my little Charley to know the truth,' he said. 'In spite of the difference in our ages, Charley and I were playmates years ago.'"

My heart beat faster, and I felt a choking sensation at the throat the moment I heard the priest unconsciously mention my Christian name in mentioning the dying man's last words.

As soon as I could steady my voice and feel certain of my self-possession, I communicated my family name to the cure, and asked him if that was not part of the secret that he had been requested to preserve.

He started back several steps, and clasped his hands amazedly.

"Can it be?" he said, in low tones, gazing at me earnestly, with something like dread in his face.

I gave him my passport, and looked away toward the grave. The tears came into my eyes as the recollections of past days crowded back on me. Hardly knowing what I did, I knelt down by the grave, and smoothed the grass over it with my hand. Oh, Uncle George, why not have told your secret to your old playmate? Why leave him to find you here?

The priest raised me gently, and begged me to go with him into his own house. On our way there, I mentioned persons and places that I thought my uncle might have spoken of, in order to satisfy my companion that I was really the person I represented myself to be. By the time we had entered his little parlor, and had sat down alone in it, we were almost like old friends together.

I thought it best that I should begin by telling all that I have related here on the subject of Uncle George, and his disappearance from home. My host listened with a very sad face, and said, when I had done:

"I can understand your anxiety to know what I am authorized to tell you, but pardon me if I say first that there are circumstances in your uncle's story which it may pain you to hear--" He stopped suddenly.

"Which it may pain me to hear as a nephew?" I asked.

"No," said the priest, looking away from me, "as a son."

I gratefully expressed my sense of the delicacy and kindness which had prompted my companion's warning, but I begged him, at the same time, to keep me no longer in suspense and to tell me the stern truth, no matter how painfully it might affect me as a listener.

"In telling me all you knew about what you term the Family Secret," said the priest, "you have mentioned as a strange coincidence that your sister's death and your uncle's disappearance took place at the same time. Did you ever suspect what cause it was that occasioned your sister's death?"

"I only knew what my father told me, and what all our friends believed—that she had a tumor in the neck, or, as I sometimes heard it stated, from the effect on her constitution of a tumor in the neck."

"She died under an operation for the removal of that tumor," said the priest, in low tones; "and the operator was your Uncle George."

In those few words all the truth burst upon me.

"Console yourself with the thought that the long martyrdom of his life is over," the priest went on. "He rests; he is at peace. He and his little darling understand each other, and are happy now. That thought bore him up to the last on his death-bed. He always spoke of your sister as his 'little darling.' He firmly believed that she was waiting to forgive and console him in the other world—and who shall say he was deceived in that belief?"

Not I! Not anyone who has ever loved and suffered, surely!

"It was out of the depths of his self-sacrificing love for the child that he drew the fatal courage to undertake the
operation," continued the priest. "Your father naturally shrank from attempting it. His medical brethren whom he consulted all doubted the propriety of taking any measures for the removal of the tumor, in the particular condition and situation of it when they were called in. Your uncle alone differed with them. He was too modest a man to say so, but your mother found it out. The deformity of her beautiful child horrified her. She was desperate enough to catch at the faintest hope of remedying it that anyone might hold out to her; and she persuaded your uncle to put his opinion to the proof. Her horror at the deformity of the child, and her despair at the prospect of its lasting for life, seem to have utterly blinded her to all natural sense of the danger of the operation. It is hard to know how to say it to you, her son, but it must be told, nevertheless, that one day, when your father was out, she untruly informed your uncle that his brother had consented to the performance of the operation, and that he had gone purposely out of the house because he had not nerve enough to stay and witness it. After that, your uncle no longer hesitated. He had no fear of results, provided he could be certain of his own courage. All he dreaded was the effect on him of his love for the child when he first found himself face to face with the dreadful necessity of touching her skin with the knife."

I tried hard to control myself, but I could not repress a shudder at those words.

"It is useless to shock you by going into particulars," said the priest, considerately. "Let it be enough if I say that your uncle's fortitude failed to support him when he wanted it most. His love for the child shook the firm hand which had never trembled before. In a word, the operation failed. Your father returned, and found his child dying. The frenzy of his despair when the truth was told him carried him to excesses which it shocks me to mention--excesses which began in his degrading his brother by a blow, which ended in his binding himself by an oath to make that brother suffer public punishment for his fatal rashness in a court of law. Your uncle was too heartbroken by what had happened to feel those outrages as some men might have felt them. He looked for one moment at his sister-in-law (I do not like to say your mother, considering what I have now to tell you), to see if she would acknowledge that she had encouraged him to attempt the operation, and that she had deceived him in saying that he had his brother's permission to try it. She was silent, and when she spoke, it was to join her husband in denouncing him as the murderer of their child. Whether fear of your father's anger, or revengeful indignation against your uncle most actuated her, I cannot presume to inquire in your presence. I can only state facts."

The priest paused and looked at me anxiously. I could not speak to him at that moment--I could only encourage him to proceed by pressing his hand.

He resumed in these terms:

"Meanwhile, your uncle turned to your father, and spoke the last words he was ever to address to his eldest brother in this world. He said, 'I have deserved the worst your anger can inflict on me, but I will spare you the scandal of bringing me to justice in open court. The law, if it found me guilty, could at the worst but banish me from my country and my friends. I will go of my own accord. God is my witness that I honestly believed I could save the child from deformity and suffering. I have risked all and lost all. My heart and spirit are broken. I am fit for nothing but to go and hide myself, and my shame and misery, from all eyes that have ever looked on me. I shall never come back, never expect your pity or forgiveness. If you think less harshly of me when I am gone, keep secret what has happened; let no other lips say of me what yours and your wife's have said. I shall think that forbearance atonement enough--atonement greater than I have deserved. Forget me in this world. May we meet in another, where the secrets of all hearts are opened, and where the child who is gone before may make peace between us!' He said those words and went out. Your father never saw him or heard from him again."

I knew the reason now why my father had never confided the truth to anyone, his own family included. My mother had evidently confessed all to her sister under the seal of secrecy, and there the dreadful disclosure had been arrested.

"Your uncle told me," the priest continued, "that before he left England he took leave of you by stealth, in a place you were staying at by the sea-side. Tie had not the heart to quit his country and his friends forever without kissing you for the last time. He followed you in the dark, and caught you up in his arms, and left you again before you had a chance of discovering him. The next day he quitted England."

"For this place?" I asked.

"Yes. He had spent a week here once with a student friend at the time when he was a pupil in the Hotel Dieu, and to this place he returned to hide, to suffer, and to die. We all saw that he was a man crushed and broken by some great sorrow, and we respected him and his affliction. He lived alone, and only came out of doors toward evening, when he used to sit on the brow of the hill yonder, with his head on his hand, looking toward England. That place seemed a favorite with him, and he is buried close by it. He revealed the story of his past life to no living soul here but me, and to me he only spoke when his last hour was approaching. What he had suffered during his long exile no man can presume to say. I, who saw more of him than anyone, never heard a word of complaint fall from his lips. He had the courage of the martyrs while he lived, and the resignation of the saints when he died. Just at the last his mind wandered. He said he saw his little darling waiting by the bedside to lead him away, and he died with a smile.
on his face--the first I had ever seen there."

The priest ceased, and we went out together in the mournful twilight, and stood for a little while on the brow of
the hill where Uncle George used to sit, with his face turned toward England. How my heart ached for him as I
thought of what he must have suffered in the silence and solitude of his long exile! Was it well for me that I had
discovered the Family Secret at last? I have sometimes thought not. I have sometimes wished that the darkness had
never been cleared away which once hid from me the fate of Uncle George.

THE THIRD DAY.

FINE again. Our guest rode out, with her ragged little groom, as usual. There was no news yet in the paper--that
is to say, no news of George or his ship.

On this day Morgan completed his second story, and in two or three days more I expected to finish the last of my
own contributions. Owen was still behindhand and still despondent.

The lot drawing to-night was Five. This proved to be the number of the first of Morgan's stories, which he had
completed before we began the readings. His second story, finished this day, being still uncorrected by me, could
not yet be added to the common stock.

On being informed that it had come to his turn to occupy the attention of the company, Morga n startled us by
immediately objecting to the trouble of reading his own composition, and by coolly handing it over to me, on the
ground that my numerous corrections had made it, to all intents and purposes, my story.

Owen and I both remonstrated; and Jessie, mischievously persisting in her favorite jest at Morgan's expense,
entreated that he would read, if it was only for her sake. Finding that we were all determined, and all against him, he
declared that, rather than hear our voices any longer, he would submit to the minor inconvenience of listening to his
own. Accordingly, he took his manuscript back again, and, with an air of surly resignation, spread it open before
him.

"I don't think you will like this story, miss," he began, addressing Jessie, "but I shall read it, nevertheless, with
the greatest pleasure. It begins in a stable--it gropes its way through a dream--it keeps company with a hostler--and it
stops without an end. What do you think of that?"

After favoring his audience with this promising preface, Morgan indulged himself in a chuckle of supreme
satisfaction, and then began to read, without wasting another preliminary word on any one of us.

BROTHER MORGAN'S STORY

of

THE DREAM-WOMAN.

CHAPTER I.

I HAD not been settled much more than six weeks in my country practice when I was sent for to a neighboring
town, to consult with the resident medical man there on a case of very dangerous illness.

My horse had come down with me at the end of a long ride the night before, and had hurt himself, luckily, much
more than he had hurt his master. Being deprived of the animal's services, I started for my destination by the coach
(there were no railways at that time), and I hoped to get back again, toward the afternoon, in the same way.

After the consultation was over, I went to the principal inn of the town to wait for the coach. When it came up it
was full inside and out. There was no resource left me but to get home as cheaply as I could by hiring a gig. The
price asked for this accommodation struck me as being so extortionate, that I determined to look out for an inn of
inferior pretensions, and to try if I could not make a better bargain with a less prosperous establishment.

I soon found a likely-looking house, dingy and quiet, with an old-fashioned sign, that had evidently not been
repainted for many years past. The landlord, in this case, was not above making a small profit, and as soon as we
came to terms he rang the yard-bell to order the gig.

"Has Robert not come back from that errand?" asked the landlord, appealing to the waiter who answered the bell.

"No, sir, he hasn't."

"Well, then, you must wake up Isaac."

"Wake up Isaac!" I repeated; "that sounds rather odd. Do your hostlers go to bed in the daytime?"

"This one does," said the landlord, smiling to himself in rather a strange way.

"And dreams too," added the waiter, "I shan't forget the turn it gave me the first time I heard him."

"Never you mind about that," retorted the proprietor; "you go and rouse Isaac up. The gentleman's waiting for
his gig."

The landlord's manner and the waiter's manner expressed a great deal more than they either of them said. I began
to suspect that I might be on the trace of something professionally interesting to me as a medical man, and I thought
I should like to look at the hostler before the waiter awakened him.

"Stop a minute," I interposed; "I have rather a fancy for seeing this man before you wake him up. I'm a doctor;
and if this queer sleeping and dreaming of his comes from anything wrong in his brain, I may be able to tell you
what to do with him."

"I rather think you will find his complaint past all doctoring, sir," said the landlord; "but, if you would like to see him, you're welcome, I'm sure."

He led the way across a yard and down a passage to the stables, opened one of the doors, and, waiting outside himself, told me to look in.

I found myself in a two-stall stable. In one of the stalls a horse was munching his corn; in the other an old man was lying asleep on the litter.

I stooped and looked at him attentively. It was a withered, woe-begone face. The eyebrows were painfully contracted; the mouth was fast set, and drawn down at the corners.

The hollow wrinkled cheeks, and the scanty grizzled hair, told their own tale of some past sorrow or suffering. He was drawing his breath convulsively when I first looked at him, and in a moment more he began to talk in his sleep.

"Wake up!" I heard him say, in a quick whisper, through his clinched teeth. "Wake up there! Murder!"

He moved one lean arm slowly till it rested over his throat, shuddered a little, and turned on his straw. Then the arm left his throat, the hand stretched itself out, and clutched at the side toward which he had turned, as if he fancied himself to be grasping at the edge of something. I saw his lips move, and bent lower over him. He was still talking in his sleep.

"Light gray eyes," he murmured, "and a droop in the left eyelid; flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it—all right, mother—fair white arms, with a down on them—little lady's hand, with a reddish look under the finger nails. The knife—always the cursed knife—first on one side, then on the other. Aha! you she-devil, where's the knife?"

At the last word his voice rose, and he grew restless on a sudden. I saw him shudder on the straw; his withered face became distorted, and he threw up both his hands with a quick hysterical gasp. They struck against the bottom of the manger under which he lay, and the blow awakened him. I had just time to slip through the door and close it before his eyes were fairly open, and his senses his own again.

"Do you know anything about that man's past life?" I said to the landlord.

"Yes, sir, I know pretty well all about it," was the answer, "and an uncommon queer story it is. Most people don't believe it. It's true, though, for all that. Why, just look at him," continued the landlord, opening the stable door again.

"Poor devil! he's so worn out with his restless nights that he's dropped back into his sleep already."

"Don't wake him," I said; "I'm in no hurry for the gig. Wait till the other man comes back from his errand; and, in the meantime, suppose I have some lunch and a bottle of sherry, and suppose you come and help me to get through it?"

The heart of mine host, as I had anticipated, warmed to me over his own wine. He soon became communicative on the subject of the man asleep in the stable, and by little and little I drew the whole story out of him. Exaggerated and incredible as the events must appear to everybody, they are related here just as I heard them and just as they happened.

CHAPTER II.

SOME years ago there lived in the suburbs of a large seaport town on the west coast of England a man in humble circumstances, by name Isaac Scatchard. His means of subsistence were derived from any employment that he could get as an hostler, and occasionally, when times went well with him, from temporary engagements in service as stable-helper in private houses. Though a faithful, steady, and honest man, he got on badly in his calling. His ill luck was proverbial among his neighbors. He was always missing good opportunities by no fault of his own, and always living longest in service with amiable people who were not punctual payers of wages. "Unlucky Isaac" was his nickname in his own neighborhood, and no one could say that he did not richly deserve it.

With far more than one man's fair share of adversity to endure, Isaac had but one consolation to support him, and that was of the dreariest and most negative kind. He had no wife and children to increase his anxieties and add to the bitterness of his various failures in life. It might have been from mere insensibility, or it might have been from generous unwillingness to involve another in his own unlucky destiny, but the fact undoubtedly was, that he had arrived at the middle term of life without marrying, and, what is much more remarkable, without once exposing himself, from eighteen to eight-and-thirty, to the genial imputation of ever having had a sweetheart.

When he was out of service he lived alone with his widowed mother. Mrs. Scatchard was a woman above the average in her lowly station as to capacity and manners. She had seen better days, as the phrase is, but she never referred to them in the presence of curious visitors; and, though perfectly polite to every one who approached her, never cultivated any intimacies among her neighbors. She contrived to provide, hardly enough, for her simple wants by doing rough work for the tailors, and always managed to keep a decent home for her son to return to whenever his ill luck drove him out helpless into the world.

One bleak autumn when Isaac was getting on fast toward forty and when he was as usual out of place through no
fault of his own, he set forth, from his mother's cottage on a long walk inland to a gentleman's seat where he had heard that a stable-helper was required.

It wanted then but two days of his birthday; and Mrs. Scatchard, with her usual fondness, made him promise, before he started, that he would be back in time to keep that anniversary with her, in as festive a way as their poor means would allow. It was easy for him to comply with this request, even supposing he slept a night each way on the road.

He was to start from home on Monday morning, and, whether he got the new place or not, he was to be back for his birthday dinner on Wednesday at two o'clock.

Arriving at his destination too late on the Monday night to make application for the stable-helper's place, he slept at the village inn, and in good time on the Tuesday morning presented himself at the gentleman's house to fill the vacant situation. Here again his ill luck pursued him as inexorably as ever. The excellent written testimonials to his character which he was able to produce availed him nothing; his long walk had been taken in vain: only the day before the stable-helper's place had been given to another man.

Isaac accepted this new disappointment resignedly and as a matter of course. Naturally slow in capacity, he had the bluntness of sensibility and phlegmatic patience of disposition which frequently distinguish men with sluggishly-working mental powers. He thanked the gentleman's steward with his usual quiet civility for granting him an interview, and took his departure with no appearance of unusual depression in his face or manner.

Before starting on his homeward walk he made some inquiries at the inn, and ascertained that he might save a few miles on his return by following the new road. Furnished with full instructions, several times repeated, as to the various turnings he was to take, he set forth on his homeward journey and walked on all day with only one stoppage for bread and cheese. Just as it was getting toward dark, the rain came on and the wind began to rise, and he found himself, to make matters worse, in a part of the country with which he was entirely unacquainted, though he knew himself to be some fifteen miles from home. The first house he found to inquire at was a lonely roadside inn, standing on the outskirts of a thick wood. Solitary as the place looked, it was welcome to a lost man who was also hungry, thirsty, footsore and wet. The landlord was civil and respectable-looking, and the price he asked for a bed was reasonable enough. Isaac therefore decided on stopping comfortably at the inn for that night.

He was constitutionally a temperate man.

His supper consisted of two rashers of bacon, a slice of home-made bread and a pint of ale. He did not go to bed immediately after this moderate meal, but sat up with the landlord, talking about his bad prospects and his long run of ill-luck, and diverging from these topics to the subjects of horse-flesh and racing. Nothing was said either by himself, his host, or the few laborers who strayed into the tap-room, which could, in the slightest degree, excite the very small and very dull imaginative faculty which Isaac Scatchard possessed.

At a little after eleven the house was closed. Isaac went round with the landlord and held the candle while the doors and lower windows were being secured. He noticed with surprise the strength of the bolts and bars, and iron-sheathed shutters.

"You see, we are rather lonely here," said the landlord. "We never have had any attempts made to break in yet, but it's always as well to be on the safe side. When nobody is sleeping here, I am the only man in the house. My wife and daughter are timid, and the servant-girl takes after her missuses. Another glass of ale before you turn in? No! Well, how such a sober man as you comes to be out of place is more than I can make out, for one. Here's where you're to sleep. You're our only lodger to-night, and I think you'll say my missus has done her best to make you comfortable. You're quite sure you won't have another glass of ale? Very well. Good-night."

It was half-past eleven when the clock in the passage as they went upstairs to the bedroom, the window of which looked on to the wood at the back of the house.

Isaac locked the door, set his candle on the chest of drawers, and wearily got ready for bed.

The bleak autumn wind was still blowing, and the solemn, monotonous, surging moan of it in the wood was dreary and awful to hear through the night-silence. Isaac felt strangely wakeful.

He resolved, as he lay down in bed, to keep the candle alight until he began to grow sleepy, for there was something unendurably depressing in the bare idea of lying awake in the darkness, listening to the dismal, ceaseless moaning of the wind in the wood.

Sleep stole on him before he was aware of it. His eyes closed, and he fell off insensibly to rest without having so much as thought of extinguishing the candle.

The first sensation of which he was conscious after sinking into slumber was a strange shivering that ran through him suddenly from head to foot, and a dreadful sinking pain at the heart, such as he had never felt before. The shivering only disturbed his slumbers; the pain woke him instantly. In one moment he passed from a state of sleep to a state of wakefulness—his eyes wide open—his mental perceptions cleared on a sudden, as if by a miracle.

The candle had burned down nearly to the last morsel of tallow, but the top of the unsnuffed wick had just fallen
off, and the light in the little room was, for the moment, fair and full.

Between the foot of his bed and the closed door there stood a woman with a knife in her hand, looking at him.

He was stricken speechless with terror, but he did not lose the preternatural clearness of his faculties, and he
never took his eyes off the woman. She said not a word as they stared each other in the face, but she began to move
slowly toward the left-hand side of the bed.

His eyes followed her. She was a fair, fine woman, with yellowish flaxen hair and light gray eyes, with a droop
in the left eyelid. He noticed those things and fixed them on his mind before she was round at the side of the bed.

Speechless, with no expression in her face, with no noise following her footfall, she came closer and closer--
stopped--and slowly raised the knife. He laid his right arm over his throat to save it; but, as he saw the knife coming
down, threw his hand across the bed to the right side, and jerked his body over that way just as the knife descended
on the mattress within an inch of his shoulder.

His eyes fixed on her arm and hand as she slowly drew her knife out of the bed: a white, well-shaped arm, with a
pretty down lying lightly over the fair skin--a delicate lady's hand, with the crowning beauty of a pink flush under
and round the finger-nails.

She drew the knife out, and passed back again slowly to the foot of the bed; stopped there for a moment looking
at him; then came on--still speechless, still with no expression on the blank, beautiful face, still with no sound
following the stealthy footfalls--came on to the right side of the bed, where he now lay.

As she approached, she raised the knife again, and he drew himself away to the left side. She struck, as before,
right into the mattress, with a deliberate, perpendicularly downward action of the arm. This time his eyes wandered
from her to the knife. It was like the large clasp-knives which he had often seen laboring men use to cut their bread
and bacon with. Her delicate little fingers did not conceal more than two-thirds of the handle: he noticed that it was
made of buck-horn, clean and shining as the blade was, and looking like new.

For the second time she drew the knife out, concealed it in the wide sleeve of her gown, then stopped by the
bedside, watching him. For an instant he saw her standing in that position, then the wick of the spent candle fell over
into the socket; the flame diminished to a little blue point, and the room grew dark.

A moment, or less, if possible, passed so, and then the wick flamed up, smokingly, for the last time. His eyes
were still looking eagerly over the right-hand side of the bed when the final flash of light came, but they discovered
nothing. The fair woman with the knife was gone.

The conviction that he was alone again weakened the hold of the terror that had struck him dumb up to this time.
The preternatural sharpness which the very intensity of his panic had mysteriously imparted to his faculties left them
suddenly. His brain grew confused--his heart beat wildly--his ears opened for the first time since the appearance of
the woman to a sense of the woeful ceaseless moaning of the wind among the trees. With the dreadful conviction of
the reality of what he had seen still strong within him, he leaped out of bed, and screaming "Murder! Wake up,
there! wake up!" dashed headlong through the darkness to the door.

It was fast locked, exactly as he had left it on going to bed.

His cries on starting up had alarmed the house. He heard the terrified, confused exclamations of women; he saw
the master of the house approaching along the passage with his burning rush-candle in one hand and his gun in the
other.

"What is it?" asked the landlord, breathlessly. Isaac could only answer in a whisper. "A woman, with a knife in
her hand," he gasped out. "In my room--a fair, yellow-haired woman; she jobbed at me with the knife twice over."

The landlord's pale cheeks grew paler. He looked at Isaac eagerly by the flickering light of his candle, and his
face began to get red again; his voice altered, too, as well as his complexion.

"She seems to have missed you twice," he said.

"I dodged the knife as it came down," Isaac went on, in the same scared whisper. "It struck the bed each time."

The landlord took his candle into the bedroom immediately. In less than a minute he came out again into the
passage in a violent passion.

"The devil fly away with you and your woman with the knife! There isn't a mark in the bedclothes anywhere.
What do you mean by coming into a man's place and frightening his family out of their wits about a dream?"

"I'll leave your house," said Isaac, faintly. "Better out on the road, in rain and dark, on my road home, than back
again in that room, after what I've seen in it. Lend me a light to get my clothes by, and tell me what I'm to pay."

"Pay!" cried the landlord, leading the way with his light sulkily into the bedroom. "You'll find your score on the
slate when you go downstairs. I wouldn't have taken you in for all the money you've got about you if I'd known your
dreaming, screeching ways beforehand. Look at the bed. Where's the cut of a knife in it? Look at the window--is the
lock bursted? Look at the door (which I heard you fasten yourself)--is it broke in? A murdering woman with a knife
in my house! You ought to be ashamed of yourself!"

Isaac answered not a word. He huddled on his clothes, and then they went downstairs together.
"Nigh on twenty minutes past two!" said the landlord, as they passed the clock. "A nice time in the morning to frighten honest people out of their wits!"

Isaac paid his bill, and the landlord let him out at the front door, asking, with a grin of contempt, as he undid the strong fastenings, whether "the murdering woman got in that way."

They parted without a word on either side. The rain had ceased, but the night was dark, and the wind bleaker than ever. Little did the darkness, or the cold, or the uncertainty about the way home matter to Isaac. If he had been turned out into a wilderness in a thunder-storm it would have been a relief after what he had suffered in the bedroom of the inn.

What was the fair woman with the knife? The creature of a dream, or that other creature from the unknown world called among men by the name of ghost? He could make nothing of the mystery--had made nothing of it, even when it was midday on Wednesday, and when he stood, at last, after many times missing his road, once more on the doorstep of home.

CHAPTER III.

His mother came out eagerly to receive him.

His face told her in a moment that something was wrong.

"I've lost the place; but that's my luck. I dreamed an ill dream last night, mother--or maybe I saw a ghost. Take it either way, it scared me out of my senses, and I'm not my own man again yet."

"Isaac, your face frightens me. Come in to the fire--come in, and tell mother all about it."

He was as anxious to tell as she was to hear; for it had been his hope, all the way home, that his mother, with her quicker capacity and superior knowledge, might be able to throw some light on the mystery which he could not clear up for himself. His memory of the dream was still mechanically vivid, though his thoughts were entirely confused by it.

His mother's face grew paler and paler as he went on. She never interrupted him by so much as a single word; but when he had done, she moved her chair close to his, put her arm round his neck, and said to him:

"Isaac, you dreamed your ill dream on this Wednesday morning. What time was it when you saw the fair woman with the knife in her hand?" Isaac reflected on what the landlord had said when they had passed by the clock on his leaving the inn; allowed as nearly as he could for the time that must have elapsed between the unlocking of his bedroom door and the paying of his bill just before going away, and answered:

"Somewhere about two o'clock in the morning."

His mother suddenly quitted her hold of his neck, and struck her hands together with a gesture of despair.

"This Wednesday is your birthday, Isaac, and two o'clock in the morning was the time when you were born."

Isaac's capacities were not quick enough to catch the infection of his mother's superstitious dread. He was amazed, and a little startled, also, when she suddenly rose from her chair, opened her old writing-desk, took pen, ink and paper, and then said to him:

"Your memory is but a poor one, Isaac, and, now I'm an old woman, mine's not much better. I want all about this dream of yours to be as well known to both of us, years hence, as it is now. Tell me over again all you told me a minute ago, when you spoke of what the woman with the knife looked like."

Isaac obeyed, and marveled much as he saw his mother carefully set down on paper the very words that he was saying.

"Light gray eyes," she wrote, as they came to the descriptive part, "with a droop in the left eyelid; flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it; white arms, with a down upon them; little lady's hand, with a reddish look about the finger nails; clasp-knife with a buck-horn handle, that seemed as good as new." To these particulars Mrs. Scatchard added the year, month, day of the week, and time in the morning when the woman of the dream appeared to her son. She then locked up the paper carefully in her writing-desk.

Neither on that day nor on any day after could her son induce her to return to the matter of the dream. She obstinately kept her thoughts about it to herself, and even refused to refer again to the paper in her writing-desk. Ere long Isaac grew weary of attempting to make her break her resolute silence; and time, which sooner or later wears out all things, gradually wore out the impression produced on him by the dream. He began by thinking of it carelessly, and he ended by not thinking of it at all.

The result was the more easily brought about by the advent of some important changes for the better in his prospects which commenced not long after his terrible night's experience at the inn. He reaped at last the reward of his long and patient suffering under adversity by getting an excellent place, keeping it for seven years, and leaving it, on the death of his master, not only with an excellent character, but also with a comfortable annuity bequeathed to him as a reward for saving his mistress's life in a carriage accident. Thus it happened that Isaac Scatchard returned to his old mother, seven years after the time of the dream at the inn, with an annual sum of money at his disposal sufficient to keep them both in ease and independence for the rest of their lives.
The mother, whose health had been bad of late years, profited so much by the care bestowed on her and by freedom from money anxieties, that when Isaac's birthday came round she was able to sit up comfortably at table and dine with him.

On that day, as the evening drew on, Mrs. Scatchard discovered that a bottle of tonic medicine which she was accustomed to take, and in which she had fancied that a dose or more was still left, happened to be empty. Isaac immediately volunteered to go to the chemist's and get it filled again. It was as rainy and bleak an autumn night as on the memorable past occasion when he lost his way and slept at the road-side inn.

On going into the chemist's shop he was passed hurriedly by a poorly-dressed woman coming out of it. The glimpse he had of her face struck him, and he looked back after her as she descended the door-steps.

"You're noticing that woman?" said the chemist's apprentice behind the counter. "It's my opinion there's something wrong with her. She's been asking for laudanum to put to a bad tooth. Master's out for half an hour, and I told her I wasn't allowed to sell poison to strangers in his absence. She laughed in a queer way, and said she would come back in half an hour. If she expects master to serve her, I think she'll be disappointed. It's a case of suicide, sir, if ever there was one."

These words added immeasurably to the sudden interest in the woman which Isaac had felt at the first sight of her face. After he had got the medicine-bottle filled, he looked about anxiously for her as soon as he was out in the street. She was walking slowly up and down on the opposite side of the road. With his heart, very much to his own surprise, beating fast, Isaac crossed over and spoke to her.

He asked if she was in any distress. She pointed to her torn shawl, her scanty dress, her crushed, dirty bonnet; then moved under a lamp so as to let the light fall on her stern, pale, but still most beautiful face.

"I look like a comfortable, happy woman, don't I?" she said, with a bitter laugh.

She spoke with a purity of intonation which Isaac had never heard before from other than ladies' lips. Her slightest actions seemed to have the easy, negligent grace of a thoroughbred woman. Her skin, for all its poverty-stricken paleness, was as delicate as if her life had been passed in the enjoyment of every social comfort that wealth can purchase. Even her small, finely-shaped hands, gloveless as they were, had not lost their whiteness.

Little by little, in answer to his questions, the sad story of the woman came out. There is no need to relate it here; it is told over and over again in police reports and paragraphs about attempted suicides.

"My name is Rebecca Murdoch," said the woman, as she ended. "I have nine-pence left, and I thought of spending it at the chemist's over in securing a passage to the other world. Whatever it is, it can't be worse to me than this, so why should I stop here?"

Besides the natural compassion and sadness moved in his heart by what he heard, Isaac felt within him some mysterious influence at work all the time the woman was speaking which utterly confused his ideas and almost deprived him of his powers of speech. All that he could say in answer to her last reckless words was that he would prevent her from attempting her own life, if he followed her about all night to do it. His rough, trembling earnestness seemed to impress her.

"I won't occasion you that trouble," she answered, when he repeated his threat. "You have given me a fancy for living by speaking kindly to me. No need for the mockery of protestations and promises. You may believe me without them. Come to Fuller's Meadow to-morrow at twelve, and you will find me alive, to answer for myself—No!--no money. My ninepence will do to get me as good a night's lodging as I want."

She nodded and left him. He made no attempt to follow—he felt no suspicion that she was deceiving him.

"It's strange, but I can't help believing her," he said to himself, and walked away, bewildered, toward home.

On entering the house, his mind was still so completely absorbed by its new subject of interest that he took no notice of what his mother was doing when he came in with the bottle of medicine. She had opened her old writing-desk in his absence, and was now reading a paper attentively that lay inside it. On every birthday of Isaac's since she had written down the particulars of his dream from his own lips, she had been accustomed to read that same paper, and ponder over it in private.

The next day he went to Fuller's Meadow.

He had done only right in believing her so implicitly. She was there, punctual to a minute, to answer for herself. The last-left faint defenses in Isaac's heart against the fascination which a word or look from her began inscrutably to exercise over him sank down and vanished before her forever on that memorable morning.

When a man, previously insensible to the influence of women, forms an attachment in middle life, the instances are rare indeed, let the warning circumstances be what they may, in which he is found capable of freeing himself from the tyranny of the new ruling passion. The charm of being spoken to familiarly, fondly, and gratefully by a woman whose language and manners still retained enough of their early refinement to hint at the high social station that she had lost, would have been a dangerous luxury to a man of Isaac's rank at the age of twenty. But it was far more than that—it was certain ruin to him—now that his heart was opening unworthily to a new influence at that
middle time of life when strong feelings of all kinds, once implanted, strike root most stubbornly in a man's moral nature. A few more stolen interviews after that first morning in Fuller's Meadow completed his infatuation. In less than a month from the time when he first met her, Isaac Scatchard had consented to give Rebecca Murdoch a new interest in existence, and a chance of recovering the character she had lost by promising to make her his wife.

She had taken possession, not of his passions only, but of his faculties as well. All the mind he had he put into her keeping. She directed him on every point—even instructing him how to break the news of his approaching marriage in the safest manner to his mother.

"If you tell her how you met me and who I am at first," said the cunning woman, "she will move heaven and earth to prevent our marriage. Say I am the sister of one of your fellow-servants—ask her to see me before you go into any more particulars—and leave it to me to do the rest. I mean to make her love me next best to you, Isaac, before she knows anything of who I really am." The motive of the deceit was sufficient to sanctify it to Isaac. The stratagem proposed relieved him of his one great anxiety, and quieted his uneasy conscience on the subject of his mother. Still, there was something wanting to perfect his happiness, something that he could not realize, something mysteriously untraceable, and yet something that perpetually made itself felt; not when he was absent from Rebecca Murdoch, but, strange to say, when he was actually in her presence! She was kindness itself with him. She never made him feel his inferior capacities and inferior manners. She showed the sweetest anxiety to please him in the smallest trifles; but, in spite of all these attractions, he never could feel quite at his ease with her. At their first meeting, there had mingled with his admiration, when he looked in her face, a faint, involuntary feeling of doubt whether that face was entirely strange to him. No after familiarity had the slightest effect on this inexplicable, wearisome uncertainty.

Concealing the truth as he had been directed, he announced his marriage engagement precipitately and confusedly to his mother on the day when he contracted it. Poor Mrs. Scatchard showed her perfect confidence in her son by flinging her arms round his neck, and giving him joy of having found at last, in the sister of one of his fellow-servants, a woman to comfort and care for him after his mother was gone. She was all eagerness to see the woman of her son's choice, and the next day was fixed for the introduction.

It was a bright sunny morning, and the little cottage parlor was full of light as Mrs. Scatchard, happy and expectant, dressed for the occasion in her Sunday gown, sat waiting for her son and her future daughter-in-law.

Punctual to the appointed time, Isaac hurriedly and nervously led his promised wife into the room. His mother rose to receive her—advanced a few steps, smiling—looked Rebecca full in the eyes, and suddenly stopped. Her face, which had been flushed the moment before, turned white in an instant; her eyes lost their expression of softness and kindness, and assumed a blank look of terror; her outstretched hands fell to her sides, and she staggered back a few steps with a low cry to her son.

"Isaac," she whispered, clutching him fast by the arm when he asked alarmedly if she was taken ill, "Isaac, does that woman's face remind you of nothing?"

Before he could answer—before he could look round to where Rebecca stood, astonished and angered by her reception, at the lower end of the room, his mother pointed impatiently to her writing-desk, and gave him the key.

"Open it," she said, in a quick breathless whisper.

"What does this mean? Why am I treated as if I had no business here? Does your mother want to insult me?" asked Rebecca, angrily.

"Open it, and give me the paper in the left-hand drawer. Quick! quick, for Heaven's sake!" said Mrs. Scatchard, shrinking further back in terror.

Isaac gave her the paper. She looked it over eagerly for a moment, then followed Rebecca, who was now turning away haughtily to leave the room, and caught her by the shoulder—abruptly raised the long, loose sleeve of her gown, and glanced at her hand and arm. Something like fear began to steal over the angry expression of Rebecca's face as she shook herself free from the old woman's grasp. "Mad!" she said to herself; "and Isaac never told me." With these few words she left the room.

Isaac was hastening after her when his mother turned and stopped his further progress. It wrung his heart to see the misery and terror in her face as she looked at him.

"Light gray eyes," she said, in low, mournful, awe-struck tones, pointing toward the open door; "a droop in the left eyelid; flaxen hair, with a gold-yellow streak in it; white arms, with a down upon them; little lady's hand, with a reddish look under the finger nails—The Dream-Woman, Isaac, the Dream-Woman!"

That faint cleaving doubt which he had never been able to shake off in Rebecca Murdoch's presence was fatally set at rest forever. He had seen her face, then, before—seven years before, on his birthday, in the bedroom of the lonely inn.

"Be warned! oh, my son, be warned! Isaac, Isaac, let her go, and do you stop with me!"

Something darkened the parlor window as those words were said. A sudden chill ran through him, and he
glanced sidelong at the shadow. Rebecca Murdoch had come back. She was peering in curiously at them over the low window-blind.

"I have promised to marry, mother," he said, "and marry I must."

The tears came into his eyes as he spoke and dimmed his sight, but he could just discern the fatal face outside moving away again from the window.

His mother's head sank lower.

"Are you faint?" he whispered.

"Broken-hearted, Isaac."

He stooped down and kissed her. The shadow, as he did so, returned to the window, and the fatal face peered in curiously once more.

CHAPTER IV.

THREE weeks after that day Isaac and Rebecca were man and wife. All that was hopelessly dogged and stubborn in the man's moral nature seemed to have closed round his fatal passion, and to have fixed it unassailably in his heart.

After that first interview in the cottage parlor no consideration would induce Mrs. Scatchard to see her son's wife again or even to talk of her when Isaac tried hard to plead her cause after their marriage.

This course of conduct was not in any degree occasioned by a discovery of the degradation in which Rebecca had lived. There was no question of that between mother and son. There was no question of anything but the fearfully-exact resemblance between the living, breathing woman and the specter-woman of Isaac's dream.

Rebecca on her side neither felt nor expressed the slightest sorrow at the estrangement between herself and her mother-in-law. Isaac, for the sake of peace, had never contradicted her first idea that age and long illness had affected Mrs. Scatchard's mind. He even allowed his wife to upbraid him for not having confessed this to her at the time of their marriage engagement, rather than risk anything by hinting at the truth. The sacrifice of his integrity before his one all-mastering delusion seemed but a small thing, and cost his conscience but little after the sacrifices he had already made.

The time of waking from this delusion--the cruel and the rueful time--was not far off. After some quiet months of married life, as the summer was ending, and the year was getting on toward the month of his birthday, Isaac found his wife altering toward him. She grew sullen and contemptuous; she formed acquaintances of the most dangerous kind in defiance of his objections, his entreaties, and his commands; and, worst of all, she learned, ere long, after every fresh difference with her husband, to seek the deadly self-oblivion of drink. Little by little, after the first miserable discovery that his wife was keeping company with drunkards, the shocking certainty forced itself on Isaac that she had grown to be a drunkard herself.

He had been in a sadly desponding state for some time before the occurrence of these domestic calamities. His mother's health, as he could but too plainly discern every time he went to see her at the cottage, was failing fast, and he upbraided himself in secret as the cause of the bodily and mental suffering she endured. When to his remorse on his mother's account was added the shame and misery occasioned by the discovery of his wife's degradation, he sank under the double trial--his face began to alter fast, and he looked what he was, a spirit-broken man.

His mother, still struggling bravely against the illness that was hurrying her to the grave, was the first to notice the sad alteration in him, and the first to hear of his last worst trouble with his wife. She had fortunately drunk but little at that early hour, and she was less sullen and capricious than usual.

He could not disobey her, and they walked together slowly toward his miserable home.

It was only one o'clock in the afternoon when they reached the cottage where he lived. It was their dinner-hour, and Rebecca was in the kitchen. He was thus able to take his mother quietly into the parlor, and then prepare his wife for the interview. She had fortunately drunk but little at that early hour, and she was less sullen and capricious than usual.

He returned to his mother with his mind tolerably at ease. His wife soon followed him into the parlor, and the meeting between her and Mrs. Scatchard passed off better than he had ventured to anticipate, though he observed with secret apprehension that his mother, resolutely as she controlled herself in other respects, could not look his wife in the face when she spoke to her. It was a relief to him, therefore, when Rebecca began to lay the cloth.

She laid the cloth, brought in the bread-tray, and cut a slice from the loaf for her husband, then returned to the
kitchen. At that moment, Isaac, still anxiously watching his mother, was startled by seeing the same ghastly change pass over her face which had altered it so awfully on the morning when Rebecca and she first met. Before he could say a word, she whispered, with a look of horror:

"Take me back--home, home again, Isaac. Come with me, and never go back again."

He was afraid to ask for an explanation; he could only sign to her to be silent, and help her quickly to the door. As they passed the breadtray on the table she stopped and pointed to it.

"Did you see what your wife cut your bread with?" she asked, in a low whisper.

"No, mother--I was not noticing--what was it?"

"Look!"

He did look. A new clasp-knife with a buckhorn handle lay with the loaf in the bread-tray. He stretched out his hand shudderingly to possess himself of it; but, at the same time, there was a noise in the kitchen, and his mother caught at his arm.

"The knife of the dream! Isaac, I'm faint with fear. Take me away before she comes back."

He was hardly able to support her. The visible, tangible reality of the knife struck him with a panic, and utterly destroyed any faint doubts that he might have entertained up to this time in relation to the mysterious dream-warning of nearly eight years before. By a last desperate effort, he summoned self-possession enough to help his mother out of the house--so quietly that the "Dream-woman" (he thought of her by that name now) did not hear them departing from the kitchen.

"Don't go back, Isaac--don't go back!" implored Mrs. Scatchard, as he turned to go away, after seeing her safely seated again in her own room.

"I must get the knife," he answered, under his breath. His mother tried to stop him again, but he hurried out without another word.

On his return he found that his wife had discovered their secret departure from the house. She had been drinking, and was in a fury of passion. The dinner in the kitchen was flung under the grate; the cloth was off the parlor table. Where was the knife?

Unwisely, he asked for it. She was only too glad of the opportunity of irritating him which the request afforded her. "He wanted the knife, did he? Could he give her a reason why? No! Then he should not have it--not if he went down on his knees to ask for it." Further recriminations elicited the fact that she had bought it a bargain, and that she considered it her own especial property. Isaac saw the uselessness of attempting to get the knife by fair means, and determined to search for it, later in the day, in secret. The search was unsuccessful. Night came on, and he left the house to walk about the streets. He was afraid now to sleep in the same room with her.

Three weeks passed. Still sullenly enraged with him, she would not give up the knife; and still that fear of sleeping in the same room with her possessed him. He walked about at night, or dozed in the parlor, or sat watching by his mother's bedside. Before the expiration of the first week in the new month his mother died. It wanted then but ten days of his son's birthday. She had longed to live till that anniversary. Isaac was present at her death, and her last words in this world were addressed to him:

"Don't go back, my son, don't go back!" He was obliged to go back, if it were only to watch his wife. Exasperated to the last degree by his distrust of her, she had revengefully sought to add a sting to his grief, during the last days of his mother's illness, by declaring that she would assert her right to attend the funeral. In spite of anything he could do or say, she held with wicked pertinacity to her word, and on the day appointed for the burial forced herself--inflamed and shameless with drink--into her husband's presence, and declared that she would walk in the funeral procession to his mother's grave.

This last worst outrage, accompanied by all that was most insulting in word and look, maddened him for the moment. He struck her.

The instant the blow was dealt he repented it. She crouched down, silent, in a corner of the room, and eyed him steadily; it was a look that cooled his hot blood and made him tremble. But there was no time now to think of a means of making atonement. Nothing remained but to risk the worst till the funeral was over. There was but one way of making sure of her. He locked her into her bedroom.

When he came back some hours after, he found her sitting, very much altered in look and bearing, by the bedside, with a bundle on her lap. She rose, and faced him quietly, and spoke with a strange stillness in her voice, a strange repose in her eyes, a strange composure in her manner.

"No man has ever struck me twice," she said, "and my husband shall have no second opportunity. Set the door open and let me go. From this day forth we see each other no more."

Before he could answer she passed him and left the room. He saw her walk away up the street.

Would she return?

All that night he watched and waited, but no footstep came near the house. The next night, overpowered by
fatigue, he lay down in bed in his clothes, with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning. His slumber was not disturbed. The third night, the fourth, the fifth, the sixth passed, and nothing happened.

He lay down on the seventh, still in his clothes, still with the door locked, the key on the table, and the candle burning, but easier in his mind.

Easier in his mind, and in perfect health of body when he fell off to sleep. But his rest was disturbed. He woke twice without any sensation of uneasiness. But the third time it was that never-to-be-forgotten shivering of the night at the lonely inn, that dreadful sinking pain at the heart, which once more aroused him in an instant.

His eyes opened toward the left-hand side of the bed, and there stood—The Dream-Woman again? No! His wife; the living reality, with the dream-specter's face, in the dream-specter's attitude; the fair arm up, the knife clasped in the delicate white hand.

He sprang upon her almost at the instant of seeing her, and yet not quickly enough to prevent her from hiding the knife. Without a word from him—without a cry from her—he pinioned her in a chair. With one hand he felt up her sleeve, and there, where the Dream-Woman had hidden the knife, his wife had hidden it—the knife with the buckhorn handle, that looked like new.

In the despair of that fearful moment his brain was steady, his heart was calm. He looked at her fixedly with the knife in his hand, and said these last words:

"You told me we should see each other no more, and you have come back. It is my turn now to go, and to go forever. I say that we shall see each other no more, and my word shall not be broken."

He left her, and set forth into the night. There was a bleak wind abroad, and the smell of recent rain was in the air. The distant church-clocks chimed the quarter as he walked rapidly beyond the last houses in the suburb. He asked the first policeman he met what hour that was the quarter past had just struck.

The man referred sleepily to his watch, and answered, "Two o'clock." Two in the morning. What day of the month was this day that had just begun? He reckoned it up from the date of his mother's funeral. The fatal parallel was complete: it was his birthday!

Had he escaped the mortal peril which his dream foretold? or had he only received a second warning?

As that ominous doubt forced itself on his mind, he stopped, reflected, and turned back again toward the city. He was still resolute to hold to his word, and never to let her see him more; but there was a thought now in his mind of having her watched and followed. The knife was in his possession; the world was before him; but a new distrust of her—a vague, unspeakable, superstitious dread had overcome him.

"I must know where she goes, now she thinks I have left her," he said to himself, as he stole back wearily to the precincts of his house.

It was still dark. He had left the candle burning in the bedchamber; but when he looked up to the window of the room now there was no light in it. He crept cautiously to the house door. On going away, he remembered to have closed it; on trying it now, he found it open.

He waited outside, never losing sight of the house, till daylight. Then he ventured indoors—listened, and heard nothing—looked into kitchen, scullery, parlor and found nothing; went up at last into the bedroom—it was empty. A picklock lay on the floor betraying how she had gained entrance in the night, and that was the only trace of her.

Whither had she gone? That no mortal tongue could tell him. The darkness had covered her flight; and when the day broke, no man could say where the light found her.

Before leaving the house and the town forever, he gave instructions to a friend and neighbor to sell his furniture for anything that it would fetch, and apply the proceeds to employing the police to trace her. The directions were honestly followed, and the money was all spent, but the inquiries led to nothing. The picklock on the bedroom floor remained the one last useless trace of the Dream-Woman.

At this point of the narrative the landlord paused, and, turning toward the window of the room in which we were sitting, looked in the direction of the stable-yard.

"So far," he said, "I tell you what was told to me. The little that remains to be added lies within my own experience. Between two and three months after the events I have just been relating, Isaac Scatchard came to me, withered and old-looking before his time, just as you saw him to-day. He had his testimonials to character with him, and he asked for employment here. Knowing that my wife and he were distantly related, I gave him a trial in consideration of that relationship, and liked him in spite of his queer habits. He is as sober, honest, and willing a man as there is in England. As for his restlessness at night, and his sleeping away his leisure time in the day, who can wonder at it after hearing his story? Besides, he never objects to being roused up when he's wanted, so there's not much inconvenience to complain of, after all."

"I suppose he is afraid of a return of that dreadful dream, and of waking out of it in the dark?" said I.

"No," returned the landlord. "The dream comes back to him so often that he has got to bear with it by this time resignedly enough. It's his wife keeps him waking at night as he has often told me."
"What! Has she never been heard of yet?"

"Never. Isaac himself has the one perpetual thought about her, that she is alive and looking for him. I believe he
wouldn't let himself drop off to sleep toward two in the morning for a king's ransom. Two in the morning, he says, is
the time she will find him, one of these days. Two in the morning is the time all the year round when he likes to be
most certain that he has got that clasp-knife safe about him. He does not mind being alone as long as he is awake,
except on the night before his birthday, when he firmly believes himself to be in peril of his life. The birthday has
only come round once since he has been here, and then he sat up along with the night-porter. 'She's looking for me,'
is all he says when anybody speaks to him about the one anxiety of his life; 'she's looking for me.' He may be right.
She may be looking for him. Who can tell?"

"Who can tell?" said I.

THE FOURTH DAY.

The sky once more cloudy and threatening. No news of George. I corrected Morgan's second story to-day;
numbered it Seven, and added it to our stock.

Undeterred by the weather, Miss Jessie set off this morning on the longest ride she had yet undertaken. She had
heard--through one of my brother's laborers, I believe--of the actual existence, in this nineteenth century, of no less a
personage than a Welsh Bard, who was to be found at a distant farmhouse far beyond the limits of Owen's property.
The prospect of discovering this remarkable relic of past times hurried her off, under the guidance of her ragged
groom, in a high state of excitement, to see and hear the venerable man. She was away the whole day, and for the
first time since her visit she kept us waiting more than half an hour for dinner. The moment we all sat down to table,
she informed us, to Morgan's great delight, that the bard was a rank impostor.

"Why, what did you expect to see?" I asked.

"A Welsh patriarch, to be sure, with a long white beard, flowing robes, and a harp to match," answered Miss
Jessie.

"And what did you find?"

"A highly-respectable middle-aged rustic; a smiling, smoothly-shaven, obliging man, dressed in a blue swallow-
tailed coat, with brass buttons, and exhibiting his bardic legs in a pair of extremely stout. and comfortable corduroy
trousers."

"But he sang old Welsh songs, surely?"

"Sang! I'll tell you what he did. He sat down on a Windsor chair, without a harp; he put his hands in his pockets,
cleared his throat, looked up at the ceiling, and suddenly burst into a series of the shrillest falsetto screeches I ever
heard in my life. My own private opinion is that he was suffering from hydrophobia. I have lost all belief, henceforth
and forever, in bards--all belief in everything, in short, except your very delightful stories and this remarkably good
dinner.

Ending with that smart double fire of compliments to her hosts, the Queen of Hearts honored us all three with a
smile of approval, and transferred her attention to her knife and fork.

The number drawn to-night was One. On examination of the Purple Volume, it proved to be my turn to read
again.

"Our story to-night," I said, "contains the narrative of a very remarkable adventure which really befell me when I
was a young man. At the time of my life when these events happened I was dabbling in literature when I ought to
have been studying law, and traveling on the Continent when I ought to have been keeping my terms at Lincoln's
Inn. At the outset of the story, you will find that I refer to the county in which I lived in my youth, and to a
neighboring family possessing a large estate in it. That county is situated in a part of England far away from The
Glen Tower, and that family is therefore not to be associated with any present or former neighbors of ours in this
part of the world."

After saying these necessary words of explanation, I opened the first page, and began the story of my Own
Adventure. I observed that my audience started a little as I read the title, which I must add, in my own defense, had
been almost forced on my choice by the peculiar character of the narrative. It was "MAD MONKTON."

BROTHER GRIFFITH'S STORY

of

MAD MONKTON

CHAPTER I.

The Monktons of Wincot Abbey bore a sad character for want of sociability in our county. They never went to
other people's houses, and, excepting my father, and a lady and her daughter living near them, never received
anybody under their own roof.

Proud as they all certainly were, it was not pride, but dread, which kept them thus apart from their neighbors.
The family had suffered for generations past from the horrible affliction of hereditary insanity, and the members of it
shrank from exposing their calamity to others, as they must have exposed it if they had mingled with the busy little world around them. There is a frightful story of a crime committed in past times by two of the Monktons, near relatives, from which the first appearance of the insanity was always supposed to date, but it is needless for me to shock any one by repeating it. It is enough to say that at intervals almost every form of madness appeared in the family, monomania being the most frequent manifestation of the affliction among them. I have these particulars, and one or two yet to be related, from my father.

At the period of my youth but three of the Monktons were left at the Abbey—Mr. and Mrs. Monkton and their only child Alfred, heir to the property. The one other member of this, the elder branch of the family, who was then alive, was Mr. Monkton's younger brother, Stephen. He was an unmarried man, possessing a fine estate in Scotland; but he lived almost entirely on the Continent, and bore the reputation of being a shameless profligate. The family at Wincot held almost as little communication with him as with their neighbors.

I have already mentioned my father, and a lady and her daughter, as the only privileged people who were admitted into Wincot Abbey.

My father had been an old school and college friend of Mr. Monkton, and accident had brought them so much together in later life that their continued intimacy at Wincot was quite intelligible. I am not so well able to account for the friendly terms on which Mrs. Elmslie (the lady to whom I have alluded) lived with the Monktons. Her late husband had been distantly related to Mrs. Monkton, and my father was her daughter's guardian. But even these claims to friendship and regard never seemed to me strong enough to explain the intimacy between Mrs. Elmslie and the inhabitants of the Abbey. Intimate, however, they certainly were, and one result of the constant interchange of visits between the two families in due time declared itself: Mr. Monkton's son and Mrs. Elmslie's daughter became attached to each other.

I had no opportunities of seeing much of the young lady; I only remember her at that time as a delicate, gentle, lovable girl, the very opposite in appearance, and apparently in character also, to Alfred Monkton. But perhaps that was one reason why they fell in love with each other. The attachment was soon discovered, and was far from being disapproved by the parents on either side. In all essential points except that of wealth, the Elmslies were nearly the equals of the Monktons, and want of money in a bride was of no consequence to the heir of Wincot. Alfred, it was well known, would succeed to thirty thousand a year on his father's death.

Thus, though the parents on both sides thought the young people not old enough to be married at once, they saw no reason why Ada and Alfred should not be engaged to each other, with the understanding that they should be united when young Monkton came of age, in two years' time. The person to be consulted in the matter, after the parents, was my father, in his capacity of Ada's guardian. He knew that the family misery had shown itself many years ago in Mrs. Monkton, who was her husband's cousin. The illness as it was significantly called, had been palliated by careful treatment, and was reported to have passed away. But my father was not to be deceived. He knew where the hereditary taint still lurked; he viewed with horror the bare possibility of its reappearing one day in the children of his friend's only daughter; and he positively refused his consent to the marriage engagement.

The result was that the doors of the Abbey and the doors of Mrs. Elmslie's house were closed to him. This suspension of friendly intercourse had lasted but a very short time when Mrs. Monkton died. Her husband, who was fondly attached to her, caught a violent cold while attending her funeral. The cold was neglected, and settled on his lungs. In a few months' time he followed his wife to the grave, and Alfred was left master of the grand old Abbey and the fair lands that spread all around it.

At this period Mrs. Elmslie had the delicacy to endeavor a second time to procure my father's consent to the marriage engagement. He refused it again more positively than before. More than a year passed away. The time was approaching fast when Alfred would be of age. I returned from college to spend the long vacation at home, and made some advances toward bettering my acquaintance with young Monkton. They were evaded—certainly with perfect politeness, but still in such a way as to prevent me from offering my friendship to him again. Any mortification I might have felt at this petty repulse under ordinary circumstances was dismissed from my mind by the occurrence of a real misfortune in our household. For some months past my father's health had been failing, and, just at the time of which I am now writing, his sons had to mourn the irreparable calamity of his death.

This event, through some informality or error in the late Mr. Elmslie's will, left the future of Ada's life entirely at her mother's disposal. The consequence was the immediate ratification of the marriage engagement to which my father had so steadily refused his consent. As soon as the fact was publicly announced, some of Mrs. Elmslie's more intimate friends, who were acquainted with the reports affecting the Monkton family, ventured to mingle with their formal congratulations one or two significant references to the late Mrs. Monkton and some searching inquiries as to the disposition of her son.

Mrs. Elmslie always met these polite hints with one bold form of answer. She first admitted the existence of these reports about the Monktons which her friends were unwilling to specify distinctly, and then declared that they
were infamous calumnies. The hereditary taint had died out of the family generations back. Alfred was the best, the
kindest, the sanest of human beings. He loved study and retirement; Ada sympathized with his tastes, and had made
her choice unbiased; if any more hints were dropped about sacrificing her by her marriage, those hints would be
viewed as so many insults to her mother, whose affection for her it was monstrous to call in question. This way of
talking silenced people, but did not convince them. They began to suspect, what was indeed the actual truth, that
Mrs. Elmslie was a selfish, worldly, grasping woman, who wanted to get her daughter well married, and cared
nothing for consequences as long as she saw Ada mistress of the greatest establishment in the whole county.

It seemed, however, as if there was some fatality at work to prevent the attainment of Mrs. Elmslie's great object
in life. Hardly was one obstacle to the ill-omened marriage removed by my father's death before another succeeded
it in the shape of anxieties and difficulties caused by the delicate state of Ada's health. Doctors were consulted in all
directions, and the result of their advice was that the marriage must be deferred, and that Miss Elmslie must leave
England for a certain time, to reside in a warmer climate—the south of France, if I remember rightly. Thus it
happened that just before Alfred came of age Ada and her mother departed for the Continent, and the union of the
two young people was understood to be indefinitely postponed. Some curiosity was felt in the neighborhood as to
what Alfred Monkton would do under these circumstances. Would he follow his lady-love? would he go yachting?
would he throw open the doors of the old Abbey at last, and endeavor to forget the absence of Ada and the
postponement of his marriage in a round of gayeties? He did none of these things. He simply remained at Wincot,
living as suspiciously strange and solitary a life as his father had lived before him. Literally, there was now no
companion for him at the Abbey but the old priest—the Monktons, I should have mentioned before, were Roman
Catholics—who had held the office of tutor to Alfred from his earliest years. He came of age, and there was not even
so much as a private dinner-party at Wincot to celebrate the event. Families in the neighborhood determined to
forget the offense which his father's reserve had given them, and invited him to their houses. The invitations were
politely declined. Civil visitors called resolutely at the Abbey, and were as resolutely bowed away from the doors as
soon as they had left their cards. Under this combination of sinister and aggravating circumstances people in all
directions took to shaking their heads mysteriously when the name of Mr. Alfred Monkton was mentioned, hinting
at the family calamity, and wondering peevishly or sadly, as their tempers inclined them, what he could possibly do
to occupy himself month after month in the lonely old house.

The right answer to this question was not easy to find. It was quite useless, for ex ample, to apply to the priest
for it. He was a very quiet, polite old gentleman; his replies were always excessively ready and civil, and appeared at
the time to convey an immense quantity of information; but when they came to be reflected on, it was universally
observed that nothing tangible could ever be got out of them. The housekeeper, a weird old woman, with a very
abrupt and repelling manner, was too fierce and taciturn to be safely approached. The few indoor servants had all
been long enough in the family to have learned to hold their tongues in public as a regular habit. It was only from
the farm-servants who supplied the table at the Abbey that any information could be obtained, and vague enough it
was when they came to communicate it.

Some of them had observed the "young master" walking about the library with heaps of dusty papers in his
hands. Others had heard odd noises in the uninhabited parts of the Abbey, had looked up, and had seen him forcing
open the old windows, as if to let light and air into the rooms supposed to have been shut close for years and years,
or had discovered him standing on the perilous summit of one of the crumbling turrets, never ascended before within
their memories, and popularly considered to be inhabited by the ghosts of the monks who had once possessed the
building. The result of these observations and discoveries, when they were communicated to others, was of course to
impress every one with a firm belief that "poor young Monkton was going the way that the rest of the family had
gone before him," which opinion always appeared to be immensely strengthened in the popular mind by a
conviction—founded on no particle of evidence—that the priest was at the bottom of all the mischief.

Thus far I have spoken from hearsay evidence mostly. What I have next to tell will be the result of my own
personal experience.

CHAPTER II.

ABOUT five months after Alfred Monkton came of age I left college, and resolved to amuse and instruct myself
a little by traveling abroad.

At the time when I quitted England young Monkton was still leading his secluded life at the Abbey, and was, in
the opinion of everybody, sinking rapidly, if he had not already succumbed, under the hereditary curse of his family.
As to the Elmslies, report said that Ada had benefited by her sojourn abroad, and that mother and daughter were on
their way back to England to resume their old relations with the heir of Wincot. Before they returned I was away on
my travels, and wandered half over Europe, hardly ever planning whither I should shape my course beforehand.
Chance, which thus led me everywhere, led me at last to Naples. There I met with an old school friend, who was one
of the attaches at the English embassy, and there began the extraordinary events in connection with Alfred
Monkton which form the main interest of the story I am now relating.

I was idling away the time one morning with my friend the _attache_ in the garden of the Villa Reale, when we were passed by a young man, walking alone, who exchanged bows with my friend.

I thought I recognized the dark, eager eyes, the colorless cheeks, the strangely-vigilant, anxious expression which I remembered in past times as characteristic of Alfred Monkton's face, and was about to question my friend on the subject, when he gave me unasked the information of which I was in search.

"That is Alfred Monkton," said he; "he comes from your part of England. You ought to know him."

"I do know a little of him," I answered; "he was engaged to Miss Elmslie when I was last in the neighborhood of Wincot. Is he married to her yet?"

"No, and he never ought to be. He has gone the way of the rest of the family—or, in plainer words, he has gone mad."

"Mad! But I ought not to be surprised at hearing that, after the reports about him in England."

"I speak from no reports; I speak from what he has said and done before me, and before hundreds of other people. Surely you must have heard of it?"

"Never. I have been out of the way of news from Naples or England for months past."

"Then I have a very extraordinary story to tell you. You know, of course, that Alfred had an uncle, Stephen Monkton. Well, some time ago this uncle fought a duel in the Roman States with a Frenchman, who shot him dead. The seconds and the Frenchman (who was unhurt) took to flight in different directions, as it is supposed. We heard nothing here of the details of the duel till a month after it happened, when one of the French journals published an account of it, taken from the papers left by Monkton's second, who died at Paris of consumption. These papers stated the manner in which the duel was fought, and how it terminated, but nothing more. The surviving second and the Frenchman have never been traced from that time to this. All that anybody knows, therefore, of the duel is that Stephen Monkton was shot; an event which nobody can regret, for a greater scoundrel never existed. The exact place where he died, and what was done with the body are still mysteries not to be penetrated."

"But what has all this to do with Alfred?"

"Wait a moment, and you will hear. Soon after the news of his uncle's death reached England, what do you think Alfred did? He actually put off his marriage with Miss Elmslie, which was then about to be celebrated, to come out here in search of the burial-place of his wretched scamp of an uncle; and no power on earth will now induce him to return to England and to Miss Elmslie until he has found the body, and can take it back with him, to be buried with all the other dead Monktons in the vault under Wincot Abbey Chapel. He has squandered his money, pestered the police, and exposed himself to the ridicule of the men and the indignation of the women for the last three months in trying to achieve his insane purpose, and is now as far from it as ever. He will not assign to anybody the smallest motive for his conduct. You can't laugh him out of it or reason him out of it. When we met him just now, I happen to know that he was on his way to the office of the police minister, to send out fresh agents to search and inquire through the Roman States for the place where his uncle was shot. And, mind, all this time he professes to be passionately in love with Miss Elmslie, and to be miserable at his separation from her. Just think of that! And then think of his self-imposed absence from her here, to hunt after the remains of a wretch who was a disgrace to the family, and whom he never saw but once or twice in his life. Of all the 'Mad Monktons,' as they used to call them in England, Alfred is the maddest. He is actually our principal excitement in this dull opera season; though, for my own part, when I think of the poor girl in England, I am a great deal more ready to despise him than to laugh at him."

"You know the Elmslies then?"

"Intimately. The other day my mother wrote to me from England, after having seen Ada. This escapade of Monkton's has outraged all her friends. They have been entreating her to break off the match, which it seems she could do if she liked. Even her mother, sordid and selfish as she is, has been obliged at last, in common decency, to side with the rest of the family; but the good, faithful girl won't give Monkton up. She humors his insanity; declares he gave her a good reason in secret for going away; says she could always make him happy when they were together in the old Abbey, and can make him still happier when they are married; in short, she loves him dearly, and will therefore believe in him to the last. Nothing shakes her. She has made up her mind to throw away her life on him, and she will do it."

"I hope not. Mad as his conduct looks to us, he may have some sensible reason for it that we cannot imagine. Does his mind seem at all disordered when he talks on ordinary topics?"

"Not in the least. When you can get him to say anything, which is not often, he talks like a sensible, well-educated man. Keep silence about his precious errand here, and you would fancy him the gentlest and most temperate of human beings; but touch the subject of his vagabond of an uncle, and the Monkton madness comes out directly. The other night a lady asked him, jestingly of course, whether he had ever seen his uncle's ghost. He
eyes were turned away from me with the same extraordinary expression in them to which I have already alluded.

pronounced.

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looking out, and listening to the dance-music which faintly reached me from the ballroom. My thoughts were far

bathed in the bright softness of Italian moonlight, was so lovely that I remained for a long time at the window,

the occasion with Chinese lanterns. Nobody was in the room when I got there. The view over the Mediterranean,

one extremity of the palace, which was half conservatory, half boudoir, and which had been prettily illuminated for

that period, were all to be revealed.

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errand at Naples, and never once spoke of Miss Elmslie, or of his life at Wincot Abbey. This not only astonished me,

and fierceness in his eyes. This looked so like madness--or hypochondria at the least--that I felt afraid to ask him

on one side of me, now on the other, but always where there was nothing to see, and always with the same intensity

talking about, or where we happened to be, there were times when he would suddenly look away from my face, now

We took many a quiet ride together in the country, and sailed often along the shores of the Bay on either side. But

his family and his own conduct had arrayed against him, I began to like "Mad Monkton" as much as he liked me.

and, in spite of what I had heard about his behavior to Miss Elmslie, in spite of the suspicions which the history of

afterward, and never lost a single opportunity of bettering our acquaintance. I felt that he had taken a liking to me,

We took a long talk together on the first evening of our meeting; we often saw each other

nor concealing it affectingly. His manner was in itself a standing protest against such a nickname as "Mad Monkton." He

roughly, he looked back at me directly, and, as long as we stood in our corner, his eyes

could not assist his inquiries. He pursued them no further; and, mindful of my friend's warning, I took care to lead

which. I had come to Naples from Spain by sea, and briefly told him so, as the best way of satisfying him that I

perfectly empty wall at our side, or on the vacant space at our side, it was impossible to say

as they had looked hitherto, his eyes wandered away, and fixed themselves intensely, almost fiercely, either on the

They came from hell to do it. We laughed at his words, but the lady fainted at his looks, and we had a scene of

"Not at all," said I. "Can I do anything for you? Are you ill?"

scowled at her like a perfect fiend, and said that he and his uncle would answer her question together some day, if

came from hell to do it. We laughed at his words, but the lady fainted at his looks, and we had a scene of

hysterics and hartshorn in consequence. Any other man would have been kicked out of the room for nearly

frightening a pretty woman to death in that way; but 'Mad Monkton,' as we have christened him, is a privileged

lunatic in Neapolitan society, because he is English, good-looking, and worth thirty thousand a year. He goes out
everywhere under the impression that he may meet with somebody who has been let into the secret of the place
where the mysterious duel was fought. If you are introduced to him he is sure to ask you whether you know anything
about it; but beware of following up the subject after you have answered him, unless you want to make sure that he
is out of his senses. In that case, only talk of his uncle, and the result will rather more than satisfy you."

A day or two after this conversation with my friend the _attache_, I met Monkton at an evening party.

The moment he heard my name mentioned, his face flushed up; he drew me away into a corner, and referring to
his cool reception of my advance years ago toward making his acquaintance, asked my pardon for what he termed
his inexcusable ingratitude with an earnestness and an agitation which utterly astonished me. His next proceeding
was to question me, as my friend had said he would, about the place of the mysterious duel.

An extraordinary change came over him while he interrogated me on this point. Instead of looking into my face
as they had looked hitherto, his eyes wandered away, and fixed themselves intensely, almost fiercely, either on the
perfectly empty wall at our side, or on the vacant space between the wall and ourselves, it was impossible to say
which. I had come to Naples from Spain by sea, and briefly told him so, as the best way of satisfying him that I
could not assist his inquiries. He pursued them no further; and, mindful of my friend's warning, I took care to lead
the conversation to general topics. He looked back at me directly, and, as long as we stood in our corner, his eyes
never wandered away again to the empty wall or the vacant space at our side.

Though more ready to listen than to speak, his conversation, when he did talk, had no trace of anything the least
like insanity about it. He had evidently read, not generally only, but deeply as well, and could apply his reading with
singular felicity to the illustration of almost any subject under discussion, neither obtruding his knowledge absurdly,
nor concealing it affectedly. His manner was in itself a standing protest against such a nickname as "Mad Monkton." He

He was so shy, so quiet, so composed and gentle in all his actions, that at times I should have been almost inclined
to call him effeminate. We had a long talk together on the first evening of our meeting; we often saw each other
afterward, and never lost a single opportunity of bettering our acquaintance. I felt that he had taken a liking to me,
and, in spite of what I had heard about his behavior to Miss Elmslie, in spite of the suspicions which the history of
his family and his own conduct had arrayed against him, I began to like "Mad Monkton" as much as he liked me.
We took a quiet ride together in the country, and sailed often along the shores of the Bay on either side. But
for two eccentricities in his conduct, which I could not at all understand, I should soon have felt as much at my ease
in his society as if he had been my own brother.

The first of these eccentricities consisted in the reappearance on several occasions of the odd expression in his
eyes which I had first seen when he asked me whether I knew anything about the duel. No matter what we were
talking about, or where we happened to be, there were times when he would suddenly look away from my face, now
on one side of me, now on the other, but always where there was nothing to see, and always with the same intensity
and fierceness in his eyes. This looked so like madness--or hypochondria at the least--that I felt afraid to ask him
about it, and always pretended not to observe him.

The second peculiarity in his conduct was that he never referred, while in my company, to the reports about his
errand at Naples, and never once spoke of Miss Elmslie, or of his life at Wincot Abbey. This not only astonished me,
but amazed those who had noticed our intimacy, and who had made sure that I must be the depositary of all his
secrets. But the time was near at hand when this mystery, and some other mysteries of which I had no suspicion at
that period, were all to be revealed.

I met him one night at a large ball, given by a Russian nobleman, whose name I could not pronounce then, and
cannot remember now. I had wandered away from reception-room, ballroom, and cardroom, to a small apartment at
one extremity of the palace, which was half conservatory, half boudoir, and which had been prettily illuminated for
the occasion with Chinese lanterns. Nobody was in the room when I got there. The view over the Mediterranean,
bathed in the bright softness of Italian moonlight, was so lovely that I remained for a long time at the window,
looking out, and listening to the dance-music which faintly reached me from the ballroom. My thoughts were far
away with the relations I had left in England, when I was startled out of them by hearing my name softly
pronounced.

I looked round directly, and saw Monkton standing in the room. A livid paleness overspread his face, and his
eyes were turned away from me with the same extraordinary expression in them to which I have already alluded.

"Do you mind leaving the ball early to-night?" he asked, still not looking at me.

"Not at all," said I. "Can I do anything for you? Are you ill?"
"No--at least nothing to speak of. Will you come to my rooms?"

"At once, if you like."

"No, not at once. _I_ must go home directly; but don't you come to me for half an hour yet. You have not been at my rooms before, I know, but you will easily find them out; they are close by. There is a card with my address. I _must_ speak to you to-night; my life depends on it. Pray come! for God's sake, come when the half hour is up!"

I promised to be punctual, and he left me directly.

Most people will be easily able to imagine the state of nervous impatience and vague expectation in which I passed the allotted period of delay, after hearing such words as those Monkton had spoken to me. Before the half hour had quite expired I began to make my way out through the ballroom.

At the head of the staircase my friend, the _attache_, met me.

"What! going away already?" Said he.

"Yes; and on a very curious expedition. I am going to Monkton's rooms, by his own invitation."

"You don't mean it! Upon my honor, you're a bold fellow to trust yourself alone with 'Mad Monkton' when the moon is at the full."

"He is ill, poor fellow. Besides, I don't think him half as mad as you do."

"We won't dispute about that; but mark my words, he has not asked you to go where no visitor has ever been admitted before without a special purpose. I predict that you will see or hear something to-night which you will remember for the rest of your life."

We parted. When I knocked at the courtyard gate of the house where Monkton lived, my friend's last words on the palace staircase recurred to me, and, though I had laughed at him when he spoke them, I began to suspect even then that his prediction would be fulfilled.

CHAPTER III.

THE porter who let me into the house where Monkton lived directed me to the floor on which his rooms were situated. On getting upstairs, I found his door on the landing ajar. He heard my footsteps, I suppose, for he called to me to come in before I could knock.

I entered, and found him sitting by the table, with some loose letters in his hand, which he was just tying together into a packet. I noticed, as he asked me to sit down, that his express ion looked more composed, though the paleness had not yet left his face. He thanked me for coming; repeated that he had something very important to say to me; and then stopped short, apparently too much embarrassed to proceed. I tried to set him at his ease by assuring him that, if my assistance or advice could be of any use, I was ready to place myself and my time heartily and unreservedly at his service.

As I said this I saw his eyes beginning to wander away from my face--to wander slowly, inch by inch, as it were, until they stopped at a certain point, with the same fixed stare into vacancy which had so often startled me on former occasions. The whole expression of his face altered as I had never yet seen it alter; he sat before me looking like a man in a death-trance.

"You are very kind," he said, slowly and faintly, speaking, not to me, but in the direction in which his eyes were still fixed. "I know you can help me; but--"

He stopped; his face whitened horribly, and the perspiration broke out all over it. He tried to continue--said a word or two--then stopped again. Seriously alarmed about him, I rose from my chair with the intention of getting him some water from a jug which I saw standing on a side-table.

He sprang up at the same moment. All the suspicions I had ever heard whispered against his sanity flashed over my mind in an instant, and involuntarily stepped back a pace or two.

"Stop," he said, seating himself again; "don't mind me; and don't leave your chair. I want--I wish, if you please, to make a little alteration, before we say anything more. Do you mind sitting in a strong light?"

"Not in the least."

I had hitherto been seated in the shade of his reading-lamp, the only light in the room.

As I answered him he rose again, and, going into another apartment, returned with a large lamp in his hand; then took two candles from the side-table, and two others from the chimney piece; placed them all, to my amazement, together, so as to stand exactly between us, and then tried to light them. His hand trembled so that he was obliged to give up the attempt, and allow me to come to his assistance. By his direction, I took the shade off the reading-lamp after I had lit the other lamp and the four candles. When we sat down again, with this concentration of light between us, his better and gentler manner began to return, and while he now addressed me he spoke without the slightest hesitation.

"It is useless to ask whether you have heard the reports about me," he said; "I know that you have. My purpose to-night is to give you some reasonable explanation of the conduct which has produced those reports. My secret has been hitherto confided to one person only; I am now about to trust it to your keeping, with a special object which
will appear as I go on. First, however, I must begin by telling you exactly what the great difficulty is which obliges me to be still absent from England. I want your advice and your help; and, to conceal nothing from you, I want also to test your forbearance and your friendly sympathy, before I can venture on thrusting my miserable secret into your keeping. Will you pardon this apparent distrust of your frank and open character--this apparent ingratitude for your kindness toward me ever since we first met?"

I begged him not to speak of these things, but to go on.
"You know," he proceeded, "that I am here to recover the body of my Uncle Stephen, and to carry it back with me to our family burial-place in England, and you must also be aware that I have not yet succeeded in discovering his remains. Try to pass over, for the present, whatever may seem extraordinary and incomprehensible in such a purpose as mine is, and read this newspaper article where the ink-line is traced. It is the only evidence hitherto obtained on the subject of the fatal duel in which my uncle fell, and I want to hear what course of proceeding the perusal of it may suggest to you as likely to be best on my part."

He handed me an old French newspaper. The substance of what I read there is still so firmly impressed on my memory that I am certain of being able to repeat correctly at this distance of time all the facts which it is necessary for me to communicate to the reader.

The article began, I remember, with editorial remarks on the great curiosity then felt in regard to the fatal duel between the Count St. Lo and Mr. Stephen Monkton, an English gentleman. The writer proceeded to dwell at great length on the extraordinary secrecy in which the whole affair had been involved from first to last, and to express a hope that the publication of a certain manuscript, to which his introductory observations referred, might lead to the production of fresh evidence from other and better-informed quarters. The manuscript had been found among the papers of Monsieur Foulon, Mr. Monkton's second, who had died at Paris of a rapid decline shortly after returning to his home in that city from the scene of the duel. The document was unfinished, having been left incomplete at the very place where the reader would most wish to find it continued. No reason could be discovered for this, and no second manuscript bearing on the all-important subject had been found, after the strictest search among the papers left by the deceased.

The document itself then followed.

It purported to be an agreement privately drawn up between Mr. Monkton's second, Monsieur Foulon, and the Count St. Lo's second, Monsieur Dalville, and contained a statement of all the arrangements for conducting the duel. The paper was dated "Naples, February 22d," and was divided into some seven or eight clauses. The first clause described the origin and nature of the quarrel--a very disgraceful affair on both sides, worth neither remembering nor repeating. The second clause stated that, the challenged man having chosen the pistol as his weapon, and the challenger (an excellent swordsman), having, on his side, thereupon insisted that the duel should be fought in such a manner as to make the first fire decisive in its results, the seconds, seeing that fatal consequences must inevitably follow the hostile meeting, determined, first of all, that the duel should be kept a profound secret from everybody, and that the place where it was to be fought should not be made known beforehand, even to the principals themselves. It was added that this excess of precaution had been rendered absolutely necessary in consequence of a recent address from the Pope to the ruling powers in Italy commenting on the scandalous frequency of the practice of dueling, and urgently desiring that the laws against duelists should be enforced for the future with the utmost rigor.

The third clause detailed the manner in which it had been arranged that the duel should be fought.

The pistols having been loaded by the seconds on the ground, the combatants were to be placed thirty paces apart, and were to toss up for the first fire. The man who won was to advance ten paces marked out for him beforehand--and was then to discharge his pistol. If he missed, or failed to disable his opponent, the latter was free to advance, if he chose, the whole remaining twenty paces before he fired in his turn. This arrangement insured the decisive termination of the duel at the first discharge of the pistols, and both principals and seconds pledged themselves on either side to abide by it.

The fourth clause stated that the seconds had agreed that the duel should be fought out of the Neapolitan States, but left themselves to be guided by circumstances as to the exact locality in which it should take place. The remaining clauses, so far as I remember them, were devoted to detailing the different precautions to be adopted for avoiding discovery. Their duelists and their seconds were to leave Naples in separate parties; were to change carriages several times; were to meet at a certain town, or, failing that, at a certain post-house on the high road from Naples to Rome; were to carry drawing-books, color boxes, and camp-stools, as if they had been artists out on a sketching-tour; and were to proceed to the place of the duel on foot, employing no guides, for fear of treachery. Such general arrangements as these, and others for facilitating the flight of the survivors after the affair was over, formed the conclusion of this extraordinary document, which was signed, in initials only, by both the seconds.

Just below the initials appeared the beginning of a narrative, dated "Paris," and evidently intended to describe the
dual itself with extreme minuteness. The hand-writing was that of the deceased second.

Monsieur Foulon, tire gentleman in question, stated his belief that circumstances might transpire which would render an account by an eyewitness of the hostile meeting between St. Lo and Mr. Monkton an important document. He proposed, therefore, as one of the seconds, to testify that the duel had been fought in exact accordance with the terms of the agreement, both the principals conducting themselves like men of gallantry and honor (!). And he further announced that, in order not to compromise any one, he should place the paper containing his testimony in safe hands, with strict directions that it was on no account to be opened except in a case of the last emergency.

After thus preamble, Monsieur Foulon related that the duel had been fought two days after the drawing up of the agreement, in a locality to which accident had conducted the dueling party. (The name of the place was not mentioned, nor even the neighborhood in which it was situated.) The men having been placed according to previous arrangement, the Count St. Lo had won the toss for the first fire, had advanced his ten paces, and had shot his opponent in the body. Mr. Monkton did not immediately fall, but staggered forward some six or seven paces, discharged his pistol ineffectually at the count, and dropped to the ground a dead man. Monsieur Foulon then stated that he tore a leaf from his pocketbook, wrote on it a brief description of the manner in which Mr. Monkton had died, and pinned the paper to his clothes; this proceeding having been rendered necessary by the peculiar nature of the plan organized on the spot for safely disposing of the dead body. What this plan was, or what was done with the corpse, did not appear, for at this important point the narrative abruptly broke off.

A foot-note in the newspaper merely stated the manner in which the document had been obtained for publication, and repeated the announcement contained in the editor's introductory remarks, that no continuation had been found by the persons intrusted with the care of Monsieur Foulon's papers. I have now given the whole substance of what I read, and have mentioned all that was then known of Mr. Stephen Monkton's death.

When I gave the newspaper back to Alfred he was too much agitated to speak, but he reminded me by a sign that he was anxiously waiting to hear what I had to say. My position was a very trying and a very painful one. I could hardly tell what consequences might not follow any want of caution on my part, and could think at first of no safer plan than questioning him carefully before I committed myself either one way or the other.

"Will you excuse me if I ask you a question or two before I give you my advice?" said I.

He nodded impatiently.

"Yes, yes--any questions you like."

"Were you at any time in the habit of seeing your uncle frequently?"

"I never saw him more than twice in my life--on each occasion when I was a mere child."

"Then you could have had no very strong personal regard for him?"

"Regard for him! I should have been ashamed to feel any regard for him. He disgraced us wherever he went."

"May I ask if any family motive is involved in your anxiety to recover his remains?"

"Family motives may enter into it among others--but why do you ask?"

"Because, having heard that you employ the police to assist your search, I was anxious to know whether you had stimulated their superiors to make them do their best in your service by giving some strong personal reasons at headquarters for the very unusual project which has brought you here."

"I give no reasons. I pay for the work I want done, and, in return for my liberality, I am treated with the most infamous indifferance on all sides. A stranger in the country, and badly acquainted with the language, I can do nothing to help myself. The authorities, both at Rome and in this place, pretend to assist me, pretend to search and inquire as I would have them search and inquire, and do nothing more. I am insulted, laughed at, almost to my face."

"Do you not think it possible--mind, I have no wish to excuse the misconduct of the authorities, and do not share in any such opinion myself--but do you not think it likely that the police may doubt whether you are in earnest?"

"Not in earnest!" he cried, starting up and confronting me fiercely, with wild eyes and quickened breath. "Not in earnest! _You_ think I'm not in earnest too. I know you think it, though you tell me you don't. Stop; before we say another word, your own eyes shall convince you. Come here--only for a minute--only for one minute!"

I followed him into his bedroom, which opened out of the sitting-room. At one side of his bed stood a large packing-case of plain wood, upward of seven feet in length.

"Open the lid and look in," he said, "while I hold the candle so that you can see."

I obeyed his directions, and discovered to my astonishment that the packing-case contained a leaden coffin, magnificently emblazoned with the arms of the Monkton family, and inscribed in old-fashioned letters with the name of "Stephen Monkton," his age and the manner of his death being added underneath.

"I keep his coffin ready for him," whispered Alfred, close at my ear. "Does that look like earnest?"

It looked more like insanity--so like that I shrank from answering him.

"Yes! yes! I see you are convinced," he continued quickly; "we may go back into the next room, and may talk without restraint on either side now."
On returning to our places, I mechanically moved my chair away from the table. My mind was by this time in such a state of confusion and uncertainty about what it would be best for me to say or do next, that I forgot for the moment the position he had assigned to me when we lit the candles. He reminded me of this directly.

"Don't move away," he said, very earnestly; "keep on sitting in the light; pray do! I'll soon tell you why I am so particular about that. But first give me your advice; help me in my great distress and suspense. Remember, you promised me you would."

I made an effort to collect my thoughts, and succeeded. It was useless to treat the affair otherwise than seriously in his presence; it would have been cruel not to have advised him as I best could.

"You know," I said, "that two days after the drawing up of the agreement at Naples, the duel was fought out of the Neapolitan States. This fact has of course led you to the conclusion that all inquiries about localities had better be confined to the Roman territory?"

"Certainly; the search, such as it is, has been made there, and there only. If I can believe the police, they and their agents have inquired for the place where the duel was fought (offering a large reward in my name to the person who can discover it) all along the high road from Naples to Rome. They have also circulated—at least so they tell me—descriptions of the duelists and their seconds; have left an agent to superintend investigations at the post-house, and another at the town mentioned as meeting-points in the agreement; and have endeavored, by correspondence with foreign authorities, to trace the Count St. Lo and Monsieur Dalville to their place or places of refuge. All these efforts, supposing them to have been really made, have hitherto proved utterly fruitless."

"My impression is," said I, after a moment’s consideration, "that all inquiries made along the high road, or anywhere near Rome, are likely to be made in vain. As to the discovery of your uncle's remains, that is, I think, identical with the discovery of the place where he was shot; for those engaged in the duel would certainly not risk detection by carrying a corpse any distance with them in their flight. The place, then, is all that we want to find out. Now let us consider for a moment. The dueling-party changed carriages; traveled separately, two and two; doubtless took roundabout roads; stopped at the post-house and the town as a blind; walked, perhaps, a considerable distance unguided. Depend upon it, such precautions as these (which we know they must have employed) left them very little time out of the two days—though they might start at sunrise and not stop at night-fall—for straightforward traveling. My belief therefore is, that the duel was fought somewhere near the Neapolitan frontier; and, if I had been the police agent who conducted the search, I should only have pursued it parallel with the frontier, starting from west to east till I got up among the lonely places in the mountains. That is my idea; do you think it worth anything?"

His face flushed all over in an instant. "I think it an inspiration!" he cried. "Not a day is to be lost in carrying out our plan. The police are not to be trusted with it. I must start myself to-morrow morning; and you—"

He stopped; his face grew suddenly pale; he sighed heavily; his eyes wandered once more into the fixed look at vacancy; and the rigid, deathly expression fastened again upon all his features.

"I must tell you my secret before I talk of to-morrow," he proceeded, faintly. "If I hesitated any longer at confessing everything, I should be unworthy of your past kindness, unworthy of the help which it is my last hope that you will gladly give me when you have heard all."

I begged him to wait until he was more composed, until he was better able to speak; but he did not appear to notice what I said. Slowly, and struggling as it seemed against himself, he turned a little away from me, and, bending his head over the table, supported it on his hand. The packet of letters with which I had seen him occupied

CHAPTER IV.

"You were born, I believe, in our county," he said; "perhaps, therefore, you may have heard at some time of a curious old prophecy about our family, which is still preserved among the traditions of Wincot Abbey?"

"I have heard of such a prophecy," I answered, "but I never knew in what terms it was expressed. It professed to predict the extinction of your family, or something of that sort, did it not?"

"No inquiries," he went on, "have traced back that prophecy to the time when it was first made; none of our family records tell us anything of its origin. Old servants and old tenants of ours remember to have heard it from their fathers and grandfathers. The monks, whom we succeeded in the Abbey in Henry the Eighth’s time, got knowledge of it in some way, for I myself discovered the rhymes, in which we know the prophecy to have been preserved from a very remote period, written on a blank leaf of one of the Abbey manuscripts. These are the verses, if verses they deserve to be called:"

When in Wincot vault a place
Waits for one of Monkton’s race—
When that one forlorn shall lie
Graveless under open sky,
Beggared of six feet of earth,
Though lord of acres from his birth—
That shall be a certain sign
Of the end of Monkton's line.
Dwindling ever faster, faster,
Dwindling to the last-left master;
From mortal ken, from light of day,
Monkton’s race shall pass away.

"The prediction seems almost vague enough to have been uttered by an ancient oracle," said I, observing that he
waited, after repeating the verses, as if expecting me to say something.

"Vague or not, it is being accomplished," he returned. "I am now the 'last-left master'--the last of that elder line of our family at which the prediction points; and the corpse of Stephen Monkton is not in the vaults of Wincot Abbey. Wait before you exclaim against me. I have more to say about this. Long before the Abbey was ours, when we lived in the ancient manor-house near it (the very ruins of which have long since disappeared), the family burying-place was in the vault under the Abbey chapel. Whether in those remote times the prediction against us was known and dreaded or not, this much is certain: every one of the Monktons (whether living at the Abbey or on the smaller estate in Scotland) was buried in Wincot vault, no matter at what risk or what sacrifice. In the fierce fighting days of the olden time, the bodies of my ancestors who fell in foreign places were recovered and brought back to Wincot, though it often cost not heavy ransom only, but desperate bloodshed as well, to obtain them. This superstition, if you please to call it so, has never died out of the family from that time to the present day; for centuries the succession of the dead in the vault at the Abbey has been unbroken--absolutely unbroken--until now. The place mentioned in the prediction as waiting to be filled is Stephen Monkton's place; the voice that cries vainly to the earth for shelter is the spirit-voice of the dead. As surely as if I saw it, I know that they have left him unburied on the ground where he fell!"

He stopped me before I could utter a word in remonstrance by slowly rising to his feet, and pointing in the same direction toward which his eyes had wandered a short time since.

"I can guess what you want to ask me," he exclaimed, sternly and loudly; "you want to ask me how I can be mad enough to believe in a doggerel prophecy uttered in an age of superstition to awe the most ignorant hearers. I answer" (at those words his voice sank suddenly to a whisper), "I answer, because Stephen Monkton himself stands there at this moment confirming me in my belief._"

Whether it was the awe and horror that looked out ghastly from his face as he confronted me, whether it was that I had never hitherto fairly believed in the reports about his madness, and that the conviction of their truth now forced itself upon me on a sudden, I know not, but I felt my blood curdling as he spoke, and I knew in my own heart, as I sat there speechless, that I dare not turn round and look where he was still pointing close at my side.

"I see there," he went on, in the same whispering voice, "the figure of a dark-complexioned man standing up with his head uncovered. One of his hands, still clutching a pistol, has fallen to his side; the other presses a bloody handkerchief over his mouth. The spasm of mortal agony convulses his features; but I know them for the features of a swarthy man who twice frightened me by taking me up in his arms when I was a child at Wincot Abbey. I asked the nurses at the time who that man was, and they told me it was my uncle, Stephen Monkton. Plainly, as if he stood there living, I see him now at your side, with the death-glare in his great black eyes; and so have I ever seen him, since the moment when he was shot; at home and abroad, waking or sleeping, day and night, we are always together, wherever I go!"

His whispering tones sank into almost inaudible murmuring as he pronounced these last words. From the direction and expression of his eyes, I suspected that he was speaking to the apparition. If I had beheld it myself at that moment, it would have been, I think, a less horrible sight to witness than to see him, as I saw him now, muttering inarticulately at vacancy. My own nerves were more shaken than I could have thought possible by what had passed. A vague dread of being near him in his present mood came over me, and I moved back a step or two.

He noticed the action instantly.

"Don't go! pray--pray don't go! Have I alarmed you? Don't you believe me? Do the lights make your eyes ache? I only asked you to sit in the glare of the candles because I could not bear to see the light that always shines from the phantom there at dusk shining over you as you sat in the shadow. Don't go--don't leave me yet!"

There was an utter forlornness, an unspeakable misery in his face as he spoke these words, which gave me back my self-possession by the simple process of first moving me to pity. I resumed my chair, and said that I would stay with him as long as he wished.

"Thank you a thousand times. You are patience and kindness itself," he said, going back to his former place and resuming his former gentleness of manner. "Now that I have got over my first confession of the misery that follows me in secret wherever I go, I think I can tell you calmly all that remains to be told. You see, as I said, my Uncle Stephen" he turned away his head quickly, and looked down at the table as the name passed his lips--"my Uncle Stephen came twice to Wincot while I was a child, and on both occasions frightened me dreadfully. He only took me up in his arms and spoke to me--very kindly, as I afterward heard, for _him_--but he terrified me, nevertheless. Perhaps I was frightened at his great stature, his swarthy complexion, and his thick black hair and mustache, as other children might have been; perhaps the mere sight of him had some strange influence on me which I could not then understand and cannot now explain. However it was, I used to dream of him long after he had gone away, and to fancy that he was stealing on me to catch me up in his arms whenever I was left in the dark. The servants who took care of me found this out, and used to threaten me with my Uncle Stephen whenever I was perverse and difficult to
manage. As I grew up, I still retained my vague dread and abhorrence of our absent relative. I always listened intently, yet without knowing why, whenever his name was mentioned by my father or my mother--listened with an unaccountable presentiment that something terrible had happened to him, or was about to happen to me. This feeling only changed when I was left alone in the Abbey; and then it seemed to merge into the eager curiosity which had begun to grow on me, rather before that time, about the origin of the ancient prophecy predicting the extinction of our race. Are you following me?"

"I follow every word with the closest attention."

"You must know, then, that I had first found out some fragments of the old rhyme in which the prophecy occurs quoted as a curiosity in an antiquarian book in the library. On the page opposite this quotation had been pasted a rude old wood-cut, representing a dark-haired man, whose face was so strangely like what I remembered of my Uncle Stephen that the portrait absolutely startled me. When I asked my father about this--it was then just before his death--he either knew, or pretended to know, nothing of it; and when I afterward mentioned the prediction he fretfully changed the subject. It was just the same with our chaplain when I spoke to him. He said the portrait had been done centuries before my uncle was born, and called the prophecy doggerel and nonsense. I used to argue with him on the latter point, asking why we Catholics, who believed that the gift of working miracles had never departed from certain favored persons, might not just as well believe that the gift of prophecy had never departed, either? He would not dispute with me; he would only say that I must not waste time in thinking of such trifles; that I had more imagination than was good for me, and must suppress instead of exciting it. Such advice as this only irritated my curiosity. I determined secretly to search throughout the oldest uninhabited part of the Abbey, and to try if I could not find out from forgotten family records what the portrait was, and when the prophecy had been first written or uttered. Did you ever pass a day alone in the long-deserted chambers of an ancient house?"

"Never! such solitude as that is not at all to my taste."

"Ah! what a life it was when I began my search. I should like to live it over again. Such tempting suspense, such strange discoveries, such wild fancies, such inthralling terrors, all belonged to that life. Only think of breaking open the door of a room which no living soul had entered for you for nearly a hundred years; think of the first step forward into a region of airless, awful stillness, where the light falls faint and sickly through closed windows and rotting curtains; think of the ghostly creaking of the old floor that cries out on you for treading on it, step as softly as you will; think of arms, helmets, weird tapestries of by-gone days, that seem to be moving out on you from the walls as you first walk up to them in the dim light; think of prying into great cabinets and iron-clasped chests, not knowing what horrors may appear when you tear them open; of poring over their contents till twilight stole on you and darkness grew terrible in the lonely place; of trying to leave it, and not being able to go, as if something held you; of wind wailing at you outside; of shadows darkening round you, and closing you up in obscurity within--only think of these things, and you may imagine the fascination of suspense and terror in such a life as mine was in those past days."

(I shrank from imagining that life: it was bad enough to see its results, as I saw them before me now.)

"Well, my search lasted months and months; then it was suspended a little; then resumed. In whatever direction I pursued it I always found something to lure me on. Terrible confessions of past crimes, shocking proofs of secret wickedness that had been hidden securely from all eyes but mine, came to light. Sometimes these discoveries were associated with particular parts of the Abbey, which have had a horrible interest of their own for me ever since; sometimes with certain old portraits in the picture-gallery, which I actually dreaded to look at after what I had found out. There were periods when the results of this search of mine so horrified me that I determined to give it up entirely; but I never could persevere in my resolution; the temptation to go on seemed at certain intervals to get too strong for me, and then I yielded to it again and again. At last I found the book that had belonged to the monks with the whole of the prophecy written in the blank leaf. This first success encouraged me to get back further yet in the family records. I had discovered nothing hitherto of the identity of the mysterious portrait; but the same intuitive conviction which had assured me of its extraordinary resemblance to my Uncle Stephen seemed also to assure me that he must be more closely connected with the prophecy, and must know more of it than any one else. I had no means of holding any communication with him, no means of satisfying myself whether this strange idea of mine were right or wrong, until the day when my doubts were settled forever by the same terrible proof which is now present to me in this very room."

He paused for a moment, and looked at me intently and suspiciously; then asked if I believed all he had said to me so far. My instant reply in the affirmative seemed to satisfy his doubts, and he went on.

"On a fine evening in February I was standing alone in one of the deserted rooms of the western turret at the Abbey, looking at the sunset. Just before the sun went down I felt a sensation stealing over me which it is impossible to explain. I saw nothing, heard nothing, knew nothing. This utter self-oblivion came suddenly; it was not fainting, for I did not fall to the ground, did not move an inch from my place. If such a thing could be, I should say it was the
race, and commands me, if I would avoid it, to bury the unburied dead. Mortal loves and mortal interests must bow
never left me since—that stands there now by your side, warns me to escape from the fatality which hangs over our
ridiculed it, never scorned it as insanity. Mark what I say! The spirit that appeared to me in the Abbey— that has
that I have a supernatural warrant for my errand here. In that faith I live; without it I should die. _She_ never
words, the new idea which gave the new hope of life came to me in an instant. I believed then, what I believe now,
which the apparition had come to fulfill—far different when she showed me that its mission might be for good
and for me only, through every trial. But it was far different when we afterward reasoned together about the purpose
misery, rather, in hearing her say that no power on earth should make her desert me, and that she would live for me,
hers! Think of this, and you will not wonder that I betrayed my secret to her. She eagerly entreated to know the
apparition! Think of the calm angel-face and the tortured specter-face being always together whenever my eyes met
looked on my betrothed wife! Think of my taking her hand, and seeming to take it through the figure of the
availed me nothing with Ada. The day of our marriage was approaching."
"I mean that what she said suggested the design which has brought me to Naples,” he answered. “While I
past”—his voice trembled, and the tears came into his eyes—”but I dare not trust myself to speak of that; the thought
of the old happy days in the Abbey almost breaks my heart now. Let me get back to the other subject. I must tell you
that I kept the frightful vision which pursued me, at all times and in all places, a secret from everybody, knowing the
vile reports about my having inherited madness from my family, and fearing that an unfair advantage would be
taken of any confession that I might make. Though the phantom always stood opposite to me, and therefore always
appeared either before or by the side of any person to whom I spoke, I soon schooled myself to hide from others that
self-possession availed me nothing with Ada. The day of our marriage was approaching."
"Yes, often. I have some acquaintance myself with Miss Elmslie."
"You never can know all that she has sacrificed for me—never can imagine what I have felt for years and years
past”—his voice trembled, and the tears came into his eyes—”but I dare not trust myself to speak of that; the thought
of seeing the apparition, the prophecy against our house came to my mind, and with it the conviction that I beheld before me, in that spectral presence, the warning of my own doom. As soon as I recovered a little, I determined, nevertheless, to test the reality of what I saw; to find out whether I was the
dupe of my own diseased fancy or not. I left the turret; the phantom left it with me. I made an excuse to have the
drawing-room at the Abbey brilliantly lighted up; the figure was still opposite me. I walked out into the park; it was
there in the clear starlight. I went away from home, and traveled many miles to the sea-side; still the tall dark man in
his death agony was with me. After this I strove against the fatality no more. I returned to the Abbey, and tried to
resign myself to my misery. But this was not to be. I had a hope that was dearer to me than my own life; I had one
treasure belonging to me that I shuddered at the prospect of losing; and when the phantom presence stood a warning
obstacle between me and this one treasure, this dearest hope, then my misery grew heavier than I could bear. You
must know what I am alluding to; you must have heard often that I was engaged to be married?"
"Do you mean that you came to Naples?" I asked, in amazement.
"I mean that what she said suggested the design which has brought me to Naples,” he answered. “While I
believed that the phantom had appeared to me as the fatal messenger of death, there was no comfort—there was
misery, rather, in hearing her say that no power on earth should make her desert me, and that she would live for me,
and for me only, through every trial. But it was far different when we afterward reasoned together about the purpose
which the apparition had come to fulfill—far different when she showed me that its mission might be for good
instead of for evil, and that the warning it was sent to give might be to my profit instead of to my loss. At those
words, the new idea which gave the new hope of life came to me in an instant. I believed then, what I believe now,
that I have a supernatural warrant for my errand here. In that faith I live; without it I should die. _She_ never
ridiculed it, never scorned it as insanity. Mark what I say! The spirit that appeared to me in the Abbey—that has
never left me since—that stands there now by your side, warns me to escape from the fatality which hangs over our
race, and commands me, if I would avoid it, to bury the unburied dead. Mortal loves and mortal interests must bow
to that awful bidding. The specter-presence will never leave me till I have sheltered the corpse that cries to the earth to cover it! I dare not return--I dare not marry till I have filled the place that is empty in Wincot vault."

His eyes flashed and dilated--his voice deepened--a fanatic ecstasy shone in his expression as he uttered these words. Shocked and grieved as I was, I made no attempt to remonstrate or to reason with him. It would have been useless to have referred to any of the usual commonplaces about optical delusions or diseased imaginations--worse than useless to have attempted to account by natural causes for any of the extraordinary coincidences and events of which he had spoken. Briefly as he had referred to Miss Elmslie, he had said enough to show me that the only hope of the poor girl who loved him best and had known him longest of any one was in humoring his delusions to the last. How faithfully she still clung to the belief that she could restore him! How resolutely was she sacrificing herself to his morbid fancies, in the hope of a happy future that might never come! Little as I knew of Miss Elmslie, the mere thought of her situation, as I now reflected on it, made me feel sick at heart.

"They call me Mad Monkton!" he exclaimed, suddenly breaking the silence between us during the last few minutes, "Here and in England everybody believes I am out of my senses except Ada and you. She has been my salvation, and you will be my salvation too. Something told me that when I first met you walking in the Villa Peale. I struggled against the strong desire that was in me to trust my secret to you, but I could resist it no longer when I saw you to-night at the ball; the phantom seemed to draw me on to you as you stood alone in the quiet room. Tell me more of that idea of yours about finding the place where the duel was fought. If I set out to-morrow to seek for it myself, where must I go to first? where?" He stopped; his strength was evidently becoming exhausted, and his mind was growing confused. "What am I to do? I can't remember. You know everything--will you not help me? My misery has made me unable to help myself."

He stopped, murmured something about failing if he went to the frontier alone, and spoke confusedly of delays that might be fatal, then tried to utter the name of "Ada"; but, in pronouncing the first letter, his voice faltered, and, turning abruptly from me, he burst into tears.

"Yes, yes," he rejoined, in answer to the few words I now spoke to try and calm him, "don't be afraid about me. After what you have said, I'll answer for my own coolness and composure under all emergencies. I have been so long used to the apparition that I hardly feel its presence at all except on rare occasions. Besides, I have here in this little packet of letters the medicine for every malady of the sick heart. They are Ada's letters; I read them to calm me whenever my misfortune seems to get the better of my endurance. I wanted that half hour to read them in to-night before you came, to make myself fit to see you, and I shall go through them again after you are gone; so, once more, don't be afraid about me. I know I shall succeed with your help, and Ada shall thank you as you deserve to be thanked when we get back to England. If you hear the fools at Naples talk about my being mad, don't trouble yourself to contradict them; the scandal is so contemptible that it must end by contradicting itself."

I left him, promising to return early the next day.

When I got back to my hotel, I felt that any idea of sleeping after all that I had seen and heard was out of the question; so I lit my pipe, and, sitting by the window--how it refreshed my mind just then to look at the calm moonlight!--tried to think what it would be best to do. In the first place, any appeal to doctors or to Alfred's friends in England was out of the question. I could not persuade myself that his intellect was sufficiently disordered to justify me, under existing circumstances, in disclosing the secret which he had intrusted to my keeping. In the second place, all attempts on my part to induce him to abandon the idea of searching out his uncle's remains would be utterly useless after what I had incautiously said to him. Having settled these two conclusions, the only really great difficulty which remained to perplex me was whether I was justified in aiding him to execute his extraordinary purpose.

Supposing that, with my help, he found Mr. Monkton's body, and took it back with him to England, was it right in me thus to lend myself to promoting the marriage which would most likely follow these events--a marriage which it might be the duty of every one to prevent at all hazards? This set me thinking about the extent of his madness, or to speak more mildly and more correctly, of his delusion. Sane he certainly was on all ordinary subjects; nay, in all the narrative parts of what he had said to me on this very evening he had spoken clearly and connectedly. As for the story of the apparition, other men, with intellects as clear as the intellects of their neighbors had fancied themselves pursued by a phantom, and had even written about it in a high strain of philosophical speculation. It was plain that the real hallucination in the case now before me lay in Monkton's conviction of the truth of the old prophecy, and in his idea that the fancied apparition was a supernatural warning to him to evade its denunciations; and it was equally
clear that both delusions had been produced, in the first instance, by the lonely life he had led acting on a naturally excitable temperament, which was rendered further liable to moral disease by an hereditary taint of insanity.

Was this curable? Miss Elmslie, who knew him far better than I did, seemed by her conduct to think so. Had I any reason or right to determine offhand that she was mistaken? Supposing I refused to go to the frontier with him, he would then most certainly depart by himself, to commit all sorts of errors, and perhaps to meet with all sorts of accidents; while I, an idle man, with my time entirely at my own disposal, was stopping at Naples, and leaving him to his fate after I had suggested the plan of his expedition, and had encouraged him to confide in me. In this way I kept turning the subject over and over again in my mind, being quite free, let me add, from looking at it in any other than a practical point of view. I firmly believed, as a derider of all ghost stories, that Alfred was deceiving himself in fancying that he had seen the apparition of his uncle before the news of Mr. Monkton's death reached England, and I was on this account, therefore, uninfluenced by the slightest infection of my unhappy friend's delusions when I at last fairly decided to accompany him in his extraordinary search. Possibly my harum-scarum fondness for excitement at that time biased me a little in forming my resolution; but I must add, in common justice to myself, that I also acted from motives of real sympathy for Monkton, and from a sincere wish to allay, if I could, the anxiety of the poor girl who was still so faithfully waiting and hoping for him far away in England.

Certain arrangements preliminary to our departure, which I found myself obliged to make after a second interview with Alfred, betrayed the object of our journey to most of our Neapolitan friends. The astonishment of everybody was of course unbounded, and the nearly universal suspicion that I must be as mad in my way as Monkton himself showed itself pretty plainly in my presence. Some people actually tried to combat my resolution by telling me what a shameless profligate Stephen Monkton had been—as if I had a strong personal interest in hunting out his remains! Ridicule moved me as little as any arguments of this sort; my mind was made up, and I was as obstinate then as I am now.

In two days' time I had got everything ready, and had ordered the traveling carriage to the door some hours earlier than we had originally settled. We were jovially threatened with "a parting cheer" by all our English acquaintances, and I thought it desirable to avoid this on my friend's account; for he had been more excited, as it was, by the preparations for the journey than I at all liked. Accordingly, soon after sunrise, without a soul in the street to stare at us, we privately left Naples.

Nobody will wonder, I think, that I experienced some difficulty in realizing my own position, and shrank instinctively from looking forward a single day into the future, when I now found myself starting, in company with "Mad Monkton," to hunt for the body of a dead duelist all along the frontier line of the Roman States!

CHAPTER V.

I HAD settled it in my own mind that we had better make the town of Fondi, close on the frontier, our headquarters, to begin with, and I had arranged, with the assistance of the embassy, that the leaden coffin should follow us so far, securely nailed up in its packing-case. Besides our passports, we were well furnished with letters of introduction to the local authorities at most of the important frontier towns, and, to crown all, we had money enough at our command (thanks to Monkton's vast fortune) to make sure of the services of any one whom we wanted to assist us all along our line of search. These various resources insured us every facility for action, provided always that we succeeded in discovering the body of the dead duelist. But, in the very probable event of our failing to do this, our future prospects—more especially after the responsibility I had undertaken—were of anything but an agreeable nature to contemplate. I confess I felt uneasy, almost hopeless, as we posted, in the dazzling Italian sunshine, along the road to Fondi.

We made an easy two days' journey of it; for I had insisted, on Monkton's account, that we should travel slowly.

On the first day the excessive agitation of my companion a little alarmed me; he showed, in many ways, more symptoms of a disordered mind than I had yet observed in him. On the second day, however, he seemed to get accustomed to contemplate calmly the new idea of the search on which we were bent, and, except on one point, he was cheerful and composed enough. Whenever his dead uncle formed the subject of conversation, he still persisted—on the strength of the old prophecy, and under the influence of the apparition which he saw, or thought he saw always—in asserting that the corpse of Stephen Monkton, wherever it was, lay yet unburied. On every other topic he deferred to me with the utmost readiness and docility; on this he maintained his strange opinion with an obstinacy which set reason and persuasion alike at defiance.

On the third day we rested at Fondi. The packing-case, with the coffin in it, reached us, and was deposited in a safe place under lock and key. We engaged some mules, and found a man to act as guide who knew the country thoroughly. It occurred to me that we had better begin by confiding the real object of our journey only to the most trustworthy people we could find among the better-educated classes. For this reason we followed, in one respect, the example of the fatal dueling-party, by starting, early on the morning of the fourth day, with sketch-books and color-boxes, as if we were only artists in search of the picturesque.
After traveling some hours in a northerly direction within the Roman frontier, we halted to rest ourselves and our mules at a wild little village far out of the track of tourists in general.

The only person of the smallest importance in the place was the priest, and to him I addressed my first inquiries, leaving Monkton to await my return with the guide. I spoke Italian quite fluently, and correctly enough for my purpose, and was extremely polite and cautious in introducing my business, but in spite of all the pains I took, I only succeeded in frightening and bewildering the poor priest more and more with every fresh word I said to him. The idea of a dueling-party and a dead man seemed to scare him out of his senses. He bowed, fidgeted, cast his eyes up to heaven, and piteously shrugging his shoulders, told me, with rapid Italian circumlocution, that he had not the faintest idea of what I was talking about. This was my first failure. I confess I was weak enough to feel a little dispirited when I rejoined Monkton and the guide.

After the heat of the day was over we resumed our journey.

About three miles from the village, the road, or rather cart-track, branched off in two directions. The path to the right, our guide informed us, led up among the mountains to a convent about six miles off. If we penetrated beyond the convent we should soon reach the Neapolitan frontier. The path to the left led far inward on the Roman territory, and would conduct us to a small town where we could sleep for the night. Now the Roman territory presented the first and fittest field for our search, and the convent was always within reach, supposing we returned to Fondi unsuccessful. Besides, the path to the left led over the widest part of the country we were starting to explore, and I was always for vanquishing the greatest difficulty first; so we decided manfully on turning to the left. The expedition in which this resolution involved us lasted a whole week, and produced no results. We discovered absolutely nothing, and returned to our headquarters at Fondi so completely baffled that we did not know whither to turn our steps next.

I was made much more uneasy by the effect of our failure on Monkton than by the failure itself. His resolution appeared to break down altogether as soon as we began to retrace our steps.

He became first fretful and capricious, then silent and desponding. Finally, he sank into a lethargy of body and mind that seriously alarmed me. On the morning after our return to Fondi he showed a strange tendency to sleep incessantly, which made me suspect the existence of some physical malady in his brain. The whole day he hardly exchanged a word with me, and seemed to be never fairly awake. Early the next morning I went into his room, and found him as silent and lethargic as ever. His servant, who was with us, informed me that Alfred had once or twice before exhibited such physical symptoms of mental exhaustion as we were now observing during his father's lifetime at Wincot Abbey. This piece of information made me feel easier, and left my mind free to return to the consideration of the errand which had brought us to Fondi.

I resolved to occupy the time until my companion got better in prosecuting our search by myself. That path to the right hand which led to the convent had not yet been explored. If I set off to trace it, I need not be away from Monkton more than one night, and I should at least be able, on my return, to give him the satisfaction of knowing that one more uncertainty regarding the place of the duel had been cleared up. These considerations decided me. I left a message for my friend in case he asked where I had gone, and set out once more for the village at which we had halted when starting on our first expedition.

Intending to walk to the convent, I parted company with the guide and the mules where the track branched off, leaving them to go back to the village and await my return.

For the first four miles the path gently ascended through an open country, then became abruptly much steeper, and led me deeper and deeper among thickets and endless woods. By the time my watch informed me that I must have nearly walked my appointed distance, the view was bounded on all sides and the sky was shut out overhead by an impervious screen of leaves and branches. I still followed my only guide, the steep path; and in ten minutes, emerging suddenly on a plot of tolerably clear and level ground, I saw the convent before me.

It was a dark, low, sinister-looking place. Not a sign of life or movement was visible anywhere about it. Green stains streaked the once white facade of the chapel in all directions. Moss clustered thick in every crevice of the heavy scowling wall that surrounded the convent. Long lank weeds grew out of the fissures of roof and parapet, and, drooping far downward, waved wearily in and out of the barred dormitory windows. The very cross opposite the entrance-gate, with a shocking life-sized figure in wood nailed to it, was so beset at the base with crawling creatures, and looked so slimy, green, and rotten all the way up, that I absolutely shrank from it.

A bell-rope with a broken handle hung by the gate. I approached it--hesitated, I hardly knew why--looked up at the convent again, and then walked round to the back of the building, partly to gain time to consider what I had better do next, partly from an unaccountable curiosity that urged me, strangely to myself, to see all I could of the outside of the place before I attempted to gain admission at the gate.

At the back of the convent I found an outhouse, built on to the wall--a clumsy, decayed building, with the greater part of the roof fallen in, and with a jagged hole in one of its sides, where in all probability a window had once been.
Behind the outhouse the trees grew thicker than ever. As I looked toward them I could not determine whether the ground beyond me rose or fell—whether it was grassy, or earthy, or rocky. I could see nothing but the all-pervading leaves, brambles, ferns, and long grass.

Not a sound broke the oppressive stillness. No bird’s note rose from the leafy wilderness around me; no voices spoke in the convent garden behind the scowling wall; no clock struck in the chapel-tower; no dog barked in the ruined outhouse. The dead silence deepened the solitude of the place inexpressibly. I began to feel it weighing on my spirits—the more, because woods were never favorite places with me to walk in. The sort of pastoral happiness which poets often represent when they sing of life in the woods never, to my mind, has half the charm of life on the mountain or in the plain. When I am in a wood, I miss the boundless loveliness of the sky, and the delicious softness that distance gives to the earthly view beneath. I feel oppressively the change which the free air suffers when it gets imprisoned among leaves, and I am always awed, rather than pleased, by that mysterious still light which shines with such a strange dim luster in deep places among trees. It may convict me of want of taste and absence of due feeling for the marvelous beauties of vegetation, but I must frankly own that I never penetrate far into a wood without finding that the getting out of it again is the pleasantest part of my walk—the getting out on to the barest down, the wildest hill-side, the bleakest mountain top—the getting out anywhere, so that I can see the sky over me and the view before me as far as my eye can reach.

After such a confession as I have now made, it will appear surprisingly to no one that I should have felt the strongest possible inclination, while I stood by the ruined outhouse, to retrace my steps at once, and make the best of my way out of the wood. I had, indeed, actually turned to depart, when the remembrance of the errand which had brought me to the convent suddenly stayed my feet. It seemed doubtful whether I should be admitted into the building if I rang the bell; and more than doubtful, if I were let in, whether the inhabitants would be able to afford me any clue to the information of which I was in search. However, it was my duty to Monkton to leave no means of helping him in his desperate object untried; so I resolved to go round to the front of the convent again, and ring at the gate-bell at all hazards.

By the merest chance I looked up as I passed the side of the outhouse where the jagged hole was, and noticed that it was pierced rather high in the wall.

As I stopped to observe this, the closeness of the atmosphere in the wood seemed to be affecting me more unpleasantly than ever.

I waited a minute and untied my cravat.

Closeness? surely it was something more than that. The air was even more distasteful to my nostrils than to my lungs. There was some faint, indescribable smell loading it—some smell of which I had never had any previous experience—some smell which I thought (now that my attention was directed to it) grew more and more certainly traceable to its source the nearer I advanced to the outhouse.

By the time I had tried the experiment two or three times, and had made myself sure of this fact, my curiosity became excited. There were plenty of fragments of stone and brick lying about me. I gathered some of them together, and piled them up below the hole, then mounted to the top, and, feeling rather ashamed of what I was doing, peeped into the outhouse.

The sight of horror that met my eyes the instant I looked through the hole is as present to my memory now as if I had beheld it yesterday. I can hardly write of it at this distance of time without a thrill of the old terror running through me again to the heart.

The first impression conveyed to me, as I looked in, was of a long, recumbent object, tinged with a lightish blue color all over, extended on trestles, and bearing a certain hideous, half-formed resemblance to the human face and figure. I looked again, and felt certain of it. There were the prominences of the forehead, nose, and chin, dimly shown as under a veil—there, the round outline of the chest and the hollow below it—there, the points of the knees, and the stiff, ghastly, upturned feet. I looked again, yet more attentively. My eyes got accustomed to the dim light streaming in through the broken roof, and I satisfied myself, judging by the great length of the body from head to foot, that I was looking at the corpse of a man—a corpse that had apparently once had a sheet spread over it, and that had lain rotting on the trestles under the open sky long enough for the linen to take the livid, light-blue tinge of mildew and decay which now covered it.

How long I remained with my eyes fixed on that dread sight of death, on that tombless, terrible wreck of humanity, poisoning the still air, and seeming even to stain the faint descending light that disclosed it, I know not. I remember a dull, distant sound among the trees, as if the breeze were rising—the slow creeping on of the sound near the place where I stood—the noiseless whirling fall of a dead leaf on the corpse below me, through the gap in the outhouse roof—and the effect of awakening my energies, of relaxing the heavy strain on my mind, which even the slight change wrought in the scene I beheld by the falling leaf produced in me immediately. I descended to the ground, and, sitting down on the heap of stones, wiped away the thick perspiration which covered my face, and
which I now became aware of for the first time. It was something more than the hideous spectacle unexpectedly
offered to my eyes which had shaken my nerves as I felt that they were shaken now. Monkton's prediction that, if we
succeeded in discovering his uncle's body, we should find it unburied, recurred to me the instant I saw the trestles
and their ghastly burden. I felt assured on the instant that I had found the dead man--the old prophecy recurred to my
memory--a strange yearning sorrow, a vague foreboding of ill, an inexplicable terror, as I thought of the poor lad
who was awaiting my return in the distant town, struck through me with a chill of superstitious dread, robbed me of
my judgment and resolution, and left me when I had at last recovered myself, weak and dizzy, as if I had just
suffered under some pang of overpowering physical pain.

I hastened round to the convent gate and rang impatiently at the bell--waited a little while and rang again--then
heard footsteps.

In the middle of the gate, just opposite my face, there was a small sliding panel, not more than a few inches long;
this was presently pushed aside from within. I saw, through a bit of iron grating, two dull, light gray eyes staring
vacantly at me, and heard a feeble husky voice saying:

"What may you please to want?"
"I am a traveler--" I began.
"We live in a miserable place. We have nothing to show travelers here."
"I don't come to see anything. I have an important question to ask, which I believe some one in this convent will
be able to answer. If you are not willing to let me in, at least come out and speak to me here."
"Are you alone?"
"Quite alone."
"Are there no women with you?"
"None."

The gate was slowly unbarred, and an old Capuchin, very infirm, very suspicious, and very dirty, stood before
me. I was far too excited and impatient to waste any time in prefatory phrases; so, telling the monk at once how I
had looked through the hole in the outhouse, and what I had seen inside, I asked him, in plain terms, who the man
had been whose corpse I had beheld, and why the body was left unburied?

The old Capuchin listened to me with watery eyes that twinkled suspiciously. He had a battered tin snuff-box in
his hand, and his finger and thumb slowly chased a few scattered grains of snuff round and round the inside of the
box all the time I was speaking. When I had done, he shook his head and said: "That was certainly an ugly sight in
their outhouse; one of the ugliest sights, he felt sure, that ever I had seen in all my life!"

"I don't want to talk of the sight," I rejoined, impatiently; "I want to know who the man was, how he died, and
why he is not decently buried. Can you tell me?"

The monk's finger and thumb having captured three or four grains of snuff at last, he slowly drew them into his
nostrils, holding the box open under his nose the while, to prevent the possibility of wasting even one grain, sniffed
once or twice luxuriously--closed the box--then looked at me again with his eyes watering and twinkling more
suspiciously than before.

"Yes," said the monk, "that's an ugly sight in our outhouse--a very ugly sight, certainly!"

I never had more difficulty in keeping my temper in my life than at that moment. I succeeded, however, in
repressing a very disrespectful expression on the subject of monks in general, which was on the tip of my tongue,
and made another attempt to conquer the old man's exasperating reserve. Fortunately for my chances of succeeding
with him, I was a snuff-taker myself, and I had a box full of excellent English snuff in my pocket, which I now
produced as a bribe. It was my last resource.

"I thought your box seemed empty just now," said I; "will you try a pinch out of mine?"

The offer was accepted with an almost youthful alacrity of gesture. The Capuchin took the largest pinch I ever
saw held between any man's finger and thumb--inhaled it slowly without spilling a single grain--half closed his eyes-
-and, wagging his head gently, patted me paternally on the back.

"Oh, my son," said the monk, "what delectable snuff! Oh, my son and amiable traveler, give the spiritual father
who loves you yet another tiny, tiny pinch!"

"Let me fill your box for you. I shall have plenty left for myself."

The battered tin snuff-box was given to me before I had done speaking; the paternal hand patted my back more
approvingly than ever; the feeble, husky voice grew glib and eloquent in my praise. I had evidently found out the
weak side of the old Capuchin, and, on returning him his box, I took instant advantage of the discovery.

"Excuse my troubling you on the subject again," I said, "but I have particular reasons for wanting to hear all that
you can tell me in explanation of that horrible sight in the outhouse."

"Come in," answered the monk.

He drew me inside the gate, closed it, and then leading the way across a grass-grown courtyard, looking out on a
weedy kitchen-garden, showed me into a long room with a low ceiling, a dirty dresser, a few rudely-carved stall seats, and one or two grim, mildewed pictures for ornaments. This was the sacristy.

"There's nobody here, and it's nice and cool," said the old Capuchin. It was so damp that I actually shivered. "Would you like to see the church?" said the monk; "a jewel of a church, if we could keep it in repair; but we can't. Ah! malediction and misery, we are too poor to keep our church in repair!"

Here he shook his head and began fumbling with a large bunch of keys.

"Never mind the church now," said I. "Can you, or can you not, tell me what I want to know?"

"Everything, from beginning to end--absolutely everything. Why, I answered the gate-bell--I always answer the gate-bell here," said the Capuchin.

"What, in Heaven's name, has the gate-bell to do with the unburied corpse in your house?"

"Listen, son of mine, and you shall know. Some time ago--some months--ah! me, I'm old; I've lost my memory; I don't know how many months--ah! miserable me, what a very old, old monk I am!" Here he comforted himself with another pinch of snuff.

"Never mind the exact time," said I. "I don't care about that."

"Good," said the Capuchin. "Now I can go on. Well, let us say it is some months ago--we in this convent are all at breakfast--wretched, wretched breakfasts, son of mine, in this convent!--we are at breakfast, and we hear bang! bang! twice over. 'Guns,' says I. 'What are they shooting for?' says Brother Jeremy. 'Game,' says Brother Vincent. 'Aha! game,' says Brother Jeremy. 'If I hear more, I shall send out and discover what it means,' says the father superior. We hear no more, and we go on with our wretched breakfasts."

"Where did the report of firearms come from?" I inquired.

"From down below--beyond the big trees at the back of the convent, where there's some clear ground--nice ground, if it wasn't for the pools and puddles. But, ah! misery, how damp we are in these parts! how very, very damp!"

"Well, what happened after the report of firearms?"

"You shall hear. We are still at breakfast, all silent--for what have we to talk about here? What have we but our devotions, our kitchen-garden, and our wretched, wretched bits of breakfasts and dinners? I say we are all silent, when there comes suddenly such a ring at the bell as never was heard before--a very devil of a ring--a ring that caught us all with our bits--our wretched, wretched bits!--in our mouths, and stopped us before we could swallow them. 'Go, brother of mine,' says the father superior to me, 'go; it is your duty--go to the gate.' I am brave--a very lion of a Capuchin. I slip out on tiptoe--I wait--I listen--I pull back our little shutter in the gate--I wait, I listen again--I peep through the hole--nothing, absolutely nothing that I can see. I am brave--I am not to be daunted. What do I do next? I open the gate. Ah! sacred Mother of Heaven, what do I behold lying all along our threshold? A man--dead!--a big man; bigger than you, bigger than me, bigger than anybody in this convent--buttoned up tight in a fine coat, with black eyes, staring, staring up at the sky, and blood soaking through and through the front of his shirt. What do I do? I scream once--I scream twice--and run back to the father superior!"

All the particulars of the fatal duel which I had gleaned from the French newspaper in Monkton's room at Naples recurred vividly to my memory. The suspicion that I had felt when I looked into the outhouse became a certainty as I listened to the old monk's last words.

"So far I understand," said I. "The corpse I have just seen in the outhouse is the corpse of the man whom you found dead outside your gate. Now tell me why you have not given the remains decent burial."

"Wait--wait--wait," answered the Capuchin. "The father superior hears me scream and comes out; we all run together to the gate; we lift up the big man and look at him close. Dead! dead as this (smacking the dresser with his hand). I am brave--a very lion of a Capuchin. I slip out on tiptoe--I wait--I listen--I pull back our little shutter in the gate--I wait, I listen again--I peep through the hole--nothing, absolutely nothing that I can see. I am brave--I am not to be daunted. What do I do next? I open the gate. Ah! sacred Mother of Heaven, what do I behold lying all along our threshold? A man--dead!--a big man; bigger than you, bigger than me, bigger than anybody in this convent--buttoned up tight in a fine coat, with black eyes, staring, staring up at the sky, and blood soaking through and through the front of his shirt. What do I do? I scream once--I scream twice--and run back to the father superior!"

I had started, indeed. That paper was doubtless the leaf mentioned in the second's unfinished narrative as having been torn out of his pocketbook, and inscribed with the statement of how the dead man had lost his life. If proof positive were wanted to identify the dead body, here was such proof found.

"What do you think was written on the bit of paper?" continued the Capuchin "We read and shudder. This dead man has been killed in a duel--he, the desperate, the miserable, has died in the commission of mortal sin; and the men who saw the killing of him ask us Capuchins, holy men, servants of Heaven, children of our lord the Pope--they ask us, to give him burial! Oh! but we are outraged when we read that; we groan, we wring our hands, we turn away, we tear our beards, we--"

"Wait one moment," said I, seeing that the old man was heating himself with his narrative, and was likely, unless I stopped him, to talk more and more fluently to less and less purpose--"wait a moment. Have you preserved the paper that was pinned to the dead man's coat; and can I look at it?"

The Capuchin seemed on the point of giving me an answer, when he suddenly checked himself. I saw his eyes
wander away from my face, and at the same moment heard a door softly opened and closed again behind me.

Looking round immediately, I observed another monk in the sacristy—a tall, lean, black-bearded man, in whose presence my old friend with the snuff-box suddenly became quite decorous and devotional to look at. I suspected I was in the presence of the father superior, and I found that I was right the moment he addressed me.

"I am the father superior of this convent," he said, in quiet, clear tones, and looking me straight in the face while he spoke, with coldly attentive eyes. "I have heard the latter part of your conversation, and I wish to know why you are so particularly anxious to see the piece of paper that was pinned to the dead man's coat?"

The coolness with which he avowed that he had been listening, and the quietly imperative manner in which he put his concluding question, perplexed and startled me. I hardly knew at first what tone I ought to take in answering him. He observed my hesitation, and attributing it to the wrong cause, signed to the old Capuchin to retire. Humbly stroking his long gray beard, and furtively consoling himself with a private pinch of the "delectable snuff," my venerable friend shuffled out of the room, making a profound obeisance at the door just before he disappeared.

"Now," said the father superior, as coldly as ever, "I am waiting, sir, for your reply."

"You shall have it in the fewest possible words," said I, answering him in his own tone. "I find, to my disgust and horror, that there is an unburied corpse in an outhouse attached to your convent. I believe that corpse to be the body of an English gentleman of rank and fortune, who was killed in a duel. I have come into this neighborhood with the nephew and only relation of the slain man, for the express purpose of recovering his remains; and I wish to see the paper found on the body, because I believe that paper will identify it to the satisfaction of the relative to whom I have referred. Do you find my reply sufficiently straightforward? And do you mean to give me permission to look at the paper?"

"I am satisfied with your reply, and see no reason for refusing you a sight of the paper," said the father superior; "but I have something to say first. In speaking of the impression produced on you by beholding the corpse, you used the words 'disgust' and 'horror.' This license of expression in relation to what you have seen in the precincts of a convent proves to me that you are out of the pale of the Holy Catholic Church. You have no right, therefore, to expect any explanation; but I will give you one, nevertheless, as a favor. The slain man died, unabsolved, in the commission of mortal sin. We infer so much from the paper which we found on his body; and we know, by the evidence of our own eyes and ears, that he was killed on the territories of the Church, and in the act of committing direct violation of those special laws against the crime of dueling, the strict enforcement of which the holy father himself has urged on the faithful throughout his dominions by letters signed with his own hand. Inside this convent the ground is consecrated, and we Catholics are not accustomed to bury the outlaws of our religion, the enemies of our holy father, and the violators of our most sacred laws in consecrated ground. Outside this convent we have no rights and no power; and, if we had both, we should remember that we are monks, not grave-diggers, and that the only burial with which _we_ can have any concern is burial with the prayers of the Church. That is all the explanation I think it necessary to give. Wait for me here, and you shall see the paper." With those words the father superior left the room as quietly as he had entered it.

I had hardly time to think over this bitter and ungracious explanation, and to feel a little piqued by the language and manner of the person who had given it to me, before the father superior returned with the paper in his hand. He placed it before me on the dresser, and I read, hurriedly traced in pencil, the following lines:

"This paper is attached to the body of the late Mr. Stephen Monkton, an Englishman of distinction. He has been shot in a duel, conducted with perfect gallantry and honor on both sides. His body is placed at the door of this convent, to receive burial at the hands of its inmates, the survivors of the encounter being obliged to separate and secure their safety by immediate flight. I, the second of the slain man, and the writer of this explanation, certify, on my word of honor as a gentleman that the shot which killed my principal on the instant was fired fairly, in the strictest accordance with the rules laid down beforehand for the conduct of the duel.

"(Signed), F."

"F." I recognized easily enough as the initial letter of Monsieur Foulon's name, the second of Mr. Monkton, who had died of consumption at Paris.

The discovery and the identification were now complete. Nothing remained but to break the news to Alfred, and to get permission to remove the remains in the outhouse. I began almost to doubt the evidence of my own senses when I reflected that the apparently impracticable object with which we had left Naples was already, by the merest chance, virtually accomplished.

"The evidence of the paper is decisive," said I, handing it back. "There can be no doubt that the remains in the outhouse are the remains of which we have been in search. May I inquire if any obstacles will be thrown in our way should the late Mr. Monkton's nephew wish to remove his uncle's body to the family burial-place in England?"

"Where is this nephew?" asked the father superior.

"He is now awaiting my return at the town of Fondi."
"Is he in a position to prove his relationship?"
"Certainly; he has papers with him which will place it beyond a doubt."
"Let him satisfy the civil authorities of his claim, and he need expect no obstacle to his wishes from any one here."

I was in no humor for talking a moment longer with my sour-tempered companion than I could help. The day was wearing on me fast; and, whether night overtook me or not, I was resolved never to stop on my return till I got back to Fondi. Accordingly, after telling the father superior that he might expect to hear from me again immediately, I made my bow and hastened out of the sacristy.

At the convent gate stood my old friend with the tin snuff-box, waiting to let me out.
"Bless you, my son," said the venerable recluse, giving me a farewell pat on the shoulder, "come back soon to your spiritual father who loves you, and amiably favor him with another tiny, tiny pinch of the delectable snuff."

CHAPTER VI.
I RETURNED at the top of my speed to the village where I had left the mules, had the animals saddled immediately, and succeeded in getting back to Fondi a little before sunset.

While ascending the stairs of our hotel, I suffered under the most painful uncertainty as to how I should best communicate the news of my discovery to Alfred. If I could not succeed in preparing him properly for my tidings, the results, with such an organization as his, might be fatal. On opening the door of his room, I felt by no means sure of myself; and when I confronted him, his manner of receiving me took me so much by surprise that, for a moment or two, I lost my self-possession altogether.

Every trace of the lethargy in which he was sunk when I had last seen him had disappeared. His eyes were bright, his cheeks deeply flushed. As I entered, he started up, and refused my offered hand.
"You have not treated me like a friend," he said, passionately; "you had no right to continue the search unless I searched with you--you had no right to leave me here alone. I was wrong to trust you; you are no better than all the rest of them."

I had by this time recovered a little from my first astonishment, and was able to reply before he could say anything more. It was quite useless, in his present state, to reason with him or to defend myself. I determined to risk everything, and break my news to him at once.
"You will treat me more justly, Monkton, when you know that I have been doing you good service during my absence," I said. "Unless I am greatly mistaken, the object for which we have left Naples may be nearer attainment by both of us than--"

The flush left his cheeks almost in an instant. Some expression in my face, or some tone in my voice, of which I was not conscious, had revealed to his nervously-quickened perception more than I had intended that he should know at first. His eyes fixed themselves intently on mine; his hand grasped my arm; and he said to me in an eager whisper:
"Tell me the truth at once. Have you found him?"
It was too late to hesitate. I answered in the affirmative.
"Buried or unburied?"
His voice rose abruptly as he put the question, and his unoccupied hand fastened on my other arm.
"Unburied."
I had hardly uttered the word before the blood flew back into his cheeks; his eyes flashed again as they looked into mine, and he burst into a fit of triumphant laughter, which shocked and startled me inexpressibly.
"What did I tell you? What do you say to the old prophecy now?" he cried, dropping his hold on my arms, and pacing backward and forward in the room. "Own you were wrong. Own it, as all Naples shall own it, when once I have got him safe in his coffin!"

His laughter grew more and more violent. I tried to quiet him in vain. His servant and the landlord of the inn entered the room, but they only added fuel to the fire, and I made them go out again. As I shut the door on them, I observed lying on a table near at hand the packet of letters from Miss Elmslie, which my unhappy friend preserved with such care, and read and re-read with such unfailing devotion. Looking toward me just when I passed by the table, the letters caught his eye. The new hope for the future, in connection with the writer of them, which my news was already awakening in his heart, seemed to overwhelm him in an instant at sight of the treasured memorials that reminded him of his betrothed wife. His laughter ceased, his face changed, he ran to the table, caught the letters up in his hand, looked from them to me for one moment with an alterèd expression which went to my heart, then sank down on his knees at the table, laid his face on the letters, and burst into tears. I let the new emotion have its way uninterruptedly, and quitted the room without saying a word. When I returned after a lapse of some little time, I found him sitting quietly in his chair, reading one of the letters from the pack et which rested on his knee.

His look was kindness itself; his gesture almost womanly in its gentleness as he rose to meet me, and anxiously
held out his hand.

He was quite calm enough now to hear in detail all that I had to tell him. I suppressed nothing but the particulars of the state in which I had found the corpse. I assumed no right of direction as to the share he was to take in our future proceedings, with the exception of insisting beforehand that he should leave the absolute superintendence of the removal of the body to me, and that he should be satisfied with a sight of M. Foulon's paper, after receiving my assurance that the remains placed in the coffin were really and truly the remains of which we had been in search.

"Your nerves are not so strong as mine," I said, by way of apology for my apparent dictation, "and for that reason I must beg leave to assume the leadership in all that we have now to do, until I see the leaden coffin soldered down and safe in your possession. After that I shall resign all my functions to you."

"I want words to thank you for your kindness," he answered. "No brother could have borne with me more affectionately, or helped me more patiently than you."

He stopped, and grew thoughtful, then occupied himself in tying up slowly and carefully the packet of Miss Elmslie's letters, and then looked suddenly toward the vacant wall behind me with that strange expression the meaning of which I knew so well. Since we had left Naples I had purposely avoided exciting him by talking on the useless and shocking subject of the apparition by which he believed himself to be perpetually followed. Just now, however, he seemed so calm and collected--so little likely to be violently agitated by any allusion to the dangerous topic, that I ventured to speak out boldly.

"Does the phantom still appear to you," I asked, "as it appeared at Naples?"

He looked at me and smiled.

"Did I not tell you that it followed me everywhere?" His eyes wandered back again to the vacant space, and he went on speaking in that direction as if he had been continuing the conversation with some third person in the room. "We shall part," he said, slowly and softly, when the empty place is filled in Wincot vault. Then I shall stand with Ada before the altar in the Abbey chapel, and when my eyes meet hers they will see the tortured face no more."

Saying this, he leaned his head on his hand, sighed, and began repeating softly to himself the lines of the old prophecy:

When in Wincot vault a place Waits for one of Monkton's race-- When that one forlorn shall lie Graveless under open sky, Beggared of six feet of earth, Though lord of acres from his birth-- That shall he a certain sign Of the end of Monkton's line. Dwindling ever faster, faster, Dwindling to the last-left master; From mortal ken, from light of day, Monkton's race shall pass away.

Fancying that he pronounced the last lines a little incoherently, I tried to make him change the subject. He took no notice of what I said, and went on talking to himself.

"Monkton's race shall pass away," he repeated, "but not with _me_. The fatality hangs over _my_ head no longer. I shall bury the unburied dead; I shall fill the vacant place in Wincot vault; and then--then the new life, the life with Ada!" That name seemed to recall him to himself. He drew his traveling desk toward him, placed the packet of letters in it, and then took out a sheet of paper. "I am going to write to Ada," he said, turning to me, "and tell her the good news. Her happiness, when she knows it, will be even greater than mine."

Worn out by the events of the day, I left him writing and went to bed. I was, however, either too anxious or too tired to sleep. In this waking condition, my mind naturally occupied itself with the discovery at the convent and with the events to which that discovery would in all probability lead. As I thought on the future, a depression for which I could not account weighed on my spirits. There was not the slightest reason for the vaguely melancholy forebodings that oppressed me. The remains, to the finding of which my unhappy friend attached so much importance, had been traced; they would certainly be placed at his disposal in a few days; he might take them to England by the first merchant vessel that sailed from Naples; and, the gratification of his strange caprice thus accomplished, there was at least some reason to hope that his mind might recover its tone, and that the new life he would lead at Wincot might result in making him a happy man. Such considerations as these were, in themselves, certainly not calculated to exert any melancholy influence over me; and yet, all through the night, the same inconceivable, unaccountable depression weighed heavily on my spirits--heavily through the hours of darkness--heavily, even when I walked out to breathe the first freshness of the early morning air.

With the day came the all-engrossing business of opening negotiations with the authorities.

Only those who have had to deal with Italian officials can imagine how our patience was tried by every one with whom we came in contact. We were banded about from one authority to the other, were stared at, cross-questioned, mystified--not in the least because the case presented any special difficulties or intricacies, but because it was absolutely necessary that every civil dignitary to whom we applied should assert his own importance by leading us to our object in the most roundabout manner possible. After our first day's experience of official life in Italy, I left the absurd formalities, which we had no choice but to perform, to be accomplished by Alfred alone, and applied myself to the really serious question of how the remains in the convent outhouse were to be safely removed.
The best plan that suggested itself to me was to write to a friend in Rome, where I knew that it was a custom to embalm the bodies of high dignitaries of the Church, and where, I consequently inferred, such chemical assistance as was needed in our emergency might be obtained. I simply stated in my letter that the removal of the body was imperative, then described the condition in which I had found it, and engaged that no expense on our part should be spared if the right person or persons could be found to help us. Here, again, more difficulties interposed themselves, and more useless formalities were to be gone through, but in the end patience, perseverance, and money triumphed, and two men came expressly from Rome to undertake the duties we required of them.

It is unnecessary that I should shock the reader by entering into any detail in this part of my narrative. When I have said that the progress of decay was so far suspended by chemical means as to allow of the remains being placed in the coffin, and to insure their being transported to England with perfect safety and convenience, I have said enough. After ten days had been wasted in useless delays and difficulties, I had the satisfaction of seeing the convent outhouse empty at last; passed through a final ceremony of snuff-taking, or rather, of snuff-giving, with the old Capuchin, and ordered the traveling carriages to be ready at the inn door. Hardly a month had elapsed since our departure ere we entered Naples successful in the achievement of a design which had been ridiculed as wildly impracticable by every friend of ours who had heard of it.

The first object to be accomplished on our return was to obtain the means of carrying the coffin to England--by sea, as a matter of course. All inquiries after a merchant vessel on the point of sailing for any British port led to the most unsatisfactory results. There was only one way of insuring the immediate transportation of the remains to England, and that was to hire a vessel. Impatient to return, and resolved not to lose sight of the coffin till he had seen it placed in Wincot vault, Monkton decided immediately on hiring the first ship that could be obtained. The vessel in port which we were informed could soonest be got ready for sea was a Sicilian brig, and this vessel my friend accordingly engaged. The best dock-yard artisans that I could be got were set to work, and the smartest captain and crew to be picked up on an emergency in Naples were chosen to navigate the brig.

Monkton, after again expressing in the warmest terms his gratitude for the services I had rendered him, disclaimed any intention of asking me to accompany him on the voyage to England. Greatly to his surprise and delight, however, I offered of my own accord to take passage in the brig. The strange coincidences I had witnessed, the extraordinary discovery I had hit on since our first meeting in Naples, had made his one great interest in life my one great interest for the time being as well. I shared none of his delusions, poor fellow; but it is hardly an exaggeration to say that my eagerness to follow our remarkable adventure to its end was as great as his anxiety to see the coffin laid in Wincot vault. Curiosity influenced me, I am afraid, almost as strongly as friendship, when I offered myself as the companion of his voyage home.

We set sail for England on a calm and lovely afternoon.

For the first time since I had known him, Monkton seemed to be in high spirits. He talked and jested on all sorts of subjects, and laughed at me for allowing my cheerfulness to be affected by the dread of seasickness. I had really no such fear; it was my excuse to my friend for a return of that unaccountable depression under which I had suffered at Fondi. Everything was in our favor; everybody on board the brig was in good spirits. The captain was delighted with the vessel; the crew, Italians and Maltese, were in high glee at the prospect of making a short voyage on high wages in a well-provisioned ship. I alone felt heavy at heart. There was no valid reason that I could assign to myself with the vessel; the crew, Italians and Maltese, were in high glee at the prospect of making a short voyage on high wages in a well-provisioned ship.

Late on our first night at sea, I made a discovery which was by no means calculated to restore my spirits to their usual equilibrium. Monkton was in the cabin, on the floor of which had been placed the packing-case containing the coffin, and I was on deck. The wind had fallen almost to a calm, and I was lazily watching the sails of the brig as they flapped from time to time against the masts, when the captain approached, and, drawing me out of hearing of the man at the helm, whispered in my ear:

"There's something wrong among the men forward. Did you observe how suddenly they all became silent just before sunset?"

I had observed it, and told him so.

"There's a Maltese boy on board," pursued the captain, "who is a smart enough lad, but a bad one to deal with. I have found out that he has been telling the men there is a dead body inside that packing-case of your friend's in the cabin."

My heart sank as he spoke. Knowing the superstitious irrationality of sailors--of foreign sailors especially--I had taken care to spread a report on board the brig, before the coffin was shipped, that the packing-case contained a valuable marble statue which Mr. Monkton prized highly, and was unwilling to trust out of his own sight. How could this Maltese boy have discovered that the pretended statue was a human corpse? As I pondered over the question, my suspicions fixed themselves on Monkton's servant, who spoke Italian fluently, and whom I knew to be an incorrigible gossip. The man denied it when I charged him with betraying us, but I have never believed his denial.
to this day.

"The little imp won't say where he picked up this notion of his about the dead body," continued the captain. "It's not my place to pry into secrets; but I advise you to call the crew aft, and contradict the boy, whether he speaks the truth or not. The men are a parcel of fools who believe in ghosts, and all the rest of it. Some of them say they would never have signed our articles if they had known they were going to sail with a dead man; others only grumble; but I'm afraid we shall have some trouble with them all, in case of rough weather, unless the boy is contradicted by you or the other gentleman. The men say that if either you or your friend tell them on your words of honor that the Maltese is a liar, they will hand him up to be rope's-ended accordingly; but that if you won't, they have made up their minds to believe the boy."

Here the captain paused and awaited my answer. I could give him none. I felt hopeless under our desperate emergency. To get the boy punished by giving my word of honor to support a direct falsehood was not to be thought of even for a moment. What other means of extrication from this miserable dilemma remained? None that I could think of. I thanked the captain for his attention to our interests, told him I would take time to consider what course I should pursue, and begged that he would say nothing to my friend about the discovery he had made. He promised to be silent, sulkily enough, and walked away from me.

We had expected the breeze to spring up with the morning, but no breeze came. As it wore on toward noon the atmosphere became insufferably sultry, and the sea looked as smooth as glass. I saw the captain's eye turn often and anxiously to windward. Far away in that direction, and alone in the blue heaven, I observed a little black cloud, and asked if it would bring us any wind.

"More than we want," the captain replied, shortly; and then, to my astonishment, ordered the crew aloft to take in sail. The execution of this maneuver showed but too plainly the temper of the men; they did their work sulkily and slowly, grumbling and murmuring among themselves. The captain's manner, as he urged them on with oaths and threats, convinced me we were in danger. I looked again to windward. The one little cloud had enlarged to a great bank of murky vapor, and the sea at the horizon had changed in color.

"The squall will be on us before we know where we are," said the captain. "Go below; you will be only in the way here."

I descended to the cabin, and prepared Monkton for what was coming. He was still questioning me about what I had observed on deck when the storm burst on us. We felt the little brig strain for an instant as if she would part in two, then she seemed to be swinging round with us, then to be quite still for a moment, trembling in every timber. Last came a shock which hurled us from our seats, a deafening crash, and a flood of water pouring into the cabin. We clambered, half drowned, to the deck. The brig had, in the nautical phrase, "broached to," and she now lay on her beam-ends.

Before I could make out anything distinctly in the horrible confusion except the one tremendous certainty that we were entirely at the mercy of the sea, I heard a voice from the fore part of the ship which stilled the clamoring and shouting of the rest of the crew in an instant. The words were in Italian, but I understood their fatal meaning only too easily. We had sprung a leak, and the sea was pouring into the ship's hold like the race of a mill-stream. The captain did not lose his presence of mind in this fresh emergency. He called for his ax to cut away the foremast, and, ordering some of the crew to help him, directed the others to rig out the pumps.

The words had hardly passed his lips before the men broke into open mutiny. With a savage look at me, their ringleader declared that the passengers might do as they pleased, but that he and his messmates were determined to take to the boat, and leave the accursed ship, and _the dead man in her,_ to go to the bottom together. As he spoke there was a shout among the sailors, and I observed some of them pointing derisively behind me. Looking round, I saw Monkton, who had hitherto kept close at my side, making his way back to the cabin. I followed him directly, but saw him, half drowned, to the deck. The brig had, in the nautical phrase, "broached to," and she now lay on her beam-ends.

"There is nothing left for it, Alfred, but to bow to our misfortune, and do the best we can to save our lives."

"Save yours," he cried, waving his hand to me, "for_you_ have a future before you. Mine is gone when this coffin goes to the bottom. If the ship sinks, I shall know that the fatality is accomplished, and shall sink with her."

I saw that he was in no state to be reasoned with or persuaded, and raised myself again to the deck. The men were cutting away all obstacles so as to launch the longboat placed amidships over the depressed bulwark of the brig as she lay on her side, and the captain, after having made a last vain exertion to restore his authority, was looking on at them in silence. The violence of the squall seemed already to be spending itself, and I asked whether there was really no chance for us if we remained by the ship. The captain answered that there might have been the best chance
if the men had obeyed his orders, but that now there was none. Knowing that I could place no dependence on the presence of mind of Monkton's servant, I confided to the captain, in the fewest and plainest words, the condition of my unhappy friend, and asked if I might depend on his help. He nodded his head, and we descended together to the cabin. Even at this day it costs me pain to write of the terrible necessity to which the strength and obstinacy of Monkton's delusion reduced us in the last resort. We were compelled to secure his hands, and drag him by main force to the deck. The men were on the point of launching the boat, and refused at first to receive us into it.

"You cowards!" cried the captain, "have we got the dead man with us this time? Isn't he going to the bottom along with the brig? Who are you afraid of when we get into the boat?"

This sort of appeal produced the desired effect; the men became ashamed of themselves, and retracted their refusal.

Just as we pushed off from the sinking ship Alfred made an effort to break from me, but I held him firm, and he never repeated the attempt. He sat by me with drooping head, still and silent, while the sailors rowed away from the vessel; still and silent when, with one accord, they paused at a little distance off, and we all waited and watched to see the brig sink; still and silent, even when that sinking happened, when the laboring hull plunged slowly into a hollow of the sea--hesitated, as it seemed, for one moment, rose a little again, then sank to rise no more.

Sank with her dead freight--sank, and snatched forever from our power the corpse which we had discovered almost by a miracle--those jealously-preserved remains, on the safe-keeping of which rested so strangely the hopes and the love-destinies of two living beings! As the last signs of the ship in the depths of the waters,

I felt Monkton trembling all over as he sat close at my side, and heard him repeating to himself, sadly, and many times over, the name of "Ada."

I tried to turn his thoughts to another subject, but it was useless. He pointed over the sea to where the brig had once been, and where nothing was left to look at but the rolling waves.

"The empty place will now remain empty forever in Wincot vault."

As he said these words, he fixed his eyes for a moment sadly and earnestly on my face, then looked away, leaned his cheek on his hand, and spoke no more.

We were sighted long before nightfall by a trading vessel, were taken on board, and landed at Cartagena in Spain. Alfred never held up his head, and never once spoke to me of his own accord the whole time we were at sea in the merchantman. I observed, however, with alarm, that he talked often and incoherently to himself--constantly muttering the lines of the old prophecy--constantly referring to the fatal place that was empty in Wincot vault--constantly repeating in broken accents, which it affected me inexpressibly to hear, the name of the poor girl who was awaiting his return to England. Nor were these the only causes for the apprehension that I now felt on his account. Toward the end of our voyage he began to suffer from alternations of fever-fits and shivering-fits, which I ignorantly imagined to be attacks of ague. I was soon undeceived. We had hardly been a day on shore before he became so much worse that I secured the best medical assistance Cartagena could afford. For a day or two the doctors differed, as usual, about the nature of his complaint, but ere long alarming symptoms displayed themselves. The medical men declared that his life was in danger, and told me that his disease was brain fever.

Shocked and grieved as I was, I hardly knew how to act at first under the fresh responsibility now laid upon me. Ultimately I decided on writing to the old priest who had been Alfred's tutor, and who, as I knew, still resided at Wincot Abbey. I told this gentleman all that had happened, begged him to break my melancholy news as gently as possible to Miss Elmslie, and assured him of my resolution to remain with Monkton to the last.

After I had dispatched my letter, and had sent to Gibraltar to secure the best English medical advice that could be obtained, I felt that I had done my best, and that nothing remained but to wait and hope.

Many a sad and anxious hour did I pass by my poor friend's bedside. Many a time did I doubt whether I had done right in giving any encouragement to his delusion. The reasons for doing so which had suggested themselves to me after my first interview with him seemed, however, on reflection, to be valid reasons still. The only way of hastening his return to England and to Miss Elmslie, who was pining for that return, was the way I had taken. It was not my fault that a disaster which no man could foresee had overthrown all his projects and all mine. But, now that the calamity had happened and was irretrievable, how, in the event of his physical recovery, was his moral malady to be combated?

When I reflected on the hereditary taint in his mental organization, on that childish fright of Stephen Monkton from which he had never recovered, on the perilously-secluded life that he had led at the Abbey, and on his firm persuasion of the reality of the apparition by which he believed himself to be constantly followed, I confess I despaired of shaking his superstitious faith in every word and line of the old family prophecy. If the series of striking coincidences which appeared to attest its truth had made a strong and lasting impression on me (and this was assuredly the case), how could I wonder that they had produced the effect of absolute conviction on his mind, constituted as it was? If I argued with him, and he answered me, how could I rejoin? If he said, "The prophecy
points at the last of the family: _I_ am the last of the family. The prophecy mentions an empty place in Wincot vault; there is such an empty place there at this moment. On the faith of the prophecy I told you that Stephen Monkton's body was unburied, and you found that it was unburied"--if he said this, what use would it be for me to reply, "These are only strange coincidences after all?"

The more I thought of the task that lay before me, if he recovered, the more I felt inclined to despond. The oftener the English physician who attended on him said to me, "He may get the better of the fever, but he has a fixed idea, which never leaves him night or day, which has unsettled his reason, and which will end in killing him, unless you or some of his friends can remove it"--the oftener I heard this, the more acutely I felt my own powerlessness, the more I shrank from every idea that was connected with the hopeless future.

I had only expected to receive my answer from Wincot in the shape of a letter. It was consequently a great surprise, as well as a great relief, to be informed one day that two gentlemen wished to speak with me, and to find that of these two gentlemen the first was the old priest, and the second a male relative of Mrs. Elmslie.

Just before their arrival the fever symptoms had disappeared, and Alfred had been pronounced out of danger. Both the priest and his companion were eager to know when the sufferer would be strong enough to travel. The y had come to Cartagena expressly to take him home with them, and felt far more hopeful than I did of the restorative effects of his native air. After all the questions connected with the first important point of the journey to England had been asked and answered, I ventured to make some inquiries after Miss Elmslie. Her relative informed me that she was suffering both in body and in mind from excess of anxiety on Alfred's account. They had been obliged to deceive her as to the dangerous nature of his illness in order to deter her from accompanying the priest and her relation on their mission to Spain.

Slowly and imperfectly, as the weeks wore on, Alfred regained something of his former physical strength, but no alteration appeared in his illness as it affected his mind.

From the very first day of his advance toward recovery, it had been discovered that the brain fever had exercised the strangest influence over his faculties of memory. All recollection of recent events was gone from him. Everything connected with Naples, with me, with his journey to Italy, had dropped in some mysterious manner entirely out of his remembrance. So completely had all late circumstances passed from his memory that, though he recognized the old priest and his own servant easily on the first days of his convalescence, he never recognized me, but regarded me with such a wistful, doubting expression, that I felt inexpressibly pained when I approached his bedside. All his questions were about Miss Elmslie and Wincot Abbey, and all his talk referred to the period when his father was yet alive.

The doctors augured good rather than ill from this loss of memory of recent incidents, saying that it would turn out to be temporary, and that it answered the first great healing purpose of keeping his mind at ease. I tried to believe them--tried to feel as sanguine, when the day came for his departure, as the old friends felt who were taking him home. But the effort was too much for me. A foreboding that I should never see him again oppressed my heart, and the tears came into my eyes as I saw the worn figure of my poor friend half helped, half lifted into the traveling-carriage, and borne away gently on the road toward home.

He had never recognized me, and the doctors had begged that I would give him, for some time to come, as few opportunities as possible of doing so. But for this request I should have accompanied him to England. As it was, nothing better remained for me to do than to change the scene, and recruit as I best could my energies of body and mind, depressed of late by much watching and anxiety. The famous cities of Spain were not new to me, but I visited them again and revived old impressions of the Alhambra and Madrid. Once or twice I thought of making a pilgrimage to the East, but late events had sobered and altered me. That yearning, unsatisfied feeling which we call "homesickness" began to prey upon my heart, and I resolved to return to England.

I went back by way of Paris, having settled with the priest that he should write to me at my banker's there as soon as he could after Alfred had returned to Wincot. If I had gone to the East, the letter would have been forwarded to me. I wrote to prevent this; and, on my arrival at Paris, stopped at the banker's before I went to my hotel.

The moment the letter was put into my hands, the black border on the envelope told me the worst. He was dead.

There was but one consolation--he had died calmly, almost happily, without once referring to those fatal chances which had wrought the fulfillment of the ancient prophecy. "My beloved pupil," the old priest wrote, "seemed to rally a little the first few days after his return, but he gained no real strength, and soon suffered a slight relapse of fever. After this he sank gradually and gently day by day, and so departed from us on the last dread journey. Miss Elmslie (who knows that I am writing this) desires me to express her deep and lasting gratitude for all your kindness to Alfred. She told me when we brought him back that she had waited for him as his promised wife, and that she would nurse him now as a wife should; and she never left him. His face was turned toward her, his hand was clasped in hers when he died. It will console you to know that he never mentioned events at Naples, or the shipwreck that followed them, from the day of his return to the day of his death."
Three days after reading the letter I was at Wincot, and heard all the details of Alfred's last moments from the priest. I felt a shock which it would not be very easy for me to analyze or explain when I heard that he had been buried, at his own desire, in the fatal Abbey vault.

The priest took me down to see the place--a grim, cold, subterranean building, with a low roof, supported on heavy Saxon arches. Narrow niches, with the ends only of coffins visible within them, ran down each side of the vault. The nails and silver ornaments flashed here and there as my companion moved past them with a lamp in his hand. At the lower end of the place he stopped, pointed to a niche, and said, "He lies there, between his father and mother." I looked a little further on, and saw what appeared at first like a long dark tunnel. "That is only an empty niche," said the priest, following me. "If the body of Mr. Stephen Monkton had been brought to Wincot, his coffin would have been placed there."

A chill came over me, and a sense of dread which I am ashamed of having felt now, but which I could not combat then. The blessed light of day was pouring down gayly at the other end of the vault through the open door. I turned my back on the empty niche, and hurried into the sunlight and the fresh air.

As I walked across the grass glade leading down to the vault, I heard the rustle of a woman's dress behind me, and turning round, saw a young lady advancing, clad in deep mourning. Her sweet, sad face, her manner as she held out her hand, told me who it was in an instant.

"I heard that you were here," she said, "and I wished--" Her voice faltered a little. My heart ached as I saw how her lip trembled, but before I could say anything she recovered herself and went on: "I wished to take your hand, and thank you for your brotherly kindness to Alfred; and I wanted to tell you that I am sure in all you did you acted tenderly and considerately for the best. Perhaps you may be soon going away from home again, and we may not meet any more. I shall never, never forget that you were kind to him when he wanted a friend, and that you have the greatest claim of any one on earth to be gratefully remembered in my thoughts as long as I live."

The inexpressible tenderness of her voice, trembling a little all the while she spoke, the pale beauty of her face, the artless candor in her sad, quiet eyes, so affected me that I could not trust myself to answer her at first except by gesture. Before I recovered my voice she had given me her hand once more and had left me.

I never saw her again. The chances and changes of life kept us apart. When I last heard of her, years and years ago, she was faithful to the memory of the dead, and was Ada Elmslie still for Alfred Monkton's sake.

THE FIFTH DAY.

STILL cloudy, but no rain to keep our young lady indoors. The paper, as usual, without interest to _me_.

To-day Owen actually vanquished his difficulties and finished his story. I numbered it Eight, and threw the corresponding number (as I had done the day before in Morgan's case) into the china bowl.

Although I could discover no direct evidence against her, I strongly suspected The Queen of Hearts of tampering with the lots on the fifth evening, to irritate Morgan by making it his turn to read again, after the shortest possible interval of repose. However that might be, the number drawn was certainly Seven, and the story to be read was consequently the story which my brother had finished only two days before.

If I had not known that it was part of Morgan's character always to do exactly the reverse of what might be expected from him, I should have been surprised at the extraordinary docility he exhibited the moment his manuscript was placed in his hands.

"My turn again?" he said. "How very satisfactory! I was anxious to escape from this absurd position of mine as soon as possible, and here is the opportunity most considerately put into my hands. Look out, all of you! I won't waste another moment. I mean to begin instantly."

"Do tell me," interposed Jessie, mischievously, "shall I be very much interested to-night?"

"Not you!" retorted Morgan. "You will be very much frightened instead. You hair is uncommonly smooth at the present moment, but it will be all standing on end before I've done. Don't blame me, miss, if you are an object when you go to bed to-night!"

With this curious introductory speech he began to read. I was obliged to interrupt him to say the few words of explanation which the story needed.

"Before my brother begins," I said, "it may be as well to mention that he is himself the doctor who is supposed to relate this narrative. The events happened at a time of his life when he had left London, and had established himself in medical practice in one of our large northern towns."

With that brief explanation, I apologized for interrupting the reader, and Morgan began once more.

BROTHER MORGAN'S STORY

of

THE DEAD HAND

When this present nineteenth century was younger by a good many years than it is now, a certain friend of mine, named Arthur Holliday, happened to arrive in the town of Doncaster exactly in the middle of the race-week,
or, in other words, in the middle of the month of September.

He was one of those reckless, rattle-pated, open-hearted, and open-mouthed young gentlemen who possess the gift of familiarity in its highest perfection, and who scramble carelessly along the journey of life, making friends, as the phrase is, wherever they go. His father was a rich manufacturer, and had bought landed property enough in one of the midland counties to make all the born squires in his neighborhood thoroughly envious of him. Arthur was his only son, possessor in prospect of the great estate and the great business after his father's death; well supplied with money, and not too rigidly looked after during his father's lifetime. Report, or scandal, whichever you please, said that the old gentleman had been rather wild in his youthful days, and that, unlike most parents, he was not disposed to be violently indignant when he found that his son took after him. This may be true or not. I myself only knew the elder Mr. Holliday when he was getting on in years, and then he was as quiet and as respectable a gentleman as ever I met with.

Well, one September, as I told you, young Arthur comes to Doncaster, having decided all of a sudden, in his hare-brained way, that he would go to the races. He did not reach the town till toward the close of evening, and he went at once to see about his dinner and bed at the principal hotel. Dinner they were ready enough to give him, but as for a bed, they laughed when he mentioned it. In the race-week at Doncaster it is no uncommon thing for visitors who have not bespoken apartments to pass the night in their carriages at the inn doors. As for the lower sort of strangers, I myself have often seen them, at that full time, sleeping out on the doorsteps for want of a covered place to creep under. Rich as he was, Arthur's chance of getting a night's lodging (seeing that he had not written beforehand to secure one) was more than doubtful. He tried the second hotel, and the third hotel, and two of the inferior inns after that, and was met everywhere with the same form of answer. No accommodation for the night of any sort was left. All the bright golden sovereigns in his pocket would not buy him a bed at Doncaster in the race-week.

To a young fellow of Arthur's temperament, the novelty of being turned away into the street like a penniless vagabond, at every house where he asked for a lodging, presented itself in the light of a new and highly amusing piece of experience. He went on with his carpet-bag in his hand, applying for a bed at every place of entertainment for travelers that he could find in Doncaster, until he wandered into the outskirts of the town.

By this time the last glimmer of twilight had faded out, the moon was rising dimly in a mist, the wind was getting cold, the clouds were gathering heavily, and there was every prospect that it was soon going to rain!

The look of the night had rather a lowering effect on young Holliday's spirits. He began to contemplate the houseless situation in which he was placed from the serious rather than the humorous point of view, and he looked about him for another public house to inquire at with something very like downright anxiety in his mind on the subject of a lodging for the night. The suburban part of the town toward which he had now strayed was hardly lighted at all, and he could see nothing of the houses as he passed them, except that they got progressively smaller and dirtier the further he went. Down the winding road before him shone the dull gleam of an oil lamp, the one faint lonely light that struggled ineffectually with the foggy darkness all round him. He resolved to go on as far as this lamp, and then, if it showed him nothing in the shape of an inn, to return to the central part of the town, and to try if he could not at least secure a chair to sit down on through the night at one of the principal hotels.

As he got near the lamp he heard voices, and, walking close under it, found that it lighted the entrance to a narrow court, on the wall of which was painted a long hand in faded flesh-color, pointing, with a lean forefinger, to this inscription:

THE TWO ROBINS.

Arthur turned into the court without hesitation to see what The Two Robins could do for him. Four or five men were standing together round the door of the house, which was at the bottom of the court, facing the entrance from the street. The men were all listening to one other man, better dressed than the rest, who was telling his audience something, in a low voice, in which they were apparently very much interested.

On entering the passage, Arthur was passed by a stranger with a knapsack in his hand, who was evidently leaving the house.

"No," said the traveler with the knapsack, turning round and addressing himself cheerfully to a fat, sly-looking, bald-headed man, with a dirty white apron on, who had followed him down the passage, "no, Mr. Landlord, I am not easily scared by trifles; but I don't mind confessing that I can't quite stand __that__."

It occurred to young Holliday, the moment he heard these words, that the stranger had been asked an exorbitant price for a bed at The Two Robins, and that he was unable or unwilling to pay it. The moment his back was turned, Arthur, comfortably conscious of his own well-filled pockets, addressed himself in a great hurry, for fear any other benighted traveler should slip in and forestall him, to the sly-looking landlord with the dirty apron and the bald head.

"If you have got a bed to let," he said, "and if that gentleman who has just gone out won't pay your price for it, I will."
The sly landlord looked hard at Arthur. "Will you, sir?" he asked, in a meditative, doubtful way.

"Name your price," said young Holliday, thinking that the landlord's hesitation sprang from some boorish distrust of him. "Name your price, and I'll give you the money at once, if you like."

"Are you game for five shillings?" inquired the landlord, rubbing his stubby double chin and looking up thoughtfully at the ceiling above him.

Arthur nearly laughed in the man's face; but, thinking it prudent to control himself, offered the five shillings as seriously as he could. The sly landlord held out his hand, then suddenly drew it back again.

"You're acting all fair and aboveboard by me," he said, "and, before I take your money, I'll do the same by you. Look here; this is how it stands. You can have a bed all to yourself for five shillings, but you can't have more than a half share of the room it stands in. Do you see what I mean, young gentleman?"

"Of course I do," returned Arthur, a little irritably. "You mean that it is a double-bedded room, and that one of the beds is occupied?"

The landlord nodded his head, and rubbed his double chin harder than ever. Arthur hesitated, and mechanically moved back a step or two toward the door. The idea of sleeping in the same room with a total stranger did not present an attractive prospect to him. He felt more than half inclined to drop his five shillings into his pocket and to go out into the street once more.

"Is it yes or no?" asked the landlord. "Settle it as quick as you can, because there's lots of people wanting a bed at Doncaster to-night besides you."

Arthur looked toward the court and heard the rain falling heavily in the street outside. He thought he would ask a question or two before he rashly decided on leaving the shelter of The Two Robins.

"What sort of man is it who has got the other bed?" he inquired. "Is he a gentleman? I mean, is he a quiet, well-behaved person?"

"The quietest man I ever came across," said the landlord, rubbing his fat hands stealthily one over the other. "As sober as a judge, and as regular as clock-work in his habits. It hasn't struck nine, not ten minutes ago, and he's in his bed already. I don't know whether that comes up to your notion of a quiet man: it goes a long way ahead of mine, I can tell you."

"Is he asleep, do you think?" asked Arthur.

"I know he's asleep," returned the landlord; "and, what's more, he's gone off so fast that I'll warrant you don't wake him. This way, sir," said the landlord, speaking over young Holliday's shoulder, as if he was addressing some new guest who was approaching the house.

"Here you are," said Arthur, determined to be beforehand with the stranger, whoever he might be. "I'll take the bed."

And he handed the five shillings to the landlord, who nodded, dropped the money carelessly into his waistcoat pocket, and lighted a candle.

"Come up and see the room," said the host of The Two Robins, leading the way to the staircase quite briskly, considering how fat he was.

They mounted to the second floor of the house. The landlord half opened a door fronting the landing, then stopped, and turned round to Arthur.

"It's a fair bargain, mind, on my side as well as on yours," he said. "You give me five shillings, and I give you in return a clean, comfortable bed; and I warrant, beforehand, that you won't be interfered with, or annoyed in any way, by the man who sleeps in the same room with you."

"Yes," returned the landlord, "pale enough, isn't he?"

Arthur looked closer at the man. The bedclothes were drawn up to his chin, and they lay perfectly still over the region of his chest. Surprised and vaguely startled as he noticed this, Arthur stooped down closer over the stranger, looked at his ashy, parted lips, listened breathlessly for an instant, looked again at the strangely still face, and the motionless lips and chest, and turned round suddenly on the landlord with his own cheeks as pale for the moment as
the hollow cheeks of the man on the bed.

"Come here," he whispered, under his breath. "Come here, for God's sake! The man's not asleep--he is dead."

"You have found that out sooner than I thought you would," said the landlord, composedly. "Yes, he's dead, sure enough. He died at five o'clock to-day."

"How did he die? Who is he?" asked Arthur, staggered for the moment by the audacious coolness of the answer.

"As to who he is," rejoined the landlord, "I know no more about him than you do. There are his books, and letters, and things all sealed up in that brown paper parcel for the coroner's inquest to open to-morrow or next day. He's been here a week, paying his way fairly enough, and stopping indoors, for the most part, as if he was ailing. My girl brought him up his tea at five to-day, and as he was pouring of it out, he fell down in a faint, or a fit, or a compound of both, for anything I know. We couldn't bring him to, and I said he was dead. And, the doctor couldn't bring him to, and the doctor said he was dead. And there he is. And the coroner's inquest's coming as soon as it can. And that's as much as I know about it."

Arthur held the candle close to the man's lips. The flame still burned straight up as steadily as ever. There was a moment of silence, and the rain pattered drearily through it against the panes of the window.

"If you haven't got nothing more to say to me," continued the landlord, "I suppose I may go. You don't expect your five shillings back, do you? There's the bed I promised you, clean and comfortable. There's the man I warranted not to disturb you, quiet in this world forever. If you're frightened to stop alone with him, that's not my lookout. I've kept my part of the bargain, and I mean to keep the money. I'm not Yorkshire myself, young gentleman, but I've lived long enough in these parts to have my wits sharpened, and I shouldn't wonder if you found out the way to brighten up yours next time you come among us."

With these words the landlord turned toward the door, and laughed to himself softly, in high satisfaction at his own sharpness.

Startled and shocked as he was, Arthur had by this time sufficiently recovered himself to feel indignant at the trick that had been played on him, and at the insolent manner in which the landlord exulted in it.

"Don't laugh," he said sharply, "till you are quite sure you have got the laugh against me. You shan't have the five shillings for nothing, my man. I'll keep the bed."

"Will you?" said the landlord. "Then I wish you a good night's rest." With that brief farewell he went out and shut the door after him.

A good night's rest! The words had hardly been spoken, the door had hardly been closed, before Arthur half repented the hasty words that had just escaped him. Though not naturally over-sensitive, and not wanting in courage of the moral as well as the physical sort, the presence of the dead man had an instantaneously chilling effect on his mind when he found himself alone in the room--alone, and bound by his own rash words to stay there till the next morning. An older man would have thought nothing of those words, and would have acted, without reference to them, as his calmer sense suggested. But Arthur was too young to treat the ridicule even of his inferiors with contempt--too young not to fear the momentary humiliation of falsifying his own foolish boast more than he feared the trial of watching out the long night in the same chamber with the dead.

"It is but a few hours," he thought to himself, "and I can get away the first thing in the morning."

He was looking toward the occupied bed as that idea passed through his mind, and the sharp, angular eminence made in the clothes by the dead man's upturned feet again caught his eye. He advanced and drew the curtains, purposely abstaining, as he did so, from looking at the face of the corpse, lest he might unnerve himself at the outset by fastening some ghastly impression of it on his mind. He drew the curtain very gently, and sighed involuntarily as he closed it.

"Poor fellow," he said, almost as sadly as if he had known the man. "Ah! poor fellow!"

He went next to the window. The night was black, and he could see nothing from it. The rain still pattered heavily against the glass. He inferred, from hearing it, that the window was at the back of the house, remembering that the front was sheltered from the weather by the court and the buildings over it.

While he was still standing at the window--for even the dreary rain was a relief, because of the sound it made; a relief, also, because it moved, and had some faint suggestion, in consequence, of life and companionship in it--while he was standing at the window, and looking vacantly into the black darkness outside, he heard a distant church clock strike ten. Only ten! How was he to pass the time till the house was astir the next morning?

Under any other circumstances he would have gone down to the public-house parlor, would have called for his grog, and would have laughed and talked with the company assembled as familiarly as if he had known them all his life. But the very thought of whiling away the time in this manner was now distasteful to him. The new situation in which he was placed seemed to have altered him to himself already. Thus far his life had been the common, trifling, prosaic, surface-life of a prosperous young man, with no troubles to conquer and no trials to face. He had lost no relation whom he loved, no friend whom he treasured. Till this night, what share he had of the immortal inheritance...
that is divided among us all had lain dormant within him. Till this night, Death and he had not once met, even in thought.

He took a few turns up and down the room, then stopped. The noise made by his boots on the poorly-carpeted floor jarred on his ear. He hesitated a little, and ended by taking the boots off, and walking backward and forward noiselessly.

All desire to sleep or to rest had left him. The bare thought of lying down on the unoccupied bed instantly drew the picture on his mind of a dreadful mimicry of the position of the dead man. Who was he? What was the story of his past life? Poor he must have been, or he would not have stopped at such a place as the Two Robins Inn; and weakened, probably, by long illness, or he could hardly have died in the manner which the landlord had described. Poor, ill, lonely--dead in a strange place--dead, with nobody but a stranger to pity him. A sad story; truly, on the mere face of it, a very sad story.

While these thoughts were passing through his mind, he had stopped insensibly at the window, close to which stood the foot of the bed with the closed curtains. At first he looked at it absently; then he became conscious that his eyes were fixed on it; and then a perverse desire took possession of him to do the very thing which he had resolved not to do up to this time--to look at the dead man.

He stretched out his hand toward the curtains, but checked himself in the very act of undrawing them, turned his back sharply on the bed, and walked toward the chimney-piece, to see what things were placed on it, and to try if he could keep the dead man out of his mind in that way.

There was a pewter inkstand on the chimney-piece, with some mildewed remains of ink in the bottle. There were two coarse china ornaments of the commonest kind; and there was a square of embossed card, dirty and fly-blown, with a collection of wretched riddles printed on it, in all sorts of zigzag directions, and in variously colored inks. He took the card and went away to read it at the table on which the candle was placed, sitting down with his back resolutely turned to the curtained bed.

He read the first riddle, the second, the third, all in one corner of the card, then turned it round impatiently to look at another. Before he could begin reading the riddles printed here the sound of the church clock stopped him.

Eleven.

He had got through an hour of the time in the room with the dead man.

Once more he looked at the card. It was not easy to make out the letters printed on it in consequence of the dimness of the light which the landlord had left him--a common tallow candle, furnished with a pair of heavy old-fashioned steel snuffers. Up to this time his mind had been too much occupied to think of the light. He had left the wick of the candle unsnuffed till it had risen higher than the flame, and had burned into an odd pent-house shape at the top, from which morsels of the charred cotton fell off from time to time in little flakes. He took up the snuffers now and trimmed the wick. The light brightened directly, and the room became less dismal.

Again he turned to the riddles, reading them doggedly and resolutely, now in one corner of the card, now in another. All his efforts, however, could not fix his attention on them. He pursued his occupation mechanically, deriving no sort of impression from what he was reading. It was as if a shadow from the curtained bed had got between his mind and the gayly printed letters--a shadow that nothing could dispel. At last he gave up the struggle, threw the card from him impatiently, and took to walking softly up and down the room again.

The dead man, the dead man, the _hidden_ dead man on the bed!

There was the one persistent idea still haunting him. Hidden! Was it only the body being there, or was it the body being there _concealed,_ that was preying on his mind? He stopped at the window with that doubt in him, once more listening to the pattering rain, once more looking out into the black darkness.

Still the dead man!

The darkness forced his mind back upon itself, and set his memory at work, reviving with a painfully vivid distinctness the momentary impression it had received from his first sight of the corpse. Before long the face seemed to be hovering out in the middle of the darkness, confronting him through the window, with the paleness whiter--with the dreadful dull line of light between the imperfectly-closed eyelids broader than he had seen it--with the parted lips slowly dropping further and further away from each other--with the features growing larger and moving closer, till they seemed to fill the window, and to silence the rain, and to shut out the night.

The sound of a voice shouting below stairs woke him suddenly from the dream of his own distempered fancy. He recognized it as the voice of the landlord.

"Shut up at twelve, Ben," he heard it say. "I'm off to bed."

He wiped away the damp that had gathered on his forehead, reasoned with himself for a little while, and resolved to shake his mind free of the ghastly counterfeit which still clung to it by forcing himself to confront, if it was only for a moment, the solemn reality. Without allowing himself an instant to hesitate, he parted the curtains at the foot of the bed, and looked through.
There was the sad, peaceful, white face, with the awful mystery of stillness on it, laid back upon the pillow. No stir, no change there! He only looked at it for a moment before he closed the curtains again, but that moment steadied him, calmed him, restored him—mind and body—to himself. He returned to his old occupation of walking up and down the room, persevering in it this time till the clock struck again.

Twelve.

As the sound of the clock-bell died away, it was succeeded by the confused noise downstairs of the drinkers in the taproom leaving the house. The next sound, after an interval of silence, was caused by the barring of the door and the closing of the shutters at the back of the inn. Then the silence followed again, and was disturbed no more.

He was alone now—absolutely, hopelessly alone with the dead man till the next morning.

The wick of the candle wanted trimming again. He took up the snuffers, but paused suddenly on the very point of using them, and looked attentively at the candle—then back, over his shoulder, at the curtained bed—then again at the candle. It had been lighted for the first time to show him the way upstairs, and three parts of it, at least, were already consumed. In another hour it would be burned out. In another hour, unless he called at once to the man who had shut up the inn for a fresh candle, he would be left in the dark.

Strongly as his mind had been affected since he had entered the room, his unreasonable dread of encountering ridicule and of exposing his courage to suspicion had not altogether lost its influence over him even yet.

He lingered irresolutely by the table, waiting till he could prevail on himself to open the door, and call from the landing, to the man who had shut up the inn. In his present hesitating frame of mind, it was a kind of relief to gain a few moments only by engaging in the trifling occupation of snuffing the candle. His hand trembled a little, and the snuffers were heavy and awkward to use. When he closed them on the wick, he closed them a hair-breadth too low. In an instant the candle was out, and the room was plunged in pitch darkness.

The one impression which the absence of light immediately produced on his mind was distrust of the curtained bed—distrust which shaped itself into no distinct idea, but which was powerful enough, in its very vagueness, to bind him down to his chair, to make his heart beat fast, and to set him listening intently. No sound stirred in the room, but the familiar sound of the rain against the window, louder and sharper now than he had heard it yet.

Still the vague distrust, the inexpressible dread possessed him, and kept him in his chair. He had put his carpet-bag on the table when he first entered the room, and he now took the key from his pocket, reached out his hand softly, opened the bag, and groped in it for his traveling writing-case, in which he knew that there was a small store of matches. When he had got one of the matches he waited before he struck it on the coarse wooden table, and listened intently again without knowing why. Still there was no sound in the room but the steady, ceaseless rattling sound of the rain.

He lighted the candle again without another moment of delay, and, on the instant of its burning up, the first object in the room that his eyes sought for was the curtained bed.

Just before the light had been put out he had looked in that direction, and had seen no change, no disarrangement of any sort in the folds of the closely-drawn curtains.

When he looked at the bed now, he saw hanging over the side of it a long white hand.

It lay perfectly motionless midway on the side of the bed, where the curtain at the head and the curtain at the foot met. Nothing more was visible. The clinging curtains hid everything but the long white hand.

He stood looking at it, unable to stir, unable to call out—feeling nothing, knowing nothing—every faculty he possessed gathered up and lost in the one seeing faculty. How long that first panic held him he never could tell afterward. It might have been only for a moment—it might have been for many minutes together. How he got to the bed—whether he ran to it headlong, or whether he approached it slowly; how he wrought himself up to unclose the curtains and look in, he never has remembered, and never will remember to his dying day. It is enough that he did go to the bed, and that he did look inside the curtains.

The man had moved. One of his arms was outside the clothes; his face was turned a little on the pillow; his eyelids were wide open. Changed as to position and as to one of the features, the face was otherwise fearfully and wonderfully unaltered. The dead paleness and the dead quiet were on it still.

He had shut up the inn for a fresh candle, he would be left in the dark.

The wick of the candle wanted trimming again. He took up the snuffers, but paused suddenly on the very point of using them, and looked attentively at the candle—then back, over his shoulder, at the curtained bed—then again at the candle. It had been lighted for the first time to show him the way upstairs, and three parts of it, at least, were already consumed. In another hour it would be burned out. In another hour, unless he called at once to the man who had shut up the inn for a fresh candle, he would be left in the dark.

Still the vague distrust, the inexpressible dread possessed him, and kept him in his chair. He had put his carpet-bag on the table when he first entered the room, and he now took the key from his pocket, reached out his hand softly, opened the bag, and groped in it for his traveling writing-case, in which he knew that there was a small store of matches. When he had got one of the matches he waited before he struck it on the coarse wooden table, and listened intently again without knowing why. Still there was no sound in the room but the steady, ceaseless rattling sound of the rain.

He lighted the candle again without another moment of delay, and, on the instant of its burning up, the first object in the room that his eyes sought for was the curtained bed.

Just before the light had been put out he had looked in that direction, and had seen no change, no disarrangement of any sort in the folds of the closely-drawn curtains.

When he looked at the bed now, he saw hanging over the side of it a long white hand.

It lay perfectly motionless midway on the side of the bed, where the curtain at the head and the curtain at the foot met. Nothing more was visible. The clinging curtains hid everything but the long white hand.

He stood looking at it, unable to stir, unable to call out—feeling nothing, knowing nothing—every faculty he possessed gathered up and lost in the one seeing faculty. How long that first panic held him he never could tell afterward. It might have been only for a moment—it might have been for many minutes together. How he got to the bed—whether he ran to it headlong, or whether he approached it slowly; how he wrought himself up to unclose the curtains and look in, he never has remembered, and never will remember to his dying day. It is enough that he did go to the bed, and that he did look inside the curtains.

The man had moved. One of his arms was outside the clothes; his face was turned a little on the pillow; his eyelids were wide open. Changed as to position and as to one of the features, the face was otherwise fearfully and wonderfully unaltered. The dead paleness and the dead quiet were on it still.

One glance showed Arthur this—one glance before he flew breathlessly to the door and alarmed the house.

The man whom the landlord called "Ben" was the first to appear on the stairs. In three words Arthur told him what had happened, and sent him for the nearest doctor.

I, who tell you this story, was then staying with a medical friend of mine, in practice at Doncaster, taking care of his patients for him during his absence in London; and I, for the time being, was the nearest doctor. They had sent for me from the inn when the stranger was taken ill in the afternoon, but I was not at home, and medical assistance was sought for elsewhere. When the man from The Two Robins rang the night-bell, I was just thinking of going to bed. Naturally enough, I did not believe a word of his story about "a dead man who had come to life again." However, I put on my hat, armed myself with one or two bottles of restorative medicine, and ran to the inn,
expecting to find nothing more remarkable, when I got there, than a patient in a fit.

My surprise at finding that the man had spoken the literal truth was almost, if not quite, equaled by my astonishment at finding myself face to face with Arthur Holliday as soon as I entered the bedroom. It was no time then for giving or seeking explanations. We just shook hands amazedly, and then I ordered everybody but Arthur out of the room, and hurried to the man on the bed.

The kitchen fire had not been long out. There was plenty of hot water in the boiler, and plenty of flannel to be had. With these, with my medicines, and with such help as Arthur could render under my direction, I dragged the man literally out of the jaws of death. In less than an hour from the time when I had been called in, he was alive and talking in the bed on which he had been laid out to wait for the coroner's inquest.

You will naturally ask me what had been the matter with him, and I might treat you, in reply, to a long theory, plentifully sprinkled with what the children call hard words. I prefer telling you that, in this case, cause and effect could not be satisfactorily joined together by any theory whatever. There are mysteries in life and the conditions of it which human science has not fathomed yet; and I candidly confess to you that, in bringing that man back to existence, I was, morally speaking, groping haphazard in the dark. I know (from the testimony of the doctor who attended him in the afternoon) that the vital machinery, so far as its action is appreciable by our senses, had, in this case, unquestionably stopped, and I am equally certain (seeing that I recovered him) that the vital principle was not extinct. When I add that he had suffered from a long and complicated illness, and that his whole nervous system was utterly deranged, I have told you all I really know of the physical condition of my dead-alive patient at the Two Robins Inn.

When he "came to," as the phrase goes, he was a startling object to look at, with his colorless face, his sunken cheeks, his wild black eyes, and his long black hair. The first question he asked me about himself when he could speak made me suspect that I had been called in to a man in my own profession. I mentioned to him my surmise, and he told me that I was right.

He said he had come last from Paris, where he had been attached to a hospital; that he had lately returned to England, on his way to Edinburgh, to continue his studies; that he had been taken ill on the journey; and that he had stopped to rest and recover himself at Doncaster. He did not add a word about his name, or who he was, and of course I did not question him on the subject. All I inquired when he ceased speaking was what branch of the profession he intended to follow.

"Any branch," he said, bitterly, "which will put bread into the mouth of a poor man."

At this, Arthur, who had been hitherto watching him in silent curiosity, burst out impetuously in his usual good-humored way:

"My dear fellow" (everybody was "my dear fellow" with Arthur), "now you have come to life again, don't begin by being down-hearted about your prospects. I'll answer for it I can help you to some capital thing in the medical line, or, if I can't, I know my father can."

The medical student looked at him steadily.

"Thank you," he said, coldly; then added, "May I ask who your father is?"

"He's well enough known all about this part of the country," replied Arthur. "He is a great manufacturer, and his name is Holliday."

My hand was on the man's wrist during this brief conversation. The instant the name of Holliday was pronounced I felt the pulse under my fingers flutter, stop, go on suddenly with a bound, and beat afterward for a minute or two at the fever rate.

"How did you come here?" asked the stranger, quickly, excitationly, passionately almost.

Arthur related briefly what had happened from the time of his first taking the bed at the inn.

"I am indebted to Mr. Holliday's son, then, for the help that has saved my life," said the medical student, speaking to himself, with a singular sarcasm in his voice. "Come here!"

He held out, as he spoke, his long, white, bony right hand.

"With all my heart," said Arthur, taking his hand cordially. "I may confess it now," he continued, laughing, "upon my honor, you almost frightened me out of my wits."

The stranger did not seem to listen. His wild black eyes were fixed with a look of eager interest on Arthur's face, and his long bony fingers kept tight hold of Arthur's hand. Young Holliday, on his side, returned the gaze, amazed and puzzled by the medical student's odd language and manners. The two faces were close together; I looked at them, and, to my amazement, I was suddenly impressed by the sense of a likeness between them—not in features or complexion, but solely in expression. It must have been a strong likeness, or I should certainly not have found it out, for I am naturally slow at detecting resemblances between faces.

"You have saved my life," said the strange man, still looking hard in Arthur's face, still holding tightly by his hand. "If you had been my own brother, you could not have done more for me than that."
He laid a singularly strong emphasis on those three words "my own brother," and a change passed over his face as he pronounced them--a change that no language of mine is competent to describe.

"I hope I have not done being of service to you yet," said Arthur. "I'll speak to my father as soon as I get home."

"You seem to be fond and proud of your father," said the medical student. "I suppose, in return, he is fond and proud of you?"

"Of course he is," answered Arthur, laughing. "Is there anything wonderful in that? Isn't _your_ father fond--"

The stranger suddenly dropped young Holliday's hand and turned his face away.

"I beg your pardon," said Arthur. "I hope I have not unintentionally pained you. I hope you have not lost your father?"

"I can't well lose what I have never had," retorted the medical student, with a harsh mocking laugh.

"What you have never had!"

The strange man suddenly caught Arthur's hand again, suddenly looked once more hard in his face.

"Yes," he said, with a repetition of the bitter laugh. "You have brought a poor devil back into the world who has no business there. Do I astonish you? Well, I have a fancy of my own for telling you what men in my situation generally keep a secret. I have no name and no father. The merciful law of society tells me I am nobody's son! Ask your father if he will be my father too, and help me on in life with the family name."

Arthur looked at me more puzzled than ever.

I signed to him to say nothing, and then laid my fingers again on the man's wrist. No. In spite of the extraordinary speech that he had just made, he was not, as I had been disposed to suspect, beginning to get light-headed. His pulse, by this time, had fallen back to a quiet, slow beat, and his skin was moist and cool. Not a symptom of fever or agitation about him.

Finding that neither of us answered him, he turned to me, and began talking of the extraordinary nature of his case, and asking my advice about the future course of medical treatment to which he ought to subject himself. I said the matter required careful thinking over, and suggested that I should send him a prescription a little later. He told me to write it at once, as he would most likely be leaving Doncaster in the morning before I was up. It was quite useless to represent to him the folly and danger of such a proceeding as this. He heard me politely and patiently, but held to his resolution, without offering any reasons or explanations, and repeated to me that, if I wished to give him a chance of seeing my prescription, I must write it at once.

Hearing this, Arthur volunteered the loan of a traveling writing-case, which he said he had with him, and, bringing it to the bed, shook the note-paper out of the pocket of the case forthwith in his usual careless way. With the paper there fell out on the counterpane of the bed a small packet of sticking-plaster, and a little water-color drawing of a landscape.

The medical student took up the drawing and looked at it. His eye fell on some initials neatly written in cipher in one corner. He started and trembled; his pale face grew whiter than over; his wild black eyes turned on Arthur, and looked through and through him.

"A pretty drawing," he said, in a remarkably quiet tone of voice.

"Ah! and done by such a pretty girl," said Arthur. "Oh, such a pretty girl! I wish it was not a landscape--I wish it was a portrait of her!"

"You admire her very much?"

Arthur, half in jest, half in earnest, kissed his hand for answer.

"Love at first sight," said young Holliday, putting the drawing away again. "But the course of it doesn't run smooth. It's the old story. She's monopolized, as usual; trammeled by a rash engagement to some poor man who is never likely to get money enough to marry her. It was lucky I heard of it in time, or I should certainly have risked a declaration when she gave me that drawing. Here, doctor, here is pen, ink, and paper all ready for you."

"When she gave you that drawing? Gave it? gave it?"

He repeated the words slowly to himself, and suddenly closed his eyes. A momentary distortion passed across his face, and I saw one of his hands clutch up the bedclothes and squeeze them hard. I thought he was going to be ill again, and begged that there might be no more talking. He opened his eyes when I spoke, fixed them once more searchingly on Arthur, and said, slowly and distinctly:

"You like her, and she likes you. The poor man may die out of your way. Who can tell that she may not give you herself as well as her drawing, after all?"

Before young Holliday could answer he turned to me, and said in a whisper: "Now for the prescription." From that time, though he spoke to Arthur again, he never looked at him more.

When I had written the prescription, he examined it, approved of it, and then astonished us both by abruptly wishing us good-night. I offered to sit up with him, and he shook his head. Arthur offered to sit up with him, and he said, shortly, with his face turned away, "No." I insisted on having somebody left to watch him. He gave way when
he found I was determined, and said he would accept the services of the waiter at the inn.

"Thank you both," he said, as we rose to go. "I have one last favor to ask--not of you, doctor, for I leave you to exercise your professional discretion, but of Mr. Holliday." His eyes, while he spoke, still rested steadily on me, and never once turned toward Arthur. "I beg that Mr. Holliday will not mention to any one, least of all to his father, the events that have occurred and the words that have passed in this room. I entreat him to bury me in his memory as, but for him, I might have been buried in my grave. I cannot give my reason for making this strange request. I can only implore him to grant it."

His voice faltered for the first time, and he hid his face on the pillow. Arthur, completely bewildered, gave the required pledge. I took young Holliday away with me immediately afterward to the house of my friend, determining to go back to the inn and to see the medical student again before he had left in the morning.

I returned to the inn at eight o'clock, purposely abstaining from waking Arthur, who was sleeping off the past night's excitement on one of my friend’s sofas. A suspicion had occurred to me, as soon as I was alone in my bedroom, which made me resolve that Holliday and the stranger whose life he had saved should not meet again, if I could prevent it.

I have already alluded to certain reports or scandals which I knew of relating to the early life of Arthur's father. While I was thinking, in my bed, of what had passed at the inn; of the change in the student's pulse when he heard the name of Holliday; of the resemblance of expression that I had discovered between his face and Arthur's; of the emphasis he had laid on those three words, "my own brother," and of his incomprehensible acknowledgment of his own illegitimacy—while I was thinking of these things, the reports I have mentioned suddenly flew into my mind, and linked themselves fast to the chain of my previous reflections. Something within me whispered, "It is best that those two young men should not meet again." I felt it before I slept; I felt it when I woke; and I went as I told you, alone to the inn the next morning.

I had missed my only opportunity of seeing my nameless patient again. He had been gone nearly an hour when I inquired for him.

I have now told you everything that I know for certain in relation to the man whom I brought back to life in the double-bedded room of the inn at Doncaster. What I have next to add is matter for inference and surmise, and is not, strictly speaking, matter of fact.

I have to tell you, first, that the medical student turned out to be strangely and unaccountably right in assuming it as more than probable that Arthur Holliday would marry the young lady who had given him the water-color drawing of the landscape. That marriage took place a little more than a year after the events occurred which I have just been relating.

The young couple came to live in the neighborhood in which I was then established in practice. I was present at the wedding, and was rather surprised to find that Arthur was singularly reserved with me, both before and after his marriage, on the subject of the young lady's prior engagement. He only referred to it once when we were alone, merely telling me, on that occasion, that his wife had done all that honor and duty required of her in the matter, and that the engagement had been broken off with the full approval of her parents. I never heard more from him than this. For three years he and his wife lived together happily. At the expiration of that time the symptoms of a serious illness first declared themselves in Mrs. Arthur Holliday. It turned out to be a long, lingering, hopeless malady. I attended her throughout. We had been great friends when she was well, and we became more attached to each other than ever when she was ill. I had many long and interesting conversations with her in the intervals when she suffered least. The result of one of those conversations I may briefly relate, leaving you to draw any inferences from it that you please.

The interview to which I refer occurred shortly before her death.

I called one evening as usual, and found her alone, with a look in her eyes which told me she had been crying. She only informed me at first that she had been depressed in spirits, but by little and little she became more communicative, and confessed to me that she had been looking over some old letters which had been addressed to her, before she had seen Arthur, by a man to whom she had been engaged to be married. I asked her how the engagement came to be broken off. She replied that it had not been broken off, but that it had died out in a very mysterious way. The person to whom she was engaged—her first love, she called him—was very poor, and there was no immediate prospect of their being married. He followed my profession, and went abroad to study. They had corresponded regularly until the time when, as she believed, he had returned to England. From that period she heard no more of him. He was of a fretful, sensitive temperament, and she feared that she might have inadvertently done or said something to offend him. However that might be, he had never written to her again, and after waiting a year she had married Arthur. I asked when the first estrangement had begun, and found that the time at which she ceased to hear anything of her first lover exactly corresponded with the time at which I had been called in to my mysterious patient at The Two Robins Inn.
A fortnight after that conversation she died. In course of time Arthur married again. Of late years he has lived principally in London, and I have seen little or nothing of him.

I have some years to pass over before I can approach to anything like a conclusion of this fragmentary narrative. And even when that later period is reached, the little that I have to say will not occupy your attention for more than a few minutes.

One rainy autumn evening, while I was still practicing as a country doctor, I was sitting alone, thinking over a case then under my charge, which sorely perplexed me, when I heard a low knock at the door of my room.

"Come in," I cried, looking up curiously to see who wanted me.

After a momentary delay, the lock moved, and a long, white, bony hand stole round the door as it opened, gently pushing it over a fold in the carpet which hindered it from working freely on the hinges. The hand was followed by a man whose face instantly struck me with a very strange sensation. There was something familiar to me in the look of him, and yet it was also something that suggested the idea of change.

He quietly introduced himself as "Mr. Lorn," presented to me some excellent professional recommendations, and proposed to fill the place, then vacant, of my assistant. While he was speaking I noticed it as singular that we did not appear to be meeting each other like strangers, and that, while I was certainly startled at seeing him, he did not appear to be at all startled at seeing me.

It was on the tip of my tongue to say that I thought I had met with him before. But there was something in his face, and something in my own recollections--I can hardly say what--which unaccountably restrained me from speaking and which as unaccountably attracted me to him at once, and made me feel ready and glad to accept his proposal.

He took his assistant's place on that very day. We got on together as if we had been old friends from the first; but, throughout the whole time of his residence in my house, he never volunteered any confidences on the subject of his past life, and I never approached the forbidden topic except by hints, which he resolutely refused to understand.

I had long had a notion that my patient at the inn might have been a natural son of the elder Mr. Holliday's, and that he might also have been the man who was engaged to Arthur's first wife. And now another idea occurred to me, that Mr. Lorn was the only person in existence who could, if he chose, enlighten me on both those doubtful points. But he never did choose, and I was never enlightened. He remained with me till I removed to London to try my fortune there as a physician for the second time, and then he went his way and I went mine, and we have never seen one another since.

I can add no more. I may have been right in my suspicion, or I may have been wrong. All I know is that, in those days of my country practice, when I came home late, and found my assistant asleep, and woke him, he used to look, in coming to, wonderfully like the stranger at Doncaster as he raised himself in the bed on that memorable night.

THE SIXTH DAY

AN oppressively mild temperature, and steady, soft, settled rain--dismal weather for idle people in the country. Miss Jessie, after looking longingly out of the window, resigned herself to circumstances, and gave up all hope of a ride. The gardener, the conservatory, the rabbits, the raven, the housekeeper, and, as a last resource, even the neglected piano, were all laid under contribution to help her through the time. It was a long day, but thanks to her own talent for trifling, she contrived to occupy it pleasantly enough.

Still no news of my son. The time was getting on now, and it was surely not unreasonable to look for some tidings of him.

To-day Morgan and I both finished our third and last stories. I corrected my brother's contribution with no very great difficulty on this occasion, and numbered it Nine. My own story came next, and was thus accidentally distinguished as the last of the series--Number Ten. When I dropped the two corresponding cards into the bowl, the thought that there would be now no more to add seemed to quicken my prevailing sense of anxiety on the subject of George's return. A heavy depression hung upon my spirits, and I went out desperately in the rain to shake my mind free of oppressing influences by dint of hard bodily exercise.

The number drawn this evening was Three. On the production of the corresponding manuscript it proved to be my turn to read again.

"I can promise you a little variety to-night," I said, addressing our fair guest, "if I can promise nothing else. This time it is not a story of my own writing that I am about to read, but a copy of a very curious correspondence which I found among my professional papers."

Jessie's countenance fell. "Is there no story in it?" she asked, rather discontentedly.

"Certainly there is a story in it," I replied--"a story of a much lighter kind than any we have yet read, and which may, on that account, prove acceptable, by way of contrast and relief, even if it fails to attract you by other means. I obtained the original correspondence, I must tell you, from the office of the Detective Police of London."

Jessie's face brightened. "That promises something to begin with," she said.
"Some years since," I continued, "there was a desire at headquarters to increase the numbers and efficiency of the Detective Police, and I had the honor of being one of the persons privately consulted on that occasion. The chief obstacle to the plan proposed lay in the difficulty of finding new recruits. The ordinary rank and file of the police of London are sober, trustworthy, and courageous men, but as a body they are sadly wanting in intelligence. Knowing this, the authorities took into consideration a scheme, which looked plausible enough on paper, for availing themselves of the services of that proverbially sharp class of men, the experienced clerks in attorney's offices. Among the persons whose advice was sought on this point, I was the only one who dissented from the arrangement proposed. I felt certain that the really experienced clerks intrusted with conducting private investigations and hunting up lost evidence, were too well paid and too independently situated in their various offices to care about entering the ranks of the Detective Police, and submitting themselves to the rigid discipline of Scotland Yard, and I ventured to predict that the inferior clerks only, whose discretion was not to be trusted, would prove to be the men who volunteered for detective employment. My advice was not taken and the experiment of enlisting the clerks was tried in two or three cases. I was naturally interested in the result, and in due course of time I applied for information in the right quarter. In reply, the originals of the letters of which I am now about to read the copies were sent to me, with an intimation that the correspondence in this particular instance offered a fair specimen of the results of the experiment in the other cases. The letters amused me, and I obtained permission to copy them before I sent them back. You will now hear, therefore, by his own statement, how a certain attorney's clerk succeeded in conducting a very delicate investigation, and how the regular members of the Detective Police contrived to help him through his first experiment."

BROTHER GRIFFITH'S STORY
of
THE BITER BIT.

Extracted from the Correspondence of the London Police.

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE, OF THE DETECTIVE POLICE, TO SERGEANT BULMER, OF THE SAME FORCE.

London, 4th July, 18--.

SERGEANT BULMER--This is to inform you that you are wanted to assist in looking up a case of importance, which will require all the attention of an experienced member of the force. The matter of the robbery on which you are now engaged you will please to shift over to the young man who brings you this letter. You will tell him all the circumstances of the case, just as they stand; you will put him up to the progress you have made (if any) toward detecting the person or persons by whom the money has been stolen; and you will leave him to make the best he can of the matter now in your hands. You will now hear, therefore, by his own statement, how a certain attorney's clerk succeeded in conducting a very delicate investigation, and how the regular members of the Detective Police contrived to help him through his first experiment.

FROM MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN TO CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE.

London, 5th July, 18--.

DEAR SIR--Having now been favored with the necessary instructions from Sergeant Bulmer, I beg to remind you of certain directions which I have received relating to the report of my future proceedings which I am to prepare for examination at headquarters.

The object of my writing, and of your examining what I have written before you send it to the higher authorities, is, I am informed, to give me, as an untried hand, the benefit of your advice in case I want it (which I venture to
think I shall not) at any stage of my proceedings. As the extraordinary circumstances of the case on which I am now engaged make it impossible for me to absent myself from the place where the robbery was committed until I have made some progress toward discovering the thief, I am necessarily precluded from consulting you personally. Hence the necessity of my writing down the various details, which might perhaps be better communicated by word of mouth. This, if I am not mistaken, is the position in which we are now placed. I state my own impressions on the subject in writing, in order that we may clearly understand each other at the outset; and have the honor to remain your obedient servant,

MATTHEW SHARPIN.

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE TO MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN.

London, 5th July, 18--.

SIR--You have begun by wasting time, ink, and paper. We both of us perfectly well knew the position we stood in toward each other when I sent you with my letter to Sergeant Bulmer. There was not the least need to repeat it in writing. Be so good as to employ your pen in future on the business actually in hand.

You have now three separate matters on which to write me. First, you have to draw up a statement of your instructions received from Sergeant Bulmer, in order to show us that nothing has escaped your memory, and that you are thoroughly acquainted with all the circumstances of the case which has been intrusted to you. Secondly, you are to inform me what it is you propose to do. Thirdly, you are to report every inch of your progress (if you make any) from day to day, and, if need be, from hour to hour as well. This is _your_ duty. As to what _my_ duty may be, when I want you to remind me of it, I will write and tell you so. In the meantime, I remain yours,

FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

FROM MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN TO CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE.

London, 6th July, 18--.

SIR--You are rather an elderly person, and as such, naturally inclined to be a little jealous of men like me, who are in the prime of their lives and their faculties. Under these circumstances, it is my duty to be considerate toward you, and not to bear too hardly on your small failings. I decline, therefore, altogether to take offense at the tone of your letter; I give you the full benefit of the natural generosity of my nature; I sponge the very existence of your surly communication out of my memory--in short, Chief Inspector Theakstone, I forgive you, and proceed to business.

My first duty is to draw up a full statement of the instructions I have received from Sergeant Bulmer. Here they are at your service, according to my version of them.

At Number Thirteen Rutherford Street, Soho, there is a stationer's shop. It is kept by one Mr. Yatman. He is a married man, but has no family. Besides Mr. and Mrs. Yatman, the other inmates in the house are a lodger, a young single man named Jay, who occupies the front room on the second floor--a shopman, who sleeps in one of the attics, and a servant-of-all-work, whose bed is in the back kitchen. Once a week a charwoman comes to help this servant. These are all the persons who, on ordinary occasions, have means of access to the interior of the house, placed, as a matter of course, at their disposal. Mr. Yatman has been in business for many years, carrying on his affairs prosperously enough to realize a handsome independence for a person in his position. Unfortunately for himself, he endeavored to increase the amount of his property by speculating. He ventured boldly in his investments; luck went against him; and rather less than two years ago he found himself a poor man again. All that was saved out of the wreck of his fortune was the sum of two hundred pounds.

Although Mr. Yatman did his best to meet his altered circumstances, by giving up many of the luxuries and comforts to which he and his wife had been accustomed, he found it impossible to retrench so far as to allow of putting by any money from the income produced by his shop. The business has been declining of late years, the cheap advertising stationers having done it injury with the public. Consequently, up to the last week, the only surplus property possessed by Mr. Yatman consisted of the two hundred pounds which had been recovered from the wreck of his fortune. This sum was placed as a deposit in a joint-stock bank of the highest possible character.

Eight days ago Mr. Yatman and his lodger, Mr. Jay, held a conversation on the subject of the commercial difficulties which are hampering trade in all directions at the present time. Mr. Jay (who lives by supplying the newspapers with short paragraphs relating to accidents, offenses, and brief records of remarkable occurrences in general--who is, in short, what they call a penny-a-liner) told his landlord that he had been in the city that day and heard unfavorable rumors on the subject of the joint-stock banks. The rumors to which he alluded had already reached the ears of Mr. Yatman from other quarters, and the confirmation of them by his lodger had such an effect on his mind--predisposed as it was to alarm by the experience of his former losses—that he resolved to go at once to the bank and withdraw his deposit. It was then getting on toward the end of the afternoon, and he arrived just in time to receive his money before the bank closed.

He received the deposit in bank-notes of the following amounts: one fifty-pound note, three twenty-pound notes,
six ten-pound notes, and six five-pound notes. His object in drawing the money in this form was to have it ready to lay out immediately in trifling loans, on good security, among the small tradespeople of his district, some of whom are sorely pressed for the very means of existence at the present time. Investments of this kind seemed to Mr. Yatman to be the most safe and the most profitable on which he could now venture.

He brought the money back in an envelope placed in his breast pocket, and asked his shopman, on getting home, to look for a small, flat, tin cash-box, which had not been used for years, and which, as Mr. Yatman remembered it, was exactly of the right size to hold the bank-notes. For some time the cash-box was searched for in vain. Mr. Yatman called to his wife to know if she had any idea where it was. The question was overheard by the servant-of-all-work, who was taking up the tea-tray at the time, and by Mr. Jay, who was coming downstairs on his way out to the theater. Ultimately the cash-box was found by the shopman. Mr. Yatman placed the bank-notes in it, secured them by a padlock, and put the box in his coat pocket. It stuck out of the coat pocket a very little, but enough to be seen. Mr. Yatman remained at home, upstairs, all that evening. No visitors called. At eleven o'clock he went to bed, and put the cash-box under his pillow.

When he and his wife woke the next morning the box was gone. Payment of the notes was immediately stopped at the Bank of England, but no news of the money has been heard of since that time.

So far the circumstances of the case are perfectly clear. They point unmistakably to the conclusion that the robbery must have been committed by some person living in the house. Suspicion falls, therefore, upon the servant-of-all-work, upon the shopman, and upon Mr. Jay. The two first knew that the cash-box was being inquired for by their master, but did not know what it was he wanted to put into it. They would assume, of course, that it was money. They both had opportunities (the servant when she took away the tea, and the shopman when he came, after shutting up, to give the keys of the till to his master) of seeing the cash-box in Mr. Yatman's pocket, and of inferring naturally, from its position there, that he intended to take it into his bedroom with him at night.

Mr. Jay, on the other hand, had been told, during the afternoon's conversation on the subject of joint-stock banks, that his landlord had a deposit of two hundred pounds in one of them. He also knew that Mr. Yatman left him with the intention of drawing that money out; and he heard the inquiry for the cash-box afterward, when he was coming downstairs. He must, therefore, have inferred that the money was in the house, and that the cash-box was the receptacle intended to contain it. That he could have had any idea, however, of the place in which Mr. Yatman intended to keep it for the night is impossible, seeing that he went out before the box was found, and did not return till his landlord was in bed. Consequently, if he committed the robbery, he must have gone into the bedroom purely on speculation.

Speaking of the bedroom reminds me of the necessity of noticing the situation of it in the house, and the means that exist of gaining easy access to it at any hour of the night.

The room in question is the back room on the first floor. In consequence of Mrs. Yatman's constitutional nervousness on the subject of fire, which makes her apprehend being burned alive in her room, in case of accident, by the hampering of the lock if the key is turned in it, her husband has never been accustomed to lock the bedroom door. Both he and his wife are, by their own admission, heavy sleepers; consequently, the risk to be run by any evil-disposed persons wishing to plunder the bedroom was of the most trifling kind. They could enter the room by merely turning the handle of the door; and, if they moved with ordinary caution, there was no fear of their waking the sleepers inside. This fact is of importance. It strengthens our conviction that the money must have been taken by one of the inmates of the house, because it tends to show that the robbery, in this case, might have been committed by persons not possessed of the superior vigilance and cunning of the experienced thief.

Such are the circumstances, as they were related to Sergeant Bulmer, when he was first called in to discover the guilty parties, and, if possible, to recover the lost bank-notes. The strictest inquiry which he could institute failed of producing the smallest fragment of evidence against any of the persons on whom suspicion naturally fell. Their language and behavior on being informed of the robbery was perfectly consistent with the language and behavior of innocent people. Sergeant Bulmer felt from the first that this was a case for private inquiry and secret observation. He began by recommending Mr. and Mrs. Yatman to affect a feeling of perfect confidence in the innocence of the persons living under their roof, and he then opened the campaign by employing himself in following the goings and comings, and in discovering the friends, the habits, and the secrets of the maid-of-all-work.

Three days and nights of exertion on his own part, and on that of others who were competent to assist his investigations, were enough to satisfy him that there was no sound cause for suspicion against the girl.

He next practiced the same precaution in relation to the shopman. There was more difficulty and uncertainty in privately clearing up this person's character without his knowledge, but the obstacles were at last smoothed away with tolerable success; and, though there is not the same amount of certainty in this case which there was in the case of the girl, there is still fair reason for supposing that the shopman has had nothing to do with the robbery of the cash-box.
As a necessary consequence of these proceedings, the range of suspicion now becomes limited to the lodger, Mr. Jay.

When I presented your letter of introduction to Sergeant Bulmer, he had already made some inquiries on the subject of this young man. The result, so far, has not been at all favorable. Mr. Jay's habits are irregular; he frequents public houses, and seems to be familiarly acquainted with a great many dissolute characters; he is in debt to most of the tradespeople whom he employs; he has not paid his rent to Mr. Yatman for the last month; yesterday evening he came home excited by liquor, and last week he was seen talking to a prize-fighter; in short, though Mr. Jay does call himself a journalist, in virtue of his penny-a-line contributions to the newspapers, he is a young man of low tastes, vulgar manners, and bad habits. Nothing has yet been discovered in relation to him which redounds to his credit in the smallest degree.

I have now reported, down to the very last details, all the particulars communicated to me by Sergeant Bulmer. I believe you will not find an omission anywhere; and I think you will admit, though you are prejudiced against me, that a clearer statement of facts was never laid before you than the statement I have now made. My next duty is to tell you what I propose to do now that the case is confided to my hands.

In the first place, it is clearly my business to take up the case at the point where Sergeant Bulmer has left it. On his authority, I am justified in assuming that I have no need to trouble myself about the maid-of-all-work and the shopman. Their characters are now to be considered as cleared up. What remains to be privately investigated is the question of the guilt or innocence of Mr. Jay. Before we give up the notes for lost, we must make sure, if we can, that he knows nothing about them.

This is the plan that I have adopted, with the full approval of Mr. and Mrs. Yatman, for discovering whether Mr. Jay is or is not the person who has stolen the cash-box:

I propose to-day to present myself at the house in the character of a young man who is looking for lodgings. The back room on the second floor will be shown to me as the room to let, and I shall establish myself there to-night as a person from the country who has come to London to look for a situation in a respectable shop or office.

By this means I shall be living next to the room occupied by Mr. Jay. The partition between us is mere lath and plaster. I shall make a small hole in it, near the cornice, through which I can see what Mr. Jay does in his room, and hear every word that is said when any friend happens to call on him. Whenever he is at home, I shall be at my post of observation; whenever he goes out, I shall be after him. By employing these means of watching him, I believe I may look forward to the discovery of his secret--if he knows anything about the lost bank-notes--as to a dead certainty.

What you may think of my plan of observation I cannot undertake to say. It appears to me to unite the invaluable merits of boldness and simplicity. Fortified by this conviction, I close the present communication with feelings of the most sanguine description in regard to the future, and remain your obedient servant,

MATTHEW SHARPIN.

FROM THE SAME TO THE SAME.

7th July.

SIR--As you have not honored me with any answer to my last communication, I assume that, in spite of your prejudices against me, it has produced the favorable impression on your mind which I ventured to anticipate. Gratified and encouraged beyond measure by the token of approval which your eloquent silence conveys to me, I proceed to report the progress that has been made in the course of the last twenty-four hours.

I am now comfortably established next door to Mr. Jay, and I am delighted to say that I have two holes in the partition instead of one. My natural sense of humor has led me into the pardonable extravagance of giving them both appropriate names. One I call my peep-hole, and the other my pipe-hole. The name of the first explains itself; the name of the second refers to a small tin pipe or tube inserted in the hole, and twisted so that the mouth of it comes close to my ear while I am standing at my post of observation. Thus, while I am looking at Mr. Jay through my peep-hole, I can hear every word that may be spoken in his room through my pipe-hole.

Perfect candor--a virtue which I have possessed from my childhood--compels me to acknowledge, before I go any further, that the ingenious notion of adding a pipe-hole to my proposed peep-hole originated with Mrs. Yatman. This lady--a most intelligent and accomplished person, simple, and yet distinguished in her manners, has entered into all my little plans with an enthusiasm and intelligence which I cannot too highly praise. Mr. Yatman is so cast down by his loss that he is quite incapable of affording me any assistance. Mrs. Yatman, who is evidently most tenderly attached to him, feels her husband's sad condition of mind even more acutely than she feels the loss of the money, and is mainly stimulated to exertion by her desire to assist in raising him from the miserable state of prostration into which he has now fallen.

"The money, Mr. Sharpin," she said to me yesterday evening, with tears in her eyes, "the money may be regained by rigid economy and strict attention to business. It is my husband's wretched state of mind that makes me
so anxious for the discovery of the thief. I may be wrong, but I felt hopeful of success as soon as you entered the house; and I believe that, if the wretch who robbed us is to be found, you are the man to discover him." I accepted this gratifying compliment in the spirit in which it was offered, firmly believing that I shall be found, sooner or later, to have thoroughly deserved it.

Let me now return to business—that is to say, to my peep-hole and my pipe-hole.

I have enjoyed some hours of calm observation of Mr. Jay. Though rarely at home, as I understand from Mrs. Yatman, on ordinary occasions, he has been indoors the whole of this day. That is suspicious, to begin with. I have to report, further, that he rose at a late hour this morning (always a bad sign in a young man), and that he lost a great deal of time, after he was up, in yawning and complaining to himself of headache. Like other debauched characters, he ate little or nothing for breakfast. His next proceeding was to smoke a pipe—a dirty clay pipe, which a gentleman would have been ashamed to put between his lips. When he had done smoking he took out pen, ink and paper, and sat down to write with a groan—whether of remorse for having taken the bank-notes, or of disgust at the task before him, I am unable to say. After writing a few lines (too far away from my peep-hole to give me a chance of reading over his shoulder), he leaned back in his chair, and amused himself by humming the tunes of popular songs. I recognized "My Mary Anne," "Bobbin' Around," and "Old Dog Tray," among other melodies. Whether these do or do not represent secret signals by which he communicates with his accomplices remains to be seen. After he had amused himself for some time by humming, he got up and began to walk about the room, occasionally stopping to add a sentence to the paper on his desk. Before long he went to a locked cupboard and opened it. I strained my eyes eagerly, in expectation of making a discovery. I saw him take something carefully out of the cupboard—he turned round—and it was only a pint bottle of brandy! Having drunk some of the liquor, this extremely indolent reprobate lay down on his bed again, and in five minutes was fast asleep.

After hearing him snoring for at least two hours, I was recalled to my peep-hole by a knock at his door. He jumped up and opened it with suspicious activity.

A very small boy, with a very dirty face, walked in, said: "Please, sir, they're waiting for you," sat down on a chair with his legs a long way from the ground, and instantly fell asleep! Mr. Jay swore an oath, tied a wet towel round his head, and, going back to his paper, began to cover it with writing as fast as his fingers could move the pen. Occasionally getting up to dip the towel in water and tie it on again, he continued at this employment for nearly three hours; then folded up the leaves of writing, woke the boy, and gave them to him, with this remarkable expression: "Now, then, young sleepy-head, quick march! If you see the governor, tell him to have the money ready for me when I call for it." The boy grinned and disappeared. I was sorely tempted to follow "sleepy-head," but, on reflection, considered it safest still to keep my eye on the proceedings of Mr. Jay.

In half an hour's time he put on his hat and walked out. Of course I put on my hat and walked out also. As I went downstairs I passed Mrs. Yatman going up. The lady has been kind enough to undertake, by previous arrangement between us, to search Mr. Jay's room while he is out of the way, and while I am necessarily engaged in the pleasing duty of following him wherever he goes. On the occasion to which I now refer, he walked straight to the nearest tavern and ordered a couple of mutton-chops for his dinner. I placed myself in the next box to him, and ordered a couple of mutton-chops for my dinner. Before I had been in the room a minute, a young man of highly suspicious manners and appearance, sitting at a table opposite, took his glass of porter in his hand and joined Mr. Jay. I pretended to be reading the newspaper, and listened, as in duty bound, with all my might.

"Jack has been here inquiring after you," says the young man.

"Did he leave any message?" asks Mr. Jay.

"Yes," says the other. "He told me, if I met with you, to say that he wished very particularly to see you to-night, and that he would give you a look in at Rutherford Street at seven o'clock."

"All right," says Mr. Jay. "I'll get back in time to see him."

Upon this, the suspicious-looking young man finished his porter, and saying that he was rather in a hurry, took leave of his friend (perhaps I should not be wrong if I said his accomplice?), and left the room.

At twenty-five minutes and a half past six—in these serious cases it is important to be particular about time—Mr. Jay finished his chops and paid his bill. At twenty-six minutes and three-quarters I finished my chops and paid mine. In ten minutes more I was inside the house in Rutherford Street, and was received by Mrs. Yatman in the passage. That charming woman's face exhibited an expression of melancholy and disappointment which it quite grieved me to see.

"I am afraid, ma'am," says I, "that you have not hit on any little criminating discovery in the lodger's room?"

She shook her head and sighed. It was a soft, languid, fluttering sigh—and, upon my life, it quite upset me. For the moment I forgot business, and burned with envy of Mr. Yatman.

"Don't despair, ma'am," I said, with an insinuating mildness which seemed to touch her. "I have heard a mysterious conversation—I know of a guilty appointment—and I expect great things from my peep-hole and my pipe-
Here my enthusiastic devotion to business got the better part of my tender feelings. I looked--winked--nodded--left her.

When I got back to my observatory, I found Mr. Jay digesting his mutton-chops in an armchair, with his pipe in his mouth. On his table were two tumblers, a jug of water, and the pint bottle of brandy. It was then close upon seven o'clock. As the hour struck the person described as "Jack" walked in.

He looked agitated—I am happy to say he looked violently agitated. The cheerful glow of anticipated success diffused itself (to use a strong expression) all over me, from head to foot. With breathless interest I looked through my peep-hole, and saw the visitor--the "Jack" of this delightful case--sit down, facing me, at the opposite side of the table to Mr. Jay. Making allowance for the difference in expression which their countenances just now happened to exhibit, these two abandoned villains were so much alike in other respects as to lead at once to the conclusion that they were brothers. Jack was the cleaner man and the better dressed of the two, I admit that, at the outset. It is, perhaps, one of my failings to push justice and impartiality to their utmost limits. I am no Pharisee; and where Vice has its redeeming point, I say, let Vice have its due--yes, by all manner of means, let Vice have its due.

"What's the matter now, Jack?" says Mr. Jay.
"Can't you see it in my face?" says Jack. "My dear fellow, delays are dangerous. Let us have done with suspense, and risk it, the day after to-morrow."

"So soon as that?" cries Mr. Jay, looking very much astonished. "Well, I'm ready, if you are. But, I say, Jack, is somebody else ready too? Are you quite sure of that?"

He smiled as he spoke--a frightful smile--and laid a very strong emphasis on those two words, "Somebody else." There is evidently a third ruffian, a nameless desperado, concerned in the business.

"Meet us to-morrow," says Jack, "and judge for yourself. Be in the Regent's Park at eleven in the morning, and look out for us at the turning that leads to the Avenue Road."

"I'll be there," says Mr. Jay. "Have a drop of brandy-and-water? What are you getting up for? You're not going already?"

"Yes, I am," says Jack. "The fact is, I'm so excited and agitated that I can't sit still anywhere for five minutes together. Ridiculous as it may appear to you, I'm in a perpetual state of nervous flutter. I can't, for the life of me, help fearing that we shall be found out. I fancy that every man who looks twice at me in the street is a spy--"

At these words I thought my legs would have given way under me. Nothing but strength of mind kept me at my peep-hole--nothing else, I give you my word of honor.

"Stuff and nonsense!" cries Mr. Jay, with all the effrontery of a veteran in crime. "We have kept the secret up to this time, and we will manage cleverly to the end. Have a drop of brandy-and-water, and you will feel as certain about it as I do."

Jack steadily refused the brandy-and-water, and steadily persisted in taking his leave.

"I must try if I can't walk it off," he said. "Remember to-morrow morning--eleven o'clock, Avenue Road, side of the Regent's Park."

With those words he went out. His hardened relative laughed desperately and resumed the dirty clay pipe.

It is clear to me that no attempt has yet been made to change the stolen bank-notes, and I may add that Sergeant Bulmer was of that opinion also when he left the case in my hands. What is the natural conclusion to draw from the conversation which I have just set down? Evidently that the confederates meet to-morrow to take their respective shares in the stolen money, and to decide on the safest means of getting the notes changed the day after. Mr. Jay is, beyond a doubt, the leading criminal in this business, and he will probably run the chief risk—that of changing the fifty-pound note. I shall, therefore, still make it my business to follow him--attending at the Regent's Park to-morrow, and doing my best to hear what is said there. If another appointment is made for the day after, I shall, of course, go to it. In the meantime, I shall want the immediate assistance of two competent persons (supposing the rascals separate after their meeting) to follow the two minor criminals. It is only fair to add that, if the rogues all retire together, I shall probably keep my subordinates in reserve. Being naturally ambitious, I desire, if possible, to have the whole credit of discovering this robbery to myself.

8th July.

I have to acknowledge, with thanks, the speedy arrival of my two subordinates—men of very average abilities, I am afraid; but, fortunately, I shall always be on the spot to direct them.

My first business this morning was necessarily to prevent possible mistakes by accounting to Mr. and Mrs. Yatman for the presence of two strangers on the scene. Mr. Yatman (between ourselves, a poor, feeble man) only shook his head and groaned. Mrs. Yatman (that superior woman) favored me with a charming look of intelligence.

"Oh, Mr. Sharpin!" she said, "I am so sorry to see those two men! Your sending for their assistance looks as if
you were beginning to be doubtful of success."

I privately winked at her (she is very good in allowing me to do so without taking offense), and told her, in my facetious way, that she labored under a slight mistake.

"It is because I am sure of success, ma'am, that I send for them. I am determined to recover the money, not for my own sake only, but for Mr. Yatman's sake--and for yours."

I laid a considerable amount of stress on those last three words. She said: "Oh, Mr. Sharpin!" again, and blushed of a heavenly red, and looked down at her work. I could go to the world's end with that woman if Mr. Yatman would only die.

I sent off the two subordinates to wait until I wanted them at the Avenue Road gate of the Regent's Park. Half-an-hour afterward I was following the same direction myself at the heels of Mr. Jay.

The two confederates were punctual to the appointed time. I blush to record it, but it is nevertheless necessary to state that the third rogue--the nameless desperado of my report, or, if you prefer it, the mysterious "somebody else" of the conversation between the two brothers--is--a woman! and, what is worse, a young woman! and, what is more lamentable still, a nice-looking woman! I have long resisted a growing conviction that, wherever there is mischief in this world, an individual of the fair sex is inevitably certain to be mixed up in it. After the experience of this morning, I can struggle against that sad conclusion no longer. I give up the sex--excepting Mrs. Yatman, I give up the sex.

The man named "Jack" offered the woman his arm. Mr. Jay placed himself on the other side of her. The three then walked away slowly among the trees. I followed them at a respectful distance. My two subordinates, at a respectful distance, also, followed me.

It was, I deeply regret to say, impossible to get near enough to them to overhear their conversation without running too great a risk of being discovered. I could only infer from their gestures and actions that they were all three talking with extraordinary earnestness on some subject which deeply interested them. After having been engaged in this way a full quarter of an hour, they suddenly turned round to retrace their steps. My presence of mind did not forsake me in this emergency. I signed to the two subordinates to walk on carelessly and pass them, while I myself slipped dexterously behind a tree. As they came by me, I heard "Jack" address these words to Mr. Jay:

"Let us say half-past ten to-morrow morning. And mind you come in a cab. We had better not risk taking one in this neighborhood."

Mr. Jay made some brief reply which I could not overhear. They walked back to the place at which they had met, shaking hands there with an audacious cordiality which it quite sickened me to see. They then separated. I followed Mr. Jay. My subordinates paid the same delicate attention to the other two.

Instead of taking me back to Rutherford Street, Mr. Jay led me to the Strand. He stopped at a dingy, disreputable-looking house, which, according to the inscription over the door, was a newspaper office, but which, in my judgment, had all the external appearance of a place devoted to the reception of stolen goods.

After remaining inside for a few minutes, he came out whistling, with his finger and thumb in his waistcoat pocket. Some men would now have arrested him on the spot. I remembered the necessity of catching the two confederates, and the importance of not interfering with the appointment that had been made for the next morning. Such coolness as this, under trying circumstances, is rarely to be found, I should imagine, in a young beginner, whose reputation as a detective policeman is still to make.

From the house of suspicious appearance Mr. Jay betook himself to a cigar-divan, and read the magazines over a cheroot. From the divan he strolled to the tavern and had his chops. I strolled to the tavern and had my chops. When he had done he went back to his lodging. When I had done I went back to mine. He was overcome with drowsiness early in the evening, and went to bed. As soon as I heard him snoring, I was overcome with drowsiness and went to bed also.

Early in the morning my two subordinates came to make their report.

They had seen the man named "Jack" leave the woman at the gate of an apparently respectable villa residence not far from the Regent's Park. Left to himself, he took a turning to the right, which led to a sort of suburban street, principally inhabited by shopkeepers. He stopped at the private door of one of the houses, and let himself in with his own key--looking about him as he opened the door, and staring suspiciously at my men as they lounged along on the opposite side of the way. These were all the particulars which the subordinates had to communicate. I kept them in my room to attend on me, if needful, and mounted to my peep-hole to have a look at Mr. Jay.

He was occupied in dressing himself, and was taking extraordinary pains to destroy all traces of the natural slovenliness of his appearance. This was precisely what I expected. A vagabond like Mr. Jay knows the importance of giving himself a respectable look when he is going to run the risk of changing a stolen bank-note. At five minutes past ten o'clock he had given the last brush to his shabby hat and the last scouring with bread-crumb to his dirty gloves. At ten minutes past ten he was in the street, on his way to the nearest cab-stand, and I and my subordinates
were close on his heels.

He took a cab and we took a cab. I had not overheard them appoint a place of meeting when following them in the Park on the previous day, but I soon found that we were proceeding in the old direction of the Avenue Road gate. The cab in which Mr. Jay was riding turned into the Park slowly. We stopped outside, to avoid exciting suspicion. I got out to follow the cab on foot. Just as I did so, I saw it stop, and detected the two confederates approaching it from among the trees. They got in, and the cab was turned about directly. I ran back to my own cab and told the driver to let them pass him, and then to follow as before.

The man obeyed my directions, but so clumsily as to excite their suspicions. We had been driving after them about three minutes (returning along the road by which we had advanced) when I looked out of the window to see how far they might be ahead of us. As I did this, I saw two hats popped out of the windows of their cab, and two faces looking back at me. I sank into my place in a cold sweat; the expression is coarse, but no other form of words can describe my condition at that trying moment.

"We are found out!" I said, faintly, to my two subordinates. They stared at me in astonishment. My feelings changed instantly from the depth of despair to the height of indignation.

"It is the cabman's fault. Get out, one of you," I said, with dignity--"get out, and punch his head."

Instead of following my directions (I should wish this act of disobedience to be reported at headquarters) they both looked out of the window. Before I could pull them back they both sat down again. Before I could express my just indignation, they both grinned, and said to me: "Please to look out, sir!"

I did look out. Their cab had stopped.

Where?

At a church door!

What effect this discovery might have had upon the ordinary run of men I don't know. Being of a strong religious turn myself, it filled me with horror. I have often read of the unprincipled cunning of criminal persons, but I never before heard of three thieves attempting to double on their pursuers by entering a church! The sacrilegious audacity of that proceeding is, I should think, unparalleled in the annals of crime.

I checked my grinning subordinates by a frown. It was easy to see what was passing in their superficial minds. If I had not been able to look below the surface, I might, on observing two nicely dressed men and one nicely dressed woman enter a church before eleven in the morning on a week day, have come to the same hasty conclusion at which my inferiors had evidently arrived. As it was, appearances had no power to impose on _me_. I got out, and, followed by one of my men, entered the church. The other man I sent round to watch the vestry door. You may catch a weasel asleep, but not your humble servant, Matthew Sharpin!

We stole up the gallery stairs, diverged to the organ-loft, and peered through the curtains in front. There they were, all three, sitting in a pew below--yes, incredible as it may appear, sitting in a pew below!

Before I could determine what to do, a clergyman made his appearance in full canonicals from the vestry door, followed by a clerk. My brain whirled and my eyesight grew dim. Dark remembrances of robberies committed in vestries floated through my mind. I trembled for the excellent man in full canonicals--I even trembled for the clerk.

The clergyman placed himself inside the altar rails. The three desperadoes approached him. He opened his book and began to read. What? you will ask.

I answer, without the slightest hesitation, the first lines of the Marriage Service.

My subordinate had the audacity to look at me, and then to stuff his pocket-handkerchief into his mouth. I scorned to pay any attention to him. After I had discovered that the man "Jack" was the bridegroom, and that the man Jay acted the part of father, and gave away the bride, I left the church, followed by my men, and joined the other subordinate outside the vestry door. Some people in my position would now have felt rather crestfallen, and would have begun to think that they had made a very foolish mistake. Not the faintest misgiving of any kind troubled me. I did not feel in the slightest degree depreciated in my own estimation. And even now, after a lapse of three hours, my mind remains, I am happy to say, in the same calm and hopeful condition.

As soon as I and my subordinates were assembled together outside the church, I intimated my intention of still following the other cab in spite of what had occurred. My reason for deciding on this course will appear presently. The two subordinates appeared to be astonished at my resolution. One of them had the impertinence to say to me:

"If you please, sir, who is it that we are after? A man who has stolen money, or a man who has stolen a wife?"

The other low person encouraged him by laughing. Both have deserved an official reprimand, and both, I sincerely trust, will be sure to get it.

When the marriage ceremony was over, the three got into their cab and once more our vehicle (neatly hidden round the corner of the church, so that they could not suspect it to be near them) started to follow theirs.

We traced them to the terminus of the Southwestern Railway. The newly-married couple took tickets for Richmond, paying their fare with a half sovereign, and so depriving me of the pleasure of arresting them, which I
should certainly have done if they had offered a bank-note. They parted from Mr. Jay, saying: "Remember the address—14 Babylon Terrace. You dine with us to-morrow week." Mr. Jay accepted the invitation, and added, jocosely, that he was going home at once to get off his clean clothes, and to be comfortable and dirty again for the rest of the day. I have to report that I saw him home safely, and that he is comfortable and dirty again (to use his own disgraceful language) at the present moment.

Here the affair rests, having by this time reached what I may call its first stage.

I know very well what persons of hasty judgment will be inclined to say of my proceedings thus far. They will assert that I have been deceiving myself all through in the most absurd way; they will declare that the suspicious conversations which I have reported referred solely to the difficulties and dangers of successfully carrying out a runaway match; and they will appeal to the scene in the church as offering undeniable proof of the correctness of their assertions. So let it be. I dispute nothing up to this point. But I ask a question, out of the depths of my own sagacity as a man of the world, which the bitterest of my enemies will not, I think, find it particularly easy to answer.

 Granted the fact of the marriage, what proof does it afford me of the innocence of the three persons concerned in that clandestine transaction? It gives me none. On the contrary, it strengthens my suspicions against Mr. Jay and his confederates, because it suggests a distinct motive for their stealing the money. A gentleman who is going to spend his honeymoon at Richmond wants money; and a gentleman who is in debt to all his tradespeople wants money. Is this an unjustifiable imputation of bad motives? In the name of outraged Morality, I deny it. These men have combined together, and have stolen a woman. Why should they not combine together and steal a cash-box? I take my stand on the logic of rigid Virtue, and I defy all the sophistry of Vice to move me an inch out of my position.

Speaking of virtue, I may add that I have put this view of the case to Mr. and Mrs. Yatman. That accomplished and charming woman found it difficult at first to follow the close chain of my reasoning. I am free to confess that she shook her head, and shed tears, and joined her husband in premature lamentation over the loss of the two hundred pounds. But a little careful explanation on my part, and a little attentive listening on hers, ultimately changed her opinion. She now agrees with me that there is nothing in this unexpected circumstance of the clandestine marriage which absolutely tends to divert suspicion from Mr. Jay, or Mr. "Jack," or the runaway lady. "Audacious hussy" was the term my fair friend used in speaking of her; but let that pass. It is more to the purpose to record that Mrs. Yatman has not lost confidence in me, and that Mr. Yatman promises to follow her example, and do his best to look hopefully for future results.

I have now, in the new turn that circumstances have taken, to await advice from your office. I pause for fresh orders with all the composure of a man who has got two strings to his bow. When I traced the three confederates from the church door to the railway terminus, I had two motives for doing so. First, I followed them as a matter of official business, believing them still to have been guilty of the robbery. Secondly, I followed them as a matter of private speculation, with a view of discovering the place of refuge to which the runaway couple intended to retreat, and of making my information a marketable commodity to offer to the young lady's family and friends. Thus, whatever happens, I may congratulate myself beforehand on not having wasted my time. If the office approves of my conduct, I have my plan ready for further proceedings. If the office blames me, I shall take myself off, with my marketable information, to the genteel villa residence in the neighborhood of the Regent's Park. Anyway, the affair puts money into my pocket, and does credit to my penetration as an uncommonly sharp man.

I have only one word more to add, and it is this: If any individual ventures to assert that Mr. Jay and his confederates are innocent of all share in the stealing of the cash-box, I, in return, defy that individual—though he may even be Chief Inspector Theakstone himself—to tell me who has committed the robbery at Rutherford Street, Soho.

Strong in that conviction, I have the honor to be your very obedient servant,
MATTHEW SHARPIN.
FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE TO SERGEANT BULMER.
Birmingham, July 9th.

SERGEANT BULMER--That empty-headed puppy, Mr. Matthew Sharpin, has made a mess of the case at Rutherford Street, exactly as I expected he would. Business keeps me in this town, so I write to you to set the matter straight. I inclose with this the pages of feeble scribble-scrabble which the creature Sharpin calls a report. Look them over; and when you have made your way through all the gabble, I think you will agree with me that the conceited booby has looked for the thief in every direction but the right one. You can lay your hand on the guilty person in five minutes, now. Settle the case at once; forward your report to me at this place, and tell Mr. Sharpin that he is suspended till further notice.

Yours, FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.
FROM SERGEANT BULMER TO CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE.
London, July 10th.

INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE--Your letter and inclosure came safe to hand. Wise men, they say, may always learn something even from a fool. By the time I had got through Sharpin's maundering report of his own folly, I saw my way clear enough to the end of the Rutherford Street case, just as you thought I should. In half an hour's time I was at the house. The first person I saw there was Mr. Sharpin himself.

"Have you come to help me?" says he.

"Not exactly," says I. "I've come to tell you that you are suspended till further notice."

"Very good," says he, not taken down by so much as a single peg in his own estimation. "I thought you would be jealous of me. It's very natural and I don't blame you. Walk in, pray, and make yourself at home. I'm off to do a little detective business on my own account, in the neighborhood of the Regent's Park. Ta--ta, sergeant, ta--ta!"

With those words he took himself out of the way, which was exactly what I wanted him to do.

As soon as the maid-servant had shut the door, I told her to inform her master that I wanted to say a word to him in private. She showed me into the parlor behind the shop, and there was Mr. Yatman all alone, reading the newspaper.

"About this matter of the robbery, sir," says I.

He cut me short, peevishly enough, being naturally a poor, weak, womanish sort of man.

"Yes, yes, I know," says he. "You have come to tell me that your wonderfully clever man, who has bored holes in my second floor partition, has made a mistake, and is off the scent of the scoundrel who has stolen my money."

"Yes, sir," says I. "That is one of the things I came to tell you. But I have got something else to say besides that."

"Can you tell me who the thief is?" says he, more pettish than ever.

"Yes, sir," says I, "I think I can."

He put down the newspaper, and began to look rather anxious and frightened.

"Not my shopman?" says he. "I hope, for the man's own sake, it's not my shopman."

"Guess again, sir," says I.

"That idle slut, the maid?" says he.

"She is idle, sir," says I, "and she is also a slut; my first inquiries about her proved as much as that. But she's not the thief."

"Then, in the name of Heaven, who is?" says he.

"Will you please to prepare yourself for a very disagreeable surprise, sir?" says I. "And, in case you lose your temper, will you excuse my remarking that I am the stronger man of the two, and that if you allow yourself to lay hands on me, I may unintentionally hurt you, in pure self-defense."

He turned as pale as ashes, and pushed his chair two or three feet away from me.

"You have asked me to tell you, sir, who has taken your money," I went on. "If you insist on my giving you an answer--"

"I do insist," he said, faintly. "Who has taken it?"

"Your wife has taken it," I said, very quietly, and very positively at the same time.

He jumped out of the chair as if I had put a knife into him, and struck his fist on the table so heavily that the wood cracked again.

"Steady, sir," says I. "Flying into a passion won't help you to the truth."

"It's a lie!" says he, with another smack of his fist on the table--"a base, vile, infamous lie! How dare you--"

He stopped, and fell back into the chair again, looked about him in a bewildered way, and ended by bursting out crying.

"When your better sense comes back to you, sir," says I, "I am sure you will be gentleman enough to make an apology for the language you have just used. In the meantime, please to listen, if you can, to a word of explanation. Mr. Sharpin has sent in a report to our inspector of the most irregular and ridiculous kind, setting down not only all his own foolish doings and sayings, but the doings and sayings of Mrs. Yatman as well. In most cases, such a document would have been fit only for the waste paper basket; but in this particular case it so happens that Mr. Sharpin's budget of nonsense leads to a certain conclusion, which the simpleton of a writer has been quite innocent of suspecting from the beginning to the end. Of that conclusion I am so sure that I will forfeit my place if it does not turn out that Mrs. Yatman has been practicing upon the folly and conceit of this young man, and that she has tried to shield herself from discovery by purposely encouraging him to suspect the wrong persons. I tell you that confidently; and I will even go further. I will undertake to give a decided opinion as to why Mrs. Yatman took the money, and what she has done with it, or with a part of it. Nobody can look at that lady, sir, without being struck by the great taste and beauty of her dress--"

As I said those last words, the poor man seemed to find his powers of speech again. He cut me short directly as
haughtily as if he had been a duke instead of a stationer.

"Try some other means of justifying your vile calumny against my wife," says he. "Her milliner's bill for the past year is on my file of receipted accounts at this moment."

"Excuse me, sir," says I, "but that proves nothing. Milliners, I must tell you, have a certain rascally custom which comes within the daily experience of our office. A married lady who wishes it can keep two accounts at her dressmaker's; one is the account which her husband sees and pays; the other is the private account, which contains all the extravagant items, and which the wife pays secretly, by installments, whenever she can. According to our usual experience, these installments are mostly squeezed out of the housekeeping money. In your case, I suspect, no installments have been paid; proceedings have been threatened; Mrs. Yatman, knowing your altered circumstances, has felt herself driven into a corner, and she has paid her private account out of your cash-box."

"I won't believe it," says he. "Every word you speak is an abominable insult to me and to my wife."

Are you man enough, sir," says I, taking him up short, in order to save time and words, "to get that receipted bill you spoke of just now off the file, and come with me at once to the milliner's shop where Mrs. Yatman deals?"

He turned red in the face at that, got the bill directly, and put on his hat. I took out of my pocket-book the list containing the numbers of the lost notes, and we left the house together immediately.

Arrived at the milliner's (one of the expensive West-End houses, as I expected), I asked for a private interview, on important business, with the mistress of the concern. It was not the first time that she and I had met over the same delicate investigation. The moment she set eyes on me she sent for her husband. I mentioned who Mr. Yatman was, and what we wanted.

"This is strictly private?" inquires the husband. I nodded my head.

"And confidential?" says the wife. I nodded again.

"Do you see any objection, dear, to obliging the sergeant with a sight of the books?" says the husband.

"None in the world, love, if you approve of it," says the wife.

All this while poor Mr. Yatman sat looking the picture of astonishment and distress, quite out of place at our polite conference. The books were brought, and one minute's look at the pages in which Mrs. Yatman's name figured was enough, and more than enough, to prove the truth of every word that I had spoken.

There, in one book, was the husband's account which Mr. Yatman had settled; and there, in the other, was the private account, crossed off also, the date of settlement being the very day after the loss of the cash-box. This said private account amounted to the sum of a hundred and seventy-five pounds, odd shillings, and it extended over a period of three years. Not a single installment had been paid on it. Under the last line was an entry to this effect: "Written to for the third time, June 23d." I pointed to it, and asked the milliner if that meant "last June." Yes, it did mean last June; and she now deeply regretted to say that it had been accompanied by a threat of legal proceedings.

"I thought you gave good customers more than three years' credit?" says I.

The milliner looks at Mr. Yatman, and whispers to me, "Not when a lady's husband gets into difficulties."

She pointed to the account as she spoke. The entries after the time when Mr. Yatman's circumstances became involved were just as extravagant, for a person in his wife's situation, as the entries for the year before that period. If the lady had economized in other things, she had certainly not economized in the matter of dress.

There was nothing left now but to examine the cash-book, for form's sake. The money had been paid in notes, the amounts and numbers of which exactly tallied with the figures set down in my list.

After that, I thought it best to get Mr. Yatman out of the house immediately. He was in such a pitiable condition that I called a cab and accompanied him home in it. At first he cried and raved like a child; but I soon quieted him; and I must add, to his credit, that he made me a most handsome apology for his language as the cab drew up at his house door. In return, I tried to give him some advice about how to set matters right for the future with his wife. He paid very little attention to me, and went upstairs muttering to himself about a separation. Whether Mrs. Yatman will come cleverly out of the scrape or not seems doubtful. I should say myself that she would go into screeching hysterics, and so frighten the poor man into forgiving her. But this is no business of ours. So far as we are concerned, the case is now at an end, and the present report may come to a conclusion along with it.

I remain, accordingly, yours to command,

THOMAS BULMER.

_P.S._--I have to add that, on leaving Rutherford Street, I met Mr. Matthew Sharpin coming to pack up his things.

"Only think!" says he, rubbing his hands in great spirits, "I've been to the genteel villa residence, and the moment I mentioned my business they kicked me out directly. There were two witnesses of the assault, and it's worth a hundred pounds to me if it's worth a farthing."

"I wish you joy of your luck," says I.

"Thank you," says he. "When may I pay you the same compliment on finding the thief?"
"Whenever you like," says I, "for the thief is found."

"Just what I expected," says he. "I've done all the work, and now you cut in and claim all the credit--Mr. Jay, of course."

"No," says I.

"Who is it then?" says he.

"Ask Mrs. Yatman," says I. "She's waiting to tell you."

"All right! I'd much rather hear it from that charming woman than from you," says he, and goes into the house in a mighty hurry.

What do you think of that, Inspector Theakstone? Would you like to stand in Mr. Sharpin's shoes? I shouldn't, I can promise you.

FROM CHIEF INSPECTOR THEAKSTONE TO MR. MATTHEW SHARPIN.

July 12th.

SIR--Sergeant Bulmer has already told you to consider yourself suspended until further notice. I have now authority to add that your services as a member of the Detective police are positively declined. You will please to take this letter as notifying officially your dismissal from the force.

I may inform you, privately, that your rejection is not intended to cast any reflections on your character. It merely implies that you are not quite sharp enough for our purposes. If we _are_ to have a new recruit among us, we should infinitely prefer Mrs. Yatman.

Your obedient servant,

FRANCIS THEAKSTONE.

NOTE ON THE PRECEDING CORRESPONDENCE, ADDED BY MR. THEAKSTONE.

The inspector is not in a position to append any explanations of importance to the last of the letters. It has been discovered that Mr. Matthew Sharpin left the house in Rutherford Street five minutes after his interview outside of it with Sergeant Bulmer, his manner expressing the liveliest emotions of terror and astonishment, and his left cheek displaying a bright patch of red, which looked as if it might have been the result of what is popularly termed a smart box on the ear. He was also heard by the shopman at Rutherford Street to use a very shocking expression in reference to Mrs. Yatman, and was seen to clinch his fist vindictively as he ran round the corner of the street. Nothing more has been heard of him; and it is conjectured that he has left London with the intention of offering his valuable services to the provincial police.

On the interesting domestic subject of Mr. and Mrs. Yatman still less is known. It has, however, been positively ascertained that the medical attendant of the family was sent for in a great hurry on the day when Mr. Yatman returned from the milliner's shop. The neighboring chemist received, soon afterward, a prescription of a soothing nature to make up for Mrs. Yatman. The day after, Mr. Yatman purchased some smelling-salts at the shop, and afterward appeared at the circulating library to ask for a novel descriptive of high life that would amuse an invalid lady. It has been inferred from these circumstances that he has not thought it desirable to carry out his threat of separating from his wife, at least in the present (presumed) condition of that lady's sensitive nervous system.

THE SEVENTH DAY.

FINE enough for our guest to go out again. Long, feathery lines of white cloud are waving upward in the sky, a sign of coming wind.

There was a steamer telegraphed yesterday from the West Indies. When the next vessel is announced from abroad, will it be George's ship?

I don't know how my brothers feel to-day, but the sudden cessation of my own literary labors has left me still in bad spirits. I tried to occupy my mind by reading, but my attention wandered. I went out into the garden, but it looked dreary; the autumn flowers were few and far between--the lawn was soaked and sodden with yesterday's rain. I wandered into Owen's room. He had returned to his painting, but was not working, as it struck me, with his customary assiduity and his customary sense of enjoyment.

We had a long talk together about George and Jessie and the future. Owen urged me to risk speaking of my son in her presence once more, on the chance of making her betray herself on a second occasion, and I determined to take his advice. But she was in such high spirits when she came home to dinner on this Seventh Day, and seemed so incapable, for the time being, of either feeling or speaking seriously, that I thought it wiser to wait till her variable mood altered again with the next wet day.

The number drawn this evening was Eight, being the number of the story which it had cost Owen so much labor to write. He looked a little fluttered and anxious as he opened the manuscript. This was the first occasion on which his ability as a narrator was to be brought to the test, and I saw him glance nervously at Jessie's attentive face.

"I need not trouble you with much in the way of preface," he said. "This is the story of a very remarkable event in the life of one of my brother clergymen. He and I became acquainted through being associated with each other in
the management of a Missionary Society. I saw him for the last time in London when he was about to leave his country and his friends forever, and was then informed of the circumstances which have afforded the material for this narrative.

BROTHER OWEN'S STORY
of
THE PARSON'S SCRUPLE.
CHAPTER I.

If you had been in the far West of England about thirteen years since, and if you had happened to take up one of the Cornish newspapers on a certain day of the month, which need not be specially mentioned, you would have seen this notice of a marriage at the top of a column:

On the third instant, at the parish church, the Reverend Alfred Carling, Rector of Penliddy, to Emily Harriet, relict of the late Fergus Duncan, Esq., of Glendarn, N. B.

The rector's marriage did not produce a very favorable impression in the town, solely in consequence of the unaccountable private and unpretending manner in which the ceremony had been performed. The middle-aged bride and bridegroom had walked quietly to church one morning, had been married by the curate before any one was aware of it, and had embarked immediately afterward in the steamer for Tenby, where they proposed to pass their honeymoon. The bride being a stranger at Penliddy, all inquiries about her previous history were fruitless, and the townspeople had no alternative but to trust to their own investigations for enlightenment when the rector and his wife came home to settle among their friends.

After six weeks' absence Mr. and Mrs. Carling returned, and the simple story of the rector's courtship and marriage was gathered together in fragments, by inquisitive friends, from his own lips and from the lips of his wife.

Mr. Carling and Mrs. Duncan had met at Torquay. The rector, who had exchanged houses and duties for the season with a brother clergyman settled at Torquay, had called on Mrs. Duncan in his clerical capacity, and had come away from the interview deeply impressed and interested by the widow's manners and conversation. The visits were repeated; the acquaintance grew into friendship, and the friendship into love--ardent, devoted love on both sides.

Middle-aged man though he was, this was Mr. Carling's first attachment, and it was met by the same freshness of feeling on the lady's part. Her life with her first husband had not been a happy one. She had made the fatal mistake of marrying to please her parents rather than herself, and had repented it ever afterward. On her husband's death his family had not behaved well to her, and she had passed her widowhood, with her only child, a daughter, in the retirement of a small Scotch town many miles away from the home of her married life. After a time the little girl's health had begun to fail, and, by the doctor's advice, she had migrated southward to the mild climate of Torquay. The change had proved to be of no avail; and, rather more than a year since, the child had died. The place where her darling was buried was a sacred place to her and she remained a resident at Torquay. Her position in the world was now a lonely one. She was herself an only child; her father and mother were both dead; and, excepting cousins, her one near relation left alive was a maternal uncle living in London.

These particulars were all related simply and unaffectedly before Mr. Carling ventured on the confession of his attachment. When he made his proposal of marriage, Mrs. Duncan received it with an excess of agitation which astonished and almost alarmed the inexperienced clergyman. As soon as she could speak, she begged with extraordinary earnestness and anxiety for a week to consider her answer, and requested Mr. Carling not to visit her on any account until the week for consideration had expired.

The next morning she and her maid departed for London. They did not return until the week for consideration had expired. On the eighth day Mr. Carling called again and was accepted.

The proposal to make the marriage as private as possible came from the lady. She had been to London to consult her uncle (whose health, she regretted to say, would not allow him to travel to Cornwall to give his niece away at the altar), and he agreed with Mrs. Duncan that the wedding could not be too private and unpretending. If it was made public, the family of her first husband would expect cards to be sent to them, and a renewal of intercourse, which would be painful on both sides, might be the consequence. Other friends in Scotland, again, would resent her marrying a second time at her age, and would distress her and annoy her future husband in many ways. She was anxious to break altogether with her past existence, and to begin a new and happier life untrammeled by any connection with former times and troubles. She urged these points, as she had received the offer of marriage, with an agitation which was almost painful to see. This peculiarity in her conduct, however, which might have irritated some men, and rendered others distrustful, had no unfavorable effect on Mr. Carling. He set it down to an excess of sensitiveness and delicacy which charmed him. He was himself--though he never would confess it--a shy, nervous man by nature. Ostentation of any sort was something which he shrank from instinctively, even in the simplest affairs of daily life; and his future wife's proposal to avoid all the usual ceremony and publicity of a wedding was
therefore more than agreeable to him—it was a positive relief.

The courtship was kept secret at Torquay, and the marriage was celebrated privately at Penliddy. It found its way into the local newspapers as a matter of course, but it was not, as usual in such cases, also advertised in the _Times_. Both husband and wife were equally happy in the enjoyment of their new life, and equally unsocial in taking no measures whatever to publish it to others.

Such was the story of the rector's marriage. Socially, Mr. Carling's position was but little affected either way by the change in his life. As a bachelor, his circle of friends had been a small one, and when he married he made no attempt to enlarge it. He had never been popular with the inhabitants of his parish generally. Essentially a weak man, he was, like other weak men, only capable of asserting himself positively in serious matters by running into extremes. As a consequence of this moral defect, he presented some singular anomalies in character. In the ordinary affairs of life he was the gentlest and most yielding of men, but in all that related to strictness of religious principle he was the sternest and the most aggressive of fanatics. In the pulpit he was a preacher of merciless sermons—an interpreter of the Bible by the letter rather than by the spirit, as pitiless and gloomy as one of the Puritans of old; while, on the other hand, by his own fireside he was considerate, forbearing, and humble almost to a fault. As a necessary result of this singular inconsistency of character, he was feared, and sometimes even disliked, by the members of his congregation who only knew him as their pastor, and he was prized and loved by the small circle of friends who also knew him as a man.

Those friends gathered round him more closely and more affectionately than ever after his marriage, not on his own account only, but influenced also by the attractions that they found in the society of his wife. Her refinement and gentleness of manner; her extraordinary accomplishments as a musician; her unvarying sweetness of temper, and her quick, winning, womanly intelligence in conversation, charmed every one who approached her. She was quoted as a model wife and woman by all her husband's friends, and she amply deserved the character that they gave her. Although no children came to cheer it, a happier and a more admirable married life has seldom been witnessed in this world than the life which was once to be seen in the rectory house at Penliddy.

With these necessary explanations, that preliminary part of my narrative of which the events may be massed together generally, for brevity's sake, comes to a close. What I have next to tell is of a deeper and a more serious interest, and must be carefully related in detail.

The rector and his wife had lived together without, as I honestly believe, a harsh word or an unkind look once passing between them for upward of two years, when Mr. Carling took his first step toward the fatal future that was awaiting him by devoting his leisure hours to the apparently simple and harmless occupation of writing a pamphlet.

He had been connected for many years with one of our great Missionary Societies, and had taken as active a part as a country clergyman could in the management of its affairs. At the period of which I speak, certain influential members of the society had proposed a plan for greatly extending the sphere of its operations, trusting to a proportionate increase in the annual subscriptions to defray the additional expenses of the new movement. The question was not now brought forward for the first time. It had been agitated eight years previously, and the settlement of it had been at that time deferred to a future opportunity. The revival of the project, as usual in such cases, split the working members of the society into two parties; one party cautiously objecting to run any risks, the other hopefully declaring that the venture was a safe one, and that success was sure to attend it. Mr. Carling sided enthusiastically with the members who espoused this latter side of the question, and the object of his pamphlet was to address the subscribers to the society on the subject, and so to interest them in it as to win their charitable support, on a larger scale than usual, to the new project.

He had worked hard at his pamphlet, and had got more than half way through it, when he found himself brought to a stand-still for want of certain facts which had been produced on the discussion of the question eight years since, and which were necessary to the full and fair statement of his case.

At first he thought of writing to the secretary of the society for information; but, remembering that he had not held his office more than two years, he had thought it little likely that this gentleman would be able to help him, and looked back to his own Diary of the period to see if he had made any notes in it relating to the original discussion of the affair. He found a note referring in general terms only to the matter in hand, but alluding at the end to a report in the _Times_ of the proceedings of a deputation from the society which had waited on a member of the government of that day, and to certain letters to the editor which had followed the publication of the report. The note described these letters as "very important," and Mr. Carling felt, as he put his Diary away again, that the successful conclusion of his pamphlet now depended on his being able to get access to the back numbers of the _Times_ of eight years since.

It was winter time when he was thus stopped in his work, and the prospect of a journey to London (the only place he knew of at which files of the paper were to be found) did not present many attractions; and yet he could see no other and easier means of effecting his object. After considering for a little while and arriving at no positive
He found her working industriously by the blazing fire. She looked so happy and comfortable—so gentle and charming in her pretty little lace cap, and her warm brown morning-dress, with its bright cherry-colored ribbons, and its delicate swan's down trimming circling round her neck and nestling over her bosom, that he stooped and kissed her with the tenderness of his bridegroom days before he spoke. When he told her of the cause that had suspended his literary occupation, she listened, with the sensation of the kiss still lingering in her downcast eyes and her smiling lips, until he came to the subject of his Diary and its reference to the newspaper.

As he mentioned the name of the _Times_ she altered and looked him straight in the face gravely.

"Can you suggest any plan, love," he went on, "which may save me the necessity of a journey to London at this bleak time of the year? I must positively have this information, and, so far as I can see, London is the only place at which I can hope to meet with a file of the _Times_.

"A file of the _Times?" she repeated.

"Yes—of eight years since," he said.

The instant the words passed his lips he saw her face overspread by a ghastly paleness; her eyes fixed on him with a strange mixture of rigidity and vacancy in their look; her hands, with her work held tight in them, dropped slowly on her lap, and a shiver ran through her from head to foot.

He sprang to his feet, and snatched the smelling-salts from her work-table, thinking she was going to faint. She put the bottle from her, when he offered it, with a hand that thrilled him with the deadly coldness of its touch, and said, in a whisper:

"A sudden chill, dear—let me go upstairs and lie down."

He took her to her room. As he laid her down on the bed, she caught his hand, and said, entreatingly:

"You won't go to London, darling, and leave me here ill?"

He promised that nothing should separate him from her until she was well again, and then ran downstairs to send for the doctor. The doctor came, and pronounced that Mrs. Carling was only suffering from a nervous attack; that there was not the least reason to be alarmed; and that, with proper care, she would be well again in a few days.

Both husband and wife had a dinner engagement in the town for that evening. Mr. Carling proposed to write an apology and to remain with his wife. But she would not hear of his abandoning the party on her account. The doctor also recommended that his patient should be left to her maid's care, to fall asleep under the influence of the quieting medicine which he meant to give her. Yielding to this advice, Mr. Carling did his best to suppress his own anxieties, and went to the dinner-party.

CHAPTER II.

AMONG the guests whom the rector met was a gentleman named Rambert, a single man of large fortune, well known in the neighborhood of Penliddy as the owner of a noble country-seat and the possessor of a magnificent library.

Mr. Rambert (with whom Mr. Carling was well acquainted) greeted him at the dinner-party with friendly expressions of regret at the time that had elapsed since they had last seen each other, and mentioned that he had recently been adding to his collection of books some rare old volumes of theology, which he thought the rector might find it useful to look over. Mr. Carling, with the necessity of finishing his pamphlet uppermost in his mind, replied, jestingly, that the species of literature which he was just then most interested in examining happened to be precisely of the sort which (excepting novels, perhaps) had least affinity to theological writing. The necessary explanation followed this avowal as a matter of course, and, to Mr. Carling's great delight, his friend turned on him gayly with the most surprising and satisfactory of answers:

"You don't know half the resources of my miles of bookshelves," he said, "or you would never have thought of going to London for what you can get from me. A whole side of one of my rooms upstairs is devoted to periodical literature. I have reviews, magazines, and three weekly newspapers, bound, in each case, from the first number; and, what is just now more to your purpose, I have the _Times_ for the last fifteen years in huge half-yearly volumes. Give me the date to-night, and you shall have the volume you want by two o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

The necessary information was given at once, and, with a great sense of relief, so far as his literary anxieties were concerned, Mr. Carling went home early to see what the quieting medicine had done for his wife.

She had dozed a little, but had not slept. However, she was evidently better, for she was able to take an interest in the sayings and doings at the dinner-party, and questioned her husband about the guests and the conversation with all a woman's curiosity about the minutest matters. She lay with her face turned toward him and her eyes meeting his, until the course of her inquiries drew an answer from him, which informed her of his fortunate discovery in relation to Mr. Rambert's library, and of the prospect it afforded of his resuming his labors the next day.

When he mentioned this circumstance, she suddenly turned her head on the pillow so that her face was hidden from him, and he could see through the counterpane that the shivering, which he had observed when her illness had
seized her in the morning, had returned again.

"I am only cold," she said, in a hurried way, with her face under the clothes.

He rang for the maid, and had a fresh covering placed on the bed. Observing that she seemed unwilling to be disturbed, he did not remove the clothes from her face when he wished her goodnight, but pressed his lips on her head, and patted it gently with his hand. She shrank at the touch as if it hurt her, light as it was, and he went downstairs, resolved to send for the doctor again if she did not get to rest on being left quiet. In less than half an hour afterward the maid came down and relieved his anxiety by reporting that her mistress was asleep.

The next morning he found her in better spirits. Her eyes, she said, felt too weak to bear the light, so she kept the bedroom darkened. But in other respects she had little to complain of.

After answering her husband's first inquiries, she questioned him about his plans for the day. He had letters to write which would occupy him until twelve o'clock. At two o'clock he expected the volume of the _Times_ to arrive, and he should then devote the rest of the afternoon to his work. After hearing what his plans were, Mrs. Carling suggested that he should ride out after he had done his letters, so as to get some exercise at the fine part of the day; and she then reminded him that a longer time than usual had elapsed since he had been to see a certain old pensioner of his, who had nursed him as a child, and who was now bedridden, in a village at some distance, called Tringweighton. Although the rector saw no immediate necessity for making this charitable visit, the more especially as the ride to the village and back, and the intermediate time devoted to gossip, would occupy at least two hours and a half, he assented to his wife's proposal, perceiving that she urged it with unusual earnestness, and being unwilling to thwart her, even in a trifle, at a time when she was ill.

Accordingly, his horse was at the door at twelve precisely. Impatient to get back to the precious volume of the _Times_, he rode so much faster than usual, and so shortened his visit to the old woman, that he was home again by a quarter past two. Ascertaining from the servant who opened the door that the volume had been left by Mr. Rambert's messenger punctually at two, he ran up to his wife's room to tell her about his visit before he secluded himself for the rest of the afternoon over his work. On entering the bedroom he found it still darkened, and he was struck by a smell of burned paper in it.

His wife (who was now dressed in her wrapper and lying on the sofa) accounted for the smell by telling him that she had fancied the room felt close, and that she had burned some paper--being afraid of the cold air if she opened the window--to fumigate it. Her eyes were evidently still weak, for she kept her hand over them while she spoke. After remaining with her long enough to relate the few trivial events of his ride, Mr. Carling descended to his study to occupy himself at last with the volume of the _Times_.

It lay on his table in the shape of a large flat brown paper package. On proceeding to undo the covering, he observed that it had been very carelessly tied up. The strings were crooked and loosely knotted, and the direction bearing his name and address, instead of being in the middle of the paper, was awkwardly folded over at the edge of the volume. However, his business was with the inside of the parcel; so he tossed away the covering and the string, and began at once to hunt through the volume for the particular number of the paper which he wished first to consult.

He soon found it, with the report of the speeches delivered by the members of the deputation, and the answer returned by the minister. After reading through the report, and putting a mark in the place where it occurred, he turned to the next day's number of the paper, to see what further hints on the subject the letters addressed to the editor might happen to contain.

To his inexpressible vexation and amazement, he found that one number of the paper was missing.

He bent the two sides of the volume back, looked closely between the leaves, and saw immediately that the missing number had been cut out.

A vague sense of something like alarm began to mingle with his first feeling of disappointment. He wrote at once to Mr. Rambert, mentioning the discovery he had just made, and sent the note off by his groom, with orders to the man to wait for an answer.

The reply with which the servant returned was almost insolent in the shortness and coolness of its tone. Mr. Rambert had no books in his library which were not in perfect condition. The volume of the _Times_ had left his house perfect, and whatever blame might attach to the mutilation of it rested therefore on other shoulders than those of the owner.

Like many other weak men, Mr. Carling was secretly touchy on the subject of his dignity. After reading the note and questioning his servants, who were certain that the volume had not been touched till he had opened it, he resolved that the missing number of the _Times_ should be procured at any expense and inserted in its place; that the volume should be sent back instantly without a word of comment; and that no more books from Mr. Rambert's library should enter his house.

He walked up and down the study considering what first step he should take to effect the purpose in view. Under
the quickening influence of his irritation, an idea occurred to him, which, if it had only entered his mind the day before, might probably have proved the means of saving him from placing himself under an obligation to Mr. Rambert. He resolved to write immediately to his bookseller and publisher in London (who knew him well as an old and excellent customer), mentioning the date of the back number of the _Times_ that was required, and authorizing the publisher to offer any reward he judged necessary to any person who might have the means of procuring it at the office of the paper or elsewhere. This letter he wrote and dispatched in good time for the London post, and then went upstairs to see his wife and to tell her what had happened. Her room was still darkened and she was still on the sofa. On the subject of the missing number she said nothing, but of Mr. Rambert and his note she spoke with the most sovereign contempt. Of course the pompous old fool was mistaken, and the proper thing to do was to send back the volume instantly and take no more notice of him.

"It shall be sent back," said Mr. Carling, "but not till the missing number is replaced." And he then told her what he had done.

The effect of that simple piece of information on Mrs. Carling was so extraordinary and so unaccountable that her husband fairly stood aghast. For the first time since their marriage he saw her temper suddenly in a flame. She started up from the sofa and walked about the room as if she had lost her senses, upbraiding him for making the weakest of concessions to Mr. Rambert's insolent assumption that the rector was to blame. If she could only have laid hands on that letter, she would have consulted her husband's dignity and independence by putting it in the fire! She hoped and prayed the number of the paper might not be found! In fact, it was certain that the number, after all these years, could not possibly be hunted up. The idea of his acknowledging himself to be in the wrong in that way, when he knew himself to be in the right! It was almost ridiculous—no, it was _quite_ ridiculous! And she threw herself back on the sofa, and suddenly burst out laughing.

At the first word of remonstrance which fell from her husband's lips her mood changed again in an instant. She sprang up once more, kissed him passionately, with the tears streaming from her eyes, and implored him to leave her alone to recover herself. He quitted the room so seriously alarmed about her that he resolved to go to the doctor privately and question him on the spot. There was an unspeakable dread in his mind that the nervous attack from which she had been pronounced to be suffering might be a mere phrase intended to prepare him for the future disclosure of something infinitely and indescribably worse.

The doctor, on hearing Mr. Carling's report, exhibited no surprise and held to his opinion. Her nervous system was out of order, and her husband had been needlessly frightened by a hysterical paroxysm. If she did not get better in a week, change of scene might then be tried. In the meantime, there was not the least cause for alarm.

On the next day she was quieter, but she hardly spoke at all. At night she slept well, and Mr. Carling's faith in the medical man revived again.

The morning after was the morning which would bring the answer from the publisher in London. The rector's study was on the ground floor, and when he heard the postman's knock, being especially anxious that morning about his correspondence, he went out into the hall to receive his letters the moment they were put on the table.

It was not the footman who had answered the door, as usual, but Mrs. Carling's maid. She had taken the letters from the postman, and she was going away with them upstairs.

He stopped her, and asked her why she did not put the letters on the hall table as usual. The maid, looking very much confused, said that her mistress had desired that whatever the postman had brought that morning should be carried up to her room. He took the letters abruptly from the girl, without asking any more questions, and went back into his study.

Up to this time no shadow of a suspicion had fallen on his mind. Hitherto there had been a simple obvious explanation for every unusual event that had occurred during the last three or four days; but this last circumstance in connection with the letters was not to be accounted for. Nevertheless, even now, it was not distrust of his wife that was busy at his mind—he was too fond of her and too proud of her to feel it—the sensation was more like uneasy surprise. He longed to go and question her, and get a satisfactory answer, and have done with it. But there was a voice speaking within him that had never made itself heard before—a voice with a persistent warning in it, that said, Wait; and look at your letters first.

He spread them out on the table with hands that trembled he knew not why. Among them was the back number of the _Times_ for which he had written to London, with a letter from the publisher explaining the means by which the copy had been procured.

He opened the newspaper with a vague feeling of alarm at finding that those letters to the editor which he had been so eager to read, and that perfecting of the mutilated volume which he had been so anxious to accomplish, had become objects of secondary importance in his mind. An inexplicable curiosity about the general contents of the paper was now the one moving influence which asserted itself within him, he spread open the broad sheet on the table.
The first page on which his eye fell was the page on the right-hand side. It contained those very letters—three in number—which he had once been so anxious to see. He tried to read them, but no effort could fix his wandering attention. He looked aside to the opposite page, on the left hand. It was the page that contained the leading articles.

They were three in number. The first was on foreign politics; the second was a sarcastic commentary on a recent division in the House of Lords; the third was one of those articles on social subjects which have greatly and honorably helped to raise the reputation of the _Times_ above all contest and all rivalry.

The lines of this third article which first caught his eye comprised the opening sentence of the second paragraph, and contained these words:

It appears, from the narrative which will be found in another part of our columns, that this unfortunate woman married, in the spring of the year 18--, one Mr. Fergus Duncan, of Glendarn, in the Highlands of Scotland.

The letters swam and mingled together under his eyes before he could go on to the next sentence. His wife exhibited as an object for public compassion in the _Times_ newspaper! On the brink of the dreadful discovery that was advancing on him, his mind reeled back, and a deadly faintness came over him. There was water on a side-table—he drank a deep draught of it—roused himself—seized on the newspaper with both hands, as if it had been a living thing that could feel the desperate resolution of his grasp, and read the article through, sentence by sentence, word by word.

The subject was the Law of Divorce, and the example quoted was the example of his wife.

At that time England stood disgracefully alone as the one civilized country in the world having a divorce law for the husband which was not also a divorce law for the wife. The writer in the _Times_ boldly and eloquently exposed this discreditable anomaly in the administration of justice; hinted delicately at the unutterable wrongs suffered by Mrs. Duncan; and plainly showed that she was indebted to the accident of having been married in Scotland, and to her consequent right of appeal to the Scotch tribunals, for a full and final release from the tie that bound her to the vilest of husbands, which the English law of that day would have mercilessly refused.

He read that. Other men might have gone on to the narrative extracted from the Scotch newspaper. But at the last word of the article _he_ stopped.

The newspaper, and the unread details which it contained, lost all hold on his attention in an instant, and in their stead, living and burning on his mind, like the Letters of Doom on the walls of Belshazzar, there rose up in judgment against him the last words of a verse in the Gospel of Saint Luke—

_"Whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband, commiteth adultery."_

He had preached from these words, he had warned his hearers, with the whole strength of the fanatical sincerity that was in him, to beware of prevaricating with the prohibition which that verse contained, and to accept it as literally, unreservedly, finally forbidding the marriage of a divorced woman. He had insisted on that plain interpretation of plain words in terms which had made his congregation tremble. And now he stood alone in the secrecy of his own chamber self-convicted of the deadly sin which he had denounced—he stood, as he had told the wicked among his hearers that they would stand at the Last Day, before the Judgment Seat.

He was unconscious of the lapse of time; he never knew whether it was many minutes or few before the door of his room was suddenly and softly opened. It did open, and his wife came in.

In her white dress, with a white shawl thrown over her shoulders; her dark hair, so neat and glossy at other times, hanging tangled about her colorless cheeks, and heightening the glassy brightness of terror in her eyes—so he saw her; the woman put away from her husband--the woman whose love had made his life happy and had stained his soul with a deadly sin.

She came on to within a few paces of him without a word or a tear, or a shadow of change passing over the dreadful rigidity of her face. She looked at him with a strange look; she pointed to the newspaper crumpled in his hand with a strange gesture; she spoke to him in a strange voice.

"You know it!" she said.

His eyes met hers--she shrank from them--turned--and laid her arms and her head heavily against the wall.

"Oh, Alfred," she said, "I was so lonely in the world, and I was so fond of you!"

The woman's delicacy, the woman's trembling tenderness welled up from her heart, and touched her voice with a tone of its old sweetness as she murmured those simple words.

She said no more. Her confession of her fault, her appeal to their past love for pardon, were both poured forth in that one sentence. She left it to his own heart to tell him the rest. How anxiously her vigilant love had followed his every word and treasured up his every opinion in the days when they first met; how weakly and falsely, and yet with how true an affection for him, she had shrunk from the disclosure which she knew but too well would have separated them even at the church door; how desperately she had fought against the coming discovery which threatened to tear her from the bosom she clung to, and to cast her out into the world with the shadow of her own shame to darken her life to the end—-all this she left him to feel; for the moment which might part them forever was the
moment when she knew best how truly, how passionately he had loved her.

His lips trembled as he stood looking at her in silence, and the slow, burning tears dropped heavily, one by one, down his cheeks. The natural human remembrance of the golden days of their companionship, of the nights and nights when that dear head—turned away from him now in unutterable misery and shame—had nestled itself so fondly and so happily on his breast, fought hard to silence his conscience, to root out his dreadful sense of guilt, to tear the words of Judgment from their ruthless hold on his mind, to claim him in the sweet names of Pity and of Love. If she had turned and looked at him at that moment, their next words would have been spoken in each other's arms. But the oppression of her despair under his silence was too heavy for her, and she never moved.

He forced himself to look away from her; he struggled hard to break the silence between them.

"God forgive you, Emily!" he said.

As her name passed his lips, his voice failed him, and the torture at his heart burst its way out in sobs. He hurried to the door to spare her the terrible reproof of the grief that had now mastered him. When he passed her she turned toward him with a faint cry.

He caught her as she sank forward, and saved her from dropping on the floor. For the last time his arms closed round her. For the last time his lips touched hers—cold and insensible to him now. He laid her on the sofa and went out.

One of the female servants was crossing the hall. The girl started as she met him, and turned pale at the sight of his face. He could not speak to her, but he pointed to the study door. He saw her go into the room, and then left the house.

He never entered it more, and he and his wife never met again.

Later on that last day, a sister of Mr. Carling's—a married woman living in the town—came to the rectory. She brought an open note with her, addressed to the unhappy mistress of the house. It contained these few lines, blotted and stained with tears:

May God grant us both the time for repentance! If I had loved you less, I might have trusted myself to see you again. Forgive me, and pity me, and remember me in your prayers, as I shall forgive, and pity, and remember you.

He had tried to write more, but the pen had dropped from his hand. His sister's entreaties had not moved him. After giving her the note to deliver, he had solemnly charged her to be gentle in communicating the tidings that she bore, and had departed alone for London. He heard all remonstrances with patience. He did not deny that the deception of which his wife had been guilty was the most pardonable of all concealments of the truth, because it sprang from her love for him; but he had the same hopeless answer for every one who tried to plead with him—the verse from the Gospel of Saint Luke.

His purpose in traveling to London was to make the necessary arrangements for his wife's future existence, and then to get employment which would separate him from his home and from all its associations. A missionary expedition to one of the Pacific Islands accepted him as a volunteer. Broken in body and spirit, his last look of England from the deck of the ship was his last look at land. A fortnight afterward, his brethren read the burial-service over him on a calm, cloudless evening at sea. Before he was committed to the deep, his little pocket Bible, which had been a present from his wife, was, in accordance with his dying wishes, placed open on his breast, so that the inscription, "To my dear Husband," might rest over his heart.

His unhappy wife still lives. When the farewell lines of her husband's writing reached her she was incapable of comprehending them. The mental prostration which had followed the parting scene was soon complicated by physical suffering—by fever on the brain. To the surprise of all who attended her, she lived through the shock, recovering with the complete loss of one faculty, which, in her situation, poor thing, was a mercy and a gain to her—the faculty of memory. From that time to this she has never had the slightest gleam of recollection of anything that happened before her illness. In her happy oblivion, the veriest trifles are as new and as interesting to her as if she was beginning her existence again. Under the tender care of the friends who now protect her, she lives contentedly the life of a child. When her last hour comes, may she die with nothing on her memory but the recollection of their kindness!

THE EIGHTH DAY.

THE wind that I saw in the sky yesterday has come. It sweeps down our little valley in angry howling gusts, and drives the heavy showers before it in great sheets of spray.

There are some people who find a strangely exciting effect produced on their spirits by the noise, and rush, and tumult of the elements on a stormy day. It has never been so with me, and it is less so than ever now. I can hardly bear to think of my son at sea in such a tempest as this. While I can still get no news of his ship, morbid fancies beset me which I vainly try to shake off. I see the trees through my window bending before the wind. Are the masts of the good ship bending like them at this moment? I hear the wash of the driving rain. Is _he_ hearing the thunder of the raging waves? If he had only come back last night!—it is vain to dwell on it, but the thought will haunt me—
he had only come back last night!

I tried to speak cautiously about him again to Jessie, as Owen had advised me; but I am so old and feeble now that this ill-omened storm has upset me, and I could not feel sure enough of my own self-control to venture on matching myself to-day against a light-hearted, lively girl, with all her wits about her. It is so important that I should not betray George—it would be so inexcusable on my part if his interests suffered, even accidentally, in my hands.

This was a trying day for our guest. Her few trifling indoor resources had, as I could see, begun to lose their attractions for her at last. If we were not now getting to the end of the stories, and to the end, therefore, of the Ten Days also, our chance of keeping her much longer at the Glen Tower would be a very poor one.

It was, I think, a great relief for us all to be summoned together this evening for a definite purpose. The wind had fallen a little as it got on toward dusk. To hear it growing gradually fainter and fainter in the valley below added immeasurably to the comforting influence of the blazing fire and the cheerful lights when the shutters were closed for the night.

The number drawn happened to be the last of the series—Ten—and the last also of the stories which I had written. There were now but two numbers left in the bowl. Owen and Morgan had each one reading more to accomplish before our guest's stay came to an end, and the manuscripts in the Purple Volume were all exhausted.

"This new story of mine," I said, "is not, like the story I last read, a narrative of adventure happening to myself, but of adventures that happened to a lady of my acquaintance. I was brought into contact, in the first instance, with one of her male relatives, and, in the second instance, with the lady herself, by certain professional circumstances which I need not particularly describe. They involved a dry question of wills and title-deeds in no way connected with this story, but sufficiently important to interest me as a lawyer. The case came to trial at the Assizes on my circuit, and I won it in the face of some very strong points, very well put, on the other side. I was in poor health at the time, and my exertions so completely knocked me up that I was confined to bed in my lodgings for a week or more—"

"And the grateful lady came and nursed you, I suppose," said the Queen of Hearts, in her smart, off-hand way.

"The grateful lady did something much more natural in her position, and much more useful in mine," I answered—"she sent her servant to attend on me. He was an elderly man, who had been in her service since the time of her first marriage, and he was also one of the most sensible and well-informed persons whom I have ever met with in his station of life. From hints which he dropped while he was at my bedside, I discovered for the first time that his mistress had been unfortunate in her second marriage, and that the troubles of that period of her life had ended in one of the most singular events which had happened in that part of England for many a long day past. It is hardly necessary to say that, before I allowed the man to enter into any particulars, I stipulated that he should obtain his mistress's leave to communicate what he knew. Having gained this, and having further surprised me by mentioning that he had been himself connected with all the circumstances, he told me the whole story in the fullest detail. I have now tried to reproduce it as nearly as I could in his own language. Imagine, therefore, that I am just languidly recovering in bed, and that a respectable elderly man, in quiet black costume, is sitting at my pillow and speaking to me in these terms—"

Thus ending my little preface, I opened the manuscript and began my last story.

BROTHER GRIFFITH'S STORY

of

A PLOT IN PRIVATE LIFE.

CHAPTER I.

THE first place I got when I began going out to service was not a very profitable one. I certainly gained the advantage of learning my business thoroughly, but I never had my due in the matter of wages. My master was made a bankrupt, and his servants suffered with the rest of his creditors

My second situation, however, amply compensated me for my want of luck in the first. I had the good fortune to enter the service of Mr. and Mrs. Norcross. My master was a very rich gentleman. He had the Darrock house and lands in Cumberland, an estate also in Yorkshire, and a very large property in Jamaica, which produced, at that time and for some years afterward, a great income. Out in the West Indies he met with a pretty young lady, a governess in an English family, and, taking a violent fancy to her, married her, though she was a good five-and-twenty years younger than himself. After the wedding they came to England, and it was at this time that I was lucky enough to be engaged by them as a servant.

I lived with my new master and mistress three years. They had no children. At the end of that period Mr. Norcross died. He was sharp enough to foresee that his young widow would marry again, and he bequeathed his property so that it all went to Mrs. Norcross first, and then to any children she might have by a second marriage, and, failing that, to relations and friends of his own. I did not suffer by my master's death, for his widow kept me in her service. I had attended on Mr. Norcross all through his last illness, and had made myself useful enough to win
my mistress’s favor and gratitude. Besides me she also retained her maid in her service—a quadroon woman named
Josephine, whom she brought with her from the West Indies. Even at that time I disliked the half-breed’s wheedling
manners, and her cruel, tawny face, and wondered how my mistress could be so fond of her as she was. Time
showed that I was right in distrusting this woman. I shall have much more to say about her when I get further
advanced with my story.

Meanwhile I have next to relate that my mistress broke up the rest of her establishment, and, taking me and the
lady’s maid with her, went to travel on the Continent.

Among other wonderful places we visited Paris, Genoa, Venice, Florence, Rome, and Naples, staying in some of
those cities for months together. The fame of my mistress’s riches followed her wherever she went; and there were
plenty of gentlemen, foreigners as well as Englishmen, who were anxious enough to get into her good graces and to
prevail on her to marry them. Nobody succeeded, however, in producing any very strong or lasting impression on
her; and when we came back to England, after more than two years of absence, Mrs. Norcross was still a widow, and
showed no signs of wanting to change her condition.

We went to the house on the Yorkshire estate first; but my mistress did not fancy some of the company round
about, so we moved again to Darrock Hall, and made excursions from time to time in the lake district, some miles
off. On one of these trips Mrs. Norcross met with some old friends, who introduced her to a gentleman of their party
bearing the very common and very uninteresting name of Mr. James Smith.

He was a tall, fine young man enough, with black hair, which grew very long, and the biggest, bushiest pair of
black whiskers I ever saw. Altogether he had a rakish, unsettled look, and a bouncable way of talking which made
him the prominent person in company. He was poor enough himself, as I heard from his servant, but well connected—a
gentleman by birth and education, though his manners were so free. What my mistress saw to like in him I don’t
know; but when she asked her friends to stay with her at Darrock, she included Mr. James Smith in the invitation.
We had a fine, gay, noisy time of it at the Hall, the strange gentleman, in particular, making himself as much at
home as if the place belonged to him. I was surprised at Mrs. Norcross putting up with him as she did, but I was
fairly thunderstruck some months afterward when I heard that she and her free-and-easy visitor were actually going
to be married! She had refused offers by dozens abroad, from higher, and richer, and better-behaved men. It seemed
next to impossible that she could seriously think of throwing herself away upon such a hare-brained, headlong,
 penniless young gentleman as Mr. James Smith.

Married, nevertheless, they were, in due course of time; and, after spending the honeymoon abroad, they came
back to Darrock Hall.

I soon found that my new master had a very variable temper. There were some days when he was as easy, and
familiar, and pleasant with his servants as any gentleman need be. At other times some devil within him seemed to
get possession of his whole nature. He flew into violent passions, and took wrong ideas into his head, which no
reasoning or remonstrance could remove. It rather amazed me, considering how gay he was in his tastes, and how
restless his habits were, that he should consent to live at such a quiet, dull place as Darrock. The reason for this,
however, soon came out. Mr. James Smith was not much of a sportsman; he cared nothing for indoor amusements,
such as reading, music, and so forth; and he had no ambition for representing the county in parliament. The one
pursuit that he was really fond of was yachting. Darrock was within sixteen miles of a sea-port town, with an
excellent harbor, and to this accident of position the Hall was entirely indebted for recommending itself as a place of
residence to Mr. James Smith.

He had such an untiring enjoyment and delight in cruising about at sea, and all his ideas of pleasure seemed to be
so closely connected with his remembrance of the sailing trips he had taken on board different yachts belonging to
his friends, that I verily believe his chief object in marrying my mistress was to get the command of money enough
to keep a vessel for himself. Be that as it may, it is certain that he prevailed on her, some time after their marriage, to
make him a present of a fine schooner yacht, which was brought round from Cowes to our coast-town, and kept
always waiting ready for him in the harbor.

His wife required some little persuasion before she could make up her mind to let him have the vessel. She
suffered so much from sea-sickness that pleasure-sailing was out of the question for her; and, being very fond of her
husband, she was naturally unwilling that he should engage in an amusement which took him away from her.
However, Mr. James Smith used his influence over her cleverly, promising that he would never go away without
first asking her leave, and engaging that his terms of absence at sea should never last for more than a week or ten
days at a time. Accordingly, my mistress, who was the kindest and most unselfish woman in the world, put her own
feelings aside, and made her husband happy in the possession of a vessel of his own.

While my master was away cruising, my mistress had a dull time of it at the Hall. The few gentlefolks there were
in our part of the county lived at a distance, and could only come to Darrock when they were asked to stay there for
some days together. As for the village near us, there was but one person living in it whom my mistress could think
of asking to the Hall, and that person was the clergyman who did duty at the church.

This gentleman's name was Mr. Meeke. He was a single man, very young, and very lonely in his position. He had a mild, melancholy, pesty-looking face, and was as shy and soft-spoken as a little girl--altogether, what one may call, without being unjust or severe, a poor, weak creature, and, out of all sight, the very worst preacher I ever sat under in my life. The one thing he did, which, as I heard, he could really do well, was playing on the fiddle. He was uncommonly fond of music--so much so that he often took his instrument out with him when he went for a walk. This taste of his was his great recommendation to my mistress, who was a wonderfully fine player on the piano, and who was delighted to get such a performer as Mr. Meeke to play duets with her. Besides liking his society for this reason, she felt for him in his lonely position; naturally enough, I think, considering how often she was left in solitude herself. Mr. Meeke, on his side, when he got over his first shyness, was only too glad to leave his lonesome little parsonage for the fine music-room at the Hall, and for the company of a handsome, kind-hearted lady, who made much of him, and admired his fiddle-playing with all her heart. Thus it happened that, whenever my master was away at sea, my mistress and Mr. Meeke were always together, playing duets as if they had their living to get by it. A more harmless connection than the connection between those two never existed in this world; and yet, innocent as it was, it turned out to be the first cause of all the misfortunes that afterward happened.

My master's treatment of Mr. Meeke was, from the first, the very opposite of my mistress's. The restless, rackety, bounceable Mr. James Smith felt a contempt for the weak, womanish, fiddling little parson, and, what was more, did not care to conceal it. For this reason, Mr. Meeke (who was dreadfully frightened by my master's violent language and rough ways) very seldom visited at the Hall except when my mistress was alone there. Meaning no wrong, and therefore stooping to no concealment, she never thought of taking any measures to keep Mr. Meeke out of the way when he happened to be with her at the time of her husband's coming home, whether it was only from a riding excursion in the neighborhood or from a cruise in the schooner. In this way it so turned out that whenever my master came home, after a long or short absence, in nine cases out of ten he found the parson at the Hall.

At first he used to laugh at this circumstance, and to amuse himself with some coarse jokes at the expense of his wife and her companion. But, after a while, his variable temper changed, as usual. He grew sulky, rude, angry, and, at last, downright jealous of Mr. Meeke. Though too proud to confess it in so many words, he still showed the state of his mind clearly enough to my mistress to excite her indignation. She was a woman who could be led anywhere by any one for whom she had a regard, but there was a firm spirit within her that rose at the slightest show of injustice or oppression, and that resented tyrannical usage of any sort perhaps a little too warmly. The bare suspicion that her husband could feel any distrust of her set her all in a flame, and she took the most unfortunate, and yet, at the same time, the most natural way for a woman, of resenting it. She, on her side, directed against herself, and by commanding her never to open the doors again to Mr. Meeke; she, on her side, declaring that she would never consent to insult a clergyman and a gentleman in order to satisfy the whim of a tyrannical husband. Upon that, he called out, with a great oath, to have his horse saddled directly, declaring that he would not stop another instant under the same roof with a woman who had set him at defiance, and warning his wife that she would come back, if Mr. Meeke entered the house again, and horsewhip him, in spite of his black coat, all through the village.

Without repeating their words--which I have no right to do, having heard by accident what I had no business to hear--I may say generally, to show how serious the quarrel was, that my mistress charged my master with having married from mercenary motives, with keeping out of her company as much as he could, and with insulting her by a suspicion which it would be hard ever to forgive, and impossible ever to forget. He replied by violent language directed against herself, and by commanding her never to open the doors again to Mr. Meeke; she, on her side, declaring that she would never consent to insult a clergyman and a gentleman in order to satisfy the whim of a tyrannical husband. Upon that, he called out, with a great oath, to have his horse saddled directly, declaring that he would not stop another instant under the same roof with a woman who had set him at defiance, and warning his wife that she would come back, if Mr. Meeke entered the house again, and horsewhip him, in spite of his black coat, all through the village.

With those words he left her, and rode away to the sea-port where his yacht was lying. My mistress kept up her spirit till he was out of sight, and then burst into a dreadful screaming passion of tears, which ended by leaving her so weak that she had to be carried to her bed like a woman who was at the point of death.

The same evening my master's horse was ridden back by a messenger, who brought a scrap of notepaper with him addressed to me. It only contained these lines:

"Pack up my clothes and deliver them immediately to the bearer. You may tell your mistress that I sail to-night at eleven o'clock for a cruise to Sweden. Forward my letters to the post-office, Stockholm."

I obeyed the orders given to me except that relating to my mistress. The doctor had been sent for, and was still in the house. I consulted him upon the propriety of my delivering the message. He positively forbade me to do so that night, and told me to give him the slip of paper, and leave it to his discretion to show it to her or not the next morning.

The messenger had hardly been gone an hour when Mr. Meeke's housekeeper came to the Hall with a roll of
music for my mistress. I told the woman of my master's sudden departure, and of the doctor being in the house. This news brought Mr. Meeke himself to the Hall in a great flutter.

I felt so angry with him for being the cause—innocent as he might be—of the shocking scene which had taken place, that I exceeded the bounds of my duty, and told him the whole truth. The poor, weak, wakening, childish creature flushed up red in the face, then turned as pale as ashes, and dropped into one of the hall chairs crying—literally crying fit to break his heart. "Oh, William," says he, wringing his little frail, trembling white hands as helpless as a baby, "oh, William, what am I to do?"

"As you ask me that question, sir," says I, "you will excuse me, I hope, if, being a servant, I plainly speak my mind notwithstanding. I know my station well enough to be aware that, strictly speaking, I have done wrong, and far exceeded my duty, in telling you as much as I have told you already; but I would go through fire and water, sir," says I, feeling my own eyes getting moist, "for my mistress's sake. She has no relation here who can speak to you; and it is even better that a servant like me should risk being guilty of an impertinence, than that dreadful and lasting mischief should arise from the right remedy not being applied at the right time. This is what I should do, sir, in your place. Saving your presence, I should leave off crying; and go back home and write to Mr. James Smith, saying that I would not, as a clergymen, give him railing for railing, but would prove how unworthily he had suspected me by ceasing to visit at the Hall from this time forth, rather than be a cause of dissension between man and wife. If you will put that into proper language, sir, and will have the letter ready for me in half an hour's time, I will call for it on the fastest horse in our stables, and, at my own risk, will give it to my master before he sails to-night. I have nothing more to say, sir, except to ask your pardon for forgetting my proper place, and for making bold to speak on a very serious matter as equal to equal, and as man to man."

To do Mr. Meeke justice, he had a heart, though it was a very small one. He shook hands with me, and said he accepted my advice as the advice of a friend, and so went back to his parsonage to write the letter. In half an hour I called for it on horseback, but it was not ready for me. Mr. Meeke was ridiculously nice about how he should express himself when he got a pen into his hand. I found him with his desk littered with rough copies, in a perfect agony about how to turn his phrases delicately enough in referring to my mistress. Every minute being precious, I hurried him as much as I could, without standing on any ceremony. It took half an hour more, with all my efforts, before he could make up his mind that the letter would do. I started off with it at a gallop, and never drew rein till I got to the sea-port town.

The harbor-clock chimed the quarter past eleven as I rode by it, and when I got down to the jetty there was no yacht to be seen. She had been cast off from her moorings ten minutes before eleven, and as the clock struck she had sailed out of the harbor. I would have followed in a boat, but it was a fine starlight night, with a fresh wind blowing, and the sailors on the pier laughed at me when I spoke of rowing after a schooner yacht which had got a quarter of an hour's start of us, with the wind abeam and the tide in her favor.

I rode back with a heavy heart. All I could do now was to send the letter to the post-office, Stockholm.

The next day the doctor showed my mistress the scrap of paper with the message on it from my master, and an hour or two after that, a letter was sent to her in Mr. Meeke's handwriting, explaining the reason why she must not expect to see him at the Hall, and referring to me in terms of high praise as a sensible and faithful man who had spoken the right word at the right time. I am able to repeat the substance of the letter, because I heard all about it from my mistress, under very unpleasant circumstances so far as I was concerned.

The news of my master's departure did not affect her as the doctor had supposed it would. Instead of distressing her, it roused her spirit and made her angry; her pride, as I imagine, being wounded by the contemptuous manner in which her husband had notified his intention of sailing to Sweden at the end of a message to a servant about packing his clothes. Finding her in that temper of mind, the letter from Mr. Meeke only irritated her the more. Every minute being precious, I hurried him as much as I could, without standing on any ceremony. It took half an hour more, with all my efforts, before he could make up his mind that the letter would do. I started off with it at a gallop, and never drew rein till I got to the sea-port town.

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to him after the service; but this was the first occasion on which she had visited him at his house. As the carriage stopped, the little parson came out, in great hurry and agitation, to meet her at the garden gate.

"Don't look alarmed, Mr. Meeke," says my mistress, getting out. "Though you have engaged not to come near the Hall, I have made no promise to keep away from the parsonage." With those words she went into the house.

The quadroon maid, Josephine, was sitting with me in the rumble of the carriage, and I saw a smile on her tawny face as the parson and his visitor went into the house together. Harmless as Mr. Meeke was, and innocent of all wrong as I knew my mistress to be, I regretted that she should be so rash as to despise appearances, considering the situation she was placed in. She had already exposed herself to be thought of disrespectfully by her own maid, and it was hard to say what worse consequences might not happen after that.

Half an hour later we were away on our journey. My mistress stayed in London two months. Throughout all that long time no letter from my master was forwarded to her from the country house.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN the two months had passed we returned to Darrock Hall. Nobody there had received any news in our absence of the whereabouts of my master and his yacht.

Six more weary weeks elapsed, and in that time but one event happened at the Hall to vary the dismal monotony of the lives we now led in the solitary place. One morning Josephine came down after dressing my mistress with her face downright livid to look at, except on one cheek, where there was a mark as red as burning fire. I was in the kitchen at the time, and I asked what was the matter.

"The matter!" says she, in her shrill voice and her half-foreign English. "Use your own eyes, if you please, and look at this cheek of mine. What! have you lived so long a time with your mistress, and don't you know the mark of her hand yet?"

I was at a loss to understand what she meant, but she soon explained herself. My mistress, whose temper had been sadly altered for the worse by the trials and humiliations she had gone through, had got up that morning more out of humor than usual, and, in answer to her maid's inquiry as to how she had passed the night, had begun talking about her weary, miserable life in an unusually fretful and desperate way. Josephine, in trying to cheer her spirits, had ventured, most improperly, on making a light, jesting reference to Mr. Meeke, which had so enraged my mistress that she turned round sharp on the half-breed and gave her--to use the common phrase--a smart box on the ear. Josephine confessed that, the moment after she had done this, her better sense appeared to tell her that she had taken a most improper way of resenting undue familiarity. She had immediately expressed her regret for having forgotten herself, and had proved the sincerity of it by a gift of half a dozen cambric handkerchiefs, presented as a peace-offering on the spot. After that I thought it impossible that Josephine could bear any malice against a mistress whom she had served ever since she had been a girl, and I said as much to her when she had done telling me what had happened upstairs.

"I! Malice!" cries Miss Josephine, in her hard, sharp, snappish way. "And why, and wherefore, if you please? If my mistress smacks my cheek with one hand, she gives me handkerchiefs to wipe it with the other. My good mistress, my kind mistress, my pretty mistress! I, the servant, bear malice against her, the mistress! Ah! you bad man, even to think of such a thing! Ah! fie, fie! I am quite ashamed of you!"

She gave me one look--the wickedest look I ever saw, and burst out laughing--the harshest laugh I ever heard from a woman's lips. Turning away from me directly after, she said no more, and never referred to the subject again on any subsequent occasion.

From that time, however, I noticed an alteration in Miss Josephine; not in her way of doing her work, for she was just as sharp and careful about it as ever, but in her manners and habits. She grew amazingly quiet, and passed almost all her leisure time alone. I could bring no charge against her which authorized me to speak a word of warning; but, for all that, I could not help feeling that if I had been in my mistress's place, I would have followed up the present of the cambric handkerchiefs by paying her a month's wages in advance, and sending her away from the house the same evening.

With the exception of this little domestic matter, which appeared trifling enough at the time, but which led to very serious consequences afterward, nothing happened at all out of the ordinary way during the six weary weeks to which I have referred. At the beginning of the seventh week, however, an event occurred at last.

One morning the postman brought a letter to the Hall addressed to my mistress. I took it upstairs, and looked at the direction as I put it on the salver. The handwriting was not my master's; was not, as it appeared to me, the handwriting of any well-educated person. The outside of the letter was also very dirty, and the seal a common office-seal of the usual lattice-work pattern. "This must be a begging-letter," I thought to myself as I entered the breakfast-room and advanced with it to my mistress.

She held up her hand before she opened it as a sign to me that she had some order to give, and that I was not to leave the room till I had received it. Then she broke the seal and began to read the letter.
Her eyes had hardly been on it a moment before her face turned as pale as death, and the paper began to tremble in her fingers. She read on to the end, and suddenly turned from pale to scarlet, started out of her chair, crumpled the letter up violently in her hand, and took several turns backward and forward in the room, without seeming to notice me as I stood by the door. "You villain! you villain! you villain!" I heard her whisper to herself many times over, in a quick, hissing, fierce way. Then she stopped, and said on a sudden, "Can it be true?" Then she looked up, and, seeing me standing at the door, started as if I had been a stranger, changed color again, and told me, in a stifled voice, to leave her and come back again in half an hour. I obeyed, feeling certain that she must have received some very bad news of her husband, and wondering, anxiously enough, what it might be.

When I returned to the breakfast-room her face was as much discomposed as ever. Without speaking a word she handed me two sealed letters: one, a note to be left for Mr. Meeke at the parsonage; the other, a letter marked "Immediate," and addressed to her solicitor in London, who was also, I should add, her nearest living relative.

I left one of these letters and posted the other. When I came back I heard that my mistress had taken to her room. She remained there for four days, keeping her new sorrow, whatever it was, strictly to herself. On the fifth day the lawyer from London arrived at the Hall. My mistress went down to him in the library, and was shut up there with him for nearly two hours. At the end of that time the bell rang for me.

"Sit down, William," said my mistress, when I came into the room. "I feel such entire confidence in your fidelity and attachment that I am about, with the full concurrence of this gentleman, who is my nearest relative and my legal adviser, to place a very serious secret in your keeping, and to employ your services on a matter which is as important to me as a matter of life and death."

Her poor eyes were very red, and her lips quivered as she spoke to me. I was so startled by what she had said that I hardly knew which chair to sit in. She pointed to one placed near herself at the table, and seemed about to speak to me again, when the lawyer interfered.

"Let me entreat you," he said, "not to agitate yourself unnecessarily. I will put this person in possession of the facts, and, if I omit anything, you shall stop me and set me right."

My mistress leaned back in her chair and covered her face with her handkerchief. The lawyer waited a moment, and then addressed himself to me.

"You are already aware," he said, "of the circumstances under which your master left this house, and you also know, I have no doubt, that no direct news of him has reached your mistress up to this time?"

I bowed to him and said I knew of the circumstances so far.

"Do you remember," he went on, "taking a letter to your mistress five days ago?"

"Yes, sir," I replied; "a letter which seemed to distress and alarm her very seriously."

"I will read you that letter before we say any more," continued the lawyer. "I warn you beforehand that it contains a terrible charge against your master, which, however, is not attested by the writer's signature. I have already told your mistress that she must not attach too much importance to an anonymous letter; and I now tell you the same thing."

Saying that, he took up a letter from the table and read it aloud. I had a copy of it given to me afterward, which I looked at often enough to fix the contents of the letter in my memory. I can now repeat them, I think, word for word.

"MADAM--I cannot reconcile it to my conscience to leave you in total ignorance of your husband 's atrocious conduct toward you. If you have ever been disposed to regret his absence do so no longer. Hope and pray, rather, that you and he may never meet face to face again in this world. I write in great haste and in great fear of being observed. Time fails me to prepare you as you ought to be prepared for what I have now to disclose. I must tell you plainly, with much respect for you and sorrow for your misfortune, that your husband _has married another wife_. I saw the ceremony performed, unknown to him. If I could not have spoken of this infamous act as an eye-witness, I would not have spoken of it at all.

"I dare not acknowledge who I am, for I believe Mr. James Smith would stick at no crime to revenge himself on me if he ever came to a knowledge of the step I am now taking, and of the means by which I got my information; neither have I time to enter into particulars. I simply warn you of what has happened, and leave you to act on that warning as you please. You may disbelieve this letter, because it is not signed by any name. In that case, if Mr. James Smith should ever venture into your presence, I recommend you to ask him suddenly what he has done with his _new wife_, and to see if his countenance does not immediately testify that the truth has been spoken by "YOUR UNKNOWN FRIEND."

Poor as my opinion was of my master, I had never believed him to be capable of such villainy as this, and I could not believe it when the lawyer had done reading the letter.

"Oh, sir," I said, "surely that is some base imposition? Surely it cannot be true?"

"That is what I have told your mistress," he answered. "But she says in return--"

"That I feel it to be true," my mistress broke in, speaking behind the handkerchief in a faint, smothered voice.
"We need not debate the question," the lawyer went on. "Our business now is to prove the truth or falsehood of this letter. That must be done at once. I have written to one of my clerks, who is accustomed to conducting delicate investigations, to come to this house without loss of time. He is to be trusted with anything, and he will pursue the needful inquiries immediately.

It is absolutely necessary, to make sure of committing no mistakes, that he should be accompanied by some one who is well acquainted with Mr. James Smith's habits and personal appearance, and your mistress has fixed upon you to be that person. However well the inquiry is managed, it may be attended by much trouble and delay, may necessitate a long journey, and may involve some personal danger. Are you," said the lawyer, looking hard at me, "ready to suffer any inconvenience and to run any risk for your mistress's sake?"

"There is nothing I _can_ do, sir," said I, "that I will not do. I am afraid I am not clever enough to be of much use; but, so far as troubles and risks are concerned, I am ready for anything from this moment."

My mistress took the handkerchief from her face, looked at me with her eyes full of tears, and held out her hand. How I came to do it I don't know, but I stooped down and kissed the hand she offered me, feeling half startled, half ashamed at my own boldness the moment after.

"You will do, my man," said the lawyer, nodding his head. "Don't trouble yourself about the cleverness or the cunning that may be wanted. My clerk has got head enough for two. I have only one word more to say before you go downstairs again. Remember that this investigation and the cause that leads to it must be kept a profound secret. Except us three, and the clergyman here (to whom your mistress has written word of what has happened), nobody knows anything about it. I will let my clerk into the secret when he joins us. As soon as you and he are away from the house, you may talk about it. Until then, you will close your lips on the subject."

The clerk did not keep us long waiting. He came as fast as the mail from London could bring him.

I had expected, from his master's description, to see a serious, sedate man, rather sly in his looks, and rather reserved in his manner. To my amazement, this practiced hand at delicate investigations was a brisk, plump, jolly little man, with a comfortable double chin, a pair of very bright black eyes, and a big bottle-nose of the true groggy red color. He wore a suit of black, and a limp, dingy white cravat; took snuff perpetually out of a very large box; walked with his hands crossed behind his back; and looked, upon the whole, much more like a parson of free-and-easy habits than a lawyer's clerk.

"How d'ye do?" says he, when I opened the door to him. "I'm the man you expect from the office in London. Just say Mr. Dark, will you? I'll sit down here till you come back; and, young man, if there is such a thing as a glass of ale in the house, I don't mind committing myself so far as to say that I'll drink it."

I got him the ale before I announced him. He winked at me as he put it to his lips.

"Your good health," says he. "I like you. Don't forget that the name's Dark; and just leave the jug and glass, will you, in case my master keeps me waiting."

I announced him at once, and was told to show him into the library.

When I got back to the hall the jug was empty, and Mr. Dark was comforting himself with a pinch of snuff, snorting over it like a perfect grampus. He had swallowed more than a pint of the strongest old ale in the house; and, for all the effect it seemed to have had on him, he might just as well have been drinking so much water.

As I led him along the passage to the library Josephine passed us. Mr. Dark winked at me again, and made her a low bow.

"Lady's maid," I heard him whisper to himself. "A fine woman to look at, but a damned bad one to deal with." I turned round on him, rather angry at his cool ways, and looked hard at him just before I opened the library door. Mr. Dark looked hard at me. "All right," says he. "I can show myself in." And he knocks at the door, and opens it, and goes in with another wicked wink, all in a moment.

Half an hour later the bell rang for me. Mr. Dark was sitting between my mistress (who was looking at him in amazement) and the lawyer (who was looking at him with approval). He had a map open on his knee, and a pen in his hand. Judging by his face, the communication of the secret about my master did not seem to have made the smallest impression on him.

"I've got leave to ask you a question," says he, the moment I appeared. "When you found your master's yacht gone, did you hear which way she had sailed? Was it northward toward Scotland? Speak up, young man, speak up!"

"Yes," I answered. "The boatmen told me that when I made inquiries at the harbor."

"Well, sir," says Mr. Dark, turning to the lawyer, "if he said he was going to Sweden, he seems to have started on the road to it, at all events. I think I have got my instructions now?"

The lawyer nodded, and looked at my mistress, who bowed her head to him. He then said, turning to me:

"Pack up your bag for traveling at once, and have a conveyance got ready to go to the nearest post-town. Look sharp, young man--look sharp!"

"And, whatever happens in the future," added my mistress, her kind voice trembling a little, "believe, William,
that I shall never forget the proof you now show of your devotion to me. It is still some comfort to know that I have your fidelity to depend on in this dreadful trial--your fidelity and the extraordinary intelligence and experience of Mr. Dark."

Mr. Dark did not seem to hear the compliment. He was busy writing, with his paper upon the map on his knee. A quarter of an hour later, when I had ordered the dog-cart, and had got down into the hall with my bag packed, I found him there waiting for me. He was sitting in the same chair which he had occupied when he first arrived, and he had another jug of the old ale on the table by his side.

"Got any fishing-rods in the house?" says he, when I put my bag down in the hall.

"Yes," I replied, astonished at the question. "What do you want with them?"

"Pack a couple in cases for traveling," says Mr. Dark, "with lines, and hooks, and fly-books all complete. Have a drop of the ale before you go--and don't stare, William, don't stare. I'll let the light in on you as soon as we are out of the house. Off with you for the rods! I want to be on the road in five minutes."

When I came back with the rods and tackle I found Mr. Dark in the dog-cart.

"Money, luggage, fishing-rods, papers of directions, copy of anonymous letter, guide-book, map," says he, running over in his mind the things wanted for the journey--"all right so far. Drive off."

I took the reins and started the horse. As we left the house I saw my mistress and Josephine looking after us from two of the windows on the second floor. The memory of those two attentive faces--one so fair and so good, the other so yellow and so wicked--haunted my mind perpetually for many days afterward.

"Now, William," says Mr. Dark, when we were clear of the lodge gates, "I'm going to begin by telling you that you must step out of your own character till further notice. You are a clerk in a bank, and I'm another. We have got our regular holiday, that comes, like Christmas, once a year, and we are taking a little tour in Scotland to see the curiosities, and to breathe the sea air, and to get some fishing whenever we can. I'm the fat cashier who digs holes in a drawerful of gold with a copper shovel, and you're the arithmetical young man who sits on a perch behind me and keeps the books. Scotland's a beautiful country, William. Can you make whisky-toddy? I can; and, what's more, unlikely as the thing may seem to you, I can actually drink it into the bargain."

"Scotland!" says I. "What are we going to Scotland for?"

"Question for question," says Mr. Dark. "What are we starting on a journey for?"

"To find my master," I answered, "and to make sure if the letter about him is true."

"Very good," says he. "How would you set about doing that, eh?"

"I should go and ask about him at Stockholm in Sweden, where he said his letters were to be sent."

"Should you, indeed?" says Mr. Dark. "If you were a shepherd, William, and had lost a sheep in Cumberland, would you begin looking for it at the Land's End, or would you try a little nearer home?"

"You're attempting to make a fool of me now," says I.

"No," says Mr. Dark, "I'm only letting the light in on you, as I said I would. Now listen to reason, William, and profit by it as much as you can. Mr. James Smith says he is going on a cruise to Sweden, and makes his word good, at the beginning, by starting northward toward the coast of Scotland. What does he go in? A yacht. Do yachts carry live beasts and a butcher on board? No. Will joints of meat keep fresh all the way from Cumberland to Sweden? No. Do gentlemen like living on salt provisions? No. What follows from these three Noes? That Mr. James Smith must have stopped somewhere on the way to Sweden to supply his sea-larder with fresh provisions. Where, in that case, must he stop? Somewhere in Scotland, supposing he didn't alter his course when he was out of sight of your seaport. Where in Scotland? Northward on the main land, or westward at one of the islands? Most likely on the main land, where the seaside places are largest, and where he is sure of getting all the stores he wants. Next, what is our business? Not to risk losing a link in the chain of evidence by missing any place where he has put his foot on shore. Where in Scotland? Northward on the main land, or westward at one of the islands? Most likely on the main land, where the seaside places are largest, and where he is sure of getting all the stores he wants. Next, what is our business? Not to risk losing a link in the chain of evidence by missing any place where he has put his foot on shore. Not to overshoot the mark when we want to hit it in the bull's-eye. Not to waste money and time by taking a long trip to Sweden till we know that we must absolutely go there. Where is our journey of discovery to take us to first, then? Clearly to the north of Scotland. What do you say to that, Mr. William? Is my catechism all correct, or has your strong ale muddled my head?"

It was evident by this time that no ale could do that, and I told him so. He chuckled, winked at me, and, taking another pinch of snuff, said he would now turn the whole case over in his mind again, and make sure that he had got all the bearings of it quite clear.

By the time we reached the post-town he had accomplished this mental effort to his own perfect satisfaction, and was quite ready to compare the ale at the inn with the ale at Darrock Hall. The dog-cart was left to be taken back the next morning by the hostler. A post-chaise and horses were ordered out. A loaf of bread, a Bologna sausage, and two bottles of sherry were put into the pockets of the carriage; we took our seats, and started briskly on our doubtful journey.

"One word more of friendly advice," says Mr. Dark, settling himself comfortably in his corner of the carriage.
"Take your sleep, William, whenever you feel that you can get it. You won't find yourself in bed again till we get to Glasgow."

CHAPTER III.

ALTHOUGH the events that I am now relating happened many years ago, I shall still, for caution's sake, avoid mentioning by name the various places visited by Mr. Dark and myself for the purpose of making inquiries. It will be enough if I describe generally what we did, and if I mention in substance only the result at which we ultimately arrived.

On reaching Glasgow, Mr. Dark turned the whole case over in his mind once more. The result was that he altered his original intention of going straight to the north of Scotland, considering it safer to make sure, if possible, of the course the yacht had taken in her cruise along the western coast.

The carrying out of this new resolution involved the necessity of delaying our onward journey by perpetually diverging from the direct road. Three times we were sent uselessly to wild places in the Hebrides by false reports. Twice we wandered away inland, following gentlemen who answered generally to the description of Mr. James Smith, but who turned out to be the wrong men as soon as we set eyes on them. These vain excursions--especially the three to the western islands--consumed time terribly. It was more than two months from the day when we had left Darrock Hall before we found ourselves up at the very top of Scotland at last, driving into a considerable sea-side town, with a harbor attached to it. Thus far our journey had led to no results, and I began to despair of success. As for Mr. Dark, he never got to the end of his sweet temper and his wonderful patience.

"You don't know how to wait, William," was his constant remark whenever he heard me complaining. "I do."

We drove into the town toward evening in a modest little gig, and put up, according to our usual custom, at one of the inferior inns.

"We must begin at the bottom," Mr. Dark used to say. "High company in a coffee-room won't be familiar with us; low company in a tap-room will." And he certainly proved the truth of his own words. The like of him for making intimate friends of total strangers at the shortest notice I have never met with before or since. Cautious as the Scotch are, Mr. Dark seemed to have the knack of twisting them round his finger as he pleased. He varied his way artfully with different men, but there were three standing opinions of his which he made a point of expressing in all varieties of company while we were in Scotland. In the first place, he thought the view of Edinburgh from Arthur's Seat the finest in the world. In the second place, he considered whisky to be the most wholesome spirit in the world. In the third place, he believed his late beloved mother to be the best woman in the world. It may be worthy of note that, whenever he expressed this last opinion in Scotland, he invariably added that her maiden name was Macleod.

Well, we put up at a modest little inn near the harbor. I was dead tired with the journey, and lay down on my bed to get some rest. Mr. Dark, whom nothing ever fatigued, left me to take his toddy and pipe among the company in the taproom.

I don't know how long I had been asleep when I was roused by a shake on my shoulder. The room was pitch dark, and I felt a hand suddenly clapped over my mouth. Then a strong smell of whisky and tobacco saluted my nostrils, and a whisper stole into my ear--

"William, we have got to the end of our journey."

"Mr. Dark," I stammered out, "is that you? What, in Heaven's name, do you mean?"

"The yacht put in here," was the answer, still in a whisper, "and your blackguard of a master came ashore--"

"Oh, Mr. Dark," I broke in, "don't tell me that the letter is true!"

"Every word of it," says he. "He was married here, and was off again to the Mediterranean with Number Two a good three weeks before we left your mistress's house. Hush! don't say a word, Go to sleep again, or strike a light, if you like it better. Do anything but come downstairs with me. I'm going to find out all the particulars without seeming to want to know one of them. Yours is a very good-looking face, William, but it's so infernally honest that I can't trust it in the tap-room. I'm making friends with the Scotchmen already. They know my opinion of Arthur's Seat; they _see_ what I think of whisky; and I rather think it won't be long before they hear that my mother's maiden name was Macleod."

With those words he slipped out of the room, and left me, as he had found me, in the dark.

I was far too much agitated by what I had heard to think of going to sleep again, so I struck a light, and tried to amuse myself as well as I could with an old newspaper that had been stuffed into my carpet bag. It was then nearly ten o'clock. Two hours later, when the house shut up, Mr. Dark came back to me again in high spirits.

"I have got the whole case here," says he, tapping his forehead--"the whole case, as neat and clean as if it was drawn in a brief. That master of yours doesn't stick at a trifle, William. It's my opinion that your mistress and you have not seen the last of him yet."

We were sleeping that night in a double-bedded room. As soon as Mr. Dark had secured the door and disposed himself comfortably in his bed, he entered on a detailed narrative of the particulars communicated to him in the tap-
been present at the ceremony; and after it had been performed the newly-married couple left the town at once for a
son-in-law to object to any proposals for hastening the marriage. He and his wife, and a few intimate relations had
of Mr. James Smith without having the slightest suspicion of who the bridegroom really was.

was mentioned in the Scotch newspapers. All his friends, even his wife herself, might read a report of the marriage
made public without risk of discovery, his own common name being of itself a sufficient protection in case the event
town who knew of the existence of his unhappy wife. After that the news of his approaching marriage might be
up in the harbor, gave the sailing-master leave of absence to return to his family at Cowes, and paid off the whole of
intended to amuse himself by a long fishing tour in Scotland. After this explanation, he ordered the vessel to be laid

fixed, as nearly as possible, at one and the same time.

date of the father's return and the date of Mr. James Smith's first wicked resolution to marry the girl might both be
imperfect evidence of persons who were not admitted to the family councils. The fact, however, was certain that the
presence on the scene decided him at last. How this new influence acted it was impossible to find out from the

in this last alternative. While he was still in doubt, the father's coasting vessel sailed into the harbor, and the father's
anchor. On the third day, the cause of the coolness, whatever it was, appears to have been removed, and he returned
to his lodgings on shore. Some of the more inquisitive among the townspeople observed soon afterward, when they
met him in the street, that he looked rather anxious and uneasy. The conclusion had probably forced itself upon his
mind, by this time, that he must decide on pursuing one of two courses: either he must resolve to make the sacrifice
of leaving the girl altogether, or he must commit the villainy of marrying her.

Scoundrel as he was, he hesitated at encountering the risk--perhaps, also, at being guilty of the crime--involved
in this last alternative. While he was still in doubt, the father's coasting vessel sailed into the harbor, and the father's
presence on the scene decided him at last. How this new influence acted it was impossible to find out from the
imperfect evidence of persons who were not admitted to the family councils. The fact, however, was certain that the
date of the father's return and the date of Mr. James Smith's first wicked resolution to marry the girl might both be
fixed, as nearly as possible, at one and the same time.

Having once made up his mind to the commission of the crime, he proceeded with all possible coolness and
cunning to provide against the chances of detection.

Returning on board his yacht he announced that he had given up his intention of cruising to Sweden and that he
intended to amuse himself by a long fishing tour in Scotland. After this explanation, he ordered the vessel to be laid
up in the harbor, gave the sailing-master leave of absence to return to his family at Cowes, and paid off the whole of
the crew from the mate to the cabin-boy. By these means he cleared the scene, at one blow, of the only people in the
town who knew of the existence of his unhappy wife. After that the news of his approaching marriage might be
made public without risk of discovery, his own common name being of itself a sufficient protection in case the event
was mentioned in the Scotch newspapers. All his friends, even his wife herself, might read a report of the marriage
of Mr. James Smith without having the slightest suspicion of who the bridegroom really was.

A fortnight after the paying off of the crew he was married to the merchant-captain's daughter. The father of the
girl was well known among his fellow-townsmen as a selfish, grasping man, who was too anxious to secure a rich
son-in-law to object to any proposals for hastening the marriage. He and his wife, and a few intimate relations had
been present at the ceremony; and after it had been performed the newly-married couple left the town at once for a
honeymoon trip to the Highland lakes.

Two days later, however, they unexpectedly returned, announcing a complete change in their plans. The bridegroom (thinking, probably, that he would be safer out of England than in it) had been pleasing the bride's fancy by his descriptions of the climate and the scenery of southern parts. The new Mrs. James Smith was all curiosity to see Spain and Italy; and, having often proved herself an excellent sailor on board her father's vessel, was anxious to go to the Mediterranean in the easiest way by sea. Her affectionate husband, having now no other object in life than to gratify her wishes, had given up the Highland excursion, and had returned to have his yacht got ready for sea immediately. In this explanation there was nothing to awaken the suspicions of the lady's parents. The mother thought Mr. James Smith a model among bridegrooms. The father lent his assistance to man the yacht at the shortest notice with as smart a crew as could be picked up about the town. Principally through his exertions, the vessel was got ready for sea with extraordinary dispatch. The sails were bent, the provisions were put on board, and Mr. James Smith sailed for the Mediterranean with the unfortunate woman who believed herself to be his wife, before Mr. Dark and myself set forth to look after him from Darrock Hall.

Such was the true account of my master's infamous conduct in Scotland as it was related to me. On concluding, Mr. Dark hinted that he had something still left to tell me, but declared that he was too sleepy to talk any more that night. As soon as we were awake the next morning he returned to the subject.

"I didn't finish all I had to say last night, did I?" he began.

You unfortunately told me enough, and more than enough, to prove the truth of the statement in the anonymous letter," I answered.

"Yes," says Mr. Dark, "but did I tell you who wrote the anonymous letter?"

"You don't mean to say that you have found that out!" says I.

"I think I have," was the cool answer. "When I heard about your precious master paying off the regular crew of the yacht I put the circumstance by in my mind, to be brought out again and sifted a little as soon as the opportunity offered. It offered in about half an hour. Says I to the gauger, who was the principal talker in the room: 'How about those men that Mr. Smith paid off? Did they all go as soon as they got their money, or did they stop here till they had spent every farthing of it in the public-houses?' The gauger laughs. 'No such luck,' says he, in the broadest possible Scotch (which I translate into English, William, for your benefit); 'no such luck; they all went south, to spend their money among finer people than us--all, that is to say, with one exception. It was thought the steward of the yacht had gone along with the rest, when, the very day Mr. Smith sailed for the Mediterranean, who should turn up unexpectedly but the steward himself! Where he had been hiding, and why he had been hiding, nobody could tell.' Perhaps he had been imitating his master, and looking out for a wife,' says I. 'Likely enough,' says the gauger; 'he gave a very confused account of himself, and he cut all questions short by going away south in a violent hurry.' That was enough for me: I let the subject drop. Clear as daylight, isn't it, William? The steward suspected something wrong--the steward waited and watched--the steward wrote that anonymous letter to your mistress. We can find him, if we want him, by inquiring at Cowes; and we can send to the church for legal evidence of the marriage as soon as we are instructed to do so. All that we have got to do now is to go back to your mistress, and see what course she means to take under the circumstances. It's a pretty case, William, so far--an uncommonly pretty case, as it stands at present."

We returned to Darrock Hall as fast as coaches and post-horses could carry us.

Having from the first believed that the statement in the anonymous letter was true, my mistress received the bad news we brought calmly and resignedly--so far, at least, as outward appearances went. She astonished and disappointed Mr. Dark by declining to act in any way on the information that he had collected for her, and by insisting that the whole affair should still be buried in the profoundest secrecy. For the first time since I had known my traveling companion, he became depressed in spirits on hearing that nothing more was to be done, and, although he left the Hall with a handsome present, he left it discontentedly.

"Such a pretty case, William," says he, quite sorrowfully, as we shook hands--"such an uncommonly pretty case--it's a thousand pities to stop it, in this way, before it's half over!"

"You don't know what a proud lady and what a delicate lady my mistress is," I answered. "She would die rather than expose her forlorn situation in a public court for the sake of punishing her husband."

"Bless your simple heart!" says Mr. Dark, "do you really think, now, that such a case as this can be hushed up?"

"Why not," I asked, "if we all keep the secret?"

"That for the secret!" cries Mr. Dark, snapping his fingers. "Your master will let the cat out of the bag, if nobody else does."

"My master!" I repeated, in amazement.

"Yes, your master!" says Mr. Dark. "I have had some experience in my time, and I say you have not seen the last of him yet. Mark my words, William, Mr. James Smith will come back."
With that prophecy, Mr. Dark fretfully treated himself to a last pinch of snuff, and departed in dudgeon on his journey back to his master in London. His last words hung heavily on my mind for days after he had gone. It was some weeks before I got over a habit of starting whenever the bell was rung at the front door.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR life at the Hall soon returned to its old, dreary course. The lawyer in London wrote to my mistress to ask her to come and stay for a little while with his wife; but she declined the invitation, being averse to facing company after what had happened to her. Though she tried hard to keep the real state of her mind concealed from all about her, I, for one, could see plainly enough that she was pining under the bitter injury that had been inflicted on her. What effect continued solitude might have had on her spirits I tremble to think.

Fortunately for herself, it occurred to her, before long, to send and invite Mr. Meeke to resume his musical practicing with her at the Hall. She told him—and, as it seemed to me, with perfect truth—that any implied engagement which he had made with Mr. James Smith was now canceled, since the person so named had morally forfeited all his claims as a husband, first, by his desertion of her, and, secondly, by his criminal marriage with another woman. After stating this view of the matter, she left it to Mr. Meeke to decide whether the perfectly innocent connection between them should be resumed or not. The little parson, after hesitating and pondering in his helpless way, ended by agreeing with my mistress, and by coming back once more to the Hall with his fiddle under his arm. This renewal of their old habits might have been imprudent enough, as tending to weaken my mistress's case in the eyes of the world, but, for all that, it was the most sensible course she could take for her own sake. The harmless company of Mr. Meeke, and the relief of playing the old tunes again in the old way, saved her, I verily believe, from sinking altogether under the oppression of the shocking situation in which she was now placed.

So, with the assistance of Mr. Meeke and his fiddle, my mistress got though the weary time. The winter passed, the spring came, and no fresh tidings reached us of Mr. James Smith. It had been a long, hard winter that year, and the spring was backward and rainy. The first really fine day we had was the day that fell on the fourteenth of March.

I am particular in mentioning this date merely because it is fixed forever in my memory. As long as there is life in me I shall remember that fourteenth of March, and the smallest circumstances connected with it.

The day began ill, with what superstitious people would think a bad omen. My mistress remained late in her room in the morning, amusing herself by looking over her clothes, and by setting to rights some drawers in her cabinet which she had not opened for some time past. Just before luncheon we were startled by hearing the drawing-room bell rung violently. I ran up to see what was the matter, and the quadroon, Josephine, who had heard the bell in another part of the house, hastened to answer it also. She got into the drawing-room first, and I followed close on her heels. My mistress was standing alone on the hearth-rug, with an appearance of great discomposure in her face and manner.

"I have been robbed!" she said, vehemently, "I don't know when or how; but I miss a pair of bracelets, three rings, and a quantity of old-fashioned lace pocket-handkerchiefs."

"If you have any suspicions, ma'am," said Josephine, in a sharp, sudden way, "say who they point at. My boxes, for one, are quite at your disposal."

"Who asked about your boxes?" said my mistress, angrily. "Be a little less ready with your answer, if you please, the next time I speak."

She then turned to me, and began explaining the circumstances under which she had discovered her loss. I suggested that the missing things should be well searched for first, and then, if nothing came of that, that I should go for the constable, and place the matter under his direction.

My mistress agreed to this plan, and the search was undertaken immediately. It lasted till dinner-time, and led to no results. I then proposed going for the constable. But my mistress said it was too late to do anything that day, and told me to wait at table as usual, and to go on my errand the first thing the next morning. Mr. Meeke was coming with some new music in the evening, and I suspect she was not willing to be disturbed at her favorite occupation by the arrival of the constable.

When dinner was over the parson came, and the concert went on as usual through the evening. At ten o'clock I took up the tray, with the wine, and soda-water, and biscuits. Just as I was opening one of the bottles of soda-water, there was a sound of wheels on the drive outside, and a ring at the bell.

I had unfastened the wires of the cork, and could not put the bottle down to run at once to the door. One of the female servants answered it. I heard a sort of half scream—then the sound of a footstep that was familiar to me.

My mistress turned round from the piano, and looked me hard in the face.

"William," she said, "do you know that step?" Before I could answer the door was pushed open, and Mr. James Smith walked into the room.

He had his hat on. His long hair flowed down under it over the collar of his coat; his bright black eyes, after resting an instant on my mistress, turned to Mr. Meeke. His heavy eyebrows met together, and one of his hands went
up to one of his bushy black whiskers, and pulled at it angrily.

"You here again!" he said, advancing a few steps toward the little parson, who sat trembling all over, with his fiddle hugged up in his arms as if it had been a child.

Seeing her villainous husband advance, my mistress moved, too, so as to face him. He turned round on her at the first step she took, as quick as lightning.

"You shameless woman!" he said. "Can you look me in the face in the presence of that man?" He pointed, as he spoke, to Mr. Meeke.

My mistress never shrank when he turned upon her. Not a sign of fear was in her face when they confronted each other. Not the faintest flush of anger came into her cheeks when he spoke. The sense of the insult and injury that he had inflicted on her, and the consciousness of knowing his guilty secret, gave her all her self-possession at that trying moment.

"I ask you again," he repeated, finding that she did not answer him, "how dare you look me in the face in the presence of that man?"

She raised her steady eyes to his hat, which he still kept on his head.

"Who has taught you to come into a room and speak to a lady with your hat on?" she asked, in quiet, contemptuous tones. "Is that a habit which is sanctioned by _your new wife?_"

My eyes were on him as she said those last words. His complexion, naturally dark and swarthy, changed instantly to a livid yellow white; his hand caught at the chair nearest to him, and he dropped into it heavily.

"I don't understand you," he said, after a moment of silence, looking about the room unsteadily while he spoke.

"You do," said my mistress. "Your tongue lies, but your face speaks the truth."

He called back his courage and audacity by a desperate effort, and started up from the chair again with an oath.

The instant before this happened I thought I heard the sound of a rustling dress in the passage outside, as if one of the women servants was stealing up to listen outside the door. I should have gone at once to see whether this was the case or not, but my master stopped me just after he had risen from the chair.

"Get the bed made in the Red Room, and light a fire there directly," he said, with his fiercest look and in his roughest tones. "As for you," he continued, turning toward Mr. Meeke, who still sat pale and speechless with his fiddle hugged up in his arms, "leave the house, or you won't find your cloth any protection to you."

At this insult the blood flew into my mistress's face. Before she could say anything, Mr. James Smith raised his voice loud enough to drown hers.

"I won't hear another word from you," he cried out, brutally. "You have been talking like a mad woman, and you look like a mad woman. You are out of your senses. As sure as you live, I'll have you examined by the doctors tomorrow. Why the devil do you stand there, you scoundrel?" he roared, wheeling round on his heel to me. "Why don't you obey my orders?"

I looked at my mistress. If she had directed me to knock Mr. James Smith down, big as he was, I think at that moment I could have done it.

"Do as he tells you, William," she said, squeezing one of her hands firmly over her bosom, as if she was trying to keep down the rising indignation in that way. "This is the last order of his giving that I shall ask you to obey."

"Do you threaten me, you mad--"

He finished the question by a word I shall not repeat.

"I tell you," she answered, in clear, ringing, resolute tones, "that you have outraged me past all forgiveness and all endurance, and that you shall never insult me again as you have insulted me to-night."

After saying those words she fixed one steady look on him, then turned away and walked slowly to the door.

A minute previously Mr. Meeke had summoned courage enough to get up and leave the room quietly. I noticed him walking demurely away, close to the wall, with his fiddle held under one tail of his long frock-coat, as if he was afraid that the savage passions of Mr. James Smith might be wreaked on that unoffending instrument. He got to the door before my mistress. As he softly pulled it open, I saw him start, and the rustling of the gown caught my ear again from the outside.

My mistress followed him into the passage, turning, however, in the opposite direction to that taken by the little parson, in order to reach the staircase that led to her own room. I went out next, leaving Mr. James Smith alone.

I overtook Mr. Meeke in the hall, and opened the door for him.

"I beg your pardon, sir," I said, "but did you come upon anybody listening outside the music-room when you left it just now?"

"Yes, William," said Mr. Meeke, in a faint voice, "I think it was Josephine; but I was so dreadfully agitated that I can't be quite certain about it."

Had she surprised our secret? That was the question I asked myself as I went away to light the fire in the Red
Room. Calling to mind the exact time at which I had first detected the rustling outside the door, I came to the conclusion that she had only heard the last part of the quarrel between my mistress and her rascal of a husband. Those bold words about the "new wife" had been assuredly spoken before I heard Josephine stealing up to the door.

As soon as the fire was alight and the bed made, I went back to the music-room to announce that my orders had been obeyed. Mr. James Smith was walking up and down in a perturbed way, still keeping his hat on. He followed me to the Red Room without saying a word.

Ten minutes later he rang for the kettle and the bottle of brandy. When I took them in I found him unpacking a small carpet-bag, which was the only luggage he had brought with him. He still kept silence, and did not appear to take any notice of me. I left him immediately without our having so much as exchanged a single word.

So far as I could tell, the night passed quietly. The next morning I heard that my mistress was suffering so severely from a nervous attack that she was unable to rise from her bed. It was no surprise to me to be told that, knowing as I did what she had gone through the night before.

About nine o'clock I went with the hot water to the Red Room. After knocking twice I tried the door, and, finding it not locked, went in with the jug in my hand.

I looked at the bed--I looked all round the room. Not a sign of Mr. James Smith was to be seen anywhere. Judging by appearances, the bed had certainly been occupied. Thrown across the counterpane lay the nightgown he had worn. I took it up and saw some spots on it. I looked at them a little closer. They were spots of blood.

CHAPTER V.

The first amazement and alarm produced by this discovery deprived me of my presence of mind. Without stopping to think what I ought to do first, I ran back to the servants' hall, calling out that something had happened to my master.

All the household hurried directly into the Red Room, Josephine among the rest. I was first brought to my senses, as it were, by observing the strange expression of her countenance when she saw the bed-gown and the empty room. All the other servants were bewildered and frightened. She alone, after giving a little start, recovered herself directly. A look of devilish satisfaction broke out on her face, and she left the room quickly and quietly, without exchanging a word with any of us. I saw this, and it aroused my suspicions. There is no need to mention what they were, for, as events soon showed, they were entirely wide of the mark.

Having come to myself a little, I sent them all out of the room except the coachman. We two then examined the place.

The Red Room was usually occupied by visitors. It was on the ground floor, and looked out into the garden. We found the window-shutters, which I had barred overnight, open, but the window itself was down. The fire had been out long enough for the grate to be quite cold. Half the bottle of brandy had been drunk. The carpet-bag was gone. There were no marks of violence or struggling anywhere about the bed or the room. We examined every corner carefully, but made no other discoveries than these.

When I returned to the servants' hall, bad news of my mistress was awaiting me there. The unusual noise and confusion in the house had reached her ears, and she had been told what had happened without sufficient caution being exercised in preparing her to hear it. In her weak, nervous state, the shock of the intelligence had quite prostrated her. She had fallen into a swoon, and had been brought back to her senses with the greatest difficulty. As to giving me or anybody else directions what to do under the embarrassing circumstances which had now occurred, she was totally incapable of the effort.

I waited till the middle of the day, in the hope that she might get strong enough to give her orders; but no message came from her. At last I resolved to send and ask her what she thought it best to do. Josephine was the proper person to go on this errand; but when I asked for Josephine, she was nowhere to be found. The housemaid, who had searched for her ineffectually, brought word that her bonnet and shawl were not hanging in their usual places. The parlor-maid, who had been in attendance in my mistress's room, came down while we were all aghast at this new disappearance. She could only tell us that Josephine had begged her to do lady's-maid's duty that morning, as she was not well. Not well! And the first result of her illness appeared to be that she had left the house!

I cautioned the servants on no account to mention this circumstance to my mistress, and then went upstairs myself to knock at her door. My object was to ask if I might count on her approval if I wrote in her name to the lawyer in London, and if I afterward went and gave information of what had occurred to the nearest justice of the peace. I might have sent to make this inquiry through one of the female servants; but by this time, though not naturally suspicious, I had got to distrust everybody in the house, whether they deserved it or not.

So I asked the question myself, standing outside the door. My mistress thanked me in a faint voice, and begged me to do what I had proposed immediately.

I went into my own bedroom and wrote to the lawyer, merely telling him that Mr. James Smith had appeared unexpectedly at the Hall, and that events had occurred in consequence which required his immediate presence. I
made the letter up like a parcel, and sent the coachman with it to catch the mail on its way through to London.

The next thing was to go to the justice of the peace. The nearest lived about five miles off, and was well acquainted with my mistress. He was an old bachelor, and he kept house with his brother, who was a widower. The two were much respected and beloved in the county, being kind, unaffected gentlemen, who did a great deal of good among the poor. The justice was Mr. Robert Nicholson, and his brother, the widower, was Mr. Philip.

I had got my hat on, and was asking the groom which horse I had better take, when an open carriage drove up to the house. It contained Mr. Philip Nicholson and two persons in plain clothes, not exactly servants and not exactly gentlemen, as far as I could judge. Mr. Philip looked at me, when I touched my hat to him, in a very grave, downcast way, and asked for my mistress. I told him she was ill in bed. He shook his head at hearing that, and said he wished to speak to me in private. I showed him into the library. One of the men in plain clothes followed us, and sat in the hall. The other waited with the carriage.

"I was just going out, sir," I said, as I set a chair for him, "to speak to Mr. Robert Nicholson about a very extraordinary circumstance--"

"I know what you refer to," said Mr. Philip, cutting me short rather abruptly; "and I must beg, for reasons which will presently appear, that you will make no statement of any sort to me until you have first heard what I have to say. I am here on a very serious and a very shocking errand, which deeply concerns your mistress and you."

His face suggested something worse than his words expressed. My heart began to beat fast, and I felt that I was turning pale.

"Your master, Mr. James Smith," he went on, "came here unexpectedly yesterday evening, and slept in this house last night. Before he retired to rest and your mistress had high words together, which ended, I am sorry to hear, in a threat of a serious nature addressed by Mrs. James Smith to her husband. They slept in separate rooms. This morning you went into your master's room and saw no sign of him there. You only found his nightgown on the bed, spotted with blood."

"Yes, sir," I said, in as steady a voice as I could command. "Quite true."

"I am not examining you," said Mr. Philip. "I am only making a certain statement, the truth of which you can admit or deny before my brother."

"Before your brother, sir!" I repeated. "Am I suspected of anything wrong?"

"There is a suspicion that Mr. James Smith has been murdered," was the answer I received to that question. My flesh began to creep all over from head to foot.

"I am shocked--I am horrified to say," Mr. Philip went on, "that the suspicion affects your mistress in the first place, and you in the second."

I shall not attempt to describe what I felt when he said that. No words of mine, no words of anybody's, could give an idea of it. What other men would have done in my situation I don't know. I stood before Mr. Philip, staring straight at him, without speaking, without moving, almost without breathing. If he or any other man had struck me at that moment, I do not believe I should have felt the blow.

"Both my brother and myself," said Mr. Philip, "have such unfeigned respect for your mistress, such sympathy for her under these frightful circumstances, and such an implicit belief in her capability of proving her innocence, that we are desirous of sparing her in this dreadful emergency as much as possible. For those reasons, I have undertaken to come here with the persons appointed to execute my brother's warrant--"

"Warrant, sir!" I said, getting command of my voice as he pronounced that word--"a warrant against my mistress!"

"Against her and against you," said Mr. Philip. "The suspicious circumstances have been sworn to by a competent witness, who has declared on oath that your mistress is guilty, and that you are an accomplice."

"What witness, sir?"

"Your mistress's quadroon maid, who came to my brother this morning, and who has made her deposition in due form."

"And who is as false as hell," I cried out passionately, "in every word she says against my mistress and against me."

"I hope--no, I will go further, and say I believe she is false," said Mr. Philip. "But her perjury must he proved, and the necessary examination must take place. My carriage is going back to my brother's, and you will go in it, in charge of one of my men, who has the warrant to take you in custody. I shall remain here with the man who is waiting in the hall; and before any steps are taken to execute the other warrant, I shall send for the doctor to ascertain when your mistress can be removed."

"Oh, my poor mistress!" I said, "this will be the death of her, sir."

"I will take care that the shock shall strike her as tenderly as possible," said Mr. Philip. "I am here for that express purpose. She has my deepest sympathy and respect, and shall have every help and alleviation that I can
afford her."

The hearing him say that, and the seeing how sincerely he meant what he said, was the first gleam of comfort in
the dreadful affliction that had befallen us. I felt this; I felt a burning anger against the wretch who had done her best
to ruin my mistress’s fair name and mine, but in every other respect I was like a man who had been stunned, and
whose faculties had not perfectly recovered from the shock. Mr. Philip was obliged to remind me that time was of
importance, and that I had better give myself up immediately, on the merciful terms which his kindness offered to
me. I acknowledged that, and wished him good morning. But a mist seemed to come over my eyes as I turned round
to go away—a mist that prevented me from finding my way to the door. Mr. Philip opened it for me, and said a
friendly word or two which I could hardly hear. The man waiting outside took me to his companion in the carriage
at the door, and I was driven away, a prisoner for the first time in my life.

On our way to the justice’s, what little thinking faculty I had left in me was all occupied in the attempt to trace a
motive for the inconceivable treachery and falsehood of which Josephine had been guilty.

Her words, her looks, and her manner, on that unfortunate day when my mistress so far forget herself as to
strike, her, came back dimly to my memory, and led to the inference that part of the motive, at least, of which I was
in search, might be referred to what had happened on that occasion. But was this the only reason for her devilish
vengeance against my mistress? And, even if it were so, what fancied injuries had I done her? Why should I be
included in the false accusation? In the dazed state of my faculties at that time, I was quite incapable of seeking the
answer to these questions. My mind was clouded all over, and I gave up the attempt to clear it in despair.

I was brought before Mr. Robert Nicholson that day, and the fiend of a quadroon was examined in my presence.
The first sight of her face, with its wicked self-possession, with its smooth leering triumph, so sickened me that I
turned my head away and never looked at her a second time throughout the proceedings. The answers she gave
amounted to a mere repetition of the deposition to which she had already sworn. I listened to her with the most
breathless attention, and was thunderstruck at the inconceivable artfulness with which she had mixed up truth and
falsehood in her charge against my mistress and me.

This was, in substance, what she now stated in my presence:

After describing the manner of Mr. James Smith's arrival at the Hall, the witness, Josephine Durand, confessed
that she had been led to listen at the music-room door by hearing angry voices inside, and she then described, truly
enough, the latter part of the altercation between husband and wife. Fearing, after this, that something serious might
happen, she had kept watch in her room, which was on the same floor as her mistress's. She had heard her mistress's
doors open softly between one and two in the morning--had followed her mistress, who carried a small lamp, along
the passage and down the stairs into the hall--had hidden herself in the porter's chair--had seen her mistress take a
dagger in a green sheath from a collection of Eastern curiosities kept in the hall--had followed her again, and seen
her softly enter the Red Room--had heard the heavy breathing of Mr. James Smith, which gave token that he was
asleep--had slipped into an empty room, next door to the Red Roam, and had waited there about a quarter of an
hour, when her mistress came out again with the dagger in her hand--had followed her mistress again into the hall,
where she had put the dagger back into its place--had seen her mistress turn into a side passage that led to my room--
had heard her knock at my door, and heard me answer and open it--had hidden again in the porter's chair--had, after
a while, seen me and my mistress pass together through the passage that led to the Red Room--had watched us both into
the Red Room--and had then, through fear of being discovered and murdered herself, if she risked detection any
longer, stolen back to her own room for the rest of the night.

After deposing on oath to the truth of these atrocious falsehoods, and declaring, in conclusion, that Mr. James
Smith had been murdered by my mistress, and that I was an accomplice, the quadroon had further asserted, in order
to show a motive for the crime, that Mr. Meeke was my mistress's lover; that he had been forbidden the house by her
husband, and that he was found in the house, and alone with her, on the evening of Mr. James Smith's return. Here
again there were some grains of truth cunningly mixed up with a revolting lie, and they had their effect in giving to
the falsehood a look of probability.

I was cautioned in the usual manner and asked if I had anything to say.

I replied that I was innocent, but that I would wait for legal assistance before I defended myself. The justice
remanded me and the examination was over. Three days later my unhappy mistress was subjected to the same trial. I
was not allowed to communicate with her. All I knew was that the lawyer had arrived from London to help her. Toward the evening he was admitted to see me. He shook his head sorrowfully when I asked after my mistress.

"I am afraid," he said, "that she has sunk under the horror of the situation in which that vile woman has placed
her. Weakened by her previous agitation, she seems to have given way under this last shock, tenderly and carefully
as Mr. Philip Nicholson broke the bad news to her. All her feelings appeared to be strangely blunted at the
examination to-day. She answered the questions put to her quite correctly, but at the same time quite mechanically,
with no change in her complexion, or in her tone of voice, or in her manner, from beginning to end. It is a sad thing,
William, when women cannot get their natural vent of weeping, and your mistress has not shed a tear since she left Darrock Hall."

"But surely, sir," I said, "if my examination has not proved Josephine's perjury, my mistress's examination must have exposed it?"

"Nothing will expose it," answered the lawyer, "but producing Mr. James Smith, or, at least, legally proving that he is alive. Morally speaking, I have no doubt that the justice before whom you have been examined is as firmly convinced as we can be that the quadroon has perjured herself. Morally speaking, he believes that those threats which your mistress unfortunately used referred (as she said they did to-day) to her intention of leaving the Hall early in the morning, with you for her attendant, and coming to me, if she had been well enough to travel, to seek effectual legal protection from her husband for the future. Mr. Nicholson believes that; and I, who know more of the circumstances than he does, believe also that Mr. James Smith stole away from Darrock Hall in the night under fear of being indicted for bigamy. But if I can't find him--if I can't prove him to be alive--if I can't account for those spots of blood on the night-gown, the accidental circumstances of the case remain unexplained--your mistress's rash language, the bad terms on which she has lived with her husband, and her unlucky disregard of appearances in keeping up her intercourse with Mr. Meeke, all tell dead against us--and the justice has no alternative, in a legal point of view, but to remand you both, as he has now done, for the production of further evidence."

"But how, then, in Heaven's name, is our innocence to be proved, sir?" I asked.

"In the first place," said the lawyer, "by finding Mr. James Smith; and, in the second place, by persuading him, when he is found, to come forward and declare himself."

"Do you really believe, sir," said I, "that he would hesitate to do that, when he knows the horrible charge to which his disappearance has exposed his wife? He is a heartless villain, I know; but surely--"

"I don't suppose," said the lawyer, cutting me short, "that he is quite scoundrel enough to decline coming forward, supposing he ran no risk by doing so. But remember that he has placed himself in a position to be tried for bigamy, and that he believes your mistress will put the law in force against him."

I had forgotten that circumstance. My heart sank within me when it was recalled to my memory, and I could say nothing more.

"It is a very serious thing," the lawyer went on--"it is a downright offense against the law of the land to make any private offer of a compromise to this man. Knowing what we know, our duty as good citizens is to give such information as may bring him to trial. I tell you plainly that, if I did not stand toward your mistress in the position of a relation as well as a legal adviser, I should think twice about running the risk--the very serious risk--on which I am now about to venture for her sake. As it is, I have taken the right measures to assure Mr. James Smith that he will not be treated according to his deserts. When he knows what the circumstances are, he will trust us--supposing always that we can find him. The search about this neighborhood has been quite useless. I have sent private instructions by to-day's post to Mr. Dark in London, and with them a carefully-worded form of advertisement for the public newspapers. You may rest assured that every human means of tracing him will be tried forthwith. In the meantime, I have an important question to put to you about Josephine. She may know more than we think she does; she may have surprised the secret of the second marriage, and may be keeping it in reserve to use against us. If this should turn out to be the case, I shall want some other chance against her besides the chance of indicting her for perjury. As to her motive now for making this horrible accusation, what can you tell me about that, William?"

"Her motive against me, sir?"

"No, no, not against you. I can see plainly enough that she accuses you because it is necessary to do so to add to the probability of her story, which, of course, assumes that you helped your mistress to dispose of the dead body. You are coolly sacrificed to some devilish vengeance against her mistress. Let us get at that first."

"Has there ever been a quarrel between them?"

I told him of the quarrel, and of how Josephine had looked and talked when she showed me her cheek.

"Yes," he said, "that is a strong motive for revenge with a naturally pitiless, vindictive woman. But is that all? Had your mistress any hold over her? Is there any self-interest mixed up along with this motive of vengeance? Think a little, William. Has anything ever happened in the house to compromise this woman, or to make her fancy herself compromised?"

The remembrance of my mistress's lost trinkets and handkerchiefs, which later and greater troubles had put out of my mind, flashed back into my memory while he spoke. I told him immediately of the alarm in the house when the loss was discovered.

"Did your mistress suspect Josephine and question her?" he asked, eagerly.

"No, sir," I replied. "Before she could say a word, Josephine impudently asked who she suspected, and boldly offered her own boxes to be searched."

The lawyer's face turned red as scarlet. He jumped out of his chair, and hit me such a smack on the shoulder that
"By Jupiter!" he cried out, "we have got the whip-hand of that she-devil at last."

I looked at him in astonishment.

"Why, man alive," he said, "don't you see how it is? Josephine's the thief! I am as sure of it as that you and I are talking together. This vile accusation against your mistress answers another purpose besides the vindictive one --it is the very best screen that the wretch could possibly set up to hide herself from detection. It has stopped your mistress and you from moving in the matter; it exhibits her in the false character of an honest witness against a couple of criminals; it gives her time to dispose of the goods, or to hide them, or to do anything she likes with them. Stop! let me be quite sure that I know what the lost things are. A pair of bracelets, three rings, and a lot of lace pocket-handkerchiefs--is that what you said?"

"Yes, sir."

"Your mistress will describe them particularly, and I will take the right steps the first thing to-morrow morning. Good-evening, William, and keep up your spirits. It shan't be my fault if you don't soon see the quadroon in the right place for her--at the prisoner's bar."

With that farewell he went out.

The days passed, and I did not see him again until the period of my remand had expired. On this occasion, when I once more appeared before the justice, my mistress appeared with me. The first sight of her absolutely startled me, she was so sadly altered. Her face looked so pinched and thin that it was like the face of an old woman. The dull, vacant resignation of her expression was something shocking to see. It changed a little when her eyes first turned heavily toward me, and she whispered, with a faint smile, "I am sorry for you, William--I am very, very sorry for you." But as soon as she had said those words the blank look returned, and she sat with her head drooping forward, quiet, and inattentive, and hopeless--so changed a being that her oldest friends would hardly have known her.

Our examination was a mere formality. There was no additional evidence either for or against us, and we were remanded again for another week.

I asked the lawyer, privately, if any chance had offered itself of tracing Mr. James Smith. He looked mysterious, and only said in answer, "Hope for the best." I inquired next if any progress had been made toward fixing the guilt of the robbery on Josephine.

"I never boast," he replied. "But, cunning as she is, I should not be surprised if Mr. Dark and I, together, turned out to be more than a match for her."

Mr. Dark! There was something in the mere mention of his name that gave me confidence in the future. If I could only have got my poor mistress's sad, dazed face out of my mind, I should not have had much depression of spirits to complain of during the interval of time that elapsed between the second examination and the third.

CHAPTER VI.

ON the third appearance of my mistress and myself before the justice, I noticed some faces in the room which I had not seen there before. Greatly to my astonishment--for the previous examinations had been conducted as privately as possible--I remarked the presence of two of the servants from the Hall, and of three or four of the tenants on the Darrock estate, who lived nearest to the house. They all sat together on one side of the justice-room. Opposite to them and close at the side of a door, stood my old acquaintance, Mr. Dark, with his big snuff-box, his jolly face, and his winking eye. He nodded to me, when I looked at him, as jauntily as if we were meeting at a party of pleasure. The quadroon woman, who had been summoned to the examination, had a chair placed opposite to the witness-box, and in a line with the seat occupied by my poor mistress, whose looks, as I was grieved to see, were not altered for the better. The lawyer from London was with her, and I stood behind her chair.

We were all quietly disposed in the room in this way, when the justice, Mr. Robert Nicholson, came in with his brother. It might have been only fancy, but I thought I could see in both their faces that something remarkable had happened since we had met at the last examination.

The deposition of Josephine Durand was read over by the clerk, and she was asked if she had anything to add to it. She replied in the negative. The justice then appealed to my mistress's relation, the lawyer, to know if he could produce any evidence relating to the charge against his clients.

"I have evidence," answered the lawyer, getting briskly on his legs, "which I believe, sir, will justify me in asking for their discharge."

"Where are your witnesses?" inquired the justice, looking hard at Josephine while he spoke.

"One of them is in waiting, your worship," said Mr. Dark, opening the door near which he was standing. He went out of the room, remained away about a minute, and returned with his witness at his heels.

My heart gave a bound as if it would jump out of my body. There, with his long hair cut short, and his bushy whiskers shaved off--there, in his own proper person, safe and sound as ever, was Mr. James Smith!

The quadroon's iron nature resisted the shock of his unexpected presence on the scene with a steadiness that was
nothing short of marvelous. Her thin lips closed together convulsively, and there was a slight movement in the
muscles of her throat. But not a word, not a sign betrayed her. Even the yellow tinge of her complexion remained
unchanged.

"It is not necessary, sir, that I should waste time and words in referring to the wicked and preposterous charge
against my clients," said the lawyer, addressing Mr. Robert Nicholson. "The one sufficient justification for
discharging them immediately is before you at this moment in the person of that gentleman. There, sir, stands the
murdered Mr. James Smith, of Darrock Hall, alive and well, to answer for himself."

"That is not the man!" cried Josephine, her shrill voice just as high, clear, and steady as ever, "I denounce that
man as an impostor. Of my own knowledge, I deny that he is Mr. James Smith."

"No doubt you do," said the lawyer; "but we will prove his identity for all that."

The first witness called was Mr. Philip Nicholson. He could swear that he had seen Mr. James Smith, and spoken
to him at least a dozen times. The person now before him was Mr. James Smith, altered as to personal appearance
by having his hair cut short and his whiskers shaved off, but still unmistakably the man he assumed to be.

"Conspiracy!" interrupted the prisoner, hissing the word out viciously between her teeth.

"If you are not silent," said Mr. Robert Nicholson, "you will be removed from the room. It will sooner meet the
ends of justice," he went on, addressing the lawyer, "if you prove the question of identity by witnesses who have
been in habits of daily communication with Mr. James Smith."

Upon this, one of the servants from the Hall was placed in the box.

The alteration in his master's appearance evidently puzzled the man. Besides the perplexing change already
adverted to, there was also a change in Mr. James Smith's expression and manner. Rascal as he was, I must do him
the justice to say that he looked startled and ashamed when he first caught sight of his unfortunate wife. The servant,
who was used to be eyed tyrannically by him, and ordered about roughly, seeing him now for the first time abashed
and silent, stammered and hesitated on being asked to swear to his identity.

"I can hardly say for certain, sir," said the man, addressing the justice in a bewildered manner. "He is like my
master, and yet he isn't. If he wore whiskers and had his hair long, and if he was, saying your presence, sir, a little
more rough and ready in his way, I could swear to him anywhere with a safe conscience."

Fortunately for us, at this moment Mr. James Smith's feeling of uneasiness at the situation in which he was
placed changed to a feeling of irritation at being coolly surveyed and then stupidly doubted in the matter of his
identity by one of his own servants.

"Can't you say in plain words, you idiot, whether you know me or whether you don't?" he called out, angrily.

"That's his voice!" cried the servant, starting in the box. "Whiskers or no whiskers, that's him!"

"If there's any difficulty, your worship, about the gentleman's hair," said Mr. Dark, coming forward with a grin,
"here's a small parcel which, I may make so bold as to say, will remove it." Saying that, he opened the parcel, took
some locks of hair out of it, and held them up close to Mr. James Smith's head. "A pretty good match, your
worship," continued Mr. Dark. "I have no doubt the gentleman's head feels cooler now it's off. We can't put the
whiskers on, I'm afraid, but they match the hair; and they are in the paper (if one may say such a thing of whiskers)
to speak for themselves."

"Lies! lies! lies!" screamed Josephine, losing her wicked self-control at this stage of the proceedings.

The justice made a sign to two of the constables present as she burst out with those exclamations, and the men
removed her to an adjoining room.

The second servant from the Hall was then put in the box, and was followed by one of the tenants. After what
they had heard and seen, neither of these men had any hesitation in swearing positively to their master's identity.

"It is quite unnecessary," said the justice, as soon as the box was empty again, "to examine any more witnesses
as to the question of identity. All the legal formalities are accomplished, and the charge against the prisoners falls
to the ground. I have great pleasure in ordering the immediate discharge of both the accused persons, and in declaring
from this place that they leave the court without the slightest stain on their characters."

He bowed low to my mistress as he said that, paused a moment, and then looked inquiringly at Mr. James Smith.

"I have hitherto abstained from making any remark unconnected with the immediate matter in hand," he went
on. "But, now that my duty is done, I cannot leave this chair without expressing my strong sense of disapprobation
of the conduct of Mr. James Smith—conduct which, whatever may be the motives that occasioned it, has given a
false color of probability to a most horrible charge against a lady of unspotted reputation, and against a person in a
lower rank of life whose good character ought not to have been imputed even for a moment. Mr. Smith may or may
not choose to explain his mysterious disappearance from Darrock Hall, and the equally unaccountable change which
he has chosen to make in his personal appearance. There is no legal charge against him; but, speaking morally, I
should be unworthy of the place I hold if I hesitated to declare my present conviction that his conduct has been
deceitful, inconsiderate, and unfeeling in the highest degree."
To this sharp reprimand Mr. James Smith (evidently tutored beforehand as to what he was to say) replied that, in attending before the justice, he wished to perform a plain duty and to keep himself strictly within the letter of the law. He apprehended that the only legal obligation laid on him was to attend in that court to declare himself, and to enable competent witnesses to prove his identity. This duty accomplished, he had merely to add that he preferred submitting to a reprimand from the bench to entering into explanations which would involve the disclosure of domestic circumstances of a very unhappy nature. After that brief reply he had nothing further to say, and he would respectfully request the justice’s permission to withdraw.

The permission was accorded. As he crossed the room he stopped near his wife, and said, confusedly, in a very low tone:

"I have done you many injuries, but I never intended this. I am sorry for it. Have you anything to say to me before I go?"

My mistress shuddered and hid her face. He waited a moment, and, finding that she did not answer him, bowed his head politely and went out. I did not know it then, but I had seen him for the last time.

After he had gone, the lawyer, addressing Mr. Robert Nicholson, said that he had an application to make in reference to the woman Josephine Durand.

At the mention of that name my mistress hurriedly whispered a few words into her relation's ear. He looked toward Mr. Philip Nicholson, who immediately advanced, offered his arm to my mistress, and led her out. I was about to follow, when Mr. Dark stopped me, and begged that I would wait a few minutes longer, in order to give myself the pleasure of seeing "the end of the case."

In the meantime, the justice had pronounced the necessary order to have the quadroon brought back. She came in, as bold and confident as ever. Mr. Robert Nicholson looked away from her in disgust and said to the lawyer:

"Your application is to have her committed for perjury, of course?"

"For perjury?" said Josephine, with her wicked smile. "Very good. I shall explain some little matters that I have not explained before. You think I am quite at your mercy now? Bah! I shall make myself a thorn in your sides yet."

"She has got scent of the second marriage," whispered Mr. Dark to me.

There could be no doubt of it. She had evidently been listening at the door on the night when my master came back longer than I had supposed. She must have heard those words about "the new wife"—she might even have seen the effect of them on Mr. James Smith.

"We do not at present propose to charge Josephine Durand with perjury," said the lawyer, "but with another offense, for which it is important to try her immediately, in order to effect the restoration of property that has been stolen. I charge her with stealing from her mistress, while in her service at Darrock Hall, a pair of bracelets, three rings, and a dozen and a half of lace pocket-handkerchiefs. The articles in question were taken this morning from between the mattresses of her bed; and a letter was found in the same place which clearly proves that she had represented the property as belonging to herself, and that she had tried to dispose of it to a purchaser in London." While he was speaking, Mr. Dark produced the jewelry, the handkerchiefs and the letter, and laid them before the justice.

Even Josephine's extraordinary powers of self-control now gave way at last. At the first words of the unexpected charge against her she struck her hands together violently, gnashed her sharp white teeth, and burst out with a torrent of fierce-sounding words in some foreign language, the meaning of which I did not understand then and cannot explain now.

"I think that's checkmate for marmzelle," whispered Mr. Dark, with his invariable wink. "Suppose you go back to the Hall, now, William, and draw a jug of that very remarkable old ale of yours? I'll be after you in five minutes, as soon as the charge is made out."

I could hardly realize it when I found myself walking back to Darrock a free man again.

In a quarter of an hour's time Mr. Dark joined me, and drank to my health, happiness and prosperity in three separate tumblers. After performing this ceremony, he wagged his head and chuckled with an appearance of such excessive enjoyment that I could not avoid remarking on his high spirits.

"It's the case, William—it's the beautiful neatness of the case that quite intoxicates me. Oh, Lord, what a happiness it is to be concerned in such a job as this!" cries Mr. Dark, slapping his stumpy hands on his fat knees in a sort of ecstasy.

I had a very different opinion of the case for my own part, but I did not venture on expressing it. I was too anxious to know how Mr. James Smith had been discovered and produced at the examination to enter into any arguments. Mr. Dark guessed what was passing in my mind, and, telling me to sit down and make myself comfortable, volunteered of his own accord to inform me of all that I wanted to know.

"When I got my instructions and my statement of particulars," he began, "I was not at all surprised to hear that Mr. James Smith had come back. (I prophesied that, if you remember, William, the last time we met?) But I was a
good deal astonished, nevertheless, at the turn things had taken, and I can't say I felt very hopeful about finding our man. However, I followed my master's directions, and put the advertisement in the papers. It addressed Mr. James Smith by name, but it was very carefully worded as to what was wanted of him. Two days after it appeared, a letter came to our office in a woman's handwriting. It was my business to open the letters, and I opened that. The writer was short and mysterious. She requested that somebody would call from our office at a certain address, between the hours of two and four that afternoon, in reference to the advertisement which we had inserted in the newspapers. Of course, I was the somebody who went. I kept myself from building up hopes by the way, knowing what a lot of Mr. James Smiths there were in London. On getting to the house, I was shown into the drawing-room, and there, dressed in a wrapper and lying on a sofa, was an uncommonly pretty woman, who looked as if she was just recovering from an illness. She had a newspaper by her side, and came to the point at once: 'My husband's name is James Smith,' she says, 'and I have my reasons for wanting to know if he is the person you are in search of.' I described our man as Mr. James Smith, of Darrock Hall, Cumberland. 'I know no such person,' says she--"

"What! was it not the second wife, after all?" I broke out.

"Wait a bit," says Mr. Dark. 'I mentioned the name of the yacht next, and she started up on the sofa as if she had been shot. 'I think you were married in Scotland, ma'am,' says I. She turns as pale as ashes, and drops back on the sofa, and says, faintly: 'It is my husband. Oh, sir, what has happened? What do you want with him? Is he in debt?' I took a minute to think, and then made up my mind to tell her everything, feeling that she would keep her husband (as she called him) out of the way if I frightened her by any mysteries. A nice job I had, William, as you may suppose, when she knew about the bigamy business. What with screaming, fainting, crying, and blowing me up (as if I was to blame!), she kept me by that sofa of hers the best part of an hour--kept me there, in short, till Mr. James Smith himself came back. I leave you to judge if that mended matters. He found me mopping the poor woman's temples with scent and water; and he would have pitched me out of the window, as sure as I sit here, if I had not met him and staggered him at once with the charge of murder against his wife. That stopped him when he was in full cry, I can promise you. 'Go and wait in the next room,' says he, 'and I'll come in and speak to you directly.'"

"And did you go?" I asked.

"Of course I did," said Mr. Dark. 'I knew he couldn't get out by the drawing-room windows, and I knew I could watch the door; so away I went, leaving him alone with the lady, who didn't spare him by any manner of means, as I could easily hear in the next room. However, all rows in this world come to an end sooner or later, and a man with any brains in his head may do what he pleases with a woman who is fond of him. Before long I heard her crying and kissing him. 'I can't go home,' she says, after this. 'You have behaved like a villain and a monster to me--but oh, Jimmy, I can't give you up to anybody! Don't go back to your wife! Oh, don't, don't go back to your wife!' 'No fear of that,' says he. 'My wife wouldn't have me if I did go back to her.' After that I heard the door open, and went out to meet him on the landing. He began swearing the moment he saw me, as if that was any good. 'Business first, if you please, sir,' says I, 'and any pleasure you like, in the way of swearing, afterward.' With that beginning, I mentioned our terms to him, and asked the pleasure of his company to Cumberland in return, he was uncommonly suspicious at first, but I promised to draw out a legal document (mere waste paper, of no earthly use except to pacify him), engaging to hold him harmless throughout the proceedings; and what with that, and telling him of the frightful danger his wife was in, I managed, at last, to carry my point."

"But did the second wife make no objection to his going away with you?" I inquired.

"Not she," said Mr. Dark. 'I stated the case to her just as it stood, and soon satisfied her that there was no danger of Mr. James Smith's first wife laying any claim to him. After hearing that, she joined me in persuading him to do his duty, and said she pitied your mistress from the bottom of her heart. With her influence to back me, I had no great fear of our man changing his mind. I had the door watched that night, however, so as to make quite sure of him. The next morning he was ready to time when I called, and a quarter of an hour after that we were off together for the north road. We made the journey with post-horses, being afraid of chance passengers, you know, in public conveyances. On the way down, Mr. James Smith and I got on as comfortably together as if we had been a pair of old friends. I told the story of our tracing him to the north of Scotland, and he gave me the particulars, in return, of his bolting from Darrock Hall. They are rather amusing, William; would you like to hear them?"

I told Mr. Dark that he had anticipated the very question I was about to ask him.

"Well," he said, "this is how it was: To begin at the beginning, our man really took Mrs. Smith, Number Two, to the Mediterranean, as we heard. He sailed up the Spanish coast, and, after short trips ashore, stopped at a seaside place in France called Cannes. There he saw a house and grounds to be sold which took his fancy as a nice retired place to keep Number Two in. Nothing particular was wanted but the money to buy it; and, not having the little amount in his own possession, Mr. James Smith makes a virtue of necessity, and goes back overland to his wife with private designs on her purse-strings. Number Two, who objects to be left behind, goes with him as far as London. There he trumps up the first story that comes into his head about rents in the country, and a house in Lincolnshire
that is too damp for her to trust herself in; and so, leaving her for a few days in London, starts boldly for Darrock Hall. His notion was to wheedle your mistress out of the money by good behavior; but it seems he started badly by quarreling with her about a fiddle-playing parson—"

"Yes, yes, I know all about that part of the story," I broke in, seeing by Mr. Dark's manner that he was likely to speak both ignorantly and impertinently of my mistresse's unlucky friendship for Mr. Meeke. "Go on to the time when I left my master alone in the Red Room, and tell me what he did between midnight and nine the next morning."

"Did?" said Mr. Dark. "Why, he went to bed with the unpleasant conviction on his mind that your mistress had found him out, and with no comfort to speak of except what he could get out of the brandy bottle. He couldn't sleep; and the more he tossed and tumbled, the more certain he felt that his wife intended to have him tried for bigamy. At last, toward the gray of the morning, he could stand it no longer, and he made up his mind to give the law the slip while he had the chance. As soon as he was dressed, it struck him that there might be a reward offered for catching him, and he determined to make that slight change in his personal appearance which puzzled the witnesses so much before the magistrate to-day. So he opens his dressing-case and crops his hair in no time, and takes off his whiskers next. The fire was out, and he had to shave in cold water. What with that, and what with the flurry of his mind, naturally enough he cut himself—"

"And dried the blood with his nightgown?" says I.

"With his nightgown," repeated Mr. Dark. "It was the first thing that lay handy, and he snatched it up. Wait a bit, though; the cream of the thing is to come. When he had done being his own barber, he couldn't for the life of him hit on a way of getting rid of the loose hair. The fire was out, and he had no matches; so he couldn't burn it. As for throwing it away, he didn't dare do that in the house or about the house, for fear of its being found, and betraying what he had done. So he wraps it all up in paper, crams it into his pocket to be disposed of when he is at a safe distance from the Hall, takes his bag, gets out at the window, shuts it softly after him, and makes for the road as fast as his long legs will carry him. There he walks on till a coach overtakes him, and so travels back to London to find himself in a fresh scrape as soon as he gets there. An interesting situation, William, and hard traveling from one end of France to the other, had not agreed together in the case of Number Two. Mr. James Smith found her in bed, with doctor's orders that she was not to be moved. There was nothing for it after that but to lie by in London till the lady got better. Luckily for us, she didn't hurry herself; so that, after all, your mistress has to thank the very woman who supplanted her for clearing her character by helping us to find Mr. James Smith."

"And, pray, how did you come by that loose hair of his which you showed before the justice to-day?" I asked.

"Thank Number Two again," says Mr. Dark. "I was put up to asking after it by what she told me. While we were talking about the advertisement, I made so bold as to inquire what first set her thinking that her husband and the Mr. James Smith whom we wanted might be one and the same man. 'Nothing,' says she, 'but seeing him come home with his hair cut short and his whiskers shaved off, and finding that he could not give me any good reason for disfiguring himself in that way. I had my suspicions that something was wrong, and the sight of your advertisement strengthened them directly.' The hearing her say that suggested to my mind that there might be a difficulty in identifying him after the change in his looks, and I asked him what he had done with the loose hair before we left London. It was found in the pocket of his traveling coat just as he had huddled it up there on leaving the Hall, worry, and fright, and vexation, having caused him to forget all about it. Of course I took charge of the parcel, and you know what good it did as well as I do. So to speak, William, it just completed this beautifully neat case. Looking at the matter in a professional point of view, I don't hesitate to say that we have managed our business with Mr. James Smith to perfection. We have produced him at the right time, and we are going to get rid of him at the right time. By to-night he will be on his way to foreign parts with Number Two, and he won't show his nose in England again if he lives to the age of Methuselah."

It was a relief to hear that and it was almost as great a comfort to find, from what Mr. Dark said next, that my mistress need fear nothing that Josephine could do for the future.

The charge of theft, on which she was about to be tried, did not afford the shadow of an excuse in law any more than in logic for alluding to the crime which her master had committed. If she meant to talk about it she might do so in her place of transportation, but she would not have the slightest chance of being listened to previously in a court of law.

"In short," said Mr. Dark, rising to take his leave, "as I have told you already, William, it's checkmate for marmzelle. She didn't manage the business of the robbery half as sharply as I should have expected. She certainly began well enough by staying modestly at a lodging in the village to give her attendance at the examinations, as it might be required; nothing could look more innocent and respectable so far; but her hiding the property between the mattresses of her bed--the very first place that any experienced man would think of looking in--was such an amazingly stupid thing to do, that I really can't account for it, unless her mind had more weighing on it than it was..."
able to bear, which, considering the heavy stakes she played for, is likely enough. Anyhow, her hands are tied now, and her tongue too, for the matter of that. Give my respects to your mistress, and tell her that her runaway husband and her lying maid will never either of them harm her again as long as they live. She has nothing to do now but to pluck up her spirits and live happy. Here's long life to her and to you, William, in the last glass of ale; and here's the same toast to myself in the bottom of the jug."

With those words Mr. Dark pocketed his large snuff-box, gave a last wink with his bright eye, and walked rapidly away, whistling, to catch the London coach. From that time to this he and I have never met again.

A few last words relating to my mistress and to the other persons chiefly concerned in this narrative will conclude all that it is now necessary for me to say.

For some months the relatives and friends, and I myself, felt sad misgivings on my poor mistress's account. We doubted if it was possible, with such a quick, sensitive nature as hers, that she could support the shock which had been inflicted on her. But our powers of endurance are, as I have learned to believe, more often equal to the burdens laid upon us than we are apt to imagine. I have seen many surprising recoveries from illness after all hope had been lost, and I have lived to see my mistress recover from the grief and terror which we once thought would prove fatal to her. It was long before she began to hold up her head again; but care and kindness, and time and change wrought their effect on her at last. She is not now, and never will be again, the woman she was once; her manner is altered, and she looks older by many a year than she really is. But her health causes us no anxiety now; her spirits are calm and equal, and I have good hope that many quiet years of service in her house are left for me still. I myself have married during the long interval of time which I am now passing over in a few words. This change in my life is, perhaps, not worth mentioning, but I am reminded of my two little children when I speak of my mistress in her present position. I really think they make the great happiness, and interest, and amusement of her life, and prevent her from feeling lonely and dried up at heart. It is a pleasant reflection to me to remember this, and perhaps it may be the same to you, for which reason only I speak of it.

As for the other persons connected with the troubles at Darrock Hall, I may mention the vile woman Josephine first, so as to have the sooner done with her. Mr. Dark's guess, when he tried to account for her want of cunning in hiding the stolen property, by saying that her mind might have had more weighing on it than she was able to bear, turned out to be nothing less than the plain and awful truth. After she had been found guilty of the robbery, and had been condemned to seven years' transportation, a worse sentence fell upon her from a higher tribunal than any in this world. While she was still in the county jail, previous to her removal, her mind gave way, the madness breaking out in an attempt to set fire to the prison. Her case was pronounced to be hopeless from the first. The lawful asylum received her, and the lawful asylum will keep her to the end of her days.

Mr. James Smith, who, in my humble opinion, deserved hanging by law, or drowning by accident at least, lived quietly abroad with his Scotch wife (or no wife) for two years, and then died in the most quiet and customary manner, in his bed, after a short illness. His end was described to me as a "highly edifying one." But as he was also reported to have sent his forgiveness to his wife—which was as much as to say that _he_ was the injured person of the two—I take leave to consider that he was the same impudent vagabond in his last moments that he had been all his life. His Scotch widow has married again, and is now settled in London. I hope her husband is all her own property this time.

Mr. Meeke must not be forgotten, although he has dropped out of the latter part of my story because he had nothing to do with the serious events which followed Josephine's perjury. In the confusion and wretchedness of that time, he was treated with very little ceremony, and was quite passed over when we left the neighborhood. After pining and fretting some time, as we afterward heard, in his lonely parsonage, he resigned his living at the first chance he got, and took a sort of under-chaplain's place in an English chapel abroad. He writes to my mistress once or twice a year to ask after her health and well-being, and she writes back to him. That is all the communication they ever have with each other. The music they once played together will never sound again. Its last notes were rapidly away, whistling, to catch the London coach. From that time to this he and I have never met again.

THE NINTH DAY.

A LITTLE change in the weather. The rain still continues, but the wind is not quite so high. Have I any reason to believe, because it is calmer on land, that it is also calmer at sea? Perhaps not. But my mind is scarcely so uneasy today, nevertheless.

I had looked over the newspaper with the usual result, and had laid it down with the customary sense of disappointment, when Jessie handed me a letter which she had received that morning. It was written by her aunt, and it upbraided her in the highly exaggerated terms which ladies love to employ, where any tender interests of their own are concerned, for her long silence and her long absence from home. Home! I thought of my poor boy and of the one hope on which all his happiness rested, and I felt jealous of the word when I saw it used persuasively in a
letter to our guest. What right had any one to mention "home" to her until George had spoken first?

"I must answer it by return of post," said Jessie, with a tone of sorrow in her voice for which my heart warmed to
her. "You have been very kind to me; you have taken more pains to interest and amuse me than I am worth. I can
laugh about most things, but I can't laugh about going away. I am honestly and sincerely too grateful for that."

She paused, came round to where I was sitting, perched herself on the end of the table, and, resting her hands on
my shoulders, added gently:

"It must be the day after to-morrow, must it not?"

I could not trust myself to answer. If I had spoken, I should have betrayed George's secret in spite of myself.

"To-morrow is the tenth day," she went on, softly. "It looks so selfish and so ungrateful to go the moment I have
heard the last of the stories, that I am quite distressed at being obliged to enter on the subject at all. And yet, what
choice is left me? what can I do when my aunt writes to me in that way?"

She took up the letter again, and looked at it so ruefully that I drew her head a little nearer to me, and gratefully
kissed the smooth white forehead.

"If your aunt is only half as anxious to see you again, my love, as I am to see my son, I must forgive her for
taking you away from us." The words came from me without premeditation. It was not calculation this time, but
sheer instinct that impelled me to test her in this way, once more, by a direct reference to George. She was so close
to me that I felt her breath quiver on my cheek. Her eyes had been fixed on my face a moment before, but they now
wandered away from it constrainedly. One of her hands trembled a little on my shoulder, and she took it off.

"Thank you for trying to make our parting easier to me," she said, quickly, and in a lower tone than she had
spoken in yet. I made no answer, but still looked her anxiously in the face. For a few seconds her nimble delicate
fingers nervously folded and refolded the letter from her aunt, then she abruptly changed her position.

"The sooner I write, the sooner it will be over," she said, and hurriedly turned away to the paper-case on the side-
table.

How was the change in her manner to be rightly interpreted? Was she hurt by what I had said, or was she
secretly so much affected by it, in the impressionable state of her mind at that moment, as to be incapable of exerting
a young girl's customary self-control? Her looks, actions, and language might bear either interpretation. One striking
omission had marked her conduct when I had referred to George's return. She had not inquired when I expected him
back. Was this indifference? Surely not. Surely indifference would have led her to ask the conventionally civil
question which ninety-nine persons out of a hundred would have addressed to me as a matter of course. Was she, on
her side, afraid to trust herself to speak of George at a time when an unusual tenderness was aroused in her by the
near prospect of saying farewell? It might be—it might not be—it might be. My feeble reason took the side of my
inclination; and, after vibrating between Yes and No, I stopped where I had begun—at Yes.

She finished the letter in a few minutes, and dropped it into the post-bag the moment it was done.

"Not a word more," she said, returning to me with a sigh of relief—"not a word about my aunt or my going away
till the time comes. We have two more days; let us make the most of them."

Two more days! Eight-and-forty hours still to pass; sixty minutes in each of those hours; and every minute long
enough to bring with it an event fatal to George's future! The bare thought kept my mind in a fever. For the
remainder of the day I was as desultory and as restless as our Queen of Hearts herself. Owen affectionately did his
best to quiet me, but in vain. Even Morgan, who whiled away the time by smoking incessantly, was struck by the
wretched spectacle of nervous anxiety that I presented to him, and pitied me openly for being unable to compose
myself with a pipe. Wearily and uselessly the hours wore on till the sun set. The clouds in the western heaven wore
wild and tortured shapes when I looked out at them; and, as the gathering darkness fell on us, the fatal fearful wind
rose once more.

When we assembled at eight, the drawing of the lots had no longer any interest or suspense, so far as I was
concerned. I had read my last story, and it now only remained for chance to decide the question of precedence
between Owen and Morgan. Of the two numbers left in the bowl, the one drawn was Nine. This made it Morgan's
turn to read, and left it appropriately to Owen, as our eldest brother, to close the proceedings on the next night.

Morgan looked round the table when he had spread out his manuscript, and seemed half inclined to open fire, as
usual, with a little preliminary sarcasm; but his eyes met mine; he saw the anxiety I was suffering; and his natural
kindness, perversely as he might strive to hide it, got the better of him. He looked down on his paper; growled out
briefly, "No need for a preface; my little bit of writing explains itself; let's go on and have done with it," and so
began to read without another word from himself or from any of us.

BROTHER MORGAN'S STORY

of

FAUNTLEROY.

IT was certainly a dull little dinner-party. Of the four guests, two of us were men between fifty and sixty, and
two of us were youths between eighteen and twenty, and we had no subjects in common. We were all intimate with our host, but we were only slightly acquainted with each other. Perhaps we should have got on better if there had been some ladies among us; but the master of the house was a bachelor, and, except the parlor-maids who assisted in waiting on us at dinner, no daughter of Eve was present to brighten the dreary scene.

We tried all sorts of subjects, but they dropped one after the other. The elder gentlemen seemed to be afraid of committing themselves by talking too freely within hearing of us juniors, and we, on our side, restrained our youthful flow of spirits and youthful freedom of conversation out of deference to our host, who seemed once or twice to be feeling a little nervous about the continued propriety of our behavior in the presence of his respectable guests. To make matters worse, we had dined at a sensible hour. When the bottles made their first round at dessert, the clock on the mantel-piece only struck eight. I counted the strokes, and felt certain, from the expression of his face, that the other junior guest, who sat on one side of me at the round table, was counting them also. When we came to the final eight, we exchanged looks of despair. "Two hours more of this! What on earth is to become of us?"

In the language of the eyes, that was exactly what we said to each other.

The wine was excellent, and I think we all came separately and secretly to the same conclusion—that our chance of getting through the evening was intimately connected with our resolution in getting through the bottles.

As a matter of course, we talked wine. No company of Englishmen can assemble together for an evening without doing that. Every man in this country who is rich enough to pay income-tax has at one time or other in his life effected a very remarkable transaction in wine. Sometimes he has made such a bargain as he never expects to make again. Sometimes he is the only man in England, not a peer of the realm, who has got a single drop of a certain famous vintage which has perished from the face of the earth. Sometimes he has purchased, with a friend, a few last left dozens from the cellar of a deceased potentate, at a price so exorbitant that he can only wag his head and decline mentioning it; and, if you ask his friend, that friend will wag his head, and decline mentioning it also. Sometimes he has been at an out-of-the-way country inn; has found the sherry not drinkable; has asked if there is no other wine in the house; has been informed that there is some "sourish foreign stuff that nobody ever drinks"; has called for a bottle of it; has found it Burgundy, such as all France cannot now produce, has cunningly kept his own counsel with the widowed landlady, and has bought the whole stock for "an old song." Sometimes he knows the proprietor of a famous tavern in London, and he recommends his one or two particular friends, the next time they are passing that way, to go in and dine, and give his compliments to the landlord, and ask for a bottle of the brown sherry, with the light blue—as distinguished from the dark blue—seal. Thousands of people dine there every year, and think they have got the famous sherry when they get the dark blue seal; but the real wine, the famous win, is the light blue seal, and nobody in England knows it but the landlord and his friends. In all these wine-conversations, whatever variety there may be in the various experiences related, one of two great first principles is invariably assumed by each speaker in succession. Either he knows more about it than any one else, or he has got better wine of his own even than the excellent wine he is now drinking. Men can get together sometimes without talking of women, without talking of horses, without talking of politics, but they cannot assemble to eat a meal together without talking of wine, and they cannot talk of wine without assuming to each one of themselves an absolute infallibility in connection with that single subject which they would shrink from asserting in relation to any other topic under the sun.

How long the inevitable wine-talk lasted on the particular social occasion of which I am now writing is more than I can undertake to say. I had heard so many other conversations of the same sort at so many other tables that my attention wandered away wearily, and I began to forget all about the dull little dinner-party and the badly-assorted company of guests of whom I formed one. How long I remained in this not over-courteous condition of mental oblivion is more than I can tell; but when my attention was recalled, in due course of time, to the little world around me, I found that the good wine had begun to do its good office.

The stream of talk on either side of the host's chair was now beginning to flow cheerfully and continuously; the wine-conversation had worn itself out; and one of the elder guests—Mr. Wendell—was occupied in telling the other guest—Mr. Trowbridge—of a small fraud which had lately been committed on him by a clerk in his employment. The first part of the story I missed altogether. The last part, which alone caught my attention, followed the career of the guest—Mr. Trowbridge—of a small fraud which had lately been committed on him by a clerk in his employment. The wine-conversation had worn itself out; and one of the elder guests—Mr. Wendell—was occupied in telling the other guest—Mr. Trowbridge—of a small fraud which had lately been committed on him by a clerk in his employment. The first part of the story I missed altogether. The last part, which alone caught my attention, followed the career of the guest—Mr. Trowbridge—of a small fraud which had lately been committed on him by a clerk in his employment.

"So, as I was telling you," continued Mr. Wendell, "I made up my mind to prosecute, and I did prosecute. Thoughtless people blamed me for sending the young man to prison, and said I might just as well have forgiven him, seeing that the trifling sum of money I had lost by his breach of trust was barely as much as ten pounds. Of course, personally speaking, I would much rather not have gone into court; but I considered that my duty to society in general, and to my brother merchants in particular, absolutely compelled me to prosecute for the sake of example. I acted on that principle, and I don't regret that I did so. The circumstances under which the man robbed me were particularly disgraceful. He was a hardened reprobate, sir, if ever there was one yet; and I believe, in my conscience, that he wanted nothing but the opportunity to be as great a villain as Fauntleroy himself."
At the moment when Mr. Wendell personified his idea of consummate villainy by quoting the example of Fauntleroy, I saw the other middle-aged gentleman--Mr. Trowbridge--color up on a sudden, and begin to fidget in his chair.

"The next time you want to produce an instance of a villain, sir," said Mr. Trowbridge, "I wish you could contrive to quote some other example than Fauntleroy."

Mr. Wendell naturally enough looked excessively astonished when he heard these words, which were very firmly and, at the same time, very politely addressed to him.

"May I inquire why you object to my example?" he asked.

"I object to it, sir," said Mr. Trowbridge, "because it makes me very uncomfortable to hear Fauntleroy called a villain."

"Good heavens above!" exclaimed Mr. Wendell, utterly bewildered. "Uncomfortable!--you, a mercantile man like myself--you, whose character stands so high everywhere--you uncomfortable when you hear a man who was hanged for forgery called a villain! In the name of wonder, why?"

"Because," answered Mr. Trowbridge, with perfect composure, "Fauntleroy was a friend of mine."

"Excuse me, my dear sir," retorted Mr. Wendell, in as polished a tone of sarcasm as he could command; "but of all the friends whom you have made in the course of your useful and honorable career, I should have thought the friend you have just mentioned would have been the very last to whom you were likely to refer in respectable society, at least by name."

"Fauntleroy committed an unpardonable crime, and died a disgraceful death," said Mr. Trowbridge. "But, for all that, Fauntleroy was a friend of mine, and in that character I shall always acknowledge him boldly to my dying day. I have a tenderness for his memory, though he violated a sacred trust, and died for it on the gallows. Don't look shocked, Mr. Wendell. I will tell you, and our other friends here, if they will let me, why I feel that tenderness, which looks so strange and so discreditable in your eyes. It is rather a curious anecdote, sir, and has an interest, I think, for all observers of human nature quite apart from its connection with the unhappy man of whom we have been talking. You young gentlemen," continued Mr. Trowbridge, addressing himself to us juniors, "have heard of Fauntleroy, though he sinned and suffered, and shocked all England long before your time?"

We answered that we had certainly heard of him as one of the famous criminals of his day. We knew that he had been a partner in a great London banking-house; that he had not led a very virtuous life; that he had possessed himself, by forgery, of trust-moneys which he was doubly bound to respect; and that he had been hanged for his offense, in the year eighteen hundred and twenty-four, when the gallows was still set up for other crimes than murder, and when Jack Ketch was in fashion as one of the hard-working reformers of the age.

"Very good," said Mr. Trowbridge. "You both of you know quite enough of Fauntleroy to be interested in what I am going to tell you. When the bottles have been round the table, I will start with my story."

The bottles went round--claret for the degenerate youngsters; port for the sterling, steady-headed, middle-aged gentlemen. Mr. Trowbridge sipped his wine--meditated a little--sipped again--and started with the promised anecdote in these terms:

CHAPTER II.

WHAT I am going to tell you, gentlemen, happened when I was a very young man, and when I was just setting up in business on my own account.

My father had been well acquainted for many years with Mr. Fauntleroy, of the famous London banking firm of Marsh, Stacey, Fauntleroy & Graham. Thinking it might be of some future service to me to make my position known to a great man in the commercial world, my father mentioned to his highly-respected friend that I was about to start in business for myself in a very small way, and with very little money. Mr. Fauntleroy received the intimation with a kind appearance of interest, and said that he would have his eye on me. I expected from this that he would wait to see if I could keep on my legs at starting, and that, if he found I succeeded pretty well, he would then help me forward if it lay in his power. As events turned out, he proved to be a far better friend than that, and he soon showed me that I had very much underrated the hearty and generous interest which he had felt in my welfare from the first.

While I was still fighting with the difficulties of setting up my office, and recommending myself to my connection, and so forth, I got a message from Mr. Fauntleroy telling me to call on him, at the banking-house, the first time I was passing that way. As you may easily imagine, I contrived to be passing that way on a particularly early occasion, and, on presenting myself at the bank, I was shown at once into Mr. Fauntleroy's private room.

He was as pleasant a man to speak to as ever I met with--bright, and gay, and companionable in his manner--with a sort of easy, hearty, jovial bluntness about him that attracted everybody. The clerks all liked him--and that is something to say of a partner in a banking-house, I can tell you!

"Well, young Trowbridge," says he, giving his papers on the table a brisk push away from him, "so you are
going to set up in business for yourself, are you? I have a great regard for your father, and a great wish to see you succeed. Have you started yet? No? Just on the point of beginning, eh? Very good. You will have your difficulties, my friend, and I mean to smooth one of them away for you at the outset. A word of advice for your private ear--

"You are very kind, sir," I answered, "and I should ask nothing better than to profit by your suggestion, if I could. But my expenses are heavy at starting, and when they are all paid I am afraid I shall have very little left to put by for the first year. I doubt if I shall be able to muster much more than three hundred pounds of surplus cash in the world after paying what I must pay before I set up my office, and I should be ashamed to trouble your house, sir, to open an account for such a trifle as that."

"Stuff and nonsense!" says Mr. Fauntleroy. "Are _you_ a banker? What business have you to offer an opinion on the matter? Do as I tell you--leave it to me--bank with us--and draw for what you like. Stop! I haven't done yet. When you open the account, speak to the head cashier. Perhaps you may find he has got something to tell you. There! there! go away--don't interrupt me--good-by--God bless you!"

That was his way--ah! poor fellow, that was his way.

I went to the head cashier the next morning when I opened my little modicum of an account. He had received orders to pay my drafts without reference to my balance. My checks, when I had overdrawn, were to be privately shown to Mr. Fauntleroy. Do many young men who start in business find their prosperous superiors ready to help them in that way?

Well, I got on--got on very fairly and steadily, being careful not to venture out of my depth, and not to forget that small beginnings may lead in time to great ends. A prospect of one of those great ends--great, I mean, to such a small trader as I was at that period--showed itself to me when I had been some little time in business. In plain terms, I had a chance of joining in a first-rate transaction, which would give me profit, and position, and everything I wanted, provided I could qualify myself for engaging in it by getting good security beforehand for a very large amount.

In this emergency, I thought of my kind friend, Mr. Fauntleroy, and went to the bank, and saw him once more in his private room.

There he was at the same table, with the same heaps of papers about him, and the same hearty, easy way of speaking his mind to you at once, in the fewest possible words. I explained the business I came upon with some little hesitation and nervousness, for I was afraid he might think I was taking an unfair advantage of his former kindness to me. When I had done, he just nodded his head, snatched up a blank sheet of paper, scribbled a few lines on it in his rapid way, handed the writing to me, and pushed me out of the room by the two shoulders before I could say a single word. I looked at the paper in the outer office. It was my security from the great banking-house for the whole amount, and for more, if more was wanted.

I could not express my gratitude then, and I don't know that I can describe it now. I can only say that it has outlived the crime, the disgrace, and the awful death on the scaffold. I am grieved to speak of that death at all; but I have no other alternative. The course of my story must now lead me straight on to the later time, and to the terrible discovery which exposed my benefactor and my friend to all England as the forger Fauntleroy.

I must ask you to suppose a lapse of some time after the occurrence of the events that I have just been relating. During this interval, thanks to the kind assistance I had received at the outset, my position as a man of business had greatly improved. Imagine me now, if you please, on the high road to prosperity, with good large offices and a respectable staff of clerks, and picture me to yourselves sitting alone in my private room between four and five o'clock on a certain Saturday afternoon.

All my letters had been written, all the people who had appointments with me had been received. I was looking carelessly over the newspaper, and thinking about going home, when one of my clerks came in, and said that a stranger wished to see me immediately on very important business.

"Did he mention his name?" I inquired.

"No, sir."

"Did you not ask him for it?"

"Yes, sir. And he said you would be none the wiser if he told me what it was."

"Does he look like a begging-letter writer?"

"He looks a little shabby, sir, but he doesn't talk at all like a begging-letter writer. He spoke sharp and decided, sir, and said it was in your interests that he came, and that you would deeply regret it afterward if you refused to see him."

"He said that, did he? Show him in at once, then."

He was shown in immediately: a middling-sized man, with a sharp, unwholesome-looking face, and with a flippant, reckless manner, dressed in a style of shabby smartness, eying me with a bold look, and not so
overburdened with politeness as to trouble himself about taking off his hat when he came in. I had never seen him before in my life, and I could not form the slightest conjecture from his appearance to guide me toward guessing his position in the world. He was not a gentleman, evidently; but as to fixing his whereabouts in the infinite downward gradations of vagabond existence in London, that was a mystery which I was totally incompetent to solve.

"Is your name Trowbridge?" he began.
"Yes," I answered, dryly enough.
"Do you bank with Marsh, Stracey, Fauntleroy & Graham?"
"Why do you ask?"
"Answer my question, and you will know."

"Very well, I do bank with Marsh, Stracey, Fauntleroy & Graham--and what then?"
"Draw out every farthing of balance you have got before the bank closes at five to-day."
I stared at him in speechless amazement. The words, for an instant, absolutely petrified me.

"Stare as much as you like," he proceeded, coolly, "I mean what I say. Look at your clock there. In twenty minutes it will strike five, and the bank will be shut. Draw out every farthing, I tell you again, and look sharp about it."

"Draw out my money!" I exclaimed, partially recovering myself. "Are you in your right senses? Do you know that the firm I bank with represents one of the first houses in the world? What do you mean--you, who are a total stranger to me--by taking this extraordinary interest in my affairs? If you want me to act on your advice, why don't you explain yourself?"

"I have explained myself. Act on my advice or not, just as you like. It doesn't matter to me. I have done what I promised, and there's an end of it."

He turned to the door. The minute-hand of the clock was getting on from the twenty minutes to the quarter.
"Done what you promised?" I repeated, getting up to stop him.
"Yes," he said, with his hand on the lock. "I have given my message. Whatever happens, remember that. Good-afternoon."

He was gone before I could speak again.
I tried to call after him, but my speech suddenly failed me. It was very foolish, it was very unaccountable, but there was something in the man's last words which had more than half frightened me.

I looked at the clock. The minute-hand was on the quarter.

My office was just far enough from the bank to make it necessary for me to decide on the instant. If I had had time to think, I am perfectly certain that I should not have profited by the extraordinary warning that had just been addressed to me. The suspicious appearance and manners of the stranger; the outrageous improbability of the inference against the credit of the bank toward which his words pointed; the chance that some underhand attempt was being made, by some enemy of mine, to frighten me into embroiling myself with one of my best friends, through showing an ignorant distrust of the firm with which he was associated as partner--all these considerations would unquestionably have occurred to me if I could have found time for reflection; and, as a necessary consequence, not one farthing of my balance would have been taken from the keeping of the bank on that memorable day.

As it was, I had just time enough to act, and not a spare moment for thinking. Some heavy payments made at the beginning of the week had so far decreased my balance that the sum to my credit in the banking-book barely reached fifteen hundred pounds. I snatched up my check-book, wrote a draft for the whole amount, and ordered one of my clerks to run to the bank and get it cashed before the doors closed. What impulse urged me on, except the blind impulse of hurry and bewilderment, I can't say. I acted mechanically, under the influence of the vague inexplicable fear which the man's extraordinary parting words had aroused in me, without stopping to analyze my own sensations--almost without knowing what I was about. In three minutes from the time when the stranger had closed my door the clerk had started for the bank, and I was alone again in my room, with my hands as cold as ice and my head all in a whirl.

I did not recover my control over myself until the clerk came back with the notes in his hand. He had just got to the bank in the nick of time. As the cash for my draft was handed to him over the counter, the clock struck five, and he heard the order given to close the doors.

When I had counted the bank-notes and had locked them up in the safe, my better sense seemed to come back to me on a sudden. Never have I reproached myself before or since as I reproached myself at that moment. What sort of return had I made for Mr. Fauntleroy's fatherly kindness to me? I had insulted him by the meanest, the grossest distrust of the honor and the credit of his house, and that on the word of an absolute stranger, of a vagabond, if ever there was one yet. It was madness--downright madness in any man to have acted as I had done. I could not account for my own inconceivably thoughtless proceeding. I could hardly believe in it myself. I opened the safe and looked
at the bank-notes again. I locked it once more, and flung the key down on the table in a fury of vexation against myself. There the money was, upbraiding me with my own inconceivable folly, telling me in the plainest terms that I had risked depriving myself of my best and kindest friend henceforth and forever.

It was necessary to do something at once toward making all the atonement that lay in my power. I felt that, as soon as I began to cool down a little. There was but one plain, straight-forward way left now out of the scrape in which I had been mad enough to involve myself. I took my hat, and, without stopping an instant to hesitate, hurried off to the bank to make a clean breast of it to Mr. Fauntleroy.

When I knocked at the private door and asked for him, I was told that he had not been at the bank for the last two days. One of the other partners was there, however, and was working at that moment in his own room.

I sent in my name at once, and asked to see him. He and I were little better than strangers to each other, and the interview was likely to be, on that account, unspeakably embarrassing and humiliating on my side. Still, I could not go home. I could not endure the inaction of the next day, the Sunday, without having done my best on the spot to repair the error into which my own folly had led me. Uncomfortable as I felt at the prospect of the approaching interview, I should have been far more uneasy in my mind if the partner had declined to see me.

To my relief, the bank porter returned with a message requesting me to walk in.

What particular form my explanations and apologies took when I tried to offer them is more than I can tell now. I was so confused and distressed that I hardly knew what I was talking about at the time. The one circumstance which I remember clearly is that I was ashamed to refer to my interview with the strange man, and that I tried to account for my sudden withdrawal of my balance by referring it to some inexplicable panic, caused by mischievous reports which I was unable to trace to their source, and which, for anything I knew to the contrary, might, after all, have been only started in jest. Greatly to my surprise, the partner did not seem to notice the lamentable lameness of my excuses, and did not additionally confuse me by asking any questions. A weary, absent look, which I had observed on his face when I came in, remained on it while I was speaking. It seemed to be an effort to him even to keep up the appearance of listening to me; and when, at last, I fairly broke down in the middle of a sentence, and gave up the hope of getting any further, all the answer he gave me was comprised in these few civil commonplace words:

"Never mind, Mr. Trowbridge; pray don't think of apologizing. We are all liable to make mistakes. Say nothing more about it, and bring the money back on Monday if you still honor us with your confidence."

He looked down at his papers as if he was anxious to be alone again, and I had no alternative, of course, but to take my leave immediately. I went home, feeling a little easier in my mind now that I had paved the way for making the best practical atonement in my power by bringing my balance back the first thing on Monday morning. Still, I passed a weary day on Sunday, reflecting, sadly enough, that I had not yet made my peace with Mr. Fauntleroy. My anxiety to set myself right with my generous friend was so intense that I risked intruding myself on his privacy by calling at his town residence on the Sunday. He was not there, and his servant could tell me nothing of his whereabouts. There was no help for it now but to wait till his weekday duties brought him back to the bank.

I went to business on Monday morning half an hour earlier than usual, so great was my impatience to restore the amount of that unlucky draft to my account as soon as possible after the bank opened.

On entering my office, I stopped with a startled feeling just inside the door. Something serious had happened. The clerks, instead of being at their desks as usual, were all huddled together in a group, talking to each other with blank faces. When they saw me, they fell back behind my managing man, who stepped forward with a circular in his hand.

"Have you heard the news, sir?" he said.

"No. What is it?"

He handed me the circular. My heart gave one violent throb the instant I looked at it. I felt myself turn pale; I felt my knees trembling under me.

Marsh, Stracey, Fauntleroy & Graham had stopped payment.

"The circular has not been issued more than half an hour," continued my managing clerk. "I have just come from the bank, sir. The doors are shut; there is no doubt about it. Marsh & Company have stopped this morning."

I hardly heard him; I hardly knew who was talking to me. My strange visitor of the Saturday had taken instant possession of all my thoughts, and his words of warning seemed to be sounding once more in my ears. This man had known the true condition of the bank when not another soul outside the doors was aware of it! The last draft paid across the counter of that ruined house, when the doors closed on Saturday, was the draft that I had so bitterly reproached myself for drawing; the one balance saved from the wreck was my balance. Where had the stranger got the information that had saved me? and why had he brought it to my ears?

I was still groping, like a man in the dark, for an answer to those two questions--I was still bewildered by the unfathomable mystery of doubt into which they had plunged me--when the discovery of the stopping of the bank
was followed almost immediately by a second shock, far more dreadful, far heavier to bear, so far as I was concerned, than the first.

While I and my clerks were still discussing the failure of the firm, two mercantile men, who were friends of mine, ran into the office, and overwhelmed us with the news that one of the partners had been arrested for forgery. Never shall I forget the terrible Monday morning when those tidings reached me, and when I knew that the partner was Mr. Fauntleroy.

I was true to him--I can honestly say I was true to my belief in my generous friend--when that fearful news reached me. My fellow-merchants had got all the particulars of the arrest. They told me that two of Mr. Fauntleroy's fellow-trustees had come up to London to make arrangements about selling out some stock. On inquiring for Mr. Fauntleroy at the banking-house, they had been informed that he was not there; and, after leaving a message for him, they had gone into the City to make an appointment with their stockbroker for a future day, when their fellow-trustee might be able to attend. The stock-broker volunteered to make certain business inquiries on the spot, with a view to saving as much time as possible, and left them at his office to await his return. He came back, looking very much amazed, with the information that the stock had been sold out down to the last five hundred pounds. The affair was instantly investigated; the document authorizing the selling out was produced; and the two trustees saw on it, side by side with Mr. Fauntleroy's signature, the forged signatures of their own names. This happened on the Friday, and the trustees, without losing a moment, sent the officers of justice in pursuit of Mr. Fauntleroy. He was arrested, brought up before the magistrate, and remanded on the Saturday. On the Monday I heard from my friends the particulars which I have just narrated.

But the events of that one morning were not destined to end even yet. I had discovered the failure of the bank and the arrest of Mr. Fauntleroy. I was next to be enlightened, in the strangest and the saddest manner, on the difficult question of his innocence or his guilt.

Before my friends had left my office--before I had exhausted the arguments which my gratitude rather than my reason suggested to me in favor of the unhappy prisoner--a note, marked immediate, was placed in my hands, which silenced me the instant I looked at it. It was written from the prison by Mr. Fauntleroy, and it contained two lines only, entreating me to apply for the necessary order, and to go and see him immediately.

I shall not attempt to describe the flutter of expectation, the strange mixture of dread and hope that agitated me when I recognized his handwriting, and discovered what it was that he desired me to do. I obtained the order and went to the prison. The authorities, knowing the dreadful situation in which he stood, were afraid of his attempting to destroy himself, and had set two men to watch him. One came out as they opened his cell door. The other, who was bound not to leave him, very delicately and considerately affected to be looking out of window the moment I was shown in.

He was sitting on the side of his bed, with his head drooping and his hands hanging listlessly over his knees when I first caught sight of him. At the sound of my approach he started to his feet, and, without speaking a word, flung both his arms round my neck.

My heart swelled up.

"Tell me it's not true, sir! For God's sake, tell me it's not true!" was all I could say to him.

He never answered--oh me! he never answered, and he turned away his face.

There was one dreadful moment of silence. He still held his arms round my neck, and on a sudden he put his lips close to my ear.

"Did you get your money out?" he whispered. "Were you in time on Saturday afternoon?"

I broke free from him in the astonishment of hearing those words.

"What!" I cried out loud, forgetting the third person at the window. "That man who brought the message--"

"Hush!" he said, putting his hand on my lips. "There was no better man to be found, after the officers had taken me--I know no more about him than you do--I paid him well as a chance messenger, and risked his cheating me of his errand."

"You sent him, then!"

"I sent him."

My story is over, gentlemen. There is no need for me to tell you that Mr. Fauntleroy was found guilty, and that he died by the hangman's hand. It was in my power to soothe his last moments in this world by taking on myself the arrangement of some of his private affairs, which, while they remained unsettled, weighed heavily on his mind. They had no connection with the crimes he had committed, so I could do him the last little service he was ever to accept at my hands with a clear conscience.

I say nothing in defense of his character--nothing in palliation of the offense for which he suffered. But I cannot forget that in the time of his most fearful extremity, when the strong arm of the law had already seized him, he thought of the young man whose humble fortunes he had helped to build; whose heartfelt gratitude he had fairly
won; whose simple faith he was resolved never to betray. I leave it to greater intellects than mine to reconcile the anomaly of his reckless falsehood toward others and his steadfast truth toward me. It is as certain as that we sit here that one of Fauntleroy's last efforts in this world was the effort he made to preserve me from being a loser by the trust that I had placed in him. There is the secret of my strange tenderness for the memory of a felon; that is why the word villain does somehow still grate on my heart when I hear it associated with the name—the disgraced name, I grant you—of the forger Fauntleroy. Pass the bottles, young gentlemen, and pardon a man of the old school for having so long interrupted your conversation with a story of the old time.

THE TENTH DAY.

THE storm has burst on us in its full fury. Last night the stout old tower rocked on its foundations.

I hardly ventured to hope that the messenger who brings us our letters from the village—the postman, as we call him—would make his appearance this morning; but he came bravely through rain, hail and wind. The old pony which he usually rides had refused to face the storm, and, sooner than disappoint us, our faithful postman had boldly started for The Glen Tower on foot. All his early life had been passed on board ship, and, at sixty years of age, he had battled his way that morning through the storm on shore as steadily and as resolutely as ever he had battled it in his youth through the storm at sea.

I opened the post-bag eagerly. There were two letters for Jessie from young lady friends; a letter for Owen from a charitable society; a letter to me upon business; and—on this last day, of all others—no newspaper!

I sent directly to the kitchen (where the drenched and weary postman was receiving the hospitable attentions of the servants) to make inquiries. The disheartening answer returned was that the newspaper could not have arrived as usual by the morning's post, or it must have been put into the bag along with the letters. No such accident as this had occurred, except on one former occasion, since the beginning of the year. And now, on the very day when I might have looked confidently for news of George's ship, when the state of the weather made the finding of that news of the last importance to my peace of mind, the paper, by some inconceivable fatality, had failed to reach me! If there had been the slightest chance of borrowing a copy in the village, I should have gone there myself through the tempest to get it. If there had been the faintest possibility of communicating, in that frightful weather, with the distant county town, I should have sent there or gone there myself. I even went the length of speaking to the groom, an old servant whom I knew I could trust. The man stared at me in astonishment, and then pointed through the window to the blinding hail and the writhing trees.

"No horse that ever was foaled, sir," he said, "would face _that_ for long. It's almost a miracle that the postman got here alive. He says himself that he dursn't go back again. I'll try it, sir, if you order me; but if an accident happens, please to remember, whatever becomes of _me_, that I warned you beforehand."

It was only too plain that the servant was right, and I dismissed him. What I suffered from that one accident of the missing newspaper I am ashamed to tell. No educated man can conceive how little his acquired mental advantages will avail him against his natural human inheritance of superstition, under certain circumstances of fear and suspense, until he has passed the ordeal in his own proper person. We most of us soon arrive at a knowledge of the extent of our strength, but we may pass a lifetime and be still ignorant of the extent of our weakness.

Up to this time I had preserved self-control enough to hide the real state of my feelings from our guest; but the arrival of the tenth day, and the unexpected trial it had brought with it, found me at the end of my resources. Jessie's acute observation soon showed her that something had gone wrong, and she questioned me on the subject directly. My mind was in such a state of confusion that no excuse occurred to me. I left her precipitately, and entreated Owen and Morgan to keep her in their company, and out of mine, for the rest of the day. My strength to preserve my son's secret had failed me, and my only chance of resisting the betrayal of it lay in the childish resource of keeping out of the way. I shut myself into my room till I could bear it no longer. I watched my opportunity, and paid stolen visits over and over again to the barometer in the hall. I mounted to Morgan's rooms at the top of the tower, and looked out hopelessly through rain-mist and scud for signs of a carriage on the flooded valley-road below us. I stole down again to the servants' hall, and questioned the old postman (half-tipsy by this time with restorative mulled ale) about his past experience of storms at sea; drew him into telling long, rambling, wearisome stories, not one-tenth part of which he usually rides that morning through the storm at sea.

Before we assembled at the dinner-table, Owen whispered to me that he had made my excuses to our guest, and that I need dread nothing more than a few friendly inquiries about my health when I saw her again. The meal was dispatched hastily and quietly. Toward dusk the storm began to lessen, and for a moment the idea of sending to the
I was twenty-six last birthday and he was thirty-three, and there seems less chance now than ever of our being married. It is all I can do to keep myself by my needle; and his prospects, since he failed in the small stationery business three years ago, are worse, if possible, than mine.

Not that I mind so much for myself; women, in all ways of life, and especially in my dressmaking way, learn, I think, to be more patient than men. What I dread is Robert's despondency, and the hard struggle he will have in this cruel city to get his bread, let alone making money enough to marry me. So little as poor people want to set up in the world, and its temptations without first speaking to her of George in the lamentable event of George not being present to speak for himself.

We were a sad and silent little company when the clock struck eight that night, and when we met for the last time to hear the last story. The shadow of the approaching farewell--itself the shade of the long farewell--rested heavily on our guest's spirits. The gay dresses which she had hitherto put on to honor our little ceremony were all packed up, and the plain gown she wore kept the journey of the morrow cruelly before her eyes and ours. A quiet melancholy shed its tenderness over her bright young face as she drew the last number, for form's sake, out of the bowl, and handed it to Owen with a faint smile. Even our positions at the table were altered now. Under the pretense that the light hurt my eyes, I moved back into a dim corner, to keep my anxious face out of view. Morgan, looking at me hard, and muttering under his breath, "Thank Heaven, I never married!" stole his chair by degrees, with rough, silent kindness, nearer and nearer to mine. Jessie, after a moment's hesitation, vacated her place next, and, saying that she wanted to sit close to one of us on the farewell night, took a chair at Owen's side. Sad! sad! we had instinctively broken up already, so far as our places at the table were concerned, before the reading of the last story had so much as begun.

It was a relief when Owen's quiet voice stole over the weary silence, and pleaded for our attention to the occupation of the night.

"Number Six," he said, "is the number that chance has left to remain till the last. The manuscript to which it refers is not, as you may see, in my handwriting. It consists entirely of passages from the Diary of a poor hard-working girl--passages which tell an artless story of love and friendship in humble life. When that story has come to an end, I may inform you how I became possessed of it. If I did so now, I should only forestall one important part of the interest of the narrative. I have made no attempt to find a striking title for it. It is called, simply and plainly, after the name of the writer of the Diary--the Story of Anne Rodway."

In the short pause that Owen made before he began to read, I listened anxiously for the sound of a traveler's approach outside. At short intervals, all through the story, I listened and listened again. Still, nothing caught my ear but the trickle of the rain and the rush of the sweeping wind through the valley, sinking gradually lower and lower as the night advanced.

BROTHER OWEN'S STORY

of

ANNE RODWAY.

[TAKEN FROM HER DIARY.]

* * * MARCH 3d, 1840. A long letter today from Robert, which surprised and vexed me so that I have been sadly behindhand with my work ever since. He writes in worse spirits than last time, and absolutely declares that he is poorer even than when he went to America, and that he has made up his mind to come home to London.

How happy I should be at this news, if he only returned to me a prosperous man! As it is, though I love him dearly, I cannot look forward to the meeting him again, disappointed and broken down, and poorer than ever, without a feeling almost of dread for both of us. I was twenty-six last birthday and he was thirty-three, and there seems less chance now than ever of our being married. It is all I can do to keep myself by my needle; and his prospects, since he failed in the small stationery business three years ago, are worse, if possible, than mine.

Not that I mind so much for myself; women, in all ways of life, and especially in my dressmaking way, learn, I think, to be more patient than men. What I dread is Robert's despondency, and the hard struggle he will have in this cruel city to get his bread, let alone making money enough to marry me. So little as poor people want to set up in housekeeping and be happy together, it seems hard that they can't get it when they are honest and hearty, and willing to work. The clergyman said in his sermon last Sunday evening that all things were ordered for the best, and we are all put into the stations in life that are properest for us. I suppose he was right, being a very clever gentleman who fills the church to crowding; but I think I should have understood him better if I had not been very hungry at the time, in consequence of my own station in life being nothing but plain needlewoman.

March 4th. Mary Mallinson came down to my room to take a cup of tea with me. I read her bits of Robert's letter, to show her that, if she has her troubles, I have mine too; but I could not succeed in cheering her. She says she is born to misfortune, and that, as long back as she can remember, she has never had the least morsel of luck to be thankful for. I told her to go and look in my glass, and to say if she had nothing to be thankful for then; for Mary is a
very pretty girl, and would look still prettier if she could be more cheerful and dress neater. However, my compliment did no good. She rattled her spoon impatiently in her tea-cup, and said, "If I was only as good a hand at needle-work as you are, Anne, I would change faces with the ugliest girl in London." "Not you!" says I, laughing. She looked at me for a moment, and shook her head, and was out of the room before I could get up and stop her. She always runs off in that way when she is going to cry, having a kind of pride about letting other people see her in tears.

March 5th. A fright about Mary. I had not seen her all day, as she does not work at the same place where I do; and in the evening she never came down to have tea with me, or sent me word to go to her; so, just before I went to bed, I ran upstairs to say good-night.

She did not answer when I knocked; and when I stepped softly in the room I saw her in bed, asleep, with her work not half done, lying about the room in the untidiest way. There was nothing remarkable in that, and I was just going away on tiptoe, when a tiny bottle and wine-glass on the chair by her bedside caught my eye. I thought she was ill and had been taking physic, and looked at the bottle. It was marked in large letters, "Laudanum--Poison."

My heart gave a jump as if it was going to fly out of me. I laid hold of her with both hands, and shook her with all my might. She was sleeping heavily, and woke slowly, as it seemed to me--but still she did wake. I tried to pull her out of bed, having heard that people ought to be always walked up and down when they have taken laudanum but she resisted, and pushed me away violently.

"Anne!" says she, in a fright. "For gracious sake, what's come to you! Are you out of your senses?"

"Oh, Mary! Mary!" says I, holding up the bottle before her, "if I hadn't come in when I did--" And I laid hold of her to shake her again.

She looked puzzled at me for a moment--then smiled (the first time I had seen her do so for many a long day)--then put her arms round my neck.

"Don't be frightened about me, Anne," she says; "I am not worth it, and there is no need."

"No need!" says I, out of breath--"no need, when the bottle has got Poison marked on it!"

"Poison, dear, if you take it all," says Mary, looking at me very tenderly, "and a night's rest if you only take a little."

I watched her for a moment, doubtful whether I ought to believe what she said or to alarm the house. But there was no sleepiness now in her eyes, and nothing drowsy in her voice; and she sat up in bed quite easily, without anything to support her.

"You have given me a dreadful fright, Mary," says I, sitting down by her in the chair, and beginning by this time to feel rather faint after being startled so.

She jumped out of bed to get me a drop of water, and kissed me, and said how sorry she was, and how undeserving of so much interest being taken in her. At the same time, she tried to possess herself of the laudanum bottle which I still kept cuddled up tight in my own hands.

"No," says I. "You have got into a low-spirited, despairing way. I won't trust you with it."

"I am afraid I can't do without it," says Mary, in her usual quiet, hopeless voice. "What with work that I can't get through as I ought, and troubles that I can't help thinking of, sleep won't come to me unless I take a few drops out of that bottle. Don't keep it away from me, Anne; it's the only thing in the world that makes me forget myself."

"Forget yourself!" says I. "You have no right to talk in that way, at your age. There's something horrible in the notion of a girl of eighteen sleeping with a bottle of laudanum by her bedside every night. We all of us have our troubles. Haven't I got mine?"

"You can do twice the work I can, twice as well as me," says Mary. "You are never scolded and rated at for awkwardness with your needle, and I always am. You can pay for your room every week, and I am three weeks in debt for mine."

"A little more practice," says I, "and a little more courage, and you will soon do better. You have got all your life before you--"

"I wish I was at the end of it," says she, breaking in. "I am alone in the world, and my life's no good to me."

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself for saying so," says I. "Haven't you got me for a friend? Didn't I take a fancy to you when first you left your step-mother and came to lodge in this house? And haven't I been sisters with you ever since? Suppose you are alone in the world, am I much better off? I'm an orphan like you. I've almost as many things in pawn as you; and, if your pockets are empty, mine have only got ninepence in them, to last me for all the rest of the week."

"Your father and mother were honest people," says Mary, obstinately. "My mother ran away from home, and died in a hospital. My father was always drunk, and always beating me. My step-mother is as good as dead, for all she cares about me. My only brother is thousands of miles away in foreign parts, and never writes to me, and never helps me with a farthing. My sweetheart--"
She stopped, and the red flew into her face. I knew, if she went on that way, she would only get to the saddest part of her sad story, and give both herself and me unnecessary pain.

"My sweetheart is too poor to marry me, Mary," I said, "so I'm not so much to be envied even there. But let's give over disputing which is worst off. Lie down in bed, and let me tuck you up. I'll put a stitch or two into that work of yours while you go to sleep."

Instead of doing what I told her, she burst out crying (being very like a child in some of her ways), and hugged me so tight round the neck that she quite hurt me. I let her go on till she had worn herself out, and was obliged to lie down. Even then, her last few words before she dropped off to sleep were such as I was half sorry, half frightened to hear.

"I won't plague you long, Anne," she said. "I haven't courage to go out of the world as you seem to fear I shall; but I began my life wretchedly, and wretchedly I am sentenced to end it."

It was of no use lecturing her again, for she closed her eyes.

I tucked her up as neatly as I could, and put her petticoat over her, for the bedclothes were scanty, and her hands felt cold. She looked so pretty and delicate as she fell asleep that it quite made my heart ache to see her, after such talk as we had held together. I just waited long enough to be quite sure that she was in the land of dreams, then emptied the horrible laudanum bottle into the grate, took up her half-done work, and, going out softly, left her for that night.

March 6th. Sent off a long letter to Robert, begging and entreating him not to be so down-hearted, and not to leave America without making another effort. I told him I could bear any trial except the wretchedness of seeing him come back a helpless, broken-down man, trying uselessly to begin life again when too old for a change.

It was not till after I had posted my own letter, and read over part of Robert's again, that the suspicion suddenly floated across me, for the first time, that he might have sailed for England immediately after writing to me. There were expressions in the letter which seemed to indicate that he had some such headlong project in his mind. And yet, surely, if it were so, I ought to have noticed them at the first reading. I can only hope I am wrong in my present interpretation of much of what he has written to me—hope it earnestly for both our sakes.

This has been a doleful day for me. I have been uneasy about Robert and uneasy about Mary. My mind is haunted by those last words of hers: "I began my life wretchedly, and wretchedly I am sentenced to end it." Her usual melancholy way of talking never produced the same impression on me that I feel now. Perhaps the discovery of the laudanum-bottle is the cause of this. I would give many a hard day's work to know what to do for Mary's good. My heart warmed to her when we first met in the same lodging-house two years ago, and, although I am not one of the over-affectionate sort myself, I feel as if I could go to the world's end to serve that girl. Yet, strange to say, if I was asked why I was so fond of her, I don't think I should know how to answer the question.

March 7th. I am almost ashamed to write it down, even in this journal, which no eyes but mine ever look on; yet I must honestly confess to myself that here I am, at nearly one in the morning, sitting up in a state of serious uneasiness because Mary has not yet come home.

I walked with her this morning to the place where she works, and tried to lead her into talking of the relations she has got who are still alive. My motive in doing this was to see if she dropped anything in the course of conversation which might suggest a way of helping her interests with those who are bound to give her all reasonable assistance. But the little I could get her to say to me led to nothing. Instead of doing what I told her, she burst out crying (being very like a child in some of her ways), and hugged me so tight round the neck that she quite hurt me. I let her go on till she had worn herself out, and was obliged to lie down. When I did get her to speak of her brother, she only knew that he had gone out to a place called Assam, where they grew tea. How he was doing, or whether he was there still, she did not seem to know, never having heard a word from him for years and years past.

As for her step-mother, Mary not unnaturally flew into a passion the moment I spoke of her. She keeps an eating-house at Hammersmith, and could have given Mary good employment in it; but she seems always to have hated her, and to have made her life so wretched with abuse and ill usage that she had no refuge left but to go away from home, and do her best to make a living for herself. Her husband (Mary's father) appears to have behaved badly to her, and, after his death, she took the wicked course of revenging herself on her step-daughter. I felt, after this, that it was impossible Mary could go back, and that it was the hard necessity of her position, as it is of mine, that she should struggle on to make a decent livelihood without assistance from any of her relations. I confessed as much as this to her; but I added that I would try to get her employment with the persons for whom I work, who pay higher wages, and show a little more indulgence to those under them than the people to whom she is now obliged to look for support.

I spoke much more confidently than I felt about being able to do this, and left her, as I thought, in better spirits than usual. She promised to be back to-night to tea at nine o'clock, and now it is nearly one in the morning, and she
is not home yet. If it was any other girl I should not feel uneasy, for I should make up my mind that there was extra work to be done in a hurry, and that they were keeping her late, and I should go to bed. But Mary is so unfortunate in everything that happens to her, and her own melancholy talk about herself keeps hanging on my mind so, that I have fears on her account which would not distress me about any one else. It seems inexcusably silly to think such a thing, much more to write it down; but I have a kind of nervous dread upon me that some accident--

What does that loud knocking at the street door mean? And those voices and heavy footsteps outside? Some lodger who has lost his key, I suppose. And yet, my heart-- What a coward I have become all of a sudden!

More knocking and louder voices. I must run to the door and see what it is. Oh, Mary! Mary! I hope I am not going to have another fright about you, but I feel sadly like it.

March 8th.
March 9th.
March 10th.
March 11th. Oh me! all the troubles I have ever had in my life are as nothing to the trouble I am in now. For three days I have not been able to write a single line in this journal, which I have kept so regularly ever since I was a girl. For three days I have not once thought of Robert--I, who am always thinking of him at other times.

My poor, dear, unhappy Mary! the worst I feared for you on that night when I sat up alone was far below the dreadful calamity that has really happened. How can I write about it, with my eyes full of tears and my hand all of a tremble? I don't even know why I am sitting down at my desk now, unless it is habit that keeps me to my old everyday task, in spite of all the grief and fear which seem to unfit me entirely for performing it.

The people of the house were asleep and lazy on that dreadful night, and I was the first to open the door. Never, never could I describe in writing, or even say in plain talk, though it is so much easier, what I felt when I saw two policemen come in, carrying between them what seemed to me to be a dead girl, and that girl Mary! I caught hold of her, and gave a scream that must have alarmed the whole house; for frightened people came crowding downstairs in their night-dresses. There was a dreadful confusion and noise of loud talking, but I heard nothing and saw nothing till I had got her into my room and laid on my bed. I stooped down, frantic-like, to kiss her, and saw an awful mark of a blow on the left temple, and felt, at the same time, a feeble flutter of her breath on my cheek. The discovery that she was not dead seemed to give me back my senses again. I told one of the policemen where the nearest doctor was to be found, and sat down by the bedside while he was gone, and bathed her poor head with cold water. She never opened her eyes, or moved, or spoke; but she breathed, and that was enough for me, because it was enough for life.

The policeman left in the room was a big, thick-voiced, pompous man, with a horrible unfeeling pleasure in hearing himself talk before an assembly of frightened, silent people. He told us how he had found her, as if he had been telling a story in a tap-room, and began with saying: "I don't think the young woman was drunk."

Drunk! My Mary, who might have been a born lady for all the spirits she ever touched--drunk! I could have struck the man for uttering the word, with her lying--poor suffering angel--so white, and still, and helpless before him. As it was, I gave him a look, but he was too stupid to understand it, and went droning on, saying the same thing over and over again in the same words. And yet the story of how they found her was, like all the sad stories I have ever heard told in real life, so very, very short. They had just seen her lying along on the curbstone a few streets off, and had taken her to the station-house. There she had been searched, and one of my cards, that I gave to ladies who opened her eyes, or moved, or spoke; but she breathed, and that was enough for me, because it was enough for life.

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What a time it was before the doctor came, and how dreadful to hear him say, after he had looked at her, that he was afraid all the medical men in the world could be of no use here! He could not get her to swallow anything; and the more he tried to bring her back to her senses the less chance there seemed of his succeeding. He examined the blow on her temple, and said he thought she must have fallen down in a fit of some sort, and struck her head against the pavement, and so have given her brain what he was afraid was a fatal shake. I asked what was to be done if she--

The rest of the lodgers followed him, all silent and shocked, except the inhuman wretch who owns the house and lives in idleness on the high rents he wrings from poor people like us.

"She's three weeks in my debt," says he, with a frown and an oath. "Where the devil is my money to come from now?" Brute! brute!

I had a long cry alone with her that seemed to ease my heart a little. She was not the least changed for the better
when I had wiped away the tears and could see her clearly again. I took up her right hand, which lay nearest to me. It was tight clinched. I tried to unclasp the fingers, and succeeded after a little time. Something dark fell out of the palm of her hand as I straightened it.

I picked the thing up, and smoothed it out, and saw that it was an end of a man's cravat.

A very old, rotten, dingy strip of black silk, with thin lilac lines, all blurred and deadened with dirt, running across and across the stuff in a sort of trellis-work pattern. The small end of the cravat was hemmed in the usual way, but the other end was all jagged, as if the morsel then in my hands had been torn off violently from the rest of the stuff. A chill ran all over me as I looked at it; for that poor, stained, crumpled end of a cravat seemed to be saying to me, as though it had been in plain words: "If she dies, she has come to her death by foul means, and I am the witness of it."

I had been frightened enough before, lest she should die suddenly and quietly without my knowing it, while we were alone together; but I got into a perfect agony now, for fear this last worst affliction should take me by surprise. I don't suppose five minutes passed all that woeful night through without my getting up and putting my cheek close to her mouth, to feel if the faint breaths still fluttered out of it. They came and went just the same as at first, though the fright I was in often made me fancy they were stilled forever.

Just as the church clocks were striking four I was startled by seeing the room door open. It was only Dusty Sal (as they call her in the house), the maid-of-all-work. She was wrapped up in the blanket off her bed; her hair was all tumbled over her face, and her eyes were heavy with sleep as she came up to the bedside where I was sitting.

"I've two hours good before I begin to work," says she, in her hoarse, drowsy voice, "and I've come to sit up and take my turn at watching her. You lay down and get some sleep on the rug. Here's my blanket for you. I don't mind the cold--it will keep me awake."

"You are very kind--very, very kind and thoughtful, Sally," says I, "but I am too wretched in my mind to want sleep, or rest, or to do anything but wait where I am, and try and hope for the best."

"Then I'll wait, too," says Sally. "I must do something; if there's nothing to do but waiting, I'll wait."

And she sat down opposite me at the foot of the bed, and drew the blanket close round her with a shiver.

"After working so hard as you do, I'm sure you must want all the little rest you can get," says I.

"Excepting only you," says Sally, putting her heavy arm very clumsily, but very gently at the same time, round Mary's feet, and looking hard at the pale, still face on the pillow. "Excepting you, she's the only soul in this house as never swore at me, or give me a hard word that I can remember. When you made puddings on Sundays, and give her half, she always give me a bit. The rest of 'em calls me Dusty Sal. Excepting only you, again, she always called me Sally, as if she knowed me in a friendly way. I ain't no good here, but I ain't no harm, neither; and I shall take my turn at the sitting up--that's what I shall do!"

She nestled her head down close at Mary's feet as she spoke those words, and said no more. I once or twice thought she had fallen asleep, but whenever I looked at her her heavy eyes were always wide open. She never changed her position an inch till the church clocks struck six; then she gave one little squeeze to Mary's feet with her arm, and shuffled out of the room without a word. A minute or two after, I heard her down below, lighting the kitchen fire just as usual.

A little later the doctor stepped over before his breakfast-time to see if there had been any change in the night. He only shook his head when he looked at her as if there was no hope. Having nobody else to consult that I could put trust in, I showed him the end of the cravat, and told him of the dreadful suspicion that had arisen in my mind when I found it in her hand.

"You must keep it carefully, and produce it at the inquest," he said. "I don't know, though, that it is likely to lead to anything. The bit of stuff may have been lying on the pavement near her, and her hand may have unconsciously clutched it when she fell. Was she subject to fainting-fits?"

"Not more so, sir, than other young girls who are hard-worked and anxious, and weakly from poor living," I answered.

"I can't say that she may not have got that blow from a fall," the doctor went on, locking at her temple again. "I can't say that it presents any positive appearance of having been inflicted by another person. It will be important, however, to ascertain what state of health she was in last night. Have you any idea where she was yesterday evening?"

I told him where she was employed at work, and said I imagined she must have been kept there later than usual.

"I shall pass the place this morning" said the doctor, "in going my rounds among my patients, and I'll just step in and make some inquiries."

I thanked him, and we parted. Just as he was closing the door he looked in again.

"Was she your sister?" he asked.

"No, sir, only my dear friend."
He said nothing more, but I heard him sigh as he shut the door softly. Perhaps he once had a sister of his own, and lost her? Perhaps she was like Mary in the face?

The doctor was hours gone away. I began to feel unspeakably forlorn and helpless, so much so as even to wish selfishly that Robert might really have sailed from America, and might get to London in time to assist and console me.

No living creature came into the room but Sally. The first time she brought me some tea; the second and third times she only looked in to see if there was any change, and glanced her eye toward the bed. I had never known her so silent before; it seemed almost as if this dreadful accident had struck her dumb. I ought to have spoken to her, perhaps, but there was something in her face that daunted me; and, besides, the fever of anxiety I was in began to dry up my lips, as if they would never be able to shape any words again. I was still tormented by that frightful apprehension of the past night, that she would die without my knowing it--die without saying one word to clear up the awful mystery of this blow, and set the suspicions at rest forever which I still felt whenever my eyes fell on the end of the old cravat.

At last the doctor came back.

"I think you may safely clear your mind of any doubts to which that bit of stuff may have given rise," he said. "She was, as you supposed, detained late by her employers, and she fainted in the work-room. They most unwisely and unkindly let her go home alone, without giving her any stimulant, as soon as she came to her senses again. Nothing is more probable, under these circumstances, than that she should faint a second time on her way here. A fall on the pavement, without any friendly arm to break it, might have produced even a worse injury than the injury we see. I believe that the only ill usage to which the poor girl was exposed was the neglect she met with in the work-room."

"You speak very reasonably, I own, sir," said I, not yet quite convinced. "Still, perhaps she may--"

"My poor girl, I told you not to hope," said the doctor, interrupting me. He went to Mary, and lifted up her eyelids, and looked at her eyes while he spoke; then added, "If you still doubt how she came by that blow, do not encourage the idea that any words of hers will ever enlighten you. She will never speak again."

"Not dead! Oh, sir, don't say she's dead!"

"She is dead to pain and sorrow--dead to speech and recognition. There is more animation in the life of the feeblest insect that flies than in the life that is left in her. When you look at her now, try to think that she is in heaven. That is the best comfort I can give you, after telling the hard truth."

I did not believe him. I could not believe him. So long as she breathed at all, so long I was resolved to hope. Soon after the doctor was gone, Sally came in again, and found me listening (if I may call it so) at Mary's lips. She went to where my little hand-glass hangs against the wall, took it down, and gave it to me.

"See if the breath marks it," she said.

Yes; her breath did mark it, but very faintly. Sally cleaned the glass with her apron, and gave it back to me. As she did so, she half stretched out her hand to Mary's face, but drew it in again suddenly, as if she was afraid of soiling Mary's delicate skin with her hard, horny fingers. Going out, she stopped at the foot of the bed, and scraped away a little patch of mud that was on one of Mary's shoes.

"I always used to clean 'em for her," said Sally, "to save her hands from getting blacked. May I take 'em off now, and clean 'em again?"

I nodded my head, for my heart was too heavy to speak. Sally took the shoes off with a slow, awkward tenderness, and went out.

An hour or more must have passed, when, putting the glass over her lips again, I saw no mark on it. I held it closer and closer. I dulled it accidentally with my own breath, and cleaned it. I held it over her again. Oh, Mary, Mary, the doctor was right! I ought to have only thought of you in heaven!

Dead, without a word, without a sign--without even a look to tell the true story of the blow that killed her! I could not call to anybody, I could not cry, I could not so much as put the glass down and give her a kiss for the last time. I don't know how long I had sat there with my eyes burning, and my hands deadly cold, when Sally came in with the shoes cleaned, and carried carefully in her apron for fear of a soil touching them. At the sight of that--

I can write no more. My tears drop so fast on the paper that I can see nothing.

March 12th. She died on the afternoon of the eighth. On the morning of the ninth, I wrote, as in duty bound, to her stepmother at Hammersmith. There was no answer. I wrote again; my letter was returned to me this morning unopened. For all that woman cares, Mary might be buried with a pauper's funeral; but this shall never be, if I pawn everything about me, down to the very gown that is on my back. The bare thought of Mary being buried by the workhouse gave me the spirit to dry my eyes, and go to the undertaker's, and tell him how I was placed. I said if he would get me an estimate of all that would have to be paid, from first to last, for the cheapest decent funeral that could be had, I would undertake to raise the money. He gave me the estimate, written in this way, like a common
inquest—if I didn't, I tell you so now. I'll give it to him! Come along with me.”

that he wears on Sundays, and his long cane with the ivory top to it.

was suffering in consequence of them, he rose up with a stamp of his foot, and sent for his gold-laced cocked hat

seemed, I really thought, to pity me. So to him I determined to apply in my great danger and distress.

The beadle was the next person who came into my head. He had the look of being a very dignified, unapproachable

kind of man when he came about the inquest; but he talked to me a little then, and said I was a good girl, and

And I must set about parting with them without delay, for the funeral is to be to-morrow, the thirteenth.

The funeral--Mary's funeral! It is well that the straits and difficulties I am in keep my mind on the stretch. If I had leisure to grieve, where should I find the courage to face to-morrow?

Thank God they did not want me at the inquest. The verdict given, with the doctor, the policeman, and two

persons from the place where she worked, for witnesses, was Accidental Death. The end of the cravat was produced, and the coroner said that it was certainly enough to suggest suspicion; but the jury, in the absence of any positive evidence, held to the doctor's notion that she had fainted and fallen down, and so got the blow on her temple. They reproved the people where Mary worked for letting her go home alone, without so much as a drop of brandy to support her, after she had fallen into a swoon from exhaustion before their eyes. The coroner added, on his own account, that he thought the reproof was thoroughly deserved. After that, the cravat-end was given back to me by my own desire, the police saying that they could make no investigations with such a slight clew to guide them. They may think so, and the coroner, and doctor, and jury may think so; but, in spite of all that has passed, I am now more firmly persuaded than ever that there is some dreadful mystery in connection with that blow on my poor lost Mary's temple which has yet to be revealed, and which may come to be discovered through this very fragment of a cravat that I found in her hand. I cannot give any good reason for why I think so, but I know that if I had been one of the jury at the inquest, nothing should have induced me to consent to such a verdict as Accidental Death.

After I had pawned my things, and had begged a small advance of wages at the place where I work to make up what was still wanting to pay for Mary's funeral, I thought I might have had a little quiet time to prepare myself as I best could for to-morrow. But this was not to be. When I got home the landlord met me in the passage. He was in liquor, and more brutal and pitiless in his way of looking and speaking than ever I saw him before.

"So you're going to be fool enough to pay for her funeral, are you?" were his first words to me.

I was too weary and heart-sick to answer; I only tried to get by him to my own door.

"If you can pay for burying her," he went on, putting himself in front of me, "you can pay her lawful debts. She owes me three weeks' rent. Suppose you raise the money for that next, and hand it over to me? I'm not joking, I can promise you. I mean to have my rent; and, if somebody don't pay it, I'll have her body seized and sent to the workhouse!"

Between terror and disgust, I thought I should have dropped to the floor at his feet. But I determined not to let him see how he had terrified me, if I could possibly control myself. So I mustered resolution enough to answer that I did not believe the law gave him any such wicked power over the dead.

"I'll teach you what the law is!" he broke in; "you'll raise money to bury her like a born lady, when she's died in my debt, will you? And you think I'll let my rights be trampled upon like that, do you? See if I can! I'll give you till to-night to think about it. If I don't have the three weeks she owes before to-morrow, dead or alive, she shall go to the workhouse!"

This time I managed to push by him, and get to my own room, and lock the door in his face. As soon as I was alone I fell into a breathless, suffocating fit of crying that seemed to be shaking me to pieces. But there was no good and no help in tears; I did my best to calm myself after a little while, and tried to think who I should run to for help and protection.

The doctor was the first friend I thought of; but I knew he was always out seeing his patients of an afternoon.

The beadle was the next person who came into my head. He had the look of being a very dignified, unapproachable kind of man when he came about the inquest; but he talked to me a little then, and said I was a good girl, and seemed, I really thought, to pity me. So to him I determined to apply in my great danger and distress.

Most fortunately, I found him at home. When I told him of the landlord's infamous threats, and of the misery I was suffering in consequence of them, he rose up with a stamp of his foot, and sent for his gold-laced cocked hat that he wears on Sundays, and his long cane with the ivory top to it.

"I'll give it to him," said the beadle. "Come along with me, my dear. I think I told you you were a good girl at the inquest--if I didn't, I tell you so now. I'll give it to him! Come along with me."
And he went out, striding on with his cocked hat and his great cane, and I followed him.

"Landlord!" he cries, the moment he gets into the passage, with a thump of his cane on the floor, "landlord!" with a look all round him as if he was King of England calling to a beast, "come out!"

The moment the landlord came out and saw who it was, his eye fixed on the cocked hat, and he turned as pale as ashes.

"How dare you frighten this poor girl?" says the beadle. "How dare you bully her at this sorrowful time with threatening to do what you know you can't do? How dare you be a cowardly, bullying, bragadocio of an unmanly landlord? Don't talk to me: I won't hear you. I'll pull you up, sir. If you say another word to the young woman, I'll pull you up before the authorities of this metropolitan parish. I've had my eye on you, and the authorities have had their eye on you, and the rector has had his eye on you. We don't like the look of some of the customers who deal at it; we don't like disorderly characters; and we don't by any manner of means like you. Go away. Leave the young woman alone. Hold your tongue, or I'll pull you up. If he says another word, or interferes with you again, my dear, come and tell me; and, as sure as he's a bullying, unmanly, bragadocio of a landlord, I'll pull him up."

With those words the beadle gave a loud cough to clear his throat, and another thump of his cane on the floor, and so went striding out again before I could open my lips to thank him. The landlord slunk back into his room without a word. I was left alone and unmolested at last, to strengthen myself for the hard trial of my poor love's funeral to-morrow.

March 13th. It is all over. A week ago her head rested on my bosom. It is laid in the churchyard now; the fresh earth lies heavy over her grave. I and my dearest friend, the sister of my love, are parted in this world forever.

I followed her funeral alone through the cruel, hustling streets. Sally, I thought, might have offered to go with me, but she never so much as came into my room. I did not like to think badly of her for this, and I am glad I restrained myself; for, when we got into the churchyard, among the two or three people who were standing by the open grave I saw Sally, in her ragged gray shawl and her patched black bonnet. She did not seem to notice me till the last words of the service had been read and the clergyman had gone away; then she came up and spoke to me.

"I couldn't follow along with you," she said, looking at her ragged shawl, "for I haven't a decent suit of clothes to walk in. I wish I could get vent in crying for her like you, but I can't; all the crying's been drudged and starved out of me long ago. Don't you think about lighting your fire when you get home. I'll do that, and get you a drop of tea to comfort you."

She seemed on the point of saying a kind word or two more, when, seeing the beadle coming toward me, she drew back, as if she was afraid of him, and left the churchyard.

"Here's my subscription toward the funeral," said the beadle, giving me back his shilling fee. "Don't say anything about it, for it mightn't be approved of in a business point of view, if it came to some people's ears. Has the landlord said anything more to you? no, I thought not. He's too polite a man to give me the trouble of pulling him up. Don't stop crying here, my dear. Take the advice of a man familiar with funerals, and go home."

I tried to take his advice, but it seemed like deserting Mary to go away when all the rest forsook her.

I waited about till the earth was thrown in and the man had left the place, then I returned to the grave. Oh, how bare and cruel it was, without so much as a bit of green turf to soften it! Oh, how much harder it seemed to live than to die, when I stood alone looking at the heavy piled-up lumps of clay, and thinking of what was hidden beneath them!

I was driven home by my own despairing thoughts. The sight of Sally lighting the fire in my room eased my heart a little. When she was gone, I took up Robert's letter again to keep my mind employed on the only subject in the world that has any interest for it now.

This fresh reading increased the doubts I had already felt relative to his having remained in America after writing to me. My grief and forlornness have made a strange alteration in my former feelings about his coming back. I seem to have lost all my prudence and self-denial, and to care so little about his poverty, and so much about himself, that the prospect of his return is really the only comforting thought I have now to support me. I know this is weak in me, to have lost all my prudence and self-denial, and to care so little about his poverty, and so much about himself, that to me. My grief and forlornness have made a strange alteration in my former feelings about his coming back. I seem
or the beginning of May.

March 19th. I don't remember my mind running once on the end of the cravat yesterday, and I am certain I never looked at it; yet I had the strangest dream concerning it at night. I thought it was lengthened into a long clew, like the silken thread that led to Rosamond's Bower. I thought I took hold of it, and followed it a little way, and then got frightened and tried to go back, but found that I was obliged, in spite of myself, to go on. It led me through a place like the Valley of the Shadow of Death, in an old print I remember in my mother's copy of the Pilgrim's Progress. I seemed to be months and months following it without any respite, till at last it brought me, on a sudden, face to face with an angel whose eyes were like Mary's. He said to me, "Go on, still; the truth is at the end, waiting for you to find it." I burst out crying, for the angel had Mary's voice as well as Mary's eyes, and woke with my heart throbbing and my cheeks all wet. What is the meaning of this? Is it always superstitious, I wonder, to believe that dreams may come true?

* * * * * *

April 30th. I have found it! God knows to what results it may lead; but it is as certain as that I am sitting here before my journal that I have found the cravat from which the end in Mary's hand was torn. I discovered it last night; but the flutter I was in, and the nervousness and uncertainty I felt, prevented me from noting down this most extraordinary and unexpected event at the time when it happened. Let me try if I can preserve the memory of it in writing now.

I was going home rather late from where I work, when I suddenly remembered that I had forgotten to buy myself any candles the evening before, and that I should be left in the dark if I did not manage to rectify this mistake in some way. The shop close to me, at which I usually deal, would be shut up, I knew, before I could get to it; so I determined to go into the first place I passed where candles were sold. This turned out to be a small shop with two counters, which did business on one side in the general grocery way, and on the other in the rag and bottle and old iron line.

There were several customers on the grocery side when I went in, so I waited on the empty rag side till I could be served. Glancing about me here at the worthless-looking things by which I was surrounded, my eye was caught by a bundle of rags lying on the counter, as if they had just been brought in and left there. From mere idle curiosity, I looked close at the rags, and saw among them something like an old cravat. I took it up directly and held it under a gaslight. The pattern was blurred lilac lines running across and across the dingy black ground in a trellis-work form. I looked at the ends: one of them was torn off.

How I managed to hide the breathless surprise into which this discovery threw me I cannot say, but I certainly contrived to steady my voice somehow, and to ask for my candles calmly when the man and woman serving in the shop, having disposed of their other customers, inquired of me what I wanted.

As the man took down the candles, my brain was all in a whirl with trying to think how I could get possession of the old cravat without exciting any suspicion. Chance, and a little quickness on my part in taking advantage of it, put the object within my reach in a moment. The man, having counted out the candles, asked the woman for some paper to wrap them in. She produced a piece much too small and flimsy for the purpose, and declared, when he called for something better, that the day's supply of stout paper was all exhausted. He flew into a rage with her for managing so badly. Just as they were beginning to quarrel violently, I stepped back to the rag-counter, took the old cravat carelessly out of the bundle, and said, in as light a tone as I could possibly assume:

"Come, come, don't let my candles be the cause of hard words between you. Tie this ragged old thing round them with a bit of string, and I shall carry them home quite comfortably."

The man seemed disposed to insist on the stout paper being produced; but the woman, as if she was glad of an opportunity of spiting him, snatched the candles away, and tied them up in a moment in the torn old cravat. I was afraid he would have struck her before my face, he seemed in such a fury; but, fortunately, another customer came in, and obliged him to put his hands to peaceable and proper use.

"Quite a bundle of all sorts on the opposite counter there," I said to the woman, as I paid her for the candles.

"Yes, and all hoarded up for sale by a poor creature with a lazy brute of a husband, who lets his wife do all the work while he spends all the money," answered the woman, with a malicious look at the man by her side.

"He can't surely have much money to spend, if his wife has no better work to do than picking up rags," said I.

"It isn't her fault if she hasn't got no better," says the woman, rather angrily. "She's ready to turn her hand to anything. Charing, washing, laying-out, keeping empty houses--nothing comes amiss to her. She's my half-sister, and I think I ought to know."

"Did you say she went out charing?" I asked, making believe as if I knew of somebody who might employ her.

"Yes, of course I did," answered the woman; "and if you can put a job into her hands, you'll be doing a good turn to a poor hard-working creature as wants it. She lives down the Mews here to the right--name of Horlick, and as honest a woman as ever stood in shoe-leather. Now, then, ma'am, what for you?"
Another customer came in just then, and occupied her attention. I left the shop, passed the turning that led down to the Mews, looked up at the name of the street, so as to know how to find it again, and then ran home as fast as I could. Perhaps it was the remembrance of my strange dream striking me on a sudden, or perhaps it was the shock of the discovery I had just made, but I began to feel frightened without knowing why, and anxious to be under shelter in my own room.

It Robert should come back! Oh, what a relief and help it would be now if Robert should come back!

May 1st. On getting indoors last night, the first thing I did, after striking a light, was to take the ragged cravat off the candles, and smooth it out on the table. I then took the end that had been in poor Mary's hand out of my writing-desk, and smoothed that out too. It matched the torn side of the cravat exactly. I put them together, and satisfied myself that there was not a doubt of it.

Not once did I close my eyes that night. A kind of fever got possession of me—a vehement yearning to go on from this first discovery and find out more, no matter what the risk might be. The cravat now really became, to my mind, the clew that I thought I saw in my dream—the clew that I was resolved to follow. I determined to go to Mrs. Horlick this evening on my return from work.

I found the Mews easily. A crook-backed dwarf of a man was lounging at the corner of it smoking his pipe. Not liking his looks, I did not inquire of him where Mrs. Horlick lived, but went down the Mews till I met with a woman, and asked her. She directed me to the right number. I knocked at the door, and Mrs. Horlick herself—a lean, ill-tempered, miserable-looking woman—answered it. I told her at once that I had come to ask what her terms were for chartering. She stared at me for a moment, then answered my question civilly enough.

"You look surprised at a stranger like me finding you out," I said. "I first came to hear of you last night, from a relation of yours, in rather an odd way."

And I told her all that had happened in the chandler's shop, bringing in the bundle of rags, and the circumstance of my carrying home the candles in the old torn cravat, as often as possible.

"It's the first time I've heard of anything belonging to him turning out any use," said Mrs. Horlick, bitterly. "What! the spoiled old neck-handkerchief belonged to your husband, did it?" said I, at a venture.

"Yes; I pitched his rotten rag of a neck-handkerchief into the bundle along with the rest, and I wish I could have pitched him in after it," said Mrs. Horlick. "I'd sell him cheap at any ragshop. There he stands, smoking his pipe at the end of the Mews, out of work for weeks past, the idliest humpbacked pig in all London!"

She pointed to the man whom I had passed on entering the Mews. My cheeks began to burn and my knees to tremble, for I knew that in tracing the cravat to its owner I was advancing a step toward a fresh discovery. I wished Mrs. Horlick good evening, and said I would write and mention the day on which I wanted her.

What I had just been told put a thought into my mind that I was afraid to follow out. I have heard people talk of being light-headed, and I felt as I have heard them say they felt when I retraced my steps up the Mews. My head got giddy, and my eyes seemed able to see nothing but the figure of the little crook-backed man, still smoking his pipe in his former place. I could see nothing but that; I could think of nothing but the mark of the blow on my poor lost Mary's temple. I know that I must have been light-headed, for as I came close to the crook-backed man I stopped without meaning it. The minute before, there had been no idea in me of speaking to him. I did not know how to speak, or in what way it would be safest to begin; and yet, the moment I came face to face with him, something out of myself seemed to stop me, and to make me speak without considering beforehand, without thinking of consequences, without knowing, I may almost say, what words I was uttering till the instant when they rose to my lips.

"When your old necktie was torn, did you know that one end of it went to the rag-shop, and the other fell into my hands?"

I said these bold words to him suddenly, and, as it seemed, without my own will taking any part in them.

He started, stared, changed color. He was too much amazed by my sudden speaking to find an answer for me. When he did open his lips, it was to say rather to himself than me:

"You're not the girl."

"No," I said, with a strange choking at my heart, "I'm her friend."

By this time he had recovered his surprise, and he seemed to be aware that he had let out more than he ought.

"You may be anybody's friend you like," he said, brutally, "so long as you don't come jabbering nonsense here. I don't know you, and I don't understand your jokes."

He turned quickly away from me when he had said the last words. He had never once looked fairly at me since I first spoke to him.

Was it his hand that had struck the blow? I had only sixpence in my pocket, but I took it out and followed him. If it had been a five-pound note I should have done the same in the state I was in then.

"Would a pot of beer help you to understand me?" I said, and offered him the sixpence.
"A pot ain't no great things," he answered, taking the sixpence doubtfully.
"It may lead to something better," I said. His eyes began to twinkle, and he came close to me. Oh, how my legs trembled--how my head swam!
"This is all in a friendly way, is it?" he asked, in a whisper.
I nodded my head. At that moment I could not have spoken for worlds.
"Friendly, of course," he went on to himself, "or there would have been a policeman in it. She told you, I suppose, that I wasn't the man?"
I nodded my head again. It was all I could do to keep myself standing upright.
"I suppose it's a case of threatening to have him up, and make him settle it quietly for a pound or two? How much for me if you lay hold of him?"
"Half."
I began to be afraid that he would suspect something if I was still silent. The wretch's eyes twinkled again and he came yet closer.
"I drove him to the Red Lion, corner of Dodd Street and Rudgely Street. The house was shut up, but he was let in at the jug and bottle door, like a man who was known to the landlord. That's as much as I can tell you, and I'm certain I'm right. He was the last fare I took up at night. The next morning master gave me the sack--said I cribbed his corn and his fares. I wish I had."
I gathered from this that the crook-backed man had been a cab-driver.
"Why don't you speak?" he asked, suspiciously. "Has she been telling you a pack of lies about me? What did she say when she came home?"
"What ought she to have said?"
"She ought to have said my fare was drunk, and she came in the way as he was going to get into the cab. That's what she ought to have said to begin with."
"But after?"
"Well, after, my fare, by way of larking with her, puts out his leg for to trip her up, and she stumbles and catches at me for to save herself, and tears off one of the limp ends of my rotten old tie. 'What do you mean by that, you brute?' says she, turning round as soon as she was steady on her legs, to my fare. Says my fare to her: 'I means to teach you to keep a civil tongue in your head.' And he ups with his fist, and--what's come to you, now? What are you looking at me like that for? How do you think a man of my size was to take her part against a man big enough to have eaten me up? Look as much as you like, in my place you would have done what I done--drew off when he shook his fist at you, and swore he'd be the death of you if you didn't start your horse in no time."
I saw he was working himself up into a rage; but I could not, if my life had depended on it, have stood near him or looked at him any longer. I just managed to stammer out that I had been walking a long way, and that, not being used to much exercise, I felt faint and giddy with fatigue. He only changed from angry to sulky when I made that excuse. I got a little further away from him, and then added that if he would be at the Mews entrance the next evening I should have something more to say and something more to give him. He grumbled a few suspicious words in answer about doubting whether he should trust me to come back. Fortunately, at that moment, a policeman passed on the opposite side of the way. He slunk down the Mews immediately, and I was free to make my escape.
How I got home I can't say, except that I think I ran the greater part of the way. Sally opened the door, and asked if anything was the matter the moment she saw my face. I answered: "Nothing--nothing." She stopped me as I was going into my room, and said:
"Smooth your hair a bit, and put your collar straight. There's a gentleman in there waiting for you."
My heart gave one great bound: I knew who it was in an instant, and rushed into the room like a mad woman.
"Oh, Robert, Robert!"
All my heart went out to him in those two little words.
"Good God, Anne, has anything happened? Are you ill?"
"Mary! my poor, lost, murdered, dear, dear Mary!"
That was all I could say before I fell on his breast.
May 2d. Misfortunes and disappointments have saddened him a little, but toward me he is unaltered. He is as good, as kind, as gently and truly affectionate as ever. I believe no other man in the world could have listened to the story of Mary's death with such tenderness and pity as he. Instead of cutting me short anywhere, he drew me on to tell more than I had intended; and his first generous words when I had done were to assure me that he would see himself to the grass being laid and the flowers planted on Mary's grave. I could almost have gone on my knees and worshiped him when he made me that promise.
Surely this best, and kindest, and noblest of men cannot always be unfortunate! My cheeks burn when I think that he has come back with only a few pounds in his pocket, after all his hard and honest struggles to do well in
America. They must be bad people there when such a man as Robert cannot get on among them. He now talks
calmly and resignedly of trying for any one of the lowest employments by which a man can earn his bread honestly
in this great city—he who knows French, who can write so beautifully! Oh, if the people who have places to give
away only knew Robert as well as I do, what a salary he would have, what a post he would be chosen to occupy!

I am writing these lines alone while he has gone to the Mews to treat with the dastardly, heartless wretch with
whom I spoke yesterday.

Robert says the creature—I won't call him a man—must be humored and kept deceived about poor Mary's end, in
order that we may discover and bring to justice the monster whose drunken blow was the death of her. I shall know
no ease of mind till her murderer is secured, and till I am certain that he will be made to suffer for his crimes. I
wanted to go with Robert to the Mews, but he said it was best that he should carry out the rest of the investigation
alone, for my strength and resolution had been too hardly taxed already. He said more words in praise of me for
what I have been able to do up to this time, which I am almost ashamed to write down with my own pen. Besides,
there is no need; praise from his lips is one of the things that I can trust my memory to preserve to the latest day of
my life.

May 3d. Robert was very long last night before he came back to tell me what he had done. He easily recognized
the hunchback at the corner of the Mews by my description of him; but he found it a hard matter, even with the help
of money, to overcome the cowardly wretch's distrust of him as a stranger and a man. However, when this had been
accomplished, the main difficulty was conquered. The hunchback, excited by the promise of more money, went at
once to the Red Lion to inquire about the person whom he had driven there in his cab. Robert followed him, and
waited at the corner of the street. The tidings brought by the cabman were of the most unexpected kind. The
murderer—I can write of him by no other name—had fallen ill on the very night when he was driven to the Red Lion,
had taken to his bed there and then, and was still confined to it at that very moment. His disease was of a kind that is
brought on by excessive drinking, and that affects the mind as well as the body. The people at the public house call
it the Horrors.

Hearing these things, Robert determined to see if he could not find out something more for himself by going and
inquiring at the public house, in the character of one of the friends of the sick man in bed upstairs. He made two
important discoveries. First, he found out the name and address of the doctor in attendance. Secondly, he entrapped
the barman into mentioning the murderous wretch by his name. This last discovery adds an unspeakably fearful
interest to the dreadful misfortune of Mary's death. Noah Truscott, as she told me herself in the last conversation I
ever had with her, was the name of the man whose drunken example ruined her father, and Noah Truscott is also the
name of the man whose drunken fury killed her. There is something that makes one shudder, something supernatural
in this awful fact. Robert agrees with me that the hand of Providence must have guided my steps to that shop from
which all the discoveries since made took their rise. He says he believes we are the instruments of effecting a
righteous retribution; and, if he spends his last farthing, he will have the investigation brought to its full end in a
court of justice.

May 4th. Robert went to-day to consult a lawyer whom he knew in former times. The lawyer was much
interested, though not so seriously impressed as I ought to have been by the story of Mary's death and of the events
that have followed it. He gave Robert a confidential letter to take to the doctor in attendance on the double-dyed
villain at the Red Lion. Robert left the letter, and called again and saw the doctor, who said his patient was getting
better, and would most likely be up again in ten days or a fortnight. This statement Robert communicated to the
lawyer, and the lawyer has undertaken to have the public house properly watched, and the hunchback (who is the
most important witness) sharply looked after for the next fortnight, or longer if necessary. Here, then, the progress of
this dreadful business stops for a while.

May 5th. Robert has got a little temporary employment in copying for his friend the lawyer. I am working harder
than ever at my needle, to make up for the time that has been lost lately.

May 6th. To-day was Sunday, and Robert proposed that we should go and look at Mary's grave. He, who forgets
nothing where a kindness is to be done, has found time to perform the promise he made to me on the night when we
first met. The grave is already, by his orders, covered with turf, and planted round with shrubs. Some flowers, and a
low headstone, are to be added, to make the place look worthier of my poor lost darling who is beneath it. Oh, I hope
I shall live long after I am married to Robert! I want so much time to show him all my gratitude!

May 20th. A hard trial to my courage to-day. I have given evidence at the police-office, and have seen the
monster who murdered her.

I could only look at him once. I could just see that he was a giant in size, and that he kept his dull, lowering,
bestial face turned toward the witness-box, and his bloodshot, vacant eyes staring on me. For an instant I tried to
confront that look; for an instant I kept my attention fixed on him—on his blotched face—on the short, grizzled hair
above it—on his knotty, murderous right hand, hanging loose over the bar in front of him, like the paw of a wild

beast over the edge of its den. Then the horror of him—the double horror of confronting him, in the first place, and
afterward of seeing that he was an old man—overcame me, and I turned away, faint, sick, and shuddering. I never
faced him again; and, at the end of my evidence, Robert considerately took me out.

When we met once more at the end of the examination, Robert told me that the prisoner never spoke and never
changed his position. He was either fortified by the cruel composure of a savage, or his faculties had not yet
thoroughly recovered from the disease that had so lately shaken them. The magistrate seemed to doubt if he was in
his right mind; but the evidence of the medical man relieved this uncertainty, and the prisoner was committed for
trial on a charge of manslaughter.

Why not on a charge of murder? Robert explained the law to me when I asked that question. I accepted the
explanation, but it did not satisfy me. Mary Mallinson was killed by a blow from the hand of Noah Truscott. That is
murder in the sight of God. Why not murder in the sight of the law also?

June 18th. To-morrow is the day appointed for the trial at the Old Bailey.

Before sunset this evening I went to look at Mary’s grave. The turf has grown so green since I saw it last, and the
flowers are springing up so prettily. A bird was perched dressing his feathers on the low white headstone that bears
the inscription of her name and age. I did not go near enough to disturb the little creature. He looked innocent and
pretty on the grave, as Mary herself was in her lifetime. When he flew away I went and sat for a little by the
headstone, and read the mournful lines on it. Oh, my love! my love! what harm or wrong had you ever done in this
world, that you should die at eighteen by a blow from a drunkard’s hand?

June 19th. The trial. My experience of what happened at it is limited, like my experience of the examination at
the police-office, to the time occupied in giving my own evidence. They made me say much more than I said before
the magistrate. Between examination and cross-examination, I had to go into almost all the particulars about poor
Mary and her funeral that I have written in this journal; the jury listening to every word I spoke with the most
anxious attention. At the end, the judge said a few words to me approving of my conduct, and then there was a
crashing of hands among the people in court. I was so agitated and excited that I trembled all over when they let me
go out into the air again.

I looked at the prisoner both when I entered the witness-box and when I left it. The lowering brutality of his face
was unchanged, but his faculties seemed to be more alive and observant than they were at the police-office. A
frightful blue change passed over his face, and he drew his breath so heavily that the gasps were distinctly audible
while I mentioned Mary by name and described the mark or the blow on her temple. When they asked me if I knew
anything of the prisoner, and I answered that I only knew what Mary herself had told me about his having been her
father’s ruin, he gave a kind of groan, and struck both his hands heavily on the dock. And when I passed beneath him
on my way out of court, he leaned over suddenly, whether to speak to me or to strike me I can’t say, for he was
immediately made to stand upright again by the turnkeys on either side of him. While the evidence proceeded (as
Robert described it to me), the signs that he was suffering under superstitious terror became more and more
apparent; until, at last, just as the lawyer appointed to defend him was rising to speak, he suddenly cried out, in a
voice that startled every one, up to the very judge on the bench: “Stop!”

There was a pause, and all eyes looked at him. The perspiration was pouring over his face like water, and he
made strange, uncouth signs with his hands to the judge opposite. “Stop all this!” he cried again; “I’ve been the ruin
of the father and the death of the child. Hang me before I do more harm! Hang me, for God’s sake, out of the way!”
As soon as the shock produced by this extraordinary interruption had subsided, he was removed, and there followed
a long discussion about whether he was of sound mind or not. The matter was left to the jury to decide by their
verdict. They found him guilty of the charge of manslaughter, without the excuse of insanity. He was brought up
again, and condemned to transportation for life. All he did, on hearing the dreadful sentence, was to reiterate his
desperate words: "Hang me before I do more harm! Hang me, for God’s sake, out of the way!"

June 20th. I made yesterday’s entry in sadness of heart, and I have not been better in my spirits to-day. It is
something to have brought the murderer to the punishment that he deserves. But the knowledge that this most
righteous act of retribution is accomplished brings no consolation with it. The law does indeed punish Noah Truscott
for his crime, but can it raise up Mary Mallinson from her last resting-place in the churchyard?

While writing of the law, I ought to record that the heartless wretch who allowed Mary to be struck down in his
presence without making an attempt to defend her is not likely to escape with perfect impunity. The policeman who
looked after him to insure his attendance at the trial discovered that he had committed past offenses, for which the
law can make him answer. A summons was executed upon him, and he was taken before the magistrate the moment
he left the court after giving his evidence.

I had just written these few lines, and was closing my journal, when there came a knock at the door. I answered
it, thinking that Robert had called on his way home to say good-night, and found myself face to face with a strange
gentleman, who immediately asked for Anne Rodway. On hearing that I was the person inquired for, he requested
five minutes' conversation with me. I showed him into the little empty room at the back of the house, and waited,
rather surprised and fluttered, to hear what he had to say.

He was a dark man, with a serious manner, and a short, stern way of speaking I was certain that he was a
stranger, and yet there seemed something in his face not unfamiliar to me. He began by taking a newspaper from his
pocket, and asking me if I was the person who had given evidence at the trial of Noah Truscott on a charge of
manslaughter. I answered immediately that I was.

"I have been for nearly two years in London seeking Mary Mallinson, and always seeking her in vain," he said.
"The first and only news I have had of her I found in the newspaper report of the trial yesterday."

He still spoke calmly, but there was something in the look of his eyes which showed me that he was suffering in
spirit. A sudden nervousness overcame me, and I was obliged to sit down.

"You knew Mary Mallinson, sir?" I asked, as quietly as I could.

"I am her brother."

I clasped my hands and hid my face in despair. Oh, the bitterness of heart with which I heard him say those
simple words!

"You were very kind to her," said the calm, tearless man. "In her name and for her sake, I thank you."

"Oh, sir," I said, "why did you never write to her when you were in foreign parts?"

"I wrote often," he answered; "but each of my letters contained a remittance of money. Did Mary tell you she
had a stepmother? If she did, you may guess why none of my letters were allowed to reach her. I now know that this
woman robbed my sister. Has she lied in telling me that she was never informed of Mary's place of abode?"

I remembered that Mary had never communicated with her stepmother after the separation, and could therefore
assure him that the woman had spoken the truth.

He paused for a moment after that, and sighed. Then he took out a pocket-book, and said:

"I have already arranged for the payment of any legal expenses that may have been incurred by the trial, but I
have still to reimburse you for the funeral charges which you so generously defrayed. Excuse my speaking bluntly
on this subject; I am accustomed to look on all matters where money is concerned purely as matters of business."

I saw that he was taking several bank-notes out of the pocket-book, and stopped him.

"I will gratefully receive back the little money I actually paid, sir, because I am not well off, and it would be an
ungracious act of pride in me to refuse it from you," I said; "but I see you handling bank-notes, any one of which is
far beyond the amount you have to repay me. Pray put them back, sir. What I did for your poor lost sister I did from
my love and fondness for her. You have thanked me for that, and your thanks are all I can receive."

He had hitherto concealed his feelings, but I saw them now begin to get the better of him. His eyes softened, and
he took my hand and squeezed it hard.

"I beg your pardon," he said; "I beg your pardon, with all my heart."

There was silence between us, for I was crying, and I believe, at heart, he was crying too. At last he dropped my
hand, and seemed to change back, by an effort, to his former calmness.

"Is there no one belonging to you to whom I can be of service?" he asked. "I see among the witnesses on the trial
the name of a young man who appears to have assisted you in the inquiries which led to the prisoner's conviction. Is
he a relation?"

"No, sir--at least, not now--but I hope--""?

"What?"

"I hope that he may, one day, be the nearest and dearest relation to me that a woman can have." I said those
words boldly, because I was afraid of his otherwise taking some wrong view of the connection between Robert and
me

"One day?" he repeated. "One day may be a long time hence."

"We are neither of us well off, sir," I said. "One day means the day when we are a little richer than we are now."

"Is the young man educated? Can he produce testimonials to his character? Oblige me by writing his name and
address down on the back of that card."

When I had obeyed, in a handwriting which I am afraid did me no credit, he took out another card and gave it to
me.

"I shall leave England to-morrow," he said. "There is nothing now to keep me in my own country. If you are
ever in any difficulty or distress (which I pray God you may never be), apply to my London agent, whose address
you have there."

He stopped, and looked at me attentively, then took my hand again.

"Where is she buried?" he said, suddenly, in a quick whisper, turning his head away.

I told him, and added that we had made the grave as beautiful as we could with grass and flowers. I saw his lips
whiten and tremble.

"God bless and reward you!" he said, and drew me toward him quickly and kissed my forehead. I was quite overcome, and sank down and hid my face on the table. When I looked up again he was gone.

June 25th, 1841. I write these lines on my wedding morning, when little more than a year has passed since Robert returned to England.

His salary was increased yesterday to one hundred and fifty pounds a year. If I only knew where Mr. Mallinson was, I would write and tell him of our present happiness. But for the situation which his kindness procured for Robert, we might still have been waiting vainly for the day that has now come.

I am to work at home for the future, and Sally is to help us in our new abode. If Mary could have lived to see this day! I am not ungrateful for my blessings; but oh, how I miss that sweet face on this morning of all others!

I got up to-day early enough to go alone to the grave, and to gather the nosegay that now lies before me from the flowers that grow round it. I shall put it in my bosom when Robert comes to fetch me to the church. Mary would have been my bridesmaid if she had lived; and I can't forget Mary, even on my wedding-day. . . .

THE NIGHT.

THE last words of the last story fell low and trembling from Owen's lips. He waited for a moment while Jessie dried the tears which Anne Rodway's simple diary had drawn from her warm young heart, then closed the manuscript, and taking her hand patted it in his gentle, fatherly way.

"You will be glad to hear, my love," he said, "that I can speak from personal experience of Anne Rodway's happiness. She came to live in my parish soon after the trial at which she appeared as chief witness, and I was the clergyman who married her. Months before that I knew her story, and had read those portions of her diary which you have just heard. When I made her my little present on her wedding day, and when she gratefully entreated me to tell her what she could do for me in return, I asked for a copy of her diary to keep among the papers that I treasured most. 'The reading of it now and then,' I said, 'will encourage that faith in the brighter and better part of human nature which I hope, by God's help, to preserve pure to my dying day.' In that way I became possessed of the manuscript: it was Anne's husband who made the copy for me. You have noticed a few withered leaves scattered here and there between the pages. They were put there, years since, by the bride's own hand: they are all that now remain of the flowers that Anne Rodway gathered on her marriage morning from Mary Mallinson's grave."

Jessie tried to answer, but the words failed on her lips. Between the effect of the story, and the anticipation of the parting now so near at hand, the good, impulsive, affectionate creature was fairly overcome. She laid her head on Owen's shoulder, and kept tight hold of his hand, and let her heart speak simply for itself, without attempting to help it by a single word.

The silence that followed was broken harshly by the tower clock. The heavy hammer slowly rang out ten strokes through the gloomy night-time and the dying storm.

I waited till the last humming echo of the clock fainted into dead stillness. I listened once more attentively, and again listened in vain. Then I rose, and proposed to my brothers that we should leave our guest to compose herself for the night.

When Owen and Morgan were ready to quit the room, I took her by the hand, and drew her a little aside.

"You leave us early, my dear," I said; "but, before you go to-morrow morning--"

I stopped to listen for the last time, before the words were spoken which committed me to the desperate experiment of pleading George's cause in defiance of his own request. Nothing caught my ear but the sweep of the weary weakened wind and the melancholy surging of the shaken trees.

"But, before you go to-morrow morning," I resumed, "I want to speak to you in private. We shall breakfast at eight o'clock. Is it asking too much to beg you to come and see me alone in my study at half past seven?"

Just as her lips opened to answer me I saw a change pass over her face. I had kept her hand in mine while I was speaking, and I must have pressed it unconsciously so hard as almost to hurt her. She may even have uttered a few words of remonstrance; but they never reached me: my whole hearing sense was seized, absorbed, petrified. At the very instant when I had ceased speaking, I, and I alone, heard a faint sound--a sound that was new to me--fly past the Glen Tower on the wings of the wind.

"Open the window, for God's sake!" I cried.

My hand mechanically held hers tighter and tighter. She struggled to free it, looking hard at me with pale cheeks and frightened eyes. Owen hastened up and released her, and put his arms round me.

"Griffith, Griffith!" he whispered, "control yourself, for George's sake."

Morgan hurried to the window and threw it wide open.

The wind and rain rushed in fiercely. Welcome, welcome wind! They all heard it now. "Oh, Father in heaven, so merciful to fathers on earth--my son, my son!"
It came in, louder and louder with every gust of wind--the joyous, rapid gathering roll of wheels. My eyes fastened on her as if they could see to her heart, while she stood there with her sweet face turned on me all pale and startled. I tried to speak to her; I tried to break away from Owen's arms, to throw my own arms round her, to keep her on my bosom, till _he_ came to take her from me. But all my strength had gone in the long waiting and the long suspense. My head sank on Owen's breast--but I still heard the wheels. Morgan loosened my cravat, and sprinkled water over my face--I still heard the wheels. The poor terrified girl ran into her room, and came back with her smelling-salts--I heard the carriage stop at the house. The room whirled round and round with me; but I heard the eager hurry of footsteps in the hall, and the opening of the door. In another moment my son's voice rose clear and cheerful from below, greeting the old servants who loved him. The dear, familiar tones just poured into my ear, and then, the moment they filled it, hushed me suddenly to rest.

When I came to myself again my eyes opened upon George. I was lying on the sofa, still in the same room; the lights we had read by in the evening were burning on the table; my son was kneeling at my pillow, and we two were alone.

THE MORNING.

The wind is fainter, but there is still no calm. The rain is ceasing, but there is still no sunshine. The view from my window shows me the mist heavy on the earth, and a dim gray veil drawn darkly over the sky. Less than twelve hours since, such a prospect would have saddened me for the day. I look out at it this morning, through the bright medium of my own happiness, and not the shadow of a shade falls across the steady inner sunshine that is poring over my heart.

The pen lingers fondly in my hand, and yet it is little, very little, that I have left to say. The Purple Volume lies open by my side, with the stories ranged together in it in the order in which they were read. My son has learned to prize them already as the faithful friends who served him at his utmost need. I have only to wind off the little thread of narrative on which they are all strung together before the volume is closed and our anxious literary experiment fairly ended.

My son and I had a quiet hour together on that happy night before we retired to rest. The little love-plot invented in George's interests now required one last stroke of diplomacy to complete it before we all threw off our masks and assumed our true characters for the future. When my son and I parted for the night, we had planned the necessary stratagem for taking our lovely guest by surprise as soon as she was out of her bed in the morning.

Shortly after seven o'clock I sent a message to Jessie by her maid, informing her that a good night's rest had done wonders for me, and that I expected to see her in my study at half past seven, as we had arranged the evening before. As soon as her answer, promising to be punctual to the appointment, had reached me, I took George into my study--left him in my place to plead his own cause--and stole away, five minutes before the half hour, to join my brothers in the breakfast-room.

Although the sense of my own happiness disposed me to take the brightest view of my son's chances, I must nevertheless acknowledge that some nervous anxieties still fluttered about my heart while the slow minutes of suspense were counting themselves out in the breakfast-room. I had as little attention to spare for Owen's quiet prognostications of success as for Morgan's pitiless sarcasms on love, courtship, and matrimony. A quarter of an hour elapsed--then twenty minutes. The hand moved on, and the clock pointed to five minutes to eight, before I heard the study door open, and before the sound of rapidly-advancing footsteps warned me that George was coming into the room.

His beaming face told the good news before a word could be spoken on either side. The excess of his happiness literally and truly deprived him of speech. He stood eagerly looking at us all three, with outstretched hands and glistening eyes.

"Have I folded up my surplice forever," asked Owen, "or am I to wear it once again, George, in your service?"

"Answer this question first," interposed Morgan, with a look of grim anxiety. "Have you actually taken your young woman off my hands, or have you not?"

No direct answer followed either question. George's feelings had been too deeply stirred to allow him to return jest for jest at a moment's notice.

"Oh, father, how can I thank you!" he said. "And you! and you!" he added, looking at Owen and Morgan gratefully.

"You must thank Chance as well as thank us," I replied, speaking as lightly as my heart would let me, to encourage him. "The advantage of numbers in our little love-plot was all on our side. Remember, George, we were three to one."

While I was speaking the breakfast-room door opened noiselessly, and showed us Jessie standing on the threshold, uncertain whether to join us or to run back to her own room. Her bright complexion heightened to a deep glow; the tears just rising in her eyes, and not yet falling from them; her delicate lips trembling a little, as if they
were still shyly conscious of other lips that had pressed them but a few minutes since; her attitude irresolutely graceful; her hair just disturbed enough over her forehead and her cheeks to add to the charm of them--she stood before us, the loveliest living picture of youth, and tenderness, and virgin love that eyes ever looked on. George and I both advanced together to meet her at the door. But the good, grateful girl had heard from my son the true story of all that I had done, and hoped, and suffered for the last ten days, and showed charmingly how she felt it by turning at once to _me_.

"May I stop at the Glen Tower a little longer?" she asked, simply.

"If you think you can get through your evenings, my love," I answered. "But surely you forget that the Purple Volume is closed, and that the stories have all come to an end?"

She clasped her arms round my neck, and laid her cheek fondly against mine.

"How you must have suffered yesterday!" she whispered, softly.

"And how happy I am to-day!"

The tears gathered in her eyes and dropped over her cheeks as she raised her head to look at me affectionately when I said those words. I gently unclasped her arms and led her to George.

"So you really did love him, then, after all," I whispered, "though you were too sly to let me discover it?"

A smile broke out among the tears as her eyes wandered away from mine and stole a look at my son. The clock struck the hour, and the servant came in with breakfast. A little domestic interruption of this kind was all that was wanted to put us at our ease. We drew round the table cheerfully, and set the Queen of Hearts at the head of it, in the character of mistress of the house already.

Go to Start
The Traveller's Story of a Very Strange Bed

by Wilkie Collins

♦ Prologue to the First Story
♦ Story of a Very Strange Bed

Before I begin, by the aid of my wife's patient attention and ready pen, to relate any of the stories which I have heard at various times from persons whose likenesses I have been employed to take, it will not be amiss if I try to secure the reader's interest in the following pages by briefly explaining how I became possessed of the narrative matter which they contain.

Of myself I have nothing to say, but that I have followed the profession of a travelling portrait-painter for the last fifteen years. The pursuit of my calling has not only led me all through England, but has taken me twice to Scotland and once to Ireland. In moving from district to district, I am never guided beforehand by any settled plan. Sometimes the letters of recommendation which I get from persons who are satisfied with the work I have done for them determine the direction in which I travel. Sometimes I hear of a new neighbourhood in which there is no resident artist of ability, and remove thither on speculation. Sometimes my friends among the picture-dealers say a good word on my behalf to their rich customers, and so pave the way for me in the large towns. Sometimes my prosperous and famous brother artists, hearing of small commissions which it is not worth their while to accept, mention my name, and procure me introductions to pleasant country houses. Thus I get on, now in one way and now in another, not winning a reputation or making a fortune, but happier, perhaps, on the whole, than many men who have got both the one and the other. So, at least, I try to think now, though I started in my youth with as high an ambition as the best of them. Thank God, it is not my business here to speak of past times and their disappointments. A twinge of the old hopeless heartache comes over me sometimes still, when I think of my student days.

One peculiarity of my present way of life is, that it brings me into contact with all sorts of characters. I almost feel, by this time, as if I had painted every civilised variety of the human race. Upon the whole, my experience of the world, rough as it has been, has not taught me to think unkindly of my fellow-creatures. I have certainly received such treatment at the hands of some of my sitters as I could not describe without saddening and shocking any kind-hearted reader; but, taking one year and one place with another, I have cause to remember with gratitude and respect, sometimes even with friendship and affection, a very large proportion of the numerous persons who have employed me.

Some of the results of my experience are curious in a moral point of view. For example, I have found women almost uniformly less delicate in asking me about my terms, and less generous in remunerating me for my services, than men. On the other hand, men, within my knowledge, are decidedly vainer of their personal attractions, and more vexatiously anxious to have them done full justice to on canvas, than women. Taking both sexes together, I have found young people, for the most part, more gentle, more reasonable, and more considerate than old. And, summing up, in a general way, my experience of different ranks (which extends, let me premise, all the way down from peers to publicans), I have met with most of my formal and ungracious receptions among rich people of uncertain social standing; the highest classes and the lowest among my employers almost always contrive-in widely different ways, of course-to make me feel at home as soon as I enter their houses.

The one great obstacle that I have to contend against in the practice of my profession is not, as some persons may imagine, the difficulty of making my sitters keep their heads still while I paint them, but the difficulty of getting them to preserve the natural look and the every-day peculiarities of dress and manner. People will assume an expression, will brush up their hair, will correct any little characteristic carelessness in their apparel-will, in short, when they want to have their likenesses taken, look as if they were sitting for their pictures. If I paint them under these artificial circumstances, I fail, of course, to present them in their habitual aspect; and my portrait, as a necessary consequence, disappoints everybody, the sitter always included. When we wish to judge of a man's character by his handwriting, we want his customary scrawl dashed off with his common workaday pen, not his best small text traced laboriously with the finest procurable crow-quill point. So it is with portrait-painting, which is, after all, nothing but a right reading of the externals of character recognisably presented to the view of others.

Experience, after repeated trials, has proved to me that the only way of getting sitters who persist in assuming a set look to resume their habitual expression is to lead them into talking about some subject in which they are greatly interested. If I can only beguile them into speaking earnestly, no matter on what topic, I am sure of recovering their natural expression; sure of seeing all the little precious every-day peculiarities of the man or woman peep out, one after another, quite unawares. The long mauldering stories about nothing, the wearisome recitals of petty
grievances, the local anecdotes unrelieved by the faintest suspicion of anything like general interest, which I have been condemned to hear, as a consequence of thawing the ice off the features of formal sitters by the method just described, would fill hundreds of volumes and promote the repose of thousands of readers. On the other hand, if I have suffered under the tediousness of the many, I have not been without my compensating gains from the wisdom and experience of the few. To some of my sitters I have been indebted for information which has enlarged my mind, to some for advice which has lightened my heart, to some for narratives of strange adventure which riveted my attention at the time, which have served to interest and amuse my fireside circle for many years past, and which are now, I would fain hope, destined to make kind friends for me among a wider audience than any that I have yet addressed.

Singularly enough, almost all the best stories that I have heard from my sitters have been told by accident. I only remember two cases in which a story was volunteered to me; and, although I have often tried the experiment, I cannot call to mind even a single instance in which leading questions (as lawyers call them) on my part, addressed to a sitter, ever produced any result worth recording. Over and over again I have been disastrously successful in encouraging dull people to weary me. But the clever people who have something interesting to say seem, so far as I have observed them, to acknowledge no other stimulant than chance. For every story, excepting one, I have been indebted, in the first instance, to the capricious influence of the same chance. Something my sitter has seen about me, something I have remarked in my sitter, or in the room in which I take the likeness, or in the neighbourhood through which I pass on my way to work, has suggested the necessary association, or has started the right train of recollections, and then the story appeared to begin of its own accord. Occasionally the most casual notice, on my part, of some very unpromising object has smoothed the way for the relation of a long and interesting narrative. I first heard one of the most dramatic stories merely through being carelessly inquisitive to know the history of a stuffed poodle-dog.

It is thus not without reason that I lay some stress on the desirableness of prefacing the following narrative by a brief account of the curious manner in which I became possessed of it. As to my capacity for repeating the story correctly, I can answer for it that my memory may be trusted. I may claim it as a merit, because it is, after all, a mechanical one, that I forget nothing, and that I can call long-past conversations and events as readily to my recollection as if they had happened but a few weeks ago. Of two things at least I feel tolerably certain before-hand, in meditating over its contents: first, that I can repeat correctly all that I have heard; and, secondly, that I have never missed anything worth hearing when my sitters were addressing me on an interesting subject. Although I cannot take the lead in talking while I am engaged in painting, I can listen while others speak, and work all the better for it.

So much in the way of general preface to the pages for which I am about to ask the reader's attention. Let me now advance to particulars, and describe how I came to hear the story. I begin with it because it is the story that I now advance to particulars, and describe how I came to hear the story. I begin with it because it is the story that I have oftenermost "rehearsed," to borrow a phrase from the stage. Wherever I go, I am sooner or later sure to tell it. Only last night I was persuaded into repeating it once more by the inhabitants of the farm-house in which I am now staying.

Not many years ago, on returning from a short holiday visit to a friend settled in Paris, I found professional letters awaiting me at my agent's in London, which required my immediate presence in Liverpool. Without stopping to unpack, I proceeded by the first conveyance to my new destination; and, calling at the picture-dealer's shop where portrait-painting engagements were received for me, found to my great satisfaction that I had remunerative employment in prospect, in and about Liverpool, for at least two months to come. I was putting up my letters in high spirits, and was just leaving the picture-dealer's shop to look out for comfortable lodgings, when I was met at the door by the landlord of one of the largest hotels in Liverpool-an old acquaintance whom I had known as manager of a tavern in London in my student days.

"Mr. Kerby!" he exclaimed, in great astonishment. "What an unexpected meeting! the last man in the world whom I expected to see, and yet the very man whose services I want to make use of!"

"What! more work for me?" said I. "Are all the people in Liverpool going to have their portraits painted?"

"I only know of one," replied the landlord, "a gentleman staying at my hotel, who wants a chalk drawing done of him. I was on my way here to inquire for any artist whom our picture-dealing friend could recommend. How glad I am that I met you before I had committed myself to employing a stranger!"

"Is this likeness wanted at once?" I asked, thinking of the number of engagements that I had already got in my pocket.

"Immediately-to-day-this very hour, if possible," said the landlord. "Mr. Faulkner, the gentleman I am speaking of, was to have sailed yesterday for the Brazils from this place; but the wind shifted last night to the wrong quarter, and he came ashore again this morning. He may, of course, be detained here for some time; but he may also be called on board ship at half an hour's notice, if the wind shifts back again in the right direction. This uncertainty makes it a matter of importance that the likeness should be begun immediately. Undertake it if you possibly can, for
Mr. Faulkner is a liberal gentleman, who is sure to give you your own terms."

I reflected for a minute or two. The portrait was only wanted in chalk, and would not take long; besides, I might finish it in the evening, if my other engagements pressed hard upon me in the daytime. Why not leave my luggage at the picture-dealer's, put off looking for lodgings till night, and secure the new commission boldly by going back at once with the landlord to the hotel? I decided on following this course almost as soon as the idea occurred to me; put my chalks in my pocket, and a sheet of drawing-paper in the first of my portfolios that came to hand; and so presented myself before Mr. Faulkner, ready to take his likeness, literally at five minutes' notice.

I found him a very pleasant, intelligent man, young and handsome. He had been a great traveller, had visited all the wonders of the East, and was now about to explore the wilds of the vast South American continent. Thus much he told me good-humouredly and unconstrainedly while I was preparing my drawing materials.

As soon as I had put him in the right light and position, and had seated myself opposite to him, he changed the subject of conversation, and asked me, a little confusedly as I thought, if it was not a customary practice among portrait-painters to gloss over the faults in their sitters' faces, and to make as much as possible of any good points which their features might possess.

"Certainly," I answered. "You have described the whole art and mystery of successful portrait-painting in a few words."

"May I beg, then," said he, "that you will depart from the usual practice in my case, and draw me with all my defects, exactly as I am? The fact is," he went on, after a moment's pause, "the likeness you are now preparing to take is intended for my mother; my roving disposition makes me a great anxiety to her, and she parted from me this last time very sadly and unwillingly. I don't know how the idea came into my head, but it struck me this morning that I could not better employ the time while I was delayed here on shore than by getting my likeness done to send to her as a keepsake. She has no portrait of me since I was a child, and she is sure to value a drawing of me more than anything else I could send to her. I only trouble you with this explanation to prove that I am really sincere in my wish to be drawn unflatteringly, exactly as I am."

Secretly respecting and admiring him for what he had just said, I promised that his directions should be implicitly followed, and began to work immediately. Before I had pursued my occupation for ten minutes, the conversation began to flag, and the usual obstacle to my success with a sitter gradually set itself up between us. Quite unconsciously, of course, Mr. Faulkner stiffened his neck, shut his mouth, and contracted his eyebrows-evidently under the impression that he was facilitating the process of taking his portrait by making his face as like a lifeless mask as possible. All traces of his natural animated expression were fast disappearing, and he was beginning to change into a heavy and rather melancholy-looking man.

This complete alteration was of no great consequence so long as I was only engaged in drawing the outline of his face and the general form of his features. I accordingly worked on doggedly for more than an hour; then left off to point my chalks again, and to give my sitter a few minutes' rest. Thus far the likeness had not suffered through Mr. Faulkner's unfortunate notion of the right way of sitting for his portrait; but the time of difficulty, as I well knew, was to come. It was impossible for me to think of putting any expression into the drawing unless I could contrive some means, when he resumed his chair, of making him look like himself again. "I will talk to him about foreign parts," thought I, "and try if I can't make him forget that he is sitting for his picture in that way."

While I was pointing my chalks, Mr. Faulkner was walking up and down the room. He chanced to see the portfolio I had brought with me leaning against the wall, and asked if there were any sketches in it. I told him there were a few which I had made during my recent stay in Paris. "In Paris?" he repeated, with a look of interest; "may I see them?"

I gave him the permission he asked as a matter of course. Sitting down, he took the portfolio on his knee, and began to look through it. He turned over the first five sketches rapidly enough; but when he came to the sixth I saw his face flush directly, and observed that he took the drawing out of the portfolio, carried it to the window, and remained silently absorbed in the contemplation of it for full five minutes. After that he turned round to me, and asked very anxiously if I had any objection to parting with that sketch.

It was the least interesting drawing of the collection—merely a view in one of the streets running by the backs of the houses in the Palais Royal. Some four or five of these houses were comprised in the view, which was of no particular use to me in any way, and which was too valueless, as a work of art, for me to think of selling it. I begged his acceptance of it at once. He thanked me quite warmly; and then, seeing that I looked a little surprised at the odd selection he had made from my sketches, laughingly asked me if I could guess why he had been so anxious to become possessed of the view which I had given him.

"Probably," I answered, "there is some remarkable historical association connected with that street at the back of the Palais Royal, of which I am ignorant."

"No," said Mr. Faulkner; "at least none that I know of. The only association connected with the place in my mind..."
is a purely personal association. Look at this house in your drawing-the house with the water-pipe running down it from top to bottom. I once passed a night there—a night I shall never forget to the day of my death. I have had some awkward travelling adventures in my time; but that adventure! Well, never mind, suppose we begin the sitting. I make but a bad return for your kindness in giving me the sketch by thus wasting your time in mere talk."

"Come! come!" thought I, as he went back to the sitter's chair, "I shall see your natural expression on your face if I can only get you to talk about that adventure." It was easy enough to lead him in the right direction. At the first hint from me, he returned to the subject of the house in the back street. Without, I hope, showing any undue curiosity, I contrived to let him see that I felt a deep interest in everything he now said. After two or three preliminary hesitations, he at last, to my great joy, fairly started on the narrative of his adventure. In the interest of his subject he soon completely forgot that he was sitting for his portrait,—the very expression that I wanted came over his face,—and my drawing proceeded toward completion, in the right direction, and to the best purpose. At every fresh touch I felt more and more certain that I was now getting the better of my grand difficulty; and I enjoyed the additional gratification of having my work lightened by the recital of a true story, which possessed, in my estimation, all the excitement of the most exciting romance.

This, as I recollect it, is how Mr. Faulkner told me his adventure.

The Traveller's Story of a Very Strange Bed

Shortly after my education at college was finished, I happened to be staying at Paris with an English friend. We were both young men then, and lived, I am afraid, rather a wild life, in the delightful city of our sojourn. One night we were idling about the neighbourhood of the Palais Royal, doubtful to what amusement we should next betake ourselves. My friend proposed a visit to Frascati's; but his suggestion was not to my taste. I knew Frascati's, as the French saying is, by heart; had lost and won plenty of five-franc pieces there, merely for amusement's sake, until it was amusement no longer, and was thoroughly tired, in fact, of all the ghastly respectabilities of such a social anomaly as a respectable gambling-house. "For Heaven's sake," said I to my friend, "let us go somewhere where we can see a little genuine, blackguard, poverty-stricken gaming with no false gingerbread glitter thrown over it all. Let us get away from fashionable Frascati's, to a house where they don't mind letting in a man with a ragged coat, or a man with no coat, ragged or otherwise." "Very well," said my friend, "we needn't go out of the Palais Royal to find the sort of company you want. Here's the place just before us; as blackguard a place, by all report, as you could possibly wish to see." In another minute we arrived at the door and entered the house, the back of which you have drawn in your sketch.

When we got upstairs, and had left our hats and sticks with the doorkeeper, we were admitted into the chief gambling-room. We did not find many people assembled there. But, few as the men were who looked up at us on our entrance, they were all types-lamentably true types-of their respective classes.

We had come to see blackguards; but these men were something worse. There is a comic side, more or less appreciable, in all blackguardism—here there was nothing but tragedy-mute, weird tragedy. The quiet in the room was horrible. The thin, haggard, long-haired young man, whose sunken eyes fiercely watched the turning up of the cards, never spoke; the flabby, fat-faced, pimpily player, who pricked his piece of pasteboard perseveringly, to register how often black won, and how often red—never spoke; the dirty, wrinkled old man, with the vulture eyes and the darned great-coat, who had lost his last sou, and still looked on desperately, after he could play no longer—never spoke. Even the voice of the croupier sounded as if it were strangely dulled and thickened in the atmosphere of the room. I had entered the place to laugh, but the spectacle before me was something to weep over. I soon found it necessary to take refuge in excitement from the depression of spirits which was fast stealing on me. Unfortunately I sought the nearest excitement, by going to the table and beginning to play. Still more unfortunately, as the event will show, I won—prodigiously; won incredibly; won at such a rate that the regular players at the table crowded round me; and staring at my stakes with hungry, superstitious eyes, whispered to one another that the English stranger was going to break the bank.

The game was Rouge et Noir. I had played at it in every city in Europe, without, however, the care or the wish to study the Theory of Chances—that philosopher's stone of all gamblers! And a gambler, in the strict sense of the word, I had never been. I was heart-whole from the corroding passion for play. My gaming was a mere idle amusement. I never resorted to it by necessity, because I never knew what it was to want money. I never practised it so incessantly as to lose more than I could afford, or to gain more than I could coolly pocket without being thrown off my balance by my good luck. In short, I had hitherto frequented gambling-tables—just as I frequented ball-rooms and opera-houses—because they amused me, and because I had nothing better to do with my leisure hours.

But on this occasion it was very different—now, for the first time in my life, I felt what the passion for play really
placed his dirty forefinger by the side of his broken nose; solemnly ejaculated "Coffee!" and immediately ran off.

"Do you hear, my hero of Austerlitz? My SYSTEM was on fire. Do you hear, my hero of Austerlitz? Let us have a third bottle of champagne to put the flame out!"

Was the stimulant acting upon my system when I was in a highly excited state? Was my stomach in a particularly disordered condition? Or was the champagne amazingly strong?

Was it the result of a specimen of an old soldier. He had goggling bloodshot eyes, mangy moustaches, and a broken nose. His voice betrayed a barrack-room intonation of the worst order, and he had the dirtiest pair of hands I ever saw-even in France. These little personal peculiarities exercised, however, no repelling influence on me. In the mad excitement, the reckless triumph of that moment, I was ready to "fraternize" with anybody who encouraged me in my game. I accepted the old soldier's offered pinch of snuff; clapped him on the back, and swore he was the honestest fellow in the world-the most glorious relic of the Grand Army that I had ever met with. "Go on!" cried my military friend, snapping his fingers in ecstasy—"Go on, and win! Break the bank-Mille tonnerres! my gallant English comrade, break the bank!"

"Tie it up, as we used to tie up a bit of dinner in the Grand Army; your winnings are too heavy for any breeches-pockets that ever were sewed. There! that's it-shovel them in, notes and all! Credie! what luck! Stop! another napoleon on the floor! Ah! sacre petit polisson de Napoleon! have I found thee at last? Now then, sir-two tight double knots each way with your honourable permission, and the money's safe. Feel it! feel it, fortunate sir! hard and round as a cannon-ball-Aah, bah! if they had only fired such cannon-balls at us at Austerlitz-nom d'une pipe! if they only had! And now, as an ancient grenadier, as an ex-brave of the French army, what remains for me to do? I ask what? Simply this: to entreat my valued English friend to drink a bottle of champagne with me, and toast the goddess Fortune in foaming goblets before we part!"

"Excellent ex-brave! Convivial ancient grenadier! Champagne by all means! An English cheer for an old soldier! Hurrah! hurrah! Another English cheer for the goddess Fortune! Hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!"

"Bravo! the Englishman; the amiable, gracious Englishman, in whose veins circulates the vivacious blood of France! Another glass? Ah, bah! the bottle is empty! Never mind! Vive le vin! I, the old soldier, order another bottle, and half a pound of bonbons with it!"

"No, no, ex-brave; never-ancient grenadier! Your bottle last time; my bottle this. Behold it! Toast away! The French Army! the great Napoleon! the present company! the croupier! the honest croupier's wife and daughters-if he has any! the Ladies generally! everybody in the world!"

By the time the second bottle of champagne was emptied, I felt as if I had been drinking liquid fire-my brain seemed all aflame. No excess in wine had ever had this effect on me before in my life. Was it the result of a stimulant acting upon my system when I was in a highly excited state? Was my stomach in a particularly disordered condition? Or was the champagne amazingly strong?

"Ex-brave of the French Army!" cried I, in a mad state of exhilaration, "I am on fire! how are you? You have set me on fire. Do you hear, my hero of Austerlitz? Let us have a third bottle of champagne to put the flame out!"

The old soldier wagged his head, rolled his goggle-eyes, until I expected to see them slip out of their sockets; placed his dirty forefinger by the side of his broken nose; solemnly ejaculated "Coffee!" and immediately ran off
tossed and rolled, and tried every kind of position, and perseveringly sought out the cold corners of the bed, and all handkerchief full of money under my pillow. I put my light, which was a dim one, on the hearth among a feathery litter of wood-ashes, and got into bed, with the fastening of the window; and then, satisfied that I had taken every proper precaution, pulled off my upper clothing, lock, bolt, and barricade my door, and take my chance till the next morning.

I was going to Paris with a large sum of money about me. I had slept in worse places than this on my travels; so I determined to greater risk of trying to get out after the house was closed, and of going home alone at night through the streets of being again. My first thought was of the risk of sleeping all night in a gambling-house; my second, of the still wonderfully the restorative effects of cold water. The giddiness left me, and I began to feel a little like a reasonable change for my eyes, from the glaring gaslights of the "salon" to the dim, quiet flicker of one bedroom candle, aided atmosphere of the gambling-room to the cool air of the apartment I now occupied, the almost equally refreshing it; then sat down in a chair and tried to compose myself. I soon felt better. The change for my lungs, from the fetid left me for the night.

I ran to the wash-hand stand; drank some of the water in my jug; poured the rest out, and plunged my face into draught. Almost instantly afterwards, I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. The room whirled round and round furiously; the old soldier seemed to be regularly bobbing up and down before me like the piston of a steam-engine. I was half deafened by a violent singing in my ears; a feeling of utter bewildermnt, helplessness, idiocy, overcame me. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance; and stammered out that I felt dreadfully unwell-so unwell that I did not know how I was to get home.

"My dear friend," answered the old soldier-and even his voice seemed to be bobbing up and down as he spoke-"my dear friend, it would be madness to go home in your state; you would be sure to lose your money; you might be robbed and murdered with the greatest ease. I am going to sleep here; do you sleep here, too-they make up capital beds in this house-take one; sleep off the effects of the wine, and go home safely with your winnings to-morrow to-morrow, in broad daylight."

I had but two ideas left: one, that I must never let go hold of my handkerchief full of money; the other, that I must lie down somewhere immediately, and fall off into a comfortable sleep. So I agreed to the proposal about the bed, and took the offered arm of the old soldier, carrying my money with my disengaged hand. Preceded by the croupier, we passed along some passages and up a flight of stairs into the bedroom which I was to occupy. The ex-brave shook me warmly by the hand, proposed that we should breakfast together, and then, followed by the croupier, we passed along some passages and up a flight of stairs into the bedroom which I was to occupy. The ex-brave ended his oration in very lachrymose tones, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups. My attentive friend handed me one of the cups with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it off at a draught. Just as the ex-brave ended his oration in very lachrymose tones, the coffee came in, ready poured out in two cups. My attentive friend handed me one of the cups with a bow. I was parched with thirst, and drank it off at a draught. Almost instantly afterwards, I was seized with a fit of giddiness, and felt more completely intoxicated than ever. The room whirled round and round furiously; the old soldier seemed to be regularly bobbing up and down before me like the piston of a steam-engine. I was half deafened by a violent singing in my ears; a feeling of utter bewildermnt, helplessness, idiocy, overcame me. I rose from my chair, holding on by the table to keep my balance; and stammered out that I felt dreadfully unwell-so unwell that I did not know how I was to get home.

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I ran to the wash-hand stand; drank some of the water in my jug; poured the rest out, and plunged my face into it; then sat down in a chair to compose myself. I soon felt better. The change for my lungs, from the fetid atmosphere of the gambling-room to the cool air of the apartment I now occupied, the almost equally refreshing change for my eyes, from the glaring gaslights of the "salon" to the dim, quiet flicker of one bedroom candle, aided wonderfully the restorative effects of cold water. The giddiness left me, and I began to feel a little like a reasonable being again. My first thought was of the risk of sleeping all night in a gambling-house; my second, of the still greater risk of trying to get out after the house was closed, and of going home alone at night through the streets of Paris with a large sum of money about me. I had slept in worse places than this on my travels; so I determined to lock, bolt, and barricade my door, and take my chance till the next morning.

Accordingly, I secured myself against all intrusion; looked under the bed, and into the cupboard; tried the fastening of the window; and then, satisfied that I had taken every proper precaution, pulled off my upper clothing, put my light, which was a dim one, on the hearth among a feathery litter of wood-ashes, and got into bed, with the handkerchief full of money under my pillow.

I soon felt not only that I could not go to sleep, but that I could not even close my eyes. I was wide awake, and in a high fever. Every nerve in my body trembled-every one of my senses seemed to be preternaturally sharpened. I tossed and rolled, and tried every kind of position, and perseveringly sought out the cold corners of the bed, and all
to no purpose. Now I thrust my arms over the clothes; now I poked them under the clothes; now I violently shot my
legs straight out down to the bottom of the bed; now I convulsively coiled them up as near my chin as they would
go; now I shook out my crumpled pillow, changed it to the cool side, patted it flat, and lay down quietly on my back;
now I fiercely doubled it in two, set it up on end, thrust it against the board of the bed, and tried a sitting posture.
Every effort was in vain; I groaned with vexation as I felt that I was in for a sleepless night.

What could I do? I had no book to read. And yet, unless I found out some method of diverting my mind, I felt
certain that I was in the condition to imagine all sorts of horrors; to rack my brain with forebodings of every possible
and impossible danger; in short, to pass the night in suffering all conceivable varieties of nervous terror.

I raised myself on my elbow, and looked about the room—which was brightened by a lovely moonlight pouring
straight through the window—to see if it contained any pictures or ornaments that I could at all clearly distinguish.
While my eyes wandered from wall to wall, a remembrance of Le Maistre's delightful little book, "Voyage autour de
ma Chambre," occurred to me. I resolved to imitate the French author, and find occupation and amusement enough
to relieve the tedium of my wakefulness, by making a mental inventory of every article of furniture I could see, and
by following up to their sources the multitude of associations which even a chair, a table, or a wash-hand stand may
be made to call forth.

In the nervous unsettled state of my mind at that moment, I found it much easier to make my inventory than to
make my reflections, and thereupon soon gave up all hope of thinking in Le Maistre's fanciful track—or, indeed, of
thinking at all. I looked about the room at the different articles of furniture, and did nothing more.

There was, first, the bed I was lying in; a four-post bed, of all things in the world to meet with in Paris—yes, a
thoroughly clumsy British four-poster, with the regular top lined with chintz—the regular fringed valance all round—
the regular stifling, unwholesome curtains, which I remembered having mechanically drawn back against the posts
without particularly noticing the bed when I first got into the room. Then there was the marble-topped wash-hand
stand, from which the water I had spilled, in my hurry to pour it out, was still dripping, slowly and more slowly, on
to the brick floor. Then two small chairs, with my coat, waistcoat, and trousers flung on them. Then a large elbow-
chair covered with dirty-white dimity, with my cravat and shirt collar thrown over the back. Then a chest of drawers
with two of the brass handles off, and a tawdry, broken china inkstand placed on it by way of ornament for the top.
Then the dressing-table, adorned by a very small looking-glass, and a very large pincushion. Then the window—an
unusually large window. Then a dark old picture, which the feeble candle dimly showed me. It was a picture of a
fellow in a high Spanish hat, crowned with a plume of towering feathers. A swarthy, sinister ruffian, looking
upward, shading his eyes with his hand, and looking intently upward—it might be at some tall gallows at which he
was going to be hanged. At any rate, he had the appearance of thoroughly deserving it.

This picture put a kind of constraint upon me to look upward too—at the top of the bed. It was a gloomy and not
an interesting object, and I looked back at the picture. I counted the feathers in the man's hat—they stood out in relief—
three white, two green. I observed the crown of his hat, which was of conical shape, according to the fashion
supposed to have been favoured by Guido Fawkes. I wondered what he was looking up at. It couldn't be at the stars;
such a desperado was neither astrologer nor astronomer. It must be at the high gallows, and he was going to be
hanged presently. Would the executioner come into possession of his conical crowned hat and plume of feathers? I
counted the feathers again—three white, two green.

While I still lingered over this very improving and intellectual employment, my thoughts insensibly began to
wander. The moonlight shining into the room reminded me of a certain moonlight night in England—the night after a
picnic party in a Welsh valley. Every incident of the drive homeward, through lovely scenery, which the moonlight
made lovelier than ever, came back to my remembrance, though I had never given the picnic a thought for years;
though, if I had tried to recollect it, I could certainly have recalled little or nothing of that scene long past. Of all the
wonderful faculties that help to tell us we are immortal, which speaks the sublime truth more eloquently than
memory? Here was I, in a strange house of the most suspicious character, in a situation of uncertainty, and even of
peril, which might seem to make the cool exercise of my recollection almost out of the question; nevertheless,
remembering, quite involuntarily, places, people, conversations, minute circumstances of every kind, which I had
thought forgotten for ever; which I could not possibly have recalled at will, even under the most favourable
auspices. And what cause had produced in a moment the whole of this strange, complicated, mysterious effect?
Nothing but some rays of moonlight shining in at my bedroom window.

I was still thinking of the picnic—of our Merriment on the drive home—of the sentimental young lady who would
quote "Childe Harold" because it was moonlight. I was absorbed by these past scenes and past amusements, when,
in an instant, the thread on which my memories hung snapped asunder; my attention immediately came back to
present things more vividly than ever, and I found myself, I neither knew why nor wherefore, looking hard at the
picture again.

Looking for what?
Great God! the man had pulled his hat down on his brows! No! the hat itself was gone! Where was the conical crown? Where the feathers-three white, two green? Not there! In place of the hat and feathers, what dusky object was it that now hid his forehead, his eyes, his shading hand?

Was the bed moving?

I turned on my back and looked up. Was I mad? drunk? dreaming? giddy again? or was the top of the bed really moving down-sinking slowly, regularly, silently, horribly, right down throughout the whole of its length and breadth-right down upon me, as I lay underneath?

My blood seemed to stand still. A deadly paralysing coldness stole all over me as I turned my head round on the pillow and determined to test whether the bedtop was really moving or not, by keeping my eye on the man in the picture.

The next look in that direction was enough. The dull, black, frowzy outline of the valance above me was within an inch of being parallel with his waist. I still looked breathlessly. And steadily and slowly-slowly-I saw the figure, and the line of frame below the figure, vanish, as the valance moved down before it.

I am, constitutionally, anything but timid. I have been on more than one occasion in peril of my life, and have not lost my self-possession for an instant; but when the conviction first settled on my mind that the bed-top was really moving, was steadily and continuously sinking down upon me, I looked up shuddering, helpless, panic-stricken, beneath the hideous machinery for murder, which was advancing closer and closer to suffocate me where I lay.

I looked up, motionless, speechless, breathless. The candle, fully spent, went out; but the moonlight still brightened the room. Down and down, without pausing and without sounding, came the bedtop, and still my panic terror seemed to bind me faster and faster to the mattress on which I lay-down and down it sank, till the dusty odour from the lining of the canopy came stealing into my nostrils.

At that final moment the instinct of self-preservation startled me out of my trance, and I moved at last. There was just room for me to roll myself sideways off the bed. As I dropped noiselessly to the floor, the edge of the murderous canopy touched me on the shoulder.

Without stopping to draw my breath, without wiping the cold sweat from my face, I rose instantly on my knees to watch the bedtop. I was literally spellbound by it. If I had heard footsteps behind me, I could not have turned round; if a means of escape had been miraculously provided for me, I could not have moved to take advantage of it. The whole life in me was, at that moment, concentrated in my eyes.

It descended-the whole canopy, with the fringe round it, came down-down-close down; so close that there was not room now to squeeze my finger between the bedtop and the bed. I felt at the sides, and discovered that what had appeared to me from beneath to be the ordinary light canopy of a four-post bed was in reality a thick, broad mattress, the substance of which was concealed by the valance and its fringe. I looked up and saw the four posts rising hideously bare. In the middle of the bedtop was a huge wooden screw that had evidently worked it down through a hole in the ceiling, just as ordinary presses are worked down on the substance selected for compression. The frightful apparatus moved without making the faintest noise. There had been no creaking as it came down; there was now not the faintest sound from the room above. Amid a dead and awful silence I beheld before me-the nineteenth century, and in the civilized capital of France-such a machine for secret murder by suffocation as might have existed in the worst days of the Inquisition, in the lonely inns among the Harz Mountains, in the mysterious tribunals of Westphalia! Still, as I looked on it, I could not move, I could hardly breathe, but I began to recover the power of thinking, and in a moment I discovered the murderous conspiracy framed against me in all its horror.

My cup of coffee had been drugged, and drugged too strongly. I had been saved from being smothered by having taken an overdose of some narcotic. How I had chafed and fretted at the fever-fit which had preserved my life by keeping me awake! How recklessly I had confided myself to the two wretches who had led me into this room, determined, for the sake of my winnings, to kill me in my sleep by the surest and most horrible contrivance for secretly accomplishing my destruction! How many men, winners like me, had slept, as I had proposed to sleep, in that bed, and had never been seen or heard of more! I shuddered at the bare idea of it.

But, ere long, all thought was again suspended by the sight of the murderous canopy moving once more. After it had remained on the bed-as nearly as I could guess-about ten minutes, it began to move up again. The villains who worked it from above evidently believed that their purpose was now accomplished. Slowly and silently, as it had descended, that horrible bedtop rose towards its former place. When it reached the upper extremities of the four posts, it reached the ceiling, too. Neither hole nor screw could be seen; the bed became in appearance an ordinary bed again-the canopy an ordinary canopy-even to the most suspicious eyes.

Now, for the first time, I was able to move-to rise from my knees-to dress myself in my upper clothing-and to consider of how I should escape. If I betrayed by the smallest noise that the attempt to suffocate me had failed, I was certain to be murdered. Had I made any noise already? I listened intently, looking towards the door.
No! no footsteps in the passage outside-no sound of a tread, light or heavy, in the room above—absolute silence everywhere. Besides locking and bolting my door, I had moved an old wooden chest against it, which I had found under the bed. To remove this chest (my blood ran cold as I thought of what its contents might be!) without making some disturbance was impossible; and, moreover, to think of escaping through the house, now barred up for the night, was sheer insanity. Only one chance was left me—the window. I stole to it on tiptoe.

My bedroom was on the first floor, above an entresol, and looked into a back street. I raised my hand to open the window, knowing that on that action hung, by the merest hairbreadth, my chance of safety. They keep vigilant watch in a house of murder. If any part of the frame cracked, if the hinge creaked, I was a lost man! It must have occupied me at least five minutes, reckoning by time-five hours, reckoning by suspense—to open that window. I succeeded in doing it silently—in doing it with all the dexterity of a house-breaker—and then looked down into the street. To leap the distance beneath me would be almost certain destruction! Next, I looked round at the sides of the house. Down the left side ran a thick water-pipe—it passed close by the outer edge of the window. The moment I saw the pipe I knew I was saved. My breath came and went freely for the first time since I had seen the canopy of the bed moving down upon me!

To some men the means of escape which I had discovered might have seemed difficult and dangerous enough to me the prospect of slipping down the pipe into the street did not suggest even a thought of peril. I had always been accustomed, by the practice of gymnastics, to keep up my school-boy powers as a daring and expert climber; and knew that my head, hands, and feet would serve me faithfully in any hazards of ascent or descent. I had already got one leg over the window-sill, when I remembered the handkerchief filled with money under my pillow. I could well have afforded to leave it behind me, but I was revengefully determined that the miscreants of the gambling-house should miss their plunder as well as their victim. So I went back to the bed and tied the heavy handkerchief at my back by my cravat.

Just as I had made it tight and fixed it in a comfortable place, I thought I heard a sound of breathing outside the door. The chill feeling of horror ran through me again as I listened! No! dead silence still in the passage—I had only heard the night air blowing softly into the room. The next moment I was on the window-sill, and the next I had a firm grip on the water-pipe with my hands and knees.

I slid down into the street easily and quietly, as I thought I should, and immediately set off at the top of my speed to a branch “prefecture” of Police, which I knew was situated in the immediate neighbourhood. A “subprefect,” and several picked men among his subordinates, happened to be up, maturing, I believe, some scheme for discovering the perpetrator of a mysterious murder which all Paris was talking of just then. When I began my story, in a breathless hurry and in very bad French, I could see that the subprefect suspected me of being a drunken Englishman who had robbed somebody; but he soon altered his opinion as I went on, and before I had anything like concluded, he shoved all the papers before him into a drawer, put on his hat, supplied me with another (for I was bareheaded), ordered a file of soldiers, desired his expert followers to get ready all sorts of tools for breaking open doors and ripping up brick flooring, and took my arm, in the most friendly and familiar manner possible, to lead me with him out of the house. I will venture to say that when the subprefect was a little boy, and was taken for the first time to the play, he was not half as much pleased as he was now at the job in prospect for him at the gambling-house!

Away we went through the streets, the subprefect cross-examining and congratulating me in the same breath as we marched at the head of our formidable posse comitatus. Sentinels were placed at the back and front of the house the moment we got to it; a tremendous battery of knocks was directed against the door; a light appeared at a window; I was told to conceal myself behind the police; then came more knocks and a cry of “Open in the name of the law!” At that terrible summons bolts and locks gave way before an invisible hand, and the moment after the subprefect was in the passage, confronting a waiter half dressed and ghastly pale. This was the short dialogue which immediately took place:

"We want to see the Englishman who is sleeping in this house."

"He went away hours ago."

"He did no such thing. His friend went away; he remained. Show us to his bedroom!"

"I swear to you, Monsieur le Sous-prefet, he is not here! he—"

"I swear to you, Monsieur le Garcon, he is. He slept here; he didn't find your bed comfortable; he came to us to complain of it; here he is among my men; and here am I ready to look for a flea or two in his bedstead. Renaudin!" (calling to one of the subordinates, and pointing to the waiter), “collar that man, and tie his hands behind him. Now then, gentlemen, let us walk upstairs!"

Every man and woman in the house was secured—the "old soldier" the first. Then I identified the bed in which I had slept, and then we went into the room above.

No object that was at all extraordinary appeared in any part of it. The subprefect looked round the place, commanded everybody to be silent, stamped twice on the floor, called for a candle, looked attentively at the spot he
trouble of putting them into some out-of-the-way corner, in very small type. In modestly at the end of the story. If the printer should notice my few last words, perhaps he may not mind the mention such a trifle in anything so important as a book. I cannot venture, after this, to do more than slip these lines might not come down in the night and suffocate him. I thought this chance reference to the distinguishing feature of declared that he particularly hated four-post beds, because he never slept in one without doubting whether the top farmhouse the other night. Our friend the young sailor, among his other quaint objections to sleeping on shore, your story, you have unconsciously shown me the natural expression I wanted to insure my success."

Just as Mr. Faulkner pronounced these words he started in his chair, and resumed his stiff, dignified position in a great hurry. "Bless my soul!" cried he, with a comic look of astonishment and vexation, "while I have been telling you what is the real secret of my interest in the sketch you have so kindly given to me, I have altogether forgotten that I came here to sit for my portrait. For the last hour or more I must have been the worst model you ever had to draw from!"

"On the contrary, you have been the best," said I. "I have been trying to catch your likeness; and, while telling your story, you have unconsciously shown me the natural expression I wanted to insure my success."

NOTE BY MRS. KERBY
I cannot let this story end without mentioning what the chance saying was which caused it to be told at the farmhouse the other night. Our friend the young sailor, among his other quaint objections to sleeping on shore, declared that he particularly hated four-post beds, because he never slept in one without doubting whether the top might not come down in the night and suffocate him. I thought this chance reference to the distinguishing feature of William's narrative curious enough, and my husband agreed with me. But he says it is scarcely worth while to mention such a trifle in anything so important as a book. I cannot venture, after this, to do more than slip these lines in modestly at the end of the story. If the printer should notice my few last words, perhaps he may not mind the trouble of putting them into some out-of-the-way corner, in very small type.
L. K.

Go to Start
This is the story of what a Woman's patience can endure, and what a Man's resolution can achieve.

If the machinery of the Law could be depended on to fathom every case of suspicion, and to conduct every process of inquiry, with moderate assistance only from the lubricating influences of oil of gold, the events which fill these pages might have claimed their share of the public attention in a Court of Justice.

But the Law is still, in certain inevitable cases, the pre-engaged servant of the long purse; and the story is left to be told, for the first time, in this place. As the Judge might once have heard it, so the Reader shall hear it now. No circumstance of importance, from the beginning to the end of the disclosure, shall be related on hearsay evidence.

When the writer of these introductory lines (Walter Hartright by name) happens to be more closely connected than others with the incidents to be recorded, he will describe them in his own person. When his experience fails, he will retire from the position of narrator; and his task will be continued, from the point at which he has left it off, by other persons who can speak to the circumstances under notice from their own knowledge, just as clearly and positively as he has spoken before them.

Thus, the story here presented will be told by more than one pen, as the story of an offence against the laws is told in Court by more than one witness--with the same object, in both cases, to present the truth always in its most direct and most intelligible aspect; and to trace the course of one complete series of events, by making the persons who have been most closely connected with them, at each successive stage, relate their own experience, word for word.

Let Walter Hartright, teacher of drawing, aged twenty-eight years, be heard first.

II

It was the last day of July. The long hot summer was drawing to a close; and we, the weary pilgrims of the London pavement, were beginning to think of the cloud-shadows on the corn-fields, and the autumn breezes on the sea-shore.

For my own poor part, the fading summer left me out of health, out of spirits, and, if the truth must be told, out of money as well. During the past year I had not managed my professional resources as carefully as usual; and my extravagance now limited me to the prospect of spending the autumn economically between my mother's cottage at Hampstead and my own chambers in town.

The evening, I remember, was still and cloudy; the London air was at its heaviest; the distant hum of the street-
traffic was at its faintest; the small pulse of the life within me, and the great heart of the city around me, seemed to be sinking in unison, languidly and more languidly, with the sinking sun. I roused myself from the book which I was dreaming over rather than reading, and left my chambers to meet the cool night air in the suburbs. It was one of the two evenings in every week which I was accustomed to spend with my mother and my sister. So I turned my steps northward in the direction of Hampstead.

Events which I have yet to relate make it necessary to mention in this place that my father had been dead some years at the period of which I am now writing; and that my sister Sarah and I were the sole survivors of a family of five children. My father was a drawing-master before me. His exertions had made him highly successful in his profession; and his affectionate anxiety to provide for the future of those who were dependent on his labours had impelled him, from the time of his marriage, to devote to the insuring of his life a much larger portion of his income than most men consider it necessary to set aside for that purpose. Thanks to his admirable prudence and self-denial my mother and sister were left, after his death, as independent of the world as they had been during his lifetime. I succeeded to his connection, and had every reason to feel grateful for the prospect that awaited me at my starting in life.

The quiet twilight was still trembling on the topmost ridges of the heath; and the view of London below me had sunk into a black gulf in the shadow of the cloudy night, when I stood before the gate of my mother's cottage. I had hardly rung the bell before the house door was opened violently; my worthy Italian friend, Professor Pesca, appeared in the servant's place; and darted out joyously to receive me, with a shrill foreign parody on an English cheer.

On his own account, and, I must be allowed to add, on mine also, the Professor merits the honour of a formal introduction. Accident has made him the starting-point of the strange family story which it is the purpose of these pages to unfold.

I had first become acquainted with my Italian friend by meeting him at certain great houses where he taught his own language and I taught drawing. All I then knew of the history of his life was, that he had once held a situation in the University of Padua; that he had left Italy for political reasons (the nature of which he uniformly declined to mention to any one); and that he had been for many years respectively established in London as a teacher of languages.

Without being actually a dwarf—for he was perfectly well proportioned from head to foot—Pesca was, I think, the smallest human being I ever saw out of a show-room. Remarkable anywhere, by his personal appearance, he was still further distinguished among the rank and file of mankind by the harmless eccentricity of his character. The ruling idea of his life appeared to be, that he was bound to show his gratitude to the country which had afforded him an asylum and a means of subsistence by doing his utmost to turn himself into an Englishman. Not content with paying the nation in general the compliment of invariably carrying an umbrella, and invariably wearing gaiters and a white hat, the Professor further aspired to become an Englishman in his habits and amusements, as well as in his personal appearance. Finding us distinguished, as a nation, by our love of athletic exercises, the little man, in the innocence of his heart, devoted himself impromptu to all our English sports and pastimes whenever he had the opportunity of joining them; firmly persuaded that he could adopt our national amusements of the field by an effort of will precisely as he had adopted our national gaiters and our national white hat.

I had seen him risk his limbs blindly at a fox-hunt and in a cricket-field; and soon afterwards I saw him risk his life, just as blindly, in the sea at Brighton.

We had met there accidentally, and were bathing together. If we had been engaged in any exercise peculiar to my own nation I should, of course, have looked after Pesca carefully; but as foreigners are generally quite as well able to take care of themselves in the water as Englishmen, it never occurred to me that the art of swimming might merely add one more to the list of manly exercises which the Professor believed that he could learn impromptu. Soon after we had both struck out from shore, I stopped, finding my friend did not gain on me, and turned round to look for him. To my horror and amazement, I saw nothing between me and the beach but two little white arms which struggled for an instant above the surface of the water, and then disappeared from view. When I dived for him, the poor little man was lying quietly coiled up at the bottom, in a hollow of shingle, looking by many degrees smaller than I had ever seen him look before. During the few minutes that elapsed while I was taking him in, the air revived him, and he ascended the steps of the machine with my assistance. With the partial recovery of his animation came the return of his wonderful delusion on the subject of swimming. As soon as his chattering teeth would let him speak, he smiled vacantly, and said he thought it must have been the Cramp.

When he had thoroughly recovered himself, and had joined me on the beach, his warm Southern nature broke through all artificial English restraints in a moment. He overwhelmed me with the wildest expressions of affection—exclaimed passionately, in his exaggerated Italian way, that he would hold his life henceforth at my disposal—and declared that he should never be happy again until he had found an opportunity of proving his gratitude by rendering me some service which I might remember, on my side, to the end of my days.
I did my best to stop the torrent of his tears and protestations by persisting in treating the whole adventure as a good subject for a joke; and succeeded at last, as I imagined, in lessening Pesca's overwhelming sense of obligation to me. Little did I think then--little did I think afterwards when our pleasant holiday had drawn to an end--that the opportunity of serving me for which my grateful companion so ardently longed was soon to come; that he was eagerly to seize it on the instant; and that by so doing he was to turn the whole current of my existence into a new channel, and to alter me to myself almost past recognition.

Yet so it was. If I had not dived for Professor Pesca when he lay under water on his shingle bed, I should in all human probability never have been connected with the story which these pages will relate--I should never, perhaps, have heard even the name of the woman who has lived in all my thoughts, who has possessed herself of all my energies, who has become the one guiding influence that now directs the purpose of my life.

III

Pesca's face and manner, on the evening when we confronted each other at my mother's gate, were more than sufficient to inform me that something extraordinary had happened. It was quite useless, however, to ask him for an immediate explanation. I could only conjecture, while he was dragging me in by both hands, that (knowing my habits) he had come to the cottage to make sure of meeting me that night, and that he had some news to tell of an unusually agreeable kind.

We both bounced into the parlour in a highly abrupt and undignified manner. My mother sat by the open window laughing and fanning herself. Pesca was one of her especial favourites and his wildest eccentricities were always pardonable in her eyes. Poor dear soul! from the first moment when she found out that the little Professor was deeply and gratefully attached to her son, she opened her heart to him unreservedly, and took all his puzzling foreign peculiarities for granted, without so much as attempting to understand any one of them.

My sister Sarah, with all the advantages of youth, was, strangely enough, less pliable. She did full justice to Pesca's excellent qualities of heart; but she could not accept him implicitly, as my mother accepted him, for my sake. Her insular notions of propriety rose in perpetual revolt against Pesca's constitutional contempt for appearances; and she was always more or less undisguisedly astonished at her mother's familiarity with the eccentric little foreigner. I have observed, not only in my sister's case, but in the instances of others, that we of the young generation are nothing like so hearty and so impulsive as some of our elders. I constantly see old people flushed and excited by the prospect of some anticipated pleasure which altogether fails to ruffle the tranquillity of their serene grandchildren. Are we, I wonder, quite such genuine boys and girls now as our seniors were in their time? Has the great advance in education taken rather too long a stride; and are we in these modern days, just the least trifle in the world too well brought up?

Without attempting to answer those questions decisively, I may at least record that I never saw my mother and my sister together in Pesca's society, without finding my mother much the younger woman of the two. On this occasion, for example, while the old lady was laughing heartily over the boyish manner in which we tumbled into the parlour, Sarah was perturbedly picking up the broken pieces of a teacup, which the Professor had knocked off the table in his precipitate advance to meet me at the door.

"I don't know what would have happened, Walter," said my mother, "if you had delayed much longer. Pesca has been half mad with impatience, and I have been half mad with curiosity. The Professor has brought some wonderful news with him, in which he says you are concerned; and he has cruelly refused to give us the smallest hint of it till his friend Walter appeared."

"Very provoking: it spoils the Set," murmured Sarah to herself, mournfully absorbed over the ruins of the broken cup.

While these words were being spoken, Pesca, happily and fussily unconscious of the irreparable wrong which the crockery had suffered at his hands, was dragging a large arm-chair to the opposite end of the room, so as to command us all three, in the character of a public speaker addressing an audience. Having turned the chair with its back towards us, he jumped into it on his knees, and excitedly addressed his small congregation of three from an impromptu pulpit.

"Now, my good dears," began Pesca (who always said "good dears" when he meant "worthy friends"), "listen to me. The time has come--I recite my good news--I speak at last."

"Hear, hear!" said my mother, humouring the joke.

"The next thing he will break, mamma," whispered Sarah, "will be the back of the best arm-chair."

"I go back into my life, and I address myself to the noblest of created beings," continued Pesca, vehemently apostrophising my unworthy self over the top rail of the chair. "Who found me dead at the bottom of the sea (through Cramp); and who pulled me up to the top; and what did I say when I got into my own life and my own clothes again?"

"Much more than was at all necessary," I answered as doggedly as possible; for the least encouragement in
connection with this subject invariably let loose the Professor's emotions in a flood of tears.

"I said," persisted Pesca, "that my life belonged to my dear friend, Walter, for the rest of my days--and so it does. I said that I should never be happy again till I had found the opportunity of doing a good Something for Walter--and I have never been contented with myself till this most blessed day. Now," cried the enthusiastic little man at the top of his voice, "the overflowing happiness bursts out of me at every pore of my skin, like a perspiration; for on my faith, and soul, and honour, the something is done at last, and the only word to say now is--Right-all-right!"

It may be necessary to explain here that Pesca prided himself on being a perfect Englishman in his language, as well as in his dress, manners, and amusements. Having picked up a few of our most familiar colloquial expressions, he scattered them about over his conversation whenever they happened to occur to him, turning them, in his high relish for their sound and his general ignorance of their sense, into compound words and repetitions of his own, and always running them into each other, as if they consisted of one long syllable.

"Among the fine London Houses where I teach the language of my native country," said the Professor, rushing into his long-deferred explanation without another word of preface, "there is one, mighty fine, in the big place called Portland. You all know where that is? Yes, yes--course-of-course. The fine house, my good dears, has got inside it a fine family. A Mamma, fair and fat; three young Misses, fair and fat; two young Misters, fair and fat; and a Papa, the fairest and the fattest of all, who is a mighty merchant, up to his eyes in gold--a fine man once, but seeing that he has got a naked head and two chins, fine no longer at the present time. Now mind! I teach the sublime Dante to the young Misses, and ah!--my-soul-bless-my-soul!--it is not in human language to say how the sublime Dante puzzles the pretty heads of all three! No matter--all in good time--and the more lessons the better for me. Now mind! Imagine to yourselves that I am teaching the young Misses to-day, as usual. We are all four of us down together in the Hell of Dante. At the Seventh Circle--but no matter for that: all the Circles are alike to the three young Misses, fair and fat,--at the Seventh Circle, nevertheless, my pupils are sticking fast; and I, to set them going again, recite, explain, and blow myself up red-hot with useless enthusiasm, when--a creak of boots in the passage outside, and in comes the golden Papa, the mighty merchant with the naked head and the two chins.--Ha! my good dears, I am closer than you think for to the business, now. Have you been patient so far? or have you said to yourselves, 'Deuce-what-the-deuce! Pesca is long-winded to-night?'

We declared that we were deeply interested. The Professor went on:

"In his hand, the golden Papa has a letter; and after he has made his excuse for disturbing us in our Infernal Region with the common mortal Business of the house, he addresses himself to the three young Misses, and begins, as you English begin everything in this blessed world that you have to say, with a great O. 'O, my dears,' says the mighty merchant, 'I have got here a letter from my friend, Mr.----' (the name has slipped out of my mind; but no matter; we shall come back to that; yes, yes--right-all-right). So the Papa says, 'I have got a letter from my friend, the Mister; and he wants a recommend from me, of a drawing-master, to go down to his house in the country. My-soul-bless-my-soul! when I heard the golden Papa say those words, if I had been big enough to reach up to him, I should have put my arms round his neck, and pressed him to my bosom in a long and grateful hug! As it was, I only bounced upon my chair. My seat was on thorns, and my soul was on fire to speak but I held my tongue, and let Papa go on. 'Perhaps you know,' says this good man of money, twiddling his friend's letter this way and that, in his golden fingers and thumbs, 'perhaps you know, my dears, of a drawing-master that I can recommend?' The three young Misses all look at each other, and then say (with the indispensable great O to begin) "O, my dears," says the Professor, "I have got here a letter from my friend, the mighty merchant, up to his eyes in gold--a fine man once, but seeing that he has got a naked head and two chins, fine no longer at the present time. Now mind! I teach the sublime Englishman's bosom, and, what is more, his father had it before him! 'Never mind,' says the golden barbarian of a Papa, 'never mind about his genius, Mr. Pesca. We don't want genius in this country, unless it is accompanied by respectability--and then we are very glad to have it, very glad indeed. Can your friend produce testimonials--letters that speak to his character?' I wave my hand negligently. 'Letters?' I say. 'Ha! my-soul-bless-my-soul! I should think so, indeed! Volumes of letters and portfolios of testimonials, if you like! 'One or two will do,' says this man of phlegm and money. 'Let him send them to me, with his name and address. And--stop, stop, Mr. Pesca--before you go to your friend, you had better take a note. 'Bank-note!' I say, indignantly. 'No bank-note, if you please, till my brave Englishman has earned it first. 'Bank-note!' says Papa, in a great surprise, 'who talked of bank-note? I mean a note of the terms--a memorandum of what he is expected to do. Go on with your lesson, Mr. Pesca, and I will give you
the necessary extract from my friend's letter.' Down sits the man of merchandise and money to his pen, ink, and paper; and down I go once again into the Hell of Dante, with my three young Misses after me. In ten minutes' time the note is written, and the boots of Papa are creaking themselves away in the passage outside. From that moment, on my faith, and soul, and honour, I know nothing more! The glorious thought that I have caught my opportunity at last, and that my grateful service for my dearest friend in the world is as good as done already, flies up into my head and makes me drunk. How I pull my young Misses and myself out of our Infernal Region again, how my other business is done afterwards, how my little bit of dinner slides itself down my throat, I know no more than a man in the moon. Enough for me, that here I am, with the mighty merchant's note in my hand, as large as life, as hot as fire, and as happy as a king! Ha! ha! ha! right-right-right-all-right!' Here the Professor waved the memorandum of terms over his head, and ended his long and voluble narrative with his shrill Italian parody on an English cheer."

My mother rose the moment he had done, with flushed cheeks and brightened eyes. She caught the little man warmly by both hands."

"My dear, good Pesca," she said, "I never doubted your true affection for Walter--but I am more than ever persuaded of it now!"

"I am sure we are very much obliged to Professor Pesca, for Walter's sake," added Sarah. She half rose, while she spoke, as if to approach the arm-chair, in her turn; but, observing that Pesca was rapturously kissing my mother's hands, looked serious, and resumed her seat. "If the familiar little man treats my mother in that way, how will he treat ME?" Faces sometimes tell truth; and that was unquestionably the thought in Sarah's mind, as she sat down again.

Although I myself was gratefully sensible of the kindness of Pesca's motives, my spirits were hardly so much elevated as they ought to have been by the prospect of future employment now placed before me. When the Professor had quite done with my mother's hand, and when I had warmly thanked him for his interference on my behalf, I asked to be allowed to look at the note of terms which his respectable patron had drawn up for my inspection.

Pesca handed me the paper, with a triumphant flourish of the hand.

"Read!" said the little man majestically. "I promise you my friend, the writing of the golden Papa speaks with a tongue of trumpets for itself."

The note of terms was plain, straightforward, and comprehensive, at any rate. It informed me,

First, That Frederick Fairlie, Esquire, of Limmeridge House, Cumberland, wanted to engage the services of a thoroughly competent drawing-master, for a period of four months certain.

Secondly, That the duties which the master was expected to perform would be of a twofold kind. He was to superintend the instruction of two young ladies in the art of painting in water-colours; and he was to devote his leisure time, afterwards, to the business of repairing and mounting a valuable collection of drawings, which had been suffered to fall into a condition of total neglect.

Thirdly, That the terms offered to the person who should undertake and properly perform these duties were four guineas a week; that he was to reside at Limmeridge House; and that he was to be treated there on the footing of a gentleman.

Fourthly, and lastly, That no person need think of applying for this situation unless he could furnish the most unexceptionable references to character and abilities. The references were to be sent to Mr. Fairlie's friend in London, who was empowered to conclude all necessary arrangements. These instructions were followed by the name and address of Pesca's employer in Portland Place—and there the note, or memorandum, ended.

The prospect which this offer of an engagement held out was certainly an attractive one. The employment was likely to be both easy and agreeable; it was proposed to me at the autumn time of the year when I was least occupied; and the terms, judging by my personal experience in my profession, were surprisingly liberal. I knew this; I knew that I ought to consider myself very fortunate if I succeeded in securing the offered employment—and yet, no sooner had I read the memorandum than I felt an inexplicable unwillingness within me to stir in the matter. I had never in the whole of my previous experience found my duty and my inclination so painfully and so unaccountably at variance as I found them now.

"Oh, Walter, your father never had such a chance as this!" said my mother, when she had read the note of terms and had handed it back to me.

"Such distinguished people to know," remarked Sarah, straightening herself in the chair; "and on such gratifying terms of equality too!"

"Yes, yes; the terms, in every sense, are tempting enough," I replied impatiently. "But before I send in my testimonials, I should like a little time to consider—--"

"Consider!" exclaimed my mother. "Why, Walter, what is the matter with you?"

"Consider!" echoed my sister. "What a very extraordinary thing to say, under the circumstances!"
"Consider!" chimed in the Professor. "What is there to consider about? Answer me this! Have you not been complaining of your health, and have you not been longing for what you call a smack of the country breeze? Well! there in your hand is the paper that offers you perpetual choking mouthfuls of country breeze for four months' time. Is it not so? Ha! Again--you want money. Well! Is four golden guineas a week nothing? My-soul-bless-my-soul! only give it to me--and my boots shall creak like the golden Papa's, with a sense of the overpowering richness of the man who walks in them! Four guineas a week, and, more than that, the charming society of two young misses! and, more than that, your bed, your breakfast, your dinner, your gorging English teas and lunches and drinks of foaming beer, all for nothing--why, Walter, my dear good friend--deuce-what-the-deuce!--for the first time in my life I have not eyes enough in my head to look, and wonder at you!"

Neither my mother's evident astonishment at my behaviour, nor Pesca's fervid enumeration of the advantages offered to me by the new employment, had any effect in shaking my unreasonable disinclination to go to Limmeridge House. After starting all the petty objections that I could think of to going to Cumberland, and after hearing them answered, one after another, to my own complete discomfiture, I tried to set up a last obstacle by asking what was to become of my pupils in London while I was teaching Mr. Fairlie's young ladies to sketch from nature. The obvious answer to this was, that the greater part of them would be away on their autumn travels, and that the few who remained at home might be confined to the care of one of my brother drawing-masters, whose pupils I had once taken off his hands under similar circumstances. My sister reminded me that this gentleman had expressly placed his services at my disposal, during the present session, in case I wished to leave town; my mother seriously appealed to me not to let an idle caprice stand in the way of my own interests and my own health; and Pesca piteously entreated that I would not wound him to the heart by rejecting the first grateful offer of service that he had been able to make to the friend who had saved his life.

The evident sincerity and affection which inspired these remonstrances would have influenced any man with an atom of good feeling in his composition. Though I could not conquer my own unaccountable perversity, I had at least virtue enough to be heartily ashamed of it, and to end the discussion pleasantly by giving way, and promising to do all that was wanted of me.

The rest of the evening passed merrily enough in humorous anticipations of my coming life with the two young ladies in Cumberland. Pesca, inspired by our national grog, which appeared to get into his head, in the most marvellous manner, five minutes after it had gone down his throat, asserted his claims to be considered a complete Englishman by making a series of speeches in rapid succession, proposing my mother's health, my sister's health, my health, and the healths, in mass, of Mr. Fairlie and the two young Misses, pathetically returning thanks himself, immediately afterwards, for the whole party. "A secret, Walter," said my little friend confidentially, as we walked home together, "I am flushed by the recollection of my own eloquence. My soul bursts itself with ambition. One of these days I go into your noble Parliament. It is the dream of my whole life to be Honourable Pesca, M.P."

The next morning I sent my testimonials to the Professor's employer in Portland Place. Three days passed, and I concluded, with secret satisfaction, that my papers had not been found sufficiently explicit. On the fourth day, however, an answer came. It announced that Mr. Fairlie accepted my services, and requested me to start for Cumberland immediately. All the necessary instructions for my journey were carefully and clearly added in a postscript.

I made my arrangements, unwillingly enough, for leaving London early the next day. Towards evening Pesca looked in, on his way to a dinner-party, to bid me good-bye.

"I shall dry my tears in your absence," said the Professor gaily, "with this glorious thought. It is my auspicious hand that has given the first push to your fortune in the world. Go, my friend! When your sun shines in Cumberland (English proverb), in the name of heaven make your hay. Marry one of the two young Misses; become Honourable Hartright, M.P.; and when you are on the top of the ladder remember that Pesca, at the bottom, has done it all!"

I tried to laugh with my little friend over his parting jest, but my spirits were not to be commanded. Something jarred in me almost painfully while he was speaking his light farewell words.

When I was left alone again nothing remained to be done but to walk to the Hampstead cottage and bid my mother and Sarah good-bye.

IV

The heat had been painfully oppressive all day, and it was now a close and sultry night.

My mother and sister had spoken so many last words, and had begged me to wait another five minutes so many times, that it was nearly midnight when the servant locked the garden-gate behind me. I walked forward a few paces on the shortest way back to London, then stopped and hesitated.

The moon was full and broad in the dark blue starless sky, and the broken ground of the heath looked wild enough in the mysterious light to be hundreds of miles away from the great city that lay beneath it. The idea of descending any sooner than I could help into the heat and gloom of London repelled me. The prospect of going to
bed in my airless chambers, and the prospect of gradual suffocation, seemed, in my present restless frame of mind and body, to be one and the same thing. I determined to stroll home in the purer air by the most roundabout way I could take; to follow the white winding paths across the lonely heath; and to approach London through its most open suburb by striking into the Finchley Road, and so getting back, in the cool of the new morning, by the western side of the Regent's Park.

I wound my way down slowly over the heath, enjoying the divine stillness of the scene, and admiring the soft alternations of light and shade as they followed each other over the broken ground on every side of me. So long as I was proceeding through this first and prettiest part of my night walk my mind remained passively open to the impressions produced by the view; and I thought but little on any subject--indeed, so far as my own sensations were concerned, I can hardly say that I thought at all.

But when I had left the heath and had turned into the by-road, where there was less to see, the ideas naturally engendered by the approaching change in my habits and occupations gradually drew more and more of my attention exclusively to themselves. By the time I had arrived at the end of the road I had become completely absorbed in my own fanciful visions of Limmeridge House, of Mr. Fairlie, and of the two ladies whose practice in the art of water-colour painting I was so soon to superintend.

I had now arrived at that particular point of my walk where four roads met--the road to Hampstead, along which I had returned, the road to Finchley, the road to West End, and the road back to London. I had mechanically turned in this latter direction, and was strolling along the lonely high-road--idly wondering, I remember, what the Cumberland young ladies would look like--when, in one moment, every drop of blood in my body was brought to a stop by the touch of a hand laid lightly and suddenly on my shoulder from behind me.

I turned on the instant, with my fingers tightening round the handle of my stick.

There, in the middle of the broad bright high-road--there, as if it had that moment sprung out of the earth or dropped from the heaven--stood the figure of a solitary Woman, dressed from head to foot in white garments, her face bent in grave inquiry on mine, her hand pointing to the dark cloud over London, as I faced her.

I was far too seriously startled by the suddenness with which this extraordinary apparition stood before me, in the dead of night and in that lonely place, to ask what she wanted. The strange woman spoke first.

"Is that the road to London?" she said.

"Yes," I replied, "that is the way: it leads to St. John's Wood and the Regent's Park. You must excuse my not answering you before. I was rather startled by your sudden appearance in the road; and I am, even now, quite unable to account for it."

"You don't suspect me of doing anything wrong, do you? I have done nothing wrong. I have met with an accident--I am very unfortunate in being here alone so late. Why do you suspect me of doing wrong?"

She spoke with unnecessary earnestness and agitation, and shrank back from me several paces. I did my best to reassure her.

"Did you hear me?" she said, still quietly and rapidly, and without the least fretfulness or impatience. "I asked if that was the way to London."

"Yes," I replied, "that is the way: it leads to St. John's Wood and the Regent's Park. You must excuse my not answering you before. I was rather startled by your sudden appearance in the road; and I am, even now, quite unable to account for it."

"You don't suspect me of doing anything wrong, do you? I have done nothing wrong. I have met with an accident--I am very unfortunate in being here alone so late. Why do you suspect me of doing wrong?"

She spoke with unnecessary earnestness and agitation, and shrank back from me several paces. I did my best to reassure her.

"Pray don't suppose that I have any idea of suspecting you," I said, "or any other wish than to be of assistance to you, if I can. I only wondered at your appearance in the road, because it seemed to me to be empty the instant before I saw you."

She turned, and pointed back to a place at the junction of the road to London and the road to Hampstead, where there was a gap in the hedge.

"I heard you coming," she said, "and hid there to see what sort of man you were, before I risked speaking. I
doubted and feared about it till you passed; and then I was obliged to steal after you, and touch you."

"May I trust you?" she asked. "You don't think the worse of me because I have met with an accident?" She stopped in confusion; shifted her bag from one hand to the other; and sighed bitterly.

The loneliness and helplessness of the woman touched me. The natural impulse to assist her and to spare her got the better of the judgment, the caution, the worldly tact, which an older, wiser, and colder man might have summoned to help him in this strange emergency.

"You may trust me for any harmless purpose," I said. "If it troubles you to explain your strange situation to me, don't think of returning to the subject again. I have no right to ask you for any explanations. Tell me how I can help you; and if I can, I will."

"You are very kind, and I am very, very thankful to have met you." The first touch of womanly tenderness that I had heard from her trembled in her voice as she said the words; but no tears glistened in those large, wistfully attentive eyes of hers, which were still fixed on me. "I have only been in London once before," she went on, more and more rapidly, "and I know nothing about that side of it, yonder. Can I get a fly, or a carriage of any kind? Is it too late? I don't know. If you could show me where to get a fly--and if you will only promise not to interfere with me, and to let me leave you, when and how I please--I have a friend in London who will be glad to receive me--I want nothing else--will you promise?"

She looked anxiously up and down the road; shifted her bag again from one hand to the other; repeated the words, "Will you promise?" and looked hard in my face, with a pleading fear and confusion that it troubled me to see.

What could I do? Here was a stranger utterly and helplessly at my mercy--and that stranger a forlorn woman. No house was near; no one was passing whom I could consult; and no earthly right existed on my part to give me a power of control over her, even if I had known how to exercise it. I trace these lines, self-distrustfully, with the shadows of after-events darkening the very paper I write on; and still I say, what could I do?

What I did do, was to try and gain time by questioning her. "Are you sure that your friend in London will receive you at such a late hour as this?" I said.

"Quite sure. Only say you will let me leave you when and how I please--only say you won't interfere with me. Will you promise?"

As she repeated the words for the third time, she came close to me and laid her hand, with a sudden gentle stealthiness, on my bosom--a thin hand; a cold hand (when I removed it with mine) even on that sultry night. Remember that I was young; remember that the hand which touched me was a woman's.

"Will you promise?"

"Yes."

One word! The little familiar word that is on everybody's lips, every hour in the day. Oh me! and I tremble, now, when I write it.

We set our faces towards London, and walked on together in the first still hour of the new day--I, and this woman, whose name, whose character, whose story, whose objects in life, whose very presence by my side, at that moment, were fathomless mysteries to me. It was like a dream. Was I Walter Hartright? Was this the well-known, uneventful road, where holiday people strolled on Sundays? Had I really left, little more than an hour since, the quiet, decent, conventionally domestic atmosphere of my mother's cottage? I was too bewildered--too conscious also of a vague sense of something like self-reproach--to speak to my strange companion for some minutes. It was her voice again that first broke the silence between us.

"I want to ask you something," she said suddenly. "Do you know many people in London?"

"Yes, a great many."

"Many men of rank and title?" There was an unmistakable tone of suspicion in the strange question. I hesitated about answering it.

"Some," I said, after a moment's silence.

"Many"--she came to a full stop, and looked me searchingly in the face--"many men of the rank of Baronet?"

Too much astonished to reply, I questioned her in my turn.

"Why do you ask?"

"Because I hope, for my own sake, there is one Baronet that you don't know."

"Will you tell me his name?"

"I can't--I dare not--I forget myself when I mention it." She spoke loudly and almost fiercely, raised her clenched hand in the air, and shook it passionately; then, on a sudden, controlled herself again, and added, in tones lowered to a whisper "Tell me which of them YOU know."

I could hardly refuse to humour her in such a trifle, and I mentioned three names. Two, the names of fathers of
families whose daughters I taught; one, the name of a bachelor who had once taken me a cruise in his yacht, to make sketches for him.

"Ah! you DON'T know him," she said, with a sigh of relief. "Are you a man of rank and title yourself?"

"Far from it. I am only a drawing-master."

As the reply passed my lips--a little bitterly, perhaps--she took my arm with the abruptness which characterised all her actions.

"Not a man of rank and title," she repeated to herself. "Thank God! I may trust HIM."

I had hitherto contrived to master my curiosity out of consideration for my companion; but it got the better of me now.

"I am afraid you have serious reason to complain of some man of rank and title?" I said. "I am afraid the baronet, whose name you are unwilling to mention to me, has done you some grievous wrong? Is he the cause of your being out here at this strange time of night?"

"Don't ask me: don't make me talk of it," she answered. "I'm not fit now. I have been cruelly used and cruelly wronged. You will be kinder than ever, if you will walk on fast, and not speak to me. I sadly want to quiet myself, if I can."

We moved forward again at a quick pace; and for half an hour, at least, not a word passed on either side. From time to time, being forbidden to make any more inquiries, I stole a look at her face. It was always the same; the lips close shut, the brow frowning, the eyes looking straight forward, eagerly and yet absently. We had reached the first houses, and were close on the new Wesleyan college, before her set features relaxed and she spoke once more.

"Do you live in London?" she said.

"Yes." As I answered, it struck me that she might have formed some intention of appealing to me for assistance or advice, and that I ought to spare her a possible disappointment by warning her of my approaching absence from home. So I added, "But to-morrow I shall be away from London for some time. I am going into the country."

"Where?" she asked. "North or south?"

"North--to Cumberland."

"Cumberland!" she repeated the word tenderly. "Ah! wish I was going there too. I was once happy in Cumberland."

I tried again to lift the veil that hung between this woman and me.

"Perhaps you were born," I said, "in the beautiful Lake country."

"No," she answered. "I was born in Hampshire; but I once went to school for a little while in Cumberland. Lakes? I don't remember any lakes. It's Limmeridge village, and Limmeridge House, I should like to see again."

It was my turn now to stop suddenly. In the excited state of my curiosity, at that moment, the chance reference to Mr. Fairlie's place of residence, on the lips of my strange companion, staggered me with astonishment.

"Did you hear anybody calling after us?" she asked, looking up and down the road affrightedly, the instant I stopped.

"No, no. I was only struck by the name of Limmeridge House. I heard it mentioned by some Cumberland people a few days since."

"Ah! not my people. Mrs. Fairlie is dead; and her husband is dead; and their little girl may be married and gone away by this time. I can't say who lives at Limmeridge now. If any more are left there of that name, I only know I love them for Mrs. Fairlie's sake."

She seemed about to say more; but while she was speaking, we came within view of the turnpike, at the top of the Avenue Road. Her hand tightened round my arm, and she looked anxiously at the gate before us.

"Is the turnpike man looking out?" she asked.

He was not looking out; no one else was near the place when we passed through the gate. The sight of the gas-lamps and houses seemed to agitate her, and to make her impatient.

"This is London," she said. "Do you see any carriage I can get? I am tired and frightened. I want to shut myself in and be driven away."

I explained to her that we must walk a little further to get to a cab-stand, unless we were fortunate enough to meet with an empty vehicle; and then tried to resume the subject of Cumberland. It was useless. That idea of shutting herself in, and being driven away, had now got full possession of her mind. She could think and talk of nothing else.

We had hardly proceeded a third of the way down the Avenue Road when I saw a cab draw up at a house a few doors below us, on the opposite side of the way. A gentleman got out and let himself in at the garden door. I hailed the cab, as the driver mounted the box again. When we crossed the road, my companion's impatience increased to such an extent that she almost forced me to run.

"It's so late," she said. "I am only in a hurry because it's so late."
"I can't take you, sir, if you're not going towards Tottenham Court Road," said the driver civilly, when I opened the cab door. "My horse is dead beat, and I can't get him no further than the stable."

"Yes, yes. That will do for me. I'm going that way--I'm going that way." She spoke with breathless eagerness, and pressed by me into the cab.

I had assured myself that the man was sober as well as civil before I let her enter the vehicle. And now, when she was seated inside, I entreated her to let me see her set down safely at her destination.

"No, no, no," she said vehemently. "I'm quite safe, and quite happy now. If you are a gentleman, remember your promise. Let him drive on till I stop him. Thank you--oh! thank you, thank you!"

My hand was on the cab door. She caught it in hers, kissed it, and pushed it away. The cab drove off at the same moment--I started into the road, with some vague idea of stopping it again, I hardly knew why--hesitated from dread of frightening and distressing her--called, at last, but not loudly enough to attract the driver's attention. The sound of the wheels grew fainter in the distance--the cab melted into the black shadows on the road--the woman in white was gone.

Ten minutes or more had passed. I was still on the same side of the way; now mechanically walking forward a few paces; now stopping again absent-mindedly. At one moment I found myself doubting the reality of my own adventure; at another I was perplexed and distressed by an uneasy sense of having done wrong, which yet left me confusedly ignorant of how I could have done right. I hardly knew where I was going, or what I meant to do next; I was conscious of nothing but the confusion of my own thoughts, when I was abruptly recalled to myself--awakened, I might almost say--by the sound of rapidly approaching wheels close behind me.

I was on the dark side of the road, in the thick shadow of some garden trees, when I stopped to look round. On the opposite and lighter side of the way, a short distance below me, a policeman was strolling along in the direction of the Regent's Park.

The carriage passed me--an open chaise driven by two men.

"Stop!" cried one. "There's a policeman. Let's ask him."

The horse was instantly pulled up, a few yards beyond the dark place where I stood.

"Policeman!" cried the first speaker. "Have you seen a woman pass this way?"

"What sort of woman, sir?"

"A woman in a lavender-coloured gown----"

"No, no," interposed the second man. "The clothes we gave her were found on her bed. She must have gone away in the clothes she wore when she came to us. In white, policeman. A woman in white."

"I haven't seen her, sir."

"If you or any of your men meet with the woman, stop her, and send her in careful keeping to that address. I'll pay all expenses, and a fair reward into the bargain."

The policeman looked at the card that was handed down to him.

"Why are we to stop her, sir? What has she done?"

"Done! She has escaped from my Asylum. Don't forget; a woman in white. Drive on."

"She has escaped from my Asylum!"

I cannot say with truth that the terrible inference which those words suggested flashed upon me like a new revelation. Some of the strange questions put to me by the woman in white, after my ill-considered promise to leave her free to act as she pleased, had suggested the conclusion either that she was naturally flighty and unsettled, or that some recent shock of terror had disturbed the balance of her faculties. But the idea of absolute insanity which we all associate with the very name of an Asylum, had, I can honestly declare, never occurred to me, in connection with her. I had seen nothing, in her language or her actions, to justify it at the time; and even with the new light thrown on her by the words which the stranger had addressed to the policeman, I could see nothing to justify it now.

What had I done? Assisted the victim of the most horrible of all false imprisonments to escape; or cast loose on the wide world of London an unfortunate creature, whose actions it was my duty, and every man's duty, mercifully to control? I turned sick at heart when the question occurred to me, and when I felt self-reproachfully that it was asked too late.

In the disturbed state of my mind, it was useless to think of going to bed, when I at last got back to my chambers in Clement's Inn. Before many hours elapsed it would be necessary to start on my journey to Cumberland. I sat down and tried, first to sketch, then to read--but the woman in white got between me and my pencil, between me and my book. Had the forlorn creature come to any harm? That was my first thought, though I shrank selfishly from confronting it. Other thoughts followed, on which it was less harrowing to dwell. Where had she stopped the cab? What had become of her now? Had she been traced and captured by the men in the chaise? Or was she still capable of controlling her own actions; and were we two following our widely parted roads towards one point in the
mysterious future, at which we were to meet once more?

It was a relief when the hour came to lock my door, to bid farewell to London pursuits, London pupils, and London friends, and to be in movement again towards new interests and a new life. Even the bustle and confusion at the railway terminus, so wearisome and bewildering at other times, roused me and did me good.

My travelling instructions directed me to go to Carlisle, and then to diverge by a branch railway which ran in the direction of the coast. As a misfortune to begin with, our engine broke down between Lancaster and Carlisle. The delay occasioned by this accident caused me to be too late for the branch train, by which I was to have gone on immediately. I had to wait some hours; and when a later train finally deposited me at the nearest station to Limmeridge House, it was past ten, and the night was so dark that I could hardly see my way to the pony-chaise which Mr. Fairlie had ordered to be in waiting for me.

The driver was evidently discomposed by the lateness of my arrival. He was in that state of highly respectful sulkiness which is peculiar to English servants. We drove away slowly through the darkness in perfect silence. The roads were bad, and the dense obscurity of the night increased the difficulty of getting over the ground quickly. It was, by my watch, nearly an hour and a half from the time of our leaving the station before I heard the sound of the sea in the distance, and the crunch of our wheels on a smooth gravel drive. We had passed one gate before entering the drive, and we passed another before we drew up at the house. I was received by a solemn man-servant out of livery, who informed me that the family had retired for the night, and was then led into a large and lofty room where my supper was waiting me, in a forlorn manner, at one extremity of a lonesome mahogany wilderness of dining-table.

I was too tired and out of spirits to eat or drink much, especially with the solemn servant waiting on me as elaborately as if a small dinner party had arrived at the house instead of a solitary man. In a quarter of an hour I was ready to be taken up to my bedchamber. The solemn servant conducted me into a prettily furnished room—said, "Breakfast at nine o'clock, sir"—looked all round him to see that everything was in its proper place, and noiselessly withdrew.

"What shall I see in my dreams to-night?" I thought to myself, as I put out the candle; "the woman in white? or the unknown inhabitants of this Cumberland mansion?" It was a strange sensation to be sleeping in the house, like a friend of the family, and yet not to know one of the inmates, even by sight!

VI

When I rose the next morning and drew up my blind, the sea opened before me joyously under the broad August sunlight, and the distant coast of Scotland fringed the horizon with its lines of melting blue.

The view was such a surprise, and such a change to me, after my weary London experience of brick and mortar landscape, that I seemed to burst into a new life and a new set of thoughts the moment I looked at it. A confused sensation of having suddenly lost my familiarity with the past, without acquiring any additional clearness of idea in reference to the present or the future, took possession of my mind. Circumstances that were but a few days old faded back in my memory, as if they had happened months and months since. Pesca's quaint announcement of the means by which he had procured me my present employment; the farewell evening I had passed with my mother and sister; even my mysterious adventure on the way home from Hampstead—had all become like events which might have occurred at some former epoch of my existence. Although the woman in white was still in my mind, the image of her seemed to have grown dull and faint already.

A little before nine o'clock, I descended to the ground-floor of the house. The solemn man-servant of the night before met me wandering among the passages, and compassionately showed me the way to the breakfast-room.

My first glance round me, as the man opened the door, disclosed a well-furnished breakfast-table, standing in the middle of a long room, with many windows in it. I looked from the table to the window farthest from me, and saw a lady standing at it, with her back turned towards me. The instant my eyes rested on her, I was struck by the rare beauty of her form, and by the unaffected grace of her attitude. Her figure was tall, yet not too tall; comely and well-developed, yet not fat; her head set on her shoulders with an easy, pliant firmness; her waist, perfection in the eyes of a man, for it occupied its natural place, it filled out its natural circle, it was visibly and delightfully undeformed by stays. She had not heard my entrance into the room; and I allowed myself the luxury of admiring her for a few moments, before I moved one of the chairs near me, as the least embarrassing means of attracting her attention. She turned towards me immediately. The easy elegance of every movement of her limbs and body as soon as she began to advance from the far end of the room, set me in a flutter of expectation to see her face clearly. She left the window—and I said to myself, The lady is dark. She moved forward a few steps—and I said to myself, The lady is young. She approached nearer—and I said to myself (with a sense of surprise which words fail me to express), The lady is ugly!

Never was the old conventional maxim, that Nature cannot err, more flatly contradicted—never was the fair promise of a lovely figure more strangely and startlingly belied by the face and head that crowned it. The lady's complexion was almost swarthy, and the dark down on her upper lip was almost a moustache. She had a large, firm,
masculine mouth and jaw; prominent, piercing, resolute brown eyes; and thick, coal-black hair, growing unusually low down on her forehead. Her expression—bright, frank, and intelligent—appeared, while she was silent, to be altogether wanting in those feminine attractions of gentleness and pliability, without which the beauty of the handsomest woman alive is beauty incomplete. To see such a face as this set on shoulders that a sculptor would have longed to model—to be charmed by the modest graces of action through which the symmetrical limbs betrayed their beauty when they moved, and then to be almost repelled by the masculine form and masculine look of the features in which the perfectly shaped figure ended—was to feel a sensation oddly akin to the helpless discomfort familiar to us all in sleep, when we recognise yet cannot reconcile the anomalies and contradictions of a dream.

"Mr. Hartright?" said the lady interrogatively, her dark face lighting up with a smile, and softening and growing womanly the moment she began to speak. "We resigned all hope of you last night, and went to bed as usual. Accept my apologies for our apparent want of attention; and allow me to introduce myself as one of your pupils. Shall we shake hands? I suppose we must come to it sooner or later—and why not sooner?"

These odd words of welcome were spoken in a clear, ringing, pleasant voice. The offered hand—rather large, but beautifully formed—was given to me with the easy, unaffected self-reliance of a highly-bred woman. We sat down together at the breakfast-table in as cordial and customary a manner as if we had known each other for years, and had met at Limmeridge House to talk over old times by previous appointment.

"I hope you come here good-humouredly determined to make the best of your position," continued the lady. "You will have to begin this morning by putting up with no other company at breakfast than mine. My sister is in her own room, nursing that essentially feminine malady, a slight headache; and her old governess, Mrs. Vesey, is charitably attending on her with restorative tea. My uncle, Mr. Fairlie, never joins us at any of our meals: he is an invalid, and keeps bachelor state in his own apartments. There is nobody else in the house but me. Two young ladies have been staying here, but they went away yesterday, in despair; and no wonder. All through their visit (in consequence of Mr. Fairlie's invalid condition) we produced no such convenience in the house as a flirtable, danceable, small-talkable creature of the male sex; and the consequence was, we did nothing but quarrel, especially at dinner-time. How can you expect four women to dine together alone every day, and not quarrel? We are such fools, we can't entertain each other at table. You see I don't think much of my own sex, Mr. Hartright—which will you have, tea or coffee?—no woman does think much of her own sex, although few of them confess it as freely as I do. Dear me, you look puzzled. Why? Are you wondering what you will have for breakfast? or are you surprised at my careless way of talking? In the first case, I advise you, as a friend, to have nothing to do with that cold ham at your elbow, and to wait till the omelette comes in. In the second case, I will give you some tea to compose your spirits, and do all a woman can (which is very little, by-the-bye) to hold my tongue."

She handed me my cup of tea, laughing gaily. Her light flow of talk, and her lively familiarity of manner with a total stranger, were accompanied by an unaffected naturalness and an easy inborn confidence in herself and her position, which would have secured her the respect of the most audacious man breathing. While it was impossible to be formal and reserved in her company, it was more than impossible to take the faintest vestige of a liberty with her, even in thought. I felt this instinctively, even while I caught the infection of her own bright gaiety of spirits—even while I did my best to answer her in her own frank, lively way.

"Yes, yes," she said, when I had suggested the only explanation I could offer, to account for my perplexed looks, "I understand. You are such a perfect stranger in the house, that you are puzzled by my familiar references to the worthy inhabitants. Natural enough: I ought to have thought of it before. At any rate, I can set it right now. Suppose I begin with myself, so as to get done with that part of the subject as soon as possible? My name is Marian Halcombe; and I am as inaccurate as women usually are, in calling Mr. Fairlie my uncle, and Miss Fairlie my sister. My mother was twice married: the first time to Mr. Halcombe, my father; the second time to Mr. Fairlie, my half-sister's father. Except that we are both orphans, we are in every respect as unlike each other as possible. My father was a poor man, and Miss Fairlie's father was a rich man. I have got nothing, and she has a fortune. I am dark and ugly, and she is fair and pretty. Everybody thinks me crabbed and odd (with perfect justice); and everybody thinks her sweet-tempered and charming (with more justice still). In short, she is an angel; and I am---- Try some of that marmalade, Mr. Hartright, and finish the sentence, in the name of female propriety, for yourself. What am I to tell you about Mr. Fairlie? Upon my honour, I hardly know. He is sure to send for you after breakfast, and you can study him for yourself. In the meantime, I may inform you, first, that he is the late Mr. Fairlie's younger brother; secondly, that he is a single man; and thirdly, that he is Miss Fairlie's guardian. I won't live without her, and she can't live without me; and that is how I come to be at Limmeridge House. My sister and I are honestly fond of each other; and Mr. Fairlie is too great an invalid to be a companion for anybody. I don't know what is the matter with..."
him, and the doctors don't know what is the matter with him, and he doesn't know himself what is the matter with
him. We all say it's on the nerves, and we none of us know what we mean when we say it. However, I advise you to
humour his little peculiarities, when you see him to-day. Admire his collection of coins, prints, and water-colour
drawings, and you will win his heart. Upon my word, if you can be contented with a quiet country life, I don't see
why you should not get on very well here. From breakfast to lunch, Mr. Fairlie's drawings will occupy you. After
lunch, Miss Fairlie and I shouldour sketch-books, and go out to misrepresent Nature, under your directions.
Drawing is her favourite whim, mind, not mine. Women can't draw--their minds are too flighty, and their eyes are
too inattentive. No matter--my sister likes it; so I waste paint and spoil paper, for her sake, as composedly as any
woman in England. As for the evenings, I think we can help you through them. Miss Fairlie plays delightfully. For
my own poor part, I don't know one note of music from the other, but I can match you at chess, backgammon,
ecarte, and (with the inevitable female drawbacks) even at billiards as well. What do you think of the programme?
Can you reconcile yourself to our quiet, regular life? or do you mean to be restless, and secretly thirst for change and
adventure, in the humdrum atmosphere of Limmeridge House?"

She had run on thus far, in her gracefully bantering way, with no other interruptions on my part than the
unimportant replies which politeness required of me. The turn of the expression, however, in her last question, or
rather the one chance word, "adventure," lightly as it fell from her lips, recalled my thoughts to my meeting with the
woman in white, and urged me to discover the connection which the stranger's own reference to Mrs. Fairlie
informed me must once have existed between the nameless fugitive from the Asylum, and the former mistress of
Limmeridge House.

"Even if I were the most restless of mankind," I said, "I should be in no danger of thirsting after adventures for
some time to come. The very night before I arrived at this house, I met with an adventure; and the wonder and
excitement of it, I can assure you, Miss Halcombe, will last me for the whole term of my stay in Cumberland, if not
for a much longer period."

"You don't say so, Mr. Hartright! May I hear it?"

"You have a claim to hear it. The chief person in the adventure was a total stranger to me, and may perhaps be a
total stranger to you; but she certainly mentioned the name of the late Mrs. Fairlie in terms of the sincerest gratitude
and regard."

"Mentioned my mother's name! You interest me indescribably. Pray go on."

I at once related the circumstances under which I had met the woman in white, exactly as they had occurred; and
I repeated what she had said to me about Mrs. Fairlie and Limmeridge House, word for word.

Miss Halcombe's bright resolute eyes looked eagerly into mine, from the beginning of the narrative to the end.
Her face expressed vivid interest and astonishment, but nothing more. She was evidently as far from knowing of any
clue to the mystery as I was myself.

"Are you quite sure of those words referring to my mother?" she asked.

"Quite sure," I replied. "Whoever she may be, the woman was once at school in the village of Limmeridge, was
-treated with especial kindness by Mrs. Fairlie, and, in grateful remembrance of that kindness, feels an affectionate
interest in all surviving members of the family. She knew that Mrs. Fairlie and her husband were both dead; and she
spoke of Miss Fairlie as if they had known each other when they were children."

"You said, I think, that she denied belonging to this place?"

"Yes, she told me she came from Hampshire."

"And you entirely failed to find out her name?"

"Entirely."

"Very strange. I think you were quite justified, Mr. Hartright, in giving the poor creature her liberty, for she
seems to have done nothing in your presence to show herself unfit to enjoy it. But I wish you had been a little more
resolute about finding out her name. We must really clear up this mystery, in some way. You had better not speak of
it yet to Mr. Fairlie, or to my sister. They are both of them, I am certain, quite as ignorant of who the woman is, and
of what her past history in connection with us can be, as I am myself. But they are also, in widely different ways,
rather nervous and sensitive; and you would only fidget one and alarm the other to no purpose. As for myself, I am
all afame with curiosity, and I devote my whole energies to the business of discovery from this moment. When my
mother came here, after her second marriage, she certainly established the village school just as it exists at the
present time. But the old teachers are all dead, or gone elsewhere; and no enlightenment is to be hoped for from that
quarter. The only other alternative I can think of----"

At this point we were interrupted by the entrance of the servant, with a message from Mr. Fairlie, intimating that
he would be glad to see me, as soon as I had done breakfast.

"Wait in the hall," said Miss Halcombe, answering the servant for me, in her quick, ready way. "Mr. Hartright
will come out directly. I was about to say," she went on, addressing me again, "that my sister and I have a large
collection of my mother's letters, addressed to my father and to hers. In the absence of any other means of getting
information, I will pass the morning in looking over my mother's correspondence with Mr. Fairlie. He was fond of
London, and was constantly away from his country home; and she was accustomed, at such times, to write and
report to him how things went on at Limmeridge. Her letters are full of references to the school in which she took so
strong an interest; and I think it more than likely that I may have discovered something when we meet again. The
luncheon hour is two, Mr. Hartright. I shall have the pleasure of introducing you to my sister by that time, and we
will occupy the afternoon in driving round the neighbourhood and showing you all our pet points of view. Till two
o'clock, then, farewell."

She nodded to me with the lively grace, the delightful refinement of familiarity, which characterised all that she
did and all that she said; and disappeared by a door at the lower end of the room. As soon as she had left me, I
turned my steps towards the hall, and followed the servant, on my way, for the first time, to the presence of Mr.
Fairlie.

VII

My conductor led me upstairs into a passage which took us back to the bedchamber in which I had slept during
the past night; and opening the door next to it, begged me to look in.

"I have my master's orders to show you your own sitting-room, sir," said the man, "and to inquire if you approve
of the situation and the light."

I must have been hard to please, indeed, if I had not approved of the room, and of everything about it. The bow-
window looked out on the same lovely view which I had admired, in the morning, from my bedroom. The furniture
was the perfection of luxury and beauty; the table in the centre was bright with gaily bound books, elegant
conveniences for writing, and beautiful flowers; the second table, near the window, was covered with all the
necessary materials for mounting water-colour drawings, and had a little easel attached to it, which I could expand
or fold up at will; the walls were hung with gaily tinted chintz; and the floor was spread with Indian matting in
maize-colour and red. It was the prettiest and most luxurious little sitting-room I had ever seen; and I admired it with
the warmest enthusiasm.

The solemn servant was far too highly trained to betray the slightest satisfaction. He bowed with icy deference
when my terms of eulogy were all exhausted, and silently opened the door for me to go out into the passage again.

We turned a corner, and entered a long second passage, ascended a short flight of stairs at the end, crossed a
small circular upper hall, and stopped in front of a door covered with dark baize. The servant opened this door, and
led me on a few yards to a second; opened that also, and disclosed two curtains of pale sea-green silk hanging before
us; raised one of them noiselessly; softly uttered the words, "Mr. Hartright," and left me.

I found myself in a large, lofty room, with a magnificent carved ceiling, and with a carpet over the floor, so thick
and soft that it felt like piles of velvet under my feet. One side of the room was occupied by a long book-case of
some rare inlaid wood that was quite new to me. It was not more than six feet high, and the top was adorned with
statuettes in marble, ranged at regular distances one from the other. On the opposite side stood two antique cabinets;
and between them, and above them, hung a picture of the Virgin and Child, protected by glass, and bearing
Raphael's name on the gilt tablet at the bottom of the frame. On my right hand and on my left, as I stood inside the
door, were chiffoniers and little stands in buhl and marquetterie, loaded with figures in Dresden china, with rare
vases, ivory ornaments, and toys and curiosities that sparkled at all points with gold, silver, and precious stones. At
the lower end of the room, opposite to me, the windows were concealed and the sunlight was tempered by large
blinds of the same pale sea-green colour as the curtains over the door. The light thus produced was deliciously soft,
mysterious, and subdued; it fell equally upon all the objects in the room; it helped to intensify the deep silence, and
the air of profound seclusion that possessed the place; and it surrounded, with an appropriate halo of repose, the
solitary figure of the master of the house, leaning back, listlessly composed, in a large easy-chair, with a reading-
easel fastened on one of its arms, and a little table on the other.

If a man's personal appearance, when he is out of his dressing-room, and when he has passed forty, can be
accepted as a safe guide to his time of life—which is more than doubtful—Mr. Fairlie's age, when I saw him, might
have been reasonably computed at over fifty and under sixty years. His beardless face was thin, worn, and
transarently pale, but not wrinkled; his nose was high and hooked; his eyes were of a dim greyish blue, large,
prominent, and rather red round the rims of the eyelids; his hair was scanty, soft to look at, and of that light sandy
colour which is the last to disclose its own changes towards grey. He was dressed in a dark frock-coat, of some
substance much thinner than cloth, and in waistcoat and trousers of spotless white. His feet were effeminately small,
and were clad in buff-coloured silk stockings, and little womanish bronze-leather slippers. Two rings adorned his
white delicate hands, the value of which even my inexperienced observation detected to be all but priceless. Upon
the whole, he had a frail, languidly-fretful, over-refined look—something singularly and unpleasantly delicate in its
association with a man, and, at the same time, something which could by no possibility have looked natural and
appropriate if it had been transferred to the personal appearance of a woman. My morning's experience of Miss Halcombe had predisposed me to be pleased with everybody in the house; but my sympathies shut themselves up resolutely at the first sight of Mr. Fairlie.

On approaching nearer to him, I discovered that he was not so entirely without occupation as I had at first supposed. Placed amid the other rare and beautiful objects on a large round table near him, was a dwarf cabinet in ebony and silver, containing coins of all shapes and sizes, set out in little drawers lined with dark purple velvet. One of these drawers lay on the small table attached to his chair; and near it were some tiny jeweller's brushes, a wash-leather "stump," and a little bottle of liquid, all waiting to be used in various ways for the removal of any accidental impurities which might be discovered on the coins. His frail white fingers were listlessly toying with something which looked, to my uninstructed eyes, like a dirty pewter medal with ragged edges, when I advanced within a respectful distance of his chair, and stopped to make my bow.

"So glad to possess you at Limmeridge, Mr. Hartright," he said in a querulous, croaking voice, which combined, in anything but an agreeable manner, a discordantly high tone with a drowsily languid utterance. "Pray sit down. And don't trouble yourself to move the chair, please. In the wretched state of my nerves, movement of any kind is exquisitely painful to me. Have you seen your studio? Will it do?"

"I have just come from seeing the room, Mr. Fairlie; and I assure you----"

He stopped me in the middle of the sentence, by closing his eyes, and holding up one of his white hands imploringly. I paused in astonishment; and the croaking voice honoured me with this explanation--

"Pray excuse me. But could you contrive to speak in a lower key? In the wretched state of my nerves, loud sound of any kind is indescribable torture to me. You will pardon an invalid? I only say to you what the lamentable state of my health obliges me to say to everybody. Yes. And you really like the room?"

"I could wish for nothing prettier and nothing more comfortable," I answered, dropping my voice, and beginning to discover already that Mr. Fairlie's selfish affectation and Mr. Fairlie's wretched nerves meant one and the same thing.

"So glad. You will find your position here, Mr. Hartright, properly recognised. There is none of the horrid English barbarity of feeling about the social position of an artist in this house. So much of my early life has been passed abroad, that I have quite cast my insular skin in that respect. I wish I could say the same of the gentry--detestable word, but I suppose I must use it--of the gentry in the neighbourhood. They are sad Goths in Art, Mr. Hartright. People, I do assure you, who would have opened their eyes in astonishment, if they had seen Charles the Fifth pick up Titian's brush for him. Do you mind putting this tray of coins back in the cabinet, and giving me the next one to it? In the wretched state of my nerves, exertion of any kind is unspeakably disagreeable to me. Yes. Thank you."

As a practical commentary on the liberal social theory which he had just favoured me by illustrating, Mr. Fairlie's cool request rather amused me. I put back one drawer and gave him the other, with all possible politeness. He began trifling with the new set of coins and the little brushes immediately; languidly looking at them and admiring them all the time he was speaking to me.

"A thousand thanks and a thousand excuses. Do you like coins? Yes. So glad we have another taste in common besides our taste for Art. Now, about the pecuniary arrangements between us--do tell me--are they satisfactory?"

"Most satisfactory, Mr. Fairlie."

"So glad. And--what next? Ah! I remember. Yes. In reference to the consideration which you are good enough to accept for giving me the benefit of your accomplishments in art, my steward will wait on you at the end of the first week, to ascertain your wishes. And--what next? Curious, is it not? I had a great deal more to say: and I appear to have quite forgotten it. Do you mind touching the bell? In that corner. Yes. Thank you."

I rang; and a new servant noiselessly made his appearance--a foreigner, with a set smile and perfectly brushed hair--a valet every inch of him.

"Louis," said Mr. Fairlie, dreamily dusting the tips of his fingers with one of the tiny brushes for the coins, "I made some entries in my tablettes this morning. Find my tablettes. A thousand pardons, Mr. Hartright, I'm afraid I bore you."

As he wearily closed his eyes again, before I could answer, and as he did most assuredly bore me, I sat silent, and looked up at the Madonna and Child by Raphael. In the meantime, the valet left the room, and returned shortly with a little ivory book. Mr. Fairlie, after first relieving himself by a gentle sigh, let the book drop open with one hand, and held up the tiny brush with the other, as a sign to the servant to wait for further orders.

"Yes. Just so!" said Mr. Fairlie, consulting the tablettes. "Louis, take down that portfolio." He pointed, as he spoke, to several portfolios placed near the window, on mahogany stands. "No. Not the one with the green back--that contains my Rembrant etchings, Mr. Hartright. Do you like etchings? Yes? So glad we have another taste in common. The portfolio with the red back, Louis. Don't drop it! You have no idea of the tortures I should suffer, Mr.

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Hartright, if Louis dropped that portfolio. Is it safe on the chair? Do YOU think it safe, Mr. Hartright? Yes? So glad. Will you oblige me by looking at the drawings, if you really think they are quite safe. Louis, go away. What an ass you are. Don't you see me holding the tablettes? Do you suppose I want to hold them? Then why not relieve me of the tablettes without being told? A thousand pardons, Mr. Hartright; servants are such asses, are they not? Do tell me--what do you think of the drawings? They have come from a sale in a shocking state--I thought they smelt of horrid dealers' and brokers' fingers when I looked at them last. CAN you undertake them?

Although my nerves were not delicate enough to detect the odour of plebeian fingers which had offended Mr. Fairlie's nostrils, my taste was sufficiently educated to enable me to appreciate the value of the drawings, while I turned them over. They were, for the most part, really fine specimens of English water-colour art; and they had deserved much better treatment at the hands of their former possessor than they appeared to have received.

"The drawings," I answered, "require careful straining and mounting; and, in my opinion, they are well worth----"

"I beg your pardon," interposed Mr. Fairlie. "Do you mind my closing my eyes while you speak? Even this light is too much for them. Yes?"

"I was about to say that the drawings are well worth all the time and trouble----"

Mr. Fairlie suddenly opened his eyes again, and rolled them with an expression of helpless alarm in the direction of the window.

"I entreat you to excuse me, Mr. Hartright," he said in a feeble flutter. "But surely I hear some horrid children in the garden--my private garden--below?"

"I can't say, Mr. Fairlie. I heard nothing myself."

"Oblige me--you have been so very good in humouring my poor nerves--oblige me by lifting up a corner of the blind. Don't let the sun in on me, Mr. Hartright! Have you got the blind up? Yes? Then will you be so very kind as to look into the garden and make quite sure?"

I complied with this new request. The garden was carefully walled in, all round. Not a human creature, large or small, appeared in any part of the sacred seclusion. I reported that gratifying fact to Mr. Fairlie.

"A thousand thanks. My fancy, I suppose. There are no children, thank Heaven, in the house; but the servants (persons born without nerves) will encourage the children from the village. Such brats--oh, dear me, such brats! Shall I confess it, Mr. Hartright?--I sadly want a reform in the construction of children. Nature's only idea seems to be to make them machines for the production of incessant noise. Surely our delightful Raffaello's conception is infinitely preferable?"

He pointed to the picture of the Madonna, the upper part of which represented the conventional cherubs of Italian Art, celestially provided with sitting accommodation for their chins, on balloons of buff-coloured cloud.

"Quite a model family!" said Mr. Fairlie, leering at the cherubs. "Such nice round faces, and such nice soft wings, and--nothing else. No dirty little legs to run about on, and no noisy little lungs to scream with. How immeasurably superior to the existing construction! I will close my eyes again, if you will allow me. And you really can manage the drawings? So glad. Is there anything else to settle? if there is, I think I have forgotten it. Shall we ring for Louis again?"

Being, by this time, quite as anxious, on my side, as Mr. Fairlie evidently was on his, to bring the interview to a speedy conclusion, I thought I would try to render the summoning of the servant unnecessary, by offering the requisite suggestion on my own responsibility.

"The only point, Mr. Fairlie, that remains to be discussed," I said, "refers, I think, to the instruction in sketching which I am engaged to communicate to the two young ladies."

"Ah! just so," said Mr. Fairlie. "I wish I felt strong enough to go into that part of the arrangement--but I don't. The ladies who profit by your kind services, Mr. Hartright, must settle, and decide, and so on, for themselves. My niece is fond of your charming art. She knows just enough about it to be conscious of her own sad defects. Please take pains with her. Yes. Is there anything else? No. We quite understand each other--don't we? I have no right to detain you any longer from your delightful pursuit--have I? So pleasant to have settled everything--such a sensible relief to have done business. Do you mind ringing for Louis to carry the portfolio to your own room?"

"I will carry it there myself, Mr. Fairlie, if you will allow me."

"Will you really? Are you strong enough? How nice to be so strong! Are you sure you won't drop it? So glad to possess you at Limmeridge. Mr. Hartright, I am such a sufferer that I hardly dare hope to enjoy much of your society. Would you mind taking great pains not to let the doors bang, and not to drop the portfolio? Thank you. Gently with the curtains, please--the slightest noise from them goes through me like a knife. Yes. GOOD morning!"

When the sea-green curtains were closed, and when the two baize doors were shut behind me, I stopped for a moment in the little circular hall beyond, and drew a long, luxurious breath of relief. It was like coming to the surface of the water after deep diving, to find myself once more on the outside of Mr. Fairlie's room.
As soon as I was comfortably established for the morning in my pretty little studio, the first resolution at which I arrived was to turn my steps no more in the direction of the apartments occupied by the master of the house, except in the very improbable event of his honouring me with a special invitation to pay him another visit. Having settled this satisfactory plan of future conduct in reference to Mr. Fairlie, I soon recovered the serenity of temper of which my employer's haughty familiarity and impudent politeness had, for the moment, deprived me. The remaining hours of the morning passed away pleasantly enough, in looking over the drawings, arranging them in sets, trimming their ragged edges, and accomplishing the other necessary preparations in anticipation of the business of mounting them. I ought, perhaps, to have made more progress than this; but, as the luncheon-time drew near, I grew restless and unsettled, and felt unable to fix my attention on work, even though that work was only of the humble manual kind.

At two o'clock I descended again to the breakfast-room, a little anxiously. Expectations of some interest were connected with my approaching reappearance in that part of the house. My introduction to Miss Fairlie was now close at hand; and, if Miss Halcombe's search through her mother's letters had produced the result which she anticipated, the time had come for clearing up the mystery of the woman in white.

VIII

When I entered the room, I found Miss Halcombe and an elderly lady seated at the luncheon-table.

The elderly lady, when I was presented to her, proved to be Miss Fairlie's former governess, Mrs. Vesey, who had been briefly described to me by my lively companion at the breakfast-table, as possessed of "all the cardinal virtues, and counting for nothing." I can do little more than offer my humble testimony to the truthfulness of Miss Halcombe's sketch of the old lady's character. Mrs. Vesey looked the personification of human composure and female amiability. A calm enjoyment of a calm existence beamed in drowsy smiles on her plump, placid face. Some of us rush through life, and some of us saunter through life. Mrs. Vesey SAT through life. Sat in the house, early and late; sat in the garden; sat in unexpected window-seats in passages; sat (on a camp-stool) when her friends tried to take her out walking; sat before she looked at anything, before she talked of anything, before she answered Yes, or No, to the commonest question--always with the same serene smile on her lips, the same vacantly-attentive turn of the head, the same snugly-comfortable position of her hands and arms, under every possible change of domestic circumstances. A mild, a compliant, an unutterably tranquil and harmless old lady, who never by any chance suggested the idea that she had been actually alive since the hour of her birth. Nature has so much to do in this world, and is engaged in generating such a vast variety of co-existent productions, that she must surely be now and then too flurried and confused to distinguish between the different processes that she is carrying on at the same time. Starting from this point of view, it will always remain my private persuasion that Nature was absorbed in making cabbages when Mrs. Vesey was born, and that the good lady suffered the consequences of a vegetable preoccupation in the mind of the Mother of us all.

"Now, Mrs. Vesey," said Miss Halcombe, looking brighter, sharper, and readier than ever, by contrast with the undemonstrative old lady at her side, "what will you have? A cutlet?"

Mrs. Vesey crossed her dimpled hands on the edge of the table, smiled placidly, and said, "Yes, dear."

"What is that opposite Mr. Hartright? Boiled chicken, is it not? I thought you liked boiled chicken better than cutlet, Mrs. Vesey?"

Mrs. Vesey took her dimpled hands off the edge of the table and crossed them on her lap instead; nodded contemplatively at the boiled chicken, and said, "Yes, dear."

"Well, but which will you have, to-day? Shall Mr. Hartright give you some chicken? or shall I give you some cutlet?"

Mrs. Vesey put one of her dimpled hands back again on the edge of the table; hesitated dimly one moment; went out again the next; bowed obediently, and said, "If you please, sir."

Surely a mild, a compliant, an unutterably tranquil and harmless old lady! But enough, perhaps, for the present, of Mrs. Vesey.

All this time, there were no signs of Miss Fairlie. We finished our luncheon; and still she never appeared. Miss Halcombe, whose quick eye nothing escaped, noticed the looks that I cast, from time to time, in the direction of the door.

"I understand you, Mr. Hartright," she said; "you are wondering what has become of your other pupil. She has been downstairs, and has got over her headache; but has not sufficiently recovered her appetite to join us at lunch. If you will put yourself under my charge, I think I can undertake to find her somewhere in the garden."

She took up a parasol lying on a chair near her, and led the way out, by a long window at the bottom of the
room, which opened on to the lawn. It is almost unnecessary to say that we left Mrs. Vesey still seated at the table, with her dimpled hands still crossed on the edge of it; apparently settled in that position for the rest of the afternoon.

As we crossed the lawn, Miss Halcombe looked at me significantly, and shook her head.

"That mysterious adventure of yours," she said, "still remains involved in its own appropriate midnight darkness. I have been all the morning looking over my mother's letters, and I have made no discoveries yet. However, don't despair, Mr. Hartright. This is a matter of curiosity; and you have got a woman for your ally. Under such conditions success is certain, sooner or later. The letters are not exhausted. I have three packets still left, and you may confidently rely on my spending the whole evening over them."

Here, then, was one of my anticipations of the morning still unfulfilled. I began to wonder, next, whether my introduction to Miss Fairlie would disappoint the expectations that I had been forming of her since breakfast-time.

"And how did you get on with Mr. Fairlie?" inquired Miss Halcombe, as we left the lawn and turned into a shrubbery. "Was he particularly nervous this morning? Never mind considering about your answer, Mr. Hartright. The mere fact of your being obliged to consider is enough for me. I see in your face that he WAS particularly nervous; and, as I am amiably unwilling to throw you into the same condition, I ask no more."

We turned off into a winding path while she was speaking, and approached a pretty summer-house, built of wood, in the form of a miniature Swiss chalet. The one room of the summer-house, as we ascended the steps of the door, was occupied by a young lady. She was standing near a rustic table, looking out at the inland view of moor and hill presented by a gap in the trees, and absent-mindedly turning over the leaves of a little sketch-book that lay at her side. This was Miss Fairlie.

How can I describe her? How can I separate her from my own sensations, and from all that has happened in the later time? How can I see her again as she looked when my eyes first rested on her—as she should look, now, to the eyes that are about to see her in these pages?

The water-colour drawing that I made of Laura Fairlie, at an after period, in the place and attitude in which I first saw her, lies on my desk while I write. I look at it, and there dawns upon me bright, from the dark greenish-brown background of the summer-house, a light, youthful figure, clothed in a simple muslin dress, the pattern of it formed by broad alternate stripes of delicate blue and white. A scarf of the same material sits crisply and closely round her shoulders, and a little straw hat of the natural colour, plainly and sparingly trimmed with ribbon to match the gown, covers her head, and throws its soft pearly shadow over the upper part of her face. Her hair is of so faint and pale a brown—not flaxen, and yet almost as light; not golden, and yet almost as glossy—so nearly melts, here and there, into the shadow of the hat. It is plainly parted and drawn back over her ears, and the line of it ripples naturally as it crosses her forehead. The eyebrows are rather darker than the hair; and the eyes are of that soft, limpid, turquoise blue, so often sung by the poets, so seldom seen in real life. Lovely eyes in colour, lovely eyes in form—large and tender and quietly thoughtful—but beautiful above all things in the clear truthfulness of look that dwells in their inmost depths, and shines through all their changes of expression with the light of a purer and a better world. The charm—most gently and yet most distinctly expressed—which they shed over the whole face, so covers and transforms its little natural human blemishes elsewhere, that it is difficult to estimate the relative merits and defects of the other features. It is hard to see that the lower part of the face is too delicately refined away towards the chin to be in full and fair proportion with the upper part; that the nose, in escaping the aquiline bend (always hard and cruel in a woman, no matter how abstractedly perfect it may be), has erred a little in the other extreme, and has missed the ideal straightness of line; and that the sweet, sensitive lips are subject to a slight nervous contraction, when she smiles, which draws them upward a little at one corner, towards the cheek. It might be possible to note these blemishes in another woman's face but it is not easy to dwell on them in hers, so subtly are they connected with all that is individual and characteristic in her expression, and so closely does the expression depend for its full play and life, in every other feature, on the moving impulse of the eyes.

Does my poor portrait of her, my fond, patient labour of long and happy days, show me these things? Ah, how few of them are in the dim mechanical drawing, and how many in the mind with which I regard it! A fair, delicate girl, in a pretty light dress, trifling with the leaves of a sketch-book, while she looks up from it with truthful, innocent blue eyes—that is all the drawing can say; all, perhaps, that even the deeper reach of thought and pen can say in their language, either. The woman who first gives life, light, and form to our shadowy conceptions of beauty, fills a void in our spiritual nature that has remained unknown to us till she appeared. Sympathies that lie too deep for words, too deep almost for thoughts, are touched, at such times, by other charms than those which the senses feel and which the resources of expression can realise. The mystery which underlies the beauty of women is never raised above the reach of all expression until it has claimed kindred with the deeper mystery in our own souls. Then, and then only, has it passed beyond the narrow region on which light falls, in this world, from the pencil and the pen.

Think of her as you thought of the first woman who quickened the pulses within you that the rest of her sex had no art to stir. Let the kind, candid blue eyes meet yours, as they met mine, with the one matchless look which we
both remember so well. Let her voice speak the music that you once loved best, attuned as sweetly to your ear as to mine. Let her footstep, as she comes and goes, in these pages, be like that other footstep to whose airy fall your own heart once beat time. Take her as the visionary nursling of your own fancy; and she will grow upon you, all the more clearly, as the living woman who dwells in mine.

Among the sensations that crowded on me, when my eyes first looked upon her--familiar sensations which we all know, which spring to life in most of our hearts, die again in so many, and renew their bright existence in so few--there was one that troubled and perplexed me: one that seemed strangely inconsistent and unaccountably out of place in Miss Fairlie's presence.

Mingling with the vivid impression produced by the charm of her fair face and head, her sweet expression, and her winning simplicity of manner, was another impression, which, in a shadowy way, suggested to me the idea of something wanting. At one time it seemed like something wanting in HER: at another, like something wanting in myself, which hindered me from understanding her as I ought. The impression was always strongest in the most contradictory manner, when she looked at me; or, in other words, when I was most conscious of the harmony and charm of her face, and yet, at the same time, most troubled by the sense of an incompleteness which it was impossible to discover. Something wanting, something wanting--and where it was, and what it was, I could not say.

The effect of this curious caprice of fancy (as I thought it then) was not of a nature to set me at my ease, during a first interview with Miss Fairlie. The few kind words of welcome which she spoke found me hardly self-possessed enough to thank her in the customary phrases of reply. Observing my hesitation, and no doubt attributing it, naturally enough, to some momentary shyness on my part, Miss Halcombe took the business of talking, as easily and readily as usual, into her own hands.

"Look there, Mr. Hartright," she said, pointing to the sketch-book on the table, and to the little delicate wandering hand that was still trifling with it. "Surely you will acknowledge that your model pupil is found at last? The moment she hears that you are in the house, she seizes her inestimable sketch-book, looks universal Nature straight in the face, and longs to begin!"

Miss Fairlie laughed with a ready good-humour, which broke out as brightly as if it had been part of the sunshine above us, over her lovely face.

"I must not take credit to myself where no credit is due," she said, her clear, truthful blue eyes looking alternately at Miss Halcombe and at me. "Fond as I am of drawing, I am so conscious of my own ignorance that I am more afraid than anxious to begin. Now I know you are here, Mr. Hartright, I find myself looking over my sketches, as I used to look over my lessons when I was a little girl, and when I was sadly afraid that I should turn out not fit to be heard."

She made the confession very prettily and simply, and, with quaint, childish earnestness, drew the sketch-book away close to her own side of the table. Miss Halcombe cut the knot of the little embarrassment forthwith, in her resolute, downright way.

"Good, bad, or indifferent," she said, "the pupil's sketches must pass through the fiery ordeal of the master's judgment--and there's an end of it. Suppose we take them with us in the carriage, Laura, and let Mr. Hartright see them, for the first time, under circumstances of perpetual jolting and interruption? If we can only confuse him all through the drive, between Nature as it is, when he looks up at the view, and Nature as it is not when he looks down again at our sketch-books, we shall drive him into the last desperate refuge of paying us compliments, and shall slip through his professional fingers with our pet feathers of vanity all unruffled."

"I hope Mr. Hartright will pay ME no compliments," said Miss Fairlie, as we all left the summer-house.

"May I venture to inquire why you express that hope?" I asked.

"Because I shall believe all that you say to me," she answered simply.

In those few words she unconsciously gave me the key to her whole character: to that generous trust in others which, in her nature, grew innocently out of the sense of her own truth. I only knew it intuitively then. I know it by experience now.

We merely waited to rouse good Mrs. Vesey from the place which she still occupied at the deserted luncheon-table, before we entered the open carriage for our promised drive. The old lady and Miss Halcombe occupied the back seat, and Miss Fairlie and I sat together in front, with the sketch-book open between us, fairly exhibited at last to my professional eyes. All serious criticism on the drawings, even if I had been disposed to volunteer it, was rendered impossible by Miss Halcombe's lively resolution to see nothing but the ridiculous side of the Fine Arts, as practised by herself, her sister, and ladies in general. I can remember the conversation that passed far more easily than the sketches that I mechanically looked over. That part of the talk, especially, in which Miss Fairlie took any share, is still as vividly impressed on my memory as if I had heard it only a few hours ago.

Yes! let me acknowledge that on this first day I let the charm of her presence lure me from the recollection of myself and my position. The most trifling of the questions that she put to me, on the subject of using her pencil and
mixing her colours; the slightest alterations of expression in the lovely eyes that looked into mine with such an earnest desire to learn all that I could teach, and to discover all that I could show, attracted more of my attention than the finest view we passed through, or the grandest changes of light and shade, as they flowed into each other over the waving moorland and the level beach. At any time, and under any circumstances of human interest, is it not strange to see how little real hold the objects of the natural world amid which we live can gain on our hearts and minds? We go to Nature for comfort in trouble, and sympathy in joy, only in books. Admiration of those beauties of the inanimate world, which modern poetry so largely and so eloquently describes, is not, even in the best of us, one of the original instincts of our nature. As children, we none of us possess it. No un instructed man or woman possesses it. Those whose lives are most exclusively passed amid the ever-changing wonders of sea and land are also those who are most universally insensible to every aspect of Nature not directly associated with the human interest of their calling. Our capacity of appreciating the beauties of the earth we live on is, in truth, one of the civilised accomplishments which we all learn as an Art; and, more, that very capacity is rarely practised by any of us except when our minds are most indolent and most unoccupied. How much share have the attractions of Nature ever had in the pleasurable or painful interests and emotions of ourselves or our friends? What space do they ever occupy in the thousand little narratives of personal experience which pass every day by word of mouth from one of us to the other? All that our minds can compass, all that our hearts can learn, can be accomplished with equal certainty, equal profit, and equal satisfaction to ourselves, in the poorest as in the richest prospect that the face of the earth can show. There is surely a reason for this want of inborn sympathy between the creature and the creation around it, a reason which may perhaps be found in the widely-differing destinies of man and his earthly sphere. The grandest mountain prospect that the eye can range over is appointed to annihilation. The smallest human interest that the pure heart can feel is appointed to immortality.

We had been out nearly three hours, when the carriage again passed through the gates of Limmeridge House.

On our way back I had let the ladies settle for themselves the first point of view which they were to sketch, under my instructions, on the afternoon of the next day. When they withdrew to dress for dinner, and when I was alone again in my little sitting-room, my spirits seemed to leave me on a sudden. I felt ill at ease and dissatisfied with myself, I hardly knew why. Perhaps I was now conscious for the first time of having enjoyed our drive too much in the character of a guest, and too little in the character of a drawing-master. Perhaps that strange sense of something wanting, either in Miss Fairlie or in myself, which had perplexed me when I was first introduced to her, haunted me still. Anyhow, it was a relief to my spirits when the dinner-hour called me out of my solitude, and took me back to the society of the ladies of the house.

I was struck, on entering the drawing-room, by the curious contrast, rather in material than in colour, of the dresses which they now wore. While Mrs. Vesey and Miss Halcombe were richly clad (each in the manner most becoming to her age), the first in silver-grey, and the second in that delicate primrose-yellow colour which matches so well with a dark complexion and black hair, Miss Fairlie was unpretendingly and almost poorly dressed in plain white muslin. It was spotlessly pure: it was beautifully put on; but still it was the sort of dress which the wife or daughter of a poor man might have worn, and it made her, so far as externals went, look less affluent in circumstances than her own governess. At a later period, when I learnt to know more of Miss Fairlie's character, I discovered that this curious contrast, on the wrong side, was due to her natural delicacy of feeling and natural intensity of aversion to the slightest personal display of her own wealth. Neither Mrs. Vesey nor Miss Halcombe could ever induce her to let the advantage in dress desert the two ladies who were poor, to lean to the side of the one lady who was rich.

When the dinner was over we returned together to the drawing-room. Although Mr. Fairlie (emulating the magnificent condescension of the monarch who had picked up Titian's brush for him) had instructed his butler to consult my wishes in relation to the wine that I might prefer after dinner, I was resolute enough to resist the temptation of sitting in solitary grandeur among bottles of my own choosing, and sensible enough to ask the ladies' permission to leave the table with them habitually, on the civilised foreign plan, during the period of my residence at Limmeridge House.

The drawing-room, to which we had now withdrawn for the rest of the evening, was on the ground-floor, and was of the same shape and size as the breakfast-room. Large glass doors at the lower end opened on to a terrace, beautifully ornamented along its whole length with a profusion of flowers. The soft, hazy twilight was just shading leaf and blossom alike into harmony with its own sober hues as we entered the room, and the sweet evening scent of the flowers met us with its fragrant welcome through the open glass doors. Good Mrs. Vesey (always the first of the party to sit down) took possession of an arm-chair in a corner, and dozed off comfortably to sleep. At my request Miss Fairlie placed herself at the piano. As I followed her to a seat near the instrument, I saw Miss Halcombe retire into a recess of one of the side windows, to proceed with the search through her mother's letters by the last quiet rays of the evening light.
How vividly that peaceful home-picture of the drawing-room comes back to me while I write! From the place where I sat I could see Miss Halcombe's graceful figure, half of it in soft light, half in mysterious shadow, bending intently over the letters in her lap; while, nearer to me, the fair profile of the player at the piano was just delicately defined against the faintly-deepening background of the inner wall of the room. Outside, on the terrace, the clustering flowers and long grasses and creepers waved so gently in the light evening air, that the sound of their rustling never reached us. The sky was without a cloud, and the dawning mystery of moonlight began to tremble already in the region of the eastern heaven. The sense of peace and seclusion soothed all thought and feeling into a rapt, unearthly repose; and the balmy quiet, that deepened ever with the deepening light, seemed to hover over us with a gentler influence still, when there stole upon it from the piano the heavenly tenderness of the music of Mozart. It was an evening of sights and sounds never to forget.

We all sat silent in the places we had chosen--Mrs. Vesey still sleeping, Miss Fairlie still playing, Miss Halcombe still reading--till the light failed us. By this time the moon had stolen round to the terrace, and soft, mysterious rays of light were slanting already across the lower end of the room. The change from the twilight obscurity was so beautiful that we banished the lamps, by common consent, when the servant brought them in, and kept the large room unlighted, except by the glimmer of the two candles at the piano.

For half an hour more the music still went on. After that the beauty of the moonlight view on the terrace tempted Miss Fairlie out to look at it, and I followed her. When the candles at the piano had been lighted Miss Halcombe had changed her place, so as to continue her examination of the letters by their assistance. We left her, on a low chair, at one side of the instrument, so absorbed over her reading that she did not seem to notice when we moved.

We had been out on the terrace together, just in front of the glass doors, hardly so long as five minutes, I should think; and Miss Fairlie was, by my advice, just tying her white handkerchief over her head as a precaution against the night air--when I heard Miss Halcombe's voice--low, eager, and altered from its natural lively tone--pronounce my name.

"Mr. Hartright," she said, "will you come here for a minute? I want to speak to you."

I entered the room again immediately. The piano stood about half-way down along the inner wall. On the side of the instrument farthest from the terrace Miss Halcombe was sitting with the letters scattered on her lap, and with one in her hand selected from them, and held close to the candle. On the side nearest to the terrace there stood a low ottoman, on which I took my place. In this position I was not far from the glass doors, and I could see Miss Fairlie plainly, as she passed and repassed the opening on to the terrace, walking slowly from end to end of it in the full radiance of the moon.

"I want you to listen while I read the concluding passages in this letter," said Miss Halcombe. "Tell me if you think they throw any light upon your strange adventure on the road to London. The letter is addressed by my mother to her second husband, Mr. Fairlie, and the date refers to a period of between eleven and twelve years since. At that time Mr. and Mrs. Fairlie, and my half-sister Laura, had been living for years in this house; and I was away from them completing my education at a school in Paris."

She looked and spoke earnestly, and, as I thought, a little uneasily as well. At the moment when she raised the letter to the candle before beginning to read it, Miss Fairlie passed us on the terrace, looked in for a moment, and seeing that we were engaged, slowly walked on.

Miss Halcombe began to read as follows:--

"You will be tired, my dear Philip, of hearing perpetually about my schools and my scholars. Lay the blame, pray, on the dull uniformity of life at Limmeridge, and not on me. Besides, this time I have something really interesting to tell you about a new scholar.

"You know old Mrs. Kempe at the village shop. Well, after years of ailing, the doctor has at last given her up, and she is dying slowly day by day. Her only living relation, a sister, arrived last week to take care of her. This sister comes all the way from Hampshire--her name is Mrs. Catherick. Four days ago Mrs. Catherick came here to see me, and brought her only child with her, a sweet little girl about a year older than our darling Laura----""

As the last sentence fell from the reader's lips, Miss Fairlie passed us on the terrace once more. She was softly singing to herself one of the melodies which she had been playing earlier in the evening. Miss Halcombe waited till she had passed out of sight again, and then went on with the letter--

"Mrs. Catherick is a decent, well-behaved, respectable woman; middle-aged, and with the remains of having been moderately, only moderately, nice-looking. There is something in her manner and in her appearance, however, which I can't make out. She is reserved about herself to the point of downright secrecy, and there is a look in her face--I can't describe it--which suggests to me that she has something on her mind. She is altogether what you would call a walking mystery. Her errand at Limmeridge House, however, was simple enough. When she left Hampshire to nurse her sister, Mrs. Kempe, through her last illness, she had been obliged to bring her daughter with her, through having no one at home to take care of the little girl. Mrs. Kempe may die in a week's time, or may linger on for
months; and Mrs. Catherick's object was to ask me to let her daughter, Anne, have the benefit of attending my school, subject to the condition of her being removed from it to go home again with her mother, after Mrs. Kempe's death. I consented at once, and when Laura and I went out for our walk, we took the little girl (who is just eleven years old) to the school that very day."

Once more Miss Fairlie's figure, bright and soft in its snowy muslin dress--her face prettily framed by the white folds of the handkerchief which she had tied under her chin--passed by us in the moonlight. Once more Miss Halcombe waited till she was out of sight, and then went on--

"I have taken a violent fancy, Philip, to my new scholar, for a reason which I mean to keep till the last for the sake of surprising you. Her mother having told me as little about the child as she told me of herself, I was left to discover (which I did on the first day when we tried her at lessons) that the poor little thing's intellect is not developed as it ought to be at her age. Seeing this I had her up to the house the next day, and privately arranged with the doctor to come and watch her and question her, and tell me what he thought. His opinion is that she will grow out of it. But he says her careful bringing-up at school is a matter of great importance just now, because her unusual slowness in acquiring ideas implies an unusual tenacity in keeping them, when they are once received into her mind. Now, my love, you must not imagine, in your off-hand way, that I have been attaching myself to an idiot. This poor little Anne Catherick is a sweet, affectionate, grateful girl, and says the quaintest, prettiest things (as you shall judge by an instance), in the most oddly sudden, surprised, half-frightened way. Although she is dressed very neatly, her clothes show a sad want of taste in colour and pattern. So I arranged, yesterday, that some of our darling Laura's old white frocks and white hats should be altered for Anne Catherick, explaining to her that little girls of her complexion looked neater and better all in white than in anything else. She hesitated and seemed puzzled for a minute, then flushed up, and appeared to understand. Her little hand clasped mine suddenly. She kissed it, Philip, and said (oh, so earnestly!), "I will always wear white as long as I live. It will help me to remember you, ma'am, and to think that I am pleasing you still, when I go away and see you no more." This is only one specimen of the quaint things she says so prettily. Poor little soul! She shall have a stock of white frocks, made with good deep tucks, to let out for her as she grows--"

Miss Halcombe paused, and looked at me across the piano.

"Did the forlorn woman whom you met in the high-road seem young?" she asked. "Young enough to be two- or three-and-twenty?"

"Yes, Miss Halcombe, as young as that."

"And she was strangely dressed, from head to foot, all in white?"

"All in white."

While the answer was passing my lips Miss Fairlie glided into view on the terrace for the third time. Instead of proceeding on her walk, she stopped, with her back turned towards us, and, leaning on the balustrade of the terrace, looked down into the garden beyond. My eyes fixed upon the white gleam of her muslin gown and head-dress in the moonlight, and a sensation, for which I can find no name--a sensation that quickened my pulse, and raised a fluttering at my heart--began to steal over me.

"All in white?" Miss Halcombe repeated. "The most important sentences in the letter, Mr. Hartright, are those at the end, which I will read to you immediately. But I can't help dwelling a little upon the coincidence of the white costume of the woman you met, and the white frocks which produced that strange answer from my mother's little scholar. The doctor may have been wrong when he discovered the child's defects of intellect, and predicted that she would 'grow out of them.' She may never have grown out of them, and the old grateful fancy about dressing in white, which was a serious feeling to the girl, may be a serious feeling to the woman still."

I said a few words in answer--I hardly know what. All my attention was concentrated on the white gleam of Miss Fairlie's muslin dress.

"Listen to the last sentences of the letter," said Miss Halcombe. "I think they will surprise you."

As she raised the letter to the light of the candle, Miss Fairlie turned from the balustrade, looked doubtfully up and down the terrace, advanced a step towards the glass doors, and then stopped, facing us.

Meanwhile Miss Halcombe read me the last sentences to which she had referred--

"And now, my love, seeing that I am at the end of my paper, now for the real reason, the surprising reason, for my fondness for little Anne Catherick. My dear Philip, although she is not half so pretty, she is, nevertheless, by one of those extraordinary caprices of accidental resemblance which one sometimes sees, the living likeness, in her hair, her complexion, the colour of her eyes, and the shape of her face----"
in white! The doubt which had troubled my mind for hours and hours past flashed into conviction in an instant. That "something wanting" was my own recognition of the ominous likeness between the fugitive from the asylum and my pupil at Limmeridge House.

"You see it!" said Miss Halcombe. She dropped the useless letter, and her eyes flashed as they met mine. "You see it now, as my mother saw it eleven years since!"

"I see it--more unwillingly than I can say. To associate that forlorn, friendless, lost woman, even by an accidental likeness only, with Miss Fairlie, seems like casting a shadow on the future of the bright creature who stands looking at us now. Let me lose the impression again as soon as possible. Call her in, out of the dreary moonlight--pray call her in!"

"Mr. Hartright, you surprise me. Whatever women may be, I thought that men, in the nineteenth century, were above superstition."

"Pray call her in!"

"Hush, hush! She is coming of her own accord. Say nothing in her presence. Let this discovery of the likeness be kept a secret between you and me. Come in, Laura, come in, and wake Mrs. Vesey with the piano. Mr. Hartright is petitioning for some more music, and he wants it, this time, of the lightest and liveliest kind."

IX

So ended my eventful first day at Limmeridge House. Miss Halcombe and I kept our secret. After the discovery of the likeness no fresh light seemed destined to break over the mystery of the woman in white. At the first safe opportunity Miss Halcombe cautiously led her half-sister to speak of their mother, of old times, and of Anne Catherick. Miss Fairlie's recollections of the little scholar at Limmeridge were, however, only of the most vague and general kind. She remembered the likeness between herself and her mother's favourite pupil, as something which had been supposed to exist in past times; but she did not refer to the gift of the white dresses, or to the singular form of words in which the child had artlessly expressed her gratitude for them. She remembered that Anne had remained at Limmeridge for a few months only, and had then left it to go back to her home in Hampshire; but she could not say whether the mother and daughter had ever returned, or had ever been heard of afterwards. No further search, on Miss Halcombe's part, through the few letters of Mrs. Fairlie's writing which she had left unread, assisted in clearing up the uncertainties still left to perplex us. We had identified the unhappy woman whom I had met in the night-time with Anne Catherick--we had made some advance, at least, towards connecting the probably defective condition of the poor creature's intellect with the peculiarity of her being dressed all in white, and with the continuance, in her maturer years, of her childish gratitude towards Mrs. Fairlie--and there, so far as we knew at that time, our discoveries had ended.

The days passed on, the weeks passed on, and the track of the golden autumn wound its bright way visibly through the green summer of the trees. Peaceful, fast-flowing, happy time! my story glides by you now as swiftly as you once glided by me. Of all the treasures of enjoyment that you poured so freely into my heart, how much is left me that has purpose and value enough to be written on this page? Nothing but the saddest of all confessions that a man can make--the confession of his own folly.

The secret which that confession discloses should be told with little effort, for it has indirectly escaped me already. The poor weak words, which have failed to describe Miss Fairlie, have succeeded in betraying the sensations she awakened in me. It is so with us all. Our words are giants when they do us an injury, and dwarfs when they do us a service.

I loved her.

Ah! how well I know all the sadness and all the mockery that is contained in those three words. I can sigh over my mournful confession with the tenderest woman who reads it and pities me. I can laugh at it as bitterly as the hardest man who tosses it from him in contempt. I loved her! Feel for me, or despise me, I confess it with the same immovable resolution to own the truth.

Was there no excuse for me? There was some excuse to be found, surely, in the conditions under which my term of hired service was passed at Limmeridge House.

My morning hours succeeded each other calmly in the quiet and seclusion of my own room. I had just work enough to do, in mounting my employer's drawings, to keep my hands and eyes pleasurably employed, while my mind was left free to enjoy the dangerous luxury of its own unbridled thoughts. A perilous solitude, for it lasted long enough to enervate, not long enough to fortify me. A perilous solitude, for it was followed by afternoons and evenings spent, day after day and week after week alone in the society of two women, one of whom possessed all the accomplishments of grace, wit, and high-breeding, the other all the charms of beauty, gentleness, and simple truth, that can purify and subdue the heart of man. Not a day passed, in that dangerous intimacy of teacher and pupil, in which my hand was not close to Miss Fairlie's; my cheek, as we bent together over her sketch-book, almost touching hers. The more attentively she watched every movement of my brush, the more closely I was breathing the
The change meant more than this. There was a coldness in her hand, there was an unnatural immobility in her face, blue eyes looked at me, sometimes with the pity of an angel, sometimes with the innocent perplexity of a child. But together alone. I understood why the sweet sensitive lips smiled so rarely and so restrainedly now, and why the clear nervous anxiety to absorb herself in the first occupation she could seize on, whenever we happened to be left greater kindness and quicker readiness in interpreting all my wishes, before others--to constraint and sadness, and language--I am sorry for him; I am sorry for myself.

Hushed asleep first laid its weary weight on her heart, the true face owned all, and said, in its own frank, simple plainest, the truest, the kindest of all warnings, for it came silently from HER.

I should have remembered my position, and have put myself secretly on my guard. I did so, but not till it was too late. All the discretion, all the experience, which had availed me with other women, and secured me against other temptations, failed me with her. It had been my profession, for years past, to be in this close contact with young girls of all ages, and of all orders of beauty. I had accepted the position as part of my calling in life; I had trained myself to leave all the sympathies natural to my age in my employer's outer hall, as coolly as I left my umbrella there before I went upstairs. I had long since learnt to understand, composedly and as a matter of course, that my situation in life was considered a guarantee against any of my female pupils feeling more than the most ordinary interest in me, and that I was admitted among beautiful and captivating women much as a harmless domestic animal is admitted among them. This guardian experience I had gained early; this guardian experience had sternly and strictly guided me straight along my own poor narrow path, without once letting me stray aside, to the right hand or to the left. And now I and my trusty talisman were parted for the first time. Yes, my hardly-earned self-control was as completely lost to me as if I had never possessed it; lost to me, as it is lost every day to other men, in other critical situations, where women are concerned. I know, now, that I should have questioned myself from the first. I should have asked why any room in the house was better than home to me when she entered it, and barren as a desert when she went out again--why I always noticed and remembered the little changes in her dress that I had noticed and remembered in no other woman's before--why I saw her, heard her, and touched her (when we shook hands at night and morning) as I had never seen, heard, and touched any other woman in my life? I should have looked into my own heart, and found this new growth springing up there, and plucked it out while it was young. Why was this easiest, simplest work of self-culture always too much for me? The explanation has been written already in the three words that were many enough, and plain enough, for my confession. I loved her.

The days passed, the weeks passed; it was approaching the third month of my stay in Cumberland. The delicious monotony of life in our calm seclusion flowed on with me, like a smooth stream with a swimmer who glides down the current. All memory of the past, all thought of the future, all sense of the falseness and hopelessness of my own position, lay hushed within me into deceitful rest. Lulled by the Syren-song that my own heart sung to me, with eyes shut to all sight, and ears closed to all sound of danger, I drifted nearer and nearer to the fatal rocks. The warning that aroused me at last, and startled me into sudden, self-accusing consciousness of my own weakness, was the plainest, the truest, the kindest of all warnings, for it came silently from HER.

We had parted one night as usual. No word had fallen from my lips, at that time or at any time before it, that could betray me, or startle her into sudden knowledge of the truth. But when we met again in the morning, a change had come over her--a change that told me all.

I shrank then--I shrink still--from invading the innermost sanctuary of her heart, and laying it open to others, as I have laid open my own. Let it be enough to say that the time when she first surprised my secret was, I firmly believe, the time when she first surprised her own, and the time, also, when she changed towards me in the interval of one night. Her nature, too truthful to deceive others, was too noble to deceive itself. When the doubt that I had hushed asleep first laid its weary weight on her heart, the true face owned all, and said, in its own frank, simple language--I am sorry for him; I am sorry for myself.

It said this, and more, which I could not then interpret. I understood but too well the change in her manner, to greater kindness and quicker readiness in interpreting all my wishes, before others--to constraint and sadness, and nervous anxiety to absorb herself in the first occupation she could seize on, whenever we happened to be left together alone. I understood why the sweet sensitive lips smiled so rarely and so restrainedly now, and why the clear blue eyes looked at me, sometimes with the pity of an angel, sometimes with the innocent perplexity of a child. But the change meant more than this. There was a coldness in her hand, there was an unnatural immobility in her face,
there was in all her movements the mute expression of constant fear and clinging self-reproach. The sensations that I could trace to herself and to me, the unacknowledged sensations that we were feeling in common, were not these. There were certain elements of the change in her that were still secretly drawing us together, and others that were, as secretly, beginning to drive us apart.

In my doubt and perplexity, in my vague suspicion of something hidden which I was left to find by my own unaided efforts, I examined Miss Halcombe's looks and manner for enlightenment. Living in such intimacy as ours, no serious alteration could take place in any one of us which did not sympathetically affect the others. The change in Miss Fairlie was reflected in her half-sister. Although not a word escaped Miss Halcombe which hinted at an altered state of feeling towards myself, her penetrating eyes had contracted a new habit of always watching me. Sometimes the look was like suppressed anger, sometimes like suppressed dread, sometimes like neither--like nothing, in short, which I could understand. A week elapsed, leaving us all three still in this position of secret constraint towards one another. My situation, aggravated by the sense of my own miserable weakness and forgetfulness of myself, now too late awakened in me, was becoming intolerable. I felt that I must cast off the oppression under which I was living, at once and for ever--yet how to act for the best, or what to say first, was more than I could tell.

From this position of helplessness and humiliation I was rescued by Miss Halcombe. Her lips told me the bitter, the necessary, the unexpected truth; her hearty kindness sustained me under the shock of hearing it; her sense and courage turned to its right use an event which threatened the worst that could happen, to me and to others, in Limmeridge House.

X

It was on a Thursday in the week, and nearly at the end of the third month of my sojourn in Cumberland.

In the morning, when I went down into the breakfast-room at the usual hour, Miss Halcombe, for the first time since I had known her, was absent from her customary place at the table.

Miss Fairlie was out on the lawn. She bowed to me, but did not come in. Not a word had dropped from my lips, or from hers, that could unsettle either of us--and yet the same unacknowledged sense of embarrassment made us shrink alike from meeting one another alone. She waited on the lawn, and I waited in the breakfast-room, till Mrs. Vesey or Miss Halcombe came in. How quickly I should have joined her: how readily we should have shaken hands, and glided into our customary talk, only a fortnight ago.

In a few minutes Miss Halcombe entered. She had a preoccupied look, and she made her apologies for being late rather absently.

"I have been detained," she said, "by a consultation with Mr. Fairlie on a domestic matter which he wished to speak to me about."

Miss Fairlie came in from the garden, and the usual morning greeting passed between us. Her hand struck colder to mine than ever. She did not look at me, and she was very pale. Even Mrs. Vesey noticed it when she entered the room a moment after.

"I suppose it is the change in the wind," said the old lady. "The winter is coming--ah, my love, the winter is coming soon!"

In her heart and in mine it had come already!

Our morning meal--once so full of pleasant good-humoured discussion of the plans for the day--was short and silent. Miss Fairlie seemed to feel the oppression of the long pauses in the conversation, and looked appealingly to her sister to fill them up. Miss Halcombe, after once or twice hesitating and checking herself, in a most uncharacteristic manner, spoke at last.

"I have seen your uncle this morning, Laura," she said. "He thinks the purple room is the one that ought to be got ready, and he confirms what I told you. Monday is the day--not Tuesday."

While these words were being spoken Miss Fairlie looked down at the table beneath her. Her fingers moved nervously among the crumbs that were scattered on the cloth. The paleness on her cheeks spread to her lips, and the lips themselves trembled visibly. I was not the only person present who noticed this. Miss Halcombe saw it, too, and at once set us the example of rising from table.

Mrs. Vesey and Miss Fairlie left the room together. The kind sorrowful blue eyes looked at me, for a moment, with the present sadness of a coming and a long farewell. I felt the answering pang in my own heart--the pang that told me I must lose her soon, and love her the more unchangeably for the loss.

I turned towards the garden when the door had closed on her. Miss Halcombe was standing with her hat in her hand, and her shawl over her arm, by the large window that led out to the lawn, and was looking at me attentively.

"Have you any leisure time to spare," she asked, "before you begin to work in your own room?"

"Certainly, Miss Halcombe. I have always time at your service."

"I want to say a word to you in private, Mr. Hartright. Get your hat and come out into the garden. We are not likely to be disturbed there at this hour in the morning."
As we stepped out on to the lawn, one of the under-gardeners--a mere lad--passed us on his way to the house, with a letter in his hand. Miss Halcombe stopped him.

"Is that letter for me?" she asked.
"Nay, miss; it's just said to be for Miss Fairlie," answered the lad, holding out the letter as he spoke.
Miss Halcombe took it from him and looked at the address.
"A strange handwriting," she said to herself. "Who can Laura's correspondent be? Where did you get this?" she continued, addressing the gardener.
"Well, miss," said the lad, "I just got it from a woman."
"What woman?"
"A woman well stricken in age."
"Oh, an old woman. Any one you knew?"
"I canna' tak' it on mysel' to say that she was other than a stranger to me."
"Which way did she go?"
"That gate," said the under-gardener, turning with great deliberation towards the south, and embracing the whole of that part of England with one comprehensive sweep of his arm.
Curious," said Miss Halcombe; "I suppose it must be a begging-letter. There," she added, handing the letter back to the lad, "take it to the house, and give it to one of the servants. And now, Mr. Hartright, if you have no objection, let us walk this way."

She led me across the lawn, along the same path by which I had followed her on the day after my arrival at Limmeridge.

At the little summer-house, in which Laura Fairlie and I had first seen each other, she stopped, and broke the silence which she had steadily maintained while we were walking together.

"What I have to say to you I can say here."

With those words she entered the summer-house, took one of the chairs at the little round table inside, and signed to me to take the other. I suspected what was coming when she spoke to me in the breakfast-room; I felt certain of it now.

"Mr. Hartright," she said, "I am going to begin by making a frank avowal to you. I am going to say--without phrase-making, which I detest, or paying compliments, which I heartily despise--that I have come, in the course of your residence with us, to feel a strong friendly regard for you. I was predisposed in your favour when you first told me of your conduct towards that unhappy woman whom you met under such remarkable circumstances. Your management of the affair might not have been prudent, but it showed the self-control, the delicacy, and the compassion of a man who was naturally a gentleman. It made me expect good things from you, and you have not disappointed my expectations."

She paused--but held up her hand at the same time, as a sign that she awaited no answer from me before she proceeded. When I entered the summer-house, no thought was in me of the woman in white. But now, Miss Halcombe's own words had put the memory of my adventure back in my mind. It remained there throughout the interview--remained, and not without a result.

"As your friend," she proceeded, "I am going to begin by making a frank avowal to you. I am going to say--without phrase-making, which I detest, or paying compliments, which I heartily despise--that I have come, in the course of your residence with us, to feel a strong friendly regard for you. I was predisposed in your favour when you first told me of your conduct towards that unhappy woman whom you met under such remarkable circumstances. Your management of the affair might not have been prudent, but it showed the self-control, the delicacy, and the compassion of a man who was naturally a gentleman. It made me expect good things from you, and you have not disappointed my expectations."

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"As your friend," she proceeded, "I am going to tell you, at once, in my own plain, blunt, downright language, that I have discovered your secret--without help or hint, mind, from any one else. Mr. Hartright, you have thoughtlessly allowed yourself to form an attachment--a serious and devoted attachment I am afraid--to my sister Laura. I don't put you to the pain of confessing it in so many words, because I see and know that you are too honest to deny it. I don't even blame you--I pity you for opening your heart to a hopeless affection. You have not attempted to take any underhand advantage--you have not spoken to my sister in secret. You are guilty of weakness and want of attention to your own best interests, but of nothing worse. If you had acted, in any single respect, less delicately and less modestly, I should have told you to leave the house without an instant's notice, or an instant's consultation of anybody. As it is, I blame the misfortune of your years and your position--I don't blame YOU. Shake hands--I have given you pain; I am going to give you more, but there is no help for it--shake hands with your friend, Marian Halcombe, first."

The sudden kindness--the warm, high-minded, fearless sympathy which met me on such mercifully equal terms, which appealed with such delicate and generous abruptness straight to my heart, my honour, and my courage, overcame me in an instant. I tried to look at her when she took my hand, but my eyes were dim. I tried to thank her, but my voice failed me.

"Listen to me," she said, considerably avoiding all notice of my loss of self-control. "Listen to me, and let us get it over at once. It is a real true relief to me that I am not obliged, in what I have now to say, to enter into the question--the hard and cruel question as I think it--of social inequalities. Circumstances which will try you to the quick, spare me the ungracious necessity of paining a man who has lived in friendly intimacy under the same roof
with myself by any humiliating reference to matters of rank and station. You must leave Limmeridge House, Mr. Hartright, before more harm is done. It is my duty to say that to you; and it would be equally my duty to say it, under precisely the same serious necessity, if you were the representative of the oldest and wealthiest family in England. You must leave us, not because you are a teacher of drawing----"

She waited a moment, turned her face full on me, and reaching across the table, laid her hand firmly on my arm. "Not because you are a teacher of drawing," she repeated, "but because Laura Fairlie is engaged to be married."

The last word went like a bullet to my heart. My arm lost all sensation of the hand that grasped it. I never moved and never spoke. The sharp autumn breeze that scattered the dead leaves at our feet came as cold to me, on a sudden, as if my own mad hopes were dead leaves too, whirled away by the wind like the rest. Hopes! Betrothed, or not betrothed, she was equally far from me. Would other men have remembered that in my place? Not if they had loved her as I did.

The pang passed, and nothing but the dull numbing pain of it remained. I felt Miss Halcombe's hand again, tightening its hold on my arm--I raised my head and looked at her. Her large black eyes were rooted on me, watching the white change on my face, which I felt, and which she saw.

"Crush it!" she said. "Here, where you first saw her, crush it! Don't shrink under it like a woman. Tear it out; trample it under foot like a man!"

The suppressed vehemence with which she spoke, the strength which her will--concentrated in the look she fixed on me, and in the hold on my arm that she had not yet relinquished--communicated to mine, steadied me. We both waited for a minute in silence. At the end of that time I had justified her generous faith in my manhood--I had, outwardly at least, recovered my self-control.

"Are you yourself again?"

"Enough myself, Miss Halcombe, to ask your pardon and hers. Enough myself to be guided by your advice, and to prove my gratitude in that way, if I can prove it in no other."

"You have proved it already," she answered, "by those words. Mr. Hartright, concealment is at an end between us. I cannot affect to hide from you what my sister has unconsciously shown to me. You must leave us for her sake, as well as for your sake. Your presence here, your necessary intimacy with us, harmless as it has been, God knows, in all other respects, has unsteadied her and made her wretched. I, who love her better than my own life--I, who have learnt to believe in that pure, noble, innocent nature as I believe in my religion--know but too well the secret misery of self-reproach that she has been suffering since the first shadow of a feeling disloyal to her marriage engagement entered her heart in spite of her. I don't say--it would be useless to attempt to say it after what has happened--that her engagement has ever had a strong hold on her affections. It is an engagement of honour, not of love; her father sanctioned it on his deathbed, two years since; she herself neither welcomed it nor shrank from it--she was content to make it. Till you came here she was in the position of hundreds of other women, who marry men without being greatly attracted to them or greatly repelled by them, and who learn to love them (when they don't learn to hate!) after marriage, instead of before. I hope more earnestly than words can say--and you should have the self-sacrificing courage to hope too--that the new thoughts and feelings which have disturbed the old calmness and the old content have not taken root too deeply to be ever removed. Your absence (if I had less belief in your honour, and your courage, and your sense, I should not trust to them as I am trusting now) your absence will help my efforts, and time will help us all three. It is something to know that my first confidence in you was not all misplaced. It is something to know that you will not be less honest, less manly, less considerate towards the pupil whose relation to yourself you have had the misfortune to forget, than towards the stranger and the outcast whose appeal to you was not made in vain."

Again the chance reference to the woman in white! Was there no possibility of speaking of Miss Fairlie and of me without raising the memory of Anne Catherick, and setting her between us like a fatality that it was hopeless to avoid?

"Tell me what apology I can make to Mr. Fairlie for breaking my engagement," I said. "Tell me when to go after that apology is accepted. I promise implicit obedience to you and to your advice."

"Time is every way of importance," she answered. "You heard me refer this morning to Monday next, and to the necessity of setting the purple room in order. The visitor whom we expect on Monday----"

I could not wait for her to be more explicit. Knowing what I knew now, the memory of Miss Fairlie's look and manner at the breakfast-table told me that the expected visitor at Limmeridge House was her future husband. I tried to force it back; but something rose within me at that moment stronger than my own will, and I interrupted Miss Halcombe.

"Let me go to-day," I said bitterly. "The sooner the better."

"No, not to-day," she replied. "The only reason you can assign to Mr. Fairlie for your departure, before the end of your engagement, must be that an unforeseen necessity compels you to ask his permission to return at once to
London. You must wait till tomorrow to tell him that, at the time when the post comes in, because he will then understand the sudden change in your plans, by associating it with the arrival of a letter from London. It is miserable and sickening to descend to deceit, even of the most harmless kind—but I know Mr. Fairlie, and if you once excite his suspicions that you are trifling with him, he will refuse to release you. Speak to him on Friday morning: occupy yourself afterwards (for the sake of your own interests with your employer) in leaving your unfinished work in as little confusion as possible, and quit this place on Saturday. It will be time enough then, Mr. Hartright, for you, and for all of us."

Before I could assure her that she might depend on my acting in the strictest accordance with her wishes, we were both startled by advancing footsteps in the shrubbery. Some one was coming from the house to seek for us! I felt the blood rush into my cheeks and then leave them again. Could the third person who was fast approaching us, at such a time and under such circumstances, be Miss Fairlie?

It was a relief—so sadly, so hopelessly was my position towards her changed already—it was absolutely a relief to me, when the person who had disturbed us appeared at the entrance of the summer-house, and proved to be only Miss Fairlie's maid.

"Could I speak to you for a moment, miss?" said the girl, in rather a flurried, unsettled manner.

Miss Halcombe descended the steps into the shrubbery, and walked aside a few paces with the maid.

Left by myself, my mind reverted, with a sense of forlorn wretchedness which it is not in any words that I can find to describe, to my approaching return to the solitude and the despair of my lonely London home. Thoughts of my kind old mother, and of my sister, who had rejoiced with her so innocently over my prospects in Cumberland—thoughts whose long banishment from my heart it was now my shame and my reproach to realise for the first time—came back to me with the loving mournfulness of old, neglected friends. My mother and my sister, what would they feel when I returned to them from my broken engagement, with the confession of my miserable secret—they who had parted from me so hopefully on that last happy night in the Hampstead cottage!

Anne Catherick again! Even the memory of the farewell evening with my mother and my sister could not return to me now unconnected with that other memory of the moonlight walk back to London. What did it mean? Were that woman and I to meet once more? It was possible, at the least. Did she know that I lived in London? Yes; I had told her so, either before or after that strange question of hers, when she had asked me so distrustfully if I knew many men of the rank of Baronet. Either before or after—my mind was not calm enough, then, to remember which.

A few minutes elapsed before Miss Halcombe dismissed the maid and came back to me. She, too, looked flurried and unsettled now.

"We have arranged all that is necessary, Mr. Hartright," she said. "We have understood each other, as friends should, and we may go back at once to the house. To tell you the truth, I am uneasy about Laura. She has sent to say she wants to see me directly, and the maid reports that her mistress is apparently very much agitated by a letter that she has received this morning—the same letter, no doubt, which I sent on to the house before we came here."

We retraced our steps together hastily along the shrubbery path. Although Miss Halcombe had ended all that she thought it necessary to say on her side, I had not ended all that I wanted to say on mine. From the moment when I had discovered that the expected visitor at Limmeridge was Miss Fairlie's future husband, I had felt a bitter curiosity, a burning envious eagerness, to know who he was. It was possible that a future opportunity of putting the question might not easily offer, so I risked asking it on our way back to the house.

"Now that you are kind enough to tell me we have understood each other, Miss Halcombe," I said, "now that you are sure of my gratitude for your forbearance and my obedience to your wishes, may I venture to ask who"—(I hesitated—I had forced myself to think of him, but it was harder still to speak of him, as her promised husband)—"who the gentleman engaged to Miss Fairlie is?"

Her mind was evidently occupied with the message she had received from her sister. She answered in a hasty, absent way—

"A gentleman of large property in Hampshire."

Hampshire! Anne Catherick's native place. Again, and yet again, the woman in white. There WAS a fatality in it."

"And his name?" I said, as quietly and indifferently as I could.

"Sir Percival Glyde."

SIR--Sir Percival! Anne Catherick's question—that suspicious question about the men of the rank of Baronet whom I might happen to know—had hardly been dismissed from my mind by Miss Halcombe's return to me in the summer-house, before it was recalled again by her own answer. I stopped suddenly, and looked at her.

"Sir Percival Glyde," she repeated, imagining that I had not heard her former reply.

"Knight, or Baronet?" I asked, with an agitation that I could hide no longer.

She paused for a moment, and then answered, rather coldly—

"Baronet, of course."
XI

Not a word more was said, on either side, as we walked back to the house. Miss Halcombe hastened immediately to her sister's room, and I withdrew to my studio to set in order all of Mr. Fairlie's drawings that I had not yet mounted and restored before I resigned them to the care of other hands. Thoughts that I had hitherto restrained, thoughts that made my position harder than ever to endure, crowded on me now that I was alone.

She was engaged to be married, and her future husband was Sir Percival Glyde. A man of the rank of Baronet, and the owner of property in Hampshire.

There were hundreds of baronets in England, and dozens of landowners in Hampshire. Judging by the ordinary rules of evidence, I had not the shadow of a reason, thus far, for connecting Sir Percival Glyde with the suspicious words of inquiry that had been spoken to me by the woman in white. And yet, I did connect him with them. Was it because he had now become associated in my mind with Miss Fairlie, Miss Fairlie being, in her turn, associated with Anne Catherick, since the night when I had discovered the ominous likeness between them? Had the events of the morning so unnerved me already that I was at the mercy of any delusion which common chances and common coincidences might suggest to my imagination? Impossible to say. I could only feel that what had passed between Miss Halcombe and myself, on our way from the summer-house, had affected me very strangely. The foreboding of some undiscoverable danger lying hid from us all in the darkness of the future was strong on me. The doubt whether I was not linked already to a chain of events which even my approaching departure from Cumberland would be powerless to snap asunder--the doubt whether we any of us saw the end as the end would really be--gathered more and more darkly over my mind. Poignant as it was, the sense of suffering caused by the miserable end of my brief, presumptuous love seemed to be blunted and deadened by the still stronger sense of something obscurely impending, something invisibly threatening, that Time was holding over our heads.

I had been engaged with the drawings little more than half an hour, when there was a knock at the door. It opened, on my answering; and, to my surprise, Miss Halcombe entered the room.

Her manner was angry and agitated. She caught up a chair for herself before I could give her one, and sat down in it, close at my side.

"Mr. Hartright," she said, "I had hoped that all painful subjects of conversation were exhausted between us, for to-day at least. But it is not to be so. There is some underhand villainy at work to frighten my sister about her approaching marriage. You saw me send the gardener on to the house, with a letter addressed, in a strange handwriting, to Miss Fairlie?"

"Certainly."

"The letter is an anonymous letter--a vile attempt to injure Sir Percival Glyde in my sister's estimation. It has so agitated and alarmed her that I have had the greatest possible difficulty in composing her spirits sufficiently to allow me to leave her room and come here. I know this is a family matter on which I ought not to consult you, and in which you can feel no concern or interest----"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Halcombe. I feel the strongest possible concern and interest in anything that affects Miss Fairlie's happiness or yours."

"I am glad to hear you say so. You are the only person in the house, or out of it, who can advise me. Mr. Fairlie, in his state of health and with his horror of difficulties and mysteries of all kinds, is not to be thought of. The clergyman is a good, weak man, who knows nothing out of the routine of his duties; and our neighbours are just the sort of comfortable, jog-trot acquaintances whom one cannot disturb in times of trouble and danger. What I want to know is this: ought I at once to take such steps as I can to discover the writer of the letter? or ought I to wait, and apply to Mr. Fairlie's legal adviser to-morrow? It is a question--perhaps a very important one--of gaining or losing a day. Tell me what you think, Mr. Hartright. If necessity had not already obliged me to take you into my confidence under very delicate circumstances, even my helpless situation would, perhaps, be no excuse for me. But as things are I cannot surely be wrong, after all that has passed between us, in forgetting that you are a friend of only three months' standing."

She gave me the letter. It began abruptly, without any preliminary form of address, as follows--

"Do you believe in dreams? I hope, for your own sake, that you do. See what Scripture says about dreams and their fulfilment (Genesis xl. 8, xli. 25; Daniel iv. 18-25), and take the warning I send you before it is too late.

"Last night I dreamed about you, Miss Fairlie. I dreamed that I was standing inside the communion rails of a church--I on one side of the altar-table, and the clergyman, with his surplice and his prayer-book, on the other.

"After a time there walked towards us, down the aisle of the church, a man and a woman, coming to be married. You were the woman. You looked so pretty and innocent in your beautiful white silk dress, and your long white lace veil, that my heart felt for you, and the tears came into my eyes.

"They were tears of pity, young lady, that heaven blesses and instead of falling from my eyes like the everyday tears that we all of us shed, they turned into two rays of light which slanted nearer and nearer to the man standing at
the altar with you, till they touched his breast. The two rays sprang ill arches like two rainbows between me and him. I looked along them, and I saw down into his inmost heart.

"The outside of the man you were marrying was fair enough to see. He was neither tall nor short—he was a little below the middle size. A light, active, high-spirited man—about five-and-forty years old, to look at. He had a pale face, and was bald over the forehead, but had dark hair on the rest of his head. His beard was shaven on his chin, but was let to grow, of a fine rich brown, on his cheeks and his upper lip. His eyes were brown too, and very bright; his nose straight and handsome and delicate enough to have done for a woman's. His hands the same. He was troubled from time to time with a dry hacking cough, and when he put up his white right hand to his mouth, he showed the red scar of an old wound across the back of it. Have I dreamt of the right man? You know best, Miss Fairlie and you can say if I was deceived or not. Read next, what I saw beneath the outside—I entreat you, read, and profit.

"I looked along the two rays of light, and I saw down into his inmost heart. It was black as night, and on it were written, in the red flaming letters which are the handwriting of the fallen angel, 'Without pity and without remorse. He has strewn with misery the paths of others, and he will live to strewn with misery the path of this woman by his side.' I read that, and then the rays of light shifted and pointed over his shoulder; and there, behind him, stood a fiend laughing. And the rays of light shifted once more, and pointed over your shoulder; and there behind you, stood an angel weeping. And the rays of light shifted for the third time, and pointed straight between you and that man. They widened and widened, thrusting you both asunder, one from the other. And the clergyman looked for the marriage-service in vain: it was gone out of the book, and he shut up the leaves, and put it from him in despair. And I woke with my eyes full of tears and my heart beating—for I believe in dreams.

"Believe too, Miss Fairlie—I beg of you, for your own sake, believe as I do. Joseph and Daniel, and others in Scripture, believed in dreams. Inquire into the past life of that man with the scar on his hand, before you say the words that make you his miserable wife. I don't give you this warning on my account, but on yours. I have an interest in your well-being that will live as long as I draw breath. Your mother's daughter has a tender place in my heart—for your mother was my first, my best, my only friend."

There the extraordinary letter ended, without signature of any sort.

The handwriting afforded no prospect of a clue. It was traced on ruled lines, in the cramped, conventional, copy-book character technically termed "small hand." It was feeble and faint, and defaced by blots, but had otherwise nothing to distinguish it.

"That is not an illiterate letter," said Miss Halcombe, "and at the same time, it is surely too incoherent to be the letter of an educated person in the higher ranks of life. The reference to the bridal dress and veil, and other little expressions, seem to point to it as the production of some woman. What do you think, Mr. Hartright?"

"I think so too. It seems to me to be not only the letter of a woman, but of a woman whose mind must be----"

"Deranged?" suggested Miss Halcombe. "It struck me in that light too."

I did not answer. While I was speaking, my eyes rested on the last sentence of the letter: "Your mother's daughter has a tender place in my heart—for your mother was my first, my best, my only friend." Those words and the doubt which had just escaped me as to the sanity of the writer of the letter, acting together on my mind, suggested an idea, which I was literally afraid to express openly, or even to encourage secretly. I began to doubt whether my own faculties were not in danger of losing their balance. It seemed almost like a monomania to be tracing back everything strange that happened, everything unexpected that was said, always to the same hidden source and the same sinister influence. I resolved, this time, in defence of my own courage and my own sense, to come to no decision that plain fact did not warrant, and to turn my back resolutely on everything that tempted me in the shape of surmise.

"If we have any chance of tracing the person who has written this," I said, returning the letter to Miss Halcombe, "there can be no harm in seizing our opportunity the moment it offers. I think we ought to speak to the gardener again about the elderly woman who gave him the letter, and then to continue our inquiries in the village. But first let me ask a question. You mentioned just now the alternative of consulting Mr. Fairlie's legal adviser to-morrow. Is there no possibility of communicating with him earlier? Why not to-day?"

"I can only explain," replied Miss Halcombe, "by entering into certain particulars, connected with my sister's marriage-engagement, which I did not think it necessary or desirable to mention to you this morning. One of Sir Percival Glyde's objects in coming here on Monday, is to fix the period of his marriage, which has hitherto been left quite unsettled. He is anxious that the event should take place before the end of the year."

"Does Miss Fairlie know of that wish?" I asked eagerly.

"She has no suspicion of it, and after what has happened, I shall not take the responsibility upon myself of enlightening her. Sir Percival has only mentioned his views to Mr. Fairlie, who has told me himself that he is ready and anxious, as Laura's guardian, to forward them. He has written to London, to the family solicitor, Mr. Gilmore. Mr. Gilmore happens to be away in Glasgow on business, and he has replied by proposing to stop at Limmeridge
House on his way back to town. He will arrive to-morrow, and will stay with us a few days, so as to allow Sir Percival time to plead his own cause. If he succeeds, Mr. Gilmore will then return to London, taking with him his instructions for my sister's marriage-settlement. You understand now, Mr. Hartright, why I speak of waiting to take legal advice until to-morrow? Mr. Gilmore is the old and tried friend of two generations of Fairlies, and we can trust him, as we could trust no one else."

The marriage-settlement! The mere hearing of those two words stung me with a jealous despair that was poison to my higher and better instincts. I began to think--it is hard to confess this, but I must suppress nothing from beginning to end of the terrible story that I now stand committed to reveal--I began to think, with a hateful eagerness of hope, of the vague charges against Sir Percival Glyde which the anonymous letter contained. What if those wild accusations rested on a foundation of truth? What if their truth could be proved before the fatal words of consent were spoken, and the marriage-settlement was drawn? I have tried to think since, that the feeling which then animated me began and ended in pure devotion to Miss Fairlie's interests, but I have never succeeded in deceiving myself into believing it, and I must not now attempt to deceive others. The feeling began and ended in reckless, vindictive, hopeless hatred of the man who was to marry her.

"If we are to find out anything," I said, speaking under the new influence which was now directing me, "we had better not let another minute slip by us unemployed. I can only suggest, once more, the propriety of questioning the gardener a second time, and of inquiring in the village immediately afterwards."

"I think I may be of help to you in both cases," said Miss Halcombe, rising. "Let us go, Mr. Hartright, at once, and do the best we can together."

I had the door in my hand to open it for her--but I stopped, on a sudden, to ask an important question before we set forth.

"One of the paragraphs of the anonymous letter," I said, "contains some sentences of minute personal description. Sir Percival Glyde's name is not mentioned, I know--but does that description at all resemble him?"

"Accurately--even in stating his age to be forty-five--"

Forty-five; and she was not yet twenty-one! Men of his age married wives of her age every day--and experience had shown those marriages to be often the happiest ones. I knew that--and yet even the mention of his age, when I contrasted it with hers, added to my blind hatred and distrust of him.

"Accurately," Miss Halcombe continued, "even to the scar on his right hand, which is the scar of a wound that he received years since when he was travelling in Italy. There can be no doubt that every peculiarity of his personal appearance is thoroughly well known to the writer of the letter."

"Even a cough that he is troubled with is mentioned, if I remember right?"

"Yes, and mentioned correctly. He treats it lightly himself, though it sometimes makes his friends anxious about him."

"I suppose no whispers have ever been heard against his character?"

"Mr. Hartright! I hope you are not unjust enough to let that infamous letter influence you?"

I felt the blood rush into my cheeks, for I knew that it HAD influenced me.

"I hope not," I answered confusedly. "Perhaps I had no right to ask the question."

"I am not sorry you asked it," she said, "for it enables me to do justice to Sir Percival's reputation. Not a whisper, Mr. Hartright, has ever reached me, or my family, against him. He has fought successfully two contested elections, and has come out of the ordeal unscathed. A man who can do that, in England, is a man whose character is established."

I opened the door for her in silence, and followed her out. She had not convinced me. If the recording angel had come down from heaven to confirm her, and had opened his book to my mortal eyes, the recording angel would not have convinced me.

We found the gardener at work as usual. No amount of questioning could extract a single answer of any importance from the lad's impenetrable stupidity. The woman who had given him the letter was an elderly woman; she had not spoken a word to him, and she had gone away towards the south in a great hurry. That was all the gardener could tell us.

The village lay southward of the house. So to the village we went next.

XII

Our inquiries at Limmeridge were patiently pursued in all directions, and among all sorts and conditions of people. But nothing came of them. Three of the villagers did certainly assure us that they had seen the woman, but as they were quite unable to describe her, and quite incapable of agreeing about the exact direction in which she was proceeding when they last saw her, these three bright exceptions to the general rule of total ignorance afforded no more real assistance to us than the mass of their unhelpful and unobservant neighbours.

The course of our useless investigations brought us, in time, to the end of the village at which the schools
established by Mrs. Fairlie were situated. As we passed the side of the building appropriated to the use of the boys, I suggested the propriety of making a last inquiry of the schoolmaster, whom we might presume to be, in virtue of his office, the most intelligent man in the place.

"I am afraid the schoolmaster must have been occupied with his scholars," said Miss Halcombe, "just at the time when the woman passed through the village and returned again. However, we can but try."

We entered the playground enclosure, and walked by the schoolroom window to get round to the door, which was situated at the back of the building. I stopped for a moment at the window and looked in.

The schoolmaster was sitting at his high desk, with his back to me, apparently haranguing the pupils, who were all gathered together in front of him, with one exception. The one exception was a sturdy white-headed boy, standing apart from all the rest on a stool in a corner—a forlorn little Crusoe, isolated in his own desert island of solitary penal disgrace.

The door, when we got round to it, was ajar, and the schoolmaster's voice reached us plainly, as we both stopped for a minute under the porch.

"Now, boys," said the voice, "mind what I tell you. If I hear another word spoken about ghosts in this school, it will be the worse for all of you. There are no such things as ghosts, and therefore any boy who believes in ghosts believes in what can't possibly be; and a boy who belongs to Limmeridge School, and believes in what can't possibly be, sets up his back against reason and discipline, and must be punished accordingly. You all see Jacob Postlethwaite standing up on the stool there in disgrace. He has been punished, not because he said he saw a ghost last night, but because he is too impudent and too obstinate to listen to reason, and because he persists in saying he saw the ghost after I have told him that no such thing can possibly be. If nothing else will do, I mean to cane the ghost out of Jacob Postlethwaite, and if the thing spreads among any of the rest of you, I mean to go a step farther, and cane the ghost out of the whole school."

"We seem to have chosen an awkward moment for our visit," said Miss Halcombe, pushing open the door at the end of the schoolmaster's address, and leading the way in.

Our appearance produced a strong sensation among the boys. They appeared to think that we had arrived for the express purpose of seeing Jacob Postlethwaite caned.

"Go home all of you to dinner," said the schoolmaster, "except Jacob. Jacob must stop where he is; and the ghost may bring him his dinner, if the ghost pleases."

Jacob's fortitude deserted him at the double disappearance of his schoolfellows and his prospect of dinner. He took his hands out of his pockets, looked hard at his knuckles, raised them with great deliberation to his eyes, and when they got there, ground them round and round slowly, accompanying the action by short spasms of sniffing, which followed each other at regular intervals—the nasal minute guns of juvenile distress.

"We came here to ask you a question, Mr. Dempster," said Miss Halcombe, addressing the schoolmaster; "and we little expected to find you occupied in exorcising a ghost. What does it all mean? What has really happened?"

"That wicked boy has been frightening the whole school, Miss Halcombe, by declaring that he saw a ghost yesterday evening," answered the master; "and he still persists in his absurd story, in spite of all that I can say to him."

"Most extraordinary," said Miss Halcombe "I should not have thought it possible that any of the boys had imagination enough to see a ghost. This is a new accession indeed to the hard labour of forming the youthful mind at Limmeridge, and I heartily wish you well through it, Mr. Dempster. In the meantime, let me explain why you see me here, and what it is I want."

She then put the same question to the schoolmaster which we had asked already of almost every one else in the village. It was met by the same discouraging answer Mr. Dempster had not set eyes on the stranger of whom we were in search.

"We may as well return to the house, Mr. Hartright," said Miss Halcombe; "the information we want is evidently not to be found."

She had bowed to Mr. Dempster, and was about to leave the schoolroom, when the forlorn position of Jacob Postlethwaite, piteously sniffing on the stool of penitence, attracted her attention as she passed him, and made her stop good-humouredly to speak a word to the little prisoner before she opened the door.

"You foolish boy," she said, "why don't you beg Mr. Dempster's pardon, and hold your tongue about the ghost?"

"Eh!—but I saw t' ghaist," persisted Jacob Postlethwaite, with a stare of terror and a burst of tears.

"Stuff and nonsense! You saw nothing of the kind. Ghost indeed! What ghost----"

"I beg your pardon, Miss Halcombe," interposed the schoolmaster a little uneasily—"but I think you had better not question the boy. The obstinate folly of his story is beyond all belief; and you might lead him into ignorantly----"

"Ignorantly what?" inquired Miss Halcombe sharply.

"Ignorantly shocking your feelings," said Mr. Dempster, looking very much decomposed.
"Upon my word, Mr. Dempster, you pay my feelings a great compliment in thinking them weak enough to be shocked by such an urchin as that!" She turned with an air of satirical defiance to little Jacob, and began to question him directly. "Come!" she said, "I mean to know all about this. You naughty boy, when did you see the ghost?"

"Yestere'en, at the gloaming," replied Jacob.

"Oh! you saw it yesterday evening, in the twilight? And what was it like?"

"Arl in white--as a ghast should be," answered the ghost-seer, with a confidence beyond his years.

"And where was it?"

"Away yander, in t' kirkyard--where a ghast ought to be."

"As a 'ghast' should be--where a 'ghast' ought to be--why, you little fool, you talk as if the manners and customs of ghosts had been familiar to you from your infancy! You have got your story at your fingers' ends, at any rate. I suppose I shall hear next that you can actually tell me whose ghost it was?"

"Eh! but I just can," replied Jacob, nodding his head with an air of gloomy triumph.

Mr. Dempster had already tried several times to speak while Miss Halcombe was examining his pupil, and he now interposed resolutely enough to make himself heard.

"Excuse me, Miss Halcombe," he said, "if I venture to say that you are only encouraging the boy by asking him these questions."

"I will merely ask one more, Mr. Dempster, and then I shall be quite satisfied. Well," she continued, turning to the boy, "and whose ghost was it?"

"T' ghast of Mistress Fairlie," answered Jacob in a whisper.

The effect which this extraordinary reply produced on Miss Halcombe fully justified the anxiety which the schoolmaster had shown to prevent her from hearing it. Her face crimsoned with indignation--she turned upon little Jacob with an angry suddenness which terrified him into a fresh burst of tears--opened her lips to speak to him--then controlled herself, and addressed the master instead of the boy.

"It is useless," she said, "to hold such a child as that responsible for what he says. I have little doubt that the idea has been put into his head by others. If there are people in this village, Mr. Dempster, who have forgotten the respect and gratitude due from every soul in it to my mother's memory, I will find them out, and if I have any influence with Mr. Fairlie, they shall suffer for it."

"I hope--indeed, I am sure, Miss Halcombe--that you are mistaken," said the schoolmaster. "The matter begins and ends with the boy's own perversity and folly. He saw, or thought he saw, a woman in white, yesterday evening, as he was passing the churchyard; and the figure, real or fancied, was standing by the marble cross, which he and every one else in Limmeridge knows to be the monument over Mrs. Fairlie's grave. These two circumstances are surely sufficient to have suggested to the boy himself the answer which has so naturally shocked you?"

Although Miss Halcombe did not seem to be convinced, she evidently felt that the schoolmaster's statement of the case was too sensible to be openly combated. She merely replied by thanking him for his attention, and by promising to see him again when her doubts were satisfied. This said, she bowed, and led the way out of the schoolroom.

Throughout the whole of this strange scene I had stood apart, listening attentively, and drawing my own conclusions. As soon as we were alone again, Miss Halcombe asked me if I had formed any opinion on what I had heard.

"A very strong opinion," I answered; "the boy's story, as I believe, has a foundation in fact. I confess I am anxious to see the monument over Mrs. Fairlie's grave, and to examine the ground about it."

"You shall see the grave."

She paused after making that reply, and reflected a little as we walked on. "What has happened in the schoolroom," she resumed, "has so completely distracted my attention from the subject of the letter, that I feel a little bewildered when I try to return to it. Must we give up all idea of making any further inquiries, and wait to place the thing in Mr. Gilmore's hands to-morrow?"

"By no means, Miss Halcombe. What has happened in the schoolroom encourages me to persevere in the investigation."

"Why does it encourage you?"

"Because it strengthens a suspicion I felt when you gave me the letter to read."

"I suppose you had your reasons, Mr. Hartright, for concealing that suspicion from me till this moment?"

"I was afraid to encourage it in myself. I thought it was utterly preposterous--I distrusted it as the result of some perversity in my own imagination. But I can do so no longer. Not only the boy's own answers to your questions, but even a chance expression that dropped from the schoolmaster's lips in explaining his story, have forced the idea back into my mind. Events may yet prove that idea to be a delusion, Miss Halcombe; but the belief is strong in me, at this moment, that the fancied ghost in the churchyard, and the writer of the anonymous letter, are one and the same
She stopped, turned pale, and looked me eagerly in the face.
"What person?"
"The schoolmaster unconsciously told you. When he spoke of the figure that the boy saw in the churchyard he called it 'a woman in white.'"
"Not Anne Catherick?"
"Yes, Anne Catherick."
She put her hand through my arm and leaned on it heavily.
"I don't know why," she said in low tones, "but there is something in this suspicion of yours that seems to startle and unnerve me. I feel----" She stopped, and tried to laugh it off. "Mr. Hartright," she went on, "I will show you the grave, and then go back at once to the house. I had better not leave Laura too long alone. I had better go back and sit with her."

We were close to the churchyard when she spoke. The church, a dreary building of grey stone, was situated in a little valley, so as to be sheltered from the bleak winds blowing over the moorland all round it. The burial-ground advanced, from the side of the church, a little way up the slope of the hill. It was surrounded by a rough, low stone wall, and was bare and open to the sky, except at one extremity, where a brook trickled down the stony hill-side, and a clump of dwarf trees threw their narrow shadows over the short, meagre grass. Just beyond the brook and the trees, and not far from one of the three stone stiles which afforded entrance, at various points, to the churchyard, rose the white marble cross that distinguished Mrs. Fairlie's grave from the humbler monuments scattered about it.

"I need go no farther with you," said Miss Halcombe, pointing to the grave. "You will let me know if you find anything to confirm the idea you have just mentioned to me. Let us meet again at the house."

She left me. I descended at once to the churchyard, and crossed the stile which led directly to Mrs. Fairlie's grave.

The grass about it was too short, and the ground too hard, to show any marks of footsteps. Disappointed thus far, I next looked attentively at the cross, and at the square block of marble below it, on which the inscription was cut.

The natural whiteness of the cross was a little clouded, here and there, by weather stains, and rather more than one half of the square block beneath it, on the side which bore the inscription, was in the same condition. The other half, however, attracted my attention at once by its singular freedom from stain or impurity of any kind. I looked closer, and saw that it had been cleaned--recently cleaned, in a downward direction from top to bottom. The boundary line between the part that had been cleaned and the part that had not was traceable wherever the inscription left a blank space of marble--sharply traceable as a line that had been produced by artificial means. Who had begun the cleansing of the marble, and who had left it unfinished?

I looked about me, wondering how the question was to be solved. No sign of a habitation could be discerned from the point at which I was standing--the burial-ground was left in the lonely possession of the dead. I returned to the church, and walked round it till I came to the back of the building; then crossed the boundary wall beyond, by another of the stone stiles, and found myself at the head of a path leading down into a deserted stone quarry. Against one side of the quarry a little two-room cottage was built, and just outside the door an old woman was engaged in washing.

I walked up to her, and entered into conversation about the church and burial-ground. She was ready enough to talk, and almost the first words she said informed me that her husband filled the two offices of clerk and sexton. I said a few words next in praise of Mrs. Fairlie's monument. The old woman shook her head, and told me I had not seen it at its best. It was her husband's business to look after it, but he had been so ailing and weak for months and months past, that he had hardly been able to crawl into church on Sundays to do his duty, and the monument had been neglected in consequence. He was getting a little better now, and in a week or ten days' time he hoped to be strong enough to set to work and clean it.

This information--extracted from a long rambling answer in the broadest Cumberland dialect--told me all that I most wanted to know. I gave the poor woman a trifle, and returned at once to Limmeridge House.

The partial cleansing of the monument had evidently been accomplished by a strange hand. Connecting what I had discovered, thus far, with what I had suspected after hearing the story of the ghost seen at twilight, I wanted nothing more to confirm my resolution to watch Mrs. Fairlie's grave, in secret, that evening, returning to it at sunset, and waiting within sight of it till the night fell. The work of cleansing the monument had been left unfinished, and the person by whom it had been begun might return to complete it.

On getting back to the house I informed Miss Halcombe of what I intended to do. She looked surprised and uneasy while I was explaining my purpose, but she made no positive objection to the execution of it. She only said, "I hope it may end well."

Just as she was leaving me again, I stopped her to inquire, as calmly as I could, after Miss Fairlie's health. She
was in better spirits, and Miss Halcombe hoped she might be induced to take a little walking exercise while the afternoon sun lasted.

I returned to my own room to resume setting the drawings in order. It was necessary to do this, and doubly necessary to keep my mind employed on anything that would help to distract my attention from myself, and from the hopeless future that lay before me. From time to time I paused in my work to look out of window and watch the sky as the sun sank nearer and nearer to the horizon. On one of those occasions I saw a figure on the broad gravel walk under my window. It was Miss Fairlie.

I had not seen her since the morning, and I had hardly spoken to her then. Another day at Limmeridge was all that remained to me, and after that day my eyes might never look on her again. This thought was enough to hold me at the window. I had sufficient consideration for her to arrange the blind so that she might not see me if she looked up, but I had no strength to resist the temptation of letting my eyes, at least, follow her as far as they could on her walk.

She was dressed in a brown cloak, with a plain black silk gown under it. On her head was the same simple straw hat which she had worn on the morning when we first met. A veil was attached to it now which hid her face from me. By her side trotted a little Italian greyhound, the pet companion of all her walks, smartly dressed in a scarlet cloth wrapper, to keep the sharp air from his delicate skin. She did not seem to notice the dog. She walked straight forward, with her head drooping a little, and her arms folded in her cloak. The dead leaves, which had whirled in the wind before me when I had heard of her marriage engagement in the morning, whirled in the wind before her, and rose and fell and scattered themselves at her feet as she walked on in the pale waning sunlight. The dog shivered and trembled, and pressed against her dress impatiently for notice and encouragement. But she never heeded him. She walked on, farther and farther away from me, with the dead leaves whirling about her on the path--walked on, till my aching eyes could see her no more, and I was left alone again with my own heavy heart.

In another hour's time I had done my work, and the sunset was at hand. I got my hat and coat in the hall, and slipped out of the house without meeting any one.

The clouds were wild in the western heaven, and the wind blew chill from the sea. Far as the shore was, the sound of the surf swept over the intervening moorland, and beat drearily in my ears when I entered the churchyard. Not a living creature was in sight. The place looked lonelier than ever as I chose my position, and waited and watched, with my eyes on the white cross that rose over Mrs. Fairlie's grave.

XIII

The exposed situation of the churchyard had obliged me to be cautious in choosing the position that I was to occupy.

The main entrance to the church was on the side next to the burial-ground, and the door was screened by a porch walled in on either side. After some little hesitation, caused by natural reluctance to conceal myself, indispensable as that concealment was to the object in view, I had resolved on entering the porch. A loophole window was pierced in each of its side walls. Through one of these windows I could see Mrs. Fairlie's grave. The other looked towards the stone quarry in which the sexton's cottage was built. Before me, facing the porch entrance, was a patch of bare burial-ground, a line of low stone wall, and a strip of lonely brown hill, with the sunset clouds sailing heavily over it before the strong, steady wind. No living creature was visible or audible--no bird flew by me, no dog barked from the sexton's cottage. The pauses in the dull beating of the surf were filled up by the dreary rustling of the dwarf trees near the grave, and the cold faint bubble of the brook over its stony bed. A dreary scene and a dreary hour. My spirits sank fast as I counted out the minutes of the evening in my hiding-place under the church porch.

It was not twilight yet--the light of the setting sun still lingered in the heavens, and little more than the first half-hour of my solitary watch had elapsed--when I heard footsteps and a voice. The footsteps were approaching from the other side of the church, and the voice was a woman's.

"Don't you fret, my dear, about the letter," said the voice. "I gave it to the lad quite safe, and the lad he took it from me without a word. He went his way and I went mine, and not a living soul followed me afterwards--that I'll warrant."

These words strung up my attention to a pitch of expectation that was almost painful. There was a pause of silence, but the footsteps still advanced. In another moment two persons, both women, passed within my range of view from the porch window. They were walking straight towards the grave; and therefore they had their backs turned towards me.

One of the women was dressed in a bonnet and shawl. The other wore a long travelling-cloak of a dark-blue colour, with the hood drawn over her head. A few inches of her gown were visible below the cloak. My heart beat fast as I noted the colour--it was white.

After advancing about half-way between the church and the grave they stopped, and the woman in the cloak turned her head towards her companion. But her side face, which a bonnet might now have allowed me to see, was
hidden by the heavy, projecting edge of the hood.

"Mind you keep that comfortable warm cloak on," said the same voice which I had already heard--the voice of the woman in the shawl. "Mrs. Todd is right about your looking too particular, yesterday, all in white. I'll walk about a little while you're here, churchyards being not at all in my way, whatever they may be in yours. Finish what you want to do before I come back, and let us be sure and get home again before night."

With those words she turned about, and retracing her steps, advanced with her face towards me. It was the face of an elderly woman, brown, rugged, and healthy, with nothing dishonest or suspicious in the look of it. Close to the church she stopped to pull her shawl closer round her.

"Queer," she said to herself, "always queer, with her whims and her ways, ever since I can remember her. Harmless, though--as harmless, poor soul, as a little child."

She sighed--looked about the burial-ground nervously--shook her head, as if the dreary prospect by no means pleased her, and disappeared round the corner of the church.

I doubted for a moment whether I ought to follow and speak to her or not. My intense anxiety to find myself face to face with her companion helped me to decide in the negative. I could ensure seeing the woman in the shawl by waiting near the churchyard until she came back--although it seemed more than doubtful whether she could give me the information of which I was in search. The person who had delivered the letter was of little consequence. The person who had written it was the one centre of interest, and the one source of information, and that person I now felt convinced was before me in the churchyard.

While these ideas were passing through my mind I saw the woman in the cloak approach close to the grave, and stand looking at it for a little while. She then glanced all round her, and taking a white linen cloth or handkerchief from under her cloak, turned aside towards the brook. The little stream ran into the churchyard under a tiny archway in the bottom of the wall, and ran out again, after a winding course of a few dozen yards, under a similar opening. She dipped the cloth in the water, and returned to the grave. I saw her kiss the white cross, then kneel down before the inscription, and apply her wet cloth to the cleansing of it.

After considering how I could show myself with the least possible chance of frightening her, I resolved to cross the wall before me, to skirt round it outside, and to enter the churchyard again by the stile near the grave, in order that she might see me as I approached. She was so absorbed over her employment that she did not hear me coming until I had stepped over the stile. Then she looked up, started to her feet with a faint cry, and stood facing me in speechless and motionless terror.

"Don't be frightened," I said. "Surely you remember me?"

I stopped while I spoke--then advanced a few steps gently--then stopped again--and so approached by little and little till I was close to her. If there had been any doubt still left in my mind, it must have been now set at rest. There, speaking affrightedly for itself--there was the same face confronting me over Mrs. Fairlie's grave which had first looked into mine on the high-road by night.

"You remember me?" I said. "We met very late, and I helped you to find the way to London. Surely you have not forgotten that?"

Her features relaxed, and she drew a heavy breath of relief. I saw the new life of recognition stirring slowly under the death-like stillness which fear had set on her face.

"Don't attempt to speak to me just yet," I went on. "Take time to recover yourself--take time to feel quite certain that I am a friend."

"You are very kind to me," she murmured. "As kind now as you were then."

She stopped, and I kept silence on my side. I was not granting time for composure to her only, I was gaining time also for myself. Under the wan wild evening light, that woman and I were met together again, a grave between us, the dead about us, the lonesome hills closing us round on every side. The time, the place, the circumstances under which we now stood face to face in the evening stillness of that dreary valley--the lifelong interests which might hang suspended on the next chance words that passed between us--the sense that, for aught I knew to the contrary, the whole future of Laura Fairlie's life might be determined, for good or for evil, by my winning or losing the confidence of the forlorn creature who stood trembling by her mother's grave--all threatened to shake the steadiness and the self-control on which every inch of the progress I might yet make now depended. I tried hard, as I felt this, to possess myself of all my resources; I did my utmost to turn the few moments for reflection to the best account.

"Are you calmer now?" I said, as soon as I thought it time to speak again. "Can you talk to me without feeling frightened, and without forgetting that I am a friend?"

"How did you come here?" she asked, without noticing what I had just said to her.

"Don't you remember my telling you, when we last met, that I was going to Cumberland? I have been in Cumberland ever since--I have been staying all the time at Limmeridge House."
"At Limmeridge House!" Her pale face brightened as she repeated the words, her wandering eyes fixed on me with a sudden interest. "Ah, how happy you must have been!" she said, looking at me eagerly, without a shadow of its former distrust left in her expression.

I took advantage of her newly-aroused confidence in me to observe her face, with an attention and a curiosity which I had hitherto restrained myself from showing, for caution's sake. I looked at her, with my mind full of that other lovely face which had so ominously recalled her to my memory on the terrace by moonlight. I had seen Anne Catherick's likeness in Miss Fairlie. I now saw Miss Fairlie's likeness in Anne Catherick--saw it all the more clearly because the points of dissimilarity between the two were presented to me as well as the points of resemblance. In the general outline of the countenance and general proportion of the features—in the colour of the hair and in the little nervous uncertainty about the lips—in the height and size of the figure, and the carriage of the head and body, the likeness appeared even more startling than I had ever felt it to be yet. But there the resemblance ended, and the dissimilarity, in details, began. The delicate beauty of Miss Fairlie's complexion, the transparent clearness of her eyes, the smooth purity of her skin, the tender bloom of colour on her lips, were all missing from the worn weary face that was now turned towards mine. Although I hated myself even for thinking such a thing, still, while I looked at the woman before me, the idea would force itself into my mind that one sad change, in the future, was all that was wanting to make the likeness complete, which I now saw to be so imperfect in detail. If ever sorrow and suffering set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of Miss Fairlie's face, then, and then only, Anne Catherick and she would be the twin-sisters of chance resemblance, the living reflections of one another.

I shuddered at the thought. There was something horrible in the blind unreasoning distrust of the future which the mere passage of it through my mind seemed to imply. It was a welcome interruption to be roused by feeling Anne Catherick's hand laid on my shoulder. The touch was as stealthy and as sudden as that other touch which had petrified me from head to foot on the night when we first met.

"You are looking at me, and you are thinking of something," she said, with her strange breathless rapidity of utterance. "What is it?"

"Nothing extraordinary," I answered. "I was only wondering how you came here."

"I came with a friend who is very good to me. I have only been here two days."

"And you found your way to this place yesterday?"

"How do you know that?"

"I only guessed it."

She turned from me, and knelt down before the inscription once more.

"Where should I go if not here?" she said. "The friend who was better than a mother to me is the only friend I have to visit at Limmeridge. Oh, it makes my heart ache to see a stain on her tomb! It ought to be kept white as snow, for her sake. I was tempted to begin cleaning it yesterday, and I can't help coming back to go on with it today. Is there anything wrong in that? I hope not. Surely nothing can be wrong that I do for Mrs. Fairlie's sake?"

The old grateful sense of her benefactress's kindness was evidently the ruling idea still in the poor creature's mind—the narrow mind which had but too plainly opened to no other lasting impression since that first impression of her younger and happier days. I saw that my best chance of winning her confidence lay in encouraging her to proceed with the artless employment which she had come into the burial-ground to pursue. She resumed it at once, on my telling her she might do so, touching the hard marble as tenderly as if it had been a sentient thing, and whispering the words of the inscription to herself, over and over again, as if the lost days of her girlhood had returned and she was patiently learning her lesson once more at Mrs. Fairlie's knees.

"Should you wonder very much," I said, preparing the way as cautiously as I could for the questions that were to come, "if I owned that it is a satisfaction to me, as well as a surprise, to see you here? I felt very uneasy about you after you left me in the cab."

She looked up quickly and suspiciously.

"Uneasy," she repeated. "Why?"

"A strange thing happened after we parted that night. Two men overtook me in a chaise. They did not see where I was standing, but they stopped near me, and spoke to a policeman on the other side of the way."

She instantly suspended her employment. The hand holding the damp cloth with which she had been cleaning the inscription dropped to her side. The other hand grasped the marble cross at the head of the grave. Her face turned towards me slowly, with the blank look of terror set rigidly on it once more. I went on at all hazards—it was too late now to draw back.

"The two men spoke to the policeman," I said, "and asked him if he had seen you. He had not seen you; and then one of the men spoke again, and said you had escaped from his Asylum."

She sprang to her feet as if my last words had set the pursuers on her track.

"Stop! and hear the end," I cried. "Stop! and you shall know how I befriended you. A word from me would have
told the men which way you had gone—and I never spoke that word. I helped your escape—I made it safe and certain. Think, try to think. Try to understand what I tell you.

My manner seemed to influence her more than my words. She made an effort to grasp the new idea. Her hands shifted the damp cloth hesitatingly from one to the other, exactly as they had shifted the little travelling-bag on the night when I first saw her. Slowly the purpose of my words seemed to force its way through the confusion and agitation of her mind. Slowly her features relaxed, and her eyes looked at me with their expression gaining in curiosity what it was fast losing in fear.

"YOU don't think I ought to be back in the Asylum, do you?" she said.
"Certainly not. I am glad you escaped from it—I am glad I helped you."
"Yes, yes, you did help me indeed; you helped me at the hard part," she went on a little vacantly. "It was easy to escape, or I should not have got away. They never suspected me as they suspected the others. I was so quiet, and so obedient, and so easily frightened. The finding London was the hard part, and there you helped me. Did I thank you at the time? I thank you now very kindly."

"Was the Asylum far from where you met me? Come! show that you believe me to be your friend, and tell me where it was."

She mentioned the place—a private Asylum, as its situation informed me; a private Asylum not very far from the spot where I had seen her—and then, with evident suspicion of the use to which I might put her answer, anxiously repeated her former inquiry, "You don't think I ought to be taken back, do you?"
"Once again, I am glad you escaped—I am glad you prospered well after you left me," I answered. "You said you had a friend in London to go to. Did you find the friend?"
"Yes. It was very late, but there was a girl up at needle-work in the house, and she helped me to rouse Mrs. Clements. Mrs. Clements is my friend. A good, kind woman, but not like Mrs. Fairlie. Ah no, nobody is like Mrs. Fairlie!"

"Is Mrs. Clements an old friend of yours? Have you known her a long time?"

"Yes, she was a neighbour of ours once, at home, in Hampshire, and liked me, and took care of me when I was a little girl. Years ago, when she went away from us, she wrote down in my Prayer-book for me where she was going to live in London, and she said, 'If you are ever in trouble, Anne, come to me. I have no husband alive to say me nay, and no children to look after, and I will take care of you.' Kind words, were they not? I suppose I remember them because they were kind. It's little enough I remember besides—little enough, little enough!"

"Had you no father or mother to take care of you?"

"Father?—I never saw him—I never heard mother speak of him. Father? Ah, dear! he is dead, I suppose."

"And your mother?"

"I don't get on well with her. We are a trouble and a fear to each other."

A trouble and a fear to each other! At those words the suspicion crossed my mind, for the first time, that her mother might be the person who had placed her under restraint.

"Don't ask me about mother," she went on. "I'd rather talk of Mrs. Clements. Mrs. Clements is like you, she doesn't think that I ought to be back in the Asylum, and she is as glad as you are that I escaped from it. She cried over my misfortune, and said it must be kept secret from everybody."

Her "misfortune." In what sense was she using that word? In a sense which might explain her motive in writing the anonymous letter? In a sense which might show it to be the too common and too customary motive that has led many a woman to interpose anonymous hindrances to the marriage of the man who has ruined her? I resolved to attempt the clearing up of this doubt before more words passed between us on either side.

"What misfortune?" I asked.

"The misfortune of my being shut up," she answered, with every appearance of feeling surprised at my question. "What other misfortune could there be?"

I determined to persist, as delicately and forbearingly as possible. It was of very great importance that I should be absolutely sure of every step in the investigation which I now gained in advance.

"There is another misfortune," I said, "to which a woman may be liable, and by which she may suffer lifelong sorrow and shame."

"What is it?" she asked eagerly.

"The misfortune of believing too innocently in her own virtue, and in the faith and honour of the man she loves," I answered.

She looked up at me with the artless bewilderment of a child. Not the slightest confusion or change of colour—not the faintest trace of any secret consciousness of shame struggling to the surface appeared in her face—that face which betrayed every other emotion with such transparent clearness. No words that ever were spoken could have assured me, as her look and manner now assured me, that the motive which I had assigned for her writing the letter
and sending it to Miss Fairlie was plainly and distinctly the wrong one. That doubt, at any rate, was now set at rest; but the very removal of it opened a new prospect of uncertainty. The letter, as I knew from positive testimony, pointed at Sir Percival Glyde, though it did not name him. She must have had some strong motive, originating in some deep sense of injury, for secretly denouncing him to Miss Fairlie in such terms as she had employed, and that motive was unquestionably not to be traced to the loss of her innocence and her character. Whatever wrong he might have inflicted on her was not of that nature. Of what nature could it be?

"I don't understand you," she said, after evidently trying hard, and trying in vain, to discover the meaning of the words I had last said to her.

"Never mind," I answered. "Let us go on with what we were talking about. Tell me how long you stayed with Mrs. Clements in London, and how you came here."

"How long?" she repeated. "I stayed with Mrs. Clements till we both came to this place, two days ago."

"You are living in the village, then?" I said. "It is strange I should not have heard of you, though you have only been here two days."

"No, no, not in the village. Three miles away at a farm. Do you know the farm? They call it Todd's Corner."

I remembered the place perfectly—we had often passed by it in our drives. It was one of the oldest farms in the neighbourhood, situated in a solitary, sheltered spot, inland at the junction of two hills.

"They are relations of Mrs. Clements at Todd's Corner," she went on, "and they had often asked her to go and see them. She said she would go, and take me with her, for the quiet and the fresh air. It was very kind, was it not? I would have gone anywhere to be quiet, and safe, and out of the way. But when I heard that Todd's Corner was near Limmeridge—oh! I was so happy I would have walked all the way barefoot to get there, and see the schools and the village and Limmeridge House again. They are very good people at Todd's Corner. I hope I shall stay there a long time. There is only one thing I don't like about them, and don't like about Mrs. Clements----"

"What is it?"

"They will tease me about dressing all in white—they say it looks so particular. How do they know? Mrs. Fairlie knew best. Mrs. Fairlie would never have made me wear this ugly blue cloak! Ah! she was fond of white in her lifetime, and here is white stone about her grave—and I am making it whiter for her sake. She often wore white herself, and she always dressed her little daughter in white. Is Miss Fairlie well and happy? Does she wear white now, as she used when she was a girl?"

Her voice sank when she put the questions about Miss Fairlie, and she turned her head farther and farther away from me. I thought I detected, in the alteration of her manner, an uneasy consciousness of the risk she had run in sending the anonymous letter, and I instantly determined so to frame my answer as to surprise her into owning it.

"Miss Fairlie was not very well or very happy this morning," I said.

She murmured a few words, but they were spoken so confusedly, and in such a low tone, that I could not even guess at what they meant.

"Did you ask me why Miss Fairlie was neither well nor happy this morning?" I continued.

"No," she said quickly and eagerly—"oh no, I never asked that."

"I will tell you without your asking," I went on. "Miss Fairlie has received your letter."

She had been down on her knees for some little time past, carefully removing the last weather-stains left about the inscription while we were speaking together. The first sentence of the words I had just addressed to her made her pause in her occupation, and turn slowly without rising from her knees, so as to face me. The second sentence literally petrified her. The cloth she had been holding dropped from her hands—her lips fell apart—all the little colour that there was naturally in her face left it in an instant.

"How do you know?" she said faintly. "Who showed it to you?" The blood rushed back into her face—rushed overwhelmingly, as the sense rushed upon her mind that her own words had betrayed her. She struck her hands together in despair. "I never wrote it," she gasped affrightedly; "I know nothing about it!"

"Yes," I said, "you wrote it, and you know about it. It was wrong to send such a letter, it was wrong to frighten Miss Fairlie. If you had anything to say that it was right and necessary for her to hear, you should have gone yourself to Limmeridge House—you should have spoken to the young lady with your own lips."

She crouched down over the flat stone of the grave, till her face was hidden on it, and made no reply.

"Miss Fairlie will be as good and kind to you as her mother was, if you mean well," I went on. "Miss Fairlie will keep your secret, and not let you come to any harm. Will you see her to-morrow at the farm? Will you meet her in the garden at Limmeridge House?"

"Oh, if I could die, and be hidden and at rest with YOU!" Her lips murmured the words close on the grave-stone, murmured them in tones of passionate endearment, to the dead remains beneath. "You know how I love your child, for your sake! Oh, Mrs. Fairlie! Mrs. Fairlie! tell me how to save her. Be my darling and my mother once more, and tell me what to do for the best."
I heard her lips kissing the stone—I saw her hands beating on it passionately. The sound and the sight deeply affected me. I stooped down, and took the poor helpless hands tenderly in mine, and tried to soothe her.

It was useless. She snatched her hands from me, and never moved her face from the stone. Seeing the urgent necessity of quieting her at any hazard and by any means, I appealed to the only anxiety that she appeared to feel, in connection with me and with my opinion of her—the anxiety to convince me of her fitness to be mistress of her own actions.

"Come, come," I said gently. "Try to compose yourself, or you will make me alter my opinion of you. Don't let me think that the person who put you in the Asylum might have had some excuse——"

The next words died away on my lips. The instant I risked that chance reference to the person who had put her in the Asylum she sprang up on her knees. A most extraordinary and startling change passed over her. Her face, at all ordinary times so touching to look at, in its nervous sensitiveness, weakness, and uncertainty, became suddenly darkened by an expression of maniacally intense hatred and fear, which communicated a wild, unnatural force to every feature. Her eyes dilated in the dim evening light, like the eyes of a wild animal. She caught up the cloth that had fallen at her side, as if it had been a living creature that she could kill, and crushed it in both her hands with such convulsive strength, that the few drops of moisture left in it trickled down on the stone beneath her.

"Talk of something else," she said, whispering through her teeth. "I shall lose myself if you talk of that."

Every vestige of the gentler thoughts which had filled her mind hardly a minute since seemed to be swept from it now. It was evident that the impression left by Mrs. Fairlie's kindness was not, as I had supposed, the only strong impression on her memory. With the grateful remembrance of her school-days at Limmeridge, there existed the vindictive remembrance of the wrong inflicted on her by her confinement in the Asylum. Who had done that wrong? Could it really be her mother?

It was hard to give up pursuing the inquiry to that final point, but I forced myself to abandon all idea of continuing it. Seeing her as I saw her now, it would have been cruel to think of anything but the necessity and the humanity of restoring her composure.

"I will talk of nothing to distress you," I said soothingly.

"You want something," she answered sharply and suspiciously. "Don't look at me like that. Speak to me—tell me what you want."

"I only want you to quiet yourself, and when you are calmer, to think over what I have said."

"Said?" She paused—twisted the cloth in her hands, backwards and forwards, and whispered to herself, "What is it he said?" She turned again towards me, and shook her head impatiently. "Why don't you help me?" she asked, with angry suddenness.

"Yes, yes," I said, "I will help you, and you will soon remember. I ask you to see Miss Fairlie to-morrow and to tell her the truth about the letter."

"Ah! Miss Fairlie—Fairlie—Fairlie——"

The mere utterance of the loved familiar name seemed to quiet her. Her face softened and grew like itself again.

"You need have no fear of Miss Fairlie," I continued, "and no fear of getting into trouble through the letter. She knows so much of it already, that you will have no difficulty in telling her all. There can be little necessity for concealment where there is hardly anything left to conceal. You mention no names in the letter; but Miss Fairlie knows that the person you write of is Sir Percival Glyde——"

The instant I pronounced that name she started to her feet, and a scream burst from her that rang through the churchyard, and made my heart leap in me with the terror of it. The dark deformity of the expression which had just left her face lowered on it once more, with doubled and trebled intensity. The shriek at the name, the reiterated look of hatred and fear that instantly followed, told all. Not even a last doubt now remained. Her mother was guiltless of imprisoning her in the Asylum. A man had shut her up—and that man was Sir Percival Glyde.

The scream had reached other ears than mine. On one side I heard the door of the sexton's cottage open; on the other I heard the voice of her companion, the woman in the shawl, the woman whom she had spoken of as Mrs. Clements.

"I'm coming! I'm coming!" cried the voice from behind the clump of dwarf trees.

In a moment more Mrs. Clements hurried into view.

"Who are you?" she cried, facing me resolutely as she set her foot on the stile. "How dare you frighten a poor helpless woman like that?"

She was at Anne Catherick's side, and had put one arm around her, before I could answer. "What is it, my dear?" she said. "What has he done to you?"

"Nothing," the poor creature answered. "Nothing. I'm only frightened."

Mrs. Clements turned on me with a fearless indignation, for which I respected her.

"I should be heartily ashamed of myself if I deserved that angry look," I said. "But I do not deserve it. I have
unfortunately startled her without intending it. This is not the first time she has seen me. Ask her yourself, and she will tell you that I am incapable of willingly harming her or any woman.

I spoke distinctly, so that Anne Catherick might hear and understand me, and I saw that the words and their meaning had reached her.

"Yes, yes," she said--"he was good to me once--he helped me----" She whispered the rest into her friend's ear.

"Strange, indeed!" said Mrs. Clements, with a look of perplexity. "It makes all the difference, though. I'm sorry I spoke so rough to you, sir; but you must own that appearances looked suspicious to a stranger. It's more my fault than yours, for humouring her whims, and letting her be alone in such a place as this. Come, my dear--come home now."

I thought the good woman looked a little uneasy at the prospect of the walk back, and I offered to go with them until they were both within sight of home. Mrs. Clements thanked me civilly, and declined. She said they were sure to meet some of the farm labourers as soon as they got to the moor.

"Try to forgive me," I said, when Anne Catherick took her friend's arm to go away. Innocent as I had been of any intention to terrify and agitate her, my heart smote me as I looked at the poor, pale, frightened face.

"I will try," she answered. "But you know too much--I'm afraid you'll always frighten me now."

Mrs. Clements glanced at me, and shook her head pityingly.

"Good-night, sir," she said. "You couldn't help it, I know but I wish it was me you had frightened, and not her."

They moved away a few steps. I thought they had left me, but Anne suddenly stopped, and separated herself from her friend.

"Wait a little," she said. "I must say good-bye."

She returned to the grave, rested both hands tenderly on the marble cross, and kissed it.

"I'm better now," she sighed, looking up at me quietly. "I forgive you."

She joined her companion again, and they left the burial-ground. I saw them stop near the church and speak to the sexton's wife, who had come from the cottage, and had waited, watching us from a distance. Then they went on again up the path that led to the moor. I looked after Anne Catherick as she disappeared, till all trace of her had faded in the twilight--looked as anxiously and sorrowfully as if that was the last I was to see in this weary world of the woman in white.

XIV

Half an hour later I was back at the house, and was informing Miss Halcombe of all that had happened.

She listened to me from beginning to end with a steady, silent attention, which, in a woman of her temperament and disposition, was the strongest proof that could be offered of the serious manner in which my narrative affected her.

"My mind misgives me," was all she said when I had done. "My mind misgives me sadly about the future."

"The future may depend," I suggested, "on the use we make of the present. It is not improbable that Anne Catherick may speak more readily and unreservedly to a woman than she has spoken to me. If Miss Fairlie----"

"Not to be thought of for a moment," interposed Miss Halcombe, in her most decided manner.

"Let me suggest, then," I continued, "that you should see Anne Catherick yourself, and do all you can to win her confidence. For my own part, I shrink from the idea of alarming the poor creature a second time, as I have most unhappily alarmed her already. Do you see any objection to accompanying me to the farmhouse to-morrow?"

"None whatever. I will go anywhere and do anything to serve Laura's interests. What did you say the place was called?"

"You must know it well. It is called Todd's Corner."

"Certainly. Todd's Corner is one of Mr. Fairlie's farms. Our dairymaid here is the farmer's second daughter. She goes backwards and forwards constantly between this house and her father's farm, and she may have heard or seen something which it may be useful to us to know. Shall I ascertain, at once, if the girl is downstairs?"

She rang the bell, and sent the servant with his message. He returned, and announced that the dairymaid was then at the farm. She had not been there for the last three days, and the housekeeper had given her leave to go home for an hour or two that evening.

"I can speak to her to-morrow," said Miss Halcombe, when the servant had left the room again. "In the meantime, let me thoroughly understand the object to be gained by my interview with Anne Catherick. Is there no doubt in your mind that the person who confined her in the Asylum was Sir Percival Glyde?"

"There is not the shadow of a doubt. The only mystery that remains is the mystery of his MOTIVE. Looking to the great difference between his station in life and hers, which seems to preclude all idea of the most distant relationship between them, it is of the last importance--even assuming that she really required to be placed under restraint--to know why HE should have been the person to assume the serious responsibility of shutting her up----"

"In a private Asylum, I think you said?"
"Yes, in a private Asylum, where a sum of money, which no poor person could afford to give, must have been paid for her maintenance as a patient."

"I see where the doubt lies, Mr. Hartright, and I promise you that it shall be set at rest, whether Anne Catherick assists us to--morrow or not. Sir Percival Glyde shall not be long in this house without satisfying Mr. Gilmore, and satisfying me. My sister's future is my dearest care in life, and I have influence enough over her to give me some power, where her marriage is concerned, in the disposal of it."

We parted for the night.

After breakfast the next morning, an obstacle, which the events of the evening before had put out of my memory, interposed to prevent our proceeding immediately to the farm. This was my last day at Limmeridge House, and it was necessary, as soon as the post came in, to follow Miss Halcombe's advice, and to ask Mr. Fairlie's permission to shorten my engagement by a month, in consideration of an unforeseen necessity for my return to London.

Fortunately for the probability of this excuse, so far as appearances were concerned, the post brought me two letters from London friends that morning. I took them away at once to my own room, and sent the servant with a message to Mr. Fairlie, requesting to know when I could see him on a matter of business.

I awaited the man's return, free from the slightest feeling of anxiety about the manner in which his master might receive my application. With Mr. Fairlie's leave or without it, I must go. The consciousness of having now taken the first step on the dreary journey which was henceforth to separate my life from Miss Fairlie's seemed to have blunted my sensibility to every consideration connected with myself. I had done with my poor man's touchy pride--I had done with all my little artist vanities. No insolence of Mr. Fairlie's, if he chose to be insolent, could wound me now.

The servant returned with a message for which I was not unprepared. Mr. Fairlie regretted that the state of his health, on that particular morning, was such as to preclude all hope of his having the pleasure of receiving me. He begged, therefore, that I would accept his apologies, and kindly communicate what I had to say in the form of a letter. Similar messages to this had reached me, at various intervals, during my three months' residence in the house. Throughout the whole of that period Mr. Fairlie had been rejoiced to "possess" me, but had never been well enough to see me for a second time. The servant took every fresh batch of drawings that I mounted and restored back to his master with my "respects," and returned empty-handed with Mr. Fairlie's "kind compliments," "best thanks," and "sincere regrets" that the state of his health still obliged him to remain a solitary prisoner in his own room. A more satisfactory arrangement to both sides could not possibly have been adopted. It would be hard to say which of us, under the circumstances, felt the most grateful sense of obligation to Mr. Fairlie's accommodating nerves.

I sat down at once to write the letter, expressing myself in it as civilly, as clearly, and as briefly as possible. Mr. Fairlie did not hurry his reply. Nearly an hour elapsed before the answer was placed in my hands. It was written with beautiful regularity and neatness of character, in violet-coloured ink, on note-paper as smooth as ivory and almost as thick as cardboard, and it addressed me in these terms--

"Mr. Fairlie's compliments to Mr. Hartright. Mr. Fairlie is more surprised and disappointed than he can say (in the present state of his health) by Mr. Hartright's application. Mr. Fairlie is not a man of business, but he has consulted his steward, who is, and that person confirms Mr. Fairlie's opinion that Mr. Hartright's request to be allowed to break his engagement cannot be justified by any necessity whatever, excepting perhaps a case of life and death. If the highly-appreciative feeling towards Art and its professors, which it is the consolation and happiness of Mr. Fairlie's suffering existence to cultivate, could be easily shaken, Mr. Hartright's present proceeding would have shaken it. It has not done so--except in the instance of Mr. Hartright himself.

"Having stated his opinion--so far, that is to say, as acute nervous suffering will allow him to state anything--Mr. Fairlie has nothing to add but the expression of his decision, in reference to the highly irregular application that has been made to him. Perfect repose of body and mind being to the last degree important in his case, Mr. Fairlie will not suffer Mr. Hartright to disturb that repose by remaining in the house under circumstances of an essentially irritating nature to both sides. Accordingly, Mr. Fairlie waives his right of refusal, purely with a view to the preservation of his own tranquillity--and informs Mr. Hartright that he may go."

I folded the letter up, and put it away with my other papers. The time had been when I should have resented it as an insult--I accepted it now as a written release from my engagement. It was off my mind, it was almost out of my memory, when I went downstairs to the breakfast-room, and informed Miss Halcombe that I was ready to walk with her to the farm.

"Has Mr. Fairlie given you a satisfactory answer?" she asked as we left the house.

"He has allowed me to go, Miss Halcombe."

She looked up at me quickly, and then, for the first time since I had known her, took my arm of her own accord. No words could have expressed so delicately that she understood how the permission to leave my employment had been granted, and that she gave me her sympathy, not as my superior, but as my friend. I had not felt the man's insolent letter, but I felt deeply the woman's atoning kindness.
On our way to the farm we arranged that Miss Halcombe was to enter the house alone, and that I was to wait outside, within call. We adopted this mode of proceeding from an apprehension that my presence, after what had happened in the churchyard the evening before, might have the effect of renewing Anne Catherick's nervous dread, and of rendering her additionally distrustful of the advances of a lady who was a stranger to her. Miss Halcombe left me, with the intention of speaking, in the first instance, to the farmer's wife (of whose friendly readiness to help her in any way she was well assured), while I waited for her in the near neighbourhood of the house.

I had fully expected to be left alone for some time. To my surprise, however, little more than five minutes had elapsed before Miss Halcombe returned.

"Does Anne Catherick refuse to see you?" I asked in astonishment.

"Anne Catherick is gone," replied Miss Halcombe.

"Gone?"

"Gone with Mrs. Clements. They both left the farm at eight o'clock this morning."

I could say nothing—I could only feel that our last chance of discovery had gone with them.

"All that Mrs. Todd knows about her guests, I know," Miss Halcombe went on, "and it leaves me, as it leaves her, in the dark. They both came back safe last night, after they left you, and they passed the first part of the evening with Mr. Todd's family as usual. Just before supper-time, however, Anne Catherick startled them all by being suddenly seized with faintness. She had had a similar attack, of a less alarming kind, on the day she arrived at the farm; and Mrs. Todd had connected it, on that occasion, with something she was reading at the time in our local newspaper, which lay on the farm table, and which she had taken up only a minute or two before."

"Does Mrs. Todd know what particular passage in the newspaper affected her in that way?" I inquired.

"No," replied Miss Halcombe. "She had looked it over, and had seen nothing in it to agitate any one. I asked leave, however, to look it over in my turn, and at the very first page I opened I found that the editor had enriched his small stock of news by drawing upon our family affairs, and had published my sister's marriage engagement, among his other announcements, copied from the London papers, of Marriages in High Life. I concluded at once that this was the paragraph which had so strangely affected Anne Catherick, and I thought I saw in it, also, the origin of the letter which she sent to our house the next day."

"There can be no doubt in either case. But what did you hear about her second attack of faintness yesterday evening?"

"Nothing. The cause of it is a complete mystery. There was no stranger in the room. The only visitor was our dairymaid, who, as I told you, is one of Mr. Todd's daughters, and the only conversation was the usual gossip about local affairs. They heard her cry out, and saw her turn deadly pale, without the slightest apparent reason. Mrs. Todd and Mrs. Clements took her upstairs, and Mrs. Clements remained with her. They were heard talking together until long after the usual bedtime, and early this morning Mrs. Clements took Mrs. Todd aside, and amazed her beyond all power of expression by saying that they must go. The only explanation Mrs. Todd could extract from her guest was, that something had happened, which was not the fault of any one at the farmhouse, but which was serious enough to make Anne Catherick resolve to leave Limmeridge immediately. It was quite useless to press Mrs. Clements to be more explicit. She only shook her head, and said that, for Anne's sake, she must beg and pray that no one would question her. All she could repeat, with every appearance of being seriously agitated herself, was that Anne must go, that she must go with her, and that the destination to which they might both betake themselves must be kept a secret from everybody. I spare you the recital of Mrs. Todd's hospitable remonstrances and refusals. It ended in her driving them both to the nearest station, more than three hours since. She tried hard on the way to get them to speak more plainly, but without success; and she set them down outside the station-door, so hurt and offended by the unceremonious abruptness of their departure and their unfriendly reluctance to place the least confidence in her, that she drove away in anger, without so much as stopping to bid them good-bye. That is exactly what has taken place. Search your own memory, Mr. Hartright, and tell me if anything happened in the burial-ground yesterday evening which can at all account for the extraordinary departure of those two women this morning."

"I should like to account first, Miss Halcombe, for the sudden change in Anne Catherick which alarmed them at the farmhouse, hours after she and I had parted, and when time enough had elapsed to quiet any violent agitation that I might have been unfortunate enough to cause. Did you inquire particularly about the gossip which was going on in the room when she turned faint?"

"Yes. But Mrs. Todd's household affairs seem to have divided her attention that evening with the talk in the farmhouse parlour. She could only tell me that it was 'just the news,'—meaning, I suppose, that they all talked as usual about each other."

"The dairymaid's memory may be better than her mother's," I said. "It may be as well for you to speak to the girl, Miss Halcombe, as soon as we get back."
My suggestion was acted on the moment we returned to the house. Miss Halcombe led me round to the servants' offices, and we found the girl in the dairy, with her sleeves tucked up to her shoulders, cleaning a large milk-pan and singing blithely over her work.

"I have brought this gentleman to see your dairy, Hannah," said Miss Halcombe. "It is one of the sights of the house, and it always does you credit."

The girl blushed and curtseyed, and said shyly that she hoped she always did her best to keep things neat and clean.

"We have just come from your father's," Miss Halcombe continued. "You were there yesterday evening, I hear, and you found visitors at the house?"

"Yes, miss."

"One of them was taken faint and ill, I am told. I suppose nothing was said or done to frighten her? You were not talking of anything very terrible, were you?"

"Oh no, miss!" said the girl, laughing. "We were only talking of the news."

"Your sisters told you the news at Todd's Corner, I suppose?"

"Yes, miss."

"And you told them the news at Limmeridge House?"

"Yes, miss. And I'm quite sure nothing was said to frighten the poor thing, for I was talking when she was taken ill. It gave me quite a turn, miss, to see it, never having been taken faint myself."

Before any more questions could be put to her, she was called away to receive a basket of eggs at the dairy door. As she left us I whispered to Miss Halcombe--

"Ask her if she happened to mention, last night, that visitors were expected at Limmeridge House."

Miss Halcombe showed me, by a look, that she understood, and put the question as soon as the dairymaid returned to us.

"Oh yes, miss, I mentioned that," said the girl simply. "The company coming, and the accident to the brindled cow, was all the news I had to take to the farm."

"Did you mention names? Did you tell them that Sir Percival Glyde was expected on Monday?"

"Yes, miss--I told them Sir Percival Glyde was coming. I hope there was no harm in it--I hope I didn't do wrong."

"Oh no, no harm. Come, Mr. Hartright, Hannah will begin to think us in the way, if we interrupt her any longer over her work."

We stopped and looked at one another the moment we were alone again.

"Is there any doubt in your mind, NOW, Miss Halcombe?"

"Sir Percival Glyde shall remove that doubt, Mr. Hartright--or Laura Fairlie shall never be his wife."

XV

As we walked round to the front of the house a fly from the railway approached us along the drive. Miss Halcombe waited on the door-steps until the fly drew up, and then advanced to shake hands with an old gentleman, who got out briskly the moment the steps were let down. Mr. Gilmore had arrived.

I looked at him, when we were introduced to each other, with an interest and a curiosity which I could hardly conceal. This old man was to remain at Limmeridge House after I had left it, he was to hear Sir Percival Glyde's explanation, and was to give Miss Halcombe the assistance of his experience in forming her judgment; he was to wait until the question of the marriage was set at rest; and his hand, if that question were decided in the affirmative, was to draw the settlement which bound Miss Fairlie irrevocably to her engagement. Even then, when I knew nothing by comparison with what I know now, I looked at the family lawyer with an interest which I had never felt before in the presence of any man breathing who was a total stranger to me.

In external appearance Mr. Gilmore was the exact opposite of the conventional idea of an old lawyer. His complexion was florid--his white hair was worn rather long and kept carefully brushed--his black coat, waistcoat, and trousers fitted him with perfect neatness--his white cravat was carefully tied, and his lavender- coloured kid gloves might have adorned the hands of a fashionable clergyman, without fear and without reproach. His manners were pleasantly marked by the formal grace and refinement of the old school of politeness, quickened by the invigorating sharpness and readiness of a man whose business in life obliges him always to keep his faculties in good working order. A sanguine constitution and fair prospects to begin with--a long subsequent career of creditable and comfortable prosperity--a cheerful, diligent, widely-respected old age--such were the general impressions I derived from my introduction to Mr. Gilmore, and it is but fair to him to add, that the knowledge I gained by later and better experience only tended to confirm them.

I left the old gentleman and Miss Halcombe to enter the house together, and to talk of family matters undisturbed by the restraint of a stranger's presence. They crossed the hall on their way to the drawing-room, and I descended the
steps again to wander about the garden alone.

My hours were numbered at Limmeridge House--my departure the next morning was irrevocably settled--my share in the investigation which the anonymous letter had rendered necessary was at an end. No harm could be done to any one but myself if I let my heart loose again, for the little time that was left me, from the cold cruelty of restraint which necessity had forced me to inflict upon it, and took my farewell of the scenes which were associated with the brief dream-time of my happiness and my love.

I turned instinctively to the walk beneath my study-window, where I had seen her the evening before with her little dog, and followed the path which her dear feet had trodden so often, till I came to the wicket gate that led into her rose garden. The winter bareness spread drearily over it now. The flowers that she had taught me to distinguish by their names, the flowers that I had taught her to paint from, were gone, and the tiny white paths that led between the beds were damp and green already. I went on to the avenue of trees, where we had breathed together the warm fragrance of August evenings, where we had adored together the myriad combinations of shade and sunlight that dappled the ground at our feet. The leaves fell about me from the groaning branches, and the earthy decay in the atmosphere chilled me to the bones. A little farther on, and I was out of the grounds, and following the lane that wound gently upward to the nearest hills. The old felled tree by the wayside, on which we had sat to rest, was sodden with rain, and the tuft of ferns and grasses which I had drawn for her, nestling under the rough stone wall in front of us, had turned to a pool of water, stagnating round an island of draggled weeds. I gained the summit of the hill, and looked at the view which we had so often admired in the happier time. It was cold and barren--it was no longer the view that I remembered. The sunshine of her presence was far from me--the charm of her voice no longer murmured in my ear. She had talked to me, on the spot from which I now looked down, of her father, who was her last surviving parent--had told me how fond of each other they had been, and how sadly she missed him still when she entered certain rooms in the house, and when she took up forgotten occupations and amusements with which he had been associated. Was the view that I had seen, while listening to those words, the view that I saw now, standing on the hill-top by myself? I turned and left it--I wound my way back again, over the moor, and round the sandhills, down to the beach. There was the white rage of the surf, and the multitudinous glory of the leaping waves--but where was the place on which she had once drawn idle figures with her parasol in the sand--the place where we had sat together, while she talked to me about myself and my home, while she asked me a woman's minutely observant questions about my mother and my sister, and innocently wondered whether I should ever leave my lonely chambers and have a wife and a house of my own? Wind and wave had long since smoothed out the trace of her which she had left in those marks on the sand, I looked over the wide monotony of the sea-side prospect, and the place in which we two had idled away the sunny hours was as lost to me as if I had never known it, as strange to me as if I stood already on a foreign shore.

The empty silence of the beach struck cold to my heart. I returned to the house and the garden, where traces were left to speak of her at every turn.

On the west terrace walk I met Mr. Gilmore. He was evidently in search of me, for he quickened his pace when we caught sight of each other. The state of my spirits little fitted me for the society of a stranger; but the meeting was inevitable, and I resigned myself to make the best of it.

"You are the very person I wanted to see," said the old gentleman. "I had two words to say to you, my dear sir; and if you have no objection I will avail myself of the present opportunity. To put it plainly, Miss Halcombe and I have been talking over family affairs--affairs which are the cause of my being here--and in the course of our conversation she was naturally led to tell me of this unpleasant matter connected with the anonymous letter, and of the share which you have most creditably and properly taken in the proceedings so far. That share, I quite understand, gives you an interest which you might not otherwise have felt, in knowing that the future management of the investigation which you have begun will be placed in safe hands. My dear sir, make yourself quite easy on that point--it will be placed in MY hands."

"You are, in every way, Mr. Gilmore, much fitter to advise and to act in the matter than I am. Is it an indiscretion on my part to ask if you have decided yet on a course of proceeding?"

"So far as it is possible to decide, Mr. Hartright, I have decided. I mean to send a copy of the letter, accompanied by a statement of the circumstances, to Sir Percival Glyde's solicitor in London, with whom I have some acquaintance. The letter itself I shall keep here to show to Sir Percival as soon as he arrives. The tracing of the two women I have already provided for, by sending one of Mr. Fairlie's servants--a confidential person--to the station to make inquiries. The man has his money and his directions, and he will follow the women in the event of his finding any clue. This is all that can be done until Sir Percival comes on Monday. I have no doubt myself that every explanation which can be expected from a gentleman and a man of honour, he will readily give. Sir Percival stands very high, sir--an eminent position, a reputation above suspicion--I feel quite easy about results--quite easy, I am rejoiced to assure you. Things of this sort happen constantly in my experience. Anonymous letters-- unfortunate
woman--sad state of society. I don't deny that there are peculiar complications in this case; but the case itself is, most unhappily, common--common."

"I am afraid, Mr. Gilmore, I have the misfortune to differ from you in the view I take of the case."

"Just so, my dear sir--just so. I am an old man, and I take the practical view. You are a young man, and you take the romantic view. Let us not dispute about our views. I live professionally in an atmosphere of disputation, Mr. Hartright, and I am only too glad to escape from it, as I am escaping here. We will wait for events--yes, yes, yes--we will wait for events. Charming place this. Good shooting? Probably not, none of Mr. Fairlie's land is preserved, I think. Charming place, though, and delightful people. You draw and paint, I hear, Mr. Hartright? Enviable accomplishment. What style?"

We dropped into general conversation, or rather, Mr. Gilmore talked and I listened. My attention was far from him, and from the topics on which he discoursed so fluently. The solitary walk of the last two hours had wrought its effect on me--it had set the idea in my mind of hastening my departure from Limmeridge House. Why should I prolong the hard trial of saying farewell by one unnecessary minute? What further service was required of me by any one? There was no useful purpose to be served by my stay in Cumberland--there was no restriction of time in the permission to leave which my employer had granted to me. Why not end it there and then?

I determined to end it. There were some hours of daylight still left--there was no reason why my journey back to London should not begin on that afternoon. I made the first civil excuse that occurred to me for leaving Mr. Gilmore, and returned at once to the house.

On my way up to my own room I met Miss Halcombe on the stairs. She saw, by the hurry of my movements and the change in my manner, that I had some new purpose in view, and asked what had happened.

I told her the reasons which induced me to think of hastening my departure, exactly as I have told them here.

"No, no," she said, earnestly and kindly, "leave us like a friend-- break bread with us once more. Stay here and dine, stay here and help us to spend our last evening with you as happily, as like our first evenings, as we can. It is my invitation--Mrs. Vesey's invitation----" she hesitated a little, and then added, "Laura's invitation as well."

I promised to remain. God knows I had no wish to leave even the shadow of a sorrowful impression with any one of them.

My own room was the best place for me till the dinner bell rang. I waited there till it was time to go downstairs.

I had not spoken to Miss Fairlie--I had not even seen her--all that day. The first meeting with her, when I entered the drawing-room, was a hard trial to her self-control and to mine. She, too, had done her best to make our last evening renew the golden bygone time--the time that could never come again. She had put on the dress which I used to admire more than any other that she possessed--a dark blue silk, trimmed quaintly and prettily with old-fashioned lace; she came forward to meet me with her former readiness--she gave me her hand with the frank, innocent goodwill of happier days. The cold fingers that trembled round mine--the pale cheeks with a bright red spot burning in the midst of them-- the faint smile that struggled to live on her lips and died away from them while I looked at it, told me at what sacrifice of herself her outward composure was maintained. My heart could take her no closer to me, or I should have loved her then as I had never loved her yet.

Mr. Gilmore was a great assistance to us. He was in high good-humour, and he led the conversation with unflagging spirit. Miss Halcombe seconded him resolutely, and I did all I could to follow her example. The kind blue eyes, whose slightest changes of expression I had learnt to interpret so well, looked at me appealingly when we first sat down to table. Help my sister--the sweet anxious face seemed to say--help my sister, and you will help me.

We got through the dinner, to all outward appearance at least, happily enough. When the ladies had risen from table, and Mr. Gilmore and I were left alone in the dining-room, a new interest presented itself to occupy our attention, and to give me an opportunity of quieting myself by a few minutes of needful and welcome silence. The servant who had been despatched to trace Anne Catherick and Mrs. Clements returned with his report, and was shown into the dining-room immediately.

"Well," said Mr. Gilmore, "what have you found out?"

"I have found out, sir," answered the man, "that both the women took tickets at our station here for Carlisle."

"You went to Carlisle, of course, when you heard that?"

"I did, sir, but I am sorry to say I could find no further trace of them."

"You inquired at the railway?"

"Yes, sir."

"And at the different inns?"

"Yes, sir."

"And you left the statement I wrote for you at the police station?"

"I did, sir."

"Well, my friend, you have done all you could, and I have done all I could, and there the matter must rest till
further notice. We have played our trump cards, Mr. Hartright," continued the old gentleman when the servant had withdrawn. "For the present, at least, the women have outmanoeuvred us, and our only resource now is to wait till Sir Percival Glyde comes here on Monday next. Won't you fill your glass again? Good bottle of port, that--sound, substantial, old wine. I have got better in my own cellar, though."

We returned to the drawing-room--the room in which the happiest evenings of my life had been passed--the room which, after this last night, I was never to see again. Its aspect was altered since the days had shortened and the weather had grown cold. The glass doors on the terrace side were closed, and hidden by thick curtains. Instead of the soft twilight obscurity, in which we used to sit, the bright radiant glow of lamplight now dazzled my eyes. All was changed--indoors and out all was changed.

Miss Halcombe and Mr. Gilmore sat down together at the card-table-- Mrs. Vesey took her customary chair. There was no restraint on the disposal of THEIR evening, and I felt the restraint on the disposal of mine all the more painfully from observing it. I saw Miss Fairlie lingering near the music-stand. The time had been when I might have joined her there. I waited irresolutely--I knew neither where to go nor what to do next. She cast one quick glance at me, took a piece of music suddenly from the stand, and came towards me of her own accord.

"Shall I play some of those little melodies of Mozart's which you used to like so much?" she asked, opening the music nervously, and looking down at it while she spoke.

Before I could thank her she hastened to the piano. The chair near it, which I had always been accustomed to occupy, stood empty. She struck a few chords--then glanced round at me--then looked back again at her music.

"Won't you take your old place?" she said, speaking very abruptly and in very low tones.

"I may take it on the last night," I answered.

She did not reply--she kept her attention riveted on the music-- music which she knew by memory, which she had played over and over again, in former times, without the book. I only knew that she had heard me, I only knew that she was aware of my being close to her, by seeing the red spot on the cheek that was nearest to me fade out, and the face grow pale all over.

"I am very sorry you are going," she said, her voice almost sinking to a whisper, her eyes looking more and more intently at the music, her fingers flying over the keys of the piano with a strange feverish energy which I had never noticed in her before.

"I shall remember those kind words, Miss Fairlie, long after to-morrow has come and gone."

The paleness grew whiter on her face, and she turned it farther away from me.

"Don't speak of to-morrow," she said. "Let the music speak to us of to-night, in a happier language than ours."

Her lips trembled--a faint sigh fluttered from them, which she tried vainly to suppress. Her fingers wavered on the piano--she struck a false note, confused herself in trying to set it right, and dropped her hands angrily on her lap. Miss Halcombe and Mr. Gilmore looked up in astonishment from the card-table at which they were playing. Even Mrs. Vesey, dozing in her chair, woke at the sudden cessation of the music, and inquired what had happened.

"You play at whist, Mr. Hartright?" asked Miss Halcombe, with her eyes directed significantly at the place I occupied.

I knew what she meant--I knew she was right, and I rose at once to go to the card-table. As I left the piano Miss Fairlie turned a page of the music, and touched the keys again with a surer hand.

"I WILL play it," she said, striking the notes almost passionately. "I WILL play it on the last night."

"Come, Mrs. Vesey," said Miss Halcombe, "Mr. Gilmore and I are tired of ecarte--come and be Mr. Hartright's partner at whist."

The old lawyer smiled satirically. His had been the winning hand, and he had just turned up a king. He evidently attributed Miss Halcombe's abrupt change in the card-table arrangements to a lady's inability to play the losing game.

The rest of the evening passed without a word or a look from her. She kept her place at the piano, and I kept mine at the card- table. She played unintermittingly--played as if the music was her only refuge from herself. Sometimes her fingers touched the notes with a lingering fondness--a soft, plaintive, dying tenderness, unutterably beautiful and mournful to hear; sometimes they faltered and failed her, or hurried over the instrument mechanically, as if their task was a burden to them. But still, change and waver as they might in the expression they imparted to the music, their resolution to play never faltered. She only rose from the piano when we all rose to say Good-night.

Mrs. Vesey was the nearest to the door, and the first to shake hands with me.

"I shall not see you again, Mr. Hartright," said the old lady. "I am truly sorry you are going away. You have been very kind and attentive, and an old woman like me feels kindness and attention. I wish you happy, sir--I wish you a kind good-bye."

Mr. Gilmore came next.

"I hope we shall have a future opportunity of bettering our acquaintance, Mr. Harright. You quite understand
about that little matter of business being safe in my hands? Yes, yes, of course. Bless me, how cold it is! Don't let me keep you at the door. Bon voyage, my dear sir—bon voyage, as the French say."

Miss Halcombe followed.

"Half-past seven to-morrow morning," she said—then added in a whisper, "I have heard and seen more than you think. Your conduct to-night has made me your friend for life."

Miss Fairlie came last. I could not trust myself to look at her when I took her hand, and when I thought of the next morning.

"My departure must be a very early one," I said. "I shall be gone, Miss Fairlie, before you----"

"No, no," she interposed hastily, "not before I am out of my room. I shall be down to breakfast with Marian. I am not so ungrateful, not so forgetful of the past three months----"

Her voice failed her, her hand closed gently round mine—then dropped it suddenly. Before I could say "Good-night" she was gone.

The end comes fast to meet me—comes inevitably, as the light of the last morning came at Limmeridge House. It was barely half-past seven when I went downstairs, but I found them both at the breakfast-table waiting for me. In the chill air, in the dim light, in the gloomy morning silence of the house, we three sat down together, and tried to eat, tried to talk. The struggle to preserve appearances was hopeless and useless, and I rose to end it.

As I held out my hand, as Miss Halcombe, who was nearest to me, took it, Miss Fairlie turned away suddenly and hurried from the room.

"Better so," said Miss Halcombe, when the door had closed—"better so, for you and for her."

I awaited a moment before I could speak—it was hard to lose her, without a parting word or a parting look. I controlled myself—I tried to take leave of Miss Halcombe in fitting terms; but all the farewell words I would fain have spoken dwindled to one sentence.

"Have I deserved that you should write to me?" was all I could say.

"You have nobly deserved everything that I can do for you, as long as we both live. Whatever the end is you shall know it."

"And if I can ever be of help again, at any future time, long after the memory of my presumption and my folly is forgotten . . .".

I could add no more. My voice faltered, my eyes moistened in spite of me. She caught me by both hands—she pressed them with the strong, steady grasp of a man—her dark eyes glittered—her brown complexion flushed deep—the force and energy of her face glowed and grew beautiful with the pure inner light of her generosity and her pity.

"I will trust you—if ever the time comes I will trust you as my friend and HER friend, as my brother and HER brother." She stopped, drew me nearer to her—the fearless, noble creature—touched my forehead, sister-like, with her lips, and called me by my Christian name. "God bless you, Walter!" she said. "Wait here alone and compose yourself—I had better not stay for both our sakes—I had better see you go from the balcony upstairs."

She left the room. I turned away towards the window, where nothing faced me but the lonely autumn landscape—I turned away to master myself, before I too left the room, and left it for ever.

A minute passed—it could hardly have been more—when I heard the door open again softly, and the rustling of a woman's dress on the carpet moved towards me. My heart beat violently as I turned round. Miss Fairlie was approaching me from the farther end of the room.

She stopped and hesitated when our eyes met, and when she saw that we were alone. Then, with that courage which women lose so often in the small emergency, and so seldom in the great, she came on nearer to me, strangely pale and strangely quiet, drawing one hand after her along the table by which she walked, and holding something at her side in the other, which was hidden by the folds of her dress.

"I only went into the drawing-room," she said, "to look for this. It may remind you of your visit here, and of the friends you leave behind you. You told me I had improved very much when I did it, and I thought you might like----"

She turned her head away, and offered me a little sketch, drawn throughout by her own pencil, of the summer-house in which we had first met. The paper trembled in her hand as she held it out to me—trembled in mine as I took it from her.

I was afraid to say what I felt—I only answered, "It shall never leave me—all my life long it shall be the treasure that I prize most. I am very grateful for it—very grateful to you, for not letting me go away without bidding you good-bye."

"Oh!" she said innocently, "how could I let you go, after we have passed so many happy days together!"

"Those days may never return, Miss Fairlie—my way of life and yours are very far apart. But if a time should come, when the devotion of my whole heart and soul and strength will give you a moment's happiness, or spare you
a moment's sorrow, will you try to remember the poor drawing-master who has taught you? Miss Halcombe has promised to trust me--will you promise too?"

The farewell sadness in the kind blue eyes shone dimly through her gathering tears.

"I promise it," she said in broken tones. "Oh, don't look at me like that! I promise it with all my heart."

I ventured a little nearer to her, and held out my hand.

"You have many friends who love you, Miss Fairlie. Your happy future is the dear object of many hopes. May I say, at parting, that it is the dear object of MY hopes too?"

The tears flowed fast down her cheeks. She rested one trembling hand on the table to steady herself while she gave me the other. I took it in mine--I held it fast. My head drooped over it, my tears fell on it, my lips pressed it--not in love; oh, not in love, at that last moment, but in the agony and the self-abandonment of despair.

"For God's sake, leave me!" she said faintly.

The confession of her heart's secret burst from her in those pleading words. I had no right to hear them, no right to answer them--they were the words that banished me, in the name of her sacred weakness, from the room. It was all over. I dropped her hand, I said no more. The blinding tears shut her out from my eyes, and I dashed them away to look at her for the last time. One look as she sank into a chair, as her arms fell on the table, as her fair head dropped on them wearily. One farewell look, and the door had closed upon her--the great gulf of separation had opened between us--the image of Laura Fairlie was a memory of the past already.

The End of Hartright's Narrative.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY VINCENT GILMORE (of Chancery Lane, Solicitor)

I

I write these lines at the request of my friend, Mr. Walter Hartright. They are intended to convey a description of certain events which seriously affected Miss Fairlie's interests, and which took place after the period of Mr. Hartright's departure from Limmeridge House.

There is no need for me to say whether my own opinion does or does not sanction the disclosure of the remarkable family story, of which my narrative forms an important component part. Mr. Hartright has taken that responsibility on himself, and circumstances yet to be related will show that he has amply earned the right to do so, if he chooses to exercise it. The plan he has adopted for presenting the story to others, in the most truthful and most vivid manner, requires that it should be told, at each successive stage in the march of events, by the persons who were directly concerned in those events at the time of their occurrence. My appearance here, as narrator, is the necessary consequence of this arrangement. I was present during the sojourn of Sir Percival Glyde in Cumberland, and was personally concerned in one important result of his short residence under Mr. Fairlie's roof. It is my duty, therefore, to add these new links to the chain of events, and to take up the chain itself at the point where, for the present only Mr. Hartright has dropped it.

I arrived at Limmeridge House on Friday the second of November.

My object was to remain at Mr. Fairlie's until the arrival of Sir Percival Glyde. If that event led to the appointment of any given day for Sir Percival's union with Miss Fairlie, I was to take the necessary instructions back with me to London, and to occupy myself in drawing the lady's marriage-settlement.

On the Friday I was not favoured by Mr. Fairlie with an interview. He had been, or had fancied himself to be, an invalid for years past, and he was not well enough to receive me. Miss Halcombe was the first member of the family whom I saw. She met me at the house door, and introduced me to Mr. Hartright, who had been staying at Limmeridge for some time past.

I did not see Miss Fairlie until later in the day, at dinner-time. She was not looking well, and I was sorry to observe it. She is a sweet lovable girl, as amiable and attentive to every one about her as her excellent mother used to be--though, personally speaking, she takes after her father. Mrs. Fairlie had dark eyes and hair, and her elder daughter, Miss Halcombe, strongly reminds me of her. Miss Halcombe played to us in the evening--not so well as usual, I thought. We had a rubber at whist, a mere profanation, so far as play was concerned, of that noble game. I had been favourably impressed by Mr. Hartright on our first introduction to one another, but I soon discovered that he was not free from the social failings incidental to his age. There are three things that none of the young men of the present generation can do. They can't sit over their wine, they can't play at whist, and they can't pay a lady a compliment. Mr. Hartright was no exception to the general rule. Otherwise, even in those early days and on that short acquaintance, he struck me as being a modest and gentlemanlike young man.

So the Friday passed. I say nothing about the more serious matters which engaged my attention on that day--the anonymous letter to Miss Fairlie, the measures I thought it right to adopt when the matter was mentioned to me, and the conviction I entertained that every possible explanation of the circumstances would be readily afforded by Sir Percival Glyde, having all been fully noticed, as I understand, in the narrative which precedes this.

On the Saturday Mr. Hartright had left before I got down to breakfast. Miss Fairlie kept her room all day, and
Miss Halcombe appeared to me to be out of spirits. The house was not what it used to be in the time of Mr. and Mrs. Philip Fairlie. I took a walk by myself in the forenoon, and looked about at some of the places which I first saw when I was staying at Limmeridge to transact family business, more than thirty years since. They were not what they used to be either.

At two o'clock Mr. Fairlie sent to say he was well enough to see me. He had not altered, at any rate, since I first knew him. His talk was to the same purpose as usual—all about himself and his ailments, his wonderful coins, and his matchless Rembrandt etchings. The moment I tried to speak of the business that had brought me to his house, he shut his eyes and said I “upset” him. I persisted in upsetting him by returning again and again to the subject. All I could ascertain was that he looked on his niece's marriage as a settled thing, that her father had sanctioned it, that he sanctioned it himself, that it was a desirable marriage, and that he should be personally rejoiced when the worry of it was over. As to the settlements, if I would consult his niece, and afterwards dive as deeply as I pleased into my own knowledge of the family affairs, and get everything ready, and limit his share in the business, as guardian, to saying Yes, at the right moment—why, of course he would meet my views, and everybody else's views, with infinite pleasure. In the meantime, there I saw him, a helpless sufferer, confined to his room. Did I think he looked as if he wanted teasing? No. Then why tease him?

I might, perhaps, have been a little astonished at this extraordinary absence of all self-assertion on Mr. Fairlie's part, in the character of guardian, if my knowledge of the family affairs had not been sufficient to remind me that he was a single man, and that he had nothing more than a life-interest in the Limmeridge property. As matters stood, therefore, I was neither surprised nor disappointed at the result of the interview. Mr. Fairlie had simply justified my expectations—and there was an end of it.

Sunday was a dull day, out of doors and in. A letter arrived for me from Sir Percival Glyde's solicitor, acknowledging the receipt of my copy of the anonymous letter and my accompanying statement of the case. Miss Fairlie joined us in the afternoon, looking pale and depressed, and altogether unlike herself. I had some talk with her, and ventured on a delicate allusion to Sir Percival. She listened and said nothing. All other subjects she pursued willingly, but this subject she allowed to drop. I began to doubt whether she might not be repenting of her engagement—just as young ladies often do, when repentance comes too late.

On Monday Sir Percival Glyde arrived.

I found him to be a most prepossessing man, so far as manners and appearance were concerned. He looked rather older than I had expected, his head being bald over the forehead, and his face somewhat marked and worn, but his movements were as active and his spirits as high as a young man's. His meeting with Miss Halcombe was delightfully hearty and unaffected, and his reception of me, upon my being presented to him, was so easy and pleasant that we got on together like old friends. Miss Fairlie was not with us when he arrived, but she entered the room about ten minutes afterwards. Sir Percival rose and paid his compliments with perfect grace. His evident concern on seeing the change for the worse in the young lady's looks was expressed with a mixture of tenderness and respect, with an unassuming delicacy of tone, voice, and manner, which did equal credit to his good breeding and his good sense. I was rather surprised, under these circumstances, to see that Miss Fairlie continued to be constrained and uneasy in his presence, and that she took the first opportunity of leaving the room again. Sir Percival neither noticed the restraint in her reception of him, nor her sudden withdrawal from our society. He had not obtruded his attentions on her while she was present, and he did not embarrass Miss Halcombe by any allusion to her departure when she was gone. His tact and taste were never at fault on this or on any other occasion while I was in his company at Limmeridge House.

As soon as Miss Fairlie had left the room he spared us all embarrassment on the subject of the anonymous letter, by advertising to it of his own accord. He had stopped in London on his way from Hampshire, had seen his solicitor, had read the documents forwarded by me, and had travelled on to Cumberland, anxious to satisfy our minds by the speediest and the fullest explanation that words could convey. On hearing him express himself to this effect, I offered him the original letter, which I had kept for his inspection. He thanked me, and declined to look at it, saying that he had seen the copy, and that he was quite willing to leave the original in our hands.

The statement itself, on which he immediately entered, was as simple and satisfactory as I had all along anticipated it would be.

Mrs. Catherick, he informed us, had in past years laid him under some obligations for faithful services rendered to his family connections and to himself. She had been doubly unfortunate in being married to a husband who had deserted her, and in having an only child whose mental faculties had been in a disturbed condition from a very early age. Although her marriage had removed her to a part of Hampshire far distant from the neighbourhood in which Sir Percival's property was situated, he had taken care not to lose sight of her—his friendly feeling towards the poor woman, in consideration of her past services, having been greatly strengthened by his admiration of the patience and courage with which she supported her calamities. In course of time the symptoms of mental affliction in her
The little beast, cowardly and cross-grained, as pet-dogs usually are, looked up at him sharply, shrank away from
his outstretched hand, whined, shivered, and hid itself under a sofa. It was scarcely possible that he could have
been put out by such a trifle as a dog's reception of him, but I observed, nevertheless, that he walked away towards
the window very suddenly. Perhaps his temper is irritable at times. If so, I can sympathise with him. My temper is
put out by such a trifle as a dog's reception of him, but I observed, nevertheless, that he walked away towards the
rug. He held out his hand, and called to the dog good-humouredly.

"Come, Nina," he said, "we remember each other, don't we?"

The little beast, cowardly and cross-grained, as pet-dogs usually are, looked up at him sharply, shrank away from
his outstretched hand, whined, shivered, and hid itself under a sofa. It was scarcely possible that he could have
been put out by such a trifle as a dog's reception of him, but I observed, nevertheless, that he walked away towards
the window very suddenly. Perhaps his temper is irritable at times. If so, I can sympathise with him. My temper is
Irritable at times too.

Miss Halcombe was not long in writing the note. When it was done she rose from the writing-table, and handed the open sheet of paper to Sir Percival. He bowed, took it from her, folded it up immediately without looking at the contents, sealed it, wrote the address, and handed it back to her in silence. I never saw anything more gracefully and more becomingly done in my life.

"You insist on my posting this letter, Sir Percival?" said Miss Halcombe.
"I beg you will post it," he answered. "And now that it is written and sealed up, allow me to ask one or two last questions about the unhappy woman to whom it refers. I have read the communication which Mr. Gilmore kindly addressed to my solicitor, describing the circumstances under which the writer of the anonymous letter was identified. But there are certain points to which that statement does not refer. Did Anne Catherick see Miss Fairlie?"
"Certainly not," replied Miss Halcombe.
"Did she see you?"
"No."
"She saw nobody from the house then, except a certain Mr. Hartright, who accidentally met with her in the churchyard here?"
"Nobody else."
"Mr. Hartright was employed at Limmeridge as a drawing-master, I believe? Is he a member of one of the Water-Colours Societies?"
"I believe he is," answered Miss Halcombe.

He paused for a moment, as if he was thinking over the last answer, and then added--
"Did you find out where Anne Catherick was living, when she was in this neighbourhood?"
"Yes. At a farm on the moor, called Todd's Corner."

"It is a duty we all owe to the poor creature herself to trace her," continued Sir Percival. "She may have said something at Todd's Corner which may help us to find her. I will go there and make inquiries on the chance. In the meantime, as I cannot prevail on myself to discuss this painful subject with Miss Fairlie, may I beg, Miss Halcombe, that you will kindly undertake to give her the necessary explanation, deferring it of course until you have received the reply to that note."

Miss Halcombe promised to comply with his request. He thanked her, nodded pleasantly, and left us, to go and establish himself in his own room. As he opened the door the cross-grained greyhound poked out her sharp muzzle from under the sofa, and barked and snapped at him.

"A good morning's work, Miss Halcombe," I said, as soon as we were alone. "Here is an anxious day well ended already."
"Yes," she answered; "no doubt. I am very glad your mind is satisfied."
"My mind! Surely, with that note in your hand, your mind is at ease too?"
"Oh yes--how can it be otherwise? I know the thing could not be," she went on, speaking more to herself than to me; "but I almost wish Walter Hartright had stayed here long enough to be present at the explanation, and to hear the proposal to me to write this note."

I was a little surprised--perhaps a little piqued also--by these last words.
"Events, it is true, connected Mr. Hartright very remarkably with the affair of the letter," I said; "and I readily admit that he conducted himself, all things considered, with great delicacy and discretion. But I am quite at a loss to understand what useful influence his presence could have exercised in relation to the effect of Sir Percival's statement on your mind or mine."

"It was only a fancy," she said absently. "There is no need to discuss it, Mr. Gilmore. Your experience ought to be, and is, the best guide I can desire."

I did not altogether like her thrusting the whole responsibility, in this marked manner, on my shoulders. If Mr. Fairlie had done it, I should not have been surprised. But resolute, clear-minded Miss Halcombe was the very last person in the world whom I should have expected to find shrinking from the expression of an opinion of her own.

"If any doubts still trouble you," I said, "why not mention them to me at once? Tell me plainly, have you any reason to distrust Sir Percival Glyde?"
"None whatever." 
"Do you see anything improbable, or contradictory, in his explanation?"
"How can I say I do, after the proof he has offered me of the truth of it? Can there be better testimony in his favour, Mr. Gilmore, than the testimony of the woman's mother?"
"None better. If the answer to your note of inquiry proves to be satisfactory, I for one cannot see what more any friend of Sir Percival's can possibly expect from him."

"Then we will post the note," she said, rising to leave the room, "and dismiss all further reference to the subject
until the answer arrives. Don't attach any weight to my hesitation. I can give no better reason for it than that I have been over-anxious about Laura lately--and anxiety, Mr. Gilmore, unsettles the strongest of us."

She left me abruptly, her naturally firm voice faltering as she spoke those last words. A sensitive, vehement, passionate nature--a woman of ten thousand in these trivial, superficial times. I had known her from her earliest years--I had seen her tested, as she grew up, in more than one trying family crisis, and my long experience made me attach an importance to her hesitation under the circumstances here detailed, which I should certainly not have felt in the case of another woman. I could see no cause for any uneasiness or any doubt, but she had made me a little uneasy, and a little doubtful, nevertheless. In my youth, I should have chafed and fretted under the irritation of my own unreasonable state of mind. In my age, I knew better, and went out philosophically to walk it off.

II

We all met again at dinner-time.

Sir Percival was in such boisterous high spirits that I hardly recognised him as the same man whose quiet tact, refinement, and good sense had impressed me so strongly at the interview of the morning. The only trace of his former self that I could detect reappeared, every now and then, in his manner towards Miss Fairlie. A look or a word from her suspended his loudest laugh, checked his gayest flow of talk, and rendered him all attention to her, and to no one else at table, in an instant. Although he never openly tried to draw her into the conversation, he never lost the slightest chance she gave him of letting her drift into it by accident, and of saying the words to her, under those favourable circumstances, which a man with less tact and delicacy would have pointedly addressed to her the moment they occurred to him. Rather to my surprise, Miss Fairlie appeared to be sensible of his attentions without being moved by them. She was a little confused from time to time when he looked at her, or spoke to her; but she never warmed towards him. Rank, fortune, good breeding, good looks, the respect of a gentleman, and the devotion of a lover were all humbly placed at her feet, and, so far as appearances went, were all offered in vain.

On the next day, the Tuesday, Sir Percival went in the morning (taking one of the servants with him as a guide) to Todd's Corner. His inquiries, as I afterwards heard, led to no results. On his return he had an interview with Mr. Fairlie, and in the afternoon he and Miss Halcombe rode out together. Nothing else happened worthy of record. The evening passed as usual. There was no change in Sir Percival, and no change in Miss Fairlie.

The Wednesday's post brought with it an event--the reply from Mrs. Catherick. I took a copy of the document, which I have preserved, and which I may as well present in this place. It ran as follows--

"MADAM,--I beg to acknowledge the receipt of your letter, inquiring whether my daughter, Anne, was placed under medical superintendence with my knowledge and approval, and whether the share taken in the matter by Sir Percival Glyde was such as to merit the expression of my gratitude towards that gentleman. Be pleased to accept my answer in the affirmative to both those questions, and believe me to remain, your obedient servant,

"JANE ANNE CATHERICK."

Short, sharp, and to the point; in form rather a business-like letter for a woman to write--in substance as plain a confirmation as could be desired of Sir Percival Glyde's statement. This was my opinion, and with certain minor reservations, Miss Halcombe's opinion also. Sir Percival, when the letter was shown to him, did not appear to be struck by the sharp, short tone of it. He told us that Mrs. Catherick was a woman of few words, a clear-headed, straightforward, unimaginative person, who wrote briefly and plainly, just as she spoke.

The next duty to be accomplished, now that the answer had been received, was to acquaint Miss Fairlie with Sir Percival's explanation. Miss Halcombe had undertaken to do this, and had left the room to go to her sister, when she suddenly returned again, and sat down by the easy-chair in which I was reading the newspaper. Sir Percival had gone out a minute before to look at the stables, and no one was in the room but ourselves.

"I suppose we have really and truly done all we can?" she said, turning and twisting Mrs. Catherick's letter in her hand.

"If we are friends of Sir Percival's, who know him and trust him, we have done all, and more than all, that is necessary," I answered, a little annoyed by this return of her hesitation. "But if we are enemies who suspect him----"

"That alternative is not even to be thought of," she interposed. "We are Sir Percival's friends, and if generosity and forbearance can add to our regard for him, we ought to be Sir Percival's admirers as well. You know that he saw Mr. Fairlie yesterday, and that he afterwards went out with me."

"Yes. I saw you riding away together."

"We began the ride by talking about Anne Catherick, and about the singular manner in which Mr. Hartright met with her. But we soon dropped that subject, and Sir Percival spoke next, in the most unselfish terms, of his engagement with Laura. He said he had observed that she was out of spirits, and he was willing, if not informed to the contrary, to attribute to that cause the alteration in her manner towards him during his present visit. If, however, there was any more serious reason for the change, he would entreat that no constraint might be placed on her inclinations either by Mr. Fairlie or by me. All he asked, in that case, was that she would recall to mind, for the last
time, what the circumstances were under which the engagement between them was made, and what his conduct had been from the beginning of the courtship to the present time. If, after due reflection on those two subjects, she seriously desired that he should withdraw his pretensions to the honour of becoming her husband—and if she would tell him so plainly with her own lips—he would sacrifice himself by leaving her perfectly free to withdraw from the engagement.

"No man could say more than that, Miss Halcombe. As to my experience, few men in his situation would have said as much."

She paused after I had spoken those words, and looked at me with a singular expression of perplexity and distress.

"I accuse nobody, and I suspect nothing," she broke out abruptly. "But I cannot and will not accept the responsibility of persuading Laura to this marriage."

"That is exactly the course which Sir Percival Glyde has himself requested you to take," I replied in astonishment. "He has begged you not to force her inclinations."

"And he indirectly obliges me to force them, if I give her his message."

"How can that possibly be?"

"Consult your own knowledge of Laura, Mr. Gilmore. If I tell her to reflect on the circumstances of her engagement, I at once appeal to two of the strongest feelings in her nature—her love for her father's memory, and to her strict regard for truth. You know that she never broke a promise in her life—you know that she entered on this engagement at the beginning of her father's fatal illness, and that he spoke hopefully and happily of her marriage to Sir Percival Glyde on his deathbed."

I own that I was a little shocked at this view of the case.

"Surely," I said, "you don't mean to infer that when Sir Percival spoke to you yesterday he speculated on such a result as you have just mentioned?"

Her frank, fearless face answered for her before she spoke.

"Do you think I would remain an instant in the company of any man whom I suspected of such baseness as that?" she asked angrily.

I liked to feel her hearty indignation flash out on me in that way. We see so much malice and so little indignation in my profession.

"In that case," I said, "excuse me if I tell you, in our legal phrase, that you are travelling out of the record. Whatever the consequences may be, Sir Percival has a right to expect that your sister should carefully consider her engagement from every reasonable point of view before she claims her release from it. If that unlucky letter has prejudiced her against him, go at once, and tell her that he has cleared himself in your eyes and in mine. What objection can she urge against him after that? What excuse can she possibly have for changing her mind about a man whom she had virtually accepted for her husband more than two years ago?"

"In the eyes of law and reason, Mr. Gilmore, no excuse, I daresay. If she still hesitates, and if I still hesitate, you must attribute our strange conduct, if you like, to caprice in both cases, and we must bear the imputation as well as we can."

With those words she suddenly rose and left me. When a sensible woman has a serious question put to her, and evades it by a flippant answer, it is a sure sign, in ninety-nine cases out of a hundred, that she has something to conceal. I returned to the perusal of the newspaper, strongly suspecting that Miss Halcombe and Miss Fairlie had a secret between them which they were keeping from Sir Percival, and keeping from me. I thought this hard on both of us, especially on Sir Percival.

My doubts—or to speak more correctly, my convictions—were confirmed by Miss Halcombe's language and manner when I saw her again later in the day. She was suspiciously brief and reserved in telling me the result of her interview with her sister. Miss Fairlie, it appeared, had listened quietly while the affair of the letter was placed before her in the right point of view, but when Miss Halcombe next proceeded to say that the object of Sir Percival's visit at Limmeridge was to prevail on her to let a day be fixed for the marriage she checked all further reference to the subject by begging for time. If Sir Percival would consent to spare her for the present, she would undertake to give him his final answer before the end of the year. She pleaded for this delay with such anxiety and agitation, that Miss Halcombe had promised to use her influence, if necessary, to obtain it, and there, at Miss Fairlie's earnest entreaty, all further discussion of the marriage question had ended.

The purely temporary arrangement thus proposed might have been convenient enough to the young lady, but it proved somewhat embarrassing to the writer of these lines. That morning's post had brought a letter from my partner, which obliged me to return to town the next day by the afternoon train. It was extremely probable that I should find no second opportunity of presenting myself at Limmeridge House during the remainder of the year. In that case, supposing Miss Fairlie ultimately decided on holding to her engagement, my necessary personal
communication with her, before I drew her settlement, would become something like a downright impossibility, and we should be obliged to commit to writing questions which ought always to be discussed on both sides by word of mouth. I said nothing about this difficulty until Sir Percival had been consulted on the subject of the desired delay. He was too gallant a gentleman not to grant the request immediately. When Miss Halcombe informed me of this I told her that I must absolutely speak to her sister before I left Limmeridge, and it was, therefore, arranged that I should see Miss Fairlie in her own sitting-room the next morning. She did not come down to dinner, or join us in the evening. Indisposition was the excuse, and I thought Sir Percival looked, as well he might, a little annoyed when he heard of it.

The next morning, as soon as breakfast was over, I went up to Miss Fairlie's sitting-room. The poor girl looked so pale and sad, and came forward to welcome me so readily and prettily, that the resolution to lecture her on her caprice and indecision, which I had been forming all the way upstairs, failed me on the spot. I led her back to the chair from which she had risen, and placed myself opposite to her. Her cross-grained pet greyhound was in the room, and I fully expected a barking and snapping reception. Strange to say, the whimsical little brute falsified my expectations by jumping into my lap and poking its sharp muzzle familiarly into my hand the moment I sat down.

"You used often to sit on my knee when you were a child, my dear," I said, "and now your little dog seems determined to succeed you in the vacant throne. Is that pretty drawing your doing?"

I pointed to a little album which lay on the table by her side and which she had evidently been looking over when I came in. The page that lay open had a small water-colour landscape very neatly mounted on it. This was the drawing which had suggested my question--an idle question enough--but how could I begin to talk of business to her the moment I opened my lips?

"No," she said, looking away from the drawing rather confusedly, "it is not my doing."

Her fingers had a restless habit, which I remembered in her as a child, of always playing with the first thing that came to hand whenever any one was talking to her. On this occasion they wandered to the album, and toyed absently about the margin of the little water-colour drawing. The expression of melancholy deepened on her face. She did not look at the drawing, or look at me. Her eyes moved uneasily from object to object in the room, betraying plainly that she suspected what my purpose was in coming to speak to her. Seeing that, I thought it best to get to the purpose with as little delay as possible.

"One of the errands, my dear, which brings me here is to bid you good-bye," I began. "I must get back to London to-day: and, before I leave, I want to have a word with you on the subject of your own affairs."

"I am very sorry you are going, Mr. Gilmore," she said, looking at me kindly. "It is like the happy old times to have you here."

"I hope I may be able to come back and recall those pleasant memories once more," I continued; "but as there is some uncertainty about the future, I must take my opportunity when I can get it, and speak to you now. I am your old lawyer and your old friend, and I may remind you, I am sure, without offence, of the possibility of your marrying Sir Percival Glyde."

She took her hand off the little album as suddenly as if it had turned hot and burnt her. Her fingers twined together nervously in her lap, her eyes looked down again at the floor, and an expression of constraint settled on her face which looked almost like an expression of pain.

"And now," I said in conclusion, "tell me if you can think of any condition which, in the case we have supposed, you would wish me to make for you--subject, of course, to your guardian's approval, as you are not yet of age."

She moved uneasily in her chair, then looked in my face on a sudden very earnestly.

"If it does happen," she began faintly, "if I am----""If you are married," I added, helping her out.

"Don't let him part me from Marian," she cried, with a sudden outbreak of energy. "Oh, Mr. Gilmore, pray make it law that Marian is to live with me!"
Under other circumstances I might, perhaps, have been amused at this essentially feminine interpretation of my question, and of the long explanation which had preceded it. But her looks and tones, when she spoke, were of a kind to make me more than serious—they distressed me. Her words, few as they were, betrayed a desperate clinging to the past which boded ill for the future.

"Your having Marian Halcombe to live with you can easily be settled by private arrangement," I said. "You hardly understood my question, I think. It referred to your own property—to the disposal of your money. Supposing you were to make a will when you come of age, who would you like the money to go to?"

"Marian has been mother and sister both to me," said the good, affectionate girl, her pretty blue eyes glistening while she spoke. "May I leave it to Marian, Mr. Gilmore?"

"Certainly, my love," I answered. "But remember what a large sum it is. Would you like it all to go to Miss Halcombe?"

She hesitated; her colour came and went, and her hand stole back again to the little album.

"Not all of it," she said. "There is some one else besides Marian----"

She stopped; her colour heightened, and the fingers of the hand that rested upon the album beat gently on the margin of the drawing, as if her memory had set them going mechanically with the remembrance of a favourite tune.

"You mean some other member of the family besides Miss Halcombe?" I suggested, seeing her at a loss to proceed.

The heightening colour spread to her forehead and her neck, and the nervous fingers suddenly clasped themselves fast round the edge of the book.

"There is some one else," she said, not noticing my last words, though she had evidently heard them; "there is some one else who might like a little keepsake if—if I might leave it. There would be no harm if I should die first----"

She paused again. The colour that had spread over her cheeks suddenly, as suddenly left them. The hand on the album resigned its hold, trembled a little, and moved the book away from her. She looked at me for an instant—then turned her head aside in the chair. Her handkerchief fell to the floor as she changed her position, and she hurriedly hid her face from me in her hands.

Sad! To remember her, as I did, the liveliest, happiest child that ever laughed the day through, and to see her now, in the flower of her age and her beauty, so broken and so brought down as this!

In the distress that she caused me I forgot the years that had passed, and the change they had made in our position towards one another. I moved my chair close to her, and picked up her handkerchief from the carpet, and drew her hands from her face gently. "Don't cry, my love," I said, and dried the tears that were gathering in her eyes with my own hand, as if she had been the little Laura Fairlie of ten long years ago.

It was the best way I could have taken to compose her. She laid her head on my shoulder, and smiled faintly through her tears.

"I am very sorry for forgetting myself," she said artlessly. "I have not been well—I have felt sadly weak and nervous lately, and I often cry without reason when I am alone. I am better now—I can answer you as I ought, Mr. Gilmore, I can indeed."

"No, no, my dear," I replied, "we will consider the subject as done with for the present. You have said enough to sanction my taking the best possible care of your interests, and we can settle details at another opportunity. Let us have done with business now, and talk of something else."

I led her at once into speaking on other topics. In ten minutes' time she was in better spirits, and I rose to take my leave.

"Come here again," she said earnestly. "I will try to be worthier of your kind feeling for me and for my interests if you will only come again."

Still clinging to the past—that past which I represented to her, in my way, as Miss Halcombe did in hers! It troubled me sorely to see her looking back, at the beginning of her career, just as I look back at the end of mine.

"If I do come again, I hope I shall find you better," I said; "better and happier. God bless you, my dear!"

She only answered by putting up her cheek to me to be kissed. Even lawyers have hearts, and mine ached a little as I took leave of her.

The whole interview between us had hardly lasted more than half an hour—she had not breathed a word, in my presence, to explain the mystery of her evident distress and dismay at the prospect of her marriage, and yet she had contrived to win me over to her side of the question, I neither knew how nor why. I had entered the room, feeling that Sir Percival Glyde had fair reason to complain of the manner in which she was treating him. I left it, secretly hoping that matters might end in her taking him at his word and claiming her release. A man of my age and experience ought to have known better than to vacillate in this unreasonable manner. I can make no excuse for myself; I can only tell the truth, and say—so it was.
The hour for my departure was now drawing near. I sent to Mr. Fairlie to say that I would wait on him to take
leave if he liked, but that he must excuse my being rather in a hurry. He sent a message back, written in pencil on a
slip of paper: "Kind love and best wishes, dear Gilmore. Hurry of any kind is inexpressibly injurious to me. Pray
take care of yourself. Good-bye."

Just before I left I saw Miss Halcombe for a moment alone.
"Have you said all you wanted to Laura?" she asked.
"Yes," I replied. "She is very weak and nervous--I am glad she has you to take care of her."

Miss Halcombe's sharp eyes studied my face attentively.
"You are altering your opinion about Laura," she said. "You are readier to make allowances for her than you
were yesterday."

No sensible man ever engages, unprepared, in a fencing match of words with a woman. I only answered--
"Let me know what happens. I will do nothing till I hear from you."

She still looked hard in my face. "I wish it was all over, and well over, Mr. Gilmore--and so do you." With those
words she left me.

Sir Percival most politely insisted on seeing me to the carriage door.

"If you are ever in my neighbourhood," he said, "pray don't forget that I am sincerely anxious to improve our
acquaintance. The tried and trusted old friend of this family will be always a welcome visitor in any house of mine."

A really irresistible man--courteous, considerate, delightfully free from pride--a gentleman, every inch of him.As I drove away to the station I felt as if I could cheerfully do anything to promote the interests of Sir Percival
Glyde--anything in the world, except drawing the marriage settlement of his wife.

III

A week passed, after my return to London, without the receipt of any communication from Miss Halcombe.

On the eighth day a letter in her handwriting was placed among the other letters on my table.

It announced that Sir Percival Glyde had been definitely accepted, and that the marriage was to take place, as he
had originally desired, before the end of the year. In all probability the ceremony would be performed during the last
fortnight in December. Miss Fairlie's twenty-first birthday was late in March. She would, therefore, by this
arrangement, become Sir Percival's wife about three months before she was of age.

I ought not to have been surprised, I ought not to have been sorry, but I was surprised and sorry, nevertheless.
Some little disappointment, caused by the unsatisfactory shortness of Miss Halcombe's letter, mingled itself with
these feelings, and contributed its share towards upsetting my serenity for the day. In six lines my correspondent
announced the proposed marriage--in three more, she told me that Sir Percival had left Cumberland to return to his
house in Hampshire, and in two concluding sentences she informed me, first, that Laura was sadly in want of change
and cheerful society; secondly, that she had resolved to try the effect of some such change forthwith, by taking her
sister away with her on a visit to certain old friends in Yorkshire. There the letter ended, without a word to explain
what the circumstances were which had decided Miss Fairlie to accept Sir Percival Glyde in one short week from the
time when I had last seen her.

At a later period the cause of this sudden determination was fully explained to me. It is not my business to relate
it imperfectly, on hearsay evidence. The circumstances came within the personal experience of Miss Halcombe, and
when her narrative succeeds mine, she will describe them in every particular exactly as they happened. In the
meantime, the plain duty for me to perform-- before I, in my turn, lay down my pen and withdraw from the story-- is
to relate the one remaining event connected with Miss Fairlie's proposed marriage in which I was concerned,
namely, the drawing of the settlement.

It is impossible to refer intelligibly to this document without first entering into certain particulars in relation to
the bride's pecuniary affairs. I will try to make my explanation briefly and plainly, and to keep it free from
professional obscurities and technicalities. The matter is of the utmost importance. I warn all readers of these lines
that Miss Fairlie's inheritance is a very serious part of Miss Fairlie's story, and that Mr. Gilmore's experience, in this
particular, must be their experience also, if they wish to understand the narratives which are yet to come.

Miss Fairlie's expectations, then, were of a twofold kind, comprising her possible inheritance of real property, or
land, when her uncle died, and her absolute inheritance of personal property, or money, when she came of age.

Let us take the land first.

In the time of Miss Fairlie's paternal grandfather (whom we will call Mr. Fairlie, the elder) the entailed
succession to the Limmeridge estate stood thus--

Mr. Fairlie, the elder, died and left three sons, Philip, Frederick, and Arthur. As eldest son, Philip succeeded to
the estate, If he died without leaving a son, the property went to the second brother, Frederick; and if Frederick died
also without leaving a son, the property went to the third brother, Arthur.

As events turned out, Mr. Philip Fairlie died leaving an only daughter, the Laura of this story, and the estate, in
consequence, went, in course of law, to the second brother, Frederick, a single man. The third brother, Arthur, had
died many years before the decease of Philip, leaving a son and a daughter. The son, at the age of eighteen, was
drowned at Oxford. His death left Laura, the daughter of Mr. Philip Fairlie, presumptive heiress to the estate, with
every chance of succeeding to it, in the ordinary course of nature, on her uncle Frederick's death, if the said
Frederick died without leaving male issue.

Except in the event, then, of Mr. Frederick Fairlie's marrying and leaving an heir (the two very last things in the
world that he was likely to do), his niece, Laura, would have the property on his death, possessing, it must be
remembered, nothing more than a life-interest in it. If she died single, or died childless, the estate would revert to her
cousin, Magdalen, the daughter of Mr. Arthur Fairlie. If she married, with a proper settlement—or, in other words,
with the settlement I meant to make for her—the income from the estate (a good three thousand a year) would, during
her lifetime, be at her own disposal. If she died before her husband, he would naturally expect to be left in the
enjoyment of the income, for HIS lifetime. If she had a son, that son would be the heir, to the exclusion of her cousin
Magdalen. Thus, Sir Percival's prospects in marrying Miss Fairlie (so far as his wife's expectations from real
property were concerned) promised him these two advantages, on Mr. Frederick Fairlie's death: First, the use of
three thousand a year (by his wife's permission, while she lived, and in his own right, on her death, if he survived
her); and, secondly, the inheritance of Limmeridge for his son, if he had one.

So much for the landed property, and for the disposal of the income from it, on the occasion of Miss Fairlie's
marriage. Thus far, no difficulty or difference of opinion on the lady's settlement was at all likely to arise between
Sir Percival's lawyer and myself.

The personal estate, or, in other words, the money to which Miss Fairlie would become entitled on reaching the
age of twenty-one years, is the next point to consider.

This part of her inheritance was, in itself, a comfortable little fortune. It was derived under her father's will, and
it amounted to the sum of twenty thousand pounds. Besides this, she had a life-interest in ten thousand pounds more,
which latter amount was to go, on her decease, to her aunt Eleanor, her father's only sister. It will greatly assist in
setting the family affairs before the reader in the clearest possible light, if I stop here for a moment, to explain why
the aunt had been kept waiting for her legacy until the death of the niece.

Mr. Philip Fairlie had lived on excellent terms with his sister Eleanor, as long as she remained a single woman.
But when her marriage took place, somewhat late in life, and when that marriage united her to an Italian gentleman
named Fosco, or, rather, to an Italian nobleman—seeing that he rejoiced in the title of Count-- Mr. Fairlie
disapproved of her conduct so strongly that he ceased to hold any communication with her, and even went the length
of striking her name out of his will. The other members of the family all thought this serious manifestation of
resentment at his sister's marriage more or less unreasonable. Count Fosco, though not a rich man, was not a
penniless adventurer either. He had a small but sufficient income of his own. He had lived many years in England,
and he held an excellent position in society. These recommendations, however, availed nothing with Mr. Fairlie. In
many of his opinions he was an Englishman of the old school, and he hated a foreigner simply and solely because he
was a foreigner. The utmost that he could be prevailed on to do, in after years--mainly at Miss Fairlie's intercession--
was to restore his sister's name to its former place in his will, but to keep her waiting for her legacy by giving the
income of the money to his daughter for life, and the money itself, if her aunt died before her, to her cousin
Magdalen. Considering the relative ages of the two ladies, the aunt's chance, in the ordinary course of nature, of
receiving the ten thousand pounds, was thus rendered doubtful in the extreme; and Madame Fosco resented her
brother's treatment of her as unjustly as usual in such cases, by refusing to see her niece, and declining to believe
that Miss Fairlie's intercession had ever been exerted to restore her name to Mr. Fairlie's will.

Such was the history of the ten thousand pounds. Here again no difficulty could arise with Sir Percival's legal
adviser. The income would be at the wife's disposal, and the principal would go to her aunt or her cousin on her
death.

All preliminary explanations being now cleared out of the way, I come at last to the real knot of the case—to the
twenty thousand pounds.

This sum was absolutely Miss Fairlie's own on her completing her twenty-first year, and the whole future
disposition of it depended, in the first instance, on the conditions I could obtain for her in her marriage-settlement.
The other clauses contained in that document were of a formal kind, and need not be recited here. But the clause
relating to the money is too important to be passed over. A few lines will be sufficient to give the necessary abstract
of it.

My stipulation in regard to the twenty thousand pounds was simply this: The whole amount was to be settled so
as to give the income to the lady for her life—afterwards to Sir Percival for his life—and the principal to the children
of the marriage. In default of issue, the principal was to be disposed of as the lady might by her will direct, for which
purpose I reserved to her the right of making a will. The effect of these conditions may be thus summed up. If Lady
Glyde died without leaving children, her half-sister Miss Halcombe, and any other relatives or friends whom she might be anxious to benefit, would, on her husband's death, divide among them such shares of her money as she desired them to have. If, on the other hand, she died leaving children, then their interest, naturally and necessarily, superseded all other interests whatsoever. This was the clause—and no one who reads it can fail, I think, to agree with me that it meted out equal justice to all parties.

We shall see how my proposals were met on the husband's side.

At the time when Miss Halcombe's letter reached me I was even more busily occupied than usual. But I contrived to make leisure for the settlement. I had drawn it, and had sent it for approval to Sir Percival's solicitor, in less than a week from the time when Miss Halcombe had informed me of the proposed marriage.

After a lapse of two days the document was returned to me, with notes and remarks of the baronet's lawyer. His objections, in general, proved to be of the most trifling and technical kind, until he came to the clause relating to the twenty thousand pounds. Against this there were double lines drawn in red ink, and the following note was appended to them--

"Not admissible. The PRINCIPAL to go to Sir Percival Glyde, in the event of his surviving Lady Glyde, and there being no issue."

That is to say, not one farthing of the twenty thousand pounds was to go to Miss Halcombe, or to any other relative or friend of Lady Glyde's. The whole sum, if she left no children, was to slip into the pockets of her husband.

The answer I wrote to this audacious proposal was as short and sharp as I could make it. "My dear sir. Miss Fairlie's settlement. I maintain the clause to which you object, exactly as it stands. Yours truly." The rejoinder came back in a quarter of an hour. "My dear sir. Miss Fairlie's settlement. I maintain the red ink to which you object, exactly as it stands. Yours truly." In the detestable slang of the day, we were now both "at a deadlock," and nothing was left for it but to refer to our clients on either side.

As matters stood, my client—Miss Fairlie not having yet completed her twenty-first year—Mr. Frederick Fairlie, was her guardian. I wrote by that day's post, and put the case before him exactly as it stood, not only urging every argument I could think of to induce him to maintain the clause as I had drawn it, but stating to him plainly the mercenary motive which was at the bottom of the opposition to my settlement of the twenty thousand pounds. The knowledge of Sir Percival's affairs which I had necessarily gained when the provisions of the deed on HIS side were submitted in due course to my examination, had but too plainly informed me that the debts on his estate were enormous, and that his income, though nominally a large one, was virtually, for a man in his position, next to nothing. The want of ready money was the practical necessity of Sir Percival's existence, and his lawyer's note on the clause in the settlement was nothing but the frankly selfish expression of it.

Mr. Fairlie's answer reached me by return of post, and proved to be wandering and irrelevant in the extreme. Turned into plain English, it practically expressed itself to this effect: "Would dear Gilmore be so very obliging as not to worry his friend and client about such a trifle as a remote contingency? Was it likely that a young woman of twenty-one would die before a man of forty five, and die without children? On the other hand, in such a miserable world as this, was it possible to over-estimate the value of peace and quietness? If those two heavenly blessings were offered in exchange for such an earthly trifle as a remote chance of twenty thousand pounds, was it not a fair bargain? Surely, yes. Then why not make it?"

I threw the letter away in disgust. Just as it had fluttered to the ground, there was a knock at my door, and Sir Percival's solicitor, Mr. Merriman, was shown in. There are many varieties of sharp practitioners in this world, but I think the hardest of all to deal with are the men who overreach you under the disguise of inveterate good-humour. A fat, well fed, smiling, friendly man of business is of all parties to a bargain the most hopeless to deal with. Mr. Merriman was one of this class.

"And how is good Mr. Gilmore?" he began, all in a glow with the warmth of his own amiability. "Glad to see you, sir, in such excellent health. I was passing your door, and I thought I would look in in case you might have something to say to me. Do—now pray do let us settle this little difference of ours by word of mouth, if we can! Have you heard from your client yet?"

"Yes. Have you heard from yours?"

"My dear, good sir! I wish I had heard from him to any purpose—I wish, with all my heart, the responsibility was off my shoulders; but he is obstinate—or let me rather say, resolute—and he won't take it off. 'Merriman, I leave details to you. Do what you think right for my interests, and consider me as having personally withdrawn from the business until it is all over.' Those were Sir Percival's words a fortnight ago, and all I can get him to do now is to repeat them. I am not a hard man, Mr. Gilmore, as you know. Personally and privately, I do assure you, I should like to sponge out that note of mine at this very moment. But if Sir Percival won't go into the matter, if Sir Percival will blindly leave all his interests in my sole care, what course can I possibly take except the course of asserting them?
My hands are bound--don't you see, my dear sir?--my hands are bound."

"You maintain your note on the clause, then, to the letter?" I said.

"Yes--deuce take it! I have no other alternative." He walked to the fireplace and warmed himself, humming the fag end of a tune in a rich convivial bass voice. "What does your side say?" he went on; "now pray tell me--what does your side say?"

I was ashamed to tell him. I attempted to gain time--nay, I did worse. My legal instincts got the better of me, and I even tried to bargain.

"Twenty thousand pounds is rather a large sum to be given up by the lady's friends at two days' notice," I said.

"Very true," replied Mr. Merriman, looking down thoughtfully at his boots. "Properly put, sir--most properly put!"

"A compromise, recognising the interests of the lady's family as well as the interests of the husband, might not perhaps have frightened my client quite so much," I went on. "Come, come! this contingency resolves itself into a matter of bargaining after all. What is the least you will take?"

"The least we will take," said Mr. Merriman, "is nineteen-thousand-nine-hundred-and-ninety-nine-pounds-nine-shillings-and-elevenpence-three-farthings. Ha! ha! ha! Excuse me, Mr. Gilmore. I must have my little joke."

"Little enough," I remarked. "The joke is just worth the odd farthing it was made for."

Mr. Merriman was delighted. He laughed over my retort till the room rang again. I was not half so good-humoured on my side; I came back to business, and closed the interview.

"This is Friday," I said. "Give us till Tuesday next for our final answer."

"By all means," replied Mr. Merriman. "Longer, my dear sir, if you like." He took up his hat to go, and then addressed me again. "By the way," he said, "your clients in Cumberland have not heard anything more of the woman who wrote the anonymous letter, have they?"

"Nothing more," I answered. "Have you found no trace of her?"

"Not yet," said my legal friend. "But we don't despair. Sir Percival has his suspicions that Somebody is keeping her in hiding, and we are having that Somebody watched."

"You mean the old woman who was with her in Cumberland," I said.

"Quite another party, sir," answered Mr. Merriman. "We don't happen to have laid hands on the old woman yet. Our Somebody is a man. We have got him close under our eye here in London, and we strongly suspect he had something to do with helping her in the first instance to escape from the Asylum. Sir Percival wanted to question him at once, but I said, 'No. Questioning him will only put him on his guard--watch him, and wait.' We shall see what happens. A dangerous woman to be at large, Mr. Gilmore; nobody knows what she may do next. I wish you good-morning, sir. On Tuesday next I shall hope for the pleasure of hearing from you." He smiled amiably and went out.

My mind had been rather absent during the latter part of the conversation with my legal friend. I was so anxious about the matter of the settlement that I had little attention to give to any other subject, and the moment I was left alone again I began to think over what my next proceeding ought to be.

In the case of any other client I should have acted on my instructions, however personally distasteful to me, and have given up the point about the twenty thousand pounds on the spot. But I could not act with this business-like indifference towards Miss Fairlie. I had an honest feeling of affection and admiration for her--I remembered gratefully that her father had been the kindest patron and friend to me that ever man had--I had felt towards her while I was drawing the settlement as I might have felt, if I had not been an old bachelor, towards a daughter of my own, and I was determined to spare no personal sacrifice in her service and where her interests were concerned. Writing a second time to Mr. Fairlie was not to be thought of--it would only be giving him a second opportunity of slipping through my fingers. Seeing him and personally remonstrating with him might possibly be of more use. The next day was Saturday. I determined to take a return ticket and jolt my old bones down to Cumberland, on the chance of persuading him to adopt the just, the independent, and the honourable course. It was a poor chance enough, no doubt, but when I had tried it my conscience would be at ease. I should then have done all that a man in my position could do to serve the interests of my old friend's only child.

The weather on Saturday was beautiful, a west wind and a bright sun. Having felt latterly a return of that fulness and oppression of the head, against which my doctor warned me so seriously more than two years since, I resolved to take the opportunity of getting a little extra exercise by sending my bag on before me and walking to the terminus in Euston Square. As I came out into Holborn a gentleman walking by rapidly stopped and spoke to me. It was Mr. Walter Hartright.

If he had not been the first to greet me I should certainly have passed him. He was so changed that I hardly knew him again. His face looked pale and haggard--his manner was hurried and uncertain--and his dress, which I
remembered as neat and gentlemanlike when I saw him at Limmeridge, was so slovenly now that I should really have been ashamed of the appearance of it on one of my own clerks.

"Have you been long back from Cumberland?" he asked. "I heard from Miss Halcombe lately. I am aware that Sir Percival Glyde's explanation has been considered satisfactory. Will the marriage take place soon? Do you happen to know Mr. Gilmore?"

He spoke so fast, and crowded his questions together so strangely and confusedly, that I could hardly follow him. However accidentally intimate he might have been with the family at Limmeridge, I could not see that he had any right to expect information on their private affairs, and I determined to drop him, as easily as might be, on the subject of Miss Fairlie's marriage.

"Time will show, Mr. Hartright," I said--"time will show. I dare say if we look out for the marriage in the papers we shall not be far wrong. Excuse my noticing it, but I am sorry to see you not looking so well as you were when we last met."

A momentary nervous contraction quivered about his lips and eyes, and made me half reproach myself for having answered him in such a significantly guarded manner.

"I had no right to ask about her marriage," he said bitterly. "I must wait to see it in the newspapers like other people. Yes,"-- he went on before I could make any apologies--"I have not been well lately. I am going to another country to try a change of scene and occupation. Miss Halcombe has kindly assisted me with her influence, and my testimonials have been found satisfactory. It is a long distance off, but I don't care where I go, what the climate is, or how long I am away." He looked about him while he said this at the throng of strangers passing us by on either side, in a strange, suspicious manner, as if he thought that some of them might be watching us.

"I wish you well through it, and safe back again," I said, and then added, so as not to keep him altogether at arm's length on the subject of the Fairlies, "I am going down to Limmeridge to-day on business. Miss Halcombe and Miss Fairlie are away just now on a visit to some friends in Yorkshire."

His eyes brightened, and he seemed about to say something in answer, but the same momentary nervous spasm crossed his face again. He took my hand, pressed it hard, and disappeared among the crowd without saying another word. Though he was little more than a stranger to me, I waited for a moment, looking after him almost with a feeling of regret. I had gained in my profession sufficient experience of young men to know what the outward signs and tokens were of their beginning to go wrong, and when I resumed my walk to the railway I am sorry to say I felt more than doubtful about Mr. Hartright's future.

IV

Leaving by an early train, I got to Limmeridge in time for dinner. The house was oppressively empty and dull. I had expected that good Mrs. Vesey would have been company for me in the absence of the young ladies, but she was confined to her room by a cold. The servants were so surprised at seeing me that they hurried and bustled absurdly, and made all sorts of annoying mistakes. Even the butler, who was old enough to have known better, brought me a bottle of port that was chilled. The reports of Mr. Fairlie's health were just as usual, and when I sent up a message to announce my arrival, I was told that he would be delighted to see me the next morning but that the sudden news of my appearance had prostrated him with palpitations for the rest of the evening. The wind howled dismally all night, and strange cracking and groaning noises sounded here, there, and everywhere in the empty house. I slept as wretchedly as possible, and got up in a mighty bad humour to breakfast by myself the next morning.

At ten o'clock I was conducted to Mr. Fairlie's apartments. He was in his usual room, his usual chair, and his usual aggravating state of mind and body. When I went in, his valet was standing before him, holding up for inspection a heavy volume of etchings, as long and as broad as my office writing-desk. The miserable foreigner grinned in the most abject manner, and looked ready to drop with fatigue, while his master composedly turned over the etchings, and brought their hidden beauties to light with the help of a magnifying glass.

"You very best of good old friends," said Mr. Fairlie, leaning back lazily before he could look at me, "are you QUITE well? How nice of you to come here and see me in my solitude. Dear Gilmore!"

I had expected that the valet would be dismissed when I appeared, but nothing of the sort happened. There he stood, in front of his master's chair, trembling under the weight of the etchings, and there Mr. Fairlie sat, serenely twirling the magnifying glass between his white fingers and thumbs.

"I have come to speak to you on a very important matter," I said, "and you will therefore excuse me, if I suggest that we had better be alone."

The unfortunate valet looked at me gratefully. Mr. Fairlie faintly repeated my last three words, "better be alone," with every appearance of the utmost possible astonishment.

I was in no humour for trifling, and I resolved to make him understand what I meant.

"Oblige me by giving that man permission to withdraw," I said, pointing to the valet.

Mr. Fairlie arched his eyebrows and pursed up his lips in sarcastic surprise.
"Man?" he repeated. "You provoking old Gilmore, what can you possibly mean by calling him a man? He's nothing of the sort. He might have been a man half an hour ago, before I wanted my etchings, and he may be a man half an hour hence, when I don't want them any longer. At present he is simply a portfolio stand. Why object, Gilmore, to a portfolio stand?"

"I DO object. For the third time, Mr. Fairlie, I beg that we may be alone."

My tone and manner left him no alternative but to comply with my request. He looked at the servant, and pointed peevishly to a chair at his side.

"Put down the etchings and go away," he said. "Don't upset me by losing my place. Have you, or have you not, lost my place? Are you sure you have not? And have you put my hand-bell quite within my reach? Yes? Then why the devil don't you go?"

The valet went out. Mr. Fairlie twisted himself round in his chair, polished the magnifying glass with his delicate cambric handkerchief, and indulged himself with a sidelong inspection of the open volume of etchings. It was not easy to keep my temper under these circumstances, but I did keep it.

"I have come here at great personal inconvenience," I said, "to serve the interests of your niece and your family, and I think I have established some slight claim to be favoured with your attention in return."

"Don't bully me!" exclaimed Mr. Fairlie, falling back helplessly in the chair, and closing his eyes. "Please don't bully me. I'm not strong enough."

I was determined not to let him provoke me, for Laura Fairlie's sake.

"My object," I went on, "is to entreat you to reconsider your letter, and not to force me to abandon the just rights of your niece, and of all who belong to her. Let me state the case to you once more, and for the last time."

Mr. Fairlie shook his head and sighed piteously.

"This is heartless of you, Gilmore--very heartless," he said. "Never mind, go on."

I put all the points to him carefully--I set the matter before him in every conceivable light. He lay back in the chair the whole time I was speaking with his eyes closed. When I had done he opened them indolently, took his silver smelling-bottle from the table, and sniffed at it with an air of gentle relish.

"Good Gilmore!" he said between the sniffs, "how very nice this is of you! How you reconcile one to human nature!"

"Give me a plain answer to a plain question, Mr. Fairlie. I tell you again, Sir Percival Glyde has no shadow of a claim to expect more than the income of the money. The money itself if your niece has no children, ought to be under her control, and to return to her family. If you stand firm, Sir Percival must give way--he must give way, I tell you, or he exposes himself to the base imputation of marrying Miss Fairlie entirely from mercenary motives."

Mr. Fairlie shook the silver smelling-bottle at me playfully.

"You dear old Gilmore, how you do hate rank and family, don't you? How you detest Glyde because he happens to be a baronet. What a Radical you are--oh, dear me, what a Radical you are!"

A Radical!!! I could put up with a good deal of provocation, but, after holding the soundest Conservative principles all my life, I could NOT put up with being called a Radical. My blood boiled at it--I started out of my chair--I was speechless with Indignation.

"Don't shake the room!" cried Mr. Fairlie--"for Heaven's sake don't shake the room! Worthiest of all possible Gilmores, I meant no offence. My own views are so extremely liberal that I think I am a Radical myself. Yes. We are a pair of Radicals. Please don't be angry. I can't quarrel--I haven't stamina enough. Shall we drop the subject? Yes. Come and look at these sweet etchings. Do let me teach you to understand the heavenly pearliness of these lines. Do now, there's a good Gilmore!"

While he was maundering on in this way I was, fortunately for my own self-respect, returning to my senses. When I spoke again I was composed enough to treat his impertinence with the silent contempt that it deserved.

"You are entirely wrong, sir," I said, "in supposing that I speak from any prejudice against Sir Percival Glyde. I may regret that he has so unreservedly resigned himself in this matter to his lawyer's direction as to make any appeal to himself impossible, but I am not prejudiced against him. What I have said would equally apply to any other man in his situation, high or low. The principle I maintain is a recognised principle. If you were to apply at the nearest town here, to the first respectable solicitor you could find, he would tell you as a stranger what I tell you as a friend. He would inform you that it is against all rule to abandon the lady's money entirely to the man she marries. He would decline, on grounds of common legal caution, to give the husband, under any circumstances whatever, an interest of twenty thousand pounds in his wife's death."

"Would he really, Gilmore?" said Mr. Fairlie. "If he said anything half so horrid, I do assure you I should tinkle my bell for Louis, and have him sent out of the house immediately."

"You shall not irritate me, Mr. Fairlie--for your niece's sake and for her father's sake, you shall not irritate me. You shall take the whole responsibility of this discreditable settlement on your own shoulders before I leave the
"Don't!--now please don't!" said Mr. Fairlie. "Think how precious your time is, Gilmore, and don't throw it away. I would dispute with you if I could, but I can't--I haven't stamina enough. You want to upset me, to upset yourself, to upset Glyde, and to upset Laura; and--oh, dear me!--all for the sake of the very last thing in the world that is likely to happen. No, dear friend, in the interests of peace and quietness, positively No!"

"I am to understand, then, that you hold by the determination expressed in your letter?"

"Yes, please. So glad we understand each other at last. Sit down again--do!"

I walked at once to the door, and Mr. Fairlie resignedly "tinkled" his hand-bell. Before I left the room I turned round and addressed him for the last time.

"Whatever happens in the future, sir," I said, "remember that my plain duty of warning you has been performed. As the faithful friend and servant of your family, I tell you, at parting, that no daughter of mine should be married to any man alive under such a settlement as you are forcing me to make for Miss Fairlie."

The door opened behind me, and the valet stood waiting on the threshold.

"Louis," said Mr. Fairlie, "show Mr. Gilmore out, and then come back and hold up my etchings for me again. Make them give you a good lunch downstairs. Do, Gilmore, make my idle beasts of servants give you a good lunch!"

I was too much disgusted to reply--I turned on my heel, and left him in silence. There was an up train at two o'clock in the afternoon, and by that train I returned to London.

On the Tuesday I sent in the altered settlement, which practically disinherited the very persons whom Miss Fairlie's own lips had informed me she was most anxious to benefit. I had no choice. Another lawyer would have drawn up the deed if I had refused to undertake it.

My task is done. My personal share in the events of the family story extends no farther than the point which I have just reached. Other pens than mine will describe the strange circumstances which are now shortly to follow. Seriously and sorrowfully I close this brief record. Seriously and sorrowfully I repeat here the parting words that I spoke at Limmeridge House:--No daughter of mine should be married to any man alive under such a settlement as I was compelled to make for Laura Fairlie.

The End of Mr. Gilmore's Narrative.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY MARIAN HALCOMBE (in Extracts from her Diary)

LIMMERIDGE HOUSE, Nov. 8.[1]

[1] The passages omitted, here and elsewhere, in Miss Halcombe's Diary are only those which bear no reference to Miss Fairlie or to any of the persons with whom she is associated in these pages.

This morning Mr. Gilmore left us.

His interview with Laura had evidently grieved and surprised him more than he liked to confess. I felt afraid, from his look and manner when we parted, that she might have inadvertently betrayed to him the real secret of her depression and my anxiety. This doubt grew on me so, after he had gone, that I declined riding out with Sir Percival, and went up to Laura's room instead.

I have been sadly distrustful of myself, in this difficult and lamentable matter, ever since I found out my own ignorance of the strength of Laura's unhappy attachment. I ought to have known that the delicacy and forbearance and sense of honour which drew me to poor Hartright, and made me so sincerely admire and respect him, were just the qualities to appeal most irresistibly to Laura's natural sensitiveness and natural generosity of nature. And yet, until she opened her heart to me of her own accord, I had no suspicion that this new feeling had taken root so deeply. I once thought time and care might remove it. I now fear that it will remain with her and alter her for life. The discovery that I have committed such an error in judgment as this makes me hesitate about everything else. I hesitate about Sir Percival, in the face of the plainest proofs. I hesitate even in speaking to Laura. On this very morning I doubted, with my hand on the door, whether I should ask her the questions I had come to put, or not.

When I went into her room I found her walking up and down in great impatience. She looked flushed and excited, and she came forward at once, and spoke to me before I could open my lips.

"I wanted you," she said. "Come and sit down on the sofa with me. Marian! I can bear this no longer--I must and will end it."

There was too much colour in her cheeks, too much energy in her manner, too much firmness in her voice. The little book of Hartright's drawings--the fatal book that she will dream over whenever she is alone--was in one of her hands. I began by gently and firmly taking it from her, and putting it out of sight on a side-table.

"Tell me quietly, my darling, what you wish to do," I said. "Has Mr. Gilmore been advising you?"

She shook her head. "No, not in what I am thinking of now. He was very kind and good to me, Marian, and I am ashamed to say I distressed him by crying. I am miserably helpless--I can't control myself. For my own sake, and for all our sakes, I must have courage enough to end it."
"Do you mean courage enough to claim your release?" I asked.

"No," she said simply. "Courage, dear, to tell the truth."

She put her arms round my neck, and rested her head quietly on my bosom. On the opposite wall hung the miniature portrait of her father. I bent over her, and saw that she was looking at it while her head lay on my breast.

"I can never claim my release from my engagement," she went on. "Whatever way it ends it must end wretchedly for me. All I can do, Marian, is not to add the remembrance that I have broken my promise and forgotten my father's dying words, to make that wretchedness worse."

"What is it you propose, then?" I asked.

"To tell Sir Percival Glyde the truth with my own lips," she answered, "and to let him release me, if he will, not because I ask him, but because he knows all."

"What do you mean, Laura, by 'all'? Sir Percival will know enough (he has told me so himself) if he knows that the engagement is opposed to your own wishes."

"Can I tell him that, when the engagement was made for me by my father, with my own consent? I should have kept my promise, not happily, I am afraid, but still contentedly--" she stopped, turned her face to me, and laid her cheek close against mine--"I should have kept my engagement, Marian, if another love had not grown up in my heart, which was not there when I first promised to be Sir Percival's wife."

"Laura! you will never lower yourself by making a confession to him?"

"I shall lower myself, indeed, if I gain my release by hiding from him what he has a right to know."

"He has not the shadow of a right to know it!"

"Wrong, Marian, wrong! I ought to deceive no one--least of all the man to whom my father gave me, and to whom I gave myself." She put her lips to mine, and kissed me. "My own love," she said softly, "you are so much too fond of me, and so much too proud of me, that you forget, in my case, what you would remember in your own. Better that Sir Percival should doubt my motives, and misjudge my conduct if he will, than that I should be first false to him in thought, and then mean enough to serve my own interests by hiding the falsehood."

I held her away from me in astonishment. For the first time in our lives we had changed places--the resolution was all on her side, the hesitation all on mine. I looked into the pale, quiet, resigned young face--I saw the pure, innocent heart, in the loving eyes that looked back at me--and the poor worldly cautions and objections that rose to my lips dwindled and died away in their own emptiness. I hung my head in silence. In her place the despicably small pride which makes so many women deceitful would have been my pride, and would have made me deceitful too.

"Don't be angry with me, Marian," she said, mistaking my silence.

I only answered by drawing her close to me again. I was afraid of crying if I spoke. My tears do not flow so easily as they ought-- they come almost like men's tears, with sobs that seem to tear me in pieces, and that frighten every one about me.

"I have thought of this, love, for many days," she went on, twining and twisting my hair with that childish restlessness in her fingers, which poor Mrs. Vesey still tries so patiently and so vainly to cure her of--"I have thought of it very seriously, and I can be sure of my courage when my own conscience tells me I am right. Let me speak to him to-morrow--in your presence, Marian. I will say nothing that is wrong, nothing that you or I need be ashamed of--but, oh, it will ease my heart so to end this miserable concealment! Only let me know and feel that I have no deception to answer for on my side, and then, when he has heard what I have to say, let him act towards me as he will."

She sighed, and put her head back in its old position on my bosom. Sad misgivings about what the end would be weighed upon my mind, but still distrusting myself, I told her that I would do as she wished. She thanked me, and we passed gradually into talking of other things.

At dinner she joined us again, and was more easy and more herself with Sir Percival than I have seen her yet. In the evening she went to the piano, choosing new music of the dexterous, tuneless, florid kind. The lovely old melodies of Mozart, which poor Hartright was so fond of, she has never played since he left. The book is no longer in the music-stand. She took the volume away herself, so that nobody might find it out and ask her to play from it.

I had no opportunity of discovering whether her purpose of the morning had changed or not, until she wished Sir Percival good-night--and then her own words informed me that it was unaltered. She said, very quietly, that she wished to speak to him after breakfast, and that he would find her in her sitting-room with me. He changed colour at those words, and I felt his hand trembling a little when it came to my turn to take it. The event of the next morning would decide his future life, and he evidently knew it.

I went in, as usual, through the door between our two bedrooms, to bid Laura good-night before she went to sleep. In stooping over her to kiss her I saw the little book of Hartright's drawings half hidden under her pillow, just in the place where she used to hide her favourite toys when she was a child. I could not find it in my heart to say anything, but I pointed to the book and shook my head. She reached both hands up to my cheeks, and drew my face
down to hers till our lips met.

"Leave it there to-night," she whispered; "to-morrow may be cruel, and may make me say good-bye to it for ever."

9th.—The first event of the morning was not of a kind to raise my spirits—a letter arrived for me from poor Walter Hartright. It is the answer to mine describing the manner in which Sir Percival cleared himself of the suspicions raised by Anne Catherick's letter. He writes shortly and bitterly about Sir Percival's explanations, only saying that he has no right to offer an opinion on the conduct of those who are above him. This is sad, but his occasional references to himself grieve me still more. He says that the effort to return to his old habits and pursuits grows harder instead of easier to him every day and he implores me, if I have any interest, to exert it to get him employment that will necessitate his absence from England, and take him among new scenes and new people. I have been made all the readier to comply with this request by a passage at the end of his letter, which has almost alarmed me.

After mentioning that he has neither seen nor heard anything of Anne Catherick, he suddenly breaks off, and hints in the most abrupt, mysterious manner, that he has been perpetually watched and followed by strange men ever since he returned to London. He acknowledges that he cannot prove this extraordinary suspicion by fixing on any particular persons, but he declares that the suspicion itself is present to him night and day. This has frightened me, because it looks as if his one fixed idea about Laura was becoming too much for his mind. I will write immediately to some of my mother's influential old friends in London, and press his claims on their notice. Change of scene and change of occupation may really be the salvation of him at this crisis in his life.

Greatly to my relief, Sir Percival sent an apology for not joining us at breakfast. He had taken an early cup of coffee in his own room, and he was still engaged there in writing letters. At eleven o'clock, if that hour was convenient, he would do himself the honour of waiting on Miss Fairlie and Miss Halcombe.

My eyes were on Laura's face while the message was being delivered. I had found her unaccountably quiet and composed on going into her room in the morning, and so she remained all through breakfast. Even when we were sitting together on the sofa in her room, waiting for Sir Percival, she still preserved her self-control.

"Don't be afraid of me, Marian," was all she said; "I may forget myself with an old friend like Mr. Gilmore, or with a dear sister like you, but I will not forget myself with Sir Percival Glyde."

I looked at her, and listened to her in silent surprise. Through all the years of our close intimacy this passive force in her character had been hidden from me—hidden even from herself, till love found it, and suffering called it forth.

As the clock on the mantelpiece struck eleven Sir Percival knocked at the door and came in. There was suppressed anxiety and agitation in every line of his face. The dry, sharp cough, which teases him at most times, seemed to be troubling him more incessantly than ever. He sat down opposite to us at the table, and Laura remained by me. I looked attentively at them both, and he was the palest of the two.

He said a few unimportant words, with a visible effort to preserve his customary ease of manner. But his voice was not to be steadied, and the restless uneasiness in his eyes was not to be concealed. He must have felt this himself, for he stopped in the middle of a sentence, and gave up even the attempt to hide his embarrassment any longer.

There was just one moment of dead silence before Laura addressed him.

"I wish to speak to you, Sir Percival," she said, "on a subject that is very important to us both. My sister is here, because her presence helps me and gives me confidence. She has not suggested one word of what I am going to say—I speak from my own thoughts, not from hers. I am sure you will be kind enough to understand that before I go any farther?"

Sir Percival bowed. She had proceeded thus far, with perfect outward tranquillity and perfect propriety of manner. She looked at him, and he looked at her. They seemed, at the outset, at least, resolved to understand one another plainly.

"I have heard from Marian," she went on, "that I have only to claim my release from our engagement to obtain that release from you. It was forbearing and generous on your part, Sir Percival, to send me such a message. It is only doing you justice to say that I am grateful for the offer, and I hope and believe that it is only doing myself justice to tell you that I decline to accept it."

His attentive face relaxed a little. But I saw one of his feet, softly, quietly, incessantly beating on the carpet under the table, and I felt that he was secretly as anxious as ever.

"I have not forgotten," she said, "that you asked my father's permission before you honoured me with a proposal of marriage. Perhaps you have not forgotten either what I said when I consented to our engagement? I ventured to tell you that my father's influence and advice had mainly decided me to give you my promise. I was guided by my father, because I had always found him the truest of all advisers, the best and fondest of all protectors and friends. I
have lost him now--I have only his memory to love, but my faith in that dear dead friend has never been shaken. I believe at this moment, as truly as I ever believed, that he knew what was best, and that his hopes and wishes ought to be my hopes and wishes too."

Her voice trembled for the first time. Her restless fingers stole their way into my lap, and held fast by one of my hands. There was another moment of silence, and then Sir Percival spoke.

"May I ask," he said, "if I have ever proved myself unworthy of the trust which it has been hitherto my greatest honour and greatest happiness to possess?"

"I have found nothing in your conduct to blame," she answered. "You have always treated me with the same delicacy and the same forbearance. You have deserved my trust, and, what is of far more importance in my estimation, you have deserved my father's trust, out of which mine grew. You have given me no excuse, even if I had wanted to find one, for asking to be released from my pledge. What I have said so far has been spoken with the wish to acknowledge my whole obligation to you. My regard for that obligation, my regard for my father's memory, and my regard for my own promise, all forbid me to set the example, on my side, of withdrawing from our present position. The breaking of our engagement must be entirely your wish and your act, Sir Percival--not mine."

The uneasy beating of his foot suddenly stopped, and he leaned forward eagerly across the table.

"My act?" he said. "What reason can there be on my side for withdrawing?"

I heard her breath quickening--I felt her hand growing cold. In spite of what she had said to me when we were alone, I began to be afraid of her. I was wrong.

"A reason that it is very hard to tell you," she answered. "There is a change in me, Sir Percival--a change which is serious enough to justify you, to yourself and to me, in breaking off our engagement."

His face turned so pale again that even his lips lost their colour. He raised the arm which lay on the table, turned a little away in his chair, and supported his head on his hand, so that his profile only was presented to us.

"What change?" he asked. The tone in which he put the question jarred on me--there was something painfully suppressed in it.

She sighed heavily, and leaned towards me a little, so as to rest her shoulder against mine. I felt her trembling, and tried to spare her by speaking myself. She stopped me by a warning pressure of her hand, and then addressed Sir Percival one more, but this time without looking at him.

"I have heard," she said, "and I believe it, that the fondest and truest of all affections is the affection which a woman ought to bear to her husband. When our engagement began that affection was mine to give, if I could, and yours to win, if you could. Will you pardon me, and spare me, Sir Percival, if I acknowledge that it is not so any longer?"

A few tears gathered in her eyes, and dropped over her cheeks slowly as she paused and waited for his answer. He did not utter a word. At the beginning of her reply he had moved the hand on which his head rested, so that it hid his face. I saw nothing but the upper part of his figure at the table. Not a muscle of him moved. The fingers of the hand which supported his head were dented deep in his hair. They might have expressed hidden anger or hidden grief--it was hard to say which--there was no significant trembling in them. There was nothing, absolutely nothing, to tell the secret of his thoughts at that moment--the moment which was the crisis of his life and the crisis of hers.

I was determined to make him declare himself, for Laura's sake.

"Sir Percival!" I interposed sharply, "have you nothing to say when my sister has said so much? More, in my opinion," I added, my unlucky temper getting the better of me, "than any man alive, in your position, has a right to hear from her."

That last rash sentence opened a way for him by which to escape me if he chose, and he instantly took advantage of it.

"Pardon me, Miss Halcombe," he said, still keeping his hand over his face, "pardon me if I remind you that I have claimed no such right."

The few plain words which would have brought him back to the point from which he had wandered were just on my lips, when Laura checked me by speaking again.

"I hope I have not made my painful acknowledgment in vain," she continued. "I hope it has secured me your entire confidence in what I have still to say."

"Pray be assured of it." He made that brief reply warmly, dropping his hand on the table while he spoke, and turning towards us again. Whatever outward change had passed over him was gone now. His face was eager and expectant--it expressed nothing but the most intense anxiety to hear her next words.

"I wish you to understand that I have not spoken from any selfish motive," she said. "If you leave me, Sir Percival, after what you have just heard, you do not leave me to marry another man, you only allow me to remain a single woman for the rest of my life. My fault towards you has begun and ended in my own thoughts. It can never go any farther. No word has passed--" She hesitated, in doubt about the expression she should use next, hesitated in a
momentary confusion which it was very sad and very painful to see. "No word has passed," she patiently and resolutely resumed, "between myself and the person to whom I am now referring for the first and last time in your presence of my feelings towards him, or of his feelings towards me--no word ever can pass--neither he nor I are likely, in this world, to meet again. I earnestly beg you to spare me from saying any more, and to believe me, on my word, in what I have just told you. It is the truth. Sir Percival, the truth which I think my promised husband has a claim to hear, at any sacrifice of my own feelings. I trust to his generosity to pardon me, and to his honour to keep my secret."

"Both those trusts are sacred to me," he said, "and both shall be sacredly kept."

After answering in those terms he paused, and looked at her as if he was waiting to hear more.

"I have said all I wish to say," she added quietly--"I have said more than enough to justify you in withdrawing from your engagement."

"You have said more than enough," he answered, "to make it the dearest object of my life to KEEP the engagement." With those words he rose from his chair, and advanced a few steps towards the place where she was sitting.

She started violently, and a faint cry of surprise escaped her. Every word she had spoken had innocently betrayed her purity and truth to a man who thoroughly understood the priceless value of a pure and true woman. Her own noble conduct had been the hidden enemy, throughout, of all the hopes she had trusted to it. I had dreaded this from the first. I would have prevented it, if she had allowed me the smallest chance of doing so. I even waited and watched now, when the harm was done, for a word from Sir Percival that would give me the opportunity of putting him in the wrong.

"You have left it to ME, Miss Fairlie, to resign you," he continued. "I am not heartless enough to resign a woman who has just shown herself to be the noblest of her sex."

He spoke with such warmth and feeling, with such passionate enthusiasm, and yet with such perfect delicacy, that she raised her head, flushed up a little, and looked at him with sudden animation and spirit.

"No!" she said firmly. "The most wretched of her sex, if she must give herself in marriage when she cannot give her love."

"May she not give it in the future," he asked, "if the one object of her husband's life is to deserve it?"

"Never!" she answered. "If you still persist in maintaining our engagement, I may be your true and faithful wife, Sir Percival--your loving wife, if I know my own heart, never!"

She looked so irresistibly beautiful as she said those brave words that no man alive could have steeled his heart against her. I tried hard to feel that Sir Percival was to blame, and to say so, but my womanhood would pity him, in spite of myself.

"I gratefully accept your faith and truth," he said. "The least that you can offer is more to me than the utmost that I could hope for from any other woman in the world."

Her left hand still held mine, but her right hand hung listlessly at her side. He raised it gently to his lips--touched it with them, rather than kissed it--bowed to me--and then, with perfect delicacy and discretion, silently quit the room.

She neither moved nor said a word when he was gone--she sat by me, cold and still, with her eyes fixed on the ground. I saw it was hopeless and useless to speak, and I only put my arm round her, and held her to me in silence. We remained together so for what seemed a long and weary time--so long and so weary, that I grew uneasy and spoke to her softly, in the hope of producing a change.

The sound of my voice seemed to startle her into consciousness. She suddenly drew herself away from me and rose to her feet.

"I must submit, Marian, as well as I can," she said. "My new life has its hard duties, and one of them begins today."

As she spoke she went to a side-table near the window, on which her sketching materials were placed, gathered them together carefully, and put them in a drawer of her cabinet. She locked the drawer and brought the key to me.

"I must part from everything that reminds me of him," she pleaded. "I am bidding it good-bye for ever."

Before I could say a word she had turned away to her book-case, and had taken from it the album that contained Walter Hartright's drawings. She hesitated for a moment, holding the little volume fondly in her hands--then lifted it to her lips and kissed it.

"Oh, Laura! Laura!" I said, not angrily, not reprovingly--with nothing but sorrow in my voice, and nothing but sorrow in my heart.

"It is the last time, Marian," she pleaded. "I am bidding it good-bye for ever."

She laid the book on the table and drew out the comb that fastened her hair. It fell, in its matchless beauty, over
her back and shoulders, and dropped round her, far below her waist. She separated one long, thin lock from the rest, cut it off, and pinned it carefully, in the form of a circle, on the first blank page of the album. The moment it was fastened she closed the volume hurriedly, and placed it in my hands.

"You write to him and he writes to you," she said. "While I am alive, if he asks after me always tell him I am well, and never say I am unhappy. Don't distress him, Marian, for my sake, don't distress him. If I die first, promise you will give him this little book of his drawings, with my hair in it. There can be no harm, when I am gone, in telling him that I put it there with my own hands. And say--oh, Marian, say for me, then, what I can never say for myself--say I loved him!"

She flung her arms round my neck, and whispered the last words in my ear with a passionate delight in uttering them which it almost broke my heart to hear. All the long restraint she had imposed on herself gave way in that first outburst of tenderness. She broke from me with hysterical vehemence, and threw herself on the sofa in a paroxysm of sobs and tears that shook her from head to foot.

I tried vainly to soothe her and reason with her--she was past being soothed, and past being reasoned with. It was the sad, sudden end for us two of this memorable day. When the fit had worn itself out she was too exhausted to speak. She slumbered towards the afternoon, and I put away the book of drawings so that she might not see it when she woke. My face was calm, whatever my heart might be, when she opened her eyes again and looked at me. We said no more to each other about the distressing interview of the morning. Sir Percival's name was not mentioned. Walter Hartright was not alluded to again by either of us for the remainder of the day.

10th.--Finding that she was composed and like herself this morning, I returned to the painful subject of yesterday, for the sole purpose of imploring her to let me speak to Sir Percival and Mr. Fairlie, more plainly and strongly than she could speak to either of them herself, about this lamentable marriage. She interposed, gently but firmly, in the middle of my remonstrances.

"I left yesterday to decide," she said; "and yesterday HAS decided. It is too late to go back."

Sir Percival spoke to me this afternoon about what had passed in Laura's room. He assured me that the unparalleled trust she had placed in him had awakened such an answering conviction of her innocence and integrity in his mind, that he was guiltless of having felt even a moment's unworthy jealousy, either at the time when he was in her presence, or afterwards when he had withdrawn from it. Deeply as he lamented the unfortunate attachment which had hindered the progress he might otherwise have made in her esteem and regard, he firmly believed that it had remained unacknowledged in the past, and that it would remain, under all changes of circumstance which it was possible to contemplate, unacknowledged in the future. This was his absolute conviction; and the strongest proof he could give of it was the assurance, which he now offered, that he felt no curiosity to know whether the attachment was of recent date or not, or who had been the object of it. His implicit confidence in Miss Fairlie made him satisfied with what she had thought fit to say to him, and he was honestly innocent of the slightest feeling of anxiety to hear more.

He waited after saying those words and looked at me. I was so conscious of my unreasonable prejudice against him--so conscious of my unworthy suspicion that he might be speculating on my impulsively answering the very questions which he had just described himself as resolved not to ask--that I evaded all reference to this part of the subject with something like a feeling of confusion on my own part. At the same time I was resolved not to lose even the smallest opportunity of trying to plead Laura's cause, and I told him boldly that I regretted his generosity had not carried him one step farther, and induced him to withdraw from the engagement altogether.

Here, again, he disarmed me by not attempting to defend himself. He would merely beg me to remember the difference there was between his allowing Miss Fairlie to give him up, which was a matter of submission only, and his forcing himself to give up Miss Fairlie, which was, in other words, asking him to be the suicide of his own hopes. Her conduct of the day before had so strengthened the unchangeable love and admiration of two long years, that all active contention against those feelings, on his part, was henceforth entirely out of his power. I must think him weak, selfish, unfeeling towards the very woman whom he idolised, and he must bow to my opinion as resignedly as he could--only putting it to me, at the same time, whether her future as a single woman, pining under the sad, sudden end for us two of this memorable day. When the fit had worn itself out she was too exhausted to speak. She slumbered towards the afternoon, and I put away the book of drawings so that she might not see it when she woke. My face was calm, whatever my heart might be, when she opened her eyes again and looked at me. We said no more to each other about the distressing interview of the morning. Sir Percival's name was not mentioned. Walter Hartright was not alluded to again by either of us for the remainder of the day.

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I answered him--more because my tongue is a woman's, and must answer, than because I had anything convincing to say. It was only too plain that the course Laura had adopted the day before had offered him the advantage if he chose to take it--and that he HAD chosen to take it. I felt this at the time, and I feel it just as strongly now, while I write these lines, in my own room. The one hope left is that his motives really spring, as he says they do, from the irresistible strength of his attachment to Laura.

Before I close my diary for to-night I must record that I wrote to-day, in poor Hartright's interest, to two of my
mother's old friends in London—both men of influence and position. If they can do anything for him, I am quite sure they will. Except Laura, I never was more anxious about any one than I am now about Walter. All that has happened since he left us has only increased my strong regard and sympathy for him. I hope I am doing right in trying to help him to employment abroad—I hope, most earnestly and anxiously, that it will end well.

11th.—Sir Percival had an interview with Mr. Fairlie, and I was sent for to join them.

I found Mr. Fairlie greatly relieved at the prospect of the "family worry" (as he was pleased to describe his niece's marriage) being settled at last. So far, I did not feel called on to say anything to him about my own opinion, but when he proceeded, in his most aggravatingly languid manner, to suggest that the time for the marriage had better be settled next, in accordance with Sir Percival's wishes, I enjoyed the satisfaction of assailing Mr. Fairlie's nerves with as strong a protest against hurrying Laura's decision as I could put into words. Sir Percival immediately assured me that he felt the force of my objection, and begged me to believe that the proposal had not been made in consequence of any interference on his part. Mr. Fairlie leaned back in his chair, closed his eyes, said we both of us did honour to human nature, and then repeated his suggestion as coolly as if neither Sir Percival nor I had said a word in opposition to it. It ended in my flatly declining to mention the subject to Laura, unless she first approached it of her own accord. I left the room at once after making that declaration. Sir Percival looked seriously embarrassed and distressed, Mr. Fairlie stretched out his lazy legs on his velvet footstool, and said, "Dear Marian! how I envy you your robust nervous system! Don't bang the door!"

On going to Laura's room I found that she had asked for me, and that Mrs. Vesey had informed her that I was with Mr. Fairlie. She inquired at once what I had been wanted for, and I told her all that had passed, without attempting to conceal the vexation and annoyance that I really felt. Her answer surprised and distressed me inexpressibly—it was the very last reply that I should have expected her to make.

"My uncle is right," she said. "I have caused trouble and anxiety enough to you, and to all about me. Let me cause no more, Marian—let Sir Percival decide."

I remonstrated warmly, but nothing that I could say moved her.

"I am held to my engagement," she replied; "I have broken with my old life. The evil day will not come the less surely because I put it off. No, Marian! once again my uncle is right. I have caused trouble enough and anxiety enough, and I will cause no more."

She used to be pliability itself, but she was now inflexibly passive in her resignation—I might almost say in her despair. Dearly as I love her, I should have been less pained if she had been violently agitated—it was so shockingly unlike her natural character to see her as cold and insensible as I saw her now.

12th.—Sir Percival put some questions to me at breakfast about Laura, which left me no choice but to tell him what she had said.

While we were talking she herself came down and joined us. She was just as unnaturally composed in Sir Percival's presence as she had been in mine. When breakfast was over he had an opportunity of saying a few words to her privately, in a recess of one of the windows. They were not more than two or three minutes together, and on their separating she left the room with Mrs. Vesey, while Sir Percival came to me. He said he had entreated her to favour him by maintaining her privilege of fixing the time for the marriage at her own will and pleasure. In reply she had merely expressed her acknowledgments, and had desired him to mention what his wishes were to Miss Halcombe.

I have no patience to write more. In this instance, as in every other, Sir Percival has carried his point with the utmost possible credit to himself, in spite of everything that I can say or do. His wishes are now, what they were, of course, when he first came here; and Laura having resigned herself to the one inevitable sacrifice of the marriage, remains as coldly hopeless and enduring as ever. In parting with the little occupations and relics that reminded her of Hartright, she seems to have parted with all her tenderness and all her impressibility. It is only three o'clock in the afternoon while I write these lines, and Sir Percival has left us already, in the happy hurry of a bridegroom, to prepare for the bride's reception at his house in Hampshire. Unless some extraordinary event happens to prevent it they will be married exactly at the time when he wished to be married—before the end of the year. My very fingers burn as I write it!

13th.—A sleepless night, through uneasiness about Laura. Towards the morning I came to a resolution to try what change of scene would do to rouse her. She cannot surely remain in her present torpor of insensibility, if I take her away from Limmeridge and surround her with the pleasant faces of old friends? After some consideration I decided on writing to the Arnolds, in Yorkshire. They are simple, kind-hearted, hospitable people, and she has known them from her childhood. When I had put the letter in the post-bag I told her what I had done. It would have been a relief to me if she had shown the spirit to resist and object. But no—she only said, "I will go anywhere with you, Marian. I dare say you are right—I dare say the change will do me good."

14th.—I wrote to Mr. Gilmore, informing him that there was really a prospect of this miserable marriage taking
place, and also mentioning my idea of trying what change of scene would do for Laura. I had no heart to go into particulars. Time enough for them when we get nearer to the end of the year.

15th.--Three letters for me. The first, from the Arnolds, full of delight at the prospect of seeing Laura and me. The second, from one of the gentlemen to whom I wrote on Walter Hartright's behalf, informing me that he has been fortunate enough to find an opportunity of complying with my request. The third, from Walter himself, thanking me, poor fellow, in the warmest terms, for giving him an opportunity of leaving his home, his country, and his friends. A private expedition to make excavations among the ruined cities of Central America is, it seems, about to sail from Liverpool. The draughtsman who had been already appointed to accompany it has lost heart, and withdrawn at the eleventh hour, and Walter is to fill his place. He is to be engaged for six months certain, from the time of the landing in Honduras, and for a year afterwards, if the excavations are successful, and if the funds hold out. His letter ends with a promise to write me a farewell line when they are all on board ship, and when the pilot leaves them. I can only hope and pray earnestly that he and I are both acting in this matter for the best. It seems such a serious step for him to take, that the mere contemplation of it startles me. And yet, in his unhappy position, how can I expect him or wish him to remain at home?

16th.--The carriage is at the door. Laura and I set out on our visit to the Arnolds to-day.

POLESDEAN LODGE, YORKSHIRE.

23rd.--A week in these new scenes and among these kind-hearted people has done her some good, though not so much as I had hoped. I have resolved to prolong our stay for another week at least. It is useless to go back to Limmeridge till there is an absolute necessity for our return.

24th.--Sad news by this morning's post. The expedition to Central America sailed on the twenty-first. We have parted with a true man—we have lost a faithful friend. Walter Hartright has left England.

25th.--Sad news yesterday—ominous news to-day. Sir Percival Glyde has written to Mr. Fairlie, and Mr. Fairlie has written to Laura and me, to recall us to Limmeridge immediately.

What can this mean? Has the day for the marriage been fixed in our absence?

II

LIMMERIDGE HOUSE.

November 27th.--My forebodings are realised. The marriage is fixed for the twenty-second of December.

The day after we left for Polesdean Lodge Sir Percival wrote, it seems, to Mr. Fairlie, to say that the necessary repairs and alterations in his house in Hampshire would occupy a much longer time in completion than he had originally anticipated. The proper estimates were to be submitted to him as soon as possible, and it would greatly facilitate his entering into definite arrangements with the workpeople, if he could be informed of the exact period at which the wedding ceremony might be expected to take place. He could then make all his calculations in reference to time, besides writing the necessary apologies to friends who had been engaged to visit him that winter, and who could not, of course, be received when the house was in the hands of the workmen.

To this letter Mr. Fairlie had replied by requesting Sir Percival himself to suggest a day for the marriage, subject to Miss Fairlie's approval, which her guardian willingly undertook to do his best to obtain. Sir Percival wrote back by the next post, and proposed (in accordance with his own views and wishes from the first?) the latter part of December—perhaps the twenty-second, or twenty-fourth, or any other day that the lady and her guardian might prefer. The lady not being at hand to speak for herself, her guardian had decided, in her absence, on the earliest day mentioned—the twenty-second of December, and had written to recall us to Limmeridge in consequence.

After explaining these particulars to me at a private interview yesterday, Mr. Fairlie suggested, in his most amiable manner, that I should open the necessary negotiations to-day. Feeling that resistance was useless, unless I could first obtain Laura's authority to make it, I consented to speak to her, but declared, at the same time, that I would on no consideration undertake to gain her consent to Sir Percival's wishes. Mr. Fairlie complimented me on my "excellent conscience," much as he would have complimented me, if he had been out walking, on my "excellent constitution," and seemed perfectly satisfied, so far, with having simply shifted one more family responsibility from his own shoulders to mine.

This morning I spoke to Laura as I had promised. The composure—I may almost say, the insensibility—which she has so strangely and so resolutely maintained ever since Sir Percival left us, was not proof against the shock of the news I had to tell her. She turned pale and trembled violently.

"Not so soon!" she pleaded. "Oh, Marian, not so soon!"

The slightest hint she could give was enough for me. I rose to leave the room, and fight her battle for her at once with Mr. Fairlie.

Just as my hand was on the door, she caught fast hold of my dress and stopped me.

"Let me go!" I said. "My tongue burns to tell your uncle that he and Sir Percival are not to have it all their own way."
She sighed bitterly, and still held my dress.
"No!" she said faintly. "Too late, Marian, too late!"
"Not a minute too late," I retorted. "The question of time is OUR question--and trust me, Laura, to take a
woman's full advantage of it."

I unclasped her hand from my gown while I spoke; but she slipped both her arms round my waist at the same
moment, and held me more effectually than ever.

"It will only involve us in more trouble and more confusion," she said. "It will set you and my uncle at variance,
and bring Sir Percival here again with fresh causes of complaint--"

"So much the better!" I cried out passionately. "Who cares for his causes of complaint? Are you to break your
heart to set his mind at ease? No man under heaven deserves these sacrifices from us women. Men! They are the
enemies of our innocence and our peace--they drag us away from our parents' love and our sisters' friendship--they
take us body and soul to themselves, and fasten our helpless lives to theirs as they chain up a dog to his kennel. And
what does the best of them give us in return? Let me go, Laura--I'm mad when I think of it!"

The tears--miserable, weak, women's tears of vexation and rage--started to my eyes. She smiled sadly, and put
her handkerchief over my face to hide for me the betrayal of my own weakness--the weakness of all others which
she knew that I most despised.

"Oh, Marian!" she said. "You crying! Think what you would say to me, if the places were changed, and if those
tears were mine. All your love and courage and devotion will not alter what must happen, sooner or later. Let my
uncle have his way. Let us have no more troubles and heart-burnings that any sacrifice of mine can prevent. Say you
will live with me, Marian, when I am married-- and say no more."

But I did say more. I forced back the contemptible tears that were no relief to ME, and that only distressed HER,
and reasoned and pleaded as calmly as I could. It was of no avail. She made me twice repeat the promise to live with
her when she was married, and then suddenly asked a question which turned my sorrow and my sympathy for her
into a new direction.

"While we were at Polesdean," she said, "you had a letter, Marian----"

Her altered tone--the abrupt manner in which she looked away from me and hid her face on my shoulder--the
hesitation which silenced her before she had completed her question, all told me, but too plainly, to whom the half-
expressed inquiry pointed.

"I thought, Laura, that you and I were never to refer to him again," I said gently.
"You had a letter from him?" she persisted.
"Yes," I replied, "if you must know it."
"Do you mean to write to him again?"

I hesitated. I had been afraid to tell her of his absence from England, or of the manner in which my exertions to
serve his new hopes and projects had connected me with his departure. What answer could I make? He was gone
where no letters could reach him for months, perhaps for years, to come.

"Suppose I do mean to write to him again," I said at last. "What then, Laura?"

Her cheek grew burning hot against my neck, and her arms trembled and tightened round me.
"Don't tell him about THE TWENTY-SECOND," she whispered. "Promise, Marian--pray promise you will not
even mention my name to him when you write next."

I gave the promise. No words can say how sorrowfully I gave it. She instantly took her arm from my waist,
walked away to the window, and stood looking out with her back to me. After a moment she spoke once more, but
without turning round, without allowing me to catch the smallest glimpse of her face.

"Are you going to my uncle's room?" she asked. "Will you say that I consent to whatever arrangement he may
think best? Never mind leaving me, Marian. I shall be better alone for a little while."

I went out. If, as soon as I got into the passage, I could have transported Mr. Fairlie and Sir Percival Glyde to the
uttermost ends of the earth by lifting one of my fingers, that finger would have been raised without an instant's
hesitation. For once my unhappy temper now stood my friend. I should have broken down altogether and burst into a
violent fit of crying, if my tears had not been all burnt up in the heat of my anger. As it was, I dashed into Mr.
Fairlie's room--called to him as harshly as possible, "Laura consents to the twenty-second"--and dashed out again
without waiting for a word of answer. I banged the door after me, and I hope I shattered Mr. Fairlie's nervous system
for the rest of the day.

28th.--This morning I read poor Hartright's farewell letter over again, a doubt having crossed my mind since
yesterday, whether I am acting wisely in concealing the fact of his departure from Laura.

On reflection, I still think I am right. The allusions in his letter to the preparations made for the expedition to
Central America, all show that the leaders of it know it to be dangerous. If the discovery of this makes me uneasy,
what would it make HER? It is bad enough to feel that his departure has deprived us of the friend of all others to
whose devotion we could trust in the hour of need, if ever that hour comes and finds us helpless; but it is far worse to know that he has gone from us to face the perils of a bad climate, a wild country, and a disturbed population. Surely it would be a cruel candour to tell Laura this, without a pressing and a positive necessity for it?

I almost doubt whether I ought not to go a step farther, and burn the letter at once, for fear of its one day falling into wrong hands. It not only refers to Laura in terms which ought to remain a secret for ever between the writer and me, but it reiterates his suspicion--so obstinate, so unaccountable, and so alarming--that he has been secretly watched since he left Limmeridge. He declares that he saw the faces of the two strange men who followed him about the streets of London, watching him among the crowd which gathered at Liverpool to see the expedition embark, and he positively asserts that he heard the name of Anne Catherick pronounced behind him as he got into the boat. His own words are, "These events have a meaning, these events must lead to a result. The mystery of Anne Catherick is NOT cleared up yet. She may never cross my path again, but if ever she crosses yours, make better use of the opportunity, Miss Halcombe, than I made of it. I speak on strong conviction--I entreat you to remember what I say." These are his own expressions. There is no danger of my forgetting them--my memory is only too ready to dwell on any words of Hartright's that refer to Anne Catherick. But there is danger in my keeping the letter. The merest accident might place it at the mercy of strangers. I may fall ill--I may die. Better to burn it at once, and have one anxiety the less.

It is burnt. The ashes of his farewell letter--the last he may ever write to me--lie in a few black fragments on the hearth. Is this the sad end to all that sad story? Oh, not the end--surely, surely not the end already!

29th.--The preparations for the marriage have begun. The dressmaker has come to receive her orders. Laura is perfectly impassive, perfectly careless about the question of all others in which a woman's personal interests are most closely bound up. She has left it all to the dressmaker and to me. If poor Hartright had been the baronet, and the husband of her father's choice, how differently she would have behaved! How anxious and capricious she would have been, and what a hard task the best of dressmakers would have found it to please her!

30th.--We hear every day from Sir Percival. The last news is that the alterations in his house will occupy from four to six months before they can be properly completed. If painters, paperhangers, and upholsterers could make happiness as well as splendour, I should be interested about their proceedings in Laura's future home. As it is, the only part of Sir Percival's last letter which does not leave me as it found me, perfectly indifferent to all his plans and projects, is the part which refers to the wedding tour. He proposes, as Laura is delicate, and as the winter threatens to be unusually severe, to take her to Rome, and to remain in Italy until the early part of next summer. If this plan should not be approved, he is equally ready, although he has no establishment of his own in town, to spend the season in London, in the most suitable furnished house that can be obtained for the purpose.

Putting myself and my own feelings entirely out of the question (which it is my duty to do, and which I have done), I, for one, have no doubt of the propriety of adopting the first of these proposals. In either case a separation between Laura and me is inevitable. It will be a longer separation, in the event of their going abroad, than it would be in the event of their remaining in London--but we must set against this disadvantage the benefit to Laura, on the other side, of passing the winter in a mild climate, and more than that, the immense assistance in raising her spirits, and reconciling her to her new existence, which the mere wonder and excitement of travelling for the first time in her life in the most interesting country in the world, must surely afford. She is not of a disposition to find resources in the conventional gaieties and excitements of London. They would only make the first oppression of this lamentable marriage fall the heavier on her. I dread the beginning of her new life more than words can tell, but I see some hope for her if she travels--none if she remains at home.

It is strange to look back at this latest entry in my journal, and to find that I am writing of the marriage and the parting with Laura, as people write of a settled thing. It seems so cold and so unfeeling to be looking at the future already in this cruelly composed way. But what other way is possible, now that the time is drawing so near? Before another month is over our heads she will be HIS Laura instead of mine! HIS Laura! I am as little able to realise the idea which those two words convey--my mind feels almost as dulled and stunned by it--as if writing of her marriage were like writing of her death.

December 1st.--A sad, sad day--a day that I have no heart to describe at any length. After weakly putting it off last night, I was obliged to speak to her this morning of Sir Percival's proposal about the wedding tour.

In the full conviction that I should be with her wherever she went, the poor child--for a child she is still in many things--was almost happy at the prospect of seeing the wonders of Florence and Rome and Naples. It nearly broke my heart to dispel her delusion, and to bring her face to face with the hard truth. I was obliged to tell her that no man tolerates a rival--not even a woman rival--in his wife's affections, when he first marries, whatever he may do afterwards. I was obliged to warn her that my chance of living with her permanently under her own roof, depended entirely on my not arousing Sir Percival's jealousy and distrust by standing between them at the beginning of their marriage, in the position of the chosen depositary of his wife's closest secrets. Drop by drop I poured the profaning
bitterness of this world's wisdom into that pure heart and that innocent mind, while every higher and better feeling within me recoiled from my miserable task. It is over now. She has learnt her hard, her inevitable lesson. The simple illusions of her girlhood are gone, and my hand has stripped them off. Better mine than his--that is all my consolation--better mine than his.

So the first proposal is the proposal accepted. They are to go to Italy, and I am to arrange, with Sir Percival's permission, for meeting them and staying with them when they return to England. In other words, I am to ask a personal favour, for the first time in my life, and to ask it of the man of all others to whom I least desire to owe a serious obligation of any kind. Well! I think I could do even more than that, for Laura's sake.

2nd.--On looking back, I find myself always referring to Sir Percival in disparaging terms. In the turn affairs have now taken. I must and will root out my prejudice against him, I cannot think how it first got into my mind. It certainly never existed in former times.

Is it Laura's reluctance to become his wife that has set me against him? Have Hartright's perfectly intelligible prejudices infected me without my suspecting their influence? Does that letter of Anne Catherick's still leave a lurking distrust in my mind, in spite of Sir Percival's explanation, and of the proof in my possession of the truth of it? I cannot account for the state of my own feelings; the one thing I am certain of is, that it is my duty--doubly my duty now--not to wrong Sir Percival by unjustly distrusting him. If it has got to be a habit with me always to write of him in the same unfavourable manner, I must and will break myself of this unworthy tendency, even though the effort should force me to close the pages of my journal till the marriage is over! I am seriously dissatisfied with myself--I will write no more to-day.

December 16th.--A whole fortnight has passed, and I have not once opened these pages. I have been long enough away from my journal to come back to it with a healthier and better mind, I hope, so far as Sir Percival is concerned.

There is not much to record of the past two weeks. The dresses are almost all finished, and the new travelling trunks have been sent here from London. Poor dear Laura hardly leaves me for a moment all day, and last night, when neither of us could sleep, she came and crept into my bed to talk to me there. "I shall lose you so soon, Marian," she said; "I must make the most of you while I can."

They are to be married at Limmeridge Church, and thank Heaven, not one of the neighbours is to be invited to the ceremony. The only visitor will be our old friend, Mr. Arnold, who is to come from Polesdean to give Laura away, her uncle being far too delicate to trust himself outside the door in such inclement weather as we now have. If I were not determined, from this day forth, to see nothing but the bright side of our prospects, the melancholy absence of any male relative of Laura's, at the most important moment of her life, would make me very gloomy and very distrustful of the future. But I have done with gloom and distrust--that is to say, I have done with writing about either the one or the other in this journal.

Sir Percival is to arrive to-morrow. He offered, in case we wished to treat him on terms of rigid etiquette, to write and ask our clergyman to grant him the hospitality of the rectory, during the short period of his sojourn at Limmeridge, before the marriage. Under the circumstances, neither Mr. Fairlie nor I thought it at all necessary for us to trouble ourselves about attending to trifling forms and ceremonies. In our wild moorland country, and in this great lonely house, we may well claim to be beyond the reach of the trivial conventionalities which hamper people in other places. I wrote to Sir Percival to thank him for his polite offer, and to beg that he would occupy his old rooms, just as usual, at Limmeridge House.

17th.--He arrived to-day, looking, as I thought, a little worn and anxious, but still talking and laughing like a man in the best possible spirits. He brought with him some really beautiful presents in jewellery, which Laura received with her best grace, and, outwardly at least, with perfect self-possession. The only sign I can detect of the struggle it must cost her to preserve appearances at this trying time, expresses itself in a sudden unwillingness, on her part, ever to be left alone. Instead of retreating to her own room, as usual, she seems to dread going there. When I went upstairs to-day, after lunch, to put on my bonnet for a walk, she volunteered to join me, and again, before dinner, she threw the door open between our two rooms, so that we might talk to each other while we were dressing. "Keep me always doing something," she said; "keep me always in company with somebody. Don't let me think--that is all I ask now, Marian--don't let me think."

This sad change in her only increases her attractions for Sir Percival. He interprets it, I can see, to his own advantage. There is a feverish flush in her cheeks, a feverish brightness in her eyes, which he welcomes as the return of her beauty and the recovery of her spirits. She talked to-day at dinner with a gaiety and carelessness so false, so shockingly out of her character, that I secretly longed to silence her and take her away. Sir Percival's delight and surprise appeared to be beyond all expression. The anxiety which I had noticed on his face when he arrived totally disappeared from it, and he looked, even to my eyes, a good ten years younger than he really is.

There can be no doubt--though some strange perversity prevents me from seeing it myself--there can be no doubt
that Laura's future husband is a very handsome man. Regular features form a personal advantage to begin with—and he has them. Bright brown eyes, either in man or woman, are a great attraction—and he has them. Even baldness, when it is only baldness over the forehead (as in his case), is rather becoming than not in a man, for it heightens the head and adds to the intelligence of the face. Grace and ease of movement, untried animation of manner, ready, plaintive, conversational powers—all these are unquestionable merits, and all these he certainly possesses. Surely Mr. Gilmore, ignorant as he is of Laura's secret, was not to blame for feeling surprised that she should repent of her marriage engagement? Any one else in his place would have shared our good old friend's opinion. If I were asked, at this moment, to say plainly what defects I have discovered in Sir Percival, I could only point out two. One, his incessant restlessness and excitability—which may be caused, naturally enough, by unusual energy of character. The other, his short, sharp, ill-tempered manner of speaking to the servants—which may be only a bad habit after all. No, I cannot dispute it, and I will not dispute it—Sir Percival is a very handsome and a very agreeable man. There! I have written it down at last, and I am glad it's over.

18th.—Feeling weary and depressed this morning, I left Laura with Mrs. Vesey, and went out alone for one of my brisk midday walks, which I have discontinued too much of late. I took the dry airy road over the moor that leads to Todd's Corner. After having been out half an hour, I was excessively surprised to see Sir Percival approaching me from the direction of the farm. He was walking rapidly, swinging his stick, his head erect as usual, and his shooting jacket flying open in the wind. When we met he did not wait for me to ask any questions—he told me at once that he had been to the farm to inquire if Mr. or Mrs. Todd had received any tidings, since his last visit to Limmeridge, of Anne Catherick.

"You found, of course, that they had heard nothing?" I said.

"Nothing whatever," he replied. "I begin to be seriously afraid that we have lost her. Do you happen to know," he continued, looking me in the face very attentively "if the artist--Mr. Hartright--is in a position to give us any further information?"

"He has neither heard of her, nor seen her, since he left Cumberland," I answered.

"Very sad," said Sir Percival, speaking like a man who was disappointed, and yet, oddly enough, looking at the same time like a man who was relieved. "It is impossible to say what misfortunes may not have happened to the miserable creature. I am inexpressibly annoyed at the failure of all my efforts to restore her to the care and protection which she so urgently needs."

This time he really looked annoyed. I said a few sympathising words, and we then talked of other subjects on our way back to the house. Surely my chance meeting with him on the moor has disclosed another favourable trait in his character? Surely it was singularly considerate and unselfish of him to think of Anne Catherick on the eve of his marriage, and to go all the way to Todd's Corner to make inquiries about her, when he might have passed the time so much more agreeably in Laura's society? Considering that he can only have acted from motives of pure charity, his conduct, under the circumstances, shows unusual good feeling and deserves extraordinary praise. Well! I give him extraordinary praise—and there's an end of it.

19th.—More discoveries in the inexhaustible mine of Sir Percival's virtues.

To-day I approached the subject of my proposed sojourn under his wife's roof when he brings her back to England. I had hardly dropped my first hint in this direction before he caught me warmly by the hand, and said I had made the very offer to him which he had been, on his side, most anxious to make to me. I was the companion of all others whom he most sincerely longed to secure for his wife, and he begged me to believe that I had conferred a lasting favour on him by making the proposal to live with Laura after her marriage, exactly as I had always lived with her before it.

When I had thanked him in her name and mine for his considerate kindness to both of us, we passed next to the subject of his wedding tour, and began to talk of the English society in Rome to which Laura was to be introduced. He ran over the names of several friends whom he expected to meet abroad this winter. They were all English, as well as I can remember, with one exception. The one exception was Count Fosco.

The mention of the Count's name, and the discovery that he and his wife are likely to meet the bride and bridegroom on the continent, puts Laura's marriage, for the first time, in a distinctly favourable light. It is likely to be the means of healing a family feud. Hitherto Madame Fosco has chosen to forget her obligations as Laura's aunt out of sheer spite against the late Mr. Fairlie for his conduct in the affair of the legacy. Now however, she can persist in this course of conduct no longer. Sir Percival and Count Fosco are old and fast friends, and their wives will have no choice but to meet on civil terms. Madame Fosco in her maiden days was one of the most impertinent women I ever met with—capricious, exacting, and vain to the last degree of absurdity. If her husband has succeeded in bringing her to her senses, he deserves the gratitude of every member of the family, and he may have mine to begin with.

I am becoming anxious to know the Count. He is the most intimate friend of Laura's husband, and in that
Arnold from Polesdean had not called me away to new duties downstairs. Have shocked Mr. Fairlie by some of the hardest and rudest truths he has ever heard in his life, if the arrival of Mr. Fairlie WITHOUT TEARS! I was so exasperated by this miserable selfish trifling, at such a time, that I should certainly feel my own love, and without tears--"in the name of pity, in the name of everything, she was going away, and without tears--"in the name of pity, in the name of everything, and without tears--"in the name of pity, in the name of everything, anything is better than brooding over my own gloomy thoughts. Anything is better than brooding over my own gloomy thoughts. I have learned, for the last few days, in a tone of levity which, Heaven knows, is far enough from my heart, and which it has rather shocked me to discover on looking back at the entries in my journal.

Perhaps I may have caught the feverish excitement of Laura's spirits for the last week. If so, the fit has already passed away from me, and has left me in a very strange state of mind. A persistent idea has been forcing itself on my attention, ever since last night, that something will yet happen to prevent the marriage. What has produced this singular fancy? Is it the indirect result of my apprehensions for Laura's future? Or has it been unconsciously suggested to me by the increasing restlessness and irritability which I have certainly observed in Sir Percival's manner as the wedding-day draws nearer and nearer? Impossible to say. I know that I have the idea--surely the wildest idea, under the circumstances, that ever entered a woman's head?--but try as I may, I cannot trace it back to its source.

This last day has been all confusion and wretchedness. How can I write about it?--and yet, I must write. Kind Mrs. Vesey, whom we have all too much overlooked and forgotten of late, innocently caused us a sad morning to begin with. She has been, for months past, secretly making a warm Shetland shawl for her dear pupil--a most beautiful and surprising piece of work to be done by a woman at her age and with her habits. The gift was presented this morning, and poor warm-hearted Laura completely broke down when the shawl was put proudly on her shoulders by the loving old friend and guardian of her motherless childhood. I was hardly allowed time to quiet them both, or even to dry my own eyes, when I was sent for by Mr. Fairlie, to be favoured with a long recital of his arrangements for the preservation of his own tranquillity on the wedding-day.

"Dear Laura" was to receive his present--a shabby ring, with her affectionate uncle's hair for an ornament, instead of a precious stone, and with a heartless French inscription inside, about congenial sentiments and eternal friendship--"dear Laura" was to receive this tender tribute from my hands immediately, so that she might have plenty of time to recover from the agitation produced by the gift before she appeared in Mr. Fairlie's presence. "Dear Laura" was to pay him a little visit that evening, and to be kind enough not to make a scene. "Dear Laura" was to pay him another little visit in her wedding-dress the next morning, and to be kind enough, again, not to make a scene. "Dear Laura" was to look in once more, for the third time, before going away, but without harrowing his feelings by saying WHEN she was going away, and without tears--"in the name of pity, in the name of everything, dear Marian, that is most affectionate and most domestic, and most delightfully and charmingly self-composed, WITHOUT TEARS!" I was so exasperated by this miserable selfish trifling, at such a time, that I should certainly have shocked Mr. Fairlie by some of the hardest and rudest truths he has ever heard in his life, if the arrival of Mr. Arnold from Polesdean had not called me away to new duties downstairs.

The rest of the day is indescribable. I believe no one in the house really knew how it passed. The confusion of
small events, all huddled together one on the other, bewildered everybody. There were dresses sent home that had been forgotten--there were trunks to be packed and unpacked and packed again--there were presents from friends far and near, friends high and low. We were all needlessly hurried, all nervously expectant of the morrow. Sir Percival, especially, was too restless now to remain five minutes together in the same place. That short, sharp cough of his troubled him more than ever. He was in and out of doors all day long, and he seemed to grow so inquisitive on a sudden, that he questioned the very strangers who came on small errands to the house. Add to all this, the one perpetual thought in Laura's mind and mine, that we were to part the next day, and the haunting dread, unexpressed by either of us, and yet ever present to both, that this deplorable marriage might prove to be the one fatal error of her life and the one hopeless sorrow of mine. For the first time in all the years of our close and happy intercourse we almost avoided looking each other in the face, and we refrained, by common consent, from speaking together in private through the whole evening. I can dwell on it no longer. Whatever future sorrows may be in store for me, I shall always look back on this twenty-first of December as the most comfortless and most miserable day of my life.

I am writing these lines in the solitude of my own room, long after midnight, having just come back from a stolen look at Laura in her pretty little white bed--the bed she has occupied since the days of her girlhood. There she lay, unconscious that I was looking at her--quiet, more quiet than I had dared to hope, but not sleeping. The glimmer of the night-light showed me that her eyes were only partially closed--the traces of tears glistened between her eyelids. My little keepsake--only a brooch--lay on the table at her bedside, with her prayer-book, and the miniature portrait of her father which she takes with her wherever she goes. I waited a moment, looking at her from behind her pillow, as she lay beneath me, with one arm and hand resting on the white coverlid, so still, so quietly breathing, that the frill on her night-dress never moved--I waited, looking at her, as I have seen her hundreds of times, as I shall never see her again--and then stole back to my room. My own love! with all your wealth, and all your beauty, how friendless you are! The one man who would give his heart's life to serve you is far away, tossing, this stormy night, on the awful sea. Who else is left to you? No father, no brother--no living creature but the helpless, useless woman who writes these sad lines, and watches by you for the morning, in sorrow that she cannot compose, in doubt that she cannot conquer. Oh, what a trust is to be placed in that man's hands to-morrow! If ever he forgets it--if ever he injures a hair of her head!----

THE TWENTY-SECOND OF DECEMBER. Seven o'clock. A wild, unsettled morning. She has just risen--better and calmer, now that the time has come, than she was yesterday.

Ten o'clock. She is dressed. We have kissed each other--we have promised each other not to lose courage. I am away for a moment in my own room. In the whirl and confusion of my thoughts, I can detect that strange fancy of some hindrance happening to stop the marriage still hanging about my mind. Is it hanging about HIS mind too? I see him from the window, moving hither and thither uneasily among the carriages at the door.--How can I write such folly! The marriage is a certainty. In less than half an hour we start for the church.

Eleven o'clock. It is all over. They are married.

Three o'clock. They are gone! I am blind with crying--I can write no more----

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[The First Epoch of the Story closes here.]

THE SECOND EPOCH

THE STORY CONTINUED BY MARIAN HALCOMBE.

I

BLACKWATER PARK, HAMPSHIRE.

June 11th, 1850.--Six months to look back on--six long, lonely months since Laura and I last saw each other! How many days have I still to wait? Only one! To-morrow, the twelfth, the travellers return to England. I can hardly realise my own happiness--I can hardly believe that the next four-and- twenty hours will complete the last day of separation between Laura and me.

She and her husband have been in Italy all the winter, and afterwards in the Tyrol. They come back, accompanied by Count Fosco and his wife, who propose to settle somewhere in the neighbourhood of London, and who have engaged to stay at Blackwater Park for the summer months before deciding on a place of residence. So long as Laura returns, no matter who returns with her. Sir Percival may fill the house from floor to ceiling, if he likes, on condition that his wife and I inhabit it together.

Meanwhile, here I am, established at Blackwater Park, "the ancient and interesting seat" (as the county history obligingly informs me) "of Sir Percival Glyde, Bart.," and the future abiding-place (as I may now venture to add on my account) of plain Marian Halcombe, spinster, now settled in a snug little sitting-room, with a cup of tea by her side, and all her earthly possessions ranged round her in three boxes and a bag.

I left Limmeridge yesterday, having received Laura's delightful letter from Paris the day before. I had been previously uncertain whether I was to meet them in London or in Hampshire, but this last letter informed me that Sir
Percival proposed to land at Southampton, and to travel straight on to his country-house. He has spent so much money abroad that he has none left to defray the expenses of living in London for the remainder of the season, and he is economically resolved to pass the summer and autumn quietly at Blackwater. Laura has had more than enough of excitement and change of scene, and is pleased at the prospect of country tranquillity and retirement which her husband's prudence provides for her. As for me, I am ready to be happy anywhere in her society. We are all, therefore, well contented in our various ways, to begin with.

Last night I slept in London, and was delayed there so long to-day by various calls and commissions, that I did not reach Blackwater this evening till after dusk.

Judging by my vague impressions of the place thus far, it is the exact opposite of Limmeridge.

The house is situated on a dead flat, and seems to be shut in-- almost suffocated, to my north-country notions, by trees. I have seen nobody but the man-servant who opened the door to me, and the housekeeper, a very civil person, who showed me the way to my own room, and got me my tea. I have a nice little boudoir and bedroom, at the end of a long passage on the first floor. The servants and some of the spare rooms are on the second floor, and all the living rooms are on the ground floor. I have not seen one of them yet, and I know nothing about the house, except that one wing of it is said to be five hundred years old, that it had a moat round it once, and that it gets its name of Blackwater from a lake in the park.

Eleven o'clock has just struck, in a ghostly and solemn manner, from a turret over the centre of the house, which I saw when I came in. A large dog has been woke, apparently by the sound of the bell, and is howling and yawning drearily, somewhere round a corner. I hear echoing footsteps in the passages below, and the iron thumping of bolts and bars at the house door. The servants are evidently going to bed. Shall I follow their example?

No, I am not half sleepy enough. Sleepy, did I say? I feel as if I should never close my eyes again. The bare anticipation of seeing that dear face, and hearing that well-known voice to-morrow, keeps me in a perpetual fever of excitement. If I only had the privileges of a man, I would order out Sir Percival's best horse instantly, and tear away on a night-gallop, eastward, to meet the rising sun--a long, hard, heavy, ceaseless gallop of hours and hours, like the famous highwayman's ride to York. Being, however, nothing but a woman, condemned to patience, propriety, and petticoats for life, I must respect the housekeeper's opinions, and try to compose myself in some feeble and feminine way.

Reading is out of the question--I can't fix my attention on books. Let me try if I can write myself into sleepiness and fatigue. My journal has been very much neglected of late. What can I recall-- standing, as I now do, on the threshold of a new life--of persons and events, of chances and changes, during the past six months-- the long, weary, empty interval since Laura's wedding-day?

Walter Hartright is uppermost in my memory, and he passes first in the shadowy procession of my absent friends. I received a few lines from him, after the landing of the expedition in Honduras, written more cheerfully and hopefully than he has written yet. A month or six weeks later I saw an extract from an American newspaper, describing the departure of the adventurers on their inland journey. They were last seen entering a wild primeval forest, each man with his rifle on his shoulder and his baggage at his back. Since that time, civilisation has lost all trace of them. Not a line more have I received from Walter, not a fragment of news from the expedition has appeared in any of the public journals.

The same dense, disheartening obscurity hangs over the fate and fortunes of Anne Catherick, and her companion, Mrs. Clements. Nothing whatever has been heard of either of them. Whether they are in the country or out of it, whether they are living or dead, no one knows. Even Sir Percival's solicitor has lost all hope, and has ordered the useless search after the fugitives to be finally given up.

Our good old friend Mr. Gilmore has met with a sad check in his active professional career. Early in the spring we were alarmed by hearing that he had been found insensible at his desk, and that the seizure was pronounced to be an apoplectic fit. He had been long complaining of fulness and oppression in the head, and his doctor had warned him of the consequences that would follow his persistency in continuing to work, early and late, as if he were still a young man. The result now is that he has been positively ordered to keep out of his office for a year to come, at least, and to seek repose of body and relief of mind by altogether changing his usual mode of life. The business is left, accordingly, to be carried on by his partner, and he is himself, at this moment, away in Germany, visiting some relations who are settled there in mercantile pursuits. Thus another true friend and trustworthy adviser is lost to us--lost, I earnestly hope and trust, for a time only.

Poor Mrs. Vesey travelled with me as far as London. It was impossible to abandon her to solitude at Limmeridge after Laura and I had both left the house, and we have arranged that she is to live with an unmarried younger sister of hers, who keeps a school at Clapham. She is to come here this autumn to visit her pupil--I might almost say her adopted child. I saw the good old lady safe to her destination, and left her in the care of her relative, quietly happy at the prospect of seeing Laura again in a few months' time.
As for Mr. Fairlie, I believe I am guilty of no injustice if I describe him as being unutterably relieved by having the house clear of us women. The idea of his missing his niece is simply preposterous--he used to let months pass in the old times without attempting to see her--and in my case and Mrs. Vesey's, I take leave to consider his telling us both that he was half heart-broken at our departure, to be equivalent to a confession that he was secretly rejoiced to get rid of us. His last caprice has led him to keep two photographers incessantly employed in producing sun-pictures of all the treasures and curiosities in his possession. One complete copy of the collection of the photographs is to be presented to the Mechanics' Institution of Carlisle, mounted on the finest cardboard, with ostentatious red-letter inscriptions underneath, "Madonna and Child by Raphael. In the possession of Frederick Fairlie, Esquire." "Copper coin of the period of Tiglath Pileser. In the possession of Frederick Fairlie, Esquire." "Unique Rembrandt etching. Known all over Europe as THE SMUDGE, from a printer's blot in the corner which exists in no other copy. Valued at three hundred guineas. In the possession of Frederick Fairlie, Esq." Dozens of photographs of this sort, and all inscribed in this manner, were completed before I left Cumberland, and hundreds more remain to be done. With this new interest to occupy him, Mr. Fairlie will be a happy man for months and months to come, and the two unfortunate photographers will share the social martyrdom which he has hitherto inflicted on his valet alone.

So much for the persons and events which hold the foremost place in my memory. What next of the one person who holds the foremost place in my heart? Laura has been present to my thoughts all the while I have been writing these lines. What can I recall of her during the past six months, before I close my journal for the night?

I have only her letters to guide me, and on the most important of all the questions which our correspondence can discuss, every one of those letters leaves me in the dark.

Does he treat her kindly? Is she happier now than she was when I parted with her on the wedding-day? All my letters have contained these two inquiries, put more or less directly, now in one form, and now in another, and all, on that point only, have remained without reply, or have been answered as if my questions merely related to the state of her health. She informs me, over and over again, that she is perfectly well--that travelling agrees with her--that she is getting through the winter, for the first time in her life, without catching cold--but not a word can I find anywhere which tells me plainly that she is reconciled to her marriage, and that she can now look back to the twenty-second of December without any bitter feelings of repentance and regret. The name of her husband is only mentioned in her letters, as she might mention the name of a friend who was travelling with them, and who had undertaken to make all the arrangements for the journey. "Sir Percival" has settled that we leave on such a day--"Sir Percival" has decided that we travel by such a road. Sometimes she writes "Percival" only, but very seldom--in nine cases out of ten she gives him his title.

I cannot find that his habits and opinions have changed and coloured hers in any single particular. The usual moral transformation which is insensibly wrought in a young, fresh, sensitive woman by her marriage, seems never to have taken place in Laura. She writes of her own thoughts and impressions, amid all the wonders she has seen, exactly as she might have written to some one else, if I had been travelling with her instead of her husband. I see no betrayal anywhere of sympathy of any kind existing between them. Even when she wanders from the subject of her travels, and occupies herself with the prospects that await her in England, her speculations are busied with her future as my sister, and persistently neglect to notice her future as Sir Percival's wife. In all this there is no undertone of complaint to warn me that she is absolutely unhappy in her married life. The impression I have derived from our correspondence does not, thank God, lead me to any such distressing conclusion as that. I only see a sad torpor, an unchanged indifference, when I turn my mind from her in the old character of a sister, and look at her, through the medium of her letters, in the new character of a wife. In other words, it is always Laura Fairlie who has been writing to me for the last six months, and never Lady Glyde.

The strange silence which she maintains on the subject of her husband's character and conduct, she preserves with almost equal resolution in the few references which her later letters contain to the name of her husband's bosom friend, Count Fosco.

For some unexplained reason the Count and his wife appear to have changed their plans abruptly, at the end of last autumn, and to have gone to Vienna instead of going to Rome, at which latter place Sir Percival had expected to find them when he left England. They only quitted Vienna in the spring, and travelled as far as the Tyrol to meet the bride and bridegroom on their homeward journey. Laura writes readily enough about the meeting with Madame Fosco, and assures me that she has found her aunt so much changed for the better--so much quieter, and so much more sensible as a wife than she was as a single woman--that I shall hardly know her again when I see her here. But on the subject of Count Fosco (who interests me infinitely more than his wife), Laura is provokingly circumspect and silent. She only says that he puzzles her, and that she will not tell me what her impression of him is until I have seen him, and formed my own opinion first.

This, to my mind, looks ill for the Count. Laura has preserved, far more perfectly than most people do in later life, the child's subtle faculty of knowing a friend by instinct, and if I am right in assuming that her first impression
of Count Fosco has not been favourable, I for one am in some danger of doubting and distrusting that illustrious
foreigner before I have so much as set eyes on him. But, patience, patience--this uncertainty, and many uncertainties
more, cannot last much longer. To-morrow will see all my doubts in a fair way of being cleared up, sooner or later.

Twelve o'clock has struck, and I have just come back to close these pages, after looking out at my open window.

It is a still, sultry, moonless night. The stars are dull and few. The trees that shut out the view on all sides look
dimly black and solid in the distance, like a great wall of rock. I hear the croaking of frogs, faint and far off, and the
echoes of the great clock hum in the airless calm long after the strokes have ceased. I wonder how Blackwater Park
will look in the daytime? I don't altogether like it by night.

12th.--A day of investigations and discoveries--a more interesting day, for many reasons, than I had ventured to
anticipate.

I began my sight-seeing, of course, with the house.

The main body of the building is of the time of that highly- overrated woman, Queen Elizabeth. On the ground
floor there are two hugely long galleries, with low ceilings lying parallel with each other, and rendered additionally
dark and dismal by hideous family portraits--every one of which I should like to burn. The rooms on the floor above
the two galleries are kept in tolerable repair, but are very seldom used. The civil housekeeper, who acted as my
guide, offered to show me over them, but considerately added that she feared I should find them rather out of order.

My respect for the integrity of my own petticoats and stockings infinitely exceeds my respect for all the Elizabethan
bedrooms in the kingdom, so I positively declined exploring the upper regions of dust and dirt at the risk of soiling
my nice clean clothes. The housekeeper said, "I am quite of your opinion, miss," and appeared to think me the most
sensible woman she had met with for a long time past.

So much, then, for the main building. Two wings are added at either end of it. The half-ruined wing on the left
(as you approach the house) was once a place of residence standing by itself, and was built in the fourteenth century.
One of Sir Percival's maternal ancestors--I don't remember, and don't care which--tacked on the main building, at
right angles to it, in the aforesaid Queen Elizabeth's time. The housekeeper told me that the architecture of "the old
wing," both outside and inside, was considered remarkably fine by good judges. On further investigation I
discovered that good judges could only exercise their abilities on Sir Percival's piece of antiquity by previously
dismissing from their minds all fear of damp, darkness, and rats. Under these circumstances, I unhesitatingly
acknowledged myself to be no judge at all, and suggested that we should treat "the old wing" precisely as we had
previously treated the Elizabethan bedrooms. Once more the housekeeper said, "I am quite of your opinion, miss,"
and once more she looked at me with undisguised admiration of my extraordinary common-sense.

We went next to the wing on the right, which was built, by way of completing the wonderful architectural
jumble at Blackwater Park, in the time of George the Second.

This is the habitable part of the house, which has been repaired and redecorated inside on Laura's account. My
two rooms, and all the good bedrooms besides, are on the first floor, and the basement contains a drawing-room, a
dining-room, a morning-room, a library, and a pretty little boudoir for Laura, all very nicely ornamented in the
bright modern way, and all very elegantly furnished with the delightful modern luxuries. None of the rooms are
anything like so large and airy as our rooms at Limmeridge, but they all look pleasant to live in. I was terribly afraid,
from what I had heard of Blackwater Park, of fatiguing antique chairs, and dismal stained glass, and musty, frouzy
hangings, and all the barbarous lumber which people born without a sense of comfort accumulate about them, in
defiance of the consideration due to the convenience of their friends. It is an inexpressible relief to find that the
nineteenth century has invaded this strange future home of mine, and has swept the dirty "good old times" out of the
way of our daily life.

I dawdled away the morning--part of the time in the rooms downstairs, and part out of doors in the great square
which is formed by the three sides of the house, and by the lofty iron railings and gates which protect it in front.
A large circular fish-pond with stone sides, and an allegorical leaden monster in the middle, occupies the centre of the
square. The pond itself is full of gold and silver fish, and is encircled by a broad belt of the softest turf I ever walked
on. I loitered here on the shady side pleasantly enough till luncheon-time, and after that took my broad straw hat and
wandered out alone in the warm lovely sunlight to explore the grounds.

Daylight confirmed the impression which I had felt the night before, of there being too many trees at
Blackwater. The house is stifled by them. They are, for the most part, young, and planted far too thickly. I suspect
there must have been a ruinous cutting down of timber all over the estate before Sir Percival's time, and an angry
anxiety on the part of the next possessor to fill up all the gaps as thickly and rapidly as possible. After looking about
me in front of the house, I observed a flower-garden on my left hand, and walked towards it to see what I could
discover in that direction.

On a nearer view the garden proved to be small and poor and ill kept. I left it behind me, opened a little gate in a
ring fence, and found myself in a plantation of fir-trees.
A pretty winding path, artificially made, led me on among the trees, and my north-country experience soon informed me that I was approaching sandy, heathy ground. After a walk of more than half a mile, I should think, among the firs, the path took a sharp turn—the trees abruptly ceased to appear on either side of me, and I found myself standing suddenly on the margin of a vast open space, and looking down at the Blackwater lake from which the house takes its name.

The ground, shelving away below me, was all sand, with a few little heathy hillocks to break the monotony of it in certain places. The lake itself had evidently once flowed to the spot on which I stood, and had been gradually wasted and dried up to less than a third of its former size. I saw its still, stagnant waters, a quarter of a mile away from me in the hollow, separated into pools and ponds by twining reeds and rushes, and little knolls of earth. On the farther bank from me the trees rose thickly again, and shut out the view, and cast their black shadows on the sluggish, shallow water. As I walked down to the lake, I saw that the ground on its farther side was damp and marshy, overgrown with rank grass and dismal willows. The water, which was clear enough on the open sandy side, where the sun shone, looked black and poisonous opposite to me, where it lay deeper under the shade of the spongy banks, and the rank overhanging thickets and tangled trees. The frogs were croaking, and the rats were slipping in and out of the shadowy water, like live shadows themselves, as I got nearer to the marshy side of the lake. I saw here, lying half in and half out of the water, the rotten wreck of an old overturned boat, with a sickly spot of sunlight glimmering through a gap in the trees on its dry surface, and a snake basking in the midst of the spot, fantastically coiled and treacherously still. Far and near the view suggested the same dreary impressions of solitude and decay, and the glorious brightness of the summer sky overhead seemed only to deepen and harden the gloom and barrenness of the wilderness on which it shone. I turned and retraced my steps to the high heathy ground, directing them a little aside from my former path towards a shabby old wooden shed, which stood on the outer skirt of the fir plantation, and which had hitherto been too unimportant to share my notice with the wide, wild prospect of the lake.

On approaching the shed I found that it had once been a boat-house, and that an attempt had apparently been made to convert it afterwards into a sort of rude arbour, by placing inside it a firwood seat, a few stools, and a table. I entered the place, and sat down for a little while to rest and get my breath again.

I had not been in the boat-house more than a minute when it struck me that the sound of my own quick breathing was very strangely echoed by something beneath me. I listened intently for a moment, and heard a low, thick, sobbing breath that seemed to come from the ground under the seat which I was occupying. My nerves are not easily shaken by trifles, but on this occasion I started to my feet in a fright—called out—received no answer—summoned back my recreant courage, and looked under the seat.

There, crouched up in the farthest corner, lay the forlorn cause of my terror, in the shape of a poor little dog—a black and white spaniel. The creature moaned feebly when I looked at it and called to it, but never stirred. I moved away the seat and looked closer. The poor little dog's eyes were glazing fast, and there were spots of blood on its glossy white side. The misery of a weak, helpless, dumb creature is surely one of the saddest of all the mournful sights which this world can show. I lifted the poor dog in my arms as gently as I could, and contrived a sort of makeshift hammock for him to lie in, by gathering up the front of my dress all round him. In this way I took the creature, as painlessly as possible, and as fast as possible, back to the house.

Finding no one in the hall I went up at once to my own sitting-room, made a bed for the dog with one of my old shawls, and rang the bell. The largest and fattest of all possible house-maids answered it, in a state of cheerful stupidity which would have provoked the patience of a saint. The girl's fat, shapeless face actually stretched into a broad grin at the sight of the wounded creature on the floor.

"What do you see there to laugh at?" I asked, as angrily as if she had been a servant of my own. "Do you know whose dog it is?"

"No, miss, that I certainly don't." She stooped, and looked down at the spaniel's injured side—brightened suddenly with the irradiation of a new idea—and pointing to the wound with a chuckle of satisfaction, said, "That's Baxter's doings, that is."

I was so exasperated that I could have boxed her ears. "Baxter?" I said. "Who is the brute you call Baxter?"

The girl grinned again more cheerfully than ever. "Bless you, miss! Baxter's the keeper, and when he finds strange dogs hunting about, he takes and shoots 'em. It's keeper's doody miss, I think that dog will die. Here's where he's been shot, ain't it? That's Baxter's doings, that is. Baxter's doings, miss, and Baxter's doody— that's what it is."

The housekeeper, a person of some education and intelligence, thoughtfully brought upstairs with her some milk
and some warm water. The instant she saw the dog on the floor she started and changed colour.

"Why, Lord bless me," cried the housekeeper, "that must be Mrs. Catherick's dog!"

"Whose?" I asked, in the utmost astonishment.

"Mrs. Catherick's. You seem to know Mrs. Catherick, Miss Halcombe?"

"Not personally, but I have heard of her. Does she live here? Has she had any news of her daughter?"

"No, Miss Halcombe, she came here to ask for news."

"When?"

"Only yesterday. She said some one had reported that a stranger answering to the description of her daughter had
been seen in our neighbourhood. No such report has reached us here, and no such report was known in the village,
when I sent to make inquiries there on Mrs. Catherick's account. She certainly brought this poor little dog with her
when she came, and I saw it trot out after her when she went away. I suppose the creature strayed into the
plantations, and got shot. Where did you find it, Miss Halcombe?"

"In the old shed that looks out on the lake."

"Ah, yes, that is the plantation side, and the poor thing dragged itself, I suppose, to the nearest shelter, as dogs
will, to die. If you can moisten its lips with the milk, Miss Halcombe, I will wash the clotted hair from the wound. I
am very much afraid it is too late to do any good. However, we can but try."

Mrs. Catherick! The name still rang in my ears, as if the housekeeper had only that moment surprised me by
uttering it. While we were attending to the dog, the words of Walter Hartright's caution to me returned to my
memory: "If ever Anne Catherick crosses your path, make better use of the opportunity, Miss Halcombe, than I
made of it." The finding of the wounded spaniel had led me already to the discovery of Mrs. Catherick's visit to
Blackwater Park, and that event might lead in its turn, to something more. I determined to make the most of the
chance which was now offered to me, and to gain as much information as I could.

"Did you say that Mrs. Catherick lived anywhere in this neighbourhood?" I asked.

"Oh dear, no," said the housekeeper. "She lives at Welmingham, quite at the other end of the county--five-and-
twenty miles off, at least."

"I suppose you have known Mrs. Catherick for some years?"

"On the contrary, Miss Halcombe, I never saw her before she came here yesterday. I had heard of her, of course,
because I had heard of Sir Percival's kindness in putting her daughter under medical care. Mrs. Catherick is rather a
strange person in her manners, but extremely respectable-looking. She seemed sorely put out when she found that
there was no foundation--none, at least, that any of us could discover--for the report of her daughter having been
seen in this neighbourhood."

"I am rather interested about Mrs. Catherick," I went on, continuing the conversation as long as possible. "I wish
I had arrived here soon enough to see her yesterday. Did she stay for any length of time?"

"Yes," said the housekeeper, "she stayed for some time; and I think she would have remained longer, if I had not
been called away to speak to a strange gentleman--a gentleman who came to ask when Sir Percival was expected
back. Mrs. Catherick got up and left at once, when she heard the maid tell me what the visitor's errand was. She said
to me, at parting, that there was no need to tell Sir Percival of her coming here. I thought that rather an odd remark
to make, especially to a person in my responsible situation."

I thought it an odd remark too. Sir Percival had certainly led me to believe, at Limmeridge, that the most perfect
confidence existed between himself and Mrs. Catherick. If that was the case, why should she be anxious to have her
visit at Blackwater Park kept a secret from him?

"Probably," I said, seeing that the housekeeper expected me to give my opinion on Mrs. Catherick's parting
words, "probably she thought the announcement of her visit might vex Sir Percival to no purpose, by reminding him
that her lost daughter was not found yet. Did she talk much on that subject?"

"Very little," replied the housekeeper. "She talked principally of Sir Percival, and asked a great many questions
about where he had been travelling, and what sort of lady his new wife was. She seemed to be more soured and put
out than distressed, by failing to find any traces of her daughter in these parts. 'I give her up,' were the last words she
said that I can remember; 'I give her up, ma'am, for lost.' And from that she passed at once to her questions about
Lady Glyde, wanting to know if she was a handsome, amiable lady, comely and healthy and young----Ah, dear! I
thought how it would end. Look, Miss Halcombe, the poor thing is out of its misery at last!"

The dog was dead. It had given a faint, sobbing cry, it had suffered an instant's convulsion of the limbs, just as
those last words, "comely and healthy and young," dropped from the housekeeper's lips. The change had happened
with startling suddenness--in one moment the creature lay lifeless under our hands.

Eight o'clock. I have just returned from dining downstairs, in solitary state. The sunset is burning redly on the
wilderness of trees that I see from my window, and I am poring over my journal again, to calm my impatience for
the return of the travellers. They ought to have arrived, by my calculations, before this. How still and lonely the
house is in the drowsy evening quiet! Oh me! how many minutes more before I hear the carriage wheels and run downstairs to find myself in Laura's arms?

The poor little dog! I wish my first day at Blackwater Park had not been associated with death, though it is only the death of a stray animal.

Welmingham--I see, on looking back through these private pages of mine, that Welmingham is the name of the place where Mrs. Catherick lives. Her note is still in my possession, the note in answer to that letter about her unhappy daughter which Sir Percival obliged me to write. One of these days, when I can find a safe opportunity, I will take the note with me by way of introduction, and try what I can make of Mrs. Catherick at a personal interview. I don't understand her wishings to conceal her visit to this place from Sir Percival's knowledge, and I don't feel half so sure, as the housekeeper seems to do, that her daughter Anne is not in the neighbourhood after all. What would Walter Hartright have said in this emergency? Poor, dear Hartright! I am beginning to feel the want of his honest advice and his willing help already.

Surely I heard something. Was it a bustle of footsteps below stairs? Yes! I hear the horses' feet--I hear the rolling wheels----

II

June 15th.--The confusion of their arrival has had time to subside. Two days have elapsed since the return of the travellers, and that interval has sufficed to put the new machinery of our lives at Blackwater Park in fair working order. I may now return to my journal, with some little chance of being able to continue the entries in it as collectedly as usual.

I think I must begin by putting down an odd remark which has suggested itself to me since Laura came back.

When two members of a family or two intimate friends are separated, and one goes abroad and one remains at home, the return of the relative or friend who has been travelling always seems to place the relative or friend who has been staying at home at a painful disadvantage when the two first meet. The sudden encounter of the new thoughts and new habits eagerly gained in the one case, with the old thoughts and old habits passively preserved in the other, seems at first to part the sympathies of the most loving relatives and the fondest friends, and to set a sudden strangeness, unexpected by both and uncontrollable by both, between them on either side. After the first happiness of my meeting with Laura was over, after we had sat down together hand in hand to recover breath enough and calmness enough to talk, I felt this strangeness instantly, and I could see that she felt it too. It has partially worn away, now that we have fallen back into most of our old habits, and it will probably disappear before long. But it has certainly had an influence over the first impressions that I have formed of her, now that we are living together again--for which reason only I have thought fit to mention it here.

She has found me unaltered, but I have found her changed.

Changed in person, and in one respect changed in character. I cannot absolutely say that she is less beautiful than she used to be--I can only say that she is less beautiful to me.

Others, who do not look at her with my eyes and my recollections, would probably think her improved. There is more colour and more decision and roundness of outline in her face than there used to be, and her figure seems more firmly set and more sure and easy in all its movements than it was in her maiden days. But I miss something when I look at her--something that once belonged to the happy, innocent life of Laura Fairlie, and that I cannot find in Lady Glyde. There was in the old times a freshness, a softness, an ever-varying and yet ever-remaining tenderness of beauty in her face, the charm of which it is not possible to express in words, or, as poor Hartright used often to say, in painting either. This is gone. I thought I saw the faint reflection of it for a moment when she turned pale under the agitation of our sudden meeting on the evening of her return, but it has never reappeared since. None of her letters had prepared me for a personal change in her. On the contrary, they had led me to expect that her marriage had left her, in appearance at least, quite unaltered. Perhaps I read her letters wrongly in the past, and am now reading her face wrongly in the present? No matter! Whether her beauty has gained or whether it has lost in the last six months, the separation either way has made her own dear self more precious to me than ever, and that is one good result of her marriage, at any rate!

The second change, the change that I have observed in her character, has not surprised me, because I was prepared for it in this case by the tone of her letters. Now that she is at home again, I find her just as unwilling to enter into any details on the subject of her married life as I had previously found her all through the time of our separation, when we could only communicate with each other by writing. At the first approach I made to the forbidden topic she put her hand on my lips with a look and gesture which touchingly, almost painfully, recalled to my memory the days of her girlhood and the happy bygone time when there were no secrets between us.

"Whenever you and I are together, Marian," she said, "we shall both be happier and easier with one another, if we accept my married life for what it is, and say and think as little about it as possible. I would tell you everything, darling, about myself," she went on, nervously buckling and unbuckling the ribbon round my waist, "if my
confidences could only end there. But they could not--they would lead me into confidences about my husband too; and now I am married, I think I had better avoid them, for his sake, and for your sake, and for mine. I don't say that they would distress you, or distress me--I wouldn't have you think that for the world. But--I want to be so happy, now I have got you back again, and I want you to be so happy too----" She broke off abruptly, and looked round the room, my own sitting-room, in which we were talking. "Ah!" she cried, clapping her hands with a bright smile of recognition, "another old friend found already! Your book-case, Marian--your dear-little-shabby-old-satin-wood book-case--how glad I am you brought it with you from Limmeridge! And the horrid heavy man's umbrella, that you always would walk out with when it rained! And first and foremost of all, your own dear, dark, clever, gipsy-face, looking at me just as usual! It is so like home again to be here. How can we make it more like home still? I will put my father's portrait in your room instead of in mine--and I will keep all my little treasures from Limmeridge here--and we will pass hours and hours every day with these four friendly walls round us. Oh, Marian!" she said, suddenly seating herself on a footstool at my knees, and looking up earnestly in my face, "promise you will never marry, and leave me. It is selfish to say so, but you are so much better off as a single woman--unless--unless you are very fond of your husband--but you won't be very fond of anybody but me, will you?" She stopped again, crossed my hands on my lap, and laid her face on them. "Have you been writing many letters, and receiving many letters lately?" she asked, in low, suddenly-altered tones. I understood what the question meant, but I thought it my duty not to encourage her by meeting her half way. "Have you heard from him?" she went on, coaxing me to forgive the more direct appeal on which she now ventured, by kissing my hands, upon which her face still rested. "Is he well and happy, and getting on in his profession? Has he recovered himself--and forgotten me?"

She should not have asked those questions. She should have remembered her own resolution, on the morning when Sir Percival held her to her marriage engagement, and when she resigned the book of Hartright's drawings into my hands for ever. But, ah me! where is the faultless human creature who can persevere in a good resolution, without sometimes failing and falling back? Where is the woman who has ever really torn from her heart the image that has been once fixed in it by a true love? Books tell us that such unearthly creatures have existed--but what does our own experience say in answer to books?

I made no attempt to remonstrate with her: perhaps, because I sincerely appreciated the fearless candour which let me see, what other women in her position might have had reasons for concealing even from their dearest friends--perhaps, because I felt, in my own heart and conscience, that in her place I should have asked the same questions and had the same thoughts. All I could honestly do was to reply that I had not written to him or heard from him lately, and then to turn the conversation to less dangerous topics.

There has been much to sadden me in our interview--my first confidential interview with her since her return. The change which her marriage has produced in our relations towards each other, by placing a forbidden subject between us, for the first time in our lives; the melancholy conviction of the dearth of all warmth of feeling, of all close sympathy, between her husband and herself, which her own unwilling words now force on my mind; the distressing discovery that the influence of that ill-fated attachment still remains (no matter how innocently, how harmlessly) rooted as deeply as ever in her heart--all these are disclosures to sadden any woman who loves her as dearly, and feels for her as acutely, as I do.

There is only one consolation to set against them--a consolation that ought to comfort me, and that does comfort me. All the graces and gentleness of her character--all the frank affection of her nature--all the sweet, simple, womanly charms which used to make her the darling and delight of every one who approached her, have come back to me with herself. Of my other impressions I am sometimes a little inclined to doubt. Of this last, best, happiest of all impressions, I grow more and more certain every hour in the day.

Let me turn, now, from her to her travelling companions. Her husband must engage my attention first. What have I observed in Sir Percival, since his return, to improve my opinion of him?

I can hardly say. Small vexations and annoyances seem to have beset him since he came back, and no man, under those circumstances, is ever presented at his best. He looks, as I think, thinner than he was when he left England. His wearisome cough and his comfortless restlessness have certainly increased. His manner--at least his manner towards me--is much more abrupt than it used to be. He greeted me, on the evening of his return, with little or nothing of the ceremony and civility of former times--no polite speeches of welcome--no appearance of extraordinary gratification at seeing me--nothing but a short shake of the hand, and a sharp "How-d'ye-do, Miss Halcombe--glad to see you again." He seemed to accept me as one of the necessary fixtures of Blackwater Park, to be satisfied at finding me established in my proper place, and then to pass me over altogether.

Most men show something of their disposition in their own houses, which they have concealed elsewhere, and Sir Percival has already displayed a mania for order and regularity, which is quite a new revelation of him, so far as my previous knowledge of his character is concerned. If I take a book from the library and leave it on the table, he follows me and puts it back again. If I rise from a chair, and let it remain where I have been sitting, he carefully
restores it to its proper place against the wall. He picks up stray flower-blossoms from the carpet, and mutters to himself as discontentedly as if they were hot cinders burning holes in it, and he storms at the servants if there is a crease in the tablecloth, or a knife missing from its place at the dinner-table, as fiercely as if they had personally insulted him.

I have already referred to the small annoyances which appear to have troubled him since his return. Much of the alteration for the worse which I have noticed in him may be due to these. I try to persuade myself that it is so, because I am anxious not to be disheartened already about the future. It is certainly trying to any man's temper to be met by a vexation the moment he sets foot in his own house again, after a long absence, and this annoying circumstance did really happen to Sir Percival in my presence.

On the evening of their arrival the housekeeper followed me into the hall to receive her master and mistress and their guests. The instant he saw her, Sir Percival asked if any one had called lately. The housekeeper mentioned to him, in reply, what she had previously mentioned to me, the visit of the strange gentleman to make inquiries about the time of her master's return. He asked immediately for the gentleman's name. No name had been left. The gentleman's business? No business had been mentioned. What was the gentleman like? The housekeeper tried to describe him, but failed to distinguish the nameless visitor by any personal peculiarity which her master could recognise. Sir Percival frowned, stamped angrily on the floor, and walked on into the house, taking no notice of anybody. Why he should have been so discomposed by a trifle I cannot say--but he was seriously discomposed, beyond all doubt.

Upon the whole, it will be best, perhaps, if I abstain from forming a decisive opinion of his manners, language, and conduct in his own house, until time has enabled him to shake off the anxieties, whatever they may be, which now evidently troubled his mind in secret. I will turn over to a new page, and my pen shall let Laura's husband alone for the present.

The two guests--the Count and Countess Fosco--come next in my catalogue. I will dispose of the Countess first, so as to have done with the woman as soon as possible.

Laura was certainly not chargeable with any exaggeration, in writing me word that I should hardly recognise her aunt again when we met. Never before have I beheld such a change produced in a woman by her marriage as has been produced in Madame Fosco.

As Eleanor Fairlie (aged seven-and-thirty), she was always talking pretentious nonsense, and always worrying the unfortunate men with every small exaction which a vain and foolish woman can impose on long-suffering male humanity. As Madame Fosco (aged three-and-forty), she sits for hours together without saying a word, frozen up in the strangest manner in herself. The hideously ridiculous love-locks which used to hang on either side of her face are now replaced by stiff little rows of very short curls, of the sort one sees in old-fashioned wigs. A plain, matronly cap covers her head, and makes her look, for the first time in her life since I remember her, like a decent woman. Nobody (putting her husband out of the question, of course) now sees in her, what everybody once saw--I mean the structure of the female skeleton, in the upper regions of the collar-bones and the shoulder-blades. Clad in quiet black or grey gowns, made high round the throat--dresses that she would have laughed at, or screamed at, as the whim of the moment inclined her, in her maiden days--she sits speechless in corners; her dry white hands (so dry that the pores of her skin look chalky) incessantly engaged, either in monotonous embroidery work or in rolling up endless cigarettes for the Count's own particular smoking. On the few occasions when her cold blue eyes are off her work, they are generally turned on her husband, with the look of mute submissive inquiry which we are all familiar with in the eyes of a faithful dog. The only approach to an inward thaw which I have yet detected under her outer covering of icy constraint, has betrayed itself, once or twice, in the form of a suppressed tigerish jealousy of any woman in the house (the maids included) to whom the Count speaks, or on whom he looks with anything approaching to special interest or attention. Except in this one particular, she is always, morning, noon, and night, indoors and out, fair weather or foul, as cold as a statue, and as impenetrable as the stone out of which it is cut. For the common purposes of society the extraordinary change thus produced in her is, beyond all doubt, a change for the better, seeing that it has transformed her into a civil, silent, unobtrusive woman, who is never in the way. How far she is really reformed or deteriorated in her secret self, is another question. I have once or twice seen sudden changes of expression on her pinched lips, and heard sudden inflexions of tone in her calm voice, which have led me to suspect that her present state of suppression may have sealed up something dangerous in her nature, which used to evaporate harmlessly in the freedom of her former life. It is quite possible that I may be altogether wrong in this idea. My own impression, however, is, that I am right. Time will show.

And the magician who has wrought this wonderful transformation--the foreign husband who has tamed this once wayward English woman till her own relations hardly know her again--the Count himself? What of the Count?

This in two words: He looks like a man who could tame anything. If he had married a tigress, instead of a woman, he would have tamed the tigress. If he had married me, I should have made his cigarettes, as his wife does--
I should have held my tongue when he looked at me, as she holds hers.

I am almost afraid to confess it, even to these secret pages. The man has interested me, has attracted me, has forced me to like him. In two short days he has made his way straight into my favourable estimation, and how he has worked the miracle is more than I can tell.

It absolutely startles me, now he is in my mind, to find how plainly I see him!—how much more plainly than I see Sir Percival, or Mr. Fairlie, or Walter Hartright, or any other absent person of whom I think, with the one exception of Laura herself! I can hear his voice, as if he was speaking at this moment. I know what his conversation was yesterday, as well as if I was hearing it now. How am I to describe him? There are peculiarities in his personal appearance, his habits, and his amusements, which I should blame in the boldest terms, or ridicule in the most merciless manner, if I had seen them in another man. What is it that makes me unable to blame them, or to ridicule them in HIM?

For example, he is immensely fat. Before this time I have always especially disliked corpulent humanity. I have always maintained that the popular notion of connecting excessive grossness of size and excessive good-humour as inseparable allies was equivalent to declaring, either that no people but amiable people ever get fat, or that the accidental addition of so many pounds of flesh has a directly favourable influence over the disposition of the person on whose body they accumulate. I have invariably combated both these absurd assertions by quoting examples of fat people who were as mean, vicious, and cruel as the leanest and the worst of their neighbours. I have asked whether Henry the Eighth was an amiable character? Whether Pope Alexander the Sixth was a good man? Whether Mr. Murderer and Mrs. Murderess Manning were not both unusually stout people? Whether hired nurses, proverbially as cruel a set of women as are to be found in all England, were not, for the most part, also as fat a set of women as are to be found in all England?—and so on, through dozens of other examples, modern and ancient, native and foreign, high and low. Holding these strong opinions on the subject with might and main as I do at this moment, here, nevertheless, is Count Fosco, as fat as Henry the Eighth himself, established in my favour, at one day’s notice, without let or hindrance from his own odious corpulence. Marvellous indeed!

Is it his face that has recommended him?

It may be his face. He is a most remarkable likeness, on a large scale, of the great Napoleon. His features have Napoleon’s magnificent regularity—his expression recalls the grandly calm, immovable power of the Great Soldier’s face. This striking resemblance certainly impressed me, to begin with; but there is something in him besides the resemblance, which has impressed me more. I think the influence I am now trying to find is in his eyes. They are the most unfathomable grey eyes I ever saw, and they have at times a cold, clear, beautiful, irresistible glitter in them which forces me to look at him, and yet causes me sensations, when I do look, which I would rather not feel. Other parts of his face and head have their strange peculiarities. His complexion, for instance, has a singular sallow-fairness, so much at variance with the dark-brown colour of his hair, that I suspect the hair of being a wig, and his face, closely shaven all over, is smoother and freer from all marks and wrinkles than mine, though (according to Sir Percival’s account of him) he is close on sixty years of age. But these are not the prominent personal characteristics which distinguish him, to my mind, from all the other men I have ever seen. The marked peculiarity which singles him out from the rank and file of humanity lies entirely, so far as I can tell at present, in the extraordinary expression and extraordinary power of his eyes.

His manner and his command of our language may also have assisted him, in some degree, to establish himself in my good opinion. He has that quiet deference, that look of pleased, attentive interest in listening to a woman, and that secret gentleness in his voice in speaking to a woman, which, say what we may, we can none of us resist. Here, too, his unusual command of the English language necessarily helps him. I had often heard of the extraordinary aptitude which many Italians show in mastering our strong, hard, Northern speech; but, until I saw Count Fosco, I had never supposed it possible that any foreigner could have spoken English as he speaks it. There are times when it is almost impossible to detect, by his accent that he is not a countryman of our own, and as for fluency, there are very few born Englishmen who can talk with as few stoppages and repetitions as the Count. He may construct his sentences more or less in the foreign way, but I have never yet heard him use a wrong expression, or hesitate for a moment in his choice of a word.

All the smallest characteristics of this strange man have something strikingly original and perplexingly contradictory in them. Fat as he is and old as he is, his movements are astonishingly light and easy. He is as noiseless in a room as any of us women, and more than that, with all his look of unmistakable mental firmness and power, he is as nervously sensitive as the weakest of us. He starts at chance noises as inverterately as Laura herself. He winced and shuddered yesterday, when Sir Percival beat one of the spaniels, so that I felt ashamed of my own want of tenderness and sensibility by comparison with the Count.

The relation of this last incident reminds me of one of his most curious peculiarities, which I have not yet mentioned—his extraordinary fondness for pet animals.
Some of these he has left on the Continent, but he has brought with him to this house a cockatoo, two canary-birds, and a whole family of white mice. He attends to all the necessities of these strange favourites himself, and he has taught the creatures to be surprisingly fond of him and familiar with him. The cockatoo, a most vicious and treacherous bird towards every one else, absolutely seems to love him. When he lets it out of its cage, it hops on to his knee, and claws its way up his great big body, and rubs its top-knot against his sallow double chin in the most caressing manner imaginable. He has only to set the doors of the canaries’ cages open, and to call them, and the pretty little cleverly trained creatures perch fearlessly on his hand, mount his fat outstretched fingers one by one, when he tells them to “go upstairs,” and sing together as if they would burst their throats with delight when they get to the top finger. His white mice live in a little pagoda of gaily-painted wirework, designed and made by himself. They are as tame as the canaries, and they are perpetually let out like the canaries. They crawl all over him, popping in and out of his waistcoat, and sitting in couples, white as snow, on his capacious shoulders. He seems to be even fonder of his mice than of his other pets, smiles at them, and kisses them, and calls them by all sorts of endearing names. If it be possible to suppose an Englishman with any taste for such childish interests and amusements as these, that Englishman would certainly feel rather ashamed of them, and would be anxious to apologise for them, in the company of grown-up people. But the Count, apparently, sees nothing ridiculous in the amazing contrast between his colossal self and his frail little pets. He would blandly kiss his white mice and twitter to his canary-birds amid an assembly of English fox-hunters, and would only pity them as barbarians when they were all laughing their loudest at him.

It seems hardly credible while I am writing it down, but it is certainly true, that this same man, who has all the fondness of an old maid for his cockatoo, and all the small dexterities of an organ-boy in managing his white mice, can talk, when anything happens to rouse him, with a daring independence of thought, a knowledge of books in every language, and an experience of society in half the capitals of Europe, which would make him the prominent personage of any assembly in the civilised world. This trainer of canary-birds, this architect of a pagoda for white mice, is (as Sir Percival himself has told me) one of the first experimental chemists living, and has discovered, among other wonderful inventions, a means of petrifying the body after death, so as to preserve it, as hard as marble, to the end of time. This fat, indolent, elderly man, whose nerves are so finely strung that he starts at chance noises, and wincies when he sees a house-spaniel get a whipping, went into the stable-yard on the morning after his arrival, and put his hand on the head of a chained bloodhound—a beast so savage that the very groom who feeds him keeps out of his reach. His wife and I were present, and I shall not forget the scene that followed, short as it was.

"Mind that dog, sir," said the groom; "he flies at everybody!" "He does that, my friend," replied the Count quietly, "because everybody is afraid of him. Let us see if he flies at me." And he laid his plump, yellow-white fingers, on which the canary-birds had been perching ten minutes before, upon the formidable brute’s head, and looked him straight in the eyes. "You big dogs are all cowards," he said, addressing the animal contemptuously, with his face and the dog’s within an inch of each other. "You would kill a poor cat, you infernal coward. You would fly at a starving beggar, you infernal coward. Anything that you can surprise unawares—anything that is afraid of your big body, and your wicked white teeth, and your slobbering, bloodthirsty mouth, is the thing you like to fly at. You could throttle me at this moment, you mean, miserable bully, and you daren’t so much as look me in the face, because I’m not afraid of you. Will you think better of it, and try your teeth in my fat neck? Bah! not you!" He turned away, laughing at the astonishment of the men in the yard, and the dog crept back meekly to his kennel. "Ah! my nice waistcoat!" he said pathetically. "I am sorry I came here. Some of that brute’s slobber has got on my pretty clean waistcoat." Those words express another of his incomprehensible oddities. He is as fond of fine clothes as the veriest fool in existence, and has appeared in four magnificent waistcoats already—all of light garish colours, and all immensely large even for him—in the two days of his residence at Blackwater Park.

His tact and cleverness in small things are quite as noticeable as the singular inconsistencies in his character, and the childish triviality of his ordinary tastes and pursuits.

I can see already that he means to live on excellent terms with all of us during the period of his sojourn in this place. He has evidently discovered that Laura secretly dislikes him (she confessed as much to me when I pressed her on the subject)—but he has also found out that she is extravagantly fond of flowers. Whenever she wants a nosegay he has got one to give her, gathered and arranged by himself, and greatly to my amusement, he is always cunningly provided with a duplicate, composed of exactly the same flowers, grouped in exactly the same way, to appease his icily jealous wife before she can so much as think herself aggrieved. His management of the Countess (in public) is a sight to see. He bows to her, he habitually addresses her as "my angel," he carries his canaries to pay her little visits on his fingers and to sing to her, he kisses her hand when she gives him his cigarettes; he presents her with sugar-plums in return, which he puts into her mouth playfully, from a box in his pocket. The rod of iron with which he rules her never appears in company—it is a private rod, and is always kept upstairs.
seriously and sensibly as if I was a man. Yes! I can find him out when I am away from him--I know he flatters my
vanity, when I think of him up here in my own room--and yet, when I go downstairs, and get into his company
again, he will blind me again, and I shall be flattered again, just as if I had never found him out at all! He can
manage me as he manages his wife and Laura, as he managed the bloodhound in the stable-yard, as he manages Sir
Percival himself, every hour in the day. "My good Percival! how I like your rough English humour!"--"My good
Percival! how I enjoy your solid English sense!" He puts the rudest remarks Sir Percival can make on his effeminate
tastes and amusements quietly away from him in that manner--always calling the baronet by his Christian name,
smiling at him with the calmest superiority, patting him on the shoulder, and bearing with him benignantly, as a
good-humoured father bears with a wayward son.

The interest which I really cannot help feeling in this strangely original man has led me to question Sir Percival
about his past life.

Sir Percival either knows little, or will tell me little, about it. He and the Count first met many years ago, at
Rome, under the dangerous circumstances to which I have alluded elsewhere. Since that time they have been
perpetually together in London, in Paris, and in Vienna--but never in Italy again; the Count having, oddly enough,
not crossed the frontiers of his native country for years past. Perhaps he has been made the victim of some political
persecution? At all events, he seems to be patriotically anxious not to lose sight of any of his own countrymen
who may happen to be in England. On the evening of his arrival he asked how far we were from the nearest town, and
whether we knew of any Italian gentlemen who might happen to be settled there. He is certainly in correspondence
with people on the Continent, for his letters have all sorts of odd stamps on them, and I saw one for him this
morning, waiting in his place at the breakfast-table, with a huge, official-looking seal on it. Perhaps he is in
 correspondence with his government? And yet, that is hardly to be reconciled either with my other idea that he may
be a political exile.

How much I seem to have written about Count Fosco! And what does it all amount to?--as poor, dear Mr.
Gilmore would ask, in his impenetrable business-like way I can only repeat that I do assuredly feel, even on this
short acquaintance, a strange, half-willing, half-unwilling liking for the Count. He seems to have established over
me the same sort of ascendency which he has evidently gained over Sir Percival. Free, and even rude, as he may
occasionally be in his manner towards his fat friend, Sir Percival is nevertheless afraid, as I can plainly see, of giving
any serious offence to the Count. I wonder whether I am afraid too? I certainly never saw a man, in all my
experience, whom I should be so sorry to have for an enemy. Is this because I like him, or because I am afraid of
him? Chi sa?--as Count Fosco might say in his own language. Who knows?

June 16th.--Something to chronicle to-day besides my own ideas and impressions. A visitor has arrived--quite
unknown to Laura and to me, and apparently quite unexpected by Sir Percival.

We were all at lunch, in the room with the new French windows that open into the verandah, and the Count (who
devours pastry as I have never yet seen it devoured by any human beings but girls at boarding-schools) had just
amused us by asking gravely for his fourth tart--when the servant entered to announce the visitor.

"Mr. Merriman has just come, Sir Percival, and wishes to see you immediately."

Sir Percival started, and looked at the man with an expression of angry alarm.

"Mr. Merriman!" he repeated, as if he thought his own ears must have deceived him.

"Yes, Sir Percival--Mr. Merriman, from London."

"Where is he?"

"In the library, Sir Percival."

He left the table the instant the last answer was given, and hurried out of the room without saying a word to any
of us.

"Who is Mr. Merriman?" asked Laura, appealing to me.

"I have not the least idea," was all I could say in reply.

The Count had finished his fourth tart, and had gone to a side-table to look after his vicious cockatoo. He turned
round to us with the bird perched on his shoulder.

"Mr. Merriman is Sir Percival's solicitor," he said quietly.

Sir Percival's solicitor. It was a perfectly straightforward answer to Laura's question, and yet, under the
circumstances, it was not satisfactory. If Mr. Merriman had been specially sent for by his client, there would have
been nothing very wonderful in his leaving town to obey the summons. But when a lawyer travels from London to
Hampshire without being sent for, and when his arrival at a gentleman's house seriously startles the gentleman
himself, it may be safely taken for granted that the legal visitor is the bearer of some very important and very
unexpected news--news which may be either very good or very bad, but which cannot, in either case, be of the
common everyday kind.

Laura and I sat silent at the table for a quarter of an hour or more, wondering uneasily what had happened, and
waiting for the chance of Sir Percival's speedy return. There were no signs of his return, and we rose to leave the room.

The Count, attentive as usual, advanced from the corner in which he had been feeding his cockatoo, with the bird still perched on his shoulder, and opened the door for us. Laura and Madame Fosco went out first. Just as I was on the point of following them he made a sign with his hand, and spoke to me, before I passed him, in the oddest manner.

"Yes," he said, quietly answering the unexpressed idea at that moment in my mind, as if I had plainly confided it to him in so many words--"yes, Miss Halcombe, something HAS happened."

I was on the point of answering, "I never said so," but the vicious cockatoo ruffled his clipped wings and gave a screech that set all my nerves on edge in an instant, and made me only too glad to get out of the room.

I joined Laura at the foot of the stairs. The thought in her mind was the same as the thought in mine, which Count Fosco had surprised, and when she spoke her words were almost the echo of his. She, too, said to me secretly that she was afraid something had happened.

III

June 16th.--I have a few lines more to add to this day's entry before I go to bed to-night.

About two hours after Sir Percival rose from the luncheon-table to receive his solicitor, Mr. Merriman, in the library, I left my room alone to take a walk in the plantations. Just as I was at the end of the landing the library door opened and the two gentlemen came out. Thinking it best not to disturb them by appearing on the stairs, I resolved to defer going down till they had crossed the hall. Although they spoke to each other in guarded tones, their words were pronounced with sufficient distinctness of utterance to reach my ears.

"Make your mind easy, Sir Percival," I heard the lawyer say; "it all rests with Lady Glyde."

I had turned to go back to my own room for a minute or two, but the sound of Laura's name on the lips of a stranger stopped me instantly. I daresay it was very wrong and very discreditable to listen, but where is the woman, in the whole range of our sex, who can regulate her actions by the abstract principles of honour, when those principles point one way, and when her affections, and the interests which grow out of them, point the other?

I listened--and under similar circumstances I would listen again--yes! with my ear at the keyhole, if I could not possibly manage it in any other way.

"You quite understand, Sir Percival," the lawyer went on. "Lady Glyde is to sign her name in the presence of a witness--or of two witnesses, if you wish to be particularly careful--and is then to put her finger on the seal and say, 'I deliver this as my act and deed.' If that is done in a week's time the arrangement will be perfectly successful, and the anxiety will be all over. If not----"

"What do you mean by 'if not'?” asked Sir Percival angrily. "If the thing must be done it SHALL be done. I promise you that, Merriman."

"Just so, Sir Percival--just so; but there are two alternatives in all transactions, and we lawyers like to look both of them in the face boldly. If through any extraordinary circumstance the arrangement should not be made, I think I may be able to get the parties to accept bills at three months. But how the money is to be raised when the bills fall due----"

"Damn the bills! The money is only to be got in one way, and in that way, I tell you again, it SHALL be got. Take a glass of wine, Merriman, before you go."

"Much obliged, Sir Percival, I have not a moment to lose if I am to catch the up-train. You will let me know as soon as the arrangement is complete? and you will not forget the caution I recommended----"

"Of course I won't. There's the dog-cart at the door for you. My groom will get you to the station in no time. Benjamin, drive like mad! Jump in. If Mr. Merriman misses the train you lose your place. Hold fast, Merriman, and if you are upset trust to the devil to save his own." With that parting benediction the baronet turned about and walked back to the library.

I had not heard much, but the little that had reached my ears was enough to make me feel uneasy. The "something" that "had happened" was but too plainly a serious money embarrassment, and Sir Percival's relief from it depended upon Laura. The prospect of seeing her involved in her husband's secret difficulties filled me with dismay, exaggerated, no doubt, by my ignorance of business and my settled distrust of Sir Percival. Instead of going out, as I proposed, I went back immediately to Laura's room to tell her what I had heard.

She received my bad news so composedly as to surprise me. She evidently knows more of her husband's character and her husband's embarrassments than I have suspected up to this time.

"I feared as much," she said, "when I heard of that strange gentleman who called, and declined to leave his name."

"Who do you think the gentleman was, then?" I asked.

"Some person who has heavy claims on Sir Percival," she answered, "and who has been the cause of Mr.
Merriman's visit here to-day."

"Do you know anything about those claims?"

"No, I know no particulars."

"You will sign nothing, Laura, without first looking at it?"

"Certainly not, Marian. Whatever I can harmlessly and honestly do to help him I will do—for the sake of making your life and mine, love, as easy and as happy as possible. But I will do nothing ignorantly, which we might, one day, have reason to feel ashamed of. Let us say no more about it now. You have got your hat on—suppose we go and dream away the afternoon in the grounds?"

On leaving the house we directed our steps to the nearest shade.

As we passed an open space among the trees in front of the house, there was Count Fosco, slowly walking backwards and forwards on the grass, sunning himself in the full blaze of the hot June afternoon. He had a broad straw hat on, with a violet-coloured ribbon round it. A blue blouse, with profuse white fancy-work over the bosom, covered his prodigious body, and was girt about the place where his waist might once have been with a broad scarlet leather belt. Nankeen trousers, displaying more white fancy-work over the ankles, and purple morocco slippers, adorned his lower extremities. He was singing Figaro's famous song in the Barber of Seville, with that crisply fluent vocalisation which is never heard from any other than an Italian throat, accompanying himself on the concertina, which he played with ecstatic throwings-up of his arms, and graceful twistings and turnings of his head, like a fat St. Cecilia masquerading in male attire. "Figaro qua! Figaro la! Figaro su! Figaro giu!" sang the Count, jauntily tossing up the concertina at arm's length, and bowing to us, on one side of the instrument, with the airy grace and elegance of Figaro himself at twenty years of age.

"Take my word for it, Laura, that man knows something of Sir Percival's embarrassments," I said, as we returned the Count's salutation from a safe distance.

"What makes you think that?" she asked.

"How should he have known, otherwise, that Mr. Merriman was Sir Percival's solicitor?" I rejoined. "Besides, when I followed you out of the luncheon-room, he told me, without a single word of inquiry on my part, that something had happened. Depend upon it, he knows more than we do."

"Don't ask him any questions if he does. Don't take him into our confidence!"

"You seem to dislike him, Laura, in a very determined manner. What has he said or done to justify you?"

"Nothing, Marian. On the contrary, he was all kindness and attention on our journey home, and he several times checked Sir Percival's outbreaks of temper, in the most considerate manner towards me. Perhaps I dislike him because he has so much more power over my husband than I have. Perhaps it hurts my pride to be under any obligations to his interference. All I know is, that I DO dislike him."

The rest of the day and evening passed quietly enough. The Count and I played at chess. For the first two games he politely allowed me to conquer him, and then, when he saw that I had found him out, begged my pardon, and at the third game checkmated me in ten minutes. Sir Percival never once referred, all through the evening, to the lawyer's visit. But either that event, or something else, had produced a singular alteration for the better in him. He was as polite and agreeable to all of us, as he used to be in the days of his probation at Limmeridge, and he was so amazingly attentive and kind to his wife, that even icy Madame Fosco was roused into looking at him with a grave surprise. What does this mean? I think I can guess—I am afraid Laura can guess—and I am sure Count Fosco knows. I caught Sir Percival looking at him for approval more than once in the course of the evening.

June 17th.—A day of events. I most fervently hope I may not have to add, a day of disasters as well. Sir Percival was as silent at breakfast as he had been the evening before, on the subject of the mysterious "arrangement" (as the lawyer called it) which is hanging over our heads. An hour afterwards, however, he suddenly entered the morning-room, where his wife and I were waiting, with our hats on, for Madame Fosco to join us, and inquired for the Count.

"We expect to see him here directly," I said.

"The fact is," Sir Percival went on, walking nervously about the room, "I want Fosco and his wife in the library, for a mere business formality, and I want you there, Laura, for a minute too." He stopped, and appeared to notice, for the first time, that we were in our walking costume. "Have you just come in?" he asked, "or were you just going out?"

"We were all thinking of going to the lake this morning," said Laura. "But if you have any other arrangement to propose—."

"No, no," he answered hastily. "My arrangement can wait. After lunch will do as well for it as after breakfast. All going to the lake, eh? A good idea. Let's have an idle morning—I'll be one of the party."

There was no mistaking his manner, even if it had been possible to mistake the uncharacteristic readiness which his words expressed, to submit his own plans and projects to the convenience of others. He was evidently relieved at
finding any excuse for delaying the business formality in the library, to which his own words had referred. My heart sank within me as I drew the inevitable inference.

The Count and his wife joined us at that moment. The lady had her husband's embroidered tobacco-pouch, and her store of paper in her hand, for the manufacture of the eternal cigarettes. The gentleman, dressed, as usual, in his blouse and straw hat, carried the gay little pagoda-cage, with his darling white mice in it, and smiled on them, and on us, with a bland amiability which it was impossible to resist.

"With your kind permission," said the Count, "I will take my small family here--my poor-little-harmless-pretty-Mouseys, out for an airing along with us. There are dogs about the house, and shall I leave my forlorn white children at the mercies of the dogs? Ah, never!"

He chirruped paternally at his small white children through the bars of the pagoda, and we all left the house for the lake.

In the plantation Sir Percival strayed away from us. It seems to be part of his restless disposition always to separate himself from his companions on these occasions, and always to occupy himself when he is alone in cutting new walking-sticks for his own use. The mere act of cutting and lopping at hazard appears to please him. He has filled the house with walking-sticks of his own making, not one of which he ever takes up for a second time. When they have been once used his interest in them is all exhausted, and he thinks of nothing but going on and making more.

At the old boat-house he joined us again. I will put down the conversation that ensued when we were all settled in our places exactly as it passed. It is an important conversation, so far as I am concerned, for it has seriously disposed me to distrust the influence which Count Fosco has exercised over my thoughts and feelings, and to resist it for the future as resolutely as I can.

The boat-house was large enough to hold us all, but Sir Percival remained outside trimming the last new stick with his pocket-axe. We three women found plenty of room on the large seat. Laura took her work, and Madame Fosco began her cigarettes. I, as usual, had nothing to do. My hands always were, and always will be, as awkward as a man's. The Count good-humouredly took a stool many sizes too small for him, and balanced himself on it with his back against the side of the shed, which creaked and groaned under his weight. He put the pagoda-cage on his lap, and let out the mice to crawl over him as usual. They are pretty, innocent-looking little creatures, but the sight of them creeping about a man's body is for some reason not pleasant to me. It excites a strange responsive creeping in my own nerves, and suggests hideous ideas of men dying in prison with the crawling creatures of the dungeon preying on them undisturbed.

The morning was windy and cloudy, and the rapid alternations of shadow and sunlight over the waste of the lake made the view look doubly wild, weird, and gloomy.

"Some people call that picturesque," said Sir Percival, pointing over the wide prospect with his half-finished walking-stick. "I call it a blot on a gentleman's property. In my great-grandfather's time the lake flowed to this place. Look at it now! It is not four feet deep anywhere, and it is all puddles and pools. I wish I could afford to drain it, and plant it all over. My bailiff (a superstitious idiot) says he is quite sure the lake has a curse on it, like the Dead Sea. What do you think, Fosco? It looks just the place for a murder, doesn't it?"

"My good Percival," remonstrated the Count. "What is your solid English sense thinking of? The water is too shallow to hide the body, and there is sand everywhere to print off the murderer's footsteps. It is, upon the whole, the very worst place for a murder that I ever set my eyes on."

"Humbug!" said Sir Percival, cutting away fiercely at his stick. "You know what I mean. The dreary scenery, the lonely situation. If you choose to understand me, you can--if you don't choose, I am not going to trouble myself to explain my meaning."

"And why not," asked the Count, "when your meaning can be explained by anybody in two words? If a fool was going to commit a murder, your lake is the first place he would choose for it. If a wise man was going to commit a murder, your lake is the last place he would choose for it. Is that your meaning? If it is, there is your explanation for you ready made. Take it, Percival, with your good Fosco's blessing."

Laura looked at the Count with her dislike for him appearing a little too plainly in her face. He was so busy with his mice that he did not notice her.

"I am sorry to hear the lake-view connected with anything so horrible as the idea of murder," she said. "And if Count Fosco must divide murderers into classes, I think he has been very unfortunate in his choice of expressions. To describe them as fools only seems like treating them with an indulgence to which they have no claim. And to describe them as wise men sounds to me like a downright contradiction in terms. I have always heard that truly wise men are truly good men, and have a horror of crime."

"My dear lady," said the Count, "those are admirable sentiments, and I have seen them stated at the tops of copybooks." He lifted one of the white mice in the palm of his hand, and spoke to it in his whimsical way. "My pretty
little smooth white rascal," he said, "here is a moral lesson for you. A truly wise mouse is a truly good mouse.
Mention that, if you please, to your companions, and never gnaw at the bars of your cage again as long as you live."

"It is easy to turn everything into ridicule," said Laura resolutely; "but you will not find it quite so easy, Count
Fosco, to give me an instance of a wise man who has been a great criminal."

The Count shrugged his huge shoulders, and smiled on Laura in the friendliest manner.

"Most true!" he said. "The fool's crime is the crime that is found out, and the wise man's crime is the crime that
is NOT found out. If I could give you an instance, it would not be the instance of a wise man. Dear Lady Glyde,
your sound English common sense has been too much for me. It is checkmate for me this time, Miss Halcombe--
ha?"

"Stand to your guns, Laura," sneered Sir Percival, who had been listening in his place at the door. "Tell him next,
that crimes cause their own detection. There's another bit of copy-book morality for you, Fosco. Crimes cause their
own detection. What infernal humbug!"

"I believe it to be true," said Laura quietly.

Sir Percival burst out laughing, so violently, so outrageously, that he quite startled us all--the Count more than
any of us.

"I believe it too," I said, coming to Laura's rescue.

Sir Percival, who had been unaccountably amused at his wife's remark, was just as unaccountably irritated by
mine. He struck the new stick savagely on the sand, and walked away from us.

"Poor dear Percival!" cried Count Fosco, looking after him gaily, "he is the victim of English spleen. But, my
dear Miss Halcombe, my dear Lady Glyde, do you really believe that crimes cause their own detection? And you,
my angel," he continued, turning to his wife, who had not uttered a word yet, "do you think so too?"

"I wait to be instructed," replied the Countess, in tones of freezing reproof, intended for Laura and me, "before I
venture on giving my opinion in the presence of well-informed men."

"Do you, indeed?" I said. "I remember the time, Countess, when you advocated the Rights of Women, and
freedom of female opinion was one of them."

"What is your view of the subject, Count?" asked Madame Fosco, calmly proceeding with her cigarettes, and not
taking the least notice of me.

The Count stroked one of his white mice reflectively with his chubby little finger before he answered.

"It is truly wonderful," he said, "how easily Society can console itself for the worst of its shortcomings with a
little bit of clap-trap. The machinery it has set up for the detection of crime is miserably ineffective--and yet only
invent a moral epigram, saying that it works well, and you blind everybody to its blunders from that moment.
Crimes cause their own detection, do they? And murder will out (another moral epigram), will it? Ask Coroners who
sit at inquests in large towns if that is true, Lady Glyde. Ask secretaries of life-assurance companies if that is true,
Miss Halcombe. Read your own public journals. In the few cases that get into the newspapers, are there not
instances of slain bodies found, and no murderers ever discovered? Multiply the cases that are reported by the cases
that are NOT reported, and the bodies that are found by the bodies that are NOT found, and what conclusion do you
come to? This. That there are foolish criminals who are discovered, and wise criminals who escape. The hiding of a
crime, or the detection of a crime, what is it? A trial of skill between the police on one side, and the individual on the
other. When the criminal is a brutal, ignorant fool, the police in nine cases out of ten win. When the criminal is a
resolute, educated, highly-intelligent man, the police in nine cases out of ten lose. If the police win, you generally
hear all about it. If the police lose, you generally hear nothing. And on this tottering foundation you build up your
comfortable moral maxim that Crime causes its own detection! Yes--all the crime you know of. And what of the
rest?"

"Devilish true, and very well put," cried a voice at the entrance of the boat-house. Sir Percival had recovered his
equanimité, and had come back while we were listening to the Count.

"Some of it may be true," I said, "and all of it may be very well put. But I don't see why Count Fosco should
celebrate the victory of the criminal over Society with so much exultation, or why you, Sir Percival, should applaud
him so loudly for doing it."

"Do you hear that, Fosco?" asked Sir Percival. "Take my advice, and make your peace with your audience. Tell
them virtue's a fine thing--they like that, I can promise you."

The Count laughed inwardly and silently, and two of the white mice in his waistcoat, alarmed by the internal
convulsion going on beneath them, darted out in a violent hurry, and scrambled into their cage again.

"The ladies, my good Percival, shall tell me about virtue," he said. "They are better authorities than I am, for
they know what virtue is, and I don't."

"You hear him?" said Sir Percival. "Isn't it awful?"

"It is true," said the Count quietly. "I am a citizen of the world, and I have met, in my time, with so many
different sorts of virtue, that I am puzzled, in my old age, to say which is the right sort and which is the wrong. Here, in England, there is one virtue. And there, in China, there is another virtue. And John Chinaman says my virtue is the genuine virtue. And John Englishman says my virtue is the genuine virtue. And I say Yes to one, or No to the other, and am just as much bewildered about it in the case of John with the top-boots as I am in the case of John with the pigtail. Ah, nice little Mousey! come, kiss me. What is your own private notion of a virtuous man, my pret-pret-pretty? A man who keeps you warm, and gives you plenty to eat. And a good notion, too, for it is intelligible, at the least."

"Stay a minute, Count," I interposed. "Accepting your illustration, surely we have one unquestionable virtue in England which is wanting in China. The Chinese authorities kill thousands of innocent people on the most frivolous pretexts. We in England are free from all guilt of that kind--we commit no such dreadful crime--we abhor reckless bloodshed with all our hearts."

"Quite right, Marian," said Laura. "Well thought of, and well expressed."

"Pray allow the Count to proceed," said Madame Fosco, with stern civility. "You will find, young ladies, that HE never speaks without having excellent reasons for all that he says."

"Thank you, my angel," replied the Count. "Have a bon-bon?" He took out of his pocket a pretty little inlaid box, and placed it open on the table. "Chocolat a la Vanille," cried the impenetrable man, cheerfully rattling the sweetmeats in the box, and bowing all round. "Offered by Fosco as an act of homage to the charming society."

"Be good enough to go on, Count," said his wife, with a spiteful reference to myself. "Oblige me by answering Miss Halcombe."

"Miss Halcombe is unanswerable," replied the polite Italian; "that is to say, so far as she goes. Yes! I agree with her. John Bull does abhor the crimes of John Chinaman. He is the quickest old gentleman at finding out faults that are his neighbours', and the slowest old gentleman at finding out the faults that are his own, who exists on the face of creation. Is he so very much better in this way than the people whom he condemns in their way? English Society, Miss Halcombe, is as often the accomplice as it is the enemy of crime. Yes! yes! Crime is in this country what crime is in other countries--a good friend to a man and to those about him as often as it is an enemy. A great rascal provides for his wife and family. The worse he is the more he makes them the objects for your sympathy. He often provides also for himself. A profligate spendthrift who is always borrowing money will get more from his friends than the rigidly honest man who only borrows of them once, under pressure of the direst want. In the one case the friends will not be at all surprised, and they will give. In the other case they will be very much surprised, and they will hesitate. Is the prison that Mr. Scoundrel lives in at the end of his career a more uncomfortable place than the workhouse that Mr. Honesty lives in at the end of his career? When John-Howard-Philanthropist wants to relieve misery he goes to find it in prisons, where crime is wretched--not in huts and hovels, where virtue is wretched too. Who is the English poet who has won the most universal sympathy--who makes the easiest of all subjects for pathetic writing and pathetic painting? That nice young person who began life with a forgery, and ended it by a suicide--your dear, romantic, interesting Chatterton. Which gets on best, do you think, of two poor starving dressmakers--the woman who resists temptation and is honest, or the woman who falls under temptation and steals? You all know that the stealing is the making of that second woman's fortune--it advertises her from length to breadth of good-humoured, charitable England--and she is relieved, as the breaker of a commandment, when she would have been left to starve, as the keeper of it. Come here, my jolly little Mouse! Hey! presto! pass! I transform you, for the time being, into a respectable lady. Stop there, in the palm of my great big hand, my dear, and listen. You marry the poor man whom you love, Mouse, and one half your friends pity, and the other half blame you. And now, on the contrary, you sell yourself for gold to a man you don't care for, and all your friends rejoice over you, and a minister of public worship sanctions the base horror of the vilest of all human bargains, and smiles and smirks afterwards at your table, if you are polite enough to ask him to breakfast. Hey! presto! pass! Be a mouse again, and squeak. If you continue to be a lady much longer, I shall have you telling me that Society abhors crime--and then, Mouse, I shall doubt if your own eyes and ears are really of any use to you. Ah! I am a bad man, Lady Glyde, am I not? I say what other people only think, and when all the rest of the world is in a conspiracy to accept the mask for the true face, mine is the rash hand that tears off the plump pasteboard, and shows the bare bones beneath. I will get up on my big elephant's legs, before I do myself any more harm in your amiable estimations--I will get up and take a little airy walk of my own. Dear ladies, as your excellent Sheridan said, I go--and leave my character behind me."

He got up, put the cage on the table, and paused for a moment to count the mice in it. "One, two, three, four----Ha!" he cried, with a look of horror, "where, in the name of Heaven, is the fifth--the youngest, the whitest, the most amiable of all--my Benjamin of mice!"

Neither Laura nor I were in any favorable disposition to be amused. The Count's glib cynicism had revealed a new aspect of his nature from which we both recoiled. But it was impossible to resist the comical distress of so very large a man at the loss of so very small a mouse. We laughed in spite of ourselves; and when Madame Fosco rose to
set the example of leaving the boat-house empty, so that her husband might search it to its remotest corners, we rose also to follow her out.

Before we had taken three steps, the Count's quick eye discovered the lost mouse under the seat that we had been occupying. He pulled aside the bench, took the little animal up in his hand, and then suddenly stopped, on his knees, looking intently at a particular place on the ground just beneath him.

When he rose to his feet again, his hand shook so that he could hardly put the mouse back in the cage, and his face was of a faint livid yellow hue all over.

"Percival!" he said, in a whisper. "Percival! come here."

Sir Percival had paid no attention to any of us for the last ten minutes. He had been entirely absorbed in writing figures on the sand, and then rubbing them out again with the point of his stick.

"What's the matter now?" he asked, lounging carelessly into the boat-house.

"Do you see nothing there?" said the Count, catching him nervously by the collar with one hand, and pointing with the other to the place near which he had found the mouse.

"I see plenty of dry sand," answered Sir Percival, "and a spot of dirt in the middle of it."

"Not dirt," whispered the Count, fastening the other hand suddenly on Sir Percival's collar, and shaking it in his agitation. "Blood."

Laura was near enough to hear the last word, softly as he whispered it. She turned to me with a look of terror.

"Nonsense, my dear," I said. "There is no need to be alarmed. It is only the blood of a poor little stray dog."

Everybody was astonished, and everybody's eyes were fixed on me inquiringly.

"How do you know that?" asked Sir Percival, speaking first.

"I found the dog here, dying, on the day when you all returned from abroad," I replied. "The poor creature had strayed into the plantation, and had been shot by your keeper."

"Whose dog was it?" inquired Sir Percival. "Not one of mine?"

"Did you try to save the poor thing?" asked Laura earnestly. "Surely you tried to save it, Marian?"

"Yes," I said, "the housekeeper and I both did our best--but the dog was mortally wounded, and he died under our hands."

"Whose dog was it?" persisted Sir Percival, repeating his question a little irritably. "One of mine?"

"No, not one of yours."

"Whose then? Did the housekeeper know?"

The housekeeper's report of Mrs. Catherick's desire to conceal her visit to Blackwater Park from Sir Percival's knowledge recurred to my memory the moment he put that last question, and I half doubted the discretion of answering it; but in my anxiety to quiet the general alarm, I had thoughtlessly advanced too far to draw back, except at the risk of exciting suspicion, which might only make matters worse. There was nothing for it but to answer at once, without reference to results.

"Yes," I said. "The housekeeper knew. She told me it was Mrs. Catherick's dog."

Sir Percival had hitherto remained at the inner end of the boat-house with Count Fosco, while I spoke to him from the door. But the instant Mrs. Catherick's name passed my lips he pushed by the Count roughly, and placed himself face to face with me under the open daylight.

"How came the housekeeper to know it was Mrs. Catherick's dog?" he asked, fixing his eyes on mine with a frowning interest and attention, which half angered, half startled me.

"She knew it," I said quietly, "because Mrs. Catherick brought the dog with her."

"Brought it with her? Where did she bring it with her?"

"To this house."

"What the devil did Mrs. Catherick want at this house?"

The manner in which he put the question was even more offensive than the language in which he expressed it. I marked my sense of his want of common politeness by silently turning away from him.

Just as I moved the Count's persuasive hand was laid on his shoulder, and the Count's mellifluous voice interposed to quiet him.

"My dear Percival!--gently--gently!"

Sir Percival looked round in his angriest manner. The Count only smiled and repeated the soothing application.

"Gently, my good friend--gently!"

Sir Percival hesitated, followed me a few steps, and, to my great surprise, offered me an apology.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Halcombe," he said. "I have been out of order lately, and I am afraid I am a little irritable. But I should like to know what Mrs. Catherick could possibly want here. When did she come? Was the housekeeper the only person who saw her?"

"The only person," I answered, "so far as I know."
The Count interposed again.

"In that case why not question the housekeeper?" he said. "Why not go, Percival, to the fountain-head of information at once?"

"Quite right!" said Sir Percival. "Of course the housekeeper is the first person to question. Excessively stupid of me not to see it myself." With those words he instantly left us to return to the house.

The motive of the Count's interference, which had puzzled me at first, betrayed itself when Sir Percival's back was turned. He had a host of questions to put to me about Mrs. Catherick, and the cause of her visit to Blackwater Park, which he could scarcely have asked in his friend's presence. I made my answers as short as I civilly could, for I had already determined to check the least approach to any exchanging of confidences between Count Fosco and myself. Laura, however, unconsciously helped him to extract all my information, by making inquiries herself, which left me no alternative but to reply to her, or to appear in the very unenviable and very false character of a depositary of Sir Percival's secrets. The end of it was, that, in about ten minutes' time, the Count knew as much as I know of Mrs. Catherick, and of the events which have so strangely connected us with her daughter, Anne, from the time when Cartwright met with her to this day.

The effect of my information on him was, in one respect, curious enough.

Intimately as he knows Sir Percival, and closely as he appears to be associated with Sir Percival's private affairs in general, he is certainly as far as I am from knowing anything of the true story of Anne Catherick. The unsolved mystery in connection with this unhappy woman is now rendered doubly suspicious, in my eyes, by the absolute conviction which I feel, that the clue to it has been hidden by Sir Percival from the most intimate friend he has in the world. It was impossible to mistake the eager curiosity of the Count's look and manner while he drank in greedily every word that fell from my lips. There are many kinds of curiosity, I know--but there is no misinterpreting the curiosity of blank surprise: if I ever saw it in my life I saw it in the Count's face.

While the questions and answers were going on, we had all been strolling quietly back through the plantation. As soon as we reached the house the first object that we saw in front of it was Sir Percival's dog-cart, with the horse put to and the groom waiting by it in his stable-jacket. If these unexpected appearances were to be trusted, the examination of the housekeeper had produced important results already.

"A fine horse, my friend," said the Count, addressing the groom with the most engaging familiarity of manner, "You are going to drive out?"

"I am not going, sir," replied the man, looking at his stable-jacket, and evidently wondering whether the foreign gentleman took it for his livery. "My master drives himself."

"Aha!" said the Count, "does he indeed? I wonder he gives himself the trouble when he has got you to drive for him. Is he going to fatigue that nice, shining, pretty horse by taking him very far to-day?"

"I don't know, sir," answered the man. "The horse is a mare, if you please, sir. She's the highest-couraged thing we've got in the stables. Her name's Brown Molly, sir, and she'll go till she drops. Sir Percival usually takes Isaac of York for the short distances."

"And your shining courageous Brown Molly for the long?"

"Logical inference, Miss Halcombe," continued the Count, wheeling round briskly, and addressing me. "Sir Percival is going a long distance to-day."

I made no reply. I had my own inferences to draw, from what I knew through the housekeeper and from what I saw before me, and I did not choose to share them with Count Fosco.

When Sir Percival was in Cumberland (I thought to myself), he walked away a long distance, on Anne's account, to question the family at Todd's Corner. Now he is in Hampshire, is he going to drive away a long distance, on Anne's account again, to question Mrs. Catherick at Welmingham?

We all entered the house. As we crossed the hall Sir Percival came out from the library to meet us. He looked hurried and pale and anxious--but for all that, he was in his most polite mood when he spoke to us.

"I am sorry to say I am obliged to leave you," he began--"a long drive--a matter that I can't very well put off. I shall be back in good time to-morrow--but before I go I should like that little business-formality, which I spoke of this morning, to be settled. Laura, will you come into the library? It won't take a minute--a mere formality. Countess, may I trouble you also? I want you and the Countess, Fosco, to be witnesses to a signature--nothing more. Come in at once and get it over."

He held the library door open until they had passed in, followed them, and shut it softly.

I remained, for a moment afterwards, standing alone in the hall, with my heart beating fast and my mind misgiving me sadly. Then I went on to the staircase, and ascended slowly to my own room.

IV

June 17th.--Just as my hand was on the door of my room, I heard Sir Percival's voice calling to me from below.

"I must beg you to come downstairs again," he said. "It is Fosco's fault, Miss Halcombe, not mine. He has started
some nonsensical objection to his wife being one of the witnesses, and has obliged me to ask you to join us in the library."

I entered the room immediately with Sir Percival. Laura was waiting by the writing-table, twisting and turning her garden hat uneasily in her hands. Madame Fosco sat near her, in an arm- chair, imperturbably admiring her husband, who stood by himself at the other end of the library, picking off the dead leaves from the flowers in the window.

The moment I appeared the Count advanced to meet me, and to offer his explanations.

"A thousand pardons, Miss Halcombe," he said. "You know the character which is given to my countrymen by the English? We Italians are all wily and suspicious by nature, in the estimation of the good John Bull. Set me down, if you please, as being no better than the rest of my race. I am a wily Italian and a suspicious Italian. You have thought so yourself, dear lady, have you not? Well! it is part of my wiliness and part of my suspicion to object to Madame Fosco being a witness to Lady Glyde's signature, when I am also a witness myself."

"There is not the shadow of a reason for his objection," interposed Sir Percival. "I have explained to him that the law of England allows Madame Fosco to witness a signature as well as her husband."

"I admit it," resumed the Count. "The law of England says, Yes, but the conscience of Fosco says, No." He spread out his fat fingers on the bosom of his blouse, and bowed solemnly, as if he wished to introduce his conscience to us all, in the character of an illustrious addition to the society. "What this document which Lady Glyde is about to sign may be," he continued, "I neither know nor desire to know. I only say this, circumstances may happen in the future which may oblige Percival, or his representatives, to appeal to the two witnesses, in which case it is certainly desirable that those witnesses should represent two opinions which are perfectly independent the one of the other. This cannot be if my wife signs as well as myself, because we have but one opinion between us, and that opinion is mine. I will not have it cast in my teeth, at some future day, that Madame Fosco acted under my coercion, and was, in plain fact, no witness at all. I speak in Percival's interest, when I propose that my name shall appear (as the nearest friend of the husband), and your name, Miss Halcombe (as the nearest friend of the wife). I am a Jesuit, if you please to think so--a splitter of straws--a man of trifles and crochets and scruples--but you will humour me, I hope, in merciful consideration for my suspicious Italian character, and my uneasy Italian conscience." He bowed again, stepped back a few paces, and withdrew his conscience from our society as politely as he had introduced it.

The Count's scruples might have been honourable and reasonable enough, but there was something in his manner of expressing them which increased my unwillingness to be concerned in the business of the signature. No consideration of less importance than my consideration for Laura would have induced me to consent to be a witness at all. One look, however, at her anxious face decided me to risk anything rather than desert her.

"I will readily remain in the room," I said. "And if I find no reason for starting any small scruples on my side, you may rely on me as a witness."

Sir Percival looked at me sharply, as if he was about to say something. But at the same moment, Madame Fosco attracted his attention by rising from her chair. She had caught her husband's eye, and had evidently received her orders to leave the room.

"You needn't go," said Sir Percival.

Madame Fosco looked for her orders again, got them again, said she would prefer leaving us to our business, and resolutely walked out. The Count lit a cigarette, went back to the flowers in the window, and puffed little jets of smoke at the leaves, in a state of the deepest anxiety about killing the insects.

Meanwhile Sir Percival unlocked a cupboard beneath one of the book-cases, and produced from it a piece of parchment, folded longwise, many times over. He placed it on the table, opened the last fold only, and kept his hand on the rest. The last fold displayed a strip of blank parchment with little wafers stuck on it at certain places. Every line of the writing was hidden in the part which he still held folded up under his hand. Laura and I looked at each other. Her face was pale, but it showed no indecision and no fear.

Sir Percival dipped a pen in ink, and handed it to his wife. "Sign your name there," he said, pointing to the place. "You and Fosco are to sign afterwards, Miss Halcombe, opposite those two wafers. Come here, Fosco! witnessing a signature is not to be done by mooning out of window and smoking into the flowers."

The Count threw away his cigarette, and joined us at the table, with his hands carelessly thrust into the scarlet belt of his blouse, and his eyes steadily fixed on Sir Percival's face. Laura, who was on the other side of her husband, with the pen in her hand, looked at him too. He stood between them holding the folded parchment down firmly on the table, and glancing across at me, as I sat opposite to him, with such a sinister mixture of suspicion and embarrassment on his face that he looked more like a prisoner at the bar than a gentleman in his own house.

"Sign there," he repeated, turning suddenly on Laura, and pointing once more to the place on the parchment.

"What is it I am to sign?" she asked quietly.
"I have no time to explain," he answered. "The dog-cart is at the door, and I must go directly. Besides, if I had time, you wouldn't understand. It is a purely formal document, full of legal technicalities, and all that sort of thing. Come! come! sign your name, and let us have done as soon as possible."

"I ought surely to know what I am signing, Sir Percival, before I write my name?"

"Nonsense! What have women to do with business? I tell you again, you can't understand it."

"At any rate, let me try to understand it. Whenever Mr. Gilmore had any business for me to do, he always explained it first, and I always understood him."

"I dare say he did. He was your servant, and was obliged to explain. I am your husband, and am NOT obliged. How much longer do you mean to keep me here? I tell you again, there is no time for reading anything--the dog-cart is waiting at the door. Once for all, will you sign or will you not?"

She still had the pen in her hand, but she made no approach to signing her name with it.

"If my signature pledges me to anything," she said, "surely I have some claim to know what that pledge is?"

He lifted up the parchment, and struck it angrily on the table.

"Speak out!" he said. "You were always famous for telling the truth. Never mind Miss Halcombe, never mind Fosco--say, in plain terms, you distrust me."

The Count took one of his hands out of his belt and laid it on Sir Percival's shoulder. Sir Percival shook it off irritably. The Count put it on again with unruffled composure.

"Control your unfortunate temper, Percival," he said "Lady Glyde is right."

"Right!" cried Sir Percival. "A wife right in distrusting her husband!"

"It is unjust and cruel to accuse me of distrusting you," said Laura. "Ask Marian if I am not justified in wanting to know what this writing requires of me before I sign it."

"I won't have any appeals made to Miss Halcombe," retorted Sir Percival. "Miss Halcombe has nothing to do with the matter."

I had not spoken hitherto, and I would much rather not have spoken now. But the expression of distress in Laura's face when she turned it towards me, and the insolent injustice of her husband's conduct, left me no other alternative than to give my opinion, for her sake, as soon as I was asked for it.

"Excuse me, Sir Percival," I said--"but as one of the witnesses to the signature, I venture to think that I HAVE something to do with the matter. Laura's objection seems to me a perfectly fair one, and speaking for myself only, I cannot assume the responsibility of witnessing her signature, unless she first understands what the writing is which you wish her to sign."

"A cool declaration, upon my soul!" cried Sir Percival. "The next time you invite yourself to a man's house, Miss Halcombe, I recommend you not to repay his hospitality by taking his wife's side against him in a matter that doesn't concern you."

I started to my feet as suddenly as if he had struck me. If I had been a man, I would have knocked him down on the threshold of his own door, and have left his house, never on any earthly consideration to enter it again. But I was only a woman--and I loved his wife so dearly!

Thank God, that faithful love helped me, and I sat down again without saying a word. SHE knew what I had suffered and what I had suppressed. She ran round to me, with the tears streaming from her eyes. "Oh, Marian!" she whispered softly. "If my mother had been alive, she could have done no more for me!"

"Come back and sign!" cried Sir Percival from the other side of the table.

"Shall I?" she asked in my ear; "I will, if you tell me."

"No," I answered. "The right and the truth are with you--sign nothing, unless you have read it first."

"Come back and sign!" he reiterated, in his loudest and angriest tones.

The Count, who had watched Laura and me with a close and silent attention, interposed for the second time.

"Percival!" he said. "I remember that I am in the presence of ladies. Be good enough, if you please, to remember it too."

Sir Percival turned on him speechless with passion. The Count's firm hand slowly tightened its grasp on his shoulder, and the Count's steady voice quietly repeated, "Be good enough, if you please, to remember it too."

They both looked at each other. Sir Percival slowly drew his shoulder from under the Count's hand, slowly turned his face away from the Count's eyes, doggedly looked down for a little while at the parchment on the table, and then spoke, with the sullen submission of a tamed animal, rather than the becoming resignation of a convinced man.

"I don't want to offend anybody," he said, "but my wife's obstinacy is enough to try the patience of a saint. I have told her this is merely a formal document--and what more can she want? You may say what you please, but it is no part of a woman's duty to set her husband at defiance. Once more, Lady Glyde, and for the last time, will you sign or will you not?"
Laura returned to his side of the table, and took up the pen again. "I will sign with pleasure," she said, "if you will only treat me as a responsible being. I care little what sacrifice is required of me, if it will affect no one else, and lead to no ill results--"

"Who talked of a sacrifice being required of You?" he broke in, with a half-suppressed return of his former violence.

"I only meant," she resumed, "that I would refuse no concession which I could honourably make. If I have a scruple about signing my name to an engagement of which I know nothing, why should you visit it on me so severely? It is rather hard, I think, to treat Count Fosco's scruples so much more indulgently than you have treated mine."

This unfortunate, yet most natural, reference to the Count's extraordinary power over her husband, indirect as it was, set Sir Percival's smouldering temper on fire again in an instant.

"Scruples!" he repeated. "YOUR scruples! It is rather late in the day for you to be scrupulous. I should have thought you had got over all weakness of that sort, when you made a virtue of necessity by marrying me."

The instant he spoke those words, Laura threw down the pen--looked at him with an expression in her eyes which, throughout all my experience of her, I had never seen in them before, and turned her back on him in dead silence.

This strong expression of the most open and the most bitter contempt was so entirely unlike herself, so utterly out of her character, that it silenced us all. There was something hidden, beyond a doubt, under the mere surface-brutality of the words which her husband had just addressed to her. There was some lurking insult beneath them, of which I was wholly ignorant, but which had left the mark of its profanation so plainly on her face that even a stranger might have seen it.

The Count, who was no stranger, saw it as distinctly as I did. When I left my chair to join Laura, I heard him whisper under his breath to Sir Percival, "You idiot!"

Laura walked before me to the door as I advanced, and at the same time her husband spoke to her once more. "You positively refuse, then, to give me your signature?" he said, in the altered tone of a man who was conscious that he had let his own licence of language seriously injure him.

"After what you have just said to me," she replied firmly, "I refuse my signature until I have read every line in that parchment from the first word to the last. Come away, Marian, we have remained here long enough."

"One moment!" interposed the Count before Sir Percival could speak again--"one moment, Lady Glyde, I implore you!"

Laura would have left the room without noticing him, but I stopped her. "Don't make an enemy of the Count!" I whispered. "Whatever you do, don't make an enemy of the Count!"

She yielded to me. I closed the door again, and we stood near it waiting. Sir Percival sat down at the table, with his elbow on the folded parchment, and his head resting on his clenched fist. The Count stood between us--master of the dreadful position in which we were placed, as he was master of everything else.

"Lady Glyde," he said, with a gentleness which seemed to address itself to our forlorn situation instead of to ourselves, "pray pardon me if I venture to offer one suggestion, and pray believe that I speak out of my profound respect and my friendly regard for the mistress of this house." He turned sharply towards Sir Percival. "Is it absolutely necessary," he asked, "that this thing here, under your elbow, should be signed to-day?"

"It is necessary to my plans and wishes," returned the other sulkily. "But that consideration, as you may have noticed, has no influence with Lady Glyde."

"Answer my plain question plainly. Can the business of the signature be put off till to-morrow--Yes or No?"

"Yes, if you will have it so."

"Then what are you wasting your time for here? Let the signature wait till to-morrow--let it wait till you come back."

Sir Percival looked up with a frown and an oath. "You are taking a tone with me that I don't like," he said. "A tone I won't bear from any man."

"I am advising you for your good," returned the Count, with a smile of quiet contempt. "Give yourself time--give Lady Glyde time. Have you forgotten that your dog-cart is waiting at the door? My tone surprises you--ha? I dare say it does--it is the tone of a man who can keep his temper. How many doses of good advice have I given you in my time? More than you can count. Have I ever been wrong? I defy you to quote me an instance of it. Go! take your drive. The matter of the signature can wait till to-morrow. Let it wait--and renew it when you come back."

Sir Percival hesitated and looked at his watch. His anxiety about the secret journey which he was to take that day, revived by the Count's words, was now evidently disputing possession of his mind with his anxiety to obtain Laura's signature. He considered for a little while, and then got up from his chair.

"It is easy to argue me down," he said, "when I have no time to answer you. I will take your advice, Fosco--not
because I want it, or believe in it, but because I can't stop here any longer." He paused, and looked round darkly at his wife. "If you don't give me your signature when I come back to-morrow!" The rest was lost in the noise of his opening the book-case cupboard again, and locking up the parchment once more. He took his hat and gloves off the table, and made for the door. Laura and I drew back to let him pass. "Remember to-morrow!" he said to his wife, and went out.

We waited to give him time to cross the hall and drive away. The Count approached us while we were standing near the door.

"You have just seen Percival at his worst, Miss Halcombe," he said. "As his old friend, I am sorry for him and ashamed of him. As his old friend, I promise you that he shall not break out to-morrow in the same disgraceful manner in which he has broken out to-day."

Laura had taken my arm while he was speaking and she pressed it significantly when he had done. It would have been a hard trial to any woman to stand by and see the office of apologist for her husband's misconduct quietly assumed by his male friend in her own house—and it was a trial to HER. I thanked the Count civilly, and let her out.

Yes! I thanked him: for I felt already, with a sense of inexpressible helplessness and humiliation, that it was either his interest or his caprice to make sure of my continuing to reside at Blackwater Park, and I knew after Sir Percival's conduct to me, that without the support of the Count's influence, I could not hope to remain there. His influence, the influence of all others that I dreaded most, was actually the one tie which now held me to Laura in the hour of her utmost need!

We heard the wheels of the dog-cart crashing on the gravel of the drive as we came into the hall. Sir Percival had started on his journey.

"Where is he going to, Marian?" Laura whispered. "Every fresh thing he does seems to terrify me about the future. Have you any suspicions?"

After what she had undergone that morning, I was unwilling to tell her my suspicions.

"How should I know his secrets?" I said evasively.

"I wonder if the housekeeper knows?" she persisted.

"Certainly not," I replied. "She must be quite as ignorant as we are."

Laura shook her head doubtfully.

"Did you not hear from the housekeeper that there was a report of Anne Catherick having been seen in this neighbourhood? Don't you think he may have gone away to look for her?"

"I would rather compose myself, Laura, by not thinking about it at all, and after what has happened, you had better follow my example. Come into my room, and rest and quiet yourself a little."

We sat down together close to the window, and let the fragrant summer air breathe over our faces.

"I am ashamed to look at you, Marian," she said, "after what you submitted to downstairs, for my sake. Oh, my own love, I am almost heartbroken when I think of it! But I will try to make it up to you--I will indeed!"

"Hush! hush!" I replied; "don't talk so. What is the trifling mortification of my pride compared to the dreadful sacrifice of your happiness?"

"You heard what he said to me?" she went on quickly and vehemently. "You heard the words--but you don't know what they meant--you don't know why I threw down the pen and turned my back on him. She rose in sudden agitation, and walked about the room. "I have kept many things from your knowledge, Marian, for fear of distressing you, and making you unhappy at the outset of our new lives. You don't know how he has used me. And yet you ought to know, for you saw how he used me to-day. You heard him sneer at my presuming to be scrupulous--you heard him say I had made a virtue of necessity in marrying him. She sat down again, her face flushed deeply, and her hands twisted and twined together in her lap. "I can't tell you about it now," she said; "I shall burst out crying if I tell you now--later, Marian, when I am more sure of myself. My poor head aches, darling--aches, aches, aches. Where is your smelling-bottle? Let me talk to you about yourself. I wish I had given him my signature, for your sake. Shall I give it to him to-morrow? I would rather compromise myself than compromise you. After your taking my part against him, he will lay all the blame on you if I refuse again. What shall we do? Oh, for a friend to help us and advise us!--a friend we could really trust!"

She sighed bitterly. I saw in her face that she was thinking of Hartright--saw it the more plainly because her last words set me thinking of him too. In six months only from her marriage we wanted the faithful service he had offered to us in his farewell words. "How little I once thought that we should ever want it at all!"

"We must do what we can to help ourselves," I said. "Let us try to talk it over calmly, Laura--let us do all in our power to decide for the best."

Putting what she knew of her husband's embarrassments and what I had heard of his conversation with the lawyer together, we arrived necessarily at the conclusion that the parchment in the library had been drawn up for the purpose of borrowing money, and that Laura's signature was absolutely necessary to fit it for the attainment of Sir
Percival's object.

The second question, concerning the nature of the legal contract by which the money was to be obtained, and the degree of personal responsibility to which Laura might subject herself if she signed it in the dark, involved considerations which lay far beyond any knowledge and experience that either of us possessed. My own convictions led me to believe that the hidden contents of the parchment concealed a transaction of the meanest and the most fraudulent kind.

I had not formed this conclusion in consequence of Sir Percival's refusal to show the writing or to explain it, for that refusal might well have proceeded from his obstinate disposition and his domineering temper alone. My sole motive for distrusting his honesty sprang from the change which I had observed in his language and his manners at Blackwater Park, a change which convinced me that he had been acting a part throughout the whole period of his probation at Limmeridge House. His elaborate delicacy, his ceremonious politeness which harmonised so agreeably with Mr. Gilmore's old-fashioned notions, his modesty with Laura, his candour with me, his moderation with Mr. Fairlie—all these were the artifices of a mean, cunning, and brutal man, who had dropped his disguise when his practised duplicity had gained its end, and had openly shown himself in the library on that very day. I say nothing of the grief which this discovery caused me on Laura's account, for it is not to be expressed by any words of mine. I only refer to it at all, because it decided me to oppose her signing the parchment, whatever the consequences might be, unless she was first made acquainted with the contents.

Under these circumstances, the one chance for us when to-morrow came was to be provided with an objection to giving the signature, which might rest on sufficiently firm commercial or legal grounds to shake Sir Percival's resolution, and to make him suspect that we two women understood the laws and obligations of business as well as himself.

After some pondering, I determined to write to the only honest man within reach whom we could trust to help us discreetly in our forlorn situation. That man was Mr. Gilmore's partner, Mr. Kyrle, who conducted the business now that our old friend had been obliged to withdraw from it, and to leave London on account of his health. I explained to Laura that I had Mr. Gilmore's own authority for placing implicit confidence in his partner's integrity, discretion, and accurate knowledge of all her affairs, and with her full approval I sat down at once to write the letter, I began by stating our position to Mr. Kyrle exactly as it was, and then asked for his advice in return, expressed in plain, downright terms which he could comprehend without any danger of misinterpretations and mistakes. My letter was as short as I could possibly make it, and was, I hope, unencumbered by needless apologies and needless details.

Just as I was about to put the address on the envelope an obstacle was discovered by Laura, which in the effort and preoccupation of writing had escaped my mind altogether.

"How are we to get the answer in time?" she asked. "Your letter will not be delivered in London before to-morrow morning, and the post will not bring the reply here till the morning after."

The only way of overcoming this difficulty was to have the answer brought to us from the lawyer's office by a special messenger. I wrote a postscript to that effect, begging that the messenger might be despatched with the reply by the eleven o'clock morning train, which would bring him to our station at twenty minutes past one, and so enable him to reach Blackwater Park by two o'clock at the latest. He was to be directed to ask for me, to answer no questions addressed to him by any one else, and to deliver his letter into no hands but mine.

"In case Sir Percival should come back to-morrow before two o'clock," I said to Laura, "the wisest plan for you to adopt is to be out in the grounds all the morning with your book or your work, and not to appear at the house till the messenger has had time to arrive with the letter. I will wait here for him all the morning, to guard against any misadventures or mistakes. By following this arrangement I hope and believe we shall avoid being taken by surprise. Let us go down to the drawing-room now. We may excite suspicion if we remain shut up together too long."

"Suspicion?" she repeated. "Whose suspicion can we excite, now that Sir Percival has left the house? Do you mean Count Fosco?"

"Perhaps I do, Laura."

"You are beginning to dislike him as much as I do, Marian."

"No, not to dislike him. Dislike is always more or less associated with contempt--I can see nothing in the Count to despise."

"You are not afraid of him, are you?"

"Perhaps I am--a little."

"Afraid of him, after his interference in our favour to-day!"

"Yes. I am more afraid of his interference than I am of Sir Percival's violence. Remember what I said to you in the library. Whatever you do, Laura, don't make an enemy of the Count!"

We went downstairs. Laura entered the drawing-room, while I proceeded across the hall, with my letter in my hand, to put it into the post-bag, which hung against the wall opposite to me.
June 17th.---When the dinner hour brought us together again, Count Fosco was in his usual excellent spirits. He exerted himself to interest and amuse us, as if he was determined to efface from our memories all recollection of what had passed in the library that afternoon. Lively descriptions of his adventures in travelling, amusing anecdotes of remarkable people whom he had met with abroad, quaint comparisons between the social customs of various nations, illustrated by examples drawn from men and women indiscriminately all over Europe, humorous confessions of the innocent follies of his own early life, when he ruled the fashions of a second-rate Italian town, and wrote preposterous romances on the French model for a second-rate Italian newspaper—all flowed in succession

The house door was open, and as I crossed past it, I saw Count Fosco and his wife standing talking together on the steps outside, with their faces turned towards me.

The Countess came into the hall rather hastily, and asked if I had leisure enough for five minutes' private conversation. Feeling a little surprised by such an appeal from such a person, I put my letter into the bag, and replied that I was quite at her disposal. She took my arm with unaccustomed friendliness and familiarity, and instead of leading me into an empty room, drew me out with her to the belt of turf which surrounded the large fish-pond.

As we passed the Count on the steps he bowed and smiled, and then went at once into the house, pushing the hall door to after him, but not actually closing it.

The Countess walked me gently round the fish-pond. I expected to be made the depository of some extraordinary confidence, and I was astonished to find that Madame Fosco's communication for my private ear was nothing more than a polite assurance of her sympathy for me, after what had happened in the library. Her husband had told her of all that had passed, and of the insolent manner in which Sir Percival had spoken to me. This information had so shocked and distressed her, on my account and on Laura's, that she had made up her mind, if anything of the sort happened again, to mark her sense of Sir Percival's outrageous conduct by leaving the house. The Count had approved of her idea, and she now hoped that I approved of it too.

I thought this a very strange proceeding on the part of such a remarkably reserved woman as Madame Fosco, especially after the interchange of sharp speeches which had passed between us during the conversation in the boat-house on that very morning. However, it was my plain duty to meet a polite and friendly advance on the part of one of my elders with a polite and friendly reply. I answered the Countess accordingly in her own tone, and then, thinking we had said all that was necessary on either side, made an attempt to get back to the house.

But Madame Fosco seemed resolved not to part with me, and to my unspeakable amazement, resolved also to talk. Hitherto the most silent of women, she now persecuted me with fluent conventionalities on the subject of married life, on the subject of Sir Percival and Laura, on the subject of her own happiness, on the subject of the late Mr. Fairlie's conduct to her in the matter of her legacy, and on half a dozen other subjects besides, until she had detained me walking round and round the fish-pond for more than half an hour, and had quite wearied me out. Whether she discovered this or not, I cannot say, but she stopped as abruptly as she had begun--looked towards the house door, resumed her icy manner in a moment, and dropped my arm of her own accord before I could think of an excuse for accomplishing my own release from her.

As I pushed open the door and entered the hall, I found myself suddenly face to face with the Count again. He was just putting a letter into the post-bag.

After he had dropped it in and had closed the bag, he asked me where I had left Madame Fosco. I told him, and he went out at the hall door immediately to join his wife. His manner when he spoke to me was so unusually quiet and subdued that I turned and looked after him, wondering if he were ill or out of spirits.

Why my next proceeding was to go straight up to the post-bag and take out my own letter and look at it again, with a vague distrust on me, and why the looking at it for the second time instantly suggested the idea to my mind of sealing the envelope for its greater security--are mysteries which are either too deep or too shallow for me to fathom. Women, as everybody knows, constantly act on impulses which they cannot explain even to themselves, and I can only suppose that one of those impulses was the hidden cause of my unaccountable conduct on this occasion.

Whatever influence animated me, I found cause to congratulate myself on having obeyed it as soon as I prepared to seal the letter in my own room. I had originally closed the envelope in the usual way by moistening the adhesive point and pressing it on the paper beneath, and when I now tried it with my finger, after a lapse of full three-quarters of an hour, the envelope opened on the instant, without sticking or tearing. Perhaps I had fastened it insufficiently? Perhaps there might have been some defect in the adhesive gum?

Or, perhaps----No! it is quite revolting enough to feel that third conjecture stirring in my mind. I would rather not see it confronting me in plain black and white.

I almost dread to-morrow--so much depends on my discretion and self-control. There are two precautions, at all events, which I am sure not to forget. I must be careful to keep up friendly appearances with the Count, and I must be well on my guard when the messenger from the office comes here with the answer to my letter.

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so easily and so gaily from his lips, and all addressed our various curiosities and various interests so directly and so delicately, that Laura and I listened to him with as much attention and, inconsistent as it may seem, with as much admiration also, as Madame Fosco herself. Women can resist a man's love, a man's fame, a man's personal appearance, and a man's money, but they cannot resist a man's tongue when he knows how to talk to them.

After dinner, while the favourable impression which he had produced on us was still vivid in our minds, the Count modestly withdrew to read in the library.

Laura proposed a stroll in the grounds to enjoy the close of the long evening. It was necessary in common politeness to ask Madame Fosco to join us, but this time she had apparently received her orders beforehand, and she begged we would kindly excuse her. "The Count will probably want a fresh supply of cigarettes," she remarked by way of apology, "and nobody can make them to his satisfaction but myself." Her cold blue eyes almost warmed as she spoke the words--she looked actually proud of being the officiating medium through which her lord and master composed himself with tobacco-smoke!

Laura and I went out together alone.

It was a misty, heavy evening. There was a sense of blight in the air; the flowers were drooping in the garden, and the ground was parched and dewless. The western heaven, as we saw it over the quiet trees, was of a pale yellow hue, and the sun was setting faintly in a haze. Coming rain seemed near--it would fall probably with the fall of night.

"Which way shall we go?" I asked
"Towards the lake, Marian, if you like," she answered.
"You seem unaccountably fond, Laura, of that dismal lake."
"No, not of the lake but of the scenery about it. The sand and heath and the fir-trees are the only objects I can discover, in all this large place, to remind me of Limmeridge. But we will walk in some other direction if you prefer it."

"I have no favourite walks at Blackwater Park, my love. One is the same as another to me. Let us go to the lake--we may find it cooler in the open space than we find it here."

We walked through the shadowy plantation in silence. The heaviness in the evening air oppressed us both, and when we reached the boat-house we were glad to sit down and rest inside.

A white fog hung low over the lake. The dense brown line of the trees on the opposite bank appeared above it, like a dwarf forest floating in the sky. The sandy ground, shelving downward from where we sat, was lost mysteriously in the outward layers of the fog. The silence was horrible. No rustling of the leaves--no bird's note in the wood--no cry of water-fowl from the pools of the hidden lake. Even the croaking of the frogs had ceased to-night.

"It is very desolate and gloomy," said Laura. "But we can be more alone here than anywhere else."

She spoke quietly and looked at the wilderness of sand and mist with steady, thoughtful eyes. I could see that her mind was too much occupied to feel the dreary impressions from without which had fastened themselves already on mine.

"I promised, Marian, to tell you the truth about my married life, instead of leaving you any longer to guess it for yourself," she began. "That secret is the first I have ever had from you, love, and I am determined it shall be the last. I was silent, as you know, for your sake--and perhaps a little for my own sake as well. It is very hard for a woman to confess that the man to whom she has given her whole life is the man of all others who cares least for the gift. If you were married yourself, Marian--and especially if you were happily married--you would feel for me as no single woman CAN feel, however kind and true she may be."

What answer could I make? I could only take her hand and look at her with my whole heart as well as my eyes would let me.

"How often," she went on, "I have heard you laughing over what you used to call your 'poverty!' how often you have made me mock- speeches of congratulation on my wealth! Oh, Marian, never laugh again. Thank God for your poverty--it has made you your own mistress, and has saved you from the lot that has fallen on ME."

A sad beginning on the lips of a young wife!--sad in its quiet plain-spoken truth. The few days we had all passed together at Blackwater Park had been many enough to show me--to show any one--what her husband had married her for.

"You shall not be distressed," she said, "by hearing how soon my disappointments and my trials began--or even by knowing what they were. It is bad enough to have them on my memory. If I tell you how he received the first and last attempt at remonstrance that I ever made, you will know how he has always treated me, as well as if I had described it in so many words. It was one day at Rome when we had ridden out together to the tomb of Cecilia Metella. The sky was calm and lovely, and the grand old ruin looked beautiful, and the remembrance that a husband's love had raised it in the old time to a wife's memory, made me feel more tenderly and more anxiously towards my husband than I had ever felt yet. 'Would you build such a tomb for ME, Percival?' I asked him. 'You
and stood over me with his hands on my shoulders. 'Ever since that morning when you made your audacious
upstairs as usual. But the moment we were in the drawing-room, he locked the door, pushed me down into a chair,
We came away early. He was silent in the carriage driving back to the hotel. He helped me out, and followed me
back to England. I agree with you, Mrs. Markland--I think Lady Glyde is sure to like him.' He laid an emphasis on
that my face had betrayed me. 'We will see about Mr. Hartright,' he said, looking at me all the time, 'when we get
drawings. When I ventured to raise my head again, my eyes and my husband's eyes met, and I knew, by his look,
meet the bride and bridegroom! I did all I could to control myself--I said nothing, and looked down close at the
'Think of those words being spoken to me publicly, in the presence of strangers--strangers who had been invited to
drawings again, do try him as a master. He is a young man--modest and gentlemanlike--I am sure you will like him.
went on, 'but the best of all, the most intelligent and the most attentive, was a Mr. Hartright. If you ever take up your
something I said attracted her attention particularly to me. 'Surely you draw yourself?' she asked. 'I used to draw a
very beautifully, and some of the guests prevailed on her to show us her drawings. We all admired them, but
English by some friends of Sir Percival's--Mr. and Mrs. Markland. Mrs. Markland had the reputation of sketching
all I kept from him, and he has discovered it.
I was obliged to turn my face from her. "Don't ask me!" I said. "Have I suffered as you have suffered? What
right have I to decide?"
"I used to think of him," she pursued, dropping her voice and moving closer to me, "I used to think of him when
Percival left me alone at night to go among the Opera people. I used to fancy what I might have been if it had
pleased God to bless me with poverty, and if I had been his wife. I used to see myself in my neat cheap gown, sitting
at home and waiting for him while he was earning our bread--sitting at home and working for him and loving him all
the better because I had to work for him--seeing him come in tired and taking off his hat and coat for him, and,
Marian, pleasing him with little dishes at dinner that I had learnt to make for his sake. Oh! I hope he is never lonely
enough and sad enough to think of me and see me as I have thought of HIM and see HIM!"
As she said those melancholy words, all the lost tenderness returned to her voice, and all the lost beauty trembled
back into her face. Her eyes rested as lovingly on the blighted, solitary, ill-omened view before us, as if they saw the
friendly hills of Cumberland in the dim and threatening sky.
"Don't speak of Walter any more," I said, as soon as I could control myself. "Oh, Laura, spare us both the
wretchedness of talking of him now!"
She roused herself, and looked at me tenderly.
"I would rather be silent about him for ever," she answered, "than cause you a moment's pain."
"It is in your interests," I pleaded; "it is for your sake that I speak. If your husband heard you-----"
"It would not surprise him if he did hear me."
She made that strange reply with a weary calmness and coldness. The change in her manner, when she gave the
answer, startled me almost as much as the answer itself.
"Not surprise him!" I repeated. "Laura! remember what you are saying--you frighten me!"
"It is true," she said; "it is what I wanted to tell you to-day, when we were talking in your room. My only secret
when I opened my heart to him at Limmeridge was a harmless secret, Marian--you said so yourself. The name was
all I kept from him, and he has discovered it.
I heard her, but I could say nothing. Her last words had killed the little hope that still lived in me.
"It happened at Rome," she went on, as wearily calm and cold as ever. "We were at a little party given to the
English by some friends of Sir Percival's--Mr. and Mrs. Markland. Mrs. Markland had the reputation of sketching
very beautifully, and some of the guests prevailed on her to show us her drawings. We all admired them, but
something I said attracted her attention particularly to me. 'Surely you draw yourself?' she asked. 'I used to draw a
little once,' I answered, 'but I have given it up.' 'If you have once drawn,' she said, 'you may take to it again one of
these days, and if you do, I wish you would let me recommend you a master.' I said nothing--you know why,
Marian--and tried to change the conversation. But Mrs. Markland persisted. 'I have had all sorts of teachers,' she
went on, 'but the best of all, the most intelligent and the most attentive, was a Mr. Hartright. If you ever take up your
drawing again, do try him as a master. He is a young man--modest and gentlemanlike--I am sure you will like him.
Think of those words being spoken to me publicly, in the presence of strangers--strangers who had been invited to
meet the bride and bridegroom! I did all I could to control myself--I said nothing, and looked down close at the
drawings. When I ventured to raise my head again, my eyes and my husband's eyes met, and I knew, by his look,
that my face had betrayed me. 'We will see about Mr. Hartright,' he said, looking at me all the time, 'when we get
back to England. I agree with you, Mrs. Markland--I think Lady Glyde is sure to like him.' He laid an emphasis on
the last words which made my cheeks burn, and set my heart beating as if it would stifle me. Nothing more was said.
We came away early. He was silent in the carriage driving back to the hotel. He helped me out, and followed me
upstairs as usual. But the moment we were in the drawing-room, he locked the door, pushed me down into a chair,
and stood over me with his hands on my shoulders. 'Ever since that morning when you made your audacious
confession to me at Limmeridge,' he said, 'I have wanted to find out the man, and I found him in your face to-night. Your drawing-master was the man, and his name is Hartright. You shall repent it, and he shall repent it, to the last hour of your lives. Now go to bed and dream of him if you like, with the marks of my horsewhip on his shoulders.' Whenever he is angry with me now he refers to what I acknowledged to him in your presence with a sneer or a threat. I have no power to prevent him from putting his own horrible construction on the confidence I placed in him. I have no influence to make him believe me, or to keep him silent. You looked surprised to-day when you heard him tell me that I had made a virtue of necessity in marrying him. You will not be surprised again when you hear him repeat it, the next time he is out of temper----Oh, Marian! don't! don't! you hurt me!"

I had caught her in my arms, and the sting and torment of my remorse had closed them round her like a vice. Yes! my remorse. The white despair of Walter's face, when my cruel words struck him to the heart in the summer-house at Limmeridge, rose before me in mute, unendurable reproach. My hand had pointed the way which led the man my sister loved, step by step, far from his country and his friends. Between those two young hearts I had stood, to sunder them for ever, the one from the other, and his life and her life lay wasted before me alike in witness of the deed. I had done this, and done it for Sir Percival Glyde.

For Sir Percival Glyde.

I heard her speaking, and I knew by the tone of her voice that she was comforting me--I, who deserved nothing but the reproach of her silence! How long it was before I mastered the absorbing misery of my own thoughts, I cannot tell. I was first conscious that she was kissing me, and then my eyes seemed to wake on a sudden to their sense of outward things, and I knew that I was looking mechanically straight before me at the prospect of the lake.

"It is late," I heard her whisper. "It will be dark in the plantation." She shook my arm and repeated, "Marian! it will be dark in the plantation."

"Give me a minute longer," I said--"a minute, to get better in."

I was afraid to trust myself to look at her yet, and I kept my eyes fixed on the view.

It WAS late. The dense brown line of trees in the sky had faded in the gathering darkness to the faint resemblance of a long wreath of smoke. The mist over the lake below had stealthily enlarged, and advanced on us. The silence was as breathless as ever, but the horror of it had gone, and the solemn mystery of its stillness was all that remained.

"We are far from the house," she whispered. "Let us go back."

She stopped suddenly, and turned her face from me towards the entrance of the boat-house.

"Marian!" she said, trembling violently. "Do you see nothing? Look!"

"Where?"

"Down there, below us."

She pointed. My eyes followed her hand, and I saw it too.

A living figure was moving over the waste of heath in the distance. It crossed our range of view from the boat-house, and passed darkly along the outer edge of the mist. It stopped far off, in front of us--waited--and passed on; moving slowly, with the white cloud of mist behind it and above it--slowly, slowly, till it glided by the edge of the boat-house, and we saw it no more.

We were both unnerved by what had passed between us that evening. Some minutes elapsed before Laura would venture into the plantation, and before I could make up my mind to lead her back to the house.

"Was it a man or a woman?" she asked in a whisper, as we moved at last into the dark dampness of the outer air.

"I am not certain."

"Which do you think?"

"It looked like a woman."

"I was afraid it was a man in a long cloak."

"It may be a man. In this dim light it is not possible to be certain."

"Wait, Marian! I'm frightened--I don't see the path. Suppose the figure should follow us?"

"Not at all likely, Laura. There is really nothing to be alarmed about. The shores of the lake are not far from the village, and they are free to any one to walk on by day or night. It is only wonderful we have seen no living creature there before."

We were now in the plantation. It was very dark--so dark, that we found some difficulty in keeping the path. I gave Laura my arm, and we walked as fast as we could on our way back.

Before we were half-way through she stopped, and forced me to stop with her. She was listening.

"Hush," she whispered. "I hear something behind us."

"Dead leaves," I said to cheer her, "or a twig blown off the trees."

"It is summer time, Marian, and there is not a breath of wind. Listen!"

I heard the sound too--a sound like a light footstep following us.
"No matter who it is, or what it is," I said, "let us walk on. In another minute, if there is anything to alarm us, we shall be near enough to the house to be heard."

We went on quickly--so quickly, that Laura was breathless by the time we were nearly through the plantation, and within sight of the lighted windows.

I waited a moment to give her breathing-time. Just as we were about to proceed she stopped me again, and signed to me with her hand to listen once more. We both heard distinctly a long, heavy sigh behind us, in the black depths of the trees.

"Who's there?" I called out.

There was no answer.

"Who's there?" I repeated.

An instant of silence followed, and then we heard the light fall of the footsteps again, fainter and fainter--sinking away into the darkness--sinking, sinking, sinking--till they were lost in the silence.

We hurried out from the trees to the open lawn beyond crossed it rapidly; and without another word passing between us, reached the house.

In the light of the hall-lamp Laura looked at me, with white cheeks and startled eyes.

"I am half dead with fear," she said. "Who could it have been?"

"We will try to guess to-morrow," I replied. "In the meantime say nothing to any one of what we have heard and seen."

"Why not?"

"Because silence is safe, and we have need of safety in this house."

I sent Laura upstairs immediately, waited a minute to take off my hat and put my hair smooth, and then went at once to make my first investigations in the library, on pretence of searching for a book.

There sat the Count, filling out the largest easy-chair in the house, smoking and reading calmly, with his feet on an ottoman, his cravat across his knees, and his shirt collar wide open. And there sat Madame Fosco, like a quiet child, on a stool by his side, making cigarettes. Neither husband nor wife could, by any possibility, have been out late that evening, and have just got back to the house in a hurry. I felt that my object in visiting the library was answered the moment I set eyes on them.

Count Fosco rose in polite confusion and tied his cravat on when I entered the room.

"Pray don't let me disturb you," I said. "I have only come here to get a book."

"All unfortunate men of my size suffer from the heat," said the Count, refreshing himself gravely with a large green fan. "I wish I could change places with my excellent wife. She is as cool at this moment as a fish in the pond outside."

The Countess allowed herself to thaw under the influence of her husband's quaint comparison. "I am never warm, Miss Halcombe," she remarked, with the modest air of a woman who was confessing to one of her own merits.

"Have you and Lady Glyde been out this evening?" asked the Count, while I was taking a book from the shelves to preserve appearances.

"Yes, we went out to get a little air."

"May I ask in what direction?"

"In the direction of the lake--as far as the boat-house."

"Aha? As far as the boat-house?"

Under other circumstances I might have resented his curiosity. But to-night I hailed it as another proof that neither he nor his wife were connected with the mysterious appearance at the lake.

"No more adventures, I suppose, this evening?" he went on. "No more discoveries, like your discovery of the wounded dog?"

He fixed his unfathomable grey eyes on me, with that cold, clear, irresistible glitter in them which always forces me to look at him, and always makes me uneasy while I do look. An unutterable suspicion that his mind is prying into mine overcomes me at these times, and it overcame me now.

"No," I said shortly; "no adventures--no discoveries."

I tried to look away from him and leave the room. Strange as it seems, I hardly think I should have succeeded in the attempt if Madame Fosco had not helped me by causing him to move and look away first.

"Count, you are keeping Miss Halcombe standing," she said.

The moment he turned round to get me a chair, I seized my opportunity--thanked him--made my excuses--and slipped out.

An hour later, when Laura's maid happened to be in her mistress's room, I took occasion to refer to the closeness of the night, with a view to ascertaining next how the servants had been passing their time.
"Have you been suffering much from the heat downstairs?" I asked.

"No, miss," said the girl, "we have not felt it to speak of."

"You have been out in the woods then, I suppose?"

"Some of us thought of going, miss. But cook said she should take her chair into the cool court-yard, outside the kitchen door, and on second thoughts, all the rest of us took our chairs out there too."

The housekeeper was now the only person who remained to be accounted for.

"Is Mrs. Michelson gone to bed yet?" I inquired.

"I should think not, miss," said the girl, smiling. "Mrs. Michelson is more likely to be getting up just now than going to bed."

"Why? What do you mean? Has Mrs. Michelson been taking to her bed in the daytime?"

"No, miss, not exactly, but the next thing to it. She's been asleep all the evening on the sofa in her own room."

Putting together what I observed for myself in the library, and what I have just heard from Laura's maid, one conclusion seems inevitable. The figure we saw at the lake was not the figure of Madame Fosco, of her husband, or of any of the servants. The footsteps we heard behind us were not the footsteps of any one belonging to the house.

Who could it have been?

It seems useless to inquire. I cannot even decide whether the figure was a man's or a woman's. I can only say that I think it was a woman's.

VI

June 18th.--The misery of self-reproach which I suffered yesterday evening, on hearing what Laura told me in the boat-house, returned in the loneliness of the night, and kept me waking and wretched for hours.

I lighted my candle at last, and searched through my old journals to see what my share in the fatal error of her marriage had really been, and what I might have once done to save her from it. The result soothed me a little for it showed that, however blindly and ignorantly I acted, I acted for the best. Crying generally does me harm; but it was not so last night--I think it relieved me. I rose this morning with a settled resolution and a quiet mind. Nothing Sir Percival can say or do shall ever irritate me again, or make me forget for one moment that I am staying here in defiance of mortifications, insults, and threats, for Laura's service and for Laura's sake.

The speculations in which we might have indulged this morning, on the subject of the figure at the lake and the footsteps in the plantation, have been all suspended by a trifling accident which has caused Laura great regret. She has lost the little brooch I gave her for a keepsake on the day before her marriage. As she wore it when we went out yesterday evening we can only suppose that it must have dropped from her dress, either in the boat-house or on our way back. The servants have been sent to search, and have returned unsuccessful. And now Laura herself has gone to look for it. Whether she finds it or not the loss will help to excuse her absence from the house, if Sir Percival returns before the letter from Mr. Gilmore's partner is placed in my hands.

One o'clock has just struck. I am considering whether I had better wait here for the arrival of the messenger from London, or slip away quietly, and watch for him outside the lodge gate.

My suspicion of everybody and everything in this house inclines me to think that the second plan may be the best. The Count is safe in the breakfast-room. I heard him, through the door, as I ran upstairs ten minutes since, exercising his canary-birds at their tricks:--"Come out on my little finger, my pret-pret-pretties! Come out, and hop upstairs! One, two, three--and up! Three, two, one--and down! One, two, three--twit-twit-twit-twit-tweet!" The birds burst into their usual ecstasy of singing, and the Count chirruped and whistled at them in return, as if he was a bird himself. My room door is open, and I can hear the shrill singing and whistling at this very moment. If I am really to slip out without being observed, now is my time.

FOUR O'CLOCK. The three hours that have passed since I made my last entry have turned the whole march of events at Blackwater Park in a new direction. Whether for good or for evil, I cannot and dare not decide.

Let me get back first to the place at which I left off, or I shall lose myself in the confusion of my own thoughts.

I went out, as I had proposed, to meet the messenger with my letter from London at the lodge gate. On the stairs I saw no one. In the hall I heard the Count still exercising his birds. But on crossing the quadrangle outside, I passed Madame Fosco, walking by herself in her favourite circle, round and round the great fish-pond. I at once slackened my pace, so as to avoid all appearance of being in a hurry, and even went the length, for caution's sake, of inquiring if she thought of going out before lunch. She smiled at me in the friendliest manner--said she preferred remaining near the house, nodded pleasantly, and re-entered the hall. I looked back, and saw that she had closed the door before I had opened the wicket by the side of the carriage gates.

In less than a quarter of an hour I reached the lodge.

The lane outside took a sudden turn to the left, ran on straight for a hundred yards or so, and then took another sharp turn to the right to join the high-road. Between these two turns, hidden from the lodge on one side, and from the way to the station on the other, I waited, walking backwards and forwards. High hedges were on either side of
me, and for twenty minutes, by my watch, I neither saw nor heard anything. At the end of that time the sound of a carriage caught my ear, and I was met, as I advanced towards the second turning, by a fly from the railway. I made a sign to the driver to stop. As he obeyed me a respectable-looking man put his head out of the window to see what was the matter.

"I beg your pardon," I said, "but am I right in supposing that you are going to Blackwater Park?"

"Yes, ma’am."

"With a letter for any one?"

"With a letter for Miss Halcombe, ma’am."

"You may give me the letter. I am Miss Halcombe."

The man touched his hat, got out of the fly immediately, and gave me the letter.

I opened it at once and read these lines. I copy them here, thinking it best to destroy the original for caution’s sake.

"DEAR MADAM,--Your letter received this morning has caused me very great anxiety. I will reply to it as briefly and plainly as possible.

"My careful consideration of the statement made by yourself, and my knowledge of Lady Glyde’s position, as defined in the settlement, lead me, I regret to say, to the conclusion that a loan of the trust money to Sir Percival (or, in other words, a loan of some portion of the twenty thousand pounds of Lady Glyde’s fortune) is in contemplation, and that she is made a party to the deed, in order to secure her approval of a flagrant breach of trust, and to have her signature produced against her if she should complain hereafter. It is impossible, on any other supposition, to account, situated as she is, for her execution to a deed of any kind being wanted at all.

"In the event of Lady Glyde’s signing such a document, as I am compelled to suppose the deed in question to be, her trustees would be at liberty to advance money to Sir Percival out of her twenty thousand pounds. If the amount so lent should not be paid back, and if Lady Glyde should have children, their fortune will then be diminished by the sum, large or small, so advanced. In plainer terms still, the transaction, for anything that Lady Glyde knows to the contrary, may be a fraud upon her unborn children.

"Under these serious circumstances, I would recommend Lady Glyde to assign as a reason for withholding her signature, that she wishes the deed to be first submitted to myself, as her family solicitor (in the absence of my partner, Mr. Gilmore). No reasonable objection can be made to taking this course--for, if the transaction is an honourable one, there will necessarily be no difficulty in my giving my approval.

"Sincerely assuring you of my readiness to afford any additional help or advice that may be wanted, I beg to remain, Madam, your faithful servant,

"WILLIAM KYRLE."

I read this kind and sensible letter very thankfully. It supplied Laura with a reason for objecting to the signature which was unanswerable, and which we could both of us understand. The messenger waited near me while I was reading to receive his directions when I had done.

"Will you be good enough to say that I understand the letter, and that I am very much obliged?" I said. "There is no other reply necessary at present."

Exactly at the moment when I was speaking those words, holding the letter open in my hand, Count Fosco turned the corner of the lane from the high-road, and stood before me as if he had sprung up out of the earth.

The suddenness of his appearance, in the very last place under heaven in which I should have expected to see him, took me completely by surprise. The messenger wished me good-morning, and got into the fly again. I could not say a word to him--I was not even able to return his bow. The conviction that I was discovered--and by that man, of all others--absolutely petrified me.

"Are you going back to the house, Miss Halcombe?" he inquired, without showing the least surprise on his side, and without even looking after the fly, which drove off while he was speaking to me.

I collected myself sufficiently to make a sign in the affirmative.

"I am going back too," he said. "Pray allow me the pleasure of accompanying you. Will you take my arm? You look surprised at seeing me!"

I took his arm. The first of my scattered senses that came back was the sense that warned me to sacrifice anything rather than make an enemy of him.

"You look surprised at seeing me!" he repeated in his quietly pertinacious way.

"I thought, Count, I heard you with your birds in the breakfast-room," I answered, as quietly and firmly as I could.

"Surely. But my little feathered children, dear lady, are only too like other children. They have their days of perversity, and this morning was one of them. My wife came in as I was putting them back in their cage, and said she had left you going out alone for a walk. You told her so, did you not?"
"Certainly."

"Well, Miss Halcombe, the pleasure of accompanying you was too great a temptation for me to resist. At my age there is no harm in confessing so much as that, is there? I seized my hat, and set off to offer myself as your escort. Even so fat an old man as Fosco is surely better than no escort at all? I took the wrong path--I came back in despair, and here I am, arrived (may I say it?) at the height of my wishes."

He talked on in this complimentary strain with a fluency which left me no exertion to make beyond the effort of maintaining my composure. He never referred in the most distant manner to what he had seen in the lane, or to the letter which I still had in my hand. This ominous discretion helped to convince me that he must have surprised, by the most dishonourable means, the secret of my application in Laura's interest to the lawyer; and that, having now assured himself of the private manner in which I had received the answer, he had discovered enough to suit his purposes, and was only bent on trying to quiet the suspicions which he knew he must have aroused in my mind. I was wise enough, under these circumstances, not to attempt to deceive him by plausible explanations, and woman enough, notwithstanding my dread of him, to feel as if my hand was tainted by resting on his arm.

On the drive in front of the house we met the dog-cart being taken round to the stables. Sir Percival had just returned. He came out to meet us at the house-door. Whatever other results his journey might have had, it had not ended in softening his savage temper.

"Oh! here are two of you come back," he said, with a lowering face. "What is the meaning of the house being deserted in this way? Where is Lady Glyde?"

I told him of the loss of the brooch, and said that Laura had gone into the plantation to look for it.

"Brooch or no brooch," he growled sulkily, "I recommend her not to forget her appointment in the library this afternoon. I shall expect to see her in half an hour."

I took my hand from the Count's arm, and slowly ascended the steps. He honoured me with one of his magnificent bows, and then addressed himself gaily to the scowling master of the house.

"Tell me, Percival," he said, "have you had a pleasant drive? And has your pretty shining Brown Molly come back at all tired?"

"Brown Molly be hanged--and the drive too! I want my lunch."

"And I want five minutes' talk with you, Percival, first," returned the Count. "Five minutes' talk, my friend, here on the grass."

"What about?"

"About business that very much concerns you."

I lingered long enough in passing through the hall-door to hear this question and answer, and to see Sir Percival thrust his hands into his pockets in sullen hesitation.

"If you want to badger me with any more of your infernal scruples," he said, "I for one won't hear them. I want my lunch."

"Come out here and speak to me," repeated the Count, still perfectly uninfluenced by the rudest speech that his friend could make to him.

Sir Percival descended the steps. The Count took him by the arm, and walked him away gently. The "business," I was sure, referred to the question of the signature. They were speaking of Laura and of me beyond a doubt. I felt heart-sick and faint with anxiety. It might be of the last importance to both of us to know what they were saying to each other at that moment, and not one word of it could by any possibility reach my ears.

I walked about the house, from room to room, with the lawyer's letter in my bosom (I was afraid by this time even to trust it under lock and key), till the oppression of my suspense half maddened me. There were no signs of Laura's return, and I thought of going out to look for her. But my strength was so exhausted by the trials and anxieties of the morning that the heat of the day quite overpowered me, and after an attempt to get to the door I was obliged to return to the drawing-room and lie down on the nearest sofa to recover.

I was just composing myself when the door opened softly and the Count looked in.

"A thousand pardons, Miss Halcombe," he said; "I only venture to disturb you because I am the bearer of good news. Percival--who is capricious in everything, as you know--has seen fit to alter his mind at the last moment, and the business of the signature is put off for the present. A great relief to all of us, Miss Halcombe, as I see with pleasure in your face. Pray present my best respects and felicitations, when you mention this pleasant change of circumstances to Lady Glyde."

He left me before I had recovered my astonishment. There could be no doubt that this extraordinary alteration of purpose in the matter of the signature was due to his influence, and that his discovery of my application to London yesterday, and of my having received an answer to it to-day, had offered him the means of interfering with certain success.

I felt these impressions, but my mind seemed to share the exhaustion of my body, and I was in no condition to
dwell on them with any useful reference to the doubtful present or the threatening future. I tried a second time to run out and find Laura, but my head was giddy and my knees trembled under me. There was no choice but to give it up again and return to the sofa, sorely against my will.

The quiet in the house, and the low murmuring hum of summer insects outside the open window, soothed me. My eyes closed of themselves, and I passed gradually into a strange condition, which was not waking—for I knew nothing of what was going on about me, and not sleeping—for I was conscious of my own repose. In this state my fevered mind broke loose from me, while my weary body was at rest, and in a trance, or day-dream of my fancy—I know not what to call it—I saw Walter Hartright. I had not thought of him since I rose that morning—Laura had not said one word to me either directly or indirectly referring to him—and yet I saw him now as plainly as if the past time had returned, and we were both together again at Limmeridge House.

He appeared to me as one among many other men, none of whose faces I could plainly discern. They were all lying on the steps of an immense ruined temple. Colossal tropical trees—with rank creepers twining endlessly about their trunks, and hideous stone idols glimmering and grinning at intervals behind leaves and stalks and branches—surrounded the temple and shut out the sky, and threw a dismal shadow over the forlorn band of men on the steps. White exhalations twisted and curled up stealthily from the ground, approached the men in wreaths like smoke, touched them, and stretched them out dead, one by one, in the places where they lay. An agony of pity and fear for Walter loosened my tongue, and I implored him to escape. "Come back, come back!" I said. "Remember your promise to HER and to ME. Come back to us before the Pestilence reaches you and lays you dead like the rest!"

He looked at me with an unearthly quiet in his face. "Wait," he said, "I shall come back. The night when I met the lost Woman on the highway was the night which set my life apart to be the instrument of a Design that is yet unseen. Here, lost in the wilderness, or there, welcomed back in the land of my birth, I am still walking on the dark road which leads me, and you, and the sister of your love and mine, to the unknown Retribution and the inevitable End. Wait and look. The Pestilence which touches the rest will pass ME."

I saw him again. He was still in the forest, and the numbers of his lost companions had dwindled to very few. The temple was gone, and the idols were gone—and in their place the figures of dark, dwarfish men lurked murderously among the trees, with bows in their hands, and arrows fitted to the string. Once more I feared for Walter, and cried out to warn him. Once more he turned to me, with the immovable quiet in his face.

"Another step," he said, "on the dark road. Wait and look. The arrows that strike the rest will spare me."

I saw him for the third time in a wrecked ship, stranded on a wild, sandy shore. The overloaded boats were making away from him for the land, and he alone was left to sink with the ship. I cried to him to hail the hindmost boat, and to make a last effort for his life. The quiet face looked at me in return, and the unmoved voice gave me back the changeless reply. "Another step on the journey. Wait and look. The Sea which drowns the rest will spare me."

I saw him for the last time. He was kneeling by a tomb of white marble, and the shadow of a veiled woman rose out of the grave beneath and waited by his side. The unearthly quiet of his face had changed to an unearthly sorrow. But the terrible certainty of his words remained the same. "Darker and darker," he said; "farther and farther yet. Death takes the good, the beautiful, and the young—and spares me. The Pestilence that wastes, the Arrow that strikes, the Sea that drowns, the Grave that closes over Love and Hope, are steps of my journey, and take me nearer and nearer to the End."

My heart sank under a dread beyond words, under a grief beyond tears. The darkness closed round the pilgrim at the marble tomb—closed round the veiled woman from the grave—closed round the dreamer who looked on them. I saw and heard no more.

I was aroused by a hand laid on my shoulder. It was Laura's.

She had dropped on her knees by the side of the sofa. Her face was flushed and agitated, and her eyes met mine in a wild bewildered manner. I started the instant I saw her.

"What has happened?" I asked. "What has frightened you?"

She looked round at the half-open door, put her lips close to my ear, and answered in a whisper—

"Marian!—the figure at the lake—the footsteps last night—I've just seen her! I've just spoken to her!"

"Who, for Heaven's sake?"

"Anne Catherick."

I was so startled by the disturbance in Laura's face and manner, and so dismayed by the first waking impressions of my dream, that I was not fit to bear the revelation which burst upon me when that name passed her lips. I could only stand rooted to the floor, looking at her in breathless silence.

She was too much absorbed by what had happened to notice the effect which her reply had produced on me. "I have seen Anne Catherick! I have spoken to Anne Catherick!" she repeated as if I had not heard her. "Oh, Marian, I have such things to tell you! Come away—we may be interrupted here—come at once into my room."
With those eager words she caught me by the hand, and led me through the library, to the end room on the ground floor, which had been fitted up for her own especial use. No third person, except her maid, could have any excuse for surprising us here. She pushed me in before her, locked the door, and drew the chintz curtains that hung over the inside.

The strange, stunned feeling which had taken possession of me still remained. But a growing conviction that the complications which had long threatened to gather about her, and to gather about me, had suddenly closed fast round us both, was now beginning to penetrate my mind. I could not express it in words—I could hardly even realise it dimly in my own thoughts. "Anne Catherick!" I whispered to myself, with useless, helpless reiteration—"Anne Catherick!"

Laura drew me to the nearest seat, an ottoman in the middle of the room. "Look!" she said, "look here!"—and pointed to the bosom of her dress.

I saw, for the first time, that the lost brooch was pinned in its place again. There was something real in the sight of it, something real in the touching of it afterwards, which seemed to steady the whirl and confusion in my thoughts, and to help me to compose myself.

"Where did you find your brooch?" The first words I could say to her were the words which put that trivial question at that important moment.

"SHE found it, Marian."

"Where?"

"On the floor of the boat-house. Oh, how shall I begin—how shall I tell you about it! She talked to me so strangely—she looked so fearfully ill—she left me so suddenly!"

Her voice rose as the tumult of her recollections pressed upon her mind. The inveterate distrust which weighs, night and day, on my spirits in this house, instantly roused me to warn her—just as the sight of the brooch had roused me to question her, the moment before.

"Speak low," I said. "The window is open, and the garden path runs beneath it. Begin at the beginning, Laura. Tell me, word for word, what passed between that woman and you."

"Shall I close the window?"

"No, only speak low—only remember that Anne Catherick is a dangerous subject under your husband's roof. Where did you first see her?"

"At the boat-house, Marian. I went out, as you know, to find my brooch, and I walked along the path through the plantation, looking down on the ground carefully at every step. In that way I got on, after a long time, to the boat-house, and as soon as I was inside it, I went on my knees to hunt over the floor. I was still searching with my back to the doorway, when I heard a soft, strange voice behind me say, 'Miss Fairlie.'"

"Miss Fairlie!"

"Yes, my old name—the dear, familiar name that I thought I had parted from for ever. I started up—not frightened, the voice was too kind and gentle to frighten anybody—but very much surprised. There, looking at me from the doorway, stood a woman, whose face I never remembered to have seen before—"

"How was she dressed?"

"She had a neat, pretty white gown on, and over it a poor worn thin dark shawl. Her bonnet was of brown straw, as poor and worn as the shawl. I was struck by the difference between her gown and the rest of her dress, and she saw that I noticed it. 'Don't look at my bonnet and shawl,' she said, speaking in a quick, breathless, sudden way; 'if I mustn't wear white, I don't care what I wear. Look at my gown as much as you please—I'm not ashamed of that.' Very strange, was it not? Before I could say anything to soothe her, she held out one of her hands, and I saw my brooch in it. I was so pleased and so grateful, that I went quite close to her to say what I really felt. 'Are you thankful enough to do me one little kindness?' she asked. 'Yes, indeed,' I answered, 'any kindness in my power I shall be glad to show you.' Then let me pin your brooch on for you, now I have found it.' Her request was so unexpected, Marian, and she made it with such extraordinary eagerness, that I drew back a step or two, not well knowing what to do. 'Ah!' she said, 'your mother would have let me pin on the brooch.' There was something in her voice and her look, as well as in her mentioning my mother in that reproachful manner, which made me ashamed of my distrust. I took her hand with the brooch in it, and put it up gently on the bosom of my dress. 'You knew my mother?' I said. 'Was it very long ago? have I ever seen you before?' Her hands were busy fastening the brooch: she stopped and pressed them against my breast. 'You don't remember a fine spring day at Limmeridge,' she said, 'and your mother walking down the path that led to the school, with a little girl on each side of her? I have had nothing else to think of since, and I remember it. You were one of the little girls, and I was the other. Pretty, clever Miss Fairlie, and poor dazed Anne Catherick were nearer to each other than they are now!'"

"Did you remember her, Laura, when she told you her name?"

"Yes, I remembered your asking me about Anne Catherick at Limmeridge, and your saying that she had once
“What reminded you of that, Laura?”

“She reminded me. While I was looking at her, while she was very close to me, it came over my mind suddenly that we were like each other! Her face was pale and thin and weary—but the sight of it startled me, as if it had been the sight of my own face in the glass after a long illness. The discovery—I don't know why—gave me such a shock, that I was perfectly incapable of speaking to her for the moment.”

“Did she seem hurt by your silence?”

“I am afraid she was hurt by it. ‘You have not got your mother's face,’ she said, ‘or your mother's heart. Your mother's face was dark, and your mother's heart, Miss Fairlie, was the heart of an angel.’ ‘I am sure I feel kindly towards you,’ I said, ‘though I may not be able to express it as I ought. Why do you call me Miss Fairlie?—’

‘Because I love the name of Fairlie and hate the name of Glyde,’ she broke out violently. I had seen nothing like madness in her before this, but I fancied I saw it now in her eyes. ‘I only thought you might not know I was married,’ I said, remembering the wild letter she wrote to me at Limmeridge, and trying to quiet her. She sighed bitterly, and turned away from me. ‘Not know you were married?’ she repeated. ‘I am here because you are married. I am here to make atonement to you, before I meet your mother in the world beyond the grave.’ She drew farther and farther away from me, till she was out of the boat-house, and then she watched and listened for a little while. When she turned round to speak again, instead of coming back, she stopped where she was, looking in at me, with a hand on each side of the entrance. ‘Did you see me at the lake last night?’ she said. ‘Did you hear me following you in the wood? I have been waiting for days together to speak to you alone—I have left the only friend I have in the world, anxious and frightened about me—I have risked being shut up again in the mad-house—and all for your sake, Miss Fairlie, all for your sake.’ Her words alarmed me, Marian, and yet there was something in the way she spoke that made me pity her with all my heart. I am sure my pity must have been sincere, for it made me bold enough to ask the poor creature to come in, and sit down in the boat-house, by my side.”

“Did she do so?”

“No. She shook her head, and told me she must stop where she was, to watch and listen, and see that no third person surprised us. And from first to last, there she waited at the entrance, with a hand on each side of it, sometimes bending in suddenly to speak to me, sometimes drawing back suddenly to look about her. ‘I was here yesterday,’ she said, ‘before it came dark, and I heard you, and the lady with you, talking together. I heard you tell her about your husband. I heard you say you had no influence to make him believe you, and no influence to keep him silent. Ah! I knew what those words meant—my conscience told me while I was listening. Why did I ever let you marry him? Oh, my fear—my mad, miserable, wicked fear! ‘She covered up her face in her poor worn shawl, and moaned and murmured to herself behind it. I began to be afraid she might break out into some terrible despair which neither she nor I could master. ‘Try to quiet yourself,’ I said; ‘try to tell me how you might have prevented my marriage.’ She took the shawl from her face, and looked at me vacantly. ‘I ought to have had heart enough to stop at Limmeridge,’ she answered. ‘I ought never to have let the news of his coming there frighten me away. I ought to have warned you—I have lost the only friend I have in the world. ‘No,’ she said, ‘I am not afraid now.’ ‘Can't you guess why?’ I shook my head. ‘Look at me,’ she went on. I told her I was grieved to see that she looked so sorrowful and very ill. ‘I only thought you might not know I was married,’ she answered. ‘I ought never to have let the news of his coming there frighten me away. I ought to have warned you—’

“Why did I only have courage enough to write you that letter? Why did I only have heart enough to stop at Limmeridge, and save you before it was too late. Why did I only have courage enough to write you that letter? Why did I only do harm, when I wanted and meant to do good? Oh, my fear—my mad, miserable, wicked fear!’ She repeated those words again, and hid her face again in the end of her poor worn shawl. It was dreadful to see her, and dreadful to hear her.”

“Surely, Laura, you asked what the fear was which she dwelt on so earnestly?”

“Yes, I asked that.”

“And what did she say?”

“She asked me in return, if I should not be afraid of a man who had shut me up in a mad-house, and who would shut me up again, if he could? I said, ‘Are you afraid still? Surely you would not be here if you were afraid now?’ ‘No,’ she said, ‘I am not afraid now.’ ‘Can't you guess why?’ I shook my head. ‘Look at me,’ she went on. I told her I was grieved to see that she looked so sorrowful and very ill. ‘I only thought you might not know I was married,’ she answered. ‘I ought never to have let the news of his coming there frighten me away. I ought to have warned you—’

“Do you think I shall meet your mother in heaven? Will she forgive me if I do?’ I was so shocked and so sorrowful, I could make no reply. ‘I have been thinking of it,’ she went on, ‘all the time I have been in hiding from your mother's face was dark, and your mother's heart, Miss Fairlie, was the heart of an angel. ‘I am sure I feel kindly towards you,’ I said, ‘though I may not be able to express it as I ought. Why do you call me Miss Fairlie?—’

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“Do you think I shall meet your mother in heaven? Will she forgive me if I do?’ I was so shocked and so startled, that I could make no reply. ‘I have been thinking of it,’ she went on, ‘all the time I have been in hiding from your husband, all the time I lay ill. My thoughts have driven me here—I want to make atonement—I want to undo all I can of the harm I once did.’ I begged her as earnestly as I could to tell me what she meant. She still looked at me with fixed vacant eyes. ‘SHALL I undo the harm?’ she said to herself doubtfully. ‘You have friends to take your part. If YOU know his Secret, he will be afraid of you, he won't dare use you as he used me. He must treat you mercifully for his own sake, if he is afraid of you and your friends. And if he treats you mercifully, and if I can say it was my doing—’”
"I tried, but she only drew herself away from me again, and leaned her face and arms against the side of the boat-house. 'Oh!' I heard her say, with a dreadful, distracted tenderness in her voice, 'oh! if I could only be buried with your mother! If I could only wake at her side, when the angel's trumpet sounds, and the graves give up their dead at the resurrection!'--Marian! I trembled from head to foot--it was horrible to hear her. 'But there is no hope of that,' she said, moving a little, so as to look at me again, 'no hope for a poor stranger like me. I shall not rest under the marble cross that I washed with my own hands, and made so white and pure for her sake. Oh no! oh no! God's mercy, not man's, will take me to her, where the wicked cease from troubling and the weary are at rest.' She spoke those words quietly and sorrowfully, with a heavy, hopeless sigh, and then waited a little. Her face was confused and troubled, she seemed to be thinking, or trying to think. 'What was it I said just now?' she asked after a while. 'When your mother is in my mind, everything else goes out of it. What was I saying? what was I saying?' I reminded the poor creature, as kindly and delicately as I could. 'Ah, yes, yes,' she said, still in a vacant, perplexed manner. 'You are helpless with your wicked husband. Yes. And I must do what I have come to do here--I must make it up to you for having been afraid to speak out at a better time.' 'What IS it you have to tell me?' I asked. 'The Secret that your cruel husband is afraid of,' she answered. 'I once threatened him with the Secret, and frightened him. You shall threaten him with the Secret, and frighten him too.' Her face darkened, and a hard, angry stare fixed itself in her eyes. She began waving her hand at me in a vacant, unmeaning manner. 'My mother knows the Secret,' she said. 'My mother has wasted under the Secret half her lifetime. One day, when I was grown up, she said something to ME. And the next day your husband----"

"Yes! yes! Go on. What did she tell you about your husband?"

"She stopped again, Marian, at that point----"

"And said no more?"

"And listened eagerly. 'Hush!' she whispered, still waving her hand at me. 'Hush!' She moved aside out of the doorway, moved slowly and stealthily, step by step, till I lost her past the edge of the boat-house."

"Surely you followed her?"

"Yes, my anxiety made me bold enough to rise and follow her. Just as I reached the entrance, she appeared again suddenly, round the side of the boat-house. 'The Secret,' I whispered to her--'wait and tell me the Secret!' She caught hold of my arm, and looked at me with wild frightened eyes. 'Not now,' she said, 'we are not alone--we are watched. Come here to-morrow at this time--by yourself--mind--by yourself.' She pushed me roughly into the boat-house again, and I saw her no more."

"Oh, Laura, Laura, another chance lost! If I had only been near you she should not have escaped us. On which side did you lose sight of her?"

"On the left side, where the ground sinks and the wood is thickest."

"Did you run out again? did you call after her?"

"How could I? I was too terrified to move or speak."

"But when you DID move--when you came out?"

"I ran back here, to tell you what had happened."

"Did you see any one, or hear any one, in the plantation?"

"No, it seemed to be all still and quiet when I passed through it."

I waited for a moment to consider. Was this third person, supposed to have been secretly present at the interview, a reality, or the creature of Anne Catherick's excited fancy? It was impossible to determine. The one thing certain was, that we had failed again on the very brink of discovery--failed utterly and irretrievably, unless Anne Catherick kept her appointment at the boat-house for the next day.

"Are you quite sure you have told me everything that passed? Every word that was said? I inquired.

"I think so," she answered. "My powers of memory, Marian, are not like yours. But I was so strongly impressed, so deeply interested, that nothing of any importance can possibly have escaped me."

"My dear Laura, the merest trifles are of importance where Anne Catherick is concerned. Think again. Did no chance reference escape her as to the place in which she is living at the present time?"

"None that I can remember."

"Did she not mention a companion and friend--a woman named Mrs. Clements?"

"Oh yes! yes! I forgot that. She told me Mrs. Clements wanted sadly to go with her to the lake and take care of her, and begged and prayed that she would not venture into this neighbourhood alone."

"Was that all she said about Mrs. Clements?"

"Yes, that was all."

"She told you nothing about the place in which she took refuge after leaving Todd's Corner?"

"Nothing--I am quite sure."

"Nor where she has lived since? Nor what her illness had been?"
"No, Marian, not a word. Tell me, pray tell me, what you think about it. I don't know what to think, or what to do next."

"You must do this, my love: You must carefully keep the appointment at the boat-house to-morrow. It is impossible to say what interests may not depend on your seeing that woman again. You shall not be left to yourself a second time. I will follow you at a safe distance. Nobody shall see me, but I will keep within hearing of your voice, if anything happens. Anne Catherick has escaped Walter Hartright, and has escaped you. Whatever happens, she shall not escape ME."

Laura's eyes read mine attentively.

"You believe," she said, "in this secret that my husband is afraid of? Suppose, Marian, it should only exist after all in Anne Catherick's fancy? Suppose she only wanted to see me and to speak to me, for the sake of old remembrances? Her manner was so strange--I almost doubted her. Would you trust her in other things?"

"I trust nothing, Laura, but my own observation of your husband's conduct. I judge Anne Catherick's words by his actions, and I believe there is a secret."

I said no more, and got up to leave the room. Thoughts were troubling me which I might have told her if we had spoken together longer, and which it might have been dangerous for her to know. The influence of the terrible dream from which she had awakened me hung darkly and heavily over every fresh impression which the progress of her narrative produced on my mind. I felt the ominous future coming close, chilling me with an unutterable awe, forcing on me the conviction of an unseen design in the long series of complications which had now fastened round us. I thought of Hartright--as I saw him in the body when he said farewell; as I saw him in the spirit in my dream--and I too began to doubt now whether we were not advancing blindfold to an appointed and an inevitable end.

Leaving Laura to go upstairs alone, I went out to look about me in the walks near the house. The circumstances under which Anne Catherick had parted from her had made me secretly anxious to know how Count Fosco was passing the afternoon, and had rendered me secretly distrustful of the results of that solitary journey from which Sir Percival had returned but a few hours since.

After looking for them in every direction and discovering nothing, I returned to the house, and entered the different rooms on the ground floor one after another. They were all empty. I came out again into the hall, and went upstairs to return to Laura. Madame Fosco opened her door as I passed it in my way along the passage, and I stopped to see if she could inform me of the whereabouts of her husband and Sir Percival. Yes, she had seen them both from her window more than an hour since. The Count had looked up with his customary kindness, and had mentioned with his habitual attention to her in the smallest trifles, that he and his friend were going out together for a long walk.

For a long walk! They had never yet been in each other's company with that object in my experience of them. Sir Percival cared for no exercise but riding, and the Count (except when he was polite enough to be my escort) cared for no exercise at all.

When I joined Laura again, I found that she had called to mind in my absence the impending question of the signature to the deed, which, in the interest of discussing her interview with Anne Catherick, we had hitherto overlooked. Her first words when I saw her expressed her surprise at the absence of the expected summons to attend Sir Percival in the library.

"You may make your mind easy on that subject," I said. "For the present, at least, neither your resolution nor mine will be exposed to any further trial. Sir Percival has altered his plans--the business of the signature is put off."

"Put off?" Laura repeated amazedly. "Who told you so?"

"My authority is Count Fosco. I believe it is to his interference that we are indebted for your husband's sudden change of purpose."

"It seems impossible, Marian. If the object of my signing was, as we suppose, to obtain money for Sir Percival that he urgently wanted, how can the matter be put off?"

"I think, Laura, we have the means at hand of setting that doubt at rest. Have you forgotten the conversation that I heard between Sir Percival and the lawyer as they were crossing the hall?"

"No, but I don't remember--""

"I do. There were two alternatives proposed. One was to obtain your signature to the parchment. The other was to gain time by giving bills at three months. The last resource is evidently the resource now adopted, and we may fairly hope to be relieved from our share in Sir Percival's embarrassments for some time to come."

"Oh, Marian, it sounds too good to be true!"

"Does it, my love? You complimented me on my ready memory not long since, but you seem to doubt it now. I will get my journal, and you shall see if I am right or wrong."

I went away and got the book at once.

On looking back to the entry referring to the lawyer's visit, we found that my recollection of the two alternatives
presented was accurately correct. It was almost as great a relief to my mind as to Laura's, to find that my memory
had served me, on this occasion, as faithfully as usual. In the perilous uncertainty of our present situation, it is hard
to say what future interests may not depend upon the regularity of the entries in my journal, and upon the reliability
of my recollection at the time when I make them.

Laura's face and manner suggested to me that this last consideration had occurred to her as well as to myself.
Anyway, it is only a trifling matter, and I am almost ashamed to put it down here in writing--it seems to set the
forlornness of our situation in such a miserably vivid light. We must have little indeed to depend on, when the
discovery that my memory can still be trusted to serve us is hailed as if it was the discovery of a new friend!

The first bell for dinner separated us. Just as it had done ringing, Sir Percival and the Count returned from their
walk. We heard the master of the house storming at the servants for being five minutes late, and the master's guest
interposing, as usual, in the interests of propriety, patience, and peace.

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The evening has come and gone. No extraordinary event has happened. But I have noticed certain peculiarities in
the conduct of Sir Percival and the Count, which have sent me to my bed feeling very anxious and uneasy about
Anne Catherick, and about the results which to-morrow may produce.

I know enough by this time, to be sure, that the aspect of Sir Percival which is the most false, and which,
therefore, means the worst, is his polite aspect. That long walk with his friend had ended in improving his manners,
especially towards his wife. To Laura's secret surprise and to my secret alarm, he called her by her Christian name,
asked if she had heard lately from her uncle, inquired when Mrs. Vesey was to receive her invitation to Blackwater,
and showed her so many other little attentions that he almost recalled the days of his hateful courtship at
Limmeridge House. This was a bad sign to begin with, and I thought it more ominous still that he should pretend
after dinner to fall asleep in the drawing-room, and that his eyes should cunningly follow Laura and me when he
thought we neither of us suspected him. I have never had any doubt that his sudden journey by himself took him to
Welmingham to question Mrs. Catherick--but the experience of to-night has made me fear that the expedition was
not undertaken in vain, and that he has got the information which he unquestionably left us to collect. If I knew
where Anne Catherick was to be found, which would be up to-morrow with sunrise and warn her.

While the aspect under which Sir Percival presented himself to-night was unhappily too familiar to me, the
aspect under which the Count appeared was, on the other hand, entirely new in my experience of him. He permitted
me, this evening, to make his acquaintance, for the first time, in the character of a Man of Sentiment--of sentiment,
as I believe, really felt, not assumed for the occasion.

For instance, he was quiet and subdued--his eyes and his voice expressed a restrained sensibility. He wore (as if
there was some hidden connection between his showiest finery and his deepest feeling) the most magnificent
waistcoat he has yet appeared in--it was made of pale sea-green silk, and delicately trimmed with fine silver braid.
His voice sank into the tenderest inflections, his smile expressed a thoughtful, fatherly admiration, whenever he
spoke to Laura or to me. He pressed his wife's hand under the table when she thanked him for trifling little attentions
at dinner. He took wine with her. "Your health and happiness, my angel!" he said, with fond glistening eyes. He ate
little or nothing, and sighed, and said "Good Percival!" when his friend laughed at him. After dinner, he took Laura
by the hand, and asked her if she would be "so sweet as to play to him." She complied, through sheer astonishment.
He sat by the piano, with his watch-chain resting in folds, like a golden serpent, on the sea-green protuberance of his
waistcoat. His immense head lay languidly on one side, and he gently beat time with two of his yellow-white
fingers. He highly approved of the music, and tenderly admired Laura's manner of playing--not as poor Hartright
used to praise it, with an innocent enjoyment of the sweet sounds, but with a clear, cultivated, practical knowledge
of the merits of the composition, in the first place, and of the merits of the player's touch in the second. As the
evening closed in, he begged that the lovely dying light might not be profaned, just yet, by the appearance of the
lamps. He came, with his horribly silent tread, to the distant window at which I was standing, to be out of his way
and to avoid the very sight of him--he came to ask me to support his protest against the lamps. If any one of them
could only have burnt him up at that moment, I would have gone down to the kitchen and fetched it myself.

"Surely you like this modest, trembling English twilight?" he said softly. "Ah! I love it. I feel my inborn
admiration of all that is noble, and great, and good, purified by the breath of heaven on an evening like this. Nature
has such imperishable charms, such inextinguishable tenderness for me!--I am an old, fat man--talk which would
become your lips, Miss Halcombe, sounds like a derision and a mockery on mine. It is hard to be laughed at in my
moments of sentiment, as if my soul was like myself, old and overgrown. Observe, dear lady, what a light is dying
on the trees! Does it penetrate your heart, as it penetrates mine?"

He paused, looked at me, and repeated the famous lines of Dante on the Evening-time, with a melody and
tenderness which added a charm of their own to the matchless beauty of the poetry itself.

"Bah!" he cried suddenly, as the last cadence of those noble Italian words died away on his lips; "I make an old
fool of myself, and only weary you all! Let us shut up the window in our bosoms and get back to the matter-of-fact world. Percival! I sanction the admission of the lamps. Lady Glyde--Miss Halcombe-- Eleanor, my good wife--which of you will indulge me with a game at dominoes?"

He addressed us all, but he looked especially at Laura.

She had learnt to feel my dread of offending him, and she accepted his proposal. It was more than I could have done at that moment. I could not have sat down at the same table with him for any consideration. His eyes seemed to reach my inmost soul through the thickening obscurity of the twilight. His voice trembled along every nerve in my body, and turned me hot and cold alternately. The mystery and terror of my dream, which had haunted me at intervals all through the evening, now oppressed my mind with an unendurable foreboding and an unutterable awe. I saw the white tomb again, and the veiled woman rising out of it by Hartright's side. The thought of Laura welled up like a spring in the depths of my heart, and filled it with waters of bitterness, never, never known to it before. I caught her by the hand as she passed me on her way to the table, and kissed her as if that night was to part us for ever. While they were all gazing at me in astonishment, I ran out through the low window which was open before me to the ground--ran out to hide from them in the darkness, to hide even from myself.

We separated that evening later than usual. Towards midnight the summer silence was broken by the shuddering of a low, melancholy wind among the trees. We all felt the sudden chill in the atmosphere, but the Count was the first to notice the stealthy rising of the wind. He stopped while he was lighting my candle for me, and held up his hand warningly--

"Listen!" he said. "There will be a change to-morrow."

VII

June 19th.--The events of yesterday warned me to be ready, sooner or later, to meet the worst. To-day is not yet at an end, and the worst has come.

Judging by the closest calculation of time that Laura and I could make, we arrived at the conclusion that Anne Catherick must have appeared at the boat-house at half-past two o'clock on the afternoon of yesterday. I accordingly arranged that Laura should just show herself at the luncheon-table to-day, and should then slip out at the first opportunity, leaving me behind to preserve appearances, and to follow her as soon as I could safely do so. This mode of proceeding, if no obstacles occurred to thwart us, would enable her to be at the boat-house before half-past two, and (when I left the table, in my turn) would take me to a safe position in the plantation before three.

The change in the weather, which last night's wind warned us to expect, came with the morning. It was raining heavily when I got up, and it continued to rain until twelve o'clock--when the clouds dispersed, the blue sky appeared, and the sun shone again with the bright promise of a fine afternoon.

My anxiety to know how Sir Percival and the Count would occupy the early part of the day was by no means set at rest, so far as Sir Percival was concerned, by his leaving us immediately after breakfast, and going out by himself, in spite of the rain. He neither told us where he was going nor when we might expect him back. We saw him pass the breakfast-room window hastily, with his high boots and his waterproof coat on--and that was all.

The Count passed the morning quietly indoors, some part of it in the library, some part in the drawing-room, playing odds and ends of music on the piano, and humming to himself. Judging by appearances, the sentimental side of his character was persistently inclined to betray itself still. He was silent and sensitive, and ready to sigh and languish ponderously (as only fat men CAN sigh and languish) on the smallest provocation.

Luncheon-time came and Sir Percival did not return. The Count took his friend's place at the table, plaintively devoured the greater part of a fruit tart, submerged under a whole jugful of cream, and explained the full merit of the achievement to us as soon as he had done. "A taste for sweets," he said in his softest tones and his tenderest manner, "is the innocent taste of women and children. I love to share it with them--it is another bond, dear ladies, between you and me."

Laura left the table in ten minutes' time. I was sorely tempted to accompany her. But if we had both gone out together we must have excited suspicion, and worse still, if we allowed Anne Catherick to see Laura, accompanied by a second person who was a stranger to her, we should in all probability forfeit her confidence from that moment, never to regain it again.

I waited, therefore, as patiently as I could, until the servant came in to clear the table. When I quitted the room, there were no signs, in the house or out of it, of Sir Percival's return. I left the Count with a piece of sugar between his lips, and the vicious cockatoo scrambling up his waistcoat to get at it, while Madame Fosco, sitting opposite to her husband, watched the proceedings of his bird and himself as attentively as if she had never seen anything of the sort before in her life. On my way to the plantation I kept carefully beyond the range of view from the luncheon-room window. Nobody saw me and nobody followed me. It was then a quarter to three o'clock by my watch.

Once among the trees I walked rapidly, until I had advanced more than half-way through the plantation. At that point I slackened my pace and proceeded cautiously, but I saw no one, and heard no voices. By little and little I
came within view of the back of the boat-house--stopped and listened--then went on, till I was close behind it, and must have heard any persons who were talking inside. Still the silence was unbroken--still far and near no sign of a living creature appeared anywhere.

After skirting round by the back of the building, first on one side and then on the other, and making no discoveries, I ventured in front of it, and fairly looked in. The place was empty.

I called, "Laura!"--at first softly, then louder and louder. No one answered and no one appeared. For all that I could see and hear, the only human creature in the neighbourhood of the lake and the plantation was myself.

My heart began to beat violently, but I kept my resolution, and searched, first the boat-house and then the ground in front of it, for any signs which might show me whether Laura had really reached the place or not. No mark of her presence appeared inside the building, but I found traces of her outside it, in footsteps on the sand.

I detected the footsteps of two persons--large footsteps like a man's, and small footsteps, which, by putting my own feet into them and testing their size in that manner, I felt certain were Laura's. The ground was confusedly marked in this way just before the boat-house. Close against one side of it, under shelter of the projecting roof, I discovered a little hole in the sand--a hole artificially made, beyond a doubt. I just noticed it, and then turned away immediately to trace the footsteps as far as I could, and to follow the direction in which they might lead me.

They led me, starting from the left-hand side of the boat-house, along the edge of the trees, a distance, I should think, of between two and three hundred yards, and then the sandy ground showed no further trace of them. Feeling that the persons whose course I was tracking must necessarily have entered the plantation at this point, I entered it too. At first I could find no path, but I discovered one afterwards, just faintly traced among the trees, and followed it. It took me, for some distance, in the direction of the village, until I stopped at a point where another foot-track crossed it. The brambles grew thickly on either side of this second path. I stood looking down it, uncertain which way to take next, and while I looked I saw on one thorny branch some fragments of fringe from a woman's shawl. A closer examination of the fringe satisfied me that it had been torn from a shawl of Laura's, and I instantly followed the second path. It brought me out at last, to my great relief, at the back of the house. I say to my great relief, because I inferred that Laura must, for some unknown reason, have returned before me by this roundabout way. I went in by the court-yard and the offices. The first person whom I met in crossing the servants' hall was Mrs. Michelson, the housekeeper.

"Do you know," I asked, "whether Lady Glyde has come in from her walk or not?"

"My lady came in a little while ago with Sir Percival," answered the housekeeper. "I am afraid, Miss Halcombe, something very distressing has happened."

My heart sank within me. "You don't mean an accident?" I said faintly.

"No, no--thank God, no accident. But my lady ran upstairs to her own room in tears, and Sir Percival has ordered me to give Fanny warning to leave in an hour's time."

Fanny was Laura's maid--a good affectionate girl who had been with her for years--the only person in the house whose fidelity and devotion we could both depend upon.

"Where is Fanny?" I inquired.

"In my room, Miss Halcombe. The young woman is quite overcome, and I told her to sit down and try to recover herself."

I went to Mrs. Michelson's room, and found Fanny in a corner, with her box by her side, crying bitterly.

She could give me no explanation whatever of her sudden dismissal. Sir Percival had ordered that she should have a month's wages, in place of a month's warning, and go. No reason had been assigned--no objection had been made to her conduct. She had been forbidden to appeal to her mistress, forbidden even to see her for a moment to say good-bye. She was to go without explanations or farewells, and to go at once.

After soothing the poor girl by a few friendly words, I asked where she proposed to sleep that night. She replied that she thought of going to the little inn in the village, the landlady of which was a respectable woman, known to the servants at Blackwater Park. The next morning, by leaving early, she might get back to her friends in Cumberland without stopping in London, where she was a total stranger.

I felt directly that Fanny's departure offered us a safe means of communication with London and with Limmeridge House, of which it might be very important to avail ourselves. Accordingly, I told her that she might expect to hear from her mistress or from me in the course of the evening, and that she might depend on our both doing all that lay in our power to help her, under the trial of leaving us for the present. Those words said, I shook hands with her and went upstairs.

The door which led to Laura's room was the door of an ante-chamber opening on to the passage. When I tried it, it was bolted on the inside.

I knocked, and the door was opened by the same heavy, overgrown housemaid whose lumpish insensibility had tried my patience so severely on the day when I found the wounded dog.
I had, since that time, discovered that her name was Margaret Porcher, and that she was the most awkward, slatternly, and obstinate servant in the house.

On opening the door she instantly stepped out to the threshold, and stood grinning at me in stolid silence.

"Why do you stand there?" I said. "Don't you see that I want to come in?"

"Ah, but you mustn't come in," was the answer, with another and a broader grin still.

"How dare you talk to me in that way? Stand back instantly!"

She stretched out a great red hand and arm on each side of her, so as to bar the doorway, and slowly nodded her addle head at me.

"Master's orders," she said, and nodded again.

I had need of all my self-control to warn me against contesting the matter with HER, and to remind me that the next words I had to say must be addressed to her master. I turned my back on her, and instantly went downstairs to find him. My resolution to keep my temper under all the irritations that Sir Percival could offer was, by this time, as completely forgotten--I say so to my shame--as if I had never made it. It did me good, after all I had suffered and suppressed in that house--it actually did me good to feel how angry I was.

The drawing-room and the breakfast-room were both empty. I went on to the library, and there I found Sir Percival, the Count, and Madame Fosco. They were all three standing up, close together, and Sir Percival had a little slip of paper in his hand. As I opened the door I heard the Count say to him, "No--a thousand times over, no."

I walked straight up to him, and looked him full in the face.

"Am I to understand, Sir Percival, that your wife's room is a prison, and that your housemaid is the gaoler who keeps it?" I asked.

"Yes, that is what you are to understand," he answered. "Take care my gaoler hasn't got double duty to do--take care your room is not a prison too."

"Take YOU care how you treat your wife, and how you threaten ME," I broke out in the heat of my anger. "There are laws in England to protect women from cruelty and outrage. If you hurt a hair of Laura's head, if you dare to interfere with my freedom, come what may, to those laws I will appeal."

Instead of answering me he turned round to the Count.

"What did I tell you?" he asked. "What do you say now?"

"What I said before," replied the Count--"No."

Even in the vehemence of my anger I felt his calm, cold, grey eyes on my face. They turned away from me as soon as he had spoken, and looked significantly at his wife. Madame Fosco immediately moved close to my side, and in that position addressed Sir Percival before either of us could speak again.

"Favour me with your attention for one moment," she said, in her clear icily-suppressed tones. "I have to thank you, Sir Percival, for your hospitality, and to decline taking advantage of it any longer. I remain in no house in which ladies are treated as your wife and Miss Halcombe have been treated here to-day!"

Sir Percival drew back a step, and stared at her in dead silence. The declaration he had just heard--a declaration which he well knew, as I well knew, Madame Fosco would not have ventured to make without her husband's permission--seemed to petrify him with surprise. The Count stood by, and looked at his wife with the most enthusiastic admiration.

"She is sublime!" he said to himself. He approached her while he spoke, and drew her hand through his arm. "I am at your service, Eleanor," he went on, with a quiet dignity that I had never noticed in him before. "And at Miss Halcombe's service, if she will honour me by accepting all the assistance I can offer her."

"Damn it! what do you mean?" cried Sir Percival, as the Count quietly moved away with his wife to the door.

"At other times I mean what I say, but at this time I mean what my wife says," replied the impenetrable Italian. "We have changed places, Percival, for once, and Madame Fosco's opinion is--mine."

Sir Percival crumpled up the paper in his hand, and pushing past the Count, with another oath, stood between him and the door.

"Have your own way," he said, with baffled rage in his low, half-whispering tones. "Have your own way--and see what comes of it." With those words he left the room.

Madame Fosco glanced inquiringly at her husband. "He has gone away very suddenly," she said. "What does it mean?"

"It means that you and I together have brought the worst-tempered man in all England to his senses," answered the Count. "It means, Miss Halcombe, that Lady Glyde is relieved from a gross indignity, and you from the repetition of an unpardonable insult. Suffer me to express my admiration of your conduct and your courage at a very trying moment."

"Sincere admiration," suggested Madame Fosco.

"Sincere admiration," echoed the Count.
I had no longer the strength of my first angry resistance to outrage and injury to support me. My heart-sick anxiety to see Laura, my sense of my own helpless ignorance of what had happened at the boat-house, pressed on me with an intolerable weight. I tried to keep up appearances by speaking to the Count and his wife in the tone which they had chosen to adopt in speaking to me, but the words failed on my lips--my breath came short and thick--my eyes looked longingly, in silence, at the door. The Count, understanding my anxiety, opened it, went out, and pulled it to after him. At the same time Sir Percival's heavy step descended the stairs. I heard them whispering together outside, while Madame Fosco was assuring me, in her calmest and most conventional manner, that she rejoiced, for all our sakes, that Sir Percival's conduct had not obliged her husband and herself to leave Blackwater Park. Before she had done speaking the whispering ceased, the door opened, and the Count looked in.

"Miss Halcombe," he said, "I am happy to inform you that Lady Glyde is mistress again in her own house. I thought it might be more agreeable to you to hear of this change for the better from me than from Sir Percival, and I have therefore expressly returned to mention it."

"Admirable delicacy!" said Madame Fosco, paying back her husband's tribute of admiration with the Count's own coin, in the Count's own manner. He smiled and bowed as if he had received a formal compliment from a polite stranger, and drew back to let me pass out first.

Sir Percival was standing in the hall. As I hurried to the stairs I heard him call impatiently to the Count to come out of the library.

"What are you waiting there for?" he said. "I want to speak to you."

"And I want to think a little by myself," replied the other. "Wait till later, Percival, wait till later."

Neither he nor his friend said any more. I gained the top of the stairs and ran along the passage. In my haste and my agitation I left the door of the ante-chamber open, but I closed the door of the bedroom the moment I was inside it.

Laura was sitting alone at the far end of the room, her arms resting wearily on a table, and her face hidden in her hands. She started up with a cry of delight when she saw me.

"How did you get here?" she asked. "Who gave you leave? Not Sir Percival?"

In my overpowering anxiety to hear what she had to tell me, I could not answer her--I could only put questions on my side. Laura's eagerness to know what had passed downstairs proved, however, too strong to be resisted. She persistently repeated her inquiries.

"The Count, of course," I answered impatiently. "Whose influence in the house-----"

She stopped me with a gesture of disgust.

"Don't speak of him," she cried. "The Count is the vilest creature breathing! The Count is a miserable Spy----!"

Before we could either of us say another word we were alarmed by a soft knocking at the door of the bedroom. I had not yet sat down, and I went first to see who it was. When I opened the door Madame Fosco confronted me with my handkerchief in her hand.

"You dropped this downstairs, Miss Halcombe," she said, "and I thought I could bring it to you, as I was passing by to my own room."

Her face, naturally pale, had turned to such a ghastly whiteness that I started at the sight of it. Her hands, so sure and steady at all other times, trembled violently, and her eyes looked wolfishly past me through the open door, and fixed on Laura.

She had been listening before she knocked! I saw it in her white face, I saw it in her trembling hands, I saw it in her look at Laura.

After waiting an instant she turned from me in silence, and slowly walked away.

I closed the door again. "Oh, Laura! Laura! We shall both rue the day when you called the Count a Spy!"

"You would have called him so yourself, Marian, if you had known what I know. Anne Catherick was right.

There was a third person watching us in the plantation yesterday, and that third person---"

"Are you sure it was the Count?"

"I am absolutely certain. He was Sir Percival's spy--he was Sir Percival's informer--he set Sir Percival watching and waiting, all the morning through, for Anne Catherick and for me."

"Is Anne found? Did you see her at the lake?"

"No. She has saved herself by keeping away from the place. When I got to the boat-house no one was there."

"Yes? Yes?"

"I went in and sat waiting for a few minutes. But my restlessness made me get up again, to walk about a little. As I passed out I saw some marks on the sand, close under the front of the boat-house. I stooped down to examine them, and discovered a word written in large letters on the sand. The word was--LOOK."

"And you scraped away the sand, and dug a hollow place in it?"

"How do you know that, Marian?"
"I saw the hollow place myself when I followed you to the boat-house. Go on--go on!"
"Yes, I scraped away the sand on the surface, and in a little while I came to a strip of paper hidden beneath, which had writing on it. The writing was signed with Anne Catherick's initials."
"Where is it?"
"Sir Percival has taken it from me."
"Can you remember what the writing was? Do you think you can repeat it to me?"
"In substance I can, Marian. It was very short. You would have remembered it, word for word."
"Try to tell me what the substance was before we go any further."
She complied. I write the lines down here exactly as she repeated them to me. They ran thus--

"I was seen with you, yesterday, by a tall, stout old man, and had to run to save myself. He was not quick enough on his feet to follow me, and he lost me among the trees. I dare not risk coming back here to-day at the same time. I write this, and hide it in the sand, at six in the morning, to tell you so. When we speak next of your wicked husband's Secret we must speak safely, or not at all. Try to have patience. I promise you shall see me again and that soon.--A. C."

The reference to the "tall, stout old man" (the terms of which Laura was certain that she had repeated to me correctly) left no doubt as to who the intruder had been. I called to mind that I had told Sir Percival, in the Count's presence the day before, that Laura had gone to the boat-house to look for her brooch. In all probability he had followed her there, in his officious way, to relieve her mind about the matter of the signature, immediately after he had mentioned the change in Sir Percival's plans to me in the drawing-room. In this case he could only have got to the neighbourhood of the boat-house at the very moment when Anne Catherick discovered him. The suspiciously hurried manner in which she parted from Laura had no doubt prompted his useless attempt to follow her. Of the conversation which had previously taken place between them he could have heard nothing. The distance between the house and the lake, and the time at which he left me in the drawing-room, as compared with the time at which Laura and Anne Catherick had been speaking together, proved that fact to us at any rate, beyond a doubt.

Having arrived at something like a conclusion so far, my next great interest was to know what discoveries Sir Percival had made after Count Fosco had given him his information.

"How came you to lose possession of the letter?" I asked. "What did you do with it when you found it in the sand?"

"After reading it once through," she replied, "I took it into the boat-house with me to sit down and look over it a second time. While I was reading a shadow fell across the paper. I looked up, and saw Sir Percival standing in the doorway watching me."
"Did you try to hide the letter?"
"I tried, but he stopped me. 'You needn't trouble to hide that,' he said. 'I happen to have read it.' I could only look at him helplessly--I could say nothing. 'You understand?' he went on; 'I have read it. I dug it up out of the sand two hours since, and buried it again, and wrote the word above it again, and left it ready to your hands. You can't lie yourself out of the scrape now. You saw Anne Catherick in secret yesterday, and you have got her letter in your hand at this moment. I have not caught HER yet, but I have caught YOU. Give me the letter.' He stepped close up to me--I was alone with him, Marian--what could I do?--I gave him the letter."
"What did he say when you gave it to him?"
"At first he said nothing. He took me by the arm, and led me out of the boat-house, and looked about him on all sides, as if he was afraid of our being seen or heard. Then he clasped his hand fast round my arm, and whispered to me, 'What did Anne Catherick say to you yesterday? I insist on hearing every word, from first to last.'"
"Did you tell him?"
"I was alone with him, Marian--his cruel hand was bruising my arm--what could I do?"
"Is the mark on your arm still? Let me see it."
"Why do you want to see it?"
"I want to see it, Laura, because our endurance must end, and our resistance must begin to-day. That mark is a weapon to strike him with. Let me see it now--I may have to swear to it at some future time."
"Oh, Marian, don't look so--don't talk so! It doesn't hurt me now!"
"Let me see it!"

She showed me the marks. I was past grieving over them, past crying over them, past shuddering over them. They say we are either better than men, or worse. If the temptation that has fallen in some women's way, and made them worse, had fallen in mine at that moment--Thank God! my face betrayed nothing that his wife could read. The gentle, innocent, affectionate creature thought I was frightened for her and sorry for her, and thought no more.
"Don't think too seriously of it, Marian," she said simply, as she pulled her sleeve down again. "It doesn't hurt me now."
"I will try to think quietly of it, my love, for your sake. --Well! well! And you told him all that Anne Catherick had said to you-- all that you told me?"

"Yes, all. He insisted on it--I was alone with him--I could conceal nothing."

"Did he say anything when you had done?"

"He looked at me, and laughed to himself in a mocking, bitter way. 'I mean to have the rest out of you,' he said, 'do you hear?--the rest.' I declared to him solemnly that I had told him everything I knew. 'Not you,' he answered, 'you know more than you choose to tell. Won't you tell it? You shall! I'll wring it out of you at home if I can't wring it out of you here.' He led me away by a strange path through the plantation--a path where there was no hope of our meeting you--and he spoke no more till we came within sight of the house. Then he stopped again, and said, 'Will you take a second chance, if I give it to you? Will you think better of it, and tell me the rest?' I could only repeat the same words I had spoken before. He cursed my obstinacy, and went on, and took me with him to the house. 'You can't deceive me,' he said, 'you know more than you choose to tell. I'll have your secret out of you, and I'll have it out of that sister of yours as well. There shall be no more plotting and whispering between you. Neither you nor she shall see each other again till you have confessed the truth. I'll have you watched morning, noon, and night, till you confess the truth.' He was deaf to everything I could say. He took me straight upstairs into my own room. Fanny was sitting there, doing some work for me, and he instantly ordered her out. 'I'll take good care YOU'RE not mixed up in the conspiracy,' he said. 'You shall leave this house to-day. If your mistress wants a maid, she shall have one of my choosing.' He pushed me into the room, and locked the door on me. He set that senseless woman to watch me outside, Marian! He looked and spoke like a madman. You may hardly understand it--he did indeed."

"I do understand it, Laura. He is mad--mad with the terrors of a guilty conscience. Every word you have said makes me positively certain that when Anne Catherick left you yesterday you were on the eve of discovering a secret which might have been your vile husband's ruin, and he thinks you HAVE discovered it. Nothing you can say or do will quiet that guilty distrust, and convince his false nature of your truth. I don't say this, my love, to alarm you. I say it to open your eyes to your position, and to convince you of the urgent necessity of letting me act, as I best can, for your protection while the chance is our own. Count Fosco's interference has secured me access to you to-day, but he may withdraw that interference to-morrow. Sir Percival has already dismissed Fanny because she is a quick-witted girl, and devotedly attached to you, and has chosen a woman to take her place who cares nothing for your interests, and whose dull intelligence lowers her to the level of the watch-dog in the yard. It is impossible to say what violent measures he may take next, unless we make the most of our opportunities while we have them."

"What letters?"

"I mean to write first, Laura, to Mr. Gilmore's partner, who has offered to help us in any fresh emergency. Little as I know of the law, I am certain that it can protect a woman from such treatment as that ruffian has inflicted on you to-day, but he may withdraw that interference to-morrow. Sir Percival has already dismissed Fanny because she is a quick-witted girl, and devotedly attached to you, and has chosen a woman to take her place who cares nothing for your interests, and whose dull intelligence lowers her to the level of the watch-dog in the yard. It is impossible to say what violent measures he may take next, unless we make the most of our opportunities while we have them."

"What can we do, Marian? Oh, if we could only leave this house, never to see it again!"

"Listen to me, my love, and try to think that you are not quite helpless so long as I am here with you."

"I will think so--I do think so. Don't altogether forget poor Fanny in thinking of me. She wants help and comfort too."

"I will not forget her. I saw her before I came up here, and I have arranged to communicate with her to-night. Letters are not safe in the post-bag at Blackwater Park, and I shall have two to write to-day, in your interests, which must pass through no hands but Fanny's."

"What letters?"

"I mean to write first, Laura, to Mr. Gilmore's partner, who has offered to help us in any fresh emergency. Little as I know of the law, I am certain that it can protect a woman from such treatment as that ruffian has inflicted on you to-day, but I will go into no details about Anne Catherick, because I have no certain information to give. But the lawyer shall know of those bruises on your arm, and of the violence offered to you in this room--he shall, before I rest to-night!"

"But think of the exposure, Marian!"

"I am calculating on the exposure. Sir Percival has more to dread from it than you have. The prospect of an exposure may bring him to terms when nothing else will."

I rose as I spoke, but Laura entreated me not to leave her. "You will drive him to desperation," she said, "and increase our dangers tenfold."

I felt the truth--the disheartening truth--of those words. But I could not bring myself plainly to acknowledge it to her. In our dreadful position there was no help and no hope for us but in risking the worst. I said so in guarded terms. She sighed bitterly, but did not contest the matter. She only asked about the second letter that I had proposed writing. To whom was it to be addressed?"

"To Mr. Fairlie," I said. "Your uncle is your nearest male relative, and the head of the family. He must and shall interfere."

Laura shook her head sorrowfully.

"Yes, yes," I went on, "your uncle is a weak, selfish, worldly man, I know, but he is not Sir Percival Glyde, and he has no such friend about him as Count Fosco. I expect nothing from his kindness or his tenderness of feeling
towards you or towards me, but he will do anything to pamper his own indolence, and to secure his own quiet. Let me only persuade him that his interference at this moment will save him inevitable trouble and wretchedness and responsibility hereafter, and he will bestir himself for his own sake. I know how to deal with him, Laura--I have had some practice."

"If you could only prevail on him to let me go back to Limmeridge for a little while and stay there quietly with you, Marian, I could be almost as happy again as I was before I was married!"

Those words set me thinking in a new direction. Would it be possible to place Sir Percival between the two alternatives of either exposing himself to the scandal of legal interference on his wife's behalf, or of allowing her to be quietly separated from him for a time under pretext of a visit to her uncle's house? And could he, in that case, be reckoned on as likely to accept the last resource? It was doubtful--more than doubtful. And yet, hopeless as the experiment seemed, surely it was worth trying. I resolved to try it in sheer despair of knowing what better to do.

"Your uncle shall know the wish you have just expressed," I said, "and I will ask the lawyer's advice on the subject as well. Good may come of it--and will come of it, I hope."

Saying that I rose again, and again Laura tried to make me resume my seat.

"Don't leave me," she said uneasily. "My desk is on that table. You can write here."

It tried me to the quick to refuse her, even in her own interests. But we had been too long shut up alone together already. Our chance of seeing each other again might entirely depend on our not exciting any fresh suspicions. It was full time to show myself, quietly and unconcernedly, among the wretches who were at that very moment, perhaps, thinking of us and talking of us downstairs. I explained the miserable necessity to Laura, and prevailed on her to recognise it as I did.

"I will come back again, love, in an hour or less," I said. "The worst is over for to-day. Keep yourself quiet and fear nothing."

"Is the key in the door, Marian? Can I lock it on the inside?"

"Yes, here is the key. Lock the door, and open it to nobody until I come upstairs again."

I kissed her and left her. It was a relief to me as I walked away to hear the key turned in the lock, and to know that the door was at her own command.

VIII

June 19th.--I had only got as far as the top of the stairs when the locking of Laura's door suggested to me the precaution of also locking my own door, and keeping the key safely about me while I was out of the room. My journal was already secured with other papers in the table drawer, but my writing materials were left out. These included a seal bearing the common device of two doves drinking out of the same cup, and some sheets of blotting-paper, which had the impression on them of the closing lines of my writing in these pages traced during the past night. Distorted by the suspicion which had now become a part of myself, even such trifles as these looked too dangerous to be trusted without a guard--even the locked table drawer seemed to be not sufficiently protected in my absence until the means of access to it had been carefully secured as well.

I found no appearance of any one having entered the room while I had been talking with Laura. My writing materials (which I had given the servant instructions never to meddle with) were scattered over the table much as usual. The only circumstance in connection with them that at all struck me was that the seal lay tidily in the tray with the pencils and the wax. It was not in my careless habits (I am sorry to say) to put it there, neither did I remember putting it there. But as I could not call to mind, on the other hand, where else I had thrown it down, and as I was also doubtful whether I might not for once have laid it mechanically in the right place, I abstained from adding to the perplexity with which the day's events had filled my mind by troubling it afresh about a trifle. I locked the door, put the key in my pocket, and went downstairs.

Madame Fosco was alone in the hall looking at the weather-glass.

"Still falling," she said. "I am afraid we must expect more rain."

Her face was composed again to its customary expression and its customary colour. But the hand with which she pointed to the dial of the weather-glass still trembled.

Could she have told her husband already that she had overheard Laura reviling him, in my company, as a "spy?"

My strong suspicion that she must have told him, my irresistible dread (all the more overpowering from its very vagueness) of the consequences which might follow, my fixed conviction, derived from various little self-betrayals which women notice in each other, that Madame Fosco, in spite of her well-assumed external civility, had not forgiven her niece for innocently standing between her and the legacy of ten thousand pounds--all rushed upon my mind together, all impelled me to speak in the vain hope of using my own influence and my own powers of persuasion for the atonement of Laura's offence.

"May I trust to your kindness to excuse me, Madame Fosco, if I venture to speak to you on an exceedingly painful subject?"
She crossed her hands in front of her and bowed her head solemnly, without uttering a word, and without taking her eyes off mine for a moment.

"When you were so good as to bring me back my handkerchief," I went on, "I am very, very much afraid you must have accidentally heard Laura say something which I am unwilling to repeat, and which I will not attempt to defend. I will only venture to hope that you have not thought it of sufficient importance to be mentioned to the Count?"

"I think it of no importance whatever," said Madame Fosco sharply and suddenly. "But," she added, resuming her icy manner in a moment, "I have no secrets from my husband even in trifles. When he noticed just now that I looked distressed, it was my painful duty to tell him why I was distressed, and I frankly acknowledge to you, Miss Halcombe, that I HAVE told him."

I was prepared to hear it, and yet she turned me cold all over when she said those words.

"Let me earnestly entreat you, Madame Fosco--let me earnestly entreat the Count--to make some allowances for the sad position in which my sister is placed. She spoke while she was smarting under the insult and injustice inflicted on her by her husband, and she was not herself when she said those rash words. May I hope that they will be considerately and generously forgiven?"

"Most assuredly," said the Count's quiet voice behind me. He had stolen on us with his noiseless tread and his book in his hand from the library.

"When Lady Glyde said those hasty words," he went on, "she did me an injustice which I lament--and forgive. Let us never return to the subject, Miss Halcombe; let us all comfortably combine to forget it from this moment."

"You are very kind," I said, "I relieve you inexpressibly."

I tried to continue, but his eyes were on me; his deadly smile that hides everything was set, hard, and unwavering on his broad, smooth face. My distrust of his unfathomable falseness, my sense of my own degradation in stooping to conciliate his wife and himself, so disturbed and confused me, that the next words failed on my lips, and I stood there in silence.

"I beg you on my knees to say no more, Miss Halcombe--I am truly shocked that you should have thought it necessary to say so much." With that polite speech he took my hand--oh, how I despise myself! oh, how little comfort there is even in knowing that I submitted to it for Laura's sake!--he took my hand and put it to his poisonous lips. Never did I know all my horror of him till then. That innocent familiarity turned my blood as if it had been the vilest insult that a man could offer me. Yet I hid my disgust from him--I tried to smile--I, who once mercilessly despised deceit in other women, was as false as the worst of them, as false as the Judas whose lips had touched my hand.

I could not have maintained my degrading self-control--it is all that redeems me in my own estimation to know that I could not--if he had still continued to keep his eyes on my face. His wife's tigerish jealousy came to my rescue and forced his attention away from me the moment he possessed himself of my hand. Her cold blue eyes caught light, her dull white cheeks flushed into bright colour, she looked years younger than her age in an instant.

"Count!" she said. "Your foreign forms of politeness are not understood by Englishwomen."

"Pardon me, my angel! The best and dearest Englishwoman in the world understands them." With those words he dropped my hand and quietly raised his wife's hand to his lips in place of it.

I ran back up the stairs to take refuge in my own room. If there had been time to think, my thoughts, when I was alone again, would have caused me bitter suffering. But there was no time to think. Happily for the preservation of my calmness and my courage there was time for nothing but action.

The letters to the lawyer and to Mr. Fairlie were still to be written, and I sat down at once without a moment's hesitation to devote myself to them.

There was no multitude of resources to perplex me--there was absolutely no one to depend on, in the first instance, but myself. Sir Percival had neither friends nor relatives in the neighbourhood whose intercession I could attempt to employ. He was on the coldest terms--in some cases on the worst terms with the families of his own rank and station who lived near him. We two women had neither father nor brother to come to the house and take our parts. There was no choice but to write those two doubtful letters, or to put Laura in the wrong and myself in the wrong, and to make all peaceable negotiation in the future impossible by secretly escaping from Blackwater Park. Nothing but the most imminent personal peril could justify our taking that second course. The letters must be tried first, and I wrote them.

I said nothing to the lawyer about Anne Catherick, because (as I had already hinted to Laura) that topic was connected with a mystery which we could not yet explain, and which it would therefore be useless to write about to a professional man. I left my correspondent to attribute Sir Percival's disgraceful conduct, if he pleased, to fresh disputes about money matters, and simply consulted him on the possibility of taking legal proceedings for Laura's protection in the event of her husband's refusal to allow her to leave Blackwater Park for a time and return with me.
to Limmeridge. I referred him to Mr. Fairlie for the details of this last arrangement—I assured him that I wrote with Laura's authority—and I ended by entreating him to act in her name to the utmost extent of his power and with the least possible loss of time.

The letter to Mr. Fairlie occupied me next. I appealed to him on the terms which I had mentioned to Laura as the most likely to make him bestir himself; I enclosed a copy of my letter to the lawyer to show him how serious the case was, and I represented our removal to Limmeridge as the only compromise which would prevent the danger and distress of Laura's present position from inevitably affecting her uncle as well as herself at no very distant time.

When I had done, and had sealed and directed the two envelopes, I went back with the letters to Laura's room, to show her that they were written.

"Has anybody disturbed you?" I asked, when she opened the door to me.
"Nobody has knocked," she replied. "But I heard some one in the outer room."
"Was it a man or a woman?"
"A woman. I heard the rustling of her gown."
"A rustling like silk?"
"Yes, like silk."

Madame Fosco had evidently been watching outside. The mischief she might do by herself was little to be feared. But the mischief she might do, as a willing instrument in her husband's hands, was too formidable to be overlooked.

"What became of the rustling of the gown when you no longer heard it in the ante-room?" I inquired. "Did you hear it go past your wall, along the passage?"
"Yes. I kept still and listened, and just heard it."
"Which way did it go?"
"Towards your room."

I considered again. The sound had not caught my ears. But I was then deeply absorbed in my letters, and I write with a heavy hand and a quill pen, scraping and scratching noisily over the paper. It was more likely that Madame Fosco would hear the scraping of my pen than that I should hear the rustling of her dress. Another reason (if I had wanted one) for not trusting my letters to the post-bag in the hall.

Laura saw me thinking. "More difficulties!" she said wearily; "more difficulties and more dangers!"
"No dangers," I replied. "Some little difficulty, perhaps. I am thinking of the safest way of putting my two letters into Fanny's hands."
"You have really written them, then? Oh, Marian, run no risks--pray, pray run no risks!"
"No, no—no fear. Let me see—what o'clock is it now?"

It was a quarter to six. There would be time for me to get to the village inn, and to come back again before dinner. If I waited till the evening I might find no second opportunity of safely leaving the house.

"Keep the key turned in the lock, Laura," I said, "and don't be afraid about me. If you hear any inquiries made, call through the door, and say that I am gone out for a walk."

"When shall you be back?"
"Before dinner, without fail. Courage, my love. By this time tomorrow you will have a clear-headed, trustworthy man acting for your good. Mr. Gilmore's partner is our next best friend to Mr. Gilmore himself."

A moment's reflection, as soon as I was alone, convinced me that I had better not appear in my walking-dress until I had first discovered what was going on in the lower part of the house. I had not ascertained yet whether Sir Percival was indoors or out.

The singing of the canaries in the library, and the smell of tobacco-smoke that came through the door, which was not closed, told me at once where the Count was. I looked over my shoulder as I passed the doorway, and saw to my surprise that he was exhibiting the docility of the birds in his most engagingly polite manner to the housekeeper. He must have specially invited her to see them—for she would never have thought of going into the library of her own accord. The man's slightest actions had a purpose of some kind at the bottom of every one of them. What could be his purpose here?

It was no time then to inquire into his motives. I looked about for Madame Fosco next, and found her following her favourite circle round and round the fish-pond.

I was a little doubtful how she would meet me, after the outbreak of jealousy of which I had been the cause so short a time since. But her husband had tamed her in the interval, and she now spoke to me with the same civility as usual. My only object in addressing myself to her was to ascertain if she knew what had become of Sir Percival. I contrived to refer to him indirectly, and after a little fencing on either side she at last mentioned that he had gone out.

"Which of the horses has he taken?" I asked carelessly.
"None of them," she replied. "He went away two hours since on foot. As I understood it, his object was to make
fresh inquiries about the woman named Anne Catherick. He appears to be unreasonably anxious about tracing her. Do you happen to know if she is dangerously mad, Miss Halcombe?"

"I do not, Countess."

"Are you going in?"

"Yes, I think so. I suppose it will soon be time to dress for dinner."

We entered the house together. Madame Fosco strolled into the library, and closed the door. I went at once to fetch my hat and shawl. Every moment was of importance, if I was to get to Fanny at the inn and be back before dinner.

When I crossed the hall again no one was there, and the singing of the birds in the library had ceased. I could not stop to make any fresh investigations. I could only assure myself that the way was clear, and then leave the house with the two letters safe in my pocket.

On my way to the village I prepared myself for the possibility of meeting Sir Percival. As long as I had him to deal with alone I felt certain of not losing my presence of mind. Any woman who is sure of her own wits is a match at any time for a man who is not sure of his own temper. I had no such fear of Sir Percival as I had of the Count. Instead of fluttering, it had composed me, to hear of the errand on which he had gone out. While the tracing of Anne Catherick was the great anxiety that occupied him, Laura and I might hope for some cessation of any active persecution at his hands. For our sakes now, as well as for Anne's, I hoped and prayed fervently that she might still escape him.

I walked on as briskly as the heat would let me till I reached the cross-road which led to the village, looking back from time to time to make sure that I was not followed by any one.

Nothing was behind me all the way but an empty country waggon. The noise made by the lumbering wheels annoyed me, and when I found that the waggon took the road to the village, as well as myself, I stopped to let it go by and pass out of hearing. As I looked toward it, more attentively than before, I thought I detected at intervals the feet of a man walking close behind it, the carter being in front, by the side of his horses. The part of the cross-road which I had just passed over was so narrow that the waggon coming after me brushed the trees and thickets on either side, and I had to wait until it went by before I could test the correctness of my impression. Apparently that impression was wrong, for when the waggon had passed me the road behind it was quite clear.

I reached the inn without meeting Sir Percival, and without noticing anything more, and was glad to find that the landlady had received Fanny with all possible kindness. The girl had a little parlour to sit in, away from the noise of the taproom, and a clean bedchamber at the top of the house. She began crying again at the sight of me, and said, poor soul, truly enough, that it was dreadful to feel herself turned out into the world as if she had committed some unpardonable fault, when no blame could be laid at her door by anybody—not even by her master, who had sent her away.

"Try to make the best of it, Fanny," I said. "Your mistress and I will stand your friends, and will take care that your character shall not suffer. Now, listen to me. I have very little time to spare, and I am going to put a great trust in your hands. I wish you to take care of these two letters. The one with the stamp on it you are to put into the post when you reach London to-morrow. The other, directed to Mr. Fairlie, you are to deliver to him yourself as soon as you get home. Keep both the letters about you and give them up to no one. They are of the last importance to your mistress's interests."

Fanny put the letters into the bosom of her dress. "There they shall stop, miss," she said, "till I have done what you tell me."

"Mind you are at the station in good time to-morrow morning," I continued. "And when you see the housekeeper at Limmeridge give her my compliments, and say that you are in my service until Lady Glyde is able to take you back. We may meet again sooner than you think. So keep a good heart, and don't miss the seven o'clock train."

"Thank you, miss—thank you kindly. It gives one courage to hear your voice again. Please to offer my duty to my lady, and say I left all the things as tidy as I could in the time. Oh, dear! dear! who will dress her for dinner to-day? It really breaks my heart, miss, to think of it."

When I got back to the house I had only a quarter of an hour to spare to put myself in order for dinner, and to say two words to Laura before I went downstairs.

"The letters are in Fanny's hands," I whispered to her at the door. "Do you mean to join us at dinner?"

"Oh, no, no—not for the world."

"Has anything happened? Has any one disturbed you?"

"Yes—just now—Sir Percival——"

"Did he come in?"

"No, he frightened me by a thump on the door outside. I said, 'Who's there?' 'You know,' he answered. 'Will you alter your mind, and tell me the rest? You shall! Sooner or later I'll wring it out of you. You know where Anne
Catherick is at this moment.' 'Indeed, indeed,' I said, 'I don't.' 'You do!' he called back. 'I'll crush your obstinacy--
mind that!--I'll wring it out of you!' He went away with those words--went away, Marian, hardly five minutes ago."

He had not found Anne! We were safe for that night--he had not found her yet.

"You are going downstairs, Marian? Come up again in the evening."

"Yes, yes. Don't be uneasy if I am a little late--I must be careful not to give offence by leaving them too soon."

The dinner-bell rang and I hastened away.

Sir Percival took Madame Fosco into the dining-room, and the Count gave me his arm. He was hot and flushed,
and was not dressed with his customary care and completeness. Had he, too, been out before dinner, and been late in
getting back? or was he only suffering from the heat a little more severely than usual?

However this might be, he was unquestionably troubled by some secret annoyance or anxiety, which, with all his
powers of deception, he was not able entirely to conceal. Through the whole of dinner he was almost as silent as Sir
Percival himself, and he, every now and then, looked at his wife with an expression of furtive uneasiness which was
quite new in my experience of him. The one social obligation which he seemed to be self-possessed enough to
perform as carefully as ever was the obligation of being persistently civil and attentive to me. What vile object he
has in view I cannot still discover, but be the design what it may, invariable politeness towards myself, invariable
humility towards Laura, and invariable suppression (at any cost) of Sir Percival's clumsy violence, have been the
means he has resolutely and impenetrably used to get to his end ever since he set foot in this house. I suspected it
when he first interfered in our favour, on the day when the deed was produced in the library, and I feel certain of it
now.

When Madame Fosco and I rose to leave the table, the Count rose also to accompany us back to the drawing-
room.

"What are you going away for?" asked Sir Percival--"I mean YOU, Fosco."

"I am going away because I have had dinner enough, and wine enough," answered the Count. "Be so kind,
Percival, as to make allowances for my foreign habit of going out with the ladies, as well as coming in with them."

"Nonsense! Another glass of claret won't hurt you. Sit down again like an Englishman. I want half an hour's
quiet talk with you over our wine."

"A quiet talk, Percival, with all my heart, but not now, and not over the wine. Later in the evening, if you please--
later in the evening."

"Civil!" said Sir Percival savagely. "Civil behaviour, upon my soul, to a man in his own house!"

I had more than once seen him look at the Count uneasily during dinner-time, and had observed that the Count
carefully abstained from looking at him in return. This circumstance, coupled with the host's anxiety for a little quiet
talk over the wine, and the guest's obstinate resolution not to sit down again at the table, revived in my memory the
request which Sir Percival had vainly addressed to his friend earlier in the day to come out of the library and speak
to him. The Count had deferred granting that private interview, when it was first asked for in the afternoon, and had
again deferred granting it, when it was a second time asked for at the dinner-table. Whatever the coming subject of
discussion between them might be, it was clearly an important subject in Sir Percival's estimation--and perhaps
(judging from his evident reluctance to approach it) a dangerous subject as well, in the estimation of the Count.

These considerations occurred to me while we were passing from the dining-room to the drawing-room. Sir
Percival's angry commentary on his friend's desertion of him had not produced the slightest effect. The Count
obstinately accompanied us to the tea-table-- waited a minute or two in the room--went out into the hall--and
returned with the post-bag in his hands. It was then eight o'clock--the hour at which the letters were always
despatched from Blackwater Park.

"Have you any letter for the post, Miss Halcombe?" he asked, approaching me with the bag.

I saw Madame Fosco, who was making the tea, pause, with the sugar-tongs in her hand, to listen for my answer.

"No, Count, thank you. No letters to-day."

He gave the bag to the servant, who was then in the room; sat down at the piano, and played the air of the lively
Neapolitan street-song, "La mia Carolina," twice over. His wife, who was usually the most deliberate of women in
all her movements, made the tea as quickly as I could have made it myself--finished her own cup in two minutes,
and quietly glided out of the room.

I rose to follow her example--partly because I suspected her of attempting some treachery upstairs with Laura,
partly because I was resolved not to remain alone in the same room with her husband.

Before I could get to the door the Count stopped me, by a request for a cup of tea. I gave him the cup of tea, and
tried a second time to get away. He stopped me again--this time by going back to the piano, and suddenly appealing
to me on a musical question in which he declared that the honour of his country was concerned.

I vainly pleaded my own total ignorance of music, and total want of taste in that direction. He only appealed to
me again with a vehemence which set all further protest on my part at defiance. "The English and the Germans (he
indignantly declared) were always reviling the Italians for their inability to cultivate the higher kinds of music. We
were perpetually talking of our Oratorios, and they were perpetually talking of their Symphonies. Did we forget and
did they forget his immortal friend and countryman, Rossini? What was Moses in Egypt but a sublime oratorio,
which was acted on the stage instead of being coldly sung in a concert-room? What was the overture to Guillaume
Tell but a symphony under another name? Had I heard Moses in Egypt? Would I listen to this, and this, and this, and
say if anything more sublimely sacred and grand had ever been composed by mortal man?"--And without waiting
for a word of assent or dissent on my part, looking me hard in the face all the time, he began thundering on the
piano, and singing to it with loud and lofty enthusiasm--only interrupting himself, at intervals, to announce to me
fiercely the titles of the different pieces of music: "Chorus of Egyptians in the Plague of Darkness, Miss Halcombe!"--"Recitativo of Moses with the tables of the Law."--"Prayer of Israelites, at the passage of the Red Sea.
Aha! Aha! Is that sacred? is that sublime?" The piano trembled under his powerful hands, and the teacups on the
table rattled, as his big bass voice thundered out the notes, and his heavy foot beat time on the floor.
There was something horrible--something fierce and devilish--in the outburst of his delight at his own singing
and playing, and in the triumph with which he watched its effect upon me as I shrank nearer and nearer to the door. I
was released at last, not by my own efforts, but by Sir Percival's interposition. He opened the dining-room door, and
called out angrily to know what "that infernal noise" meant. The Count instantly got up from the piano. "Ah! if
Percival is coming," he said, "harmony and melody are both at an end. The Muse of Music, Miss Halcombe, deserts
us in dismay, and I, the fat old minstrel, exhale the rest of my enthusiasm in the open air!" He stalked out into the
verandah, put his hands in his pockets, and resumed the Recitativo of Moses, sotto voce, in the garden.
I heard Sir Percival call after him from the dining-room window. But he took no notice--he seemed determined
not to hear. That long-deferred quiet talk between them was still to be put off, was still to wait for the Count's
absolute will and pleasure.
He had detained me in the drawing-room nearly half an hour from the time when his wife left us. Where had she
been, and what had she been doing in that interval?
I went upstairs to ascertain, but I made no discoveries, and when I questioned Laura, I found that she had not
heard anything. Nobody had disturbed her, no faint rustling of the silk dress had been audible, either in the ante-
room or in the passage.
It was then twenty minutes to nine. After going to my room to get my journal, I returned, and sat with Laura,
sometimes writing, sometimes stopping to talk with her. Nobody came near us, and nothing happened. We remained
together till ten o'clock. I then rose, said my last cheering words, and wished her good-night. She locked her door
again after we had arranged that I should come in and see her the first thing in the morning.
I had a few sentences more to add to my diary before going to bed myself, and as I went down again to the
drawing-room after leaving Laura for the last time that weary day, I resolved merely to show myself there, to make
my excuses, and then to retire an hour earlier than usual for the night.
Sir Percival, and the Count and his wife, were sitting together. Sir Percival was yawning in an easy-chair, the
Count was reading, Madame Fosco was fanning herself. Strange to say, HER face was flushed now. She, who never
suffered from the heat, was most undoubtedly suffering from it to-night.
"I am afraid, Countess, you are not quite so well as usual?" I said.
"The very remark I was about to make to you," she replied. "You are looking pale, my dear."
My dear! It was the first time she had ever addressed me with that familiarity! There was an insolent smile too
on her face when she said the words.
"I am suffering from one of my bad headaches," I answered coldly.
"Ah, indeed? Want of exercise, I suppose? A walk before dinner would have been just the thing for you." She
referred to the "walk" with a strange emphasis. Had she seen me go out? No matter if she had. The letters were safe
now in Fanny's hands.
"Come and have a smoke, Fosco," said Sir Percival, rising, with another uneasy look at his friend.
"With pleasure, Percival, when the ladies have gone to bed," replied the Count.
"Excuse me, Countess, if I set you the example of retiring," I said. "The only remedy for such a headache as
mine is going to bed."
I took my leave. There was the same insolent smile on the woman's face when I shook hands with her. Sir
Percival paid no attention to me. He was looking impatiently at Madame Fosco, who showed no signs of leaving the
room with me. The Count smiled to himself behind his book. There was yet another delay to that quiet talk with Sir
Percival--and the Countess was the impediment this time.
IX
June 19th.--Once safely shut into my own room, I opened these pages, and prepared to go on with that part of the
day's record which was still left to write.
For ten minutes or more I sat idle, with the pen in my hand, thinking over the events of the last twelve hours. When I at last addressed myself to my task, I found a difficulty in proceeding with it which I had never experienced before. In spite of my efforts to fix my thoughts on the matter in hand, they wandered away with the strangest persistency in the one direction of Sir Percival and the Count, and all the interest which I tried to concentrate on my journal centred instead in that private interview between them which had been put off all through the day, and which was now to take place in the silence and solitude of the night.

In this perverse state of my mind, the recollection of what had passed since the morning would not come back to me, and there was no resource but to close my journal and to get away from it for a little while.

I opened the door which led from my bedroom into my sitting-room, and having passed through, pulled it to again, to prevent any accident in case of draught with the candle left on the dressing-table. My sitting-room window was wide open, and I leaned out listlessly to look at the night.

It was dark and quiet. Neither moon nor stars were visible. There was a smell like rain in the still, heavy air, and I put my hand out of window. No. The rain was only threatening, it had not come yet.

I remained leaning on the window-sill for nearly a quarter of an hour, looking out absently into the black darkness, and hearing nothing, except now and then the voices of the servants, or the distant sound of a closing door, in the lower part of the house.

Just as I was turning away wearily from the window to go back to the bedroom and make a second attempt to complete the unfinished entry in my journal, I smelt the odour of tobacco-smoke stealing towards me on the heavy night air. The next moment I saw a tiny red spark advancing from the farther end of the house in the pitch darkness. I heard no footsteps, and I could see nothing but the spark. It travelled along in the night, passed the window at which I was standing, and stopped opposite my bedroom window, inside which I had left the light burning on the dressing-table.

The spark remained stationary for a moment, then moved back again in the direction from which it had advanced. As I followed its progress I saw a second red spark, larger than the first, approaching from the distance. The two met together in the darkness. Remembering who smoked cigarettes and who smoked cigars, I inferred immediately that the Count had come out first to look and listen under my window, and that Sir Percival had afterwards joined him. They must both have been walking on the lawn—or I should certainly have heard Sir Percival's heavy footfall, though the Count's soft step might have escaped me, even on the gravel walk.

I waited quietly at the window, certain that they could neither of them see me in the darkness of the room.

"What's the matter?" I heard Sir Percival say in a low voice. "Why don't you come in and sit down?"

"I want to see the light out of that window," replied the Count softly.

"What harm does the light do?"

"It shows she is not in bed yet. She is sharp enough to suspect something, and bold enough to come downstairs and listen, if she can get the chance. Patience, Percival—patience."

"Humbug! You're always talking of patience."

"I shall talk of something else presently. My good friend, you are on the edge of your domestic precipice, and if I let you give the women one other chance, on my sacred word of honour they will push you over it!"

"What's the devil do you mean?"

"We will come to our explanations, Percival, when the light is out of that window, and when I have had one little look at the rooms on each side of the library, and a peep at the staircase as well."

They slowly moved away, and the rest of the conversation between them (which had been conducted throughout in the same low tones) ceased to be audible. It was no matter. I had heard enough to determine me on justifying the Count's opinion of my sharpness and my courage. Before the red sparks were out of sight in the darkness I had made up my mind that there should be a listener when those two men sat down to their talk—and that the listener, in spite of all the Count's precautions to the contrary, should be myself. I wanted but one motive to sanction the act to my own conscience, and to give me courage enough for performing it—and that motive I had. Laura's honour, Laura's happiness—Laura's life itself—might depend on my quick ears and my faithful memory to-night.

I had heard the Count say that he meant to examine the rooms on each side of the library, and the staircase as well, before he entered on any explanation with Sir Percival. This expression of his intentions was necessarily sufficient to inform me that the library was the room in which he proposed that the conversation should take place. The one moment of time which was long enough to bring me to that conclusion was also the moment which showed me a means of baffling his precautions—or, in other words, of hearing what he and Sir Percival said to each other, without the risk of descending at all into the lower regions of the house.

In speaking of the rooms on the ground floor I have mentioned incidentally the verandah outside them, on which they all opened by means of French windows, extending from the cornice to the floor. The top of this verandah was flat, the rain-water being carried off from it by pipes into tanks which helped to supply the house. On the narrow
leaden roof, which ran along past the bedrooms, and which was rather less, I should think, than three feet below the sills of the window, a row of flower-pots was ranged, with wide intervals between each pot—the whole being protected from falling in high winds by an ornamental iron railing along the edge of the roof.

The plan which had now occurred to me was to get out at my sitting-room window on to this roof, to creep along noiselessly till I reached that part of it which was immediately over the library window, and to crouch down between the flower-pots, with my ear against the outer railing. If Sir Percival and the Count sat and smoked to-night, as I had seen them sitting and smoking many nights before, with their chairs close at the open window, and their feet stretched on the zinc garden seats which were placed under the verandah, every word they said to each other above a whisper (and no long conversation, as we all know by experience, can be carried on in a whisper) must inevitably reach my ears. If, on the other hand, they chose to-night to sit far back inside the room, then the chances were that I should hear little or nothing—and in that case, I must run the far more serious risk of trying to outwit them downstairs.

Strongly as I was fortified in my resolution by the desperate nature of our situation, I hoped most fervently that I might escape this last emergency. My courage was only a woman's courage after all, and it was very near to failing me when I thought of trusting myself on the ground floor, at the dead of night, within reach of Sir Percival and the Count.

I went softly back to my bedroom to try the safer experiment of the verandah roof first.

A complete change in my dress was imperatively necessary for many reasons. I took off my silk gown to begin with, because the slightest noise from it on that still night might have betrayed me. I next removed the white and cumbersome parts of my underclothing, and replaced them by a petticoat of dark flannel. Over this I put my black travelling cloak, and pulled the hood on to my head. In my ordinary evening costume I took up the room of three men at least. In my present dress, when it was held close about me, no man could have passed through the narrowest spaces more easily than I. The little breadth left on the roof of the verandah, between the flower-pots on one side and the wall and the windows of the house on the other, made this a serious consideration. If I knocked anything down, if I made the least noise, who could say what the consequences might be?

I only waited to put the matches near the candle before I extinguished it, and groped my way back into the sitting-room, I locked that door, as I had locked my bedroom door—then quietly got out of the window, and cautiously set my feet on the leaden roof of the verandah.

My two rooms were at the inner extremity of the new wing of the house in which we all lived, and I had five windows to pass before I could reach the position it was necessary to take up immediately over the library. The first window belonged to a spare room which was empty. The second and third windows belonged to Laura's room. The fourth window belonged to Sir Percival's room. The fifth belonged to the Countess's room. The others, by which it was not necessary for me to pass, were the windows of the Count's dressing-room, of the bathroom, and of the second empty spare room.

No sound reached my ears—the black blinding darkness of the night was all round me when I first stood on the verandah, except at that part of it which Madame Fosco's window overlooked. There, at the very place above the library to which my course was directed—there I saw a gleam of light! The Countess was not yet in bed.

It was too late to draw back—it was no time to wait. I determined to go on at all hazards, and trust for security to my own caution and to the darkness of the night. "For Laura's sake!" I thought to myself, as I took the first step forward on the roof, with one hand holding my cloak close round me, and the other grooping against the wall of the house. It was better to brush close by the wall than to risk striking my feet against the flower-pots within a few inches of me, on the other side.

I passed the dark window of the spare room, trying the leaden roof at each step with my foot before I risked resting my weight on it. I passed the dark windows of Laura's room ("God bless her and keep her to-night!"). I passed the dark window of Sir Percival's room. Then I waited a moment, knelt down with my hands to support me, and so crept to my position, under the protection of the low wall between the bottom of the lighted window and the verandah roof.

When I ventured to look up at the window itself I found that the top of it only was open, and that the blind inside was drawn down. While I was looking I saw the shadow of Madame Fosco pass across the white field of the blind—then pass slowly back again. Thus far she could not have heard me, or the shadow would surely have stopped at the blind, even if she had wanted courage enough to open the window and look out?

I placed myself sideways against the railing of the verandah—first ascertaining, by touching them, the position of the flower-pots on either side of me. There was room enough for me to sit between them and no more. The sweet-scented leaves of the flower on my left hand just brushed my cheek as I lightly rested my head against the railing.

The first sounds that reached me from below were caused by the opening or closing (most probably the latter) of
three doors in succession—the doors, no doubt, leading into the hall and into the rooms on each side of the library, which the Count had pledged himself to examine. The first object that I saw was the red spark again travelling out into the night from under the verandah, moving away towards my window, waiting a moment, and then returning to the place from which it had set out.

"The devil take your restlessness! When do you mean to sit down?" growled Sir Percival's voice beneath me.

"Out! how hot it is!" said the Count, sighing and puffing wearily.

His exclamation was followed by the scraping of the garden chairs on the tiled pavement under the verandah—the welcome sound which told me they were going to sit close at the window as usual. So far the chance was mine. The clock in the turret struck the quarter to twelve as they settled themselves in their chairs. I heard Madame Fosco through the open window yawning, and saw her shadow pass once more across the white field of the blind.

Meanwhile, Sir Percival and the Count began talking together below, now and then dropping their voices a little lower than usual, but never sinking them to a whisper. The strangeness and peril of my situation, the dread, which I could not master, of Madame Fosco's lighted window, made it difficult, almost impossible, for me, at first, to keep my presence of mind, and to fix my attention solely on the conversation beneath. For some minutes I could only succeed in gathering the general substance of it. I understood the Count to say that the one window alight was his wife's, that the ground floor of the house was quite clear, and that they might now speak to each other without fear of accidents. Sir Percival merely answered by upbraiding his friend with having unjustifiably slighted his wishes and neglected his interests all through the day. The Count thereupon defended himself by declaring that he had been beset by certain troubles and anxieties which had absorbed all his attention, and that the only safe time to come to an explanation was a time when they could feel certain of being neither interrupted nor overheard. "We are at a serious crisis in our affairs, Percival," he said, "and if we are to decide on the future at all, we must decide secretly to-night."

That sentence of the Count's was the first which my attention was ready enough to master exactly as it was spoken. From this point, with certain breaks and interruptions, my whole interest fixed breathlessly on the conversation, and I followed it word for word.

"Crisis?" repeated Sir Percival. "It's a worse crisis than you think for, I can tell you."

"So I should suppose, from your behaviour for the last day or two," returned the other coolly. "But wait a little. Before we advance to what I do NOT know, let us be quite certain of what I DO know. Let us first see if I am right about the time that is past, before I make any proposal to you for the time that is to come."

"Stop till I get the brandy and water. Have some yourself."

"Thank you, Percival. The cold water with pleasure, a spoon, and the basin of sugar. Eau sucree, my friend—nothing more."

"Sugar-and-water for a man of your age!—There! mix your sickly mess. You foreigners are all alike."

"Now listen, Percival. I will put our position plainly before you, as I understand it, and you shall say if I am right or wrong. You and I both came back to this house from the Continent with our affairs very seriously embarrassed—"

"Cut it short! I wanted some thousands and you some hundreds, and without the money we were both in a fair way to go to the dogs together. There's the situation. Make what you can of it. Go on."

"Well, Percival, in your own solid English words, you wanted some thousands and I wanted some hundreds, and the only way of getting them was for you to raise the money for your own necessity (with a small margin beyond for my poor little hundreds) by the help of your wife. What did I tell you about your wife on our way to England?—and what did I tell you again when we had come here, and when I had seen for myself the sort of woman Miss Halcombe was?"

"How should I know? You talked nineteen to the dozen, I suppose, just as usual."

"I said this: Human ingenuity, my friend, has hitherto only discovered two ways in which a man can manage a woman. One way is to knock her down—a method largely adopted by the brutal lower orders of the people, but utterly abhorrent to the refined and educated classes above them. The other way (much longer, much more difficult, but in the end not less certain) is never to accept a provocation at a woman's hands. It holds with animals, it holds with women, who are nothing but children grown up. Quiet resolution is the one quality..."
A chair fell on the pavement of the verandah--fell with a crash, as if it had been kicked down.

It was well for me that the Count's revelation roused Sir Percival's anger as it did. On hearing that I had been once more discovered I started so that the railing against which I leaned cracked again. Had he followed me to the inn? Did he infer that I must have given my letters to Fanny when I told him I had none for the post-bag. Even if it was so, how could he have examined the letters when they had gone straight from my hand to the bosom of the girl's dress?

"Thank your lucky star," I heard the Count say next, "that you have me in the house to undo the harm as fast as you do it. Thank your lucky star that I said No when you were mad enough to talk of turning the key to-day on Miss Halcombe, as you turned it in your mischievous folly on your wife. Where are your eyes? Can you look at Miss Halcombe and not see that she has the foresight and the resolution of a man? With that woman for my friend I would snap these fingers of mine, upon egg-shells! And this grand creature--I drink her health in my sugar-and-water--this grand creature, who stands in the strength of her love and her courage, firm as a rock, between us two and that poor, flimsy, pretty blonde wife of yours--this magnificent woman, whom I admire with all my soul, though I oppose her in your interests and in mine, you drive to extremities as if she was no sharper and no bolder than the rest of her sex. Percival! Percival! you deserve to fail, and you HAVE failed."

There was a pause. I write the villain's words about myself because I mean to remember them--because I hope yet for the day when I may speak out once for all in his presence, and cast them back one by one in his teeth.

Sir Percival was the first to break the silence again.

"Yes, yes, bully and bluster as much as you like," he said sulkily; "the difficulty about the money is not the only difficulty. You would be for taking strong measures with the women yourself--if you knew as much as I do."

"We will come to that second difficulty all in good time," rejoined the Count. "You may confuse yourself, Percival, as much as you please, but you shall not confuse me. Let the question of the money be settled first. Have I convinced your obstinacy? have I shown you that your temper will not let you help yourself?--Or must I go back, and (as you put it in your dear straightforward English) bully and bluster a little more?"

"Pooh! It's easy enough to grumble at ME. Say what is to be done--that's a little harder."

"Is it? Bah! This is what is to be done: You give up all direction in the business from to-night--you leave it for the future in my hands only. I am talking to a Practical British man--ha? Well, Practical, will that do for you?"

"What do you propose if I leave it all to you?"

"Answer me first. Is it to be in my hands or not?"

"Say it is in your hands--what then?"

"A few questions, Percival, to begin with. I must wait a little yet, to let circumstances guide me, and I must know, in every possible way, what those circumstances are likely to be. There is no time to lose. I have told you already that Miss Halcombe has written to the lawyer to-day for the second time."

"How did you find it out? What did she say?"

"If I told you, Percival, we should only come back at the end to where we are now. Enough that I have found it out--and the finding has caused that trouble and anxiety which made me so inaccessible to you all through to-day. Now, to refresh my memory about your affairs--it is some time since I talked them over with you. The money has been raised, in the absence of your wife's signature, by means of bills at three months--raised at a cost that makes my poverty-stricken foreign hair stand on end to think of it! When the bills are due, is there really and truly no earthly way of paying them but by the help of your wife?"

"None."

"What! You have no money at the bankers?"

"A few hundreds, when I want as many thousands."

"Have you no other security to borrow upon?"

"Not a shred."

"What have you actually got with your wife at the present moment?"

"Nothing but the interest of her twenty thousand pounds--barely enough to pay our daily expenses."

"What do you expect from your wife?"

"Three thousand a year when her uncle dies."

"A fine fortune, Percival. What sort of a man is this uncle? Old?"

"No--neither old nor young."

"A good-tempered, freely-living man? Married? No--I think my wife told me, not married."

"Of course not. If he was married, and had a son, Lady Glyde would not be next heir to the property. I'll tell you what he is. He's a maudlin, twaddling, selfish fool, and bores everybody who comes near him about the state of his
Men of that sort, Percival, live long, and marry malevolently when you least expect it. I don't give you much, my friend, for your chance of the three thousand a year. Is there nothing more that comes to you from your wife?"
"Nothing."
"Absolutely nothing?"
"Absolutely nothing--except in case of her death."
"Aha! in the case of her death."
There was another pause. The Count moved from the verandah to the gravel walk outside. I knew that he had moved by his voice. "The rain has come at last," I heard him say. It had come. The state of my cloak showed that it had been falling thickly for some little time.

The Count went back under the verandah--I heard the chair creak beneath his weight as he sat down in it again.
"Well, Percival," he said, "and in the case of Lady Glyde's death, what do you get then?"
"If she leaves no children----"
"Which she is likely to do?"
"Which she is not in the least likely to do----"
"Yes?"
"Why, then I get her twenty thousand pounds."
"Paid down?"
"Paid down."

They were silent once more. As their voices ceased Madame Fosco's shadow darkened the blind again. Instead of passing this time, it remained, for a moment, quite still. I saw her fingers steal round the corner of the blind, and draw it on one side. The dim white outline of her face, looking out straight over me, appeared behind the window. I kept still, shrouded from head to foot in my black cloak. The rain, which was fast wetting me, dripped over the glass, blurred it, and prevented her from seeing anything. "More rain!" I heard her say to herself. She dropped the blind, and I breathed again freely.

The talk went on below me, the Count resuming it this time.
"Percival! do you care about your wife?"
"Fosco! that's rather a downright question."
"I am a downright man, and I repeat it."
"Why the devil do you look at me in that way?"
"You won't answer me? Well, then, let us say your wife dies before the summer is out----"
"Drop it, Fosco!"
"Let us say your wife dies----"
"Drop it, I tell you!"
"In that case, you would gain twenty thousand pounds, and you would lose----"
"I should lose the chance of three thousand a year."
"The REMOTE chance, Percival--the remote chance only. And you want money, at once. In your position the gain is certain--the loss doubtful."

"Speak for yourself as well as for me. Some of the money I want has been borrowed for you. And if you come to gain, my wife's death would be ten thousand pounds in your wife's pocket. Sharp as you are, you seem to have conveniently forgotten Madame Fosco's legacy. Don't look at me in that way! I won't have it! What with your looks and your questions, upon my soul, you make my flesh creep!"

"Your flesh? Does flesh mean conscience in English? I speak of your wife's death as I speak of a possibility. Why not? The respectable lawyers who scribble-scrabble your deeds and your wills look the deaths of living people in the face. Do lawyers make your flesh creep? Why should I? It is my business to-night to clear up your position beyond the possibility of mistake, and I have now done it. Here is your position. If your wife lives, you pay those bills with her signature to the parchment. If your wife dies, you pay them with her death."

As he spoke the light in Madame Fosco's room was extinguished, and the whole second floor of the house was now sunk in darkness.

"Talk! talk!" grumbled Sir Percival. "One would think, to hear you, that my wife's signature to the deed was got already."

"You have left the matter in my hands," retorted the Count, "and I have more than two months before me to turn round in. Say no more about it, if you please, for the present. When the bills are due, you will see for yourself if my 'talk! talk!' is worth something, or if it is not. And now, Percival, having done with the money matters for to-night, I can place my attention at your disposal, if you wish to consult me on that second difficulty which has mixed itself up with our little embarrassments, and which has so altered you for the worse, that I hardly know you again. Speak, my
friend—and pardon me if I shock your fiery national tastes by mixing myself a second glass of sugar-and-water."

"It's very well to say speak," replied Sir Percival, in a far more quiet and more polite tone than he had yet adopted, "but it's not so easy to know how to begin."

"Shall I help you?" suggested the Count. "Shall I give this private difficulty of yours a name? What if I call it--Anne Catherick?"

"Look here, Fosco, you and I have known each other for a long time, and if you have helped me out of one or two scrapes before this, I have done the best I could to help you in return, as far as money would go. We have made as many friendly sacrifices, on both sides, as men could, but we have had our secrets from each other, of course—haven't we?"

"You have had a secret from me, Percival. There is a skeleton in your cupboard here at Blackwater Park that has peeped out in these last few days at other people besides yourself."

"Well, suppose it has. If it doesn't concern you, you needn't be curious about it, need you?"

"Do I look curious about it?"

"Yes, you do."

"So! so! my face speaks the truth, then? What an immense foundation of good there must be in the nature of a man who arrives at my age, and whose face has not yet lost the habit of speaking the truth!—Come, Glyde! let us be candid one with the other. This secret of yours has sought me: I have not sought it. Let us say I am curious—do you ask me, as your old friend, to respect your secret, and to leave it, once for all, in your own keeping?"

"Yes—that's just what I do ask."

"Then my curiosity is at an end. It dies in me from this moment."

"Do you really mean that?"

"What makes you doubt me?"

"I have had some experience, Fosco, of your roundabout ways, and I am not so sure that you won't worm it out of me after all."

The chair below suddenly creaked again—I felt the trellis-work pillar under me shake from top to bottom. The Count had started to his feet, and had struck it with his hand in indignation.

"Percival! Percival!" he cried passionately, "do you know me no better than that? Has all your experience shown you nothing of my character yet? I am a man of the antique type! I am capable of the most exalted acts of virtue—when I have the chance of performing them. It has been the misfortune of my life that I have had few chances. My conception of friendship is sublime! Is it my fault that your skeleton has peeped out at me? Why do I confess my curiosity? You poor superficial Englishman, it is to magnify my own self-control. I could draw your secret out of you, if I liked, as I draw this finger out of the palm of my hand—you know I could! But you have appealed to my friendship, and the duties of friendship are sacred to me. See! I trample my base curiosity under my feet. My exalted sentiments lift me above it. Recognise them, Percival! imitate them, Percival! Shake hands—I forgive you."

His voice faltered over the last words—falterered, as if he were actually shedding tears!

Sir Percival confusedly attempted to excuse himself, but the Count was too magnanimous to listen to him.

"No!" he said. "When my friend has wounded me, I can pardon him without apologies. Tell me, in plain words, do you want my help?"

"Yes, badly enough."

"And you can ask for it without compromising yourself?"

"I can try, at any rate."

"Try, then."

"Well, this is how it stands:—I told you to-day that I had done my best to find Anne Catherick, and failed."

"Yes, you did."

"Fosco! I'm a lost man if I DON'T find her."

"Ha! Is it so serious as that?"

A little stream of light travelled out under the verandah, and fell over the gravel-walk. The Count had taken the lamp from the inner part of the room to see his friend clearly by the light of it.

"Yes!" he said. "Your face speaks the truth this time. Serious, indeed—as serious as the money matters themselves."

"More serious. As true as I sit here, more serious!"

The light disappeared again and the talk went on.

"I showed you the letter to my wife that Anne Catherick hid in the sand," Sir Percival continued. "There's no boasting in that letter, Fosco—she DOES know the Secret."

"Say as little as possible, Percival, in my presence, of the Secret. Does she know it from you?"

"No, from her mother."
"Two women in possession of your private mind--bad, bad, bad, my friend! One question here, before we go any
further. The motive of your shutting up the daughter in the asylum is now plain enough to me, but the manner of her
escape is not quite so clear. Do you suspect the people in charge of her of closing their eyes purposely, at the
instance of some enemy who could afford to make it worth their while?"

"No, she was the best-behaved patient they had--and, like fools, they trusted her. She's just mad enough to be
shut up, and just sane enough to ruin me when she's at large--if you understand that?"

"I do understand it. Now, Percival, come at once to the point, and then I shall know what to do. Where is the
danger of your position at the present moment?"

"Anne Catherick is in this neighbourhood, and in communication with Lady Glyde--there's the danger, plain
enough. Who can read the letter she hid in the sand, and not see that my wife is in possession of the Secret, deny it
as she may?"

"One moment, Percival. If Lady Glyde does know the Secret, she must know also that it is a compromising
secret for you. As your wife, surely it is her interest to keep it?"

"Is it? I'm coming to that. It might be her interest if she cared two straws about me. But I happen to be an
encumbrance in the way of another man. She was in love with him before she married me-- she's in love with him
now--an infernal vagabond of a drawing-master, named Hartright."

"My dear friend! what is there extraordinary in that? They are all in love with some other man. Who gets the first
of a woman's heart? In all my experience I have never yet met with the man who was Number One. Number Two,
sometimes. Number Three, Four, Five, often. Number One, never! He exists, of course--but I have not met with
him."

"Wait! I haven't done yet. Who do you think helped Anne Catherick to get the start, when the people from the
mad-house were after her? Hartright. Who do you think saw her again in Cumberland? Hartright. Both times he
spoke to her alone. Stop! don't interrupt me. The scoundrel's as sweet on my wife as she is on him. He knows the
Secret, and she knows the Secret. Once let them both get together again, and it's her interest and his interest to turn
their information against me."

"Gently, Percival--gently! Are you insensible to the virtue of Lady Glyde?"

"That for the virtue of Lady Glyde! I believe in nothing about her but her money. Don't you see how the case
stands? She might be harmless enough by herself; but if she and that vagabond Hartright----"

"Yes, yes, I see. Where is Mr. Hartright?"

"Out of the country. If he means to keep a whole skin on his bones, I recommend him not to come back in a
hurry."

"Are you sure he is out of the country?"

"Certain. I had him watched from the time he left Cumberland to the time he sailed. Oh, I've been careful, I can
tell you! Anne Catherick lived with some people at a farmhouse near Limmeridge. I went there myself, after she had
given me the slip, and made sure that they knew nothing. I gave her mother a form of letter to write to Miss
Halcombe, exonerating me from any bad motive in putting her under restraint. I've spent, I'm afraid to say how
much, in trying to trace her, and in spite of it all, she turns up here and escapes me on my own property! How do I
know who else may see her, who else may speak to her? That prying scoundrel, Hartright, may come back without
my knowing it, and may make use of her to-morrow----"

"Not he, Percival! While I am on the spot, and while that woman is in the neighbourhood, I will answer for our
laying hands on her before Mr. Hartright--even if he does come back. I see! yes, yes, I see! The finding of Anne
Catherick is the first necessity--make your mind easy about the rest. Your wife is here, under your thumb--Miss
Halcombe is inseparable from her, and is, therefore, under your thumb also--and Mr. Hartright is out of the country.
This invisible Anne of yours is all we have to think of for the present. You have made your inquiries?"

"Yes. I have been to her mother, I have ransacked the village--and all to no purpose."

"Is her mother to be depended on?"

"Yes."

"She has told your secret once."

"She won't tell it again."

"Why not? Are her own interests concerned in keeping it, as well as yours?"

"Yes--deeply concerned."

"I am glad to hear it, Percival, for your sake. Don't be discouraged, my friend. Our money matters, as I told you,
leave me plenty of time to turn round in, and I may search for Anne Catherick to-morrow to better purpose than you.
One last question before we go to bed."

"What is it?"

"It is this. When I went to the boat-house to tell Lady Glyde that the little difficulty of her signature was put off,
accident took me there in time to see a strange woman parting in a very suspicious manner from your wife. But accident did not bring me near enough to see this same woman's face plainly. I must know how to recognise our invisible Anne. What is she like?"

"Like? Come! I'll tell you in two words. She's a sickly likeness of my wife."

The chair creaked, and the pillar shook once more. The Count was on his feet again--this time in astonishment.

"What!!" he exclaimed eagerly.

"Fancy my wife, after a bad illness, with a touch of something wrong in her head--and there is Anne Catherick for you," answered Sir Percival.

"Are they related to each other?"

"Not a bit of it."

"And yet so like?"

"Yes, so like. What are you laughing about?"

There was no answer, and no sound of any kind. The Count was laughing in his smooth silent internal way.

"What are you laughing about?" reiterated Sir Percival.

"Perhaps at my own fancies, my good friend. Allow me my Italian humour--do I not come of the illustrious nation which invented the exhibition of Punch? Well, well, well, I shall know Anne Catherick when I see her--and so enough for to-night. Make your mind easy, Percival. Sleep, my son, the sleep of the just, and see what I will do for you when daylight comes to help us both. I have my projects and my plans here in my big head. You shall pay those bills and find Anne Catherick--my sacred word of honour on it, but you shall! Am I a friend to be treasured in the best corner of your heart, or am I not? Am I worth those loans of money which you so delicately reminded me of a little while since? Whatever you do, never wound me in my sentiments any more. Recognise them, Percival! imitate them, Percival! I forgive you again--I shake hands again. Good-night!"

Not another word was spoken. I heard the Count close the library door. I heard Sir Percival barring up the window-shutters. It had been raining, raining all the time. I was cramped by my position and chilled to the bones.

When I first tried to move, the effort was so painful to me that I was obliged to desist. I tried a second time, and succeeded in rising to my knees on the wet roof.

As I crept to the wall, and raised myself against it, I looked back, and saw the window of the Count's dressing-room gleam into light. My sinking courage flickered up in me again, and kept my eyes fixed on his window, as I stole my way back, step by step, past the wall of the house.

The clock struck the quarter after one, when I laid my hands on the window-sill of my own room. I had seen nothing and heard nothing which could lead me to suppose that my retreat had been discovered.

June 20th.--Eight o'clock. The sun is shining in a clear sky. I have not been near my bed--I have not once closed my weary wakeful eyes. From the same window at which I looked out into the darkness of last night, I look out now at the bright stillness of the morning.

I count the hours that have passed since I escaped to the shelter of this room by my own sensations--and those hours seem like weeks.

How short a time, and yet how long to ME--since I sank down in the darkness, here, on the floor--drenched to the skin, cramped in every limb, cold to the bones, a useless, helpless, panic-stricken creature.

I hardly know when I roused myself. I hardly know when I groped my way back to the bedroom, and lighted the candle, and searched (with a strange ignorance, at first, of where to look for them) for dry clothes to warm me. The doing of these things is in my mind, but not the time when they were done.

Can I even remember when the chilled, cramped feeling left me, and the throbbing heat came in its place?

Surely it was before the sun rose? Yes, I heard the clock strike three. I remember the time by the sudden brightness and clearness, the feverish strain and excitement of all my faculties which came with it. I remember my resolution to control myself, to wait patiently hour after hour, till the chance offered of removing Laura from this horrible place, without the danger of immediate discovery and pursuit. I remember the persuasion settling itself in my mind that the words those two men had said to each other would furnish us, not only with our justification for leaving the house, but with our weapons of defence against them as well. I recall the impulse that awakened in me to preserve those words in writing, exactly as they were spoken, while the time was my own, and while my memory vividly retained them. All this I remember plainly: there is no confusion in my head yet. The coming in here from the bedroom, with my pen and ink and paper, before sunrise--the sitting down at the widely-opened window to get all the air I could to cool me--the ceaseless writing, faster and faster, hotter and hotter, driving on more and more wakefully, all through the dreadful interval before the house was astir again--how clearly I recall it, from the beginning by candle-light, to the end on the page before this, in the sunshine of the new day!

Why do I sit here still? Why do I weary my hot eyes and my burning head by writing more? Why not lie down
and rest myself, and try to quench the fever that consumes me, in sleep?

I dare not attempt it. A fear beyond all other fears has got possession of me. I am afraid of this heat that parches my skin. I am afraid of the creeping and throbbing that I feel in my head. If I lie down now, how do I know that I may have the sense and the strength to rise again?

Oh, the rain, the rain--the cruel rain that chilled me last night!

Nine o'clock. Was it nine struck, or eight? Nine, surely? I am shivering again--shivering, from head to foot, in the summer air. Have I been sitting here asleep? I don't know what I have been doing.

Oh, my God! am I going to be ill?

Ill, at such a time as this!

My head--I am sadly afraid of my head. I can write, but the lines all run together. I see the words. Laura--I can write Laura, and see I write it. Eight or nine--which was it?

So cold, so cold--oh, that rain last night!--and the strokes of the clock, the strokes I can't count, keep striking in my head----

* * * * * * * * * *

Note [At this place the entry in the Diary ceases to be legible. The two or three lines which follow contain fragments of words only, mingled with blots and scratches of the pen. The last marks on the paper bear some resemblance to the first two letters (L and A) of the name of Lady Glyde.

On the next page of the Diary, another entry appears. It is in a man's handwriting, large, bold, and firmly regular, and the date is "June the 21st." It contains these lines--]

POSTSCRIPT BY A SINCERE FRIEND

The illness of our excellent Miss Halcombe has afforded me the opportunity of enjoying an unexpected intellectual pleasure.

I refer to the perusal (which I have just completed) of this interesting Diary. There are many hundred pages here. I can lay my hand on my heart, and declare that every page has charmed, refreshed, delighted me.

To a man of my sentiments it is unspeakably gratifying to be able to say this.

Admirable woman!

I allude to Miss Halcombe.

Stupendous effort!

I refer to the Diary.

Yes! these pages are amazing. The tact which I find here, the discretion, the rare courage, the wonderful power of memory, the accurate observation of character, the easy grace of style, the charming outbursts of womanly feeling, have all inexpressibly increased my admiration of this sublime creature, of this magnificent Marian. The presentation of my own character is masterly in the extreme. I certify, with my whole heart, to the fidelity of the portrait. I feel how vivid an impression I must have produced to have been painted in such strong, such rich, such massive colours as these. I lament afresh the cruel necessity which sets our interests at variance, and opposes us to each other. Under happier circumstances how worthy I should have been of Miss Halcombe--how worthy Miss Halcombe would have been of ME.

The sentiments which animate my heart assure me that the lines I have just written express a Profound Truth.

Those sentiments exalt me above all merely personal considerations. I bear witness, in the most disinterested manner, to the excellence of the stratagem by which this unparalleled woman surprised the private interview between Percival and myself--also to the marvellous accuracy of her report of the whole conversation from its beginning to its end.

Those sentiments have induced me to offer to the unimpressionable doctor who attends on her my vast knowledge of chemistry, and my luminous experience of the more subtle resources which medical and magnetic science have placed at the disposal of mankind. He has hitherto declined to avail himself of my assistance.

Miserable man!

Finally, those sentiments dictate the lines--grateful, sympathetic, paternal lines--which appear in this place. I close the book. My strict sense of propriety restores it (by the hands of my wife) to its place on the writer's table. Events are hurrying me away. Circumstances are guiding me to serious issues. Vast perspectives of success unroll themselves before my eyes. I accomplish my destiny with a calmness which is terrible to myself. Nothing but the homage of my admiration is my own. I deposit it with respectful tenderness at the feet of Miss Halcombe.

I breathe my wishes for her recovery.

I condole with her on the inevitable failure of every plan that she has formed for her sister's benefit. At the same time, I entreat her to believe that the information which I have derived from her Diary will in no respect help me to contribute to that failure. It simply confirms the plan of conduct which I had previously arranged. I have to thank
these pages for awakening the finest sensibilities in my nature--nothing more.

To a person of similar sensibility this simple assertion will explain and excuse everything.

Miss Halcombe is a person of similar sensibility.

In that persuasion I sign myself, Fosco.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY FREDERICK FAIRLIE, ESQ., OF LIMMERIDGE HOUSE[2]

[2] The manner in which Mr. Fairlie's Narrative and other Narratives that are shortly to follow it, were originally obtained, forms the subject of an explanation which will appear at a later period.

It is the grand misfortune of my life that nobody will let me alone.

Why--I ask everybody--why worry ME? Nobody answers that question, and nobody lets me alone. Relatives, friends, and strangers all combine to annoy me. What have I done? I ask myself, I ask my servant, Louis, fifty times a day--what have I done? Neither of us can tell. Most extraordinary!

The last annoyance that has assailed me is the annoyance of being called upon to write this Narrative. Is a man in my state of nervous wretchedness capable of writing narratives? When I put this extremely reasonable objection, I am told that certain very serious events relating to my niece have happened within my experience, and that I am the fit person to describe them on that account. I am threatened if I fail to exert myself in the manner required, with consequences which I cannot so much as think of without perfect prostration. There is really no need to threaten me. Shattered by my miserable health and my family troubles, I am incapable of resistance. If you insist, you take your unjust advantage of me, and I give way immediately. I will endeavour to remember what I can (under protest), and to write what I can (also under protest), and what I can't remember and can't write, Louis must remember and write for me. He is an ass, and I am an invalid, and we are likely to make all sorts of mistakes between us. How humiliating!

I am told to remember dates. Good heavens! I never did such a thing in my life--how am I to begin now?

I have asked Louis. He is not quite such an ass as I have hitherto supposed. He remembers the date of the event, within a week or two--and I remember the name of the person. The date was towards the end of June, or the beginning of July, and the name (in my opinion a remarkably vulgar one) was Fanny.

At the end of June, or the beginning of July, then, I was reclining in my customary state, surrounded by the various objects of Art which I have collected about me to improve the taste of the barbarous people in my neighbourhood. That is to say, I had the photographs of my pictures, and prints, and coins, and so forth, all about me, which I intend, one of these days, to present (the photographs, I mean, if the clumsy English language will let me mean anything) to present to the institution at Carlisle (horrid place!), with a view to improving the tastes of the members (Goths and Vandals to a man). It might be supposed that a gentleman who was in course of conferring a great national benefit on his countrymen was the last gentleman in the world to be unfeelingly worried about private difficulties and family affairs. Quite a mistake, I assure you, in my case.

However, there I was, reclining, with my art-treasures about me, and wanting a quiet morning. Because I wanted a quiet morning, of course Louis came in. It was perfectly natural that I should inquire what the deuce he meant by making his appearance when I had not rung my bell. I seldom swear--it is such an ungentlemanlike habit--but when Louis answered by a grin, I think it was also perfectly natural that I should damn him for grinning. At any rate, I did.

This rigorous mode of treatment, I have observed, invariably brings persons in the lower class of life to their senses. It brought Louis to HIS senses. He was so obliging as to leave off grinning, and inform me that a Young Person was outside wanting to see me. He added (with the odious talkativeness of servants), that her name was Fanny.

"Who is Fanny?"
"Lady Glyde's maid, sir."
"What does Lady Glyde's maid want with me?"
"A letter, sir----"
"Take it."
"She refuses to give it to anybody but you, sir."
"Who sends the letter?"
"Miss Halcombe, sir."

The moment I heard Miss Halcombe's name I gave up. It is a habit of mine always to give up to Miss Halcombe. I find, by experience, that it saves noise. I gave up on this occasion. Dear Marian!

"Let Lady Glyde's maid come in, Louis. Stop! Do her shoes creak?"

I was obliged to ask the question. Creaking shoes invariably upset me for the day. I was resigned to see the Young Person, but I was NOT resigned to let the Young Person's shoes upset me. There is a limit even to my endurance.

Louis affirmed distinctly that her shoes were to be depended upon. I waved my hand. He introduced her. Is it
necessary to say that she expressed her sense of embarrassment by shutting up her mouth and breathing through her nose? To the student of female human nature in the lower orders, surely not.

Let me do the girl justice. Her shoes did NOT creak. But why do Young Persons in service all perspire at the hands? Why have they all got fat noses and hard cheeks? And why are their faces so sadly unfinished, especially about the corners of the eyelids? I am not strong enough to think deeply myself on any subject, but I appeal to professional men, who are. Why have we no variety in our breed of Young Persons?

"You have a letter for me, from Miss Halcombe? Put it down on the table, please, and don't upset anything. How is Miss Halcombe?"

"Very well, thank you, sir."

"And Lady Glyde?"

I received no answer. The Young Person's face became more unfinished than ever, and I think she began to cry. I certainly saw something moist about her eyes. Tears or perspiration? Louis (whom I have just consulted) is inclined to think, tears. He is in her class of life, and he ought to know best. Let us say, tears.

Except when the refining process of Art judiciously removes from them all resemblance to Nature, I distinctly object to tears. Tears are scientifically described as a Secretion. I can understand that a secretion may be healthy or unhealthy, but I cannot see the interest of a secretion from a sentimental point of view. Perhaps my own secretions being all wrong together, I am a little prejudiced on the subject. No matter. I behaved, on this occasion, with all possible propriety and feeling. I closed my eyes and said to Louis--

"Endeavour to ascertain what she means."

Louis endeavoured, and the Young Person endeavoured. They succeeded in confusing each other to such an extent that I am bound in common gratitude to say, they really amused me. I think I shall send for them again when I am in low spirits. I have just mentioned this idea to Louis. Strange to say, it seems to make him uncomfortable. Poor devil!

Surely I am not expected to repeat my niece's maid's explanation of her tears, interpreted in the English of my Swiss valet? The thing is manifestly impossible. I can give my own impressions and feelings perhaps. Will that do as well? Please say, Yes.

My idea is that she began by telling me (through Louis) that her master had dismissed her from her mistress's service. (Observe, throughout, the strange irrelevancy of the Young Person. Was it my fault that she had lost her place?) On her dismissal, she had gone to the inn to sleep. (I don't keep the inn--why mention it to ME?) Between six o'clock and seven Miss Halcombe had come to say good-bye, and had given her two letters, one for me, and one for a gentleman in London. (I am not a gentleman in London--hang the gentleman in London!) She had carefully put the two letters into her bosom (what have I to do with her bosom?); she had been very unhappy, when Miss Halcombe had gone away again; she had not had the heart to put bit or drop between her lips till it was near bedtime, and then, when it was close on nine o'clock, she had thought she should like a cup of tea. (Am I responsible for any of these vulgar fluctuations, which begin with unhappiness and end with tea?) Just as she was WARMING THE POT (I give the words on the authority of Louis, who says he knows what they mean, and wishes to explain, but I snub him on principle)--just as she was warming the pot the door opened, and she was STRUCK OF A HEAP (her own words again, and perfectly unintelligible this time to Louis, as well as to myself) by the appearance in the inn parlour of her ladyship the Countess. I give my niece's maid's description of my sister's title with a sense of the highest relish. My poor dear sister is a tiresome woman who married a foreigner. To resume: the door opened, her ladyship the Countess appeared in the parlour, and the Young Person was struck of a heap. Most remarkable!

I must really rest a little before I can get on any farther. When I have reclined for a few minutes, with my eyes closed, and when Louis has refreshed my poor aching temples with a little eau-de- Cologne, I may be able to proceed.

Her ladyship the Countess----

No. I am able to proceed, but not to sit up. I will recline and dictate. Louis has a horrid accent, but he knows the language, and can write. How very convenient!

Her ladyship, the Countess, explained her unexpected appearance at the inn by telling Fanny that she had come to bring one or two little messages which Miss Halcombe in her hurry had forgotten. The Young Person thereupon waited anxiously to hear what the messages were, but the Countess seemed disinclined to mention them (so like my sister's tiresome way!) until Fanny had had her tea. Her ladyship was surprisingly kind and thoughtful about it (extremely unlike my sister), and said, "I am sure, my poor girl, you must want your tea. We can let the messages wait till afterwards. Come, come, if nothing else will put you at your ease, I'll make the tea and have a cup with you." I think those were the words, as reported excitedly, in my presence, by the Young Person. At any rate, the Countess insisted on making the tea, and carried her ridiculous ostentation of humility so far as to take one cup herself, and to insist on the girl's taking the other. The girl drank the tea, and according to her own account,
solemnised the extraordinary occasion five minutes afterwards by fainting dead away for the first time in her life. Here again I use her own words. Louis thinks they were accompanied by an increased secretion of tears. I can't say myself. The effort of listening being quite as much as I could manage, my eyes were closed.

Where did I leave off? Ah, yes--she fainted after drinking a cup of tea with the Countess--a proceeding which might have interested me if I had been her medical man, but being nothing of the sort I felt bored by hearing of it, nothing more. When she came to herself in half an hour's time she was on the sofa, and nobody was with her but the landlady. The Countess, finding it too late to remain any longer at the inn, had gone away as soon as the girl showed signs of recovering, and the landlady had been good enough to help her upstairs to bed.

Left by herself, she had felt in her bosom (I regret the necessity of referring to this part of the subject a second time), and had found the two letters there quite safe, but strangely crumpled. She had been giddy in the night, but had got up well enough to travel in the morning. She had put the letter addressed to that obtrusive stranger, the gentleman in London into the post, and had now delivered the other letter into my hands as she was told. This was the plain truth, and though she could not blame herself for any intentional neglect, she was sadly troubled in her mind, and sadly in want of a word of advice. At this point Louis thinks the secretions appeared again. Perhaps they did, but it is of infinitely greater importance to mention that at this point also I lost my patience, opened my eyes, and interfered.

"What is the purport of all this?" I inquired.
My niece's irrelevant maid stared, and stood speechless.
"Endeavour to explain," I said to my servant. "Translate me, Louis."
Louis endeavoured and translated. In other words, he descended immediately into a bottomless pit of confusion, and the Young Person followed him down. I really don't know when I have been so amused. I left them at the bottom of the pit as long as they diverted me. When they ceased to divert me, I exerted my intelligence, and pulled them up again.

It is unnecessary to say that my interference enabled me, in due course of time, to ascertain the purport of the Young Person's remarks.

I discovered that she was uneasy in her mind, because the train of events that she had just described to me had prevented her from receiving those supplementary messages which Miss Halcombe had intrusted to the Countess to deliver. She was afraid the messages might have been of great importance to her mistress's interests. Her dread of Sir Percival had deterred her from going to Blackwater Park late at night to inquire about them, and Miss Halcombe's own directions to her, on no account to miss the train in the morning, had prevented her from waiting at the inn the next day. She was most anxious that the misfortune of her fainting-fit should not lead to the second misfortune of making her mistress think her neglectful, and she would humbly beg to ask me whether I would advise her to write her explanations and excuses to Miss Halcombe, requesting to receive the messages by letter, if it was not too late. I make no apologies for this extremely prosy paragraph. I have been ordered to write it. There are people, unaccountable as it may appear, who actually take more interest in what my niece's maid said to me on this occasion than in what I said to my niece's maid. Amusing perversity!

"I should feel very much obliged to you, sir, if you would kindly tell me what I had better do," remarked the Young Person.
"Let things stop as they are," I said, adapting my language to my listener. "I invariably let things stop as they are. Yes. Is that all?"
"If you think it would be a liberty in me, sir, to write, of course I wouldn't venture to do so. But I am so very anxious to do all I can to serve my mistress faithfully----"

People in the lower class of life never know when or how to go out of a room. They invariably require to be helped out by their betters. I thought it high time to help the Young Person out. I did it with two judicious words--
"Good-morning."

Something outside or inside this singular girl suddenly creaked. Louis, who was looking at her (which I was not), says she creaked when she curtseyed. Curious. Was it her shoes, her stays, or her bones? Louis thinks it was her stays. Most extraordinary!

As soon as I was left by myself I had a little nap--I really wanted it. When I awoke again I noticed dear Marian's letter. If I had had the least idea of what it contained I should certainly not have attempted to open it. Being, unfortunately for myself, quite innocent of all suspicion, I read the letter. It immediately upset me for the day.

I am, by nature, one of the most easy-tempered creatures that ever lived--I make allowances for everybody, and I take offence at nothing. But as I have before remarked, there are limits to my endurance. I laid down Marian's letter, and felt myself--justly felt myself--an injured man.

I am about to make a remark. It is, of course, applicable to the very serious matter now under notice, or I should not allow it to appear in this place.
Nothing, in my opinion, sets the odious selfishness of mankind in such a repulsively vivid light as the treatment, in all classes of society, which the Single people receive at the hands of the Married people. When you have once shown yourself too considerate and self-denying to add a family of your own to an already overcrowded population, you are vindictively marked out by your married friends, who have no similar consideration and no similar self-denial, as the recipient of half their conjugal troubles, and the born friend of all their children. Husbands and wives TALK of the cares of matrimony, and bachelors and spinsters BEAR them. Take my own case. I considerately remain single, and my poor dear brother Philip inconconsiderately marries. What does he do when he dies? He leaves his daughter to ME. She is a sweet girl—she is also a dreadful responsibility. Why lay her on my shoulders? Because I am bound, in the harmless character of a single man, to relieve my married connections of all their own troubles. I do my best with my brother's responsibility—I marry my niece, with infinite fuss and difficulty, to the man her father wanted her to marry. She and her husband disagree, and unpleasant consequences follow. What does she do with those consequences? She transfers them to ME. Why transfer them to ME? Because I am bound, in the harmless character of a single man, to relieve my married connections of all their own troubles. Poor single people! Poor human nature!

It is quite unnecessary to say that Marian's letter threatened me. Everybody threatens me. All sorts of horrors were to fall on my devoted head if I hesitated to turn Limmeridge House into an asylum for my niece and her misfortunes. I did hesitate, nevertheless.

I have mentioned that my usual course, hitherto, had been to submit to dear Marian, and save noise. But on this occasion, the consequences involved in her extremely inconsiderate proposal were of a nature to make me pause. If I opened Limmeridge House as an asylum to Lady Glyde, what security had I against Sir Percival Glyde's following her here in a state of violent resentment against ME for harbouring his wife? I saw such a perfect labyrinth of troubles involved in this proceeding that I determined to feel my ground, as it were. I wrote, therefore, to dear Marian to beg (as she had no husband to lay claim to her) that she would come here by herself, first, and talk the matter over with me. If she could answer my objections to my own perfect satisfaction, then I assured her that I would receive our sweet Laura with the greatest pleasure, but not otherwise.

I felt, of course, at the time, that this temporising on my part would probably end in bringing Marian here in a state of virtuous indignation, banging doors. But then, the other course of proceeding might end in bringing Sir Percival here in a state of violent indignation, banging doors also, and of the two indignations and bangings I preferred Marian's, because I was used to her. Accordingly I despatched the letter by return of post. It gained me time, at all events—and, oh dear me! what a point that was to begin with.

When I am totally prostrated (did I mention that I was totally prostrated by Marian's letter?) it always takes me three days to get up again. I was very unreasonable—I expected three days of quiet. Of course I didn't get them.

The third day's post brought me a most impertinent letter from a person with whom I was totally unacquainted. He described himself as the acting partner of our man of business—our dear, pig-headed old Gilmore—and he informed me that he had lately received, by the post, a letter addressed to him in Miss Halcombe's handwriting. On opening the envelope, he had discovered, to his astonishment, that it contained nothing but a blank sheet of note-paper. This circumstance appeared to him so suspicious (as suggesting to his restless legal mind that the letter had been tampered with) that he had at once written to Miss Halcombe, and had received no answer by return of post. In this difficulty, instead of acting like a sensible man and letting things take their proper course, his next absurd proceeding, on his own showing, was to pester me by writing to inquire if I knew anything about it. What the deuce would I know about it? Why alarm me as well as himself? I wrote back to that effect. It was one of my keenest pleasures.

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I have produced nothing with a sharper epistolary edge to it since I tendered his dismissal in writing to that gentleman of course made a difference. I looked at the card.
Gracious Heaven! my tiresome sister's foreign husband, Count Fosco.

Is it necessary to say what my first impression was when I looked at my visitor's card? Surely not! My sister having married a foreigner, there was but one impression that any man in his senses could possibly feel. Of course the Count had come to borrow money of me.

"Louis," I said, "do you think he would go away if you gave him five shillings?"

Louis looked quite shocked. He surprised me inexpressibly by declaring that my sister's foreign husband was dressed superbly, and looked the picture of prosperity. Under these circumstances my first impression altered to a certain extent. I now took it for granted that the Count had matrimonial difficulties of his own to contend with, and that he had come, like the rest of the family, to cast them all on my shoulders.

"Did he mention his business?" I asked.

"Count Fosco said he had come here, sir, because Miss Halcombe was unable to leave Blackwater Park."

Fresh troubles, apparently. Not exactly his own, as I had supposed, but dear Marian's. Troubles, anyway. Oh dear!

"Show him in," I said resignedly.

The Count's first appearance really startled me. He was such an alarmingly large person that I quite trembled. I felt certain that he would shake the floor and knock down my art-treasures. He did neither the one nor the other. He was refreshingly dressed in summer costume--his manner was delightfully self-possessed and quiet--he had a charming smile. My first impression of him was highly favourable. It is not creditable to my penetration--as the sequel will show--to acknowledge this, but I am a naturally candid man, and I DO acknowledge it notwithstanding.

"Allow me to present myself, Mr. Fairlie," he said. "I come from Blackwater Park, and I have the honour and the happiness of being Madame Fosco's husband. Let me take my first and last advantage of that circumstance by entreating you not to make a stranger of me. I beg you will not disturb yourself--I beg you will not move."

"You are very good," I replied. "I wish I was strong enough to get up. Charmed to see you at Limmeridge. Please take a chair."

"I am afraid you are suffering to-day," said the Count.

"As usual," I said. "I am nothing but a bundle of nerves dressed up to look like a man."

"I have studied many subjects in my time," remarked this sympathetic person. "Among others the inexhaustible subject of nerves. May I make a suggestion, at once the simplest and the most profound? Will you let me alter the light in your room?"

"Certainly--if you will be so very kind as not to let any of it in on me."

He walked to the window. Such a contrast to dear Marian! so extremely considerate in all his movements!

"Light," he said, in that delightfully confidential tone which is so soothing to an invalid, "is the first essential. Light stimulates, nourishes, preserves. You can no more do without it, Mr. Fairlie, than if you were a flower. Observe, here, where you sit, I close the shutters to compose you. There, where you do NOT sit, I draw up the blind and let in the invigorating sun. Admit the light into your room if you cannot bear it on yourself. Light, sir, is the grand decree of Providence. You accept Providence with your own restrictions. Accept light on the same terms."

I thought this very convincing and attentive. He had taken me in up to that point about the light, he had certainly taken me in.

"You see me confused," he said, returning to his place--"on my word of honour, Mr. Fairlie, you see me confused in your presence."

"Shocked to hear it, I am sure. May I inquire why?"

"Sir, can I enter this room (where you sit a sufferer), and see you surrounded by these admirable objects of Art, without discovering that you are a man whose feelings are acutely impressionable, whose sympathies are perpetually alive? Tell me, can I do this?"

If I had been strong enough to sit up in my chair I should, of course, have bowed. Not being strong enough, I smiled my acknowledgments instead. It did just as well, we both understood one another.

"Pray follow my train of thought," continued the Count. "I sit here, a man of refined sympathies myself, in the presence of another man of refined sympathies also. I am conscious of a terrible necessity for lacerating those sympathies by referring to domestic events of a very melancholy kind. What is the inevitable consequence? I have done myself the honour of pointing it out to you already. I sit confused."

Was it at this point that I began to suspect he was going to bore me? I rather think it was.

"Is it absolutely necessary to refer to these unpleasant matters?" I inquired. "In our homely English phrase, Count Fosco, won't they keep?"

The Count, with the most alarming solemnity, sighed and shook his head.

"Must I really hear them?"

He shrugged his shoulders (it was the first foreign thing he had done since he had been in the room), and looked
at me in an unpleasantly penetrating manner. My instincts told me that I had better close my eyes. I obeyed my instincts.

"Please break it gently," I pleaded. "Anybody dead?"

"Dead!" cried the Count, with unnecessary foreign fierceness. "Mr. Fairlie, your national composure terrifies me. In the name of Heaven, what have I said or done to make you think me the messenger of death?"

"Pray accept my apologies," I answered. "You have said and done nothing. I make it a rule in these distressing cases always to anticipate the worst. It breaks the blow by meeting it half-way, and so on. Inexpressibly relieved, I am sure, to hear that nobody is dead. Anybody ill?"

I opened my eyes and looked at him. Was he very yellow when he came in, or had he turned very yellow in the last minute or two? I really can't say, and I can't ask Louis, because he was not in the room at the time.

"Anybody ill?" I repeated, observing that my national composure still appeared to affect him.

"That is part of my bad news, Mr. Fairlie. Yes. Somebody is ill."

"Grieved, I am sure. Which of them is it?"

"To my profound sorrow, Miss Halcombe. Perhaps you were in some degree prepared to hear this? Perhaps when you found that Miss Halcombe did not come here by herself, as you proposed, and did not write a second time, your affectionate anxiety may have made you fear that she was ill?"

I have no doubt my affectionate anxiety had led to that melancholy apprehension at some time or other, but at the moment my wretched memory entirely failed to remind me of the circumstance. However, I said yes, in justice to myself. I was much shocked. It was so very uncharacteristic of such a robust person as dear Marian to be ill, that I could only suppose she had met with an accident. A horse, or a false step on the stairs, or something of that sort.

"Is it serious?" I asked.

"Serious--beyond a doubt," he replied. "Dangerous--I hope and trust not. Miss Halcombe unhappily exposed herself to be wetted through by a heavy rain. The cold that followed was of an aggravated kind, and it has now brought with it the worst consequence--fever."

When I heard the word fever, and when I remembered at the same moment that the unscrupulous person who was now addressing me had just come from Blackwater Park, I thought I should have fainted on the spot.

"Good God!" I said. "Is it infectious?"

"Not at present," he answered, with detestable composure. "It may turn to infection--but no such deplorable complication had taken place when I left Blackwater Park. I have felt the deepest interest in the case, Mr. Fairlie--I have endeavoured to assist the regular medical attendant in watching it--accept my personal assurances of the uninfectious nature of the fever when I last saw it."

Accept his assurances! I never was farther from accepting anything in my life. I would not have believed him on his oath. He was too yellow to be believed. He looked like a walking-West-Indian-epidemic. He was big enough to carry typhus by the ton, and to dye the very carpet he walked on with scarlet fever. In certain emergencies my mind is remarkably soon made up. I instantly determined to get rid of him.

"You will kindly excuse an invalid," I said--"but long conferences of any kind invariably upset me. May I beg to know exactly what the object is to which I am indebted for the honour of your visit?"

I fervently hoped that this remarkably broad hint would throw him off his balance--confuse him--reduce him to polite apologies--in short, get him out of the room. On the contrary, it only settled him in his chair. He became additionally solemn, and dignified, and confidential. He held up two of his horrid fingers and gave me another of his unpleasantly penetrating looks. What was I to do? I was not strong enough to quarrel with him. Conceive my situation, if you please. Is language adequate to describe it? I think not.

"The objects of my visit," he went on, quite irrepressibly, "are numbered on my fingers. They are two. First, I come to bear my testimony, with profound sorrow, to the lamentable disagreements between Sir Percival and Lady Glyde. I am Sir Percival's oldest friend--I am related to Lady Glyde by marriage--I am an eye-witness of all that has happened at Blackwater Park. In those three capacities I speak with authority, with confidence, with honourable regret. Sir, I inform you, as the head of Lady Glyde's family, that Miss Halcombe has exaggerated nothing in the letter which she wrote to your address. I affirm that the remedy which that admirable lady has proposed is the only remedy that will spare you the horrors of public scandal. A temporary separation between husband and wife is the one peaceable solution of this difficulty. Part them for the present, and when all causes of irritation are removed, I, who have now the honour of addressing you--I will undertake to bring Sir Percival to reason. Lady Glyde is innocent, Lady Glyde is injured, but--follow my thought here!--she is, on that very account (I say it with shame), the cause of irritation while she remains under her husband's roof. No other house can receive her with propriety but yours. I invite you to open it."

Cool. Here was a matrimonial hailstorm pouring in the South of England, and I was invited, by a man with fever in every fold of his coat, to come out from the North of England and take my share of the pelting. I tried to put the
point forcibly, just as I have put it here. The Count deliberately lowered one of his horrid fingers, kept the other up, and went on--rode over me, as it were, without even the common coach-manlike attention of crying "Hi!" before he knocked me down.

"Follow my thought once more, if you please," he resumed. "My first object you have heard. My second object in coming to this house is to do what Miss Halcombe's illness has prevented her from doing for herself. My large experience is consulted on all difficult matters at Blackwater Park, and my friendly advice was requested on the interesting subject of your letter to Miss Halcombe. I understood at once--for my sympathies are your sympathies--why you wished to see her here before you pledged yourself to inviting Lady Glyde. You are most right, sir, in hesitating to receive the wife until you are quite certain that the husband will not exert his authority to reclaim her. I agree to that. I also agree that such delicate explanations as this difficulty involves are not explanations which can be properly disposed of by writing only. My presence here (to my own great inconvenience) is the proof that I speak sincerely. As for the explanations themselves, I--Fosco--I, who know Sir Percival much better than Miss Halcombe knows him, affirm to you, on my honour and my word, that he will not come near this house, or attempt to communicate with this house, while his wife is living in it. His affairs are embarrassed. Offer him his freedom by means of the absence of Lady Glyde. I promise you he will take his freedom, and go back to the Continent at the earliest moment when he can get away. Is this clear to you as crystal? Yes, it is. Have you questions to address to me? Be it so, I am here to answer. Ask, Mr. Fairlie--oblige me by asking to your heart's content."

He had said so much already in spite of me, and he looked so dreadfully capable of saying a great deal more also in spite of me, that I declined his amiable invitation in pure self-defence.

"Many thanks," I replied. "I am sinking fast. In my state of health I must take things for granted. Allow me to do so on this occasion. We quite understand each other. Yes. Much obliged, I am sure, for your kind interference. If I ever get better, and ever have a second opportunity of improving our acquaintance--"

He got up. I thought he was going. No. More talk, more time for the development of infectious influences--in my room, too--remember that, in my room!

"One moment yet," he said, "one moment before I take my leave. I ask permission at parting to impress on you an urgent necessity. It is this, sir. You must not think of waiting till Miss Halcombe recovers before you receive Lady Glyde. Miss Halcombe has the attendance of the doctor, of the housekeeper at Blackwater Park, and of an experienced nurse as well--three persons for whose capacity and devotion I answer with my life. I tell you that. I tell you, also, that the anxiety and alarm of her sister's illness has already affected the health and spirits of Lady Glyde, and has made her totally unfit to be of use in the sick-room. Her position with her husband grows more and more deplorable and dangerous every day. If you leave her any longer at Blackwater Park, you do nothing whatever to hasten her sister's recovery, and at the same time, you risk the public scandal, which you and I, and all of us, are bound in the sacred interests of the family to avoid. With all my soul, I advise you to remove the serious responsibility of delay from your own shoulders by writing to Lady Glyde to come here at once. Do your affectionate, your honourable, your inevitable duty, and whatever happens in the future, no one can lay the blame on you. I speak from my large experience--I offer my friendly advice. Is it accepted--Yes, or No?"

I looked at him--merely looked at him--with my sense of his amazing assurance, and my dawning resolution to ring for Louis and have him shown out of the room expressed in every line of my face. It is perfectly incredible, but quite true, that my face did not appear to produce the slightest impression on him. Born without nerves--evidently born without nerves.

"You hesitate?" he said. "Mr. Fairlie! I understand that hesitation. You object--see, sir, how my sympathies look straight down into your thoughts!--you object that Lady Glyde is not in health and not in spirits to take the long journey, from Hampshire to this place, by herself. Her own maid is removed from her, as you know, and of other servants fit to travel with her, from one end of England to another, there are none at Blackwater Park. You object, again, that she cannot comfortably stop and rest in London, on her way here, because she cannot comfortably go alone to a public hotel where she is a total stranger. In one breath, I grant both objections--in another breath, I remove them. Follow me, if you please, for the last time. It was my intention, when I returned to England with Sir Percival, to settle myself in the neighbourhood of London. That purpose has just been happily accomplished. I have taken, for six months, a little furnished house in the quarter called St. John's Wood. Be so obliging as to keep this fact in your mind, and observe the programme I now propose. Lady Glyde travels to London (a short journey) I myself meet her at the station--I take her to rest and sleep at my house, which is also the house of her aunt--when she is restored I escort her to the station again--she travels to this place, and her own maid (who is now under your roof) receives her at the carriage-door. Here is comfort consulted--here are the interests of propriety consulted--here is your own duty--duty of hospitality, sympathy, protection, to an unhappy lady in need of all three--smoothed and made easy, from the beginning to the end. I cordially invite you, sir, to second my efforts in the sacred interests of the family. I seriously advise you to write, by my hands, offering the hospitality of your house (and heart), and the
hospitability of my house (and heart), to that injured and unfortunate lady whose cause I plead to-day."

He waved his horrid hand at me--he struck his infectious breast--he addressed me oratorically, as if I was laid up in the House of Commons. It was high time to take a desperate course of some sort. It was also high time to send for Louis, and adopt the precaution of fumigating the room.

In this trying emergency an idea occurred to me--an inestimable idea which, so to speak, killed two intrusive birds with one stone. I determined to get rid of the Count's tiresome eloquence, and of Lady Glyde's tiresome troubles, by complying with this odious foreigner's request, and writing the letter at once. There was not the least danger of the invitation being accepted, for there was not the least chance that Laura would consent to leave Blackwater Park while Marian was lying there ill. How this charmingly convenient obstacle could have escaped the officious penetration of the Count, it was impossible to conceive--but it HAD escaped him. My dread that he might yet discover it, if I allowed him any more time to think, stimulated me to such an amazing degree, that I struggled into a sitting position--seized, really seized, the writing materials by my side, and produced the letter as rapidly as if I had been a common clerk in an office. "Dearest Laura, Please come, whenever you like. Break the journey by sleeping in London at your aunt's house. Grieved to hear of dear Marian's illness. Ever affectionately yours." I handed these lines, at arm's length, to the Count--I sank back in my chair--I said, "Excuse me--I am entirely prostrated--I can do no more. Will you rest and lunch downstairs? Love to all, and sympathy, and so on. Good-morning."

He made another speech--the man was absolutely inexhaustible. I closed my eyes--I endeavoured to hear as little as possible. In spite of my endeavours I was obliged to hear a great deal. My sister's endless husband congratulated himself, and congratulated me, on the result of our interview--he mentioned a great deal more about his sympathies and mine--he deplored my miserable health--he offered to write me a prescription--he impressed me with the necessity of not forgetting what he had said about the importance of light--he accepted my obliging invitation to rest and lunch--he recommended me to expect Lady Glyde in two or three days' time--he begged my permission to look forward to our next meeting, instead of paining himself and paining me, by saying farewell--he added a great deal more, which, I rejoice to think, I did not attend to at the time, and do not remember now. I heard his sympathetic voice travelling away from me by degrees--but, large as he was, I never heard him. He had the negative merit of being absolutely noiseless. I don't know when he opened the door, or when he shut it. I ventured to make use of my eyes again, after an interval of silence--and he was gone.

I rang for Louis, and retired to my bathroom. Tepid water, strengthened with aromatic vinegar, for myself, and copious fumigation for my study, were the obvious precautions to take, and of course I adopted them. I rejoice to say they proved successful. I enjoyed my customary siesta. I awoke moist and cool.

My first inquiries were for the Count. Had we really got rid of him? Yes--he had gone away by the afternoon train. Had he lunched, and if so, upon what? Entirely upon fruit-tart and cream. What a man! What a digestion!

Am I expected to say anything more? I believe not. I believe I have reached the limits assigned to me. The shocking circumstances which happened at a later period did not, I am thankful to say, happen in my presence. I do beg and entreat that nobody will be so very unfeeling as to lay any part of the blame of those circumstances on me. I did everything for the best. I am not answerable for a deplorable calamity, which it was quite impossible to foresee. I am shattered by it--I have suffered under it, as nobody else has suffered. My servant, Louis (who is really attached to me in his unintelligent way), thinks I shall never get over it. He sees me dictating at this moment, with my handkerchief to my eyes. I wish to mention, in justice to myself, that it was not my fault, and that I am quite unaware of not forgetting what he had said about the importance of light--he accepted my obliging invitation to rest and lunch--he recommended me to expect Lady Glyde in two or three days' time--he begged my permission to look forward to our next meeting, instead of paining himself and paining me, by saying farewell--he added a great deal more, which, I rejoice to think, I did not attend to at the time, and do not remember now. I heard his sympathetic voice travelling away from me by degrees--but, large as he was, I never heard him. He had the negative merit of being absolutely noiseless. I don't know when he opened the door, or when he shut it. I ventured to make use of my eyes again, after an interval of silence--and he was gone.

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her hand, quite light-headed, in a state of burning fever.

Lady Glyde (being no longer in Sir Percival's service, I may, without impropriety, mention my former mistress by her name, instead of calling her my lady) was the first to come in from her own bedroom. She was so dreadfully alarmed and distressed that she was quite useless. The Count Fosco, and his lady, who came upstairs immediately afterwards, were both most serviceable and kind. Her ladyship assisted me to get Miss Halcombe to her bed. His lordship the Count remained in the sitting-room, and having sent for my medicine-chest, made a mixture for Miss Halcombe, and a cooling lotion to be applied to her head, so as to lose no time before the doctor came. We applied the lotion, but we could not get her to take the mixture. Sir Percival undertook to send for the doctor. He despatched a groom, on horseback, for the nearest medical man, Mr. Dawson, of Oak Lodge.

Mr. Dawson arrived in less than an hour's time. He was a respectable elderly man, well known all round the country, and we were much alarmed when we found that he considered the case to be a very serious one.

His lordship the Count affably entered into conversation with Mr. Dawson, and gave his opinions with a judicious freedom. Mr. Dawson, not over-courteously, inquired if his lordship's advice was the advice of a doctor, and being informed that it was the advice of one who had studied medicine unprofessionally, replied that he was not accustomed to consult with amateur physicians. The Count, with truly Christian meekness of temper, smiled and left the room. Before he went out he told me that he might be found, in case he was wanted in the course of the day, at the boat-house on the banks of the lake. Why he should have gone there, I cannot say. But he did go, remaining away the whole day till seven o'clock, which was dinner-time. Perhaps he wished to set the example of keeping the house as quiet as possible. It was entirely in his character to do so. He was a most considerate nobleman.

Miss Halcombe passed a very bad night, the fever coming and going, and getting worse towards the morning instead of better. No nurse fit to wait on her being at hand in the neighbourhood, her ladyship the Countess and myself undertook the duty, relieving each other. Lady Glyde, most unwisely, insisted on sitting up with us. She was much too nervous and too delicate in health to bear the anxiety of Miss Halcombe's illness calmly. She only did herself harm, without being of the least real assistance. A more gentle and affectionate lady never lived--but she cried, and she was frightened, two weaknesses which made her entirely unfit to be present in a sick-room.

Sir Percival and the Count came in the morning to make their inquiries.

Sir Percival (from distress, I presume, at his lady's affliction and at Miss Halcombe's illness) appeared much confused and unsettled in his mind. His lordship testified, on the contrary, a becoming composure and interest. He had his straw hat in one hand, and his book in the other, and he mentioned to Sir Percival in my hearing that he would go out again and study at the lake. "Let us keep the house quiet," he said. "Let us not smoke indoors, my friend, now Miss Halcombe is ill. You go your way, and I will go mine. When I study I like to be alone. Good-morning, Mrs. Michelson."

Sir Percival was not civil enough--perhaps I ought in justice to say, not composed enough--to take leave of me with the same polite attention. The only person in the house, indeed, who treated me, at that time or at any other, on the footing of a lady in distressed circumstances, was the Count. He had the manners of a true nobleman--he was considerate towards every one. Even the young person (Fanny by name) who attended on Lady Glyde was not beneath his notice. When she was sent away by Sir Percival, his lordship (showing me his sweet little birds at the time) was most kindly anxious to know what had become of her, where she was to go the day she left Blackwater Park, and so on. It is in such little delicate attentions that the advantages of aristocratic birth always show themselves. I make no apology for introducing these particulars--they are brought forward in justice to his lordship, whose character, I have reason to know, is viewed rather harshly in certain quarters. A nobleman who can respect a lady in distressed circumstances, and can take a fatherly interest in the fortunes of an humble servant girl, shows principles and feelings of too high an order to be lightly called in question. I advance no opinions--I offer facts only. My endeavour through life is to judge not that I be not judged. One of my beloved husband's finest sermons was on this text. I read it constantly--in my own copy of the edition printed by subscription, in the first days of my widowhood--and at every fresh perusal I derive an increase of spiritual benefit and edification.

There was no improvement in Miss Halcombe, and the second night was even worse than the first. Mr. Dawson was constant in his attendance. The practical duties of nursing were still divided between the Countess and myself, Lady Glyde persisting in sitting up with us, though we both entreated her to take some rest. "My place is by Marian's bedside," was her only answer. "Whether I am ill, or well, nothing will induce me to lose sight of her."

Towards midday I went downstairs to attend to some of my regular duties. An hour afterwards, on my way back to the sick-room, I saw the Count (who had gone out again early, for the third time) entering the hall, to all appearance in the highest good spirits. Sir Percival, at the same moment, put his head out of the library door, and addressed his noble friend, with extreme eagerness, in these words--

"Have you found her?"

His lordship's large face became dimpled all over with placid smiles, but he made no reply in words. At the same
time Sir Percival turned his head, observed that I was approaching the stairs, and looked at me in the most rudely angry manner possible.

"Come in here and tell me about it," he said to the Count. "Whenever there are women in a house they're always sure to be going up or down stairs."

"My dear Percival," observed his lordship kindly, "Mrs. Michelson has duties. Pray recognise her admirable performance of them as sincerely as I do! How is the sufferer, Mrs. Michelson?"

"No better, my lord, I regret to say."

"Sad--most sad!" remarked the Count. "You look fatigued, Mrs. Michelson. It is certainly time you and my wife had some help in nursing. I think I may be the means of offering you that help. Circumstances have happened which will oblige Madame Fosco to travel to London either to-morrow or the day after. She will go away in the morning and return at night, and she will bring back with her, to relieve you, a nurse of excellent conduct and capacity, who is now disengaged. The woman is known to my wife as a person to be trusted. Before she comes here say nothing about her, if you please, to the doctor, because he will look with an evil eye on any nurse of my providing. When she appears in this house she will speak for herself, and Mr. Dawson will be obliged to acknowledge that there is no excuse for not employing her. Lady Glyde will say the same. Pray present my best respects and sympathies to Lady Glyde."

I expressed my grateful acknowledgments for his lordship's kind consideration. Sir Percival cut them short by calling to his noble friend (using, I regret to say, a profane expression) to come into the library, and not to keep him waiting there any longer.

I proceeded upstairs. We are poor erring creatures, and however well established a woman's principles may be she cannot always keep on her guard against the temptation to exercise an idle curiosity. I am ashamed to say that an idle curiosity, on this occasion, got the better of my principles, and made me unduly inquisitive about the question which Sir Percival had addressed to his noble friend at the library door. Who was the Count expected to find in the course of his studious morning rambles at Blackwater Park? A woman, it was to be presumed, from the terms of Sir Percival's inquiry. I did not suspect the Count of any impropriety--I knew his moral character too well. The only question I asked myself was--Had he found her?

To resume. The night passed as usual without producing any change for the better in Miss Halcombe. The next day she seemed to improve a little. The day after that her ladyship the Countess, without mentioning the object of her journey to any one in my hearing, proceeded by the morning train to London--her noble husband, with his customary attention, accompanying her to the station.

I was now left in sole charge of Miss Halcombe, with every apparent chance, in consequence of her sister's resolution not to leave the bedside, of having Lady Glyde herself to nurse next.

The only circumstance of any importance that happened in the course of the day was the occurrence of another unpleasant meeting between the doctor and the Count.

His lordship, on returning from the station, stepped up into Miss Halcombe's sitting-room to make his inquiries. I went out from the bedroom to speak to him, Mr. Dawson and Lady Glyde being both with the patient at the time. The Count asked me many questions about the treatment and the symptoms. I informed him that the treatment was of the kind described as "saline," and that the symptoms, between the attacks of fever, were certainly those of increasing weakness and exhaustion. Just as I was mentioning these last particulars, Mr. Dawson came out from the bedroom.

"Good-morning, sir," said his lordship, stepping forward in the most urbane manner, and stopping the doctor, with a high-bred resolution impossible to resist, "I greatly fear you find no improvement in the symptoms to-day?"

"I find decided improvement," answered Mr. Dawson.

"You still persist in your lowering treatment of this case of fever?" continued his lordship.

"I persist in the treatment which is justified by my own professional experience," said Mr. Dawson.

"Permit me to put one question to you on the vast subject of professional experience," observed the Count. "I presume to offer no more advice--I only presume to make an inquiry. You live at some distance, sir, from the gigantic centres of scientific activity--London and Paris. Have you ever heard of the wasting effects of fever being reasonably and intelligibly repaired by fortifying the exhausted patient with brandy, wine, ammonia, and quinine? Has that new heresy of the highest medical authorities ever reached your ears--Yes or No?"

"When a professional man puts that question to me I shall be glad to answer him," said the doctor, opening the door to go out. "You are not a professional man, and I beg to decline answering you."

Buffeted in this inexcusably uncivil way on one cheek, the Count, like a practical Christian, immediately turned the other, and said, in the sweetest manner, "Good-morning, Mr. Dawson."

If my late beloved husband had been so fortunate as to know his lordship, how highly he and the Count would have esteemed each other!
Her ladyship the Countess returned by the last train that night, and brought with her the nurse from London. I was instructed that this person's name was Mrs. Rubelle. Her personal appearance, and her imperfect English when she spoke, informed me that she was a foreigner.

I have always cultivated a feeling of humane indulgence for foreigners. They do not possess our blessings and advantages, and they are, for the most part, brought up in the blind errors of Popery. It has also always been my precept and practice, as it was my dear husband's precept and practice before me (see Sermon XXIX. in the Collection by the late Rev. Samuel Michelson, M.A.), to do as I would be done by. On both these accounts I will not say that Mrs. Rubelle struck me as being a small, wiry, sly person, of fifty or thereabouts, with a dark brown or Creole complexion and watchful light grey eyes. Nor will I mention, for the reasons just alleged, that I thought her dress, though it was of the plainest black silk, inappropriately costly in texture and unnecessarily refined in trimming and finish, for a person in her position in life. I should not like these things to be said of me, and therefore it is my duty not to say them of Mrs. Rubelle. I will merely mention that her manners were, not perhaps unpleasantly reserved, but only remarkably quiet and retiring-- that she looked about her a great deal, and said very little, which might have arisen quite as much from her own modesty as from distrust of her position at Blackwater Park; and that she declined to partake of supper (which was curious perhaps, but surely not suspicious?), although I myself politely invited her to that meal in my own room.

At the Count's particular suggestion (so like his lordship's forgiving kindness!), it was arranged that Mrs. Rubelle should not enter on her duties until she had been seen and approved by the doctor the next morning. I sat up that night. Lady Glyde appeared to be very unwilling that the new nurse should be employed to attend on Miss Halcombe. Such want of liberality towards a foreigner on the part of a lady of her education and refinement surprised me. I ventured to say, "My lady, we must all remember not to be hasty in our judgments on our inferiors--especially when they come from foreign parts." Lady Glyde did not appear to attend to me. She only sighed, and kissed Miss Halcombe's hand as it lay on the counterpane. Scarcely a judicious proceeding in a sick-room, with a patient whom it was highly desirable not to excite. But poor Lady Glyde knew nothing of nursing--nothing whatever, I am sorry to say.

The next morning Mrs. Rubelle was sent to the sitting-room, to be approved by the doctor on his way through to the bedroom.

I left Lady Glyde with Miss Halcombe, who was slumbering at the time, and joined Mrs. Rubelle, with the object of kindly preventing her from feeling strange and nervous in consequence of the uncertainty of her situation. She did not appear to see it in that light. She seemed to be quite satisfied, beforehand, that Mr. Dawson would approve of her, and she sat calmly looking out of window, with every appearance of enjoying the country air. Some people might have thought such conduct suggestive of brazen assurance. I beg to say that I more liberally set it down to extraordinary strength of mind.

Instead of the doctor coming up to us, I was sent for to see the doctor. I thought this change of affairs rather odd, but Mrs. Rubelle did not appear to be affected by it in any way. I left her still calmly looking out of the window, and still silently enjoying the country air.

Mr. Dawson was waiting for me by himself in the breakfast-room.
"About this new nurse, Mrs. Michelson," said the doctor.
"Yes, sir?"
"I find that she has been brought here from London by the wife of that fat old foreigner, who is always trying to interfere with me. Mrs. Michelson, the fat old foreigner is a quack."

This was very rude. I was naturally shocked at it.
"Are you aware, sir," I said, "that you are talking of a nobleman?"
"Pooh! He isn't the first quack with a handle to his name. They're all Counts--hang 'em!"
"He would not be a friend of Sir Percival Glyde's, sir, if he was not a member of the highest aristocracy--excepting the English aristocracy, of course."
"Very well, Mrs. Michelson, call him what you like, and let us get back to the nurse. I have been objecting to her already."
"Without having seen her, sir?"
"Yes, without having seen her. She may be the best nurse in existence, but she is not a nurse of my providing. I have put that objection to Sir Percival, as the master of the house. He doesn't support me. He says a nurse of my providing would have been a stranger from London also, and he thinks the woman ought to have a trial, after his wife's aunt has taken the trouble to fetch her from London. There is some justice in that, and I can't decently say No. But I have made it a condition that she is to go at once, if I find reason to complain of her. This proposal being one which I have some right to make, as medical attendant, Sir Percival has consented to it. Now, Mrs. Michelson, I know I can depend on you, and I want you to keep a sharp eye on the nurse for the first day or two, and to see that
she gives Miss Halcombe no medicines but mine. This foreign nobleman of yours is dying to try his quack remedies (mesmerism included) on my patient, and a nurse who is brought here by his wife may be a little too willing to help him. You understand? Very well, then, we may go upstairs. Is the nurse there? I'll say a word to her before she goes into the sick-room."

We found Mrs. Rubelle still enjoying herself at the window. When I introduced her to Mr. Dawson, neither the doctor's doubtful looks nor the doctor's searching questions appeared to confuse her in the least. She answered him quietly in her broken English, and though he tried hard to puzzle her, she never betrayed the least ignorance, so far, about any part of her duties. This was doubtless the result of strength of mind, as I said before, and not of brazen assurance, by any means.

We all went into the bedroom.

Mrs. Rubelle looked very attentively at the patient, curtseyed to Lady Glyde, set one or two little things right in the room, and sat down quietly in a corner to wait until she was wanted. Her ladyship seemed startled and annoyed by the appearance of the strange nurse. No one said anything, for fear of rousing Miss Halcombe, who was still slumbering, except the doctor, who whispered a question about the night. I softly answered, "Much as usual," and then Mr. Dawson went out. Lady Glyde followed him, I suppose to speak about Mrs. Rubelle. For my own part, I had made up my mind already that this quiet foreign person would keep her situation. She had all her wits about her, and she certainly understood her business. So far, I could hardly have done much better by the bedside myself.

Remembering Mr. Dawson's caution to me, I subjected Mrs. Rubelle to a severe scrutiny at certain intervals for the next three or four days. I over and over again entered the room softly and suddenly, but I never found her out in any suspicious action. Lady Glyde, who watched her as attentively as I did, discovered nothing either. I never detected a sign of the medicine bottles being tampered with, I never saw Mrs. Rubelle say a word to the Count, or the Count to her. She managed Miss Halcombe with unquestionable care and discretion. The poor lady wavered backwards and forwards between a sort of sleepy exhaustion, which was half faintness and half slumbering, and attacks of fever which brought with them more or less of wandering in her mind. Mrs. Rubelle never disturbed her in the first case, and never startled her in the second, by appearing too suddenly at the bedside in the character of a stranger. Honour to whom honour is due (whether foreign or English)--and I give her privilege impartially to Mrs. Rubelle. She was remarkably uncommunicative about herself, and she was too quietly independent of all advice from experienced persons who understood the duties of a sick-room--but with these drawbacks, she was a good nurse, and she never gave either Lady Glyde or Mr. Dawson the shadow of a reason for complaining of her.

The next circumstance of importance that occurred in the house was the temporary absence of the Count, occasioned by business which took him to London. He went away (I think) on the morning of the fourth day after the arrival of Mrs. Rubelle, and at parting he spoke to Lady Glyde very seriously, in my presence, on the subject of Miss Halcombe.

"Trust Mr. Dawson," he said, "for a few days more, if you please. But if there is not some change for the better in that time, send for advice from London, which this mule of a doctor must accept in spite of himself. Offend Mr. Dawson, and save Miss Halcombe. I say this seriously, on my word of honour and from the bottom of my heart."

His lordship spoke with extreme feeling and kindness. But poor Lady Glyde's nerves were so completely broken down that she seemed quite frightened at him. She trembled from head to foot, and allowed him to take his leave without uttering a word on her side. She turned to me when he had gone, and said, "Oh, Mrs. Michelson, I am heartbroken about my sister, and I have no friend to advise me! Do you think Mr. Dawson is wrong? He told me himself this morning that there was no fear, and no need to send for another doctor."

"With all respect to Mr. Dawson," I answered, "in your ladyship's place I should remember the Count's advice."

Lady Glyde turned away from me suddenly, with an appearance of despair, for which I was quite unable to account.

"HIS advice!" she said to herself. "God help us--HIS advice!"

The Count was away from Blackwater Park, as nearly as I remember, a week.

Sir Percival seemed to feel the loss of his lordship in various ways, and appeared also, I thought, much depressed and altered by the sickness and sorrow in the house. Occasionally he was so very restless that I could not help noticing it, coming and going, and wandering here and there and everywhere in the grounds. His inquiries about Miss Halcombe, and about his lady (whose failing health seemed to cause him sincere anxiety), were most attentive. I think his heart was much softened. If some kind clerical friend--some such friend as he might have found in my late excellent husband--had been near him at this time, cheering moral progress might have been made with Sir Percival. I seldom find myself mistaken on a point of this sort, having had experience to guide me in my happy married days.

Her ladyship the Countess, who was now the only company for Sir Percival downstairs, rather neglected him, as I considered--or, perhaps, it might have been that he neglected her. A stranger might almost have supposed that they
were bent, now they were left together alone, on actually avoiding one another. This, of course, could not be. But it did so happen, nevertheless, that the Countess made her dinner at luncheon-time, and that she always came upstairs towards evening, although Mrs. Rubelle had taken the nursing duties entirely off her hands. Sir Percival dined by himself, and William (the man out of livery) make the remark, in my hearing, that his master had put himself on half rations of food and on a double allowance of drink. I attach no importance to such an insolent observation as this on the part of a servant. I reprobed it at the time, and I wish to be understood as reprobing it once more on this occasion.

In the course of the next few days Miss Halcombe did certainly seem to all of us to be mending a little. Our faith in Mr. Dawson revived. He appeared to be very confident about the case, and he assured Lady Glyde, when she spoke to him on the subject, that he would himself propose to send for a physician the moment he felt so much as the shadow of a doubt crossing his own mind.

The only person among us who did not appear to be relieved by these words was the Countess. She said to me privately, that she could not feel easy about Miss Halcombe on Mr. Dawson's authority, and that she should wait anxiously for her husband's opinion on his return. That return, his letters informed her, would take place in three days' time. The Count and Countess corresponded regularly every morning during his lordship's absence. They were in that respect, as in all others, a pattern to married people.

On the evening of the third day I noticed a change in Miss Halcombe, which caused me serious apprehension. Mrs. Rubelle noticed it too. We said nothing on the subject to Lady Glyde, who was then lying asleep, completely overpowered by exhaustion, on the sofa in the sitting-room.

Mr. Dawson did not pay his evening visit till later than usual. As soon as he set eyes on his patient I saw his face alter. He tried to hide it, but he looked both confused and alarmed. A messenger was sent to his residence for his medicine-chest, disinfecting preparations were used in the room, and a bed was made up for him in the house by his own directions. "Has the fever turned to infection?" I whispered to him. "I am afraid it has," he answered; "we shall know better to-morrow morning."

By Mr. Dawson's own directions Lady Glyde was kept in ignorance of this change for the worse. He himself absolutely forbade her, on account of her health, to join us in the bedroom that night. She tried to resist--there was a sad scene--but he had his medical authority to support him, and he carried his point.

The next morning one of the men-servants was sent to London at eleven o'clock, with a letter to a physician in town, and with orders to bring the new doctor back with him by the earliest possible train. Half an hour after the messenger had gone the Count returned to Blackwater Park.

The Countess, on her own responsibility, immediately brought him in to see the patient. There was no impropriety that I could discover in her taking this course. His lordship was a married man, he was old enough to be Miss Halcombe's father, and he saw her in the presence of a female relative, Lady Glyde's aunt. Mr. Dawson nevertheless protested against his presence in the room, but I could plainly remark the doctor was too much alarmed to make any serious resistance on this occasion.

The poor suffering lady was past knowing any one about her. She seemed to take her friends for enemies. When the Count approached her bedside her eyes, which had been wandering incessantly round and round the room before, settled on his face with a dreadful stare of terror, which I shall remember to my dying day. The Count sat down by her, felt her pulse and her temples, looked at her very attentively, and then turned round upon the doctor with such an expression of indignation and contempt in his face, that the words failed on Mr. Dawson's lips, and he stood for a moment, pale with anger and alarm--pale and perfectly speechless.

His lordship looked next at me.
"When did the change happen?" he asked.
I told him the time.
"Has Lady Glyde been in the room since?"
I replied that she had not. The doctor had absolutely forbidden her to come into the room on the evening before, and had repeated the order again in the morning.
"Have you and Mrs. Rubelle been made aware of the full extent of the mischief?" was his next question.
We were aware, I answered, that the malady was considered infectious. He stopped me before I could add anything more.
"It is typhus fever," he said.
In the minute that passed, while these questions and answers were going on, Mr. Dawson recovered himself, and addressed the Count with his customary firmness.
"It is NOT typhus fever," he remarked sharply. "I protest against this intrusion, sir. No one has a right to put questions here but me. I have done my duty to the best of my ability--"

The Count interrupted him--not by words, but only by pointing to the bed. Mr. Dawson seemed to feel that silent
contradiction to his assertion of his own ability, and to grow only the more angry under it.

"I say I have done my duty," he reiterated. "A physician has been sent for from London. I will consult on the nature of the fever with him, and with no one else. I insist on your leaving the room."

"I entered this room, sir, in the sacred interests of humanity," said the Count. "And in the same interests, if the coming of the physician is delayed, I will enter it again. I warn you once more that the fever has turned to typhus, and that your treatment is responsible for this lamentable change. If that unhappy lady dies, I will give my testimony in a court of justice that your ignorance and obstinacy have been the cause of her death."

Before Mr. Dawson could answer, before the Count could leave us, the door was opened from the sitting-room, and we saw Lady Glyde on the threshold.

"I MUST and WILL come in," she said, with extraordinary firmness.

Instead of stopping her, the Count moved into the sitting-room, and made way for her to go in. On all other occasions he was the last man in the world to forget anything, but in the surprise of the moment he apparently forgot the danger of infection from typhus, and the urgent necessity of forcing Lady Glyde to take proper care of herself.

To my astonishment Mr. Dawson showed more presence of mind. He stopped her ladyship at the first step she took towards the bedside. "I am sincerely sorry, I am sincerely grieved," he said. "The fever may, I fear, be infectious. Until I am certain that it is not, I entreat you to keep out of the room."

She struggled for a moment, then suddenly dropped her arms and sank forward. She had fainted. The Countess and I took her from the doctor and carried her into her own room. The Count preceded us, and waited in the passage till I came out and told him that we had recovered her from the swoon.

I went back to the doctor to tell him, by Lady Glyde's desire, that she insisted on speaking to him immediately. He withdrew at once to quiet her ladyship's agitation, and to assure her of the physician's arrival in the course of a few hours. Those hours passed very slowly. Sir Percival and the Count were together downstairs, and sent up from time to time to make their inquiries. At last, between five and six o'clock, to our great relief, the physician came.

He was a younger man than Mr. Dawson, very serious and very decided. What he thought of the previous treatment I cannot say, but it struck me as curious that he put many more questions to myself and to Mrs. Rubelle than he put to the doctor, and that he did not appear to listen with much interest to what Mr. Dawson said, while he was examining Mr. Dawson's patient. I began to suspect, from what I observed in this way, that the Count had been right about the illness all the way through, and I was naturally confirmed in that idea when Mr. Dawson, after some little delay, asked the one important question which the London doctor had been sent for to set at rest.

"What is your opinion of the fever?" he inquired.

"Typhus," replied the physician. "Typhus fever beyond all doubt."

That quiet foreign person, Mrs. Rubelle, crossed her thin brown hands in front of her, and looked at me with a very significant smile. The Count himself could hardly have appeared more gratified if he had been present in the room and had heard the confirmation of his own opinion.

After giving us some useful directions about the management of the patient, and mentioning that he would come again in five days' time, the physician withdrew to consult in private with Mr. Dawson. He would offer no opinion on Miss Halcombe's chances of recovery—he said it was impossible at that stage of the illness to pronounce one way or the other.

The five days passed anxiously.

Countess Fosco and myself took it by turns to relieve Mrs. Rubelle, Miss Halcombe's condition growing worse and worse, and requiring our utmost care and attention. It was a terribly trying time. Lady Glyde (supported, as Mr. Dawson said, by the constant strain of her suspense on her sister's account) rallied in the most extraordinary manner, and showed a firmness and determination for which I should myself never have given her credit. She insisted on coming into the sick-room two or three times every day, to look at Miss Halcombe with her own eyes, promising not to go too close to the bed, if the doctor would consent to her wishes so far. Mr. Dawson very unwillingly made the concession required of him—I think he saw that it was hopeless to dispute with her. She came in every day, and she self-denyingly kept her promise. I felt it personally so distressing (as reminding me of my own affliction during my husband's last illness) to see how she suffered under these circumstances, that I must beg not to dwell on this part of the subject any longer. It is more agreeable to me to mention that no fresh disputes took place between Mr. Dawson and the Count. His lordship made all his inquiries by deputy, and remained continually in company with Sir Percival downstairs.

On the fifth day the physician came again and gave us a little hope. He said the tenth day from the first appearance of the typhus would probably decide the result of the illness, and he arranged for his third visit to take place on that date. The interval passed as before—except that the Count went to London again one morning and returned at night.

On the tenth day it pleased a merciful Providence to relieve our household from all further anxiety and alarm.
The physician positively assured us that Miss Halcombe was out of danger. “She wants no doctor now--all she requires is careful watching and nursing for some time to come, and that I see she has.” Those were his own words. That evening I read my husband's touching sermon on Recovery from Sickness, with more happiness and advantage (in a spiritual point of view) than I ever remember to have derived from it before.

The effect of the good news on poor Lady Glyde was, I grieve to say, quite overpowering. She was too weak to bear the violent reaction, and in another day or two she sank into a state of debility and depression which obliged her to keep her room. Rest and quiet, and change of air afterwards, were the best remedies which Mr. Dawson could suggest for her benefit. It was fortunate that matters were no worse, for, on the very day after she took to her room, the Count and the doctor had another disagreement--and this time the dispute between them was of so serious a nature that Mr. Dawson left the house.

I was not present at the time, but I understood that the subject of dispute was the amount of nourishment which it was necessary to give to assist Miss Halcombe's convalescence after the exhaustion of the fever. Mr. Dawson, now that his patient was safe, was less inclined than ever to submit to unprofessional interference, and the Count (I cannot imagine why) lost all the self-control which he had so judiciously preserved on former occasions, and taunted the doctor, over and over again, with his mistake about the fever when it changed to typhus. The unfortunate affair ended in Mr. Dawson's appealing to Sir Percival, and threatening (now that he could leave without absolute danger to Miss Halcombe) to withdraw from his attendance at Blackwater Park if the Count's interference was not peremptorily suppressed from that moment. Sir Percival's reply (though not designedly uncivil) had only resulted in making matters worse, and Mr. Dawson had thereupon withdrawn from the house in a state of extreme indignation at Count Fosco's usage of him, and had sent in his bill the next morning.

We were now, therefore, left without the attendance of a medical man. Although there was no actual necessity for another doctor--nursing and watching being, as the physician had observed, all that Miss Halcombe required--I should still, if my authority had been consulted, have obtained professional assistance from some other quarter, for form's sake.

The matter did not seem to strike Sir Percival in that light. He said it would be time enough to send for another doctor if Miss Halcombe showed any signs of a relapse. In the meanwhile we had the Count to consult in any minor difficulty, and we need not unnecessarily disturb our patient in her present weak and nervous condition by the presence of a stranger at her bedside. There was much that was reasonable, no doubt, in these considerations, but they left me a little anxious nevertheless. Nor was I quite satisfied in my own mind of the propriety of our concealing the doctor's absence as we did from Lady Glyde. It was a merciful deception, I admit--for she was in no state to bear any fresh anxieties. But still it was a deception, and, as such, to a person of my principles, at best a doubtful proceeding.

A second perplexing circumstance which happened on the same day, and which took me completely by surprise, added greatly to the sense of uneasiness that was now weighing on my mind.

I was sent for to see Sir Percival in the library. The Count, who was with him when I went in, immediately rose and left us alone together. Sir Percival civilly asked me to take a seat, and then, to my great astonishment, addressed me in these terms--

"I want to speak to you, Mrs. Michelson, about a matter which I decided on some time ago, and which I should have mentioned before, but for the sickness and trouble in the house. In plain words, I have reasons for wishing to break up my establishment immediately at this place--leaving you in charge, of course, as usual. As soon as Lady Glyde and Miss Halcombe can travel they must both have change of air. My friends, Count Fosco and the Countess, will leave us before that time to live in the neighbourhood of London, and I have reasons for not opening the house to any more company, with a view to economising as carefully as I can. I don't blame you, but my expenses here are a great deal too heavy. In short, I shall sell the horses, and get rid of all the servants at once. I never do things by halves, as you know, and I mean to have the house clear of a pack of useless people by this time to-morrow."

I listened to him, perfectly aghast with astonishment.

"Do you mean, Sir Percival, that I am to dismiss the indoor servants under my charge without the usual month's warning?" I asked.

"Certainly I do. We may all be out of the house before another month, and I am not going to leave the servants here in idleness, with no master to wait on."

"Who is to do the cooking, Sir Percival, while you are still staying here?"

"Margaret Porcher can roast and boil--keep her. What do I want with a cook if I don't mean to give any dinner-parties?"

"The servant you have mentioned is the most unintelligent servant in the house, Sir Percival."

"Keep her, I tell you, and have a woman in from the village to do the cleaning and go away again. My weekly expenses must and shall be lowered immediately. I don't send for you to make objections, Mrs. Michelson--I send
for you to carry out my plans of economy. Dismiss the whole lazy pack of indoor servants to-morrow, except Porcher. She is as strong as a horse—and we'll make her work like a horse."

"You will excuse me for reminding you, Sir Percival, that if the servants go to-morrow they must have a month's wages in lieu of a month's warning."

"Let them! A month's wages saves a month's waste and gluttony in the servants' hall."

This last remark conveyed an aspersion of the most offensive kind on my management. I had too much self-respect to defend myself under so gross an imputation. Christian consideration for the helpless position of Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde, and for the serious inconvenience which my sudden absence might inflict on them, alone prevented me from resigning my situation on the spot. I rose immediately. It would have lowered me in my own estimation to have permitted the interview to continue a moment longer.

"After that last remark, Sir Percival, I have nothing more to say. Your directions shall be attended to."

Pronouncing those words, I bowed my head with the most distant respect, and went out of the room.

The next day the servants left in a body. Sir Percival himself dismissed the grooms and stablemen, sending them, with all the horses but one, to London. Of the whole domestic establishment, indoors and out, there now remained only myself, Margaret Porcher, and the gardener—this last living in his own cottage, and being wanted to take care of the one horse that remained in the stables.

With the house left in this strange and lonely condition—with the mistress of it ill in her room—with Miss Halcombe still as helpless as a child—and with the doctor's attendance withdrawn from us in enmity—it was surely not unnatural that my spirits should sink, and my customary composure be very hard to maintain. My mind was ill at ease. I wished the poor ladies both well again, and I wished myself away from Blackwater Park.

II

The next event that occurred was of so singular a nature that it might have caused me a feeling of superstitious surprise, if my mind had not been fortified by principle against any pagan weakness of that sort. The uneasy sense of something wrong in the family which had made me wish myself away from Blackwater Park, was actually followed, strange to say, by my departure from the house. It is true that my absence was for a temporary period only, but the coincidence was, in my opinion, not the less remarkable on that account.

My departure took place under the following circumstances—

A day or two after the servants all left I was again sent for to see Sir Percival. The undeserved slur which he had cast on my management of the household did not, I am happy to say, prevent me from returning good for evil to the best of my ability, by complying with his request as readily and respectfully as ever. It cost me a struggle with that fallen nature, which we all share in common, before I could suppress my feelings. Being accustomed to self-discipline, I accomplished the sacrifice.

I found Sir Percival and Count Fosco sitting together again. On this occasion his lordship remained present at the interview, and assisted in the development of Sir Percival's views.

The subject to which they now requested my attention related to the healthy change of air by which we all hoped that Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde might soon be enabled to profit. Sir Percival mentioned that both the ladies would probably pass the autumn (by invitation of Frederick Fairlie, Esquire) at Limmeridge House, Cumberland. But before they went there, it was his opinion, confirmed by Count Fosco (who here took up the conversation and continued it to the end), that they would benefit by a short residence first in the genial climate of Torquay. The great object, therefore, was to engage lodgings at that place, affording all the comforts and advantages of which they stood in need, and the great difficulty was to find an experienced person capable of choosing the sort of residence which they wanted. In this emergency the Count begged to inquire, on Sir Percival's behalf, whether I would object to give the ladies the benefit of my assistance, by proceeding myself to Torquay in their interests.

It was impossible for a person in my situation to meet any proposal, made in these terms, with a positive objection.

I could only venture to represent the serious inconvenience of my leaving Blackwater Park in the extraordinary absence of all the indoor servants, with the one exception of Margaret Porcher. But Sir Percival and his lordship declared that they were both willing to put up with inconvenience for the sake of the invalids. I next respectfully suggested writing to an agent at Torquay, but I was met here by being reminded of the imprudence of taking lodgings without first seeing them. I was also informed that the Countess (who would otherwise have gone to Devonshire herself) could not, in Lady Glyde's present condition, leave her niece, and that Sir Percival and the Count had business to transact together which would oblige them to remain at Blackwater Park. In short, it was clearly shown me that if I did not undertake the errand, no one else could be trusted with it. Under these circumstances, I could only inform Sir Percival that my services were at the disposal of Miss Halcombe and Lady Glyde.

It was thereupon arranged that I should leave the next morning, that I should occupy one or two days in
examining all the most convenient houses in Torquay, and that I should return with my report as soon as I
conveniently could. A memorandum was written for me by his lordship, stating the requisites which the place I was
sent to take must be found to possess, and a note of the pecuniary limit assigned to me was added by Sir Percival.
My own idea on reading over these instructions was, that no such residence as I saw described could be found at
any watering-place in England, and that, even if it could by chance be discovered, it would certainly not be parted
with for any period on such terms as I was permitted to offer. I hinted at these difficulties to both the gentlemen, but
Sir Percival (who undertook to answer me) did not appear to feel them. It was not for me to dispute the question. I
said no more, but I felt a very strong conviction that the business on which I was sent away was so beset by
difficulties that my errand was almost hopeless at starting.
Before I left I took care to satisfy myself that Miss Halcombe was going on favourably.
There was a painful expression of anxiety in her face which made me fear that her mind, on first recovering
itself, was not at ease. But she was certainly strengthening more rapidly than I could have ventured to anticipate, and
she was able to send kind messages to Lady Glyde, saying that she was fast getting well, and entreating her ladyship
not to exert herself again too soon. I left her in charge of Mrs. Rubelle, who was still as quietly independent of every
one else in the house as ever. When I knocked at Lady Glyde's door before going away, I was told that she was still
sadly weak and depressed, my informant being the Countess, who was then keeping her company in her room. Sir
Percival and the Count were walking on the road to the lodge as I was driven by in the chaise. I bowed to them and
quitted the house, with not a living soul left in the servants' offices but Margaret Porcher.
Every one must feel what I have felt myself since that time, that these circumstances were more than unusual--
they were! almost suspicious. Let me, however, say again that it was impossible for me, in my dependent position,
to act otherwise than I did.
The result of my errand at Torquay was exactly what I had foreseen. No such lodgings as I was instructed to take
could be found in the whole place, and the terms I was permitted to give were much too low for the purpose, even if
I had been able to discover what I wanted. I accordingly returned to Blackwater Park, and informed Sir Percival,
who met me at the door, that my journey had been taken in vain. He seemed too much occupied with some other
subject to care about the failure of my errand, and his first words informed me that even in the short time of my
absence another remarkable change had taken place in the house.
The Count and Countess Fosco had left Blackwater Park for their new residence in St. John's Wood.
I was not made aware of the motive for this sudden departure--I was only told that the Count had been very
particular in leaving his kind compliments to me. When I ventured on asking Sir Percival whether Lady Glyde had
any one to attend to her comforts in the absence of the Countess, he replied that she had Margaret Porcher to wait on
her, and he added that a woman from the village had been sent for to do the work downstairs.
The answer really shocked me--there was such a glaring impropriety in permitting an under-housemaid to fill the
place of confidential attendant on Lady Glyde. I went upstairs at once, and met Margaret on the bedroom landing.
Her services had not been required (naturally enough), her mistress having sufficiently recovered that morning to be
able to leave her bed. I asked next after Miss Halcombe, but I was answered in a slouching, sulky way, which left
me no wiser than I was before.
I did not choose to repeat the question, and perhaps provoke an impertinent reply. It was in every respect more
becoming to a person in my position to present myself immediately in Lady Glyde's room.
I found that her ladyship had certainly gained in health during the last few days. Although still sadly weak and
nervous, she was able to get up without assistance, and to walk slowly about her room, feeling no worse effect from
the exertion than a slight sensation of fatigue. She had been made a little anxious that morning about Miss
Halcombe, through having received no news of her from any one. I thought this seemed to imply a blamable want of
attention on the part of Mrs. Rubelle, but I said nothing, and remained with Lady Glyde to assist her to dress. When
she was ready we both left the room together to go to Miss Halcombe.
We were stopped in the passage by the appearance of Sir Percival. He looked as if he had been purposely
waiting there to see us.
"Where are you going?" he said to Lady Glyde.
"To Marian's room," she answered.
"It may spare you a disappointment," remarked Sir Percival, "if I tell you at once that you will not find her
there."
"Not find her there!"
"No. She left the house yesterday morning with Fosco and his wife."
Lady Glyde was not strong enough to bear the surprise of this extraordinary statement. She turned fearfully pale,
and leaned back against the wall, looking at her husband in dead silence.
I was so astonished myself that I hardly knew what to say. I asked Sir Percival if he really meant that Miss
Halcombe had left Blackwater Park.

"I certainly mean it," he answered.

"In her state, Sir Percival! Without mentioning her intentions to Lady Glyde!"

Before he could reply her ladyship recovered herself a little and spoke.

"Impossible!" she cried out in a loud, frightened manner, taking a step or two forward from the wall. "Where was the doctor? where was Mr. Dawson when Marian went away?"

"Mr. Dawson wasn't wanted, and wasn't here," said Sir Percival. "He left of his own accord, which is enough of itself to show that she was strong enough to travel. How you stare! If you don't believe she has gone, look for yourself. Open her room door, and all the other room doors if you like."

She took him at his word, and I followed her. There was no one in Miss Halcombe's room but Margaret Porcher, who was busy setting it to rights. There was no one in the spare rooms or the dressing-rooms when we looked into them afterwards. Sir Percival still waited for us in the passage. As we were leaving the last room that we had examined Lady Glyde whispered, "Don't go, Mrs. Michelson! don't leave me, for God's sake!" Before I could say anything in return she was out again in the passage, speaking to her husband.

"What does it mean, Sir Percival? I insist--I beg and pray you will tell me what it means."

"It means," he answered, "that Miss Halcombe was strong enough yesterday morning to sit up and be dressed, and that she insisted on taking advantage of Fosco's going to London to go there too."

"To London!"

"Yes--on her way to Limmeridge."

Lady Glyde turned and appealed to me.

"You saw Miss Halcombe last," she said. "Tell me plainly, Mrs. Michelson, did you think she looked fit to travel?"

"Not in MY opinion, your ladyship."

Sir Percival, on his side, instantly turned and appealed to me also.

"Before you went away," he said, "did you, or did you not, tell the nurse that Miss Halcombe looked much stronger and better?"

"I certainly made the remark, Sir Percival."

He addressed her ladyship again the moment I offered that reply.

"Set one of Mrs. Michelson's opinions fairly against the other," he said, "and try to be reasonable about a perfectly plain matter. If she had not been well enough to be moved do you think we should any of us have risked letting her go? She has got three competent people to look after her--Fosco and your aunt, and Mrs. Rubelle, who went away with them expressly for that purpose. They took a whole carriage yesterday, and made a bed for her on the seat in case she felt tired. To-day, Fosco and Mrs. Rubelle go on with her themselves to Cumberland."

"Why does Marian go to Limmeridge and leave me here by myself?" said her ladyship, interrupting Sir Percival.

"Because your uncle won't receive you till he has seen your sister first," he replied. "Have you forgotten the letter he wrote to her at the beginning of her illness? It was shown to you, you read it yourself, and you ought to remember it."

"I do remember it."

"If you do, why should you be surprised at her leaving you? You want to be back at Limmeridge, and she has gone there to get your uncle's leave for you on his own terms."

Poor Lady Glyde's eyes filled with tears.

"Marian never left me before," she said, "without bidding me good- bye."

"She would have bid you good-bye this time," returned Sir Percival, "if she had not been afraid of herself and of you. She knew you would try to stop her, she knew you would distress her by crying. Do you want to make any more objections? If you do, you must come downstairs and ask questions in the dining-room. These worries upset me. I want a glass of wine."

He left us suddenly.

His manner all through this strange conversation had been very unlike what it usually was. He seemed to be almost as nervous and fluttered, every now and then, as his lady herself. I should never have supposed that his health had been so delicate, or his composure so easy to upset.

I tried to prevail on Lady Glyde to go back to her room, but it was useless. She stopped in the passage, with the look of a woman whose mind was panic-stricken.

"Something has happened to my sister!" she said.

"Remember, my lady, what surprising energy there is in Miss Halcombe," I suggested. "She might well make an effort which other ladies in her situation would be unfit for. I hope and believe there is nothing wrong--I do indeed."

"I must follow Marian," said her ladyship, with the same panic-stricken look. "I must go where she has gone, I
must see that she is alive and well with my own eyes. Come! come down with me to Sir Percival."

I hesitated, fearing that my presence might be considered an intrusion. I attempted to represent this to her ladyship, but she was deaf to me. She held my arm fast enough to force me to go downstairs with her, and she still clung to me with all the little strength she had at the moment when I opened the dining-room door.

Sir Percival was sitting at the table with a decanter of wine before him. He raised the glass to his lips as we went in and drained it at a draught. Seeing that he looked at me angrily when he put it down again, I attempted to make some apology for my accidental presence in the room.

"Do you suppose there are any secrets going on here?" he broke out suddenly; "there are none--there is nothing underhand, nothing kept from you or from any one." After speaking those strange words loudly and sternly, he filled himself another glass of wine and asked Lady Glyde what she wanted of him.

"If my sister is fit to travel I am fit to travel" said her ladyship, with more firmness than she had yet shown. "I come to beg you will make allowances for my anxiety about Marian, and let me follow her at once by the afternoon train."

"You must wait till to-morrow," replied Sir Percival, "and then if you don't hear to the contrary you can go. I don't suppose you are at all likely to hear to the contrary, so I shall write to Fosco by to-night's post."

He said those last words holding his glass up to the light, and looking at the wine in it instead of at Lady Glyde. Indeed he never once looked at her throughout the conversation. Such a singular want of good breeding in a gentleman of his rank impressed me, I own, very painfully.

"Why should you write to Count Fosco?" she asked, in extreme surprise.

"To tell him to expect you by the midday train," said Sir Percival. "He will meet you at the station when you get to London, and take you on to sleep at your aunt's in St. John's Wood."

Lady Glyde's hand began to tremble violently round my arm--why I could not imagine.

"There is no necessity for Count Fosco to meet me," she said. "I would rather not stay in London to sleep."

"You must. You can't take the whole journey to Cumberland in one day. You must rest a night in London--and I don't choose you to go by yourself to an hotel. Fosco made the offer to your uncle to give you house-room on the way down, and your uncle has accepted it. Here! here is a letter from him addressed to yourself. I ought to have sent it up this morning, but I forgot. Read it and see what Mr. Fairlie himself says to you."

Lady Glyde looked at the letter for a moment and then placed it in my hands.

"Read it," she said faintly. "I don't know what is the matter with me. I can't read it myself."

It was a note of only four lines--so short and so careless that it quite struck me. If I remember correctly it contained no more than these words--

"Dearest Laura, Please come whenever you like. Break the journey by sleeping at your aunt's house. Grieved to hear of dear Marian's illness. Affectionately yours, Frederick Fairlie."

"I would rather not go there--I would rather not stay a night in London," said her ladyship, breaking out eagerly with those words before I had quite done reading the note, short as it was. "Don't write to Count Fosco! Pray, pray don't write to him!"

Sir Percival filled another glass from the decanter so awkwardly that he upset it and spilt all the wine over the table. "My sight seems to be failing me," he muttered to himself, in an odd, muffled voice. He slowly set the glass up again, refilled it, and drained it once more at a draught. I began to fear, from his look and manner, that the wine was getting into his head.

"Pray don't write to Count Fosco," persisted Lady Glyde, more earnestly than ever.

"Why not, I should like to know?" cried Sir Percival, with a sudden burst of anger that startled us both. "Where can you stay more properly in London than at the place your uncle himself chooses for you--at your aunt's house? Ask Mrs. Michelson."

The arrangement proposed was so unquestionably the right and the proper one, that I could make no possible objection to it. Much as I sympathised with Lady Glyde in other respects, I could not sympathise with her in her unjust prejudices against Count Fosco. I never before met with any lady of her rank and station who was so lamentably narrow-minded on the subject of foreigners. Neither her uncle's note nor Sir Percival's increasing impatience seemed to have the least effect on her. She still objected to staying a night in London, she still implored her husband not to write to the Count.

"Drop it!" said Sir Percival, rudely turning his back on us. "If you haven't sense enough to know what is best for yourself other people must know it too. The arrangement is made and there is an end of it. You are only wanted to do what Miss Halcombe has done for you--"

"Marian?" repeated her Ladyship, in a bewildered manner; "Marian sleeping in Count Fosco's house!"

"Yes, in Count Fosco's house. She slept there last night to break the journey, and you are to follow her example, and do what your uncle tells you. You are to sleep at Fosco's to-morrow night, as your sister did, to break the
journey. Don't throw too many obstacles in my way! don't make me repent of letting you go at all!"

He started to his feet, and suddenly walked out into the verandah through the open glass doors.

"Will your ladyship excuse me," I whispered, "if I suggest that we had better not wait here till Sir Percival comes back? I am very much afraid he is over-excited with wine."

She consented to leave the room in a weary, absent manner.

As soon as we were safe upstairs again, I did all I could to compose her ladyship's spirits. I reminded her that Mr. Fairlie's letters to Miss Halcombe and to herself did certainly sanction, and even render necessary, sooner or later, the course that had been taken. She agreed to this, and even admitted, of her own accord, that both letters were strictly in character with her uncle's peculiar disposition--but her fears about Miss Halcombe, and her unaccountable dread of sleeping at the Count's house in London, still remained unshaken in spite of every consideration that I could urge. I thought it my duty to protest against Lady Glyde's unfavourable opinion of his lordship, and I did so, with becoming forbearance and respect.

"Your ladyship will pardon my freedom," I remarked, in conclusion, "but it is said, 'by their fruits ye shall know them.' I am sure the Count's constant kindness and constant attention, from the very beginning of Miss Halcombe's illness, merit our best confidence and esteem. Even his lordship's serious misunderstanding with Mr. Dawson was entirely attributable to his anxiety on Miss Halcombe's account."

"What misunderstanding?" inquired her ladyship, with a look of sudden interest.

I related the unhappy circumstances under which Mr. Dawson had withdrawn his attendance--mentioning them all the more readily because I disapproved of Sir Percival's continuing to conceal what had happened (as he had done in my presence) from the knowledge of Lady Glyde.

Her ladyship started up, with every appearance of being additionally agitated and alarmed by what I had told her.

"Worse! worse than I thought!" she said, walking about the room, in a bewildered manner. "The Count knew Mr. Dawson would never consent to Marian's taking a journey--he purposely insulted the doctor to get him out of the house."

"Oh, my lady! my lady!" I remonstrated.

"Mrs. Michelson!" she went on vehemently, "no words that ever were spoken will persuade me that my sister is in that man's power and in that man's house with her own consent. My horror of him is such, that nothing Sir Percival could say and no letters my uncle could write, would induce me, if I had only my own feelings to consult, to eat, drink, or sleep under his roof. But my misery of suspense about Marian gives me the courage to follow her anywhere, to follow her even into Count Fosco's house."

I thought it right, at this point, to mention that Miss Halcombe had already gone on to Cumberland, according to Sir Percival's account of the matter.

"I am afraid to believe it!" answered her ladyship. "I am afraid she is still in that man's house. If I am wrong, if she has really gone on to Limmeridge, I am resolved I will not sleep to-morrow night under Count Fosco's roof. My dearest friend in the world, next to my sister, lives near London. You have heard me, you have heard Miss Halcombe, speak of Mrs. Vesey? I mean to write, and propose to sleep at her house. I don't know how I shall get there--I don't know how I shall avoid the Count--but to that refuge I will escape in some way, if my sister has gone to Cumberland. All I ask of you to do, is to see yourself that my letter to Mrs. Vesey goes to London to-night, as certainly as Sir Percival's letter goes to Count Fosco. I have reasons for not trusting the post-bag downstairs. Will you keep my secret, and help me in this? it is the last favour, perhaps, that I shall ever ask of you."

I hesitated, I thought it all very strange, I almost feared that her ladyship's mind had been a little affected by recent anxiety and suffering. At my own risk, however, I ended by giving my consent. If the letter had been addressed to a stranger, or to any one but a lady so well known to me by report as Mrs. Vesey, I might have refused. I thank God--looking to what happened afterwards--I thank God I never thwarted that wish, or any other, which Lady Glyde expressed to me, on the last day of her residence at Blackwater Park.

The letter was written and given into my hands. I myself put it into the post-box in the village that evening.

We saw nothing more of Sir Percival for the rest of the day.

I slept, by Lady Glyde's own desire, in the next room to hers, with the door open between us. There was something so strange and dreadful in the loneliness and emptiness of the house, that I was glad, on my side, to have a companion near me. Her ladyship sat up late, reading letters and burning them, and emptying her drawers and cabinets of little things she prized, as if she never expected to return to Blackwater Park. Her sleep was sadly disturbed when she at last went to bed--she cried out in it several times, once so loud that she woke herself. Whatever her dreams were, she did not think fit to communicate them to me. Perhaps, in my situation, I had no right to expect that she should do so. It matters little now. I was sorry for her, I was indeed heartily sorry for her all the same.

The next day was fine and sunny. Sir Percival came up, after breakfast, to tell us that the chaise would be at the
door at a quarter to twelve—the train to London stopping at our station at twenty minutes after. He informed Lady Glyde that he was obliged to go out, but added that he hoped to be back before she left. If any unforeseen accident delayed him, I was to accompany her to the station, and to take special care that she was in time for the train. Sir Percival communicated these directions very hastily—walking here and there about the room all the time. Her ladyship looked attentively after him wherever he went. He never once looked at her in return.

She only spoke when he had done, and then she stopped him as he approached the door, by holding out her hand. "I shall see you no more," she said, in a very marked manner. "This is our parting—our parting, it may be for ever. Will you try to forgive me, Percival, as heartily as I forgive YOU?"

His face turned of an awful whiteness all over, and great beads of perspiration broke out on his bald forehead. "I shall come back," he said, and made for the door, as hastily as if his wife's farewell words had frightened him out of the room.

I had never liked Sir Percival, but the manner in which he left Lady Glyde made me feel ashamed of having eaten his bread and lived in his service. I thought of saying a few comforting and Christian words to the poor lady, but there was something in her face, as she looked after her husband when the door closed on him, that made me alter my mind and keep silence.

At the time named the chaise drew up at the gates. Her ladyship was right—Sir Percival never came back. I waited for him till the last moment, and waited in vain.

No positive responsibility lay on my shoulders, and yet I did not feel easy in my mind. "It is of your own free will," I said, as the chaise drove through the lodge-gates, "that your ladyship goes to London?"

"I will go anywhere," she answered, "to end the dreadful suspense that I am suffering at this moment."

She had made me feel almost as anxious and as uncertain about Miss Halcombe as she felt herself. I presumed to ask her to write me a line, if all went well in London. She answered, "Most willingly, Mrs. Michelson."

"We all have our crosses to bear, my lady," I said, seeing her silent and thoughtful, after she had promised to write.

She made no reply—she seemed to be too much wrapped up in her own thoughts to attend to me.

"I fear your ladyship rested badly last night," I remarked, after waiting a little.

"Yes," she said, "I was terribly disturbed by dreams."

"Indeed, my lady?" I thought she was going to tell me her dreams, but no, when she spoke next it was only to ask a question.

"You posted the letter to Mrs. Vesey with your own hands?"

"Yes, my lady."

"Did Sir Percival say, yesterday, that Count Fosco was to meet me at the terminus in London?"

"He did, my lady."

She sighed heavily when I answered that last question, and said no more.

We arrived at the station, with hardly two minutes to spare. The gardener (who had driven us) managed about the luggage, while I took the ticket. The whistle of the train was sounding when I joined her ladyship on the platform. She looked very strangely, and pressed her hand over her heart, as if some sudden pain or fright had overcome her at that moment.

"I wish you were going with me!" she said, catching eagerly at my arm when I gave her the ticket.

If there had been time, if I had felt the day before as I felt then, I would have made my arrangements to accompany her, even though the doing so had obliged me to give Sir Percival warning on the spot. As it was, her wishes, expressed at the last moment only, were expressed too late for me to comply with them. She seemed to understand this herself before I could explain it, and did not repeat her desire to have me for a travelling companion. The train drew up at the platform. She gave the gardener a present for his children, and took my hand, in her simple hearty manner, before she got into the carriage.

"You have been very kind to me and to my sister," she said—"kind when we were both friendless. I shall remember you gratefully, as long as I live to remember any one. Good-bye—and God bless you!"

She spoke those words with a tone and a look which brought the tears into my eyes—she spoke them as if she was bidding me farewell for ever.

"Good-bye, my lady," I said, putting her into the carriage, and trying to cheer her, "good-bye, for the present only; good-bye, with my best and kindest wishes for happier times."

She shook her head, and shuddered as she settled herself in the carriage. The guard closed the door. "Do you believe in dreams?" she whispered to me at the window. "My dreams, last night, were dreams I have never had before. The terror of them is hanging over me still." The whistle sounded before I could answer, and the train moved. Her pale quiet face looked at me for the last time—looked sorrowfully and solemnly from the window. She waved her hand, and I saw her no more.
Towards five o'clock on the afternoon of that same day, having a little time to myself in the midst of the household duties which now pressed upon me, I sat down alone in my own room, to try and compose my mind with the volume of my husband's Sermons. For the first time in my life I found my attention wandering over those pious and cheering words. Concluding that Lady Glyde's departure must have disturbed me far more seriously than I had myself supposed, I put the book aside, and went out to take a turn in the garden. Sir Percival had not yet returned, to my knowledge, so I could feel no hesitation about showing myself in the grounds.

On turning the corner of the house, and gaining a view of the garden, I was startled by seeing a stranger walking in it. The stranger was a woman--she was lounging along the path with her back to me, and was gathering the flowers.

As I approached she heard me, and turned round.

My blood curdled in my veins. The strange woman in the garden was Mrs. Rubelle!

I could neither move nor speak. She came up to me, as composedly as ever, with her flowers in her hand.

"What is the matter, ma'am?" she said quietly.

"You here!" I gasped out. "Not gone to London! Not gone to Cumberland!"

Mrs. Rubelle smelt at her flowers with a smile of malicious pity.

"Certainly not," she said. "I have never left Blackwater Park."

I summoned breath enough and courage enough for another question.

"Where is Miss Halcombe?"

Mrs. Rubelle fairly laughed at me this time, and replied in these words--

"Miss Halcombe, ma'am, has not left Blackwater Park either."

When I heard that astounding answer, all my thoughts were startled back on the instant to my parting with Lady Glyde. I can hardly say I reproached myself, but at that moment I think I would have given many a year's hard savings to have known four hours earlier what I knew now.

Mrs. Rubelle waited, quietly arranging her nosegay, as if she expected me to say something.

I could say nothing. I thought of Lady Glyde's worn-out energies and weakly health, and I trembled for the time when the shock of the discovery that I had made would fall on her. For a minute or more my fears for the poor ladies silenced me. At the end of that time Mrs. Rubelle looked up sideways from her flowers, and said, "Here is Sir Percival, ma'am, returned from his ride."

I saw him as soon as she did. He came towards us, slashing viciously at the flowers with his riding-whip. When he was near enough to see my face he stopped, struck at his boot with the whip, and burst out laughing, so harshly and so violently that the birds flew away, startled, from the tree by which he stood.

"Well, Mrs. Michelson," he said, "you have found it out at last, have you?"

I made no reply. He turned to Mrs. Rubelle.

"When did you show yourself in the garden?"

"I showed myself about half an hour ago, sir. You said I might take my liberty again as soon as Lady Glyde had gone away to London."

"Quite right. I don't blame you--I only asked the question." He waited a moment, and then addressed himself once more to me. "You can't believe it, can you?" he said mockingly. "Here! come along and see for yourself."

He led the way round to the front of the house. I followed him, and Mrs. Rubelle followed me. After passing through the iron gates he stopped, and pointed with his whip to the disused middle wing of the building.

"There!" he said. "Look up at the first floor. You know the old Elizabethan bedrooms? Miss Halcombe is snug and safe in one of the best of them at this moment. Take her in, Mrs. Rubelle (you have got your key?); take Mrs. Michelson in, and let her own eyes satisfy her that there is no deception this time."

The tone in which he spoke to me, and the minute or two that had passed since we left the garden, helped me to recover my spirits a little. What I might have done at this critical moment, if all my life had been passed in service, I cannot say. As it was, possessing the feelings, the principles, and the bringing up of a lady, I could not hesitate about the right course to pursue. My duty to myself, and my duty to Lady Glyde, alike forbade me to remain in the employment of a man who had shamefully deceived us both by a series of atrocious falsehoods.

"I must beg permission, Sir Percival, to speak a few words to you in private," I said. "Having done so, I shall be ready to proceed with this person to Miss Halcombe's room."

Mrs. Rubelle, whom I had indicated by a slight turn of my head, insolently sniffed at her nosegay and walked away, with great deliberation, towards the house door.

"Well," said Sir Percival sharply, "what is it now?"

"I wish to mention, sir, that I am desirous of resigning the situation I now hold at Blackwater Park." That was literally how I put it. I was resolved that the first words spoken in his presence should be words which expressed my intention to leave his service.
He eyed me with one of his blackest looks, and thrust his hands savagely into the pockets of his riding-coat.

"Why?" he said, "why, I should like to know?"

"It is not for me, Sir Percival, to express an opinion on what has taken place in this house. I desire to give no offence. I merely wish to say that I do not feel it consistent with my duty to Lady Glyde and to myself to remain any longer in your service."

"Is it consistent with your duty to me to stand there, casting suspicion on me to my face?" he broke out in his most violent manner. "I see what you're driving at. You have taken your own mean, underhand view of an innocent deception practised on Lady Glyde for her own good. It was essential to her health that she should have a change of air immediately, and you know as well as I do she would never have gone away if she had been told Miss Halcombe was still left here. She has been deceived in her own interests--and I don't care who knows it. Go, if you like--there are plenty of housekeepers as good as you to be had for the asking. Go when you please--but take care how you spread scandals about me and my affairs when you're out of my service. Tell the truth, and nothing but the truth, or it will be the worse for you! See Miss Halcombe for yourself--see if she hasn't been as well taken care of in one part of the house as in the other. Remember the doctor's own orders that Lady Glyde was to have a change of air at the earliest possible opportunity. Bear all that well in mind, and then say anything against me and my proceedings if you dare!"

He poured out these words fiercely, all in a breath, walking backwards and forwards, and striking about him in the air with his whip.

Nothing that he said or did shook my opinion of the disgraceful series of falsehoods that he had told in my presence the day before, or of the cruel deception by which he had separated Lady Glyde from her sister, and had sent her uselessly to London, when she was half distracted with anxiety on Miss Halcombe's account. I naturally kept these thoughts to myself, and said nothing more to irritate him; but I was not the less resolved to persist in my purpose. A soft answer turneth away wrath, and I suppressed my own feelings accordingly when it was my turn to reply.

"While I am in your service, Sir Percival," I said, "I hope I know my duty well enough not to inquire into your motives. When I am out of your service, I hope I know my own place well enough not to speak of matters which don't concern me--""

"When do you want to go?" he asked, interrupting me without ceremony. "Don't suppose I am anxious to keep you--don't suppose I care about your leaving the house. I am perfectly fair and open in this matter, from first to last. When do you want to go?"

"I should wish to leave at your earliest convenience, Sir Percival."

"My convenience has nothing to do with it. I shall be out of the house for good and all to-morrow morning, and I can settle your accounts to-night. If you want to study anybody's convenience, it had better be Miss Halcombe's. Mrs. Rubelle's time is up to-day, and she has reasons for wishing to be in London to-night. If you go at once, Miss Halcombe won't have a soul left here to look after her."

I hope it is unnecessary for me to say that I was quite incapable of deserting Miss Halcombe in such an emergency as had now befallen Lady Glyde and herself. After first distinctly ascertaining from Sir Percival that Mrs. Rubelle was certain to leave at once if I took her place, and after also obtaining permission to arrange for Mr. Dawson's resuming his attendance on his patient, I willingly consented to remain at Blackwater Park until Miss Halcombe no longer required my services. It was settled that I should give Sir Percival's solicitor a week's notice before I left, and that he was to undertake the necessary arrangements for appointing my successor. The matter was discussed in very few words. At its conclusion Sir Percival abruptly turned on his heel, and left me free to join Mrs. Rubelle. That singular foreign person had been sitting composedly on the door-step all this time, waiting till I could follow her to Miss Halcombe's room.

I had hardly walked half-way towards the house when Sir Percival, who had withdrawn in the opposite direction, suddenly stopped and called me back.

"Why are you leaving my service?" he asked.

The question was so extraordinary, after what had just passed between us, that I hardly knew what to say in answer to it.

"Mind! I don't know why you are going," he went on. "You must give a reason for leaving me, I suppose, when you get another situation. What reason? The breaking up of the family? Is that it?"

"There can be no positive objection, Sir Percival, to that reason----"

"Very well! That's all I want to know. If people apply for your character, that's your reason, stated by yourself. You go in consequence of the breaking up of the family."

He turned away again before I could say another word, and walked out rapidly into the grounds. His manner was as strange as his language. I acknowledge he alarmed me.
Even the patience of Mrs. Rubelle was getting exhausted, when I joined her at the house door.

"At last!" she said, with a shrug of her lean foreign shoulders. She led the way into the inhabited side of the house, ascended the stairs, and opened with her key the door at the end of the passage, which communicated with the old Elizabethan rooms—a door never previously used, in my time, at Blackwater Park. The rooms themselves I knew well, having entered them myself on various occasions from the other side of the house. Mrs. Rubelle stopped at the third door along the old gallery, handed me the key of it, with the key of the door of communication, and told me I should find Miss Halcombe in that room. Before I went in I thought it desirable to make her understand that her attendance had ceased. Accordingly, I told her in plain words that the charge of the sick lady henceforth devolved entirely on myself.

"I am glad to hear it, ma'am," said Mrs. Rubelle. "I want to go very much."

"Do you leave to-day?" I asked, to make sure of her.

"Now that you have taken charge, ma'am, I leave in half an hour's time. Sir Percival has kindly placed at my disposition the gardener, and the chaise, whenever I want them. I shall want them in half an hour's time to go to the station. I am packed up in anticipation already. I wish you good-day, ma'am."

She dropped a brisk curtsey, and walked back along the gallery, humming a little tune, and keeping time to it cheerfully with the nosegay in her hand. I am sincerely thankful to say that was the last I saw of Mrs. Rubelle.

When I went into the room Miss Halcombe was asleep. I looked at her anxiously, as she lay in the dismal, high, old-fashioned bed. She was certainly not in any respect altered for the worse since I had seen her last. She had not been neglected, I am bound to admit, in any way that I could perceive. The room was dreary, and dusty, and dark, but the window (looking on a solitary court-yard at the back of the house) was opened to let in the fresh air, and all that could be done to make the place comfortable had been done. The whole cruelty of Sir Percival's deception had fallen on poor Lady Glyde. The only ill-usage which either he or Mrs. Rubelle had inflicted on Miss Halcombe consisted, so far as I could see, in the first offence of hiding her away.

I stole back, leaving the sick lady still peacefully asleep, to give the gardener instructions about bringing the doctor. I begged the man, after he had taken Mrs. Rubelle to the station, to drive round by Mr. Dawson's, and leave a message in my name, asking him to call and see me. I knew he would come on my account, and I knew he would remain when he found Count Fosco had left the house.

In due course of time the gardener returned, and said that he had driven round by Mr. Dawson's residence, after leaving Mrs. Rubelle at the station. The doctor sent me word that he was poorly in health himself, but that he would call, if possible, the next morning.

Having delivered his message the gardener was about to withdraw, but I stopped him to request that he would come back before dark, and sit up that night, in one of the empty bedrooms, so as to be within call in case I wanted him. He understood readily enough my unwillingness to be left alone all night in the most desolate part of that desolate house, and we arranged that he should come in between eight and nine.

He came punctually, and I found cause to be thankful that I had adopted the precaution of calling him in. Before midnight Sir Percival's strange temper broke out in the most violent and most alarming manner, and if the gardener had not been on the spot to pacify him on the instant, I am afraid to think what might have happened.

Almost all the afternoon and evening he had been walking about the house and grounds in an unsettled, excitable manner, having, in all probability, as I thought, taken an excessive quantity of wine at his solitary dinner. However that may be, I heard his voice calling loudly and angrily in the new wing of the house, as I was taking a turn backwards and forwards along the gallery the last thing at night. The gardener immediately ran down to him, and I closed the door of communication, to keep the alarm, if possible, from reaching Miss Halcombe's ears. It was full half an hour before the gardener came back. He declared that his master was quite out of his senses—not through the excitement of drink, as I thought, but through a kind of panic or frenzy of mind, for which it was impossible to account. He had found Sir Percival walking backwards and forwards by himself in the hall, swearing, with every appearance of the most violent passion, that he would not stop another minute alone in such a dungeon as his own house, and that he would take the first stage of his journey immediately in the middle of the night. The gardener, on approaching him, had been hunted out, with oaths and threats, to get the horse and chaise ready instantly. In a quarter of an hour Sir Percival had joined him in the yard, had jumped into the chaise, and, lashing the horse into a gallop, had driven himself away, with his face as pale as ashes in the moonlight. The gardener had heard him shouting and cursing at the lodge-keeper to get up and open the gate—had heard the wheels roll furiously on again in the still night, when the gate was unlocked—and knew no more.

The next day, or a day or two after, I forget which, the chaise was brought back from Knowlesbury, our nearest town, by the ostler at the old inn. Sir Percival had stopped there, and had afterwards left by the train—for what destination the man could not tell. I never received any further information, either from himself or from any one else, of Sir Percival's proceedings, and I am not even aware, at this moment, whether he is in England or out of it.
He and I have not met since he drove away like an escaped criminal from his own house, and it is my fervent hope and prayer that we may never meet again.

My own part of this sad family story is now drawing to an end.

I have been informed that the particulars of Miss Halcombe's waking, and of what passed between us when she found me sitting by her bedside, are not material to the purpose which is to be answered by the present narrative. It will be sufficient for me to say in this place, that she was not herself conscious of the means adopted to remove her from the inhabited to the uninhabited part of the house. She was in a deep sleep at the time, whether naturally or artificially produced she could not say. In my absence at Torquay, and in the absence of all the resident servants except Margaret Porcher (who was perpetually eating, drinking, or sleeping, when she was not at work), the secret transfer of Miss Halcombe from one part of the house to the other was no doubt easily performed. Mrs. Rubelle (as I discovered for myself, in looking about the room) had provisions, and all other necessaries, together with the means of heating water, broth, and so on, without kindling a fire, placed at her disposal during the few days of her imprisonment with the sick lady. She had declined to answer the questions which Miss Halcombe naturally put, but had not, in other respects, treated her with unkindness or neglect. The disgrace of lending herself to a vile deception is the only disgrace with which I can conscientiously charge Mrs. Rubelle.

I need write no particulars (and I am relieved to know it) of the effect produced on Miss Halcombe by the news of Lady Glyde's departure, or by the far more melancholy tidings which reached us only too soon afterwards at Blackwater Park. In both cases I prepared her mind beforehand as gently and as carefully as possible, having the doctor's advice to guide me, in the last case only, through Mr. Dawson's being too unwell to come to the house for some days after I had sent for him. It was a sad time, a time which it afflicts me to think of or to write of now. The precious blessings of religious consolation which I endeavoured to convey were long in reaching Miss Halcombe's heart, but I hope and believe they came home to her at last. I never left her till her strength was restored. The train which took me away from that miserable house was the train which took her away also. We parted very mournfully in London. I remained with a relative at Islington, and she went on to Mr. Fairlie's house in Cumberland.

I have only a few lines more to write before I close this painful statement. They are dictated by a sense of duty.

In the first place, I wish to record my own personal conviction that no blame whatever, in connection with the events which I have now related, attaches to Count Fosco. I am informed that a dreadful suspicion has been raised, and that some very serious constructions are placed upon his lordship's conduct. My persuasion of the Count's innocence remains, however, quite unshaken. If he assisted Sir Percival in sending me to Torquay, he assisted under a delusion, for which, as a foreigner and a stranger, he was not to blame. If he was concerned in bringing Mrs. Rubelle to Blackwater Park, it was his misfortune and not his fault, when that foreign person was base enough to assist a deception planned and carried out by the master of the house. I protest, in the interests of morality, against blame being gratuitously and wantonly attached to the proceedings of the Count.

In the second place, I desire to express my regret at my own inability to remember the precise day on which Lady Glyde left Blackwater Park for London. I am told that it is of the last importance to ascertain the exact date of that lamentable journey, and I have anxiously taxed my memory to recall it. The effort has been in vain. I can only remember now that it was towards the latter part of July. We all know the difficulty, after a lapse of time, of fixing precisely on a past date unless it has been previously written down. That difficulty is greatly increased in my case by the alarming and confusing events which took place about the period of Lady Glyde's departure. I heartily wish I had made a memorandum at the time. I heartily wish my memory of the date was as vivid as my memory of that poor lady's face, when it looked at me sorrowfully for the last time from the carriage window.

THE STORY CONTINUED IN SEVERAL NARRATIVES
1. THE NARRATIVE OF HESTER PINHORN, COOK IN THE SERVICE OF COUNT FOSCO
   [Taken down from her own statement]
   I am sorry to say that I have never learnt to read or write. I have been a hard-working woman all my life, and have kept a good character. I know that it is a sin and wickedness to say the thing which is not, and I will truly beware of doing so on this occasion. All that I know I will tell, and I humbly beg the gentleman who takes this down to put my language right as he goes on, and to make allowances for my being no scholar.

   In this last summer I happened to be out of place (through no fault of my own), and I heard of a situation as plain cook, at Number Five, Forest Road, St. John's Wood. I took the place on trial. My master's name was Fosco. My mistress was an English lady. He was Count and she was Countess. There was a girl to do housemaid's work when I got there. She was not over-clean or tidy, but there was no harm in her. I and she were the only servants in the house.

   Our master and mistress came after we got in; and as soon as they did come we were told, downstairs, that company was expected from the country.

   The company was my mistress's niece, and the back bedroom on the first floor was got ready for her. My
mistress mentioned to me that Lady Glyde (that was her name) was in poor health, and that I must be particular in my cooking accordingly. She was to come that day, as well as I can remember—but whatever you do, don't trust my memory in the matter. I am sorry it's no use asking me about days of the month, and such-like. Except Sundays, half my time I take no heed of them, being a hard-working woman and no scholar. All I know is Lady Glyde came, and when she did come, a fine fright she gave us all surely. I don't know how master brought her to the house, being hard at work at the time. But he did bring her in the afternoon, I think, and the housemaid opened the door to them, and showed them into the parlour. Before she had been long down in the kitchen again with me, we heard a hurry-skurry upstairs, and the parlour bell ringing like mad, and my mistress's voice calling out for help.

We both ran up, and there we saw the lady laid on the sofa, with her face ghastly white, and her hands fast clenched, and her head drawn down to one side. She had been taken with a sudden fright, my mistress said, and master had told us she was in a fit of convulsions. I ran out, knowing the neighbourhood a little better than the rest of them, to fetch the nearest doctor's help. The nearest help was at Goodricke's and Garth's, who worked together as partners, and had a good name and connection, as I have heard, all round St. John's Wood. Mr. Goodricke was in, and he came back with me directly.

It was some time before he could make himself of much use. The poor unfortunate lady fell out of one fit into another, and went on so till she was quite wearied out, and as helpless as a new-born babe. We then got her to bed. Mr. Goodricke went away to his house for medicine, and came back again in a quarter of an hour or less. Besides the medicine he brought a bit of hollow mahogany wood with him, shaped like a kind of trumpet, and after waiting a little while, he put one end over the lady's heart and the other to his ear, and listened carefully.

When he had done he says to my mistress, who was in the room, "This is a very serious case," he says, "I recommend you to write to Lady Glyde's friends directly." My mistress says to him, "Is it heart-disease?" And he says, "Yes, heart-disease of a most dangerous kind." He told her exactly what he thought was the matter, which I was not clever enough to understand. But I know this, he ended by saying that he was afraid neither his help nor any other doctor's help was likely to be of much service.

My mistress took this ill news more quietly than my master. He was a big, fat, odd sort of elderly man, who kept birds and white mice, and spoke to them as if they were so many Christian children. He seemed terribly cut up by what had happened. "Ah! poor Lady Glyde! poor dear Lady Glyde!" he says, and went stalking about, wringing his fat hands more like a play-actor than a gentleman. For one question my mistress asked the doctor about the lady's chances of getting round, he asked a good fifty at least. I declare he quite tormented us all, and when he was quiet at last, out he went into the bit of back garden, picking trumpery little nosegays, and asking me to take them upstairs and make the sick-room look pretty with them. As if THAT did any good. I think he must have been, at times, a little soft in his head. But he was not a bad master—he had a monstrous civil tongue of his own, and a jolly, easy, coaxing way with him. I liked him a deal better than my mistress. She was a hard one, if ever there was a hard one yet.

Towards night-time the lady roused up a little. She had been so wearied out, before that, by the convulsions, that she never stirred hand or foot, or spoke a word to anybody. She moved in the bed now, and stared about her at the room and us in it. She must have been a nice-looking lady when well, with light hair, and blue eyes and all that. Her rest was troubled at night—at least so I heard from my mistress, who sat up alone with her. I only went in once before going to bed to see if I could be of any use, and then she was talking to herself in a confused, rambling manner. She seemed to want sadly to speak to somebody who was absent from her somewhere. I couldn't catch the name the first time, and the second time master knocked at the door, with his regular mouthful of questions, and make the sick-room look pretty with them. As if THAT did any good. I think he must have been, at times, a little soft in his head. But he was not a bad master—he had a monstrous civil tongue of his own, and a jolly, easy, coaxing way with him. I liked him a deal better than my mistress. She was a hard one, if ever there was a hard one yet.

When I went in early the next morning, the lady was clean worn out again, and lay in a kind of faint sleep. Mr. Goodricke brought his partner, Mr. Garth, with him to advise. They said she must not be disturbed out of her rest on any account. They asked my mistress many questions, at the other end of the room, about what the lady's health had been in past times, and who had attended her, and whether she had ever suffered much and long together under distress of mind. I remember my mistress said "Yes" to that last question. And Mr. Goodricke looked at Mr. Garth, and shook his head; and Mr. Garth looked at Mr. Goodricke, and shook his head. They seemed to think that the distress might have something to do with the mischief at the lady's heart. She was but a frail thing to look at, poor creature! Very little strength at any time, I should say—very little strength.

Later on the same morning, when she woke, the lady took a sudden turn, and got seemingly a great deal better. I was not let in again to see her, no more was the housemaid, for the reason that she was not to be disturbed by strangers. What I heard of her being better was through my master. He was in wonderful good spirits about the change, and looked in at the kitchen window from the garden, with his great big curly-brimmed white hat on, to go out.

"Good Mrs. Cook," says he, "Lady Glyde is better. My mind is more easy than it was, and I am going out to
say, on my oath as a Christian woman, this is the truth.

on her first coming into the house. The cause was never explained, either to me or to my fellow-servant.

mourning, with his big solemn face, and his slow walk, and his broad hatband— that he did! 

funeral, I say again, and master went down to attend the burying in the country himself. He looked grand in his deep 

should be buried there, in the same grave along with her mother. Everything was done handsomely, in respect of the 

parts. But my mistress (being her aunt) settled it with her friends in the country (Cumberland, I think) that she 

of money— the coffin, in particular, being most beautiful. The dead lady's husband was away, as we heard, in foreign 

like, by what had happened. My mistress managed all that was to be done about the funeral. It must have cost a sight 

thick knees, and his head down, and his eyes looking at nothing. He seemed not so much sorry, as scared and dazed 

see him he looked awfully overcome by it, to be sure. He sat quiet in a corner, with his fat hands hanging over his 

say that she understood what was wanted of her, and that she had winded a many of them in her time. 

She was, by name, Jane Gould. I considered her to be a respectable-looking woman. She made no remark, except to 

got on my bonnet and shawl, when, as good luck would have it, the doctor himself came to the house for his promised 

visit. 

I let him in, and went upstairs along with him. "Lady Glyde was just as usual," says my mistress to him at the 
door; "she was awake, and looking about her in a strange, forlorn manner, when I heard her give a sort of half cry, 

and she fainted in a moment." The doctor went up to the bed, and stooped down over the sick lady. He looked very 

serious, all on a sudden, at the sight of her, and put his hand on her heart. 

My mistress stared hard in Mr. Goodricke's face. "Not dead!" says she, whispering, and turning all of a tremble 

from head to foot. 

"Yes," says the doctor, very quiet and grave. "Dead. I was afraid it would happen suddenly when I examined her 

heart yesterday." My mistress stepped back from the bedside while he was speaking, and trembled and trembled 

again. "Dead!" she whispers to herself; "dead so suddenly! dead so soon! What will the Count say?" Mr. Goodricke 
advised her to go downstairs, and quiet herself a little. "You have been sitting up all night," says he, "and your 

nerves are shaken. This person," says he, meaning me, "this person will stay in the room till I can send for the 
necessary assistance." My mistress did as he told her. "I must prepare the Count," she says. "I must carefully prepare 

the Count." And so she left us, shaking from head to foot, and went out. 

"Your master is a foreigner," says Mr. Goodricke, when my mistress had left us. "Does he understand about 

registering the death?" "I can't rightly tell, sir," says I, "but I should think not." The doctor considered a minute, and 

then says he, "I don't usually do such things," says he, "but it may save the family trouble in this case if I register the 
death myself. I shall pass the district office in half an hour's time, and I can easily look in. Mention, if you please, 

that I will do so." "Yes, sir," says I, "with thanks, I'm sure, for your kindness in thinking of it." "You don't mind 
staying here till I can send you the proper person?" says he. "No, sir," says I; "I'll stay with the poor lady till then. I 

suppose nothing more could be done, sir, than was done?" says I. "No," says he, "nothing; she must have suffered 
sadly before ever I saw her—the case was hopeless when I was called in." "Ah, dear me! we all come to it, sooner or 
later, don't we, sir?" says I. He gave no answer to that—he didn't seem to care about talking. He said, "Good-day," 

and went out. 

I stopped by the bedside from that time till the time when Mr. Goodricke sent the person in, as he had promised. 

She was, by name, Jane Gould. I considered her to be a respectable-looking woman. She made no remark, except to 
say that she understood what was wanted of her, and that she had winded a many of them in her time. 

How master bore the news, when he first heard it, is more than I can tell, not having been present. When I did 

see him he looked awfully overcome by it, to be sure. He sat quiet in a corner, with his fat hands hanging over his 
thick knees, and his head down, and his eyes looking at nothing. He seemed not so much sorry, as scared and dazed 

like, by what had happened. My mistress managed all that was to be done about the funeral. It must have cost a sight 
of money—the coffin, in particular, being most beautiful. The dead lady's husband was away, as we heard, in foreign 

parts. But my mistress (being her aunt) settled it with her friends in the country (Cumberland, I think) that she 

should be buried there, in the same grave along with her mother. Everything was done handsomely, in respect of the 
funeral, I say again, and master went down to attend the burying in the country himself. He looked grand in his deep 
mourning, with his big solemn face, and his slow walk, and his broad hatband—that he did! 

In conclusion. I have to say, in answer to questions put to me—

(1) That neither I nor my fellow-servant ever saw my master give Lady Glyde any medicine himself. 

(2) That he was never, to my knowledge and belief, left alone in the room with Lady Glyde. 

(3) That I am not able to say what caused the sudden fright, which my mistress informed me had seized the lady 
on her first coming into the house. The cause was never explained, either to me or to my fellow-servant. 

The above statement has been read over in my presence. I have nothing to add to it, or to take away from it. I 
say, on my oath as a Christian woman, this is the truth. 

(Signed) HESTER PINHORN, Her Mark.
2. THE NARRATIVE OF THE DOCTOR
To the Registrar of the Sub-District in which the undermentioned death took place.--I hereby certify that I attended Lady Glyde, aged Twenty-One last Birthday; that I last saw her on Thursday the 25th July 1850; that she died on the same day at No. 5 Forest Road, St. John's Wood, and that the cause of her death was Aneurism. Duration of disease not known.
(Signed) Alfred Goodricke.
Prof. Title. M.R.C.S. Eng., L.S.A. Address, 12 Croydon Gardens St. John's Wood.

3. THE NARRATIVE OF JANE GOULD
I was the person sent in by Mr. Goodricke to do what was right and needful by the remains of a lady who had died at the house named in the certificate which precedes this. I found the body in charge of the servant, Hester Pinhorn. I remained with it, and prepared it at the proper time for the grave. It was laid in the coffin in my presence, and I afterwards saw the coffin screwed down previous to its removal. When that had been done, and not before, I received what was due to me and left the house. I refer persons who may wish to investigate my character to Mr. Goodricke. He will bear witness that I can be trusted to tell the truth.
(Signed) JANE GOULD

4. THE NARRATIVE OF THE TOMBSTONE
Sacred to the Memory of Laura, Lady Glyde, wife of Sir Percival Glyde, Bart., of Blackwater Park, Hampshire, and daughter of the late Philip Fairlie, Esq., of Limmeridge House, in this parish. Born March 27th, 1829; married December 22nd, 1849; died July 25th, 1850.

5. THE NARRATIVE OF WALTER HARTRIGHT
Early in the summer of 1850 I and my surviving companions left the wilds and forests of Central America for home. Arrived at the coast, we took ship there for England. The vessel was wrecked in the Gulf of Mexico--I was among the few saved from the sea. It was my third escape from peril of death. Death by disease, death by the Indians, death by drowning--all three had approached me; all three had passed me by.
The survivors of the wreck were rescued by an American vessel bound for Liverpool. The ship reached her port on the thirteenth day of October 1850. We landed late in the afternoon, and I arrived in London the same night.
These pages are not the record of my wanderings and my dangers away from home. The motives which led me from my country and my friends to a new world of adventure and peril are known. From that self-imposed exile I came back, as I had hoped, prayed, believed I should come back--a changed man. In the waters of a new life I had tempered my nature afresh. In the stern school of extremity and danger my will had learnt to be strong, my heart to be resolute, my mind to rely on itself. I had gone out to fly from my own future. I came back to face it, as a man should.
To face it with that inevitable suppression of myself which I knew it would demand from me. I had parted with the worst bitterness of the past, but not with my heart's remembrance of the sorrow and the tenderness of that memorable time. I had not ceased to feel the irreparable disappointment of my life--I had only learnt to bear it. Laura Fairlie was in all my thoughts when the ship bore me away, and I looked my last at England. Laura Fairlie was in all my thoughts when the ship brought me back, and the morning light showed the friendly shore in view.
My pen traces the old letters as my heart goes back to the old love. I write of her as Laura Fairlie still. It is hard to think of her, it is hard to speak of her, by her husband's name.
There are no more words of explanation to add on my appearance for the second time in these pages. This narrative, if I have the strength and the courage to write it, may now go on.
My first anxieties and first hopes when the morning came centred in my mother and my sister. I felt the necessity of preparing them for the joy and surprise of my return, after an absence during which it had been impossible for them to receive any tidings of me for months past. Early in the morning I sent a letter to the Hampstead Cottage, and followed it myself in an hour's time.
When the first meeting was over, when our quiet and composure of other days began gradually to return to us, I saw something in my mother's face which told me that a secret oppression lay heavy on her heart. There was more than love--there was sorrow in the anxious eyes that looked on me so tenderly--there was pity in the kind hand that slowly and fondly strengthened its hold on mine. We had no concealments from each other. She knew how the hope of my life had been wrecked--she knew why I had left her. It was on my lips to ask as composedly as I could if any letter had come for me from Miss Halcombe, if there was any news of her sister that I might hear. But when I looked in my mother's face I lost courage to put the question even in that guarded form. I could only say, doubtingly and restrainedly--
"You have something to tell me."
My sister, who had been sitting opposite to us, rose suddenly without a word of explanation--rose and left the room.
My mother moved closer to me on the sofa and put her arms round my neck. Those fond arms trembled--the tears flowed fast over the faithful loving face.

"Walter!" she whispered, "my own darling! my heart is heavy for you. Oh, my son! my son! try to remember that I am still left!"

My head sank on her bosom. She had said all in saying those words.

* * * * * * * * * *

It was the morning of the third day since my return--the morning of the sixteenth of October.

I had remained with them at the cottage--I had tried hard not to embitter the happiness of my return to THEM as it was embittered to ME. I had done all man could to rise after the shock, and accept my life resignedly--to let my great sorrow come in tenderness to my heart, and not in despair. It was useless and hopeless. No tears soothed my aching eyes, no relief came to me from my sister's sympathy or my mother's love.

On that third morning I opened my heart to them. At last the words passed my lips which I had longed to speak on the day when my mother told me of her death.

"Let me go away alone for a little while," I said. "I shall bear it better when I have looked once more at the place where I first saw her--when I have knelt and prayed by the grave where they have laid her to rest."

I departed on my journey--my journey to the grave of Laura Fairlie.

It was a quiet autumn afternoon when I stopped at the solitary station, and set forth alone on foot by the well-remembered road. The waning sun was shining faintly through thin white clouds--the air was warm and still--the peacefulness of the lonely country was overshadowed and saddened by the influence of the falling year.

I reached the moor--I stood again on the brow of the hill--I looked on along the path--and there were the familiar garden trees in the distance, the clear sweeping semicircle of the drive, the high white walls of Limmeridge House. The chances and changes, the wanderings and dangers of months and months past, all shrank and shrivelled to nothing in my mind. It was like yesterday since my feet had last trodden the fragrant heathy ground. I thought I should see her coming to meet me, with her little straw hat shading her face, her simple dress fluttering in the air, and her well-filled sketch-book ready in her hand.

Oh death, thou hast thy sting! oh, grave, thou hast thy victory!

I turned aside, and there below me in the glen was the lonesome grey church, the porch where I had waited for the coming of the woman in white, the hills encircling the quiet burial-ground, the brook bubbling cold over its stony bed. There was the marble cross, fair and white, at the head of the tomb--the tomb that now rose over mother and daughter alike.

I approached the grave. I crossed once more the low stone stile, and bared my head as I touched the sacred ground. Sacred to gentleness and goodness, sacred to reverence and grief.

I stopped before the pedestal from which the cross rose. On one side of it, on the side nearest to me, the newly-cut inscription met my eyes--the hard, clear, cruel black letters which told the story of her life and death. I tried to read them. I did read as far as the name. "Sacred to the Memory of Laura----" The kind blue eyes dim with tears--the fair head drooping wearily--the innocent parting words which implored me to leave her--oh, for a happier last memory of her than this; the memory I took away with me, the memory I bring back with me to her grave!

A second time I tried to read the inscription. I saw at the end the date of her death, and above it----

Above it there were lines on the marble--there was a name among them which disturbed my thoughts of her. I went round to the other side of the grave, where there was nothing to read, nothing of earthly vileness to force its way between her spirit and mine.

I knelt down by the tomb. I laid my hands, I laid my head on the broad white stone, and closed my weary eyes on the earth around, on the light above. I let her come back to me. Oh, my love! my love! my heart may speak to you NOW! It is yesterday again since we parted--yesterday, since your dear hand lay in mine--yesterday, since my eyes looked their last on you. My love! my love!

Time had flowed on, and silence had fallen like thick night over its course.

The first sound that came after the heavenly peace rustled faintly like a passing breath of air over the grass of the burial-ground. I heard it nearing me slowly, until it came changed to my ear-- came like footsteps moving onward--then stopped.

I looked up.

The sunset was near at hand. The clouds had parted--the slanting light fell mellow over the hills. The last of the day was cold and clear and still in the quiet valley of the dead.

Beyond me, in the burial-ground, standing together in the cold clearness of the lower light, I saw two women. They were looking towards the tomb, looking towards me.

Two.
They came a little on, and stopped again. Their veils were down, and hid their faces from me. When they stopped, one of them raised her veil. In the still evening light I saw the face of Marian Halcombe.

Changed, changed as if years had passed over it! The eyes large and wild, and looking at me with a strange terror in them. The face worn and wasted piteously. Pain and fear and grief written on her as with a brand.

I took one step towards her from the grave. She never moved--she never spoke. The veiled woman with her cried out faintly. I stopped. The springs of my life fell low, and the shuddering of an unutterable dread crept over me from head to foot.

The woman with the veiled face moved away from her companion, and came towards me slowly. Left by herself, standing by herself, Marian Halcombe spoke. It was the voice that I remembered--the voice not changed, like the frightened eyes and the wasted face.

"My dream! my dream!" I heard her say those words softly in the awful silence. She sank on her knees, and raised her clasped hands to heaven. "Father! strengthen him. Father! help him in his hour of need."

The voice that was praying for me faltered and sank low--then rose on a sudden, and called affrightedly, called despairingly to me to come away.

But the veiled woman had possession of me, body and soul. She stopped on one side of the grave. We stood face to face with the tombstone between us. She was close to the inscription on the side of the pedestal. Her gown touched the black letters.

The voice came nearer, and rose and rose more passionately still. "Hide your face! don't look at her! Oh, for God's sake, spare him----"

The woman lifted her veil.
"Sacred to the Memory of Laura, Lady Glyde----"

Laura, Lady Glyde, was standing by the inscription, and was looking at me over the grave.

[The Second Epoch of the Story closes here.]

THE THIRD EPOCH

THE STORY CONTINUED BY WALTER HARTRIGHT.

I

I open a new page. I advance my narrative by one week.

The history of the interval which I thus pass over must remain unrecorded. My heart turns faint, my mind sinks in darkness and confusion when I think of it. This must not be, if I who write am to guide, as I ought, you who read. This must not be, if the clue that leads through the windings of the story is to remain from end to end untangled in my hands.

A life suddenly changed--its whole purpose created afresh, its hopes and fears, its struggles, its interests, and its sacrifices all turned at once and for ever into a new direction--this is the prospect which now opens before me, like the burst of view from a mountain's top. I left my narrative in the quiet shadow of Limmeridge church--I resume it, one week later, in the stir and turmoil of a London street.

The street is in a populous and a poor neighbourhood. The ground floor of one of the houses in it is occupied by a small newsvendor's shop, and the first floor and the second are let as furnished lodgings of the humblest kind.

I have taken those two floors in an assumed name. On the upper floor I live, with a room to work in, a room to sleep in. On the lower floor, under the same assumed name, two women live, who are described as my sisters. I get my bread by drawing and engraving on wood for the cheap periodicals. My sisters are supposed to help me by taking in a little needle-work. Our poor place of abode, our humble calling, our assumed name, are all used alike as a means of hiding us in the house-forest of London. We are numbered no longer with the people whose lives are open and known. I am an obscure, unnoticed man, without patron or friend to help me. Marian Halcombe is nothing now but my eldest sister, who provides for our household wants by the toil of her own hands. We two, in the estimation of others, are at once the dupes and the agents of a daring imposture. We are supposed to be the accomplices of mad Anne Catherick, who claims the name, the place, and the living personality of dead Lady Glyde.

That is our situation. That is the changed aspect in which we three must appear, henceforth, in this narrative, for many and many a page to come.

In the eye of reason and of law, in the estimation of relatives and friends, according to every received formality of civilised society, "Laura, Lady Glyde," lay buried with her mother in Limmeridge churchyard. Torn in her own lifetime from the list of the living, the daughter of Philip Fairlie and the wife of Percival Glyde might still exist for her sister, might still exist for me, but to all the world besides she was dead. Dead to her uncle, who had renounced her; dead to the servants of the house, who had failed to recognise her; dead to the persons in authority, who had transmitted her fortune to her husband and her aunt; dead to my mother and my sister, who believed me to be the
dupe of an adventuress and the victim of a fraud; socially, morally, legally—dead.

And yet alive! Alive in poverty and in hiding. Alive, with the poor drawing-master to fight her battle, and to win
the way back for her to her place in the world of living beings.

Did no suspicion, excited by my own knowledge of Anne Catherick's resemblance to her, cross my mind, when
her face was first revealed to me? Not the shadow of a suspicion, from the moment when she lifted her veil by the
side of the inscription which recorded her death.

Before the sun of that day had set, before the last glimpse of the home which was closed against her had passed
from our view, the farewell words I spoke, when we parted at Limmeridge House, had been recalled by both of us--
repeated by me, recognised by her. "If ever the time comes, when the devotion of my whole heart and soul and
strength will give you a moment's happiness, or spare you a moment's sorrow, will you try to remember the poor
drawing-master who has taught you?" She, who now remembered so little of the trouble and terror of a later time,
remembered those words, and laid her poor head innocently and trustingly on the bosom of the man who had spoken
them. In that moment, when she called me by my name, when she said, "They have tried to make me forget
everything, Walter; but I remember Marian, and I remember YOU"—in that moment, I, who had long since given her
my love, gave her my life, and thanked God that it was mine to bestow on her. Yes! the time had come. From
thousands on thousands of miles away—through forest and wilderness, where companions stronger than I had fallen
by my side, through peril of death thrice renewed, and thrice escaped, the Hand that leads men on the dark road to
the future had led me to meet that time. Forlorn and disowned, sorely tried and sadly changed—her beauty faded, her
mind clouded—robbed of her station in the world, of her place among living creatures—the devotion I had promised,
the devotion of my whole heart and soul and strength, might be laid blamelessly now at those dear feet. In the right
of her calamity, in the right of her friendlessness, she was mine at last! Mine to support, to protect, to cherish, to
restore. Mine to love and honour as father and brother both. Mine to vindicate through all risks and all sacrifices—
through the hopeless struggle against Rank and Power, through the long fight with armed deceit and fortified
Success, through the waste of my reputation, through the loss of my friends, through the hazard of my life.

II

My position is defined—my motives are acknowledged. The story of Marian and the story of Laura must come
next.

I shall relate both narratives, not in the words (often interrupted, often inevitably confused) of the speakers
themselves, but in the words of the brief, plain, studiously simple abstract which I committed to writing for my own
guidance, and for the guidance of my legal adviser. So the tangled web will be most speedily and most intelligibly
unrolled.

The story of Marian begins where the narrative of the housekeeper at Blackwater Park left off.

On Lady Glyde's departure from her husband's house, the fact of that departure, and the necessary statement of
the circumstances under which it had taken place, were communicated to Miss Halcombe by the housekeeper. It was
not till some days afterwards (how many days exactly, Mrs. Michelson, in the absence of any written memorandum
on the subject, could not undertake to say) that a letter arrived from Madame Fosco announcing Lady Glyde's
sudden death in Count Fosco's house. The letter avoided mentioning dates, and left it to Mrs. Michelson's discretion
to break the news at once to Miss Halcombe, or to defer doing so until that lady's health should be more firmly
established.

Having consulted Mr. Dawson (who had been himself delayed, by ill health, in resuming his attendance at
Blackwater Park), Mrs. Michelson, by the doctor's advice, and in the doctor's presence, communicated the news,
either on the day when the letter was received, or on the day after. It is not necessary to dwell here upon the effect
which the intelligence of Lady Glyde's sudden death produced on her sister. It is only useful to the present purpose
to say that she was not able to travel for more than three weeks afterwards. At the end of that time she proceeded to
London accompanied by the housekeeper. They parted there—Mrs. Michelson previously informing Miss Halcombe
of her address, in case they might wish to communicate at a future period.

On parting with the housekeeper Miss Halcombe went at once to the office of Messrs. Gilmore & Kyrl to
consult with the latter gentleman in Mr. Gilmore's absence. She mentioned to Mr. Kyrl what she had thought it
desirable to conceal from everyone else (Mrs. Michelson included)—her suspicion of the circumstances under which
Lady Glyde was said to have met her death. Mr. Kyrl, who had previously given friendly proof of his anxiety to
serve Miss Halcombe, at once undertook to make such inquiries as the delicate and dangerous nature of the
investigation proposed to him would permit.

To exhaust this part of the subject before going farther, it may be mentioned that Count Fosco offered every
facility to Mr. Kyrl, on that gentleman's stating that he was sent by Miss Halcombe to collect such particulars as
had not yet reached her of Lady Glyde's decease. Mr. Kyrl was placed in communication with the medical man,
Mr. Goodricke, and with the two servants. In the absence of any means of ascertaining the exact date of Lady
Glyde's departure from Blackwater Park, the result of the doctor's and the servants' evidence, and of the volunteered statements of Count Fosco and his wife, was conclusive to the mind of Mr. Kyrle. He could only assume that the intensity of Miss Halcombe's suffering, under the loss of her sister, had misled her judgment in a most deplorable manner, and he wrote her word that the shocking suspicion to which she had alluded in his presence was, in his opinion, destitute of the smallest fragment of foundation in truth. Thus the investigation by Mr. Gilmore's partner began and ended.

Meanwhile, Miss Halcombe had returned to Limmeridge House, and had there collected all the additional information which she was able to obtain.

Mr. Fairlie had received his first intimation of his niece's death from his sister, Madame Fosco, this letter also not containing any exact reference to dates. He had sanctioned his sister's proposal that the deceased lady should be laid in her mother's grave in Limmeridge churchyard. Count Fosco had accompanied the remains to Cumberland, and had attended the funeral at Limmeridge, which took place on the 30th of July. It was followed, as a mark of respect, by all the inhabitants of the village and the neighbourhood. On the next day the inscription (originally drawn out, it was said, by the aunt of the deceased lady, and submitted for approval to her brother, Mr. Fairlie) was engraved on one side of the monument over the tomb.

On the day of the funeral, and for one day after it, Count Fosco had been received as a guest at Limmeridge House, but no interview had taken place between Mr. Fairlie and himself, by the former gentleman's desire. They had communicated by writing, and through this medium Count Fosco had made Mr. Fairlie acquainted with the details of his niece's last illness and death. The letter presenting this information added no new facts to the facts already known, but one very remarkable paragraph was contained in the postscript. It referred to Anne Catherick.

The substance of the paragraph in question was as follows--

It first informed Mr. Fairlie that Anne Catherick (of whom he might hear full particulars from Miss Halcombe when she reached Limmeridge) had been traced and recovered in the neighbourhood of Blackwater Park, and had been for the second time placed under the charge of the medical man from whose custody she had once escaped.

This was the first part of the postscript. The second part warned Mr. Fairlie that Anne Catherick's mental malady had been aggravated by her long freedom from control, and that the insane hatred and distrust of Sir Percival Glyde, which had been one of her most marked delusions in former times, still existed under a newly-acquired form. The unfortunate woman's last idea in connection with Sir Percival was the idea of annoying and distressing him, and of elevating herself, as she supposed, in the estimation of the patients and nurses, by assuming the character of his deceased wife, the scheme of this personation having evidently occurred to her after a stolen interview which she had succeeded in obtaining with Lady Glyde, and at which she had observed the extraordinary accidental likeness between the deceased lady and herself. It was to the last degree improbable that she would succeed a second time in escaping from the Asylum, but it was just possible she might find some means of annoying the late Lady Glyde's relatives with letters, and in that case Mr. Fairlie was warned beforehand how to receive them.

The postscript, expressed in these terms, was shown to Miss Halcombe when she arrived at Limmeridge. There were also placed in her possession the clothes Lady Glyde had worn, and the other effects she had brought with her to her aunt's house. They had been carefully collected and sent to Cumberland by Madame Fosco.

Such was the posture of affairs when Miss Halcombe reached Limmeridge in the early part of September.

Shortly afterwards she was confined to her room by a relapse, her weakened physical energies giving way under the severe mental affliction from which she was now suffering. On getting stronger again, in a month's time, her suspicion of the circumstances described as attending her sister's death still remained unshaken. She had heard nothing in the interim of Sir Percival Glyde, but letters had reached her from Madame Fosco, making the most affectionate inquiries on the part of her husband and herself. Instead of answering these letters, Miss Halcombe caused the house in St. John's Wood, and the proceedings of its inmates, to be privately watched.

Nothing doubtful was discovered. The same result attended the next investigations, which were secretly instituted on the subject of Mrs. Rubelle. She had arrived in London about six months before with her husband. They had come from Lyons, and they had taken a house in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, to be fitted up as a boarding-house for foreigners, who were expected to visit England in large numbers to see the Exhibition of 1851.

Nothing was known against husband or wife in the neighbourhood. They were quiet people, and they had paid their way honestly up to the present time. The final inquiries related to Sir Percival Glyde. He was settled in Paris, and living there quietly in a small circle of English and French friends.

Foiled at all points, but still not able to rest, Miss Halcombe next determined to visit the Asylum in which she then supposed Anne Catherick to be for the second time confined. She had felt a strong curiosity about the woman in former days, and she was now doubly interested--first, in ascertaining whether the report of Anne Catherick's attempted personation of Lady Glyde was true, and secondly (if it proved to be true), in discovering for herself what the poor creature's real motives were for attempting the deceit.
Although Count Fosco’s letter to Mr. Fairlie did not mention the address of the Asylum, that important omission cast no difficulties in Miss Halcombe’s way. When Mr. Hartright had met Anne Catherick at Limmeridge, she had informed him of the locality in which the house was situated, and Miss Halcombe had noted down the direction in her diary, with all the other particulars of the interview exactly as she heard them from Mr. Hartright’s own lips. Accordingly she looked back at the entry and extracted the address—furnished herself with the Count’s letter to Mr. Fairlie as a species of credential which might be useful to her, and started by herself for the Asylum on the eleventh of October.

She passed the night of the eleventh in London. It had been her intention to sleep at the house inhabited by Lady Glyde’s old governess, but Mrs. Vesey’s agitation at the sight of her lost pupil’s nearest and dearest friend was so distressing that Miss Halcombe considerably refrained from remaining in her presence, and removed to a respectable boarding-house in the neighbourhood, recommended by Mrs. Vesey’s married sister. The next day she proceeded to the Asylum, which was situated not far from London on the northern side of the metropolis.

She was immediately admitted to see the proprietor.

At first he appeared to be decidedly unwilling to let her communicate with his patient. But on her showing him the postscript to Count Fosco’s letter—on her reminding him that she was the "Miss Halcombe" there referred to—that she was a near relative of the deceased Lady Glyde—and that she was therefore naturally interested, for family reasons, in observing for herself the extent of Anne Catherick’s delusion in relation to her late sister—the tone and manner of the owner of the Asylum altered, and he withdrew his objections. He probably felt that a continued refusal, under these circumstances, would not only be an act of discourtesy in itself, but would also imply that the proceedings in his establishment were not of a nature to bear investigation by respectable strangers.

Miss Halcombe’s own impression was that the owner of the Asylum had not been received into the confidence of Sir Percival and the Count. His consenting at all to let her visit his patient seemed to afford one proof of this, and his readiness in making admissions which could scarcely have escaped the lips of an accomplice, certainly appeared to furnish another.

For example, in the course of the introductory conversation which took place, he informed Miss Halcombe that Anne Catherick had been brought back to him with the necessary order and certificates by Count Fosco on the twenty-seventh of July—the Count also producing a letter of explanations and instructions signed by Sir Percival Glyde. On receiving his inmate again, the proprietor of the Asylum acknowledged that he had observed some curious personal changes in her. Such changes no doubt were not without precedent in his experience of persons mentally afflicted. Insane people were often at one time, outwardly as well as inwardly, unlike what they were at another—the change from better to worse, or from worse to better, in the madness having a necessary tendency to produce alterations of appearance externally. He allowed for these, and he allowed also for the modification in the form of Anne Catherick’s delusion, which was reflected no doubt in her manner and expression. But he was still perplexed at times by certain differences between his patient before she had escaped and his patient since she had been brought back. Those differences were too minute to be described. He could not say of course that she was absolutely altered in height or shape or complexion, or in the colour of her hair and eyes, or in the general form of her face—the change was something that he felt more than something that he saw. In short, the case had been a puzzle from the first, and one more perplexity was added to it now.

It cannot be said that this conversation led to the result of even partially preparing Miss Halcombe’s mind for what was to come. But it produced, nevertheless, a very serious effect upon her. She was so completely unnerved by it, that some little time elapsed before she could summon composure enough to follow the proprietor of the Asylum to that part of the house in which the inmates were confined.

On inquiry, it turned out that the supposed Anne Catherick was then taking exercise in the grounds attached to the establishment. One of the nurses volunteered to conduct Miss Halcombe to the place, the proprietor of the Asylum remaining in the house for a few minutes to attend to a case which required his services, and then engaging to join his visitor in the grounds.

The nurse led Miss Halcombe to a distant part of the property, which was prettily laid out, and after looking about her a little, turned into a turf walk, shaded by a shrubbery on either side. About half-way down this walk two women were slowly approaching. The nurse pointed to them and said, "There is Anne Catherick, ma’am, with the attendant who waits on her. The attendant will answer any questions you wish to put." With those words the nurse left her to return to the duties of the house.

Miss Halcombe advanced on her side, and the women advanced on theirs. When they were within a dozen paces of each other, one of the women stopped for an instant, looked eagerly at the strange lady, shook off the nurse’s grasp on her, and the next moment rushed into Miss Halcombe’s arms. In that moment Miss Halcombe recognised her sister—recognised the dead-alive.

Fortunately for the success of the measures taken subsequently, no one was present at that moment but the nurse.
She was a young woman, and she was so startled that she was at first quite incapable of interfering. When she was able to do so her whole services were required by Miss Halcombe, who had for the moment sunk altogether in the effort to keep her own senses under the shock of the discovery. After waiting a few minutes in the fresh air and the cool shade, her natural energy and courage helped her a little, and she became sufficiently mistress of herself to feel the necessity of recalling her presence of mind for her unfortunate sister's sake.

She obtained permission to speak alone with the patient, on condition that they both remained well within the nurse's view. There was no time for questions--there was only time for Miss Halcombe to impress on the unhappy lady the necessity of controlling herself, and to assure her of immediate help and rescue if she did so. The prospect of escaping from the Asylum by obedience to her sister's directions was sufficient to quiet Lady Glyde, and to make her understand what was required of her. Miss Halcombe next returned to the nurse, placed all the gold she then had in her pocket (three sovereigns) in the nurse's hands, and asked when and where she could speak to her alone.

The woman was at first surprised and distrustful. But on Miss Halcombe's declaring that she only wanted to put some questions which she was too much agitated to ask at that moment, and that she had no intention of misleading the nurse into any dereliction of duty, the woman took the money, and proposed three o'clock on the next day as the time for the interview. She might then slip out for half an hour, after the patients had dined, and she would meet the lady in a retired place, outside the high north wall which screened the grounds of the house. Miss Halcombe had only time to assent, and to whisper to her sister that she should hear from her on the next day, when the proprietor of the Asylum joined them. He noticed his visitor's agitation, which Miss Halcombe accounted for by saying that her interview with Anne Catherick had a little startled her at first. She took her leave as soon after as possible--that is to say, as soon as she could summon courage to force herself from the presence of her unfortunate sister.

A very little reflection, when the capacity to reflect returned, convinced her that any attempt to identify Lady Glyde and to rescue her by legal means, would, even if successful, involve a delay that might be fatal to her sister's intellects, which were shaken already by the horror of the situation to which she had been consigned. By the time Miss Halcombe had got back to London, she had determined to effect Lady Glyde's escape privately, by means of the nurse.

She went at once to her stockbroker, and sold out of the funds all the little property she possessed, amounting to rather less than seven hundred pounds. Determined, if necessary, to pay the price of her sister's liberty with every farthing she had in the world, she repaired the next day, having the whole sum about her in bank-notes, to her appointment outside the Asylum wall.

The nurse was there. Miss Halcombe approached the subject cautiously by many preliminary questions. She discovered, among other particulars, that the nurse who had in former times attended on the true Anne Catherick had been held responsible (although she was not to blame for it) for the patient's escape, and had lost her place in consequence. The same penalty, it was added, would attach to the person then speaking to her, if the supposed Anne Catherick was missing a second time; and, moreover, the nurse in this case had an especial interest in keeping her place. She was engaged to be married, and she and her future husband were waiting till they could save, together, between two and three hundred pounds to start in business. The nurse's wages were good, and she might succeed, by strict economy, in contributing her small share towards the sum required in two years' time.

On this hint Miss Halcombe spoke. She declared that the supposed Anne Catherick was nearly related to her, that she had been placed in the Asylum under a fatal mistake, and that the nurse would be doing a good and a Christian action in being the means of restoring them to one another. Before there was time to start a single objection, Miss Halcombe took four bank-notes of a hundred pounds each from her pocket-book, and offered them to the woman, as a compensation for the risk she was to run, and for the loss of her place.

The nurse hesitated, through sheer incredulity and surprise. Miss Halcombe pressed the point on her firmly.

"You will be doing a good action," she repeated; "you will be helping the most injured and unhappy woman alive. There is your marriage portion for a reward. Bring her safely to me here, and I will put these four bank-notes into your hand before I claim her."

"Will you give me a letter saying those words, which I can show to my sweetheart when he asks how I got the money?" inquired the woman.

"I will bring the letter with me, ready written and signed," answered Miss Halcombe.

"Then I'll risk it," said the nurse.

"When?"

"To-morrow."

It was hastily agreed between them that Miss Halcombe should return early the next morning and wait out of sight among the trees--always, however, keeping near the quiet spot of ground under the north wall. The nurse could fix no time for her appearance, caution requiring that she should wait and be guided by circumstances. On that understanding they separated.
Miss Halcombe was at her place, with the promised letter and the promised bank-notes, before ten the next morning. She waited more than an hour and a half. At the end of that time the nurse came quickly round the corner of the wall holding Lady Glyde by the arm. The moment they met Miss Halcombe put the bank-notes and the letter into her hand, and the sisters were united again.

The nurse had dressed Lady Glyde, with excellent forethought, in a bonnet, veil, and shawl of her own. Miss Halcombe only detained her to suggest a means of turning the pursuit in a false direction, when the escape was discovered at the Asylum. She was to go back to the house, to mention in the hearing of the other nurses that Anne Catherick had been inquiring latterly about the distance from London to Hampshire, to wait till the last moment, before discovery was inevitable, and then to give the alarm that Anne was missing. The supposed inquiries about Hampshire, when communicated to the owner of the Asylum, would lead him to imagine that his patient had returned to Blackwater Park, under the influence of the delusion which made her persist in asserting herself to be Lady Glyde, and the first pursuit would, in all probability, be turned in that direction.

The nurse consented to follow these suggestions, the more readily as they offered her the means of securing herself against any worse consequences than the loss of her place, by remaining in the Asylum, and so maintaining the appearance of innocence, at least. She at once returned to the house, and Miss Halcombe lost no time in taking her sister back with her to London. They caught the afternoon train to Carlisle the same afternoon, and arrived at Limmeridge, without accident or difficulty of any kind, that night.

During the latter part of their journey they were alone in the carriage, and Miss Halcombe was able to collect such remembrances of the past as her sister's confused and weakened memory was able to recall. The terrible story of the conspiracy so obtained was presented in fragments, sadly incoherent in themselves, and widely detached from each other. Imperfect as the revelation was, it must nevertheless be recorded here before this explanatory narrative closes with the events of the next day at Limmeridge House.

Lady Glyde's recollection of the events which followed her departure from Blackwater Park began with her arrival at the London terminus of the South Western Railway. She had omitted to make a memorandum beforehand of the day on which she took the journey. All hope of fixing that important date by any evidence of hers, or of Mrs. Michelson's, must be given up for lost.

On the arrival of the train at the platform Lady Glyde found Count Fosco waiting for her. He was at the carriage door as soon as the porter could open it. The train was unusually crowded, and there was great confusion in getting the luggage. Some person whom Count Fosco brought with him procured the luggage which belonged to Lady Glyde. It was marked with her name. She drove away alone with the Count in a vehicle which she did not particularly notice at the time.

Her first question, on leaving the terminus, referred to Miss Halcombe. The Count informed her that Miss Halcombe had not yet gone to Cumberland, after-consideration having caused him to doubt the prudence of her taking so long a journey without some days' previous rest.

Lady Glyde next inquired whether her sister was then staying in the Count's house. Her recollection of the answer was confused, her only distinct impression in relation to it being that the Count declared he was then taking her to see Miss Halcombe. Lady Glyde's experience of London was so limited that she could not tell, at the time, through what streets they were driving. But they never left the streets, and they never passed any gardens or trees. When the carriage stopped, it stopped in a small street behind a square—a square in which there were shops, and public buildings, and many people. From these recollections (of which Lady Glyde was certain) it seems quite clear that Count Fosco did not take her to his own residence in the suburb of St. John's Wood.

They entered the house, and went upstairs to a back room, either on the first or second floor. The luggage was carefully brought in. A female servant opened the door, and a man with a dark beard, apparently a foreigner, met them in the hall, and with great politeness showed them the way upstairs. In answer to Lady Glyde's inquiries, the Count assured her that Miss Halcombe was in the house, and that she should be immediately informed of her sister's arrival. He and the foreigner then went away and left her by herself in the room. It was poorly furnished as a sitting-room, and it looked out on the backs of houses.

The place was remarkably quiet—no footsteps went up or down the stairs—she only heard in the room beneath her a dull, rumbling sound of men's voices talking. Before she had been long left alone the Count returned, to explain that Miss Halcombe was then taking rest, and could not be disturbed for a little while. He was accompanied into the room by a gentleman (an Englishman), whom he begged to present as a friend of his.

After this singular introduction—in the course of which no names, to the best of Lady Glyde's recollection, had been mentioned—she was left alone with the stranger. He was perfectly civil, but he startled and confused her by some odd questions about herself, and by looking at her, while he asked them, in a strange manner. After remaining a short time he went out, and a minute or two afterwards a second stranger—also an Englishman—came in. This person introduced himself as another friend of Count Fosco's, and he, in his turn, looked at her very oddly, and
asked some curious questions—never, as well as she could remember, addressing her by name, and going out again, after a little while, like the first man. By this time she was so frightened about herself, and so uneasy about her sister, that she had thoughts of venturing downstairs again, and claiming the protection and assistance of the only woman she had seen in the house—the servant who answered the door.

Just as she had risen from her chair, the Count came back into the room.

The moment he appeared she asked anxiously how long the meeting between her sister and herself was to be still delayed. At first he returned an evasive answer, but on being pressed, he acknowledged, with great apparent reluctance, that Miss Halcombe was by no means so well as he had hitherto represented her to be. His tone and manner, in making this reply, so alarmed Lady Glyde, or rather so painfully increased the uneasiness which she had felt in the company of the two strangers, that a sudden faintness overcame her, and she was obliged to ask for a glass of water. The Count called from the door for water, and for a bottle of smelling-salts. Both were brought in by the foreign-looking man with the beard. The water, when Lady Glyde attempted to drink it, had so strange a taste that it increased her faintness, and she hastily took the bottle of salts from Count Fosco, and smelt at it. Her head became giddy on the instant. The Count caught the bottle as it dropped out of her hand, and the last impression of which she was conscious was that he held it to her nostrils again.

From this point her recollections were found to be confused, fragmentary, and difficult to reconcile with any reasonable probability.

Her own impression was that she recovered her senses later in the evening, that she then left the house, that she went (as she had previously arranged to go, at Blackwater Park) to Mrs. Vesey's— that she drank tea there, and that she passed the night under Mrs. Vesey's roof. She was totally unable to say how, or when, or in what company she left the house to which Count Fosco had brought her. But she persisted in asserting that she had been to Mrs. Vesey's, and still more extraordinary, that she had been helped to undress and get to bed by Mrs. Rubelle! She could not remember what the conversation was at Mrs. Vesey's or whom she saw there besides that lady, or why Mrs. Rubelle should have been present in the house to help her.

Her recollection of what happened to her the next morning was still more vague and unreliable.

She had some dim idea of driving out (at what hour she could not say) with Count Fosco, and with Mrs. Rubelle again for a female attendant. But when, and why, she left Mrs. Vesey she could not tell; neither did she know what direction the carriage drove in, or where it set her down, or whether the Count and Mrs. Rubelle did or did not remain with her all the time she was out. At this point in her sad story there was a total blank. She had no impressions of the faintest kind to communicate—no idea whether one day, or more than one day, had passed—until she came to herself suddenly in a strange place, surrounded by women who were all unknown to her.

This was the Asylum. Here she first heard herself called by Anne Catherick's name, and here, as a last remarkable circumstance in the story of the conspiracy, her own eyes informed her that she had Anne Catherick's clothes on. The nurse, on the first night in the Asylum, had shown her the marks on each article of her underclothing as it was taken off, and had said, not at all irritatingly or unkindly, "Look at your own name on your own clothes, and don't worry us all any more about being Lady Glyde. She's dead and buried, and you're alive and hearty. Do look at your clothes now! There it is, in good marking ink, and there you will find it on all your old things, which we have kept in the house— Anne Catherick, as plain as print!" And there it was, when Miss Halcombe examined the linen her sister wore, on the night of their arrival at Limmeridge House.

These were the only recollections—all of them uncertain, and some of them contradictory—which could be extracted from Lady Glyde by careful questioning on the journey to Cumberland. Miss Halcombe abstained from pressing her with any inquiries relating to events in the Asylum—her mind being but too evidently unfit to bear the trial of reverting to them. It was known, by the voluntary admission of the owner of the mad-house, that she was received there on the twenty-seventh of July. From that date until the fifteenth of October (the day of her rescue) she had been under restraint, her identity with Anne Catherick systematically asserted, and her sanity, from first to last, practically denied. Faculties less delicately balanced, constitutions less tenderly organised, must have suffered under such an ordeal as this. No man could have gone through it and come out of it unchanged.

Arriving at Limmeridge late on the evening of the fifteenth, Miss Halcombe wisely resolved not to attempt the assertion of Lady Glyde's identity until the next day.

The first thing in the morning she went to Mr. Fairlie's room, and using all possible cautions and preparations beforehand, at last told him in so many words what had happened. As soon as his first astonishment and alarm had subsided, he angrily declared that Miss Halcombe had allowed herself to be duped by Anne Catherick. He referred her to Count Fosco's letter, and to what she had herself told him of the personal resemblance between Anne and his deceased niece, and he positively declined to admit to his presence, even for one minute only, a madwoman, whom it was an insult and an outrage to have brought into his house at all.

Miss Halcombe left the room—waited till the first heat of her indignation had passed away—decided on reflection
that Mr. Fairlie should see his niece in the interests of common humanity before he closed his doors on her as a stranger--and thereupon, without a word of previous warning, took Lady Glyde with her to his room. The servant was posted at the door to prevent their entrance, but Miss Halcombe insisted on passing him, and made her way into Mr. Fairlie's presence, leading her sister by the hand.

The scene that followed, though it only lasted for a few minutes, was too painful to be described--Miss Halcombe herself shrank from referring to it. Let it be enough to say that Mr. Fairlie declared, in the most positive terms, that he did not recognise the woman who had been brought into his room--that he saw nothing in her face and manner to make him doubt for a moment that his niece lay buried in Limmeridge churchyard, and that he would call on the law to protect him if before the day was over she was not removed from the house.

Taking the very worst view of Mr. Fairlie's selfishness, indolence, and habitual want of feeling, it was manifestly impossible to suppose that he was capable of such infamy as secretly recognising and openly disowning his brother's child. Miss Halcombe humanely and sensibly allowed all due force to the influence of prejudice and alarm in preventing him from fairly exercising his perceptions, and accounted for what had happened in that way. But when she next put the servants to the test, and found that they too were, in every case, uncertain, to say the least of it, whether the lady presented to them was their young mistress or Anne Catherick, of whose resemblance to her they had all heard, the sad conclusion was inevitable that the change produced in Lady Glyde's face and manner by her imprisonment in the Asylum was far more serious than Miss Halcombe had at first supposed. The vile deception which had asserted her death defied exposure even in the house where she was born, and among the people with whom she had lived.

In a less critical situation the effort need not have been given up as hopeless even yet.

For example, the maid, Fanny, who happened to be then absent from Limmeridge, was expected back in two days, and there would be a chance of gaining her recognition to start with, seeing that she had been in much more constant communication with her mistress, and had been much more heartily attached to her than the other servants. Again, Lady Glyde might have been privately kept in the house or in the village to wait until her health was a little recovered and her mind was a little steadied again. When her memory could be once more trusted to serve her, she would naturally refer to persons and events in the past with a certainty and a familiarity which no impostor could simulate, and so the fact of her identity, which her own appearance had failed to establish, might subsequently be proved, with time to help her, by the surer test of her own words.

But the circumstances under which she had regained her freedom rendered all recourse to such means as these simply impracticable. The pursuit from the Asylum, diverted to Hampshire for the time only, would infallibly next take the direction of Cumberland. The persons appointed to seek the fugitive might arrive at Limmeridge House at a few hours' notice, and in Mr. Fairlie's present temper of mind they might count on the immediate exertion of his local influence and authority to assist them. The commonest consideration for Lady Glyde's safety forced on Miss Halcombe the necessity of resigning the struggle to do her justice, and of removing her at once from the place of all others that was now most dangerous to her--the neighbourhood of her own home.

An immediate return to London was the first and wisest measure of security which suggested itself. In the great city all traces of them might be most speedily and most surely effaced. There were no preparations to make--no farewell words of kindness to exchange with any one. On the afternoon of that memorable day of the sixteenth Miss Halcombe roused her sister to a last exertion of courage, and without a living soul to wish them well at parting, the two took their way into the world alone, and turned their backs for ever on Limmeridge House.

They had passed the hill above the churchyard, when Lady Glyde insisted on turning back to look her last at her mother's grave. Miss Halcombe tried to shake her resolution, but, in this one instance, tried in vain. She was immovable. Her dim eyes lit with a sudden fire, and flashed through the veil that hung over them--her wasted fingers strengthened moment by moment round the friendly arm by which they had held so listlessly till this time. I believe in my soul that the hand of God was pointing their way back to them, and that the most innocent and the most afflicted of His creatures was chosen in that dread moment to see it.

They retraced their steps to the burial-ground, and by that act sealed the future of our three lives.

III

This was the story of the past--the story so far as we knew it then.

Two obvious conclusions presented themselves to my mind after hearing it. In the first place, I saw darkly what the nature of the conspiracy had been, how chances had been watched, and how circumstances had been handled to ensure impunity to a daring and an intricate crime. While all details were still a mystery to me, the vile manner in which the personal resemblance between the woman in white and Lady Glyde had been turned to account was clear beyond a doubt. It was plain that Anne Catherick had been introduced into Count Fosco's house as Lady Glyde--it was plain that Lady Glyde had taken the dead woman's place in the Asylum--the substitution having been so managed as to make innocent people (the doctor and the two servants certainly, and the owner of the mad-house in
strengthened the fatal resemblance between Anne Catherick and herself. In my narrative of events at the time of my seeing her.

If we had loved her less dearly, if the instinct implanted in us by that love had not been far more certain, we might have hesitated on first identity. But even we, far keener than any process of observation, even we might have hesitated on first sight, almost in the midst of that very face, almost at the very first glance, almost at the very first thought. The sense of this serious peril—a peril which every day and every hour might bring nearer and nearer to us—was the one influence that guided me in fixing the place of our retreat. I chose it in the far east of London, where there were fewest idle people to lounge and look about them in the streets. I chose it in a poor and a populous neighbourhood—because the harder the struggle for existence among the men and women about us, the less the risk of their having the time or taking the pains to notice chance strangers who came among them. These were the great advantages I looked to, but our locality was a gain to us also in another and a hardly less important respect. We could live cheaply by the daily work of my hands, and could save every farthing we possessed to forward the purpose, the righteous purpose, of redressing an infamous wrong—which, from first to last, I now kept steadily in view.

In a week's time Marian Halcombe and I had settled how the course of our new lives should be directed.

There were no other lodgers in the house, and we had the means of going in and out without passing through the shop. I arranged, for the present at least, that neither Marian nor Laura should stir outside the door without my being with them, and that in my absence from home they should let no one into their rooms on any pretence whatever. This rule established, I went to a friend whom I had known in former days—a wood engraver in large practice—to seek for employment, telling him, at the same time, that I had reasons for wishing to remain unknown.

He at once concluded that I was in debt, expressed his regret in the usual forms, and then promised to do what he could to assist me. I left his false impression undisturbed, and accepted the work he had to give. He knew that he could trust my experience and my industry. I had what he wanted, steadiness and facility, and though my earnings were but small, they sufficed for our necessities. As soon as we could feel certain of this, Marian Halcombe and I put together what we possessed. She had between two and three hundred pounds left of her own property, and I had nearly as much remaining from the purchase-money obtained by the sale of my drawing-master's practice before I left England. Together we made up between us more than four hundred pounds. I deposited this little fortune in a bank, to be kept for the expense of those secret inquiries and investigations which I was determined to set on foot, and to carry on by myself if I could find no one to help me. We calculated our weekly expenditure to the last farthing, and we never touched our little fund except in Laura's interests and for Laura's sake.

The house-work, which, if we had dared trust a stranger near us, would have been done by a servant, was taken on the first day, taken as her own right, by Marian Halcombe. "What a woman's hands ARE fit for," she said, "early and late, these hands of mine shall do." They trembled as she held them out. The wasted arms told their sad story of the past, as she turned up the sleeves of the poor plain dress that she wore for safety's sake; but the unquenchable spirit of the woman burnt bright in her even yet. I saw the big tears rise thick in her eyes, and fall slowly over her cheeks as she looked at me. She dashed them away with a touch of her old energy, and smiled with a faint reflection of her old good spirits. "Don't doubt my courage, Walter," she pleaded, "it's my weakness that cries, not ME. The house-work shall conquer it if I can't." And she kept her word—the victory was won when we met in the evening, and she sat down to rest. Her large steady black eyes looked at me with a flash of their bright firmness of bygone days. "I am not quite broken down yet," she said. "I am worth trusting with my share of the work." Before I could answer, she added in a whisper, "And worth trusting with my share in the risk and the danger too. Remember that, if the time comes!"

I did remember it when the time came.

As early as the end of October the daily course of our lives had assumed its settled direction, and we three were as completely isolated in our place of concealment as if the house we lived in had been a desert island, and the great network of streets and the thousands of our fellow-creatures all round us the waters of an illimitable sea. I could now reckon on some leisure time for considering what my future plan of action should be, and how I might arm myself most securely at the outset for the coming struggle with Sir Percival and the Count.

I gave up all hope of appealing to my recognition of Laura, or to Marian's recognition of her, in proof of her identity. If we had loved her less dearly, if the instinct implanted in us by that love had not been far more certain than any exercise of reasoning, far keener than any process of observation, even we might have hesitated on first seeing her.

The outward changes wrought by the suffering and the terror of the past had fearfully, almost hopelessly, strengthened the fatal resemblance between Anne Catherick and herself. In my narrative of events at the time of my
residence in Limmeridge House, I have recorded, from my own observation of the two, how the likeness, striking as it was when viewed generally, failed in many important points of similarity when tested in detail. In those former days, if they had both been seen together side by side, no person could for a moment have mistaken them one for the other--as has happened often in the instances of twins. I could not say this now. The sorrow and suffering which I had once blamed myself for associating even by a passing thought with the future of Laura Fairlie, HAD set their profaning marks on the youth and beauty of her face; and the fatal resemblance which I had once seen and shuddered at seeing, in idea only, was now a real and living resemblance which asserted itself before my own eyes. Strangers, acquaintances, friends even who could not look at her as we looked, if she had been shown to them in the first days of her rescue from the Asylum, might have doubted if she were the Laura Fairlie they had once seen, and doubted without blame.

The one remaining chance, which I had at first thought might be trusted to serve us--the chance of appealing to her recollection of persons and events with which no impostor could be familiar, was proved, by the sad test of our later experience, to be hopeless. Every little caution that Marian and I practised towards her--every little remedy we tried, to strengthen and steady slowly the weakened, shaken faculties, was a fresh protest in itself against the risk of turning her mind back on the troubled and the terrible past.

The only events of former days which we ventured on encouraging her to recall were the little trivial domestic events of that happy time at Limmeridge, when I first went there and taught her to draw. The day when I roused those remembrances by showing her the sketch of the summer-house which she had given me on the morning of our farewell, and which had never been separated from me since, was the birthday of our first hope. Tenderly and gradually, the memory of the old walks and drives dawned upon her, and the poor weary pining eyes looked at Marian and at me with a new interest, with a faltering thoughtfulness in them, which from that moment we cherished and kept alive. I bought her a little box of colours, and a sketch-book like the old sketch-book which I had seen in her hands on the morning that we first met. Once again--oh me, once again!--at spare hours saved from my work, in the dull London light, in the poor London room, I sat by her side to guide the faltering touch, to help the feeble hand. Day by day I raised and raised the new interest till its place in the blank of her existence was at last assured--till she could think of her drawing and talk of it, and patiently practise it by herself, with some faint reflection of the innocent pleasure in my encouragement, the growing enjoyment in her own progress, which belonged to the lost life and the lost happiness of past days.

We helped her mind slowly by this simple means, we took her out between us to walk on fine days, in a quiet old City square near at hand, where there was nothing to confuse or alarm her--we spared a few pounds from the fund at the banker's to get her wine, and the delicate strengthening food that she required--we amused her in the evenings with children's games at cards, with scrap-books full of prints which I borrowed from the engraver who employed me--by these, and other trifling attentions like them, we composed her and steadied her, and hoped all things, as cheerfully as we could from time and care, and love that never neglected and never despaired of her. But to take her mercilessly from seclusion and repose--to confront her with strangers, or with acquaintances who were little better than strangers--to rouse the painful impressions of her past life which we had so carefully hushed to rest--this, even in her own interests, we dared not do. Whatever sacrifices it cost, whatever long, weary, heartbreaking delays it involved, the wrong that had been inflicted on her, if mortal means could grapple it, must be redressed without her knowledge and without her help.

This resolution settled, it was next necessary to decide how the first risk should be ventured, and what the first proceedings should be.

After consulting with Marian, I resolved to begin by gathering together as many facts as could be collected--then to ask the advice of Mr. Kyrle (whom we knew we could trust), and to ascertain from him, in the first instance, if the legal remedy lay fairly within our reach. I owed it to Laura's interests not to stake her whole future on my own unaided exertions, so long as there was the faintest prospect of strengthening our position by obtaining reliable assistance of any kind.

The first source of information to which I applied was the journal kept at Blackwater Park by Marian Halcombe. There were passages in this diary relating to myself which she thought it best that I should not see. Accordingly, she read to me from the manuscript, and I took the notes I wanted as she went on. We could only find time to pursue this occupation by sitting up late at night. Three nights were devoted to the purpose, and were enough to put me in possession of all that Marian could tell.

My next proceeding was to gain as much additional evidence as I could procure from other people without exciting suspicion. I went myself to Mrs. Vesey to ascertain if Laura's impression of having slept there was correct or not. In this case, from consideration for Mrs. Vesey's age and infirmity, and in all subsequent cases of the same kind from considerations of caution, I kept our real position a secret, and was always careful to speak of Laura as "the late Lady Glyde."
Mrs. Vesey’s answer to my inquiries only confirmed the apprehensions which I had previously felt. Laura had certainly written to say she would pass the night under the roof of her old friend—but she had never been near the house.

Her mind in this instance, and, as I feared, in other instances besides, confusedly presented to her something which she had only intended to do in the false light of something which she had really done. The unconscious contradiction of herself was easy to account for in this way—but it was likely to lead to serious results. It was a stumble on the threshold at starting—it was a flaw in the evidence which told fatally against us.

When I next asked for the letter which Laura had written to Mrs. Vesey from Blackwater Park, it was given to me without the envelope, which had been thrown into the wastepaper basket, and long since destroyed. In the letter itself no date was mentioned— not even the day of the week. It only contained these lines:— “Dearest Mrs. Vesey, I am in sad distress and anxiety, and I may come to your house to-morrow night, and ask for a bed. I can’t tell you what is the matter in this letter—I write it in such fear of being found out that I can fix my mind on nothing. Pray be at home to see me. I will give you a thousand kisses, and tell you everything. Your affectionate Laura.” What help was there in those lines? None.

On returning from Mrs. Vesey’s, I instructed Marian to write (observing the same caution which I practised myself) to Mrs. Michelson. She was to express, if she pleased, some general suspicion of Count Fosco’s conduct, and she was to ask the housekeeper to supply us with a plain statement of events, in the interests of truth. While we were waiting for the answer, which reached us in a week’s time, I went to the doctor in St. John’s Wood, introducing myself as sent by Miss Halcombe to collect, if possible, more particulars of her sister’s last illness than Mr. Kyrle had found the time to procure. By Mr. Goodricke’s assistance, I obtained a copy of the certificate of death, and an interview with the woman (Jane Gould) who had been employed to prepare the body for the grave. Through this person I also discovered a means of communicating with the servant, Hester Pinhorn. She had recently left her place in consequence of a disagreement with her mistress, and she was lodging with some people in the neighbourhood whom Mrs. Gould knew. In the manner here indicated I obtained the Narratives of the housekeeper, of the doctor, of Jane Gould, and of Hester Pinhorn, exactly as they are presented in these pages.

Furnished with such additional evidence as these documents afforded, I considered myself to be sufficiently prepared for a consultation with Mr. Kyrle, and Marian wrote accordingly to mention my name to him, and to specify the day and hour at which I requested to see him on private business.

There was time enough in the morning for me to take Laura out for her walk as usual, and to see her quietly settled at her drawing afterwards. She looked up at me with a new anxiety in her face as I rose to leave the room, and her fingers began to toy doubtfully, in the old way, with the brushes and pencils on the table.

“You are not tired of me yet?” she said. “You are not going away because you are tired of me? I will try to do better—I will try to get well. Are you as fond of me, Walter as you used to be, now I am so pale and thin, and so slow in learning to draw?”

She spoke as a child might have spoken, she showed me her thoughts as a child might have shown them. I waited a few minutes longer— waited to tell her that she was dearer to me now than she had ever been in the past times. “Try to get well again,” I said, encouraging the new hope in the future which I saw dawning in her mind, “try to get well again, for Marian’s sake and for mine.”

“Yes,” she said to herself, returning to her drawing. “I must try, because they are both so fond of me.” She suddenly looked up again. “Don’t be gone long! I can’t get on with my drawing, Walter, when you are not here to help me.”

"I shall soon be back, my darling—soon be back to see how you are getting on."

My voice faltered a little in spite of me. I forced myself from the room. It was no time, then, for parting with the self-control which might yet serve me in my need before the day was out.

As I opened the door, I beckoned to Marian to follow me to the stairs. It was necessary to prepare her for a result which I felt might sooner or later follow my showing myself openly in the streets.

"I shall, in all probability, be back in a few hours," I said, "and you will take care, as usual, to let no one inside the doors in my absence. But if anything happens—"

"What can happen?" she interposed quickly. "Tell me plainly, Walter, if there is any danger, and I shall know how to meet it."

"The only danger," I replied, "is that Sir Percival Glyde may have been recalled to London by the news of Laura’s escape. You are aware that he had me watched before I left England, and that he probably knows me by sight, although I don’t know him?"

She laid her hand on my shoulder and looked at me in anxious silence. I saw she understood the serious risk that threatened us.

"It is not likely," I said, "that I shall be seen in London again so soon, either by Sir Percival himself or by the
persons in his employ. But it is barely possible that an accident may happen. In that case, you will not be alarmed if I fail to return to-night, and you will satisfy any inquiry of Laura's with the best excuse that you can make for me? If I find the least reason to suspect that I am watched, I will take good care that no spy follows me back to this house. Don't doubt my return, Marian, however it may be delayed--and fear nothing."

"Nothing!" she answered firmly. "You shall not regret, Walter, that you have only a woman to help you." She paused, and detained me for a moment longer. "Take care!" she said, pressing my hand anxiously--"take care!"

I left her, and set forth to pave the way for discovery--the dark and doubtful way, which began at the lawyer's door.

IV

No circumstance of the slightest importance happened on my way to the offices of Messrs. Gilmore & Kyrle, in Chancery Lane.

While my card was being taken in to Mr. Kyrle, a consideration occurred to me which I deeply regretted not having thought of before. The information derived from Marian's diary made it a matter of certainty that Count Fosco had opened her first letter from Blackwater Park to Mr. Kyrle, and had, by means of his wife, intercepted the second. He was therefore well aware of the address of the office, and he would naturally infer that if Marian wanted advice and assistance, after Laura's escape from the Asylum, she would apply once more to the experience of Mr. Kyrle. In this case the office in Chancery Lane was the very first place which he and Sir Percival would cause to be watched, and if the same persons were chosen for the purpose who had been employed to follow me, before my departure from England, the fact of my return would in all probability be ascertained on that very day. I had thought, generally, of the chances of my being recognised in the streets, but the special risk connected with the office had never occurred to me until the present moment. It was too late now to repair this unfortunate error in judgment--too late to wish that I had made arrangements for meeting the lawyer in some place privately appointed beforehand. I could only resolve to be cautious on leaving Chancery Lane, and not to go straight home again under any circumstances whatever.

After waiting a few minutes I was shown into Mr. Kyrle's private room. He was a pale, thin, quiet, self-possessed man, with a very attentive eye, a very low voice, and a very undemonstrative manner--not (as I judged) ready with his sympathy where strangers were concerned, and not at all easy to disturb in his professional composure. A better man for my purpose could hardly have been found. If he committed himself to a decision at all, and if the decision was favourable, the strength of our case was as good as proved from that moment.

"Before I enter on the business which brings me here," I said, "I ought to warn you, Mr. Kyrle, that the shortest statement I can make of it may occupy some little time."

"My time is at Miss Halcombe's disposal," he replied. "Where any interests of hers are concerned, I represent my partner personally, as well as professionally. It was his request that I should do so, when he ceased to take an active part in business."

"May I inquire whether Mr. Gilmore is in England?"

"He is not, he is living with his relatives in Germany. His health has improved, but the period of his return is still uncertain."

While we were exchanging these few preliminary words, he had been searching among the papers before him, and he now produced from them a sealed letter. I thought he was about to hand the letter to me, but, apparently changing his mind, he placed it by itself on the table, settled himself in his chair, and silently waited to hear what I had to say.

Without wasting a moment in prefatory words of any sort, I entered on my narrative, and put him in full possession of the events which have already been related in these pages.

Lawyer as he was to the very marrow of his bones, I startled him out of his professional composure. Expressions of incredulity and surprise, which he could not repress, interrupted me several times before I had done. I persevered, however, to the end, and as soon as I reached it, boldly asked the one important question--

"What is your opinion, Mr. Kyrle?"

He was too cautious to commit himself to an answer without taking time to recover his self-possession first.

"Before I give my opinion," he said, "I must beg permission to clear the ground by a few questions."

He put the questions--sharp, suspicious, unbelieving questions, which clearly showed me, as they proceeded, that he thought I was the victim of a delusion, and that he might even have doubted, but for my introduction to him by Miss Halcombe, whether I was not attempting the perpetration of a cunningly-designed fraud.

"Do you believe that I have spoken the truth, Mr. Kyrle?" I asked, when he had done examining me.

"So far as your own convictions are concerned, I am certain you have spoken the truth," he replied. "I have the highest esteem for Miss Halcombe, and I have therefore every reason to respect a gentleman whose mediation she trusts in a matter of this kind. I will even go farther, if you like, and admit, for courtesy's sake and for argument's
sake, that the identity of Lady Glyde as a living person is a proved fact to Miss Halcombe and yourself. But you come to me for a legal opinion. As a lawyer, and as a lawyer only, it is my duty to tell you, Mr. Hartright, that you have not the shadow of a case."

"You put it strongly, Mr. Kyrle."

"I will try to put it plainly as well. The evidence of Lady Glyde's death is, on the face of it, clear and satisfactory. There is her aunt's testimony to prove that she came to Count Fosco's house, that she fell ill, and that she died. There is the testimony of the medical certificate to prove the death, and to show that it took place under natural circumstances. There is the fact of the funeral at Limmeridge, and there is the assertion of the inscription on the tomb. That is the case you want to overthrow. What evidence have you to support the declaration on your side that the person who died and was buried was not Lady Glyde? Let us run through the main points of your statement and see what they are worth. Miss Halcombe goes to a certain private Asylum, and there sees a certain female patient. It is known that a woman named Anne Catherick, and bearing an extraordinary personal resemblance to Lady Glyde, escaped from the Asylum; it is known that the person received there last July was received as Anne Catherick brought back; it is known that the gentleman who brought her back warned Mr. Fairlie that it was part of her insanity to be bent on personating his dead niece; and it is known that she did repeatedly declare herself in the Asylum (where no one believed her) to be Lady Glyde. These are all facts. What have you to set against them? Miss Halcombe's recognition of the woman, which recognition after-events invalidate or contradict. Does Miss Halcombe assert her supposed sister's identity to the owner of the Asylum, and take legal means for rescuing her? No, she secretly bribes a nurse to let her escape. When the patient has been released in this doubtful manner, and is taken to Mr. Fairlie, does he recognise her? Is he staggered for one instant in his belief of his niece's death? No. Do the servants recognise her? No. Is she kept in the neighbourhood to assert her own identity, and to stand the test of further proceedings? No, she is privately taken to London. In the meantime you have recognised her also, but you are not a relative--you are not even an old friend of the family. The servants contradict you, and Mr. Fairlie contradicts Miss Halcombe, and the supposed Lady Glyde contradicts herself. She declares she passed the night in London at a certain house. Your own evidence shows that she has never been near that house, and your own admission is that her condition of mind prevents you from producing her anywhere to submit to investigation, and to speak for herself. I pass over minor points of evidence on both sides to save time, and I ask you, if this case were to go now into a court of law--to go before a jury, bound to take facts as they reasonably appear--where are your proofs?"

I was obliged to wait and collect myself before I could answer him. It was the first time the story of Laura and the story of Marian had been presented to me from a stranger's point of view--the first time the terrible obstacles that lay across our path had been made to show themselves in their true character.

"There can be no doubt," I said, "that the facts, as you have stated them, appear to tell against us, but----"

"But you think those facts can be explained away," interposed Mr. Kyrle. "Let me tell you the result of my experience on that point. When an English jury has to choose between a plain fact ON the surface and a long explanation UNDER the surface, it always takes the fact in preference to the explanation. For example, Lady Glyde (I call the lady you represent by that name for argument's sake) declares she has slept at a certain house, and it is proved that she has not slept at that house. You explain this circumstance by entering into the state of her mind, and (I call the lady you represent by that name for argument's sake) declares she has slept at a certain house, and it is proved that she has not slept at that house. You explain this circumstance by entering into the state of her mind, and deducing from it a metaphysical conclusion. I don't say the conclusion is wrong--I only say that the jury will take the fact of her contradicting herself in preference to the explanation. For example, Lady Glyde (I call the lady you represent by that name for argument's sake) declares she has slept at a certain house, and it is proved that she has not slept at that house. You explain this circumstance by entering into the state of her mind, and deducing from it a metaphysical conclusion. I don't say the conclusion is wrong--I only say that the jury will take the fact of her contradicting herself in preference to the explanation. I don't say the conclusion is wrong--I only say that the jury will take the fact of her contradicting herself in preference to the explanation. I don't say the conclusion is wrong--I only say that the jury will take the fact of her contradicting herself in preference to the explanation."

"But is it not possible," I urged, "by dint of patience and exertion, to discover additional evidence? Miss Halcombe and I have a few hundred pounds----"

He looked at me with a half-suppressed pity, and shook his head.

"Consider the subject, Mr. Hartright, from your own point of view," he said. "If you are right about Sir Percival Glyde and Count Fosco (which I don't admit, mind), every imaginable difficulty would be thrown in the way of your getting fresh evidence. Every obstacle of litigation would be raised--every point in the case would be systematically contested--and by the time we had spent our thousands instead of our hundreds, the final result would, in all probability, be against us. Questions of identity, where instances of personal resemblance are concerned, are, in themselves, the hardest of all questions to settle--the hardest, even when they are free from the complications which beset the case we are now discussing. I really see no prospect of throwing any light whatever on this extraordinary affair. Even if the person buried in Limmeridge churchyard be not Lady Glyde, she was, in life, on your own showing, so like her, that we should gain nothing, if we applied for the necessary authority to have the body exhumed. In short, there is no case, Mr. Hartright--there is really no case."

I was determined to believe that there WAS a case, and in that determination shifted my ground, and appealed to him once more.

"Are there not other proofs that we might produce besides the proof of identity?" I asked.
"Not as you are situated," he replied. "The simplest and surest of all proofs, the proof by comparison of dates, is, as I understand, altogether out of your reach. If you could show a discrepancy between the date of the doctor's certificate and the date of Lady Glyde's journey to London, the matter would wear a totally different aspect, and I should be the first to say, Let us go on."

"That date may yet be recovered, Mr. Kyrle."

"On the day when it is recovered, Mr. Hartright, you will have a case. If you have any prospect, at this moment, of getting at it—tell me, and we shall see if I can advise you."

I considered. The housekeeper could not help us—Laura could not help us—Marian could not help us. In all probability, the only persons in existence who knew the date were Sir Percival and the Count.

"I can think of no means of ascertaining the date at present," I said, "because I can think of no persons who are sure to know it, but Count Fosco and Sir Percival Glyde."

Mr. Kyrle's calmly attentive face relaxed, for the first time, into a smile.

"With your opinion of the conduct of those two gentlemen," he said, "you don't expect help in that quarter, I presume? If they have combined to gain large sums of money by a conspiracy, they are not likely to confess it, at any rate."

"They may be forced to confess it, Mr. Kyrle."

"By whom?"

"By me."

We both rose. He looked me attentively in the face with more appearance of interest than he had shown yet. I could see that I had perplexed him a little.

"You are very determined," he said. "You have, no doubt, a personal motive for proceeding, into which it is not my business to inquire. If a case can be produced in the future, I can only say, my best assistance is at your service. At the same time I must warn you, as the money question always enters into the law question, that I see little hope, even if you ultimately established the fact of Lady Glyde's being alive, of recovering her fortune. The foreigner would probably leave the country before proceedings were commenced, and Sir Percival's embarrassments are numerous enough and pressing enough to transfer almost any sum of money he may possess from himself to his creditors. You are of course aware——"

I stopped him at that point.

"Let me beg that we may not discuss Lady Glyde's affairs," I said. "I have never known anything about them in former times, and I know nothing of them now—except that her fortune is lost. You are right in assuming that I have personal motives for stirring in this matter. I wish those motives to be always as disinterested as they are at the present moment——"

I bowed and walked to the door. He called me back and gave me the letter which I had seen him place on the table by itself at the beginning of our interview.

"This came by post a few days ago," he said. "Perhaps you will not mind delivering it? Pray tell Miss Halcombe, at the same time, that I sincerely regret being, thus far, unable to help her, except by advice, which will not be more welcome, I am afraid, to her than to you."

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"It is addressed to "Miss Halcombe. Care of Messrs. Gilmore & Kyrle, Chancery Lane." The handwriting was quite unknown to me.

On leaving the room I asked one last question.

"Do you happen to know," I said, "if Sir Percival Glyde is still in Paris?"
"He has returned to London," replied Mr. Kyrle. "At least I heard so from his solicitor, whom I met yesterday."

After that answer I went out.

On leaving the office the first precaution to be observed was to abstain from attracting attention by stopping to look about me. I walked towards one of the quietest of the large squares on the north of Holborn, then suddenly stopped and turned round at a place where a long stretch of pavement was left behind me.

There were two men at the corner of the square who had stopped also, and who were standing talking together. After a moment's reflection I turned back so as to pass them. One moved as I came near, and turned the corner leading from the square into the street. The other remained stationary. I looked at him as I passed and instantly recognised one of the men who had watched me before I left England.

If I had been free to follow my own instincts, I should probably have begun by speaking to the man, and have ended by knocking him down. But I was bound to consider consequences. If I once placed myself publicly in the wrong, I put the weapons at once into Sir Percival's hands. There was no choice but to oppose cunning by cunning. I turned into the street down which the second man had disappeared, and passed him, waiting in a doorway. He was a stranger to me, and I was glad to make sure of his personal appearance in case of future annoyance. Having done this, I again walked northward till I reached the New Road. There I turned aside to the west (having the men behind me all the time), and waited at a point where I knew myself to be at some distance from a cab-stand, until a fast two-wheeled cab, empty, should have passed me. One passed in a few minutes. I jumped in and told the man to drive rapidly towards Hyde Park. There was no second fast cab for the spies behind me. I saw them dart across to the other side of the road, to follow me by running, until a cab or a cab-stand came in their way. But I had the start of them, and when I stopped the driver and got out, they were nowhere in sight. I crossed Hyde Park and made sure, on the open ground, that I was free. When I at last turned my steps homewards, it was not till many hours later—not till after dark.

I found Marian waiting for me alone in the little sitting-room. She had persuaded Laura to go to rest, after first promising to show me her drawing the moment I came in. The poor little dim faint sketch—so trifling in itself, so touching in its associations—was propped up carefully on the table with two books, and was placed where the faint light of the one candle we allowed ourselves might fall on it to the best advantage. I sat down to look at the drawing, and to tell Marian, in whispers, what had happened. The partition which divided us from the next room was so thin that we could almost hear Laura's breathing, and we might have disturbed her if we had spoken aloud.

Marian preserved her composure while I described my interview with Mr. Kyrle. But her face became troubled when I spoke next of the men who had followed me from the lawyer's office, and when I told her of the discovery of Sir Percival's return.

"Bad news, Walter," she said, "the worst news you could bring. Have you nothing more to tell me?"

"I have something to give you," I replied, handing her the note which Mr. Kyrle had confided to my care.

She looked at the address and recognised the handwriting instantly.

"You know your correspondent?" I said.

"Too well," she answered. "My correspondent is Count Fosco."

With that reply she opened the note. Her face flushed deeply while she read it—her eyes brightened with anger as she handed it to me to read in my turn.

The note contained these lines—

"Impelled by honourable admiration—honourable to myself, honourable to you—I write, magnificent Marian, in the interests of your tranquility, to say two consoling words—"

"Fear nothing!"

"Exercise your fine natural sense and remain in retirement. Dear and admirable woman, invite no dangerous publicity. Resignation is sublime—adopt it. The modest repose of home is eternally fresh—enjoy it. The storms of life pass harmless over the valley of Seclusion—dwell, dear lady, in the valley.

"Do this and I authorise you to fear nothing. No new calamity shall lacerate your sensibilities—sensibilities precious to me as my own. You shall not be molested, the fair companion of your retreat shall not be pursued. She has found a new asylum in your heart. Priceless asylum!—I envy her and leave her there.

"One last word of affectionate warning, of paternal caution, and I tear myself from the charm of addressing you—I close these fervent lines—"

"Advance no farther than you have gone already, compromise no serious interests, threaten nobody. Do not, I implore you, force me into action—ME, the Man of Action—when it is the cherished object of my ambition to be passive, to restrict the vast reach of my energies and my combinations for your sake. If you have rash friends, moderate their deplorable ardour. If Mr. Hartright returns to England, hold no communication with him. I walk on a path of my own, and Percival follows at my heels. On the day when Mr. Hartright crosses that path, he is a lost man."
The only signature to these lines was the initial letter F, surrounded by a circle of intricate flourishes. I threw the letter on the table with all the contempt that I felt for it.

"He is trying to frighten you--a sure sign that he is frightened himself," I said.

She was too genuine a woman to treat the letter as I treated it. The insolent familiarity of the language was too much for her self-control. As she looked at me across the table, her hands clenched themselves in her lap, and the old quick fiery temper flamed out again brightly in her cheeks and her eyes.

"Walter!" she said, "if ever those two men are at your mercy, and if you are obliged to spare one of them, don't let it be the Count."

"I will keep this letter, Marian, to help my memory when the time comes."

She looked at me attentively as I put the letter away in my pocket-book.

"When the time comes?" she repeated. "Can you speak of the future as if you were certain of it?--certain after what you have heard in Mr. Kyrle's office, after what has happened to you to-day?"

"I don't count the time from to-day, Marian. All I have done to-day is to ask another man to act for me. I count from to-morrow----"

"Why from to-morrow?"

"Because to-morrow I mean to act for myself."

"How?"

"I shall go to Blackwater by the first train, and return, I hope, at night."

"To Blackwater!"

"Yes. I have had time to think since I left Mr. Kyrle. His opinion on one point confirms my own. We must persist to the last in hunting down the date of Laura's journey. The one weak point in the conspiracy, and probably the one chance of proving that she is a living woman, centre in the discovery of that date."

"You mean," said Marian, "the discovery that Laura did not leave Blackwater Park till after the date of her death on the doctor's certificate?"

"Certainly."

"What makes you think it might have been AFTER? Laura can tell us nothing of the time she was in London."

"But the owner of the Asylum told you that she was received there on the twenty-seventh of July. I doubt Count Fosco's ability to keep her in London, and to keep her insensible to all that was passing around her, more than one night. In that case, she must have started on the twenty-sixth, and must have come to London one day after the date of her own death on the doctor's certificate. If we can prove that date, we prove our case against Sir Percival and the Count."

"Yes, yes--I see! But how is the proof to be obtained?"

"Mrs. Michelson's narrative has suggested to me two ways of trying to obtain it. One of them is to question the doctor, Mr. Dawson, who must know when he resumed his attendance at Blackwater Park after Laura left the house. The other is to make inquiries at the inn to which Sir Percival drove away by himself at night. We know that his departure followed Laura's after the lapse of a few hours, and we may get at the date in that way. The attempt is at least worth making, and to-morrow I am determined it shall be made."

"And suppose it fails--I look at the worst now, Walter; but I will look at the best if disappointments come to try us--suppose no one can help you at Blackwater?"

"There are two men who can help me, and shall help me in London--Sir Percival and the Count. Innocent people may well forget the date--but THEY are guilty, and THEY know it. If I fail everywhere else, I mean to force a confession out of one or both of them on my own terms."

All the woman flushed up in Marian's face as I spoke.

"Begin with the Count," she whispered eagerly. "For my sake, begin with the Count."

"We must begin, for Laura's sake, where there is the best chance of success," I replied.

The colour faded from her face again, and she shook her head sadly.

"Yes," she said, "you are right--it was mean and miserable of me to say that. I try to be patient, Walter, and succeed better now than I did in happier times. But I have a little of my old temper still left, and it will get the better of me when I think of the Count!"

"His turn will come," I said. "But, remember, there is no weak place in his life that we know of yet." I waited a little to let her recover her self-possession, and then spoke the decisive words--

"Marian! There is a weak place we both know of in Sir Percival's life----"

"You mean the Secret!"

"Yes: the Secret. It is our only sure hold on him. I can force him from his position of security, I can drag him and his villainy into the face of day, by no other means. Whatever the Count may have done, Sir Percival has consented to the conspiracy against Laura from another motive besides the motive of gain. You heard him tell the Count that
he believed his wife knew enough to ruin him? You heard him say that he was a lost man if the secret of Anne
Catherick was known?"

"Yes! yes! I did."

"Well, Marian, when our other resources have failed us, I mean to know the Secret. My old superstition clings to
me, even yet. I say again the woman in white is a living influence in our three lives. The End is appointed--the End
is drawing us on--and Anne Catherick, dead in her grave, points the way to it still!"

V

The story of my first inquiries in Hampshire is soon told.

My early departure from London enabled me to reach Mr. Dawson's house in the forenoon. Our interview, so far
as the object of my visit was concerned, led to no satisfactory result.

Mr. Dawson's books certainly showed when he had resumed his attendance on Miss Halcombe at Blackwater
Park, but it was not possible to calculate back from this date with any exactness, without such help from Mrs.
Michelson as I knew she was unable to afford. She could not say from memory (who, in similar cases, ever can?)
how many days had elapsed between the renewal of the doctor's attendance on his patient and the previous departure
of Lady Glyde. She was almost certain of having mentioned the circumstance of the departure to Miss Halcombe, on
the day after it happened--but then she was no more able to fix the date of the day on which this disclosure took
place, than to fix the date of the day before, when Lady Glyde had left for London. Neither could she calculate, with
any nearer approach to exactness, the time that had passed from the departure of her mistress, to the period when the
undated letter from Madame Fosco arrived. Lastly, as if to complete the series of difficulties, the doctor himself,
having been ill at the time, had omitted to make his usual entry of the day of the week and month when the gardener
from Blackwater Park had called on him to deliver Mrs. Michelson's message.

Hopeless of obtaining assistance from Mr. Dawson, I resolved to try next if I could establish the date of Sir
Percival's arrival at Knowlesbury.

It seemed like a fatality! When I reached Knowlesbury the inn was shut up, and bills were posted on the walls.
The speculation had been a bad one, as I was informed, ever since the time of the railway. The new hotel at the
station had gradually absorbed the business, and the old inn (which we knew to be the inn at which Sir Percival had
put up), had been closed about two months since. The proprietor had left the town with all his goods and chattels,
and where he had gone I could not positively ascertain from any one. The four people of whom I inquired gave me
four different accounts of his plans and projects when he left Knowlesbury.

There were still some hours to spare before the last train left for London, and I drove back again in a fly from the
Knowlesbury station to Blackwater Park, with the purpose of questioning the gardener and the person who kept the
lodge. If they, too, proved unable to assist me, my resources for the present were at an end, and I might return to
town.

I dismissed the fly a mile distant from the park, and getting my directions from the driver, proceeded by myself
to the house.

As I turned into the lane from the high-road, I saw a man, with a carpet-bag, walking before me rapidly on the
way to the lodge. He was a little man, dressed in shabby black, and wearing a remarkably large hat. I set him down
(as well as it was possible to judge) for a lawyer's clerk, and stopped at once to widen the distance between us. He
had not heard me, and he walked on out of sight, without looking back. When I passed through the gates myself, a
little while afterwards, he was not visible--he had evidently gone on to the house.

There were two women in the lodge. One of them was old, the other I knew at once, by Marian's description of
her, to be Margaret Porcher.

I asked first if Sir Percival was at the Park, and receiving a reply in the negative, inquired next when he had left
it. Neither of the women could tell me more than that he had gone away in the summer. I could extract nothing from
Margaret Porcher but vacant smiles and shakings of the head. The old woman was a little more intelligent, and I
managed to lead her into speaking of the manner of Sir Percival's departure, and of the alarm that it caused her. She
remembered her master calling her out of bed, and remembered his frightening her by swearing--but the date at
which the occurrence happened was, as she honestly acknowledged, "quite beyond her."

On leaving the lodge I saw the gardener at work not far off. When I first addressed him, he looked at me rather
distrustfully, but on my using Mrs. Michelson's name, with a civil reference to himself, he entered into conversation
readily enough. There is no need to describe what passed between us--it ended, as all my other attempts to discover
the date had ended. The gardener knew that his master had driven away, at night, "some time in July, the last
fortnight or the last ten days in the month"--and knew no more.

While we were speaking together I saw the man in black, with the large hat, come out from the house, and stand
at some little distance observing us.

Certain suspicions of his errand at Blackwater Park had already crossed my mind. They were now increased by
the gardener’s inability (or unwillingness) to tell me who the man was, and I determined to clear the way before me, if possible, by speaking to him. The plainest question I could put as a stranger would be to inquire if the house was allowed to be shown to visitors. I walked up to the man at once, and accosted him in those words.

His look and manner unmistakably betrayed that he knew who I was, and that he wanted to irritate me into quarrelling with him. His reply was insolent enough to have answered the purpose, if I had been less determined to control myself. As it was, I met him with the most resolute politeness, apologised for my involuntary intrusion (which he called a “trespass,”) and left the grounds. It was exactly as I suspected. The recognition of me when I left Mr. Kyrle’s office had been evidently communicated to Sir Percival Glyde, and the man in black had been sent to the Park in anticipation of my making inquiries at the house or in the neighbourhood. If I had given him the least chance of lodging any sort of legal complaint against me, the interference of the local magistrate would no doubt have been turned to account as a clog on my proceedings, and a means of separating me from Marian and Laura for some days at least.

I was prepared to be watched on the way from Blackwater Park to the station, exactly as I had been watched in London the day before. But I could not discover at the time, whether I was really followed on this occasion or not. The man in black might have had means of tracking me at his disposal of which I was not aware, but I certainly saw nothing of him, in his own person, either on the way to the station, or afterwards on my arrival at the London terminus in the evening. I reached home on foot, taking the precaution, before I approached our own door, of walking round by the loneliest street in the neighbourhood, and there stopping and looking back more than once over the open space behind me. I had first learnt to use this stratagem against suspected treachery in the wilds of Central America—and now I was practising it again, with the same purpose and with even greater caution, in the heart of civilised London!

Nothing had happened to alarm Marian during my absence. She asked eagerly what success I had met with. When I told her she could not conceal her surprise at the indifference with which I spoke of the failure of my investigations thus far.

The truth was, that the ill-success of my inquiries had in no sense daunted me. I had pursued them as a matter of duty, and I had expected nothing from them. In the state of my mind at that time, it was almost a relief to me to know that the struggle was now narrowed to a trial of strength between myself and Sir Percival Glyde. The vindictive motive had mingled itself all along with my other and better motives, and I confess it was a satisfaction to me to feel that the surest way, the only way left, of serving Laura’s cause, was to fasten my hold firmly on the villain who had married her.

While I acknowledge that I was not strong enough to keep my motives above the reach of this instinct of revenge, I can honestly say something in my own favour on the other side. No base speculation on the future relations of Laura and myself, and on the private and personal concessions which I might force from Sir Percival if I once had him at my mercy, ever entered my mind. I never said to myself, “If I do succeed, it shall be one result of my success that I put it out of her husband’s power to take her from me again.” I could not look at her and think of him who had married her.

The way to the Secret lay through the mystery, hitherto impenetrable to all of us, of the woman in white. The first difficulty then was to find Mrs. Clements.
was impossible for us to say, but that separation once effected, it would certainly occur to Mrs. Clements to inquire
after the missing woman in the neighbourhood of all others to which she was known to be most attached--the
neighbourhood of Limmeridge. I saw directly that Marian's proposal offered us a prospect of success, and she wrote
to Mrs. Todd accordingly by that day's post.

While we were waiting for the reply, I made myself master of all the information Marian could afford on the
subject of Sir Percival's family, and of his early life. She could only speak on these topics from hearsay, but she was
reasonably certain of the truth of what little she had to tell.

Sir Percival was an only child. His father, Sir Felix Glyde, had suffered from his birth under a painful and
incurable deformity, and had shunned all society from his earliest years. His sole happiness was in the enjoyment of
music, and he had married a lady with tastes similar to his own, who was said to be a most accomplished musician.
He inherited the Blackwater property while still a young man. Neither he nor his wife after taking possession, made
advances of any sort towards the society of the neighbourhood, and no one endeavoured to tempt them into
abandoning their reserve, with the one disastrous exception of the rector of the parish.

The rector was the worst of all innocent mischief-makers--an over-zealous man. He had heard that Sir Felix had
left College with the character of being little better than a revolutionist in politics and an infidel in religion, and he
arrived conscientiously at the conclusion that it was his bounden duty to summon the lord of the manor to hear
sound views enunciated in the parish church. Sir Felix fiercely resented the clergyman's well-meant but ill-directed
interference, insulting him so grossly and so publicly, that the families in the neighbourhood sent letters of indignant
remonstrance to the Park, and even the tenants of the Blackwater property expressed their opinion as strongly as
they dared. The baronet, who had no country tastes of any kind, and no attachment to the estate or to any one living
on it, declared that society at Blackwater should never have a second chance of annoying him, and left the place
from that moment.

After a short residence in London he and his wife departed for the Continent, and never returned to England
again. They lived part of the time in France and part in Germany--always keeping themselves in the strict retirement
which the morbid sense of his own personal deformity had made a necessity to Sir Felix. Their son, Percival, had
been born abroad, and had been educated there by private tutors. His mother was the first of his parents whom he
lost. His father had died a few years after her, either in 1825 or 1826. Sir Percival had been in England, as a young
man, once or twice before that period, but his acquaintance with the late Mr. Fairlie did not begin till after the time
of his father's death. They soon became very intimate, although Sir Percival was seldom, or never, at Limmeridge
House in those days. Mr. Frederick Fairlie might have met him once or twice in Mr. Philip Fairlie's company, but he
could have known little of him at that or at any other time. Sir Percival's only intimate friend in the Fairlie family
had been Laura's father.

These were all the particulars that I could gain from Marian. They suggested nothing which was useful to my
present purpose, but I noted them down carefully, in the event of their proving to be of importance at any future
period.

Mrs. Todd's reply (addressed, by our own wish, to a post-office at some distance from us) had arrived at its
destination when I went to apply for it. The chances, which had been all against us hitherto, turned from this
moment in our favour. Mrs. Todd's letter contained the first item of information of which we were in search.

Mrs. Clements, it appeared, had (as we had conjectured) written to Todd's Corner, asking pardon in the first
place for the abrupt manner in which she and Anne had left their friends at the farm-house (on the morning after I
had met the woman in white in Limmeridge churchyard), and then informing Mrs. Todd of Anne's disappearance,
and entreating that she would cause inquiries to be made in the neighbourhood, on the chance that the lost woman
might have strayed back to Limmeridge. In making this request, Mrs. Clements had been careful to add to it the
address at which she might always be heard of, and that address Mrs. Todd now transmitted to Marian. It was in
London, and within half an hour's walk of our own lodging.

In the words of the proverb, I was resolved not to let the grass grow under my feet. The next morning I set forth
to seek an interview with Mrs. Clements. This was my first step forward in the investigation. The story of the
desperate attempt to which I now stood committed begins here.

VI

The address communicated by Mrs. Todd took me to a lodging-house situated in a respectable street near the
Gray's Inn Road.

When I knocked the door was opened by Mrs. Clements herself. She did not appear to remember me, and asked
what my business was. I recalled to her our meeting in Limmeridge churchyard at the close of my interview there
with the woman in white, taking special care to remind her that I was the person who assisted Anne Catherick (as
Anne had herself declared) to escape the pursuit from the Asylum. This was my only claim to the confidence of Mrs.
Clements. She remembered the circumstance the moment I spoke of it, and asked me into the parlour, in the greatest
Clements had done her best to secure, for the first week at least. She had also tried hard to induce Anne to be content in the neighbourhood of the lake. Three and four miles—and that distance, and back again, Anne had walked on each occasion when she had appeared to Sir Percival's residence, was a large village called Sandon. The distance here from Blackwater Park was between seven and eight miles. Mrs. Clements was well acquainted with the neighbourhood of Blackwater, and could give her all the information she needed on the subject of localities. In this way she found out that the only place they could go to, which was not dangerously near the subject of the conspiracy, which it would have been dangerous to confide to a stranger. She could only abstain most carefully from raising any false hopes, and then explain that the object of her visit was to discover the persons who were really responsible for Anne's disappearance. I even added, so as to exonerate myself from any after-reproach of my own conscience, that I entertained not the least hope of being able to trace her—that I believed we should never see her alive again—and that my main interest in the affair was to bring to punishment two men whom I suspected to be concerned in luring her away, and at whose hands I and some dear friends of mine had suffered a grievous wrong. With this explanation I left it to Mrs. Clements to say whether our interest in the matter (whatever difference there might be in the motives which actuated us) was not the same, and whether she felt any reluctance to forward my object by giving me such information on the subject of my inquiries as she happened to possess.

The poor woman was at first too much confused and agitated to understand thoroughly what I said to her. She could only reply that I was welcome to anything she could tell me in return for the kindness I had shown to Anne; but as she was not very quick and ready, at the best of times, in talking to strangers, she would beg me to put her in the right way, and to say where I wished her to begin.

Knowing by experience that the plainest narrative attainable from persons who are not accustomed to arrange their ideas, is the narrative which goes far enough back at the beginning to avoid all impediments of retrospection in its course, I asked Mrs. Clements to tell me first what had happened after she had left Limmeridge, and so, by watchful questioning, carried her on from point to point, till we reached the period of Anne's disappearance.

The substance of the information which I thus obtained was as follows:--

On leaving the farm at Todd's Corner, Mrs. Clements and Anne had travelled that day as far as Derby, and had remained there a week on Anne's account. They had then gone on to London, and had lived in the lodging occupied by Mrs. Clements at that time for a month or more, when circumstances connected with the house and the landlord had obliged them to change their quarters. Anne's terror of being discovered in London or its neighbourhood, whenever they ventured to walk out, had gradually communicated itself to Mrs. Clements, and she had determined on removing to one of the most out-of-the-way places in England—to the town of Grimsby in Lincolnshire, where her deceased husband had passed all his early life. His relatives were respectable people settled in the town—they had always treated Mrs. Clements with great kindness, and she thought it impossible to do better than go there and take the advice of her husband's friends. Anne would not hear of returning to her mother at Welmingham, because she had been removed to the Asylum from that place, and because Sir Percival would be certain to go back there and find her again. There was serious weight in this objection, and Mrs. Clements felt that it was not to be easily removed.

At Grimsby the first serious symptoms of illness had shown themselves in Anne. They appeared soon after the news of Lady Glyde's marriage had been made public in the newspapers, and had reached her through that medium.

The medical man who was sent for to attend the sick woman discovered at once that she was suffering from a serious affection of the heart. The illness lasted long, left her very weak, and returned at intervals, though with mitigated severity, again and again. They remained at Grimsby, in consequence, during the first half of the new year, and there they might probably have stayed much longer, but for the sudden resolution which Anne took at this time to venture back to Hampshire, for the purpose of obtaining a private interview with Lady Glyde.

Mrs. Clements did all in her power to oppose the execution of this hazardous and unaccountable project. No explanation of her motives was offered by Anne, except that she believed the day of her death was not far off, and that she had something on her mind which must be communicated to Lady Glyde, at any risk, in secret. Her resolution to accomplish this purpose was so firmly settled that she declared her intention of going to Hampshire by herself if Mrs. Clements felt any unwillingness to go with her. The doctor, on being consulted, was of opinion that serious opposition to her wishes would, in all probability, produce another and perhaps a fatal fit of illness, and Mrs. Clements, under this advice, yielded to necessity, and once more, with sad forebodings of trouble and danger to come, allowed Anne Catherick to have her own way.

On the journey from London to Hampshire Mrs. Clements discovered that one of their fellow-passengers was well acquainted with the neighbourhood of Blackwater, and could give her all the information she needed on the subject of localities. In this way she found out that the only place they could go to, which was not dangerously near to Sir Percival's residence, was a large village called Sandon. The distance here from Blackwater Park was between three and four miles—and that distance, and back again, Anne had walked on each occasion when she had appeared in the neighbourhood of the lake.

For the few days during which they were at Sandon without being discovered they had lived a little away from the village, in the cottage of a decent widow-woman who had a bedroom to let, and whose discreet silence Mrs. Clements had done her best to secure, for the first week at least. She had also tried hard to induce Anne to be content
with writing to Lady Glyde, in the first instance; but the failure of the warning contained in the anonymous letter sent to Limmeridge had made Anne resolute to speak this time, and obstinate in the determination to go on her errand alone.

Mrs. Clements, nevertheless, followed her privately on each occasion when she went to the lake, without, however, venturing near enough to the boat-house to be witness of what took place there. When Anne returned for the last time from the dangerous neighbourhood, the fatigue of walking, day after day, distances which were far too great for her strength, added to the exhausting effect of the agitation from which she had suffered, produced the result which Mrs. Clements had dreaded all along. The old pain over the heart and the other symptoms of the illness at Grimsby returned, and Anne was confined to her bed in the cottage.

In this emergency the first necessity, as Mrs. Clements knew by experience, was to endeavour to quiet Anne's anxiety of mind, and for this purpose the good woman went herself the next day to the lake, to try if she could find Lady Glyde (who would be sure, as Anne said, to take her daily walk to the boat-house), and prevail on her to come back privately to the cottage near Sandon. On reaching the outskirts of the plantation Mrs. Clements encountered, not Lady Glyde, but a tall, stout, elderly gentleman, with a book in his hand—in other words, Count Fosco.

The Count, after looking at her very attentively for a moment, asked if she expected to see any one in that place, and added, before she could reply, that he was waiting there with a message from Lady Glyde, but that he was not quite certain whether the person then before him was the messenger with whom he was desired to communicate.

Upon this Mrs. Clements at once confided her errand to him, and entreated that he would help to allay Anne's anxiety by trusting his message to her. The Count most readily and kindly complied with her request. The message, he said, was a very important one. Lady Glyde entreated Anne and her good friend to return immediately to London, as she felt certain that Sir Percival would discover them if they remained any longer in the neighbourhood of Blackwater. She was herself going to London in a short time, and if Mrs. Clements and Anne would go there first, and would let her know what their address was, they should hear from her and see her in a fortnight or less. The Count added that he had already attempted to give a friendly warning to Anne herself, but that she had been too much startled by seeing that he was a stranger to let him approach and speak to her.

To this Mrs. Clements replied, in the greatest alarm and distress, that she asked nothing better than to take Anne safely to London, but that there was no present hope of removing her from the dangerous neighbourhood, as she lay ill in her bed at that moment. The Count inquired if Mrs. Clements had sent for medical advice, and hearing that she had hitherto hesitated to do so, from the fear of making their position publicly known in the village, informed her that he was himself a medical man, and that he would go back with her if she pleased, and see what could be done for Anne. Mrs. Clements (feeling a natural confidence in the Count, as a person trusted with a secret message from Lady Glyde) gratefully accepted the offer, and they went back together to the cottage.

Anne was asleep when they got there. The Count started at the sight of her (evidently from astonishment at her resemblance to Lady Glyde). Poor Mrs. Clements supposed that he was only shocked to see how ill she was. He would not allow her to be awakened—he was contented with putting questions to Mrs. Clements about her symptoms, with looking at her, and with lightly touching her pulse. Sandon was a large enough place to have a grocer's and druggist's shop in it, and thither the Count went to write his prescription and to get the medicine made up. He brought it back himself, and told Mrs. Clements that the medicine was a powerful stimulant, and that it would certainly give Anne strength to get up and bear the fatigue of a journey to London of only a few hours. The remedy was to be administered at stated times on that day and on the day after. On the third day she would be well enough to travel, and he arranged to meet Mrs. Clements at the Blackwater station, and to see them off by the midday train. If they did not appear he would assume that Anne was worse, and would proceed at once to the cottage.

As events turned out, no such emergency as this occurred.

This medicine had an extraordinary effect on Anne, and the good results of it were helped by the assurance Mrs. Clements could now give her that she would soon see Lady Glyde in London. At the appointed day and time (when they had not been quite so long as a week in Hampshire altogether), they arrived at the station. The Count was waiting there for them, and was talking to an elderly lady, who appeared to be going to travel by the train to London also. He most kindly assisted them, and put them into the carriage himself, begging Mrs. Clements not to forget to send her address to Lady Glyde. The elderly lady did not travel in the same compartment, and they did not notice what became of her on reaching the London terminus. Mrs. Clements secured respectable lodgings in a quiet neighbourhood, and then wrote, as she had engaged to do, to inform Lady Glyde of the address.

A little more than a fortnight passed, and no answer came.

At the end of that time a lady (the same elderly lady whom they had seen at the station) called in a cab, and said that she came from Lady Glyde, who was then at an hotel in London, and who wished to see Mrs. Clements, for the
purpose of arranging a future interview with Anne. Mrs. Clements expressed her willingness (Anne being present at
the time, and entreating her to do so) to forward the object in view, especially as she was not required to be away
from the house for more than half an hour at the most. She and the elderly lady (clearly Madame Fosco) then left in
the cab. The lady stopped the cab, after it had driven some distance, at a shop before they got to the hotel, and
begged Mrs. Clements to wait for her for a few minutes while she made a purchase that had been forgotten. She
never appeared again.

After waiting some time Mrs. Clements became alarmed, and ordered the cabman to drive back to her lodgings.
When she got there, after an absence of rather more than half an hour, Anne was gone.

The only information to be obtained from the people of the house was derived from the servant who waited on
the lodgers. She had opened the door to a boy from the street, who had left a letter for "the young woman who lived
on the second floor" (the part of the house which Mrs. Clements occupied). The servant had delivered the letter, had
then gone downstairs, and five minutes afterwards had observed Anne open the front door and go out, dressed in her
bonnet and shawl. She had probably taken the letter with her, for it was not to be found, and it was therefore
impossible to tell what inducement had been offered to make her leave the house. It must have been a strong one, for
she would never stir out alone in London of her own accord. If Mrs. Clements had not known this by experience
nothing would have induced her to go away in the cab, even for so short a time as half an hour only.

As soon as she could collect her thoughts, the first idea that naturally occurred to Mrs. Clements was to go and
make inquiries at the Asylum, to which she dreaded that Anne had been taken back.

She went there the next day, having been informed of the locality in which the house was situated by Anne
herself. The answer she received (her application having in all probability been made a day or two before the false
Anne Catherick had really been consigned to safe keeping in the Asylum) was, that no such person had been brought
back there. She had then written to Mrs. Catherick at Welmingham to know if she had seen or heard anything of her
daughter, and had received an answer in the negative. After that reply had reached her, she was at the end of her
resources, and perfectly ignorant where else to inquire or what else to do. From that time to this she had remained in
total ignorance of the cause of Anne's disappearance and of the end of Anne's story.

VII

Thus far the information which I had received from Mrs. Clements-- though it established facts of which I had
not previously been aware--was of a preliminary character only.

It was clear that the series of deceptions which had removed Anne Catherick to London, and separated her from
Mrs. Clements, had been accomplished solely by Count Fosco and the Countess, and the question whether any part
of the conduct of husband or wife had been of a kind to place either of them within reach of the law might be well
worthy of future consideration. But the purpose I had now in view led me in another direction than this. The
immediate object of my visit to Mrs. Clements was to make some approach at least to the discovery of Sir Percival's
secret, and she had said nothing as yet which advanced me on my way to that important end. I felt the necessity of
trying to awaken her recollections of other times, persons, and events than those on which her memory had hitherto
been employed, and when I next spoke I spoke with that object indirectly in view.

"I wish I could be of any help to you in this sad calamity," I said. "All I can do is to feel heartily for your
distress. If Anne had been your own child, Mrs. Clements, you could have shown her no truer kindness--you could
have made no readier sacrifices for her sake."

"There's no great merit in that, sir," said Mrs. Clements simply. "The poor thing was as good as my own child to
me. I nursed her from a baby, sir, bringing her up by hand--and a hard job it was to rear her. It wouldn't go to my
heart so to lose her if I hadn't made her first short clothes and taught her to walk. I always said she was sent to
console me for never having chick or child of my own. And now she's lost the old times keep coming back to my
mind, and even at my age I can't help crying about her-- I can't indeed, sir!"

I waited a little to give Mrs. Clements time to compose herself. Was the light that I had been looking for so long
glimmering on me--far off, as yet--in the good woman's recollections of Anne's early life?

"Did you know Mrs. Catherick before Anne was born?" I asked.

"Not very long, sir--not above four months. We saw a great deal of each other in that time, but we were never
very friendly together."

Her voice was steadier as she made that reply. Painful as many of her recollections might be, I observed that it
was unconsciously a relief to her mind to revert to the dimly-seen troubles of the past, after dwelling so long on the
vivid sorrows of the present.

"Were you and Mrs. Catherick neighbours?" I inquired, leading her memory on as encouragingly as I could.

"Yes, sir--neighbours at Old Welmingham."

"OLD Welmingham? There are two places of that name, then, in Hampshire?"

"Well, sir, there used to be in those days--better than three-and- twenty years ago. They built a new town about
two miles off, convenient to the river—and Old Welmingham, which was never much more than a village, got in time to be deserted. The new town is the place they call Welmingham now—but the old parish church is the parish church still. It stands by itself, with the houses pulled down or gone to ruin all round it. I've lived to see sad changes. It was a pleasant, pretty place in my time."

"Did you live there before your marriage, Mrs. Clements?"

"No, sir—I'm a Norfolk woman. It wasn't the place my husband belonged to either. He was from Grimsby, as I told you, and he served his apprenticeship there. But having friends down south, and hearing of an opening, he got into business at Southampton. It was in a small way, but he made enough for a plain man to retire on, and settled at Old Welmingham. I went there with him when he married me. We were neither of us young, but we lived very happy together—happier than our neighbour, Mr. Catherick, lived along with his wife when they came to Old Welmingham a year or two afterwards."

"Was your husband acquainted with them before that?"

"With Catherick, sir—not with his wife. She was a stranger to both of us. Some gentlemen had made interest for Catherick, and he got the situation of clerk at Welmingham church, which was the reason of his coming to settle in our neighbourhood. He brought his newly-married wife along with him, and we heard in course of time she had been lady's-maid in a family that lived at Varneck Hall, near Southampton. Catherick had found it a hard matter to get her to marry him, in consequence of her holding herself uncommonly high. He had asked and asked, and given the thing up at last, seeing she was so contrary about it. When he HAD given it up she turned contrary just the other way, and came to him of her own accord, without rhyme or reason seemingly. My poor husband always said that was the time to have given her a lesson. But Catherick was too fond of her to do anything of the sort—he never checked her either before they were married or after. He was a quick man in his feelings, letting them carry him a deal too far, now in one way and now in another, and he would have spoilt a better wife than Mrs. Catherick if a better had married him. I don't like to speak ill of any one, sir, but she was a heartless woman, with a terrible will of her own—fond of foolish admiration and fine clothes, and not caring to show so much as decent outward respect to Catherick, kindly as he always treated her. My husband said he thought things would turn out badly when they first came to live near us, and his words proved true. Before they had been quite four months in our neighbourhood there was a dreadful scandal and a miserable break-up in their household. Both of them were in fault—I am afraid both of them were equally in fault."

"You mean both husband and wife?"

"Oh, no, sir! I don't mean Catherick—he was only to be pitied. I meant his wife and the person—"

"And the person who caused the scandal?"

"Yes, sir. A gentleman born and brought up, who ought to have set a better example. You know him, sir—and my poor dear Anne knew him only too well."

"Sir Percival Glyde?"

"Yes, Sir Percival Glyde."

My heart beat fast—I thought I had my hand on the clue. How little I knew then of the windings of the labyrinths which were still to mislead me!

"Did Sir Percival live in your neighbourhood at that time?" I asked.

"No, sir. He came among us as a stranger. His father had died not long before in foreign parts. I remember he was in mourning. He put up at the little inn on the river (they have pulled it down since that time), where gentlemen used to go to fish. He wasn't much noticed when he first came—it was a common thing enough for gentlemen to travel from all parts of England to fish in our river."

"Did he make his appearance in the village before Anne was born?"

"Yes, sir. Anne was born in the June month of eighteen hundred and twenty-seven—and I think he came at the end of April or the beginning of May."

"came as a stranger to all of you? A stranger to Mrs. Catherick as well as to the rest of the neighbours?"

"So we thought at first, sir. But when the scandal broke out, nobody believed they were strangers. I remember how it happened as well as if it was yesterday. Catherick came into our garden one night, and woke us by throwing up a handful of gravel from the walk at our window. I heard him beg my husband, for the Lord's sake, to come down and speak to him. They were a long time together talking in the porch. When my husband came back upstairs he was all of a tremble. He sat down on the side of the bed and he says to me, 'Lizzie! I always told you that woman was a bad one—I always said she would end ill, and I'm afraid in my own mind that the end has come already. Catherick has found a lot of lace handkerchiefs, and two fine rings, and a new gold watch and chain, hid away in his wife's drawer—things that nobody but a born lady ought ever to have—and his wife won't say how she came by them. 'Does he think she stole them?' says I. 'No,' says he, 'stealing would be bad enough. But it's worse than that, she's had no chance of stealing such things as those, and she's not a woman to take them if she had. They're gifts, Lizzie—there's..."
her own initials engraved inside the watch—and Catherick has seen her talking privately, and carrying on as no married woman should, with that gentleman in mourning, Sir Percival Glyde. Don't you say anything about it—I've quieted Catherick for to-night. I've told him to keep his tongue to himself, and his eyes and his ears open, and to wait a day or two, till he can be quite certain. 'I believe you are both of you wrong,' says I. 'It's not in nature, comfortable and respectable as she is here, that Mrs. Catherick should take up with a chance stranger like Sir Percival Glyde.' 'Ay, but is he a stranger to her?' says my husband. 'You forget how Catherick's wife came to marry him. She went to him of her own accord, after saying No over and over again when he asked her. There have been wicked women before her time, Lizzie, who have used honest men who loved them as a means of saving their characters, and I'm sorely afraid this Mrs. Catherick is as wicked as the worst of them. We shall see,' says my husband, 'we shall soon see.' And only two days afterwards we did see."

Mrs. Clements waited for a moment before she went on. Even in that moment, I began to doubt whether the clue that I thought I had found was really leading me to the central mystery of the labyrinth after all. Was this common, too common, story of a man's treachery and a woman's frailty the key to a secret which had been the lifelong terror of Sir Percival Glyde?

"Well, sir, Catherick took my husband's advice and waited," Mrs. Clements continued. "And as I told you, he hadn't long to wait. On the second day he found his wife and Sir Percival whispering together quite familiar, close under the vestry of the church. I suppose they thought the neighbourhood of the vestry was the last place in the world where anybody would think of looking after them, but, however that may be, there they were. Sir Percival, being seemingly surprised and confounded, defended himself in such a guilty way that poor Catherick (whose quick temper I have told you of already) fell into a kind of frenzy at his own disgrace, and struck Sir Percival. He was no match (and I am sorry to say it) for the man who had wronged him, and he was beaten in the cruellest manner, before the neighbours, who had come to the place on hearing the disturbance, could run in to part them. All this happened towards evening, and before nightfall, when my husband went to Catherick's house, he was gone, nobody knew where. No living soul in the village ever saw him again. He knew too well, by that time, what his wife's vile reason had been for marrying him, and he felt his misery and disgrace, especially after what had happened to him with Sir Percival, too keenly. The clergyman of the parish put an advertisement in the paper begging him to come back, and saying that he should not lose his situation or his friends. But Catherick had too much pride and spirit, as some people said—too much feeling, as I think, sir—to face his neighbours again, and try to live down the memory of his disgrace. My husband heard from him when he had left England, and heard a second time, when he was settled and doing well in America. He is alive there now, as far as I know, but none of us in the old country—his wicked wife least of all—are ever likely to set eyes on him again."

"What became of Sir Percival?" I inquired. "Did he stay in the neighbourhood?"

"Not he, sir. The place was too hot to hold him. He was heard at high words with Mrs. Catherick the same night when the scandal broke out, and the next morning he took himself off."

"And Mrs. Catherick? Surely she never remained in the village among the people who knew of her disgrace?"

"She did, sir. She was hard enough and heartless enough to set the opinions of all her neighbours at flat defiance. She declared to everybody, from the clergyman downwards, that she was the victim of a dreadful mistake, and that all the scandal-mongers in the place should not drive her out of it, as if she was a guilty woman. All through my time she lived at Old Welmingham, and after my time, when the new town was building, and the respectable neighbours began moving to it, she moved too, as if she was determined to live among them and scandalise them to the very last. There she is now, and there she will stop, in defiance of the best of them, to her dying day."

"But how has she lived through all these years?" I asked. "Was her husband able and willing to help her?"

"Both able and willing, sir," said Mrs. Clements. "In the second letter he wrote to my good man, he said he had borne his name, and lived in his home, and, wicked as she was, she must not starve like a beggar in the street. He could afford to make her some small allowance, and she might draw for it quarterly at a place in London."

"Did she accept the allowance?"

"Not a farthing of it, sir. She said she would never be beholden to Catherick for bit or drop, if she lived to be a hundred. And she has kept her word ever since. When my poor dear husband died, and left all to me, Catherick's letter was put in my possession with the other things, and I told her to let me know if she was ever in want. 'I'll let all hundred. And she has kept her word ever since. When my poor dear husband died, and left all to me, Catherick's letter was put in my possession with the other things, and I told her to let me know if she was ever in want. 'I'll let all

"Very little, if any, sir. It was said, and said truly, I am afraid, that her means of living came privately from Sir Percival Glyde."

After that last reply I waited a little, to reconsider what I had heard. If I unreservedly accepted the story so far, it was now plain that no approach, direct or indirect, to the Secret had yet been revealed to me, and that the pursuit of
my object had ended again in leaving me face to face with the most palpable and the most disheartening failure.

But there was one point in the narrative which made me doubt the propriety of accepting it unreservedly, and which suggested the idea of something hidden below the surface.

I could not account to myself for the circumstance of the clerk's guilty wife voluntarily living out all her afterexistence on the scene of her disgrace. The woman's own reported statement that she had taken this strange course as a practical assertion of her innocence did not satisfy me. It seemed, to my mind, more natural and more probable to assume that she was not so completely a free agent in this matter as she had herself asserted. In that case, who was the likeliest person to possess the power of compelling her to remain at Welmingham? The person unquestionably from whom she derived the means of living. She had refused assistance from her husband, she had no adequate resources of her own, she was a friendless, degraded woman—from what source should she derive help but from the source at which report pointed—Sir Percival Glyde?

Reasoning on these assumptions, and always bearing in mind the one certain fact to guide me, that Mrs. Catherick was in possession of the Secret, I easily understood that it was Sir Percival's interest to keep her at Welmingham, because her character in that place was certain to isolate her from all communication with female neighbours, and to allow her no opportunities of talking incautiously in moments of free intercourse with inquisitive bosom friends. But what was the mystery to be concealed? Not Sir Percival's infamous connection with Mrs. Catherick's disgrace, for the neighbours were the very people who knew of it—not the suspicion that he was Anne's father, for Welmingham was the place in which that suspicion must inevitably exist. If I accepted the guilty appearances described to me as unreservedly as others had accepted them, if I drew from them the same superficial conclusion which Mr. Catherick and all his neighbours had drawn, where was the suggestion, in all that I had heard, of a dangerous secret between Sir Percival and Mrs. Catherick, which had been kept hidden from that time to this?

And yet, in those stolen meetings, in those familiar whisperings between the clerk's wife and "the gentleman in mourning," the clue to discovery existed beyond a doubt.

Was it possible that appearances in this case had pointed one way while the truth lay all the while unsuspected in another direction? Could Mrs. Catherick's assertion, that she was the victim of a dreadful mistake, by any possibility be true? Or, assuming it to be false, could the conclusion which associated Sir Percival with her guilt have been founded in some inconceivable error? Had Sir Percival, by any chance, courted the suspicion that was wrong for the sake of diverting from himself some other suspicion that was right? Here—if I could find it—here was the approach to the Secret, hidden deep under the surface of the apparently unpromising story which I had just heard.

My next questions were now directed to the one object of ascertaining whether Mr. Catherick had or had not arrived truly at the conviction of his wife's misconduct. The answers I received from Mrs. Clements left me in no doubt whatever on that point. Mrs. Catherick had, on the clearest evidence, compromised her reputation, while a single woman, with some person unknown, and had married to save her character. It had been positively ascertained, by calculations of time and place into which I need not enter particularly, that the daughter who bore her husband's name was not her husband's child.

The next object of inquiry, whether it was equally certain that Sir Percival must have been the father of Anne, was beset by far greater difficulties. I was in no position to try the probabilities on one side or on the other in this instance by any better test than the test of personal resemblance.

"I suppose you often saw Sir Percival when he was in your village?" I said.
"Yes, sir, very often," replied Mrs. Clements.
"Did you ever observe that Anne was like him?"
"She was not at all like him, sir."
"Was she like her mother, then?"
"Not like her mother either, sir. Mrs. Catherick was dark, and full in the face."

Not like her mother and not like her (supposed) father. I knew that the test by personal resemblance was not to be implicitly trusted, but, on the other hand, it was not to be altogether rejected on that account. Was it possible to strengthen the evidence by discovering any conclusive facts in relation to the lives of Mrs. Catherick and Sir Percival before they either of them appeared at Old Welmingham? When I asked my next questions I put them with this view.

"When Sir Percival first arrived in your neighbourhood," I said, "did you hear where he had come from last?"
"No, sir. Some said from Blackwater Park, and some said from Scotland—but nobody knew."
"Was Mrs. Catherick living in service at Varneck Hall immediately before her marriage?"
"Yes, sir."
"And had she been long in her place?"
"Three or four years, sir; I am not quite certain which."
"Did you ever hear the name of the gentleman to whom Varneck Hall belonged at that time?"
"Yes, sir. His name was Major Donthorne."

"Did Mr. Catherick, or did any one else you knew, ever hear that Sir Percival was a friend of Major Donthorne's, or ever see Sir Percival in the neighbourhood of Varneck Hall?"

"Catherick never did, sir, that I can remember--nor any one else either, that I know of."

I noted down Major Donthorne's name and address, on the chance that he might still be alive, and that it might be useful at some future time to apply to him. Meanwhile, the impression on my mind was now decidedly adverse to the opinion that Sir Percival was Anne's father, and decidedly favourable to the conclusion that the secret of his stolen interviews with Mrs. Catherick was entirely unconnected with the disgrace which the woman had inflicted on her husband's good name. I could think of no further inquiries which I might make to strengthen this impression--I could only encourage Mrs. Clements to speak next of Anne's early days, and watch for any chance-suggestion which might in this way offer itself to me.

"I have not heard yet," I said, "how the poor child, born in all this sin and misery, came to be trusted, Mrs. Clements, to your care."

"There was nobody else, sir, to take the little helpless creature in hand," replied Mrs. Clements. "The wicked mother seemed to hate it--as if the poor baby was in fault!--from the day it was born. My heart was heavy for the child, and I made the offer to bring it up as tenderly as if it was my own."

"Did Anne remain entirely under your care from that time?"

"Not quite entirely, sir. Mrs. Catherick had her whims and fancies about it at times, and used now and then to lay claim to the child, as if she wanted to spite me for bringing it up. But these fits of hers never lasted for long. Poor little Anne was always returned to me, and was always glad to get back--though she led but a gloomy life in my house, having no playmates, like other children, to brighten her up. Our longest separation was when her mother took her to Limmeridge. Just at that time I lost my husband, and I felt it was as well, in that miserable affliction, that Anne should not be in the house. She was between ten and eleven years old then, slow at her lessons, poor soul, and not so cheerful as other children--but as pretty a little girl to look at as you would wish to see. I waited at home till her mother brought her back, and then I made the offer to take her with me to London--the truth being, sir, that I could not find it in my heart to stop at Old Welmingham after my husband's death, the place was so changed and so dismal to me."

"And did Mrs. Catherick consent to your proposal?"

"No, sir. She came back from the north harder and bitterer than ever. Folks did say that she had been obliged to ask Sir Percival's leave to go, to begin with; and that she only went to nurse her dying sister at Limmeridge because the poor woman was reported to have saved money--the truth being that she hardly left enough to bury her. These things may have soured Mrs. Catherick likely enough, but however that may be, she wouldn't hear of my taking the child away. She seemed to like distressing us both by parting us. All I could do was to give Anne my direction, and to tell her privately, if she was ever in trouble, to come to me. But years passed before she was free to come. I never saw her again, poor soul, till the night she escaped from the mad-house."

"You know, Mrs. Clements, why Sir Percival Glyde shut her up?"

"I only know what Anne herself told me, sir. The poor thing used to ramble and wander about it sadly. She said her mother had got some secret of Sir Percival's to keep, and had let it out to her long after I left Hampshire--and when Sir Percival found she knew it, he shut her up. But she never could say what it was when I asked her. All she could tell me was, that her mother might be the ruin and destruction of Sir Percival if she chose. Mrs. Catherick may have let out just as much as that, and no more. I'm next to certain I should have heard the whole truth from Anne, if she had really known it as she pretended to do, and as she very likely fancied she did, poor soul."

This idea had more than once occurred to my own mind. I had already told Marian that I doubted whether Laura was really on the point of making any important discovery when she and Anne Catherick were disturbed by Count Fosco at the boat-house. It was perfectly in character with Anne's mental affliction that she should assume an absolute knowledge of the secret on no better grounds than vague suspicion, derived from hints which her mother had incautiously let drop in her presence. Sir Percival's guilty distrust would, in that case, infallibly inspire him with the false idea that Anne knew all from her mother, just as it had afterwards fixed in his mind the equally false suspicion that his wife knew all from Anne.

The time was passing, the morning was wearing away. It was doubtful, if I stayed longer, whether I should hear anything more from Mrs. Clements that would be at all useful to my purpose. I had already discovered those local and family particulars, in relation to Mrs. Catherick, of which I had been in search, and I had arrived at certain conclusions, entirely new to me, which might immensely assist in directing the course of my future proceedings. I rose to take my leave, and to thank Mrs. Clements for the friendly readiness she had shown in affording me information.

"I am afraid you must have thought me very inquisitive," I said. "I have troubled you with more questions than
many people would have cared to answer."

"You are heartily welcome, sir, to anything I can tell you," answered Mrs. Clements. She stopped and looked at me wistfully. "But I do wish," said the poor woman, "you could have told me a little more about Anne, sir. I thought I saw something in your face when you came in which looked as if you could. You can't think how hard it is not even to know whether she is living or dead. I could bear it better if I was only certain. You said you never expected we should see her alive again. Do you know, sir-- do you know for truth--that it has pleased God to take her?"

I was not proof against this appeal, it would have been unspeakably mean and cruel of me if I had resisted it.

"I am afraid there is no doubt of the truth," I answered gently; "I have the certainty in my own mind that her troubles in this world are over."

The poor woman dropped into her chair and hid her face from me. "Oh, sir," she said, "how do you know it? Who can have told you?"

"No one has told me, Mrs. Clements. But I have reasons for feeling sure of it--reasons which I promise you shall know as soon as I can safely explain them. I am certain she was not neglected in her last moments--I am certain the heart complaint from which she suffered so sadly was the true cause of her death. You shall feel as sure of this as I do, soon--you shall know, before long, that she is buried in a quiet country churchyard--in a pretty, peaceful place, which you might have chosen for her yourself."

"Dead!" said Mrs. Clements, "dead so young, and I am left to hear it! I made her first short frocks. I taught her to walk. The first time she ever said Mother she said it to me--and now I am left and Anne is taken! Did you say, sir," said the poor woman, removing the handkerchief from her face, and looking up at me for the first time, "did you say that she had been nicely buried? Was it the sort of funeral she might have had if she had really been my own child?"

I assured her that it was. She seemed to take an inexplicable pride in my answer--to find a comfort in it which no other and higher considerations could afford. "It would have broken my heart," she said simply, "if Anne had not been nicely buried--but how do you know it, sir? who told you?" I once more entreated her to wait until I could speak to her unreservedly. "You are sure to see me again," I said, "for I have a favour to ask when you are a little more composed--perhaps in a day or two."

"Don't keep it waiting, sir, on my account," said Mrs. Clements. "Never mind my crying if I can be of use. If you have anything on your mind to say to me, sir, please to say it now."

"I only wish to ask you one last question," I said. "I only want to know Mrs. Catherick's address at Welmingham."

My request so startled Mrs. Clements, that, for the moment, even the tidings of Anne's death seemed to be driven from her mind. Her tears suddenly ceased to flow, and she sat looking at me in blank amazement.

"For the Lord's sake, sir!" she said, "what do you want with Mrs. Catherick!"

"I want this, Mrs. Clements," I replied, "I want to know the secret of those private meetings of hers with Sir Percival Glyde. There is something more in what you have told me of that woman's past conduct, and of that man's past relations with her, than you or any of your neighbours ever suspected. There is a secret we none of us know between those two, and I am going to Mrs. Catherick with the resolution to find it out."

"Think twice about it, sir!" said Mrs. Clements, rising in her earnestness and laying her hand on my arm. "She's an awful woman-- you don't know her as I do. Think twice about it."

"I am sure your warning is kindly meant, Mrs. Clements. But I am determined to see the woman, whatever comes of it."

Mrs. Clements looked me anxiously in the face.

"I see your mind is made up, sir," she said. "I will give you the address."

I wrote it down in my pocket-book and then took her hand to say farewell.

"You shall hear from me soon," I said; "you shall know all that I have promised to tell you."

Mrs. Clements sighed and shook her head doubtfully.

"An old woman's advice is sometimes worth taking, sir," she said. "Think twice before you go to Welmingham."

VIII

When I reached home again after my interview with Mrs. Clements, I was struck by the appearance of a change in Laura.

The unvarying gentleness and patience which long misfortune had tried so cruelly and had never conquered yet, seemed now to have suddenly failed her. Insensible to all Marian's attempts to soothe and amuse her, she sat, with her neglected drawing pushed away on the table, her eyes resolutely cast down, her fingers twining and untwining themselves restlessly in her lap. Marian rose when I came in, with a silent distress in her face, waited for a moment to see if Laura would look up at my approach, whispered to me, "Try if you can rouse her," and left the room.

I sat down in the vacant chair--gently unclasped the poor, worn, restless fingers, and took both her hands in mine.
"What are you thinking of, Laura? Tell me, my darling--try and tell me what it is."

She struggled with herself, and raised her eyes to mine. "I can't feel happy," she said, "I can't help thinking----" She stopped, bent forward a little, and laid her head on my shoulder, with a terrible mute helplessness that struck me to the heart.

"Try to tell me," I repeated gently; "try to tell me why you are not happy."

"I am so useless--I am such a burden on both of you," she answered, with a weary, hopeless sigh. "You work and get money, Walter, and Marian helps you. Why is there nothing I can do? You will end in liking Marian better than you like me--you will, because I am so helpless! Oh, don't, don't, don't treat me like a child!"

I raised her head, and smoothed away the tangled hair that fell over her face, and kissed her--my poor, faded flower! my lost, afflicted sister! "You shall help us, Laura," I said, "you shall begin, my darling, to-day."

She looked at me with a feverish eagerness, with a breathless interest, that made me tremble for the new life of hope which I had called into being by those few words.

I rose, and set her drawing materials in order, and placed them near her again.

"You know that I work and get money by drawing," I said. "Now you have taken such pains, now you are so much improved, you shall begin to work and get money too. Try to finish this little sketch as nicely and prettily as you can. When it is done I will take it away with me, and the same person will buy it who buys all that I do. You shall keep your own earnings in your own purse, and Marian shall come to you to help us, as often as she comes to me. Think how useful you are going to make yourself to both of us, and you will soon be as happy, Laura, as the day is long."

Her face grew eager, and brightened into a smile. In the moment while it lasted, in the moment when she again took up the pencils that had been laid aside, she almost looked like the Laura of past days.

I had rightly interpreted the first signs of a new growth and strength in her mind, unconsciously expressing themselves in the notice she had taken of the occupations which filled her sister's life and mine. Marian (when I told her what had passed) saw, as I saw, that she was longing to assume her own little position of importance, to raise herself in her own estimation and in ours-- and, from that day, we tenderly helped the new ambition which gave promise of the hopeful, happier future, that might now not be far off. Her drawings, as she finished them, or tried to finish them, were placed in my hands. Marian took them from me and hid them carefully, and I set aside a little weekly tribute from my earnings, to be offered to her as the price paid by strangers for the poor, faint, valueless sketches, of which I was the only purchaser. It was hard sometimes to maintain our innocent deception, when she proudly brought out her purse to contribute her share towards the expenses, and wondered with serious interest, whether I or she had earned the most that week. I have all those hidden drawings in my possession still--they are my treasures beyond price--the dear remembrances that I love to keep alive--the friends in past adversity that my heart will never part from, my tenderness never forget.

Am I trifling, here, with the necessities of my task? am I looking forward to the happier time which my narrative has not yet reached? Yes. Back again--back to the days of doubt and dread, when the spirit within me struggled hard for its life, in the icy stillness of perpetual suspense. I have paused and rested for a while on my forward course. It is not, perhaps, time wasted, if the friends who read these pages have paused and rested too.

I took the first opportunity I could find of speaking to Marian in private, and of communicating to her the result of the inquiries which I had made that morning. She seemed to share the opinion on the subject of my proposed journey to Welmingham, which Mrs. Clements had already expressed to me.

"Surely, Walter," she said, "you hardly know enough yet to give you any hope of claiming Mrs. Catherick's confidence? Is it wise to proceed to these extremities, before you have really exhausted all safer and simpler means of attaining your object? When you told me that Sir Percival and the Count were the only two people in existence who knew the exact date of Laura's journey, you forgot, and I forgot, that there was a third person who must surely know it--I mean Mrs. Rubelle. Would it not be far easier, and far less dangerous, to insist on a confession from her, than to force it from Sir Percival?"

"It might be easier," I replied, "but we are not aware of the full extent of Mrs. Rubelle's connivance and interest in the conspiracy, and we are therefore not certain that the date has been impressed on her mind, as it has been assuredly impressed on the minds of Sir Percival and the Count. It is too late, now, to waste the time on Mrs. Rubelle, which may be all-important to the discovery of the one assailable point in Sir Percival's life. Are you thinking a little too seriously, Marian, of the risk I may run in returning to Hampshire? Are you beginning to doubt whether Sir Percival Glyde may not in the end be more than a match for me?"

"He will not be more than your match," she replied decidedly, "because he will not be helped in resisting you by the impenetrable wickedness of the Count."

"What has led you to that conclusion?" I replied, in some surprise.

"My own knowledge of Sir Percival's obstinacy and impatience of the Count's control," she answered. "I believe
he will insist on meeting you single-handed—just as he insisted at first on acting for himself at Blackwater Park. The
time for suspecting the Count's interference will be the time when you have Sir Percival at your mercy. His own
interests will then be directly threatened, and he will act, Walter, to terrible purpose in his own defence."

"We may deprive him of his weapons beforehand," I said. "Some of the particulars I have heard from Mrs.
Clements may yet be turned to account against him, and other means of strengthening the case may be at our
disposal. There are passages in Mrs. Michelson's narrative which show that the Count found it necessary to place
himself in communication with Mr. Fairlie, and there may be circumstances which compromise him in that
proceeding. While I am away, Marian, write to Mr. Fairlie and say that you want an answer describing exactly what
passed between the Count and himself, and informing you also of any particulars that may have come to his
knowledge at the same time in connection with his niece. Tell him that the statement you request will, sooner or
later, be insisted on, if he shows any reluctance to furnish you with it of his own accord."

"The letter shall be written, Walter. But are you really determined to go to Welmingham?"

"Absolutely determined. I will devote the next two days to earning what we want for the week to come, and on
the third day I go to Hampshire."

When the third day came I was ready for my journey.

As it was possible that I might be absent for some little time, I arranged with Marian that we were to correspond
every day—of course addressing each other by assumed names, for caution's sake. As long as I heard from her
regularly, I should assume that nothing was wrong. But if the morning came and brought me no letter, my return to
London would take place, as a matter of course, by the first train. I contrived to reconcile Laura to my departure by
telling her that I was going to the country to find new purchasers for her drawings and for mine, and I left her
occupied and happy. Marian followed me downstairs to the street door.

"Remember what anxious hearts you leave here," she whispered, as we stood together in the passage.
"Remember all the hopes that hang on your safe return. If strange things happen to you on this journey—if you and
Sir Percival meet-----"

"What makes you think we shall meet?" I asked.

"I don't know—I have fears and fancies that I cannot account for. Laugh at them, Walter, if you like—but, for
God's sake, keep your temper if you come in contact with that man!"

"Never fear, Marian! I answer for my self-control."

With those words we parted.

I walked briskly to the station. There was a glow of hope in me. There was a growing conviction in my mind that
my journey this time would not be taken in vain. It was a fine, clear, cold morning. My nerves were firmly strung,
and I felt all the strength of my resolution stirring in me vigorously from head to foot.

As I crossed the railway platform, and looked right and left among the people congregated on it, to search for
any faces among them that I knew, the doubt occurred to me whether it might not have been to my advantage if I
had adopted a disguise before setting out for Hampshire. But there was something so repellent to me in the idea—
something so meanly like the common herd of spies and informers in the mere act of adopting a disguise—that I
dismissed the question from consideration almost as soon as it had risen in my mind. Even as a mere matter of
expediency the proceeding was doubtful in the extreme. If I tried the experiment at home the landlord of the house
would sooner or later discover me, and would have his suspicions aroused immediately. If I tried it away from home
the same persons might see me, by the commonest accident, with the disguise and without it, and I should in that
way be inviting the notice and distrust which it was my most pressing interest to avoid. In my own character I had
acted thus far—and in my own character I was resolved to continue to the end.

The train left me at Welmingham early in the afternoon.

Is there any wilderness of sand in the deserts of Arabia, is there any prospect of desolation among the ruins of
Palestine, which can rival the repelling effect on the eye, and the depressing influence on the mind, of an English
country town in the first stage of its existence, and in the transition state of its prosperity? I asked myself that
question as I passed through the clean desolation, the neat ugliness, the prim torpor of the streets of Welmingham.
And the tradesmen who stared after me from their lonely shops—the trees that drooped helpless in their arid exile of
unfinished crescents and squares—the dead house carcasses that waited in vain for the vivifying human element to
animate them with the breath of life—every creature that I saw, every object that I passed, seemed to answer with one
accord: The deserts of Arabia are innocent of our civilised desolation—the ruins of Palestine are incapable of our
modern gloom!

I inquired my way to the quarter of the town in which Mrs. Catherick lived, and on reaching it found myself in a
square of small houses, one story high. There was a bare little plot of grass in the middle, protected by a cheap wire
fence. An elderly nursemaid and two children were standing in a corner of the enclosure, looking at a lean goat
tethered to the grass. Two foot-passengers were talking together on one side of the pavement before the houses, and
an idle little boy was leading an idle little dog along by a string on the other. I heard the dull tinkling of a piano at a
distance, accompanied by the intermittent knocking of a hammer nearer at hand. These were all the sights and
sounds of life that encountered me when I entered the square.

I walked at once to the door of Number Thirteen--the number of Mrs. Catherick's house--and knocked, without
waiting to consider beforehand how I might best present myself when I got in. The first necessity was to see Mrs.
Catherick. I could then judge, from my own observation, of the safest and easiest manner of approaching the object
of my visit.

The door was opened by a melancholy middle-aged woman servant. I gave her my card, and asked if I could see
Mrs. Catherick. The card was taken into the front parlour, and the servant returned with a message requesting me to
mention what my business was.

"Say, if you please, that my business relates to Mrs. Catherick's daughter," I replied. This was the best pretext I
could think of, on the spur of the moment, to account for my visit.

The servant again retired to the parlour, again returned, and this time begged me, with a look of gloomy
amazement, to walk in.

I entered a little room, with a flaring paper of the largest pattern on the walls. Chairs, tables, cheffonier, and sofa,
all gleamed with the glutinous brightness of cheap upholstery. On the largest table, in the middle of the room, stood
a smart Bible, placed exactly in the centre on a red and yellow woollen mat and at the side of the table nearest to the
window, with a little knitting-basket on her lap, and a wheezing, blear-eyed old spaniel crouched at her feet, there
sat an elderly woman, wearing a black net cap and a black silk gown, and having slate-coloured mittens on her
hands. Her iron-grey hair hung in heavy bands on either side of her face--her dark eyes looked straight forward, with
a hard, defiant, implacable stare. She had full square cheeks, a long, firm chin, and thick, sensual, colourless lips.
Her figure was stout and sturdy, and her manner aggressively self-possessed. This was Mrs. Catherick.

"You have come to speak to me about my daughter," she said, before I could utter a word on my side. "Be so
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"You have come to speak to me about my daughter," she said, before I could utter a word on my side. "Be so
good as to mention what you have to say."

"Yes. Have you come here to tell me she is dead?"
"I have."
"Why?"

She put that extraordinary question without the slightest change in her voice, her face, or her manner. She could
not have appeared more perfectly unconcerned if I had told her of the death of the goat in the enclosure outside.

"Why?" I repeated. "Do you ask why I come here to tell you of your daughter's death?"
"Yes. What interest have you in me, or in her? How do you come to know anything about my daughter?"

"In this way. I met her on the night when she escaped from the Asylum, and I assisted her in reaching a place of
safety."
"You did very wrong."
"I am sorry to hear her mother say so."
"Her mother does say so. How do you know she is dead?"
"I am not at liberty to say how I know it--but I DO know it."
"Are you at liberty to say how you found out my address?"
"Certainly. I got your address from Mrs. Clements."
"Mrs. Clements is a foolish woman. Did she tell you to come here?"
"She did not."
"Then, I ask you again, why did you come?"

As she was determined to have her answer, I gave it to her in the plainest possible form.
"I came," I said, "because I thought Anne Catherick's mother might have some natural interest in knowing
whether she was alive or dead."
"Just so," said Mrs. Catherick, with additional self-possession. "Had you no other motive?"
I hesitated. The right answer to that question was not easy to find at a moment's notice.
"If you have no other motive," she went on, deliberately taking off her slate-coloured mittens, and rolling them
up, "I have only to thank you for your visit, and to say that I will not detain you here any longer. Your information
would be more satisfactory if you were willing to explain how you became possessed of it. However, it justifies me, I suppose, in going into mourning. There is not much alteration necessary in my dress, as you see. When I have changed my mittens, I shall be all in black."

She searched in the pocket of her gown, drew out a pair of black lace mittens, put them on with the stoniest and steadiest composure, and then quietly crossed her hands in her lap.

"I wish you good morning," she said.

The cool contempt of her manner irritated me into directly avowing that the purpose of my visit had not been answered yet.

"I HAVE another motive in coming here," I said.

"Ah! I thought so," remarked Mrs. Catherick.

"Your daughter's death----"

"What did she die of?"

"Of disease of the heart."

"Yes. Go on."

"Your daughter's death has been made the pretext for inflicting serious injury on a person who is very dear to me. Two men have been concerned, to my certain knowledge, in doing that wrong. One of them is Sir Percival Glyde."

"Indeed!"

I looked attentively to see if she flinched at the sudden mention of that name. Not a muscle of her stirred--the hard, defiant, implacable stare in her eyes never wavered for an instant.

"You may wonder," I went on, "how the event of your daughter's death can have been made the means of inflicting injury on another person."

"No," said Mrs. Catherick; "I don't wonder at all. This appears to be your affair. You are interested in my affairs. I am not interested in yours."

"You may ask, then," I persisted, "why I mention the matter in your presence."

"Yes, I DO ask that."

"I mention it because I am determined to bring Sir Percival Glyde to account for the wickedness he has committed."

"What have I to do with your determination?"

"You shall hear. There are certain events in Sir Percival's past life which it is necessary for my purpose to be fully acquainted with. YOU know them--and for that reason I come to YOU."

"What events do you mean?"

"Events that occurred at Old Welmingham when your husband was parish-clerk at that place, and before the time when your daughter was born."

I had reached the woman at last through the barrier of impenetrable reserve that she had tried to set up between us. I saw her temper smouldering in her eyes--as plainly as I saw her hands grow restless, then unclasp themselves, and begin mechanically smoothing her dress over her knees.

"What do you know of those events?" she asked.

"All that Mrs. Clements could tell me," I answered.

There was a momentary flush on her firm square face, a momentary stillness in her restless hands, which seemed to betoken a coming outburst of anger that might throw her off her guard. But no--she mastered the rising irritation, leaned back in her chair, crossed her arms on her broad bosom, and with a smile of grim sarcasm on her thick lips, looked at me as steadily as ever.

"Ah! I begin to understand it all now," she said, her tamed and disciplined anger only expressing itself in the elaborate mockery of her tone and manner. "You have got a grudge of your own against Sir Percival Glyde, and I must help you to wreak it. I must tell you this, that, and the other about Sir Percival and myself, must I? Yes, indeed? You have been prying into my private affairs. You think you have found a lost woman to deal with, who lives here on sufferance, and who will do anything you ask for fear you may injure her in the opinions of the town's-people. I see through you and your precious speculation--I do! and it amuses me. Ha! ha!"

She stopped for a moment, her arms tightened over her bosom, and she laughed to herself--a hard, harsh, angry laugh.

"You don't know how I have lived in this place, and what I have done in this place, Mr. What's-your-name," she went on. "I'll tell you, before I ring the bell and have you shown out. I came here a wronged woman--I came here robbed of my character and determined to claim it back. I've been years and years about it-- and I HAVE claimed it back. I have matched the respectable people fairly and openly on their own ground. If they say anything against me now they must say it in secret--they can't say it, they daren't say it, openly. I stand high enough in this town to be out
of your reach. THE CLERGYMAN BOWS TO ME. Aha! you didn't bargain for that when you came here. Go to the
church and inquire about me—you will find Mrs. Catherick has her sitting like the rest of them, and pays the rent on
the day it's due. Go to the town-hall. There's a petition lying there—a petition of the respectable inhabitants against
allowing a circus to come and perform here and corrupt our morals—yes! OUR morals. I signed that petition this
morning. Go to the bookseller's shop. The clergyman's Wednesday evening Lectures on Justification by Faith are
publishing there by subscription—I'm down on the list. The doctor's wife only put a shilling in the plate at our last
charity sermon—I put half-a-crown. Mr. Churchwarden Soward held the plate, and bowed to me. Ten years ago he
told Pigrum the chemist I ought to be whipped out of the town at the cart's tail. Is your mother alive? Has she got a
better Bible on her table than I have got on mine? Does she stand better with her trades-people than I do with mine?
Has she always lived within her income? I have always lived within mine. Ah! there IS the clergyman coming along
the square. Look, Mr. What's-your-name—look, if you please!"

She started up with the activity of a young woman, went to the window, waited till the clergyman passed, and
bowed to him solemnly. The clergyman ceremoniously raised his hat, and walked on. Mrs. Catherick returned to her
chair, and looked at me with a grimmer sarcasm than ever.

"There!" she said. "What do you think of that for a woman with a lost character? How does your speculation
look now?"

The singular manner in which she had chosen to assert herself, the extraordinary practical vindication of her
position in the town which she had just offered, had so perplexed me that I listened to her in silent surprise. I was not
the less resolved, however, to make another effort to throw her off her guard. If the woman's fierce temper once got
beyond her control, and once flamed out on me, she might yet say the words which would put the clue in my hands.

"How does your speculation look now?" she repeated.

"Exactly as it looked when I first came in," I answered. "I don't doubt the position you have gained in the town,
and I don't wish to assail it even if I could. I came here because Sir Percival Glyde is, to my certain knowledge, your
enemy, as well as mine. If I have a grudge against him, you have a grudge against him too. You may deny it if you
like, you may distrust me as much as you please, you may be as angry as you will—but, of all the women in England,
you, if you have any sense of injury, are the woman who ought to help me to crush that man."

"Crush him for yourself," she said; "then come back here, and see what I say to you."

She spoke those words as she had not spoken yet, quickly, fiercely, vindictively. I had stirred in its lair the
serpent-hostility of years, but only for a moment. Like a lurking reptile it leaped up at me as she eagerly bent forward
towards the place in which I was sitting. Like a lurking reptile it dropped out of sight again as she instantly resumed
her former position in the chair.

"You won't trust me?" I said.

"No."

"You are afraid?"

"Do I look as if I was?"

"You are afraid of Sir Percival Glyde?"

"Am I?"

Her colour was rising, and her hands were at work again smoothing her gown. I pressed the point farther and
farther home, I went on without allowing her a moment of delay.

"Sir Percival has a high position in the world," I said; "it would be no wonder if you were afraid of him. Sir
Percival is a powerful man, a baronet, the possessor of a fine estate, the descendant of a great family----"

She amazed me beyond expression by suddenly bursting out laughing.

"Yes," she repeated, in tones of the bitterest, steadiest contempt. "A baronet, the possessor of a fine estate, the
descendant of a great family. Yes, indeed! A great family—especially by the mother's side."

There was no time to reflect on the words that had just escaped her, there was only time to feel that they were
well worth thinking over the moment I left the house.

"I am not here to dispute with you about family questions," I said. "I know nothing of Sir Percival's mother----"

"And you know as little of Sir Percival himself," she interposed sharply.

"I advise you not to be too sure of that," I rejoined. "I know some things about him, and I suspect many more."

"What do you suspect?"

"I'll tell you what I DON'T suspect. I DON'T suspect him of being Anne's father."

She started to her feet, and came close up to me with a look of fury.

"How dare you talk to me about Anne's father! How dare you say who was her father, or who wasn't!" she broke
out, her face quivering, her voice trembling with passion.

"The secret between you and Sir Percival is not THAT secret," I persisted. "The mystery which darkens Sir
Percival's life was not born with your daughter's birth, and has not died with your daughter's death."
She drew back a step. "Go!" she said, and pointed sternly to the door.
"There was no thought of the child in your heart or in his," I went on, determined to press her back to her last defences. "There was no bond of guilty love between you and him when you held those stolen meetings, when your husband found you whispering together under the vestry of the church."

Her pointing hand instantly dropped to her side, and the deep flush of anger faded from her face while I spoke. I saw the change pass over her--I saw that hard, firm, fearless, self-possessed woman quail under a terror which her utmost resolution was not strong enough to resist when I said those five last words, "the vestry of the church."

For a minute or more we stood looking at each other in silence. I spoke first.
"Do you still refuse to trust me?" I asked.
She could not call the colour that had left it back to her face, but she had steadied her voice, she had recovered the defiant self-possession of her manner when she answered me.
"I do refuse," she said.
"Do you still tell me to go?"
"Yes. Go--and never come back."
I walked to the door, waited a moment before I opened it, and turned round to look at her again.
"I may have news to bring you of Sir Percival which you don't expect," I said, "and in that case I shall come back."
"There is no news of Sir Percival that I don't expect, except----"
She stopped, her pale face darkened, and she stole back with a quiet, stealthy, cat-like step to her chair.
"Except the news of his death," she said, sitting down again, with the mockery of a smile just hovering on her cruel lips, and the furtive light of hatred lurking deep in her steady eyes.

As I opened the door of the room to go out, she looked round at me quickly. The cruel smile slowly widened her lips--she eyed me, with a strange stealthy interest, from head to foot--an unutterable expectation showed itself wickedly all over her face. Was she speculating, in the secrecy of her own heart, on my youth and strength, on the force of my sense of injury and the limits of my self-control, and was she considering the lengths to which they might carry me, if Sir Percival and I ever chanced to meet? The bare doubt that it might be so drove me from her presence, and silenced even the common forms of farewell on my lips. Without a word more, on my side or on hers, I left the room.

As I opened the outer door, I saw the same clergyman who had already passed the house once, about to pass it again, on his way back through the square. I waited on the door-step to let him go by, and looked round, as I did so, at the parlour window.

Mrs. Catherick had heard his footsteps approaching, in the silence of that lonely place, and she was on her feet at the window again, waiting for him. Not all the strength of all the terrible passions I had roused in that woman's heart, could loosen her desperate hold on the one fragment of social consideration which years of resolute effort had just dragged within her grasp. There she was again, not a minute after I had left her, placed purposely in a position which made it a matter of common courtesy on the part of the clergyman to bow to her for a second time. He raised his hat once more. I saw the hard ghastly face behind the window soften, and light up with gratified pride--I saw the head with the grim black cap bend ceremoniously in return. The clergyman had bowed to her, and in my presence, twice in one day!

IX

I Left the house, feeling that Mrs. Catherick had helped me a step forward, in spite of herself. Before I had reached the turning which led out of the square, my attention was suddenly aroused by the sound of a closing door behind me.

I looked round, and saw an undersized man in black on the door-step of a house, which, as well as I could judge, stood next to Mrs. Catherick's place of abode--next to it, on the side nearest to me. The man did not hesitate a moment about the direction he should take. He advanced rapidly towards the turning at which I had stopped. I recognised him as the lawyer's clerk, who had preceded me in my visit to Blackwater Park, and who had tried to pick a quarrel with me, when I asked him if I could see the house.

I waited where I was, to ascertain whether his object was to come to close quarters and speak on this occasion. To my surprise he passed on rapidly, without saying a word, without even looking up in my face as he went by. This was such a complete inversion of the course of proceeding which I had every reason to expect on his part, that my curiosity, or rather my suspicion, was aroused, and I determined on my side to keep him cautiously in view, and to discover what the business might be in which he was now employed. Without caring whether he saw me or not, I walked after him. He never looked back, and he led me straight through the streets to the railway station.

The train was on the point of starting, and two or three passengers who were late were clustering round the small opening through which the tickets were issued. I joined them, and distinctly heard the lawyer's clerk demand a ticket
for the Blackwater station. I satisfied myself that he had actually left by the train before I came away.

There was only one interpretation that I could place on what I had just seen and heard. I had unquestionably observed the man leaving a house which closely adjoined Mrs. Catherick's residence. He had been probably placed there, by Sir Percival's directions, as a lodger, in anticipation of my inquiries leading me, sooner or later, to communicate with Mrs. Catherick. He had doubtless seen me go in and come out, and he had hurried away by the first train to make his report at Blackwater Park, to which place Sir Percival would naturally betake himself (knowing what he evidently knew of my movements), in order to be ready on the spot, if I returned to Hampshire. Before many days were over, there seemed every likelihood now that he and I might meet.

Whatever result events might be destined to produce, I resolved to pursue my own course, straight to the end in view, without stopping or turning aside for Sir Percival or for any one. The great responsibility which weighed on me heavily in London--the responsibility of so guiding my slightest actions as to prevent them from leading accidentally to the discovery of Laura's place of refuge--was removed, now that I was in Hampshire. I could go and come as I pleased at Welmingham, and if I chanced to fail in observing any necessary precautions, the immediate results, at least, would affect no one but myself.

When I left the station the winter evening was beginning to close in. There was little hope of continuing my inquiries after dark to any useful purpose in a neighbourhood that was strange to me. Accordingly, I made my way to the nearest hotel, and ordered my dinner and my bed. This done, I wrote to Marian, to tell her that I was safe and well, and that I had fair prospects of success. I had directed her, on leaving home, to address the first letter she wrote to me (the letter I expected to receive the next morning) to "The Post-Office, Welmingham," and I now begged her to send her second day's letter to the same address.

I could easily receive it by writing to the postmaster if I happened to be away from the town when it arrived.

The coffee-room of the hotel, as it grew late in the evening, became a perfect solitude. I was left to reflect on what I had accomplished that afternoon as uninterruptedly as if the house had been my own. Before I retired to rest I had attentively thought over my extraordinary interview with Mrs. Catherick from beginning to end, and had verified at my leisure the conclusions which I had hastily drawn in the earlier part of the day.

The vestry of Old Welmingham church was the starting-point from which my mind slowly worked its way back through all that I had heard Mrs. Catherick say, and through all I had seen Mrs. Catherick do.

At the time when the neighbourhood of the vestry was first referred to in my presence by Mrs. Clements, I had thought it the strangest and most unaccountable of all places for Sir Percival to select for a clandestine meeting with the clerk's wife. Influenced by this impression, and by no other, I had mentioned "the vestry of the church" before Mrs. Catherick on pure speculation--it represented one of the minor peculiarities of the story which occurred to me while I was speaking. I was prepared for her answering me confusedly or angrily, but the blank terror that seized her when I said the words took me completely by surprise. I had long before associated Sir Percival's Secret with the concealment of a serious crime which Mrs. Catherick knew of, but I had gone no further than this. Now the woman's paroxysm of terror associated the crime, either directly or indirectly, with the vestry, and convinced me that she had been more than the mere witness of it--she was also the accomplice, beyond a doubt.

What had been the nature of the crime? Surely there was a contemptible side to it, as well as a dangerous side, or Mrs. Catherick would not have repeated my own words, referring to Sir Percival's rank and power, with such marked disdain as she had certainly displayed. It was a contemptible crime then and a dangerous crime, and she had shared in it, and it was associated with the vestry of the church.

The next consideration to be disposed of led me a step farther from this point.

Mrs. Catherick's undisguised contempt for Sir Percival plainly extended to his mother as well. She had referred with the bitterest sarcasm to the great family he had descended from--"especially by the mother's side." What did this mean?

There appeared to be only two explanations of it. Either his mother's birth had been low, or his mother's reputation was damaged by some hidden flaw with which Mrs. Catherick and Sir Percival were both privately acquainted? I could only put the first explanation to the test by looking at the register of her marriage, and so ascertaining her maiden name and her parentage as a preliminary to further inquiries.

On the other hand, if the second case supposed were the true one, what had been the flaw in her reputation? Remembering the account which Marian had given me of Sir Percival's father and mother, and of the suspiciously unsocial secluded life they had both led, I now asked myself whether it might not be possible that his mother had never been married at all. Here again the register might, by offering written evidence of the marriage, prove to me, at any rate, that this doubt had no foundation in truth. But where was the register to be found? At this point I took up the conclusions which I had previously formed, and the same mental process which had discovered the locality of the concealed crime, now lodged the register also in the vestry of Old Welmingham church.

These were the results of my interview with Mrs. Catherick--these were the various considerations, all steadily...
converging to one point, which decided the course of my proceedings on the next day.

The morning was cloudy and lowering, but no rain fell. I left my bag at the hotel to wait there till I called for it, and, after inquiring the way, set forth on foot for Old Welmingham church.

It was a walk of rather more than two miles, the ground rising slowly all the way.

On the highest point stood the church—an ancient, weather-beaten building, with heavy buttresses at its sides, and a clumsy square tower in front. The vestry at the back was built out from the church, and seemed to be of the same age. Round the building at intervals appeared the remains of the village which Mrs. Clements had described to me as her husband's place of abode in former years, and which the principal inhabitants had long since deserted for the new town. Some of the empty houses had been dismantled to their outer walls, some had been left to decay with time, and some were still inhabited by persons evidently of the poorest class. It was a dreary scene, and yet, in the worst aspect of its ruin, not so dreary as the modern town that I had just left. Here there was the brown, breezy sweep of surrounding fields for the eye to rest on—here the trees, leafless as they were, still varied the monotony of the prospect, and helped the mind to look forward to summer-time and shade.

As I moved away from the back of the church, and passed some of the dismantled cottages in search of a person who might direct me to the clerk, I saw two men saunter out after me from behind a wall. The tallest of the two—a stout muscular man in the dress of a gamekeeper—was a stranger to me. The other was one of the men who had followed me in London on the day when I left Mr. Kyrle's office. I had taken particular notice of him at the time; and I felt sure that I was not mistaken in identifying the fellow on this occasion.

Neither he nor his companion attempted to speak to me, and both kept themselves at a respectful distance, but the motive of their presence in the neighbourhood of the church was plainly apparent. It was exactly as I had supposed—Sir Percival was already prepared for me. My visit to Mrs. Catherick had been reported to him the evening before, and those two men had been placed on the look-out near the church in anticipation of my appearance at Old Welmingham. If I had wanted any further proof that my investigations had taken the right direction at last, the plan now adopted for watching me would have supplied it.

I walked on away from the church till I reached one of the inhabited houses, with a patch of kitchen garden attached to it on which a labourer was at work. He directed me to the clerk's abode, a cottage at some little distance off, standing by itself on the outskirts of the forsaken village. The clerk was indoors, and was just putting on his greatcoat. He was a cheerful, familiar, loudly-talkative old man, with a very poor opinion (as I soon discovered) of the place in which he lived, and a happy sense of superiority to his neighbours in virtue of the great personal distinction of having once been in London.

"It's well you came so early, sir," said the old man, when I had mentioned the object of my visit. "I should have been away in ten minutes more. Parish business, sir, and a goodish long trot before it's all done for a man at my age. But, bless you, I'm strong on my legs still! As long as a man don't give at his legs, there's a deal of work left in him. Don't you think so yourself, sir?"

He took his keys down while he was talking from a hook behind the fireplace, and locked his cottage door behind us.

"Nobody at home to keep house for me," said the clerk, with a cheerful sense of perfect freedom from all family encumbrances. "My wife's in the churchyard there, and my children are all married. A wretched place this, isn't it, sir? But the parish is a large one—every man couldn't get through the business as I do. It's learning does it, and I've had my share, and a little more. I can talk the Queen's English (God bless the Queen!), and that's more than most of the people about here can do. You're from London, I suppose, sir? I've been in London a matter of five-and-twenty year ago. What's the news there now, if you please?"

Chattering on in this way, he led me back to the vestry. I looked about to see if the two spies were still in sight. They were not visible anywhere. After having discovered my application to the clerk, they had probably concealed themselves where they could watch my next proceedings in perfect freedom.

The vestry door was of stout old oak, studded with strong nails, and the clerk put his large heavy key into the lock with the air of a man who knew that he had a difficulty to encounter, and who was not quite certain of creditably conquering it.

"I'm obliged to bring you this way, sir," he said, "because the door from the vestry to the church is bolted on the vestry side. We might have got in through the church otherwise. This is a perverse lock, if ever there was one yet. It's big enough for a prison-door—it's been hampered over and over again, and it ought to be changed for a new one. I've mentioned that to the churchwarden fifty times over at least—he's always saying, 'I'll see about it'—and he never does see. Ah, it's a sort of lost corner, this place. Not like London—is it, sir? Bless you, we are all asleep here! We don't march with the times."

After some twisting and turning of the key, the heavy lock yielded, and he opened the door.

The vestry was larger than I should have supposed it to be, judging from the outside only. It was a dim, mouldy,
who had the appointment of vestry-clerk to this church. A fine hearty old gentleman, and the most particular man

"Safe?" If I've heard him say that once, I've heard him say it a hundred times. He was the solicitor in those days, sir, when I was a lad. 'Why isn't the register' (meaning this register here, under my hand)-- 'why isn't it kept in an iron

"Those were the very words my old master was always saying years and years ago, this ought to be protected by a better lock, and kept carefully in an iron safe?"

"If you want to look back, sir?"

"What is there in the packing-cases?" I asked.

"Bits of old wood carvings from the pulpit, and panels from the chancel, and images from the organ-loft," said the clerk. "Portraits of the twelve apostles in wood, and not a whole nose among 'em. All broken, and worm-eaten, and crumbling to dust at the edges. As brittle as crockery, sir, and as old as the church, if not older."

"And why were they going to London? To be repaired?"

"That's it, sir, to be repaired, and where they were past repair, to be copied in sound wood. But, bless you, the money fell short, and there they are, waiting for new subscriptions, and nobody to subscribe. It was all done a year ago, sir. Six gentlemen dined together about it, at the hotel in the new town. They made speeches, and passed resolutions, and put their names down, and printed off thousands of prospectuses. Beautiful prospectuses, sir, all flourished over with Gothic devices in red ink, saying it was a disgrace not to restore the church and repair the famous carvings, and so on. There are the prospectuses that couldn't be distributed, and the architect's plans and estimates, and the whole correspondence which set everybody at loggerheads and ended in a dispute, all down together in that corner, behind the packing-cases. The money dribbled in a little at first--but what CAN you expect out of London? There was just enough, you know, to pack the broken carvings, and get the estimates, and pay the printer's bill, and after that there wasn't a halfpenny left. There the things are, as I said before. We have nowhere else to put them--nobody in the new town cares about accommodating us-- we're in a lost corner--and this is an untidy vestry--and who's to help it?--that's what I want to know."

My anxiety to examine the register did not dispose me to offer much encouragement to the old man's talkativeness. I agreed with him that nobody could help the untidiness of the vestry, and then suggested that we should proceed to our business without more delay.

"Ay, ay, the marriage-register, to be sure," said the clerk, taking a little bunch of keys from his pocket. "How far do you want to look back, sir?"

Marian had informed me of Sir Percival's age at the time when we had spoken together of his marriage engagement with Laura. She had then described him as being forty-five years old. Calculating back from this, and making due allowance for the year that had passed since I had gained my information, I found that he must have been born in eighteen hundred and four, and that I might safely start on my search through the register from that date.

"I want to begin with the year eighteen hundred and four," I said.

"Which way after that, sir?" asked the clerk. "Forwards to our time or backwards away from us?"

"Backwards from eighteen hundred and four."

He opened the door of one of the presses--the press from the side of which the surplices were hanging--and produced a large volume bound in greasy brown leather. I was struck by the insecurity of the place in which the register was kept. The door of the press was warped and cracked with age, and the lock was of the smallest and commonest kind. I could have forced it easily with the walking-stick I carried in my hand.

"Is that considered a sufficiently secure place for the register?" I inquired. "Surely a book of such importance as this ought to be protected by a better lock, and kept carefully in an iron safe?"

"Well, now, that's curious!" said the clerk, shutting up the book again, just after he had opened it, and smacking his hand cheerfully on the cover. "Those were the very words my old master was always saying years and years ago, when I was a lad. 'Why isn't the register' (meaning this register here, under my hand)-- 'why isn't it kept in an iron safe?' If I've heard him say that once, I've heard him say it a hundred times. He was the solicitor in those days, sir, who had the appointment of vestry-clerk to this church. A fine hearty old gentleman, and the most particular man
breathing. As long as he lived he kept a copy of this book in his office at Knowlesbury, and had it posted up regular, from time to time, to correspond with the fresh entries here. You would hardly think it, but he had his own appointed days, once or twice in every quarter, for riding over to this church on his old white pony, to check the copy, by the register, with his own eyes and hands. 'How do I know?' (he used to say) 'how do I know that the register in this vestry may not be stolen or destroyed? Why isn't it kept in an iron safe? Why can't I make other people as careful as I am myself? Some of these days there will be an accident happen, and when the register's lost, then the parish will find out the value of my copy.' He used to take his pinch of snuff after that, and look about him as bold as a lord. Ah! the like of him for doing business isn't easy to find now. You may go to London and not match him, even THERE. Which year did you say, sir? Eighteen hundred and what?"

"Eighteen hundred and four," I replied, mentally resolving to give the old man no more opportunities of talking, until my examination of the register was over.

The clerk put on his spectacles, and turned over the leaves of the register, carefully wetting his finger and thumb at every third page. "There it is, sir," said he, with another cheerful smack on the open volume. "There's the year you want."

As I was ignorant of the month in which Sir Percival was born, I began my backward search with the early part of the year. The register-book was of the old-fashioned kind, the entries being all made on blank pages in manuscript, and the divisions which separated them being indicated by ink lines drawn across the page at the close of each entry.

I reached the beginning of the year eighteen hundred and four without encountering the marriage, and then travelled back through December eighteen hundred and three--through November and October--through----

No! not through September also. Under the heading of that month in the year I found the marriage.

I looked carefully at the entry. It was at the bottom of a page, and was for want of room compressed into a smaller space than that occupied by the marriages above. The marriage immediately before it was impressed on my attention by the circumstance of the bridegroom's Christian name being the same as my own. The entry immediately following it (on the top of the next page) was noticeable in another way from the large space it occupied, the record in this case registering the marriages of two brothers at the same time. The register of the marriage of Sir Felix Glyde was in no respect remarkable except for the narrowness of the space into which it was compressed at the bottom of the page. The information about his wife was the usual information given in such cases. She was described as "Cecilia Jane Elster, of Park-View Cottages, Knowlesbury, only daughter of the late Patrick Elster, Esq., formerly of Bath."

I noted down these particulars in my pocket-book, feeling as I did so both doubtful and disheartened about my next proceedings. The Secret which I had believed until this moment to be within my grasp seemed now farther from my reach than ever.

What suggestions of any mystery unexplained had arisen out of my visit to the vestry? I saw no suggestions anywhere. What progress had I made towards discovering the suspected stain on the reputation of Sir Percival's mother? The one fact I had ascertained vindicated her reputation. Fresh doubts, fresh difficulties, fresh delays began to open before me in interminable prospect. What was I to do next? The one immediate resource left to me appeared to be this. I might institute inquiries about "Miss Elster of Knowlesbury," on the chance of advancing towards the main object of my investigation, by first discovering the secret of Mrs. Catherick's contempt for Sir Percival's mother.

"Have you found what you wanted, sir?" said the clerk, as I closed the register-book.

"Yes," I replied, "but I have some inquiries still to make. I suppose the clergyman who officiated here in the year eighteen hundred and three is no longer alive?"

"No, no, sir, he was dead three or four years before I came here, and that was as long ago as the year twenty-seven. I got this place, sir," persisted my talkative old friend, "through the clerk before me leaving it. They say he was driven out of house and home by his wife--and she's living still down in the new town there. I don't know the rights of the story myself--all I know is I got the place. Mr. Wansborough got it for me--the son of my old master that I was tell you of. He's a free, pleasant gentleman as ever lived--rides to the hounds, keeps his pointers and all that. He's vestry-clerk here now as his father was before him."

"Did you not tell me your former master lived at Knowlesbury?" I asked, calling to mind the long story about the precise gentleman of the old school with which my talkative friend had wearied me before he opened the register-book.

"Yes, to be sure, sir," replied the clerk. "Old Mr. Wansborough lived at Knowlesbury, and young Mr. Wansbourg lives there too."

"You said just now he was vestry-clerk, like his father before him. I am not quite sure that I know what a vestry-clerk is."
"Don't you indeed, sir?--and you come from London too! Every parish church, you know, has a vestry-clerk and a parish-clerk. The parish-clerk is a man like me (except that I've got a deal more learning than most of them--though I don't boast of it). The vestry-clerk is a sort of an appointment that the lawyers get, and if there's any business to be done for the vestry, why there they are to do it. It's just the same in London. Every parish church there has got its vestry-clerk--and you may take my word for it he's sure to be a lawyer."

"Then young Mr. Wansborough is a lawyer, I suppose?"

"Of course he is, sir! A lawyer in High Street, Knowlesbury--the old offices that his father had before him. The number of times I've swept those offices out, and seen the old gentleman come trotting in to business on his white pony, looking right and left all down the street and nodding to everybody! Bless you, he was a popular character!--he'd have done in London!"

"How far is it to Knowlesbury from this place?"

"A long stretch, sir," said the clerk, with that exaggerated idea of distances, and that vivid perception of difficulties in getting from place to place, which is peculiar to all country people. "Nigh on five mile, I can tell you!"

It was still early in the forenoon. There was plenty of time for a walk to Knowlesbury and back again to Welmingham; and there was no person probably in the town who was fitter to assist my inquiries about the character and position of Sir Percival's mother before her marriage than the local solicitor. Resolving to go at once to Knowlesbury on foot, I led the way out of the vestry.

"Thank you kindly, sir," said the clerk, as I slipped my little present into his hand. "Are you really going to walk all the way to Knowlesbury and back? Well! you're strong on your legs, too-- and what a blessing that is, isn't it? There's the road, you can't miss it. I wish I was going your way--it's pleasant to meet with gentlemen from London in a lost corner like this. One hears the news. Wish you good-morning, sir, and thank you kindly once more."

We parted. As I left the church behind me I looked back, and there were the two men again on the road below, with a third in their company, that third person being the short man in black whom I had traced to the railway the evening before.

The three stood talking together for a little while, then separated. The man in black went away by himself towards Welmingham--the other two remained together, evidently waiting to follow me as soon as I walked on.

I proceeded on my way without letting the fellows see that I took any special notice of them. They caused me no conscious irritation of feeling at that moment--on the contrary, they rather revived my sinking hopes. In the surprise of discovering the evidence of the marriage, I had forgotten the inference I had drawn on first perceiving the men in the neighbourhood of the vestry. Their reappearance reminded me that Sir Percival had anticipated my visit to Old Welmingham church as the next result of my interview with Mrs. Catherick--otherwise he would never have placed his spies there to wait for me. Smoothly and fairly as appearances looked in the vestry, there was something wrong beneath them--there was something in the register-book, for aught I knew, that I had not discovered yet.

X

Once out of sight of the church, I pressed forward briskly on my way to Knowlesbury.

The road was, for the most part, straight and level. Whenever I looked back over it I saw the two spies steadily following me. For the greater part of the way they kept at a safe distance behind. But once or twice they quickened their pace, as if with the purpose of overtaking me, then stopped, consulted together, and fell back again to their former position. They had some special object evidently in view, and they seemed to be hesitating or differing about the best means of accomplishing it. I could not guess exactly what their design might be, but I felt serious doubts of reaching Knowlesbury without some mishance happening to me on the way. These doubts were realised.

I had just entered on a lonely part of the road, with a sharp turn at some distance ahead, and had just concluded (calculating by time) that I must be getting near to the town, when I suddenly heard the steps of the men close behind me.

Before I could look round, one of them (the man by whom I had been followed in London) passed rapidly on my left side and hustled me with his shoulder. I had been more irritated by the manner in which he and his companion had dogged my steps all the way from Old Welmingham than I was myself aware of, and I unfortunately pushed the fellow away smartly with my open hand. He instantly shouted for help. His companion, the tall man in the gamekeeper's clothes, sprang to my right side, and the next moment the two scoundrels held me pinioned between them in the middle of the road.

The conviction that a trap had been laid for me, and the vexation of knowing that I had fallen into it, fortunately restrained me from making my position still worse by an unavailing struggle with two men, one of whom would, in all probability, have been more than a match for me single-handed. I repressed the first natural movement by which I had attempted to shake them off, and looked about to see if there was any person near to whom I could appeal.

A labourer was at work in an adjoining field who must have witnessed all that had passed. I called to him to follow us to the town. He shook his head with stolid obstinacy, and walked away in the direction of a cottage which...
stood back from the high-road. At the same time the men who held me between them declared their intention of charging me with an assault. I was cool enough and wise enough now to make no opposition. "Drop your hold of my arms," I said, "and I will go with you to the town." The man in the gamekeeper's dress roughly refused. But the shorter man was sharp enough to look to consequences, and not to let his companion commit himself by unnecessary violence. He made a sign to the other, and I walked on between them with my arms free.

We reached the turning in the road, and there, close before us, were the suburbs of Knowlesbury. One of the local policemen was walking along the path by the roadside. The men at once appealed to him. He replied that the magistrate was then sitting at the town-hall, and recommended that we should appear before him immediately.

We went on to the town-hall. The clerk made out a formal summons, and the charge was preferred against me, with the customary exaggeration and the customary perversion of the truth on such occasions. The magistrate (an ill-tempered man, with a sour enjoyment in the exercise of his own power) inquired if any one on or near the road had witnessed the assault, and, greatly to my surprise, the complainant admitted the presence of the labourer in the field. I was enlightened, however, as to the object of the admission by the magistrate's next words. He reminded me at once for the production of the witness, expressing, at the same time, his willingness to take bail for my reappearance if I could produce one responsible surety to offer it. If I had been known in the town he would have liberated me on my own recognisances, but as I was a total stranger it was necessary that I should find responsible bail.

The whole object of the stratagem was now disclosed to me. It had been so managed as to make a remand necessary in a town where I was a perfect stranger, and where I could not hope to get my liberty on bail. The remand merely extended over three days, until the next sitting of the magistrate. But in that time, while I was in confinement, Sir Percival might use any means he pleased to embarrass my future proceedings--perhaps to screen himself from detection altogether--without the slightest fear of any hindrance on my part. At the end of the three days the charge would, no doubt, be withdrawn, and the attendance of the witness would be perfectly useless.

My indignation, I may almost say, my despair, at this mischievous check to all further progress--so base and trifling in itself, and yet so disheartening and so serious, in its probable results--quite unfitted me at first to reflect on the best means of extricating myself from the dilemma in which I now stood. I had the folly to call for writing materials, and to think of privately communicating my real position to the magistrate. The hopelessness and the imprudence of this proceeding failed to strike me before I had actually written the opening lines of the letter. It was not till I had pushed the paper away--not till, I am ashamed to say, I had almost allowed the vexation of my helpless position to conquer me--that a course of action suddenly occurred to my mind, which Sir Percival had probably not anticipated, and which might set me free again in a few hours. I determined to communicate the situation in which I was placed to Mr. Dawson, of Oak Lodge.

I had visited this gentleman's house, it may be remembered, at the time of my first inquiries in the Blackwater Park neighbourhood, and I had presented to him a letter of introduction from Miss Halcombe, in which she recommended me to his friendly attention in the strongest terms. I now wrote, referring to this letter, and to what I had previously told Mr. Dawson of the delicate and dangerous nature of my inquiries. I had not revealed to him the truth about Laura, having merely described my errand as being of the utmost importance to private family interests with which Miss Halcombe was concerned. Using the same caution still, I now accounted for my presence at Knowlesbury in the same manner, and I put it to the doctor to say whether the trust reposed in me by a lady whom he well knew, and the hospitality I had myself received in his house, justified me or not in asking him to come to my assistance in a place where I was quite friendless.

I obtained permission to hire a messenger to drive away at once with my letter in a conveyance which might be used to bring the doctor back immediately. Oak Lodge was on the Knowlesbury side of Blackwater. The man declared he could drive there in forty minutes, and could bring Mr. Dawson back in forty more. I directed him to follow the doctor wherever he might happen to be, if he was not at home, and then sat down to wait for the result with all the patience and all the hope that I could summon to help me.

It was not quite half-past one when the messenger departed. Before half-past three he returned, and brought the doctor with him. Mr. Dawson's kindness, and the delicacy with which he treated his prompt assistance quite as a matter of course, almost overpowered me. The bail required was offered, and accepted immediately. Before four o'clock, on that afternoon, I was shaking hands warmly with the good old doctor--a free man again--in the streets of Knowlesbury.

Mr. Dawson hospitably invited me to go back with him to Oak Lodge, and take up my quarters there for the night. I could only reply that my time was not my own, and I could only ask him to let me pay my visit in a few days, when I might repeat my thanks, and offer to him all the explanations which I felt to be only his due, but which I was not then in a position to make. We parted with friendly assurances on both sides, and I turned my steps at once to Mr. Wansborough's office in the High Street.

Time was now of the last importance.
The news of my being free on bail would reach Sir Percival, to an absolute certainty, before night. If the next few hours did not put me in a position to justify his worst fears, and to hold him helpless at my mercy, I might lose every inch of the ground I had gained, never to recover it again. The unscrupulous nature of the man, the local influence he possessed, the desperate peril of exposure with which my blindfold inquiries threatened him--all warned me to press on to positive discovery, without the useless waste of a single minute. I had found time to think while I was waiting for Mr. Dawson's arrival, and I had well employed it. Certain portions of the conversation of the talkative old clerk, which had wearied me at the time, now recurred to my memory with a new significance, and a suspicion crossed my mind darkly which had not occurred to me while I was in the vestry. On my way to Knowlesbury, I had only proposed to apply to Mr. Wansborough for information on the subject of Sir Percival's mother. My object now was to examine the duplicate register of Old Welmingham Church.

Mr. Wansborough was in his office when I inquired for him.

He was a jovial, red-faced, easy-looking man--more like a country squire than a lawyer--and he seemed to be both surprised and amused by my application. He had heard of his father's copy of the register, but had not even seen it himself. It had never been inquired after, and it was no doubt in the strong room among other papers that had not been disturbed since his father's death. It was a pity (Mr. Wansborough said) that the old gentleman was not alive to hear his precious copy asked for at last. He would have ridden his favourite hobby harder than ever now. How had I come to hear of the copy? was it through anybody in the town?

I parried the question as well as I could. It was impossible at this stage of the investigation to be too cautious, and it was just as well not to let Mr. Wansborough know prematurely that I had already examined the original register. I described myself, therefore, as pursuing a family inquiry, to the object of which every possible saving of time was of great importance. I was anxious to send certain particulars to London by that day's post, and one look at the duplicate register (paying, of course, the necessary fees) might supply what I required, and save me a further journey to Old Welmingham. I added that, in the event of my subsequently requiring a copy of the original register, I should make application to Mr. Wansborough's office to furnish me with the document.

After this explanation no objection was made to producing the copy. A clerk was sent to the strong room, and after some delay returned with the volume. It was of exactly the same size as the volume in the vestry, the only difference being that the copy was more smartly bound. I took it with me to an unoccupied desk. My hands were trembling--my head was burning hot--I felt the necessity of concealing my agitation as well as I could from the persons about me in the room, before I ventured on opening the book.

On the blank page at the beginning, to which I first turned, were traced some lines in faded ink. They contained these words--

"Copy of the Marriage Register of Welmingham Parish Church. Executed under my orders, and afterwards compared, entry by entry, with the original, by myself. (Signed) Robert Wansborough, vestry-clerk." Below this note there was a line added, in another handwriting, as follows: "Extending from the first of January, 1800, to the thirtieth of June, 1815."

I turned to the month of September, eighteen hundred and three. I found the marriage of the man whose Christian name was the same as my own. I found the double register of the marriages of the two brothers. And between these entries, at the bottom of the page?

Nothing! Not a vestige of the entry which recorded the marriage of Sir Felix Glyde and Cecilia Jane Elster in the register of the church!

My heart gave a great bound, and throbbed as if it would stifle me. I looked again--I was afraid to believe the evidence of my own eyes. No! not a doubt. The marriage was not there. The entries on the copy occupied exactly the same places on the page as the entries in the original. The last entry on one page recorded the marriage of the man with my Christian name. Below it there was a blank space--a space evidently left because it was too narrow to contain the entry of the marriages of the two brothers, which in the copy, as in the original, occupied the top of the next page. That space told the whole story! There it must have remained in the church register from eighteen hundred and three to eighteen hundred and twenty-seven, when Sir Percival appeared at Old Welmingham. Here, at Knowlesbury, was the chance of committing the forgery shown to me in the copy, and there, at Old Welmingham, was the forgery committed in the register of the church.

My head turned giddy--I held by the desk to keep myself from falling. Of all the suspicions which had struck me in relation to that desperate man, not one had been near the truth.

The idea that he was not Sir Percival Glyde at all, that he had no more claim to the baronetcy and to Blackwater Park than the poorest labourer who worked on the estate, had never once occurred to my mind. At one time I had thought he might be Anne Catherick's father--at another time I had thought he might have been Anne Catherick's husband--the offence of which he was really guilty had been, from first to last, beyond the widest reach of my
The paltry means by which the fraud had been effected, the magnitude and daring of the crime that it represented, the horror of the consequences involved in its discovery, overwhelmed me. Who could wonder now at the brute-restlessness of the wretch's life—at his desperate alternations between abject duplicity and reckless violence—at the madness of guilty distrust which had made him imprison Anne Catherick in the Asylum, and had given him over to the vile conspiracy against his wife, on the bare suspicion that the one and the other knew his terrible secret? The disclosure of that secret might, in past years, have hanged him—might now transport him for life. The disclosure of that secret, even if the sufferers by his deception spared him the penalties of the law, would deprive him at one blow of the name, the rank, the estate, the whole social existence that he had usurped. This was the Secret, and it was mine! A word from me, and house, lands, baronetcy, were gone from him for ever—a word from me, and he was driven out into the world, a nameless, penniless, friendless outcast! The man's whole future hung on my lips—and he knew it by this time as certainly as I did!

That last thought steadied me. Interests far more precious than my own depended on the caution which must now guide my slightest actions. There was no possible treachery which Sir Percival might not attempt against me. In the danger and desperation of his position he would be staggered by no risks, he would recoil at no crime—he would literally hesitate at nothing to save himself.

I considered for a minute. My first necessity was to secure positive evidence in writing of the discovery that I had just made, and in the event of any personal misadventure happening to me, to place that evidence beyond Sir Percival's reach. The copy of the register was sure to be safe in Mr. Wansborough's strong room. But the position of the original in the vestry was, as I had seen with my own eyes, anything but secure.

In this emergency I resolved to return to the church, to apply again to the clerk, and to take the necessary extract from the register before I slept that night. I was not then aware that a legally-certified copy was necessary, and that no document merely drawn out by myself could claim the proper importance as a proof. I was not aware of this, and my determination to keep my present proceedings a secret prevented me from asking any questions which might have procured the necessary information. My one anxiety was the anxiety to get back to Old Welmingham. I made the best excuses I could for the discomposure in my face and manner which Mr. Wansborough had already noticed, laid the necessary fee on his table, arranged that I should write to him in a day or two, and left the office, with my head in a whirl and my blood throbbing through my veins at fever heat.

It was just getting dark. The idea occurred to me that I might be followed again and attacked on the high-road.

My walking-stick was a light one, of little or no use for purposes of defence. I stopped before leaving Knowlesbury and bought a stout country cudgel, short, and heavy at the head. With this homely weapon, if any one man tried to stop me I was a match for him. If more than one attacked me I could trust to my heels. In my school-days I had been a noted runner, and I had not wanted for practice since in the later time of my experience in Central America.

I started from the town at a brisk pace, and kept the middle of the road.

A small misty rain was falling, and it was impossible for the first half of the way to make sure whether I was followed or not. But at the last half of my journey, when I supposed myself to be about two miles from the church, I saw a man run by me in the rain, and then heard the gate of a field by the roadside shut to sharply. I kept straight on, with my cudgel ready in my hand, my ears on the alert, and my eyes straining to see through the mist and the darkness. Before I had advanced a hundred yards there was a rustling in the hedge on my right, and three men sprang out into the road.

I drew aside on the instant to the footpath. The two foremost men were carried beyond me before they could check themselves. The third was as quick as lightning. He stopped, half turned, and struck at me with his stick. The blow was aimed at hazard, and was not a severe one. It fell on my left shoulder. I returned it heavily on his head. He stumbled back and jostled his two companions just as they were both rushing at me. This circumstance gave me a moment's start. I slipped by them, and took to the middle of the road again at the top of my speed.

The two unhurt men pursued me. They were both good runners—the road was smooth and level, and for the first five minutes or more I was conscious that I did not gain on them. It was perilous work to run for long in the darkness. I could barely see the dim black line of the hedges on either side, and any chance obstacle in the road would have thrown me down to a certainty. Ere long I felt the ground changing—it descended from the level at a turn, and then rose again beyond. Downhill the men rather gained on me, but uphill I began to distance them. The rapid, regular thump of their feet grew fainter on my ear, and I calculated by the sound that I was far enough in advance to take to the fields with a good chance of their passing me in the darkness. Diverging to the footpath, I made for the first break that I could guess at, rather than see, in the hedge. It proved to be a closed gate. I vaulted over, and finding myself in a field, kept across it steadily with my back to the road. I heard the men pass the gate, still running, then in a minute more heard one of them call to the other to come back. It was no matter what they did.
now, I was out of their sight and out of their hearing. I kept straight across the field, and when I had reached the farther extremity of it, waited there for a minute to recover my breath.

It was impossible to venture back to the road, but I was determined nevertheless to get to Old Welmingham that evening.

Neither moon nor stars appeared to guide me. I only knew that I had kept the wind and rain at my back on leaving Knowlesbury, and if I now kept them at my back still, I might at least be certain of not advancing altogether in the wrong direction.

Proceeding on this plan, I crossed the country—meeting with no worse obstacles than hedges, ditches, and thickets, which every now and then obliged me to alter my course for a little while—until I found myself on a hillside, with the ground sloping away steeply before me. I descended to the bottom of the hollow, squeezed my way through a hedge, and got out into a lane. Having turned to the right on leaving the road, I now turned to the left, on the chance of regaining the line from which I had wandered. After following the muddy windings of the lane for ten minutes or more, I saw a cottage with a light in one of the windows. The garden gate was open to the lane, and I went in at once to inquire my way.

Before I could knock at the door it was suddenly opened, and a man came running out with a lighted lantern in his hand. He stopped and held it up at the sight of me. We both started as we saw each other. My wanderings had led me round the outskirts of the village, and had brought me out at the lower end of it. I was back at Old Welmingham, and the man with the lantern was no other than my acquaintance of the morning, the parish clerk.

His manner appeared to have altered strangely in the interval since I had last seen him. He looked suspicious and confused—his ruddy cheeks were deeply flushed—and his first words, when he spoke, were quite unintelligible to me.

"Where are the keys?" he asked. "Have you taken them?"

"What keys?" I repeated. "I have this moment come from Knowlesbury. What keys do you mean?"

"The keys of the vestry. Lord save us and help us! what shall I do? The keys are gone! Do you hear?" cried the old man, shaking the lantern at me in his agitation, "the keys are gone!"

"How? When? Who can have taken them?"

"I don't know," said the clerk, staring about him wildly in the darkness. "I've only just got back. I told you I had a long day's work this morning—I locked the door and shut the window down—it's open now, the window's open. Look! somebody has got in there and taken the keys."

He turned to the casement window to show me that it was wide open. The door of the lantern came loose from its fastening as he swayed it round, and the wind blew the candle out instantly.

"Get another light," I said, "and let us both go to the vestry together. Quick! quick!"

I hurried him into the house. The treachery that I had every reason to expect, the treachery that might deprive me of every advantage I had gained, was at that moment, perhaps, in process of accomplishment. My impatience to reach the church was so great that I could not remain inactive in the cottage while the clerk lit the lantern again. I walked out, down the garden path, into the lane.

Before I had advanced ten paces a man approached me from the direction leading to the church. He spoke respectfully as we met. I could not see his face, but judging by his voice only, he was a perfect stranger to me.

"I beg your pardon, Sir Percival----" he began.

I stopped him before he could say more.

"The darkness misleads you," I said. "I am not Sir Percival."

The man drew back directly.

"I thought it was my master," he muttered, in a confused, doubtful way.

"You expected to meet your master here?"

"I was told to wait in the lane."

With that answer he retraced his steps. I looked back at the cottage and saw the clerk coming out, with the lantern lighted once more. I took the old man's arm to help him on the more quickly. We hastened along the lane, and passed the person who had accosted me. As well as I could see by the light of the lantern, he was a servant out of livery.

"Who's that?" whispered the clerk. "Does he know anything about the keys?"

"We won't wait to ask him," I replied. "We will go on to the vestry first."

The church was not visible, even by daytime, until the end of the lane was reached. As we mounted the rising ground which led to the building from that point, one of the village children—a boy—came close up to us, attracted by the light we carried, and recognised the clerk.

"I say, measter," said the boy, pulling officiously at the clerk's coat, "there be summun up yander in the church. I heerd un lock the door on hisself—I heerd un strike a loight wi' a match."
The clerk trembled and leaned against me heavily.
"Come! come!" I said encouragingly. "We are not too late. We will catch the man, whoever he is. Keep the lantern, and follow me as fast as you can."

I mounted the hill rapidly. The dark mass of the church-tower was the first object I discerned dimly against the night sky. As I turned aside to get round to the vestry, I heard heavy footsteps close to me. The servant had ascended to the church after us. "I don't mean any harm," he said, when I turned round on him, "I'm only looking for my master." The tones in which he spoke betrayed unmistakable fear. I took no notice of him and went on.

The instant I turned the corner and came in view of the vestry, I saw the lantern-skylight on the roof brilliantly lit up from within. It shone out with dazzling brightness against the murky, starless sky.

I hurried through the churchyard to the door.

As I got near there was a strange smell stealing out on the damp night air. I heard a snapping noise inside--I saw the light above grow brighter and brighter--a pane of the glass cracked--I ran to the door and put my hand on it. The vestry was on fire!

Before I could move, before I could draw my breath after that discovery, I was horror-struck by a heavy thump against the door from the inside. I heard the key worked violently in the lock--I heard a man's voice behind the door, raised to a dreadful shrillness, screaming for help.

The servant who had followed me staggered back shuddering, and dropped to his knees. "Oh, my God!" he said, "it's Sir Percival!"

As the words passed his lips the clerk joined us, and at the same moment there was another and a last grating turn of the key in the lock.

"The Lord have mercy on his soul!" said the old man. "He is doomed and dead. He has hampered the lock."

I rushed to the door. The one absorbing purpose that had filled all my thoughts, that had controlled all my actions, for weeks and weeks past, vanished in an instant from my mind. All remembrance of the heartless injury the man's crimes had inflicted--of the love, the innocence, the happiness he had pitilessly laid waste--of the oath I had sworn in my own heart to summon him to the terrible reckoning that he deserved--passed from my memory like a dream. I remembered nothing but the horror of his situation. I felt nothing but the natural human impulse to save him from a frightful death.

"Try the other door!" I shouted. "Try the door into the church! The lock's hampered. You're a dead man if you waste another moment on it."

There had been no renewed cry for help when the key was turned for the last time. There was no sound now of any kind, to give token that he was still alive. I heard nothing but the quickening crackle of the flames, and the sharp snap of the glass in the skylight above.

I looked round at my two companions. The servant had risen to his feet--he had taken the lantern, and was holding it up vacantly at the door. Terror seemed to have struck him with downright idiocy--he waited at my heels, he followed me about when I moved like a dog. The clerk sat crouched up on one of the tombstones, shivering, and moaning to himself. The one moment in which I looked at them was enough to show me that they were both helpless.

Hardly knowing what I did, acting desperately on the first impulse that occurred to me, I seized the servant and pushed him against the vestry wall. "Stoop!" I said, "and hold by the stones. I am going to climb over you to the roof--I am going to break the skylight, and give him some air!"

The man trembled from head to foot, but he held firm. I got on his back, with my cudgel in my mouth, seized the parapet with both hands, and was instantly on the roof. In the frantic hurry and agitation of the moment, it never struck me that I might let out the flame instead of letting in the air. I struck at the skylight, and battered in the cracked, loosened glass at a blow. The fire leaped out like a wild beast from its lair. If the wind had not chanced, in the position I occupied, to set it away from me, my exertions might have ended then and there. I crouched on the roof as the smoke poured out above me with the flame. The gleams and flashes of the light showed me the servant's face staring up vacantly under the wall--the clerk risen to his feet on the tombstone, wringing his hands in despair--and the scanty population of the village, haggard men and terrified women, clustered beyond in the churchyard--all appearing and disappearing, in the red of the dreadful glare, in the black of the choking smoke. And the man beneath my feet!--the man, suffocating, burning, dying so near us all, so utterly beyond our reach!

The thought half maddened me. I lowered myself from the roof, by my hands, and dropped to the ground.

"The key of the church!" I shouted to the clerk. "We must try it that way--we may save him yet if we can burst open the inner door."

"No, no, no!" cried the old man. "No hope! the church key and the vestry key are on the same ring--both inside there! Oh, sir, he's past saving--he's dust and ashes by this time!"

"They'll see the fire from the town," said a voice from among the men behind me. "There's a engine in the town.
They'll save the church."

I called to that man--HE had his wits about him--I called to him to come and speak to me. It would be a quarter of an hour at least before the town engine could reach us. The horror of remaining inactive all that time was more than I could face. In defiance of my own reason I persuaded myself that the doomed and lost wretch in the vestry might still be lying senseless on the floor, might not be dead yet. If we broke open the door, might we save him? I knew the strength of the heavy lock--I knew the thickness of the nailed oak--I knew the hopelessness of assailing the one and the other by ordinary means. But surely there were beams still left in the dismantled cottages near the church? What if we got one, and used it as a battering-ram against the door?

The thought leaped through me like the fire leaping out of the shattered skylight. I appealed to the man who had spoken first of the fire-engine in the town. "Have you got your pickaxes handy?" Yes, they had. "And a hatchet, and a saw, and a bit of rope?" Yes! yes! yes! I ran down among the villagers, with the lantern in my hand. "Five shillings apiece to every man who helps me!" They started into life at the words. That ravenous second hunger of poverty--the hunger for money--roused them into tumult and activity in a moment. "Two of you for more lanterns, if you have them! Two of you for the pickaxes and the tools! The rest after me to find the beam!" They cheered--with shrill starveling voices they cheered. The women and the children fled back on either side. We pushed in a body down the churchyard path to the first empty cottage. Not a man was left behind but the clerk--the poor old clerk standing on the flat tombstone sobbing and wailing over the church. The servant was still at my heels--his white, helpless, panic-stricken face was close over my shoulder as we pushed into the cottage. There were rafters from the torn-down floor above, lying loose on the ground--but they were too light. A beam ran across over our heads, but not out of reach of our arms and our pickaxes--a beam fast at each end in the ruined wall, with ceiling and flooring all ripped away, and a great gap in the roof above, open to the sky. We attacked the beam at both ends at once. God! how it held--how the brick and mortar of the wall resisted us! We struck, and tugged, and tore. The beam gave at one end--it came down with a lump of brickwork after it. There was a scream from the women all huddled in the doorway to look at us--a shout from the men--two of them down but not hurt. Another tug all together--and the beam was loose at both ends. We raised it, and gave the word to clear the doorway. Now for the work! now for the rush at the door! There is the fire streaming into the sky, streaming brighter than ever to light us! Steady along the churchyard path--steady with the beam for a rush at the door. One, two, three--and off. Out rings the cheering again, irrepressibly. We have shaken it already, the hinges must give if the lock won't. Another run with the beam! One, two, three--and off. It's loose! the stealthy fire darts at us through the crevice all round it. Another, and a last rush! The door falls in with a crash. A great hush of awe, a stillness of breathless expectation, possesses every living soul of us. We look for the body. The scorching heat on our faces drives us back: we see nothing--above, below, all through the room, we see nothing but a sheet of living fire.

"Where is he?" whispered the servant, staring vacantly at the flames.

"He's dust and ashes," said the clerk. "And the books are dust and ashes--and oh, sirs! the church will be dust and ashes soon."

Those were the only two who spoke. When they were silent again, nothing stirred in the stillness but the bubble and the crackle of the flames.

Hark!

A harsh rattling sound in the distance--then the hollow beat of horses' hoofs at full gallop--then the low roar, the all-predominant tumult of hundreds of human voices clamouring and shouting together. The engine at last.

The people about me all turned from the fire, and ran eagerly to the brow of the hill. The old clerk tried to go with the rest, but his strength was exhausted. I saw him holding by one of the tombstones. "Save the church!" he cried out faintly, as if the firemen could hear him already.

Save the church!

The only man who never moved was the servant. There he stood, his eyes still fastened on the flames in a changeless, vacant stare. I spoke to him, I shook him by the arm. He was past rousing. He only whispered once more, "Where is he?"

In ten minutes the engine was in position, the well at the back of the church was feeding it, and the hose was carried to the doorway of the vestry. If help had been wanted from me I could not have afforded it now. My energy of will was gone--my strength was exhausted--the turmoil of my thoughts was fearfully and suddenly stilled, now I knew that he was dead.

I stood useless and helpless--looking, looking, looking into the burning room.

I saw the fire slowly conquered. The brightness of the glare faded--the steam rose in white clouds, and the smouldering heaps of embers showed red and black through it on the floor. There was a pause--then an advance all together of the firemen and the police which blocked up the doorway--then a consultation in low voices--and then two men were detached from the rest, and sent out of the churchyard through the crowd. The crowd drew back on
either side in dead silence to let them pass.

After a while a great shudder ran through the people, and the living lane widened slowly. The men came back along it with a door from one of the empty houses. They carried it to the vestry and went in. The police closed again round the doorway, and men stole out from among the crowd by twos and threes and stood behind them to be the first to see. Others waited near to be the first to hear. Women and children were among these last.

The tidings from the vestry began to flow out among the crowd--they dropped slowly from mouth to mouth till they reached the place where I was standing. I heard the questions and answers repeated again and again in low, eager tones all round me.

"Have they found him?" "Yes."--"Where?" "Against the door, on his face."--"Which door?" "The door that goes into the church. His head was against it--he was down on his face."--"Is his face burnt?" "No." "Yes, it is." "No, scorched, not burnt--he lay on his face, I tell you."--"Who was he? A lord, they say." "No, not a lord. SIR SOMETHING; Sir means Knight." "And Baronight, too." "No." "Yes, it does."--"What did he want in there?" "No good, you may depend on it."--"Did he do it on purpose?"--"Burn himself on purpose!"--"I don't mean himself, I mean the vestry."--"Is he dreadful to look at?" "Dreadful!"--"Not about the face, though?" "No, no, not so much about the face. Don't anybody know him?" "There's a man says he does."--"Who?" "A servant, they say. But he's struck stupid-like, and the police don't believe him."--"Don't anybody else know who it is?" "Hush----!"

The loud, clear voice of a man in authority silenced the low hum of talking all round me in an instant.

"Where is the gentleman who tried to save him?" said the voice.

"Here, sir--here he is!" Dozens of eager faces pressed about me--dozens of eager arms parted the crowd. The man in authority came up to me with a lantern in his hand.

"This way, sir, if you please," he said quietly.

I was unable to speak to him, I was unable to resist him when he took my arm. I tried to say that I had never seen the dead man in his lifetime--that there was no hope of identifying him by means of a stranger like me. But the words failed on my lips. I was faint, and silent, and helpless.

"Do you know him, sir?"

I was standing inside a circle of men. Three of them opposite to me were holding lanterns low down to the ground. Their eyes, and the eyes of all the rest, were fixed silently and expectantly on my face. I knew what was at my feet--I knew why they were holding the lanterns so low to the ground.

"Can you identify him, sir?"

My eyes dropped slowly. At first I saw nothing under them but a coarse canvas cloth. The dripping of the rain on it was audible in the dreadful silence. I looked up, along the cloth, and there at the end, stark and grim and black, in the yellow light--there was his dead face.

So, for the first and last time, I saw him. So the Visitation of God ruled it that he and I should meet.

XI

The inquest was hurried for certain local reasons which weighed with the coroner and the town authorities. It was held on the afternoon of the next day. I was necessarily one among the witnesses summoned to assist the objects of the investigation.

My first proceeding in the morning was to go to the post-office, and inquire for the letter which I expected from Marian. No change of circumstances, however extraordinary, could affect the one great anxiety which weighed on my mind while I was away from London. The morning's letter, which was the only assurance I could receive that no misfortune had happened in my absence, was still the absorbing interest with which my day began.

To my relief, the letter from Marian was at the office waiting for me.

Nothing had happened--they were both as safe and as well as when I had left them. Laura sent her love, and begged that I would let her know of my return a day beforehand. Her sister added, in explanation of this message, that she had saved "nearly a sovereign" out of her own private purse, and that she had claimed the privilege of ordering the dinner and giving the dinner which was to celebrate the day of my return. I read these little domestic confidences in the bright morning with the terrible recollection of what had happened the evening before vivid in my memory. The necessity of sparing Laura any sudden knowledge of the truth was the first consideration which the letter suggested to me. I wrote at once to Marian to tell her what I have told in these pages--presenting the tidings as gradually and gently as I could, and warning her not to let any such thing as a newspaper fall in Laura's way while I was absent. In the case of any other woman, less courageous and less reliable, I might have hesitated before I ventured on unreservedly disclosing the whole truth. But I owed it to Marian to be faithful to my past experience of her, and to trust her as I trusted herself.

My letter was necessarily a long one. It occupied me until the time came for proceeding to the inquest.

The objects of the legal inquiry were necessarily beset by peculiar complications and difficulties. Besides the investigation into the manner in which the deceased had met his death, there were serious questions to be settled
relating to the cause of the fire, to the abstraction of the keys, and to the presence of a stranger in the vestry at the
time when the flames broke out. Even the identification of the dead man had not yet been accomplished. The
helpless condition of the servant had made the police distrustful of his asserted recognition of his master. They had
sent to Knowlesbury overnight to secure the attendance of witnesses who were well acquainted with the personal
appearance of Sir Percival Glyde, and they had communicated, the first thing in the morning, with Blackwater Park.
These precautions enabled the coroner and jury to settle the question of identity, and to confirm the correctness of
the servant’s assertion; the evidence offered by competent witnesses, and by the discovery of certain facts, being
subsequently strengthened by an examination of the dead man’s watch. The crest and the name of Sir Percival Glyde
were engraved inside it.

The next inquiries related to the fire.
The servant and I, and the boy who had heard the light struck in the vestry, were the first witnesses called. The
boy gave his evidence clearly enough, but the servant’s mind had not yet recovered the shock inflicted on it—he was
plainly incapable of assisting the objects of the inquiry, and he was desired to stand down.

To my own relief, my examination was not a long one. I had not known the deceased—I had never seen him—I
was not aware of his presence at Old Welmingham—and I had not been in the vestry at the finding of the body. All I
could prove was that I had stopped at the clerk’s cottage to ask my way—that I had heard from him of the loss of the
keys—that I had accompanied him to the church to render what help I could—that I had seen the fire—that I had heard
some person unknown, inside the vestry, trying vainly to unlock the door—and that I had done what I could, from
motives of humanity, to save the man. Other witnesses, who had been acquainted with the deceased, were asked if
they could explain the mystery of his presumed abstraction of the keys, and his presence in the burning room. But
the coroner seemed to take it for granted, naturally enough, that I, as a total stranger in the neighbourhood, and a
total stranger to Sir Percival Glyde, could not be in a position to offer any evidence on these two points.

The course that I was myself bound to take, when my formal examination had closed, seemed clear to me. I did
not feel called on to volunteer any statement of my own private convictions; in the first place, because my doing so
could serve no practical purpose, now that all proof in support of any surmises of mine was burnt with the burnt
register; in the second place, because I could not have intelligibly stated my opinion—my unsupported opinion—
without disclosing the whole story of the conspiracy, and producing beyond a doubt the same unsatisfactory effect
on the minds of the coroner and the jury, which I had already produced on the mind of Mr. Kyrie.

In these pages, however, and after the time that has now elapsed, no such cautions and restraints as are here
described need fetter the free expression of my opinion. I will state briefly, before my pen occupies itself with other
events, how my own convictions lead me to account for the abstraction of the keys, for the outbreak of the fire, and
for the death of the man.

The news of my being free on bail drove Sir Percival, as I believe, to his last resources. The attempted attack on
the road was one of those resources, and the suppression of all practical proof of his crime, by destroying the page of
the register on which the forgery had been committed, was the other, and the surest of the two. If I could produce no
extract from the original book to compare with the certified copy at Knowlesbury, I could produce no positive
evidence, and could threaten him with no fatal exposure. All that was necessary to the attainment of his end was,
that he should get into the vestry unperceived, that he should tear out the page in the register, and that he should
leave the vestry again as privately as he had entered it.

On this supposition, it is easy to understand why he waited until nightfall before he made the attempt, and why
he took advantage of the clerk’s absence to possess himself of the keys. Necessity would oblige him to strike a light
to find his way to the right register, and common caution would suggest his locking the door on the inside in case of
intrusion on the part of any inquisitive stranger, or on my part, if I happened to be in the neighbourhood at the time.

I cannot believe that it was any part of his intention to make the destruction of the register appear to be the result
of accident, by purposely setting the vestry on fire. The bare chance that prompt assistance might arrive, and that the
books might, by the remotest possibility, be saved, would have been enough, on a moment’s consideration, to
dismiss any idea of this sort from his mind. Remembering the quantity of combustible objects in the vestry—the
straw, the papers, the packing-cases, the dry wood, the old worm-eaten presses—all the probabilities, in my
estimation, point to the fire as the result of an accident with his matches or his light.

His first impulse, under these circumstances, was doubtless to try to extinguish the flames, and failing in that, his
second impulse (ignorant as he was of the state of the lock) had been to attempt to escape by the door which had
given him entrance. When I had called to him, the flames must have reached across the door leading into the church,
on either side of which the presses extended, and close to which the other combustible objects were placed. In all
probability, the smoke and flame (confined as they were to the room) had been too much for him when he tried to
escape by the inner door. He must have dropped in his death-swoon—he must have sunk in the place where he was
found—just as I got on the roof to break the skylight window. Even if we had been able, afterwards, to get into the
church, and to burst open the door from that side, the delay must have been fatal. He would have been past saving, long past saving, by that time. We should only have given the flames free ingress into the church—the church, which was now preserved, but which, in that event, would have shared the fate of the vestry. There is no doubt in my mind, there can be no doubt in the mind of any one, that he was a dead man before ever we got to the empty cottage, and worked with might and main to tear down the beam.

This is the nearest approach that any theory of mine can make towards accounting for a result which was visible matter of fact. As I have described them, so events passed to us outside. As I have related it, so his body was found.

The inquest was adjourned over one day—no explanation that the eye of the law could recognise having been discovered thus far to account for the mysterious circumstances of the case.

It was arranged that more witnesses should be summoned, and that the London solicitor of the deceased should be invited to attend. A medical man was also charged with the duty of reporting on the mental condition of the servant, which appeared at present to debar him from giving any evidence of the least importance. He could only declare, in a dazed way, that he had been ordered, on the night of the fire, to wait in the lane, and that he knew nothing else, except that the deceased was certainly his master.

My own impression was, that he had been first used (without any guilty knowledge on his own part) to ascertain the fact of the clerk's absence from home on the previous day, and that he had been afterwards ordered to wait near the church (but out of sight of the vestry) to assist his master, in the event of my escaping the attack on the road, and of a collision occurring between Sir Percival and myself. It is necessary to add, that the man's own testimony was never obtained to confirm this view. The medical report of him declared that what little mental faculty he possessed was seriously shaken; nothing satisfactory was extracted from him at the adjourned inquest, and for aught I know to the contrary, he may never have recovered to this day.

I returned to the hotel at Welmingham so jaded in body and mind, so weakened and depressed by all that I had gone through, as to be quite unfit to endure the local gossip about the inquest, and to answer the trivial questions that the talkers addressed to me in the coffee-room. I withdrew from my scanty dinner to my cheap garret-chamber to secure myself a little quiet, and to think undisturbed of Laura and Marian.

If I had been a richer man I would have gone back to London, and would have comforted myself with a sight of the two dear faces again that night. But I was bound to appear, if called on, at the adjourned inquest, and doubly bound to answer my bail before the magistrate at Knowlesbury. Our slender resources had suffered already, and the doubtful future—more doubtful than ever now—made me dread decreasing our means unnecessarily by allowing myself an indulgence even at the small cost of a double railway journey in the carriages of the second class.

The next day—the day immediately following the inquest—was left at my own disposal. I began the morning by again applying at the post-office for my regular report from Marian. It was waiting for me as before, and it was written throughout in good spirits. I read the letter thankfully, and then set forth with my mind at ease for the day to go to OldWelmingham, and to view the scene of the fire by the morning light.

What changes met me when I got there!

Through all the ways of our unintelligible world the trivial and the terrible walk hand in hand together. The irony of circumstances holds no mortal catastrophe in respect. When I reached the church, the trampled condition of the burial-ground was the only serious trace left to tell of the fire and the death. A rough hoarding of boards had been knocked up before the vestry doorway. Rude caricatures were scrawled on it already, and the village children were fighting and shouting for the possession of the best peep-hole to see through. On the spot where I had heard the cry for help from the burning room, on the spot where the panic-stricken servant had dropped on his knees, a fussy flock of poultry was now scrambling for the first choice of worms after the rain; and on the ground at my feet, where the door and its dreadful burden had been laid, a workman's dinner was waiting for him, tied up in a yellow basin, and his faithful cur in charge was yelping at me for coming near the food. The old clerk, looking idly at the slow commencement of the repairs, had only one interest that he could talk about now—the interest of escaping all blame for his own part on account of the accident that had happened. One of the village women, whose white wild face I remembered the picture of terror when we pulled down the beam, was giggling with another woman, the picture of inanity, over an old washing-tub. There is nothing serious in mortality! Solomon in all his glory was Solomon with nothing else, except that the deceased was certainly his master.

As I left the place, my thoughts turned, not for the first time, to the complete overthrow that all present hope of establishing Laura's identity had now suffered through Sir Percival's death. He was gone—and with him the chance was gone which had been the one object of all my labours and all my hopes.

Could I look at my failure from no truer point of view than this?

Suppose he had lived, would that change of circumstance have altered the result? Could I have made my discovery a marketable commodity, even for Laura's sake, after I had found out that robbery of the rights of others was the essence of Sir Percival's crime? Could I have offered the price of MY silence for HIS confession of the
conspiracy, when the effect of that silence must have been to keep the right heir from the estates, and the right owner from the name? Impossible! If Sir Percival had lived, the discovery, from which (In my ignorance of the true nature of the Secret) I had hoped so much, could not have been mine to suppress or to make public, as I thought best, for the vindication of Laura's rights. In common honesty and common honour I must have gone at once to the stranger whose birthright had been usurped--I must have renounced the victory at the moment when it was mine by placing my discovery unreservedly in that stranger's hands--and I must have faced afresh all the difficulties which stood between me and the one object of my life, exactly as I was resolved in my heart of hearts to face them now!

I returned to Welmingham with my mind composed, feeling more sure of myself and my resolution than I had felt yet.

On my way to the hotel I passed the end of the square in which Mrs. Catherick lived. Should I go back to the house, and make another attempt to see her. No. That news of Sir Percival's death, which was the last news she ever expected to hear, must have reached her hours since. All the proceedings at the inquest had been reported in the local paper that morning--there was nothing I could tell her which she did not know already. My interest in making her speak had slackened. I remembered the furtive hatred in her face when she said, "There is no news of Sir Percival that I don't expect--except the news of his death." I remembered the stealthy interest in her eyes when they settled on me at parting, after she had spoken those words. Some instinct, deep in my heart, which I felt to be a true one, made the prospect of again entering her presence repulsive to me--I turned away from the square, and went straight back to the hotel.

Some hours later, while I was resting in the coffee-room, a letter was placed in my hands by the waiter. It was addressed to me by name, and I found on inquiry that it had been left at the bar by a woman just as it was near dusk, and just before the gas was lighted. She had said nothing, and she had gone away again before there was time to speak to her, or even to notice who she was.

I opened the letter. It was neither dated nor signed, and the handwriting was palpably disguised. Before I had read the first sentence, however, I knew who my correspondent was--Mrs. Catherick.

The letter ran as follows--I copy it exactly, word for word--:

THE STORY CONTINUED BY MRS. CATHERICK

SIR,—You have not come back, as you said you would. No matter—I know the news, and I write to tell you so. Did you see anything particular in my face when you left me? I was wondering, in my own mind, whether the day of his downfall had come at last, and whether you were the chosen instrument for working it. You were, and you HAVE worked it.

You were weak enough, as I have heard, to try and save his life. If you had succeeded, I should have looked upon you as my enemy. Now you have failed, I hold you as my friend. Your inquiries frightened him into the vestry by night—your inquiries, without your privity and against your will, have served the hatred and wreaked the vengeance of three-and-twenty years. Thank you, sir, in spite of yourself.

I owe something to the man who has done this. How can I pay my debt? If I was a young woman still I might say, "Come, put your arm round my waist, and kiss me, if you like." I should have been fond enough of you even to go that length, and you would have accepted my invitation—yes, sir, twenty years ago! But I am an old woman now. Well! I can satisfy your curiosity, and pay my debt in that way. You HAD a great curiosity to know certain private affairs of mine when you came to see me—private affairs which all your sharpness could not look into without my help— private affairs which you have not discovered, even now. You SHALL discover them—your curiosity shall be satisfied. I will take any trouble to please you, my estimable young friend!

You were a little boy, I suppose, in the year twenty-seven? I was a handsome young woman at that time, living at Old Welmingham. I had a contemptible fool for a husband. I had also the honour of being acquainted (never mind how) with a certain gentleman (never mind whom). I shall not call him by his name. Why should I? It was not his own. He never had a name: you know that, by this time, as well as I do.

It will be more to the purpose to tell you how he worked himself into my good graces. I was born with the tastes of a lady, and he gratified them—in other words, he admired me, and he made me presents. No woman can resist admiration and presents—especially presents, provided they happen to be just the thing she wants. He was sharp enough to know that—most men are. Naturally he wanted something in return—all men do. And what do you think was the something? The merest trifle. Nothing but the key of the vestry, and the key of the press inside it, when my husband's back was turned. Of course he lied when I asked him why he wished me to get him the keys in that private way. He might have saved himself the trouble—I didn't believe him. But I liked my presents, and I wanted more. So I got him the keys, without my husband's knowledge, and I watched him, without his own knowledge. Once, twice, four times I watched him, and the fourth time I found him out.

I was never over-scrupulous where other people's affairs were concerned, and I was not over-scrupulous about his adding one to the marriages in the register on his own account.
Of course I knew it was wrong, but it did no harm to me, which was one good reason for not making a fuss about it. And I had not got a gold watch and chain, which was another, still better—and he had promised me one from London only the day before, which was a third, best of all. If I had known what the law considered the crime to be, and how the law punished it, I should have taken proper care of myself, and have exposed him then and there. But I knew nothing, and I longed for the gold watch. All the conditions I insisted on were that he should take me into his confidence and tell me everything. I was as curious about his affairs then as you are about mine now. He granted my conditions—why, you will see presently.

This, put in short, is what I heard from him. He did not willingly tell me all that I tell you here. I drew some of it from him by persuasion and some of it by questions. I was determined to have all the truth, and I believe I got it.

He knew no more than any one else of what the state of things really was between his father and mother till after his mother's death. Then his father confessed it, and promised to do what he could for his son. He died having done nothing—not having even made a will. The son (who can blame him?) wisely provided for himself. He came to England at once, and took possession of the property. There was no one to suspect him, and no one to say him nay. His father and mother had always lived as man and wife—none of the few people who were acquainted with them ever supposed them to be anything else. The right person to claim the property (if the truth had been known) was a distant relation, who had no idea of ever getting it, and who was away at sea when his father died. He had no difficulty so far—he took possession, as a matter of course. But he could not borrow money on the property as a matter of course. There were two things wanted of him before he could do this. One was a certificate of his birth, and the other was a certificate of his parents' marriage. The certificate of his birth was easily got—he was born abroad, and the certificate was there in due form. The other matter was a difficulty, and that difficulty brought him to Old Welmingham.

But for one consideration he might have gone to Knowlesbury instead.

His mother had been living there just before she met with his father—living under her maiden name, the truth being that she was really a married woman, married in Ireland, where her husband had ill-used her, and had afterwards gone off with some other person. I give you this fact on good authority—Sir Felix mentioned it to his son as the reason why he had not married. You may wonder why the son, knowing that his parents had met each other at Knowlesbury, did not play his first tricks with the register of that church, where it might have been fairly presumed his father and mother were married. The reason was that the clergyman who did duty at Knowlesbury church, in the year eighteen hundred and three (when, according to his birth certificate, his father and mother ought to have been married), was alive still when he took possession of the property in the New Year of eighteen hundred and twenty-seven. This awkward circumstance forced him to extend his inquiries to our neighbourhood. There no such danger existed, the former clergyman at our church having been dead for some years.

Old Welmingham suited his purpose as well as Knowlesbury. His father had removed his mother from Knowlesbury, and had lived with her at a cottage on the river, a little distance from our village. People who had known his solitary ways when he was single did not wonder at his solitary ways when he was supposed to be married. If he had not been a hideous creature to look at, his retired life with the lady might have raised suspicions; but, as things were, his hiding his ugliness and his deformity in the strictest privacy surprised nobody. He lived in our neighbourhood till he came in possession of the Park. After three or four and twenty years had passed, who was to say (the clergyman being dead) that his marriage had not been as private as the rest of his life, and that it had not taken place at Old Welmingham church?

So, as I told you, the son found our neighbourhood the surest place he could choose to set things right secretly in his own interests. It may surprise you to hear that what he really did to the marriage register was done on the spur of the moment—done on second thoughts.

His first notion was only to tear the leaf out (in the right year and month), to destroy it privately, to go back to London, and to tell the lawyers to get him the necessary certificate of his father's marriage, innocently referring them of course to the date on the leaf that was gone. Nobody could say his father and mother had NOT been married after that, and whether, under the circumstances, they would stretch a point or not about lending him the money (he thought they would), he had his answer ready at all events, if a question was ever raised about his right to the name and the estate.

But when he came to look privately at the register for himself, he found at the bottom of one of the pages for the year eighteen hundred and three a blank space left, seemingly through there being no room to make a long entry there, which was made instead at the top of the next page. The sight of this chance altered all his plans. It was an opportunity he had never hoped for, or thought of—and he took it—you know how. The blank space, to have exactly tallied with his birth certificate, ought to have occurred in the July part of the register. It occurred in the September part instead. However, in this case, if suspicious questions were asked, the answer was not hard to find. He had only to describe himself as a seven months' child.
I was fool enough, when he told me his story, to feel some interest and some pity for him—which was just what he calculated on, as you will see. I thought him hardly used. It was not his fault that his father and mother were not married, and it was not his father’s and mother’s fault either. A more scrupulous woman than I was—a woman who had not set her heart on a gold watch and chain—would have found some excuses for him. At all events, I held my tongue, and helped to screen what he was about.

He was some time getting the ink the right colour (mixing it over and over again in pots and bottles of mine), and some time afterwards in practising the handwriting. But he succeeded in the end, and made an honest woman of his mother after she was dead in her grave! So far, I don’t deny that he behaved honourably enough to myself. He gave me my watch and chain, and spared no expense in buying them; both were of superior workmanship, and very expensive. I have got them still—the watch goes beautifully.

You said the other day that Mrs. Clements had told you everything she knew. In that case there is no need for me to write about the trumpery scandal by which I was the sufferer—the innocent sufferer, I positively assert. You must know as well as I do what the notion was which my husband took into his head when he found me and my fine-gentleman acquaintance meeting each other privately and talking secrets together. But what you don’t know is how it ended between that same gentleman and myself. You shall read and see how he behaved to me.

The first words I said to him, when I saw the turn things had taken, were, "Do me justice—clear my character of a stain on it which you know I don’t deserve. I don’t want you to make a clean breast of it to my husband—only tell him, on your word of honour as a gentleman, that he is wrong, and that I am not to blame in the way he thinks I am. Do me that justice, at least, after all I have done for you." He flatly refused, in so many words. He told me plainly that it was his interest to let my husband and all my neighbours believe the falsehood—because, as long as they did so they were quite certain never to suspect the truth. I had a spirit of my own, and I told him they should know the truth from my lips. His reply was short, and to the point. If I spoke, I was a lost woman, as certainly as he was a lost man.

Yes! it had come to that. He had deceived me about the risk I ran in helping him. He had practised on my ignorance, he had tempted me with his gifts, he had interested me with his story—and the result of it was that he made me his accomplice. He owned this coolly, and he ended by telling me, for the first time, what the frightful punishment really was for his offence, and for any one who helped him to commit it. In those days the law was not so tender-hearted as I hear it is now. Murderers were not the only people liable to be hanged, and women convicts were not treated like ladies in undeserved distress. I confess he frightened me—the mean impostor! the cowardly blackguard! Do you understand now how I hated him? Do you understand why I am taking all this trouble—thankfully taking it—to gratify the curiosity of the meritorious young gentleman who hunted him down?

Well, to go on. He was hardly fool enough to drive me to downright desperation. I was not the sort of woman whom it was quite safe to hunt into a corner—he knew that, and wisely quieted me with proposals for the future.

I deserved some reward (he was kind enough to say) for the service I had done him, and some compensation (he was so obliging as to add) for what I had suffered. He was quite willing—generous scoundrel!—to make me a handsome yearly allowance, payable quarterly, on two conditions. First, I was to hold my tongue—in my own interests as well as in his. Secondly, I was not to stir away from Welmingham without first letting him know, and waiting till I had obtained his permission. In my own neighbourhood, no virtuous female friends would tempt me into dangerous gossiping at the tea-table. In my own neighbourhood, he would always know where to find me. A hard condition, that second one—but I accepted it.

What else was I to do? I was left helpless, with the prospect of a coming incumbrance in the shape of a child. What else was I to do? Cast myself on the mercy of my runaway idiot of a husband who had raised the scandal against me? I would have died first. Besides, the allowance WAS a handsome one. I had a better income, a better house over my head, better carpets on my floors, than half the women who turned up the whites of their eyes at the sight of me. The dress of Virtue, in our parts, was cotton print. I had silk.

So I accepted the conditions he offered me, and made the best of them, and fought my battle with my respectable neighbours on their own ground, and won it in course of time—as you saw yourself. How I kept his Secret (and mine) through all the years that have passed from that time to this, and whether my late daughter, Anne, ever really crept into my confidence, and got the keeping of the Secret too—are questions, I dare say, to which you are curious to find an answer. Well! my gratitude refuses you nothing. I will turn to a fresh page and give you the answer immediately. But you must excuse one thing—you must excuse my beginning, Mr. Hartright, with an expression of surprise at the interest which you appear to have felt in my late daughter. It is quite unaccountable to me. If that interest makes you anxious for any particulars of her early life, I must refer you to Mrs. Clements, who knows more of the subject than I do. Pray understand that I do not profess to have been at all overfond of my late daughter. She was a worry to me from first to last, with the additional disadvantage of being always weak in the head. You like candour, and I hope this satisfies you.
There is no need to trouble you with many personal particulars relating to those past times. It will be enough to say that I observed the terms of the bargain on my side, and that I enjoyed my comfortable income in return, paid quarterly.

Now and then I got away and changed the scene for a short time, always asking leave of my lord and master first, and generally getting it. He was not, as I have already told you, fool enough to drive me too hard, and he could reasonably rely on my holding my tongue for my own sake, if not for his. One of my longest trips away from home was the trip I took to Limmeridge to nurse a half-sister there, who was dying. She was reported to have saved money, and I thought it as well (in case any accident happened to stop my allowance) to look after my own interests in that direction. As things turned out, however, my pains were all thrown away, and I got nothing, because nothing was to be had.

I had taken Anne to the north with me, having my whims and fancies, occasionally, about my child, and getting, at such times, jealous of Mrs. Clements' influence over her. I never liked Mrs. Clements. She was a poor, empty-headed, spiritless woman—what you call a born drudge—and I was now and then not averse to plaguing her by taking Anne away. Not knowing what else to do with my girl while I was nursing in Cumberland, I put her to school at Limmeridge. The lady of the manor, Mrs. Fairlie (a remarkably plain-looking woman, who had entrapped one of the handsomest men in England into marrying her), amused me wonderfully by taking a violent fancy to my girl. The consequence was, she learnt nothing at school, and was petted and spoilt at Limmeridge House. Among other whims and fancies which they taught her there, they put some nonsense into her head about always wearing white. Hating white and liking colours myself, I determined to take the nonsense out of her head as soon as we got home again.

Strange to say, my daughter resolutely resisted me. When she HAD got a notion once fixed in her mind she was, like other half-witted people, as obstinate as a mule in keeping it. We quarrelled finely, and Mrs. Clements, not liking to see it, I suppose, offered to take Anne away to live in London with her. I should have said Yes, if Mrs. Clements had not sided with my daughter about her dressing herself in white. But being determined she should NOT dress herself in white, and disagreeing Mrs. Clements more than ever for taking part against me, I said No, and meant No, and stuck to No. The consequence was, my daughter remained with me, and the consequence of that, in its turn, was the first serious quarrel that happened about the Secret.

The circumstance took place long after the time I have just been writing of. I had been settled for years in the new town, and was steadily living down my bad character and slowly gaining ground among the respectable inhabitants. It helped me forward greatly towards this object to have my daughter with me. Her harmlessness and her fancy for dressing in white excited a certain amount of sympathy. I left off opposing her favourite whim on that account, because some of the sympathy was sure, in course of time, to fall to my share. Some of it did fall. I date my getting a choice of the two best sittings to let in the church from that time, and I date the clergyman's first bow from my getting the sittings.

Well, being settled in this way, I received a letter one morning from that highly born gentleman (now deceased) in answer to one of mine, warning him, according to agreement, of my wishing to leave the town for a little change of air and scene.

The ruffianly side of him must have been uppermost, I suppose, when he got my letter, for he wrote back, refusing me in such abominably insolent language, that I lost all command over myself, and abused him, in my daughter's presence, as "a low impostor whom I could ruin for life if I chose to open my lips and let out his Secret." I said no more about him than that, being brought to my senses as soon as those words had escaped me by the sight of my daughter's face looking eagerly and curiously at mine. I instantly ordered her out of the room until I had composed myself again.

My sensations were not pleasant, I can tell you, when I came to reflect on my own folly. Anne had been more than usually crazy and queer that year, and when I thought of the chance there might be of her repeating my words in the town, and mentioning HIS name in connection with them, if inquisitive people got hold of her, I was finely terrified at the possible consequences. My worst fears for myself, my worst dread of what he might do, led me no farther than this. I was quite unprepared for what really did happen only the next day.

On that next day, without any warning to me to expect him, he came to the house.

His first words, and the tone in which he spoke them, surly as it was, showed me plainly enough that he had repented already of his insolent answer to my application, and that he had come in a mighty bad temper to try and set matters right again before it was too late. Seeing my daughter in the room with me (I had been afraid to let her out of my sight after what had happened the day before) he ordered her away. They neither of them liked each other, and he vented the ill-temper on HER which he was afraid to show to ME.

"Leave us," he said, looking at her over his shoulder. She looked back over HER shoulder and waited as if she didn't care to go. "Do you hear?" he roared out, "leave the room." "Speak to me civilly," says she, getting red in the face. "Turn the idiot out," says he, looking my way. She had always had crazy notions of her own about her dignity,
and that word "idiot" upset her in a moment. Before I could interfere she stepped up to him in a fine passion. "Beg my pardon, directly," says she, "or I'll make it the worse for you. I'll let out your secret. I can ruin you for life if I choose to open my lips." My own words!--repeated exactly from what I had said the day before--repeated, in his presence, as if they had come from herself. He sat speechless, as white as the paper I am writing on, while I pushed her out of the room. When he recovered himself----

No! I am too respectably a woman to mention what he said when he recovered himself. My pen is the pen of a member of the rector's congregation, and a subscriber to the "Wednesday Lectures on Justification by Faith"--how can you expect me to employ it in writing bad language? Suppose, for yourself, the raging, swearing frenzy of the lowest ruffian in England, and let us get on together, as fast as may be, to the way in which it all ended.

It ended, as you probably guess by this time, in his insisting on securing his own safety by shutting her up.

I tried to set things right. I told him that she had merely repeated, like a parrot, the words she had heard me say and that she knew no particulars whatever, because I had mentioned none. I explained that she had affected, out of crazy spite against him, to know what she really did NOT know--that she only wanted to threaten him and aggravate him for speaking to her as he had just spoken--and that my unlucky words gave her just the chance of doing mischief of which she was in search. I referred him to other queer ways of hers, and to his own experience of the vagaries of half-witted people--it was all to no purpose--he would not believe me on my oath--he was absolutely certain I had betrayed the whole secret. In short, he would hear of nothing but shutting her up.

Under these circumstances, I did my duty as a mother. "No pauper Asylum," I said, "I won't have her put in a pauper Asylum. A Private Establishment, if you please. I have my feelings as a mother, and my character to preserve in the town, and I will submit to nothing but a Private Establishment, of the sort which my genteel neighbours would choose for afflicted relatives of their own." Those were my words. It is gratifying to me to reflect that I did my duty. Though never overfond of my late daughter, I had a proper pride about her. No pauper stain--thanks to my firmness and resolution--ever rested on my child.

Having carried my point (which I did the more easily, in consequence of the facilities offered by private Asylums), I could not refuse to admit that there were certain advantages gained by shutting her up. In the first place, she was taken excellent care of--being treated (as I took care to mention in the town) on the footing of a lady. In the second place, she was kept away from Welmingham, where she might have set people suspecting and inquiring, by repeating my own incautious words.

The only drawback of putting her under restraint was a very slight one. We merely turned her empty boast about knowing the secret into a fixed delusion. Having first spoken in sheer crazy spitefulness against the man who had offended her, she was cunning enough to see that she had seriously frightened him, and sharp enough afterwards to discover that he was concerned in shutting her up. The consequence was she flamed out into a perfect frenzy of passion against him, going to the Asylum, and the first words she said to the nurses, after they had quieted her, were, that she was put in confinement for knowing his secret, and that she meant to open her lips and ruin him, when the right time came.

She may have said the same thing to you, when you thoughtlessly assisted her escape. She certainly said it (as I heard last summer) to the unfortunate woman who married our sweet-tempered, nameless gentleman lately deceased. If either you, or that unlucky lady, had questioned my daughter closely, and had insisted on her explaining what she really meant, you would have found her lose all her self-importance suddenly, and get vacant, and restless, and confused--you would have discovered that I am writing nothing here but the plain truth. She knew that there was a secret--she knew who was connected with it--she knew who would suffer by its being known--and beyond that, whatever airs of importance she may have given herself, whatever crazy boasting she may have indulged in with strangers, she never to her dying day knew more.

Have I satisfied your curiosity? I have taken pains enough to satisfy it at any rate. There is really nothing else I have to tell you about myself or my daughter. My worst responsibilities, so far as she was concerned, were all over when she was secured in the Asylum. I had a form of letter relating to the circumstances under which she was shut up, given me to write, in answer to one Miss Halcombe, who was curious in the matter, and who must have heard plenty of lies about me from a certain tongue well accustomed to the telling of the same. And I did what I could afterwards to trace my runaway daughter, and prevent her from doing mischief by making inquiries myself in the neighbourhood where she was falsely reported to have been seen. But these, and other trifles like them, are of little or no interest to you after what you have heard already.

So far, I have written in the friendliest possible spirit. But I cannot close this letter without adding a word here of serious reproach and reproof, addressed to yourself.

In the course of your personal interview with me, you audaciously referred to my late daughter's parentage on the father's side, as if that parentage was a matter of doubt. This was highly improper and very ungentlemanly on your part! If we see each other again, remember, if you please, that I will allow no liberties to be taken with my
reputation, and that the moral atmosphere of Welmingham (to use a favourite expression of my friend the rector's) must not be tainted by loose conversation of any kind. If you allow yourself to doubt that my husband was Anne's father, you personally insult me in the grossest manner. If you have felt, and if you still continue to feel, an unhallowed curiosity on this subject, I recommend you, in your own interests, to check it at once, and for ever. On this side of the grave, Mr. Hartright, whatever may happen on the other, THAT curiosity will never be gratified.

Perhaps, after what I have just said, you will see the necessity of writing me an apology. Do so, and I will willingly receive it. I will, afterwards, if your wishes point to a second interview with me, go a step farther, and receive you. My circumstances only enable me to invite you to tea--not that they are at all altered for the worse by what has happened. I have always lived, as I think I told you, well within my income, and I have saved enough, in the last twenty years, to make me quite comfortable for the rest of my life. It is not my intention to leave Welmingham. There are one or two little advantages which I have still to gain in the town. The clergyman bows to me--as you saw. He is married, and his wife is not quite so civil. I propose to join the Dorcas Society, and I mean to make the clergyman's wife bow to me next.

If you favour me with your company, pray understand that the conversation must be entirely on general subjects. Any attempted reference to this letter will be quite useless--I am determined not to acknowledge having written it. The evidence has been destroyed in the fire, I know, but I think it desirable to err on the side of caution, nevertheless.

On this account no names are mentioned here, nor is any signature attached to these lines: the handwriting is disguised throughout, and I mean to deliver the letter myself, under circumstances which will prevent all fear of its being traced to my house. You can have no possible cause to complain of these precautions, seeing that they do not affect the information I here communicate, in consideration of the special indulgence which you have deserved at my hands. My hour for tea is half-past five, and my buttered toast waits for nobody.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY WALTER HARTRIGHT

I

My first impulse, after reading Mrs. Catherick's extraordinary narrative, was to destroy it. The hardened shameless depravity of the whole composition, from beginning to end--the atrocious perversity of mind which persistently associated me with a calamity for which I was in no sense answerable, and with a death which I had risked my life in trying to avert--so disgusted me, that I was on the point of tearing the letter, when a consideration suggested itself which warned me to wait a little before I destroyed it.

This consideration was entirely unconnected with Sir Percival. The information communicated to me, so far as it concerned him, did little more than confirm the conclusions at which I had already arrived.

He had committed his offence, as I had supposed him to have committed it, and the absence of all reference, on Mrs. Catherick's part, to the duplicate register at Knowlesbury, strengthened my previous conviction that the existence of the book, and the risk of detection which it implied, must have been necessarily unknown to Sir Percival. My interest in the question of the forgery was now at an end, and my only object in keeping the letter was to make it of some future service in clearing up the last mystery that still remained to baffle me--the parentage of Anne Catherick on the father's side. There were one or two sentences dropped in her mother's narrative, which it might be useful to refer to again, when matters of more immediate importance allowed me leisure to search for the missing evidence. I did not despair of still finding that evidence, and I had lost none of my anxiety to discover it, for I had lost none of my interest in tracing the father of the poor creature who now lay at rest in Mrs. Fairlie's grave.

Accordingly, I sealed up the letter and put it away carefully in my pocket-book, to be referred to again when the time came.

The next day was my last in Hampshire. When I had appeared again before the magistrate at Knowlesbury, and when I had attended at the adjourned inquest, I should be free to return to London by the afternoon or the evening train.

My first errand in the morning was, as usual, to the post-office. The letter from Marian was there, but I thought when it was handed to me that it felt unusually light. I anxiously opened the envelope. There was nothing inside but a small strip of paper folded in two. The few blotted hurriedly-written lines which were traced on it contained these words:

"Come back as soon as you can. I have been obliged to move. Come to Gower's Walk, Fulham (number five). I will be on the look-out for you. Don't be alarmed about us, we are both safe and well. But come back.--Marian."

The news which those lines contained--news which I instantly associated with some attempted treachery on the part of Count Fosco--fairly overwhelmed me. I stood breathless with the paper crumpled up in my hand. What had happened? What subtle wickedness had the Count planned and executed in my absence? A night had passed since Marian's note was written--hours must elapse still before I could get back to them--some new disaster might have happened already of which I was ignorant. And here, miles and miles away from them, here I must remain--held,
doubly held, at the disposal of the law!

I hardly know to what forgetfulness of my obligations anxiety and alarm might not have tempted me, but for the quieting influence of my faith in Marian. My absolute reliance on her was the one earthly consideration which helped me to restrain myself, and gave me courage to wait. The inquest was the first of the impediments in the way of my freedom of action. I attended it at the appointed time, the legal formalities requiring my presence in the room, but as it turned out, not calling on me to repeat my evidence. This useless delay was a hard trial, although I did my best to quiet my impatience by following the course of the proceedings as closely as I could.

The London solicitor of the deceased (Mr. Merriman) was among the persons present. But he was quite unable to assist the objects of the inquiry. He could only say that he was inexpressibly shocked and astonished, and that he could throw no light whatever on the mysterious circumstances of the case. At intervals during the adjourned investigation, he suggested questions which the Coroner put, but which led to no results. After a patient inquiry, which lasted nearly three hours, and which exhausted every available source of information, the jury pronounced the customary verdict in cases of sudden death by accident. They added to the formal decision a statement, that there had been no evidence to show how the keys had been abstracted, how the fire had been caused, or what the purpose was for which the deceased had entered the vestry. This act closed the proceedings. The legal representative of the dead man was left to provide for the necessities of the interment, and the witnesses were free to retire.

Resolved not to lose a minute in getting to Knowlesbury, I paid my bill at the hotel, and hired a fly to take me to the town. A gentleman who heard me give the order, and who saw that I was going alone, informed me that he lived in the neighbourhood of Knowlesbury, and asked if I would have any objection to his getting home by sharing the fly with me. I accepted his proposal as a matter of course.

Our conversation during the drive was naturally occupied by the one absorbing subject of local interest.

My new acquaintance had some knowledge of the late Sir Percival's solicitor, and he and Mr. Merriman had been discussing the state of the deceased gentleman's affairs and the succession to the property. Sir Percival's embarrassments were so well known all over the county that his solicitor could only make a virtue of necessity and plainly acknowledge them. He had died without leaving a will, and he had no personal property to bequeath, even if he had made one, the whole fortune which he had derived from his wife having been swallowed up by his creditors. The heir to the estate (Sir Percival having left no issue) was a son of Sir Felix Glyde's first cousin, an officer in command of an East Indiaman. He would find his unexpected inheritance sadly encumbered, but the property would recover with time, and, if "the captain" was careful, he might be a rich man yet before he died.

Absorbed as I was in the one idea of getting to London, this information (which events proved to be perfectly correct) had an interest of its own to attract my attention. I thought it justified me in keeping secret my discovery of Sir Percival's fraud. The heir, whose rights he had usurped, was the heir who would now have the estate. The income from it, for the last three-and-twenty years, which should properly have been his, and which the dead man had squandered to the last farthing, was gone beyond recall. If I spoke, my speaking would confer advantage on no one. If I kept the secret, my silence concealed the character of the man who had cheated Laura into marrying him. For her sake, I wished to conceal it—for her sake, still, I tell this story under feigned names.

I parted with my chance companion at Knowlesbury, and went at once to the town-hall. As I had anticipated, no one was present to prosecute the case against me—the necessary formalities were observed, and I was discharged. On leaving the court a letter from Mr. Dawson was put into my hand. It informed me that he was absent on professional business, but as it turned out, not calling on me to repeat my evidence. This useless delay was a hard trial, although I did my best to quiet my impatience by following the course of the proceedings as closely as I could.

The stir of the removal seemed to have cheered and interested her. She only spoke of it as a happy thought of Marian's to surprise me on my return with a change from the close, noisy street to the pleasant neighbourhood of trees and fields and the river. She was full of projects for the future—of the drawings she was to finish—of the purchasers I had found in the country who were to buy them—of the shillings and sixpences she had saved, till her purse was so heavy that she proudly asked me to weigh it in my own hand. The change for the better which had been
wrought in her during the few days of my absence was a surprise to me for which I was quite unprepared—and for all
the unspeakable happiness of seeing it, I was indebted to Marian's courage and to Marian's love.

When Laura had left us, and when we could speak to one another without restraint, I tried to give some
expression to the gratitude and the admiration which filled my heart. But the generous creature would not wait to
hear me. That sublime self-forgetfulness of women, which yields so much and asks so little, turned all her thoughts
from herself to me.

"I had only a moment left before post-time," she said, "or I should have written less abruptly. You look worn and
weary, Walter. I am afraid my letter must have seriously alarmed you?"

"Only at first," I replied. "My mind was quieted, Marian, by my trust in you. Was I right in attributing this
sudden change of place to some threatened annoyance on the part of Count Fosco?"

"Perfectly right," she said. "I saw him yesterday, and worse than that, Walter—I spoke to him."

"Spoke to him? Did he know where we lived? Did he come to the house?"

"He did. To the house—but not upstairs. Laura never saw him—Laura suspects nothing. I will tell you how it
happened: the danger, I believe and hope, is over now. Yesterday, I was in the sitting-room, at our old lodgings.
Laura was drawing at the table, and I was walking about and setting things to rights. I passed the window, and as I
passed it, looked out into the street. There, on the opposite side of the way, I saw the Count, with a man talking to
him——"

"Did he notice you at the window?"

"No—at least, I thought not. I was too violently startled to be quite sure."

"Who was the other man? A stranger?"

"Not a stranger, Walter. As soon as I could draw my breath again, I recognised him. He was the owner of the
Lunatic Asylum."

"Was the Count pointing out the house to him?"

"No, they were talking together as if they had accidentally met in the street. I remained at the window looking at
them from behind the curtain. If I had turned round, and if Laura had seen my face at that moment——Thank God,
she was absorbed over her drawing! They soon parted. The man from the Asylum went one way, and the Count the
other. I began to hope they were in the street by chance, till I saw the Count come back, stop opposite to us again,
take out his card-case and pencil, write something, and then cross the road to the shop below us. I ran past Laura
before she could see me, and said I had forgotten something upstairs. As soon as I was out of the room I went down
to the first landing and waited—I was determined to stop him if he tried to come upstairs. He made no such attempt.
The girl from the shop came through the door into the passage, with his card in her hand—a large gilt card with his
name, and a coronet above it, and these lines underneath in pencil: 'Dear lady' (yes! the villain could address me in
that way still)—'dear lady, one word, I implore you, on a matter serious to us both.' If one can think at all, in serious
difficulties, one thinks quick. I felt directly that it might be a fatal mistake to leave myself and to leave you in the
dark, where such a man as the Count was concerned. I felt that the doubt of what he might do, in your absence,
would be ten times more trying to me if I declined to see him than if I consented. 'Ask the gentleman to wait in the
shop,' I said. 'I will be with him in a moment.' I ran upstairs for my bonnet, being determined not to let him speak to
me indoors. I knew his deep ringing voice, and I was afraid Laura might hear it, even in the shop. In less than a
minute I was down again in the passage, with his card in her hand—a large gilt card with his
name, and a coronet above it, and these lines underneath in pencil: 'Dear lady' (yes! the villain could address me in
that way still)—'dear lady, one word, I implore you, on a matter serious to us both.' If one can think at all, in serious
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me indoors. I knew his deep ringing voice, and I was afraid Laura might hear it, even in the shop. In less than a
minute I was down again in the passage, and had opened the door into the street. He came round to meet me from
the shop. There he was in deep mourning, with his smooth bow and his deadly smile, and some idle boys and
women near him, staring at his great size, his fine black clothes, and his large cane with the gold knob to it. All the
horrible time at Blackwater came back to me the moment I set eyes on him. All the old loathing crept and crawled
through me, when he took off his hat with a flourish and spoke to me, as if we had parted on the friendliest terms
hardly a day since."

"You remember what he said?"

"I can't repeat it, Walter. You shall know directly what he said about you——but I can't repeat what he said to me.
It was worse than the polite insolence of his letter. My hands tingled to strike him, as if I had been a man! I only
kept them quiet by tearing his card to pieces under my shawl. Without saying a word on my side, I walked away
from the house (for fear of Laura seeing us), and he followed, protesting softly all the way. In the first by-street I
turned, and asked him what he wanted with me. He wanted two things. First, if I had no objection, to express his
sentiments. I declined to hear them. Secondly, to repeat the warning in his letter. I asked, what occasion there was
for repeating it. He bowed and smiled, and said he would explain. The explanation exactly confirmed the fears I
expressed before you left us. I told you, if you remember, that Sir Percival would be too headstrong to take his
friend's advice where you were concerned, and that there was no danger to be dreaded from the Count till his own
interests were threatened, and he was roused into acting for himself?"

"I recollect, Marian."
"Well, so it has really turned out. The Count offered his advice, but it was refused. Sir Percival would only take
counsel of his own violence, his own obstinacy, and his own hatred of you. The Count let him have his way, first
privately ascertaining, in case of his own interests being threatened next, where we lived. You were followed,
Walter, on returning here, after your first journey to Hampshire, by the lawyer's men for some distance from the
railway, and by the Count himself to the door of the house. How he contrived to escape being seen by you he did not
tell me, but he found us out on that occasion, and in that way. Having made the discovery, he took no advantage of it
till the news reached him of Sir Percival's death, and then, as I told you, he acted for himself, because he believed
you would next proceed against the dead man's partner in the conspiracy. He at once made his arrangements to meet
the owner of the Asylum in London, and to take him to the place where his runaway patient was hidden, believing
that the results, whichever way they ended, would be to involve you in interminable legal disputes and difficulties,
and to tie your hands for all purposes of offence, so far as he was concerned. That was his purpose, on his own
confession to me. The only consideration which made him hesitate, at the last moment----"

"Yes?"

"It is hard to acknowledge it, Walter, and yet I must. I was the only consideration. No words can say how
degraded I feel in my own estimation when I think of it, but the one weak point in that man's iron character is the
horrible admiration he feels for me. I have tried, for the sake of my own self-respect, to disbelieve it as long as I
could; but his looks, his actions, force on me the shameful conviction of the truth. The eyes of that monster of
wickedness moistened while he was speaking to me--they did, Walter! He declared that at the moment of pointing
out the house to the doctor, he thought of my misery if I was separated from Laura, of my responsibility if I was
called on to answer for effecting her escape, and he risked the worst that you could do to him, the second time, for
my sake. All he asked was that I would remember the sacrifice, and restrain your rashness, in my own interests--
interests which he might never be able to consult again. I made no such bargain with him--I would have died first.
But believe him or not, whether it is true or false that he sent the doctor away with an excuse, one thing is certain, I
saw the man leave him without so much as a glance at our window, or even at our side of the way."

"I believe it, Marian. The best men are not consistent in good-- why should the worst men be consistent in evil?
At the same time, I suspect him of merely attempting to frighten you, by threatening what he cannot really do. I
doubt his power of annoying us, by means of the owner of the Asylum, now that Sir Percival is dead, and Mrs.
Catherick is free from all control. But let me hear more. What did the Count say of me?"

"He spoke last of you. His eyes brightened and hardened, and his manner changed to what I remember it in past
times--to that mixture of pitiless resolution and mountebank mockery which makes it so impossible to fathom him.
'Warn Mr. Hartright!' he said in his loftiest manner. 'He has a man of brains to deal with, a man who snaps his big
fingers at the laws and conventions of society, when he measures himself with ME. If my lamented friend had taken
my advice, the business of the inquest would have been with the body of Mr. Hartright. But my lamented friend was
obstinate. See! I mourn his loss--inwardly in my soul, outwardly on my hat. This trivial crape expresses sensibilities
which I summon Mr. Hartright to respect. They may be transformed to immeasurable enmities if he ventures to
disturb them. Let him be content with what he has got--with what I leave unmolested, for your sake, to him and to
you. Say to him (with my compliments), if he stirs me, he has Fosco to deal with. In the English of the Popular
Tongue, I inform him--Fosco sticks at nothing. Dear lady, good morning.' His cold grey eyes settled on my face--he
took off his hat solemnly--bowed, bare-headed--and left me."

"Without returning? without saying more last words?"

"He turned at the corner of the street, and waved his hand, and then struck it theatrically on his breast. I lost sight
of him after that. He disappeared in the opposite direction to our house, and I ran back to Laura. Before I was
indoors again, I had made up my mind that we must go. The house (especially in your absence) was a place of
danger instead of a place of safety, now that the Count had discovered it. If I could have felt certain of your return, I
should have risked waiting till you came back. But I was certain of nothing, and I acted at once on my own impulse.
You had spoken, before leaving us, of moving into a quieter neighbourhood and purer air, for the sake of Laura's
health. I had only to remind her of that, and to suggest surprising you and saving you trouble by managing the move
in your absence, to make her quite as anxious for the change as I was. She helped me to pack up your things, and she
has arranged them all for you in your new working-room here."

"What made you think of coming to this place?"

"My ignorance of other localities in the neighbourhood of London. I felt the necessity of getting as far away as
possible from our old lodgings, and I knew something of Fulham, because I had once been at school there. I
despatched a messenger with a note, on the chance that the school might still be in existence. It was in existence--the
daughters of my old mistress were carrying it on for her, and they engaged this place from the instructions I had
sent. It was just post-time when the messenger returned to me with the address of the house. We moved after dark--
we came here quite unobserved. Have I done right, Walter? Have I justified your trust in me?"
I answered her warmly and gratefully, as I really felt. But the anxious look still remained on her face while I was speaking, and the first question she asked, when I had done, related to Count Fosco.

I saw that she was thinking of him now with a changed mind. No fresh outbreak of anger against him, no new appeal to me to hasten the day of reckoning escaped her. Her conviction that the man's hateful admiration of herself was really sincere, seemed to have increased a hundredfold her distrust of his unfathomable cunning, her inborn dread of the wicked energy and vigilance of all his faculties. Her voice fell low, her manner was hesitating, her eyes searched into mine with an eager fear when she asked me what I thought of his message, and what I meant to do next after hearing it.

"Not many weeks have passed, Marian," I answered, "since my interview with Mr. Kyrle. When he and I parted, the last words I said to him about Laura were these: 'Her uncle's house shall open to receive her, in the presence of every soul who followed the false funeral to the grave; the lie that records her death shall be publicly erased from the tombstone by the authority of the head of the family, and the two men who have wronged her shall answer for their crime to ME, though the justice that sits in tribunals is powerless to pursue them.' One of those men is beyond mortal reach. The other remains, and my resolution remains."

Her eyes lit up--her colour rose. She said nothing, but I saw all her sympathies gathering to mine in her face.

"I don't disguise from myself, or from you," I went on, "that the prospect before us is more than doubtful. The risks we have run already, it may be, trifles compared with the risks that threaten us in the future, but the venture shall be tried, Marian, for all that. I am not rash enough to measure myself against such a man as the Count before I am well prepared for him. I have learnt patience--I can wait my time. Let him believe that his message has produced its effect--let him know nothing of us, and hear nothing of us--let us give him full time to feel secure--his own boastful nature, unless I seriously mistake him, will hasten that result. This is one reason for waiting, but there is another more important still. My position, Marian, towards you and towards Laura ought to be a stronger one than it is now before I try our last chance."

She leaned near to me, with a look of surprise.

"How can it be stronger?" she asked.

"I will tell you," I replied, "when the time comes. It has not come yet--it may never come at all. I may be silent about it to Laura for ever--I must be silent now, even to YOU, till I see for myself that I can harmlessly and honourably speak. Let us leave that subject. There is another which has more pressing claims on our attention. You have kept Laura, mercifully kept her, in ignorance of her husband's death--"

"Oh, Walter, surely it must be long yet before we tell her of it?"

"No, Marian. Better that you should reveal it to her now, than that accident, which no one can guard against, should reveal it to her at some future time. Spare her all the details--break it to her very tenderly, but tell her that he is dead."

"You have a reason, Walter, for wishing her to know of her husband's death besides the reason you have just mentioned?"

"I have."

"A reason connected with that subject which must not be mentioned between us yet?--which may never be mentioned to Laura at all?"

She dwelt on the last words meaningly. When I answered her in the affirmative, I dwelt on them too.

Her face grew pale. For a while she looked at me with a sad, hesitating interest. An unaccustomed tenderness trembled in her dark eyes and softened her firm lips, as she glanced aside at the empty chair in which the dear companion of all our joys and sorrows had been sitting.

"I think I understand," she said. "I think I owe it to her and to you, Walter, to tell her of her husband's death."

She sighed, and held my hand fast for a moment--then dropped it abruptly, and left the room. On the next day Laura knew that his death had released her, and that the error and the calamity of her life lay buried in his tomb.

His name was mentioned among us no more. Thenceforward, we shrank from the slightest approach to the subject of his death, and in the same scrupulous manner, Marian and I avoided all further reference to that other subject, which, by her consent and mine, was not to be mentioned between us yet. It was not the less present in our minds--it was rather kept alive in them by the restraint which we had imposed on ourselves. We both watched Laura more anxiously than ever, sometimes waiting and hoping, sometimes waiting and fearing, till the time came.

By degrees we returned to our accustomed way of life. I resumed the daily work, which had been suspended during my absence in Hampshire. Our new lodgings cost us more than the smaller and less convenient rooms which we had left, and the claim thus implied on my increased exertions was strengthened by the doubtfulness of our future prospects. Emergencies might yet happen which would exhaust our little fund at the banker's, and the work of my hands might be, ultimately, all we had to look to for support. More permanent and more lucrative employment than had yet been offered to me was a necessity of our position--a necessity for which I now diligently set myself to
provide.

It must not be supposed that the interval of rest and seclusion of which I am now writing, entirely suspended, on
my part, all pursuit of the one absorbing purpose with which my thoughts and actions are associated in these pages.
That purpose was, for months and months yet, never to relax its claims on me. The slow ripening of it still left me a
measure of precaution to take, an obligation of gratitude to perform, and a doubtful question to solve.

The measure of precaution related, necessarily, to the Count. It was of the last importance to ascertain, if
possible, whether his plans committed him to remaining in England—or, in other words, to remaining within my
reach. I contrived to set this doubt at rest by very simple means. His address in St. John's Wood being known to me,
I inquired in the neighbourhood, and having found out the agent who had the disposal of the furnished house in
which he lived, I asked if number five, Forest Road, was likely to be let within a reasonable time. The reply was in
the negative. I was informed that the foreign gentleman then residing in the house had renewed his term of
occupation for another six months, and would remain in possession until the end of June in the following year. We
were then at the beginning of December only. I left the agent with my mind relieved from all present fear of the
Count's escaping me.

The obligation I had to perform took me once more into the presence of Mrs. Clements. I had promised to return,
and to confide to her those particulars relating to the death and burial of Anne Catherick which I had been obliged to
withhold at our first interview. Changed as circumstances now were, there was no hindrance to my trusting the good
woman with as much of the story of the conspiracy as it was necessary to tell. I had every reason that sympathy and
friendly feeling could suggest to urge on me the speedy performance of my promise, and I did conscientiously and
carefully perform it. There is no need to burden these pages with any statement of what passed at the interview. It
will be more to the purpose to say, that the interview itself necessarily brought to my mind the one doubtful question
still remaining to be solved—the question of Anne Catherick's parentage on the father's side.

A multitude of small considerations in connection with this subject—trifling enough in themselves, but strikingly
important when massed together—had latterly led my mind to a conclusion which I resolved to verify. I obtained
Marian's permission to write to Major Donthorne, of Varneck Hall (where Mrs. Catherick had lived in service for
some years previous to her marriage), to ask him certain questions. I made the inquiries in Marian's name, and
described them as relating to matters of personal history in her family, which might explain and excuse my
application. When I wrote the letter I had no certain knowledge that Major Donthorne was still alive—I despatched it
on the chance that he might be living, and able and willing to reply.

After a lapse of two days proof came, in the shape of a letter, that the Major was living, and that he was ready to
help us.

The idea in my mind when I wrote to him, and the nature of my inquiries will be easily inferred from his reply.
His letter answered my questions by communicating these important facts—

In the first place, "the late Sir Percival Glyde, of Blackwater Park," had never set foot in Varneck Hall. The
deceased gentleman was a total stranger to Major Donthorne, and to all his family.

In the second place, "the late Mr. Philip Fairlie, of Limmeridge House," had been, in his younger days, the
intimate friend and constant guest of Major Donthorne. Having refreshed his memory by looking back to old letters
and other papers, the Major was in a position to say positively that Mr. Philip Fairlie was staying at Varneck Hall in
the month of August, eighteen hundred and twenty-six, and that he remained there for the shooting during the
month of September and part of October following. He then left, to the best of the Major's belief, for Scotland, and
did not return to Varneck Hall till after a lapse of time, when he reappeared in the character of a newly-married man.

Taken by itself, this statement was, perhaps, of little positive value, but taken in connection with certain facts,
every one of which either Marian or I knew to be true, it suggested one plain conclusion that was, to our minds,
irresistible.

Knowing, now, that Mr. Philip Fairlie had been at Varneck Hall in the autumn of eighteen hundred and twenty-
six, and that Mrs. Catherick had been living there in service at the same time, we knew also—first, that Anne had
been born in June, eighteen hundred and twenty-seven; secondly, that she had always presented an extraordinary
personal resemblance to Laura; and, thirdly, that Laura herself was strikingly like her father. Mr. Philip Fairlie had
been one of the notoriously handsome men of his time. In disposition entirely unlike his brother Frederick, he was
the spoilt darling of society, especially of the women—an easy, light-hearted, impulsive, affectionate man—generous
to a fault—constitutionally lax in his principles, and notoriously thoughtless of moral obligations where women were
concerned. Such were the facts we knew—such was the character of the man. Surely the plain inference that follows
needs no pointing out?

Read by the new light which had now broken upon me, even Mrs. Catherick's letter, in despite of herself,
rendered its mite of assistance towards strengthening the conclusion at which I had arrived. She had described Mrs.
Fairlie (in writing to me) as "plain-looking," and as having "entrapped the handsomest man in England into
marrying her." Both assertions were gratuitously made, and both were false. Jealous dislike (which, in such a woman as Mrs. Catherick, would express itself in petty malice rather than not express itself at all) appeared to me to be the only assignable cause for the peculiar insolence of her reference to Mrs. Fairlie, under circumstances which did not necessitate any reference at all.

The mention here of Mrs. Fairlie's name naturally suggests one other question. Did she ever suspect whose child the little girl brought to her at Limmeridge might be?

Marian's testimony was positive on this point. Mrs. Fairlie's letter to her husband, which had been read to me in former days-- the letter describing Anne's resemblance to Laura, and acknowledging her affectionate interest in the little stranger-- had been written, beyond all question, in perfect innocence of heart. It even seemed doubtful, on consideration, whether Mr. Philip Fairlie himself had been nearer than his wife to any suspicion of the truth. The disgracefully deceitful circumstances under which Mrs. Catherick had married, the purpose of concealment which the marriage was intended to answer, might well keep her silent for caution's sake, perhaps for her own pride's sake also, even assuming that she had the means, in his absence, of communicating with the father of her unborn child.

As this surmise floated through my mind, there rose on my memory the remembrance of the Scripture denunciation which we have all thought of in our time with wonder and with awe: "The sins of the fathers shall be visited on the children." But for the fatal resemblance between the two daughters of one father, the conspiracy of which Anne had been the innocent instrument and Laura the innocent victim could never have been planned. With what unerring and terrible directness the long chain of circumstances led down from the thoughtless wrong committed by the father to the heartless injury inflicted on the child!

These thoughts came to me, and others with them, which drew my mind away to the little Cumberland churchyard where Anne Catherick now lay buried. I thought of the bygone days when I had met her by Mrs. Fairlie's grave, and met her for the last time. I thought of her poor helpless hands beating on the tombstone, and her weary, yearning words, murmured to the dead remains of her protectress and her friend: "Oh, if I could die, and be hidden and at rest with YOU!" Little more than a year had passed since she breathed that wish; and how inscrutably, how awfully, it had been fulfilled! The words she had spoken to Laura by the shores of the lake, the very words had now come true. "Oh, if I could only be buried with your mother! If I could only wake at her side when the angel's trumpet sounds and the graves give up their dead at the resurrection!" Through what mortal crime and horror, through what darkest windings of the way down to death--the lost creature had wandered in God's leading to the last home that, living, she never hoped to reach! In that sacred rest I leave her--in that dread companionship let her remain undisturbed.

So the ghostly figure which has haunted these pages, as it haunted my life, goes down into the impenetrable gloom. Like a shadow she first came to me in the loneliness of the night. Like a shadow she passes away in the loneliness of the dead.

III

Four months elapsed. April came--the month of spring--the month of change.

The course of time had flowed through the interval since the winter peacefully and happily in our new home. I had turned my long leisure to good account, had largely increased my sources of employment, and had placed our means of subsistence on surer grounds. Freed from the suspense and the anxiety which had tried her so sorely and hung over her so long, Marian's spirits rallied, and her natural energy of character began to assert itself again, with something, if not all, of the freedom and the vigour of former times.

More pliable under change than her sister, Laura showed more plainly the progress made by the healing influences of her new life. The worn and wasted look which had prematurely aged her face was fast leaving it, and the expression which had been the first of its charms in past days was the first of its beauties that now returned. My closest observations of her detected but one serious result of the conspiracy which had once threatened her reason and her life. Her memory of events, from the period of her leaving Blackwater Park to the period of our meeting in the burial-ground of Limmeridge Church, was lost beyond all hope of recovery. At the slightest reference to that time she changed and trembled still, her words became confused, her memory wandered and lost itself as helplessly as ever. Here, and here only, the traces of the past lay deep--too deep to be effaced.

In all else she was now so far on the way to recovery that, on her best and brightest days, she sometimes looked and spoke like the Laura of old times. The happy change wrought its natural result in us both. From their long slumber, on her side and on mine, those imperishable memories of our past life in Cumberland now awoke, which were one and all alike, the memories of our love.

Gradually and insensibly our daily relations towards each other became constrained. The fond words which I had spoken to her so naturally, in the days of her sorrow and her suffering, faltered strangely on my lips. In the time when my dread of losing her was most present to my mind, I had always kissed her when she left me at night and when she met me in the morning. The kiss seemed now to have dropped between us--to be lost out of our lives. Our
hands began to tremble again when they met. We hardly ever looked long at one another out of Marian's presence. The talk often flagged between us when we were alone. When I touched her by accident I felt my heart beating fast, as it used to beat at Limmeridge House—I saw the lovely answering flush glowing again in her cheeks, as if we were back among the Cumberland Hills in our past characters of master and pupil once more. She had long intervals of silence and thoughtfulness, and denied she had been thinking when Marian asked her the question. I surprised myself one day neglecting my work to dream over the little water-colour portrait of her which I had taken in the summer-house where we first met—just as I used to neglect Mr. Fairlie's drawings to dream over the same likeness when it was newly finished in the bygone time. Changed as all the circumstances now were, our position towards each other in the golden days of our first companionship seemed to be revived with the revival of our love. It was as if Time had drifted us back on the wreck of our early hopes to the old familiar shore!

To any other woman I could have spoken the decisive words which I still hesitated to speak to HER. The utter helplessness of her position—her friendless dependence on all the forbearing gentleness that I could show her—my fear of touching too soon some secret sensitiveness in her which my instinct as a man might not have been fine enough to discover—these considerations, and others like them, kept me self-distrustfully silent. And yet I knew that the restraint on both sides must be ended, that the relations in which we stood towards one another must be altered in some settled manner for the future, and that it rested with me, in the first instance, to recognise the necessity for a change.

The more I thought of our position, the harder the attempt to alter it appeared, while the domestic conditions on which we three had been living together since the winter remained undisturbed. I cannot account for the capricious state of mind in which this feeling originated, but the idea nevertheless possessed me that some previous change of place and circumstances, some sudden break in the quiet monotony of our lives, so managed as to vary the home aspect under which we had been accustomed to see each other, might prepare the way for me to speak, and might make it easier and less embarrassing for Laura and Marian to hear.

With this purpose in view, I said, one morning, that I thought we had all earned a little holiday and a change of scene. After some consideration, it was decided that we should go for a fortnight to the sea-side.

On the next day we left Fulham for a quiet town on the south coast. At that early season of the year we were the only visitors in the place. The cliffs, the beach, and the walks inland were all in the solitary condition which was most welcome to us. The air was mild—the prospects over hill and wood and down were beautifully varied by the shifting April light and shade, and the restless sea leapt under our windows, as if it felt, like the land, the glow and freshness of spring.

I owed it to Marian to consult her before I spoke to Laura, and to be guided afterwards by her advice.

On the third day from our arrival I found a fit opportunity of speaking to her alone. The moment we looked at one another, her quick instinct detected the thought in my mind before I could give it expression. With her customary energy and directness she spoke at once, and spoke first.

"You are thinking of that subject which was mentioned between us on the evening of your return from Hampshire," she said. "I have been expecting you to allude to it for some time past. There must be a change in our little household, Walter, we cannot go on much longer as we are now. I see it as plainly as you do—as plainly as Laura sees it, though she says nothing. How strangely the old times in Cumberland seem to have come back! You and I are together again, and the one subject of interest between us is Laura once more. I could almost fancy that this room is the summer-house at Limmeridge, and that those waves beyond us are beating on our sea-shore."

"I was guided by your advice in those past days," I said, "and now, Marian, with reliance tenfold greater I will be guided by it again."

She answered by pressing my hand. I saw that she was deeply touched by my reference to the past. We sat together near the window, and while I spoke and she listened, we looked at the glory of the sunlight shining on the majesty of the sea.

"Whatever comes of this confidence between us," I said, "whether it ends happily or sorrowfully for ME, Laura's interests will still be the interests of my life. When we leave this place, on whatever terms we leave it, my determination to wrest from Count Fosco the confession which I failed to obtain from his accomplice, goes back with me to London, as certainly as I go back myself. Neither you nor I can tell how that man may turn on me, if I bring him to bay; we only know, by his own words and actions, that he is capable of striking at me through Laura, without a moment's hesitation, or a moment's remorse. In our present position I have no claim on her which society sanctions, which the law allows, to strengthen me in resisting him, and in protecting HER. This places me at a serious disadvantage. If I am to fight our cause with the Count, strong in the consciousness of Laura's safety, I must fight it for my Wife. Do you agree to that, Marian, so far?"

"To every word of it," she answered.

"I will not plead out of my own heart," I went on; "I will not appeal to the love which has survived all changes
and all shocks-- I will rest my only vindication of myself for thinking of her, and speaking of her as my wife, on what I have just said. If the chance of forcing a confession from the Count is, as I believe it to be, the last chance left of publicly establishing the fact of Laura's existence, the least selfish reason that I can advance for our marriage is recognised by us both. But I may be wrong in my conviction--other means of achieving our purpose may be in our power, which are less uncertain and less dangerous. I have searched anxiously, in my own mind, for those means, and I have not found them. Have you?"

"No. I have thought about it too, and thought in vain."

"In all likelihood," I continued, "the same questions have occurred to you, in considering this difficult subject, which have occurred to me. Ought we to return with her to Limmeridge, now that she is like herself again, and trust to the recognition of her by the people of the village, or by the children at the school? Ought we to appeal to the practical test of her handwriting? Suppose we did so. Suppose the recognition of her obtained, and the identity of the handwriting established. Would success in both those cases do more than supply an excellent foundation for a trial in a court of law? Would the recognition and the handwriting prove her identity to Mr. Fairlie and take her back to Limmeridge House, against the evidence of her aunt, against the evidence of the medical certificate, against the fact of the funeral and the fact of the inscription on the tomb? No! We could only hope in throwing a serious doubt on the assertion of her death, a doubt which nothing short of a legal inquiry can settle. I will assume that we possess (what we have certainly not got) money enough to carry this inquiry on through all its stages. I will assume that Mr. Fairlie's prejudices might be reasoned away--that the false testimony of the Count and his wife, and all the rest of the false testimony, might be confuted--that the recognition could not possibly be ascribed to a mistake between Laura and Anne Catherick, or the handwriting be declared by our enemies to be a clever fraud--all these are assumptions which, more or less, set plain probabilities at defiance; but let them pass--and let us ask ourselves what would be the first consequence or the first questions put to Laura herself on the subject of the conspiracy. We know only too well what the consequence would be, for we know that she has never recovered her memory of what happened to her in London. Examine her privately, or examine her publicly, she is utterly incapable of assisting the assertion of her own case. If you don't see this, Marian, as plainly as I see it, we will go to Limmeridge and try the experiment to-morrow."

"I DO see it, Walter. Even if we had the means of paying all the law expenses, even if we succeeded in the end, the delays would be unendurable, the perpetual suspense, after what we have suffered already, would be heartbreaking. You are right about the hopelessness of going to Limmeridge. I wish I could feel sure that you are right also in determining to try that last chance with the Count. IS it a chance at all?"

"Beyond a doubt, Yes. It is the chance of recovering the lost date of Laura's journey to London. Without returning to the reasons I gave you some time since, I am still as firmly persuaded as ever that there is a discrepancy between the date of that journey and the date on the certificate of death. There lies the weak point of the whole conspiracy--it crumbles to pieces if we attack it in that way, and the means of attacking it are in possession of the Count. If I succeed in wresting them from him, the object of your life and mine is fulfilled. If I fail, the wrong that Laura has suffered will, in this world, never be redressed."

"Do you fear failure yourself, Walter?"

"I dare not anticipate success, and for that very reason, Marian, I speak openly and plainly as I have spoken now. In my heart and my conscience I can say it, Laura's hopes for the future are at their lowest ebb. I know that her fortune is gone--I know that the last chance of restoring her to her place in the world lies at the mercy of her worst enemy, of a man who is now absolutely unassailable, and who may remain unassailable to the end. With every worldly advantage gone from her, with all prospect of recovering her rank and station more than doubtful, with no clearer future before her than the future which her husband can provide, the poor drawing-master may harmlessly open his heart at last. In the days of her prosperity, Marian, I was only the teacher who guided her hand--I ask for it, in her adversity, as the hand of my wife!"

Marian's eyes met mine affectionately--I could say no more. My heart was full, my lips were trembling. In spite of myself I was in danger of appealing to her pity. I got up to leave the room. She rose at the same moment, laid her hand gently on my shoulder, and stopped me.

"Walter!" she said, "I once parted you both, for your good and for hers. Wait here, my brother!--wait, my dearest, best friend, till Laura comes, and tells you what I have done now!"

For the first time since the farewell morning at Limmeridge she touched my forehead with her lips. A tear dropped on my face as she kissed me. She turned quickly, pointed to the chair from which I had risen, and left the room.

I sat down alone at the window to wait through the crisis of my life. My mind in that breathless interval felt like a total blank. I was conscious of nothing but a painful intensity of all familiar perceptions. The sun grew blinding bright, the white sea birds chasing each other far beyond me seemed to be flitting before my face, the mellow
murmur of the waves on the beach was like thunder in my ears.

The door opened, and Laura came in alone. So she had entered the breakfast-room at Limmeridge House on the morning when we parted. Slowly and faltering, in sorrow and in hesitation, she had once approached me. Now she came with the haste of happiness in her feet, with the light of happiness radiant in her face. Of their own accord those dear arms clasped themselves round me, of their own accord the sweet lips came to meet mine. "My darling!" she whispered, "we may own we love each other now?" Her head nestled with a tender contentedness on my bosom. "Oh," she said innocently, "I am so happy at last!"

Ten days later we were happier still. We were married.

IV

The course of this narrative, steadily flowing on, bears me away from the morning-time of our married life, and carries me forward to the end.

In a fortnight more we three were back in London, and the shadow was stealing over us of the struggle to come.

Marian and I were careful to keep Laura in ignorance of the cause that had hurried us back—the necessity of making sure of the Count. It was now the beginning of May, and his term of occupation at the house in Forest Road expired in June. If he renewed it (and I had reasons, shortly to be mentioned, for anticipating that he would), I might be certain of his not escaping me. But if by any chance he disappointed my expectations and left the country, then I had no time to lose in arming myself to meet him as I best might.

In the first fulness of my new happiness, there had been moments when my resolution faltered—moments when I was tempted to be safely content, now that the dearest aspiration of my life was fulfilled in the possession of Laura's love. For the first time I thought faint-heartedly of the greatness of the risk, of the adverse chances arrayed against me, of the fair promise of our new life, and of the peril in which I might place the happiness which we had so hardly earned. Yes! let me own it honestly. For a brief time I wandered, in the sweet guiding of love, far from the purpose to which I had been true under sterner discipline and in darker days. Innocently Laura had tempted me aside from the hard path—innocently she was destined to lead me back again.

At times, dreams of the terrible past still disconsecutively recalled to her, in the mystery of sleep, the events of which her waking memory had lost all trace. One night (barely two weeks after our marriage), when I was watching her at rest, I saw the tears come slowly through her closed eyelids, I heard the faint murmuring words escape her which told me that her spirit was back again on the fatal journey from Blackwater Park. That unconscious appeal, so touching and so awful in the sacredness of her sleep, ran through me like fire. The next day was the day we came back to London—the day when my resolution returned to me with tenfold strength.

The first necessity was to know something of the man. Thus far, the true story of his life was an impenetrable mystery to me.

I began with such scanty sources of information as were at my own disposal. The important narrative written by Mr. Frederick Fairlie (which Marian had obtained by following the directions I had given to her in the winter) proved to be of no service to the special object with which I now looked at it. While reading it I reconsidered the disclosure revealed to me by Mrs. Clements of the series of deceptions which had brought Anne Catherick to London, and which had there devoted her to the interests of the conspiracy. Here, again, the Count had not openly committed himself—here, again, he was, to all practical purpose, out of my reach.

I next returned to Marian's journal at Blackwater Park. At my request she read to me again a passage which referred to her past curiosity about the Count, and to the few particulars which she had discovered relating to him.

The passage to which I allude occurs in that part of her journal which delineates his character and his personal appearance. She describes him as "not having crossed the frontiers of his native country for years past"—as "anxious to know if any Italian gentlemen were settled in the nearest town to Blackwater Park"—as "receiving letters with all sorts of odd stamps on them, and one with a large official-looking seal on it." She is inclined to consider that his long absence from his native country may be accounted for by assuming that he is a political exile. But she is, on the other hand, unable to reconcile this idea with the reception of the letter from abroad bearing "the large official-looking seal"—letters from the Continent addressed to political exiles being usually the last to court attention from foreign post-offices in that way.

The considerations thus presented to me in the diary, joined to certain surmises of my own that grew out of them, suggested a conclusion which I wondered I had not arrived at before. I now said to myself—what Laura had once said to Marian at Blackwater Park, what Madame Fosco had overheard by listening at the door—*the Count is a spy!*

Laura had applied the word to him at hazard, in natural anger at his proceedings towards herself. I applied it to him with the deliberate conviction that his vocation in life was the vocation of a spy. On this assumption, the reason for his extraordinary stay in England so long after the objects of the conspiracy had been gained, became, to my mind, quite intelligible.
The year of which I am now writing was the year of the famous Crystal Palace Exhibition in Hyde Park. Foreigners in unusually large numbers had arrived already, and were still arriving in England. Men were among us by hundreds whom the ceaseless distrustfulness of their governments had followed privately, by means of appointed agents, to our shores. My surmises did not for a moment class a man of the Count's abilities and social position with the ordinary rank and file of foreign spies. I suspected him of holding a position of authority, of being entrusted by the government which he secretly served with the organisation and management of agents specially employed in this country, both men and women, and I believed Mrs. Rubelle, who had been so opportunely found to act as nurse at Blackwater Park, to be, in all probability, one of the number.

Assuming that this idea of mine had a foundation in truth, the position of the Count might prove to be more assailable than I had hitherto ventured to hope. To whom could I apply to know something more of the man's history and of the man himself than I knew now?

In this emergency it naturally occurred to my mind that a countryman of his own, on whom I could rely, might be the fittest person to help me. The first man whom I thought of under these circumstances was also the only Italian with whom I was intimately acquainted--my quaint little friend, Professor Pesca.

The professor has been so long absent from these pages that he has run some risk of being forgotten altogether.

It is the necessary law of such a story as mine that the persons concerned in it only appear when the course of events takes them up--they come and go, not by favour of my personal partiality, but by right of their direct connection with the circumstances to be detailed. For this reason, not Pesca alone, but my mother and sister as well, have been left far in the background of the narrative. My visits to the Hampstead cottage, my mother's belief in the denial of Laura's identity which the conspiracy had accomplished, my vain efforts to overcome the prejudice on her part and on my sister's to which, in their jealous affection for me, they both continued to adhere, the painful necessity which that prejudice imposed on me of concealing my marriage from them till they had learnt to do justice to my wife--all these little domestic occurrences have been left unrecorded because they were not essential to the main interest of the story. It is nothing that they added to my anxieties and embittered my disappointments--the steady march of events has inexorably passed them by.

For the same reason I have said nothing here of the consolation that I found in Pesca's brotherly affection for me, when I saw him again after the sudden cessation of my residence at Limmeridge House. I have not recorded the fidelity with which my warm-hearted little friend followed me to the place of embarkation when I sailed for Central America, or the noisy transport of joy with which he received me when we next met in London. If I had felt justified in accepting the offers of service which he made to me on my return, he would have appeared again long ere this. But, though I knew that his honour and his courage were to be implicitly relied on, I was not so sure that his discretion was to be trusted, and, for that reason only, I followed the course of all my inquiries alone. It will now be sufficiently understood that Pesca was not separated from all connection with me and my interests, although he has hitherto been separated from all connection with the progress of this narrative. He was as true and as ready a friend of mine still as ever he had been in his life.

Before I summoned Pesca to my assistance it was necessary to see for myself what sort of man I had to deal with. Up to this time I had never once set eyes on Count Fosco.

Three days after my return with Laura and Marian to London, I set forth alone for Forest Road, St. John's Wood, between ten and eleven o'clock in the morning. It was a fine day--I had some hours to spare--and I thought it likely, if I waited a little for him, that the Count might be tempted out. I had no great reason to fear the chance of his recognition in the daytime, for the only occasion when I had been seen by him was the occasion on which he had followed me home at night.

No one appeared at the windows in the front of the house. I walked down a turning which ran past the side of it, and looked over the low garden wall. One of the back windows on the lower floor was thrown up and a net was stretched across the opening. I saw nobody, but I heard, in the room, first a shrill whistling and singing of birds, then the deep ringing voice which Marian's description had made familiar to me. "Come out on my little finger, my pret-pret-pretties!" cried the voice. "Come out and hop upstairs! One, two, three--and up! Three, two, one--and down! One, two, three--twit-twit-twit-twit-tweet!" The Count was exercising his canaries as he used to exercise them in Marian's time at Blackwater Park.

I waited a little while, and the singing and the whistling ceased. "Come, kiss me, my pretties!" said the deep voice. There was a responsive twittering and chirping--a low, oily laugh--a silence of a minute or so, and then I heard the opening of the house door. I turned and retraced my steps. The magnificent melody of the Prayer in Rossini's Moses, sung in a sonorous bass voice, rose grandly through the suburban silence of the place. The front garden gate opened and closed. The Count had come out.

He crossed the road and walked towards the western boundary of the Regent's Park. I kept on my own side of the way, a little behind him, and walked in that direction also.
Marian had prepared me for his high stature, his monstrous corpulence, and his ostentatious mourning garments, but not for the horrible freshness and cheerfulness and vitality of the man. He carried his sixty years as if they had been fewer than forty. He sauntered along, wearing his hat a little on one side, with a light jaunty step, swinging his big stick, humming to himself, looking up from time to time at the houses and gardens on either side of him with superb, smiling patronage. If a stranger had been told that the whole neighbourhood belonged to him, that stranger would not have been surprised to hear it. He never looked back, he paid no apparent attention to me, no apparent attention to any one who passed him on his own side of the road, except now and then, when he smiled and smirked, with an easy paternal good humour, at the nursery-maids and the children whom he met. In this way he led me on, till we reached a colony of shops outside the western terraces of the Park.

Here he stopped at a pastrycook's, went in (probably to give an order), and came out again immediately with a tart in his hand. An Italian was grinding an organ before the shop, and a miserable little shrivelled monkey was sitting on the instrument. The Count stopped, bit a piece for himself out of the tart, and gravely handed the rest to the monkey. "My poor little man!" he said, with grotesque tenderness, "you look hungry. In the sacred name of humanity, I offer you some lunch!" The organ-grinder piteously put in his claim to a penny from the benevolent stranger. The Count shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, and passed on.

We reached the streets and the better class of shops between the New Road and Oxford Street. The Count stopped again and entered a small optician's shop, with an inscription in the window announcing that repairs were neatly executed inside. He came out again with an opera-glass in his hand, walked a few paces on, and stopped to look at a bill of the opera placed outside a music-seller's shop. He read the bill attentively, considered a moment, and then hailed an empty cab as it passed him. "Opera Box-office," he said to the man, and was driven away.

I crossed the road, and looked at the bill in my turn. The performance announced was Lucrezia Borgia, and it was to take place that evening. The opera-glass in the Count's hand, his careful reading of the bill, and his direction to the cabman, all suggested that he proposed making one of the audience. I had the means of getting an admission for myself and a friend to the pit by applying to one of the scene-painters attached to the theatre, with whom I had been well acquaintance in past times. There was a chance at least that the Count might be easily visible among the audience to me and to any one with me, and in this case I had the means of ascertaining whether Pesca knew his countryman or not that very night.

This consideration at once decided the disposal of my evening. I procured the tickets, leaving a note at the Professor's lodgings on the way. At a quarter to eight I called to take him with me to the theatre. My little friend was in a state of the highest excitement, with a festive flower in his button-hole, and the largest opera-glass I ever saw hugged up under his arm.

"Are you ready?" I asked.
"Right-all-right," said Pesca.
We started for the theatre.

The last notes of the introduction to the opera were being played, and the seats in the pit were all filled, when Pesca and I reached the theatre.

There was plenty of room, however, in the passage that ran round the pit--precisely the position best calculated to answer the purpose for which I was attending the performance. I went first to the barrier separating us from the stalls, and looked for the Count in that part of the theatre. He was not there. Returning along the passage, on the left-hand side from the stage, and looking about me attentively, I discovered him in the pit. He occupied an excellent place, some twelve or fourteen seats from the end of a bench, within three rows of the stalls. I placed myself exactly on a line with him. Pesca standing by my side. The Professor was not yet aware of the purpose for which I had brought him to the theatre, and he was rather surprised that we did not move nearer to the stage.

The curtain rose, and the opera began.

Throughout the whole of the first act we remained in our position--the Count, absorbed by the orchestra and the stage, never casting so much as a chance glance at us. Not a note of Donizetti's delicious music was lost on him. There he sat, high above his neighbours, smiling, and nodding his great head joyfully from time to time. When the people near him applauded the close of an air (as an English audience in such circumstances always WILL applaud), without the least consideration for the orchestral movement which immediately followed it, he looked round at them with an expression of compassionate remonstrance, and held up one hand with a gesture of polite entreaty. At the more refined passages of the singing, at the more delicate phases of the music, which passed unapplauded by others, his fat hands, adorned with perfectly-fitting black kid gloves, softly patted each other, in token of the cultivated appreciation of a musical man. At such times, his oily murmur of approval, "Bravo! Bra-a-a-a-a!" hummed through the silence, like the purring of a great cat. His immediate neighbours on either side--hearty, ruddy-faced people from the country, basking amazedly in the sunshine of fashionable London--seeing and hearing
him, began to follow his lead. Many a burst of applause from the pit that night started from the soft, comfortable patting of the black-gloved hands. The man's voracious vanity devoured this implied tribute to his local and critical supremacy with an appearance of the highest relish. Smiles rippled continuously over his fat face. He looked about him, at the pauses in the music, serenely satisfied with himself and his fellow-creatures. "Yes! yes! these barbarous English people are learning something from ME. Here, there, and everywhere, I--Fosco--am an influence that is felt, a man who sits supreme!" If ever face spoke, his face spoke then, and that was its language.

The curtain fell on the first act, and the audience rose to look about them. This was the time I had waited for--the time to try if Pesca knew him.

He rose with the rest, and surveyed the occupants of the boxes grandly with his opera-glass. At first his back was towards us, but he turned round in time, to our side of the theatre, and looked at the boxes above us, using his glass for a few minutes--then removing it, but still continuing to look up. This was the moment I chose, when his full face was in view, for directing Pesca's attention to him.

"Do you know that man?" I asked.

"Which man, my friend?"

"The tall, fat man, standing there, with his face towards us."

Pesca raised himself on tiptoe, and looked at the Count.

"No," said the Professor. "The big fat man is a stranger to me. Is he famous? Why do you point him out?"

"Because I have particular reasons for wishing to know something of him. He is a countryman of yours--his name is Count Fosco. Do you know that name?"

"Not I, Walter. Neither the name nor the man is known to me."

"Are you quite sure you don't recognise him? Look again--look carefully. I will tell you why I am so anxious about it when we leave the theatre. Stop! let me help you up here, where you can see him better."

I helped the little man to perch himself on the edge of the raised dais upon which the pit-seats were all placed. His small stature was no hindrance to him--here he could see over the heads of the ladies who were seated near the outermost part of the bench.

A slim, light-haired man standing by us, whom I had not noticed before--a man with a scar on his left cheek--looked attentively at Pesca as I helped him up, and then looked still more attentively, following the direction of Pesca's eyes, at the Count. Our conversation might have reached his ears, and might, as it struck me, have roused his curiosity.

Meanwhile, Pesca fixed his eyes earnestly on the broad, full, smiling face turned a little upward, exactly opposite to him.

"No," he said, "I have never set my two eyes on that big fat man before in all my life."

As he spoke the Count looked downwards towards the boxes behind us on the pit tier.

The eyes of the two Italians met.

The instant before I had been perfectly satisfied, from his own reiterated assertion, that Pesca did not know the Count. The instant afterwards I was equally certain that the Count knew Pesca!

Knew him, and--more surprising still--FEARED him as well! There was no mistaking the change that passed over the villain's face. The leaden hue that altered his yellow complexion in a moment, the sudden rigidity of all his features, the furtive scrutiny of his cold grey eyes, the motionless stillness of him from head to foot told their own tale. A mortal dread had mastered him body and soul--and his own recognition of Pesca was the cause of it!

The slim man with the scar on his cheek was still close by us. He had apparently drawn his inference from the effect produced on the Count by the sight of Pesca as I had drawn mine. He was a mild, gentlemanlike man, looking like a foreigner, and his interest in our proceedings was not expressed in anything approaching to an offensive manner.

For my own part I was so startled by the change in the Count's face, so astounded at the entirely unexpected turn which events had taken, that I knew neither what to say or do next. Pesca roused me by stepping back to his former place at my side and speaking first.

"How the fat man stares!" he exclaimed. "Is it at ME? Am I famous? How can he know me when I don't know him?"

I kept my eye still on the Count. I saw him move for the first time when Pesca moved, so as not to lose sight of the little man in the lower position in which he now stood. I was curious to see what would happen if Pesca's attention under these circumstances was withdrawn from him, and I accordingly asked the Professor if he recognised any of his pupils that evening among the ladies in the boxes. Pesca immediately raised the large opera-glass to his eyes, and moved it slowly all round the upper part of the theatre, searching for his pupils with the most conscientious scrutiny.

The moment he showed himself to be thus engaged the Count turned round, slipped past the persons who
occupied seats on the farther side of him from where we stood, and disappeared in the middle passage down the
centre of the pit. I caught Pesca by the arm, and to his inexpressible astonishment, hurried him round with me to the
back of the pit to intercept the Count before he could get to the door. Somewhat to my surprise, the slim man
hastened out before us, avoiding a stoppage caused by some people on our side of the pit leaving their places, by
which Pesca and myself were delayed. When we reached the lobby the Count had disappeared, and the foreigner
with the scar was gone too.

"Come home," I said; "come home, Pesca to your lodgings. I must speak to you in private--I must speak
directly."

"My-soul-bless-my-soul!" cried the Professor, in a state of the extremest bewilderment. "What on earth is the
matter?"

I walked on rapidly without answering. The circumstances under which the Count had left the theatre suggested
to me that his extraordinary anxiety to escape Pesca might carry him to further extremities still. He might escape me,
too, by leaving London. I doubted the future if I allowed him so much as a day's freedom to act as he pleased. And I
doubted that foreign stranger, who had got the start of us, and whom I suspected of intentionally following him out.

With this double distrust in my mind, I was not long in making Pesca understand what I wanted. As soon as we
two were alone in his room, I increased his confusion and amazement a hundredfold by telling him what my purpose
was as plainly and unreservedly as I have acknowledged it here.

"My friend, what can I do?" cried the Professor, piteously appealing to me with both hands. "Deuce-what-the-
deuce! how can I help you, Walter, when I don't know the man?"

"HE knows YOU--he is afraid of you--he has left the theatre to escape you, Pesca! there must be a reason for
this. Look back into your own life before you came to England. You left Italy, as you have told me yourself, for
political reasons. You have never mentioned those reasons to me, and I don't inquire into them now. I only ask you
to consult your own recollections, and to say if they suggest no past cause for the terror which the first sight of you
produced in that man."

To my unutterable surprise, these words, harmless as they appeared to ME, produced the same astounding effect
on Pesca which the sight of Pesca had produced on the Count. The rosy face of my little friend whitened in an
instant, and he drew back from me slowly, trembling from head to foot.

"Walter!" he said. "You don't know what you ask."

He spoke in a whisper--he looked at me as if I had suddenly revealed to him some hidden danger to both of us.
In less than one minute of time he was so altered from the easy, lively, quaint little man of all my past experience,
that if I had met him in the street, changed as I saw him now, I should most certainly not have known him again.

"Forgive me, if I have unintentionally pained and shocked you," I replied. "Remember the cruel wrong my wife
has suffered at Count Fosco's hands. Remember that the wrong can never be redressed, unless the means are in my
power of forcing him to do her justice. I spoke in HER interests, Pesca--I ask you again to forgive me--I can say no
more."

I rose to go. He stopped me before I reached the door.

"Wait," he said. "You have shaken me from head to foot. You don't know how I left my country, and why I left
my country. Let me compose myself, let me think, if I can."

I returned to my chair. He walked up and down the room, talking to himself incoherently in his own language.
After several turns backwards and forwards, he suddenly came up to me, and laid his little hands with a strange
tenderness and solemnity on my breast.

"On your heart and soul, Walter," he said, "is there no other way to get to that man but the chance-way through
ME?"

"There is no other way," I answered.

He left me again, opened the door of the room and looked out cautiously into the passage, closed it once more,
and came back.

"You won your right over me, Walter," he said, "on the day when you saved my life. It was yours from that
moment, when you pleased to take it. Take it now. Yes! I mean what I say. My next words, as true as the good God
is above us, will put my life into your hands."

The trembling earnestness with which he uttered this extraordinary warning, carried with it, to my mind, the
conviction that he spoke the truth.

"Mind this!" he went on, shaking his hands at me in the vehemence of his agitation. "I hold no thread, in my own
mind, between that man Fosco, and the past time which I call back to me for your sake. If you find the thread, keep
it to yourself--tell me nothing--on my knees I beg and pray, let me be ignorant, let me be innocent, let me be blind to
all the future as I am now!"

He said a few words more, hesitatingly and disconnectedly, then stopped again.
I saw that the effort of expressing himself in English, on an occasion too serious to permit him the use of the quaint turns and phrases of his ordinary vocabulary, was painfully increasing the difficulty he had felt from the first in speaking to me at all. Having learnt to read and understand his native language (though not to speak it), in the earlier days of our intimate companionship, I now suggested to him that he should express himself in Italian, while I used English in putting any questions which might be necessary to my enlightenment. He accepted the proposal. In his smooth-flowing language, spoken with a vehement agitation which betrayed itself in the perpetual working of his features, in the wildness and the suddenness of his foreign gesticulations, but never in the raising of his voice, I now heard the words which armed me to meet the last struggle, that is left for this story to record.[3]

[3] It is only right to mention here, that I repeat Pesco's statement to me with the careful suppressions and alterations which the serious nature of the subject and my own sense of duty to my friend demand. My first and last concealments from the reader are those which caution renders absolutely necessary in this portion of the narrative.

"You know nothing of my motive for leaving Italy," he began, "except that it was for political reasons. If I had been driven to this country by the persecution of my government, I should not have kept those reasons a secret from you or from any one. I have concealed them because no government authority has pronounced the sentence of my exile. You have heard, Walter, of the political societies that are hidden in every great city on the continent of Europe? To one of those societies I belonged in Italy--and belong still in England. When I came to this country, I came by the direction of my chief. I was over-zealous in my younger time--I ran the risk of compromising myself and others. For those reasons I was ordered to emigrate to England and to wait. I emigrated--I have waited--I wait still. To-morrow I may be called away--ten years hence I may be called away. It is all one to me--I am here, I support myself by teaching, and I wait. I violate no oath (you shall hear why presently) in making my confidence complete by telling you the name of the society to which I belong. All I do is to put my life in your hands. If what I say to you now is ever known by others to have passed my lips, as certainly as we two sit here, I am a dead man."

He whispered the next words in my ear. I keep the secret which he thus communicated. The society to which he belonged will be sufficiently individualised for the purpose of these pages, if I call it "The Brotherhood," on the few occasions when any reference to the subject will be needed in this place.

"The object of the Brotherhood," Pesca went on, "is, briefly, the object of other political societies of the same sort--the destruction of tyranny and the assertion of the rights of the people. The principles of the Brotherhood are two. So long as a man's life is useful, or even harmless only, he has the right to enjoy it. But, if his life inflicts injury on the well-being of his fellow-men, from that moment he forfeits the right, and it is not only no crime, but a positive merit, to deprive him of it. It is not for me to say in what frightful circumstances of oppression and suffering this society took its rise. It is not for you to say--you Englishmen, who have conquered your freedom so long ago, that you have conveniently forgotten what blood you shed, and what extremities you proceeded to in the conquering--it is not for you to say how far the worst of all exasperations may, or may not, carry the maddened men of an enslaved nation. The iron that has entered into our souls has gone too deep for you to find it. Leave the refugee alone! Laugh at him, distrust him, open your eyes in wonder at that secret self which smoulders in him, sometimes under the everyday respectability and tranquillity of a man like me--sometimes under the grinding poverty, the fierce squalor, of men less lucky, less pliable, less patient than I am--but judge us not! In the time of your first Charles you might have done us justice--the long luxury of your own freedom has made you incapable of doing us justice now."

All the deepest feelings of his nature seemed to force themselves to the surface in those words--all his heart was poured out to me for the first time in our lives--but still his voice never rose, still his dread of the terrible revelation he was making to me never left him.

"So far," he resumed, "you think the society like other societies. Its object (in your English opinion) is anarchy and revolution. It takes the life of a bad king or a bad minister, as if the one and the other were dangerous wild beasts to be shot at the first opportunity. I grant you this. But the laws of the Brotherhood are the laws of no other political society on the face of the earth. The members are not known to one another. There is a president in Italy; there are presidents abroad. Each of these has his secretary. The presidents and the secretaries know the members, but the members, among themselves, are all strangers, until their chiefs see fit, in the political necessity of the time, or in the private necessity of the society, to make them known to each other. With such a safeguard as this there is no oath among us on admittance. We are identified with the Brotherhood by a secret mark, which we all bear, which lasts while our lives last. We are told to go about our ordinary business, and to report ourselves to the president, or the secretary, four times a year, in the event of our services being required. We are warned, if we betray the Brotherhood, or if we injure it by serving other interests, that we die by the principles of the Brotherhood--die by the hand of a stranger who may be sent from the other end of the world to strike the blow--or by the hand of our own bosom-friend, who may have been a member unknown to us through all the years of our intimacy. Sometimes the death is delayed--sometimes it follows close on the treachery. It is our first business to know how to wait--our second business to know how to obey when the word is spoken. Some of us may wait our lives through, and may not
be wanted. Some of us may be called to the work, or to the preparation for the work, the very day of our admission. I myself--the little, easy, cheerful man you know, who, of his own accord, would hardly lift up his handkerchief to strike down the fly that buzzes about his face--I, in my younger time, under provocation so dreadful that I will not tell you of it, entered the Brotherhood by an impulse, as I might have killed myself by an impulse. I must remain in it now--it has got me, whatever I may think of it in my better circumstances and my cooler manhood, to my dying day. While I was still in Italy I was chosen secretary, and all the members of that time, who were brought face to face with my president, were brought face to face also with me."

I began to understand him--I saw the end towards which his extraordinary disclosure was now tending. He waited a moment, watching me earnestly--watching till he had evidently guessed what was passing in my mind before he resumed.

"You have drawn your own conclusion already," he said. "I see it in your face. Tell me nothing--keep me out of the secret of your thoughts. Let me make my one last sacrifice of myself, for your sake, and then have done with this subject, never to return to it again."

He signed to me not to answer him--rose--removed his coat--and rolled up the shirt-sleeve on his left arm.

"I promised you that this confidence should be complete," he whispered, speaking close at my ear, with his eyes looking watchfully at the door. "Whatever comes of it you shall not reproach me with having hidden anything from you which it was necessary to your interests to know. I have said that the Brotherhood identifies its members by a mark that lasts for life. See the place, and the mark on it for yourself."

He raised his bare arm, and showed me, high on the upper part of it and in the inner side, a brand deeply burnt in the flesh and stained of a bright blood-red colour. I abstain from describing the device which the brand represented. It will be sufficient to say that it was circular in form, and so small that it would have been completely covered by a shilling coin.

"A man who has this mark, branded in this place," he said, covering his arm again, "is a member of the Brotherhood. A man who has been false to the Brotherhood is discovered sooner or later by the chiefs who know him--presidents or secretaries, as the case may be. And a man discovered by the chiefs is dead. NO HUMAN LAWS CAN PROTECT HIM. Remember what you have seen and heard--draw what conclusions YOU like--act as you please. But, in the name of God, whatever you discover, whatever you do, tell me nothing! Let me remain free from a responsibility which it horrifies me to think of--which I know, in my conscience, is not my responsibility now. For the last time I say it--on my honour as a gentleman, on my oath as a Christian, if the man you pointed out at the Opera knows ME, he is so altered, or so disguised, that I do not know him. I am ignorant of his proceedings or his purposes in England. I never saw him, I never heard the name he goes by, to my knowledge, before to-night. I say no more. Leave me a little, Walter. I am overpowered by what has happened--I am shaken by what I have said. Let me try to be like myself again when we meet next."

He dropped into a chair, and turning away from me, hid his face in his hands. I gently opened the door so as not to disturb him, and spoke my few parting words in low tones, which he might hear or not, as he pleased.

"I will keep the memory of to-night in my heart of hearts," I said. "You shall never repent the trust you have reposed in me. May I come to you to-morrow? May I come as early as nine o'clock?"

"Yes, Walter," he replied, looking up at me kindly, and speaking in English once more, as if his one anxiety now was to get back to our former relations towards each other. "Come to my little bit of breakfast before I go my ways among the pupils that I teach."

"Good-night, Pesca."

"Good-night, my friend."

VI

MY first conviction as soon as I found myself outside the house, was that no alternative was left me but to act at once on the information I had received--to make sure of the Count that night, or to risk the loss, if I only delayed till the morning, of Laura's last chance. I looked at my watch--it was ten o'clock.

Not the shadow of a doubt crossed my mind of the purpose for which the Count had left the theatre. His escape from us, that evening, was beyond all question the preliminary only to his escape from London. The mark of the Brotherhood was on his arm--I felt as certain of it as if he had shown me the brand; and the betrayal of the Brotherhood was on his conscience--I had seen it in his recognition of Pesca.

It was easy to understand why that recognition had not been mutual. A man of the Count's character would never risk the terrible consequences of turning spy without looking to his personal security quite as carefully as he looked to his golden reward. The shaven face, which I had pointed out at the Opera, might have been covered by a beard in Pesca's time--his dark brown hair might be a wig--his name was evidently a false one. The accident of time might have helped him as well--his immense corpulence might have come with his later years. There was every reason why Pesca should not have known him again--every reason also why he should have known Pesca, whose singular
personal appearance made a marked man of him, go where he might.

I have said that I felt certain of the purpose in the Count's mind when he escaped us at the theatre. How could I
doubt it, when I saw, with my own eyes, that he believed himself, in spite of the change in his appearance, to have
been recognised by Pesca, and to be therefore in danger of his life? If I could get speech of him that night, if I could
show him that I, too knew of the mortal peril in which he stood, what result would follow? Plainly this. One of us
must be master of the situation--one of us must inevitably be at the mercy of the other.

I owed it to myself to consider the chances against me before I confronted them. I owed it to my wife to do all
that lay in my power to lessen the risk.

The chances against me wanted no reckoning up--they were all merged in one. If the Count discovered, by my
own avowal, that the direct way to his safety lay through my life, he was probably the last man in existence who
would shrink from throwing me off my guard and taking that way, when he had me alone within his reach. The only
means of defence against him on which I could at all rely to lessen the risk, presented themselves, after a little
careful thinking, clearly enough. Before I made any personal acknowledgment of my discovery in his presence, I
must place the discovery itself where it would be ready for instant use against him, and safe from any attempt at
suppression on his part. If I laid the mine under his feet before I approached him, and if I left instructions with a
third person to fire it on the expiration of a certain time, unless directions to the contrary were previously received
under my own hand, or from my own lips--in that event the Count's security was absolutely dependent upon mine,
and I might hold the vantage ground over him securely, even in his own house.

This idea occurred to me when I was close to the new lodgings which we had taken on returning from the sea-
side. I went in without disturbing any one, by the help of my key. A light was in the hall, and I stole up with it to my
workroom to make my preparations, and absolutely to commit myself to an interview with the Count, before either
Laura or Marian could have the slightest suspicion of what I intended to do.

A letter addressed to Pesca represented the surest measure of precaution which it was now possible for me to
take. I wrote as follows--

"The man whom I pointed out to you at the Opera is a member of the Brotherhood, and has been false to his
trust. Put both these assertions to the test instantly. You know the name he goes by in England. His address is No. 5
Forest Road, St. John's Wood. On the love you once bore me, use the power entrusted to you without mercy and
without delay against that man. I have risked all and lost all--and the forfeit of my failure has been paid with my
life."

I signed and dated these lines, enclosed them in an envelope, and sealed it up. On the outside I wrote this
direction: "Keep the enclosure unopened until nine o'clock to-morrow morning. If you do not hear from me, or see
me, before that time, break the seal when the clock strikes, and read the contents." I added my initials, and protected
the whole by enclosing it in a second sealed envelope, addressed to Pesca at his lodgings.

Nothing remained to be done after this but to find the means of sending my letter to its destination immediately.
I should then have accomplished all that lay in my power. If anything happened to me in the Count's house, I had
now provided for his answering it with his life.

That the means of preventing his escape, under any circumstances whatever, were at Pesca's disposal, if he chose
to exert them, I did not for an instant doubt. The extraordinary anxiety which he had expressed to remain
unenlightened as to the Count's identity-- or, in other words, to be left uncertain enough about facts to justify him to
his own conscience in remaining passive--betrayed plainly that the means of exercising the terrible justice of the
Brotherhood were ready to his hand, although, as a naturally humane man, he had shrunken from plainly saying as
much in my presence. The deadly certainty with which the vengeance of foreign political societies can hunt down a
traitor to the cause, hide himself where he may, go where he might, have been too often exemplified, even in my superficial experience,
to allow of any doubt. Considering the subject only as a reader of newspapers, cases recurred to my memory, both in
London and in Paris, of foreigners found stabbed in the streets, whose assassins could never be traced--of bodies and
parts of bodies thrown into the Thames and the Seine, by hands that could never be discovered--of deaths by secret
violence which could only be accounted for in one way. I have disguised nothing relating to myself in these pages,
and I do not disguise here that I believed I had written Count Fosco's death-warrant, if the fatal emergency happened
which authorised Pesca to open my enclosure.

I left my room to go down to the ground floor of the house, and speak to the landlord about finding me a
messenger. He happened to be ascending the stairs at the time, and we met on the landing. His son, a quick lad, was
the messenger he proposed to me on hearing what I wanted. We had the boy upstairs, and I gave him his directions.
He was to take the letter in a cab, to put it into Professor Pesca's own hands, and to bring me back a line of
acknowledgment from that gentleman--returning in the cab, and keeping it at the door for my use. It was then nearly
half-past ten. I calculated that the boy might be back in twenty minutes, and that I might drive to St. John's Wood,
on his return, in twenty minutes more.
When the lad had departed on his errand I returned to my own room for a little while, to put certain papers in order, so that they might be easily found in case of the worst. The key of the old-fashioned bureau in which the papers were kept I sealed up, and left it on my table, with Marian's name written on the outside of the little packet. This done, I went downstairs to the sitting-room, in which I expected to find Laura and Marian awaiting my return from the Opera. I felt my hand trembling for the first time when I laid it on the lock of the door.

No one was in the room but Marian. She was reading, and she looked at her watch, in surprise, when I came in.

"How early you are back!" she said. "You must have come away before the Opera was over."

"Yes," I replied, "neither Pesca nor I waited for the end. Where is Laura?"

"She had one of her bad headaches this evening, and I advised her to go to bed when we had done tea."

I left the room again on the pretext of wishing to see whether Laura was asleep. Marian's quick eyes were beginning to look inquiringly at my face--Marian's quick instinct was beginning to discover that I had something weighing on my mind.

When I entered the bedchamber, and softly approached the bedside by the dim flicker of the night-lamp, my wife was asleep.

We had not been married quite a month yet. If my heart was heavy, if my resolution for a moment faltered again, when I looked at her face turned faithfully to my pillow in her sleep--when I saw her hand resting open on the coverlid, as if it was waiting unconsciously for mine--surely there was some excuse for me? I only allowed myself a few minutes to kneel down at the bedside, and to look close at her--so close that her breath, as it came and went, fluttered on my face. I only touched her hand and her cheek with my lips at parting. She stirred in her sleep and murmured my name, but without waking. I lingered for an instant at the door to look at her again. "God bless and keep you, my darling!" I whispered, and left her.

Marian was at the stairhead waiting for me. She had a folded slip of paper in her hand.

"The landlord's son has brought this for you," she said. "He has got a cab at the door--he says you ordered him to keep it at your disposal."

"Quite right, Marian. I want the cab--I am going out again."

I descended the stairs as I spoke, and looked into the sitting-room to read the slip of paper by the light on the table. It contained these two sentences in Pesca's handwriting--

"Your letter is received. If I don't see you before the time you mention, I will break the seal when the clock strikes."

I placed the paper in my pocket-book, and made for the door. Marian met me on the threshold, and pushed me back into the room, where the candle-light fell full on my face. She held me by both hands, and her eyes fastened searchingly on mine.

"I see!" she said, in a low eager whisper. "You are trying the last chance to-night."

"Yes, the last chance and the best," I whispered back.

"Not alone! Oh, Walter, for God's sake, not alone! Let me go with you. Don't refuse me because I'm only a woman. I must go! I will go! I'll wait outside in the cab!"

It was my turn now to hold HER. She tried to break away from me and get down first to the door.

"If you want to help me," I said, "stop here and sleep in my wife's room to-night. Only let me go away with my mind easy about Laura, and I answer for everything else. Come, Marian, give me a kiss, and show that you have the courage to wait till I come back."

I dared not allow her time to say a word more. She tried to hold me again. I unclasped her hands, and was out of the room in a moment. The boy below heard me on the stairs, and opened the hall-door. I jumped into the cab before the driver could get off the box. "Forest Road, St. John's Wood," I called to him through the front window. "Double fare if you get there in a quarter of an hour." "I'll do it, sir." I looked at my watch. Eleven o'clock. Not a minute to lose.

The rapid motion of the cab, the sense that every instant now was bringing me nearer to the Count, the conviction that I was embarked at last, without let or hindrance, on my hazardous enterprise, heated me into such a fever of excitement that I shouted to the man to go faster and faster. As we left the streets, and crossed St. John's Wood Road, my impatience so completely overpowered me that I stood up in the cab and stretched my head out of the window, to see the end of the journey before we reached it. Just as a church clock in the distance struck the quarter past, we turned into the Forest Road. I stopped the driver a little away from the Count's house, paid and dismissed him, and walked on to the door.

As I approached the garden gate, I saw another person advancing towards it also from the direction opposite to mine. We met under the gas lamp in the road, and looked at each other. I instantly recognised the light-haired foreigner with the scar on his cheek, and I thought he recognised me. He said nothing, and instead of stopping at the house, as I did, he slowly walked on. Was he in the Forest Road by accident? Or had he followed the Count home
from the Opera?

I did not pursue those questions. After waiting a little till the foreigner had slowly passed out of sight, I rang the
gate bell. It was then twenty minutes past eleven--late enough to make it quite easy for the Count to get rid of me by
the excuse that he was in bed.

The only way of providing against this contingency was to send in my name without asking any preliminary
questions, and to let him know, at the same time, that I had a serious motive for wishing to see him at that late hour.
Accordingly, while I was waiting, I took out my card and wrote under my name "On important business." The maid-
servant answered the door while I was writing the last word in pencil, and asked me distrustfully what I "pleased to
want."

"Be so good as to take that to your master," I replied, giving her the card.

I saw, by the girl's hesitation of manner, that if I had asked for the Count in the first instance she would only
have followed her instructions by telling me he was not at home. She was staggered by the confidence with which I
gave her the card. After staring at me, in great perturbation, she went back into the house with my message, closing
the door, and leaving me to wait in the garden.

In a minute or so she reappeared. "Her master's compliments, and would I be so obliging as to say what my
business was?" "Take my compliments back," I replied, "and say that the business cannot be mentioned to any one
but your master." She left me again, again returned, and this time asked me to walk in.

I followed her at once. In another moment I was inside the Count's house.

There was no lamp in the hall, but by the dim light of the kitchen candle, which the girl had brought upstairs
with her, I saw an elderly lady steal noiselessly out of a back room on the ground floor. She cast one viperish look at
me as I entered the hall, but said nothing, and went slowly upstairs without returning my bow. My familiarity with
Marian's journal sufficiently assured me that the elderly lady was Madame Fosco.

The servant led me to the room which the Countess had just left. I entered it, and found myself face to face with
the Count.

He was still in his evening dress, except his coat, which he had thrown across a chair. His shirt-sleeves were
turned up at the wrists, but no higher. A carpet-bag was on one side of him, and a box on the other. Books, papers,
and articles of wearing apparel were scattered about the room. On a table, at one side of the door, stood the cage, so
well known to me by description, which contained his white mice. The canaries and the cockatoo were probably in
some other room. He was seated before the box, packing it, when I went in, and rose with some papers in his hand to
receive me. His face still betrayed plain traces of the shock that had overwhelmed him at the Opera. His fat cheeks
hung loose, his cold grey eyes were furtively vigilant, his voice, look, and manner were all sharply suspicious alike,
as he advanced a step to meet me, and requested, with distant civility, that I would take a chair.

"You come here on business, sir?" he said. "I am at a loss to know what that business can possibly be."

The unconcealed curiosity, with which he looked hard in my face while he spoke, convinced me that I had
passed unnoticed by him at the Opera. He had seen Pesca first, and from that moment till he left the theatre he had
evidently seen nothing else. My name would necessarily suggest to him that I had not come into his house with other
than a hostile purpose towards himself, but he appeared to be utterly ignorant thus far of the real nature of my
errand.

"I am fortunate in finding you here to-night," I said. "You seem to be on the point of taking a journey?"

"Is your business connected with my journey?"

"In some degree."

"In what degree? Do you know where I am going to?"

"No. I only know why you are leaving London."

He slipped by me with the quickness of thought, locked the door, and put the key in his pocket.

"You and I, Mr. Hartright, are excellently well acquainted with one another by reputation," he said. "Did it, by
any chance, occur to you when you came to this house that I was not the sort of man you could trifle with?"

"It did occur to me," I replied. "And I have not come to trifle with you. I am here on a matter of life and death,
and if that door which you have locked was open at this moment, nothing you could say or do would induce me to
pass through it."

I walked farther into the room, and stood opposite to him on the rug before the fireplace. He drew a chair in front
of the door, and sat down on it, with his left arm resting on the table. The cage with the white mice was close to him,
and the little creatures scampered out of their sleeping-place as his heavy arm shook the table, and peered at him
through the gaps in the smartly painted wires.

"On a matter of life and death," he repeated to himself. "Those words are more serious, perhaps, than you think.
What do you mean?"
"What I say."

The perspiration broke out thickly on his broad forehead. His left hand stole over the edge of the table. There was a drawer in it, with a lock, and the key was in the lock. His finger and thumb closed over the key, but did not turn it.

"So you know why I am leaving London?" he went on. "Tell me the reason, if you please." He turned the key, and unlocked the drawer as he spoke.

"I can do better than that," I replied. "I can SHOW you the reason, if you like."

"How can you show it?"

"You have got your coat off," I said. "Roll up the shirt-sleeve on your left arm, and you will see it there."

The same livid leaden change passed over his face which I had seen pass over it at the theatre. The deadly glitter in his eyes shone steady and straight into mine. He said nothing. But his left hand slowly opened the table-drawer, and softly slipped into it. The harsh grating noise of something heavy that he was moving unseen to me sounded for a moment, then ceased. The silence that followed was so intense that the faint ticking nibble of the white mice at their wires was distinctly audible where I stood.

My life hung by a thread, and I knew it. At that final moment I thought with HIS mind, I felt with HIS fingers--I was as certain as if I had seen it of what he kept hidden from me in the drawer.

"Wait a little," I said. "You have got the door locked--you see I don't move--you see my hands are empty. Wait a little. I have something more to say."

"You have said enough," he replied, with a sudden composure so unnatural and so ghastly that it tried my nerves as no outbreak of violence could have tried them. "I want one moment for my own thoughts, if you please. Do you guess what I am thinking about?"

"Perhaps I do."

"I am thinking," he remarked quietly, "whether I shall add to the disorder in this room by scattering your brains about the fireplace."

If I had moved at that moment, I saw in his face that he would have done it.

"I advise you to read two lines of writing which I have about me," I rejoined, "before you finally decide that question."

The proposal appeared to excite his curiosity. He nodded his head. I took Pesca's acknowledgment of the receipt of my letter out of my pocket-book, handed it to him at arm's length, and returned to my former position in front of the fireplace.

He read the lines aloud: "Your letter is received. If I don't hear from you before the time you mention, I will break the seal when the clock strikes."

Another man in his position would have needed some explanation of those words--the Count felt no such necessity. One reading of the note showed him the precaution that I had taken as plainly as if he had been present at the time when I adopted it. The expression of his face changed on the instant, and his hand came out of the drawer empty.

"I don't lock up my drawer, Mr. Hartright," he said, "and I don't say that I may not scatter your brains about the fireplace yet. But I am a just man even to my enemy, and I will acknowledge beforehand that they are cleverer brains than I thought them. Come to the point, sir! You want something of me?"

"I do, and I mean to have it."

"On conditions?"

"On no conditions."

His hand dropped into the drawer again.

"Bah! we are travelling in a circle," he said, "and those clever brains of yours are in danger again. Your tone is deplorably imprudent, sir--moderate it on the spot! The risk of shooting you on the spot--moderate it on the spot! The risk of shooting you on the place where you stand is less to me than the risk of letting you out of this house, except on conditions that I dictate and approve. You have not got my lamented friend to deal with now--you are face to face with Fosco! If the lives of twenty Mr. Hartrights were the stepping-stones to my safety, over all those stones I would go, sustained by my sublime indifference, self-balanced by my impenetrable calm. Respect me, if you love your own life! I summon you to answer three questions before you open your lips again. Hear them--they are necessary to this interview. Answer them--they are necessary to ME." He held up one finger of his right hand. "First question!" he said. "You come here possessed of information which may be true or may be false--where did you get it?"

"I decline to tell you."

"No matter--I shall find out. If that information is true--mind I say, with the whole force of my resolution, if--you are making your market of it here by treachery of your own or by treachery of some other man. I note that circumstance for future use in my memory, which forgets nothing, and proceed." He held up another finger. "Second
question! Those lines you invited me to read are without signature. Who wrote them?"

"A man whom I have every reason to depend on, and whom you have every reason to fear."

My answer reached him to some purpose. His left hand trembled audibly in the drawer.

"How long do you give me," he asked, putting his third question in a quieter tone, "before the clock strikes and the seal is broken?"

"Time enough for you to come to my terms," I replied.

"Give me a plainer answer, Mr. Hartright. What hour is the clock to strike?"

"Nine, to-morrow morning."

"Nine, to-morrow morning? Yes, yes--your trap is laid for me before I can get my passport regulated and leave London. It is not earlier, I suppose? We will see about that presently--I can keep you hostage here, and bargain with you to send for your letter before I let you go. In the meantime, be so good next as to mention your terms."

"You shall hear them. They are simple, and soon stated. You know whose interests I represent in coming here?"

He smiled with the most supreme composure, and carelessly waved his right hand.

"I consent to hazard a guess," he said jeeringly. "A lady's interests, of course!"

"My Wife's interests."

He looked at me with the first honest expression that had crossed his face in my presence--an expression of blank amazement. I could see that I sank in his estimation as a dangerous man from that moment. He shut up the drawer at once, folded his arms over his breast, and listened to me with a smile of satirical attention.

"You are well enough aware," I went on, "of the course which my inquiries have taken for many months past, to know that any attempted denial of plain facts will be quite useless in my presence. You are guilty of an infamous conspiracy! And the gain of a fortune of ten thousand pounds was your motive for it."

He said nothing. But his face became overclouded suddenly by a lowering anxiety.

"Keep your gain," I said. (His face lightened again immediately, and his eyes opened on me in wider and wider astonishment.) "I am not here to disgrace myself by bargaining for money which has passed through your hands, and which has been the price of a vile crime.

"Gently, Mr. Hartright. Your moral clap-traps have an excellent effect in England--keep them for yourself and your own countrymen, if you please. The ten thousand pounds was a legacy left to my excellent wife by the late Mr. Fairlie. Place the affair on those grounds, and I will discuss it if you like. To a man of my sentiments, however, the subject is deplorably sordid. I prefer to pass it over. I invite you to resume the discussion of your terms. What do you demand?"

"In the first place, I demand a full confession of the conspiracy, written and signed in my presence by yourself."

He raised his finger again. "One!" he said, checking me off with the steady attention of a practical man.

"In the second place, I demand a plain proof, which does not depend on your personal asseveration, of the date at which my wife left Blackwater Park and travelled to London."

"So! so! you can lay your finger, I see, on the weak place," he remarked composedly. "Any more?"

"At present, no more."

"Good! you have mentioned your terms, now listen to mine. The responsibility to myself of admitting what you are pleased to call the 'conspiracy' is less, perhaps, upon the whole, than the responsibility of laying you dead on that hearthrug. Let us say that I meet your proposal--on my own conditions. The statement you demand of me shall be written, and the plain proof shall be produced. You call a letter from my late lamented friend informing me of the day and hour of his wife's arrival in London, written, signed, and dated by himself, a proof, I suppose? I can give you this. I can also send you to the man of whom I hired the carriage to fetch my visitor from the railway, on the day when she arrived--his order-book may help you to your date, even if his coachman who drove me proves to be of no use. These things I can do, and will do, on conditions. I recite them. First condition! Madame Fosco and I leave this house when and how we please, without interference of any kind on your part. Second condition! You wait here, in company with me, to see my agent, who is coming at seven o'clock in the morning to regulate my affairs. You give my agent a written order to the man who has got your sealed letter to resign his possession of it. You wait here till my agent places that letter unopened in my hands, and you then allow me one clear half-hour to leave the house--after which you resume your own freedom of action and go where you please. Third condition! You give me the satisfaction of a gentleman for your intrusion into my private affairs, and for the language you have allowed yourself to use to me at this conference. The time and place, abroad, to be fixed in a letter from my hand when I am safe on the Continent, and that letter to contain a strip of paper measuring accurately the length of my sword. Those are my terms. Inform me if you accept them--Yes or No."

The extraordinary mixture of prompt decision, far-sighted cunning, and mountebank bravado in this speech, staggered me for a moment--and only for a moment. The one question to consider was, whether I was justified or not in possessing myself of the means of establishing Laura's identity at the cost of allowing the scoundrel who had
robbed her of it to escape me with impunity. I knew that the motive of securing the just recognition of my wife in
the birthplace from which she had been driven out as an impostor, and of publicly erasing the lie that still profaned
her mother's tombstone, was far purer, in its freedom from all taint of evil passion, than the vindictive motive which
had mingled itself with my purpose from the first. And yet I cannot honestly say that my own moral convictions
were strong enough to decide the struggle in me by themselves. They were helped by my remembrance of Sir
Percival's death. How awfully, at the last moment, had the working of the retribution THERE been snatched from
my feeble hands! What right had I to decide, in my poor mortal ignorance of the future, that this man, too, must
escape with impunity because he escaped ME? I thought of these things--perhaps with the superstition inherent in
my nature, perhaps with a sense worthier of me than superstition. It was hard, when I had fastened my hold on him
at last, to loosen it again of my own accord--but I forced myself to make the sacrifice. In plainer words, I determined
to be guided by the one higher motive of which I was certain, the motive of serving the cause of Laura and the cause
of Truth.

"I accept your conditions," I said. "With one reservation on my part."

"What reservation may that be?" he asked.

"It refers to the sealed letter," I answered. "I require you to destroy it unopened in my presence as soon as it is
placed in your hands."

My object in making this stipulation was simply to prevent him from carrying away written evidence of the
nature of my communication with Pesca. The fact of my communication he would necessarily discover, when I gave
the address to his agent in the morning. But he could make no use of it on his own unsupported testimony--even if
he really ventured to try the experiment--which need excite in me the slightest apprehension on Pesca's account.

"I grant your reservation," he replied, after considering the question gravely for a minute or two. "It is not worth
dispute--the letter shall be destroyed when it comes into my hands."

He rose, as he spoke, from the chair in which he had been sitting opposite to me up to this time. With one effort
he appeared to free his mind from the whole pressure on it of the interview between us thus far. "Ouf!" he cried,
stretching his arms luxuriously, "the skirmish was hot while it lasted. Take a seat, Mr. Hartright. We meet as mortal
enemies hereafter--let us, like gallant gentlemen, exchange polite attentions in the meantime. Permit me to take the
liberty of calling for my wife."

He unlocked and opened the door. "Eleanor!" he called out in his deep voice. The lady of the vipers-face came
in "Madame Fosco-- Mr. Hartright," said the Count, introducing us with easy dignity. "My angel," he went on,
addressing his wife, "will your labours of packing up allow you time to make me some nice strong coffee? I have
writing business to transact with Mr. Hartright--and I require the full possession of my intelligence to do justice to
myself."

Madame Fosco bowed her head twice--once sternly to me, once submissively to her husband, and glided out of
the room.

The Count walked to a writing-table near the window, opened his desk, and took from it several quires of paper
and a bundle of quill pens. He scattered the pens about the table, so that they might lie ready in all directions to be
taken up when wanted, and then cut the paper into a heap of narrow slips, of the form used by professional writers
for the press. "I shall make this a remarkable document," he said, looking at me over his shoulder. "Habits of literary
composition are perfectly familiar to me. One of the rarest of all the intellectual accomplishments that a man can
possess is the grand faculty of arranging his ideas. Immense privilege! I possess it. Do you?"

He marched backwards and forwards in the room, until the coffee appeared, humming to himself, and marking
the places at which obstacles occurred in the arrangement of his ideas, by striking his forehead from time to time
with the palm of his hand. The enormous audacity with which he seized on the situation in which I placed him, and
made it the pedestal on which his vanity mounted for the one cherished purpose of self-display, mastered my
astonishment by main force. Sincerely as I loathed the man, the prodigious strength of his character, even in its most
trivial aspects, impressed me in spite of myself.

The coffee was brought in by Madame Fosco. He kissed her hand in grateful acknowledgment, and escorted her
to the door; returned, poured out a cup of coffee for himself, and took it to the writing-table.

"May I offer you some coffee, Mr. Hartright?" he said, before he sat down.

I declined.

"What! you think I shall poison you?" he said gaily. "The English intellect is sound, so far as it goes," he
continued, seating himself at the table; "but it has one grave defect--it is always cautious in the wrong place."

He dipped his pen in the ink, placed the first slip of paper before him with a thump of his hand on the desk,
cleared his throat, and began. He wrote with great noise and rapidity, in so large and bold a hand, and with such
wide spaces between the lines, that he reached the bottom of the slip in not more than two minutes certainly from the
time when he started at the top. Each slip as he finished it was paged, and tossed over his shoulder out of his way on
the floor. When his first pen was worn out, THAT went over his shoulder too, and he pounced on a second from the supply scattered about the table. Slip after slip, by dozens, by fifties, by hundreds, flew over his shoulders on either side of him till he had snowed himself up in paper all round his chair. Hour after hour passed--and there I sat watching, there he sat writing. He never stopped, except to sip his coffee, and when that was exhausted, to smack his forehead from time to time. One o'clock struck, two, three, four--and still the slips flew about all round him; still the untiring pen scraped its way ceaselessly from top to bottom of the page, still the white chaos of paper rose higher and higher all round his chair. At four o'clock I heard a sudden splutter of the pen, indicative of the flourish with which he signed his name. "Bravo!" he cried, springing to his feet with the activity of a young man, and looking me straight in the face with a smile of superb triumph.

"Done, Mr. Hartright!" he announced with a self-renovating thump of his fist on his broad breast. "Done, to my own profound satisfaction--to YOUR profound astonishment, when you read what I have written. The subject is exhausted: the man--Fosco--is not. I proceed to the arrangement of my slips--to the revision of my slips--to the reading of my slips--addressed emphatically to your private ear. Four o'clock has just struck. Good! Arrangement, revision, reading, from four to five. Short snooze of restoration for myself from five to six. Final preparations from six to seven. Affair of agent and sealed letter from seven to eight. At eight, en route. Behold the programme!"

He sat down cross-legged on the floor among his papers, strung them together with a bodkin and a piece of string--revised them, wrote all the titles and honours by which he was personally distinguished at the head of the first page, and then read the manuscript to me with loud theatrical emphasis and profuse theatrical gesticulation. The reader will have an opportunity, ere long, of forming his own opinion of the document. It will be sufficient to mention here that it answered my purpose.

He next wrote me the address of the person from whom he had hired the fly, and handed me Sir Percival's letter. It was dated from Hampshire on the 25th of July, and it announced the journey of "Lady Glyde" to London on the 26th. Thus, on the very day (the 25th) when the doctor's certificate declared that she had died in St. John's Wood, she was alive, by Sir Percival's own showing, at Blackwater--and, on the day after, she was to take a journey! When the proof of that journey was obtained from the flyman, the evidence would be complete.

"A quarter-past five," said the Count, looking at his watch. "Time for my restorative snooze. I personally resemble Napoleon the Great, as you may have remarked, Mr. Hartright--I also resemble that immortal man in my power of commanding sleep at will. Excuse me one moment. I will summon Madame Fosco, to keep you from feeling dull."

Knowing as well as he did, that he was summoning Madame Fosco to ensure my not leaving the house while he was asleep, I made no reply, and occupied myself in tying up the papers which he had placed in my possession.

The lady came in, cool, pale, and venomous as ever. "Amuse Mr. Hartright, my angel," said the Count. He placed a chair for her, kissed her hand for the second time, withdrew to a sofa, and, in three minutes, was as peacefully and happily asleep as the most virtuous man in existence.

Madame Fosco took a book from the table, sat down, and looked at me, with the steady vindictive malice of a woman who never forgot and never forgave.

"I have been listening to your conversation with my husband," she said. "If I had been in HIS place--I would have laid you dead on the hearthrug."

With those words she opened her book, and never looked at me or spoke to me from that time till the time when her husband woke.

He opened his eyes and rose from the sofa, accurately to an hour from the time when he had gone to sleep.

"I feel infinitely refreshed," he remarked. "Eleanor, my good wife, are you all ready upstairs? That is well. My little packing here can be completed in ten minutes--my travelling-dress assumed in ten minutes more. What remains before the agent comes?" He looked about the room, and noticed the cage with his white mice in it. "Ah!" he cried piteously, "a last laceration of my sympathies still remains. My innocent pets! my little cherished children! what am I to do with them? For the present we are settled nowhere; for the present we travel incessantly--the less baggage we carry the better for ourselves. My cockatoo, my canaries, and my little mice--who will cherish them when their good Papa is gone?"

He walked about the room deep in thought. He had not been at all troubled about writing his confession, but he was visibly perplexed and distressed about the far more important question of the disposal of his pets. After long consideration he suddenly sat down again at the writing-table.

"An idea!" he exclaimed. "I will offer my canaries and my cockatoo to this vast Metropolis--my agent shall present them in my name to the Zoological Gardens of London. The Document that describes them shall be drawn out on the spot."

He began to write, repeating the words as they flowed from his pen.

"Number one. Cockatoo of transcendent plumage: attraction, of himself, to all visitors of taste. Number two.
Canaries of unrivalled vivacity and intelligence: worthy of the garden of Eden, worthy also of the garden in the Regent's Park. Homage to British Zoology. Offered by Fosco."

"Count! you have not included the mice," said Madame Fosco

He left the table, took her hand, and placed it on his heart.

"All human resolution, Eleanor," he said solemnly, "has its limits. MY limits are inscribed on that Document. I cannot part with my white mice. Bear with me, my angel, and remove them to their travelling cage upstairs."

"Admirable tenderness!" said Madame Fosco, admiring her husband, with a last viperish look in my direction.

She took up the cage carefully, and left the room.

The Count looked at his watch. In spite of his resolute assumption of composure, he was getting anxious for the agent's arrival. The candles had long since been extinguished, and the sunlight of the new morning poured into the room. It was not till five minutes past seven that the gate bell rang, and the agent made his appearance. He was a foreigner with a dark beard.

"Mr. Hartright--Monsieur Rubelle," said the Count, introducing us. He took the agent (a foreign spy, in every line of his face, if ever there was one yet) into a corner of the room, whispered some directions to him, and then left us together. "Monsieur Rubelle," as soon as we were alone, suggested with great politeness that I should favour him with his instructions. I wrote two lines to Pesca, authorising him to deliver my sealed letter "to the bearer," directed the note, and handed it to Monsieur Rubelle.

The agent waited with me till his employer returned, equipped in travelling costume. The Count examined the address of my letter before he dismissed the agent. "I thought so!" he said, turning on me with a dark look, and altering again in his manner from that moment.

He completed his packing, and then sat consulting a travelling map, making entries in his pocket-book, and looking every now and then impatiently at his watch. Not another word, addressed to myself, passed his lips. The near approach of the hour for his departure, and the proof he had seen of the communication established between Pesca and myself, had plainly recalled his whole attention to the measures that were necessary for securing his escape.

A little before eight o'clock, Monsieur Rubelle came back with my unopened letter in his hand. The Count looked carefully at the superscription and the seal, lit a candle, and burnt the letter. "I perform my promise," he said, "but this matter, Mr. Hartright, shall not end here."

The agent had kept at the door the cab in which he had returned. He and the maid-servant now busied themselves in removing the luggage. Madame Fosco came downstairs, thickly veiled, with the travelling cage of the white mice in her hand. She neither spoke to me nor looked towards me. Her husband escorted her to the cab. "Follow me as far as the passage," he whispered in my ear; "I may want to speak to you at the last moment."

I went out to the door, the agent standing below me in the front garden. The Count came back alone, and drew me a few steps inside the passage.

"Remember the Third condition!" he whispered. "You shall hear from me, Mr. Hartright--I may claim from you the satisfaction of a gentleman sooner than you think for." He caught my hand before I was aware of him, and wrung it hard--then turned to the door, stopped, and came back to me again.

"One word more," he said confidentially. "When I last saw Miss Halcombe, she looked thin and ill. I am anxious about that admirable woman. Take care of her, sir! With my hand on my heart, I solemnly implore you, take care of Miss Halcombe!"

Those were the last words he said to me before he squeezed his huge body into the cab and drove off.

The agent and I waited at the door a few moments looking after him. While we were standing together, a second cab appeared from a turning a little way down the road. It followed the direction previously taken by the Count's cab, and as it passed the house and the open garden gate, a person inside looked at us out of the window. The stranger at the Opera again!--the foreigner with a scar on his left cheek.

"You wait here with me, sir, for half an hour more!" said Monsieur Rubelle.

"I do."

We returned to the sitting-room. I was in no humour to speak to the agent, or to allow him to speak to me. I took out the papers which the Count had placed in my hands, and read the terrible story of the conspiracy told by the man who had planned and perpetrated it.

THE STORY CONTINUED BY ISIDOR, OTTAVIO, BALDASSARE FOSCO

(Count of the Holy Roman Empire, Knight Grand Cross of the Order of the Brazen Crown, Perpetual Arch-Master of the Rosicrucian Masons of Mesopotamia; Attached (in Honorary Capacities) to Societies Musical, Societies Medical, Societies Philosophical, and Societies General Benevolent, throughout Europe; etc. etc. etc.)

THE COUNT'S NARRATIVE
In the summer of eighteen hundred and fifty I arrived in England, charged with a delicate political mission from abroad. Confidential persons were semi-officially connected with me, whose exertions I was authorised to direct, Monsieur and Madame Rubelle being among the number. Some weeks of spare time were at my disposal, before I entered on my functions by establishing myself in the suburbs of London. Curiosity may stop here to ask for some explanation of those functions on my part. I entirely sympathise with the request. I also regret that diplomatic reserve forbids me to comply with it.

I arranged to pass the preliminary period of repose, to which I have just referred, in the superb mansion of my late lamented friend, Sir Percival Glyde. HE arrived from the Continent with his wife. I arrived from the Continent with MINE. England is the land of domestic happiness—how appropriately we entered it under these domestic circumstances!

The bond of friendship which united Percival and myself was strengthened, on this occasion, by a touching similarity in the pecuniary position on his side and on mine. We both wanted money. Immense necessity! Universal want! Is there a civilised human being who does not feel for us? How insensible must that man be! Or how rich!

I enter no sordid particulars, in discussing this part of the subject. My mind recoils from them. With a Roman austerity, I show my empty purse and Percival's to the shrinking public gaze. Let us allow the deplorable fact to assert itself, once for all, in that manner, and pass on.

We were received at the mansion by the magnificent creature who is inscribed on my heart as "Marian," who is known in the colder atmosphere of society as "Miss Halcombe."

Just Heaven! with what inconceivable rapidity I learnt to adore that woman. At sixty, I worshipped her with the volcanic ardour of eighteen. All the gold of my rich nature was poured hopelessly at her feet. My wife—poor angel!—my wife, who adores me, got nothing but the shillings and the pennies. Such is the World, such Man, such Love. What are we (I ask) but puppets in a show-box? Oh, omnipotent Destiny, pull our strings gently! Dance us mercifully off our miserable little stage!

The preceding lines, rightly understood, express an entire system of philosophy. It is mine.

I resume.

The domestic position at the commencement of our residence at Blackwater Park has been drawn with amazing accuracy, with profound mental insight, by the hand of Marian herself. (Pass me the intoxicating familiarity of mentioning this sublime creature by her Christian name.) Accurate knowledge of the contents of her journal—to which I obtained access by clandestine means, unspeakably precious to me in the remembrance—warns my eager pen from topics which this essentially exhaustive woman has already made her own.

The interests—interests, breathless and immense!—with which I am here concerned, begin with the deplorable calamity of Marian's illness.

The situation at this period was emphatically a serious one. Large sums of money, due at a certain time, were wanted by Percival (I say nothing of the modicum equally necessary to myself), and the one source to look to for supplying them was the fortune of his wife, of which not one farthing was at his disposal until her death. Bad so far, and worse still farther on. My lamented friend had private troubles of his own, into which the delicacy of my disinterested attachment to him forbade me from inquiring too curiously. I knew nothing but that a woman, named Anne Catherick, was hidden in the neighbourhood, that she was in communication with Lady Glyde, and that the disclosure of a secret, which would be the certain ruin of Percival, might be the result. He had told me himself that he was a lost man, unless his wife was silenced, and unless Anne Catherick was found. If he was a lost man, what would become of our pecuniary interests? Courageous as I am by nature, I absolutely trembled at the idea!

The whole force of my intelligence was now directed to the finding of Anne Catherick. Our money affairs, important as they were, admitted of delay—but the necessity of discovering the woman admitted of none. I only knew her by description, as presenting an extraordinary personal resemblance to Lady Glyde. The statement of this curious fact—intended merely to assist me in identifying the person of whom we were in search—when coupled with the additional information that Anne Catherick had escaped from a mad-house, started the first immense conception in my mind, which subsequently led to such amazing results. That conception involved nothing less than the complete transformation of two separate identities. Lady Glyde and Anne Catherick were to change names, places, and destinies, the one with the other—the prodigious consequences contemplated by the change being the gain of thirty thousand pounds, and the eternal preservation of Sir Percival's secret.

My instincts (which seldom err) suggested to me, on reviewing the circumstances, that our invisible Anne would, sooner or later, return to the boat-house at the Blackwater lake. There I posted myself, previously mentioning to Mrs. Michelson, the housekeeper, that I might be found when wanted, immersed in study, in that solitary place. It is my rule never to make unnecessary mysteries, and never to set people suspecting me for want of a little seasonable candour on my part. Mrs. Michelson believed in me from first to last. This ladylike person (widow of a Protestant priest) overflowed with faith. Touched by such superfluity of simple confidence in a woman of her
mature years, I opened the ample reservoirs of my nature and absorbed it all.

I was rewarded for posting myself sentinel at the lake by the appearance—not of Anne Catherick herself, but of the person in charge of her. This individual also overflowed with simple faith, which I absorbed in myself, as in the case already mentioned. I leave her to describe the circumstances (if she has not done so already) under which she introduced me to the object of her maternal care. When I first saw Anne Catherick she was asleep. I was electrified by the likeness between this unhappy woman and Lady Glyde. The details of the grand scheme which had suggested themselves in outline only, up to that period, occurred to me, in all their masterly combination, at the sight of the sleeping face. At the same time, my heart, always accessible to tender influences, dissolved in tears at the spectacle of suffering before me. I instantly set myself to impart relief. In other words, I provided the necessary stimulant for strengthening Anne Catherick to perform the journey to London.

The best years of my life have been passed in the ardent study of medical and chemical science. Chemistry especially has always had irresistible attractions for me from the enormous, the illimitable power which the knowledge of it confers. Chemists—I assert it emphatically—might sway, if they pleased, the destinies of humanity. Let me explain this before I go further.

Mind, they say, rules the world. But what rules the mind? The body (follow me closely here) lies at the mercy of the most omnipotent of all potentates—the Chemist. Give me—Fosco—chemistry; and when Shakespeare has conceived Hamlet, and sits down to execute the conception—with a few grains of powder dropped into his daily food, I will reduce his mind, by the action of his body, till his pen pours out the most abject drivel that has ever degraded paper. Under similar circumstances, revive me the illustrious Newton. I guarantee that when he sees the apple fall he shall EAT IT, instead of discovering the principle of gravitation. Nero's dinner shall transform Nero into the mildest of men before he has done digesting it, and the morning draught of Alexander the Great shall make Alexander run for his life at the first sight of the enemy the same afternoon. On my sacred word of honour it is lucky for Society that modern chemists are, by incomprehensible good fortune, the most harmless of mankind. The mass are worthy fathers of families, who keep shops. The few are philosophers besotted with admiration for the sound of their own lecturing voices, visionaries who waste their lives on fantastic impossibilities, or quacks whose ambition soars no higher than our corns. Thus Society escapes, and the illimitable power of Chemistry remains the slave of the most superficial and the most insignificant ends.

Why this outburst? Why this withering eloquence?

Because my conduct has been misrepresented, because my motives have been misunderstood. It has been assumed that I used my vast chemical resources against Anne Catherick, and that I would have used them if I could against the magnificent Marian herself. Odious insinuations both! All my interests were concerned (as will be seen presently) in the preservation of Anne Catherick's life. All my anxieties were concentrated on Marian's rescue from the hands of the licensed imbecile who attended her, and who found my advice confirmed from first to last by the physician from London. On two occasions only—both equally harmless to the individual on whom I practised—did I summon to myself the assistance of chemical knowledge. On the first of the two, after following Marian to the inn at Blackwater (studying, behind a convenient waggon which hid me from her, the poetry of motion, as embodied in her walk), I availed myself of the services of my invaluable wife, to copy one and to intercept the other of two letters which my adored enemy had entrusted to a discarded maid. In this case, the letters being in the bosom of the girl's dress, Madame Fosco could only open them, read them, perform her instructions, seal them, and put them back again by scientific assistance—which assistance I rendered in a half-ounce bottle. The second occasion, when the same means were employed, was the occasion (to which I shall soon refer) of Lady Glyde's arrival in London. Never at any other time was I indebted to my Art as distinguished from myself. To all other emergencies and complications my natural capacity for grappling, single-handed, with circumstances, was invariably equal. I affirm the all-pervading intelligence of that capacity. At the expense of the Chemist I vindicate the Man.

Respect this outburst of generous indignation. It has inexpressibly relieved me. En route! Let us proceed.

Having suggested to Mrs. Clement (or Clements, I am not sure which) that the best method of keeping Anne out of Percival's reach was to remove her to London—having found that my proposal was eagerly received, and having appointed a day to meet the travellers at the station and to see them leave it, I was at liberty to return to the house and to confront the difficulties which still remained to be met.

My first proceeding was to avail myself of the sublime devotion of my wife. I had arranged with Mrs. Clements that she should communicate her London address, in Anne's interests, to Lady Glyde. But this was not enough. Designing persons in my absence might shake the simple confidence of Mrs. Clements, and she might not write after all. Who could I find capable of travelling to London by the train she travelled by, and of privately seeing her home? I asked myself this question. The conjugal part of me immediately answered—Madame Fosco.

After deciding on my wife's mission to London, I arranged that the journey should serve a double purpose. A nurse for the suffering Marian, equally devoted to the patient and to myself, was a necessity of my position. One of
the most eminently confidential and capable women in existence was by good fortune at my disposal. I refer to that
respectable matron, Madame Rubelle, to whom I addressed a letter, at her residence in London, by the hands of my
wife.

On the appointed day Mrs. Clements and Anne Catherick met me at the station. I politely saw them off, I politely
saw Madame Fosco off by the same train. The last thing at night my wife returned to Blackwater, having followed
her instructions with the most unimpeachable accuracy. She was accompanied by Madame Rubelle, and she brought
me the London address of Mrs. Clements. After- events proved this last precaution to have been unnecessary. Mrs.
Clements punctually informed Lady Glyde of her place of abode. With a wary eye on future emergencies, I kept the
letter.

The same day I had a brief interview with the doctor, at which I protested, in the sacred interests of humanity,
against his treatment of Marian's case. He was insolent, as all ignorant people are. I showed no resentment, I
defered quarrelling with him till it was necessary to quarrel to some purpose. My next proceeding was to leave
Blackwater myself. I had my London residence to take in anticipation of coming events. I had also a little business
of the domestic sort to transact with Mr. Frederick Fairlie. I found the house I wanted in St. John's Wood. I found
Mr. Fairlie at Limmeridge, Cumberland.

My own private familiarity with the nature of Marian's correspondence had previously informed me that she had
written to Mr. Fairlie, proposing, as a relief to Lady Glyde's matrimonial embarrassments, to take her on a visit to
her uncle in Cumberland. This letter I had wisely allowed to reach its destination, feeling at the time that it could do
no harm, and might do good. I now presented myself before Mr. Fairlie to support Marian's own proposal—with
certain modifications which, happily for the success of my plans, were rendered really inevitable by her illness. It
was necessary that Lady Glyde should leave Blackwater alone, by her uncle's invitation, and that she should rest a
night on the journey at her aunt's house (the house I had in St. John's Wood) by her uncle's express advice. To
achieve these results, and to secure a note of invitation which could be shown to Lady Glyde, were the objects of my
visit to Mr. Fairlie. When I have mentioned that this gentleman was equally feeble in mind and body, and that I let
loose the whole force of my character on him, I have said enough. I came, saw, and conquered Fairlie.

On my return to Blackwater Park (with the letter of invitation) I found that the doctor's imbecile treatment of
Marian's case had led to the most alarming results. The fever had turned to typhus. Lady Glyde, on the day of my
return, tried to force herself into the room to nurse her sister. She and I had no affinities of sympathy—she had
committed the unpardonable outrage on my sensibilities of calling me a spy—she was a stumbling-block in my way
and in Percival's—but, for all that, my magnanimity forbade me to put her in danger of infection with my own hand.
At the same time I offered no hindrance to her putting herself in danger. If she had succeeded in doing so, the
intricate knot which I was slowly and patiently operating on might perhaps have been cut by circumstances. As it
was, the doctor interfered and she was kept out of the room.

I had myself previously recommended sending for advice to London. This course had been now taken. The
physician, on his arrival, confirmed my view of the case. The crisis was serious. But we had hope of our charming
patient on the fifth day from the appearance of the typhus. I was only once absent from Blackwater at this time--
when I went to London by the morning train to make the final arrangements at my house in St. John's Wood, to
assure myself by private inquiry that Mrs. Clements had not moved, and to settle one or two little preliminary
matters with the husband of Madame Rubelle. I returned at night. Five days afterwards the physician pronounced
our interesting Marian to be out of all danger, and to be in need of nothing but careful nursing. This was the time I
had waited for. Now that medical attendance was no longer indispensable, I played the first move in the game by
asserting myself against the doctor. He was one among many witnesses in my way whom it was necessary to
remove. A lively altercation between us (in which Percival, previously instructed by me, refused to interfere) served
the purpose in view. I descended on the miserable man in an irresistible avalanche of indignation, and swept him
away. A lively altercation between us (in which Percival, previously instructed by me, refused to interfere) served
the purpose in view. I descended on the miserable man in an irresistible avalanche of indignation, and swept him
away.

The servants were the next encumbrances to get rid of. Again I instructed Percival (whose moral courage
required perpetual stimulants), and Mrs. Michelson was amazed, one day, by hearing from her master that the
establishment was to be broken up. We cleared the house of all the servants but one, who was kept for domestic
purposes, and whose lumpish stupidity we could trust to make no embarrassing discoveries. When they were gone,
nothing remained but to relieve ourselves of Mrs. Michelson—a result which was easily achieved by sending this
amiable lady to find lodgings for her mistress at the sea-side.

The circumstances were now exactly what they were required to be. Lady Glyde was confined to her room by
nervous illness, and the lumpish housemaid (I forget her name) was shut up there at night in attendance on her
mistress. Marian, though fast recovering, still kept her bed, with Mrs. Rubelle for nurse. No other living creatures
but my wife, myself, and Percival were in the house. With all the chances thus in our favour I confronted the next
emergency, and played the second move in the game.
On the way to Forest Road my companion showed no fear. I can be paternal--no man more so--when I please, and I was intensely paternal on this occasion. What titles I had to her confidence! I had compounded the medicine which had done her good--I had warned her of her danger from Sir Percival. Perhaps I trusted too implicitly to these titles--perhaps I underrated the keenness of the lower instincts in persons of weak intellect--it is certain that I neglected to prepare her sufficiently for a disappointment on entering my house. When I took her into the drawing-room--when she saw no one present but Madame Fosco, who was a stranger to her--she exhibited the most violent agitation; if she had scented danger in the air, as a dog scents the presence of some creature unseen, her alarm could not have displayed itself more suddenly and more causelessly. I interposed in vain. The fear from which she was suffering I might have soothed, but the serious heart-disease, under which she laboured, was beyond the reach of all moral palliatives. To my unspeakable horror she was seized with convulsions--a shock to the system, in her condition, which might have laid her dead at any moment at our feet.

The next morning my wife and I started for London, leaving Marian secluded, in the uninhabited middle of the house, under care of Madame Rubelle, who kindly consented to imprison herself with her patient for two or three days. Before taking our departure I gave Percival Mr. Fairlie's letter of invitation to his niece (instructing her to sleep on the journey to Cumberland at her aunt's house), with directions to show it to Lady Glyde on hearing from me. I also obtained from him the address of the Asylum in which Anne Catherick had been confined, and a letter to the proprietor, announcing to that gentleman the return of his runaway patient to medical care.

I had arranged, at my last visit to the metropolis, to have our modest domestic establishment ready to receive us when we arrived in London by the early train. In consequence of this wise precaution, we were enabled that same day to play the third move in the game--the getting possession of Anne Catherick.

Dates are of importance here. I combine in myself the opposite characteristics of a Man of Sentiment and a Man of Business. I have all the dates at my fingers' ends.

On Wednesday, the 24th of July 1850, I sent my wife in a cab to clear Mrs. Clements out of the way, in the first place. A supposed message from Lady Glyde in London was sufficient to obtain this result. Mrs. Clements was taken away in the cab, and was left in the cab, while my wife (on pretence of purchasing something at a shop) gave her the slip, and returned to receive her expected visitor at our house in St. John's Wood. It is hardly necessary to add that the visitor had been described to the servants as "Lady Glyde."

In the meanwhile I had followed in another cab, with a note for Anne Catherick, merely mentioning that Lady Glyde intended to keep Mrs. Clements to spend the day with her, and that she was to join them under care of the good gentleman waiting outside, who had already saved her from discovery in Hampshire by Sir Percival. The "good gentleman" sent in this note by a street boy, and paused for results a door or two farther on. At the moment when Anne appeared at the house door and closed it this excellent man had the cab door open ready for her, absorbed her into the vehicle, and drove off.

(Pass me, here, one exclamation in parenthesis. How interesting this is!)

On the way to Forest Road my companion showed no fear. I can be paternal--no man more so--when I please, and I was intensely paternal on this occasion. What titles I had to her confidence! I had compounded the medicine which had done her good--I had warned her of her danger from Sir Percival. Perhaps I trusted too implicitly to these titles--perhaps I underrated the keenness of the lower instincts in persons of weak intellect--it is certain that I neglected to prepare her sufficiently for a disappointment on entering my house. When I took her into the drawing-room--when she saw no one present but Madame Fosco, who was a stranger to her--she exhibited the most violent agitation; if she had scented danger in the air, as a dog scents the presence of some creature unseen, her alarm could not have displayed itself more suddenly and more causelessly. I interposed in vain. The fear from which she was suffering I might have soothed, but the serious heart-disease, under which she laboured, was beyond the reach of all moral palliatives. To my unspeakable horror she was seized with convulsions--a shock to the system, in her condition, which might have laid her dead at any moment at our feet.

The nearest doctor was sent for, and was told that "Lady Glyde" required his immediate services. To my infinite relief, he was a capable man. I represented my visitor to him as a person of weak intellect, and subject to delusions, and I arranged that no nurse but my wife should watch in the sick-room. The unhappy woman was too ill, however, to cause any anxiety about what she might say. The one dread which now oppressed me was the dread that the false Lady Glyde might die before the true Lady Glyde arrived in London.

I had written a note in the morning to Madame Rubelle, telling her to join me at her husband's house on the evening of Friday the 26th, with another note to Percival, warning him to show his wife her uncle's letter of invitation, to assert that Marian had gone on before her, and to despatch her to town by the midday train, on the 26th, also. On reflection I had felt the necessity, in Anne Catherick's state of health, of precipitating events, and of
having Lady Glyde at my disposal earlier than I had originally contemplated. What fresh directions, in the terrible uncertainty of my position, could I now issue? I could do nothing but trust to chance and the doctor. My emotions expressed themselves in pathetic apostrophes, which I was just self-possessed enough to couple, in the hearing of other people, with the name of "Lady Glyde." In all other respects Fosco, on that memorable day, was Fosco shrouded in total eclipse.

She passed a bad night, she awoke worn out, but later in the day she revived amazingly. My elastic spirits revived with her. I could receive no answers from Percival and Madame Rubelle till the morning of the next day, the 26th. In anticipation of their following my directions, which, accident apart, I knew they would do, I went to secure a fly to fetch Lady Glyde from the railway, directing it to be at my house on the 26th, at two o'clock. After seeing the order entered in the book, I went on to arrange matters with Monsieur Rubelle. I also procured the services of two gentlemen who could furnish me with the necessary certificates of lunacy. One of them I knew personally--the other was known to Monsieur Rubelle. Both were men whose vigorous minds soared superior to narrow scruples--both were labouring under temporary embarrassments--both believed in ME.

It was past five o'clock in the afternoon before I returned from the performance of these duties. When I got back Anne Catherick was dead. Dead on the 25th, and Lady Glyde was not to arrive in London till the 26th!

I was stunned. Meditate on that. Fosco stunned!

It was too late to retrace our steps. Before my return the doctor had officiously undertaken to save me all trouble by registering the death, on the date when it happened, with his own hand. My grand scheme, unassailable hitherto, had its weak place now--no efforts on my part could alter the fatal event of the 25th. I turned manfully to the future. Percival's interests and mine being still at stake, nothing was left but to play the game through to the end. I recalled my impenetrable calm--and played it.

On the morning of the 26th Percival's letter reached me, announcing his wife's arrival by the midday train. Madame Rubelle also wrote to say she would follow in the evening. I started in the fly, leaving the false Lady Glyde dead in the house, to receive the true Lady Glyde on her arrival by the railway at three o'clock. Hidden under the seat of the carriage, I carried with me all the clothes Anne Catherick had worn on coming into my house--they were destined to assist the resurrection of the woman who was dead in the person of the woman who was living. What a situation! I suggest it to the rising romance writers of England. I offer it, as totally new, to the worn-out dramatists of France.

Lady Glyde was at the station. There was great crowding and confusion, and more delay than I liked (in case any of her friends had happened to be on the spot), in reclaiming her luggage. Her first questions, as we drove off, implored me to tell her news of her sister. I invented news of the most pacifying kind, assuring her that she was about to see her sister at my house. My house, on this occasion only, was in the neighbourhood of Leicester Square, and was in the occupation of Monsieur Rubelle, who received us in the hall.

I took my visitor upstairs into a back room, the two medical gentlemen being there in waiting on the floor beneath to see the patient, and to give me their certificates. After quieting Lady Glyde by the necessary assurances about her sister, I introduced my friends separately to her presence. They performed the formalities of the occasion briefly, intelligently, conscientiously. I entered the room again as soon as they had left it, and at once precipitated events by a reference of the alarming kind to "Miss Halcombe's" state of health.

Results followed as I had anticipated. Lady Glyde became frightened, and turned faint. For the second time, and the last, I called Science to my assistance. A medicated glass of water and a medicated bottle of smelling-salts relieved her of all further embarrassment and alarm. Additional applications later in the evening procured her the inestimable blessing of a good night's rest. Madame Rubelle arrived in time to preside at Lady Glyde's toilet. Her own clothes were taken away from her at night, and Anne Catherick's were put on her in the morning, with the strictest regard to propriety, by the matronly hands of the good Rubelle. Throughout the day I kept our patient in a state of partially-suspended consciousness, until the dexterous assistance of my medical friends enabled me to procure the necessary order rather earlier than I had ventured to hope. That evening (the evening of the 27th) Madame Rubelle and I took our revived "Anne Catherick" to the Asylum. She was received with great surprise, but without suspicion, thanks to the order and certificates, to Percival's letter, to the likeness, to the clothes, and to the patient's own confused mental condition at the time. I returned at once to assist Madame Fosco in the preparations for the burial of the False "Lady Glyde," having the clothes and luggage of the true "Lady Glyde" in my possession. They were afterwards sent to Cumberland by the conveyance which was used for the funeral. I attended the funeral, with becoming dignity, attired in the deepest mourning.

My narrative of these remarkable events, written under equally remarkable circumstances, closes here. The minor precautions which I observed in communicating with Limmeridge House are already known, so is the magnificent success of my enterprise, so are the solid pecuniary results which followed it. I have to assert, with the whole force of my conviction, that the one weak place in my scheme would never have been found out if the one
weak place in my heart had not been discovered first. Nothing but my fatal admiration for Marian restrained me from stepping in to my own rescue when she effected her sister's escape. I ran the risk, and trusted in the complete destruction of Lady Glyde's identity. If either Marian or Mr. Hartright attempted to assert that identity, they would publicly expose themselves to the imputation of sustaining a rank deception, they would be distrusted and disgraced accordingly, and they would therefore be powerless to place my interests or Percival's secret in jeopardy. I committed one error in trusting myself to such a blindfold calculation of chances as this. I committed another when Percival had paid the penalty of his own obstinacy and violence, by granting Lady Glyde a second reprieve from the mad-house, and allowing Mr. Hartright a second chance of escaping me. In brief, Fosco, at this serious crisis, was untrue to himself. Deplorable and uncharacteristic fault! Behold the cause, in my heart--behold, in the image of Marian Halcombe, the first and last weakness of Fosco's life!

At the ripe age of sixty, I make this unparalleled confession. Youths! I invoke your sympathy. Maidens! I claim your tears.

A word more, and the attention of the reader (concentrated breathlessly on myself) shall be released.

My own mental insight informs me that three inevitable questions will be asked here by persons of inquiring minds. They shall be stated--they shall be answered.

First question. What is the secret of Madame Fosco's unhesitating devotion of herself to the fulfilment of my boldest wishes, to the furtherance of my deepest plans? I might answer this by simply referring to my own character, and by asking, in my turn, Where, in the history of the world, has a man of my order ever been found without a woman in the background self-immolated on the altar of his life? But I remember that I am writing in England, I remember that I was married in England, and I ask if a woman's marriage obligations in this country provide for her private opinion of her husband's principles? No! They charge her unreservedly to love, honour, and obey him. That is exactly what my wife has done. I stand here on a supreme moral elevation, and I loftily assert her accurate performance of her conjugal duties. Silence, Calumny! Your sympathy, Wives of England, for Madame Fosco!

Second question. If Anne Catherick had not died when she did, what should I have done? I should, in that case, have assisted worn-out Nature in finding permanent repose. I should have opened the doors of the Prison of Life, and have extended to the captive (incurably afflicted in mind and body both) a happy release.

Third question. On a calm revision of all the circumstances--Is my conduct worthy of any serious blame? Most emphatically, No! Have I not carefully avoided exposing myself to the odium of committing unnecessary crime? With my vast resources in chemistry, I might have taken Lady Glyde's life. At immense personal sacrifice I followed the dictates of my own ingenuity, my own humanity, my own caution, and took her identity instead. Judge me by what I might have done. How comparatively innocent! how indirectly virtuous I appear in what I really did!

I announced on beginning it that this narrative would be a remarkable document. It has entirely answered my expectations. Receive these fervid lines--my last legacy to the country I leave for ever. They are worthy of the occasion, and worthy of FOSCO.

THE STORY CONCLUDED BY WALTER HARTRIGHT

When I closed the last leaf of the Count's manuscript the half-hour during which I had engaged to remain at Forest Road had expired. Monsieur Rubelle looked at his watch and bowed. I rose immediately, and left the agent in possession of the empty house. I never saw him again--I never heard more of him or of his wife. Out of the dark byways of villainy and deceit they had crawled across our path--into the same byways they crawled back secretly and were lost.

In a quarter of an hour after leaving Forest Road I was at home again.

But few words sufficed to tell Laura and Marian how my desperate venture had ended, and what the next event in our lives was likely to be. I left all details to be described later in the day, and hastened back to St. John's Wood, to see the person of whom Count Fosco had ordered the fly, when he went to meet Laura at the station.

The address in my possession led me to some "livery stables," about a quarter of a mile distant from Forest Road. The proprietor proved to be a civil and respectable man. When I explained that an important family matter obliged me to ask him to refer to his books for the purpose of ascertaining a date with which the record of his business transactions might supply me, he offered no objection to granting my request. The book was produced, and there, under the date of "July 26th, 1850," the order was entered in these words--

"Brougham to Count Fosco, 5 Forest Road. Two o'clock. (John Owen)."

I found on inquiry that the name of "John Owen," attached to the entry, referred to the man who had been employed to drive the fly. He was then at work in the stable-yard, and was sent for to see me at my request.

"Do you remember driving a gentleman, in the month of July last, from Number Five Forest Road to the Waterloo Bridge station?" I asked.

"Well, sir," said the man, "I can't exactly say I do."
"Perhaps you remember the gentleman himself? Can you call to mind driving a foreigner last summer--a tall gentleman and remarkably fat?" The man's face brightened directly.

"I remember him, sir! The fattest gentleman as ever I see, and the heaviest customer as ever I drove. Yes, yes--I call him to mind, sir! We DID go to the station, and it WAS from Forest Road. There was a parrot, or summat like it, screeching in the window. The gentleman was in a mortal hurry about the lady's luggage, and he gave me a handsome present for looking sharp and getting the boxes."

Getting the boxes! I recollected immediately that Laura's own account of herself on her arrival in London described her luggage as being collected for her by some person whom Count Fosco brought with him to the station. This was the man.

"Did you see the lady?" I asked. "What did she look like? Was she young or old?"

"Well, sir, what with the hurry and the crowd of people pushing about, I can't rightly say what the lady looked like. I can't call nothing to mind about her that I know of excepting her name."

"You remember her name?"

"Yes, sir. Her name was Lady Glyde."

"How do you come to remember that, when you have forgotten what she looked like?"

The man smiled, and shifted his feet in some little embarrassment.

"Why, to tell you the truth, sir," he said, "I hadn't been long married at that time, and my wife's name, before she changed it for mine, was the same as the lady's--meaning the name of Glyde, sir. The lady mentioned it herself. Is your name on your boxes, ma'am?" says I. "Yes," says she, 'my name is on my luggage--it is Lady Glyde.' 'Come!' I says to myself, 'I've a bad head for gentlefolks' names in general--but THIS one comes like an old friend, at any rate.' I can't say nothing about the time, sir, it might be nigh on a year ago, or it mightn't. But I can swear to the stout gentleman, and swear to the lady's name."

There was no need that he should remember the time--the date was positively established by his master's order-book. I felt at once that the means were now in my power of striking down the whole conspiracy at a blow with the irresistible weapon of plain fact. Without a moment's hesitation, I took the proprietor of the livery stables aside and told him what the real importance was of the evidence of his order-book and the evidence of his driver. An arrangement to compensate him for the temporary loss of the man's services was easily made, and a copy of the entry in the book was taken by myself, and certified as true by the master's own signature. I left the livery stables, having settled that John Owen was to hold himself at my disposal for the next three days, or for a longer period if necessity required it.

I now had in my possession all the papers that I wanted--the district registrar's own copy of the certificate of death, and Sir Percival's dated letter to the Count, being safe in my pocket-book.

With this written evidence about me, and with the coachman's answers fresh in my memory, I next turned my steps, for the first time since the beginning of all my inquiries, in the direction of Mr. Kyrle's office. One of my objects in paying him this second visit was, necessarily, to tell him what I had done. The other was to warn him of the necessity required it.

...
every available opportunity, until I checked them once for all, by placing him firmly between two inevitable alternatives. I gave him his choice between doing his niece justice on my terms, or facing the consequence of a public assertion of her existence in a court of law. Mr. Kyrle, to whom he turned for help, told him plainly that he must decide the question then and there. Characteristically choosing the alternative which promised soonest to release him from all personal anxiety, he announced with a sudden outburst of energy, that he was not strong enough to bear any more bullying, and that we might do as we pleased.

Mr. Kyrle and I at once went downstairs, and agreed upon a form of letter which was to be sent round to the tenants who had attended the false funeral, summoning them, in Mr. Fairlie's name, to assemble in Limmeridge House on the next day but one. An order referring to the same date was also written, directing a statuary in Carlisle to send a man to Limmeridge churchyard for the purpose of erasing an inscription—Mr. Kyrle, who had arranged to sleep in the house, undertaking that Mr. Fairlie should hear these letters read to him, and should sign them with his own hand.

I occupied the interval day at the farm in writing a plain narrative of the conspiracy, and in adding to it a statement of the practical contradiction which facts offered to the assertion of Laura's death. This I submitted to Mr. Kyrle before I read it the next day to the assembled tenants. We also arranged the form in which the evidence should be presented at the close of the reading. After these matters were settled, Mr. Kyrle endeavoured to turn the conversation next to Laura's affairs. Knowing, and desiring to know nothing of those affairs, and doubting whether he would approve, as a man of business, of my conduct in relation to my wife's life-interest in the legacy left to Madame Fosco, I begged Mr. Kyrle to excuse me if I abstained from discussing the subject. It was connected, as I could truly tell him, with those sorrows and troubles of the past which we never referred to among ourselves, and which we instinctively shrank from discussing with others.

My last labour, as the evening approached, was to obtain "The Narrative of the Tombstone," by taking a copy of the false inscription on the grave before it was erased.

The day came—the day when Laura once more entered the familiar breakfast-room at Limmeridge House. All the persons assembled rose from their seats as Marian and I led her in. A perceptible shock of surprise, an audible murmur of interest ran through them, at the sight of her face. Mr. Fairlie was present (by my express stipulation), with Mr. Kyrle by his side. His valet stood behind him with a smelling-bottle ready in one hand, and a white handkerchief, saturated with eau-de-Cologne, in the other.

I opened the proceedings by publicly appealing to Mr. Fairlie to say whether I appeared there with his authority and under his express sanction. He extended an arm, on either side, to Mr. Kyrle and to his valet—was by them assisted to stand on his legs, and then expressed himself in these terms: "Allow me to present Mr. Hartright. I am as great an invalid as ever, and he is so very obliging as to speak for me. The subject is dreadfully embarrassing. Please hear him, and don't make a noise!" With those words he slowly sank back again into the chair, and took refuge in his scented pocket-handkerchief.

The disclosure of the conspiracy followed, after I had offered my preliminary explanation, first of all, in the fewest and the plainest words. I was there present (I informed my hearers) to declare, first, that my wife, then sitting by me, was the daughter of the late Mr. Philip Fairlie; secondly, to prove by positive facts, that the funeral which they had attended in Limmeridge churchyard was the funeral of another woman; thirdly, to give them a plain account of how it had all happened. Without further preface, I at once read the narrative of the conspiracy, describing it in clear outline, and dwelling only upon the pecuniary motive for it, in order to avoid complicating my statement by unnecessary reference to Sir Percival's secret. This done, I reminded my audience of the date on the inscription in the churchyard (the 25th), and confirmed its correctness by producing the certificate of death. I then read them Sir Percival's letter of the 25th, announcing his wife's intended journey from Hampshire to London on the 26th. I next showed that she had taken that journey, by the personal testimony of the driver of the fly, and I proved that she had performed it on the appointed day, by the order-book at the livery stables. Marian then added her own statement of the meeting between Laura and herself at the mad-house, and of her sister's escape. After which I closed the proceedings by informing the persons present of Sir Percival's death and of my marriage.

Mr. Kyrle rose when I resumed my seat, and declared, as the legal adviser of the family, that my case was proved by the plainest evidence he had ever heard in his life. As he spoke those words, I put my arm round Laura, and raised her so that she was plainly visible to every one in the room. "Are you all of the same opinion?" I asked, advancing towards them a few steps, and pointing to my wife.

The effect of the question was electrical. Far down at the lower end of the room one of the oldest tenants on the estate started to his feet, and led the rest with him in an instant. I see the man now, with his honest brown face and his iron-grey hair, mounted on the window-seat, waving his heavy riding-whip over his head, and leading the cheers. "There she is, alive and hearty--God bless her! Gi' it tongue, lads! Gi' it tongue!" The shout that answered him, reiterated again and again, was the sweetest music I ever heard. The labourers in the village and the boys from the
school, assembled on the lawn, caught up the cheering and echoed it back on us. The farmers' wives clustered round
Laura, and struggled which should be first to shake hands with her, and to implore her, with the tears pouring over
their own cheeks, to bear up bravely and not to cry. She was so completely overwhelmed, that I was obliged to take
her from them, and carry her to the door. There I gave her into Marian's care--Marian, who had never failed us yet,
whose courageous self-control did not fail us now. Left by myself at the door, I invited all the persons present (after
thanking them in Laura's name and mine) to follow me to the churchyard, and see the false inscription struck off the
tombstone with their own eyes.

They all left the house, and all joined the throng of villagers collected round the grave, where the statuary's man
was waiting for us. In a breathless silence, the first sharp stroke of the steel sounded on the marble. Not a voice was
heard--not a soul moved, till those three words, "Laura, Lady Glyde," had vanished from sight. Then there was a
great heave of relief among the crowd, as if they felt that the last fetters of the conspiracy had been struck off Laura
herself, and the assembly slowly withdrew. It was late in the day before the whole inscription was erased. One line
only was afterwards engraved in its place: "Anne Catherick, July 25th, 1850."

I returned to Limmeridge House early enough in the evening to take leave of Mr. Kyrle. He and his clerk, and
the driver of the fly, went back to London by the night train. On their departure an insolent message was delivered to
me from Mr. Fairlie--who had been carried from the room in a shattered condition, when the first outbreak of
cheering answered my appeal to the tenantry. The message conveyed to us "Mr. Fairlie's best congratulations," and
requested to know whether "we contemplated stopping in the house." I sent back word that the only object for which
we had entered his doors was accomplished--that I contemplated stopping in no man's house but my own--and that
Mr. Fairlie need not entertain the slightest apprehension of ever seeing us or hearing from us again. We went back to
our friends at the farm to rest that night, and the next morning--escorted to the station, with the heartiest enthusiasm
and good will, by the whole village and by all the farmers in the neighbourhood--we returned to London.

As our view of the Cumberland hills faded in the distance, I thought of the first disheartening circumstances
under which the long struggle was at last past and over had been pursued. It was strange to look back and to see,
now, that the poverty which had denied us all hope of assistance had been the indirect means of our success, by
forcing me to act for myself. If we had been rich enough to find legal help, what would have been the result? The
gain (on Mr. Kyrle's own showing) would have been more than doubtful--the loss, judging by the plain test of events
as they had really happened, certain. The law would never have obtained me my interview with Mrs. Catherick. The
law would never have made Pesca the means of forcing a confession from the Count.

II

Two more events remain to be added to the chain before it reaches fairly from the outset of the story to the close.

While our new sense of freedom from the long oppression of the past was still strange to us, I was sent for by the
friend who had given me my first employment in wood engraving, to receive from him a fresh testimony of his
regard for my welfare. He had been commissioned by his employers to go to Paris, and to examine for them a fresh
discovery in the practical application of his Art, the merits of which they were anxious to ascertain. His own
engagements had not allowed him leisure time to undertake the errand, and he had most kindly suggested that it
should be transferred to me. I could have no hesitation in thankfully accepting the offer, for if I acquitted myself of
my commission as I hoped I should, the result would be a permanent engagement on the illustrated newspaper, to
which I was now only occasionally attached.

I received my instructions and packed up for the journey the next day. On leaving Laura once more (under what
changed circumstances?) in her sister's care, a serious consideration recurred to me, which had more than once
crossed my wife's mind, as well as my own, already--I mean the consideration of Marian's future. Had we any right
to let our selfish affection accept the devotion of all that generous life? Was it not our duty, our best expression of
gratitude, to forget ourselves, and to think only of HER? I tried to say this when we were alone for a moment, before
I went away. She took my hand, and silenced me at the first words.

"After all that we three have suffered together," she said "there can be no parting between us till the last parting
of all. My heart and my happiness, Walter, are with Laura and you. Wait a little till there are children's voices at
your fireside. I will teach them to speak for me in THEIR language, and the first lesson they say to their father and
mother shall be--"We can't spare our aunt!"

My journey to Paris was not undertaken alone. At the eleventh hour Pesca decided that he would accompany me.
He had not recovered his customary cheerfulness since the night at the Opera, and he determined to try what a
week's holiday would do to raise his spirits.

I performed the errand entrusted to me, and drew out the necessary report, on the fourth day from our arrival in
Paris. The fifth day I arranged to devote to sight-seeing and amusements in Pesca's company.

Our hotel had been too full to accommodate us both on the same floor. My room was on the second story, and
Pesca's was above me, on the third. On the morning of the fifth day I went upstairs to see if the Professor was ready
to go out. Just before I reached the landing I saw his door opened from the inside—a long, delicate, nervous hand (not my friend's hand certainly) held it ajar. At the same time I heard Pesca's voice saying eagerly, in low tones, and in his own language—"I remember the name, but I don't know the man. You saw at the Opera he was so changed that I could not recognise him. I will forward the report—I can do no more." "No more need be done," answered the second voice. The door opened wide, and the light-haired man with the scar on his cheek—the man I had seen following Count Fosco's cab a week before—came out. He bowed as I drew aside to let him pass—his face was fearfully pale—and he held fast by the banisters as he descended the stairs.

I pushed open the door and entered Pesca's room. He was crouched up, in the strangest manner, in a corner of the sofa. He seemed to shrink from me when I approached him.

"Am I disturbing you?" I asked. "I did not know you had a friend with you till I saw him come out."

"No friend," said Pesca eagerly. "I see him to-day for the first time and the last."

"I am afraid he has brought you bad news?"

"Horrible news, Walter! Let us go back to London—I don't want to stop here—I am sorry I ever came. The misfortunes of my youth are very hard upon me," he said, turning his face to the wall, "very hard upon me in my later time. I try to forget them—and they will not forget ME!"

"We can't return, I am afraid, before the afternoon," I replied. "Would you like to come out with me in the meantime?"

"No, my friend, I will wait here. But let us go back to-day—pray let us go back."

I left him with the assurance that he should leave Paris that afternoon. We had arranged the evening before to ascend the Cathedral of Notre Dame, with Victor Hugo's noble romance for our guide. There was nothing in the French capital that I was more anxious to see, and I departed by myself for the church.

Approaching Notre Dame by the river-side, I passed on my way the terrible dead-house of Paris—the Morgue. A great crowd clamoured and heaved round the door. There was evidently something inside which excited the popular curiosity, and fed the popular appetite for horror.

I should have walked on to the church if the conversation of two men and a woman on the outskirts of the crowd had not caught my ear. They had just come out from seeing the sight in the Morgue, and the account they were giving of the dead body to their neighbours described it as the corpse of a man—a man of immense size, with a strange mark on his left arm.

The moment those words reached me I stopped and took my place with the crowd going in. Some dim foreshadowing of the truth had crossed my mind when I heard Pesca's voice through the open door, and when I saw the stranger's face as he passed me on the stairs of the hotel. Other vengeance than mine had followed that fated man from the theatre to his own door—from his own door to his refuge in Paris. Other vengeance than mine had called him to the day of reckoning, and had exacted from him the penalty of his life. The moment when I had pointed him out to Pesca at the theatre in the hearing of that stranger by our side, who was looking for him too—was the moment that sealed his doom. I remembered the struggle in my own heart, when he and I stood face to face—the struggle before I could let him escape me—and shuddered as I recalled it.

Slowly, inch by inch, I pressed in with the crowd, moving nearer and nearer to the great glass screen that parts the dead from the living at the Morgue—nearer and nearer, till I was close behind the front row of spectators, and could look in.

There he lay, unowned, unknown, exposed to the flippant curiosity of a French mob! There was the dreadful end of that long life of degraded ability and heartless crime! Hushed in the sublime repose of death, the broad, firm, massive face and head fronted us so grandly that the chattering Frenchwomen about me lifted their hands in admiration, and cried in shrill chorus, "Ah, what a handsome man!" The wound that had killed him had been struck with a knife or dagger exactly over his heart. No other traces of violence appeared about the body except on the left arm, and there, exactly in the place where I had seen the brand on Pesca's arm, were two deep cuts in the shape of the letter T, which entirely obliterated the mark of the Brotherhood. His clothes, hung above him, showed that he had been himself conscious of his danger—they were clothes that had disguised him as a French artisan. For a few moments, but not for longer, I forced myself to see these things through the glass screen. I can write of them at no greater length, for I saw no more.

The few facts in connection with his death which I subsequently ascertained (partly from Pesca and partly from other sources), may be stated here before the subject is dismissed from these pages.

His body was taken out of the Seine in the disguise which I have described, nothing being found on him which revealed his name, his rank, or his place of abode. The hand that struck him was never traced, and the circumstances under which he was killed were never discovered. I leave others to draw their own conclusions in reference to the secret of the assassination as I have drawn mine. When I have intimated that the foreigner with the scar was a
member of the Brotherhood (admitted in Italy after Pesca's departure from his native country), and when I have further added that the two cuts, in the form of a T, on the left arm of the dead man, signified the Italian word "Traditore," and showed that justice had been done by the Brotherhood on a traitor, I have contributed all that I know towards elucidating the mystery of Count Fosco's death.

The body was identified the day after I had seen it by means of an anonymous letter addressed to his wife. He was buried by Madame Fosco in the cemetery of Pere la Chaise. Fresh funeral wreaths continue to this day to be hung on the ornamental bronze railings round the tomb by the Countess's own hand. She lives in the strictest retirement at Versailles. Not long since she published a biography of her deceased husband. The work throws no light whatever on the name that was really his own or on the secret history of his life—it is almost entirely devoted to the praise of his domestic virtues, the assertion of his rare abilities, and the enumeration of the honours conferred on him. The circumstances attending his death are very briefly noticed, and are summed up on the last page in this sentence—"His life was one long assertion of the rights of the aristocracy and the sacred principles of Order, and he died a martyr to his cause."

III

The summer and autumn passed after my return from Paris, and brought no changes with them which need be noticed here. We lived so simply and quietly that the income which I was now steadily earning sufficed for all our wants.

In the February of the new year our first child was born—a son. My mother and sister and Mrs. Vesey were our guests at the little christening party, and Mrs. Clements was present to assist my wife on the same occasion. Marian was our boy's godmother, and Pesca and Mr. Gilmore (the latter acting by proxy) were his godfathers. I may add here that when Mr. Gilmore returned to us a year later he assisted the design of these pages, at my request, by writing the Narrative which appears early in the story under his name, and which, though first in order of precedence, was thus, in order of time, the last that I received.

The only event in our lives which now remains to be recorded, occurred when our little Walter was six months old.

At that time I was sent to Ireland to make sketches for certain forthcoming illustrations in the newspaper to which I was attached. I was away for nearly a fortnight, corresponding regularly with my wife and Marian, except during the last three days of my absence, when my movements were too uncertain to enable me to receive letters. I performed the latter part of my journey back at night, and when I reached home in the morning, to my utter astonishment there was no one to receive me. Laura and Marian and the child had left the house on the day before my return.

A note from my wife, which was given to me by the servant, only increased my surprise, by informing me that they had gone to Limmeridge House. Marian had prohibited any attempt at written explanations—I was entreated to follow them the moment I came back—complete enlightenment awaited me on my arrival in Cumberland—and I was forbidden to feel the slightest anxiety in the meantime. There the note ended. It was still early enough to catch the morning train. I reached Limmeridge House the same afternoon.

My wife and Marian were both upstairs. They had established themselves (by way of completing my amazement) in the little room which had been once assigned to me for a studio, when I was employed on Mr. Fairlie's drawings. On the very chair which I used to occupy when I was at work Marian was sitting now, with the child industriously sucking his coral upon her lap—while Laura was standing by the well-remembered drawing-table which I had so often used, with the little album that I had filled for her in past times open under her hand.

"What in the name of heaven has brought you here?" I asked. "Does Mr. Fairlie know----?"

Marian suspended the question on my lips by telling me that Mr. Fairlie was dead. He had been struck by paralysis, and had never rallied after the shock. Mr. Kyrle had informed them of his death, and had advised them to proceed immediately to Limmeridge House.

Some dim perception of a great change dawned on my mind. Laura spoke before I had quite realised it. She stole close to me to enjoy the surprise which was still expressed in my face.

"My darling Walter," she said, "must we really account for our boldness in coming here? I am afraid, love, I can only explain it by breaking through our rule, and referring to the past."

"There is not the least necessity for doing anything of the kind," said Marian. "We can be just as explicit, and much more interesting, by referring to the future." She rose and held up the child kicking and crowing in her arms. "Do you know who this is, Walter?" she asked, with bright tears of happiness gathering in her eyes.

"Even MY bewildernent has its limits," I replied. "I think I can still answer for knowing my own child."

"Child!" she exclaimed, with all her easy gaiety of old times. "Do you talk in that familiar manner of one of the landed gentry of England? Are you aware, when I present this illustrious baby to your notice, in whose presence you stand? Evidently not! Let me make two eminent personages known to one another: Mr. Walter Hartright—THE
HEIR OF LIMMERIDGE."

So she spoke. In writing those last words, I have written all. The pen falters in my hand. The long, happy labour of many months is over. Marian was the good angel of our lives--let Marian end our Story.
CHAPTER I--THE DAWN

An ancient English Cathedral Tower? How can the ancient English Cathedral tower be here! The well-known massive gray square tower of its old Cathedral? How can that be here! There is no spike of rusty iron in the air, between the eye and it, from any point of the real prospect. What is the spike that intervenes, and who has set it up? Maybe it is set up by the Sultan's orders for the impaling of a horde of Turkish robbers, one by one. It is so, for cymbals clash, and the Sultan goes by to his palace in long procession. Ten thousand scimitars flash in the sunlight, and thrice ten thousand dancing-girls strew flowers. Then, follow white elephants caparisoned in countless gorgeous colours, and infinite in number and attendants. Still the Cathedral Tower rises in the background, where it cannot be, and still no writhing figure is on the grim spike. Stay! Is the spike so low a thing as the rusty spike on the top of a post of an old bedstead that has tumbled all awry? Some vague period of drowsy laughter must be devoted to the consideration of this possibility.

Shaking from head to foot, the man whose scattered consciousness has thus fantastically pieced itself together, at length rises, supports his trembling frame upon his arms, and looks around. He is in the meanest and closest of small rooms. Through the ragged window-curtain, the light of early day steals in from a miserable court. He lies, dressed, across a large unseemly bed, upon a bedstead that has indeed given way under the weight upon it. Lying, also dressed and also across the bed, not longwise, are a Chinaman, a Lascar, and a haggard woman. The two first are in a sleep or stupor; the last is blowing at a kind of pipe, to kindle it. And as she blows, and shading it with her lean hand, concentrates its red spark of light, it serves in the dim morning as a lamp to show him what he sees of her.

"Another?" says this woman, in a querulous, rattling whisper. "Have another?"

He looks about him, with his hand to his forehead.

"Ye've smoked as many as five since ye come in at midnight," the woman goes on, as she chronically complains. "Poor me, poor me, my head is so bad. Them two come in after ye. Ah, poor me, the business is slack, is slack! Few Chinamen about the Docks, and fewer Lascars, and no ships coming in, these say! Here's another ready for ye, deary. Ye'll remember like a good soul, won't ye, that the market price is dreffle high just now? More nor three shillings and sixpence for a thimbleful! And ye'll remember that nobody but me (and Jack Chinaman t'other side the court; but he can't do it as well as me) has the true secret of mixing it? Ye'll pay up accordingly, deary, won't ye?"

She blows at the pipe as she speaks, and, occasionally bubbling at it, inhales much of its contents.

"O me, O me, my lungs is weak, my lungs is bad! It's nearly ready for ye, deary. Ah, poor me, poor me, my poor hand shakes like to drop off! I see ye coming-to, and I ses to my poor self, 'I'll have another ready for him, and he'll bear in mind the market price of opium, and pay according.' O my poor head! I makes my pipes of old penny ink-bottles, ye see, deary--this is one--and I fits-in a mouthpiece, this way, and I takes my mixter out of this thimble with this little horn spoon; and so I fills, deary. Ah, my poor nerves! I got Heavens-hard drunk for sixteen year afore I took to this; but this don't hurt me, not to speak of. And it takes away the hunger as well as wittles, deary."

She hands him the nearly-emptied pipe, and sinks back, turning over on her face.

He rises unsteadily from the bed, lays the pipe upon the hearth-stone, draws back the ragged curtain, and looks with repugnance at his three companions. He notices that the woman has opium-smoked herself into a strange likeness of the Chinaman. His form of cheek, eye, and temple, and his colour, are repeated in her. Said Chinaman convulsively wrestles with one of his many Gods or Devils, perhaps, and snarls horribly. The Lascar laughs and dribbles at the mouth. The hostess is still.

"What visions can SHE have?" the waking man muses, as he turns her face towards him, and stands looking down at it. 'Visions of many butchers' shops, and public-houses, and much credit? Of an increase of hideous customers, and this horrible bedstead set upright again, and this horrible court swept clean? What can she rise to, under any quantity of opium, higher than that!--Eh?"

He bends down his ear, to listen to her mutterings.

'Unintelligible!'

As he watches the spasmodic shoots and darts that break out of her face and limbs, like fitful lightning out of a dark sky, some contagion in them seizes upon him: insomuch that he has to withdraw himself to a lean arm-chair by the hearth--placed there, perhaps, for such emergencies--and to sit in it, holding tight, until he has got the better of this unclean spirit of imitation.
Then he comes back, pounces on the Chinaman, and seizing him with both hands by the throat, turns him violently on the bed. The Chinaman clutches the aggressive hands, resists, gasps, and protests.

'What do you say?'
A watchful pause.
'Unintelligible!'

Slowly loosening his grasp as he listens to the incoherent jargon with an attentive frown, he turns to the Lascar and fairly drags him forth upon the floor. As he falls, the Lascar starts into a half-risen attitude, glares with his eyes, lashes about him fiercely with his arms, and draws a phantom knife. It then becomes apparent that the woman has taken possession of this knife, for safety's sake; for, she too starting up, and restraining and expostulating with him, the knife is visible in her dress, not in his, when they drowsily drop back, side by side.

There has been chattering and clattering enough between them, but to no purpose. When any distinct word has been flung into the air, it has had no sense or sequence. Wherefore 'unintelligible!' is again the comment of the watcher, made with some reassured nodding of his head, and a gloomy smile. He then lays certain silver money on the table, finds his hat, gropes his way down the broken stairs, gives a good morning to some rat-ridden doorkeeper, in bed in a black hutch beneath the stairs, and passes out.

That same afternoon, the massive gray square tower of an old Cathedral rises before the sight of a jaded traveller. The bells are going for daily vesper service, and he must needs attend it, one would say, from his haste to reach the open Cathedral door. The choir are getting on their sullied white robes, in a hurry, when he arrives among them, gets on his own robe, and falls into the procession filing in to service. Then, the Sacristan locks the iron-barred gates that divide the sanctuary from the chancel, and all of the procession having scuttled into their places, hide their faces; and then the intoned words, 'WHEN THE WICKED MAN--' rise among groins of arches and beams of roof, awakening muttered thunder.

CHAPTER II--A DEAN, AND A CHAPTER ALSO

Whosoever has observed that sedate and clerical bird, the rook, may perhaps have noticed that when he wings his way homeward towards nightfall, in a sedate and clerical company, two rooks will suddenly detach themselves from the rest, will retrace their flight for some distance, and will there poise and linger; conveying to mere men the fancy that it is of some occult importance to the body politic, that this artful couple should pretend to have renounced connection with it.

Similarly, service being over in the old Cathedral with the square tower, and the choir scuffling out again, and divers venerable persons of rook-like aspect dispersing, two of these latter retrace their steps, and walk together in the echoing Close.

Not only is the day waning, but the year. The low sun is fiery and yet cold behind the monastery ruin, and the Virginia creeper on the Cathedral wall has showered half its deep-red leaves down on the pavement. There has been rain this afternoon, and a wintry shudder goes among the little pools on the cracked, uneven flag-stones, and through the giant elm-trees as they shed a gust of tears. Their fallen leaves lie strewn thickly about. Some of these leaves, in a timid rush, seek sanctuary within the low arched Cathedral door; but two men coming out resist them, and cast them forth again with their feet; this done, one of the two locks the door with a goodly key, and the other flits away with a folio music-book.

'Mr. Jasper was that, Tope?'
'Yes, Mr. Dean.'
'He has stayed late.'

'Yes, Mr. Dean. I have stayed for him, your Reverence. He has been took a little poorly.'

'Say "taken," Tope--to the Dean,' the younger rook interposes in a low tone with this touch of correction, as who should say: 'You may offer bad grammar to the laity, or the humbler clergy, not to the Dean.'

Mr. Tope, Chief Verger and Showman, and accustomed to be high with excursion parties, declines with a silent loftiness to perceive that any suggestion has been tendered to him.

'And when and how has Mr. Jasper been taken--for, as Mr. Crisparkle has remarked, it is better to say taken--taken--' repeats the Dean; 'when and how has Mr. Jasper been Taken--'

'Taken, sir,' Tope deferentially murmurs.

'--Poorly, Tope?'

'Why, sir, Mr. Jasper was that breathed--'

'I wouldn't say "That breathed," Tope,' Mr. Crisparkle interposes with the same touch as before. 'Not English--to the Dean.'

'Breathed to that extent,' the Dean (not unflattered by this indirect homage) condescendingly remarks, 'would be preferable.'

'Mr. Jasper's breathing was so remarkably short'--thus discreetly does Mr. Tope work his way round the sunken
rock—'when he came in, that it distressed him mightily to get his notes out: which was perhaps the cause of his having a kind of fit on him after a little. His memory grew DAZED.' Mr. Tope, with his eyes on the Reverend Mr. Crisparkle, shoots this word out, as defying him to improve upon it: 'and a dimness and giddiness crept over him as strange as ever I saw: though he didn't seem to mind it particularly, himself. However, a little time and a little water brought him out of his DAZE.' Mr. Tope repeats the word and its emphasis, with the air of saying: 'As I HAVE made a success, I'll make it again.'

'And Mr. Jasper has gone home quite himself, has he?' asked the Dean.

'Your Reverence, he has gone home quite himself. And I'm glad to see he's having his fire kindled up, for it's chilly after the wet, and the Cathedral had both a damp feel and a damp touch this afternoon, and he was very shivery.'

They all three look towards an old stone gatehouse crossing the Close, with an arched thoroughfare passing beneath it. Through its latticed window, a fire shines out upon the fast-darkening scene, involving in shadow the pendent masses of ivy and creeper covering the building's front. As the deep Cathedral-bell strikes the hour, a ripple of wind goes through these at their distance, like a ripple of the solemn sound that hums through tomb and tower, broken niche and defaced statue, in the pile close at hand.

'Is Mr. Jasper's nephew with him?' the Dean asks.

'No, sir,' replied the Verger, 'but expected. There's his own solitary shadow betwixt his two windows--the one looking this way, and the one looking down into the High Street--drawing his own curtains now.'

'Well, well,' says the Dean, with a sprightly air of breaking up the little conference, 'I hope Mr. Jasper's heart may not be too much set upon his nephew. Our affections, however laudable, in this transitory world, should never master us; we should guide them, guide them. I find I am not disagreeably reminded of my dinner, by hearing my dinner-bell. Perhaps, Mr. Crisparkle, you will, before going home, look in on Jasper?'

'Certainly, Mr. Dean. And tell him that you had the kindness to desire to know how he was?'

'Ay; do so, do so. Certainly. Wished to know how he was. By all means. Wished to know how he was.'

With a pleasant air of patronage, the Dean as nearly cocks his quaint hat as a Dean in good spirits may, and directs his comely gaiters towards the ruddy dining-room of the snug old red-brick house where he is at present, 'in residence' with Mrs. Dean and Miss Dean.

Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon, fair and rosy, and perpetually pitching himself head-foremost into all the deep running water in the surrounding country; Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon, early riser, musical, classical, cheerful, kind, good-natured, social, contented, and boy-like; Mr. Crisparkle, Minor Canon and good man, lately 'Coach' upon the chief Pagan high roads, but since promoted by a patron (grateful for a well-taught son) to his present Christian beat; betakes himself to the gatehouse, on his way home to his early tea.

'Sorry to hear from Tope that you have not been well, Jasper.'

'O, it was nothing, nothing!'

'Do I? O, I don't think so. What is better, I don't feel so. Tope has made too much of it, I suspect. It's his trade to make the most of everything appertaining to the Cathedral, you know.'

'I may tell the Dean--I call expressly from the Dean--that you are all right again?'

'The reply, with a slight smile, is: 'Certainly; with my respects and thanks to the Dean.'

'I'm glad to hear that you expect young Drood.'

'I expect the dear fellow every moment.'

'Ah! He will do you more good than a doctor, Jasper.'

'More good than a dozen doctors. For I love him dearly, and I don't love doctors, or doctors' stuff.'

'Mr. Jasper is a dark man of some six-and-twenty, with thick, lustrous, well-arranged black hair and whiskers. He looks older than he is, as dark men often do. His voice is deep and good, his face and figure are good, his manner is a little sombre. His room is a little sombre, and may have had its influence in forming his manner. It is mostly in shadow. Even when the sun shines brilliantly, it seldom touches the grand piano in the recess, or the folio music-books on the stand, or the book-shelves on the wall, or the unfinished picture of a blooming schoolgirl hanging over the chimney-piece; her flowing brown hair tied with a blue riband, and her beauty remarkable for a quite childish, almost babyish, touch of saucy discontent, comically conscious of itself. (There is not the least artistic merit in this picture, which is a mere daub; but it is clear that the painter has made it humorously--one might almost say, revengefully--like the original.)

'We shall miss you, Jasper, at the "Alternate Musical Wednesdays" to-night; but no doubt you are best at home. Good-night. God bless you! "Tell me, shep-herds, te-e-ell me; tell me-e-e, have you seen (have you seen, have you seen, have you seen) my-y-y Flo- o-ora-a pass this way!" Melodiously good Minor Canon the Reverend Septimus Crisparkle thus delivers himself, in musical rhythm, as he withdraws his amiable face from the doorway and
conveys it down-stairs.

Sounds of recognition and greeting pass between the Reverend Septimus and somebody else, at the stair-foot. Mr. Jasper listens, starts from his chair, and catches a young fellow in his arms, exclaiming:

'My dear Edwin!

'My dear Jack! So glad to see you!'

'Get off your greatcoat, bright boy, and sit down here in your own corner. Your feet are not wet? Pull your boots off. Do pull your boots off.'

'My dear Jack, I am as dry as a bone. Don't muddle-coddle, there's a good fellow. I like anything better than being muddle-coddled.'

With the check upon him of being unsympathetically restrained in a genial outburst of enthusiasm, Mr. Jasper stands still, and looks on intently at the young fellow, divesting himself of his outward coat, hat, gloves, and so forth. Once for all, a look of intentness and intensity—a look of hungry, exacting, watchful, and yet devoted affection—is always, now and ever afterwards, on the Jasper face whenever the Jasper face is addressed in this direction. And whenever it is so addressed, it is never, on this occasion or on any other, dividedly addressed; it is always concentrated.

'Now I am right, and now I'll take my corner, Jack. Any dinner, Jack?'

Mr. Jasper opens a door at the upper end of the room, and discloses a small inner room pleasantly lighted and prepared, wherein a comely dame is in the act of setting dishes on table.

'What a jolly old Jack it is! cries the young fellow, with a clap of his hands. 'Look here, Jack; tell me; whose birthday is it?'

'Not yours, I know,' Mr. Jasper answers, pausing to consider.

'Not mine, you know? No; not mine, _I_ know! Pussy's!'

Fixed as the look the young fellow meets, is, there is yet in it some strange power of suddenly including the sketch over the chimneypiece.

'Pussy's, Jack! We must drink Many happy returns to her. Come, uncle; take your dutiful and sharp-set nephew in to dinner.'

As the boy (for he is little more) lays a hand on Jasper's shoulder, Jasper cordially and gaily lays a hand on HIS shoulder, and so Marseillaise-wise they go in to dinner.

'And, Lord! here's Mrs. Tope!' cries the boy. 'Lovelier than ever!'

'Never you mind me, Master Edwin,' retorts the Verger's wife; 'I can take care of myself.'

'You can't. You're much too handsome. Give me a kiss because it's Pussy's birthday.'

'I'd Pussy you, young man, if I was Pussy, as you call her,' Mrs. Tope blushingly retorts, after being saluted. 'Your uncle's too much wrapt up in you, that's where it is. He makes so much of you, that it's my opinion you think you've only to call your Pussys by the dozen, to make 'em come.'

'You forget, Mrs. Tope,' Mr. Jasper interposes, taking his place at the table with a genial smile, 'and so do you, Ned, that Uncle and Nephew are words prohibited here by common consent and express agreement. For what we are going to receive His holy name be praised!'

'Done like the Dean! Witness, Edwin Drood! Please to carve, Jack, for I can't.'

This sally ushers in the dinner. Little to the present purpose, or to any purpose, is said, while it is in course of being disposed of. At length the cloth is drawn, and a dish of walnuts and a decanter of rich-coloured sherry are placed upon the table.

'I say! Tell me, Jack,' the young fellow then flows on: 'do you really and truly feel as if the mention of our relationship divided us at all? _I_ don't.'

'Uncles as a rule, Ned, are so much older than their nephews,' is the reply, 'that I have that feeling instinctively.'

'As a rule! Ah, may-be! But what is a difference in age of half-a-dozen years or so? And some uncles, in large families, are even younger than their nephews. By George, I wish it was the case with us!'

'Why?'

'Because if it was, I'd take the lead with you, Jack, and be as wise as Begone, dull Care! that turned a young man gray, and Begone, dull Care! that turned an old man to clay.--Halloa, Jack! Don't drink.'

'Why not?'

'Asks why not, on Pussy's birthday, and no Happy returns proposed! Pussy, Jack, and many of 'em! Happy returns, I mean.'

Laying an affectionate and laughing touch on the boy's extended hand, as if it were at once his giddy head and his light heart, Mr. Jasper drinks the toast in silence.

'Hip, hip, hip, and nine times nine, and one to finish with, and all that, understood. Hooray, hooray, hooray!--And now, Jack, let's have a little talk about Pussy. Two pairs of nut-crackers? Pass me one, and take the other.'
Crack. 'How's Pussy getting on, Jack?'
 'With her music? Fairly.'
 'What a dreadfully conscientious fellow you are, Jack! But _I_ know, Lord bless you! Inattentive, isn't she?'
 'She can learn anything, if she will.'
 'IF she will! Egad, that's it. But if she won't?'
 Crack!—on Mr. Jasper's part.
 'How's she looking, Jack?'
 Mr. Jasper's concentrated face again includes the portrait as he returns: 'Very like your sketch indeed.'
 'I AM a little proud of it,' says the young fellow, glancing up at the sketch with complacency, and then shutting one eye, and taking a corrected prospect of it over a level bridge of nut-crackers in the air: 'Not badly hit off from memory. But I ought to have caught that expression pretty well, for I have seen it often enough.'
 Crack!—on Edwin Drood's part.
 Crack!—on Mr. Jasper's part.
 'In point of fact,' the former resumes, after some silent dipping among his fragments of walnut with an air of pique, 'I see it whenever I go to see Pussy. If I don't find it on her face, I leave it there.--You know I do, Miss Scornful Pert. Booh! With a twirl of the nut-crackers at the portrait.
 Crack! crack! crack. Slowly, on Mr. Jasper's part.
 Crack. Sharply on the part of Edwin Drood.
 Silence on both sides.
 'Have you lost your tongue, Jack?'
 'Have you found yours, Ned?'
 'No, but really;--isn't it, you know, after all--'
 Mr. Jasper lifts his dark eyebrows inquiringly.
 'Isn't it unsatisfactory to be cut off from choice in such a matter? There, Jack! I tell you! If I could choose, I would choose Pussy from all the pretty girls in the world.'
 'But you have not got to choose.'
 'That's what I complain of. My dead and gone father and Pussy's dead and gone father must needs marry us together by anticipation. Why the--Devil, I was going to say, if it had been respectful to their memory--couldn't they leave us alone?'
 'Tut, tut, dear boy,' Mr. Jasper remonstrates, in a tone of gentle deprecation.
 'Tut, tut? Yes, Jack, it's all very well for YOU. YOU can take it easily. YOUR life is not laid down to scale, and lined and dotted out for you, like a surveyor's plan. YOU have no uncomfortable suspicion that you are forced upon anybody, nor has anybody an uncomfortable suspicion that she is forced upon you, or that you are forced upon her. YOU can choose for yourself. Life, for YOU, is a plum with the natural bloom on; it hasn't been over-carefully wiped off for YOU--'
 'Don't stop, dear fellow. Go on.'
 'Can I anyhow have hurt your feelings, Jack?'
 'How can you have hurt my feelings?'
 'Good Heaven, Jack, you look frightfully ill! There's a strange film come over your eyes.'
 Mr. Jasper, with a forced smile, stretches out his right hand, as if at once to disarm apprehension and gain time to get better. After a while he says faintly:
 'I have been taking opium for a pain--an agony--that sometimes overcomes me. The effects of the medicine steal over me like a blight or a cloud, and pass. You see them in the act of passing; they will be gone directly. Look away from me. They will go all the sooner.'

With a scared face the younger man complies by casting his eyes downward at the ashes on the hearth. Not relaxing his own gaze on the fire, but rather strengthening it with a fierce, firm grip upon his elbow-chair, the elder sits for a few moments rigid, and then, with thick drops standing on his forehead, and a sharp catch of his breath, becomes as he was before. On his so subsiding in his chair, his nephew gently and assiduously tends him while he quite recovers. When Jasper is restored, he lays a tender hand upon his nephew's shoulder, and, in a tone of voice less troubled than the purport of his words--indeed with something of raillery or banter in it--thus addresses him:

'There is said to be a hidden skeleton in every house; but you thought there was none in mine, dear Ned.'

'Upon my life, Jack, I did think so. However, when I come to consider that even in Pussy's house--if she had one--and in mine--if I had one--'

'You were going to say (but that I interrupted you in spite of myself) what a quiet life mine is. No whirl and uproar around me, no distracting commerce or calculation, no risk, no change of place, myself devoted to the art I pursue, my business my pleasure.'
'I really was going to say something of the kind, Jack; but you see, you, speaking of yourself, almost necessarily leave out much that I should have put in. For instance: I should have put in the foreground your being so much respected as Lay Precentor, or Lay Clerk, or whatever you call it, of this Cathedral; your enjoying the reputation of having done such wonders with the choir; your choosing your society, and holding such an independent position in this queer old place; your gift of teaching (why, even Pussy, who don't like being taught, says there never was such a Master as you are!), and your connexion.'

'Yes; I saw what you were tending to. I hate it.'

'Hate it, Jack?' (Much bewildered.)

'I hate it. The cramped monotony of my existence grinds me away by the grain. How does our service sound to you?'

'Beautiful! Quite celestial!'

'It often sounds to me quite devilish. I am so weary of it. The echoes of my own voice among the arches seem to mock me with my daily drudging round. No wretched monk who droned his life away in that gloomy place, before me, can have been more tired of it than I am. He could take for relief (and did take) to carving demons out of the stalls and seats and desks. What shall I do? Must I take to carving them out of my heart?'

'I thought you had so exactly found your niche in life, Jack,' Edwin Drood returns, astonished, bending forward in his chair to lay a sympathetic hand on Jasper's knee, and looking at him with an anxious face.

'I know you thought so. They all think so.'

'Well, I suppose they do,' says Edwin, meditating aloud. 'Pussy thinks so.'

'When did she tell you that?'

'The last time I was here. You remember when. Three months ago.'

'How did she phrase it?'

'O, she only said that she had become your pupil, and that you were made for your vocation.'

The younger man glances at the portrait. The elder sees it in him.

'Anyhow, my dear Ned,' Jasper resumes, as he shakes his head with a grave cheerfulness, 'I must subdue myself to my vocation: which is much the same thing outwardly. It's too late to find another now. This is a confidence between us.'

'It shall be sacredly preserved, Jack.'

'I have reposed it in you, because--'

'I feel it, I assure you. Because we are fast friends, and because you love and trust me, as I love and trust you. Both hands, Jack.'

As each stands looking into the other's eyes, and as the uncle holds the nephew's hands, the uncle thus proceeds:

'You know now, don't you, that even a poor monotonous chorister and grinder of music--in his niche--may be troubled with some stray sort of ambition, aspiration, restlessness, dissatisfaction, what shall we call it?'

'Yes, dear Jack.'

'And you will remember?'

'My dear Jack, I only ask you, am I likely to forget what you have said with so much feeling?'

'Take it as a warning, then.'

In the act of having his hands released, and of moving a step back, Edwin pauses for an instant to consider the application of these last words. The instant over, he says, sensibly touched:

'I am afraid I am but a shallow, surface kind of fellow, Jack, and that my headpiece is none of the best. But I needn't say I am young; and perhaps I shall not grow worse as I grow older. At all events, I hope I have something impressible within me, which feels--deeply feels--the disinterestedness of your painfully laying your inner self bare, as a warning to me.'

Mr. Jasper's steadiness of face and figure becomes so marvellous that his breathing seems to have stopped.

'I couldn't fail to notice, Jack, that it cost you a great effort, and that you were very much moved, and very unlike your usual self. Of course I knew that you were extremely fond of me, but I really was not prepared for your, as I may say, sacrificing yourself to me in that way.'

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'I couldn't fail to notice, Jack, that it cost you a great effort, and that you were very much moved, and very unlike your usual self. Of course I knew that you were extremely fond of me, but I really was not prepared for your, as I may say, sacrificing yourself to me in that way.'

Mr. Jasper, becoming a breathing man again without the smallest stage of transition between the two extreme states, lifts his shoulders, laughs, and waves his right arm.

'No; don't put the sentiment away, Jack; please don't; for I am very much in earnest. I have no doubt that that unhealthy state of mind which you have so powerfully described is attended with some real suffering, and is hard to bear. But let me reassure you, Jack, as to the chances of its overcoming me. I don't think I am in the way of it. In some few months less than another year, you know, I shall carry Pussy off from school as Mrs. Edwin Drood. I shall then go engineering into the East, and Pussy with me. And although we have our little tiffs now, arising out of a certain unavoidable flatness that attends our love-making, owing to its end being all settled beforehand, still I have
no doubt of our getting on capitally then, when it's done and can't be helped. In short, Jack, to go back to the old song I was freely quoting at dinner (and who knows old songs better than you?), my wife shall dance, and I will sing, so merrily pass the day. Of Pussy's being beautiful there cannot be a doubt;—and when you are good besides, Little Miss Impudence,' once more apostrophising the portrait, 'I'll burn your comic likeness, and paint your music-master another.'

Mr. Jasper, with his hand to his chin, and with an expression of musing benevolence on his face, has attentively watched every animated look and gesture attending the delivery of these words. He remains in that attitude after they are spoken, as if in a kind of fascination attendant on his strong interest in the youthful spirit that he loves so well. Then he says with a quiet smile:

'You won't be warned, then?'

'No, Jack.'

'You can't be warned, then?'

'No, Jack, not by you. Besides that I don't really consider myself in danger, I don't like your putting yourself in that position.'

'Shall we go and walk in the churchyard?'

'By all means. You won't mind my slipping out of it for half a moment to the Nuns' House, and leaving a parcel there? Only gloves for Pussy; as many pairs of gloves as she is years old to-day. Rather poetical, Jack?'

Mr. Jasper, still in the same attitude, murmurs: "Nothing half so sweet in life," Ned!"

'Here's the parcel in my greatcoat-pocket. They must be presented to-night, or the poetry is gone. It's against regulations for me to call at night, but not to leave a packet. I am ready, Jack!'

Mr. Jasper dissolves his attitude, and they go out together.

CHAPTER III--THE NUNS' HOUSE

For sufficient reasons, which this narrative will itself unfold as it advances, a fictitious name must be bestowed upon the old Cathedral town. Let it stand in these pages as Cloisterham. It was once possibly known to the Druids by another name, and certainly to the Romans by another, and to the Saxons by another, and to the Normans by another; and a name more or less in the course of many centuries can be of little moment to its dusty chronicles.

An ancient city, Cloisterham, and no meet dwelling-place for any one with hankerings after the noisy world. A monotonous, silent city, deriving an earthy flavour throughout from its Cathedral crypt, and so abounding in vestiges of monastic graves, that the Cloisterham children grow small salad in the dust of abbots and abbesses, and make dirt-pies of nuns and friars; while every ploughman in its outlying fields renders to once puissant Lord Treasurers, Archbishops, Bishops, and such-like, the attention which the Ogre in the story-book desired to render to his unbidden visitor, and grinds their bones to make his bread.

A drowsy city, Cloisterham, whose inhabitants seem to suppose, with an inconsistency more strange than rare, that all its changes lie behind it, and that there are no more to come. A queer moral to derive from antiquity, yet older than any traceable antiquity. So silent are the streets of Cloisterham (though prone to echo on the smallest provocation), that of a summer-day the sunblinds of its shops scarce dare to flap in the south wind; while the sun-browned tramps, who pass along and stare, quicken their limp a little, that they may the sooner get beyond the confines of its oppressive respectability. This is a feat not difficult of achievement, seeing that the streets of Cloisterham city are little more than one narrow street by which you get into it and get out of it: the rest being mostly disappointing yards with pumps in them and no thoroughfare—exception made of the Cathedral-close, and a paved Quaker settlement, in colour and general confirmation very like a Quakeress's bonnet, up in a shady corner.

In a word, a city of another and a bygone time is Cloisterham, with its hoarse Cathedral-bell, its hoarse rooks hovering about the Cathedral tower, its hoarier and less distinct rooks in the stalls far beneath. Fragments of old wall, saint's chapel, chapter-house, convent and monastery, have got incongruously or obstructively built into many of its houses and gardens, much as kindred jumbled notions have become incorporated into many of its citizens' minds. All things in it are of the past. Even its single pawnbroker takes in no pledges, nor has he for a long time, but offers vainly an unredeemed stock for sale, of which the costlier articles are dim and pale old watches apparently in a slow perspiration, tarnished sugar-tongs with ineffectual legs, and odd volumes of dismal books. The most abundant and the most agreeable evidences of progressing life in Cloisterham are the evidences of vegetable life in many gardens; even its drooping and despondent little theatre has its poor strip of garden, receiving the foul fiend, when he ducks from its stage into the infernal regions, among scarlet-beans or oyster-shells, according to the season of the year.

In the midst of Cloisterham stands the Nuns' House: a venerable brick edifice, whose present appellation is doubtless derived from the legend of its conventual uses. On the trim gate enclosing its old courtyard is a resplendent brass plate flashing forth the legend: 'Seminary for Young Ladies. Miss Twinkleton.' The house-front is so old and worn, and the brass plate is so shining and staring, that the general result has reminded imaginative
strangers of a battered old beau with a large modern eye-glass stuck in his blind eye.

Whether the nuns of yore, being of a submissive rather than a stiff-necked generation, habitually bent their contemplative heads to avoid collision with the beams in the low ceilings of the many chambers of their House; whether they sat in its long low windows telling their beads for their mortification, instead of making necklaces of them for their adornment; whether they were ever walled up alive in odd angles and jutting gables of the building for having some ineradicable leaven of busy mother Nature in them which has kept the fermenting world alive ever since; these may be matters of interest to its haunting ghosts (if any), but constitute no item in Miss Twinkleton's half-yearly accounts. They are neither of Miss Twinkleton's inclusive regulars, nor of her extras. The lady who undertakes the poetical department of the establishment at so much (or so little) a quarter has no pieces in her list of recitals bearing on such unprofitable questions.

As, in some cases of drunkenness, and in others of animal magnetism, there are two states of consciousness which never clash, but each of which pursues its separate course as though it were continuous instead of broken (thus, if I hide my watch when I am drunk, I must be drunk again before I can remember where), so Miss Twinkleton has two distinct and separate phases of being. Every night, the moment the young ladies have retired to rest, does Miss Twinkleton smarten up her curls a little, brighten up her eyes a little, and become a sprightly Miss Twinkleton than the young ladies have ever seen. Every night, at the same hour, does Miss Twinkleton resume the topics of the previous night, comprehending the tenderer scandal of Cloisterham, of which she has no knowledge whatever by day, and references to a certain season at Tunbridge Wells (airily called by Miss Twinkleton in this state of her existence 'The Wells'), notably the season wherein a certain finished gentleman (compassionately called by Miss Twinkleton, in this stage of her existence, 'Foolish Mr. Porters') revealed a homage of the heart, whereof Miss Twinkleton, in her scholastic state of existence, is as ignorant as a granite pillar. Miss Twinkleton's companion in both states of existence, and equally adaptable to either, is one Mrs. Tisher: a deferential widow with a weak back, a chronic sigh, and a suppressed voice, who looks after the young ladies' wardrobes, and leads them to infer that she has seen better days. Perhaps this is the reason why it is an article of faith with the servants, handed down from race to race, that the departed Tisher was a hairdresser.

The pet pupil of the Nuns' House is Miss Rosa Bud, of course called Rosebud; wonderfully pretty, wonderfully childish, wonderfully whimsical. An awkward interest (awkward because romantic) attaches to Miss Bud in the minds of the young ladies, on account of its being known to them that a husband has been chosen for her by will and bequest, and that her guardian is bound down to bestow her on that husband when he comes of age. Miss Twinkleton, in her seminarian state of existence, has combated the romantic aspect of this destiny by affecting to bequest, and that her guardian is bound down to bestow her on that husband when he comes of age. Miss Twinkleton has two distinct and separate phases of being. Every night, the moment the young ladies have retired to rest, does Miss Twinkleton smarten up her curls a little, brighten up her eyes a little, and become a sprightlier Miss Twinkleton than the young ladies have ever seen. Every night, at the same hour, does Miss Twinkleton resume the topics of the previous night, comprehending the tenderer scandal of Cloisterham, of which she has no knowledge whatever by day, and references to a certain season at Tunbridge Wells (airily called by Miss Twinkleton in this state of her existence 'The Wells'), notably the season wherein a certain finished gentleman (compassionately called by Miss Twinkleton, in this stage of her existence, 'Foolish Mr. Porters') revealed a homage of the heart, whereof Miss Twinkleton, in her scholastic state of existence, is as ignorant as a granite pillar. Miss Twinkleton's companion in both states of existence, and equally adaptable to either, is one Mrs. Tisher: a deferential widow with a weak back, a chronic sigh, and a suppressed voice, who looks after the young ladies' wardrobes, and leads them to infer that she has seen better days. Perhaps this is the reason why it is an article of faith with the servants, handed down from race to race, that the departed Tisher was a hairdresser.

The Nuns' House is never in such a state of flutter as when this allotted husband calls to see little Rosebud. (It is unanimously understood by the young ladies that he is lawfully entitled to this privilege, and that if Miss Twinkleton disputed it, she would be instantly taken up and transported.) When his ring at the gate- bell is expected, or takes place, every young lady who can, under any pretence, look out of window, looks out of window; while every young lady who is 'practising,' practises out of time; and the French class becomes so demoralised that the mark goes round as briskly as the bottle at a convivial party in the last century.

On the afternoon of the day next after the dinner of two at the gatehouse, the bell is rung with the usual fluttering results.

'Mr. Edwin Drood to see Miss Rosa.'

This is the announcement of the parlour-maid in chief. Miss Twinkleton, with an exemplary air of melancholy on her, turns to the sacrifice, and says, 'You may go down, my dear.' Miss Bud goes down, followed by all eyes.

Mr. Edwin Drood is waiting in Miss Twinkleton's own parlour: a dainty room, with nothing more directly scholastic in it than a terrestrial and a celestial globe. These expressive machines imply (to parents and guardians) that even when Miss Twinkleton retires into the bosom of privacy, duty may at any moment compel her to become a sort of Wandering Jewess, scouring the earth and soaring through the skies in search of knowledge for her pupils.

The last new maid, who has never seen the young gentleman Miss Rosa is engaged to, and who is making his acquaintance between the hinges of the open door, left open for the purpose, stumbles guiltily down the kitchen stairs, as a charming little apparition, with its face concealed by a little silk apron thrown over its head, glides into the parlour.

'O! IT IS so ridiculous!' says the apparition, stopping and shrinking. 'Don't, Eddy!'

'Don't what, Rosa?'

'Don't come any nearer, please. It IS so absurd.'
'What is absurd, Rosa?'
'The whole thing is. It IS so absurd to be an engaged orphan and it IS so absurd to have the girls and the servants scuttling about after one, like mice in the wainscot; and it IS so absurd to be called upon!'
The apparition appears to have a thumb in the corner of its mouth while making this complaint.
'You give me an affectionate reception, Pussy, I must say.'
'Well, I will in a minute, Eddy, but I can't just yet. How are you?' (very shortly.)
'I am unable to reply that I am much the better for seeing you, Pussy, inasmuch as I see nothing of you.'
This second remonstrance brings a dark, bright, pouting eye out from a corner of the apron; but it swiftly becomes invisible again, as the apparition exclaims: 'O good gracious! you have had half your hair cut off!'
'I should have done better to have had my head cut off, I think,' says Edwin, rumpling the hair in question, with a fierce glance at the looking-glass, and giving an impatient stamp. 'Shall I go?'
'No; you needn't go just yet, Eddy. The girls would all be asking questions why you went.'
'Once for all, Rosa, will you uncover that ridiculous little head of yours and give me a welcome?'
The apron is pulled off the childish head, as its wearer replies: 'You're very welcome, Eddy. There! I'm sure that's nice. Shake hands. No, I can't kiss you, because I've got an acidulated drop in my mouth.'
'Are you at all glad to see me, Pussy?'
'O, yes, I'm dreadfully glad.--Go and sit down.--Miss Twinkleton.'
It is the custom of that excellent lady when these visits occur, to appear every three minutes, either in her own person or in that of Mrs. Tisher, and lay an offering on the shrine of Propriety by affecting to look for some desiderated article. On the present occasion Miss Twinkleton, gracefully gliding in and out, says in passing: 'How do you do, Mr. Drood? Very glad indeed to have the pleasure. Pray excuse me. Tweezers. Thank you!'
'I got the gloves last evening, Eddy, and I like them very much. They are beauties.'
'Well, that's something,' the affianced replies, half grumbling. 'The smallest encouragement thankfully received.
And how did you pass your birthday, Pussy?'
'Delightfully! Everybody gave me a present. And we had a feast. And we had a ball at night.'
'A feast and a ball, eh? These occasions seem to go off tolerably well without me, Pussy.'
'De-lightfully!' cries Rosa, in a quite spontaneous manner, and without the least pretence of reserve.
'Hah! And what was the feast?'
'Tarts, oranges, jellys, and shrimps.'
'Any partners at the ball?'
'We danced with one another, of course, sir. But some of the girls made game to be their brothers. It WAS so droll!'
'Did anybody make game to be--'
'To be you? O dear yes!' cries Rosa, laughing with great enjoyment. 'That was the first thing done.'
'I hope she did it pretty well,' says Edwin rather doubtfully.
'O, it was excellent! --I wouldn't dance with you, you know.'
Edwin scarcely seems to see the force of this; begs to know if he may take the liberty to ask why?
'Because I was so tired of you,' returns Rosa. But she quickly adds, and pleadingly too, seeing displeasure in his face: 'Dear Eddy, you were just as tired of me, you know.'
'Did I say so, Rosa?'
'Say so! Do you ever say so? No, you only showed it. O, she did it so well!' cries Rosa, in a sudden ecstasy with her counterfeit betrothed.
'It strikes me that she must be a devilish impudent girl,' says Edwin Drood. 'And so, Pussy, you have passed your last birthday in this old house.'
'Ah, yes!' Rosa clasps her hands, looks down with a sigh, and shakes her head.
'You seem to be sorry, Rosa.'
'I am sorry for the poor old place. Somehow, I feel as if it would miss me, when I am gone so far away, so young.'
'Perhaps we had better stop short, Rosa?'
She looks up at him with a swift bright look; next moment shakes her head, sighs, and looks down again.
'That is to say, is it, Pussy, that we are both resigned?'
She nods her head again, and after a short silence, quaintly bursts out with: 'You know we must be married, and married from here, Eddy, or the poor girls will be so dreadfully disappointed!'
For the moment there is more of compassion, both for her and for himself, in her affianced husband's face, than there is of love. He checks the look, and asks: 'Shall I take you out for a walk, Rosa dear?'
Rosa dear does not seem at all clear on this point, until her face, which has been comically reflective, brightens.
‘O, yes, Eddy; let us go for a walk! And I tell you what we’ll do. You shall pretend that you are engaged to somebody else, and I’ll pretend that I am not engaged to anybody, and then we shan’t quarrel.’

‘Do you think that will prevent our falling out, Rosa?’

‘I know it will. Hush! Pretend to look out of window--Mrs. Tisher!’

Through a fortuitous concourse of accidents, the matronly Tisher heaves in sight, says, in rustling through the room like the legendary ghost of a dowager in silken skirts: ‘I hope I see Mr. Drood well; though I needn’t ask, if I may judge from his complexion. I trust I disturb no one; but there WAS a paper-knife--O, thank you, I am sure!’ and disappears with her prize.

‘One other thing you must do, Eddy, to oblige me,’ says Rosebud. ‘The moment we get into the street, you must put me outside, and keep close to the house yourself--squeeze and graze yourself against it.’

‘By all means, Rosa, if you wish it. Might I ask why?’

‘O! because I don’t want the girls to see you.’

‘It’s a fine day; but would you like me to carry an umbrella up?’

‘Don’t be foolish, sir. You haven’t got polished leather boots on,’ pouting, with one shoulder raised.

‘Perhaps that might escape the notice of the girls, even if they did see me,’ remarks Edwin, looking down at his boots with a sudden distaste for them.

‘Nothing escapes their notice, sir. And then I know what would happen. Some of them would begin reflecting on me by saying (for THEY are free) that they never will on any account engage themselves to lovers without polished leather boots. Hark! Miss Twinkleton. I’ll ask for leave.’

That discreet lady being indeed heard without, inquiring of nobody in a blandly conversational tone as she advances: ‘Eh? Indeed! Are you quite sure you saw my mother-of-pearl button-holder on the work-table in my room?’ is at once solicited for walking leave, and graciously accords it. And soon the young couple go out of the Nuns’ House, taking all precautions against the discovery of the so vitally defective boots of Mr. Edwin Drood: precautions, let us hope, effective for the peace of Mrs. Edwin Drood that is to be.

‘Which way shall we take, Rosa?’

Rosa replies: ‘I want to go to the Lumps-of-Delight shop.’

‘To the--?’

‘A Turkish sweetmeat, sir. My gracious me, don’t you understand anything? Call yourself an Engineer, and not know THAT?’

‘Why, how should I know it, Rosa?’

‘Because I am very fond of them. But O! I forgot what we are to pretend. No, you needn’t know anything about them; never mind.’

So he is gloomily borne off to the Lumps-of-Delight shop, where Rosa makes her purchase, and, after offering some to him (which he rather indignantly declines), begins to partake of it with great zest: previously taking off and rolling up a pair of little pink gloves, like rose-leaves, and occasionally putting her little pink fingers to her rosy lips, to cleanse them from the Dust of Delight that comes off the Lumps.

‘Now, be a good-tempered Eddy, and pretend. And so you are engaged?’

‘And so I am engaged.’

‘Is she nice?’

‘Charming.’

‘Tall?’

‘Immensely tall!’ Rosa being short.

‘Must be gawky, I should think,’ is Rosa’s quiet commentary.

‘I beg your pardon; not at all,’ contradiction rising in him.

‘What is termed a fine woman; a splendid woman.’

‘Big nose, no doubt,’ is the quiet commentary again.

‘Not a little one, certainly,’ is the quick reply, (Rosa’s being a little one.)

‘Long pale nose, with a red knob in the middle. I know the sort of nose,’ says Rosa, with a satisfied nod, and tranquilly enjoying the Lumps.

‘You DON’T know the sort of nose, Rosa,’ with some warmth; ‘because it’s nothing of the kind.’

‘Not a pale nose, Eddy?’

‘No.’ Determined not to assent.

‘A red nose? O! I don’t like red noses. However; to be sure she can always powder it.’

‘She would scorn to powder it,’ says Edwin, becoming heated.

‘Would she? What a stupid thing she must be! Is she stupid in everything?’

‘No; in nothing.’
After a pause, in which the whimsically wicked face has not been unobservant of him, Rosa says:

'And this most sensible of creatures likes the idea of being carried off to Egypt; does she, Eddy?'

'Yes. She takes a sensible interest in triumphs of engineering skill: especially when they are to change the whole condition of an undeveloped country.'

'Lor!' says Rosa, shrugging her shoulders, with a little laugh of wonder.

'Do you object,' Edwin inquires, with a majestic turn of his eyes downward upon the fairy figure: 'do you object, Rosa, to her feeling that interest?'

'Object? my dear Eddy! But really, doesn't she hate boilers and things?'

'I can answer for her not being so idiotic as to hate Boilers,' he returns with angry emphasis; 'though I cannot answer for her views about Things; really not understanding what Things are meant.'

'But don't she hate Arabs, and Turks, and Fellahs, and people?'

'Certainly not.' Very firmly.

'At least she MUST hate the Pyramids? Come, Eddy?'

'Why should she be such a little--tall, I mean--goose, as to hate the Pyramids, Rosa?'

'Ah! you should hear Miss Twinkleton,' often nodding her head, and much enjoying the Lumps, 'bore about them, and then you wouldn't ask. Tiresome old burying-grounds! Isises, and Ibises, and Cheopses, and Pharaohses; who cares about them? And then there was Belzoni, or somebody, dragged out by the legs, half-choked with bats and dust. All the girls say: Serve him right, and hope it hurt him, and wish he had been quite choked.'

The two youthful figures, side by side, but not now arm-in-arm, wander discontentedly about the old Close; and each sometimes stops and slowly imprints a deeper footstep in the fallen leaves.

'Well!' says Edwin, after a lengthy silence. 'According to custom. We can't get on, Rosa.'

Rosa tosses her head, and says she don't want to get on.

'That's a pretty sentiment, Rosa, considering.'

'Considering what?'

'If I say what, you'll go wrong again.'

'YOU'LL go wrong, you mean, Eddy. Don't be ungenerous.'

'Ungenerous! I like that!'

'Then I DON'T like that, and so I tell you plainly,' Rosa pouts.

'Now, Rosa, I put it to you. Who disparaged my profession, my destination--'

'You are not going to be buried in the Pyramids, Come, Eddy? I hope?' she interrupts, arching her delicate eyebrows. 'You never said you were. If you are, why haven't you mentioned it to me? I can't find out your plans by instinct.'

'Now, Rosa, you know very well what I mean, my dear.'

'Well then, why did you begin with your detestable red-nosed giantesses? And she would, she would, she would, she WOULD powder it!' cries Rosa, in a little burst of comical contradictory spleen.

'Somehow or other, I never can come right in these discussions,' says Edwin, sighing and becoming resigned.

'How is it possible, sir, that you ever can come right when you're always wrong? And as to Belzoni, I suppose he's dead;--I'm sure I hope he is--and how can his legs or his chokes concern you?'

'It is nearly time for your return, Rosa. We have not had a very happy walk, have we?'

'A happy walk? A detestably unhappy walk, sir. If I go up-stairs the moment I get in and cry till I can't take my dancing lesson, you are responsible, mind!'

'Let us be friends, Rosa.'

'Ah!' cries Rosa, shaking her head and bursting into real tears, 'I wish we COULD be friends! It's because we can't be friends, that we try one another so. I am a young little thing, Eddy, to have an old heartache; but I really, really have, sometimes. Don't be angry. I know you have one yourself too often. We should both of us have done better, if What is to be had been left What might have been. I am quite a little serious thing now, and not teasing you. Let each of us forbear, this one time, on our own account, and on the other's!'

Disarmed by this glimpse of a woman's nature in the spoilt child, though for an instant disposed to resent it as seeming to involve the enforced infliction of himself upon her, Edwin Drood stands watching her as she childishly cries and sobs, with both hands to the handkerchief at her eyes, and then--she becoming more composed, and indeed beginning in her young inconstancy to laugh at herself for having been so moved--leads her to a seat hard by, under the elm-trees.

'One clear word of understanding, Pussy dear. I am not clever out of my own line--now I come to think of it, I don't know that I am particularly clever in it--but I want to do right. There is not-- there may be--I really don't see my way to what I want to say, but I must say it before we part--there is not any other young--'

'O no, Eddy! It's generous of you to ask me; but no, no, no!'

They have come very near to the Cathedral windows, and at this moment the organ and the choir sound out
sublimely. As they sit listening to the solemn swell, the confidence of last night rises in young Edwin Drood's mind, and he thinks how unlike this music is to that discordance.

'I fancy I can distinguish Jack's voice,' is his remark in a low tone in connection with the train of thought.

'Take me back at once, please,' urges his Affianced, quickly laying her light hand upon his wrist. 'They will all be coming out directly; let us get away. O, what a resounding chord! But don't let us stop to listen to it; let us get away!'

Her hurry is over as soon as they have passed out of the Close. They go arm-in-arm now, gravely and deliberately enough, along the old High-street, to the Nuns' House. At the gate, the street being within sight empty, Edwin bends down his face to Rosebud's.

She remonstrates, laughing, and is a childish schoolgirl again.

'Eddy, no! I'm too sticky to be kissed. But give me your hand, and I'll blow a kiss into that.'

He does so. She breathes a light breath into it and asks, retaining it and looking into it:-

'Now say, what do you see?'

'See, Rosa?'

'Why, I thought you Egyptian boys could look into a hand and see all sorts of phantoms. Can't you see a happy Future?'

For certain, neither of them sees a happy Present, as the gate opens and closes, and one goes in, and the other goes away.

CHAPTER IV--MR. SAPSEA

Accepting the Jackass as the type of self-sufficient stupidity and conceit--a custom, perhaps, like some few other customs, more conventional than fair--then the purest jackass in Cloisterham is Mr. Thomas Sapsea, Auctioneer.

Mr. Sapsea 'dresses at' the Dean; has been bowed to for the Dean, in mistake; has even been spoken to in the street as My Lord, under the impression that he was the Bishop come down unexpectedly, without his chaplain. Mr. Sapsea is very proud of this, and of his voice, and of his style. He has even (in selling landed property) tried the experiment of slightly intoning in his pulpit, to make himself more like what he takes to be the genuine ecclesiastical article. So, in ending a Sale by Public Auction, Mr. Sapsea finishes off with an air of bestowing a benediction on the assembled brokers, which leaves the real Dean--a modest and worthy gentleman--far behind.

Mr. Sapsea has many admirers; indeed, the proposition is carried by a large local majority, even including non-believers in his wisdom, that he is a credit to Cloisterham. He possesses the great qualities of being portentous and dull, and of having a roll in his speech, and another roll in his gait; not to mention a certain gravely flowing action with his hands, as if he were presently going to Confirm the individual with whom he holds discourse. Much nearer sixty years of age than fifty, with a flowing outline of stomach, and horizontal creases in his waistcoat; reputed to be rich; voting at elections in the strictly respectable interest; morally satisfied that nothing but he himself has grown since he was a baby; how can dunder-headed Mr. Sapsea be otherwise than a credit to Cloisterham, and society?

Mr. Sapsea's premises are in the High-street, over against the Nuns' House. They are of about the period of the Nuns' House, irregularly modernised here and there, as steadily deteriorating generations found, more and more, that they preferred air and light to Fever and the Plague. Over the doorway is a wooden effigy, about half life-size, representing Mr. Sapsea's father, in a curly wig and toga, in the act of selling. The chastity of the idea, and the natural appearance of the little finger, hammer, and pulpit, have been much admired.

Mr. Sapsea sits in his dull ground-floor sitting-room, giving first on his paved back yard; and then on his railed-off garden. Mr. Sapsea has a bottle of port wine on a table before the fire--the fire is an early luxury, but pleasant on the cool, chilly autumn evening--and is characteristically attended by his portrait, his eight-day clock, and his weather-glass. Characteristically, because he would uphold himself against mankind, his weather-glass against weather, and his clock against time.

By Mr. Sapsea's side on the table are a writing-desk and writing materials. Glancing at a scrap of manuscript, Mr. Sapsea reads it to himself with a lofty air, and then, slowly pacing the room with his thumbs in the arm-holes of his waistcoat, repeats it from memory: so internally, though with much dignity, that the word 'Ethelinda' is alone audible.

There are three clean wineglasses in a tray on the table. His serving-maid entering, and announcing 'Mr. Jasper is come, sir,' Mr. Sapsea waves 'Admit him,' and draws two wineglasses from the rank, as being claimed.

'Glad to see you, sir. I congratulate myself on having the honour of receiving you here for the first time.' Mr. Sapsea does the honours of his house in this wise.

'You are very good. The honour is mine and the self-congratulation is mine.'

'You are pleased to say so, sir. But I do assure you that it is a satisfaction to me to receive you in my humble home. And that is what I would not say to everybody.' Ineffable loftiness on Mr. Sapsea's part accompanies these words, as leaving the sentence to be understood: 'You will not easily believe that your society can be a satisfaction to
a man like myself; nevertheless, it is.'

'I have for some time desired to know you, Mr. Sapsea.'

'And I, sir, have long known you by reputation as a man of taste. Let me fill your glass. I will give you, sir,' says Mr. Sapsea, filling his own:

'When the French come over, May we meet them at Dover!'

This was a patriotic toast in Mr. Sapsea's infancy, and he is therefore fully convinced of its being appropriate to any subsequent era.

'You can scarcely be ignorant, Mr. Sapsea,' observes Jasper, watching the auctioneer with a smile as the latter stretches out his legs before the fire, 'that you know the world.'

'Well, sir,' is the chuckling reply, 'I think I know something of it; something of it.'

'Your reputation for that knowledge has always interested and surprised me, and made me wish to know you. For Cloisterham is a little place. Cooped up in it myself, I know nothing beyond it, and feel it to be a very little place.'

'If I have not gone to foreign countries, young man,' Mr. Sapsea begins, and then stops:-- 'You will excuse me calling you young man, Mr. Jasper? You are much my junior.'

'By all means.'

'If I have not gone to foreign countries, young man, foreign countries have come to me. They have come to me in the way of business, and I have improved upon my opportunities. Put it that I take an inventory, or make a catalogue. I see a French clock. I never saw him before, in my life, but I instantly lay my finger on him and say "Paris!" I see some cups and saucers of Chinese make, equally strangers to me personally: I put my finger on them, then and there, and I say "Pekin, Nankin, and Canton." It is the same with Japan, with Egypt, and with bamboo and sandalwood from the East Indies; I put my finger on them all. I have put my finger on the North Pole before now, and said "Spear of Esquimaux make, for half a pint of pale sherry!"'

'Really? A very remarkable way, Mr. Sapsea, of acquiring a knowledge of men and things.'

'I mention it, sir,' Mr. Sapsea rejoins, with unspeakable complacency, 'because, as I say, it don't do to boast of what you are; but show how you came to be it, and then you prove it.'

'Most interesting. We were to speak of the late Mrs. Sapsea.'

'Very well. We were, sir.' Mr. Sapsea fills both glasses, and takes the decanter into safe keeping again. 'Before I consult your opinion as a man of taste on this little trifle--holding it up--which is BUT a trifle, and still has required some thought, sir, some little fever of the brow, I ought perhaps to describe the character of the late Mrs. Sapsea, now dead three quarters of a year.'

Mr. Sapsea, in the act of yawning behind his wineglass, puts down that screen and calls up a look of interest. It is a little impaired in its expressiveness by his having a shut-up gape still to dispose of, with watering eyes.

'Half a dozen years ago, or so,' Mr. Sapsea proceeds, 'when I had enlarged my mind up to--I will not say to what it now is, for that might seem to aim at too much, but up to the pitch of wanting another mind to be absorbed in it--I cast my eye about me for a nuptial partner. Because, as I say, it is not good for man to be alone.'

Mr. Jasper appears to commit this original idea to memory.

'Miss Brobity at that time kept, I will not call it the rival establishment to the establishment at the Nuns' House opposite, but I will call it the other parallel establishment down town. The world did have it that she showed a passion for attending my sales, when they took place on half holidays, or in vacation time. The world did put it about, that she admired my style. The world did notice that as time flowed by, my style became traceable in the dictation-exercises of Miss Brobity's pupils. Young man, a whisper even sprang up in obscure malignity, that one ignorant and besotted Churl (a parent) so committed himself as to object to it by name. But I do not believe this. For is it likely that any human creature in his right senses would so lay himself open to be pointed at, by what I call the finger of scorn?'

Mr. Jasper shakes his head. Not in the least likely. Mr. Sapsea, in a grandiloquent state of absence of mind, seems to refill his visitor's glass, which is full already; and does really refill his own, which is empty.

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'Miss Brobity's Being, young man, was deeply imbued with homage to Mind. She revered Mind, when launched, or, as I say, precipitated, on an extensive knowledge of the world. When I made my proposal, she did me the honour to be so overshadowed with a species of Awe, as to be able to articulate only the two words, "O Thou!" meaning myself. Her limpid blue eyes were fixed upon me, her semi-transparent hands were clasped together, pallor overspread her aquiline features, and, though encouraged to proceed, she never did proceed a word further. I disposed of the parallel establishment by private contract, and we became as nearly one as could be expected under the circumstances. But she never could, and she never did, find a phrase satisfactory to her perhaps-too-favourable estimate of my intellect. To the very last (feeble action of liver), she addressed me in the same unfinished terms.'

Mr. Jasper has closed his eyes as the auctioneer has deepened his voice. He now abruptly opens them, and says, in unison with the deepened voice 'Ah!'--rather as if stopping himself on the extreme verge of adding--'men!'
I have been since,' says Mr. Sapsea, with his legs stretched out, and solemnly enjoying himself with the wine and the fire, 'what you behold me; I have been since a solitary mourner; I have been since, as I say, wasting my evening conversation on the desert air. I will not say that I have reproached myself; but there have been times when I have asked myself the question: What if her husband had been nearer on a level with her? If she had not had to look up quite so high, what might the stimulating action have been upon the liver?'

Mr. Jasper says, with an appearance of having fallen into dreadfully low spirits, that he 'supposes it was to be.'

'We can only suppose so, sir,' Mr. Sapsea coincides. 'As I say, Man proposes, Heaven disposes. It may or may not be putting the same thought in another form; but that is the way I put it.'

Mr. Jasper murmurs assent.

'And now, Mr. Jasper,' resumes the auctioneer, producing his scrap of manuscript, 'Mrs. Sapsea's monument having had full time to settle and dry, let me take your opinion, as a man of taste, on the inscription I have (as I before remarked, not without some little fever of the brow) drawn out for it. Take it in your own hand. The setting out of the lines requires to be followed with the eye, as well as the contents with the mind.'

Mr. Jasper complying, sees and reads as follows:

**ETHELINDA, Reverential Wife of MR. THOMAS SAPSEA, AUCTIONEER, VALUER, ESTATE AGENT, &c., OF THIS CITY.** Whose Knowledge of the World, Though somewhat extensive, Never brought him acquainted with A SPIRIT More capable of LOOKING UP TO HIM. STRANGER, PAUSE And ask thyself the Question, CANST THOU DO LIKewise? If Not, WITH A BLUSH RETIRE.

Mr. Sapsea having risen and stationed himself with his back to the fire, for the purpose of observing the effect of these lines on the countenance of a man of taste, consequently has his face towards the door, when his serving-maid, again appearing, announces, 'Durdles is come, sir!' He promptly draws forth and fills the third wineglass, as being now claimed, and replies, 'Show Durdles in.'

'Admirable!' quoth Mr. Jasper, handing back the paper.

'You approve, sir?'

'Impossible not to approve. Striking, characteristic, and complete.'

The auctioneer inclines his head, as one accepting his due and giving a receipt; and invites the entering Durdles to take off that glass of wine (hanging the same), for it will warm him.

Durdles is a stonemason; chiefly in the gravestone, tomb, and monument way, and wholly of their colour from head to foot. No man is better known in Cloisterham. He is the chartered libertine of the place. Fame trumpets him a wonderful workman—which, for aught that anybody knows, he may be (as he never works); and a wonderful sot—which everybody knows he is. With the Cathedral crypt he is better acquainted than any living authority; it may even be than any dead one. It is said that the intimacy of this acquaintance began in his habitually resorting to that secret place, to lock-out the Cloisterham boy-populace, and sleep off fumes of liquor: he having ready access to the Cathedral, as contractor for rough repairs. Be this as it may, he does know much about it, and, in the demolition of impedimental fragments of wall, buttress, and pavement, has seen strange sights. He often speaks of himself in the third person; perhaps, being a little misty as to his own identity, when he narrates; perhaps impartially adopting the Cloisterham nomenclature in reference to a character of acknowledged distinction. Thus he will say, touching his strange sights: 'Durdles come upon the old chap,' in reference to a buried magnate of ancient time and high degree, 'by striking right into the coffin with his pick. The old chap gave Durdles a look with his open eyes, as much as to say, 'Is your name Durdles? Why, my man, I've been waiting for you a devil of a time!'' And then he turned to powder.' With a two-foot rule always in his pocket, and a mason's hammer all but always in his hand, Durdles goes continually sounding and tapping all about and about the Cathedral; and whenever he says to Tope: 'Tope, here's another old 'un in here!' Tope announces it to the Dean as an established discovery.

In a suit of coarse flannel with horn buttons, a yellow neckerchief with dragged ends, an old hat more russet-coloured than black, and laced boots of the hue of his story calling, Durdles leads a hazy, gipsy sort of life, carrying his dinner about with him in a small bundle, and sitting on all manner of tombstones to dine. This dinner of Durdles's has become quite a Cloisterham institution: not only because of his never appearing in public without it, but because of its having been, on certain renowned occasions, taken into custody along with Durdles (as drunk and incapable), and exhibited before the Bench of justices at the townhall. These occasions, however, have been few and far apart: Durdles being as seldom drunk as sober. For the rest, he is an old bachelor, and he lives in a little antiquated hole of a house that was never finished: supposed to be built, so far, of stones stolen from the city wall. To this abode there is an approach, ankle-deep in stone chips, resembling a petrified grove of tombstones, urns, draperies, and broken columns, in all stages of sculpture. Herein two journeymen incessantly chip, while other two journeymen, who face each other, incessantly saw stone; dipping as regularly in and out of their sheltering sentry-boxes, as if they were mechanical figures emblematical of Time and Death.
Durdles unfeelingly takes out his two-foot rule, and measures the lines calmly, alloying them with stone-grit.

'This is for the monument, is it, Mr. Sapsea?'

'The Inscription. Yes.' Mr. Sapsea waits for its effect on a common mind.

'It'll come in to a eighth of a inch,' says Durdles. 'Your servant, Mr. Jasper. Hope I see you well.'

'How are you Durdles?'

'I've got a touch of the Tombatism on me, Mr. Jasper, but that I must expect.'

'You mean the Rheumatism,' says Sapsea, in a sharp tone. (He is nettled by having his composition so mechanically received.)

'No, I don't. I mean, Mr. Sapsea, the Tombatism. It's another sort from Rheumatism. Mr. Jasper knows what Durdles means. You get among them Tombs afore it's well light on a winter morning, and keep on, as the Catechism says, a-walking in the same all the days of your life, and YOU'LL know what Durdles means.'

'It is a bitter cold place,' Mr. Jasper assents, with an antipathetic shiver.

'And if it's bitter cold for you, up in the chancel, with a lot of live breath smoking out about you, what the bitterness is to Durdles, down in the crypt among the earthy damp there, and the dead breath of the old 'uns,' returns that individual, 'Durdles leaves you to judge.--Is this to be put in hand at once, Mr. Sapsea?'

Mr. Sapsea, with an Author's anxiety to rush into publication, replies that it cannot be put too soon.

'Why, man, it is not to be put inside the monument!'

'Durdles knows where it's to be put, Mr. Sapsea; no man better. Ask 'ere a man in Cloisterham whether Durdles knows his work.'

Mr. Sapsea rises, takes a key from a drawer, unlocks an iron safe let into the wall, and takes from it another key.

'When Durdles puts a touch or a finish upon his work, no matter where, inside or outside, Durdles likes to look at his work all round, and see that his work is a-doing him credit,' Durdles explains, doggedly.

The key proffered him by the bereaved widower being a large one, he slips his two-foot rule into a side-pocket of his flannel trousers made for it, and deliberately opens his flannel coat, and opens the mouth of a large breast-pocket within it before taking the key to place it in that repository.

'Why, Durdles!' exclaims Jasper, looking on amused, 'you are undermined with pockets!'

'And I carries weight in 'em too, Mr. Jasper. Feel those!' producing two other large keys.

'Hand me Mr. Sapsea's likewise. Surely this is the heaviest of the three.'

'You'll find 'em much of a muchness, I expect,' says Durdles. 'They all belong to monuments. They all open Durdles's work. Durdles keeps the keys of his work mostly. Not that they're much used.'

'By the bye,' it comes into Jasper's mind to say, as he idly examines the keys, 'I have been going to ask you, many a day, and have always forgotten. You know they sometimes call you Stony Durdles, don't you?'

'Cloisterham knows me as Durdles, Mr. Jasper.'

'I am aware of that, of course. But the boys sometimes--'

'O! if you mind them young imps of boys--' Durdles gruffly interrupts.

'I don't mind them any more than you do. But there was a discussion the other day among the Choir, whether Stony stood for Tony;' clinking one key against another.

('Take care of the wards, Mr. Jasper."

'Or whether Stony stood for Stephen;' clinking with a change of keys.

('You can't make a pitch pipe of 'em, Mr. Jasper.'"

'Or whether the name comes from your trade. How stands the fact?"

Mr. Jasper weighs the three keys in his hand, lifts his head from his idly stooping attitude over the fire, and delivers the keys to Durdles with an ingenuous and friendly face.

But the stony one is a gruff one likewise, and that hazy state of his is always an uncertain state, highly conscious of its dignity, and prone to take offence. He drops his two keys back into his pocket one by one, and buttons them up; he takes his dinner-bundle from the chair-back on which he hung it when he came in; he distributes the weight he carries, by tying the third key up in it, as though he were an Ostrich, and liked to dine off cold iron; and he gets out of the room, deigning no word of answer.

Mr. Sapsea then proposes a hit at backgammon, which, seasoned with his own improving conversation, and terminating in a supper of cold roast beef and salad, beguiles the golden evening until pretty late. Mr. Sapsea's wisdom being, in its delivery to mortals, rather of the diffuse than the epigrammatic order, is by no means expended even then; but his visitor intimates that he will come back for more of the precious commodity on future occasions, and Mr. Sapsea lets him off for the present, to ponder on the instalment he carries away.

CHAPTER V--MR. DURDLES AND FRIEND

John Jasper, on his way home through the Close, is brought to a standstill by the spectacle of Stony Durdles,
dinner-bundle and all, leaning his back against the iron railing of the burial-ground enclosing it from the old cloister-arches; and a hideous small boy in rags flinging stones at him as a well-defined mark in the moonlight. Sometimes
the stones hit him, and sometimes they miss him, but Durdles seems indifferent to either fortune. The hideous small
boy, on the contrary, whenever he hits Durdles, blows a whistle of triumph through a jagged gap, convenient for the
purpose, in the front of his mouth, where half his teeth are wanting; and whenever he misses him, yelps out 'Mulled
again!' and tries to atone for the failure by taking a more correct and vicious aim.

'What are you doing to the man?' demands Jasper, stepping out into the moonlight from the shade.
'Making a cock-shy of him,' replies the hideous small boy.
'Give me those stones in your hand.'
'Yes, I'll give 'em you down your throat, if you come a-ketching hold of me,' says the small boy, shaking himself
loose, and backing. 'I'll smash your eye, if you don't look out!'
'Baby-Devil that you are, what has the man done to you?'
'He won't go home.'
'What is that to you?'
'He gives me a 'apenny to pelt him home if I ketches him out too late,' says the boy. And then chants, like a little
savage, half stumbling and half dancing among the rags and laces of his dilapidated boots:-

'Widdy widdy wen! I--ket--ches--Im--out--ar--ter--ten, Widdy widdy wy! Then--E--don't--go--then--I--shy - Widdy Widdy Wake-cock warning!'
- with a comprehensive sweep on the last word, and one more delivery at Durdles.
This would seem to be a poetical note of preparation, agreed upon, as a caution to Durdles to stand clear if he
can, or to betake himself homeward.

John Jasper invites the boy with a beck of his head to follow him (feeling it hopeless to drag him, or coax him),
and crosses to the iron railing where the Stony (and stoned) One is profoundly meditating.

'Do you know this thing, this child?' asks Jasper, at a loss for a word that will define this thing.
'Deputy,' says Durdles, with a nod.
'Is that its--his--name?'
'Deputy,' assents Durdles.
'I'm man-servant up at the Travellers' Twopenny in Gas Works Garding,' this thing explains. 'All us man-
servants at Travellers' Lodgings is named Deputy. When we're chock full and the Travellers is all a-bed I come out
for my 'elth.' Then withdrawing into the road, and taking aim, he resumes:-

'Widdy widdy wen! I--ket--ches--Im--out--ar--ter--'

'Hold your hand,' cries Jasper, 'and don't throw while I stand so near him, or I'll kill you! Come, Durdles; let me
walk home with you to-night. Shall I carry your bundle?'

'Not on any account,' replies Durdles, adjusting it. 'Durdles was making his reflections here when you come up,
sir, surrounded by his works, like a poplar Author.--Your own brother-in-law;' introducing a sarcophagus within the
railing, white and cold in the moonlight. 'Mrs. Sapsea;' introducing the monument of that devoted wife. 'Late
Incumbent;' introducing the Reverend Gentleman's broken column. 'Departed Assessed Taxes;' introducing a vase
and towel, standing on what might represent the cake of soap. 'Former pastrycook and Muffin-maker, much
respected;' introducing gravestone. 'All safe and sound here, sir, and all Durdles's work. Of the common folk, that is
merely bundled up in turf and brambles, the less said the better. A poor lot, soon forgot.'

'This creature, Deputy, is behind us,' says Jasper, looking back. 'Is he to follow us?'

The relations between Durdles and Deputy are of a capricious kind; for, on Durdles's turning himself about with
the slow gravity of beery suddenness, Deputy makes a pretty wide circuit into the road and stands on the defensive.

'You never cried Widdy Warning before you begun to-night,' says Durdles, unexpectedly reminded of, or
imagining, an injury.

'Yer lie, I did,' says Deputy, in his only form of polite contradiction.
'Own brother, sir,' observes Durdles, turning himself about again, and as unexpectedly forgetting his offence as
he had recalled or conceived it; 'own brother to Peter the Wild Boy! But I gave him an object in life.'

'At which he takes aim?' Mr. Jasper suggests.

'That's it, sir,' returns Durdles, quite satisfied; 'at which he takes aim. I took him in hand and gave him an object.
What was he before? A destroyer. What work did he do? Nothing but destruction. What did he earn by it? Short
terms in Cloisterham jail. Not a person, not a piece of property, not a winder, not a horse, nor a dog, nor a cat, nor a
bird, nor a fowl, nor a pig, but what he stoned, for want of an enlightened object. I put that enlightened object before
him, and now he can turn his honest halfpenny by the three penn'orth a week.'

'I wonder he has no competitors.'

'He has plenty, Mr. Jasper, but he stones 'em all away. Now, I don't know what this scheme of mine comes to,'
pursues Durdles, considering about it with the same sodden gravity; 'I don't know what you may precisely call it. It ain't a sort of a--scheme of a--National Education?'

'I should say not,' replies Jasper.

'I should say not,' assents Durdles; 'then we won't try to give it a name.'

'He still keeps behind us,' repeats Jasper, looking over his shoulder; 'is he to follow us?'

'We can't help going round by the Travellers' Twopenny, if we go the short way, which is the back way,' Durdles answers, 'and we'll drop him there.'

So they go on; Deputy, as a rear rank one, taking open order, and invading the silence of the hour and place by stoning every wall, post, pillar, and other inanimate object, by the deserted way.

'Is there anything new down in the crypt, Durdles?' asks John Jasper.

'Anything old, I think you mean,' growls Durdles. 'It ain't a spot for novelty.'

'Any new discovery on your part, I meant.'

'There's a old 'un under the seventh pillar on the left as you go down the broken steps of the little underground chapel as formerly was; I make him out (so fur as I've made him out yet) to be one of them old 'uns with a crook. To judge from the size of the passages in the walls, and of the steps and doors, by which they come and went, them crooks must have been a good deal in the way of the old 'uns! Two on 'em meeting promiscuous must have hitched one another by the mitre pretty often, I should say.'

Without any endeavour to correct the literality of this opinion, Jasper surveys his companion—covered from head to foot with old mortar, lime, and stone grit—as though he, Jasper, were getting imbued with a romantic interest in his weird life.

'Yours is a curious existence.'

Without furnishing the least clue to the question, whether he receives this as a compliment or as quite the reverse, Durdles gruffly answers: 'Yours is another.'

'Well! inasmuch as my lot is cast in the same old earthy, chilly, never-changing place, Yes. But there is much more mystery and interest in your connection with the Cathedral than in mine. Indeed, I am beginning to have some idea of asking you to take me on as a sort of student, or free 'prentice, under you, and to let me go about with you sometimes, and see some of these old nooks in which you pass your days.'

The Stony One replies, in a general way, 'All right. Everybody knows where to find Durdles, when he's wanted.' Which, if not strictly true, is approximately so, if taken to express that Durdles may always be found in a state of vagabondage somewhere.

'What I dwell upon most,' says Jasper, pursuing his subject of romantic interest, 'is the remarkable accuracy with which you would seem to find out where people are buried.--What is the matter? That bundle is in your way; let me hold it.'

Durdles has stopped and backed a little (Deputy, attentive to all his movements, immediately skirmishing into the road), and was looking about for some ledge or corner to place his bundle on, when thus relieved of it.

'Just you give me my hammer out of that,' says Durdles, 'and I'll show you.'

Clink, clink. And his hammer is handed him.

'Now, lookee here. You pitch your note, don't you, Mr. Jasper?'

'Yes.'

'So I sound for mine. I take my hammer, and I tap.' (Here he strikes the pavement, and the attentive Deputy skirmishes at a rather wider range, as suspecting that his head may be in requisition.) 'I tap, tap, tap. Solid! I go on tapping. Solid still! Tap again. Holloa! Hollow! Tap again, persevering. Solid in hollow! Tap, tap, tap, to try it better. Solid in hollow; and inside solid, hollow again! There you are! Old 'un crumbled away in stone coffin, in vault!'

'Astonishing!' 'I have even done this,' says Durdles, drawing out his two-foot rule (Deputy meanwhile skirmishing nearer, as suspecting that Treasure may be about to be discovered, which may somehow lead to his own enrichment, and the delicious treat of the discoverers being hanged by the neck, on his evidence, until they are dead). 'Say that hammer of mine's a wall--my work. Two; four; and two is six,' measuring on the pavement. 'Six foot inside that wall is Mrs. Sapsea.'

'Not really Mrs. Sapsea?'

'Say Mrs. Sapsea. Her wall's thicker, but say Mrs. Sapsea. Durdles taps, that wall represented by that hammer, and says, after good sounding: "Something betwixt us!" Sure enough, some rubbish has been left in that same six-foot space by Durdles's men!'

Jasper opines that such accuracy 'is a gift.'

'I wouldn't have it at a gift,' returns Durdles, by no means receiving the observation in good part. 'I worked it out
for myself. Durdles comes by HIS knowledge through grubbing deep for it, and having it up by the roots when it
don't want to come.-- Holloa you Deputy!

'Widdy!' is Deputy's shrill response, standing off again.

'Catch that ha'penny. And don't let me see any more of you to- night, after we come to the Travellers' Twopenny.'

'Warning!' returns Deputy, having caught the halfpenny, and appearing by this mystic word to express his assent
to the arrangement.

They have but to cross what was once the vineyard, belonging to what was once the Monastery, to come into the
narrow back lane wherein stands the crazy wooden house of two low stories currently known as the Travellers' Twopenny:- a house all warped and distorted, like the morals of the travellers, with scant remains of a lattice-work
porch over the door, and also of a rustic fence before its stamped-out garden; by reason of the travellers being so
bound to the premises by a tender sentiment (or so fond of having a fire by the roadside in the course of the day),
that they can never be persuaded or threatened into departure, without violently possessing themselves of some
wooden forget-me-not, and bearing it off.

The semblance of an inn is attempted to be given to this wretched place by fragments of conventional red
curtaining in the windows, which rags are made muddily transparent in the night-season by feeble lights of rush or
cotton dip burning dully in the close air of the inside. As Durdles and Jasper come near, they are addressed by an
inscribed paper lantern over the door, setting forth the purport of the house. They are also addressed by some half-
dozen other hideous small boys--whether twopenny lodgers or followers or hangers-on of such, who knows!--who,
as if attracted by some carrion-scent of Deputy in the air, start into the moonlight, as vultures might gather in the
desert, and instantly fall to stoning him and one another.

'Stop, you young brutes,' cries Jasper angrily, 'and let us go by!'

This remonstrance being received with yells and flying stones, according to a custom of late years comfortably
established among the police regulations of our English communities, where Christians are stoned on all sides, as if
the days of Saint Stephen were revived, Durdles remarks of the young savages, with some point, that 'they haven't
got an object,' and leads the way down the lane.

At the corner of the lane, Jasper, hotly enraged, checks his companion and looks back. All is silent. Next
moment, a stone coming rattling at his hat, and a distant yell of 'Wake-Cock! Warning!' followed by a crow, as from
some infernally-hatched Chanticleer, apprising him under whose victorious fire he stands, he turns the corner into
safety, and takes Durdles home: Durdles stumbling among the litter of his stony yard as if he were going to turn
head foremost into one of the unfinished tombs.

John Jasper returns by another way to his gatehouse, and entering softly with his key, finds his fire still burning.
He takes from a locked press a peculiar-looking pipe, which he fills--but not with tobacco--and, having adjusted the
contents of the bowl, very carefully, with a little instrument, ascends an inner staircase of only a few steps, leading
to two rooms. One of these is his own sleeping chamber: the other is his nephew's. There is a light in each.

His nephew lies asleep, calm and untroubled. John Jasper stands looking down upon him, his unlighted pipe in
his hand, for some time, with a fixed and deep attention. Then, hushing his footsteps, he passes to his own room,
lights his pipe, and delivers himself to the Spectres it invokes at midnight.

CHAPTER VI--PHILANTHROPY IN MINOR CANON CORNER

The Reverend Septimus Crisparkle (Septimus, because six little brother Crisparkles before him went out, one by
one, as they were born, like six weak little rushlights, as they were lighted), having broken the thin morning ice near
Cloisterham Weir with his amiable head, much to the invigoration of his frame, was now assisting his circulation by
boxing at a looking-glass with great science and prowess. A fresh and healthy portrait the looking- glass presented
of the Reverend Septimus, feinting and dodging with the utmost artfulness, and hitting out from the shoulder with
the utmost straightness, while his radiant features teemed with innocence, and soft-hearted benevolence beamed
from his boxing- gloves.

It was scarcely breakfast-time yet, for Mrs. Crisparkle--mother, not wife of the Reverend Septimus--was only
just down, and waiting for the urn. Indeed, the Reverend Septimus left off at this very moment to take the pretty old
lady's entering face between his boxing-gloves and kiss it. Having done so with tenderness, the Reverend Septimus
turned to again, countering with his left, and putting in his right, in a tremendous manner.

'I say, every morning of my life, that you'll do it at last, Sept,' remarked the old lady, looking on; 'and so you
will.'

'Do what, Ma dear?'

'Break the pier-glass, or burst a blood-vessel.'

'Neither, please God, Ma dear. Here's wind, Ma. Look at this!' In a concluding round of great severity, the
Reverend Septimus administered and escaped all sorts of punishment, and wound up by getting the old lady's cap
into Chancery--such is the technical term used in scientific circles by the learned in the Noble Art-- with a lightness of touch that hardly stirred the lightest lavender or cherry riband on it. Magnanimously releasing the defeated, just in time to get his gloves into a drawer and feign to be looking out of window in a contemplative state of mind when a servant entered, the Reverend Septimus then gave place to the urn and other preparations for breakfast. These completed, and the two alone again, it was pleasant to see (or would have been, if there had been any one to see it, which there never was), the old lady standing to say the Lord's Prayer aloud, and her son, Minor Canon nevertheless, standing with bent head to hear it, he being within five years of forty: much as he had stood to hear the same words from the same lips when he was within five months of four.

What is prettier than an old lady--except a young lady--when her eyes are bright, when her figure is trim and compact, when her face is cheerful and calm, when her dress is as the dress of a china shepherdess: so dainty in its colours, so individually assorted to herself, so neatly moulded on her? Nothing is prettier, thought the good Minor Canon frequently, when taking his seat at table opposite his long-widowed mother. Her thought at such times may be condensed into the two words that oftenest did duty together in all her conversations: 'My Sept!'

They were a good pair to sit breakfasting together in Minor Canon Corner, Cloisterham. For Minor Canon Corner was a quiet place in the shadow of the Cathedral, which the cawing of the rooks, the echoing footsteps of rare passers, the sound of the Cathedral bell, or the roll of the Cathedral organ, seemed to render more quiet than absolute silence. Swaggering fighting men had had their centuries of ramping and raving about Minor Canon Corner, and beaten serfs had had their centuries of drudging and dying there, and powerful monks had had their centuries of being sometimes useful and sometimes harmful there, and behold they were all gone out of Minor Canon Corner, and so much the better. Perhaps one of the highest uses of their ever having been there, was, that there might be left behind, that blessed air of tranquillity which pervaded Minor Canon Corner, and that serenely romantic state of the mind--productive for the most part of pity and forbearance-- which is engendered by a sorrowful story that is all told, or a pathetic play that is played out.

Red-brick walls harmoniously toned down in colour by time, strong-rooted ivy, latticed windows, panelled rooms, big oaken beams in little places, and stone-walled gardens where annual fruit yet ripened upon monkish trees, were the principal surroundings of pretty old Mrs. Crisparkle and the Reverend Septimus as they sat at breakfast.

'And what, Ma dear,' inquired the Minor Canon, giving proof of a wholesome and vigorous appetite, 'does the letter say?'

The pretty old lady, after reading it, had just laid it down upon the breakfast-cloth. She handed it over to her son. Now, the old lady was exceedingly proud of her bright eyes being so clear that she could read writing without spectacles. Her son was also so proud of the circumstance, and so dutifully bent on her deriving the utmost possible gratification from it, that he had invented the pretence that he himself could NOT read writing without spectacles. Therefore he now assumed a pair, of grave and prodigious proportions, which not only seriously inconvenienced his nose and his breakfast, but seriously impeded his perusal of the letter. For, he had the eyes of a microscope and a telescope combined, when they were unassisted.

'It's from Mr. Honeythunder, of course,' said the old lady, folding her arms.

'Of course,' assented her son. He then lamely read on:


"DEAR MADAM,

"I write in the--;" In the what's this? What does he write in?

'In the chair,' said the old lady.

The Reverend Septimus took off his spectacles, that he might see her face, as he exclaimed:

'Why, what should he write in?'

'Bless me, bless me, Sept,' returned the old lady, 'you don't see the context! Give it back to me, my dear.'

Glad to get his spectacles off (for they always made his eyes water), her son obeyed: murmuring that his sight for reading manuscript got worse and worse daily.

'I write," his mother went on, reading very perspicuously and precisely, "from the chair, to which I shall probably be confined for some hours."'

Septimus looked at the row of chairs against the wall, with a half-protesting and half-appealing countenance.

"We have," the old lady read on with a little extra emphasis, "a meeting of our Convened Chief Composite Committee of Central and District Philanthropists, at our Head Haven as above; and it is their unanimous pleasure that I take the chair."

Septimus breathed more freely, and muttered: 'O! if he comes to THAT, let him,'

"Not to lose a day's post, I take the opportunity of a long report being read, denouncing a public miscreant--""

'It is a most extraordinary thing,' interposed the gentle Minor Canon, laying down his knife and fork to rub his
ear in a vexed manner, 'that these Philanthropists are always denouncing somebody. And it is another most extraordinary thing that they are always so violently flush of miscreants!'

"Denouncing a public miscreant--"--the old lady resumed, "to get our little affair of business off my mind. I have spoken with my two wards, Neville and Helena Landless, on the subject of their defective education, and they give in to the plan proposed; as I should have taken good care they did, whether they liked it or not.'"

'And it is another most extraordinary thing,' remarked the Minor Canon in the same tone as before, 'that these philanthropists are so given to seizing their fellow-creatures by the scruff of the neck, and (as one may say) bumping them into the paths of peace.--I beg your pardon, Ma dear, for interrupting.'

"Therefore, dear Madam, you will please prepare your son, the Rev. Mr. Septimus, to expect Neville as an inmate to be read with, on Monday next. On the same day Helena will accompany him to Cloisterham, to take up her quarters at the Nuns' House, the establishment recommended by yourself and son jointly. Please likewise to prepare for her reception and tuition there. The terms in both cases are understood to be exactly as stated to me in writing by yourself, when I opened a correspondence with you on this subject, after the honour of being introduced to you at your sister's house in town here. With compliments to the Rev. Mr. Septimus, I am, Dear Madam, Your affectionate brother (In Philanthropy), LUKE HONEYTHUNDER."

'Well, Ma,' said Septimus, after a little more rubbing of his ear, 'we must try it. There can be no doubt that we have room for an inmate, and that I have time to bestow upon him, and inclination too. I must confess to feeling rather glad that he is not Mr. Honeythunder himself. Though that seems wretchedly prejudiced-- does it not?--for I never saw him. Is he a large man, Ma?'

'I should call him a large man, my dear,' the old lady replied after some hesitation, 'but that his voice is so much larger.'

'Than himself?'

'Than anybody.'

'Hah!' said Septimus. And finished his breakfast as if the flavour of the Superior Family Souchong, and also of the ham and toast and eggs, were a little on the wane.

Mrs. Crisparkle's sister, another piece of Dresden china, and matching her so neatly that they would have made a delightful pair of ornaments for the two ends of any capacious old-fashioned chimneypiece, and by right should never have been seen apart, was the childless wife of a clergyman holding Corporation preferment in London City. Mr. Honeythunder in his public character of Professor of Philanthropy had come to know Mrs. Crisparkle during the last re-matching of the china ornaments (in other words during her last annual visit to her sister), after a public occasion of a philanthropic nature, when certain devoted orphans of tender years had been glutted with plum buns, and plump bumptiousness. These were all the antecedents known in Minor Canon Corner of the coming pupils.

'I am sure you will agree with me, Ma,' said Mr. Crisparkle, after thinking the matter over, 'that the first thing to be done, is, to put these young people as much at their ease as possible. There is nothing disinterested in the notion, because we cannot be at our ease with them unless they are at their ease with us. Now, Jasper's nephew is down here at present; and like takes to like, and youth takes to youth. He is a cordial young fellow, and we will have him to meet the brother and sister at dinner. That's three. We can't think of asking him, without asking Jasper. That's four. Add Miss Twinkleton and the fairy bride that is to be, and that's six. Add our two selves, and that's eight. Would eight at a friendly dinner at all put you out, Ma?'

'Nine would, Sept,' returned the old lady, visibly nervous.

'My dear Ma, I particularise eight.'

'The exact size of the table and the room, my dear.'

So it was settled that way: and when Mr. Crisparkle called with his mother upon Miss Twinkleton, to arrange for the reception of Miss Helena Landless at the Nuns' House, the two other invitations having reference to that establishment were proffered and accepted. Miss Twinkleton did, indeed, glance at the globes, as regretting that they were not formed to be taken out into society; but became reconciled to leaving them behind. Instructions were then despatched to the Philanthropist for the departure and arrival, in good time for dinner, of Mr. Neville and Miss Helena; and stock for soup became fragrant in the air of Minor Canon Corner.

In those days there was no railway to Cloisterham, and Mr. Sapsea said there never would be. Mr. Sapsea said more; he said there never should be. And yet, marvellous to consider, it has come to pass, in these days, that Express Trains don't think Cloisterham worth stopping at, but yell and whirl through it on their larger errands, casting the dust off their wheels as a testimony against its insignificance. Some remote fragment of Main Line to somewhere else, there was, which was going to ruin the Money Market if it failed, and Church and State if it succeeded, and (of course), the Constitution, whether or no; but even that had already so unsettled Cloisterham traffic, that the traffic, deserting the high road, came sneaking in from an unprecedented part of the country by a back stable-way, for many years labelled at the corner: 'Beware of the Dog.'
To this ignominious avenue of approach, Mr. Crisparkle repaired, awaiting the arrival of a short, squat omnibus, with a disproportionate heap of luggage on the roof—like a little Elephant with infinitely too much Castle—which was then the daily service between Cloisterham and external mankind. As this vehicle lumbered up, Mr. Crisparkle could hardly see anything else of it for a large outside passenger seated on the box, with his elbows squared, and his hands on his knees, compressing the driver into a most uncomfortably small compass, and glowering about him with a strongly-marked face.

'Is this Cloisterham?' demanded the passenger, in a tremendous voice.

'It is,' replied the driver, rubbing himself as if he ached, after throwing the reins to the ostler. 'And I never was so glad to see it.'

'Tell your master to make his box-seat wider, then,' returned the passenger. 'Your master is morally bound—and ought to be legally, under ruinous penalties—to provide for the comfort of his fellow-man.'

The driver instituted, with the palms of his hands, a superficial perquisition into the state of his skeleton; which seemed to make him anxious.

'Have I sat upon you?' asked the passenger.

'You have,' said the driver, as if he didn't like it all.

'Take that card, my friend.'

'I think I won't deprive you on it,' returned the driver, casting his eyes over it with no great favour, without taking it. 'What's the good of it to me?'

'Be a Member of that Society,' said the passenger.

'What shall I get by it?' asked the driver.

'Brotherhood,' returned the passenger, in a ferocious voice.

'Thankee,' said the driver, very deliberately, as he got down; 'my mother was contented with myself, and so am I. I don't want no brothers.'

'But you must have them,' replied the passenger, also descending, 'whether you like it or not. I am your brother.'

'I say!' expostulated the driver, becoming more chafed in temper, 'not too fur! The worm WILL, when—'

But here, Mr. Crisparkle interposed, remonstrating aside, in a friendly voice: 'Joe, Joe, Joe! don't forget yourself, Joe, my good fellow!' and then, when Joe peaceably touched his hat, accosting the passenger with: 'Mr. Honeythunder?'

'That is my name, sir.'

'My name is Crisparkle.'

'Reverend Mr. Septimus? Glad to see you, sir. Neville and Helena are inside. Having a little succumbed of late, under the pressure of my public labours, I thought I would take a mouthful of fresh air, and come down with them, and return at night. So you are the Reverend Mr. Septimus, are you?' surveying him on the whole with disappointment, and twisting a double eyeglass by its ribbon, as if he were roasting it, but not otherwise using it.

'Hah! I expected to see you older, sir.'

'I hope you will,' was the good-humoured reply.

'Oh?' demanded Mr. Honeythunder.

'Only a poor little joke. Not worth repeating.'

'Joke? Ay; I never see a joke,' Mr. Honeythunder frowningly retorted. 'A joke is wasted upon me, sir. Where are they? Helena and Neville, come here! Mr. Crisparkle has come down to meet you.'

An unusually handsome lithe young fellow, and an unusually handsome lithe girl; much alike; both very dark, and very rich in colour; she of almost the gipsy type; something untamed about them both; a certain air upon them of hunter and huntress; yet withal a certain air of being the objects of the chase, rather than the followers. Slender, supple, quick of eye and limb; half shy, half defiant; fierce of look; an indefinable kind of pause coming and going on their whole expression, both of face and form, which might be equally likened to the pause before a crouch or a bound. The rough mental notes made in the first five minutes by Mr. Crisparkle would have read thus, verbatim.

He invited Mr. Honeythunder to dinner, with a troubled mind (for the discomfiture of the dear old china shepherdess lay heavy on it), and gave his arm to Helena Landless. Both she and her brother, as they walked all together through the ancient streets, took great delight in what he pointed out of the Cathedral and the Monastery ruin, and wondered—so his notes ran on—much as if they were beautiful barbaric captives brought from some wild tropical dominion. Mr. Honeythunder walked in the middle of the road, shouldering the natives out of his way, and loudly developing a scheme he had, for making a raid on all the unemployed persons in the United Kingdom, laying them every one by the heels in jail, and forcing them, on pain of prompt extermination, to become philanthropists.

Mrs. Crisparkle had need of her own share of philanthropy when she beheld this very large and very loud excrescence on the little party. Always something in the nature of a Boil upon the face of society, Mr. Honeythunder expanded into an inflammatory Wen in Minor Canon Corner. Though it was not literally true, as was facetiously
charged against him by public unbelievers, that he called aloud to his fellow-creatures: 'Curse your souls and bodies, come here and be blessed!' still his philanthropy was of that gunpowderous sort that the difference between it and animosity was hard to determine. You were to abolish military force, but you were first to bring all commanding officers who had done their duty, to trial by court-martial for that offence, and shoot them. You were to abolish war, but were to make converts by making war upon them, and charging them with loving war as the apple of their eye. You were to have no capital punishment, but were first to sweep off the face of the earth all legislators, jurists, and judges, who were of the contrary opinion. You were to have universal concord, and were to get it by eliminating all the people who wouldn't, or conscientiously couldn't, be concordant. You were to love your brother as yourself, but after an indefinite interval of maligning him (very much as if you hated him), and calling him all manner of names. Above all things, you were to do nothing in private, or on your own account. You were to go to the offices of the Haven of Philanthropy, and put your name down as a Member and a Professing Philanthropist. Then, you were to pay up your subscription, get your card of membership and your ribbon and medal, and were evermore to live upon a platform, and evermore to say what Mr. Honeythunder said, and what the Treasurer said, and what the sub-Treasurer said, and what the Committee said, and what the sub-Committee said, and what the Secretary said, and what the Vice-Secretary said. And this was usually said in the unanimously-carried resolution under hand and seal, to the effect: 'That this assembled Body of Professing Philanthropists views, with indignant scorn and contempt, not unmixed with utter detestation and loathing abhorrence'--in short, the baseness of all those who do not belong to it, and pledges itself to make as many obnoxious statements as possible about them, without being at all particular as to facts.

The dinner was a most doleful breakdown. The philanthropist deranged the symmetry of the table, sat himself in the way of the waiting, blocked up the thoroughfare, and drove Mr. Tope (who assisted the parlour-maid) to the verge of distraction by passing plates and dishes on, over his own head. Nobody could talk to anybody, because he held forth to everybody at once, as if the company had no individual existence, but were a Meeting. He impounded the Reverend Mr. Septimus, as an official personage to be addressed, or kind of human peg to hang his oratorical hat on, and fell into the exasperating habit, common among such orators, of impersonating him as a wicked and weak opponent. Thus, he would ask: 'And will you, sir, now stultify yourself by telling me'--and so forth, when the innocent man had not opened his lips, nor meant to open them. Or he would say: 'Now see, sir, to what a position you are reduced. I will leave you no escape. After exhausting all the resources of fraud and falsehood, during years upon years; after exhibiting a combination of dastardly meanness with ensanguined daring, such as the world has not often witnessed; you have now the hypocrisy to bend the knee before the most degraded of mankind, and to sue and whine and howl for mercy!' Whereat the unfortunate Minor Canon would look, in part indignant and in part perplexed; while his worthy mother sat bridling, with tears in her eyes, and the remainder of the party lapsed into a sort of gelatinous state, in which there was no flavour or solidity, and very little resistance.

But the gush of philanthropy that burst forth when the departure of Mr. Honeythunder began to impend, must have been highly gratifying to the feelings of that distinguished man. His coffee was produced, by the special activity of Mr. Tope, a full hour before he wanted it. Mr. Crisparkle sat with his watch in his hand for about the same period, lest he should overstay his time. The four young people were unanimous in believing that the Cathedral clock struck three-quarters, when it actually struck but one. Miss Twinkleton estimated the distance to the omnibus at five-and-twenty minutes' walk, when it was really five. The affectionate kindness of the whole circle hustled him into his greatcoat, and shoved him out into the moonlight, as if he were a fugitive traitor with whom they sympathised, and a troop of horse were at the back door. Mr. Crisparkle and his new charge, who took him to the omnibus, were so fervent in their apprehensions of his catching cold, that they shut him up in it instantly and left him, with still half-an-hour to spare.

CHAPTER VII--MORE CONFIDENCES THAN ONE

'I know very little of that gentleman, sir,' said Neville to the Minor Canon as they turned back.

'You know very little of your guardian?' the Minor Canon repeated.

'Almost nothing!'

'How came he--'

'To BE my guardian? I'll tell you, sir. I suppose you know that we come (my sister and I) from Ceylon?'

'Indeed, no.'

'I wonder at that. We lived with a stepfather there. Our mother died there, when we were little children. We have had a wretched existence. She made him our guardian, and he was a miserly wretch who grudged us food to eat, and clothes to wear. At his death, he passed us over to this man; for no better reason that I know of, than his being a friend or connexion of his, whose name was always in print and catching his attention.'

'That was lately, I suppose?'

'Quite lately, sir. This stepfather of ours was a cruel brute as well as a grinding one. It is well he died when he
did, or I might have killed him.'

Mr. Crisparkle stopped short in the moonlight and looked at his hopeful pupil in consternation.

'I surprise you, sir?' he said, with a quick change to a submissive manner.

'You shook me; unspeakably shock me.'

The pupil hung his head for a little while, as they walked on, and then said: 'You never saw him beat your sister. I have seen him beat mine, more than once or twice, and I never forgot it.'

'Nothing,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'not even a beloved and beautiful sister's tears under dastardly ill-usage; for I became less severe, in spite of himself, as his indignation rose; could justify those horrible expressions that you used.'

'I am sorry I used them, and especially to you, sir. I beg to recall them. But permit me to set you right on one point. You spoke of my sister's tears. My sister would have let him tear her to pieces, before she would have let him believe that he could make her shed a tear.'

Mr. Crisparkle reviewed those mental notes of his, and was neither at all surprised to hear it, nor at all disposed to question it.

'Perhaps you will think it strange, sir;'--this was said in a hesitating voice--'that I should so soon ask you to allow me to confide in you, and to have the kindness to hear a word or two from me in my defence?'

'Defence?' Mr. Crisparkle repeated. 'You are not on your defence, Mr. Neville.'

'I think I am, sir. At least I know I should be, if you were better acquainted with my character.'

'Well, Mr. Neville,' was the rejoinder. 'What if you leave me to find it out?'

'Since it is your pleasure, sir,' answered the young man, with a quick change in his manner to sullen disappointment: 'since it is your pleasure to check me in my impulse, I must submit.'

There was that in the tone of this short speech which made the conscientious man to whom it was addressed uneasy. It hinted to him that he might, without meaning it, turn aside a trustfulness beneficial to a mis-shapen young mind and perhaps to his own power of directing and improving it. They were within sight of the lights in his windows, and he stopped.

'Let us turn back and take a turn or two up and down, Mr. Neville, or you may not have time to finish what you wish to say to me. You are hasty in thinking that I mean to check you. Quite the contrary. I invite your confidence.'

'You have invited it, sir, without knowing it, ever since I came here. I say "ever since," as if I had been here a week. The truth is, we came here (my sister and I) to quarrel with you, and affront you, and break away again.'

'Really?' said Mr. Crisparkle, at a dead loss for anything else to say.

'You see, we could not know what you were beforehand, sir; could we?'

'Clearly not,' said Mr. Crisparkle.

'And having liked no one else with whom we have ever been brought into contact, we had made up our minds not to like you.'

'Really?' said Mr. Crisparkle again.

'But we do like you, sir, and we see an unmistakable difference between your house and your reception of us, and anything else we have ever known. This--and my happening to be alone with you--and everything around us seeming so quiet and peaceful after Mr. Honeythunder's departure--and Cloisterham being so old and grave and beautiful, with the moon shining on it--these things inclined me to open my heart.'

'I quite understand, Mr. Neville. And it is salutary to listen to such influences.'

'In describing my own imperfections, sir, I must ask you not to suppose that I am describing my sister's. She has come out of the disadvantages of our miserable life, as much better than I am, as that Cathedral tower is higher than those chimneys.'

Mr. Crisparkle in his own breast was not so sure of this.

'I have had, sir, from my earliest remembrance, to suppress a deadly and bitter hatred. This has made me secret and revengeful. I have been always tyrannically held down by the strong hand. This has driven me, in my weakness, to the resource of being false and mean. I have been stinted of education, liberty, money, dress, the very necessaries of life, the commonest pleasures of childhood, the commonest possessions of youth. This has caused me to be utterly wanting in I don't know what emotions, or remembrances, or good instincts--I have not even a name for the thing, you see!--that you have had to work upon in other young men to whom you have been accustomed.'

'This is evidently true. But this is not encouraging,' thought Mr. Crisparkle as they turned again.

'And to finish with, sir: I have been brought up among abject and servile dependents, of an inferior race, and I may easily have contracted some affinity with them. Sometimes, I don't know but that it may be a drop of what is tigerish in their blood.'

'As in the case of that remark just now,' thought Mr. Crisparkle.

'In a last word of reference to my sister, sir (we are twin children), you ought to know, to her honour, that
nothing in our misery ever subdued her, though it often cowed me. When we ran away from it (we ran away four times in six years, to be soon brought back and cruelly punished), the flight was always of her planning and leading. Each time she dressed as a boy, and showed the daring of a man. I take it we were seven years old when we first decamped; but I remember, when I lost the pocket-knife with which she was to have cut her hair short, how desperately she tried to tear it out, or bite it off. I have nothing further to say, sir, except that I hope you will bear with me and make allowance for me.'

'Of that, Mr. Neville, you may be sure,' returned the Minor Canon. 'I don't preach more than I can help, and I will not repay your confidence with a sermon. But I entreat you to bear in mind, very seriously and steadily, that if I am to do you any good, it can only be with your own assistance; and that you can only render that, efficiently, by seeking aid from Heaven.'

'I will try to do my part, sir.'

'And, Mr. Neville, I will try to do mine. Here is my hand on it. May God bless our endeavours!'

They were now standing at his house-door, and a cheerful sound of voices and laughter was heard within.

'We will take one more turn before going in,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'for I want to ask you a question. When you said you were in a changed mind concerning me, you spoke, not only for yourself, but for your sister too?'

'Undoubtedly I did, sir.'

'Excuse me, Mr. Neville, but I think you have had no opportunity of communicating with your sister, since I met you. Mr. Honeythunder was very eloquent; but perhaps I may venture to say, without ill- nature, that he rather monopolised the occasion. May you not have answered for your sister without sufficient warrant?'

Neville shook his head with a proud smile.

'You don't know, sir, yet, what a complete understanding can exist between my sister and me, though no spoken word--perhaps hardly as much as a look--may have passed between us. She not only feels as I have described, but she very well knows that I am taking this opportunity of speaking to you, both for her and for myself.'

Mr. Crisparkle looked in his face, with some incredulity; but his face expressed such absolute and firm conviction of the truth of what he said, that Mr. Crisparkle looked at the pavement, and mused, until they came to his door again.

'I will ask for one more turn, sir, this time,' said the young man, with a rather heightened colour rising in his face. 'But for Mr. Honeythunder's--I think you called it eloquence, sir?' (somewhat slyly.)

'I--yes, I called it eloquence,' said Mr. Crisparkle.

'But for Mr. Honeythunder's eloquence, I might have had no need to ask you what I am going to ask you. This Mr. Edwin Drood, sir: I think that's the name?'

'Quite correct,' said Mr. Crisparkle. 'D-r-double o-d.'

'Does he--or did he--read with you, sir?'

'Never, Mr. Neville. He comes here visiting his relation, Mr. Jasper.'

'Is Miss Bud his relation too, sir?'

'(Now, why should he ask that, with sudden superciliousness?' thought Mr. Crisparkle.) Then he explained, aloud, what he knew of the little story of their betrothal.

'O! THAT'S it, is it?' said the young man. 'I understand his air of proprietorship now!'

'This was said so evidently to himself, or to anybody rather than Mr. Crisparkle, that the latter instinctively felt as if to notice it would be almost tantamount to noticing a passage in a letter which he had read by chance over the writer's shoulder. A moment afterwards they re-entered the house.

Mr. Jasper was seated at the piano as they came into his drawing-room, and was accompanying Miss Rosebud while she sang. It was a consequence of his playing the accompaniment without notes, and of her being a heedless little creature, very apt to go wrong, that he followed her lips most attentively, with his eyes as well as hands; carefully and softly hinting the key-note from time to time. Standing with an arm drawn round her, but with a face far more intent on Mr. Jasper than on her singing, stood Helena, between whom and her brother an instantaneous recognition passed, in which Mr. Crisparkle saw, or thought he saw, the understanding that had been spoken of, flash out. Mr. Neville then took his admiring station, leaning against the piano, opposite the singer; Mr. Crisparkle sat down by the china shepherdess; Edwin Drood gallantly furled and unfurled Miss Twinkleton's fan; and that lady passively claimed that sort of exhibitor's proprietorship in the accomplishment on view, which Mr. Tope, the Verger, daily claimed in the Cathedral service.

The song went on. It was a sorrowful strain of parting, and the fresh young voice was very plaintive and tender. As Jasper watched the pretty lips, and ever and again hinted the one note, as though it were a low whisper from himself, the voice became less steady, until all at once the singer broke into a burst of tears, and shrieked out, with her hands over her eyes: 'I can't bear this! I am frightened! Take me away!'

With one swift turn of her lithe figures Helena laid the little beauty on a sofa, as if she had never caught her up.
Then, on one knee beside her, and with one hand upon her rosy mouth, while with the other she appealed to all the rest, Helena said to them: 'It's nothing; it's all over; don't speak to her for one minute, and she is well!'

Jasper's hands had, in the same instant, lifted themselves from the keys, and were now poised above them, as though he waited to resume. In that attitude he yet sat quiet: not even looking round, when all the rest had changed their places and were reassuring one another.

'Pussy's not used to an audience; that's the fact,' said Edwin Drood. 'She got nervous, and couldn't hold out. Besides, Jack, you are such a conscientious master, and require so much, that I believe you make her afraid of you. No wonder.'

'No wonder,' repeated Helena.

'There, Jack, you hear! You would be afraid of him, under similar circumstances, wouldn't you, Miss Landless?'

'Not under any circumstances,' returned Helena.

Jasper brought down his hands, looked over his shoulder, and begged to thank Miss Landless for her vindication of his character. Then he fell to dumbly playing, without striking the notes, while his little pupil was taken to an open window for air, and was otherwise petted and restored. When she was brought back, his place was empty. 'Jack's gone, Pussy,' Edwin told her. 'I am more than half afraid he didn't like to be charged with being the Monster who had frightened you.' But she answered never a word, and shivered, as if they had made her a little too cold.

Miss Twinkleton now opining that indeed these were late hours, Mrs. Crisparkle, for finding ourselves outside the walls of the Nuns' House, and that we who undertook the formation of the future wives and mothers of England (the last words in a lower voice, as requiring to be communicated in confidence) were really bound (voice coming up again) to set a better example than one of rakish habits, wrappers were put in requisition, and the two young cavaliers volunteered to see the ladies home. It was soon done, and the gate of the Nuns' House closed upon them.

The boarders had retired, and only Mrs. Tisher in solitary vigil awaited the new pupil. Her bedroom being within Rosa's, very little introduction or explanation was necessary, before she was placed in charge of her new friend, and left for the night.

'This is a blessed relief, my dear,' said Helena. 'I have been dreading all day, that I should be brought to bay at this time.'

'There are not many of us,' returned Rosa, 'and we are good-natured girls; at least the others are; I can answer for them.'

'I can answer for you,' laughed Helena, searching the lovely little face with her dark, fiery eyes, and tenderly caressing the small figure. 'You will be a friend to me, won't you?'

'I hope so. But the idea of my being a friend to you seems too absurd, though.'

'Why?'

'O, I am such a mite of a thing, and you are so womanly and handsome. You seem to have resolution and power enough to crush me. I shrink into nothing by the side of your presence even.'

'I am a neglected creature, my dear, unacquainted with all accomplishments, sensitively conscious that I have everything to learn, and deeply ashamed to own my ignorance.'

'And yet you acknowledge everything to me!' said Rosa.

'My pretty one, can I help it? There is a fascination in you.'

'O! is there though?' pouted Rosa, half in jest and half in earnest. 'What a pity Master Eddy doesn't feel it more!' Of course her relations towards that young gentleman had been already imparted in Minor Canon Corner.

'Why, surely he must love you with all his heart!' cried Helena, with an earnestness that threatened to blaze into ferocity if he didn't.

'Eh? O, well, I suppose he does,' said Rosa, pouting again; 'I am sure I have no right to say he doesn't. Perhaps it's my fault. Perhaps I am not as nice to him as I ought to be. I don't think I am. But it IS so ridiculous!'

Helena's eyes demanded what was.

'WE are,' said Rosa, answering as if she had spoken. 'We are such a ridiculous couple. And we are always quarrelling.'

'Why?'

'Because we both know we are ridiculous, my dear!' Rosa gave that answer as if it were the most conclusive answer in the world.

Helena's masterful look was intent upon her face for a few moments, and then she impulsively put out both her hands and said:

'You will be my friend and help me?'

'Indeed, my dear, I will,' replied Rosa, in a tone of affectionate childishness that went straight and true to her heart; 'I will be as good a friend as such a mite of a thing can be to such a noble creature as you. And be a friend to me, please; I don't understand myself: and I want a friend who can understand me, very much indeed.'
Helena Landless kissed her, and retaining both her hands said:

'Who is Mr. Jasper?'

Rosa turned aside her head in answering: 'Eddy's uncle, and my music-master.'

'You do not love him?'

'Ugh!' She put her hands up to her face, and shook with fear or horror.

'You know that he loves you?'

'O, don't, don't, don't!' cried Rosa, dropping on her knees, and clinging to her new resource. 'Don't tell me of it! He terrifies me. He haunts my thoughts, like a dreadful ghost. I feel that I am never safe from him. I feel as if he could pass in through the wall when he is spoken of.' She actually did look round, as if she dreaded to see him standing in the shadow behind her.

'Try to tell me more about it, darling.'

'Yes, I will, I will. Because you are so strong. But hold me the while, and stay with me afterwards.'

'My child! You speak as if he had threatened you in some dark way.'

'He has never spoken to me about--that. Never.'

'What has he done?'

'He has made a slave of me with his looks. He has forced me to understand him, without his saying a word; and he has forced me to keep silence, without his uttering a threat. When I play, he never moves his eyes from my hands. When I sing, he never moves his eyes from my lips. When he corrects me, and strikes a note, or a chord, or plays a passage, he himself is in the sounds, whispering that he pursues me as a lover, and commanding me to keep his secret. I avoid his eyes, but he forces me to see them without looking at them. Even when a glaze comes over them (which is sometimes the case), and he seems to wander away into a frightful sort of dream in which he threatens most, he obliges me to know it, and to know that he is sitting close at my side, more terrible to me than ever.'

'What is this imagined threatening, pretty one? What is threatened?'

'I don't know. I have never even dared to think or wonder what it is.'

'And was this all, to-night?'

'This was all; except that to-night when he watched my lips so closely as I was singing, besides feeling terrified I felt ashamed and passionately hurt. It was as if he kissed me, and I couldn't bear it, but cried out. You must never breathe this to any one. Eddy is devoted to him. But you said to-night that you would not be afraid of him, under any circumstances, and that gives me--who am so much afraid of him--courage to tell only you. Hold me! Stay with me! I am too frightened to be left by myself.'

The lustrous gipsy-face drooped over the clinging arms and bosom, and the wild black hair fell down protectingly over the childish form. There was a slumbering gleam of fire in the intense dark eyes, though they were then softened with compassion and admiration. Let whomsoever it most concerned look well to it!

CHAPTER VIII--DAGGERS DRAWN

The two young men, having seen the damsels, their charges, enter the courtyard of the Nuns' House, and finding themselves coldly stared at by the brazen door-plate, as if the battered old beau with the glass in his eye were insolent, look at one another, look along the perspective of the moonlit street, and slowly walk away together.

'Do you stay here long, Mr. Drood?' says Neville.

'Not this time,' is the careless answer. 'I leave for London again, to-morrow. But I shall be here, off and on, until next Midsummer; then I shall take my leave of Cloisterham, and England too; for many a long day, I expect.'

'Are you going abroad?'

'Going to wake up Egypt a little,' is the condescending answer.

'Are you reading?'

'Reading?' repeats Edwin Drood, with a touch of contempt. 'No. Doing, working, engineering. My small patrimony was left a part of the capital of the Firm I am with, by my father, a former partner; and I am a charge upon the Firm until I come of age; and then I step into my modest share in the concern. Jack--you met him at dinner--is, until then, my guardian and trustee.'

'I heard from Mr. Crisparkle of your other good fortune.'

'What do you mean by my other good fortune?'

Neville has made his remark in a watchfully advancing, and yet furtive and shy manner, very expressive of that peculiar air already noticed, of being at once hunter and hunted. Edwin has made his retort with an abruptness not at all polite. They stop and interchange a rather heated look.

'I hope,' says Neville, 'there is no offence, Mr. Drood, in my innocently referring to your betrothal?'

'By George!' cries Edwin, leading on again at a somewhat quicker pace; 'everybody in this chattering old Cloisterham refers to it I wonder no public-house has been set up, with my portrait for the sign of The Betrothed's Head. Or Pussy's portrait. One or the other.'
'I am not accountable for Mr. Crisparkle's mentioning the matter to me, quite openly,' Neville begins.

'No; that's true; you are not,' Edwin Drood assents.

'But,' resumes Neville, 'I am accountable for mentioning it to you. And I did so, on the supposition that you could not fail to be highly proud of it.'

Now, there are these two curious touches of human nature working the secret springs of this dialogue. Neville Landless is already enough impressed by Little Rosebud, to feel indignant that Edwin Drood (far below her) should hold his prize so lightly. Edwin Drood is already enough impressed by Helena, to feel indignant that Helena's brother (far below her) should dispose of him so coolly, and put him out of the way so entirely.

However, the last remark had better be answered. So, says Edwin:

'I don't know, Mr. Neville' (adopting that mode of address from Mr. Crisparkle), 'that what people are proudest of, they usually talk most about; I don't know either, that what they are proudest of, they most like other people to talk about. But I live a busy life, and I speak under correction by you readers, who ought to know everything, and I daresay do.'

By this time they had both become savage; Mr. Neville out in the open; Edwin Drood under the transparent cover of a popular tune, and a stop now and then to pretend to admire picturesque effects in the moonlight before him.

'It does not seem to me very civil in you,' remarks Neville, at length, 'to reflect upon a stranger who comes here, not having had your advantages, to try to make up for lost time. But, to be sure, I was not brought up in "busy life," and my ideas of civility were formed among Heathens.'

'Perhaps, the best civility, whatever kind of people we are brought up among,' retorts Edwin Drood, 'is to mind our own business. If you will set me that example, I promise to follow it.'

'Do you know that you take a great deal too much upon yourself?' is the angry rejoinder, 'and that in the part of the world I come from, you would be called to account for it?'

'By whom, for instance?' asks Edwin Drood, coming to a halt, and surveying the other with a look of disdain. But, here a startling right hand is laid on Edwin's shoulder, and Jasper stands between them. For, it would seem that he, too, has strolled round by the Nuns' House, and has come up behind them on the shadowy side of the road.

'Ned, Ned, Ned!' he says; 'we must have no more of this. I don't like this. I have overheard high words between you two. Remember, my dear boy, you are almost in the position of host to-night. You belong, as it were, to the place, and in a manner represent it towards a stranger. Mr. Neville is a stranger, and you should respect the obligations of hospitality. And, Mr. Neville,' laying his left hand on the inner shoulder of that young gentleman, and thus walking on between them, hand to shoulder on either side: 'you will pardon me; but I appeal to you to govern your temper too. Now, what is amiss? But why ask! Let there be nothing amiss, and the question is superfluous. We are all three on a good understanding, are we not?'

After a silent struggle between the two young men who shall speak last, Edwin Drood strikes in with: 'So far as I am concerned, Jack, there is no anger in me.'

'Nor in me,' says Neville Landless, though not so freely; or perhaps so carelessly. 'But if Mr. Drood knew all that lies behind me, far away from here, he might know better how it is that sharp-edged words have sharp edges to wound me.'

'Perhaps,' says Jasper, in a soothing manner, 'we had better not qualify our good understanding. We had better not say anything having the appearance of a remonstrance or condition; it might not seem generous. Frankly and freely, you see there is no anger in Ned. Frankly and freely, there is no anger in you, Mr. Neville?'

'None at all, Mr. Jasper.' Still, not quite so frankly or so freely; or, be it said once again, not quite so carelessly perhaps.

'All over then! Now, my bachelor gatehouse is a few yards from here, and the heater is on the fire, and the wine and glasses are on the table, and it is not a stone's throw from Minor Canon Corner. Ned, you are up and away tomorrow. We will carry Mr. Neville in with us, to take a stirrup-cup.'

'With all my heart, Jack.'

'And with all mine, Mr. Jasper.' Neville feels it impossible to say less, but would rather not go. He has an impression upon him that he has lost hold of his temper; feels that Edwin Drood's coolness, so far from being infectious, makes him red-hot.

Mr. Jasper, still walking in the centre, hand to shoulder on either side, beautifully turns the Refrain of a drinking song, and they all go up to his rooms. There, the first object visible, when he adds the light of a lamp to that of the fire, is the portrait over the chimneypiece. It is not an object calculated to improve the understanding between the two young men, as rather awkwardly reviving the subject of their difference. Accordingly, they both glance at it consciously, but say nothing. Jasper, however (who would appear from his conduct to have gained but an imperfect clue to the cause of their late high words), directly calls attention to it.
'You recognise that picture, Mr. Neville?' shading the lamp to throw the light upon it.
'I recognise it, but it is far from flattering the original.'
'O, you are hard upon it! It was done by Ned, who made me a present of it.'
'I am sorry for that, Mr. Drood.' Neville apologises, with a real intention to apologise; 'if I had known I was in the artist's presence--'
'O, a joke, sir, a mere joke,' Edwin cuts in, with a provoking yawn. 'A little humouring of Pussy's points! I'm going to paint her gravely, one of these days, if she's good.'

The air of leisurely patronage and indifference with which this is said, as the speaker throws himself back in a chair and clasps his hands at the back of his head, as a rest for it, is very exasperating to the excitable and excited Neville. Jasper looks observantly from the one to the other, slightly smiles, and turns his back to mix a jug of mulled wine at the fire. It seems to require much mixing and compounding.

'I suppose, Mr. Neville,' says Edwin, quick to resent the indignant protest against himself in the face of young Landless, which is fully as visible as the portrait, or the fire, or the lamp: 'I suppose that if you painted the picture of your lady love--'

'I can't paint,' is the hasty interruption.

'That's your misfortune, and not your fault. You would if you could. But if you could, I suppose you would make her (no matter what she was in reality), Juno, Minerva, Diana, and Venus, all in one. Eh?'

'I have no lady love, and I can't say.'

'If I were to try my hand,' says Edwin, with a boyish boastfulness getting up in him, 'on a portrait of Miss Landless--in earnest, mind you; in earnest--you should see what I could do!'

'My sister's consent to sit for it being first got, I suppose? As it never will be got, I am afraid I shall never see what you can do. I must bear the loss.'

Jasper turns round from the fire, fills a large goblet glass for Neville, fills a large goblet glass for Edwin, and hands each his own; then fills for himself, saying:

'Come, Mr. Neville, we are to drink to my nephew, Ned. As it is his foot that is in the stirrup--metaphorically--our stirrup-cup is to be devoted to him. Ned, my dearest fellow, my love!'

Jasper sets the example of nearly emptying his glass, and Neville follows it. Edwin Drood says, 'Thank you both very much,' and follows the double example.

'Look at him,' cries Jasper, stretching out his hand admiringly and tenderly, though rallyingly too. 'See where he lounges so easily, Mr. Neville! The world is all before him where to choose. A life of stirring work and interest, a life of change and excitement, a life of domestic ease and love! Look at him!'

Edwin Drood's face has become quickly and remarkably flushed with the wine; so has the face of Neville Landless. Edwin still sits thrown back in his chair, making that rest of clasped hands for his head.

'See how little he heeds it all!' Jasper proceeds in a bantering vein. 'It is hardly worth his while to pluck the golden fruit that hangs ripe on the tree for him. And yet consider the contrast, Mr. Neville. You and I have no prospect of stirring work and interest, or of change and excitement, or of domestic ease and love. You and I have no prospect (unless you are more fortunate than I am, which may easily be), but the tedious unchanging round of this dull place.'

'Upon my soul, Jack,' says Edwin, complacently, 'I feel quite apologetic for having my way smoothed as you describe. But you know what I know, Jack, and it may not be so very easy as it seems, after all. May it, Pussy? To the portrait, with a snap of his thumb and finger. 'We have got to hit it off yet; haven't we, Pussy? You know what I mean, Jack.'

His speech has become thick and indistinct. Jasper, quiet and self-possessed, looks to Neville, as expecting his answer or comment. When Neville speaks, HIS speech is also thick and indistinct.

'It might have been better for Mr. Drood to have known some hardships,' he says, defiantly.

'Pray,' retorts Edwin, turning merely his eyes in that direction, 'pray why might it have been better for Mr. Drood to have known some hardships?'

'Ay,' Jasper assents, with an air of interest; 'let us know why?'

'Because they might have made him more sensible,' says Neville, 'of good fortune that is not by any means necessarily the result of his own merits.'

Mr. Jasper quickly looks to his nephew for his rejoinder.

'Have YOU known hardships, may I ask?' says Edwin Drood, sitting upright.

Mr. Jasper quickly looks to the other for his retort.

'I have.'

'And what have they made you sensible of?'

Mr. Jasper's play of eyes between the two holds good throughout the dialogue, to the end.
'I have told you once before to-night.'
'You have done nothing of the sort.'
'I tell you I have. That you take a great deal too much upon yourself.'
'You added something else to that, if I remember?'
'Yes, I did say something else.'
'Say it again.'
'I said that in the part of the world I come from, you would be called to account for it.'
'Only there?' cries Edwin Drood, with a contemptuous laugh. 'A long way off, I believe? Yes; I see! That part of the world is at a safe distance.'
'Say here, then,' rejoins the other, rising in a fury. 'Say anywhere! Your vanity is intolerable, your conceit is beyond endurance; you talk as if you were some rare and precious prize, instead of a common boaster. You are a common fellow, and a common boaster.'
'Pooh, pooh,' says Edwin Drood, equally furious, but more collected; 'how should you know? You may know a black common fellow, or a black common boaster, when you see him (and no doubt you have a large acquaintance that way); but you are no judge of white men.'

This insulting allusion to his dark skin infuriates Neville to that violent degree, that he flings the dregs of his wine at Edwin Drood, and is in the act of flinging the goblet after it, when his arm is caught in the nick of time by Jasper.

'Ned, my dear fellow!' he cries in a loud voice; 'I entreat you, I command you, to be still!' There has been a rush of all the three, and a clattering of glasses and overturning of chairs. 'Mr. Neville, for shame! Give this glass to me. Open your hand, sir. I WILL have it!'

But Neville throws him off, and pauses for an instant, in a raging passion, with the goblet yet in his uplifted hand. Then, he dashes it down under the grate, with such force that the broken splinters fly out again in a shower; and he leaves the house.

When he first emerges into the night air, nothing around him is still or steady; nothing around him shows like what it is; he only knows that he stands with a bare head in the midst of a blood-red whirl, waiting to be struggled with, and to struggle to the death.

But, nothing happening, and the moon looking down upon him as if he were dead after a fit of wrath, he holds his steam-hammer beating head and heart, and staggers away. Then, he becomes half-conscious of having heard himself bolted and barred out, like a dangerous animal; and thinks what shall he do?

Some wildly passionate ideas of the river dissolve under the spell of the moonlight on the Cathedral and the graves, and the remembrance of his sister, and the thought of what he owes to the good man who has but that very day won his confidence and given him his pledge. He repairs to Minor Canon Corner, and knocks softly at the door.

His knock is immediately answered by Mr. Crisparkle himself. When he opens the door, candle in hand, his cheerful face falls, and disappointed amazement is in it.

'Mr. Neville! In this disorder! Where have you been?'
'I have been to Mr. Jasper's, sir. With his nephew.'
'Come in.'

The Minor Canon props him by the elbow with a strong hand (in a strictly scientific manner, worthy of his morning trainings), and turns him into his own little book-room, and shuts the door.'

'I have begun ill, sir. I have begun dreadfully ill.'
'Too true. You are not sober, Mr. Neville.'
'I am afraid I am not, sir, though I can satisfy you at another time that I have had a very little indeed to drink, and that it overcame me in the strangest and most sudden manner.'

'Mr. Neville, Mr. Neville,' says the Minor Canon, shaking his head with a sorrowful smile; 'I have heard that said before.'
'I think--my mind is much confused, but I think--it is equally true of Mr. Jasper's nephew, sir.'
'Very likely,' is the dry rejoinder.
'We quarrelled, sir. He insulted me most grossly. He had heated that tigerish blood I told you of to-day, before then.'

'Mr. Neville,' rejoins the Minor Canon, mildly, but firmly: 'I request you not to speak to me with that clenched right hand. Unclench it, if you please.'
'He goaded me, sir,' pursues the young man, instantly obeying, 'beyond my power of endurance. I cannot say whether or no he meant it at first, but he did it. He certainly meant it at last. In short, sir,' with an irrepressible outburst, 'in the passion into which he lashed me, I would have cut him down if I could, and I tried to do it.'

'You have clenched that hand again,' is Mr. Crisparkle's quiet commentary.

'I beg your pardon, sir.'

'You know your room, for I showed it you before dinner; but I will accompany you to it once more. Your arm, if you please. Softly, for the house is all a-bed.'

Scooping his hand into the same scientific elbow-rest as before, and backing it up with the inert strength of his arm, as skilfully as a Police Expert, and with an apparent repose quite unattainable by novices, Mr. Crisparkle conducts his pupil to the pleasant and orderly old room prepared for him. Arrived there, the young man throws himself into a chair, and, flinging his arms upon his reading-table, rests his head upon them with an air of wretched self-reproach.

The gentle Minor Canon has had it in his thoughts to leave the room, without a word. But looking round at the door, and seeing this dejected figure, he turns back to it, touches it with a mild hand, says 'Good night!' A sob is his only acknowledgment. He might have had many a worse; perhaps, could have had few better.

Another soft knock at the outer door attracts his attention as he goes down-stairs. He opens it to Mr. Jasper, holding in his hand the pupil's hat.

'We have had an awful scene with him,' says Jasper, in a low voice.

'Has it been so bad as that?'

'Murderous!'

Mr. Crisparkle remonstrates: 'No, no, no. Do not use such strong words.'

'He might have laid my dear boy dead at my feet. It is no fault of his, that he did not. But that I was, through the mercy of God, swift and strong with him, he would have cut him down on my hearth.'

The phrase smites home. 'Ah!' thinks Mr. Crisparkle, 'his own words!'

'Seeing what I have seen to-night, and hearing what I have heard,' adds Jasper, with great earnestness, 'I shall never know peace of mind when there is danger of those two coming together, with no one else to interfere. It was horrible. There is something of the tiger in his dark blood.'

'Ah!' thinks Mr. Crisparkle, 'so he said!'

'You, my dear sir,' pursues Jasper, taking his hand, 'even you, have accepted a dangerous charge.'

'You need have no fear for me, Jasper,' returns Mr. Crisparkle, with a quiet smile. 'I have none for myself.'

'I have none for myself,' returns Jasper, with an emphasis on the last pronoun, 'because I am not, nor am I in the way of being, the object of his hostility. But you may be, and my dear boy has been. Good night!'

Mr. Crisparkle goes in, with the hat that has so easily, so almost imperceptibly, acquired the right to be hung up in his hall; hangs it up; and goes thoughtfully to bed.

CHAPTER IX--BIRDS IN THE BUSH

Rosa, having no relation that she knew of in the world, had, from the seventh year of her age, known no home but the Nuns' House, and no mother but Miss Twinkleton. Her remembrance of her own mother was of a pretty little creature like herself (not much older than herself it seemed to her), who had been brought home in her father's arms, drowned. The fatal accident had happened at a party of pleasure. Every fold and colour in the pretty summer dress, and even the long wet hair, with scattered petals of ruined flowers still clinging to it, as the dead young figure, in its sad, sad beauty lay upon the bed, were fixed indelibly in Rosa's recollection. So were the wild despair and the subsequent bowed-down grief of her poor young father, who died broken-hearted on the first anniversary of that hard day.

The betrothal of Rosa grew out of the soothing of his year of mental distress by his fast friend and old college companion, Drood: who likewise had been left a widower in his youth. But he, too, went the silent road into which all earthly pilgrimages merge, some sooner, and some later; and thus the young couple had come to be as they were.

The atmosphere of pity surrounding the little orphan girl when she first came to Cloisterham, had never cleared away. It had taken brighter hues as she grew older, happier, prettier; now it had been golden, now roseate, and now azure; but it had always adorned her with some soft light of its own. The general desire to console and caress her, had caused her to be treated in the beginning as a child much younger than her years; the same desire had caused her to be still petted when she was a child no longer. Who should be her favourite, who should anticipate this or that small present, or do her this or that small service; who should take her home for the holidays; who should write to her the oftenest when they were separated, and whom she would most rejoice to see again when they were reunited; even these gentle rivalries were not without their slight dashes of bitterness in the Nuns' House. Well for the poor Nuns in their day, if they hid no harder strife under their veils and rosaries!

Thus Rosa had grown to be an amiable, giddy, wilful, winning little creature; spoilt, in the sense of counting
upon kindness from all around her; but not in the sense of repaying it with indifference. Possessing an exhaustless well of affection in her nature, its sparkling waters had freshened and brightened the Nuns’ House for years, and yet its depths had never yet been moved: what might betide when that came to pass; what developing changes might fall upon the heedless head, and light heart, then; remained to be seen.

By what means the news that there had been a quarrel between the two young men overnight, involving even some kind of onslaught by Mr. Neville upon Edwin Drood, got into Miss Twinkleton’s establishment before breakfast, it is impossible to say. Whether it was brought in by the birds of the air, or came blowing in with the very air itself, when the casement windows were set open; whether the baker brought it kneaded into the bread, or the milkman delivered it as part of the adulteration of his milk; or the housemaids, beating the dust out of their mats against the gateposts, received it in exchange deposited on the mats by the town atmosphere; certainly it is that the news permeated every gable of the old building before Miss Twinkleton was down, and that Miss Twinkleton herself received it through Mrs. Tisher, while yet in the act of dressing; or (as she might have expressed the phrase to a parent or guardian of a mythological turn) of sacrificing to the Graces.

Miss Landless’s brother had thrown a bottle at Mr. Edwin Drood.
Miss Landless’s brother had thrown a knife at Mr. Edwin Drood.
Miss Landless’s brother had thrown a fork at Mr. Edwin Drood.

A knife became suggestive of a fork; and Miss Landless’s brother had thrown a fork at Mr. Edwin Drood.

As in the governing precedence of Peter Piper, alleged to have picked the peck of pickled pepper, it was held physically desirable to have evidence of the existence of the peck of pickled pepper which Peter Piper was alleged to have picked; so, in this case, it was held psychologically important to know why Miss Landless’s brother threw a bottle, knife, or fork-or bottle, knife, AND fork-- for the cook had been given to understand it was all three--at Mr. Edwin Drood?

Well, then. Miss Landless’s brother had said he admired Miss Bud. Mr. Edwin Drood had said to Miss Landless’s brother that he had no business to admire Miss Bud. Miss Landless’s brother had then ’up'd' (this was the cook’s exact information) with the bottle, knife, fork, and decanter (the decanter now coolly flying at everybody’s head, without the least introduction), and thrown them all at Mr. Edwin Drood.

Poor little Rosa put a forefinger into each of her ears when these rumours began to circulate, and retired into a corner, beseeching not to be told any more; but Miss Landless, begging permission of Miss Twinkleton to go and speak with her brother, and pretty plainly showing that she would take it if it were not given, struck out the more definite course of going to Mr. Crisparkle’s for accurate intelligence.

When she came back (being first closeted with Miss Twinkleton, in order that anything objectionable in her tidings might be retained by that discreet filter), she imparted to Rosa only, what had taken place; dwelling with a flushed cheek on the provocation her brother had received, but almost limiting it to that last gross affront as crowning ‘some other words between them,’ and, out of consideration for her new friend, passing lightly over the fact that the other words had originated in her lover’s taking things in general so very easily. To Rosa direct, she brought a petition from her brother that she would forgive him; and, having delivered it with sisterly earnestness, made an end of the subject.

It was reserved for Miss Twinkleton to tone down the public mind of the Nuns’ House. That lady, therefore, entering in a stately manner what plebeians might have called the school-room, but what, in the patrician language of the head of the Nuns’ House, was euphuistically, not to say round-aboutedly, denominated ‘the apartment allotted to study,’ and saying with a forensic air, ‘Ladies!’ all rose. Mrs. Tisher at the same time grouped herself behind her chief, as representing Queen Elizabeth’s first historical female friend at Tilbury fort. Miss Twinkleton then proceeded to remark that Rumour, Ladies, had been represented by the bard of Avon--needless were it to mention the immortal SHAKESPEARE, also called the Swan of his native river, not improbably with some reference to the ancient superstition that that bird of graceful plumage (Miss Jennings will please stand upright) sang sweetly on the air itself, when the casement windows were set open; whether the baker brought it kneaded into the bread, or the milkman delivered it as part of the adulteration of his milk; or the housemaids, beating the dust out of their mats against the gateposts, received it in exchange deposited on the mats by the town atmosphere; certain it is that the news permeated every gable of the old building before Miss Twinkleton was down, and that Miss Twinkleton herself received it through Mrs. Tisher, while yet in the act of dressing; or (as she might have expressed the phrase to a parent or guardian of a mythological turn) of sacrificing to the Graces.

'who drew The celebrated Jew,'
one of those 'airy nothings' pointed at by the Poet (whose name and date of birth Miss Giggles will supply within half an hour), we would now discard the subject, and concentrate our minds upon the grateful labours of the day.

But the subject so survived all day, nevertheless, that Miss Ferdinand got into new trouble by surreptitiously clapping on a paper moustache at dinner-time, and going through the motions of aiming a water-bottle at Miss Giggles, who drew a table-spoon in defence.

Now, Rosa thought of this unlucky quarrel a great deal, and thought of it with an uncomfortable feeling that she was involved in it, as cause, or consequence, or what not, through being in a false position altogether as to her marriage engagement. Never free from such uneasiness when she was with her affianced husband, it was not likely that she would be free from it when they were apart. To-day, too, she was cast in upon herself, and deprived of the relief of talking freely with her new friend, because the quarrel had been with Helena's brother, and Helena undisguisedly avoided the subject as a delicate and difficult one to herself. At this critical time, of all times, Rosa's guardian was announced as having come to see her.

Mr. Grewgious had been well selected for his trust, as a man of incorruptible integrity, but certainly for no other appropriate quality discernible on the surface. He was an arid, sandy man, who, if he had been put into a grinding-mill, looked as if he would have ground immediately into high-dried snuff. He had a scanty flat crop of hair, in colour and consistency like some very mangy yellow fur tippet; it was so unlike hair, that it must have been a wig, but for the stupendous improbability of anybody's voluntarily sporting such a head. The little play of feature that his face presented, was cut deep into it, in a few hard curves that made it more like work; and he had certain notches in his forehead, which looked as though Nature had been about to touch them into sensibility or refinement, when she had impatiently thrown away the chisel, and said: 'I really cannot be worried to finish off this man; let him go as he is.'

With too great length of throat at his upper end, and too much ankle-bone and heel at his lower; with an awkward and hesitating manner; with a shambling walk; and with what is called a near sight—which perhaps prevented his observing how much white cotton stocking he displayed to the public eye, in contrast with his black suit—Mr. Grewgious still had some strange capacity in him of making on the whole an agreeable impression.

Mr. Grewgious was discovered by his ward, much discomfited by being in Miss Twinkleton's company in Miss Twinkleton's own sacred room. Dim forebodings of being examined in something, and not coming well out of it, seemed to oppress the poor gentleman when found in these circumstances.

'My dear, how do you do? I am glad to see you. My dear, how much improved you are. Permit me to hand you a chair, my dear.'

Miss Twinkleton rose at her little writing-table, saying, with general sweetness, as to the polite Universe: 'Will you permit me to retire?'

'By no means, madam, on my account. I beg that you will not move.'

'I must entreat permission to MOVE,' returned Miss Twinkleton, repeating the word with a charming grace; 'but I will not withdraw, since you are so obliging. If I wheel my desk to this corner window, shall I be in the way?'

'Madam! In the way!'

'You are very kind.--Rosa, my dear, you will be under no restraint, I am sure.'

Here Mr. Grewgious, left by the fire with Rosa, said again: 'My dear, how do you do? I am glad to see you, my dear.' And having waited for her to sit down, sat down himself.

'My visits,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'are, like those of the angels-- not that I compare myself to an angel.'

'No, sir,' said Rosa.

'Not by any means,' assented Mr. Grewgious. 'I merely refer to my visits, which are few and far between. The angels are, we know very well, up-stairs.'

Miss Twinkleton looked round with a kind of stiff stare.

'I refer, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious, laying his hand on Rosa's, as the possibility thrilled through his frame of his otherwise seeming to take the awful liberty of calling Miss Twinkleton my dear; 'I refer to the other young ladies.'

Miss Twinkleton resumed her writing.

Mr. Grewgious, with a sense of not having managed his opening point quite as neatly as he might have desired, smoothed his head from back to front as if he had just dived, and were pressing the water out--this smoothing action, however superfluous, was habitual with him--and took a pocket-book from his coat-pocket, and a stump of black-lead pencil from his waistcoat-pocket.

'I made,' he said, turning the leaves: 'I made a guiding memorandum or so--as I usually do, for I have no conversational powers whatever--to which I will, with your permission, my dear, refer. "Well and happy." Truly. You are well and happy, my dear? You look so.'

'Yes, indeed, sir,' answered Rosa.
'For which,' said Mr. Grewgious, with a bend of his head towards the corner window, 'our warmest acknowledgments are due, and I am sure are rendered, to the maternal kindness and the constant care and consideration of the lady whom I have now the honour to see before me.'

This point, again, made but a lame departure from Mr. Grewgious, and never got to its destination; for, Miss Twinkleton, feeling that the courtesies required her to be by this time quite outside the conversation, was biting the end of her pen, and looking upward, as waiting for the descent of an idea from any member of the Celestial Nine who might have one to spare.

Mr. Grewgious smoothed his smooth head again, and then made another reference to his pocket-book; lining out 'well and happy,' as disposed of.

"Pounds, shillings, and pence," is my next note. A dry subject for a young lady, but an important subject too. Life is pounds, shillings, and pence. Death is--' A sudden recollection of the death of her two parents seemed to stop him, and he said in a softer tone, and evidently inserting the negative as an after-thought: 'Death is NOT pounds, shillings, and pence.'

His voice was as hard and dry as himself, and Fancy might have ground it straight, like himself, into high-dried snuff. And yet, through the very limited means of expression that he possessed, he seemed to express kindness. If Nature had but finished him off, kindness might have been recognisable in his face at this moment. But if the notches in his forehead wouldn't fuse together, and if his face would work and couldn't play, what could he do, poor man!

"Pounds, shillings, and pence." You find your allowance always sufficient for your wants, my dear?"
Rosa wanted for nothing, and therefore it was ample.

'And you are not in debt?'
Rosa laughed at the idea of being in debt. It seemed, to her inexperience, a comical vagary of the imagination. Mr. Grewgious stretched his near sight to be sure that this was her view of the case. 'Ah!' he said, as comment, with a furtive glance towards Miss Twinkleton, and lining out pounds, shillings, and pence: 'I spoke of having got among the angels! So I did!'

Rosa felt what his next memorandum would prove to be, and was blushing and folding a crease in her dress with one embarrassed hand, long before he found it.

"Marriage." Hem!' Mr. Grewgious carried his smoothing hand down over his eyes and nose, and even chin, before drawing his chair a little nearer, and speaking a little more confidentially: 'I now touch, my dear, upon the point that is the direct cause of my troubling you with the present visit. Otherwise, being a particularly Angular man, I should not have intruded here. I am the last man to intrude into a sphere for which I am so entirely unfitted. I feel, on these premises, as if I was a bear--with the cramp--in a youthful Cotillon."

His ungainliness gave him enough of the air of his simile to set Rosa off laughing heartily.

'It strikes you in the same light,' said Mr. Grewgious, with perfect calmness. 'Just so. To return to my memorandum. Mr. Edwin has been to and fro here, as was arranged. You have mentioned that, in your quarterly letters to me. And you like him, and he likes you.'

'I LIKE him very much, sir,' rejoined Rosa.

'So I said, my dear,' returned her guardian, for whose ear the timid emphasis was much too fine. 'Good. And you correspond.'

'We write to one another,' said Rosa, pouting, as she recalled their epistolary differences.

'Such is the meaning that I attach to the word "correspond" in this application, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Good. All goes well, time works on, and at this next Christmas-time it will become necessary, as a matter of form, to give the exemplary lady in the corner window, to whom we are so much indebted, business notice of your departure in the ensuing half-year. Your relations with her are far more than business relations, no doubt; but a residue of business remains in them, and business is business ever. I am a particularly Angular man,' proceeded Mr. Grewgious, as if it suddenly occurred to him to mention it, 'and I am not used to give anything away. If, for these two reasons, some competent Proxy would give YOU away, I should take it very kindly.'

Rosa intimated, with her eyes on the ground, that she thought a substitute might be found, if required.

'Surely, surely,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'For instance, the gentleman who teaches Dancing here--he would know how to do it with graceful propriety. He would advance and retire in a manner satisfactory to the feelings of the officiating clergyman, and of yourself, and the bridegroom, and all parties concerned. I am--I am a particularly Angular man,' said Mr. Grewgious, as if he had made up his mind to screw it out at last: 'and should only blunder.'

Rosa sat still and silent. Perhaps her mind had not got quite so far as the ceremony yet, but was lagging on the way there.

'Memorandum, "Will." Now, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious, referring to his notes, disposing of 'Marriage' with his pencil, and taking a paper from his pocket; 'although. I have before possessed you with the contents of your
father's will, I think it right at this time to leave a certified copy of it in your hands. And although Mr. Edwin is also aware of its contents, I think it right at this time likewise to place a certified copy of it in Mr. Jasper's hand--'

'Not in his own!' asked Rosa, looking up quickly. 'Cannot the copy go to Eddy himself?'

'Why, yes, my dear, if you particularly wish it; but I spoke of Mr. Jasper as being his trustee.'

'I do particularly wish it, if you please,' said Rosa, hurriedly and earnestly; 'I don't like Mr. Jasper to come between us, in any way.'

'It is natural, I suppose,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'that your young husband should be all in all. Yes. You observe that I say, I suppose. The fact is, I am a particularly Unnatural man, and I don't know from my own knowledge.'

Rosa looked at him with some wonder.

'I mean,' he explained, 'that young ways were never my ways. I was the only offspring of parents far advanced in life, and I half believe I was born advanced in life myself. No personality is intended towards the name you will so soon change, when I remark that while the general growth of people seem to have come into existence, buds, I seem to have come into existence a chip. I was a chip--and a very dry one--when I first became aware of myself. Respecting the other certified copy, your wish shall be complied with. Respecting your inheritance, I think you know all. It is an annuity of two hundred and fifty pounds. The savings upon that annuity, and some other items to your credit, all duly carried to account, with vouchers, will place you in possession of a lump-sum of money, rather exceeding Seventeen Hundred Pounds. I am empowered to advance the cost of your preparations for your marriage out of that fund. All is told.'

'Will you please tell me,' said Rosa, taking the paper with a prettily knitted brow, but not opening it: 'whether I am right in what I am going to say? I can understand what you tell me, so very much better than what I read in law-writings. My poor papa and Eddy's father made their agreement together, as very dear and firm and fast friends, in order that we, too, might be very dear and firm and fast friends after them?'

'Just so.'

'For the lasting good of both of us, and the lasting happiness of both of us?'

'Just so.'

'If we might be to one another even much more than they had been to one another?'

'Just so.'

'It was not bound upon Eddy, and it was not bound upon me, by any forfeiture, in case--'

'Don't be agitated, my dear. In the case that it brings tears into your affectionate eyes even to picture to yourself--in the case of your not marrying another--no, no forfeiture on either side. You would then have been my ward until you were of age. No worse would have befallen you. Bad enough perhaps!'

'And Eddy?'

'He would have come into his partnership derived from his father, and into its arrears to his credit (if any), on attaining his majority, just as now.'

Rosa, with her perplexed face and knitted brow, bit the corner of her attested copy, as she sat with her head on one side, looking abstractedly on the floor, and smoothing it with her foot.

'In short,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'this betrothal is a wish, a sentiment, a friendly project, tenderly expressed on both sides. That it was strongly felt, and that there was a lively hope that it would prosper, there can be no doubt. When you were both children, you began to be accustomed to it, and it HAS prospered. But circumstances alter cases; and I made this visit to-day, partly, indeed principally, to discharge myself of the duty of telling you, my dear, that two young people can only be betrothed in marriage (except as a matter of convenience, and therefore mockery and misery) of their own free will, their own attachment, and their own assurance (it may or it may not prove a mistaken one, but we must take our chance of that), that they are suited to each other, and will make each other happy. Is it to be supposed, for example, that if either of your fathers were living now, and had any mistrust on that subject, his mind would not be changed by the change of circumstances involved in the change of your years? Untenable, unreasonable, inconclusive, and preposterous!'

Mr. Grewgious said all this, as if he were reading it aloud; or, still more, as if he were repeating a lesson. So expressionless of any approach to spontaneity were his face and manner.

'I have now, my dear,' he added, blurring out 'Will' with his pencil, 'discharged myself of what is doubtless a formal duty in this case, but still a duty in such a case. Memorandum, "Wishes." My dear, is there any wish of yours that I can further?'

Rosa shook her head, with an almost plaintive air of hesitation in want of help.

'Is there any instruction that I can take from you with reference to your affairs?'

'1--I should like to settle them with Eddy first, if you please,' said Rosa, plaitsing the crease in her dress.

'Surely, surely,' returned Mr. Grewgious. 'You two should be of one mind in all things. Is the young gentleman expected shortly?'
'He has gone away only this morning. He will be back at Christmas.'

'Nothing could happen better. You will, on his return at Christmas, arrange all matters of detail with him; you will then communicate with me; and I will discharge myself (as a mere business acquaintance) of my business responsibilities towards the accomplished lady in the corner window. They will accrue at that season.' Blurring pencil once again. 'Memorandum, "Leave." Yes. I will now, my dear, take my leave.'

'Could I,' said Rosa, rising, as he jerked out of his chair in his ungainly way: 'could I ask you, most kindly to come to me at Christmas, if I had anything particular to say to you?'

'Why, certainly, certainly,' he rejoined; apparently--if such a word can be used of one who had no apparent lights or shadows about him--complimented by the question. 'As a particularly Angular man, I do not fit smoothly into the social circle, and consequently I have no other engagement at Christmas-time than to partake, on the twenty-fifth, of a boiled turkey and celery sauce with a--with a particularly Angular clerk I have the good fortune to possess, whose father, being a Norfolk farmer, sends him up (the turkey up), as a present to me, from the neighbourhood of Norwich. I should be quite proud of your wishing to see me, my dear. As a professional Receiver of rents, so very few people DO wish to see me, that the novelty would be bracing.'

For his ready acquiescence, the grateful Rosa put her hands upon his shoulders, stood on tiptoe, and instantly kissed him.

'Lord bless me!' cried Mr. Grewgious. 'Thank you, my dear! The honour is almost equal to the pleasure. Miss Twinkleton, madam, I have had a most satisfactory conversation with my ward, and I will now release you from the incumbrance of my presence.'

'Nay, sir,' rejoined Miss Twinkleton, rising with a gracious condescension: 'say not incumbrance. Not so, by any means. I cannot permit you to say so.'

'Thank you, madam. I have read in the newspapers,' said Mr. Grewgious, stammering a little, 'that when a distinguished visitor (not that I am one: far from it) goes to a school (not that this is one: far from it), he asks for a holiday, or some sort of grace. It being now the afternoon in the--College--of which you are the eminent head, the young ladies might gain nothing, except in name, by having the rest of the day allowed them. But if there is any young lady at all under a cloud, might I solicit--'

'Ah, Mr. Grewgious, Mr. Grewgious!' cried Miss Twinkleton, with a chastely-rallying forefinger. 'O you gentlemen, you gentlemen! Fie for shame, that you are so hard upon us poor maligned disciplinarians of our sex, for your sakes! But as Miss Ferdinand is at present weighed down by an incubus'--Miss Twinkleton might have said a pen-and-ink-ubus of writing out Monsieur La Fontaine--' go to her, Rosa my dear, and tell her the penalty is remitted, in deference to the intercession of your guardian, Mr. Grewgious.'

Miss Twinkleton here achieved a curtsey, suggestive of marvels happening to her respected legs, and which she came out of nobly, three yards behind her starting-point.

As he held it incumbent upon him to call on Mr. Jasper before leaving Cloisterham, Mr. Grewgious went to the gatehouse, and climbed its postern stair. But Mr. Jasper's door being closed, and presenting on a slip of paper the word 'Cathedral,' the fact of its being service-time was borne into the mind of Mr. Grewgious. So he descended the stair again, and, crossing the Close, paused at the great western folding-door of the Cathedral, which stood open on the fine and bright, though short-lived, afternoon, for the airing of the place.

'Dear me,' said Mr. Grewgious, peeping in, 'it's like looking down the throat of Old Time.'

Old Time heaved a mouldy sigh from tomb and arch and vault; and gloomy shadows began to deepen in corners; and damps began to rise from green patches of stone; and jewels, cast upon the pavement of the nave from stained glass by the declining sun, began to perish. Within the grill-gate of the chancel, up the steps surmounted loomingly by the fast-darkening organ, white robes could be dimly seen, and one feeble voice, rising and falling in a cracked, monotonous mutter, could at intervals be faintly heard. In the free outer air, the river, the green pastures, and the brown arable lands, the teeming hills and dales, were reddened by the sunset: while the distant little windows in windmills and farm homesteads, shone, patches of bright beaten gold. In the Cathedral, all became gray, murky, and sepulchral, and the cracked monotonous mutter went on like a dying voice, until the organ and the choir burst forth, and drowned it in a sea of music. Then, the sea fell, and the dying voice made another feeble effort, and then the sea rose high, and beat its life out, and lashed the roof, and surged among the arches, and pierced the heights of the great tower; and then the sea was dry, and all was still.

Mr. Grewgious had by that time walked to the chancel-steps, where he met the living waters coming out.

'Nothing is the matter?' Thus Jasper accosted him, rather quickly. 'You have not been sent for?'

'Not at all, not at all. I came down of my own accord. I have been to my pretty ward's, and am now homeward bound again.'

'You found her thriving?'

'Blooming indeed. Most blooming. I merely came to tell her, seriously, what a betrothal by deceased parents is.'
'And what is it--according to your judgment?'

Mr. Grewgious noticed the whiteness of the lips that asked the question, and put it down to the chilling account of the Cathedral.

'I merely came to tell her that it could not be considered binding, against any such reason for its dissolution as a want of affection, or want of disposition to carry it into effect, on the side of either party.'

'May I ask, had you any especial reason for telling her that?'

Mr. Grewgious answered somewhat sharply: 'The especial reason of doing my duty, sir. Simply that.' Then he added: 'Come, Mr. Jasper; I know your affection for your nephew, and that you are quick to feel on his behalf. I assure you that this implies not the least doubt of, or disrespect to, your nephew.'

'You could not,' returned Jasper, with a friendly pressure of his arm, as they walked on side by side, 'speak more handsomely.'

Mr. Grewgious pulled off his hat to smooth his head, and, having smoothed it, nodded it contentedly, and put his hat on again.

'I will wager,' said Jasper, smiling--his lips were still so white that he was conscious of it, and bit and moistened them while speaking: 'I will wager that she hinted no wish to be released from Ned.'

'And you will win your wager, if you do,' retorted Mr. Grewgious. 'We should allow some margin for little maidenly delicacies in a young motherless creature, under such circumstances, I suppose; it is not in my line; what do you think?'

'There can be no doubt of it.'

'I am glad you say so. Because,' proceeded Mr. Grewgious, who had all this time very knowingly felt his way round to action on his remembrance of what she had said of Jasper himself: 'because she seems to have some little delicate instinct that all preliminary arrangements had best be made between Mr. Edwin Drood and herself, don't you see? She don't want us, don't you know?'

Jasper touched himself on the breast, and said, somewhat indistinctly: 'You mean me.'

Mr. Grewgious touched himself on the breast, and said: 'I mean us. Therefore, let them have their little discussions and councils together, when Mr. Edwin Drood comes back here at Christmas; and then you and I will step in, and put the final touches to the business.'

'So, you settled with her that you would come back at Christmas?' observed Jasper. 'I see! Mr. Grewgious, as you quite fairly said just now, there is such an exceptional attachment between my nephew and me, that I am more sensitive for the dear, fortunate, happy, happy fellow than for myself. But it is only right that the young lady should be considered, as you have pointed out, and that I should accept my cue from you. I accept it. I understand that at Christmas they will complete their preparations for May, and that their marriage will be put in final train by themselves, and that nothing will remain for us but to put ourselves in train also, and have everything ready for our formal release from our trusts, on Edwin's birthday.'

'That is my understanding,' assented Mr. Grewgious, as they shook hands to part. 'God bless them both!'

'God save them both!' cried Jasper.

'I said, bless them,' remarked the former, looking back over his shoulder.

'I said, save them,' returned the latter. 'Is there any difference?'

CHAPTER X--SMOOTHING THE WAY

It has been often enough remarked that women have a curious power of divining the characters of men, which would seem to be innate and instinctive; seeing that it is arrived at through no patient process of reasoning, that it can give no satisfactory or sufficient account of itself, and that it pronounces in the most confident manner even against accumulated observation on the part of the other sex. But it has not been quite so often remarked that this power (fallible, like every other human attribute) is for the most part absolutely incapable of self-revision; and that when it has delivered an adverse opinion which by all human lights is subsequently proved to have failed, it is undistinguishable from prejudice, in respect of its determination not to be corrected. Nay, the very possibility of contradiction or disproof, however remote, communicates to this feminine judgment from the first, in nine cases out of ten, the weakness attendant on the testimony of an interested witness; so personally and strongly does the fair diviner connect herself with her divination.

'Now, don't you think, Ma dear,' said the Minor Canon to his mother one day as she sat at her knitting in his little book-room, 'that you are rather hard on Mr. Neville?'

'No, I do NOT, Sept,' returned the old lady.

'Let us discuss it, Ma.'

'I have no objection to discuss it, Sept. I trust, my dear, I am always open to discussion.' There was a vibration in the old lady's cap, as though she internally added: 'and I should like to see the discussion that would change MY mind!'
'Very good, Ma,' said her conciliatory son. 'There is nothing like being open to discussion.'
'I hope not, my dear,' returned the old lady, evidently shut to it.
'Well! Mr. Neville, on that unfortunate occasion, commits himself under provocation.'
'And under mulled wine,' added the old lady.
'I must admit the wine. Though I believe the two young men were much alike in that regard.'
'I don't,' said the old lady.
'Why not, Ma?'
'Because I DON'T,' said the old lady. 'Still, I am quite open to discussion.'
'But, my dear Ma, I cannot see how we are to discuss, if you take that line.'
'Blame Mr. Neville for it, Sept, and not me;' said the old lady, with stately severity.
'My dear Ma! why Mr. Neville?'
'Because,' said Mrs. Crisparkle, retiring on first principles, 'he came home intoxicated, and did great discredit to this house, and showed great disrespect to this family.'
'That is not to be denied, Ma. He was then, and he is now, very sorry for it.'
'But for Mr. Jasper's well-bred consideration in coming up to me, next day, after service, in the Nave itself, with his gown still on, and expressing his hope that I had not been greatly alarmed or had my rest violently broken, I believe I might never have heard of that disgraceful transaction,' said the old lady.
'To be candid, Ma, I think I should have kept it from you if I could: though I had not decided to made up my mind. I was following Jasper out, to confer with him on the subject, and to consider the expediency of his and my jointly hushing the thing up on all accounts, when I found him speaking to you. Then it was too late.'
'Too late, indeed, Sept. He was still as pale as gentlemanly ashes at what had taken place in his rooms overnight.'
'If I HAD kept it from you, Ma, you may be sure it would have been for your peace and quiet, and for the good of the young men, and in my best discharge of my duty according to my lights.'
The old lady immediately walked across the room and kissed him: saying, 'Of course, my dear Sept, I am sure of that.'
'However, it became the town-talk;' said Mr. Crisparkle, rubbing his ear, as his mother resumed her seat, and her knitting, 'and passed out of my power.'
'And I said then, Sept,' returned the old lady, 'that I thought ill of Mr. Neville. And I say now, that I think ill of Mr. Neville. And I said then, and I say now, that I hope Mr. Neville may come to good, but I don't believe he will.' Here the cap vibrated again considerably.
'I am sorry to hear you say so, Ma--'
'I am sorry to say so, my dear,' interposed the old lady, knitting on firmly, 'but I can't help it.'
'--For,' pursued the Minor Canon, 'it is undeniable that Mr. Neville is exceedingly industrious and attentive, and that he improves apace, and that he has--I hope I may say--an attachment to me.'
'There is no merit in the last article, my dear,' said the old lady, quickly; 'and if he says there is, I think the worse of him for the boast.'
'But, my dear Ma, he never said there was.'
'Perhaps not,' returned the old lady; 'still, I don't see that it greatly signifies.'
'There was no impatience in the pleasant look with which Mr. Crisparkle contemplated the pretty old piece of china as it knitted; but there was, certainly, a humorous sense of its not being a piece of china to argue with very closely.
'Besides, Sept, ask yourself what he would be without his sister. You know what an influence she has over him; you know what a capacity she has; you know that whatever he reads with you, he reads with her. Give her her fair share of your praise, and how much do you leave for him?' At these words Mr. Crisparkle fell into a little reverie, in which he thought of several things. He thought of the times he had seen the brother and sister together in deep converse over one of his own old college books; now, in the rindy mornings, when he made those sharpening pilgrimages to Cloisterham Weir; now, in the sombre evenings, when he face the wind at sunset, having climbed his favourite outlook, a beetling fragment of monastery ruin; and the two studious figures passed below him along the margin of the river, in which the town fires and lights already shone, making the landscape bleaker. He thought how the consciousness had stolen upon him that in teaching one, he was teaching two; and how he had almost insensibly adapted his explanations to both minds--that with which his own was daily in contact, and that which he only approached through it. He thought of the gossip that had reached him from the Nuns' House, to the effect that Helena, whom he had mistrusted as so proud and fierce, submitted herself to the fairy-bride (as he called her), and learnt from her what she knew. He thought of the picturesque alliance between those two, externally so very different. He thought--perhaps most of all--could it be that these things were yet but so many weeks old, and had become an integral part of his life?
As, whenever the Reverend Septimus fell a-musing, his good mother took it to be an infallible sign that he 'wanted support,' the blooming old lady made all haste to the dining-room closet, to produce from it the support embodied in a glass of Constantia and a home-made biscuit. It was a most wonderful closet, worthy of Cloisterham and of Minor Canon Corner. Above it, a portrait of Handel in a flowing wig beamed down at the spectator, with a knowing air of being up to the contents of the closet, and a musical air of intending to combine all its harmonies in one delicious fugue. No common closet with a vulgar door on hinges, openable all at once, and leaving nothing to be disclosed by degrees, this rare closet had a lock in mid-air, where two perpendicular slides met; the one falling down, and the other pushing up. The upper slide, on being pulled down (leaving the lower a double mystery), revealed deep shelves of pickle-jars, jam-pots, tin canisters, spice-boxes, and agreeably outlandish vessels of blue and white, the luscious lodgings of preserved tamarinds and ginger. Every benevolent inhabitant of this retreat had his name inscribed upon his stomach. The pickles, in a uniform of rich brown double-breasted buttoned coat, and yellow or sombre drab continuations, announced their portly forms, in printed capitals, as Walnut, Gherkin, Onion, Cabbage, Cauliflower, Mixed, and other members of that noble family. The jams, as being of a less masculine temperament, and as wearing curlpapers, announced themselves in feminine calligraphy, like a soft whisper, to be Raspberry, Gooseberry, Apricot, Plum, Damson, Apple, and Peach. The scene closing on these charmers, and the lower slide ascending, oranges were revealed, attended by a mighty japanned sugar-box, to temper their acerbity if unripe. Home-made biscuits waited at the Court of these Powers, accompanied by a goodly fragment of plum-cake, and various slender ladies’ fingers, to be dipped into sweet wine and kissed. Lowest of all, a compact leaden-vault enshrined the sweet wine and a stock of cordials: whence issued whispers of Seville Orange, Lemon, Almond, and Caraway-seed. There was a crowning air upon this closet of closets, of having been for ages hummed through by the Cathedral bell and organ, until those venerable bees had made sublimated honey of everything in store; and it was always observed that every dipper among the shelves (deep, as has been noticed, and swelling up head, shoulders, and elbows) came forth again mellow-faced, and seeming to have undergone a saccharine transfiguration.

The Reverend Septimus yielded himself up quite as willing a victim to a nauseous medicinal herb-closet, also presided over by the china shepherdess, as to this glorious cupboard. To what amazing infusions of gentian, peppermint, gilliflower, sage, parsley, thyme, rue, rosemary, and dandelion, did his courageous stomach submit itself! In what wonderful wrappers, enclosing layers of dried leaves, would he swathe his rosy and contented face, if his mother suspected him of a toothache! What botanical blotches would he cheerfully stick upon his cheek, or forehead, if the dear old lady convicted him of an imperceptible pimple there! Into this herbaceous penitentiary, situated on an upper staircase-landing: a low and narrow whitewashed cell, where bunches of dried leaves hung from rusty hooks in the ceiling, and were spread out upon shelves, in company with portentous bottles: would the Reverend Septimus submissively be led, like the highly popular lamb who has so long and unresistingly been led to the slaughter, and there would he, unlike that lamb, bore nobody but himself. Not even doing that much, so that the old lady were busy and pleased, he would quietly swallow what was given him, merely taking a corrective dip of hands and face into the great bowl of dried rose-leaves, and into the other great bowl of dried lavender, and then would go out, as confident in the sweetening powers of Cloisterham Weir and a wholesome mind, as Lady Macbeth herself was hopeless of those of all the seas that roll.

In the present instance the good Minor Canon took his glass of Constantia with an excellent grace, and, so supported to his mother’s satisfaction, applied himself to the remaining duties of the day. In their orderly and punctual progress they brought round Vesper Service and twilight. The Cathedral being very cold, he set off for a brisk trot after service; the trot to end in a charge at his favourite fragment of ruin, which was to be carried by storm, without a pause for breath.

He carried it in a masterly manner, and, not breathed even then, stood looking down upon the river. The river at Cloisterham is sufficiently near the sea to throw up oftentimes a quantity of seaweed. An unusual quantity had come in with the last tide, and this, and the confusion of the water, and the restless dipping and flapping of the noisy gulls, and an angry light out seaward beyond the brown-sailed barges that were turning black, foreshadowed a stormy night. In his mind he was contrasting the wild and noisy sea with the quiet harbour of Minor Canon Corner, when Helena and Neville Landless passed below him. He had had the two together in his thoughts all day, and at once climbed down to speak to them together. The footing was rough in an uncertain light for any tread save that of a good climber; but the Minor Canon was as good a climber as most men, and stood beside them before many good climbers would have been half-way down.

1'A wild evening, Miss Landless! Do you not find your usual walk with your brother too exposed and cold for the time of year? Or at all events, when the sun is down, and the weather is driving in from the sea?'

Helena thought not. It was their favourite walk. It was very retired.

2'It is very retired,' assented Mr. Crisparkle, laying hold of his opportunity straightway, and walking on with them. 'It is a place of all others where one can speak without interruption, as I wish to do. Mr. Neville, I believe you
'Tell your sister everything that passes between us?'

'Everything, sir.'

'Consequently,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'your sister is aware that I have repeatedly urged you to make some kind of apology for that unfortunate occurrence which befell on the night of your arrival here.' In saying it he looked to her, and not to him; therefore it was she, and not he, who replied:

'Yes.'

'I call it unfortunate, Miss Helena,' resumed Mr. Crisparkle, 'forasmuch as it certainly has engendered a prejudice against Neville. There is a notion about, that he is a dangerously passionate fellow, of an uncontrollable and furious temper: he is really avoided as such.'

'I have no doubt he is, poor fellow,' said Helena, with a look of proud compassion at her brother, expressing a deep sense of his being ungenerously treated. 'I should be quite sure of it, from your saying so; but what you tell me is confirmed by suppressed hints and references that I meet with every day.'

'Now,' Mr. Crisparkle again resumed, in a tone of mild though firm persuasion, 'is not this to be regretted, and ought it not to be amended? These are early days of Neville's in Cloisterham, and I have no fear of his outliving such a prejudice, and proving himself to have been misunderstood. But how much wiser to take action at once, than to trust to uncertain time! Besides, apart from its being politic, it is right. For there can be no question that Neville was wrong.'

'He was provoked,' Helena submitted.

'He was the assailant,' Mr. Crisparkle submitted.

'They walked on in silence, until Helena raised her eyes to the Minor Canon's face, and said, almost reproachfully: 'O Mr. Crisparkle, would you have Neville throw himself at young Drood's feet, or at Mr. Jasper's, who maligns him every day? In your heart you cannot mean it. From your heart you could not do it, if his case were yours.'

'I have represented to Mr. Crisparkle, Helena,' said Neville, with a glance of deference towards his tutor, 'that if I could do it from my heart, I would. But I cannot, and I revolt from the pretence. You forget however, that to put the case to Mr. Crisparkle as his own, is to suppose to have done what I did.'

'I ask his pardon,' said Helena.

'You see,' remarked Mr. Crisparkle, again laying hold of his opportunity, though with a moderate and delicate touch, 'you both instinctively acknowledge that Neville did wrong. Then why stop short, and not otherwise acknowledge it?'

'Is there no difference,' asked Helena, with a little faltering in her manner; 'between submission to a generous spirit, and submission to a base or trivial one?'

'Before the worthy Minor Canon was quite ready with his argument in reference to this nice distinction, Neville struck in:

'Help me to clear myself with Mr. Crisparkle, Helena. Help me to convince him that I cannot be the first to make concessions without mockery and falsehood. My nature must be changed before I can do so, and it is not changed. I am sensible of inexpressible affront, and deliberate aggravation of inexpressible affront, and I am angry. The plain truth is, I am still as angry when I recall that night as I was that night.'

'Neville,' hinted the Minor Canon, with a steady countenance, 'you have repeated that former action of your hands, which I so much dislike.'

'I am sorry for it, sir, but it was involuntary. I confessed that I was still as angry.'

'And I confess,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'that I hoped for better things.'

'I am sorry to disappoint you, sir, but it would be far worse to deceive you, and I should deceive you grossly if I pretended that you had softened me in this respect. The time may come when your powerful influence will do even that with the difficult pupil whose antecedents you know; but it has not come yet. Is this so, and in spite of my struggles against myself, Helena?'

'She, whose dark eyes were watching the effect of what he said on Mr. Crisparkle's face, replied--to Mr. Crisparkle, not to him: 'It is so.' After a short pause, she answered the slightest look of inquiry conceivable, in her brother's eyes, with as slight an affirmative bend of her own head; and he went on:

'I have never yet had the courage to say to you, sir, what in full openness I ought to have said when you first talked with me on this subject. It is not easy to say, and I have been withheld by a fear of its seeming ridiculous, which is very strong upon me down to this last moment, and might, but for my sister, prevent my being quite open with you even now.--I admire Miss Bud, sir, so very much, that I cannot bear her being treated with conceit or indifference; and even if I did not feel that I had an injury against young Drood on my own account, I should feel that I had an injury against him on hers.'

'Mr. Crisparkle, in utter amazement, looked at Helena for corroboration, and met in her expressive face full
corroboration, and a plea for advice.

'The young lady of whom you speak is, as you know, Mr. Neville, shortly to be married,' said Mr. Crisparkle, gravely; 'therefore your admiration, if it be of that special nature which you seem to indicate, is outrageously misplaced. Moreover, it is monstrous that you should take upon yourself to be the young lady's champion against her chosen husband. Besides, you have seen them only once, The young lady has become your sister's friend; and I wonder that your sister, even on her behalf, has not checked you in this irrational and culpable fancy.'

'She has tried, sir, but uselessly. Husband or no husband, that fellow is incapable of the feeling with which I am inspired towards the beautiful young creature whom he treats like a doll. I say he is as incapable of it, as he is unworthy of her. I say she is sacrificed in being bestowed upon him. I say that I love her, and despise and hate him!' This with a face so flushed, and a gesture so violent, that his sister crossed to his side, and caught his arm, remonstrating, 'Neville, Neville!'

Thus recalled to himself, he quickly became sensible of having lost the guard he had set upon his passionate tendency, and covered his face with his hand, as one repentant and wretched.

Mr. Crisparkle, watching him attentively, and at the same time meditating how to proceed, walked on for some paces in silence. Then he spoke:

'Mr. Neville, Mr. Neville, I am sorely grieved to see in you more traces of a character as sullen, angry, and wild, as the night now closing in. They are of too serious an aspect to leave me the resource of treating the infatuation you have disclosed, as undeserving serious consideration. I give it very serious consideration, and I speak to you accordingly. This feud between you and young Drood must not go on. I cannot permit it to go on any longer, knowing what I now know from you, and you living under my roof. Whatever prejudiced and unauthorised constructions your blind and envious wrath may put upon his character, it is a frank, good-natured character. I know I can trust to it for that. Now, pray observe what I am about to say. On reflection, and on your sister's representation, I am willing to admit that, in making peace with young Drood, you have a right to be met half-way. I will engage that you shall be, and even that young Drood shall make the first advance. This condition fulfilled, you will pledge me the honour of a Christian gentleman that the quarrel is for ever at an end on your side. What may be in your heart when you give him your hand, can only be known to the Searcher of all hearts; but it will never go well with you, if there be any treachery there. So far, as to that; next as to what I must again speak of as your infatuation. I understand it to have been confided to me, and to be known to no other person save your sister and yourself. Do I understand aright?'

Helena answered in a low voice: 'It is only known to us three who are here together.'

'It is not at all known to the young lady, your friend?'

'On my soul, no!'

'I require you, then, to give me your similar and solemn pledge, Mr. Neville, that it shall remain the secret it is, and that you will take no other action whatsoever upon it than endeavouring (and that most earnestly) to erase it from your mind. I will not tell you that it will soon pass; I will not tell you that it is the fancy of the moment; I will not tell you that such caprices have their rise and fall among the young and ardent every hour; I will leave you undisturbed in the belief that it has few parallels or none, that it will abide with you a long time, and that it will be very difficult to conquer. So much the more weight shall I attach to the pledge I require from you, when it is unreservedly given.'

The young man twice or thrice essayed to speak, but failed.

'Let me leave you with your sister, whom it is time you took home,' said Mr. Crisparkle. 'You will find me alone in my room by-and-by.'

'Pray do not leave us yet,' Helena implored him. 'Another minute.'

'I should not,' said Neville, pressing his hand upon his face, 'have needed so much as another minute, if you had been less patient with me, Mr. Crisparkle, less considerate of me, and less unpretendingly good and true. O, if in my childhood I had known such a guide!'

'Follow your guide now, Neville,' murmured Helena, 'and follow him to Heaven!'

There was that in her tone which broke the good Minor Canon's voice, or it would have repudiated her exaltation of him. As it was, he laid a finger on his lips, and looked towards her brother.

'To say that I give both pledges, Mr. Crisparkle, out of my innermost heart, and to say that there is no treachery in it, is to say nothing!' Thus Neville, greatly moved. 'I beg your forgiveness for my miserable lapse into a burst of passion.'

'Not mine, Neville, not mine. You know with whom forgiveness lies, as the highest attribute conceivable. Miss Helena, you and your brother are twin children. You came into this world with the same dispositions, and you passed your younger days together surrounded by the same adverse circumstances. What you have overcome in yourself, can you not overcome in him? You see the rock that lies in his course. Who but you can keep him clear of
'Who but you, sir?' replied Helena. 'What is my influence, or my weak wisdom, compared with yours!' 'You have the wisdom of Love,' returned the Minor Canon, 'and it was the highest wisdom ever known upon this earth, remember. As to mine--but the less said of that commonplace commodity the better. Good night!' She took the hand he offered her, and gratefully and almost reverently raised it to her lips. 'Tut!' said the Minor Canon softly, 'I am much overpaid!' and turned away. Retracing his steps towards the Cathedral Close, he tried, as he went along in the dark, to think out the best means of bringing to pass what he had promised to effect, and what must somehow be done. 'I shall probably be asked to marry them,' he reflected, 'and I would they were married and gone! But this presses first.' He debated principally whether he should write to young Drood, or whether he should speak to Jasper. The consciousness of being popular with the whole Cathedral establishment inclined him to the latter course, and the well-timed sight of the lighted gatehouse decided him to take it. 'I will strike while the iron is hot,' he said, 'and see him now.' Jasper was lying asleep on a couch before the fire, when, having ascended the postern-stair, and received no answer to his knock at the door, Mr. Crisparkle gently turned the handle and looked in. Long afterwards he had cause to remember how Jasper sprang from the couch in a delirious state between sleeping and waking, and crying out: 'What is the matter? Who did it?' 'It is only I, Jasper. I am sorry to have disturbed you.' The glare of his eyes settled down into a look of recognition, and he moved a chair or two, to make a way to the fireside. 'I was dreaming at a great rate, and am glad to be disturbed from an indigestive after-dinner sleep. Not to mention that you are always welcome.' 'Thank you. I am not confident,' returned Mr. Crisparkle, as he sat himself down in the easy-chair placed for him, 'that my subject will at first sight be quite as welcome as myself; but I am a minister of peace, and I pursue my subject in the interests of peace. In a word, Jasper, I want to establish peace between these two young fellows.' A very perplexed expression took hold of Mr. Jasper's face; a very perplexing expression too, for Mr. Crisparkle could make nothing of it. 'How?' was Jasper's inquiry, in a low and slow voice, after a silence. 'For the "How" I come to you. I want to ask you to do me the great favour and service of interposing with your nephew (I have already interposed with Mr. Neville), and getting him to write you a short note, in his lively way, saying that he is willing to shake hands. I know what a good-natured fellow he is, and what influence you have with him. And without in the least defending Mr. Neville, we must all admit that he was bitterly stung.' Jasper turned that perplexed face towards the fire. Mr. Crisparkle continuing to observe it, found it even more perplexing than before, inasmuch as it seemed to denote (which could hardly be) some close internal calculation. 'I know that you are not prepossessed in Mr. Neville's favour,' the Minor Canon was going on, when Jasper stopped him: 'You have cause to say so. I am not, indeed.' 'Undoubtedly; and I admit his lamentable violence of temper, though I hope he and I will get the better of it between us. But I have exacted a very solemn promise from him as to his future demeanour towards your nephew, if you do kindly interpose; and I am sure he will keep it.' 'You are always responsible and trustworthy, Mr. Crisparkle. Do you really feel sure that you can answer for him so confidently?' 'I do.' The perplexed and perplexing look vanished. 'Then you relieve my mind of a great dread, and a heavy weight,' said Jasper; 'I will do it.' Mr. Crisparkle, delighted by the swiftness and completeness of his success, acknowledged it in the handsomest terms. 'I will do it,' repeated Jasper, 'for the comfort of having your guarantee against my vague and unfounded fears. You will laugh--but do you keep a Diary?' 'A line for a day; not more.' 'A line for a day would be quite as much as my uneventful life would need, Heaven knows,' said Jasper, taking a book from a desk, 'but that my Diary is, in fact, a Diary of Ned's life too. You will laugh at this entry; you will guess when it was made: "Past midnight.--After what I have just now seen, I have a morbid dread upon me of some horrible consequences resulting to my dear boy, that I cannot reason with or in any way contend against. All my efforts are vain. The demoniacal passion of this Neville Landless, his strength in his fury, and his savage rage for the
destruction of its object, appal me. So profound is the impression, that twice since I have gone into my dear boy's room, to assure myself of his sleeping safely, and not lying dead in his blood."

'Here is another entry next morning:

"'Ned up and away. Light-hearted and unsuspicous as ever. He laughed when I cautioned him, and said he was as good a man as Neville Landless any day. I told him that might be, but he was not as bad a man. He continued to make light of it, but I travelled with him as far as I could, and left him most unwillingly. I am unable to shake off these dark intangible presentiments of evil--if feelings founded upon staring facts are to be so called."

'Again and again,' said Jasper, in conclusion, twirling the leaves of the book before putting it by, 'I have relapsed into these moods, as other entries show. But I have now your assurance at my back, and shall put it in my book, and make it an antidote to my black humours.'

'Such an antidote, I hope,' returned Mr. Crisparkle, 'as will induce you before long to consign the black humours to the flames. I ought to be the last to find any fault with you this evening, when you have met my wishes so freely; but I must say, Jasper, that your devotion to your nephew has made you exaggerative here.'

'You are my witness,' said Jasper, shrugging his shoulders, 'what my state of mind honestly was, that night, before I sat down to write, and in what words I expressed it. You remember objecting to a word I used, as being too strong? It was a stronger word than any in my Diary.'

'Well, well. Try the antidote,' rejoined Mr. Crisparkle; 'and may it give you a brighter and better view of the case! We will discuss it no more now. I have to thank you for myself, thank you sincerely.'

'You shall find,' said Jasper, as they shook hands, 'that I will not do the thing you wish me to do, by halves. I will take care that Ned, giving way at all, shall give way thoroughly.'

On the third day after this conversation, he called on Mr. Crisparkle with the following letter:

'MY DEAR JACK,

'I am touched by your account of your interview with Mr. Crisparkle, whom I much respect and esteem. At once I openly say that I forgot myself on that occasion quite as much as Mr. Landless did, and that I wish that bygone to be a bygone, and all to be right again.

'Look here, dear old boy. Ask Mr. Landless to dinner on Christmas Eve (the better the day the better the deed), and let there be only we three, and let us shake hands all round there and then, and say no more about it.

'My dear Jack, 'Ever your most affectionate, 'EDWIN DROOD.

'P.S. Love to Miss Pussy at the next music-lesson.'

'You expect Mr. Neville, then?' said Mr. Crisparkle.

'I count upon his coming,' said Mr. Jasper.

CHAPTER XI--A PICTURE AND A RING

Behind the most ancient part of Holborn, London, where certain gabled houses some centuries of age still stand looking on the public way, as if disconsolately looking for the Old Bourne that has long run dry, is a little nook composed of two irregular quadrangles, called Staple Inn. It is one of those nooks, the turning into which out of the clashing street, imparts to the relieved pedestrian the sensation of having put cotton in his ears, and velvet soles on his boots. It is one of those nooks where a few smoky sparrows twitter in smoky trees, as though they called to one another, 'Let us play at country,' and where a few feet of garden-mould and a few yards of gravel enable them to do that refreshing violence to their tiny understandings. Moreover, it is one of those nooks which are legal nooks; and it contains a little Hall, with a little lantern in its roof: to what obstructive purposes devoted, and at whose expense, this history knoweth not.

In the days when Cloisterham took offence at the existence of a railroad afar off, as menacing that sensitive constitution, the property of us Britons: the odd fortune of which sacred institution it is to be in exactly equal degrees croaked about, trembled for, and boasted of, whatever happens to anything, anywhere in the world: in those days no neighbouring architecture of lofty proportions had arisen to overshadow Staple Inn. The westering sun bestowed bright glances on it, and the south-west wind blew into it unimpeded.

Neither wind nor sun, however, favoured Staple Inn one December afternoon towards six o'clock, when it was filled with fog, and candles shed murky and blurred rays through the windows of all its then-occupied sets of chambers; notably from a set of chambers in a corner house in the little inner quadrangle, presenting in black and white over its ugly portal the mysterious inscription:

P J T 1747

In which set of chambers, never having troubled his head about the inscription, unless to bethink himself at odd times on glancing up at it, that haply it might mean Perhaps John Thomas, or Perhaps Joe Tyler, sat Mr. Grewgious writing by his fire.

Who could have told, by looking at Mr. Grewgious, whether he had ever known ambition or disappointment? He had been bred to the Bar, and had laid himself out for chamber practice; to draw deeds; 'convey the wise it call,' as
Pistol says. But Conveyancing and he had made such a very indifferent marriage of it that they had separated by consent—if there can be said to be separation where there has never been coming together.

No. Coy Conveyancing would not come to Mr. Grewgious. She was wooed, not won, and they went their several ways. But an Arbitration being blown towards him by some unaccountable wind, and he gaining great credit in it as one indefatigable in seeking out right and doing right, a pretty fat Receivership was next blown into his pocket by a wind more traceable to its source. So, by chance, he had found his niche. Receiver and Agent now, to two rich estates, and deputing their legal business, in an amount worth having, to a firm of solicitors on the floor below, he had snuffed out his ambition (supposing him to have ever lighted it), and had settled down with his snuffers for the rest of his life under the dry vine and fig-tree of P. J. T., who planted in seventeen-forty-seven.

Many accounts and account-books, many files of correspondence, and several strong boxes, garnished Mr. Grewgious's room. They can scarcely be represented as having lumbered it, so conscientious and precise was their orderly arrangement. The apprehension of dying suddenly, and leaving one fact or one figure with any incompleteness or obscurity attaching to it, would have stretched Mr. Grewgious stone-dead any day. The largest fidelity to a trust was the life-blood of the man. There are sorts of life-blood that course more quickly, more gaily, more attractively; but there is no better sort in circulation.

There was no luxury in his room. Even its comforts were limited to its being dry and warm, and having a snug though faded fireside. What may be called its private life was confined to the hearth, and all easy-chair, and an old-fashioned occasional round table that was brought out upon the rug after business hours, from a corner where it elsewhere remained turned up like a shining mahogany shield. Behind it, when standing thus on the defensive, was a closet, usually containing something good to drink. An outer room was the clerk's room; Mr. Grewgious's sleeping-room was across the common stair; and he held some not empty cellarge at the bottom of the common stair. Three hundred days in the year, at least, he crossed over to the hotel in Furnival's Inn for his dinner, and after dinner crossed back again, to make the most of these simplicities until it should become broad business day once more, with P. J. T., date seventeen-forty-seven.

As Mr. Grewgious sat and wrote by his fire that afternoon, so did the clerk of Mr. Grewgious sit and write by his fire. A pale, puffy-faced, dark-haired person of thirty, with big dark eyes that wholly wanted lustre, and a dissatisfied doughy complexion, that seemed to ask to be sent to the baker's, this attendant was a mysterious being, possessed of some strange power over Mr. Grewgious. As though he had been called into existence, like a fabulous Familiar, by a magic spell which had failed when required to dismiss him, he stuck tight to Mr. Grewgious's stool, although Mr. Grewgious's comfort and convenience would manifestly have been advanced by dispossessing him. A gloomy person with tangled locks, and a general air of having been reared under the shadow of that baleful tree of Java which has given shelter to more lies than the whole botanical kingdom, Mr. Grewgious, nevertheless, treated him with unaccountable consideration.

'Now, Bazzard,' said Mr. Grewgious, on the entrance of his clerk: looking up from his papers as he arranged them for the night: 'what is in the wind besides fog?'

'Mr. Drood,' said Bazzard.

'What of him?'

'Has called,' said Bazzard.

'You might have shown him in.'

'I am doing it,' said Bazzard.

The visitor came in accordingly.

'Dear me!' said Mr. Grewgious, looking round his pair of office candles. 'I thought you had called and merely left your name and gone. How do you do, Mr. Edwin? Dear me, you're choking!'

'It's this fog,' returned Edwin; 'and it makes my eyes smart, like Cayenne pepper.'

'Is it really so bad as that? Pray undo your wrappers. It's fortunate I have so good a fire; but Mr. Bazzard has taken care of me.'

'No I haven't,' said Mr. Bazzard at the door.

'Ah! then it follows that I must have taken care of myself without observing it,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Pray be seated in my chair. No. I beg! Coming out of such an atmosphere, in MY chair.'

Edwin took the easy-chair in the corner; and the fog he had brought in with him, and the fog he took off with his greatcoat and neck-shawl, was speedily licked up by the eager fire.

'I look,' said Edwin, smiling, 'as if I had come to stop.'

'--By the by,' cried Mr. Grewgious; 'excuse my interrupting you; do stop. The fog may clear in an hour or two. We can have dinner in from just across Holborn. You had better take your Cayenne pepper here than outside; pray stop and dine.'

'You are very kind,' said Edwin, glancing about him as though attracted by the notion of a new and relishing sort
of gipsy-party.

'Not at all,' said Mr. Grewgious; 'YOU are very kind to join issue with a bachelor in chambers, and take pot-luck. And I'll ask,' said Mr. Grewgious, dropping his voice, and speaking with a twinkling eye, as if inspired with a bright thought: 'I'll ask Bazzard. He mightn't like it else.--Bazzard!'

Bazzard reappeared.

'Dine presently with Mr. Drood and me.'

'If I am ordered to dine, of course I will, sir,' was the gloomy answer.

'Save the man!' cried Mr. Grewgious. 'You're not ordered; you're invited.'

'Thank you, sir,' said Bazzard; 'in that case I don't care if I do.'

'That's arranged. And perhaps you wouldn't mind,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'stepping over to the hotel in Furnival's, and asking them to send in materials for laying the cloth. For dinner we'll have a tureen of the hottest and strongest soup available, and we'll have the best made-dish that can be recommended, and we'll have a joint (such as a haunch of mutton), and we'll have a goose, or a turkey, or any little stuffed thing of that sort that may happen to be in the bill of fare--in short, we'll have whatever there is on hand.'

These liberal directions Mr. Grewgious issued with his usual air of reading an inventory, or repeating a lesson, or doing anything else by rote. Bazzard, after drawing out the round table, withdrew to execute them.

'I was a little delicate, you see,' said Mr. Grewgious, in a lower tone, after his clerk's departure, 'about employing him in the foraging or commissariat department. Because he mightn't like it.'

'He seems to have his own way, sir,' remarked Edwin.

'His own way?' returned Mr. Grewgious. 'O dear no! Poor fellow, you quite mistake him. If he had his own way, he wouldn't be here.'

'I wonder where he would be!' Edwin thought. But he only thought it, because Mr. Grewgious came and stood himself with his back to the other corner of the fire, and his shoulder-blades against the chimneypiece, and collected his skirts for easy conversation.

'I take it, without having the gift of prophecy, that you have done me the favour of looking in to mention that you are going down yonder--where I can tell you, you are expected--and to offer to execute any little commission from me to my charming ward, and perhaps to sharpen me up a bit in any proceedings? Eh, Mr. Edwin?'

'I called, sir, before going down, as an act of attention.'

'Of attention!' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Ah! of course, not of impatience?'

'Impatience, sir?'

Mr. Grewgious had meant to be arch--not that he in the remotest degree expressed that meaning--and had brought himself into scarcely supportable proximity with the fire, as if to burn the fullest effect of his archness into himself, as other subtle impressions are burnt into hard metals. But his archness suddenly flying before the composed face and manner of his visitor, and only the fire remaining, he started and rubbed himself.

'I have lately been down yonder,' said Mr. Grewgious, rearranging his skirts; 'and that was what I referred to, when I said I could tell you you are expected.'

'Indeed, sir! Yes; I knew that Pussy was looking out for me.'

'Do you keep a cat down there?' asked Mr. Grewgious.

Edwin coloured a little as he explained: 'I call Rosa Pussy.'

'O, really,' said Mr. Grewgious, smoothing down his head; 'that's very affable.'

Edwin glanced at his face, uncertain whether or no he seriously objected to the appellation. But Edwin might as well have glanced at the face of a clock.

'A pet name, sir,' he explained again.

'Umps,' said Mr. Grewgious, with a nod. But with such an extraordinary compromise between an unqualified assent and a qualified dissent, that his visitor was much disconcerted.

'Did PRosa--' Edwin began by way of recovering himself.

'PRosa?' repeated Mr. Grewgious.

'I was going to say Pussy, and changed my mind;--did she tell you anything about the Landlesses?'

'No,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'What is the Landlesses? An estate? A villa? A farm?'

'A brother and sister. The sister is at the Nuns' House, and has become a great friend of P--'

'PRosa's,' Mr. Grewgious struck in, with a fixed face.

'She is a strikingly handsome girl, sir, and I thought she might have been described to you, or presented to you perhaps?'

'Neither,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'But here is Bazzard.'

Bazzard returned, accompanied by two waiters--an immovable waiter, and a flying waiter; and the three brought in with them as much fog as gave a new roar to the fire. The flying waiter, who had brought everything on his
shoulders, laid the cloth with amazing rapidity and dexterity; while the immovable waiter, who had brought nothing, found fault with him. The flying waiter then highly polished all the glasses he had brought, and the immovable waiter looked through them. The flying waiter then flew across Holborn for the soup, and flew back again, and then took another flight for the made-dish, and flew back again, and then took another flight for the joint and poultry, and flew back again, and between whiles took supplementary flights for a great variety of articles, as it was discovered from time to time that the immovable waiter had forgotten them all. But let the flying waiter cleave the air as he might, he was always reproached on his return by the immovable waiter for bringing fog with him, and being out of breath. At the conclusion of the repast, by which time the flying waiter was severely blown, the immovable waiter gathered up the tablecloth under his arm with a grand air, and having sternly (not to say with indignation) looked on at the flying waiter while he set the clean glasses round, directed a valedictory glance towards Mr. Grewgious, conveying: 'Let it be clearly understood between us that the reward is mine, and that Nil is the claim of this slave,' and pushed the flying waiter before him out of the room.

It was like a highly-finished miniature painting representing My Lords of the Circumlocution Department, Commandership-in-Chief of any sort, Government. It was quite an edifying little picture to be hung on the line in the National Gallery.

As the fog had been the proximate cause of this sumptuous repast, so the fog served for its general sauce. To hear the out-door clerks sneezing, wheezing, and beating their feet on the gravel was a zest far surpassing Doctor Kitchener's. To bid, with a shiver, the unfortunate flying waiter shut the door before he had opened it, was a condiment of a profounder flavour than Harvey. And here let it be noticed, parenthetically, that the leg of this young man, in its application to the door, evinced the finest sense of touch: always preceding himself and tray (with something of an angling air about it), by some seconds: and always lingering after he and the tray had disappeared, like Macbeth's leg when accompanying him off the stage with reluctance to the assassination of Duncan.

The host had gone below to the cellar, and had brought up bottles of ruby, straw-coloured, and golden drinks, which had ripened long ago in lands where no fogs are, and had since lain slumbering in the shade. Sparkling and tingling after so long a nap, they pushed at their corks to help the corkscrew (like prisoners helping rioters to force their gates), and danced out gaily. If P. J. T. in seventeen-forty-seven, or in any other year of his period, drank such wines--then, for a certainty, P. J. T. was Pretty Jolly Too.

Externally, Mr. Grewgious showed no signs of being mellowed by these glowing vintages. Instead of his drinking them, they might have been poured over him in his high-dried snuff form, and run to waste, for any lights and shades they caused to flicker over his face. Neither was his manner influenced. But, in his wooden way, he had observant eyes for Edwin; and when at the end of dinner, he motioned Edwin back to his own easy-chair in the fireside corner, and Edwin sank luxuriously into it after very brief remonstrance, Mr. Grewgious, as he turned his seat round towards the fire too, and smoothed his head and face, might have been seen looking at his visitor between his smoothing fingers.

'Bazzard!' said Mr. Grewgious, suddenly turning to him.

'I follow you, sir,' returned Bazzard; who had done his work of consuming meat and drink in a workmanlike manner, though mostly in speechlessness.

'I drink to you, Bazzard; Mr. Edwin, success to Mr. Bazzard!'

'Success to Mr. Bazzard!' echoed Edwin, with a totally unfounded appearance of enthusiasm, and with the unspoken addition: 'What in, I wonder!'

'And May!' pursued Mr. Grewgious--'I am not at liberty to be definite--May!--my conversational powers are so very limited that I know I shall not come well out of this--May!--it ought to be put imaginatively, but I have no imagination--May!--the thorn of anxiety is as nearly the mark as I am likely to get--May it come out at last!'

Mr. Bazzard, with a frowning smile at the fire, put a hand into his tangled locks, as if the thorn of anxiety were there; then into his waistcoat, as if it were there; then into his pockets, as if it were there. In all these movements he was closely followed by the eyes of Edwin, as if that young gentleman expected to see the thorn in action. It was not produced, however, and Mr. Bazzard merely said: 'I follow you, sir, and I thank you.'

'I am going,' said Mr. Grewgious, jingling his glass on the table with one hand, and bending aside under cover of the other, to whisper to Edwin, 'to drink to my ward. But I put Bazzard first. He mightn't like it else.'

This was said with a mysterious wink; or what would have been a wink, if, in Mr. Grewgious's hands, it could have been quick enough. So Edwin winked responsively, without the least idea what he meant by doing so.

'And now,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'I devote a bumper to the fair and fascinating Miss Rosa. Bazzard, the fair and fascinating Miss Rosa!'

'I follow you, sir,' said Bazzard, 'and I pledge you!'

'And so do I!' said Edwin.

'Lord bless me,' cried Mr. Grewgious, breaking the blank silence which of course ensued: though why these
pauses SHOULD come upon us when we have performed any small social rite, not directly inducive of self-

examination or mental despondency, who can tell? 'I am a particularly Angular man, and yet I fancy (if I may use

the word, not having a morsel of fancy), that I could draw a picture of a true lover's state of mind, to-night.'

'Let us follow you, sir,' said Bazzard, 'and have the picture.'

'Mr. Edwin will correct it where it's wrong,' resumed Mr. Grewgious, 'and will throw in a few touches from the

life. I dare say it is wrong in many particulars, and wants many touches from the life, for I was born a Chip, and

have neither soft sympathies nor soft experiences. Well! I hazard the guess that the true lover's mind is completely

permeated by the beloved object of his affections. I hazard the guess that her dear name is precious to him, cannot be

heard or repeated without emotion, and is preserved sacred. If he has any distinguishing appellation of fondness for

her, it is reserved for her, and is not for common ears. A name that it would be a privilege to call her by, being alone

with her own bright self, it would be a liberty, a coldness, an insensibility, almost a breach of good faith, to flaunt

elsewhere.'

It was wonderful to see Mr. Grewgious sitting bolt upright, with his hands on his knees, continuously chopping

this discourse out of himself: much as a charity boy with a very good memory might get his catechism said: and

evincing no correspondent emotion whatever, unless in a certain occasional little tingling perceptible at the end of

his nose.

'My picture,' Mr. Grewgious proceeded, 'goes on to represent (under correction from you, Mr. Edwin), the true

lover as ever impatient to be in the presence or vicinity of the beloved object of his affections; as caring very little

for his case in any other society; and as constantly seeking that. If I was to say seeking that, as a bird seeks its nest, I

should make an ass of myself, because that would trench upon what I understand to be poetry; and I am so far from

trenching upon poetry at any time, that I never, to my knowledge, got within ten thousand miles of it. And I am

besides totally unacquainted with the habits of birds, except the birds of Staple Inn, who seek their nests on ledges,

and in gutter-pipes and chimney-pots, not constructed for them by the beneficent hand of Nature. I beg, therefore, to

be understood as foregoing the bird's-nest. But my picture does represent the true lover as having no existence

separable from that of the beloved object of his affections, and as living at once a doubled life and a halved life. And

if I do not clearly express what I mean by that, it is either for the reason that having no conversational powers, I

cannot express what I mean, or that having no meaning, I do not mean what I fail to express. Which, to the best of

my belief, is not the case.'

Edwin had turned red and turned white, as certain points of this picture came into the light. He now sat looking

at the fire, and bit his lip.

'The speculations of an Angular man,' resumed Mr. Grewgious, still sitting and speaking exactly as before, 'are

probably erroneous on so globular a topic. But I figure to myself (subject, as before, to Mr. Edwin's correction), that

there can be no coolness, no lassitude, no doubt, no indifference, no half fire and half smoke state of mind, in a real

lover. Pray am I at all near the mark in my picture?'

As abrupt in his conclusion as in his commencement and progress, he jerked this inquiry at Edwin, and stopped

when one might have supposed him in the middle of his oration.

'I should say, sir,' stammered Edwin, 'as you refer the question to me--'

'Yes,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'I refer it to you, as an authority.'

'I should say, then, sir,' Edwin went on, embarrassed, 'that the picture you have drawn is generally correct; but I

submit that perhaps you may be rather hard upon the unlucky lover.'

'Likely so,' assented Mr. Grewgious, 'likely so. I am a hard man in the grain.'

'He may not show,' said Edwin, 'all he feels; or he may not--'

There he stopped so long, to find the rest of his sentence, that Mr. Grewgious rendered his difficulty a thousand

times the greater by unexpectedly striking in with:

'No to be sure; he MAY not!'

After that, they all sat silent; the silence of Mr. Bazzard being occasioned by slumber.

'His responsibility is very great, though,' said Mr. Grewgious at length, with his eyes on the fire.

Edwin nodded assent, with HIS eyes on the fire.

'And let him be sure that he trifles with no one,' said Mr. Grewgious; 'neither with himself, nor with any other.'

Edwin bit his lip again, and still sat looking at the fire.

'He must not make a plaything of a treasure. Woe betide him if he does! Let him take that well to heart,' said Mr.

Grewgious.

Though he said these things in short sentences, much as the supposititious charity boy just now referred to might

have repeated a verse or two from the Book of Proverbs, there was something dreamy (for so literal a man) in the

way in which he now shook his right forefinger at the live coals in the grate, and again fell silent.

But not for long. As he sat upright and stiff in his chair, he suddenly rapped his knees, like the carved image of
some queer Joss or other coming out of its reverie, and said: 'We must finish this bottle, Mr. Edwin. Let me help
you. I'll help Bazzard too, though he IS asleep. He mightn't like it else.'

He helped them both, and helped himself, and drained his glass, and stood it bottom upward on the table, as
though he had just caught a bluebottle in it.

'And now, Mr. Edwin,' he proceeded, wiping his mouth and hands upon his handkerchief: 'to a little piece of
business. You received from me, the other day, a certified copy of Miss Rosa's father's will. You knew its contents
before, but you received it from me as a matter of business. I should have sent it to Mr. Jasper, but for Miss Rosa's
wishing it to come straight to you, in preference. You received it?'

'Quite safely, sir.'

'You should have acknowledged its receipt,' said Mr. Grewgious; 'business being business all the world over.
However, you did not.'

'I meant to have acknowledged it when I first came in this evening, sir.'

'Not a business-like acknowledgment,' returned Mr. Grewgious; 'however, let that pass. Now, in that document
you have observed a few words of kindly allusion to its being left to me to discharge a little trust, confided to me in
conversation, at such time as I in my discretion may think best.'

'Yes, sir.'

'Mr. Edwin, it came into my mind just now, when I was looking at the fire, that I could, in my discretion, acquit
myself of that trust at no better time than the present. Favour me with your attention, half a minute.'

He took a bunch of keys from his pocket, singled out by the candle-light the key he wanted, and then, with a
candle in his hand, went to a bureau or escritoire, unlocked it, touched the spring of a little secret drawer, and took
from it an ordinary ring-case made for a single ring. With this in his hand, he returned to his chair. As he held it up
for the young man to see, his hand trembled.

'Mr. Edwin, this rose of diamonds and rubies delicately set in gold, was a ring belonging to Miss Rosa's mother.
It was removed from her dead hand, in my presence, with such distracted grief as I hope it may never be my lot to
contemplate again. Hard man as I am, I am not hard enough for that. See how bright these stones shine!' opening the
case. 'And yet the eyes that were so much brighter, and that so often looked upon them with a light and a proud
heart, have been ashes among ashes, and dust among dust, some years! If I had any imagination (which it is needless
to say I have not), I might imagine that the lasting beauty of these stones was almost cruel.'

He closed the case again as he spoke.

'This ring was given to the young lady who was drowned so early in her beautiful and happy career, by her
husband, when they first plighted their faith to one another. It was he who removed it from her unconscious hand,
and it was he who, when his death drew very near, placed it in mine. The trust in which I received it, was, that, you
and Miss Rosa growing to manhood and womanhood, and your betrothal prospering and coming to maturity, I
should give it to you to place upon her finger. Failing those desired results, it was to remain in my possession.'

Some trouble was in the young man's face, and some indecision was in the action of his hand, as Mr. Grewgious,
looking steadfastly at him, gave him the ring.

'Your placing it on her finger,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'will be the solemn seal upon your strict fidelity to the living
and the dead. You are going to her, to make the last irrevocable preparations for your marriage. Take it with you.'

The young man took the little case, and placed it in his breast.

'If anything should be amiss, if anything should be even slightly wrong, between you; if you should have any
secret consciousness that you are committing yourself to this step for no higher reason than because you have long
been accustomed to look forward to it; then,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'I charge you once more, by the living and by the
dead, to bring that ring back to me!'

Here Bazzard awoke himself by his own snoring; and, as is usual in such cases, sat apoplectically staring at
vacancy, as defying vacancy to accuse him of having been asleep.

'Bazzard!' said Mr. Grewgious, harder than ever.

'I follow you, sir,' said Bazzard, 'and I have been following you.'

'In discharge of a trust, I have handed Mr. Edwin Drood a ring of diamonds and rubies. You see?'

Edwin reproduced the little case, and opened it; and Bazzard looked into it.

'I follow you both, sir,' returned Bazzard, 'and I witness the transaction.'

Evidently anxious to get away and be alone, Edwin Drood now resumed his outer clothing, muttering something
about time and appointments. The fog was reported no clearer (by the flying waiter, who alighted from a speculative
flight in the coffee interest), but he went out into it; and Bazzard, after his manner, 'followed' him.

Mr. Grewgious, left alone, walked softly and slowly to and fro, for an hour and more. He was restless to-night,
and seemed dispirited.

'I hope I have done right,' he said. 'The appeal to him seemed necessary. It was hard to lose the ring, and yet it
must have gone from me very soon.'

He closed the empty little drawer with a sigh, and shut and locked the escritoire, and came back to the solitary fireside.

'Her ring,' he went on. 'Will it come back to me? My mind hangs about her ring very uneasily to-night. But that is explainable. I have had it so long, and I have prized it so much! I wonder--'

He was in a wondering mood as well as a restless; for, though he checked himself at that point, and took another walk, he resumed his wondering when he sat down again.

'I wonder (for the ten-thousandth time, and what a weak fool I, for what can it signify now!) whether he confided the charge of their orphan child to me, because he knew--Good God, how like her mother she has become!'

'I wonder whether he ever so much as suspected that some one doted on her, at a hopeless, speechless distance, when he struck in and won her. I wonder whether it ever crept into his mind who that unfortunate some one was!'

'I wonder whether I shall sleep to-night! At all events, I will shut out the world with the bedclothes, and try.'

Mr. Grewgious crossed the staircase to his raw and foggy bedroom, and was soon ready for bed. Dimly catching sight of his face in the misty looking-glass, he held his candle to it for a moment.

'A likely some one, YOU, to come into anybody's thoughts in such an aspect!' he exclaimed. 'There! there! there! Get to bed, poor man, and cease to jabber!'

With that, he extinguished his light, pulled up the bedclothes around him, and with another sigh shut out the world. And yet there are such unexplored romantic nooks in the unlikeliest men, that even old tinderous and touchwoody P. J. T. Possibly Jabbered Thus, at some odd times, in or about seventeen-forty-seven.

CHAPTER XII--A NIGHT WITH DURDLES

When Mr. Sapsea has nothing better to do, towards evening, and finds the contemplation of his own profundity becoming a little monotonous in spite of the vastness of the subject, he often takes an airing in the Cathedral Close and thereabout. He likes to pass the churchyard with a swelling air of proprietorship, and to encourage in his breast a sort of benignant-landlord feeling, in that he has been bountiful towards that meritorious tenant, Mrs. Sapsea, and has publicly given her a prize. He likes to see a stray face or two looking in through the railings, and perhaps reading his inscription. Should he meet a stranger coming from the churchyard with a quick step, he is morally convinced that the stranger is 'with a blush retiring,' as monumentally directed.

Mr. Sapsea's importance has received enhancement, for he has become Mayor of Cloisterham. Without mayors, and many of them, it cannot be disputed that the whole framework of society--Mr. Sapsea is confident that he invented that forcible figure--would fall to pieces. Mayors have been knighted for 'going up' with addresses: explosive machines intrepidly discharging shot and shell into the English Grammar. Mr. Sapsea may 'go up' with an address. Rise, Sir Thomas Sapsea! Of such is the salt of the earth.

Mr. Sapsea has improved the acquaintance of Mr. Jasper, since their first meeting to partake of port, epitaph, backgammon, beef, and salad. Mr. Sapsea has been received at the gatehouse with kindred hospitality; and on that occasion Mr. Jasper seated himself at the piano, and sang to him, tickling his ears--figuratively--long enough to present a considerable area for tickling. What Mr. Sapsea likes in that young man is, that he is always ready to profit by the wisdom of his elders, and that he is sound, sir, at the core. In proof of which, he sang to Mr. Sapsea that evening, no kickshaw ditties, favourites with national enemies, but gave him the genuine George the Third home-brewed; exhorting him (as 'my brave boys') to reduce to a smashed condition all other islands but this island, and all continents, peninsulas, isthmuses, promontories, and other geographical forms of land soever, besides sweeping the seas in all directions. In short, he rendered it pretty clear that Providence made a distinct mistake in originating so small a nation of hearts of oak, and so many other verminous peoples.

Mr. Sapsea, walking slowly this moist evening near the churchyard with his hands behind him, on the look-out for a blushing and retiring stranger, turns a corner, and comes instead into the goodly presence of the Dean, conversing with the Verger and Mr. Jasper. Mr. Sapsea makes his obeisance, and is instantly stricken far more ecclesiastical than any Archbishop of York or Canterbury.

'You are evidently going to write a book about us, Mr. Jasper,' quoth the Dean; 'to write a book about us. Well! We are very ancient, and we ought to make a good book. We are not so richly endowed in possessions as in age; but perhaps you will put THAT in your book, among other things, and call attention to our wrongs.'

Mr. Tope, as in duty bound, is greatly entertained by this.

'I really have no intention at all, sir,' replies Jasper, 'of turning author or archaeologist. It is but a whim of mine. And even for my whim, Mr. Sapsea here is more accountable than I am.'

'How so, Mr. Mayor?' says the Dean, with a nod of good-natured recognition of his Fetch. 'How is that, Mr. Mayor?'

'I am not aware,' Mr. Sapsea remarks, looking about him for information, 'to what the Very Reverend the Dean does me the honour of referring.' And then falls to studying his original in minute points of detail.
"Durdles," Mr. Tope hints.
"Ay!" the Dean echoes; "Durdles, Durdles!"

The truth is, sir," explains Jasper, "that my curiosity in the man was first really stimulated by Mr. Sapsea. Mr. Sapsea's knowledge of mankind and power of drawing out whatever is reclusive or odd around him, first led to my bestowing a second thought upon the man: though of course I had met him constantly about. You would not be surprised by this, Mr. Dean, if you had seen Mr. Sapsea deal with him in his own parlour, as I did.'

"O!' cries Sapsea, picking up the ball thrown to him with ineffable complacency and pomposity; 'yes, yes. The Very Reverend the Dean refers to that? Yes. I happened to bring Durdles and Mr. Jasper together. I regard Durdles as a Character.'

"A character, Mr. Sapsea, that with a few skilful touches you turn inside out,' says Jasper.

"Nay, not quite that,' returns the lumbering auctioneer. 'I may have a little influence over him, perhaps; and a little insight into his character, perhaps. The Very Reverend the Dean will Please to bear in mind that I have seen the world.' Here Mr. Sapsea gets a little behind the Dean, to inspect his coat-buttons.

"Well!' says the Dean, looking about him to see what has become of his copyist: 'I hope, Mr. Mayor, you will use your study and knowledge of Durdles to the good purpose of exhorting him not to break our worthy and respected Choir-Master's neck; we cannot afford it; his head and voice are much too valuable to us.'

Mr. Tope is again highly entertained, and, having fallen into respectful convulsions of laughter, subsides into a deferential murmur, importing that surely any gentleman would deem it a pleasure and an honour to have his neck broken, in return for such a compliment from such a source.

"I will take it upon myself, sir,' observes Sapsea loftily, 'to answer for Mr. Jasper's neck. I will tell Durdles to be careful of it. He will mind what _I_ say. How is it at present endangered?' he inquires, looking about him with magnificent patronage.

"Only by my making a moonlight expedition with Durdles among the tombs, vaults, towers, and ruins,' returns Jasper. 'You remember suggesting, when you brought us together, that, as a lover of the picturesque, it might be worth my while?'

"I remember!' replies the auctioneer. And the solemn idiot really believes that he does remember.

"Profiting by your hint,' pursues Jasper, 'I have had some day-rambles with the extraordinary old fellow, and we are to make a moonlight hole-and-corner exploration to-night.'

"And here he is,' says the Dean.

Durdles with his dinner-bundle in his hand, is indeed beheld slouching towards them. Slouching nearer, and perceiving the Dean, he pulls off his hat, and is slouching away with it under his arm, when Mr. Sapsea lays upon him.

"Mind you take care of my friend,' is the injunction Mr. Sapsea lays upon him.

"What friend o' yourn is dead?' asks Durdles. 'No orders has come in for any friend o' yourn.'

"I mean my live friend there.'

"O! him?' says Durdles. 'He can take care of himself, can Mister Jasper.'

"But do you take care of him too,' says Sapsea.

Whom Durdles (there being command in his tone) surliy surveys from head to foot.

"With submission to his Reverence the Dean, if you'll mind what concerns you, Mr. Sapsea, Durdles he'll mind what concerns him.'

"You're out of temper,' says Mr. Sapsea, winking to the company to observe how smoothly he will manage him. 'My friend concerns me, and Mr. Jasper is my friend. And you are my friend.'

"Don't you get into a bad habit of boasting,' retorts Durdles, with a grave cautionary nod. 'It'll grow upon you.'

"You are out of temper,' says Sapsea again; reddening, but again sinking to the company.

"I own to it,' returns Durdles; 'I don't like liberties.'

Mr. Sapsea winks a third wink to the company, as who should say: 'I think you will agree with me that I have settled HIS business;' and stalks out of the controversy.

Durdles then gives the Dean a good evening, and adding, as he puts his hat on, 'You'll find me at home, Mister Jasper, as agreed, when you want me; I'm a-going home to clean myself,' soon slouches out of sight. This going home to clean himself is one of the man's incomprehensible compromises with inexorable facts; he, and his hat, and his boots, and his clothes, never showing any trace of cleaning, but being uniformly in one condition of dust and grit.

The lamplighter now dotting the quiet Close with specks of light, and running at a great rate up and down his little ladder with that object—his little ladder under the sacred shadow of whose inconvenience generations had grown up, and which all Cloisterham would have stood aghast at the idea of abolishing—the Dean withdraws to his dinner, Mr. Tope to his tea, and Mr. Jasper to his piano. There, with no light but that of the fire, he sits chanting choir-music in a low and beautiful voice, for two or three hours; in short, until it has been for some time dark, and
the moon is about to rise.

Then he closes his piano softly, softly changes his coat for a pea-jacket, with a goodly wicker-cased bottle in its largest pocket, and putting on a low-crowned, flap-brimmed hat, goes softly out. Why does he move so softly tonight? No outward reason is apparent for it. Can there be any sympathetic reason crouching darkly within him?

Repairing to Durdles's unfinished house, or hole in the city wall, and seeing a light within it, he softly picks his course among the gravestones, monuments, and stony lumber of the yard, already touched here and there, sidewise, by the rising moon. The two journeymen have left their two great saws sticking in their blocks of stone; and two skeleton journeymen out of the Dance of Death might be grinning in the shadow of their sheltering sentry-boxes, about to slash away at cutting out the gravestones of the next two people destined to die in Cloisterham. Likely enough, the two think little of that now, being alive, and perhaps merry. Curious, to make a guess at the two;--or say one of the two!

'Ho! Durdles!'

The light moves, and he appears with it at the door. He would seem to have been 'cleaning himself' with the aid of a bottle, jug, and tumbler; for no other cleansing instruments are visible in the bare brick room with rafters overhead and no plastered ceiling, into which he shows his visitor.

'Are you ready?'

'I am ready, Mister Jarsper. Let the old 'uns come out if they dare, when we go among their tombs. My spirit is ready for 'em.'

'Do you mean animal spirits, or ardent?'

'The one's the t'other,' answers Durdles, 'and I mean 'em both.'

He takes a lantern from a hook, puts a match or two in his pocket wherewith to light it, should there be need; and they go out together, dinner-bundle and all.

Surely an unaccountable sort of expedition! That Durdles himself, who is always prowling among old graves, and ruins, like a Ghoul-- that he should be stealing forth to climb, and dive, and wander without an object, is nothing extraordinary; but that the Choir-Master or any one else should hold it worth his while to be with him, and to study moonlight effects in such company is another affair. Surely an unaccountable sort of expedition, therefore!

'Ware that there mound by the yard-gate, Mister Jarsper.'

'I see it. What is it?'

'Lime.'

Mr. Jasper stops, and waits for him to come up, for he lags behind. 'What you call quick-lime?'

'Ay!' says Durdles; 'quick enough to eat your boots. With a little handy stirring, quick enough to eat your bones.'

They go on, presently passing the red windows of the Travellers' Twopenny, and emerging into the clear moonlight of the Monks' Vineyard. This crossed, they come to Minor Canon Corner: of which the greater part lies in shadow until the moon shall rise higher in the sky.

The sound of a closing house-door strikes their ears, and two men come out. These are Mr. Crisparkle and Neville. Jasper, with a strange and sudden smile upon his face, lays the palm of his hand upon the breast of Durdles, stopping him where he stands.

At that end of Minor Canon Corner the shadow is profound in the existing state of the light: at that end, too, there is a piece of old dwarf wall, breast high, the only remaining boundary of what was once a garden, but is now the thoroughfare. Jasper and Durdles would have turned this wall in another instant; but, stopping so short, stand behind it.

'Those two are only sauntering,' Jasper whispers; 'they will go out into the moonlight soon. Let us keep quiet here, or they will detain us, or want to join us, or what not.'

Durdles nods assent, and falls to munching some fragments from his bundle. Jasper folds his arms upon the top of the wall, and, with his chin resting on them, watches. He takes no note whatever of the Minor Canon, but watches Neville, as though his eye were at the trigger of a loaded rifle, and he had covered him, and were going to fire. A sense of destructive power is so expressed in his face, that even Durdles pauses in his munching, and looks at him, with an unmunched something in his cheek.

Meanwhile Mr. Crisparkle and Neville walk to and fro, quietly talking together. What they say, cannot be heard consecutively; but Mr. Jasper has already distinguished his own name more than once.

'This is the first day of the week,' Mr. Crisparkle can be distinctly heard to observe, as they turn back; 'and the last day of the week is Christmas Eve.'

'You may be certain of me, sir.'

The echoes were favourable at those points, but as the two approach, the sound of their talking becomes confused again. The word 'confidence,' shattered by the echoes, but still capable of being pieced together, is uttered by Mr. Crisparkle. As they draw still nearer, this fragment of a reply is heard: 'Not deserved yet, but shall be, sir.' As
they turn away again, Jasper again hears his own name, in connection with the words from Mr. Crisparkle: 'Remember that I said I answered for you confidently.' Then the sound of their talk becomes confused again; they halting for a little while, and some earnest action on the part of Neville succeeding. When they move once more, Mr. Crisparkle is seen to look up at the sky, and to point before him. They then slowly disappear; passing out into the moonlight at the opposite end of the Corner.

It is not until they are gone, that Mr. Jasper moves. But then he turns to Durdles, and bursts into a fit of laughter. Durdles, who still has that suspended something in his cheek, and who sees nothing to laugh at, stares at him until Mr. Jasper lays his face down on his arms to have his laugh out. Then Durdles bolts the something, as if desperately resigning himself to indigestion.

Among those secluded nooks there is very little stir or movement after dark. There is little enough in the high tide of the day, but there is next to none at night. Besides that the cheerfully frequented High Street lies nearly parallel to the spot (the old Cathedral rising between the two), and is the natural channel in which the Cloisterham traffic flows, a certain awful hush pervades the ancient pile, the cloisters, and the churchyard, after dark, which not many people care to encounter. Ask the first hundred citizens of Cloisterham, met at random in the streets at noon, if they believed in Ghosts, they would tell you no; but put them to choose at night between these eerie Precincts and the thoroughfare of shops, and you would find that ninety-nine declared for the longer round and the more frequented way. The cause of this is not to be found in any local superstition that attaches to the Precincts--albeit a mysterious lady, with a child in her arms and a rope dangling from her neck, has been seen flitting about there by sundry witnesses as intangible as herself--but it is to be sought in the innate shrinking of dust with the breath of life in it from dust out of which the breath of life has passed; also, in the widely diffused, and almost as widely unacknowledged, reflection: 'If the dead do, under any circumstances, become visible to the living, these are such likely surroundings for the purpose that I, the living, will get out of them as soon as I can.' Hence, when Mr. Jasper and Durdles pause to glance around them, before descending into the crypt by a small side door, of which the latter has a key, the whole expanse of moonlight in their view is utterly deserted. One might fancy that the tide of life was stemmed by Mr. Jasper's own gatehouse. The murmur of the tide is heard beyond; but no wave passes the archway, over which his lamp burns red behind his curtain, as if the building were a Lighthouse.

They enter, locking themselves in, descend the rugged steps, and are down in the Crypt. The lantern is not wanted, for the moonlight streams in at the groined windows, bare of glass, the broken frames for which cast patterns on the ground. The heavy pillars which support the roof engender masses of black shade, but between them there are lanes of light. Up and down these lanes they walk, Durdles discoursing of the 'old uns' he yet counts on disinterring, and slapping a wall, in which he considers 'a whole family on 'em' to be stoned and earthed up, just as if he were a familiar friend of the family. The taciturnity of Durdles is for the time overcome by Mr. Jasper's wicker bottle, which circulates freely;--in the sense, that is to say, that its contents enter freely into Mr. Durdles's circulation, while Mr. Jasper only rinses his mouth once, and casts forth the rinsing.

They are to ascend the great Tower. On the steps by which they rise to the Cathedral, Durdles pauses for new store of breath. The steps are very dark, but out of the darkness they can see the lanes of light they have traversed. Durdles seats himself upon a step. Mr. Jasper seats himself upon another. The odour from the wicker bottle (which has somehow passed into Durdles's keeping) soon intimates that the cork has been taken out; but this is not ascertainable through the sense of sight, since neither can descry the other. And yet, in talking, they turn to one another, as though their faces could commune together.

'This is good stuff, Mister Jarsper!'

'It is very good stuff, I hope.--I bought it on purpose.'

'They don't show, you see, the old uns don't, Mister Jarsper!'

'It would be a more confused world than it is, if they could.'

'Well, it WOULD lead towards a mixing of things,' Durdles acquiesces: pausing on the remark, as if the idea of ghosts had not previously presented itself to him in a merely inconvenient light, domestically or chronologically.

'But do you think there may be Ghosts of other things, though not of men and women?'

'What things? Flower-beds and watering-pots? horses and harness?'

'No. Sounds.'

'What sounds?'

'Cries.'

'What cries do you mean? Chairs to mend?'

'No. I mean screeches. Now I'll tell you, Mr. Jarsper. Wait a bit till I put the bottle right.' Here the cork is evidently taken out again, and replaced again. 'There! NOW it's right! This time last year, only a few days later, I happened to have been doing what was correct by the season, in the way of giving it the welcome it had a right to expect, when them town-boys set on me at their worst. At length I gave 'em the slip, and turned in here. And here I
fell asleep. And what woke me? The ghost of a cry. The ghost of one terrific shriek, which shriek was followed by
the ghost of the howl of a dog: a long, dismal, woeful howl, such as a dog gives when a person's dead. That was MY
last Christmas Eve.'

'What do you mean?' is the very abrupt, and, one might say, fierce retort.

'I mean that I made inquiries everywhere about, and, that no living ears but mine heard either that cry or that
howl. So I say they was both ghosts; though why they came to me, I've never made out.'

'I thought you were another kind of man,' says Jasper, scornfully.

'So I thought myself,' answers Durdles with his usual composure; 'and yet I was picked out for it.'

Jasper had risen suddenly, when he asked him what he meant, and he now says, 'Come; we shall freeze here;
lead the way.'

Durdles complies, not over-steadily; opens the door at the top of the steps with the key he has already used; and
so emerges on the Cathedral level, in a passage at the side of the chancel. Here, the moonlight is so very bright again
that the colours of the nearest stained-glass window are thrown upon their faces. The appearance of the unconscious
Durdles, holding the door open for his companion to follow, as if from the grave, is ghastly enough, with a purple
hand across his face, and a yellow splash upon his brow; but he bears the close scrutiny of his companion in an
insensible way, although it is prolonged while the latter fumbles among his pockets for a key confided to him that
will open an iron gate, so to enable them to pass to the staircase of the great tower.

'That and the bottle are enough for you to carry,' he says, giving it to Durdles; 'hand your bundle to me; I am
younger and longer- winded than you.' Durdles hesitates for a moment between bundle and bottle; but gives the
preference to the bottle as being by far the better company, and consigns the dry weight to his fellow- explorer.

Then they go up the winding staircase of the great tower, toilsomely, turning and turning, and lowering their
heads to avoid the stairs above, or the rough stone pivot around which they twist. Durdles has lighted his lantern, by
drawing from the cold, hard wall a spark of that mysterious fire which lurks in everything, and, guided by this speck,
they clamber up among the cobwebs and the dust. Their way lies through strange places. Twice or thrice they
emerge into level, low-arched galleries, whence they can look down into the moon-lit nave; and where Durdles,
wavestheir lantern, waves the dim angels' heads upon the corbels of the roof, seeming to watch their progress. Anon
they turn into narrower and steeper staircases, and the night-air begins to blow upon them, and the chirp of some
startled jackdaw or frightened rook precedes the heavy beating of wings in a confined space, and the beating down
of dust and straws upon their heads. At last, leaving their light behind a stair--for it blows fresh up here--they look
down on Cloisterham, fair to see in the moonlight: its ruined habitations and sanctuaries of the dead, at the tower's
base: its moss- softened red-tiled roofs and red-brick houses of the living, clustered beyond: its river winding down
from the mist on the horizon, as though that were its source, and already heaving with a restless knowledge of its
approach towards the sea.

Once again, an unaccountable expedition this! Jasper (always moving softly with no visible reason)
contemplates the scene, and especially that stillest part of it which the Cathedral overshadows. But he contemplates
Durdles quite as curiously, and Durdles is by times conscious of his watchful eyes.

Only by times, because Durdles is growing drowsy. As aeronauts lighten the load they carry, when they wish to
rise, similarly Durdles has lightened the wicker bottle in coming up. Snatches of sleep surprise him on his legs, and
stop him in his talk. A mild fit of calenture seizes him, in which he deems that the ground so far below, is on a level
with the tower, and would as lief walk off the tower into the air as not. Such is his state when they begin to come
down. And as aeronauts make themselves heavier when they wish to descend, similarly Durdles charges himself
with more liquid from the wicker bottle, that he may come down the better.

The iron gate attained and locked--but not before Durdles has tumbled twice, and cut an eyebrow open once--
they descend into the crypt again, with the intent of issuing forth as they entered. But, while returning among those
lanes of light, Durdles becomes so very uncertain, both of foot and speech, that he half drops, half throws himself
down, by one of the heavy pillars, scarcely less heavy than itself, and indistinctly appeals to his companion for forty
winks of a second each.

'If you will have it so, or must have it so,' replies Jasper, 'I'll not leave you here. Take them, while I walk to and
fro.'

Durdles is asleep at once; and in his sleep he dreams a dream.

It is not much of a dream, considering the vast extent of the domains of dreamland, and their wonderful
productions; it is only remarkable for being unusually restless and unusually real. He dreams of lying there, asleep,
and yet counting his companion’s footsteps as he walks to and fro. He dreams that the footsteps die away into
distance of time and of space, and that something touches him, and that something falls from his hand. Then
something clinks and gropes about, and he dreams that he is alone for so long a time, that the lanes of light take new
directions as the moon advances in her course. From succeeding unconsciousness he passes into a dream of slow
uneasiness from cold; and painfully awakes to a perception of the lanes of light--really changed, much as he had dreamed--and Jasper walking among them, beating his hands and feet.

'Holloa!' Durdles cries out, unmeaningly alarmed.

'Awake at last?' says Jasper, coming up to him. 'Do you know that your forties have stretched into thousands?'

'No.'

'They have though.'

'What's the time?'

'Hark! The bells are going in the Tower!'

They strike four quarters, and then the great bell strikes.

'Two!' cries Durdles, scrambling up; 'why didn't you try to wake me, Mister Jarsper?'

'I did. I might as well have tried to wake the dead--your own family of dead, up in the corner there.'

'Did you touch me?'

'Touch you! Yes. Shook you.'

As Durdles recalls that touching something in his dream, he looks down on the pavement, and sees the key of the crypt door lying close to where he himself lay.

'I dropped you, did I?' he says, picking it up, and recalling that part of his dream. As he gathers himself up again into an upright position, or into a position as nearly upright as he ever maintains, he is again conscious of being watched by his companion.

'Well?' says Jasper, smiling, 'are you quite ready? Pray don't hurry.'

'Let me get my bundle right, Mister Jarsper, and I'm with you.' As he ties it afresh, he is once more conscious that he is very narrowly observed.

'What do you suspect me of, Mister Jarsper?' he asks, with drunken displeasure. 'Let them as has any suspicions of Durdles name 'em.'

'I've no suspicions of you, my good Mr. Durdles; but I have suspicions that my bottle was filled with something stiffer than either of us supposed. And I also have suspicions,' Jasper adds, taking it from the pavement and turning it bottom upwards, 'that it's empty.'

Durdles condescends to laugh at this. Continuing to chuckle when his laugh is over, as though remonstrant with himself on his drinking powers, he rolls to the door and unlocks it. They both pass out, and Durdles relocks it, and pockets his key.

'A thousand thanks for a curious and interesting night,' says Jasper, giving him his hand; 'you can make your own way home?'

'I should think so!' answers Durdles. 'If you was to offer Durdles the affront to show him his way home, he wouldn't go home.

Durdles wouldn't go home till morning; And THEN Durdles wouldn't go home, Durdles wouldn't. 'This with the utmost defiance.

'Good-night, then.'

'Good-night, Mister Jarsper.'

Each is turning his own way, when a sharp whistle rends the silence, and the jargon is yelped out:

Widdy widdy wen! I--ket--ches--Im--out--ar--ter--ten. Widdy widdy wy! Then--E--don't --go--then--I--shy - Widdy Widdy Wake-cock warning!'

Instantly afterwards, a rapid fire of stones rattles at the Cathedral wall, and the hideous small boy is beheld opposite, dancing in the moonlight.

'What! Is that baby-devil on the watch there!' cries Jasper in a fury: so quickly roused, and so violent, that he seems an older devil himself. 'I shall shed the blood of that impish wretch! I know I shall do it!' Regardless of the fire, though it hits him more than once, he rushes at Deputy, collars him, and tries to bring him across. But Deputy is not to be so easily brought across. With a diabolical insight into the strongest part of his position, he is no sooner taken by the throat than he curls up his legs, forces his assailant to hang him, as it were, and gurgles in his throat, and screws his body, and twists, as already undergoing the first agonies of strangulation. There is nothing for it but to drop him. He instantly gets himself together, backs over to Durdles, and cries to his assailant, gnashing the great gap in front of his mouth with rage and malice:

'I'll blind yer, s'elp me! I'll stone yer eyes out, s'elp me! If I don't have yer eyesight, bellows me!' At the same time dodging behind Durdles, and snarling at Jasper, now from this side of him, and now from that: prepared, if pounced upon, to dart away in all manner of curvilinear directions, and, if run down after all, to grovel in the dust, and cry: 'Now, hit me when I'm down! Do it!'

'Don't hurt the boy, Mister Jarsper,' urges Durdles, shielding him. 'Recollect yourself.'

'He followed us to-night, when we first came here!'
'Yer lie, I didn't!' replies Deputy, in his one form of polite contradiction.

'He has been prowling near us ever since!'

'Yer lie, I haven't,' returns Deputy. 'I'd only jest come out for my 'elth when I see you two a-coming out of the Kin-freederel. If I--ket--ches--Im--out--ar--ter--ten!'

(with the usual rhythm and dance, though dodging behind Durdles), 'it ain't ANY fault, is it?'

'Take him home, then,' retorts Jasper, ferociously, though with a strong check upon himself, 'and let my eyes be rid of the sight of you!'

Deputy, with another sharp whistle, at once expressing his relief, and his commencement of a milder stoning of Mr. Durdles, begins stoning that respectable gentleman home, as if he were a reluctant ox. Mr. Jasper goes to his gatehouse, brooding. And thus, as everything comes to an end, the unaccountable expedition comes to an end--for the time.

CHAPTER XIII--BOTH AT THEIR BEST

Miss Twinkleton's establishment was about to undergo a serene hush. The Christmas recess was at hand. What had once, and at no remote period, been called, even by the erudite Miss Twinkleton herself, 'the half;' but what was now called, as being more elegant, and more strictly collegiate, 'the term,' would expire to-morrow. A noticeable relaxation of discipline had for some few days pervaded the Nuns' House. Club suppers had occurred in the bedrooms, and a dressed tongue had been carved with a pair of scissors, and handed round with the curling tongs. Portions of marmalade had likewise been distributed on a service of plates constructed of curlpaper; and cowslip wine had been quaffed from the small squat measuring glass in which little Rickitts (a junior of weakly constitution) took her steel drops daily. The housemaids had been bribed with various fragments of riband, and sundry pairs of shoes more or less down at heel, to make no mention of crumbs in the beds; the airiest costumes had been worn on these festive occasions; and the daring Miss Ferdinand had even surprised the company with a sprightly solo on the comb-and-curlpaper, until suffocated in her own pillow by two flowing-haired executioners.

Nor were these the only tokens of dispersal. Boxes appeared in the bedrooms (where they were capital at other times), and a surprising amount of packing took place, out of all proportion to the amount packed. Largess, in the form of odds and ends of cold cream and pomatum, and also of hairpins, was freely distributed among the attendants. On charges of inviolable secrecy, confidences were interchanged respecting golden youth of England expected to call, 'at home,' on the first opportunity. Miss Giggles (deficient in sentiment) did indeed profess that she, for her part, acknowledged such homage by making faces at the golden youth; but this young lady was outvoted by an immense majority.

On the last night before a recess, it was always expressly made a point of honour that nobody should go to sleep, and that Ghosts should be encouraged by all possible means. This compact invariably broke down, and all the young ladies went to sleep very soon, and got up very early.

The concluding ceremony came off at twelve o'clock on the day of departure; when Miss Twinkleton, supported by Mrs. Tisher, held a drawing-room in her own apartment (the globes already covered with brown Holland), where glasses of white-wine and plates of cut pound-cake were discovered on the table. Miss Twinkleton then said: Ladies, another revolving year had brought us round to that festive period at which the first feelings of our nature bounded in our--Miss Twinkleton was annually going to add 'bosoms,' but annually stopped on the brink of that expression, and substituted 'hearts.' Hearts; our hearts. Hem! Again a revolving year, ladies, had brought us to a pause in our studies--let us hope our greatly advanced studies--and, like the mariner in his bark, the warrior in his tent, the captive in his dungeon, and the traveller in his various conveyances, we yearned for home. Did we say, on such an occasion, in the opening words of Mr. Addison's impressive tragedy:

'The dawn is overcast, the morning lowers, And heavily in clouds brings on the day, The great, th' important day--?'

Not so. From horizon to zenith all was couleur de rose, for all was redolent of our relations and friends. Might WE find THEM prospering as WE expected; might THEY find US prospering as THEY expected! Ladies, we would now, with our love to one another, wish one another good-bye, and happiness, until we met again. And when the time should come for our resumption of those pursuits which (here a general depression set in all round), pursuits which, pursuits which;--then let us ever remember what was said by the Spartan General, in words too trite for repetition, at the battle it were superfluous to specify.

The handmaidens of the establishment, in their best caps, then handed the trays, and the young ladies sipped and crumbled, and the bespoken coaches began to choke the street. Then leave-taking was not long about; and Miss Twinkleton, in saluting each young lady's cheek, confided to her an exceedingly neat letter, addressed to her next friend at law, 'with Miss Twinkleton's best compliments' in the corner. This missive she handed with an air as if it had not the least connexion with the bill, but were something in the nature of a delicate and joyful surprise.
So many times had Rosa seen such dispersals, and so very little did she know of any other Home, that she was contented to remain where she was, and was even better contented than ever before, having her latest friend with her. And yet her latest friendship had a blank place in it of which she could not fail to be sensible. Helena Landless, having been a party to her brother's revelation about Rosa, and having entered into that compact of silence with Mr. Crisparkle, shrank from any allusion to Edwin Drood's name. Why she so avoided it, was mysterious to Rosa, but she perfectly perceived the fact. But for the fact, she might have relieved her own little perplexed heart of some of its doubts and hesitations, by taking Helena into her confidence. As it was, she had no such vent: she could only ponder on her own difficulties, and wonder more and more why this avoidance of Edwin's name should last, now that she knew—for so much Helena had told her—that a good understanding was to be reestablished between the two young men, when Edwin came down.

It would have made a pretty picture, so many pretty girls kissing Rosa in the cold porch of the Nuns' House, and that sunny little creature peeping out of it (unconscious of sly faces carved on spout and gable peeping at her), and waving farewells to the departing coaches, as if she represented the spirit of rosy youth abiding in the place to keep it bright and warm in its desertion. The hoarse High Street became musical with the cry, in various silvery voices, 'Good-bye, Rosebud darling!' and the effigy of Mr. Sapsea's father over the opposite doorway seemed to say to mankind: 'Gentlemen, favour me with your attention to this charming little last lot left behind, and bid with a spirit worthy of the occasion!' Then the staid street, so unwontedly sparkling, youthful, and fresh for a few rippling moments, ran dry, and Cloisterham was itself again.

If Rosebud in her bower now waited Edwin Drood's coming with an uneasy heart, Edwin for his part was uneasy too. With far less force of purpose in his composition than the childish beauty, crowned by acclamation fairy queen of Miss Twinkleton's establishment, he had a conscience, and Mr. Grewgious had pricked it. That gentleman's steady convictions of what was right and what was wrong in such a case as his, were neither to be frowned aside nor laughed aside. They would not be moved. But for the dinner in Staple Inn, and but for the ring he carried in the breast pocket of his coat, he would have drifted into their wedding-day without another pause for real thought, loosely trusting that all would go well, left alone. But that serious putting him on his truth to the living and the dead had brought him to a check. He must either give the ring to Rosa, or he must take it back. Once put into this narrowed way of action, it was curious that he began to consider Rosa's claims upon him more unselfishly than he had ever considered them before, and began to be less sure of himself than he had ever been in all his easy-going days.

'I will be guided by what she says, and by how we get on,' was his decision, walking from the gatehouse to the Nuns' House. 'Whatever comes of it, I will bear his words in mind, and try to be true to the living and the dead.'

Rosa was dressed for walking. She expected him. It was a bright, frosty day, and Miss Twinkleton had already graciously sanctioned fresh air. Thus they got out together before it became necessary for either Miss Twinkleton, or the deputy high-priest Mrs. Tisher, to lay even so much as one of those usual offerings on the shrine of Propriety.

'My dear Eddy,' said Rosa, when they had turned out of the High Street, and had got among the quiet walks in the neighbourhood of the Cathedral and the river: 'I want to say something very serious to you. I have been thinking about it for a long, long time.'

'I want to be serious with you too, Rosa dear. I mean to be serious and earnest.'

'Thank you, Eddy. And you will not think me unkind because I begin, will you? You will not think I speak for myself only, because I speak first? That would not be generous, would it? And I know you are generous!'

He said, 'I hope I am not ungenerous to you, Rosa.' He called her Pussy no more. Never again.

'And there is no fear,' pursued Rosa, 'of our quarrelling, is there? Because, Eddy,' clasping her hand on his arm, 'we have so much reason to be very lenient to each other!'

'Never!'

Neither spoke again for a little while. But after that pause he said, with some effort:

'Of course I know that this has been in both our minds, Rosa, and of course I am in honour bound to confess freely that it does not originate with you.'

'No, nor with you, dear,' she returned, with pathetic earnestness. 'That sprung up between us. You are not truly happy in our engagement; I am not truly happy in it. O, I am so sorry, so sorry! And there she broke into tears.

'I am deeply sorry too, Rosa. Deeply sorry for you.'

'And I for you, poor boy! And I for you!'

This pure young feeling, this gentle and forbearing feeling of each towards the other, brought with it its reward in a softening light that seemed to shine on their position. The relations between them did not look wilful, or
capricious, or a failure, in such a light; they became elevated into something more self-denying, honourable, affectionate, and true.

'If we knew yesterday,' said Rosa, as she dried her eyes, 'and we did know yesterday, and on many, many yesterdays, that we were far from right together in those relations which were not of our own choosing, what better could we do to-day than change them? It is natural that we should be sorry, and you see how sorry we both are; but how much better to be sorry now than then!'

'When, Rosa?'

'When it would be too late. And then we should be angry, besides.'

Another silence fell upon them.

'And you know,' said Rosa innocently, 'you couldn't like me then; and you can always like me now, for I shall not be a drag upon you, or a worry to you. And I can always like you now, and your sister will not tease or trifle with you. I often did when I was not your sister, and I beg your pardon for it.'

'Don't let us come to that, Rosa; or I shall want more pardoning than I like to think of.'

'No, indeed, Eddy; you are too hard, my generous boy, upon yourself. Let us sit down, brother, on these ruins, and let me tell you how it was with us. I think I know, for I have considered about it very much since you were here last time. You liked me, didn't you? You thought I was a nice little thing?'

'Everybody thinks that, Rosa.'

'Do they?' She knitted her brow musingly for a moment, and then flashed out with the bright little induction: 'Well, but say they do. Surely it was not enough that you should think of me only as other people did; now, was it?'

The point was not to be got over. It was not enough.

'And that is just what I mean; that is just how it was with us,' said Rosa. 'You liked me very well, and you had grown used to me, and had grown used to the idea of our being married. You accepted the situation as an inevitable kind of thing, didn't you? It was to be, you thought, and why discuss or dispute it?'

It was new and strange to him to have himself presented to himself so clearly, in a glass of her holding up. He had always patronised her, in his superiority to her share of woman's wit. Was that but another instance of something radically amiss in the terms on which they had been gliding towards a life-long bondage?

'All this that I say of you is true of me as well, Eddy. Unless it was, I might not be bold enough to say it. Only, the difference between us was, that by little and little there crept into my mind a habit of thinking about it, instead of dismissing it. My life is not so busy as yours, you see, and I have not so many things to think of. So I thought about it very much, and I cried about it very much too (though that was not your fault, poor boy); when all at once my guardian came down, to prepare for my leaving the Nuns' House. I tried to hint to him that I was not quite settled in my mind, but I hesitated and failed, and he didn't understand me. But he is a good, good man. And he put before me so kindly, and yet so strongly, how seriously we ought to consider, in our circumstances, that I resolved to speak to you the next moment we were alone and grave. And if I seemed to come to it easily just now, because I came to it all at once, don't think it was so really, Eddy, for O, it was very, very hard, and O, I am very, very sorry!'

Her full heart broke into tears again. He put his arm about her waist, and they walked by the river-side together.

'Your guardian has spoken to me too, Rosa dear. I saw him before I left London.' His right hand was in his breast, seeking the ring; but he checked it, as he thought: 'If I am to take it back, why should I tell her of it?'

'And that made you more serious about it, didn't it, Eddy? And if I had not spoken to you, as I have, you would have spoken to me? I hope you can tell me so? I don't like it to be ALL my doing, though it IS so much better for us.'

'Yes, I should have spoken; I should have put everything before you; I came intending to do it. But I never could have spoken to you as you have spoken to me, Rosa.'

'Don't say you mean so coldly or unkindly, Eddy, please, if you can help it.'

'I mean so sensibly and delicately, so wisely and affectionately.'

'That's my dear brother!' She kissed his hand in a little rapture. 'The dear girls will be dreadfully disappointed,' added Rosa, laughing, with the dewdrops glistening in her bright eyes. 'They have looked forward to it so, poor pets!'

'Ah! but I fear it will be a worse disappointment to Jack,' said Edwin Drood, with a start. 'I never thought of Jack!'

Her swift and intent look at him as he said the words could no more be recalled than a flash of lightning can. But it appeared as though she would have instantly recalled it, if she could; for she looked down, confused, and breathed quickly.

'You don't doubt its being a blow to Jack, Rosa?'

She merely replied, and that evasively and hurriedly: Why should she? She had not thought about it. He seemed, to her, to have so little to do with it.
'My dear child! can you suppose that any one so wrapped up in another--Mrs. Tope's expression: not mine--as Jack is in me, could fail to be struck all of a heap by such a sudden and complete change in my life? I say sudden, because it will be sudden to HIM, you know.'

She nodded twice or thrice, and her lips parted as if she would have assented. But she uttered no sound, and her breathing was no slower.

'How shall I tell Jack?' said Edwin, ruminating. If he had been less occupied with the thought, he must have seen her singular emotion. 'I never thought of Jack. It must be broken to him, before the town-crier knows it. I dine with the dear fellow to-morrow and next day--Christmas Eve and Christmas Day--but it would never do to spoil his feast-days. He always worries about me, and moddle-coddles in the merest trifles. The news is sure to overset him. How on earth shall this be broken to Jack?'

'He must be told, I suppose?' said Rosa.

'My dear Rosa! who ought to be in our confidence, if not Jack?'

'My guardian promised to come down, if I should write and ask him. I am going to do so. Would you like to leave it to him?'

'A bright idea!' cried Edwin. 'The other trustee. Nothing more natural. He comes down, he goes to Jack, he relates what we have agreed upon, and he states our case better than we could. He has already spoken feelingly to you, he has already spoken feelingly to me, and he'll put the whole thing feelingly to Jack. That's it! I am not a coward, Rosa, but to tell you a secret, I am a little afraid of Jack.'

'No, no! you are not afraid of him!' cried Rosa, turning white, and clasping her hands.

'Why, sister Rosa, sister Rosa, what do you see from the turret?' said Edwin, rallying her. 'My dear girl!'

'You frightened me.'

'Most unintentionally, but I am as sorry as if I had meant to do it. Could you possibly suppose for a moment, from any loose way of speaking of mine, that I was literally afraid of the dear fond fellow? What I mean is, that he is subject to a kind of paroxysm, or fit--I saw him in it once--and I don't know but that so great a surprise, coming upon him direct from me whom he is so wrapped up in, might bring it on perhaps. Which--and this is the secret I was going to tell you--is another reason for your guardian's making the communication. He is so steady, precise, and exact, that he will talk Jack's thoughts into shape, in no time: whereas with me Jack is always impulsive and hurried, and, I may say, almost womanish.'

Rosa seemed convinced. Perhaps from her own very different point of view of 'Jack,' she felt comforted and protected by the interposition of Mr. Grewgious between herself and him.

And now, Edwin Drood's right hand closed again upon the ring in its little case, and again was checked by the consideration: 'It is certain, now, that I am to give it back to him; then why should I tell her of it?' That pretty sympathetic nature which could be so sorry for him in the blight of their childish hopes of happiness together, and could so quietly find itself alone in a new world to weave fresh wreaths of such flowers as it might prove to bear, the old world's flowers being withered, would be grieved by those sorrowful jewels; and to what purpose? Why should it be? They were but a sign of broken joys and baseless projects; in their very beauty they were (as the unlikeliest of men had said) almost a cruel satire on the loves, hopes, plans, of humanity, which are able to forecast nothing, and are so much brittle dust. Let them be. He would restore them to her guardian when he came down; he in his turn would restore them to the cabinet from which he had unwillingly taken them; and there, like old letters or old vows, or other records of old aspirations come to nothing, they would be disregarded, until, being valuable, they were sold into circulation again, to repeat their former round.

Let them be. Let them lie unspoken of, in his breast. However distinctly or indistinctly he entertained these thoughts, he arrived at the conclusion, Let them be. Among the mighty store of wonderful chains that are for ever forging, day and night, in the vast iron-works of time and circumstance, there was one chain forged in the moment of that small conclusion, riveted to the foundations of heaven and earth, and gifted with invincible force to hold and drag.

They walked on by the river. They began to speak of their separate plans. He would quicken his departure from England, and she would remain where she was, at least as long as Helena remained. The poor dear girls should have their disappointment broken to them gently, and, as the first preliminary, Miss Twinkleton should be confided in by Rosa, even in advance of the reappearance of Mr. Grewgious. It should be made clear in all quarters that she and Edwin were the best of friends. There had never been so serene an understanding between them since they were first affianced. And yet there was one reservation on each side; on hers, that she intended through her guardian to withdraw herself immediately from the tuition of her music-master; on his, that he did already entertain some wandering speculations whether it might ever come to pass that he would know more of Miss Landless.

The bright, frosty day declined as they walked and spoke together. The sun dipped in the river far behind them, and the old city lay red before them, as their walk drew to a close. The moaning water cast its seaweed duskily at
their feet, when they turned to leave its margin; and the rooks hovered above them with hoarse cries, darker splashes in the darkening air.

'I will prepare Jack for my flitting soon,' said Edwin, in a low voice, 'and I will but see your guardian when he comes, and then go before they speak together. It will be better done without my being by. Don't you think so?'

'Yes.'

'We know we have done right, Rosa?'

'Yes.'

'We know we are better so, even now?'

'And shall be far, far better so by-and-by.'

Still there was that lingering tenderness in their hearts towards the old positions they were relinquishing, that they prolonged their parting. When they came among the elm-trees by the Cathedral, where they had last sat together, they stopped as by consent, and Rosa raised her face to his, as she had never raised it in the old days;--for they were old already.

'God bless you, dear! Good-bye!'

'God bless you, dear! Good-bye!'

They kissed each other fervently.

'Now, please take me home, Eddy, and let me be by myself.'

'Don't look round, Rosa,' he cautioned her, as he drew her arm through his, and led her away. 'Didn't you see Jack?'

'No! Where?'

'Under the trees. He saw us, as we took leave of each other. Poor fellow! he little thinks we have parted. This will be a blow to him, I am much afraid!'

She hurried on, without resting, and hurried on until they had passed under the gatehouse into the street; once there, she asked:

'Has he followed us? You can look without seeming to. Is he behind?'

'No. Yes, he is! He has just passed out under the gateway. The dear, sympathetic old fellow likes to keep us in sight. I am afraid he will be bitterly disappointed!'

She pulled hurriedly at the handle of the hoarse old bell, and the gate soon opened. Before going in, she gave him one last, wide, wondering look, as if she would have asked him with imploring emphasis: 'O! don't you understand? And out of that look he vanished from her view.

CHAPTER XIV--WHEN SHALL THESE THREE MEET AGAIN?

Christmas Eve in Cloisterham. A few strange faces in the streets; a few other faces, half strange and half familiar, once the faces of Cloisterham children, now the faces of men and women who come back from the outer world at long intervals to find the city wonderfully shrunken in size, as if it had not washed by any means well in the meanwhile. To these, the striking of the Cathedral clock, and the cawing of the rooks from the Cathedral tower, are like voices of their nursery time. To such as these, it has happened in their dying hours afar off, that they have imagined their chamber-floor to be strewn with the autumnal leaves fallen from the elm-trees in the Close: so have the rustling sounds and fresh scents of their earliest impressions revived when the circle of their lives was very nearly traced, and the beginning and the end were drawing close together.

Seasonable tokens are about. Red berries shine here and there in the lattices of Minor Canon Corner; Mr. and Mrs. Tope are daintily sticking sprigs of holly into the carvings and sconces of the Cathedral stalls, as if they were sticking them into the coat- button-holes of the Dean and Chapter. Lavish profusion is in the shops: particularly in the articles of currants, raisins, spices, candied peel, and moist sugar. An unusual air of gallantry and dissipation is abroad; evinced in an immense bunch of mistletoe hanging in the greengrocer's shop doorway, and a poor little Twelfth Cake, culminating in the figure of a Harlequin--such a very poor little Twelfth Cake, that one would rather called it a Twenty-fourth Cake or a Forty-eighth Cake--to be raffled for at the pastrycook's, terms one shilling per member. Public amusements are not wanting. The Wax-Work which made so deep an impression on the reflective mind of the Emperor of China is to be seen by particular desire during Christmas Week only, on the premises of the bankrupt livery-stable-keeper up the lane; and a new grand comic Christmas pantomime is to be produced at the Theatre: the latter heralded by the portrait of Signor Jacksonini the clown, saying 'How do you do to-morrow?' quite as large as life, and almost as miserably. In short, Cloisterham is up and doing: though from this description the High School and Miss Twinkleton's are to be excluded. From the former establishment the scholars have gone home, every one of them in love with one of Miss Twinkleton's young ladies (who knows nothing about it); and only the handmaidens flutter occasionally in the windows of the latter. It is noticed, by the bye, that these damsels become, within the limits of decorum, more skittish when thus intrusted with the concrete representation of their sex, than when dividing the representation with Miss Twinkleton's young ladies.
Neville Landless, though absolved from his books for the time by Mr. Crisparkle--whose fresh nature is by no means insensible to the charms of a holiday--reads and writes in his quiet room, with a concentrated air, until it is two hours past noon. He then sets himself to clearing his table, to arranging his books, and to tearing up and burning his stray papers. He makes a clean sweep of all untidy accumulations, puts all his drawers in order, and leaves no note or scrap of paper undestroyed, save such memoranda as bear directly on his studies. This done, he turns to his wardrobe, selects a few articles of ordinary wear--among them, change of stout shoes and socks for walking--and packs these in a knapsack. This knapsack is new, and he bought it in the High Street yesterday. He also purchased, at the same time and at the same place, a heavy walking-stick; strong in the handle for the grip of the hand, and iron-shod. He tries this, swings it, poises it, and lays it by, with the knapsack, on a window-seat. By this time his arrangements are complete.

He dresses for going out, and is in the act of going--indeed has left his room, and has met the Minor Canon on the staircase, coming out of his bedroom upon the same story--when he turns back again for his walking-stick, thinking he will carry it now. Mr. Crisparkle, who has paused on the staircase, sees it in his hand on his immediately reappearing, takes it from him, and asks him with a smile how he chooses a stick?

'Really I don't know that I understand the subject,' he answers. 'I chose it for its weight.'

'Much too heavy, Neville; MUCH too heavy.'

'To rest upon in a long walk, sir?'

'Rest upon?' repeats Mr. Crisparkle, throwing himself into pedestrian form. 'You don't rest upon it; you merely balance with it.'

'I shall know better, with practice, sir. I have not lived in a walking country, you know.'

'True,' says Mr. Crisparkle. 'Get into a little training, and we will have a few score miles together. I should leave you nowhere now. Do you come back before dinner?'

'I think not, as we dine early.'

Mr. Crisparkle gives him a bright nod and a cheerful good-bye; expressing (not without intention) absolute confidence and ease.

Neville repairs to the Nuns' House, and requests that Miss Landless may be informed that her brother is there, by appointment. He waits at the gate, not even crossing the threshold; for he is on his parole not to put himself in Rosa's way.

His sister is at least as mindful of the obligation they have taken on themselves as he can be, and loses not a moment in joining him. They meet affectionately, avoid lingering there, and walk towards the upper inland country.

'I am not going to tread upon forbidden ground, Helena,' says Neville, when they have walked some distance and are turning; 'you will understand in another moment that I cannot help referring to-- what shall I say?--my infatuation.'

'Had you not better avoid it, Neville? You know that I can hear nothing.'

'You can hear, my dear, what Mr. Crisparkle has heard, and heard with approval.'

'Yes; I can hear so much.'

'Well, it is this. I am not only unsettled and unhappy myself, but I am conscious of unsettling and interfering with other people. How do I know that, but for my unfortunate presence, you, and--and--the rest of that former party, our engaging guardian excepted, might be dining cheerfully in Minor Canon Corner to-morrow? Indeed it probably would be so. I can see too well that I am not high in the old lady's opinion, and it is easy to understand what an irksome clog I must be upon the hospitality of her orderly house--especially at this time of year--when I must be kept asunder from this person, and there is such a reason for my not being brought into contact with that person, and an unfavourable reputation has preceded me with such another person; and so on. I have put this very gently to Mr. Crisparkle, for you know his self-denying ways; but still I have put it. What I have laid much greater stress upon at the same time is, that I am engaged in a miserable struggle with myself, and that a little change and absence may enable me to come through it the better. So, the weather being bright and hard, I am going on a walking expedition, and intend taking myself out of everybody's way (my own included, I hope) to-morrow morning.'

'When to come back?'

'In a fortnight.'

'And going quite alone?'

'I am much better without company, even if there were any one but you to bear me company, my dear Helena.'

'Mr. Crisparkle entirely agrees, you say?'

'Entirely. I am not sure but that at first he was inclined to think it rather a moody scheme, and one that might do a brooding mind harm. But we took a moonlight walk last Monday night, to talk it over at leisure, and I represented
the case to him as it really is. I showed him that I do want to conquer myself, and that, this evening well got over, it is surely better that I should be away from here just now, than here. I could hardly help meeting certain people walking together here, and that could do no good, and is certainly not the way to forget. A fortnight hence, that chance will probably be over, for the time; and when it again arises for the last time, why, I can again go away. Farther, I really do feel hopeful of bracing exercise and wholesome fatigue. You know that Mr. Crisparkle allows such things their full weight in the preservation of his own sound mind in his own sound body, and that his just spirit is not likely to maintain one set of natural laws for himself and another for me. He yielded to my view of the matter, when convinced that I was honestly in earnest; and so, with his full consent, I start to-morrow morning. Early enough to be not only out of the streets, but out of hearing of the bells, when the good people go to church.’

Helena thinks it over, and thinks well of it. Mr. Crisparkle doing so, she would do so; but she does originally, out of her own mind, think well of it, as a healthy project, denoting a sincere endeavour and an active attempt at self-correction. She is inclined to pity him, poor fellow, for going away solitary on the great Christmas festival; but she feels it much more to the purpose to encourage him. And she does encourage him.

He will write to her?
He will write to her every alternate day, and tell her all his adventures.

Does he send clothes on in advance of him?
'My dear Helena, no. Travel like a pilgrim, with wallet and staff. My wallet—or my knapsack—is packed, and ready for strapping on; and here is my staff!'

He hands it to her; she makes the same remark as Mr. Crisparkle, that it is very heavy; and gives it back to him, asking what wood it is? Iron-wood.

Up to this point he has been extremely cheerful. Perhaps, the having to carry his case with her, and therefore to present it in its brightest aspect, has roused his spirits. Perhaps, the having done so with success, is followed by a revulsion. As the day closes in, and the city-lights begin to spring up before them, he grows depressed.

'I wish I were not going to this dinner, Helena.'

'Dear Neville, is it worth while to care much about it? Think how soon it will be over.'

'How soon it will be over!' he repeats gloomily. 'Yes. But I don't like it.'

There may be a moment's awkwardness, she cheeringly represents to him, but it can only last a moment. He is quite sure of himself.

'I wish I felt as sure of everything else, as I feel of myself;' he answers her.

'How strangely you speak, dear! What do you mean?'

'Helena, I don't know. I only know that I don't like it. What a strange dead weight there is in the air!'

She calls his attention to those copperous clouds beyond the river, and says that the wind is rising. He scarcely speaks again, until he takes leave of her, at the gate of the Nuns' House. She does not immediately enter, when they have parted, but remains looking after him along the street. Twice he passes the gatehouse, reluctant to enter. At length, the Cathedral clock chiming one quarter, with a rapid turn he hurries in.

And so HE goes up the postern stair.

Edwin Drood passes a solitary day. Something of deeper moment than he had thought, has gone out of his life; and in the silence of his own chamber he wept for it last night. Though the image of Miss Landless still hovers in the background of his mind, the pretty little affectionate creature, so much firmer and wiser than he had supposed, occupies its stronghold. It is with some misgiving of his own unworthiness that he thinks of her, and of what they might have been to one another, if he had been more in earnest some time ago; if he had set a higher value on her; if, instead of accepting his lot in life as an inheritance of course, he had studied the right way to its appreciation and enhancement. And still, for all this, and though there is a sharp heartache in all this, the vanity and caprice of youth sustain that handsome figure of Miss Landless in the background of his mind.

That was a curious look of Rosa's when they parted at the gate. Did it mean that she saw below the surface of his thoughts, and down into their twilight depths? Scarcely that, for it was a look of astonished and keen inquiry. He decides that he cannot understand it, though it was remarkably expressive.

As he only waits for Mr. Grewgious now, and will depart immediately after having seen him, he takes a sauntering leave of the ancient city and its neighbourhood. He recalls the time when Rosa and he walked here or there, mere children, full of the dignity of being engaged. Poor children! he thinks, with a pitying sadness.

Finding that his watch has stopped, he turns into the jeweller's shop, to have it wound and set. The jeweller is knowing on the subject of a bracelet, which he begs leave to submit, in a general and quite aimless way. It would suit (he considers) a young bride, to perfection; especially if of a rather diminutive style of beauty. Finding the bracelet but coldly looked at, the jeweller invites attention to a tray of rings for gentlemen; here is a style of ring, now, he remarks—a very chaste signet—which gentlemen are much given to purchasing, when changing their condition. A ring of a very responsible appearance. With the date of their wedding-day engraved inside, several
gentlemen have preferred it to any other kind of memento.

The rings are as coldly viewed as the bracelet. Edwin tells the tempter that he wears no jewellery but his watch and chain, which were his father's; and his shirt-pin.

'That I was aware of,' is the jeweller's reply, 'for Mr. Jasper dropped in for a watch-glass the other day, and, in fact, I showed these articles to him, remarking that if he SHOULD wish to make a present to a gentleman relative, on any particular occasion--But he said with a smile that he had an inventory in his mind of all the jewellery his gentleman relative ever wore; namely, his watch and chain, and his shirt-pin.' Still (the jeweller considers) that might not apply to all times, though applying to the present time. 'Twenty minutes past two, Mr. Drood, I set your watch at. Let me recommend you not to let it run down, sir.'

Edwin takes his watch, puts it on, and goes out, thinking: 'Dear old Jack! If I were to make an extra crease in my neckcloth, he would think it worth noticing!'

He strolls about and about, to pass the time until the dinner-hour. It somehow happens that Cloisterham seems reproachful to him to-day; has fault to find with him, as if he had not used it well; but is far more pensive with him than angry. His wonted carelessness is replaced by a wistful looking at, and dwelling upon, all the old landmarks. He will soon be far away, and may never see them again, he thinks. Poor youth! Poor youth!

As dusk draws on, he paces the Monks' Vineyard. He has walked to and fro, full half an hour by the Cathedral chimes, and it has closed in dark, before he becomes quite aware of a woman crouching on the ground near a wicket gate in a corner. The gate commands a cross bye-path, little used in the gloaming; and the figure must have been there all the time, though he has but lately made it out.

He strikes into that path, and walks up to the wicket. By the light of a lamp near it, he sees that the woman is of a haggard appearance, and that her weazen chin is resting on her hands, and that her eyes are staring--with an unwinking, blind sort of steadfastness--before her.

Always kindly, but moved to be unusually kind this evening, and having bestowed kind words on most of the children and aged people he has met, he at once bends down, and speaks to this woman.

'Are you ill?'
'No, deary,' she answers, without looking at him, and with no departure from her strange blind stare.

'Are you blind?'
'No, deary.'

'Are you lost, homeless, faint? What is the matter, that you stay here in the cold so long, without moving?'

By slow and stiff efforts, she appears to contract her vision until it can rest upon him; and then a curious film passes over her, and she begins to shake.

He straightens himself, recoils a step, and looks down at her in a dread amazement; for he seems to know her.

'Good Heaven!' he thinks, next moment. 'Like Jack that night!' As he looks down at her, she looks up at him, and whimpers: 'My lungs is weakly; my lungs is dreffle bad. Poor me, poor me, my cough is rattling dry!' and coughs in confirmation horribly.

'Where do you come from?'
'Come from London, deary.' (Her cough still rending her.)

'Where are you going to?'

'Back to London, deary. I came here, looking for a needle in a haystack, and I ain't found it. Look'ee, deary; give me three-and-sixpence, and don't you be afraid for me. I'll get back to London then, and trouble no one. I'm in a business.--Ah, me! It's slack, it's slack, and times is very bad!--but I can make a shift to live by it.'

'Do you eat opium?'

'Smokes it,' she replies with difficulty, still racked by her cough. 'Give me three-and-sixpence, and I'll lay it out well, and get back. If you don't give me three-and-sixpence, don't give me a brass farden. And if you do give me three-and-sixpence, deary, I'll tell you something.'

He counts the money from his pocket, and puts it in her hand. She instantly clutches it tight, and rises to her feet with a croaking laugh of satisfaction.

'Bless ye! Hark'ee, dear gen'l'mn. What's your Chris'en name?'

'Edwin.'

'Edwin, Edwin, Edwin,' she repeats, trailing off into a drowsy repetition of the word; and then asks suddenly: 'Is the short of that name Eddy?'

'It is sometimes called so,' he replies, with the colour starting to his face.

'Don't sweethearts call it so?' she asks, pondering.

'How should I know?'

'Haven't you a sweetheart, upon your soul?'

'None.'
She is moving away, with another 'Bless ye, and thank'ee, deary!' when he adds: 'You were to tell me something; you may as well do so.'

'So I was, so I was. Well, then. Whisper. You be thankful that your name ain't Ned.'

He looks at her quite steadily, as he asks: 'Why?'

'Because it's a bad name to have just now.'

'How a bad name?'

'A threatened name. A dangerous name.'

'The proverb says that threatened men live long,' he tells her, lightly.

'Then Ned--so threatened is he, wherever he may be while I am a- talking to you, deary--should live to all eternity!' replies the woman.

She has leaned forward to say it in his ear, with her forefinger shaking before his eyes, and now huddles herself together, and with another 'Bless ye, and thank'ee!' goes away in the direction of the Travellers' Lodging House.

This is not an inspiriting close to a dull day. Alone, in a sequestered place, surrounded by vestiges of old time and decay, it rather has a tendency to call a shudder into being. He makes for the better-lighted streets, and resolves as he walks on to say nothing of this to-night, but to mention it to Jack (who alone calls him Ned), as an odd coincidence, to-morrow; of course only as a coincidence, and not as anything better worth remembering.

Still, it holds to him, as many things much better worth remembering never did. He has another mile or so, to linger out before the dinner-hour; and, when he walks over the bridge and by the river, the woman's words are in the rising wind, in the angry sky, in the troubled water, in the flickering lights. There is some solemn echo of them even in the Cathedral chime, which strikes a sudden surprise to his heart as he turns in under the archway of the gatehouse.

And so HE goes up the postern stair.

John Jasper passes a more agreeable and cheerful day than either of his guests. Having no music-lessons to give in the holiday season, his time is his own, but for the Cathedral services. He is early among the shopkeepers, ordering little table luxuries that his nephew likes. His nephew will not be with him long, he tells his provision-dealers, and so must be petted and made much of. While out on his hospitable preparations, he looks in on Mr. Sapsea; and mentions that dear Ned, and that inflammable young spark of Mr. Crisparkle's, are to dine at the gatehouse to-day, and make up their difference. Mr. Sapsea is by no means friendly towards the inflammable young spark. He says that his complexion is 'Un- English.' And when Mr. Sapsea has once declared anything to be Un-English, he considers that thing everlastingly sunk in the bottomless pit.

John Jasper is truly sorry to hear Mr. Sapsea speak thus, for he knows right well that Mr. Sapsea never speaks without a meaning, and that he has a subtle trick of being right. Mr. Sapsea (by a very remarkable coincidence) is of exactly that opinion.

Mr. Jasper is in beautiful voice this day. In the pathetic supplication to have his heart inclined to keep this law, he quite astonishes his fellows by his melodious power. He has never sung difficult music with such skill and harmony, as in this day's Anthem. His nervous temperament is occasionally prone to take difficult music a little too quickly; to-day, his time is perfect.

These results are probably attained through a grand composure of the spirits. The mere mechanism of his throat is a little tender, for he wears, both with his singing-robe and with his ordinary dress, a large black scarf of strong close-woven silk, slung loosely round his neck. But his composure is so noticeable, that Mr. Crisparkle speaks of it as they come out from Vespers.

'I must thank you, Jasper, for the pleasure with which I have heard you to-day. Beautiful! Delightful! You could not have so outdone yourself, I hope, without being wonderfully well.'

'AM wonderfully well.'

'Nothing unequal,' says the Minor Canon, with a smooth motion of his hand: 'nothing unsteady, nothing forced, nothing avoided; all thoroughly done in a masterly manner, with perfect self-command.'

'Thank you. I hope so, if it is not too much to say.'

'One would think, Jasper, you had been trying a new medicine for that occasional indisposition of yours.'

'No, really? That's well observed; for I have.'

'Then stick to it, my good fellow,' says Mr. Crisparkle, clapping him on the shoulder with friendly encouragement, 'stick to it.'

'I will.'

'I congratulate you,' Mr. Crisparkle pursues, as they come out of the Cathedral, 'on all accounts.'

'Thank you again. I will walk round to the Corner with you, if you don't object; I have plenty of time before my company come; and I want to say a word to you, which I think you will not be displeased to hear.'

'What is it?
'Well. We were speaking, the other evening, of my black humours.'

Mr. Crisparkle's face falls, and he shakes his head deploringly.

'I said, you know, that I should make you an antidote to those black humours; and you said you hoped I would consign them to the flames.'

'And I still hope so, Jasper.'

'With the best reason in the world! I mean to burn this year's Diary at the year's end.'

'Because you--?' Mr. Crisparkle brightens greatly as he thus begins.

'You anticipate me. Because I feel that I have been out of sorts, gloomy, bilious, brain-oppressed, whatever it may be. You said I had been exaggerative. So I have.'

Mr. Crisparkle's brightened face brightens still more.

'I couldn't see it then, because I WAS out of sorts; but I am in a healthier state now, and I acknowledge it with genuine pleasure. I made a great deal of a very little; that's the fact.'

'It does me good,' cries Mr. Crisparkle, 'to hear you say it!'

'A man leading a monotonous life,' Jasper proceeds, 'and getting his nerves, or his stomach, out of order, dwells upon an idea until it loses its proportions. That was my case with the idea in question. So I shall burn the evidence of my case, when the book is full, and begin the next volume with a clearer vision.'

'This is better,' says Mr. Crisparkle, stopping at the steps of his own door to shake hands, 'than I could have hoped.'

'Why, naturally,' returns Jasper. 'You had but little reason to hope that I should become more like yourself. You are always training yourself to be, mind and body, as clear as crystal, and you always are, and never change; whereas I am a muddy, solitary, moping weed. However, I have got over that mope. Shall I wait, while you ask if Mr. Neville has left for my place? If not, he and I may walk round together.'

'I think,' says Mr. Crisparkle, opening the entrance-door with his key, 'that he left some time ago; at least I know he left, and I think he has not come back. But I'll inquire. You won't come in?'

'My company wait,' said Jasper, with a smile.

The Minor Canon disappears, and in a few moments returns. As he thought, Mr. Neville has not come back; indeed, as he remembers now, Mr. Neville said he would probably go straight to the gatehouse.

'Bad manners in a host!' says Jasper. 'My company will be there before me! What will you bet that I don't find my company embracing?'

'I will bet--or I would, if ever I did bet,' returns Mr. Crisparkle, 'that your company will have a gay entertainer this evening.'

Jasper nods, and laughs good-night!

He retraces his steps to the Cathedral door, and turns down past it to the gatehouse. He sings, in a low voice and with delicate expression, as he walks along. It still seems as if a false note were not within his power to-night, and as if nothing could hurry or retard him. Arriving thus under the arched entrance of his dwelling, he pauses for an instant in the shelter to pull off that great black scarf, and bang it in a loop upon his arm. For that brief time, his face is knitted and stern. But it immediately clears, as he resumes his singing, and his way.

And so HE goes up the postern stair.

The red light burns steadily all the evening in the lighthouse on the margin of the tide of busy life. Softened sounds and hum of traffic pass it and flow on irregularly into the lonely Precincts; but very little else goes by, save violent rushes of wind. It comes on to blow a boisterous gale.

The Precincts are never particularly well lighted; but the strong blasts of wind blowing out many of the lamps (in some instances shattering the frames too, and bringing the glass rattling to the ground), they are unusually dark to-night. The darkness is augmented and confused, by flying dust from the earth, dry twigs from the trees, and great ragged fragments from the rooks' nests up in the tower. The trees themselves so toss and creak, as this tangible part of the darkness madly whirls about, that they seem in peril of being torn out of the earth: while ever and again a crack, and a rushing fall, denote that some large branch has yielded to the storm.

Not such power of wind has blown for many a winter night. Chimneys topple in the streets, and people hold to posts and corners, and to one another, to keep themselves upon their feet. The violent rushes abate not, but increase in frequency and fury until at midnight, when the streets are empty, the storm goes thundering along them, rattling at all the latches, and tearing at all the shutters, as if warning the people to get up and fly with it, rather than have the roofs brought down upon their brains.

Still, the red light burns steadily. Nothing is steady but the red light.

All through the night the wind blows, and abates not. But early in the morning, when there is barely enough light in the east to dim the stars, it begins to lull. From that time, with occasional wild charges, like a wounded monster dying, it drops and sinks; and at full daylight it is dead.
It is then seen that the hands of the Cathedral clock are torn off; that lead from the roof has been stripped away, rolled up, and blown into the Close; and that some stones have been displaced upon the summit of the great tower. Christmas morning though it be, it is necessary to send up workmen, to ascertain the extent of the damage done. These, led by Durdles, go aloft; while Mr. Tope and a crowd of early idlers gather down in Minor Canon Corner, shading their eyes and watching for their appearance up there.

This cluster is suddenly broken and put aside by the hands of Mr. Jasper; all the gazing eyes are brought down to the earth by his loudly inquiring of Mr. Crisparkle, at an open window:

'Where is my nephew?'

'He has not been here. Is he not with you?'

'No. He went down to the river last night, with Mr. Neville, to look at the storm, and has not been back. Call Mr. Neville!'

'He left this morning, early.'

'Left this morning early? Let me in! let me in!'

There is no more looking up at the tower, now. All the assembled eyes are turned on Mr. Jasper, white, half-dressed, panting, and clinging to the rail before the Minor Canon's house.

CHAPTER XV--IMPEACHED

Neville Landless had started so early and walked at so good a pace, that when the church-bells began to ring in Cloisterham for morning service, he was eight miles away. As he wanted his breakfast by that time, having set forth on a crust of bread, he stopped at the next roadside tavern to refresh.

Visitors in want of breakfast--unless they were horses or cattle, for which class of guests there was preparation enough in the way of water-trough and hay--were so unusual at the sign of The Tilted Wagon, that it took a long time to get the wagon into the track of tea and toast and bacon. Neville in the interval, sitting in a sanded parlour, wondering in how long a time after he had gone, the sneezy fire of damp fagots would begin to make somebody else warm.

Indeed, The Tilted Wagon, as a cool establishment on the top of a hill, where the ground before the door was puddled with damp hoofs and trodden straw; where a scolding landlady slapped a moist baby (with one red sock on and one wanting), in the bar; where the cheese was cast aground upon a shelf, in company with a mouldy tablecloth and a green-handled knife, in a sort of cast-iron canoe; where the pale-faced bread shed tears of crumb over its shipwreck in another canoe; where the family linen, half washed and half dried, led a public life of lying about; where everything to drink was drunk out of mugs, and everything else was suggestive of a rhyme to mugs; The Tilted Wagon, all these things considered, hardly kept its painted promise of providing good entertainment for Man and Beast. However, Man, in the present case, was not critical, but took what entertainment he could get, and went on again after a longer rest than he needed.

He stopped at some quarter of a mile from the house, hesitating whether to pursue the road, or to follow a cart track between two high hedgerows, which led across the slope of a breezy heath, and evidently struck into the road again by-and-by. He decided in favour of this latter track, and pursued it with some toil; the rise being steep, and the way worn into deep ruts.

He was labouring along, when he became aware of some other pedestrians behind him. As they were coming up at a faster pace than his, he stood aside, against one of the high banks, to let them pass. But their manner was very curious. Only four of them passed. Other four slackened speed, and loitered as intending to follow him when he should go on. The remainder of the party (half-a-dozen perhaps) turned, and went back at a great rate.

He looked at the four behind him, and he looked at the four before him. They all returned his look. He resumed his way. The four in advance went on, constantly looking back; the four in the rear came closing up.

When they all ranged out from the narrow track upon the open slope of the heath, and this order was maintained, let him diverge as he would to either side, there was no longer room to doubt that he was beset by these fellows. He stopped, as a last test; and they all stopped.

'Why do you attend upon me in this way?' he asked the whole body. 'Are you a pack of thieves?'

'Don't answer him,' said one of the number; he did not see which. 'Better be quiet.'

'Better be quiet?' repeated Neville. 'Who said so?'

Nobody replied.

'It's good advice, whichever of you skulkers gave it,' he went on angrily. 'I will not submit to be penned in between four men there, and four men there. I wish to pass, and I mean to pass, those four in front.'

They were all standing still; himself included.

'If eight men, or four men, or two men, set upon one,' he proceeded, growing more enraged, 'the one has no chance but to set his mark upon some of them. And, by the Lord, I'll do it, if I am interrupted any farther!'

Shouldering his heavy stick, and quickening his pace, he shot on to pass the four ahead. The largest and
strongest man of the number changed swiftly to the side on which he came up, and dexterously closed with him and went down with him; but not before the heavy stick had descended smartly.

'Let him be!' said this man in a suppressed voice, as they struggled together on the grass. 'Fair play! His is the build of a girl to mine, and he's got a weight strapped to his back besides. Let him alone. I'll manage him.'

After a little rolling about, in a close scuffle which caused the faces of both to be besmeared with blood, the man took his knee from Neville's chest, and rose, saying: 'There! Now take him arm-in-arm, any two of you!'

It was immediately done.

'As to our being a pack of thieves, Mr. Landless,' said the man, as he spat out some blood, and wiped more from his face; 'you know better than that at midday. We wouldn't have touched you if you hadn't forced us. We're going to take you round to the high road, anyhow, and you'll find help enough against thieves there, if you want it.--Wipe his face, somebody; see how it's a-trickling down him!'

When his face was cleansed, Neville recognised in the speaker, Joe, driver of the Cloisterham omnibus, whom he had seen but once, and that on the day of his arrival.

'And what I recommend you for the present, is, don't talk, Mr. Landless. You'll find a friend waiting for you, at the high road--gone ahead by the other way when we split into two parties--and you had much better say nothing till you come up with him. Bring that stick along, somebody else, and let's be moving!'

Utterly bewildered, Neville stared around him and said not a word. Walking between his two conductors, who held his arms in theirs, he went on, as in a dream, until they came again into the high road, and into the midst of a little group of people. The men who had turned back were among the group; and its central figures were Mr. Jasper and Mr. Crisparkle. Neville's conductors took him up to the Minor Canon, and there released him, as an act of deference to that gentleman.

'What is all this, sir? What is the matter? I feel as if I had lost my senses!' cried Neville, the group closing in around him.

'Where is my nephew?' asked Mr. Jasper, wildly.

'Where is your nephew?' repeated Neville, 'Why do you ask me?'

'I ask you,' retorted Jasper, 'because you were the last person in his company, and he is not to be found.'

'Not to be found!' cried Neville, aghast.

'Stay, stay,' said Mr. Crisparkle. 'Permit me, Jasper. Mr. Neville, you are confounded; collect your thoughts; it is of great importance that you should collect your thoughts; attend to me.'

'I will try, sir, but I seem mad.'

'You left Mr. Jasper last night with Edwin Drood?'

'Yes.'

'At what hour?'

'Was it at twelve o'clock?' asked Neville, with his hand to his confused head, and appealing to Jasper.

'Quite right,' said Mr. Crisparkle; 'the hour Mr. Jasper has already named to me. You went down to the river together?'

'Undoubtedly. To see the action of the wind there.'

'What followed? How long did you stay there?'

'About ten minutes; I should say not more. We then walked together to your house, and he took leave of me at the door.'

'Did he say that he was going down to the river again?'

'No. He said that he was going straight back.'

The bystanders looked at one another, and at Mr. Crisparkle. To whom Mr. Jasper, who had been intensely watching Neville, said, in a low, distinct, suspicious voice: 'What are those stains upon his dress?'

All eyes were turned towards the blood upon his clothes.

'And here are the same stains upon this stick!' said Jasper, taking it from the hand of the man who held it. 'I know the stick to be his, and he carried it last night. What does this mean?'

'In the name of God, say what it means, Neville!' urged Mr. Crisparkle.

'That man and I,' said Neville, pointing out his late adversary, 'had a struggle for the stick just now, and you may see the same marks on him, sir. What was I to suppose, when I found myself molested by eight people? Could I dream of the true reason when they would give me none at all?'

They admitted that they had thought it discreet to be silent, and that the struggle had taken place. And yet the very men who had seen it looked darkly at the smears which the bright cold air had already dried.

'We must return, Neville,' said Mr. Crisparkle; 'of course you will be glad to come back to clear yourself?'

'Of course, sir.'

'Mr. Landless will walk at my side,' the Minor Canon continued, looking around him. 'Come, Neville!'
Jasper walked on the other side of Neville, and never quitted that position. He was silent, while Mr. Crisparkle more than once repeated his former questions, and while Neville repeated his former answers; also, while they both hazarded some explanatory conjectures. He was obstinately silent, because Mr. Crisparkle's manner directly appealed to him to take some part in the discussion, and no appeal would move his fixed face. When they drew near to the city, and it was suggested by the Minor Canon that they might do well in calling on the Mayor at once, he assented with a stern nod; but he spake no word until they stood in Mr. Sapsea's parlour.

Mr. Sapsea being informed by Mr. Crisparkle of the circumstances under which they desired to make a voluntary statement before him, Mr. Jasper broke silence by declaring that he placed his whole reliance, humanly speaking, on Mr. Sapsea's penetration. There was no conceivable reason why his nephew should have suddenly absconded, unless Mr. Sapsea could suggest one, and then he would defer. There was no intelligible likelihood of his having returned to the river, and been accidentally drowned in the dark, unless it should appear likely to Mr. Sapsea, and then again he would defer. He washed his hands as clean as he could of all horrible suspicions, unless it should appear to Mr. Sapsea that some such were inseparable from his last companion before his disappearance (not on good terms with previously), and then, once more, he would defer. His own state of mind, he being distracted with doubts, and labouring under dismal apprehensions, was not to be safely trusted; but Mr. Sapsea's was.

Mr. Sapsea expressed his opinion that the case had a dark look; in short (and here his eyes rested full on Neville's countenance), an Un-English complexion. Having made this grand point, he wandered into a denser haze and maze of nonsense than even a mayor might have been expected to disport himself in, and came out of it with the brilliant discovery that to take the life of a fellow-creature was to take something that didn't belong to you. He wavered whether or no he should at once issue his warrant for the committal of Neville Landless to jail, under circumstances of grave suspicion; and he might have gone so far as to do it but for the indignant protest of the Minor Canon: who undertook for the young man's remaining in his own house, and being produced by his own hands, whenever demanded. Mr. Jasper then understood Mr. Sapsea to suggest that the river should be dragged, that its banks should be rigidly examined, that particulars of the disappearance should be sent to all outlying places and to London, and that placards and advertisements should be widely circulated imploring Edwin Drood, if for any unknown reason he had withdrawn himself from his uncle's home and society, to take pity on that loving kinsman's sore bereavement and distress, and somehow inform him that he was yet alive. Mr. Sapsea was perfectly understood, for this was exactly his meaning (though he had said nothing about it); and measures were taken towards all these ends immediately.

It would be difficult to determine which was the more oppressed with horror and amazement: Neville Landless, or John Jasper. But that Jasper's position forced him to be active, while Neville's forced him to be passive, there would have been nothing to choose between them. Each was bowed down and broken.

With the earliest light of the next morning, men were at work upon the river, and other men--most of whom volunteered for the service--were examining the banks. All the livelong day the search went on; upon the river, with barge and pole, and drag and net; upon the muddy and rushy shore, with jack-boots, hatchet, spade, rope, dogs, and all imaginable appliances. Even at night, the river was specked with lanterns, and lurid with fires; far-off creeks, into which the tide washed as it changed, had their knots of watchers, listening to the lapping of the stream, and looking out for any burden it might bear; remote shingly causeways near the sea, and lonely points off which there was a race of water, had their unwonted flaring cressets and rough-coated figures when the next day dawned; but no trace of Edwin Drood revisited the light of the sun.

All that day, again, the search went on. Now, in barge and boat; and now ashore among the osiers, or tramping amidst mud and stakes and jagged stones in low-lying places, where solitary watermarks and signals of strange shapes showed like spectres, John Jasper worked and toiled. But to no purpose; for still no trace of Edwin Drood revisited the light of the sun.

Setting his watches for that night again, so that vigilant eyes should be kept on every change of tide, he went home exhausted. Unkempt and disordered, bedaubed with mud that had dried upon him, and with much of his clothing torn to rags, he had but just dropped into his easy-chair, when Mr. Grewgious stood before him.

'This is strange news,' said Mr. Grewgious.

'Strange and fearful news.'

Jasper had merely lifted up his heavy eyes to say it, and now dropped them again as he drooped, worn out, over one side of his easy-chair.

Mr. Grewgious smoothed his head and face, and stood looking at the fire.

'How is your ward?' asked Jasper, after a time, in a faint, fatigued voice.

'Poor little thing! You may imagine her condition.'

'Have you seen his sister?' inquired Jasper, as before.
'Whose?'

The curtness of the counter-question, and the cool, slow manner in which, as he put it, Mr. Grewgious moved his eyes from the fire to his companion's face, might at any other time have been exasperating. In his depression and exhaustion, Jasper merely opened his eyes to say: 'The suspected young man's.'

'Do you suspect him?' asked Mr. Grewgious.

'I don't know what to think. I cannot make up my mind.'

'Nor I,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'But as you spoke of him as the suspected young man, I thought you HAD made up your mind.--I have just left Miss Landless.'

'What is her state?'

'Defiance of all suspicion, and unbounded faith in her brother.'

'Poor thing!'

'However,' pursued Mr. Grewgious, 'it is not of her that I came to speak. It is of my ward. I have a communication to make that will surprise you. At least, it has surprised me.'

Jasper, with a groaning sigh, turned wearily in his chair.

'Shall I put it off till to-morrow?' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Mind, I warn you, that I think it will surprise you!'

More attention and concentration came into John Jasper's eyes as they caught sight of Mr. Grewgious smoothing his head again, and again looking at the fire; but now, with a compressed and determined mouth.

'What is it?' demanded Jasper, becoming upright in his chair.

'To be sure,' said Mr. Grewgious, provokingly slowly and internally, as he kept his eyes on the fire: 'I might have known it sooner; she gave me the opening; but I am such an exceedingly Angular man, that it never occurred to me; I took all for granted.'

'Mr. Grewgious, alternately opening and shutting the palms of his hands as he warmed them at the fire, and looking fixedly at him sideways, and never changing either his action or his look in all that followed, went on to reply.

'This young couple, the lost youth and Miss Rosa, my ward, though so long betrothed, and so long recognising their betrothal, and so near being married--'

Mr. Grewgious saw a staring white face, and two quivering white lips, in the easy-chair, and saw two muddy hands gripping its sides. But for the hands, he might have thought he had never seen the face.

'--This young couple came gradually to the discovery (made on both sides pretty equally, I think), that they would be happier and better, both in their present and their future lives, as affectionate friends, or say rather as brother and sister, than as husband and wife.'

Mr. Grewgious saw a ghastly figure rise, open-mouthed, from the easy-chair, and lift its outspread hands towards its head.

'One of this young couple, and that one your nephew, fearful, however, that in the tenderness of your affection for him you would be bitterly disappointed by so wide a departure from his projected life, forbore to tell you the secret, for a few days, and left it to be disclosed by me, when I should come down to speak to you, and he would be gone. I speak to you, and he is gone.'

Mr. Grewgious saw the ghastly figure throw back its head, clutch its hair with its hands, and turn with a writhing action from him.

'I have now said all I have to say: except that this young couple parted, firmly, though not without tears and sorrow, on the evening when you last saw them together.'

Mr. Grewgious heard a terrible shriek, and saw no ghastly figure, sitting or standing; saw nothing but a heap of torn and miry clothes upon the floor.

Not changing his action even then, he opened and shut the palms of his hands as he warmed them, and looked down at it.

CHAPTER XVI--DEVOTED

When John Jasper recovered from his fit or swoon, he found himself being tended by Mr. and Mrs. Tope, whom his visitor had summoned for the purpose. His visitor, wooden of aspect, sat stiffly in a chair, with his hands upon his knees, watching his recovery.

'There! You've come to nicely now, sir,' said the tearful Mrs. Tope; 'you were thoroughly worn out, and no
'A man,' said Mr. Grewgious, with his usual air of repeating a lesson, 'cannot have his rest broken, and his mind cruelly tormented, and his body overtaxed by fatigue, without being thoroughly worn out.'

'I fear I have alarmed you?' Jasper apologised faintly, when he was helped into his easy-chair.

'Not at all, I thank you,' answered Mr. Grewgious.

'You are too considerate.'

'Not at all, I thank you,' answered Mr. Grewgious again.

'You must take some wine, sir,' said Mrs. Tope, 'and the jelly that I had ready for you, and that you wouldn't put your lips to at noon, though I warned you what would come of it, you know, and you not breakfasted; and you must have a wing of the roast fowl that has been put back twenty times if it's been put back once. It shall all be on table in five minutes, and this good gentleman belike will stop and see you take it.'

This good gentleman replied with a snort, which might mean yes, or no, or anything or nothing, and which Mrs. Tope would have found highly mystifying, but that her attention was divided by the service of the table.

'You will take something with me?' said Jasper, as the cloth was laid.

'I couldn't get a morsel down my throat, I thank you,' answered Mr. Grewgious.

Jasper both ate and drank almost voraciously. Combined with the hurry in his mode of doing it, was an evident indifference to the taste of what he took, suggesting that he ate and drank to fortify himself against any other failure of the spirits, far more than to gratify his palate. Mr. Grewgious in the meantime sat upright, with no expression in his face, and a hard kind of imperturbably polite protest all over him: as though he would have said, in reply to some invitation to discourse; 'I couldn't originate the faintest approach to an observation on any subject whatever, I thank you.'

'Do you know,' said Jasper, when he had pushed away his plate and glass, and had sat meditating for a few minutes: 'do you know that I find some crumbs of comfort in the communication with which you have so much amazed me?'

'DO you?' returned Mr. Grewgious, pretty plainly adding the unspoken clause: 'I don't, I thank you!'

'After recovering from the shock of a piece of news of my dear boy, so entirely unexpected, and so destructive of all the castles I had built for him; and after having had time to think of it; yes.'

'I shall be glad to pick up your crumbs,' said Mr. Grewgious, dryly.

'Is there not, or is there--if I deceive myself, tell me so, and shorten my pain--is there not, or is there, hope that, finding himself in this new position, and becoming sensitively alive to the awkward burden of explanation, in this quarter, and that, and the other, with which it would load him, he avoided the awkwardness, and took to flight?'

'Such a thing might be,' said Mr. Grewgious, pondering.

'Such a thing has been. I have read of cases in which people, rather than face a seven days' wonder, and have to account for themselves to the idle and impertinent, have taken themselves away, and been long unheard of.'

'I believe such things have happened,' said Mr. Grewgious, pondering still.

'When I had, and could have, no suspicion,' pursued Jasper, eagerly following the new track, 'that the dear lost boy had withheld anything from me--most of all, such a leading matter as this--what gleam of light was there for me in the whole black sky? When I supposed that his intended wife was here, and his marriage close at hand, how could I entertain the possibility of his voluntarily leaving this place, in a manner that would be so unaccountable, capricious, and cruel? But now that I know what you have told me, is there no little chink through which day pierces? Supposing him to have disappeared of his own act, is not his disappearance more accountable and less cruel? The fact of his having just parted from your ward, is in itself a sort of reason for his going away. It does not make his mysterious departure the less cruel to me, it is true; but it relieves it of cruelty to her.'

Mr. Grewgious could not but assent to this.

'And even as to me,' continued Jasper, still pursuing the new track, with ardour, and, as he did so, brightening with hope: 'he knew that you were coming to me; he knew that you were intrusted to tell me what you have told me; if your doing so has awakened a new train of thought in my perplexed mind, it reasonably follows that, from the same premises, he might have foreseen the inferences that I should draw. Grant that he did foresee them; and even the cruelty to me--and who am I!--John Jasper, Music Master, vanishes!' -

Once more, Mr. Grewgious could not but assent to this.

'I have had my distrusts, and terrible distrusts they have been,' said Jasper; 'but your disclosure, overpowering as it was at first--showing me that my own dear boy had had a great disappointing reservation from me, who so fondly loved him, kindles hope within me. You do not extinguish it when I state it, but admit it to be a reasonable hope. I begin to believe it possible:' here he clasped his hands: 'that he may have disappeared from among us of his own accord, and that he may yet be alive and well.'

Mr. Crisparkle came in at the moment. To whom Mr. Jasper repeated:
'I begin to believe it possible that he may have disappeared of his own accord, and may yet be alive and well.'

Mr. Crisparkle taking a seat, and inquiring: 'Why so?' Mr. Jasper repeated the arguments he had just set forth. If they had been less plausible than they were, the good Minor Canon's mind would have been in a state of preparation to receive them, as exculpatory of his unfortunate pupil. But he, too, did really attach great importance to the lost young man's having been, so immediately before his disappearance, placed in a new and embarrassing relation towards every one acquainted with his projects and affairs; and the fact seemed to him to present the question in a new light.

'I stated to Mr. Sapsea, when we waited on him,' said Jasper: as he really had done: 'that there was no quarrel or difference between the two young men at their last meeting. We all know that their first meeting was unfortunately very far from amicable; but all went smoothly and quietly when they were last together at my house. My dear boy was not in his usual spirits; he was depressed- -I noticed that--and I am bound henceforth to dwell upon the circumstance the more, now that I know there was a special reason for his being depressed: a reason, moreover, which may possibly have induced him to absent himself.'

'I pray to Heaven it may turn out so!' exclaimed Mr. Crisparkle.

'_I_ pray to Heaven it may turn out so!' repeated Jasper. 'You know--and Mr. Grewgious should now know likewise--that I took a great prepossession against Mr. Neville Landless, arising out of his furious conduct on that first occasion. You know that I came to you, extremely apprehensive, on my dear boy's behalf, of his mad violence. You know that I even entered in my Diary, and showed the entry to you, that I had dark forebodings against him. Mr. Grewgious ought to be possessed of the whole case. He shall not, through any suppression of mine, be informed of a part of it, and kept in ignorance of another part of it. I wish him to be good enough to understand that the communication he has made to me has hopefully influenced my mind, in spite of its having been, before this mysterious occurrence took place, profoundly impressed against young Landless.'

This fairness troubled the Minor Canon much. He felt that he was not as open in his own dealing. He charged against himself reproachfully that he had suppressed, so far, the two points of a second strong outbreak of temper against Edwin Drood on the part of Neville, and of the passion of jealousy having, to his own certain knowledge, flamed up in Neville's breast against him. He was convinced of Neville's innocence of any part in the ugly disappearance; and yet so many little circumstances combined so wofully against him, that he dreaded to add two more to their cumulative weight. He was among the truest of men; but he had been balancing in his mind, much to its distress, whether his volunteering to tell these two fragments of truth, at this time, would not be tantamount to a piecing together of falsehood in the place of truth.

However, here was a model before him. He hesitated no longer. Addressing Mr. Grewgious, as one placed in authority by the revelation he had brought to bear on the mystery (and surpassingly Angular Mr. Grewgious became when he found himself in that unexpected position), Mr. Crisparkle bore his testimony to Mr. Jasper's strict sense of justice, and, expressing his absolute confidence in the complete clearance of his pupil from the least taint of suspicion, sooner or later, avowed that his confidence in that young gentleman had been formed, in spite of his confidential knowledge that his temper was of the hottest and fiercest, and that it was directly incensed against Mr. Jasper's nephew, by the circumstance of his romantically supposing himself to be enamoured of the same young lady. The sanguine reaction manifest in Mr. Jasper was proof even against this unlooked-for declaration. It turned him paler; but he repeated that he would cling to the hope he had derived from Mr. Grewgious; and that if no trace of his dear boy were found, leading to the dreadful inference that he had been made away with, he would cherish unto the last stretch of possibility the idea, that he might have absconded of his own wild will.

Now, it fell out that Mr. Crisparkle, going away from this conference still very uneasy in his mind, and very much troubled on behalf of the young man whom he held as a kind of prisoner in his own house, took a memorable night walk.

He walked to Cloisterham Weir.

He often did so, and consequently there was nothing remarkable in his footsteps tending that way. But the preoccupation of his mind so hindered him from planning any walk, or taking heed of the objects he passed, that his first consciousness of being near the Weir, was derived from the sound of the falling water close at hand.

'How did I come here!' was his first thought, as he stopped.

'Why did I come here!' was his second.

Then, he stood intently listening to the water. A familiar passage in his reading, about airy tongues that syllable men's names, rose so unbidden to his ear, that he put it from him with his hand, as if it were tangible.

It was starlight. The Weir was full two miles above the spot to which the young men had repaired to watch the storm. No search had been made up here, for the tide had been running strongly down, at that time of the night of Christmas Eve, and the likeliest places for the discovery of a body, if a fatal accident had happened under such circumstances, all lay--both when the tide ebbed, and when it flowed again--between that spot and the sea. The
water came over the Weir, with its usual sound on a cold starlight night, and little could be seen of it; yet Mr. Crisparkle had a strange idea that something unusual hung about the place.

He reasoned with himself: What was it? Where was it? Put it to the proof. Which sense did it address?

No sense reported anything unusual there. He listened again, and his sense of hearing again checked the water coming over the Weir, with its usual sound on a cold starlight night.

Knowing very well that the mystery with which his mind was occupied, might of itself give the place this haunted air, he strained those hawk’s eyes of his for the correction of his sight. He got closer to the Weir, and peered at its well-known posts and timbers. Nothing in the least unusual was remotely shadowed forth. But he resolved that he would come back early in the morning.

The Weir ran through his broken sleep, all night, and he was back again at sunrise. It was a bright frosty morning. The whole composition before him, when he stood where he had stood last night, was clearly discernible in its minutest details. He had surveyed it closely for some minutes, and was about to withdraw his eyes, when they were attracted keenly to one spot.

He turned his back upon the Weir, and looked far away at the sky, and at the earth, and then looked again at that one spot. It caught his sight again immediately, and he concentrated his vision upon it. He could not lose it now, though it was but such a speck in the landscape. It fascinated his sight. His hands began plucking off his coat. For it struck him that at that spot—a corner of the Weir—something glistened, which did not move and come over with the glistening water-drops, but remained stationary.

He assured himself of this, he threw off his clothes, he plunged into the icy water, and swam for the spot. Climbing the timbers, he took from them, caught among their interstices by its chain, a gold watch, bearing engraved upon its back E. D.

He brought the watch to the bank, swam to the Weir again, climbed it, and dived off. He knew every hole and corner of all the depths, and dived and dived and dived, until he could bear the cold no more. His notion was, that he would find the body; he only found a shirt-pin sticking in some mud and ooze.

With these discoveries he returned to Cloisterham, and, taking Neville Landless with him, went straight to the Mayor. Mr. Jasper was sent for; the watch and shirt-pin were identified, Neville was detained, and the wildest frenzy and fatuity of evil report rose against him. He was of that vindictive and violent nature, that but for his poor sister, who alone had influence over him, and out of whose sight he was never to be trusted, he would be in the daily commission of murder. Before coming to England he had caused to be whipped to death sundry ‘Natives’—nomadic persons, encamping now in Asia, now in Africa, now in the West Indies, and now at the North Pole—vaguely supposed in Cloisterham to be always black, always of great virtue, always calling themselves Me, and everybody else Massa or Missie (according to sex), and always reading tracts of the obscurest meaning, in broken English, but always accurately understanding them in the purest mother tongue. He had nearly brought Mrs. Crisparkle’s grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. (Those original expressions were Mr. Sapsea’s.) He had repeatedly said he would have Mr. Crisparkle’s life. He had repeatedly said he would have everybody’s life, and become in effect the last man. He had been brought down to Cloisterham, from London, by an eminent Philanthropist, and why? Because that Philanthropist had expressly declared: ‘I owe it to my fellow-creatures that he should be, in the words of BENTHAM, where he is the cause of the greatest danger to the smallest number.’

These dropping shots from the blunderbusses of blunderheadedness might not have hit him in a vital place. But he had to stand against a trained and well-directed fire of arms of precision too. He had notoriously threatened the lost young man, and had, according to the showing of his own faithful friend and tutor who strove so hard for him, a cause of bitter animosity (created by himself, and stated by himself), against that ill-starred fellow. He had armed himself with an offensive weapon for the fatal night, and he had gone off early in the morning, after making preparations for departure. He had been found with traces of blood on him; truly, they might have been wholly caused as he represented, but they might not, also. On a search-warrant being issued for the examination of his room, clothes, and so forth, it was discovered that he had destroyed all his papers, and rearranged all his possessions, on the very afternoon of the disappearance. The watch found at the Weir was challenged by the jeweller as one he had wound and set for Edwin Drood, at twenty minutes past two on that same afternoon; and it had run down, before being cast into the water; and it was the jeweller’s positive opinion that it had never been re-wound. This would justify the hypothesis that the watch was taken from him not long after he left Mr. Jasper’s house at midnight, in company with the last person seen with him, and that it had been thrown away after being retained some hours. Why thrown away? If he had been murdered, and so artfully disfigured, or concealed, or both, as that the murderer hoped identification to be impossible, except from something that he wore, assuredly the murderer would seek to remove from the body the most lasting, the best known, and the most easily recognisable, things upon it. Those things would be the watch and shirt-pin. As to his opportunities of casting them into the river; if he were the object of these suspicions, they were easy. For, he had been seen by many persons, wandering about on that side of the city—indeed
on all sides of it—in a miserable and seemingly half-distracted manner. As to the choice of the spot, obviously such criminating evidence had better take its chance of being found anywhere, rather than upon himself, or in his possession. Concerning the reconciliatory nature of the appointed meeting between the two young men, very little could be made of that in young Landless's favour; for it distinctly appeared that the meeting originated, not with him, but with Mr. Crisparkle, and that it had been urged on by Mr. Crisparkle; and who could say how unwillingly, or in what ill-conditioned mood, his enforced pupil had gone to it? The more his case was looked into, the weaker it became in every point. Even the broad suggestion that the lost young man had absconded, was rendered additionally improbable on the showing of the young lady from whom he had so lately parted; for, what did she say, with great earnestness and sorrow, when interrogated? That he had, expressly and enthusiastically, planned with her, that he would await the arrival of her guardian, Mr. Grewgious. And yet, be it observed, he disappeared before that gentleman appeared.

On the suspicions thus urged and supported, Neville was detained, and re-detained, and the search was pressed on every hand, and Jasper laboured night and day. But nothing more was found. No discovery being made, which proved the lost man to be dead, it at length became necessary to release the person suspected of having made away with him. Neville was set at large. Then, a consequence ensued which Mr. Crisparkle had too well foreseen. Neville must leave the place, for the place shunned him and cast him out. Even had it not been so, the dear old china shepherdess would have worried herself to death with fears for her son, and with general trepidation occasioned by their having such an inmate. Even had that not been so, the authority to which the Minor Canon deferred officially, would have settled the point.

'Mr. Crisparkle,' quoth the Dean, 'human justice may err, but it must act according to its lights. The days of taking sanctuary are past. This young man must not take sanctuary with us.'

'You mean that he must leave my house, sir?'

'Mr. Crisparkle,' returned the prudent Dean, 'I claim no authority in your house. I merely confer with you, on the painful necessity you find yourself under, of depriving this young man of the great advantages of your counsel and instruction.'

'It is very lamentable, sir,' Mr. Crisparkle represented.

'Very much so,' the Dean assented.

'And if it be a necessity--' Mr. Crisparkle faltered.

'As you unfortunately find it to be,' returned the Dean.

Mr. Crisparkle bowed submissively: 'It is hard to prejudge his case, sir, but I am sensible that--'

'Just so. Perfectly. As you say, Mr. Crisparkle,' interposed the Dean, nodding his head smoothly, 'there is nothing else to be done. No doubt, no doubt. There is no alternative, as your good sense has discovered.'

'I am entirely satisfied of his perfect innocence, sir, nevertheless.'

'We-e-ell!' said the Dean, in a more confidential tone, and slightly glancing around him, 'I would not say so, generally. Not generally. Enough of suspicion attaches to him to--no, I think I would not say so, generally.'

Mr. Crisparkle bowed again.

'It does not become us, perhaps,' pursued the Dean, 'to be partisans. Not partisans. We clergy keep our hearts warm and our heads cool, and we hold a judicious middle course.'

'I hope you do not object, sir, to my having stated in public, emphatically, that he will reappear here, whenever any new suspicion may be awakened, or any new circumstance may come to light in this extraordinary matter?'

'Not at all,' returned the Dean. 'And yet, do you know, I don't think,' with a very nice and neat emphasis on those two words: 'I DON'T THINK I would state it emphatically. State it? Ye-e-es! But emphatically? No-o-o. I THINK not. In point of fact, Mr. Crisparkle, keeping our hearts warm and our heads cool, we clergy need do nothing emphatically.'

So Minor Canon Row knew Neville Landless no more; and he went whithersoever he would, or could, with a blight upon his name and fame.

It was not until then that John Jasper silently resumed his place in the choir. Haggard and red-eyed, his hopes plainly had deserted him, his sanguine mood was gone, and all his worst misgivings had come back. A day or two afterwards, while unrobing, he took his Diary from a pocket of his coat, turned the leaves, and with an impressive look, and without one spoken word, handed this entry to Mr. Crisparkle to read:

'My dear boy is murdered. The discovery of the watch and shirt-pin convinces me that he was murdered that night, and that his jewellery was taken from him to prevent identification by its means. All the delusive hopes I had founded on his separation from his betrothed wife, I give to the winds. They perish before this fatal discovery. I now swear, and record the oath on this page, That I nevermore will discuss this mystery with any human creature until I hold the clue to it in my hand. That I never will relax in my secrecy or in my search. That I will fasten the crime of the murder of my dear dead boy upon the murderer. And, That I devote myself to his destruction.'
CHAPTER XVII--PHILANTHROPY, PROFESSIONAL AND UNPROFESSIONAL

Full half a year had come and gone, and Mr. Crisparkle sat in a waiting-room in the London chief offices of the Haven of Philanthropy, until he could have audience of Mr. Honeythunder.

In his college days of athletic exercises, Mr. Crisparkle had known professors of the Noble Art of fisticuffs, and had attended two or three of their gloved gatherings. He had now an opportunity of observing that as to the phrenological formation of the backs of their heads, the Professing Philanthropists were uncommonly like the Pugilists. In the development of all those organs which constitute, or attend, a propensity to 'pitch into' your fellow-creatures, the Philanthropists were remarkably favoured. There were several Professors passing in and out, with exactly the aggressive air upon them of being ready for a turn-up with any Novice who might happen to be on hand, that Mr. Crisparkle well remembered in the circles of the Fancy. Preparations were in progress for a moral little Mill somewhere on the rural circuit, and other Professors were backing this or that Heavy-Weight as good for such or such speech-making hits, so very much after the manner of the sporting publicans, that the intended Resolutions might have been Rounds. In an official manager of these displays much celebrated for his platform tactics, Mr. Crisparkle recognised (in a suit of black) the counterpart of a deceased benefactor of his species, an eminent public character, once known to fame as Frosty-faced Fogo, who in days of yore superintended the formation of the magic circle with the ropes and stakes. There were only three conditions of resemblance wanting between these Professors and those. Firstly, the Philanthropists were in very bad training: much too fleshy, and presenting, both in face and figure, a superabundance of what is known to Pugilistic Experts as Suet Pudding. Secondly, the Philanthropists had not the good temper of the Pugilists, and used worse language. Thirdly, their fighting code stood in great need of revision, as empowering them not only to bore their man to the ropes, but to bore him to the confines of distraction; also to hit him when he was down, hit him anywhere and anyhow, kick him, stamp upon him, gouge him, and maul him behind his back without mercy. In these last particulars the Professors of the Noble Art were much nobler than the Professors of Philanthropy.

Mr. Crisparkle was so completely lost in musing on these similarities and dissimilarities, at the same time watching the crowd which came and went by, always, as it seemed, on errands of antagonistically snatching something from somebody, and never giving anything to anybody, that his name was called before he heard it. On his at length responding, he was shown by a miserably shabby and underpaid stipendiary Philanthropist (who could hardly have done worse if he had taken service with a declared enemy of the human race) to Mr. Honeythunder's room.

'Sir,' said Mr. Honeythunder, in his tremendous voice, like a schoolmaster issuing orders to a boy of whom he had a bad opinion, 'sit down.'

Mr. Crisparkle seated himself.

Mr. Honeythunder having signed the remaining few score of a few thousand circulars, calling upon a corresponding number of families without means to come forward, stump up instantly, and be Philanthropists, or go to the Devil, another shabby stipendiary Philanthropist (highly disinterested, if in earnest) gathered these into a basket and walked off with them.

'Now, Mr. Crisparkle,' said Mr. Honeythunder, turning his chair half round towards him when they were alone, and squaring his arms with his hands on his knees, and his brows knitted, as if he added, I am going to make short work of YOU: 'Now, Mr. Crisparkle, we entertain different views, you and I, sir, of the sanctity of human life.'

'Do we?' returned the Minor Canon.

'We do, sir?'

'Might I ask you,' said the Minor Canon: 'what are your views on that subject?'

'That human life is a thing to be held sacred, sir.'

'Might I ask you,' pursued the Minor Canon as before: 'what you suppose to be my views on that subject?'

'By George, sir!' returned the Philanthropist, squaring his arms still more, as he frowned on Mr. Crisparkle: 'they are best known to yourself.'

'Readily admitted. But you began by saying that we took different views, you know. Therefore (or you could not say so) you must have set up some views as mine. Pray, what views HAVE you set up as mine?'

'Here is a man--and a young man,' said Mr. Honeythunder, as if that made the matter infinitely worse, and he could have easily borne the loss of an old one, 'swept off the face of the earth by a deed of violence. What do you call that?'

'Murder,' said the Minor Canon.

'What do you call the doer of that deed, sir?'

'A murderer,' said the Minor Canon.

'I am glad to hear you admit so much, sir,' retorted Mr. Honeythunder, in his most offensive manner; 'and I candidly tell you that I didn't expect it.' Here he lowered heavily at Mr. Crisparkle again.
'Be so good as to explain what you mean by those very unjustifiable expressions.'
'I don't sit here, sir,' returned the Philanthropist, raising his voice to a roar, 'to be browbeaten.'
'As the only other person present, no one can possibly know that better than I do,' returned the Minor Canon very quietly. 'But I interrupt your explanation.'
'Murder!' proceeded Mr. Honeythunder, in a kind of boisterous reverie, with his platform folding of his arms, and his platform nod of abhorrent reflection after each short sentiment of a word. 'Bloodshed! Abel! Cain! I hold no terms with Cain. I repudiate with a shudder the red hand when it is offered me.'
Instead of instantly leaping into his chair and cheering himself hoarse, as the Brotherhood in public meeting assembled would infallibly have done on this cue, Mr. Crisparkle merely reversed the quiet crossing of his legs, and said mildly: 'Don't let me interrupt your explanation--when you begin it.'
The Commandments say, no murder. NO murder, sir!' proceeded Mr. Honeythunder, platformally pausing as if he took Mr. Crisparkle to task for having distinctly asserted that they said: You may do a little murder, and then leave off.
'And they also say, you shall bear no false witness,' observed Mr. Crisparkle. 'Enough!' bellowed Mr. Honeythunder, with a solemnity and severity that would have brought the house down at a meeting, 'E-e-nough! My late wards being now of age, and I being released from a trust which I cannot contemplate without a thrill of horror, there are the accounts which you have undertaken to accept on their behalf, and there is a statement of the balance which you have undertaken to receive, and which you cannot receive too soon. And let me tell you, sir, I wish that, as a man and a Minor Canon, you were better employed,' with a nod. 'Better employed,' with another nod. 'Bet-ter em-ployed!' with another and the three nods added up.
Mr. Crisparkle rose; a little heated in the face, but with perfect command of himself.
'Mr. Honeythunder,' he said, taking up the papers referred to: 'my being better or worse employed than I am at present is a matter of taste and opinion. You might think me better employed in enrolling myself a member of your Society.'
'Ay, indeed, sir!' retorted Mr. Honeythunder, shaking his head in a threatening manner. 'It would have been better for you if you had done that long ago!
'I think otherwise.'
'Or,' said Mr. Honeythunder, shaking his head again, 'I might think one of your profession better employed in devoting himself to the discovery and punishment of guilt than in leaving that duty to be undertaken by a layman.'
'I may regard my profession from a point of view which teaches me that its first duty is towards those who are in necessity and tribulation, who are desolate and oppressed,' said Mr. Crisparkle. 'However, as I have quite clearly satisfied myself that it is no part of my profession to make professions, I say no more of that. But I owe it to Mr. Neville, and to Mr. Neville's sister (and in a much lower degree to myself), to say to you that I KNOW I was in the full possession and understanding of Mr. Neville's mind and heart at the time of this occurrence; and that, without in the least colouring or concealing what was to be deplored in him and required to be corrected, I feel certain that his tale is true. Feeling that certainty, I befriend him. As long as that certainty shall last, I will befriend him. And if any consideration could shake me in this resolve, I should be so ashamed of myself for my meanness, that no man's good opinion--no, nor no woman's--so gained, could compensate me for the loss of my own.'

Good fellow! manly fellow! And he was so modest, too. There was no more self-assertion in the Minor Canon than in the schoolboy who had stood in the breezy playing-fields keeping a wicket. He was simply and staunchly true to his duty alike in the large case and in the small. So all true souls ever are. So every true soul ever was, ever is, and ever will be. There is nothing little to the really great in spirit.
'Then who do you make out did the deed?' asked Mr. Honeythunder, turning on him abruptly.
'Heaven forbid,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'that in my desire to clear one man I should lightly criminate another! I accuse no one,'
'Tcha!' ejaculated Mr. Honeythunder with great disgust; for this was by no means the principle on which the Philanthropic Brotherhood usually proceeded. 'And, sir, you are not a disinterested witness, we must bear in mind.'
'How am I an interested one?' inquired Mr. Crisparkle, smiling innocently, at a loss to imagine.
'There was a certain stipend, sir, paid to you for your pupil, which may have warped your judgment a bit,' said Mr. Honeythunder, coarsely.
'Perhaps I expect to retain it still?' Mr. Crisparkle returned, enlightened; 'do you mean that too?'
'Well, sir,' returned the professional Philanthropist, getting up and thrusting his hands down into his trousers-pockets, 'I don't go about measuring people for caps. If people find I have any about me that fit 'em, they can put 'em on and wear 'em, if they like. That's their look out: not mine.'
Mr. Crisparkle eyed him with a just indignation, and took him to task thus:
'Mr. Honeythunder, I hoped when I came in here that I might be under no necessity of commenting on the
introduction of platform manners or platform manoeuvres among the decent forbearances of private life. But you have given me such a specimen of both, that I should be a fit subject for both if I remained silent respecting them. They are detestable.'

'They don't suit YOU, I dare say, sir.'

'They are,' repeated Mr. Crisparkle, without noticing the interruption, 'detestable. They violate equally the justice that should belong to Christians, and the restraints that should belong to gentlemen. You assume a great crime to have been committed by one whom I, acquainted with the attendant circumstances, and having numerous reasons on my side, devoutly believe to be innocent of it. Because I differ from you on that vital point, what is your platform resource? Instantly to turn upon me, charging that I have no sense of the enormity of the crime itself, but am its aider and abettor! So, another time--taking me as representing your opponent in other cases--you set up a platform credulity; a moved and seconded and carried-unanimously profession of faith in some ridiculous delusion or mischievous imposition. I decline to believe it, and you fall back upon your platform resource of proclaiming that I believe nothing; that because I will not bow down to a false God of your making, I deny the true God! Another time you make the platform discovery that War is a calamity, and you propose to abolish it by a string of twisted resolutions tossed into the air like the tail of a kite. I do not admit the discovery to be yours in the least, and I have not a grain of faith in your remedy. Again, your platform resource of representing me as revelling in the horrors of a battle-field like a fiend incarnate! Another time, in another of your undiscriminating platform rushes, you would punish the sober for the drunken. I claim consideration for the comfort, convenience, and refreshment of the sober; and you presently make platform proclamation that I have a depraved desire to turn Heaven's creatures into swine and wild beasts! In all such cases your movers, and your seconders, and your supporters --your regular Professors of all degrees, run amuck like so many mad Malays; habitually attributing the lowest and basest motives with the utmost recklessness (let me call your attention to a recent instance in yourself for which you should blush), and quoting figures which you know to be as wilfully onesided as a statement of any complicated account that should be all Creditor side and no Debtor, or all Debtor side and no Creditor. Therefore it is, Mr. Honeythunder, that I consider the platform a sufficiently bad example and a sufficiently bad school, even in public life; but hold that, carried into private life, it becomes an unendurable nuisance.'

'These are strong words, sir!' exclaimed the Philanthropist.

'I hope so,' said Mr. Crisparkle. 'Good morning.'

He walked out of the Haven at a great rate, but soon fell into his regular brisk pace, and soon had a smile upon his face as he went along, wondering what the china shepherdess would have said if she had seen him pounding Mr. Honeythunder in the late little lively affair. For Mr. Crisparkle had just enough of harmless vanity to hope that he had hit hard, and to glow with the belief that he had trimmed the Philanthropic Jacket pretty handsomely.

He took himself to Staple Inn, but not to P. J. T. and Mr. Grewgious. Full many a creaking stair he climbed before he reached some attic rooms in a corner, turned the latch of their unbolted door, and stood beside the table of Neville Landless.

An air of retreat and solitude hung about the rooms and about their inhabitant. He was much worn, and so were they. Their sloping ceilings, cumbrous rusty locks and grates, and heavy wooden bins and beams, slowly mouldering withal, had a prisonous look, and he had the haggard face of a prisoner. Yet the sunlight shone in at the ugly garret-window, which had a penthouse to itself thrust out among the tiles; and on the cracked and smoke-blackened parapet beyond, some of the deluded sparrows of the place rheumatically hopped, like little feathered cripples who had left their crutches in their nests; and there was a play of living leaves at hand that changed the air, and made an imperfect sort of music in it that would have been melody in the country.

The rooms were sparely furnished, but with good store of books. Everything expressed the abode of a poor student. That Mr. Crisparkle had been either chooser, lender, or donor of the books, or that he combined the three characters, might have been easily seen in the friendly beam of his eyes upon them as he entered.

'How goes it, Neville?'

'I am in good heart, Mr. Crisparkle, and working away.'

'I wish your eyes were not quite so large and not quite so bright,' said the Minor Canon, slowly releasing the hand he had taken in his.

'Rally, rally!' urged the other, in a stimulating tone. 'Fight for it, Neville!' 'If I were dying, I feel as if a word from you would rally me; if my pulse had stopped, I feel as if your touch would make it beat again,' said Neville. 'But I HAVE rallied, and am doing famously.'

Mr. Crisparkle turned him with his face a little more towards the light.

'I want to see a ruddier touch here, Neville,' he said, indicating his own healthy cheek by way of pattern. 'I want
'more sun to shine upon you.'

Neville drooped suddenly, as he replied in a lowered voice: 'I am not hardy enough for that, yet. I may become so, but I cannot bear it yet. If you had gone through those Cloisterham streets as I did; if you had seen, as I did, those averted eyes, and the better sort of people silently giving me too much room to pass, that I might not touch them or come near them, you wouldn't think it quite unreasonable that I cannot go about in the daylight.'

'My poor fellow!' said the Minor Canon, in a tone so purely sympathetic that the young man caught his hand, 'I never said it was unreasonable; never thought so. But I should like you to do it.'

'And that would give me the strongest motive to do it. But I cannot yet. I cannot persuade myself that the eyes of even the stream of strangers I pass in this vast city look at me without suspicion. I feel marked and tainted, even when I go out—as I do only—at night. But the darkness covers me then, and I take courage from it.'

Mr. Crisparkle laid a hand upon his shoulder, and stood looking down at him.

'If I could have changed my name,' said Neville, 'I would have done so. But as you wisely pointed out to me, I can't do that, for it would look like guilt. If I could have gone to some distant place, I might have found relief in that, but the thing is not to be thought of, for the same reason. Hiding and escaping would be the construction in either case. It seems a little hard to be so tied to a stake, and innocent; but I don't complain.'

'And you must expect no miracle to help you, Neville,' said Mr. Crisparkle, compassionately.

'No, sir, I know that. The ordinary fulness of time and circumstances is all I have to trust to.'

'It will right you at last, Neville.'

'So I believe, and I hope I may live to know it.'

But perceiving that the despondent mood into which he was falling cast a shadow on the Minor Canon, and (it may be) feeling that the broad hand upon his shoulder was not then quite as steady as its own natural strength had rendered it when it first touched him just now, he brightened and said:

'Excellent circumstances for study, anyhow! and you know, Mr. Crisparkle, what need I have of study in all ways. Not to mention that you have advised me to study for the difficult profession of the law, specially, and that of course I am guiding myself by the advice of such a friend and helper. Such a good friend and helper!'

He took the fortifying hand from his shoulder, and kissed it. Mr. Crisparkle beamed at the books, but not so brightly as when he had entered.

'I gather from your silence on the subject that my late guardian is adverse, Mr. Crisparkle?'

The Minor Canon answered: 'Your late guardian is a—a most unreasonable person, and it signifies nothing to any reasonable person whether he is ADverse, PERverse, or the REverse.'

'Well for me that I have enough with economy to live upon,' sighed Neville, half wearily and half cheerily, 'while I wait to be learned, and wait to be righted! Else I might have proved the proverb, that while the grass grows, the steed starves!'

He opened some books as he said it, and was soon immersed in their interleaved and annotated passages; while Mr. Crisparkle sat beside him, expounding, correcting, and advising. The Minor Canon's Cathedral duties made these visits of his difficult to accomplish, and only to be compassed at intervals of many weeks. But they were as serviceable as they were precious to Neville Landless.

When they had got through such studies as they had in hand, they stood leaning on the window-sill, and looking down upon the patch of garden. 'Next week,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'you will cease to be alone, and will have a devoted companion.'

'And yet,' returned Neville, 'this seems an uncongenial place to bring my sister to.'

'I don't think so,' said the Minor Canon. 'There is duty to be done here; and there are womanly feeling, sense, and courage wanted here.'

'I meant,' explained Neville, 'that the surroundings are so dull and unwomanly, and that Helena can have no suitable friend or society here.'

'You have only to remember,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'that you are here yourself, and that she has to draw you into the sunlight.'

They were silent for a little while, and then Mr. Crisparkle began anew.

'When we first spoke together, Neville, you told me that your sister had risen out of the disadvantages of your past lives as superior to you as the tower of Cloisterham Cathedral is higher than the chimneys of Minor Canon Corner. Do you remember that?'

'Right well!'

'I was inclined to think it at the time an enthusiastic flight. No matter what I think it now. What I would emphasise is, that under the head of Pride your sister is a great and opportune example to you.'

'Under ALL heads that are included in the composition of a fine character, she is.'

'Say so; but take this one. Your sister has learnt how to govern what is proud in her nature. She can dominate it
even when it is wounded through her sympathy with you. No doubt she has suffered deeply in those same streets where you suffered deeply. No doubt her life is darkened by the cloud that darkens yours. But bending her pride into a grand composure that is not haughty or aggressive, but is a sustained confidence in you and in the truth, she has won her way through those streets until she passes along them as high in the general respect as any one who treads them. Every day and hour of her life since Edwin Drood's disappearance, she has faced malignity and folly--for you--as only a brave nature well directed can. So it will be with her to the end. Another and weaker kind of pride might sink broken-hearted, but never such a pride as hers: which knows no shrinking, and can get no mastery over her.'

The pale cheek beside him flushed under the comparison, and the hint implied in it.

'I will do all I can to imitate her,' said Neville.

'Do so, and be a truly brave man, as she is a truly brave woman,' answered Mr. Crisparkle stoutly. 'It is growing dark. Will you go my way with me, when it is quite dark? Mind! it is not I who wait for darkness.'

Neville replied, that he would accompany him directly. But Mr. Crisparkle said he had a moment's call to make on Mr. Grewgious as an act of courtesy, and would run across to that gentleman's chambers, and rejoin Neville on his own doorstep, if he would come down there to meet him.

Mr. Grewgious, bolt upright as usual, sat taking his wine in the dusk at his open window; his wineglass and decanter on the round table at his elbow; himself and his legs on the window-seat; only one hinge in his whole body, like a bootjack.

'How do you do, reverend sir?' said Mr. Grewgious, with abundant offers of hospitality, which were as cordially declined as made. 'And how is your charge getting on over the way in the set that I had the pleasure of recommending to you as vacant and eligible?'

Mr. Crisparkle replied suitably.

'I am glad you approve of them,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'because I entertain a sort of fancy for having him under my eye.'

As Mr. Grewgious had to turn his eye up considerably before he could see the chambers, the phrase was to be taken figuratively and not literally.

'And how did you leave Mr. Jasper, reverend sir?' said Mr. Grewgious. Mr. Crisparkle had left him pretty well.

'And where did you leave Mr. Jasper, reverend sir?' Mr. Crisparkle had left him at Cloisterham.

'And when did you leave Mr. Jasper, reverend sir?' That morning.

'Umps!' said Mr. Grewgious. 'He didn't say he was coming, perhaps?'

'Coming where?'

'Anywhere, for instance?' said Mr. Grewgious.

'No.'

'Because here he is,' said Mr. Grewgious, who had asked all these questions, with his preoccupied glance directed out at window. 'And he don't look agreeable, does he?'

Mr. Crisparkle was craning towards the window, when Mr. Grewgious added:

'If you will kindly step round here behind me, in the gloom of the room, and will cast your eye at the second-floor landing window in yonder house, I think you will hardly fail to see a slinking individual in whom I recognise our local friend.'

'You are right!' cried Mr. Crisparkle.

'Umps!' said Mr. Grewgious. Then he added, turning his face so abruptly that his head nearly came into collision with Mr. Crisparkle's: 'what should you say that our local friend was up to?'

The last passage he had been shown in the Diary returned on Mr. Crisparkle's mind with the force of a strong recoil, and he asked Mr. Grewgious if he thought it possible that Neville was to be harassed by the keeping of a watch upon him?

'A watch?' repeated Mr. Grewgious musingly. 'Ay!'

'Which would not only of itself haunt and torture his life,' said Mr. Crisparkle warmly, 'but would expose him to the torment of a perpetually reviving suspicion, whatever he might do, or wherever he might go.'

'Ay!' said Mr. Grewgious musingly still. 'Do I see him waiting for you?'

'No doubt you do.'

'Then WOULD you have the goodness to excuse my getting up to see you out, and to go out to join him, and to go the way that you were going, and to take no notice of our local friend?' said Mr. Grewgious. 'I entertain a sort of fancy for having HIM under my eye to-night, do you know?'

Mr. Crisparkle, with a significant need complied; and rejoining Neville, went away with him. They dined together, and parted at the yet unfinished and undeveloped railway station: Mr. Crisparkle to get home; Neville to walk the streets, cross the bridges, make a wide round of the city in the friendly darkness, and tire himself out.
It was midnight when he returned from his solitary expedition and climbed his staircase. The night was hot, and the windows of the staircase were all wide open. Coming to the top, it gave him a passing chill of surprise (there being no rooms but his up there) to find a stranger sitting on the window-sill, more after the manner of a venturesome glazier than an amateur ordinarily careful of his neck; in fact, so much more outside the window than inside, as to suggest the thought that he must have come up by the water-spool instead of the stairs.

The stranger said nothing until Neville put his key in his door; then, seeming to make sure of his identity from the action, he spoke:

'I beg your pardon,' he said, coming from the window with a frank and smiling air, and a prepossessing address; 'the beans.'

Neville was quite at a loss.

'Runners,' said the visitor. 'Scarlet. Next door at the back.'

'O,' returned Neville. 'And the mignonette and wall-flower?'

'The same,' said the visitor.

'Pray walk in.'

'Thank you.'

Neville lighted his candles, and the visitor sat down. A handsome gentleman, with a young face, but with an older figure in its robustness and its breadth of shoulder; say a man of eight-and-twenty, or at the utmost thirty; so extremely sunburnt that the contrast between his brown visage and the white forehead shaded out of doors by his hat, and the glimpses of white throat below the neckerchief, would have been almost ludicrous but for his broad temples, bright blue eyes, clustering brown hair, and laughing teeth.

'I have noticed,' said he; '--my name is Tartar.'

Neville inclined his head.

'I have noticed (excuse me) that you shut yourself up a good deal, and that you seem to like my garden aloft here. If you would like a little more of it, I could throw out a few lines and stays between my windows and yours, which the runners would take to directly. And I have some boxes, both of mignonette and wall-flower, that I could shove on along the gutter (with a boathook I have by me) to your windows, and draw back again when they wanted watering or gardening, and shove on again when they were ship-shape; so that they would cause you no trouble. I couldn't take this liberty without asking your permission, so I venture to ask it. Tartar, corresponding set, next door.'

'You are very kind.'

'Not at all. I ought to apologise for looking in so late. But having noticed (excuse me) that you generally walk out at night, I thought I should inconvenience you least by awaiting your return. I am always afraid of inconveniencing busy men, being an idle man.'

'I should not have thought so, from your appearance.'

'No? I take it as a compliment. In fact, I was bred in the Royal Navy, and was First Lieutenant when I quitted it. But, an uncle disappointed in the service leaving me his property on condition that I left the Navy, I accepted the fortune, and resigned my commission.'

'Lately, I presume?'

'Well, I had had twelve or fifteen years of knocking about first. I came here some nine months before you; I had had one crop before you came. I chose this place, because, having served last in a little corvette, I knew I should feel more at home where I had a constant opportunity of knocking my head against the ceiling. Besides, it would never do for a man who had been aboard ship from his boyhood to turn luxurious all at once. Besides, again; having been accustomed to a very short allowance of land all my life, I thought I'd feel my way to the command of a landed estate, by beginning in boxes.'

Whimsically as this was said, there was a touch of merry earnestness in it that made it doubly whimsical.

'However,' said the Lieutenant, 'I have talked quite enough about myself. It is not my way, I hope; it has merely been to present myself to you naturally. If you will allow me to take the liberty I have described, it will be a charity, for it will give me something more to do. And you are not to suppose that it will entail any interruption or intrusion on you, for that is far from my intention.'

Neville replied that he was greatly obliged, and that he thankfully accepted the kind proposal.

'I am very glad to take your windows in tow,' said the Lieutenant. 'From what I have seen of you when I have been gardening at mine, and you have been looking on, I have thought you (excuse me) rather too studious and delicate. May I ask, is your health at all affected?'

'I have undergone some mental distress,' said Neville, confused, 'which has stood me in the stead of illness.'

'Pardon me,' said Mr. Tartar.

With the greatest delicacy he shifted his ground to the windows again, and asked if he could look at one of them. On Neville's opening it, he immediately sprang out, as if he were going aloft with a whole watch in an emergency,
and were setting a bright example.

'For Heaven's sake,' cried Neville, 'don't do that! Where are you going Mr. Tartar? You'll be dashed to pieces!'

'All well!' said the Lieutenant, coolly looking about him on the housetop. 'All taut and trim here. Those lines and stays shall be rigged before you turn out in the morning. May I take this short cut home, and say good-night?'

'Mr. Tartar!' urged Neville. 'Pray! It makes me giddy to see you!'

But Mr. Tartar, with a wave of his hand and the deftness of a cat, had already dipped through his scuttle of scarlet runners without breaking a leaf, and 'gone below.'

Mr. Grewgious, his bedroom window-blind held aside with his hand, happened at the moment to have Neville's chambers under his eye for the last time that night. Fortunately his eye was on the front of the house and not the back, or this remarkable appearance and disappearance might have broken his rest as a phenomenon. But Mr. Grewgious seeing nothing there, not even a light in the windows, his gaze wandered from the windows to the stars, as if he would have read in them something that was hidden from him. Many of us would, if we could; but none of us so much as know our letters in the stars yet—or seem likely to do it, in this state of existence—and few languages can be read until their alphabets are mastered.

CHAPTER XVIII--A SETTLER IN CLOISTERHAM

At about this time a stranger appeared in Cloisterham; a white-haired personage, with black eyebrows. Being buttoned up in a tightish blue surtout, with a buff waistcoat and gray trousers, he had something of a military air, but he announced himself at the Crozier (the orthodox hotel, where he put up with a portmanteau) as an idle dog who lived upon his means; and he farther announced that he had a mind to take a lodging in the picturesque old city for a month or two, with a view of settling down there altogether. Both announcements were made in the coffee-room of the Crozier, to all whom it might or might not concern, by the stranger as he stood with his back to the empty fireplace, waiting for his fried sole, veal cutlet, and pint of sherry. And the waiter (business being chronically slack at the Crozier) represented all whom it might or might not concern, and absorbed the whole of the information.

This gentleman's white head was unusually large, and his shock of white hair was unusually thick and ample. 'I suppose, waiter,' he said, shaking his shock of hair, as a Newfoundland dog might shake his before sitting down to dinner, 'that a fair lodging for a single buffer might be found in these parts, eh?'

The waiter had no doubt of it.

'Something old,' said the gentleman. 'Take my hat down for a moment from that peg, will you? No, I don't want it; look into it. What do you see written there?'

The waiter read: 'Datchery.'

'Now you know my name,' said the gentleman; 'Dick Datchery. Hang it up again. I was saying something old is what I should prefer, something odd and out of the way; something venerable, architectural, and inconvenient.'

'We have a good choice of inconvenient lodgings in the town, sir, I think,' replied the waiter, with modest confidence in its resources that way; 'indeed, I have no doubt that we could suit you that far, however particular you might be. But a architectural lodging!' That seemed to trouble the waiter's head, and he shook it.

'Anything Cathedraly, now,' Mr. Datchery suggested.

'Mr. Tope,' said the waiter, brightening, as he rubbed his chin with his hand, 'would be the likeliest party to inform in that line.'

'Who is Mr. Tope?' inquired Dick Datchery.

The waiter explained that he was the Verger, and that Mrs. Tope had indeed once upon a time let lodgings herself or offered to let them; but that as nobody had ever taken them, Mrs. Tope's window-bill, long a Cloisterham Institution, had disappeared; probably had tumbled down one day, and never been put up again.

'I'll call on Mrs. Tope,' said Mr. Datchery, 'after dinner.'

So when he had done his dinner, he was duly directed to the spot, and sallied out for it. But the Crozier being an hotel of a most retiring disposition, and the waiter's directions being fatally precise, he soon became bewildered, and went boggling about and about the Cathedral Tower, whenever he could catch a glimpse of it, with a general impression on his mind that Mrs. Tope's was somewhere very near it, and that, like the children in the game of hot boiled beans and very good butter, he was warm in his search when he saw the Tower, and cold when he didn't see it.

He was getting very cold indeed when he came upon a fragment of burial-ground in which an unhappy sheep was grazing. Unhappy, because a hideous small boy was stoning it through the railings, and had already lamed it in one leg, and was much excited by the benevolent sportsmanlike purpose of breaking its other three legs, and bringing it down.

''It 'im agin!' cried the boy, as the poor creature leaped; 'and made a dint in his wool.'

'Let him be!' said Mr. Datchery. 'Don't you see you have lamed him?'

'Yer lie,' returned the sportsman. 'E went and lamed insself. I see 'im do it, and I giv' 'im a shy as a Widdy-
warning to 'im not to go a-bruisin' 'is master's mutton any more.'

'Come here.'

'I won't; I'll come when yer can ketch me.'

'Stay there then, and show me which is Mr. Tope's.'

'Ow can I stay here and show you which is Topeseses, when Topeseses is t'other side the Kinfreederal, and over the crossings, and round ever so many comers? Stoo-pid! Ya-a-ah!'

>Show me where it is, and I'll give you something.'

'Come on, then.'

This brisk dialogue concluded, the boy led the way, and by-and-by stopped at some distance from an arched passage, pointing.

'Lookie yonder. You see that there winder and door?'

'That's Tope's?'

'Yer lie; it ain't. That's Jarssper's.'

'Indeed?' said Mr. Datchery, with a second look of some interest.

'Yes, and I ain't a-goin' no nearer 'IM, I tell yer.'

'Why not?'

'Cos I ain't a-goin' to be lifted off my legs and 'ave my braces bust and be choked; not if I knows it, and not by 'Im. Wait till I set a jolly good flint a-flyin' at the back o' 'is jolly old 'ed some day! Now look t'other side the harch; not the side where Jarssper's door is; t'other side.'

'I see.'

'A little way in, o' that side, there's a low door, down two steps. That's Topeseses with 'is name on a hoval plate.'

'Good. See here,' said Mr. Datchery, producing a shilling. 'You owe me half of this.'

'Yer lie! I don't owe yer nothing; I never seen yer.'

'I tell you you owe me half of this, because I have no sixpence in my pocket. So the next time you meet me you shall do something else for me, to pay me.'

'All right, give us 'old.'

'What is your name, and where do you live?'

'Deputy. Travellers' Twopenny, 'cross the green.'

The boy instantly darted off with the shilling, lest Mr. Datchery should repent, but stopped at a safe distance, on the happy chance of his being uneasy in his mind about it, to goad him with a demon dance expressive of its irrevocability.

Mr. Datchery, taking off his hat to give that shock of white hair of his another shake, seemed quite resigned, and betook himself whither he had been directed.

Mr. Tope's official dwelling, communicating by an upper stair with Mr. Jasper's (hence Mrs. Tope's attendance on that gentleman), was of very modest proportions, and partook of the character of a cool dungeon. Its ancient walls were massive, and its rooms rather seemed to have been dug out of them, than to have been designed beforehand with any reference to them. The main door opened at once on a chamber of no describable shape, with a groined roof, which in its turn opened on another chamber of no describable shape, with another groined roof: their windows small, and in the thickness of the walls. These two chambers, close as to their atmosphere, and swarthy as to their illumination by natural light, were the apartments which Mrs. Tope had so long offered to an unappreciative city. Mr. Datchery, however, was more appreciative. He found that if he sat with the main door open he would enjoy the passing society of all comers to and fro by the gateway, and would have light enough. He found that if Mr. and Mrs. Tope, living overhead, used for their own egress and ingress a little side stair that came plump into the Precincts by a door opening outward, to the surprise and inconvenience of a limited public of pedestrians in a narrow way, he would be alone, as in a separate residence. He found the rent moderate, and everything as quaintly inconvenient as he could desire. He agreed, therefore, to take the lodging then and there, and money down, possession to be had next evening, on condition that reference was permitted him to Mr. Jasper as occupying the gatehouse, of which on the other side of the gateway, the Verger's hole-in-the-wall was an appanage or subsidiary part.

The poor dear gentleman was very solitary and very sad, Mrs. Tope said, but she had no doubt he would 'speak for her.' Perhaps Mr. Datchery had heard something of what had occurred there last winter?

Mr. Datchery had as confused a knowledge of the event in question, on trying to recall it, as he well could have. He begged Mrs. Tope's pardon when she found it incumbent on her to correct him in every detail of his summary of the facts, but pledged that he was merely a single buffer getting through life upon his means as idly as he could, and that so many people were so constantly making away with so many other people, as to render it difficult for a buffer of an easy temper to preserve the circumstances of the several cases unmixed in his mind.
Mr. Jasper proving willing to speak for Mrs. Tope, Mr. Datchery, who had sent up his card, was invited to ascend the postern staircase. The Mayor was there, Mr. Tope said; but he was not to be regarded in the light of company, as he and Mr. Jasper were great friends.

'I beg pardon,' said Mr. Datchery, making a leg with his hat under his arm, as he addressed himself equally to both gentlemen; 'a selfish precaution on my part, and not personally interesting to anybody but myself. But as a buffer living on his means, and having an idea of doing it in this lovely place in peace and quiet, for remaining span of life, I beg to ask if the Tope family are quite respectable?'

Mr. Jasper could answer for that without the slightest hesitation.

'That is enough, sir,' said Mr. Datchery.

'My friend the Mayor,' added Mr. Jasper, presenting Mr. Datchery with a courtly motion of his hand towards that potentate; 'whose recommendation is actually much more important to a stranger than that of an obscure person like myself, will testify in their behalf, I am sure.'

'The Worshipful the Mayor,' said Mr. Datchery, with a low bow, 'places me under an infinite obligation.'

'Very good people, sir, Mr. and Mrs. Tope,' said Mr. Sapsea, with condescension. 'Very good opinions. Very well behaved. Very respectful. Much approved by the Dean and Chapter.'

'The Worshipful the Mayor gives them a character,' said Mr. Datchery, 'of which they may indeed be proud. I would ask His Honour (if I might be permitted) whether there are not many objects of great interest in the city which is under his beneficent sway?'

'We are, sir,' returned Mr. Sapsea, 'an ancient city, and an ecclesiastical city. We are a constitutional city, as it becomes such a city to be, and we uphold and maintain our glorious privileges.'

'His Honour,' said Mr. Datchery, bowing, 'inspires me with a desire to know more of the city, and confirms me in my inclination to end my days in the city.'

'Retired from the Army, sir?' suggested Mr. Sapsea.

'His Honour the Mayor does me too much credit,' returned Mr. Datchery.

'Navy, sir?' suggested Mr. Sapsea.

'Again,' repeated Mr. Datchery, 'His Honour the Mayor does me too much credit.'

'Diplomacy is a fine profession,' said Mr. Sapsea, as a general remark.

'There, I confess, His Honour the Mayor is too many for me,' said Mr. Datchery, with an ingenious smile and bow; 'even a diplomatic bird must fall to such a gun.'

Now this was very soothing. Here was a gentleman of a great, not to say a grand, address, accustomed to rank and dignity, really setting a fine example how to behave to a Mayor. There was something in that third-person style of being spoken to, that Mr. Sapsea found particularly recognisant of his merits and position.

'But I crave pardon,' said Mr. Datchery. 'His Honour the Mayor will bear with me, if for a moment I have been deluded into occupying his time, and have forgotten the humble claims upon my own, of my hotel, the Crozier.'

'Not at all, sir,' said Mr. Sapsea. 'I am returning home, and if you would like to take the exterior of our Cathedral in your way, I shall be glad to point it out.'

'His Honour the Mayor,' said Mr. Datchery, 'is more than kind and gracious.'

As Mr. Datchery, when he had made his acknowledgments to Mr. Jasper, could not be induced to go out of the room before the Worshipful, the Worshipful led the way down-stairs; Mr. Datchery following with his hat under his arm, and his shock of white hair streaming in the evening breeze.

'Might I ask His Honour,' said Mr. Datchery, 'whether that gentleman we have just left is the gentleman of whom I have heard in the neighbourhood as being much afflicted by the loss of a nephew, and concentrating his life on avenging the loss?'

'That is the gentleman. John Jasper, sir.'

'Would His Honour allow me to inquire whether there are strong suspicions of any one?'

'More than suspicions, sir,' returned Mr. Sapsea; 'all but certainties.'

'Only think now!' cried Mr. Datchery.

'But proof, sir, proof must be built up stone by stone,' said the Mayor. 'As I say, the end crowns the work. It is not enough that justice should be morally certain; she must be immorally certain-- legally, that is.'

'His Honour,' said Mr. Datchery, 'reminds me of the nature of the law. Immoral. How true!' 'As I say, sir,' pompously went on the Mayor, 'the arm of the law is a strong arm, and a long arm. That is the may I put it. A strong arm and a long arm.'

'How forcible!--And yet, again, how true!' murmured Mr. Datchery.

'And without betraying, what I call the secrets of the prison-house,' said Mr. Sapsea; 'the secrets of the prison-house is the term I used on the bench.'

'And what other term than His Honour's would express it?' said Mr. Datchery.
'Without, I say, betraying them, I predict to you, knowing the iron will of the gentleman we have just left (I take the bold step of calling it iron, on account of its strength), that in this case the long arm will reach, and the strong arm will strike.--This is our Cathedral, sir. The best judges are pleased to admire it, and the best among our townsman own to being a little vain of it.'

All this time Mr. Datchery had walked with his hat under his arm, and his white hair streaming. He had an odd momentary appearance upon him of having forgotten his hat, when Mr. Sapsea now touched it; and he clapped his hand up to his head as if with some vague expectation of finding another hat upon it.

'Pray be covered, sir,' entreated Mr. Sapsea; magnificently plying: 'I shall not mind it, I assure you.'

'His Honour is very good, but I do it for coolness,' said Mr. Datchery.

Then Mr. Datchery admired the Cathedral, and Mr. Sapsea pointed it out as if he himself had invented and built it: there were a few details indeed of which he did not approve, but those he glossed over, as if the workmen had made mistakes in his absence. The Cathedral disposed of, he led the way by the churchyard, and stopped to extol the beauty of the evening--by chance--in the immediate vicinity of Mrs. Sapsea's epitaph.

'And by the by,' said Mr. Sapsea, appearing to descend from an elevation to remember it all of a sudden; like Apollo shooting down from Olympus to pick up his forgotten lyre; 'THAT is one of our small lions. The partiality of our people has made it so, and strangers have been seen taking a copy of it now and then. I am not a judge of it myself, for it is a little work of my own. But it was troublesome to turn, sir; I may say, difficult to turn with elegance.'

Mr. Datchery became so ecstatic over Mr. Sapsea's composition, that, in spite of his intention to end his days in Cloisterham, and therefore his probably having in reserve many opportunities of copying it, he would have transcribed it into his pocket-book on the spot, but for the slouching towards them of its material producer and perpetuator, Durdles, whom Mr. Datchery hailed, not sorry to show him a bright example of behaviour to superiors.

'Ah, Durdles! This is the mason, sir; one of our Cloisterham worthies; everybody here knows Durdles. Mr. Datchery, Durdles a gentleman who is going to settle here.'

'I wouldn't do it if I was him,' growled Durdles. 'We're a heavy lot.'

'You surely don't speak for yourself, Mr. Durdles,' returned Mr. Datchery, 'any more than for His Honour.'

'Who's His Honour?' demanded Durdles.

'His Honour the Mayor.'

'I never was brought afore him,' said Durdles, with anything but the look of a loyal subject of the mayoralty, 'and it'll be time enough for me to Honour him when I am. Until which, and when, and where,

"Mister Sapsea is his name, England is his nation, Cloisterham's his dwelling-place, Aukshneer's his occupation."'

Here, Deputy (preceded by a flying oyster-shell) appeared upon the scene, and requested to have the sum of threepence instantly 'chucked' to him by Mr. Durdles, whom he had been vainly seeking up and down, as lawful wages overdue. While that gentleman, with his bundle under his arm, slowly found and counted out the money, Mr. Sapsea informed the new settler of Durdles's habits, pursuits, abode, and reputation. 'I suppose a curious stranger might come to see you, and your works, Mr. Durdles, at any odd time?' said Mr. Datchery upon that.

'Any gentleman is welcome to come and see me any evening if he brings liquor for two with him,' returned Durdles, with a penny between his teeth and certain halfpence in his hands; 'or if he likes to make it twice two, he'll be doubly welcome.'

'I shall come. Master Deputy, what do you owe me?'

'A job.'

'Mind you pay me honestly with the job of showing me Mr. Durdles's house when I want to go there.'

Deputy, with a piercing broadside of whistle through the whole gap in his mouth, as a receipt in full for all arrears, vanished.

The Worshipful and the Worshipper then passed on together until they parted, with many ceremonies, at the Worshipful's door; even then the Worshipper carried his hat under his arm, and gave his streaming white hair to the breeze.

Said Mr. Datchery to himself that night, as he looked at his white hair in the gas-lighted looking-glass over the coffee-room chimney-pieace at the Crozier, and shook it out: 'For a single buffer, of an easy temper, living idly on his means, I have had a rather busy afternoon!'

CHAPTER XIX--SHADOW ON THE SUN-DIAL

Again Miss Twinkleton has delivered her valedictory address, with the accompaniments of white-wine and pound-cake, and again the young ladies have departed to their several homes. Helena Landless has left the Nuns' House to attend her brother's fortunes, and pretty Rosa is alone.

Cloisterham is so bright and sunny in these summer days, that the Cathedral and the monastery-ruin show as if
their strong walls were transparent. A soft glow seems to shine from within them, rather than upon them from
without, such is their mellowness as they look forth on the hot corn-fields and the smoking roads that distantly wind
among them. The Cloisterham gardens blush with ripening fruit. Time was when travel-stained pilgrims rode in
clattering parties through the city's welcome shades; time is when wayfarers, leading a gipsy life between
haymaking time and harvest, and looking as if they were just made of the dust of the earth, so very dusty are they,
ложе about on cool door-steps, trying to mend their unmendable shoes, or giving them to the city kennels as a
hopeless job, and seeking others in the bundles that they carry, along with their yet unused sickles swathed in bands
of straw. At all the more public pumps there is much cooling of bare feet, together with much bubbling and gurgling
of drinking with hand to spout on the part of these Bedouins; the Cloisterham police meanwhile looking askant from
their beats with suspicion, and manifest impatience that the intruders should depart from within the civic bounds,
and once more fry themselves on the simmering high-roads.

On the afternoon of such a day, when the last Cathedral service is done, and when that side of the High Street on
which the Nuns' House stands is in grateful shade, save where its quaint old garden opens to the west between the
boughs of trees, a servant informs Rosa, to her terror, that Mr. Jasper desires to see her.

If he had chosen his time for finding her at a disadvantage, he could have done no better. Perhaps he has chosen
it. Helena Landless is gone, Mrs. Tisher is absent on leave, Miss Twinkleton (in her amateur state of existence) has
contributed herself and a veal pie to a picnic.

'O why, why, why, did you say I was at home!' cried Rosa, helplessly.
The maid replies, that Mr. Jasper never asked the question.
That he said he knew she was at home, and begged she might be told that he asked to see her.
'What shall I do! what shall I do!' thinks Rosa, clasping her hands.
Possessed by a kind of desperation, she adds in the next breath, that she will come to Mr. Jasper in the garden.
She shudders at the thought of being shut up with him in the house; but many of its windows command the garden,
and she can be seen as well as heard there, and can shriek in the free air and run away. Such is the wild idea that
flutters through her mind.

She has never seen him since the fatal night, except when she was questioned before the Mayor, and then he was
present in gloomy watchfulness, as representing his lost nephew and burning to avenge him. She hangs her garden-
hat on her arm, and goes out. The moment she sees him from the porch, leaning on the sun-dial, the old horrible
feeling of being compelled by him, asserts its hold upon her. She feels that she would even then go back, but that he
draws her feet towards him. She cannot resist, and sits down, with her head bent, on the garden-seat beside the sun-
dial. She cannot look up at him for abhorrence, but she has perceived that he is dressed in deep mourning. So is she.
It was not so at first; but the lost has long been given up, and mourned for, as dead.

He would begin by touching her hand. She feels the intention, and draws her hand back. His eyes are then fixed
upon her, she knows, though her own see nothing but the grass.

'I have been waiting,' he begins, 'for some time, to be summoned back to my duty near you.'
After several times forming her lips, which she knows he is closely watching, into the shape of some other
hesitating reply, and then into none, she answers: 'Duty, sir?'
'The duty of teaching you, serving you as your faithful music- master.'
'I have left off that study.'
'Not left off, I think. Discontinued. I was told by your guardian that you discontinued it under the shock that we
have all felt so acutely. When will you resume?'
'Never, sir.'
'Never? You could have done no more if you had loved my dear boy.'
'I did love him!' cried Rosa, with a flash of anger.
'Yes; but not quite--not quite in the right way, shall I say? Not in the intended and expected way. Much as my
dear boy was, unhappily, too self-conscious and self-satisfied (I'll draw no parallel between him and you in that
respect) to love as he should have loved, or as any one in his place would have loved--must have loved!' She sits in the same still attitude, but shrinking a little more.
'Then, to be told that you discontinued your study with me, was to be politely told that you abandoned it
altogether?' he suggested.
'Yes,' says Rosa, with sudden spirit, 'The politeness was my guardian's, not mine. I told him that I was resolved
to leave off, and that I was determined to stand by my resolution.'
'And you still are?'
'I still am, sir. And I beg not to be questioned any more about it. At all events, I will not answer any more; I have
that in my power.'
She is so conscious of his looking at her with a glistening admiration of the touch of anger on her, and the fire and
animation it brings with it, that even as her spirit rises, it falls again, and she struggles with a sense of shame, affront, and fear, much as she did that night at the piano.

'I will not question you any more, since you object to it so much; I will confess--'

'I do not wish to hear you, sir,' cries Rosa, rising.

This time he does touch her with his outstretched hand. In shrinking from it, she shrinks into her seat again.

'We must sometimes act in opposition to our wishes,' he tells her in a low voice. 'You must do so now, or do more harm to others than you can ever set right.'

'What harm?'

'Presently, presently. You question ME, you see, and surely that's not fair when you forbid me to question you. Nevertheless, I will answer the question presently. Dearest Rosa! Charming Rosa!'

She starts up again.

This time he does not touch her. But his face looks so wicked and menacing, as he stands leaning against the sun-dial-setting, as it were, his black mark upon the very face of day—that her flight is arrested by horror as she looks at him.

'I do not forget how many windows command a view of us,' he says, glancing towards them. 'I will not touch you again; I will come no nearer to you than I am. Sit down, and there will be no mighty wonder in your music-master's leaning idly against a pedestal and speaking with you, remembering all that has happened, and our shares in it. Sit down, my beloved.'

She would have gone once more—as all but gone—and once more his face, darkly threatening what would follow if she went, has stopped her. Looking at him with the expression of the instant frozen on her face, she sits down on the seat again.

'Rosa, even when my dear boy was affianced to you, I loved you madly; even when I thought his happiness in having you for his wife was certain, I loved you madly; even when I strove to make him more ardently devoted to you, I loved you madly; even when he gave me the picture of your lovely face so carelessly traduced by him, which I feigned to hang always in my sight for his sake, but worshipped in torment for years, I loved you madly; in the distasteful work of the day, in the wakeful misery of the night, girded by sordid realities, or wandering through Paradises and Hells of visions into which I rushed, carrying your image in my arms, I loved you madly.'

If anything could make his words more hideous to her than they are in themselves, it would be the contrast between the violence of his look and delivery, and the composure of his assumed attitude.

'I endured it all in silence. So long as you were his, or so long as I supposed you to be his, I hid my secret loyally. Did I not?'

This lie, so gross, while the mere words in which it is told are so true, is more than Rosa can endure. She answers with kindling indignation: 'You were as false throughout, sir, as you are now. You were false to him, daily and hourly. You know that you made my life unhappy by your pursuit of me. You know that you made me afraid to open his generous eyes, and that you forced me, for his own trusting, good, good sake, to keep the truth from him, that you were a bad, bad man!'

His preservation of his easy attitude rendering his working features and his convulsive hands absolutely diabolical, he returns, with a fierce extreme of admiration:

'How beautiful you are! You are more beautiful in anger than in repose. I don't ask you for your love; give me yourself and your hatred; give me yourself and that pretty rage; give me yourself and that enchanting scorn; it will be enough for me.'

Impatient tears rise to the eyes of the trembling little beauty, and her face flames; but as she again rises to leave him in indignation, and seek protection within the house, he stretches out his hand towards the porch, as though he invited her to enter it.

'I told you, you rare charmer, you sweet witch, that you must stay and hear me, or do more harm than can ever be undone. You asked me what harm. Stay, and I will tell you. Go, and I will do it!'

Again Rosa quails before his threatening face, though innocent of its meaning, and she remains. Her panting breathing comes and goes as if it would choke her; but with a repressive hand upon her bosom, she remains.

'I have made my confession that my love is mad. It is so mad, that had the ties between me and my dear lost boy been one silken thread less strong, I might have swept even him from your side, when you favoured him.'

A film come over the eyes she raises for an instant, as though he had turned her faint.

'Even him,' he repeats. 'Yes, even him! Rosa, you see me and you hear me. Judge for yourself whether any other admirer shall love you and live, whose life is in my hand.'

'What do you mean, sir?'

'I mean to show you how mad my love is. It was hawked through the late inquiries by Mr. Crisparkle, that young Landless had confessed to him that he was a rival of my lost boy. That is an inexpiable offence in my eyes. The
same Mr. Crisparkle knows under my hand that I have devoted myself to the murderer's discovery and destruction, 
be he whom he might, and that I determined to discuss the mystery with no one until I should hold the clue in which 
to entangle the murderer as in a net. I have since worked patiently to wind and wind it round him; and it is slowly 
winding as I speak.'

'Your belief, if you believe in the criminality of Mr. Landless, is not Mr. Crisparkle's belief, and he is a good 
man,' Rosa retorts.

'My belief is my own; and I reserve it, worshipped of my soul! Circumstances may accumulate so strongly 
EVEN AGAINST AN INNOCENT MAN, that directed, sharpened, and pointed, they may slay him. One wanting 
link discovered by perseverance against a guilty man, proves his guilt, however slight its evidence before, and he 
dies. Young Landless stands in deadly peril either way.'

'If you really suppose,' Rosa pleads with him, turning paler, 'that I favour Mr. Landless, or that Mr. Landless has 
ever in any way addressed himself to me, you are wrong.'

He puts that from him with a slighting action of his hand and a curled lip.

'I was going to show you how madly I love you. More madly now than ever, for I am willing to renounce the 
second object that has arisen in my life to divide it with you; and henceforth to have no object in existence but you 
only. Miss Landless has become your bosom friend. You care for her peace of mind?'

'I love her dearly.'

'You care for her good name?'

'I have said, sir, I love her dearly.'

'I am unconsciously,' he observes with a smile, as he folds his hands upon the sun-dial and leans his chin upon 
them, so that his talk would seem from the windows (faces occasionally come and go there) to be of the airiest and 
playfullest--'I am unconsciously giving offence by questioning again. I will simply make statements, therefore, and 
not put questions. You do care for your bosom friend's good name, and you do care for her peace of mind. Then 
remove the shadow of the gallows from her, dear one!'

'You dare propose to me to--'?

'Darling, I dare propose to you. Stop there. If it be bad to idolise you, I am the worst of men; if it be good, I am 
the best. My love for you is above all other love, and my truth to you is above all other truth. Let me have hope and 
favour, and I am a forsworn man for your sake.'

Rosa puts her hands to her temples, and, pushing back her hair, looks wildly and abhorrently at him, as though 
she were trying to piece together what it is his deep purpose to present to her only in fragments.

'Reckon up nothing at this moment, angel, but the sacrifices that I lay at those dear feet, which I could fall down 
among the vilest ashes and kiss, and put upon my head as a poor savage might. There is my fidelity to my dear boy 
after death. Tread upon it!' 

With an action of his hands, as though he cast down something precious.

'There is the inexpiable offence against my adoration of you. Spurn it!' 

With a similar action.

'There are my labours in the cause of a just vengeance for six toiling months. Crush them!' 

With another repetition of the action.

'There is my past and my present wasted life. There is the desolation of my heart and my soul. There is my 
peace; there is my despair. Stamp them into the dust; so that you take me, were it even mortally hating me!' 

The frightful vehemence of the man, now reaching its full height, so additionally terrifies her as to break the 
spell that has held her to the spot. She swiftly moves towards the porch; but in an instant he is at her side, and 
speaking in her ear.

'Rosa, I am self-repressed again. I am walking calmly beside you to the house. I shall wait for some 
encouragement and hope. I shall not strike too soon. Give me a sign that you attend to me.' 

She slightly and constrainedly moves her hand.

'Not a word of this to any one, or it will bring down the blow, as certainly as night follows day. Another sign that 
you attend to me.' 

She moves her hand once more.

'I love you, love you, love you! If you were to cast me off now-- but you will not--you would never be rid of me. 
No one should come between us. I would pursue you to the death.'

The handmaid coming out to open the gate for him, he quietly pulls off his hat as a parting salute, and goes away 
with no greater show of agitation than is visible in the effigy of Mr. Sapsea's father opposite. Rosa faints in going 
up-stairs, and is carefully carried to her room and laid down on her bed. A thunderstorm is coming on, the maids 
say, and the hot and stifling air has overset the pretty dear: no wonder; they have felt their own knees all of a tremble 
all day long.
CHAPTER XX--A FLIGHT

Rosa no sooner came to herself than the whole of the late interview was before her. It even seemed as if it had pursued her into its insensibility, and she had not had a moment’s unconsciousness of it. What to do, she was at a frightened loss to know: the only one clear thought in her mind was, that she must fly from this terrible man.

But where could she take refuge, and how could she go? She had never breathed her dread of him to any one but Helena. If she went to Helena, and told her what had passed, that very act might bring down the irreparable mischief that he threatened he had the power, and that she knew he had the will, to do. The more fearful he appeared to her excited memory and imagination, the more alarming her responsibility appeared; seeing that a slight mistake on her part, either in action or delay, might let his malevolence loose on Helena’s brother.

Rosa’s mind throughout the last six months had been stormily confused. A half-formed, wholly unexpressed suspicion tossed in it, now heaving itself up, and now sinking into the deep; now gaining palpability, and now losing it. Jasper’s self-absorption in his nephew when he was alive, and his unceasing pursuit of the inquiry how he came by his death, if he were dead, were themes so rife in the place, that no one appeared able to suspect the possibility of foul play at his hands. She had asked herself the question, ‘Am I so wicked in my thoughts as to conceive a wickedness that others cannot imagine?’ Then she had considered, Did the suspicion come of her previous recoiling from him before the fact? And if so, was not that a proof of its baselessness? Then she had reflected, ‘What motive could he have, according to my accusation?’ She was ashamed to answer in her mind, ‘The motive of gaining ME!’ And covered her face, as if the lightest shadow of the idea of founding murder on such an idle vanity were a crime almost as great.

She ran over in her mind again, all that he had said by the sun-dial in the garden. He had persisted in treating the disappearance as murder, consistently with his whole public course since the finding of the watch and shirt-pin. If he were afraid of the crime being traced out, would he not rather encourage the idea of a voluntary disappearance? He had even declared that if the ties between him and his nephew had been less strong, he might have swept ‘even him’ away from her side. Was that like his having really done so? He had spoken of laying his six months’ labours in the cause of a just vengeance at her feet. Would he have done that, with that violence of passion, if they were a pretence? Would he have ranged them with his desolate heart and soul, his wasted life, his peace and his despair? The very first sacrifice that he represented himself as making for her, was his fidelity to his dear boy after death. Surely these facts were strong against a fancy that scarcely dared to hint itself. And yet he was so terrible a man! In short, the poor girl (for what could she know of the criminal intellect, which its own professed students perpetually misread, because they persist in trying to reconcile it with the average intellect of average men, instead of identifying it as a horrible wonder apart) could get by no road to any other conclusion than that he WAS a terrible man, and must be fled from.

She had been Helena’s stay and comfort during the whole time. She had constantly assured her of her full belief in her brother’s innocence, and of her sympathy with him in his misery. But she had never seen him since the disappearance, nor had Helena ever spoken one word of his avowal to Mr. Crisparkle in regard of Rosa, though as a part of the interest of the case it was well known far and wide. He was Helena’s unfortunate brother, to her, and nothing more. The assurance she had given her odious suitor was strictly true, though it would have been better (she considered now) if she could have restrained herself from so giving it. Afraid of him as he the bright and delicate little creature was, her spirit swelled at the thought of his knowing it from her own lips.

But where was she to go? Anywhere beyond his reach, was no reply to the question. Somewhere must be thought of. She determined to go to her guardian, and to go immediately. The feeling she had imparted to Helena on the night of their first confidence, was so strong upon her—the feeling of not being safe from him, and of the solid walls of the old convent being powerless to keep out his ghostly following of her—that no reasoning of her own could calm her fears. The fascination of repulsion had been upon her so long, and now culminated so darkly, that she felt as if he had power to bind her by a spell. Glancing out at window, even now, as she rose to dress, the sight of the sun-dial on which he had leaned when he declared himself, turned her cold, and made her shrink from it, as though he had invested it with some awful quality from his own nature.

She wrote a hurried note to Miss Twinkleton, saying that she had sudden reason for wishing to see her guardian promptly, and had gone to him; also, entreating the good lady not to be uneasy, for all was well with her. She hurried a few quite useless articles into a very little bag, left the note in a conspicuous place, and went out, softly closing the gate after her.

It was the first time she had ever been even in Cloisterham High Street alone. But knowing all its ways and windings very well, she hurried straight to the corner from which the omnibus departed. It was, at that very moment, going off.

‘Stop and take me, if you please, Joe. I am obliged to go to London.’

In less than another minute she was on her road to the railway, under Joe’s protection. Joe waited on her when
she got there, put her safely into the railway carriage, and handed in the very little bag after her, as though it were some enormous trunk, hundredweights heavy, which she must on no account endeavour to lift.

'Can you go round when you get back, and tell Miss Twinkleton that you saw me safely off, Joe?

'It shall be done, Miss.'

'With my love, please, Joe.'

'Yes, Miss--and I wouldn't mind having it myself!' But Joe did not articulate the last clause; only thought it.

Now that she was whirling away for London in real earnest, Rosa was at leisure to resume the thoughts which her personal hurry had checked. The indignant thought that his declaration of love soiled her; that she could only be cleansed from the stain of its impurity by appealing to the honest and true; supported her for a time against her fears, and confirmed her in her hasty resolution. But as the evening grew darker and darker, and the great city impended nearer and nearer, the doubts usual in such cases began to arise. Whether this was not a wild proceeding, after all; how Mr. Grewgious might regard it; whether she should find him at the journey's end; how she would act if he were absent; what might become of her, alone, in a place so strange and crowded; how if she had but waited and taken counsel first; whether, if she could now go back, she would not do it thankfully; a multitude of such uneasy speculations disturbed her, more and more as they accumulated. At length the train came into London over the housetops; and down below lay the gritty streets with their yet un-needed lamps a-glow, on a hot, light, summer night.

'Hiram Grewgious, Esquire, Staple Inn, London.' This was all Rosa knew of her destination; but it was enough to send her rattling away again in a cab, through deserts of gritty streets, where many people crowded at the corner of courts and byways to get some air, and where many other people walked with a miserably monotonous noise of shuffling of feet on hot paving-stones, and where all the people and all their surroundings were so gritty and so shabby!

There was music playing here and there, but it did not enliven the case. No barrel-organ mended the matter, and no big drum beat dull care away. Like the chapel bells that were also going here and there, they only seemed to evoke echoes from brick surfaces, and dust from everything. As to the flat wind-instruments, they seemed to have cracked their hearts and souls in pining for the country.

Her jingling conveyance stopped at last at a fast-closed gateway, which appeared to belong to somebody who had gone to bed very early, and was much afraid of housebreakers; Rosa, discharging her conveyance, timidly knocked at this gateway, and was let in, very little bag and all, by a watchman.

'Does Mr. Grewgious live here?'

'Mr. Grewgious lives there, Miss,' said the watchman, pointing further in.

So Rosa went further in, and, when the clocks were striking ten, stood on P. J. T.'s doorsteps, wondering what P. J. T. had done with his street-door.

Guided by the painted name of Mr. Grewgious, she went up-stairs and softly tapped and tapped several times. But no one answering, and Mr. Grewgious's door-handle yielding to her touch, she went in, and saw her guardian sitting on a window-seat at an open window, with a shaded lamp placed far from him on a table in a corner.

Rosa drew nearer to him in the twilight of the room. He saw her, and he said, in an undertone: 'Good Heaven!' Rosa fell upon his neck, with tears, and then he said, returning her embrace:

'My child, my child! I thought you were your mother!--But what, what, what,' he added, soothingly, 'has happened? My dear, what has brought you here? Who has brought you here?'

'No one. I came alone.'

'Lord bless me!' ejaculated Mr. Grewgious. 'Came alone! Why didn't you write to me to come and fetch you?'

'I had no time. I took a sudden resolution. Poor, poor Eddy!'

'Ah, poor fellow, poor fellow!'

'His uncle has made love to me. I cannot bear it,' said Rosa, at once with a burst of tears, and a stamp of her little foot; 'I shudder with horror of him, and I have come to you to protect me and all of us from him, if you will?'

'I will,' cried Mr. Grewgious, with a sudden rush of amazing energy. 'Damn him!

"Confound his politics! Frustrate his knavish tricks! On Thee his hopes to fix? Damn him again!"

After this most extraordinary outburst, Mr. Grewgious, quite beside himself, plunged about the room, to all appearance undecided whether he was in a fit of loyal enthusiasm, or combative denunciation.

He stopped and said, wiping his face: 'I beg your pardon, my dear, but you will be glad to know I feel better. Tell me no more just now, or I might do it again. You must be refreshed and cheered. What did you take last? Was it breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea, or supper? And what will you take next? Shall it be breakfast, lunch, dinner, tea, or supper?'

The respectful tenderness with which, on one knee before her, he helped her to remove her hat, and disentangle her pretty hair from it, was quite a chivalrous sight. Yet who, knowing him only on the surface, would have
expected chivalry—and of the true sort, too; not the spurious—from Mr. Grewgious?

'Your rest too must be provided for,' he went on; 'and you shall have the prettiest chamber in Furnival's. Your toilet must be provided for, and you shall have everything that an unlimited head chambermaid—by which expression I mean a head chambermaid not limited as to outlay—can procure. Is that a bag?' he looked hard at it; sooth to say, it required hard looking at to be seen at all in a dimly lighted room: 'and is it your property, my dear?'

'Yes, sir. I brought it with me.'

'It is not an extensive bag,' said Mr. Grewgious, candidly, 'though admirably calculated to contain a day's provision for a canary-bird. Perhaps you brought a canary-bird?'

Rosa smiled and shook her head.

'If you had, he should have been made welcome,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'and I think he would have been pleased to be hung upon a nail outside and pit himself against our Staple sparrows; whose execution must be admitted to be not quite equal to their intention. Which is the case with so many of us! You didn't say what meal, my dear. Have a nice jumble of all meals.'

Rosa thanked him, but said she could only take a cup of tea. Mr. Grewgious, after several times running out, and in again, to mention such supplementary items as marmalade, eggs, watercresses, salted fish, and frizzled ham, ran across to Furnival's without his hat, to give his various directions. And soon afterwards they were realised in practice, and the board was spread.

'Lord bless my soul,' cried Mr. Grewgious, putting the lamp upon it, and taking his seat opposite Rosa; 'what a new sensation for a poor old Angular bachelor, to be sure!'

Rosa's expressive little eyebrows asked him what he meant?

'The sensation of having a sweet young presence in the place, that whitewashes it, paints it, papers it, decorates it with gilding, and makes it Glorious!' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Ah me! Ah me!'

As there was something mournful in his sigh, Rosa, in touching him with her tea-cup, ventured to touch him with her small hand too.

'Thank you, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Ahem! Let's talk!'

'Do you always live here, sir?' asked Rosa.

'Yes, my dear.'

'And always alone?'

'Always alone; except that I have daily company in a gentleman by the name of Bazzard, my clerk.'

'HE doesn't live here?'

'No, he goes his way, after office hours. In fact, he is off duty here, altogether, just at present; and a firm downstairs, with which I have business relations, lend me a substitute. But it would be extremely difficult to replace Mr. Bazzard.'

'He must be very fond of you,' said Rosa.

'He bears up against it with commendable fortitude if he is,' returned Mr. Grewgious, after considering the matter. 'But I doubt if he is. Not particularly so. You see, he is discontented, poor fellow.'

'Why isn't he contented?' was the natural inquiry.

'Misplaced,' said Mr. Grewgious, with great mystery.

'Rosa's eyebrows resumed their inquisitive and perplexed expression.

'So misplaced,' Mr. Grewgious went on, 'that I feel constantly apologetic towards him. And he feels (though he doesn't mention it) that I have reason to be.'

Mr. Grewgious had by this time grown so very mysterious, that Rosa did not know how to go on. While she was thinking about it Mr. Grewgious suddenly jerked out of himself for the second time:

'Let's talk. We were speaking of Mr. Bazzard. It's a secret, and moreover it is Mr. Bazzard's secret; but the sweet presence at my table makes me so unusually expansive, that I feel I must impart it in inviolable confidence. What do you think Mr. Bazzard has done?'

'O dear!' cried Rosa, drawing her chair a little nearer, and her mind reverting to Jasper, 'nothing dreadful, I hope?'

'He has written a play,' said Mr. Grewgious, in a solemn whisper. 'A tragedy.'

Rosa seemed much relieved.

'And nobody,' pursued Mr. Grewgious in the same tone, 'will hear, on any account whatever, of bringing it out.'

Rosa looked reflective, and nodded her head slowly; as who should say, 'Such things are, and why are they?'

'Now, you know,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'I couldn't write a play.'

'Not a bad one, sir?' said Rosa, innocently, with her eyebrows again in action.

'No. If I was under sentence of decapitation, and was about to be instantly decapitated, and an express arrived with a pardon for the condemned convict Grewgious if he wrote a play, I should be under the necessity of resuming
the block, and begging the executioner to proceed to extremities,—meaning,' said Mr. Grewgious, passing his hand under his chin, 'the singular number, and this extremity.'

Rosa appeared to consider what she would do if the awkward supposititious case were hers.

'Consequently,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'Mr. Bazzard would have a sense of my inferiority to himself under any circumstances; but when I am his master, you know, the case is greatly aggravated.'

Mr. Grewgious shook his head seriously, as if he felt the offence to be a little too much, though of his own committing.

'How came you to be his master, sir?' asked Rosa.

'A question that naturally follows,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Let's talk. Mr. Bazzard's father, being a Norfolk farmer, would have furiously laid about him with a flail, a pitch-fork, and every agricultural implement available for assaulting purposes, on the slightest hint of his son's having written a play. So the son, bringing to me the father's rent (which I receive), imparted his secret, and pointed out that he was determined to pursue his genius, and that it would put him in peril of starvation, and that he was not formed for it.'

'I am glad he is grateful,' said Rosa.

'For pursuing his genius, sir?'

'No, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'for starvation. It was impossible to deny the position, that Mr. Bazzard was not formed to be starved, and Mr. Bazzard then pointed out that it was desirable that I should stand between him and a fate so perfectly unsuited to his formation. In that way Mr. Bazzard became my clerk, and he feels it very much.'

'I didn't quite mean that, my dear. I mean, that he feels the degradation. There are some other geniuses that Mr. Bazzard has become acquainted with, who have also written tragedies, which likewise nobody will on any account whatever hear of bringing out, and these choice spirits dedicate their plays to one another in a highly panegyrical manner. Mr. Bazzard has been the subject of one of these dedications. Now, you know, I never had a play dedicated to ME!'

Rosa looked at him as if she would have liked him to be the recipient of a thousand dedications.

'Which again, naturally, rubs against the grain of Mr. Bazzard,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'He is very short with me sometimes, and then I feel that he is meditating, "This blockhead is my master! A fellow who couldn't write a tragedy on pain of death, and who will never have one dedicated to him with the most complimentary congratulations on the high position he has taken in the eyes of posterity!" Very trying, very trying. However, in giving him directions, I reflect beforehand: "Perhaps he may not like this," or "He might take it ill if I asked that," and so we get on very well. Indeed, better than I could have expected.'

'Is the tragedy named, sir?' asked Rosa.

'Strictly between ourselves,' answered Mr. Grewgious, 'it has a dreadfully appropriate name. It is called The Thorn of Anxiety. But Mr. Bazzard hopes—and I hope—that it will come out at last.'

It was not hard to divine that Mr. Grewgious had related the Bazzard history thus fully, at least quite as much for the recreation of his ward's mind that had driven her there, as for the gratification of his own tendency to be social and communicative.

'And now, my dear,' he said at this point, 'if you are not too tired to tell me more of what passed to-day—'but only if you feel quite able—I should be glad to hear it. I may digest it the better, if I sleep on it to-night.'

Rosa, composed now, gave him a faithful account of the interview. Mr. Grewgious often smoothed his head while it was in progress, and begged to be told a second time those parts which bore on Helena and Neville. When Rosa had finished, he sat grave, silent, and meditative for a while.

'Clearly narrated,' was his only remark at last, 'and, I hope, clearly put away here,' smoothing his head again. 'See, my dear,' taking her to the open window, 'where they live! The dark windows over yonder.'

'I may go to Helena to-morrow?' asked Rosa.

'I should like to sleep on that question to-night,' he answered doubtfully. 'But let me take you to your own rest, for you must need it.'

With that Mr. Grewgious helped her to get her hat on again, and hung upon his arm the very little bag that was of no earthly use, and led her by the hand (with a certain stately awkwardness, as if he were going to walk a minuet) across Holborn, and into Furnival's Inn. At the hotel door, he confided her to the Unlimited head chambermaid, and said that while she went up to see her room, he would remain below, in case she should wish it exchanged for another, or should find that there was anything she wanted.

Rosa's room was airy, clean, comfortable, almost gay. The Unlimited had laid in everything omitted from the very little bag (that is to say, everything she could possibly need), and Rosa tripped down the great many stairs again, to thank her guardian for his thoughtful and affectionate care of her.

'Not at all, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious, infinitely gratified; 'it is I who thank you for your charming confidence and for your charming company. Your breakfast will be provided for you in a neat, compact, and graceful little
sitting-room (appropriate to your figure), and I will come to you at ten o'clock in the morning. I hope you don't feel very strange indeed, in this strange place.'

'O no, I feel so safe!'

'Yes, you may be sure that the stairs are fire-proof,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'and that any outbreak of the devouring element would be perceived and suppressed by the watchmen.'

'I did not mean that,' Rosa replied. 'I mean, I feel so safe from him.'

'There is a stout gate of iron bars to keep him out,' said Mr. Grewgious, smiling; 'and Furnival's is fire-proof, and specially watched and lighted, and _I_ live over the way!' In the stoutness of his knight-errantry, he seemed to think the last-named protection all sufficient. In the same spirit he said to the gate-keeper as he went out, 'If some one staying in the hotel should wish to send across the road to me in the night, a crown will be ready for the messenger.' In the same spirit, he walked up and down outside the iron gate for the best part of an hour, with some solicitude; occasionally looking in between the bars, as if he had laid a dove in a high roost in a cage of lions, and had it on his mind that she might tumble out.

CHAPTER XXI--A RECOGNITION

Nothing occurred in the night to flutter the tired dove; and the dove arose refreshed. With Mr. Grewgious, when the clock struck ten in the morning, came Mr. Crisparkle, who had come at one plunge out of the river at Cloisterham.

'Miss Twinkleton was so uneasy, Miss Rosa,' he explained to her, 'and came round to Ma and me with your note, in such a state of wonder, that, to quiet her, I volunteered on this service by the very first train to be caught in the morning. I wished at the time that you had come to me; but now I think it best that you did AS you did, and came to your guardian.'

'I did think of you,' Rosa told him; 'but Minor Canon Corner was so near him--'

'I understand. It was quite natural.'

'I have told Mr. Crisparkle,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'all that you told me last night, my dear. Of course I should have written it to him immediately; but his coming was most opportune. And it was particularly kind of him to come, for he had but just gone.'

'Have you settled,' asked Rosa, appealing to them both, 'what is to be done for Helena and her brother?'

'Why really,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'I am in great perplexity. If even Mr. Grewgious, whose head is much longer than mine, and who is a whole night's cogitation in advance of me, is undecided, what must I be!'

The Unlimited here put her head in at the door--after having rapped, and been authorised to present herself--announcing that a gentleman wished for a word with another gentleman named Crisparkle, if any such gentleman were there. If no such gentleman were there, he begged pardon for being mistaken.

'Such a gentleman is here,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'but is engaged just now.'

'Is it a dark gentleman?' interposed Rosa, retreating on her guardian.

'No, Miss, more of a brown gentleman.'

'You are sure not with black hair?' asked Rosa, taking courage.

'Quite sure of that, Miss. Brown hair and blue eyes.'

'Perhaps, hinted Mr. Grewgious, with habitual caution, 'it might be well to see him, reverend sir, if you don't object. When one is in a difficulty or at a loss, one never knows in what direction a way out may chance to open. It is a business principle of mine, in such a case, not to close up any direction, but to keep an eye on every direction that may present itself. I could relate an anecdote in point, but that it would be premature.'

'If Miss Rosa will allow me, then? Let the gentleman come in,' said Mr. Crisparkle.

The gentleman came in; apologised, with a frank but modest grace, for not finding Mr. Crisparkle alone; turned to Mr. Crisparkle, and smilingly asked the unexpected question: 'Who am I?'

'You are the gentleman I saw smoking under the trees in Staple Inn, a few minutes ago.'

'True. There I saw you. Who else am I?'

Mr. Crisparkle concentrated his attention on a handsome face, much sunburnt; and the ghost of some departed boy seemed to rise, gradually and dimly, in the room.

The gentleman saw a struggling recollection lighten up the Minor Canon's features, and smiling again, said: 'What will you have for breakfast this morning? You are out of jam.'

'Wait a moment!' cried Mr. Crisparkle, raising his right hand. 'Give me another instant! Tartar!' The two shook hands with the greatest heartiness, and then went the wonderful length--for Englishmen--of laying their hands each on the other's shoulders, and looking joyfully each into the other's face.

'My old fag!' said Mr. Crisparkle.

'My old master!' said Mr. Tartar.

'You saved me from drowning!' said Mr. Crisparkle.
'After which you took to swimming, you know!' said Mr. Tartar.
'God bless my soul!' said Mr. Crisparkle.
'Amen!' said Mr. Tartar.

And then they fell to shaking hands most heartily again.

'Imagine,' exclaimed Mr. Crisparkle, with glistening eyes: 'Miss Rosa Bud and Mr. Grewgious, imagine Mr. Tartar, when he was the smallest of juniors, diving for me, catching me, a big heavy senior, by the hair of the head, and striking out for the shore with me like a water-giant!'

'Imagine my not letting him sink, as I was his fag!' said Mr. Tartar. 'But the truth being that he was my best protector and friend, and did me more good than all the masters put together, an irrational impulse seized me to pick him up, or go down with him.'

'Hem! Permit me, sir, to have the honour,' said Mr. Grewgious, advancing with extended hand, 'for an honour I truly esteem it. I am proud to make your acquaintance. I hope you didn't take cold. I hope you were not inconvenienced by swallowing too much water. How have you been since?'

It was by no means apparent that Mr. Grewgious knew what he said, though it was very apparent that he meant to say something highly friendly and appreciative.

If Heaven, Rosa thought, had but sent such courage and skill to her poor mother's aid! And he to have been so slight and young then!

'I don't wish to be complimented upon it, I thank you; but I think I have an idea,' Mr. Grewgious announced, after taking a jog-trot or two across the room, so unexpected and unaccountable that they all stared at him, doubtful whether he was choking or had the cramp—'I THINK I have an idea. I believe I have had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Tartar's name as tenant of the top set in the house next the top set in the corner?'

'Yes, sir,' returned Mr. Tartar. 'You are right so far.'

'I am right so far,' said Mr. Grewgious. 'Tick that off; which he did, with his right thumb on his left. 'Might you happen to know the name of your neighbour in the top set on the other side of the party-wall?' coming very close to Mr. Tartar, to lose nothing of his face, in his shortness of sight.

'Landless.'

'Tick that off,' said Mr. Grewgious, taking another trot, and then coming back. 'No personal knowledge, I suppose, sir?'

'Slight, but some.'

'Tick that off,' said Mr. Grewgious, taking another trot, and again coming back. 'Nature of knowledge, Mr. Tartar?'

'I thought he seemed to be a young fellow in a poor way, and I asked his leave—only within a day or so— to share my flowers up there with him; that is to say, to extend my flower-garden to his windows.'

'Would you have the kindness to take seats?' said Mr. Grewgious. 'I HAVE an idea!'

They complied; Mr. Tartar none the less readily, for being all abroad; and Mr. Grewgious, seated in the centre, with his hands upon his knees, thus stated his idea, with his usual manner of having got the statement by heart.

'I cannot as yet make up my mind whether it is prudent to hold open communication under present circumstances, and on the part of the fair member of the present company, with Mr. Neville or Miss Helena. I have reason to know that a local friend of ours (on whom I beg to bestow a passing but a hearty malediction, with the kind permission of my reverend friend) sneaks to and fro, and dodges up and down. When not doing so himself, he may have some informant skulking about, in the person of a watchman, porter, or such-like hanger-on of Staple. On the other hand, Miss Rosa very naturally wishes to see her friend Miss Helena, and it would seem important that at least Miss Helena (if not her brother too, through her) should privately know from Miss Rosa's lips what has occurred, and what has been threatened. Am I agreed with generally in the views I take?'

'I entirely coincide with them,' said Mr. Crisparkle, who had been very attentive.

'As I have no doubt I should,' added Mr. Tartar, smiling, 'if I understood them.'

'Fair and softly, sir,' said Mr. Grewgious; 'we shall fully confide in you directly, if you will favour us with your permission. Now, if our local friend should have any informant on the spot, it is tolerably clear that such informant can only be set to watch the chambers in the occupation of Mr. Neville. He reporting, to our local friend, who comes and goes there, our local friend would supply for himself, from his own previous knowledge, the identity of the parties. Nobody can be set to watch all Staple, or to concern himself with comers and goers to other sets of chambers: unless, indeed, mine.'

'I begin to understand to what you tend,' said Mr. Crisparkle, 'and highly approve of your caution.'

'I needn't repeat that I know nothing yet of the why and wherefore,' said Mr. Tartar; 'but I also understand to what you tend, so let me say at once that my chambers are freely at your disposal.'

'There!' cried Mr. Grewgious, smoothing his head triumphantly, 'now we have all got the idea. You have it, my
dear?"

'I think I have,' said Rosa, blushing a little as Mr. Tartar looked quickly towards her.

'You see, you go over to Staple with Mr. Crisparkle and Mr. Tartar,' said Mr. Grewgious; 'I going in and out, and out and in alone, in my usual way; you go up with those gentlemen to Mr. Tartar's rooms; you look into Mr. Tartar's flower-garden; you wait for Miss Helena's appearance there, or you signify to Miss Helena that you are close by; and you communicate with her freely, and no spy can be the wiser.'

'I am very much afraid I shall be--'

'Be what, my dear?' asked Mr. Grewgious, as she hesitated. 'Not frightened?'

'No, not that,' said Rosa, shyly; 'in Mr. Tartar's way. We seem to be appropriating Mr. Tartar's residence so very coolly.'

'I protest to you,' returned that gentleman, 'that I shall think the better of it for evermore, if your voice sounds in it only once.'

Rosa, not quite knowing what to say about that, cast down her eyes, and turning to Mr. Grewgious, dutifully asked if she should put her hat on? Mr. Grewgious being of opinion that she could not do better, she withdrew for the purpose. Mr. Crisparkle took the opportunity of giving Mr. Tartar a summary of the distresses of Neville and his sister; the opportunity was quite long enough, as the hat happened to require a little extra fitting on.

Mr. Tartar gave his arm to Rosa, and Mr. Crisparkle walked, detached, in front.

'Poor, poor Eddy!' thought Rosa, as they went along.

Mr. Tartar waved his right hand as he bent his head down over Rosa, talking in an animated way.

'It was not so powerful or so sun-browned when it saved Mr. Crisparkle,' thought Rosa, glancing at it; 'but it must have been very steady and determined even then.'

Mr. Tartar told her he had been a sailor, roving everywhere for years and years.

'When are you going to sea again?' asked Rosa.

'Never!'

Rosa wondered what the girls would say if they could see her crossing the wide street on the sailor's arm. And she fancied that the passers-by must think her very little and very helpless, contrasted with the strong figure that could have caught her up and carried her out of any danger, miles and miles without resting.

She was thinking further, that his far-seeing blue eyes looked as if they had been used to watch danger afar off, and to watch it without flinching, drawing nearer and nearer: when, happening to raise her own eyes, she found that he seemed to be thinking something about THEM.

This a little confused Rosebud, and may account for her never afterwards quite knowing how she ascended (with his help) to his garden in the air, and seemed to get into a marvellous country that came into sudden bloom like the country on the summit of the magic bean-stalk. May it flourish for ever!

CHAPTER XXII--A GRITTY STATE OF THINGS COMES ON

Mr. Tartar's chambers were the neatest, the cleanest, and the best-ordered chambers ever seen under the sun, moon, and stars. The floors were scrubbed to that extent, that you might have supposed the London blacks emancipated for ever, and gone out of the land for good. Every inch of brass-work in Mr. Tartar's possession was polished and burnished, till it shone like a brazen mirror. No speck, nor spot, nor spatter soiled the purity of any of Mr. Tartar's household gods, large, small, or middle-sized. His sitting-room was like the admiral's cabin, his bathroom was like a dairy, his sleeping-chamber, fitted all about with lockers and drawers, was like a seedsman's shop; and his nicely-balanced cot just stirred in the midst, as if it breathed. Everything belonging to Mr. Tartar had quarters of its own assigned to it: his maps and charts had their quarters; his books had theirs; his brushes had theirs; his boots had theirs; his clothes had theirs; his case-bottles had theirs; his telescopes and other instruments had theirs. Everything was readily accessible. Shelf, bracket, locker, hook, and drawer were equally within reach, and were equally contrived with a view to avoiding waste of room, and providing some snug inches of stowage for something that would have exactly fitted nowhere else. His gleaming little service of plate was so arranged upon his sideboard as that a slack salt-spoon would have instantly betrayed itself; his toilet implements were so arranged upon his dressing-table as that a toothpick of slovenly deportment could have been reported at a glance. So with the curiosities he had brought home from various voyages. Stuffed, dried, repolished, or otherwise preserved, according to their kind; birds, fishes, reptiles, arms, articles of dress, shells, seaweeds, grasses, or memorials of coral reef; each was displayed in its especial place, and each could have been displayed in no better place. Paint and varnish seemed to be kept somewhere out of sight, in constant readiness to obliterate stray finger-marks wherever any might become perceptible in Mr. Tartar's chambers. No man-of-war was ever kept more spick and span from careless touch. On this bright summer day, a neat awning was rigged over Mr. Tartar's flower-garden as only a sailor can rig it, and there was a sea-going air upon the whole effect, so delightfully complete, that the flower-garden might have appertained to stern-windows afloat, and the whole concern might have bowed away gallantly with all on board, if
Mr. Tartar had only clapped to his lips the speaking-trumpet that was slung in a corner, and given hoarse orders to
heave the anchor up, look alive there, men, and get all sail upon her!

Mr. Tartar doing the honours of this gallant craft was of a piece with the rest. When a man rides an amiable
hobby that shies at nothing and kicks nobody, it is only agreeable to find him riding it with a humorous sense of the
droll side of the creature. When the man is a cordial and an earnest man by nature, and withal is perfectly fresh and
genuine, it may be doubted whether he is ever seen to greater advantage than at such a time. So Rosa would have
naturally thought (even if she hadn't been conducted over the ship with all the homage due to the First Lady of the
Admiralty, or First Fairy of the Sea), that it was charming to see and hear Mr. Tartar half laughing at, and half
rejoicing in, his various contrivances. So Rosa would have naturally thought, anyhow, that the sunburnt sailor
showed to great advantage when, the inspection finished, he delicately withdrew out of his admiral's cabin,
beseecching her to consider herself its Queen, and waving her free of his flower-garden with the hand that had had
Mr. Crisparkle's life in it.

'Helena! Helena Landless! Are you there?'

'Who speaks to me? Not Rosa?' Then a second handsome face appearing.

'Yes, my darling!'

'Why, how did you come here, dearest?'

'I--I don't quite know,' said Rosa with a blush; 'unless I am dreaming!'

Why with a blush? For their two faces were alone with the other flowers. Are blushes among the fruits of the
country of the magic bean-stalk?

'I am not dreaming,' said Helena, smiling. 'I should take more for granted if I were. How do we come together,-
or so near together--so very unexpectedly?'

Unexpectedly indeed, among the dingy gables and chimney-pots of P. J. T.'s connection, and the flowers that
had sprung from the salt sea. But Rosa, waking, told in a hurry how they came to be together, and all the why and
wherefore of that matter.

'And Mr. Crisparkle is here,' said Rosa, in rapid conclusion; 'and, could you believe it? long ago he saved his
life!'

'I could believe any such thing of Mr. Crisparkle,' returned Helena, with a mantling face.

(More blushes in the bean-stalk country!)

'Yes, but it wasn't Crisparkle,' said Rosa, quickly putting in the correction.

'I don't understand, love.'

'It was very nice of Mr. Crisparkle to be saved,' said Rosa, 'and he couldn't have shown his high opinion of Mr.
Tartar more expressively. But it was Mr. Tartar who saved him.'

Helena's dark eyes looked very earnestly at the bright face among the leaves, and she asked, in a slower and
more thoughtful tone:

'Is Mr. Tartar with you now, dear?'

'No; because he has given up his rooms to me--to us, I mean. It is such a beautiful place!'

'Is it?'

'It is like the inside of the most exquisite ship that ever sailed. It is like--it is like--'

'Like a dream?' suggested Helena.

Rosa answered with a little nod, and smelled the flowers.

Helena resumed, after a short pause of silence, during which she seemed (or it was Rosa's fancy) to
compassionate somebody: 'My poor Neville is reading in his own room, the sun being so very bright on this side just
now. I think he had better not know that you are so near.'

'O, I think so too!' cried Rosa very readily.

'I suppose,' pursued Helena, doubtfully, 'that he must know by-and-by all you have told me; but I am not sure.
Ask Mr. Crisparkle's advice, my darling. Ask him whether I may tell Neville as much or as little of what you have
told me as I think best.'

Rosa subsided into her state-cabin, and propounded the question. The Minor Canon was for the free exercise of
Helena's judgment.

'I thank him very much,' said Helena, when Rosa emerged again with her report. 'Ask him whether it would be
best to wait until any more maligning and pursuing of Neville on the part of this wretch shall disclose itself, or to try
to anticipate it: I mean, so far as to find out whether any such goes on darkly about us?'

The Minor Canon found this point so difficult to give a confident opinion on, that, after two or three attempts
and failures, he suggested a reference to Mr. Grewgious. Helena acquiescing, he betook himself (with a most
unsuccessful assumption of lounging indifference) across the quadrangle to P. J. T.'s, and stated it. Mr. Grewgious
held decidedly to the general principle, that if you could steal a march upon a brigand or a wild beast, you had better
do it; and he also held decidedly to the special case, that John Jasper was a brigand and a wild beast in combination.

Thus advised, Mr. Crisparkle came back again and reported to Rosa, who in her turn reported to Helena. She now steadily pursuing her train of thought at her window, considered thereupon.

'We may count on Mr. Tartar's readiness to help us, Rosa?' she inquired.

O yes! Rosa shyly thought so. O yes, Rosa shyly believed she could almost answer for it. But should she ask Mr. Crisparkle? 'I think your authority on the point as good as his, my dear,' said Helena, sedately, 'and you needn't disappear again for that.' Odd of Helena!

'You see, Neville,' Helena pursued after more reflection, 'knows no one else here: he has not so much as exchanged a word with any one else here. If Mr. Tartar would call to see him openly and often; if he would spare a minute for the purpose, frequently; if he would even do so, almost daily; something might come of it.'

'Something might come of it, dear?' repeated Rosa, surveying her friend's beauty with a highly perplexed face.

'Something might?'

'If Neville's movements are really watched, and if the purpose really is to isolate him from all friends and acquaintance and wear his daily life out grain by grain (which would seem to be the threat to you), does it not appear likely,' said Helena, 'that his enemy would in some way communicate with Mr. Tartar to warn him off from Neville? In which case, we might not only know the fact, but might know from Mr. Tartar what the terms of the communication were.'

'I see!' cried Rosa. And immediately darted into her state-cabin again.

Presently her pretty face reappeared, with a greatly heightened colour, and she said that she had told Mr. Crisparkle, and that Mr. Crisparkle had fetched in Mr. Tartar, and that Mr. Tartar--'who is waiting now, in case you want him,' added Rosa, with a half look back, and in not a little confusion between the inside of the state-cabin and out--had declared his readiness to act as she had suggested, and to enter on his task that very day.

'I thank him from my heart,' said Helena. 'Pray tell him so.'

Again not a little confused between the Flower-garden and the Cabin, Rosa dipped in with her message, and dipped out again with more assurances from Mr. Tartar, and stood wavering in a divided state between Helena and him, which proved that confusion is not always necessarily awkward, but may sometimes present a very pleasant appearance.

'And now, darling,' said Helena, 'we will be mindful of the caution that has restricted us to this interview for the present, and will part. I hear Neville moving too. Are you going back?'

'To Miss Twinkleton's?' asked Rosa.

'Yes.'

'O, I could never go there any more. I couldn't indeed, after that dreadful interview!' said Rosa.

'Then where ARE you going, pretty one?'

'Now I come to think of it, I don't know,' said Rosa. 'I have settled nothing at all yet, but my guardian will take care of me. Don't be uneasy, dear. I shall be sure to be somewhere.'

(It did seem likely.)

'And I shall hear of my Rosebud from Mr. Tartar?' inquired Helena.

'Yes, I suppose so; from--' Rosa looked back again in a flutter, instead of supplying the name. 'But tell me one thing before we part, dearest Helena. Tell me--that you are sure, sure, sure, I couldn't help it.'

'Help it, love?'

'Help making him malicious and revengeful. I couldn't hold any terms with him, could I?'

'You know how I love you, darling,' answered Helena, with indignation; 'but I would sooner see you dead at his wicked feet.'

'That's a great comfort to me! And you will tell your poor brother so, won't you? And you will give him my remembrance and my sympathy? And you will ask him not to hate me?'

With a mournful shake of the head, as if that would be quite a superfluous entreaty, Helena lovingly kissed her two hands to her friend, and her friend's two hands were kissed to her; and then she saw a third hand (a brown one) appear among the flowers and leaves, and help her friend out of sight.

The refection that Mr. Tartar produced in the Admiral's Cabin by merely touching the spring knob of a locker and the handle of a drawer, was a dazzling enchanted repast. Wonderful macaroons, glittering liqueurs, magically-preserved tropical spices, and jellies of celestial tropical fruits, displayed themselves profusely at an instant's notice.

But Mr. Tartar could not make time stand still; and time, with his hard-hearted fleetness, strode on so fast, that Rosa was obliged to come down from the bean-stalk country to earth and her guardian's chambers.

'And now, my dear,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'what is to be done next? To put the same thought in another form; what is to be done with you?'

Rosa could only look apologetically sensible of being very much in her own way and in everybody else's. Some
passing idea of living, fireproof, up a good many stairs in Furnival's Inn for the rest of her life, was the only thing in the nature of a plan that occurred to her.

'It has come into my thoughts,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'that as the respected lady, Miss Twinkleton, occasionally repairs to London in the recess, with the view of extending her connection, and being available for interviews with metropolitan parents, if any-- whether, until we have time in which to turn ourselves round, we might invite Miss Twinkleton to come and stay with you for a month?'

'Stay where, sir?'

'Whether,' explained Mr. Grewgious, 'we might take a furnished lodging in town for a month, and invite Miss Twinkleton to assume the charge of you in it for that period?'

'And afterwards?' hinted Rosa.

'I think that might smooth the way,' assented Rosa.

'Then let us,' said Mr. Grewgious, rising, 'go and look for a furnished lodging. Nothing could be more acceptable to me than the sweet presence of last evening, for all the remaining evenings of my existence; but these are not fit surroundings for a young lady. Let us set out in quest of adventures, and look for a furnished lodging. In the meantime, Mr. Crisparkle here, about to return home immediately, will no doubt kindly see Miss Twinkleton, and invite that lady to co-operate in our plan.'

Mr. Crisparkle, willingly accepting the commission, took his departure; Mr. Grewgious and his ward set forth on their expedition.

As Mr. Grewgious's idea of looking at a furnished lodging was to get on the opposite side of the street to a house with a suitable bill in the window, and stare at it; and then work his way tortuously to the back of the house, and stare at that; and then not go in, but make similar trials of another house, with the same result; their progress was but slow. At length he bethought himself of a widowed cousin, divers times removed, of Mr. Bazzard's, who had once solicited his influence in the lodger world, and who lived in Southampton Street, Bloomsbury Square. This lady's name, stated in uncompromising capitals of considerable size on a brass door-plate, and yet not lucidly as to sex or condition, was BILLICKIN.

Personal faintness, and an overpowering personal candour, were the distinguishing features of Mrs. Billickin's organisation. She came languishing out of her own exclusive back parlour, with the air of having been expressly brought-to for the purpose, from an accumulation of several swoons.

'I hope I see you well, sir,' said Mrs. Billickin, recognising her visitor with a bend.

'Thank you, quite well. And you, ma'am?' returned Mr. Grewgious.

'I am as well,' said Mrs. Billickin, becoming aspirational with excess of faintness, 'as I hever ham.'

'My ward and an elderly lady,' said Mr. Grewgious, 'wish to find a genteel lodging for a month or so. Have you any apartments available, ma'am?'

'Mr. Grewgious,' returned Mrs. Billickin, 'I will not deceive you; far from it. I HAVE apartments available.'

'This with the air of adding: 'Convey me to the stake, if you will; but while I live, I will be candid.'

'And now, what apartments, ma'am?' asked Mr. Grewgious, cosily. To tame a certain severity apparent on the part of Mrs. Billickin.

'There is this sitting-room--which, call it what you will, it is the front parlour, Miss,' said Mrs. Billickin, impressing Rosa into the conversation: 'the back parlour being what I cling to and never part with; and there is two bedrooms at the top of the 'ouse with gas laid on. I do not tell you that your bedroom floors is firm, for firm they are not. The gas-fitter himself allowed, that to make a firm job, he must go right under your jistes, and it were not worth the outlay as a yearly tenant so to do. The piping is carried above your jistes, and it is best that it should be made known to you.'

Mr. Grewgious and Rosa exchanged looks of some dismay, though they had not the least idea what latent horrors this carriage of the piping might involve. Mrs. Billickin put her hand to her heart, as having eased it of a load.

'Well! The roof is all right, no doubt,' said Mr. Grewgious, plucking up a little.

'Mr. Grewgious,' returned Mrs. Billickin, 'if I was to tell you, sir, that to have nothink above you is to have a floor above you, I should put a deception upon you which I will not do. No, sir. Your slates WILL rattle loose at that elevation in windy weather, do your utmost, best or worst! I defy you, sir, be you what you may, to keep your slates tight, try how you can.' Here Mrs. Billickin, having been warm with Mr. Grewgious, cooled a little, not to abuse the moral power she held over him. 'Consequent,' proceeded Mrs. Billickin, more mildly, but still firmly in her incorruptible candour: 'consequent it would be worse than of no use for me to trapse and travel up to the top of the 'ouse with you, and for you to say, "Mrs. Billickin, what stain do I notice in the ceiling, for a stain I do consider it?" and for me to answer, "I do not understand you, sir." No, sir, I will not be so underhand. I DO understand you before
you pint it out. It is the wet, sir. It do come in, and it do not come in. You may lay dry there half your lifetime; but
the time will come, and it is best that you should know it, when a dripping sop would be no name for you.'

Mr. Grewgious looked much disgraced by being prefigured in this pickle.

'Have you any other apartments, ma'am?' he asked.

'Mr. Grewgious,' returned Mrs. Billickin, with much solemnity, 'I have. You ask me have I, and my open and my
honest answer air, I have. The first and second floors is wacant, and sweet rooms.'

'Come, come! There's nothing against THEM,' said Mr. Grewgious, comforting himself.

'Mr. Grewgious,' replied Mrs. Billickin, 'pardon me, there is the stairs. Unless your mind is prepared for the
stairs, it will lead to inevitable disappointment. You cannot, Miss,' said Mrs. Billickin, addressing Rosa
reproachfully, 'place a first floor, and far less a second, on the level footing 'of a parlour. No, you cannot do it, Miss,
it is beyond your power, and wherefore try?'

Mrs. Billickin put it very feelingly, as if Rosa had shown a headstrong determination to hold the untenable
position.

'Can we see these rooms, ma'am?' inquired her guardian.

'Mr. Grewgious, I can. I will not disguise it from you, sir; you can.'

Mrs. Billickin then sent into her back parlour for her shawl (it being a state fiction, dating from immemorial
antiquity, that she could never go anywhere without being wrapped up), and having been enrolled by her attendant,
led the way. She made various genteel pauses on the stairs for breath, and clutched at her heart in the drawing-room
as if it had very nearly got loose, and she had caught it in the act of taking wing.

'And the second floor?' said Mr. Grewgious, on finding the first satisfactory.

'Mr. Grewgious,' replied Mrs. Billickin, turning upon him with ceremony, as if the time had now come when a
distinct understanding on a difficult point must be arrived at, and a solemn confidence established, 'the second floor
is over this.'

'Can we see that too, ma'am?'

'Yes, sir,' returned Mrs. Billickin, 'it is open as the day.'

That also proving satisfactory, Mr. Grewgious retired into a window with Rosa for a few words of consultation,
and then asking for pen and ink, sketched out a line or two of agreement. In the meantime Mrs. Billickin took a seat,
and delivered a kind of Index to, or Abstract of, the general question.

'Five-and-forty shillings per week by the month certain at the time of year,' said Mrs. Billickin, 'is only
reasonable to both parties. It is not Bond Street nor yet St. James's Palace; but it is not pretended that it is. Neither is
it attempted to be denied--for why should it?--that the Arching leads to a mews. Mews must exist. Respecting
attendance; two is kep', at liberal wages. Words HAS arisen as to tradesmen, but dirty shoes on fresh hearth- stoning
was attributable, and no wish for a commission on your orders. Coals is either BY the fire, or PER the scuttle.' She
emphasised the prepositions as marking a subtle but immense difference. 'Dogs is not viewed with favour. Besides
litter, they gets stole, and sharing suspicions is apt to creep in, and unpleasantness takes place.'

By this time Mr. Grewgious had his agreement-lines, and his earnest-money, ready. 'I have signed it for the
ladies, ma'am,' he said, 'and you'll have the goodness to sign it for yourself, Christian and Surname, there, if you
please.'

'Mr. Grewgious,' said Mrs. Billickin in a new burst of candour, 'no, sir! You must excuse the Christian name.'

Mr. Grewgious stared at her.

'The door-plate is used as a protection,' said Mrs. Billickin, 'and acts as such, and go from it I will not.'

Mr. Grewgious stared at Rosa.

'No, Mr. Grewgious, you must excuse me. So long as this 'OUSE is known indefinite as Billickin's, and so long as
it is a doubt with the riff-raff where Billickin may be hidin', near the street-door or down the airy, and what his
weight and size, so long I feel safe. But commit myself to a solitary female statement, no, Miss! Nor would you for a
moment wish,' said Mrs. Billickin, with a strong sense of injury, 'to take that advantage of your sex, if you were not
brought to it by inconsiderate example.'

Rosa reddening as if she had made some most disgraceful attempt to overreach the good lady, besought Mr.
Grewgious to rest content with any signature. And accordingly, in a baronial way, the sign- manual BILLICKIN got
appended to the document.

Details were then settled for taking possession on the next day but one, when Miss Twinkleton might be
reasonably expected; and Rosa went back to Furnival's Inn on her guardian's arm.

Behold Mr. Tartar walking up and down Furnival's Inn, checking himself when he saw them coming, and
advancing towards them!

'It occurred to me,' hinted Mr. Tartar, 'that we might go up the river, the weather being so delicious and the tide
serving. I have a boat of my own at the Temple Stairs.'
'I have not been up the river for this many a day,' said Mr. Grewgious, tempted.
'I was never up the river,' added Rosa.

Within half an hour they were setting this matter right by going up the river. The tide was running with them, the afternoon was charming. Mr. Tartar's boat was perfect. Mr. Tartar and Lobley (Mr. Tartar's man) pulled a pair of oars. Mr. Tartar had a yacht, it seemed, lying somewhere down by Greenhithe; and Mr. Tartar's man had charge of this yacht, and was detached upon his present service. He was a jolly-favoured man, with tawny hair and whiskers, and a big red face. He was the dead image of the sun in old woodcuts, his hair and whiskers answering for rays all around him. Resplendent in the bow of the boat, he was a shining sight, with a man-of-war's man's shirt on--or off, according to opinion--and his arms and breast tattooed all sorts of patterns. Lobley seemed to take it easily, and so did Mr. Tartar; yet their oars bent as they pulled, and the boat bounded under them. Mr. Tartar talked as if he were doing nothing, to Rosa who was really doing nothing, and to Mr. Grewgious who was doing this much that he steered all wrong; but what did that matter, when a turn of Mr. Tartar's skilful wrist, or a mere grin of Mr. Lobley's over the bow, put all to rights! The tide bore them on in the gayest and most sparkling manner, until they stopped to dine in some ever-lasting-green garden, needing no matter-of-fact identification here; and then the tide obligingly turned--being devoted to that party alone for that day; and as they floated idly among some osier-beds, Rosa tried what she could do in the rowing way, and came off splendidly, being much assisted; and Mr. Grewgious tried what he could do, and came off on his back, doubled up with an oar under his chin, being not assisted at all. Then there was an interval of rest under boughs (such rest!) what time Mr. Lobley mopped, and, arranging cushions, stretchers, and the like, danced the tight- rope the whole length of the boat like a man to whom shoes were a superstition and stockings slavery; and then came the sweet return among delicious odours of limes in bloom, and musical ripplings; and, all too soon, the great black city cast its shadow on the waters, and its dark bridges spanned them as death spans life, and the everlasting- green garden seemed to be left for everlasting, unregainable and far away.

'Cannot people get through life without gritty stages, I wonder?' Rosa thought next day, when the town was very gritty again, and everything had a strange and an uncomfortable appearance of seeming to wait for something that wouldn't come. NO. She began to think, that, now the Cloisterham school-days had glided past and gone, the gritty stages would begin to set in at intervals and make themselves wearily known!

Yet what did Rosa expect? Did she expect Miss Twinkleton? Miss Twinkleton duly came. Forth from her back parlour issued the Billickin to receive Miss Twinkleton, and War was in the Billickin's eye from that fell moment. Miss Twinkleton brought a quantity of luggage with her, having all Rosa's as well as her own. The Billickin took it ill that Miss Twinkleton's mind, being sorely disturbed by this luggage, failed to take in her personal identity with that clearness of perception which was due to its demands. Stateliness mounted her gloomy throne upon the Billickin's brow in consequence. And when Miss Twinkleton, in agitation taking stock of her trunks and packages, of which she had seventeen, particularly counted in the Billickin herself as number eleven, the B. found it necessary to repudiate.

'Things cannot too soon be put upon the footing,' said she, with a candour so demonstrative as to be almost obtrusive, 'that the person of the 'ouse is not a box nor yet a bundle, nor a carpet- bag. No, I am 'ily obleeged to you, Miss Twinkleton, nor yet a beggar.'

This last disclaimer had reference to Miss Twinkleton's distractedly pressing two-and-sixpence on her, instead of the cabman.

Thus cast off, Miss Twinkleton wildly inquired, 'which gentleman' was to be paid? There being two gentlemen in that position (Miss Twinkleton having arrived with two cabs), each gentleman on being paid held forth his two-and-sixpence on the flat of his open hand, and, with a speechless stare and a dropped jaw, displayed his wrong to heaven and earth. Terrified by this alarming spectacle, Miss Twinkleton placed another shilling in each hand; at the same time appealing to the law in flurried accents, and recounting her luggage this time with the two gentlemen in, who caused the total to come out complicated. Meanwhile the two gentlemen, each looking very hard at the last shilling grumblingly, as if it might become eighteen-pence if he kept his eyes on it, descended the doorsteps, ascended their carriages, and drove away, leaving Miss Twinkleton on a bonnet-box in tears.

The Billickin beheld this manifestation of weakness without sympathy, and gave directions for 'a young man to be got in' to wrestle with the luggage. When that gladiator had disappeared from the arena, peace ensued, and the new lodgers dined.

But the Billickin had somehow come to the knowledge that Miss Twinkleton kept a school. The leap from that knowledge to the inference that Miss Twinkleton set herself to teach HER something, was easy. 'But you don't do it,' soliloquised the Billickin; 'I am not your pupil, whatever she,' meaning Rosa, 'may be, poor thing!'

Miss Twinkleton, on the other hand, having changed her dress and recovered her spirits, was animated by a bland desire to improve the occasion in all ways, and to be as serene a model as possible. In a happy compromise between her two states of existence, she had already become, with her workbasket before her, the equably vivacious
companion with a slight judicious flavouring of information, when the Billickin announced herself.

'I will not hide from you, ladies,' said the B., enveloped in the shawl of state, 'for it is not my character to hide neither my motives nor my actions, that I take the liberty to look in upon you to express a 'ope that your dinner was to your liking. Though not Professed but Plain, still her wages should be a sufficient object to her to stimulate to soar above mere roast and biled.'

'We dined very well indeed,' said Rosa, 'thank you.'

'Accustomed,' said Miss Twinkleton with a gracious air, which to the jealous ears of the Billickin seemed to add 'my good woman'-- 'accustomed to a liberal and nutritious, yet plain and salutary diet, we have found no reason to bemoan our absence from the ancient city, and the methodical household, in which the quiet routine of our lot has been hitherto cast.'

'I did think it well to mention to my cook,' observed the Billickin with a gush of candour, 'which I 'ope you will agree with, Miss Twinkleton, was a right precaution, that the young lady being used to what we should consider here but poor diet, had better be brought forward by degrees. For, a rush from scanty feeding to generous feeding, and from what you may call messing to what you may call method, do require a power of constitution which is not often found in youth, particular when undermined by boarding-school!'

It will be seen that the Billickin now openly pitted herself against Miss Twinkleton, as one whom she had fully ascertained to be her natural enemy.

'Your remarks,' returned Miss Twinkleton, from a remote moral eminence, 'are well meant, I have no doubt; but you will permit me to observe that they develop a mistaken view of the subject, which can only be imputed to your extreme want of accurate information.'

'My information,' retorted the Billickin, throwing in an extra syllable for the sake of emphasis at once polite and powerful--'my information, Miss Twinkleton, were my own experience, which I believe is usually considered to be good guidance. But whether so or not, I was put in youth to a very genteel boarding-school, the mistress being no less a lady than yourself, of about your own age or it may be some years younger, and a poorness of blood flowed from the table which has run through my life.'

'Very likely,' said Miss Twinkleton, still from her distant eminence; 'and very much to be deplored.--Rosa, my dear, how are you getting on with your work?'

'Miss Twinkleton,' resumed the Billickin, in a courtly manner, 'before retiring on the 'int, as a lady should, I wish to ask of yourself, as a lady, whether I am to consider that my words is doubted?'

'I am not aware on what ground you cherish such a supposition,' began Miss Twinkleton, when the Billickin neatly stopped her.

'Do not, if you please, put suppositions betwixt my lips where none such have been imparted by myself. Your flow of words is great, Miss Twinkleton, and no doubt is expected from you by your pupils, and no doubt is considered worth the money. NO doubt, I am sure. But not paying for flows of words, and not asking to be favoured with them here, I wish to repeat my question.'

'If you refer to the poverty of your circulation,' began Miss Twinkleton, when again the Billickin neatly stopped her.

'I have used no such expressions.'

'If you refer, then, to the poorness of your blood--'

'Brought upon me,' stipulated the Billickin, expressly, 'at a boarding-school--'

'Then,' resumed Miss Twinkleton, 'all I can say is, that I am bound to believe, on your asseveration, that it is very poor indeed. I cannot forbear adding, that if that unfortunate circumstance influences your conversation, it is much to be lamented, and it is eminently desirable that your blood were richer.--Rosa, my dear, how are you getting on with your work?'

'Hem! Before retiring, Miss,' proclaimed the Billickin to Rosa, loftily cancelling Miss Twinkleton, 'I should wish it to be understood between yourself and me that my transactions in future is with you alone. I know no elderly lady here, Miss, none older than yourself.'

'A highly desirable arrangement, Rosa my dear,' observed Miss Twinkleton.

'It is not, Miss,' said the Billickin, with a sarcastic smile, 'that I possess the Mill I have heard of, in which old single ladies could be ground up young (what a gift it would be to some of us), but that I limit myself to you totally.'

'When I have any desire to communicate a request to the person of the house, Rosa my dear,' observed Miss Twinkleton with majestic cheerfulness, 'I will make it known to you, and you will kindly undertake, I am sure, that it is conveyed to the proper quarter.'

'Good-evening, Miss,' said the Billickin, at once affectionately and distantly. 'Being alone in my eyes, I wish you good-evening with best wishes, and do not find myself drove, I am truly 'appy to say, into expressing my contempt for an indiviidual, unfortunately for yourself, belonging to you.'
The Billickin gracefully withdrew with this parting speech, and from that time Rosa occupied the restless position of shuttlecock between these two battledores. Nothing could be done without a smart match being played out. Thus, on the daily-arising question of dinner, Miss Twinkleton would say, the three being present together:

'Perhaps, my love, you will consult with the person of the house, whether she can procure us a lamb's fry; or, failing that, a roast fowl.'

On which the Billickin would retort (Rosa not having spoken a word), 'If you was better accustomed to butcher's meat, Miss, you would not entertain the idea of a lamb's fry. Firstly, because lambs has long been sheep, and secondly, because there is such things as killing-days, and there is not. As to roast fowls, Miss, why you must be quite surfeited with roast fowls, letting alone your buying, when you market for yourself, the agedest of poultry with the scaliest of legs, quite as if you was accustomed to picking 'em out for cheapness. Try a little invention, Miss. Use yourself to 'ousekeeping a bit. Come now, think of somethink else.'

To this encouragement, offered with the indulgent toleration of a wise and liberal expert, Miss Twinkleton would rejoin, reddening:

'Or, my dear, you might propose to the person of the house a duck.'

'Well, Miss!' the Billickin would exclaim (still no word being spoken by Rosa), 'you do surprise me when you speak of ducks! Not to mention that they're getting out of season and very dear, it really strikes to my heart to see you have a duck; for the breast, which is the only delicate cuts in a duck, always goes in a direction which I cannot imagine where, and your own plate comes down so miserably skin-and-bony! Try again, Miss. Think more of yourself, and less of others. A dish of sweetbreads now, or a bit of mutton. Something at which you can get your equal chance.'

Occasionally the game would wax very brisk indeed, and would be kept up with a smartness rendering such an encounter as this quite tame. But the Billickin almost invariably made by far the higher score; and would come in with side hits of the most unexpected and extraordinary description, when she seemed without a chance.

All this did not improve the gritty state of things in London, or the air that London had acquired in Rosa's eyes of waiting for something that never came. Tired of working, and conversing with Miss Twinkleton, she suggested working and reading: to which Miss Twinkleton readily assented, as an admirable reader, of tried powers. But Rosa soon made the discovery that Miss Twinkleton didn't read fairly. She cut the love-scenes, interpolated passages in praise of female celibacy, and was guilty of other glaring pious frauds. As an instance in point, take the glowing passage: 'Ever dearest and best adored,--said Edward, clasping the dear head to his breast, and drawing the silken hair through his caressing fingers, from which he suffered it to fall like golden rain,--ever dearest and best adored, let us fly from the unsympathetic world and the sterile coldness of the stony-hearted, to the rich warm Paradise of Trust and Love.' Miss Twinkleton's fraudulent version tamely ran thus: 'Ever engaged to me with the consent of our parents on both sides, and the approbation of the silver-haired rector of the district,--said Edward, respectfully calling on thy papa ere to- morrow's dawn has sunk into the west, and propose a suburban establishment, lowly it may be, but within our means, where he will always be welcome as an evening guest, and where every arrangement shall invest economy, and constant interchange of scholastic acquirements with the attributes of the ministering angel to domestic bliss.'

As the days crept on and nothing happened, the neighbours began to say that the pretty girl at Billickin's, who looked so wistfully and so much out of the gritty windows of the drawing-room, seemed to be losing her spirits. The pretty girl might have lost them but for the accident of lighting on some books of voyages and sea-adventure. As a compensation against their romance, Miss Twinkleton, reading aloud, made the most of all the latitudes and longitudes, bearings, winds, currents, offsets, and other statistics (which she felt to be none the less improving because they expressed nothing whatever to her); while Rosa, listening intently, made the most of all the latitudes and longitudes, bearings, winds, currents, offsets, and other statistics (which she felt to be none the less improving because they expressed nothing whatever to her); while Rosa, listening intently, made the most of what was nearest to her heart. So they both did better than before.

CHAPTER XXIII--THE DAWN AGAIN

Although Mr. Crisparkle and John Jasper met daily under the Cathedral roof, nothing at any time passed between them having reference to Edwin Drood, after the time, more than half a year gone by, when Jasper mutely showed the Minor Canon the conclusion and the resolution entered in his Diary. It is not likely that they ever met, though so often, without the thoughts of each reverting to the subject. It is not likely that they ever met, though so often, without a sensation on the part of each that the other was a perplexing secret to him. Jasper as the denouncer and pursuer of Neville Landless, and Mr. Crisparkle as his consistent advocate and protector, must at least have stood sufficiently in opposition to have speculated with keen interest on the steadiness and next direction of the other's designs. But neither ever broached the theme.

False pretence not being in the Minor Canon's nature, he doubtless displayed openly that he would at any time have revived the subject, and even desired to discuss it. The determined reticence of Jasper, however, was not to be
so approached. Impassive, moody, solitary, resolute, so concentrated on one idea, and on its attendant fixed purpose, that he would share it with no fellow-creature, he lived apart from human life. Constantly exercising an Art which brought him into mechanical harmony with others, and which could not have been pursued unless he and they had been in the nicest mechanical relations and unison, it is curious to consider that the spirit of the man was in moral accordance or interchange with nothing around him. This indeed he had confided to his lost nephew, before the occasion for his present inflexibility arose.

That he must know of Rosa's abrupt departure, and that he must divine its cause, was not to be doubted. Did he suppose that he had terrified her into silence? or did he suppose that she had imparted to any one—to Mr. Crisparkle himself, for instance—the particulars of his last interview with her? Mr. Crisparkle could not determine this in his mind. He could not but admit, however, as a just man, that it was not, of itself, a crime to fall in love with Rosa, any more than it was a crime to offer to set love above revenge.

The dreadful suspicion of Jasper, which Rosa was so shocked to have received into her imagination, appeared to have no harbour in Mr. Crisparkle's. If it ever haunted Helena's thoughts or Neville's, neither gave it one spoken word of utterance. Mr. Grewgious took no pains to conceal his implacable dislike of Jasper, yet he never referred it, however distantly, to such a source. But he was a reticent as well as an eccentric man; and he made no mention of a certain evening when he warmed his hands at the gatehouse fire, and looked steadily down upon a certain heap of torn and miry clothes upon the floor.

Drowsy Cloisterham, whenever it awoke to a passing reconsideration of a story above six months old and dismissed by the bench of magistrates, was pretty equally divided in opinion whether John Jasper's beloved nephew had been killed by his treacherously passionate rival, or in an open struggle; or had, for his own purposes, spirited himself away. It then lifted up its head, to notice that the bereaved Jasper was still ever devoted to discovery and revenge; and then dozed off again. This was the condition of matters, all round, at the period to which the present history has now attained.

The Cathedral doors have closed for the night; and the Choir-master, on a short leave of absence for two or three services, sets his face towards London. He travels thither by the means by which Rosa travelled, and arrives, as Rosa arrived, on a hot, dusty evening.

His travelling baggage is easily carried in his hand, and he repairs with it on foot, to a hybrid hotel in a little square behind Aldersgate Street, near the General Post Office. It is hotel, boarding-house, or lodging-house, at its visitor's option. It announces itself, in the new Railway Advertisers, as a novel enterprise, timidly beginning to spring up. It bashfully, almost apologetically, gives the traveller to understand that it does not expect him, on the good old constitutional hotel plan, to order a pint of sweet blacking for his drinking, and throw it away; but insinuates that he may have his boots blacked instead of his stomach, and maybe also have bed, breakfast, attendance, and a porter up all night, for a certain fixed charge. From these and similar premises, many true Britons in the lowest spirits deduce that the times are levelling times, except in the article of high roads, of which there will shortly be not one in England.

He eats without appetite, and soon goes forth again. Eastward and still eastward through the stale streets he takes his way, until he reaches his destination: a miserable court, specially miserable among many such.

He ascends a broken staircase, opens a door, looks into a dark stifling room, and says: 'Are you alone here?'

'Alone, deary; worse luck for me, and better for you,' replies a croaking voice. 'Come in, come in, whoever you be: I can't see you till I light a match, yet I seem to know the sound of your speaking. I'm acquainted with you, ain't I?'

'Light your match, and try.'

'So I will, deary; so I will; but my hand that shakes, as I can't lay it on a match all in a moment. And I cough so, that, put my matches where I may, I never find 'em there. They jump and start, as I cough and cough, like live things. Are you off a voyage, deary?'

'No.'

'Not seafaring?'

'No.'

'Well, there's land customers, and there's water customers. I'm a mother to both. Different from Jack Chinaman t'other side the court. He ain't a father to neither. It ain't in him. And he ain't got the true secret of mixing, though he charges as much as me that has, and more if he can get it. Here's a match, and now where's the candle? If my cough takes me, I shall cough out twenty matches afore I gets a light.'

But she finds the candle, and lights it, before the cough comes on. It seizes her in the moment of success, and she sits down rocking herself to and fro, and gasping at intervals: 'O, my lungs is awful bad! my lungs is wore away to cabbage-nets!' until the fit is over. During its continuance she has had no power of sight, or any other power not absorbed in the struggle; but as it leaves her, she begins to strain her eyes, and as soon as she is able to articulate, she
cries, staring:

'Why, it's you!'

'Are you so surprised to see me?'

'I thought I never should have seen you again, deary. I thought you was dead, and gone to Heaven.'

'Why?'

'I didn't suppose you could have kept away, alive, so long, from the poor old soul with the real receipt for mixing it. And you are in mourning too! Why didn't you come and have a pipe or two of comfort? Did they leave you money, perhaps, and so you didn't want comfort?'

'No.'

'Who was they as died, deary?'

'A relative.'

'Died of what, lovey?'

'Probably, Death.'

'We are short to-night!' cries the woman, with a propitiatory laugh. 'Short and snappish we are! But we're out of sorts for want of a smoke. We've got the all-overs, haven't us, deary? But this is the place to cure 'em in; this is the place where the all-overs is smoked off.'

'You may make ready, then,' replies the visitor, 'as soon as you like.'

He divests himself of his shoes, loosens his cravat, and lies across the foot of the squalid bed, with his head resting on his left hand.

'Now you begin to look like yourself,' says the woman approvingly. 'Now I begin to know my old customer indeed! Been trying to mix for yourself this long time, poppet?'

'I have been taking it now and then in my own way.'

'Never take it your own way. It ain't good for trade, and it ain't good for you. Where's my ink-bottle, and where's my thimble, and where's my little spoon? He's going to take it in a artful form now, my deary dear!'

Entering on her process, and beginning to bubble and blow at the faint spark enclosed in the hollow of her hands, she speaks from time to time, in a tone of snuffling satisfaction, without leaving off. When he speaks, he does so without looking at her, and as if his thoughts were already roaming away by anticipation.

'I've got a pretty many smokes ready for you, first and last, haven't I, chuckey?'

'A good many.'

'When you first come, you was quite new to it; warn't ye?'

'Yes, I was easily disposed of, then.'

'But you got on in the world, and was able by-and-by to take your pipe with the best of 'em, warn't ye?'

'Ah; and the worst.'

'It's just ready for you. What a sweet singer you was when you first come! Used to drop your head, and sing yourself off like a bird! It's ready for you now, deary.'

He takes it from her with great care, and puts the mouthpiece to his lips. She seats herself beside him, ready to refill the pipe.

After inhaling a few whiffs in silence, he doubtingly accosts her with:

'Is it as potent as it used to be?'

'What do you speak of, deary?'

'What should I speak of, but what I have in my mouth?'

'It's just the same. Always the identical same.'

'It doesn't taste so. And it's slower.'

'You've got more used to it, you see.'

'That may be the cause, certainly. Look here.' He stops, becomes dreamy, and seems to forget that he has invited her attention. She bends over him, and speaks in his ear.

'I'm attending to you. Says you just now, Look here. Says I now, I'm attending to ye. We was talking just before of your being used to it.'

'I know all that. I was only thinking. Look here. Suppose you had something in your mind; something you were going to do.'

'Yes, deary; something I was going to do?'

'But had not quite determined to do.'

'Yes, deary.'

'Might or might not do, you understand.'

'Yes.' With the point of a needle she stirs the contents of the bowl.

'Should you do it in your fancy, when you were lying here doing this?'
She nods her head. 'Over and over again.'

'Just like me! I did it over and over again. I have done it hundreds of thousands of times in this room.'

'It's to be hoped it was pleasant to do, deary.'

'It WAS pleasant to do!'

He says this with a savage air, and a spring or start at her. Quite unmoved she retouches and replenishes the contents of the bowl with her little spatula. Seeing her intent upon the occupation, he sinks into his former attitude.

'It was a journey, a difficult and dangerous journey. That was the subject in my mind. A hazardous and perilous journey, over abysses where a slip would be destruction. Look down, look down! You see what lies at the bottom there?'

He has darted forward to say it, and to point at the ground, as though at some imaginary object far beneath. The woman looks at him, as his spasmodic face approaches close to hers, and not at his pointing. She seems to know what the influence of her perfect quietude would be; if so, she has not miscalculated it, for he subsides again.

'Well; I have told you I did it here hundreds of thousands of times. What do I say? I did it millions and billions of times. I did it so often, and through such vast expanses of time, that when it was really done, it seemed not worth the doing, it was done so soon.'

'That's the journey you have been away upon,' she quietly remarks.

He glares at her as he smokes; and then, his eyes becoming filmy, answers: 'That's the journey.'

Silence ensues. His eyes are sometimes closed and sometimes open. The woman sits beside him, very attentive to the pipe, which is all the while at his lips.

'I'll warrant,' she observes, when he has been looking fixedly at her for some consecutive moments, with a singular appearance in his eyes of seeming to see her a long way off, instead of so near him: 'I'll warrant you made the journey in a many ways, when you made it so often?'

'No, always in one way.'

'Always in the same way?'

'Ay.'

'In the way in which it was really made at last?'

'Ay.'

'And always took the same pleasure in harping on it?'

'Ay.'

For the time he appears unequal to any other reply than this lazy monosyllabic assent. Probably to assure herself that it is not the assent of a mere automaton, she reverses the form of her next sentence.

'Did you never get tired of it, deary, and try to call up something else for a change?'

He struggles into a sitting posture, and retorts upon her: 'What do you mean? What did I want? What did I come for?'

She gently lays him back again, and before returning him the instrument he has dropped, revives the fire in it with her own breath; then says to him, coaxingly:

'Sure, sure, sure! Yes, yes, yes! Now I go along with you. You was too quick for me. I see now. You come o' purpose to take the journey. Why, I might have known it, through its standing by you so.'

He answers first with a laugh, and then with a passionate setting of his teeth: 'Yes, I came on purpose. When I could not bear my life, I came to get the relief, and I got it. It WAS one! It WAS one!' This repetition with extraordinary vehemence, and the snarl of a wolf.

She observes him very cautiously, as though mentally feeling her way to her next remark. It is: 'There was a fellow-traveller, deary.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' He breaks into a ringing laugh, or rather yell.

'To think,' he cries, 'how often fellow-traveller, and yet not know it! To think how many times he went the journey, and never saw the road!'

The woman kneels upon the floor, with her arms crossed on the coverlet of the bed, close by him, and her chin upon them. In this crouching attitude she watches him. The pipe is falling from his mouth. She puts it back, and laying her hand upon his chest, moves him slightly from side to side. Upon that he speaks, as if she had spoken.

'Yes! I always made the journey first, before the changes of colours and the great landscapes and glittering processions began. They couldn't begin till it was off my mind. I had no room till then for anything else.'

Once more he lapses into silence. Once more she lays her hand upon his chest, and moves him slightly to and fro, as a cat might stimulate a half-slain mouse. Once more he speaks, as if she had spoken.

'What? I told you so. When it comes to be real at last, it is so short that it seems unreal for the first time. Hark!'

'Yes, deary. I'm listening.'

'Time and place are both at hand.'
He is on his feet, speaking in a whisper, and as if in the dark. 
'Time, place, and fellow-traveller,' she suggests, adopting his tone, and holding him softly by the arm. 
'How could the time be at hand unless the fellow-traveller was? Hush! The journey's made. It's over.' 
'So soon?'
'That's what I said to you. So soon. Wait a little. This is a vision. I shall sleep it off. It has been too short and easy. I must have a better vision than this; this is the poorest of all. No struggle, no consciousness of peril, no entreaty—and yet I never saw THAT before.' With a start.
'Saw what, deary?'
'Look at it! Look what a poor, mean, miserable thing it is! THAT must be real. It's over.'

He has accompanied this incoherence with some wild unmeaning gestures; but they trail off into the progressive inaction of stupor, and he lies a log upon the bed.

The woman, however, is still inquisitive. With a repetition of her cat-like action she slightly stirs his body again, and listens; stirs again, and listens; whispers to it, and listens. Finding it past all rousing for the time, she slowly gets upon her feet, with an air of disappointment, and flicks the face with the back of her hand in turning from it.

But she goes no further away from it than the chair upon the hearth. She sits in it, with an elbow on one of its arms, and her chin upon her hand, intent upon him. 'I heard ye say once,' she croaks under her breath, 'I heard ye say once, when I was lying where you're lying, and you were making your speculations upon me, "Unintelligible!" I heard you say so, of two more than me. But don't ye be too sure always; don't be ye too sure, beauty!'

Unwinking, cat-like, and intent, she presently adds: 'Not so potent as it once was? Ah! Perhaps not at first. You may be more right there. Practice makes perfect. I may have learned the secret how to make ye talk, deary.'

He talks no more, whether or no. Twitching in an ugly way from time to time, both as to his face and limbs, he lies heavy and silent. The wretched candle burns down; the woman takes its expiring end between her fingers, lights another at it, crams the guttering frying morsel deep into the candlestick, and rams it home with the new candle, as if she were loading some ill-savoured and unseemly weapon of witchcraft; the new candle in its turn burns down; and still he lies insensible. At length what remains of the last candle is blown out, and daylight looks into the room.

It has not looked very long, when he sits up, chilled and shaking, slowly recovers consciousness of where he is, and makes himself ready to depart. The woman receives what he pays her with a grateful, 'Bless ye, bless ye, deary!' and seems, tired out, to begin making herself ready for sleep as he leaves the room.

But seeming may be false or true. It is false in this case; for, the moment the stairs have ceased to creak under his tread, she glides after him, muttering emphatically: 'I'll not miss ye twice!'

There is no egress from the court but by its entrance. With a weird peep from the doorway, she watches for his looking back. He does not look back before disappearing, with a wavering step. She follows him, peeps from the court, sees him still faltering on without looking back, and holds him in view.

He repairs to the back of Aldersgate Street, where a door immediately opens to his knocking. She crouches in another doorway, watching that one, and easily comprehending that he puts up temporarily at that house. Her patience is unexhausted by hours. For sustenance she can, and does, buy bread within a hundred yards, and milk as it is carried past her.

He comes forth again at noon, having changed his dress, but carrying nothing in his hand, and having nothing carried for him. He is not going back into the country, therefore, just yet. She follows him a little way, hesitates, instantly turns confidently, and goes straight into the house he has quitted.

'Is the gentleman from Cloisterham indoors?'
'Just gone out.'

'Unlucky. When does the gentleman return to Cloisterham?'
'At six this evening.'

'Bless ye and thank ye. May the Lord prosper a business where a civil question, even from a poor soul, is so civilly answered!'

'I'll not miss ye twice!' repeats the poor soul in the street, and not so civilly. 'I lost ye last, where that omnibus you got into nigh your journey's end plied betwixt the station and the place. I wasn't so much as certain that you even went right on to the place. Now I know ye did. My gentleman from Cloisterham, I'll be there before ye, and bide your coming. I've swore my oath that I'll not miss ye twice!'

Accordingly, that same evening the poor soul stands in Cloisterham High Street, looking at the many quaint gables of the Nuns' House, and getting through the time as she best can until nine o'clock; at which hour she has reason to suppose that the arriving omnibus passengers may have some interest for her. The friendly darkness, at that hour, renders it easy for her to ascertain whether this be so or not; and it is so, for the passenger not to be missed twice arrives among the rest.

'Now let me see what becomes of you. Go on!'
An observation addressed to the air, and yet it might be addressed to the passenger, so compliantly does he go on along the High Street until he comes to an arched gateway, at which he unexpectedly vanishes. The poor soul quickens her pace; is swift, and close upon him entering under the gateway; but only sees a postern staircase on one side of it, and on the other side an ancient vaulted room, in which a large-headed, gray-haired gentleman is writing, under the odd circumstances of sitting open to the thoroughfare and eyeing all who pass, as if he were toll-taker of the gateway: though the way is free.

'Halloa!' he cries in a low voice, seeing her brought to a standstill: 'who are you looking for?'

'There was a gentleman passed in here this minute, sir.'

'Of course there was. What do you want with him?'

'Where do he live, deary?'

'Live? Up that staircase.'

'Bless ye! Whisper. What's his name, deary?'

'Surname Jasper, Christian name John. Mr. John Jasper.'

'Has he a calling, good gentleman?'

'Calling? Yes. Sings in the choir.'

'In the spire?'

'Choir.'

'What's that?'

Mr. Datchery rises from his papers, and comes to his doorstep. 'Do you know what a cathedral is?' he asks, jocosely.

The woman nods.

'What is it?'

She looks puzzled, casting about in her mind to find a definition, when it occurs to her that it is easier to point out the substantial object itself, massive against the dark-blue sky and the early stars.

'That's the answer. Go in there at seven to-morrow morning, and you may see Mr. John Jasper, and hear him too.'

'Thank ye! Thank ye!' The burst of triumph in which she thanks him does not escape the notice of the single buffer of an easy temper living idly on his means. He glances at her; clasps his hands behind him, as the wont of such buffers is; and lounges along the echoing Precincts at her side.

'Or,' he suggests, with a backward hitch of his head, 'you can go up at once to Mr. Jasper's rooms there.'

The woman eyes him with a cunning smile, and shakes her head.

'O! you don't want to speak to him?'

She repeats her dumb reply, and forms with her lips a soundless 'No.'

'You can admire him at a distance three times a day, whenever you like. It's a long way to come for that, though.'

The woman looks up quickly. If Mr. Datchery thinks she is to be so induced to declare where she comes from, he is of a much easier temper than she is. But she acquits him of such an artful thought, as he lounges along, like the chartered bore of the city, with his uncovered gray hair blowing about, and his purposeless hands rattling the loose money in the pockets of his trousers.

The chink of the money has an attraction for her greedy ears. 'Wouldn't you help me to pay for my traveller's lodging, dear gentleman, and to pay my way along? I am a poor soul, I am indeed, and troubled with a grievous cough.'

'You know the travellers' lodging, I perceive, and are making directly for it,' is Mr. Datchery's bland comment, still rattling. 'Been here often, my good woman?'

'Once in all my life.'

'Ay, ay?' They have arrived at the entrance to the Monks' Vineyard. An appropriate remembrance, presenting an exemplary model for imitation, is revived in the woman's mind by the sight of the place. She stops at the gate, and says energetically:

'By this token, though you mayn't believe it, That a young gentleman gave me three-and-sixpence as I was coughing my breath away on this very grass. I asked him for three-and-sixpence, and he gave it me.'

'Wasn't it a little cool to name your sum?' hints Mr. Datchery, still rattling. 'Isn't it customary to leave the amount open? Mightn't it have had the appearance, to the young gentleman--only the appearance--that he was rather dictated to?'

'Look'ee here, deary,' she replies, in a confidential and persuasive tone, 'I wanted the money to lay it out on a medicine as does me good, and as I deal in. I told the young gentleman so, and he gave it me, and I laid it out honest to the last brass farden. I want to lay out the same sum in the same way now; and if you'll give it me, I'll lay it out
honest to the last brass farden again, upon my soul!'

'What's the medicine?'

'I'll be honest with you beforehand, as well as after. It's opium.'

Mr. Datchery, with a sudden change of countenance, gives her a sudden look.

'It's opium, deary. Neither more nor less. And it's like a human creetur so far, that you always hear what can be
said against it, but seldom what can be said in its praise.'

Mr. Datchery begins very slowly to count out the sum demanded of him. Greedily watching his hands, she
continues to hold forth on the great example set him.

'It was last Christmas Eve, just arter dark, the once that I was here afore, when the young gentleman gave me the
three-and-six.' Mr. Datchery stops in his counting, finds he has counted wrong, shakes his money together, and
begins again.

'And the young gentleman's name,' she adds, 'was Edwin.'

Mr. Datchery drops some money, stoops to pick it up, and reddens with the exertion as he asks:

'How do you know the young gentleman's name?'

'I asked him for it, and he told it me. I only asked him the two questions, what was his Chris'en name, and
whether he'd a sweetheart? And he answered, Edwin, and he hadn't.'

Mr. Datchery pauses with the selected coins in his hand, rather as if he were falling into a brown study of their
value, and couldn't bear to part with them. The woman looks at him distrustfully, and with her anger brewing for the
event of his thinking better of the gift; but he bestows it on her as if he were abstracting his mind from the sacrifice,
and with many servile thanks she goes her way.

John Jasper's lamp is kindled, and his lighthouse is shining when Mr. Datchery returns alone towards it. As
mariners on a dangerous voyage, approaching an iron-bound coast, may look along the beams of the warning light to
the haven lying beyond it that may never be reached, so Mr. Datchery's wistful gaze is directed to this beacon, and
beyond.

His object in now revisiting his lodging is merely to put on the hat which seems so superfluous an article in his
wardrobe. It is half-past ten by the Cathedral clock when he walks out into the Precincts again; he lingers and looks
about him, as though, the enchanted hour when Mr. Durdles may be stoned home having struck, he had some
expectation of seeing the Imp which he had supposed to be the mission of stoning him.

In effect, that Power of Evil is abroad. Having nothing living to stone at the moment, he is discovered by Mr.
Datchery in the unholy office of stoning the dead, through the railings of the churchyard. The Imp finds this a
relishing and piquing pursuit; firstly, because their resting-place is announced to be sacred; and secondly, because
the tall headstones are sufficiently like themselves, on their beat in the dark, to justify the delicious fancy that they
are hurt when hit.

Mr. Datchery hails with him: 'Halloa, Winks!'

He acknowledges the hail with: 'Halloa, Dick!' Their acquaintance seemingly having been established on a
familiar footing.

'But, I say,' he remonstrates, 'don't yer go a-making my name public. I never means to plead to no name, mind
yer. When they says to me in the Lock-up, a-going to put me down in the book, "What's your name?" I says to them,
"Find out." Likewise when they says, "What's your religion?" I says, "Find out."'

Which, it may be observed in passing, it would be immensely difficult for the State, however statistical, to do.

'Asides which,' adds the boy, 'there ain't no family of Winkses.'

'I think there must be.'

'Yer lie, there ain't. The travellers give me the name on account of my getting no settled sleep and being knocked
up all night; whereby I gets one eye roused open afore I've shut the other. That's what Winks means. Deputy's the
nighest name to indict me by: but yer wouldn't catch me pleading to that, neither.'

'Deputy be it always, then. We two are good friends; eh, Deputy?'

'Jolly good.'

'I forgave you the debt you owed me when we first became acquainted, and many of my sixpences have come
your way since; eh, Deputy?'

'Ah! And what's more, yer ain't no friend o' Jarsper's. What did he go a-histing me off my legs for?'

'What indeed! But never mind him now. A shilling of mine is going your way to-night, Deputy. You have just
taken in a lodger I have been speaking to; an infirm woman with a cough.'

'Puffer,' assents Deputy, with a shrewd leer of recognition, and smoking an imaginary pipe, with his head very
much on one side and his eyes very much out of their places: 'Hopeum Puffer.'

'What is her name?'

'Er Royal Highness the Princess Puffer.'
'She has some other name than that; where does she live?'

'Up in London. Among the Jacks.'

'The sailors?'

'I said so; Jacks; and Chayner men: and hother Knifers.'

'I should like to know, through you, exactly where she lives.'

'All right. Give us 'old.'

A shilling passes; and, in that spirit of confidence which should pervade all business transactions between principals of honour, this piece of business is considered done.

'But here's a lark!' cries Deputy. 'Where did yer think 'Er Royal Highness is a-goin' to to-morrow morning? Blest if she ain't a- goin' to the KIN-FREE-DER-EL!' He greatly prolongs the word in his ecstasy, and smites his leg, and doubles himself up in a fit of shrill laughter.

'How do you know that, Deputy?'

'Cos she told me so just now. She said she must be hup and hout o' purpose. She ses, "Deputy, I must 'ave a early wash, and make myself as swell as I can, for I'm a-goin' to take a turn at the KIN-FREE-DER-EL!"' He separates the syllables with his former zest, and, not finding his sense of the ludicrous sufficiently relieved by stamping about on the pavement, breaks into a slow and stately dance, perhaps supposed to be performed by the Dean.

Mr. Datchery receives the communication with a well-satisfied though pondering face, and breaks up the conference. Returning to his quaint lodging, and sitting long over the supper of bread-and-cheese and salad and ale which Mrs. Tope has left prepared for him, he still sits when his supper is finished. At length he rises, throws open the door of a corner cupboard, and refers to a few uncouth chalked strokes on its inner side.

'I like,' says Mr. Datchery, 'the old tavern way of keeping scores. Illegible except to the scorer. The scorer not committed, the scored debited with what is against him. Hum; ha! A very small score this; a very poor score!'

He sighs over the contemplation of its poverty, takes a bit of chalk from one of the cupboard shelves, and pauses with it in his hand, uncertain what addition to make to the account.

'I think a moderate stroke,' he concludes, 'is all I am justified in scoring up;' so, suits the action to the word, closes the cupboard, and goes to bed.

A brilliant morning shines on the old city. Its antiquities and ruins are surpassingly beautiful, with a lusty ivy gleaming in the sun, and the rich trees waving in the balmy air. Changes of glorious light from moving boughs, songs of birds, scents from gardens, woods, and fields—or, rather, from the one great garden of the whole cultivated island in its yielding time—penetrate into the Cathedral, subdue its earthy odour, and preach the Resurrection and the Life. The cold stone tombs of centuries ago grow warm; and flecks of brightness dart into the sternest marble corners of the building, fluttering there like wings.

Comes Mr. Tope with his large keys, and yawningly unlocks and sets open. Come Mrs. Tope and attendant sweeping sprites. Come, in due time, organist and bellows-boy, peeping down from the red curtains in the loft, fearlessly flapping dust from books up at that remote elevation, and whisking it from stops and pedals. Come sundry rooks, from various quarters of the sky, back to the great tower; who may be presumed to enjoy vibration, and to know that bell and organ are going to give it them. Come a very small and straggling congregation indeed: chiefly from Minor Canon Corner and the Precincts. Come Mr. Crisparkle, fresh and bright; and his ministering brethren, not quite so fresh and bright. Come the Choir in a hurry (always in a hurry, and struggling into their nightgowns at the last moment, like children shirking bed), and comes John Jasper leading their line. Last of all comes Mr. Datchery into a stall, one of a choice empty collection very much at his service, and glancing about him for Her Royal Highness the Princess Puffer.

The service is pretty well advanced before Mr. Datchery can discern Her Royal Highness. But by that time he has made her out, in the shade. She is behind a pillar, carefully withdrawn from the Choir- master's view, but regards him with the closest attention. All unconscious of her presence, he chants and sings. She grins when he is most musically fervid, and—yes, Mr. Datchery sees her do it!—shakes her fist at him behind the pillar's friendly shelter.

Mr. Datchery looks again, to convince himself. Yes, again! As ugly and withered as one of the fantastic carvings on the under brackets of the stall seats, as malignant as the Evil One, as hard as the big brass eagle holding the sacred books upon his wings (and, according to the sculptor's representation of his ferocious attributes, not at all converted by them), she hugs herself in her lean arms, and then shakes both fists at the leader of the Choir.

And at that moment, outside the grated door of the Choir, having eluded the vigilance of Mr. Tope by shifty resources in which he is an adept, Deputy peeps, sharp-eyed, through the bars, and staring astounded from the threaten to the threatened.

The service comes to an end, and the servitors disperse to breakfast. Mr. Datchery accosts his last new acquaintance outside, when the Choir (as much in a hurry to get their bedgowns off, as they were but now to get them on) have scuffled away.
'Well, mistress. Good morning. You have seen him?'
'I'VE seen him, deary; I'VE seen him!'
'And you know him?'
'Know him! Better far than all the Reverend Parsons put together know him.'

Mrs. Tope's care has spread a very neat, clean breakfast ready for her lodger. Before sitting down to it, he opens his corner-cupboard door; takes his bit of chalk from its shelf; adds one thick line to the score, extending from the top of the cupboard door to the bottom; and then falls to with an appetite.
A STUDY IN SCARLET

by Arthur Conan Doyle

PART I.

CHAPTER I.

MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES.

IN the year 1878 I took my degree of Doctor of Medicine of the University of London, and proceeded to Netley to go through the course prescribed for surgeons in the army. Having completed my studies there, I was duly attached to the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers as Assistant Surgeon. The regiment was stationed in India at the time, and before I could join it, the second Afghan war had broken out. On landing at Bombay, I learned that my corps had advanced through the passes, and was already deep in the enemy's country. I followed, however, with many other officers who were in the same situation as myself, and succeeded in reaching Candahar in safety, where I found my regiment, and at once entered upon my new duties.

The campaign brought honours and promotion to many, but for me it had nothing but misfortune and disaster. I was removed from my brigade and attached to the Berkshires, with whom I served at the fatal battle of Maiwand. There I was struck on the shoulder by a Jezail bullet, which shattered the bone and grazed the subclavian artery. I should have fallen into the hands of the murderous Ghazis had it not been for the devotion and courage shown by Murray, my orderly, who threw me across a pack-horse, and succeeded in bringing me safely to the British lines.

Worn with pain, and weak from the prolonged hardships which I had undergone, I was removed, with a great train of wounded sufferers, to the base hospital at Peshawar. Here I rallied, and had already improved so far as to be able to walk about the wards, and even to bask a little upon the verandah, when I was struck down by enteric fever, that curse of our Indian possessions. For months my life was despaired of, and when at last I came to myself and became convalescent, I was so weak and emaciated that a medical board determined that not a day should be lost in sending me back to England. I was dispatched, accordingly, in the troopship "Orontes," and landed a month later on Portsmouth jetty, with my health irretrievably ruined, but with permission from a paternal government to spend the next nine months in attempting to improve it.

I had neither kith nor kin in England, and was therefore as free as air -- or as free as an income of eleven shillings and sixpence a day will permit a man to be. Under such circumstances, I naturally gravitated to London, that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained. There I stayed for some time at a private hotel in the Strand, leading a comfortable, meaningless existence, and spending such money as I had, considerably more freely than I ought. So alarming did the state of my finances become, that I soon realized that I must either leave the metropolis and rusticate somewhere in the country, or that I must make a complete alteration in my style of living. Choosing the latter alternative, I began by making up my mind to leave the hotel, and to take up my quarters in some less pretentious and less expensive domicile.

On the very day that I had come to this conclusion, I was standing at the Criterion Bar, when some one tapped me on the shoulder, and turning round I recognized young Stamford, who had been a dresser under me at Barts. The
sight of a friendly face in the great wilderness of London is a pleasant thing indeed to a lonely man. In old days Stamford had never been a particular crony of mine, but now I hailed him with enthusiasm, and he, in his turn, appeared to be delighted to see me. In the exuberance of my joy, I asked him to lunch with me at the Holborn, and we started off together in a hansom.

"Whatever have you been doing with yourself, Watson?" he asked in undisguised wonder, as we rattled through the crowded London streets. "You are as thin as a lath and as brown as a nut."

I gave him a short sketch of my adventures, and had hardly concluded it by the time that we reached our destination.

"Poor devil!" he said, commiseratingly, after he had listened to my misfortunes. "What are you up to now?"

"Looking for lodgings." I answered. "Trying to solve the problem as to whether it is possible to get comfortable rooms at a reasonable price."

"That's a strange thing," remarked my companion; "you are the second man to-day that has used that expression to me."

"And who was the first?" I asked.

"A fellow who is working at the chemical laboratory up at the hospital. He was bemoaning himself this morning because he could not get someone to go halves with him in some nice rooms which he had found, and which were too much for his purse."

"By Jove!" I cried, "if he really wants someone to share the rooms and the expense, I am the very man for him. I should prefer having a partner to being alone."

Young Stamford looked rather strangely at me over his wine-glass. "You don't know Sherlock Holmes yet," he said; "perhaps you would not care for him as a constant companion."

"Why, what is there against him?"

"Oh, I didn't say there was anything against him. He is a little queer in his ideas -- an enthusiast in some branches of science. As far as I know he is a decent fellow enough."

"A medical student, I suppose?" said I.

"No -- I have no idea what he intends to go in for. I believe he is well up in anatomy, and he is a first-class chemist; but, as far as I know, he has never taken out any systematic medical classes. His studies are very desultory and eccentric, but he has amassed a lot of out-of-the way knowledge which would astonish his professors."

"Did you never ask him what he was going in for?" I asked.

"No; he is not a man that it is easy to draw out, though he can be communicative enough when the fancy seizes him."

"I should like to meet him," I said. "If I am to lodge with anyone, I should prefer a man of studious and quiet habits. I am not strong enough yet to stand much noise or excitement. I had enough of both in Afghanistan to last me for the remainder of my natural existence. How could I meet this friend of yours?"

"He is sure to be at the laboratory," returned my companion. "He either avoids the place for weeks, or else he works there from morning to night. If you like, we shall drive round together after luncheon."

"Certainly," I answered, and the conversation drifted away into other channels.

As we made our way to the hospital after leaving the Holborn, Stamford gave me a few more particulars about the gentleman whom I proposed to take as a fellow-lodger.

"You mustn't blame me if you don't get on with him," he said; "I know nothing more of him than I have learned from meeting him occasionally in the laboratory. You proposed this arrangement, so you must not hold me responsible."

"If we don't get on it will be easy to part company," I answered. "It seems to me, Stamford," I added, looking hard at my companion, "that you have some reason for washing your hands of the matter. Isn't this fellow's temper so formidable, or what is it? Don't be mealy-mouthed about it."

"It is not easy to express the inexpressible," he answered with a laugh. "Holmes is a little too scientific for my tastes -- it approaches to cold-bloodedness. I could imagine his giving a friend a little pinch of the latest vegetable alkaloid, not out of malevolence, you understand, but simply out of a spirit of inquiry in order to have an accurate idea of the effects. To do him justice, I think that he would take it himself with the same readiness. He appears to have a passion for definite and exact knowledge."

"Very right too."

"Yes, but it may be pushed to excess. When it comes to beating the subjects in the dissecting-rooms with a stick, it is certainly taking rather a bizarre shape."

"Beating the subjects!"

"Yes, to verify how far bruises may be produced after death. I saw him at it with my own eyes."

"And yet you say he is not a medical student?"
"No. Heaven knows what the objects of his studies are. But here we are, and you must form your own impressions about him." As he spoke, we turned down a narrow lane and passed through a small side-door, which opened into a wing of the great hospital. It was familiar ground to me, and I needed no guiding as we ascended the bleak stone staircase and made our way down the long corridor with its vista of whitewashed wall and dun-coloured doors. Near the further end a low arched passage branched away from it and led to the chemical laboratory.

This was a lofty chamber, lined and littered with countless bottles. Broad, low tables were scattered about, which bristled with retorts, test-tubes, and little Bunsen lamps, with their blue flickering flames. There was only one student in the room, who was bending over a distant table absorbed in his work. At the sound of our steps he glanced round and sprang to his feet with a cry of pleasure. "I've found it! I've found it," he shouted to my companion, running towards us with a test-tube in his hand. "I have found a re-agent which is precipitated by hoemoglobin, and by nothing else." Had he discovered a gold mine, greater delight could not have shone upon his features.

"Dr. Watson, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Stamford, introducing us.

"How are you?" he said cordially, gripping my hand with a strength for which I should hardly have given him credit. "You have been in Afghanistan, I perceive."

"How on earth did you know that?" I asked in astonishment.

"Never mind," said he, chuckling to himself. "The question now is about hoemoglobin. No doubt you see the significance of this discovery of mine?"

"It is interesting, chemically, no doubt," I answered, "but practically ----"

"Why, man, it is the most practical medico-legal discovery for years. Don't you see that it gives us an infallible test for blood stains. Come over here now!" He seized me by the coat-sleeve in his eagerness, and drew me over to the table at which he had been working. "Let us have some fresh blood," he said, digging a long bodkin into his finger, and drawing off the resulting drop of blood in a chemical pipette. "Now, I add this small quantity of blood to a litre of water. You perceive that the resulting mixture has the appearance of pure water. The proportion of blood cannot be more than one in a million. I have no doubt, however, that we shall be able to obtain the characteristic reaction." As he spoke, he threw into the vessel a few white crystals, and then added some drops of a transparent fluid. In an instant the contents assumed a dull mahogany colour, and a brownish dust was precipitated to the bottom of the glass jar.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, clapping his hands, and looking as delighted as a child with a new toy. "What do you think of that?"

"It seems to be a very delicate test," I remarked.

"Beautiful! beautiful! The old Guiacum test was very clumsy and uncertain. So is the microscopic examination for blood corpuscles. The latter is valueless if the stains are a few hours old. Now, this appears to act as well whether the blood is old or new. Had this test been invented, there are hundreds of men now walking the earth who would long ago have paid the penalty of their crimes."

"Indeed!" I murmured.

"Criminal cases are continually hinging upon that one point. A man is suspected of a crime months perhaps after it has been committed. His linen or clothes are examined, and brownish stains discovered upon them. Are they blood stains, or mud stains, or rust stains, or fruit stains, or what are they? That is a question which has puzzled many an
expert, and why? Because there was no reliable test. Now we have the Sherlock Holmes' test, and there will no longer be any difficulty."

His eyes fairly glittered as he spoke, and he put his hand over his heart and bowed as if to some applauding crowd conjured up by his imagination.

"You are to be congratulated," I remarked, considerably surprised at his enthusiasm.

"There was the case of Von Bischoff at Frankfort last year. He would certainly have been hung had this test been in existence. Then there was Mason of Bradford, and the notorious Muller, and Lefevre of Montpellier, and Samson of new Orleans. I could name a score of cases in which it would have been decisive."

"You seem to be a walking calendar of crime," said Stamford with a laugh. "You might start a paper on those lines. Call it the 'Police News of the Past.'"

"Very interesting reading it might be made, too," remarked Sherlock Holmes, sticking a small piece of plaster over the prick on his finger. "I have to be careful," he continued, turning to me with a smile, "for I dabble with poisons a good deal." He held out his hand as he spoke, and I noticed that it was all mottled over with similar pieces of plaster, and discoloured with strong acids.

"We came here on business," said Stamford, sitting down on a high three-legged stool, and pushing another one in my direction with his foot. "My friend here wants to take diggings, and as you were complaining that you could get no one to go halves with you, I thought that I had better bring you together."

Sherlock Holmes seemed delighted at the idea of sharing his rooms with me. "I have my eye on a suite in Baker Street," he said, "which would suit us down to the ground. You don't mind the smell of strong tobacco, I hope?"

"I always smoke 'ship's' myself," I answered.

"That's good enough. I generally have chemicals about, and occasionally do experiments. Would that annoy you?"

"By no means."

"Let me see -- what are my other shortcomings. I get in the dumps at times, and don't open my mouth for days on end. You must not think I am sulky when I do that. Just let me alone, and I'll soon be right. What have you to confess now? It's just as well for two fellows to know the worst of one another before they begin to live together."

I laughed at this cross-examination. "I keep a bull pup," I said, "and I object to rows because my nerves are shaken, and I get up at all sorts of ungodly hours, and I am extremely lazy. I have another set of vices when I'm well, but those are the principal ones at present."

"Do you include violin-playing in your category of rows?" he asked, anxiously.

"It depends on the player," I answered. "A well-played violin is a treat for the gods -- a badly-played one ----"

"Oh, that's all right," he cried, with a merry laugh. "I think we may consider the thing as settled -- that is, if the rooms are agreeable to you."

"When shall we see them?"

"Call for me here at noon to-morrow, and we'll go together and settle everything," he answered.

"All right -- noon exactly," said I, shaking his hand.

We left him working among his chemicals, and we walked together towards my hotel.

"By the way," I asked suddenly, stopping and turning upon Stamford, "how did you find out that I had come from Afghanistan?"

My companion smiled an enigmatical smile. "That's just his little peculiarity," he said. "A good many people have wanted to know how he finds things out."

"Oh! a mystery is it?" I cried, rubbing my hands. "This is very piquant. I am much obliged to you for bringing us together. 'The proper study of mankind is man,' you know."

"You must study him, then," Stamford said, as he bade me good-bye. "You'll find him a knotty problem, though. I'll wager he learns more about you than you about him. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," I answered, and strolled on to my hotel, considerably interested in my new acquaintance.

CHAPTER II.

THE SCIENCE OF DEDUCTION.

We met next day as he had arranged, and inspected the rooms at No. 221B, Baker Street, of which he had spoken at our meeting. They consisted of a couple of comfortable bed-rooms and a single large airy sitting-room, cheerfully furnished, and illuminated by two broad windows. So desirable in every way were the apartments, and so moderate did the terms seem when divided between us, that the bargain was concluded upon the spot, and we at once entered into possession. That very evening I moved my things round from the hotel, and on the following morning Sherlock Holmes followed me with several boxes and portmanteaus. For a day or two we were busily employed in unpacking and laying out our property to the best advantage. That done, we gradually began to settle down and to accommodate ourselves to our new surroundings.
Holmes was certainly not a difficult man to live with. He was quiet in his ways, and his habits were regular. It was rare for him to be up after ten at night, and he had invariably breakfasted and gone out before I rose in the morning. Sometimes he spent his day at the chemical laboratory, sometimes in the dissecting-rooms, and occasionally in long walks, which appeared to take him into the lowest portions of the City. Nothing could exceed his energy when the working fit was upon him; but now and again a reaction would seize him, and for days on end he would lie upon the sofa in the sitting-room, hardly uttering a word or moving a muscle from morning to night. On these occasions I have noticed such a dreamy, vacant expression in his eyes, that I might have suspected him of being addicted to the use of some narcotic, had not the temperance and cleanliness of his whole life forbidden such a notion.

As the weeks went by, my interest in him and my curiosity as to his aims in life, gradually deepened and increased. His very person and appearance were such as to strike the attention of the most casual observer. In height he was rather over six feet, and so excessively lean that he seemed to be considerably taller. His eyes were sharp and piercing, save during those intervals of torpor to which I have alluded; and his thin, hawk-like nose gave his whole expression an air of alertness and decision. His chin, too, had the prominence and squareness which mark the man of determination. His hands were invariably blotted with ink and stained with chemicals, yet he was possessed of extraordinary delicacy of touch, as I frequently had occasion to observe when I watched him manipulating his fragile philosophical instruments.

The reader may set me down as a hopeless busybody, when I confess how much this man stimulated my curiosity, and how often I endeavoured to break through the reticence which he showed on all that concerned himself. Before pronouncing judgment, however, be it remembered, how objectless was my life, and how little there was to engage my attention. My health forbade me from venturing out unless the weather was exceptionally genial, and I had no friends who would call upon me and break the monotony of my daily existence. Under these circumstances, I eagerly hailed the little mystery which hung around my companion, and spent much of my time in endeavouring to unravel it.

He was not studying medicine. He had himself, in reply to a question, confirmed Stamford's opinion upon that point. Neither did he appear to have pursued any course of reading which might fit him for a degree in science or any other recognized portal which would give him an entrance into the learned world. Yet his zeal for certain studies was remarkable, and within eccentric limits his knowledge was so extraordinarily ample and minute that his observations have fairly astounded me. Surely no man would work so hard or attain such precise information unless he had some definite end in view. Desultory readers are seldom remarkable for the exactness of their learning. No man burdens his mind with small matters unless he has some very good reason for doing so.

His ignorance was as remarkable as his knowledge. Of contemporary literature, philosophy and politics he appeared to know next to nothing. Upon my quoting Thomas Carlyle, he inquired in the naivest way who he might be and what he had done. My surprise reached a climax, however, when I found incidentally that he was ignorant of the Copernican Theory and of the composition of the Solar System. That any civilized human being in this nineteenth century should not be aware that the earth travelled round the sun appeared to be to me such an extraordinary fact that I could hardly realize it.

"You appear to be astonished," he said, smiling at my expression of surprise. "Now that I do know it I shall do my best to forget it."

"To forget it!"

"You see," he explained, "I consider that a man's brain originally is like a little empty attic, and you have to stock it with such furniture as you choose. A fool takes in all the lumber of every sort that he comes across, so that the knowledge which might be useful to him gets crowded out, or at best is jumbled up with a lot of other things so that he has a difficulty in laying his hands upon it. Now the skilful workman is very careful indeed as to what he takes into his brain-attic. He will have nothing but the tools which may help him in doing his work, but of these he has a large assortment, and all in the most perfect order. It is a mistake to think that that little room has elastic walls and can distend to any extent. Depend upon it there comes a time when for every addition of knowledge you forget something that you knew before. It is of the highest importance, therefore, not to have useless facts elbowing out the useful ones."

"But the Solar System!" I protested.

"What the deuce is it to me?" he interrupted impatiently; "you say that we go round the sun. If we went round the moon it would not make a pennyworth of difference to me or to my work."

I was on the point of asking him what that work might be, but something in his manner showed me that the question would be an unwelcome one. I pondered over our short conversation, however, and endeavoured to draw my deductions from it. He said that he would acquire no knowledge which did not bear upon his object. Therefore all the knowledge which he possessed was such as would be useful to him. I enumerated in my own mind all the
various points upon which he had shown me that he was exceptionally well-informed. I even took a pencil and jotted them down. I could not help smiling at the document when I had completed it. It ran in this way --

SHERLOCK HOLMES -- his limits.

1. Knowledge of Literature. -- Nil. 2. Philosophy. -- Nil. 3. Astronomy. -- Nil. 4. Politics. -- Feeble. 5. Botany. -- Variable. Well up in belladonna, opium, and poisons generally. Knows nothing of practical gardening. 6. Geology. - - Practical, but limited. Tells at a glance different soils from each other. After walks has shown me splashes upon his trousers, and told me by their colour and consistence in what part of London he had received them. 7. Chemistry. -- Profound. 8. Anatomy. -- Accurate, but unsystematic. 9. Sensational Literature. -- Immense. He appears to know every detail of every horror perpetrated in the century. 10. Plays the violin well. 11. Is an expert singlestick player, boxer, and swordsman. 12. Has a good practical knowledge of British law.

When I had got so far in my list I threw it into the fire in despair. "If I can only find what the fellow is driving at by reconciling all these accomplishments, and discovering a calling which needs them all," I said to myself, "I may as well give up the attempt at once."

I see that I have alluded above to his powers upon the violin. These were very remarkable, but as eccentric as all his other accomplishments. That he could play pieces, and difficult pieces, I knew well, because at my request he has played me some of Mendelssohn's Lieder, and other favourites. When left to himself, however, he would seldom produce any music or attempt any recognized air. Leaning back in his arm-chair of an evening, he would close his eyes and scrape carelessly at the fiddle which was thrown across his knee. Sometimes the chords were sonorous and melancholy. Occasionally they were fantastic and cheerful. Clearly they reflected the thoughts which possessed him, but whether the music aided those thoughts, or whether the playing was simply the result of a whim or fancy was more than I could determine. I might have rebelled against these exasperating solos had it not been that he usually terminated them by playing in quick succession a whole series of my favourite airs as a slight compensation for the trial upon my patience.

During the first week or so we had no callers, and I had begun to think that my companion was as friendless a man as I was myself. Presently, however, I found that he had many acquaintances, and those in the most different classes of society. There was one little sallow rat-faced, dark-eyed fellow who was introduced to me as Mr. Lestrade, and who came three or four times in a single week. One morning a young girl called, fashionably dressed, and stayed for half an hour or more. The same afternoon brought a grey-headed, seedy visitor, looking like a Jew pedlar, who appeared to me to be much excited, and who was closely followed by a slip-shod elderly woman. On another occasion an old white-haired gentleman had an interview with my companion; and on another a railway porter in his velveteen uniform. When any of these nondescript individuals put in an appearance, Sherlock Holmes used to beg for the use of the sitting-room, and I would retire to my bed-room. He always apologized to me for putting me to this inconvenience. "I have to use this room as a place of business," he said, "and these people are my clients." Again I had an opportunity of asking him a point blank question, and again my delicacy prevented me from forcing another man to confide in me. I imagined at the time that he had some strong reason for not alluding to it, but he soon dispelled the idea by coming round to the subject of his own accord.

It was upon the 4th of March, as I have good reason to remember, that I rose somewhat earlier than usual, and found that Sherlock Holmes had not yet finished his breakfast. The landlady had become so accustomed to my late habits that my place had not been laid nor my coffee prepared. With the unreasonable petulance of mankind I rang the bell and gave a curt intimation that I was ready. Then I picked up a magazine from the table and attempted to
while away the time with it, while my companion munched silently at his toast. One of the articles had a pencil mark at the heading, and I naturally began to run my eye through it.

Its somewhat ambitious title was "The Book of Life," and it attempted to show how much an observant man might learn by an accurate and systematic examination of all that came in his way. It struck me as being a remarkable mixture of shrewdness and of absurdity. The reasoning was close and intense, but the deductions appeared to me to be far-fetched and exaggerated. The writer claimed by a momentary expression, a twitch of a muscle or a glance of an eye, to fathom a man's inmost thoughts. Deceit, according to him, was an impossibility in the case of one trained to observation and analysis. His conclusions were as infallible as so many propositions of Euclid. So startling would his results appear to the uninitiated that until they learned the processes by which he had arrived at them they might well consider him as a necromancer.

"From a drop of water," said the writer, "a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it. Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. Before turning to those moral and mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the enquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems. Let him, on meeting a fellow-mortal, learn at a glance to distinguish the history of the man, and the trade or profession to which he belongs. Puerile as such an exercise may seem, it sharpens the faculties of observation, and teaches one where to look and what to look for. By a man's finger nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boot, by his trouser knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his shirt cuffs -- by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed. That all united should fail to enlighten the competent enquirer in any case is almost inconceivable."

"What ineffable twaddle!" I cried, slapping the magazine down on the table, "I never read such rubbish in my life."

"What is it?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"Why, this article," I said, pointing at it with my egg spoon as I sat down to my breakfast. "I see that you have read it since you have marked it. I don't deny that it is smartly written. It irritates me though. It is evidently the theory of some arm-chair lounger who evolves all these neat little paradoxes in the seclusion of his own study. It is not practical. I should like to see him clapped down in a third class carriage on the Underground, and asked to give the trades of all his fellow-travellers. I would lay a thousand to one against him."

"You would lose your money," Sherlock Holmes remarked calmly. "As for the article I wrote it myself."

"You!"

"Yes, I have a turn both for observation and for deduction. The theories which I have expressed there, and which appear to you to be so chimerical are really extremely practical -- so practical that I depend upon them for my bread and cheese."

"And how?" I asked involuntarily.

"Well, I have a trade of my own. I suppose I am the only one in the world. I'm a consulting detective, if you can understand what that is. Here in London we have lots of Government detectives and lots of private ones. When these fellows are at fault they come to me, and I manage to put them on the right scent. They lay all the evidence before me, and I am generally able, by the help of my knowledge of the history of crime, to set them straight. There is a strong family resemblance about misdeeds, and if you have all the details of a thousand at your finger ends, it is odd if you can't unravel the thousand and first. Lestrade is a well-known detective. He got himself into a fog recently over a forgery case, and that was what brought him here."

"And these other people?"

"They are mostly sent on by private inquiry agencies. They are all people who are in trouble about something, and want a little enlightening. I listen to their story, they listen to my comments, and then I pocket my fee."

"But do you mean to say," I said, "that without leaving your room you can unravel some knot which other men can make nothing of, although they have seen every detail for themselves?"

"Quite so. I have a kind of intuition that way. Now and again a case turns up which is a little more complex. Then I have to hustle about and see things with my own eyes. You see I have a lot of special knowledge which I apply to the problem, and which facilitates matters wonderfully. Those rules of deduction laid down in that article which aroused your scorn, are invaluable to me in practical work. Observation with me is second nature. You appeared to be surprised when I told you, on our first meeting, that you had come from Afghanistan."

"You were told, no doubt."

"Nothing of the sort. I knew you came from Afghanistan. From long habit the train of thoughts ran so swiftly through my mind, that I arrived at the conclusion without being conscious of intermediate steps. There were such steps, however. The train of reasoning ran, 'Here is a gentleman of a medical type, but with the air of a military man.
Clearly an army doctor, then. He has just come from the tropics, for his face is dark, and that is not the natural tint of his skin, for his wrists are fair. He has undergone hardship and sickness, as his haggard face says clearly. His left arm has been injured. He holds it in a stiff and unnatural manner. Where in the tropics could an English army doctor have seen much hardship and got his arm wounded? Clearly in Afghanistan.' The whole train of thought did not occupy a second. I then remarked that you came from Afghanistan, and you were astonished."

"It is simple enough as you explain it," I said, smiling. "You remind me of Edgar Allen Poe's Dupin. I had no idea that such individuals did exist outside of stories."

Sherlock Holmes rose and lit his pipe. "No doubt you think that you are complimenting me in comparing me to Dupin," he observed. "Now, in my opinion, Dupin was a very inferior fellow. That trick of his of breaking in on his friends' thoughts with an apropos remark after a quarter of an hour's silence is really very showy and superficial. He had some analytical genius, no doubt; but he was by no means such a phenomenon as Poe appeared to imagine."

"Have you read Gaboriau's works?" I asked. "Does Lecoq come up to your idea of a detective?"

Sherlock Holmes sniffed sardonically. "Lecoq was a miserable bungler," he said, in an angry voice; "he had only one thing to recommend him, and that was his energy. That book made me positively ill. The question was how to identify an unknown prisoner. I could have done it in twenty-four hours. Lecoq took six months or so. It might be made a text-book for detectives to teach them what to avoid."

I felt rather indignant at having two characters whom I had admired treated in this cavalier style. I walked over to the window, and stood looking out into the busy street. "This fellow may be very clever," I said to myself, "but he is certainly very conceited."

"There are no crimes and no criminals in these days," he said, querulously. "What is the use of having brains in our profession. I know well that I have it in me to make my name famous. No man lives or has ever lived who has brought the same amount of study and of natural talent to the detection of crime which I have done. And what is the result? There is no crime to detect, or, at most, some bungling villany with a motive so transparent that even a Scotland Yard official can see through it."

I was still annoyed at his bumptious style of conversation. I thought it best to change the topic.

"I wonder what that fellow is looking for?" I asked, pointing to a stalwart, plainly-dressed individual who was walking slowly down the other side of the street, looking anxiously at the numbers. He had a large blue envelope in his hand, and was evidently the bearer of a message.

"You mean the retired sergeant of Marines," said Sherlock Holmes. "Brag and bounce!" thought I to myself. "He knows that I cannot verify his guess."

The thought had hardly passed through my mind when the man whom we were watching caught sight of the number on our door, and ran rapidly across the roadway. We heard a loud knock, a deep voice below, and heavy steps ascending the stair.

"For Mr. Sherlock Holmes," he said, stepping into the room and handing my friend the letter.

Here was an opportunity of taking the conceit out of him. He little thought of this when he made that random shot. "May I ask, my lad," I said, in the blandest voice, "what your trade may be?"

"Commissionaire, sir," he said, gruffly. "Uniform away for repairs."

"And you were?" I asked, with a slightly malicious glance at my companion.
"A sergeant, sir, Royal Marine Light Infantry, sir. No answer? Right, sir."
He clicked his heels together, raised his hand in a salute, and was gone.

CHAPTER III.
THE LAURISTON GARDEN MYSTERY

I CONFESS that I was considerably startled by this fresh proof of the practical nature of my companion's theories. My respect for his powers of analysis increased wondrously. There still remained some lurking suspicion in my mind, however, that the whole thing was a pre-arranged episode, intended to dazzle me, though what earthly object he could have in taking me in was past my comprehension. When I looked at him he had finished reading the note, and his eyes had assumed the vacant, lack-lustre expression which showed mental abstraction.

"How in the world did you deduce that?" I asked.
"Deduce what?" said he, petulantly.
"Why, that he was a retired sergeant of Marines."
"I have no time for trifles," he answered, brusquely; then with a smile, "Excuse my rudeness. You broke the thread of my thoughts; but perhaps it is as well. So you actually were not able to see that that man was a sergeant?"

"No, indeed."

"It was easier to know it than to explain why I knew it. If you were asked to prove that two and two made four, you might find some difficulty, and yet you are quite sure of the fact. Even across the street I could see a great blue anchor tattooed on the back of the fellow's hand. That smacked of the sea. He had a military carriage, however, and regulation side whiskers. There we have the marine. He was a man with some amount of self-importance and a certain air of command. You must have observed the way in which he held his head and swung his cane. A steady, respectable, middle-aged man, too, on the face of it -- all facts which led me to believe that he had been a sergeant."

"Wonderful!" I ejaculated.

"Commonplace," said Holmes, though I thought from his expression that he was pleased at my evident surprise and admiration. "I said just now that there were no criminals. It appears that I am wrong -- look at this!" He threw me over the note which the commissionaire had brought.

"Why," I cried, as I cast my eye over it, "this is terrible!"

"It does seem to be a little out of the common," he remarked, calmly. "Would you mind reading it to me aloud?"
This is the letter which I read to him ----

"MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES, -- "There has been a bad business during the night at 3, Lauriston Gardens, off the Brixton Road. Our man on the beat saw a light there about two in the morning, and as the house was an empty one, suspected that something was amiss. He found the door open, and in the front room, which is bare of furniture, discovered the body of a gentleman, well dressed, and having cards in his pocket bearing the name of `Enoch J. Drebber, Cleveland, Ohio, U.S.A.' There had been no robbery, nor is there any evidence as to how the man met his death. There are marks of blood in the room, but there is no wound upon his person. We are at a loss as to how he came into the empty house; indeed, the whole affair is a puzzler. If you can come round to the house any time before twelve, you will find me there. I have left everything _in statu quo_ until I hear from you. If you are unable to come I shall give you fuller details, and would esteem it a great kindness if you would favour me with your opinion. Yours faithfully, "TOBIAS GREGSON."

"Gregson is the smartest of the Scotland Yarders," my friend remarked; "he and Lestrade are the pick of a bad lot. They are both quick and energetic, but conventional -- shockingly so. They have their knives into one another, too. They are as jealous as a pair of professional beauties. There will be some fun over this case if they are both put upon the scent."

I was amazed at the calm way in which he rippled on. "Surely there is not a moment to be lost," I cried, "shall I go and order you a cab?"

"I'm not sure about whether I shall go. I am the most incurably lazy devil that ever stood in shoe leather -- that is, when the fit is on me, for I can be spry enough at times."

"Why, it is just such a chance as you have been longing for."

"My dear fellow, what does it matter to me. Supposing I unravel the whole matter, you may be sure that Gregson, Lestrade, and Co. will pocket all the credit. That comes of being an unofficial personage."

"But he begs you to help him."

"Yes. He knows that I am his superior, and acknowledges it to me; but he would cut his tongue out before he would own it to any third person. However, we may as well go and have a look. I shall work it out on my own hook. I may have a laugh at them if I have nothing else. Come on!"

He hustled on his overcoat, and bustled about in a way that showed that an energetic fit had superseded the
apathetic one.
"Get your hat," he said.
"You wish me to come?"
"Yes, if you have nothing better to do." A minute later we were both in a hansom, driving furiously for the Brixton Road.

It was a foggy, cloudy morning, and a dun-coloured veil hung over the house-tops, looking like the reflection of the mud-coloured streets beneath. My companion was in the best of spirits, and prattled away about Cremona fiddles, and the difference between a Stradivarius and an Amati. As for myself, I was silent, for the dull weather and the melancholy business upon which we were engaged, depressed my spirits.

"You don't seem to give much thought to the matter in hand," I said at last, interrupting Holmes' musical disquisition.

"No data yet," he answered. "It is a capital mistake to theorize before you have all the evidence. It biases the judgment."

"You will have your data soon," I remarked, pointing with my finger; "this is the Brixton Road, and that is the house, if I am not very much mistaken."

"So it is. Stop, driver, stop!" We were still a hundred yards or so from it, but he insisted upon our alighting, and we finished our journey upon foot.

Number 3, Lauriston Gardens wore an ill-omened and minatory look. It was one of four which stood back some little way from the street, two being occupied and two empty. The latter looked out with three tiers of vacant melancholy windows, which were blank and dreary, save that here and there a "To Let" card had developed like a cataract upon the bleared panes. A small garden sprinkled over with a scattered eruption of sickly plants separated each of these houses from the street, and was traversed by a narrow pathway, yellowish in colour, and consisting apparently of a mixture of clay and of gravel. The whole place was very sloppy from the rain which had fallen through the night. The garden was bounded by a three-foot brick wall with a fringe of wood rails upon the top, and against this wall was leaning a stalwart police constable, surrounded by a small knot of loafers, who craned their necks and strained their eyes in the vain hope of catching some glimpse of the proceedings within.

I had imagined that Sherlock Holmes would at once have hurried into the house and plunged into a study of the mystery. Nothing appeared to be further from his intention. With an air of nonchalance which, under the circumstances, seemed to me to border upon affectation, he lounged up and down the pavement, and gazed vacantly at the ground, the sky, the opposite houses and the line of railings. Having finished his scrutiny, he proceeded slowly down the path, or rather down the fringe of grass which flanked the path, keeping his eyes riveted upon the ground. Twice he stopped, and once I saw him smile, and heard him utter an exclamation of satisfaction. There were many marks of footsteps upon the wet clayey soil, but since the police had been coming and going over it, I was unable to see how my companion could hope to learn anything from it. Still I had had such extraordinary evidence of the quickness of his perceptive faculties, that I had no doubt that he could see a great deal which was hidden from me.

At the door of the house we were met by a tall, white-faced, flaxen-haired man, with a notebook in his hand, who rushed forward and wrung my companion's hand with effusion. "It is indeed kind of you to come," he said, "I have had everything left untouched."

"Except that!" my friend answered, pointing at the pathway. "If a herd of buffaloes had passed along there could not be a greater mess. No doubt, however, you had drawn your own conclusions, Gregson, before you permitted this."

"I have had everything left untouched," the detective said evasively. "My colleague, Mr. Lestrade, is here. I have had everything left untouched."

"Except that!" my friend answered, pointing at the pathway. "If a herd of buffaloes had passed along there could not be a greater mess. No doubt, however, you had drawn your own conclusions, Gregson, before you permitted this."

"I have had so much to do inside the house," the detective said evasively. "My colleague, Mr. Lestrade, is here. I had relied upon him to look after this."

Holmes glanced at me and raised his eyebrows sardonically. "With two such men as yourself and Lestrade upon the ground, there will not be much for a third party to find out," he said.

Gregson rubbed his hands in a self-satisfied way. "With two such men as yourself and Lestrade upon the ground, there will not be much for a third party to find out," he said.

"No, sir."

"Nor Lestrade?"

"No, sir."

"Then let us go and look at the room." With which inconsequent remark he strode on into the house, followed by Gregson, whose features expressed his astonishment.

A short passage, bare planked and dusty, led to the kitchen and offices. Two doors opened out of it to the left and to the right. One of these had obviously been closed for many weeks. The other belonged to the dining-room, which was the apartment in which the mysterious affair had occurred. Holmes walked in, and I followed him with that
subdued feeling at my heart which the presence of death inspires.

It was a large square room, looking all the larger from the absence of all furniture. A vulgar flaring paper adorned the walls, but it was blotched in places with mildew, and here and there great strips had become detached and hung down, exposing the yellow plaster beneath. Opposite the door was a showy fireplace, surmounted by a mantelpiece of imitation white marble. On one corner of this was stuck the stump of a red wax candle. The solitary window was so dirty that the light was hazy and uncertain, giving a dull grey tinge to everything, which was intensified by the thick layer of dust which coated the whole apartment.

All these details I observed afterwards. At present my attention was centred upon the single grim motionless figure which lay stretched upon the boards, with vacant sightless eyes staring up at the discoloured ceiling. It was that of a man about forty-three or forty-four years of age, middle-sized, broad shouldered, with crisp curling black hair, and a short stubbly beard. He was dressed in a heavy broadcloth frock coat and waistcoat, with light-coloured trousers, and immaculate collar and cuffs. A top hat, well brushed and trim, was placed upon the floor beside him. His hands were clenched and his arms thrown abroad, while his lower limbs were interlocked as though his death struggle had been a grievous one. On his rigid face there stood an expression of horror, and as it seemed to me, of hatred, such as I have never seen upon human features. This malignant and terrible contortion, combined with the low forehead, blunt nose, and prognathous jaw gave the dead man a singularly simious and ape-like appearance, which was increased by his writhing, unnatural posture. I have seen death in many forms, but never has it appeared to me in a more fearsome aspect than in that dark grimy apartment, which looked out upon one of the main arteries of suburban London.

Lestrade, lean and ferret-like as ever, was standing by the doorway, and greeted my companion and myself.

"This case will make a stir, sir," he remarked. "It beats anything I have seen, and I am no chicken."

"There is no clue?" said Gregson.

"None at all," chimed in Lestrade.

Sherlock Holmes approached the body, and, kneeling down, examined it intently. "You are sure that there is no wound?" he asked, pointing to numerous gouts and splashes of blood which lay all round.

"Positive!" cried both detectives.

"Then, of course, this blood belongs to a second individual -- presumably the murderer, if murder has been committed. It reminds me of the circumstances attendant on the death of Van Jansen, in Utrecht, in the year '34. Do you remember the case, Gregson?"

"No, sir."

"Read it up -- you really should. There is nothing new under the sun. It has all been done before."

As he spoke, his nimble fingers were flying here, there, and everywhere, feeling, pressing, unbuttoning, examining, while his eyes wore the same far-away expression which I have already remarked upon. So swiftly was the examination made, that one would hardly have guessed the minuteness with which it was conducted. Finally, he sniffed the dead man's lips, and then glanced at the soles of his patent leather boots.

"He has not been moved at all?" he asked.

"No more than was necessary for the purposes of our examination."

"You can take him to the mortuary now," he said. "There is nothing more to be learned."

Gregson had a stretcher and four men at hand. At his call they entered the room, and the stranger was lifted and
carried out. As they raised him, a ring tinkled down and rolled across the floor. Lestrade grabbed it up and stared at it with mystified eyes.

"There's been a woman here," he cried. "It's a woman's wedding-ring."

He held it out, as he spoke, upon the palm of his hand. We all gathered round him and gazed at it. There could be no doubt that that circlet of plain gold had once adorned the finger of a bride.

"This complicates matters," said Gregson. "Heaven knows, they were complicated enough before."

"You're sure it doesn't simplify them?" observed Holmes. "There's nothing to be learned by staring at it. What did you find in his pockets?"

"We have it all here," said Gregson, pointing to a litter of objects upon one of the bottom steps of the stairs. "A gold watch, No. 97163, by Barraud, of London. Gold Albert chain, very heavy and solid. Gold ring, with masonic device. Gold pin -- bull-dog's head, with rubies as eyes. Russian leather card-case, with cards of Enoch J. Drebber of Cleveland, corresponding with the E. J. D. upon the linen. No purse, but loose money to the extent of seven pounds thirteen. Pocket edition of Boccaccio's 'Decameron,' with name of Joseph Stangerson upon the fly-leaf. Two letters - - one addressed to E. J. Drebber and one to Joseph Stangerson."

"At what address?"

"American Exchange, Strand -- to be left till called for. They are both from the Guion Steamship Company, and refer to the sailing of their boats from Liverpool. It is clear that this unfortunate man was about to return to New York."

"Have you made any inquiries as to this man, Stangerson?"

"I did it at once, sir," said Gregson. "I have had advertisements sent to all the newspapers, and one of my men has gone to the American Exchange, but he has not returned yet."

"Have you sent to Cleveland?"

"We telegraphed this morning."

"How did you word your inquiries?"

"We simply detailed the circumstances, and said that we should be glad of any information which could help us."

"You did not ask for particulars on any point which appeared to you to be crucial?"

"I asked about Stangerson."

"Nothing else? Is there no circumstance on which this whole case appears to hinge? Will you not telegraph again?"

"I have said all I have to say," said Gregson, in an offended voice.

Sherlock Holmes chuckled to himself, and appeared to be about to make some remark, when Lestrade, who had been in the front room while we were holding this conversation in the hall, reappeared upon the scene, rubbing his hands in a pompous and self-satisfied manner.

"Mr. Gregson," he said, "I have just made a discovery of the highest importance, and one which would have been overlooked had I not made a careful examination of the walls."

The little man's eyes sparkled as he spoke, and he was evidently in a state of suppressed exultation at having scored a point against his colleague.

"Come here," he said, bustling back into the room, the atmosphere of which felt clearer since the removal of its ghastly inmate. "Now, stand there!"

He struck a match on his boot and held it up against the wall.

"Look at that!" he said, triumphantly.

I have remarked that the paper had fallen away in parts. In this particular corner of the room a large piece had
peeled off, leaving a yellow square of coarse plastering. Across this bare space there was scrawled in blood-red letters a single word — *RACHE*.

"What do you think of that?" cried the detective, with the air of a showman exhibiting his show. "This was overlooked because it was in the darkest corner of the room, and no one thought of looking there. The murderer has written it with his or her own blood. See this smear where it has trickled down the wall! That disposes of the idea of suicide anyhow. Why was that corner chosen to write it on? I will tell you. See that candle on the mantelpiece. It was lit at the time, and if it was lit this corner would be the brightest instead of the darkest portion of the wall."

"And what does it mean now that you _have_ found it?" asked Gregson in a depreciatory voice.

"Mean? Why, it means that the writer was going to put the female name Rachel, but was disturbed before he or she had time to finish. You mark my words, when this case comes to be cleared up you will find that a woman named Rachel has something to do with it. It's all very well for you to laugh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. You may be very smart and clever, but the old hound is the best, when all is said and done."

"I really beg your pardon!" said my companion, who had ruffled the little man's temper by bursting into an explosion of laughter. "You certainly have the credit of being the first of us to find this out, and, as you say, it bears every mark of having been written by the other participant in last night's mystery. I have not had time to examine this room yet, but with your permission I shall do so now."

As he spoke, he whipped a tape measure and a large round magnifying glass from his pocket. With these two implements he trotted noiselessly about the room, sometimes stopping, occasionally kneeling, and once lying flat upon his face. So engrossed was he with his occupation that he appeared to have forgotten our presence, for he chattered away to himself under his breath the whole time, keeping up a running fire of exclamations, groans, whistles, and little cries suggestive of encouragement and of hope. As I watched him I was irresistibly reminded of a pure-bred well-trained foxhound as it dashes backwards and forwards through the covert, whining in its eagerness, until it comes across the lost scent. For twenty minutes or more he continued his researches, measuring with the most exact care the distance between marks which were entirely invisible to me, and occasionally applying his tape to the walls in an equally incomprehensible manner. In one place he gathered up very carefully a little pile of grey dust from the floor, and packed it away in an envelope. Finally, he examined with his glass the word upon the wall, going over every letter of it with the most minute exactness. This done, he appeared to be satisfied, for he replaced his tape and his glass in his pocket.

"They say that genius is an infinite capacity for taking pains," he remarked with a smile. "It's a very bad definition, but it does apply to detective work."

Gregson and Lestrade had watched the manoeuvres of their amateur companion with considerable curiosity and some contempt. They evidently failed to appreciate the fact, which I had begun to realize, that Sherlock Holmes' smallest actions were all directed towards some definite and practical end.

"What do you think of it, sir?" they both asked.

"It would be robbing you of the credit of the case if I was to presume to help you," remarked my friend. "You are doing so well now that it would be a pity for anyone to interfere." There was a world of sarcasm in his voice as he spoke. "If you will let me know how your investigations go," he continued, "I shall be happy to give you any help I can. In the meantime I should like to speak to the constable who found the body. Can you give me his name and address?"

Lestrade glanced at his note-book. "John Rance," he said. "He is off duty now. You will find him at 46, Audley Court, Kennington Park Gate."

Holmes took a note of the address.

"Come along, Doctor," he said; "we shall go and look him up. I'll tell you one thing which may help you in the case," he continued, turning to the two detectives. "There has been murder done, and the murderer was a man. He was more than six feet high, was in the prime of life, had small feet for his height, wore coarse, square-toed boots and smoked a Trichinopoly cigar. He came here with his victim in a four-wheeled cab, which was drawn by a horse with three old shoes and one new one on his off fore leg. In all probability the murderer had a florid face, and the finger-nails of his right hand were remarkably long. These are only a few indications, but they may assist you."

Lestrade and Gregson glanced at each other with an incredulous smile.

"If this man was murdered, how was it done?" asked the former.

"Poison," said Sherlock Holmes curtly, and strode off. "One other thing, Lestrade," he added, turning round at the door: "'Rache,' is the German for 'revenge'; so don't lose your time looking for Miss Rachel."

With which Parthian shot he walked away, leaving the two rivals open-mouthed behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

WHAT JOHN RANCE HAD TO TELL.
IT was one o'clock when we left No. 3, Lauriston Gardens. Sherlock Holmes led me to the nearest telegraph office, whence he dispatched a long telegram. He then hailed a cab, and ordered the driver to take us to the address given us by Lestrade.

"There is nothing like first hand evidence," he remarked; "as a matter of fact, my mind is entirely made up upon the case, but still we may as well learn all that is to be learned."

"You amaze me, Holmes," said I. "Surely you are not as sure as you pretend to be of all those particulars which you gave."

"There's no room for a mistake," he answered. "The very first thing which I observed on arriving there was that a cab had made two ruts with its wheels close to the curb. Now, up to last night, we have had no rain for a week, so that those wheels which left such a deep impression must have been there during the night. There were the marks of the horse's hoofs, too, the outline of one of which was far more clearly cut than that of the other three, showing that that was a new shoe. Since the cab was there after the rain began, and was not there at any time during the morning -- I have Gregson's word for that -- it follows that it must have been there during the night, and, therefore, that it brought those two individuals to the house."

"That seems simple enough," said I; "but how about the other man's height?"

"Why, the height of a man, in nine cases out of ten, can be told from the length of his stride. It is a simple calculation enough, though there is no use my boring you with figures. I had this fellow's stride both on the clay outside and on the dust within. Then I had a way of checking my calculation. When a man writes on a wall, his instinct leads him to write about the level of his own eyes. Now that writing was just over six feet from the ground. It was child's play."

"And his age?" I asked.

"Well, if a man can stride four and a-half feet without the smallest effort, he can't be quite in the sere and yellow. That was the breadth of a puddle on the garden walk which he had evidently walked across. Patent-leather boots had gone round, and Square-toes had hopped over. There is no mystery about it at all. I am simply applying to ordinary life a few of those precepts of observation and deduction which I advocated in that article. Is there anything else that puzzles you?"

"The finger nails and the Trichinopoly," I suggested.

"The writing on the wall was done with a man's forefinger dipped in blood. My glass allowed me to observe that the plaster was slightly scratched in doing it, which would not have been the case if the man's nail had been trimmed. I gathered up some scattered ash from the floor. It was dark in colour and flakey -- such an ash as is only made by a Trichinopoly. I have made a special study of cigar ashes -- in fact, I have written a monograph upon the subject. I flatter myself that I can distinguish at a glance the ash of any known brand, either of cigar or of tobacco. It is just in such details that the skilled detective differs from the Gregson and Lestrade type."

"And the florid face?" I asked.

"Ah, that was a more daring shot, though I have no doubt that I was right. You must not ask me that at the present state of the affair."

I passed my hand over my brow. "My head is in a whirl," I remarked; "the more one thinks of it the more mysterious it grows. How came these two men -- if there were two men -- into an empty house? What has become of the cabman who drove them? How could one man compel another to take poison? Where did the blood come from? What was the object of the murderer, since robbery had no part in it? How came the woman's ring there? Above all, why should the second man write up the German word RACHE before decamping? I confess that I cannot see any possible way of reconciling all these facts."

My companion smiled approvingly.

"You sum up the difficulties of the situation succinctly and well," he said. "There is much that is still obscure, though I have quite made up my mind on the main facts. As to poor Lestrade's discovery it was simply a blind intended to put the police upon a wrong track, by suggesting Socialism and secret societies. It was not done by a German. The A, if you noticed, was printed somewhat after the German fashion. Now, a real German invariably prints in the Latin character, so that we may safely say that this was not written by one, but by a clumsy imitator who overdid his part. It was simply a ruse to divert inquiry into a wrong channel. I'm not going to tell you much more of the case, Doctor. You know a conjuror gets no credit when once he has explained his trick, and if I show you too much of my method of working, you will come to the conclusion that I am a very ordinary individual after all."

"I shall never do that," I answered; "you have brought detection as near an exact science as it ever will be brought in this world."

My companion flushed up with pleasure at my words, and the earnest way in which I uttered them. I had already observed that he was as sensitive to flattery on the score of his art as any girl could be of her beauty.
"I'll tell you one other thing," he said. "Patent leathers and Square-toes came in the same cab, and they walked down the pathway together as friendly as possible -- arm-in-arm, in all probability. When they got inside they walked up and down the room -- or rather, Patent-leathers stood still while Square-toes walked up and down. I could read all that in the dust; and I could read that as he walked he grew more and more excited. That is shown by the increased length of his strides. He was talking all the while, and working himself up, no doubt, into a fury. Then the tragedy occurred. I've told you all I know myself now, for the rest is mere surmise and conjecture. We have a good working basis, however, on which to start. We must hurry up, for I want to go to Halle's concert to hear Norman Neruda this afternoon."

This conversation had occurred while our cab had been threading its way through a long succession of dingy streets and dreary by-ways. In the dingiest and dreariest of them our driver suddenly came to a stand. "That's Audley Court in there," he said, pointing to a narrow slit in the line of dead-coloured brick. "You'll find me here when you come back."

Audley Court was not an attractive locality. The narrow passage led us into a quadrangle paved with flags and lined by sordid dwellings. We picked our way among groups of dirty children, and through lines of discoloured linen, until we came to Number 46, the door of which was decorated with a small slip of brass on which the name Rance was engraved. On enquiry we found that the constable was in bed, and we were shown into a little front parlour to await his coming.

He appeared presently, looking a little irritable at being disturbed in his slumbers. "I made my report at the office," he said.

Holmes took a half-sovereign from his pocket and played with it pensively. "We thought that we should like to hear it all from your own lips," he said.

"I shall be most happy to tell you anything I can," the constable answered with his eyes upon the little golden disk.

"Just let us hear it all in your own way as it occurred."

Rance sat down on the horsehair sofa, and knitted his brows as though determined not to omit anything in his narrative.

"I'll tell it ye from the beginning," he said. "My time is from ten at night to six in the morning. At eleven there was a fight at the 'White Hart'; but bar that all was quiet enough on the beat. At one o'clock it began to rain, and I met Harry Murcher -- him who has the Holland Grove beat -- and we stood together at the corner of Henrietta Street a-talkin'. Presently -- maybe about two or a little after -- I thought I would take a look round and see that all was right down the Brixton Road. It was precious dirty and lonely. Not a soul did I meet all the way down, though a cab or two went past me. I was a strollin' down, thinkin' between ourselves how uncommon handy a four of gin hot would be, when suddenly the glint of a light caught my eye in the window of that same house. Now, I knew that them two houses in Lauriston Gardens was empty on account of him that owns them who won't have the drains seed to, though the very last tenant what lived in one of them died o' typhoid fever. I was knocked all in a heap therefore at seeing a light in the window, and I suspected as something was wrong. When I got to the door ----"

"You stopped, and then walked back to the garden gate," my companion interrupted. "What did you do that for?"

Rance gave a violent jump, and stared at Sherlock Holmes with the utmost amazement upon his features.
"Why, that's true, sir," he said; "though how you come to know it, Heaven only knows. Ye see, when I got up to
the door it was so still and so lonesome, that I thought I'd be none the worse for some one with me. I ain't afeared of
anything on this side o' the grave; but I thought that maybe it was him that died o' the typhoid inspecting the drains
what killed him. The thought gave me a kind o' turn, and I walked back to the gate to see if I could see Murcher's
lantern, but there wasn't no sign of him nor of anyone else."

"There was no one in the street?"

"Not a livin' soul, sir, nor as much as a dog. Then I pulled myself together and went back and pushed the door
open. All was quiet inside, so I went into the room where the light was a-burnin'. There was a candle flickerin' on
the mantelpiece -- a red wax one -- and by its light I saw ----"

"Yes, I know all that you saw. You walked round the room several times, and you knelt down by the body, and
then you walked through and tried the kitchen door, and then ----"

John Rance sprang to his feet with a frightened face and suspicion in his eyes. "Where was you hid to see all
that?" he cried. "It seems to me that you knows a deal more than you should."

Holmes laughed and threw his card across the table to the constable. "Don't get arresting me for the murder," he
said. "I am one of the hounds and not the wolf; Mr. Gregson or Mr. Lestrade will answer for that. Go on, though.
What did you do next?"

Rance resumed his seat, without however losing his mystified expression. "I went back to the gate and sounded
my whistle. That brought Murcher and two more to the spot."

"Was the street empty then?"

"Well, it was, as far as anybody that could be of any good goes."

"What do you mean?"

The constable's features broadened into a grin. "I've seen many a drunk chap in my time," he said, "but never
anyone so cryin' drunk as that cove. He was at the gate when I came out, a-leanin' up agin the railings, and a-singin'
at the pitch o' his lungs about Columbine's New-fangled Banner, or some such stuff. He couldn't stand, far less
help."

"What sort of a man was he?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

John Rance appeared to be somewhat irritated at this digression. "He was an uncommon drunk sort o' man," he
said. "He'd ha' found hisself in the station if we hadn't been so took up."

"His face -- his dress -- didn't you notice them?" Holmes broke in impatiently.

"I should think I did notice them, seeing that I had to prop him up -- me and Murcher between us. He was a long
chap, with a red face, the lower part muffled round ----"

"That will do," cried Holmes. "What became of him?"

"We'd enough to do without lookin' after him," the policeman said, in an aggrieved voice. "I'll wager he found
his way home all right."

"How was he dressed?"

"A brown overcoat."

"Had he a whip in his hand?"

"A whip -- no."
"He must have left it behind," muttered my companion. "You didn't happen to see or hear a cab after that?"

"No."

"There's a half-sovereign for you," my companion said, standing up and taking his hat. "I am afraid, Rance, that you will never rise in the force. That head of yours should be for use as well as ornament. You might have gained your sergeant's stripes last night. The man whom you held in your hands is the man who holds the clue of this mystery, and whom we are seeking. There is no use of arguing about it now; I tell you that it is so. Come along, Doctor."

We started off for the cab together, leaving our informant incredulous, but obviously uncomfortable.

"The blundering fool," Holmes said, bitterly, as we drove back to our lodgings. "Just to think of his having such an incomparable bit of good luck, and not taking advantage of it."

"I am rather in the dark still. It is true that the description of this man tallies with your idea of the second party in this mystery. But why should he come back to the house after leaving it? That is not the way of criminals."

"The ring, man, the ring: that was what he came back for. If we have no other way of catching him, we can always bait our line with the ring. I shall have him, Doctor -- I'll lay you two to one that I have him. I must thank you for it all. I might not have gone but for you, and so have missed the finest study I ever came across: a study in scarlet, eh? Why shouldn't we use a little art jargon. There's the scarlet thread of murder running through the colourless skein of life, and our duty is to unravel it, and isolate it, and expose every inch of it. And now for lunch, and then for Norman Neruda. Her attack and her bowing are splendid. What's that little thing of Chopin's she plays so magnificently: Tra-la-la-la-lira-lira-lay."

Leaning back in the cab, this amateur bloodhound carolled away like a lark while I meditated upon the many-sidedness of the human mind.

CHAPTER V.

OUR ADVERTISEMENT BRINGS A VISITOR.

Our morning's exertions had been too much for my weak health, and I was tired out in the afternoon. After Holmes' departure for the concert, I lay down upon the sofa and endeavoured to get a couple of hours' sleep. It was a useless attempt. My mind had been too much excited by all that had occurred, and the strangest fancies and surmises crowded into it. Every time that I closed my eyes I saw before me the distorted baboon-like countenance of the murdered man. So sinister was the impression which that face had produced upon me that I found it difficult to feel anything but gratitude for him who had removed its owner from the world. If ever human features bespoke vice of the most malignant type, they were certainly those of Enoch J. Drebber, of Cleveland. Still I recognized that justice must be done, and that the depravity of the victim was no condonment in the eyes of the law.

The more I thought of it the more extraordinary did my companion's hypothesis, that the man had been poisoned, appear. I remembered how he had sniffed his lips, and had no doubt that he had detected something which had given rise to the idea. Then, again, if not poison, what had caused the man's death, since there was neither wound nor marks of strangulation? But, on the other hand, whose blood was that which lay so thickly upon the floor? There were no signs of a struggle, nor had the victim any weapon with which he might have wounded an antagonist. As long as all these questions were unsolved, I felt that sleep would be no easy matter, either for Holmes or myself. His quiet self-confident manner convinced me that he had already formed a theory which explained all the facts, though what it was I could not for an instant conjecture.

He was very late in returning -- so late, that I knew that the concert could not have detained him all the time. Dinner was on the table before he appeared.

"It was magnificent," he said, as he took his seat. "Do you remember what Darwin says about music? He claims that the power of producing and appreciating it existed among the human race long before the power of speech was arrived at. Perhaps that is why we are so subtly influenced by it. There are vague memories in our souls of those misty centuries when the world was in its childhood."

"That's rather a broad idea," I remarked.

"One's ideas must be as broad as Nature if they are to interpret Nature," he answered. "What's the matter? You're not looking quite yourself. This Brixton Road affair has upset you."

"To tell the truth, it has," I said. "I ought to be more case-hardened after my Afghan experiences. I saw my own comrades hacked to pieces at Maiwand without losing my nerve."

"I can understand. There is a mystery about this which stimulates the imagination; where there is no imagination there is no horror. Have you seen the evening paper?"

"No."

"It gives a fairly good account of the affair. It does not mention the fact that when the man was raised up, a woman's wedding ring fell upon the floor. It is just as well it does not."

"Why?"
"Look at this advertisement," he answered. "I had one sent to every paper this morning immediately after the affair."

He threw the paper across to me and I glanced at the place indicated. It was the first announcement in the "Found" column. "In Brixton Road, this morning," it ran, "a plain gold wedding ring, found in the roadway between the 'White Hart' Tavern and Holland Grove. Apply Dr. Watson, 221B, Baker Street, between eight and nine this evening."

"Excuse my using your name," he said. "If I used my own some of these dunderheads would recognize it, and want to meddle in the affair."

"That is all right," I answered. "But supposing anyone applies, I have no ring."

"Oh yes, you have," said he, handing me one. "This will do very well. It is almost a facsimile."

"And who do you expect will answer this advertisement."

"Why, the man in the brown coat -- our florid friend with the square toes. If he does not come himself he will send an accomplice."

"Would he not consider it as too dangerous?"

"Not at all. If my view of the case is correct, and I have every reason to believe that it is, this man would rather risk anything than lose the ring. According to my notion he dropped it while stooping over Drebber's body, and did not miss it at the time. After leaving the house he discovered his loss and hurried back, but found the police already in possession, owing to his own folly in leaving the candle burning. He had to pretend to be drunk in order to allay the suspicions which might have been aroused by his appearance at the gate. Now put yourself in that man's place. On thinking the matter over, it must have occurred to him that it was possible that he had lost the ring in the road after leaving the house. What would he do, then? He would eagerly look out for the evening papers in the hope of seeing it among the articles found. His eye, of course, would light upon this. He would be overjoyed. Why should he fear a trap? There would be no reason in his eyes why the finding of the ring should be connected with the murder. He would come. He will come. You shall see him within an hour?"

"And then?" I asked.

"Oh, you can leave me to deal with him then. Have you any arms?"

"I have my old service revolver and a few cartridges."

"You had better clean it and load it. He will be a desperate man, and though I shall take him unawares, it is as well to be ready for anything."

I went to my bedroom and followed his advice. When I returned with the pistol the table had been cleared, and Holmes was engaged in his favourite occupation of scraping upon his violin.

"The plot thickens," he said, as I entered; "I have just had an answer to my American telegram. My view of the case is the correct one."

"And that is?" I asked eagerly.

"My fiddle would be the better for new strings," he remarked. "Put your pistol in your pocket. When the fellow comes speak to him in an ordinary way. Leave the rest to me. Don't frighten him by looking at him too hard."

"It is eight o'clock now," I said, glancing at my watch.

"Yes. He will probably be here in a few minutes. Open the door slightly. That will do. Now put the key on the inside. Thank you! This is a queer old book I picked up at a stall yesterday -- 'De Jure inter Gentes' -- published in Latin at Liege in the Lowlands, in 1642. Charles' head was still firm on his shoulders when this little brown-backed volume was struck off."

"Who is the printer?"

"Philippe de Croy, whoever he may have been. On the fly-leaf, in very faded ink, is written 'Ex libris Guliolmi Whyte.' I wonder who William Whyte was. Some pragmatical seventeenth century lawyer, I suppose. His writing has a legal twist about it. Here comes our man, I think."

As he spoke there was a sharp ring at the bell. Sherlock Holmes rose softly and moved his chair in the direction of the door. We heard the servant pass along the hall, and the sharp click of the latch as she opened it.

"Does Dr. Watson live here?" asked a clear but rather harsh voice. We could not hear the servant's reply, but the door closed, and some one began to ascend the stairs. The footfall was an uncertain and shuffling one. A look of surprise passed over the face of my companion as he listened to it. It came slowly along the passage, and there was a feeble tap at the door.

"Come in," I cried.
At my summons, instead of the man of violence whom we expected, a very old and wrinkled woman hobbled into the apartment. She appeared to be dazzled by the sudden blaze of light, and after dropping a curtsey, she stood blinking at us with her bleared eyes and fumbling in her pocket with nervous, shaky fingers. I glanced at my companion, and his face had assumed such a disconsolate expression that it was all I could do to keep my countenance.

The old crone drew out an evening paper, and pointed at our advertisement. "It's this as has brought me, good gentlemen," she said, dropping another curtsey; "a gold wedding ring in the Brixton Road. It belongs to my girl Sally, as was married only this time twelvemonth, which her husband is steward aboard a Union boat, and what he'd say if he come 'ome and found her without her ring is more than I can think, he being short enough at the best o' times, but more especially when he has the drink. If it please you, she went to the circus last night along with ----"

"Is that her ring?" I asked.

"The Lord be thanked!" cried the old woman; "Sally will be a glad woman this night. That's the ring."

"And what may your address be?" I inquired, taking up a pencil.

"13, Duncan Street, Houndsditch. A weary way from here."

"The Brixton Road does not lie between any circus and Houndsditch," said Sherlock Holmes sharply.

The old woman faced round and looked keenly at him from her little red-rimmed eyes. "The gentleman asked me for _my_ address," she said. "Sally lives in lodgings at 3, Mayfield Place, Peckham."

"And your name is ----?"

"My name is Sawyer -- her's is Dennis, which Tom Dennis married her -- and a smart, clean lad, too, as long as he's at sea, and no steward in the company more thought of; but when on shore, what with the women and what with liquor shops ----"

"Here is your ring, Mrs. Sawyer," I interrupted, in obedience to a sign from my companion; "it clearly belongs to your daughter, and I am glad to be able to restore it to the rightful owner."

With many mumbled blessings and protestations of gratitude the old crone packed it away in her pocket, and shuffled off down the stairs. Sherlock Holmes sprang to his feet the moment that she was gone and rushed into his room. He returned in a few seconds enveloped in an ulster and a cravat. "I'll follow her," he said, hurriedly; "she must be an accomplice, and will lead me to him. Wait up for me." The hall door had hardly slammed behind our visitor before Holmes had descended the stair. Looking through the window I could see her walking feebly along the other side, while her pursuer dogged her some little distance behind. "Either his whole theory is incorrect," I thought to myself, "or else he will be led now to the heart of the mystery." There was no need for him to ask me to wait up for him, for I felt that sleep was impossible until I heard the result of his adventure.

It was close upon nine when he set out. I had no idea how long he might be, but I sat stolidly puffing at my pipe and skipping over the pages of Henri Murger's "Vie de Boheme." Ten o'clock passed, and I heard the footsteps of the maid as they pattered off to bed. Eleven, and the more stately tread of the landlady passed my door, bound for the same destination. It was close upon twelve before I heard the sharp sound of his latch-key. The instant he entered I saw by his face that he had not been successful. Amusement and chagrin seemed to be struggling for the mastery, until the former suddenly carried the day, and he burst into a hearty laugh.

"I wouldn't have the Scotland Yarders know it for the world," he cried, dropping into his chair; "I have chaffed
them so much that they would never have let me hear the end of it. I can afford to laugh, because I know that I will be even with them in the long run."

"What is it then?" I asked.

"Oh, I don't mind telling a story against myself. That creature had gone a little way when she began to limp and show every sign of being foot-sore. Presently she came to a halt, and hailed a four-wheeler which was passing. I managed to be close to her so as to hear the address, but I need not have been so anxious, for she sang it out loud enough to be heard at the other side of the street, 'Drive to 13, Duncan Street, Houndsditch,' she cried. This begins to look genuine, I thought, and having seen her safely inside, I perched myself behind. That's an art which every detective should be an expert at. Well, away we rattled, and never drew rein until we reached the street in question. I hopped off before we came to the door, and strolled down the street in an easy, lounging way. I saw the cab pull up. The driver jumped down, and I saw him open the door and stand expectantly. Nothing came out though. When I reached him he was grooping about frantically in the empty cab, and giving vent to the finest assorted collection of oaths that ever I listened to. There was no sign or trace of his passenger, and I fear it will be some time before he gets his fare. On inquiring at Number 13 we found that the house belonged to a respectable paperhanger, named Keswick, and that no one of the name either of Sawyer or Dennis had ever been heard of there."

"You don't mean to say," I cried, in amazement, "that that tottering, feeble old woman was able to get out of the cab while it was in motion, without either you or the driver seeing her?"

"Old woman be damned!" said Sherlock Holmes, sharply. "We were the old women to be so taken in. It must have been a young man, and an active one, too, besides being an incomparable actor. The get-up was inimitable. He saw that he was followed, no doubt, and used this means of giving me the slip. It shows that the man we are after is not as lonely as I imagined he was, but has friends who are ready to risk something for him. Now, Doctor, you are looking done-up. Take my advice and turn in."

I was certainly feeling very weary, so I obeyed his injunction. I left Holmes seated in front of the smouldering fire, and long into the watches of the night I heard the low, melancholy waiving of his violin, and knew that he was still pondering over the strange problem which he had set himself to unravel.

CHAPTER VI.

TOBIAS GREGSON SHOWS WHAT HE CAN DO.

The papers next day were full of the "Brixton Mystery," as they termed it. Each had a long account of the affair, and some had leaders upon it in addition. There was some information in them which was new to me. I still retain in my scrap-book numerous clippings and extracts bearing upon the case. Here is a condensation of a few of them:--

The_Daily Telegraph_ remarked that in the history of crime there had seldom been a tragedy which presented stranger features. The German name of the victim, the absence of all other motive, and the sinister inscription on the wall, all pointed to its perpetration by political refugees and revolutionists. The Socialists had many branches in America, and the deceased had, no doubt, infringed their unwritten laws, and been tracked down by them. After alluding airily to the Vehmgericht, aqua tofana, Carbonari, the Marchioness de Brinvilliers, the Darwinian theory, the principles of Malthus, and the Ratcliff Highway murders, the article concluded by admonishing the Government and advocating a closer watch over foreigners in England.

The_Standard_ commented upon the fact that lawless outrages of the sort usually occurred under a Liberal Administration. They arose from the unsettling of the minds of the masses, and the consequent weakening of all authority. The deceased was an American gentleman who had been residing for some weeks in the Metropolis. He had stayed at the boarding-house of Madame Charpentier, in Torquay Terrace, Camberwell. He was accompanied in his travels by his private secretary, Mr. Joseph Stangerson. The two bade adieu to their landlady upon Tuesday, the 4th inst., and departed to Euston Station with the avowed intention of catching the Liverpool express. They were afterwards seen together upon the platform. Nothing more is known of them until Mr. Drebber's body was, as recorded, discovered in an empty house in the Brixton Road, many miles from Euston. How he came there, or how he met his fate, are questions which are still involved in mystery. Nothing is known of the whereabouts of Stangerson. We are glad to learn that Mr. Lestrade and Mr. Gregson, of Scotland Yard, are both engaged upon the case, and it is confidently anticipated that these well-known officers will speedily throw light upon the matter.

The_Daily News_ observed that there was no doubt as to the crime being a political one. The despotism and hatred of Liberalism which animated the Continental Governments had had the effect of driving to our shores a number of men who might have made excellent citizens were they not soured by the recollection of all that they had undergone. Among these men there was a stringent code of honour, any infringement of which was punished by death. Every effort should be made to find the secretary, Stangerson, and to ascertain some particulars of the habits of the deceased. A great step had been gained by the discovery of the address of the house at which he had boarded - - a result which was entirely due to the acuteness and energy of Mr. Gregson of Scotland Yard. Sherlock Holmes and I read these notices over together at breakfast, and they appeared to afford him
considerable amusement.

"I told you that, whatever happened, Lestrade and Gregson would be sure to score."

"That depends on how it turns out."

"Oh, bless you, it doesn't matter in the least. If the man is caught, it will be _on account_ of their exertions; if he escapes, it will be _in spite_ of their exertions. It's heads I win and tails you lose. Whatever they do, they will have followers. 'Un sot trouve toujours un plus sot qui l'admire.'"

"What on earth is this?" I cried, for at this moment there came the pattering of many steps in the hall and on the stairs, accompanied by audible expressions of disgust upon the part of our landlady.

"It's the Baker Street division of the detective police force," said my companion, gravely; and as he spoke there rushed into the room half a dozen of the dirtiest and most ragged street Arabs that ever I clapped eyes on.

"'Tention!" cried Holmes, in a sharp tone, and the six dirty little scoundrels stood in a line like so many disreputable statuettes. "In future you shall send up Wiggins alone to report, and the rest of you must wait in the street. Have you found it, Wiggins?"

"No, sir, we hain't," said one of the youths.

"I hardly expected you would. You must keep on until you do. Here are your wages. He handed each of them a shilling. "Now, off you go, and come back with a better report next time."

He waved his hand, and they scampered away downstairs like so many rats, and we heard their shrill voices next moment in the street.

"There's more work to be got out of one of those little beggars than out of a dozen of the force," Holmes remarked. "The mere sight of an official-looking person seals men's lips. These youngsters, however, go everywhere and hear everything. They are as sharp as needles, too; all they want is organisation."

"Is it on this Brixton case that you are employing them?" I asked.

"Yes; there is a point which I wish to ascertain. It is merely a matter of time. Hullo! we are going to hear some news now with a vengeance! Here is Gregson coming down the road with beatitude written upon every feature of his face. Bound for us, I know. Yes, he is stopping. There he is!"

There was a violent peal at the bell, and in a few seconds the fair-haired detective came up the stairs, three steps at a time, and burst into our sitting-room.

"My dear fellow," he cried, wringing Holmes' unresponsive hand, "congratulate me! I have made the whole thing as clear as day."

A shade of anxiety seemed to me to cross my companion's expressive face.

"Do you mean that you are on the right track?" he asked.

"The right track! Why, sir, we have the man under lock and key."

"And his name is?"

"Arthur Charpentier, sub-lieutenant in Her Majesty's navy," cried Gregson, pompously, rubbing his fat hands and inflating his chest.

Sherlock Holmes gave a sigh of relief, and relaxed into a smile.

"Take a seat, and try one of these cigars," he said. "We are anxious to know how you managed it. Will you have some whiskey and water?"
"I don't mind if I do," the detective answered. "The tremendous exertions which I have gone through during the last day or two have worn me out. Not so much bodily exertion, you understand, as the strain upon the mind. You will appreciate that, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, for we are both brain-workers."

"You do me too much honour," said Holmes, gravely. "Let us hear how you arrived at this most gratifying result."

The detective seated himself in the arm-chair, and puffed complacently at his cigar. Then suddenly he slapped his thigh in a paroxysm of amusement.

"The fun of it is," he cried, "that that fool Lestrade, who thinks himself so smart, has gone off upon the wrong track altogether. He is after the secretary Stangerson, who had no more to do with the crime than the babe unborn. I have no doubt that he has caught him by this time."

The idea tickled Gregson so much that he laughed until he choked.

"And how did you get your clue?"

"Ah, I'll tell you all about it. Of course, Doctor Watson, this is strictly between ourselves. The first difficulty which we had to contend with was the finding of this American's antecedents. Some people would have waited until their advertisements were answered, or until parties came forward and volunteered information. That is not Tobias Gregson's way of going to work. You remember the hat beside the dead man?"

"Yes," said Holmes; "by John Underwood and Sons, 129, Camberwell Road."

Gregson looked quite crest-fallen.

"I had no idea that you noticed that," he said. "Have you been there?"

"No."

"Ha!" cried Gregson, in a relieved voice; "you should never neglect a chance, however small it may seem."

"To a great mind, nothing is little," remarked Holmes, sententiously.

"Well, I went to Underwood, and asked him if he had sold a hat of that size and description. He looked over his books, and came on it at once. He had sent the hat to a Mr. Drebber, residing at Charpentier's Boarding Establishment, Torquay Terrace. Thus I got at his address."

"Smart -- very smart!" murmured Sherlock Holmes.

"I next called upon Madame Charpentier," continued the detective. "I found her very pale and distressed. Her daughter was in the room, too -- an uncommonly fine girl she is, too; she was looking red about the eyes and her lips trembled as I spoke to her. That didn't escape my notice. I began to smell a rat. You know the feeling, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, when you come upon the right scent -- a kind of thrill in your nerves. 'Have you heard of the mysterious death of your late boarder Mr. Enoch J. Drebber, of Cleveland?' I asked.

"The mother nodded. She didn't seem able to get out a word. The daughter burst into tears. I felt more than ever that these people knew something of the matter.

"'At what o'clock did Mr. Drebber leave your house for the train?' I asked.

"'At eight o'clock,' she said, gulping in her throat to keep down her agitation. 'His secretary, Mr. Stangerson, said that there were two trains -- one at 9.15 and one at 11. He was to catch the first."

"'And was that the last which you saw of him?'

"'A terrible change came over the woman's face as I asked the question. Her features turned perfectly livid. It was some seconds before she could get out the single word 'Yes' -- and when it did come it was in a husky unnatural tone.

"There was silence for a moment, and then the daughter spoke in a calm clear voice.

"'No good can ever come of falsehood, mother,' she said. 'Let us be frank with this gentleman. We _did_ see Mr. Drebber again.'"

"'God forgive you!' cried Madame Charpentier, throwing up her hands and sinking back in her chair. 'You have murdered your brother.'"

"'Arthur would rather that we spoke the truth,' the girl answered firmly.

"'You had best tell me all about it now,' I said. 'Half-confidences are worse than none. Besides, you do not know how much we know of it.'"

"'On your head be it, Alice!' cried her mother; and then, turning to me, 'I will tell you all, sir. Do not imagine that my agitation on behalf of my son arises from any fear lest he should have had a hand in this terrible affair. He is utterly innocent of it. My dread is, however, that in your eyes and in the eyes of others he may appear to be compromised. That however is surely impossible. His high character, his profession, his antecedents would all forbid it."

"'Your best way is to make a clean breast of the facts,' I answered. 'Depend upon it, if your son is innocent he will be none the worse.'"

"'Perhaps, Alice, you had better leave us together,' she said, and her daughter withdrew. 'Now, sir,' she
continued, 'I had no intention of telling you all this, but since my poor daughter has disclosed it I have no alternative. Having once decided to speak, I will tell you all without omitting any particular.'

"It is your wisest course," said I.

"Mr. Drebber has been with us nearly three weeks. He and his secretary, Mr. Stangerson, had been travelling on the Continent. I noticed a "Copenhagen" label upon each of their trunks, showing that that had been their last stopping place. Stangerson was a quiet reserved man, but his employer, I am sorry to say, was far otherwise. He was coarse in his habits and brutish in his ways. The very night of his arrival he became very much the worse for drink, and, indeed, after twelve o'clock in the day he could hardly ever be said to be sober. His manners towards the maid-servants were disgustingly free and familiar. Worst of all, he speedily assumed the same attitude towards my daughter, Alice, and spoke to her more than once in a way which, fortunately, she is too innocent to understand. On one occasion he actually seized her in his arms and embraced her -- an outrage which caused his own secretary to reproach him for his unmanly conduct.'

"But why did you stand all this," I asked. 'I suppose that you can get rid of your boarders when you wish.'

"Mrs. Charpentier blushed at my pertinent question. 'Would to God that I had given him notice on the very day that he came,' she said. 'But it was a sore temptation. They were paying a pound a day each -- fourteen pounds a week, and this is the slack season. I am a widow, and my boy in the Navy has cost me much. I grudged to lose the money. I acted for the best. This last was too much, however, and I gave him notice to leave on account of it. That was the reason of his going.'

"Well?"

"My heart grew light when I saw him drive away. My son is on leave just now, but I did not tell him anything of all this, for his temper is violent, and he is passionately fond of his sister. When I closed the door behind them a load seemed to be lifted from my mind. Alas, in less than an hour there was a ring at the bell, and I learned that Mr. Drebber had returned. He was much excited, and evidently the worse for drink. He forced his way into the room, where I was sitting with my daughter, and made some incoherent remark about having missed his train. He then turned to Alice, and before my very face, proposed to her that she should fly with him. "You are of age," he said, "and there is no law to stop you. I have money enough and to spare. Never mind the old girl here, but come along with me now straight away. You shall live like a princess." Poor Alice was so frightened that she shrunk away from him, but he caught her by the wrist and endeavoured to draw her towards the door. I screamed, and at that moment my son Arthur came into the room. What happened then I do not know. I heard oaths and the confused sounds of a scuffle. I was too terrified to raise my head. When I did look up I saw Arthur standing in the doorway laughing, with a stick in his hand. "I don't think that fine fellow will trouble us again," he said. "I will just go after him and see what he does with himself." With those words he took his hat and started off down the street. The next morning we heard of Mr. Drebber's mysterious death.'

"This statement came from Mrs. Charpentier's lips with many gasps and pauses. At times she spoke so low that I could hardly catch the words. I made shorthand notes of all that she said, however, so that there should be no possibility of a mistake."

"It's quite exciting," said Sherlock Holmes, with a yawn. "What happened next?"

"When Mrs. Charpentier paused," the detective continued, "I saw that the whole case hung upon one point. Fixing her with my eye in a way which I always found effective with women, I asked her at what hour her son returned.

"'I do not know,' she answered.

"'Not know?'

"'No; he has a latch-key, and he let himself in.'

"'After you went to bed?'

"'Yes.'

"'When did you go to bed?'

"'About eleven.'

"'So your son was gone at least two hours?'

"'Yes.'

"'Possibly four or five?'

"'Yes.'

"'What was he doing during that time?'

"'I do not know,' she answered, turning white to her very lips.

"Of course after that there was nothing more to be done. I found out where Lieutenant Charpentier was, took two officers with me, and arrested him. When I touched him on the shoulder and warned him to come quietly with us, he answered us as bold as brass, 'I suppose you are arresting me for being concerned in the death of that scoundrel
"Drebber,' he said. We had said nothing to him about it, so that his alluding to it had a most suspicious aspect."

"Very," said Holmes.

"He still carried the heavy stick which the mother described him as having with him when he followed Drebber. It was a stout oak cudgel."

"What is your theory, then?"

"Well, my theory is that he followed Drebber as far as the Brixton Road. When there, a fresh altercation arose between them, in the course of which Drebber received a blow from the stick, in the pit of the stomach, perhaps, which killed him without leaving any mark. The night was so wet that no one was about, so Charpentier dragged the body of his victim into the empty house. As to the candle, and the blood, and the writing on the wall, and the ring, they may all be so many tricks to throw the police on to the wrong scent."

"Well done!" said Holmes in an encouraging voice. "Really, Gregson, you are getting along. We shall make something of you yet."

"I flatter myself that I have managed it rather neatly," the detective answered proudly. "The young man volunteered a statement, in which he said that after following Drebber some time, the latter perceived him, and took a cab in order to get away from him. On his way home he met an old shipmate, and took a long walk with him. On being asked where this old shipmate lived, he was unable to give any satisfactory reply. I think the whole case fits together uncommonly well. What amuses me is to think of Lestrade, who had started off upon the wrong scent. I am afraid he won't make much of Why, by Jove, here's the very man himself!"

It was indeed Lestrade, who had ascended the stairs while we were talking, and who now entered the room. The assurance and jauntiness which generally marked his demeanour and dress were, however, wanting. His face was disturbed and troubled, while his clothes were disarranged and untidy. He had evidently come with the intention of consulting with Sherlock Holmes, for on perceiving his colleague he appeared to be embarrassed and put out. He stood in the centre of the room, fumbling nervously with his hat and uncertain what to do. "This is a most extraordinary case," he said at last -- "a most incomprehensible affair."

"Ah, you find it so, Mr. Lestrade!" cried Gregson, triumphantly. "I thought you would come to that conclusion. Have you managed to find the Secretary, Mr. Joseph Stangerson?"

"The Secretary, Mr. Joseph Stangerson," said Lestrade gravely, "was murdered at Halliday's Private Hotel about six o'clock this morning."

CHAPTER VII.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS.

The intelligence with which Lestrade greeted us was so momentous and so unexpected, that we were all three fairly dumfoundered. Gregson sprang out of his chair and upset the remainder of his whiskey and water. I stared in silence at Sherlock Holmes, whose lips were compressed and his brows drawn down over his eyes.

"Stangerson too!" he muttered. "The plot thickens."

"It was quite thick enough before," grumbled Lestrade, taking a chair. "I seem to have dropped into a sort of council of war."

"Are you -- are you sure of this piece of intelligence?" stammered Gregson.

"I have just come from his room," said Lestrade. "I was the first to discover what had occurred."

"We have been hearing Gregson's view of the matter," Holmes observed. "Would you mind letting us know what
you have seen and done?"

"I have no objection," Lestrade answered, seating himself. "I freely confess that I was of the opinion that Stangerson was concerned in the death of Drebber. This fresh development has shown me that I was completely mistaken. Full of the one idea, I set myself to find out what had become of the Secretary. They had been seen together at Euston Station about half-past eight on the evening of the third. At two in the morning Drebber had been found in the Brixton Road. The question which confronted me was to find out how Stangerson had been employed between 8.30 and the time of the crime, and what had become of him afterwards. I telegraphed to Liverpool, giving a description of the man, and warning them to keep a watch upon the American boats. I then set to work calling upon all the hotels and lodging-houses in the vicinity of Euston. You see, I argued that if Drebber and his companion had become separated, the natural course for the latter would be to put up somewhere in the vicinity for the night, and then to hang about the station again next morning."

"They would be likely to agree on some meeting-place beforehand," remarked Holmes.

"So it proved. I spent the whole of yesterday evening in making enquiries entirely without avail. This morning I began very early, and at eight o'clock I reached Halliday's Private Hotel, in Little George Street. On my enquiry as to whether a Mr. Stangerson was living there, they at once answered me in the affirmative.

"No doubt you are the gentleman whom he was expecting,' they said. 'He has been waiting for a gentleman for two days.'

"Where is he now? I asked.

"He is upstairs in bed. He wished to be called at nine."

"I will go up and see him at once,' I said.

"It seemed to me that my sudden appearance might shake his nerves and lead him to say something unguarded. The Boots volunteered to show me the room: it was on the second floor, and there was a small corridor leading up to it. The Boots pointed out the door to me, and was about to go downstairs again when I saw something that made me feel sickish, in spite of my twenty years' experience. From under the door there curled a little red ribbon of blood, which had meandered across the passage and formed a little pool along the skirting at the other side. I gave a cry, which brought the Boots back. He nearly fainted when he saw it. The door was locked on the inside, but we put our shoulders to it, and knocked it in. The window of the room was open, and beside the window, all huddled up, lay the body of a man in his nightdress. He was quite dead, and had been for some time, for his limbs were rigid and cold. When we turned him over, the Boots recognized him at once as being the same gentleman who had engaged the room under the name of Joseph Stangerson. The cause of death was a deep stab in the left side, which must have penetrated the heart. And now comes the strangest part of the affair. What do you suppose was above the murdered man?"

I felt a creeping of the flesh, and a presentiment of coming horror, even before Sherlock Holmes answered.

"The word RACHE, written in letters of blood," he said.

"That was it," said Lestrade, in an awe-struck voice; and we were all silent for a while.

There was something so methodical and so incomprehensible about the deeds of this unknown assassin, that it imparted a fresh ghastliness to his crimes. My nerves, which were steady enough on the field of battle tingled as I thought of it.

"The man was seen," continued Lestrade. "A milk boy, passing on his way to the dairy, happened to walk down the lane which leads from the mews at the back of the hotel. He noticed that a ladder, which usually lay there, was raised against one of the windows of the second floor, which was wide open. After passing, he looked back and saw a man descend the ladder. He came down so quietly and openly that the boy imagined him to be some carpenter or joiner at work in the hotel. He took no particular notice of him, beyond thinking in his own mind that it was early for him to be at work. He has an impression that the man was tall, had a reddish face, and was dressed in a long, brownish coat. He must have stayed in the room some little time after the murder, for we found blood-stained water in the basin, where he had washed his hands, and marks on the sheets where he had deliberately wiped his knife."

I glanced at Holmes on hearing the description of the murderer, which tallied so exactly with his own. There was, however, no trace of exultation or satisfaction upon his face.

"Did you find nothing in the room which could furnish a clue to the murderer?" he asked.

"Nothing. Stangerson had Drebber's purse in his pocket, but it seems that this was usual, as he did all the paying. There was eighty odd pounds in it, but nothing had been taken. Whatever the motives of these extraordinary crimes, robbery is certainly not one of them. There were no papers or memoranda in the murdered man's pocket, except a single telegram, dated from Cleveland about a month ago, and containing the words, 'J. H. is in Europe.' There was no name appended to this message."

"And there was nothing else?" Holmes asked.

"Nothing of any importance. The man's novel, with which he had read himself to sleep was lying upon the bed,
and his pipe was on a chair beside him. There was a glass of water on the table, and on the window-sill a small chip ointment box containing a couple of pills."

Sherlock Holmes sprang from his chair with an exclamation of delight.
"The last link," he cried, exultantly. "My case is complete."

The two detectives stared at him in amazement.

"I have now in my hands," my companion said, confidently, "all the threads which have formed such a tangle. There are, of course, details to be filled in, but I am as certain of all the main facts, from the time that Drebber parted from Stangerson at the station, up to the discovery of the body of the latter, as if I had seen them with my own eyes. I will give you a proof of my knowledge. Could you lay your hand upon those pills?"

"I have them," said Lestrade, producing a small white box; "I took them and the purse and the telegram, intending to have them put in a place of safety at the Police Station. It was the merest chance my taking these pills, for I am bound to say that I do not attach any importance to them."

"Give them here," said Holmes. "Now, Doctor," turning to me, "are those ordinary pills?"

They certainly were not. They were of a pearly grey colour, small, round, and almost transparent against the light. "From their lightness and transparency, I should imagine that they are soluble in water," I remarked.

"Precisely so," answered Holmes. "Now would you mind going down and fetching that poor little devil of a terrier which has been bad so long, and which the landlady wanted you to put out of its pain yesterday."

I went downstairs and carried the dog upstairs in my arms. It's laboured breathing and glazing eye showed that it was not far from its end. Indeed, its snow-white muzzle proclaimed that it had already exceeded the usual term of canine existence. I placed it upon a cushion on the rug.

"I will now cut one of these pills in two," said Holmes, and drawing his penknife he suited the action to the word. "One half we return into the box for future purposes. The other half I will place in this wine glass, in which is a teaspoonful of water. You perceive that our friend, the Doctor, is right, and that it readily dissolves."

"This may be very interesting," said Lestrade, in the injured tone of one who suspects that he is being laughed at, "I cannot see, however, what it has to do with the death of Mr. Joseph Stangerson."

"Patience, my friend, patience! You will find in time that it has everything to do with it. I shall now add a little milk to make the mixture palatable, and on presenting it to the dog we find that he laps it up readily enough."

As he spoke he turned the contents of the wine glass into a saucer and placed it in front of the terrier, who speedily licked it dry. Sherlock Holmes' earnest demeanour had so far convinced us that we all sat in silence, watching the animal intently, and expecting some startling effect. None such appeared, however. The dog continued to lie stretched upon the cushion, breathing in a laboured way, but apparently neither the better nor the worse for its draught.

Holmes had taken out his watch, and as minute followed minute without result, an expression of the utmost chagrin and disappointment appeared upon his features. He gnawed his lip, drummed his fingers upon the table, and showed every other symptom of acute impatience. So great was his emotion, that I felt sincerely sorry for him, while the two detectives smiled derisively, by no means displeased at this check which he had met.

"It can't be a coincidence," he cried, at last springing from his chair and pacing wildly up and down the room; "it is impossible that it should be a mere coincidence. The very pills which I suspected in the case of Drebber are actually found after the death of Stangerson. And yet they are inert. What can it mean? Surely my whole chain of
reasoning cannot have been false. It is impossible! And yet this wretched dog is none the worse. Ah, I have it! I have
it!" With a perfect shriek of delight he rushed to the box, cut the other pill in two, dissolved it, added milk, and
presented it to the terrier. The unfortunate creature's tongue seemed hardly to have been moistened in it before it
gave a convulsive shiver in every limb, and lay as rigid and lifeless as if it had been struck by lightning.

Sherlock Holmes drew a long breath, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. "I should have more faith," he
said; "I ought to know by this time that when a fact appears to be opposed to a long train of deductions, it
invariably proves to be capable of bearing some other interpretation. Of the two pills in that box one was of the most
deadly poison, and the other was entirely harmless. I ought to have known that before ever I saw the box at all."

This last statement appeared to me to be so startling, that I could hardly believe that he was in his sober senses.
There was the dead dog, however, to prove that his conjecture had been correct. It seemed to me that the mists in my
own mind were gradually clearing away, and I began to have a dim, vague perception of the truth.

"All this seems strange to you," continued Holmes, "because you failed at the beginning of the inquiry to grasp
the importance of the single real clue which was presented to you. I had the good fortune to seize upon that, and
everything which has occurred since then has served to confirm my original supposition, and, indeed, was the
logical sequence of it. Hence things which have perplexed you and made the case more obscure, have served to
enlighten me and to strengthen my conclusions. It is a mistake to confound strangeness with mystery. The most
commonplace crime is often the most mysterious because it presents no new or special features from which
deductions may be drawn. This murder would have been infinitely more difficult to unravel had the body of the
victim been simply found lying in the roadway without any of those _outre_ and sensational accompaniments which
have rendered it remarkable. These strange details, far from making the case more difficult, have really had the
effect of making it less so."

Mr. Gregson, who had listened to this address with considerable impatience, could contain himself no longer.
"Look here, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," he said, "we are all ready to acknowledge that you are a smart man, and that you
have your own methods of working. We want something more than mere theory and preaching now, though. It is a
case of taking the man. I have made my case out, and it seems I was wrong. Young Charpentier could not have been
engaged in this second affair. Lestrade went after his man, Stangerson, and it appears that he was wrong too. You
have thrown out hints here, and hints there, and seem to know more than we do, but the time has come when we feel
that we have a right to ask you straight how much you do know of the business. Can you name the man who did it?"

"I cannot help feeling that Gregson is right, sir," remarked Lestrade. "We have both tried, and we have both
failed. You have remarked more than once since I have been in the room that you had all the evidence which you
require. Surely you will not withhold it any longer."

"Any delay in arresting the assassin," I observed, "might give him time to perpetrate some fresh atrocity."

Thus pressed by us all, Holmes showed signs of irresolution. He continued to walk up and down the room with
his head sunk on his chest and his brows drawn down, as was his habit when lost in thought.

"There will be no more murders," he said at last, stopping abruptly and facing us. "You can put that
consideration out of the question. You have asked me if I know the name of the assassin. I do. The mere knowing of
his name is a small thing, however, compared with the power of laying our hands upon him. This I expect very
shortly to do. I have good hopes of managing it through my own arrangements; but it is a thing which needs delicate
handling, for we have a shrewd and desperate man to deal with, who is supported, as I have had occasion to prove,
by another who is as clever as himself. As long as this man has no idea that anyone can have a clue there is some
chance of securing him; but if he had the slightest suspicion, he would change his name, and vanish in an instant
among the four million inhabitants of this great city. Without meaning to hurt either of your feelings, I am bound to
say that I consider these men to be more than a match for the official force, and that is why I have not asked your
assistance. If I fail I shall, of course, incur all the blame due to this omission; but that I am prepared for. At present I
am ready to promise that the instant that I can communicate with you without endangering my own combinations, I
shall do so."

Gregson and Lestrade seemed to be far from satisfied by this assurance, or by the depreciating allusion to the
detective police. The former had flushed up to the roots of his flaxen hair, while the other's beady eyes glistened
with curiosity and resentment. Neither of them had time to speak, however, before there was a tap at the door, and
the spokesman of the street Arabs, young Wiggins, introduced his insignificant and unsavoury person.

"Please, sir," he said, touching his forelock, "I have the cab downstairs."

"Good boy," said Holmes, blandly. "Why don't you introduce this pattern at Scotland Yard?" he continued,
taking a pair of steel handcuffs from a drawer. "See how beautifully the spring works. They fasten in an instant."

"The old pattern is good enough," remarked Lestrade, "if we can only find the man to put them on."

"Very good, very good," said Holmes, smiling. "The cabman may as well help me with my boxes. Just ask him
to step up, Wiggins."
I was surprised to find my companion speaking as though he were about to set out on a journey, since he had not said anything to me about it. There was a small portmanteau in the room, and this he pulled out and began to strap. He was busily engaged at it when the cabman entered the room.

"Just give me a help with this buckle, cabman," he said, kneeling over his task, and never turning his head.

The fellow came forward with a somewhat sullen, defiant air, and put down his hands to assist. At that instant there was a sharp click, the jangling of metal, and Sherlock Holmes sprang to his feet again.

"Gentlemen," he cried, with flashing eyes, "let me introduce you to Mr. Jefferson Hope, the murderer of Enoch Drebber and of Joseph Stangerson."

The whole thing occurred in a moment -- so quickly that I had no time to realize it. I have a vivid recollection of that instant, of Holmes' triumphant expression and the ring of his voice, of the cabman's dazed, savage face, as he glared at the glittering handcuffs, which had appeared as if by magic upon his wrists. For a second or two we might have been a group of statues. Then, with an inarticulate roar of fury, the prisoner wrenched himself free from Holmes's grasp, and hurled himself through the window. Woodwork and glass gave way before him; but before he got quite through, Gregson, Lestrade, and Holmes sprang upon him like so many staghounds. He was dragged back into the room, and then commenced a terrific conflict. So powerful and so fierce was he, that the four of us were shaken off again and again. He appeared to have the convulsive strength of a man in an epileptic fit. His face and hands were terribly mangled by his passage through the glass, but loss of blood had no effect in diminishing his resistance. It was not until Lestrade succeeded in getting his hand inside his neckcloth and half-strangling him that we made him realize that his struggles were of no avail; and even then we felt no security until we had pinioned his feet as well as his hands. That done, we rose to our feet breathless and panting.

"We have his cab," said Sherlock Holmes. "It will serve to take him to Scotland Yard. And now, gentlemen," he continued, with a pleasant smile, "we have reached the end of our little mystery. You are very welcome to put any questions that you like to me now, and there is no danger that I will refuse to answer them."

PART II.

_The Country of the Saints._

CHAPTER I.

ON THE GREAT ALKALI PLAIN.

In the central portion of the great North American Continent there lies an arid and repulsive desert, which for many a long year served as a barrier against the advance of civilisation. From the Sierra Nevada to Nebraska, and from the Yellowstone River in the north to the Colorado upon the south, is a region of desolation and silence. Nor is Nature always in one mood throughout this grim district. It comprises snow-capped and lofty mountains, and dark and gloomy valleys. There are swift-flowing rivers which dash through jagged canons; and there are enormous plains, which in winter are white with snow, and in summer are grey with the saline alkali dust. They all preserve, however, the common characteristics of barrenness, inhospitality, and misery.

There are no inhabitants of this land of despair. A band of Pawnees or of Blackfeet may occasionally traverse it in order to reach other hunting-grounds, but the hardest of the braves are glad to lose sight of those awesome plains, and to find themselves once more upon their prairies. The coyote skulks among the scrub, the buzzard flaps heavily through the air, and the clumsy grizzly bear lumbers through the dark ravines, and picks up such sustenance as it can amongst the rocks. These are the sole dwellers in the wilderness.

In the whole world there can be no more dreary view than that from the northern slope of the Sierra Blanco. As far as the eye can reach stretches the great flat plain-land, all dusted over with patches of alkali, and intersected by clumps of the dwarfish chaparral bushes. On the extreme verge of the horizon lie a long chain of mountain peaks,
with their rugged summits flecked with snow. In this great stretch of country there is no sign of life, nor of anything appertaining to life. There is no bird in the steel-blue heaven, no movement upon the dull, grey earth -- above all, there is absolute silence. Listen as one may, there is no shadow of a sound in all that mighty wilderness; nothing but silence -- complete and heart-subduing silence.

It has been said there is nothing appertaining to life upon the broad plain. That is hardly true. Looking down from the Sierra Blanco, one sees a pathway traced out across the desert, which winds away and is lost in the extreme distance. It is rutted with wheels and trodden down by the feet of many adventurers. Here and there there are scattered white objects which glisten in the sun, and stand out against the dull deposit of alkali. Approach, and examine them! They are bones: some large and coarse, others smaller and more delicate. The former have belonged to oxen, and the latter to men. For fifteen hundred miles one may trace this ghastly caravan route by these scattered remains of those who had fallen by the wayside.

Looking down on this very scene, there stood upon the fourth of May, eighteen hundred and forty-seven, a solitary traveller. His appearance was such that he might have been the very genius or demon of the region. An observer would have found it difficult to say whether he was nearer to forty or to sixty. His face was lean and haggard, and the brown parchment-like skin was drawn tightly over the projecting bones; his long, brown hair and beard were all flecked and dashed with white; his eyes were sunken in his head, and burned with an unnatural lustre; while the hand which grasped his rifle was hardly more fleshy than that of a skeleton. As he stood, he leaned upon his weapon for support, and yet his tall figure and the massive framework of his bones suggested a wiry and vigorous constitution. His gaunt face, however, and his clothes, which hung so baggily over his shrivelled limbs, proclaimed what it was that gave him that senile and decrepit appearance. The man was dying -- dying from hunger and from thirst.

He had toiled painfully down the ravine, and on to this little elevation, in the vain hope of seeing some signs of water. Now the great salt plain stretched before his eyes, and the distant belt of savage mountains, without a sign anywhere of plant or tree, which might indicate the presence of moisture. In all that broad landscape there was no gleam of hope. North, and east, and west he looked with wild questioning eyes, and then he realised that his wanderings had come to an end, and that there, on that barren crag, he was about to die. "Why not here, as well as in a feather bed, twenty years hence," he muttered, as he seated himself in the shelter of a boulder.

Before sitting down, he had deposited upon the ground his useless rifle, and also a large bundle tied up in a grey shawl, which he had carried slung over his right shoulder. It appeared to be somewhat too heavy for his strength, for in lowering it, it came down on the ground with some little violence. Instantly there broke from the grey parcel a little moaning cry, and from it there protruded a small, scared face, with very bright brown eyes, and two little speckled, dimpled fists.

"You've hurt me!" said a childish voice reproachfully.

"Have I though," the man answered penitently, "I didn't go for to do it." As he spoke he unwrapped the grey shawl and extricated a pretty little girl of about five years of age, whose dainty shoes and smart pink frock with its little linen apron all bespoke a mother's care. The child was pale and wan, but her healthy arms and legs showed that she had suffered less than her companion.

"How is it now?" he answered anxiously, for she was still rubbing the towsy golden curls which covered the back of her head.

"Kiss it and make it well," she said, with perfect gravity, shoving the injured part up to him. "That's what mother used to do. Where's mother?"

"Mother's gone. I guess you'll see her before long."

"Gone, eh!" said the little girl. "Funny, she didn't say good-bye; she 'most always did if she was just goin' over to Auntie's for tea, and now she's been away three days. Say, it's awful dry, ain't it? Ain't there no water, nor nothing to eat?"

"No, there ain't nothing, dearie. You'll just need to be patient awhile, and then you'll be all right. Put your head up agin me like that, and then you'll feel bullier. It ain't easy to talk when your lips is like leather, but I guess I'd best let you know how the cards lie. What's that you've got?"

"Pretty things! fine things!" cried the little girl enthusiastically, holding up two glittering fragments of mica.

"When we goes back to home I'll give them to brother Bob."

"You'll see prettier things than them soon," said the man confidently. "You just wait a bit. I was going to tell you though -- you remember when we left the river?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, we reckoned we'd strike another river soon, d'yee see. But there was somethin' wrong; compasses, or map, or somethin', and it didn't turn up. Water ran out. Just except a little drop for the likes of you and -- and ----"

"And you couldn't wash yourself," interrupted his companion gravely, staring up at his grimy visage.
"No, nor drink. And Mr. Bender, he was the fust to go, and then Indian Pete, and then Mrs. McGregor, and then Johnny Hones, and then, dearie, your mother."

"Then mother's a deader too," cried the little girl dropping her face in her pinafore and sobbing bitterly.

"Yes, they all went except you and me. Then I thought there was some chance of water in this direction, so I heaved you over my shoulder and we tramped it together. It don't seem as though we've improved matters. There's an almighty small chance for us now!"

"Do you mean that we are going to die too?" asked the child, checking her sobs, and raising her tear-stained face.

"I guess that's about the size of it."

"Why didn't you say so before?" she said, laughing gleefully. "You gave me such a fright. Why, of course, now as long as we die we'll be with mother again."

"Yes, you will, dearie."

"And you too. I'll tell her how awful good you've been. I'll bet she meets us at the door of Heaven with a big pitcher of water, and a lot of buckwheat cakes, hot, and toasted on both sides, like Bob and me was fond of. How long will it be first?"

"I don't know -- not very long." The man's eyes were fixed upon the northern horizon. In the blue vault of the heaven there had appeared three little specks which increased in size every moment, so rapidly did they approach. They speedily resolved themselves into three large brown birds, which circled over the heads of the two wanderers, and then settled upon some rocks which overlooked them. They were buzzards, the vultures of the west, whose coming is the forerunner of death.

"Cocks and hens," cried the little girl gleefully, pointing at their ill-omened forms, and clapping her hands to make them rise. "Say, did God make this country?"

"In course He did," said her companion, rather startled by this unexpected question.

"He made the country down in Illinois, and He made the Missouri," the little girl continued. "I guess somebody else made the country in these parts. It's not nearly so well done. They forgot the water and the trees."

"What would ye think of offering up prayer?" the man asked diffidently.

"It ain't night yet," she answered.

"It don't matter. It ain't quite regular, but He won't mind that, you bet. You say over them ones that you used to say every night in the waggon when we was on the Plains."

"Why don't you say some yourself?" the child asked, with wondering eyes.

"I disremember them," he answered. "I hain't said none since I was half the height o' that gun. I guess it's never too late. You say them out, and I'll stand by and come in on the choruses."

"Then you'll need to kneel down, and me too," she said, laying the shawl out for that purpose. "You've got to put your hands up like this. It makes you feel kind o' good."

It was a strange sight had there been anything but the buzzards to see it. Side by side on the narrow shawl knelt the two wanderers, the little prattling child and the reckless, hardened adventurer. Her chubby face, and his haggard, angular visage were both turned up to the cloudless heaven in heartfelt entreaty to that dread being with whom they were face to face, while the two voices -- the one thin and clear, the other deep and harsh -- united in the entreaty for mercy and forgiveness. The prayer finished, they resumed their seat in the shadow of the boulder until the child fell asleep, nestling upon the broad breast of her protector. He watched over her slumber for some time, but Nature proved to be too strong for him. For three days and three nights he had allowed himself neither rest nor repose. Slowly the eyelids drooped over the tired eyes, and the head sunk lower and lower upon the breast, until the man's grizzled beard was mixed with the gold tresses of his companion, and both slept the same deep and dreamless slumber.

Had the wanderer remained awake for another half hour a strange sight would have met his eyes. Far away on
the extreme verge of the alkali plain there rose up a little spray of dust, very slight at first, and hardly to be distinguished from the mists of the distance, but gradually growing higher and broader until it formed a solid, well-defined cloud. This cloud continued to increase in size until it became evident that it could only be raised by a great multitude of moving creatures. In more fertile spots the observer would have come to the conclusion that one of those great herds of bisons which graze upon the prairie land was approaching him. This was obviously impossible in these arid wilds. As the whirl of dust drew nearer to the solitary bluff upon which the two castaways were reposing, the canvas-covered tilts of waggons and the figures of armed horsemen began to show up through the haze, and the apparition revealed itself as being a great caravan upon its journey for the West. But what a caravan! When the head of it had reached the base of the mountains, the rear was not yet visible on the horizon. Right across the enormous plain stretched the straggling array, waggons and carts, men on horseback, and men on foot. Innumerable women who staggered along under burdens, and children who toddled beside the waggons or peeped out from under the white coverings. This was evidently no ordinary party of immigrants, but rather some nomad people who had been compelled from stress of circumstances to seek themselves a new country. There rose through the clear air a confused clattering and rumbling from this great mass of humanity, with the creaking of wheels and the neighing of horses. Loud as it was, it was not sufficient to rouse the two tired wayfarers above them.

At the head of the column there rode a score or more of grave ironfaced men, clad in sombre homespun garments and armed with rifles. On reaching the base of the bluff they halted, and held a short council among themselves.

"The wells are to the right, my brothers," said one, a hard-lipped, clean-shaven man with grizzly hair.
"To the right of the Sierra Blanco -- so we shall reach the Rio Grande," said another.
"Fear not for water," cried a third. "He who could draw it from the rocks will not now abandon His own chosen people."
"Amen! Amen!" responded the whole party.

They were about to resume their journey when one of the youngest and keenest-eyed uttered an exclamation and pointed up at the rugged crag above them. From its summit there fluttered a little wisp of pink, showing up hard and bright against the grey rocks behind. At the sight there was a general reining up of horses and unslinging of guns, while fresh horsemen came galloping up to reinforce the vanguard. The word 'Redskins' was on every lip.

"There can't be any number of Injuns here," said the elderly man who appeared to be in command. "We have passed the Pawnees, and there are no other tribes until we cross the great mountains."
"Shall I go forward and see, Brother Stangerson," asked one of the band.
"And I," "and I," cried a dozen voices.
"Leave your horses below and we will await you here," the Elder answered. In a moment the young fellows had dismounted, fastened their horses, and were ascending the precipitous slope which led up to the object which had excited their curiosity. They advanced rapidly and noiselessly, with the confidence and dexterity of practised scouts. The watchers from the plain below could see them flit from rock to rock until their figures stood out against the skyline. The young man who had first given the alarm was leading them. Suddenly his followers saw him throw up his hands, as though overcome with astonishment, and on joining him they were affected in the same way by the sight which met their eyes.

On the little plateau which crowned the barren hill there stood a single giant boulder, and against this boulder there lay a tall man, long-bearded and hard-featured, but of an excessive thinness. His placid face and regular breathing showed that he was fast asleep. Beside him lay a little child, with her round white arms encircling his brown sinewy neck, and her golden haired head resting upon the breast of his velveteen tunic. Her rosy lips were parted, showing the regular line of snow-white teeth within, and a playful smile played over her infantile features. Her plump little white legs terminating in white socks and neat shoes with shining buckles, offered a strange contrast to the long shrivelled members of her companion. On the ledge of rock above this strange couple there stood three solemn buzzards, who, at the sight of the new comers uttered raucous screams of disappointment and flapped sullenly away.

The cries of the foul birds awoke the two sleepers who stared about them in bewilderment. The man staggered to his feet and looked down upon the plain which had been so desolate when sleep had overtaken him, and which was now traversed by this enormous body of men and of beasts. His face assumed an expression of incredulity as he gazed, and he passed his honey hand over his eyes. "This is what they call delirium, I guess," he muttered. The child stood beside him, holding on to the skirt of his coat, and said nothing but looked all round her with the wondering questioning gaze of childhood.

The rescuing party were speedily able to convince the two castaways that their appearance was no delusion. One of them seized the little girl, and hoisted her upon his shoulder, while two others supported her gaunt companion, and assisted him towards the waggons.
"My name is John Ferrier," the wanderer explained; "me and that little un are all that's left o' twenty-one people. The rest is all dead o' thirst and hunger away down in the south."

"Is she your child?" asked someone.

"I guess she is now," the other cried, defiantly; "she's mine 'cause I saved her. No man will take her from me. She's Lucy Ferrier from this day on. Who are you, though?" he continued, glancing with curiosity at his stalwart, sunburned rescuers; "there seems to be a powerful lot of ye."

"Nigh upon ten thousand," said one of the young men; "we are the persecuted children of God -- the chosen of the Angel Merona."

"I never heard tell on him," said the wanderer. "He appears to have chosen a fair crowd of ye."

"Do not jest at that which is sacred," said the other sternly. "We are of those who believe in those sacred writings, drawn in Egyptian letters on plates of beaten gold, which were handed unto the holy Joseph Smith at Palmyra. We have come from Nauvoo, in the State of Illinois, where we had founded our temple. We have come to seek a refuge from the violent man and from the godless, even though it be the heart of the desert."

The name of Nauvoo evidently recalled recollections to John Ferrier. "I see," he said, "you are the Mormons."

"We are the Mormons," answered his companions with one voice.

"And where are you going?"

"We do not know. The hand of God is leading us under the person of our Prophet. You must come before him. He shall say what is to be done with you."

They had reached the base of the hill by this time, and were surrounded by crowds of the pilgrims -- pale-faced meek-looking women, strong laughing children, and anxious earnest-eyed men. Many were the cries of astonishment and of commiseration which arose from them when they perceived the youth of one of the strangers and the destitution of the other. Their escort did not halt, however, but pushed on, followed by a great crowd of Mormons, until they reached a wagggon, which was conspicuous for its great size and for the gaudiness and smartness of its appearance. Six horses were yoked to it, whereas the others were furnished with two, or, at most, four a-piece. Beside the driver there sat a man who could not have been more than thirty years of age, but whose massive head and resolute expression marked him as a leader. He was reading a brown-backed volume, but as the crowd approached he laid it aside, and listened attentively to an account of the episode. Then he turned to the two waifs.

"If we take you with us," he said, in solemn words, "it can only be as believers in our own creed. We shall have no wolves in our fold. Better far that your bones should bleach in this wilderness than that you should prove to be that little speck of decay which in time corrupts the whole fruit. Will you come with us on these terms?"

"Guess I'll come with you on any terms," said Ferrier, with such emphasis that the grave Elders could not restrain a smile. The leader alone retained his stern, impressive expression.

"Take him, Brother Stangerson," he said, "give him food and drink, and the child likewise. Let it be your task also to teach him our holy creed. We have delayed long enough. Forward! On, on to Zion!"

"On, on to Zion!" cried the crowd of Mormons, and the words rippled down the long caravan, passing from mouth to mouth until they died away in a dull murmur in the far distance. With a cracking of whips and a creaking of wheels the great waggons got into motion, and soon the whole caravan was winding along once more. The Elder to whose care the two waifs had been committed, led them to his wagggon, where a meal was already awaiting them.

"You shall remain here," he said. "In a few days you will have recovered from your fatigues. In the meantime, remember that now and for ever you are of our religion. Brigham Young has said it, and he has spoken with the voice of Joseph Smith, which is the voice of God."
CHAPTER II.
THE FLOWER OF UTAH.

THIS is not the place to commemorate the trials and privations endured by the immigrant Mormons before they came to their final haven. From the shores of the Mississippi to the western slopes of the Rocky Mountains they had struggled on with a constancy almost unparalleled in history. The savage man, and the savage beast, hunger, thirst, fatigue, and disease -- every impediment which Nature could place in the way, had all been overcome with Anglo-Saxon tenacity. Yet the long journey and the accumulated terrors had shaken the hearts of the stoutest among them. There was not one who did not sink upon his knees in heartfelt prayer when they saw the broad valley of Utah bathed in the sunlight beneath them, and learned from the lips of their leader that this was the promised land, and that these virgin acres were to be theirs for evermore.

Young speedily proved himself to be a skilful administrator as well as a resolute chief. Maps were drawn and charts prepared, in which the future city was sketched out. All around farms were apportioned and allotted in proportion to the standing of each individual. The tradesman was put to his trade and the artisan to his calling. In the town streets and squares sprang up, as if by magic. In the country there was draining and hedging, planting and clearing, until the next summer saw the whole country golden with the wheat crop. Everything prospered in the strange settlement. Above all, the great temple which they had erected in the centre of the city grew ever taller and larger. From the first blush of dawn until the closing of the twilight, the clatter of the hammer and the rasp of the saw was never absent from the monument which the immigrants erected to Him who had led them safe through many dangers.

The two castaways, John Ferrier and the little girl who had shared his fortunes and had been adopted as his daughter, accompanied the Mormons to the end of their great pilgrimage. Little Lucy Ferrier was borne along pleasantly enough in Elder Stangerson's waggon, a retreat which she shared with the Mormon's three wives and with his son, a headstrong forward boy of twelve. Having rallied, with the elasticity of childhood, from the shock caused by her mother's death, she soon became a pet with the women, and reconciled herself to this new life in her moving canvas-covered home. In the meantime Ferrier having recovered from his privations, distinguished himself as a useful guide and an indefatigable hunter. So rapidly did he gain the esteem of his new companions, that when they reached the end of their wanderings, it was unanimously agreed that he should be provided with as large and as fertile a tract of land as any of the settlers, with the exception of Young himself, and of Stangerson, Kemball, Johnston, and Drebber, who were the four principal Elders.

On the farm thus acquired John Ferrier built himself a substantial log-house, which received so many additions in succeeding years that it grew into a roomy villa. He was a man of a practical turn of mind, keen in his dealings and skilful with his hands. His iron constitution enabled him to work morning and evening at improving and tilling his lands. Hence it came about that his farm and all that belonged to him prospered exceedingly. In three years he was better off than his neighbours, in six he was well-to-do, in nine he was rich, and in twelve there were not half a dozen men in the whole of Salt Lake City who could compare with him. From the great inland sea to the distant Wahsatch Mountains there was no name better known than that of John Ferrier.

There was one way and only one in which he offended the susceptibilities of his co-religionists. No argument or persuasion could ever induce him to set up a female establishment after the manner of his companions. He never gave reasons for this persistent refusal, but contented himself by resolutely and inflexibly adhering to his determination. There were some who accused him of lukewarmness in his adopted religion, and others who put it down to greed of wealth and reluctance to incur expense. Others, again, spoke of some early love affair, and of a fair-haired girl who had pined away on the shores of the Atlantic. Whatever the reason, Ferrier remained strictly celibate. In every other respect he conformed to the religion of the young settlement, and gained the name of being an orthodox and straight-walking man.

Lucy Ferrier grew up within the log-house, and assisted her adopted father in all his undertakings. The keen air of the mountains and the balsamic odour of the pine trees took the place of nurse and mother to the young girl. As year succeeded to year she grew taller and stronger, her cheek more rudy, and her step more elastic. Many a wayfarer upon the high road which ran by Ferrier's farm felt long-forgotten thoughts revive in their mind as they watched her lithe girlish figure tripping through the wheatfields, or met her mounted upon her father's mustang, and managing it with all the ease and grace of a true child of the West. So the bud blossomed into a flower, and the year which saw her father the richest of the farmers left her as fair a specimen of American girlhood as could be found in the whole Pacific slope.

It was not the father, however, who first discovered that the child had developed into the woman. It seldom is in such cases. That mysterious change is too subtle and too gradual to be measured by dates. Least of all does the maiden herself know it until the tone of a voice or the touch of a hand sets her heart thrilling within her, and she learns, with a mixture of pride and of fear, that a new and a larger nature has awoken within her. There are few who
cannot recall that day and remember the one little incident which heralded the dawn of a new life. In the case of Lucy Ferrier the occasion was serious enough in itself, apart from its future influence on her destiny and that of many besides.

It was a warm June morning, and the Latter Day Saints were as busy as the bees whose hive they have chosen for their emblem. In the fields and in the streets rose the same hum of human industry. Down the dusty high roads defiled long streams of heavily-laden mules, all heading to the west, for the gold fever had broken out in California, and the Overland Route lay through the City of the Elect. There, too, were droves of sheep and bullocks coming in from the outlying pasture lands, and trains of tired immigrants, men and horses equally weary of their interminable journey. Through all this motley assemblage, threading her way with the skill of an accomplished rider, there galloped Lucy Ferrier, her fair face flushed with the exercise and her long chestnut hair floating out behind her. She had a commission from her father in the City, and was dashing in as she had done many a time before, with all the fearlessness of youth, thinking only of her task and how it was to be performed. The travel-stained adventurers gazed after her in astonishment, and even the unemotional Indians, journeying in with their pelties, relaxed their accustomed stoicism as they marvelled at the beauty of the pale-faced maiden.

She had reached the outskirts of the city when she found the road blocked by a great drove of cattle, driven by a half-dozen wild-looking herdsmen from the plains. In her impatience she endeavoured to pass this obstacle by pushing her horse into what appeared to be a gap. Scarcely had she got fairly into it, however, before the beasts closed in behind her, and she found herself completely imbedded in the moving stream of fierce-eyed, long-horned bullocks. Accustomed as she was to deal with cattle, she was not alarmed at her situation, but took advantage of every opportunity to urge her horse on in the hopes of pushing her way through the cavalcade. Unfortunately the horns of one of the creatures, either by accident or design, came in violent contact with the flank of the mustang, and excited it to madness. In an instant it reared up upon its hind legs with a snort of rage, and pranced and tossed in a way that would have unseated any but a most skilful rider. The situation was full of peril. Every plunge of the excited horse brought it against the horns again, and goaded it to fresh madness. It was all that the girl could do to keep herself in the saddle, yet a slip would mean a terrible death under the hoofs of the unwieldy and terrified animals. Unaccustomed to sudden emergencies, her head began to swim, and her grip upon the bridle to relax. Choked by the rising cloud of dust and by the steam from the struggling creatures, she might have abandoned her efforts in despair, but for a kindly voice at her elbow which assured her of assistance. At the same moment a sinewy brown hand caught the frightened horse by the curb, and forcing a way through the drove, soon brought her to the outskirts.

"You're not hurt, I hope, miss," said her preserver, respectfully.

She looked up at his dark, fierce face, and laughed saucily. "I'm awful frightened," she said, naively; "whoever would have thought that Poncho would have been so scared by a lot of cows?"

"Thank God you kept your seat," the other said earnestly. He was a tall, savage-looking young fellow, mounted on a powerful roan horse, and clad in the rough dress of a hunter, with a long rifle slung over his shoulders. "I guess you are the daughter of John Ferrier," he remarked, "I saw you ride down from his house. When you see him, ask him if he remembers the Jefferson Hopes of St. Louis. If he's the same Ferrier, my father and he were pretty thick."

"Hadn't you better come and ask yourself?" she asked, demurely.

The young fellow seemed pleased at the suggestion, and his dark eyes sparkled with pleasure. "I'll do so," he said, "we've been in the mountains for two months, and are not over and above in visiting condition. He must take us as he finds us."

"He has a good deal to thank you for, and so have I," she answered, "he's awful fond of me. If those cows had
jumped on me he'd have never got over it."

"Neither would I," said her companion.

"You! Well, I don't see that it would make much matter to you, anyhow. You ain't even a friend of ours."

The young hunter's dark face grew so gloomy over this remark that Lucy Ferrier laughed aloud.

"There, I didn't mean that," she said; "of course, you are a friend now. You must come and see us. Now I must push along, or father won't trust me with his business any more. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye," he answered, raising his broad sombrero, and bending over her little hand. She wheeled her mustang round, gave it a cut with her riding-whip, and darted away down the broad road in a rolling cloud of dust.

Young Jefferson Hope rode on with his companions, gloomy and taciturn. He and they had been among the Nevada Mountains prospecting for silver, and were returning to Salt Lake City in the hope of raising capital enough to work some lodes which they had discovered. He had been as keen as any of them upon the business until this sudden incident had drawn his thoughts into another channel. The sight of the fair young girl, as frank and wholesome as the Sierra breezes, had stirred his volcanic, untamed heart to its very depths. When she had vanished from his sight, he realized that a crisis had come in his life, and that neither silver speculations nor any other questions could ever be of such importance to him as this new and all-absorbing one. The love which had sprung up in his heart was not the sudden, changeable fancy of a boy, but rather the wild, fierce passion of a man of strong will and imperious temper. He had been accustomed to succeed in all that he undertook. He swore in his heart that he would not fail in this if human effort and human perseverance could render him successful.

He called on John Ferrier that night, and many times again, until his face was a familiar one at the farm-house. John, cooped up in the valley, and absorbed in his work, had had little chance of learning the news of the outside world during the last twelve years. All this Jefferson Hope was able to tell him, and in a style which interested Lucy as well as her father. He had been a pioneer in California, and could narrate many a strange tale of fortunes made and fortunes lost in those wild, halcyon days. He had been a scout too, and a trapper, a silver explorer, and a ranchman. Wherever stirring adventures were to be had, Jefferson Hope had been there in search of them. He soon became a favourite with the old farmer, who spoke eloquently of his virtues. On such occasions, Lucy was silent, but her blushing cheek and her bright, happy eyes, showed only too clearly that her young heart was no longer her own. Her honest father may not have observed these symptoms, but they were assuredly not thrown away upon the man who had won her affections.

It was a summer evening when he came galloping down the road and pulled up at the gate. She was at the doorway, and came down to meet him. He threw the bridle over the fence and strode up the pathway.

"I am off, Lucy," he said, taking her two hands in his, and gazing tenderly down into her face; "I won't ask you to come with me now, but will you be ready to come when I am here again?"

"And when will that be?" she asked, blushing and laughing.

"A couple of months at the outside. I will come and claim you then, my darling. There's no one who can stand between us."

"And how about father?" she asked.

"He has given his consent, provided we get these mines working all right. I have no fear on that head."

"Oh, well; of course, if you and father have arranged it all, there's no more to be said," she whispered, with her cheek against his broad breast.

"Thank God!" he said, hoarsely, stooping and kissing her. "It is settled, then. The longer I stay, the harder it will be to go. They are waiting for me at the canon. Good-bye, my own darling -- good-bye. In two months you shall see me."

He tore himself from her as he spoke, and, flinging himself upon his horse, galloped furiously away, never even
looking round, as though afraid that his resolution might fail him if he took one glance at what he was leaving. She stood at the gate, gazing after him until he vanished from her sight. Then she walked back into the house, the happiest girl in all Utah.

CHAPTER III.
JOHN FERRIER TALKS WITH THE PROPHET.

THREE weeks had passed since Jefferson Hope and his comrades had departed from Salt Lake City. John Ferrier's heart was sore within him when he thought of the young man's return, and of the impending loss of his adopted child. Yet her bright and happy face reconciled him to the arrangement more than any argument could have done. He had always determined, deep down in his resolute heart, that nothing would ever induce him to allow his daughter to wed a Mormon. Such a marriage he regarded as no marriage at all, but as a shame and a disgrace. Whatever he might think of the Mormon doctrines, upon that one point he was inflexible. He had to seal his mouth on the subject, however, for to express an unorthodox opinion was a dangerous matter in those days in the Land of the Saints.

Yes, a dangerous matter -- so dangerous that even the most saintly dared only whisper their religious opinions with bated breath, lest something which fell from their lips might be misconstrued, and bring down a swift retribution upon them. The victims of persecution had now turned persecutors on their own account, and persecutors of the most terrible description. Not the Inquisition of Seville, nor the German Vehm-gericht, nor the Secret Societies of Italy, were ever able to put a more formidable machinery in motion than that which cast a cloud over the State of Utah.

Its invisibility, and the mystery which was attached to it, made this organization doubly terrible. It appeared to be omniscient and omnipotent, and yet was neither seen nor heard. The man who held out against the Church vanished away, and none knew whither he had gone or what had befallen him. His wife and his children awaited him at home, but no father ever returned to tell them how he had fared at the hands of his secret judges. A rash word or a hasty act was followed by annihilation, and yet none knew what the nature might be of this terrible power which was suspended over them. No wonder that men went about in fear and trembling, and that even in the heart of the wilderness they dared not whisper the doubts which oppressed them.

At first this vague and terrible power was exercised only upon the recalcitrants who, having embraced the Mormon faith, wished afterwards to pervert or to abandon it. Soon, however, it took a wider range. The supply of adult women was running short, and polygamy without a female population on which to draw was a barren doctrine indeed. Strange rumours began to be bandied about -- rumours of murdered immigrants and rifled camps in regions where Indians had never been seen. Fresh women appeared in the harems of the Elders -- women who pined and wept, and bore upon their faces the traces of an unextinguishable horror. Belated wanderers upon the mountains spoke of gangs of armed men, masked, stealthy, and noiseless, who flitted by them in the darkness. These tales and rumours took substance and shape, and were corroborated and re-corroborated, until they resolved themselves into a definite name. To this day, in the lonely ranches of the West, the name of the Danite Band, or the Avenging Angels, is a sinister and an ill-omened one.

Fuller knowledge of the organization which produced such terrible results served to increase rather than to lessen the horror which it inspired in the minds of men. None knew who belonged to this ruthless society. The names of the participators in the deeds of blood and violence done under the name of religion were kept profoundly secret. The very friend to whom you communicated your misgivings as to the Prophet and his mission, might be one of those who would come forth at night with fire and sword to exact a terrible reparation. Hence every man feared his neighbour, and none spoke of the things which were nearest his heart.

One fine morning, John Ferrier was about to set out to his wheatfields, when he heard the click of the latch, and, looking through the window, saw a stout, sandy-haired, middle-aged man coming up the pathway. His heart leapt to his mouth, for this was none other than the great Brigham Young himself. Full of trepidation -- for he knew that such a visit boded him little good -- Ferrier ran to the door to greet the Mormon chief. The latter, however, received his salutations coldly, and followed him with a stern face into the sitting-room.

"Brother Ferrier," he said, taking a seat, and eyeing the farmer keenly from under his light-coloured eyelashes, "the true believers have been good friends to you. We picked you up when you were starving in the desert, we shared our food with you, led you safe to the Chosen Valley, gave you a goodly share of land, and allowed you to wax rich under our protection. Is not this so?"

"It is so," answered John Ferrier.

"In return for all this we asked but one condition: that was, that you should embrace the true faith, and conform in every way to its usages. This you promised to do, and this, if common report says truly, you have neglected."

"And how have I neglected it?" asked Ferrier, throwing out his hands in expostulation. "Have I not given to the common fund? Have I not attended at the Temple? Have I not ----?"
"Where are your wives?" asked Young, looking round him. "Call them in, that I may greet them."

"It is true that I have not married," Ferrier answered. "But women were few, and there were many who had better claims than I. I was not a lonely man; I had my daughter to attend to my wants."

"It is of that daughter that I would speak to you," said the leader of the Mormons. "She has grown to be the flower of Utah, and has found favour in the eyes of many who are high in the land."

John Ferrier groaned internally.

"There are stories of her which I would fain disbelieve -- stories that she is sealed to some Gentile. This must be the gossip of idle tongues. What is the thirteenth rule in the code of the sainted Joseph Smith? 'Let every maiden of the true faith marry one of the elect; for if she wed a Gentile, she commits a grievous sin.' This being so, it is impossible that you, who profess the holy creed, should suffer your daughter to violate it."

John Ferrier made no answer, but he played nervously with his riding-whip.

"Upon this one point your whole faith shall be tested -- so it has been decided in the Sacred Council of Four. The girl is young, and we would not have her wed grey hairs, neither would we deprive her of all choice. We Elders have many heifers, * but our children must also be provided. Stangerson has a son, and Drebber has a son, and either of them would gladly welcome your daughter to their house. Let her choose between them. They are young and rich, and of the true faith. What say you to that?"

Ferrier remained silent for some little time with his brows knitted.

"You will give us time," he said at last. "My daughter is very young -- she is scarce of an age to marry."

"She shall have a month to choose," said Young, rising from his seat. "At the end of that time she shall give her answer."

He was passing through the door, when he turned, with flushed face and flashing eyes. "It were better for you, John Ferrier," he thundered, "that you and she were now lying blanched skeletons upon the Sierra Blanco, than that you should put your weak wills against the orders of the Holy Four!"

With a threatening gesture of his hand, he turned from the door, and Ferrier heard his heavy step scrunching along the shingly path.

He was still sitting with his elbows upon his knees, considering how he should broach the matter to his daughter when a soft hand was laid upon his, and looking up, he saw her standing beside him. One glance at her pale, frightened face showed him that she had heard what had passed.

"I could not help it," she said, in answer to his look. "His voice rang through the house. Oh, father, father, what shall we do?"

"Don't you scare yourself," he answered, drawing her to him, and passing his broad, rough hand caressingly over her chestnut hair. "We'll fix it up somehow or another. You don't find your fancy kind o' lessening for this chap, do you?"

A sob and a squeeze of his hand was her only answer.

"No; of course not. I shouldn't care to hear you say you did. He's a likely lad, and he's a Christian, which is more than these folk here, in spite o' all their praying and preaching. There's a party starting for Nevada to-morrow, and I'll manage to send him a message letting him know the hole we are in. If I know anything o' that young man, he'll be back here with a speed that would whip electro-telegraphs."
Lucy laughed through her tears at her father's description.

"When he comes, he will advise us for the best. But it is for you that I am frightened, dear. One hears -- one hears such dreadful stories about those who oppose the Prophet: something terrible always happens to them."

"But we haven't opposed him yet," her father answered. "It will be time to look out for squalls when we do. We have a clear month before us; at the end of that, I guess we had best shin out of Utah."

"Leave Utah!"

"That's about the size of it."

"But the farm?"

"We will raise as much as we can in money, and let the rest go. To tell the truth, Lucy, it isn't the first time I have thought of doing it. I don't care about knuckling under to any man, as these folk do to their damned prophet. I'm a free-born American, and it's all new to me. Guess I'm too old to learn. If he comes browsing about this farm, he might chance to run up against a charge of buckshot travelling in the opposite direction."

"But they won't let us leave," her daughter objected.

"Wait till Jefferson comes, and we'll soon manage that. In the meantime, don't you fret yourself, my dearie, and don't get your eyes swelled up, else he'll be walking into me when he sees you. There's nothing to be afeared about, and there's no danger at all."

John Ferrier uttered these consoling remarks in a very confident tone, but she could not help observing that he paid unusual care to the fastening of the doors that night, and that he carefully cleaned and loaded the rusty old shotgun which hung upon the wall of his bedroom.

CHAPTER IV.

A FLIGHT FOR LIFE.

On the morning which followed his interview with the Mormon Prophet, John Ferrier went in to Salt Lake City, and having found his acquaintance, who was bound for the Nevada Mountains, he entrusted him with his message to Jefferson Hope. In it he told the young man of the imminent danger which threatened them, and how necessary it was that he should return. Having done thus he felt easier in his mind, and returned home with a lighter heart.

As he approached his farm, he was surprised to see a horse hitched to each of the posts of the gate. Still more surprised was he on entering to find two young men in possession of his sitting-room. One, with a long pale face, was leaning back in the rocking-chair, with his feet cocked up upon the stove. The other, a bull-necked youth with coarse bloated features, was standing in front of the window with his hands in his pocket, whistling a popular hymn.

Both of them nodded to Ferrier as he entered, and the one in the rocking-chair commenced the conversation.

"Maybe you don't know us," he said. "This here is the son of Elder Drebber, and I'm Joseph Stangerson, who travelled with you in the desert when the Lord stretched out His hand and gathered you into the true fold."

"As He will all the nations in His own good time," said the other in a nasal voice; "He grindeth slowly but exceeding small."

John Ferrier bowed coldly. He had guessed who his visitors were.

"We have come," continued Stangerson, "at the advice of our fathers to solicit the hand of your daughter for whichever of us may seem good to you and to her. As I have but four wives and Brother Drebber here has seven, it appears to me that my claim is the stronger one."

"Nay, nay, Brother Stangerson," cried the other; "the question is not how many wives we have, but how many we can keep. My father has now given over his mills to me, and I am the richer man."

"But my prospects are better," said the other, warmly. "When the Lord removes my father, I shall have his tanning yard and his leather factory. Then I am your elder, and am higher in the Church."

"It will be for the maiden to decide," rejoined young Drebber, smirking at his own reflection in the glass. "We will leave it all to her decision."

During this dialogue, John Ferrier had stood fuming in the doorway, hardly able to keep his riding-whip from the backs of his two visitors.

"Look here," he said at last, striding up to them, "when my daughter summons you, you can come, but until then I don't want to see your faces again."

The two young Mormons stared at him in amazement. In their eyes this competition between them for the maiden's hand was the highest of honours both to her and her father.

"There are two ways out of the room," cried Ferrier; "there is the door, and there is the window. Which do you care to use?"

His brown face looked so savage, and his gaunt hands so threatening, that his visitors sprang to their feet and beat a hurried retreat. The old farmer followed them to the door.

"Let me know when you have settled which it is to be," he said, sardonically.

"You shall smart for this!" Stangerson cried, white with rage. "You have defied the Prophet and the Council of
he had been spirited away before now, and their goods given over to the Church. He was a brave man, but he
trembled at the vague, shadowy terrors which hung over him. Any known danger he could face with a firm lip, but
this suspense was unnerving. He concealed his fears from his daughter, however, and affected to make light of the
whole matter, though she, with the keen eye of love, saw plainly that he was ill at ease.

He expected that he would receive some message or remonstrance from Young as to his conduct, and he was not
mistaken, though it came in an unlooked-for manner. Upon rising next morning he found, to his surprise, a small
square of paper pinned on to the coverlet of his bed just over his chest. On it was printed, in bold straggling letters:--

"Twenty-nine days are given you for amendment, and then ----"

The dash was more fear-inspiring than any threat could have been. How this warning came into his room
puzzled John Ferrier sorely, for his servants slept in an outhouse, and the doors and windows had all been secured.
He crumpled the paper up and said nothing to his daughter, but the incident struck a chill into his heart. The twenty-
nine days were evidently the balance of the month which Young had promised. What strength or courage could avail
against an enemy armed with such mysterious powers? The hand which fastened that pin might have struck him to
the heart, and he could never have known who had slain him.

Still more shaken was he next morning. They had sat down to their breakfast when Lucy with a cry of surprise
pointed upwards. In the centre of the ceiling was scrawled, with a burned stick apparently, the number 28. To his
daughter it was unintelligible, and he did not enlighten her. That night he sat up with his gun and kept watch and
ward. He saw and he heard nothing, and yet in the morning a great 27 had been painted upon the outside of his door.

Thus day followed day; and as sure as morning came he found that his unseen enemies had kept their register,
and had marked up in some conspicuous position how many days were still left to him out of the month of grace.
Sometimes the fatal numbers appeared upon the walls, sometimes upon the floors, occasionally they were on small
placards stuck upon the garden gate or the railings. With all his vigilance John Ferrier could not discover whence
these daily warnings proceeded. A horror which was almost superstitious came upon him at the sight of them. He
became haggard and restless, and his eyes had the troubled look of some hunted creature. He had but one hope in
life now, and that was for the arrival of the young hunter from Nevada.

Twenty had changed to fifteen and fifteen to ten, but there was no news of the absentee. One by one the numbers
dwindled down, and still there came no sign of him. Whenever a horseman clattered down the road, or a driver
shouted at his team, the old farmer hurried to the gate thinking that help had arrived at last. At last, when he saw five
give way to four and that again to three, he lost heart, and abandoned all hope of escape. Single-handed, and with his
limited knowledge of the mountains which surrounded the settlement, he knew that he was powerless. The more-
frequented roads were strictly watched and guarded, and none could pass along them without an order from the
Council. Turn which way he would, there appeared to be no avoiding the blow which hung over him. Yet the old
man never wavered in his resolution to part with life itself before he consented to what he regarded as his daughter's
dishonour.

He was sitting alone one evening pondering deeply over his troubles, and searching vainly for some way out of
them. That morning had shown the figure 2 upon the wall of his house, and the next day would be the last of the
allotted time. What was to happen then? All manner of vague and terrible fancies filled his imagination. And his
daughter -- what was to become of her after he was gone? Was there no escape from the invisible network which
was drawn all round them. He sank his head upon the table and sobbed at the thought of his own impotence.

What was that? In the silence he heard a gentle scratching sound -- low, but very distinct in the quiet of the
night. It came from the door of the house. Ferrier crept into the hall and listened intently. There was a pause for a
few moments, and then the low insidious sound was repeated. Someone was evidently tapping very gently upon one
of the panels of the door. Was it some midnight assassin who had come to carry out the murderous orders of the secret tribunal? Or was it some agent who was marking up that the last day of grace had arrived. John Ferrier felt that instant death would be better than the suspense which shook his nerves and chilled his heart. Springing forward he drew the bolt and threw the door open.

Outside all was calm and quiet. The night was fine, and the stars were twinkling brightly overhead. The little front garden lay before the farmer's eyes bounded by the fence and gate, but neither there nor on the road was any human being to be seen. With a sigh of relief, Ferrier looked to right and to left, until happening to glance straight down at his own feet he saw to his astonishment a man lying flat upon his face upon the ground, with arms and legs all asprawl.

So unnerved was he at the sight that he leaned up against the wall with his hand to his throat to stifle his inclination to call out. His first thought was that the prostrate figure was that of some wounded or dying man, but as he watched it he saw it writhe along the ground and into the hall with the rapidity and noiselessness of a serpent. Once within the house the man sprang to his feet, closed the door, and revealed to the astonished farmer the fierce face and resolute expression of Jefferson Hope.

"Good God!" gasped John Ferrier. "How you scared me! Whatever made you come in like that."

"Give me food," the other said, hoarsely. "I have had no time for bite or sup for eight-and-forty hours." He flung himself upon the cold meat and bread which were still lying upon the table from his host's supper, and devoured it voraciously. "Does Lucy bear up well?" he asked, when he had satisfied his hunger.

"Yes. She does not know the danger," her father answered.

"That is well. The house is watched on every side. That is why I crawled my way up to it. They may be darned sharp, but they're not quite sharp enough to catch a Washoe hunter."

John Ferrier felt a different man now that he realized that he had a devoted ally. He seized the young man's leathery hand and wrung it cordially. "You're a man to be proud of," he said. "There are not many who would come to share our danger and our troubles."

"You've hit it there, pard," the young hunter answered. "I have a respect for you, but if you were alone in this business I'd think twice before I put my head into such a hornet's nest. It's Lucy that brings me here, and before harm comes on her I guess there will be one less o' the Hope family in Utah."

"What are we to do?"

"To-morrow is your last day, and unless you act to-night you are lost. I have a mule and two horses waiting in the Eagle Ravine. How much money have you?"

"Two thousand dollars in gold, and five in notes."

"That will do. I have as much more to add to it. We must push for Carson City through the mountains. You had best wake Lucy. It is as well that the servants do not sleep in the house."

While Ferrier was absent, preparing his daughter for the approaching journey, Jefferson Hope packed all the eatables that he could find into a small parcel, and filled a stoneware jar with water, for he knew by experience that the mountain wells were few and far between. He had hardly completed his arrangements before the farmer returned with his daughter all dressed and ready for a start. The greeting between the lovers was warm, but brief, for minutes were precious, and there was much to be done.

"We must make our start at once," said Jefferson Hope, speaking in a low but resolute voice, like one who realizes the greatness of the peril, but has steeled his heart to meet it. "The front and back entrances are watched, but
with caution we may get away through the side window and across the fields. Once on the road we are only two miles from the Ravine where the horses are waiting. By daybreak we should be half-way through the mountains."

"What if we are stopped," asked Ferrier.

Hope slapped the revolver butt which protruded from the front of his tunic. "If they are too many for us we shall take two or three of them with us," he said with a sinister smile.

The lights inside the house had all been extinguished, and from the darkened window Ferrier peered over the fields which had been his own, and which he was now about to abandon for ever. He had long nerved himself to the sacrifice, however, and the thought of the honour and happiness of his daughter outweighed any regret at his ruined fortunes. All looked so peaceful and happy, the rustling trees and the broad silent stretch of grain-land, that it was difficult to realize that the spirit of murder lurked through it all. Yet the white face and set expression of the young hunter showed that in his approach to the house he had seen enough to satisfy him upon that head.

Ferrier carried the bag of gold and notes, Jefferson Hope had the scanty provisions and water, while Lucy had a small bundle containing a few of her more valued possessions. Opening the window very slowly and carefully, they waited until a dark cloud had somewhat obscured the night, and then one by one passed through into the little garden. With bated breath and crouching figures they stumbled across it, and gained the shelter of the hedge, which they skirted until they came to the gap which opened into the cornfields. They had just reached this point when the young man seized his two companions and dragged them down into the shadow, where they lay silent and trembling.

It was as well that his prairie training had given Jefferson Hope the ears of a lynx. He and his friends had hardly crouched down before the melancholy hooting of a mountain owl was heard within a few yards of them, which was immediately answered by another hoot at a small distance. At the same moment a vague shadowy figure emerged from the gap for which they had been making, and uttered the plaintive signal cry again, on which a second man appeared out of the obscurity.

"To-morrow at midnight," said the first who appeared to be in authority. "When the Whip-poor-Will calls three times."

"It is well," returned the other. "Shall I tell Brother Drebber?"

"Pass it on to him, and from him to the others. Nine to seven!"

"Seven to five!" repeated the other, and the two figures flitted away in different directions. Their concluding words had evidently been some form of sign and countersign. The instant that their footsteps had died away in the distance, Jefferson Hope sprang to his feet, and helping his companions through the gap, led the way across the fields at the top of his speed, supporting and half-carrying the girl when her strength appeared to fail her.

"Hurry on! hurry on!" he gasped from time to time. "We are through the line of sentinels. Everything depends on speed. Hurry on!"

Once on the high road they made rapid progress. Only once did they meet anyone, and then they managed to slip into a field, and so avoid recognition. Before reaching the town the hunter branched away into a rugged and narrow footpath which led to the mountains. Two dark jagged peaks loomed above them through the darkness, and the defile which led between them was the Eagle Canon in which the horses were awaiting them. With unerring instinct Jefferson Hope picked his way among the great boulders and along the bed of a dried-up watercourse, until he came to the retired corner, screened with rocks, where the faithful animals had been picketed. The girl was placed upon the mule, and old Ferrier upon one of the horses, with his money-bag, while Jefferson Hope led the other along the precipitous and dangerous path.

It was a bewildering route for anyone who was not accustomed to face Nature in her wildest moods. On the one side a great crag towered up a thousand feet or more, black, stern, and menacing, with long basaltic columns upon its rugged surface like the ribs of some petrified monster. On the other hand a wild chaos of boulders and debris made all advance impossible. Between the two ran the irregular track, so narrow in places that they had to travel in Indian file, and so rough that only practised riders could have traversed it at all. Yet in spite of all dangers and difficulties, the hearts of the fugitives were light within them, for every step increased the distance between them and the terrible despotism from which they were flying.

They soon had a proof, however, that they were still within the jurisdiction of the Saints. They had reached the very wildest and most desolate portion of the pass when the girl gave a startled cry, and pointed upwards. On a rock which overlooked the track, showing out dark and plain against the sky, there stood a solitary sentinel. He saw them as soon as they perceived him, and his military challenge of "Who goes there?" rang through the silent ravine.

"Travellers for Nevada," said Jefferson Hope, with his hand upon the rifle which hung by his saddle.

They could see the lonely watcher fingering his gun, and peering down at them as if dissatisfied at their reply.

"By whose permission?" he asked.

"The Holy Four," answered Ferrier. His Mormon experiences had taught him that that was the highest authority
to which he could refer.

"Nine from seven," cried the sentinel.

"Seven from five," returned Jefferson Hope promptly, remembering the countersign which he had heard in the garden.

"Pass, and the Lord go with you," said the voice from above. Beyond his post the path broadened out, and the horses were able to break into a trot. Looking back, they could see the solitary watcher leaning upon his gun, and knew that they had passed the outlying post of the chosen people, and that freedom lay before them.

CHAPTER V.

THE AVENGING ANGELS.

All night their course lay through intricate defiles and over irregular and rock-strewn paths. More than once they lost their way, but Hope's intimate knowledge of the mountains enabled them to regain the track once more. When morning broke, a scene of marvellous though savage beauty lay before them. In every direction the great snow-capped peaks hemmed them in, peeping over each other's shoulders to the far horizon. So steep were the rocky banks on either side of them, that the larch and the pine seemed to be suspended over their heads, and to need only a gust of wind to come hurtling down upon them. Nor was the fear entirely an illusion, for the barren valley was thickly strewn with trees and boulders which had fallen in a similar manner. Even as they passed, a great rock came thundering down with a hoarse rattle which woke the echoes in the silent gorges, and startled the weary horses into a gallop.

As the sun rose slowly above the eastern horizon, the caps of the great mountains lit up one after the other, like lamps at a festival, until they were all ruddy and glowing. The magnificent spectacle cheered the hearts of the three fugitives and gave them fresh energy. At a wild torrent which swept out of a ravine they called a halt and watered their horses, while they partook of a hasty breakfast. Lucy and her father would fain have rested longer, but Jefferson Hope was inexorable. "They will be upon our track by this time," he said. "Everything depends upon our speed. Once safe in Carson we may rest for the remainder of our lives."

During the whole of that day they struggled on through the defiles, and by evening they calculated that they were more than thirty miles from their enemies. At night-time they chose the base of a beetling crag, where the rocks offered some protection from the chill wind, and there huddling together for warmth, they enjoyed a few hours' sleep. Before daybreak, however, they were up and on their way once more. They had seen no signs of any pursuers, and Jefferson Hope began to think that they were fairly out of the reach of the terrible organization whose enmity they had incurred. He little knew how far that iron grasp could reach, or how soon it was to close upon them and crush them.

About the middle of the second day of their flight their scanty store of provisions began to run out. This gave the hunter little uneasiness, however, for there was game to be had among the mountains, and he had frequently before had to depend upon his rifle for the needs of life. Choosing a sheltered nook, he piled together a few dried branches and made a blazing fire, at which his companions might warm themselves, for they were now nearly five thousand feet above the sea level, and the air was bitter and keen. Having tethered the horses, and bade Lucy adieu, he threw his gun over his shoulder, and set out in search of whatever chance might throw in his way. Looking back he saw the old man and the young girl crouching over the blazing fire, while the three animals stood motionless in the background. Then the intervening rocks hid them from his view.

He walked for a couple of miles through one ravine after another without success, though from the marks upon the bark of the trees, and other indications, he judged that there were numerous bears in the vicinity. At last, after two or three hours' fruitless search, he was thinking of turning back in despair, when casting his eyes upwards he saw a sight which sent a thrill of pleasure through his heart. On the edge of a jutting pinnacle, three or four hundred
feet above him, there stood a creature somewhat resembling a sheep in appearance, but armed with a pair of gigantic horns. The big-horn -- for so it is called -- was acting, probably, as a guardian over a flock which were invisible to the hunter; but fortunately it was heading in the opposite direction, and had not perceived him. Lying on his face, he rested his rifle upon a rock, and took a long and steady aim before drawing the trigger. The animal sprang into the air, tottered for a moment upon the edge of the precipice, and then came crashing down into the valley beneath.

The creature was too unwieldy to lift, so the hunter contented himself with cutting away one haunch and part of the flank. With this trophy over his shoulder, he hastened to retrace his steps, for the evening was already drawing in. He had hardly started, however, before he realized the difficulty which faced him. In his eagerness he had wandered far past the ravines which were known to him, and it was no easy matter to pick out the path which he had taken. The valley in which he found himself divided and sub-divided into many gorges, which were so like each other that it was impossible to distinguish one from the other. He followed one for a mile or more until he came to a mountain torrent which he was sure that he had never seen before. Convinced that he had taken the wrong turn, he tried another, but with the same result. Night was coming on rapidly, and it was almost dark before he at last found himself in a defile which was familiar to him. Even then it was no easy matter to keep to the right track, for the moon had not yet risen, and the high cliffs on either side made the obscurity more profound. Weighed down with his burden, and weary from his exertions, he stumbled along, keeping up his heart by the reflection that every step brought him nearer to Lucy, and that he carried with him enough to ensure them food for the remainder of their journey.

He had now come to the mouth of the very defile in which he had left them. Even in the darkness he could recognize the outline of the cliffs which bounded it. They must, he reflected, be awaiting him anxiously, for he had been absent nearly five hours. In the gladness of his heart he put his hands to his mouth and made the glen re-echo to a loud halloo as a signal that he was coming. He paused and listened for an answer. None came save his own cry, which clattered up the dreary silent ravines, and was borne back to his ears in countless repetitions. Again he shouted, even louder than before, and again no whisper came back from the friends whom he had left such a short time ago. A vague, nameless dread came over him, and he hurried onwards frantically, dropping the precious food in his agitation.

When he turned the corner, he came full in sight of the spot where the fire had been lit. There was still a glowing pile of wood ashes there, but it had evidently not been tended since his departure. The same dead silence still reigned all round. With his fears all changed to convictions, he hurried on. There was no living creature near the remains of the fire: animals, man, maiden, all were gone. It was only too clear that some sudden and terrible disaster had occurred during his absence -- a disaster which had embraced them all, and yet had left no traces behind it.

Bewildered and stunned by this blow, Jefferson Hope felt his head spin round, and had to lean upon his rifle to save himself from falling. He was essentially a man of action, however, and speedily recovered from his temporary impotence. Seizing a half-consumed piece of wood from the smouldering fire, he blew it into a flame, and proceeded with its help to examine the little camp. The ground was all stamped down by the feet of horses, showing that a large party of mounted men had overtaken the fugitives, and the direction of their tracks proved that they had afterwards turned back to Salt Lake City. Had they carried back both of his companions with them? Jefferson Hope had almost persuaded himself that they must have done so, when his eye fell upon an object which made every nerve of his body tingle within him. A little way on one side of the camp was a low-lying heap of reddish soil, which had assuredly not been there before. There was no mistaking it for anything but a newly-dug grave. As the young hunter approached it, he perceived that a stick had been planted on it, with a sheet of paper stuck in the cleft fork of it. The inscription upon the paper was brief, but to the point:

JOHN FERRIER, FORMERLY OF SALT LAKE CITY, Died August 4th, 1860.
The sturdy old man, whom he had left so short a time before, was gone, then, and this was all his epitaph. Jefferson Hope looked wildly round to see if there was a second grave, but there was no sign of one. Lucy had been carried back by their terrible pursuers to fulfil her original destiny, by becoming one of the harem of the Elder's son. As the young fellow realized the certainty of her fate, and his own powerlessness to prevent it, he wished that he, too, was lying with the old farmer in his last silent resting-place.

Again, however, his active spirit shook off the lethargy which springs from despair. If there was nothing else left to him, he could at least devote his life to revenge. With indomitable patience and perseverance, Jefferson Hope possessed also a power of sustained vindictiveness, which he may have learned from the Indians amongst whom he had lived. As he stood by the desolate fire, he felt that the only one thing which could assuage his grief would be thorough and complete retribution, brought by his own hand upon his enemies. His strong will and untiring energy should, he determined, be devoted to that one end. With a grim, white face, he retraced his steps to where he had dropped the food, and having stirred up the smouldering fire, he cooked enough to last him for a few days. This he made up into a bundle, and, tired as he was, he set himself to walk back through the mountains upon the track of the avenging angels.

For five days he toiled footsore and weary through the defiles which he had already traversed on horseback. At night he flung himself down among the rocks, and snatched a few hours of sleep; but before daybreak he was always well on his way. On the sixth day, he reached the Eagle Canon, from which they had commenced their ill-fated flight. Thence he could look down upon the home of the saints. Worn and exhausted, he leaned upon his rifle and shook his gaunt hand fiercely at the silent widespread city beneath him. As he looked at it, he observed that there were flags in some of the principal streets, and other signs of festivity. He was still speculating as to what this might mean when he heard the clatter of horse's hoofs, and saw a mounted man riding towards him. As he approached, he recognized him as a Mormon named Cowper, to whom he had rendered services at different times. He therefore accosted him when he got up to him, with the object of finding out what Lucy Ferrier's fate had been.

"I am Jefferson Hope," he said. "You remember me."

The Mormon looked at him with undisguised astonishment -- indeed, it was difficult to recognize in this tattered, unkempt wanderer, with ghastly white face and fierce, wild eyes, the spruce young hunter of former days. Having, however, at last, satisfied himself as to his identity, the man's surprise changed to consternation.

"You are mad to come here," he cried. "It is as much as my own life is worth to be seen talking with you. There is a warrant against you from the Holy Four for assisting the Ferriers away."

"I don't fear them, or their warrant," Hope said, earnestly. "You must know something of this matter, Cowper. I conjure you by everything you hold dear to answer a few questions. We have always been friends. For God's sake, don't refuse to answer me."

"What is it?" the Mormon asked uneasily. "Be quick. The very rocks have ears and the trees eyes."

"What has become of Lucy Ferrier?"

"She was married yesterday to young Drebber. Hold up, man, hold up, you have no life left in you."

"Don't mind me," said Hope faintly. He was white to the very lips, and had sunk down on the stone against which he had been leaning. "Married, you say?"

"Married yesterday -- that's what those flags are for on the Endowment House. There was some words between young Drebber and young Stangerson as to which was to have her. They'd both been in the party that followed them, and Stangerson had shot her father, which seemed to give him the best claim; but when they argued it out in council, Drebber's party was the stronger, so the Prophet gave her over to him. No one won't have her very long though, for I saw death in her face yesterday. She is more like a ghost than a woman. Are you off, then?"

"Yes, I am off," said Jefferson Hope, who had risen from his seat. His face might have been chiselled out of marble, so hard and set was its expression, while its eyes glowed with a baleful light.

"Where are you going?"

"Never mind," he answered; and, slinging his weapon over his shoulder, strode off down the gorge and so away into the heart of the mountains to the haunts of the wild beasts. Amongst them all there was none so fierce and so dangerous as himself.

The prediction of the Mormon was only too well fulfilled. Whether it was the terrible death of her father or the effects of the hateful marriage into which she had been forced, poor Lucy never held up her head again, but pined away and died within a month. Her sottish husband, who had married her principally for the sake of John Ferrier's property, did not affect any great grief at his bereavement; but his other wives mourned over her, and sat up with her the night before the burial, as is the Mormon custom. They were grouped round the bier in the early hours of the morning, when, to their inexpressible fear and astonishment, the door was flung open, and a savage-looking, weather-beaten man in tattered garments strode into the room. Without a glance or a word to the cowering women, he walked up to the white silent figure which had once contained the pure soul of Lucy Ferrier. Stooping over her,
he pressed his lips reverently to her cold forehead, and then, snatching up her hand, he took the wedding-ring from her finger. "She shall not be buried in that," he cried with a fierce snarl, and before an alarm could be raised sprang down the stairs and was gone. Strange and so brief was the episode, that the watchers might have found it hard to believe it themselves or persuade other people of it, had it not been for the undeniable fact that the circlet of gold which marked her as having been a bride had disappeared.

For some months Jefferson Hope lingered among the mountains, leading a strange wild life, and nursing in his heart the fierce desire for vengeance which possessed him. Tales were told in the City of the weird figure which was seen prowling about the suburbs, and which haunted the lonely mountain gorges. Once a bullet whistled through Stangerson's window and flattened itself upon the wall within a foot of him. On another occasion, as Drebber passed under a cliff a great boulder crashed down on him, and he only escaped a terrible death by throwing himself upon his face. The two young Mormons were not long in discovering the reason of these attempts upon their lives, and led repeated expeditions into the mountains in the hope of capturing or killing their enemy, but always without success. Then they adopted the precaution of never going out alone or after nightfall, and of having their houses guarded. After a time they were able to relax these measures, for nothing was either heard or seen of their opponent, and they hoped that time had cooled his vindictiveness.

Far from doing so, it had, if anything, augmented it. The hunter's mind was of a hard, unyielding nature, and the predominant idea of revenge had taken such complete possession of it that there was no room for any other emotion. He was, however, above all things practical. He soon realized that even his iron constitution could not stand the incessant strain which he was putting upon it. Exposure and want of wholesome food were wearing him out. If he died like a dog among the mountains, what was to become of his revenge then? And yet such a death was sure to overtake him if he persisted. He felt that that was to play his enemy's game, so he reluctantly returned to the old Nevada mines, there to recruit his health and to amass money enough to allow him to pursue his object without privation.

His intention had been to be absent a year at the most, but a combination of unforeseen circumstances prevented his leaving the mines for nearly five. At the end of that time, however, his memory of his wrongs and his craving for revenge were quite as keen as on that memorable night when he had stood by John Ferrier's grave. Disguised, and under an assumed name, he returned to Salt Lake City, careless what became of his own life, as long as he obtained what he knew to be justice. There he found evil tidings awaiting him. There had been a schism among the Chosen People a few months before, some of the younger members of the Church having rebelled against the authority of the Elders, and the result had been the secession of a certain number of the malcontents, who had left Utah and become Gentiles. Among these had been Drebber and Stangerson; and no one knew whither they had gone. Rumour reported that Drebber had managed to convert a large part of his property into money, and that he had departed a wealthy man, while his companion, Stangerson, was comparatively poor. There was no clue at all, however, as to their whereabouts.

Many a man, however vindictive, would have abandoned all thought of revenge in the face of such a difficulty, but Jefferson Hope never faltered for a moment. With the small competence he possessed, eked out by such employment as he could pick up, he travelled from town to town through the United States in quest of his enemies. Year passed into year, his black hair turned grizzled, but still he wandered on, a human bloodhound, with his mind wholly set upon the one object upon which he had devoted his life. At last his perseverance was rewarded. It was but a glance of a face in a window, but that one glance told him that Cleveland in Ohio possessed the men whom he was in pursuit of. He returned to his miserable lodgings with his plan of vengeance all arranged. It chanced, however, that Drebber, looking from his window, had recognized the vagrant in the street, and had read murder in his eyes. He hurried before a justice of the peace, accompanied by Stangerson, who had become his private secretary, and represented to him that they were in danger of their lives from the jealousy and hatred of an old rival. That evening Jefferson Hope was taken into custody, and not being able to find sureties, was detained for some weeks. When at last he was liberated, it was only to find that Drebber's house was deserted, and that he and his secretary had departed for Europe.

Again the avenger had been foiled, and again his concentrated hatred urged him to continue the pursuit. Funds were wanting, however, and for some time he had to return to work, saving every dollar for his approaching journey. At last, having collected enough to keep life in him, he departed for Europe, and tracked his enemies from city to city, working his way in any menial capacity, but never overtaking the fugitives. When he reached St. Petersburg they had departed for Paris; and when he followed them there he learned that they had just set off for Copenhagen. At the Danish capital he was again a few days late, for they had journeyed on to London, where he at last succeeded in running them to earth. As to what occurred there, we cannot do better than quote the old hunter's own account, as duly recorded in Dr. Watson's Journal, to which we are already under such obligations.

CHAPTER VI.
OUR prisoner's furious resistance did not apparently indicate any ferocity in his disposition towards ourselves, for on finding himself powerless, he smiled in an affable manner, and expressed his hopes that he had not hurt any of us in the scuffle. "I guess you're going to take me to the police-station," he remarked to Sherlock Holmes. "My cab's at the door. If you'll lose my legs I'll walk down to it. I'm not so light to lift as I used to be."

Gregson and Lestrade exchanged glances as if they thought this proposition rather a bold one; but Holmes at once took the prisoner at his word, and loosened the towel which we had bound round his ankles. He rose and stretched his legs, as though to assure himself that they were free once more. I remember that I thought to myself, as I eyed him, that I had seldom seen a more powerfully built man; and his dark sunburned face bore an expression of determination and energy which was as formidable as his personal strength.

"If there's a vacant place for a chief of the police, I reckon you are the man for it," he said, gazing with undisguised admiration at my fellow-lodger. "The way you kept on my trail was a caution."

"You had better come with me," said Holmes to the two detectives.

"I can drive you," said Lestrade.

"Good! and Gregson can come inside with me. You too, Doctor, you have taken an interest in the case and may as well stick to us."

I assented gladly, and we all descended together. Our prisoner made no attempt at escape, but stepped calmly into the cab which had been his, and we followed him. Lestrade mounted the box, whipped up the horse, and brought us in a very short time to our destination. We were ushered into a small chamber where a police Inspector noted down our prisoner's name and the names of the men with whose murder he had been charged. The official was a white-faced unemotional man, who went through his duties in a dull mechanical way. "The prisoner will be put before the magistrates in the course of the week," he said; "in the mean time, Mr. Jefferson Hope, have you anything that you wish to say? I must warn you that your words will be taken down, and may be used against you."

"I've got a good deal to say," our prisoner said slowly. "I want to tell you gentlemen all about it."

"Hadn't you better reserve that for your trial?" asked the Inspector.

"I may never be tried," he answered. "You needn't look startled. It isn't suicide I am thinking of. Are you a Doctor?" He turned his fierce dark eyes upon me as he asked this last question.

"Yes; I am," I answered.

"Then put your hand here," he said, with a smile, motioning with his manacled wrists towards his chest.

I did so; and became at once conscious of an extraordinary throbbing and commotion which was going on inside. The walls of his chest seemed to thrill and quiver as a frail building would do inside when some powerful engine was at work. In the silence of the room I could hear a dull humming and buzzing noise which proceeded from the same source.

"Why," I cried, "you have an aortic aneurism!"

"That's what they call it," he said, placidly. "I went to a Doctor last week about it, and he told me that it is bound to burst before many days passed. It has been getting worse for years. I got it from over-exposure and under-feeding among the Salt Lake Mountains. I've done my work now, and I don't care how soon I go, but I should like to leave some account of the business behind me. I don't want to be remembered as a common cut-throat."

The Inspector and the two detectives had a hurried discussion as to the advisability of allowing him to tell his story.

"Do you consider, Doctor, that there is immediate danger?" the former asked,

"Most certainly there is," I answered.
"In that case it is clearly our duty, in the interests of justice, to take his statement," said the Inspector. "You are at liberty, sir, to give your account, which I again warn you will be taken down."

"I'll sit down, with your leave," the prisoner said, suitting the action to the word. "This aneurism of mine makes me easily tired, and the tussle we had half an hour ago has not mended matters. I'm on the brink of the grave, and I am not likely to lie to you. Every word I say is the absolute truth, and how you use it is a matter of no consequence to me."

With these words, Jefferson Hope leaned back in his chair and began the following remarkable statement. He spoke in a calm and methodical manner, as though the events which he narrated were commonplace enough. I can vouch for the accuracy of the subjoined account, for I have had access to Lestrade's note-book, in which the prisoner's words were taken down exactly as they were uttered.

"It don't much matter to you why I hated these men," he said; "it's enough that they were guilty of the death of two human beings -- a father and a daughter -- and that they had, therefore, forfeited their own lives. After the lapse of time that has passed since their crime, it was impossible for me to secure a conviction against them in any court. I knew of their guilt though, and I determined that I should be judge, jury, and executioner all rolled into one. You'd have done the same, if you have any manhood in you, if you had been in my place.

"That girl that I spoke of was to have married me twenty years ago. She was forced into marrying that same Drebber, and broke her heart over it. I took the marriage ring from her dead finger, and I vowed that his dying eyes should rest upon that very ring, and that his last thoughts should be of the crime for which he was punished. I have carried it about with me, and have followed him and his accomplice over two continents until I caught them. They thought to tire me out, but they could not do it. If I die to-morrow, as is likely enough, I die knowing that my work in this world is done, and well done. They have perished, and by my hand. There is nothing left for me to hope for, or to desire.

"They were rich and I was poor, so that it was no easy matter for me to follow them. When I got to London my pocket was about empty, and I found that I must turn my hand to something for my living. Driving and riding are as natural to me as walking, so I applied at a cabowner's office, and soon got employment. I was to bring a certain sum a week to the owner, and whatever was over that I might keep for myself. There was seldom much over, but I managed to scrape along somehow. The hardest job was to learn my way about, for I reckoned that all of the mazes that ever were contrived, this city is the most confusing. I had a map beside me though, and when once I had spotted the principal hotels and stations, I got on pretty well.

"It was some time before I found out where my two gentlemen were living; but I inquired and inquired until at last I dropped across them. They were at a boarding-house at Camberwell, over on the other side of the river. When once I found them out I knew that I had them at my mercy. I had grown my beard, and there was no chance of their recognizing me. I would dog them and follow them until I saw my opportunity. I was determined that they should not escape me again.

"They were very near doing it for all that. Go where they would about London, I was always at their heels. Sometimes I followed them on my cab, and sometimes on foot, but the former was the best, for then they could not get away from me. It was only early in the morning or late at night that I could earn anything, so that I began to get behind hand with my employer. I did not mind that, however, as long as I could lay my hand upon the men I wanted."

"They were very cunning, though. They must have thought that there was some chance of their being followed, for they would never go out alone, and never after nightfall. During two weeks I drove behind them every day, and never once saw them separate. Drebber himself was drunk half the time, but Stangerson was not to be caught napping. I watched them late and early, but never saw the ghost of a chance; but I was not discouraged, for something told me that the hour had almost come. My only fear was that this thing in my chest might burst a little too soon and leave my work undone.

"At last, one evening I was driving up and down Torquay Terrace, as the street was called in which they boarded, when I saw a cab drive up to their door. Presently some luggage was brought out, and after a time Drebber and Stangerson followed it, and drove off. I whipped up my horse and kept within sight of them, feeling very ill at ease, for I feared that they were going to shift their quarters. At Euston Station they got out, and I left a boy to hold my horse, and followed them on to the platform. I heard them ask for the Liverpool train, and the guard answer that one had just gone and there would not be another for some hours. Stangerson seemed to be put out at that, but Drebber was rather pleased than otherwise. I got so close to them in the bustle that I could hear every word that passed between them. Drebber said that he had a little business of his own to do, and that if the other would wait for him he would soon rejoin him. His companion remonstrated with him, and reminded him that they had resolved to stick together. Drebber answered that the matter was a delicate one, and that he must go alone. I could not catch what Stangerson said to that, but the other burst out swearing, and reminded him that he was nothing more than his paid servant, and that he must not presume to dictate to him. On that the Secretary gave it up as a bad job, and
simply bargained with him that if he missed the last train he should rejoin him at Halliday's Private Hotel; to which Drebber answered that he would be back on the platform before eleven, and made his way out of the station.

"The moment for which I had waited so long had at last come. I had my enemies within my power. Together they could protect each other, but singly they were at my mercy. I did not act, however, with undue precipitation. My plans were already formed. There is no satisfaction in vengeance unless the offender has time to realize who it is that strikes him, and why retribution has come upon him. I had my plans arranged by which I should have the opportunity of making the man who had wronged me understand that his old sin had found him out. It chanced that some days before a gentleman who had been engaged in looking over some houses in the Brixton Road had dropped the key of one of them in my carriage. It was claimed that same evening, and returned; but in the interval I had taken a moulding of it, and had a duplicate constructed. By means of this I had access to at least one spot in this great city where I could rely upon being free from interruption. How to get Drebber to that house was the difficult problem which I had now to solve.

"He walked down the road and went into one or two liquor shops, staying for nearly half-an-hour in the last of them. When he came out he staggered in his walk, and was evidently pretty well on. There was a hansom just in front of me, and he hailed it. I followed it so close that the nose of my horse was within a yard of his driver the whole way. We rattled across Waterloo Bridge and through miles of streets, until, to my astonishment, we found ourselves back in the Terrace in which he had boarded. I could not imagine what his intention was in returning there; but I went on and pulled up my cab a hundred yards or so from the house. He entered it, and his hansom drove away. Give me a glass of water, if you please. My mouth gets dry with the talking."

I handed him the glass, and he drank it down.

"That's better," he said. "Well, I waited for a quarter of an hour, or more, when suddenly there came a noise like people struggling inside the house. Next moment the door was flung open and two men appeared, one of whom was Drebber, and the other was a young chap whom I had never seen before. This fellow had Drebber by the collar, and when they came to the head of the steps he gave him a shove and a kick which sent him half across the road. 'You hound,' he cried, shaking his stick at him; 'I'll teach you to insult an honest girl!' He was so hot that I think he would have thrashed Drebber with his cudgel, only that the cur staggered away down the road as fast as his legs would carry him. He ran as far as the corner, and then, seeing my cab, he hailed me and jumped in. 'Drive me to Halliday's Private Hotel,' said he.

"When I had him fairly inside my cab, my heart jumped so with joy that I feared lest at this last moment my aneurism might go wrong. I drove along slowly, weighing in my own mind what it was best to do. I might take him right out into the country, and there in some deserted lane have my last interview with him. I had almost decided upon this, when he solved the problem for me. The craze for drink had seized him again, and he ordered me to pull up outside a gin palace. He went in, leaving word that I should wait for him. There he remained until closing time, and when he came out he was so far gone that I knew the game was in my own hands.

"Don't imagine that I intended to kill him in cold blood. It would only have been rigid justice if I had done so, but I could not bring myself to do it. I had long determined that he should have a show for his life if he chose to take advantage of it. Among the many billets which I have filled in America during my wandering life, I was once janitor and sweeper out of the laboratory at York College. One day the professor was lecturing on poisons, and he showed his students some alkaloid, as he called it, which he had extracted from some South American arrow poison, and which was so powerful that the least grain meant instant death. I spotted the bottle in which this preparation was kept, and when they were all gone, I helped myself to a little of it. I was a fairly good dispenser, so I worked this alkaloid into small, soluble pills, and each pill I put in a box with a similar pill made without the poison. I determined at the time that when I had my chance, my gentlemen should each have a draw out of one of these boxes, while I ate the pill that remained. It would be quite as deadly, and a good deal less noisy than firing across a handkerchief. From that day I had always my pill boxes about with me, and the time had now come when I was to use them.

"It was nearer one than twelve, and a wild, bleak night, blowing hard and raining in torrents. Dismal as it was outside, I was glad within -- so glad that I could have shouted out from pure exultation. If any of you gentlemen have ever pined for a thing, and longed for it during twenty long years, and then suddenly found it within your reach, you would understand my feelings. I lit a cigar, and puffed at it to steady my nerves, but my hands were trembling, and my temples throbbing with excitement. As I drove, I could see old John Ferrier and sweet Lucy looking at me out of the darkness and smiling at me, just as plain as I see you all in this room. All the way they were ahead of me, one on each side of the horse until I pulled up at the house in the Brixton Road.

"There was not a soul to be seen, nor a sound to be heard, except the dripping of the rain. When I looked in at the window, I found Drebber all huddled together in a drunken sleep. I shook him by the arm, 'It's time to get out,' I said.
"All right, cabby,' said he.

"I suppose he thought we had come to the hotel that he had mentioned, for he got out without another word, and
followed me down the garden. I had to walk beside him to keep him steady, for he was still a little top-heavy. When
we came to the door, I opened it, and led him into the front room. I give you my word that all the way, the father and
the daughter were walking in front of us.

"It's infernally dark,' said he, stamping about.

"We'll soon have a light,' I said, striking a match and putting it to a wax candle which I had brought with me.

'Now, Enoch Drebber,' I continued, turning to him, and holding the light to my own face, 'who am I?'

"He gazed at me with bleared, drunken eyes for a moment, and then I saw a horror spring up in them, and
convulse his whole features, which showed me that he knew me. He staggered back with a livid face, and I saw the
perspiration break out upon his brow, while his teeth chattered in his head. At the sight, I leaned my back against the
door and laughed loud and long. I had always known that vengeance would be sweet, but I had never hoped for the
contentment of soul which now possessed me.

"You dog!' I said; 'I have hunted you from Salt Lake City to St. Petersburg, and you have always escaped me.
Now, at last your wanderings have come to an end, for either you or I shall never see to-morrow's sun rise.' He
shrunk still further away as I spoke, and I could see on his face that he thought I was mad. So I was for the time. The
pulses in my temples beat like sledge-hammers, and I believe I would have had a fit of some sort if the blood had
not gushed from my nose and relieved me.

"What do you think of Lucy Ferrier now?' I cried, locking the door, and shaking the key in his face.

'Punishment has been slow in coming, but it has overtaken you at last.' I saw his coward lips tremble as I spoke. He
would have begged for his life, but he knew well that it was useless.

"Would you murder me?' he stammered.

"There is no murder,' I answered. 'Who talks of murdering a mad dog? What mercy had you upon my poor
darling, when you dragged her from her slaughtered father, and bore her away to your accursed and shameless
harem.'

"It was not I who killed her father,' he cried.

"But it was you who broke her innocent heart,' I shrieked, thrusting the box before him. 'Let the high God judge
between us. Choose and eat. There is death in one and life in the other. I shall take what you leave. Let us see if
there is justice upon the earth, or if we are ruled by chance.'

He cowered away with wild cries and prayers for mercy, but I drew my knife and held it to his throat until he
had obeyed me. Then I swallowed the other, and we stood facing one another in silence for a minute or more, 
waiting to see which was to live and which was to die. Shall I ever forget the look which came over his face when
the first warning pangs told him that the poison was in his system? I laughed as I saw it, and held Lucy's marriage
ring in front of his eyes. It was but for a moment, for the action of the alkaloid is rapid. A spasm of pain contorted
his features; he threw his hands out in front of him, staggered, and then, with a hoarse cry, fell heavily upon the
floor. I turned him over with my foot, and placed my hand upon his heart. There was no movement. He was dead!

"The blood had been streaming from my nose, but I had taken no notice of it. I don't know what it was that put it
into my head to write upon the wall with it. Perhaps it was some mischievous idea of setting the police upon a wrong
track, for I felt light-hearted and cheerful. I remembered a German being found in New York with RACHE written
up above him, and it was argued at the time in the newspapers that the secret societies must have done it. I guessed
that what puzzled the New Yorkers would puzzle the Londoners, so I dipped my finger in my own blood and printed
it on a convenient place on the wall. Then I walked down to my cab and found that there was nobody about, and that
the night was still very wild. I had driven some distance when I put my hand into the pocket in which I usually kept
Lucy's ring, and found that it was not there. I was thunderstruck at this, for it was the only memento that I had of
her. Thinking that I might have dropped it when I stooped over Drebber's body, I drove back, and leaving my cab in
a side street, I went boldly up to the house -- for I was ready to dare anything rather than lose the ring. When I
arrived there, I walked right into the arms of a police-officer who was coming out, and only managed to disarm his
suspicions by pretending to be hopelessly drunk.

"That was how Enoch Drebber came to his end. All I had to do then was to do as much for Stangerson, and so
pay off John Ferrier's debt. I knew that he was staying at Halliday's Private Hotel, and I hung about all day, but he
never came out. fancy that he suspected something when Drebber failed to put in an appearance. He was cunning,
was Stangerson, and always on his guard. If he thought he could keep me off by staying indoors he was very much
mistaken. I soon found out which was the window of his bedroom, and early next morning I took advantage of some
ladders which were lying in the lane behind the hotel, and so made my way into his room in the grey of the dawn. I
woke him up and told him that the hour had come when he was to answer for the life he had taken so long before. I
described Drebber's death to him, and I gave him the same choice of the poisoned pills. Instead of grasping at the
chance of safety which that offered him, he sprang from his bed and flew at my throat. In self-defence I stabbed him
to the heart. It would have been the same in any case, for Providence would never have allowed his guilty hand to
pick out anything but the poison.

"I have little more to say, and it's as well, for I am about done up. I went on cabbing it for a day or so, intending
to keep at it until I could save enough to take me back to America. I was standing in the yard when a ragged
youngster asked if there was a cabby there called Jefferson Hope, and said that his cab was wanted by a gentleman
at 221B, Baker Street. I went round, suspecting no harm, and the next thing I knew, this young man here had the
bracelets on my wrists, and as neatly snatched as ever I saw in my life. That's the whole of my story, gentlemen.
You may consider me to be a murderer; but I hold that I am just as much an officer of justice as you are."

So thrilling had the man's narrative been, and his manner was so impressive that we had sat silent and absorbed.
Even the professional detectives, _blase_ as they were in every detail of crime, appeared to be keenly interested in
the man's story. When he finished we sat for some minutes in a stillness which was only broken by the scratching of
Lestrade's pencil as he gave the finishing touches to his shorthand account.

"There is only one point on which I should like a little more information," Sherlock Holmes said at last. "Who
was your accomplice who came for the ring which I advertised?"

The prisoner winked at my friend jocosely. "I can tell my own secrets," he said, "but I don't get other people into
trouble. I saw your advertisement, and I thought it might be a plant, or it might be the ring which I wanted. My
friend volunteered to go and see. I think you'll own he did it smartly."

"Not a doubt of that," said Holmes heartily.

"Now, gentlemen," the Inspector remarked gravely, "the forms of the law must be complied with. On Thursday
the prisoner will be brought before the magistrates, and your attendance will be required. Until then I will be
responsible for him." He rang the bell as he spoke, and Jefferson Hope was led off by a couple of warders, while my
friend and I made our way out of the Station and took a cab back to Baker Street.

CHAPTER VII.
THE CONCLUSION.

WE had all been warned to appear before the magistrates upon the Thursday; but when the Thursday came there
was no occasion for our testimony. A higher Judge had taken the matter in hand, and Jefferson Hope had been
summoned before a tribunal where strict justice would be meted out to him. On the very night after his capture the
aneurism burst, and he was found in the morning stretched upon the floor of the cell, with a placid smile upon his
face, as though he had been able in his dying moments to look back upon a useful life, and on work well done.

"Gregson and Lestrade will be wild about his death," Holmes remarked, as we chatted it over next evening.
"Where will their grand advertisement be now?"

"I don't see that they had very much to do with his capture," I answered.

"What you do in this world is a matter of no consequence," returned my companion, bitterly. "The question is,
what can you make people believe that you have done. Never mind," he continued, more brightly, after a pause. "I
would not have missed the investigation for anything. There has been no better case within my recollection. Simple
as it was, there were several most instructive points about it."

"Simple!" I ejaculated.

"Well, really, it can hardly be described as otherwise," said Sherlock Holmes, smiling at my surprise. "The proof
of its intrinsic simplicity is, that without any help save a few very ordinary deductions I was able to lay my hand
upon the criminal within three days."
"That is true," said I.

"I have already explained to you that what is out of the common is usually a guide rather than a hindrance. In solving a problem of this sort, the grand thing is to be able to reason backwards. That is a very useful accomplishment, and a very easy one, but people do not practise it much. In the every-day affairs of life it is more useful to reason forwards, and so the other comes to be neglected. There are fifty who can reason synthetically for one who can reason analytically."

"I confess," said I, "that I do not quite follow you."

"I hardly expected that you would. Let me see if I can make it clearer. Most people, if you describe a train of events to them, will tell you what the result would be. They can put those events together in their minds, and argue from them that something will come to pass. There are few people, however, who, if you told them a result, would be able to evolve from their own inner consciousness what the steps were which led up to that result. This power is what I mean when I talk of reasoning backwards, or analytically."

"I understand," said I.

"Now this was a case in which you were given the result and had to find everything else for yourself. Now let me endeavour to show you the different steps in my reasoning. To begin at the beginning. I approached the house, as you know, on foot, and with my mind entirely free from all impressions. I naturally began by examining the roadway, and there, as I have already explained to you, I saw clearly the marks of a cab, which, I ascertained by inquiry, must have been there during the night. I satisfied myself that it was a cab and not a private carriage by the narrow gauge of the wheels. The ordinary London growler is considerably less wide than a gentleman's brougham.

"This was the first point gained. I then walked slowly down the garden path, which happened to be composed of a clay soil, peculiarly suitable for taking impressions. No doubt it appeared to you to be a mere trampled line of slush, but to my trained eyes every mark upon its surface had a meaning. There is no branch of detective science which is so important and so much neglected as the art of tracing footsteps. Happily, I have always laid great stress upon it, and much practice has made it second nature to me. I saw the heavy footmarks of the constables, but I saw also the track of the two men who had first passed through the garden. It was easy to tell that they had been before the others, because in places their marks had been entirely obliterated by the others coming upon the top of them. In this way my second link was formed, which told me that the nocturnal visitors were two in number, one remarkable for his height (as I calculated from the length of his stride), and the other fashionably dressed, to judge from the small and elegant impression left by his boots.

"On entering the house this last inference was confirmed. My well-booted man lay before me. The tall one, then, had done the murder, if murder there was. There was no wound upon the dead man's person, but the agitated expression upon his face assured me that he had foreseen his fate before it came upon him. Men who die from heart disease, or any sudden natural cause, never by any chance exhibit agitation upon their features. Having sniffed the dead man's lips I detected a slightly sour smell, and I came to the conclusion that he had had poison forced upon him. Again, I argued that it had been forced upon him from the hatred and fear expressed upon his face. By the method of exclusion, I had arrived at this result, for no other hypothesis would meet the facts. Do not imagine that it was a very unheard of idea. The forcible administration of poison is by no means a new thing in criminal annals. The cases of Dolsky in Odessa, and of Leturier in Montpellier, will occur at once to any toxicologist.

"And now came the great question as to the reason why. Robbery had not been the object of the murder, for nothing was taken. Was it politics, then, or was it a woman? That was the question which confronted me. I was inclined from the first to the latter supposition. Political assassins are only too glad to do their work and to fly. This murder had, on the contrary, been done most deliberately, and the perpetrator had left his tracks all over the room, showing that he had been there all the time. It must have been a private wrong, and not a political one, which called for such a methodical revenge. When the inscription was discovered upon the wall I was more inclined than ever to my opinion. The thing was too evidently a blind. When the ring was found, however, it settled the question. Clearly the murderer had used it to remind his victim of some dead or absent woman. It was at this point that I asked Gregson whether he had enquired in his telegram to Cleveland as to any particular point in Mr. Drebber's former career. He answered, you remember, in the negative."

"I then proceeded to make a careful examination of the room, which confirmed me in my opinion as to the murderer's height, and furnished me with the additional details as to the Trichinopoly cigar and the length of his nails. I had already come to the conclusion, since there were no signs of a struggle, that the blood which covered the floor had burst from the murderer's nose in his excitement. I could perceive that the track of blood coincided with the track of his feet. It is seldom that any man, unless he is very full-blooded, breaks out in this way through emotion, so I hazarded the opinion that the criminal was probably a robust and ruddy-faced man. Events proved that I had judged correctly.

"Having left the house, I proceeded to do what Gregson had neglected. I telegraphed to the head of the police at
Cleveland, limiting my enquiry to the circumstances connected with the marriage of Enoch Drebber. The answer was conclusive. It told me that Drebber had already applied for the protection of the law against an old rival in love, named Jefferson Hope, and that this same Hope was at present in Europe. I knew now that I held the clue to the mystery in my hand, and all that remained was to secure the murderer.

"I had already determined in my own mind that the man who had walked into the house with Drebber, was none other than the man who had driven the cab. The marks in the road showed me that the horse had wandered on in a way which would have been impossible had there been anyone in charge of it. Where, then, could the driver be, unless he were inside the house? Again, it is absurd to suppose that any sane man would carry out a deliberate crime under the very eyes, as it were, of a third person, who was sure to betray him. Lastly, supposing one man wished to dog another through London, what better means could he adopt than to turn cabdriver? All these considerations led me to the irresistible conclusion that Jefferson Hope was to be found among the jarveys of the Metropolis.

"If he had been one there was no reason to believe that he had ceased to be. On the contrary, from his point of view, any sudden chance would be likely to draw attention to himself. He would, probably, for a time at least, continue to perform his duties. There was no reason to suppose that he was going under an assumed name. Why should he change his name in a country where no one knew his original one? I therefore organized my Street Arab detective corps, and sent them systematically to every cab proprietor in London until they ferreted out the man that I wanted. How well they succeeded, and how quickly I took advantage of it, are still fresh in your recollection. The murder of Stangerson was an incident which was entirely unexpected, but which could hardly in any case have been prevented. Through it, as you know, I came into possession of the pills, the existence of which I had already surmised. You see the whole thing is a chain of logical sequences without a break or flaw."

"It is wonderful!" I cried. "Your merits should be publicly recognized. You should publish an account of the case. If you won't, I will for you."

"You may do what you like, Doctor," he answered. "See here!" he continued, handing a paper over to me, "look at this!"

It was the _Echo_ for the day, and the paragraph to which he pointed was devoted to the case in question.

"The public," it said, "have lost a sensational treat through the sudden death of the man Hope, who was suspected of the murder of Mr. Enoch Drebber and of Mr. Joseph Stangerson. The details of the case will probably be never known now, though we are informed upon good authority that the crime was the result of an old standing and romantic feud, in which love and Mormonism bore a part. It seems that both the victims belonged, in their younger days, to the Latter Day Saints, and Hope, the deceased prisoner, hails also from Salt Lake City. If the case has had no other effect, it, at least, brings out in the most striking manner the efficiency of our detective police force, and will serve as a lesson to all foreigners that they will do wisely to settle their feuds at home, and not to carry them on to British soil. It is an open secret that the credit of this smart capture belongs entirely to the well-known Scotland Yard officials, Messrs. Lestrade and Gregson. The man was apprehended, it appears, in the rooms of a certain Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who has himself, as an amateur, shown some talent in the detective line, and who, with such instructors, may hope in time to attain to some degree of their skill. It is expected that a testimonial of some sort will be presented to the two officers as a fitting recognition of their services."

"Didn't I tell you so when we started?" cried Sherlock Holmes with a laugh. "That's the result of all our Study in Scarlet: to get them a testimonial!"

"Never mind," I answered, "I have all the facts in my journal, and the public shall know them. In the meantime you must make yourself contented by the consciousness of success, like the Roman miser --

"Populus me sibilat, at mihi plaudo Iapeake simul ac nummos contemplor in arca."
Chapter 1 The Science of Deduction

Sherlock Holmes took his bottle from the corner of the mantelpiece and his hypodermic syringe from its neat morocco case. With his long, white, nervous fingers he adjusted the delicate needle, and rolled back his left shirt-cuff. For some little time his eyes rested thoughtfully upon the sinewy forearm and wrist all dotted and scarred with innumerable puncture-marks. Finally he thrust the sharp point home, pressed down the tiny piston, and sank back into the velvet-lined arm-chair with a long sigh of satisfaction.

Three times a day for many months I had witnessed this performance, but custom had not reconciled my mind to it. On the contrary, from day to day I had become more irritable at the sight, and my conscience swelled nightly within me at the thought that I had lacked the courage to protest. Again and again I had registered a vow that I should deliver my soul upon the subject, but there was that in the cool, nonchalant air of my companion which made him the last man with whom one would care to take anything approaching to a liberty. His great powers, his masterly manner, and the experience which I had had of his many extraordinary qualities, all made me diffident and backward in crossing him.

Yet upon that afternoon, whether it was the Beaune which I had taken with my lunch, or the additional exasperation produced by the extreme deliberation of his manner, I suddenly felt that I could hold out no longer. "Which is it to-day?" I asked,--"morphine or cocaine?"

He raised his eyes languidly from the old black-letter volume which he had opened. "It is cocaine," he said,--"a seven-per-cent. solution. Would you care to try it?"

"No, indeed," I answered, brusquely. "My constitution has not got over the Afghan campaign yet. I cannot afford to throw any extra strain upon it."

He smiled at my vehemence. "Perhaps you are right, Watson," he said. "I suppose that its influence is physically a bad one. I find it, however, so transcendentally stimulating and clarifying to the mind that its secondary action is a matter of small moment."

"But consider!" I said, earnestly. "Count the cost! Your brain may, as you say, be roused and excited, but it is a pathological and morbid process, which involves increased tissue-change and may at last leave a permanent weakness. You know, too, what a black reaction comes upon you. Surely the game is hardly worth the candle. Why should you, for a mere passing pleasure, risk the loss of those great powers with which you have been endowed? Remember that I speak not only as one comrade to another, but as a medical man to one for whose constitution he is to some extent answerable."

He did not seem offended. On the contrary, he put his finger-tips together and leaned his elbows on the arms of his chair, like one who has a relish for conversation.

"My mind," he said, "rebels at stagnation. Give me problems, give me work, give me the most abstruse cryptogram or the most intricate analysis, and I am in my own proper atmosphere. I can dispense then with artificial stimulants. But I abhor the dull routine of existence. I crave for mental exaltation. That is why I have chosen my own particular profession,--or rather created it, for I am the only one in the world."
"The only unofficial detective?" I said, raising my eyebrows.

"The only unofficial consulting detective," he answered. "I am the last and highest court of appeal in detection. When Gregson or Lestrade or Athelney Jones are out of their depths—which, by the way, is their normal state—the matter is laid before me. I examine the data, as an expert, and pronounce a specialist's opinion. I claim no credit in such cases. My name figures in no newspaper. The work itself, the pleasure of finding a field for my peculiar powers, is my highest reward. But you have yourself had some experience of my methods of work in the Jefferson Hope case."

"Yes, indeed," said I, cordially. "I was never so struck by anything in my life. I even embodied it in a small brochure with the somewhat fantastic title of 'A Study in Scarlet.'"

He shook his head sadly. "I glanced over it," said he. "Honesty, I cannot congratulate you upon it. Detection is, or ought to be, an exact science, and should be treated in the same cold and unemotional manner. You have attempted to tinge it with romanticism, which produces much the same effect as if you worked a love-story or an elopement into the fifth proposition of Euclid."

"But the romance was there," I remonstrated. "I could not tamper with the facts."

"Some facts should be suppressed, or at least a just sense of proportion should be observed in treating them. The only point in the case which deserved mention was the curious analytical reasoning from effects to causes by which I succeeded in unraveling it."

I was annoyed at this criticism of a work which had been specially designed to please him. I confess, too, that I was irritated by the egotism which seemed to demand that every line of my pamphlet should be devoted to his own special doings. More than once during the years that I had lived with him in Baker Street I had observed that a small vanity underlay my companion's quiet and didactic manner. I made no remark, however, but sat nursing my wounded leg. I had a Jezail bullet through it some time before, and, though it did not prevent me from walking, it ached wearily at every change of the weather.

"My practice has extended recently to the Continent," said Holmes, after a while, filling up his old brier-root pipe. "I was consulted last week by Francois Le Villard, who, as you probably know, has come rather to the front lately in the French detective service. He has all the Celtic power of quick intuition, but he is deficient in the wide range of exact knowledge which is essential to the higher developments of his art. The case was concerned with a will, and possessed some features of interest. I was able to refer him to two parallel cases, the one at Riga in 1857, and the other at St. Louis in 1871, which have suggested to him the true solution. Here is the letter which I had this morning acknowledging my assistance." He tossed over, as he spoke, a crumpled sheet of foreign notepaper. I glanced my eyes down it, catching a profusion of notes of admiration, with stray "magnifiques," "coup-de-maitres," and "tours-de-force," all testifying to the ardent admiration of the Frenchman.

"He speaks as a pupil to his master," said I.

"Oh, he rates my assistance too highly," said Sherlock Holmes, lightly. "He has considerable gifts himself. He possesses two out of the three qualities necessary for the ideal detective. He has the power of observation and that of deduction. He is only wanting in knowledge; and that may come in time. He is now translating my small works into French."

"Your works?"

"Oh, didn't you know?" he cried, laughing. "Yes, I have been guilty of several monographs. They are all upon technical subjects. Here, for example, is one 'Upon the Distinction between the Ashes of the Various Tobaccoes.' In it I enumerate a hundred and forty forms of cigar-, cigarette-, and pipe-tobacco, with colored plates illustrating the difference in the ash. It is a point which is continually turning up in criminal trials, and which is sometimes of supreme importance as a clue. If you can say definitely, for example, that some murder has been done by a man who was smoking an Indian lunkah, it obviously narrows your field of search. To the trained eye there is as much difference between the black ash of a Trichinopoly and the white fluff of bird's-eye as there is between a cabbage and a potato."

"You have an extraordinary genius for minutiae," I remarked.

"I appreciate their importance. Here is my monograph upon the tracing of footsteps, with some remarks upon the uses of plaster of Paris as a preserver of impresses. Here, too, is a curious little work upon the influence of a trade upon the form of the hand, with lithotypes of the hands of slaters, sailors, corkcutters, compositors, weavers, and diamond-polishers. That is a matter of great practical interest to the scientific detective,—especially in cases of unclaimed bodies, or in discovering the antecedents of criminals. But I weary you with my hobby."

"Not at all," I answered, earnestly. "It is of the greatest interest to me, especially since I have had the opportunity of observing your practical application of it. But you spoke just now of observation and deduction. Surely the one to some extent implies the other."

"Why, hardly," he answered, leaning back luxuriously in his arm-chair, and sending up thick blue wreaths from
his pipe. "For example, observation shows me that you have been to the Wigmore Street Post-Office this morning, but deduction lets me know that when there you dispatched a telegram."

"Right!" said I. "Right on both points! But I confess that I don't see how you arrived at it. It was a sudden impulse upon my part, and I have mentioned it to no one."

"It is simplicity itself," he remarked, chuckling at my surprise,--"so absurdly simple that an explanation is superfluous; and yet it may serve to define the limits of observation and of deduction. Observation tells me that you have a little reddish mould adhering to your instep. Just opposite the Seymour Street Office they have taken up the pavement and thrown up some earth which lies in such a way that it is difficult to avoid treading in it in entering. The earth is of this peculiar reddish tint which is found, as far as I know, nowhere else in the neighborhood. So much is observation. The rest is deduction."

"How, then, did you deduce the telegram?"

"Why, of course I knew that you had not written a letter, since I sat opposite to you all morning. I see also in your open desk there that you have a sheet of stamps and a thick bundle of post-cards. What could you go into the post-office for, then, but to send a wire? Eliminate all other factors, and the one which remains must be the truth."

"In this case it certainly is so," I replied, after a little thought. "The thing, however, is, as you say, of the simplest. Would you think me impertinent if I were to put your theories to a more severe test?"

"On the contrary," he answered, "it would prevent me from taking a second dose of cocaine. I should be delighted to look into any problem which you might submit to me."

"I have heard you say that it is difficult for a man to have any object in daily use without leaving the impress of his individuality upon it in such a way that a trained observer might read it. Now, I have here a watch which has recently come into my possession. Would you have the kindness to let me have an opinion upon the character or habits of the late owner?"

I handed him over the watch with some slight feeling of amusement in my heart, for the test was, as I thought, an impossible one, and I intended it as a lesson against the somewhat dogmatic tone which he occasionally assumed. He balanced the watch in his hand, gazed hard at the dial, opened the back, and examined the works, first with his naked eyes and then with a powerful convex lens. I could hardly keep from smiling at his crestfallen face when he finally snapped the case to and handed it back.

"There are hardly any data," he remarked. "The watch has been recently cleaned, which robs me of my most suggestive facts."

"You are right," I answered. "It was cleaned before being sent to me." In my heart I accused my companion of putting forward a most lame and impotent excuse to cover his failure. What data could he expect from an uncleaned watch?

"Though unsatisfactory, my research has not been entirely barren," he observed, staring up at the ceiling with dreamy, lack-lustre eyes. "Subject to your correction, I should judge that the watch belonged to your elder brother, who inherited it from your father."

"That you gather, no doubt, from the H. W. upon the back?"

"Quite so. The W. suggests your own name. The date of the watch is nearly fifty years back, and the initials are as old as the watch: so it was made for the last generation. Jewelry usually descends to the eldest son, and he is most likely to have the same name as the father. Your father has, if I remember right, been dead many years. It has, therefore, been in the hands of your eldest brother."

"Right, so far," said I. "Anything else?"

"He was a man of untidy habits,--very untidy and careless. He was left with good prospects, but he threw away his chances, lived for some time in poverty with occasional short intervals of prosperity, and finally, taking to drink, he died. That is all I can gather."

I sprang from my chair and limped impatiently about the room with considerable bitterness in my heart.

"This is unworthy of you, Holmes," I said. "I could not have believed that you would have descended to this. You have made inquiries into the history of my unhappy brother, and you now pretend to deduce this knowledge in some fanciful way. You cannot expect me to believe that you have read all this from his old watch! It is unkind, and, to speak plainly, has a touch of charlatanism in it."

"My dear doctor," said he, kindly, "pray accept my apologies. Viewing the matter as an abstract problem, I had forgotten how personal and painful a thing it might be to you. I assure you, however, that I never even knew that you had a brother until you handed me the watch."

"Then how in the name of all that is wonderful did you get these facts? They are absolutely correct in every particular."

"Ah, that is good luck. I could only say what was the balance of probability. I did not at all expect to be so accurate."
"But it was not mere guess-work?"

"No, no: I never guess. It is a shocking habit,—destructive to the logical faculty. What seems strange to you is only so because you do not follow my train of thought or observe the small facts upon which large inferences may depend. For example, I began by stating that your brother was careless. When you observe the lower part of that watch-case you notice that it is not only dinted in two places, but it is cut and marked all over from the habit of keeping other hard objects, such as coins or keys, in the same pocket. Surely it is no great feat to assume that a man who treats a fifty-guinea watch so cavalierly must be a careless man. Neither is it a very far-fetched inference that a man who inherits one article of such value is pretty well provided for in other respects."

I nodded, to show that I followed his reasoning.

"It is very customary for pawnbrokers in England, when they take a watch, to scratch the number of the ticket with a pin-point upon the inside of the case. It is more handy than a label, as there is no risk of the number being lost or transposed. There are no less than four such numbers visible to my lens on the inside of this case. Inference,—that your brother was often at low water. Secondary inference,—that he had occasional bursts of prosperity, or he could not have redeemed the pledge. Finally, I ask you to look at the inner plate, which contains the key-hole. Look at the thousands of scratches all round the hole,—marks where the key has slipped. What sober man's key could have scored those grooves? But you will never see a drunkard's watch without them. He winds it at night, and he leaves these traces of his unsteady hand. Where is the mystery in all this?"

"It is as clear as daylight," I answered. "I regret the injustice which I did you. I should have had more faith in your marvellous faculty. May I ask whether you have any professional inquiry on foot at present?"

"None. Hence the cocaine. I cannot live without brain-work. What else is there to live for? Stand at the window here. Was ever such a dreary, dismal, unprofitable world? See how the yellow fog swirls down the street and drifts across the dun-colored houses. What could be more hopelessly prosaic and material? What is the use of having powers, doctor, when one has no field upon which to exert them? Crime is commonplace, existence is commonplace, and no qualities save those which are commonplace have any function upon earth."

I had opened my mouth to reply to this tirade, when with a crisp knock our landlady entered, bearing a card upon the brass salver.

"A young lady for you, sir," she said, addressing my companion.

"Miss Mary Morstan," he read. "Hum! I have no recollection of the name. Ask the young lady to step up, Mrs. Hudson. Don't go, doctor. I should prefer that you remain."

Chapter II The Statement of the Case

Miss Morstan entered the room with a firm step and an outward composure of manner. She was a blonde young lady, small, dainty, well gloved, and dressed in the most perfect taste. There was, however, a plainness and simplicity about her costume which bore with it a suggestion of limited means. The dress was a sombre grayish beige, untrimmed and unbraided, and she wore a small turban of the same dull hue, relieved only by a suspicion of white feather in the side. Her face had neither regularity of feature nor beauty of complexion, but her expression was sweet and amiable, and her large blue eyes were singularly spiritual and sympathetic. In an experience of women which extends over many nations and three separate continents, I have never looked upon a face which gave a clearer promise of a refined and sensitive nature. I could not but observe that as she took the seat which Sherlock Holmes placed for her, her lip trembled, her hand quivered, and she showed every sign of intense inward agitation.

"I have come to you, Mr. Holmes," she said, "because you once enabled my employer, Mrs. Cecil Forrester, to unravel a little domestic complication. She was much impressed by your kindness and skill."

"Mrs. Cecil Forrester," he repeated thoughtfully. "I believe that I was of some slight service to her. The case, however, as I remember it, was a very simple one."

"She did not think so. But at least you cannot say the same of mine. I can hardly imagine anything more strange, more utterly inexplicable, than the situation in which I find myself."

Holmes rubbed his hands, and his eyes glistened. He leaned forward in his chair with an expression of extraordinary concentration upon his clear-cut, hawklike features. "State your case," said he, in brisk, business tones.

I felt that my position was an embarrassing one. "You will, I am sure, excuse me," I said, rising from my chair.

To my surprise, the young lady held up her gloved hand to detain me. "If your friend," she said, "would be good enough to stop, he might be of inestimable service to me."

I relapsed into my chair.

"Briefly," she continued, "the facts are these. My father was an officer in an Indian regiment who sent me home when I was quite a child. My mother was dead, and I had no relative in England. I was placed, however, in a comfortable boarding establishment at Edinburgh, and there I remained until I was seventeen years of age. In the year 1878 my father, who was senior captain of his regiment, obtained twelve months' leave and came home. He telegraphed to me from London that he had arrived all safe, and directed me to come down at once, giving the
Langham Hotel as his address. His message, as I remember, was full of kindness and love. On reaching London I drove to the Langham, and was informed that Captain Morstan was staying there, but that he had gone out the night before and had not yet returned. I waited all day without news of him. That night, on the advice of the manager of the hotel, I communicated with the police, and next morning we advertised in all the papers. Our inquiries led to no result; and from that day to this no word has ever been heard of my unfortunate father. He came home with his heart full of hope, to find some peace, some comfort, and instead—" She put her hand to her throat, and a choking sob cut short the sentence.

"The date?" asked Holmes, opening his note-book.

"He disappeared upon the 3d of December, 1878,--nearly ten years ago."

"His luggage?"

"Remained at the hotel. There was nothing in it to suggest a clue,—some clothes, some books, and a considerable number of curiosities from the Andaman Islands. He had been one of the officers in charge of the convict-guard there."

"Had he any friends in town?"

"Only one that we know of,—Major Sholto, of his own regiment, the 34th Bombay Infantry. The major had retired some little time before, and lived at Upper Norwood. We communicated with him, of course, but he did not even know that his brother officer was in England."

"A singular case," remarked Holmes.

"I have not yet described to you the most singular part. About six years ago,—to be exact, upon the 4th of May, 1882,—an advertisement appeared in the Times asking for the address of Miss Mary Morstan and stating that it would be to her advantage to come forward. There was no name or address appended. I had at that time just entered the family of Mrs. Cecil Forrester in the capacity of governess. By her advice I published my address in the advertisement column. The same day there arrived through the post a small card-board box addressed to me, which I found to contain a very large and lustrous pearl. No word of writing was enclosed. Since then every year upon the same date there has always appeared a similar box, containing a similar pearl, without any clue as to the sender. They have been pronounced by an expert to be of a rare variety and of considerable value. You can see for yourselves that they are very handsome." She opened a flat box as she spoke, and showed me six of the finest pearls that I had ever seen.

"Your statement is most interesting," said Sherlock Holmes. "Has anything else occurred to you?"

"Yes, and no later than to-day. That is why I have come to you. This morning I received this letter, which you will perhaps read for yourself."

"Thank you," said Holmes. "The envelope too, please. Postmark, London, S.W. Date, July 7. Hum! Man's thumb-mark on corner,—probably postman. Best quality paper. Envelopes at sixpence a packet. Particular man in his stationery. No address. 'Be at the third pillar from the left outside the Lyceum Theatre to-night at seven o'clock. If you are distrustful, bring two friends. You are a wronged woman, and shall have justice. Do not bring police. If you do, all will be in vain. Your unknown friend.' Well, really, this is a very pretty little mystery. What do you intend to do, Miss Morstan?"

"That is exactly what I want to ask you."

"Then we shall most certainly go. You and I and,—yes, why, Dr. Watson is the very man. Your correspondent says two friends. He and I have worked together before."

"But would he come?" she asked, with something appealing in her voice and expression.

"I should be proud and happy," said I, fervently, "if I can be of any service."

"You are both very kind," she answered. "I have led a retired life, and have no friends whom I could appeal to. If I am here at six it will do, I suppose?"

"You must not be later," said Holmes. "There is one other point, however. Is this handwriting the same as that upon the pearl-box addresses?"

"I have them here," she answered, producing half a dozen pieces of paper.

"You are certainly a model client. You have the correct intuition. Let us see, now." He spread out the papers upon the table, and gave little darting glances from one to the other. "They are disguised hands, except the letter," he said, presently, "but there can be no question as to the authorship. See how the irrepressible Greek e will break out, and see the twirl of the final s. They are undoubtedly by the same person. I should not like to suggest false hopes, Miss Morstan, but is there any resemblance between this hand and that of your father?"

"Nothing could be more unlike."

"I expected to hear you say so. We shall look out for you, then, at six. Pray allow me to keep the papers. I may look into the matter before then. It is only half-past three. Au revoir, then."

"Au revoir," said our visitor, and, with a bright, kindly glance from one to the other of us, she replaced her pearl-
box in her bosom and hurried away. Standing at the window, I watched her walking briskly down the street, until the gray turban and white feather were but a speck in the sombre crowd.

"What a very attractive woman!" I exclaimed, turning to my companion.

He had lit his pipe again, and was leaning back with drooping eyelids. "Is she?" he said, languidly. "I did not observe."

"You really are an automaton,--a calculating-machine!" I cried. "There is something positively inhuman in you at times."

He smiled gently. "It is of the first importance," he said, "not to allow your judgment to be biased by personal qualities. A client is to me a mere unit,--a factor in a problem. The emotional qualities are antagonistic to clear reasoning. I assure you that the most winning woman I ever knew was hanged for poisoning three little children for their insurance-money, and the most repellant man of my acquaintance is a philanthropist who has spent nearly a quarter of a million upon the London poor."

"In this case, however--"

"I never make exceptions. An exception disproves the rule. Have you ever had occasion to study character in handwriting? What do you make of this fellow's scribble?"

"It is legible and regular," I answered. "A man of business habits and some force of character."

Holmes shook his head. "Look at his long letters," he said. "They hardly rise above the common herd. That d might be an a, and that l an e. Men of character always differentiate their long letters, however illegibly they may write. There is vacillation in his k's and self-esteem in his capitals. I am going out now. I have some few references to make. Let me recommend this book,--one of the most remarkable ever penned. It is Winwood Reade's 'Martyrdom of Man.' I shall be back in an hour."

I sat in the window with the volume in my hand, but my thoughts were far from the daring speculations of the writer. My mind ran upon our late visitor,--her smiles, the deep rich tones of her voice, the strange mystery which overhung her life. If she were seventeen at the time of her father's disappearance she must be seven-and-twenty now,--a sweet age, when youth has lost its self-consciousness and become a little sobered by experience. So I sat and mused, until such dangerous thoughts came into my head that I hurried away to my desk and plunged furiously into the latest treatise upon pathology. What was I, an army surgeon with a weak leg and a weaker banking-account, that I should dare to think of such things? She was a unit, a factor,--nothing more. If my future were black, it was better surely to face it like a man than to attempt to brighten it by mere will-o'-the-wisps of the imagination.

Chapter III In Quest of a Solution

It was half-past five before Holmes returned. He was bright, eager, and in excellent spirits,--a mood which in his case alternated with fits of the blackest depression.

"There is no great mystery in this matter," he said, taking the cup of tea which I had poured out for him. "The facts appear to admit of only one explanation."

"What! you have solved it already?"

"Well, that would be too much to say. I have discovered a suggestive fact, that is all. It is, however, VERY suggestive. The details are still to be added. I have just found, on consulting the back files of the Times, that Major Sholto, of Upper Norwood, late of the 34th Bombay Infantry, died upon the 28th of April, 1882."

"I may be very obtuse, Holmes, but I fail to see what this suggests."

"No? You surprise me. Look at it in this way, then. Captain Morstan disappears. The only person in London whom he could have visited is Major Sholto. Major Sholto denies having heard that he was in London. Four years later Sholto dies. WITHIN A WEEK OF HIS DEATH Captain Morstan's daughter receives a valuable present, which is repeated from year to year, and now culminates in a letter which describes her as a wronged woman. What wrong can it refer to except this deprivation of her father? And why should the presents begin immediately after Sholto's death, unless it is that Sholto's heir knows something of the mystery and desires to make compensation? Have you any alternative theory which will meet the facts?"

"But what a strange compensation! And how strangely made! Why, too, should he write a letter now, rather than six years ago? Again, the letter speaks of giving her justice. What justice can she have? It is too much to suppose that her father is still alive. There is no other injustice in her case that you know of."

"There are difficulties; there are certainly difficulties," said Sherlock Holmes, pensively. "But our expedition of to-night will solve them all. Ah, here is a four-wheeler, and Miss Morstan is inside. Are you all ready? Then we had better go down, for it is a little past the hour."

I picked up my hat and my heaviest stick, but I observed that Holmes took his revolver from his drawer and slipped it into his pocket. It was clear that he thought that our night's work might be a serious one.

Miss Morstan was muffled in a dark cloak, and her sensitive face was composed, but pale. She must have been more than woman if she did not feel some uneasiness at the strange enterprise upon which we were embarking, yet
he muttered the names as the cab rattled through squares and in and out by tortuous by-streets.

knew nothing, save that we seemed to be going a very long way. Sherlock Holmes was never at fault, however, and

driving; but soon, what with our pace, the fog, and my own limited knowledge of London, I lost my bearings, and

and how I fired a double-barrelled tiger cub at it. At first I had some idea as to the direction in which we were

day she declares that I told her one moving anecdote as to how a musket looked into my tent at the dead of night,

myself so excited at our situation and so curious as to our destination that my stories were slightly involved. To this

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that important issues might hang upon our journey. Miss Morstan's demeanor was as resolute and collected as ever. I

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bediamonded women. We had hardly reached the third pillar, which was our rendezvous, before a small, dark, brisk

hansoms and four-wheelers were rattling up, discharging their cargoes of shirt-fronted men and beshawled,

time he jotted down figures and memoranda in the light of his pocket-lantern.

Holmes alone could rise superior to petty influences. He held his open note-book upon his knee, and from time to

kept carefully in a pocket-book; for the one side is as clean as the other."}

"It was in his pocket-book that we found it."

"Preserve it carefully, then, Miss Morstan, for it may prove to be of use to us. I begin to suspect that this matter

may turn out to be much deeper and more subtle than I at first supposed. I must reconsider my ideas." He leaned

back in the cab, and I could see by his drawn brow and his vacant eye that he was thinking intently. Miss Morstan

and I chatted in an undertone about our present expedition and its possible outcome, but our companion maintained

his impenetrable reserve until the end of our journey.

It was a September evening, and not yet seven o'clock, but the day had been a dreary one, and a dense drizzly

gog lay low upon the great city. Mud-colored clouds drooped sadly over the muddy streets. Down the Strand the

lamps were but misty splotches of diffused light which threw a feeble circular glimmer upon the slimy pavement.

The yellow glare from the shop-windows streamed out into the steamy, vaporous air, and threw a murky, shifting

radiance across the crowded thoroughfare. There was, to my mind, something eerie and ghost-like in the endless

procession of faces which flitted across these narrow bars of light,—sad faces and glad, haggard and merry. Like all

human kind, they flitted from the gloom into the light, and so back into the gloom once more. I am not subject to

impressions, but the dull, heavy evening, with the strange business upon which we were engaged, combined to make

me nervous and depressed. I could see from Miss Morstan's manner that she was suffering from the same feeling.

Holmes alone could rise superior to petty influences. He held his open note-book upon his knee, and from time to
time he jotted down figures and memoranda in the light of his pocket-lantern.

At the Lyceum Theatre the crowds were already thick at the side-entrances. In front a continuous stream of

hansoms and four-wheelers were rattling up, discharging their cargoes of shirt-fronted men and beshawled,

bediamonded women. We had hardly reached the third pillar, which was our rendezvous, before a small, dark, brisk

man in the dress of a coachman accosted us.

"Are you the parties who come with Miss Morstan?" he asked.

"I am Miss Morstan, and these two gentlemen are my friends," said she.

He bent a pair of wonderfully penetrating and questioning eyes upon us. "You will excuse me, miss," he said

with a certain dogged manner, "but I was to ask you to give me your word that neither of your companions is a

police-officer."

"I give you my word on that," she answered.

He gave a shrill whistle, on which a street Arab led across a four-wheeler and opened the door. The man who

had addressed us mounted to the box, while we took our places inside. We had hardly done so before the driver

whipped up his horse, and we plunged away at a furious pace through the foggy streets.

The situation was a curious one. We were driving to an unknown place, on an unknown errand. Yet our

invitation was either a complete hoax,—which was an inconceivable hypothesis,—or else we had good reason to think

that important issues might hang upon our journey. Miss Morstan's demeanor was as resolute and collected as ever. I

endeavored to cheer and amuse her by reminiscences of my adventures in Afghanistan; but, to tell the truth, I was

myself so excited at our situation and so curious as to our destination that my stories were slightly involved. To this
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driving; but soon, what with our pace, the fog, and my own limited knowledge of London, I lost my bearings, and

knew nothing, save that we seemed to be going a very long way. Sherlock Holmes was never at fault, however, and

he muttered the names as the cab rattled through squares and in and out by tortuous by-streets.

"Rochester Row," said he. "Now Vincent Square. Now we come out on the Vauxhall Bridge Road. We are
making for the Surrey side, apparently. Yes, I thought so. Now we are on the bridge. You can catch glimpses of the river."

We did indeed get a fleeting view of a stretch of the Thames with the lamps shining upon the broad, silent water; but our cab dashed on, and was soon involved in a labyrinth of streets upon the other side.

"Wordsworth Road," said my companion. "Priory Road. Lark Hall Lane. Stockwell Place. Robert Street. Cold Harbor Lane. Our quest does not appear to take us to very fashionable regions."

We had, indeed, reached a questionable and forbidding neighborhood. Long lines of dull brick houses were only relieved by the coarse glare and tawdry brilliancy of public houses at the corner. Then came rows of two-storied villas each with a fronting of miniature garden, and then again interminable lines of new staring brick buildings,--the monster tentacles which the giant city was throwing out into the country. At last the cab drew up at the third house in a new terrace. None of the other houses were inhabited, and that at which we stopped was as dark as its neighbors, save for a single glimmer in the kitchen window. On our knocking, however, the door was instantly thrown open by a Hindoo servant clad in a yellow turban, white loose-fitting clothes, and a yellow sash. There was something strangely incongruous in this Oriental figure framed in the commonplace door-way of a third-rate suburban dwelling-house.

"The Sahib awaits you," said he, and even as he spoke there came a high piping voice from some inner room. "Show them in to me, khitmutgar," it cried. "Show them straight in to me."

Chapter IV The Story of the Bald-Headed Man

We followed the Indian down a sordid and common passage, ill lit and worse furnished, until he came to a door upon the right, which he threw open. A blaze of yellow light streamed out upon us, and in the centre of the glare there stood a small man with a very high head, a bristle of red hair all round the fringe of it, and a bald, shining scalp which shot out from among it like a mountain-peak from fir-trees. He writhed his hands together as he stood, and his features were in a perpetual jerk, now smiling, now scowling, but never for an instant in repose. Nature had given him a pendulous lip, and a too visible line of yellow and irregular teeth, which he strove feebly to conceal by constantly passing his hand over the lower part of his face. In spite of his obtrusive baldness, he gave the impression of youth. In point of fact he had just turned his thirtieth year.

"Your servant, Miss Morstan," he kept repeating, in a thin, high voice. "Your servant, gentlemen. Pray step into my little sanctum. A small place, miss, but furnished to my own liking. An oasis of art in the howling desert of South London."

We were all astonished by the appearance of the apartment into which he invited us. In that sorry house it looked as out of place as a diamond of the first water in a setting of brass. The richest and glossiest of curtains and tapestries draped the walls, looped back here and there to expose some richly-mounted painting or Oriental vase. The carpet was of amber-and-black, so soft and so thick that the foot sank pleasantly into it, as into a bed of moss. Two great tiger-skins thrown athwart it increased the suggestion of Eastern luxury, as did a huge hookah which stood upon a mat in the corner. A lamp in the fashion of a silver dove was hung from an almost invisible golden wire in the centre of the room. As it burned it filled the air with a subtle and aromatic odor.

"Mr. Thaddeus Sholto," said the little man, still jerking and smiling. "That is my name. You are Miss Morstan, of course. And these gentlemen--"

"This is Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and this is Dr. Watson."

"A doctor, eh?" cried he, much excited. "Have you your stethoscope? Might I ask you--would you have the kindness? I have grave doubts as to my mitral valve, if you would be so very good. The aortic I may rely upon, but I should value your opinion upon the mitral."

I listened to his heart, as requested, but was unable to find anything amiss, save indeed that he was in an ecstasy of fear, for he shivered from head to foot. "It appears to be normal," I said. "You have no cause for uneasiness."

"You will excuse my anxiety, Miss Morstan," he remarked, airtily. "I am a great sufferer, and I have long had suspicions as to that valve. I am delighted to hear that they are unwarranted. Had your father, Miss Morstan, refrained from throwing a strain upon his heart, he might have been alive now."

I could have struck the man across the face, so hot was I at this callous and off-hand reference to so delicate a matter. Miss Morstan sat down, and her face grew white to the lips. "I knew in my heart that he was dead," said she.

"I can give you every information," said he, "and, what is more, I can do you justice; and I will, too, whatever Brother Bartholomew may say. I am so glad to have your friends here, not only as an escort to you, but also as witnesses to what I am about to do and say. The three of us can show a bold front to Brother Bartholomew. But let us have no outsiders,--no police or officials. We can settle everything satisfactorily among ourselves, without any interference. Nothing would annoy Brother Bartholomew more than any publicity."

"For my part," said Holmes, "whatever you may choose to say will go no further."
That is well! That is well!" said he. "May I offer you a glass of Chianti, Miss Morstan? Or of Tokay? I keep no other wines. Shall I open a flask? No? Well, then, I trust that you have no objection to tobacco-smoke, to the mild balsamic odor of the Eastern tobacco. I am a little nervous, and I find my hookah an invaluable sedative." He applied a taper to the great bowl, and the smoke bubbled merrily through the rose-water. We sat all three in a semicircle, with our heads advanced, and our chins upon our hands, while the strange, jerky little fellow, with his high, shining head, puffed uneasily in the centre.

"When I first determined to make this communication to you," said he, "I might have given you my address, but I feared that you might disregard my request and bring unpleasant people with you. I took the liberty, therefore, of making an appointment in such a way that my man Williams might be able to see you first. I have complete confidence in his discretion, and he had orders, if he were dissatisfied, to proceed no further in the matter. You will excuse these precautions, but I am a man of somewhat retiring, and I might even say refined, tastes, and there is nothing more unesthetic than a policeman. I have a natural shrinking from all forms of rough materialism. I seldom come in contact with the rough crowd. I live, as you see, with some little atmosphere of elegance around me. I may call myself a patron of the arts. It is my weakness. The landscape is a genuine Corot, and, though a connoisseur might perhaps throw a doubt upon that Salvator Rosa, there cannot be the least question about the Bouguereau. I am partial to the modern French school."

"You will excuse me, Mr. Sholto," said Miss Morstan, "but I am here at your request to learn something which you desire to tell me. It is very late, and I should desire the interview to be as short as possible."

"At the best it must take some time," he answered; "for we shall certainly have to go to Norwood and see Brother Bartholomew. We shall all go and try if we can get the better of Brother Bartholomew. He is very angry with me for taking the course which has seemed right to me. I had quite high words with him last night. You cannot imagine what a terrible fellow he is when he is angry."

"If we are to go to Norwood it would perhaps be as well to start at once," I ventured to remark.

He laughed until his ears were quite red. "That would hardly do," he cried. "I don't know what he would say if I brought you in that sudden way. No, I must prepare you by showing you how we all stand to each other. In the first place, I must tell you that there are several points in the story of which I am myself ignorant. I can only lay the facts before you as far as I know them myself.

"My father was, as you may have guessed, Major John Sholto, once of the Indian army. He retired some eleven years ago, and came to live at Pondicherry Lodge in Upper Norwood. He had prospered in India, and brought back with him a considerable sum of money, a large collection of valuable curiosities, and a staff of native servants. With these advantages he bought himself a house, and lived in great luxury. My twin-brother Bartholomew and I were the only children.

"I very well remember the sensation which was caused by the disappearance of Captain Morstan. We read the details in the papers, and, knowing that he had been a friend of our father's, we discussed the case freely in his presence. He used to join in our speculations as to what could have happened. Never for an instant did we suspect that he had the whole secret hidden in his own breast,—that of all men he alone knew the fate of Arthur Morstan.

"We did know, however, that some mystery--some positive danger--overhung our father. He was very fearful of going out alone, and he always employed two prize-fighters to act as porters at Pondicherry Lodge. Williams, who drove you to-night, was one of them. He was once light-weight champion of England. Our father would never tell us what it was he feared, but he had a most marked aversion to men with wooden legs. On one occasion he actually fired his revolver at a wooden-legged man, who proved to be a harmless tradesman canvassing for orders. We had to pay a large sum to hush the matter up. My brother and I used to think this a mere whim of my father's, but events have since led us to change our opinion.

"Early in 1882 my father received a letter from India which was a great shock to him. He nearly fainted at the breakfast-table when he opened it, and from that day he sickened to his death. What was in the letter we could never discover, but I could see as he held it that it was short and written in a scrathing hand. He had suffered for years from an enlarged spleen, but he now became rapidly worse, and towards the end of April we were informed that he was beyond all hope, and that he wished to make a last communication to us.

"When we entered his room he was propped up with pillows and breathing heavily. He besought us to lock the door and to come upon either side of the bed. Then, grasping our hands, he made a remarkable statement to us, in a voice which was broken as much by emotion as by pain. I shall try and give it to you in his own very words.

"I have only one thing," he said, 'which weighs upon my mind at this supreme moment. It is my treatment of poor Morstan's orphan. The cursed greed which has been my besetting sin through life has withheld from her the treasure, half of which should have been hers. And yet I have made no use of it myself,--so blind and foolish a thing is avarice. The mere feeling of possession has been so dear to me that I could not bear to share it with
another. See that chaplet dipped with pearls beside the quinine-bottle. Even that I could not bear to part with, although I had got it out with the design of sending it to her. You, my sons, will give her a fair share of the Agra treasure. But send her nothing—not even the chaplet—until I am gone. After all, men have been as bad as this and have recovered.

"I will tell you how Morstan died," he continued. 'He had suffered for years from a weak heart, but he concealed it from every one. I alone knew it. When in India, he and I, through a remarkable chain of circumstances, came into possession of a considerable treasure. I brought it over to England, and on the night of Morstan's arrival he came straight over here to claim his share. He walked over from the station, and was admitted by my faithful Lal Chowdar, who is now dead. Morstan and I had a difference of opinion as to the division of the treasure, and we came to heated words. Morstan had sprung out of his chair in a paroxysm of anger, when he suddenly pressed his hand to his side, his face turned a dusky hue, and he fell backwards, cutting his head against the corner of the treasure-chest. When I stooped over him I found, to my horror, that he was dead.

"For a long time I sat half distracted, wondering what I should do. My first impulse was, of course, to call for assistance; but I could not but recognize that there was every chance that I would be accused of his murder. His death at the moment of a quarrel, and the gash in his head, would be black against me. Again, an official inquiry could not be made without bringing out some facts about the treasure, which I was particularly anxious to keep secret. He had told me that no soul upon earth knew where he had gone. There seemed to be no necessity why any soul ever should know.

"I was still pondering over the matter, when, looking up, I saw my servant, Lal Chowdar, in the doorway. He stole in and bolted the door behind him. "Do not fear, Sahib," he said. "No one need know that you have killed him. Let us hide him away, and who is the wiser?" "I did not kill him," said I. Lal Chowdar shook his head and smiled. "I heard it all, Sahib," said he. "I heard you quarrel, and I heard the blow. But my lips are sealed. All are asleep in the house. Let us put him away together." That was enough to decide me. If my own servant could not believe my innocence, how could I hope to make it good before twelve foolish tradesmen in a jury-box? Lal Chowdar and I disposed of the body that night, and within a few days the London papers were full of the mysterious disappearance of Captain Morstan. You will see from what I say that I can hardly be blamed in the matter. My fault lies in the fact that we concealed not only the body, but also the treasure, and that I have clung to Morstan's share as well as to my own. I wish you, therefore, to make restitution. Put your ears down to my mouth. The treasure is hidden in—" At this instant a horrible change came over his expression; his eyes stared wildly, his jaw dropped, and he yelled, in a voice which I can never forget, 'Keep him out! For Christ's sake keep him out!' We both stared round at the window behind us upon which his gaze was fixed. A face was looking in at us out of the darkness. We could see the whitening of the nose where it was pressed against the glass. It was a bearded, hairy face, with wild cruel eyes and an expression of concentrated malevolence. My brother and I rushed towards the window, but the man was gone. When we returned to my father his head had dropped and his pulse had ceased to beat.

"We searched the garden that night, but found no sign of the intruder, save that just under the window a single footprint was visible in the flower-bed. But for that one trace, we might have thought that our imaginations had conjured up that wild, fierce face. We soon, however, had another and a more striking proof that there were secret agencies at work all round us. The window of my father's room was found open in the morning, his cupboards and boxes had been rifled, and upon his chest was fixed a torn piece of paper, with the words 'The sign of the four' scrawled across it. What the phrase meant, or who our secret visitor may have been, we never knew. As far as we can judge, none of my father's property had been actually stolen, though everything had been turned out. My brother and I naturally associated this peculiar incident with the fear which haunted my father during his life; but it is still a complete mystery to us."

The little man stopped to relight his hookah and puffed thoughtfully for a few moments. We had all sat absorbed, listening to his extraordinary narrative. At the short account of her father's death Miss Morstan had turned deadly white, and for a moment I feared that she was about to faint. She rallied however, on drinking a glass of water which I quietly poured out for her from a Venetian carafe upon the side-table. Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair with an abstracted expression and the lids drawn low over his glittering eyes. As I glanced at him I could not but think how on that very day he had complained bitterly of the commonplaceness of life. Here at least was a problem which would tax his sagacity to the utmost. Mr. Thaddeus Sholto looked from one to the other of us with an obvious pride at the effect which his story had produced, and then continued between the puffs of his overgrown pipe.

"My brother and I," said he, "were, as you may imagine, much excited as to the treasure which my father had spoken of. For weeks and for months we dug and delved in every part of the garden, without discovering its whereabouts. It was maddening to think that the hiding-place was on his very lips at the moment that he died. We could judge the splendor of the missing riches by the chaplet which he had taken out. Over this chaplet my brother Bartholomew and I had some little discussion. The pearls were evidently of great value, and he was averse to part
A single narrow iron-clamped door formed the only means of entrance. On this our guide knocked with a

"It was a kindly thought," said our companion, earnestly. "It was extremely good of you."

The little man waved his hand deprecatingly. "We were your trustees," he said. "That was the view which I took

"You have done well, sir, from first to last," said he. "It is possible that we may be able to make you some small

Our new acquaintance very deliberately coiled up the tube of his hookah, and produced from behind a curtain a

"Bartholomew is a clever fellow," said he. "How do you think he found out where the treasure was? He had

At the mention of this gigantic sum we all stared at one another open-eyed. Miss Morstan, could we secure her

Chapter V The Tragedy of Pondicherry Lodge

It was nearly eleven o'clock when we reached this final stage of our night's adventures. We had left the damp fog

peculiar postman-like rat-tat.

"Who is there?" cried a gruff voice from within.

"It is I, McMurdo. You surely know my knock by this time."

There was a grumbling sound and a clanking and jarring of keys. The door swung heavily back, and a short, deep-chested man stood in the opening, with the yellow light of the lantern shining upon his protruded face and twinkling distrustful eyes.

"That you, Mr. Thaddeus? But who are the others? I had no orders about them from the master."

"No, McMurdo? You surprise me! I told my brother last night that I should bring some friends."

"He ain't been out o' his room to-day, Mr. Thaddeus, and I have no orders. You know very well that I must stick to regulations. I can let you in, but your friends must just stop where they are."

This was an unexpected obstacle. Thaddeus Sholto looked about him in a perplexed and helpless manner. "This is too bad of you, McMurdo!" he said. "If I guarantee them, that is enough for you. There is the young lady, too. She cannot wait on the public road at this hour."

"Very sorry, Mr. Thaddeus," said the porter, inexorably. "Folk may be friends o' yours, and yet no friends o' the master's. He pays me well to do my duty, and my duty I'll do. I don't know none o' your friends."

"Oh, yes you do, McMurdo," cried Sherlock Holmes, genially. "I don't think you can have forgotten me. Don't you remember the amateur who fought three rounds with you at Alison's rooms on the night of your benefit four years back?"

"Not Mr. Sherlock Holmes!" roared the prize-fighter. "God's truth! how could I have mistook you? If instead o' standin' there so quiet you had just stepped up and given me that cross-hit of yours under the jaw, I'd ha' known you without a question. Ah, you're one that has wasted your gifts, you have! You might have aimed high, if you had joined the fancy."

"You see, Watson, if all else fails me I have still one of the scientific professions open to me," said Holmes, laughing. "Our friend won't keep us out in the cold now, I am sure."

"In you come, sir, in you come,—you and your friends," he answered. "Very sorry, Mr. Thaddeus, but orders are very strict. Had to be certain of your friends before I let them in."

Inside, a gravel path wound through desolate grounds to a huge clump of a house, square and prosaic, all plunged in shadow save where a moonbeam struck one corner and glimmered in a garret window. The vast size of the building, with its gloom and its deathly silence, struck a chill to the heart. Even Thaddeus Sholto seemed ill at ease, and the lantern quivered and rattled in his hand.

"I cannot understand it," he said. "There must be some mistake. I distinctly told Bartholomew that we should be here, and yet there is no light in his window. I do not know what to make of it."

"Does he always guard the premises in this way?" asked Holmes.

"Yes; he has followed my father's custom. He was the favorite son, you know, and I sometimes think that my father may have told him more than he ever told me. That is Bartholomew's window up there where the moonshine strikes. It is quite bright, but there is no light from within, I think."

"None," said Holmes. "But I see the glint of a light in that little window beside the door."

"Ah, that is the housekeeper's room. That is where old Mrs. Bernstone sits. She can tell us all about it. But perhaps you would not mind waiting here for a minute or two, for if we all go in together and she has no word of our coming she may be alarmed. But hush! what is that?"

He held up the lantern, and his hand shook until the circles of light flickered and wavered all round us. Miss Morstan seized my wrist, and we all stood with thumping hearts, straining our ears. From the great black house there sounded through the silent night the saddest and most pitiful of sounds,—the shrill, broken whimpering of a frightened woman.

"It is Mrs. Bernstone," said Sholto. "She is the only woman in the house. Wait here. I shall be back in a moment." He hurried for the door, and knocked in his peculiar way. We could see a tall old woman admit him, and sway with pleasure at the very sight of him.

"Oh, Mr. Thaddeus, sir, I am so glad you have come! I am so glad you have come, Mr. Thaddeus, sir!" We heard her reiterated rejoicings until the door was closed and her voice died away into a muffled monotone.

Our guide had left us the lantern. Holmes swung it slowly round, and peered keenly at the house, and at the great rubbish-heaps which cumbered the grounds. Miss Morstan and I stood together, and her hand was in mine. A wondrous subtle thing is love, for here were we two who had never seen each other before that day, between whom no word or even look of affection had ever passed, and yet now in an hour of trouble our hands instinctively sought for each other. I have marvelled at it since, but at the time it seemed the most natural thing that I should go out to her so, and, as she has often told me, there was in her also the instinct to turn to me for comfort and protection. So we stood hand in hand, like two children, and there was peace in our hearts for all the dark things that surrounded us.
"What a strange place!" she said, looking round.

"It looks as though all the moles in England had been let loose in it. I have seen something of the sort on the side of a hill near Ballarat, where the prospectors had been at work."

"And from the same cause," said Holmes. "These are the traces of the treasure-seekers. You must remember that they were six years looking for it. No wonder that the grounds look like a gravel-pit."

At that moment the door of the house burst open, and Thaddeus Sholto came running out, with his hands thrown forward and terror in his eyes.

"There is something amiss with Bartholomew!" he cried. "I am frightened! My nerves cannot stand it." He was, indeed, half blubbering with fear, and his twitching feeble face peeping out from the great Astrakhan collar had the helpless appealing expression of a terrified child.

"Come into the house," said Holmes, in his crisp, firm way.

"Yes, do!" pleaded Thaddeus Sholto. "I really do not feel equal to giving directions."

We all followed him into the housekeeper's room, which stood upon the left-hand side of the passage. The old woman was pacing up and down with a scared look and restless picking fingers, but the sight of Miss Morstan appeared to have a soothing effect upon her.

"God bless your sweet calm face!" she cried, with an hysterical sob. "It does me good to see you. Oh, but I have been sorely tried this day!"

Our companion patted her thin, work-worn hand, and murmured some few words of kindly womanly comfort which brought the color back into the others bloodless cheeks.

"Master has locked himself in and will not answer me," she explained. "All day I have waited to hear from him, for he often likes to be alone; but an hour ago I feared that something was amiss, so I went up and peeped through the key-hole. You must go up, Mr. Thaddeus,--you must go up and look for yourself. I have seen Mr. Bartholomew Sholto in joy and in sorrow for ten long years, but I never saw him with such a face on him as that."

Sherlock Holmes took the lamp and led the way, for Thaddeus Sholto's teeth were chattering in his head. So shaken was he that I had to pass my hand under his arm as we went up the stairs, for his knees were trembling under him. Twice as we ascended Holmes whipped his lens out of his pocket and carefully examined marks which appeared to me to be mere shapeless smudges of dust upon the cocoa-nut matting which served as a stair-carpet. He walked slowly from step to step, holding the lamp, and shooting keen glances to right and left. Miss Morstan had remained behind with the frightened housekeeper.

The third flight of stairs ended in a straight passage of some length, with a great picture in Indian tapestry upon the right of it and three doors upon the left. Holmes advanced along it in the same slow and methodical way, while we kept close at his heels, with our long black shadows streaming backwards down the corridor. The third door was that which we were seeking. Holmes knocked without receiving any answer, and then tried to turn the handle and force it open. It was locked on the inside, however, and by a broad and powerful bolt, as we could see when we set our lamp up against it. Sherlock Holmes bent down to it, and instantly rose again with a sharp intake of the breath.

"There is something devilish in this, Watson," said he, more moved than I had ever before seen him. "What do you make of it?"

I stooped to the hole, and recoiled in horror. Moonlight was streaming into the room, and it was bright with a vague and shifty radiance. Looking straight at me, and suspended, as it were, for all beneath was in shadow, there hung a face,--the very face of our companion Thaddeus. There was the same high, shining head, the same circular bristle of red hair, the same bloodless countenance. The features were set, however, in a horrible smile, a fixed and unnatural grin, which in that still and moonlit room was more jarring to the nerves than any scowl or contortion. So like was the face to that of our little friend that I looked round to make sure that he was indeed with us. Then I recalled to mind that he had mentioned to us that his brother and he were twins.

"This is terrible!" I said to Holmes. "What is to be done?"

"The door must come down," he answered, and, springing against it, he put all his weight upon the lock. It creaked and groaned, but did not yield. Together we flung ourselves upon it once more, and this time it gave way with a sudden snap, and we found ourselves within Bartholomew Sholto's chamber.

It appeared to have been fitted up as a chemical laboratory. A double line of glass-stoppered bottles was drawn up upon the wall opposite the door, and the table was littered over with Bunsen burners, test-tubes, and retorts. In the corners stood carboys of acid in wicker baskets. One of these appeared to leak or to have been broken, for a stream of dark-colored liquid had trickled out from it, and the air was heavy with a peculiarly pungent, tar-like odor. A set of steps stood at one side of the room, in the midst of a litter of lath and plaster, and above them there was an opening in the ceiling large enough for a man to pass through. At the foot of the steps a long coil of rope was thrown carelessly together.
By the table, in a wooden arm-chair, the master of the house was seated all in a heap, with his head sunk upon his left shoulder, and that ghastly, inscrutable smile upon his face. He was stiff and cold, and had clearly been dead many hours. It seemed to me that not only his features but all his limbs were twisted and turned in the most fantastic fashion. By his hand upon the table there lay a peculiar instrument,—a brown, close-grained stick, with a stone head like a hammer, rudely lashed on with coarse twine. Beside it was a torn sheet of note-paper with some words scrawled upon it. Holmes glanced at it, and then handed it to me.

"You see," he said, with a significant raising of the eyebrows.

In the light of the lantern I read, with a thrill of horror, "The sign of the four."

"In God's name, what does it all mean?" I asked.

"It means murder," said he, stooping over the dead man. "Ah, I expected it. Look here!" He pointed to what looked like a long, dark thorn stuck in the skin just above the ear.

"It looks like a thorn," said I.

"It is a thorn. You may pick it out. But be careful, for it is poisoned."

I took it up between my finger and thumb. It came away from the skin so readily that hardly any mark was left behind. One tiny speck of blood showed where the puncture had been.

"This is all an insoluble mystery to me," said I. "It grows darker instead of clearer."

"On the contrary," he answered, "it clears every instant. I only require a few missing links to have an entirely connected case."

We had almost forgotten our companion's presence since we entered the chamber. He was still standing in the door-way, the very picture of terror, wringing his hands and moaning to himself. Suddenly, however, he broke out into a sharp, querulous cry.

"The treasure is gone!" he said. "They have robbed him of the treasure! There is the hole through which we lowered it. I helped him to do it! I was the last person who saw him! I left him here last night, and I heard him lock the door as I came down-stairs."

"What time was that?"

"It was ten o'clock. And now he is dead, and the police will be called in, and I shall be suspected of having had a hand in it. Oh, yes, I am sure I shall. But you don't think so, gentlemen? Surely you don't think that it was I? Is it likely that I would have brought you here if it were I? Oh, dear! oh, dear! I know that I shall go mad!" He jerked his arms and stamped his feet in a kind of convulsive frenzy.

"You have no reason for fear, Mr. Sholto," said Holmes, kindly, putting his hand upon his shoulder. "Take my advice, and drive down to the station to report this matter to the police. Offer to assist them in every way. We shall wait here until your return."

The little man obeyed in a half-stupefied fashion, and we heard him stumbling down the stairs in the dark.

Chapter VI Sherlock Holmes Gives a Demonstration

"Now, Watson," said Holmes, rubbing his hands, "we have half an hour to ourselves. Let us make good use of it. My case is, as I have told you, almost complete; but we must not err on the side of over-confidence. Simple as the case seems now, there may be something deeper underlying it."

"Simple!" I ejaculated.

"Surely," said he, with something of the air of a clinical professor expounding to his class. "Just sit in the corner there, that your footprints may not complicate matters. Now to work! In the first place, how did these folk come, and how did they go? The door has not been opened since last night. How of the window?" He carried the lamp across to it, muttering his observations aloud the while, but addressing them to himself rather than to me. "Window is snibbed on the inner side. Framework is solid. No hinges at the side. Let us open it. No water-pipe near. Roof quite out of reach. Yet a man has mounted by the window. It rained a little last night. Here is the print of a foot in mould upon the sill. And here is a circular muddy mark, and here again upon the floor, and here again by the table. See here, Watson! This is really a very pretty demonstration."

I looked at the round, well-defined muddy discs. "This is not a footmark," said I.

"It is something much more valuable to us. It is the impression of a wooden stump. You see here on the sill is the boot-mark, a heavy boot with the broad metal heel, and beside it is the mark of the timber-toe."

"It is the wooden-legged man."

"Quite so. But there has been some one else,—a very able and efficient ally. Could you scale that wall, doctor?"

I looked out of the open window. The moon still shone brightly on that angle of the house. We were a good sixty feet from the round, and, look where I would, I could see no foothold, nor as much as a crevice in the brick-work.

"It is absolutely impossible," I answered.

"Without aid it is so. But suppose you had a friend up here who lowered you this good stout rope which I see in the corner, securing one end of it to this great hook in the wall. Then, I think, if you were an active man, You might"
swarm up, wooden leg and all. You would depart, of course, in the same fashion, and your ally would draw up the rope, untie it from the hook, shut the window, snib it on the inside, and get away in the way that he originally came. As a minor point it may be noted," he continued, fingerling the rope, "that our wooden-legged friend, though a fair climber, was not a professional sailor. His hands were far from horny. My lens discloses more than one blood-mark, especially towards the end of the rope, from which I gather that he slipped down with such velocity that he took the skin off his hand."

"This is all very well," said I, "but the thing becomes more unintelligible than ever. How about this mysterious ally? How came he into the room?"

"Yes, the ally!" repeated Holmes, pensively. "There are features of interest about this ally. He lifts the case from the regions of the commonplace. I fancy that this ally breaks fresh ground in the annals of crime in this country,—though parallel cases suggest themselves from India, and, if my memory serves me, from Senegambia."

"How came he, then?" I reiterated. "The door is locked, the window is inaccessible. Was it through the chimney?"

"The grate is much too small," he answered. "I had already considered that possibility."

"How then?" I persisted.

"You will not apply my precept," he said, shaking his head. "How often have I said to you that when you have eliminated the impossible whatever remains, HOWEVER IMPROBABLE, must be the truth? We know that he did not come through the door, the window, or the chimney. We also know that he could not have been concealed in the room, as there is no concealment possible. Whence, then, did he come?"

"He came through the hole in the roof," I cried.

"Of course he did. He must have done so. If you will have the kindness to hold the lamp for me, we shall now extend our researches to the room above,—the secret room in which the treasure was found."

He mounted the steps, and, seizing a rafter with either hand, he swung himself up into the garret. Then, lying on his face, he reached down for the lamp and held it while I followed him.

The chamber in which we found ourselves was about ten feet one way and six the other. The floor was formed by the rafters, with thin lath-and-plaster between, so that in walking one had to step from beam to beam. The roof ran up to an apex, and was evidently the inner shell of the true roof of the house. There was no furniture of any sort, and the accumulated dust of years lay thick upon the floor.

"Here you are, you see," said Sherlock Holmes, putting his hand against the sloping wall. "This is a trap-door which leads out on to the roof. I can press it back, and here is the roof itself, sloping at a gentle angle. This, then, is the way by which Number One entered. Let us see if we can find any other traces of his individuality."

He held down the lamp to the floor, and as he did so I saw for the second time that night a startled, surprised look come over his face. For myself, as I followed his gaze my skin was cold under my clothes. The floor was covered thickly with the prints of a naked foot,—clear, well defined, perfectly formed, but scarce half the size of those of an ordinary man.

"Holmes," I said, in a whisper, "a child has done the horrid thing."

He had recovered his self-possession in an instant. "I was staggered for the moment," he said, "but the thing is quite natural. My memory failed me, or I should have been able to foretell it. There is nothing more to be learned here. Let us go down."

"What is your theory, then, as to those footmarks?" I asked, eagerly, when we had regained the lower room once more.

"My dear Watson, try a little analysis yourself," said he, with a touch of impatience. "You know my methods. Apply them, and it will be instructive to compare results."

"I cannot conceive anything which will cover the facts," I answered.

"It will be clear enough to you soon," he said, in an off-hand way. "I think that there is nothing else of importance here, but I will look." He whipped out his lens and a tape measure, and hurried about the room on his knees, measuring, comparing, examining, with his long thin nose only a few inches from the planks, and his beady eyes gleaming and deep-set like those of a bird. So swift, silent, and furtive were his movements, like those of a trained blood-hound picking out a scent, that I could not but think what a terrible criminal he would have made had he turned his energy and sagacity against the law, instead of exerting them in its defense. As he hunted about, he kept muttering to himself, and finally he broke out into a loud crow of delight.

"We are certainly in luck," said he. "We ought to have very little trouble now. Number One has had the misfortune to tread in the creosote. You can see the outline of the edge of his small foot here at the side of this evil-smelling mess. The carboy has been cracked, You see, and the stuff has leaked out."

"What then?" I asked.

"Why, we have got him, that's all," said he. "I know a dog that would follow that scent to the world's end. If a
pack can track a trailed herring across a shire, how far can a specially-trained hound follow so pungent a smell as this? It sounds like a sum in the rule of three. The answer should give us the--But halloo! here are the accredited representatives of the law."

"Before they come," said Holmes, "just put your hand here on this poor fellow's arm, and here on his leg. What do you feel?"

"The muscles are as hard as a board," I answered.

"Quite so. They are in a state of extreme contraction, far exceeding the usual rigor mortis. Coupled with this distortion of the face, this Hippocratic smile, or 'risus sardonicus,' as the old writers called it, what conclusion would it suggest to your mind?"

"Death from some powerful vegetable alkaloid," I answered,--"some strychnine-like substance which would produce tetanus."

"That was the idea which occurred to me the instant I saw the drawn muscles of the face. On getting into the room I at once looked for the means by which the poison had entered the system. As you saw, I discovered a thorn which had been driven or shot with no great force into the scalp. You observe that the part struck was that which would be turned towards the hole in the ceiling if the man were erect in his chair. Now examine the thorn."

I took it up gingerly and held it in the light of the lantern. It was long, sharp, and black, with a glazed look near the point as though some gummy substance had dried upon it. The blunt end had been trimmed and rounded off with a knife.

"Is that an English thorn?" he asked.

"No, it certainly is not."

"With all these data you should be able to draw some just inference. But here are the regulars: so the auxiliary forces may beat a retreat."

As he spoke, the steps which had been coming nearer sounded loudly on the passage, and a very stout, portly man in a gray suit strode heavily into the room. He was red-faced, burly and plethoric, with a pair of very small twinkling eyes which looked keenly out from between swollen and puffy pouches. He was closely followed by an inspector in uniform, and by the still palpitating Thaddeus Sholto.

"Here's a business!" he cried, in a muffled, husky voice. "Here's a pretty business! But who are all these? Why, the house seems to be as full as a rabbit-warren!"

"I think you must recollect me, Mr. Athelney Jones," said Holmes, quietly.

"Why, of course I do!" he wheezed. "It's Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the theorist. Remember you! I'll never forget how you lectured us all on causes and inferences and effects in the Bishopgate jewel case. It's true you set us on the right track; but you'll own now that it was more by good luck than good guidance."

"It was a piece of very simple reasoning."

"Oh, come, now, come! Never be ashamed to own up. But what is all this? Bad business! Bad business! Stern facts here,—no room for theories. How lucky that I happened to be out at Norwood over another case! I was at the station when the message arrived. What d'you think the man died of?"

"Oh, this is hardly a case for me to theorize over," said Holmes, dryly.

"No, no. Still, we can't deny that you hit the nail on the head sometimes. Dear me! Door locked, I understand. Jewels worth half a million missing. How was the window?"

"Fastened; but there are steps on the sill."

"Well, well, if it was fastened the steps could have nothing to do with the matter. That's common sense. Man might have died in a fit; but then the jewels are missing. Ha! I have a theory. These flashes come upon me at times.—Just step outside, sergeant, and you, Mr. Sholto. Your friend can remain.—What do you think of this, Holmes? Sholto was, on his own confession, with his brother last night. The brother died in a fit, on which Sholto walked off with the treasure. How's that?"

"On which the dead man very considerately got up and locked the door on the inside."

"Hum! There's a flaw there. Let us apply common sense to the matter. This Thaddeus Sholto WAS with his brother; there WAS a quarrel; so much we know. The brother is dead and the jewels are gone. So much also we know. No one saw the brother from the time Thaddeus left him. His bed had not been slept in. Thaddeus is evidently in a most disturbed state of mind. His appearance is—well, not attractive. You see that I am weaving my web round Thaddeus. The net begins to close upon him."

"You are not quite in possession of the facts yet," said Holmes. "This splinter of wood, which I have every reason to believe to be poisoned, was in the man's scalp where you still see the mark; this card, inscribed as you see it, was on the table; and beside it lay this rather curious stone-headed instrument. How does all that fit into your theory?"
"Confirms it in every respect," said the fat detective, pompously. "House is full of Indian curiosities. Thaddeus brought this up, and if this splinter be poisonous Thaddeus may as well have made murderous use of it as any other man. The card is some hocus-pocus,—a blind, as like as not. The only question is, how did he depart? Ah, of course, here is a hole in the roof." With great activity, considering his bulk, he sprang up the steps and squeezed through into the garret, and immediately afterwards we heard his exulting voice proclaiming that he had found the trap-door.

"He can find something," remarked Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. "He has occasional glimmerings of reason. Il n'y a pas des sots si incommodes que ceux qui ont de l'esprit!"

"You see!" said Athelney Jones, reappearing down the steps again. "Facts are better than mere theories, after all. My view of the case is confirmed. There is a trap-door communicating with the roof, and it is partly open."

"It was I who opened it."

"Oh, indeed! You did notice it, then?" He seemed a little crestfallen at the discovery. "Well, whoever noticed it, it shows how our gentleman got away. Inspector!"

"Yes, sir," from the passage.

"Ask Mr. Sholto to step this way.--Mr. Sholto, it is my duty to inform you that anything which you may say will be used against you. I arrest you in the queen's name as being concerned in the death of your brother."

"There, now! Didn't I tell you!" cried the poor little man, throwing out his hands, and looking from one to the other of us.

"Don't trouble yourself about it, Mr. Sholto," said Holmes. "I think that I can engage to clear you of the charge."

"Don't promise too much, Mr. Theorist,—don't promise too much!" snapped the detective. "You may find it a harder matter than you think."

"Not only will I clear him, Mr. Jones, but I will make you a free present of the name and description of one of the two people who were in this room last night. His name, I have every reason to believe, is Jonathan Small. He is a poorly-educated man, small, active, with his right leg off, and wearing a wooden stump which is worn away upon the inner side. His left boot has a coarse, square-toed sole, with an iron band round the heel. He is a middle-aged man, much sunburned, and has been a convict. These few indications may be of some assistance to you, coupled with the fact that there is a good deal of skin missing from the palm of his hand. The other man—"

"Ah! the other man—?" asked Athelney Jones, in a sneering voice, but impressed none the less, as I could easily see, by the precision of the other's manner.

"Is a rather curious person," said Sherlock Holmes, turning upon his heel. "I hope before very long to be able to introduce you to the pair of them.—A word with you, Watson."

He led me out to the head of the stair. "This unexpected occurrence," he said, "has caused us rather to lose sight of the original purpose of our journey."

"I have just been thinking so," I answered. "It is not right that Miss Morstan should remain in this stricken house."

"No. You must escort her home. She lives with Mrs. Cecil Forrester, in Lower Camberwell: so it is not very far. I will wait for you here if you will drive out again. Or perhaps you are too tired?"

"By no means. I don't think I could rest until I know more of this fantastic business. I have seen something of the rough side of life, but I give you my word that this quick succession of strange surprises to-night has shaken my nerve completely. I should like, however, to see the matter through with you, now that I have got so far."

"Your presence will be of great service to me," he answered. "We shall work the case out independently, and leave this fellow Jones to exult over any mare's-nest which he may choose to construct. When you have dropped Miss Morstan I wish you to go on to No. 3 Pinchin Lane, down near the water's edge at Lambeth. The third house on the right-hand side is a bird-stuffer's: Sherman is the name. You will see a weasel holding a young rabbit in the window. Knock old Sherman up, and tell him, with my compliments, that I want Toby at once. You will bring Toby back in the cab with you."

"A dog, I suppose."

"Yes,—a queer mongrel, with a most amazing power of scent. I would rather have Toby's help than that of the whole detective force of London."

"I shall bring him, then," said I. "It is one now. I ought to be back before three, if I can get a fresh horse."

"And I," said Holmes, "shall see what I can learn from Mrs. Bernstone, and from the Indian servant, who, Mr. Thaddeus tell me, sleeps in the next garret. Then I shall study the great Jones's methods and listen to his not too delicate sarcasms. 'Wir sind gewohnt das die Menschen verhoehnen was sie nicht verstehen.' Goethe is always pithy."

Chapter VII The Episode of the Barrel

The police had brought a cab with them, and in this I escorted Miss Morstan back to her home. After the angelic fashion of women, she had borne trouble with a calm face as long as there was some one weaker than herself to
support, and I had found her bright and placid by the side of the frightened housekeeper. In the cab, however, she first turned faint, and then burst into a passion of weeping,—so sorely had she been tried by the adventures of the night. She has told me since that she thought me cold and distant upon that journey. She little guessed the struggle within my breast, or the effort of self-restraint which held me back. My sympathies and my love went out to her, even as my hand had in the garden. I felt that years of the conventionalities of life could not teach me to know her sweet, brave nature as had this one day of strange experiences. Yet there were two thoughts which sealed the words of affection upon my lips. She was weak and helpless, shaken in mind and nerve. It was to take her at a disadvantage to obtrude love upon her at such a time. Worse still, she was rich. If Holmes's researches were successful, she would be an heiress. Was it fair, was it honorable, that a half-pay surgeon should take such advantage of an intimacy which chance had brought about? Might she not look upon me as a mere vulgar fortune-seeker? I could not bear to risk that such a thought should cross her mind. This Agra treasure intervened like an impassable barrier between us.

It was nearly two o'clock when we reached Mrs. Cecil Forrester's. The servants had retired hours ago, but Mrs. Forrester had been so interested by the strange message which Miss Morstan had received that she had sat up in the hope of her return. She opened the door herself, a middle-aged, graceful woman, and it gave me joy to see how tenderly her arm stole round the other's waist and how motherly was the voice in which she greeted her. She was clearly no mere paid dependant, but an honored friend. I was introduced, and Mrs. Forrester earnestly begged me to step in and tell her our adventures. I explained, however, the importance of my errand, and promised faithfully to call and report any progress which we might make with the case. As we drove away I stole a glance back, and I still seem to see that little group on the step, the two graceful, clinging figures, the half-opened door, the hall light shining through stained glass, the barometer, and the bright stair-rods. It was soothing to catch even that passing glimpse of a tranquil English home in the midst of the wild, dark business which had absorbed us.

And the more I thought of what had happened, the wilder and darker it grew. I reviewed the whole extraordinary sequence of events as I rattled on through the silent gas-lit streets. There was the original problem: that at least was pretty clear now. The death of Captain Morstan, the sending of the pearls, the advertisement, the letter,—we had had light upon all those events. They had only led us, however, to a deeper and far more tragic mystery. The Indian treasure, the curious plan found among Morstan's baggage, the strange scene at Major Sholto's death, the rediscovery of the treasure immediately followed by the murder of the discoverer, the very singular accompaniments to the crime, the footsteps, the remarkable weapons, the words upon the card, corresponding with those upon Captain Morstan's chart,—here was indeed a labyrinth in which a man less singularly endowed than my fellow-lodger might well despair of ever finding the clue.

Pinchin Lane was a row of shabby two-storied brick houses in the lower quarter of Lambeth. I had to knock for some time at No. 3 before I could make my impression. At last, however, there was the glint of a candle behind the blind, and a face looked out at the upper window.

"Go on, you drunken vagabone," said the face. "If you kick up any more row I'll open the kennels and let out forty-three dogs upon you."

"If you'll let one out it's just what I have come for," said I.

"Go on!" yelled the voice. "So help me gracious, I have a wiper in the bag, an' I'll drop it on your 'ead if you don't hook it."

"But I want a dog," I cried.

"I won't be argued with!" shouted Mr. Sherman. "Now stand clear, for when I say 'three,' down goes the wiper."

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes--" I began, but the words had a most magical effect, for the window instantly slammed down, and within a minute the door was unbarred and open. Mr. Sherman was a lanky, lean old man, with stooping shoulders, a stringy neck, and blue-tinted glasses.

"A friend of Mr. Sherlock is always welcome," said he. "Step in, sir. Keep clear of the badger; for he bites. Ah, naughty, naughty, would you take a nip at the gentleman?" This to a stoat which thrust its wicked head and red eyes between the bars of its cage. "Don't mind that, sir: it's only a slow-worm. It hain't got no fangs, so I gives it the run o' the room, for it keeps the bettles down. You must not mind my bein' just a little short wi' you at first, for I'm guyed at by the children, and there's many a one just comes down this lane to knock me up. What was it that Mr. Sherlock Holmes wanted, sir?"

"He wanted a dog of yours."

"Ah! that would be Toby."

"Yes, Toby was the name."

"Toby lives at No. 7 on the left here." He moved slowly forward with his candle among the queer animal family which he had gathered round him. In the uncertain, shadowy light I could see dimly that there were glancing, glimmering eyes peeping down at us from every cranny and corner. Even the rafters above our heads were lined by solemn fowls, who lazily shifted their weight from one leg to the other as our voices disturbed their slumbers.
Toby proved to an ugly, long-haired, lop-eared creature, half spaniel and half lurcher, brown-and-white in color, with a very clumsy waddling gait. It accepted after some hesitation a lump of sugar which the old naturalist handed to me, and, having thus sealed an alliance, it followed me to the cab, and made no difficulties about accompanying me. It had just struck three on the Palace clock when I found myself back once more at Pondicherry Lodge. The ex-prize-fighter McMurdo had, I found, been arrested as an accessory, and both he and Mr. Sholto had been marched off to the station. Two constables guarded the narrow gate, but they allowed me to pass with the dog on my mentioning the detective's name.

Holmes was standing on the door-step, with his hands in his pockets, smoking his pipe.

"Ah, you have him there!" said he. "Good dog, then! Atheney Jones has gone. We have had an immense display of energy since you left. He has arrested not only friend Thaddeus, but the gatekeeper, the housekeeper, and the Indian servant. We have the place to ourselves, but for a sergeant up-stairs. Leave the dog here, and come up."

We tied Toby to the hall table, and reascended the stairs. The room was as he had left it, save that a sheet had been draped over the central figure. A weary-looking police-sergeant reclined in the corner.

"Lend me your bull's-eye, sergeant," said my companion. "Now tie this bit of card round my neck, so as to hang it in front of me. Thank you. Now I must kick off my boots and stockings.--Just you carry them down with you, Watson. I am going to do a little climbing. And dip my handkerchief into the creasote. That will do. Now come up into the garret with me for a moment."

We clambered up through the hole. Holmes turned his light once more upon the footsteps in the dust.

"I wish you particularly to notice these footmarks," he said. "Do you observe anything noteworthy about them?"

"They belong," I said, "to a child or a small woman."

"Apart from their size, though. Is there nothing else?"

"They appear to be much as other footmarks."

"Not at all. Look here! This is the print of a right foot in the dust. Now I make one with my naked foot beside it. What is the chief difference?"

"Your toes are all cramped together. The other print has each toe distinctly divided."

"Quite so. That is the spot. Bear that in mind. Now, would you kindly step over to that flap-window and smell the edge of the wood-work? I shall stay here, as I have this handkerchief in my hand."

I did as he directed, and was instantly conscious of a strong tarry smell.

"That is where he put his foot in getting out. If YOU can trace him, I should think that Toby will have no difficulty. Now run down-stairs, loose the dog, and look out for Blondin."

By the time that I got out into the grounds Sherlock Holmes was on the roof, and I could see him like an enormous glow-worm crawling very slowly along the ridge. I lost sight of him behind a stack of chimneys, but he presently reappeared, and then vanished once more upon the opposite side. When I made my way round there I found him seated at one of the corner eaves.

"That you, Watson?" he cried.

"Yes."

"This is the place. What is that black thing down there?"

"A water-barrel."

"Top on it?"

"Yes."

"No sign of a ladder?"

"No."

"Confound the fellow! It's a most break-neck place. I ought to be able to come down where he could climb up. The water-pipe feels pretty firm. Here goes, anyhow."

There was a scuffling of feet, and the lantern began to come steadily down the side of the wall. Then with a light spring he came on to the barrel, and from there to the earth.

"It was easy to follow him," he said, drawing on his stockings and boots. "Tiles were loosened the whole way along, and in his hurry he had dropped this. It confirms my diagnosis, as you doctors express it."

The object which he held up to me was a small pocket or pouch woven out of colored grasses and with a few tawdry beads strung round it. In shape and size it was not unlike a cigarette-case. Inside were half a dozen spines of dark wood, sharp at one end and rounded at the other, like that which had struck Bartholomew Sholto.

"They are hellish things," said he. "Look out that you don't prick yourself. I'm delighted to have them, for the chances are that they are all he has. There is the less fear of you or me finding one in our skin before long. I would sooner face a Martini bullet, myself. Are you game for a six-mile trudge, Watson?"

"Certainly," I answered.

"Your leg will stand it?"
"Oh, yes."

"Here you are, doggy! Good old Toby! Smell it, Toby, smell it!" He pushed the creasote handkerchief under the dog's nose, while the creature stood with its fluffy legs separated, and with a most comical cock to its head, like a connoisseur sniffing the bouquet of a famous vintage. Holmes then threw the handkerchief to a distance, fastened a stout cord to the mongrel's collar, and led him to the foot of the water-barrel. The creature instantly broke into a succession of high, tremulous yelps, and, with his nose on the ground, and his tail in the air, pattered off upon the trail at a pace which strained his leash and kept us at the top of our speed.

The east had been gradually whitening, and we could now see some distance in the cold gray light. The square, massive house, with its black, empty windows and high, bare walls, towered up, sad and forlorn, behind us. Our course led right across the grounds, in and out among the trenches and pits with which they were scarred and intersected. The whole place, with its scattered dirt-heaps and ill-grown shrubs, had a blighted, ill-omened look which harmonized with the black tragedy which hung over it.

On reaching the boundary wall Toby ran along, whimpering eagerly, underneath its shadow, and stopped finally in a corner screened by a young beech. Where the two walls joined, several bricks had been loosened, and the crevices left were worn down and rounded upon the lower side, as though they had frequently been used as a ladder. Holmes clambered up, and, taking the dog from me, he dropped it over upon the other side.

"There's the print of wooden-leg's hand," he remarked, as I mounted up beside him. "You see the slight smudge of blood upon the white plaster. What a lucky thing it is that we have had no very heavy rain since yesterday! The scent will lie upon the road in spite of their eight-and-twenty hours' start."

I confess that I had my doubts myself when I reflected upon the great traffic which had passed along the London road in the interval. My fears were soon appeased, however. Toby never hesitated or swerved, but waddled on in his peculiar rolling fashion. Clearly, the pungent smell of the creasote rose high above all other contending scents.

"Do not imagine," said Holmes, "that I depend for my success in this case upon the mere chance of one of these fellows having put his foot in the chemical. I have knowledge now which would enable me to trace them in many different ways. This, however, is the readiest and, since fortune has put it into our hands, I should be culpable if I neglected it. It has, however, prevented the case from becoming the pretty little intellectual problem which it at one time promised to be. There might have been some credit to be gained out of it, but for this too palpable clue."

"There is credit, and to spare," said I. "I assure you, Holmes, that I marvel at the means by which you obtain your results in this case, even more than I did in the Jefferson Hope Murder. The thing seems to me to be deeper and more inexplicable. How, for example, could you describe with such confidence the wooden-legged man?"

"Pshaw, my dear boy! it was simplicity itself. I don't wish to be theatrical. It is all patent and above-board. Two officers who are in command of a convict-guard learn an important secret as to buried treasure. A map is drawn for them by an Englishman named Jonathan Small. You remember that we saw the name upon the chart in Captain Morstan's possession. He had signed it in behalf of himself and his associates,—the sign of the four, as he somewhat dramatically called it. Aided by this chart, the officers—or one of them—gets the treasure and brings it to England, leaving, we will suppose, some condition under which he received it unfulfilled. Now, then, why did not Jonathan Small get the treasure himself? The answer is obvious. The chart is dated at a time when Morstan was brought into close association with convicts. Jonathan Small did not get the treasure because he and his associates were themselves convicts and could not get away."

"But that is mere speculation," said I.

"It is more than that. It is the only hypothesis which covers the facts. Let us see how it fits in with the sequel. Major Sholto remains at peace for some years, happy in the possession of his treasure. Then he receives a letter from India which gives him a great fright. What was that?"

"A letter to say that the men whom he had wronged had been set free."

"Or had escaped. That is much more likely, for he would have known what their term of imprisonment was. It would not have been a surprise to him. What does he do then? He guards himself against a wooden-legged man,—a white man, mark you, for he mistakes a white tradesman for him, and actually fires a pistol at him. Now, only one white man's name is on the chart. The others are Hindoos or Mohammedans. There is no other white man. Therefore we may say with confidence that the wooden-legged man is identical with Jonathan Small. Does the reasoning strike you as being faulty?"

"No: it is clear and concise."

"Well, now, let us put ourselves in the place of Jonathan Small. Let us look at it from his point of view. He comes to England with the double idea of regaining what he would consider to be his rights and of having his revenge upon the man who had wronged him. He found out where Sholto lived, and very possibly he established communications with some one inside the house. There is this butler, Lal Rao, whom we have not seen. Mrs. Bernstone gives him far from a good character. Small could not find out, however, where the treasure was hid, for
no one ever knew, save the major and one faithful servant who had died. Suddenly Small learns that the major is on his death-bed. In a frenzy lest the secret of the treasure die with him, he runs the gauntlet of the guards, makes his way to the dying man's window, and is only deterred from entering by the presence of his two sons. Mad with hate, however, against the dead man, he enters the room that night, searches his private papers in the hope of discovering some memorandum relating to the treasure, and finally leaves a momento of his visit in the short inscription upon the card. He had doubtless planned beforehand that should he slay the major he would leave some such record upon the body as a sign that it was not a common murder, but, from the point of view of the four associates, something in the nature of an act of justice. Whimsical and bizarre conceits of this kind are common enough in the annals of crime, and usually afford valuable indications as to the criminal. Do you follow all this?"

"Very clearly."

"Now, what could Jonathan Small do? He could only continue to keep a secret watch upon the efforts made to find the treasure. Possibly he leaves England and only comes back at intervals. Then comes the discovery of the garret, and he is instantly informed of it. We again trace the presence of some confederate in the household. Jonathan, with his wooden leg, is utterly unable to reach the lofty room of Bartholomew Sholto. He takes with him, however, a rather curious associate, who gets over this difficulty, but dips his naked foot into creasote, whence comes Toby, and a six-mile limp for a half-pay officer with a damaged tendo Achillis."

"But it was the associate, and not Jonathan, who committed the crime."

"Quite so. And rather to Jonathan's disgust, to judge by the way he stamped about when he got into the room. He bore no grudge against Bartholomew Sholto, and would have preferred if he could have been simply bound and gagged. He did not wish to put his head in a halter. There was no help for it, however: the savage instincts of his companion had broken out, and the poison had done its work: so Jonathan Small left his record, lowered the treasure-box to the ground, and followed it himself. That was the train of events as far as I can decipher them. Of course as to his personal appearance he must be middle-aged, and must be sunburned after serving his time in such an oven as the Andamans. His height is readily calculated from the length of his stride, and we know that he was bearded. His hairiness was the one point which impressed itself upon Thaddeus Sholto when he saw him at the window. I don't know that there is anything else."

"The associate?"

"Ah, well, there is no great mystery in that. But you will know all about it soon enough. How sweet the morning air is! See how that one little cloud floats like a pink feather from some gigantic flamingo. Now the red rim of the sun pushes itself over the London cloud-bank. It shines on a good many folk, but on none, I dare bet, who are on a stranger errand than you and I. How small we feel with our petty ambitions and strivings in the presence of the great elemental forces of nature! Are you well up in your Jean Paul?"

"Fairly so. I worked back to him through Carlyle."

"That was like following the brook to the parent lake. He makes one curious but profound remark. It is that the chief proof of man's real greatness lies in his perception of his own smallness. It argues, you see, a power of comparison and of appreciation which is in itself a proof of nobility. There is much food for thought in Richter. You have not a pistol, have you?"

"I have my stick."

"It is just possible that we may need something of the sort if we get to their lair. Jonathan I shall leave to you, but if the other turns nasty I shall shoot him dead." He took out his revolver as he spoke, and, having loaded two of the chambers, he put it back into the right-hand pocket of his jacket.

We had during this time been following the guidance of Toby down the half-rural villa-lined roads which lead to the metropolis. Now, however, we were beginning to come among continuous streets, where laborers and dockmen were already astir, and slatternly women were taking down shutters and brushing door-steps. At the square-topped corner public houses business was just beginning, and rough-looking men were emerging, rubbing their sleeves across their beards after their morning wet. Strange dogs sauntered up and stared wonderingly at us as we passed, and an occasional eager whine which spoke of a hot scent.

"What the deuce is the matter with the dog?" growled Holmes. "They surely would not take a cab, or go off in a
"Perhaps they stood here for some time," I suggested.

"Ah! it's all right. He's off again," said my companion, in a tone of relief.

He was indeed off, for after sniffing round again he suddenly made up his mind, and darted away with an energy and determination such as he had not yet shown. The scent appeared to be much hotter than before, for he had not even to put his nose on the ground, but tugged at his leash and tried to break into a run. I cold see by the gleam in Holmes's eyes that he thought we were nearing the end of our journey.

Our course now ran down Nine Elms until we came to Broderick and Nelson's large timber-yard, just past the White Eagle tavern. Here the dog, frantic with excitement, turned down through the side-gate into the enclosure, where the sawyers were already at work. On the dog raced through sawdust and shavings, down an alley, round a passage, between two wood-piles, and finally, with a triumphant yelp, sprang upon a large barrel which still stood upon the hand-trolley on which it had been brought. With lolling tongue and blinking eyes, Toby stood upon the cask, looking from one to the other of us for some sign of appreciation. The staves of the barrel and the wheels of the trolley were smeared with a dark liquid, and the whole air was heavy with the smell of creasote.

Sherlock Holmes and I looked blankly at each other, and then burst simultaneously into an uncontrollable fit of laughter.

Chapter VIII The Baker Street Irregulars

"What now?" I asked. "Toby has lost his character for infallibility."

"He acted according to his lights," said Holmes, lifting him down from the barrel and walking him out of the timber-yard. "If you consider how much creasote is carted about London in one day, it is no great wonder that our trail should have been crossed. It is much used now, especially for the seasoning of wood. Poor Toby is not to blame."

"We must get on the main scent again, I suppose."

"Yes. And, fortunately, we have no distance to go. Evidently what puzzled the dog at the corner of Knight's Place was that there were two different trails running in opposite directions. We took the wrong one. It only remains to follow the other."

There was no difficulty about this. On leading Toby to the place where he had committed his fault, he cast about in a wide circle and finally dashed off in a fresh direction.

"We must take care that he does not now bring us to the place where the creasote-barrel came from," I observed.

"I had thought of that. But you notice that he keeps on the pavement, whereas the barrel passed down the roadway. No, we are on the true scent now."

It tended down towards the river-side, running through Belmont Place and Prince's Street. At the end of Broad Street it ran right down to the water's edge, where there was a small wooden wharf. Toby led us to the very edge of this, and there stood whining, looking out on the dark current beyond.

"We are out of luck," said Holmes. "They have taken to a boat here." Several small punts and skiffs were lying about in the water and on the edge of the wharf. We took Toby round to each in turn, but, though he sniffed earnestly, he made no sign.

Close to the rude landing-stage was a small brick house, with a wooden placard slung out through the second window. "Mordecai Smith" was printed across it in large letters, and, underneath, "Boats to hire by the hour or day."

A second inscription above the door informed us that a steam launch was kept,--a statement which was confirmed by a great pile of coke upon the jetty. Sherlock Holmes looked slowly round, and his face assumed an ominous expression.

"This looks bad," said he. "These fellows are sharper than I expected. They seem to have covered their tracks. There has, I fear, been preconcerted management here."

He was approaching the door of the house, when it opened, and a little, curly-headed lad of six came running out, followed by a stoutish, red-faced woman with a large sponge in her hand.

"You come back and be washed, Jack," she shouted. "Come back, you young imp; for if your father comes home and finds you like that, he'll let us hear of it."

"Dear little chap!" said Holmes, strategically. "What a rosy-cheeked young rascal! Now, Jack, is there anything you would like?"

The youth pondered for a moment. "I'd like a shillin,'" said he.

"Nothing you would like better?"

"I'd like two shillin' better," the prodigy answered, after some thought.

"Here you are, then! Catch!--A fine child, Mrs. Smith!"

"Lor' bless you, sir, he is that, and forward. He gets a'most too much for me to manage, 'special when my man is away days at a time."
"Away, is he?" said Holmes, in a disappointed voice. "I am sorry for that, for I wanted to speak to Mr. Smith."

"He's been away since yesterday mornin', sir, and, truth to tell, I am beginnin' to feel frightened about him. But if it was about a boat, sir, maybe I could serve as well."

"I wanted to hire his steam launch."

"Why, bless you, sir, it is in the steam launch that he has gone. That's what puzzles me; for I know there ain't more coals in her than would take her to about Woolwich and back. If he'd been away in the barge I'd ha' thought nothin'; for many a time a job has taken him as far as Gravesend, and then if there was much doin' there he might ha' stayed over. But what good is a steam launch without coals?"

"He might have bought some at a wharf down the river."

"He might, sir, but it weren't his way. Many a time I've heard him call out at the prices they charge for a few odd bags. Besides, I don't like that wooden-legged man, wi' his ugly face and outlandish talk. What did he want always knockin' about here for?"

"A wooden-legged man?" said Holmes, with bland surprise.

"Yes, sir, a brown, monkey-faced chap that's called more'n once for my old man. It was him that roused him up yesternight, and, what's more, my man knew he was comin', for he had steam up in the launch. I tell you straight, sir, I don't feel easy in my mind about it."

"But, my dear Mrs. Smith," said Holmes, shrugging his shoulders, "You are frightening yourself about nothing. How could you possibly tell that it was the wooden-legged man who came in the night? I don't quite understand how you can be so sure."

"His voice, sir. I knew his voice, which is kind o' thick and foggy. He tapped at the winder,--about three it would be. 'Show a leg, matey,' says he: 'time to turn out guard.' My old man woke up Jim,--that's my eldest,--and away they went, without so much as a word to me. I could hear the wooden leg clackin' on the stones."

"And was this wooden-legged man alone?"

"Couldn't say, I am sure, sir. I didn't hear no one else."

"I am sorry, Mrs. Smith, for I wanted a steam launch, and I have heard good reports of the--Let me see, what is her name?"

"The Aurora, sir."

"Ah! She's not that old green launch with a yellow line, very broad in the beam?"

"No, indeed. She's as trim a little thing as any on the river. She's been fresh painted, black with two red streaks."

"Thanks. I hope that you will hear soon from Mr. Smith. I am going down the river; and if I should see anything of the Aurora I shall let him know that you are uneasy. A black funnel, you say?"

"No, sir. Black with a white band."

"Ah, of course. It was the sides which were black. Good- morning, Mrs. Smith.--There is a boatman here with a wherry, Watson. We shall take it and cross the river."

"The main thing with people of that sort," said Holmes, as we sat in the sheets of the wherry, "is never to let them think that their information can be of the slightest importance to you. If you do, they will instantly shut up like an oyster. If you listen to them under protest, as it were, you are very likely to get what you want."

"Our course now seems pretty clear," said I.

"What would you do, then?"

"I would engage a launch and go down the river on the track of the Aurora."

"My dear fellow, it would be a colossal task. She may have touched at any wharf on either side of the stream between here and Greenwich. Below the bridge there is a perfect labyrinth of landing-places for miles. It would take you days and days to exhaust them, if you set about it alone."

"Employ the police, then."

"No. I shall probably call Athelney Jones in at the last moment. He is not a bad fellow, and I should not like to do anything which would injure him professionally. But I have a fancy for working it out myself, now that we have gone so far."

"Could we advertise, then, asking for information from wharfingers?"

"Worse and worse! Our men would know that the chase was hot at their heels, and they would be off out of the country. As it is, they are likely enough to leave, but as long as they think they are perfectly safe they will be in no hurry. Jones's energy will be of use to us there, for his view of the case is sure to push itself into the daily press, and the runaways will think that every one is off on the wrong scent."

"What are we to do, then?" I asked, as we landed near Millbank Penitentiary.

"Take this hansom, drive home, have some breakfast, and get an hour's sleep. It is quite on the cards that we may be afoot to- night again. Stop at a telegraph-office, cabby! We will keep Toby, for he may be of use to us yet."

We pulled up at the Great Peter Street post-office, and Holmes despatched his wire. "Whom do you think that is
"to?" he asked, as we resumed our journey.

"I am sure I don't know."

"You remember the Baker Street division of the detective police force whom I employed in the Jefferson Hope case?"

"Well," said I, laughing.

"This is just the case where they might be invaluable. If they fail, I have other resources; but I shall try them first. That wire was to my dirty little lieutenant, Wiggins, and I expect that he and his gang will be with us before we have finished our breakfast."

It was between eight and nine o'clock now, and I was conscious of a strong reaction after the successive excitements of the night. I was limp and weary, befogged in mind and fatigued in body. I had not the professional enthusiasm which carried my companion on, nor could I look at the matter as a mere abstract intellectual problem. As far as the death of Bartholomew Sholto went, I had heard little good of him, and could feel no intense antipathy to his murderers. The treasure, however, was a different matter. That, or part of it, belonged rightfully to Miss Morstan. While there was a chance of recovering it I was ready to devote my life to the one object. True, if I found it it would probably put her forever beyond my reach. Yet it would be a petty and selfish love which would be influenced by such a thought as that. If Holmes could work to find the criminals, I had a tenfold stronger reason to urge me on to find the treasure.

A bath at Baker Street and a complete change freshened me up wonderfully. When I came down to our room I found the breakfast laid and Holmes pouring out the coffee.

"Here it is," said he, laughing, and pointing to an open newspaper. "The energetic Jones and the ubiquitous reporter have fixed it up between them. But you have had enough of the case. Better have your ham and eggs first."

I took the paper from him and read the short notice, which was headed "Mysterious Business at Upper Norwood."

"About twelve o'clock last night," said the Standard, "Mr. Bartholomew Sholto, of Pondicherry Lodge, Upper Norwood, was found dead in his room under circumstances which point to foul play. As far as we can learn, no actual traces of violence were found upon Mr. Sholto's person, but a valuable collection of Indian gems which the deceased gentleman had inherited from his father has been carried off. The discovery was first made by Mr. Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson, who had called at the house with Mr. Thaddeus Sholto, brother of the deceased. By a singular piece of good fortune, Mr. Athelney Jones, the well-known member of the detective police force, happened to be at the Norwood Police Station, and was on the ground within half an hour of the first alarm. His trained and experienced faculties were at once directed towards the detection of the criminals, with the gratifying result that the brother, Thaddeus Sholto, has already been arrested, together with the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernstone, an Indian butler named Lal Rao, and a porter, or gatekeeper, named McMurdo. It is quite certain that the thief or thieves were well acquainted with the house, for Mr. Jones's well-known technical knowledge and his powers of minute observation have enabled him to prove conclusively that the miscreants could not have entered by the door or by the window, but must have made their way across the roof of the building, and so through a trap-door into a room which communicated with that in which the body was found. This fact, which has been very clearly made out, proves conclusively that it was no mere haphazard burglary. The prompt and energetic action of the officers of the law shows the great advantage of the presence on such occasions of a single vigorous and masterful mind. We cannot but think that it supplies an argument to those who would wish to see our detectives more decentralized, and so brought into closer and more effective touch with the cases which it is their duty to investigate."

"Isn't it gorgeous!" said Holmes, grinning over his coffee-cup. "What do you think of it?"

"I think that we have had a close shave ourselves of being arrested for the crime."

"So do I. I wouldn't answer for our safety now, if he should happen to have another of his attacks of energy."

At this moment there was a loud ring at the bell, and I could hear Mrs. Hudson, our landlady, raising her voice in a wail of expostulation and dismay.

"By heaven, Holmes," I said, half rising, "I believe that they are really after us."

"No, it's not quite so bad as that. It is the unofficial force,—the Baker Street irregulars."

As he spoke, there came a swift pattering of naked feet upon the stairs, a clatter of high voices, and in rushed a dozen dirty and ragged little street-Arabs. There was some show of discipline among them, despite their tumultuous entry, for they instantly drew up in line and stood facing us with expectant faces. One of their number, taller and older than the others, stood forward with an air of lounging superiority which was very funny in such a disreputable little scarecrow.

"Got your message, sir," said he, "and brought 'em on sharp. Three bob and a tanner for tickets."

"Here you are," said Holmes, producing some silver. "In future they can report to you, Wiggins, and you to me. I cannot have the house invaded in this way. However, it is just as well that you should all hear the instructions. I
want to find the whereabouts of a steam launch called the Aurora, owner Mordecai Smith, black with two red streaks, funnel black with a white band. She is down the river somewhere. I want one boy to be at Mordecai Smith's landing-stage opposite Millbank to say if the boat comes back. You must divide it out among yourselves, and do both banks thoroughly. Let me know the moment you have news. Is that all clear?"

"Yes, guv'nor," said Wiggins.

"The old scale of pay, and a guinea to the boy who finds the boat. Here's a day in advance. Now off you go!" He handed them a shilling each, and away they buzzed down the stairs, and I saw them a moment later streaming down the street.

"If the launch is above water they will find her," said Holmes, as he rose from the table and lit his pipe. "They can go everywhere, see everything, overhear every one. I expect to hear before evening that they have spotted her. In the mean while, we can do nothing but await results. We cannot pick up the broken trail until we find either the Aurora or Mr. Mordecai Smith."

"Toby could eat these scraps, I dare say. Are you going to bed, Holmes?"

"No: I am not tired. I have a curious constitution. I never remember feeling tired by work, though idleness exhausts me completely. I am going to smoke and to think over this queer business to which my fair client has introduced us. If ever man had an easy task, this of ours ought to be. Wooden-legged men are not so common, but the other man must, I should think, be absolutely unique."

"That other man again!"

"I have no wish to make a mystery of him,—to you, anyway. But you must have formed your own opinion. Now, do consider the data. Diminutive footmarks, toes never fettered by boots, naked feet, stone-headed wooden mace, great agility, small poisoned darts. What do you make of all this?"

"A savage!" I exclaimed. "Perhaps one of those Indians who were the associates of Jonathan Small."

"Hardly that," said he. "When first I saw signs of strange weapons I was inclined to think so; but the remarkable character of the footmarks caused me to reconsider my views. Some of the inhabitants of the Indian Peninsula are small men, but none could have left such marks as that. The Hindoo proper has long and thin feet. The sandal-wearing Mohammedan has the great toe well separated from the others, because the thong is commonly passed between. These little darts, too, could only be shot in one way. They are from a blow-pipe. Now, then, where are we to find our savage?"


He stretched his hand up, and took down a bulky volume from the shelf. "This is the first volume of a gazetteer which is now being published. It may be looked upon as the very latest authority. What have we here? 'Andaman Islands, situated 340 miles to the north of Sumatra, in the Bay of Bengal.' Hum! hum! What's all this? Moist climate, coral reefs, sharks, Port Blair, convict-barracks, Rutland Island, cottonwoods—Ah, here we are. 'The aborigines of the Andaman Islands may perhaps claim the distinction of being the smallest race upon this earth, though some anthropologists prefer the Bushmen of Africa, the Digger Indians of America, and the Terra del Fuegians. The average height is rather below four feet, although many full-grown adults may be found who are very much smaller than this. They are a fierce, morose, and intractable people, though capable of forming most devoted friendships when their confidence has once been gained.' Mark that, Watson. Now, then, listen to this. 'They are naturally hideous, having large, misshapen heads, small, fierce eyes, and distorted features. Their feet and hands, however, are remarkably small. So intractable and fierce are they that all the efforts of the British official have failed to win them over in any degree. They have always been a terror to shipwrecked crews, braining the survivors with their stone-headed clubs, or shooting them with their poisoned arrows. These massacres are invariably concluded by a cannibal feast.' Nice, amiable people, Watson! If this fellow had been left to his own unaided devices this affair might have taken an even more ghastly turn. I fancy that, even as it is, Jonathan Small would give a good deal not to have employed him."

"But how came he to have so singular a companion?"

"Ah, that is more than I can tell. Since, however, we had already determined that Small had come from the Andamans, it is not so very wonderful that this islander should be with him. No doubt we shall know all about it in time. Look here, Watson; you look regularly done. Lie down there on the sofa, and see if I can put you to sleep."

He took up his violin from the corner, and as I stretched myself out he began to play some low, dreamy, melodious air,—his own, no doubt, for he had a remarkable gift for improvisation. I have a vague remembrance of his gaunt limbs, his earnest face, and the rise and fall of his bow. Then I seemed to be floated peacefully away upon a soft sea of sound, until I found myself in dream-land, with the sweet face of Mary Morstan looking down upon me.

Chapter IX A Break in the Chain

It was late in the afternoon before I woke, strengthened and refreshed. Sherlock Holmes still sat exactly as I had
left him, save that he had laid aside his violin and was deep in a book. He looked across at me, as I stirred, and I noticed that his face was dark and troubled.

"You have slept soundly," he said. "I feared that our talk would wake you."

"I heard nothing," I answered. "Have you had fresh news, then?"

"Unfortunately, no. I confess that I am surprised and disappointed. I expected something definite by this time. Wiggins has just been up to report. He says that no trace can be found of the launch. It is a provoking check, for every hour is of importance."

"Can I do anything? I am perfectly fresh now, and quite ready for another night's outing."

"No, we can do nothing. We can only wait. If we go ourselves, the message might come in our absence, and delay be caused. You can do what you will, but I must remain on guard."

"Then I shall run over to Camberwell and call upon Mrs. Cecil Forrester. She asked me to, yesterday."

"On Mrs. Cecil Forrester?" asked Holmes, with the twinkle of a smile in his eyes.

"Well, of course Miss Morstan too. They were anxious to hear what happened."

"I would not tell them too much," said Holmes. "Women are never to be entirely trusted,—not the best of them."

"I did not pause to argue over this atrocious sentiment. "I shall be back in an hour or two," I remarked.

"All right! Good luck! But, I say, if you are crossing the river you may as well return Toby, for I don't think it is at all likely that we shall have any use for him now."

I took our mongrel accordingly, and left him, together with a half-sovereign, at the old naturalist's in Pinchin Lane. At Camberwell I found Miss Morstan a little weary after her night's adventures, but very eager to hear the news. Mrs. Forrester, too, was full of curiosity. I told them all that we had done, suppressing, however, the more dreadful parts of the tragedy. Thus, although I spoke of Mr. Sholto's death, I said nothing of the exact manner and method of it. With all my omissions, however, there was enough to startle and amaze them.

"It is a romance!" cried Mrs. Forrester. "An injured lady, half a million in treasure, a black cannibal, and a wooden-legged ruffian. They take the place of the conventional dragon or wicked earl."

"And two knight-errants to the rescue," added Miss Morstan, with a bright glance at me.

"Why, Mary, your fortune depends upon the issue of this search. I don't think that you are nearly excited enough. Just imagine what it must be to be so rich, and to have the world at your feet!"

It sent a little thrill of joy to my heart to notice that she showed no sign of elation at the prospect. On the contrary, she gave a toss of her proud head, as though the matter were one in which she took small interest.

"It is for Mr. Thaddeus Sholto that I am anxious," she said. "Nothing else is of any consequence; but I think that he has behaved most kindly and honorably throughout. It is our duty to clear him of this dreadful and unfounded charge."

It was evening before I left Camberwell, and quite dark by the time I reached home. My companion's book and pipe lay by his chair, but he had disappeared. I looked about in the hope of seeing a note, but there was none.

"I suppose that Mr. Sherlock Holmes has gone out," I said to Mrs. Hudson as she came up to lower the blinds.

"No, sir. He has gone to his room, sir. Do you know, sir," sinking her voice into an impressive whisper, "I am afraid for his health?"

"Why so, Mrs. Hudson?"

"Well, he's that strange, sir. After you was gone he walked and he walked, up and down, and up and down, until I was weary of the sound of his footstep. Then I heard him talking to himself and muttering, and every time the bell rang out he came on the stairhead, with What is that, Mrs. Hudson? And now he has slammed off to his room, but I can hear him walking away the same as ever. I hope he's not going to be ill, sir. I ventured to say something to him about cooling medicine, but he turned on me, sir, with such a look that I don't know how ever I got out of the room."

"I don't think that you have any cause to be uneasy, Mrs. Hudson," I answered. "I have seen him like this before. He has some small matter upon his mind which makes him restless." I tried to speak lightly to our worthy landlady, but I was myself somewhat uneasy when through the long night I still from time to time heard the dull sound of his tread, and knew how his keen spirit was chafing against this involuntary inaction.

At breakfast-time he looked worn and haggard, with a little fleck of feverish color upon either cheek.

"You are knocking yourself up, old man," I remarked. "I heard you marching about in the night."

"No, I could not sleep," he answered. "This infernal problem is consuming me. It is too much to be balked by so petty an obstacle, when all else had been overcome. I know the men, the launch, everything; and yet I can get no news. I have set other agencies at work, and used every means at my disposal. The whole river has been searched on either side, but there is no news, nor has Mrs. Smith heard of her husband. I shall come to the conclusion soon that they have scuttled the craft. But there are objections to that."

"Or that Mrs. Smith has put us on a wrong scent."

"No, I think that may be dismissed. I had inquiries made, and there is a launch of that description."
"Could it have gone up the river?"

"I have considered that possibility too, and there is a search-party who will work up as far as Richmond. If no news comes to-day, I shall start off myself to-morrow, and go for the men rather than the boat. But surely, surely, we shall hear something."

We did not, however. Not a word came to us either from Wiggins or from the other agencies. There were articles in most of the papers upon the Norwood tragedy. They all appeared to be rather hostile to the unfortunate Thaddeus Sholto. No fresh details were to be found, however, in any of them, save that an inquest was to be held upon the following day. I walked over to Camberwell in the evening to report our ill success to the ladies, and on my return I found Holmes dejected and somewhat morose. He would hardly reply to my questions, and busied himself all evening in an abstruse chemical analysis which involved much heating of retorts and distilling of vapors, ending at last in a smell which fairly drove me out of the apartment. Up to the small hours of the morning I could hear the clinking of his test-tubes which told me that he was still engaged in his malodorous experiment.

In the early dawn I woke with a start, and was surprised to find him standing by my bedside, clad in a rude sailor dress with a pea-jacket, and a coarse red scarf round his neck.

"I am off down the river, Watson," said he. "I have been turning it over in my mind, and I can see only one way out of it. It is worth trying, at all events."

"Surely I can come with you, then?" said I.

"No; you can be much more useful if you will remain here as my representative. I am loath to go, for it is quite on the cards that some message may come during the day, though Wiggins was despondent about it last night. I want you to open all notes and telegrams, and to act on your own judgment if any news should come. Can I rely upon you?"

"Most certainly."

"I am afraid that you will not be able to wire to me, for I can hardly tell yet where I may find myself. If I am in luck, however, I may not be gone so very long. I shall have news of some sort or other before I get back."

I had heard nothing of him by breakfast-time. On opening the Standard, however, I found that there was a fresh allusion to the business. "With reference to the Upper Norwood tragedy," it remarked, "we have reason to believe that the matter promises to be even more complex and mysterious than was originally supposed. Fresh evidence has shown that it is quite impossible that Mr. Thaddeus Sholto could have been in any way concerned in the matter. He and the housekeeper, Mrs. Bernstone, were both released yesterday evening. It is believed, however, that the police have a clue as to the real culprits, and that it is being prosecuted by Mr. Athelney Jones, of Scotland Yard, with all his well-known energy and sagacity. Further arrests may be expected at any moment."

"That is satisfactory so far as it goes," thought I. "Friend Sholto is safe, at any rate. I wonder what the fresh clue may be; though it seems to be a stereotyped form whenever the police have made a blunder."

I tossed the paper down upon the table, but at that moment my eye caught an advertisement in the agony column. It ran in this way:

"Lost.--Whereas Mordecai Smith, boatman, and his son, Jim, left Smith's Wharf at or about three o'clock last Tuesday morning in the steam launch Aurora, black with two red stripes, funnel black with a white band, the sum of five pounds will be paid to any one who can give information to Mrs. Smith, at Smith's Wharf, or at 221b Baker Street, as to the whereabouts of the said Mordecai Smith and the launch Aurora."

This was clearly Holmes's doing. The Baker Street address was enough to prove that. It struck me as rather ingenious, because it might be read by the fugitives without their seeing in it more than the natural anxiety of a wife for her missing husband.

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"Lost.--Whereas Mordecai Smith, boatman, and his son, Jim, left Smith's Wharf at or about three o'clock last Tuesday morning in the steam launch Aurora, black with two red stripes, funnel black with a white band, the sum of five pounds will be paid to any one who can give information to Mrs. Smith, at Smith's Wharf, or at 221b Baker Street, as to the whereabouts of the said Mordecai Smith and the launch Aurora."

This was clearly Holmes's doing. The Baker Street address was enough to prove that. It struck me as rather ingenious, because it might be read by the fugitives without their seeing in it more than the natural anxiety of a wife for her missing husband.

It was a long day. Every time that a knock came to the door, or a sharp step passed in the street, I imagined that it was either Holmes returning or an answer to his advertisement. I tried to read, but my thoughts would wander off to our strange quest and to the ill-assorted and villainous pair whom we were pursuing. Could there be, I wondered, some radical flaw in my companion's reasoning. Might he be suffering from some huge self-deception? Was it not possible that his nimble and speculative mind had built up this wild theory upon faulty premises? I had never known him to be wrong; and yet the keenest reasoner may occasionally be deceived. He was likely, I thought, to fall into error through the over-refinement of his logic,—his preference for a subtle and bizarre explanation when a plainer and more commonplace one lay ready to his hand. Yet, on the other hand, I had myself seen the evidence, and I had heard the reasons for his deductions. When I looked back on the long chain of curious circumstances, many of them trivial in themselves, but all tending in the same direction, I could not disguise from myself that even if Holmes's explanation were incorrect the true theory must be equally outre and startling.

At three o'clock in the afternoon there was a loud peal at the bell, an authoritative voice in the hall, and, to my surprise, no less a person than Mr. Athelney Jones was shown up to me. Very different was he, however, from the brusque and masterful professor of common sense who had taken over the case so confidently at Upper Norwood.
His expression was downcast, and his bearing meek and even apologetic.

"Good-day, sir; good-day," said he. "Mr. Sherlock Holmes is out, I understand."

"Yes, and I cannot be sure when he will be back. But perhaps you would care to wait. Take that chair and try one of these cigars."

"Thank you; I don't mind if I do," said he, mopping his face with a red bandanna handkerchief.

"And a whiskey-and-soda?"

"Well, half a glass. It is very hot for the time of year; and I have had a good deal to worry and try me. You know my theory about this Norwood case?"

"I remember that you expressed one."

"Well, I have been obliged to reconsider it. I had my net drawn tightly round Mr. Sholto, sir, when pop he went through a hole in the middle of it. He was able to prove an alibi which could not be shaken. From the time that he left his brother's room he was never out of sight of some one or other. So it could not be he who climbed over roofs and through trap-doors. It's a very dark case, and my professional credit is at stake. I should be very glad of a little assistance."

"We all need help sometimes," said I.

"Your friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes is a wonderful man, sir," said he, in a husky and confidential voice. "He's a man who is not to be beat. I have known that young man go into a good many cases, but I never saw the case yet that he could not throw a light upon. He is irregular in his methods, and a little quick perhaps in jumping at theories, but, on the whole, I think he would have made a most promising officer, and I don't care who knows it. I have had a wire from him this morning, by which I understand that he has got some clue to this Sholto business. Here is the message."

He took the telegram out of his pocket, and handed it to me. It was dated from Poplar at twelve o'clock. "Go to Baker Street at once," it said. "If I have not returned, wait for me. I am close on the track of the Sholto gang. You can come with us to-night if you want to be in at the finish."

"This sounds well. He has evidently picked up the scent again," said I.

"Ah, then he has been at fault too," exclaimed Jones, with evident satisfaction. "Even the best of us are thrown off sometimes. Of course this may prove to be a false alarm; but it is my duty as an officer of the law to allow no chance to slip. But there is some one at the door. Perhaps this is he."

A heavy step was heard ascending the stair, with a great wheezing and rattling as from a man who was sorely put to it for breath. Once or twice he stopped, as though the climb were too much for him, but at last he made his way to our door and entered. His appearance corresponded to the sounds which we had heard. He was an aged man, clad in seafaring garb, with an old pea-jacket buttoned up to his throat. His back was bowed, his knees were shaky, and his breathing was painfully asthmatic. As he leaned upon a thick oaken cudgel his shoulders heaved in the effort to draw the air into his lungs. He had a colored scarf round his chin, and I could see little of his face save a pair of keen dark eyes, overhung by bushy white brows, and long gray side-whiskers. Altogether he gave me the impression of a respectable master mariner who had fallen into years and poverty.

"What is it, my man?" I asked.

He looked about him in the slow methodical fashion of old age.

"Is Mr. Sherlock Holmes here?" said he.

"No; but I am acting for him. You can tell me any message you have for him."

"It was to him himself I was to tell it," said he.

"But I tell you that I am acting for him. Was it about Mordecai Smith's boat?"

"Yes. I knows well where it is. An' I knows where the men he is after are. An' I knows where the treasure is. I knows all about it."

"Then tell me, and I shall let him know."

"It was to him I was to tell it," he repeated, with the petulant obstinacy of a very old man.

"Well, you must wait for him."

"No, no; I ain't goin' to lose a whole day to please no one. If Mr. Holmes ain't here, then Mr. Holmes must find it all out for himself. I don't care about the look of either of you, and I won't tell a word."

He shuffled towards the door, but Athelney Jones got in front of him.

"Wait a bit, my friend," said he. "You have important information, and you must not walk off. We shall keep you, whether you like or not, until our friend returns."

The old man made a little run towards the door, but, as Athelney Jones put his broad back up against it, he recognized the uselessness of resistance.

"Pretty sort o' treatment this!" he cried, stamping his stick. "I come here to see a gentleman, and you two, who I never saw in my life, seize me and treat me in this fashion!"
"You will be none the worse," I said. "We shall recompense you for the loss of your time. Sit over here on the sofa, and you will not have long to wait."

He came across sullenly enough, and seated himself with his face resting on his hands. Jones and I resumed our cigars and our talk. Suddenly, however, Holmes's voice broke in upon us.

"I think that you might offer me a cigar too," he said.

We both started in our chairs. There was Holmes sitting close to us with an air of quiet amusement.

"Holmes!" I exclaimed. "You here! But where is the old man?"

"Here is the old man," said he, holding out a heap of white hair. "Here he is,--wig, whiskers, eyebrows, and all. I thought my disguise was pretty good, but I hardly expected that it would stand that test."

"Ah, You rogue!" cried Jones, highly delighted. "You would have made an actor, and a rare one. You had the proper workhouse cough, and those weak legs of yours are worth ten pound a week. I thought I knew the glint of your eye, though. You didn't get away from us so easily, You see."

"I have been working in that get-up all day," said he, lighting his cigar. "You see, a good many of the criminal classes begin to know me,--especially since our friend here took to publishing some of my cases: so I can only go on the war-path under some simple disguise like this. You got my wire?"

"Yes; that was what brought me here."

"How has your case prospered?"

"It has all come to nothing. I have had to release two of my prisoners, and there is no evidence against the other two."

"Never mind. We shall give you two others in the place of them. But you must put yourself under my orders. You are welcome to all the official credit, but you must act on the line that I point out. Is that agreed?"

"Entirely, if you will help me to the men."

"Then I shall want a fast police-boat-- a steam launch--to be at the Westminster Stairs at seven o'clock."

"That is easily managed. There is always one about there; but I can step across the road and telephone to make sure."

"Then I shall want two stanch men, in case of resistance."

"There will be two or three in the boat. What else?"

"When we secure the men we shall get the treasure. I think that it would be a pleasure to my friend here to take the box round to the young lady to whom half of it rightfully belongs. Let her be the first to open it.--Eh, Watson?"

"It would be a great pleasure to me."

"Rather an irregular proceeding," said Jones, shaking his head. "However, the whole thing is irregular, and I suppose we must wink at it. The treasure must afterwards be handed over to the authorities until after the official investigation."

"Certainly. That is easily managed. One other point. I should much like to have a few details about this matter from the lips of Jonathan Small himself. You know I like to work the detail of my cases out. There is no objection to my having an unofficial interview with him, either here in my rooms or elsewhere, as long as he is efficiently guarded?"

"Well, you are master of the situation. I have had no proof yet of the existence of this Jonathan Small. However, if you can catch him I don't see how I can refuse you an interview with him."

"That is understood, then?"

"Perfectly. Is there anything else?"

"Only that I insist upon your dining with us. It will be ready in half an hour. I have oysters and a brace of grouse, with something a little choice in white wines.--Watson, you have never yet recognized my merits as a housekeeper."

Chapter X The End of the Islander

Our meal was a merry one. Holmes could talk exceedingly well when he chose, and that night he did choose. He appeared to be in a state of nervous exaltation. I have never known him so brilliant. He spoke on a quick succession of subjects,--on miracle-plays, on medieval pottery, on Stradivarius violins, on the Buddhism of Ceylon, and on the war-ships of the future,-- handling each as though he had made a special study of it. His bright humor marked the reaction from his black depression of the preceding days. Athelney Jones proved to be a sociable soul in his hours of relaxation, and faced his dinner with the air of a bon vivant. For myself, I felt elated at the thought that we were nearing the end of our task, and I caught something of Holmes's gaiety. None of us alluded during dinner to the cause which had brought us together.

When the cloth was cleared, Holmes glanced at his watch, and filled up three glasses with port. "One bumper," said he, "to the success of our little expedition. And now it is high time we were off. Have you a pistol, Watson?"

"I have my old service-revolver in my desk."
"You had best take it, then. It is well to be prepared. I see that the cab is at the door. I ordered it for half-past six."

It was a little past seven before we reached the Westminster wharf, and found our launch awaiting us. Holmes eyed it critically.

"Is there anything to mark it as a police-boat?"
"Yes,—that green lamp at the side."
"Then take it off."

The small change was made, we stepped on board, and the ropes were cast off. Jones, Holmes, and I sat in the stern. There was one man at the rudder, one to tend the engines, and two burly police-inspectors forward.

"Where to?" asked Jones.
"To the Tower. Tell them to stop opposite Jacobson's Yard."

Our craft was evidently a very fast one. We shot past the long lines of loaded barges as though they were stationary. Holmes smiled with satisfaction as we overhauled a river steamer and left her behind us.

"We ought to be able to catch anything on the river," he said.
"Well, hardly that. But there are not many launches to beat us."

"We shall have to catch the Aurora, and she has a name for being a clipper. I will tell you how the land lies, Watson. You recollect how annoyed I was at being balked by so small a thing?"

"Yes."

"Well, I gave my mind a thorough rest by plunging into a chemical analysis. One of our greatest statesmen has said that a change of work is the best rest. So it is. When I had succeeded in dissolving the hydrocarbon which I was at work at, I came back to our problem of the Sholtos, and thought the whole matter out again. My boys had been up the river and down the river without result. The launch was not at any landing-stage or wharf, nor had it returned. Yet it could hardly have been scuttled to hide their traces,—though that always remained as a possible hypothesis if all else failed. I knew this man Small had a certain degree of low cunning, but I did not think him capable of anything in the nature of delicate finesses. That is usually a product of higher education. I then reflected that since he had certainly been in London some time—as we had evidence that he maintained a continual watch over Pondicherry Lodge—he could hardly leave at a moment's notice, but would need some little time, if it were only a day, to arrange his affairs. That was the balance of probability, at any rate."

"It seems to me to be a little weak," said I. "It is more probable that he had arranged his affairs before ever he set out upon his expedition."

"No, I hardly think so. This lair of his would be too valuable a retreat in case of need for him to give it up until he was sure that he could do without it. But a second consideration struck me. Jonathan Small must have felt that the peculiar appearance of his companion, however much he may have top-coated him, would give rise to gossip, and possibly be associated with this Norwood tragedy. He was quite sharp enough to see that. They had started from their head-quarters under cover of darkness, and he would wish to get back before it was broad light. Now, it was past three o'clock, according to Mrs. Smith, when they got the boat. It would be quite bright, and people would be about in an hour or so. Therefore, I argued, they did not go very far. They paid Smith well to hold his tongue, reserved his launch for the final escape, and hurried to their lodgings with the treasure-box. In a couple of nights, when they had time to see what view the papers took, and whether there was any suspicion, they would make their way under cover of darkness to some ship at Gravesend or in the Downs, where no doubt they had already arranged for passages to America or the Colonies."

"But the launch? They could not have taken that to their lodgings."

"Quite so. I argued that the launch must be no great way off, in spite of its invisibility. I then put myself in the place of Small, and looked at it as if it were his capacity would. He would probably consider that to send back the launch or to keep it at a wharf would make pursuit easy if the police did happen to get on his track. How, then, could he conceal the launch and yet have her at hand when wanted? I wondered what I should do myself if I were in his shoes. I could only think of one way of doing it. I might land the launch over to some boat-builder or repairer, with directions to make a trifling change in her. She would then be removed to his shed or yard, and so be effectually concealed, while at the same time I could have her at a few hours' notice."

"That seems simple enough."

"It is just these very simple things which are extremely liable to be overlooked. However, I determined to act on the idea. I started at once in this harmless seaman's rig and inquired at all the yards down the river. I drew blank at fifteen, but at the sixteenth—Jacobson's—I learned that the Aurora had been handed over to them two days ago by a wooden-legged man, with some trivial directions as to her rudder. 'There ain't naught amiss with her rudder,' said the foreman. 'There she lies, with the red streaks.' At that moment who should come down but Mordecai Smith, the missing owner? He was rather the worse for liquor. I should not, of course, have known him, but he bellowed out his
name and the name of his launch. 'I want her to-night at eight o'clock,' said he,--'eight o'clock sharp, mind, for I have
two gentlemen who won't be kept waiting.' They had evidently paid him well, for he was very flush of money,
chucking shillings about to the men. I followed him some distance, but he subsided into an ale-house: so I went back
to the yard, and, happening to pick up one of my boys on the way, I stationed him as a sentry over the launch. He is
to stand at water's edge and wave his handkerchief to us when they start. We shall be lying off in the stream, and it
will be a strange thing if we do not take men, treasure, and all."

"You have planned it all very neatly, whether they are the right men or not," said Jones; "but if the affair were in
my hands I should have had a body of police in Jacobson's Yard, and arrested them when they came down."

"Which would have been never. This man Small is a pretty shrewd fellow. He would send a scout on ahead, and
if anything made him suspicious lie snug for another week."

"But you might have stuck to Mordecai Smith, and so been led to their hiding-place," said I.

"In that case I should have wasted my day. I think that it is a hundred to one against Smith knowing where they
live. As long as he has liquor and good pay, why should he ask questions? They send him messages what to do. No,
I thought over every possible course, and this is the best."

While this conversation had been proceeding, we had been shooting the long series of bridges which span the
Thames. As we passed the City the last rays of the sun were gilding the cross upon the summit of St. Paul's. It was
twilight before we reached the Tower.

"That is Jacobson's Yard," said Holmes, pointing to a bristle of masts and rigging on the Surrey side. "Cruise
gently up and down here under cover of this string of lighters." He took a pair of night-glasses from his pocket and
gazed some time at the shore. "I see my sentry at his post," he remarked, "but no sign of a handkerchief."

"Suppose we go down-stream a short way and lie in wait for them," said Jones, eagerly. We were all eager by
this time, even the policemen and stokers, who had a very vague idea of what was going forward.

"We have no right to take anything for granted," Holmes answered. "It is certainly ten to one that they go down-
stream, but we cannot be certain. From this point we can see the entrance of the yard, and they can hardly see us. It
will be a clear night and plenty of light. We must stay where we are. See how the folk swarm over yonder in the
gaslight."

"They are coming from work in the yard."

"Dirty-looking rascals, but I suppose every one has some little immortal spark concealed about him. You would
not think it, to look at them. There is no a priori probability about it. A strange enigma is man!"

"Some one calls him a soul concealed in an animal," I suggested.

"Winwood Reade is good upon the subject," said Holmes. "He remarks that, while the individual man is an
insoluble puzzle, in the aggregate he becomes a mathematical certainty. You can, for example, never foretell what
any one man will do, but you can say with precision what an average number will be up to. Individuals vary, but
percentages remain constant. So says the statistician. But do I see a handkerchief? Surely there is a white flutter over
yonder."

"Yes, it is your boy," I cried. "I can see him plainly."

"And there is the Aurora," exclaimed Holmes, "and going like the devil! Full speed ahead, engineer. Make after
that launch with the yellow light. By heaven, I shall never forgive myself if she proves to have the heels of us!"

She had slipped unseen through the yard-entrance and passed behind two or three small craft, so that she had
fairly got her speed up before we saw her. Now she was flying down the stream, near in to the shore, going at a
tremendous rate. Jones looked gravely at her and shook his head.

"She is very fast," he said. "I doubt if we shall catch her."

"We MUST catch her!" cried Holmes, between his teeth. "Heap it on, stokers! Make her do all she can! If we
burn the boat we must have them!"

We were fairly after her now. The furnaces roared, and the powerful engines whizzed and clanked, like a great
metallic heart. Her sharp, steep prow cut through the river-water and sent two rolling waves to right and to left of us.
With every throb of the engines we sprang and quivered like a living thing. One great yellow lantern in our bows
threw a long, flickering funnel of light in front of us. Right ahead a dark blur upon the water showed where the
Aurora lay, and the swirl of white foam behind her spoke of the pace at which she was going. We flashed past
barges, steamers, merchant-vessels, in and out, behind this one and round the other. Voices hailed us out of the
darkness, but still the Aurora thundered on, and still we followed close upon her track.

"Pile it on, men, pile it on!" cried Holmes, looking down into the engine-room, while the fierce glow from below
beat upon his eager, aquiline face. "Get every pound of steam you can."

"I think we gain a little," said Jones, with his eyes on the Aurora.

"I am sure of it," said I. "We shall be up with her in a very few minutes."

At that moment, however, as our evil fate would have it, a tug with three barges in tow blundered in between us.
It was only by putting our helm hard down that we avoided a collision, and before we could round them and recover our way the Aurora had gained a good two hundred yards. She was still, however, well in view, and the murky uncertain twilight was setting into a clear starlit night. Our boilers were strained to their utmost, and the frail shell vibrated and creaked with the fierce energy which was driving us along. We had shot through the Pool, past the West India Docks, down the long Deptford Reach, and up again after rounding the Isle of Dogs. The dull blur in front of us resolved itself now clearly enough into the dainty Aurora. Jones turned our search-light upon her, so that we could plainly see the figures upon her deck. One man sat by the stern, with something black between his knees over which he stooped. Beside him lay a dark mass which looked like a Newfoundland dog. The boy held the tiller, while against the red glare of the furnace I could see old Smith, stripped to the waist, and shovelling coals for dear life. They may have had some doubt at first as to whether we were really pursuing them, but now as we followed every winding and turning which they took there could no longer be any question about it. At Greenwich we were about three hundred paces behind them. At Blackwall we could not have been more than two hundred and fifty. I have coursed many creatures in many countries during my checkered career, but never did sport give me such a wild thrill as this mad, flying man-hunt down the Thames. Steadily we drew in upon them, yard by yard. In the silence of the night we could hear the panting and clanking of their machinery. The man in the stern still crouched upon the deck, and his arms were moving as though he were busy, while every now and then he would look up and measure with a glance the distance which still separated us. Nearer we came and nearer. Jones yelled to them to stop. We were not more than four boat's lengths behind them, both boats flying at a tremendous pace. It was a clear reach of the river, with Barking Level upon one side and the melancholy Plumstead Marshes upon the other. At our hail the man in the stern sprang up from the deck and shook his two clinched fists at us, cursing the while in a high, cracked voice. He was a good-sized, powerful man, and as he stood posing himself with legs astride I could see that from the thigh downwards there was but a wooden stump upon the right side. At the sound of his strident, angry cries there was movement in the huddled bundle upon the deck. It straightened itself into a little black man—the smallest I have ever seen—with a great, misshapen head and a shock of tangled, dishevelled hair. Holmes had already drawn his revolver, and I whipped out mine at the sight of this savage, distorted creature. He was wrapped in some sort of dark ulster or blanket, which left only his face exposed; but that face was enough to give a man a sleepless night. Never have I seen features so deeply marked with all bestiality and cruelty. His small eyes glowed and burned with a sombre light, and his thick lips were writhed back from his teeth, which grinned and chattered at us with a half animal fury.

"Fire if he raises his hand," said Holmes, quietly. We were within a boat's-length by this time, and almost within touch of our quarry. I can see the two of them now as they stood, the white man with his legs far apart, shrieking out curses, and the unhallowed dwarf with his hideous face, and his strong yellow teeth gnashing at us in the light of our lantern.

It was well that we had so clear a view of him. Even as we looked he plucked out from under his covering a short, round piece of wood, like a school-ruler, and clapped it to his lips. Our pistols rang out together. He whirled round, threw up his arms, and with a kind of choking cough fell sideways into the stream. I caught one glimpse of his venomous, menacing eyes amid the white swirl of the waters. At the same moment the wooden-legged man threw himself upon the rudder and put it hard down, so that his boat made straight in for the southern bank, while we shot past her stern, only clearing her by a few feet. We were round after her in an instant, but she was already nearly at the bank. It was a wild and desolate place, where the moon glimmered upon a wide expanse of marsh-land, with pools of stagnant water and beds of decaying vegetation. The launch with a dull thud ran up upon the mud-bank, with her bow in the air and her stern flush with the water. The fugitive sprang out, but his stump instantly sank its whole length into the sodden soil. In vain he struggled and writhed. Not one step could he possibly take either forwards or backwards. He yelled in impotent rage, and kicked frantically into the mud with his other foot, but his struggles only bored his wooden pin the deeper into the sticky bank. When we brought our launch alongside he was so firmly anchored that it was only by throwing the end of a rope over his shoulders that we were able to haul him out, and to drag him, like some evil fish, over our side. The two Smiths, father and son, sat sullenly in their launch, but came aboard meekly enough when commanded. The Aurora herself we hauled off and made fast to our stern. A solid iron chest of Indian workmanship stood upon the deck. This, there could be no question, was the same that had contained the ill-omened treasure of the Sholtos. There was no key, but it was of considerable weight, so we transferred it carefully to our own little cabin. As we steamed slowly up-stream again, we flashed our search-light in every direction, but there was no sign of the Islander. Somewhere in the dark ooze at the bottom of the Thames lie the bones of that strange visitor to our shores.

"See here," said Holmes, pointing to the wooden hatchway. "We were hardly quick enough with our pistols." There, sure enough, just behind where we had been standing, stuck one of those murderous darts which we knew so well. It must have whizzed between us at the instant that we fired. Holmes smiled at it and shrugged his shoulders in
his easy fashion, but I confess that it turned me sick to think of the horrible death which had passed so close to us
that night.

Chapter XI The Great Agra Treasure

Our captive sat in the cabin opposite to the iron box which he had done so much and waited so long to gain. He
was a sunburned, reckless-eyed fellow, with a net-work of lines and wrinkles all over his mahogany features, which
told of a hard, open-air life. There was a singular prominence about his bearded chin which marked a man who was
not to be easily turned from his purpose. His age may have been fifty or thereabouts, for his black, curly hair was
thickly shot with gray. His face in repose was not an unpleasing one, though his heavy brows and aggressive chin
gave him, as I had lately seen, a terrible expression when moved to anger. He sat now with his handcuffed hands
upon his lap, and his head sunk upon his breast, while he looked with his keen, twinkling eyes at the box which had
been the cause of his ill-doings. It seemed to me that there was more sorrow than anger in his rigid and contained
countenance. Once he looked up at me with a gleam of something like humor in his eyes.

"Well, Jonathan Small," said Holmes, lighting a cigar, "I am sorry that it has come to this."

"And so am I, sir," he answered, frankly. "I don't believe that I can swing over the job. I give you my word on
the book that I never raised hand against Mr. Sholto. It was that little hell-hound Tonga who shot one of his cursed
darts into him. I had no part in it, sir. I was as grieved as if it had been my blood-relation. I welted the little devil
with the slack end of the rope for it, but it was done, and I could not undo it again."

"Have a cigar," said Holmes; "and you had best take a pull out of my flask, for you are very wet. How could you
expect so small and weak a man as this black fellow to overpower Mr. Sholto and hold him while you were climbing
the rope?"

"You seem to know as much about it as if you were there, sir. The truth is that I hoped to find the room clear. I
knew the habits of the house pretty well, and it was the time when Mr. Sholto usually went down to his supper. I
shall make no secret of the business. The best defence that I can make is just the simple truth. Now, if it had been the
old major I would have swung for him with a light heart. I would have thought no more of knifing him than of
smoking this cigar. But it's cursed hard that I should be lagged over this young Sholto, with whom I had no quarrel
whatever."

"You are under the charge of Mr. Athelney Jones, of Scotland Yard. He is going to bring you up to my rooms,
and I shall ask you for a true account of the matter. You must make a clean breast of it, for if you do I hope that I
may be of use to you. I think I can prove that the poison acts so quickly that the man was dead before ever you
reached the room."

"That he was, sir. I never got such a turn in my life as when I saw him grinning at me with his head on his
shoulder as I climbed through the window. It fairly shook me, sir. I'd have half killed Tonga for it if he had not
scrambled off. That was how he came to leave his club, and some of his darts too, as he tells me, which I dare say
helped to put you on our track; though how you kept on it is more than I can tell. I don't feel no malice against you
for it. But it does seem a queer thing," he added, with a bitter smile, "that I who have a fair claim to nigh upon half a
million of money should spend the first half of my life building a breakwater in the Andamans, and am like to spend
the other half digging drains at Dartmoor. It was an evil day for me when first I clapped eyes upon the merchant
Achmet and had to do with the Agra treasure, which never brought anything but a curse yet upon the man who
owned it. To him it brought murder, to Major Sholto it brought fear and guilt, to me it has meant slavery for life."

At this moment Athelney Jones thrust his broad face and heavy shoulders into the tiny cabin. "Quite a family
party," he remarked. "I think I shall have a pull at that flask, Holmes. Well, I think we may all congratulate each
other. Pity we didn't take the other alive; but there was no choice. I say, Holmes, you must confess that you cut it
rather fine. It was all we could do to overhaul her."

"All is well that ends well," said Holmes. "But I certainly did not know that the Aurora was such a clipper."

"Smith says she is one of the fastest launches on the river, and that if he had had another man to help him with
the engines we should never have caught her. He swears he knew nothing of this Norwood business."

"Neither he did," cried our prisoner,--"not a word. I chose his launch because I heard that she was a flier. We
told him nothing, but we paid him well, and he was to get something handsome if we reached our vessel, the
Esmeralda, at Gravesend, outward bound for the Brazils."

"Well, if he has done no wrong we shall see that no wrong comes to him. If we are pretty quick in catching our
men, we are not so quick in condemning them." It was amusing to notice how the consequential Jones was already
beginning to give himself airs on the strength of the capture. From the slight smile which played over Sherlock
Holmes's face, I could see that the speech had not been lost upon him.

"We will be at Vauxhall Bridge presently," said Jones, "and shall land you, Dr. Watson, with the treasure-box. I
need hardly tell you that I am taking a very grave responsibility upon myself in doing this. It is most irregular; but of
course an agreement is an agreement. I must, however, as a matter of duty, send an inspector with you, since you
have so valuable a charge. You will drive, no doubt?"

"Yes, I shall drive."

"It is a pity there is no key, that we may make an inventory first. You will have to break it open. Where is the key, my man?"

"At the bottom of the river," said Small, shortly.

"Hum! There was no use your giving this unnecessary trouble. We have had work enough already through you. However, doctor, I need not warn you to be careful. Bring the box back with you to the Baker Street rooms. You will find us there, on our way to the station."

They landed me at Vauxhall, with my heavy iron box, and with a bluff, genial inspector as my companion. A quarter of an hour's drive brought us to Mrs. Cecil Forrester's. The servant seemed surprised at so late a visitor. Mrs. Cecil Forrester was out for the evening, she explained, and likely to be very late. Miss Morstan, however, was in the drawing-room: so to the drawing-room I went, box in hand, leaving the obliging inspector in the cab.

She was seated by the open window, dressed in some sort of white diaphanous material, with a little touch of scarlet at the neck and waist. The soft light of a shaded lamp fell upon her as she leaned back in the basket chair, playing over her sweet, grave face, and tinting with a dull, metallic sparkle the rich coils of her luxuriant hair. One white arm and hand drooped over the side of the chair, and her whole pose and figure spoke of an absorbing melancholy. At the sound of my foot-fall she sprang to her feet, however, and a bright flush of surprise and of pleasure colored her pale cheeks.

"I heard a cab drive up," she said. "I thought that Mrs. Forrester had come back very early, but I never dreamed that it might be you. What news have you brought me?"

"I have brought something better than news," said I, putting down the box upon the table and speaking jovially and boisterously, though my heart was heavy within me. "I have brought you something which is worth all the news in the world. I have brought you a fortune."

She glanced at iron box. "Is that the treasure, then?" she asked, coolly enough.

"Yes, this is the great Agra treasure. Half of it is yours and half is Thaddeus Sholto's. You will have a couple of hundred thousand each. Think of that! An annuity of ten thousand pounds. There will be few richer young ladies in England. Is it not glorious?"

I think that I must have been rather overacting my delight, and that she detected a hollow ring in my congratulations, for I saw her eyebrows rise a little, and she glanced at me curiously.

"If I have it," said she, "I owe it to you."

"No, no," I answered, "not to me, but to my friend Sherlock Holmes. With all the will in the world, I could never have followed up a clue which has taxed even his analytical genius. As it was, we very nearly lost it at the last moment."

"Pray sit down and tell me all about it, Dr. Watson," said she.

I narrated briefly what had occurred since I had seen her last,—Holmes's new method of search, the discovery of the Aurora, the appearance of Athelney Jones, our expedition in the evening, and the wild chase down the Thames. She listened with parted lips and shining eyes to my recital of our adventures. When I spoke of the dart which had so narrowly missed us, she turned so white that I feared that she was about to faint.

"It is nothing," she said, as I hastened to pour her out some water. "I am all right again. It was a shock to me to hear that I had placed my friends in such horrible peril."

"That is all over," I answered. "It was nothing. I will tell you no more gloomy details. Let us turn to something brighter. There is the treasure. What could be brighter than that? I got leave to bring it with me, thinking that it would interest you to be the first to see it."

"It would be of the greatest interest to me," she said. There was no eagerness in her voice, however. It had struck her, doubtless, that it might seem ungracious upon her part to be indifferent to a prize which had cost so much to win.

"What a pretty box!" she said, stooping over it. This is Indian work, I suppose?"

"Yes; it is Benares metal-work."

"And so heavy!" she exclaimed, trying to raise it. "The box alone must be of some value. Where is the key?"

"Small threw it into the Thames," I answered. "I must borrow Mrs. Forrester's poker." There was in the front a thick and broad hasp, wrought in the image of a sitting Buddha. Under this I thrust the end of the poker and twisted it outward as a lever. The hasp sprang open with a loud snap. With trembling fingers I flung back the lid. We both stood gazing in astonishment. The box was empty!

No wonder that it was heavy. The iron-work was two-thirds of an inch thick all round. It was massive, well made, and solid, like a chest constructed to carry things of great price, but not one shred or crumb of metal or jewelry lay within it. It was absolutely and completely empty.
"The treasure is lost," said Miss Morstan, calmly.

As I listened to the words and realized what they meant, a great shadow seemed to pass from my soul. I did not know how this Agra treasure had weighed me down, until now that it was finally removed. It was selfish, no doubt, disloyal, wrong, but I could realize nothing save that the golden barrier was gone from between us. "Thank God!" I ejaculated from my very heart.

She looked at me with a quick, questioning smile. "Why do you say that?" she asked.

"Because you are within my reach again," I said, taking her hand. She did not withdraw it. "Because I love you, Mary, as truly as ever a man loved a woman. Because this treasure, these riches, sealed my lips. Now that they are gone I can tell you how I love you. That is why I said, 'Thank God.'"

"Then I say, 'Thank God,' too," she whispered, as I drew her to my side. Whoever had lost a treasure, I knew that night that I had gained one.

Chapter XII The Strange Story of Jonathan Small

A very patient man was that inspector in the cab, for it was a weary time before I rejoined him. His face clouded over when I showed him the empty box.

"There goes the reward!" said he, gloomily. "Where there is no money there is no pay. This night's work would have been worth a tenner each to Sam Brown and me if the treasure had been there."

"Mr. Thaddeus Sholto is a rich man," I said. "He will see that you are rewarded, treasure or no."

The inspector shook his head despondently, however. "It's a bad job," he repeated; "and so Mr. Athelney Jones will think."

His forecast proved to be correct, for the detective looked blank enough when I got to Baker Street and showed him the empty box. They had only just arrived, Holmes, the prisoner, and he, for they had changed their plans so far as to report themselves at a station upon the way. My companion lounged in his arm-chair with his usual listless expression, while Small sat stolidly opposite to him with his wooden leg cocked over his sound one. As I exhibited the empty box he leaned back in his chair and laughed aloud.

"This is your doing, Small," said Athelney Jones, angrily.

"Yes, I have put it away where you shall never lay hand upon it," he cried, exultantly. "It is my treasure; and if I can't have the loot I'll take darned good care that no one else does. It is my treasure; and if I can't have the loot I'll take darned good care that no one else does. It is my treasure; and if I can't have the loot I'll take darned good care that no one else does. It is my treasure; and if I can't have the loot I'll take darned good care that no one else does. It is my treasure; and if I can't have the loot I'll take darned good care that no one else does.

"Justice!" snarled the ex-convict. "A pretty justice! Whose loot is this, if it is not ours? Where is the justice that I should give it up to those who have never earned it? Look how I have earned it! Twenty long years in that fever-ridden swamp, all day at work under the mangrove-tree, all night chained up in the filthy convict-huts, bitten by mosquitoes, racked with ague, bullied by every cursed black-faced policeman who loved to take it out of a white man. That was how I earned the Agra treasure; and you talk to me of justice because I cannot bear to feel that I have paid this price only that another may enjoy it! I would rather swing a score of times, or have one of Tonga's darts in my hide, than live in a convict's cell and feel that another man is at his ease in a palace with the money that should be mine." Small had dropped his mask of stoicism, and all this came out in a wild whirl of words, while his eyes blazed, and the handcuffs clanked together with the impassioned movement of his hands. I could understand, as I saw the fury and the passion of the man, that it was no groundless or unnatural terror which had possessed Major Sholto when he first learned that the injured convict was upon his track.

"You forget that we know nothing of all this," said Holmes quietly. "We have not heard your story, and we cannot tell how far justice may originally have been on your side."

"Well, sir, you have been very fair-spoken to me, though I can see that I have you to thank that I have these
we beat them back for a time, but our powder gave out, and we had to fall back upon the city. Nothing but the worst
had been formed, and this I joined, wooden leg and all. We went out to meet the rebels at Shahgunge early in July, and
Fusiliers, some Sikhs, two troops of horse, and a battery of artillery. A volunteer corps of clerks and merchants had
been trained, handling our own weapons, and blowing our own bugle-calls. At Agra there were the 3d Bengal
Musketeers, who were our own picked troops, whom we had taught to fight against foot, horse, and gunners, were our own picked troops, whom we had taught
in the service, and there were two hundred thousand black devils let loose, and the country was a perfect hell. Of course you know all about it, gentlemen,—a deal more
than I do, very like, since reading is not in my line. I only know what I saw with my own eyes. Our plantation was at
a place called Muttra, near the border of the Northwest Provinces. Night after night the whole sky was alight with
the burning bungalows, and day after day we had small companies of Europeans passing through our estate with
their wives and children, on their way to Agra, where were the nearest troops. Mr. Abelwhite was an obstinate man.
He had it in his head that the affair had been exaggerated, and that it would blow over as suddenly as it had sprung
up. There he sat on his veranda, drinking whiskey-peggs and smoking cheroots, while the country was in a blaze
about him. Of course we stood by him, I and Dawson, who, with his wife, used to do the book-work and the
managing. Well, one fine day the crash came. I had been away on a distant plantation, and was riding slowly home
in the evening, when my eye fell upon something all huddled together at the bottom of a steep nullah. I rode down to
see what it was, and the cold struck through my heart when I found it was Dawson's wife, all cut into ribbons, and
half eaten by jackals and native dogs. A little further up the road Dawson himself was lying on his face, quite dead,
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half eaten by jackals and native dogs. A little further up the road Dawson himself was lying on his face, quite dead,
news came to us from every side,—which is not to be wondered at, for if you look at the map you will see that we were right in the heart of it. Lucknow is rather better than a hundred miles to the east, and Cawnpore about as far to the south. From every point on the compass there was nothing but torture and murder and outrage.

"The city of Agra is a great place, swarming with fanatics and fierce devil-worshippers of all sorts. Our handful of men were lost among the narrow, winding streets. Our leader moved across the river, therefore, and took up his position in the old fort at Agra. I don't know if any of you gentlemen have ever read or heard anything of that old fort. It is a very queer place,—the queerest that ever I was in, and I have been in some rum corners, too. First of all, it is enormous in size. I should think that the enclosure must be acres and acres. There is a modern part, which took all our garrison, women, children, stores, and everything else, with plenty of room over. But the modern part is nothing like the size of the old quarter, where nobody goes, and which is given over to the scorpions and the centipedes. It is all full of great deserted halls, and winding passages, and long corridors twisting in and out, so that it is easy enough for folk to get lost in it. For this reason it was seldom that any one went into it, though now and again a party with torches might go exploring.

"The river washes along the front of the old fort, and so protects it, but on the sides and behind there are many doors, and these had to be guarded, of course, in the old quarter as well as in that which was actually held by our troops. We were short-handed, with hardly men enough to man the angles of the building and to serve the guns. It was impossible for us, therefore, to station a strong guard at every one of the innumerable gates. What we did was to organize a central guard-house in the middle of the fort, and to leave each gate under the charge of one white man and two or three natives. I was selected to take charge during certain hours of the night of a small isolated door upon the southwest side of the building. Two Sikh troopers were placed under my command, and I was instructed if anything went wrong to fire my musket, when I might rely upon help coming at once from the central guard. As the guard was a good two hundred paces away, however, and as the space between was cut up into a labyrinth of passages and corridors, I had great doubts as to whether they could arrive in time to be of any use in case of an actual attack.

"Well, I was pretty proud at having this small command given me, since I was a raw recruit, and a game-legged one at that. For two nights I kept the watch with my Punjaubees. They were tall, fierce-looking chaps, Mahomet Singh and Abdullah Khan by name, both old fighting-men who had borne arms against us at Chilian- wallah. They could talk English pretty well, but I could get little out of them. They preferred to stand together and jabber all night in their queer Sikh lingo. For myself, I used to stand outside the gate-way, looking down on the broad, winding river and on the twinkling lights of the great city. The beating of drums, the rattle of tomtoms, and the yells and howls of the rebels, drunk with opium and with bang, were enough to remind us all night of our dangerous neighbors across the stream. Every two hours the officer of the night used to come round to all the posts, to make sure that all was well.

"The third night of my watch was dark and dirty, with a small, driving rain. It was dreary work standing in the gate-way hour after hour in such weather. I tried again and again to make my Sikhs talk, but without much success. At two in the morning the rounds passed, and broke for a moment the weariness of the night. Finding that my companions would not be led into conversation, I took out my pipe, and laid down my musket to strike the match. In an instant the two Sikhs were upon me. One of them snatched my firelock up and levelled it at my head, while the other held a great knife to my throat and swore between his teeth that he would plunge it into me if I moved a step.

"My first thought was that these fellows were in league with the rebels, and that this was the beginning of an assault. If our door were in the hands of the Sepoys the place must fall, and the women and children be treated as they were in Cawnpore. Maybe you gentlemen think that I am just making out a case for myself, but I give you my word that when I thought of that, though I felt the point of the knife at my throat, I opened my mouth with the intention of giving a scream, if it was my last one, which might alarm the main guard. The man who held me seemed to know my thoughts; for, even as I braced myself to it, he whispered, 'Don't make a noise. The fort is safe enough. I raise my voice I was a dead man. I could read it in the fellow's brown eyes. I waited, therefore, in silence, to see what it was that they wanted from me.

"'Listen to me, Sahib,' said the taller and fiercer of the pair, the one whom they called Abdullah Khan. 'You must either be with us now or you must be silenced forever. The thing is too great a one for us to hesitate. Either you are heart and soul with us on your oath on the cross of the Christians, or your body this night shall be thrown into the ditch and we shall pass over to our brothers in the rebel army. There is no middle way. Which is it to be, death or life? We can only give you three minutes to decide, for the time is passing, and all must be done before the rounds come again.'

"'How can I decide?' said I. 'You have not told me what you want of me. But I tell you now that if it is anything against the safety of the fort I will have no truck with it, so you can drive home your knife and welcome.'"
"'It is nothing against the fort,' said he. 'We only ask you to do that which your countrymen come to this land for. We ask you to be rich. If you will be one of us this night, we will swear to you upon the naked knife, and by the threefold oath which no Sikh was ever known to break, that you shall have your fair share of the loot. A quarter of the treasure shall be yours. We can say no fairer.'

'But what is the treasure, then?' I asked. 'I am as ready to be rich as you can be, if you will but show me how it can be done.'

'You will swear, then,' said he, 'by the bones of your father, by the honor of your mother, by the cross of your faith, to raise no hand and speak no word against us, either now or afterwards?'

'I will swear it,' I answered, 'provided that the fort is not endangered.'

'Then my comrade and I will swear that you shall have a quarter of the treasure which shall be equally divided among the four of us.'

'There are but three,' said I.

'No; Dost Akbar must have his share. We can tell the tale to you while we await them. Do you stand at the gate, Mahomet Singh, and give notice of their coming. The thing stands thus, Sahib, and I tell it to you because I know that an oath is binding upon a Feringhee, and that we may trust you. Had you been a lying Hindoo, though you had sworn by all the gods in their false temples, your blood would have been upon the knife, and your body in the water. But the Sikh knows the Englishman, and the Englishman knows the Sikh. Hearken, then, to what I have to say.

'There is a rajah in the northern provinces who has much wealth, though his lands are small. Much has come to him from his father, and more still he has set by himself, for he is of a low nature and hoards his gold rather than spend it. When the troubles broke out he would be friends both with the lion and the tiger,—with the Sepoy and with the Company's Raj. Soon, however, it seemed to him that the white men's day was come, for through all the land he could hear of nothing but of their death and their overthrow. Yet, being a careful man, he made such plans that, come what might, half at least of his treasure should be left to him. That which was in gold and silver he kept by him in the vaults of his palace, but the most precious stones and the choicest pearls that he had he put in an iron box, and sent it by a trusty servant who, under the guise of a merchant, should take it to the fort at Agra, there to lie until the land is at peace. Thus, if the rebels won he would have his money, but if the Company conquered his jewels would be saved to him. Having thus divided his hoard, he threw himself into the cause of the Sepoys, since they were strong upon his borders. By doing this, mark you, Sahib, his property becomes the due of those who have been true to their salt.

'This pretended merchant, who travels under the name of Achmet, is now in the city of Agra, and desires to gain his way into the fort. He has with him as travelling-companion my foster-brother Dost Akbar, who knows his secret. Dost Akbar has promised this night to lead him to a side-postern of the fort, and has chosen this one for his purpose. Here he will come presently, and here he will find Mahomet Singh and myself awaiting him. The place is lonely, and none shall know of his coming. The world shall know of the merchant Achmet no more, but the great treasure of the rajah shall be divided among us. What say you to it, Sahib?'

'In Worcestershire the life of a man seems a great and a sacred thing; but it is very different when there is fire and blood all round you and you have been used to meeting death at every turn. Whether Achmet the merchant lived or died was a thing as light as air to me, but at the talk about the treasure my heart turned to it, and I thought of what I might do in the old country with it, and how my folk would stare when they saw their ne'er-do-well coming back with his pockets full of gold moidores. I had, therefore, already made up my mind. Abdullah Khan, however, thinking that I hesitated, pressed the matter more closely.

'Consider, Sahib,' said he, 'that if this man is taken by the commandant he will be hung or shot, and his jewels taken by the government, so that no man will be a rupee the better for them. Now, since we do the taking of him, why should we not do the rest as well? The jewels will be as well with us as in the Company's coffers. There will be enough to make every one of us rich men and great chiefs. No one can know about the matter, for here we are cut off from all men. What could be better for the purpose? Say again, then, Sahib, whether you are with us, or if we must look upon you as an enemy.'

'I am with you heart and soul,' said I.

'It is well,' he answered, handing me back my firelock. 'You see that we trust you, for your word, like ours, is not to be broken. We have now only to wait for my brother and the merchant.'

'Does your brother know, then, of what you will do?' I asked.

'The plan is his. He has devised it. We will go to the gate and share the watch with Mahomet Singh.'

'The rain was still falling steadily, for it was just the beginning of the wet season. Brown, heavy clouds were drifting across the sky, and it was hard to see more than a stone-cast. A deep moat lay in front of our door, but the water was in places nearly dried up, and it could easily be crossed. It was strange to me to be standing there with those two wild Punjaubees waiting for the man who was coming to his death.
“Suddenly my eye caught the glint of a shaded lantern at the other side of the moat. It vanished among the mound-heaps, and then appeared again coming slowly in our direction.

‘Here they are!’ I exclaimed.

‘You will challenge him, Sahib, as usual,’ whispered Abdullah. ‘Give him no cause for fear. Send us in with him, and we shall do the rest while you stay here on guard. Have the lantern ready to uncover, that we may be sure that it is indeed the man.’

‘The light had flickered onwards, now stopping and now advancing, until I could see two dark figures upon the other side of the moat. I let them scramble down the sloping bank, splash through the mire, and climb half-way up to the gate, before I challenged them.

‘Who goes there?’ said I, in a subdued voice.

‘Friends,’ came the answer. I uncovered my lantern and threw a flood of light upon them. The first was an enormous Sikh, with a black beard which swept nearly down to his cummerbund. Outside of a show I have never seen so tall a man. The other was a little, fat, round fellow, with a great yellow turban, and a bundle in his hand, done up in a shawl. He seemed to be all in a quiver with fear, for his hands twitched as if he had the ague, and his head kept turning to left and right with two bright little twinkling eyes, like a mouse when he ventures out from his hole. It gave me the chills to think of killing him, but I thought of the treasure, and my heart set as hard as a flint within me. When he saw my white face he gave a little chirrup of joy and came running up towards me.

‘Your protection, Sahib,’ he panted,—‘your protection for the unhappy merchant Achmet. I have travelled across Rajpootana that I might seek the shelter of the fort at Agra. I have been robbed and beaten and abused because I have been the friend of the Company. It is a blessed night this when I am once more in safety,—I and my poor possessions.’

‘What have you in the bundle?’ I asked.

‘An iron box,’ he answered, ‘which contains one or two little family matters which are of no value to others, but which I should be sorry to lose. Yet I am not a beggar; and I shall reward you, young Sahib, and your governor also, if he will give me the shelter I ask.’

‘I could not trust myself to speak longer with the man. The more I looked at his fat, frightened face, the harder did it seem that we should slay him in cold blood. It was best to get it over.

‘Take him to the main guard,’ said I. The two Sikhs closed in upon him on each side, and the giant walked behind, while they marched in through the dark gate-way. Never was a man so compassed round with death. I remained at the gate-way with the lantern.

‘I could hear the measured tramp of their footsteps sounding through the lonely corridors. Suddenly it ceased, and I heard voices, and a scuffle, with the sound of blows. A moment later there came, to my horror, a rush of footsteps coming in my direction, with the loud breathing of a running man. I turned my lantern down the long, straight passage, and there was the fat man, running like the wind, with a smear of blood across his face, and close at his heels, bounding like a tiger, the great black-bearded Sikh, with a knife flashing in his hand. I have never seen a man run so fast as that little merchant. He was gaining on the Sikh, and I could see that if he once passed me and got to the open air he would save himself yet. My heart softened to him, but again the thought of his treasure turned me hard and bitter. I cast my firelock between his legs as he raced past, and he rolled twice over like a shot rabbit. Ere he could stagger to his feet the Sikh was upon him, and buried his knife twice in his side. The man never uttered moan nor moved muscle, but lay were he had fallen. I think myself that he may have broken his neck with the fall. You see, gentlemen, that I am keeping my promise. I am telling you every work of the business just exactly as it happened, whether it is in my favor or not.’

He stopped, and held out his manacled hands for the whiskey-and-water which Holmes had brewed for him. For myself, I confess that I had now conceived the utmost horror of the man, not only for this cold-blooded business in which he had been concerned, but even more for the somewhat flippan and careless way in which he narrated it. Whatever punishment was in store for him, I felt that he might expect no sympathy from me. Sherlock Holmes and Jones sat with their hands upon their knees, deeply interested in the story, but with the same disgust written upon their faces. He may have observed it, for there was a touch of defiance in his voice and manner as he proceeded.

“It was all very bad, no doubt,” said he. “I should like to know how many fellows in my shoes would have refused a share of this loot when they knew that they would have their throats cut for their pains. Besides, it was my life or his when once he was in the fort. If he had got out, the whole business would come to light, and I should have been court-martialled and shot as likely as not; for people were not very lenient at a time like that.”

“Go on with your story,” said Holmes, shortly.

“Well, we carried him in, Abdullah, Akbar, and I. A fine weight he was, too, for all that he was so short. Mahomet Singh was left to guard the door. We took him to a place which the Sikhs had already prepared. It was some distance off, where a winding passage leads to a great empty hall, the brick walls of which were all crumbling
to pieces. The earth floor had sunk in at one place, making a natural grave, so we left Achmet the merchant there, having first covered him over with loose bricks. This done, we all went back to the treasure.

"It lay where he had dropped it when he was first attacked. The box was the same which now lies open upon your table. A key was hung by a silken cord to that carved handle upon the top. We opened it, and the light of the lantern gleamed upon a collection of gems such as I have read of and thought about when I was a little lad at Pershore. It was blinding to look upon them. When we had feasted our eyes we took them all out and made a list of them. There were one hundred and forty-three diamonds of the first water, including one which has been called, I believe, 'the Great Mogul' and is said to be the second largest stone in existence. Then there were ninety-seven very fine emeralds, and one hundred and seventy rubies, some of which, however, were small. There were forty carbuncles, two hundred and ten sapphires, sixty-one agates, and a great quantity of beryls, onyxes, cats'-eyes, turquoises, and other stones, the very names of which I did not know at the time, though I have become more familiar with them since. Besides this, there were nearly three hundred very fine pearls, twelve of which were set in a gold coronet. By the way, these last had been taken out of the chest and were not there when I recovered it.

"After we had counted our treasures we put them back into the chest and carried them to the gate-way to show them to Mahomet Singh. Then we solemnly renewed our oath to stand by each other and be true to our secret. We agreed to conceal our loot in a safe place until the country should be at peace again, and then to divide it equally among ourselves. There was no use dividing it at present, for if gems of such value were found upon us it would cause suspicion, and there was no privacy in the fort nor any place where we could keep them. We carried the box, therefore, into the same hall where we had buried the body, and there, under certain bricks in the best-preserved wall, we made a hollow and put our treasure. We made careful note of the place, and next day I drew four plans, one for each of us, and put the sign of the four of us at the bottom, for we had sworn that we should each always act for all, so that none might take advantage. That is an oath that I can put my hand to my heart and swear that I have never broken.

"Well, there's no use my telling you gentlemen what came of the Indian mutiny. After Wilson took Delhi and Sir Colin relieved Lucknow the back of the business was broken. Fresh troops came pouring in, and Nana Sahib made himself scarce over the frontier. A flying column under Colonel Greathed came round to Agra and cleared the Pandies away from it. Peace seemed to be settling upon the country, and we four were beginning to hope that the time was at hand when we might safely go off with our shares of the plunder. In a moment, however, our hopes were shattered by our being arrested as the murderers of Achmet.

"It came about in this way. When the rajah put his jewels into the hands of Achmet he did it because he knew that he was a trusty man. They are suspicious folk in the East, however: so what does this rajah do but take a second even more trusty servant and set him to play the spy upon the first? This second man was ordered never to let Achmet out of his sight, and he followed him like his shadow. He went after him that night and saw him pass through the doorway. Of course he thought he had taken refuge in the fort, and applied for admission there himself next day, but could find no trace of Achmet. This seemed to him so strange that he spoke about it to a sergeant of guides, who brought it to the ears of the commandant. A thorough search was quickly made, and the body was discovered. Thus at the very moment that we thought that all was safe we were all four seized and brought to trial on a charge of murder,—three of us because we had held the gate that night, and the fourth because he was known to have been in the company of the murdered man. Not a word about the jewels came out at the trial, for the rajah had been deposed and driven out of India: so no one had any particular interest in them. The murder, however, was clearly made out, and it was certain that we must all have been concerned in it. The three Sikhs got penal servitude for life, and I was condemned to death, though my sentence was afterwards commuted into the same as the others.

"It was rather a queer position that we found ourselves in then. There we were all four tied by the leg and with precious little chance of ever getting out again, while we each held a secret which might have put each of us in a palace if we could only have made use of it. It was enough to make a man eat his heart out to have to stand the kick and the cuff of every petty jack-in- office, to have rice to eat and water to drink, when that gorgeous fortune was ready for him outside, just waiting to be picked up. It might have driven me mad; but I was always a pretty stubborn one, so I just held on and bided my time.

"At last it seemed to me to have come. I was changed from Agra to Madras, and from there to Blair Island in the Andamans. There are very few white convicts at this settlement, and, as I had behaved well from the first, I soon found myself a sort of privileged person. I was given a hut in Hope Town, which is a small place on the slopes of Mount Harriet, and I was left pretty much to myself. It is a dreary, fever-stricken place, and all beyond our little clearings was infested with wild cannibal natives, who were ready enough to blow a poisoned dart at us if they saw a chance. There was digging, and ditching, and yam- planting, and a dozen other things to be done, so we were busy enough all day; though in the evening we had a little time to ourselves. Among other things, I learned to dispense drugs for the surgeon, and picked up a smattering of his knowledge. All the time I was on the lookout for a chance..."
of escape; but it is hundreds of miles from any other land, and there is little or no wind in those seas: so it was a terribly difficult job to get away.

"The surgeon, Dr. Somerton, was a fast, sporting young chap, and the other young officers would meet in his rooms of an evening and play cards. The surgery, where I used to make up my drugs, was next to his sitting-room, with a small window between us. Often, if I felt lonesome, I used to turn out the lamp in the surgery, and then, standing there, I could hear their talk and watch their play. I am fond of a hand at cards myself, and it was almost as good as having one to watch the others. There was Major Sholto, Captain Morstan, and Lieutenant Bromley Brown, who were in command of the native troops, and there was the surgeon himself, and two or three prison-officials, crafty old hands who played a nice sly safe game. A very snug little party they used to make.

"Well, there was one thing which very soon struck me, and that was that the soldiers used always to lose and the civilians to win. Mind, I don't say that there was anything unfair, but so it was. These prison-chaps had done little else than play cards ever since they had been at the Andamans, and they knew each other's game to a point, while the others just played to pass the time and threw their cards down anyhow. Night after night the soldiers got up poorer men, and the poorer they got the more keen they were to play. Major Sholto was the hardest hit. He used to pay in notes and gold at first, but soon it came to notes of hand and for big sums. He sometimes would win for a few deals, just to give him heart, and then the luck would set in against him worse than ever. All day he would wander about as black as thunder, and he took to drinking a deal more than was good for him.

"One night he lost even more heavily than usual. I was sitting in my hut when he and Captain Morstan came stumbling along on the way to their quarters. They were bosom friends, those two, and never far apart. The major was raving about his losses.

"'It's all up, Morstan,' he was saying, as they passed my hut. 'I shall have to send in my papers. I am a ruined man.'

"'Nonsense, old chap!' said the other, slapping him upon the shoulder. 'I've had a nasty facer myself, but--' That was all I could hear, but it was enough to set me thinking.

"A couple of days later Major Sholto was strolling on the beach: so I took the chance of speaking to him.

"'I wish to have your advice, major,' said I.

"'Well, Small, what is it?' he asked, taking his cheroot from his lips.

"'I wanted to ask you, sir,' said I, 'who is the proper person to whom hidden treasure should be handed over. I know where half a million worth lies, and, as I cannot use it myself, I thought perhaps the best thing that I could do would be to hand it over to the proper authorities, and then perhaps they would get my sentence shortened for me.'

"'Half a million, Small?' he gasped, looking hard at me to see if I was in earnest.

"'Quite that, sir,--in jewels and pearls. It lies there ready for any one. And the queer thing about it is that the real owner is outlawed and cannot hold property, so that it belongs to the first comer.'

"'To government, Small,' he stammered,--'to government.' But he said it in a halting fashion, and I knew in my heart that I had got him.

"'You think, then, sir, that I should give the information to the Governor-General?' said I, quietly.

"'Well, well, you must not do anything rash, or that you might repent. Let me hear all about it, Small. Give me the facts.'

"I told him the whole story, with small changes so that he could not identify the places. When I had finished he stood stock still and full of thought. I could see by the twitch of his lip that there was a struggle going on within him.

"'This is a very important matter, Small,' he said, at last. 'You must not say a word to any one about it, and I shall see you again soon.'

"Two nights later he and his friend Captain Morstan came to my hut in the dead of the night with a lantern.

"'I want you just to let Captain Morstan hear that story from your own lips, Small,' said he.

"'I repeated it as I had told it before.

"'It rings true, eh?' said he. 'It's good enough to act upon?'

"Captain Morstan nodded.

"'Look here, Small,' said the major. 'We have been talking it over, my friend here and I, and we have come to the conclusion that this secret of yours is hardly a government matter, after all, but is a private concern of your own, which of course you have the power of disposing of as you think best. Now, the question is, what price would you ask for it? We might be inclined to take it up, and at least look into it, if we could agree as to terms.' He tried to speak in a cool, careless way, but his eyes were shining with excitement and greed.

"'Why, as to that, gentlemen,' I answered, trying also to be cool, but feeling as excited as he did, 'there is only one bargain which a man in my position can make. I shall want yo to help me to my freedom, and to help my three companions to theirs. We shall then take you into partnership, and give you a fifth share to divide between you.'

"'Hum!' said he. 'A fifth share! That is not very tempting.'
"It would come to fifty thousand apiece," said I.
"But how can we gain your freedom? You know very well that you ask an impossibility."
"Nothing of the sort," I answered. 'I have thought it all out to the last detail. The only bar to our escape is that we can get no boat fit for the voyage, and no provisions to last us for so long a time. There are plenty of little yachts and yawls at Calcutta or Madras which would serve our turn well. Do you bring one over. We shall engage to get aboard her by night, and if you will drop us on any part of the Indian coast you will have done your part of the bargain.'
"If there were only one," he said.
"None or all," I answered. 'We have sworn it. The four of us must always act together.'
"You see, Morstan," said he, 'Small is a man of his word. He does not flinch from his friend. I think we may very well trust him.'
"It's a dirty business, the other answered. 'Yet, as you say, the money would save our commissions handsomely.'
"Well, Small," said the major, 'we must, I suppose, try and meet you. We must first, of course, test the truth of your story. Tell me where the box is hid, and I shall get leave of absence and go back to India in the monthly relief-boat to inquire into the affair.'
"Not so fast," said I, growing colder as he got hot. 'I must have the consent of my three comrades. I tell you that it is four or none with us.'
"Nonsense! he broke in. 'What have three black fellows to do with our agreement?"
"Black or blue," said I, 'they are in with me, and we all go together.'
"Well, the matter ended by a second meeting, at which Mahomet Singh, Abdullah Khan, and Dost Akbar were all present. We talked the matter over again, and at last we came to an arrangement. We were to provide both the officers with charts of the part of the Agra fort and mark the place in the wall where the treasure was hid. Major Sholto was to go to India to test our story. If he found the box he was to leave it there, to send out a small yacht provisioned for a voyage, which was to lie off Rutland Island, and to which we were to make our way, and finally to return to his duties. Captain Morstan was then to apply for leave of absence, to meet us at Agra, and there we were to have a final division of the treasure, he taking the major's share as well as his own. All this we sealed by the most solemn oaths that the mind could think or the lips utter. I sat up all night with paper and ink, and by the morning I had the two charts all ready, signed with the sign of four, --that is, of Abdullah, Akbar, Mahomet, and myself.
"Well, gentlemen, I weary you with my long story, and I know that my friend Mr. Jones is impatient to get me safely stowed in chokey. I'll make it as short as I can. The villain Sholto went off to India, but he never came back again. Captain Morstan showed me his name among a list of passengers in one of the mail-boats very shortly afterwards. His uncle had died, leaving him a fortune, and he had left the army, yet he could stoop to treat five men as he had treated us. Morstan went over to Agra shortly afterwards, and found, as we expected, that the treasure was indeed gone. The scoundrel had stolen it all, without carrying out one of the conditions on which we had sold him the secret. From that day I lived only for vengeance. I thought of it by day and I nursed it by night. It became an overpowering, absorbing passion with me. I cared nothing for the law, --nothing for the gallows. To escape, to track down Sholto, to have my hand upon his throat, --that was my one thought. Even the Agra treasure had come to be a smaller thing in my mind than the slaying of Sholto.
"Well, I have set my mind on many things in this life, and never one which I did not carry out. But it was weary years before my time came. I have told you that I had picked up something of medicine. One day when Dr. Somerton was down with a fever a little Andaman Islander was picked up by a convict-gang in the woods. He was sick to death, and had gone to a lonely place to die. I took him in hand, though he was as venomous as a young snake, and after a couple of months I got him all right and able to walk. He took a kind of fancy to me then, and would hardly go back to his woods, but was always hanging about my hut. I learned a little of his lingo from him, and this made him all the fonder of me.
"Tonga--for that was his name--was a fine boatman, and owned a big, roomy canoe of his own. When I found that he was devoted to me and would do anything to serve me, I saw my chance of escape. I talked it over with him. He was to bring his boat round on a certain night to an old wharf which was never guarded, and there he was to pick me up. I gave him directions to have several gourds of water and a lot of yams, cocoa-nuts, and sweet potatoes.
"He was stanch and true, was little Tonga. No man ever had a more faithful mate. At the night named he had his boat at the wharf. As it chanced, however, there was one of the convict-guard down there, --a vile Pathan who had never missed a chance of insulting and injuring me. I had always vowed vengeance, and now I had my chance. It was as if fate had placed him in my way that I might pay my debt before I left the island. He stood on the bank with his back to me, and his carbine on his shoulder. I looked about for a stone to beat out his brains with, but none could I see. Then a queer thought came into my head and showed me where I could lay my hand on a weapon. I sat down in the darkness and unstrapped my wooden leg. With three long hops I was on him. He put his carbine to his shoulder, but I struck him full, and knocked the whole front of his skull in. You can see the split in the wood now.
where I hit him. We both went down together, for I could not keep my balance, but when I got up I found him still lying quiet enough. I made for the boat, and in an hour we were well out at sea. Tonga had brought all his earthly possessions with him, his arms and his gods. Among other things, he had a long bamboo spear, and some Andaman cocoa-nut matting, with which I made a sort of sail. For ten days we were beating about, trusting to luck, and on the eleventh we were picked up by a trader which was going from Singapore to Jiddah with a cargo of Malay pilgrims. They were a rum crowd, and Tonga and I soon managed to settle down among them. They had one very good quality: they let you alone and asked no questions.

"Well, if I were to tell you all the adventures that my little chum and I went through, you would not thank me, for I would have you here until the sun was shining. Here and there we drifted about the world, something always turning up to keep us from London. All the time, however, I never lost sight of my purpose. I would dream of Sholto at night. A hundred times I have killed him in my sleep. At last, however, some three or four years ago, we found ourselves in England. I had no great difficulty in finding where Sholto lived, and I set to work to discover whether he had realized the treasure, or if he still had it. I made friends with someone who could help me,—I name no names, for I don't want to get any one else in a hole,—and I soon found that he still had the jewels. Then I tried to get at him in many ways; but he was pretty sly, and had always two prize-fighters, besides his sons and his khitmutgar, on guard over him.

"One day, however, I got word that he was dying. I hurried at once to the garden, mad that he should slip out of my clutches like that, and, looking through the window, I saw him lying in his bed, with his sons on each side of him. I'd have come through and taken my chance with the three of them, only even as I looked at him his jaw dropped, and I knew that he was gone. I got into his room that same night, though, and I searched his papers to see if there was any record of where he had hidden our jewels. There was not a line, however; so I came away, bitter and savage as a man could be. Before I left I bethought me that if I ever met my Sikh friends again it would be a satisfaction to know that I had left some mark of our hatred: so I scrawled down the sign of the four of us, as it had been on the chart, and I pinned it on his bosom. It was too much that he should be taken to the grave without some token from the men whom he had robbed and befooled.

"We earned a living at this time by my exhibiting poor Tonga at fairs and other such places as the black cannibal. He would eat raw meat and dance his war-dance: so we always had a hatful of pennies after a day's work. I still heard all the news from Pondicherry Lodge, and for some years there was no news to hear, except that they were hunting for the treasure. At last, however, came what we had waited for so long. The treasure had been found. It was up at the top of the house, in Mr. Bartholomew Sholto's chemical laboratory. I came at once and had a look at the place, but I could not see how with my wooden leg I was to make my way up to it. I learned, however, about a trap-door in the roof, and also about Mr. Sholto's supper-hour. It seemed to me that I could manage the thing easily through Tonga. I brought him out with me with a long rope wound round his waist. He could climb like a cat, and he soon made his way through the roof, but, as ill luck would have it, Bartholomew Sholto was still in the room, to his cost. Tonga thought he had done something very clever in killing him, for when I came up by the rope I found him strut ting about as proud as a peacock. Very much surprised was he when I made at him with the rope's end and cursed him for a little blood-thirsty imp. I took the treasure-box and let it down, and then slid down myself, having first left the sign of the four upon the table, to show that the jewels had come back at last to those who had most right to them. Tonga then pulled up the rope, closed the window, and made off the way that he had come.

"I don't know that I have anything else to tell you. I had heard a waterman speak of the speed of Smith's launch the Aurora, so I thought she would be a handy craft for our escape. I engaged with old Smith, and was to give him a big sum if he got us safe to our ship. He knew, no doubt, that there was some screw loose, but he was not in our secrets. All this is the truth, and if I tell it to you, gentlemen, it is not to amuse you,—for you have not done me a very good turn,—but it is because I believe the best defence I can make is just to hold back nothing, but let all the world know how badly I have myself been served by Major Sholto, and how innocent I am of the death of his son." "A very remarkable account," said Sherlock Holmes. "A fitting wind-up to an extremely interesting case. There is nothing at all new to me in the latter part of your narrative, except that you brought your own rope. That I did not know. By the way, I had hoped that Tonga had lost all his darts; yet he managed to shoot one at us in the boat."

"He had lost them all, sir, except the one which was in his blow-pipe at the time."

"Ah, of course," said Holmes. "I had not thought of that."

"Is there any other point which you would like to ask about?" asked the convict, affably.

"I think not, thank you," my companion answered.

"Well, Holmes," said Athelney Jones, "You are a man to be humored, and we all know that you are a connoisseur of crime, but duty is duty, and I have gone rather far in doing what you and your friend asked me. I shall feel more at ease when we have our story-teller here safe under lock and key. The cab still waits, and there are two inspectors down-stairs. I am much obliged to you both for your assistance. Of course you will be wanted at the
"Good-night, gentlemen both," said Jonathan Small.

"You first, Small," remarked the wary Jones as they left the room. "I'll take particular care that you don't club me with your wooden leg, whatever you may have done to the gentleman at the Andaman Isles."

"Well, and there is the end of our little drama," I remarked, after we had set some time smoking in silence. "I fear that it may be the last investigation in which I shall have the chance of studying your methods. Miss Morstan has done me the honor to accept me as a husband in prospective."

He gave a most dismal groan. "I feared as much," said he. "I really cannot congratulate you."

I was a little hurt. "Have you any reason to be dissatisfied with my choice?" I asked.

"Not at all. I think she is one of the most charming young ladies I ever met, and might have been most useful in such work as we have been doing. She had a decided genius that way: witness the way in which she preserved that Agra plan from all the other papers of her father. But love is an emotional thing, and whatever is emotional is opposed to that true cold reason which I place above all things. I should never marry myself, lest I bias my judgment."

"I trust," said I, laughing, "that my judgment may survive the ordeal. But you look weary."

"Yes, the reaction is already upon me. I shall be as limp as a rag for a week."

"Strange," said I, "how terms of what in another man I should call laziness alternate with your fits of splendid energy and vigor."

"Yes," he answered, "there are in me the makings of a very fine loafer and also of a pretty spry sort of fellow. I often think of those lines of old Goethe,--

Schade dass die Natur nur EINEN Mensch aus Dir schuf, Denn zum wuerdigen Mann war und zum Schelmen der Stoff.

"By the way, a propos of this Norwood business, you see that they had, as I surmised, a confederate in the house, who could be none other than Lal Rao, the butler: so Jones actually has the undivided honor of having caught one fish in his great haul."

"The division seems rather unfair," I remarked. "You have done all the work in this business. I get a wife out of it, Jones gets the credit, pray what remains for you?"

"For me," said Sherlock Holmes, "there still remains the cocaine- bottle." And he stretched his long white hand up for it.
THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

by Arthur Conan Doyle

Adventures:
- I. A Scandal In Bohemia | II. The Red-headed League
- III. A Case of Identity
- IV. The Boscombe Valley Mystery
- V. The Five Orange Pips
- VI. The Man With The Twisted Lip
- VII. The Adventure of The Blue Carbuncle
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- X. The Adventure of The Noble Bachelor
- XI. The Adventure of The Beryl Coronet
- XII. The Adventure of The Copper Beeches

ADVENTURE I. A SCANDAL IN BOHEMIA

I.

To Sherlock Holmes she is always THE woman. I have seldom heard him mention her under any other name. In his eyes she eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex. It was not that he felt any emotion akin to love for Irene Adler. All emotions, and that one particularly, were abhorrent to his cold, precise but admirably balanced mind. He was, I take it, the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, but as a lover he would have placed himself in a false position. He never spoke of the softer passions, save with a gibe and a sneer. They were admirable things for the observer--excellent for drawing the veil from men's motives and actions. But for the trained reasoner to admit such intrusions into his own delicate and finely adjusted temperament was to introduce a distracting factor which might throw a doubt upon all his mental results. Grit in a sensitive instrument, or a crack in one of his own high-power lenses, would not be more disturbing than a strong emotion in a nature such as his. And yet there was but one woman to him, and that woman was the late Irene Adler, of dubious and questionable memory.

I had seen little of Holmes lately. My marriage had drifted us away from each other. My own complete happiness, and the home-centred interests which rise up around the man who first finds himself master of his own establishment, were sufficient to absorb all my attention, while Holmes, who loathed every form of society with his whole Bohemian soul, remained in our lodgings in Baker Street, buried among his old books, and alternating from week to week between cocaine and ambition, the drowsiness of the drug, and the fierce energy of his own keen nature. He was still, as ever, deeply attracted by the study of crime, and occupied his immense faculties and extraordinary powers of observation in following out those clues, and clearing up those mysteries which had been abandoned as hopeless by the official police. From time to time I heard some vague account of his doings: of his summons to Odessa in the case of the Trepoff murder, of his clearing up of the singular tragedy of the Atkinson brothers at Trincomalee, and finally of the mission which he had accomplished so delicately and successfully for the reigning family of Holland. Beyond these signs of his activity, however, which I merely shared with all the readers of the daily press, I knew little of my former friend and companion.

One night--it was on the twentieth of March, 1888--I was returning from a journey to a patient (for I had now returned to civil practice), when my way led me through Baker Street. As I passed the well-remembered door, which must always be associated in my mind with my wooing, and with the dark incidents of the Study in Scarlet, I was seized with a keen desire to see Holmes again, and to know how he was employing his extraordinary powers. His rooms were brilliantly lit, and, even as I looked up, I saw his tall, spare figure pass twice in a dark silhouette against the blind. He was pacing the room swiftly, eagerly, with his head sunk upon his chest and his hands clasped behind him. To me, who knew his every mood and habit, his attitude and manner told their own story. He was at work again. He had risen out of his drug-created dreams and was hot upon the scent of some new problem. I rang the bell and was shown up to the chamber which had formerly been in part my own.

His manner was not effusive. It seldom was; but he was glad, I think, to see me. With hardly a word spoken, but with a kindly eye, he waved me to an armchair, threw across his case of cigars, and indicated a spirit case and a gasogene in the corner. Then he stood before the fire and looked me over in his singular introspective fashion.

"Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you."

"Seven!" I answered.
"Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice again, I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness."

"Then, how do you know?"

"I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?"

"My dear Holmes," said I, "this is too much. You would certainly have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. It is true that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful mess, but as I have changed my clothes I can't imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice, but there, again, I fail to see how you work it out."

He chuckled to himself and rubbed his long, nervous hands together.

"It is simplicity itself," said he; "my eyes tell me that on the inside of your left shoe, just where the firelight strikes it, the leather is scored by six almost parallel cuts. Obviously they have been caused by someone who has very carelessly scraped round the edges of the sole in order to remove crusted mud from it. Hence, you see, my double deduction that you had been out in vile weather, and that you had a particularly malignant boot-slitting specimen of the London slavey. As to your practice, if a gentleman walks into my rooms smelling of iodoform, with a black mark of nitrate of silver upon his right forefinger, and a bulge on the right side of his top-hat to show where he has secreted his stethoscope, I must be dull, indeed, if I do not pronounce him to be an active member of the medical profession."

I could not help laughing at the ease with which he explained his process of deduction. "When I hear you give your reasons," I remarked, "the thing always appears to me to be so ridiculously simple that I could easily do it myself, though at each successive instance of your reasoning I am baffled until you explain your process. And yet I believe that my eyes are as good as yours."

"Quite so," he answered, lighting a cigarette, and throwing himself down into an armchair. "You see, but you do not observe. The distinction is clear. For example, you have frequently seen the steps which lead up from the hall to this room."

"Frequently."

"How often?"

"Well, some hundreds of times."

"Then how many are there?"

"How many? I don't know."

"Quite so! You have not observed. And yet you have seen. That is just my point. Now, I know that there are seventeen steps, because I have both seen and observed. By-the-way, since you are interested in these little problems, and since you are good enough to chronicle one or two of my trifling experiences, you may be interested in this." He threw over a sheet of thick, pink-tinted note-paper which had been lying open upon the table. "It came by the last post," said he. "Read it aloud."

The note was undated, and without either signature or address.

"There will call upon you to-night, at a quarter to eight o'clock," it said, "a gentleman who desires to consult you upon a matter of the very deepest moment. Your recent services to one of the royal houses of Europe have shown that you are one who may safely be trusted with matters which are of an importance which can hardly be exaggerated. This account of you we have from all quarters received. Be in your chamber then at that hour, and do not take it amiss if your visitor wear a mask."

"This is indeed a mystery," I remarked. "What do you imagine that it means?"

"I have no data yet. It is a capital mistake to theorize before one has data. Insensibly one begins to twist facts to suit theories, instead of theories to suit facts. But the note itself. What do you deduce from it?"

I carefully examined the writing, and the paper upon which it was written.

"The man who wrote it was presumably well to do," I remarked, endeavouring to imitate my companion's processes. "Such paper could not be bought under half a crown a packet. It is peculiarly strong and stiff."

"Peculiar--that is the very word," said Holmes. "It is not an English paper at all. Hold it up to the light."

I did so, and saw a large "E" with a small "g," a "P," and a large "G" with a small "t" woven into the texture of the paper.

"What do you make of that?" asked Holmes.

"The name of the maker, no doubt; or his monogram, rather."

"Not at all. The 'G' with the small 't' stands for 'Gesellschaft,' which is the German for 'Company.' It is a customary contraction like our 'Co.' 'P,' of course, stands for 'Papier.' Now for the 'Eg.' Let us glance at our Continental Gazetteer." He took down a heavy brown volume from his shelves. "Eglow, Eglonitz--here we are, Egria. It is in a German-speaking country--in Bohemia, not far from Carlsbad. 'Remarkable as being the scene of the
death of Wallenstein, and for its numerous glass-factories and paper-mills.' Ha, ha, my boy, what do you make of that?" His eyes sparkled, and he sent up a great blue triumphant cloud from his cigarette.

"The paper was made in Bohemia," I said.

"Precisely. And the man who wrote the note is a German. Do you note the peculiar construction of the sentence—'This account of you we have from all quarters received.' A Frenchman or Russian could not have written that. It is the German who is so un courteous to his verbs. It only remains, therefore, to discover what is wanted by this German who writes upon Bohemian paper and prefers wearing a mask to showing his face. And here he comes, if I am not mistaken, to resolve all our doubts."

As he spoke there was the sharp sound of horses' hoofs and grating wheels against the curb, followed by a sharp pull at the bell. Holmes whistled.

"A pair, by the sound," said he. "Yes," he continued, glancing out of the window. "A nice little brougham and a pair of beauties. A hundred and fifty guineas apiece. There's money in this case, Watson, if there is nothing else."

"I think that I had better go, Holmes."

"Not a bit, Doctor. Stay where you are. I am lost without my Boswell. And this promises to be interesting. It would be a pity to miss it."

"But your client—"

"Never mind him. I may want your help, and so may he. Here he comes. Sit down in that armchair, Doctor, and give us your best attention."

A slow and heavy step, which had been heard upon the stairs and in the passage, paused immediately outside the door. Then there was a loud and authoritative tap.

"Come in!" said Holmes.

A man entered who could hardly have been less than six feet six inches in height, with the chest and limbs of a Hercules. His dress was rich with a richness which would, in England, be looked upon as akin to bad taste. Heavy bands of astrakhan were slashed across the sleeves and fronts of his double-breasted coat, while the deep blue cloak which was thrown over his shoulders was lined with flame-coloured silk and secured at the neck with a brooch which consisted of a single flaming beryl. Boots which extended halfway up his calves, and which were trimmed at the tops with rich brown fur, completed the impression of barbaric opulence which was suggested by his whole appearance. He carried a broad-brimmed hat in his hand, while he wore across the upper part of his face, extending down past the cheekbones, a black vizard mask, which he had apparently adjusted that very moment, for his hand was still raised to it as he entered. From the lower part of the face he appeared to be a man of strong character, with a thick, hanging lip, and a long, straight chin suggestive of resolution pushed to the length of obstinacy.

"You had my note?" he asked with a deep harsh voice and a strongly marked German accent. "I told you that I would call." He looked from one to the other of us, as if uncertain which to address.

"Pray take a seat," said Holmes. "This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson, who is occasionally good enough to help me in my cases. Whom have I the honour to address?"

"You may address me as the Count Von Kramm, a Bohemian nobleman. I understand that this gentleman, your friend, is a man of honour and discretion, whom I may trust with a matter of the most extreme importance. If not, I should much prefer to communicate with you alone."

I rose to go, but Holmes caught me by the wrist and pushed me back into my chair. "It is both, or none," said he. "You may say before this gentleman anything which you may say to me."

The Count shrugged his broad shoulders. "Then I must begin," said he, "by binding you both to absolute secrecy for two years; at the end of that time the matter will be of no importance. At present it is not too much to say that it is of such weight it may have an influence upon European history."

"I promise," said Holmes.

"And I."

"You will excuse this mask," continued our strange visitor. "The august person who employs me wishes his agent to be unknown to you, and I may confess at once that the title by which I have just called myself is not exactly my own."

"I was aware of it," said Holmes dryly.

"The circumstances are of great delicacy, and every precaution has to be taken to quench what might grow to be an immense scandal and seriously compromise one of the reigning families of Europe. To speak plainly, the matter implicates the great House of Ormstein, hereditary kings of Bohemia."

"I was also aware of that," murmured Holmes, settling himself down in his armchair and closing his eyes.

Our visitor glanced with some apparent surprise at the languid, lounging figure of the man who had been no doubt depicted to him as the most incisive reasoner and most energetic agent in Europe. Holmes slowly reopened his eyes and looked impatiently at his gigantic client.
"If your Majesty would condescend to state your case," he remarked, "I should be better able to advise you."
The man sprang from his chair and paced up and down the room in uncontrollable agitation. Then, with a gesture of desperation, he tore the mask from his face and hurled it upon the ground. "You are right," he cried; "I am the King. Why should I attempt to conceal it?"
"Why, indeed?" murmured Holmes. "Your Majesty had not spoken before I was aware that I was addressing Wilhelm Gottsreich Sigismond von Ormstein, Grand Duke of Cassel-Felstein, and hereditary King of Bohemia."
"But you can understand," said our strange visitor, sitting down once more and passing his hand over his high white forehead, "you can understand that I am not accustomed to doing such business in my own person. Yet the matter was so delicate that I could not confide it to an agent without putting myself in his power. I have come incognito from Prague for the purpose of consulting you."
"Then, pray consult," said Holmes, shutting his eyes once more.

"The facts are briefly these: Some five years ago, during a lengthy visit to Warsaw, I made the acquaintance of the well-known adventuress, Irene Adler. The name is no doubt familiar to you."

"Kindly look her up in my index, Doctor," murmured Holmes without opening his eyes. For many years he had adopted a system of docketing all paragraphs concerning men and things, so that it was difficult to name a subject or a person on which he could not at once furnish information. In this case I found her biography sandwiched in between that of a Hebrew rabbi and that of a staff-commander who had written a monograph upon the deep-sea fishes.

"Let me see!" said Holmes. "Hum! Born in New Jersey in the year 1858. Contralto--hum! La Scala, hum! Prima donna Imperial Opera of Warsaw--yes! Retired from operatic stage--ha! Living in London--quite so! Your Majesty, as I understand, became entangled with this young person, wrote her some compromising letters, and is now desirous of getting those letters back."
"Precisely so. But how--"

"Was there a secret marriage?"
"None."
"No legal papers or certificates?"
"None."

"Then I fail to follow your Majesty. If this young person should produce her letters for blackmailing or other purposes, how is she to prove their authenticity?"

"There is the writing."
"Pooh, pooh! Forgery."
"My private note-paper."
"Stolen."
"My own seal."
"Imitated."
"My photograph."
"Bought."

"We were both in the photograph."
"Oh, dear! That is very bad! Your Majesty has indeed committed an indiscretion."
"I was mad--insane."
"You have compromised yourself seriously."
"I was only Crown Prince then. I was young. I am but thirty now."
"It must be recovered."
"We have tried and failed."
"Your Majesty must pay. It must be bought."
"She will not sell."
"Stolen, then."

"Five attempts have been made. Twice burglars in my pay ransacked her house. Once we diverted her luggage when she travelled. Twice she has been waylaid. There has been no result."

"No sign of it?"
"Absolutely none."
Holmes laughed. "It is quite a pretty little problem," said he.
"But a very serious one to me," returned the King reproachfully.
"Very, indeed. And what does she propose to do with the photograph?"
"To ruin me."
"But how?"
"I am about to be married."
"So I have heard."
"To Clotilde Lothman von Saxe-Meningen, second daughter of the King of Scandinavia. You may know the strict principles of her family. She is herself the very soul of delicacy. A shadow of a doubt as to my conduct would bring the matter to an end."
"And Irene Adler?"
"Threatens to send them the photograph. And she will do it. I know that she will do it. You do not know her, but she has a soul of steel. She has the face of the most beautiful of women, and the mind of the most resolute of men. Rather than I should marry another woman, there are no lengths to which she would not go--none."
"You are sure that she has not sent it yet?"
"I am sure."
"And why?"
"Because she has said that she would send it on the day when the betrothal was publicly proclaimed. That will be next Monday."
"Oh, then we have three days yet," said Holmes with a yawn. "That is very fortunate, as I have one or two matters of importance to look into just at present. Your Majesty will, of course, stay in London for the present?"
"Certainly. You will find me at the Langham under the name of the Count Von Kramm."
"Then I shall drop you a line to let you know how we progress."
"Pray do so. I shall be all anxiety."
"Then, as to money?"
"You have carte blanche."
"Absolutely?"
"I tell you that I would give one of the provinces of my kingdom to have that photograph."
"And for present expenses?"
The King took a heavy chamois leather bag from under his cloak and laid it on the table.
"There are three hundred pounds in gold and seven hundred in notes," he said.
Holmes scribbled a receipt upon a sheet of his note-book and handed it to him.
"And Mademoiselle's address?" he asked.
"Is Briony Lodge, Serpentine Avenue, St. John's Wood."
Holmes took a note of it. "One other question," said he. "Was the photograph a cabinet?"
"It was."
"Then, good-night, your Majesty, and I trust that we shall soon have some good news for you. And good-night, Watson," he added, as the wheels of the royal brougham rolled down the street. "If you will be good enough to call to-morrow afternoon at three o'clock I should like to chat this little matter over with you." II.

At three o'clock precisely I was at Baker Street, but Holmes had not yet returned. The landlady informed me that he had left the house shortly after eight o'clock in the morning. I sat down beside the fire, however, with the intention of awaiting him, however long he might be. I was already deeply interested in his inquiry, for, though it was surrounded by none of the grim and strange features which were associated with the two crimes which I have already recorded, still, the nature of the case and the exalted station of his client gave it a character of its own. Indeed, apart from the nature of the investigation which my friend had on hand, there was something in his masterly grasp of a situation, and his keen, incisive reasoning, which made it a pleasure to me to study his system of work, and to follow the quick, subtle methods by which he disentangled the most inextricable mysteries. So accustomed was I to his invariable success that the very possibility of his failing had ceased to enter into my head.

It was close upon four before the door opened, and a drunken-looking groom, ill-kempt and side-whiskered, with an inflamed face and disreputable clothes, walked into the room. Accustomed as I was to my friend's amazing powers in the use of disguises, I had to look three times before I was certain that it was indeed he. With a nod he vanished into the bedroom, whence he emerged in five minutes tweed-suited and respectable, as of old. Putting his hands into his pockets, he stretched out his legs in front of the fire and laughed heartily for some minutes.
"Well, really!" he cried, and then he choked and laughed again until he was obliged to lie back, limp and helpless, in the chair.
"What is it?"
"It's quite too funny. I am sure you could never guess how I employed my morning, or what I ended by doing."
"I can't imagine. I suppose that you have been watching the habits, and perhaps the house, of Miss Irene Adler."
"Quite so; but the sequel was rather unusual. I will tell you, however. I left the house a little after eight o'clock this morning in the character of a groom out of work. There is a wonderful sympathy and freemasonry among
tying up of Irene Adler, spinster, to Godfrey Norton, bachelor. It was all done in an instant, and there was the
were whispered in my ear, and vouching for things of which I knew nothing, and generally assisting in the secure
any other idler who has dropped into a church. Suddenly, to my surprise, the three at the altar faced round to me, and
expostulating with them. They were all three standing in a knot in front of the altar. I lounged up the side aisle like
church. There was not a soul there save the two whom I had followed and a surpliced clergyman, who seemed to be
landau with their steaming horses were in front of the door when I arrived. I paid the man and hurried into the
minutes.’ It was twenty-five minutes to twelve, and of course it was clear enough what was in the wind.
jumped in before he could object. ‘The Church of St. Monica,’ said I, ‘and half a sovereign if you reach it in twenty
perch behind her landau when a cab came through the street. The driver looked twice at such a shabby fare, but I
caught a glimpse of her at the moment, but she was a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for.

A neat little landau, the coachman with his coat only half-buttoned, and his tie under his ear, while all the tags of his
Church of St. Monica in the Edgeware Road. Half a guinea if you do it in twenty minutes!'

This Godfrey Norton was evidently an important factor in the matter. He was a lawyer. That sounded ominous.
Was the relation between them, and what the object of his repeated visits? Was she his client, his friend, or his
mistress? If the former, she had probably transferred the photograph to his keeping. If the latter, it was less likely.
On the issue of this question depended whether I should continue my work at Briony Lodge, or turn my attention to
the gentleman’s chambers in the Temple. It was a delicate point, and it widened the field of my inquiry. I fear that I
bore you with these details, but I have to let you see my little difficulties, if you are to understand the situation."

"I am following you closely," I answered.

"I was still balancing the matter in my mind when a hansom cab drove up to Briony Lodge, and a gentleman
sprang out. He was a remarkably handsome man, dark, aquiline, and moustached-- evidently the man of whom I had
heard. He appeared to be in a great hurry, shouted to the cabman to wait, and brushed past the maid who opened the
door with the air of a man who was thoroughly at home.

He was in the house about half an hour, and I could catch glimpses of him in the windows of the sitting-room,
pacing up and down, talking excitedly, and waving his arms. Of her I could see nothing. Presently he emerged,
looking even more flurried than before. As he stepped up to the cab, he pulled a gold watch from his pocket and
looked at it earnestly, ‘Drive like the devil,’ he shouted, ‘first to Gross & Hankey’s in Regent Street, and then to the
Church of St. Monica in the Edgeware Road. Half a guinea if you do it in twenty minutes!’

Away they went, and I was just wondering whether I should not do well to follow them when up the lane came
a neat little landau, the coachman with his coat only half-buttoned, and his tie under his ear, while all the tags of his
harness were sticking out of the buckles. It hadn’t pulled up before she shot out of the hall door and into it. I only
catched a glimpse of her at the moment, but she was a lovely woman, with a face that a man might die for.

“The Church of St. Monica, John,’ she cried, ‘and half a sovereign if you reach it in twenty minutes.’

This was quite too good to lose, Watson. I was just balancing whether I should run for it, or whether I should
perch behind her landau when a cab came through the street. The driver looked twice at such a shabby fare, but I
jumped in before he could object. ‘The Church of St. Monica,’ said I, ‘and half a sovereign if you reach it in twenty
minutes.’ It was twenty-five minutes to twelve, and of course it was clear enough what was in the wind.

My cabby drove fast. I don’t think I ever drove faster, but the others were there before us. The cab and the
landau with their steaming horses were in front of the door when I arrived. I paid the man and hurried into the
church. There was not a soul there save the two whom I had followed and a surpliced clergyman, who seemed to be
expostulating with them. They were all three standing in a knot in front of the altar. I lounged up the side aisle like
any other idler who has dropped into a church. Suddenly, to my surprise, the three at the altar faced round to me, and
Godfrey Norton came running as hard as he could towards me.

“Thank God,’ he cried. ‘You’ll do. Come! Come!’

“What then?” I asked.

“Come, man, come, only three minutes, or it won't be legal.’

“I was half-dragged up to the altar, and before I knew where I was I found myself mumbling responses which
were whispered in my ear, and vouching for things of which I knew nothing, and generally assisting in the secure
tyng up of Irene Adler, spinster, to Godfrey Norton, bachelor. It was all done in an instant, and there was the
gentleman thanking me on the one side and the lady on the other, while the clergyman beamed on me in front. It was
the most preposterous position in which I ever found myself in my life, and it was the thought of it that started me
laughing just now. It seems that there had been some informality about their license, that the clergyman absolutely
refused to marry them without a witness of some sort, and that my lucky appearance saved the bridegroom from
having to sally out into the streets in search of a best man. The bride gave me a sovereign, and I mean to wear it on
my watch-chain in memory of the occasion."
"This is a very unexpected turn of affairs," said I; "and what then?"
"Well, I found my plans very seriously menaced. It looked as if the pair might take an immediate departure, and
so necessitate very prompt and energetic measures on my part. At the church door, however, they separated, he
driving back to the Temple, and she to her own house. 'I shall drive out in the park at five as usual,' she said as she
left him. I heard no more. They drove away in different directions, and I went off to make my own arrangements."
"Which are?"
"Some cold beef and a glass of beer," he answered, ringing the bell. "I have been too busy to think of food, and I
am likely to be busier still this evening. By the way, Doctor, I shall want your co-operation."
"I shall be delighted."
"You don't mind breaking the law?"
"Not in the least."
"Nor running a chance of arrest?"
"Not in a good cause."
"Oh, the cause is excellent!"
"Then I am your man."
"I was sure that I might rely on you."
"But what is it you wish?"
"When Mrs. Turner has brought in the tray I will make it clear to you. Now," he said as he turned hungrily on the
simple fare that our landlady had provided, "I must discuss it while I eat, for I have not much time. It is nearly five
now. In two hours we must be on the scene of action. Miss Irene, or Madame, rather, returns from her drive at seven.
We must be at Briony Lodge to meet her."
"And what then?"
"You must leave that to me. I have already arranged what is to occur. There is only one point on which I must
insist. You must not interfere, come what may. You understand?"
"I am to be neutral?"
"To do nothing whatever. There will probably be some small unpleasantness. Do not join in it. It will end in my
being conveyed into the house. Four or five minutes afterwards the sitting-room window will open. You are to
station yourself close to that open window."
"Yes."
"You are to watch me, for I will be visible to you."
"Yes."
"And when I raise my hand--so--you will throw into the room what I give you to throw, and will, at the same
time, raise the cry of fire. You quite follow me?"
" Entirely."
"It is nothing very formidable," he said, taking a long cigar-shaped roll from his pocket. "It is an ordinary
plumber's smoke-rocket, fitted with a cap at either end to make it self-lighting. Your task is confined to that. When
you raise your cry of fire, it will be taken up by quite a number of people. You may then walk to the end of the
street, and I will rejoin you in ten minutes. I hope that I have made myself clear?"
"I am to remain neutral, to get near the window, to watch you, and at the signal to throw in this object, then to
raise the cry of fire, and to wait you at the corner of the street."
"Precisely."
"Then you may entirely rely on me."
"That is excellent. I think, perhaps, it is almost time that I prepare for the new role I have to play."
He disappeared into his bedroom and returned in a few minutes in the character of an amiable and simple-minded
Nonconformist clergyman. His broad black hat, his baggy trousers, his white tie, his sympathetic smile, and
general look of peering and benevolent curiosity were such as Mr. John Hare alone could have equalled. It was not
merely that Holmes changed his costume. His expression, his manner, his very soul seemed to vary with every fresh
part that he assumed. The stage lost a fine actor, even as science lost an acute reasoner, when he became a specialist
in crime.
It was a quarter past six when we left Baker Street, and it still wanted ten minutes to the hour when we found
ourselves in Serpentine Avenue. It was already dusk, and the lamps were just being lighted as we paced up and down in front of Briony Lodge, waiting for the coming of its occupant. The house was just such as I had pictured it from Sherlock Holmes' succinct description, but the locality appeared to be less private than I expected. On the contrary, for a small street in a quiet neighbourhood, it was remarkably animated. There was a group of shabbily dressed men smoking and laughing in a corner, a scissors-grinder with his wheel, two guardsmen who were flirting with a nurse-girl, and several well-dressed young men who were lounging up and down with cigars in their mouths.

"You see," remarked Holmes, as we paced to and fro in front of the house, "this marriage rather simplifies matters. The photograph becomes a double-edged weapon now. The chances are that she would be as averse to its being seen by Mr. Godfrey Norton, as our client is to its coming to the eyes of his princess. Now the question is, Where are we to find the photograph?"

"Where, indeed?"

"It is most unlikely that she carries it about with her. It is cabinet size. Too large for easy concealment about a woman's dress. She knows that the King is capable of having her waylaid and searched. Two attempts of the sort have already been made. We may take it, then, that she does not carry it about with her."

"Where, then?"

"Her banker or her lawyer. There is that double possibility. But I am inclined to think neither. Women are naturally secretive, and they like to do their own secreting. Why should she hand it over to anyone else? She could trust her own guardianship, but she could not tell what indirect or political influence might be brought to bear upon a business man. Besides, remember that she had resolved to use it within a few days. It must be where she can lay her hands upon it. It must be in her own house."

"But it has twice been burgled."

"Pshaw! They did not know how to look."

"But how will you look?"

"I will not look."

"What then?"

"I will get her to show me."

"But she will refuse."

"She will not be able to. But I hear the rumble of wheels. It is her carriage. Now carry out my orders to the letter."

As he spoke the gleam of the side-lights of a carriage came round the curve of the avenue. It was a smart little landau which rattled up to the door of Briony Lodge. As it pulled up, one of the loafing men at the corner dashed forward to open the door in the hope of earning a copper, but was elbowed away by another loafer, who had rushed up with the same intention. A fierce quarrel broke out, which was increased by the two guardsmen, who took sides with one of the loungers, and by the scissors-grinder, who was equally hot upon the other side. A blow was struck, and in an instant the lady, who had stepped from her carriage, was the centre of a little knot of flushed and struggling men, who struck savagely at each other with their fists and sticks. Holmes dashed into the crowd to protect the lady; but just as he reached her he gave a cry and dropped to the ground, with the blood running freely down his face. At his fall the guardsmen took to their heels in one direction and the loungers in the other, while a number of better-dressed people, who had watched the scuffle without taking part in it, crowded in to help the lady and to attend to the injured man. Irene Adler, as I will still call her, had hurried up the steps; but she stood at the top with her superb figure outlined against the lights of the hall, looking back into the street.

"Is the poor gentleman much hurt?" she asked.

"He is dead," cried several voices.

"No, no, there's life in him!" shouted another. "But he'll be gone before you can get him to hospital."

"He's a brave fellow," said a woman. "They would have had the lady's purse and watch if it hadn't been for him. They were a gang, and a rough one, too. Ah, he's breathing now."

"He can't lie in the street. May we bring him in, marm?"

"Surely. Bring him into the sitting-room. There is a comfortable sofa. This way, please!"

Slowly and solemnly he was borne into Briony Lodge and laid out in the principal room, while I still observed the proceedings from my post by the window. The lamps had been lit, but the blinds had not been drawn, so that I could see Holmes as he lay upon the couch. I do not know whether he was seized with compunction at that moment for the part he was playing, but I know that I never felt more heartily ashamed of myself in my life than when I saw the beautiful creature against whom I was conspiring, or the grace and kindliness with which she waited upon the injured man. And yet it would be the blackest treachery to Holmes to draw back now from the part which he had intrusted to me. I hardened my heart, and took the smoke-rocket from under my ulster. After all, I thought, we are not injuring her. We are but preventing her from injuring another.
Holmes had sat up upon the couch, and I saw him motion like a man who is in need of air. A maid rushed across and threw open the window. At the same instant I saw him raise his hand and at the signal I tossed my rocket into the room with a cry of "Fire!" The word was no sooner out of my mouth than the whole crowd of spectators, well dressed and ill--gentlemen, ostlers, and servant-maids--joined in a general shriek of "Fire!" Thick clouds of smoke curled through the room and out at the open window. I caught a glimpse of rushing figures, and a moment later the voice of Holmes from within assuring them that it was a false alarm. Slipping through the shouting crowd I made my way to the corner of the street, and in ten minutes was rejoiced to find my friend's arm in mine, and to get away from the scene of uproar. He walked swiftly and in silence for some few minutes until we had turned down one of the quiet streets which lead towards the Edgeware Road.

"You did it very nicely, Doctor," he remarked. "Nothing could have been better. It is all right."
"You have the photograph?"
"I know where it is."
"And how did you find out?"
"She showed me, as I told you she would."
"I am still in the dark."
"I do not wish to make a mystery," said he, laughing. "The matter was perfectly simple. You, of course, saw that everyone in the street was an accomplice. They were all engaged for the evening."
"I guessed as much."
"Then, when the row broke out, I had a little moist red paint in the palm of my hand. I rushed forward, fell down, clapped my hand to my face, and became a piteous spectacle. It is an old trick."
"That also I could fathom."
"Then they carried me in. She was bound to have me in. What else could she do? And into her sitting-room, which was the very room which I suspected. It lay between that and her bedroom, and I was determined to see which. They laid me on a couch, I motioned for air, they were compelled to open the window, and you had your chance."
"How did that help you?"
"It was all-important. When a woman thinks that her house is on fire, her instinct is at once to rush to the thing which she values most. It is a perfectly overpowering impulse, and I have more than once taken advantage of it. In the case of the Darlington substitution scandal it was of use to me, and also in the Arnsworth Castle business. A married woman grabs at her baby; an unmarried one reaches for her jewel-box. Now it was clear to me that our lady of to-day had nothing in the house more precious to her than what we are in quest of. She would rush to secure it. The alarm of fire was admirably done. The smoke and shouting were enough to shake nerves of steel. She responded beautifully. The photograph is in a recess behind a sliding panel just above the right bell-pull. She was there in an instant, and I caught a glimpse of it as she half-drew it out. When I cried out that it was a false alarm, she replaced it, glanced at the rocket, rushed from the room, and I have not seen her since. I rose, and, making my excuses, escaped from the house. I hesitated whether to attempt to secure the photograph at once; but the coachman had come in, and as he was watching me narrowly it seemed safer to wait. A little over-precipitance may ruin all."
"And now?" I asked.
"Our quest is practically finished. I shall call with the King to-morrow, and with you, if you care to come with us. We will be shown into the sitting-room to wait for the lady, but it is probable that when she comes she may find neither us nor the photograph. It might be a satisfaction to his Majesty to regain it with his own hands."
"And when will you call?"
"At eight in the morning. She will not be up, so that we shall have a clear field. Besides, we must be prompt, for this marriage may mean a complete change in her life and habits. I must wire to the King without delay."

We had reached Baker Street and had stopped at the door. He was searching his pockets for the key when someone passing said:

"Good-night, Mister Sherlock Holmes."

There were several people on the pavement at the time, but the greeting appeared to come from a slim youth in an ulster who had hurried by.

"I've heard that voice before," said Holmes, staring down the dimly lit street. "Now, I wonder who the deuce that could have been."

III.

I slept at Baker Street that night, and we were engaged upon our toast and coffee in the morning when the King of Bohemia rushed into the room.

"You have really got it!" he cried, grasping Sherlock Holmes by either shoulder and looking eagerly into his face.
"Not yet."
"But you have hopes?"
"I have hopes."
"Then, come. I am all impatience to be gone."
"We must have a cab."
"No, my brougham is waiting."
"Then that will simplify matters." We descended and started off once more for Briony Lodge.
"Irene Adler is married," remarked Holmes.
"Married! When?"
"Yesterday."
"But to whom?"
"To an English lawyer named Norton."
"But she could not love him."
"I am in hopes that she does."
"And why in hopes?"

"Because it would spare your Majesty all fear of future annoyance. If the lady loves her husband, she does not love your Majesty. If she does not love your Majesty, there is no reason why she should interfere with your Majesty's plan."

"It is true. And yet--Well! I wish she had been of my own station! What a queen she would have made!" He relapsed into a moody silence, which was not broken until we drew up in Serpentine Avenue.

The door of Briony Lodge was open, and an elderly woman stood upon the steps. She watched us with a sardonic eye as we stepped from the brougham.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I believe?" said she.

"I am Mr. Holmes," answered my companion, looking at her with a questioning and rather startled gaze.

"Indeed! My mistress told me that you were likely to call. She left this morning with her husband by the 5:15 train from Charing Cross for the Continent."

"What!" Sherlock Holmes staggered back, white with chagrin and surprise. "Do you mean that she has left England?"

"Never to return."

"And the papers?" asked the King hoarsely. "All is lost."

"We shall see." He pushed past the servant and rushed into the drawing-room, followed by the King and myself.

The furniture was scattered about in every direction, with dismantled shelves and open drawers, as if the lady had hurriedly ransacked them before her flight. Holmes rushed at the bell-pull, tore back a small sliding shutter, and, plunging in his hand, pulled out a photograph and a letter. The photograph was of Irene Adler herself in evening dress, the letter was superscribed to "Sherlock Holmes, Esq. To be left till called for." My friend tore it open and we all three read it together. It was dated at midnight of the preceding night and ran in this way:

"MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES,—You really did it very well. You took me in completely. Until after the alarm of fire, I had not a suspicion. But then, when I found how I had betrayed myself, I began to think. I had been warned against you months ago. I had been told that if the King employed an agent it would certainly be you. And your address had been given me. Yet, with all this, you made me reveal what you wanted to know. Even after I became suspicious, I found it hard to think evil of such a dear, kind old clergyman. But, you know, I have been trained as an actress myself. Male costume is nothing new to me. I often take advantage of the freedom which it gives. I sent John, the coachman, to watch you, ran up stairs, got into my walking-clothes, as I call them, and came down just as you departed.

"Well, I followed you to your door, and so made sure that I was really an object of interest to the celebrated Mr. Sherlock Holmes. Then I, rather imprudently, wished you good-night, and started for the Temple to see my husband."

"We both thought the best resource was flight, when pursued by so formidable an antagonist; so you will find the nest empty when you call to-morrow. As to the photograph, your client may rest in peace. I love and am loved by a better man than he. The King may do what he will without hindrance from one whom he has cruelly wronged. I keep it only to safeguard myself, and to preserve a weapon which will always secure me from any steps which he might take in the future. I leave a photograph which he might care to possess; and I remain, dear Mr. Sherlock Holmes,"

"Very truly yours, "IRENE NORTON, née ADLER."

"What a woman—oh, what a woman!" cried the King of Bohemia, when we had all three read this epistle. "Did I not tell you how quick and resolute she was? Would she not have made an admirable queen? Is it not a pity that she was not on my level?"

"From what I have seen of the lady she seems indeed to be on a very different level to your Majesty," said
Holmes coldly. "I am sorry that I have not been able to bring your Majesty's business to a more successful conclusion."

"On the contrary, my dear sir," cried the King; "nothing could be more successful. I know that her word is inviolate. The photograph is now as safe as if it were in the fire."

"I am glad to hear your Majesty say so."

"I am immensely indebted to you. Pray tell me in what way I can reward you. This ring--" He slipped an emerald snake ring from his finger and held it out upon the palm of his hand.

"Your Majesty has something which I should value even more highly," said Holmes.

"You have but to name it."

"This photograph!"

The King stared at him in amazement.

"Irene's photograph!" he cried. "Certainly, if you wish it."

"I thank your Majesty. Then there is no more to be done in the matter. I have the honour to wish you a very good-morning." He bowed, and, turning away without observing the hand which the King had stretched out to him, he set off in my company for his chambers.

And that was how a great scandal threatened to affect the kingdom of Bohemia, and how the best plans of Mr. Sherlock Holmes were beaten by a woman's wit. He used to make merry over the cleverness of women, but I have not heard him do it of late. And when he speaks of Irene Adler, or when he refers to her photograph, it is always under the honourable title of the woman.

ADVENTURE II. THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE

I had called upon my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, one day in the autumn of last year and found him in deep conversation with a very stout, florid-faced, elderly gentleman with fiery red hair. With an apology for my intrusion, I was about to withdraw when Holmes pulled me abruptly into the room and closed the door behind me.

"You could not possibly have come at a better time, my dear Watson," he said cordially.

"I was afraid that you were engaged."

"So I am. Very much so."

"Then I can wait in the next room."

"Not at all. This gentleman, Mr. Wilson, has been my partner and helper in many of my most successful cases, and I have no doubt that he will be of the utmost use to me in yours also."

The stout gentleman half rose from his chair and gave a bob of greeting, with a quick little questioning glance from his small fat-encircled eyes.

"Try the settee," said Holmes, relapsing into his armchair and putting his fingertips together, as was his custom when in judicial moods. "I know, my dear Watson, that you share my love of all that is bizarre and outside the conventions and humdrum routine of everyday life. You have shown your relish for it by the enthusiasm which has prompted you to chronicle, and, if you will excuse my saying so, somewhat to embellish so many of my own little adventures."

"Your cases have indeed been of the greatest interest to me," I observed.

"You will remember that I remarked the other day, just before we went into the very simple problem presented by Miss Mary Sutherland, that for strange effects and extraordinary combinations we must go to life itself, which is always far more daring than any effort of the imagination."

"A proposition which I took the liberty of doubting."

"You did, Doctor, but none the less you must come round to my view, for otherwise I shall keep on piling fact upon fact on you until your reason breaks down under them and acknowledges me to be right. Now, Mr. Jabez Wilson here has been good enough to call upon me this morning, and to begin a narrative which promises to be one of the most singular which I have listened to for some time. You have heard me remark that the strangest and most unique things are very often connected not with the larger but with the smaller crimes, and occasionally, indeed, where there is room for doubt whether any positive crime has been committed. As far as I have heard it is impossible for me to say whether the present case is an instance of crime or not, but the course of events is certainly among the most singular that I have ever listened to. Perhaps, Mr. Wilson, you would have the great kindness to recommence your narrative. I ask you not merely because my friend Dr. Watson has not heard the opening part but also because the peculiar nature of the story makes me anxious to have every possible detail from your lips. As a rule, when I have heard some slight indication of the course of events, I am able to guide myself by the thousands of other similar cases which occur to my memory. In the present instance I am forced to admit that the facts are, to the best of my belief, unique."

The portly client puffed out his chest with an appearance of some little pride and pulled a dirty and wrinkled newspaper from the inside pocket of his greatcoat. As he glanced down the advertisement column, with his head
thrust forward and the paper flattened out upon his knee, I took a good look at the man and endeavoured, after the fashion of my companion, to read the indications which might be presented by his dress or appearance.

I did not gain very much, however, by my inspection. Our visitor bore every mark of being an average commonplace British tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow. He wore rather baggy grey shepherd's check trousers, a not over-clean black frock-coat, unbuttoned in the front, and a drab waistcoat with a heavy brass Albert chain, and a square pierced bit of metal dangling down as an ornament. A frayed top-hat and a faded brown overcoat with a wrinkled velvet collar lay upon a chair beside him. Altogether, look as I would, there was nothing remarkable about the man save his blazing red head, and the expression of extreme chagrin and discontent upon his features.

Sherlock Holmes' quick eye took in my occupation, and he shook his head with a smile as he noticed my questioning glances. "Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else."

Mr. Jabez Wilson started up in his chair, with his forefinger upon the paper, but his eyes upon my companion. "How, in the name of good-fortune, did you know all that, Mr. Holmes?" he asked. "How did you know, for example, that I did manual labour. It's as true as gospel, for I began as a ship's carpenter."

"Your hands, my dear sir. Your right hand is quite a size larger than your left. You have worked with it, and the muscles are more developed."

"Well, the snuff, then, and the Freemasonry?"

"I won't insult your intelligence by telling you how I read that, especially as, rather against the strict rules of your order, you use an arc-and-compass breastpin."

"Ah, of course, I forgot that. But the writing?"

"What else can be indicated by that right cuff so very shiny for five inches, and the left one with the smooth patch near the elbow where you rest it upon the desk?"

"Well, but China?"

"The fish that you have tattooed immediately above your right wrist could only have been done in China. I have made a small study of tattoo marks and have even contributed to the literature of the subject. That trick of staining the fishes' scales of a delicate pink is quite peculiar to China. When, in addition, I see a Chinese coin hanging from your watch-chain, the matter becomes even more simple."

Mr. Jabez Wilson laughed heavily. "Well, I never!" said he. "I thought at first that you had done something clever, but I see that there was nothing in it, after all."

"I begin to think, Watson," said Holmes, "that I make a mistake in explaining. 'Omne ignotum pro magnifico,' you know, and my poor little reputation, such as it is, will suffer shipwreck if I am so candid. Can you not find the advertisement, Mr. Wilson?"

"Yes, I have got it now," he answered with his thick red finger planted halfway down the column. "Here it is. This is what began it all. You just read it for yourself, sir."

I took the paper from him and read as follows:

"TO THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE: On account of the bequest of the late Ezekiah Hopkins, of Lebanon, Pennsylvania, U. S. A., there is now another vacancy open which entitles a member of the League to a salary of 4 pounds a week for purely nominal services. All red-headed men who are sound in body and mind and above the age of twenty-one years, are eligible. Apply in person on Monday, at eleven o'clock, to Duncan Ross, at the offices of the League, 7 Pope's Court, Fleet Street."

"What on earth does this mean?" I ejaculated after I had twice read over the extraordinary announcement.

Holmes chuckled and wriggled in his chair, as was his habit when in high spirits. "It is a little off the beaten track, isn't it?" said he. "And now, Mr. Wilson, off you go at scratch and tell us all about yourself, your household, and the effect which this advertisement had upon your fortunes. You will first make a note, Doctor, of the paper and the date."

"It is The Morning Chronicle of April 27, 1890. Just two months ago."

"Very good. Now, Mr. Wilson?"

"Well, it is just as I have been telling you, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Jabez Wilson, mopping his forehead; "I have a small pawnbroker's business at Coburg Square, near the City. It's not a very large affair, and of late years it has not done more than just give me a living. I used to be able to keep two assistants, but now I only keep one; and I would have a job to pay him but that he is willing to come for half wages so as to learn the business."

"What is the name of this obliging youth?" asked Sherlock Holmes.

"His name is Vincent Spaulding, and he's not such a youth, either. It's hard to say his age. I should not wish a smarter assistant, Mr. Holmes; and I know very well that he could better himself and earn twice what I am able to give him. But, after all, if he is satisfied, why should I put ideas in his head?"
"Why, indeed? You seem most fortunate in having an employé who comes under the full market price. It is not a common experience among employers in this age. I don't know that your assistant is not as remarkable as your advertisement."

"Oh, he has his faults, too," said Mr. Wilson. "Never was such a fellow for photography. Snapping away with a camera when he ought to be improving his mind, and then diving down into the cellar like a rabbit into its hole to develop his pictures. That is his main fault, but on the whole he's a good worker. There's no vice in him."

"He is still with you, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir. He and a girl of fourteen, who does a bit of simple cooking and keeps the place clean--that's all I have in the house, for I am a widower and never had any family. We live very quietly, sir, the three of us; and we keep a roof over our heads and pay our debts, if we do nothing more.

'The first thing that put us out was that advertisement. Spaulding, he came down into the office just this day eight weeks, with this very paper in his hand, and he says:

"'I wish to the Lord, Mr. Wilson, that I was a red-headed man.'"

"'Why that?' I asks."

"'Why,' says he, 'here's another vacancy on the League of the Red-headed Men. It's worth quite a little fortune to any man who gets it, and I understand that there are more vacancies than there are men, so that the trustees are at their wits' end what to do with the money. If my hair would only change colour, here's a nice little crib all ready for me to step into.'"

"'Why, what is it, then?' I asked. You see, Mr. Holmes, I am a very stay-at-home man, and as my business came to me instead of my having to go to it, I was often weeks on end without putting my foot over the door-mat. In that way I didn't know much of what was going on outside, and I was always glad of a bit of news.

"'Have you never heard of the League of the Red-headed Men?' he asked with his eyes open."

"'Never.'"

"'Why, I wonder at that, for you are eligible yourself for one of the vacancies.'"

"'And what are they worth?' I asked."

"'Oh, merely a couple of hundred a year, but the work is slight, and it need not interfere very much with one's other occupations.'"

"Well, you can easily think that that made me prick up my ears, for the business has not been over-good for some years, and an extra couple of hundred would have been very handy.

"'Tell me all about it,' said I."

"'Well,' said he, showing me the advertisement, 'you can see for yourself that the League has a vacancy, and there is the address where you should apply for particulars. As far as I can make out, the League was founded by an American millionaire, Ezekiah Hopkins, who was very peculiar in his ways. He was himself red-headed, and he had a great sympathy for all red-headed men; so when he died it was found that he had left his enormous fortune in the hands of trustees, with instructions to apply the interest to the providing of easy berths to men whose hair is of that colour. From all I hear it is splendid pay and very little to do.'"

"'But,' said I, 'there would be millions of red-headed men who would apply.'"

"'Not so many as you might think,' he answered. 'You see it is really confined to Londoners, and to grown men. This American had started from London when he was young, and he wanted to do the old town a good turn. Then, again, I have heard it is no use your applying if your hair is light red, or dark red, or anything but real bright, blazing, fiery red. Now, if you cared to apply, Mr. Wilson, you would just walk in; but perhaps it would hardly be worth your while to put yourself out of the way for the sake of a few hundred pounds.'"

"'Now, it is a fact, gentlemen, as you may see for yourselves, that my hair is of a very full and rich tint, so that it seemed to me that if there was to be any competition in the matter I stood as good a chance as any man that I had ever met. Vincent Spaulding seemed to know so much about it that I thought he might prove useful, so I just ordered him to put up the shutters for the day and to come right away with me. He was very willing to have a holiday, so we shut the business up and started off for the address that was given us in the advertisement.

"I never hope to see such a sight as that again, Mr. Holmes. From north, south, east, and west every man who had a shade of red in his hair had tramped into the city to answer the advertisement. Fleet Street was choked with red-headed folk, and Pope's Court looked like a coster's orange barrow. I should not have thought there were so many in the whole country as were brought together by that single advertisement. Every shade of colour they were--straw, lemon, orange, brick, Irish-setter, liver, clay; but, as Spaulding said, there were not many who had the real vivid flame-coloured tint. When I saw how many were waiting, I would have given it up in despair; but Spaulding would not hear of it. How he did it I could not imagine, but he pushed and pulled and butted until he got me through the crowd, and right up to the steps which led to the office. There was a double stream upon the stair, some going up in hope, and some coming back dejected; but we wedged in as well as we could and soon found ourselves in the
"Your experience has been a most entertaining one," remarked Holmes as his client paused and refreshed his memory with a huge pinch of snuff. "Pray continue your very interesting statement."

"There was nothing in the office but a couple of wooden chairs and a deal table, behind which sat a small man with a head that was even redder than mine. He said a few words to each candidate as he came up, and then he always managed to find some fault in them which would disqualify them. Getting a vacancy did not seem to be such a very easy matter, after all. However, when our turn came the little man was much more favourable to me than to any of the others, and he closed the door as we entered, so that he might have a private word with us.

"This is Mr. Jabez Wilson," said my assistant, 'and he is willing to fill a vacancy in the League.'

"And he is admirably suited for it,' the other answered. 'He has every requirement. I cannot recall when I have seen anything so fine.' He took a step backward, cocked his head on one side, and gazed at my hair until I felt quite bashful. Then suddenly he plunged forward, wrung my hand, and congratulated me warmly on my success.

"It would be injustice to hesitate," said he. 'You will, however, I am sure, excuse me for taking an obvious precaution.' With that he seized my hair in both his hands, and tugged until I yelled with the pain. 'There is water in your eyes,' said he as he released me. 'I perceive that all is as it should be. But we have to be careful, for we have twice been deceived by wigs and once by paint. I could tell you tales of cobbler's wax which would disgust you with human nature.' He stepped over to the window and shouted through it at the top of his voice that the vacancy was filled. A groan of disappointment came up from below, and the folk all trooped away in different directions until there was not a red-head to be seen except my own and that of the manager.

"My name," said he, 'is Mr. Duncan Ross, and I am myself one of the pensioners upon the fund left by our noble benefactor. Are you a married man, Mr. Wilson? Have you a family?'

"I answered that I had not.

"His face fell immediately.

"'Dear me!' he said gravely, 'that is very serious indeed! I am sorry to hear you say that. The fund was, of course, for the propagation and spread of the red-heads as well as for their maintenance. It is exceedingly unfortunate that you should be a bachelor.'

"My face lengthened at this, Mr. Holmes, for I thought that I was not to have the vacancy after all; but after thinking it over for a few minutes he said that it would be all right.

"'In the case of another,' said he, 'the objection might be fatal, but we must stretch a point in favour of a man with such a head of hair as yours. When shall you be able to enter upon your new duties?'

"'Well, it is a little awkward, for I have a business already,' said I.

"'Oh, never mind about that, Mr. Wilson!' said Vincent Spaulding. 'I should be able to look after that for you.'

"'What would be the hours?' I asked.

"'Ten to two.'

"Now a pawnbroker's business is mostly done of an evening, Mr. Holmes, especially Thursday and Friday evening, which is just before pay-day; so it would suit me very well to earn a little in the mornings. Besides, I knew that my assistant was a good man, and that he would see to anything that turned up.

"'That would suit me very well,' said I. 'And the pay?'

"'Is 4 pounds a week.'

"'And the work?'

"'Is purely nominal.'

"'What do you call purely nominal?'

"'Well, you have to be in the office, or at least in the building, the whole time. If you leave, you forfeit your whole position forever. The will is very clear upon that point. You don't comply with the conditions if you budge from the office during that time.'

"'It's only four hours a day, and I should not think of leaving,' said I.

"'No excuse will avail,' said Mr. Duncan Ross; 'neither sickness nor business nor anything else. There you must stay, or you lose your billet.'

"'And the work?'

"'Is to copy out the "Encyclopaedia Britannica." There is the first volume of it in that press. You must find your own ink, pens, and blotting-paper, but we provide this table and chair. Will you be ready to-morrow?'

"'Certainly,' I answered.

"'Then, good-bye, Mr. Jabez Wilson, and let me congratulate you once more on the important position which you have been fortunate enough to gain.' He bowed me out of the room and I went home with my assistant, hardly knowing what to say or do, I was so pleased at my own good fortune.

"Well, I thought over the matter all day, and by evening I was in low spirits again; for I had quite persuaded
myself that the whole affair must be some great hoax or fraud, though what its object might be I could not imagine. It seemed altogether past belief that anyone could make such a will, or that they would pay such a sum for doing anything so simple as copying out the 'Encyclopaedia Britannica.' Vincent Spaulding did what he could to cheer me up, but by bedtime I had reasoned myself out of the whole thing. However, in the morning I determined to have a look at it anyhow, so I bought a penny bottle of ink, and with a quill-pen, and seven sheets of foolscap paper, I started off for Pope's Court.

"Well, to my surprise and delight, everything was as right as possible. The table was set out ready for me, and Mr. Duncan Ross was there to see that I got fairly to work. He started me off upon the letter A, and then he left me; but he would drop in from time to time to see that all was right with me. At two o'clock he bade me good-day, complimented me upon the amount that I had written, and locked the door of the office after me.

"This went on day after day, Mr. Holmes, and on Saturday the manager came in and planked down four golden sovereigns for my week's work. It was the same next week, and the same the week after. Every morning I was there at ten, and every afternoon I left at two. By degrees Mr. Duncan Ross took to coming in only once of a morning, and then, after a time, he did not come in at all. Still, of course, I never dared to leave the room for an instant, for I was not sure when he might come, and the billet was such a good one, and suited me so well, that I would not risk the loss of it.

"Eight weeks passed away like this, and I had written about Abbots and Archery and Armour and Architecture and Attica, and hoped with diligence that I might get on to the B's before very long. It cost me something in foolscap, and I had pretty nearly filled a shelf with my writings. And then suddenly the whole business came to an end."

"To an end?"

"Yes, sir. And no later than this morning. I went to my work as usual at ten o'clock, but the door was shut and locked, with a little square of cardboard hammered on to the middle of the panel with a tack. Here it is, and you can read for yourself."

He held up a piece of white cardboard about the size of a sheet of note-paper. It read in this fashion:

THE RED-HEADED LEAGUE
IS
DISSOLVED.
October 9, 1890.

Sherlock Holmes and I surveyed this curt announcement and the rueful face behind it, until the comical side of the affair so completely overtopped every other consideration that we both burst out into a roar of laughter.

"I cannot see that there is anything very funny," cried our client, flushing up to the roots of his flaming head. "If you can do nothing better than laugh at me, I can go elsewhere."

"No, no," cried Holmes, shoving him back into the chair from which he had half risen. "I really wouldn't miss your case for the world. It is most refreshingly unusual. But there is, if you will excuse my saying so, something just a little funny about it. Pray what steps did you take when you found the card upon the door?"

"I was staggered, sir. I did not know what to do. Then I called at the offices round, but none of them seemed to know anything about it. Finally, I went to the landlord, who is an accountant living on the ground-floor, and I asked him if he could tell me what had become of the Red-headed League. He said that he had never heard of any such body. Then I asked him who Mr. Duncan Ross was. He answered that the name was new to him."

"Well,' said I, 'the gentleman at No. 4.'"

"What, the red-headed man?"

"Yes."

"Oh,' said he, 'his name was William Morris. He was a solicitor and was using my room as a temporary convenience until his new premises were ready. He moved out yesterday.'"

"Where could I find him?"

"Oh, at his new offices. He did tell me the address. Yes, 17 King Edward Street, near St. Paul's."

"I started off, Mr. Holmes, but when I got to that address it was a manufactory of artificial knee-caps, and no one in it had ever heard of either Mr. William Morris or Mr. Duncan Ross."

"And what did you do then?" asked Holmes.

"I went home to Saxe-Coburg Square, and I took the advice of my assistant. But he could not help me in any way. He could only say that if I waited I should hear by post. But that was not quite good enough, Mr. Holmes. I did not wish to lose such a place without a struggle, so, as I had heard that you were good enough to give advice to poor folk who were in need of it, I came right away to you."

"And you did very wisely," said Holmes. "Your case is an exceedingly remarkable one, and I shall be happy to look into it. From what you have told me I think that it is possible that graver issues hang from it than might at first
"Grave enough!" said Mr. Jabez Wilson. "Why, I have lost four pound a week."

"As far as you are personally concerned," remarked Holmes, "I do not see that you have any grievance against this extraordinary league. On the contrary, you are, as I understand, richer by some 30 pounds, to say nothing of the minute knowledge which you have gained on every subject which comes under the letter A. You have lost nothing by them."

"No, sir. But I want to find out about them, and who they are, and what their object was in playing this prank—if it was a prank—upon me. It was a pretty expensive joke for them, for it cost them two and thirty pounds."

"We shall endeavour to clear up these points for you. And, first, one or two questions, Mr. Wilson. This assistant of yours who first called your attention to the advertisement—how long had he been with you?"

"About a month then."

"How did he come?"

"In answer to an advertisement."

"Was he the only applicant?"

"No, I had a dozen."

"Why did you pick him?"

"Because he was handy and would come cheap."

"At half-wages, in fact."

"Yes."

"What is he like, this Vincent Spaulding?"

"Small, stout-built, very quick in his ways, no hair on his face, though he's not short of thirty. Has a white splash of acid upon his forehead."

Holmes sat up in his chair in considerable excitement. "I thought as much," said he. "Have you ever observed that his ears are pierced for earrings?"

"Yes, sir. He told me that a gipsy had done it for him when he was a lad."

"Hum!" said Holmes, sinking back in deep thought. "He is still with you?"

"Oh, yes, sir; I have only just left him."

"And has your business been attended to in your absence?"

"Nothing to complain of, sir. There's never very much to do of a morning."

"That will do, Mr. Wilson. I shall be happy to give you an opinion upon the subject in the course of a day or two."

To-day is Saturday, and I hope that by Monday we may come to a conclusion."

"Well, Watson," said Holmes when our visitor had left us, "what do you make of it all?"

"I make nothing of it," I answered frankly. "It is a most mysterious business."

"As a rule," said Holmes, "the more bizarre a thing is the less mysterious it proves to be. It is your commonplace, featureless crimes which are really puzzling, just as a commonplace face is the most difficult to identify. But I must be prompt over this matter."

"What are you going to do, then?" I asked.

"To smoke," he answered. "It is quite a three pipe problem, and I beg that you won't speak to me for fifty minutes." He curled himself up in his chair, with his thin knees drawn up to his hawk-like nose, and there he sat with his eyes closed and his black clay pipe thrusting out like the bill of some strange bird. I had come to the conclusion that he had dropped asleep, and indeed was nodding myself, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with the gesture of a man who has made up his mind and put his pipe down upon the mantelpiece.

"Sarasate plays at the St. James's Hall this afternoon," he remarked. "What do you think, Watson? Could your patients spare you for a few hours?"

"I have nothing to do to-day. My practice is never very absorbing."

"Then put on your hat and come. I am going through the City first, and we can have some lunch on the way. I observe that there is a good deal of German music on the programme, which is rather more to my taste than Italian or French. It is introspective, and I want to introspect. Come along!"

We travelled by the Underground as far as Aldersgate; and a short walk took us to Saxe-Coburg Square, the scene of the singular story which we had listened to in the morning. It was a poky, little, shabby-genteel place, where four lines of dingy two-storied brick houses looked out into a small railed-in enclosure, where a lawn of weedy grass and a few clumps of faded laurel-bushes made a hard fight against a smoke-laden and uncongenial atmosphere. Three gilt balls and a brown board with "JABEZ WILSON" in white letters, upon a corner house, announced the place where our red-headed client carried on his business. Sherlock Holmes stopped in front of it with his head on one side and looked it all over, with his eyes shining brightly between puckered lids. Then he walked slowly up the street, and then down again to the corner, still looking keenly at the houses. Finally he returned
to the pawnbroker's, and, having thumped vigorously upon the pavement with his stick two or three times, he went up to the door and knocked. It was instantly opened by a bright-looking, clean-shaven young fellow, who asked him to step in.

"Thank you," said Holmes, "I only wished to ask you how you would go from here to the Strand."

"Third right, fourth left," answered the assistant promptly, closing the door.

"Smart fellow, that," observed Holmes as we walked away. "He is, in my judgment, the fourth smartest man in London, and for daring I am not sure that he has not a claim to be third. I have known something of him before."

"Evidently," said I, "Mr. Wilson's assistant counts for a good deal in this mystery of the Red-headed League. I am sure that you inquired your way merely in order that you might see him."

"Not him."

"What then?"

"The knees of his trousers."

"And what did you see?"

"What I expected to see."

"Why did you beat the pavement?"

"My dear doctor, this is a time for observation, not for talk. We are spies in an enemy's country. We know something of Saxe-Coburg Square. Let us now explore the parts which lie behind it."

The road in which we found ourselves as we turned round the corner from the retired Saxe-Coburg Square presented as great a contrast to it as the front of a picture does to the back. It was one of the main arteries which conveyed the traffic of the City to the north and west. The roadway was blocked with the immense stream of commerce flowing in a double tide inward and outward, while the footpaths were black with the hurrying swarm of pedestrians. It was difficult to realise as we looked at the line of fine shops and stately business premises that they really abutted on the other side upon the faded and stagnant square which we had just quitted.

"Let me see," said Holmes, standing at the corner and glancing along the line, "I should like just to remember the order of the houses here. It is a hobby of mine to have an exact knowledge of London. There is Mortimer's, the tobacconist, the little newspaper shop, the Coburg branch of the City and Suburban Bank, the Vegetarian Restaurant, and McFarlane's carriage-building depot. That carries us right on to the other block. And now, Doctor, we've done our work, so it's time we had some play. A sandwich and a cup of coffee, and then off to violin-land, where all is sweetness and delicacy and harmony, and there are no red-headed clients to vex us with their conundrums."

My friend was an enthusiastic musician, being himself not only a very capable performer but a composer of no ordinary merit. All the afternoon he sat in the stalls wrapped in the most perfect happiness, gently waving his long, thin fingers in time to the music, while his gently smiling face and his languid, dreamy eyes were as unlike those of Holmes the sleuth-hound, Holmes the relentless, keen-witted, ready-handed criminal agent, as it was possible to conceive. In his singular character the dual nature alternately asserted itself, and his extreme exactness and astuteness represented, as I have often thought, the reaction against the poetic and contemplative mood which occasionally predominated in him. The swing of his nature took him from extreme languor to devouring energy; and, as I knew well, he was never so truly formidable as when, for days on end, he had been lounging in his armchair amid his improvisations and his black-letter editions. Then it was that the lust of the chase would suddenly come upon him, and that his brilliant reasoning power would rise to the level of intuition, until those who were unacquainted with his methods would look askance at him as on a man whose knowledge was not that of other mortals. When I saw him that afternoon so enwrapped in the music at St. James's Hall I felt that an evil time might be coming upon those whom he had set himself to hunt down.

"You want to go home, no doubt, Doctor," he remarked as we emerged.

"Yes, it would be as well."

"And I have some business to do which will take some hours. This business at Coburg Square is serious."

"Why serious?"

"A considerable crime is in contemplation. I have every reason to believe that we shall be in time to stop it. But to-day being Saturday rather complicates matters. I shall want your help to-night."

"At what time?"

"Ten will be early enough."

"I shall be at Baker Street at ten."

"Very well. And, I say, Doctor, there may be some little danger, so kindly put your army revolver in your pocket." He waved his hand, turned on his heel, and disappeared in an instant among the crowd.

I trust that I am not more dense than my neighbours, but I was always oppressed with a sense of my own stupidity in my dealings with Sherlock Holmes. Here I had heard what he had heard, I had seen what he had seen, and yet from his words it was evident that he saw clearly not only what had happened but what was about to happen,
Holmes fell upon his knees upon the floor and, with the lantern and a magnifying lens, began to examine minutely the success of our expedition. Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit down upon one of those boxes, and then conduct us down a dark, earth-smelling passage, and so, after a door, which he opened for us. Within there was a small corridor, which ended in a very massive iron gate. This also was opened, and led down a flight of winding stone steps, which terminated at another formidable gate. Mr. Merryweather stopped to light a lantern, and then conducted us down a narrow passage and through a side door, which he opened for us. Within there was a small corridor, which ended in a very massive iron gate. This also was opened, and led down a flight of winding stone steps, which terminated at another formidable gate. Mr. Merryweather stopped to light a lantern, and then conducted us down a dark, earth-smelling passage, and so, after opening a third door, into a huge vault or cellar, which was piled all round with crates and massive boxes.

"You are not very vulnerable from above," Holmes remarked as he held up the lantern and gazed about him.

"Nor from below," said Mr. Merryweather, striking his stick upon the flags which lined the floor. "Why, dear me, it sounds quite hollow!" he remarked, looking up in surprise.

"I must really ask you to be a little more quiet!" said Holmes severely. "You have already imperilled the whole success of our expedition. Might I beg that you would have the goodness to sit down upon one of those boxes, and not to interfere?"

The solemn Mr. Merryweather perched himself upon a crate, with a very injured expression upon his face, while Holmes fell upon his knees upon the floor and, with the lantern and a magnifying lens, began to examine minutely.
the cracks between the stones. A few seconds sufficed to satisfy him, for he sprang to his feet again and put his glass in his pocket.

"We have at least an hour before us," he remarked, "for they can hardly take any steps until the good pawnbroker is safely in bed. Then they will not lose a minute, for the sooner they do their work the longer time they will have for their escape. We are at present, Doctor--as no doubt you have divined--in the cellar of the City branch of one of the principal London banks. Mr. Merryweather is the chairman of directors, and he will explain to you that there are reasons why the more daring criminals of London should take a considerable interest in this cellar at present."

"It is our French gold," whispered the director. "We have had several warnings that an attempt might be made upon it."

"Your French gold?"

"Yes. We had occasion some months ago to strengthen our resources and borrowed for that purpose 30,000 napoleons from the Bank of France. It has become known that we have never had occasion to unpack the money, and that it is still lying in our cellar. The crate upon which I sit contains 2,000 napoleons packed between layers of lead foil. Our reserve of bullion is much larger at present than is usually kept in a single branch office, and the directors have had misgivings upon the subject."

"Which were very well justified," observed Holmes. "And now it is time that we arranged our little plans. I expect that within an hour matters will come to a head. In the meantime Mr. Merryweather, we must put the screen over that dark lantern."

"And sit in the dark?"

"I am afraid so. I had brought a pack of cards in my pocket, and I thought that, as we were a partie carrée, you might have your rubber after all. But I see that the enemy's preparations have gone so far that we cannot risk the presence of a light. And, first of all, we must choose our positions. These are daring men, and though we shall take them at a disadvantage, they may do us some harm unless we are careful. I shall stand behind this crate, and do you conceal yourselves behind those. Then, when I flash a light upon them, close in swiftly. If they fire, Watson, have no compunction about shooting them down."

I placed my revolver, cocked, upon the top of the wooden case behind which I crouched. Holmes shot the slide across the front of his lantern and left us in pitch darkness--such an absolute darkness as I have never before experienced. The smell of hot metal remained to assure us that the light was still there, ready to flash out at a moment's notice. To me, with my nerves worked up to a pitch of expectancy, there was something depressing and subduing in the sudden gloom, and in the cold dank air of the vault.

"They have but one retreat," whispered Holmes. "That is back through the house into Saxe-Coburg Square. I hope that you have done what I asked you, Jones?"

"I have an inspector and two officers waiting at the front door."

"Then we have stopped all the holes. And now we must be silent and wait."

What a time it seemed! From comparing notes afterwards it was but an hour and a quarter, yet it appeared to me that the night must have almost gone and the dawn be breaking above us. My limbs were weary and stiff, for I feared to change my position; yet my nerves were worked up to the highest pitch of tension, and my hearing was so acute that I could not only hear the gentle breathing of my companions, but I could distinguish the deeper, heavier in-breath of the bulky Jones from the thin, sighing note of the bank director. From my position I could look over the case in the direction of the floor. Suddenly my eyes caught the glint of a light.

At first it was but a lurid spark upon the stone pavement. Then it lengthened out until it became a yellow line, and then, without any warning or sound, a gash seemed to open and a hand appeared, a white, almost womanly hand, which felt about in the centre of the little area of light. For a minute or more the hand, with its writhing fingers, protruded out of the floor. Then it was withdrawn as suddenly as it appeared, and all was dark again save the single lurid spark which marked a chink between the stones.

Its disappearance, however, was but momentary. With a rending, tearing sound, one of the broad, white stones turned over upon its side and left a square, gaping hole, through which streamed the light of a lantern. Over the edge there peeped a clean-cut, boyish face, which looked keenly about it, and then, with a hand on either side of the aperture, drew itself shoulder-high and waist-high, until one knee rested upon the edge. In another instant he stood at the side of the hole and was hauling after him a companion, lithe and small like himself, with a pale face and a shock of very red hair.

"It's all clear," he whispered. "Have you the chisel and the bags? Great Scott! Jump, Archie, jump, and I'll swing for it!"

Sherlock Holmes had sprung out and seized the intruder by the collar. The other dived down the hole, and I heard the sound of rending cloth as Jones clutched at his skirts. The light flashed upon the barrel of a revolver, but Holmes' hunting crop came down on the man's wrist, and the pistol clinked upon the stone floor.
"It's no use, John Clay," said Holmes blandly. "You have no chance at all."

"So I see," the other answered with the utmost coolness. "I fancy that my pal is all right, though I see you have got his coat-tails."

"There are three men waiting for him at the door," said Holmes.

"Oh, indeed! You seem to have done the thing very completely. I must compliment you."

"And I you," Holmes answered. "Your red-headed idea was very new and effective."

"You'll see your pal again presently," said Jones. "He's quicker at climbing down holes than I am. Just hold out while I fix the derbies."

"I beg that you will not touch me with your filthy hands," remarked our prisoner as the handcuffs clattered upon his wrists. "You may not be aware that I have royal blood in my veins. Have the goodness, also, when you address me always to say 'sir' and 'please.'"

"All right," said Jones with a stare and a snigger. "Well, would you please, sir, march upstairs, where we can get a cab to carry your Highness to the police-station?"

"That is better," said John Clay serenely. He made a sweeping bow to the three of us and walked quietly off in the custody of the detective.

"Really, Mr. Holmes," said Mr. Merryweather as we followed them from the cellar, "I do not know how the bank can thank you or repay you. There is no doubt that you have detected and defeated in the most complete manner one of the most determined attempts at bank robbery that have ever come within my experience."

"I have had one or two little scores of my own to settle with Mr. John Clay," said Holmes. "I have been at some small expense over this matter, which I shall expect the bank to refund, but beyond that I am amply repaid by having had an experience which is in many ways unique, and by hearing the very remarkable narrative of the Red-headed League."

"You see, Watson," he explained in the early hours of the morning as we sat over a glass of whisky and soda in Baker Street, "it was perfectly obvious from the first that the only possible object of this rather fantastic business of the advertisement of the League, and the copying of the 'Encyclopaedia,' must be to get this not over-bright pawnbroker out of the way for a number of hours every day. It was a curious way of managing it, but, really, it would be difficult to suggest a better. The method was no doubt suggested to Clay's ingenious mind by the colour of his accomplice's hair. The 4 pounds a week was a lure which must draw him, and what was it to them, who were playing for thousands? They put in the advertisement, one rogue has the temporary office, the other rogue incites the man to apply for it, and together they manage to secure his absence every morning in the week. From the time that I heard of the assistant having come for half wages, it was obvious to me that he had some strong motive for securing the situation."

"But how could you guess what the motive was?"

"Had there been women in the house, I should have suspected a mere vulgar intrigue. That, however, was out of the question. The man's business was a small one, and there was nothing in his house which could account for such elaborate preparations, and such an expenditure as they were at. It must, then, be something out of the house. What could it be? I thought of the assistant's fondness for photography, and his trick of vanishing into the cellar. The cellar! There was the end of this tangled clue. Then I made inquiries as to this mysterious assistant and found that I had to deal with one of the coolest and most daring criminals in London. He was doing something in the cellar--something which took many hours a day for months on end. What could it be, once more? I could think of nothing save that he was running a tunnel to some other building.

"So far I had got when we went to visit the scene of action. I surprised you by beating upon the pavement with my stick. I was ascertaining whether the cellar stretched out in front or behind. It was not in front. Then I rang the bell, and, as I hoped, the assistant answered it. We have had some skirmishes, but we had never set eyes upon each other before. I hardly looked at his face. His knees were what I wished to see. You must yourself have remarked how worn, wrinkled, and stained they were. They spoke of those hours of burrowing. The only remaining point was what they were burrowing for. I walked round the corner, saw the City and Suburban Bank abutted on our friend's premises, and felt that I had solved my problem. When you drove home after the concert I called upon Scotland Yard and upon the chairman of the bank directors, with the result that you have seen."

"And how could you tell that they would make their attempt to-night?" I asked.

"Well, when they closed their League offices that was a sign that they cared no longer about Mr. Jabez Wilson's presence--in other words, that they had completed their tunnel. But it was essential that they should use it soon, as it might be discovered, or the bullion might be removed. Saturday would suit them better than any other day, as it would give them two days for their escape. For all these reasons I expected them to come to-night."

"You reasoned it out beautifully," I exclaimed in unfeigned admiration. "It is so long a chain, and yet every link rings true."
"It saved me from ennui," he answered, yawning. "Alas! I already feel it closing in upon me. My life is spent in one long effort to escape from the commonplaces of existence. These little problems help me to do so."

"And you are a benefactor of the race," said I.

He shrugged his shoulders. "Well, perhaps, after all, it is of some little use," he remarked. "'L'homme c'est rien--l'oeuvre c'est tout,' as Gustave Flaubert wrote to George Sand."

ADVENTURE III. A CASE OF IDENTITY

"My dear fellow," said Sherlock Holmes as we sat on either side of the fire in his lodgings at Baker Street, "life is infinitely stranger than anything which the mind of man could invent. We would not dare to conceive the things which are really mere commonplaces of existence. If we could fly out of that window hand in hand, hover over this great city, gently remove the roofs, and peep in at the queer things which are going on, the strange coincidences, the plannings, the cross-purposes, the wonderful chains of events, working through generations, and leading to the most outré results, it would make all fiction with its conventionalities and foreseen conclusions most stale and unprofitable."

"And yet I am not convinced of it," I answered. "The cases which come to light in the papers are, as a rule, bald enough, and vulgar enough. We have in our police reports realism pushed to its extreme limits, and yet the result is, it must be confessed, neither fascinating nor artistic."

"A certain selection and discretion must be used in producing a realistic effect," remarked Holmes. "This is wanting in the police report, where more stress is laid, perhaps, upon the platitudes of the magistrate than upon the details, which to an observer contain the vital essence of the whole matter. Depend upon it, there is nothing so unnatural as the commonplace."

I smiled and shook my head. "I can quite understand your thinking so," I said. "Of course, in your position of unofficial adviser and helper to everybody who is absolutely puzzled, throughout three continents, you are brought in contact with all that is strange and bizarre. But here"--I picked up the morning paper from the ground--"let us put it to a practical test. Here is the first heading upon which I come. 'A husband's cruelty to his wife.' There is half a column of print, but I know without reading it that it is all perfectly familiar to me. There is, of course, the other woman, the drink, the push, the blow, the bruise, the sympathetic sister or landlady. The crudest of writers could invent nothing more crude."

"Indeed, your example is an unfortunate one for your argument," said Holmes, taking the paper and glancing his eye down it. "This is the Dundas separation case, and, as it happens, I was engaged in clearing up some small points in connection with it. The husband was a teetotaler, there was no other woman, and the conduct complained of was that he had drifted into the habit of winding up every meal by taking out his false teeth and hurling them at his wife, which, you will allow, is not an action likely to occur to the imagination of the average story-teller. Take a pinch of snuff, Doctor, and acknowledge that I have scored over you in your example."

He held out his snuffbox of old gold, with a great amethyst in the centre of the lid. Its splendour was in such contrast to his homely ways and simple life that I could not help commenting upon it.

"Ah," said he, "I forgot that I had not seen you for some weeks. It is a little souvenir from the King of Bohemia in return for my assistance in the case of the Irene Adler papers."

"And the ring?" I asked, glancing at a remarkable brilliant which sparkled upon his finger.

"It was from the reigning family of Holland, though the matter in which I served them was of such delicacy that I cannot confide it even to you, who have been good enough to chronicle one or two of my little problems."

"And have you any on hand just now?" I asked with interest.

"Some ten or twelve, but none which present any feature of interest. They are important, you understand, without being interesting. Indeed, I have found that it is usually in unimportant matters that there is a field for the observation, and for the quick analysis of cause and effect which gives the charm to an investigation. The larger crimes are apt to be the simpler, for the bigger the crime the more obvious, as a rule, is the motive. In these cases, save for one rather intricate matter which has been referred to me from Marseilles, there is nothing which presents any features of interest. It is possible, however, that I may have something better before very many minutes are over, for this is one of my clients, or I am much mistaken."

He had risen from his chair and was standing between the parted blinds gazing down into the dull neutral-tinted London street. Looking over his shoulder, I saw that on the pavement opposite there stood a large woman with a heavy fur boa round her neck, and a large curling red feather in a broad-brimmed hat which was tilted in a coquettish Duchess of Devonshire fashion over her ear. From under this great panoply she peeped up in a nervous, hesitating fashion at our windows, while her body oscillated backward and forward, and her fingers fidgeted with her glove buttons. Suddenly, with a plunge, as of the swimmer who leaves the bank, she hurried across the road, and we heard the sharp clang of the bell.

"I have seen those symptoms before," said Holmes, throwing his cigarette into the fire. "Oscillation upon the
pavement always means an affaire de coeur. She would like advice, but is not sure that the matter is not too delicate for communication. And yet even here we may discriminate. When a woman has been seriously wronged by a man she no longer oscillates, and the usual symptom is a broken bell wire. Here we may take it that there is a love matter, but that the maiden is not so much angry as perplexed. But here she comes in person to resolve our doubts."

As he spoke there was a tap at the door, and the boy in buttons entered to announce Miss Mary Sutherland, while the lady herself loomed behind his small black figure like a full-sailed merchant-man behind a tiny pilot boat. Sherlock Holmes welcomed her with the easy courtesy for which he was remarkable, and, having closed the door and bowed her into an armchair, he looked her over in the minute and yet abstracted fashion which was peculiar to him.

"Do you not find," he said, "that with your short sight it is a little trying to do so much typewriting?"

"I did at first," she answered, "but now I know where the letters are without looking." Then, suddenly realising the full purport of his words, she gave a violent start and looked up, with fear and astonishment upon her broad, good-humoured face. "You've heard about me, Mr. Holmes," she cried, "else how could you know all that?"

"Never mind," said Holmes, laughing; "it is my business to know things. Perhaps I have trained myself to see what others overlook. If not, why should you come to consult me?"

"I came to you, sir, because I heard of you from Mrs. Etherege, whose husband you found so easy when the police and everyone had given him up for dead. Oh, Mr. Holmes, I wish you would do as much for me. I'm not rich, but still I have a hundred a year in my own right, besides the little that I make by the machine, and I would give it all to know what has become of Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"Why did you come away to consult me in such a hurry?" asked Sherlock Holmes, with his finger-tips together and his eyes to the ceiling.

Again a startled look came over the somewhat vacuous face of Miss Mary Sutherland. "Yes, I did bang out of the house," she said, "for it made me angry to see the easy way in which Mr. Windibank--that is, my father--took it all. He would not go to the police, and he would not go to you, and so at last, as he would do nothing and kept on saying that there was no harm done, it made me mad, and I just on with my things and came right away to you."

"Your father," said Holmes, "your stepfather, surely, since the name is different."

"Yes, my stepfather. I call him father, though it sounds funny, too, for he is only five years and two months older than myself."

"And your mother is alive?"

"Oh, yes, mother is alive and well. I wasn't best pleased, Mr. Holmes, when she married again so soon after father's death, and a man who was nearly fifteen years younger than herself. Father was a plumber in the Tottenham Court Road, and he left a tidy business behind him, which mother carried on with Mr. Hardy, the foreman; but when Mr. Windibank came he made her sell the business, for he was very superior, being a traveller in wines. They got 4700 pounds for the goodwill and interest, which wasn't near as much as father could have got if he had been alive."

I had expected to see Sherlock Holmes impatient under this rambling and inconsequential narrative, but, on the contrary, he had listened with the greatest concentration of attention.

"Your own little income," he asked, "does it come out of the business?"

"Oh, no, sir. It is quite separate and was left me by my uncle Ned in Auckland. It is in New Zealand stock, paying 4 1/2 per cent. Two thousand five hundred pounds was the amount, but I can only touch the interest."

"You interest me extremely," said Holmes. "And since you draw so large a sum as a hundred a year, with what you earn into the bargain, you no doubt travel a little and indulge yourself in every way. I believe that a single lady can get on very nicely upon an income of about 60 pounds."

"I could do with much less than that, Mr. Holmes, but you understand that as long as I live at home I don't wish to be a burden to them, and so they have the use of the money just while I am staying with them. Of course, that is only just for the time. Mr. Windibank draws my interest every quarter and pays it over to mother, and I find that I can do pretty well with what I earn at typewriting. It brings me twopence a sheet, and I can often do from fifteen to twenty sheets in a day."

"You have made your position very clear to me," said Holmes. "This is my friend, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Kindly tell us now all about your connection with Mr. Hosmer Angel."

A flush stole over Miss Sutherland's face, and she picked nervously at the fringe of her jacket. "I met him first at the gasfitters' ball," she said. "They used to send father tickets when he was alive, and then afterwards they remembered us, and sent them to mother. Mr. Windibank did not wish us to go. He never did wish us to go anywhere. He would get quite mad if I wanted so much as to join a Sunday-school treat. But this time I was set on going, and I would go; for what right had he to prevent? He said the folk were not fit for us to know, when all father's friends were to be there. And he said that I had nothing fit to wear, when I had my purple plush that I had
never so much as taken out of the drawer. At last, when nothing else would do, he went off to France upon the
business of the firm, but we went, mother and I, with Mr. Hardy, who used to be our foreman, and it was there I met
Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"I suppose," said Holmes, "that when Mr. Windibank came back from France he was very annoyed at your
having gone to the ball."

"Oh, well, he was very good about it. He laughed, I remember, and shrugged his shoulders, and said there was
no use denying anything to a woman, for she would have her way."

"I see. Then at the gasfitters' ball you met, as I understand, a gentleman called Mr. Hosmer Angel."

"Yes, sir. I met him that night, and he called next day to ask if we had got home all safe, and after that we met
him—that is to say, Mr. Holmes, I met him twice for walks, but after that father came back again, and Mr. Hosmer
Angel could not come to the house any more."

"No?"

"Well, you know father didn't like anything of the sort. He wouldn't have any visitors if he could help it, and he
used to say that a woman should be happy in her own family circle. But then, as I used to say to mother, a woman
wants her own circle to begin with, and I had not got mine yet."

"But how about Mr. Hosmer Angel? Did he make no attempt to see you?"

"Well, father was going off to France again in a week, and Hosmer wrote and said that it would be safer and
better not to see each other until he had gone. We could write in the meantime, and he used to write every day. I
took the letters in in the morning, so there was no need for father to know."

"Were you engaged to the gentleman at this time?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Holmes. We were engaged after the first walk that we took. Hosmer--Mr. Angel--was a cashier in
an office in Leadenhall Street--and--"

"What office?"

"That's the worst of it, Mr. Holmes, I don't know."

"Where did he live, then?"

"He slept on the premises."

"And you don't know his address?"

"No--except that it was Leadenhall Street."

"Where did you address your letters, then?"

"To the Leadenhall Street Post Office, to be left till called for. He said that if they were sent to the office he
would be chaffed by all the other clerks about having letters from a lady, so I offered to typewrite them, like he did
his, but he wouldn't have that, for he said that when I wrote them they seemed to come from me, but when they were
typewritten he always felt that the machine had come between us. That will just show you how fond he was of me,
Mr. Holmes, and the little things that he would think of."

"It was most suggestive," said Holmes. "It has long been an axiom of mine that the little things are infinitely the
most important. Can you remember any other little things about Mr. Hosmer Angel?"

"He was a very shy man, Mr. Holmes. He would rather walk with me in the evening than in the daylight, for he
said that he hated to be conspicuous. Very retiring and gentlemanly he was. Even his voice was gentle. He'd had the
quinsy and swollen glands when he was young, he told me, and it had left him with a weak throat, and a hesitating,
whispering fashion of speech. He was always well dressed, very neat and plain, but his eyes were weak, just as mine
are, and he wore tinted glasses against the glare."

"Well, and what happened when Mr. Windibank, your stepfather, returned to France?"

"Mr. Hosmer Angel came to the house again and proposed that we should marry before father came back. He
was in dreadful earnest and made me swear, with my hands on the Testament, that whatever happened I would
always be true to him. Mother said he was quite right to make me swear, and that it was a sign of his passion.
Mother was all in his favour from the first, and was even fonder of him than I was. Then, when they talked of
marrying within the week, I began to ask about father; but they both said never to mind about father, but just to tell
him afterwards, and mother said she would make it all right with him. I didn't quite like that, Mr. Holmes. It seemed
funny that I should ask his leave, as he was only a few years older than me; but I didn't want to do anything on the
sly, so I wrote to father at Bordeaux, where the company has its French offices, but the letter came back to me on the
very morning of the wedding."

"It missed him, then?"

"Yes, sir; for he had started to England just before it arrived."

"Ha! that was unfortunate. Your wedding was arranged, then, for the Friday. Was it to be in church?"

"Yes, sir, but very quietly. It was to be at St. Saviour's, near King's Cross, and we were to have breakfast
afterwards at the St. Pancras Hotel. Hosmer came for us in a hansom, but as there were two of us he put us both into
it and stepped himself into a four-wheeler, which happened to be the only other cab in the street. We got to the church first, and when the four-wheeler drove up we waited for him to step out, but he never did, and when the cabman got down from the box and looked there was no one there! The cabman said that he could not imagine what had become of him, for he had seen him get in with his own eyes. That was last Friday, Mr. Holmes, and I have never seen or heard anything since then to throw any light upon what became of him."

"It seems to me that you have been very shamefully treated," said Holmes.

"Oh, no, sir! He was too good and kind to leave me so. Why, all the morning he was saying to me that, whatever happened, I was to be true; and that even if something quite unforeseen occurred to separate us, I was always to remember that I was pledged to him, and that he would claim his pledge sooner or later. It seemed strange talk for a wedding-morning, but what has happened since gives a meaning to it."

"Most certainly it does. Your own opinion is, then, that some unforeseen catastrophe has occurred to him?"

"Yes, sir. I believe that he foresaw some danger, or else he would not have talked so. And then I think that what he foresaw happened."

"But you have no notion as to what it could have been?"

"None."

"One more question. How did your mother take the matter?"

"She was angry, and said that I was never to speak of the matter again."

"And your father? Did you tell him?"

"Yes; and he seemed to think, with me, that something had happened, and that I should hear of Hosmer again. As he said, what interest could anyone have in bringing me to the doors of the church, and then leaving me? Now, if he had borrowed my money, or if he had married me and got my money settled on him, there might be some reason, but Hosmer was very independent about money and never would look at a shilling of mine. And yet, what could have happened? And why could he not write? Oh, it drives me half-mad to think of it, and I can't sleep a wink at night." She pulled a little handkerchief out of her muff and began to sob heavily into it.

"I shall glance into the case for you," said Holmes, rising, "and I have no doubt that we shall reach some definite result. Let the weight of the matter rest upon me now, and do not let your mind dwell upon it further. Above all, try to let Mr. Hosmer Angel vanish from your memory, as he has done from your life."

"Then you don't think I'll see him again?"

"I fear not."

"Then what has happened to him?"

"You will leave that question in my hands. I should like an accurate description of him and any letters of his which you can spare."

"I advertised for him in last Saturday's Chronicle," said she. "Here is the slip and here are four letters from him."

"Thank you. And your address?"

"No. 31 Lyon Place, Camberwell."

"Mr. Angel's address you never had, I understand. Where is your father's place of business?"

"He travels for Westhouse & Marbank, the great claret importers of Fenchurch Street."

"Thank you. You have made your statement very clearly. You will leave the papers here, and remember the advice which I have given you. Let the whole incident be a sealed book, and do not allow it to affect your life."

"You are very kind, Mr. Holmes, but I cannot do that. I shall be true to Hosmer. He shall find me ready when he comes back."

For all the preposterous hat and the vacuous face, there was something noble in the simple faith of our visitor which compelled our respect. She laid her little bundle of papers upon the table and went her way, with a promise to come again whenever she might be summoned.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for a few minutes with his fingertips still pressed together, his legs stretched out in front of him, and his gaze directed upward to the ceiling. Then he took down from the rack the old and oily clay pipe, which was to him as a counsellor, and, having lit it, he leaned back in his chair, with the thick blue cloud-wreaths spinning up from him, and a look of infinite languor in his face.

"Quite an interesting study, that maiden," he observed. "I found her more interesting than her little problem, which, by the way, is rather a trite one. You will find parallel cases, if you consult my index, in Andover in '77, and there was something of the sort at The Hague last year. Old as is the idea, however, there were one or two details which were new to me. But the maiden herself was most instructive."

"You appeared to read a good deal upon her which was quite invisible to me," I remarked.

"Not invisible but unnoticed, Watson. You did not know where to look, and so you missed all that was important. I can never bring you to realise the importance of sleeves, the suggestiveness of thumb-nails, or the great issues that may hang from a boot-lace. Now, what did you gather from that woman's appearance? Describe it."
"Well, she had a slate-coloured, broad-brimmed straw hat, with a feather of a brickish red. Her jacket was black, with black beads sewn upon it, and a fringe of little black jet ornaments. Her dress was brown, rather darker than coffee colour, with a little purple plush at the neck and sleeves. Her gloves were greyish and were worn through at the right forefinger. Her boots I didn't observe. She had small round, hanging gold earrings, and a general air of being fairly well-to-do in a vulgar, comfortable, easy-going way."

Sherlock Holmes clapped his hands softly together and chuckled.

"'Pon my word, Watson, you are coming along wonderfully. You have really done very well indeed. It is true that you have missed everything of importance, but you have hit upon the method, and you have a quick eye for colour. Never trust to general impressions, my boy, but concentrate yourself upon details. My first glance is always at a woman's sleeve. In a man it is perhaps better first to take the knee of the trouser. As you observe, this woman had plump on her sleeves, which is a most useful material for showing traces. The double line a little above the wrist, where the typewritist presses against the table, was beautifully defined. The sewing-machine, of the hand type, leaves a similar mark, but only on the left arm, and on the side of it farthest from the thumb, instead of being right across the broadest part, as this was. I then glanced at her face, and, observing the dint of a pince-nez at either side of her nose, I ventured a remark upon short sight and typewriting, which seemed to surprise her."

"It surprised me."

"But, surely, it was obvious. I was then much surprised and interested on glancing down to observe that, though the boots which she was wearing were not unlike each other, they were really odd ones; the one having a slightly decorated toe-cap, and the other a plain one. One was buttoned only in the two lower buttons out of five, and the other at the first, third, and fifth. Now, when you see that a young lady, otherwise neatly dressed, has come away from home with odd boots, half-buttoned, it is no great deduction to say that she came away in a hurry."

"And what else?" I asked, keenly interested, as I always was, by my friend's incisive reasoning.

"I noted, in passing, that she had written a note before leaving home but after being fully dressed. You observed that her right glove was torn at the forefinger, but you did not apparently see that both glove and finger were stained with violet ink. She had written in a hurry and dipped her pen too deep. It must have been this morning, or the mark would not remain clear upon the finger. All this is amusing, though rather elementary, but I must go back to business, Watson. Would you mind reading me the advertised description of Mr. Hosmer Angel?"

I held the little printed slip to the light.

"Missing," it said, "on the morning of the fourteenth, a gentleman named Hosmer Angel. About five ft. seven in. in height; strongly built, sallow complexion, black hair, a little bald in the centre, bushy, black side-whiskers and moustache; tinted glasses, slight infirmity of speech. Was dressed, when last seen, in black frock-coat faced with silk, black waistcoat, gold Albert chain, and grey Harris tweed trousers, with brown gaiters over elastic-sided boots. Known to have been employed in an office in Leadenhall Street. Anybody bringing--"

"That will do," said Holmes. "As to the letters," he continued, glancing over them, "they are very commonplace. Absolutely no clue in them to Mr. Angel, save that he quotes Balzac once. There is one remarkable point, however, which will no doubt strike you."

"They are typewritten," I remarked.

"Not only that, but the signature is typewritten. Look at the neat little 'Hosmer Angel' at the bottom. There is a date, you see, but no superscription except Leadenhall Street, which is rather vague. The point about the signature is very suggestive --in fact, we may call it conclusive."

"Of what?"

"My dear fellow, is it possible you do not see how strongly it bears upon the case?"

"I cannot say that I do unless it were that he wished to be able to deny his signature if an action for breach of promise were instituted.

"No, that was not the point. However, I shall write two letters, which should settle the matter. One is to a firm in the City, the other is to the young lady's stepfather, Mr. Windibank, asking him whether he could meet us here at six o'clock tomorrow evening. It is just as well that we should do business with the male relatives. And now, Doctor, we can do nothing until the answers to those letters come, so we may put our little problem upon the shelf for the interim."

I had had so many reasons to believe in my friend's subtle powers of reasoning and extraordinary energy in action that I felt that he must have some solid grounds for the assured and easy demeanour with which he treated the singular mystery which he had been called upon to fathom. Once only had I known him to fail, in the case of the King of Bohemia and of the Irene Adler photograph; but when I looked back to the weird business of the Sign of Four, and the extraordinary circumstances connected with the Study in Scarlet, I felt that it would be a strange tangle indeed which he could not unravel.

I left him then, still puffing at his black clay pipe, with the conviction that when I came again on the next
evening I would find that he held in his hands all the clues which would lead up to the identity of the disappearing bridegroom of Miss Mary Sutherland.

A professional case of great gravity was engaging my own attention at the time, and the whole of next day I was busy at the bedside of the sufferer. It was not until close upon six o'clock that I found myself free and was able to spring into a hansom and drive to Baker Street, half afraid that I might be too late to assist at the dénouement of the little mystery. I found Sherlock Holmes alone, however, half asleep, with his long, thin form curled up in the recesses of his armchair. A formidable array of bottles and test-tubes, with the pungent cleanly smell of hydrochloric acid, told me that he had spent his day in the chemical work which was so dear to him.

"Well, have you solved it?" I asked as I entered.

"Yes. It was the bisulphate of baryta."

"No, no, the mystery!" I cried.

"Oh, that! I thought of the salt that I have been working upon. There was never any mystery in the matter, though, as I said yesterday, some of the details are of interest. The only drawback is that there is no law, I fear, that can touch the scoundrel."

"Who was he, then, and what was his object in deserting Miss Sutherland?"

The question was hardly out of my mouth, and Holmes had not yet opened his lips to reply, when we heard a heavy footfall in the passage and a tap at the door.

"This is the girl's stepfather, Mr. James Windibank," said Holmes. "He has written to me to say that he would be here at six. Come in!"

The man who entered was a sturdy, middle-sized fellow, some thirty years of age, clean-shaven, and sallow-skinned, with a bland, insinuating manner, and a pair of wonderfully sharp and penetrating grey eyes. He shot a questioning glance at each of us, placed his shiny top-hat upon the sideboard, and with a slight bow sidled down into the nearest chair.

"Good-evening, Mr. James Windibank," said Holmes. "I think that this typewritten letter is from you, in which you made an appointment with me for six o'clock?"

"Yes, sir. I am afraid that I am a little late, but I am not quite my own master, you know. I am sorry that Miss Sutherland has troubled you about this little matter, for I think it is far better not to wash linen of the sort in public. It was quite against my wishes that she came, but she is a very excitable, impulsive girl, as you may have noticed, and she is not easily controlled when she has made up her mind on a point. Of course, I did not mind you so much, as you are not connected with the official police, but it is not pleasant to have a family misfortune like this noised abroad. Besides, it is a useless expense, for how could you possibly find this Hosmer Angel?"

"On the contrary," said Holmes quietly; "I have every reason to believe that I will succeed in discovering Mr. Hosmer Angel."

Mr. Windibank gave a violent start and dropped his gloves. "I cannot waste time over this sort of fantastic talk, Mr. Holmes," he said. "If you can catch the man, catch him, and let me know when you have done it."

"Certainly," said Holmes, stepping over and turning the key in the door. "I let you know, then, that I have caught him!"

"What! where?" shouted Mr. Windibank, turning white to his lips and glancing about him like a rat in a trap.

"Oh, it won't do--really it won't," said Holmes suavely. "There is no possible getting out of it, Mr. Windibank. It is quite too transparent, and it was a very bad compliment when you said that it was impossible for me to solve so simple a question. That's right! Sit down and let us talk it over."

Our visitor collapsed into a chair, with a ghastly face and a glitter of moisture on his brow. "It--it's not actionable," he stammered.
"I am very much afraid that it is not. But between ourselves, Windibank, it was as cruel and selfish and heartless a trick in a petty way as ever came before me. Now, let me just run over the course of events, and you will contradict me if I go wrong."

The man sat huddled up in his chair, with his head sunk upon his breast, like one who is utterly crushed. Holmes stuck his feet up on the corner of the mantelpiece and, leaning back with his hands in his pockets, began talking, rather to himself, as it seemed, than to us.

"The man married a woman very much older than himself for her money," said he, "and he enjoyed the use of the money of the daughter as long as she lived with them. It was a considerable sum, for people in their position, and the loss of it would have made a serious difference. It was worth an effort to preserve it. The daughter was of a good, amiable disposition, but affectionate and warm-hearted in her ways, so that it was evident that with her fair personal advantages, and her little income, she would not be allowed to remain single long. Now her marriage would mean, of course, the loss of a hundred a year, so what does her stepfather do to prevent it? He takes the obvious course of keeping her at home and forbidding her to seek the company of people of her own age. But soon he found that that would not answer forever. She became restive, insisted upon her rights, and finally announced her positive intention of going to a certain ball. What does her clever stepfather do then? He conceives an idea more creditable to his head than to his heart. With the connivance and assistance of his wife he disguised himself, covered those keen eyes with tinted glasses, masked the face with a moustache and a pair of bushy whiskers, sunk that clear voice into an insinuating whisper, and doubly secure on account of the girl's short sight, he appears as Mr. Hosmer Angel, and keeps off other lovers by making love himself."

"It was only a joke at first," groaned our visitor. "We never thought that she would have been so carried away."

"Very likely not. However that may be, the young lady was very decidedly carried away, and, having quite made up her mind that her stepfather was in France, the suspicion of treachery never for an instant entered her mind. She was flattered by the gentleman's attentions, and the effect was increased by the loudly expressed admiration of her mother. Then Mr. Angel began to call, for it was obvious that the matter should be pushed as far as it would go if a real effect were to be produced. There were meetings, and an engagement, which would finally secure the girl's affections from turning towards anyone else. But the deception could not be kept up forever. These pretended journeys to France were rather cumbrous. The thing to do was clearly to bring the business to an end in such a dramatic manner that it would leave a permanent impression upon the young lady's mind and prevent her from looking upon any other suitor for some time to come. Hence those vows of fidelity exacted upon a Testament, and hence also the allusions to a possibility of something happening on the very morning of the wedding. James Windibank wished Miss Sutherland to be so bound to Hosmer Angel, and so uncertain as to his fate, that for ten years to come, at any rate, she would not listen to another man. As far as the church door he brought her, and then, as he could go no farther, he conveniently vanished away by the old trick of stepping in at one door of a four-wheeler and out at the other. I think that was the chain of events, Mr. Windibank!"

Our visitor had recovered something of his assurance while Holmes had been talking, and he rose from his chair now with a cold sneer upon his pale face.

"It may be so, or it may not, Mr. Holmes," said he, "but if you are so very sharp you ought to be sharp enough to know that it is you who are breaking the law now, and not me. I have done nothing actionable from the first, but as long as you keep that door locked you lay yourself open to an action for assault and illegal constraint."

"The law cannot, as you say, touch you," said Holmes, unlocking and throwing open the door, "yet there never was a man who deserved punishment more. If the young lady has a brother or a friend, he ought to lay a whip across your shoulders. By Jove!" he continued, flushing up at the sight of the bitter sneer upon the man's face, "it is not part of my duties to my client, but here's a hunting crop handy, and I think I shall just treat myself to--" He took two swift steps to the whip, but before he could grasp it there was a wild clatter of steps upon the stairs, the heavy hall door banged, and from the window we could see Mr. James Windibank running at the top of his speed down the road.

"There's a cold-blooded scoundrel!" said Holmes, laughing, as he threw himself down into his chair once more. "That fellow will rise from crime to crime until he does something very bad, and ends on a gallows. The case has, in some respects, been not entirely devoid of interest."

"I cannot now entirely see all the steps of your reasoning," I remarked.

"Well, of course it was obvious from the first that this Mr. Hosmer Angel must have some strong object for his curious conduct, and it was equally clear that the only man who really profited by the incident, as far as we could see, was the stepfather. Then the fact that the two men were never together, but that the one always appeared when the other was away, was suggestive. So were the tinted spectacles and the curious voice, which both hinted at a disguise, as did the bushy whiskers. My suspicions were all confirmed by his peculiar action in typewriting his signature, which, of course, inferred that his handwriting was so familiar to her that she would recognise even the
smallest sample of it. You see all these isolated facts, together with many minor ones, all pointed in the same
direction."

"And how did you verify them?"

"Having once spotted my man, it was easy to get corroboration. I knew the firm for which this man worked.
Having taken the printed description. I eliminated everything from it which could be the result of a disguise—the
whiskers, the glasses, the voice, and I sent it to the firm, with a request that they would inform me whether it
answered to the description of any of their travellers. I had already noticed the peculiarities of the typewriter, and I
wrote to the man himself at his business address asking him if he would come here. As I expected, his reply was
typewritten and revealed the same trivial but characteristic defects. The same post brought me a letter from
Westhouse & Marbank, of Fenchurch Street, to say that the description tallied in every respect with that of their
employé, James Windibank. Voilà tout!"

"And Miss Sutherland?"

"If I tell her she will not believe me. You may remember the old Persian saying, 'There is danger for him who
taketh the tiger cub, and danger also for whoso snatches a delusion from a woman.' There is as much sense in Hafiz
as in Horace, and as much knowledge of the world."

ADVENTURE IV. THE BOSCOMBE VALLEY MYSTERY

We were seated at breakfast one morning, my wife and I, when the maid brought in a telegram. It was from
Sherlock Holmes and ran in this way:

"Have you a couple of days to spare? Have just been wired for from the west of England in connection with
Boscombe Valley tragedy. Shall be glad if you will come with me. Air and scenery perfect. Leave Paddington by the
11:15."

"What do you say, dear?" said my wife, looking across at me. "Will you go?"

"I really don't know what to say. I have a fairly long list at present."

"Oh, Anstruther would do your work for you. You have been looking a little pale lately. I think that the change
would do you good, and you are always so interested in Mr. Sherlock Holmes' cases."

"I should be ungrateful if I were not, seeing what I gained through one of them," I answered. "But if I am to go, I
must pack at once, for I have only half an hour."

My experience of camp life in Afghanistan had at least had the effect of making me a prompt and ready traveller.
My wants were few and simple, so that in less than the time stated I was in a cab with my valise, rattling away to
Paddington Station. Sherlock Holmes was pacing up and down the platform, his tall, gaunt figure made even gaunter
and taller by his long grey travelling-cloak and close-fitting cloth cap.

"It is really very good of you to come, Watson," said he. "It makes a considerable difference to me, having
someone with me on whom I can thoroughly rely. Local aid is always either worthless or else biased. If you will
keep the two corner seats I shall get the tickets."

We had the carriage to ourselves save for an immense litter of papers which Holmes had brought with him.
Among these he rummaged and read, with intervals of note-taking and of meditation, until we were past Reading.
Then he suddenly rolled them all into a gigantic ball and tossed them up onto the rack.

"Have you heard anything of the case?" he asked.

"Not a word. I have not seen a paper for some days."

"The London press has not had very full accounts. I have just been looking through all the recent papers in order
to master the particulars. It seems, from what I gather, to be one of those simple cases which are so extremely
difficult."

"That sounds a little paradoxical."

"But it is profoundly true. Singularity is almost invariably a clue. The more featureless and commonplace a
crime is, the more difficult it is to bring it home. In this case, however, they have established a very serious case
against the son of the murdered man."

"It is a murder, then?"

"Well, it is conjectured to be so. I shall take nothing for granted until I have the opportunity of looking personally into it. I will explain the state of things to you, as far as I have been able to understand it, in a very few words.

"Boscombe Valley is a country district not very far from Ross, in Herefordshire. The largest landed proprietor in that part is a Mr. John Turner, who made his money in Australia and returned some years ago to the old country. One of the farms which he held, that of Hatherley, was let to Mr. Charles McCarthy, who was also an ex-Australian. The men had known each other in the colonies, so that it was not unnatural that when they came to settle down they should do so as near each other as possible. Turner was apparently the richer man, so McCarthy became his tenant but still remained, it seems, upon terms of perfect equality, as they were frequently together. McCarthy had one son, a lad of eighteen, and Turner had an only daughter of the same age, but neither of them had wives living. They appear to have avoided the society of the neighbouring English families and to have led retired lives, though both the McCarthys were fond of sport and were frequently seen at the race-meetings of the neighbourhood. McCarthy kept two servants—a man and a girl. Turner had a considerable household, some half-dozen at the least. That is as much as I have been able to gather about the families. Now for the facts.

"On June 3rd, that is, on Monday last, McCarthy left his house at Hatherley about three in the afternoon and walked down to the Boscombe Pool, which is a small lake formed by the spreading out of the stream which runs down the Boscombe Valley. He had been out with his serving-man in the morning at Ross, and he had told the man that he must hurry, as he had an appointment of importance to keep at three. From that appointment he never came back alive.

"From Hatherley Farm-house to the Boscombe Pool is a quarter of a mile, and two people saw him as he passed over this ground. One was an old woman, whose name is not mentioned, and the other was William Crowder, a game-keeper in the employ of Mr. Turner. Both these witnesses depose that Mr. McCarthy was walking alone. The game-keeper adds that within a few minutes of his seeing Mr. McCarthy pass he had seen his son, Mr. James McCarthy, going the same way with a gun under his arm. To the best of his belief, the father was actually in sight at the time, and the son was following him. He thought no more of the matter until he heard in the evening of the tragedy that had occurred.

"The two McCarthys were seen after the time when William Crowder, the game-keeper, lost sight of them. The Boscombe Pool is thickly wooded round, with just a fringe of grass and of reeds round the edge. A girl of fourteen, Patience Moran, who is the daughter of the lodge-keeper of the Boscombe Valley estate, was in one of the woods picking flowers. She states that while she was there she saw, at the border of the wood and close by the lake, Mr. McCarthy and his son, and that they appeared to be having a violent quarrel. She heard Mr. McCarthy the elder using very strong language to his son, and she saw the latter raise up his hand as if to strike his father. She was so frightened by their violence that she ran away and told her mother when she reached home that she had left the two McCarthys quarrelling near Boscombe Pool, and that she was afraid that they were going to fight. She had hardly said the words when young Mr. McCarthy came running up to the lodge to say that he had found his father dead in the wood, and to ask for the help of the lodge-keeper. He was much excited, without either his gun or his hat, and his right hand and sleeve were observed to be stained with fresh blood. On following him they found the dead body stretched out upon the grass beside the pool. The head had been beaten in by repeated blows of some heavy and blunt weapon. The injuries were such as might very well have been inflicted by the butt-end of his son's gun, which was found lying on the grass within a few paces of the body. Under these circumstances the young man was instantly arrested, and a verdict of 'wilful murder' having been returned at the inquest on Tuesday, he was on Wednesday brought before the magistrates at Ross, who have referred the case to the next Assizes. Those are the main facts of the case as they came out before the coroner and the police-court."
"I could hardly imagine a more damning case," I remarked. "If ever circumstantial evidence pointed to a criminal it does so here."

"Circumstantial evidence is a very tricky thing," answered Holmes thoughtfully. "It may seem to point very straight to one thing, but if you shift your own point of view a little, you may find it pointing in an equally uncompromising manner to something entirely different. It must be confessed, however, that the case looks exceedingly grave against the young man, and it is very possible that he is indeed the culprit. There are several people in the neighbourhood, however, and among them Miss Turner, the daughter of the neighbouring landowner, who believe in his innocence, and who have retained Lestrade, whom you may recollect in connection with the Study in Scarlet, to work out the case in his interest. Lestrade, being rather puzzled, has referred the case to me, and hence it is that two middle-aged gentlemen are flying westward at fifty miles an hour instead of quietly digesting their breakfasts at home."

"I am afraid," said I, "that the facts are so obvious that you will find little credit to be gained out of this case."

"There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact," he answered, laughing. "Besides, we may chance to hit upon some other obvious facts which may have been by no means obvious to Mr. Lestrade. You know me too well to think that I am boasting when I say that I shall either confirm or destroy his theory by means which he is quite incapable of employing, or even of understanding. To take the first example to hand, I very clearly perceive that in your bedroom the window is upon the right-hand side, and yet I question whether Mr. Lestrade would have noted even so self-evident a thing as that."

"How on earth--"

"My dear fellow, I know you well. I know the military neatness which characterises you. You shave every morning, and in this season you shave by the sunlight; but since your shaving is less and less complete as we get farther back on the left side, until it becomes positively slovenly as we get round the angle of the jaw, it is surely very clear that that side is less illuminated than the other. I could not imagine a man of your habits looking at himself in an equal light and being satisfied with such a result. I only quote this as a trivial example of observation and inference. Therein lies my métier, and it is just possible that it may be of some service in the investigation which lies before us. There are one or two minor points which were brought out in the inquest, and which are worth considering."

"What are they?"

"It appears that his arrest did not take place at once, but after the return to Hatherley Farm. On the inspector of constabulary informing him that he was a prisoner, he remarked that he was not surprised to hear it, and that it was no more than his deserts. This observation of his had the natural effect of removing any traces of doubt which might have remained in the minds of the coroner's jury."

"It was a confession," I ejaculated.

"No, for it was followed by a protestation of innocence."

"Coming on the top of such a damning series of events, it was at least a most suspicious remark."

"On the contrary," said Holmes, "it is the brightest rift which I can at present see in the clouds. However innocent he might be, he could not be such an absolute imbecile as not to see that the circumstances were very black against him. Had he appeared surprised at his own arrest, or feigned indignation at it, I should have looked upon it as highly suspicious, because such surprise or anger would not be natural under the circumstances, and yet might appear to be the best policy to a scheming man. His frank acceptance of the situation marks him as either an innocent man, or else as a man of considerable self-restraint and firmness. As to his remark about his deserts, it was also not unnatural if you consider that he stood beside the dead body of his father, and that there is no doubt that he had that very day so far forgotten his filial duty as to bandy words with him, and even, according to the little girl
whose evidence is so important, to raise his hand as if to strike him. The self-reproach and contrition which are displayed in his remark appear to me to be the signs of a healthy mind rather than of a guilty one."

I shook my head. "Many men have been hanged on far slighter evidence," I remarked.

"So they have. And many men have been wrongfully hanged."

"What is the young man's own account of the matter?"

"It is, I am afraid, not very encouraging to his supporters, though there are one or two points in it which are suggestive. You will find it here, and may read it for yourself."

He picked out from his bundle a copy of the local Herefordshire paper, and having turned down the sheet he pointed out the paragraph in which the unfortunate young man had given his own statement of what had occurred. I settled myself down in the corner of the carriage and read it very carefully. It ran in this way:

"Mr. James McCarthy, the only son of the deceased, was then called and gave evidence as follows: 'I had been away from home for three days at Bristol, and had only just returned upon the morning of last Monday, the 3rd. My father was absent from home at the time of my arrival, and I was informed by the maid that he had driven over to Ross with John Cobb, the groom. Shortly after my return I heard the wheels of his trap in the yard, and, looking out of my window, I saw him get out and walk rapidly out of the yard, though I was not aware in which direction he was going. I then took my gun and strolled out in the direction of the Boscombe Pool, with the intention of visiting the rabbit warren which is upon the other side. On my way I saw William Crowder, the game-keeper, as he had stated in his evidence; but he is mistaken in thinking that I was following my father. I had no idea that he was in front of me. When about a hundred yards from the pool I heard a cry of "Cooee!" which was a usual signal between my father and myself. I then hurried forward, and found him standing by the pool. He appeared to be much surprised at seeing me and asked me rather roughly what I was doing there. A conversation ensued which led to high words and almost to blows, for my father was a man of a very violent temper. Seeing that his passion was becoming ungovernable, I left him and returned towards Hatherley Farm. I had not gone more than 150 yards, however, when I heard a hideous outcry behind me, which caused me to run back again. I found my father expiring upon the ground, with his head terribly injured. I dropped my gun and held him in my arms, but he almost instantly expired. I knelt beside him for some minutes, and then made my way to Mr. Turner's lodge-keeper, his house being the nearest, to ask for assistance. I saw no one near my father when I returned, and I have no idea how he came by his injuries. He was not a popular man, being somewhat cold and forbidding in his manners, but he had, as far as I know, no active enemies. I know nothing further of the matter."

"The Coroner: Did your father make any statement to you before he died?"

"Witness: He mumbled a few words, but I could only catch some allusion to a rat."

"The Coroner: What did you understand by that?"

"Witness: It conveyed no meaning to me. I thought that he was delirious."

"The Coroner: What was the point upon which you and your father had this final quarrel?"

"Witness: I should prefer not to answer."

"The Coroner: I am afraid that I must press it."

"Witness: It is really impossible for me to tell you. I can assure you that it has nothing to do with the sad tragedy which followed."

"The Coroner: That is for the court to decide. I need not point out to you that your refusal to answer will prejudice your case considerably in any future proceedings which may arise."

"Witness: I must still refuse."

"The Coroner: I understand that the cry of 'Cooee' was a common signal between you and your father?"

"Witness: It was."

"The Coroner: How was it, then, that he uttered it before he saw you, and before he even knew that you had returned from Bristol?"

"Witness (with considerable confusion): I do not know."

"A Juryman: Did you see nothing which aroused your suspicions when you returned on hearing the cry and found your father fatally injured?"

"Witness: Nothing definite."

"The Coroner: What do you mean?"

"Witness: I was so disturbed and excited as I rushed out into the open, that I could think of nothing except of my father. Yet I have a vague impression that as I ran forward something lay upon the ground to the left of me. It seemed to me to be something grey in colour, a coat of some sort, or a plaid perhaps. When I rose from my father I looked round for it, but it was gone."

"Do you mean that it disappeared before you went for help?"

"'Yes, it was gone.'
"'You cannot say what it was?'

"'No, I had a feeling something was there.'

"'How far from the body?'

"'A dozen yards or so.'

"'And how far from the edge of the wood?'

"'About the same.'

"'Then if it was removed it was while you were within a dozen yards of it'

"'Yes, but with my back towards it.'

"This concluded the examination of the witness."

"I see," said I as I glanced down the column, "that the coroner in his concluding remarks was rather severe upon young McCarthy. He calls attention, and with reason, to the discrepancy about his father having signalled to him before seeing him, also to his refusal to give details of his conversation with his father, and his singular account of his father's dying words. They are all, as he remarks, very much against the son."

Holmes laughed softly to himself and stretched himself out upon the cushioned seat. "Both you and the coroner have been at some pains," said he, "to single out the very strongest points in the young man's favour. Don't you see that you alternately give him credit for having too much imagination and too little? Too little, if he could not invent a cause of quarrel which would give him the sympathy of the jury; too much, if he evolved from his own inner consciousness anything so outré as a dying reference to a rat, and the incident of the vanishing cloth. No, sir, I shall approach this case from the point of view that what this young man says is true, and we shall see whither that hypothesis will lead us. And now here is my pocket Petrarch, and not another word shall I say of this case until we are on the scene of action. We lunch at Swindon, and I see that we shall be there in twenty minutes."

It was nearly four o'clock when we at last, after passing through the beautiful Stroud Valley, and over the broad gleaming Severn, found ourselves at the pretty little country-town of Ross. A lean, ferret-like man, furtive and sly-looking, was waiting for us upon the platform. In spite of the light brown dustcoat and leather-leggings which he wore in deference to his rustic surroundings, I had no difficulty in recognising Lestrade, of Scotland Yard. With him we drove to the Hereford Arms where a room had already been engaged for us.

"I have ordered a carriage," said Lestrade as we sat over a cup of tea. "I knew your energetic nature, and that you would not be happy until you had been on the scene of the crime."

"It was very nice and complimentary of you," Holmes answered. "It is entirely a question of barometric pressure."

Lestrade looked startled. "I do not quite follow," he said.

"How is the glass? Twenty-nine, I see. No wind, and not a cloud in the sky. I have a caseful of cigarettes here which need smoking, and the sofa is very much superior to the usual country hotel abomination. I do not think that it is probable that I shall use the carriage to-night."

Lestrade laughed indulgently. "You have, no doubt, already formed your conclusions from the newspapers," he said. "The case is as plain as a pikestaff, and the more one goes into it the plainer it becomes. Still, of course, one can't refuse a lady, and such a very positive one, too. She has heard of you, and would have your opinion, though I repeatedly told her that there was nothing which you could do which I had not already done. Why, bless my soul! here is her carriage at the door."

He had hardly spoken before there rushed into the room one of the most lovely young women that I have ever seen in my life. Her violet eyes shining, her lips parted, a pink flush upon her cheeks, all thought of her natural reserve lost in her overpowering excitement and concern.
“Oh, Mr. Sherlock Holmes!” she cried, glancing from one to the other of us, and finally, with a woman's quick intuition, fastening upon my companion, "I am so glad that you have come. I have driven down to tell you so. I know that James didn't do it. I know it, and I want you to start upon your work knowing it, too. Never let yourself doubt upon that point. We have known each other since we were little children, and I know his faults as no one else does; but he is too tender-hearted to hurt a fly. Such a charge is absurd to anyone who really knows him."

"I hope we may clear him, Miss Turner," said Sherlock Holmes. "You may rely upon my doing all that I can."

"But you have read the evidence. You have formed some conclusion? Do you not see some loophole, some flaw? Do you not yourself think that he is innocent?"

"I think that it is very probable."

"There, now!" she cried, throwing back her head and looking defiantly at Lestrade. "You hear! He gives me hopes."

Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. "I am afraid that my colleague has been a little quick in forming his conclusions," he said.

"But he is right. Oh! I know that he is right. James never did it. And about his quarrel with his father, I am sure that the reason why he would not speak about it to the coroner was because I was concerned in it."

"In what way?" asked Holmes.

"It is no time for me to hide anything. James and his father had many disagreements about me. Mr. McCarthy was very anxious that there should be a marriage between us. James and I have always loved each other as brother and sister; but of course he is young and has seen very little of life yet, and--and--well, he naturally did not wish to do anything like that yet. So there were quarrels, and this, I am sure, was one of them."

"And your father?" asked Holmes. "Was he in favour of such a union?"

"No, he was averse to it also. No one but Mr. McCarthy was in favour of it." A quick blush passed over her fresh young face as Holmes shot one of his keen, questioning glances at her.

"Thank you for this information," said he. "May I see your father if I call to-morrow?"

"I am afraid the doctor won't allow it."

"The doctor?"

"Yes, have you not heard? Poor father has never been strong for years back, but this has broken him down completely. He has taken to his bed, and Dr. Willows says that he is a wreck and that his nervous system is shattered. Mr. McCarthy was the only man alive who had known dad in the old days in Victoria."

"Ha! In Victoria! That is important."

"Yes, at the mines."

"Quite so; at the gold-mines, where, as I understand, Mr. Turner made his money."
"Yes, certainly."
"Thank you, Miss Turner. You have been of material assistance to me."
"You will tell me if you have any news to-morrow. No doubt you will go to the prison to see James. Oh, if you do, Mr. Holmes, do tell him that I know him to be innocent."
"I will, Miss Turner."
"I must go home now, for dad is very ill, and he misses me so if I leave him. Good-bye, and God help you in your undertaking." She hurried from the room as impulsively as she had entered, and we heard the wheels of her carriage rattle down the street.
"I am ashamed of you, Holmes," said Lestrade with dignity after a few minutes' silence. "Why should you raise up hopes which you are bound to disappoint? I am not over-tender of heart, but I call it cruel."
"I think that I see my way to clearing James McCarthy," said Holmes. "Have you an order to see him in prison?"
"Yes, but only for you and me."
"Then I shall reconsider my resolution about going out. We have still time to take a train to Hereford and see him to-night?"
"Ample."
"Then let us do so. Watson, I fear that you will find it very slow, but I shall only be away a couple of hours."

I walked down to the station with them, and then wandered through the streets of the little town, finally returning to the hotel, where I lay upon the sofa and tried to interest myself in a yellow-backed novel. The puny plot of the story was so thin, however, when compared to the deep mystery through which we were groping, and I found my attention wander so continually from the action to the fact, that I at last flung it across the room and gave myself up entirely to a consideration of the events of the day. Supposing that this unhappy young man's story were absolutely true, then what hellish thing, what absolutely unforeseen and extraordinary calamity could have occurred between the time when he parted from his father, and the moment when, drawn back by his screams, he rushed into the glade? It was something terrible and deadly. What could it be? Might not the nature of the injuries reveal something to my medical instincts? I rang the bell and called for the weekly county paper, which contained a verbatim account of the inquest. In the surgeon's deposition it was stated that the posterior third of the left parietal bone and the left half of the occipital bone had been shattered by a heavy blow from a blunt weapon. I marked the spot upon my own head. Clearly such a blow must have been struck from behind. That was to some extent in favour of the accused, as when seen quarrelling he was face to face with his father. Still, it did not go for very much, for the older man might have turned his back before the blow fell. Still, it might be worth while to call Holmes' attention to it. Then there was the peculiar dying reference to a rat. What could that mean? It could not be delirium. A man dying from a sudden blow does not commonly become delirious. No, it was more likely to be an attempt to explain how he met his fate. But what could it indicate? I cudgelled my brains to find some possible explanation. And then the incident of the grey cloth seen by young McCarthy. If that were true the murderer must have dropped some part of his dress, presumably his overcoat, in his flight, and must have had the hardihood to return and to carry it away at the instant when the son was kneeling with his back turned not a dozen paces off. What a tissue of mysteries and improbabilities the whole thing was! I did not wonder at Lestrade's opinion, and yet I had so much faith in Sherlock Holmes' insight that I could not lose hope as long as every fresh fact seemed to strengthen his conviction of young McCarthy's innocence.

It was late before Sherlock Holmes returned. He came back alone, for Lestrade was staying in lodgings in the town.

"The glass still keeps very high," he remarked as he sat down. "It is of importance that it should not rain before we are able to go over the ground. On the other hand, a man should be at his very best and keenest for such nice work as that, and I did not wish to do it when flagged by a long journey. I have seen young McCarthy."
"And what did you learn from him?"
"Nothing."
"Could he throw no light?"
"None at all. I was inclined to think at one time that he knew who had done it and was screening him or her, but I am convinced now that he is as puzzled as everyone else. He is not a very quick-witted youth, though comely to look at and, I should think, sound at heart."
"I cannot admire his taste," I remarked, "if it is indeed a fact that he was averse to a marriage with so charming a young lady as this Miss Turner."

"Ah, thereby hangs a rather painful tale. This fellow is madly, insanely, in love with her, but some two years ago, when he was only a lad, and before he really knew her, for she had been away five years at a boarding-school, what does the idiot do but get into the clutches of a barmaid in Bristol and marry her at a registry office? No one knows a word of the matter, but you can imagine how maddening it must be to him to be upbraided for not doing what he would give his very eyes to do, but what he knows to be absolutely impossible. It was sheer frenzy of this sort which made him throw his hands up into the air when his father, at their last interview, was goading him on to propose to Miss Turner. On the other hand, he had no means of supporting himself, and his father, who was by all accounts a very hard man, would have thrown him over utterly had he known the truth. It was with his barmaid wife that he had spent the last three days in Bristol, and his father did not know where he was. Mark that point. It is of importance. Good has come out of evil, however, for the barmaid, finding from the papers that he is in serious trouble and likely to be hanged, has thrown him over utterly and has written to him to say that she has a husband already in the Bermuda Dockyard, so that there is really no tie between them. I think that that bit of news has consoled young McCarthy for all that he has suffered."

"But if he is innocent, who has done it?"

"Ah! who? I would call your attention very particularly to two points. One is that the murdered man had an appointment with someone at the pool, and that the someone could not have been his son, for his son was away, and he did not know when he would return. The second is that the murdered man was heard to cry 'Cooee!' before he knew that his son had returned. Those are the crucial points upon which the case depends. And now let us talk about George Meredith, if you please, and we shall leave all minor matters until to-morrow."

There was no rain, as Holmes had foretold, and the morning broke bright and cloudless. At nine o'clock Lestrade called for us with the carriage, and we set off for Hatherley Farm and the Boscombe Pool.

"There is serious news this morning," Lestrade observed. "It is said that Mr. Turner, of the Hall, is so ill that his life is despaired of."

"An elderly man, I presume?" said Holmes.

"About sixty; but his constitution has been shattered by his life abroad, and he has been in failing health for some time. This business has had a very bad effect upon him. He was an old friend of McCarthy's, and, I may add, a great benefactor to him, for I have learned that he gave him Hatherley Farm rent free."

"Indeed! That is interesting," said Holmes.

"Oh, yes! In a hundred other ways he has helped him. Everybody about here speaks of his kindness to him."

"Really! Does it not strike you as a little singular that this McCarthy, who appears to have had little of his own, and to have been under such obligations to Turner, should still talk of marrying his son to Turner's daughter, who is, presumably, heiress to the estate, and that in such a very cocksure manner, as if it were merely a case of a proposal and all else would follow? It is the more strange, since we know that Turner himself was averse to the idea. The daughter told us as much. Do you not deduce something from that?"

"We have got to the deductions and the inferences," said Lestrade, winking at me. "I find it hard enough to tackle facts, Holmes, without flying away after theories and fancies."

"You are right," said Holmes demurely; "you do find it very hard to tackle the facts."

"Anyhow, I have grasped one fact which you seem to find it difficult to get hold of," replied Lestrade with some warmth.

"And that is--"

"That McCarthy senior met his death from McCarthy junior and that all theories to the contrary are the merest moonshine."

"Well, moonshine is a brighter thing than fog," said Holmes, laughing. "But I am very much mistaken if this is not Hatherley Farm upon the left."

"Yes, that is it." It was a widespread, comfortable-looking building, two-storied, slate-roofed, with great yellow blotches of lichen upon the grey walls. The drawn blinds and the smokeless chimneys, however, gave it a stricken look, as though the weight of this horror still lay heavy upon it. We called at the door, when the maid, at Holmes' request, showed us the boots which her master wore at the time of his death, and also a pair of the son's, though not the pair which he had then had. Having measured these very carefully from seven or eight different points, Holmes desired to be led to the court-yard, from which we all followed the winding track which led to Boscombe Pool.
Sherlock Holmes was transformed when he was hot upon such a scent as this. Men who had only known the quiet thinker and logician of Baker Street would have failed to recognise him. His face flushed and darkened. His brows were drawn into two hard black lines, while his eyes shone out from beneath them with a steely glitter. His face was bent downward, his shoulders bowed, his lips compressed, and the veins stood out like whipcord in his long, sinewy neck. His nostrils seemed to dilate with a purely animal lust for the chase, and his mind was so absolutely concentrated upon the matter before him that a question or remark fell unheeded upon his ears, or, at the most, only provoked a quick, impatient snarl in reply. Swiftly and silently he made his way along the track which ran through the meadows, and so by way of the woods to the Boscombe Pool. It was damp, marshy ground, as is all that district, and there were marks of many feet, both upon the path and amid the short grass which bounded it on either side. Sometimes Holmes would hurry on, sometimes stop dead, and once he made quite a little detour into the meadow. Lestrade and I walked behind him, the detective indifferent and contemptuous, while I watched my friend with the interest which sprang from the conviction that every one of his actions was directed towards a definite end.

The Boscombe Pool, which is a little reed-girt sheet of water some fifty yards across, is situated at the boundary between the Hatherley Farm and the private park of the wealthy Mr. Turner. Above the woods which lined it upon the farther side we could see the red, jutting pinnacles which marked the site of the rich landowner's dwelling. On the Hatherley side of the pool the woods grew very thick, and there was a narrow belt of sodden grass twenty paces across between the edge of the trees and the reeds which lined the lake. Lestrade showed us the exact spot at which the body had been found, and, indeed, so moist was the ground, that I could plainly see the traces which had been left by the fall of the stricken man. To Holmes, as I could see by his eager face and peering eyes, very many other things were to be read upon the trampled grass. He ran round, like a dog who is picking up a scent, and then turned upon my companion.

"What did you go into the pool for?" he asked.

"I fished about with a rake. I thought there might be some weapon or other trace. But how on earth--"

"Oh, tut, tut! I have no time! That left foot of yours with its inward twist is all over the place. A mole could trace it, and there it vanishes among the reeds. Oh, how simple it would all have been had I been here before they came like a herd of buffalo and wallowed all over it. Here is where the party with the lodge-keeper came, and they have covered all tracks for six or eight feet round the body. But here are three separate tracks of the same feet." He drew out a lens and lay down upon his waterproof to have a better view, talking all the time rather to himself than to us. "These are young McCarthy's feet. Twice he was walking, and once he ran swiftly, so that the soles are deeply marked and the heels hardly visible. That bears out his story. He ran when he saw his father on the ground. Then here are the father's feet as he paced up and down. What is this, then? It is the butt-end of the gun as the son stood listening. And this? Ha, ha! What have we here? Tiptoes! tiptoes! Square, too, quite unusual boots! They come, they go, they come again--of course that was for the cloak. Now where did they come from?" He ran up and down, sometimes losing, sometimes finding the track until we were well within the edge of the wood and under the shadow of a great beech, the largest tree in the neighbourhood. Holmes traced his way to the farther side of this and lay down once more upon his face with a little cry of satisfaction. That bears out his story. He ran when he saw his father on the ground. Then here are the father's feet as he paced up and down. What is this, then? It is the butt-end of the gun as the son stood listening. And this? Ha, ha! What have we here? Tiptoes! tiptoes! Square, too, quite unusual boots! They come, they go, they come again--of course that was for the cloak. Now where did they come from?" He ran up and down, sometimes losing, sometimes finding the track until we were well within the edge of the wood and under the shadow of a great beech, the largest tree in the neighbourhood. Holmes traced his way to the farther side of this and lay down once more upon his face with a little cry of satisfaction. For a long time he remained there, turning over the leaves and dried sticks, gathering up what seemed to me to be dust into an envelope and examining with his lens not only the ground but even the bark of the tree as far as he could reach. A jagged stone was lying among the moss, and this also he carefully examined and retained. Then he followed a pathway through the wood until he came to the highroad, where all traces were lost.

"It has been a case of considerable interest," he remarked, returning to his natural manner. "I fancy that this grey house on the right must be the lodge. I think that I will go in and have a word with Moran, and perhaps write a little note. Having done that, we may drive back to our luncheon. You may walk to the cab, and I shall be with you presently."

It was about ten minutes before we regained our cab and drove back into Ross, Holmes still carrying with him the stone which he had picked up in the wood.
"This may interest you, Lestrade," he remarked, holding it out. "The murder was done with it."
"I see no marks."
"There are none."
"How do you know, then?"
"The grass was growing under it. It had only lain there a few days. There was no sign of a place whence it had been taken. It corresponds with the injuries. There is no sign of any other weapon."
"And the murderer?"
"Is a tall man, left-handed, limps with the right leg, wears thick-soled shooting-boots and a grey cloak, smokes Indian cigars, uses a cigar-holder, and carries a blunt pen-knife in his pocket. There are several other indications, but these may be enough to aid us in our search."
Lestrade laughed. "I am afraid that I am still a sceptic," he said. "Theories are all very well, but we have to deal with a hard-headed British jury."
"Nous verrons," answered Holmes calmly. "You work your own method, and I shall work mine. I shall be busy this afternoon, and shall probably return to London by the evening train."
"And leave your case unfinished?"
"No, finished."
"But the mystery?"
"It is solved."
"Who was the criminal, then?"
"The gentleman I describe."
"But who is he?"
"Surely it would not be difficult to find out. This is not such a populous neighbourhood."
Lestrade shrugged his shoulders. "I am a practical man," he said, "and I really cannot undertake to go about the country looking for a left-handed gentleman with a game leg. I should become the laughing-stock of Scotland Yard."
"All right," said Holmes quietly. "I have given you the chance. Here are your lodgings. Good-bye. I shall drop you a line before I leave."

Having left Lestrade at his rooms, we drove to our hotel, where we found lunch upon the table. Holmes was silent and buried in thought with a pained expression upon his face, as one who finds himself in a perplexing position.
"Look here, Watson," he said when the cloth was cleared "just sit down in this chair and let me preach to you for a little. I don't know quite what to do, and I should value your advice. Light a cigar and let me expound."
"Pray do so."
"Well, now, in considering this case there are two points about young McCarthy's narrative which struck us both instantly, although they impressed me in his favour and you against him. One was the fact that his father should, according to his account, cry 'Cooee!' before seeing him. The other was that his singular dying reference to a rat. He mumbled several words, you understand, but that was all that caught the son's ear. Now from this double point our research must commence, and we will begin it by presuming that what the lad says is absolutely true."
"What of this 'Cooee!' then?"
"Well, obviously it could not have been meant for the son. The son, as far as he knew, was in Bristol. It was mere chance that he was within earshot. The 'Cooee!' was meant to attract the attention of whoever it was that he had the appointment with. But 'Cooee' is a distinctly Australian cry, and one which is used between Australians. There is a strong presumption that the person whom McCarthy expected to meet him at Boscombe Pool was someone who had been in Australia."
"What of the rat, then?"
Sherlock Holmes took a folded paper from his pocket and flattened it out on the table. "This is a map of the Colony of Victoria," he said. "I wired to Bristol for it last night." He put his hand over part of the map. "What do you read?"
"ARAT," I read.
"And now?" He raised his hand.
"BALLARAT."
"Quite so. That was the word the man uttered, and of which his son only caught the last two syllables. He was trying to utter the name of his murderer. So and so, of Ballarat."
"It is wonderful!" I exclaimed.
"It is obvious. And now, you see, I had narrowed the field down considerably. The possession of a grey garment was a third point which, granting the son's statement to be correct, was a certainty. We have come now out of mere vagueness to the definite conception of an Australian from Ballarat with a grey cloak."
"Certainly."

"And one who was at home in the district, for the pool can only be approached by the farm or by the estate, where strangers could hardly wander."

"Quite so."

"Then comes our expedition of to-day. By an examination of the ground I gained the trifling details which I gave to that imbecile Lestrade, as to the personality of the criminal."

"But how did you gain them?"

"You know my method. It is founded upon the observation of trifles."

"His height I know that you might roughly judge from the length of his stride. His boots, too, might be told from their traces."

"Yes, they were peculiar boots."

"But his lameness?"

"The impression of his right foot was always less distinct than his left. He put less weight upon it. Why? Because he limped--he was lame."

"But his left-handedness?"

"You were yourself struck by the nature of the injury as recorded by the surgeon at the inquest. The blow was struck from immediately behind, and yet was upon the left side. Now, how can that be unless it were by a left-handed man? He had stood behind that tree during the interview between the father and son. He had even smoked there. I found the ash of a cigar, which my special knowledge of tobacco ashes enables me to pronounce as an Indian cigar. I have, as you know, devoted some attention to this, and written a little monograph on the ashes of 140 different varieties of pipe, cigar, and cigarette tobacco. Having found the ash, I then looked round and discovered the stump among the moss where he had tossed it. It was an Indian cigar, of the variety which are rolled in Rotterdam."

"And the cigar-holder?"

"I could see that the end had not been in his mouth. Therefore he used a holder. The tip had been cut off, not bitten off, but the cut was not a clean one, so I deduced a blunt pen-knife."

"Holmes," I said, "you have drawn a net round this man from which he cannot escape, and you have saved an innocent human life as truly as if you had cut the cord which was hanging him. I see the direction in which all this points. The culprit is--"

"Mr. John Turner," cried the hotel waiter, opening the door of our sitting-room, and ushering in a visitor.

The man who entered was a strange and impressive figure. His slow, limping step and bowed shoulders gave the appearance of decrepitude, and yet his hard, deep-lined, craggy features, and his enormous limbs showed that he was possessed of unusual strength of body and of character. His tangled beard, grizzled hair, and outstanding, drooping eyebrows combined to give an air of dignity and power to his appearance, but his face was of an ashen white, while his lips and the corners of his nostrils were tinged with a shade of blue. It was clear to me at a glance that he was in the grip of some deadly and chronic disease.

"Pray sit down on the sofa," said Holmes gently. "You had my note?"

"Yes, the lodge-keeper brought it up. You said that you wished to see me here to avoid scandal."

"I thought people would talk if I went to the Hall."

"And why did you wish to see me?" He looked across at my companion with despair in his weary eyes, as though his question was already answered.

"Yes," said Holmes, answering the look rather than the words. "It is so. I know all about McCarthy."

The old man sank his face in his hands. "God help me!" he cried. "But I would not have let the young man come to harm. I give you my word that I would have spoken out if it went against him at the Assizes."

"I am glad to hear you say so," said Holmes gravely.

"I would have spoken now had it not been for my dear girl. It would break her heart--it will break her heart when she hears that I am arrested."

"It may not come to that," said Holmes.

"What?"

"I am no official agent. I understand that it was your daughter who required my presence here, and I am acting in her interests. Young McCarthy must be got off, however."

"I am a dying man," said old Turner. "I have had diabetes for years. My doctor says it is a question whether I shall live a month. Yet I would rather die under my own roof than in a gaol."

Holmes rose and sat down at the table with his pen in his hand and a bundle of paper before him. "Just tell us the truth," he said. "I shall jot down the facts. You will sign it, and Watson here can witness it. Then I could produce your confession at the last extremity to save young McCarthy. I promise you that I shall not use it unless it is
absolutely needed."

"It's as well," said the old man; "it's a question whether I shall live to the Assizes, so it matters little to me, but I should wish to spare Alice the shock. And now I will make the thing clear to you; it has been a long time in the acting, but will not take me long to tell.

"You didn't know this dead man, McCarthy. He was a devil incarnate. I tell you that. God keep you out of the clutches of such a man as he. His grip has been upon me these twenty years, and he has blasted my life. I'll tell you first how I came to be in his power.

"It was in the early '60s at the diggings. I was a young chap then, hot-blooded and reckless, ready to turn my hand at anything; I got among bad companions, took to drink, had no luck with my claim, took to the bush, and in a word became what you would call over here a highway robber. There were six of us, and we had a wild, free life of it, sticking up a station from time to time, or stopping the wagons on the road to the diggings. Black Jack of Ballarat was the name I went under, and our party is still remembered in the colony as the Ballarat Gang.

"One day a gold convoy came down from Ballarat to Melbourne, and we lay in wait for it and attacked it. There were six troopers and six of us, so it was a close thing, but we emptied four of their saddles at the first volley. Three of our boys were killed, however, before we got the swag. I put my pistol to the head of the wagon-driver, who was this very man McCarthy. I wish to the Lord that I had shot him then, but I spared him, though I saw his wicked little eyes fixed on my face, as though to remember every feature. We got away with the gold, became wealthy men, and made our way over to England without being suspected. There I parted from my old pals and determined to settle down to a quiet and respectable life. I bought this estate, which chanced to be in the market, and I set myself to do a little good with my money, to make up for the way in which I had earned it. I married, too, and though my wife died young she left me my dear little Alice. Even when she was just a baby her wee hand seemed to lead me down the right path as nothing else had ever done. In a word, I turned over a new leaf and did my best to make up for the past. All was going well when McCarthy laid his grip upon me.

"I had gone up to town about an investment, and I met him in Regent Street with hardly a coat to his back or a boot to his foot.

"'Here we are, Jack,' says he, touching me on the arm; 'we'll be as good as a family to you. There's two of us, me and my son, and you can have the keeping of us. If you don't--it's a fine, law-abiding country is England, and there's always a policeman within hail.'

"Well, down they came to the west country, there was no shaking them off, and there they have lived rent free on my best land ever since. There was no rest for me, no peace, no forgetfulness; turn where I would, there was his cunning, grinning face at my elbow. It grew worse as Alice grew up, for he soon saw I was more afraid of her knowing my past than of the police. Whatever he wanted he must have, and whatever it was I gave him without question, land, money, houses, until at last he asked a thing which I could not give. He asked for Alice.

"His son, you see, had grown up, and so had my girl, and as I was known to be in weak health, it seemed a fine stroke to him that his lad should step into the whole property. But there I was firm. I would not have his cursed stock dropped in my flight. That is the true story, gentlemen, of all that occurred."

"Well, it is not for me to judge you," said Holmes as the old man signed the statement which had been drawn out. "I pray that we may never be exposed to such a temptation."

"I pray not, sir. And what do you intend to do?"

"In view of your health, nothing. You are yourself aware that you will soon have to answer for your deed at a higher court than the Assizes. I will keep your confession, and if McCarthy is condemned I shall be forced to use it. If not, it shall never be seen by mortal eye; and your secret, whether you be alive or dead, shall be safe with us."

"Farewell, then," said the old man solemnly. "Your own deathbeds, when they come, will be the easier for the
thought of the peace which you have given to mine." Tottering and shaking in all his giant frame, he stumbled slowly from the room.

"God help us!" said Holmes after a long silence. "Why does fate play such tricks with poor, helpless worms? I never hear of such a case as this that I do not think of Baxter's words, and say, 'There, but for the grace of God, goes Sherlock Holmes.'"

James McCarthy was acquitted at the Assizes on the strength of a number of objections which had been drawn out by Holmes and submitted to the defending counsel. Old Turner lived for seven months after our interview, but he is now dead; and there is every prospect that the son and daughter may come to live happily together in ignorance of the black cloud which rests upon their past.

ADVENTURE V. THE FIVE ORANGE PIPS

When I glance over my notes and records of the Sherlock Holmes cases between the years '82 and '90, I am faced by so many which present strange and interesting features that it is no easy matter to know which to choose and which to leave. Some, however, have already gained publicity through the papers, and others have not offered a field for those peculiar qualities which my friend possessed in so high a degree, and which it is the object of these papers to illustrate. Some, too, have baffled his analytical skill, and would be, as narratives, beginnings without an ending, while others have been but partially cleared up, and have their explanations founded rather upon conjecture and surmise than on that absolute logical proof which was so dear to him. There is, however, one of these last which was so remarkable in its details and so startling in its results that I am tempted to give some account of it in spite of the fact that there are points in connection with it which never have been, and probably never will be, entirely cleared up.

The year '87 furnished us with a long series of cases of greater or less interest, of which I retain the records. Among my headings under this one twelve months I find an account of the adventure of the Paradol Chamber, of the Amateur Mendicant Society, who held a luxurious club in the lower vault of a furniture warehouse, of the facts connected with the loss of the British barque "Sophy Anderson", of the singular adventures of the Grice Patersons in the island of Uffa, and finally of the Camberwell poisoning case. In the latter, as may be remembered, Sherlock Holmes was able, by winding up the dead man's watch, to prove that it had been wound up two hours before, and that therefore the deceased had gone to bed within that time—a deduction which was of the greatest importance in clearing up the case. All these I may sketch out at some future date, but none of them present such singular features as the strange train of circumstances which I have now taken up my pen to describe.

It was in the latter days of September, and the equinoctial gales had set in with exceptional violence. All day the wind had screamed and the rain had beaten against the windows, so that even here in the heart of great, hand-made London we were forced to raise our minds for the instant from the routine of life and to recognise the presence of those great elemental forces which shriek at mankind through the bars of his civilisation, like untamed beasts in a cage. As evening drew in, the storm grew higher and louder, and the wind cried and sobbed like a child in the chimney. Sherlock Holmes sat moodily at one side of the fireplace cross-indexing his records of crime, while I at the other was deep in one of Clark Russell's fine sea-stories until the howl of the gale from without seemed to blend with the text, and the splash of the rain to lengthen out into the long swash of the sea waves. My wife was on a visit to her mother's, and for a few days I was a dweller once more in my old quarters at Baker Street.

"Why," said I, glancing up at my companion, "that was surely the bell. Who could come to-night? Some friend of yours, perhaps?"

"Except yourself I have none," he answered. "I do not encourage visitors."

"A client, then?"

"If so, it is a serious case. Nothing less would bring a man out on such a day and at such an hour. But I take it that it is more likely to be some crony of the landlady's."

Sherlock Holmes was wrong in his conjecture, however, for there came a step in the passage and a tapping at the door. He stretched out his long arm to turn the lamp away from himself and towards the vacant chair upon which a newcomer must sit.

"Come in!" said he.

The man who entered was young, some two-and-twenty at the outside, well-groomed and trimly clad, with something of refinement and delicacy in his bearing. The streaming umbrella which he held in his hand, and his long shining waterproof told of the fierce weather through which he had come. He looked about him anxiously in the glare of the lamp, and I could see that his face was pale and his eyes heavy, like those of a man who is weighed down with some great anxiety.

"I owe you an apology," he said, raising his golden pince-nez to his eyes. "I trust that I am not intruding. I fear that I have brought some traces of the storm and rain into your snug chamber."

"Give me your coat and umbrella," said Holmes. "They may rest here on the hook and will be dry presently. You
have come up from the south-west, I see."
"Yes, from Horsham."
"That clay and chalk mixture which I see upon your toe caps is quite distinctive."
"I have come for advice."
"That is easily got."
"And help."
"That is not always so easy."
"I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes. I heard from Major Prendergast how you saved him in the Tankerville Club scandal."
"Ah, of course. He was wrongfully accused of cheating at cards."
"He said that you could solve anything."
"He said too much."
"That you are never beaten."
"I have been beaten four times--three times by men, and once by a woman."
"But what is that compared with the number of your successes?"
"It is true that I have been generally successful."
"Then you may be so with me."
"I beg that you will draw your chair up to the fire and favour me with some details as to your case."
"It is no ordinary one."
"None of those which come to me are. I am the last court of appeal."
"And yet I question, sir, whether, in all your experience, you have ever listened to a more mysterious and inexplicable chain of events than those which have happened in my own family."
"You fill me with interest," said Holmes. "Pray give us the essential facts from the commencement, and I can afterwards question you as to those details which seem to me to be most important."

The young man pulled his chair up and pushed his wet feet out towards the blaze.

"My name," said he, "is John Openshaw, but my own affairs have, as far as I can understand, little to do with this awful business. It is a hereditary matter; so in order to give you an idea of the facts, I must go back to the commencement of the affair.

"You must know that my grandfather had two sons--my uncle Elias and my father Joseph. My father had a small factory at Coventry, which he enlarged at the time of the invention of bicycling. He was a patentee of the Openshaw unbreakable tire, and his business met with such success that he was able to sell it and to retire upon a handsome competence.

"My uncle Elias emigrated to America when he was a young man and became a planter in Florida, where he was reported to have done very well. At the time of the war he fought in Jackson's army, and afterwards under Hood, where he rose to be a colonel. When Lee laid down his arms my uncle returned to his plantation, where he remained for three or four years. About 1869 or 1870 he came back to Europe and took a small estate in Sussex, near Horsham. He had made a very considerable fortune in the States, and his reason for leaving them was his aversion to the negroes, and his dislike of the Republican policy in extending the franchise to them. He was a singular man, fierce and quick-tempered, very foul-mouthed when he was angry, and of a most retiring disposition. During all the years that he lived at Horsham, I doubt if ever he set foot in the town. He had a garden and two or three fields round his house, and there he would take his exercise, though very often for weeks on end he would never leave his room. He drank a great deal of brandy and smoked very heavily, but he would see no society and did not want any friends, not even his own brother.

"He didn't mind me; in fact, he took a fancy to me, for at the time when he saw me first I was a youngster of twelve or so. This would be in the year 1878, after he had been eight or nine years in England. He begged my father to let me live with him and he was very kind to me in his way. When he was sober he used to be fond of playing backgammon and draughts with me, and he would make me his representative both with the servants and with the tradespeople, so that by the time that I was sixteen I was quite master of the house. I kept all the keys and could go where I liked and do what I liked, so long as I did not disturb him in his privacy. There was one singular exception, however, for he had a single room, a lumber-room up among the attics, which was invariably locked, and which he would never permit either me or anyone else to enter. With a boy's curiosity I have peeped through the keyhole, but I was never able to see more than such a collection of old trunks and bundles as would be expected in such a room.

"One day--it was in March, 1883--a letter with a foreign stamp lay upon the table in front of the colonel's plate. It was not a common thing for him to receive letters, for his bills were all paid in ready money, and he had no friends of any sort. 'From India!' said he as he took it up, 'Pondicherry postmark! What can this be?' Opening it hurriedly, out there jumped five little dried orange pips, which pattered down upon his plate. I began to laugh at this,
but the laugh was struck from my lips at the sight of his face. His lip had fallen, his eyes were protruding, his skin
the colour of putty, and he glared at the envelope which he still held in his trembling hand, 'K. K. K.' he shrieked,
and then, 'My God, my God, my sins have overtaken me!'

"What is it, uncle?" I cried.

"Death," said he, and rising from the table he retired to his room, leaving me palpitating with horror. I took up
the envelope and saw scrawled in red ink upon the inner flap, just above the gum, the letter K three times repeated.
There was nothing else save the five dried pips. What could be the reason of his overpowering terror? I left the
breakfast-table, and as I ascended the stair I met him coming down with an old rusty key, which must have belonged
to the attic, in one hand, and a small brass box, like a cashbox, in the other.

"They may do what they like, but I'll checkmate them still," said he with an oath. 'Tell Mary that I shall want a
fire in my room to-day, and send down to Fordham, the Horsham lawyer.'

'I did as he ordered, and when the lawyer arrived I was asked to step up to the room. The fire was burning
brightly, and in the grate there was a mass of black, fluffy ashes, as of burned paper, while the brass box stood open
and empty beside it. As I glanced at the box I noticed, with a start, that upon the lid was printed the treble K which I
had read in the morning upon the envelope.

"I wish you, John," said my uncle, 'to witness my will. I leave my estate, with all its advantages and all its
disadvantages, to my brother, your father, whence it will, no doubt, descend to you. If you can enjoy it in peace, well
and good! If you find you cannot, take my advice, my boy, and leave it to your deadliest enemy. I am sorry to give
you such a two-edged thing, but I can't say what turn things are going to take. Kindly sign the paper where Mr.
Fordham shows you.'

'I signed the paper as directed, and the lawyer took it away with him. The singular incident made, as you may
think, the deepest impression upon me, and I pondered over it and turned it every way in my mind without being
able to make anything of it. Yet I could not shake off the vague feeling of dread which it left behind, though the
sensation grew less keen as the weeks passed and nothing happened to disturb the usual routine of our lives. I could
see a change in my uncle, however. He drank more than ever, and he was less inclined for any sort of society. Most
of his time he would spend in his room, with the door locked upon the inside, but sometimes he would emerge in a
sort of drunken frenzy and would burst out of the house and tear about the garden with a revolver in his hand,
screaming out that he was afraid of no man, and that he was not to be cooped up, like a sheep in a pen, by man or
devil. When these hot fits were over, however, he would rush tumultuously in at the door and lock and bar it behind
him, like a man who can brazen it out no longer against the terror which lies at the roots of his soul. At such times I
have seen his face, even on a cold day, glisten with moisture, as though it were new raised from a basin.

"Well, to come to an end of the matter, Mr. Holmes, and not to abuse your patience, there came a night when he
made one of those drunken sallies from which he never came back. We found him, when we went to search for him,
face downward in a little green-scummed pool, which lay at the foot of the garden. There was no sign of any
violence, and the water was but two feet deep, so that the jury, having regard to his known eccentricity, brought in a
verdict of 'suicide.' But I, who knew how he winced from the very thought of death, had much ado to persuade
myself that he had gone out of his way to meet it. The matter passed, however, and my father entered into
possession of the estate, and of some 14,000 pounds, which lay to his credit at the bank.'

"One moment," Holmes interposed, "your statement is, I foresee, one of the most remarkable to which I have
ever listened. Let me have the date of the reception by your uncle of the letter, and the date of his supposed suicide."

"The letter arrived on March 10, 1883. His death was seven weeks later, upon the night of May 2nd."

"Thank you. Pray proceed."

"When my father took over the Horsham property, he, at my request, made a careful examination of the attic,
which had been always locked up. We found the brass box there, although its contents had been destroyed. On the
inside of the cover was a paper label, with the initials of K. K. K. repeated upon it, and 'Letters, memoranda,
receipts, and a register' written beneath. These, we presume, indicated the nature of the papers which had been
destroyed by Colonel Openshaw. For the rest, there was nothing of much importance in the attic save a great many
scattered papers and note-books bearing upon my uncle's life in America. Some of them were of the war time and
showed that he had done his duty well and had borne the repute of a brave soldier. Others were of a date during the
reconstruction of the Southern states, and were mostly concerned with politics, for he had evidently taken a strong
part in opposing the carpet-bag politicians who had been sent down from the North.

"Well, it was the beginning of '84 when my father came to live at Horsham, and all went as well as possible with
us until the January of '85. On the fourth day after the new year I heard my father give a sharp cry of surprise as we
sat together at the breakfast-table. There he was, sitting with a newly opened envelope in one hand and five dried
orange pips in the outstretched palm of the other one. He had always laughed at what he called my cock-and-bull
story about the colonel, but he looked very scared and puzzled now that the same thing had come upon himself.
"'Why, what on earth does this mean, John?' he stammered.

'My heart had turned to lead. 'It is K. K. K.,' said I.

'He looked inside the envelope. 'So it is,' he cried. 'Here are the very letters. But what is this written above them?'

'Put the papers on the sundial,' I read, peeping over his shoulder.

'What papers? What sundial?' he asked.

'The sundial in the garden. There is no other,' said I; 'but the papers must be those that are destroyed.'

'Pooh!' said he, gripping hard at his courage. 'We are in a civilised land here, and we can't have tomfoolery of this kind. Where does the thing come from?'

'From Dundee,' I answered, glancing at the postmark.

'Some preposterous practical joke,' said he. 'What have I to do with sundials and papers? I shall take no notice of such nonsense.'

'I should certainly speak to the police,' I said.

'And be laughed at for my pains. Nothing of the sort.'

'Then let me do so?'

'No, I forbid you. I won't have a fuss made about such nonsense.'

'It was in vain to argue with him, for he was a very obstinate man. I went about, however, with a heart which was full of forebodings.

'On the third day after the coming of the letter my father went from home to visit an old friend of his, Major Freebody, who is in command of one of the forts upon Portsdown Hill. I was glad that he should go, for it seemed to me that he was farther from danger when he was away from home. In that, however, I was in error. Upon the second day of his absence I received a telegram from the major, imploring me to come at once. My father had fallen over one of the deep chalk-pits which abound in the neighbourhood, and was lying senseless, with a shattered skull. I hurried to him, but he passed away without having ever recovered his consciousness. He had, as it appears, been returning from Fareham in the twilight, and as the country was unknown to him, and the chalk-pit unfenced, the jury had no hesitation in bringing in a verdict of 'death from accidental causes.' Carefully as I examined every fact connected with his death, I was unable to find anything which could suggest the idea of murder. There were no signs of violence, no footmarks, no robbery, no record of strangers having been seen upon the roads. And yet I need not tell you that my mind was far from at ease, and that I was well-nigh certain that some foul plot had been woven round him.

'In this sinister way I came into my inheritance. You will ask me why I did not dispose of it? I answer, because I was well convinced that our troubles were in some way dependent upon an incident in my uncle's life, and that the danger would be as pressing in one house as in another.

'It was in January, '85, that my poor father met his end, and two years and eight months have elapsed since then. During that time I have lived happily at Horsham, and I had begun to hope that this curse had passed away from the family, and that it had ended with the last generation. I had begun to take comfort too soon, however; yesterday morning the blow fell in the very shape in which it had come upon my father.'

The young man took from his waistcoat a crumpled envelope, and turning to the table he shook out upon it five little dried orange pips.

"This is the envelope," he continued. "The postmark is London--eastern division. Within are the very words which were upon my father's last message: 'K. K. K.; and then 'Put the papers on the sundial.'"

'What have you done?' asked Holmes.

'Nothing.'

'Nothing?'

'To tell the truth'--he sank his face into his thin, white hands--"I have felt helpless. I have felt like one of those poor rabbits when the snake is writhing towards it. I seem to be in the grasp of some resistless, inexorable evil, which no foresight and no precautions can guard against."

"Tut! tut!" cried Sherlock Holmes. "You must act, man, or you are lost. Nothing but energy can save you. This is no time for despair."

'I have seen the police."

'Ah!' "But they listened to my story with a smile. I am convinced that the inspector has formed the opinion that the letters are all practical jokes, and that the deaths of my relations were really accidents, as the jury stated, and were not to be connected with the warnings."

Holmes shook his clenched hands in the air. "Incredible imbecility!" he cried.

'They have, however, allowed me a policeman, who may remain in the house with me."
"Has he come with you to-night?"
"No. His orders were to stay in the house."
Again Holmes raved in the air.
"Why did you come to me," he cried, "and, above all, why did you not come at once?"
"I did not know. It was only to-day that I spoke to Major Prendergast about my troubles and was advised by him to come to you."
"It is really two days since you had the letter. We should have acted before this. You have no further evidence, I suppose, than that which you have placed before us--no suggestive detail which might help us?"
"There is one thing," said John Openshaw. He rummaged in his coat pocket, and, drawing out a piece of discoloured, blue-tinted paper, he laid it out upon the table. "I have some remembrance," said he, "that on the day when my uncle burned the papers I observed that the small, unburned margins which lay amid the ashes were of this particular colour. I found this single sheet upon the floor of his room, and I am inclined to think that it may be one of the papers which has, perhaps, fluttered out from among the others, and in that way has escaped destruction. Beyond the mention of pips, I do not see that it helps us much. I think myself that it is a page from some private diary. The writing is undoubtedly my uncle's."

Holmes moved the lamp, and we both bent over the sheet of paper, which showed by its ragged edge that it had indeed been torn from a book. It was headed, "March, 1869," and beneath were the following enigmatical notices:
"4th. Hudson came. Same old platform.
"7th. Set the pips on McCauley, Paramore, and John Swain, of St. Augustine.
"9th. McCauley cleared.
"10th. John Swain cleared.
"12th. Visited Paramore. All well."
"Thank you!" said Holmes, folding up the paper and returning it to our visitor. "And now you must on no account lose another instant. We cannot spare time even to discuss what you have told me. You must get home instantly and act."
"What shall I do?"
"There is but one thing to do. It must be done at once. You must put this piece of paper which you have shown us into the brass box which you have described. You must also put in a note to say that all the other papers were burned by your uncle, and that this is the only one which remains. You must assert that in such words as will carry conviction with them. Having done this, you must at once put the box out upon the sundial, as directed. Do you understand?"
"Entirely."

"Do not think of revenge, or anything of the sort, at present. I think that we may gain that by means of the law; but we have our web to weave, while theirs is already woven. The first consideration is to remove the pressing danger which threatens you. The second is to clear up the mystery and to punish the guilty parties."
"I thank you," said the young man, rising and pulling on his overcoat. "You have given me fresh life and hope. I shall certainly do as you advise."
"Do not lose an instant. And, above all, take care of yourself in the meanwhile, for I do not think that there can be a doubt that you are threatened by a very real and imminent danger. How do you go back?"
"By train from Waterloo."

"It is not yet nine. The streets will be crowded, so I trust that you may be in safety. And yet you cannot guard yourself too closely."
"I am armed."
"That is well. To-morrow I shall set to work upon your case."
"I shall see you at Horsham, then?"
"No, your secret lies in London. It is there that I shall seek it."
"Then I shall call upon you in a day, or in two days, with news as to the box and the papers. I shall take your advice in every particular." He shook hands with us and took his leave. Outside the wind still screamed and the rain splashed and pattered against the windows. This strange, wild story seemed to have come to us from amid the mad elements--blown in upon us like a sheet of sea-weed in a gale--and now to have been reabsorbed by them once more.

Sherlock Holmes sat for some time in silence, with his head sunk forward and his eyes bent upon the red glow of the fire. Then he lit his pipe, and leaning back in his chair he watched the blue smoke-rings as they chased each other up to the ceiling.
"I think, Watson," he remarked at last, "that of all our cases we have had none more fantastic than this."
"Save, perhaps, the Sign of Four."
"Well, yes. Save, perhaps, that. And yet this John Openshaw seems to me to be walking amid even greater perils..."
than did the Sholto.

"But have you," I asked, "formed any definite conception as to what these perils are?"

"There can be no question as to their nature," he answered.

"Then what are they? Who is this K. K. K., and why does he pursue this unhappy family?"

Sherlock Holmes closed his eyes and placed his elbows upon the arms of his chair, with his finger-tips together. "The ideal reasoner," he remarked, "would, when he had once been shown a single fact in all its bearings, deduce from it not only all the chain of events which led up to it but also all the results which would follow from it. As Cuvier could correctly describe a whole animal by the contemplation of a single bone, so the observer who has thoroughly understood one link in a series of incidents should be able to accurately state all the other ones, both before and after. We have not yet grasped the results which the reason alone can attain to. Problems may be solved in the study which have baffled all those who have sought a solution by the aid of their senses. To carry the art, however, to its highest pitch, it is necessary that the reasoner should be able to utilise all the facts which have come to his knowledge; and this in itself implies, as you will readily see, a possession of all knowledge, which, even in these days of free education and encyclopaedias, is a somewhat rare accomplishment. It is not so impossible, however, that a man should possess all knowledge which is likely to be useful to him in his work, and this I have endeavoured in my case to do. If I remember rightly, you on one occasion, in the early days of our friendship, defined my limits in a very precise fashion."

"Yes," I answered, laughing. "It was a singular document. Philosophy, astronomy, and politics were marked at zero, I remember. Botany variable, geology profound as regards the mud-stains from any region within fifty miles of town, chemistry eccentric, anatomy unsystematic, sensational literature and crime records unique, violin-player, boxer, swordsman, lawyer, and self-poisoner by cocaine and tobacco. Those, I think, were the main points of my analysis."

Holmes grinned at the last item. "Well," he said, "I say now, as I said then, that a man should keep his little brain-attic stocked with all the furniture that he is likely to use, and the rest he can put away in the lumber-room of his library, where he can get it if he wants it. Now, for such a case as the one which has been submitted to us tonight, we need certainly to muster all our resources. Kindly hand me down the letter K of the 'American Encyclopaedia' which stands upon the shelf beside you. Thank you. Now let us consider the situation and see what may be deduced from it. In the first place, we may start with a strong presumption that Colonel Openshaw had some very strong reason for leaving America. Men at his time of life do not change all their habits and exchange willingly the charming climate of Florida for the lonely life of an English provincial town. His extreme love of solitude in England suggests the idea that he was in fear of someone or something, so we may assume as a working hypothesis that it was fear of someone or something which drove him from America. As to what it was he feared, we can only deduce that by considering the formidable letters which were received by himself and his successors. Did you remark the postmarks of those letters?"

"The first was from Pondicherry, the second from Dundee, and the third from London."

"From East London. What do you deduce from that?"

"They are all seaports. That the writer was on board of a ship."

"Excellent. We have already a clue. There can be no doubt that the probability--the strong probability--is that the writer was on board of a ship. And now let us consider another point. In the case of Pondicherry, seven weeks elapsed between the threat and its fulfilment, in Dundee it was only some three or four days. Does that suggest anything?"

"A greater distance to travel."

"But the letter had also a greater distance to come."

"Then I do not see the point."

"There is at least a presumption that the vessel in which the man or men are is a sailing-ship. It looks as if they always send their singular warning or token before them when starting upon their mission. You see how quickly the deed followed the sign when it came from Dundee. If they had come from Pondicherry in a steamer they would have arrived almost as soon as their letter. But, as a matter of fact, seven weeks elapsed. I think that those seven weeks represented the difference between the mail-boat which brought the letter and the sailing vessel which brought the writer."

"It is possible."

"More than that. It is probable. And now you see the deadly urgency of this new case, and why I urged young Openshaw to caution. The blow has always fallen at the end of the time which it would take the senders to travel the distance. But this one comes from London, and therefore we cannot count upon delay."

"Good God!" I cried. "What can it mean, this relentless persecution?"

"The papers which Openshaw carried are obviously of vital importance to the person or persons in the sailing-
ship. I think that it is quite clear that there must be more than one of them. A single man could not have carried out two deaths in such a way as to deceive a coroner's jury. There must have been several in it, and they must have been men of resource and determination. Their papers they mean to have, be the holder of them who it may. In this way you see K. K. K. ceases to be the initials of an individual and becomes the badge of a society."

"But of what society?"

"Have you never--" said Sherlock Holmes, bending forward and sinking his voice--"have you never heard of the Ku Klux Klan?"

"I never have."

Holmes turned over the leaves of the book upon his knee. "Here it is," said he presently:

"Ku Klux Klan. A name derived from the fanciful resemblance to the sound produced by cocking a rifle. This terrible secret society was formed by some ex-Confederate soldiers in the Southern states after the Civil War, and it rapidly formed local branches in different parts of the country, notably in Tennessee, Louisiana, the Carolinas, Georgia, and Florida. Its power was used for political purposes, principally for the terrorising of the negro voters and the murdering and driving from the country of those who were opposed to its views. Its outrages were usually preceded by a warning sent to the marked man in some fantastic but generally recognised shape--a sprig of oak-leaves in some parts, melon seeds or orange pips in others. On receiving this the victim might either openly abjure his former ways, or might fly from the country. If he braved the matter out, death would unfailingly come upon him, and usually in some strange and unforeseen manner. So perfect was the organisation of the society, and so systematic its methods, that there is hardly a case upon record where any man succeeded in braving it with impunity, or in which any of its outrages were traced home to the perpetrators. For some years the organisation flourished in spite of the efforts of the United States government and of the better classes of the community in the South. Eventually, in the year 1869, the movement rather suddenly collapsed, although there have been sporadic outbreaks of the same sort since that date."

"You will observe," said Holmes, laying down the volume, "that the sudden breaking up of the society was coincident with the disappearance of Openshaw from America with their papers. It may well have been cause and effect. It is no wonder that he and his family have some of the more implacable spirits upon their track. You can understand that this register and diary may implicate some of the first men in the South, and that there may be many who will not sleep easy at night until it is recovered."

"Then the page we have seen--"

"Is such as we might expect. It ran, if I remember right, 'sent the pips to A, B, and C'--that is, sent the society's warning to them. Then there are successive entries that A and B cleared, or left the country, and finally that C was visited, with, I fear, a sinister result for C. Well, I think, Doctor, that we may let some light into this dark place, and I believe that the only chance young Openshaw has in the meantime is to do what I have told him. There is nothing more to be said or to be done to-night, so hand me over my violin and let us try to forget for half an hour the miserable weather and the still more miserable ways of our fellow-men."

It had cleared in the morning, and the sun was shining with a subdued brightness through the dim veil which hangs over the great city. Sherlock Holmes was already at breakfast when I came down.

"You will excuse me for not waiting for you," said he; "I have, I foresee, a very busy day before me in looking into this case of young Openshaw's."

"What steps will you take?" I asked.

"It will very much depend upon the results of my first inquiries. I may have to go down to Horsham, after all."

"You will not go there first?"

"No, I shall commence with the City. Just ring the bell and the maid will bring up your coffee."

As I waited, I lifted the unopened newspaper from the table and glanced my eye over it. It rested upon a heading which sent a chill to my heart.

"Holmes," I cried, "you are too late."

"Ah!" said he, laying down his cup, "I feared as much. How was it done?" He spoke calmly, but I could see that he was deeply moved.

"My eye caught the name of Openshaw, and the heading 'Tragedy Near Waterloo Bridge.' Here is the account:

"Between nine and ten last night Police-Constable Cook, of the H Division, on duty near Waterloo Bridge, heard a cry for help and a splash in the water. The night, however, was extremely dark and stormy, so that, in spite of the help of several passers-by, it was quite impossible to effect a rescue. The alarm, however, was given, and, by the aid of the water-police, the body was eventually recovered. It proved to be that of a young gentleman whose name, as it appears from an envelope which was found in his pocket, was John Openshaw, and whose residence is near Horsham. It is conjectured that he may have been hurrying down to catch the last train from Waterloo Station, and that in his haste and the extreme darkness he missed his path and walked over the edge of one of the small landing-
places for river steamboats. The body exhibited no traces of violence, and there can be no doubt that the deceased
had been the victim of an unfortunate accident, which should have the effect of calling the attention of the
authorities to the condition of the riverside landing-stages."

We sat in silence for some minutes, Holmes more depressed and shaken than I had ever seen him.
"That hurts my pride, Watson," he said at last. "It is a petty feeling, no doubt, but it hurts my pride. It becomes a
personal matter with me now, and, if God sends me health, I shall set my hand upon this gang. That he should come
to me for help, and that I should send him away to his death--!" He sprang from his chair and paced about the room
in uncontrollable agitation, with a flush upon his sallow cheeks and a nervous clasping and unclasping of his long
thin hands.
"They must be cunning devils," he exclaimed at last. "How could they have decoyed him down there? The
Embarkment is not on the direct line to the station. The bridge, no doubt, was too crowded, even on such a night, for
their purpose. Well, Watson, we shall see who will win in the long run. I am going out now!"

"To the police?"
"No; I shall be my own police. When I have spun the web they may take the flies, but not before."
All day I was engaged in my professional work, and it was late in the evening before I returned to Baker Street.
Sherlock Holmes had not come back yet. It was nearly ten o'clock before he entered, looking pale and worn. He
walked up to the sideboard, and tearing a piece from the loaf he devoured it voraciously, washing it down with a
long draught of water.
"You are hungry," I remarked.
"Starving. It had escaped my memory. I have had nothing since breakfast."
"Nothing?"
"Not a bite. I had no time to think of it."
"And how have you succeeded?"
"Well."
"You have a clue?"
"I have them in the hollow of my hand. Young Openshaw shall not long remain unavenged. Why, Watson, let us
put their own devilish trade-mark upon them. It is well thought of!"
"What do you mean?"
He took an orange from the cupboard, and tearing it to pieces he squeezed out the pips upon the table. Of these
he took five and thrust them into an envelope. On the inside of the flap he wrote "S. H. for J. O." Then he sealed it
and addressed it to "Captain James Calhoun, Barque 'Lone Star,' Savannah, Georgia."
"That will await him when he enters port," said he, chuckling. "It may give him a sleepless night. He will find it
as sure a precursor of his fate as Openshaw did before him."
"And who is this Captain Calhoun?"
"The leader of the gang. I shall have the others, but he first."
"How did you trace it, then?"
He took a large sheet of paper from his pocket, all covered with dates and names.
"I have spent the whole day," said he, "over Lloyd's registers and files of the old papers, following the future
career of every vessel which touched at Pondicherry in January and February in '83. There were thirty-six ships of
fair tonnage which were reported there during those months. Of these, one, the 'Lone Star,' instantly attracted my
attention, since, although it was reported as having cleared from London, the name is that which is given to one of
the states of the Union."
"Texas, I think."
"I was not and am not sure which; but I knew that the ship must have an American origin."
"What then?"
"I searched the Dundee records, and when I found that the barque 'Lone Star' was there in January, '85, my
suspicion became a certainty. I then inquired as to the vessels which lay at present in the port of London."
"Yes?"
"The 'Lone Star' had arrived here last week. I went down to the Albert Dock and found that she had been taken
down the river by the early tide this morning, homeward bound to Savannah. I wired to Gravesend and learned that
she had passed some time ago, and as the wind is easterly I have no doubt that she is now past the Goodwins and not
very far from the Isle of Wight."
"What will you do, then?"
"Oh, I have my hand upon him. He and the two mates, are as I learn, the only native-born Americans in the ship.
The others are Finns and Germans. I know, also, that they were all three away from the ship last night. I had it from
the stevedore who has been loading their cargo. By the time that their sailing-ship reaches Savannah the mail-boat
will have carried this letter, and the cable will have informed the police of Savannah that these three gentlemen are badly wanted here upon a charge of murder."

There is ever a flaw, however, in the best laid of human plans, and the murderers of John Openshaw were never to receive the orange pips which would show them that another, as cunning and as resolute as themselves, was upon their track. Very long and very severe were the equinoctial gales that year. We waited long for news of the "Lone Star" of Savannah, but none ever reached us. We did at last hear that somewhere far out in the Atlantic a shattered stern-post of a boat was seen swinging in the trough of a wave, with the letters "L. S." carved upon it, and that is all which we shall ever know of the fate of the "Lone Star."

ADVENTURE VI. THE MAN WITH THE TWISTED LIP

Isa Whitney, brother of the late Elias Whitney, D.D., Principal of the Theological College of St. George's, was much addicted to opium. The habit grew upon him, as I understand, from some foolish freak when he was at college; for having read De Quincey's description of his dreams and sensations, he had drenched his tobacco with laudanum in an attempt to produce the same effects. He found, as so many more have done, that the practice is easier to attain than to get rid of, and for many years he continued to be a slave to the drug, an object of mingled horror and pity to his friends and relatives. I can see him now, with yellow, pasty face, drooping lids, and pin-point pupils, all huddled in a chair, the wreck and ruin of a noble man.

One night--it was in June, '89--there came a ring to my bell, about the hour when a man gives his first yawn and glances at the clock. I sat up in my chair, and my wife laid her needle-work down in her lap and made a little face of disappointment.

"A patient!" said she. "You'll have to go out."

I groaned, for I was newly come back from a weary day.

We heard the door open, a few hurried words, and then quick steps upon the linoleum. Our own door flew open, and a lady, clad in some dark-coloured stuff, with a black veil, entered the room.

"You will excuse my calling so late," she began, and then, suddenly losing her self-control, she ran forward, threw her arms about my wife's neck, and sobbed upon her shoulder. "Oh, I'm in such trouble!" she cried; "I do so want a little help."

"Why," said my wife, pulling up her veil, "it is Kate Whitney. How you startled me, Kate! I had not an idea who you were when you came in."

"I didn't know what to do, so I came straight to you." That was always the way. Folk who were in grief came to my wife like birds to a light-house.

"It was very sweet of you to come. Now, you must have some wine and water, and sit here comfortably and tell us all about it. Or should you rather that I sent James off to bed?"

"Oh, no, no! I want the doctor's advice and help, too. It's about Isa. He has not been home for two days. I am so frightened about him!"

It was not the first time that she had spoken to us of her husband's trouble, to me as a doctor, to my wife as an old friend and school companion. We soothed and comforted her by such words as we could find. Did she know where her husband was? Was it possible that we could bring him back to her?

It seems that it was. She had the surest information that of late he had, when the fit was on him, made use of an opium den in the farthest east of the City. Hitherto his orgies had always been confined to one day, and he had come back, twitching and shattered, in the evening. But now the spell had been upon him eight-and-forty hours, and he lay there, doubtless among the dregs of the docks, breathing in the poison or sleeping off the effects. There he was to be found, she was sure of it, at the Bar of Gold, in Upper Swandam Lane. But what was she to do? How could she, a young and timid woman, make her way into such a place and pluck her husband out from among the ruffians who surrounded him?

There was the case, and of course there was but one way out of it. Might I not escort her to this place? And then, as a second thought, why should she come at all? I was Isa Whitney's medical adviser, and as such I had influence over him. I could manage it better if I were alone. I promised her on my word that I would send him home in a cab within two hours if he were indeed at the address which she had given me. And so in ten minutes I had left my armchair and cheery sitting-room behind me, and was speeding eastward in a hansom on a strange errand, as it seemed to me at the time, though the future only could show how strange it was to be.

But there was no great difficulty in the first stage of my adventure. Upper Swandam Lane is a vile alley lurking behind the high wharves which line the north side of the river to the east of London Bridge. Between a slop-shop and a gin-shop, approached by a steep flight of steps leading down to a black gap like the mouth of a cave, I found the den of which I was in search. Ordering my cab to wait, I passed down the steps, worn hollow in the centre by the ceaseless tread of drunken feet; and by the light of a flickering oil-lamp above the door I found the latch and made my way into a long, low room, thick and heavy with the brown opium smoke, and terraced with wooden berths, like
the forecastle of an emigrant ship.

Through the gloom one could dimly catch a glimpse of bodies lying in strange fantastic poses, bowed shoulders, bent knees, heads thrown back, and chins pointing upward, with here and there a dark, lack-lustre eye turned upon the newcomer. Out of the black shadows there glimmered little red circles of light, now bright, now faint, as the burning poison waxed or waned in the bowls of the metal pipes. The most lay silent, but some muttered to themselves, and others talked together in a strange, low, monotonous voice, their conversation coming in gushes, and then suddenly tailing off into silence, each mumbling out his own thoughts and paying little heed to the words of his neighbour. At the farther end was a small brazier of burning charcoal, beside which on a three-legged wooden stool there sat a tall, thin old man, with his jaw resting upon his two fists, and his elbows upon his knees, staring into the fire.

As I entered, a sallow Malay attendant had hurried up with a pipe for me and a supply of the drug, beckoning me to an empty berth.

"Thank you. I have not come to stay," said I. "There is a friend of mine here, Mr. Isa Whitney, and I wish to speak with him."

There was a movement and an exclamation from my right, and peering through the gloom, I saw Whitney, pale, haggard, and unkempt, staring out at me.

"My God! It's Watson," said he. He was in a pitiable state of reaction, with every nerve in a twitter. "I say, Watson, what o'clock is it?"
"Nearly eleven."
"Of what day?"
"Of Friday, June 19th."
"Good heavens! I thought it was Wednesday. It is Wednesday. What d'you want to frighten a chap for?" He sank his face onto his arms and began to sob in a high treble key.

"I tell you that it is Friday, man. Your wife has been waiting this two days for you. You should be ashamed of yourself!"

"So I am. But you've got mixed, Watson, for I have only been here a few hours, three pipes, four pipes--I forget how many. But I'll go home with you. I wouldn't frighten Kate--poor little Kate. Give me your hand! Have you a cab?"
"Yes, I have one waiting."
"Then I shall go in it. But I must owe something. Find what I owe, Watson. I am all off colour. I can do nothing for myself."

I walked down the narrow passage between the double row of sleepers, holding my breath to keep out the vile, stupefying fumes of the drug, and looking about for the manager. As I passed the tall man who sat by the brazier I felt a sudden pluck at my skirt, and a low voice whispered, "Walk past me, and then look back at me." The words fell quite distinctly upon my ear. I glanced down. They could only have come from the old man at my side, and yet he sat now as absorbed as ever, very thin, very wrinkled, bent with age, an opium pipe dangling down from between his knees, as though it had dropped in sheer lassitude from his fingers. I took two steps forward and looked back. It took all my self-control to prevent me from breaking out into a cry of astonishment. He had turned his face so that none could see him but I. His form had filled out, his wrinkles were gone, the dull eyes had regained their fire, and there, sitting by the fire and grinning at my surprise, was none other than Sherlock Holmes. He made a slight motion to me to approach him, and instantly, as he turned his face half round to the company once more, subsided into a doddering, loose-lipped senility.

"Holmes!" I whispered, "what on earth are you doing in this den?"
"As low as you can," he answered; "I have excellent ears. If you would have the great kindness to get rid of that sottish friend of yours I should be exceedingly glad to have a little talk with you."
"I have a cab outside."
"Then pray send him home in it. You may safely trust him, for he appears to be too limp to get into any mischief. I should recommend you also to send a note by the cabman to your wife to say that you have thrown in your lot with me. If you will wait outside, I shall be with you in five minutes."

It was difficult to refuse any of Sherlock Holmes' requests, for they were always so exceedingly definite, and put forward with such a quiet air of mastery. I felt, however, that when Whitney was once confined in the cab my mission was practically accomplished; and for the rest, I could not wish anything better than to be associated with my friend in one of those singular adventures which were the normal condition of his existence. In a few minutes I had written my note, paid Whitney's bill, led him out to the cab, and seen him driven through the darkness. In a very short time a decrepit figure had emerged from the opium den, and I was walking down the street with Sherlock Holmes. For two streets he shuffled along with a bent back and an uncertain foot. Then, glancing quickly round, he
straightened himself out and burst into a hearty fit of laughter.

"I suppose, Watson," said he, "that you imagine that I have added opium-smoking to cocaine injections, and all
the other little weaknesses on which you have favoured me with your medical views."

"I was certainly surprised to find you there."

"But not more so than I to find you."

"I came to find a friend."

"And I to find an enemy."

"An enemy?"

"Yes; one of my natural enemies, or, shall I say, my natural prey. Briefly, Watson, I am in the midst of a very
remarkable inquiry, and I have hoped to find a clue in the incoherent ramblings of these sots, as I have done before
now. Had I been recognised in that den my life would not have been worth an hour's purchase; for I have used it
before now for my own purposes, and the rascally Lascar who runs it has sworn to have vengeance upon me. There
is a trap-door at the back of that building, near the corner of Paul's Wharf, which could tell some strange tales of
what has passed through it upon the moonless nights."

"What! You do not mean bodies?"

"Ay, bodies, Watson. We should be rich men if we had 1000 pounds for every poor devil who has been done to
death in that den. It is the vilest murder-trap on the whole Riverside, and I fear that Neville St. Clair has entered it
never to leave it more. But our trap should be here." He put his two forefingers between his teeth and whistled
shrilly--a signal which was answered by a similar whistle from the distance, followed shortly by the rattle of wheels
and the clink of horses' hoofs.

"Now, Watson," said Holmes, as a tall dog-cart dashed up through the gloom, throwing out two golden tunnels
of yellow light from its side lanterns. "You'll come with me, won't you?"

"If I can be of use."

"Oh, a trusty comrade is always of use; and a chronicler still more so. My room at The Cedars is a double-
bedded one."

"The Cedars?"

"Yes; that is Mr. St. Clair's house. I am staying there while I conduct the inquiry."

"Where is it, then?"

"Near Lee, in Kent. We have a seven-mile drive before us."

"But I am all in the dark."

"Of course you are. You'll know all about it presently. Jump up here. All right, John; we shall not need you.
Here's half a crown. Look out for me to-morrow, about eleven. Give her her head. So long, then!"

He flicked the horse with his whip, and we dashed away through the endless succession of sombre and deserted
streets, which widened gradually, until we were flying across a broad balustraded bridge, with the murky river
flowing sluggishly beneath us. Beyond lay another dull wilderness of bricks and mortar, its silence broken only by
the heavy, regular footfall of the policeman, or the songs and shouts of some belated party of revellers. A dull wrack
was drifting slowly across the sky, and a star or two twinkled dimly here and there through the rifts of the clouds.
Holmes drove in silence, with his head sunk upon his breast, and the air of a man who is lost in thought, while I sat
beside him, curious to learn what this new quest might be which seemed to tax his powers so sorely, and yet afraid
to break in upon the current of his thoughts. We had driven several miles, and were beginning to get to the fringe
of the belt of suburban villas, when he shook himself, shrugged his shoulders, and lit up his pipe with the air of a man
who has satisfied himself that he is acting for the best.

"You have a grand gift of silence, Watson," said he. "It makes you quite invaluable as a companion. 'Pon my
word, it is a great thing for me to have someone to talk to, for my own thoughts are not over-pleasant. I was
wondering what I should say to this dear little woman to-night when she meets me at the door."

"You forget that I know nothing about it."

"I shall just have time to tell you the facts of the case before we get to Lee. It seems absurdly simple, and yet,
somehow I can get nothing to go upon. There's plenty of thread, no doubt, but I can't get the end of it into my hand.
Now, I'll state the case clearly and concisely to you, Watson, and maybe you can see a spark where all is dark to
me."

"Proceed, then."

"Some years ago--to be definite, in May, 1884--there came to Lee a gentleman, Neville St. Clair by name, who
appeared to have plenty of money. He took a large villa, laid out the grounds very nicely, and lived generally in
good style. By degrees he made friends in the neighbourhood, and in 1887 he married the daughter of a local brewer,
by whom he now has two children. He had no occupation, but was interested in several companies and went into
town as a rule in the morning, returning by the 5:14 from Cannon Street every night. Mr. St. Clair is now thirty-
seven years of age, is a man of temperate habits, a good husband, a very affectionate father, and a man who is popular with all who know him. I may add that his whole debts at the present moment, as far as we have been able to ascertain, amount to 88 pounds 10s., while he has 220 pounds standing to his credit in the Capital and Counties Bank. There is no reason, therefore, to think that money troubles have been weighing upon his mind.

"Last Monday Mr. Neville St. Clair went into town rather earlier than usual, remarking before he started that he had two important commissions to perform, and that he would bring his little boy home a box of bricks. Now, by the merest chance, his wife received a telegram upon this same Monday, very shortly after his departure, to the effect that a small parcel of considerable value which she had been expecting was waiting for her at the offices of the Aberdeen Shipping Company. Now, if you are well up in your London, you will know that the office of the company is in Fresno Street, which branches out of Upper Swandam Lane, where you found me to-night. Mrs. St. Clair had her lunch, started for the City, did some shopping, proceeded to the company's office, got her packet, and found herself at exactly 4:35 walking through Swandam Lane on her way back to the station. Have you followed me so far?"

"It is very clear."

"If you remember, Monday was an exceedingly hot day, and Mrs. St. Clair walked slowly, glancing about in the hope of seeing a cab, as she did not like the neighbourhood in which she found herself. While she was walking in this way down Swandam Lane, she suddenly heard an ejaculation or cry, and was struck cold to see her husband looking down at her and, as it seemed to her, beckoning to her from a second-floor window. The window was open, and she distinctly saw his face, which she describes as being terribly agitated. He waved his hands frantically to her, and then vanished from the window so suddenly that it seemed to her that he had been plucked back by some irresistible force from behind. One singular point which struck her quick feminine eye was that although he wore some dark coat, such as he had started to town in, he had on neither collar nor necktie.

"Convinced that something was amiss with him, she rushed down the steps--for the house was none other than the opium den in which you found me to-night--and running through the front room she attempted to ascend the stairs which led to the first floor. At the foot of the stairs, however, she met this Lascar scoundrel of whom I have spoken, who thrust her back and, aided by a Dane, who acts as assistant there, pushed her out into the street. Filled with the most maddening doubts and fears, she rushed down the lane and, by rare good-fortune, met in Fresno Street a number of constables with an inspector, all on their way to their beat. The inspector and two men accompanied her back, and in spite of the continued resistance of the proprietor, they made their way to the room in which Mr. St. Clair had last been seen. There was no sign of him there. In fact, in the whole of that floor there was no one to be found save a crippled wretch of hideous aspect, who, it seems, made his home there. Both he and the Lascar stoutly swore that no one else had been in the front room during the afternoon. So determined was their denial that the inspector was staggered, and had almost come to believe that Mrs. St. Clair had been deluded when, with a cry, she sprang at a small deal box which lay upon the table and tore the lid from it. Out there fell a cascade of children's bricks. It was the toy which he had promised to bring home."

"This discovery, and the evident confusion which the cripple showed, made the inspector realise that the matter was serious. The rooms were carefully examined, and results all pointed to an abominable crime. The front room was plainly furnished as a sitting-room and led into a small bedroom, which looked out upon the back of one of the wharves. Between the wharf and the bedroom window is a narrow strip, which is dry at low tide but is covered at high tide with at least four and a half feet of water. The bedroom window was a broad one and opened from below. On examination traces of blood were to be seen upon the window sill, and several scattered drops were visible upon the wooden floor of the bedroom. Thrust away behind a curtain in the front room were all the clothes of Mr. Neville St. Clair, with the exception of his coat. His boots, his socks, his hat, and his watch--all were there. There were no signs of violence upon any of these garments, and there were no other traces of Mr. Neville St. Clair. Out of the window he must apparently have gone for no other exit could be discovered, and the ominous bloodstains upon the sill gave little promise that he could save himself by swimming, for the tide was at its very highest at the moment of the tragedy.

"And now as to the villains who seemed to be immediately implicated in the matter. The Lascar was known to be a man of the vilest antecedents, but as, by Mrs. St. Clair's story, he was known to have been at the foot of the stair within a very few seconds of her husband's appearance at the window, he could hardly have been more than an accessory to the crime. His defence was one of absolute ignorance, and he protested that he had no knowledge as to the doings of Hugh Boone, his lodger, and that he could not account in any way for the presence of the missing gentleman's clothes.

"So much for the Lascar manager. Now for the sinister cripple who lives upon the second floor of the opium den, and who was certainly the last human being whose eyes rested upon Neville St. Clair. His name is Hugh Boone, and his hideous face is one which is familiar to every man who goes much to the City. He is a professional beggar,
though in order to avoid the police regulations he pretends to a small trade in wax vestas. Some little distance down
Threadneedle Street, upon the left-hand side, there is, as you may have remarked, a small angle in the wall. Here it is
that this creature takes his daily seat, cross-legged with his tiny stock of matches on his lap, and as he is a piteous
spectacle a small rain of charity descends into the greasy leather cap which lies upon the pavement beside him. I
have watched the fellow more than once before ever I thought of making his professional acquaintance, and I have
been surprised at the harvest which he has reaped in a short time. His appearance, you see, is so remarkable that no
one can pass him without observing him. A shock of orange hair, a pale face disfigured by a horrible scar, which, by
its contraction, has turned up the outer edge of his upper lip, a bulldog chin, and a pair of very penetrating dark eyes,
which present a singular contrast to the colour of his hair, all mark him out from amid the common crowd of
mendicants and so, too, does his wit, for he is ever ready with a reply to any piece of chaff which may be thrown at
him by the passers-by. This is the man whom we now learn to have been the lodger at the opium den, and to have
been the last man to see the gentleman of whom we are in quest."

"But a cripple!" said I. "What could he have done single-handed against a man in the prime of life?"

"He is a cripple in the sense that he walks with a limp; but in other respects he appears to be a powerful and
well-nurtured man. Surely your medical experience would tell you, Watson, that weakness in one limb is often
compensated for by exceptional strength in the others."

"Pray continue your narrative."

"Mrs. St. Clair had fainted at the sight of the blood upon the window, and she was escorted home in a cab by the
police, as her presence could be of no help to them in their investigations. Inspector Barton, who had charge of the
case, made a very careful examination of the premises, but without finding anything which threw any light upon the
matter. One mistake had been made in not arresting Boone instantly, as he was allowed some few minutes during
which he might have communicated with his friend the Lascar, but this fault was soon remedied, and he was seized
and searched, without anything being found which could incriminate him. There were, it is true, some blood-stains
upon his right shirt-sleeve, but he pointed to his ring-finger, which had been cut near the nail, and explained that the
bleeding came from there, adding that he had been to the window not long before, and that the stains which had been
observed there came doubtless from the same source. He denied strenuously having ever seen Mr. Neville St. Clair
and swore that the presence of the clothes in his room was as much a mystery to him as to the police. As to Mrs. St.
Clair's assertion that she had actually seen her husband at the window, he declared that she must have been either
mad or dreaming. He was removed, loudly protesting, to the police-station, while the inspector remained upon the
premises in the hope that the ebbing tide might afford some fresh clue.

"And it did, though they hardly found upon the mud-bank what they had feared to find. It was Neville St. Clair's
coat, and not Neville St. Clair, which lay uncovered as the tide receded. And what do you think they found in the
pockets?"

"I cannot imagine."

"No, I don't think you would guess. Every pocket stuffed with pennies and half-pennies--421 pennies and 270
half-pennies. It was no wonder that it had not been swept away by the tide. But a human body is a different matter.
There is a fierce eddy between the wharf and the house. It seemed likely enough that the weighted coat had
remained when the stripped body had been sucked away into the river."

"But I understand that all the other clothes were found in the room. Would the body be dressed in a coat alone?"

"No, sir, but the facts might be met speciously enough. Suppose that this man Boone had thrust Neville St. Clair
through the window, there is no human eye which could have seen the deed. What would he do then? It would of
course instantly strike him that he must get rid of the tell-tale garments. He would seize the coat, then, and be in the
act of throwing it out, when it would occur to him that it would swim and not sink. He has little time, for he has
heard the scuffle downstairs when the wife tried to force her way up, and perhaps he has already heard from his
Lascar confederate that the police are hurrying up the street. There is not an instant to be lost. He rushes to some
secret hoard, where he has accumulated the fruits of his beggary, and he stuffs all the coins upon which he can lay
his hands into the pockets to make sure of the coat's sinking. He throws it out, and would have done the same with
the other garments had not he heard the rush of steps below, and only just had time to close the window when the
police appeared."

"It certainly sounds feasible."

"Well, we will take it as a working hypothesis for want of a better. Boone, as I have told you, was arrested and
taken to the station, but it could not be shown that there had ever before been anything against him. He had for years
been known as a professional beggar, but his life appeared to have been a very quiet and innocent one. There the
matter stands at present, and the questions which have to be solved--what Neville St. Clair was doing in the opium
den, what happened to him when there, where is he now, and what Hugh Boone had to do with his disappearance--
are all as far from a solution as ever. I confess that I cannot recall any case within my experience which looked at the
first glance so simple and yet which presented such difficulties."

While Sherlock Holmes had been detailing this singular series of events, we had been whirling through the outskirts of the great town until the last straggling houses had been left behind, and we rattled along with a country hedge upon either side of us. Just as he finished, however, we drove through two scattered villages, where a few lights still glimmered in the windows.

"We are on the outskirts of Lee," said my companion. "We have touched on three English counties in our short drive, starting in Middlesex, passing over an angle of Surrey, and ending in Kent. See that light among the trees? That is The Cedars, and beside that lamp sits a woman whose anxious ears have already, I have little doubt, caught the clink of our horse's feet."

"But why are you not conducting the case from Baker Street?" I asked.

"Because there are many inquiries which must be made out here. Mrs. St. Clair has most kindly put two rooms at my disposal, and you may rest assured that she will have nothing but a welcome for my friend and colleague. I hate to meet her, Watson, when I have no news of her husband. Here we are. Whoa, there, whoa!"

We had pulled up in front of a large villa which stood within its own grounds. A stable-boy had run out to the horse's head, and springing down, I followed Holmes up the small, winding gravel-drive which led to the house. As we approached, the door flew open, and a little blonde woman stood in the opening, clad in some sort of light mousseline de soie, with a touch of fluffy pink chiffon at her neck and wrists. She stood with her figure outlined against the flood of light, one hand upon the door, one half-raised in her eagerness, her body slightly bent, her head and face protruded, with eager eyes and parted lips, a standing question.

"Well?" she cried, "well?" And then, seeing that there were two of us, she gave a cry of hope which sank into a groan as she saw that my companion shook his head and shrugged his shoulders.

"No good news?"

"None."

"No bad?"

"No."

"Thank God for that. But come in. You must be weary, for you have had a long day."

"This is my friend, Dr. Watson. He has been of most vital use to me in several of my cases, and a lucky chance has made it possible for me to bring him out and associate him with this investigation."

"I am delighted to see you," said she, pressing my hand warmly. "You will, I am sure, forgive anything that may be wanting in our arrangements, when you consider the blow which has come so suddenly upon us."

"My dear madam," said I, "I am an old campaigner, and if I were not I can very well see that no apology is needed. If I can be of any assistance, either to you or to my friend here, I shall be indeed happy."

"Now, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said the lady as we entered a well-lit dining-room, upon the table of which a cold supper had been laid out, "I should very much like to ask you one or two plain questions, to which I beg that you will give a plain answer."

"Certainly, madam."

"Do not trouble about my feelings. I am not hysterical, nor given to fainting. I simply wish to hear your real, real opinion."

"Upon what point?"

"In your heart of hearts, do you think that Neville is alive?"

Sherlock Holmes seemed to be embarrassed by the question. "Frankly, now!" she repeated, standing upon the rug and looking keenly down at him as he leaned back in a basket-chair.

"Frankly, then, madam, I do not."

"You think that he is dead?"

"I do."

"Murdered?"

"I don't say that. Perhaps."

"And on what day did he meet his death?"

"On Monday."

"Then perhaps, Mr. Holmes, you will be good enough to explain how it is that I have received a letter from him to-day."

Sherlock Holmes sprang out of his chair as if he had been galvanised. "What!" he roared.

"Yes, to-day." She stood smiling, holding up a little slip of paper in the air.

"May I see it?"

"Certainly."
He snatched it from her in his eagerness, and smoothing it out upon the table he drew over the lamp and examined it intently. I had left my chair and was gazing at it over his shoulder. The envelope was a very coarse one and was stamped with the Gravesend postmark and with the date of that very day, or rather of the day before, for it was considerably after midnight.

"Coarse writing," murmured Holmes. "Surely this is not your husband's writing, madam."

"No, but the enclosure is."

"I perceive also that whoever addressed the envelope had to go and inquire as to the address."

"How can you tell that?"

"The name, you see, is in perfectly black ink, which has dried itself. The rest is of the greyish colour, which shows that blotting-paper has been used. If it had been written straight off, and then blotted, none would be of a deep black shade. This man has written the name, and there has then been a pause before he wrote the address, which can only mean that he was not familiar with it. It is, of course, a trifle, but there is nothing so important as trifles. Let us now see the letter. Ha! there has been an enclosure here!"

"Yes, there was a ring. His signet-ring."

"And you are sure that this is your husband's hand?"

"One of his hands."

"One?"

"His hand when he wrote hurriedly. It is very unlike his usual writing, and yet I know it well."

"Dearest do not be frightened. All will come well. There is a huge error which it may take some little time to rectify. Wait in patience.--NEVILLE.' Written in pencil upon the fly-leaf of a book, octavo size, no water-mark. Hum! Posted to-day in Gravesend by a man with a dirty thumb. Ha! And the flap has been gummed, if I am not very much in error, by a person who had been chewing tobacco. And you have no doubt that it is your husband's hand, madam?"

"None. Neville wrote those words."

"And they were posted to-day at Gravesend. Well, Mrs. St. Clair, the clouds lighten, though I should not venture to say that the danger is over."

"But he must be alive, Mr. Holmes."

"Unless this is a clever forgery to put us on the wrong scent. The ring, after all, proves nothing. It may have been taken from him."

"No, no; it is, it is his very own writing!"

"Very well. It may, however, have been written on Monday and only posted to-day."

"That is possible."

"If so, much may have happened between."

"Oh, you must not discourage me, Mr. Holmes. I know that all is well with him. There is so keen a sympathy between us that I should know if evil came upon him. On the very day that I saw him last he cut himself in the bedroom, and yet I in the dining-room rushed upstairs instantly with the utmost certainty that something had happened. Do you think that I would respond to such a trifle and yet be ignorant of his death?"

"I have seen too much not to know that the impression of a woman may be more valuable than the conclusion of an analytical reasoner. And in this letter you certainly have a very strong piece of evidence to corroborate your view. But if your husband is alive and able to write letters, why should he remain away from you?"

"I cannot imagine. It is unthinkable."

"And on Monday he made no remarks before leaving you?"

"No."

"And you were surprised to see him in Swandam Lane?"

"Very much so."

"Was the window open?"

"Yes."

"Then he might have called to you?"

"He might."

"He only, as I understand, gave an inarticulate cry?"

"Yes."

"A call for help, you thought?"

"Yes. He waved his hands."

"But it might have been a cry of surprise. Astonishment at the unexpected sight of you might cause him to throw up his hands?"

"It is possible."
"And you thought he was pulled back?"
"He disappeared so suddenly."
"He might have leaped back. You did not see anyone else in the room?"
"No, but this horrible man confessed to having been there, and the Lascar was at the foot of the stairs."
"Quite so. Your husband, as far as you could see, had his ordinary clothes on?"
"But without his collar or tie. I distinctly saw his bare throat."
"Had he ever spoken of Swandam Lane?"
"Never."
"Had he ever showed any signs of having taken opium?"
"Never."
"Thank you, Mrs. St. Clair. Those are the principal points about which I wished to be absolutely clear. We shall now have a little supper and then retire, for we may have a very busy day to-morrow."

A large and comfortable double-bedded room had been placed at our disposal, and I was quickly between the sheets, for I was weary after my night of adventure. Sherlock Holmes was a man, however, who, when he had an unsolved problem upon his mind, would go for days, and even for a week, without rest, turning it over, rearranging his facts, looking at it from every point of view until he had either fathomed it or convinced himself that his data were insufficient. It was soon evident to me that he was now preparing for an all-night sitting. He took off his coat and waistcoat, put on a large blue dressing-gown, and then wandered about the room collecting pillows from his bed and cushions from the sofa and armchairs. With these he constructed a sort of Eastern divan, upon which he perched himself cross-legged, with an ounce of shag tobacco and a box of matches laid out in front of him. In the dim light of the lamp I saw him sitting there, an old briar pipe between his lips, his eyes fixed vacantly upon the corner of the ceiling, the blue smoke curling up from him, silent, motionless, with the light shining upon his strong-set aquiline features. So he sat as I dropped off to sleep, and so he sat when a sudden ejaculation caused me to wake up, and I found the summer sun shining into the apartment. The pipe was still between his lips, the smoke still curled upward, and the room was full of a dense tobacco haze, but nothing remained of the heap of shag which I had seen upon the previous night.

"Awake, Watson?" he asked.
"Yes."
"Game for a morning drive?"
"Certainly."
"Then dress. No one is stirring yet, but I know where the stable-boy sleeps, and we shall soon have the trap out."
He chuckled to himself as he spoke, his eyes twinkled, and he seemed a different man to the sombre thinker of the previous night.

As I dressed I glanced at my watch. It was no wonder that no one was stirring. It was twenty-five minutes past four. I had hardly finished when Holmes returned with the news that the boy was putting in the horse.

"I want to test a little theory of mine," said he, pulling on his boots. "I think, Watson, that you are now standing in the presence of one of the most absolute fools in Europe. I deserve to be kicked from here to Charing Cross. But I think I have the key of the affair now."

"And where is it?" I asked, smiling.

"In the bathroom," he answered. "Oh, yes, I am not joking," he continued, seeing my look of incredulity. "I have just been there, and I have taken it out, and I have got it in this Gladstone bag. Come on, my boy, and we shall see whether it will not fit the lock."

We made our way downstairs as quietly as possible, and out into the bright morning sunshine. In the road stood our horse and trap, with the half-clad stable-boy waiting at the head. We both sprang in, and away we dashed down the London Road. A few country carts were stirring, bearing in vegetables to the metropolis, but the lines of villas on either side were as silent and lifeless as some city in a dream.

"It has been in some points a singular case," said Holmes, flicking the horse on into a gallop. "I confess that I have been as blind as a mole, but it is better to learn wisdom late than never to learn it at all."

In town the earliest risers were just beginning to look sleepily from their windows as we drove through the streets of the Surrey side. Passing down the Waterloo Bridge Road we crossed over the river, and dashing up Wellington Street wheeled sharply to the right and found ourselves in Bow Street. Sherlock Holmes was well known to the force, and the two constables at the door saluted him. One of them held the horse's head while the other led us in.

"Who is on duty?" asked Holmes.

"Inspector Bradstreet, sir."

"Ah, Bradstreet, how are you?" A tall, stout official had come down the stone-flagged passage, in a peaked cap
and frogged jacket. "I wish to have a quiet word with you, Bradstreet." "Certainly, Mr. Holmes. Step into my room here." It was a small, office-like room, with a huge ledger upon the table, and a telephone projecting from the wall. The inspector sat down at his desk.

"What can I do for you, Mr. Holmes?"

"I called about that beggarman, Boone--the one who was charged with being concerned in the disappearance of Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee."

"Yes. He was brought up and remanded for further inquiries."

"So I heard. You have him here?"

"In the cells."

"Is he quiet?"

"Oh, he gives no trouble. But he is a dirty scoundrel."

"Dirty?"

"Yes, it is all we can do to make him wash his hands, and his face is as black as a tinker's. Well, when once his case has been settled, he will have a regular prison bath; and I think, if you saw him, you would agree with me that he needed it."

"I should like to see him very much."

"Would you? That is easily done. Come this way. You can leave your bag."

"No, I think that I'll take it."

"Very good. Come this way, if you please." He led us down a passage, opened a barred door, passed down a winding stair, and brought us to a whitewashed corridor with a line of doors on each side.

"The third on the right is his," said the inspector. "Here it is!" He quietly shot back a panel in the upper part of the door and glanced through.

"He is asleep," said he. "You can see him very well."

We both put our eyes to the grating. The prisoner lay with his face towards us, in a very deep sleep, breathing slowly and heavily. He was a middle-sized man, coarsely clad as became his calling, with a coloured shirt protruding through the rent in his tattered coat. He was, as the inspector had said, extremely dirty, but the grime which covered his face could not conceal its repulsive ugliness. A broad wheal from an old scar ran right across it from eye to chin, and by its contraction had turned up one side of the upper lip, so that three teeth were exposed in a perpetual snarl. A shock of very bright red hair grew low over his eyes and forehead.

"He's a beauty, isn't he?" said the inspector.

"He certainly needs a wash," remarked Holmes. "I had an idea that he might, and I took the liberty of bringing the tools with me." He opened the Gladstone bag as he spoke, and took out, to my astonishment, a very large bath-sponge.

"He! he! You are a funny one," chuckled the inspector.

"Now, if you will have the great goodness to open that door very quietly, we will soon make him cut a much more respectable figure."

"Well, I don't know why not," said the inspector. "He doesn't look a credit to the Bow Street cells, does he?" He slipped his key into the lock, and we all very quietly entered the cell. The sleeper half turned, and then settled down once more into a deep slumber. Holmes stooped to the water-jug, moistened his sponge, and then rubbed it twice vigorously across and down the prisoner's face.

"Let me introduce you," he shouted, "to Mr. Neville St. Clair, of Lee, in the county of Kent."

Never in my life have I seen such a sight. The man's face peeled off under the sponge like the bark from a tree. Gone was the coarse brown tint! Gone, too, was the horrid scar which had seamed it across, and the twisted lip which had given the repulsive sneer to the face! A twitch brought away the tangled red hair, and there, sitting up in his bed, was a pale, sad-faced, refined-looking man, black-haired and smooth-skinned, rubbing his eyes and staring about him with sleepy bewilderment. Then suddenly realising the exposure, he broke into a scream and threw himself down with his face to the pillow.

"Great heavens!" cried the inspector, "it is, indeed, the missing man. I know him from the photograph."

The prisoner turned with the reckless air of a man who abandons himself to his destiny. "Be it so," said he. "And pray what am I charged with?"

"With making away with Mr. Neville St.-- Oh, come, you can't be charged with that unless they make a case of attempted suicide of it," said the inspector with a grin. "Well, I have been twenty-seven years in the force, but this really takes the cake."

"If I am Mr. Neville St. Clair, then it is obvious that no crime has been committed, and that, therefore, I am illegally detained."

"No crime, but a very great error has been committed," said Holmes. "You would have done better to have
It was not the wife; it was the children," groaned the prisoner. "God help me, I would not have them ashamed of their father. My God! What an exposure! What can I do?"

Sherlock Holmes sat down beside him on the couch and patted him kindly on the shoulder.

"If you leave it to a court of law to clear the matter up," said he, "of course you can hardly avoid publicity. On the other hand, if you convince the police authorities that there is no possible case against you, I do not know that there is any reason that the details should find their way into the papers. Inspector Bradstreet would, I am sure, make notes upon anything which you might tell us and submit it to the proper authorities. The case would then never go into court at all."

"God bless you!" cried the prisoner passionately. "I would have endured imprisonment, ay, even execution, rather than have left my miserable secret as a family blot to my children.

"You are the first who have ever heard my story. My father was a schoolmaster in Chesterfield, where I received an excellent education. I travelled in my youth, took to the stage, and finally became a reporter on an evening paper in London. One day my editor wished to have a series of articles upon begging in the metropolis, and I volunteered to supply them. There was the point from which all my adventures started. It was only by trying begging as an amateur that I could get the facts upon which to base my articles. When an actor I had, of course, learned all the secrets of making up, and had been famous in the green-room for my skill. I took advantage now of my attainments. I painted my face, and to make myself as pitiable as possible I made a good scar and fixed one side of my lip in a twist by the aid of a small slip of flesh-coloured plaster. Then with a red head of hair, and an appropriate dress, I took my station in the business part of the city, ostensibly as a match-seller but really as a beggar. For seven hours I plied my trade, and when I returned home in the evening I found to my surprise that I had received no less than 26s. 4d.

"I wrote my articles and thought little more of the matter until, some time later, I backed a bill for a friend and had a writ served upon me for 25 pounds. I was at my wit's end where to get the money, but a sudden idea came to me. I begged a fortnight's grace from the creditor, asked for a holiday from my employers, and spent the time in begging in the City under my disguise. In ten days I had the money and had paid the debt.

"Well, you can imagine how hard it was to settle down to arduous work at 2 pounds a week when I knew that I could earn as much in a day by smearing my face with a little paint, laying my cap on the ground, and sitting still. It was a long fight between my pride and the money, but the dollars won at last, and I threw up reporting and sat day after day in the corner which I had first chosen, inspiring pity by my ghastly face and filling my pockets with coppers. Only one man knew my secret. He was the keeper of a low den in which I used to lodge in Swandam Lane, where I could every morning emerge as a squalid beggar and in the evenings transform myself into a well-dressed man about town. This fellow, a Lascar, was well paid by me for his rooms, so that I knew that my secret was safe in his possession.

"Well, very soon I found that I was saving considerable sums of money. I do not mean that any beggar in the streets of London could earn 700 pounds a year—which is less than my average takings—but I had exceptional advantages in my power of making up, and also in a facility of repartee, which improved by practice and made me quite a recognised character in the City. All day a stream of pennies, varied by silver, poured in upon me, and it was a very bad day in which I failed to take 2 pounds.

"As I grew richer I grew more ambitious, took a house in the country, and eventually married, without anyone having a suspicion as to my real occupation. My dear wife knew that I had business in the City. She little knew what.

"Last Monday I had finished for the day and was dressing in my room above the opium den when I looked out of my window and saw, to my horror and astonishment, that my wife was standing in the street, with her eyes fixed full upon me. I gave a cry of surprise, threw up my arms to cover my face, and, rushing to my confidant, the Lascar, entreated him to prevent anyone from coming up to me. I heard her voice downstairs, but I knew that she could not ascend. Swiftly I threw off my clothes, pulled on those of a beggar, and put on my pigments and wig. Even a wife's eyes could not pierce so complete a disguise. But then it occurred to me that there might be a search in the room, and that the clothes might betray me. I threw open the window, reopening by my violence a small cut which I had inflicted upon myself in the bedroom that morning. Then I seized my coat, which was weighted by the coppers which I had just transferred to it from the leather bag in which I carried my takings. I hurls it out of the window, and it disappeared into the Thames. The other clothes would have followed, but at that moment there was a rush of constables up the stair, and a few minutes after I found, rather, I confess, to my relief, that instead of being identified as Mr. Neville St. Clair, I was arrested as his murderer.

"I do not know that there is anything else for me to explain. I was determined to preserve my disguise as long as possible, and hence my preference for a dirty face. Knowing that my wife would be terribly anxious, I slipped off
my ring and confided it to the Lascar at a moment when no constable was watching me, together with a hurried scrawl, telling her that she had no cause to fear."

"That note only reached her yesterday," said Holmes.

"Good God! What a week she must have spent!"

"The police have watched this Lascar," said Inspector Bradstreet, "and I can quite understand that he might find it difficult to post a letter unobserved. Probably he handed it to some sailor customer of his, who forgot all about it for some days."

"That was it," said Holmes, nodding approvingly; "I have no doubt of it. But have you never been prosecuted for begging?"

"Many times; but what was a fine to me?"

"It must stop here, however," said Bradstreet. "If the police are to hush this thing up, there must be no more of Hugh Boone."

"I have sworn it by the most solemn oaths which a man can take."

"In that case I think that it is probable that no further steps may be taken. But if you are found again, then all must come out. I am sure, Mr. Holmes, that we are very much indebted to you for having cleared the matter up. I wish I knew how you reach your results."

"I reached this one," said my friend, "by sitting upon five pillows and consuming an ounce of shag. I think, Watson, that if we drive to Baker Street we shall just be in time for breakfast."

VII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE BLUE CARBUNCLE

I had called upon my friend Sherlock Holmes upon the second morning after Christmas, with the intention of wishing him the compliments of the season. He was lounging upon the sofa in a purple dressing-gown, a pipe-rack within his reach upon the right, and a pile of crumpled morning papers, evidently newly studied, near at hand. Beside the couch was a wooden chair, and on the angle of the back hung a very seedy and disreputable hard-felt hat, much the worse for wear, and cracked in several places. A lens and a forceps lying upon the seat of the chair suggested that the hat had been suspended in this manner for the purpose of examination.

"You are engaged," said I; "perhaps I interrupt you."

"Not at all. I am glad to have a friend with whom I can discuss my results. The matter is a perfectly trivial one"--he jerked his thumb in the direction of the old hat--"but there are points in connection with it which are not entirely devoid of interest and even of instruction."

I seated myself in his armchair and warmed my hands before his crackling fire, for a sharp frost had set in, and the windows were thick with the ice crystals. "I suppose," I remarked, "that, homely as it looks, this thing has some deadly story linked on to it--that it is the clue which will guide you in the solution of some mystery and the punishment of some crime."

"No, no. No crime," said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. "Only one of those whimsical little incidents which will happen when you have four million human beings all jostling each other within the space of a few square miles. Amid the action and reaction of so dense a swarm of humanity, every possible combination of events may be expected to take place, and many a little problem will be presented which may be striking and bizarre without being criminal. We have already had experience of such."

"So much so," I remarked, "that of the last six cases which I have added to my notes, three have been entirely free of any legal crime."

"Precisely. You allude to my attempt to recover the Irene Adler papers, to the singular case of Miss Mary Sutherland, and to the adventure of the man with the twisted lip. Well, I have no doubt that this small matter will fall into the same innocent category. You know Peterson, the commissionaire?"

"Yes."

"It is to him that this trophy belongs."

"It is his hat."
"No, no, he found it. Its owner is unknown. I beg that you will look upon it not as a battered billycock but as an intellectual problem. And, first, to how it came here. It arrived upon Christmas morning, in company with a good fat goose, which is, I have no doubt, roasting at this moment in front of Peterson's fire. The facts are these: about four o'clock on Christmas morning, Peterson, who, as you know, is a very honest fellow, was returning from some small jollification and was making his way homeward down Tottenham Court Road. In front of him he saw, in the gaslight, a tallish man, walking with a slight stagger, and carrying a white goose slung over his shoulder. As he reached the corner of Goodge Street, a row broke out between this stranger and a little knot of roughs. One of the latter knocked off the man's hat, on which he raised his stick to defend himself and, swinging it over his head, smashed the shop window behind him. Peterson had rushed forward to protect the stranger from his assailants; but the man, shocked at having broken the window, and seeing an official-looking person in uniform rushing towards him, dropped his goose, took to his heels, and vanished amid the labyrinth of small streets which lie at the back of Tottenham Court Road. The roughs had also fled at the appearance of Peterson, so that he was left in possession of the field of battle, and also of the spoils of victory in the shape of this battered hat and a most unimpeachable Christmas goose."

"Which surely he restored to their owner?"

"My dear fellow, there lies the problem. It is true that 'For Mrs. Henry Baker' was printed upon a small card which was tied to the bird's left leg, and it is also true that the initials 'H. B.' are legible upon the lining of this hat, but as there are some thousands of Bakers, and some hundreds of Henry Bakers in this city of ours, it is not easy to restore lost property to any one of them."

"What, then, did Peterson do?"

"He brought round both hat and goose to me on Christmas morning, knowing that even the smallest problems are of interest to me. The goose we retained until this morning, when there were signs that, in spite of the slight frost, it would be well that it should be eaten without unnecessary delay. Its finder has carried it off, therefore, to fulfil the ultimate destiny of a goose, while I continue to retain the hat of the unknown gentleman who lost his Christmas dinner."

"Did he not advertise?"

"No."

"Then, what clue could you have as to his identity?"

"Only as much as we can deduce."

"From his hat?"

"Precisely."

"But you are joking. What can you gather from this old battered felt?"

"Here is my lens. You know my methods. What can you gather yourself as to the individuality of the man who has worn this article?"

I took the tattered object in my hands and turned it over rather ruefully. It was a very ordinary black hat of the usual round shape, hard and much the worse for wear. The lining had been of red silk, but was a good deal discoloured. There was no maker's name; but, as Holmes had remarked, the initials "H. B." were scrawled upon one side. It was pierced in the brim for a hat-securer, but the elastic was missing. For the rest, it was cracked, exceedingly dusty, and spotted in several places, although there seemed to have been some attempt to hide the discoloured patches by smearing them with ink.

"I can see nothing," said I, handing it back to my friend.

"On the contrary, Watson, you can see everything. You fail, however, to reason from what you see. You are too timid in drawing your inferences."

"Then, pray tell me what it is that you can infer from this hat?"

He picked it up and gazed at it in the peculiar introspective fashion which was characteristic of him. "It is perhaps less suggestive than it might have been," he remarked, "and yet there are a few inferences which are very
distinct, and a few others which represent at least a strong balance of probability. That the man was highly intellectual is of course obvious upon the face of it, and also that he was fairly well-to-do within the last three years, although he has now fallen upon evil days. He had foresight, but has less now than formerly, pointing to a moral retrogression, which, when taken with the decline of his fortunes, seems to indicate some evil influence, probably drink, at work upon him. This may account also for the obvious fact that his wife has ceased to love him."

"My dear Holmes!"

"He has, however, retained some degree of self-respect," he continued, disregarding my remonstrance. "He is a man who leads a sedentary life, goes out little, is out of training entirely, is middle-aged, has grizzled hair which he has had cut within the last few days, and which he anoints with lime-cream. These are the more patent facts which are to be deduced from his hat. Also, by the way, that it is extremely improbable that he has gas laid on in his house."

"You are certainly joking, Holmes."

"Not in the least. Is it possible that even now, when I give you these results, you are unable to see how they are attained?"

"I have no doubt that I am very stupid, but I must confess that I am unable to follow you. For example, how did you deduce that this man was intellectual?"

For answer Holmes clapped the hat upon his head. It came right over the forehead and settled upon the bridge of his nose. "It is a question of cubic capacity," said he; "a man with so large a brain must have something in it."

"The decline of his fortunes, then?"

"This hat is three years old. These flat brims curled at the edge came in then. It is a hat of the very best quality. Look at the band of ribbed silk and the excellent lining. If this man could afford to buy so expensive a hat three years ago, and has had no hat since, then he has assuredly gone down in the world."

"Well, that is clear enough, certainly. But how about the foresight and the moral retrogression?"

Sherlock Holmes laughed. "Here is the foresight," said he putting his finger upon the little disc and loop of the hat-securer. "They are never sold upon hats. If this man ordered one, it is a sign of a certain amount of foresight, since he went out of his way to take this precaution against the wind. But since we see that he has broken the elastic and has not troubled to replace it, it is obvious that he has less foresight now than formerly, which is a distinct proof of a weakening nature. On the other hand, he has endeavoured to conceal some of these stains upon the felt by daubing them with ink, which is a sign that he has not entirely lost his self-respect."

"Your reasoning is certainly plausible."

"The further points, that he is middle-aged, that his hair is grizzled, that it has been recently cut, and that he uses lime-cream, are all to be gathered from a close examination of the lower part of the lining. The lens discloses a large number of hair-ends, clean cut by the scissors of the barber. They all appear to be adhesive, and there is a distinct odour of lime-cream. This dust, you will observe, is not the gritty, grey dust of the street but the fluffy brown dust of the house, showing that it has been hung up indoors most of the time, while the marks of moisture upon the inside are proof positive that the wearer perspired very freely, and could therefore, hardly be in the best of training."

"But his wife--you said that she had ceased to love him."

"This hat has not been brushed for weeks. When I see you, my dear Watson, with a week's accumulation of dust upon your hat, and when your wife allows you to go out in such a state, I shall fear that you also have been unfortunate enough to lose your wife's affection."

"But he might be a bachelor."

"Nay, he was bringing home the goose as a peace-offering to his wife. Remember the card upon the bird's leg."

"You have an answer to everything. But how on earth do you deduce that the gas is not laid on in his house?"

"One tallow stain, or even two, might come by chance; but when I see no less than five, I think that there can be little doubt that the individual must be brought into frequent contact with burning tallow--walks upstairs at night probably with his hat in one hand and a guttering candle in the other. Anyhow, he never got tallow-stains from a gas-jet. Are you satisfied?"

"Well, it is very ingenious," said I, laughing; "but since, as you said just now, there has been no crime committed, and no harm done save the loss of a goose, all this seems to be rather a waste of energy."

Sherlock Holmes had opened his mouth to reply, when the door flew open, and Peterson, the commissionaire, rushed into the apartment with flushed cheeks and the face of a man who is dazed with astonishment.

"The goose, Mr. Holmes! The goose, sir!" he gasped.

"Eh? What of it, then? Has it returned to life and flapped off through the kitchen window?" Holmes twisted himself round upon the sofa to get a fairer view of the man's excited face.
"See here, sir! See what my wife found in its crop!" He held out his hand and displayed upon the centre of the palm a brilliantly scintillating blue stone, rather smaller than a bean in size, but of such purity and radiance that it twinkled like an electric point in the dark hollow of his hand.

Sherlock Holmes sat up with a whistle. "By Jove, Peterson!" said he, "this is treasure trove indeed. I suppose you know what you have got?"

"A diamond, sir? A precious stone. It cuts into glass as though it were putty."

"It's more than a precious stone. It is the precious stone."

"Not the Countess of Morcar's blue carbuncle!" I ejaculated.

"Precisely so. I ought to know its size and shape, seeing that I have read the advertisement about it in The Times every day lately. It is absolutely unique, and its value can only be conjectured, but the reward offered of 1000 pounds is certainly not within a twentieth part of the market price."

"A thousand pounds! Great Lord of mercy!" The commissionaire plumped down into a chair and stared from one to the other of us.

"That is the reward, and I have reason to know that there are sentimental considerations in the background which would induce the Countess to part with half her fortune if she could but recover the gem."

"It was lost, if I remember aright, at the Hotel Cosmopolitan," I remarked.

"Precisely so, on December 22nd, just five days ago. John Horner, a plumber, was accused of having abstracted it from the lady's jewel-case. The evidence against him was so strong that the case has been referred to the Assizes. I have some account of the matter here, I believe." He rummaged amid his newspapers, glancing over the dates, until at last he smoothed one out, doubled it over, and read the following paragraph:

"Hotel Cosmopolitan Jewel Robbery. John Horner, 26, plumber, was brought up upon the charge of having upon the 22nd inst., abstracted from the jewel-case of the Countess of Morcar the valuable gem known as the blue carbuncle. James Ryder, upper-attendant at the hotel, gave his evidence to the effect that he had shown Horner up to the dressing-room of the Countess of Morcar upon the day of the robbery in order that he might solder the second bar of the grate, which was loose. He had remained with Horner some little time, but had finally been called away. On returning, he found that Horner had disappeared, that the bureau had been forced open, and that the small morocco casket in which, as it afterwards transpired, the Countess was accustomed to keep her jewel, was lying empty upon the dressing-table. Ryder instantly gave the alarm, and Horner was arrested the same evening; but the stone could not be found either upon his person or in his rooms. Catherine Cusack, maid to the Countess, deposed to having heard Ryder's cry of dismay on discovering the robbery, and to having rushed into the room, where she found matters as described by the last witness. Inspector Bradstreet, B division, gave evidence as to the arrest of Horner, who struggled frantically, and protested his innocence in the strongest terms. Evidence of a previous conviction for robbery having been given against the prisoner, the magistrate refused to deal summarily with the offence, but referred it to the Assizes. Horner, who had shown signs of intense emotion during the proceedings, fainted away at the conclusion and was carried out of court."

"Hum! So much for the police-court," said Holmes thoughtfully, tossing aside the paper. "The question for us now to solve is the sequence of events leading from a rifled jewel-case at one end to the crop of a goose in Tottenham Court Road at the other. You see, Watson, our little deductions have suddenly assumed a much more important and less innocent aspect. Here is the stone; the stone came from the goose, and the goose came from Mr. Henry Baker, the gentleman with the bad hat and all the other characteristics with which I have bored you. So now we must set ourselves very seriously to finding this gentleman and ascertaining what part he has played in this little mystery. To do this, we must try the simplest means first, and these lie undoubtedly in an advertisement in all the evening papers. If this fail, I shall have recourse to other methods."

"What will you say?"

"Give me a pencil and that slip of paper. Now, then: 'Found at the corner of Goodge Street, a goose and a black felt hat. Mr. Henry Baker can have the same by applying at 6:30 this evening at 221B, Baker Street.' That is clear and concise."
"Very. But will he see it?"

"Well, he is sure to keep an eye on the papers, since, to a poor man, the loss was a heavy one. He was clearly so scared by his mischance in breaking the window and by the approach of Peterson that he thought of nothing but flight, but since then he must have bitterly regretted the impulse which caused him to drop his bird. Then, again, the introduction of his name will cause him to see it, for everyone who knows him will direct his attention to it. Here you are, Peterson, run down to the advertising agency and have this put in the evening papers."

"In which, sir?"

"Oh, in the Globe, Star, Pall Mall, St. James's, Evening News, Standard, Echo, and any others that occur to you."

"Very well, sir. And this stone?"

"Ah, yes, I shall keep the stone. Thank you. And, I say, Peterson, just buy a goose on your way back and leave it here with me, for we must have one to give to this gentleman in place of the one which your family is now devouring."

When the commissionaire had gone, Holmes took up the stone and held it against the light. "It's a bonny thing," said he. "Just see how it glints and sparkles. Of course it is a nucleus and focus of crime. Every good stone is. They are the devil's pet baits. In the larger and older jewels every facet may stand for a bloody deed. This stone is not yet twenty years old. It was found in the banks of the Amoy River in southern China and is remarkable in having every characteristic of the carbuncle, save that it is blue in shade instead of ruby red. In spite of its youth, it has already a sinister history. There have been two murders, a vitriol-throwing, a suicide, and several robberies brought about for the sake of this forty-grain weight of crystallised charcoal. Who would think that so pretty a toy would be a purveyor to the gallows and the prison? I'll lock it up in my strong box now and drop a line to the Countess to say that we have it."

"Do you think that this man Horner is innocent?"

"I cannot tell."

"Well, then, do you imagine that this other one, Henry Baker, had anything to do with the matter?"

"It is, I think, much more likely that Henry Baker is an absolutely innocent man, who had no idea that the bird which he was carrying was of considerably more value than if it were made of solid gold. That, however, I shall determine by a very simple test if we have an answer to our advertisement."

"And you can do nothing until then?"

"Nothing."

"In that case I shall continue my professional round. But I shall come back in the evening at the hour you have mentioned, for I should like to see the solution of so tangled a business."

"Very glad to see you. I dine at seven. There is a woodcock, I believe. By the way, in view of recent occurrences, perhaps I ought to ask Mrs. Hudson to examine its crop."

I had been delayed at a case, and it was a little after half-past six when I found myself in Baker Street once more. As I approached the house I saw a tall man in a Scotch bonnet with a coat which was buttoned up to his chin waiting outside in the bright semicircle which was thrown from the fanlight. Just as I arrived the door was opened, and we were shown up together to Holmes' room.

"Mr. Henry Baker, I believe," said he, rising from his armchair and greeting his visitor with the easy air of geniality which he could so readily assume. "Pray take this chair by the fire, Mr. Baker. It is a cold night, and I observe that your circulation is more adapted for summer than for winter. Ah, Watson, you have just come at the right time. Is that your hat, Mr. Baker?"

"Yes, sir, that is undoubtedly my hat."

He was a large man with rounded shoulders, a massive head, and a broad, intelligent face, sloping down to a pointed beard of grizzled brown. A touch of red in nose and cheeks, with a slight tremor of his extended hand, recalled Holmes' surmise as to his habits. His rusty black frock-coat was buttoned right up in front, with the collar turned up, and his lank wrists protruded from his sleeves without a sign of cuff or shirt. He spoke in a slow staccato fashion, choosing his words with care, and gave the impression generally of a man of learning and letters who had had ill-usage at the hands of fortune.

"We have retained these things for some days," said Holmes, "because we expected to see an advertisement from you giving your address. I am at a loss to know now why you did not advertise."

Our visitor gave a rather shamefaced laugh. "Shillings have not been so plentiful with me as they once were," he remarked. "I had no doubt that the gang of roughs who assaulted me had carried off both my hat and the bird. I did not care to spend more money in a hopeless attempt at recovering them."

"Very naturally. By the way, about the bird, we were compelled to eat it."

"To eat it!" Our visitor rose from his chair in his excitement.

"Yes, it would have been of no use to anyone had we not done so. But I presume that this other goose upon the
sideboard, which is about the same weight and perfectly fresh, will answer your purpose equally well?"

"Oh, certainly, certainly," answered Mr. Baker with a sigh of relief.

"Of course, we still have the feathers, legs, crop, and so on of your own bird, so if you wish—"

The man burst into a hearty laugh. "They might be useful to me as relics of my adventure," said he, "but beyond that I can hardly see what use the disjecta membra of my late acquaintance are going to be to me. No, sir, I think that, with your permission, I will confine my attentions to the excellent bird which I perceive upon the sideboard."

Sherlock Holmes glanced sharply across at me with a slight shrug of his shoulders.

"There is your hat, then, and there your bird," said he. "By the way, would it bore you to tell me where you got the other one from? I am somewhat of a fowl fancier, and I have seldom seen a better grown goose."

"Certainly, sir," said Baker, who had risen and tucked his newly gained property under his arm. "There are a few of us who frequent the Alpha Inn, near the Museum—we are to be found in the Museum itself during the day, you understand. This year our good host, Windigate by name, instituted a goose club, by which, on consideration of some few pence every week, we were each to receive a bird at Christmas. My pence were duly paid, and the rest is familiar to you. I am much indebted to you, sir, for a Scotch bonnet is fitted neither to my years nor my gravity."

With a comical pomposity of manner he bowed solemnly to both of us and strode off upon his way.

"So much for Mr. Henry Baker," said Holmes when he had closed the door behind him. "It is quite certain that he knows nothing whatever about the matter. Are you hungry, Watson?"

"Not particularly."

"Then I suggest that we turn our dinner into a supper and follow up this clue while it is still hot."

"By all means."

It was a bitter night, so we drew on our ulsters and wrapped cravats about our throats. Outside, the stars were shining coldly in a cloudless sky, and the breath of the passers-by blew out into smoke like so many pistol shots. Our footfalls rang out crisply and loudly as we swung through the doctors' quarter, Wimpole Street, Harley Street, and so through Wigmore Street into Oxford Street. In a quarter of an hour we were in Bloomsbury at the Alpha Inn, which is a small public-house at the corner of one of the streets which runs down into Holborn. Holmes pushed open the door of the private bar and ordered two glasses of beer from the ruddy-faced, white-aproned landlord.

"Your beer should be excellent if it is as good as your geese," said he.

"My geese! The man seemed surprised.

"Yes, I was speaking only half an hour ago to Mr. Henry Baker, who was a member of your goose club."

"Ah! yes, I see. But you see, sir, them's not our geese."

"Indeed! Whose, then?"

"Well, I got the two dozen from a salesman in Covent Garden."

"Indeed? I know some of them. Which was it?"

"Breckinridge is his name."

"Ah! I don't know him. Well, here's your good health landlord, and prosperity to your house. Good-night."

"Now for Mr. Breckinridge," he continued, buttoning up his coat as we came out into the frosty air. "Remember, Watson that though we have so homely a thing as a goose at one end of this chain, we have at the other a man who will certainly get seven years' penal servitude unless we can establish his innocence. It is possible that our inquiry may but confirm his guilt; but, in any case, we have a line of investigation which has been missed by the police, and which a singular chance has placed in our hands. Let us follow it out to the bitter end. Faces to the south, then, and quick march!"

We passed across Holborn, down Endell Street, and so through a zigzag of slums to Covent Garden Market. One of the largest stalls bore the name of Breckinridge upon it, and the proprietor a horsey-looking man, with a sharp face and trim side-whiskers was helping a boy to put up the shutters.

"Good-evening. It's a cold night," said Holmes.

The salesman nodded and shot a questioning glance at my companion.
“Sold out of geese, I see,” continued Holmes, pointing at the bare slabs of marble. 
"Let you have five hundred to-morrow morning."
"That's no good."
"Well, there are some on the stall with the gas-flare."
"Ah, but I was recommended to you."
"Who by?"
"The landlord of the Alpha."
"Oh, yes; I sent him a couple of dozen."
"Fine birds they were, too. Now where did you get them from?"
To my surprise the question provoked a burst of anger from the salesman.
"Now, then, mister," said he, with his head cocked and his arms akimbo, "what are you driving at? Let's have it straight, now."
"It is straight enough. I should like to know who sold you the geese which you supplied to the Alpha."
"Well then, I shan't tell you. So now!"
"Oh, it is a matter of no importance; but I don't know why you should be so warm over such a trifle."
"Warm! You'd be as warm, maybe, if you were as pestered as I am. When I pay good money for a good article there should be an end of the business; but it's 'Where are the geese?' and 'Who did you sell the geese to?' and 'What will you take for the geese?' One would think they were the only geese in the world, to hear the fuss that is made over them."
"Well, I have no connection with any other people who have been making inquiries," said Holmes carelessly. "If you won't tell us the bet is off, that is all. But I'm always ready to back my opinion on a matter of fowls, and I have a fiver on it that the bird I ate is country bred."
"Well, then, you've lost your fiver, for it's town bred," snapped the salesman.
"It's nothing of the kind."
"I say it is."
"I don't believe it."
"D'you think you know more about fowls than I, who have handled them ever since I was a nipper? I tell you, all those birds that went to the Alpha were town bred."
"You'll never persuade me to believe that."
"Will you bet, then?"
"It's merely taking your money, for I know that I am right. But I'll have a sovereign on with you, just to teach you not to be obstinate."
The salesman chuckled grimly. "Bring me the books, Bill," said he.
The small boy brought round a small thin volume and a great greasy-backed one, laying them out together beneath the hanging lamp.
"Now then, Mr. Cocksure," said the salesman, "I thought that I was out of geese, but before I finish you'll find that there is still one left in my shop. You see this little book?"
"Well?"
"That's the list of the folk from whom I buy. D'you see? Well, then, here on this page are the country folk, and the numbers after their names are where their accounts are in the big ledger. Now, then! You see this other page in red ink? Well, that is a list of my town suppliers. Now, look at that third name. Just read it out to me."

"Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road--249," read Holmes.
"Quite so. Now turn that up in the ledger."
Holmes turned to the page indicated. "Here you are, 'Mrs. Oakshott, 117, Brixton Road, egg and poultry supplier.'"
"Now, then, what's the last entry?"
"December 22nd. Twenty-four geese at 7s. 6d."
"Quite so. There you are. And underneath?"
"Sold to Mr. Windigate of the Alpha, at 12s."
"What have you to say now?"

Sherlock Holmes looked deeply chagrined. He drew a sovereign from his pocket and threw it down upon the slab, turning away with the air of a man whose disgust is too deep for words. A few yards off he stopped under a lamp-post and laughed in the hearty, noiseless fashion which was peculiar to him.

When you see a man with whiskers of that cut and the 'Pink 'un' protruding out of his pocket, you can always draw him by a bet," said he. "I daresay that if I had put 100 pounds down in front of him, that man would not have given me such complete information as was drawn from him by the idea that he was doing me on a wager. Well, Watson, we are, I fancy, nearing the end of our quest, and the only point which remains to be determined is whether we should go on to this Mrs. Oakshott to-night, or whether we should reserve it for to-morrow. It is clear from what that surly fellow said that there are others besides ourselves who are anxious about the matter, and I should--"

His remarks were suddenly cut short by a loud hubbub which broke out from the stall which we had just left. Turning round we saw a little rat-faced fellow standing in the centre of the circle of yellow light which was thrown by the swinging lamp, while Breckinridge, the salesman, framed in the door of his stall, was shaking his fists fiercely at the cringing figure.

"I've had enough of you and your geese," he shouted. "I wish you were all at the devil together. If you come pesterling me any more with your silly talk I'll set the dog at you. You bring Mrs. Oakshott here and I'll answer her, but what have you to do with it? Did I buy the geese off you?"

"No; but one of them was mine all the same," whined the little man.

"Well, then, ask Mrs. Oakshott for it."

"She told me to ask you."

"Well, you can ask the King of Proosia, for all I care. I've had enough of it. Get out of this!" He rushed fiercely forward, and the inquirer flitted away into the darkness.

"Ha! this may save us a visit to Brixton Road," whispered Holmes. "Come with me, and we will see what is to be made of this fellow." Striding through the scattered knots of people who lounged round the flaring stalls, my companion speedily overtook the little man and touched him upon the shoulder. He sprang round, and I could see in the gas-light that every vestige of colour had been driven from his face.

"Who are you, then? What do you want?" he asked in a quavering voice.

"You will excuse me," said Holmes blandly, "but I could not help overhearing the questions which you put to the salesman just now. I think that I could be of assistance to you."

"You? Who are you? How could you know anything of the matter?"

"My name is Sherlock Holmes. It is my business to know what other people don't know."

"But you can know nothing of this?"

"Excuse me, I know everything of it. You are endeavouring to trace some geese which were sold by Mrs. Oakshott, of Brixton Road, to a salesman named Breckinridge, by him in turn to Mr. Windigate, of the Alpha, and by him to his club, of which Mr. Henry Baker is a member."

"Oh, sir, you are the very man whom I have longed to meet," cried the little fellow with outstretched hands and quivering fingers. "I can hardly explain to you how interested I am in this matter."

Sherlock Holmes hailed a four-wheeler which was passing. "In that case we had better discuss it in a cosy room rather than in this wind-swept market-place," said he. "But pray tell me, before we go farther, who it is that I have the pleasure of assisting."

The man hesitated for an instant. "My name is John Robinson," he answered with a sidelong glance.

"No, no; the real name," said Holmes sweetly. "It is always awkward doing business with an alias."

A flush sprang to the white cheeks of the stranger. "Well then," said he, "my real name is James Ryder."
"Precisely so. Head attendant at the Hotel Cosmopolitan. Pray step into the cab, and I shall soon be able to tell you everything which you would wish to know."

The little man stood glancing from one to the other of us with half-frightened, half-hopeful eyes, as one who is not sure whether he is on the verge of a windfall or of a catastrophe. Then he stepped into the cab, and in half an hour we were back in the sitting-room at Baker Street. Nothing had been said during our drive, but the high, thin breathing of our new companion, and the clasplings and unclaspsings of his hands, spoke of the nervous tension within him.

"Here we are!" said Holmes cheerily as we filed into the room. "The fire looks very seasonable in this weather. You look cold, Mr. Ryder. Pray take the basket-chair. I will just put on my slippers before we settle this little matter of yours. Now, then! You want to know what became of those geese?"

"Yes, sir."

"Or rather, I fancy, of that goose. It was one bird, I imagine in which you were interested--white, with a black bar across the tail."

Ryder quivered with emotion. "Oh, sir," he cried, "can you tell me where it went to?"

"It came here."

"Here?"

"Yes, and a most remarkable bird it proved. I don't wonder that you should take an interest in it. It laid an egg after it was dead--the bonniest, brightest little blue egg that ever was seen. I have it here in my museum."

Our visitor staggered to his feet and clutched the mantelpiece with his right hand. Holmes unlocked his strong-box and held up the blue carbuncle, which shone out like a star, with a cold, brilliant, many-pointed radiance. Ryder stood glaring with a drawn face, uncertain whether to claim or to disown it.

"The game's up, Ryder," said Holmes quietly. "Hold up, man, or you'll be into the fire! Give him an arm back into his chair, Watson. He's not got blood enough to go in for felony with impunity. Give him a dash of brandy. So! Now he looks a little more human. What a shrimp it is, to be sure!"

For a moment he had staggered and nearly fallen, but the brandy brought a tinge of colour into his cheeks, and he sat staring with frightened eyes at his accuser.

"I have almost every link in my hands, and all the proofs which I could possibly need, so there is little which you need tell me. Still, that little may as well be cleared up to make the case complete. You had heard, Ryder, of this blue stone of the Countess of Morcar's?"

"It was Catherine Cusack who told me of it," said he in a crackling voice.

"I see--her ladyship's waiting-maid. Well, the temptation of sudden wealth so easily acquired was too much for you, as it has been for better men before you; but you were not very scrupulous in the means you used. It seems to me, Ryder, that there is the making of a very pretty villain in you. You knew that this man Horner, the plumber, had been concerned in some such matter before, and that suspicion would rest the more readily upon him. What did you do, then? You made some small job in my lady's room--you and your confederate Cusack--and you managed that he should be the man sent for. Then, when he had left, you rifled the jewel-case, raised the alarm, and had this unfortunate man arrested. You then--"
enough of this poor Horner in the dock for a crime of which he knew nothing."

"I will fly, Mr. Holmes. I will leave the country, sir. Then the charge against him will break down."

"Hum! We will talk about that. And now let us hear a true account of the next act. How came the stone into the
goose, and how came the goose into the open market? Tell us the truth, for there lies your only hope of safety."

Ryder passed his tongue over his parched lips. "I will tell you it just as it happened, sir," said he. "When Horner
had been arrested, it seemed to me that it would be best for me to get away with the stone at once, for I did not know
at what moment the police might not take it into their heads to search me and my room. There was no place about
the hotel where it would be safe. I went out, as if on some commission, and I made for my sister's house. She had
married a man named Oakshott, and lived in Brixton Road, where she fattened fowls for the market. All the way
there every man I met seemed to me to be a policeman or a detective; and, for all that it was a cold night, the sweat
was pouring down my face before I came to the Brixton Road. My sister asked me what was the matter, and why I
was so pale; but I told her that I had been upset by the jewel robbery at the hotel. Then I went into the back yard and
smoked a pipe and wondered what it would be best to do.

"I had a friend once called Maudsley, who went to the bad, and has just been serving his time in Pentonville.
One day he had met me, and fell into talk about the ways of thieves, and how they could get rid of what they stole. I
knew that he would be true to me, for I knew one or two things about him; so I made up my mind to go right on to
Kilburn, where he lived, and take him into my confidence. He would show me how to turn the stone into money. But
how to get to him in safety? I thought of the agonies I had gone through in coming from the hotel. I might at any
moment be seized and searched, and there would be the stone in my waistcoat pocket. I was leaning against the wall
at the time and looking at the geese which were waddling about round my feet, and suddenly an idea came into my
head which showed me how I could beat the best detective that ever lived.

"My sister had told me some weeks before that I might have the pick of her geese for a Christmas present, and I
knew that she was always as good as her word. I would take my goose now, and in it I would carry my stone to
Kilburn. There was a little shed in the yard, and behind this I drove one of the birds--a fine big one, white, with a
barred tail. I caught it, and prying its bill open, I thrust the stone down its throat as far as my finger could reach. The
bird gave a gulp, and I felt the stone pass along its gullet and down into its crop. But the creature flapped and
struggled, and out came my sister to know what was the matter. As I turned to speak to her the brute broke loose and
fluttered off among the others.

"Whatever were you doing with that bird, Jem?" says she.

"Well," said I, 'you said you'd give me one for Christmas, and I was feeling which was the fattest."

"Oh," says she, 'we've set yours aside for you--Jem's bird, we call it. It's the big white one over yonder. There's
twenty-six of them, which makes one for you, and one for us, and two dozen for the market.'

"Thank you, Maggie," says I; 'but if it is all the same to you, I'd rather have that one I was handling just now.'

"The other is a good three pound heavier," said she, 'and we fattened it expressly for you.'

"Never mind. I'll have the other, and I'll take it now," said I.

"Oh, just as you like," said she, a little huffed. 'Which is it you want, then?'

"That white one with the barred tail, right in the middle of the flock.'

"Oh, very well. Kill it and take it with you.'

Well, I did what she said, Mr. Holmes, and I carried the bird all the way to Kilburn. I told my pal what I had
done, for he was a man that it was easy to tell a thing like that to. He laughed until he choked, and we got a knife
and opened the goose. My heart turned to water, for there was no sign of the stone, and I knew that some terrible
mistake had occurred. I left the bird, rushed back to my sister's, and hurried into the back yard. There was not a bird
to be seen there.

"Where are they all, Maggie?" I cried.

"Gone to the dealer's, Jem.'

"Which dealer's?"

"Breckinridge, of Covent Garden.'

"But was there another with a barred tail?" I asked, 'the same as the one I chose?'

"Yes, Jem; there were two barred-tailed ones, and I could never tell them apart.'

"Well, then, of course I saw it all, and I ran off as hard as my feet would carry me to this man Breckinridge; but
he had sold the lot at once, and not one word would he tell me as to where they had gone. You heard him yourselves
to-night. Well, he has always answered me like that. My sister thinks that I am going mad. Sometimes I think that I
am myself. And now--and now I am myself a branded thief, without ever having touched the wealth for which I sold
my character. God help me! God help me!" He burst into convulsive sobbing, with his face buried in his hands.
There was a long silence, broken only by his heavy breathing and by the measured tapping of Sherlock Holmes' finger-tips upon the edge of the table. Then my friend rose and threw open the door.

"Get out!" said he.

"What, sir! Oh, Heaven bless you!"

"No more words. Get out!"

And no more words were needed. There was a rush, a clatter upon the stairs, the bang of a door, and the crisp rattle of running footfalls from the street.

"After all, Watson," said Holmes, reaching up his hand for his clay pipe, "I am not retained by the police to supply their deficiencies. If Horner were in danger it would be another thing; but this fellow will not appear against him, and the case must collapse. I suppose that I am commuting a felony, but it is just possible that I am saving a soul. This fellow will not go wrong again; he is too terribly frightened. Send him to gaol now, and you make him a gallo-bird for life. Besides, it is the season of forgiveness. Chance has put in our way a most singular and whimsical problem, and its solution is its own reward. If you will have the goodness to touch the bell, Doctor, we will begin another investigation, in which, also a bird will be the chief feature."

VIII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE SPECKLED BAND

On glancing over my notes of the seventy odd cases in which I have during the last eight years studied the methods of my friend Sherlock Holmes, I find many tragic, some comic, a large number merely strange, but none commonplace; for, working as he did rather for the love of his art than for the acquirement of wealth, he refused to associate himself with any investigation which did not tend towards the unusual, and even the fantastic. Of all these varied cases, however, I cannot recall any which presented more singular features than that which was associated with the well-known Surrey family of the Roylotts of Stoke Moran. The events in question occurred in the early days of my association with Holmes, when we were sharing rooms as bachelors in Baker Street. It is possible that I might have placed them upon record before, but a promise of secrecy was made at the time, from which I have only been freed during the last month by the untimely death of the lady to whom the pledge was given. It is perhaps as well that the facts should now come to light, for I have reasons to know that there are widespread rumours as to the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott which tend to make the matter even more terrible than the truth.

It was early in April in the year '83 that I woke one morning to find Sherlock Holmes standing, fully dressed, by the side of my bed. He was a late riser, as a rule, and as the clock on the mantelpiece showed me that it was only a quarter-past seven, I blinked up at him in some surprise, and perhaps just a little resentment, for I was myself regular in my habits.

"Very sorry to knock you up, Watson," said he, "but it's the common lot this morning. Mrs. Hudson has been knocked up, she retorted upon me, and I on you."

"What is it, then--a fire?"

"No; a client. It seems that a young lady has arrived in a considerable state of excitement, who insists upon seeing me. She is waiting now in the sitting-room. Now, when young ladies wander about the metropolis at this hour of the morning, and knock sleepy people up out of their beds, I presume that it is something very pressing which they have to communicate. Should it prove to be an interesting case, you would, I am sure, wish to follow it from the outset. I thought, at any rate, that I should call you and give you the chance."

"My dear fellow, I would not miss it for anything."

I had no keener pleasure than in following Holmes in his professional investigations, and in admiring the rapid deductions, as swift as intuitions, and yet always founded on a logical basis with which he unravelled the problems which were submitted to him. I rapidly threw on my clothes and was ready in a few minutes to accompany my friend down to the sitting-room. A lady dressed in black and heavily veiled, who had been sitting in the window, rose as we entered.

"Good-morning, madam," said Holmes cheerily. "My name is Sherlock Holmes. This is my intimate friend and
associate, Dr. Watson, before whom you can speak as freely as before myself. Ha! I am glad to see that Mrs. Hudson has had the good sense to light the fire. Pray draw up to it, and I shall order you a cup of hot coffee, for I observe that you are shivering."

"It is not cold which makes me shiver," said the woman in a low voice, changing her seat as requested.

"What, then?"

"It is fear, Mr. Holmes. It is terror." She raised her veil as she spoke, and we could see that she was indeed in a pitiable state of agitation, her face all drawn and grey, with restless frightened eyes, like those of some hunted animal. Her features and figure were those of a woman of thirty, but her hair was shot with premature grey, and her expression was weary and haggard. Sherlock Holmes ran her over with one of his quick, all-comprehensive glances.

"You must not fear," said he soothingly, bending forward and patting her forearm. "We shall soon set matters right, I have no doubt. You have come in by train this morning, I see."

"You know me, then?"

"No, but I observe the second half of a return ticket in the palm of your left glove. You must have started early, and yet you had a good drive in a dog-cart, along heavy roads, before you reached the station."

The lady gave a violent start and stared in bewilderment at my companion.

"There is no mystery, my dear madam," said he, smiling. "The left arm of your jacket is spattered with mud in no less than seven places. The marks are perfectly fresh. There is no vehicle save a dog-cart which throws up mud in that way, and then only when you sit on the left-hand side of the driver."

"Whatever your reasons may be, you are perfectly correct," said she. "I started from home before six, reached Leatherhead at twenty past, and came in by the first train to Waterloo. Sir, I can stand this strain no longer; I shall go mad if it continues. I have no one to turn to--none, save only one, who cares for me, and he, poor fellow, can be of little aid. I have heard of you, Mr. Holmes; I have heard of you from Mrs. Farintosh, whom you helped in the hour of her sore need. It was from her that I had your address. Oh, sir, do you not think that you could help me, too, and at least throw a little light through the dense darkness which surrounds me? At present it is out of my power to reward you for your services, but in a month or six weeks I shall be married, with the control of my own income, and then at least you shall not find me ungrateful."

Holmes turned to his desk and, unlocking it, drew out a small case-book, which he consulted.

"Farintosh," said he. "Ah yes, I recall the case; it was concerned with an opal tiara. I think it was before your time, Watson. I can only say, madam, that I shall be happy to devote the same care to your case as I did to that of your friend. As to reward, my profession is its own reward; but you are at liberty to defray whatever expenses I may be put to, at the time which suits you best. And now I beg that you will lay before us everything that may help us in forming an opinion upon the matter."

"Alas!" replied our visitor, "the very horror of my situation lies in the fact that my fears are so vague, and my suspicions depend so entirely upon small points, which might seem trivial to another, that even he to whom of all others I have a right to look for help and advice looks upon all that I tell him about it as the fancies of a nervous woman. He does not say so, but I can read it from his soothing answers and averted eyes. But I have heard, Mr. Holmes, that you can see deeply into the manifold wickedness of the human heart. You may advise me how to walk amid the dangers which encompass me."

"I am all attention, madam."

"My name is Helen Stoner, and I am living with my stepfather, who is the last survivor of one of the oldest Saxon families in England, the Roylotts of Stoke Moran, on the western border of Surrey."

Holmes nodded his head. "The name is familiar to me," said he.

"The family was at one time among the richest in England, and the estates extended over the borders into Berkshire in the north, and Hampshire in the west. In the last century, however, four successive heirs were of a dissolute and wasteful disposition, and the family ruin was eventually completed by a gambler in the days of the Regency. Nothing was left save a few acres of ground, and the two-hundred-year-old house, which is itself crushed under a heavy mortgage. The last squire dragged out his existence there, living the horrible life of an aristocratic pauper; but his only son, my stepfather, seeing that he must adapt himself to the new conditions, obtained an advance from a relative, which enabled him to take a medical degree and went out to Calcutta, where, by his professional skill and his force of character, he established a large practice. In a fit of anger, however, caused by some robberies which had been perpetrated in the house, he beat his native butler to death and narrowly escaped a capital sentence. As it was, he suffered a long term of imprisonment and afterwards returned to England a morose and disappointed man.

"When Dr. Roylott was in India he married my mother, Mrs. Stoner, the young widow of Major-General Stoner, of the Bengal Artillery. My sister Julia and I were twins, and we were only two years old at the time of my mother's re-marriage. She had a considerable sum of money--not less than 1000 pounds a year--and this she bequeathed to
Dr. Roylott entirely while we resided with him, with a provision that a certain annual sum should be allowed to each of us in the event of our marriage. Shortly after our return to England my mother died—she was killed eight years ago in a railway accident near Crewe. Dr. Roylott then abandoned his attempts to establish himself in practice in London and took us to live with him in the old ancestral house at Stoke Moran. The money which my mother had left was enough for all our wants, and there seemed to be no obstacle to our happiness.

"But a terrible change came over our stepfather about this time. Instead of making friends and exchanging visits with our neighbours, who had at first been overjoyed to see a Roylott of Stoke Moran back in the old family seat, he shut himself up in his house and seldom came out save to indulge in ferocious quarrels with whoever might cross his path. Violence of temper approaching to mania has been hereditary in the men of the family, and in my stepfather's case it had, I believe, been intensified by his long residence in the tropics. A series of disgraceful brawls took place, two of which ended in the police-court, until at last he became the terror of the village, and the folks would fly at his approach, for he is a man of immense strength, and absolutely uncontrollable in his anger.

"Last week he hurled the local blacksmith over a parapet into a stream, and it was only by paying over all the money which I could gather together that I was able to avert another public exposure. He had no friends at all save the wandering gipsies, and he would give these vagabonds leave to encamp upon the few acres of bramble-covered land which represent the family estate, and would accept in return the hospitality of their tents, wandering away with them sometimes for weeks on end. He has a passion also for Indian animals, which are sent over to him by a correspondent, and he has at this moment a cheetah and a baboon, which wander freely over his grounds and are feared by the villagers almost as much as their master.

"You can imagine from what I say that my poor sister Julia and I had no great pleasure in our lives. No servant would stay with us, and for a long time we did all the work of the house. She was but thirty at the time of her death, and yet her hair had already begun to whiten, even as mine has."

"Your sister is dead, then?"

"She died just two years ago, and it is of her death that I wish to speak to you. You can understand that, living the life which I have described, we were little likely to see anyone of our own age and position. We had, however, an aunt, my mother's maiden sister, Miss Honoria Westphail, who lives near Harrow, and we were occasionally allowed to pay short visits at this lady's house. Julia went there at Christmas two years ago, and met there a half-pay major of marines, to whom she became engaged. My stepfather learned of the engagement when my sister returned and offered no objection to the marriage; but within a fortnight of the day which had been fixed for the wedding, the terrible event occurred which has deprived me of my only companion."

Sherlock Holmes had been leaning back in his chair with his eyes closed and his head sunk in a cushion, but he half opened his lids now and glanced across at his visitor.

"Pray be precise as to details," said he.

"It is easy for me to be so, for every event of that dreadful time is seared into my memory. The manor-house is, as I have already said, very old, and only one wing is now inhabited. The bedrooms in this wing are on the ground floor, the sitting-rooms being in the central block of the buildings. Of these bedrooms the first is Dr. Roylott's, the second my sister's, and the third my own. There is no communication between them, but they all open out into the same corridor. Do I make myself plain?"

"Perfectly so."

"The windows of the three rooms open out upon the lawn. That fatal night Dr. Roylott had gone to his room early, though we knew that he had not retired to rest, for my sister was troubled by the smell of the strong Indian cigars which it was his custom to smoke. She left her room, therefore, and came into mine, where she sat for some time, chatting about her approaching wedding. At eleven o'clock she rose to leave me, but she paused at the door and looked back.

"'Tell me, Helen,' said she, "have you ever heard anyone whistle in the dead of the night?'

"'Never,' said I.

"'I suppose that you could not possibly whistle, yourself, in your sleep?'

"'Certainly not. But why?'

"'Because during the last few nights I have always, about three in the morning, heard a low, clear whistle. I am a light sleeper, and it has awakened me. I cannot tell where it came from—perhaps from the next room, perhaps from the lawn. I thought that I would just ask you whether you had heard it.'

"'No, I have not. It must be those wretched gipsies in the plantation.'

"'Very likely. And yet if it were on the lawn, I wonder that you did not hear it also.'

"'Ah, but I sleep more heavily than you.'

"'Well, it is of no great consequence, at any rate.' She smiled back at me, closed my door, and a few moments later I heard her key turn in the lock."
"Indeed," said Holmes. "Was it your custom always to lock yourselves in at night?"
"Always."
"And why?"
"I think that I mentioned to you that the doctor kept a cheetah and a baboon. We had no feeling of security unless our doors were locked."
"Quite so. Pray proceed with your statement."
"I could not sleep that night. A vague feeling of impending misfortune impressed me. My sister and I, you will recollect, were twins, and you know how subtle are the links which bind two souls which are so closely allied. It was a wild night. The wind was howling outside, and the rain was beating and splashing against the windows. Suddenly, amid all the hubbub of the gale, there burst forth the wild scream of a terrified woman. I knew that it was my sister's voice. I sprang from my bed, wrapped a shawl round me, and rushed into the corridor. As I opened my door I seemed to hear a low whistle, such as my sister described, and a few moments later a clanging sound, as if a mass of metal had fallen. As I ran down the passage, my sister's door was unlocked, and revolved slowly upon its hinges. I stared at it horror-stricken, not knowing what was about to issue from it. By the light of the corridor-lamp I saw my sister appear at the opening, her face blanched with terror, her hands groping for help, her whole figure swaying to and fro like that of a drunkard. I ran to her and threw my arms round her, but at that moment her knees seemed to give way and she fell to the ground. She writhed as one who is in terrible pain, and her limbs were dreadfully convulsed. At first I thought that she had not recognised me, but as I bent over her she suddenly shrieked out in a voice which I shall never forget, 'Oh, my God! Helen! It was the band! The speckled band!' There was something else which she would fain have said, and she stabbed with her finger into the air in the direction of the doctor's room, but a fresh convulsion seized her and choked her words. I rushed out, calling loudly for my stepfather, and I met him hastening from his room in his dressing-gown. When he reached my sister's side she was unconscious, and though he poured brandy down her throat and sent for medical aid from the village, all efforts were in vain, for she slowly sank and died without having recovered her consciousness. Such was the dreadful end of my beloved sister."
"One moment," said Holmes, "are you sure about this whistle and metallic sound? Could you swear to it?"
"That was what the county coroner asked me at the inquiry. It is my strong impression that I heard it, and yet, among the crash of the gale and the creaking of an old house, I may possibly have been deceived."
"Was your sister dressed?"
"No, she was in her night-dress. In her right hand was found the charred stump of a match, and in her left a match-box."
"Showing that she had struck a light and looked about her when the alarm took place. That is important. And what conclusions did the coroner come to?"
"He investigated the case with great care, for Dr. Roylott's conduct had long been notorious in the county, but he was unable to find any satisfactory cause of death. My evidence showed that the door had been fastened upon the inner side, and the windows were blocked by old-fashioned shutters with broad iron bars, which were secured every night. The walls were carefully sounded, and were shown to be quite solid all round, and the flooring was also thoroughly examined, with the same result. The chimney is wide, but is barred up by four large staples. It is certain, therefore, that my sister was quite alone when she met her end. Besides, there were no marks of any violence upon her."
"How about poison?"
"The doctors examined her for it, but without success."
"What do you think that this unfortunate lady died of, then?"
"It is my belief that she died of pure fear and nervous shock, though what it was that frightened her I cannot imagine."
"Were there gipsies in the plantation at the time?"
"Yes, there are nearly always some there."
"Ah, and what did you gather from this allusion to a band--a speckled band?"
"Sometimes I have thought that it was merely the wild talk of delirium, sometimes that it may have referred to some band of people, perhaps to these very gipsies in the plantation. I do not know whether the spotted handkerchiefs which so many of them wear over their heads might have suggested the strange adjective which she used."

Holmes shook his head like a man who is far from being satisfied.
"These are very deep waters," said he; "pray go on with your narrative."
"Two years have passed since then, and my life has been until lately lonelier than ever. A month ago, however, a dear friend, whom I have known for many years, has done me the honour to ask my hand in marriage. His name is Armitage--Percy Armitage--the second son of Mr. Armitage, of Crane Water, near Reading. My stepfather has
offered no opposition to the match, and we are to be married in the course of the spring. Two days ago some repairs
were started in the west wing of the building, and my bedroom wall has been pierced, so that I have had to move
into the chamber in which my sister died, and to sleep in the very bed in which she slept. Imagine, then, my thrill of
terror when last night, as I lay awake, thinking over her terrible fate, I suddenly heard in the silence of the night the
low whistle which had been the herald of her own death. I sprang up and lit the lamp, but nothing was to be seen in
the room. I was too shaken to go to bed again, however, so I dressed, and as soon as it was daylight I slipped down,
got a dog-cart at the Crown Inn, which is opposite, and drove to Leatherhead, from whence I have come on this
morning with the one object of seeing you and asking your advice."

"You have done wisely," said my friend. "But have you told me all?"

"Yes, all."

"Miss Roylott, you have not. You are screening your stepfather."

"Why, what do you mean?"

For answer Holmes pushed back the frill of black lace which fringed the hand that lay upon our visitor's knee.

Five little livid spots, the marks of four fingers and a thumb, were printed upon the white wrist.

"You have been cruelly used," said Holmes.

The lady coloured deeply and covered over her injured wrist. "He is a hard man," she said, "and perhaps he
hardly knows his own strength."

There was a long silence, during which Holmes leaned his chin upon his hands and stared into the crackling fire.

"This is a very deep business," he said at last. "There are a thousand details which I should desire to know before
I decide upon our course of action. Yet we have not a moment to lose. If we were to come to Stoke Moran to-day,
would it be possible for us to see over these rooms without the knowledge of your stepfather?"

"As it happens, he spoke of coming into town to-day upon some most important business. It is probable that he
will be away all day, and that there would be nothing to disturb you. We have a housekeeper now, but she is old and
foolish, and I could easily get her out of the way."

"Excellent. You are not averse to this trip, Watson?"

"By no means."

"Then we shall both come. What are you going to do yourself?"

"I have one or two things which I would wish to do now that I am in town. But I shall return by the twelve
o'clock train, so as to be there in time for your coming."

"And you may expect us early in the afternoon. I have myself some small business matters to attend to. Will you
not wait and breakfast?"

"No, I must go. My heart is lightened already since I have confided my trouble to you. I shall look forward to
seeing you again this afternoon." She dropped her thick black veil over her face and glided from the room.

"And what do you think of it all, Watson?" asked Sherlock Holmes, leaning back in his chair.

"It seems to me to be a most dark and sinister business."

"Dark enough and sinister enough."

"Yet if the lady is correct in saying that the flooring and walls are sound, and that the door, window, and
chimney are impassable, then her sister must have been undoubtedly alone when she met her mysterious end."

"What becomes, then, of these nocturnal whistles, and what of the very peculiar words of the dying woman?"

"I cannot think."

"When you combine the ideas of whistles at night, the presence of a band of gipsies who are on intimate terms
with this old doctor, the fact that we have every reason to believe that the doctor has an interest in preventing his
stepdaughter's marriage, the dying allusion to a band, and, finally, the fact that Miss Helen Stoner heard a metallic
clang, which might have been caused by one of those metal bars that secured the shutters falling back into its place, I
think that there is good ground to think that the mystery may be cleared along those lines."

"But what, then, did the gipsies do?"

"I cannot imagine."

"I see many objections to any such theory."

"And so do I. It is precisely for that reason that we are going to Stoke Moran this day. I want to see whether the
objections are fatal, or if they may be explained away. But what in the name of the devil!"

The ejaculation had been drawn from my companion by the fact that our door had been suddenly dashed open,
and that a huge man had framed himself in the aperture. His costume was a peculiar mixture of the professional and
of the agricultural, having a black top-hat, a long frock-coat, and a pair of high gaiters, with a hunting-crop swinging
in his hand. So tall was he that his hat actually brushed the cross bar of the doorway, and his breadth seemed to span
it across from side to side. A large face, seared with a thousand wrinkles, burned yellow with the sun, and marked
with every evil passion, was turned from one to the other of us, while his deep-set, bile-shot eyes, and his high, thin,
fleshless nose, gave him somewhat the resemblance to a fierce old bird of prey.

"Which of you is Holmes?" asked this apparition.

"My name, sir; but you have the advantage of me," said my companion quietly.

"I am Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran."

"Indeed, Doctor," said Holmes blandly. "Pray take a seat."

"I will do nothing of the kind. My stepdaughter has been here. I have traced her. What has she been saying to you?"

"It is a little cold for the time of the year," said Holmes.

"What has she been saying to you?" screamed the old man furiously.

"But I have heard that the crocuses promise well," continued my companion imperturbably.

"Ha! You put me off, do you?" said our new visitor, taking a step forward and shaking his hunting-crop. "I know you, you scoundrel! I have heard of you before. You are Holmes, the meddler."

My friend smiled.

"Holmes, the busybody!"

His smile broadened.

"Holmes, the Scotland Yard Jack-in-office!"

Holmes chuckled heartily. "Your conversation is most entertaining," said he. "When you go out close the door, for there is a decided draught."

"I will go when I have said my say. Don't you dare to meddle with my affairs. I know that Miss Stoner has been here. I traced her! I am a dangerous man to fall foul of! See here." He stepped swiftly forward, seized the poker, and bent it into a curve with his huge brown hands.

"See that you keep yourself out of my grip," he snarled, and hurling the twisted poker into the fireplace he strode out of the room.

"He seems a very amiable person," said Holmes, laughing. "I am not quite so bulky, but if he had remained I might have shown him that my grip was not much more feeble than his own." As he spoke he picked up the steel poker and, with a sudden effort, straightened it out again.

"Fancy his having the insolence to confound me with the official detective force! This incident gives zest to our investigation, however, and I only trust that our little friend will not suffer from her imprudence in allowing this brute to trace her. And now, Watson, we shall order breakfast, and afterwards I shall walk down to Doctors' Commons, where I hope to get some data which may help us in this matter."

It was nearly one o'clock when Sherlock Holmes returned from his excursion. He held in his hand a sheet of blue paper, scrawled over with notes and figures.

"I have seen the will of the deceased wife," said he. "To determine its exact meaning I have been obliged to work out the present prices of the investments with which it is concerned. The total income, which at the time of the wife's death was little short of 1100 pounds, is now, through the fall in agricultural prices, not more than 750 pounds. Each daughter can claim an income of 250 pounds, in case of marriage. It is evident, therefore, that if both girls had married, this beauty would have had a mere pittance, while even one of them would cripple him to a very serious extent. My morning's work has not been wasted, since it has proved that he has the very strongest motives for standing in the way of anything of the sort. And now, Watson, this is too serious for dawdling, especially as the old man is aware that we are interesting ourselves in his affairs; so if you are ready, we shall call a cab and drive to Waterloo. I should be very much obliged if you would slip your revolver into your pocket. An Eley's No. 2 is an excellent argument with gentlemen who can twist steel pokers into knots. That and a tooth-brush are, I think, all that we need."

At Waterloo we were fortunate in catching a train for Leatherhead, where we hired a trap at the station inn and drove for four or five miles through the lovely Surrey lanes. It was a perfect day, with a bright sun and a few fleecy clouds in the heavens. The trees and wayside hedges were just throwing out their first green shoots, and the air was full of the pleasant smell of the moist earth. To me at least there was a strange contrast between the sweet promise of the spring and this sinister quest upon which we were engaged. My companion sat in the front of the trap, his arms folded, his hat pulled down over his eyes, and his chin sunk upon his breast, buried in the deepest thought. Suddenly, however, he started, tapped me on the shoulder, and pointed over the meadows.

"Look there!" said he.

A heavily timbered park stretched up in a gentle slope, thickening into a grove at the highest point. From amid the branches there jutted out the grey gables and high roof-tree of a very old mansion.

"Stoke Moran?" said he.

"Yes, sir, that be the house of Dr. Grimesby Roylott," remarked the driver.

"There is some building going on there," said Holmes; "that is where we are going."
"There's the village," said the driver, pointing to a cluster of roofs some distance to the left; "but if you want to get to the house, you'll find it shorter to get over this stile, and so by the foot-path over the fields. There it is, where the lady is walking."

"And the lady, I fancy, is Miss Stoner," observed Holmes, shading his eyes. "Yes, I think we had better do as you suggest."

We got off, paid our fare, and the trap rattled back on its way to Leatherhead.

"I thought it as well," said Holmes as we climbed the stile, "that this fellow should think we had come here as architects, or on some definite business. It may stop his gossip. Good-afternoon, Miss Stoner. You see that we have been as good as our word."

Our client of the morning had hurried forward to meet us with a face which spoke her joy. "I have been waiting so eagerly for you," she cried, shaking hands with us warmly. "All has turned out splendidly. Dr. Roylott has gone to town, and it is unlikely that he will be back before evening."

"We have had the pleasure of making the doctor's acquaintance," said Holmes, and in a few words he sketched out what had occurred. Miss Stoner turned white to the lips as she listened.

"Good heavens!" she cried, "he has followed me, then."

"So it appears."

"He is so cunning that I never know when I am safe from him. What will he say when he returns?"

"He must guard himself, for he may find that there is someone more cunning than himself upon his track. You must lock yourself up from him to-night. If he is violent, we shall take you away to your aunt's at Harrow. Now, we must make the best use of our time, so kindly take us at once to the rooms which we are to examine."

The building was of grey, lichen-blotched stone, with a high central portion and two curving wings, like the claws of a crab, thrown out on each side. In one of these wings the windows were broken and blocked with wooden boards, while the roof was partly caved in, a picture of ruin. The central portion was in little better repair, but the right-hand block was comparatively modern, and the blinds in the windows, with the blue smoke curling up from the chimneys, showed that this was where the family resided. Some scaffolding had been erected against the end wall, and the stone-work had been broken into, but there were no signs of any workmen at the moment of our visit. Holmes walked slowly up and down the ill-trimmed lawn and examined with deep attention the outsides of the windows.

"This, I take it, belongs to the room in which you used to sleep, the centre one to your sister's, and the one next to the main building to Dr. Roylott's chamber?"

"Exactly so. But I am now sleeping in the middle one."  "Pending the alterations, as I understand. By the way, there does not seem to be any very pressing need for repairs at that end wall."

"There were none. I believe that it was an excuse to move me from my room."

"Ah! that is suggestive. Now, on the other side of this narrow wing runs the corridor from which these three rooms open. There are windows in it, of course?"

"Yes, but very small ones. Too narrow for anyone to pass through."

"As you both locked your doors at night, your rooms were unapproachable from that side. Now, would you have the kindness to go into your room and bar your shutters?"

Miss Stoner did so, and Holmes, after a careful examination through the open window, endeavoured in every way to force the shutter open, but without success. There was no slit through which a knife could be passed to raise the bar. Then with his lens he tested the hinges, but they were of solid iron, built firmly into the massive masonry. "Hum!" said he, scratching his chin in some perplexity, "my theory certainly presents some difficulties. No one could pass these shutters if they were bolted. Well, we shall see if the inside throws any light upon the matter."

A small side door led into the whitewashed corridor from which the three bedrooms opened. Holmes refused to examine the third chamber, so we passed at once to the second, that in which Miss Stoner was now sleeping, and in which her sister had met with her fate. It was a homely little room, with a low ceiling and a gaping fireplace, after the fashion of old country-houses. A brown chest of drawers stood in one corner, a narrow white-counterpaned bed in another, and a dressing-table on the left-hand side of the window. These articles, with two small wicker-work chairs, made up all the furniture in the room save for a square of Wilton carpet in the centre. The boards round and the panelling of the walls were of brown, worm-eaten oak, so old and discoloured that it may have dated from the original building of the house. Holmes drew one of the chairs into a corner and sat silent, while his eyes travelled round and round and up and down, taking in every detail of the apartment.

"Where does that bell communicate with?" he asked at last pointing to a thick bell-ropo which hung down beside the bed, the tassel actually lying upon the pillow.

"It goes to the housekeeper's room."
"It looks newer than the other things?"
"Yes, it was only put there a couple of years ago."
"Your sister asked for it, I suppose?"
"No, I never heard of her using it. We used always to get what we wanted for ourselves."
"Indeed, it seemed unnecessary to put so nice a bell-pull there. You will excuse me for a few minutes while I satisfy myself as to this floor." He threw himself down upon his face with his lens in his hand and crawled swiftly backward and forward, examining minutely the cracks between the boards. Then he did the same with the wood-work with which the chamber was panelled. Finally he walked over to the bed and spent some time in staring at it and in running his eye up and down the wall. Finally he took the bell-rope in his hand and gave it a brisk tug.

"Why, it's a dummy," said he.
"Won't it ring?"
"No, it is not even attached to a wire. This is very interesting. You can see now that it is fastened to a hook just above where the little opening for the ventilator is."
"How very absurd! I never noticed that before."
"Very strange!" muttered Holmes, pulling at the rope. "There are one or two very singular points about this room. For example, what a fool a builder must be to open a ventilator into another room, when, with the same trouble, he might have communicated with the outside air!"
"That is also quite modern," said the lady.
"Done about the same time as the bell-rope?" remarked Holmes.
"Yes, there were several little changes carried out about that time."
"They seem to have been of a most interesting character--dummy bell-ropes, and ventilators which do not ventilate. With your permission, Miss Stoner, we shall now carry our researches into the inner apartment."

Dr. Grimesby Roylott's chamber was larger than that of his step-daughter, but was as plainly furnished. A camp-bed, a small wooden shelf full of books, mostly of a technical character, an armchair beside the bed, a plain wooden chair against the wall, a round table, and a large iron safe were the principal things which met the eye. Holmes walked slowly round and examined each and all of them with the keenest interest.

"What's in here?" he asked, tapping the safe.
"My stepfather's business papers."
"Oh! you have seen inside, then?"
"Only once, some years ago. I remember that it was full of papers."
"There isn't a cat in it, for example?"
"No. What a strange idea!"
"Well, look at this!" He took up a small saucer of milk which stood on the top of it.
"No; we don't keep a cat. But there is a cheetah and a baboon."
"Ah, yes, of course! Well, a cheetah is just a big cat, and yet a saucer of milk does not go very far in satisfying its wants, I daresay. There is one point which I should wish to determine." He squatted down in front of the wooden chair and examined the seat of it with the greatest attention.

"Thank you. That is quite settled," said he, rising and putting his lens in his pocket. "Hallo! Here is something interesting!"

The object which had caught his eye was a small dog lash hung on one corner of the bed. The lash, however, was curled upon itself and tied so as to make a loop of whipcord.

"What do you make of that, Watson?"
"It's a common enough lash. But I don't know why it should be tied."
"That is not quite so common, is it? Ah, me! it's a wicked world, and when a clever man turns his brains to crime it is the worst of all. I think that I have seen enough now, Miss Stoner, and with your permission we shall walk out upon the lawn."

I had never seen my friend's face so grim or his brow so dark as it was when we turned from the scene of this investigation. We had walked several times up and down the lawn, neither Miss Stoner nor myself liking to break in upon his thoughts before he roused himself from his reverie.

"It is very essential, Miss Stoner," said he, "that you should absolutely follow my advice in every respect."
"I shall most certainly do so."
"The matter is too serious for any hesitation. Your life may depend upon your compliance."
"I assure you that I am in your hands."
"In the first place, both my friend and I must spend the night in your room."
Both Miss Stoner and I gazed at him in astonishment.
"Yes, it must be so. Let me explain. I believe that that is the village inn over there?"
"Yes, that is the Crown."
"Very good. Your windows would be visible from there?"
"Certainly."
"You must confine yourself to your room, on pretence of a headache, when your stepfather comes back. Then when you hear him retire for the night, you must open the shutters of your window, undo the hasp, put your lamp there as a signal to us, and then withdraw quietly with everything which you are likely to want into the room which you used to occupy. I have no doubt that, in spite of the repairs, you could manage there for one night."
"Oh, yes, easily."
"The rest you will leave in our hands."
"But what will you do?"
"We shall spend the night in your room, and we shall investigate the cause of this noise which has disturbed you."
"I believe, Mr. Holmes, that you have already made up your mind," said Miss Stoner, laying her hand upon my companion's sleeve.
"Perhaps I have."
"Then, for pity's sake, tell me what was the cause of my sister's death."
"I should prefer to have clearer proofs before I speak."
"You can at least tell me whether my own thought is correct, and if she died from some sudden fright."
"No, I do not think so. I think that there was probably some more tangible cause. And now, Miss Stoner, we must leave you for if Dr. Roylott returned and saw us our journey would be in vain. Good-bye, and be brave, for if you will do what I have told you, you may rest assured that we shall soon drive away the dangers that threaten you."
Sherlock Holmes and I had no difficulty in engaging a bedroom and sitting-room at the Crown Inn. They were on the upper floor, and from our window we could command a view of the avenue gate, and of the inhabited wing of Stoke Moran Manor House. At dusk we saw Dr. Grimesby Roylott drive past, his huge form looming up beside the little figure of the lad who drove him. The boy had some slight difficulty in undoing the heavy iron gates, and we heard the hoarse roar of the doctor's voice and saw the fury with which he shook his clinched fists at him. The trap drove on, and a few minutes later we saw a sudden light spring up among the trees as the lamp was lit in one of the sitting-rooms.
"Do you know, Watson," said Holmes as we sat together in the gathering darkness, "I have really some scruples as to taking you to-night. There is a distinct element of danger."
"Can I be of assistance?"
"Your presence might be invaluable."
"Then I shall certainly come."
"It is very kind of you."
"You speak of danger. You have evidently seen more in these rooms than was visible to me."
"No, but I fancy that I may have deduced a little more. I imagine that you saw all that I did."
"I saw nothing remarkable save the bell-rope, and what purpose that could answer I confess is more than I can imagine."
"You saw the ventilator, too?"
"Yes, but I do not think that it is such a very unusual thing to have a small opening between two rooms. It was so small that a rat could hardly pass through."
"I knew that we should find a ventilator before ever we came to Stoke Moran."
"My dear Holmes!"
"Oh, yes, I did. You remember in her statement she said that her sister could smell Dr. Roylott's cigar. Now, of course that suggested at once that there must be a communication between the two rooms. It could only be a small one, or it would have been remarked upon at the coroner's inquiry. I deduced a ventilator."
"But what harm can there be in that?"
"Well, there is at least a curious coincidence of dates. A ventilator is made, a cord is hung, and a lady who sleeps in the bed dies. Does not that strike you?"
"I cannot as yet see any connection."
"Did you observe anything very peculiar about that bed?"
"No."
"It was clamped to the floor. Did you ever see a bed fastened like that before?"
"I cannot say that I have."
"The lady could not move her bed. It must always be in the same relative position to the ventilator and to the rope--or so we may call it, since it was clearly never meant for a bell-pull."
"Holmes," I cried, "I seem to see dimly what you are hinting at. We are only just in time to prevent some subtle and horrible crime."

"Subtle enough and horrible enough. When a doctor does go wrong he is the first of criminals. He has nerve and he has knowledge. Palmer and Pritchard were among the heads of their profession. This man strikes even deeper, but I think, Watson, that we shall be able to strike deeper still. But we shall have horrors enough before the night is over; for goodness' sake let us have a quiet pipe and turn our minds for a few hours to something more cheerful."

About nine o'clock the light among the trees was extinguished, and all was dark in the direction of the Manor House. Two hours passed slowly away, and then, suddenly, just at the stroke of eleven, a single bright light shone out right in front of us.

"That is our signal," said Holmes, springing to his feet; "it comes from the middle window."

As we passed out he exchanged a few words with the landlord, explaining that we were going on a late visit to an acquaintance, and that it was possible that we might spend the night there. A moment later we were out on the dark road, a chill wind blowing in our faces, and one yellow light twinkling in front of us through the gloom to guide us on our sombre errand.

There was little difficulty in entering the grounds, for unrepaired breaches gaped in the old park wall. Making our way among the trees, we reached the lawn, crossed it, and were about to enter through the window when out from a clump of laurel bushes there darted what seemed to be a hideous and distorted child, who threw itself upon the grass with writhing limbs and then ran swiftly across the lawn into the darkness.

"My God!" I whispered; "did you see it?"

Holmes was for the moment as startled as I. His hand closed like a vice upon my wrist in his agitation. Then he broke into a low laugh and put his lips to my ear.

"It is a nice household," he murmured. "That is the baboon."

I had forgotten the strange pets which the doctor affected. There was a cheetah, too; perhaps we might find it upon our shoulders at any moment. I confess that I felt easier in my mind when, after following Holmes' example and slipping off my shoes, I found myself inside the bedroom. My companion noiselessly closed the shutters, moved the lamp onto the table, and cast his eyes round the room. All was as we had seen it in the daytime. Then creeping up to me and making a trumpet of his hand, he whispered into my ear again so gently that it was all that I could do to distinguish the words:

"The least sound would be fatal to our plans."

I nodded to show that I had heard.

"We must sit without light. He would see it through the ventilator."

I nodded again.

"Do not go asleep; your very life may depend upon it. Have your pistol ready in case we should need it. I will sit on the side of the bed, and you in that chair."

I took out my revolver and laid it on the corner of the table.

Holmes had brought up a long thin cane, and this he placed upon the bed beside him. By it he laid the box of matches and the stump of a candle. Then he turned down the lamp, and we were left in darkness.

How shall I ever forget that dreadful vigil? I could not hear a sound, not even the drawing of a breath, and yet I knew that my companion sat open-eyed, within a few feet of me, in the same state of nervous tension in which I was myself. The shutters cut off the least ray of light, and we waited in absolute darkness.

From outside came the occasional cry of a night-bird, and once at our very window a long drawn catlike whine, which told us that the cheetah was indeed at liberty. Far away we could hear the deep tones of the parish clock, which boomed out every quarter of an hour. How long they seemed, those quarters! Twelve struck, and one and two and three, and still we sat waiting silently for whatever might befall.

Suddenly there was the momentary gleam of a light up in the direction of the ventilator, which vanished immediately, but was succeeded by a strong smell of burning oil and heated metal. Someone in the next room had lit a dark-lantern. I heard a gentle sound of movement, and then all was silent once more, though the smell grew stronger. For half an hour I sat with straining ears. Then suddenly another sound became audible—a very gentle, soothing sound, like that of a small jet of steam escaping continually from a kettle. The instant that we heard it, Holmes sprang from the bed, struck a match, and lashed furiously with his cane at the bell-pull.

"You see it, Watson?" he yelled. "You see it?"

But I saw nothing. At the moment when Holmes struck the light I heard a low, clear whistle, but the sudden glare flashing into my weary eyes made it impossible for me to tell what it was at which my friend lashed so savagely. I could, however, see that his face was deadly pale and filled with horror and loathing. He had ceased to strike and was gazing up at the ventilator when suddenly there broke from the silence of the night the most horrible cry to which I have ever listened. It swelled up louder and louder, a hoarse yell of pain and fear and anger all
mingled in the one dreadful shriek. They say that away down in the village, and even in the distant parsonage, that
cry raised the sleepers from their beds. It struck cold to our hearts, and I stood gazing at Holmes, and he at me, until
the last echoes of it had died away into the silence from which it rose.

"What can it mean?" I gasped.

"It means that it is all over," Holmes answered. "And perhaps, after all, it is for the best. Take your pistol, and
we will enter Dr. Roylott's room."

With a grave face he lit the lamp and led the way down the corridor. Twice he struck at the chamber door
without any reply from within. Then he turned the handle and entered, I at his heels, with the cocked pistol in my
hand.

It was a singular sight which met our eyes. On the table stood a dark-lantern with the shutter half open, throwing
a brilliant beam of light upon the iron safe, the door of which was ajar. Beside this table, on the wooden chair, sat
Dr. Grimesby Roylott clad in a long grey dressing-gown, his bare ankles protruding beneath, and his feet thrust into
red heelless Turkish slippers. Across his lap lay the short stock with the long lash which we had noticed during the
day. His chin was cocked upward and his eyes were fixed in a dreadful, rigid stare at the corner of the ceiling.
Round his brow he had a peculiar yellow band, with brownish speckles, which seemed to be bound tightly round his
head. As we entered he made neither sound nor motion.

"The band! the speckled band!" whispered Holmes.

I took a step forward. In an instant his strange headgear began to move, and there reared itself from among his
hair the squat diamond-shaped head and puffed neck of a loathsome serpent.

"It is a swamp adder!" cried Holmes; "the deadliest snake in India. He has died within ten seconds of being
bitten. Violence does, in truth, recoil upon the violent, and the schemer falls into the pit which he digs for another.
Let us thrust this creature back into its den, and we can then remove Miss Stoner to some place of shelter and let the
county police know what has happened."

As he spoke he drew the dog-whip swiftly from the dead man's lap, and throwing the noose round the reptile's
neck he drew it from its horrid perch and, carrying it at arm's length, threw it into the iron safe, which he closed
upon it.

Such are the true facts of the death of Dr. Grimesby Roylott, of Stoke Moran. It is not necessary that I should
prolong a narrative which has already run to too great a length by telling how we broke the sad news to the terrified
girl, how we conveyed her by the morning train to the care of her good aunt at Harrow, of how the slow process of
official inquiry came to the conclusion that the doctor met his fate while indiscreetly playing with a dangerous pet.
The little which I had yet to learn of the case was told me by Sherlock Holmes as we travelled back next day.

"I had," said he, "come to an entirely erroneous conclusion which shows, my dear Watson, how dangerous it
always is to reason from insufficient data. The presence of the gipsies, and the use of the word 'band,' which was
used by the poor girl, no doubt, to explain the appearance which she had caught a hurried glimpse of by the light of
her match, were sufficient to put me upon an entirely wrong scent. I can only claim the merit that I instantly
reconsidered my position when, however, it became clear to me that whatever danger threatened an occupant of the
room could not come either from the window or the door. My attention was speedily drawn, as I have already
remarked to you, to this ventilator, and to the bell-rope which hung down to the bed. The discovery that this was a
dummy, and that the bed was clamped to the floor, instantly gave rise to the suspicion that the rope was there as a
bridge for something passing through the hole and coming to the bed. The idea of a snake instantly occurred to me,
and when I coupled it with my knowledge that the doctor was furnished with a supply of creatures from India, I felt
that I was probably on the right track. The idea of using a form of poison which could not possibly be discovered by
any chemical test was just such a one as would occur to a clever and ruthless man who had had an Eastern training.
The rapidity with which such a poison would take effect would also, from his point of view, be an advantage. It
would be a sharp-eyed coroner, indeed, who could distinguish the two little dark punctures which would show where
the poison fangs had done their work. Then I thought of the whistler. Of course he must recall the snake before the
morning light revealed it to the victim. He had trained it, probably by the use of the milk which we saw, to return to
him when summoned. He would put it through this ventilator at the hour that he thought best, with the certainty that
it would crawl down the rope and land on the bed. It might or might not bite the occupant, perhaps she might escape
every night for a week, but sooner or later she must fall a victim.

"I had come to these conclusions before ever I had entered his room. An inspection of his chair showed me that
he had been in the habit of standing on it, which of course would be necessary in order that he should reach the
ventilator. The sight of the safe, the saucer of milk, and the loop of whipcord were enough to finally dispel any
doubts which may have remained. The metallic clang heard by Miss Stoner was obviously caused by her stepfather
hastily closing the door of his safe upon its terrible occupant. Having once made up my mind, you know the steps
which I took in order to put the matter to the proof. I heard the creature hiss as I have no doubt that you did also, and
I instantly lit the light and attacked it."

"With the result of driving it through the ventilator."

"And also with the result of causing it to turn upon its master at the other side. Some of the blows of my cane came home and roused its snakish temper, so that it flew upon the first person it saw. In this way I am no doubt indirectly responsible for Dr. Grimesby Roylott's death, and I cannot say that it is likely to weigh very heavily upon my conscience."

IX. THE ADVENTURE OF THE ENGINEER'S THUMB

Of all the problems which have been submitted to my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, for solution during the years of our intimacy, there were only two which I was the means of introducing to his notice--that of Mr. Hatherley's thumb, and that of Colonel Warburton's madness. Of these the latter may have afforded a finer field for an acute and original observer, but the other was so strange in its inception and so dramatic in its details that it may be the more worthy of being placed upon record, even if it gave my friend fewer openings for those deductive methods of reasoning by which he achieved such remarkable results. The story has, I believe, been told more than once in the newspapers, but, like all such narratives, its effect is much less striking when set forth en bloc in a single half-column of print than when the facts slowly evolve before your own eyes, and the mystery clears gradually away as each new discovery furnishes a step which leads on to the complete truth. At the time the circumstances made a deep impression upon me, and the lapse of two years has hardly served to weaken the effect.

It was in the summer of '89, not long after my marriage, that the events occurred which I am now about to summarise. I had returned to civil practice and had finally abandoned Holmes in his Baker Street rooms, although I continually visited him and occasionally even persuaded him to forgo his Bohemian habits so far as to come and visit us. My practice had steadily increased, and as I happened to live at no very great distance from Paddington Station, I got a few patients from among the officials. One of these, whom I had cured of a painful and lingering disease, was never weary of advertising my virtues and of endeavouring to send me on every sufferer over whom he might have any influence.

One morning, at a little before seven o'clock, I was awakened by the maid tapping at the door to announce that two men had come from Paddington and were waiting in the consulting-room. I dressed hurriedly, for I knew by experience that railway cases were seldom trivial, and hastened downstairs. As I descended, my old ally, the guard, came out of the room and closed the door tightly behind him.

"I've got him here," he whispered, jerking his thumb over his shoulder; "he's all right."

"What is it, then?" I asked, for his manner suggested that it was some strange creature which he had caged up in my room.

"It's a new patient," he whispered. "I thought I'd bring him round myself; then he couldn't slip away. There he is, all safe and sound. I must go now, Doctor; I have my duties, just the same as you." And off he went, this trusty tout, without even giving me time to thank him.

I entered my consulting-room and found a gentleman seated by the table. He was quietly dressed in a suit of heather tweed with a soft cloth cap which he had laid down upon my books. Round one of his hands he had a handkerchief wrapped, which was mottled all over with bloodstains. He was young, not more than five-and-twenty, I should say, with a strong, masculine face; but he was exceedingly pale and gave me the impression of a man who was suffering from some strong agitation, which it took all his strength of mind to control.

"I am sorry to knock you up so early, Doctor," said he, "but I have had a very serious accident during the night. I came in by train this morning, and on inquiring at Paddington as to where I might find a doctor, a worthy fellow between me and waiting in the consulting-room. I dressed hurriedly, for I knew by experience that railway cases were seldom trivial, and hastened downstairs. As I descended, my old ally, the guard, came out of the room and closed the door tightly behind him.

"I've got him here," he whispered, jerking his thumb over his shoulder; "he's all right."

"What is it, then?" I asked, for his manner suggested that it was some strange creature which he had caged up in my room.

"It's a new patient," he whispered. "I thought I'd bring him round myself; then he couldn't slip away. There he is, all safe and sound. I must go now, Doctor; I have my dooties, just the same as you." And off he went, this trusty tout, without even giving me time to thank him.

I entered my consulting-room and found a gentleman seated by the table. He was quietly dressed in a suit of heather tweed with a soft cloth cap which he had laid down upon my books. Round one of his hands he had a handkerchief wrapped, which was mottled all over with bloodstains. He was young, not more than five-and-twenty, I should say, with a strong, masculine face; but he was exceedingly pale and gave me the impression of a man who was suffering from some strong agitation, which it took all his strength of mind to control.

"I am sorry to knock you up so early, Doctor," said he, "but I have had a very serious accident during the night. I came in by train this morning, and on inquiring at Paddington as to where I might find a doctor, a worthy fellow very kindly escorted me here. I gave the maid a card, but I see that she has left it upon the side-table."

I took it up and glanced at it. "Mr. Victor Hatherley, hydraulic engineer, 16A, Victoria Street (3rd floor)." That was the name, style, and abode of my morning visitor. "I regret that I have kept you waiting," said I, sitting down in my library-chair. "You are fresh from a night journey, I understand, which is in itself a monotonous occupation."

"Oh, my night could not be called monotonous," said he, and laughed. He laughed very heartily, with a high, ringing note, leaning back in his chair and shaking his sides. All my medical instincts rose up against that laugh.

"Stop it!" I cried; "pull yourself together!" and I poured out some water from a caraffe.

It was useless, however. He was off in one of those hysterical outbursts which come upon a strong nature when some great crisis is over and gone. Presently he came to himself once more, very weary and pale-looking.

"I have been making a fool of myself," he gasped.

"Not at all. Drink this." I dashed some brandy into the water, and the colour began to come back to his bloodless cheeks.

"That's better!" said he. "And now, Doctor, perhaps you would kindly attend to my thumb, or rather to the place where my thumb used to be."

He unwound the handkerchief and held out his hand. It gave even my hardened nerves a shudder to look at it.
There were four protruding fingers and a horrid red, spongy surface where the thumb should have been. It had been hacked or torn right out from the roots.

"Good heavens!" I cried, "this is a terrible injury. It must have bled considerably."

"Yes, it did. I fainted when it was done, and I think that I must have been senseless for a long time. When I came to I found that it was still bleeding, so I tied one end of my handkerchief very tightly round the wrist and braced it up with a twig."

"Excellent! You should have been a surgeon."

"It is a question of hydraulics, you see, and came within my own province."

"This has been done," said I, examining the wound, "by a very heavy and sharp instrument."

"A thing like a cleaver," said he.

"An accident, I presume?"

"By no means."

"What! a murderous attack?"

"Very murderous indeed."

"You horrify me."

I sponged the wound, cleaned it, dressed it, and finally covered it over with cotton wadding and carbolised bandages. He lay back without wincing, though he bit his lip from time to time.

"How is that?" I asked when I had finished.

"Capital! Between your brandy and your bandage, I feel a new man. I was very weak, but I have had a good deal to go through."

"Perhaps you had better not speak of the matter. It is evidently trying to your nerves."

"Oh, no, not now. I shall have to tell my tale to the police; but, between ourselves, if it were not for the convincing evidence of this wound of mine, I should be surprised if they believed my statement, for it is a very extraordinary one, and I have not much in the way of proof with which to back it up; and, even if they believe me, the clues which I can give them are so vague that it is a question whether justice will be done."

"Ha!" cried I, "if it is anything in the nature of a problem which you desire to see solved, I should strongly recommend you to come to my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, before you go to the official police."

"Oh, I have heard of that fellow," answered my visitor, "and I should be very glad if he would take the matter up, though of course I must use the official police as well. Would you give me an introduction to him?"

"I'll do better. I'll take you round to him myself."

"I should be immensely obliged to you."

"We'll call a cab and go together. We shall just be in time to have a little breakfast with him. Do you feel equal to it?"

"Yes; I shall not feel easy until I have told my story."

"Then my servant will call a cab, and I shall be with you in an instant." I rushed upstairs, explained the matter shortly to my wife, and in five minutes was inside a hansom, driving with my new acquaintance to Baker Street.

Sherlock Holmes was, as I expected, lounging about his sitting-room in his dressing-gown, reading the agony column of The Times and smoking his before-breakfast pipe, which was composed of all the plugs and dottles left from his smokes of the day before, all carefully dried and collected on the corner of the mantelpiece. He received us in his quietly genial fashion, ordered fresh rashers and eggs, and joined us in a hearty meal. When it was concluded he settled our new acquaintance upon the sofa, placed a pillow beneath his head, and laid a glass of brandy and water within his reach.

"It is easy to see that your experience has been no common one, Mr. Hatherley," said he. "Pray, lie down there and make yourself absolutely at home. Tell us what you can, but stop when you are tired and keep up your strength with a little stimulant."

"Thank you," said my patient. "but I have felt another man since the doctor bandaged me, and I think that your breakfast has completed the cure. I shall take up as little of your valuable time as possible, so I shall start at once upon my peculiar experiences."

Holmes sat in his big armchair with the weary, heavy-lidded expression which veiled his keen and eager nature, while I sat opposite to him, and we listened in silence to the strange story which our visitor detailed to us.

"You must know," said he, "that I am an orphan and a bachelor, residing alone in lodgings in London. By profession I am a hydraulic engineer, and I have had considerable experience of my work during the seven years that I was apprenticed to Venner & Matheson, the well-known firm, of Greenwich. Two years ago, having served my time, and having also come into a fair sum of money through my poor father's death, I determined to start in business for myself and took professional chambers in Victoria Street.

"I suppose that everyone finds his first independent start in business a dreary experience. To me it has been
exceptionally so. During two years I have had three consultations and one small job, and that is absolutely all that my profession has brought me. My gross takings amount to 27 pounds 10s. Every day, from nine in the morning until four in the afternoon, I waited in my little den, until at last my heart began to sink, and I came to believe that I should never have any practice at all.

"Yesterday, however, just as I was thinking of leaving the office, my clerk entered to say there was a gentleman waiting who wished to see me upon business. He brought up a card, too, with the name of 'Colonel Lysander Stark' engraved upon it. Close at his heels came the colonel himself, a man rather over the middle size, but of an exceeding thinness. I do not think that I have ever seen so thin a man. His whole face sharpened away into nose and chin, and the skin of his cheeks was drawn quite tense over his outstanding bones. Yet this emaciation seemed to be his natural habit, and due to no disease, for his eye was bright, his step brisk, and his bearing assured. He was plainly but neatly dressed, and his age, I should judge, would be nearer forty than thirty.

"Mr. Hatherley?" said he, with something of a German accent. 'You have been recommended to me, Mr. Hatherley, as being a man who is not only proficient in his profession but is also discreet and capable of preserving a secret.'

"I bowed, feeling as flattered as any young man would at such an address. 'May I ask who it was who gave me so good a character?'

"Well, perhaps it is better that I should not tell you that just at this moment. I have it from the same source that you are both an orphan and a bachelor and are residing alone in London.'

"That is quite correct," I answered; "but you will excuse me if I say that I cannot see how all this bears upon my professional qualifications. I understand that it was on a professional matter that you wished to speak to me?"

"Undoubtedly so. But you will find that all I say is really to the point. I have a professional commission for you, but absolute secrecy is quite essential--absolute secrecy, you understand, and of course we may expect that more from a man who is alone than from one who lives in the bosom of his family.'

"If I promise to keep a secret,' said I, 'you may absolutely depend upon my doing so.'

"He looked very hard at me as I spoke, and it seemed to me that I had never seen so suspicious and questioning an eye.

"Do you promise, then?" said he at last.

"Yes, I promise.'

"Absolute and complete silence before, during, and after? No reference to the matter at all, either in word or writing?'

"I have already given you my word.'

"Very good." He suddenly sprang up, and darting like lightning across the room he flung open the door. The passage outside was empty.

"That's all right," said he, coming back. 'I know that clerks are sometimes curious as to their master's affairs. Now we can talk in safety.' He drew up his chair very close to mine and began to stare at me again with the same questioning and thoughtful look.

"A feeling of repulsion, and of something akin to fear had begun to rise within me at the strange antics of this fleshless man. Even my dread of losing a client could not restrain me from showing my impatience.

"I beg that you will state your business, sir," said I; 'my time is of value.' Heaven forgive me for that last sentence, but the words came to my lips.

"How would fifty guineas for a night's work suit you?" he asked.

"Most admirably.'

"I say a night's work, but an hour's would be nearer the mark. I simply want your opinion about a hydraulic stamping machine which has got out of gear. If you show us what is wrong we shall soon set it right ourselves. What do you think of such a commission as that?"

"The work appears to be light and the pay munificent.'

"Precisely so. We shall want you to come to-night by the last train.'

"Where to?"

"To Eyford, in Berkshire. It is a little place near the borders of Oxfordshire, and within seven miles of Reading. There is a train from Paddington which would bring you there at about 11:15.'

"Very good.'

"I shall come down in a carriage to meet you.'

"There is a drive, then?"

"Yes, our little place is quite out in the country. It is a good seven miles from Eyford Station.'

"Then we can hardly get there before midnight. I suppose there would be no chance of a train back. I should be compelled to stop the night.'
"'Yes, we could easily give you a shake-down.'

"'That is very awkward. Could I not come at some more convenient hour?'

"'We have judged it best that you should come late. It is to recompense you for any inconvenience that we are paying to you, a young and unknown man, a fee which would buy an opinion from the very heads of your profession. Still, of course, if you would like to draw out of the business, there is plenty of time to do so.'

"I thought of the fifty guineas, and of how very useful they would be to me. 'Not at all,' said I, 'I shall be very happy to accommodate myself to your wishes. I should like, however, to understand a little more clearly what it is that you wish me to do.'

"'Quite so. It is very natural that the pledge of secrecy which we have exacted from you should have aroused your curiosity. I have no wish to commit you to anything without your having it all laid before you. I suppose that we are absolutely safe from eavesdroppers?'

"'Entirely.'

"'Then the matter stands thus. You are probably aware that fuller's-earth is a valuable product, and that it is only found in one or two places in England?'

"'I have heard so.'

"'Some little time ago I bought a small place--a very small place--within ten miles of Reading. I was fortunate enough to discover that there was a deposit of fuller's-earth in one of my fields. On examining it, however, I found that this deposit was a comparatively small one, and that it formed a link between two very much larger ones upon the right and left--both of them, however, in the grounds of my neighbours. These good people were absolutely ignorant that their land contained that which was quite as valuable as a gold-mine. Naturally, it was to my interest to buy their land before they discovered its true value, but unfortunately I had no capital by which I could do this. I took a few of my friends into the secret, however, and they suggested that we should quietly and secretly work our own little deposit and that in this way we should earn the money which would enable us to buy the neighbouring fields. This we have now been doing for some time, and in order to help us in our operations we erected a hydraulic press. This press, as I have already explained, has got out of order, and we wish your advice upon the subject. We guard our secret very jealously, however, and if it once became known that we had hydraulic engineers coming to our little house, it would soon rouse inquiry, and then, if the facts came out, it would be good-bye to any chance of getting these fields and carrying out our plans. That is why I have made you promise me that you will not tell a human being that you are going to Eyford to-night. I hope that I make it all plain?'

"'I quite follow you,' said I. 'The only point which I could not quite understand was what use you could make of a hydraulic press in excavating fuller's-earth, which, as I understand, is dug out like gravel from a pit.'

"'Ah!' said he carelessly, 'we have our own process. We compress the earth into bricks, so as to remove them without revealing what they are. But that is a mere detail. I have taken you fully into my confidence now, Mr. Hatherley, and I have shown you how I trust you.' He rose as he spoke. 'I shall expect you, then, at Eyford at 11:15.'

"'I shall certainly be there.'

"'And not a word to a soul.' He looked at me with a last long, questioning gaze, and then, pressing my hand in a cold, dank grasp, he hurried from the room.

"Well, when I came to think it all over in cool blood I was very much astonished, as you may both think, at this sudden commission which had been intrusted to me. On the one hand, of course, I was glad, for the fee was at least tenfold what I should have asked had I set a price upon my own services, and it was possible that this order might lead to other ones. On the other hand, the face and manner of my patron had made an unpleasant impression upon me, and I could not think that his explanation of the fuller's-earth was sufficient to explain the necessity for my coming at midnight, and his extreme anxiety lest I should tell anyone of my errand. However, I threw all fears to the winds, ate a hearty supper, drove to Paddington, and started off, having obeyed to the letter the injunction as to holding my tongue.

"At Reading I had to change not only my carriage but my station. However, I was in time for the last train to Eyford, and I reached the little dim-lit station after eleven o'clock. I was the only passenger who got out there, and there was no one upon the platform save a single sleepy porter with a lantern. As I passed out through the wicket gate, however, I found my acquaintance of the morning waiting in the shadow upon the other side. Without a word he grasped my arm and hurried me into a carriage, the door of which was standing open. He drew up the windows on either side, tapped on the wood-work, and away we went as fast as the horse could go.'

"One horse?" interjected Holmes.

"Yes, only one.

"Did you observe the colour?"

"Yes, I saw it by the side-lights when I was stepping into the carriage. It was a chestnut."

"Tired-looking or fresh?"
"Oh, fresh and glossy."

"Thank you. I am sorry to have interrupted you. Pray continue your most interesting statement."

"Away we went then, and we drove for at least an hour. Colonel Lysander Stark had said that it was only seven miles, but I should think, from the rate that we seemed to go, and from the time that we took, that it must have been nearer twelve. He sat at my side in silence all the time, and I was aware, more than once when I glanced in his direction, that he was looking at me with great intensity. The country roads seem to be not very good in that part of the world, for we lurched and jolted terribly. I tried to look out of the windows to see something of where we were, but they were made of frosted glass, and I could make out nothing save the occasional bright blur of a passing light. Now and then I hazarded some remark to break the monotony of the journey, but the colonel answered only in monosyllables, and the conversation soon flagged. At last, however, the bumping of the road was exchanged for the crisp smoothness of a gravel-drive, and the carriage came to a stand. Colonel Lysander Stark sprang out, and, as I followed after him, pulled me swiftly into a porch which gaped in front of us. We stepped, as it were, right out of the carriage and into the hall, so that I failed to catch the most fleeting glance of the front of the house. The instant that I had crossed the threshold the door slammed heavily behind us, and I heard faintly the rattle of the wheels as the carriage drove away.

"It was pitch dark inside the house, and the colonel fumbled about looking for matches and muttering under his breath. Suddenly a door opened at the other end of the passage, and a long, golden bar of light shot out in our direction. It grew broader, and a woman appeared with a lamp in her hand, which she held above her head, pushing her face forward and peering at us. I could see that she was pretty, and from the gloss with which the light shone upon her dark dress I knew that it was a rich material. She spoke a few words in a foreign tongue in a tone as though asking a question, and when my companion answered in a gruff monosyllable she gave such a start that the lamp nearly fell from her hand. Colonel Stark went up to her, whispered something in her ear, and then, pushing her back into the room from whence she had come, he walked towards me again with the lamp in his hand.

"'Perhaps you will have the kindness to wait in this room for a few minutes,' said he, throwing open another door. It was a quiet, little, plainly furnished room, with a round table in the centre, on which several German books were scattered. Colonel Stark laid down the lamp on the top of a harmonium beside the door. 'I shall not keep you waiting an instant,' said he, and vanished into the darkness.

"I glanced at the books upon the table, and in spite of my ignorance of German I could see that two of them were treatises on science, the others being volumes of poetry. Then I walked across to the window, hoping that I might catch some glimpse of the country-side, but an oak shutter, heavily barred, was folded across it. It was a wonderfully silent house. There was an old clock ticking loudly somewhere in the passage, but otherwise everything was deadly still. A vague feeling of uneasiness began to steal over me. Who were these German people, and what were they doing living in this strange, out-of-the-way place? And where was the place? I was ten miles or so from Eyford, that was all I knew, but whether north, south, east, or west I had no idea. For that matter, Reading, and possibly other large towns, were within that radius, so the place might not be so secluded, after all. Yet it was quite certain, from the absolute stillness, that we were in the country. I paced up and down the room, humming a tune under my breath to keep up my spirits and feeling that I was thoroughly earning my fifty-guinea fee.

"Suddenly, without any preliminary sound in the midst of the utter stillness, the door of my room swung slowly open. The woman was standing in the aperture, the darkness of the hall behind her, the yellow light from my lamp beating upon her eager and beautiful face. I could see at a glance that she was sick with fear, and the sight sent a chill to my own heart. She held up one shaking finger to warn me to be silent, and she shot a few whispered words of broken English at me, her eyes glancing back, like those of a frightened horse, into the gloom behind her.

"'I would go,' said she, trying hard, as it seemed to me, to speak calmly; 'I would go. I should not stay here. There is no good for you to do.'

"'But, madam,' said I, 'I have not yet done what I came for. I cannot possibly leave until I have seen the machine.'

"'It is not worth your while to wait,' she went on. 'You can pass through the door; no one hinders.' And then, seeing that I smiled and shook my head, she suddenly threw aside her constraint and made a step forward, with her hands wrung together. 'For the love of Heaven!' she whispered, 'get away from here before it is too late!'

"'But I am somewhat headstrong by nature, and the more ready to engage in an affair when there is some obstacle in the way. I thought of my fifty-guinea fee, of my wearisome journey, and of the unpleasant night which seemed to be before me. Was it all to go for nothing? Why should I slink away without having carried out my commission, and without the payment which was my due? This woman might, for all I knew, be a monomaniac. With a stout bearing, therefore, though her manner had shaken me more than I cared to confess, I still shook my head and declared my intention of remaining where I was. She was about to renew her entreaties when a door slammed overhead, and the sound of several footsteps was heard upon the stairs. She listened for an instant, threw up her hands with a despairing gesture, and vanished as suddenly and as noiselessly as she had come."
"The newcomers were Colonel Lysander Stark and a short thick man with a chinchilla beard growing out of the creases of his double chin, who was introduced to me as Mr. Ferguson.

"This is my secretary and manager," said the colonel. "By the way, I was under the impression that I left this door shut just now. I fear that you have felt the draught.'

"On the contrary," said I, 'I opened the door myself because I felt the room to be a little close.'

"He shot one of his suspicious looks at me. 'Perhaps we had better proceed to business, then,' said he. 'Mr. Ferguson and I will take you up to see the machine.'

"I had better put my hat on, I suppose.'

"Oh, no, it is in the house.'

"What, you dig fuller's-earth in the house?'

"No, no. This is only where we compress it. But never mind that. All we wish you to do is to examine the machine and to let us know what is wrong with it.'

We went upstairs together, the colonel first with the lamp, the fat manager and I behind him. It was a labyrinth of an old house, with corridors, passages, narrow winding staircases, and little low doors, the thresholds of which were hollowed out by the generations who had crossed them. There were no carpets and no signs of any furniture above the ground floor, while the plaster was peeling off the walls, and the damp was breaking through in green, unhealthy blotches. I tried to put on as unconcerned an air as possible, but I had not forgotten the warnings of the lady, even though I disregarded them, and I kept a keen eye upon my two companions. Ferguson appeared to be a morose and silent man, but I could see from the little that he said that he was at least a fellow-countryman.

Colonel Lysander Stark stopped at last before a low door, which he unlocked. Within was a small, square room, in which the three of us could hardly get at one time. Ferguson remained outside, and the colonel ushered me in.

"We are now," said he, 'actually within the hydraulic press, and it would be a particularly unpleasant thing for us if anyone were to turn it on. The ceiling of this small chamber is really the end of the descending piston, and it comes down with the force of many tons upon this metal floor. There are small lateral columns of water outside which receive the force, and which transmit and multiply it in the manner which is familiar to you. The machine goes readily enough, but there is some stiffness in the working of it, and it has lost a little of its force. Perhaps you will have the goodness to look it over and to show us how we can set it right.'

"I took the lamp from him, and I examined the machine very thoroughly. It was indeed a gigantic one, and capable of exercising enormous pressure. When I passed outside, however, and pressed down the levers which controlled it, I knew at once by the whishing sound that there was a slight leakage, which allowed a regurgitation of water through one of the side cylinders. An examination showed that one of the india-rubber bands which was round the head of a driving-rod had shrunk so as not quite to fill the socket along which it worked. This was clearly the cause of the loss of power, and I pointed it out to my companions, who followed my remarks very carefully and asked several practical questions as to how they should proceed to set it right. When I had made it clear to them, I returned to the main chamber of the machine and took a good look at it to satisfy my own curiosity. It was obvious at a glance that the story of the fuller's-earth was the merest fabrication, for it would be absurd to suppose that so powerful an engine could be designed for so inadequate a purpose. The walls were of wood, but the floor consisted of a large iron trough, and when I came to examine it I could see a crust of metallic deposit all over it. I had stooped and was scraping at this to see exactly what it was when I heard a muttered exclamation in German and saw the cadaverous face of the colonel looking down at me.

"What are you doing there?" he asked.

"I felt angry at having been tricked by so elaborate a story as that which he had told me. 'I was admiring your fuller's-earth,' said I; 'I think that I should be better able to advise you as to your machine if I knew what the exact purpose was for which it was used.'

"The instant that I uttered the words I regretted the rashness of my speech. His face set hard, and a baleful light sprang up in his grey eyes.

"Very well," said he, 'you shall know all about the machine.' He took a step backward, slammed the little door, and turned the key in the lock. I rushed towards it and pulled at the handle, but it was quite secure, and did not give in the least to my kicks and shoves. 'Hullo!' I yelled. 'Hullo! Colonel! Let me out!'

"And then suddenly in the silence I heard a sound which sent my heart into my mouth. It was the clank of the levers and the swish of the leaking cylinder. He had set the engine at work. The lamp still stood upon the floor where I had placed it when examining the trough. By its light I saw that the black ceiling was coming down upon me, slowly, jerkily, but, as none knew better than myself, with a force which must within a minute grind me to a shapeless pulp. I threw myself, screaming, against the door, and dragged with my nails at the lock. I implored the colonel to let me out, but the remorseless clanking of the levers drowned my cries. The ceiling was only a foot or two above my head, and with my hand upraised I could feel its hard, rough surface. Then it flashed through my
mind that the pain of my death would depend very much upon the position in which I met it. If I lay on my face the weight would come upon my spine, and I shuddered to think of that dreadful snap. Easier the other way, perhaps; and yet, had I the nerve to lie and look up at that deadly black shadow wavering down upon me? Already I was unable to stand erect, when my eye caught something which brought a gush of hope back to my heart.

"I have said that though the floor and ceiling were of iron, the walls were of wood. As I gave a last hurried glance around, I saw a thin line of yellow light between two of the boards, which broadened and broadened as a small panel was pushed backward. For an instant I could hardly believe that here was indeed a door which led away from death. The next instant I threw myself through, and lay half-fainting upon the other side. The panel had closed again behind me, but the crash of the lamp, and a few moments afterwards the clang of the two slabs of metal, told me how narrow had been my escape.

"I was recalled to myself by a frantic plucking at my wrist, and I found myself lying upon the stone floor of a narrow corridor, while a woman bent over me and tugged at me with her left hand, while she held a candle in her right. It was the same good friend whose warning I had so foolishly rejected.

"'Come! come!' she cried breathlessly. 'They will be here in a moment. They will see that you are not there. Oh, do not waste the so-precious time, but come!'

"This time, at least, I did not scorn her advice. I staggered to my feet and ran with her along the corridor and down a winding stair. The latter led to another broad passage, and just as we reached it we heard the sound of running feet and the shouting of two voices, one answering the other from the floor on which we were and from the one beneath. My guide stopped and looked about her like one who is at her wit's end. Then she threw open a door which led into a bedroom, through the window of which the moon was shining brightly.

"'It is your only chance,' said she. 'It is high, but it may be that you can jump it.'

"As she spoke a light sprang into view at the further end of the passage, and I saw the lean figure of Colonel Lysander Stark rushing forward with a lantern in one hand and a weapon like a butcher's cleaver in the other. I rushed across the bedroom, flung open the window, and looked out. How quiet and sweet and wholesome the garden looked in the moonlight, and it could not be more than thirty feet down. I clambered out upon the sill, but I hesitated to jump until I should have heard what passed between my saviour and the ruffian who pursued me. If she were ill-used, then at any risks I was determined to go back to her assistance. The thought had hardly flashed through my mind before he was at the door, pushing his way past her; but she threw her arms round him and tried to hold him back.

"'Fritz! Fritz!' she cried in English, 'remember your promise after the last time. You said it should not be again. He will be silent! Oh, he will be silent!'

"'You are mad, Elise!' he shouted, struggling to break away from her. 'You will be the ruin of us. He has seen too much. Let me pass, I say!' He dashed her to one side, and, rushing to the window, cut at me with his heavy weapon. I had let myself go, and was hanging by the hands to the sill, when his blow fell. I was conscious of a dull pain, my grip loosened, and I fell into the garden below.

"I was shaken but not hurt by the fall; so I picked myself up and rushed off among the bushes as hard as I could run, for I understood that I was far from being out of danger yet. Suddenly, however, as I ran, a deadly dizziness and sickness came over me. I glanced down at my hand, which was throbbing painfully, and then, for the first time, saw that my thumb had been cut off and that the blood was pouring from my wound. I endeavoured to tie my handkerchief round it, but there came a sudden buzzing in my ears, and next moment I fell in a dead faint among the rose-bushes.

"How long I remained unconscious I cannot tell. It must have been a very long time, for the moon had sunk, and a bright morning was breaking when I came to myself. My clothes were all sodden with dew, and my coat-sleeve was drenched with blood from my wounded thumb. The smarting of it recalled in an instant all the particulars of my night's adventure, and I sprang to my feet with the feeling that I might hardly yet be safe from my pursuers. But to my astonishment, when I came to look round me, neither house nor garden were to be seen. I had been lying in an angle of the hedge close by the highroad, and just a little lower down was a long building, which proved, upon my approaching it, to be the very station at which I had arrived upon the previous night. Were it not for the ugly wound upon my hand, all that had passed during those dreadful hours might have been an evil dream.

"Half dazed, I went into the station and asked about the morning train. There would be one to Reading in less than an hour. The same porter was on duty, I found, as had been there when I arrived. I inquired of him whether he had ever heard of Colonel Lysander Stark. The name was strange to him. Had he observed a carriage the night before waiting for me? No, he had not. Was there a police-station anywhere near? There was one about three miles off.

"It was too far for me to go, weak and ill as I was. I determined to wait until I got back to town before telling my story to the police. It was a little past six when I arrived, so I went first to have my wound dressed, and then the
doctor was kind enough to bring me along here. I put the case into your hands and shall do exactly what you advise."

We both sat in silence for some little time after listening to this extraordinary narrative. Then Sherlock Holmes pulled down from the shelf one of the ponderous commonplace books in which he placed his cuttings.

"Here is an advertisement which will interest you," said he. "It appeared in all the papers about a year ago. Listen to this: 'Lost, on the 9th inst., Mr. Jeremiah Hayling, aged twenty-six, a hydraulic engineer. Left his lodgings at ten o'clock at night, and has not been heard of since. Was dressed in,' etc., etc. Ha! That represents the last time that the colonel needed to have his machine overhauled, I fancy."

"Good heavens!" cried my patient. "Then that explains what the girl said."

"Undoubtedly. It is quite clear that the colonel was a cool and desperate man, who was absolutely determined that nothing should stand in the way of his little game, like those out-and-out pirates who will leave no survivor from a captured ship. Well, every moment now is precious, so if you feel equal to it we shall go down to Scotland Yard at once as a preliminary to starting for Eyford."

Some three hours or so afterwards we were all in the train together, bound from Reading to the little Berkshire village. There were Sherlock Holmes, the hydraulic engineer, Inspector Bradstreet, of Scotland Yard, a plain-clothes man, and myself. Bradstreet had spread an ordnance map of the county out upon the seat and was busy with his compasses drawing a circle with Eyford for its centre.

"There you are," said he. "That circle is drawn at a radius of ten miles from the village. The place we want must be somewhere near that line. You said ten miles, I think, sir."

"It was an hour's good drive."

"And you think that they brought you back all that way when you were unconscious?"

"They must have done so. I have a confused memory, too, of having been lifted and conveyed somewhere."

"What I cannot understand," said I, "is why they should have spared you when they found you lying fainting in the garden. Perhaps the villain was softened by the woman's entreaties."

"I hardly think that likely. I never saw a more inexorable face in my life."

"Oh, we shall soon clear up all that," said Bradstreet. "Well, I have drawn my circle, and I only wish I knew at what point upon it the folk that we are in search of are to be found."

"I think I could lay my finger on it," said Holmes quietly."

"Really, now!" cried the inspector, "you have formed your opinion! Come, now, we shall see who agrees with you. I say it is south, for the country is more deserted there."

"And I say east," said my patient."

"I am for west," remarked the plain-clothes man. "There are several quiet little villages up there."

"And I am for north," said I, "because there are no hills there, and our friend says that he did not notice the carriage go up any."

"Come," cried the inspector, laughing; "it's a very pretty diversity of opinion. We have boxed the compass among us. Who do you give your casting vote to?"

"You are all wrong."

"But we can't all be."

"Oh, yes, you can. This is my point." He placed his finger in the centre of the circle. "This is where we shall find them."

"But the twelve-mile drive?" gasped Hatherley."

"Six out and six back. Nothing simpler. You say yourself that the horse was fresh and glossy when you got in. How could it be that if it had gone twelve miles over heavy roads?"

"Indeed, it is a likely ruse enough," observed Bradstreet thoughtfully. "Of course there can be no doubt as to the nature of this gang."

"None at all," said Holmes. "They are coiners on a large scale, and have used the machine to form the amalgam which has taken the place of silver."

"We have known for some time that a clever gang was at work," said the inspector. "They have been turning out half-crowns by the thousand. We even traced them as far as Reading, but could get no farther, for they had covered their traces in a way that showed that they were very old hands. But now, thanks to this lucky chance, I think that we have got them right enough."

But the inspector was mistaken, for those criminals were not destined to fall into the hands of justice. As we rolled into Eyford Station we saw a gigantic column of smoke which streamed up from behind a small clump of trees in the neighbourhood and hung like an immense ostrich feather over the landscape.

"A house on fire?" asked Bradstreet as the train steamed off again on its way.

"Yes, sir!" said the station-master.

"When did it break out?"
"I hear that it was during the night, sir, but it has got worse, and the whole place is in a blaze."
"Whose house is it?"
"Dr. Becher's."
"Tell me," broke in the engineer, "is Dr. Becher a German, very thin, with a long, sharp nose?"

The station-master laughed heartily. "No, sir, Dr. Becher is an Englishman, and there isn't a man in the parish who has a better-lined waistcoat. But he has a gentleman staying with him, a patient, as I understand, who is a foreigner, and he looks as if a little good Berkshire beef would do him no harm."

The station-master had not finished his speech before we were all hastening in the direction of the fire. The road topped a low hill, and there was a great widespread whitewashed building in front of us, spouting fire at every chink and window, while in the garden in front three fire-engines were vainly striving to keep the flames under.

"That's it!" cried Hatherley, in intense excitement. "There is the gravel-drive, and there are the rose-bushes where I lay. That second window is the one that I jumped from."

"Well, at least," said Holmes, "you have had your revenge upon them. There can be no question that it was your oil-lamp which, when it was crushed in the press, set fire to the wooden walls, though no doubt they were too excited in the chase after you to observe it at the time. Now keep your eyes open in this crowd for your friends of last night, though I very much fear that they are a good hundred miles off by now."

And Holmes' fears came to be realised, for from that day to this no word has ever been heard either of the beautiful woman, the sinister German, or the morose Englishman. Early that morning a peasant had met a cart containing several people and some very bulky boxes driving rapidly in the direction of Reading, but there all traces of the fugitives disappeared, and even Holmes' ingenuity failed ever to discover the least clue as to their whereabouts.

The firemen had been much perturbed at the strange arrangements which they had found within, and still more so by discovering a newly severed human thumb upon a window-sill of the second floor. About sunset, however, their efforts were at last successful, and they subdued the flames, but not before the roof had fallen in, and the whole place been reduced to such absolute ruin that, save some twisted cylinders and iron piping, not a trace remained of the machinery which had cost our unfortunate acquaintance so dearly. Large masses of nickel and of tin were discovered stored in an out-house, but no coins were to be found, which may have explained the presence of those bulky boxes which have been already referred to.

How our hydraulic engineer had been conveyed from the garden to the spot where he recovered his senses might have remained forever a mystery were it not for the soft mould, which told us a very plain tale. He had evidently been carried down by two persons, one of whom had remarkably small feet and the other unusually large ones. On the whole, it was most probable that the silent Englishman, being less bold or less murderous than his companion, had assisted the woman to bear the unconscious man out of the way of danger.

"Well," said our engineer ruefully as we took our seats to return once more to London, "it has been a pretty business for me! I have lost my thumb and I have lost a fifty-guinea fee, and what have I gained?"

"Experience," said Holmes, laughing. "Indirectly it may be of value, you know; you have only to put it into words to gain the reputation of being excellent company for the remainder of your existence."

X. THE ADVENTURE OF THE NOBLE BACHELOR

The Lord St. Simon marriage, and its curious termination, have long ceased to be a subject of interest in those exalted circles in which the unfortunate bridegroom moves. Fresh scandals have eclipsed it, and their more piquant details have drawn the gossips away from this four-year-old drama. As I have reason to believe, however, that the full facts have never been revealed to the general public, and as my friend Sherlock Holmes had a considerable share in clearing the matter up, I feel that no memoir of him would be complete without some little sketch of this remarkable episode.

It was a few weeks before my own marriage, during the days when I was still sharing rooms with Holmes in Baker Street, that he came home from an afternoon stroll to find a letter on the table waiting for him. I had remained indoors all day, for the weather had taken a sudden turn to rain, with high autumnal winds, and the Jezail bullet which I had brought back in one of my limbs as a relic of my Afghan campaign throbbed with dull persistence. With my body in one easy-chair and my legs upon another, I had surrounded myself with a cloud of newspapers until at last, saturated with the news of the day, I tossed them all aside and lay listless, watching the huge crest and monogram upon the envelope upon the table and wondering lazily who my friend's noble correspondent could be.

"Here is a very fashionable epistle," I remarked as he entered. "Your morning letters, if I remember right, were from a fish-monger and a tide-waiter."

"Yes, my correspondence has certainly the charm of variety," he answered, smiling, "and the humbler are usually the more interesting. This looks like one of those unwelcome social summonses which call upon a man either to be bored or to lie."
He broke the seal and glanced over the contents.

"Oh, come, it may prove to be something of interest, after all."

"Not social, then?"

"No, distinctly professional."

"And from a noble client?"

"One of the highest in England."

"My dear fellow, I congratulate you."

"I assure you, Watson, without affectation, that the status of my client is a matter of less moment to me than the interest of his case. It is just possible, however, that that also may not be wanting in this new investigation. You have been reading the papers diligently of late, have you not?"

"It looks like it," said I ruefully, pointing to a huge bundle in the corner. "I have had nothing else to do."

"It is fortunate, for you will perhaps be able to post me up. I read nothing except the criminal news and the agony column. The latter is always instructive. But if you have followed recent events so closely you must have read about Lord St. Simon and his wedding?"

"Oh, yes, with the deepest interest."

"That is well. The letter which I hold in my hand is from Lord St. Simon. I will read it to you, and in return you must turn over these papers and let me have whatever bears upon the matter. This is what he says:

"MY DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES:--Lord Backwater tells me that I may place implicit reliance upon your judgment and discretion. I have determined, therefore, to call upon you and to consult you in reference to the very painful event which has occurred in connection with my wedding. Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, is acting already in the matter, but he assures me that he sees no objection to your co-operation, and that he even thinks that it might be of some assistance. I will call at four o'clock in the afternoon, and, should you have any other engagement at that time, I hope that you will postpone it, as this matter is of paramount importance. Yours faithfully, ST. SIMON."

"It is dated from Grosvenor Mansions, written with a quill pen, and the noble lord has had the misfortune to get a smear of ink upon the outer side of his right little finger," remarked Holmes as he folded up the epistle.

"He says four o'clock. It is three now. He will be here in an hour."

"Then I have just time, with your assistance, to get clear upon the subject. Turn over those papers and arrange the extracts in their order of time, while I take a glance as to who our client is."

"Here he is," said he, sitting down and flattening it out upon his knee. "Lord Robert Walsingham de Vere St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral. 'Arms: Azure, three caltrops in chief over a fess sable. Born in 1846.' He's forty-one years of age, which is mature for marriage. Was Under-Secretary for the colonies in a late administration. The Duke, his father, was at one time Secretary for Foreign Affairs. They inherit Plantagenet blood by direct descent, and Tudor on the distaff side. Ha! Well, there is nothing very instructive in all this. I think that I must turn to you Watson, for something more solid."

"I have very little difficulty in finding what I want," said I, "for the facts are quite recent, and the matter struck me as remarkable. I feared to refer them to you, however, as I knew that you had an inquiry on hand and that you disliked the intrusion of other matters."

"Oh, you mean the little problem of the Grosvenor Square furniture van. That is quite cleared up now--though, indeed, it was obvious from the first. Pray give me the results of your newspaper selections."

"Here is the first notice which I can find. It is in the personal column of the Morning Post, and dates, as you see, some weeks back: 'A marriage has been arranged,' it says, 'and will, if rumour is correct, very shortly take place, between Lord Robert St. Simon, second son of the Duke of Balmoral, and Miss Hatty Doran, the only daughter of Aloysius Doran, Esq., of San Francisco, Cal., U.S.A.' That is all."

"Terse and to the point," remarked Holmes, stretching his long, thin legs towards the fire.

"There was a paragraph amplifying this in one of the society papers of the same week. Ah, here it is: 'There will soon be a call for protection in the marriage market, for the present free-trade principle appears to tell heavily against our home product. One by one the management of the noble houses of Great Britain is passing into the hands of our fair cousins from across the Atlantic. An important addition has been made during the last week to the list of the prizes which have been borne away by these charming invaders. Lord St. Simon, who has shown himself for over twenty years proof against the little god's arrows, has now definitely announced his approaching marriage with Miss Hatty Doran, the fascinating daughter of a California millionaire. Miss Doran, whose graceful figure and striking face attracted much attention at the Westbury House festivities, is an only child, and it is currently reported that her dowry will run to considerably over the six figures, with expectancies for the future. As it is an open secret that the Duke of Balmoral has been compelled to sell his pictures within the last few years, and as Lord St. Simon has no property of his own save the small estate of Birchmoor, it is obvious that the Californian heiress is not the
only gainer by an alliance which will enable her to make the easy and common transition from a Republican lady to a British peeress."

"Anything else?" asked Holmes, yawning.

"Oh, yes; plenty. Then there is another note in the Morning Post to say that the marriage would be an absolutely quiet one, that it would be at St. George’s, Hanover Square, that only half a dozen intimate friends would be invited, and that the party would return to the furnished house at Lancaster Gate which has been taken by Mr. Aloysius Doran. Two days later--that is, on Wednesday last--there is a curt announcement that the wedding had taken place, and that the honeymoon would be passed at Lord Backwater’s place, near Petersfield. Those are all the notices which appeared before the disappearance of the bride."

"Before the what?" asked Holmes with a start.

"The vanishing of the lady."

"When did she vanish, then?"

"At the wedding breakfast."

"Indeed. This is more interesting than it promised to be; quite dramatic, in fact."

"Yes; it struck me as being a little out of the common."

"They often vanish before the ceremony, and occasionally during the honeymoon; but I cannot call to mind anything quite so prompt as this. Pray let me have the details."

"I warn you that they are very incomplete."

"Perhaps we may make them less so."

"Such as they are, they are set forth in a single article of a morning paper of yesterday, which I will read to you."

It is headed, 'Singular Occurrence at a Fashionable Wedding':

"The family of Lord Robert St. Simon has been thrown into the greatest consternation by the strange and painful episodes which have taken place in connection with his wedding. The ceremony, as shortly announced in the papers of yesterday, occurred on the previous morning; but it is only now that it has been possible to confirm the strange rumours which have been so persistently floating about. In spite of the attempts of the friends to hush the matter up, so much public attention has now been drawn to it that no good purpose can be served by affecting to disregard what is a common subject for conversation.

"The ceremony, which was performed at St. George’s, Hanover Square, was a very quiet one, no one being present save the father of the bride, Mr. Aloysius Doran, the Duchess of Balmoral, Lord Backwater, Lord Eustace and Lady Clara St. Simon (the younger brother and sister of the bridegroom), and Lady Alicia Whittington. The whole party proceeded afterwards to the house of Mr. Aloysius Doran, at Lancaster Gate, where breakfast had been prepared. It appears that some little trouble was caused by a woman, whose name has not been ascertained, who endeavoured to force her way into the house after the bridal party, alleging that she had some claim upon Lord St. Simon. It was only after a painful and prolonged scene that she was ejected by the butler and the footman. The bride, who had fortunately entered the house before this unpleasant interruption, had sat down to breakfast with the rest, when she complained of a sudden indisposition and retired to her room. Her prolonged absence having caused some comment, her father followed her, but learned from her maid that she had only come up to her chamber for an instant, caught up an ulster and bonnet, and hurried down to the passage. One of the footmen declared that he had seen a lady leave the house thus apparelled, but had refused to credit that it was his mistress, believing her to be with the company. On ascertaining that his daughter had disappeared, Mr. Aloysius Doran, in conjunction with the bridegroom, instantly put themselves in communication with the police, and very energetic inquiries are being made, which will probably result in a speedy clearing up of this very singular business. Up to a late hour last night, however, nothing had transpired as to the whereabouts of the missing lady. There are rumours of foul play in the matter, and it is said that the police have caused the arrest of the woman who had caused the original disturbance, in the belief that, from jealousy or some other motive, she may have been concerned in the strange disappearance of the bride."

"And is that all?"

"Only one little item in another of the morning papers, but it is a suggestive one."

"And it is--"

"That Miss Flora Millar, the lady who had caused the disturbance, has actually been arrested. It appears that she was formerly a danseuse at the Allegro, and that she has known the bridegroom for some years. There are no further particulars, and the whole case is in your hands now--so far as it has been set forth in the public press."

"And an exceedingly interesting case it appears to be. I would not have missed it for worlds. But there is a ring at the bell, Watson, and as the clock makes it a few minutes after four, I have no doubt that this will prove to be our noble client. Do not dream of going, Watson, for I very much prefer having a witness, if only as a check to my own memory."
"Lord Robert St. Simon," announced our page-boy, throwing open the door. A gentleman entered, with a pleasant, cultured face, high-nosed and pale, with something perhaps of petulance about the mouth, and with the steady, well-opened eye of a man whose pleasant lot it had ever been to command and to be obeyed. His manner was brisk, and yet his general appearance gave an undue impression of age, for he had a slight forward stoop and a little bend of the knees as he walked. His hair, too, as he swept off his very curly-brimmed hat, was grizzled round the edges and thin upon the top. As to his dress, it was careful to the verge of foppishness, with high collar, black frock-coat, white waistcoat, yellow gloves, patent-leather shoes, and light-coloured gaiters. He advanced slowly into the room, turning his head from left to right, and swinging in his right hand the cord which held his golden eyeglasses.

"Good-day, Lord St. Simon," said Holmes, rising and bowing. "Pray take the basket-chair. This is my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson. Draw up a little to the fire, and we will talk this matter over."

"A most painful matter to me, as you can most readily imagine, Mr. Holmes. I have been cut to the quick. I understand that you have already managed several delicate cases of this sort, sir, though I presume that they were hardly from the same class of society."

"No, I am descending."

"I beg pardon."

"My last client of the sort was a king."

"Oh, really! I had no idea. And which king?"

"The King of Scandinavia."

"What! Had he lost his wife?"

"You can understand," said Holmes suavely, "that I extend to the affairs of my other clients the same secrecy which I promise to you in yours."

"Of course! Very right! very right! I'm sure I beg pardon. As to my own case, I am ready to give you any information which may assist you in forming an opinion."

"Thank you. I have already learned all that is in the public prints, nothing more. I presume that I may take it as correct--this article, for example, as to the disappearance of the bride."

Lord St. Simon glanced over it. "Yes, it is correct, as far as it goes."

"But it needs a great deal of supplementing before anyone could offer an opinion. I think that I may arrive at my facts most directly by questioning you."

"Pray do so."

"When did you first meet Miss Hatty Doran?"

"In San Francisco, a year ago."

"You were travelling in the States?"

"Yes."

"Did you become engaged then?"

"No."

"But you were on a friendly footing?"

"I was amused by her society, and she could see that I was amused."

"Her father is very rich?"

"He is said to be the richest man on the Pacific slope."

"And how did he make his money?"

"In mining. He had nothing a few years ago. Then he struck gold, invested it, and came up by leaps and bounds."

"Now, what is your own impression as to the young lady's--your wife's character?"

The nobleman swung his glasses a little faster and stared down into the fire. "You see, Mr. Holmes," said he, "my wife was twenty before her father became a rich man. During that time she ran free in a mining camp and wandered through woods or mountains, so that her education has come from Nature rather than from the schoolmaster. She is what we call in England a tomboy, with a strong nature, wild and free, unfettered by any sort of traditions. She is impetuous--volcanic, I was about to say. She is swift in making up her mind and fearless in carrying out her resolutions. On the other hand, I would not have given her the name which I have the honour to bear--he gave a little stately cough--had not I thought her to be at bottom a noble woman. I believe that she is capable of heroic self-sacrifice and that anything dishonourable would be repugnant to her."

"Have you her photograph?"

"I brought this with me." He opened a locket and showed us the full face of a very lovely woman. It was not a photograph but an ivory miniature, and the artist had brought out the full effect of the lustrous black hair, the large dark eyes, and the exquisite mouth. Holmes gazed long and earnestly at it. Then he closed the locket and handed it back to Lord St. Simon.
"The young lady came to London, then, and you renewed your acquaintance?"
"Yes, her father brought her over for this last London season. I met her several times, became engaged to her, and have now married her."
"She brought, I understand, a considerable dowry?"
"A fair dowry. Not more than is usual in my family."
"And this, of course, remains to you, since the marriage is a fait accompli?"
"I really have made no inquiries on the subject."
"Very naturally not. Did you see Miss Doran on the day before the wedding?"
"Yes."
"Was she in good spirits?"
"Never better. She kept talking of what we should do in our future lives."
"Indeed! That is very interesting. And on the morning of the wedding?"
"She was as bright as possible--at least until after the ceremony."
"And did you observe any change in her then?"
"Well, to tell the truth, I saw then the first signs that I had ever seen that her temper was just a little sharp. The incident however, was too trivial to relate and can have no possible bearing upon the case."
"Pray let us have it, for all that."
"Oh, it is childish. She dropped her bouquet as we went towards the vestry. She was passing the front pew at the time, and it fell over into the pew. There was a moment's delay, but the gentleman in the pew handed it up to her again, and it did not appear to be the worse for the fall. Yet when I spoke to her of the matter, she answered me abruptly; and in the carriage, on our way home, she seemed absurdly agitated over this trifling cause."
"Indeed! You say that there was a gentleman in the pew. Some of the general public were present, then?"
"Oh, yes. It is impossible to exclude them when the church is open."
"This gentleman was not one of your wife's friends?"
"No, no; I call him a gentleman by courtesy, but he was quite a common-looking person. I hardly noticed his appearance. But really I think that we are wandering rather far from the point."
"Lady St. Simon, then, returned from the wedding in a less cheerful frame of mind than she had gone to it. What did she do on re-entering her father's house?"
"I saw her in conversation with her maid."
"And who is her maid?"
"Alice is her name. She is an American and came from California with her."
"A confidential servant?"
"A little too much so. It seemed to me that her mistress allowed her to take great liberties. Still, of course, in America they look upon these things in a different way."
"How long did she speak to this Alice?"
"Oh, a few minutes. I had something else to think of."
"You did not overhear what they said?"
"Lady St. Simon said something about 'jumping a claim.' She was accustomed to use slang of the kind. I have no idea what she meant."
"American slang is very expressive sometimes. And what did your wife do when she finished speaking to her maid?"
"She walked into the breakfast-room."
"On your arm?"
"No, alone. She was very independent in little matters like that. Then, after we had sat down for ten minutes or so, she rose hurriedly, muttered some words of apology, and left the room. She never came back."
"But this maid, Alice, as I understand, deposes that she went to her room, covered her bride's dress with a long ulster, put on a bonnet, and went out."
"Quite so. And she was afterwards seen walking into Hyde Park in company with Flora Millar, a woman who is now in custody, and who had already made a disturbance at Mr. Doran's house that morning."
"Ah, yes. I should like a few particulars as to this young lady, and your relations to her."
Lord St. Simon shrugged his shoulders and raised his eyebrows. "We have been on a friendly footing for some years--I may say on a very friendly footing. She used to be at the Allegro. I have not treated her ungenerously, and she had no just cause of complaint against me, but you know what women are, Mr. Holmes. Flora was a dear little thing, but exceedingly hot-headed and devotedly attached to me. She wrote me dreadful letters when she heard that I was about to be married, and, to tell the truth, the reason why I had the marriage celebrated so quietly was that I feared lest there might be a scandal in the church. She came to Mr. Doran's door just after we returned, and she
endeavoured to push her way in, uttering very abusive expressions towards my wife, and even threatening her, but I had foreseen the possibility of something of the sort, and I had two police fellows there in private clothes, who soon pushed her out again. She was quiet when she saw that there was no good in making a row."

"Did your wife hear all this?"
"No, thank goodness, she did not."
"And she was seen walking with this very woman afterwards?"
"Yes. That is what Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, looks upon as so serious. It is thought that Flora decoyed my wife out and laid some terrible trap for her."

"Well, it is a possible supposition."
"You think so, too?"
"I did not say a probable one. But you do not yourself look upon this as likely?"
"I do not think Flora would hurt a fly."
"Still, jealousy is a strange transformer of characters. Pray what is your own theory as to what took place?"
"Well, really, I came to seek a theory, not to propound one. I have given you all the facts. Since you ask me, however, I may say that it has occurred to me as possible that the excitement of this affair, the consciousness that she had made so immense a social stride, had the effect of causing some little nervous disturbance in my wife."

"In short, that she had become suddenly deranged?"
"Well, really, when I consider that she has turned her back--I will not say upon me, but upon so much that many have aspired to without success--I can hardly explain it in any other fashion."
"Well, certainly that is also a conceivable hypothesis," said Holmes, smiling. "And now, Lord St. Simon, I think that I have nearly all my data. May I ask whether you were seated at the breakfast-table so that you could see out of the window?"

"We could see the other side of the road and the Park."
"Quite so. Then I do not think that I need to detain you longer. I shall communicate with you."
"Should you be fortunate enough to solve this problem," said our client, rising, "I have solved it."
"I have solved it."
"Eh? What was that?"
"I say that I have solved it."
"Where, then, is my wife?"
"That is a detail which I shall speedily supply."

Lord St. Simon shook his head. "I am afraid that it will take wiser heads than yours or mine," he remarked, and bowing in a stately, old-fashioned manner he departed.

"It is very good of Lord St. Simon to honour my head by putting it on a level with his own," said Sherlock Holmes, laughing. "I think that I shall have a whisky and soda and a cigar after all this cross-questioning. I had formed my conclusions as to the case before our client came into the room."

"My dear Holmes!"
"I have notes of several similar cases, though none, as I remarked before, which were quite as prompt. My whole examination served to turn my conjecture into a certainty. Circumstantial evidence is occasionally very convincing, as when you find a trout in the milk, to quote Thoreau's example."
"But I have heard all that you have heard."
"Without, however, the knowledge of pre-existing cases which serves me so well. There was a parallel instance in Aberdeen some years back, and something on very much the same lines at Munich the year after the Franco-Prussian War. It is one of these cases--but, hullo, here is Lestrade! Good-afternoon, Lestrade! You will find an extra tumbler upon the sideboard, and there are cigars in the box."

The official detective was attired in a pea-jacket and cravat, which gave him a decidedly nautical appearance, and he carried a black canvas bag in his hand. With a short greeting he seated himself and lit the cigar which had been offered to him.

"What's up, then?" asked Holmes with a twinkle in his eye. "You look dissatisfied."

"And I feel dissatisfied. It is this infernal St. Simon marriage case. I can make neither head nor tail of the business."

"Really! You surprise me."
"Who ever heard of such a mixed affair? Every clue seems to slip through my fingers. I have been at work upon it all day."

"And very wet it seems to have made you," said Holmes laying his hand upon the arm of the pea-jacket.
"Yes, I have been dragging the Serpentine."
"In heaven's name, what for?"
"In search of the body of Lady St. Simon."
Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his chair and laughed heartily.
"Have you dragged the basin of Trafalgar Square fountain?" he asked.
"Why? What do you mean?"
"Because you have just as good a chance of finding this lady in the one as in the other."
Lestrade shot an angry glance at my companion. "I suppose you know all about it," he snarled.
"Well, I have only just heard the facts, but my mind is made up."
"Oh, indeed! Then you think that the Serpentine plays no part in the matter?"
"I think it very unlikely."
"Then perhaps you will kindly explain how it is that we found this in it?" He opened his bag as he spoke, and tumbled onto the floor a wedding-dress of watered silk, a pair of white satin shoes and a bride's wreath and veil, all discoloured and soaked in water. "There," said he, putting a new wedding-ring upon the top of the pile. "There is a little nut for you to crack, Master Holmes."
"Oh, indeed!" said my friend, blowing blue rings into the air. "You dragged them from the Serpentine?"
"No. They were found floating near the margin by a park-keeper. They have been identified as her clothes, and it seemed to me that if the clothes were there the body would not be far off."
"By the same brilliant reasoning, every man's body is to be found in the neighbourhood of his wardrobe. And pray what did you hope to arrive at through this?"
"At some evidence implicating Flora Millar in the disappearance."
"I am afraid that you will find it difficult."
"Are you, indeed, now?" cried Lestrade with some bitterness. "I am afraid, Holmes, that you are not very practical with your deductions and your inferences. You have made two blunders in as many minutes. This dress does implicate Miss Flora Millar."
"And how?"
"In the dress is a pocket. In the pocket is a card-case. In the card-case is a note. And here is the very note." He slapped it down upon the table in front of him. "Listen to this: 'You will see me when all is ready. Come at once. F.H.M.' Now my theory all along has been that Lady St. Simon was decoyed away by Flora Millar, and that she, with confederates, no doubt, was responsible for her disappearance. Here, signed with her initials, is the very note which was no doubt quietly slipped into her hand at the door and which lured her within their reach."
"Very good, Lestrade," said Holmes, laughing. "You really are very fine indeed. Let me see it." He took up the paper in a listless way, but his attention instantly became riveted, and he gave a little cry of satisfaction. "This is indeed important," said he.
"Ha! you find it so?"
"Extremely so. I congratulate you warmly."
Lestrade rose in his triumph and bent his head to look. "Why," he shrieked, "you're looking at the wrong side!"
"On the contrary, this is the right side."
"The right side? You're mad! Here is the note written in pencil over here."
"And over here is what appears to be the fragment of a hotel bill, which interests me deeply."
"There's nothing in it. I looked at it before," said Lestrade. "Oct. 4th, rooms 8s., breakfast 2s. 6d., cocktail 1s., lunch 2s. 6d., glass sherry, 8d. I see nothing in that."
"Very likely not. It is most important, all the same. As to the note, it is important also, or at least the initials are, so I congratulate you again."
"I've wasted time enough," said Lestrade, rising. "I believe in hard work and not in sitting by the fire spinning fine theories. Good-day, Mr. Holmes, and we shall see which gets to the bottom of the matter first." He gathered up the garments, thrust them into the bag, and made for the door.
"Just one hint to you, Lestrade," drawled Holmes before his rival vanished; "I will tell you the true solution of the matter. Lady St. Simon is a myth. There is not, and there never has been, any such person."
Lestrade looked sadly at my companion. Then he turned to me, tapped his forehead three times, shook his head solemnly, and hurried away.
He had hardly shut the door behind him when Holmes rose to put on his overcoat. "There is something in what the fellow says about outdoor work," he remarked, "so I think, Watson, that I must leave you to your papers for a little."
It was after five o'clock when Sherlock Holmes left me, but I had no time to be lonely, for within an hour there arrived a confectioner's man with a very large flat box. This he unpacked with the help of a youth whom he had brought with him, and presently, to my very great astonishment, a quite epicurean little cold supper began to be laid out upon our humble lodging-house mahogany. There were a couple of brace of cold woodcock, a pheasant, a pâté
de foie gras pie with a group of ancient and cobwebby bottles. Having laid out all these luxuries, my two visitors vanished away, like the genii of the Arabian Nights, with no explanation save that the things had been paid for and were ordered to this address.

Just before nine o'clock Sherlock Holmes stepped briskly into the room. His features were gravely set, but there was a light in his eye which made me think that he had not been disappointed in his conclusions.

"They have laid the supper, then," he said, rubbing his hands.
"You seem to expect company. They have laid for five."
"Yes, I fancy we may have some company dropping in," said he. "I am surprised that Lord St. Simon has not already arrived. Ha! fancy that I hear his step now upon the stairs."

It was indeed our visitor of the afternoon who came bustling in, dangling his glasses more vigorously than ever, and with a very perturbed expression upon his aristocratic features.

"My messenger reached you, then?" asked Holmes.
"Yes, and I confess that the contents startled me beyond measure. Have you good authority for what you say?"
"The best possible."

Lord St. Simon sank into a chair and passed his hand over his forehead.

"What will the Duke say," he murmured, "when he hears that one of the family has been subjected to such humiliation?"

"It is the purest accident. I cannot allow that there is any humiliation."
"Ah, you look on these things from another standpoint."

"I fail to see that anyone is to blame. I can hardly see how the lady could have acted otherwise, though her abrupt method of doing it was undoubtedly to be regretted. Having no mother, she had no one to advise her at such a crisis."

"It was a slight, sir, a public slight," said Lord St. Simon, tapping his fingers upon the table.
"You must make allowance for this poor girl, placed in so unprecedented a position."
"I will make no allowance. I am very angry indeed, and I have been shamefully used."

"I think that I heard a ring," said Holmes. "Yes, there are steps on the landing. If I cannot persuade you to take a lenient view of the matter, Lord St. Simon, I have brought an advocate here who may be more successful." He opened the door and ushered in a lady and gentleman. "Lord St. Simon," said he "allow me to introduce you to Mr. and Mrs. Francis Hay Moulton. The lady, I think, you have already met."

At the sight of these newcomers our client had sprung from his seat and stood very erect, with his eyes cast down and his hand thrust into the breast of his frock-coat, a picture of offended dignity. The lady had taken a quick step forward and had held out her hand to him, but he still refused to raise his eyes. It was as well for his resolution, perhaps, for her pleading face was one which it was hard to resist.

"You're angry, Robert," said she. "Well, I guess you have every cause to be."
"Pray make no apology to me," said Lord St. Simon bitterly.

"Oh, yes, I know that I have treated you real bad and that I should have spoken to you before I went; but I was kind of rattled, and from the time when I saw Frank here again I just didn't know what I was doing or saying. I only wonder I didn't fall down and do a faint right there before the altar."

"Perhaps, Mrs. Moulton, you would like my friend and me to leave the room while you explain this matter?"
"If I may give an opinion," remarked the strange gentleman, "we've had just a little too much secrecy over this business already. For my part, I should like all Europe and America to hear the rights of it." He was a small, wiry, sunburnt man, clean-shaven, with a sharp face and alert manner.

"Then I'll tell our story right away," said the lady. "Frank here and I met in '84, in McQuire's camp, near the Rockies, where pa was working a claim. We were engaged to each other, Frank and I; but then one day father struck a rich pocket and made a pile, while poor Frank here had a claim that petered out and came to nothing. The richer pa grew the poorer was Frank; so at last pa wouldn't hear of our engagement lasting any longer, and he took me away to 'Frisco. Frank wouldn't throw up his hand, though; so he followed me there, and he saw me without pa knowing anything about it. It would only have made him mad to know, so we just fixed it all up for ourselves. Frank said that he would go and make his pile, too, and never come back to claim me until he had as much as pa. So then I promised to wait for him to the end of time and pledged myself not to marry anyone else while he lived. "Why shouldn't we be married right away, then,' said he, 'and then I will feel sure of you; and I won't claim to be your husband until I come back?' Well, we talked it over, and he had fixed it all up so nicely, with a clergyman all ready in waiting, that we just did it right there; and then Frank went off to seek his fortune, and I went back to pa.

"The next I heard of Frank was that he was in Montana, and then he went prospecting in Arizona, and then I heard of him from New Mexico. After that came a long newspaper story about how a miners' camp had been attacked by Apache Indians, and there was my Frank's name among the killed. I fainted dead away, and I was very
sick for months after. Pa thought I had a decline and took me to half the doctors in 'Frisco. Not a word of news came for a year and more, so that I never doubted that Frank was really dead. Then Lord St. Simon came to 'Frisco, and we came to London, and a marriage was arranged, and pa was very pleased, but I felt all the time that no man on this earth would ever take the place in my heart that had been given to my poor Frank.

"Still, if I had married Lord St. Simon, of course I'd have done my duty by him. We can't command our love, but we can our actions. I went to the altar with him with the intention to make him just as good a wife as it was in me to be. But you may imagine what I felt when, just as I came to the altar rails, I glanced back and saw Frank standing and looking at me out of the first pew. I thought it was his ghost at first; but when I looked again there he was still, with a kind of question in his eyes, as if to ask me whether I was glad or sorry to see him. I wonder I didn't drop. I know that everything was turning round, and the words of the clergyman were just like the buzz of a bee in my ear. I didn't know what to do. Should I stop the service and make a scene in the church? I glanced at him again, and he seemed to know what I was thinking, for he raised his finger to his lips to tell me to be still. Then I saw him scribble on a piece of paper, and I knew that he was writing me a note. As I passed his pew on the way out I dropped my bouquet over to him, and he slipped the note into my hand when he returned me the flowers. It was only a line asking me to join him when he made the sign to me to do so. Of course I never doubted for a moment that my first duty was now to him, and I determined to do just whatever he might direct.

"When I got back I told my maid, who had known him in California, and had always been his friend. I ordered her to say nothing, but to get a few things packed and my ulster ready. I know I ought to have spoken to Lord St. Simon, but it was dreadful hard before his mother and all those great people. I just made up my mind to run away and explain afterwards. I hadn't been at the table ten minutes before I saw Frank out of the window at the other side of the road. He beckoned to me and then began walking into the Park. I slipped out, put on my things, and followed him. Some woman came talking something or other about Lord St. Simon to me--seemed to me from the little I heard as if he had a little secret of his own before marriage also--but I managed to get away from her and soon overtook Frank. We got into a cab together, and away we drove to some lodgings he had taken in Gordon Square, and that was my true wedding after all those years of waiting. Frank had been a prisoner among the Apaches, had escaped, came on to 'Frisco, found that I had given him up for dead and had gone to England, followed me there, and had come upon me at last on the very morning of my second wedding."

"I saw it in a paper," explained the American. "It gave the name and the church but not where the lady lived."

"Then we had a talk as to what we should do, and Frank was all for openness, but I was so ashamed of it all that I felt as if I should like to vanish away and never see any of them again--just sending a line to pa, perhaps, to show him that I was alive. It was awful to me to think of all those lords and ladies sitting round that breakfast-table and waiting for me to come back. So Frank took my wedding-clothes and things and made a bundle of them, so that I should not be traced, and dropped them away somewhere where no one could find them. It is likely that we should have gone on to Paris to-morrow, only that this good gentleman, Mr. Holmes, came round to us this evening, though how he found us is more than I can think, and he showed us very clearly and kindly that I was wrong and that Frank was right, and that we should be putting ourselves in the wrong if we were so secret. Then he offered to give us a chance of talking to Lord St. Simon alone, and so we came right away round to his rooms at once. Now, Robert, you have heard it all, and I am very sorry if I have given you pain, and I hope that you do not think very meanly of me."

Lord St. Simon had by no means relaxed his rigid attitude, but had listened with a frowning brow and a compressed lip to this long narrative.

"Excuse me," he said, "but it is not my custom to discuss my most intimate personal affairs in this public manner."

"Then you won't forgive me? You won't shake hands before I go?"

"Oh, certainly, if it would give you any pleasure." He put out his hand and coldly grasped that which she extended to him.

"I had hoped," suggested Holmes, "that you would have joined us in a friendly supper."

"I think that there you ask a little too much," responded his Lordship. "I may be forced to acquiesce in these recent developments, but I can hardly be expected to make merry over them. I think that with your permission I will now wish you all a very good-night." He included us all in a sweeping bow and stalked out of the room.

"Then I trust that you at least will honour me with your company," said Sherlock Holmes. "It is always a joy to meet an American, Mr. Moulton, for I am one of those who believe that the folly of a monarch and the blundering of a minister in far-gone years will not prevent our children from being some day citizens of the same world-wide country under a flag which shall be a quartering of the Union Jack with the Stars and Stripes."

"The case has been an interesting one," remarked Holmes when our visitors had left us, "because it serves to show very clearly how simple the explanation may be of an affair which at first sight seems to be almost inexplicable. Nothing could be more natural than the sequence of events as narrated by this lady, and nothing
"You were not yourself at fault at all, then?"

"From the first, two facts were very obvious to me, the one that the lady had been quite willing to undergo the wedding ceremony, the other that she had repented of it within a few minutes of returning home. Obviously something had occurred during the morning, then, to cause her to change her mind. What could that something be? She could not have spoken to anyone when she was out, for she had been in the company of the bridegroom. Had she seen someone, then? If she had, it must be someone from America because she had spent so short a time in this country that she could hardly have allowed anyone to acquire so deep an influence over her that the mere sight of him would induce her to change her plans so completely. You see we have already arrived, by a process of exclusion, at the idea that she might have seen an American. Then who could this American be, and why should he possess so much influence over her? It might be a lover; it might be a husband. Her young womanhood had, I knew, been spent in rough scenes and under strange conditions. So far I had got before I ever heard Lord St. Simon's narrative. When he told us of a man in a pew, of the change in the bride's manner, of so transparent a device for obtaining a note as the dropping of a bouquet, of her resort to her confidential maid, and of her very significant allusion to claim-jumping—which in miners' parlance means taking possession of that which another person has a prior claim to—the whole situation became absolutely clear. She had gone off with a man, and the man was either a lover or was a previous husband—the chances being in favour of the latter."

"And how in the world did you find them?"

"It might have been difficult, but friend Lestrade held information in his hands the value of which he did not himself know. The initials were, of course, of the highest importance, but more valuable still was it to know that within a week he had settled his bill at one of the most select London hotels."

"How did you deduce the select?"

"By the select prices. Eight shillings for a bed and eightpence for a glass of sherry pointed to one of the most expensive hotels. There are not many in London which charge at that rate. In the second one which I visited in Northumberland Avenue, I learned by an inspection of the book that Francis H. Moulton, an American gentleman, had left only the day before, and on looking over the entries against him, I came upon the very items which I had seen in the duplicate bill. His letters were to be forwarded to 226 Gordon Square; so thither I travelled, and being fortunate enough to find the loving couple at home, I ventured to give them some paternal advice and to point out to them that it would be better in every way that they should make their position a little clearer both to the general public and to Lord St. Simon in particular. I invited them to meet him here, and, as you see, I made him keep the appointment."

"But with no very good result," I remarked. "His conduct was certainly not very gracious."

"Ah, Watson," said Holmes, smiling, "perhaps you would not be very gracious either, if, after all the trouble of wooing and wedding, you found yourself deprived in an instant of wife and of fortune. I think that we may judge Lord St. Simon very mercifully and thank our stars that we are never likely to find ourselves in the same position. Draw your chair up and hand me my violin, for the only problem we have still to solve is how to while away these bleak autumnal evenings."
"Yes; I rather think he is coming to consult me professionally. I think that I recognise the symptoms. Ha! did I not tell you?" As he spoke, the man, puffing and blowing, rushed at our door and pulled at our bell until the whole house resounded with the clanging.

A few moments later he was in our room, still puffing, still gesticulating, but with so fixed a look of grief and despair in his eyes that our smiles were turned in an instant to horror and pity. For a while he could not get his words out, but swayed his body and plucked at his hair like one who has been driven to the extreme limits of his reason. Then, suddenly springing to his feet, he beat his head against the wall with such force that we both rushed upon him and tore him away to the centre of the room. Sherlock Holmes pushed him down into the easy-chair and, sitting beside him, patted his hand and chatted with him in the easy, soothing tones which he knew so well how to employ.

"You have come to me to tell your story, have you not?" said he. "You are fatigued with your haste. Pray wait until you have recovered yourself, and then I shall be most happy to look into any little problem which you may submit to me."

The man sat for a minute or more with a heaving chest, fighting against his emotion. Then he passed his handkerchief over his brow, set his lips tight, and turned his face towards us.

"No doubt you think me mad?" said he.

"I see that you have had some great trouble," responded Holmes.

"God knows I have!--a trouble which is enough to unseat my reason, so sudden and so terrible is it. Public disgrace I might have faced, although I am a man whose character has never yet borne a stain. Private affliction also is the lot of every man; but the two coming together, and in so frightful a form, have been enough to shake my very soul. Besides, it is not I alone. The very noblest in the land may suffer unless some way be found out of this horrible affair."

"Pray compose yourself, sir," said Holmes, "and let me have a clear account of who you are and what it is that has befallen you."

"My name," answered our visitor, "is probably familiar to your ears. I am Alexander Holder, of the banking firm of Holder & Stevenson, of Threadneedle Street."

The name was indeed well known to us as belonging to the senior partner in the second largest private banking concern in the City of London. What could have happened, then, to bring one of the foremost citizens of London to this most pitiable pass? We waited, all curiosity, until with another effort he braced himself to tell his story.

"It is, of course, well known to you that in a successful banking business as much depends upon our being able to find remunerative investments for our funds as upon our increasing our connection and the number of our depositors. One of our most lucrative means of laying out money is in the shape of loans, where the security is unimpeachable. We have done a good deal in this direction during the last few years, and there are many noble families to whom we have advanced large sums upon the security of their pictures, libraries, or plate.

"Yesterday morning I was seated in my office at the bank when a card was brought in to me by one of the clerks. I started when I saw the name, for it was that of none other than--well, perhaps even to you I had better say no more than that it was a name which is a household word all over the earth--one of the highest, noblest, most exalted names in England. I was overwhelmed by the honour and attempted, when he entered, to say so, but he plunged at once into business with the air of a man who wishes to hurry quickly through a disagreeable task.

"Mr. Holder,' said he, 'I have been informed that you are in the habit of advancing money.'

"The firm does so when the security is good.' I answered.

"It is absolutely essential to me,' said he, 'that I should have 50,000 pounds at once. I could, of course, borrow so trifling a sum ten times over from my friends, but I much prefer to make it a matter of business and to carry out that business myself. In my position you can readily understand that it is unwise to place one's self under obligations.'

"For how long, may I ask, do you want this sum?" I asked.

"Next Monday I have a large sum due to me, and I shall then most certainly repay what you advance, with whatever interest you think it right to charge. But it is very essential to me that the money should be paid at once.

"I should be happy to advance it without further parley from my own private purse,' said I, 'were it not that the strain would be rather more than it could bear. If, on the other hand, I am to do it in the name of the firm, then in justice to my partner I must insist that, even in your case, every businesslike precaution should be taken.'

"I should much prefer to have it so,' said he, raising up a square, black morocco case which he had laid beside his chair. 'You have doubtless heard of the Beryl Coronet?"

"One of the most precious public possessions of the empire,' said I.
'Precisely.' He opened the case, and there, imbedded in soft, flesh-coloured velvet, lay the magnificent piece of jewellery which he had named. 'There are thirty-nine enormous beryls,' said he, 'and the price of the gold chasing is incalculable. The lowest estimate would put the worth of the coronet at double the sum which I have asked. I am prepared to leave it with you as my security.'

'I took the precious case into my hands and looked in some perplexity from it to my illustrious client. '

'You doubt its value?' he asked.

'Not at all. I only doubt--'

'The propriety of my leaving it. You may set your mind at rest about that. I should not dream of doing so were it not absolutely certain that I should be able in four days to reclaim it. It is a pure matter of form. Is the security sufficient?'

'Ample.'

'You understand, Mr. Holder, that I am giving you a strong proof of the confidence which I have in you, founded upon all that I have heard of you. I rely upon you not only to be discreet and to refrain from all gossip upon the matter but, above all, to preserve this coronet with every possible precaution because I need not say that a great public scandal would be caused if any harm were to befall it. Any injury to it would be almost as serious as its complete loss, for there are no beryls in the world to match these, and it would be impossible to replace them. I leave it with you, however, with every confidence, and I shall call for it in person on Monday morning.'

'Seeing that my client was anxious to leave, I said no more but, calling for my cashier, I ordered him to pay over fifty 1000 pound notes. When I was alone once more, however, with the precious case lying upon the table in front of me, I could not but think with some misgivings of the immense responsibility which it entailed upon me. There could be no doubt that, as it was a national possession, a horrible scandal would ensue if any misfortune should occur to it. I already regretted having ever consented to take charge of it. However, it was too late to alter the matter now, so I locked it up in my private safe and turned once more to my work.

'And now a word as to my household, Mr. Holmes, for I wish you to thoroughly understand the situation. My groom and my page sleep out of the house, and may be set aside altogether. I have three maid-servants who have been with me a number of years and whose absolute reliability is quite above suspicion. Another, Lucy Parr, the second waiting-maid, has only been in my service a few months. She came with an excellent character, however, and has always given me satisfaction. She is a very pretty girl and has attracted admirers who have occasionally hung about the place. That is the only drawback which we have found to her, but we believe her to be a thoroughly good girl in every way.

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'So much for the servants. My family itself is so small that it will not take me long to describe it. I am a widower and have an only son, Arthur. He has been a disappointment to me, Mr. Holmes—a grievous disappointment. I have no doubt that I am myself to blame. People tell me that I have spoiled him. Very likely I have. When my dear wife died I felt that he was all I had to love. I could not bear to see the smile fade even for a moment from his face. I have never denied him a wish. Perhaps it would have been better for both of us had I been sterner, but I meant it for the best.

'It was naturally my intention that he should succeed me in my business, but he was not of a business turn. He was wild, wayward, and, to speak the truth, I could not trust him in the handling of large sums of money. When he was young he became a member of an aristocratic club, and there, having charming manners, he was soon the intimate of a number of men with long purses and expensive habits. He learned to play heavily at cards and to squander money on the turf, until he had again and again to come to me and implore me to give him an advance upon his allowance, that he might settle his debts of honour. He tried more than once to break away from the dangerous company which he was keeping, but each time the influence of his friend, Sir George Burnwell, was enough to draw him back again.

'And, indeed, I could not wonder that such a man as Sir George Burnwell should gain an influence over him, for he has frequently brought him to my house, and I have found myself that I could hardly resist the fascination of his manner. He is older than Arthur, a man of the world to his finger-tips, one who had been everywhere, seen everything, a brilliant talker, and a man of great personal beauty. Yet when I think of him in cold blood, far away from the glamour of his presence, I am convinced from his cynical speech and the look which I have caught in his eyes that he is one who should be deeply distrusted. So I think, and so, too, thinks my little Mary, who has a
a woman's quick insight into character.

"And now there is only she to be described. She is my niece; but when my brother died five years ago and left her alone in the world I adopted her, and have looked upon her ever since as my daughter. She is a sunbeam in my house—sweet, loving, beautiful, a wonderful manager and housekeeper, yet as tender and quiet and gentle as a woman could be. She is my right hand. I do not know what I could do without her. In only one matter has she ever gone against my wishes. Twice my boy has asked her to marry him, for he loves her devotedly, but each time she has refused him. I think that if anyone could have drawn him into the right path it would have been she, and that his marriage might have changed his whole life; but now, alas! it is too late—forever too late!

"Now, Mr. Holmes, you know the people who live under my roof, and I shall continue with my miserable story.

"When we were taking coffee in the drawing-room that night after dinner, I told Arthur and Mary my experience, and of the precious treasure which we had under our roof, suppressing only the name of my client. Lucy Parr, who had brought in the coffee, had, I am sure, left the room; but I cannot swear that the door was closed. Mary and Arthur were much interested and wished to see the famous coronet, but I thought it better not to disturb it.

"Where have you put it?" asked Arthur.

"In my own bureau."

"Well, I hope to goodness the house won't be burgled during the night." said he.

"It is locked up," I answered.

"Oh, any old key will fit that bureau. When I was a youngster I have opened it myself with the key of the box-room cupboard."

"He often had a wild way of talking, so that I thought little of what he said. He followed me to my room, however, that night with a very grave face.

"'Look here, dad,' said he with his eyes cast down, 'can you let me have 200 pounds?'

"'No, I cannot!' I answered sharply. 'I have been far too generous with you in money matters.'

"'You have been very kind,' said he, 'but I must have this money, or else I can never show my face inside the club again.'

"And a very good thing, too!' I cried.

"'Yes, but you would not have me leave it a dishonoured man,' said he. 'I could not bear the disgrace. I must raise the money in some way, and if you will not let me have it, then I must try other means.'

"I was very angry, for this was the third demand during the month. 'You shall not have a farthing from me,' I cried, on which he bowed and left the room without another word.

"When he was gone I unlocked my bureau, made sure that my treasure was safe, and locked it again. Then I started to go round the house to see that all was secure—a duty which I usually leave to Mary but which I thought it well to perform myself that night. As I came down the stairs I saw Mary herself at the side window of the hall, which she closed and fastened as I approached.

"Tell me, dad,' said she, looking, I thought, a little disturbed, 'did you give Lucy, the maid, leave to go out tonight?'

"Certainly not.'

"She came in just now by the back door. I have no doubt that she has only been to the side gate to see someone, but I think that it is hardly safe and should be stopped.'

"'You must speak to her in the morning, or I will if you prefer it. Are you sure that everything is fastened?'

"'Quite sure, dad.'

"Then, good-night.' I kissed her and went up to my bedroom again, where I was soon asleep.

"I am endeavouring to tell you everything, Mr. Holmes, which may have any bearing upon the case, but I beg that you will question me upon any point which I do not make clear."

"On the contrary, your statement is singularly lucid."

"I come to a part of my story now in which I should wish to be particularly so. I am not a very heavy sleeper, and the anxiety in my mind tended, no doubt, to make me even less so than usual. About two in the morning, then, I was awakened by some sound in the house. It had ceased ere I was wide awake, but it had left an impression behind it as though a window had gently closed somewhere. I lay listening with all my ears. Suddenly, to my horror, there was a distinct sound of footsteps moving softly in the next room. I slipped out of bed, all palpitating with fear, and peeped round the corner of my dressing-room door.

"Arthur! I screamed, 'you villain! you thief! How dare you touch that coronet?'

"The gas was half up, as I had left it, and my unhappy boy, dressed only in his shirt and trousers, was standing beside the light, holding the coronet in his hands. He appeared to be wrenching at it, or bending it with all his strength. At my cry he dropped it from his grasp and turned as pale as death. I snatched it up and examined it. One of the gold corners, with three of the beryls in it, was missing.
"'You blackguard!' I shouted, beside myself with rage. 'You have destroyed it! You have dishonoured me forever! Where are the jewels which you have stolen?'

"'Stolen!' he cried.

"'Yes, thief!' I roared, shaking him by the shoulder.

"'There are none missing. There cannot be any missing,' said he.

"'There are three missing. And you know where they are. Must I call you a liar as well as a thief? Did I not see you trying to tear off another piece?'

"'You have called me names enough,' said he, 'I will not stand it any longer. I shall not say another word about this business, since you have chosen to insult me. I will leave your house in the morning and make my own way in the world.'

"'You shall leave it in the hands of the police!' I cried half-mad with grief and rage. 'I shall have this matter probed to the bottom.'

"'You shall learn nothing from me,' said he with a passion such as I should not have thought was in his nature. 'If you choose to call the police, let the police find what they can.'

By this time the whole house was astir, for I had raised my voice in my anger. Mary was the first to rush into my room, and, at the sight of the coronet and of Arthur's face, she read the whole story and, with a scream, fell down senseless on the ground. I sent the house-maid for the police and put the investigation into their hands at once. When the inspector and a constable entered the house, Arthur, who had stood sullenly with his arms folded, asked me whether it was my intention to charge him with theft. I answered that it had ceased to be a private matter, but had become a public one, since the ruined coronet was national property. I was determined that the law should have its way in everything.

"'At least,' said he, 'you will not have me arrested at once. It would be to your advantage as well as mine if I might leave the house for five minutes.'

"'That you may get away, or perhaps that you may conceal what you have stolen,' said I. And then, realising the dreadful position in which I was placed, I implored him to remember that not only my honour but that of one who was far greater than I was at stake; and that he threatened to raise a scandal which would convulse the nation. He might avert it all if he would but tell me what he had done with the three missing stones.

"'You may as well face the matter,' said I; 'you have been caught in the act, and no confession could make your guilt more heinous. If you but make such reparation as is in your power, by telling us where the beryls are, all shall be forgiven and forgotten.'

"'Keep your forgiveness for those who ask for it,' he answered, turning away from me with a sneer. I saw that he was too hardened for any words of mine to influence him. There was but one way for it. I called in the inspector and gave him into custody. A search was made at once not only of his person but of his room and of every portion of the house where he could possibly have concealed the gems; but no trace of them could be found, nor would the wretched boy open his mouth for all our persuasions and our threats. This morning he was removed to a cell, and I, after going through all the police formalities, have hurried round to you to implore you to use your skill in unravelling the matter. The police have openly confessed that they can at present make nothing of it. You may go to any expense which you think necessary. I have already offered a reward of 1000 pounds. My God, what shall I do! I have lost my honour, my gems, and my son in one night. Oh, what shall I do!"

He put a hand on either side of his head and rocked himself to and fro, droning to himself like a child whose grief has got beyond words.

Sherlock Holmes sat silent for some few minutes, with his brows knitted and his eyes fixed upon the fire.

"Do you receive much company?" he asked.

"None save my partner with his family and an occasional friend of Arthur's. Sir George Burnwell has been several times lately. No one else, I think."

"Do you go out much in society?"

"Arthur does. Mary and I stay at home. We neither of us care for it."

"That is unusual in a young girl."

"She is of a quiet nature. Besides, she is not so very young. She is four-and-twenty."

"This matter, from what you say, seems to have been a shock to her also."

"Terrible! She is even more affected than I."

"You have neither of you any doubt as to your son's guilt?"

"How can we have when I saw him with my own eyes with the coronet in his hands."

"I hardly consider that a conclusive proof. Was the remainder of the coronet at all injured?"

"Yes, it was twisted."

"Do you not think, then, that he might have been trying to straighten it?"
"God bless you! You are doing what you can for him and for me. But it is too heavy a task. What was he doing there at all? If his purpose were innocent, why did he not say so?"

"Precisely. And if it were guilty, why did he not invent a lie? His silence appears to me to cut both ways. There are several singular points about the case. What did the police think of the noise which awoke you from your sleep?"

"They considered that it might be caused by Arthur's closing his bedroom door."

"A likely story! As if a man bent on felony would slam his door so as to wake a household. What did they say, then, of the disappearance of these gems?"

"They are still sounding the planking and probing the furniture in the hope of finding them."

"Have they thought of looking outside the house?"

"Yes, they have shown extraordinary energy. The whole garden has already been minutely examined."

"Now, my dear sir," said Holmes, "is it not obvious to you now that this matter really strikes very much deeper than either you or the police were at first inclined to think? It appeared to you to be a simple case; to me it seems exceedingly complex. Consider what is involved by your theory. You suppose that your son came down from his bed, went, at great risk, to your dressing-room, opened your bureau, took out your coronet, broke off by main force a small portion of it, went off to some other place, concealed three gems out of the thirty-nine, with such skill that nobody can find them, and then returned with the other thirty-six into the room in which he exposed himself to the greatest danger of being discovered. I ask you now, is such a theory tenable?"

"But what other is there?" cried the banker with a gesture of despair. "If his motives were innocent, why does he not explain them?"

"It is our task to find that out," replied Holmes; "so now, if you please, Mr. Holder, we will set off for Streatham together, and devote an hour to glancing a little more closely into details."

My friend insisted upon my accompanying them in their expedition, which I was eager enough to do, for my curiosity and sympathy were deeply stirred by the story to which we had listened. I confess that the guilt of the banker's son appeared to me to be as obvious as it did to his unhappy father, but still I had such faith in Holmes' judgment that I felt that there must be some grounds for hope as long as he was dissatisfied with the accepted explanation. He hardly spoke a word the whole way out to the southern suburb, but sat with his chin upon his breast and his hat drawn over his eyes, sunk in the deepest thought. Our client appeared to have taken fresh heart at the little glimpse of hope which had been presented to him, and he even broke into a desultory chat with me over his business affairs. A short railway journey and a shorter walk brought us to Fairbank, the modest residence of the great financier.

Fairbank was a good-sized square house of white stone, standing back a little from the road. A double carriage-sweep, with a snow-clad lawn, stretched down in front to two large iron gates which closed the entrance. On the right side was a small wooden thicket, which led into a narrow path between two neat hedges stretching from the road to the kitchen door, and forming the tradesmen's entrance. On the left ran a lane which led to the stables, and was not itself within the grounds at all, being a public, though little used, thoroughfare. Holmes left us standing at the door and walked slowly all round the house, across the front, down the tradesmen's path, and so round by the garden behind into the stable lane. So long was he that Mr. Holder and I went into the dining-room and waited by the fire until he should return. We were sitting there in silence when the door opened and a young lady came in. She was rather above the middle height, slim, with dark hair and eyes, which seemed the darker against the absolute pallor of her skin. I do not think that I have ever seen such deadly paleness in a woman's face. Her lips, too, were bloodless, but her eyes were flushed with crying. As she swept silently into the room she impressed me with a greater sense of grief than the banker had done in the morning, and it was the more striking in her as she was evidently a woman of strong character, with immense capacity for self-restraint. Disregarding my presence, she went straight to her uncle and passed her hand over his head with a sweet womanly caress.

"You have given orders that Arthur should be liberated, have you not, dad?" she asked.

"No, no, my girl, the matter must be probed to the bottom."

"But I am so sure that he is innocent. You know what woman's instincts are. I know that he has done no harm and that you will be sorry for having acted so harshly."

"Why is he silent, then, if he is innocent?"

"Who knows? Perhaps because he was so angry that you should suspect him."

"How could I help suspecting him, when I actually saw him with the coronet in his hand?"

"Oh, but he had only picked it up to look at it. Oh, do, do take my word for it that he is innocent. Let the matter drop and say no more. It is so dreadful to think of our dear Arthur in prison!"

"I shall never let it drop until the gems are found--never, Mary! Your affection for Arthur blinds you as to the awful consequences to me. Far from hushing the thing up, I have brought a gentleman down from London to inquire more deeply into it."
"This gentleman?" she asked, facing round to me.
"No, his friend. He wished us to leave him alone. He is round in the stable lane now."
"The stable lane?" She raised her dark eyebrows. "What can he hope to find there? Ah! this, I suppose, is he. I trust, sir, that you will succeed in proving, what I feel sure is the truth, that my cousin Arthur is innocent of this crime."
"I fully share your opinion, and I trust, with you, that we may prove it," returned Holmes, going back to the mat to knock the snow from his shoes. "I believe I have the honour of addressing Miss Mary Holder. Might I ask you a question or two?"
"Pray do, sir, if it may help to clear this horrible affair up."
"You heard nothing yourself last night?"
"Nothing, until my uncle here began to speak loudly. I heard that, and I came down."
"You shut up the windows and doors the night before. Did you fasten all the windows?"
"Yes."
"Were they all fastened this morning?"
"Yes."
"You have a maid who has a sweetheart? I think that you remarked to your uncle last night that she had been out to see him?"
"Yes, and she was the girl who waited in the drawing-room, and who may have heard uncle's remarks about the coronet."
"I see. You infer that she may have gone out to tell her sweetheart, and that the two may have planned the robbery."
"But what is the good of all these vague theories," cried the banker impatiently, "when I have told you that I saw Arthur with the coronet in his hands?"
"Wait a little, Mr. Holder. We must come back to that. About this girl, Miss Holder. You saw her return by the kitchen door, I presume?"
"Yes; when I went to see if the door was fastened for the night I met her slipping in. I saw the man, too, in the gloom."
"Do you know him?"
"Oh, yes! he is the green-grocer who brings our vegetables round. His name is Francis Prosper."
"He stood," said Holmes, "to the left of the door--that is to say, farther up the path than is necessary to reach the door?"
"Yes, he did."
"And he is a man with a wooden leg?"
Something like fear sprang up in the young lady's expressive black eyes. "Why, you are like a magician," said she. "How do you know that?" She smiled, but there was no answering smile in Holmes' thin, eager face.
"I should be very glad now to go upstairs," said he. "I shall probably wish to go over the outside of the house again. Perhaps I had better take a look at the lower windows before I go up."
He walked swiftly round from one to the other, pausing only at the large one which looked from the hall onto the stable lane. This he opened and made a very careful examination of the sill with his powerful magnifying lens. "Now we shall go upstairs," said he at last.
The banker's dressing-room was a plainly furnished little chamber, with a grey carpet, a large bureau, and a long mirror. Holmes went to the bureau first and looked hard at the lock.
"Which key was used to open it?" he asked.
"That which my son himself indicated--that of the cupboard of the lumber-room."
"Have you it here?"
"That is it on the dressing-table."
Sherlock Holmes took it up and opened the bureau.
"It is a noiseless lock," said he. "It is no wonder that it did not wake you. This case, I presume, contains the coronet. We must have a look at it." He opened the case, and taking out the diadem he laid it upon the table. It was a magnificent specimen of the jeweller's art, and the thirty-six stones were the finest that I have ever seen. At one side of the coronet was a cracked edge, where a corner holding three gems had been torn away.
"Now, Mr. Holder," said Holmes, "here is the corner which corresponds to that which has been so unfortunately lost. Might I beg that you will break it off."
The banker recoiled in horror. "I should not dream of trying," said he.
"Then I will." Holmes suddenly bent his strength upon it, but without result. "I feel it give a little," said he; "but, though I am exceptionally strong in the fingers, it would take me all my time to break it. An ordinary man could not
do it. Now, what do you think would happen if I did break it, Mr. Holder? There would be a noise like a pistol shot.

"I do not know what to think. It is all dark to me."

"But perhaps it may grow lighter as we go. What do you think, Miss Holder?"

"I confess that I still share my uncle's perplexity."

"Your son had no shoes or slippers on when you saw him?"

"He had nothing on save only his trousers and shirt."

"Thank you. We have certainly been favoured with extraordinary luck during this inquiry, and it will be entirely our own fault if we do not succeed in clearing the matter up. With your permission, Mr. Holder, I shall now continue my investigations outside."

He went alone, at his own request, for he explained that any unnecessary footmarks might make his task more difficult. For an hour or more he was at work, returning at last with his feet heavy with snow and his features as inscrutable as ever.

"I think that I have seen now all that there is to see, Mr. Holder," said he; "I can serve you best by returning to my rooms."

"But the gems, Mr. Holmes. Where are they?"

"I cannot tell."

The banker wrung his hands. "I shall never see them again!" he cried. "And my son? You give me hopes?"

"My opinion is in no way altered."

"Then, for God's sake, what was this dark business which was acted in my house last night?"

"If you can call upon me at my Baker Street rooms to-morrow morning between nine and ten I shall be happy to do what I can to make it clearer. I understand that you give me carte blanche to act for you, provided only that I get back the gems, and that you place no limit on the sum I may draw."

"I would give my fortune to have them back."

"Very good. I shall look into the matter between this and then. Good-bye; it is just possible that I may have to come over here again before evening."

It was obvious to me that my companion's mind was now made up about the case, although what his conclusions were was more than I could even dimly imagine. Several times during our homeward journey I endeavoured to sound him upon the point, but he always glided away to some other topic, until at last I gave it over in despair. It was not yet three when we found ourselves in our rooms once more. He hurried to his chamber and was down again in a few minutes dressed as a common loafer. With his collar turned up, his shiny, seedy coat, his red cravat, and his worn boots, he was a perfect sample of the class.

"I think that this should do," said he, glancing into the glass above the fireplace. "I only wish that you could come with me, Watson, but I fear that it won't do. I may be on the trail in this matter, or I may be following a will-o'-the-wisp, but I shall soon know which it is. I hope that I may be back in a few hours."

He cut a slice of beef from the joint upon the sideboard, sandwiched it between two rounds of bread, and thrusting this rude meal into his pocket he started off upon his expedition.

I had just finished my tea when he returned, evidently in excellent spirits, swinging an old elastic-sided boot in his hand. He chuckled it down into a corner and helped himself to a cup of tea.

"I only looked in as I passed," said he. "I am going right on."

"Where to?"

"Oh, to the other side of the West End. It may be some time before I get back. Don't wait up for me in case I should be late."

"How are you getting on?"

"Oh, so so. Nothing to complain of. I have been out to Streatham since I saw you last, but I did not call at the house. It is a very sweet little problem, and I would not have missed it for a good deal. However, I must not sit gossiping here, but must get these disreputable clothes off and return to my highly respectable self."

I could see by his manner that he had stronger reasons for satisfaction than his words alone would imply. His eyes twinkled, and there was even a touch of colour upon his sallow cheeks. He hastened upstairs, and a few minutes later I heard the slam of the hall door, which told me that he was off once more upon his congenial hunt.

I waited until midnight, but there was no sign of his return, so I retired to my room. It was no uncommon thing for him to be away for days and nights on end when he was hot upon a scent, so that his lateness caused me no surprise. I do not know at what hour he came in, but when I came down to breakfast in the morning there he was with a cup of coffee in one hand and the paper in the other, as fresh and trim as possible.

"You will excuse my beginning without you, Watson," said he, "but you remember that our client has rather an early appointment this morning."
"Why, it is after nine now," I answered. "I should not be surprised if that were he. I thought I heard a ring."

It was, indeed, our friend the financier. I was shocked by the change which had come over him, for his face which was naturally of a broad and massive mould, was now pinched and fallen in, while his hair seemed to me at least a shade whiter. He entered with a weariness and lethargy which was even more painful than his violence of the morning before, and he dropped heavily into the armchair which I pushed forward for him.

"I do not know what I have done to be so severely tried," said he. "Only two days ago I was a happy and prosperous man, without a care in the world. Now I am left to a lonely and dishonoured age. One sorrow comes close upon the heels of another. My niece, Mary, has deserted me."

"Deserted you?"

"Yes. Her bed this morning had not been slept in, her room was empty, and a note for me lay upon the hall table. I had said to her last night, in sorrow and not in anger, that if she had married my boy all might have been well with him. Perhaps it was thoughtless of me to say so. It is to that remark that she refers in this note:

"MY DEAREST UNCLE:--I feel that I have brought trouble upon you, and that if I had acted differently this terrible misfortune might never have occurred. I cannot, with this thought in my mind, ever again be happy under your roof, and I feel that I must leave you forever. Do not worry about my future, for that is provided for; and, above all, do not search for me, for it will be fruitless labour and an ill-service to me. In life or in death, I am ever your loving,--MARY."

"What could she mean by that note, Mr. Holmes? Do you think it points to suicide?"

"No, no, nothing of the kind. It is perhaps the best possible solution. I trust, Mr. Holder, that you are nearing the end of your troubles."

"Ha! You say so! You have heard something, Mr. Holmes; you have learned something! Where are the gems?"

"You would not think 1000 pounds apiece an excessive sum for them?"

"I would pay ten."

"That would be unnecessary. Three thousand will cover the matter. And there is a little reward, I fancy. Have you your check-book? Here is a pen. Better make it out for 4000 pounds."

With a dazed face the banker made out the required check. Holmes walked over to his desk, took out a little triangular piece of gold with three gems in it, and threw it down upon the table.

With a shriek of joy our client clutched it up.

"You have it!" he gasped. "I am saved! I am saved!"

The reaction of joy was as passionate as his grief had been, and he hugged his recovered gems to his bosom.

"There is one other thing you owe, Mr. Holder," said Sherlock Holmes rather sternly.

"Owe!" He caught up a pen. "Name the sum, and I will pay it."

"No, the debt is not to me. You owe a very humble apology to that noble lad, your son, who has carried himself in this matter as I should be proud to see my own son do, should I ever chance to have one."

"Then it was not Arthur who took them?"

"I told you yesterday, and I repeat to-day, that it was not."

"You are sure of it! Then let us hurry to him at once to let him know that the truth is known."

"He knows it already. When I had cleared it all up I had an interview with him, and finding that he would not tell me the story, I told it to him, on which he had to confess that I was right and to add the very few details which were not yet quite clear to me. Your news of this morning, however, may open his lips."

"For heaven's sake, tell me, then, what is this extraordinary mystery?"

"I will do so, and I will show you the steps by which I reached it. And let me say to you, first, that which it is hardest for me to say and for you to hear: there has been an understanding between Sir George Burnwell and your niece Mary. They have now fled together."

"My Mary? Impossible!"

"It is unfortunately more than possible; it is certain. Neither you nor your son knew the true character of this man when you admitted him into your family circle. He is one of the most dangerous men in England--a ruined gambler, an absolutely desperate villain, a man without heart or conscience. Your niece knew nothing of such men. When he breathed his vows to her, as he had done to a hundred before her, she flattered herself that she alone had touched his heart. The devil knows best what he said, but at least she became his tool and was in the habit of seeing him nearly every evening."

"I cannot, and I will not, believe it!" cried the banker with an ashen face.

"I will tell you, then, what occurred in your house last night. Your niece, when you had, as she thought, gone to your room, slipped down and talked to her lover through the window which leads into the stable lane. His footmarks had pressed right through the snow, so long had he stood there. She told him of the coronet. His wicked lust for gold kindled at the news, and he bent her to his will. I have no doubt that she loved you, but there are women in whom
the love of a lover extinguishes all other loves, and I think that she must have been one. She had hardly listened to his instructions when she saw you coming downstairs, on which she closed the window rapidly and told you about one of the servants' escapade with her wooden-legged lover, which was all perfectly true.

"Your boy, Arthur, went to bed after his interview with you but he slept badly on account of his uneasiness about his club debts. In the middle of the night he heard a soft tread pass his door, so he rose and, looking out, was surprised to see his cousin walking very stealthily along the passage until she disappeared into your dressing-room. Petrified with astonishment, the lad slipped on some clothes and waited there in the dark to see what would come of this strange affair. Presently she emerged from the room again, and in the light of the passage-lamp your son saw that she carried the precious coronet in her hands. She passed down the stairs, and he, thrilling with horror, ran along and slipped behind the curtain near your door, whence he could see what passed in the hall beneath. He saw her stealthily open the window, hand out the coronet to someone in the gloom, and then closing it once more hurry back to her room, passing quite close to where he stood hid behind the curtain.

"As long as she was on the scene he could not take any action without a horrible exposure of the woman whom he loved. But the instant that she was gone he realised how crushing a misfortune this would be for you, and how all-important it was to set it right. He rushed down, just as he was, in his bare feet, opened the window, sprang out into the snow, and ran down the lane, where he could see a dark figure in the moonlight. Sir George Burnwell tried to get away, but Arthur caught him, and there was a struggle between them, your lad tugging at one side of the coronet, and his opponent at the other. In the scuffle, your son struck Sir George and cut him over the eye. Then something suddenly snapped, and your son, finding that he had the coronet in his hands, rushed back, closed the window, ascended to your room, and had just observed that the coronet had been twisted in the struggle and was endeavouring to straighten it when you appeared upon the scene."

"Is it possible?" gasped the banker.

"You then roused his anger by calling him names at a moment when he felt that he had deserved your warmest thanks. He could not explain the true state of affairs without betraying one who certainly deserved little enough consideration at his hands. He took the more chivalrous view, however, and preserved her secret."

"And that was why she shrieked and fainted when she saw the coronet," cried Mr. Holder. "Oh, my God! what a blind fool I have been! And his asking to be allowed to go out for five minutes! The dear fellow wanted to see if the missing piece were at the scene of the struggle. How cruelly I have misjudged him!"

"When I arrived at the house," continued Holmes, "I at once went very carefully round it to observe if there were any traces in the snow which might help me. I knew that none had fallen since the evening before, and also that there had been a strong frost to preserve impressions. I passed along the tradesmen's path, but found it all trampled down and indistinguishable. Just beyond it, however, at the far side of the kitchen door, a woman had stood and talked with a man, whose round impressions on one side showed that he had a wooden leg. I could even tell that they had been disturbed, for the woman had run back swiftly to the door, as was shown by the deep toe and light heel marks, while Wooden-leg had waited a little, and then had gone away. I thought at the time that this might be the maid and her sweetheart, of whom you had already spoken to me, and inquiry showed it was so. I passed round the garden without seeing anything more than random tracks, which I took to be the police; but when I got into the stable lane a very long and complex story was written in the snow in front of me.

"There was a double line of tracks of a booted man, and a second double line which I saw with delight belonged to a man with naked feet. I was at once convinced from what you had told me that the latter was your son. The first had walked both ways, but the other had run swiftly, and as his tread was marked in places over the depression of the boot, it was obvious that he had passed after the other. I followed them up and found they led to the hall window, where Boots had worn all the snow away while waiting. Then I walked to the other end, which was a hundred yards or more down the lane. I saw where Boots had faced round, where the snow was cut up as though there had been a struggle, and, finally, where a few drops of blood had fallen, to show me that I was not mistaken. Boots had then run down the lane, and another little smudge of blood showed that it was he who had been hurt. When he came to the highroad at the other end, I found that the pavement had been cleared, so there was an end to that clue.

"On entering the house, however, I examined, as you remember, the sill and framework of the hall window with my lens, and I could at once see that someone had passed out. I could distinguish the outline of an instep where the wet foot had been placed in coming in. I was then beginning to be able to form an opinion as to what had occurred. A man had waited outside the window; someone had brought the gems; the deed had been overseen by your son; he had pursued the thief; had struggled with him; they had each tugged at the coronet, their united strength causing injuries which neither alone could have effected. He had returned with the prize, but had left a fragment in the grasp of his opponent. So far I was clear. The question now was, who was the man and who was it brought him the coronet?

"It is an old maxim of mine that when you have excluded the impossible, whatever remains, however
improbable, must be the truth. Now, I knew that it was not you who had brought it down, so there only remained your niece and the maids. But if it were the maids, why should your son allow himself to be accused in their place? There could be no possible reason. As he loved his cousin, however, there was an excellent explanation why he should retain her secret--the more so as the secret was a disgraceful one. When I remembered that you had seen her at that window, and how she had hinted on seeing the coronet again, my conjecture became a certainty.

"And who could it be who was her confederate? A lover evidently, for who else could outweigh the love and gratitude which she must feel to you? I knew that you went out little, and that your circle of friends was a very limited one. But among them was Sir George Burnwell. I had heard of him before as being a man of evil reputation among women. It must have been he who wore those boots and retained the missing gems. Even though he knew that Arthur had discovered him, he might still flatter himself that he was safe, for the lad could not say a word without compromising his own family.

"Well, your own good sense will suggest what measures I took next. I went in the shape of a loafer to Sir George's house, managed to pick up an acquaintance with his valet, learned that his master had cut his head the night before, and, finally, at the expense of six shillings, made all sure by buying a pair of his cast-off shoes. With these I journeyed down to Streatham and saw that they exactly fitted the tracks."

"I saw an ill-dressed vagabond in the lane yesterday evening," said Mr. Holder.

"Precisely. It was I. I found that I had my man, so I came home and changed my clothes. It was a delicate part which I had to play then, for I saw that a prosecution must be avoided to avert scandal, and I knew that so astute a villain would see that our hands were tied in the matter. I went and saw him. At first, of course, he denied everything. But when I gave him every particular that had occurred, he tried to bluster and took down a life-preserver from the wall. I knew my man, however, and I clapped a pistol to his head before he could strike. Then he became a little more reasonable. I told him that we would give him a price for the stones he held--1000 pounds apiece. That brought out the first signs of grief that he had shown. 'Why, dash it all!' said he, 'I've let them go at six hundred for the three!' I soon managed to get the address of the receiver who had them, on promising him that there would be no prosecution. Off I set to him, and after much chaffering I got our stones at 1000 pounds apiece. Then I looked in upon your son, told him that all was right, and eventually got to my bed about two o'clock, after what I may call a really hard day's work."

"A day which has saved England from a great public scandal," said the banker, rising. "Sir, I cannot find words to thank you, but you shall not find me ungrateful for what you have done. Your skill has indeed exceeded all that I have heard of it. And now I must fly to my dear boy to apologise to him for the wrong which I have done him. As to what you tell me of poor Mary, it goes to my very heart. Not even your skill can inform me where she is now."

"I think that we may safely say," returned Holmes, "that she is wherever Sir George Burnwell is. It is equally certain, too, that whatever her sins are, they will soon receive a more than sufficient punishment."

XII. THE ADVENTURE OF THE COPPER BEECHES

"To the man who loves art for its own sake," remarked Sherlock Holmes, tossing aside the advertisement sheet of the Daily Telegraph, "it is frequently in its least important and lowliest manifestations that the keenest pleasure is to be derived. It is pleasant to me to observe, Watson, that you have so far grasped this truth that in these little records of our cases which you have been good enough to draw up, and, I am bound to say, occasionally to embellish, you have given prominence not so much to the many causes célèbres and sensational trials in which I have figured but rather to those incidents which may have been trivial in themselves, but which have given room for those faculties of deduction and of logical synthesis which I have made my special province."

"And yet," said I, smiling, "I cannot quite hold myself absolved from the charge of sensationalism which has been urged against my records."

"You have erred, perhaps," he observed, taking up a glowing cinder with the tongs and lighting with it the long cherry-wood pipe which was wont to replace his clay when he was in a disputative rather than a meditative mood--"you have erred perhaps in attempting to put colour and life into each of your statements instead of confining yourself to the task of placing upon record that severe reasoning from cause to effect which is really the only notable feature about the thing."

"It seems to me that I have done you full justice in the matter," I remarked with some coldness, for I was repelled by the egotism which I had more than once observed to be a strong factor in my friend's singular character.

"No, it is not selfishness or conceit," said he, answering, as was his wont, my thoughts rather than my words. "If I claim full justice for my art, it is because it is an impersonal thing--a thing beyond myself. Crime is common. Logic is rare. Therefore it is upon the logic rather than upon the crime that you should dwell. You have degraded what should have been a course of lectures into a series of tales."

It was a cold morning of the early spring, and we sat after breakfast on either side of a cheery fire in the old room at Baker Street. A thick fog rolled down between the lines of dun-coloured houses, and the opposing windows
loomed like dark, shapeless blurs through the heavy yellow wreaths. Our gas was lit and shone on the white cloth and glimmer of china and metal, for the table had not been cleared yet. Sherlock Holmes had been silent all the morning, dipping continuously into the advertisement columns of a succession of papers until at last, having apparently given up his search, he had emerged in no very sweet temper to lecture me upon my literary shortcomings.

"At the same time," he remarked after a pause, during which he had sat puffing at his long pipe and gazing down into the fire, "you can hardly be open to a charge of sensationalism, for out of these cases which you have been so kind as to interest yourself in, a fair proportion do not treat of crime, in its legal sense, at all. The small matter in which I endeavoured to help the King of Bohemia, the singular experience of Miss Mary Sutherland, the problem connected with the man with the twisted lip, and the incident of the noble bachelor, were all matters which are outside the pale of the law. But in avoiding the sensational, I fear that you may have bordered on the trivial."

"The end may have been so," I answered, "but the methods I hold to have been novel and of interest."

"Pshaw, my dear fellow, what do the public, the great unobservant public, who could hardly tell a weaver by his tooth or a compositor by his left thumb, care about the finer shades of analysis and deduction! But, indeed, if you are trivial. I cannot blame you, for the days of the great cases are past. Man, or at least criminal man, has lost all enterprise and originality. As to my own little practice, it seems to be degenerating into an agency for recovering lost lead pencils and giving advice to young ladies from boarding-schools. I think that I have touched bottom at last, however. This note I had this morning marks my zero-point, I fancy. Read it!" He tossed a crumpled letter across to me.

It was dated from Montague Place upon the preceding evening, and ran thus:

"DEAR MR. HOLMES:--I am very anxious to consult you as to whether I should or should not accept a situation which has been offered to me as governess. I shall call at half-past ten to-morrow if I do not inconvenience you. Yours faithfully, "VIOLET HUNTER."

"Do you know the young lady?" I asked.

"Not I."

"It is half-past ten now."

"Yes, and I have no doubt that is her ring."

"It may turn out to be of more interest than you think. You remember that the affair of the blue carbuncle, which appeared to be a mere whim at first, developed into a serious investigation. It may be so in this case, also."

"Well, let us hope so. But our doubts will very soon be solved, for here, unless I am much mistaken, is the person in question."

As he spoke the door opened and a young lady entered the room. She was plainly but neatly dressed, with a bright, quick face, freckled like a plover's egg, and with the brisk manner of a woman who has had her own way to make in the world.

"You will excuse my troubling you, I am sure," said she, as my companion rose to greet her, "but I have had a very strange experience, and as I have no parents or relations of any sort from whom I could ask advice, I thought that perhaps you would be kind enough to tell me what I should do."

"Pray take a seat, Miss Hunter. I shall be happy to do anything that I can to serve you."

I could see that Holmes was favourably impressed by the manner and speech of his new client. He looked her over in his searching fashion, and then composed himself, with his lids drooping and his finger-tips together, to listen to her story.

"I have been a governess for five years," said she, "in the family of Colonel Spence Munro, but two months ago the colonel received an appointment at Halifax, in Nova Scotia, and took his children over to America with him, so that I found myself without a situation. I advertised, and I answered advertisements, but without success. At last the little money which I had saved began to run short, and I was at my wit's end as to what I should do."

"There is a well-known agency for governesses in the West End called Westaway's, and there I used to call about once a week in order to see whether anything had turned up which might suit me. Westaway was the name of the founder of the business, but it is really managed by Miss Stoper. She sits in her own little office, and the ladies who are seeking employment wait in an anteroom, and are then shown in one by one, when she consults her ledgers and sees whether she has anything which would suit them.

"Well, when I called last week I was shown into the little office as usual, but I found that Miss Stoper was not alone. A prodigiously stout man with a very smiling face and a great heavy chin which rolled down in fold upon fold over his throat sat at her elbow with a pair of glasses on his nose, looking very earnestly at the ladies who entered. As I came in he gave quite a jump in his chair and turned quickly to Miss Stoper."

"That will do," said he; 'I could not ask for anything better. Capital! capital!' He seemed quite enthusiastic and rubbed his hands together in the most genial fashion. He was such a comfortable-looking man that it was quite a
pleasure to look at him.

"'You are looking for a situation, miss?' he asked.
"'Yes, sir.'
"'As governess?'
"'Yes, sir.'
"'And what salary do you ask?'
"'I had 4 pounds a month in my last place with Colonel Spence Munro.'
"'Oh, tut, tut! sweating--rank sweating!' he cried, throwing his fat hands out into the air like a man who is in a boiling passion. 'How could anyone offer so pitiful a sum to a lady with such attractions and accomplishments?'
"'My accomplishments, sir, may be less than you imagine,' said I. 'A little French, a little German, music, and drawing--'

"'Tut, tut!' he cried. 'This is all quite beside the question. The point is, have you or have you not the bearing and deportment of a lady? There it is in a nutshell. If you have not, you are not fitted for the rearing of a child who may some day play a considerable part in the history of the country. But if you have why, then, how could any gentleman ask you to condescend to accept anything under the three figures? Your salary with me, madam, would commence at 100 pounds a year.'

'You may imagine, Mr. Holmes, that to me, destitute as I was, such an offer seemed almost too good to be true. The gentleman, however, seeing perhaps the look of incredulity upon my face, opened a pocket-book and took out a note.

"'It is also my custom,' said he, smiling in the most pleasant fashion until his eyes were just two little shining slits amid the white creases of his face, 'to advance to my young ladies half their salary beforehand, so that they may meet any little expenses of their journey and their wardrobe.'

"It seemed to me that I had never met so fascinating and so thoughtful a man. As I was already in debt to my tradesmen, the advance was a great convenience, and yet there was something unnatural about the whole transaction which made me wish to know a little more before I quite committed myself.

"'May I ask where you live, sir?' said I.

"'Hampshire. Charming rural place. The Copper Beeches, five miles on the far side of Winchester. It is the most lovely country, my dear young lady, and the dearest old country-house.'

"'And my duties, sir? I should be glad to know what they would be.'

"'One child--one dear little romper just six years old. Oh, if you could see him killing cockroaches with a slipper! Smack! smack! smack! Three gone before you could wink! He leaned back in his chair and laughed his eyes into his head again.

'I was a little startled at the nature of the child's amusement, but the father's laughter made me think that perhaps he was joking.

"'My sole duties, then,' I asked, 'are to take charge of a single child?'

"'No, no, not the sole, not the sole, my dear young lady,' he cried. 'Your duty would be, as I am sure your good sense would suggest, to obey any little commands my wife might give, provided always that they were such commands as a lady might with propriety obey. You see no difficulty, heh?'

"'I should be happy to make myself useful.'

"'Quite so. In dress now, for example. We are faddy people, you know--faddy but kind-hearted. If you were asked to wear any dress which we might give you, you would not object to our little whim. Heh?'

"'No,' said I, considerably astonished at his words.

"'Or to sit here, or sit there, that would not be offensive to you?'

"'Oh, no.'

"'Or to cut your hair quite short before you come to us?'

'I could hardly believe my ears. As you may observe, Mr. Holmes, my hair is somewhat luxuriant, and of a rather peculiar tint of chestnut. It has been considered artistic. I could not dream of sacrificing it in this offhand fashion.

"'I am afraid that that is quite impossible,' said I. He had been watching me eagerly out of his small eyes, and I could see a shadow pass over his face as I spoke.

"'I am afraid that it is quite essential,' said he. 'It is a little fancy of my wife's, and ladies' fancies, you know, madam, ladies' fancies must be consulted. And so you won't cut your hair?'

"'No, sir, I really could not,' I answered firmly.

"'Ah, very well; then that quite settles the matter. It is a pity, because in other respects you would really have done very nicely. In that case, Miss Stoper, I had best inspect a few more of your young ladies.'

'The manageress had sat all this while busy with her papers without a word to either of us, but she glanced at me
now with so much annoyance upon her face that I could not help suspecting that she had lost a handsome
commission through my refusal.

"Do you desire your name to be kept upon the books?" she asked.

"If you please, Miss Stoper."

"Well, really, it seems rather useless, since you refuse the most excellent offers in this fashion," said she sharply.
'You can hardly expect us to exert ourselves to find another such opening for you. Good-day to you, Miss Hunter.'

She struck a gong upon the table, and I was shown out by the page.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, when I got back to my lodgings and found little enough in the cupboard, and two or three
bills upon the table. I began to ask myself whether I had not done a very foolish thing. After all, if these people had
strange fads and expected obedience on the most extraordinary matters, they were at least ready to pay for their
eccentricity. Very few governesses in England are getting 100 pounds a year. Besides, what use was my hair to me?
Many people are improved by wearing it short and perhaps I should be among the number. Next day I was inclined
to think that I had made a mistake, and by the day after I was sure of it. I had almost overcome my pride so far as to
go back to the agency and inquire whether the place was still open when I received this letter from the gentleman
himself. I have it here and I will read it to you:

"The Copper Beeches, near Winchester. "DEAR MISS HUNTER:--Miss Stoper has very kindly given me your
address, and I write from here to ask you whether you have reconsidered your decision. My wife is very anxious that
you should come, for she has been much attracted by my description of you. We are willing to give 30 pounds a
quarter, or 120 pounds a year, so as to recompense you for any little inconvenience which our fads may cause you.
They are not very exacting, after all. My wife is fond of a particular shade of electric blue and would like you to
wear such a dress indoors in the morning. You need not, however, go to the expense of purchasing one, as we have
one belonging to my dear daughter Alice (now in Philadelphia), which would, I should think, fit you very well.
Then, as to sitting here or there, or amusing yourself in any manner indicated, that need cause you no inconvenience.
As regards your hair, it is no doubt a pity, especially as I could not help remarking its beauty during our short
interview, but I am afraid that I must remain firm upon this point, and I only hope that the increased salary may
recompense you for the loss. Your duties, as far as the child is concerned, are very light. Now do try to come, and I
shall meet you with the dog-cart at Winchester. Let me know your train. Yours faithfully, JEPHRO RUCASTLE.'

"That is the letter which I have just received, Mr. Holmes, and my mind is made up that I will accept it. I
thought, however, that before taking the final step I should like to submit the whole matter to your consideration."

"Well, Miss Hunter, if your mind is made up, that settles the question," said Holmes, smiling.

"But you would not advise me to refuse?"

"I confess that it is not the situation which I should like to see a sister of mine apply for."

"What is the meaning of it all, Mr. Holmes?"

"Ah, I have no data. I cannot tell. Perhaps you have yourself formed some opinion?"

"Well, there seems to me to be only one possible solution. Mr. Rucastle seemed to be a very kind, good-natured
man. Is it not possible that his wife is a lunatic, that he desires to keep the matter quiet for fear she should be taken
to an asylum, and that he humours her fancies in every way in order to prevent an outbreak?"

"That is a possible solution--in fact, as matters stand, it is the most probable one. But in any case it does not
seem to be a nice household for a young lady."

"But the money, Mr. Holmes, the money!"

"Well, yes, of course the pay is good--too good. That is what makes me uneasy. Why should they give you 120
pounds a year, when they could have their pick for 40 pounds? There must be some strong reason behind."

"I thought that if I told you the circumstances you would understand afterwards if I wanted your help. I should
feel so much stronger if I felt that you were at the back of me."

"Oh, you may carry that feeling away with you. I assure you that your little problem promises to be the most
interesting which has come my way for some months. There is something distinctly novel about some of the
features. If you should find yourself in doubt or in danger--"

"Danger! What danger do you foresee?"

Holmes shook his head gravely. "It would cease to be a danger if we could define it," said he. "But at any time,
day or night, a telegram would bring me down to your help."

"That is enough." She rose briskly from her chair with the anxiety all swept from her face. "I shall go down to
Hampshire quite easy in my mind now. I shall write to Mr. Rucastle at once, sacrifice my poor hair to-night, and
start for Winchester to-morrow." With a few grateful words to Holmes she bade us both good-night and bustled off
upon her way.

"At least," said I as we heard her quick, firm steps descending the stairs, "she seems to be a young lady who is
very well able to take care of herself."
"And she would need to be," said Holmes gravely. "I am much mistaken if we do not hear from her before many days are past."

It was not very long before my friend's prediction was fulfilled. A fortnight went by, during which I frequently found my thoughts turning in her direction and wondering what strange side-alley of human experience this lonely woman had strayed into. The unusual salary, the curious conditions, the light duties, all pointed to something abnormal, though whether a fad or a plot, or whether the man were a philanthropist or a villain, it was quite beyond my powers to determine. As to Holmes, I observed that he sat frequently for half an hour on end, with knitted brows and an abstracted air, but he swept the matter away with a wave of his hand when I mentioned it. "Data! data! data!" he cried impatiently. "I can't make bricks without clay." And yet he would always wind up by muttering that no sister of his should ever have accepted such a situation.

The telegram which we eventually received came late one night just as I was thinking of turning in and Holmes was settling down to one of those all-night chemical researches which he frequently indulged in, when I would leave him stooping over a retort and a test-tube at night and find him in the same position when I came down to breakfast in the morning. He opened the yellow envelope, and then, glancing at the message, threw it across to me.

"Just look up the trains in Bradshaw," said he, and turned back to his chemical studies.

The summons was a brief and urgent one.

"Please be at the Black Swan Hotel at Winchester at midday to-morrow," it said. "Do come! I am at my wit's end. HUNTER."

"Will you come with me?" asked Holmes, glancing up.

"I should wish to."

"Just look it up, then."

"There is a train at half-past nine," said I, glancing over my Bradshaw. "It is due at Winchester at 11:30."

"That will do very nicely. Then perhaps I had better postpone my analysis of the acetones, as we may need to be at our best in the morning."

By eleven o'clock the next day we were well upon our way to the old English capital. Holmes had been buried in the morning papers all the way down, but after we had passed the Hampshire border he threw them down and began to admire the scenery. It was an ideal spring day, a light blue sky, flecked with little fleecy white clouds drifting across from west to east. The sun was shining very brightly, and yet there was an exhilarating nip in the air, which set an edge to a man's energy. All over the countryside, away to the rolling hills around Aldershot, the little red and grey roofs of the farm-steadings peeped out from amid the light green of the new foliage.

"Are they not fresh and beautiful?" I cried with all the enthusiasm of a man fresh from the fogs of Baker Street. But Holmes shook his head gravely.

"Do you know, Watson," said he, "that it is one of the curses of a mind with a turn like mine that I must look at everything with reference to my own special subject. You look at these scattered houses, and you are impressed by their beauty. I look at them, and the only thought which comes to me is a feeling of their isolation and of the impunity with which crime may be committed there."

"Good heavens!" I cried. "Who would associate crime with these dear old homesteads?"

"They always fill me with a certain horror. It is my belief, Watson, founded upon my experience, that the lowest and vilest alleys in London do not present a more dreadful record of sin than does the smiling and beautiful countryside."

"You horrify me!"

"But the reason is very obvious. The pressure of public opinion can do in the town what the law cannot accomplish. There is no lane so vile that the scream of a tortured child, or the thud of a drunkard's blow, does not beget sympathy and indignation among the neighbours, and then the whole machinery of justice is ever so close that a word of complaint can set it going, and there is but a step between the crime and the dock. But look at these lonely houses, each in its own fields, filled for the most part with poor ignorant folk who know little of the law. Think of the deeds of hellish cruelty, the hidden wickedness which may go on, year in, year out, in such places, and none the wiser. Had this lady who appeals to us for help gone to live in Winchester, I should never have had a fear for her. It is the five miles of country which makes the danger. Still, it is clear that she is not personally threatened."

"No. If she can come to Winchester to meet us she can get away."

"Quite so. She has her freedom."

"What CAN be the matter, then? Can you suggest no explanation?"

"I have devised seven separate explanations, each of which would cover the facts as far as we know them. But which of these is correct can only be determined by the fresh information which we shall no doubt find waiting for us. Well, there is the tower of the cathedral, and we shall soon learn all that Miss Hunter has to tell."

The Black Swan is an inn of repute in the High Street, at no distance from the station, and there we found the
young lady waiting for us. She had engaged a sitting-room, and our lunch awaited us upon the table.

"I am so delighted that you have come," she said earnestly. "It is so very kind of you both; but indeed I do not know what I should do. Your advice will be altogether invaluable to me."

"Pray tell us what has happened to you."

"I will do so, and I must be quick, for I have promised Mr. Rucastle to be back before three. I got his leave to come into town this morning, though he little knew for what purpose."

"Let us have everything in its due order." Holmes thrust his long thin legs out towards the fire and composed himself to listen.

"In the first place, I may say that I have met, on the whole, with no actual ill-treatment from Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle. It is only fair to them to say that. But I cannot understand them, and I am not easy in my mind about them."

"What can you not understand?"

"Their reasons for their conduct. But you shall have it all just as it occurred. When I came down, Mr. Rucastle met me here and drove me in his dog-cart to the Copper Beeches. It is, as he said, beautifully situated, but it is not beautiful in itself, for it is a large square block of a house, whitewashed, but all stained and streaked with damp and bad weather. There are grounds round it, woods on three sides, and on the fourth a field which slopes down to the Southampton highroad, which curves past about a hundred yards from the front door. This ground in front belongs to the house, but the woods all round are part of Lord Southerton's preserves. A clump of copper beeches immediately in front of the hall door has given its name to the place.

"I was driven over by my employer, who was as amiable as ever, and was introduced by him that evening to his wife and the child. There was no truth, Mr. Holmes, in the conjecture which seemed to us to be probable in your rooms at Baker Street. Mrs. Rucastle is not mad. I found her to be a silent, pale-faced woman, much younger than her husband, not more than thirty, I should think, while he can hardly be less than forty-five. From their conversation I have gathered that they have been married about seven years, that he was a widower, and that his only child by the first wife was the daughter who has gone to Philadelphia. Mr. Rucastle told me in private that the reason why she had left them was that she had an unreasoning aversion to her stepmother. As the daughter could not have been less than twenty, I can quite imagine that her position must have been uncomfortable with her father's young wife.

"Mrs. Rucastle seemed to me to be colourless in mind as well as in feature. She impressed me neither favourably nor the reverse. She was a nonentity. It was easy to see that she was passionately devoted both to her husband and to her little son. Her light grey eyes wandered continually from one to the other, noting every little want and forestalling it if possible. He was kind to her also in his bluff, boisterous fashion, and on the whole they seemed to be a happy couple. And yet she had some secret sorrow, this woman. She would often be lost in deep thought, with the saddest look upon her face. More than once I have surprised her in tears. I have thought sometimes that it was the disposition of her child which weighed upon her mind, for I have never met so utterly spoiled and so ill-natured a little creature. He is small for his age, with a head which is quite disproportionately large. His whole life appears to be spent in an alternation between savage fits of passion and gloomy intervals of sulking. Giving pain to any creature weaker than himself seems to be his one idea of amusement, and he shows quite remarkable talent in planning the capture of mice, little birds, and insects. But I would rather not talk about the creature, Mr. Holmes, and, indeed, he has little to do with my story."

"I am glad of all details," remarked my friend, "whether they seem to you to be relevant or not."

"I shall try not to miss anything of importance. The one unpleasant thing about the house, which struck me at once, was the appearance and conduct of the servants. There are only two, a man and his wife. Toller, for that is his name, is a rough, uncouth man, with grizzled hair and whiskers, and a perpetual smell of drink. Twice since I have been with them he has been quite drunk, and yet Mr. Rucastle seemed to take no notice of it. His wife is a very tall and strong woman with a sour face, as silent as Mrs. Rucastle and much less amiable. They are a most unpleasant couple, but fortunately I spend most of my time in the nursery and my own room, which are next to each other in one corner of the building.

"For two days after my arrival at the Copper Beeches my life was very quiet; on the third, Mrs. Rucastle came down just after breakfast and whispered something to her husband.

"Oh, yes," said he, turning to me, 'we are very much obliged to you, Miss Hunter, for falling in with our whims so far as to cut your hair. I assure you that it has not detracted in the tiniest iota from your appearance. We shall now see how the electric-blue dress will become you. You will find it laid out upon the bed in your room, and if you would be so good as to put it on we should both be extremely obliged.'

"The dress which I found waiting for me was of a peculiar shade of blue. It was of excellent material, a sort of beige, but it bore unmistakable signs of having been worn before. It could not have been a better fit if I had been
measured for it. Both Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle expressed a delight at the look of it, which seemed quite exaggerated in its vehemence. They were waiting for me in the drawing-room, which is a very large room, stretching along the entire front of the house, with three long windows reaching down to the floor. A chair had been placed close to the central window, with its back turned towards it. In this I was asked to sit, and then Mr. Rucastle, walking up and down on the other side of the room, began to tell me a series of the funniest stories that I have ever listened to. You cannot imagine how comical he was, and I laughed until I was quite weary. Mrs. Rucastle, however, who has evidently no sense of humour, never so much as smiled, but sat with her hands in her lap, and a sad, anxious look upon her face. After an hour or so, Mr. Rucastle suddenly remarked that it was time to commence the duties of the day, and that I might change my dress and go to little Edward in the nursery.

"Two days later this same performance was gone through under exactly similar circumstances. Again I changed my dress, again I sat in the window, and again I laughed very heartily at the funny stories of which my employer had an immense répertoire, and which he told inimitably. Then he handed me a yellow-backed novel, and moving my chair a little sideways, that my own shadow might not fall upon the page, he begged me to read aloud to him. I read for about ten minutes, beginning in the heart of a chapter, and then suddenly, in the middle of a sentence, he ordered me to cease and to change my dress.

"You can easily imagine, Mr. Holmes, how curious I became as to what the meaning of this extraordinary performance could possibly be. They were always very careful, I observed, to turn my face away from the window, so that I became consumed with the desire to see what was going on behind my back. At first it seemed to be impossible, but I soon devised a means. My hand-mirror had been broken, so a happy thought seized me, and I concealed a piece of the glass in my handkerchief. On the next occasion, in the midst of my laughter, I put my handkerchief up to my eyes, and was able with a little management to see all that there was behind me. I confess that I was disappointed. There at least was my first impression. At the second glance, however, I perceived that there was a man standing in the Southampton Road, a small bearded man in a grey suit, who seemed to be looking in my direction. The road is an important highway, and there are usually people there. This man, however, was leaning against the railings which bordered our field and was looking earnestly up. I lowered my handkerchief and glanced at Mrs. Rucastle to find her eyes fixed upon me with a most searching gaze. She said nothing, but I am convinced that she had divined that I had a mirror in my hand and had seen what was behind me. She rose at once.

"Jephro,' she said, 'there is an impertinent fellow upon the road there who stares up at Miss Hunter.'

"No friend of yours, Miss Hunter?' he asked.

"No, I know no one in these parts.'

"Dear me! How very impertinent! Kindly turn round and motion to him to go away.'

"Surely it would be better to take no notice.'

"No, no, we should have him loitering here always. Kindly turn round and wave him away like that.'

"I did as I was told, and at the same instant Mrs. Rucastle drew down the blind. That was a week ago, and from that time I have not sat again in the window, nor have I worn the blue dress, nor seen the man in the road."

"Pray continue," said Holmes. "Your narrative promises to be a most interesting one."

"You will find it rather disconnected, I fear, and there may prove to be little relation between the different incidents of which I speak. On the very first day that I was at the Copper Beeches, Mr. Rucastle took me to a small outhouse which stands near the kitchen door. As we approached it I heard the sharp rattling of a chain, and the sound as of a large animal moving about.

"Look in here!' said Mr. Rucastle, showing me a slit between two planks. 'Is he not a beauty?'

"I looked through and was conscious of two glowing eyes, and of a vague figure huddled up in the darkness.

"Don't be frightened,' said my employer, laughing at the start which I had given. 'It's only Carlo, my mastiff. I call him mine, but really old Toller, my groom, is the only man who can do anything with him. We feed him once a day, and not too much then, so that he is always as keen as mustard. Toller lets him loose every night, and God help the trespasser whom he lays his fangs upon. For goodness' sake don't you ever on any pretext set your foot over the threshold at night, for it's as much as your life is worth.'

"The warning was no idle one, for two nights later I happened to look out of my bedroom window about two o'clock in the morning. It was a beautiful moonlight night, and the lawn in front of the house was silvered over and almost as bright as day. I was standing, rapt in the peaceful beauty of the scene, when I was aware that something was moving under the shadow of the copper beeches. As it emerged into the moonshine I saw what it was. It was a giant dog, as large as a calf, tawny tinted, with hanging jowl, black muzzle, and huge projecting bones. It walked slowly across the lawn and vanished into the shadow upon the other side. That dreadful sentinel sent a chill to my heart which I do not think that any burglar could have done.

"And now I have a very strange experience to tell you. I had, as you know, cut off my hair in London, and I had
placed it in a great coil at the bottom of my trunk. One evening, after the child was in bed, I began to amuse myself by examining the furniture of my room and by rearranging my own little things. There was an old chest of drawers in the room, the two upper ones empty and open, the lower one locked. I had filled the first two with my linen, and as I had still much to pack away I was naturally annoyed at not having the use of the third drawer. It struck me that it might have been fastened by a mere oversight, so I took out my bunch of keys and tried to open it. The very first key fitted to perfection, and I drew the drawer open. There was only one thing in it, but I am sure that you would never guess what it was. It was my coil of hair.

"I took it up and examined it. It was of the same peculiar tint, and the same thickness. But then the impossibility of the thing obstructed itself upon me. How could my hair have been locked in the drawer? With trembling hands I undid my trunk, turned out the contents, and drew from the bottom my own hair. I laid the two tresses together, and I assure you that they were identical. Was it not extraordinary? Puzzle as I would, I could make nothing at all of what it meant. I returned the strange hair to the drawer, and I said nothing of the matter to the Rucastles as I felt that I had put myself in the wrong by opening a drawer which they had locked.

"I am naturally observant, as you may have remarked, Mr. Holmes, and I soon had a pretty good plan of the whole house in my head. There was one wing, however, which appeared not to be inhabited at all. A door which faced that which led into the quarters of the Toller opened into this suite, but it was invariably locked. One day, however, as I ascended the stair, I met Mr. Rucastle coming out through this door, his keys in his hand, and a look on his face which made him a very different person to the round, jovial man to whom I was accustomed. His cheeks were red, his brow was all crinkled with anger, and the veins stood out at his temples with passion. He locked the door and hurried past me without a word or a look.

"This aroused my curiosity, so when I went out for a walk in the grounds with my charge, I strolled round to the side from which I could see the windows of this part of the house. There were four of them in a row, three of which were simply dirty, while the fourth was shuttered up. They were evidently all deserted. As I strolled up and down, glancing at them occasionally, Mr. Rucastle came out to me, looking as merry and jovial as ever.

"'Ah!' said he, 'you must not think me rude if I passed you without a word, my dear young lady. I was preoccupied with business matters.'

"I assured him that I was not offended. 'By the way,' said I, 'you seem to have quite a suite of spare rooms up there, and one of them has the shutters up.'

"He looked surprised and, as it seemed to me, a little startled at my remark.

"'Photography is one of my hobbies,' said he. 'I have made my dark room up there. But, dear me! what an observant young lady we have come upon. Who would have believed it? Who would have ever believed it?' He spoke in a jesting tone, but there was no jest in his eyes as he looked at me. I read suspicion there and annoyance, but no jest.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, from the moment that I understood that there was something about that suite of rooms which I was not to know, I was all on fire to go over them. It was not mere curiosity, though I have my share of that. It was more a feeling of duty--a feeling that some good might come from my penetrating to this place. They talk of woman's instinct; perhaps it was woman's instinct which gave me that feeling. At any rate, it was there, and I was keenly on the lookout for any chance to pass the forbidden door.

"It was only yesterday that the chance came. I may tell you that, besides Mr. Rucastle, both Toller and his wife find something to do in these deserted rooms, and I once saw him carrying a large black linen bag with him through the door. Recently he has been drinking hard, and yesterday evening he was very drunk; and when I came upstairs there was the key in the door. I have no doubt at all that he had left it there. Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle were both downstairs, and the child was with them, so that I had an admirable opportunity. I turned the key gently in the lock, opened the door, and slipped through.

"There was a little passage in front of me, unpapered and uncarpeted, which turned at a right angle at the farther end. Round this corner were three doors in a line, the first and third of which were open. They each led into an empty room, dusty and cheerless, with two windows in the one and one in the other, so thick with dirt that the evening light glimmered dimly through them. The centre door was closed, and across the outside of it had been fastened one of the broad bars of an iron bed, padlocked at one end to a ring in the wall, and fastened at the other with stout cord. The door itself was locked as well, and the key was not there. This barricaded door corresponded clearly with the shuttered window outside, and yet I could see by the glimmer from beneath it that the room was not in darkness. Evidently there was a skylight which let in light from above. As I stood in the passage gazing at the sinister door and wondering what secret it might veil, I suddenly heard the sound of steps within the room and saw a shadow pass backward and forward against the little slit of dim light which shone out from under the door. A mad, unreasoning terror rose up in me at the sight, Mr. Holmes. My overstrung nerves failed me suddenly, and I turned and ran--ran as though some dreadful hand were behind me clutching at the skirt of my dress. I rushed down the
passage, through the door, and straight into the arms of Mr. Rucastle, who was waiting outside.

"So,' said he, smiling, 'it was you, then. I thought that it must be when I saw the door open.'

"Oh, I am so frightened!' I panted.

"'My dear young lady! my dear young lady!'--you cannot think how caressing and soothing his manner was--'and what has frightened you, my dear young lady?'

"But his voice was just a little too coaxing. He overdid it. I was keenly on my guard against him.

"'I was foolish enough to go into the empty wing,' I answered. 'But it is so lonely and eerie in this dim light that I was frightened and ran out again. Oh, it is so dreadfully still in there!'

"'Only that?' said he, looking at me keenly.

"'Why, what did you think?' I asked.

"'Why do you think that I lock this door?'

"'I am sure that I do not know.'

"'It is to keep people out who have no business there. Do you see?' He was still smiling in the most amiable manner.

"'I am sure if I had known--'

"'Well, then, you know now. And if you ever put your foot over that threshold again'--here in an instant the smile hardened into a grin of rage, and he glared down at me with the face of a demon--'I'll throw you to the mastiff.'

"I was so terrified that I do not know what I did. I suppose that I must have rushed past him into my room. I remember nothing until I found myself lying on my bed trembling all over. Then I thought of you, Mr. Holmes. I could not live there longer without some advice. I was frightened of the house, of the man, of the woman, of the servants, even of the child. They were all horrible to me. If I could only bring you down all would be well. Of course I might have fled from the house, but my curiosity was almost as strong as my fears. My mind was soon made up. I would send you a wire. I put on my hat and cloak, went down to the office, which is about half a mile from the house, and then returned, feeling very much easier. A horrible doubt came into my mind as I approached the door lest the dog might be loose, but I remembered that Toller had drunk himself into a state of insensibility that evening, and I knew that he was the only one in the household who had any influence with the savage creature, or who would venture to set him free. I slipped in in safety and lay awake half the night in my joy at the thought of seeing you. I had no difficulty in getting leave to come into Winchester this morning, but I must be back before three o'clock, for Mr. and Mrs. Rucastle are going on a visit, and will be away all the evening, so that I must look after the child. Now I have told you all my adventures, Mr. Holmes, and I should be very glad if you could tell me what it all means, and, above all, what I should do."

Holmes and I had listened spellbound to this extraordinary story. My friend rose now and paced up and down the room, his hands in his pockets, and an expression of the most profound gravity upon his face.

"Is Toller still drunk?" he asked.

"Yes. I heard his wife tell Mrs. Rucastle that she could do nothing with him."

"That is well. And the Rucastles go out to-night?"

"Yes."

"Is there a cellar with a good strong lock?"

"Yes, the wine-cellar."

"You seem to me to have acted all through this matter like a very brave and sensible girl, Miss Hunter. Do you think that you could perform one more feat? I should not ask it of you if I did not think you a quite exceptional woman."

"I will try. What is it?"

"We shall be at the Copper Beeches by seven o'clock, my friend and I. The Rucastles will be gone by that time, and Toller will, we hope, be incapable. There only remains Mrs. Toller, who might give the alarm. If you could send her into the cellar on some errand, and then turn the key upon her, you would facilitate matters immensely."

"I will do it."

"Excellent! We shall then look thoroughly into the affair. Of course there is only one feasible explanation. You have been brought there to personate someone, and the real person is imprisoned in this chamber. That is obvious. As to who this prisoner is, I have no doubt that it is the daughter, Miss Alice Rucastle, if I remember right, who was said to have gone to America. You were chosen, doubtless, as resembling her in height, figure, and the colour of your hair. Hers had been cut off, very possibly in some illness through which she has passed, and so, of course, yours had to be sacrificed also. By a curious chance you came upon her tresses. The man in the road was undoubtedly some friend of hers--possibly her fiancé--and no doubt, as you wore the girl's dress and were so like her, he was convinced from your laughter, whenever he saw you, and afterwards from your gesture, that Miss Rucastle was perfectly happy, and that she no longer desired his attentions. The dog is let loose at night to prevent
him from endeavouring to communicate with her. So much is fairly clear. The most serious point in the case is the disposition of the child."

"What on earth has that to do with it?" I ejaculated.

"My dear Watson, you as a medical man are continually gaining light as to the tendencies of a child by the study of the parents. Don't you see that the converse is equally valid. I have frequently gained my first real insight into the character of parents by studying their children. This child's disposition is abnormally cruel, merely for cruelty's sake, and whether he derives this from his smiling father, as I should suspect, or from his mother, it bodes evil for the poor girl who is in their power."

"I am sure that you are right, Mr. Holmes," cried our client. "A thousand things come back to me which make me certain that you have hit it. Oh, let us lose not an instant in bringing help to this poor creature."

"We must be circumspect, for we are dealing with a very cunning man. We can do nothing until seven o'clock. At that hour we shall be with you, and it will not be long before we solve the mystery."

We were as good as our word, for it was just seven when we reached the Copper Beeches, having put up our trap at a wayside public-house. The group of trees, with their dark leaves shining like burnished metal in the light of the setting sun, were sufficient to mark the house even had Miss Hunter not been standing smiling on the door-step.

"Have you managed it?" asked Holmes.

A loud thudding noise came from somewhere downstairs. "That is Mrs. Toller in the cellar," said she. "Her husband lies snoring on the kitchen rug. Here are his keys, which are the duplicates of Mr. Rucastle's."

"You have done well indeed!" cried Holmes with enthusiasm. "Now lead the way, and we shall soon see the end of this black business."

We passed up the stair, unlocked the door, followed on down a passage, and found ourselves in front of the barricade which Miss Hunter had described. Holmes cut the cord and removed the transverse bar. Then he tried the various keys in the lock, but without success. No sound came from within, and at the silence Holmes' face clouded over.

"I trust that we are not too late," said he. "I think, Miss Hunter, that we had better go in without you. Now, Watson, put your shoulder to it, and we shall see whether we cannot make our way in."

It was an old rickety door and gave at once before our united strength. Together we rushed into the room. It was empty. There was no furniture save a little pallet bed, a small table, and a basketful of linen. The skylight above was open, and the prisoner gone.

"There has been some villainy here," said Holmes; "this beauty has guessed Miss Hunter's intentions and has carried his victim off."

"But how?"

"Through the skylight. We shall soon see how he managed it." He swung himself up onto the roof. "Ah, yes," he cried, "here's the end of a long light ladder against the eaves. That is how he did it."

"But it is impossible," said Miss Hunter; "the ladder was not there when the Rucastles went away."

"He has come back and done it. I tell you that he is a clever and dangerous man. I should not be very much surprised if this were he whose step I hear now upon the stair. I think, Watson, that it would be as well for you to have your pistol ready."

The words were hardly out of his mouth before a man appeared at the door of the room, a very fat and burly man, with a heavy stick in his hand. Miss Hunter screamed and shrunk against the wall at the sight of him, but Sherlock Holmes sprang forward and confronted him.

"You villain!" said he, "where's your daughter?"

The fat man cast his eyes round, and then up at the open skylight.

"It is for me to ask you that," he shrieked, "you thieves! Spies and thieves! I have caught you, have I? You are in my power. I'll serve you!" He turned and clattered down the stairs as hard as he could go.

"He's gone for the dog!" cried Miss Hunter.

"I have my revolver," said I.

"Better close the front door," cried Holmes, and we all rushed down the stairs together. We had hardly reached the hall when we heard the baying of a hound, and then a scream of agony, with a horrible worrying sound which it was dreadful to listen to. An elderly man with a red face and shaking limbs came staggering out at a side door.

"My God!" he cried. "Someone has loosed the dog. It's not been fed for two days. Quick, quick, or it'll be too late!"

Holmes and I rushed out and round the angle of the house, with Toller hurrying behind us. There was the huge famished brute, its black muzzle buried in Rucastle's throat, while he writhed and screamed upon the ground. Running up, I blew its brains out, and it fell over with its keen white teeth still meeting in the great creases of his neck. With much labour we separated them and carried him, living but horribly mangled, into the house. We laid
him upon the drawing-room sofa, and having dispatched the sobered Toller to bear the news to his wife, I did what I
could to relieve his pain. We were all assembled round him when the door opened, and a tall, gaunt woman entered
the room.

"Mrs. Toller!" cried Miss Hunter.

"Yes, miss. Mr. Rucastle let me out when he came back before he went up to you. Ah, miss, it is a pity you didn't
let me know what you were planning, for I would have told you that your pains were wasted."

"Ha!" said Holmes, looking keenly at her. "It is clear that Mrs. Toller knows more about this matter than anyone
else."

"Yes, sir, I do, and I am ready enough to tell what I know."

"Then, pray, sit down, and let us hear it for there are several points on which I must confess that I am still in the
dark."

"I will soon make it clear to you," said she; "and I'd have done so before now if I could ha' got out from the
ceiling. If there's a police-court business over this, you'll remember that I was the one that stood your friend, and that I
was Miss Alice's friend too.

"She was never happy at home, Miss Alice wasn't, from the time that her father married again. She was slighted
like and had no say in anything, but it never really became bad for her until after she met Mr. Fowler at a friend's
house. As well as I could learn, Miss Alice had rights of her own by will, but she was so quiet and patient, she was,
that she never said a word about them but just left everything in Mr. Rucastle's hands. He knew he was safe with
her; but when there was a chance of a husband coming forward, who would ask for all that the law would give him,
then her father thought it time to put a stop on it. He wanted her to sign a paper, so that whether she married or not,
he could use her money. When she wouldn't do it, he kept on worrying her until she got brain-fever, and for six
weeks was at death's door. Then she got better at last, all worn to a shadow, and with her beautiful hair cut off; but
that didn't make no change in her young man, and he stuck to her as true as man could be."

"Ah," said Holmes, "I think that what you have been good enough to tell us makes the matter fairly clear, and
that I can deduce all that remains. Mr. Rucastle then, I presume, took to this system of imprisonment?"

"Yes, sir."

"And brought Miss Hunter down from London in order to get rid of the disagreeable persistence of Mr. Fowler."

"That was it, sir."

"But Mr. Fowler being a persevering man, as a good seaman should be, blockaded the house, and having met
you succeeded by certain arguments, metallic or otherwise, in convincing you that your interests were the same as
his."

"Mr. Fowler was a very kind-spoken, free-handed gentleman," said Mrs. Toller serenely.

"And in this way he managed that your good man should have no want of drink, and that a ladder should be
ready at the moment when your master had gone out."

"You have it, sir, just as it happened."

"I am sure we owe you an apology, Mrs. Toller," said Holmes, "for you have certainly cleared up everything
which puzzled us. And here comes the country surgeon and Mrs. Rucastle, so I think, Watson, that we had best
escort Miss Hunter back to Winchester, as it seems to me that our locus standi now is rather a questionable one."

And thus was solved the mystery of the sinister house with the copper beeches in front of the door. Mr. Rucastle
survived, but was always a broken man, kept alive solely through the care of his devoted wife. They still live with
their old servants, who probably know so much of Rucastle's past life that he finds it difficult to part from them. Mr.
Fowler and Miss Rucastle were married, by special license, in Southampton the day after their flight, and he is now
the holder of a government appointment in the island of Mauritius. As to Miss Violet Hunter, my friend Holmes,
rather to my disappointment, manifested no further interest in her when once she had ceased to be the centre of one
of his problems, and she is now the head of a private school at Walsall, where I believe that she has met with
considerable success.

Go to Start
"I am afraid, Watson, that I shall have to go," said Holmes, as we sat down together to our breakfast one morning.

"Go! Where to?"

"To Dartmoor; to King's Pyland."

I was not surprised. Indeed, my only wonder was that he had not already been mixed upon this extraordinary case, which was the one topic of conversation through the length and breadth of England. For a whole day my companion had rambled about the room with his chin upon his chest and his brows knitted, charging and recharging his pipe with the strongest black tobacco, and absolutely deaf to any of my questions or remarks. Fresh editions of every paper had been sent up by our news agent, only to be glanced over and tossed down into a corner. Yet, silent as he was, I knew perfectly well what it was over which he was brooding. There was but one problem before the public which could challenge his powers of analysis, and that was the singular disappearance of the favourite for the Wessex Cup, and the tragic murder of its trainer. When, therefore, he suddenly announced his intention of setting out for the scene of the drama it was only what I had both expected and hoped for.

"I should be most happy to go down with you if I should not be in the way," said I.

"My dear Watson, you would confer a great favour upon me by coming. And I think that your time will not be misspent, for there are points about the case which promise to make it an absolutely unique one. We have, I think, just time to catch our train at Paddington, and I will go further into the matter upon our journey. You would oblige me by bringing with you your very excellent field-glass."

And so it happened that an hour or so later I found myself in the corner of a first-class carriage flying along en route for Exeter, while Sherlock Holmes, with his sharp, eager face framed in his ear-flapped travelling-cap, dipped rapidly into the bundle of fresh papers which he had procured at Paddington. We had left Reading far behind us before he thrust the last one of them under the seat, and offered me his cigar-case.

"We are going well," said he, looking out the window and glancing at his watch. "Our rate at present is fifty-three and a half miles an hour."

"I have not observed the quarter-mile posts," said I.

"Nor have I. But the telegraph posts upon this line are sixty yards apart, and the calculation is a simple one. I presume that you have looked into this matter of the murder of John Straker and the disappearance of Silver Blaze?"

"I have seen what the Telegraph and the Chronicle have to say."

"It is one of those cases where the art of the reasoner should be used rather for the sifting of details than for the acquiring of fresh evidence. The tragedy has been so uncommon, so complete and of such personal importance to so many people, that we are suffering from a plethora of surmise, conjecture, and hypothesis. The difficulty is to detach the framework of fact--of absolute undeniable fact--from the embellishments of theorists and reporters. Then, having established ourselves upon this sound basis, it is our duty to see what inferences may be drawn and what are the special points upon which the whole mystery turns. On Tuesday evening I received telegrams from both Colonel Ross, the owner of the horse, and from Inspector Gregory, who is looking after the case, inviting my co-operation."

"Tuesday evening!" I exclaimed. "And this is Thursday morning. Why didn't you go down yesterday?"

"Because I made a blunder, my dear Watson--which is, I am afraid, a more common occurrence than any one would think who only knew me through your memoirs. The fact is that I could not believe it possible that the most remarkable horse in England could long remain concealed, especially in so sparsely inhabited a place as the north of
Dartmoor. From hour to hour yesterday I expected to hear that he had been found, and that his abductor was the
murderer of John Straker. When, however, another morning had come, and I found that beyond the arrest of young
Fitzroy Simpson nothing had been done, I felt that it was time for me to take action. Yet in some ways I feel that
yesterday has not been wasted."

"You have formed a theory, then?"

"At least I have got a grip of the essential facts of the case. I shall enumerate them to you, for nothing clears up a
case so much as stating it to another person, and I can hardly expect your co-operation if I do not show you the
position from which we start."

Holmes gave me a sketch of the events.

I lay back against the cushions, puffing at my cigar, while Holmes, leaning forward, with his long, thin
forefinger checking off the points upon the palm of his left hand, gave me a sketch of the events which had led to
our journey.

"Silver Blaze," said he, "is from the Somomy stock, and holds as brilliant a record as his famous ancestor. He is
now in his fifth year, and has brought in turn each of the prizes of the turf to Colonel Ross, his fortunate owner. Up
to the time of the catastrophe he was the first favourite for the Wessex Cup, the betting being three to one on him.
He has always, however, been a prime favourite with the racing public, and has never yet disappointed them, so that
even at those odds enormous sums of money have been laid upon him. It is obvious, therefore, that there were many
people who had the strongest interest in preventing Silver Blaze from being there at the fall of the flag next Tuesday.

"The fact was, of course, appreciated at King's Pyland, where the Colonel's training-stable is situated. Every
precaution was taken to guard the favourite. The trainer, John Straker, is a retired jockey who rode in Colonel Ross's
colours before he became too heavy for the weighing-chair. He has served the Colonel for five years as jockey and
for seven as trainer, and has always shown himself to be a zealous and honest servant. Under him were three lads;
for the establishment was a small one, containing only four horses in all. One of these lads sat up each night in the
stable, while the others slept in the loft. All three bore excellent characters. John Straker, who is a married man,
lived in a small villa about two hundred yards from the stables. He has no children, keeps one maid-servant, and is
comfortably off. The country round is very lonely, but about half a mile to the north there is a small cluster of villas
which have been built by a Tavistock contractor for the use of invalids and others who may wish to enjoy the pure
Dartmoor air. Tavistock itself lies two miles to the west, while across the moor, also about two miles distant, is the
larger training establishment of Mapleton, which belongs to Lord Backwater, and is managed by Silas Brown. In
every other direction the moor is a complete wilderness, inhabited only by a few roaming gypsies. Such was the
general situation last Monday night when the catastrophe occurred.

"On that evening the horses had been exercised and watered as usual, and the stables were locked up at nine
o'clock. Two of the lads walked up to the trainer's house, where they had supper in the kitchen, while the third, Ned
Hunter, remained on guard. At a few minutes after nine the maid, Edith Baxter, carried down to the stables his
supper, which consisted of a dish of curried mutton. She took no liquid, as there was a water-tap in the stables, and it
was the rule that the lad on duty should drink nothing else. The maid carried a lantern with her, as it was very dark
and the path ran across the open moor.

"Edith Baxter was within thirty yards of the stables, when a man appeared out of the darkness and called to her
to stop. As he stepped into the circle of yellow light thrown by the lantern she saw that he was a person of
gentlemanly bearing, dressed in a grey suit of tweeds, with a cloth cap. He wore gaiters, and carried a heavy stick
with a knob to it. She was most impressed, however, by the extreme pallor of his face and by the nervousness of his
manner. His age, she thought, would be rather over thirty than under it.

"'Can you tell me where I am?' he asked. 'I had almost made up my mind to sleep on the moor, when I saw the
light of your lantern.'

"'You are close to the King's Pyland training-stables,' said she.

"'Oh, indeed! What a stroke of luck!' he cried. 'I understand that a stable-boy sleeps there alone every night.
Perhaps that is his supper which you are carrying to him. Now I am sure that you would not be too proud to earn the
price of a new dress, would you?' He took a piece of white paper folded up out of his waistcoat pocket. 'See that the
boy has this to-night, and you shall have the prettiest frock that money can buy.'

"She was frightened by the earnestness of his manner, and ran past him to the window through which she was accustomed to hand the meals. It was already opened, and Hunter was seated at the small table inside. She had begun to tell him of what had happened, when the stranger came up again.

"'Good-evening,' said he, looking through the window. 'I wanted to have a word with you.' The girl has sworn that as he spoke she noticed the corner of the little paper packet protruding from his closed hand.

"'What business have you here?' asked the lad.

"'It's business that may put something into your pocket,' said the other. 'You've two horses in for the Wessex Cup--Silver Blaze and Bayard. Let me have the straight tip and you won't be a loser. Is it a fact that at the weights Bayard could give the other a hundred yards in five furlongs, and that the stable have put their money on him?" "So, you're one of those damned touts!' cried the lad. 'I'll show you how we serve them in King's Pyland.' He sprang up and rushed across the stable to unloose the dog. The girl fled away to the house, but as she ran she looked back and saw that the stranger was leaning through the window. A minute later, however, when Hunter rushed out with the hound he was gone, and though he ran all round the buildings he failed to find any trace of him."

"One moment," I asked. "Did the stable-boy, when he ran out with the dog, leave the door unlocked behind him?"

"Excellent, Watson, excellent!" murmured my companion. "The importance of the point struck me so forcibly that I sent a special wire to Dartmoor yesterday to clear the matter up. The boy locked the door before he left it. The window, I may add, was not large enough for a man to get through.

"Hunter waited until his fellow-grooms had returned, when he sent a message to the trainer and told him what had occurred. Straker was excited at hearing the account, although he does not seem to have quite realised its true significance. It left him, however, vaguely uneasy, and Mrs. Straker, waking at one in the morning, found that he was dressing. In reply to her inquiries, he said that he could not sleep on account of his anxiety about the horses, and that he intended to walk down to the stables to see that all was well. She begged him to remain at home, as she could hear the rain pattering against the window, but in spite of her entreaties he pulled on his large mackintosh and left the house.

"Mrs. Straker awoke at seven in the morning, to find that her husband had not yet returned. She dressed herself hastily, called the maid, and set off for the stables. The door was open; inside, huddled together upon a chair, Hunter was sunk in a state of absolute stupor, the favourite's stall was empty, and there were no signs of his trainer.

"The two lads who slept in the chaff-cutting loft above the harness-room were quickly aroused. They had heard nothing during the night, for they are both sound sleepers. Hunter was obviously under the influence of some powerful drug, and as no sense could be got out of him, he was left to sleep it off while the two lads and the two women ran out in search of the absentees. They still had hopes that the trainer had for some reason taken out the horse for early exercise, but on ascending the knoll near the house, from which all the neighbouring moors were visible, they not only could see no signs of the missing favourite, but they perceived something which warned them that they were in the presence of a tragedy.

"About a quarter of a mile from the stables John Straker's overcoat was flapping from a furze-bush. Immediately beyond there was a bowl-shaped depression in the moor, and at the bottom of this was found the dead body of the unfortunate trainer. His head had been shattered by a savage blow from some heavy weapon, and he was wounded on the thigh, where there was a long, clean cut, inflicted evidently by some very sharp instrument. It was clear, however, that Straker had defended himself vigorously against his assailants, for in his right hand he held a small knife, which was clotted with blood up to the handle, while in his left he clapped a red and black silk cravat, which was recognised by the maid as having been worn on the preceding evening by the stranger who had visited the stables. Hunter, on recovering from his stupor, was also quite positive as to the ownership of the cravat. He was equally certain that the same stranger had, while standing at the window, drugged his curried mutton, and so deprived the stables of their watchman. As to the missing horse, there were abundant proofs in the mud which lay at the bottom of the fatal hollow that he had been there at the time of the struggle. But from that morning he has disappeared, and although a large reward has been offered, and all the gypsies of Dartmoor are on the alert, no news has come of him. Finally, an analysis has shown that the remains of his supper left by the stable-lad contain an appreciable quantity of powdered opium, while the people at the house partook of the same dish on the same night without any ill effect.

"Those are the main facts of the case, stripped of all surmise, and stated as baldly as possible. I shall now recapitulate what the police have done in the matter.

"Inspector Gregory, to whom the case has been committed, is an extremely competent officer. Were he but gifted with imagination he might rise to great heights in his profession. On his arrival he promptly found and arrested the man upon whom suspicion naturally rested. There was little difficulty in finding him, for he inhabited
one of those villas which I have mentioned. His name, it appears, was Fitzroy Simpson. He was a man of excellent
birth and education, who had squandered a fortune upon the turf, and who lived now by doing a little quiet and
gentle book-making in the sporting clubs of London. An examination of his betting-book shows that bets to the
amount of five thousand pounds had been registered by him against the favourite. On being arrested he volunteered
that statement that he had come down to Dartmoor in the hope of getting some information about the King's Pyland
horses, and also about Desborough, the second favourite, which was in charge of Silas Brown at the Mapleton
stables. He did not attempt to deny that he had acted as described upon the evening before, but declared that he had
no sinister designs, and had simply wished to obtain first-hand information. When confronted with his cravat, he
turned very pale, and was utterly unable to account for its presence in the hand of the murdered man. His wet
clothing showed that he had been out in the storm of the night before, and his stick, which was a Penang-lawyer
weighted with lead, was just such a weapon as might, by repeated blows, have inflicted the terrible injuries to which
the trainer had succumbed. On the other hand, there was no wound upon his person, while the state of Straker's knife
would show that one at least of his assailants must bear his mark upon him. There you have it all in a nutshell,
Watson, and if you can give me any light I shall be infinitely obliged to you."

I had listened with the greatest interest to the statement which Holmes, with characteristic clearness, had laid
before me. Though most of the facts were familiar to me, I had not sufficiently appreciated their relative importance,
or their connection to each other.

"Is it not possible," I suggested, "that the incised wound upon Straker may have been caused by his own knife in
the convulsive struggles which follow any brain injury?"

"It is more than possible; it is probable," said Holmes. "In that case one of the main points in favour of the
accused disappears."

"And yet," said I, "even now I fail to understand what the theory of the police can be."

"I am afraid that whatever theory we state has very grave objections to it," returned my companion. "The police
imagine, I take it, that this Fitzroy Simpson, having drugged the lad, and having in some way obtained a duplicate
key, opened the stable door and took out the horse, with the intention, apparently, of kidnapping him altogether. His
bridle is missing, so that Simpson must have put this on. Then, having left the door open behind him, he was leading
the horse away over the moor, when he was either met or overtaken by the trainer. A row naturally ensued. Simpson
beat out the trainer's brains with his heavy stick without receiving any injury from the small knife which Straker
used in self-defence, and then the thief either led the horse on to some secret hiding-place, or else it may have bolted
during the struggle, and be now wandering out on the moors. That is the case as it appears to the police, and
improbable as it is, all other explanations are more improbable still. However, I shall very quickly test the matter
when I am once upon the spot, and until then I cannot really see how we can get much further than our present
position."

It was evening before we reached the little town of Tavistock, which lies, like the boss of a shield, in the middle
of the huge circle of Dartmoor. Two gentlemen were awaiting us in the station--the one a tall, fair man with lion-like
hair and beard and curiously penetrating light blue eyes; the other a small, alert person, very neat and dapper, in a
frock-coat and gaiters, with trim little side-whiskers and an eye-glass. The latter was Colonel Ross, the well-known
sportsman; the other, Inspector Gregory, a man who was rapidly making his name in the English detective service.

"I am delighted that you have come down, Mr. Holmes," said the Colonel. "The Inspector here has done all that
could possibly be suggested, but I wish to leave no stone unturned in trying to avenge poor Straker and in recovering
my horse."

"Have there been any fresh developments?" asked Holmes.

"I am sorry to say that we have made very little progress," said the Inspector. "We have an open carriage outside,
and as you would no doubt like to see the place before the light fails, we might talk it over as we drive."

A minute later we were all seated in a comfortable landau, and were rattling through the quaint old Devonshire
city. Inspector Gregory was full of his case, and poured out a stream of remarks, while Holmes threw in an
occasional question or interjection. Colonel Ross leaned back with his arms folded and his hat tilted over his eyes,
while I listened with interest to the dialogue of the two detectives. Gregory was formulating his theory, which was
almost exactly what Holmes had foretold in the train.

"The net is drawn pretty close round Fitzroy Simpson," he remarked, "and I believe myself that he is our man. At
the same time I recognise that the evidence is purely circumstantial, and that some new development may upset it."

"How about Straker's knife?"

"We have quite come to the conclusion that he wounded himself in his fall."

"My friend Dr. Watson made that suggestion to me as we came down. If so, it would tell against this man
Simpson."

"Undoubtedly. He has neither a knife nor any sign of a wound. The evidence against him is certainly very strong.

"Undoubtedly. He has neither a knife nor any sign of a wound. The evidence against him is certainly very strong.
He had a great interest in the disappearance of the favourite. He lies under suspicion of having poisoned the stable-boy, he was undoubtedly out in the storm, he was armed with a heavy stick, and his cravat was found in the dead man's hand. I really think we have enough to go before a jury.

Holmes shook his head. "A clever counsel would tear it all to rags," said he. "Why should he take the horse out of the stable? If he wished to injure it why could he not do it there? Has a duplicate key been found in his possession? What chemist sold him the powdered opium? Above all, where could he, a stranger to the district, hide a horse, and such a horse as this? What is his own explanation as to the paper which he wished the maid to give to the stable-boy?"

"He says that it was a ten-pound note. One was found in his purse. But your other difficulties are not so formidable as they seem. He is not a stranger to the district. He has twice lodged at Tavistock in the summer. The opium was probably brought from London. The key, having served its purpose, would be hurled away. The horse may be at the bottom of one of the pits or old mines upon the moor."

"What does he say about the cravat?"

"He acknowledges that it is his, and declares that he had lost it. But a new element has been introduced into the case which may account for his leading the horse from the stable."

Holmes pricked up his ears.

"We have found traces which show that a party of gypsies encamped on Monday night within a mile of the spot where the murder took place. On Tuesday they were gone. Now, presuming that there was some understanding between Simpson and these gypsies, might he not have been leading the horse to them when he was overtaken, and may they not have him now?"

"It is certainly possible."

"The moor is being scoured for these gypsies. I have also examined every stable and out-house in Tavistock, and for a radius of ten miles."

"There is another training-stable quite close, I understand?"

"Yes, and that is a factor which we must certainly not neglect. As Desborough, their horse, was second in the betting, they had an interest in the disappearance of the favourite. Silas Brown, the trainer, is known to have had large bets upon the event, and he was no friend to poor Straker. We have, however, examined the stables, and there is nothing to connect him with the affair."

"And nothing to connect this man Simpson with the interests of the Mapleton stables?"

"Nothing at all."

Holmes leaned back in the carriage, and the conversation ceased. A few minutes later our driver pulled up at a neat little red-brick villa with overhanging eaves which stood by the road. Some distance off, across a paddock, lay a long grey-tiled out-building. In every other direction the low curves of the moor, bronze-coloured from the fading ferns, stretched away to the sky-line, broken only by the steeples of Tavistock, and by a cluster of houses away to the westward which marked the Mapleton stables. We all sprang out with the exception of Holmes, who continued to lean back with his eyes fixed upon the sky in front of him, entirely absorbed in his own thoughts. It was only when I touched his arm that he roused himself with a violent start and stepped out of the carriage.

"Excuse me," said he, turning to Colonel Ross, who had looked at him in some surprise. "I was day-dreaming." There was a gleam in his eyes and a suppressed excitement in his manner which convinced me, used as I was to his ways, that his hand was upon a clue, though I could not imagine where he had found it.

"Perhaps you would prefer at once to go on to the scene of the crime, Mr. Holmes?" said Gregory.

"I think that I should prefer to stay here a little and go into one or two questions of detail. Straker was brought back here, I presume?"

"Yes; he lies upstairs. The inquest is to-morrow."

"He has been in your service some years, Colonel Ross?"

"I have always found him an excellent servant."

"I presume that you made an inventory of what he had in this pockets at the time of his death, Inspector?"

"I have the things themselves in the sitting-room, if you would care to see them."

"I should be very glad." We all filed into the front room and sat round the central table while the Inspector unlocked a square tin box and laid a small heap of things before us. There was a box of vestas, two inches of tallow candle, an A D P brier-root pipe, a pouch of seal-skin with half an ounce of long-cut Cavendish, a silver watch with a gold chain, five sovereigns in gold, an aluminium pencil-case, a few papers, and an ivory-handled knife with a very delicate, inflexible blade marked Weiss & Co., London.

"This is a very singular knife," said Holmes, lifting it up and examining it minutely. "I presume, as I see blood-stains upon it, that it is the one which was found in the dead man's grasp. Watson, this knife is surely in your line?"

"It is what we call a cataract knife," said I.
"I thought so. A very delicate blade devised for very delicate work. A strange thing for a man to carry with him upon a rough expedition, especially as it would not shut in his pocket."

"The tip was guarded by a disk of cork which we found beside his body," said the Inspector. "His wife tells us that the knife had lain upon the dressing-table, and that he had picked it up as he left the room. It was a poor weapon, but perhaps the best that he could lay his hands on at the moment."

"Very possible. How about these papers?"

"Three of them are receipted hay-dealers' accounts. One of them is a letter of instructions from Colonel Ross. This other is a milliner's account for thirty-seven pounds fifteen made out by Madame Lesurier, of Bond Street, to William Derbyshire. Mrs. Straker tells us that Derbyshire was a friend of her husband's and that occasionally his letters were addressed here."

"Madam Derbyshire had somewhat expensive tastes," remarked Holmes, glancing down the account. "Twenty-two guineas is rather heavy for a single costume. However there appears to be nothing more to learn, and we may now go down to the scene of the crime."

As we emerged from the sitting-room a woman, who had been waiting in the passage, took a step forward and laid her hand upon the Inspector's sleeve. Her face was haggard and thin and eager, stamped with the print of a recent horror.

"Have you got them? Have you found them?" she panted.

"No, Mrs. Straker. But Mr. Holmes here has come from London to help us, and we shall do all that is possible."

"Surely I met you in Plymouth at a garden-party some little time ago, Mrs. Straker?" said Holmes.

"No, sir; you are mistaken."

"Dear me! Why, I could have sworn to it. You wore a costume of dove-coloured silk with ostrich-feather trimming."

"I never had such a dress, sir," answered the lady.

"Ah, that quite settles it," said Holmes. And with an apology he followed the Inspector outside. A short walk across the moor took us to the hollow in which the body had been found. At the brink of it was the furze-bush upon which the coat had been hung.

"There was no wind that night, I understand," said Holmes.

"None; but very heavy rain."

"In that case the overcoat was not blown against the furze-bush, but placed there."

"Yes, it was laid across the bush."

"You fill me with interest, I perceive that the ground has been trampled up a good deal. No doubt many feet have been here since Monday night."

"A piece of matting has been laid here at the side, and we have all stood upon that."

"Excellent."

"In this bag I have one of the boots which Straker wore, one of Fitzroy Simpson's shoes, and a cast horseshoe of Silver Blaze."

"My dear Inspector, you surpass yourself!" Homes took the bag, and, descending into the hollow, he pushed the matting into a more central position. Then stretching himself upon his face and leaning his chin upon his hands, he made a careful study of the trampled mud in front of him. "Hullo!" said he, suddenly. "What's this?" It was a wax vesta half burned, which was so coated with mud that it looked at first like a little chip of wood.

"I cannot think how I came to overlook it," said the Inspector, with an expression of annoyance.

"It was invisible, buried in the mud. I only saw it because I was looking for it."

"What! You expected to find it?"

"I thought it not unlikely."

He took the boots from the bag, and compared the impressions of each of them with marks upon the ground. Then he clambered up to the rim of the hollow, and crawled about among the ferns and bushes.

"I am afraid that there are no more tracks," said the Inspector. "I have examined the ground very carefully for a hundred yards in each direction."

"Indeed!" said Holmes, rising. "I should not have the impertinence to do it again after what you say. But I should like to take a little walk over the moor before it grows dark, that I may know my ground to-morrow, and I think that I shall put this horseshoe into my pocket for luck."

Colonel Ross, who had shown some signs of impatience at my companion's quiet and systematic method of work, glanced at his watch. "I wish you would come back with me, Inspector," said he. "There are several points on which I should like your advice, and especially as to whether we do not owe it to the public to remove our horse's name from the entries for the Cup."

"Certainly not," cried Holmes, with decision. "I should let the name stand."
The Colonel bowed. "I am very glad to have had your opinion, sir," said he. "You will find us at poor Straker's house when you have finished your walk, and we can drive together into Tavistock."

He turned back with the Inspector, while Holmes and I walked slowly across the moor. The sun was beginning to sink behind the stables of Mapleton, and the long, sloping plain in front of us was tinged with gold, deepening into rich, ruddy browns where the faded ferns and brambles caught the evening light. But the glories of the landscape were all wasted upon my companion, who was sunk in the deepest thought.

"It's this way, Watson," said he at last. "We may leave the question of who killed John Straker for the instant, and confine ourselves to finding out what has become of the horse. Now, supposing that he broke away during or after the tragedy, where could he have gone to? The horse is a very gregarious creature. If left to himself his instincts would have been either to return to King's Pyland or go over to Mapleton. Why should he run wild upon the moor? He would surely have been seen by now. And why should gypsies kidnap him? These people always clear out when they hear of trouble, for they do not wish to be pestered by the police. They could not hope to sell such a horse. They would run a great risk and gain nothing by taking him. Surely that is clear."

"Where is he, then?"

"I have already said that he must have gone to King's Pyland or to Mapleton. He is not at King's Pyland. Therefore he is at Mapleton. Let us take that as a working hypothesis and see what it leads us to. This part of the moor, as the Inspector remarked, is very hard and dry. But if falls away towards Mapleton, and you can see from here that there is a long hollow over yonder, which must have been very wet on Monday night. If our supposition is correct, then the horse must have crossed that, and there is the point where we should look for his tracks."

We had been walking briskly during this conversation, and a few more minutes brought us to the hollow in question. At Holmes' request I walked down the bank to the right, and he to the left, but I had not taken fifty paces before I heard him give a shout, and saw him waving his hand to me. The track of a horse was plainly outlined in the soft earth in front of him, and the shoe which he took from his pocket exactly fitted the impression.

"See the value of imagination," said Holmes. "It is the one quality which Gregory lacks. We imagined what might have happened, acted upon the supposition, and find ourselves justified. Let us proceed."

We crossed the marshy bottom and passed over a quarter of a mile of dry, hard turf. Again the ground sloped, and again we came on the tracks. Then we lost them for half a mile, but only to pick them up once more quite close to Mapleton. It was Holmes who saw them first, and he stood pointing with a look of triumph upon his face. A man's track was visible beside the horse's.

"The horse was alone before," I cried.

"Quite so. It was alone before. Hullo, what is this?"

The double track turned sharp off and took the direction of King's Pyland. Holmes whistled, and we both followed along after it. His eyes were on the trail, but I happened to look a little to one side, and saw to my surprise the same tracks coming back again in the opposite direction.

"One for you, Watson," said Holmes, when I pointed it out. "You have saved us a long walk, which would have brought us back on our own traces. Let us follow the return track."

We had not to go far. It ended at the paving of asphalt which led up to the gates of the Mapleton stables. As we approached, a groom ran out from them.

"We don't want any loiterers about here," said he. "I only wished to ask a question," said Holmes, with his finger and thumb in his waistcoat pocket. "Should I be too early to see your master, Mr. Silas Brown, if I were to call at five o'clock to-morrow morning?"

"Bless you, sir, if any one is about he will be, for he is always the first stirring. But here he is, sir, to answer your questions for himself. No, sir, no; it is as much as my place is worth to let him see me touch your money. Afterwards, if you like."

As Sherlock Holmes replaced the half-crown which he had drawn from his pocket, a fierce-looking elderly man strode out from the gate with a hunting-crop swinging in his hand.

"What's this, Dawson!" he cried. "No goossiping! Go about your business! And you, what the devil do you want here?"

"Ten minutes' talk with you, my good sir," said Holmes in the sweetest of voices.

"I've no time to talk to every gadabout. We want no stranger here. Be off, or you may find a dog at your heels."

Holmes leaned forward and whispered something in the trainer's ear. He started violently and flushed to the temples.

"It's a lie!" he shouted, "an infernal lie!"

"Very good. Shall we argue about it here in public or talk it over in your parlour?"

"Oh, come in if you wish to."

Holmes smiled. "I shall not keep you more than a few minutes, Watson," said he. "Now, Mr. Brown, I am quite
at your disposal."

It was twenty minutes, and the reds had all faded into greys before Holmes and the trainer reappeared. Never have I seen such a change as had been brought about in Silas Brown in that short time. His face was ashy pale, beads of perspiration shone upon his brow, and his hands shook until the hunting-crop wagged like a branch in the wind. His bullying, overbearing manner was all gone too, and he cringed along at my companion's side like a dog with its master.

"You instructions will be done. It shall all be done," said he.

"There must be no mistake," said Holmes, looking round at him. The other winced as he read the menace in his eyes.

"Oh no, there shall be no mistake. It shall be there. Should I change it first or not?"

Holmes thought a little and then burst out laughing. "No, don't," said he; "I shall write to you about it. No tricks, now, or--"

"Oh, you can trust me, you can trust me!"

"Yes, I think I can. Well, you shall hear from me to-morrow." He turned upon his heel, disregarding the trembling hand which the other held out to him, and we set off for King's Pyland.

"A more perfect compound of the bully, coward, and sneak than Master Silas Brown I have seldom met with," remarked Holmes as we trudged along together.

"He has the horse, then?"

"He tried to bluster out of it, but I described to him so exactly what his actions had been upon that morning that he is convinced that I was watching him. Of course you observed the peculiarly square toes in the impressions, and that his own boots exactly corresponded to them. Again, of course no subordinate would have dared to do such a thing. I described to him how, when according to his custom he was the first down, he perceived a strange horse wandering over the moor. How he went out to it, and his astonishment at recognising, from the white forehead which has given the favourite its name, that chance had put in his power the only horse which could beat the one upon which he had put his money. Then I described how his first impulse had been to lead him back to King's Pyland, and how the devil had shown him how he could hide the horse until the race was over, and how he had led it back and concealed it at Mapleton. When I told him every detail he gave it up and thought only of saving his own skin."

"But his stables had been searched?"

"Oh, an old horse-fakir like him has many a dodge."

"But are you not afraid to leave the horse in his power now, since he has every interest in injuring it?"

"My dear fellow, he will guard it as the apple of his eye. He knows that his only hope of mercy is to produce it safe."

"Colonel Ross did not impress me as a man who would be likely to show much mercy in any case."

"The matter does not rest with Colonel Ross. I follow my own methods, and tell as much or as little as I choose. That is the advantage of being unofficial. I don't know whether you observed it, Watson, but the Colonel's manner has been just a trifle cavalier to me. I am inclined now to have a little amusement at his expense. Say nothing to him about the horse."

"Certainly not without your permission."

"And of course this is all quite a minor point compared to the question of who killed John Straker."

"And you will devote yourself to that?"

"On the contrary, we both go back to London by the night train."

I was thunderstruck by my friend's words. We had only been a few hours in Devonshire, and that he should give up an investigation which he had begun so brilliantly was quite incomprehensible to me. Not a word more could I draw from him until we were back at the trainer's house. The Colonel and the Inspector were awaiting us in the parlour.

"My friend and I return to town by the night-express," said Holmes. "We have had a charming little breath of your beautiful Dartmoor air."

The Inspector opened his eyes, and the Colonel's lip curled in a sneer.

"So you despair of arresting the murderer of poor Straker," said he.

Holmes shrugged his shoulders. "There are certainly grave difficulties in the way," said he. "I have every hope, however, that your horse will start upon Tuesday, and I beg that you will have your jockey in readiness. Might I ask for a photograph of Mr. John Straker?"

The Inspector took one from an envelope and handed it to him.

"My dear Gregory, you anticipate all my wants. If I might ask you to wait here for an instant, I have a question which I should like to put to the maid."
"I must say that I am rather disappointed in our London consultant," said Colonel Ross, bluntly, as my friend left the room. "I do not see that we are any further than when he came."

"At least you have his assurance that your horse will run," said I.

"Yes, I have his assurance," said the Colonel, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I should prefer to have the horse."

I was about to make some reply in defence of my friend when he entered the room again.

"Now, gentlemen," said he, "I am quite ready for Tavistock."

As we stepped into the carriage one of the stable-lads held the door open for us. A sudden idea seemed to occur to Holmes, for he leaned forward and touched the lad upon the sleeve.

"You have a few sheep in the paddock," he said. "Who attends to them?"

"I do, sir."

"Have you noticed anything amiss with them of late?"

"Well, sir, not of much account; but three of them have gone lame, sir."

I could see that Holmes was extremely pleased, for he chuckled and rubbed his hands together.

"A long shot, Watson; a very long shot," said he, pinching my arm. "Gregory, let me recommend to your attention this singular epidemic among the sheep. Drive on, coachman!"

Colonel Ross still wore an expression which showed the poor opinion which he had formed of my companion's ability, but I saw by the Inspector's face that his attention had been keenly aroused.

"You consider that to be important?" he asked.

"Exceedingly so."

"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

Four days later Holmes and I were again in the train, bound for Winchester to see the race for the Wessex Cup. Colonel Ross met us by appointment outside the station, and we drove in his drag to the course beyond the town. His face was grave, and his manner was cold in the extreme. "I have seen nothing of my horse," said he.

"I suppose that you would know him when you saw him?" asked Holmes.

The Colonel was very angry. "I have been on the turf for twenty years, and never was asked such a question as that before," said he. "A child would know Silver Blaze, with his white forehead and his mottled off-foreleg."

"How is the betting?"

"Well, that is the curious part of it. You could have got fifteen to one yesterday, but the price has become shorter and shorter, until you can hardly get three to one now."

"Hum!" said Holmes. "Somebody knows something, that is clear."

As the drag drew up in the enclosure near the grand stand I glanced at the card to see the entries.


"We scratched our other one, and put all hopes on your word," said the Colonel. "Why, what is that? Silver Blaze favourite?"

"Five to four against Silver Blaze!" roared the ring. "Five to four against Silver Blaze! Five to fifteen against Desborough! Five to four on the field!"

"There are the numbers up," I cried. "They are all six there."

"All six there? Then my horse is running," cried the Colonel in great agitation. "But I don't see him. My colours have not passed."

"Only five have passed. This must be he."

As I spoke a powerful bay horse swept out from the weighting enclosure and cantered past us, bearing on it back the well-known black and red of the Colonel.

"That's not my horse," cried the owner. "That beast has not a white hair upon its body. What is this that you have done, Mr. Holmes?"

"Well, well, let us see how he gets on," said my friend, imperturbably. For a few minutes he gazed through my field-glass. "Capital! An excellent start!" he cried suddenly. "There they are, coming round the curve!"

From our drag we had a superb view as they came up the straight. The six horses were so close together that a carpet could have covered them, but half way up the yellow of the Mapleton stable showed to the front. Before they reached us, however, Desborough's bolt was shot, and the Colonel's horse, coming away with a rush, passed the post.
a good six lengths before its rival, the Duke of Balmoral's Iris making a bad third.

"It's my race, anyhow," gasped the Colonel, passing his hand over his eyes. "I confess that I can make neither head nor tail of it. Don't you think that you have kept up your mystery long enough, Mr. Holmes?"

"Certainly, Colonel, you shall know everything. Let us all go round and have a look at the horse together. Here he is," he continued, as we made our way into the weighing enclosure, where only owners and their friends find admittance. "You have only to wash his face and his leg in spirits of wine, and you will find that he is the same old Silver Blaze as ever."

"You take my breath away!"

"I found him in the hands of a fakir, and took the liberty of running him just as he was sent over."

"My dear sir, you have done wonders. The horse looks very fit and well. It never went better in its life. I owe you a thousand apologies for having doubted your ability. You have done me a great service by recovering my horse. You would do me a greater still if you could lay your hands on the murderer of John Straker."

"I have done so," said Holmes quietly.

The Colonel and I stared at him in amazement. "You have got him! Where is he, then?"

"He is here."

"Here! Where?"

"In my company at the present moment."

The Colonel flushed angrily. "I quite recognise that I am under obligations to you, Mr. Holmes," said he, "but I must regard what you have just said as either a very bad joke or an insult."

Sherlock Holmes laughed. "I assure you that I have not associated you with the crime, Colonel," said he. "The real murderer is standing immediately behind you." He stepped past and laid his hand upon the glossy neck of the thoroughbred.

"The horse!" cried both the Colonel and myself.

"Yes, the horse. And it may lessen his guilt if I say that it was done in self-defence, and that John Straker was a man who was entirely unworthy of your confidence. But there goes the bell, and as I stand to win a little on this next race, I shall defer a lengthy explanation until a more fitting time."

We had the corner of a Pullman car to ourselves that evening as we whirled back to London, and I fancy that the journey was a short one to Colonel Ross as well as to myself, as we listened to our companion's narrative of the events which had occurred at the Dartmoor training-stables upon the Monday night, and the means by which he had unravelled them.

"I confess," said he, "that any theories which I had formed from the newspaper reports were entirely erroneous. And yet there were indications there, had they not been overlaid by other details which concealed their true import. I went to Devonshire with the conviction that Fitzroy Simpson was the true culprit, although, of course, I saw that the evidence against him was by no means complete. It was while I was in the carriage, just as we reached the trainer's house, that the immense significance of the curried mutton occurred to me. You may remember that I was distrait, and remained sitting after you had all alighted. I was marvelling in my own mind how I could possibly have overlooked so obvious a clue."

"I confess," said the Colonel, "that even now I cannot see how it helps us."

"It was the first link in my chain of reasoning. Powdered opium is by no means tasteless. The flavour is not disagreeable, but it is perceptible. Were it mixed with any ordinary dish the eater would undoubtedly detect it, and would probably eat no more. A curry was exactly the medium which would disguise this taste. By no possible supposition could this stranger, Fitzroy Simpson, have caused curry to be served in the trainer's family that night, and it is surely too monstrous a coincidence to suppose that he happened to come along with powdered opium upon the very night when a dish happened to be served which would disguise the flavour. That is unthinkable. Therefore Simpson becomes eliminated from the case, and our attention centres upon Straker and his wife, the only two people who could have chosen curried mutton for supper that night. The opium was added after the dish was set aside for the stable-boy, for the others had the same for supper with no ill effects. Which of them, then, had access to that dish without the maid seeing them?

"Before deciding that question I had grasped the significance of the silence of the dog, for one true inference invariably suggests others. The Simpson incident had shown me that a dog was kept in the stables, and yet, though some one had been in and had fetched out a horse, he had not barked enough to arouse the two lads in the loft. Obviously the midnight visitor was some one whom the dog knew well."

"I was already convinced, or almost convinced, that John Straker went down to the stables in the dead of the night and took out Silver Blaze. For what purpose? For a dishonest one, obviously, or why should he drug his own stable-boy? And yet I was at a loss to know why. There have been cases before now where trainers have made sure of great sums of money by laying against their own horses, through agents, and then preventing them from winning
by fraud. Sometimes it is a pulling jockey. Sometimes it is some surer and subtler means. What was it here? I hoped that the contents of his pockets might help me to form a conclusion.

"And they did so. You cannot have forgotten the singular knife which was found in the dead man's hand, a knife which certainly no sane man would choose for a weapon. It was, as Dr. Watson told us, a form of knife which is used for the most delicate operations known in surgery. And it was to be used for a delicate operation that night. You must know, with your wide experience of turf matters, Colonel Ross, that it is possible to make a slight nick upon the tendons of a horse's ham, and to do it subcutaneously, so as to leave absolutely no trace. A horse so treated would develop a slight lameness, which would be put down to a strain in exercise or a touch of rheumatism, but never to foul play."

"Villain! Scoundrel!" cried the Colonel.

"We have here the explanation of why John Straker wished to take the horse out on to the moor. So spirited a creature would have certainly roused the soundest of sleepers when it felt the prick of the knife. It was absolutely necessary to do it in the open air."

"I have been blind!" cried the Colonel. "Of course that was why he needed the candle, and struck the match."

"Undoubtedly. But in examining his belongings I was fortunate enough to discover not only the method of the crime, but even its motives. As a man of the world, Colonel, you know that men do not carry other people's bills about in their pockets. We have most of us quite enough to do to settle our own. I at once concluded that Straker was leading a double life, and keeping a second establishment. The nature of the bill showed that there was a lady in the case, and one who had expensive tastes. Liberal as you are with your servants, one can hardly expect that they can buy twenty-guinea walking dresses for their ladies. I questioned Mrs. Straker as to the dress without her knowing it, and having satisfied myself that it had never reached her, I made a note of the milliner's address, and felt that by calling there with Straker's photograph I could easily dispose of the mythical Derbyshire.

"From that time on all was plain. Straker had led out the horse to a hollow where his light would be invisible. Simpson in his flight had dropped his cravat, and Straker had picked it up--with some idea, perhaps, that he might use it in securing the horse's leg. Once in the hollow, he had got behind the horse and had struck a light; but the creature frightened at the sudden glare, and with the strange instinct of animals feeling that some mischief was intended, had lashed out, and the steel shoe had struck Straker full on the forehead. He had already, in spite of the rain, taken off his overcoat in order to do his delicate task, and so, as he fell, his knife gashed his thigh. Do I make it clear?"

"Wonderful!" cried the Colonel. "Wonderful! You might have been there!"

"My final shot was, I confess a very long one. It struck me that so astute a man as Straker would not undertake this delicate tendon-nicking without a little practice. What could he practice on? My eyes fell upon the sheep, and I asked a question which, rather to my surprise, showed that my surmise was correct.

"When I returned to London I called upon the milliner, who had recognised Straker as an excellent customer of the name of Derbyshire, who had a very dashing wife, with a strong partiality for expensive dresses. I have no doubt that this woman had plunged him over head and ears in debt, and so led him into this miserable plot."

"You have explained all but one thing," cried the Colonel. "Where was the horse?"

"Ah, it bolted, and was cared for by one of your neighbours. We must have an amnesty in that direction, I think. This is Clapham Junction, if I am not mistaken, and we shall be in Victoria in less than ten minutes. If you care to smoke a cigar in our rooms, Colonel, I shall be happy to give you any other details which might interest you."

The Yellow Face

[In publishing these short sketches based upon the numerous cases in which my companion's singular gifts have made us the listeners to, and eventually the actors in, some strange drama, it is only natural that I should dwell rather upon his successes than upon his failures. And this not so much for the sake of his reputations--for, indeed, it was when he was at his wits' end that his energy and his versatility were most admirable--but because where he failed it happened too often that no one else succeeded, and that the tale was left forever without a conclusion. Now and again, however, it chanced that even when he erred, the truth was still discovered. I have notes of some half-dozen cases of the kind; the Adventure of the Musgrave Ritual and that which I am about to recount are the two which present the strongest features of interest.]

Sherlock Holmes was a man who seldom took exercise for exercise's sake. Few men were capable of greater muscular effort, and he was undoubtedly one of the finest boxers of his weight that I have ever seen; but he looked upon aimless bodily exertion as a waste of energy, and he seldom bestirred himself save when there was some professional object to be served. Then he was absolutely untiring and indefatigable. That he should have kept himself in training under such circumstances is remarkable, but his diet was usually of the sparsest, and his habits were simple to the verge of austerity. Save for the occasional use of cocaine, he had no vices, and he only turned to the drug as a protest against the monotony of existence when cases were scanty and the papers uninteresting.
One day in early spring he had so far relaxed as to go for a walk with me in the Park, where the first faint shoots of green were breaking out upon the elms, and the sticky spear-heads of the chestnuts were just beginning to burst into their five-fold leaves. For two hours we rambled about together, in silence for the most part, as befits two men who know each other intimately. It was nearly five before we were back in Baker Street once more.

"Beg pardon, sir," said our page-boy, as he opened the door. "There's been a gentleman here asking for you, sir." Holmes glanced reproachfully at me. "So much for afternoon walks!" said he. "Has this gentleman gone, then?"

"Yes, sir."

"Didn't you ask him in?"

"Yes, sir; he came in."

"How long did he wait?"

"Half an hour, sir. He was a very restless gentleman, sir, a-walkin' and a-stampin' all the time he was here. I was waitin' outside the door, sir, and I could hear him. At last he outs into the passage, and he cries, 'Is that man never goin' to come?' Those were his very words, sir. 'You'll only need to wait a little longer;' says I. 'Then I'll wait in the open air, for I feel half choked,' says he. 'I'll be back before long.' And with that he ups and he outs, and all I could say wouldn't hold him back."

"Well, well, you did your best," said Holmes, as we walked into our room. "It's very annoying, though, Watson. I was badly in need of a case, and this looks, from the man's impatience, as if it were of importance. Hullo! That's not your pipe on the table. He must have left his behind him. A nice old brier with a good long stem of what the tobacconists call amber. I wonder how many real amber mouthpieces there are in London? Some people think that a fly in it is a sign. Well, he must have been disturbed in his mind to leave a pipe behind him which he evidently values highly."

"How do you know that he values it highly?" I asked.

"Well, I should put the original cost of the pipe at seven and sixpence. Now it has, you see, been twice mended, once in the wooden stem and once in the amber. Each of these mends, done, as you observe, with silver bands, must have cost more than the pipe did originally. The man must value the pipe highly when he prefers to patch it up rather than buy a new one with the same money."

"Anything else?" I asked, for Holmes was turning the pipe about in his hand, and staring at it in his peculiar pensive way.

He held it up and tapped on it with his long, thin fore-finger, as a professor might who was lecturing on a bone.

"Pipes are occasionally of extraordinary interest," said he. "Nothing has more individuality, save perhaps watches and bootlaces. The indications here, however, are neither very marked nor very important. The owner is obviously a muscular man, left-handed, with an excellent set of teeth, careless in his habits, and with no need to practise economy."

My friend threw out the information in a very offhand way, but I saw that he cocked his eye at me to see if I had followed his reasoning.

"You think a man must be well-to-do if he smokes a seven-shilling pipe," said I.

"This is Grosvenor mixture at eightpence an ounce," Holmes answered, knocking a little out on his palm. "As he might get an excellent smoke for half the price, he has no need to practise economy."

"And the other points?"

"He has been in the habit of lighting his pipe at lamps and gas-jets. You can see that it is quite charred all down one side. Of course a match could not have done that. Why should a man hold a match to the side of his pipe? But you cannot light it at a lamp without getting the bowl charred. And it is all on the right side of the pipe. From that I gather that he is a left-handed man. You hold your own pipe to the lamp, and see how naturally you, being right-handed, hold the left side to the flame. You might do it once the other way, but not as a constancy. This has always been held so. Then he has bitten through his amber. It takes a muscular, energetic fellow, and one with a good set of teeth, to do that. But if I am not mistaken I hear him upon the stair, so we shall have something more interesting than his pipe to study."

An instant later our door opened, and a tall young man entered the room. He was well but quietly dressed in a dark-grey suit, and carried a brown wide-awake in his hand. I should have put him at about thirty, though he was really some years older.

"I beg your pardon," said he, with some embarrassment; "I suppose I should have knocked. Yes, of course I should have knocked. The fact is that I am a little upset, and you must put it all down to that." He passed his hand over his forehead like a man who is half dazed, and then fell rather than sat down upon a chair.

"I can see that you have not slept for a night or two," said Holmes, in his easy, genial way. "That tries a man's nerves more than work, and more even than pleasure. May I ask how I can help you?"

"I wanted your advice, sir. I don't know what to do and my whole life seems to have gone to pieces."
"You wish to employ me as a consulting detective?"

"Not that only. I want your opinion as a judicious man—as a man of the world. I want to know what I ought to do next. I hope to God you'll be able to tell me."

He spoke in little, sharp, jerky outbursts, and it seemed to me that to speak at all was very painful to him, and that his will all through was overriding his inclinations.

"It's a very delicate thing," said he. "One does not like to speak of one's domestic affairs to strangers. It seems dreadful to discuss the conduct of one's wife with two men whom I have never seen before. It's horrible to have to do it. But I've got to the end of my tether, and I must have advice."

"My dear Mr. Grant Munro—" began Holmes.

Our visitor sprang from his chair. "What!" he cried, "you know my name?"

"If you wish to preserve your incognito,' said Holmes, smiling, "I would suggest that you cease to write your name upon the lining of your hat, or else that you turn the crown towards the person whom you are addressing. I was about to say that my friend and I have listened to a good many strange secrets in this room, and that we have had the good fortune to bring peace to many troubled souls. I trust that we may do as much for you. Might I beg you, as time may prove to be of importance, to furnish me with the facts of your case without further delay?"

Our visitor again passed his hand over his forehead, as if he found it bitterly hard. From every gesture and expression I could see that he was a reserved, self-contained man, with a dash of pride in his nature, more likely to hide his wounds than to expose them. Then suddenly, with a fierce gesture of his closed hand, like one who throws reserve to the winds, he began.

"The facts are these, Mr. Holmes," said he. "I am a married man, and have been so for three years. During that time my wife and I have loved each other as fondly and lived as happily as any two that ever were joined. We have not had a difference, not one, in thought or word or deed. And now, since last Monday, there has suddenly sprung up a barrier between us, and I find that there is something in her life and in her thought of which I know as little as if she were the woman who brushes by me in the street. We are estranged, and I want to know why."

"Now there is one thing that I want to impress upon you before I go any further, Mr. Holmes. Effie loves me. Don't let there be any mistake about that. She loves me with her whole heart and soul, and never more than now. I know it. I feel it. I don't want to argue about that. A man can tell easily enough when a woman loves him. But there's this secret between us, and we can never be the same until it is cleared."

"Kindly let me have the facts, Mr. Munro," said Holmes, with some impatience.

"I'll tell you what I know about Effie's history. She was a widow when I met her first, though quite young—only twenty-five. Her name then was Mrs. Hebron. She went out to America when she was young, and lived in the town of Atlanta, where she married this Hebron, who was a lawyer with a good practice. They had one child, but the yellow fever broke out badly in the place, and both husband and child died of it. I have seen his death certificate. This sickened her of America, and she came back to live with a maiden aunt at Pinner, in Middlesex. I may mention that her husband had left her comfortably off, and that she had a capital of about four thousand five hundred pounds, which had been so well invested by him that it returned an average of seven per cent. She had only been six months at Pinner when I met her; we fell in love with each other, and we married a few weeks afterwards.

"I am a hop merchant myself, and as I have an income of seven or eight hundred, we found ourselves comfortably off, and took a nice eighty-pound-a-year villa at Norbury. Our little place was very countrified, considering that it is so close to town. We had an inn and two houses a little above us, and a single cottage at the other side of the field which faces us, and except those there were no houses until you got half way to the station. My business took me into town at certain seasons, but in summer I had less to do, and then in our country home my wife and I were just as happy as could be wished. I tell you that there never was a shadow between us until this accursed affair began."

"There's one thing I ought to tell you before I go further. When we married, my wife made over all her property to me—rather against my will, for I saw how awkward it would be if my business affairs went wrong. However, she would have it so, and it was done. Well, about six weeks ago she came to me."

"'Jack,' said she, 'when you took my money you said that if ever I wanted any I was to ask you for it.'"

"'Certainly,' said I. 'It's all your own.'"

"'Well,' said she, 'I want a hundred pounds.'"

"I was a bit staggered at this, for I had imagined it was simply a new dress or something of the kind that she was after."

"'What on earth for?' I asked."

"'Oh,' said she, in her playful way, 'you said that you were only my banker, and bankers never ask questions, you know.'"

"'If you really mean it, of course you shall have the money,' said I.
"Oh, yes, I really mean it."
"And you won't tell me what you want it for?"
"Some day, perhaps, but not just at present, Jack."

"So I had to be content with that, though it was the first time that there had ever been any secret between us. I gave her a check, and I never thought any more of the matter. It may have nothing to do with what came afterwards, but I thought it only right to mention it.

"Well, I told you just now that there is a cottage not far from our house. There is just a field between us, but to reach it you have to go along the road and then turn down a lane. Just beyond it is a nice little grove of Scotch firs, and I used to be very fond of strolling down there, for trees are always a neighbourly kind of thing. The cottage had been standing empty this eight months, and it was a pity, for it was a pretty two storied place, with an old-fashioned porch and honeysuckle about it. I have stood many a time and thought what a neat little homestead it would make.

"Well, last Monday evening I was taking a stroll down that way, when I met an empty van coming up the lane, and saw a pile of carpets and things lying about on the grass-plot beside the porch. It was clear that the cottage had at last been let. I walked past it, and wondered what sort of folk they were who had come to live so near us. And as I looked I suddenly became aware that a face was watching me out of one of the upper windows.

"I don't know what there was about that face, Mr. Holmes, but it seemed to send a chill right down my back. I was some little way off, so that I could not make out the features, but there was something unnatural and inhuman about the face. That was the impression that I had, and I moved quickly forwards to get a nearer view of the person who was watching me. But as I did so the face suddenly disappeared, so suddenly that it seemed to have been plucked away into the darkness of the room. I stood for five minutes thinking the business over, and trying to analyse my impressions. I could not tell if the face were that of a man or a woman. It had been too far from me for that. But its colour was what had impressed me most. It was of a livid chalky white, and with something set and rigid about it which was shockingly unnatural. So disturbed was I that I determined to see a little more of the new inmates of the cottage. I approached and knocked at the door, which was instantly opened by a tall, gaunt woman with a harsh, forbidding face.

"What may you be wantin'?" she asked, in a Northern accent.
"I am your neighbour over yonder," I said, nodding towards my house. 'I see that you have only just moved in, so I thought that if I could be of any help to you in any--'

"Ay, we'll just ask ye when we want ye,' said she, and shut the door in my face. Annoyed at the churlish rebuff, I turned my back and walked home. All evening, though I tried to think of other things, my mind would still turn to the apparition at the window and the rudeness of the woman. I determined to say nothing about the former to my wife, for she is a nervous, highly strung woman, and I had no wish that she would share the unpleasant impression which had been produced upon myself. I remarked to her, however, before I fell asleep, that the cottage was now occupied, to which she returned no reply.

"I am usually an extremely sound sleeper. It has been a standing jest in the family that nothing could ever wake me during the night. And yet somehow on that particular night, whether it may have been the slight excitement produced by my little adventure or not I know not, but I slept much more lightly than usual. Half in my dreams I was dimly conscious that something was going on in the room, and gradually became aware that my wife had dressed herself and was slipping on her mantle and her bonnet. My lips were parted to murmur out some sleepy words of surprise or remonstrance at this untimely preparation, when suddenly my half-opened eyes fell upon her face, illuminated by the candle-light, and astonishment held me dumb. She wore an expression such as I had never seen before--such as I should have thought her incapable of assuming. She was deadly pale and breathing fast, glancing furtively towards the bed as she fastened her mantle, to see if she had disturbed me. Then, thinking that I was still asleep, she slipped noiselessly from the room, and an instant later I heard a sharp creaking which could only come from the hinges of the front door. I sat up in bed and rapped my knuckles against the rail to make certain that I was truly awake. Then I took my watch from under the pillow. It was three in the morning. What on this earth could my wife be doing out on the country road at three in the morning?"

"You awake, Jack!' she cried, with a nervous laugh. 'Why, I thought that nothing could awake you.'
"'Where have you been?' I asked, more sternly.

"I don't wonder that you are surprised,' said she, and I could see that her fingers were trembling as she undid the fastenings of her mantle. 'Why, I never remember having done such a thing in my life before. The fact is that I felt as though I were choking, and had a perfect longing for a breath of fresh air. I really think that I should have fainted if I had not gone out. I stood at the door for a few minutes, and now I am quite myself again.'

"All the time that she was telling me this story she never once looked in my direction, and her voice was quite unlike her usual tones. It was evident to me that she was saying what was false. I said nothing in reply, but turned my face to the wall, sick at heart, with my mind filled with a thousand venomous doubts and suspicions. What was it that my wife was concealing from me? Where had she been during that strange expedition? I felt that I should have no peace until I knew, and yet I shrank from asking her again after once she had told me what was false. All the rest of the night I tossed and tumbled, framing theory after theory, each more unlikely than the last.

"I should have gone to the City that day, but I was too disturbed in my mind to be able to pay attention to business matters. My wife seemed to be as upset as myself, and I could see from the little questioning glances which she kept shooting at me that she understood that I disbelieved her statement, and that she was at her wits' end what to do. We hardly exchanged a word during breakfast, and immediately afterwards I went out for a walk, that I might think the matter out in the fresh morning air.

"I went as far as the Crystal Palace, spent an hour in the grounds, and was back in Norbury by one o'clock. It happened that my way took me past the cottage, and I stopped for an instant to look at the windows, and to see if I could catch a glimpse of the strange face which had looked out at me on the day before. As I stood there, imagine my surprise, Mr. Holmes, when the door suddenly opened and my wife walked out.

"I was struck dumb with astonishment at the sight of her; but my emotions were nothing to those which showed themselves upon her face when our eyes met. She seemed for an instant to wish to shrink back inside the house again; and then, seeing how useless all concealment must be, she came forward, with a very white face and frightened eyes which belied the smile upon her lips.

"'Ah, Jack,' she said, 'I have just been in to see if I can be of any assistance to our new neighbours. Why do you look at me like that, Jack? You are not angry with me?'

"'So,' said I, 'this is where you went during the night.'

"'What do you mean?' she cried.

"'You came here. I am sure of it. Who are these people, that you should visit them at such an hour?'

"'I have not been here before.'

"'How can you tell me what you know is false?' I cried. 'Your very voice changes as you speak. When have I ever had a secret from you? I shall enter that cottage, and I shall probe the matter to the bottom.'

"'No, no, Jack, for God's sake!' she gasped, in uncontrollable emotion. Then, as I approached the door, she seized my sleeve and pulled me back with convulsive strength.

"'I implore you not to do this, Jack,' she cried. 'I swear that I will tell you everything some day, but nothing but misery can come of it if you enter that cottage.' Then, as I tried to shake her off, she clung to me in a frenzy of entreaty.

"'Trust me, Jack!' she cried. 'Trust me only this once. You will never have cause to regret it. You know that I would not have a secret from you if it were not for your own sake. Our whole lives are at stake in this. If you come home with me, all will be well. If you force your way into that cottage, all is over between us.'

"'There was such earnestness, such despair, in her manner that her words arrested me, and I stood irresolute before the door.

"'I will trust you on one condition, and on one condition only,' said I at last. 'It is that this mystery comes to an end from now. You are at liberty to preserve your secret, but you must promise me that there shall be no more nightly visits, no more doings which are kept from my knowledge. I am willing to forget those which are passed if you will promise that there shall be no more in the future.'

"'I was sure that you would trust me,' she cried, with a great sigh of relief. 'It shall be just as you wish. Come away--oh, come away up to the house.'

"Still pulling at my sleeve, she led me away from the cottage. As we went I glanced back, and there was that yellow livid face watching us out of the upper window. What link could there be between that creature and my wife? Or how could the coarse, rough woman whom I had seen the day before be connected with her? It was a strange puzzle, and yet I knew that my mind could never know ease again until I had solved it.

"For two days after this I stayed at home, and my wife appeared to abide loyally by our engagement, for, as far as I know, she never stirred out of the house. On the third day, however, I had ample evidence that her solemn promise was not enough to hold her back from this secret influence which drew her away from her husband and her duty.
"I had gone into town on that day, but I returned by the 2.40 instead of the 3.36, which is my usual train. As I entered the house the maid ran into the hall with a startled face.

"Where is your mistress?" I asked.

"I think that she has gone out for a walk," she answered.

"My mind was instantly filled with suspicion. I rushed upstairs to make sure that she was not in the house. As I did so I happened to glance out of one of the upper windows, and saw the maid with whom I had just been speaking running across the field in the direction of the cottage. Then of course I saw exactly what it all meant. My wife had gone over there, and had asked the servant to call her if I should return. Tingling with anger, I rushed down and hurried across, determined to end the matter once and forever. I saw my wife and the maid hurrying back along the lane, but I did not stop to speak with them. In the cottage lay the secret which was casting a shadow over my life. I vowed that, come what might, it should be a secret no longer. I did not even knock when I reached it, but turned the handle and rushed into the passage.

"It was all still and quiet upon the ground floor. In the kitchen a kettle was singing on the fire, and a large black cat lay coiled up in the basket; but there was no sign of the woman whom I had seen before. I ran into the other room, but it was equally deserted. Then I rushed up the stairs, only to find two other rooms empty and deserted at the top. There was no one at all in the whole house. The furniture and pictures were of the most common and vulgar description, save in the one chamber at the window of which I had seen the strange face. That was comfortable and elegant, and all my suspicions rose into a fierce bitter flame when I saw that on the mantelpiece stood a copy of a fell-length photograph of my wife, which had been taken at my request only three months ago.

"I stayed long enough to make certain that the house was absolutely empty. Then I left it, feeling a weight at my heart such as I had never had before. My wife came out into the hall as I entered my house; but I was too hurt and angry to speak with her, and pushing past her, I made my way into my study. She followed me, however, before I could close the door.

"I am sorry that I broke my promise, Jack," said she; 'but if you knew all the circumstances I am sure that you would forgive me.'

"Tell me everything, then," said I.

"I cannot, Jack, I cannot," she cried.

"Until you tell me who it is that has been living in that cottage, and who it is to whom you have given that photograph, there can never be any confidence between us," said I, and breaking away from her, I left the house. That was yesterday, Mr. Holmes, and I have not seen her since, nor do I know anything more about this strange business. It is the first shadow that has come between us, and it has so shaken me that I do not know what I should do for the best. Suddenly this morning it occurred to me that you were the man to advise me, so I have hurried to you now, and I place myself unreservedly in your hands. If there is any point which I have not made clear, pray question me about it. But, above all, tell me quickly what I am to do, for this misery is more than I can bear."

Holmes and I had listened with the utmost interest to this extraordinary statement, which had been delivered in the jerky, broken fashion of a man who is under the influence of extreme emotions. My companion sat silent for some time, with his chin upon his hand, lost in thought.

"Tell me," said he at last, "could you swear that this was a man's face which you saw at the window?"

"Each time that I saw it I was some distance away from it, so that it is impossible for me to say."

"You appear, however, to have been disagreeably impressed by it."

"It seemed to be of an unnatural colour, and to have a strange rigidity about the features. When I approached, it vanished with a jerk."

"How long is it since your wife asked you for a hundred pounds?"

"Nearly two months."

"Have you ever seen a photograph of her first husband?"

"No; there was a great fire at Atlanta very shortly after his death, and all her papers were destroyed."

"And yet she had a certificate of death. You say that you saw it."

"Yes; she got a duplicate after the fire."

"Did you ever meet any one who knew her in America?"

"No."

"Did she ever talk of revisiting the place?"

"No."

"Or get letters from it?"

"No."

"Thank you. I should like to think over the matter a little now. If the cottage is now permanently deserted we may have some difficulty. If, on the other hand, as I fancy is more likely, the inmates were warned of you coming,
and left before you entered yesterday, then they may be back now, and we should clear it all up easily. Let me advise you, then, to return to Norbury, and to examine the windows of the cottage again. If you have reason to believe that is inhabited, do not force your way in, but send a wire to my friend and me. We shall be with you within an hour of receiving it, and we shall then very soon get to the bottom of the business."

"And if it is still empty?"
"In that case I shall come out to-morrow and talk it over with you. Good-by; and, above all, do not fret until you know that you really have a cause for it."
"I am afraid that this is a bad business, Watson," said my companion, as he returned after accompanying Mr. Grant Munro to the door. "What do you make of it?"
"It had an ugly sound," I answered.
"Yes. There's blackmail in it, or I am much mistaken."
"And who is the blackmailer?"
"Well, it must be the creature who lives in the only comfortable room in the place, and has her photograph above his fireplace. Upon my word, Watson, there is something very attractive about that livid face at the window, and I would not have missed the case for worlds."
"You have a theory?"
"Yes, a provisional one. But I shall be surprised if it does not turn out to be correct. This woman's first husband is in that cottage."
"Why do you think so?"
"How else can we explain her frenzied anxiety that her second one should not enter it? The facts, as I read them, are something like this: This woman was married in America. Her husband developed some hateful qualities; or shall we say that he contracted some loathsome disease, and became a leper or an imbecile? She flies from him at last, returns to England, changes her name, and starts her life, as she thinks, afresh. She has been married three years, and believes that her position is quite secure, having shown her husband the death certificate of some man whose name she has assumed, when suddenly her whereabouts is discovered by her first husband; or, we may suppose, by some unscrupulous woman who has attached herself to the invalid. They write to the wife, and threaten to come and expose her. She asks for a hundred pounds, and endeavours to buy them off. They come in spite of it, and when the husband mentions casually to the wife that there a new-comers in the cottage, she knows in some way that they are her pursuers. She waits until her husband is asleep, and then she rushes down to endeavour to persuade them to leave her in peace. She asks for a hundred pounds, and endeavours to buy them off. They come in spite of it, and when the husband mentions casually to the wife that there a new-comers in the cottage, she knows in some way that they are her pursuers. She waits until her husband is asleep, and then she rushes down to endeavour to persuade them to leave her in peace. Having no success, she goes again next morning, and her husband meets her, as he has told us, as she comes out. She promises him then not to go there again, but two days afterwards the hope of getting rid of those dreadful neighbours was too strong for her, and she made another attempt, taking down with her the photograph which had probably been demanded from her. In the midst of this interview the maid rushed in to say that the master had come home, on which the wife, knowing that he would come straight down to the cottage, hurried the inmates out at the back door, into the grove of fir-trees, probably, which was mentioned as standing near. In this way he found the place deserted. I shall be very much surprised, however, if it still so when he reconnoitres it this evening. What do you think of my theory?"
"It is all surmise."
"But at least it covers all the facts. When new facts come to our knowledge which cannot be covered by it, it will be time enough to reconsider it. We can do nothing more until we have a message from our friend at Norbury."

But we had not a very long time to wait for that. It came just as we had finished our tea. "The cottage is still tenanted," it said. "Have seen the face again at the window. Will meet the seven o'clock train, and will take no steps until you arrive."

He was waiting on the platform when we stepped out, and we could see in the light of the station lamps that he was very pale, and quivering with agitation.
"They are still there, Mr. Holmes," said he, laying his hand hard upon my friend's sleeve. "I saw lights in the cottage as I came down. We shall settle it now once and for all."
"What is your plan, then?" asked Holmes, as he walked down the dark tree-lined road.
"I am going to force my way in and see for myself who is in the house. I wish you both to be there as witnesses."
"You are quite determined to do this, in spite of your wife's warning that it is better that you should not solve the mystery?"
"Yes, I am determined."
"Well, I think that you are in the right. Any truth is better than indefinite doubt. We had better go up at once. Of course, legally, we are putting ourselves hopelessly in the wrong; but I think that it is worth it."

It was a very dark night, and a thin rain began to fall as we turned from the high road into a narrow lane, deeply rutted, with hedges on either side. Mr. Grant Munro pushed impatiently forward, however, and we stumbled after
him as best we could.

"There are the lights of my house," he murmured, pointing to a glimmer among the trees. "And here is the
cottage which I am going to enter."

We turned a corner in the lane as he spoke, and there was the building close beside us. A yellow bar falling
across the black foreground showed that the door was not quite closed, and one window in the upper story was
brightly illuminated. As we looked, we saw a dark blur moving across the blind.

"There is that creature!" cried Grant Munro. "You can see for yourselves that some one is there. Now follow me,
and we shall soon know all."

We approached the door; but suddenly a woman appeared out of the shadow and stood in the golden track of the
lamp-light. I could not see her face in the he darkness, but her arms were thrown out in an attitude of entreaty.

"For God's sake, don't Jack!" she cried. "I had a presentiment that you would come this evening. Think better of
it, dear! Trust me again, and you will never have cause to regret it."

"I have trusted you tool long, Effie," he cried, sternly. "Leave go of me! I must pass you. My friends and I are
going to settle this matter once and forever!" He pushed her to one side, and we followed closely after him. As he
threw the door open an old woman ran out in front of him and tried to bar his passage, but he thrust her back, and an
instant afterwards we were all upon the stairs. Grant Munro rushed into the lighted room at the top, and we entered
at his heels.

It was a cosy, well-furnished apartment, with two candles burning upon the table and two upon the mantelpiece.
In the corner, stooping over a desk, there sat what appeared to be a little girl. Her face was turned away as we
entered, but we could see that she was dressed in a red frock, and that she had long white gloves on. As she whisked
round to us, I gave a cry of surprise and horror. The face which she turned towards us was of the strangest livid tint,
and the features were absolutely devoid of any expression. An instant later the mystery was explained. Holmes, with
a laugh, passed his hand behind the child's ear, a mask peeled off from her countenance, an there was a little coal
black negress, with all her white teeth flashing in amusement at our amazed faces. I burst out laughing, out of
sympathy with her merriment; but Grant Munro stood staring, with his hand clutching his throat.

"My God!" he cried. "What can be the meaning of this?"

"I will tell you the meaning of it," cried the lady, sweeping into the room with a proud, set face. "You have
forced me, against my own judgement, to tell you, and now we must both make the best of it. My husband died at
Atlanta. My child survived."

"Your child?"

She drew a large silver locket from her bosom. "You have never seen this open."

"I understood that it did not open."

She touched a spring, and the front hinged back. There was a portrait within of a man strikingly handsome and
intelligent-looking, but bearing unmistakable signs upon his features of his African descent.

"That is John Hebron, of Atlanta," said the lady, "and a nobler man never walked the earth. I cut myself off from
my race in order to wed him, but never once while he lived did I for an instant regret it. It was our misfortune that
our only child took after his people rather than mine. It is often so in such matches, and little Lucy is darker far than
ever her father was. But dark or fair, she is my own dear little girlie, and her mother's pet." The little creature ran
across at the words and nestled up against the lady's dress. "When I left her in America," she continued, "it was only
because her health was weak, and the change might have done her harm. She was given to the care of a faithful
Scotch woman who had once been our servant. Never for an instant did I dream of disowning her as my child. But
when chance threw you in my way, Jack, and I learned to love you, I feared to tell you about my child. God forgive
me, I feared that I should lose you, and I had not the courage to tell you. I had to choose between you, and in my
weakness I turned away from my own little girl. For three years I have kept her existence a secret from you, but I
heard from the nurse, and I knew that all was well with her. At last, however, there came an overwhelming desire to
see the child once more. I struggled against it, but in vain. Though I knew the danger, I determined to have the child
over, if it were but for a few weeks. I sent a hundred pounds to the nurse, and I gave her instructions about this
cottage, so that she might come as a neighbour, without my appearing to be in any way connected with her. I pushed
my precautions so far as to order her to keep the child in the house during the daytime, and to cover up her little face
and hands so that even those who might see her at the window should not gossip about there being a black child in
the neighbourhood. If I had been less cautious I might have been more wise, but I was half crazy with fear that you
should learn the truth.

"It was you who told me first that the cottage was occupied. I should have waited for the morning, but I could
not sleep for excitement, and so at last I slipped out, knowing how difficult it is to awake you. But you saw me go,
and that was the beginning of my troubles. Next day you had my secret at your mercy, but you nobly refrained from
pursuing your advantage. Three days later, however, the nurse and child only just escaped from the back door as you
rushed in at the front one. And now to-night you at last know all, and I ask you what is to become of us, my child and me?" She clasped her hands and waited for an answer.

It was a long ten minutes [1] before Grant Munro broke the silence, and when his answer came it was one of which I love to think. He lifted the little child, kissed her, and then, still carrying her, he held his other hand out to his wife and turned towards the door.

"We can talk it over more comfortably at home," said he. "I am not a very good man, Effie, but I think that I am a better one than you have given me credit for being."

Holmes and I followed them down the lane, and my friend plucked at my sleeve as we came out.

"I think," said he, "that we shall be of more use in London than in Norbury."

Not another word did he say of the case until late that night, when he was turning away, with his lighted candle, for his bedroom.

"Watson," said he, "if it should ever strike you that I am getting a little over-confident in my powers, or giving less pains to a case than it deserves, kindly whisper 'Norbury' in my ear, and I shall be infinitely obliged to you."

[1] The original English text read "It was a long two minutes before..." The time was lengthened to ten minutes for the U.S. edition. It is hypothesized by some readers that interracial marriage was even more taboo in the U.S. than in England and so it was felt that Mr. Munro would take longer to overcome his mixed feelings about the child.

The Stock-broker's Clerk

Shortly after my marriage I had bought a connection in the Paddington district. Old Mr. Farquhar, from whom I purchased it, had at one time an excellent general practice; but his age, and an affliction of the nature of St. Vitus's dance from which he suffered, had very much thinned it. The public not unnaturally goes on the principle that he who would heal others must himself be whole, and looks askance at the curative powers of the man whose own case is beyond the reach of his drugs. Thus as my predecessor weakened his practice declined, until when I purchased it from him it had sunk from twelve hundred to little more than three hundred a year. I had confidence, however, in my own youth and energy, and was convinced that in a very few years the concern would be as flourishing as ever.

For three months after taking over the practice I was kept very closely at work, and saw little of my friend Sherlock Holmes, for I was too busy to visit Baker Street, and he seldom went anywhere himself save upon professional business. I was surprised, therefore, when, one morning in June, as I sat reading the British Medical Journal after breakfast, I heard a ring at the bell, followed by the high, somewhat strident tones of my old companion's voice.

"Ah, my dear Watson," said he, striding into the room, "I am very delighted to see you! I trust that Mrs. Watson has entirely recovered from all the little excitements connected with our adventure of the Sign of Four."

"Thank you, we are both very well," said I, shaking him warmly by the hand.

"And I hope, also," he continued, sitting down in the rocking-chair, "that the cares of medical practice have not entirely obliterated the interest which you used to take in our little deductive problems."

"On the contrary," I answered, "it was only last night that I was looking over my old notes, and classifying some of our past results."

"I trust that you don't consider your collection closed."

"Not at all. I should wish nothing better than to have some more of such experiences."

"To-day, for example?"

"Yes, to-day, if you like."

"And as far off as Birmingham?"

"Certainly, if you wish it."

"And the practice?"

"I do my neighbour's when he goes. He is always ready to work off the debt."

"Ha! Nothing could be better," said Holmes, leaning back in his chair and looking keenly at me from under his half closed lids. "I perceive that you have been unwell lately. Summer colds are always a little trying."

"I was confined to the house by a severe chill for three days last week. I thought, however, that I had cast off every trace of it."

"So you have. You look remarkably robust."

"How, then, did you know of it?"

"My dear fellow, you know my methods."

"You deduced it, then?"

"Certainly."

"And from what?"

"From your slippers."

I glanced down at the new patent leathers which I was wearing. "How on earth--" I began, but Holmes answered
my question before it was asked.

"Your slippers are new," he said. "You could not have had them more than a few weeks. The soles which you are at this moment presenting to me are slightly scorched. For a moment I thought they might have got wet and been burned in the drying. But near the instep there is a small circular wafer of paper with the shopman's hieroglyphics upon it. Damp would of course have removed this. You had, then, been sitting with our feet outstretched to the fire, which a man would hardly do even in so wet a June as this if he were in his full health."

Like all Holmes's reasoning the thing seemed simplicity itself when it was once explained. He read the thought upon my features, and his smile had a tinge of bitterness.

"I am afraid that I rather give myself away when I explain," said he. "Results without causes are much more impressive. You are ready to come to Birmingham, then?"

"Certainly. What is the case?"

"You shall hear it all in the train. My client is outside in a four-wheeler. Can you come at once?"

"In an instant." I scribbled a note to my neighbour, rushed upstairs to explain the matter to my wife, and joined Holmes upon the door-step.

"Your neighbour is a doctor," said he, nodding at the brass plate.

"Yes; he bought a practice as I did."

"An old-established one?"

"Just the same as mine. Both have been ever since the houses were built."

"Ah! Then you got hold of the best of the two."

"I think I did. But how do you know?"

"By the steps, my boy. Yours are worn three inches deeper than his. But this gentleman in the cab is my client, Mr. Hall Pycroft. Allow me to introduce you to him. Whip your horse up, cabby, for we have only just time to catch our train."

The man whom I found myself facing was a well built, fresh-complexioned young fellow, with a frank, honest face and a slight, crisp, yellow moustache. He wore a very shiny top hat and a neat suit of sober black, which made him look what he was—a smart young City man, of the class who have been labelled cockneys, but who give us our crack volunteer regiments, and who turn out more fine athletes and sportsmen than any body of men in these islands.

His round, ruddy face was naturally full of cheeriness, but the corners of his mouth seemed to me to be pulled down in a half-comical distress. It was not, however, until we were all in a first-class carriage and well started upon our journey to Birmingham that I was able to learn what the trouble was which had driven him to Sherlock Holmes.

"We have a clear run here of seventy minutes," Holmes remarked. "I want you, Mr. Hall Pycroft, to tell my friend your very interesting experience exactly as you have told it to me, or with more detail if possible. It will be of use to me to hear the succession of events again. It is a case, Watson, which may prove to have something in it, or may prove to have nothing, but which, at least, presents those unusual and outre' features which are as dear to you as they are to me. Now, Mr. Pycroft, I shall not interrupt you again."

Our young companion looked at me with a twinkle in his eye.

"The worst of the story is," said he, "that I show myself up as such a confounded fool. Of course it may work out all right, and I don't see that I could have done otherwise; but if I have lost my crib and get nothing in exchange I shall feel what a soft Johnny I have been. I'm not very good at telling a story, Dr. Watson, but it is like this with me"

"I used to have a billet at Coxon & Woodhouse's, of Draper's Gardens, but they were let in early in the spring through the Venezuelan loan, as no doubt you remember, and came a nasty cropper. I had been with them five years, and old Coxon gave me a ripping good testimonial when the smash came, but of course we clerks were all turned adrift, the twenty-seven of us. I tried here and tried there, but there were lots of other chaps on the same lay as myself, and it was a perfect frost for a long time. I had been taking three pounds a week at Coxon's, and I had saved about seventy of them, but I soon worked my way through that and out at the other end. I was fairly at the end of my tether at last, and could hardly find the stamps to answer the advertisements or the envelopes to stick them to. I had worn out my boots padding up office stairs, and I seemed just as far from getting a billet as ever."

"At last I saw a vacancy at Mawson & Williams's, the great stock-broking firm in Lombard Street. I dare say E. C. is not much in your line, but I can tell you that this is about the richest house in London. The advertisement was to be answered by letter only. I sent in my testimonial and application, but without the least hope of getting it. Back came an answer by return, saying that if I would appear next Monday I might take over my new duties at once, provided that my appearance was satisfactory. No one knows how these things are worked. Some people say that the manager just plunges his hand into the heap and takes the first that comes. Anyhow it was my innings that time, and I don't ever wish to feel better pleased. The screw was a pound a week rise, and the duties just about the same as at Coxon's."

"And now I come to the queer part of the business. I was in diggings out Hampstead way, 17 Potter's Terrace.
Well, I was sitting doing a smoke that very evening after I had been promised the appointment, when up came my landlady with a card which had "Arthur Pinner, Financial Agent," printed upon it. I had never heard the name before and could not imagine what he wanted with me; but, of course, I asked her to show him up. In he walked, a middle-sized, dark-haired, dark-eyed, black-bearded man, with a touch of the Sheeny about his nose. He had a brisk kind of way with him and spoke sharply, like a man who knew the value of time.

"Mr. Hall Pycroft, I believe?" said he.
"Yes, sir," I answered, pushing a chair towards him.
"Lately engaged at Coxon & Woodhouse's?"
"Yes, sir."
"And now on the staff of Mawson's."
"Quite so."
"Well," said he, "the fact is that I have heard some really extraordinary stories about your financial ability. You remember Parker, who used to be Coxon's manager? He can never say enough about it."

"Of course I was pleased to hear this. I had always been pretty sharp in the office, but I had never dreamed that I was talked about in the City in this fashion."
"You have a good memory?" said he.
"Pretty fair," I answered, modestly.
"Have you kept in touch with the market while you have been out of work?" he asked.
"Yes. I read the stock exchange list every morning."
"Now that shows real application!" he cried. "That is the way to prosper! You won't mind my testing you, will you? Let me see. How are Ayrshires?"
"A hundred and six and a quarter to a hundred and five and seven-eighths."
"And New Zealand consolidated?"
"A hundred and four."
"And British Broken Hills?"
"Seven to seven-and-six."
"Wonderful!" he cried, with his hands up. "This quite fits in with all that I had heard. My boy, my boy, you are very much too good to be a clerk at Mawson's!"

"This outburst rather astonished me, as you can think. "Well," said I, "other people don't think quite so much of me as you seem to do, Mr. Pinner. I had a hard enough fight to get this berth, and I am very glad to have it."
"Pooh, man; you should soar above it. You are not in your true sphere. Now, I'll tell you how it stands with me. What I have to offer is little enough when measured by your ability, but when compared with Mawson's, it's light to dark. Let me see. When do you go to Mawson's?"
"On Monday."
"Ha, ha! I think I would risk a little sporting flutter that you don't go there at all."
"Not go to Mawson's?"
"No, sir. By that day you will be the business manager of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, with a hundred and thirty-four branches in the towns and villages of France, not counting one in Brussels and one in San Remo."

This took my breath away. "I never heard of it," said I.
"Very likely not. It has been kept very quiet, for the capital was all privately subscribed, and it's too good a thing to let the public into. My brother, Harry Pinner, is promoter, and joins the board after allotment as managing director. He knew I was in the swim down here, and asked me to pick up a good man cheap. A young, pushing man with plenty of snap about him. Parker spoke of you, and that brought me here tonight. We can only offer you a beggarly five hundred to start with."
"Five hundred a year!" I shouted.
"Only that at the beginning; but you are to have an overriding commission of one per cent on all business done by your agents, and you may take my word for it that this will come to more than your salary."
"But I know nothing about hardware."
"Tut, my boy; you know about figures."

My head buzzed, and I could hardly sit still in my chair. But suddenly a little chill of doubt came upon me.
"I must be frank with you," said I. "Mawson only gives me two hundred, but Mawson is safe. Now, really, I know so little about your company that--"
"Ah, smart, smart!" he cried, in a kind of ecstasy of delight. "You are the very man for us. You are not to be talked over, and quite right, too. Now, here's a note for a hundred pounds, and if you think that we can do business you may just slip it into your pocket as an advance upon your salary."
"That is very handsome," said I. "When should I take over my new duties?"

"Be in Birmingham to-morrow at one," said he. "I have a note in my pocket here which you will take to my brother. You will find him at 126b Corporation Street, where the temporary offices of the company are situated. Of course he must confirm your engagement, but between ourselves it will be all right."

"Really, I hardly know how to express my gratitude, Mr. Pinner," said I.

"Not at all, my boy. You have only got your desserts. There are one or two small things--mere formalities--which I must arrange with you. You have a bit of paper beside you there. Kindly write upon it 'I am perfectly willing to act as business manager to the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, at a minimum salary of £500.'"

I did as he asked, and he put the paper in his pocket.

"There is one other detail," said he. "What do you intend to do about Mawson's?"

I had forgotten all about Mawson's in my joy. "I'll write and resign," said I.

"Precisely what I don't want you to do. I had a row over you with Mawson's manager. I had gone up to ask him about you, and he was very offensive; accused me of coaxing you away from the service of the firm, and that sort of thing. At last I fairly lost my temper. 'If you want good men you should pay them a good price,' said I.

"'He would rather have our small price than your big one,' said he.

"'I'll lay you a fiver,' said I, 'that when he has my offer you'll never so much as hear from him again.'

"'Done!' said he. 'We picked him out of the gutter, and he won't leave us so easily.' Those were his very words."

"The impudent scoundrel!" I cried. "I've never so much as seen him in my life. Why should I consider him in any way? I shall certainly not write if you would rather I didn't."

"Good! That's a promise," said he, rising from his chair. "Well, I'm delighted to have got so good a man for my brother. Here's your advance of a hundred pounds, and here is the letter. Make a note of the address, 126b Corporation Street, and remember that one o'clock to-morrow is your appointment. Good-night; and may you have all the fortune that you deserve!"

That's just about all that passed between us, as near as I can remember. You can imagine, Dr. Watson, how pleased I was at such an extraordinary bit of good fortune. I sat up half the night hugging myself over it, and next day I was off to Birmingham in a train that would take me in plenty time for my appointment. I took my things to a hotel in New Street, and then I made my way to the address which had been given me.

It was a quarter of an hour before my time, but I thought that would make no difference. 126b was a passage between two large shops, which led to a winding stone stair, from which there were many flats, let as offices to companies or professional men. The names of the occupants were painted at the bottom on the wall, but there was no such name as the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited. I stood for a few minutes with my heart in my boots, wondering whether the whole thing was an elaborate hoax or not, when up came a man and addressed me. He was very like the chap I had seen the night before, the same figure and voice, but he was clean shaven and his hair was lighter.

"Are you Mr. Hall Pycroft?" he asked.

"Yes," said I.

"Oh! I was expecting you, but you are a trifle before your time. I had a note from my brother this morning in which he sung your praises very loudly."

"I was just looking for the offices when you came."

"We have not got our name up yet, for we only secured these temporary premises last week. Come up with me, and we will talk the matter over."

I followed him to the top of a very lofty stair, and there, right under the slates, were a couple of empty, dusty little rooms, uncarpeted and uncurtained, into which he led me. I had thought of a great office with shining tables and rows of clerks, such as I was used to, and I dare say I stared rather straight at the two deal chairs and one little table, which, with a ledger and a waste paper basket, made up the whole furniture.

"Don't be disheartened, Mr. Pycroft," said my new acquaintance, seeing the length of my face. "Rome was not built in a day, and we have lots of money at our backs, though we don't cut much dash yet in offices. Pray sit down, and let me have your letter."

I gave it to him, and her read it over very carefully.

"You seem to have made a vast impression upon my brother Arthur," said he; "and I know that he is a pretty shrewd judge. Hew swears by London, you know; and I by Birmingham; but this time I shall follow his advice. Pray consider yourself definitely engaged."

"What are my duties?" I asked.

"You will eventually manage the great depot in Paris, which will pour a flood of English crockery into the shops of a hundred and thirty-four agents in France. The purchase will be completed in a week, and meanwhile you will remain in Birmingham and make yourself useful."
"How?"
For answer, he took a big red book out of a drawer.
"This is a directory of Paris," said he, "with the trades after the names of the people. I want you to take it home with you, and to mark off all the hardware sellers, with their addresses. It would be of the greatest use to me to have them."
"Surely there are classified lists?" I suggested.
"Not reliable ones. Their system is different from ours. Stick at it, and let me have the lists by Monday, at twelve. Good-day, Mr. Pycroft. If you continue to show zeal and intelligence you will find the company a good master."

I went back to the hotel with the big book under my arm, and with very conflicting feelings in my breast. On the one hand, I was definitely engaged and had a hundred pounds in my pocket; on the other, the look of the offices, the absence of name on the wall, and other of the points which would strike a business man had left a bad impression as to the position of my employers. However, come what might, I had my money, so I settled down to my task. All Sunday I was kept hard at work, and yet by Monday I had only got as far as H. I went round to my employer, found him in the same dismantled kind of room, and was told to keep at it until Wednesday, and then come again. On Wednesday it was still unfinished, so I hammered away until Friday--that is, yesterday. Then I brought it round to Mr. Harry Pinner.

"Thank you very much," said he; "I fear that I underrated the difficulty of the task. This list will be of very material assistance to me."
"It took some time," said I.
"And now," said he, "I want you to make a list of the furniture shops, for they all sell crockery."
"Very good."
"And you can come up to-morrow evening, at seven, and let me know how you are getting on. Don't overwork yourself. A couple of hours at Day's Music Hall in the evening would do you no harm after your labours." He laughed as he spoke, and I saw with a thrill that his second tooth upon the left-hand side had been very badly stuffed with gold.

Sherlock Holmes rubbed his hands with delight, and I stared with astonishment at our client.
"You may well look surprised, Dr. Watson; but it is this way," said he: "When I was speaking to the other chap in London, at the time that he laughed at my not going to Mawson's, I happened to notice that his tooth was stuffed in this very identical fashion. The glint of the gold in each case caught my eye, you see. When I put that with the voice and figure being the same, and only those things altered which might be changed by a razor or a wig, I could not doubt that it was the same man. Of course you expect two brothers to be alike, but not that they should have the same tooth stuffed in the same way. He bowed me out, and I found myself in the street, hardly knowing whether I was on my head or my heels. Back I went to my hotel, put my head in a basin of cold water, and tried to think it out. Why had he sent me from London to Birmingham? Why had he got there before me? And why had he written a letter from himself to himself? It was altogether too much for me, and I could make no sense of it. And then suddenly it struck me that what was dark to me might be very light to Mr. Sherlock Holmes. I had just time to get up to town by the night train to see him this morning, and to bring you both back with me to Birmingham."

There was a pause after the stock-broker's clerk had concluded his surprising experience. Then Sherlock Holmes cocked his eye at me, leaning back on the cushions with a pleased and yet critical face, like a connoisseur who has just taken his first sip of a comet vintage.
"Rather fine, Watson, is it not?" said he. "There are points in it which please me. I think that you will agree with me that an interview with Mr. Arthur Harry Pinner in the temporary offices of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company, Limited, would be a rather interesting experience for both of us."
"But how can we do it?" I asked.
"Oh, easily enough," said Hall Pycroft, cheerily. "You are two friends of mine who are in want of a billet, and what could be more natural than that I should bring you both round to the managing director?"
"Quite so, of course," said Holmes. "I should like to have a look at the gentleman, and see if I can make anything of his little game. What qualities have you, my friend, which would make your services so valuable? or is it possible that--" He began biting his nails and staring blankly out of the window, and we hardly drew another word from him until we were in New Street.

At seven o'clock that evening we were walking, the three of us, down Corporation Street to the company's offices.
"It is no use our being at all before our time," said our client. "He only comes there to see me, apparently, for the place is deserted up to the very hour he names."
"That is suggestive," remarked Holmes.
"By Jove, I told you so!" cried the clerk. "That's he walking ahead of us there."

He pointed to a smallish, dark, well-dressed man who was bustling along the other side of the road. As we watched him he looked across at a boy who was bawling out the latest edition of the evening paper, and running over among the cabs and busses, he bought one from him. Then, clutching it in his hand, he vanished through a door-way.

"There he goes!" cried Hall Pycroft. "These are the company's offices into which he has gone. Come with me, and I'll fix it up as easily as possible."

Following his lead, we ascended five stories, until we found ourselves outside a half-opened door, at which our client tapped. A voice within bade us enter, and we entered a bare, unfurnished room such as Hall Pycroft had described. At the single table sat the man whom we had seen in the street, with his evening paper spread out in front of him, and as he looked up at us it seemed to me that I had never looked upon a face which bore such marks of grief, and of something beyond grief---of a horror such as comes to few men in a lifetime. His brow glistened with perspiration, his cheeks were of the dull, dead white of a fish's belly, and his eyes were wild and staring. He looked at his clerk as though he failed to recognise him, and I could see by the astonishment depicted upon our conductor's face that this was by no means the usual appearance of his employer.

"You look ill, Mr. Pinner!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I am not very well," answered the other, making obvious efforts to pull himself together, and licking his dry lips before he spoke. "Who are these gentlemen whom you have brought with you?"

"One is Mr. Harris, of Bermondsey, and the other is Mr. Price, of this town," said our clerk, glibly. "They are friends of mine and gentlemen of experience, but they have been out of a place for some little time, and they hoped that perhaps you might find an opening for them in the company's employment."

"Very possibly! Very possibly!" cried Mr. Pinner with a ghastly smile. "Yes, I have no doubt that we shall be able to do something for you. What is your particular line, Mr. Harris?"

"I am an accountant," said Holmes. "Ah yes, we shall want something of the sort. And you, Mr. Price?"

"A clerk," said I.

"I have every hope that the company may accommodate you. I will let you know about it as soon as we come to any conclusion. And now I beg that you will go. For God's sake leave me to myself!"

These last words were shot out of him, as though the constraint which he was evidently setting upon himself had suddenly and utterly burst asunder. Holmes and I glanced at each other, and Hall Pycroft took a step towards the table.

"You forget, Mr. Pinner, that I am here by appointment to receive some directions from you," said he.

"Certainly, Mr. Pycroft, certainly," the other resumed in a calmer tone. "You may wait here a moment; and there is no reason why your friends should not wait with you. I will be entirely at your service in three minutes, if I might trespass upon your patience so far." He rose with a very courteous air, and, bowing to us, he passed out through a door at the farther end of the room, which he closed behind him.

"What now?" whispered Holmes. "Is he giving us the slip?"

"Impossible," answered Pycroft. "Why so?"

"That door leads into an inner room."

"There is no exit?"

"None."

"Is it furnished?"

"It was empty yesterday."

"Then what on earth can he be doing? There is something which I don't understand in his manner. If ever a man was three parts mad with terror, that man's name is Pinner. What can have put the shivers on him?"

"He suspects that we are detectives," I suggested.

"That's it," cried Pycroft. Holmes shook his head. "He did not turn pale. He was pale when we entered the room," said he. "It is just possible that---"

His words were interrupted by a sharp rat-tat from the direction of the inner door.

"What the deuce is he knocking at his own door for?" cried the clerk.

Again and much louder cam the rat-tat-tat. We all gazed expectantly at the closed door. Glancing at Holmes, I saw his face turn rigid, and he leaned forward in intense excitement. Then suddenly came a low gurgling, gargling sound, and a brisk drumming upon woodwork. Holmes sprang frantically across the room and pushed at the door. It was fastened on the inner side. Following his example, we threw ourselves upon it with all our weight. One hinge
snapped, then the other, and down came the door with a crash. Rushing over it, we found ourselves in the inner room. It was empty.

But it was only for a moment that we were at fault. At one corner, the corner nearest the room which we had left, there was a second door. Holmes sprang to it and pulled it open. A coat and waistcoat were lying on the floor, and from a hook behind the door, with his own braces round his neck, was hanging the managing director of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company. His knees were drawn up, his head hung at a dreadful angle to his body, and the clatter of his heels against the door made the noise which had broken in upon our conversation. In an instant I had caught him round the waist, and held him up while Holmes and Pycroft untied the elastic bands which had disappeared between the livid creases of skin. Then we carried him into the other room, where he lay with a clay-coloured face, puffing his purple lips in and out with every breath—a dreadful wreck of all that he had been but five minutes before.

"What do you think of him, Watson?" asked Holmes.

I stooped over him and examined him. His pulse was feeble and intermittent, but his breathing grew longer, and there was a little shivering of his eyelids, which showed a thin white slit of ball beneath.

"It has been touch and go with him," said I, "but he'll live now. Just open that window, and hand me the water carafe." I undid his collar, poured the cold water over his face, and raised and sank his arms until he drew a long, natural breath. "It's only a question of time now," said I, as I turned away from him.

Holmes stood by the table, with his hands deep in his trousers pockets and his chin upon his breast.

"I suppose we ought to call the police in now," said he. "And yet I confess that I'd like to give them a complete case when they come."

"Pooh! All that is clear enough," said Holmes impatiently. "It is this last sudden move."

"You understand the rest, then?"

"I think that it is fairly obvious. What do you say, Watson?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "I must confess that I am out of my depths," said I.

"Oh surely if you consider the events at first they can only point to one conclusion."

"What do you make of them?"

"Well, the whole thing hinges upon two points. The first is the making of Pycroft write a declaration by which he entered the service of this preposterous company. Do you not see how very suggestive that is?"

"I am afraid I miss the point."

"Well, why did they want him to do it? Not as a business matter, for these arrangements are usually verbal, and there was no earthly business reason why this should be an exception. Don't you see, my young friend, that they were very anxious to obtain a specimen of your handwriting, and had no other way of doing it?"

"And why?"

"Quite so. Why? When we answer that we have made some progress with our little problem. Why? There can be only one adequate reason. Some one wanted to learn to imitate your writing, and had to procure a specimen of it first. And now if we pass on to the second point we find that each throws light upon the other. That point is the request made by Pinner that you should not resign your place, but should leave the manager of this important business in the full expectation that a Mr. Hall Pycroft, whom he had never seen, was about to enter the office upon the Monday morning."

"My God!" cried our client, "what a blind beetle I have been!"

"Now you see the point about the handwriting. Suppose that some one turned up in your place who wrote a completely different hand from that in which you had applied for the vacancy, of course the game would have been up. But in the interval the rogue had learned to imitate you, and his position was therefore secure, as I presume that nobody in the office had ever set eyes upon you."

"Not a soul,"groaned Hall Pycroft.

"Very good. Of course it was of the utmost importance to prevent you from thinking better of it, and also to keep you from coming into contact with any one who might tell you that your double was at work in Mawson's office. Therefore they gave you a handsome advance on your salary, and ran you off to the Midlands, where they gave you enough work to do to prevent your going to London, where you might have burst their little game up. That is all plain enough."

"But why should this man pretend to be his own brother?"

"Well, that is pretty clear also. There are evidently only two of them in it. The other is personating you at the office. This one acted as your engager, and then found that he could not find you an employer without admitting a third person into his plot. That he was most unwilling to do. He changed his appearance as far as he could, and
trusted that the likeness, which you could not fail to observe, would be put down to a family resemblance. But for
the happy chance of the gold stuffing, your suspicions would probably never have been aroused."

Hall Pycroft shook his clinched hands in the air. "Good Lord!" he cried, "while I have been fooled in this way,
what has this other Hall Pycroft been doing at Mawson's? What should we do, Mr. Holmes? Tell me what to do."

"We must wire to Mawson's."

"They shut at twelve on Saturdays."

"Never mind. There may be some door-keeper or attendant--""

"Ah yes, they keep a permanent guard there on account of the value of the securities that they hold. I remember
hearing it talked of in the City."

"Very good; we shall wire to him, and see if all is well, and if a clerk of your name is working there. That is
clear enough; but what is not so clear is why at sight of us one of the rogues should instantly walk out of the room
and hang himself."

"The paper!" croaked a voice behind us. The man was sitting up, blanched and ghastly, with returning reason in
his eyes, and hands which rubbed nervously at the broad red band which still encircled his throat.

"The paper! Of course!" yelled Holmes, in a paroxysm of excitement. "Idiot that I was! I thought so much of our
visit that the paper never entered my head for an instant. To be sure, the secret must be there." He flattened it out
upon the table, and a cry of triumph burst from his lips. "Look at this, Watson," he cried. "It is a London paper, an
early edition of the Evening Standard. Here is what we want. Look at the headlines: 'Crime in the City. Murder at
Mawson & Williams's. Gigantic attempted Robbery. Capture of the Criminal.' Here, Watson, we are all equally
anxious to hear it, so kindly read it aloud to us."

It appeared from its position in the paper to have been the one event of importance in town, and the account of it
ran in this way:

"A desperate attempt at robbery, culminating in the death of one man and the capture of the criminal, occurred
this afternoon in the City. For some time back Mawson & Williams, the famous financial house, have been the
 guardians of securities which amount in the aggregate to a sum of considerably over a million sterling. So conscious
was the manager of the responsibility which devolved upon him in consequence of the great interests at stake that
safes of the very latest construction have been employed, and an armed watchman has been left day and night in the
building. It appears that last week a new clerk named Hall Pycroft was engaged by the firm. This person appears to
have been none other that Beddington, the famous forger and cracksman, who, with his brother, had only recently
emerged from a five years' spell of penal servitude. By some means, which are not yet clear, he succeeded in
winning, under a false name, this official position in the office, which he utilised in order to obtain mouldings of
various locks, and a thorough knowledge of the position of the strong room and the safes.

"It is customary at Mawson's for the clerks to leave at midday on Saturday. Sergeant Tuson, of the City Police,
was somewhat surprised, therefore to see a gentleman with a carpet bag come down the steps at twenty minutes past
one. His suspicions being aroused, the sergeant followed the man, and with the aid of Constable Pollack succeeded,
after a most desperate resistance, in arresting him. It was at once clear that a daring and gigantic robbery had been
committed. Nearly a hundred thousand pounds' worth of American railway bonds, with a large amount of scrip in
mines and other companies, was discovered in the bag. On examining the premises the body of the unfortunate
watchman was found doubled up and thrust into the largest of the safes, where it would not have been discovered
until Monday morning had it not been for the prompt action of Sergeant Tuson. The man's skull had been shattered
by a blow from a poker delivered from behind. There could be no doubt that Beddington had obtained entrance by
pretending that he had left something behind him, and having murdered the watchman, rapidly rifled the large safe,
and then made off with his booty. His brother, who usually works with him, has not appeared in this job as far as can
at present beascertained, although the police are making energetic inquiries as to his whereabouts."

"Well, we may save the police some little trouble in that direction," said Holmes, glancing at the haggard figure
huddled up by the window. "Human nature is a strange mixture, Watson. You see that even a villain and murderer
can inspire such affection that his brother turns to suicide when he learns that his neck is forfeited. However, we
have no choice as to our action. The doctor and I will remain on guard, Mr. Pycroft, if you will have the kindness to
step out for the police."

The 'Gloria Scott'

"I have some papers here," said my friend Sherlock Holmes, as we sat one winter's night on either side of the
fire, "which I really think, Watson, that it would be worth your while to glance over. These are the documents in the
extraordinary case of the Gloria Scott, and this is the message which struck Justice of the Peace Trevor dead with
horror when he read it."

He had picked from a drawer a little tarnished cylinder, and, undoing the tape, he handed me a short note
scrawled upon a half-sheet of slate grey-paper.
"The supply of game for London is going steadily up," it ran. "Head-keeper Hudson, we believe, had been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen-paceant's life."

As I glanced up from reading this enigmatic message, I saw Holmes chuckling at the expression upon my face.
"You look a little bewildered," said he.
"I cannot see how such a message as this could inspire horror. It seems to me to be rather grotesque than otherwise."
"Very likely. Yet the fact remains that the reader, who was a fine, robust old man, was knocked clean down by it as if it had been the butt end of a pistol."
"You arouse my curiosity," said I. "But why did you say just now that there were very particular reasons why I should study this case?"
"Because it was the first in which I was ever engaged."

I had often endeavoured to elicit from my companion what had first turned is mind in the direction of criminal research, but had never caught him before in a communicative humour. Now he sat forward in this arm chair and spread out the documents upon his knees. Then he lit his pipe and sat for some time smoking and turning them over.
"You never heard me talk of Victor Trevor?" he asked. "He was the only friend I made during the two years I was at college. I was never a very sociable fellow, Watson, always rather fond of moping in my rooms and working out my own little methods of thought, so that I never mixed much with the men of my year. Bar fencing and boxing I had few athletic tastes, and then my line of study was quite distinct from that of the other fellows, so that we had no points of contact at all. Trevor was the only man I knew, and that only through the accident of his bull terrier freezing on to my ankle one morning as I went down to chapel.

"It was a prosaic way of forming a friendship, but it was effective. I was laid by the heels for ten days, but Trevor used to come in to inquire after me. At first it was only a minute's chat, but soon his visits lengthened, and before the end of the term we were close friends. He was a hearty, full-blooded fellow, full of spirits and energy, the very opposite to me in most respects, but we had some subjects in common, and it was a bond of union when I found that he was as friendless as I. Finally, he invited me down to his father's place at Donnithorpe, in Norfolk, and I accepted his hospitality for a month of the long vacation."

"Old Trevor was evidently a man of some wealth and consideration, a J.P., and a landed proprietor. Donnithorpe is a little hamlet just to the north of Langmere, in the country of the Broads. The house was an old-fashioned, wide-spread, oak-beamed brick building, with a fine lime-lined avenue leading up to it. There was excellent wild-duck shooting in the fens, remarkably good fishing, a small but select library, taken over, as I understood, from a former occupant, and a tolerable cook, so that he would be a fastidious man who could not put in a pleasant month there.

"Trevor senior was a widower, and my friend his only son."

"There had been a daughter, I heard, but she had died of diphtheria while on a visit to Birmingham. The father interested me extremely. He was a man of little culture, but with a considerable amount of rude strength, both physically and mentally. He knew hardly any books, but he had travelled far, had seen much of the world. And had remembered all that he had learned. In person he was a thick-set, burly man with a shock of grizzled hair, a brown, weather-beaten face, and blue eyes which were keen to the verge of fierceness. Yet he had a reputation for kindness and charity on the country-side, and was noted for the leniency of his sentences from the bench.

"One evening, shortly after my arrival, we were sitting over a glass of port after dinner, when young Trevor began to talk about those habits of observation and inference which I had already formed into a system, although I had not yet appreciated the part which they were to play in my life. The old man evidently thought that his son was exaggerating in his description of one or two trivial feats which I had performed.

"'Come, now, Mr. Holmes,' said he, laughing good-humoredly. 'I'm an excellent subject, if you can deduce anything from me.'

"'I fear there is not very much,' I answered; 'I might suggest that you have gone about in fear of some personal attack with the last twelvemonth.'

"'The laugh faded from his lips, and he stared at me in great surprise.

"'Well, that's true enough,' said he. 'You know, Victor,' turning to his son, 'when we broke up that poaching gang they swore to knife us, and Sir Edward Holly has actually been attacked. I've always been on my guard since then, though I have no idea how you know it.'

"'You have a very handsome stick,' I answered. 'By the inscription I observed that you had not had it more than a year. But you have taken some pains to bore the head of it and pour melted lead into the hole so as to make it a formidable weapon. I argued that you would not take such precautions unless you had some danger to fear.'

"'Anything else?' he asked, smiling.

"'You have boxed a good deal in your youth.'

"'Right again. How did you know it? Is my nose knocked a little out of the straight?' "'No,' said I. 'It is your ears.
They have the peculiar flattening and thickening which marks the boxing man.'

"Anything else?"

"You have done a good deal of digging by your callosities."

"Made all my money at the gold fields."

"You have been in New Zealand."

"Right again."

"You have visited Japan."

"Quite true."

"And you have been most intimately associated with some one whose initials were J. A., and whom you afterwards were eager to entirely forget."

'Mr. Trevor stood slowly up, fixed his large blue eyes upon me with a strange wild stare, and then pitched forward, with his face among the nutshells which strewed the cloth, in a dead faint.

'You can imagine, Watson, how shocked both his son and I were. His attack did not last long, however, for when we undid his collar, and sprinkled the water from one of the finger-glasses over his face, he gave a gasp or two and sat up.

'Ah, boys,' said he, forcing a smile, 'I hope I haven't frightened you. Strong as I look, there is a weak place in my heart, and it does not take much to knock me over. I don't know how you manage this, Mr. Holmes, but it seems to me that all the detectives of fact and of fancy would be children in your hands. That's you line of life, sir, and you may take the word of a man who has seen something of the world.'

'And that recommendation, with the exaggerated estimate of my ability with which he prefaced it, was, if you will believe me, Watson, the very first thing which ever made me feel that a profession might be made out of what had up to that time been the merest hobby. At the moment, however, I was too much concerned at the sudden illness of my host to think of anything else.

"I hope that I have said nothing to pain you?' said I.

'Well, you certainly touched upon rather a tender point. Might I ask how you know, and how much you know?' He spoke now in a half-jesting fashion, but a look of terror still lurked at the back of his eyes.

'It is simplicity itself,' said I. 'When you bared your arm to draw that fish into the boat I saw that J. A. had been tattooed in the bend of the elbow. The letters were still legible, but it was perfectly clear from their blurred appearance, and from the staining of the skin round them, that efforts had been made to obliterate them. It was obvious, then, that those initials had once been very familiar to you, and that you had afterwards wished to forget them.'

'What an eye you have!' he cried, with a sigh of relief. 'It is just as you say. But we won't talk of it. Of all ghosts the ghosts of our old lovers are the worst. Come into the billiard-room and have a quiet cigar.'

'From that day, amid all his cordiality, there was always a touch of suspicion in Mr. Trevor's manner towards me. Even his son remarked it. Even his son remarked it. Even his son remarked it. "You've given the governor such a turn," said he, 'that he'll never be sure again of what you know and what you don't know.' He did not mean to show it, I am sure, but it was so strongly in his mind that it peeped out at every action. At last I became so convinced that I was causing him uneasiness that I drew my visit to a close. On the very day, however, before I left, an incident occurred which proved in the sequel to be of importance.

'"We were sitting out upon the lawn on garden chairs, the three of us, basking in the sun and admiring the view across the Broads, when a maid came out to say that there was a man at the door who wanted to see Mr. Trevor."

'"What is his name?" asked my host.

'"He would not give any."

'"What does he want, then?"

'"He says that you know him, and that he only wants a moment's conversation."

'"Show him round here." An instant afterwards there appeared a little wizened fellow with a cringing manner and a shambling style of walking. He wore an open jacket, with a splotch of tar on the sleeve, a red-and-black check shirt, dungaree trousers, and heavy boots badly worn. His face was thin and brown and crafty, with a perpetual smile upon it, which showed an irregular line of yellow teeth, and his crinkled hands were half closed in a way that is distinctive of sailors. As he came slouching across the lawn I heard Mr. Trevor make a sort of hiccoughing noise in his throat, and jumping out of his chair, he ran into the house. He was back in a moment, and I smelt a strong reek of brandy as he passed me.

'"Well, my man," said he. '"What can I do for you?"

'The sailor stood looking at him with puckered eyes, and with the same loose-lipped smile upon his face.

'"You don't know me?" he asked.

'"Why, dear me, it is surely Hudson," said Mr. Trevor in a tone of surprise.

'Hudson it is, sir,' said the seaman. 'Why, it's thirty year and more since I saw you last. Here you are in your
house, and me still picking my salt meat out of the harness cask.'

"'Tut, you will find that I have not forgotten old times,' cried Mr. Trevor, and, walking towards the sailor, he said something in a low voice. 'Go into the kitchen,' he continued out loud, 'and you will get food and drink. I have no doubt that I shall find you a situation.'

"'Thank you, sir,' said the seaman, touching his fore-lock. 'I'm just off a two-yearer in an eight-knot tramp, short-handed at that, and I wants a rest. I thought I'd get it either with Mr. Beddoes or with you.'

"'Ah!' cried Trevor. 'You know where Mr. Beddoes is?'

"'Bless you, sir, I know where all my old friends are,' said the fellow with a sinister smile, and he slouched off after the maid to the kitchen. Mr. Trevor mumbled something to us about having been shipmate with the man when he was going back to the diggings, and then, leaving us on the lawn, he went indoors. An hour later, when we entered the house, we found him stretched dead drunk upon the dining-room sofa. The whole incident left a most ugly impression upon my mind, and I was not sorry next day to leave Donnithorpe behind me, for I felt that my presence must be a source of embarrassment to my friend.

"All this occurred during the first month of the long vacation. I went up to my London rooms, where I spent seven weeks working out a few experiments in organic chemistry. On day, however, when the autumn was far advanced and the vacation drawing to a close, I received a telegram from my friend imploring me to return to Donnithorpe, and saying that he was in great need of my advice and assistance. Of course I dropped everything and set out for the North once more.

"He met me with the dog-cart at the station, and I saw at a glance that the last two months had been very trying ones for him. He had grown thin and careworn, and had lost the loud, cheery manner for which he had been remarkable.

"'The governor is dying,' were the first words he said.

"'Impossible!' I cried. 'What is the matter?'

"'Apoplexy. Nervous shock. He's been on the verge all day. I doubt if we shall find him alive.'

"'I was, as you may think, Watson, horrified at this unexpected news.

"'What has caused it?' I asked.

"'Ah, that is the point. Jump in and we can talk it over while we drive. You remember that fellow who came upon the evening before you left us?'

"'Perfectly.'

"'Do you know who it was that we let into the house that day?'

"'I have no idea.'

"'It was the devil, Holmes,' he cried.

"'I stared at him in astonishment.

"'Yes, it was the devil himself. We have not had a peaceful hour since—not one. The governor has never held up his head from that evening, and now the life has been crushed out of him and his heart broken, all through this accursed Hudson.'

"'What power had he, then?'

"'Ah, that is what I would give so much to know. The kindly, charitable, good old governor—how could he have fallen into the clutches of such a ruffian! But I am so glad that you have come, Holmes. I trust very much to your judgement and discretion, and I know that you will advise me for the best.'

"We were dashing along the smooth white country road, with the long stretch of the Broads in front of us glistening in the red light of the setting sun. From a grove upon our left I could already see the high chimneys and the flag-staff which marked the squire's dwelling.

"'My father made the fellow gardener,' said my companion, 'and then, as that did not satisfy him, he was promoted to be butler. The house seemed to be at his mercy, and he wandered about and did what he chose in it. The maids complained of his drunken habits and his vile language. The dad raised their wages all round to recompense them for the annoyance. The fellow would take the boat and my father's best gun and treat himself to little shooting trips. And all this with such a sneering, leering, insolent face that I would have knocked him down twenty times over if he had been a man of my own age. I tell you, Holmes, I have had to keep a tight hold upon myself all this time; and now I am asking myself whether, if I had let myself go a little more, I might not have been a wiser man.

"Well, matters went from bad to worse with us, and this animal Hudson became more and more intrusive, until at last, on making some insolent reply to my father in my presence one day, I took him by the shoulders and turned him out of the room. He slunk away with a livid face and two venomous eyes which uttered more threats than his tongue could do. I don't know what passed between the poor dad and him after that, but the dad came to me next day and asked me whether I would mind apologising to Hudson. I refused, as you can imagine, and asked my father how he could allow such a wretch to take such liberties with himself and his household.
"'Ah, my boy,' said he, "it is all very well to talk, but you don't know how I am placed. But you shall know, Victor. I'll see that you shall know, come what may. You wouldn't believe harm of your poor old father, would you, lad?" He was very much moved, and shut himself up in the study all day, where I could see through the window that he was writing busily.

"'That evening there came what seemed to me to be a grand release, for Hudson told us that he was going to leave us. He walked into the dining-room as we sat after dinner, and announced his intention in the thick voice of a half-drunken man.

"'I've had enough of Norfolk," said he. "I'll run down to Mr. Beddoes in Hampshire. He'll be as glad to see me as you were, I dare say."

"'You're not going away in any kind of spirit, Hudson, I hope," said my father, with a tameness which mad my blood boil.

"'I've not had my 'pology," said he sulkily, glancing in my direction.

"'Victor, you will acknowledge that you have used this worthy fellow rather roughly," said the dad, turning to me.

"'On the contrary, I think that we have both shown extraordinary patience towards him," I answered.

"'Oh, you do, do you?" he snarls. "Very good, mate. We'll see about that!"

"He slouched out of the room, and half an hour afterwards left the house, leaving my father in a state of pitiable nervousness. Night after night I heard him pacing his room, and it was just as he was recovering his confidence that the blow did at last fall.'

"'And how?' I asked eagerly.

"'In a most extraordinary fashion. A letter arrived for my father yesterday evening, bearing the Fordingbridge post-mark. My father read it, clapped both his hands to his head, and began running round the room in little circles like a man who has been driven out of his senses. When I at last drew him down on to the sofa, his mouth and eyelids were all puckered on one side, and I saw that he had a stroke. Dr. Fordham came over at once. We put him to bed; but the paralysis has spread, he has shown no sign of returning consciousness, and I think that we shall hardly find him alive."

"'You horrify me, Trevor!' I cried. 'What then could have been in this letter to cause so dreadful a result?'

"'Nothing. There lies the inexplicable part of it. The message was absurd and trivial. Ah, my God, it is as I feared!'

"As he spoke we came round the curve of the avenue, and saw in the fading light that every blind in the house had been drawn down. As we dashed up to the door, my friend's face convulsed with grief, a gentleman in black emerged from it.

"'When did it happen, doctor?' asked Trevor.

"'Almost immediately after you left.'

"'Did he recover consciousness?'

"'For an instant before the end.'

"'Any message for me.'

"'Only that the papers were in the back drawer of the Japanese cabinet.'

"My friend ascended with the doctor to the chamber of death, while I remained in the study, turning the whole matter over and over in my head, and feeling as sombre as ever I had done in my life. What was the past of this Trevor, pugilist, traveller, and gold-digger, and how had he placed himself in the power of this acid-faced seaman? Why, too, should he faint at an allusion to the half-effaced initials upon his arm, and die of fright when he had a letter from Fordingham? Then I remembered that Fordingham was in Hampshire, and that this Mr. Beddoes, whom the seaman had gone to visit and presumably to blackmail, had also been mentioned as living in Hampshire. The letter, then, might either come from Hudson, the seaman, saying that he had betrayed the guilty secret which appeared to exist, or it might come from Beddoes, warning an old confederate that such a betrayal was imminent. So far it seemed clear enough. But then how could this letter be trivial and grotesque, as described by the son? He must have misread it. If so, it must have been one of those ingenious secret codes which mean one thing while they seem to mean another. I must see this letter. If there were a hidden meaning in it, I was confident that I could pluck it forth. For an hour I sat pondering over it in the gloom, until at last a weeping maid brought in a lamp, and close at her heels came my friend Trevor, pale but composed, with these very papers which lie upon my knee held in his grasp. He sat down opposite to me, drew the lamp to the edge of the table, and handed me a short note scribbled, as you see, upon a single sheet of grey paper. "The supply of game for London is going steadily up," it ran. 'Head-keeper Hudson, we believe, has been now told to receive all orders for fly-paper and for preservation of your hen-pheasant's life."

"I dare say my face looked as bewildered as your did just now when first I read this message. Then I reread it
very carefully. It was evidently as I had thought, and some secret meaning must lie buried in this strange combination of words. Or could it be that there was a prearranged significance to such phrases as 'fly-paper' and 'hen-pheasant'? Such a meaning would be arbitrary and could not be deduced in any way. And yet I was loath to believe that this was the case, and the presence of the word Hudson seemed to show that the subject of the message was as I had guessed, and that it was from Beddoes rather than the sailor. I tried it backwards, but the combination 'life pheasant's hen' was not encouraging. Then I tried alternate words, but neither 'the of for' nor 'supply game London' promised to throw any light upon it.

"And then in an instant the key of the riddle was in my hands, and I saw that every third word, beginning with the first, would give a message which might well drive old Trevor to despair.

"It was short and terse, the warning, as I now read it to my companion:

"The game is up. Hudson has told all. Fly for your life.'

"Victor Trevor sank his face into his shaking hands, 'It must be that, I suppose,' said he. "This is worse than death, for it means disgrace as well. But what is the meaning of these "head-keepers" and "hen-pheasants"?

"It means nothing to the message, but it might mean a good deal to us if we had no other means of discovering the sender. You see that he has begun by writing "The...game...is," and so on. Afterwards he had, to fulfil the prearranged cipher, to fill in any two words in each space. He would naturally use the first words which came to his mind, and if there were so many with which referred to sport among them, you may be tolerably sure that he is either an ardent shot or interested in breeding. Do you know anything of this Beddoes?"

"'Why, now that you mention it,' said he, 'I remember that my poor father used to have an invitation from him to shoot over his preserves every autumn.'

"'Then it is undoubtedly from him that the note comes,' said I. 'It only remains for us to find out what this secret was which the sailor Hudson seems to have held over the heads of these two wealthy and respected men.'

"'Alas, Holmes, I fear that it is one of sin and shame!' cried my friend. 'But from you I shall have no secrets. Here is the statement which was drawn up by my father when he knew that the danger from Hudson had become imminent. I found it in the Japanese cabinet, as he told the doctor. Take it and read it to me, for I have neither the strength nor the courage to do it myself.'

"These are the very papers, Watson, which he handed to me, and I will read them to you, as I read them in the old study that night to him. They are endorsed outside, as you see, 'Some particulars of the voyage of the bark Gloria Scott, from her leaving Falmouth on the 8th October, 1855, to her destruction in N. Lat. 15 degrees 20', W. Long. 25 degrees 14' on Nov. 6th.' It is in the form of a letter, and runs in this way:

"'My dear, dear son, now that approaching disgrace begins to darken the closing years of my life, I can write with all truth and honesty that it is not the terror of the law, it is not the loss of my position in the county, nor is it my fall in the eyes of all who have known me, which cuts me to the heart; but it is the thought that you should come to blush for me—you who love me and who have seldom, I hope, had reason to do other than respect me. But if the blow falls which is forever hanging over me, then I should wish you to read this, that you may know straight from me how far I have been to blame. On the other hand, if all should go well (which may kind God Almighty grant!), then if by any chance this paper should be still undestroyed and should fall into your hands, I conjure you, by all you hold sacred, by the memory of your dear mother, and by the love which had been between us, to hurl it into the fire and to never give one thought to it again.

"If then your eye goes onto read this line, I know that I shall already have been exposed and dragged from my home, or as is more likely, for you know that my heart is weak, by lying with my tongue sealed forever in death. In either case the time for suppression is past, and every word which I tell you is the naked truth, and this I swear as I hope for mercy.

"'My name, dear lad, is not Trevor. I was James Armitage in my younger days, and you can understand now the shock that it was to me a few weeks ago when your college friend addressed me in words which seemed to imply that he had surprised my secret. As Armitage it was that I entered a London banking-house, and as Armitage I was convicted of breaking my country's laws, and was sentenced to transportation. Do not think very harshly of me, laddie. It was a debt of honour, so called, which I had to pay, and I used money which was not my own to do it, in the certainty that I could replace it before there could be any possibility of its being missed. But the most dreadful ill-luck pursued me. The money which I had reckoned upon never came to hand, and a premature examination of accounts exposed my deficit. The case might have been dealt leniently with, but the laws were more harshly administered thirty years ago than now, and on my twenty-third birthday I found myself chained as a felon with thirty-seven other convicts in 'tween-decks of the bark Gloria Scott, bound for Australia.

"It was the year '55 when the Crimean war was at its height, and the old convict ships had been largely used as transports in the Black Sea. The government was compelled, therefore, to use smaller and less suitable vessels for sending out their prisoners. The Gloria Scott had been in the Chinese tea-trade, but she was an old-fashioned, heavy-
bowed, broad-beamed craft, and the new clippers had cut her out. She was a five-hundred-ton boat; and besides her thirty-eight jail-birds, she carried twenty-six of a crew, eighteen soldiers, a captain, three mates, a doctor, a chaplain, and four warders. Nearly a hundred souls were in her, all told, when we set sail from Falmouth.

"The partitions between the cells of the convicts, instead of being of thick oak, as is usual in convict-ships, were quite thin and frail. The man next to me, upon the aft side, was one whom I had particularly noticed when we were led down the quay. He was a young man with a clear, hairless face, a long, thin nose, and rather nut-cracker jaws. He carried his head very jauntily in the air, had a swaggering style of walking, and was, above all else, remarkable for his extraordinary height. I don't think any of our heads would have come up to his shoulder, and I am sure that he could not have measured less than six and a half feet. It was strange among so many sad and weary faces to see one which was full of energy and resolution. The sight of it was to me like a fire in a snow-storm. I was glad, then, to find that he was my neighbour, and gladder still when, in the dead of the night, I heard a whisper close to my ear, and found that he had managed to cut an opening in the board which separated us.

"'Hullo, chummy!' said he, 'what's your name, and what are you here for?'

'"I answered him, and asked in turn who I was talking with.

'I'm Jack Prendergast," said he, "and by God! You'll learn to bless my name before you've done with me."

'I remembered hearing of his case, for it was one which had made an immense sensation throughout the country some time before my own arrest. He was a man of good family and of great ability, but on incurably vicious habits, who had been an ingenious system of fraud obtained huge sums of money from the leading London merchants.

'"Ha, ha! You remember my case!" said he proudly.

'"Very well, indeed."

'"Then maybe you remember something queer about it?"

'"What was that, then?"

'"I'd had nearly a quarter of a million, hadn't I?"

'"So it was said."

'"But none was recovered, eh?"

'"No."

'"Well, where d'ye suppose the balance is?" he asked.

'"I have no idea," said I.

'"Right between my finger and thumb," he cried. "By God! I've go more pounds to my name than you've hairs on your head. And if you've money, my son, and know how to handle it and spread it, you can do anything. Now, you don't think it likely that a man who could do anything is going to wear his breeches out sitting in the stinking hold of a rat-gutted, beetle-ridden, mouldy old coffin of a Chin China coaster. No, sir, such a man will look after himself and will look after his chums. You may lay to that! You hold on to him, and you may kiss the book that he'll haul you through."

"That was his style of talk, and at first I thought it meant nothing; but after a while, when he had tested me and sworn me in with all possible solemnity, he let me understand that there really was a plot to gain command of the vessel. A dozen of the prisoners had hatched it before they came aboard, Prendergast was the leader, and his money was the motive power.

'"I'd a partner," said he, "a rare good man, as true as a stock to a barrel. He's got the dibbs, he has, and where do you think he is at this moment? Why, he's the chaplain of this ship—the chaplain, no less! He came aboard with a black coat, and his papers right, and money enough in his box to buy the thing right up from keel to main-truck. The crew are his, body and soul. He could buy 'em at so much a gross with a cash discount, and he did it before ever they signed on. He's got two of the warders and Mereer, the second mate, and he'd get the captain himself, if he thought him worth it."

'"What are we to do, then?" I asked.

'"What do you think?" said he. "We'll make the coats of some of these soldiers redder than ever the tailor did."

'"But they are armed," said I.

'"And so shall we be, my boy. There's a brace of pistols for every mother's son of us, and if we can't carry this ship, with the crew at our back, it's time we were all sent to a young misses' boarding-school. You speak to your mate upon the left to-night, and see if he is to be trusted."

"I did so, and found my other neighbour to be a young fellow in much the same position as myself, whose crime had been forgery. His name was Evans, but he afterwards changed it, like myself, and his is now a rich and prosperous man in the south of England. He was ready enough to join the conspiracy, as the only means of saving ourselves, and before we had crossed the Bay there were only two of the prisoners who were not in the secret. One of these was of weak mind, and we did not dare to trust him, and the other was suffering from jaundice, and could not be of any use to us.
"From the beginning there was really nothing to prevent us from taking possession of the ship. The crew were a set of ruffians, specially picked for the job. The sham chaplain came into our cells to exhort us, carrying a black bag, supposed to be full of tracts, and so often did he come that by the third day we had each stowed away at the foot of our beds a file, a brace of pistols, a pound of powder, and twenty slugs. Two of the warders were agents of Prendergast, and the second mate was his right-hand man. The captain, the two mates, two warders Lieutenant Martin, his eighteen soldiers, and the doctor were all that we had against us. Yet, safe as it was, we determined to neglect no precaution, and to make our attack suddenly by night. It came, however, more quickly than we expected, and in this way.

"One evening, about the third week after our start, the doctor had come down to see one of the prisoners who was ill, and putting his hand down on the bottom of his bunk he felt the outline of the pistols. If he had been silent he might have blown the whole thing, but he was a nervous little chap, so he gave a cry of surprise and turned so pale that the man knew what was up in an instant and seized him. He was gagged before he could give the alarm, and tied down upon the bed. He had unlocked the door that led to the deck, and we were through it in a rush. The two sentries were shot down, and so was a corporal who came running to see what was the matter. There were two more soldiers at the door of the state-room, and their muskets seemed not to be loaded, for they never fired upon us, and they were shot while trying to fix their bayonets. Then we rushed on into the captain's cabin, but as we pushed open the door there was an explosion from within, and there he lay wit his brains smeared over the chart of the Atlantic which was pinned upon the table, while the chaplain stood with a smoking pistol in his hand at his elbow. The two mates had both been seized by the crew, and the whole business seemed to be settled.

"The state-room was next the cabin, and we flocked in there and flopped down on the settees, all speaking together, for we were just mad with the feeling that we were free once more. There were lockers all round, and Wilson, the sham chaplain, knocked one of them in, and pulled out a dozen of brown sherry. We cracked off the necks of the bottles, poured the stuff out into tumblers, and were just tossing them off, when in an instant without warning there came the roar of muskets in our ears, and the saloon was so full of smoke that we could not see across the table. When it cleared again the place was a shambles. Wilson and eight others were wriggling on the top of each other on the floor, and the blood and the brown sherry on that table turn me sick now when I think of it. We were so cowed by the sight that I think we should have given the job up if had not been for Prendergast. He bellowed like a bull and rushed for the door with all that were left alive at his heels. Out we ran, and there on the poop were the lieutenant and ten of his men. The swing skylights above the saloon table had been a bit open, and they had fired on us through the slit. We got on them before they could load, and they stood to it like men; but we had the upper hand of them, and in five minutes it was all over. My God! Was there ever a slaughter-house like that ship! Prendergast was like a raging devil, and he picked the soldiers up as if they had been children and threw them overboard alive or dead. There was one sergeant that was horribly wounded and yet kept on swimming for a surprising time, until some one in mercy blew out his brains. When the fighting was over there was no one left of our enemies except just the warders, the mates, and the doctor.

"It was over them that the great quarrel arose. There were many of us who were glad enough to win back our freedom, and yet who had no wish to have murder on our souls. It was one thing to knock the soldiers over with their muskets in their hands, and it was another to stand by while men were being killed in cold blood. Eight of us, five convicts and three sailors, said that we would not see it done. But there was no moving Prendergast and those who were with him. Our only chance of safety lay in making a clean job of it, said he, and he would not leave a warden, the mates, and the doctor.

"And now I come to the most surprising part of my story, my dear son. The seamen had hauled the fore-yard aback during the rising, but now as we left them they brought it square again, and as there was a light wind from the north and east the bark began to draw slowly away from us. Our boat lay, rising and falling, upon the long, smooth rollers, and Evans and I, who were the most educated of the party, were sitting in the sheets working out our position and planning what coast we should make for. It was a nice question, for the Cape de Verde were about five hundred miles to the north of us, and the African coast about seven hundred to the east. On the whole, as the wind was coming round to the north, we thought that Sierra Leone might be best, and turned our head in that direction, the bark being at that time nearly hull down on our starboard quarter. Suddenly as we looked at her we saw a dense black cloud of smoke shoot up from her, which hung like a monstrous tree upon the sky line. A few seconds later a roar like thunder burst upon our ears, and as the smoke thinned away there was no sign left of the Gloria Scott. In an
instant we swept the boat's head round again and pulled with all our strength for the place where the haze still trailing over the water marked the scene of this catastrophe.

"It was a long hour before we reached it, and at first we feared that we had come too late to save any one. A splintered boat and a number of crates and fragments of spars rising and falling on the waves showed us where the vessel had foundered; but there was no sign of life, and we had turned away in despair when we heard a cry for help, and saw at some distance a piece of wreckage with a man lying stretched across it. When we pulled him aboard the boat he proved to be a young seaman of the name of Hudson, who was so burned and exhausted that he could give us no account of what had happened until the following morning.

"It seemed that after we had left, Prendergast and his gang had proceeded to put to death the five remaining prisoners. The two warders had been shot and thrown overboard, and so also had the third mate. Prendergast then descended into the 'tween-decks and with his own hands cut the throat of the unfortunate surgeon. There only remained the first mate, who was a bold and active man. When he saw the convict approaching him with the bloody knife in his hand he kicked off his bonds, which he had somehow contrived to loosen, and rushing down the deck he plunged into the after-hold. A dozen convicts, who descended with their pistols in search of him, found him with a match-box in his hand seated beside an open powder-barrel, which was one of a hundred carried on board, and swearing that he would blow all hands up if he were in any way molested. An instant later the explosion occurred, though Hudson thought it was caused by the misdirected bullet of one of the convicts rather than the mate's match.

Be the cause what it may, it was the end of the Gloria Scott and of the rabble who held command of her.

"Such, in a few words, my dear boy, is the history of this terrible business in which I was involved. Next day we were picked up by the brig *Hotspur*, bound for Australia, whose captain found no difficulty in believing that we were the survivors of a passenger ship which had foundered. The transport ship Gloria Scott was set down by the Admiralty as being lost at sea, and no word has ever leaked out as to her true fate. After an excellent voyage the *Hotspur* landed us at Sydney, where Evans and I changed our names and made our way to the diggings, where, among the crowds who were gathered from all nations, we had no difficulty in losing our former identities. The rest I need not relate. We prospered, we travelled, we came back as rich colonials to England, and we bought country estates. For more than twenty years we have led peaceful and useful lives, and we hoped that our past was forever buried. Imagine, then, my feelings when in the seaman who came to us I recognised instantly the man who had been picked off the wreck. He had tracked us down somehow, and had set himself to live upon our fears. You will understand now how it was that I strove to keep the peace with him, and you will in some measure sympathise with me in the fears which fill me, now that he has gone from me to his other victim with threats upon his tongue."

"Underneath is written in a hand so shaky as to be hardly legible, 'Beddoes writes in cipher to say H. has told all. Sweet Lord, have mercy on our souls!'

"That was the narrative which I read that night to young Trevor, and I think, Watson, that under the circumstances it was a dramatic one. The good fellow was heart-broken at it, and went out to the Terai tea planting, where I hear that he is doing well. As to the sailor and Beddoes, neither of them was ever heard of again after that day on which the letter of warning was written. They both disappeared utterly and completely. No complaint had been lodged with he police, so that Beddoes had mistaken a threat for a deed. Hudson had been seen lurking about, and it was believed by the police that he had done away with Beddoes and had fled. For myself I believe that the truth was exactly the opposite. I think that it is most probable that Beddoes, pushed to desperation and believing himself to have been already betrayed, had revenged himself upon Hudson, and had fled from the country with as much money as he could lay his hands on. Those are the facts of the case, Doctor, and if they are of any use to your collection, I am sure that they are very heartily at your service."

The Musgrave Ritual

An anomaly which often struck me in the character of my friend Sherlock Holmes was that, although in his methods of thought he was the neatest and most methodical of mankind, and although also he affected a certain quiet primness of dress, he was none the less in his personal habits one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction. Not that I am in the least conventional in that respect myself. The rough-and-tumble work in Afghanistan, coming on the top of a natural Bohemianism of disposition, has made me rather more lax than befits a medical man. But with me there is a limit, and when I find a man who keeps his cigars in the coal-scuttle, his tobacco in the toe end of a Persian slipper, and his unanswered correspondence transfixed by a jack-knife into the very centre of his wooden mantelpiece, then I begin to give myself virtuous airs. I have always held, too, that pistol practice should be distinctly an open-air pastime; and when Holmes, in one of his queer humours, would sit in an arm-chair with his hair-trigger and a hundred Boxer cartridges, and proceed to adorn the opposite wall with a patriotic V. R. done in bullet-pocks, I felt strongly that neither the atmosphere nor the appearance of our room was improved by it.

Our chambers were always full of chemicals and of criminal relics which had a way of wandering into unlikely
positions, and of turning up in the butter-dish or in even less desirable places. But his papers were my great crux. He had a horror of destroying documents, especially those which were connected with his past cases, and yet it was only once in every year or two that he would muster energy to docket and arrange them; for, as I have mentioned somewhere in these incoherent memoirs, the outbursts of passionate energy when he performed the remarkable feats with which his name is associated were followed by reactions of lethargy during which he would lie about with his violin and his books, hardly moving save from the sofa to the table. Thus month after month his papers accumulated, until every corner of the room was stacked with bundles of manuscript which were on no account to be burned, and which could not be put away save by their owner. One winter's night, as we sat together by the fire, I ventured to suggest to him that, as he had finished pasting extracts into his common-place book, he might employ the next two hours in making our room a little more habitable. He could not deny the justice of my request, so with a rather rueful face he went off to his bedroom, from which he returned presently pulling a large tin box behind him. This he placed in the middle of the floor and, squatting down upon a stool in front of it, he threw back the lid. I could see that it was already a third full of bundles of paper tied up with red tape into separate packages.

"There are cases enough here, Watson," said he, looking at me with mischievous eyes. "I think that if you knew all that I had in this box you would ask me to pull some out instead of putting others in."

"These are the records of your early work, then?" I asked. "I have often wished that I had notes of those cases."

"Yes, my boy, these were all done prematurely before my biographer had come to glorify me." He lifted bundle after bundle in a tender, caressing sort of way. "They are not all successes, Watson," said he. "But there are some pretty little problems among them. Here's the record of the Tarleton murders, and the case of Vamberry, the wine merchant, and the adventure of the old Russian woman, and the singular affair of the aluminium crutch, as well as a full account of Ricoletti of the club-foot, and his abominable wife. And here--ah, now, this really is something a little recherché."

He dived his arm down to the bottom of the chest, and brought up a small wooden box with a sliding lid, such as children's toys are kept in. From within he produced a crumpled piece of paper, and old-fashioned brass key, a peg of wood with a ball of string attached to it, and three rusty old disks of metal.

"Well, my boy, what do you make of this lot?" he asked, smiling at my expression.

"It is a curious collection."

"Very curious, and the story that hangs round it will strike you as being more curious still."

"These relics have a history then?"

"So much so that they are history."

"What do you mean by that?"

Sherlock Holmes picked them up one by one, and laid them along the edge of the table. Then he reseated himself in his chair and looked them over with a gleam of satisfaction in his eyes.

"These," said he, "are all that I have left to remind me of the adventure of the Musgrave Ritual."

I had heard him mention the case more than once, though I had never been able to gather the details. "I should be so glad," said I, "if you would give me an account of it."

"And leave the litter as it is?" he cried, mischievously. "Your tidiness won't bear much strain after all, Watson. But I should be glad that you should add this case to your annals, for there are points in it which make it quite unique in the criminal records of this or, I believe, of any other country. A collection of my trifling achievements would certainly be incomplete which contained no account of this very singular business.

"You may remember how the affair of the Gloria Scott, and my conversation with the unhappy man whose fate I told you of, first turned my attention in the direction of the profession which has become my life's work. You see me now when my name has become known far and wide, and when I am generally recognised both by the public and by the official force as being a final court of appeal in doubtful cases. Even when you knew me first, at the time of the affair which you have commemorated in 'A Study in Scarlet,' I had already established a considerable, though not a very lucrative, connection. You can hardly realise, then, how difficult I found it at first, and how long I had to wait before I succeeded in making any headway.

"When I first came up to London I had rooms in Montague Street, just round the corner from the British Museum, and there I waited, filling in my too abundant leisure time by studying all those branches of science which might make me more efficient. Now and again cases came in my way, principally through the introduction of old fellow-students, for during my last years at the University there was a good deal of talk there about myself and my methods. The third of these cases was that of the Musgrave Ritual, and it is to the interest which was aroused by that singular chain of events, and the large issues which proved to be at stake, that I trace my first stride towards to position which I now hold.

"Reginald Musgrave had been in the same college as myself, and I had some slight acquaintance with him. He was not generally popular among the undergraduates, though it always seemed to me that what was set down as
pride was really an attempt to cover extreme natural diffidence. In appearance he was a man of exceedingly aristocratic type, thin, high-nosed, and large-eyed, with languid and yet courtly manners. He was indeed a scion of one of the very oldest families in the kingdom, though his branch was a cadet one which had separated from the northern Musgraves some time in the sixteenth century, and had established itself in western Sussex, where the Manor House of Hurlstone is perhaps the oldest inhabited building in the county. Something of his birth place seemed to cling to the man, and I never looked at his pale, keen face or the poise of his head without associating him with grey archways and mullioned windows and all the venerable wreckage of a feudal keep. Once or twice we drifted into talk, and I can remember that more than once he expressed a keen interest in my methods of observation and inference.

"For four years I had seen nothing of him until one morning he walked into my room in Montague Street. He had changed little, was dressed like a young man of fashion--he was always a bit of a dandy--and preserved the same quiet, suave manner which had formerly distinguished him.

"How has all gone with you Musgrave?" I asked, after we had cordially shaken hands.

"You probably heard of my poor father's death," said he; 'he was carried off about two years ago. Since then I have of course had the Hurlstone estates to manage, and as I am member for my district as well, my life has been a busy one. But I understand, Holmes, that you are turning to practical ends those powers with which you used to amaze us?"

"Yes," said I, 'I have taken to living by my wits.'

"I am delighted to hear it, for your advice at present would be exceedingly valuable to me. We have had some very strange doings at Hurlstone, and the police have been able to throw no light upon the matter. It is really the most extraordinary and inexplicable business.

"You can imagine with what eagerness I listened to him, Watson, for the very chance for which I had been panting during all those months of inaction seemed to have come within my reach. In my inmost heart I believed that I could succeed where others failed, and now I had the opportunity to test myself.

"Pray, let me have the details," I cried.

"Reginald Musgrave sat down opposite to me, and lit the cigarette which I had pushed towards him.

"You must know," said he, 'that though I am a bachelor, I have to keep up a considerable staff of servants at Hurlstone, for it is a rambling old place, and takes a good deal of looking after. I preserve, too, and in the pheasant months I usually have a house-party, so that it would not do to be short-handed. Altogether there are eight maids, the cook, the butler, two footmen, and a boy. The garden and the stables of course have a separate staff.

"Of these servants the one who had been longest in our service was Brunton the butler. He was a young schoolmaster out of place when he was first taken up by my father, but he was a man of great energy and character, and he soon became quite invaluable in the household. He was a well-grown, handsome man, with a splendid forehead, and though he has been with us for twenty years he cannot be more than forty now. With his personal advantages and his extraordinary gifts--for he can speak several languages and play nearly every musical instrument--it is wonderful that he should have been satisfied so long in such a position, but I suppose that he was comfortable, and lacked energy to make any change. The butler of Hurlstone is always a thing that is remembered by all who visit us.

"But this paragon has one fault. He is a bit of a Don Juan, and you can imagine that for a man like him it is not a very difficult part to play in a quiet country district. When he was married it was all right, but since he has been a widower we have had no end of trouble with him. A few months ago we were in hopes that he was about to settle down again for he became engaged to Rachel Howells, our second house-maid; but he has thrown her over since then and taken up with Janet Tregellis, the daughter of the head game-keeper. Rachel--who is a very good girl, but of an excitable Welsh temperament--had a sharp touch of brain-fever, and goes about the house now--or did until yesterday--like a black-eyed shadow of her former self. That was our first drama at Hurlstone; but a second one came to drive it from our minds, and it was prefaced by the disgrace and dismissal of butler Brunton.

"This was how it came about. I have said that the man was intelligent, and this very intelligence has caused his ruin, for it seems to have led to an insatiable curiosity about things which did not in the least concern him. I had no idea of the lengths to which this would carry him, until the merest accident opened my eyes to it.

"I have said that the house is a rambling one. One day last week--on Thursday night, to be more exact--I found that I could not sleep, having foolishly taken a cup of strong café noir after my dinner. After struggling against it until two in the morning, I felt that it was quite hopeless, so I rose and lit the candle with the intention of continuing a novel which I was reading. The book, however, had been left in the billiard-room, so I pulled on my dressing-gown and started off to get it.

"In order to reach the billiard-room I had to descend a flight of stairs and then to cross the head of a passage which led to the library and the gun-room. You can imagine my surprise when, as I looked down this corridor, I saw a glimmer of light coming from the open door of the library. I had myself extinguished the lamp and closed the door..."
before coming to bed. Naturally my first thought was of burglars. The corridors at Hurlstone have their walls largely
decorated with trophies of old weapons. From one of these I picked a battle-axe, and then, leaving my candle behind
me, I crept on tip-toe down the passage and peeped in at the open door.

"Brunton, the butler, was in the library. He was sitting, fully dressed, in an easy-chair, with a slip of paper which
looked like a map upon his knee, and his forehead sunk forward upon his hand in deep thought. I stood dumb with
astonishment, watching him from the darkness. A small taper on the edge of the table shed a feeble light which
sufficed to show me that he was fully dressed. Suddenly, as I looked, he rose from his chair, and walking over to a
bureau at the side, he unlocked it and drew out one of the drawers. From this he took a paper, and returning to his
seat he flattened it out beside the taper on the edge of the table, and began to study it with minute attention. My
indignation at this calm examination of our family documents overcame me so far that I took a step forward, and
Brunton, looking up, saw me standing in the doorway. He sprang to his feet, his face turned livid with fear, and he
thrust into his breast the chart-like paper which he had been originally studying.

"'So!' said I. "This is how you repay the trust which we have reposed in you. You will leave my service to-
morrow.'

"He bowed with the look of a man who is utterly crushed, and slunk past me without a word. The taper was still
on the table, and by its light I glanced to see what the paper was which Brunton had taken from the bureau. To my
surprise it was nothing of any importance at all, but simply a copy of the questions and answers in the singular old
observance called the Musgrave Ritual. It is a sort of ceremony peculiar to our family, which each Musgrave for
centuries past has gone through on his coming of age--a thing of private interest, and perhaps of some little
importance to the archaeologist, like our own blazonings and charges, but of no practical use whatever.'

"'We had better come back to the paper afterwards,' said I.

"'If you think it really necessary,' he answered, with some hesitation. 'To continue my statement, however: I
relocked the bureau, using the key which Brunton had left, and I had turned to go when I was surprised to find that
the butler had returned, and was standing before me.

"'Mr. Musgrave, sir," he cried, in a voice which was hoarse with emotion, "I can't bear disgrace, sir. I've always
been proud above my station in life, and disgrace would kill me. My blood will be on your head, sir--it will, indeed--
if you drive me to despair. If you cannot keep me after what has passed, then for God's sake let me give you notice
and leave in a month, as if of my own free will. I could stand that, Mr. Musgrave, but not to be cast out before all the
folk that I know so well.'

"'You don't deserve much consideration, Brunton," I answered. "Your conduct has been most infamous.
However, as you have been a long time in the family, I have no wish to bring public disgrace upon you. A month,
however is too long. Take yourself away in a week, and give what reason you like for going.'

"'Only a week, sir?' he cried, in a despairing voice. "A fortnight--say at least a fortnight!"

"'A week,' I repeated, "and you may consider yourself to have been very leniently dealt with.'

"He crept away, his face sunk upon his breast, like a broken man, while I put out the light and returned to my
room.

"For two days after this Brunton was most assiduous in his attention to his duties. I made no allusion to what
had passed, and waited with some curiosity to see how he would cover his disgrace. On the third morning, however
he did not appear, as was his custom, after breakfast to receive my instructions for the day. As I left the dining-room
I happened to meet Rachel Howells, the maid. I have told you that she had only recently recovered from an illness,
and was looking so wretchedly pale and wan that I remonstrated with her for being at work.

"'You should be in bed," I said. "Come back to your duties when you are stronger.'

"'She looked at me with so strange an expression that I began to suspect that her brain was affected.

"'I am strong enough, Mr. Musgrave," said she.

"'We will see what the doctor says," I answered. "You must stop work now, and when you go downstairs just
say that I wish to see Brunton.'

"'The butler is gone," said she.

"'He is gone. No one has seen him. He is not in his room. Oh, yes, he is gone, he is gone!' She fell back against
the wall with shriek after shriek of laughter, while I, horrified at this sudden hysterical attack, rushed to the bell to
summon help. The girl was taken to her room, still screaming and sobbing, while I made inquiries about Brunton.
There was no doubt about it that he had disappeared. His bed had not been slept in, he had been seen by no one since
he had retired to his room the night before, and yet it was difficult to see how he could have left the house, as both
windows and doors were found to be fastened in the morning. His clothes, his watch, and even his money were in
his room, but the black suit which he usually wore was missing. His slippers, too, were gone, but his boots were left
behind. Where then could butler Brunton have gone in the night, and what could have become of him now?
"Of course we searched the house from cellar to garret, but there was no trace of him. It is, as I have said, a labyrinth of an old house, especially the original wing, which is now practically uninhabited; but we ransacked every room and cellar without discovering the least sign of the missing man. It was incredible to me that he could have gone away leaving all his property behind him, and yet where could he be? I called in the local police, but without success. Rain had fallen on the night before and we examined the lawn and the paths all round the house, but in vain. Matters were in this state, when a new development quite drew our attention away from the original mystery.

"For two days Rachel Howells had been so ill, sometimes delirious, sometimes hysterical, that a nurse had been employed to sit up with her at night. On the third night after Brunton's disappearance, the nurse, finding her patient sleeping nicely, had dropped into a nap in the arm-chair, when she woke in the early morning to find the bed empty, the window open, and no signs of the invalid. I was instantly aroused, and, with the two footmen, started off at once in search of the missing girl. It was not difficult to tell the direction which she had taken, for, starting from under her window, we could follow her footmarks easily across the lawn to the edge of the mere, where they vanished close to the gravel path which leads out of the grounds. The lake there is eight feet deep, and you can imagine our feelings when we saw that the trail of the poor demented girl came to an end at the edge of it.

"Of course, we had the drags at once, and set to work to recover the remains, but no trace of the body could we find. On the other hand, we brought to the surface an object of a most unexpected kind. It was a linen bag which contained within it a mass of old rusted and discoloured metal and several dull-coloured pieces of pebble or glass. This strange find was all that we could get from the mere, and, although we made every possible search and inquiry yesterday, we know nothing of the fate either of Rachel Howells or of Richard Brunton. The county police are at their wits' end, and I have come up to you as a last resource.'

"You can imagine, Watson, with what eagerness I listened to this extraordinary sequence of events, and endeavoured to piece them together, and to devise some common thread upon which they might all hang. The butler was gone. The maid was gone. The maid had loved the butler, but had afterwards had cause to hate him. She was of Welsh blood, fiery and passionate. She had been terribly excited immediately after his disappearance. She had flung into the lake a bag containing some curious contents. These were all factors which had to be taken into consideration, and yet none of them got quite to the heart of the matter. What was the starting-point of this chain of events? There lay the end of this tangled line.

"I must see that paper, Musgrave,' said I, 'which this butler of your thought it worth his while to consult, even at the risk of the loss of his place.'

"It is rather an absurd business, this ritual of ours,' he answered. 'But it has at least the saving grace of antiquity to excuse it. I have a copy of the questions and answers here if you care to run your eye over them.'

"He handed me the very paper which I have here, Watson, and this is the strange catechism to which each Musgrave had to submit when he came to man's estate. I will read you the questions and answers as they stand.

"Whose was it?"
"His who is gone.'
"Who shall have it?"
"He who will come.'
"Where was the sun?"
"Over the oak.'
"Where was the shadow?"
"Under the elm.'
"How was it stepped?
"North by ten and by ten, east by five and by five, south by two and by two, west by one and by one, and so under.'
"What shall we give for it?"
"All that is ours.'
"Why should we give it?"
"For the sake of the trust.'

"The original has no date, but is in the spelling of the middle of the seventeenth century,' remarked Musgrave. 'I am afraid, however, that it can be of little help to you in solving this mystery.'

"At least,' said I, 'it gives us another mystery, and one which is even more interesting than the first. It may be that the solution of the one may prove to be the solution of the other. You will excuse me, Musgrave, if I say that your butler appears to me to have been a very clever man, and to have had a clearer insight that ten generations of his masters.'

"I hardly follow you,' said Musgrave. 'The paper seems to me to be of no practical importance.'

"But to me it seems immensely practical, and I fancy that Brunton took the same view. He had probably seen it
before that night on which you caught him.'

"It is very possible. We took no pains to hide it."

"He simply wished, I should imagine, to refresh his memory upon that last occasion. He had, as I understand, some sort of map or chart which he was comparing with the manuscript, and which he thrust into his pocket when you appeared."

"That is true. But what could he have to do with this old family custom of ours, and what does this rigmarole mean?"

"I don't think that we should have much difficulty in determining that," said I; 'with your permission we will take the first train down to Sussex, and go a little more deeply into the matter upon the spot.'

"The same afternoon saw us both at Hurlstone. Possibly you have seen pictures and read descriptions of the famous old building, so I will confine my account of it to saying that it is built in the shape of an L, the long arm being the more modern portion, and the shorter the ancient nucleus, from which the other had developed. Over the low, heavily-lintelled door, in the centre of this old part, is chiselled the date, 1607, but experts are agreed that the beams and stone-work are really much older than this. The enormously thick walls and tiny windows of this part had in the last century driven the family into building the new wing, and the old one was used now as a store-house and a cellar, when it was used at all. A splendid park with fine old timber surrounds the house, and the lake, to which my client had referred, lay close to the avenue, about two hundred yards from the building."

"I was already firmly convinced, Watson, that there were not three separate mysteries here, but one only, and that if I could read the Musgrave Ritual aright I should hold in my hand the clue which would lead me to the truth concerning both the butler Brunton and the maid Howells. To that then I turned all my energies. Why should this servant be so anxious to master this old formula? Evidently because he saw something in it which had escaped all those generations of country squires, and from which he expected some personal advantage. What was it then, and how had it affected his fate?

"It was perfectly obvious to me, on reading the ritual, that the measurements must refer to some spot to which the rest of the document alluded, and that if we could find that spot, we should be in a fair way towards finding what the secret was which the old Musgraves had thought it necessary to embalm in so curious a fashion. There were two guides given us to start with, an oak and an elm. As to the oak there could be no question at all. Right in front of the house, upon the left-hand side of the drive, there stood a patriarch among oaks, one of the most magnificent trees that I have ever seen."

"That was there when you ritual was drawn up,' said I, as we drove past it."

"It was there at the Norman Conquest in all probability,' he answered. 'It has a girth of twenty-three feet.'

"Have you any old elms? I asked."

"There used to be a very old one over yonder but it was struck by lightning ten years ago, and we cut down the stump."

"You can see where it used to be?"

"Oh, yes."

"There are no other elms?"

"No old ones, but plenty of beeches."

"I should like to see where it grew."

"We had driven up in a dogcart, and my client led me away at once, without our entering the house, to the scar on the lawn where the elm had stood. It was nearly midway between the oak and the house. My investigation seemed to be progressing."

"I suppose it is impossible to find out how high the elm was? I asked."

"I can give you it at once. It was sixty-four feet."

"How do you come to know it? I asked, in surprise."

"When my old tutor used to give me an exercise in trigonometry, it always took the shape of measuring heights. When I was a lad I worked out every tree and building in the estate."

"This was an unexpected piece of luck. My data were coming more quickly than I could have reasonably hoped."

"Tell me,' I asked, 'did your butler ever ask you such a question?"

"Reginald Musgrave looked at me in astonishment. 'Now that you call it to my mind,' he answered, 'Brunton did ask me about the height of the tree some months ago, in connection with some little argument with the groom.'"

"This was excellent news, Watson, for it showed me that I was on the right road. I looked up at the sun. It was low in the heavens, and I calculated that in less than an hour it would lie just above the topmost branches of the old oak. One condition mentioned in the Ritual would then be fulfilled. And the shadow of the elm must mean the farther end of the shadow, otherwise the trunk would have been chosen as the guide. I had, then, to find where the far end of the shadow would fall when the sun was just clear of the oak."
That must have been difficult, Holmes, when the elm was no longer there."

"Well, at least I knew that if Brunton could do it, I could also. Besides, there was no real difficulty. I went with Musgrave to his study and whittled myself this peg, to which I tied this long string with a knot at each yard. Then I took two lengths of a fishing-rod, which came to just six feet, and I went back with my client to where the elm had been. The sun was just grazing the top of the oak. I fastened the rod on end, marked out the direction of the shadow, and measured it. It was nine feet in length.

"Of course the calculation now was a simple one. If a rod of six feet threw a shadow of nine, a tree of sixty-four feet would throw one of ninety-six, and the line of the one would of course the line of the other. I measured out the distance, which brought me almost to the wall of the house, and I thrust a peg into the spot. You can imagine my exultation, Watson, when within two inches of my peg I saw a conical depression in the ground. I knew that it was the mark made by Brunton in his measurements, and that I was still upon his trail.

"From this starting-point I proceeded to step, having first taken the cardinal points by my pocket-compass. Ten steps with each foot took me along parallel with the wall of the house, and again I marked my spot with a peg. Then I carefully paced off five to the east and two to the south. It brought me to the very threshold of the old door. Two steps to the west meant now that I was to go two paces down the stone-flagged passage, and this was the place indicated by the Ritual.

"Never have I felt such a cold chill of disappointment, Watson. For a moment is seemed to me that there must be some radical mistake in my calculations. The setting sun shone full upon the passage floor, and I could see that the old, foot-worn grey stones with which it was paved were firmly cemented together, and had certainly not been moved for many a long year. Brunton had not been at work here. I tapped upon the floor, but it sounded the same all over, and there was no sign of any crack or crevice. But, Fortunately, Musgrave, who had begun to appreciate the meaning of my proceedings, and who was now as excited as myself, took out his manuscript to check my calculation.

"And under,' he cried. 'You have omitted the "and under."'

"I had thought that it meant that we were to dig, but now, of course, I saw at once that I was wrong. There is a cellar under this then?" I cried.

"Yes, and as old as the house. Down here, through this door.'

"We went down a winding stone stair, and my companion, striking a match, lit a large lantern which stood on a barrel in the corner. In an instant it was obvious that we had at last come upon the true place, and that we had not been the only people to visit the spot recently.

"It had been used for the storage of wood, but the billets, which had evidently been littered over the floor, were now piled at the sides, so as to leave a clear space in the middle. In this space lay a large and heavy flagstone with a rusted iron ring in the centre to which a thick shepherd's-check muffler was attached.

"By Jove!' cried my client. 'That's Brunton's muffler. I have seen it on him, and could swear to it. What has the villain been doing here?'

"At my suggestion a couple of the county police were summoned to be present, and I then endeavoured to raise the stone by pulling on the cravat. I could only move it slightly, and it was with the aid of one of the constables that I succeeded at last in carrying it to one side. A black hole yawned beneath into which we all peered, while Musgrave, kneeling at the side, pushed down the lantern.

"A small chamber about seven feet deep and four feet square lay open to us. At one side of this was a squat, brass-bound wooden box, the lid of which was hinged upwards, with this curious old-fashioned key projecting from the lock. It was furred outside by a thick layer of dust, and damp and worms had eaten through the wood, so that a crop of livid fungi was growing on the inside of it. Several discs of metal, old coins apparently, such as I hold here, were scattered over the bottom of the box, but it contained nothing else.

"At the moment, however, we had no thought for the old chest, for our eyes were riveted upon that which crouched beside it. It was the figure of a man, clad in a suit of black, who squatted down upon him hams with his forehead sunk upon the edge of the box and his two arms thrown out on each side of it. The attitude had drawn all the stagnant blood to the face, and no man could have recognised that distorted liver-coloured countenance; but his height, his dress, and his hair were all sufficient to show my client, when we had drawn the body up, that it was indeed his missing butler. He had been dead some days, but there was no wound or bruise upon his person to show how he had met his dreadful end. When his body had been carried from the cellar we found ourselves still confronted with a problem which was almost as formidable as that with which we had started.

"I confess that so far, Watson, I had been disappointed in my investigation. I had reckoned upon solving the matter when once I had found the place referred to in the Ritual; but now I was there, and was apparently as far as ever from knowing what it was which the family had concealed with such elaborate precautions. It is true that I had thrown a light upon the fate of Brunton, but now I had to ascertain how that fate had come upon him, and what part
had been played in the matter by the woman who had disappeared. I sat down upon a keg in the corner and thought
the whole matter carefully over.

"You know my methods in such cases, Watson. I put myself in the man's place and, having first gauged his
intelligence, I try to imagine how I should myself have proceeded under the same circumstances. In this case the
matter was simplified by Brunton's intelligence being quite first-rate, so that it was unnecessary to make any
allowance for the personal equation, as the astronomers have dubbed it. He know that something valuable was
concealed. He had spotted the place. He found that the stone which covered it was just too heavy for a man to move
unaided. What would he do next? He could not get help from outside, even if he had some one whom he could trust,
without the unbarring of doors and considerable risk of detection. It was better, if he could, to have his helmpate
inside the house. But whom could he ask? This girl had been devoted to him. A man always finds it hard to realise
that he may have finally lost a woman's love, however badly he may have treated her. He would try by a few
attentions to make his peace with the girl Howells, and then would engage her as his accomplice. Together they
would come at night to the cellar, and their united force would suffice to raise the stone. So far I could follow their
actions as if I had actually seen them.

"But for two of them, and one a woman, it must have been heavy work the raising of that stone. A burly Sussex
policeman and I had found it no light job. What would they do to assist them? Probably what I should have done
myself. I rose and examined carefully the different billets of wood which were scattered round the floor. Almost at
once I came upon what I expected. One piece, about three feet in length, had a very marked indentation at one end,
while several were flattened at the sides as if they had been compressed by some considerable weight. Evidently, as
they had dragged the stone up they had thrust the chunks of wood into the chink, until at last, when the opening was
large enough to crawl through, they would hold it open by a billet placed lengthways, which might very well
become indented at the lower end, since the whole weight of the stone would press it down on to the edge of this
other slab. So far I was still on safe ground.

"And now how was I to proceed to reconstruct this midnight drama? Clearly, only one could fit into the hole,
and that one was Brunton. The girl must have waited above. Brunton then unlocked the box, handed up the contents
presumably--since they were not to be found--and then--and then what happened?

"What smouldering fire of vengeance had suddenly sprung into flame in this passionate Celtic woman's soul
when she saw the man who had wronged her--wronged her, perhaps, far more than we suspected--in her power?
Was it a chance that the wood had slipped, and that the stone had shut Brunton into what had become his sepulchre?
Had she only been guilty of silence as to his fate? Or had some sudden blow from her hand dashed the support away
and sent the slab crashing down into its place? Be that as it might, I seemed to see that woman's figure still clutching
at her treasure trove and flying wildly up the winding stair, with her ears ringing perhaps with the muffled screams
from behind her and with the drumming of frenzied hands against the slab of stone which was choking her faithless
lover's life out.

"Here was the secret of her blanched face, her shaken nerves, her peals of hysterical laughter on the next
morning. But what had been in the box? What had she done with that? Of course, it must have been the old metal
and pebbles which my client had dragged from the mere. She had thrown them in there at the first opportunity to
remove the last trace of her crime.

"For twenty minutes I had sat motionless, thinking the matter out. Musgrave still stood with a very pale face,
swinging his lantern and peering down into the hole.

"These are coins of Charles the First,' said he, holding out the few which had been in the box; 'you see we were
right in fixing our date for the Ritual.'

"We may find something else of Charles the First,' I cried, as the probable meaning of the first two question of
the Ritual broke suddenly upon me. 'Let me see the contents of the bag which you fished from the mere.'

"We ascended to his study, and he laid the debris before me. I could understand his regarding it as of small
importance when I looked at it, for the metal was almost black and the stones lustreless and dull. I rubbed one of
them on my sleeve, however, and it glowed afterwards like a spark in the dark hollow of my hand. The metal work
was in the form of a double ring, but it had been bent and twisted out of its original shape.

"You must bear in mind,' said I, 'that the royal party made head in England even after the death of the king, and
that when they at last fled they probably left many of their most precious possessions buried behind them, with the
intention of returning for them in more peaceful times.'

"My ancestor, Sir Ralph Musgrave, as a prominent Cavalier and the right-hand man of Charles the Second in his
wanderings,' said my friend.

"Ah, indeed!' I answered. 'Well now, I think that really should give us the last link that we wanted. I must
congratulate you on coming into the possession, though in rather a tragic manner of a relic which is of great intrinsic
value, but of even greater importance as an historical curiosity.'"
"What is it, then?" he gasped in astonishment.

"It is nothing less than the ancient crown of the kings of England.'

"The crown!'  

"Precisely. Consider what the Ritual says: How does it run? "Whose was it?" "His who is gone." That was after the execution of Charles. Then, "Who shall have it?" "He who will come." That was Charles the Second, whose advent was already foreseen. There can, I think, be no doubt that this battered and shapeless diadem once encircled the brows of the royal Stuarts.'

"And how came it in the pond?"

"Ah, that is a question that will take some time to answer.' And with that I sketched out to him the whole long chain of surmise and of proof which I had constructed. The twilight had closed in and the moon was shining brightly in the sky before my narrative was finished.

"And how was it then that Charles did not get his crown when he returned?" asked Musgrave, pushing back the relic into its linen bag.

"Ah, there you lay your finger upon the one point which we shall probably never be able to clear up. It is likely that the Musgrave who held the secret died in the interval, and by some oversight left this guide to his descendant without explaining the meaning of it. From that day to this it has been handed down from father to son, until at last it came within reach of a man who tore its secret out of it and lost his life in the venture.'

"And that's the story of the Musgrave Ritual, Watson. They have the crown down at Hurlstone--though they had some legal bother and a considerable sum to pay before they were allowed to retain it. I am sure that if you mentioned my name they would be happy to show it to you. Of the woman nothing was ever heard, and the probability is that she got away out of England and carried herself and the memory of her crime to some land beyond the seas."

The Reigate Puzzle

It was some time before the health of my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes recovered from the strain caused by his immense exertions in the spring of '87. The whole question of the Netherland-Sumatra Company and of the colossal schemes of Baron Maupertuis are too recent in the minds of the public, and are too intimately concerned with politics and finance to be fitting subjects for this series of sketches. They led, however, in an indirect fashion to a singular and complex problem which gave my friend an opportunity of demonstrating the value of a fresh weapon among the many with which he waged his life-long battle against crime.

On referring to my notes I see that it was upon the 14th of April that I received a telegram from Lyons which informed me that Holmes was lying ill in the Hotel Dulong. Within twenty-four hours I was in his sick-room, and was relieved to find that there was nothing formidable in his symptoms. Even his iron constitution, however, had broken down under the strain of an investigation which had extended over two months, during which period he had never worked less than fifteen hours a day, and had more than once, as he assured me, kept to his task for five days at a stretch. Even the triumphant issue of his labours could not save him from reaction after so terrible an exertion, and at a time when Europe was ringing with his name and when his room was literally ankle-deep with congratulatory telegrams I found him a prey to the blackest depression. Even the knowledge that he had succeeded where the police of three countries had failed, and that he had outmanoeuvred at every point the most accomplished swindler in Europe, was insufficient to rouse him from his nervous prostration.

Three days later we were back in Baker Street together; but it was evident that my friend would be much the better for a change, and the thought of a week of spring time in the country was full of attractions to me also. My old friend, Colonel Hayter, who had come under my professional care in Afghanistan, had now taken a house near Reigate in Surrey, and had frequently asked me to come down to him upon a visit. On the last occasion he had remarked that if my friend would only come with me he would be glad to extend his hospitality to him also. A little diplomacy was needed, but when Holmes understood that the establishment was a bachelor one, and that he would be allowed the fullest freedom, he fell in with my plans and a week after our return from Lyons we were under the Colonel's roof. Hayter was a fine old soldier who had seen much of the world, and he soon found, as I had expected, that Holmes and he had much in common.

On the evening of our arrival we were sitting in the Colonel's gun-room after dinner, Holmes stretched upon the sofa, while Hayter and I looked over his little armoury of Eastern weapons.

"By the way," said he suddenly, "I think I'll take one of these pistols upstairs with me in case we have an alarm."

"An alarm!" said I.

"Yes, we've had a scare in this part lately. Old Acton, who is one of our county magnates, had his house broken into last Monday. No great damage done, but the fellows are still at large."

"No clue?" asked Holmes, cocking his eye at the Colonel.

"None as yet. But the affair is a pretty one, one of our little country crimes, which must seem too small for your
attention, Mr. Holmes, after this great international affair."

Holmes waved away the compliment, though his smile showed that it had pleased him.

"Was there any feature of interest?"

"I fancy not. The thieves ransacked the library and got very little for their pains. The whole place was turned upside down, drawers burst open, and presses ransacked, with the result that an odd volume of Pope's 'Homer,' two plated candlesticks, an ivory letter-weight, a small oak barometer, and a ball of twine are all that have vanished."

"What an extraordinary assortment!" I exclaimed.

"Oh, the fellows evidently grabbed hold of everything they could get."

Holmes grunted from the sofa.

"The county police ought to make something of that," said he; "why, it is surely obvious that--"

But I held up a warning finger.

"You are here for a rest, my dear fellow. For Heaven's sake don't get started on a new problem when your nerves are all in shreds."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders with a glance of comic resignation towards the Colonel, and the talk drifted away into less dangerous channels.

It was destined, however, that all my professional caution should be wasted, for next morning the problem obtruded itself upon us in such a way that it was impossible to ignore it, and our country visit took a turn which neither of us could have anticipated. We were at breakfast when the Colonel's butler rushed in with all his propriety shaken out of him.

"Have you heard the news, sir?" he gasped. "At the Cunningham's sir!"

"Burglary!" cried the Colonel, with his coffee-cup in mid-air.

"Murder!"

The Colonel whistled. "By Jove!" said he. "Who's killed, then? The J.P. or his son?"

"Neither, sir. It was William the coachman. Shot through the heart, sir, and never spoke again."

"Who shot him, then?"

"The burglar, sir. He was off like a shot and got clean away. He'd just broke in at the pantry window when William came on him and met his end in saving his master's property."

"What time?"

"It was last night, sir, somewhere about twelve."

"Ah, then, we'll step over afterwards," said the Colonel, coolly settling down to his breakfast again. "It's a baddish business," he added when the butler had gone; "he's our leading man about here, is old Cunningham, and a very decent fellow too. He'll be cut up over this, for the man has been in his service for years and was a good servant. It's evidently the same villains who broke into Acton's."

"And stole that very singular collection," said Holmes, thoughtfully.

"Precisely."

"Hum! It may prove the simplest matter in the world, but all the same at first glance this is just a little curious, is it not? A gang of burglars acting in the country might be expected to vary the scene of their operations, and not to crack two cribs in the same district within a few days. When you spoke last night of taking precautions I remember that it passed through my mind that this was probably the last parish in England to which the thief or thieves would be likely to turn their attention--which shows that I have still much to learn."

"I fancy it's some local practitioner," said the Colonel. "In that case, of course, Acton's and Cunningham's are just the places he would go for, since they are far the largest about here."

"And richest?"

"Well, they ought to be, but they've had a lawsuit for some years which has sucked the blood out of both of them, I fancy. Old Acton has some claim on half Cunningham's estate, and the lawyers have been at it with both hands."

"If it's a local villain there should not be much difficulty in running him down," said Holmes with a yawn. "All right, Watson, I don't intend to meddle."

"Inspector Forrester, sir," said the butler, throwing open the door.

The official, a smart, keen-faced young fellow, stepped into the room. "Good-morning, Colonel," said he; "I hope I don't intrude, but we hear that Mr. Holmes of Baker Street is here."

The Colonel waved his hand towards my friend, and the Inspector bowed.

"We thought that perhaps you would care to step across, Mr. Holmes."

"The fates are against you, Watson," said he, laughing. "We were chatting about the matter when you came in, Inspector. Perhaps you can let us have a few details." As he leaned back in his chair in the familiar attitude I knew that the case was hopeless.
"We had no clue in the Acton affair. But here we have plenty to go on, and there's no doubt it is the same party in each case. The man was seen."

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir. But he was off like a deer after the shot that killed poor William Kirwan was fired. Mr. Cunningham saw him from the bedroom window, and Mr. Alec Cunningham saw him from the back passage. It was quarter to twelve when the alarm broke out. Mr. Cunningham had just got into bed, and Mr. Alec was smoking a pipe in his dressing-gown. They both heard William the coachman calling for help, and Mr. Alec ran down to see what was the matter. The back door was open, and as he came to the foot of the stairs he saw two men wrestling together outside. One of them fired a shot, the other dropped, and the murderer rushed across the garden and over the hedge. Mr. Cunningham, looking out of his bedroom, saw the fellow as he gained the road, but lost sight of him at once. Mr. Alec stopped to see if he could help the dying man, and so the villain got clean away. Beyond the fact that he was a middle-sized man and dressed in some dark stuff, we have no personal clue; but we are making energetic inquiries, and if he is a stranger we shall soon find him out."

"What was this William doing there? Did he say anything before he died?"

"Not a word. He lives at the lodge with his mother, and as he was a very faithful fellow we imagine that he walked up to the house with the intention of seeing that all was right there. Of course this Acton business has put every one on their guard. The robber must have just burst open the door--the lock has been forced--when William came upon him."

"Did William say anything to his mother before going out?"

"She is very old and deaf, and we can get no information from her. The shock has made her half-witted, but I understand that she was never very bright. There is one very important circumstance, however. Look at this!"

He took a small piece of torn paper from a note-book and spread it out upon his knee.

"This was found between the finger and thumb of the dead man. It appears to be a fragment torn from a larger sheet. You will observe that the hour mentioned upon it is the very time at which the poor fellow met his fate. You see that his murderer might have torn the rest of the sheet from him or he might have taken this fragment from the murderer. It reads almost as though it were an appointment."

Holmes took up the scrap of paper, a fac-simile of which is here reproduced.

"Presuming that it is an appointment," continued the Inspector, "it is of course a conceivable theory that this William Kirwan--though he had the reputation of being an honest man, may have been in league with the thief. He may have met him there, may even have helped him to break in the door, and then they may have fallen out between themselves."

"This writing is of extraordinary interest," said Holmes, who had been examining it with intense concentration. "These are much deeper waters than I had thought." He sank his head upon his hands, while the Inspector smiled at the effect which his case had had upon the famous London specialist.

"Your last remark," said Holmes, presently, "as to the possibility of there being an understanding between the burglar and the servant, and this being a note of appointment from one to the other, is an ingenious and not entirely impossible supposition. But this writing opens up--" He sank his head into his hands again and remained for some minutes in the deepest thought. When he raised his face again, I was surprised to see that his cheek was tinged with colour, and his eyes as bright as before his illness. He sprang to his feet with all his old energy.

"I'll tell you what," said he, "I should like to have a quiet little glance into the details of this case. There is something in it which fascinates me extremely. If you will permit me, Colonel, I will leave my friend Watson and you, and I will step round with the Inspector to test the truth of one or two little fancies of mine. I will be with you again in half an hour."

An hour and half had elapsed before the Inspector returned alone.

"Mr. Holmes is walking up and down in the field outside," said he. "He wants us all four to go up to the house together."

"To Mr. Cunningham's?"

"Yes, sir."

"What for?"

The Inspector shrugged his shoulders. "I don't quite know, sir. Between ourselves, I think Mr. Holmes had not quite got over his illness yet. He's been behaving very queerly, and he is very much excited."

"I don't think you need alarm yourself," said I. "I have usually found that there was method in his madness."

"Some folks might say there was madness in his method," muttered the Inspector. "But he's all on fire to start, Colonel, so we had best go out if you are ready."

We found Holmes pacing up and down in the field, his chin sunk upon his breast, and his hands thrust into his
"The matter grows in interest," said he. "Watson, your country-trip has been a distinct success. I have had a charming morning."

"You have been up to the scene of the crime, I understand," said the Colonel.

"Yes; the Inspector and I have made quite a little reconnaissance together."

"Any success?"

"Well, we have seen some very interesting things. I'll tell you what we did as we walk. First of all, we saw the body of this unfortunate man. He certainly died from a revolved wound as reported."

"Had you doubted it, then?"

"Oh, it is as well to test everything. Our inspection was not wasted. We then had an interview with Mr. Cunningham and his son, who were able to point out the exact spot where the murderer had broken through the garden-hedge in his flight. That was of great interest."

"Naturally."

"Then we had a look at this poor fellow's mother. We could get no information from her, however, as she is very old and feeble."

"And what is the result of your investigations?"

"The conviction that the crime is a very peculiar one. Perhaps our visit now may do something to make it less obscure. I think that we are both agreed, Inspector that the fragment of paper in the dead man's hand, bearing, as it does, the very hour of his death written upon it, is of extreme importance."

"It should give a clue, Mr. Holmes."

"It does give a clue. Whoever wrote that note was the man who brought William Kirwan out of his bed at that hour. But where is the rest of that sheet of paper?"

"I examined the ground carefully in the hope of finding it," said the Inspector.

"It was torn out of the dead man's hand. Why was some one so anxious to get possession of it? Because it incriminated him. And what would he do with it? Thrust it into his pocket, most likely, never noticing that a corner of it had been left in the grip of the corpse. If we could get the rest of that sheet it is obvious that we should have gone a long way towards solving the mystery."

"Yes, but how can we get at the criminal's pocket before we catch the criminal?"

"Well, well, it was worth thinking over. Then there is another obvious point. The note was sent to William. The man who wrote it could not have taken it; otherwise, of course, he might have delivered his own message by word of mouth. Who brought the note, then? Or did it come through the post?"

"I have made inquiries," said the Inspector. "William received a letter by the afternoon post yesterday. The envelope was destroyed by him."

"Excellent!" cried Holmes, clapping the Inspector on the back. "You've seen the postman. It is a pleasure to work with you. Well, here is the lodge, and if you will come up, Colonel, I will show you the scene of the crime."

We passed the pretty cottage where the murdered man had lived, and walked up an oak-lined avenue to the fine old Queen Anne house, which bears the date of Malplaquet upon the lintel of the door. Holmes and the Inspector led us round it until we came to the side gate, which is separated by a stretch of garden from the hedge which lines the road. A constable was standing at the kitchen door.

"Throw the door open, officer," said Holmes. "Now, it was on those stairs that young Mr. Cunningham stood and saw the two men struggling just where we are. Old Mr. Cunningham was at that window--the second on the left--and he saw the fellow get away just to the left of that bush. Then Mr. Alec ran out and knelt beside the wounded man. The ground is very hard, you see, and there are no marks to guide us." As he spoke two men came down the garden path, from round the angle of the house. The one was an elderly man, with a strong, deep-lined, heavy-eyed face; the other a dashing young fellow, whose bright, smiling expression and showy dress were in strange contract with the business which had brought us there.

"Still at it, then?" said he to Holmes. "I thought you Londoners were never at fault. You don't seem to be so very quick, after all."

"Ah, you must give us a little time," said Holmes good-humoredly.

"You'll want it," said young Alec Cunningham. "Why, I don't see that we have any clue at all."

"There's only one," answered the Inspector. "We thought that if we could only find--Good heavens, Mr. Holmes! What is the matter?"

My poor friend's face had suddenly assumed the most dreadful expression. His eyes rolled upwards, his features wrinkled in agony, and with a suppressed groan he dropped on his face upon the ground. Horrified at the suddenness and severity of the attack, we carried him into the kitchen, where he lay back in a large chair, and breathed heavily for some minutes. Finally, with a shamefaced apology for his weakness, he rose once more.
"Watson would tell you that I have only just recovered from a severe illness," he explained. "I am liable to these sudden nervous attacks."

"Shall I send you home in my trap?" asked old Cunningham.

"Well, since I am here, there is one point on which I should like to feel sure. We can very easily verify it."

"What was it?"

"Well, it seems to me that it is just possible that the arrival of this poor fellow William was not before, but after, the entrance of the burglary into the house. You appear to take it for granted that, although the door was forced, the robber never got in."

"I fancy that is quite obvious," said Mr. Cunningham, gravely. "Why, my son Alec had not yet gone to bed, and he would certainly have heard any one moving about."

"Where was he sitting?"

"I was smoking in my dressing-room."

"Which window is that?"

"The last on the left next my father's."

"Both of your lamps were lit, of course?"

"Undoubtedly."

"There are some very singular points here," said Holmes, smiling. "Is it not extraordinary that a burglary--and a burglar who had had some previous experience--should deliberately break into a house at a time when he could see from the lights that two of the family were still afoot?"

"He must have been a cool hand."

"Well, of course, if the case were not an odd one we should not have been driven to ask you for an explanation," said young Mr. Alec. "But as to your ideas that the man had robbed the house before William tackled him, I think it a most absurd notion. Wouldn't we have found the place disarranged, and missed the things which he had taken?"

"It depends on what the things were," said Holmes. "You must remember that we are dealing with a burglar who is a very peculiar fellow, and who appears to work on lines of his own. Look, for example, at the queer lot of things which he took from Acton's--what was it?--a ball of string, a letter-weight, and I don't know what other odds and ends."

"Well, we are quite in your hands, Mr. Holmes," said old Cunningham. "Anything which you or the Inspector may suggest will most certainly be done."

"In the first place," said Holmes, "I should like you to offer a reward--coming from yourself, for the officials may take a little time before they would agree upon the sum, and these things cannot be done too promptly. I have jotted down the form here, if you would not mind signing it. Fifty pound was quite enough, I thought."

"I would willingly give five hundred," said the J.P., taking the slip of paper and the pencil which Holmes handed to him. "This is not quite correct, however," he added, glancing over the document.

"I wrote it rather hurriedly."

"You see you begin, 'Whereas, at about a quarter to one on Tuesday morning an attempt was made,' and so on. It was at a quarter to twelve, as a matter of fact."

I was pained at the mistake, for I knew how keenly Holmes would feel any slip of the kind. It was his speciality to be accurate as to fact, but his recent illness had shaken him, and this one little incident was enough to show me that he was still far from being himself. He was obviously embarrassed for an instant, while the Inspector raised his eyebrows, and Alec Cunningham burst into a laugh. The old gentleman corrected the mistake, however, and handed the paper back to Holmes.

"Get it printed as soon as possible," he said; "I think your idea is an excellent one."

Holmes put the slip of paper carefully away into his pocket-book.

"And now," said he, "it really would be a good thing that we should all go over the house together and make certain that this rather erratic burglar did not, after all, carry anything away with him."

Before entering, Holmes made an examination of the door which had been forced. It was evident that a chisel or strong knife had been thrust in, and the lock forced back with it. We could see the marks in the wood where it had been pushed in.

"You don't use bars, then?" he asked.

"We have never found it necessary."

"You don't keep a dog?"

"Yes, but he is chained on the other side of the house."

"When do the servants go to bed?"

"About ten."

"I understand that William was usually in bed also at that hour."
"Yes."

"It is singular that on this particular night he should have been up. Now, I should be very glad if you would have
the kindness to show us over the house, Mr. Cunningham."

A stone-flagged passage, with the kitchens branching away from it, led by a wooden staircase directly to the first
floor of the house. It came out upon the landing opposite to a second more ornamental stair which came up from the
front hall. Out of this landing opened the drawing-room and several bedrooms, including those of Mr. Cunningham
and his son. Holmes walked slowly, taking keen note of the architecture of the house. I could tell from his
expression that he was on a hot scent, and yet I could not in the least imagine in what direction his inferences were
leading him.

"My good sir," said Mr. Cunningham with some impatience, "this is surely very unnecessary. That is my room at
the end of the stairs, and my son's is the one beyond it. I leave it to your judgement whether it was possible for the
thief to have come up here without disturbing us."

"You must try round and get on a fresh scent, I fancy," said the son with a rather malicious smile.

"Still, I must ask you to humour me a little further. I should like, for example, to see how far the windows of the
bedrooms command the front. This, I understand is your son's room"--he pushed open the door--"and that, I
presume, is the dressing-room in which he sat smoking when the alarm was given. Where does the window of that
look out to?" He stepped across the bedroom, pushed open the door, and glanced round the other chamber.

"I hope that you are satisfied now?" said Mr. Cunningham, tartly.

"Thank you, I think I have seen all that I wished."

"If it is not too much trouble."

The J. P. shrugged his shoulders, and led the way into his own chamber, which was a plainly furnished and
commonplace room. As we moved across it in the direction of the window, Holmes fell back until he and I were the
last of the group. Near the foot of the bed stood a dish of oranges and a carafe of water. As we passed it Holmes, to
my unutterable astonishment, leaned over in front of me and deliberately knocked the whole thing over. The glass
smashed into a thousand pieces and the fruit rolled about into every corner of the room.

"You've done it now, Watson," said he, coolly. "A pretty mess you've made of the carpet."

I stooped in some confusion and began to pick up the fruit, understanding for some reason my companion
desired me to take the blame upon myself. The others did the same, and set the table on its legs again.

"Hullo!" cried the Inspector, "where's he got to?"

Holmes had disappeared.

"Wait here an instant," said young Alec Cunningham. "The fellow is off his head, in my opinion. Come with me,
father, and see where he has got to!"

They rushed out of the room, leaving the Inspector, the Colonel, and me staring at each other.

"'Pon my word, I am inclined to agree with Master Alec," said the official. "It may be the effect of this illness,
but it seems to me that--"

His words were cut short by a sudden scream of "Help! Help! Murder!" With a thrill I recognised the voice of
that of my friend. I rushed madly from the room on to the landing. The cries, which had sunk down into a hoarse,
iarticulate shouting, came from the room which we had first visited. I dashed in, and on into the dressing-room
beyond. The two Cunninghams were bending over the prostrate figure of Sherlock Holmes, the younger clutching
his throat with both hands, while the elder seemed to be twisting one of his wrists. In an instant the three of us had
torn them away from him, and Holmes staggered to his feet, very pale and evidently greatly exhausted.

"Arrest these men, Inspector," he gasped.

"On what charge?"

"That of murdering their coachman, William Kirwan."

The Inspector stared about him in bewilderment. "Oh, come now, Mr. Holmes," said he at last, "I'm sure you
don't really mean to--"

"Tut, man, look at their faces!" cried Holmes, curtly.

Never certainly have I seen a plainer confession of guilt upon human countenances. The older man seemed
numbed and dazed with a heavy, sullen expression upon his strongly-marked face. The son, on the other hand, had
dropped all that jaunty, dashing style which had characterised him, and the ferocity of a dangerous wild beast
gleamed in his dark eyes and distorted his handsome features. The Inspector said nothing, but, stepping to the door,
he blew his whistle. Two of his constables came at the call.

"I have no alternative, Mr. Cunningham," said he. "I trust that this may all prove to be an absurd mistake, but
you can see that--Ah, would you? Drop it!" He struck out with his hand, and a revolver which the younger man was
in the act of cocking clattered down upon the floor.
"Keep that," said Holmes, quietly putting his foot upon it; "you will find it useful at the trial. But this is what we really wanted." He held up a little crumpled piece of paper.

"The remainder of the sheet!" cried the Inspector.

"Precisely."

"And where was it?"

"Where I was sure it must be. I'll make the whole matter clear to you presently. I think, Colonel, that you and Watson might return now, and I will be with you again in an hour at the furthest. The Inspector and I must have a word with the prisoners, but you will certainly see me back at luncheon time."

Sherlock Holmes was as good as his word, for about one o'clock he rejoined us in the Colonel's smoking-room. He was accompanied by a little elderly gentleman, who was introduced to me as the Mr. Acton whose house had been the scene of the original burglary.

"I wished Mr. Acton to be present while I demonstrated this small matter to you," said Holmes, "for it is natural that he should take a keen interest in the details. I am afraid, my dear Colonel, that you must regret the hour that you took in such a stormy petrel as I am."

"On the contrary," answered the Colonel, warmly, "I consider it the greatest privilege to have been permitted to study your methods of working. I confess that they quite surpass my expectations, and that I am utterly unable to account for you result. I have not yet seen the vestige of a clue."

"I am afraid that my explanation may disillusion you but it has always been my habit to hide none of my methods, either from my friend Watson or from any one who might take an intelligent interest in them. But, first, as I am rather shaken by the knocking about which I had in the dressing-room, I think that I shall help myself to a dash of your brandy, Colonel. My strength had been rather tried of late."

"I trust that you had no more of those nervous attacks."

Sherlock Holmes laughed heartily. "We will come to that in its turn," said he. "I will lay an account of the case before you in its due order, showing you the various points which guided me in my decision. Pray interrupt me if there is any inference which is not perfectly clear to you.

"It is of the highest importance in the art of detection to be able to recognise, out of a number of facts, which are incidental and which vital. Otherwise your energy and attention must be dissipated instead of being concentrated. Now, in this case there was not the slightest doubt in my mind from the first that the key of the whole matter must be looked for in the scrap of paper in the dead man's hand.

"Before going into this, I would draw your attention to the fact that, if Alec Cunningham's narrative was correct, and if the assailant, after shooting William Kirwan, had instantly fled, then it obviously could not be he who tore the paper from the dead man's hand. But if it was not he, it must have been Alec Cunningham himself, for by the time that the old man had descended several servants were upon the scene. The point is a simple one, but the Inspector had overlooked it because he had started with the supposition that these county magnates had had nothing to do with the matter. Now, I make a pint of never having any prejudices, and of following docilely wherever fact may lead me, and so, in the very first stage of the investigation, I found myself looking a little askance at the part which had been played by Mr. Alec Cunningham.

"And now I made a very careful examination of the corner of paper which the Inspector had submitted to us. It was at once clear to me that it formed part of a very remarkable document. Here it is. Do you not now observed something very suggestive about it?"

"It has a very irregular look," said the Colonel.

"My dear sir," cried Holmes, "there cannot be the least doubt in the world that it has been written by two persons doing alternate words. When I draw your attention to the strong t's of 'at' and 'to', and ask you to compare them with the weak ones of 'quarter' and 'twelve,' you will instantly recognise the fact. A very brief analysis of these four words would enable you to say with the utmost confidence that the 'learn' and the 'maybe' are written in the stronger hand, and the 'what' in the weaker."

"By Jove, it's as clear as day!" cried the Colonel. "Why on earth should two men write a letter in such a fashion?"

"Obviously the business was a bad one, and one of the men who distrusted the other was determined that, whatever was done, each should have an equal hand in it. Now, of the two men, it is clear that the one who wrote the 'at' and 'to' was the ringleader."

"How do you get at that?"

"We might deduce it from the mere character of the one hand as compared with the other. But we have more assured reasons than that for supposing it. If you examine this scrap with attention you will come to the conclusion that the man with the stronger hand wrote all his words first, leaving blanks for the other to fill up. These blanks were not always sufficient, and you can see that the second man had a squeeze to fit his 'quarter' in between the 'at'
and the 'to,' showing that the latter were already written. The man who wrote all his words first in undoubtedly the
man who planned the affair."

"Excellent!" cried Mr. Acton.

"But very superficial," said Holmes. "We come now, however, to a point which is of importance. You may not
be aware that the deduction of a man's age from his writing is one which has brought to considerable accuracy by
experts. In normal cases one can place a man in his true decade with tolerable confidence. I say normal cases,
because ill-health and physical weakness reproduce the signs of old age, even when the invalid is a youth. In this
case, looking at the bold, strong hand of the one, and the rather broken-backed appearance of the other, which still
retains its legibility although the t's have begun to lose their crossing, we can say that the one was a young man and
the other was advanced in years without being positively decrepit."

"Excellent!" cried Mr. Acton again.

"There is a further point, however, which is subtler and of greater interest. There is something in common
between these hands. They belong to men who are blood-relatives. It may be most obvious to you in the Greek e's,
but to me there are many small points which indicate the same thing. I have no doubt at all that a family mannerism
can be traced in these two specimens of writing. I am only, of course, giving you the leading results now of my
examination of the paper. There were twenty-three other deductions which would be of more interest to experts than
to you. They all tend to deepen the impression upon my mind that the Cunninghams, father and son, had written this
letter.

"Having got so far, my next step was, of course, to examine into the details of the crime, and to see how far they
would help us. I went up to the house with the Inspector, and saw all that was to be seen. The wound upon the dead
man was, as I was able to determine with absolute confidence, fired from a revolver at the distance of something
over four yards. There was no powder-blackening on the clothes. Evidently, therefore, Alec Cunningham had lied
when he said that the two men were struggling when the shot was fired. Again, both father and son agreed as to the
place where the man escaped into the road. At that point, however, as it happens, there is a broadish ditch, moist at
the bottom. As there were no indications of boot-marks about this ditch, I was absolutely sure not only that the
Cunninghams had again lied, but that there had never been any unknown man upon the scene at all.

"And now I have to consider the motive of this singular crime. To get at this, I endeavoured first of all to solve
the reason of the original burglary at Mr. Acton's. I understood, from something which the Colonel told us, that a
lawsuit had been going on between you, Mr. Acton, and the Cunninghams. Of course, it instantly occurred to me
precisely so," said Mr. Acton. "There can be no possible doubt as to their intentions. I have the clearest claim
upon half of their present estate, and if they could have found a single paper--which, fortunately, was in the strong-
box of my solicitors--they would undoubtedly have crippled our case."

"There you are," said Holmes, smiling. "It was a dangerous, reckless attempt, in which I seem to trace the
influence of young Alec. Having found nothing they tried to divert suspicion by making it appear to be an ordinary
burglary, to which end they carried off whatever they could lay their hands upon. That is all clear enough, but there
was much that was still obscure. What I wanted above all was to get the missing part of that note. I was certain that
Alec had torn it out of the dead man's hand, and almost certain that he must have thrust it into the pocket of his
dressing-gown. Where else could he have put it? The only question was whether it was still there. It was worth an
effort to find out, and for that object we all went up to the house.

"The Cunninghams joined us, as you doubtless remember, outside the kitchen door. It was, of course, of the very
first importance that they should not be reminded of the existence of this paper, otherwise they would naturally
destroy it without delay. The Inspector was about to tell them the importance which we attached to it when, by the
luckiest chance in the world, I tumbled down in a sort of fit and so changed the conversation.

"Good heavens!" cried the Colonel, laughing, "do you mean to say all our sympathy was wasted and your fit an
imposture?"

"Speaking professionally, it was admirably done," cried I, looking in amazement at this man who was forever
confounding me with some new phase of his astuteness.

"It is an art which is often useful," said he. "When I recovered I managed, by a device which had perhaps some
little merit of ingenuity, to get old Cunningham to write the word 'twelve,' so that I might compare it with the
'twelve' upon the paper."

"Oh, what an ass I have been!" I exclaimed.

"I could see that you were commiserating me over my weakness," said Holmes, laughing. "I was sorry to cause
you the sympathetic pain which I know that you felt. We then went upstairs together, and having entered the room
and seen the dressing-gown hanging up behind the door, I contrived, by upsetting a table, to engage their attention
for the moment, and slipped back to examine the pockets. I had hardly got the paper, however—which was, as I had
expected, in one of them—when the two Cunninghams were on me, and would, I verily believe, have murdered me
then and there but for your prompt and friendly aid. As it is, I feel that young man's grip on my throat now, and the
father has twisted my wrist round in the effort to get the paper out of my hand. They saw that I must know all about
it, you see, and the sudden change from absolute security to complete despair made them perfectly desperate.

"I had a little talk with old Cunningham afterwards as to the motive of the crime. He was tractable enough,
though his son was a perfect demon, ready to blow out his own or anybody else's brains if he could have got to his
revolver. When Cunningham saw that the case against him was so strong he lost all heart and made a clean breast of
everything. It seems that William had secretly followed his two masters on the night when they made their raid upon
Mr. Acton's, and having thus got them into his power, proceeded, under threats of exposure, to levy black-mail upon
them. Mr. Alec, however, was a dangerous man to play games of that sort with. It was a stroke of positive genius on
his part to see in the burglary scare which was convulsing the country side an opportunity of plausibly getting rid of
the man whom he feared. William was decoyed up and shot, and had they only got the whole of the note and paid a
little more attention to detail in the accessories, it is very possible that suspicion might never have been aroused."

"And the note?" I asked.

Sherlock Holmes placed the subjoined paper before us.

If you will only come around to the east gate you will very much surprise you and be of the greatest service to
you and also to Annie Morrison. But say nothing to anyone upon the matter

"It is very much the sort of thing that I expected," said he. "Of course, we do not yet know what the relations
may have been between Alec Cunningham, William Kirwan, and Annie Morrison. The results shows that the trap
was skilfully baited. I am sure that you cannot fail to be delighted with the traces of heredity shown in the p's and in
the tails of the g's. The absence of the i-dots in the old man's writing is also most characteristic. Watson, I think our
quiet rest in the country has been a distinct success, and I shall certainly return much invigorated to Baker Street to-
morrow."

The Crooked Man

One summer night, a few months after my marriage, I was seated by my own hearth smoking a last pipe and
nodding over a novel, for my day's work had been an exhausting one. My wife had already gone upstairs, and the
sound of the locking of the hall door some time before told me that the servants had also retired. I had risen from my
seat and was knocking out the ashes of my pipe when I suddenly heard the clang of the bell.

I looked at the clock. It was a quarter to twelve. This could not be a visitor at so late an hour. A patient,
evidently, and possibly an all-night sitting. With a wry face I went out into the hall and opened the door. To my
astonishment it was Sherlock Holmes who stood upon my step.

"Ah, Watson," said he, "I hoped that I might not be too late to catch you."

"My dear fellow, pray come in."

"You look surprised, and no wonder! Relieved, too, I fancy! Hum! You still smoke the Arcadia mixture of your
bachelor days then! There's no mistaking that fluffy ash upon your coat. It's easy to tell that you have been
accustomed to wear a uniform, Watson. You'll never pass as a pure-bred civilian as long as you keep that habit of
carrying your handkerchief in your sleeve. Could you put me up tonight?"

"With pleasure."

I handed him my pouch, and he seated himself opposite to me and smoked for some time in silence. I was well
aware that nothing but business of importance would have brought him to me at such an hour, so I waited patiently
until he should come round to it.

"I see that you are professionally rather busy just now," said he, glancing very keenly across at me.

"Yes, I've had a busy day," I answered. "It may seem very foolish in your eyes," I added, "but really I don't know
how you deduced it."

Holmes chuckled to himself.

"I have the advantage of knowing your habits, my dear Watson," said he. "When your round is a short one you
walk, and when it is a long one you use a hansom. As I perceive that your boots, although used, are by no means
"Dirty, I cannot doubt that you are at present busy enough to justify the hansom."

"Excellent!" I cried.

"Elementary," said he. "It is one of those instances where the reasoner can produce an effect which seems remarkable to his neighbour, because the latter has missed the one little point which is the basis of the deduction. The same may be said, my dear fellow, for the effect of some of these little sketches of yours, which is entirely meretricious, depending as it does upon your retaining in your own hands some factors in the problem which are never imparted to the reader. Now, at present I am in the position of these same readers, for I hold in this hand several threads of one of the strangest cases which ever perplexed a man's brain, and yet I lack the one or two which are needful to complete my theory. But I'll have them, Watson, I'll have them!" His eyes kindled and a slight flush sprang into his thin cheeks. For an instant only. When I glanced again his face had resumed that red-Indian composure which had made so many regard him as a machine rather than a man.

"The problem presents features of interest," said he. "I may even say exceptional features of interest. I have already looked into the matter, and have come, as I think, within sight of my solution. If you could accompany me in that last step you might be of considerable service to me."

"I should be delighted."

"Could you go as far as Aldershot to-morrow?"

"I have no doubt Jackson would take my practice."

"Very good. I want to start by the 11.10 from Waterloo."

"That would give me time."

"Then, if you are not too sleepy, I will give you a sketch of what has happened, and of what remains to be done."

"I was sleepy before you came. I am quite wakeful now."

"I will compress the story as far as may be done without omitting anything vital to the case. It is conceivable that you may even have read some account of the matter. It is the supposed murder of Colonel Barclay, of the Royal Munsters, at Aldershot, which I am investigating."

"I have heard nothing of it."

"It has not excited much attention yet, except locally. The facts are only two days old. Briefly they are these: The Royal Munsters is, as you know, one of the most famous Irish regiments in the British army. It did wonders both in the Crimea and the Mutiny, and has since that time distinguished itself upon every possible occasion. It was commanded up to Monday night by James Barclay, a gallant veteran, who started as a full private, was raised to commissioned rank for his bravery at the time of the Mutiny, and so lived to command the regiment in which he had once carried a musket.

"Colonel Barclay had married at the time when he was a sergeant, and his wife, whose maiden name was Miss Nancy Devoy, was the daughter of a former colour-sergeant in the same corps. There was, therefore, as can be imagined, some little social friction when the young couple (for they were still young) found themselves in their new surroundings. They appear, however, to have quickly adapted themselves, and Mrs. Barclay has always, I understand, been as popular with the ladies of the regiment as her husband was with his brother officers. I may add that she was a woman of great beauty, and that even now, when she has been married for upwards of thirty years, she is still of a striking and queenly appearance.

"Colonel Barclay's family life appears to have been a uniformly happy one. Major Murphy, to whom I owe most of my facts, assures me that he has never heard of any misunderstanding between the pair. On the whole, he thinks that Barclay's devotion to his wife was greater than his wife's to Barclay. He was acutely uneasy if he were absent from her for a day. She, on the other hand, though devoted and faithful, was less obtrusively affectionate. But they were regarded in the regiment as the very model of a middle-aged couple. There was absolutely nothing in their mutual relations to prepare people for the tragedy which was to follow.

"Colonel Barclay himself seems to have had some singular traits in his character. He was a dashing, jovial old soldier in his usual mood, but there were occasions on which he seemed to show himself capable of considerable violence and vindictiveness. This side of his nature, however, appears never to have been turned towards his wife. Another fact, which had struck Major Murphy and three out of five of the other officers with whom I conversed, was the singular sort of depression which came upon him at times. As the major expressed it, the smile had often been struck from his mouth, as if by some invisible hand, when he has been joining the gayeties and chaff of the mess-table. For days on end, when the mood was on him, he has been sunk in the deepest gloom. This and a certain tinge of superstition were the only unusual traits in his character which his brother officers had observed. The latter peculiarity took the form of a dislike to being left alone, especially after dark. This puerile feature in a nature which was conspicuously manly had often given rise to comment and conjecture.

"The first battalion of the Royal Munsters (which is the old 117th) has been stationed at Aldershot for some years. The married officers live out of barracks, and the Colonel has during all this time occupied a villa called
Lachine, about half a mile from the north camp. The house stands in its own grounds, but the west side of it is not more than thirty yards from the high-road. A coachman and two maids form the staff of servants. These with their master and mistress were the sole occupants of Lachine, for the Barclays had no children, nor was it usual for them to have resident visitors.

"Now for the events at Lachine between nine and ten on the evening of last Monday."

"Mrs. Barclay was, it appears, a member of the Roman Catholic Church, and had interested herself very much in the establishment of the Guild of St. George, which was formed in connection with the Watt Street Chapel for the purpose of supplying the poor with cast-off clothing. A meeting of the Guild had been held that evening at eight, and Mrs. Barclay had hurried over her dinner in order to be present at it. When leaving the house she was heard by the coachman to make some commonplace remark to her husband, and to assure him that she would be back before very long. She then called for Miss Morrison, a young lady who lives in the next villa, and the two went off together to their meeting. It lasted forty minutes, and at a quarter-past nine Mrs. Barclay returned home, having left Miss Morrison at her door as she passed.

"There is a room which is used as a morning-room at Lachine. This faces the road and opens by a large glass folding-door on to the lawn. The lawn is thirty yards across, and is only divided from the highway by a low wall with an iron rail above it. It was into this room that Mrs. Barclay went upon her return. The blinds were not down, for the room was seldom used in the evening, but Mrs. Barclay herself lit the lamp and then rang the bell, asking Jane Stewart, the house-maid, to bring her a cup of tea, which was quite contrary to her usual habits. The Colonel had been sitting in the dining-room, but hearing that his wife had returned he joined her in the morning-room. The coachman saw him cross the hall and enter it. He was never seen again alive.

"The tea which had been ordered was brought up at the end of ten minutes; but the maid, as she approached the door, was surprised to hear the voices of her master and mistress in furious altercation. She knocked without receiving any answer, and even turned the handle, but only to find that the door was locked upon the inside. Naturally enough she ran down to tell the cook, and the two women with the coachman came up into the hall and listened to the dispute which was still raging. They all agreed that only two voices were to be heard, those of Barclay and of his wife. Barclay's remarks were subdued and abrupt, so that none of them were audible to the listeners. The lady's, on the other hand, were most bitter, and when she raised her voice could be plainly heard. 'You coward!' she repeated over and over again. 'What can be done now? What can be done now? Give me back my life. I will never so much as breathe the same air with you again! You coward! You Coward!' Those were scraps of her conversation, ending in a sudden dreadful cry in the man's voice, with a crash, and a piercing scream from the woman. Convinced that some tragedy had occurred, the coachman rushed to the door and strove to force it, while scream after scream issued from within. He was unable, however, to make his way in, and the maids were too distracted with fear to be of any assistance to him. A sudden thought struck him, however, and he ran through the hall door and round to the lawn upon which the long French windows open. One side of the window was open, which I understand was quite usual in the summer-time, and he passed without difficulty into the room. His mistress had ceased to scream and was stretched insensible upon a couch, while with his feet tilted over the side of an arm-chair, and his head upon the ground near the corner of the fender, was lying the unfortunate soldier stone dead in a pool of his own blood.

"Naturally, the coachman's first thought, on finding that he could do nothing for his master, was to open the door. But here an unexpected and singular difficulty presented itself. The key was not in the inner side of the door, nor could he find it anywhere in the room. He went out again, therefore, through the window, and having obtained the help of a policeman and of a medical man, he returned. The lady, against whom naturally the strongest suspicion rested, was removed to her room, still in a state of insensibility. The Colonel's body was then placed upon the sofa, and a careful examination made of the scene of the tragedy.

"The injury from which the unfortunate veteran was suffering was found to be a jagged cut some two inches long at the back part of his head, which had evidently been caused by a violent blow from a blunt weapon. Nor was it difficult to guess what that weapon may have been. Upon the floor, close to the body, was lying a singular club of hard carved wood with a bone handle. The Colonel possessed a varied collection of weapons brought from the different countries in which he had fought, and it is conjectured by the police that his club was among his trophies. The servants deny having seen it before, but among the numerous curiosities in the house it is possible that it may have been overlooked. Nothing else of importance was discovered in the room by the police, save the inexplicable fact that neither upon Mrs. Barclay's person nor upon that of the victim nor in any part of the room was the missing key to be found. The door had eventually to be opened by a locksmith from Aldershot.

"That was the state of things, Watson, when upon the Tuesday morning I, at the request of Major Murphy, went down to Aldershot to supplement the efforts of the police. I think that you will acknowledge that the problem was already one of interest, but my observations soon made me realise that it was in truth much more extraordinary than would at first sight appear."
"Before examining the room I cross-questioned the servants, but only succeeded in eliciting the facts which I have already stated. One other detail of interest was remembered by Jane Stewart, the housemaid. You will remember that on hearing the sound of the quarrel she descended and returned with the other servants. On that first occasion, when she was alone, she says that the voices of her master and mistress were sunk so low that she could hear hardly anything, and judged by their tones rather than their words that they had fallen out. On my pressing her, however, she remembered that she heard the word David uttered twice by the lady. The point is of the utmost importance as guiding us towards the reason of the sudden quarrel. The Colonel's name, you remember, was James.

"There was one thing in the case which had made the deepest impression both upon the servants and the police. This was the contortion of the Colonel's face. It had set, according to their account, into the most dreadful expression of fear and horror which a human countenance is capable of assuming. More than one person fainted at the mere sight of him, so terrible was the effect. It was quite certain that he had foreseen his fate, and that it had caused him the utmost horror. This, of course, fitted in well enough with the police theory, if the Colonel could have seen his wife making a murderous attack upon him. Nor was the fact of the wound being on the back of his head a fatal objection to this, as he might have turned to avoid the blow. No information could be got from the lady herself, who was temporarily insane from an acute attack of brain-fever.

"From the police I learned that Miss Morrison, who you remember went out that evening with Mrs. Barclay, denied having any knowledge of what it was which had caused the ill-humour in which her companion had returned.

"Having gathered these facts, Watson, I smoke several pipes over them, trying to separate those which were crucial from others which were merely incidental. There could be no question that the most distinctive and suggestive point in the case was the singular disappearance of the door-key. A most careful search had failed to discover it in the room. Therefore it must have been taken from it. But neither the Colonel nor the Colonel's wife could have taken it. That was perfectly clear. Therefore a third person must have entered the room. And that third person could only have come through the window. It seemed to me that a careful examination of the room and the lawn might possibly reveal some traces of this mysterious individual. You know my methods, Watson. There was not one of them which I did not apply to the inquiry. And ones from those which I had expected. There had been a man in the room, and he had crossed the lawn coming from the road. I was able to obtain five very clear impressions of his foot-marks: one in the roadway itself, at the point where he had climbed the low wall, two on the lawn, and two very faint ones upon the stained boards near the window where he had entered. He had apparently rushed across the lawn, for his toe-marks were much deeper than his heels. But it was not the man who surprised me. It was his companion."

"His companion!"

Holmes pulled a large sheet of tissue-paper out of his pocket and carefully unfolded it upon his knee.

"What do you make of that?" he asked.

The paper was covered with the tracings of the foot-marks of some small animal. It had five well-marked foot-pads, an indication of long nails, and the whole print might be nearly as large as a dessert-spoon.

"It's a dog," said I.

"Did you ever hear of a dog running up a curtain? I found distinct traces that this creature had done so."

"A monkey, then?"

"But it is not the print of a monkey."

"What can it be, then?"

"Neither dog nor cat nor monkey nor any creature that we are familiar with. I have tried to reconstruct it from the measurements. Here are four prints where the beast has been standing motionless. You see that it is no less than fifteen inches from fore-foot to hind. Add to that the length of neck and head, and you get a creature not much less than two feet long--probably more if there is any tail. But now observe this other measurement. The animal has been moving, and we have the length of its stride. In each case it is only about three inches. You have an indication, you see, of a long body with very short legs attached to it. It has not been considerate enough to leave any of its hair behind it. But its general shape must be what I have indicated, and it can run up a curtain, and it is carnivorous."

"How do you deduce that?"

"Because it ran up the curtain. A canary's cage was hanging in the window, and its aim seems to have been to get at the bird."

"Then what was the beast?"

"Ah, if I could give it a name it might go a long way towards solving the case. On the whole, it was probably some creature of the weasel and stoat tribe--and yet it is larger than any of these that I have seen."

"But what had it to do with the crime?"

"That, also, is still obscure. But we have learned a good deal, you perceive. We know that a man stood in the road looking at the quarrel between the Barclays--the blinds were up and the room lighted. We know, also, that he
ran across the lawn, entered the room, accompanied by a strange animal, and that he either struck the Colonel or, as
is equally possible, that the Colonel fell down from sheer fright at the sight of him, and cut his head on the corner of
the fender. Finally, we have the curious fact that the intruder carried away the key with him when he left."

"You discoveries seem to have left the business more obscure that it was before," said I.

"Quite so. They undoubtedly showed that the affair was much deeper than was at first conjectured. I thought the
matter over, and I came to the conclusion that I must approach the case from another aspect. But really, Watson, I
am keeping you up, and I might just as well tell you all this on our way to Aldershot to-morrow."

"Thank you, you have gone rather too far to stop."

"It is quite certain that when Mrs. Barclay left the house at half-past seven she was on good terms with her
husband. She was never, as I think I have said, ostentatiously affectionate, but she was heard by the coachman
chatting with the Colonel in a friendly fashion. Now, it was equally certain that, immediately on her return, she had
gone to the room in which she was least likely to see her husband, had flown to tea as an agitated woman will, and
finally, on his coming in to her, had broken into violent recriminations. Therefore something had occurred between
seven-thirty and nine o'clock which had completely altered her feelings towards him. But Miss Morrison had been
with her during the whole of that hour and a half. It was absolutely certain, therefore, in spite of her denial, that she
must know something of the matter.

"My first conjecture was, that possibly there had been some passages between this young lady and the old
soldier, which the former had now confessed to the wife. That would account for the angry return, and also for the
girl's denial that anything had occurred. Nor would it be entirely incompatible with most of the words overhead. But
there was the reference to David, and there was the known affection of the Colonel for his wife, to weigh against it,
to say nothing of the tragic intrusion of this other man, which might, of course, be entirely disconnected with what
had gone before. It was not easy to pick one's steps, but, on the whole, I was inclined to dismiss the idea that there
had been anything between the Colonel and Miss Morrison, but more than ever convinced that the young lady held
the clue as to what it was which had turned Mrs. Barclay to hatred of her husband. I took the obvious course,
therefore, of calling upon Miss M., of explaining to her that I was perfectly certain that she held the facts in her
possession, and of assuring her that her friend, Mrs. Barclay, might find herself in the dock upon a capital charge
unless the matter were cleared up.

"Miss Morrison is a little ethereal slip of a girl, with timid eyes and blond hair, but I found her by no means
wanton in shrewdness and common-sense. She sat thinking for some time after I had spoken, and then, turning to
me with a brisk air of resolution, she broke into a remarkable statement which I will condense for your benefit.

"I promised my friend that I would say nothing of the matter, and a promise is a promise; said she; 'but if I can
really help her when so serious a charge is laid against her, and when her own mouth, poor darling, is closed by
illness, then I think I am absolved from my promise. I will tell you exactly what happened upon Monday evening.

"We were returning from the Watt Street Mission about a quarter to nine o'clock. On our way we had to pass
through Hudson Street, which is a very quiet thoroughfare. There is only one lamp in it, upon the left-hand side, and
as we approached this lamp I saw a man coming towards us with is back very bent, and something like a box slung
over one of his shoulders. He appeared to be deformed, for he carried his head low and walked with his knees bent.
We were passing him when he raised his face to look at us in the circle of light thrown by the lamp, and as he did so
he stopped and screamed out in a dreadful voice, "My God, it's Nancy!" Mrs. Barclay turned as white as death, and
would have fallen down had the dreadful-looking creature not caught hold of her. I was going to call for the police,
bu she, to my surprise, spoke quite civilly to the fellow.

"'I thought you had been dead this thirty years, Henry," said she, in a shaking voice.

"'So I have," said he, and it was awful to hear the tones that he said it in. He had a very dark, fearsome face,
and a gleam in his eyes that comes back to me in my dreams. His hair and whiskers were shot with grey, and his
face was all crinkled and puckered like a withered apple.

"'Just walk on a little way, dear," said Mrs. Barclay; "I want to have a word with this man. There is nothing to
be afraid of." She tried to speak boldly, but she was still deadly pale and could hardly get her words out for the
shaking of her lips.

"I did as she asked me, and they talked together for a few minutes. Then she came down the street with her eyes
blazing, and I saw the crippled wretch standing by the lamp-post and shaking his clenched fists in the air as if he
were made with rage. She never said a word until we were at the door here, when she took me by the hand and
begged me to tell no one what had happened.

"'It's an old acquaintance of mine who has come down in the world," said she. When I promised her I would
say nothing she kissed me, and I have never seen her since. I have told you now the whole truth, and if I withheld it
from the police it is because I did not realise then the danger in which my dear friend stood. I know that it can only
be to her advantage that everything should be known.'
"There was her statement, Watson, and to me, as you can imagine, it was like a light on a dark night. Everything which had been disconnected before began at once to assume its true place, and I had a shadowy presentiment of the whole sequence of events. My next step obviously was to find the man who had produced such a remarkable impression upon Mrs. Barclay. If he were still in Aldershot it should not be a very difficult matter. There are not such a very great number of civilians, and a deformed man was sure to have attracted attention. I spent a day in the search, and by evening--this very evening, Watson--I had run him down. The man's name is Henry Wood, and he lives in lodgings in this same street in which the ladies met him. He has only been five days in the place. In the character of a registration-agent I had a most interesting gossip with his landlady. The man is by trade a conjurer and performer, going round the canteens after nightfall, and giving a little entertainment at each. He carries some creature about with him in that box; about which the landlady seemed to be in considerable trepidation, for she had never seen an animal like it. He uses it in some of his tricks according to her account. So much the woman was able to tell me, and also that it was a wonder the man lived, seeing how twisted he was, and that he spoke in a strange tongue sometimes, and that for the last two nights she had heard him groaning and weeping in his bedroom. He was all right, as far as money went, but in his deposit he had given her what looked like a bad florin. She showed it to me, Watson, and it was an Indian rupee.

"So now, my dear fellow, you see exactly how we stand and why it is I want you. It is perfectly plain that after the ladies parted from this man he followed them at a distance, that he saw the quarrel between husband and wife through the window, that he rushed in, and that the creature which he carried in his box got loose. That is all very certain. But he is the only person in this world who can tell us exactly what happened in that room."

"And you intend to ask him?"
"Most certainly--but in the presence of a witness."
"And I am the witness?"
"If you will be so good. If he can clear the matter up, well and good. If he refuses, we have no alternative but to apply for a warrant."

"But how do you know he'll be there when we return?"
"You may be sure that I took some precautions. I have one of my Baker Street boys mounting guard over him who would stick to him like a burr, go where he might. We shall find him in Hudson Street to-morrow, Watson, and meanwhile I should be the criminal myself if I kept you out of bed any longer."

It was midday when we found ourselves at the scene of the tragedy, and, under my companion's guidance, we made our way at once to Hudson Street. In spite of his capacity for concealing his emotions, I could easily see that Holmes was in a state of suppressed excitement, while I was myself tingling with that half-sporting, half-intellectual pleasure which I invariably experienced when I associated myself with him in his investigations.

"This is the street," said he, as we turned into a short thoroughfare lined with plain tow-storied brick houses. "Ah, here is Simpson to report."

"He's in all right, Mr. Holmes," cried a small street Arab, running up to us.

"Good, Simpson!" said Holmes, patting him on the head. "Come along, Watson. This is the house." He sent in his card with a message that he had come on important business, and a moment later we were face to face with the man whom we had come to see. In spite of the warm weather he was crouching over a fire, and the little room was like an oven. The man sat all twisted and huddled in his chair in a way which gave an indescribably impression of deformity; but the face which he turned towards us, though worn and swarthy, must at some time have been remarkable for its beauty. He looked suspiciously at us now out of yellow-shot, bilious eyes, and, without speaking or rising, he waved towards two chairs.

"Mr. Henry Wood, late of India, I believe," said Holmes, affably. "I've come over this little matter of Colonel Barclay's death."

"What should I know about that?"
"That's what I want to ascertain. You know, I suppose, that unless the matter is cleared up, Mrs. Barclay, who is an old friend of yours, will in all probability be tried for murder."

The man gave a violent start.

"I don't know who you are," he cried, "nor how you come to know what you do know, but will you swear that this is true that you tell me?"

"Why, they are only waiting for her to come to her senses to arrest her."
"My God! Are you in the police yourself?"
"No."
"What business is it of yours, then?"
"It's every man's business to see justice done."
"You can take my word that she is innocent."
"Then you are guilty."

"No, I am not."

"Who killed Colonel James Barclay, then?"

"It was a just providence that killed him. But, mind you this, that if I had knocked his brains out, as it was in my heart to do, he would have had no more than his due from my hands. If his own guilty conscience had not struck him down it is likely enough that I might have had his blood upon my soul. You want me to tell the story. Well, I don't know why I shouldn't, for there's no cause for me to be ashamed of it.

"It was in this way, sir. You see me now with my back like a camel and by ribs all awry, but there was a time when Corporal Henry Wood was the smartest man in the 117th foot. We were in India then, in cantonments, at a place we'll call Bhurtee. Barclay, who died the other day, was sergeant in the same company as myself, and the belle of the regiment, ay, and the finest girl that ever had the breath of life between her lips, was Nancy Devoy, the daughter of the colour-sergeant. There were two men that loved her, and one that she loved, and you'll smile when you look at this poor thing huddled before the fire, and hear me say that it was for my good looks that she loved me.

"Well, though I had her heart, her father was set upon her marrying Barclay. I was a harum-scarum, reckless lad, and he had had an education, and was already marked for the sword-belt. But the girl held true to me, and it seemed that I would have had her when the Mutiny broke out, and all hell was loose in the country.

"We were shut up in Bhurtee, the regiment of us with half a battery of artillery, a company of Sikhs, and a lot of civilians and women-folk. There were ten thousand rebels round us, and they were as keen as a set of terriers round a rat-cage. About the second week of it our water gave out, and it was a question whether we could communicate with General Neill's column, which was moving up country. It was our only chance, for we could not hope to fight our way out with all the women and children, so I volunteered to go out and to warn General Neill of our danger. My offer was accepted, and I talked it over with Sergeant Barclay, who was supposed to know the ground better than any other man, and who drew up a route by which I might get through the rebel lines. At ten o'clock the same night I started off upon my journey. There were a thousand lives to save, but it was of only one that I was thinking when I dropped over the wall that night.

"My way ran down a dried-up watercourse, which we hoped would screen me from the enemy's sentries; but as I crept round the corner of it I walked right into six of them, who were crouching down in the dark waiting for me. In an instant I was stunned with a blow and bound hand and foot. But the real blow was to my heart and not to my head, for as I came to and listened to as much as I could understand of their talk, I heard enough to tell me that my comrade, the very man who had arranged the way that I was to take, had betrayed me by means of a native servant into the hands of the enemy.

"Well, there's no need for me to dwell on that part of it. You know now what James Barclay was capable of. Bhurtee was relieved by Neill next day, but the rebels took me away with them in their retreat, and it was many a long year before ever I saw a white face again. I was tortured and tried to get away, and was captured and tortured again. You can see for yourselves the state in which I was left. Some of them that fled into Nepal took me with them, and then afterwards I was up past Darjeeling. The hill-folk up there murdered the rebels who had me, and I became their slave for a time until I escaped; but instead of going south I had to go north, until I found myself among the Afghans. There I wandered about for many a year, and at last came back to the Punjab, where I lived mostly among the natives and picked up a living by the conjuring tricks that I had learned. What use was it for me, a wretched cripple, to go back to England or to make myself known to my old comrades? Even my wish for revenge would not make me do that. I had rather that Nancy and my old pals should think of Harry Wood as having died with a straight back, than see him living and crawling with a stick like a chimpanzee. They never doubted that I was dead, and I meant that they never should. I heard that Barclay had married Nancy, and that he was rising rapidly in the regiment, but even that did not make me speak.

"But when one gets old one has a longing for home. For years I've been dreaming of the bright green fields and the hedges of England. At last I determined to see them before I died. I saved enough to bring me across, and then I came here where the soldiers are, for I know their ways and how to amuse them and so earn enough to keep me."

"Your narrative is most interesting," said Sherlock Holmes. "I have already heard of your meeting with Mrs. Barclay, and your mutual recognition. You then, as I understand, followed her home and saw through the window an altercation between her husband and her, in which she doubtless cast his conduct to you in his teeth. Your own feelings overcame you, and you ran across the lawn and broke in upon them."

"I did, sir, and at the sight of me he looked as I have never seen a man look before, and over he went with his head on the fender. But he was dead before he fell. I read death on his face as plain as I can read that text over the fire. The bare sight of me was like a bullet through his guilty heart."

"And then?"

"Then Nancy fainted, and I caught up the key of the door from her hand, intending to unlock it and get help. But
as I was doing it it seemed to me better to leave it alone and get away, for the thing might look black against me, and any way my secret would be out if I were taken. In my haste I thrust the key into my pocket, and dropped my stick while I was chasing Teddy, who had run up the curtain. When I got him into his box, from which he had slipped, I was off as fast as I could run."

"Who's Teddy?" asked Holmes.

The man leaned over and pulled up the front of a kind of hutch in the corner. In an instant out there slipped a beautiful reddish-brown creature, thin and lithe, with the legs of a stoat, a long, thin nose, and a pair of the finest red eyes that ever I saw in an animal's head.

"It's a mongoose," I cried.

"Well, some call them that, and some call them ichneumon," said the man. "Snake-catcher is what I call them, and Teddy is amazing quick on cobras. I have one here without the fangs, and Teddy catches it every night to please the folk in the canteen.

"Any other point, sir?"

"Well, we may have to apply to you again if Mrs. Barclay should prove to be in serious trouble."

"In that case, of course, I'd come forward."

"But if not, there is no object in raking up this scandal against a dead man, foully as he has acted. You have at least the satisfaction of knowing that for thirty years of his life his conscience bitterly reproached him for this wicked deed. Ah, there goes Major Murphy on the other side of the street. Good-by, Wood. I want to learn if anything has happened since yesterday."

We were in time to overtake the major before he reached the corner.

"Ah, Holmes," he said: "I suppose you have heard that all this fuss has come to nothing?"

"What then?"

"The inquest is just over. The medical evidence showed conclusively that death was due to apoplexy. You see it was quite a simple case after all."

"Oh, remarkably superficial," said Holmes, smiling. "Come, Watson, I don't think we shall be wanted in Aldershot any more."

"There's one thing," said I, as we walked down to the station. "If the husband's name was James, and the other was Henry, what was this talk about David?"

"That one word, my dear Watson, should have told me the whole story had I been the ideal reasoner which you are so fond of depicting. It was evidently a term of reproach."

"Of reproach?" "Yes; David strayed a little occasionally, you know, and on one occasion in the same direction as Sergeant James Barclay. You remember the small affair of Uriah and Bathsheba? My biblical knowledge is a trifle rusty, I fear, but you will find the story in the first or second of Samuel."

The Resident Patient

Glancing over the somewhat incoherent series of Memoirs with which I have endeavoured to illustrate a few of the mental peculiarities of my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I have been struck by the difficulty which I have experienced in picking out examples which shall in every way answer my purpose. For in those cases in which Holmes has performed some tour de force of analytical reasoning, and has demonstrated the value of his peculiar methods of investigation, the facts themselves have often been so slight or so commonplace that I could not feel justified in laying them before the public. On the other hand, it has frequently happened that he has been concerned in some research where the facts have been of the most remarkable and dramatic character, but where the share which he has himself taken in determining their causes has been less pronounced than I, as his biographer, could wish. The small matter which I have chronicled under the heading of "A Study in Scarlet," and that other later one connected with the loss of the Gloria Scott, may serve as examples of this Scylla and Charybdis which are forever threatening the historian. It may be that in the business of which I am now about to write the part which my friend played is not sufficiently accentuated; and yet the whole train of circumstances is so remarkable that I cannot bring myself to omit it entirely from this series.

It had been a close, rainy day in October. Our blinds were half-drawn, and Holmes lay curled upon the sofa, reading and re-reading a letter which he had received by the morning post. For myself, my term of service in India had trained me to stand heat better than cold, and a thermometer of 90 was no hardship. But the paper was uninteresting. Parliament had risen. Everybody was out of town, and I yearned for the glades of the New Forest or the shingle of Southsea. A depleted bank account had caused me to postpone my holiday, and as to my companion, neither the country nor the sea presented the slightest attraction to him. He loved to lie in the very centre of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime. Appreciation of Nature found no place among his many gifts, and his only change was when he turned his mind from the evil-doer of the town to track down his brother of the country.
Finding that Holmes was too absorbed for conversation, I had tossed aside the barren paper, and leaning back in my chair, I fell into a brown study. Suddenly my companion's voice broke in upon my thoughts.

"You are right, Watson," said he. "It does seem a very preposterous way of settling a dispute."

"Most preposterous!" I exclaimed, and then, suddenly realising how he had echoed the inmost thought of my soul, I sat up in my chair and stared at him in blank amazement.

"What is this, Holmes?" I cried. "This is beyond anything which I could have imagined."

He laughed heartily at my perplexity.

"You remember," he said, "that some little time ago, when I read you the passage in one of Poe's sketches, in which a close reasoner follows the unspoken thought of his companion, you were inclined to treat the matter as a mere tour de force of the author. On my remarking that I was constantly in the habit of doing the same thing you expressed incredulity."

"Oh, no!"

"Perhaps not with your tongue, my dear Watson, but certainly with your eyebrows. So when I saw you throw down your paper and enter upon a train of thought, I was very happy to have the opportunity of reading it off, and eventually of breaking into it, as a proof that I had been in rapport with you."

But I was still far from satisfied. "In the example which you read to me," said I, "the reasoner drew his conclusions from the actions of the man whom he observed. If I remember right, he stumbled over a heap of stones, looked up at the stars, and so on. But I have been seated quietly in my chair, and what clews can I have given you?"

"You do yourself an injustice. The features are given to man as the means by which he shall express his emotions, and yours are faithful servants."

"Do you mean to say that you read my train of thoughts from my features?"

"Your features, and especially your eyes. Perhaps you cannot yourself recall how your reverie commenced?"

"No, I cannot."

"Then I will tell you. After throwing down your paper, which was the action which drew my attention to you, you sat for half a minute with a vacant expression. Then your eyes fixed themselves upon your newly-framed picture of General Gordon, and I saw by the alteration in your face that a train of thought had been started. But it did not lead very far. Your eyes turned across to the unframed portrait of Henry Ward Beecher which stands upon the top of your books. You then glanced up at the wall, and of course your meaning was obvious. You were thinking that if the portrait were framed it would just cover that bare space and correspond with Gordon's picture over there."

"You have followed me wonderfully!" I exclaimed.

"So far I could hardly have gone astray. But now your thoughts went back to Beecher, and you looked hard across as if you were studying the character in his features. Then your eyes ceased to pucker, but you continued to look across, and your face was thoughtful. You were recalling the incidents of Beecher's career. I was well aware that you could not do this without thinking of the mission which he undertook on behalf of the North at the time of the Civil War, for I remember you expressing your passionate indignation at the way in which he was received by the more turbulent of our people. You felt so strongly about it that I knew you could not think of Beecher without thinking of that also. When a moment later I saw your eyes wander away from the picture, I suspected that your mind had now turned to the Civil War, and when I observed that your lips set, your eyes sparkled, and your hands clenched, I was positive that you were indeed thinking of the gallantry which was shown by both sides in that desperate struggle. But then, again, your face grew sadder; you shook your head. You were dwelling upon the sadness and horror and useless waste of life. Your hand stole towards your own old wound, and a smile quivered on your lips, which showed me that the ridiculous side of this method of settling international questions had forced itself upon your mind. At this point I agreed with you that it was preposterous, and was glad to find that all my deductions had been correct."

"Absolutely!" said I. "And now that you have explained it, I confess that I am as amazed as before."

"It was very superficial, my dear Watson, I assure you. I should not have intruded it upon your attention had you not shown some incredulity the other day. But the evening has brought a breeze with it. What do you say to a ramble through London?"

I was weary of our little sitting-room and gladly acquiesced. For three hours we strolled about together, watching the ever-changing kaleidoscope of life as it ebbs and flows through Fleet Street and the Strand. His characteristic talk, with its keen observance of detail and subtle power of inference held me amused and enthralled. It was ten o'clock before we reached Baker Street again. A brougham was waiting at our door.

"Hum! A doctor's--general practitioner, I perceive," said Holmes. "Not been long in practice, but has had a great deal to do. Come to consult us, I fancy! Lucky we came back!"

I was sufficiently conversant with Holmes's methods to be able to follow his reasoning, and to see that the nature and state of the various medical instruments in the wicker basket which hung in the lamplight inside the brougham
had given him the data for his swift deduction. The light in our window above showed that this late visit was indeed intended for us. With some curiosity as to what could have sent a brother medico to us at such an hour, I followed Holmes into our sanctum.

A pale, taper-faced man with sandy whiskers rose up from a chair by the fire as we entered. His age may not have been more than three or four and thirty, but his haggard expression and unhealthy hue told of a life which has sapped his strength and robbed him of his youth. His manner was nervous and shy, like that of a sensitive gentleman, and the thin white hand which he laid on the mantelpiece as he rose was that of an artist rather than of a surgeon. His dress was quiet and sombre—a black frock-coat, dark trousers, and a touch of colour about his necktie.

"Good-evening, doctor," said Holmes, cheerily. "I am glad to see that you have only been waiting a very few minutes."

"You spoke to my coachman, then?"

"No, it was the candle on the side-table that told me. Pray resume your seat and let me know how I can serve you."

"My name is Doctor Percy Trevelyan," said our visitor, "and I live at 403 Brook Street."

"Are you not the author of a monograph upon obscure nervous lesions?" I asked.

His pale cheeks flushed with pleasure at hearing that his work was known to me.

"I so seldom hear of the work that I thought it was quite dead," said he. "My publishers gave me a most discouraging account of its sale. You are yourself, I presume, a medical man?"

"A retired army surgeon."

"My own hobby has always been nervous disease. I should wish to make it an absolute speciality, but, of course, a man must take what he can get at first. This, however, is beside the question, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and I quite appreciate how valuable your time is. The fact is that a very singular train of events has occurred recently at my house in Brook Street, and to-night they came to such a head that I felt it was quite impossible for me to wait another hour before asking for your advice and assistance."

Sherlock Holmes sat down and lit his pipe. "You are very welcome to both," said he. "Pray let me have a detailed account of what the circumstances are which have disturbed you."

"One or two of them are so trivial," said Dr. Trevelyan, "that really I am almost ashamed to mention them. But the matter is so inexplicable, and the recent turn which it has taken is so elaborate, that I shall lay it all before you, and you shall judge what is essential and what is not."

"I am compelled, to begin with, to say something of my own college career. I am a London University man, you know, and I am sure that your will not think that I am unduly singing my own praises if I say that my student career was considered by my professors to be a very promising one. After I had graduated I continued to devote myself to research, occupying a minor position in King's College Hospital, and I was fortunate enough to excite considerable interest by my research into the pathology of catalepsy, and finally to win the Bruce Pinkerton prize and medal by the monograph on nervous lesions to which your friend has just alluded. I should not go too far if I were to say that there was a general impression at that time that a distinguished career lay before me.

"But the one great stumbling-block lay in my want of capital. As you will readily understand, a specialist who aims high is compelled to start in one of a dozen streets in the Cavendish Square quarter, all of which entail enormous rents and furnishing expenses. Besides this preliminary outlay, he must be prepared to keep himself for some years, and to hire a presentable carriage and horse. To do this was quite beyond my power, and I could only hope that by economy I might in ten years' time save enough to enable me to put up my plate. Suddenly, however, an unexpected incident opened up quite a new prospect to me.

"This was a visit from a gentleman of the name of Blessington, who was a complete stranger to me. He came up to my room one morning, and plunged into business in an instant.

"You are the same Percy Trevelyan who has had so distinguished a career and own a great prize lately?" said he.

"I bowed.

"'Answer my frankly,' he continued, 'for you will find it to your interest to do so. You have all the cleverness which makes a successful man. Have you the tact?'

"I could not help smiling at the abruptness of the question.

"'I trust that I have my share,' I said.

"'Any bad habits? Not drawn towards drink, eh?'

"'Really, sir!' I cried.

"'Quite right! That's all right! But I was bound to ask. With all these qualities, why are you not in practice?'

"I shrugged my shoulders.

"'Come, come!' said he, in his bustling way. 'It's the old story. More in your brains than in your pocket, eh? What would you say if I were to start you in Brook Street?'"
"I stared at him in astonishment."

"'Oh, it's for my sake, not for yours,' he cried. 'I'll be perfectly frank with you, and if it suits you it will suit me very well. I have a few thousands to invest, d'ye see, and I think I'll sink them in you.'

"'But why?' I gasped.

"'Well, it's just like any other speculation, and safer than most.'

"'What am I to do, then?'

"'I'll tell you. I'll take the house, furnish it, pay the maids, and run the whole place. All you have to do is just to wear out your chair in the consulting-room. I'll let you have pocket-money and everything. Then you hand over to me three quarters of what you earn, and you keep the other quarter for yourself.'

"This was the strange proposal, Mr. Holmes, with which the man Blessington approached me. I won't weary you with the account of how we bargained and negotiated. It ended in my moving into the house next Lady-day, and starting in practice on very much the same conditions as he had suggested. He cam himself to live with me in the character of a resident patient. His heart was weak, it appears, and he needed constant medical supervision. He turned the two best rooms of the first floor into a sitting-room and bedroom for himself. He was a man of singular habits, shunning company and very seldom going out. His life was irregular, but in one respect he was regularity itself. Every evening, at the same hour, he walked into the consulting-room, examined the books, put down five and three-pence for every guinea that I had earned, and carried the rest off to the strong-box in his own room.

"I may say with confidence that he never had occasion to regret his speculation. From the first it was a success. A few good cases and the reputation which I had won in the hospital brought me rapidly to the front, and during the last few years I have made him a rich man.

"So much, Mr. Holmes, for my past history and my relations with Mr. Blessington. It only remains for me now to tell you what has occurred to bring me here to-night.

"Some weeks ago Mr. Blessington came down to me in, as it seemed to me, a state of considerable agitation. He spoke of some burglary which, he said, had been committed in the West End, and he appeared, I remember, to be quite unnecessarily excited about it, declaring that a day should not pass before we should add stronger bolts to our windows and doors. For a week he continued to be in a peculiar state of restlessness, peering continually out of the windows, and ceasing to take the short walk which had usually been the prelude to his dinner. From his manner it struck me that he was in mortal dread of something or somebody, but when I questioned him upon the point he became so offensive that I was compelled to drop the subject. Gradually, as time passed, his fears appeared to die away, and he had renewed his former habits, when a fresh event reduced him to the pitiable state of prostration in which he now lies.

"What happened was this. Two days ago I received the letter which I now read to you. Neither address nor date is attached to it.

"'A Russian nobleman who is now resident in England,' it runs, 'would be glad to avail himself of the professional assistance of Dr. Percy Trevelyan. He has been for some years a victim to cataleptic attacks, on which, as is well known, Dr. Trevelyan is an authority. He proposes to call at about quarter past six to-morrow evening, if Dr. Trevelyan will make it convenient to be at home.'

"This letter interested me deeply, because the chief difficulty in the study of catalepsy is the rareness of the disease. You may believe, than, that I was in my consulting-room when, at the appointed hour, the page showed in the patient.

"He was an elderly man, thin, demure, and common-place--by no means the conception one forms of a Russian nobleman. I was much more struck by the appearance of his companion. This was a tall young man, surprisingly handsome, with a dark, fierce face, and the limbs and chest of a Hercules. He had his hand under the other's arm as they entered, and helped him to a chair with a tenderness which one would hardly have expected from his appearance.

"'You will excuse my coming in, doctor,' said he to me, speaking English with a slight lisp. 'This is my father, and his health is a matter of the most overwhelming importance to me.'

"'I was touched by this filial anxiety. 'You would, perhaps, care to remain during the consultation?' said I.

"'Not for the world,' he cried with a gesture of horror. 'It is more painful to me than I can express. If I were to see my father in one of these dreadful seizures I am convinced that I should never survive it. My own nervous system is an exceptionally sensitive one. With your permission, I will remain in the waiting-room while you go into my father's case.'

"To this, of course, I assented, and the young man withdrew. The patient and I then plunged into a discussion of his case, of which I took exhaustive notes. He was not remarkable for intelligence, and his answers were frequently obscure, which I attributed to his limited acquaintance with our language. Suddenly, however, as I sat writing, he ceased to give any answer at all to my inquiries, and on my turning towards him I was shocked to see that he was
sitting bolt upright in his chair, staring at me with a perfectly blank and rigid face. He was again in the grip of his mysterious malady.

"My first feeling, as I have just said, was one of pity and horror. My second, I fear, was rather one of professional satisfaction. I made notes of my patient's pulse and temperature, tested the rigidity of his muscles, and examined his reflexes. There was nothing markedly abnormal in any of these conditions, which harmonised with my former experiences. I had obtained good results in such cases by the inhalation of nitrite of amyl, and the present seemed an admirable opportunity of testing its virtues. The bottle was downstairs in my laboratory, so leaving my patient seated in his chair, I ran down to get it. There was some little delay in finding it--five minutes, let us say--and then I returned. Imagine my amazement to find the room empty and the patient gone.

"Of course, my first act was to run into the waiting-room. The son had gone also. The hall door had been closed, but not shut. My page who admits patients is a new boy and by no means quick. He waits downstairs, and runs up to show patients out when I ring the consulting-room bell. He had heard nothing, and the affair remained a complete mystery. Mr. Blessington came in from his walk shortly afterwards, but I did not say anything to him upon the subject, for, to tell the truth, I have got in the way of late of holding as little communication with him as possible.

"Well, I never thought that I should see anything more of the Russian and his son, so you can imagine my amazement when, at the very same hour this evening, they both came marching into my consulting-room, just as they had done before.

"I feel that I owe you a great many apologies for my abrupt departure yesterday, doctor,' said my patient.

"I confess that I was very much surprised at it,' said I.

"Well, the fact is,' he remarked, 'that when I recover from these attacks my mind is always very clouded as to all that has gone before. I woke up in a strange room, as it seemed to me, and made my way out into the street in a sort of dazed way when you were absent.'

"And I,' said the son, 'seeing my father pass the door of the waiting-room, naturally thought that the consultation had come to an end. It was not until we had reached home that I began to realise the true state of affairs.'

"Well,' said I, laughing, 'there is no harm done except that you puzzled me terribly; so if you, sir, would kindly step into the waiting-room I shall be happy to continue our consultation which was brought to so abrupt an ending.'

"For half an hour or so I discussed that old gentleman's symptoms with him, and then, having prescribed for him, I saw him go off upon the arm of his son.

"I have told you that Mr. Blessington generally chose this hour of the day for his exercise. He came in shortly afterwards and passed upstairs. An instant later I heard him running down, and he burst into my consulting-room like a man who is mad with panic.

"Who has been in my room?' he cried.

"No one,' said I.

"It's a lie! He yelled. 'Come up and look!'

"I passed over the grossness of his language, as he seemed half out of his mind with fear. When I went upstairs with him he pointed to several footprints upon the light carpet.

"D'you mean to say those are mine?' he cried.

"They were certainly very much larger than any which he could have made, and were evidently quite fresh. It rained hard this afternoon, as you know, and my patients were the only people who called. It must have been the case, then, that the man in the waiting-room had, for some unknown reason, while I was busy with the other, ascended to the room of my resident patient. Nothing has been touched or taken, but there were the footprints to prove that the intrusion was an undoubted fact.

"Mr. Blessington seemed more excited over the matter than I should have thought possible, though of course it was enough to disturb anybody's peace of mind. He actually sat crying in an arm-chair, and I could hardly get him to speak coherently. It was his suggestion that I should come round to you, and of course I at once saw the propriety of it, for certainly the incident is a very singular one, though he appears to completely overtake its importance. If you would only come back with me in my brougham, you would at least be able to soothe him, though I can hardly hope that you will be able to explain this remarkable occurrence."

Sherlock Holmes had listened to this long narrative with an intentness which showed me that his interest was keenly aroused. His face was as impassive as ever, but his lids had drooped more heavily over his eyes, and his smoke had curled up more thickly from his pipe to emphasize each curious episode in the doctor's tale. As our visitor concluded, Holmes sprang up without a word, handed me my hat, picked his own from the table, and followed Dr. Trevelyan to the door. Within a quarter of an hour we had been dropped at the door of the physician's residence in Brook Street, one of those sombre, flat-faced houses which one associates with a West-End practice. A small page admitted us, and we began at once to ascend the broad, well-carpeted stair.

But a singular interruption brought us to a standstill. The light at the top was suddenly whisked out, and from the
darkness came a reedy, quivering voice.
"I have a pistol," it cried. "I give you my word that I'll fire if you come any nearer."
"This really grows outrageous, Mr. Blessington," cried Dr. Trevelyan.
"Oh, then it is you, doctor," said the voice, with a great heave of relief. "But those other gentlemen, are they what they pretend to be?"

We were conscious of a long scrutiny out of the darkness.
"Yes, yes, it's all right," said the voice at last. "You can come up, and I am sorry if my precautions have annoyed you."

He relit the stair gas as he spoke, and we saw before us a singular-looking man, whose appearance, as well as his voice, testified to his jangled nerves. He was very fat, but had apparently at some time been much fatter, so that the skin hung about his face in loose pouches, like the cheeks of a blood-hound. He was of a sickly colour, and his thin, sandy hair seemed to bristle up with the intensity of his emotion. In his hand he held a pistol, but he thrust it into his pocket as we advanced.

"Good-evening, Mr. Holmes," said he. "I am sure I am very much obliged to you for coming round. No one ever needed your advice more than I do. I suppose that Dr. Trevelyan has told you of this most unwarrantable intrusion into my rooms."

"Quite so," said Holmes. "Who are these two men Mr. Blessington, and why do they wish to molest you?"

"Well, well," said the resident patient, in a nervous fashion, "of course it is hard to say that. You can hardly expect me to answer that, Mr. Holmes."

"Do you mean that you don't know?"

"Come in here, if you please. Just have the kindness to step in here."

He led the way into his bedroom, which was large and comfortably furnished.

"You see that," said he, pointing to a big black box at the end of his bed. "I have never been a very rich man, Mr. Holmes--never made but one investment in my life, as Dr. Trevelyan would tell you. But I don't believe in bankers. I would never trust a banker, Mr. Holmes. Between ourselves, what little I have is in that box, so you can understand what it means to me when unknown people force themselves into my rooms."

Holmes looked at Blessington in his questioning way and shook his head.

"I cannot possibly advise you if you try to deceive me," said he.

"But I have told you everything."

Holmes turned on his heel with a gesture of disgust. "Good-night, Dr. Trevelyan," said he.

"And no advice for me?" cried Blessington, in a breaking voice.

"My advice to your, sir, is to speak the truth."

A minute later we were in the street and walking for home. We had crossed Oxford Street and were half way down Harley Street before I could get a word from my companion.

"Sorry to bring you out on such a fool's errand, Watson," he said at last. "It is an interesting case, too, at the bottom of it."

"I can make little of it," I confessed.

"Well, it is quite evident that there are two men--more, perhaps, but at least two--who are determined for some reason to get at this fellow Blessington. I have no doubt in my mind that both on the first and on the second occasion that young man penetrated to Blessington's room, while his confederate, by an ingenious device, kept the doctor from interfering."

"And the catalepsy?"

"A fraudulent imitation, Watson, though I should hardly dare to hint as much to our specialist. It is a very easy complaint to imitate. I have done it myself."

"And then?"

"By the purest chance Blessington was out on each occasion. Their reason for choosing so unusual an hour for a consultation was obviously to insure that there should be no other patient in the waiting-room. It just happened, however, that this hour coincided with Blessington's constitutional, which seems to show that they were not very well acquainted with his daily routine. Of course, if they had been merely after plunder they would at least have made some attempt to search for it. Besides, I can read in a man's eye when it is his own skin that he is frightened for. It is inconceivable that this fellow could have made two such vindictive enemies as these appear to be without knowing of it. I hold it, therefore, to be certain that he does know who these men are, and that for reasons of his own he suppresses it. It is just possible that to-morrow may find him in a more communicative mood."

"Is there not one alternative," I suggested, "grotesquely improbable, no doubt, but still just conceivable? Might the whole story of the cataleptic Russian and his son be a concoction of Dr. Trevelyan's, who has, for his own purposes, been in Blessington's rooms?"
I saw in the gaslight that Holmes wore an amused smile at this brilliant departure of mine.

"My dear fellow," said he, "it was one of the first solutions which occurred to me, but I was soon able to corroborate the doctor's tale. This young man has left prints upon the stair-carpet which made it quite superfluous for me to ask to see those which he had made in the room. When I tell you that his shoes were square-toed instead of being pointed like Blessington's, and were quite an inch and a third longer than the doctor's, you will acknowledge that there can be no doubt as to his individuality. But we may sleep on it now, for I shall be surprised if we do not hear something further from Brook Street in the morning."

Sherlock Holmes's prophecy was soon fulfilled, and in a dramatic fashion. At half-past seven next morning, in the first glimmer of daylight, I found him standing by my bedside in his dressing-gown.

"There's a brougham waiting for us, Watson," said he.

"What's the matter, then?"

"The Brook Street business."

"Any fresh news?"

"Tragic, but ambiguous," said he, pulling up the blind. "Look at this--a sheet from a note-book, with 'For God's sake come at once--P. T.,' scrawled upon it in pencil. Our friend, the doctor, was hard put to it when he wrote this. Come along, my dear fellow, for it's an urgent call."

In a quarter of an hour or so we were back at the physician's house. He came running out to meet us with a face of horror.

"Oh, such a business!" he cried, with his hands to his temples.

"What then?"

"Blessington has committed suicide!"

Holmes whistled.

"Yes, he hanged himself during the night."

We had entered, and the doctor had preceded us into what was evidently his waiting-room.

"I really hardly know what I am doing," he cried. "The police are already upstairs. It has shaken me most dreadfully."

"When did you find it out?"

"He has a cup of tea taken in to him early every morning. When the maid entered, about seven, there the unfortunate fellow was hanging in the middle of the room. He had tied his cord to the hook on which the heavy lamp used to hang, and he had jumped off from the top of the very box that he showed us yesterday."

Holmes stood for a moment in deep thought.

"With your permission," said he at last, "I should like to go upstairs and look into the matter."

We both ascended, followed by the doctor.

It was a dreadful sight which met us as we entered the bedroom door. I have spoken of the impression of flabbiness which this man Blessington conveyed. As he dangled from the hook it was exaggerated and intensified until he was scarce human in his appearance. The neck was drawn out like a plucked chicken's, making the rest of him seem the more obese and unnatural by the contrast. He was clad only in his long night-dress, and his swollen ankles and ungainly feet protruded starkly from beneath it. Beside him stood a smart-looking police-inspector, who was taking notes in a pocket-book.

"Ah, Mr. Holmes," said he, heartily, as my friend entered, "I am delighted to see you."

"Good-morning, Lanner," answered Holmes; "you won't think me an intruder, I am sure. Have you heard of the events which led up to this affair?"

"Yes, I heard something of them."

"Have you formed any opinion?"

"As far as I can see, the man has been driven out of his senses by fright. The bed has been well slept in, you see. There's his impression deep enough. It's about five in the morning, you know, that suicides are most common. That would be about his time for hanging himself. It seems to have been a very deliberate affair."

"I should say that he has been dead about three hours, judging by the rigidity of the muscles," said I.

" Noticed anything peculiar about the room?" asked Holmes.

"Found a screw-driver and some screws on the wash-hand stand. Seems to have smoked heavily during the night, too. Here are four cigar-ends that I picked out of the fireplace."

"Hum!" said Holmes, "have you got his cigar-holder?"

"No, I have seen none."

"His cigar-case, then?"

"Yes, it was in his coat-pocket."

Holmes opened it and smelled the single cigar which it contained.
"Oh, this is an Havana, and these others are cigars of the peculiar sort which are imported by the Dutch from their East Indian colonies. They are usually wrapped in straw, you know, and are thinner for their length than any other brand." He picked up the four ends and examined them with his pocket-lens.

"Two of these have been smoked from a holder and two without," said he. "Two have been cut by a not very sharp knife, and two have had the ends bitten off by a set of excellent teeth. This is no suicide, Mr. Lanner. It is a very deeply planned and cold-blooded murder."

"Impossible!" cried the inspector.

"And why?"

"Why should any one murder a man in so clumsy a fashion as by hanging him?"

"That is what we have to find out."

"How could they get in?"

"Through the front door."

"It was barred in the morning."

"Then it was barred after them."

"How do you know?"

"I saw their traces. Excuse me a moment, and I may be able to give you some further information about it."

He went over to the door, and turning the lock he examined it in his methodical way. Then he took out the key, which was on the inside, and inspected that also. The bed, the carpet, the chairs the mantelpiece, the dead body, and the rope were each in turn examined, until at last he professed himself satisfied, and with my aid and that of the inspector cut down the wretched object and laid it reverently under a sheet.

"How about this rope?" he asked.

"It is cut off this," said Dr. Trevelyan, drawing a large coil from under the bed. "He was morbidly nervous of fire, and always kept this beside him, so that he might escape by the window in case the stairs were burning."

"That must have saved them trouble," said Holmes, thoughtfully. "Yes, the actual facts are very plain, and I shall be surprised if by the afternoon I cannot give you the reasons for them as well. I will take this photograph of Blessington, which I see upon the mantelpiece, as it may help me in my inquiries."

"But you have told us nothing!" cried the doctor.

"Oh, there can be no doubt as to the sequence of events," said Holmes. "There were three of them in it: the young man, the old man, and a third, to whose identity I have no clue. The first two, I need hardly remark, are the same who masqueraded as the Russian count and his son, so we can give a very full description of them. They were admitted by a confederate inside the house. If I might offer you a word of advice, Inspector, it would be to arrest the page, who, as I understand, has only recently come into your service, Doctor."

"The young imp cannot be found," said Dr. Trevelyan; "the maid and the cook have just been searching for him."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"He has played a not unimportant part in this drama," said he. "The three men having ascended the stairs, which they did on tiptoe, the elder man first, the younger man second, and the unknown man in the rear--"

"My dear Holmes!" I ejaculated.

"Oh, there could be no question as to the superimposing of the footmarks. I had the advantage of learning which was which last night. They ascended, then, to Mr. Blessington's room, the door of which they found to be locked. With the help of a wire, however, they forced round the key. Even without the lens you will perceive, by the scratches on this ward, where the pressure was applied.

"On entering the room their first proceeding must have been to gag Mr. Blessington. He may have been asleep, or he may have been so paralysed with terror as to have been unable to cry out. These walls are thick, and it is conceivable that his shriek, if he had time to utter one, was unheard.

"Having secured him, it is evident to me that a consultation of some sort was held. Probably it was something in the nature of a judicial proceeding. It must have lasted for some time, for it was then that these cigars were smoked. The older man sat in that wicker chair; it was he who used the cigar-holder. The younger man sat over yonder; he knocked his ash off against the chest of drawers. The third fellow paced up and down. Blessington, I think, sat upright in the bed, but of that I cannot be absolutely certain.

"Well, it ended by their taking Blessington and hanging him. The matter was so prearranged that it is my belief that they brought with them some sort of block or pulley which might serve as a gallows. That screw-driver and those screws were, as I conceive, for fixing it up. Seeing the hook, however they naturally saved themselves the trouble. Having finished their work they made off, and the door was barred behind them by their confederate."

We had all listened with the deepest interest to this sketch of the night's doings, which Holmes had deduced from signs so subtle and minute that, even when he had pointed them out to us, we could scarcely follow him in his reasoning. The inspector hurried away on the instant to make inquiries about the page, while Holmes and I returned
to Baker Street for breakfast.

"I'll be back by three," said he, when we had finished our meal. "Both the inspector and the doctor will meet me here at that hour, and I hope by that time to have cleared up any little obscurity which the case may still present."

Our visitors arrived at the appointed time, but it was a quarter to four before my friend put in an appearance. From his expression as he entered, however, I could see that all had gone well with him.

"Any news, Inspector?"
"We have got the boy, sir."
"Excellent, and I have got the men."
"You have got them!" we cried, all three.

"Well, at least I have got their identity. This so-called Blessington is, as I expected, well known at headquarters, and so are his assailants. Their names are Biddle, Hayward, and Moffat."

"The Worthingdon bank gang," cried the inspector.
"Precisely," said Holmes.
"Then Blessington must have been Sutton."
"Exactly," said Holmes.
"Why, that makes it as clear as crystal," said the inspector.

But Trevelyan and I looked at each other in bewilderment.

"You must surely remember the great Worthingdon bank business," said Holmes. "Five men were in it--these four and a fifth called Cartwright. Tobin, the care-taker, was murdered, and the thieves got away with seven thousand pounds. This was in 1875. They were all five arrested, but the evidence against them was by no means conclusive. This Blessington or Sutton, who was the worst of the gang, turned informer. On his evidence Cartwright was hanged and the other three got fifteen years apiece. When they got out the other day, which was some years before their full term, they set themselves, as you perceive, to hunt down the traitor and to avenge the death of their comrade upon him. Twice they tried to get at him and failed; a third time, you see, it came off. Is there anything further which I can explain, Dr. Trevelyan?"

"I think you have made it all remarkable clear," said the doctor. "No doubt the day on which he was perturbed was the day when he had seen of their release in the newspapers."  
"Quite so. His talk about a burglary was the merest blind."
"But why could he not tell you this?"

"Well, my dear sir, knowing the vindictive character of his old associates, he was trying to hide his own identity from everybody as long as he could. His secret was a shameful one, and he could not bring himself to divulge it. However, wretch as he was, he was still living under the shield of British law, and I have no doubt, Inspector, that you will see that, though that shield may fail to guard, the sword of justice is still there to avenge."

Such were the singular circumstances in connection with the Resident Patient and the Brook Street Doctor. From that night nothing has been seen of the three murderers by the police, and it is surmised at Scotland Yard that they were among the passengers of the ill-fated steamer Norah Creina, which was lost some years ago with all hands upon the Portuguese coast, some leagues to the north of Oporto. The proceedings against the page broke down for want of evidence, and the Brook Street Mystery, as it was called, has never until now been fully dealt with in any public print.

The Greek Interpreter

During my long and intimate acquaintance with Mr. Sherlock Holmes I had never heard him refer to his relations, and hardly ever to his own early life. This reticence upon his part had increased the somewhat inhuman effect which he produced upon me, until sometimes I found myself regarding him as an isolated phenomenon, a brain without a heart, as deficient in human sympathy as he was pre-eminent in intelligence. His aversion to women and his disinclination to form new friendships were both typical of his unemotional character, but not more so than his complete suppression of every reference to his own people. I had come to believe that he was an orphan with no relatives living, but one day, to my very great surprise, he began to talk to me about his brother.

It was after tea on a summer evening, and the conversation, which had roamed in a desultory, spasmodic fashion from golf clubs to the causes of the change in the obliquity of the ecliptic, came round at last to the question of atavism and hereditary aptitudes. The point under discussion was, how far any singular gift in an individual was due to his ancestry and how far to his own early training.

"In your own case," said I, "from all that you have told me, it seems obvious that your faculty of observation and your peculiar facility for deduction are due to your own systematic training."

"To some extent," he answered, thoughtfully. "My ancestors were country squires, who appear to have led much the same life as is natural to their class. But, none the less, my turn that way is in my veins, and may have come with my grandmother, who was the sister of Vernet, the French artist. Art in the blood is liable to take the strangest
forms."

"But how do you know that it is hereditary?"

"Because my brother Mycroft possesses it in a larger degree than I do."

This was news to me indeed. If there were another man with such singular powers in England, how was it that neither police nor public had heard of him? I put the question, with a hint that it was my companion's modesty which made him acknowledge his brother as his superior. Holmes laughed at my suggestion.

"My dear Watson," said he, "I cannot agree with those who rank modesty among the virtues. To the logician all things should be seen exactly as they are, and to underestimate one's self is as much a departure from truth as to exaggerate one's own powers. When I say, therefore, that Mycroft has better powers of observation than I, you may take it that I am speaking the exact and literal truth."

"Is he your junior?"

"Seven years my senior."

"How comes it that he is unknown?"

"Oh, he is very well known in his own circle."

"Where, then?"

"Well, in the Diogenes Club, for example."

I had never heard of the institution, and my face must have proclaimed as much, for Sherlock Holmes pulled out his watch.

"The Diogenes Club is the queerest club in London, and Mycroft one of the queerest men. He's always there from quarter to five to twenty to eight. It's six now, so if you care for a stroll this beautiful evening I shall be very happy to introduce you to two curiosities."

Five minutes later we were in the street, walking towards Regent's Circus.

"You wonder," said my companion, "why it is that Mycroft does not use his powers for detective work. He is incapable of it."

"But I thought you said--"

"I said that he was my superior in observation and deduction. If the art of the detective began and ended in reasoning from an arm-chair, my brother would be the greatest criminal agent that ever lived. But he has no ambition and no energy. He will not even go out of his way to verify his own solution, and would rather be considered wrong than take the trouble to prove himself right. Again and again I have taken a problem to him, and have received an explanation which has afterwards proved to be the correct one. And yet he was absolutely incapable of working out the practical points which must be gone into before a case could be laid before a judge or jury."

"It is not his profession, then?"

"By no means. What is to me a means of livelihood is to him the merest hobby of a dilettante. He has an extraordinary faculty for figures, and audits the books in some of the government departments. Mycroft lodges in Pall Mall, and he walks round the corner into Whitehall every morning and back every evening. From year's end to year's end he takes no other exercise, and is seen nowhere else, except only in the Diogenes Club, which is just opposite his rooms."

"I cannot recall the name."

"Very likely not. There are many men in London, you know, who, some from shyness, some from misanthropy, have no wish for the company of their fellows. Yet they are not averse to comfortable chairs and the latest periodicals. It is for the convenience of these that the Diogenes Club was started, and it now contains the most unsociable and unclubable men in town. No member is permitted to take the least notice of any other one. Save in the Stranger's Room, no talking is, under any circumstances, allowed, and three offences, if brought to the notice of the committee, render the talker liable to expulsion. My brother was one of the founders, and I have myself found it a very soothing atmosphere."

We had reached Pall Mall as we talked, and were walking down it from the St. James's end. Sherlock Holmes stopped at a door some little distance from the Carlton, and, cautioning me not to speak, he led the way into the hall. Through the glass panelling I caught a glimpse of a large and luxurious room, in which a considerable number of men were sitting about and reading papers, each in his own little nook. Holmes showed me into a small chamber which looked out into Pall Mall, and then, leaving me for a minute, he came back with a companion whom I knew could only be his brother.

Mycroft Holmes was a much larger and stouter man than Sherlock. His body was absolutely corpulent, but his face, though massive, had preserved something of the sharpness of expression which was so remarkable in that of his brother. His eyes, which were of a peculiarly light, watery grey, seemed to always retain that far-away, introspective look which I had only observed in Sherlock's when he was exerting his full powers.
"I am glad to meet you, sir," said he, putting out a broad, fat hand like the flipper of a seal. "I hear of Sherlock everywhere since you became his chronicler. By the way, Sherlock, I expected to see you round last week, to consult me over that Manor House case. I thought you might be a little out of your depth."

"No, I solved it," said my friend, smiling.

"It was Adams, of course."

"Yes, it was Adams."

"I was sure of it from the first." The two sat down together in the bow-window of the club. "To any one who wishes to study mankind this is the spot," said Mycroft. "Look at the magnificent types! Look at these two men who are coming towards us, for example."

"The billiard-marker and the other?"

"Precisely. What do you make of the other?"

The two men had stopped opposite the window. Some chalk marks over the waistcoat pocket were the only signs of billiards which I could see in one of them. The other was a very small, dark fellow, with his hat pushed back and several packages under his arm.

"An old soldier, I perceive," said Sherlock.

"And very recently discharged," remarked the brother.

"Served in India, I see."

"And a non-commissioned officer."

"Royal Artillery, I fancy," said Sherlock.

"And a widower."

"But with a child."

"Children, my dear boy, children."

"Come," said I, laughing, "this is a little too much."

"Surely," answered Holmes, "it is not hard to say that a man with that bearing, expression of authority, and sunbaked skin, is a soldier, is more than a private, and is not long from India."

"That he has not left the service long is shown by his still wearing his ammunition boots, as they are called," observed Mycroft.

"He had not the cavalry stride, yet he wore his hat on one side, as is shown by the lighter skin of that side of his brow. His weight is against his being a sapper. He is in the artillery."

"Then, of course, his complete mourning shows that he has lost some one very dear. The fact that he is doing his own shopping looks as though it were his wife. He has been buying things for children, you perceive. There is a rattle, which shows that one of them is very young. The wife probably died in childbed. The fact that he has a picture-book under his arm shows that there is another child to be thought of."

I began to understand what my friend meant when he said that his brother possessed even keener faculties than he did himself. He glanced across at me and smiled. Mycroft took snuff from a tortoise-shell box, and brushed away the wandering grains from his coat front with a large, red silk handkerchief.

"By the way, Sherlock," said he, "I have something quite after your own heart--a most singular problem--submitted to my judgement. I really had not the energy to follow it up save in a very incomplete fashion, but it gave me a basis for some pleasing speculation. If you would care to hear the facts--"

"My dear Mycroft, I should be delighted."

The brother scribbled a note upon a leaf of his pocket-book, and, ringing the bell, he handed it to the waiter.

"I have asked Mr. Melas to step across," said he. "He lodges on the floor above me, and I have some slight acquaintance with him, which led him to come to me in his perplexity. Mr. Melas is a Greek by extraction, as I understand, and he is a remarkable linguist. He earns his living partly as interpreter in the law courts and partly by acting as guide to any wealthy Orientals who may visit the Northumberland Avenue hotels. I think I will leave him to tell his very remarkable experience in his own fashion."

A few minutes later we were joined by a short, stout man whose olive face and coal-black hair proclaimed his Southern origin, though his speech was that of an educated Englishman. He shook hands eagerly with Sherlock Holmes, and his dark eyes sparkled with pleasure when he understood that the specialist was anxious to hear his story.

"I do not believe that the police credit me--on my word, I do not," said he in a wailing voice. "Just because they have never heard of it before, they think that such a thing cannot be. But I know that I shall never be easy in my mind until I know what has become of my poor man with the sticking-plaster upon his face."

"I am all attention," said Sherlock Holmes.

"This is Wednesday evening," said Mr. Melas. "Well then, it was Monday night--only two days ago, you understand--that all this happened. I am an interpreter, as perhaps my neighbour there has told you. I interpret all
languages—or nearly all—but as I am a Greek by birth and with a Grecian name, it is with that particular tongue that I am principally associated. For many years I have been the chief Greek interpreter in London, and my name is very well known in the hotels. It happens not infrequently that I am sent for at strange hours by foreigners who get into difficulties, or by travellers who arrive late and wish my services. I was not surprised, therefore, on Monday night when a Mr. Latimer, a very fashionably dressed young man, came up to my rooms and asked me to accompany him in a cab which was waiting at the door. A Greek friend had come to see him upon business, he said, and as he could speak nothing but his own tongue, the services of an interpreter were indispensable. He gave me to understand that his house was some little distance off, in Kensington, and he seemed to be in a great hurry, bustling me rapidly into the cab when we had descended to the street.

"I say into the cab, but I soon became doubtful as to whether it was not a carriage in which I found myself. It was certainly more roomy than the ordinary four-wheeled disgrace to London, and the fittings, though frayed, were of rich quality. Mr. Latimer seated himself opposite to me and we started off through Charing Cross and up the Shaftesbury Avenue. We had come out upon Oxford Street and I had ventured some remark as to this being a roundabout way to Kensington, when my words were arrested by the extraordinary conduct of my companion.

"He began by drawing a most formidable-looking bludgeon loaded with lead from his pocket, and switching it backward and forward several times, as if to test its weight and strength. Then he placed it without a word upon the seat beside him. Having done this, he drew up the windows on each side, and I found to my astonishment that they were covered with paper so as to prevent my seeing through them.

"'I am sorry to cut off your view, Mr. Melas,' said he. 'The fact is that I have no intention that you should see what the place is to which we are driving. It might possibly be inconvenient to me if you could find your way there again.'

"As you can imagine, I was utterly taken aback by such an address. My companion was a powerful, broad-shouldered young fellow, and, apart from the weapon, I should not have had the slightest chance in a struggle with him.

"'This is very extraordinary conduct, Mr. Latimer,' I stammered. 'You must be aware that what you are doing is quite illegal.'

"'It is somewhat of a liberty, no doubt,' said he, 'but we'll make it up to you. I must warn you, however, Mr. Melas, that if at any time to-night you attempt to raise an alarm or do anything which is against my interests, you will find it a very serious thing. I beg you to remember that no one knows where you are, and that, whether you are in this carriage or in my house, you are equally in my power.'

"His words were quiet, but he had a rasping way of saying them which was very menacing. I sat in silence wondering what on earth could be his reason for kidnapping me in this extraordinary fashion. Whatever it might be, it was perfectly clear that there was no possible use in my resisting, and that I could only wait to see what might befall.

"For nearly two hours we drove without my having the least clue as to where we were going. Sometimes the rattle of the stones told of a paved causeway, and at others our smooth, silent course suggested asphalt; but, save by this variation in sound, there was nothing at all which could in the remotest way help me to form a guess as to where we were. The paper over each window was impenetrable to light, and a blue curtain was drawn across the glass work in front. It was a quarter-past seven when we left Pall Mall, and my watch showed me that it was ten minutes to nine when we at last came to a standstill. My companion let down the window, and I caught a glimpse of a low, arched doorway with a lamp burning above it. As I was hurried from the carriage it swung open, and I found myself inside the house, with a vague impression of a lawn and trees on each side of me as I entered. Whether these were private grounds, however, or bona-fide country was more than I could possibly venture to say.

"There was a coloured gas-lamp inside which was turned so low that I could see little save that the hall was of some size and hung with pictures. In the dim light I could make out that the person who had opened the door was a small, mean-looking, middle-aged man with rounded shoulders. As he turned towards us the glint of the light showed me that he was wearing glasses.

"'Is this Mr. Melas, Harold?' said he.

"'Yes.'

"'Well done, well done! No ill-will, Mr. Melas, I hope, but we could not get on without you. If you deal fair with us you'll not regret it, but if you try any tricks, God help you!' He spoke in a nervous, jerky fashion, and with little giggling laughs in between, but somehow he impressed me with fear more than the other.

"'What do you want with me?' I asked.

"'Only to ask a few questions of a Greek gentleman who is visiting us, and to let us have the answers. But say no more than you are told to say, or--' here came the nervous giggle again--'you had better never have been born.'

"As he spoke he opened a door and showed the way into a room which appeared to be very richly furnished, but
again the only light was afforded by a single lamp half-turned down. The chamber was certainly large, and the way in which my feet sank into the carpet as I stepped across it told me of its richness. I caught glimpses of velvet chairs, a high white marble mantel-piece, and what seemed to be a suit of Japanese armour at one side of it. There was a chair just under the lamp, and the elderly man motioned that I should sit in it. The younger had left us, but he suddenly returned through another door, leading with him a gentleman clad in some sort of loose dressing-gown who moved slowly towards us. As he came into the circle of dim light which enables me to see him more clearly I was thrilled with horror at his appearance. He was deadly pale and terribly emaciated, with the protruding, brilliant eyes of a man whose spirit was greater than his strength. But what shocked me more than any signs of physical weakness was that his face was grotesquely criss-crossed with sticking-plaster, and that one large pad of it was fastened over his mouth.

"Have you the slate, Harold?" cried the older man, as this strange being fell rather than sat down into a chair. 'Are his hands loose? Now, then, give him the pencil. You are to ask the questions, Mr. Melas, and he will write the answers. Ask him first of all whether he is prepared to sign the papers?"

"The man's eyes flashed fire."
"'Never!' he wrote in Greek upon the slate."
"'On no condition?' I asked, at the bidding of our tyrant."
"'Only if I see her married in my presence by a Greek priest whom I know.'"
"'The man giggled in his venomous way."
"'You know what awaits you, then?'"
"'I care nothing for myself.'"

"These are samples of the questions and answers which made up our strange half-spoken, half-written conversation. Again and again I had to ask him whether he would give in and sign the documents. Again and again I had the same indignant reply. But soon a happy thought came to me. I took to adding on little sentences of my own to each question, innocent ones at first, to test whether either of our companions knew anything of the matter, and then, as I found that they showed no signs I played a more dangerous game. Our conversation ran something like this:

"'You can do no good by this obstinacy. Who are you?'
"'I care not. I am a stranger in London.'
"'Your fate will be upon your own head. How long have you been here?'
"'Let it be so. Three weeks.'
"'The property can never be yours. What ails you?'
"'It shall not go to villains. They are starving me.'
"'You shall go free if you sign. What house is this?'
"'I will never sign. I do not know.'
"'You are not doing her any service. What is your name?'
"'Let me hear her say so. Kratides.'
"'You shall see her if you sign. Where are you from?'
"'Then I shall never see her. Athens.'

"Another five minutes, Mr. Holmes, and I should have wormed out the whole story under their very noses. My very next question might have cleared the matter up, but at that instant the door opened and a woman stepped into the room. I could not see her clearly enough to know more than that she was tall and graceful, with black hair, and clad in some sort of loose white gown.

"'Harold,' said she, speaking English with a broken accent. 'I could not stay away longer. It is so lonely up there with only--Oh, my God, it is Paul!'"

"These last words were in Greek, and at the same instant the man with a convulsive effort tore the plaster from his lips, and screaming out 'Sophy! Sophy!' rushed into the woman's arms. Their embrace was but for an instant, however, for the younger man had seized the woman and pushed her out of the room, while the elder easily overpowered his emaciated victim, and dragged him away through the other door. For a moment I was left alone in the room, and I sprang to my feet with some vague idea that I might in some way get a clue to what this house was in which I found myself. Fortunately, however, I took no steps, for looking up I saw that the older man was standing in the door-way with his eyes fixed upon me.

"'That will do, Mr. Melas,' said he. 'You perceive that we have taken you into our confidence over some very private business. We should not have troubled you, only that our friend who speaks Greek and who began these negotiations has been forced to return to the East. It was quite necessary for us to find some one to take his place, and we were fortunate in hearing of your powers.'"

"I bowed.
"'There are five sovereigns here,' said he, walking up to me, 'which will, I hope, be a sufficient fee. But remember,' he added, tapping me lightly on the chest and giggling, 'if you speak to a human soul about this--one human soul, mind--well, may God have mercy upon your soul!'"

"I cannot tell you the loathing and horror with which this insignificant-looking man inspired me. I could see him better now as the lamp-light shone upon him. His features were peaky and sallow, and his little pointed beard was thready and ill-nourished. He pushed his face forward as he spoke and his lips and eyelids were continually twitching like a man with St. Vitus's dance. I could not help thinking that his strange, catchy little laugh was also a symptom of some nervous malady. The terror of his face lay in his eyes, however, steel grey, and glistening coldly with a malignant, inexorable cruelty in their depths.

"'We shall know if you speak of this,' said he. 'We have our own means of information. Now you will find the carriage waiting, and my friend will see you on your way.'

"I was hurried through the hall and into the vehicle, again obtaining that momentary glimpse of trees and a garden. Mr. Latimer followed closely at my heels, and took his place opposite to me without a word. In silence we again drove for an interminable distance with the windows raised, until at last, just after midnight, the carriage pulled up.

"'You will get down here, Mr. Melas,' said my companion. 'I am sorry to leave you so far from your house, but there is no alternative. Any attempt upon your part to follow the carriage can only end in injury to yourself.'

"He opened the door as he spoke, and I had hardly time to spring out when the coachman lashed the horse and the carriage rattled away. I looked around me in astonishment. I was on some sort of a heathy common mottled over with dark clumps of furze-bushes. Far away stretched a line of houses, with a light here and there in the upper windows. On the other side I saw the red signal-lamps of a railway.

"The carriage which had brought me was already out of sight. I stood gazing round and wondering where on earth I might be, when I saw some one coming towards me in the darkness. As he came up to me I made out that he was a railway porter.

"'Can you tell me what place this is?' I asked.

"'Wandsworth Common,' said he.

"'Can I get a train into town?'

"'If you walk on a mile or so to Clapham Junction,' said he, 'you'll just be in time for the last to Victoria.'

"So that was the end of my adventure, Mr. Holmes. I do not know where I was, nor whom I spoke with, nor anything save what I have told you. But I know that there is foul play going on, and I want to help that unhappy man if I can. I told the whole story to Mr. Mycroft Holmes next morning, and subsequently to the police."

We all sat in silence for some little time after listening to this extraordinary narrative. Then Sherlock looked across at his brother.

"Any steps?" he asked.

"Mycroft picked up the Daily News, which was lying on the side-table.

"'Anybody supplying any information to the whereabouts of a Greek gentleman named Paul Kratides, from Athens, who is unable to speak English, will be rewarded. A similar reward paid to any one giving information about a Greek lady whose first name is Sophy. X 2473.' That was in all the dailies. No answer."

"How about the Greek Legation?"

"I have inquired. They know nothing."

"A wire to the head of the Athens police, then?"

"Sherlock has all the energy of the family," said Mycroft, turning to me. "Well, you take the case up by all means, and let me know if you do any good."

"Certainly," answered my friend, rising from his chair. "I'll let you know, and Mr. Melas also. In the meantime, Mr. Melas, I should certainly be on my guard, if I were you, for of course they must know through these advertisements that you have betrayed them."

As we walked home together, Holmes stopped at a telegraph office and sent off several wires.

"'You see, Watson,' he remarked, "our evening has been by no means wasted. Some of my most interesting cases have come to me in this way through Mycroft. The problem which we have just listened to, although it can admit of but one explanation, has still some distinguishing features."

"You have hopes of solving it?"

"Well, knowing as much as we do, it will be singular indeed if we fail to discover the rest. You must yourself have formed some theory which will explain the facts to which we have listened."

"In a vague way, yes."

"What was your idea, then?"

"It seemed to me to be obvious that this Greek girl had been carried off by the young Englishman named Harold
"Carried off from where?"

"Athens, perhaps."

Sherlock Holmes shook his head. "This young man could not talk a word of Greek. The lady could talk English fairly well. Inference—that she had been in England some little time, but he had not been in Greece."

"Well, then, we will presume that she had come on a visit to England, and that this Harold had persuaded her to fly with him."

"That is more probable."

"Then the brother—for that, I fancy, must be the relationship—comes over from Greece to interfere. He imprudently puts himself into the power of the young man and his older associate. They seize him and use violence towards him in order to make him sign some papers to make over the girl's fortune—of which he may be trustee—to them. This he refuses to do. In order to negotiate with them he has to get an interpreter, and they pitch upon this Mr. Melas, having used some other one before. The girl is not told of the arrival of her brother, and finds it out by the merest accident."

"Excellent, Watson!" cried Holmes. "I really fancy that you are not far from the truth. You see that we hold all the cards, and we have only to fear some sudden act of violence on their part. If they give us time we must have them."

"But how can we find where this house lies?"

"Well, if our conjecture is correct and the girl's name is or was Sophy Kratides, we should have no difficulty in tracing her. That must be our main hope, for the brother is, of course, a complete stranger. It is clear that some time has elapsed since this Harold established these relations with the girl—some weeks, at any rate—since the brother in Greece has had time to hear of it and come across. If they have been living in the same place during this time, it is probable that we shall have some answer to Mycroft's advertisement."

We had reached our house in Baker Street while we had been talking. Holmes ascended the stair first, and as he opened the door of our room he gave a start of surprise. Looking over his shoulder, I was equally astonished. His brother Mycroft was sitting smoking in the arm-chair.

"Come in, Sherlock! Come in, sir," said he blandly, smiling at our surprised faces. "You don't expect such energy from me, do you, Sherlock? But somehow this case attracts me."

"How did you get here?"

"I passed you in a hansom."

"There has been some new development?"

"I had an answer to my advertisement."

"Ah!"

"Yes, it came within a few minutes of your leaving."

"And to what effect?"

Mycroft Holmes took out a sheet of paper.

"Here it is," said he, "written with a J pen on royal cream paper by a middle-aged man with a weak constitution. 'Sir,' he says, 'in answer to your advertisement of to-day's date, I beg to inform you that I know the young lady in question very well. If you should care to call upon me I could give you some particulars as to her painful history. She is living at present at The Myrtles, Beckenham. Yours faithfully, J. Davenport.'"

"He writes from Lower Brixton," said Mycroft Holmes. "Do you not think that we might drive to him now, Sherlock, and learn these particulars?"

"My dear Mycroft, the brother's life is more valuable than the sister's story. I think we should call at Scotland Yard for Inspector Gregson, and go straight out to Beckenham. We know that a man is being done to death, and every hour may be vital."

"Better pick up Mr. Melas on our way," I suggested. "We may need an interpreter."

"Excellent," said Sherlock Holmes. "Send the boy for a four-wheeler, and we shall be off at once." He opened the table-drawer as he spoke, and I noticed that he slipped his revolver into his pocket. "Yes," said he, in answer to my glance; "I should say from what we have heard, that we are dealing with a particularly dangerous gang."

It was almost dark before we found ourselves in Pall Mall, at the rooms of Mr. Melas. A gentleman had just called for him, and he was gone.

"Can you tell me where?" asked Mycroft Holmes.

"I don't know, sir," answered the woman who had opened the door; "I only know that he drove away with the gentleman in a carriage."

"Did the gentleman give a name?"

"No, sir."
"He wasn't a tall, handsome, dark young man?"

"Oh, nor, sir. He was a little gentleman, with glasses, thin in the face, but very pleasant in his ways, for he was laughing at the time that he was talking."

"Come along!" cried Sherlock Holmes, abruptly. "This grows serious," he observed, as we drove to Scotland Yard. "These men have got hold of Melas again. He is a man of no physical courage, as they are well aware from their experience the other night. This villain was able to terrify him the instant that he got into his presence. No doubt they want his professional services, but, having used him, they may be inclined to punish him for what they will regard as his treachery."

Our hope was that, by taking train, we might get to Beckenham as soon or sooner than the carriage. On reaching Scotland Yard, however, it was more than an hour before we could get Inspector Gregson and comply with the legal formalities which would enable us to enter the house. It was a quarter to ten before we reached London Bridge, and half past before the four of us alighted on the Beckenham platform. A drive of half a mile brought us to The Myrtles—a large, dark house standing back from the road in its own grounds. Here we dismissed our cab, and made our way up the drive together.

"The windows are all dark," remarked the inspector. "The house seems deserted."

"Our birds are flown and the nest empty," said Holmes.

"Why do you say so?"

"A carriage heavily loaded with luggage has passed out during the last hour."

The inspector laughed. "I saw the wheel-tracks in the light of the gate-lamp, but where does the luggage come in?"

"You may have observed the same wheel-tracks going the other way. But the outward-bound ones were very much deeper—so much so that we can say for a certainty that there was a very considerable weight on the carriage."

"You get a trifle beyond me there," said the inspector, shrugging his shoulder. "It will not be an easy door to force, but we will try if we cannot make some one hear us."

He hammered loudly at the knocker and pulled at the bell, but without any success. Holmes had slipped away, but he came back in a few minutes.

"I have a window open," said he.

"It is a mercy that you are on the side of the force, and not against it, Mr. Holmes," remarked the inspector, as he noted the clever way in which my friend had forced back the catch. "Well, I think that under the circumstances we may enter without an invitation."

One after the other we made our way into a large apartment, which was evidently that in which Mr. Melas had found himself. The inspector had lit his lantern, and by its light we could see the two doors, the curtain, the lamp, and the suit of Japanese mail as he had described them. On the table lay two glasses, and empty brandy-bottle, and the remains of a meal.

"What is that?" asked Holmes, suddenly.

We all stood still and listened. A low moaning sound was coming from somewhere over our heads. Holmes rushed to the door and out into the hall. The dismal noise came from upstairs. He dashed up, the inspector and I at his heels, while his brother Mycroft followed as quickly as his great bulk would permit.

Three doors faced up upon the second floor, and it was from the central of these that the sinister sounds were issuing, sinking sometimes into a dull mumble and rising again into a shrill whine. It was locked, but the key had been left on the outside. Holmes flung open the door and rushed in, but he was out again in an instant, with his hand to his throat.

"It's charcoal," he cried. "Give it time. It will clear."

Peering in, we could see that the only light in the room came from a dull blue flame which flickered from a small brass tripod in the centre. It threw a livid, unnatural circle upon the floor, while in the shadows beyond we saw the vague loom of two figures which crouched against the wall. From the open door there reeked a horrible poisonous exhalation which set us gasping and coughing. Holmes rushed to the top of the stairs to draw in the fresh air, and then, dashing into the room, he threw up the window and hurled the brazen tripod out into the garden.

"We can enter in a minute," he gasped, darting out again. "Where is a candle? I doubt if we could strike a match in that atmosphere. Hold the light at the door and we shall get them out, Mycroft, now!"

With a rush we got to the poisoned men and dragged them out into the well-lit hall. Both of them were blue-lipped and insensible, with swollen, congested faces and protruding eyes. Indeed, so distorted were their features that, save for his black beard and stout figure, we might have failed to recognise in one of them the Greek interpreter who had parted from us only a few hours before at the Diogenes Club. His hands and feet were securely strapped together, and he bore over one eye the marks of a violent blow. The other, who was secured in a similar fashion, was a tall man in the last stage of emaciation, with several strips of sticking-plaster arranged in a grotesque pattern over
his face. He had ceased to moan as we laid him down, and a glance showed me that for him at least our aid had come too late. Mr. Melas, however, still lived, and in less than an hour, with the aid of ammonia and brandy I had the satisfaction of seeing him open his eyes, and of knowing that my hand had drawn him back from that dark valley in which all paths meet.

It was a simple story which he had to tell, and one which did but confirm our own deductions. His visitor, on entering his rooms, had drawn a life-preserver from his sleeve, and had so impressed him with the fear of instant and inevitable death that he had kidnapped him for the second time. Indeed, it was almost mesmeric, the effect which this giggling ruffian had produced upon the unfortunate linguist, for he could not speak of him save with trembling hands and a blanched cheek. He had been taken swiftly to Beckenham, and had acted as interpreter in a second interview, even more dramatic than the first, in which the two Englishmen had menaced their prisoner with instant death if he did not comply with their demands. Finally, finding him proof against every threat, they had hurled him back into his prison, and after reproaching Melas with his treachery, which appeared from the newspaper advertisement, they had stunned him with a blow from a stick, and he remembered nothing more until he found us bending over him.

And this was the singular case of the Grecian Interpreter, the explanation of which is still involved in some mystery. We were able to find out, by communicating with the gentleman who had answered the advertisement, that the unfortunate young lady came of a wealthy Grecian family, and that she had been on a visit to some friends in England. While there she had met a young man named Harold Latimer, who had acquired an ascendancy over her and had eventually persuaded her to fly with him. Her friends, shocked at the event, had contended themselves with informing her brother at Athens, and had then washed their hands of the matter. The brother, on his arrival in England, had imprudently placed himself in the power of Latimer and of his associate, whose name was Wilson Kemp—that through his ignorance of the language he was helpless in their hands, but had kept him a prisoner, and had endeavoured by cruelty and starvation to make him sign away his own and his sister's property. They had kept him in the house without the girl's knowledge, and the plaster over the face had been for the purpose of making recognition difficult in case she should ever catch a glimpse of him. Her feminine perception, however, had instantly seen through the disguise when, on the occasion of the interpreter's visit, she had seen him for the first time. The poor girl, however, was herself a prisoner, for there was no one about the house except the man who acted as coachman, and his wife, both of whom were tools of the conspirators. Finding that their secret was out, and that their prisoner was not to be coerced, the two villains with the girl had fled away at a few hours' notice from the furnished house which they had hired, having first, as they thought, taken vengeance both upon the man who had defied and the one who had betrayed them.

Months afterwards a curious newspaper cutting reached us from Buda-Pesth. It told how two Englishmen who had been travelling with a woman had met with a tragic end. They had each been stabbed, it seems, and the Hungarian police were of opinion that they had quarrelled and had inflicted mortal injuries upon each other. Holmes, however, is, I fancy, of a different way of thinking, and holds to this day that, if one could find the Grecian girl, one might learn how the wrongs of herself and her brother came to be avenged.

The Naval Treaty

The July which immediately succeeded my marriage was made memorable by three cases of interest, in which I had the privilege of being associated with Sherlock Holmes and of studying his methods. I find them recorded in my notes under the headings of "The Adventure of the Second Stain," "The Adventure of the Naval Treaty," and "The Adventure of the Tired Captain." The first of these, however, deals with interest of such importance and implicates so many of the first families in the kingdom that for many years it will be impossible to make it public. No case, however, in which Holmes was engaged has ever illustrated the value of his analytical methods so clearly or has impressed those who were associated with him so deeply. I still retain an almost verbatim report of the interview in which he demonstrated the true facts of the case to Monsieur Dubugue of the Paris police, and Fritz von Waldbaum, the well-known specialist of Dantzig, both of whom had wasted their energies upon what proved to be side-issues. The new century will have come, however, before the story can be safely told. Meanwhile I pass on to the second on my list, which promised also at one time to be of national importance, and was marked by several incidents which give it a quite unique character.

During my school-days I had been intimately associated with a lad named Percy Phelps, who was of much the same age as myself, though he was two classes ahead of me. He was a very brilliant boy, and carried away every prize which the school had to offer, finished his exploits by winning a scholarship which sent him on to continue his triumphant career at Cambridge. He was, I remember, extremely well connected, and even when we were all little boys together we knew that his mother's brother was Lord Holdhurst, the great conservative politician. This gaudy relationship did him little good at school. On the contrary, it seemed rather a piquant thing to us to chevy him about the playground and hit him over the shins with a wicket. But it was another thing when he came out into the world. I
heard vaguely that his abilities and the influences which he commanded had won him a good position at the Foreign Office, and then he passed completely out of my mind until the following letter recalled his existence:

Briarbrae, Woking.

MY DEAR WATSON,—

I have no doubt that you can remember "Tadpole" Phelps, who was in the fifth form when you were in the third. It is possible even that you may have heard that through my uncle's influence I obtained a good appointment at the Foreign Office, and that I was in a situation of trust and honour until a horrible misfortune came suddenly to blast my career.

There is no use writing of the details of that dreadful event. In the event of your acceding to my request it is probably that I shall have to narrate them to you. I have only just recovered from nine weeks of brain-fever, and am still exceedingly weak. Do you think that you could bring your friend Mr. Holmes down to see me? I should like to have his opinion of the case, though the authorities assure me that nothing more can be done. Do try to bring him down, and as soon as possible. Every minute seems an hour while I live in this state of horrible suspense. Assure him that if I have not asked his advice sooner it was not because I did not appreciate his talents, but because I have been off my head ever since the blow fell. Now I am clear again, though I dare not think of it too much for fear of a relapse. I am still so weak that I have to write, as you see, by dictating. Do try to bring him.

Your old school-fellow,

PERCY PHELPS.

There was something that touched me as I read this letter, something pitiable in the reiterated appeals to bring Holmes. So moved was I that even had it been a difficult matter I should have tried it, but of course I knew well that Holmes loved his art, so that he was ever as ready to bring his aid as his client could be to receive it. My wife agreed with me that not a moment should be lost in laying the matter before him, and so within an hour of breakfast-time I found myself back once more in the old rooms in Baker Street.

Holmes was seated at his side-table clad in his dressing-gown, and working hard over a chemical investigation. A large curved retort was boiling furiously in the bluish flame of a Bunsen burner, and the distilled drops were condensing into a two-litre measure. My friend hardly glanced up as I entered, and I, seeing that his investigation must be of importance, seated myself in an arm-chair and waited. He dipped into this bottle or that, drawing out a few drops of each with his glass pipette, and finally brought a test-tube containing a solution over to the table. In his right hand he held a slip of litmus-paper.

"You come at a crisis, Watson," said he. "If this paper remains blue, all is well. If it turns red, it means a man's life." He dipped it into the test-tube and it flushed at once into a dull, dirty crimson. "Hum! I thought as much!" he cried. "I will be at your service in an instant, Watson. You will find tobacco in the Persian slipper." He turned to his desk and scribbled off several telegrams, which were handed over to the page-boy. Then he threw himself down into the chair opposite, and drew up his knees until his fingers clasped round his long, thin shins.

"A very commonplace little murder," said he. "You've got something better, I fancy. You are the stormy petrel of crime, Watson. What is it?"

I handed him the letter, which he read with the most concentrated attention.

"It does not tell us very much, does it?" he remarked, as he handed it back to me.

"Hardly anything."

"And yet the writing is of interest."

"But the writing is not his own."

"Precisely. It is a woman's."

"A man's surely," I cried.

"No, a woman's, and a woman of rare character. You see, at the commencement of an investigation it is something to know that your client is in close contact with some one who, for good or evil, has an exceptional nature. My interest is already awakened in the case. If you are ready we will start at once for Woking, and see this diplomatist who is in such evil case, and the lady to whom he dictates his letters."

We were fortunate enough to catch an early train at Waterloo, and in a little under an hour we found ourselves among the fir-woods and the heather of Woking. Briarbrae proved to be a large detached house standing in extensive grounds within a few minutes' walk of the station. On sending in our cards we were shown into an elegantly appointed drawing-room, where we were joined in a few minutes by a rather stout man who received us with much hospitality. His age may have been nearer forty than thirty, but his cheeks were so ruddy and his eyes so merry that he still conveyed the impression of a plump and mischievous boy.

"I am so glad that you have come," said he, shaking our hands with effusion. "Percy has been inquiring for you all morning. Ah, poor old chap, he clings to any straw! His father and his mother asked me to see you, for the mere mention of the subject is very painful to them."
"We have had no details yet," observed Holmes. "I perceive that you are not yourself a member of the family."

Our acquaintance looked surprised, and then, glancing down, he began to laugh.

"Of course you saw the J H monogram on my locket," said he. "For a moment I thought you had done something clever. Joseph Harrison is my name, and as Percy is to marry my sister Annie I shall at least be a relation by marriage. You will find my sister in his room, for she has nursed him hand-and-foot this two months back. Perhaps we'd better go in at once, for I know how impatient he is."

The chamber in which we were shown was on the same floor as the drawing-room. It was furnished partly as a sitting and partly as a bedroom, with flowers arranged daintily in every nook and corner. A young man, very pale and worn, was lying upon a sofa near the open window, through which came the rich scent of the garden and the balmy summer air. A woman was sitting beside him, who rose as we entered.

"Shall I leave, Percy?" she asked.

He clutched her hand to detain her. "How are you, Watson?" said he, cordially. "I should never have known you under that moustache, and I dare say you would not be prepared to swear to me. This I presume is your celebrated friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"

I introduced him in a few words, and we both sat down. The stout young man had left us, but his sister still remained with her hand in that of the invalid. She was a striking-looking woman, a little short and thick for symmetry, but with a beautiful olive complexion, large, dark, Italian eyes, and a wealth of deep black hair. Her rich tints made the white face of her companion the more worn and haggard by the contrast.

"I won't waste your time," said he, raising himself upon the sofa. "I'll plunge into the matter without further preamble. I was a happy and successful man, Mr. Holmes, and on the eve of being married, when a sudden and dreadful misfortune wrecked all my prospects in life."

"I was, as Watson may have told you, in the Foreign Office, and through the influences of my uncle, Lord Holdhurst, I rose rapidly to a responsible position. When my uncle became foreign minister in this administration he gave me several missions of trust, and as I always brought them to a successful conclusion, he came at last to have the utmost confidence in my ability and tact."

"Nearly ten weeks ago--to be more accurate, on the 23d of May--he called me into his private room, and, after complimenting me on the good work which I had done, he informed me that he had a new commission of trust for me to execute."

"This,' said he, taking a grey roll of paper from his bureau, 'is the original of that secret treaty between England and Italy of which, I regret to say, some rumours have already got into the public press. It is of enormous importance that nothing further should leak out. The French or the Russian embassy would pay an immense sum to learn the contents of these papers. They should not leave my bureau were it not that it is absolutely necessary to have them copied. You have a desk in your office?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then take the treaty and lock it up there. I shall give directions that you may remain behind when the others go, so that you may copy it at your leisure without fear of being overlooked. When you have finished, relock both the original and the draft in the desk, and hand them over to me personally to-morrow morning."

"I took the papers and--"

"Excuse me an instant," said Holmes. "Were you alone during this conversation?"

"Absolutely."

"In a large room?"

"Thirty feet each way."

"In the centre?"

"Yes, about it."

"And speaking low?"

"My uncle's voice is always remarkably low. I hardly spoke at all."

"Thank you," said Holmes, shutting his eyes; "pray go on."

"I did exactly what he indicated, and waited until the other clerks had departed. One of them in my room, Charles Gorot, had some arrears of work to make up, so I left him there and went out to dine. When I returned he was gone. I was anxious to hurry my work, for I knew that Joseph--the Mr. Harrison whom you saw just now--was in town, and that he would travel down to Woking by the eleven-o'clock train, and I wanted if possible to catch it."

"When I came to examine the treaty I saw at once that it was of such importance that my uncle had been guilty of no exaggeration in what he had said. Without going into details, I may say that it defined the position of Great Britain towards the Triple Alliance, and fore-shadowed the policy which this country would pursue in the event of the French fleet gaining a complete ascendancy over that of Italy in the Mediterranean. The questions treated in it were purely naval. At the end were the signatures of the high dignitaries who had signed it. I glanced my eyes over
it, and then settled down to my task of copying.

"It was a long document, written in the French language, and containing twenty-six separate articles. I copied as quickly as I could, but at nine o'clock I had only done nine articles, and it seemed hopeless for me to attempt to catch my train. I was feeling drowsy and stupid, partly from my dinner and also from the effects of a long day's work. A cup of coffee would clear my brain. A commissionaire remains all night in a little lodge at the foot of the stairs, and is in the habit of making coffee at his spirit-lamp for any of the officials who may be working over time. I rang the bell, therefore, to summon him.

"To my surprise, it was a woman who answered the summons, a large, coarse-faced, elderly woman, in an apron. She explained that she was the commissionaire's wife, who did the charring, and I gave her the order for the coffee.

"I wrote two more articles and then, feeling more drowsy than ever, I rose and walked up and down the room to stretch my legs. My coffee had not yet come, and I wondered what was the cause of the delay could be. Opening the door, I started down the corridor to find out. There was a straight passage, dimly lighted, which led from the room in which I had been working, and was the only exit from it. It ended in a curving staircase, with the commissionaire's lodge in the passage at the bottom. Half way down this staircase is a small landing, with another passage running into it at right angles. This second one leads by means of a second small stair to a side door, used by servants, and also as a short cut by clerks when coming from Charles Street. Here is a rough chart of the place."

"Thank you. I think that I quite follow you," said Sherlock Holmes.

"It is of the utmost importance that you should notice this point. I went down the stairs and into the hall, where I found the commissionaire fast asleep in his box, with the kettle boiling furiously upon the spirit-lamp. I took off the kettle and blew out the lamp, for the water was spurting over the floor. Then I put out my hand and was about to shake the man, who was still sleeping soundly, when a bell over his head rang loudly, and he woke with a start.

"'Mr. Phelps, sir!' said he, looking at me in bewilderment.

"'I came down to see if my coffee was ready.'

"'I was boiling the kettle when I fell asleep, sir.' He looked at me and then up at the still quivering bell with an ever-growing astonishment upon his face.

"'If you was here, sir, then who rang the bell?' he asked.

"'The bell!' I cried. 'What bell is it?'

"'It's the bell of the room you were working in.'

"A cold hand seemed to close round my heart. Some one, then, was in that room where my precious treaty lay upon the table. I ran frantically up the stair and along the passage. There was no one in the corridors, Mr. Holmes. All was exactly as I left it, save only that the papers which had been committed to my care had been taken from the desk on which they lay. The copy was there, and the original was gone."

Holmes sat up in his chair and rubbed his hands. I could see that the problem was entirely to his heart. "Pray, what did you do then?" he murmured.

"I recognised in an instant that the thief must have come up the stairs from the side door. Of course I must have met him if he had come the other way."

"You were satisfied that he could not have been concealed in the room all the time, or in the corridor which you have just described as dimly lighted?"

"It is absolutely impossible. A rat could not conceal himself either in the room or the corridor. There is no cover at all."

"Thank you. Pray proceed."

"The commissionaire, seeing by my pale face that something was to be feared, had followed me upstairs. Now we both rushed along the corridor and down the steep steps which led to Charles Street. The door at the bottom was closed, but unlocked. We flung it open and rushed out. I can distinctly remember that as we did so there came three chimes from a neighbouring clock. It was quarter to ten."

"That is of enormous importance," said Holmes, making a note upon his shirt-cuff.

"The night was very dark, and a thin, warm rain was falling. There was no one in Charles Street, but a great traffic was going on, as usual, in Whitehall, at the extremity. We rushed along the pavement, bare-headed as we were, and at the far corner we found a policeman standing.

"'A robbery has been committed,' I gasped. 'A document of immense value has been stolen from the Foreign Office. Has any one passed this way?'

"'I have been standing here for a quarter of an hour, sir,' said he; 'only one person has passed during that time--a woman, tall and elderly, with a Paisley shawl.'

"'Ah, that is only my wife,' cried the commissionaire; 'has no one else passed?'

"'No one.'

"'Then it must be the other way that the thief took,' cried the fellow, tugging at my sleeve.
"'But I was not satisfied, and the attempts which he made to draw me away increased my suspicions.

"'Which way did the woman go?' I cried.

"'I don't know, sir. I noticed her pass, but I had no special reason for watching her. She seemed to be in a hurry.'

"'How long ago was it?'

"'Oh, not very many minutes.'

"'Within the last vie?'

"'Well, it could not be more than five.'

"'You're only wasting your time, sir, and every minute now is of importance,' cried the commissionnaire; 'take my word for it that my old woman has nothing to do with it, and come down to the other end of the street. Well, if you won't, I will.' And with that he rushed off in the other direction.

"'But I was after him in an instant and caught him by the sleeve.

"'Where do you live?' said I.

"'16 Ivy Lane, Brixton,' he answered. 'But don't let yourself be drawn away upon a false scent, Mr. Phelps. Come to the other end of the street and let us see if we can hear of anything.'

"'Nothing was to be lost by following his advice. With the policeman we both hurried down, but only to find the street full of traffic, many people coming and going, but all only too eager to get to a place of safety upon so wet a night. There was no lounger who could tell us who had passed.

"'Then we returned to the office, and searched the stairs and the passage without result. The corridor which led to the room was laid down with a kind of creamy linoleum which shows an impression very easily. We examined it very carefully, but found no outline of any footprint.'

"'Had it been raining all evening?'

"'Since about seven.'

"'How is it, then, that the woman who came into the room about nine left no traces with her muddy boots?'

"'I am glad you raised the point. It occurred to me at the time. The charwomen are in the habit of taking off their boots at the commissionnaire's office, and putting on list slippers.'

"That is very clear. There were no marks, then, though the night was a wet one? The chain of events is certainly one of extraordinary interest. What did you do next?

"'We examined the room also. There is no possibility of a secret door, and the windows are quite thirty feet from the ground. Both of them were fastened on the inside. The carpet prevents any possibility of a trap-door, and the ceiling is of the ordinary whitewashed kind. I will pledge my life that whoever stole my papers could only have come through the door.'

"'How about the fireplace?'

"'They use none. There is a stove. The bell-rope hangs from the wire just to the right of my desk. Whoever rang it must have come right up to the desk to do it. But why should any criminal wish to ring the bell? It is a most insoluble mystery.'

"'Certainly the incident was unusual. What were your next steps? You examined the room, I presume, to see if the intruder had left any traces--any cigar-end or dropped glove or hairpin or other trifle?'

"'There was nothing of the sort.'

"'No smell?'

"'Well, we never thought of that.'

"'Ah, a scent of tobacco would have been worth a great deal to us in such an investigation.'

"I never smoke myself, so I think I should have observed it if there had been any smell of tobacco. There was absolutely no clue of any kind. The only tangible fact was that the commissionnaire's wife-Mrs. Tangey was the name--had hurried our of the place. He could give no explanation save that it was about the time when the woman always went home. The policeman and I agreed that our best plan would be to seize the woman before she could get rid of the papers, presuming that she had them.

"The alarm had reached Scotland Yard by this time, and Mr. Forbes, the detective, came round at once and took up the case with a great deal of energy. We hire a hansom, and in half an hour we were at the address which had been given to us. A young woman opened the door, who proved to be Mrs. Tangey's eldest daughter. Her mother had not come back yet, and we were shown into the front room to wait.

"About ten minutes later a knock came at the door, and here we made the one serious mistake for which I blame myself. Instead of opening the door ourselves, we allowed the girl to do so. We heard her say, 'Mother, there are two men in the house waiting to see you,' and an instant afterwards we heard the patter of feet rushing down the passage. Forbes flung open the door, and we both ran into the back room or kitchen, but the woman had got there before us. She stared at us with defiant eyes, and then, suddenly recognising me, an expression of absolute astonishment came over her face.
"'Why, if it isn't Mr. Phelps, of the office!' she cried.

"'Come, come, who did you think we were when you ran away from us?' asked my companion.

"'I thought you were the brokers,' said she, 'we have had some trouble with a tradesman.'

"'That's not quite good enough,' answered Forbes. 'We have reason to believe that you have taken a paper of importance from the Foreign Office, and that you ran in here to dispose of it. You must come back with us to Scotland Yard to be searched.'

"It was in vain that she protested and resisted. A four-wheeler was brought, and we all three drove back in it. We had first made an examination of the kitchen, and especially of the kitchen fire, to see whether she might have made away with the papers during the instant that she was alone. There were no signs, however, of any ashes or scraps. When we reached Scotland Yard she was handed over at once to the female searcher. I waited in an agony of suspense until she came back with her report. There were no signs of the papers.

"Then for the first time the horror of my situation came in its full force. Hitherto I had been acting, and action had numbed thought. I had been so confident of regaining the treaty at once that I had not dared to think of what would be the consequence if I failed to do so. But now there was nothing more to be done, and I had leisure to realise my position. It was horrible. Watson there would tell you that I was a nervous, sensitive boy at school. It is my nature. I thought of my uncle and of his colleagues in the Cabinet, of the shame which I had brought upon him, upon myself, upon every one connected with me. What though I was the victim of an extraordinary accident? No allowance is made for accidents where diplomatic interests are at stake. I was ruined, shamefully, hopelessly ruined. I don't know what I did. I fancy I must have made a scene. I have a dim recollection of a group of officials who crowded round me, endeavouring to soothe me. One of them drove down with me to Waterloo, and saw me into the Woking train. I believe that he would have come all the way had it not been that Dr. Ferrier, who lives near me, was going down by that very train. The doctor most kindly took charge of me, and it was well he did so, for I had a fit in the station, and before we reached home I was practically a raving maniac.

"You can imagine the state of things here when they were roused from their beds by the doctor's ringing and found me in this condition. Poor Annie here and my mother were broken-hearted. Dr. Ferrier had just heard enough from the detective at the station to be able to give an idea of what had happened, and his story did not mend matters. It was evident to all that I was in for a long illness, so Joseph was bundled out of this cheery bedroom, and it was turned into a sick-room for me. Here I have lain, Mr. Holmes, for over nine weeks, unconscious, and raving with brain-fever. If it had not been for Miss Harrison here and for the doctor's care I should not be speaking to you now. She has nursed me by day and a hired nurse has looked after me by night, for in my mad fits I was capable of anything. Slowly my reason has cleared, but it is only during the last three days that my memory has quite returned. Sometimes I wish that it never had. The first thing that I did was to write to Mr. Forbes, who had the case in hand. He came out, and assures me that, though everything has been done, no trace of a clue has been discovered. The commissionnaire and his wife have been examined in every way without any light being thrown upon the matter. The suspicions of the police then rested upon young Gorot, who, as you may remember, stayed over time in the office that night. His remaining behind and is French name were really the only two points which could suggest suspicion; but, as a matter of fact, I did not begin work until he had gone, and his people are of Huguenot extraction, but as English in sympathy and tradition as you and I are. Nothing was found to implicate him in any way, and there the matter dropped. I turn to you, Mr. Holmes, as absolutely my last hope. If you fail me, then my honour as well as my position are forever forfeited."

The invalid sank back upon his cushions, tired out by this long recital, while his nurse poured him out a glass of some stimulating medicine. Holmes sat silently, with his head thrown back and his eyes closed, in an attitude which might seem listless to a stranger, but which I knew betokened the most intense self-absorption.

"Your statement has been so explicit," said he at last, "that you have really left me very few questions to ask. There is one of the very utmost importance, however. Did you tell any one that you had this special task to perform?"

"No one."

"Not Miss Harrison here, for example?"

"No. I had not been back to Woking between getting the order and executing the commission."

"And none of your people had by chance been to see you?"

"None."

"Did any of them know their way about in the office?"

"Oh, yes, all of them had been shown over it."

"Still, of course, if you said nothing to any one about the treaty these inquiries are irrelevant."

"I said nothing."

"Do you know anything of the commissionnaire?"
"Nothing except that he is an old soldier."
"What regiment?"
"Oh, I have heard--Coldstream Guards."
"Thank you. I have no doubt I can get details from Forbes. The authorities are excellent at amassing facts, though they do not always use them to advantage. What a lovely thing a rose is!"

He walked past the couch to the open window, and held up the drooping stalk of a moss-rose, looking down at the dainty blend of crimson and green. It was a new phase of his character to me, for I had never before seen him show any keen interest in natural objects.

"There is nothing in which deduction is so necessary as in religion," said he, leaning with his back against the shutters. "It can be built up as an exact science by the reasoner. Our highest assurance of the goodness of Providence seems to me to rest in the flowers. All other things, our powers our desires, our food, are all really necessary for our existence in the first instance. But this rose is an extra. Its smell and its colour are an embellishment of life, not a condition of it. It is only goodness which gives extras, and so I say again that we have much to hope from the flowers.

Percy Phelps and his nurse looked at Holmes during this demonstration with surprise and a good deal of disappointment written upon their faces. He had fallen into a reverie, with the moss-rose between his fingers. It had lasted some minutes before the young lady broke in upon it.

"Do you see any prospect of solving this mystery, Mr. Holmes?" she asked, with a touch of asperity in her voice.

"Oh, the mystery!" he answered, coming back with a start to the realities of life. "Well, it would be absurd to deny that the case is a very abstruse and complicated one, but I can promise you that I will look into the matter and let you know any points which may strike me."

"Do you see any clue?"
"You have furnished me with seven, but, of course, I must test them before I can pronounce upon their value."
"You suspect some one?"
"I suspect myself."
"What!"
"Of coming to conclusions to rapidly."
"Then go to London and test your conclusions."
"Your advice is very excellent, Miss Harrison," said Holmes, rising. "I think, Watson, we cannot do better. Do not allow yourself to indulge in false hopes, Mr. Phelps. The affair is a very tangled one."

"I shall be in a fever until I see you again," cried the diplomatist.

"Well, I'll come out be the same train to-morrow, though it's more than likely that my report will be a negative one."

"God bless you for promising to come," cried our client. "It gives me fresh life to know that something is being done. By the way, I have had a letter from Lord Holdhurst."

"Ha! What did he say?"
"He was cold, but not harsh. I dare say my severe illness prevented him from being that. He repeated that the matter was of the utmost importance, and added that no steps would be taken about my future--by which he means, of course, my dismissal--until my health was restored and I had an opportunity of repairing my misfortune."

"Well, that was reasonable and considerate," said Holmes. "Come, Watson, for we have a goody day's work before us in town."

Mr. Joseph Harrison drove us down to the station, and we were soon whirling up in a Portsmouth train. Holmes was sunk in profound thought, and hardly opened his mouth until we had passed Clapham Junction.

"It's a very cheery thing to come into London by any of these lines which run high, and allow you to look down upon the houses like this."

I thought he was joking, for the view was sordid enough, but he soon explained himself.

"Look at those big, isolated clumps of building rising up above the slates, like brick islands in a lead-coloured sea."

"The board-schools."

"Light-houses, my boy! Beacons of the future! Capsules with hundreds of bright little seeds in each, out of which will spring the wise, better England of the future. I suppose that man Phelps does not drink?"

"I should not think so."

"Nor should I, but we are bound to take every possibility into account. The poor devil has certainly got himself into very deep water, and it's a question whether we shall ever be able to get him ashore. What did you think of Miss Harrison?"

"A girl of strong character."
"Yes, but she is a good sort, or I am mistaken. She and her brother are the only children of an iron-master somewhere up Northumberland way. He got engaged to her when travelling last winter, and she came down to be introduced to his people, with her brother as escort. Then came the smash, and she stayed on to nurse her lover, while brother Joseph, finding himself pretty snug, stayed on too. I've been making a few independent inquiries, you see. But to-day must be a day of inquiries."

"My practice--" I began.
"Oh, if you find your own cases more interesting than mine--" said Holmes, with some asperity.
"I was going to say that my practice could get along very well for a day or two, since it is the slackest time in the year."

"Excellent," said he, recovering his good-humour. "Then we'll look into this matter together. I think that we should begin be seeing Forbes. He can probably tell us all the details we want until we know from what side the case is to be approached."

"You said you had a clue?"

"Well, we have several, but we can only test their value by further inquiry. The most difficult crime to track is the one which is purposeless. Now this is not purposeless. Who is it who profits by it? There is the French ambassador, there is the Russian, there is who-ever might sell it to either of these, and there is Lord Holdhurst."

"Lord Holdhurst!"

"Well, it is just conceivable that a statesman might find himself in a position where he was not sorry to have such a document accidentally destroyed."

"Not a statesman wit the honourable record of Lord Holdhurst?"

"It is a possibility and we cannot afford to disregard it. We shall see the noble lord to-day and find out if he can tell us anything. Meanwhile I have already set inquiries on foot."

"Already?"

"Yes, I sent wires from Woking station to every evening paper in London. This advertisement will appear in each of them."

He handed over a sheet torn from a note-book. On it was scribbled in pencil: "L10 reward. The number of the cab which dropped a fare at or about the door of the Foreign Office in Charles Street at quarter to ten in the evening of May 23d. Apply 221 B, Baker Street."

"You are confident that the thief came in a cab?"

"If not, there is no harm done. But if Mr. Phelps is correct in stating that there is no hiding-place either in the room or the corridors, then the person must have come from outside. If he came from outside on so wet a night, and yet left no trace of damp upon the linoleum, which was examined within a few minutes of his passing, then it is exceeding probably that he came in a cab. Yes, I think that we may safely deduce a cab."

"It sounds plausible."

"That is one of the clues of which I spoke. It may lead us to something. And then, of course, there is the bell--which is the most distinctive feature of the case. Why should the bell ring? Was it the thief who did it out of bravado? Or was it some one who was with the thief who did it in order to prevent the crime? Or was it an accident? Or was it--?" He sank back into the state of intense and silent thought from which he had emerged; but it seemed to me, accustomed as I was to his every mood, that some new possibility had dawned suddenly upon him.

It was twenty past three when we reached our terminus, and after a hasty luncheon at the buffet we pushed on at once to Scotland Yard. Holmes had already wired to Forbes, and we found him waiting to receive us--a small, foxy man with a sharp but by no means amiable expression. He was decidedly frigid in his manner to us, especially when he heard the errand upon which we had come.

"I've heard of your methods before now, Mr. Holmes," said he, tartly. "You are ready enough to use all the information that the police can lay at your disposal, and then you try to finish the case yourself and bring discredit on them."

"On the contrary," said Holmes, "out of my last fifty-three cases my name has only appeared in four, and the police have had all the credit in forty-nine. I don't blame you for not knowing this, for you are young and inexperienced, but if you wish to get on in your new duties you will work with me and not against me."

"I'd be very glad of a hint or two," said the detective, changing his manner. "I've certainly had no credit from the case so far."

"What steps have you taken?"

"Tangey, the commissionaire, has been shadowed. He left the Guards with a good character and we can find nothing against him. His wife is a bad lot, though. I fancy she knows more about this than appears."

"Have you shadowed her?"

"We have set one of our women on to her. Mrs. Tangey drinks, and our woman has been with her twice when
"She was well on, but she could get nothing out of her."
"I understand that they have had brokers in the house?"
"Yes, but they were paid off."
"Where did the money come from?"
"That was all right. His pension was due. They have not shown any sign of being in funds."
"What explanation did she give of having answered the bell when Mr. Phelps rang for the coffee?"
"She said that he husband was very tired and she wished to relieve him."
"Well, certainly that would agree with his being found a little later asleep in his chair. There is nothing against
them then but the woman's character. Did you ask her why she hurried away that night? Her haste attracted the
attention of the police constable."
"She was later than usual and wanted to get home."
"Did you point out to her that you and Mr. Phelps, who started at least twenty minutes after he, got home before
her?"
"She explains that by the difference between a 'bus and a hansom."
"Did she make it clear why, on reaching her house, she ran into the back kitchen?"
"Because she had the money there with which to pay off the brokers."
"She has at least an answer for everything. Did you ask her whether in leaving she met any one or saw any one
loitering about Charles Street?"
"She saw no one but the constable."
"Well, you seem to have cross-examined her pretty thoroughly. What else have you done?"
"The clerk Gorot has been shadowed all these nine weeks, but without result. We can show nothing against
him."
"Anything else?"
"Well, we have nothing else to go upon--no evidence of any kind."
"Have you formed a theory about how that bell rang?"
"Well, I must confess that it beats me. It was a cool hand, whoever it was, to go and give the alarm like that."
"Yes, it was queer thing to do. Many thanks to you for what you have told me. If I can put the man into your
hands you shall hear from me. Come along, Watson."
"Where are we going to now?" I asked, as we left the office.
"We are now going to interview Lord Holdhurst, the cabinet minister and future premier of England."
We were fortunate in finding that Lord Holdhurst was still in his chambers in Downing Street, and on Holmes
sending in his card we were instantly shown up. The statesman received us with that old-fashioned courtesy for
which he is remarkable, and seated us on the two luxuriant lounges on either side of the fireplace. Standing on the
run between us, with his slight, tall figure, his sharp features, thoughtful face, and curling hair prematurely tinged
with grey, he seemed to represent that not to common type, a nobleman who is in truth noble.
"You name is very familiar to me, Mr. Holmes," said he, smiling. "And, of course, I cannot pretend to be
ignorant of the object of your visit. There has only been once occurrence in these offices which could call for your
attention. In whose interest are you acting, may I ask?"
"In that of Mr. Percy Phelps," answered Holmes.
"Ah, my unfortunate nephew! You can understand that our kinship makes it the more impossible for me to
screen him in any way. I fear that the incident must have a very prejudicial effect upon his career."
"But if the document if found?"
"Ah, that, of course, would be different."
"I had one or two questions which I wished to ask you, Lord Holdhurst."
"I shall be happy to give you any information in my power."
"Was it in this room that you gave your instructions as to the copying of the document?"
"It was."
"Then you could hardly have been overheard?"
"It is out of the question."
"Did you ever mention to any one that it was your intention to give any one the treaty to be copied?"
"Never."
"You are certain of that?"
"Absolutely."
"Well, since you never said so, and Mr. Phelps never said so, and nobody else knew anything of the matter, then
the thief's presence in the room was purely accidental. He saw his chance and he took it."
The statesman smiled. "You take me out of my province there," said he.
Holmes considered for a moment. "There is another very important point which I wish to discuss with you," said he. "You feared, as I understand, that very grave results might follow from the details of this treaty becoming known."

A shadow passed over the expressive face of the statesman. "Very grave results indeed."

"Any have they occurred?"

"Not yet."

"If the treaty had reached, let us say, the French or Russian Foreign Office, you would expect to hear of it?"

"I should," said Lord Holdhurst, with a wry face.

"Since nearly ten weeks have elapsed, then, and nothing has been heard, it is not unfair to suppose that for some reason the treaty has not reached them."

Lord Holdhurst shrugged his shoulders.

"We can hardly suppose, Mr. Holmes, that the thief took the treaty in order to frame it and hang it up."

"Perhaps he is waiting for a better price."

"If he waits a little longer he will get no price at all. The treaty will cease to be secret in a few months."

"That is most important," said Holmes. "Of course, it is a possible supposition that the thief has had a sudden illness--"

"An attack of brain-fever, for example?" asked the statesman, flashing a swift glance at him.

"I did not say so," said Holmes, imperturbably. "And now, Lord Holdhurst, we have already taken up too much of your valuable time, and we shall wish you good-day."

"Every success to your investigation, be the criminal who it may," answered the nobleman, as he bowed us out the door.

"He's a fine fellow," said Holmes, as we came out into Whitehall. "But he has a struggle to keep up his position. He is far from rich and has many calls. You noticed, of course, that his boots had been resoled. Now, Watson, I won't detain you from your legitimate work any longer. I shall do nothing more to-day, unless I have an answer to my cab advertisement. But I should be extremely obliged to you if you would come down with me to Woking to-morrow, by the same train which we took yesterday."

I met him accordingly next morning and we travelled down to Woking together. He had had no answer to his advertisement, he said, and no fresh light had been thrown upon the case. He had, when he so willed it, the utter immobility of countenance of a red Indian, and I could not gather from his appearance whether he was satisfied or not with the position of the case. His conversation, I remember, was about the Bertillon system of measurements, and he expressed his enthusiastic admiration of the French savant.

We found our client still under the charge of his devoted nurse, but looking considerably better than before. He rose from the sofa and greeted us without difficulty when we entered.

"Any news?" he asked, eagerly.

"My report, as I expected, is a negative one," said Holmes. "I have seen Forbes, and I have seen your uncle, and I have set one or two trains of inquiry upon foot which may lead to something."

"You have not lost heart, then?"

"By no means."

"God bless you for saying that!" cried Miss Harrison. "If we keep our courage and our patience the truth must come out."

"We have more to tell you than you have for us," said Phelps, reseating himself upon the couch.

"I hoped you might have something."

"Yes, we have had an adventure during the night, and one which might have proved to be a serious one." His expression grew very grave as he spoke, and a look of something akin to fear sprang up in his eyes. "Do you know," said he, "that I begin to believe that I am the unconscious centre of some monstrous conspiracy, and that my life is aimed at as well as my honour?"

"Ah!" cried Holmes.

"It sounds incredible, for I have not, as far as I know, an enemy in the world. Yet from last night's experience I can come to no other conclusion."

"Pray let me hear it."

"You must know that last night was the very first night that I have ever slept without a nurse in the room. I was so much better that I thought I could dispense with one. I had a night-light burning, however. Well, about two in the morning I had sunk into a light sleep when I was suddenly aroused by a slight noise. It was like the sound which a mouse makes when it is gnawing a plank, and I lay listening to it for some time under the impression that it must come from that cause. Then it grew louder, and suddenly there came from the window a sharp metallic snick. I sat up in amazement. There could be no doubt what the sounds were now. The first ones had been caused by some one
forcing an instrument through the slit between the sashes, and the second by the catch being pressed back.

"There was a pause then for about ten minutes, as if the person were waiting to see whether the noise had awakened me. Then I heard a gentle creaking as the window was very slowly opened. I could stand it no longer, for my nerves are not what they used to be. I sprang out of bed and flung open the shutters. A man was crouching at the window. I could see little of him, for he was gone like a flash. He was wrapped in some sort of cloak which came across the lower part of his face. One thing only I am sure of, and that is that he had some weapon in his hand. It looked to me like a long knife. I distinctly saw the gleam of it as he turned to run."

"This is most interesting," said Holmes. "Pray what did you do then?"

"I should have followed him through the open window if I had been stronger. As it was, I rang the bell and roused the house. It took me some little time, for the bell rings in the kitchen and the servants all sleep upstairs. I shouted, however, and that brought Joseph down, and he roused the others. Joseph and the groom found marks on the bed outside the window, but the weather has been so dry lately that they found it hopeless to follow the trail across the grass. There's a place, however, on the wooden fence which skirts the road which shows signs, they tell me, as if some one had got over, and had snapped the top of the rail in doing so. I have said nothing to the local police yet, for I thought I had best have your opinion first."

This tale of our client's appeared to have an extraordinary effect upon Sherlock Holmes. He rose from his chair and paced about the room in uncontrollable excitement.

"Misfortunes never come single," said Phelps, smiling, though it was evident that his adventure had somewhat shaken him.

"You have certainly had your share," said Holmes. "Do you think you could walk round the house with me?"

"Oh, yes, I should like a little sunshine. Joseph will come, too."

"And I also," said Miss Harrison.

"I am afraid not," said Holmes, shaking his head. "I think I must ask you to remain sitting exactly where you are."

The young lady resumed her seat with an air of displeasure. Her brother, however, had joined us and we set off all four together. We passed round the lawn to the outside of the young diplomatist's window. There were, as he had said, marks upon the bed, but they were hopelessly blurred and vague. Holmes stopped over them for an instant, and then rose shrugging his shoulders.

"I don't think any one could make much of this," said he. "Let us go round the house and see why this particular room was chose by the burglar. I should have thought those larger windows of the drawing-room and dining-room would have had more attractions for him."

"They are more visible from the road," suggested Mr. Joseph Harrison.

"Ah, yes, of course. There is a door here which he might have attempted. What is it for?"

"It is the side entrance for trades-people. Of course it is locked at night."

"Have you ever had an alarm like this before?"

"Never," said our client.

"Do you keep plate in the house, or anything to attract burglars?"

"Nothing of value."

Holmes strolled round the house with his hands in his pockets and a negligent air which was unusual with him.

"By the way," said he to Joseph Harrison, "you found some place, I understand, where the fellow scaled the fence. Let us have a look at that!"

The plump young man led us to a spot where the top of one of the wooden rails had been cracked. A small fragment of the wood was hanging down. Holmes pulled it off and examined it critically.

"Do you think that was done last night? It looks rather old, does it not?"

"Well, possibly so."

"There are no marks of any one jumping down upon the other side. No, I fancy we shall get no help here. Let us go back to the bedroom and talk the matter over."

Percy Phelps was walking very slowly, leaning upon the arm of his future brother-in-law. Holmes walked swiftly across the lawn, and we were at the open window of the bedroom long before the others came up.

"Miss Harrison," said Holmes, speaking with the utmost intensity of manner, "you must stay where you are all day. Let nothing prevent you from staying where you are all day. It is of the utmost importance."

"Certainly, if you wish it, Mr. Holmes," said the girl in astonishment.

"When you go to bed lock the door of this room on the outside and keep the key. Promise to do this."

"But Percy?"

"He will come to London with us."

"And am I to remain here?"
"It is for his sake. You can serve him. Quick! Promise!"
She gave a quick nod of assent just as the other two came up.
"Why do you sit moping there, Annie?" cried her brother. "Come out into the sunshine!"
"No, thank you, Joseph. I have a slight headache and this room is deliciously cool and soothing."
"What do you propose now, Mr. Holmes?" asked our client.
"Well, in investigating this minor affair we must not lose sight of our main inquiry. It would be a very great help to me if you would come up to London with us."
"At once?"
"Well, as soon as you conveniently can. Say in an hour."
"I feel quite strong enough, if I can really be of any help."
"The greatest possible."
"Perhaps you would like me to stay there to-night?"
"I was just going to propose it."
"Then, if my friend of the night comes to revisit me, he will find the bird flown. We are all in your hands, Mr. Holmes, and you must tell us exactly what you would like done. Perhaps you would prefer that Joseph came with us so as to look after me?"
"Oh, no; my friend Watson is a medical man, you know, and he'll look after you. We'll have our lunch here, if you will permit us, and then we shall all three set off for town together."
It was arranged as he suggested, though Miss Harrison excused herself from leaving the bedroom, in accordance with Holmes's suggestion. What the object of my friend's manoeuvres was I could not conceive, unless it were to keep the lady away from Phelps, who, rejoiced by his returning health and by the prospect of action, lunched with us in the dining-room. Holmes had still more startling surprise for us, however, for, after accompanying us down to the station and seeing us into our carriage, he calmly announced that he had no intention of leaving Woking.
"There are one or two small points which I should desire to clear up before I go," said he. "Your absence, Mr. Phelps, will in some ways rather assist me. Watson, when you reach London you would oblige me by driving at once to Baker Street with our friend here, and remaining with him until I see you again. It is fortunate that you are old school-fellows, as you must have much to talk over. Mr. Phelps can have the spare bedroom to-night, and I will be with you in time for breakfast, for there is a train which will take me into Waterloo at eight."
"But how about our investigation in London?" asked Phelps, ruefully.
"We can do that to-morrow. I think that just at present I can be of more immediate use here."
"You might tell them at Briarbrae that I hope to be back to-morrow night," cried Phelps, as we began to move from the platform.
"I hardly expect to go back to Briarbrae," answered Holmes, and waved his hand to us cheerily as we shot out from the station.
Phelps and I talked it over on our journey, but neither of us could devise a satisfactory reason for this new development.
"I suppose he wants to find out some clue as to the burglary last night, if a burglar it was. For myself, I don't believe it was an ordinary thief."
"What is your own idea, then?"
"Upon my word, you may put it down to my weak nerves or not, but I believe there is some deep political intrigue going on around me, and that for some reason that passes my understanding my life is aimed at by the conspirators. It sounds high-flown and absurd, but consider the facts! Why should a thief try to break in at a bedroom window, where there could be no hope of any plunder, and why should he come with a long knife in his hand?"
"You are sure it was not a house-breaker's jimmy?"
"Oh, no, it was a knife. I saw the flash of the blade quite distinctly."
"But why on earth should you be pursued with such animosity?"
"Ah, that is the question."
"Well, if Holmes takes the same view, that would account for his action, would it not? Presuming that your theory is correct, if he can lay his hands upon the man who threatened you last night he will have gone a long way towards finding who took the naval treaty. It is absurd to suppose that you have two enemies, one of whom robs you, while the other threatens your life."
"But Holmes said that he was not going to Briarbrae."
"I have known him for some time," said I, "but I never knew him do anything yet without a very good reason," and with that our conversation drifted off on to other topics.
But it was a weary day for me. Phelps was still weak after his long illness, and his misfortune made him querulous and nervous. In vain I endeavoured to interest him in Afghanistan, in India, in social questions, in
anything which might take his mind out of the groove. He would always come back to his lost treaty, wondering, guessing, speculating, as to what Holmes was doing, what steps Lord Holdhurst was taking, what news we should have in the morning. As the evening wore on his excitement became quite painful.

"You have implicit faith in Holmes?" he asked.
"I have seen him do some remarkable things."
"But he never brought light into anything quite so dark as this?"
"Oh, yes; I have known him solve questions which presented fewer clues than yours."
"But not where such large interests are at stake?"
"I don't know that. To my certain knowledge he has acted on behalf of three of the reigning houses of Europe in very vital matters."

"But you know him well, Watson. He is such an inscrutable fellow that I never quite know what to make of him. Do you think he is hopeful? Do you think he expects to make a success of it?"
"He has said nothing."
"That is a bad sign."
"On the contrary, I have noticed that when he is off the trail he generally says so. It is when he is on a scent and is not quite absolutely sure yet that it is the right one that he is most taciturn. Now, my dear fellow, we can't help matter by making ourselves nervous about them, so let me implore you to go to bed and so be fresh for whatever may await us to-morrow."

I was able at last to persuade my companion to take my advice, though I knew from his excited manner that there was not much hope of sleep for him. Indeed, his mood was infectious, for I lay tossing half the night myself, brooding over this strange problem, and inventing a hundred theories, each of which was more impossible than the last. Why had Holmes remained at Woking? Why had he asked Miss Harrison to remain in the sick-room all day? Why had he been so careful not to inform the people at Briarbrae that he intended to remain near them? I cudgelled my brains until I fell asleep in the endeavour to find some explanation which would cover all these facts.

It was seven o'clock when I awoke, and I set off at once for Phelps's room, to find him haggard and spent after a sleepless night. His first question was whether Holmes had arrived yet.

"He'll be here when he promised," said I, "and not an instant sooner or later."
And my words were true, for shortly after eight a hansom dashed up to the door and our friend got out of it. Standing in the window we saw that his left hand was swathed in a bandage and that his face was very grim and pale. He entered the house, but it was some little time before he came upstairs.

"He looks like a beaten man," cried Phelps.
I was forced to confess that he was right. "After all," said I, "the clue of the matter lies probably here in town."

Phelps gave a groan.
"I don't know how it is," said he, "but I had hoped for so much from his return. But surely his hand was not tied up like that yesterday. What can be the matter?"

"You are not wounded, Holmes?" I asked, as my friend entered the room.
"Tut, it is only a scratch through my own clumsiness," he answered, nodding his good-mornings to us. "This case of yours, Mr. Phelps, is certainly one of the darkest which I have ever investigated."
"I feared that you would find it beyond you."
"It has been a most remarkable experience."
"That bandage tells of adventures," said I. "Won't you tell us what has happened?"
"After breakfast, my dear Watson. Remember that I have breathed thirty mile of Surrey air this morning. I suppose that there has been no answer from my cabman advertisement? Well, well, we cannot expect to score every time."

The table was all laid, and just as I was about to ring Mrs. Hudson entered wit the tea and coffee. A few minutes later she brought in three covers, and we all drew up to the table, Holmes ravenous, I curious, and Phelps in the gloomiest state of depression.

"Mrs. Hudson has risen to the occasion," said Holmes, uncovering a dish of curried chicken. "Her cuisine is a little limited, but she has as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotch-woman. What have you here, Watson?"

"Ham and eggs," I answered.
"Good! What are you going to take, Mr. Phelps--curried fowl or eggs, or will you help yourself?"
"Thank you. I can eat nothing," said Phelps.
"Oh, come! Try the dish before you."
"Thank you, I would really rather not."
"Well, then," said Holmes, with a mischievous twinkle, "I suppose that you have no objection to helping me?"

Phelps raised the cover, and as hi did so he uttered a scream, and sat there staring with a face as white as the
plate upon which he looked. Across the centre of it was lying a little cylinder of blue-grey paper. He caught it up, devoured it with his eyes, and then danced madly about the room, passing it to his bosom and shrieking out in his delight. Then he fell back into an arm-chair so limp and exhausted with his own emotions that we had to pour brandy down his throat to keep him from fainting.

"There! there!" said Holmes, soothing, patting him upon the shoulder. "It was too bad to spring it on you like this, but Watson here will tell you that I never can resist a touch of the dramatic."

Phelps seized his hand and kissed it. "God bless you!" he cried. "You have saved my honour."

"Well, my own was at stake, you know," said Holmes. "I assure you it is just as hateful to me to fail in a case as it can be to you to blunder over a commission."

Phelps thrust away the precious document into the innermost pocket of his coat.

"I have not the heart to interrupt your breakfast any further, and yet I am dying to know how you got it and where it was."

Sherlock Holmes swallowed a cup of coffee, and turned his attention to the ham and eggs. Then he rose, lit his pipe, and settled himself down into his chair.

"I'll tell you what I did first, and how I came to do it afterwards," said he. "After leaving you at the station I went for a charming walk through some admirable Surrey scenery to a pretty little village called Ripley, where I had my tea at an inn, and took the precaution of filling my flask and of putting a paper of sandwiches in my pocket. There I remained until evening, when I set off for Woking again, and found myself in the high-road outside Briarbrae just after sunset.

"Well, I waited until the road was clear—it is never a very frequented one at any time, I fancy—and then I clambered over the fence into the grounds."

"Surely the gate was open!" ejaculated Phelps.

"Yes, but I have a peculiar taste in these matters. I chose the place where the three fir-trees stand, and behind their screen I got over without the least chance of any one in the house being able to see me. I crouched down among the bushes on the other side, and crawled from one to the other—witness the disreputable state of my trouser knees—until I had reached the clump of rhododendrons just opposite to your bedroom window. There I squatted down and awaited developments.

"The blind was not down in your room, and I could see Miss Harrison sitting there reading by the table. It was quarter-past ten when she closed her book, fastened the shutters, and retired.

"I heard her shut the door, and felt quite sure that she had turned the key in the lock."

"The key!" ejaculated Phelps.

"Yes; I had given Miss Harrison instructions to lock the door on the outside and take the key with her when she went to bed. She carried out every one of my injunctions to the letter, and certainly without her co-operation you would not have that paper in you coat-pocket. She departed then and the lights went out, and I was left squatting in the rhododendron-bush.

"The night was fine, but still it was a very weary vigil. Of course it has the sort of excitement about it that the sportsman feels when he lies beside the water-course and waits for the big game. It was very long, though—almost as long, Watson, as when you and I waited in that deadly room when we looked into the little problem of the Speckled Band. There was a church-clock down at Woking which struck the quarters, and I thought more than once that it had stopped. At last however about two in the morning, I suddenly heard the gentle sound of a bolt being pushed back and the creaking of a key. A moment later the servant’s door was opened, and Mr. Joseph Harrison stepped out into the moonlight."

"Joseph!" ejaculated Phelps.

"He was bare-headed, but he had a black coat thrown over his shoulder so that he could conceal his face in an instant if there were any alarm. He walked on tiptoe under the shadow of the wall, and when he reached the window he worked a long-bladed knife through the sash and pushed back the catch. Then he flung open the window, and putting his knife through the crack in the shutters, he thrust the bar up and swung them open.

"From where I lay I had a perfect view of the inside of the room and of every one of his movements. He lit the two candles which stood upon the mantelpiece, and then he proceeded to turn back the corner of the carpet in the neighbourhood of the door. Presently he stopped and picked out a square piece of board, such as is usually left to enable plumbers to get at the joints of the gas-pipes. This one covered, as a matter of fact, the T joint which gives off the pipe which supplies the kitchen underneath. Out of this hiding-place he drew that little cylinder of paper, pushed down the board, rearranged the carpet, blew out the candles, and walked straight into my arms as I stood waiting for him outside the window.

"Well, he has rather more viciousness than I gave him credit for, has Master Joseph. He flew at me with his knife, and I had to grass him twice, and got a cut over the knuckles, before I had the upper hand of him. He looked
murder out of the only eye he could see with when we had finished, but he listened to reason and gave up the papers.

Having got them I let my man go, but I wired full particulars to Forbes this morning. If he is quick enough to catch is bird, well and good. But if, as I shrewdly suspect, he finds the nest empty before he gets there, why, all the better for the government. I fancy that Lord Holdhurst for one, and Mr. Percy Phelps for another, would very much rather that the affair never got as far as a police-court.

"My God!" gasped our client. "Do you tell me that during these long ten weeks of agony the stolen papers were within the very room with me all the time?"

"So it was."

"And Joseph! Joseph a villain and a thief!"

"Hum! I am afraid Joseph's character is a rather deeper and more dangerous one than one might judge from his appearance. From what I have heard from him this morning, I gather that he has lost heavily in dabbling with stocks, and that he is ready to do anything on earth to better his fortunes. Being an absolutely selfish man, when a chance presented itself he did not allow either his sister's happiness or your reputation to hold his hand."

Percy Phelps sank back in his chair. "My head whirls," said he. "Your words have dazed me."

"The principal difficulty in your case," remarked Holmes, in his didactic fashion, "lay in the fact of there being too much evidence. What was vital was overlaid and hidden by what was irrelevant. Of all the facts which were presented to us we had to pick just those which we deemed to be essential, and then piece them together in their order, so as to reconstruct this very remarkable chain of events. I had already begun to suspect Joseph, from the fact that you had intended to travel home with him that night, and that therefore it was a likely enough thing that he should call for you, knowing the Foreign Office well, upon his way. When I heard that some one had been so anxious to get into the bedroom, in which no one but Joseph could have concealed anything--you told us in your narrative how you had turned Joseph out when you arrived with the doctor--my suspicions all changed to certainties, especially as the attempt was made on the first night upon which the nurse was absent, showing that the intruder was well acquainted with the ways of the house."

"How blind I have been!"

"The facts of the case, as far as I have worked them out, are these: this Joseph Harrison entered the office through the Charles Street door, and knowing his way he walked straight into your room the instant after you left it. Finding no one there he promptly rang the bell, and at the instant that he did so his eyes caught the paper upon the table. A glance showed him that chance had put in his way a State document of immense value, and in an instant he had thrust it into his pocket and was gone. A few minutes elapsed, as you remember, before the sleepy commissionaire drew your attention to the bell, and those were just enough to give the thief time to make his escape.

"He made his way to Woking by the first train, and having examined his booty and assured himself that it really was of immense value, he had concealed it in what he thought was a very safe place, with the intention of taking it out again in a day or two, and carrying it to the French embassy, or wherever he thought that a long price was to be had. Then came your sudden return. He, without a moment's warning, was bundled out of his room, and from that time onward there were always at least two of you there to prevent him from regaining his treasure. The situation to him must have been a maddening one. But at last he thought he saw his chance. He tried to steal in, but was baffled by your wakefulness. You remember that you did not take your usual draught that night.""

"I remember."

"I fancy that he had taken steps to make that draught efficacious, and that he quite relied upon your being unconscious. Of course, I understood that he would repeat the attempt whenever it could be done with safety. Your leaving the room gave him the chance he wanted. I kept Miss Harrison in it all day so that he might not anticipate us. Then, having given him the idea that the coast was clear, I kept guard as I have described. I already knew that the papers were probably in the room, but I had no desire to rip up all the planking and skirting in search of them. I let him take them, therefore, from the hiding-place, and so saved myself an infinity of trouble. Is there any other point which I can make clear?"

"Why did he try the window on the first occasion," I asked, "when he might have entered by the door?"

"In reaching the door he would have to pass seven bedrooms. On the other hand, he could get out on to the lawn with ease. Anything else?"

"You do not think," asked Phelps, "that he had any murderous intention? The knife was only meant as a tool."

"It may be so," answered Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. "I can only say for certain that Mr. Joseph Harrison is a gentleman to whose mercy I should be extremely unwilling to trust."

The Final Problem

It is with a heavy heart that I take up my pen to write these the last words in which I shall ever record the singular gifts by which my friend Mr. Sherlock Holmes was distinguished. In an incoherent and, as I deeply feel, an
entirely inadequate fashion, I have endeavoured to give some account of my strange experiences in his company from the chance which first brought us together at the period of the "Study in Scarlet," up to the time of his interference in the matter of the "Naval Treaty"--and interference which had the unquestionable effect of preventing a serious international complication. It was my intention to have stopped there, and to have said nothing of that event which has created a void in my life which the lapse of two years has done little to fill. My hand has been forced, however, by the recent letters in which Colonel James Moriarty defends the memory of his brother, and I have no choice but to lay the facts before the public exactly as they occurred. I alone know the absolute truth of the matter, and I am satisfied that the time has come when no good purpose is to be served by its suppression. As far as I know, there have been only three accounts in the public press: that in the Journal de Geneve on May 6th, 1891, the Reuter's despatch in the English papers on May 7th, and finally the recent letter to which I have alluded. Of these the first and second were extremely condensed, while the last is, as I shall now show, an absolute perversion of the facts. It lies with me to tell for the first time what really took place between Professor Moriarty and Mr. Sherlock Holmes.

It may be remembered that after my marriage, and my subsequent start in private practice, the very intimate relations which had existed between Holmes and myself became to some extent modified. He still came to me from time to time when he desired a companion in his investigation, but these occasions grew more and more seldom, until I find that in the year 1890 there were only three cases of which I retain any record. During the winter of that year and the early spring of 1891, I saw in the papers that he had been engaged by the French government upon a matter of supreme importance, and I received two notes from Holmes, dated from Narbonne and from Nimes, from which I gathered that his stay in France was likely to be a long one. It was with some surprise, therefore, that I saw him walk into my consulting-room upon the evening of April 24th. It struck me that he was looking even paler and thinner than usual.

"Yes, I have been using myself up rather too freely," he remarked, in answer to my look rather than to my words; "I have been a little pressed of late. Have you any objection to my closing your shutters?"

The only light in the room came from the lamp upon the table at which I had been reading. Holmes edged his way round the wall and flinging the shutters together, he bolted them securely.

"You are afraid of something?" I asked.

"Well, I am."

"Of what?"

"Of air-guns."

"My dear Holmes, what do you mean?"

"I think that you know me well enough, Watson, to understand that I am by no means a nervous man. At the same time, it is stupidity rather than courage to refuse to recognise danger when it is close upon you. Might I trouble you for a match?" He drew in the smoke of his cigarette as if the soothing influence was grateful to him.

"I must apologise for calling so late," said he, "and I must further beg you to be so unconventional as to allow me to leave your house presently by scrambling over your back garden wall."

"But what does it all mean?" I asked.

He held out his hand, and I saw in the light of the lamp that two of his knuckles were burst and bleeding.

"It is not an airy nothing, you see," said he, smiling. "On the contrary, it is solid enough for a man to break his hand over. Is Mrs. Watson in?"

"She is away upon a visit."

"Indeed! You are alone?"

"Quite."

"Then it makes it the easier for me to propose that you should come away with me for a week to the Continent."

"Where?"

"Oh, anywhere. It's all the same to me."

There was something very strange in all this. It was not Holmes's nature to take an aimless holiday, and something about his pale, worn face told me that his nerves were at their highest tension. He saw the question in my eyes, and, putting his finger-tips together and his elbows upon his knees, he explained the situation.

"You have probably never heard of Professor Moriarty?" said he.

"Never."

"Aye, there's the genius and the wonder of the thing!" he cried. "The man pervades London, and no one has heard of him. That's what puts him on a pinnacle in the records of crime. I tell you, Watson, in all seriousness, that if I could beat that man, if I could free society of him, I should feel that my own career had reached its summit, and I should be prepared to turn to some more placid line in life. Between ourselves, the recent cases in which I have been of assistance to the royal family of Scandinavia, and to the French republic, have left me in such a position that I
that I had it there.

upon the table. He still smiled and blinked, but there was something about his eyes which made me feel very glad

only conceivable escape for him lay in silencing my tongue. In an instant I had slipped the revolver from the drawer

loaded firearms in the pocket of one's dressing-gown.'

reptilian fashion. He peered at me with great curiosity in his puckered eyes.

from much study, and his face protrudes forward, and is forever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously

tall and thin, his forehead domes out in a white curve, and his two eyes are deeply sunken in this head. He is clean-

in my thoughts standing there on my thresh-hold. His appearance was quite familiar to me. He is extremely

was sitting in my room thinking the matter over, when the door opened and Professor Moriarty stood before me.

be written, it would take its place as the most brilliant bit of thrust-and-parry work in the history of detection. Never

break away, but I as often headed him off. I tell you, my friend, that if a detailed account of that silent contest could

impossible to get evidence which would convict in a court of law. You know my powers, my dear Watson, and yet

was the organisation which I deduced, Watson, and which I devoted my whole energy to exposing and breaking up.

He is the Napoleon of crime, Watson. He is the organiser of half that is evil and of nearly all that is undetected in

great city. He is a genius, a philosopher, an abstract thinker. He has a brain of the first order. He sits motionless,

like a spider in the centre of its web, but that web has a thousand radiations, and he knows well every quiver of each

himself. He only plans. But his agents are numerous and splendidly organised. Is there a crime to be done, a paper to be abstracted, we will say, a house to be rifled, a man to be removed--the word is passed to the Professor, the matter is organised and carried out. The agent may be caught. In that case money is found for his bail or his defence. But the central power which uses the agent is never caught--never so much as suspected. This was the organisation which I deduced, Watson, and which I devoted my whole energy to exposing and breaking up.

But the Professor was fenced round with safeguards so cunningly devised that, do what I would, it seemed impossible to get evidence which would convict in a court of law. You know my powers, my dear Watson, and yet at the end of three months I was forced to confess that I had at last met an antagonist who was my intellectual equal. My horror at his crimes was lost in my admiration at his skill. But at last he made a trip--only a little, little trip--but it was more than he could afford when I was so close upon him. I had my chance, and, starting from that point, I have woven my net round him until now it is all ready to close. In three days--that is to say, on Monday next--matters will be ripe, and the Professor, with all the principal members of his gang, will be in the hands of the police. Then will come the greatest criminal trial of the century, the clearing up of over forty mysteries, and the rope for all of them; but if we move at all prematurely, you understand, they may slip out of our hands even at the last moment.

Now, if I could have done this without the knowledge of Professor Moriarty, all would have been well. But he was too wily for that. He saw every step which I took to draw my toils round him. Again and again he strove to break away, but I as often headed him off. I tell you, my friend, that if a detailed account of that silent contest could be written, it would take its place as the most brilliant bit of thrust-and-parry work in the history of detection. Never have I risen to such a height, and never have I been so hard pressed by an opponent. He cut deep, and yet I just undercut him. This morning the last steps were taken, and three days only were wanted to complete the business. I was sitting in my room thinking the matter over, when the door opened and Professor Moriarty stood before me.

My nerves are fairly proof, Watson, but I must confess to a start when I saw the very man who had been so much in my thoughts standing there on my thresh-hold. His appearance was quite familiar to me. He is extremely tall and thin, his forehead domes out in a white curve, and his two eyes are deeply sunken in this head. He is clean-shaven, pale, and ascetic-looking, retaining something of the professor in his features. His shoulders are rounded from much study, and his face protrudes forward, and is forever slowly oscillating from side to side in a curiously reptilian fashion. He peered at me with great curiosity in his puckered eyes.

'You have less frontal development that I should have expected,' said he, at last. 'It is a dangerous habit to finger loaded firearms in the pocket of one's dressing-gown.'

'The fact is that upon his entrance I had instantly recognised the extreme personal danger in which I lay. The only conceivable escape for him lay in silencing my tongue. In an instant I had slipped the revolver from the drawer into my pocket, and was covering him through the cloth. At his remark I drew the weapon out and laid it cocked upon the table. He still smiled and blinked, but there was something about his eyes which made me feel very glad that I had it there.
"You evidently don't know me,' said he.
"On the contrary,' I answered, 'I think it is fairly evident that I do. Pray take a chair. I can spare you five minutes if you have anything to say.'
"All that I have to say has already crossed your mind,' said he.
"Then possibly my answer has crossed yours,' I replied.
"You stand fast?'
"Absolutely.'
He clapped his hand into his pocket, and I raised the pistol from the table. But he merely drew out a memorandum-book in which he had scribbled some dates.
"You crossed my patch on the 4th of January,' said he. 'On the 23d you incommoded me; by the middle of February I was seriously inconvenienced by you; at the end of March I was absolutely hampered in my plans; and now, at the close of April, I find myself placed in such a position through your continual persecution that I am in positive danger of losing my liberty. The situation is becoming an impossible one.'
"Have you any suggestion to make?' I asked.
"You must drop it, Mr. Holmes,' said he, swaying his face about. 'You really must, you know.'
"After Monday,' said I.
"'Tut, tut,' said he. 'I am quite sure that a man of your intelligence will see that there can be but one outcome to this affair. It is necessary that you should withdraw. You have worked things in such a fashion that we have only one resource. It has been an intellectual treat to me to see the way in which you have grappled with this affair, and I say, unaffectedly, that it would be a grief to me to be forced to take any extreme measure. You smile, sir, but I assure you that it really would.'
"Danger is part of my trade,' I remarked.
"That is not danger,' said he. 'It is inevitable destruction. You stand in the way not merely of an individual, but of a might organisation, the full extent of which you, with all your cleverness, have been unable to realise. You must stand clear, Mr. Holmes, or be trodden under foot.'
"I am afraid,' said I, rising, 'that in the pleasure of this conversation I am neglecting business of importance which awaits me elsewhere.'
He rose also and looked at me in silence, shaking his head sadly.
"Well, well,' said he, at last. 'It seems a pity, but I have done what I could. I know every move of your game. You can do nothing before Monday. It has been a duel between you and me, Mr. Holmes. You hope to place me in the dock. I tell you that I will never stand in the dock. You hope to beat me. I tell you that you will never beat me. If you are clever enough to bring destruction upon me, rest assured that I shall do as much to you.'
"You have paid me several compliments, Mr. Moriarty,' said I. 'Let me pay you one in return when I say that if I were assured of the former eventuality I would, in the interests of the public, cheerfully accept the latter.'
"I can promise you the one, but not the other,' he snarled, and so turned his rounded back upon me, and went peering and blinking out of the room.
"That was my singular interview with Professor Moriarty. I confess that it left an unpleasant effect upon my mind. His soft, precise fashion of speech leaves a conviction of sincerity which a mere bully could not produce. Of course, you will say: 'Why not take police precautions against him?' the reason is that I am well convinced that it is from his agents the blow will fall. I have the best proofs that it would be so.'
"You have already been assaulted?
"My dear Watson, Professor Moriarty is not a man who lets the grass grow under his feet. I went out about midday to transact some business in Oxford Street. As I passed the corner which leads from Bentinck Street on to the Welbeck Street crossing a two-horse van furiously driven whizzed round and was on me like a flash. I sprang for the foot-path and saved myself by the fraction of a second. The van dashed round by Marylebone Lane and was gone in an instant. I kept to the pavement after that, Watson, but as I walked down Vere Street a brick came down from the roof of one of the houses, and was shattered to fragments at my feet. I called the police and had the place examined. There were slates and bricks piled up on the roof preparatory to some repairs, and they would have me believe that the wind had toppled over one of these. Of course I knew better, but I could prove nothing. I took a cab after that and reached my brother's rooms in Pall Mall, where I spent the day. Now I have come round to you, and on my way I was attacked by a rough with a bludgeon. I knocked him down, and the police have him in custody; but I can tell you with the most absolute confidence that no possible connection will ever be traced between the gentleman upon whose front teeth I have barked my knuckles and the retiring mathematical coach, who is, I dare say, working out problems upon a black-board ten miles away. You will not wonder, Watson, that my first act on entering your rooms was to close your shutters, and that I have been compelled to ask your permission to leave the house by some less conspicuous exit than the front door."
I had often admired my friend's courage, but never more than now, as he sat quietly checking off a series of incidents which must have combined to make up a day of horror.

"You will spend the night here?" I said.

"No, my friend, you might find me a dangerous guest. I have my plans laid, and all will be well. Matters have gone so far now that they can move without my help as far as the arrest goes, though my presence is necessary for a conviction. It is obvious, therefore, that I cannot do better than get away for the few days which remain before the police are at liberty to act. It would be a great pleasure to me, therefore, if you could come on to the Continent with me."

"The practice is quiet," said I, "and I have an accommodating neighbour. I should be glad to come."

"And to start to-morrow morning?"

"If necessary."

"Oh yes, it is most necessary. Then these are your instructions, and I beg, my dear Watson, that you will obey them to the letter, for you are now playing a double-handed game with me against the cleverest rogue and the most powerful syndicate of criminals in Europe. Now listen! You will despatch whatever luggage you intend to take by a trusty messenger unaddressed to Victoria to-night. In the morning you will send for a hansom, desiring your man to take neither the first nor the second which may present itself. Into this hansom you will jump, and you will drive to the Strand end of the Lowther Arcade, handling the address to the cabman upon a slip of paper, with a request that he will not throw it away. Have your fare ready, and the instant that your cab stops, dash through the Arcade, timing yourself to reach the other side at a quarter-past nine. You will find a small brougham waiting close to the curb, driven by a fellow with a heavy black cloak tipped at the collar with red. Into this you will step, and you will reach Victoria in time for the Continental express."

"Where shall I meet you?"

"At the station. The second first-class carriage from the front will be reserved for us."

"The carriage is our rendezvous, then?"

"Yes."

It was in vain that I asked Holmes to remain for the evening. It was evident to me that he though he might bring trouble to the roof he was under, and that that was the motive which impelled him to go. With a few hurried words as to our plans for the morrow he rose and came out with me into the garden, clambering over the wall which leads into Mortimer Street, and immediately whistling for a hansom, in which I heard him drive away.

In the morning I obeyed Holmes's injunctions to the letter. A hansom was procured with such precaution as would prevent its being one which was placed ready for us, and I drove immediately after breakfast to the Lowther Arcade, through which I hurried at the top of my speed. A brougham was waiting with a very massive driver wrapped in a dark cloak, who, the instant that I had stepped in, whipped up the horse and rattled off to Victoria Station. On my alighting there he turned the carriage, and dashed away again without so much as a look in my direction.

So far all had gone admirably. My luggage was waiting for me, and I had no difficulty in finding the carriage which Holmes had indicated, the less so as it was the only one in the train which was marked "Engaged." My only source of anxiety now was the non-appearance of Holmes. The station clock marked only seven minutes from the time when we were due to start. In vain I searched among the groups of travellers and leave-takers for the little figure of my friend. There was no sign of him. I spent a few minutes in assisting a venerable Italian priest, who was endeavouring to make a porter understand, in his broken English, that his luggage was to be booked through to Paris. Then, having taken another look round, I returned to my carriage, where I found that the porter, in spite of the ticket, had given me my decrepit Italian friend as a travelling companion. It was useless for me to explain to him that his presence was an intrusion, for my Italian was even more limited than his English, so I shrugged my shoulders resignedly, and continued to look out anxiously for my friend. A chill of fear had come over me, as I thought that his absence might mean that some blow had fallen during the night. Already the doors had all been shut and the whistle blown, when--

"My dear Watson," said a voice, "you have not even condescended to say good-morning."

I turned in uncontrollable astonishment. The aged ecclesiastic had turned his face towards me. For an instant the wrinkles were smoothed away, the nose drew away from the chin, the lower lip ceased to protrude and the mouth to mumble, the dull eyes regained their fire, the drooping figure expanded. The next the whole frame collapsed again, and Holmes had gone as quickly as he had come.

"Good heavens!" I cried; "how you startled me!"

"Every precaution is still necessary," he whispered. "I have reason to think that they are hot upon our trail. Ah, there is Moriarty himself."

The train had already begun to move as Holmes spoke. Glancing back, I saw a tall man pushing his way
furiously through the crowd, and waving his hand as if he desired to have the train stopped. It was too late, however, for we were rapidly gathering momentum, and an instant later had shot clear of the station.

"With all our precautions, you see that we have cut it rather fine," said Holmes, laughing. He rose, and throwing off the black cassock and hat which had formed his disguise, he packed them away in a hand-bag.

"Have you seen the morning paper, Watson?"
"No."
"You haven't seen about Baker Street, then?"
"Baker Street?"
"They set fire to our rooms last night. No great harm was done."
"Good heavens, Holmes! this is intolerable."

"They must have lost my track completely after their bludgeon-man was arrested. Otherwise they could not have imagined that I had returned to my rooms. They have evidently taken the precaution of watching you, however, and that is what has brought Moriarty to Victoria. You could not have made any slip in coming?"
"I did exactly what you advised."
"Did you find your brougham?"
"Yes, it was waiting."
"Did you recognise your coachman?"
"No."
"It was my brother Mycroft. It is an advantage to get about in such a case without taking a mercenary into your confidence. But we must plan what we are to do about Moriarty now."

"As this is an express, and as the boat runs in connection with it, I should think we have shaken him off very effectively."

"My dear Watson, you evidently did not realise my meaning when I said that this man may be taken as being quite on the same intellectual plane as myself. You do not imagine that if I were the pursuer I should allow myself to be baffled by so slight an obstacle. Why, then, should you think so meanly of him?"

"What will he do?"
"What I should do?"
"What would you do, then?"
"Engage a special."
"But it must be late."

"By no means. This train stops at Canterbury; and there is always at least a quarter of an hour's delay at the boat. He will catch us there."

"One would think that we were the criminals. Let us have him arrested on his arrival."

"It would be to ruin the work of three months. We should get the big fish, but the smaller would dart right and left out of the net. On Monday we should have them all. No, an arrest is inadmissible."

"What then?"

"We shall get out at Canterbury."

"And then?"

"Well, then we must make a cross-country journey to Newhaven, and so over to Dieppe. Moriarty will again do what I should do. He will get on to Paris, mark down our luggage, and wait for two days at the depot. In the meantime we shall treat ourselves to a couple of carpet-bags, encourage the manufactures of the countries through which we travel, and make our way at our leisure into Switzerland, via Luxembourg and Basle."

At Canterbury, therefore, we alighted, only to find that we should have to wait an hour before we could get a train to Newhaven.

I was still looking rather ruefully after the rapidly disappearing luggage-van which contained my wardrobe, when Holmes pulled my sleeve and pointed up the line.

"Already, you see," said he.

Far away, from among the Kentish woods there rose a thin spray of smoke. A minute later a carriage and engine could be seen flying along the open curve which leads to the station. We had hardly time to take our place behind a pile of luggage when it passed with a rattle and a roar, beating a blast of hot air into our faces.

"There he goes," said Holmes, as we watched the carriage swing and rock over the point. "There are limits, you see, to our friend's intelligence. It would have been a coup-de-matre had he deduced what I would deduce and acted accordingly."

"And what would he have done had he overtaken us?"

"There cannot be the least doubt that he would have made a murderous attack upon me. It is, however, a game at which two may play. The question, now is whether we should take a premature lunch here, or run our chance of
starving before we reach the buffet at Newhaven."

We made our way to Brussels that night and spent two days there, moving on upon the third day as far as Strasbourg. On the Monday morning Holmes had telegraphed to the London police, and in the evening we found a reply waiting for us at our hotel. Holmes tore it open, and then with a bitter curse hurled it into the grate.

"I might have known it!" he groaned. "He has escaped!"

"Moriarty?"

"They have secured the whole gang with the exception of him. He has given them the slip. Of course, when I had left the country there was no one to cope with him. But I did think that I had put the game in their hands. I think that you had better return to England, Watson."

"Why?"

"Because you will find me a dangerous companion now. This man's occupation is gone. He is lost if he returns to London. If I read his character right he will devote his whole energies to revenging himself upon me. He said as much in our short interview, and I fancy that he meant it. I should certainly recommend you to return to your practice."

It was hardly an appeal to be successful with one who was an old campaigner as well as an old friend. We sat in the Strasbourg salle-à-manger arguing the question for half an hour, but the same night we had resumed our journey and were well on our way to Geneva.

For a charming week we wandered up the Valley of the Rhone, and then, branching off at Leuk, we made our way over the Gemmi Pass, still deep in snow, and so, by way of Interlaken, to Meiringen. It was a lovely trip, the dainty green of the spring below, the virgin white of the winter above; but it was clear to me that never for one instant did Holmes forget the shadow which lay across him. In the homely Alpine villages or in the lonely mountain passes, I could tell by his quick glancing eyes and his sharp scrutiny of every face that passed us, that he was well convinced that, walk where we would, we could not walk ourselves clear of the danger which was dogging our footsteps.

Once, I remember, as we passed over the Gemmi, and walked along the border of the melancholy Daubensee, a large rock which had been dislodged from the ridge upon our right clattered down and roared into the lake behind us. In an instant Holmes had raced up on to the ridge, and, standing upon a lofty pinnacle, craned his neck in every direction. It was in vain that our guide assured him that a fall of stones was a common chance in the spring-time at that spot. He said nothing, but he smiled at me with the air of a man who sees the fulfilment of that which he had expected.

And yet for all his watchfulness he was never depressed. On the contrary, I can never recollect having seen him in such exuberant spirits. Again and again he recurred to the fact that if he could be assured that society was freed from Professor Moriarty he would cheerfully bring his own career to a conclusion.

"I think that I may go so far as to say, Watson, that I have not lived wholly in vain," he remarked. "If my record were closed to-night I could still survey it with equanimity. The air of London is the sweeter for my presence. In over a thousand cases I am not aware that I have ever used my powers upon the wrong side. Of late I have been tempted to look into the problems furnished by nature rather than those more superficial ones for which our artificial state of society is responsible. Your memoirs will draw to an end, Watson, upon the day that I crown my career by the capture or extinction of the most dangerous and capable criminal in Europe."

I shall be brief, and yet exact, in the little which remains for me to tell. It is not a subject on which I would willingly dwell, and yet I am conscious that a duty devolves upon me to omit no detail.

It was on the 3d of May that we reached the little village of Meiringen, where we put up at the Englischer Hof, then kept by Peter Steiler the elder. Our landlord was an intelligent man, and spoke excellent English, having served for three years as waiter at the Grosvenor Hotel in London. At his advice, on the afternoon of the 4th we set off together, with the intention of crossing the hills and spending the night at the hamlet of Rosenlau. We had strict injunctions, however, on no account to pass the falls of Reichenbach, which are about half-way up the hill, without making a small detour to see them.

It is indeed, a fearful place. The torrent, swollen by the melting snow, plunges into a tremendous abyss, from which the spray rolls up like the smoke from a burning house. The shaft into which the river hurls itself is a immense chasm, lined by glistening coal-black rock, and narrowing into a creaming, boiling pit of incalculable depth, which brims over and shoots the stream onward over its jagged lip. The long sweep of green water roaring forever down, and the thick flickering curtain of spray hissing forever upward, turn a man giddy with their constant whirl and clamour. We stood near the edge peering down at the gleam of the breaking water far below us against the black rocks, and listening to the half-human shout which cam booming up with the spray out of the abyss.

The path has been cut half-way round the fall to afford a complete view, but it ends abruptly, and the traveller has to return as he came. We had turned to do so, when we saw a Swiss lad come running along it with a letter in his
hand. It bore the mark of the hotel which we had just left, and was addressed to me by the landlord. It appeared that
within a very few minutes of our leaving, and English lady had arrived who was in the last stage of consumption.
She had wintered at Davos Platz, and was journeying now to join her friends at Lucerne, when a sudden
haemorrhage had overtaken her. It was thought that she could hardly live a few hours, but it would be a great
consolation to her to see an English doctor, and, if I would only return, etc. The good Steiler assured me in a
postscript that he would himself look upon my compliance as a very great favour, since the lady absolutely refused
to see a Swiss physician, and he could not but feel that he was incurring a great responsibility.

The appeal was one which could not be ignored. It was impossible to refuse the request of a fellow-
countrywoman dying in a strange land. Yet I had my scruples about leaving Holmes. It was finally agreed, however,
that he should retain the young Swiss messenger with him as guide and companion while I returned to Meiringen.
My friend would stay some little time at the fall, he said, and would then walk slowly over the hill to Rosenlaui,
where I was to join him in the evening. As I turned away I saw Holmes, with his back against a rock and his arms
folded, gazing down at the rush of the waters. It was the last that I was ever destined to see of him in this world.

When I was near the bottom of the descent I looked back. It was impossible, from that position, to see the fall,
but I could see the curving path which winds over the shoulder of the hill and leads to it. Along this a man was, I
remember, walking very rapidly.

I could see his black figure clearly outlined against the green behind him. I noted him, and the energy wit which
he walked but he passed from my mind again as I hurried on upon my errand.

It may have been a little over an hour before I reached Meiringen. Old Steiler was standing at the porch of his
hotel,

"Well," said I, as I came hurrying up, "I trust that she is no worse?"

a look of surprise passed over his face, and at the first quiver of his eyebrows my heart turned to lead in my
breast.

"You did not write this?" I said, pulling the letter from my pocket. "There is no sick Englishwoman in the
hotel?"

"Certainly not!" he cried. "But it has the hotel mark upon it! Ha, it must have been written by that tall
Englishman who came in after you had gone. He said--"

but I waited for none of the landlord's explanations. In a tingle of fear I was already running down the village
street, and making for the path which I had so lately descended. It had taken me an hour to come down. For all my
efforts two more had passed before I found myself at the fall of Reichenbach once more. There was Holmes's
Alpine-stock still leaning against the rock by which I had left him. But there was no sign of him, and it was in vain
that I shouted. My only answer was my own voice reverberating in a rolling echo from the cliffs around me.

It was the sight of that Alpine-stock which turned me cold and sick. He had not gone to Rosenlaui, then. He had
remained on that three-foot path, with sheer wall on one side and sheer drop on the other, until his enemy had
overtaken him. The young Swiss had gone too. He had probably been in the pay of Moriarty, and had left the two
men together. And then what had happened? Who was to tell us what had happened then?

I stood for a minute or two to collect myself, for I was dazed with the horror of the thing. Then I began to think
of Holmes's own methods and to try to practise them in reading this tragedy. It was, alas, only too easy to do. During
our conversation we had not gone to the end of the path, and the Alpine-stock marked the place where we had stood.
The blackish soil is kept forever soft by the incessant drift of spray, and a bird would leave its tread upon it. Two
lines of footmarks were clearly marked along the farther end of the path, both leading away from me. There were
none returning. A few yards from the end the soil was all ploughed up into a patch of mud, and the branches and
ferns which fringed the chasm were torn and bedraggled. I lay upon my face and peered over with the spray spouting
up all around me. It had darkened since I left, and now I could only see here and there the glistening of moisture
upon the black walls, and far away down at the end of the shaft the gleam of the broken water. I shouted; but only
the same half-human cry of the fall was borne back to my ears.

But it was destined that I should after all have a last word of greeting from my friend and comrade. I have said
that his Alpine-stock had been left leaning against a rock which jutted on to the path. From the top of this bowlder
the gleam of something bright caught my eye, and, raising my hand, I found that it came from the silver cigarette-
case which he used to carry. As I took it up a small square of paper upon which it had lain fluttered down on to the
ground. Unfolding it, I found that it consisted of three pages torn from his note-book and addressed to me. It was
characteristic of the man that the direction was a precise, and the writing as firm and clear, as though it had been
written in his study.

My dear Watson [it said], I write these few lines through the courtesy of Mr. Moriarty, who awaits my
convenience for the final discussion of those questions which lie between us. He has been giving me a sketch of the
methods by which he avoided the English police and kept himself informed of our movements. They certainly
confirm the very high opinion which I had formed of his abilities. I am pleased to think that I shall be able to free society from any further effects of his presence, though I fear that it is at a cost which will give pain to my friends, and especially, my dear Watson, to you. I have already explained to you, however, that my career had in any case reached its crisis, and that no possible conclusion to it could be more congenial to me than this. Indeed, if I may make a full confession to you, I was quite convinced that the letter from Meiringen was a hoax, and I allowed you to depart on that errand under the persuasion that some development of this sort would follow. Tell Inspector Patterson that the papers which he needs to convict the gang are in pigeonhole M., done up in a blue envelope and inscribed "Moriarty." I made every disposition of my property before leaving England, and handed it to my brother Mycroft. Pray give my greetings to Mrs. Watson, and believe me to be, my dear fellow,

Very sincerely yours,

Sherlock Holmes

A few words may suffice to tell the little that remains. An examination by experts leaves little doubt that a personal contest between the two men ended, as it could hardly fail to end in such a situation, in their reeling over, locked in each other's arms. Any attempt at recovering the bodies was absolutely hopeless, and there, deep down in that dreadful caldron of swirling water and seething foam, will lie for all time the most dangerous criminal and the foremost champion of the law of their generation. The Swiss youth was never found again, and there can be no doubt that he was one of the numerous agents whom Moriarty kept in this employ. As to the gang, it will be within the memory of the public how completely the evidence which Holmes had accumulated exposed their organisation, and how heavily the hand of the dead man weighted upon them. Of their terrible chief few details came out during the proceedings, and if I have now been compelled to make a clear statement of his career it is due to those injudicious champions who have endeavoured to clear his memory by attacks upon him whom I shall ever regard as the best and the wisest man whom I have ever known.

Go to Start
The Hound of the Baskervilles

by Arthur Conan Doyle

Chapter 1 Mr. Sherlock Holmes

Mr. Sherlock Holmes, who was usually very late in the mornings, save upon those not infrequent occasions when he was up all night, was seated at the breakfast table. I stood upon the hearth-rug and picked up the stick which our visitor had left behind him the night before. It was a fine, thick piece of wood, bulbous-headed, of the sort which is known as a "Penang lawyer." Just under the head was a broad silver band nearly an inch across. "To James Mortimer, M.R.C.S., from his friends of the C.C.H.,” was engraved upon it, with the date "1884." It was just such a stick as the old-fashioned family practitioner used to carry--dignified, solid, and reassuring.

"Well, Watson, what do you make of it?"

Holmes was sitting with his back to me, and I had given him no sign of my occupation.

"How did you know what I was doing? I believe you have eyes in the back of your head."

"I have, at least, a well-polished, silver-plated coffee-pot in front of me," said he. "But, tell me, Watson, what do you make of our visitor's stick? Since we have been so unfortunate as to miss him and have no notion of his errand, this accidental souvenir becomes of importance. Let me hear you reconstruct the man by an examination of it."

"I think," said I, following as far as I could the methods of my companion, "that Dr. Mortimer is a successful, elderly medical man, well-esteemed since those who know him give him this mark of their appreciation." "Good!" said Holmes. "Excellent!"

"I think also that the probability is in favour of his being a country practitioner who does a great deal of his visiting on foot."

"Why so?"

"Because this stick, though originally a very handsome one has been so knocked about that I can hardly imagine a town practitioner carrying it. The thick-iron ferrule is worn down, so it is evident that he has done a great amount of walking with it." "Perfectly sound!" said Holmes.

"And then again, there is the 'friends of the C.C.H.' I should guess that to be the Something Hunt, the local hunt to whose members he has possibly given some surgical assistance, and which has made him a small presentation in return."

"Really, Watson, you excel yourself," said Holmes, pushing back his chair and lighting a cigarette. "I am bound to say that in all the accounts which you have been so good as to give of my own small achievements you have habitually underrated your own abilities. It may be that you are not yourself luminous, but you are a conductor of light. Some people without possessing genius have a remarkable power of stimulating it. I confess, my dear fellow, that I am very much in your debt."

He had never said as much before, and I must admit that his words gave me keen pleasure, for I had often been piqued by his indifference to my admiration and to the attempts which I had made to give publicity to his methods. I was proud, too, to think that I had so far mastered his system as to apply it in a way which earned his approval. He now took the stick from my hands and examined it for a few minutes with his naked eyes. Then with an expression of interest he laid down his cigarette, and carrying the cane to the window, he looked over it again with a convex lens.
"Interesting, though elementary," said he as he returned to his favourite corner of the settee. "There are certainly one or two indications upon the stick. It gives us the basis for several deductions."

"Has anything escaped me?" I asked with some self-importance. "I trust that there is nothing of consequence which I have overlooked?"

"I am afraid, my dear Watson, that most of your conclusions were erroneous. When I said that you stimulated me I meant, to be frank, that in noting your fallacies I was occasionally guided towards the truth. Not that you are entirely wrong in this instance. The man is certainly a country practitioner. And he walks a good deal."

"Then I was right."

"To that extent."

"But that was all."

"No, no, my dear Watson, not all--by no means all. I would suggest, for example, that a presentation to a doctor is more likely to come from a hospital than from a hunt, and that when the initials 'C.C.' are placed before that hospital the words 'Charing Cross' very naturally suggest themselves."

"You may be right."

"The probability lies in that direction. And if we take this as a working hypothesis we have a fresh basis from which to start our construction of this unknown visitor."

"Well, then, supposing that 'C.C.H.' does stand for 'Charing Cross Hospital,' what further inferences may we draw?"

"Do none suggest themselves? You know my methods. Apply them!"

"I can only think of the obvious conclusion that the man has practised in town before going to the country."

"I think that we might venture a little farther than this. Look at it in this light. On what occasion would it be most probable that such a presentation would be made? When would his friends unite to give him a pledge of their good will? Obviously at the moment when Dr. Mortimer withdrew from the service of the hospital in order to start a practice for himself. We know there has been a presentation. We believe there has been a change from a town hospital to a country practice. Is it, then, stretching our inference too far to say that the presentation was on the occasion of the change?"

"It certainly seems probable."

"Now, you will observe that he could not have been on the staff of the hospital, since only a man well-established in a London practice could hold such a position, and such a one would not drift into the country. What was he, then? If he was in the hospital and yet not on the staff he could only have been a house-surgeon or a house-physician--little more than a senior student. And he left five years ago--the date is on the stick. So your grave, middle-aged family practitioner vanishes into thin air, my dear Watson, and there emerges a young fellow under thirty, amiable, unambitious, absent-minded, and the possessor of a favourite dog, which I should describe roughly as being larger than a terrier and smaller than a mastiff."

I laughed incredulously as Sherlock Holmes leaned back in his settee and blew little wavering rings of smoke up to the ceiling.

"As to the latter part, I have no means of checking you," said I, "but at least it is not difficult to find out a few particulars about the man's age and professional career." From my small medical shelf I took down the Medical Directory and turned up the name. There were several Mortimers, but only one who could be our visitor. I read his record aloud.

"Mortimer, James, M.R.C.S., 1882, Grimpen, Dartmoor, Devon. House-surgeon, from 1882 to 1884, at Charing Cross Hospital. Winner of the Jackson prize for Comparative Pathology, with essay entitled 'Is Disease a Reversion?' Corresponding member of the Swedish Pathological Society. Author of 'Some Freaks of Atavism' (Lancet 1882). 'Do We Progress?' (Journal of Psychology, March, 1883). Medical Officer for the parishes of Grimpen, Thorsley, and High Barrow."

"No mention of that local hunt, Watson," said Holmes with a mischievous smile, "but a country doctor, as you very astutely observed. I think that I am fairly justified in my inferences. As to the adjectives, I said, if I remember right, amiable, unambitious, and absent-minded. It is my experience that it is only an amiable man in this world who receives testimonials, only an unambitious one who abandons a London career for the country, and only an absent-minded one who leaves his stick and not his visiting-card after waiting an hour in your room."

"And the dog?"

"Has been in the habit of carrying this stick behind his master. Being a heavy stick the dog has held it tightly by the middle, and the marks of his teeth are very plainly visible. The dog's jaw, as shown in the space between these marks, is too broad in my opinion for a terrier and not broad enough for a mastiff. It may have been--yes, by Jove, it is a curly-haired spaniel."

He had risen and paced the room as he spoke. Now he halted in the recess of the window. There was such a ring
of conviction in his voice that I glanced up in surprise.

"My dear fellow, how can you possibly be so sure of that?"

"For the very simple reason that I see the dog himself on our very door-step, and there is the ring of its owner. Don't move, I beg you, Watson. He is a professional brother of yours, and your presence may be of assistance to me. Now is the dramatic moment of fate, Watson, when you hear a step upon the stair which is walking into your life, and you know not whether for good or ill. What does Dr. James Mortimer, the man of science, ask of Sherlock Holmes, the specialist in crime? Come in!"

The appearance of our visitor was a surprise to me, since I had expected a typical country practitioner. He was a very tall, thin man, with a long nose like a beak, which jutted out between two keen, gray eyes, set closely together and sparkling brightly from behind a pair of gold-rimmed glasses. He was clad in a professional but rather slovenly fashion, for his frock-coat was dingy and his trousers frayed. Though young, his long back was already bowed, and he walked with a forward thrust of his head and a general air of peering benevolence. As he entered his eyes fell upon the stick in Holmes's hand, and he ran towards it with an exclamation of joy. "I am so very glad," said he. "I was not sure whether I had left it here or in the Shipping Office. I would not lose that stick for the world."

"A presentation, I see," said Holmes.

"Yes, sir."

"From Charing Cross Hospital?"

"From one or two friends there on the occasion of my marriage."

"Dear, dear, that's bad!" said Holmes, shaking his head.

Dr. Mortimer blinked through his glasses in mild astonishment. "Why was it bad?"

"Only that you have disarranged our little deductions. Your marriage, you say?"

"Yes, sir. I married, and so left the hospital, and with it all hopes of a consulting practice. It was necessary to make a home of my own."

"Come, come, we are not so far wrong, after all," said Holmes. "And now, Dr. James Mortimer--"

"Mister, sir, Mister--a humble M.R.C.S."

"And a man of precise mind, evidently."

"A dabbler in science, Mr. Holmes, a picker up of shells on the shores of the great unknown ocean. I presume that it is Mr. Sherlock Holmes whom I am addressing and not--"

"No, this is my friend Dr. Watson."

"Glad to meet you, sir. I have heard your name mentioned in connection with that of your friend. You interest me very much, Mr. Holmes. I had hardly expected so dolichocephalic a skull or such well-marked supra-orbital development. Would you have any objection to my running my finger along your parietal fissure? A cast of your skull, sir, until the original is available, would be an ornament to any anthropological museum. It is not my intention to be fulsome, but I confess that I covet your skull."

Sherlock Holmes waved our strange visitor into a chair. "You are an enthusiast in your line of thought, I perceive, sir, as I am in mine," said he. "I observe from your forefinger that you make your own cigarettes. Have no hesitation in lighting one."

The man drew out paper and tobacco and twirled the one up in the other with surprising dexterity. He had long, quivering fingers as agile and restless as the antennae of an insect.

Holmes was silent, but his little darting glances showed me the interest which he took in our curious companion. "I presume, sir," said he at last, "that it was not merely for the purpose of examining my skull that you have done me the honour to call here last night and again today?"

"No, sir, no; though I am happy to have had the opportunity of doing that as well. I came to you, Mr. Holmes, because I recognized that I am myself an unpractical man and because I am suddenly confronted with a most serious and extraordinary problem. Recognizing, as I do, that you are the second highest expert in Europe--"

"Indeed, sir! May I inquire who has the honour to be the first?" asked Holmes with some asperity.

"To the man of precisely scientific mind the work of Monsieur Bertillon must always appeal strongly."

"Then had you not better consult him?"

"I said, sir, to the precisely scientific mind. But as a practical man of affairs it is acknowledged that you stand alone. I trust, sir, that I have not inadvertently--"

"Just a little," said Holmes. "I think, Dr. Mortimer, you would do wisely if without more ado you would kindly tell me plainly what the exact nature of the problem is in which you demand my assistance."

Chapter 2 The Curse of the Baskervilles

"I have in my pocket a manuscript," said Dr. James Mortimer.

"I observed it as you entered the room," said Holmes.

"It is an old manuscript."
"Early eighteenth century, unless it is a forgery."

"How can you say that, sir?"

"You have presented an inch or two of it to my examination all the time that you have been talking. It would be a poor expert who could not give the date of a document within a decade or so. You may possibly have read my little monograph upon the subject. I put that at 1730."

"The exact date is 1742." Dr. Mortimer drew it from his breast-pocket. "This family paper was committed to my care by Sir Charles Baskerville, whose sudden and tragic death some three months ago created so much excitement in Devonshire. I may say that I was his personal friend as well as his medical attendant. He was a strong-minded man, sir, shrewd, practical, and as unimaginative as I am myself. Yet he took this document very seriously, and his mind was prepared for just such an end as did eventually overtake him."

Holmes stretched out his hand for the manuscript and flattened it upon his knee. "You will observe, Watson, the alternative use of the long s and the short. It is one of several indications which enabled me to fix the date."

I looked over his shoulder at the yellow paper and the faded script. At the head was written: "Baskerville Hall," and below in large, scrawling figures: "1742."

"It appears to be a statement of some sort."

"Yes, it is a statement of a certain legend which runs in the Baskerville family."

"But I understand that it is something more modern and practical upon which you wish to consult me?"

"Most modern. A most practical, pressing matter, which must be decided within twenty-four hours. But the manuscript is short and is intimately connected with the affair. With your permission I will read it to you."

Holmes leaned back in his chair, placed his finger-tips together, and closed his eyes, with an air of resignation. Dr. Mortimer turned the manuscript to the light and read in a high, cracking voice the following curious, old-world narrative:

"Of the origin of the Hound of the Baskervilles there have been many statements, yet as I come in a direct line from Hugo Baskerville, and as I had the story from my father, who also had it from his, I have set it down with all belief that it occurred even as is here set forth. And I would have you believe, my sons, that the same Justice which punishes sin may also most graciously forgive it, and that no ban is so heavy but that by prayer and repentance it may be removed. Learn then from this story not to fear the fruits of the past, but rather to be circumspect in the future, that those foul passions whereby our family has suffered so grievously may not again be loosed to our undoing.

"Know then that in the time of the Great Rebellion (the history of which by the learned Lord Clarendon I most earnestly commend to your attention) this Manor of Baskerville was held by Hugo of that name, nor can it be gainsaid that he was a most wild, profane, and godless man. This, in truth, his neighbours might have pardoned, seeing that saints have never flourished in those parts, but there was in him a certain wanton and cruel humour which made his name a by-word through the West. It chanced that this Hugo came to love (if, indeed, so dark a passion may be known under so bright a name) the daughter of a yeoman who held lands near the Baskerville estate. But the young maiden, being discreet and of good repute, would ever avoid him, for she feared his evil name. So it came to pass that one Michaelmas this Hugo, with five or six of his idle and wicked companions, stole down upon the farm and carried off the maiden, her father and brothers being from home, as he well knew. When they had brought her to the Hall the maiden was placed in an upper chamber, while Hugo and his friends sat down to a long carouse, as was their nightly custom. Now, the poor lass upstairs was like to have her wits turned at the singing and shouting and terrible oaths which came up to her from below, for they say that the words used by Hugo Baskerville, when he was in wine, were such as might blast the man who said them. At last in the stress of her fear she did that which might have daunted the bravest or most active man, for by the aid of the growth of ivy which covered (and still covers) the south wall she came down from under the eaves, and so homeward across the moor, there being three leagues betwixt the Hall and her father's farm.

"It chanced that some little time later Hugo left his guests to carry food and drink--with other worse things, perchance--to his captive, and so found the cage empty and the bird escaped. Then, as it would seem, he became as one that hath a devil, for, rushing down the stairs into the dining-hall, he sprang upon the great table, flagons and trenchers flying before him, and he cried aloud before all the company that he would that very night render his body and soul to the Powers of Evil if he might but overtake the wench. And while the revellers stood aghast at the fury of the man, one more wicked or, it may be, more drunken than the rest, cried out that they should put the hounds upon her. Whereat Hugo ran from the house, crying to his grooms that they should saddle his mare and unkennel the pack, and giving the hounds a kerchief of the maid's, he swung them to the line, and so off full cry in the moonlight over the moor.

"Now, for some space the revellers stood agape, unable to understand all that had been done in such haste. But anon their bemused wits awoke to the nature of the deed which was like to be done upon the moorlands. Everything
was now in an uproar, some calling for their pistols, some for their horses, and some for another flask of wine. But
at length some sense came back to their crazed minds, and the whole of them, thirteen in number, took horse and
started in pursuit. The moon shone clear above them, and they rode swiftly abreast, taking that course which the
maid must needs have taken if she were to reach her own home.

"They had gone a mile or two when they passed one of the night shepherds upon the moorlands, and they cried
to him to know if he had seen the hunt. And the man, as the story goes, was so crazed with fear that he could scarce
speak, but at last he said that he had indeed seen the unhappy maiden, with the hounds upon her track. 'But I have
seen more than that,' said he, 'for Hugo Baskerville passed me upon his black mare, and there ran mute behind him
such a hound of hell as God forbid should ever be at my heels.' So the drunken squires cursed the shepherd and rode
onward. But soon their skins turned cold, for there came a galloping across the moor, and the black mare, dabbled
with white froth, went past with trailing bridle and empty saddle. Then the revellers rode close together, for a great
fear was on them, but they still followed over the moor, though each, had he been alone, would have been right glad
to have turned his horse's head. Riding slowly in this fashion they came at last upon the hounds. These, though
known for their valour and their breed, were whimpering in a cluster at the head of a deep dip or goyal, as we call it,
upon the moor, some slinking away and some, with starting hackles and staring eyes, gazing down the narrow valley
before them.

"The company had come to a halt, more sober men, as you may guess, than when they started. The most of them
would by no means advance, but three of them, the boldest, or it may be the most drunken, rode forward down the
goyal. Now, it opened into a broad space in which stood two of those great stones, still to be seen there, which were
set by certain forgotten peoples in the days of old. The moon was shining bright upon the clearing, and there in the
centre lay the unhappy maid where she had fallen, dead of fear and of fatigue. But it was not the sight of her body,
nor yet was it that of the body of Hugo Baskerville lying near her, which raised the hair upon the heads of these
three dare-devil roysterers, but it was that, standing over Hugo, and plucking at his throat, there stood a foul thing, a
great, black beast, shaped like a hound, yet larger than any hound that ever mortal eye has rested upon. And even as
they looked the thing tore the throat out of Hugo Baskerville, on which, as it turned its blazing eyes and dripping
jaws upon them, the three shrieked with fear and rode for dear life, still screaming, across the moor. One, it is said,
died that very night of what he had seen, and the other twain were but broken men for the rest of their days.

"Such is the tale, my sons, of the coming of the hound which is said to have plagued the family so sorely ever
since. If I have set it down it is because that which is clearly known hath less terror than that which is but hinted at
and guessed. Nor can it be denied that many of the family have been unhappy in their deaths, which have been
sudden, bloody, and mysterious. Yet may we shelter ourselves in the infinite goodness of Providence, which would
not forever punish the innocent beyond that third or fourth generation which is threatened in Holy Writ. To that
Providence, my sons, I hereby commend you, and I counsel you by way of caution to forbear from crossing the
moor in those dark hours when the powers of evil are exalted.

"[This from Hugo Baskerville to his sons Rodger and John, with instructions that they say nothing thereof to
their sister Elizabeth.]"

When Dr. Mortimer had finished reading this singular narrative he pushed his spectacles up on his forehead and
stared across at Mr. Sherlock Holmes. The latter yawned and tossed the end of his cigarette into the fire.

"Well?" said he.

"Do you not find it interesting?"

"To a collector of fairy tales."

Dr. Mortimer drew a folded newspaper out of his pocket.

"Now, Mr. Holmes, we will give you something a little more recent. This is the Devon County Chronicle of May
14th of this year. It is a short account of the facts elicited at the death of Sir Charles Baskerville which occurred a
few days before that date."

My friend leaned a little forward and his expression became intent. Our visitor readjusted his glasses and began:

"The recent sudden death of Sir Charles Baskerville, whose name has been mentioned as the probable Liberal
candidate for Mid-Devon at the next election, has cast a gloom over the county. Though Sir Charles had resided at
Baskerville Hall for a comparatively short period his amiability of character and extreme generosity had won the
affection and respect of all who had been brought into contact with him. In these days of nouveaux riches it is
refreshing to find a case where the scion of an old county family which has fallen upon evil days is able to make his
own fortune and to bring it back with him to restore the fallen grandeur of his line. Sir Charles, as is well known,
made large sums of money in South African speculation. More wise than those who go on until the wheel turns
against them, he realized his gains and returned to England with them. It is only two years since he took up his
residence at Baskerville Hall, and it is common talk how large were those schemes of reconstruction and
improvement which have been interrupted by his death. Being himself childless, it was his openly expressed desire
that the whole countryside should, within his own lifetime, profit by his good fortune, and many will have personal reasons for bewailing his untimely end. His generous donations to local and county charities have been frequently chronicled in these columns.

"The circumstances connected with the death of Sir Charles cannot be said to have been entirely cleared up by the inquest, but at least enough has been done to dispose of those rumours to which local superstition has given rise. There is no reason whatever to suspect foul play, or to imagine that death could be from any but natural causes. Sir Charles was a widower, and a man who may be said to have been in some ways of an eccentric habit of mind. In spite of his considerable wealth he was simple in his personal tastes, and his indoor servants at Baskerville Hall consisted of a married couple named Barrymore, the husband acting as butler and the wife as housekeeper. Their evidence, corroborated by that of several friends, tends to show that Sir Charles's health has for some time been impaired, and points especially to some affection of the heart, manifesting itself in changes of colour, breathlessness, and acute attacks of nervous depression. Dr. James Mortimer, the friend and medical attendant of the deceased, has given evidence to the same effect.

"The facts of the case are simple. Sir Charles Baskerville was in the habit every night before going to bed of walking down the famous yew alley of Baskerville Hall. The evidence of the Barrymores shows that this had been his custom. On the fourth of May Sir Charles had declared his intention of starting next day for London, and had ordered Barrymore to prepare his luggage. That night he went out as usual for his nocturnal walk, in the course of which he was in the habit of smoking a cigar. He never returned. At twelve o'clock Barrymore, finding the hall door still open, became alarmed, and, lighting a lantern, went in search of his master. The day had been wet, and Sir Charles's footmarks were easily traced down the alley. Halfway down this walk there is a gate which leads out on to the moor. There were indications that Sir Charles had stood for some little time here. He then proceeded down the alley, and it was at the far end of it that his body was discovered. One fact which has not been explained is the statement of Barrymore that his master's footprints altered their character from the time that he passed the moor-gate, and that he appeared from thence onward to have been walking upon his toes. One Murphy, a gipsy horse-dealer, was on the moor at no great distance at the time, but he appears by his own confession to have been the worse for drink. He declares that he heard cries but is unable to state from what direction they came. No signs of violence were to be discovered upon Sir Charles's person, and though the doctor's evidence pointed to an almost incredible facial distortion--so great that Dr. Mortimer refused at first to believe that it was indeed his friend and patient who lay before him--it was explained that that is a symptom which is not unusual in cases of dyspnoea and death from cardiac exhaustion. This explanation was borne out by the post-mortem examination, which showed long-standing organic disease, and the coroner's jury returned a verdict in accordance with the medical evidence. It is well that this is so, for it is obviously of the utmost importance that Sir Charles's heir should settle at the Hall and continue the good work which has been so sadly interrupted. Had the prosaic finding of the coroner not finally put an end to the romantic stories which have been whispered in connection with the affair, it might have been difficult to find a tenant for Baskerville Hall. It is understood that the next of kin is Mr. Henry Baskerville, if he be still alive, the son of Sir Charles Baskerville's younger brother. The young man when last heard of was in America, and inquiries are being instituted with a view to informing him of his good fortune."

Dr. Mortimer refolded his paper and replaced it in his pocket. "Those are the public facts, Mr. Holmes, in connection with the death of Sir Charles Baskerville."

"I must thank you," said Sherlock Holmes, "for calling my attention to a case which certainly presents some features of interest. I had observed some newspaper comment at the time, but I was exceedingly preoccupied by that little affair of the Vatican cameos, and in my anxiety to oblige the Pope I lost touch with several interesting English cases. This article, you say, contains all the public facts?"

"It does."

"Then let me have the private ones." He leaned back, put his finger-tips together, and assumed his most impassive and judicial expression.

"In doing so," said Dr. Mortimer, who had begun to show signs of some strong emotion, "I am telling that which I have not confided to anyone. My motive for withholding it from the coroner's inquiry is that a man of science shrinks from placing himself in the public position of seeming to indorse a popular superstition. I had the further motive that Baskerville Hall, as the paper says, would certainly remain untenanted if anything were done to increase its already rather grim reputation. For both these reasons I thought that I was justified in telling rather less than I knew, since no practical good could result from it, but with you there is no reason why I should not be perfectly frank.

"The moor is very sparsely inhabited, and those who live near each other are thrown very much together. For this reason I saw a good deal of Sir Charles Baskerville. With the exception of Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, and Mr. Stapleton, the naturalist, there are no other men of education within many miles. Sir Charles was a retiring man, but
the chance of his illness brought us together, and a community of interests in science kept us so. He had brought back much scientific information from South Africa, and many a charming evening we have spent together discussing the comparative anatomy of the Bushman and the Hottentot.

"Within the last few months it became increasingly plain to me that Sir Charles's nervous system was strained to the breaking point. He had taken this legend which I have read you exceedingly to heart--so much so that, although he would walk in his own grounds, nothing would induce him to go out upon the moor at night. Incredible as it may appear to you, Mr. Holmes, he was honestly convinced that a dreadful fate overhung his family, and certainly the records which he was able to give of his ancestors were not encouraging. The idea of some ghastly presence constantly haunted him, and on more than one occasion he has asked me whether I had on my medical journeys at night ever seen any strange creature or heard the baying of a hound. The latter question he put to me several times, and always with a voice which vibrated with excitement.

"I can well remember driving up to his house in the evening some three weeks before the fatal event. He chanced to be at his hall door. I had descended from my gig and was standing in front of him, when I saw his eyes fix themselves over my shoulder and stare past me with an expression of the most dreadful horror. I whisked round and had just time to catch a glimpse of something which I took to be a large black calf passing at the head of the drive. So excited and alarmed was he that I was compelled to go down to the spot where the animal had been and look around for it. It was gone, however, and the incident appeared to make the worst impression upon his mind. I stayed with him all the evening, and it was on that occasion, to explain the emotion which he had shown, that he confided to my keeping that narrative which I read to you when first I came. I mention this small episode because it assumes some importance in view of the tragedy which followed, but I was convinced at the time that the matter was entirely trivial and that his excitement had no justification.

"It was at my advice that Sir Charles was about to go to London. His heart was, I knew, affected, and the constant anxiety in which he lived, however chimerical the cause of it might be, was evidently having a serious effect upon his health. I thought that a few months among the distractions of town would send him back a new man. Mr. Stapleton, a mutual friend who was much concerned at his state of health, was of the same opinion. At the last instant came this terrible catastrophe.

"On the night of Sir Charles's death Barrymore the butler, who made the discovery, sent Perkins the groom on horseback to me, and as I was sitting up late I was able to reach Baskerville Hall within an hour of the event. I checked and corroborated all the facts which were mentioned at the inquest. I followed the footsteps down the yew alley, I saw the spot at the moor-gate where he seemed to have waited, I remarked the change in the shape of the prints after that point, I noted that there were no other footsteps save those of Barrymore on the soft gravel, and finally I carefully examined the body, which had not been touched until my arrival. Sir Charles lay on his face, his arms out, his fingers dug into the ground, and his features convulsed with some strong emotion to such an extent that I could hardly have sworn to his identity. There was certainly no physical injury of any kind. But one false statement was made by Barrymore at the inquest. He said that there were no traces upon the ground round the body. He did not observe any. But I did--some little distance off, but fresh and clear."

"Footprints?"
"Footprints."
"A man's or a woman's?"
Dr. Mortimer looked strangely at us for an instant, and his voice sank almost to a whisper as he answered.
"Mr. Holmes, they were the footprints of a gigantic hound!"

Chapter 3 The Problem

I confess at these words a shudder passed through me. There was a thrill in the doctor's voice which showed that he was himself deeply moved by that which he told us. Holmes leaned forward in his excitement and his eyes had the hard, dry glitter which shot from them when he was keenly interested.

"You saw this?"
"As clearly as I see you."
"And you said nothing?"
"What was the use?"
"How was it that no one else saw it?"
"The marks were some twenty yards from the body and no one gave them a thought. I don't suppose I should have done so had I not known this legend."
"There are many sheep-dogs on the moor?"
"No doubt, but this was no sheep-dog."
"You say it was large?"
"Enormous."
"But it had not approached the body?"
"No."
"What sort of night was it?"
"Damp and raw."
"But not actually raining?"
"No."
"What is the alley like?"
"There are two lines of old yew hedge, twelve feet high and impenetrable. The walk in the centre is about eight feet across."
"Is there anything between the hedges and the walk?"
"Yes, there is a strip of grass about six feet broad on either side."
"I understand that the yew hedge is penetrated at one point by a gate?"
"Yes, the wicket-gate which leads on to the moor."
"Is there any other opening?"
"None."
"So that to reach the yew alley one either has to come down it from the house or else to enter it by the moor-gate?"
"There is an exit through a summer-house at the far end."
"Had Sir Charles reached this?"
"No; he lay about fifty yards from it."
"Now, tell me, Dr. Mortimer--and this is important--the marks which you saw were on the path and not on the grass?"
"No marks could show on the grass."
"Were they on the same side of the path as the moor-gate?"
"Yes; they were on the edge of the path on the same side as the moor-gate."
"You interest me exceedingly. Another point. Was the wicket-gate closed?"
"Closed and padlocked."
"How high was it?"
"About four feet high."
"Then anyone could have got over it?"
"Yes."
"And what marks did you see by the wicket-gate?"
"None in particular."
"Good heaven! Did no one examine?"
"Yes, I examined, myself."
"And found nothing?"
"It was all very confused. Sir Charles had evidently stood there for five or ten minutes."
"How do you know that?"
"Because the ash had twice dropped from his cigar."
"Excellent! This is a colleague, Watson, after our own heart. But the marks?"
"He had left his own marks all over that small patch of gravel. I could discern no others."
Sherlock Holmes struck his hand against his knee with an impatient gesture.
"If I had only been there!" he cried. "It is evidently a case of extraordinary interest, and one which presented immense opportunities to the scientific expert. That gravel page upon which I might have read so much has long ere this smudged by the rain and defaced by the clogs of curious peasants. Oh, Dr. Mortimer, Dr. Mortimer, to think that you should not have called me in! You have indeed much to answer for."
"I could not call you in, Mr. Holmes, without disclosing these facts to the world, and I have already given my reasons for not wishing to do so. Besides, besides--"
"Why do you hesitate?"
"There is a realm in which the most acute and most experienced of detectives is helpless."
"You mean that the thing is supernatural?"
"I did not positively say so."
"No, but you evidently think it."
"Since the tragedy, Mr. Holmes, there have come to my ears several incidents which are hard to reconcile with the settled order of Nature."
"For example?"
"I find that before the terrible event occurred several people had seen a creature upon the moor which corresponds with this Baskerville demon, and which could not possibly be any animal known to science. They all agreed that it was a huge creature, luminous, ghastly, and spectral. I have cross-examined these men, one of them a hard-headed countryman, one a farrier, and one a moorland farmer, who all tell the same story of this dreadful apparition, exactly corresponding to the hell-hound of the legend. I assure you that there is a reign of terror in the district, and that it is a hardy man who will cross the moor at night."

"And you, a trained man of science, believe it to be supernatural?"

"I do not know what to believe."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders. "I have hitherto confined my investigations to this world," said he. "In a modest way I have combated evil, but to take on the Father of Evil himself would, perhaps, be too ambitious a task. Yet you must admit that the footprint is material."

"The original hound was material enough to tug a man's throat out, and yet he was diabolical as well."

"I see that you have quite gone over to the supernaturalists. But now, Dr. Mortimer, tell me this. If you hold these views, why have you come to consult me at all? You tell me in the same breath that it is useless to investigate Sir Charles's death, and that you desire me to do it."

"I did not say that I desired you to do it."

"Then, how can I assist you?"

"By advising me as to what I should do with Sir Henry Baskerville, who arrives at Waterloo Station"--Dr. Mortimer looked at his watch--"in exactly one hour and a quarter."

"He being the heir?"

"Yes. On the death of Sir Charles we inquired for this young gentleman and found that he had been farming in Canada. From the accounts which have reached us he is an excellent fellow in every way. I speak now not as a medical man but as a trustee and executor of Sir Charles's will."

"There is no other claimant, I presume?"

"None. The only other kinsman whom we have been able to trace was Rodger Baskerville, the youngest of three brothers of whom poor Sir Charles was the elder. The second brother, who died young, is the father of this lad Henry. The third, Rodger, was the black sheep of the family. He came of the old masterful Baskerville strain and was the very image, they tell me, of the family picture of old Hugo. He made England too hot to hold him, fled to Central America, and died there in 1876 of yellow fever. Henry is the last of the Baskervilles. In one hour and five minutes I meet him at Waterloo Station. I have had a wire that he arrived at Southampton this morning. Now, Mr. Holmes, what would you advise me to do with him?"

"Why should he not go to the home of his fathers?"

"It seems natural, does it not? And yet, consider that every Baskerville who goes there meets with an evil fate. I feel sure that if Sir Charles could have spoken with me before his death he would have warned me against bringing this, the last of the old race, and the heir to great wealth, to that deadly place. And yet it cannot be denied that the prosperity of the whole poor, bleak countryside depends upon his presence. All the good work which has been done by Sir Charles will crash to the ground if there is no tenant of the Hall. I fear lest I should be swayed too much by my own obvious interest in the matter, and that is why I bring the case before you and ask for your advice."

Holmes considered for a little time.

"Put into plain words, the matter is this," said he. "In your opinion there is a diabolical agency which makes Dartmoor an unsafe abode for a Baskerville--that is your opinion?"

"At least I might go the length of saying that there is some evidence that this may be so."

"Exactly. But surely, if your supernatural theory be correct, it could work the young man evil in London as easily as in Devonshire. A devil with merely local powers like a parish vestry would be too inconceivable a thing."

"You put the matter more flippantly, Mr. Holmes, than you would probably do if you were brought into personal contact with these things. Your advice, then, as I understand it, is that the young man will be as safe in Devonshire as in London. He comes in fifty minutes. What would you recommend?"

"I recommend, sir, that you take a cab, call off your spaniel who is scratching at my front door, and proceed to Waterloo to meet Sir Henry Baskerville."

"And then?"

"And then you will say nothing to him at all until I have made up my mind about the matter."

"How long will it take you to make up your mind?"

"Twenty-four hours. At ten o'clock tomorrow, Dr. Mortimer, I will be much obliged to you if you will call upon me here, and it will be of help to me in my plans for the future if you will bring Sir Henry Baskerville with you."

"I will do so, Mr. Holmes." He scribbled the appointment on his shirt-cuff and hurried off in his strange, peering, absent-minded fashion. Holmes stopped him at the head of the stair.
"Only one more question, Dr. Mortimer. You say that before Sir Charles Baskerville's death several people saw this apparition upon the moor?"
"Three people did."
"Did any see it after?"
"I have not heard of any."
"Thank you. Good-morning."
Holmes returned to his seat with that quiet look of inward satisfaction which meant that he had a congenial task before him.
"Going out, Watson?"
"Unless I can help you."
"No, my dear fellow, it is at the hour of action that I turn to you for aid. But this is splendid, really unique from some points of view. When you pass Bradley's, would you ask him to send up a pound of the strongest shag tobacco? Thank you. It would be as well if you could make it convenient not to return before evening. Then I should be very glad to compare impressions as to this most interesting problem which has been submitted to us this morning."

I knew that seclusion and solitude were very necessary for my friend in those hours of intense mental concentration during which he weighed every particle of evidence, constructed alternative theories, balanced one against the other, and made up his mind as to which points were essential and which immaterial. I therefore spent the day at my club and did not return to Baker Street until evening. It was nearly nine o'clock when I found myself in the sitting-room once more.

My first impression as I opened the door was that a fire had broken out, for the room was so filled with smoke that the light of the lamp upon the table was blurred by it. As I entered, however, my fears were set at rest, for it was the acrid fumes of strong coarse tobacco which took me by the throat and set me coughing. Through the haze I had a vague vision of Holmes in his dressing-gown coiled up in an armchair with his black clay pipe between his lips. Several rolls of paper lay around him.
"Caught cold, Watson?" said he.
"No, it's this poisonous atmosphere."
"I suppose it is pretty thick, now that you mention it."
"Thick! It is intolerable."
"Open the window, then! You have been at your club all day, I perceive."
"My dear Holmes!"
"Am I right?"
"Certainly, but how?"
He laughed at my bewildered expression. "There is a delightful freshness about you, Watson, which makes it a pleasure to exercise any small powers which I possess at your expense. A gentleman goes forth on a showery and miry day. He returns immaculate in the evening with the gloss still on his hat and his boots. He has been a fixture therefore all day. He is not a man with intimate friends. Where, then, could he have been? Is it not obvious?"
"Well, it is rather obvious."
"The world is full of obvious things which nobody by any chance ever observes. Where do you think that I have been?"
"A fixture also."
"On the contrary, I have been to Devonshire."
"In spirit?"
"Exactly. My body has remained in this armchair and has, I regret to observe, consumed in my absence two large pots of coffee and an incredible amount of tobacco. After you left I sent down to Stamford's for the Ordnance map of this portion of the moor, and my spirit has hovered over it all day. I flatter myself that I could find my way about."
"A large-scale map, I presume?"
"Very large."
He unrolled one section and held it over his knee. "Here you have the particular district which concerns us. That is Baskerville Hall in the middle."
"With a wood round it?"
"Exactly. I fancy the yew alley, though not marked under that name, must stretch along this line, with the moor, as you perceive, upon the right of it. This small clump of buildings here is the hamlet of Grimpen, where our friend Dr. Mortimer has his headquarters. Within a radius of five miles there are, as you see, only a very few scattered dwellings. Here is Lafter Hall, which was mentioned in the narrative. There is a house indicated here which may be
the residence of the naturalist—Stapleton, if I remember right, was his name. Here are two moorland farmhouses, High Tor and Foulmire. Then fourteen miles away the great convict prison of Princetown. Between and around these scattered points extends the desolate, lifeless moor. This, then, is the stage upon which tragedy has been played, and upon which we may help to play it again."

"It must be a wild place."

"Yes, the setting is a worthy one. If the devil did desire to have a hand in the affairs of men—"

"Then you are yourself inclining to the supernatural explanation."

"The devil's agents may be of flesh and blood, may they not? There are two questions waiting for us at the outset. The one is whether any crime has been committed at all; the second is, what is the crime and how was it committed? Of course, if Dr. Mortimer's surmise should be correct, and we are dealing with forces outside the ordinary laws of Nature, there is an end of our investigation. But we are bound to exhaust all other hypotheses before falling back upon this one. I think we'll shut that window again, if you don't mind. It is a singular thing, but I find that a concentrated atmosphere helps a concentration of thought. I have not pushed it to the length of getting into a box to think, but that is the logical outcome of my convictions. Have you turned the case over in your mind?"

"Yes, I have thought a good deal of it in the course of the day."

"What do you make of it?"

"It is very bewildering."

"It has certainly a character of its own. There are points of distinction about it. That change in the footprints, for example. What do you make of that?"

"Mortimer said that the man had walked on tiptoe down that portion of the alley."

"He only repeated what some fool had said at the inquest. Why should a man walk on tiptoe down the alley?"

"What then?"

"He was running, Watson--running desperately, running for his life, running until he burst his heart--and fell dead upon his face."

"Running from what?"

"There lies our problem. There are indications that the man was crazed with fear before ever he began to run."

"How can you say that?"

"I am presuming that the cause of his fears came to him across the moor. If that were so, and it seems most probable, only a man who had lost his wits would have run from the house instead of towards it. If the gipsy's evidence may be taken as true, he ran with cries for help in the direction where help was least likely to be. Then, again, whom was he waiting for that night, and why was he waiting for him in the yew alley rather than in his own house?"

"You think that he was waiting for someone?"

"The man was elderly and infirm. We can understand his taking an evening stroll, but the ground was damp and the night inclement. Is it natural that he should stand for five or ten minutes, as Dr. Mortimer, with more practical sense than I should have given him credit for, deduced from the cigar ash?"

"But he went out every evening."

"I think it unlikely that he waited at the moor-gate every evening. On the contrary, the evidence is that he avoided the moor. That night he waited there. It was the night before he made his departure for London. The thing takes shape, Watson. It becomes coherent. Might I ask you to hand me my violin, and we will postpone all further thought upon this business until we have had the advantage of meeting Dr. Mortimer and Sir Henry Baskerville in the morning."

Chapter 4 Sir Henry Baskerville

Our breakfast table was cleared early, and Holmes waited in his dressing-gown for the promised interview. Our clients were punctual to their appointment, for the clock had just struck ten when Dr. Mortimer was shown up, followed by the young baronet. The latter was a small, alert, dark-eyed man about thirty years of age, very sturdily built, with thick black eyebrows and a strong, pugnacious face. He wore a ruddy-tinted tweed suit and had the weather-beaten appearance of one who has spent most of his time in the open air, and yet there was something in his steady eye and the quiet assurance of his bearing which indicated the gentleman.

"This is Sir Henry Baskerville," said Dr. Mortimer.

"Why, yes," said he, "and the strange thing is, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, that if my friend here had not proposed coming round to you this morning I should have come on my own account. I understand that you think out little puzzles, and I've had one this morning which wants more thinking out than I am able to give it."

"Pray take a seat, Sir Henry. Do I understand you to say that you have yourself had some remarkable experience since you arrived in London?"

"Nothing of much importance, Mr. Holmes. Only a joke, as like as not. It was this letter, if you can call it a
letter, which reached me this morning."

He laid an envelope upon the table, and we all bent over it. It was of common quality, grayish in colour. The address, "Sir Henry Baskerville, Northumberland Hotel," was printed in rough characters; the post-mark "Charing Cross," and the date of posting the preceding evening.

"Who knew that you were going to the Northumberland Hotel?" asked Holmes, glancing keenly across at our visitor.

"No one could have known. We only decided after I met Dr. Mortimer."

"But Dr. Mortimer was no doubt already stopping there?"

"No, I had been staying with a friend," said the doctor.

"Hum! Someone seems to be very deeply interested in your movements." Out of the envelope he took a half-sheet of foolscap paper folded into four. This he opened and spread flat upon the table. Across the middle of it a single sentence had been formed by the expedient of pasting printed words upon it. It ran:

As you value your life or your reason keep away from the moor.

The word "moor" only was printed in ink.

"Now," said Sir Henry Baskerville, "perhaps you will tell me, Mr. Holmes, what in thunder is the meaning of that, and who it is that takes so much interest in my affairs?"

"What do you make of it, Dr. Mortimer? You must allow that there is nothing supernatural about this, at any rate?"

"No, sir, but it might very well come from someone who was convinced that the business is supernatural."

"What business?" asked Sir Henry sharply. "It seems to me that all you gentlemen know a great deal more than I do about my own affairs."

"You shall share our knowledge before you leave this room, Sir Henry. I promise you that," said Sherlock Holmes. "We will confine ourselves for the present with your permission to this very interesting document, which must have been put together and posted yesterday evening. Have you yesterday's Times, Watson?"

"It is here in the corner."

"Might I trouble you for it--the inside page, please, with the leading articles?" He glanced swiftly over it, running his eyes up and down the columns. "Capital article this on free trade. Permit me to give you an extract from it.

'You may be cajoled into imagining that your own special trade or your own industry will be encouraged by a protective tariff, but it stands to reason that such legislation must in the long run keep away wealth from the country, diminish the value of our imports, and lower the general conditions of life in this island.'"

"What do you think of that, Watson?" cried Holmes in high glee, rubbing his hands together with satisfaction. "Don't you think that is an admirable sentiment?"

Dr. Mortimer looked at Holmes with an air of professional interest, and Sir Henry Baskerville turned a pair of puzzled dark eyes upon me.

"I don't know much about the tariff and things of that kind," said he, "but it seems to me we've got a bit off the trail so far as that note is concerned."

"On the contrary, I think we are particularly hot upon the trail, Sir Henry. Watson here knows more about my methods than you do, but I fear that even he has not quite grasped the significance of this sentence."

"No, I confess that I see no connection."

"And yet, my dear Watson, there is so very close a connection that the one is extracted out of the other. 'You,' 'your,' 'your,' 'life,' 'reason,' 'value,' 'keep away,' 'from the.' Don't you see now whence these words have been taken?"

"By thunder, you're right! Well, if that isn't smart!" cried Sir Henry.

"If any possible doubt remained it is settled by the fact that 'keep away' and 'from the' are cut out in one piece."

"Well, now--so it is!"

"Really, Mr. Holmes, this exceeds anything which I could have imagined," said Dr. Mortimer, gazing at my friend in amazement. "I could understand anyone saying that the words were from a newspaper; but that you should name which, and add that it came from the leading article, is really one of the most remarkable things which I have ever known. How did you do it?"

"I presume, Doctor, that you could tell the skull of a negro from that of an Esquimau?"

"Most certainly."

"But how?"

"Because that is my special hobby. The differences are obvious. The supra-orbital crest, the facial angle, the maxillary curve, the--"

"But this is my special hobby, and the differences are equally obvious. There is as much difference to my eyes
between the leaded bourgeois type of a Times article and the slovenly print of an evening half-penny paper as there
could be between your negro and your Esquimau. The detection of types is one of the most elementary branches of
knowledge to the special expert in crime, though I confess that once when I was very young I confused the Leeds
Mercury with the Western Morning News. But a Times leader is entirely distinctive, and these words could have
been taken from nothing else. As it was done yesterday the strong probability was that we should find the words in
yesterday's issue."

"So far as I can follow you, then, Mr. Holmes," said Sir Henry Baskerville, "someone cut out this message with a
scissors---"

"Nail-scissors," said Holmes. "You can see that it was a very short-bladed scissors, since the cutter had to take
two snips over 'keep away.'"

"That is so. Someone, then, cut out the message with a pair of short-bladed scissors, pasted it with paste--"

"Gum," said Holmes.

"With gum on to the paper. But I want to know why the word 'moor' should have been written?"

"Because he could not find it in print. The other words were all simple and might be found in any issue, but
'moor' would be less common."

"Why, of course, that would explain it. Have you read anything else in this message, Mr. Holmes?"

"There are one or two indications, and yet the utmost pains have been taken to remove all clues. The address,
you observe is printed in rough characters. But the Times is a paper which is seldom found in any hands but those of
the highly educated. We may take it, therefore, that the letter was composed by an educated man who wished to pose
as an uneducated one, and his effort to conceal his own writing suggests that that writing might be known, or come
to be known, by you. Again, you will observe that the words are not gummed on in an accurate line, but that some
are much higher than others. 'Life,' for example is quite out of its proper place. That may point to carelessness or it
may point to agitation and hurry upon the part of the cutter. On the whole I incline to the latter view, since the matter
was evidently important, and it is unlikely that the composer of such a letter would be careless. If he were in a hurry
it opens up the interesting question why he should be in a hurry, since any letter posted up to early morning would
reach Sir Henry before he would leave his hotel. Did the composer fear an interruption--and from whom?"

"We are coming now rather into the region of guesswork," said Dr. Mortimer.

"Say, rather, into the region where we balance probabilities and choose the most likely. It is the scientific use of
the imagination, but we have always some material basis on which to start our speculation. Now, you would call it a
guess, no doubt, but I am almost certain that this address has been written in a hotel."

"How in the world can you say that?"

"If you examine it carefully you will see that both the pen and the ink have given the writer trouble. The pen has
spluttered twice in a single word and has run dry three times in a short address, showing that there was very little ink
in the bottle. Now, a private pen or ink-bottle is seldom allowed to be in such a state, and the combination of the two
must be quite rare. But you know the hotel ink and the hotel pen, where it is rare to get anything else. Yes, I have
very little hesitation in saying that could we examine the waste-paper baskets of the hotels around Charing Cross
until we found the remains of the mutilated Times leader we could lay our hands straight upon the person who sent
this singular message. Halloa! Halloa! What's this?"

He was carefully examining the foolscap, upon which the words were pasted, holding it only an inch or two from
his eyes.

"Well?"

"Nothing," said he, throwing it down. "It is a blank half-sheet of paper, without even a water-mark upon it. I
think we have drawn as much as we can from this curious letter; and now, Sir Henry, has anything else of interest
happened to you since you have been in London?"

"Why, no, Mr. Holmes. I think not."

"You have not observed anyone follow or watch you?"

"I seem to have walked right into the thick of a dime novel," said our visitor. "Why in thunder should anyone
follow or watch me?"

"We are coming to that. You have nothing else to report to us before we go into this matter?"

"Well, it depends upon what you think worth reporting."

"I think anything out of the ordinary routine of life well worth reporting."

Sir Henry smiled. "I don't know much of British life yet, for I have spent nearly all my time in the States and in
Canada. But I hope that to lose one of your boots is not part of the ordinary routine of life over here."

"You have lost one of your boots?"

"My dear sir," cried Dr. Mortimer, "it is only mislaid. You will find it when you return to the hotel. What is the
use of troubling Mr. Holmes with trifles of this kind?"
"Well, he asked me for anything outside the ordinary routine."
"Exactly," said Holmes, "however foolish the incident may seem. You have lost one of your boots, you say?"
"Well, mislaid it, anyhow. I put them both outside my door last night, and there was only one in the morning. I
could get no sense out of the chap who cleans them. The worst of it is that I only bought the pair last night in the
Strand, and I have never had them on."
"If you have never worn them, why did you put them out to be cleaned?"
"They were tan boots and had never been varnished. That was why I put them out."
"Then I understand that on your arrival in London yesterday you went out at once and bought a pair of boots?"
"I did a good deal of shopping. Dr. Mortimer here went round with me. You see, if I am to be squire down there
I must dress the part, and it may be that I have got a little careless in my ways out West. Among other things I
bought these brown boots-- gave six dollars for them--and had one stolen before ever I had them on my feet."
"It seems a singularly useless thing to steal," said Sherlock Holmes. "I confess that I share Dr. Mortimer's belief
that it will not be long before the missing boot is found."
"And, now, gentlemen," said the baronet with decision, "it seems to me that I have spoken quite enough about
the little that I know. It is time that you kept your promise and gave me a full account of what we are all driving at."
"Your request is a very reasonable one," Holmes answered. "Dr. Mortimer, I think you could not do better than
to tell your story as you told it to us."
Thus encouraged, our scientific friend drew his papers from his pocket and presented the whole case as he had
done upon the morning before. Sir Henry Baskerville listened with the deepest attention and with an occasional
exclamation of surprise.
"Well, I seem to have come into an inheritance with a vengeance," said he when the long narrative was finished.
"Of course, I've heard of the hound ever since I was in the nursery. It's the pet story of the family, though I never
thought of taking it seriously before. But as to my uncle's death--well, it all seems boiling up in my head, and I can't
get it clear yet. You don't seem quite to have made up your mind whether it's a case for a policeman or a
clergyman."
"Precisely."
"And now there's this affair of the letter to me at the hotel. I suppose that fits into its place."
"It seems to show that someone knows more than we do about what goes on upon the moor," said Dr. Mortimer.
"And also," said Holmes, "that someone is not ill-disposed towards you, since they warn you of danger."
"Or it may be that they wish, for their own purposes, to scare me away."
"Well, of course, that is possible also. I am very much indebted to you, Dr. Mortimer, for introducing me to a
problem which presents several interesting alternatives. But the practical point which we now have to decide, Sir
Henry, is whether it is or is not advisable for you to go to Baskerville Hall."
"Why should I not go?"
"There seems to be danger."
"Do you mean danger from this family fiend or do you mean danger from human beings?"
"Well, that is what we have to find out."
"Whichever it is, my answer is fixed. There is no devil in hell, Mr. Holmes, and there is no man upon earth who
can prevent me from going to the home of my own people, and you may take that to be my final answer." His dark
brows knitted and his face flushed to a dusky red as he spoke. It was evident that the fiery temper of the Baskervilles
was not extinct in this their last representative. "Meanwhile," said he, "I have hardly had time to think over all that
you have told me. It's a big thing for a man to have to understand and to decide at one sitting. I should like to have a
quiet hour by myself to make up my mind. Now, look here, Mr. Holmes, it's half-past eleven now and I am going
back right away to my hotel. Suppose you and your friend, Dr. Watson, come round and lunch with us at two. I'll be
able to tell you more clearly then how this thing strikes me."
"Is that convenient to you, Watson?"
"Perfectly."
"Then you may expect us. Shall I have a cab called?"
"I'd prefer to walk, for this affair has flurried me rather."
"I'll join you in a walk, with pleasure," said his companion.
"Then we meet again at two o'clock. Au revoir, and good-morning!"
We heard the steps of our visitors descend the stair and the bang of the front door. In an instant Holmes had
changed from the languid dreamer to the man of action.
"Your hat and boots, Watson, quick! Not a moment to lose!" He rushed into his room in his dressing-gown and
was back again in a few seconds in a frock-coat. We hurried together down the stairs and into the street. Dr.
Mortimer and Baskerville were still visible about two hundred yards ahead of us in the direction of Oxford Street.
"Shall I run on and stop them?"

"Not for the world, my dear Watson. I am perfectly satisfied with your company if you will tolerate mine. Our friends are wise, for it is certainly a very fine morning for a walk."

He quickened his pace until we had decreased the distance which divided us by about half. Then, still keeping a hundred yards behind, we followed into Oxford Street and so down Regent Street. Once our friends stopped and stared into a shop window, upon which Holmes did the same. An instant afterwards he gave a little cry of satisfaction, and, following the direction of his eager eyes, I saw that a hansom cab with a man inside which had halted on the other side of the street was now proceeding slowly onward again.

"There's our man, Watson! Come along! We'll have a good look at him, if we can do no more."

At that instant I was aware of a bushy black beard and a pair of piercing eyes turned upon us through the side window of the cab. Instantly the trapdoor at the top flew up, something was screamed to the driver, and the cab flew madly off down Regent Street. Holmes looked eagerly round for another, but no empty one was in sight. Then he dashed in wild pursuit amid the stream of the traffic, but the start was too great, and already the cab was out of sight.

"There now!" said Holmes bitterly as he emerged panting and white with vexation from the tide of vehicles. "Was ever such bad luck and such bad management, too? Watson, Watson, if you are an honest man you will record this also and set it against my successes!"

"Who was the man?"

"I have not an idea."

"A spy?"

"Well, it was evident from what we have heard that Baskerville has been very closely shadowed by someone since he has been in town. How else could it be known so quickly that it was the Northumberland Hotel which he had chosen? If they had followed him the first day I argued that they would follow him also the second. You may have observed that I twice strolled over to the window while Dr. Mortimer was reading his legend."

"Yes, I remember."

"I was looking out for loiterers in the street, but I saw none. We are dealing with a clever man, Watson. This matter cuts very deep, and though I have not finally made up my mind whether it is a benevolent or a malevolent agency which is in touch with us, I am conscious always of power and design. When our friends left I at once followed them in the hopes of marking down their invisible attendant. So wily was he that he had not trusted himself upon foot, but he had availed himself of a cab so that he could loiter behind or dash past them and so escape their notice. His method had the additional advantage that if they were to take a cab he was all ready to follow them. It has, however, one obvious disadvantage."

"It puts him in the power of the cabman."

"Exactly."

"What a pity we did not get the number!"

"My dear Watson, clumsily as I have been, you surely do not seriously imagine that I neglected to get the number? No. 2704 is our man. But that is no use to us for the moment."

"I fail to see how you could have done more."

"On observing the cab I should have instantly turned and walked in the other direction. I should then at my leisure have hired a second cab and followed the first at a respectful distance, or, better still, have driven to the Northumberland Hotel and waited there. When our unknown had followed Baskerville home we should have had the opportunity of playing his own game upon himself and seeing where he made for. As it is, by an indiscreet eagerness, which was taken advantage of with extraordinary quickness and energy by our opponent, we have betrayed ourselves and lost our man."

We had been sauntering slowly down Regent Street during this conversation, and Dr. Mortimer, with his companion, had long vanished in front of us.

"There is no object in our following them," said Holmes. "The shadow has departed and will not return. We must see what further cards we have in our hands and play them with decision. Could you swear to that man's face within the cab?"

"I could swear only to the beard."

"And so could I—from which I gather that in all probability it was a false one. A clever man upon so delicate an errand has no use for a beard save to conceal his features. Come in here, Watson!"

He turned into one of the district messenger offices, where he was warmly greeted by the manager.

"Ah, Wilson, I see you have not forgotten the little case in which I had the good fortune to help you?"

"No, sir, indeed I have not. You saved my good name, and perhaps my life."

"My dear fellow, you exaggerate. I have some recollection, Wilson, that you had among your boys a lad named Cartwright, who showed some ability during the investigation."
"Yes, sir, he is still with us."
"Could you ring him up? -- thank you! And I should be glad to have change of this five-pound note."
A lad of fourteen, with a bright, keen face, had obeyed the summons of the manager. He stood now gazing with great reverence at the famous detective.
"Let me have the Hotel Directory," said Holmes. "Thank you! Now, Cartwright, there are the names of twenty-three hotels here, all in the immediate neighbourhood of Charing Cross. Do you see?"
"Yes, sir."
"You will visit each of these in turn."
"Yes, sir."
"You will begin in each case by giving the outside porter one shilling. Here are twenty-three shillings."
"Yes, sir."
"You will tell him that you want to see the waste-paper of yesterday. You will say that an important telegram has miscarried and that you are looking for it. You understand?"
"Yes, sir."
"But what you are really looking for is the centre page of the Times with some holes cut in it with scissors. Here is a copy of the Times. It is this page. You could easily recognize it, could you not?"
"Yes, sir."
"In each case the outside porter will send for the hall porter, to whom also you will give a shilling. Here are twenty-three shillings. You will then learn in possibly twenty cases out of the twenty-three that the waste of the day before has been burned or removed. In the three other cases you will be shown a heap of paper and you will look for this page of the Times among it. The odds are enormously against your finding it. There are ten shillings over in case of emergencies. Let me have a report by wire at Baker Street before evening. And now, Watson, it only remains for us to find out by wire the identity of the cabman, No. 2704, and then we will drop into one of the Bond Street picture galleries and fill in the time until we are due at the hotel."

Chapter 5 Three Broken Threads

Sherlock Holmes had, in a very remarkable degree, the power of detaching his mind at will. For two hours the strange business in which we had been involved appeared to be forgotten, and he was entirely absorbed in the pictures of the modern Belgian masters. He would talk of nothing but art, of which he had the crudest ideas, from our leaving the gallery until we found ourselves at the Northumberland Hotel.

"Sir Henry Baskerville is upstairs expecting you," said the clerk. "He asked me to show you up at once when you came."
"Have you any objection to my looking at your register?" said Holmes.
"Not in the least."

The book showed that two names had been added after that of Baskerville. One was Theophilus Johnson and family, of Newcastle; the other Mrs. Oldmore and maid, of High Lodge, Alton.

"Surely that must be the same Johnson whom I used to know," said Holmes to the porter. "A lawyer, is he not, gray-headed, and walks with a limp?"
"No, sir, this is Mr. Johnson, the coal-owner, a very active gentleman, not older than yourself."
"Surely you are mistaken about his trade?"
"No, sir! he has used this hotel for many years, and he is very well known to us."
"Ah, that settles it. Mrs. Oldmore, too; I seem to remember the name. Excuse my curiosity, but often in calling upon one friend one finds another."
"She is an invalid lady, sir. Her husband was once mayor of Gloucester. She always comes to us when she is in town."
"Thank you; I am afraid I cannot claim her acquaintance. We have established a most important fact by these questions, Watson," he continued in a low voice as we went upstairs together. "We know now that the people who are so interested in our friend have not settled down in his own hotel. That means that while they are, as we have seen, very anxious to watch him, they are equally anxious that he should not see them. Now, this is a most suggestive fact."
"What does it suggest?"
"It suggests--halloa, my dear fellow, what on earth is the matter?"

As we came round the top of the stairs we had run up against Sir Henry Baskerville himself. His face was flushed with anger, and he held an old and dusty boot in one of his hands. So furious was he that he was hardly articulate, and when he did speak it was in a much broader and more Western dialect than any which we had heard from him in the morning.
"Seems to me they are playing me for a sucker in this hotel," he cried. "They'll find they've started in to monkey
with the wrong man unless they are careful. By thunder, if that chap can't find my missing boot there will be trouble. I can take a joke with the best, Mr. Holmes, but they've got a bit over the mark this time."

"Still looking for your boot?"
"Yes, sir, and mean to find it."
"But, surely, you said that it was a new brown boot?"
"So it was, sir. And now it's an old black one."
"What! you don't mean to say--?"
"That's just what I do mean to say. I only had three pairs in the world--the new brown, the old black, and the patent leathers, which I am wearing. Last night they took one of my brown ones, and today they have sneaked one of the black. Well, have you got it? Speak out, man, and don't stand staring!"

An agitated German waiter had appeared upon the scene.
"No, sir; I have made inquiry all over the hotel, but I can hear no word of it."
"Well, either that boot comes back before sundown or I'll see the manager and tell him that I go right straight out of this hotel."
"It shall be found, sir--I promise you that if you will have a little patience it will be found."
"Mind it is, for it's the last thing of mine that I'll lose in this den of thieves. Well, well, Mr. Holmes, you'll excuse my troubling you about such a trifle--"
"I think it's well worth troubling about."
"Why, you look very serious over it."
"How do you explain it?"
"I just don't attempt to explain it. It seems the very maddest, queerest thing that ever happened to me."
"The queerest perhaps--" said Holmes thoughtfully.
"What do you make of it yourself?"
"Well, I don't profess to understand it yet. This case of yours is very complex, Sir Henry. When taken in conjunction with your uncle's death I am not sure that of all the five hundred cases of capital importance which I have handled there is one which cuts so deep. But we hold several threads in our hands, and the odds are that one or other of them guides us to the truth. We may waste time in following the wrong one, but sooner or later we must come upon the right."

We had a pleasant luncheon in which little was said of the business which had brought us together. It was in the private sitting-room to which we afterwards repaired that Holmes asked Baskerville what were his intentions.
"To go to Baskerville Hall."
"And when?"
"At the end of the week."

"On the whole," said Holmes, "I think that your decision is a wise one. I have ample evidence that you are being dogged in London, and amid the millions of this great city it is difficult to discover who these people are or what their object can be. If their intentions are evil they might do you a mischief, and we should be powerless to prevent it. You did not know, Dr. Mortimer, that you were followed this morning from my house?"

Dr. Mortimer started violently. "Followed! By whom?"

"That, unfortunately, is what I cannot tell you. Have you among your neighbours or acquaintances on Dartmoor any man with a black, full beard?"
"No--or, let me see--why, yes. Barrymore, Sir Charles's butler, is a man with a full, black beard."
"Ha! Where is Barrymore?"
"He is in charge of the Hall."
"We had best ascertain if he is really there, or if by any possibility he might be in London."
"How can you do that?"

"Give me a telegraph form. 'Is all ready for Sir Henry?' That will do. Address to Mr. Barrymore, Baskerville Hall. What is the nearest telegraph-office? Grimpen. Very good, we will send a second wire to the postmaster, Grimpen: 'Telegram to Mr. Barrymore to be delivered into his own hand. If absent, please return wire to Sir Henry Baskerville, Northumberland Hotel.' That should let us know before evening whether Barrymore is at his post in Devonshire or not."

"That's so," said Baskerville. "By the way, Dr. Mortimer, who is this Barrymore, anyhow?"
"He is the son of the old caretaker, who is dead. They have looked after the Hall for four generations now. So far as I know, he and his wife are as respectable a couple as any in the county."
"At the same time," said Baskerville, "it's clear enough that so long as there are none of the family at the Hall these people have a mighty fine home and nothing to do."
"That is true."
"Did Barrymore profit at all by Sir Charles's will?" asked Holmes.
"He and his wife had five hundred pounds each."
"Ha! Did they know that they would receive this?"
"Yes; Sir Charles was very fond of talking about the provisions of his will."
"That is very interesting."
"I hope," said Dr. Mortimer, "that you do not look with suspicious eyes upon everyone who received a legacy from Sir Charles, for I also had a thousand pounds left to me."
"Indeed! And anyone else?"
"There were many insignificant sums to individuals, and a large number of public charities. The residue all went to Sir Henry."
"And how much was the residue?"
"Seven hundred and forty thousand pounds."
Holmes raised his eyebrows in surprise. "I had no idea that so gigantic a sum was involved," said he.
"Sir Charles had the reputation of being rich, but we did not know how very rich he was until we came to examine his securities. The total value of the estate was close on to a million."
"Dear me! It is a stake for which a man might well play a desperate game. And one more question, Dr. Mortimer. Supposing that anything happened to our young friend here--you will forgive the unpleasant hypothesis!--who would inherit the estate?"
"Since Rodger Baskerville, Sir Charles's younger brother died unmarried, the estate would descend to the Desmonds, who are distant cousins. James Desmond is an elderly clergyman in Westmoreland."
"Thank you. These details are all of great interest. Have you met Mr. James Desmond?"
"Yes; he once came down to visit Sir Charles. He is a man of venerable appearance and of saintly life. I remember that he refused to accept any settlement from Sir Charles, though he pressed it upon him."
"And this man of simple tastes would be the heir to Sir Charles's thousands."
"He would be the heir to the estate because that is entailed. He would also be the heir to the money unless it were willed otherwise by the present owner, who can, of course, do what he likes with it."
"And have you made your will, Sir Henry?"
"No, Mr. Holmes, I have not. I've had no time, for it was only yesterday that I learned how matters stood. But in any case I feel that the money should go with the title and estate. That was my poor uncle's idea. How is the owner going to restore the glories of the Baskervilles if he has not money enough to keep up the property? House, land, and dollars must go together."
"Quite so. Well, Sir Henry, I am of one mind with you as to the advisability of your going down to Devonshire without delay. There is only one provision which I must make. You certainly must not go alone."
"Dr. Mortimer returns with me."
"But Dr. Mortimer has his practice to attend to, and his house is miles away from yours. With all the goodwill in the world he may be unable to help you. No, Sir Henry, you must take with you someone, a trusty man, who will be always by your side."
"Is it possible that you could come yourself, Mr. Holmes?"
"If matters came to a crisis I should endeavour to be present in person; but you can understand that, with my extensive consulting practice and with the constant appeals which reach me from many quarters, it is impossible for me to be absent from London for an indefinite time. At the present instant one of the most revered names in England is being besmirched by a blackmailer, and only I can stop a disastrous scandal. You will see how impossible it is for me to go to Dartmoor."
"Whom would you recommend, then?"
Holmes laid his hand upon my arm. "If my friend would undertake it there is no man who is better worth having at your side when you are in a tight place. No one can say so more confidently than I."
The proposition took me completely by surprise, but before I had time to answer, Baskerville seized me by the hand and wrung it heartily.
"Well, now, that is real kind of you, Dr. Watson," said he. "You see how it is with me, and you know just as much about the matter as I do. If you will come down to Baskerville Hall and see me through I'll never forget it."
The promise of adventure had always a fascination for me, and I was complimented by the words of Holmes and by the eagerness with which the baronet hailed me as a companion.
"I will come, with pleasure," said I. "I do not know how I could employ my time better."
"And you will report very carefully to me," said Holmes. "When a crisis comes, as it will do, I will direct how you shall act. I suppose that by Saturday all might be ready?"
"Would that suit Dr. Watson?"
"Perfectly."
"Then on Saturday, unless you hear to the contrary, we shall meet at the ten-thirty train from Paddington."
We had risen to depart when Baskerville gave a cry, of triumph, and diving into one of the corners of the room he drew a brown boot from under a cabinet.
"My missing boot!" he cried.
"May all our difficulties vanish as easily!" said Sherlock Holmes.
"But it is a very singular thing," Dr. Mortimer remarked. "I searched this room carefully before lunch."
"And so did I," said Baskerville. "Every inch of it."
"There was certainly no boot in it then."
"In that case the waiter must have placed it there while we were lunching."
The German was sent for but professed to know nothing of the matter, nor could any inquiry clear it up. Another item had been added to that constant and apparently purposeless series of small mysteries which had succeeded each other so rapidly. Setting aside the whole grim story of Sir Charles's death, we had a line of inexplicable incidents all within the limits of two days, which included the receipt of the printed letter, the black-bearded spy in the hansom, the loss of the new brown boot, the loss of the old black boot, and now the return of the new brown boot. Holmes sat in silence in the cab as we drove back to Baker Street, and I knew from his drawn brows and keen face that his mind, like my own, was busy in endeavouring to frame some scheme into which all these strange and apparently disconnected episodes could be fitted. All afternoon and late into the evening he sat lost in tobacco and thought.

Just before dinner two telegrams were handed in. The first ran:
Have just heard that Barrymore is at the Hall. BASKERVILLE.
The second:
Visited twenty-three hotels as directed, but sorry, to report unable to trace cut sheet of Times. CARTWRIGHT.
"There go two of my threads, Watson. There is nothing more stimulating than a case where everything goes against you. We must cast round for another scent."
"We have still the cabman who drove the spy."
"Exactly. I have wired to get his name and address from the Official Registry. I should not be surprised if this were an answer to my question."

The ring at the bell proved to be something even more satisfactory than an answer, however, for the door opened and a rough-looking fellow entered who was evidently the man himself.

"I got a message from the head office that a gent at this address had been inquiring for No. 2704," said he. "I've driven my cab this seven years and never a word of complaint. I came here straight from the Yard to ask you to your face what you had against me."

"I have nothing in the world against you, my good man," said Holmes. "On the contrary, I have half a sovereign for you if you will give me a clear answer to my questions."
"Well, I've had a good day and no mistake," said the cabman with a grin. "What was it you wanted to ask, sir?"
"First of all your name and address, in case I want you again."
"John Clayton, 3 Turpey Street, the Borough. My cab is out of Shipley's Yard, near Waterloo Station."
Sherlock Holmes made a note of it.
"Now, Clayton, tell me all about the fare who came and watched this house at ten o'clock this morning and afterwards followed the two gentlemen down Regent Street."
The man looked surprised and a little embarrassed. "Why, there's no good my telling you things, for you seem to know as much as I do already," said he. "The truth is that the gentleman told me that he was a detective and that I was to say nothing about him to anyone."
"My good fellow; this is a very serious business, and you may find yourself in a pretty bad position if you try to hide anything from me. You say that your fare told you that he was a detective?"
"Yes, he did."
"When did he say this?"
"When he left me."
"Did he say anything more?"
"He mentioned his name."
Holmes cast a swift glance of triumph at me. "Oh, he mentioned his name, did he? That was imprudent. What was the name that he mentioned?"
"His name," said the cabman, "was Mr. Sherlock Holmes."
Never have I seen my friend more completely taken aback than by the cabman's reply. For an instant he sat in silent amazement. Then he burst into a hearty laugh.
"A touch, Watson--an undeniable touch!" said he. "I feel a foil as quick and supple as my own. He got home
upon me very prettily that time. So his name was Sherlock Holmes, was it?"
"Yes, sir, that was the gentleman's name."
"Excellent! Tell me where you picked him up and all that occurred."
"He hailed me at half-past nine in Trafalgar Square. He said that he was a detective, and he offered me two guineas if I would do exactly what he wanted all day and ask no questions. I was glad enough to agree. First we drove down to the Northumberland Hotel and waited there until two gentlemen came out and took a cab from the rank. We followed their cab until it pulled up somewhere near here."
"This very door," said Holmes.
"Well, I couldn't be sure of that, but I dare say my fare knew all about it. We pulled up halfway down the street and waited an hour and a half. Then the two gentlemen passed us, walking, and we followed down Baker Street and along--"
"I know," said Holmes.
"Until we got three-quarters down Regent Street. Then my gentleman threw up the trap, and he cried that I should drive right away to Waterloo Station as hard as I could go. I whipped up the mare and we were there under the ten minutes. Then he paid up his two guineas, like a good one, and away he went into the station. Only just as he was leaving he turned round and he said: 'It might interest you to know that you have been driving Mr. Sherlock Holmes.' That's how I come to know the name."
"I see. And you saw no more of him?"
"Not after he went into the station."
"And how would you describe Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"
The cabman scratched his head. "Well, he wasn't altogether such an easy gentleman to describe. I'd put him at forty years of age, and he was of a middle height, two or three inches shorter than you, sir. He was dressed like a toff, and he had a black beard, cut square at the end, and a pale face. I don't know as I could say more than that."
"Colour of his eyes?"
"No, I can't say that."
"Nothing more that you can remember?"
"No, sir; nothing."
"Well, then, here is your half-sovereign. There's another one waiting for you if you can bring any more information. Good-night!"
"Good-night, sir, and thank you!"
John Clayton departed chuckling, and Holmes turned to me with a shrug of his shoulders and a rueful smile.
"Snap goes our third thread, and we end where we began," said he. "The cunning rascal! He knew our number, knew that Sir Henry Baskerville had consulted me, spotted who I was in Regent Street, conjectured that I had got the number of the cab and would lay my hands on the driver, and so sent back this audacious message. I tell you, Watson, this time we have got a foeman who is worthy of our steel. I've been checkmated in London. I can only wish you better luck in Devonshire. But I'm not easy in my mind about it."
"About what?"
"About sending you. It's an ugly business, Watson, an ugly dangerous business, and the more I see of it the less I like it. Yes, my dear fellow, you may laugh, but I give you my word that I shall be very glad to have you back safe and sound in Baker Street once more."

Chapter 6 Baskerville Hall
Sir Henry Baskerville and Dr. Mortimer were ready upon the appointed day, and we started as arranged for Devonshire. Mr. Sherlock Holmes drove with me to the station and gave me his last parting injunctions and advice.
"I will not bias your mind by suggesting theories or suspicions, Watson," said he; "I wish you simply to report facts in the fullest possible manner to me, and you can leave me to do the theorizing."
"What sort of facts?" I asked.
"Anything which may seem to have a bearing however indirect upon the case, and especially the relations between young Baskerville and his neighbours or any fresh particulars concerning the death of Sir Charles. I have made some inquiries myself in the last few days, but the results have, I fear, been negative. One thing only appears to be certain, and that is that Mr. James Desmond, who is the next heir, is an elderly gentleman of a very amiable disposition, so that this persecution does not arise from him. I really think that we may eliminate him entirely from our calculations. There remain the people who will actually surround Sir Henry Baskerville upon the moor."
"Would it not be well in the first place to get rid of this Barrymore couple?"
"By no means. You could not make a greater mistake. If they are innocent it would be a cruel injustice, and if they are guilty we should be giving up all chance of bringing it home to them. No, no, we will preserve them upon our list of suspects. Then there is a groom at the Hall, if I remember right. There are two moorland farmers. There is
our friend Dr. Mortimer, whom I believe to be entirely honest, and there is his wife, of whom we know nothing. There is this naturalist, Stapleton, and there is his sister, who is said to be a young lady of attractions. There is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who is also an unknown factor, and there are one or two other neighbours. These are the folk who must be your very special study."

"I will do my best."
"You have arms, I suppose?"
"Yes, I thought it as well to take them."
"Most certainly. Keep your revolver near you night and day, and never relax your precautions."

Our friends had already secured a first-class carriage and were waiting for us upon the platform.

"No, we have no news of any kind," said Dr. Mortimer in answer to my friend's questions. "I can swear to one thing, and that is that we have not been shadowed during the last two days. We have never gone out without keeping a sharp watch, and no one could have escaped our notice."

"You have always kept together, I presume?"
"Except yesterday afternoon. I usually give up one day to pure amusement when I come to town, so I spent it at the Museum of the College of Surgeons."
"And I went to look at the folk in the park," said Baskerville."
"But we had no trouble of any kind."
"It was imprudent, all the same," said Holmes, shaking his head and looking very grave. "I beg, Sir Henry, that you will not go about alone. Some great misfortune will befall you if you do. Did you get your other boot?"

"No, sir, it is gone forever."
"Indeed. That is very interesting. Well, good-bye," he added as the train began to glide down the platform. "Bear in mind, Sir Henry, one of the phrases in that queer old legend which Dr. Mortimer has read to us, and avoid the moor in those hours of darkness when the powers of evil are exalted."

I looked back at the platform when we had left it far behind and saw the tall, austere figure of Holmes standing motionless and gazing after us.

The journey was a swift and pleasant one, and I spent it in making the more intimate acquaintance of my two companions and in playing with Dr. Mortimer's spaniel. In a very few hours the brown earth had become ruddy, the brick had changed to granite, and red cows grazed in well-hedged fields where the lush grasses and more luxuriant vegetation spoke of a richer, if a damper, climate. Young Baskerville stared eagerly out of the window and cried aloud with delight as he recognized the familiar features of the Devon scenery.

"I've been over a good part of the world since I left it, Dr. Watson," said he; "but I have never seen a place to compare with it."
"I never saw a Devonshire man who did not swear by his county," I remarked.
"It depends upon the breed of men quite as much as on the county," said Dr. Mortimer. "A glance at our friend here reveals the rounded head of the Celt, which carries inside it the Celtic enthusiasm and power of attachment. Poor Sir Charles's head was of a very rare type, half Gaelic, half Ivernian in its characteristics. But you were very young when you last saw Baskerville Hall, were you not?"

"I was a boy in my teens at the time of my father's death and had never seen the Hall, for he lived in a little cottage on the South Coast. Thence I went straight to a friend in America. I tell you it is all as new to me as it is to Dr. Watson, and I'm as keen as possible to see the moor."

"Are you? Then your wish is easily granted, for there is your first sight of the moor," said Dr. Mortimer, pointing out of the carriage window.

Over the green squares of the fields and the low curve of a wood there rose in the distance a gray, melancholy hill, with a strange jagged summit, dim and vague in the distance, like some fantastic landscape in a dream. Baskerville sat for a long time, his eyes fixed upon it, and I read upon his eager face how much it meant to him, this first sight of that strange spot where the men of his blood had held sway so long and left their mark so deep. There he sat, with his tweed suit and his American accent, in the corner of a prosaic railway-carriage, and yet as I looked at his dark and expressive face I felt more than ever how true a descendant he was of that long line of high-blooded, fiery, and masterful men. There were pride, valour, and strength in his thick brows, his sensitive nostrils, and his large hazel eyes. If on that forbidding moor a difficult and dangerous quest should lie before us, this was at least a comrade for whom one might venture to take a risk with the certainty that he would bravely share it.

The train pulled up at a small wayside station and we all descended. Outside, beyond the low, white fence, a wagonette with a pair of cobs was waiting. Our coming was evidently a great event, for station-master and porters clustered round us to carry out our luggage. It was a sweet, simple country spot, but I was surprised to observe that by the gate there stood two soldierly men in dark uniforms who leaned upon their short rifles and glanced keenly at us as we passed. The coachman, a hard-faced, gnarled little fellow, saluted Sir Henry Baskerville, and in a few
minutes we were flying swiftly down the broad, white road. Rolling pasture lands curved upward on either side of us, and old gabled houses peeped out from amid the thick green foliage, but behind the peaceful and sunlit countryside there rose ever, dark against the evening sky, the long, gloomy curve of the moor, broken by the jagged and sinister hills.

The wagonette swung round into a side road, and we curved upward through deep lanes worn by centuries of wheels, high banks on either side, heavy with dripping moss and fleshy hart's-tongue ferns. Bronzing bracken and mottled bramble gleamed in the light of the sinking sun. Still steadily rising, we passed over a narrow granite bridge and skirted a noisy stream which gushed swiftly down, foaming and roaring amid the gray boulders. Both road and stream wound up through a valley dense with scrub oak and fir. At every turn Baskerville gave an exclamation of delight, looking eagerly about him and asking countless questions. To his eyes all seemed beautiful, but to me a tinge of melancholy lay upon the countryside, which bore so clearly the mark of the waning year. Yellow leaves carpeted the lanes and fluttered down upon us as we passed. The rattle of our wheels died away as we drove through drifts of rotting vegetation--sad gifts, as it seemed to me, for Nature to throw before the carriage of the returning heir of the Baskervilles.

"Halloa!" cried Dr. Mortimer, "what is this?"

A steep curve of heath-clad land, an outlying spur of the moor, lay in front of us. On the summit, hard and clear like an equestrian statue upon its pedestal, was a mounted soldier, dark and stern, his rifle poised ready over his forearm. He was watching the road along which we travelled.

"What is this, Perkins?" asked Dr. Mortimer.

Our driver half turned in his seat. "There's a convict escaped from Princetown, sir. He's been out three days now, and the warders watch every road and every station, but they've had no sight of him yet. The farmers about here don't like it, sir, and that's a fact."

"Well, I understand that they get five pounds if they can give information."

"Yes, sir, but the chance of five pounds is but a poor thing compared to the chance of having your throat cut. You see, it isn't like any ordinary convict. This is a man that would stick at nothing."

"Who is he, then?"

"It is Selden, the Notting Hill murderer."

I remembered the case well, for it was one in which Holmes had taken an interest on account of the peculiar ferocity of the crime and the wanton brutality which had marked all the actions of the assassin. The commutation of his death sentence had been due to some doubts as to his complete sanity, so atrocious was his conduct. Our wagonette had topped a rise and in front of us rose the huge expanse of the moor, mottled with gnarled and craggy cairns and tors. A cold wind swept down from it and set us shivering. Somewhere there, on that desolate plain, was lurking this fiendish man, hiding in a burrow like a wild beast, his heart full of malignancy against the whole race which had cast him out. It needed but this to complete the grim suggestiveness of the barren waste, the chilling wind, and the darkling sky. Even Baskerville fell silent and pulled his overcoat more closely around him.

We had left the fertile country behind and beneath us. We looked back on it now, the slanting rays of a low sun turning the streams to threads of gold and glowing on the red earth new turned by the plough and the broad tangle of the woodlands. The road in front of us grew bleaker and wilder over huge russet and olive slopes, sprinkled with giant boulders. Now and then we passed a moorland cottage, walled and roofed with stone, with no creeper to break its harsh outline. Suddenly we looked down into a cuplike depression, patched with stunted oaks and firs which had been twisted and bent by the fury of years of storm. Two high, narrow towers rose over the trees. The driver pointed with his whip.

"Baskerville Hall," said he.

Its master had risen and was staring with flushed cheeks and shining eyes. A few minutes later we had reached the lodge-gates, a maze of fantastic tracery in wrought iron, with weather-bitten pillars on either side, blotched with lichens, and surmounted by the boars' heads of the Baskervilles. The lodge was a ruin of black granite and bared ribs of rafters, but facing it was a new building, half constructed, the first fruit of Sir Charles's South African gold.

Through the gateway we passed into the avenue, where the wheels were again hushed amid the leaves, and the old trees shot their branches in a sombre tunnel over our heads. Baskerville shuddered as he looked up the long, dark drive to where the house glimmered like a ghost at the farther end.

"Was it here?" he asked in a low voice.

"No, no, the yew alley is on the other side."

The young heir glanced round with a gloomy face.

"It's no wonder my uncle felt as if trouble were coming on him in such a place as this," said he. "It's enough to scare any man. I'll have a row of electric lamps up here inside of six months, and you won't know it again, with a thousand candle-power Swan and Edison right here in front of the hall door."
The avenue opened into a broad expanse of turf, and the house lay before us. In the fading light I could see that the centre was a heavy block of building from which a porch projected. The whole front was draped in ivy, with a patch clipped bare here and there where a window or a coat of arms broke through the dark veil. From this central block rose the twin towers, ancient, crenelated, and pierced with many loopholes. To right and left of the turrets were more modern wings of black granite. A dull light shone through heavy mullioned windows, and from the high chimneys which rose from the steep, high-angled roof there sprang a single black column of smoke.

"Welcome, Sir Henry! Welcome to Baskerville Hall!"

A tall man had stepped from the shadow of the porch to open the door of the wagonette. The figure of a woman was silhouetted against the yellow light of the hall. She came out and helped the man to hand down our bags.

"You don't mind my driving straight home, Sir Henry?" said Dr. Mortimer. "My wife is expecting me."

"Surely you will stay and have some dinner?"

"No, I must go. I shall probably find some work awaiting me. I would stay to show you over the house, but Barrymore will be a better guide than I. Good-bye, and never hesitate night or day to send for me if I can be of service."

The wheels died away down the drive while Sir Henry and I turned into the hall, and the door clanged heavily behind us. It was a fine apartment in which we found ourselves, large, lofty, and heavily raftered with huge baulks of age-blackened oak. In the great old-fashioned fireplace behind the high iron dogs a log-fire crackled and snapped. Sir Henry and I held out our hands to it, for we were numb from our long drive. Then we gazed round us at the high, thin window of old stained glass, the oak panelling, the stags' heads, the coats of arms upon the walls, all dim and sombre in the subdued light of the central lamp.

"It's just as I imagined it," said Sir Henry. "Is it not the very picture of an old family home? To think that this should be the same hall in which for five hundred years my people have lived. It strikes me solemn to think of it."

I saw his dark face lit up with a boyish enthusiasm as he gazed about him. The light beat upon him where he stood, but long shadows trailed down the walls and hung like a black canopy above him. Barrymore had returned from taking our luggage to our rooms. He stood in front of us now with the subdued manner of a well-trained servant. He was a remarkable-looking man, tall, handsome, with a square black beard and pale, distinguished features.

"Would you wish dinner to be served at once, sir?"

"Is it ready?"

"In a very few minutes, sir. You will find hot water in your rooms. My wife and I will be happy, Sir Henry, to stay with you until you have made your fresh arrangements, but you will understand that under the new conditions this house will require a considerable staff."

"What new conditions?"

"I only meant, sir, that Sir Charles led a very retired life, and we were able to look after his wants. You would, naturally, wish to have more company, and so you will need changes in your household."

"Do you mean that your wife and you wish to leave?"

"Only when it is quite convenient to you, sir."

"But your family have been with us for several generations, have they not? I should be sorry to begin my life here by breaking an old family connection."

I seemed to discern some signs of emotion upon the butler's white face.

"I feel that also, sir, and so does my wife. But to tell the truth, sir, we were both very much attached to Sir Charles, and his death gave us a shock and made these surroundings very painful to us. I fear that we shall never again be easy in our minds at Baskerville Hall."

"But what do you intend to do?"

"I have no doubt, sir, that we shall succeed in establishing ourselves in some business. Sir Charles's generosity has given us the means to do so. And now, sir, perhaps I had best show you to your rooms."

A square balustraded gallery ran round the top of the old hall, approached by a double stair. From this central point two long corridors extended the whole length of the building, from which all the bedrooms opened. My own was in the same wing as Baskerville's and almost next door to it. These rooms appeared to be much more modern than the central part of the house, and the bright paper and numerous candles did something to remove the sombre impression which our arrival had left upon my mind.

But the dining-room which opened out of the hall was a place of shadow and gloom. It was a long chamber with a step separating the dais where the family sat from the lower portion reserved for their dependents. At one end a minstrel's gallery overlooked it. Black beams shot across above our heads, with a smoke-darkened ceiling beyond them. With rows of flaring torches to light it up, and the colour and rude hilarity of an old-time banquet, it might have softened; but now, when two black-clothed gentlemen sat in the little circle of light thrown by a shaded lamp,
one's voice became hushed and one's spirit subdued. A dim line of ancestors, in every variety of dress, from the Elizabethan knight to the buck of the Regency, stared down upon us and daunted us by their silent company. We talked little, and I for one was glad when the meal was over and we were able to retire into the modern billiard-room and smoke a cigarette.

"My word, it isn't a very cheerful place," said Sir Henry. "I suppose one can tone down to it, but I feel a bit out of the picture at present. I don't wonder that my uncle got a little jumpy if he lived all alone in such a house as this. However, if it suits you, we will retire early tonight, and perhaps things may seem more cheerful in the morning."

I drew aside my curtains before I went to bed and looked out from my window. It opened upon the grassy space which lay in front of the hall door. Beyond, two copse of trees moaned and swung in a rising wind. A half moon broke through the rifts of racing clouds. In its cold light I saw beyond the trees a broken fringe of rocks, and the long, low curve of the melancholy moor. I closed the curtain, feeling that my last impression was in keeping with the rest.

And yet it was not quite the last. I found myself weary and yet wakeful, tossing restlessly from side to side, seeking for the sleep which would not come. Far away a chiming clock struck out the quarters of the hours, but otherwise a deathly silence lay upon the old house. And then suddenly, in the very dead of the night, there came a sound to my ears, clear, resonant, and unmistakable. It was the sob of a woman, the muffled, strangling gasp of one who is torn by an uncontrollable sorrow. I sat up in bed and listened intently. The noise could not have been far away and was certainly in the house. For half an hour I waited with every nerve on the alert, but there came no other sound save the chiming clock and the rustle of the ivy on the wall.

Chapter 7 The Stapletons of Merripit House

The fresh beauty of the following morning did something to efface from our minds the grim and gray impression which had been left upon both of us by our first experience of Baskerville Hall. As Sir Henry and I sat at breakfast the sunlight flooded in through the high mullioned windows, throwing watery patches of colour from the coats of arms which covered them. The dark panelling glowed like bronze in the golden rays, and it was hard to realize that this was indeed the chamber which had struck such a gloom into our souls upon the evening before.

"I guess it is ourselves and not the house that we have to blame!" said the baronet. "We were tired with our journey and chilled by our drive, so we took a gray view of the place. Now we are fresh and well, so it is all cheerful once more."

"And yet it was not entirely a question of imagination," I answered. "Did you, for example, happen to hear someone, a woman I think, sobbing in the night?"

"That is curious, for I did when I was half asleep fancy that I heard something of the sort. I waited quite a time, but there was no more of it, so I concluded that it was all a dream."

"I heard it distinctly, and I am sure that it was really the sob of a woman."

"We must ask about this right away." He rang the bell and asked Barrymore whether he could account for our experience. It seemed to me that the pallid features of the butler turned a shade paler still as he listened to his master's question.

"There are only two women in the house, Sir Henry," he answered. "One is the scullery-maid, who sleeps in the other wing. The other is my wife, and I can answer for it that the sound could not have come from her."

And yet he lied as he said it, for it chanced that after breakfast I met Mrs. Barrymore in the long corridor with the sun full upon her face. She was a large, impassive, heavy-featured woman with a stern set expression of mouth. But her telltale eyes were red and glanced at me from between swollen lids. It was she, then, who wept in the night, and if she did so her husband must know it. Yet he had taken the obvious risk of discovery in declaring that it was not so. Why had he done this? And why did she weep so bitterly? Already round this pale-faced, handsome, black-bearded man there was gathering an atmosphere of mystery and of gloom. It was he who had been the first to discover the body of Sir Charles, and we had only his word for all the circumstances which led up to the old man's death. Was it possible that it was Barrymore, after all, whom we had seen in the cab in Regent Street? The beard might well have been the same. The cabman had described a somewhat shorter man, but such an impression might easily have been erroneous. How could I settle the point forever? Obviously the first thing to do was to see the Grimpen postmaster and find whether the test telegram had really been placed in Barrymore's own hands. Be the answer what it might, I should at least have something to report to Sherlock Holmes.

Sir Henry had numerous papers to examine after breakfast, so that the time was propitious for my excursion. It was a pleasant walk of four miles along the edge of the moor, leading me at last to a small gray hamlet, in which two larger buildings, which proved to be the inn and the house of Dr. Mortimer, stood high above the rest. The postmaster, who was also the village grocer, had a clear recollection of the telegram.

"Certainly, sir," said he, "I had the telegram delivered to Mr. Barrymore exactly as directed."

"Who delivered it?"
"My boy here. James, you delivered that telegram to Mr. Barrymore at the Hall last week, did you not?"
"Yes, father, I delivered it."
"Into his own hands?" I asked.
"Well, he was up in the loft at the time, so that I could not put it into his own hands, but I gave it into Mrs. Barrymore's hands, and she promised to deliver it at once."
"Did you see Mr. Barrymore?"
"No, sir; I tell you he was in the loft."
"If you didn't see him, how do you know he was in the loft?"
"Well, surely his own wife ought to know where he is," said the postmaster testily. "Didn't he get the telegram? If there is any mistake it is for Mr. Barrymore himself to complain."

It seemed hopeless to pursue the inquiry any farther, but it was clear that in spite of Holmes's ruse we had no proof that Barrymore had not been in London all the time. Suppose that it were so-- suppose that the same man had been the last who had seen Sir Charles alive, and the first to dog the new heir when he returned to England. What then? Was he the agent of others or had he some sinister design of his own? What interest could he have in persecuting the Baskerville family? I thought of the strange warning clipped out of the leading article of the Times. Was that his work or was it possibly the doing of someone who was bent upon counteracting his schemes? The only conceivable motive was that which had been suggested by Sir Henry, that if the family could be scared away a comfortable and permanent home would be secured for the Barrymores. But surely such an explanation as that would be quite inadequate to account for the deep and subtle scheming which seemed to be weaving an invisible net round the young baronet. Holmes himself had said that no more complex case had come to him in all the long series of his sensational investigations. I prayed, as I walked back along the gray, lonely road, that my friend might soon be freed from his preoccupations and able to come down to take this heavy burden of responsibility from my shoulders.

Suddenly my thoughts were interrupted by the sound of running feet behind me and by a voice which called me by name. I turned, expecting to see Dr. Mortimer, but to my surprise it was a stranger who was pursuing me. He was a small, slim, clean-shaven, prim-faced man, flaxen-haired and leanjawed, between thirty and forty years of age, dressed in a gray suit and wearing a straw hat. A tin box for botanical specimens hung over his shoulder and he carried a green butterfly-net in one of his hands.

"You will, I am sure, excuse my presumption, Dr. Watson," said he as he came panting up to where I stood. "Here on the moor we are homely folk and do not wait for formal introductions. You may possibly have heard my name from our mutual friend, Mortimer. I am Stapleton, of Merripit House."
"Your net and box would have told me as much," said I, "for I knew that Mr. Stapleton was a naturalist. But how did you know me?"
"I have been calling on Mortimer, and he pointed you out to me from the window of his surgery as you passed. As our road lay the same way I thought that I would overtake you and introduce myself. I trust that Sir Henry is none the worse for his journey?"
"He is very well, thank you."
"We were all rather afraid that after the sad death of Sir Charles the new baronet might refuse to live here. It is asking much of a wealthy man to come down and bury himself in a place of this kind, but I need not tell you that it means a very great deal to the countryside. Sir Henry has, I suppose, no superstitious fears in the matter?"
"I do not think that it is likely."
"Of course you know the legend of the fiend dog which haunts the family?"
"I have heard it."
"It is extraordinary how credulous the peasants are about here! Any number of them are ready to swear that they have seen such a creature upon the moor." He spoke with a smile, but I seemed to read in his eyes that he took the matter more seriously. "The story took a great hold upon the imagination of Sir Charles, and I have no doubt that it led to his tragic end."
"But how?"
"His nerves were so worked up that the appearance of any dog might have had a fatal effect upon his diseased heart. I fancy that he really did see something of the kind upon that last night in the yew alley. I feared that some disaster might occur, for I was very fond of the old man, and I knew that his heart was weak."
"How did you know that?"
"My friend Mortimer told me."
"You think, then, that some dog pursued Sir Charles, and that he died of fright in consequence?"
"Have you any better explanation?"
"I have not come to any conclusion."
"Has Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"

The words took away my breath for an instant but a glance at the placid face and steadfast eyes of my companion showed that no surprise was intended.

"It is useless for us to pretend that we do not know you, Dr. Watson," said he. "The records of your detective have reached us here, and you could not celebrate him without being known yourself. When Mortimer told me your name he could not deny your identity. If you are here, then it follows that Mr. Sherlock Holmes is interesting himself in the matter, and I am naturally curious to know what view he may take."

"I am afraid that I cannot answer that question."

"May I ask if he is going to honour us with a visit himself?"

"He cannot leave town at present. He has other cases which engage his attention."

"What a pity! He might throw some light on that which is so dark to us. But as to your own researches, if there is any possible way in which I can be of service to you I trust that you will command me. If I had any indication of the nature of your suspicions or how you propose to investigate the case, I might perhaps even now give you some aid or advice."

"I assure you that I am simply here upon a visit to my friend, Sir Henry, and that I need no help of any kind."

"Excellent!" said Stapleton. "You are perfectly right to be wary and discreet. I am justly reproved for what I feel was an unjustifiable intrusion, and I promise you that I will not mention the matter again."

We had come to a point where a narrow grassy path struck off from the road and wound away across the moor. A steep, boulder-sprinkled hill lay upon the right which had in bygone days been cut into a granite quarry. The face which was turned towards us formed a dark cliff, with ferns and brambles growing in its niches. From over a distant rise there floated a gray plume of smoke.

"A moderate walk along this moor-path brings us to Merripit House," said he. "Perhaps you will spare an hour that I may have the pleasure of introducing you to my sister."

My first thought was that I should be by Sir Henry's side. But then I remembered the pile of papers and bills with which his study table was littered. It was certain that I could not help with those. And Holmes had expressly said that I should study the neighbours upon the moor. I accepted Stapleton's invitation, and we turned together down the path.

"It is a wonderful place, the moor," said he, looking round over the undulating downs, long green rollers, with crests of jagged granite foaming up into fantastic surges. "You never tire of the moor. You cannot think the wonderful secrets which it contains. It is so vast, and so barren, and so mysterious."

"You know it well, then?"

"I have only been here two years. The residents would call me a newcomer. We came shortly after Sir Charles settled. But my tastes led me to explore every part of the country round, and I should think that there are few men who know it better than I do."

"Is it hard to know?"

"Very hard. You see, for example, this great plain to the north here with the queer hills breaking out of it. Do you observe anything remarkable about that?"

"It would be a rare place for a gallop."

"You would naturally think so and the thought has cost several their lives before now. You notice those bright green spots scattered thickly over it?"

"Yes, they seem more fertile than the rest."

Stapleton laughed. "That is the great Grimpen Mire," said he. "A false step yonder means death to man or beast. Only yesterday I saw one of the moor ponies wander into it. He never came out. I saw his head for quite a long time craning out of the bog-hole, but it sucked him down at last. Even in dry seasons it is a danger to cross it, but after these autumn rains it is an awful place. And yet I can find my way to the very heart of it and return alive. By George, there is another of those miserable ponies!"

Something brown was rolling and tossing among the green sedges. Then a long, agonized, writhing neck shot upward and a dreadful cry echoed over the moor. It turned me cold with horror, but my companion's nerves seemed to be stronger than mine.

"It's gone!" said he. "The mire has him. Two in two days, and many more, perhaps, for they get in the way of going there in the dry weather and never know the difference until the mire has them in its clutches. It's a bad place, the great Grimpen Mire."

"And you say you can penetrate it?"

"Yes, there are one or two paths which a very active man can take. I have found them out."

"But why should you wish to go into so horrible a place?"

"Well, you see the hills beyond? They are really islands cut off on all sides by the impassable mire, which has
crawled round them in the course of years. That is where the rare plants and the butterflies are, if you have the wit to reach them."

"I shall try my luck some day."

He looked at me with a surprised face. "For God's sake put such an idea out of your mind," said he. "Your blood would be upon my head. I assure you that there would not be the least chance of your coming back alive. It is only by remembering certain complex landmarks that I am able to do it."

"Halloa!" I cried. "What is that?"

A long, low moan, indescribably sad, swept over the moor. It filled the whole air, and yet it was impossible to say whence it came. From a dull murmur it swelled into a deep roar, and then sank back into a melancholy, throbbing murmur once again. Stapleton looked at me with a curious expression in his face.

"Queer place, the moor!" said he.

"But what is it?"

"The peasants say it is the Hound of the Baskervilles calling for its prey. I've heard it once or twice before, but never quite so loud."

I looked round, with a chill of fear in my heart, at the huge swelling plain, mottled with the green patches of rushes. Nothing stirred over the vast expanse save a pair of ravens, which croaked loudly from a tor behind us.

"You are an educated man. You don't believe such nonsense as that?" said I. "What do you think is the cause of so strange a sound?"

"Bogs make queer noises sometimes. It's the mud settling, or the water rising, or something."

"No, no, that was a living voice."

"Well, perhaps it was. Did you ever hear a bittern booming?"

"No, I never did."

"It's a very rare bird--practically extinct--in England now, but all things are possible upon the moor. Yes, I should not be surprised to learn that what we have heard is the cry of the last of the bitterns."

"It's the weirdest, strangest thing that ever I heard in my life."

"Yes, it's rather an uncanny place altogether. Look at the hillside yonder. What do you make of those?"

The whole steep slope was covered with gray circular rings of stone, a score of them at least.

"What are they? Sheep-pens?"

"No, they are the homes of our worthy ancestors. Prehistoric man lived thickly on the moor, and as no one in particular has lived there since, we find all his little arrangements exactly as he left them. These are his wigwams with the roofs off. You can even see his hearth and his couch if you have the curiosity to go inside."

"But it is quite a town. When was it inhabited?"

"Neolithic man--no date."

"What did he do?"

"He grazed his cattle on these slopes, and he learned to dig for tin when the bronze sword began to supersede the stone axe. Look at the great trench in the opposite hill. That is his mark. Yes, you will find some very singular points about the moor, Dr. Watson. Oh, excuse me an instant! It is surely Cyclopides."

A small fly or moth had fluttered across our path, and in an instant Stapleton was rushing with extraordinary energy and speed in pursuit of it. To my dismay the creature flew straight for the great mire, and my acquaintance never paused for an instant, bounding from tuft to tuft behind it, his green net waving in the air. His gray clothes and jerky, zigzag, irregular progress made him not unlike some huge moth himself. I was standing watching his pursuit with a mixture of admiration for his extraordinary activity and fear lest he should lose his footing in the treacherous mire, when I heard the sound of steps and, turning round, found a woman near me upon the path. She had come from the direction in which the plume of smoke indicated the position of Merripit House, but the dip of the moor had hid her until she was quite close.

I could not doubt that this was the Miss Stapleton of whom I had been told, since ladies of any sort must be few upon the moor, and I remembered that I had heard someone describe her as being a beauty. The woman who approached me was certainly that, and of a most uncommon type. There could not have been a greater contrast between brother and sister, for Stapleton was neutral tinted, with light hair and gray eyes, while she was darker than any brunette whom I have seen in England--slim, elegant, and tall. She had a proud, finely cut face, so regular that it might have seemed impassive were it not for the sensitive mouth and the beautiful dark, eager eyes. With her perfect figure and elegant dress she was, indeed, a strange apparition upon a lonely moorland path. Her eyes were on her brother as I turned, and then she quickened her pace towards me. I had raised my hat and was about to make some explanatory remark when her own words turned all my thoughts into a new channel.

"Go back!" she said. "Go straight back to London, instantly."

I could only stare at her in stupid surprise. Her eyes blazed at me, and she tapped the ground impatiently with her
"Why should I go back?" I asked.

"I cannot explain." She spoke in a low, eager voice, with a curious lisp in her utterance. "But for God's sake do what I ask you. Go back and never set foot upon the moor again."

"But I have only just come."

"Man, man!" she cried. "Can you not tell when a warning is for your own good? Go back to London! Start tonight! Get away from this place at all costs! Hush, my brother is coming! Not a word of what I have said. Would you mind getting that orchid for me among the mare's-tails yonder? We are very rich in orchids on the moor, though, of course, you are rather late to see the beauties of the place."

Stapleton had abandoned the chase and came back to us breathing hard and flushed with his exertions.

"Halloa, Beryl!" said he, and it seemed to me that the tone of his greeting was not altogether a cordial one.

"Well, Jack, you are very hot."

"Yes, I was chasing a Cyclopides. He is very rare and seldom found in the late autumn. What a pity that I should have missed him!" He spoke unconcernedly, but his small light eyes glanced incessantly from the girl to me.

"You have introduced yourselves, I can see."

"Yes. I was telling Sir Henry that it was rather late for him to see the true beauties of the moor."

"Why, who do you think this is?"

"I imagine that it must be Sir Henry Baskerville."

"No, no," said I. "Only a humble commoner, but his friend. My name is Dr. Watson."

A flush of vexation passed over her expressive face. "We have been talking at cross purposes," said she. "Why, you had not very much time for talk," her brother remarked with the same questioning eyes.

"I talked as if Dr. Watson were a resident instead of being merely a visitor," said she. "It cannot much matter to him whether it is early or late for the orchids. But you will come on, will you not, and see Merripit House?"

A short walk brought us to it, a bleak moorland house, once the farm of some grazier in the old prosperous days, but now put into repair and turned into a modern dwelling. An orchard surrounded it, but the trees, as is usual upon the moor, were stunted and nipped, and the effect of the whole place was mean and melancholy. We were admitted by a strange, wizened, rusty-coated old manservant, who seemed in keeping with the house. Inside, however, there were large rooms furnished with an elegance in which I seemed to recognize the taste of the lady. As I looked from their windows at the interminable granite-flecked moor rolling unbroken to the farthest horizon I could not but marvel at what could have brought this highly educated man and this beautiful woman to live in such a place.

"Queer spot to choose, is it not?" said he as if in answer to my thought. "And yet we manage to make ourselves fairly happy, do we not, Beryl?"

"Quite happy," said she, but there was no ring of conviction in her words.

"I had a school," said Stapleton. "It was in the north country. The work to a man of my temperament was mechanical and uninteresting, but the privilege of living with youth, of helping to mould those young minds, and of impressing them with one's own character and ideals was very dear to me. However, the fates were against us. A serious epidemic broke out in the school and three of the boys died. It never recovered from the blow, and much of my capital was irretrievably swallowed up. And yet, if it were not for the loss of the charming companionship of the boys, I could rejoice over my own misfortune, for, with my strong tastes for botany and zoology, I find an unlimited field of work here, and my sister is as devoted to Nature as I am. All this, Dr. Watson, has been brought upon your head by your expression as you surveyed the moor out of our window."

"It certainly did cross my mind that it might be a little dull-- less for you, perhaps, than for your sister."

"No, no, I am never dull," said she quickly.

"We have books, we have our studies, and we have interesting neighbours. Dr. Mortimer is a most learned man in his own line. Poor Sir Charles was also an admirable companion. We knew him well and miss him more than I can tell. Do you think that I should intrude if I were to call this afternoon and make the acquaintance of Sir Henry?"

"I am sure that he would be delighted."

"Then perhaps you would mention that I propose to do so. We may in our humble way do something to make things more easy for him until he becomes accustomed to his new surroundings. Will you come upstairs, Dr. Watson, and inspect my collection of Lepidoptera? I think it is the most complete one in the south-west of England. By the time that you have looked through them lunch will be almost ready."

But I was eager to get back to my charge. The melancholy of the moor, the death of the unfortunate pony, the weird sound which had been associated with the grim legend of the Baskervilles, all these things tinged my thoughts with sadness. Then on the top of these more or less vague impressions there had come the definite and distinct warning of Miss Stapleton, delivered with such intense earnestness that I could not doubt that some grave and deep reason lay behind it. I resisted all pressure to stay for lunch, and I set off at once upon my return journey, taking the
grass-grown path by which we had come.

It seems, however, that there must have been some short cut for those who knew it, for before I had reached the road I was astounded to see Miss Stapleton sitting upon a rock by the side of the track. Her face was beautifully flushed with her exertions and she held her hand to her side.

"I have run all the way in order to cut you off, Dr. Watson," said she. "I had not even time to put on my hat. I must not stop, or my brother may miss me. I wanted to say to you how sorry I am about the stupid mistake I made in thinking that you were Sir Henry. Please forget the words I said, which have no application whatever to you."

"But I can't forget them, Miss Stapleton," said I. "I am Sir Henry's friend, and his welfare is a very close concern of mine. Tell me why it was that you were so eager that Sir Henry should return to London."

"A woman's whim, Dr. Watson. When you know me better you will understand that I cannot always give reasons for what I say or do."

"No, no. I remember the thrill in your voice. I remember the look in your eyes. Please, please, be frank with me, Miss Stapleton, for ever since I have been here I have been conscious of shadows all round me. Life has become like that great Grimpen Mire, with little green patches everywhere into which one may sink and with no guide to point the track. Tell me then what it was that you meant, and I will promise to convey your warning to Sir Henry."

An expression of irresolution passed for an instant over her face, but her eyes had hardened again when she answered me.

"You make too much of it, Dr. Watson," said she. "My brother and I were very much shocked by the death of Sir Charles. We knew him very intimately, for his favourite walk was over the moor to our house. He was deeply impressed with the curse which hung over the family, and when this tragedy came I naturally felt that there must be some grounds for the fears which he had expressed. I was distressed therefore when another member of the family came down to live here, and I felt that he should be warned of the danger which he will run. That was all which I intended to convey.

"But what is the danger?"

"You know the story of the hound?"

"I do not believe in such nonsense."

"But I do. If you have any influence with Sir Henry, take him away from a place which has always been fatal to his family. The world is wide. Why should he wish to live at the place of danger?"

"Because it is the place of danger. That is Sir Henry's nature. I fear that unless you can give me some more definite information than this it would be impossible to get him to move."

"I cannot say anything definite, for I do not know anything definite."

"I would ask you one more question, Miss Stapleton. If you meant no more than this when you first spoke to me, why should you not wish your brother to overhear what you said? There is nothing to which he, or anyone else, could object."

"My brother is very anxious to have the Hall inhabited, for he thinks it is for the good of the poor folk upon the moor. He would be very angry if he knew that I have said anything which might induce Sir Henry to go away. But I have done my duty now and I will say no more. I must go back, or he will miss me and suspect that I have seen you. Good-bye!" She turned and had disappeared in a few minutes among the scattered boulders, while I, with my soul full of vague fears, pursued my way to Baskerville Hall.

Chapter 8 First Report of Dr. Watson

>From this point onward I will follow the course of events by transcribing my own letters to Mr. Sherlock Holmes which lie before me on the table. One page is missing, but otherwise they are exactly as written and show my feelings and suspicions of the moment more accurately than my memory, clear as it is upon these tragic events, can possibly do.

Baskerville Hall, October 13th. MY DEAR HOLMES: My previous letters and telegrams have kept you pretty well up to date as to all that has occurred in this most God-forsaken corner of the world. The longer one stays here the more does the spirit of the moor sink into one's soul, its vastness, and also its grim charm. When you are once out upon its bosom you have left all traces of modern England behind you, but, on the other hand, you are conscious everywhere of the homes and the work of the prehistoric people. On all sides of you as you walk are the houses of these forgotten folk, with their graves and the huge monoliths which are supposed to have marked their temples. As you look at their gray stone huts against the scarred hillsides you leave your own age behind you, and if you were to see a skin-clad, hairy man crawl out from the low door fitting a flint-tipped arrow on to the string of his bow, you would feel that his presence there was more natural than your own. The strange thing is that they should have lived so thickly on what must always have been most unfruitful soil. I am no antiquarian, but I could imagine that they were some unwarlike and harried race who were forced to accept that which none other would occupy.

All this, however, is foreign to the mission on which you sent me and will probably be very uninteresting to your
severely practical mind. I can still remember your complete indifference as to whether the sun moved round the earth or the earth round the sun. Let me, therefore, return to the facts concerning Sir Henry Baskerville.

If you have not had any report within the last few days it is because up to today there was nothing of importance to relate. Then a very surprising circumstance occurred, which I shall tell you in due course. But, first of all, I must keep you in touch with some of the other factors in the situation.

One of these, concerning which I have said little, is the escaped convict upon the moor. There is strong reason now to believe that he has got right away, which is a considerable relief to the lonely householders of this district. A fortnight has passed since his flight, during which he has not been seen and nothing has been heard of him. It is surely inconceivable that he could have held out upon the moor during all that time. Of course, so far as his concealment goes there is no difficulty at all. Any one of these stone huts would give him a hiding-place. But there is nothing to eat unless he were to catch and slaughter one of the moor sheep. We think, therefore, that he has gone, and the outlying farmers sleep the better in consequence.

We are four able-bodied men in this household, so that we could take good care of ourselves, but I confess that I have had uneasy moments when I have thought of the Stapletons. They live miles from any help. There are one maid, an old manservant, the sister, and the brother, the latter not a very strong man. They would be helpless in the hands of a desperate fellow like this Notting Hill criminal if he could once effect an entrance. Both Sir Henry and I were concerned at their situation, and it was suggested that Perkins the groom should go over to sleep there, but Stapleton would not hear of it.

The fact is that our friend, the baronet, begins to display a considerable interest in our fair neighbour. It is not to be wondered at, for time hangs heavily in this lonely spot to an active man like him, and she is a very fascinating and beautiful woman. There is something tropical and exotic about her which forms a singular contrast to her cool and unemotional brother. Yet he also gives the idea of hidden fires. He has certainly a very marked influence over her, for I have seen her continually glance at him as she talked as if seeking approbation for what she said. I trust that he is kind to her. There is a dry glitter in his eyes and a firm set of his thin lips, which goes with a positive and possibly a harsh nature. You would find him an interesting study.

He came over to call upon Baskerville on that first day, and the very next morning he took us both to show us the spot where the legend of the wicked Hugo is supposed to have had its origin. It was an excursion of some miles across the moor to a place which is so dismal that it might have suggested the story. We found a short valley between rugged tors which led to an open, grassy space flecked over with the white cotton grass. In the middle of it rose two great stones, worn and sharpened at the upper end until they looked like the huge corroding fangs of some monstrous beast. In every way it corresponded with the scene of the old tragedy. Sir Henry was much interested and asked Stapleton more than once whether he did really believe in the possibility of the interference of the supernatural in the affairs of men. He spoke lightly, but it was evident that he was very much in earnest. Stapleton was guarded in his replies, but it was easy to see that he said less than he might, and that he would not express his whole opinion out of consideration for the feelings of the baronet. He told us of similar cases, where families had suffered from some evil influence, and he left us with the impression that he shared the popular view upon the matter.

On our way back we stayed for lunch at Merripit House, and it was there that Sir Henry made the acquaintance of Miss Stapleton. From the first moment that he saw her he appeared to be strongly attracted by her, and I am much mistaken if the feeling was not mutual. He referred to her again and again on our walk home, and since then hardly a day has passed that we have not seen something of the brother and sister. They dine here tonight, and there is some talk of our going to them next week. One would imagine that such a match would be very welcome to Stapleton, and yet I have more than once caught a look of the strongest disapprobation in his face when Sir Henry has been paying some attention to his sister. He is much attached to her, no doubt, and would lead a lonely life without her, but it would seem the height of selfishness if he were to stand in the way of her making so brilliant a marriage. Yet I am certain that he does not wish their intimacy to ripen into love, and I have several times observed that he has taken pains to prevent them from being tete- a-tete. By the way, your instructions to me never to allow Sir Henry to go out alone will become very much more onerous if a love affair were to be added to our other difficulties. My popularity would soon suffer if I were to carry out your orders to the letter.

The other day--Thursday, to be more exact--Dr. Mortimer lunched with us. He has been excavating a barrow at Long Down and has got a prehistoric skull which fills him with great joy. Never was there such a single-minded enthusiast as he! The Stapletons came in afterwards, and the good doctor took us all to the yew alley at Sir Henry's request to show us exactly how everything occurred upon that fatal night. It is a long, dismal walk, the yew alley, between two high walls of clipped hedge, with a narrow band of grass upon either side. At the far end is an old tumble- down summer-house. Halfway down is the moor-gate, where the old gentleman left his cigar-ash. It is a white wooden gate with a latch. Beyond it lies the wide moor. I remembered your theory of the affair and tried to picture all that had occurred. As the old man stood there he saw something coming across the moor, something
had entered one of the rooms. Now, all these rooms are unfurnished and unoccupied so that his expedition became

One other neighbour I have met since I wrote last. This is Mr. Frankland, of Lafter Hall, who lives some four
miles to the south of us. He is an elderly man, red-faced, white-haired, and choleric. His passion is for the British
law, and he has spent a large fortune in litigation. He fights for the mere pleasure of fighting and is equally ready to
take up either side of a question, so that it is no wonder that he has found it a costly amusement. Sometimes he will
shut up a right of way and defy the parish to make him open it. At others he will with his own hands tear down some
other man’s gate and declare that a path has existed there from time immemorial, defying the owner to prosecute him
for trespass. He is learned in old manorial and communal rights, and he applies his knowledge sometimes in favour
of the villagers of Fernworthy and sometimes against them, so that he is periodically either carried in triumph down
the village street or else burned in effigy, according to his latest exploit. He is said to have about seven lawsuits
upon his hands at present, which will probably swallow up the remainder of his fortune and so draw his sting and
leave him harmless for the future. Apart from the law he seems a kindly, good-natured person, and I only mention
him because you were particular that I should send some description of the people who surround us. He is curiously
employed at present, for, being an amateur astronomer, he has an excellent telescope, with which he lies upon the
roof of his own house and sweeps the moor all day in the hope of catching a glimpse of the escaped convict. If he
would confine his energies to this all would be well, but there are rumours that he intends to prosecute Dr. Mortimer
for opening a grave without the consent of the next of kin because he dug up the Neolithic skull in the barrow on
Long Down. He helps to keep our lives from being monotonous and gives a little comic relief where it is badly
needed.

And now, having brought you up to date in the escaped convict, the Stapletons, Dr. Mortimer, and Frankland, of
Lafter Hall, let me end on that which is most important and tell you more about the Barrymores, and especially
about the surprising development of last night.

First of all about the test telegram, which you sent from London in order to make sure that Barrymore was really
here. I have already explained that the testimony of the postmaster shows that the test was worthless and that we
have no proof one way or the other. I told Sir Henry how the matter stood, and he at once, in his downright fashion,
had Barrymore up and asked him whether he had received the telegram himself. Barrymore said that he had.

"Did the boy deliver it into your own hands?" asked Sir Henry.

Barrymore looked surprised, and considered for a little time.

"No," said he, "I was in the box-room at the time, and my wife brought it up to me."

"Did you answer it yourself?"

"No; I told my wife what to answer and she went down to write it."

In the evening he recurred to the subject of his own accord.

"I could not quite understand the object of your questions this morning, Sir Henry," said he. "I trust that they do
not mean that I have done anything to forfeit your confidence?"

Sir Henry had to assure him that it was not so and pacify him by giving him a considerable part of his old
wardrobe, the London outfit having now all arrived.

Mrs. Barrymore is of interest to me. She is a heavy, solid person, very limited, intensely respectable, and
inclined to be puritanical. You could hardly conceive a less emotional subject. Yet I have told you how, on the first
night here, I heard her sobbing bitterly, and since then I have more than once observed traces of tears upon her face.
Some deep sorrow gnaws ever at her heart. Sometimes I wonder if she has a guilty memory which haunts her, and
sometimes I suspect Barrymore of being a domestic tyrant. I have always felt that there was something singular and
questionable in this man's character, but the adventure of last night brings all my suspicions to a head.

And yet it may seem a small matter in itself. You are aware that I am not a very sound sleeper, and since I have
been on guard in this house my slumbers have been lighter than ever. Last night, about two in the morning, I was
aroused by a stealthy step passing my room. I rose, opened my door, and peeped out. A long black shadow was
trailing down the corridor. It was thrown by a man who walked softly down the passage with a candle held in his
hand. He was in shirt and trousers, with no covering to his feet. I could merely see the outline, but his height told me
that he was Barrymore. He walked very slowly and circumspectly, and there was something indescribably guilty and
furtive in his whole appearance.

I have told you that the corridor is broken by the balcony which runs round the hall, but that it is resumed upon
the farther side. I waited until he had passed out of sight and then I followed him. When I came round the balcony he
had reached the end of the farther corridor, and I could see from the glimmer of light through an open door that he
had entered one of the rooms. Now, all these rooms are unfurnished and unoccupied so that his expedition became
more mysterious than ever. The light shone steadily as if he were standing motionless. I crept down the passage as noiselessly as I could and peeped round the corner of the door.

Barrymore was crouching at the window with the candle held against the glass. His profile was half turned towards me, and his face seemed to be rigid with expectation as he stared out into the blackness of the moor. For some minutes he stood watching intently. Then he gave a deep groan and with an impatient gesture he put out the light. Instantly I made my way back to my room, and very shortly came the stealthy steps passing once more upon their return journey. Long afterwards when I had fallen into a light sleep I heard a key turn somewhere in a lock, but I could not tell whence the sound came. What it all means I cannot guess, but there is some secret business going on in this house of gloom which sooner or later we shall get to the bottom of. I do not trouble you with my theories, for you asked me to furnish you only with facts. I have had a long talk with Sir Henry this morning, and we have made a plan of campaign founded upon my observations of last night. I will not speak about it just now, but it should make my next report interesting reading.

Chapter 9 The Light upon the Moor [Second Report of Dr. Watson]

Baskerville Hall, Oct. 15th. MY DEAR HOLMES: If I was compelled to leave you without much news during the early days of my mission you must acknowledge that I am making up for lost time, and that events are now crowding thick and fast upon us. In my last report I ended upon my top note with Barrymore at the window, and now I have quite a budget already which will, unless I am much mistaken, considerably surprise you. Things have taken a turn which I could not have anticipated. In some ways they have become much clearer and in some ways they have become more complicated. But I will tell you all and you shall judge for yourself.

Before breakfast on the morning following my adventure I went down the corridor and examined the room in which Barrymore had been on the night before. The western window through which he had stared so intently has, I noticed, one peculiarity above all other windows in the house--it commands the nearest outlook on to the moor. There is an opening between two trees which enables one from this point of view to look right down upon it, while from all the other windows it is only a distant glimpse which can be obtained. It follows, therefore, that Barrymore, since only this window would serve the purpose, must have been looking out for something or somebody upon the moor. The night was very dark, so that I can hardly imagine how he could have hoped to see anyone. It had struck me that it was possible that some love intrigue was on foot. That would have accounted for his stealthy movements and also for the uneasiness of his wife. The man is a striking-looking fellow, very well equipped to steal the heart of a country girl, so that this theory seemed to have something to support it. That opening of the door which I had heard after I had returned to my room might mean that he had gone out to keep some clandestine appointment. So I reasoned with myself in the morning, and I tell you the direction of my suspicions, however much the result may have shown that they were unfounded.

But whatever the true explanation of Barrymore's movements might be, I felt that the responsibility of keeping them to myself until I could explain them was more than I could bear. I had an interview with the baronet in his study after breakfast, and I told him all that I had seen. He was less surprised than I had expected.

"I knew that Barrymore walked about nights, and I had a mind to speak to him about it," said he. "Two or three times I have heard his steps in the passage, coming and going, just about the hour you name."

"Perhaps then he pays a visit every night to that particular window," I suggested.

"Perhaps he does. If so, we should be able to shadow him and see what it is that he is after. I wonder what your friend Holmes would do if he were here."

"I believe that he would do exactly what you now suggest," said I. "He would follow Barrymore and see what he did."

"Then we shall do it together."

"But surely he would hear us."

"The man is rather deaf, and in any case we must take our chance of that. We'll sit up in my room tonight and wait until he passes." Sir Henry rubbed his hands with pleasure, and it was evident that he hailed the adventure as a relief to his somewhat quiet life upon the moor.

The baronet has been in communication with the architect who prepared the plans for Sir Charles, and with a contractor from London, so that we may expect great changes to begin here soon. There have been decorators and furnishers up from Plymouth, and it is evident that our friend has large ideas and means to spare no pains or expense to restore the grandeur of his family. When the house is renovated and refurnished, all that he will need will be a wife to make it complete. Between ourselves there are pretty clear signs that this will not be wanting if the lady is willing, for I have seldom seen a man more infatuated with a woman than he is with our beautiful neighbour, Miss Stapleton. And yet the course of true love does not run quite as smoothly as one would under the circumstances expect. Today, for example, its surface was broken by a very unexpected ripple, which has caused our friend
considerable perplexity and annoyance.

After the conversation which I have quoted about Barrymore, Sir Henry put on his hat and prepared to go out. As a matter of course I did the same.

"What, are you coming, Watson?" he asked, looking at me in a curious way.

"That depends on whether you are going on the moor," said I.

"Yes, I am."

"Well, you know what my instructions are. I am sorry to intrude, but you heard how earnestly Holmes insisted that I should not leave you, and especially that you should not go alone upon the moor."

Sir Henry put his hand upon my shoulder with a pleasant smile.

"My dear fellow," said he, "Holmes, with all his wisdom, did not foresee some things which have happened since I have been on the moor. You understand me? I am sure that you are the last man in the world who would wish to be a spoil-sport. I must go out alone."

It put me in a most awkward position. I was at a loss what to say or what to do, and before I had made up my mind he picked up his cane and was gone.

But when I came to think the matter over my conscience reproached me bitterly for having on any pretext allowed him to go out of my sight. I imagined what my feelings would be if I had to return to you and to confess that some misfortune had occurred through my disregard for your instructions. I assure you my cheeks flushed at the very thought. It might not even now be too late to overtake him, so I set off at once in the direction of Merripit House.

I hurried along the road at the top of my speed without seeing anything of Sir Henry, until I came to the point where the moor path branches off. There, fearing that perhaps I had come in the wrong direction after all, I mounted a hill from which I could command a view--the same hill which is cut into the dark quarry. Thence I saw him at once. He was on the moor path about a quarter of a mile off, and a lady was by his side who could only be Miss Stapleton. It was clear that there was already an understanding between them and that they had met by appointment. They were walking slowly along in deep conversation, and I saw her making quick little movements of her hands as if she were very earnest in what she was saying, while he listened intently, and once or twice shook his head in strong dissent. I stood among the rocks watching them, very much puzzled as to what I should do next. To follow them and break into their intimate conversation seemed to be an outrage, and yet my clear duty was never for an instant to let him out of my sight. To act the spy upon a friend was a hateful task. Still, I could see no better course than to observe him from the hill, and to clear my conscience by confessing to him afterwards what I had done. It is true that if any sudden danger had threatened him I was too far away to be of use, and yet I am sure that you will agree with me that the position was very difficult, and that there was nothing more which I could do.

Our friend, Sir Henry, and the lady had halted on the path and were standing deeply absorbed in their conversation, when I was suddenly aware that I was not the only witness of their interview. A wisp of green floating in the air caught my eye, and another glance showed me that it was carried on a stick by a man who was moving among the broken ground. It was Stapleton with his butterfly-net. He was very much closer to the pair than I was, and he appeared to be moving in their direction. At this instant Sir Henry suddenly drew Miss Stapleton to his side. His arm was round her, but it seemed to me that she was straining away from him with her face averted. He stooped his head to hers, and she raised one hand as if in protest. Next moment I saw them spring apart and turn hurriedly round. Stapleton was the cause of the interruption. He was running wildly towards them, his absurd net dangling behind him. He gesticulated and almost danced with excitement in front of the lovers. What the scene meant I could not imagine, but it seemed to me that Stapleton was abusing Sir Henry, who offered explanations, which became more angry as the other refused to accept them. The lady stood by in haughty silence. Finally Stapleton turned upon his heel and beckoned in a peremptory way to his sister, who, after an irresolute glance at Sir Henry, walked off by the side of her brother. The naturalist's angry gestures showed that the lady was included in his displeasure. The baronet stood for a minute looking after them, and then he walked slowly back the way that he had come, his head hanging, the very picture of dejection.

What all this meant I could not imagine, but I was deeply ashamed to have witnessed so intimate a scene without my friend's knowledge. I ran down the hill therefore and met the baronet at the bottom. His face was flushed with anger and his brows were wrinkled, like one who is at his wit's ends what to do.

"Halloa, Watson! Where have you dropped from?" said he. "You don't mean to say that you came after me in spite of all?"

I explained everything to him: how I had found it impossible to remain behind, how I had followed him, and how I had witnessed all that had occurred. For an instant his eyes blazed at me, but my frankness disarmed his anger, and he broke at last into a rather rueful laugh.

"You would have thought the middle of that prairie a fairly safe place for a man to be private," said he, "but, by
thunder, the whole countryside seems to have been out to see me do my wooing-- and a mighty poor wooing at that! Where had you engaged a seat?"

"I was on that hill."

"Quite in the back row, eh? But her brother was well up to the front. Did you see him come out on us?"

"Yes, I did."

"Did he ever strike you as being crazy--this brother of hers?"

"I can't say that he ever did."

"I dare say not. I always thought him sane enough until today, but you can take it from me that either he or I ought to be in a straitjacket. What's the matter with me, anyhow? You've lived near me for some weeks, Watson. Tell me straight, now! Is there anything that would prevent me from making a good husband to a woman that I loved?"

"I should say not."

"He can't object to my worldly position, so it must be myself that he has this down on. What has he against me? I never hurt man or woman in my life that I know of. And yet he would not so much as let me touch the tips of her fingers."

"Did he say so?"

"That, and a deal more. I tell you, Watson, I've only known her these few weeks, but from the first I just felt that she was made for me, and she, too--she was happy when she was with me, and that I'll swear. There's a light in a woman's eyes that speaks louder than words. But he has never let us get together and it was only today for the first time that I saw a chance of having a few words with her alone. She was glad to meet me, but when she did it was not love that she would talk about, and she wouldn't have let me talk about it either if she could have stopped it. She kept coming back to it that this was a place of danger, and that she would never be happy until I had left it. I told her that since I had seen her I was in no hurry to leave it, and that if she really wanted me to go, the only way to work it was for her to arrange to go with me. With that I offered in as many words to marry her, but before she could answer, down came this brother of hers, running at us with a face on him like a madman. He was just white with rage, and those light eyes of his were blazing with fury. What was I doing with the lady? How dared I offer her attentions which were distasteful to her? Did I think that because I was a baronet I could do what I liked? If he had not been her brother I should have known better how to answer him. As it was I told him that my feelings towards his sister were such as I was not ashamed of, and that I hoped that she might honour me by becoming my wife. That seemed to make the matter no better, so then I lost my temper too, and I answered him rather more hotly than I should perhaps, considering that she was standing by. So it ended by his going off with her, as you saw, and here am I as badly puzzled a man as any in this county. Just tell me what it all means, Watson, and I'll owe you more than ever I can hope to pay."

I tried one or two explanations, but, indeed, I was completely puzzled myself. Our friend's title, his fortune, his age, his character, and his appearance are all in his favour, and I know nothing against him unless it be this dark fate which runs in his family. That his advances should be rejected so brusquely without any reference to the lady's own wishes and that the lady should accept the situation without protest is very amazing. However, our conjectures were set at rest by a visit from Stapleton himself that very afternoon. He had come to offer apologies for his rudeness of the morning, and after a long private interview with Sir Henry in his study the upshot of their conversation was that the breach is quite healed, and that we are to dine at Merripit House next Friday as a sign of it.

"I don't say now that he isn't a crazy man," said Sir Henry; "I can't forget the look in his eyes when he ran at me this morning, but I must allow that no man could make a more handsome apology than he has done."

"Did he give any explanation of his conduct?"

"His sister is everything in his life, he says. That is natural enough, and I am glad that he should understand her value. They have always been together, and according to his account he has been a very lonely man with only her as a companion, so that the thought of losing her was really terrible to him. He had not understood, he said, that I was becoming attached to her, but when he saw with his own eyes that it was really so, and that she might be taken away from him, it gave him such a shock that for a time he was not responsible for what he said or did. He was very sorry for all that had passed, and he recognized how foolish and how selfish it was that he should imagine that he could hold a beautiful woman like his sister to himself for her whole life. If she had to leave him he had rather it was to a neighbour like myself than to anyone else. But in any case it was a blow to him and it would take him some time before he could prepare himself to meet it. He would withdraw all opposition upon his part if I would promise for three months to let the matter rest and to be content with cultivating the lady's friendship during that time without claiming her love. This I promised, and so the matter rests."

So there is one of our small mysteries cleared up. It is something to have touched bottom anywhere in this bog in which we are floundering. We know now why Stapleton looked with disfavour upon his sister's suitor--even when
that suitor was so eligible a one as Sir Henry. And now I pass on to another thread which I have extricated out of the tangled skein, the mystery of the sobs in the night, of the tear-stained face of Mrs. Barrymore, of the secret journey of the butler to the western lattice window. Congratulate me, my dear Holmes, and tell me that I have not disappointed you as an agent—that you do not regret the confidence which you showed in me when you sent me down. All these things have by one night's work been thoroughly cleared.

I have said "by one night's work," but, in truth, it was by two nights' work, for on the first we drew entirely blank. I sat up with Sir Henry in his rooms until nearly three o'clock in the morning, but no sound of any sort did we hear except the chiming clock upon the stairs. It was a most melancholy vigil and ended by each of us falling asleep in our chairs. Fortunately we were not discouraged, and we determined to try again. The next night we lowered the lamp and sat smoking cigarettes without making the least sound. It was incredible how slowly the hours crawled by, and yet we were helped through it by the same sort of patient interest which the hunter must feel as he watches the trap into which he hopes the game may wander. One struck, and two, and we had almost for the second time given it up in despair when in an instant we both sat bolt upright in our chairs with all our weary senses keenly on the alert once more. We had heard the creak of a step in the passage.

Very stealthily we heard it pass along until it died away in the distance. Then the baronet gently opened his door and we set out in pursuit. Already our man had gone round the gallery and the corridor was all in darkness. Softly we stole along until we had come into the other wing. We were just in time to catch a glimpse of the tall, black-bearded figure, his shoulders rounded as he tiptoed down the passage. Then he passed through the same door as before, and the light of the candle framed it in the darkness and shot one single yellow beam across the gloom of the corridor. We shuffled cautiously towards it, trying every plank before we dared to put our whole weight upon it. We had taken the precaution of leaving our boots behind us, but, even so, the old boards snapped and creaked beneath our tread. Sometimes it seemed impossible that he should fail to hear our approach. However, the man is fortunately rather deaf, and he was entirely preoccupied in that which he was doing. When at last we reached the door and peeped through we found him crouching at the window, candle in hand, his white, intent face pressed against the pane, exactly as I had seen him two nights before.

We had arranged no plan of campaign, but the baronet is a man to whom the most direct way is always the most natural. He walked into the room, and as he did so Barrymore sprang up from the window with a sharp hiss of his breath and stood, livid and trembling, before us. His dark eyes, glaring out of the white mask of his face, were full of horror and astonishment as he gazed from Sir Henry to me.

"What are you doing here, Barrymore?"

"Nothing, sir." His agitation was so great that he could hardly speak, and the shadows sprang up and down from the shaking of his candle. "It was the window, sir. I go round at night to see that they are fastened."

"On the second floor?"

"Yes, sir, all the windows."

"Look here, Barrymore," said Sir Henry sternly, "we have made up our minds to have the truth out of you, so it will save you trouble to tell it sooner rather than later. Come, now! No lies! What were you doing at that window?"

The fellow looked at us in a helpless way, and he wrung his hands together like one who is in the last extremity of doubt and misery.

"I was doing no harm, sir. I was holding a candle to the window."

"And why were you holding a candle to the window?"

"Don't ask me, Sir Henry--don't ask me! I give you my word, sir, that it is not my secret, and that I cannot tell it. If it concerned no one but myself I would not try to keep it from you."

A sudden idea occurred to me, and I took the candle from the trembling hand of the butler.

"He must have been holding it as a signal," said I. "Let us see if there is any answer." I held it as he had done, and stared out into the darkness of the night. Vaguely I could discern the black bank of the trees and the lighter expanse of the moor, for the moon was behind the clouds. And then I gave a cry of exultation, for a tiny pinpoint of yellow light had suddenly transfixed the dark veil, and glowed steadily in the centre of the black square framed by the window.

"There it is!" I cried.

"No, no, sir, it is nothing--nothing at all!" the butler broke in; "I assure you, sir--"

"Move your light across the window, Watson!" cried the baronet. "See, the other moves also! Now, you rascal, do you deny that it is a signal? Come, speak up! Who is your confederate out yonder, and what is this conspiracy that is going on?"

The man's face became openly defiant. "It is my business, and not yours. I will not tell."

"Then you leave my employment right away."

"Very good, sir. If I must I must."
"And you go in disgrace. By thunder, you may well be ashamed of yourself. Your family has lived with mine for over a hundred years under this roof, and here I find you deep in some dark plot against me."

"No, no, sir; no, not against you!" It was a woman's voice, and Mrs. Barrymore, paler and more horrorstruck than her husband, was standing at the door. Her bulky figure in a shawl and skirt might have been comic were it not for the intensity of feeling upon her face.

"We have to go, Eliza. This is the end of it. You can pack our things," said the butler.

"Oh, John, John, have I brought you to this? It is my doing, Sir Henry—all mine. He has done nothing except for my sake and because I asked him."

"Speak out, then! What does it mean?"

"My unhappy brother is starving on the moor. We cannot let him perish at our very gates. The light is a signal to him that food is ready for him, and his light out yonder is to show the spot to which to bring it."

"Then your brother is—"

"The escaped convict, sir--Selden, the criminal."

"That's the truth, sir," said Barrymore. "I said that it was not my secret and that I could not tell it to you. But now you have heard it, and you will see that if there was a plot it was not against you."

This, then, was the explanation of the stealthy expeditions at night and the light at the window. Sir Henry and I both stared at the woman in amazement. Was it possible that this stolidly respectable person was of the same blood as one of the most notorious criminals in the country?

"Yes, sir, my name was Selden, and he is my younger brother. We humoured him too much when he was a lad and gave him his own way in everything until he came to think that the world was made for his pleasure, and that he could do what he liked in it. Then as he grew older he met wicked companions, and the devil entered into him until he broke my mother's heart and dragged our name in the dirt. From crime to crime he sank lower and lower until it is only the mercy of God which has snatched him from the scaffold; but to me, sir, he was always the little curly-headed boy that I had nursed and played with as an elder sister would. That was why he broke prison, sir. He knew that I was there and that we could not refuse to help him. When he dragged himself here one night, weary and starving, with the warders hard at his heels, what could we do? We took him in and fed him and cared for him. Then you returned, sir, and my brother thought he would be safer on the moor than anywhere else until the hue and cry was over, so he lay in hiding there. But every second night we made sure if he was still there by putting a light in the window, and if there was an answer my husband took out some bread and meat to him. Every day we hoped that he was gone, but as long as he was there we could not desert him. That is the whole truth, as I am an honest Christian woman and you will see that if there is blame in the matter it does not lie with my husband but with me, for whose sake he has done all that he has."

The woman's words came with an intense earnestness which carried conviction with them.

"Is this true, Barrymore?"

"Yes, Sir Henry. Every word of it."

"Well, I cannot blame you for standing by your own wife. Forget what I have said. Go to your room, you two, and we shall talk further about this matter in the morning."

When they were gone we looked out of the window again. Sir Henry had flung it open, and the cold night wind beat in upon our faces. Far away in the black distance there still glowed that one tiny point of yellow light.

"I wonder he dares," said Sir Henry.

"It may be so placed as to be only visible from here."

"Very likely. How far do you think it is?"

"Out by the Cleft Tor, I think."

"Not more than a mile or two off."

"Hardly that."

"Well, it cannot be far if Barrymore had to carry out the food to it. And he is waiting, this villain, beside that candle. By thunder, Watson, I am going out to take that man!"

The same thought had crossed my own mind. It was not as if the Barrymores had taken us into their confidence. Their secret had been forced from them. The man was a danger to the community, an unmitigated scoundrel for whom there was neither pity nor excuse. We were only doing our duty in taking this chance of putting him back where he could do no harm. With his brutal and violent nature, others would have to pay the price if we held our hands. Any night, for example, our neighbours the Stapletons might be attacked by him, and it may have been the thought of this which made Sir Henry so keen upon the adventure.

"I will come," said I.

"Then get your revolver and put on your boots. The sooner we start the better, as the fellow may put out his light and be off."
In five minutes we were outside the door, starting upon our expedition. We hurried through the dark shrubbery, amid the dull moaning of the autumn wind and the rustle of the falling leaves. The night air was heavy with the smell of damp and decay. Now and again the moon peeped out for an instant, but clouds were driving over the face of the sky, and just as we came out on the moor a thin rain began to fall. The light still burned steadily in front.

"Are you armed?" I asked.
"I have a hunting-crop."
"We must close in on him rapidly, for he is said to be a desperate fellow. We shall take him by surprise and have him at our mercy before he can resist."

"I say, Watson," said the baronet, "what would Holmes say to this? How about that hour of darkness in which the power of evil is exalted?"

As if in answer to his words there rose suddenly out of the vast gloom of the moor that strange cry which I had already heard upon the borders of the great Grimpen Mire. It came with the wind through the silence of the night, a long, deep mutter, then a rising howl, and then the sad moan in which it died away. Again and again it sounded, the whole air throbbing with it, strident, wild, and menacing. The baronet caught my sleeve and his face glimmered white through the darkness.

"My God, what's that, Watson?"
"I don't know. It's a sound they have on the moor. I heard it once before."
It died away, and an absolute silence closed in upon us. We stood straining our ears, but nothing came.
"Watson," said the baronet, "it was the cry of a hound."
My blood ran cold in my veins, for there was a break in his voice which told of the sudden horror which had seized him.

"What do they call this sound?" he asked.
"Who?"
"The folk on the countryside."
"Oh, they are ignorant people. Why should you mind what they call it?"
"Tell me, Watson. What do they say of it?"
I hesitated but could not escape the question.
"They say it is the cry of the Hound of the Baskervilles."
He groaned and was silent for a few moments.
"A hound it was," he said at last, "but it seemed to come from miles away, over yonder, I think."
"It was hard to say whence it came."
"It rose and fell with the wind. Isn't that the direction of the great Grimpen Mire?"
"Yes, it is."
"Well, it was up there. Come now, Watson, didn't you think yourself that it was the cry of a hound? I am not a child. You need not fear to speak the truth."

"Stapleton was with me when I heard it last. He said that it might be the calling of a strange bird."
"No, no, it was a hound. My God, can there be some truth in all these stories? Is it possible that I am really in danger from so dark a cause? You don't believe it, do you, Watson?"
"No, no."
"And yet it was one thing to laugh about it in London, and it is another to stand out here in the darkness of the moor and to hear such a cry as that. And my uncle! There was the footprint of the hound beside him as he lay. It all fits together. I don't think that I am a coward, Watson, but that sound seemed to freeze my very blood. Feel my hand!"
It was as cold as a block of marble.
"You'll be all right tomorrow."
"I don't think I'll get that cry out of my head. What do you advise that we do now?"
"Shall we turn back?"
"No, by thunder; we have come out to get our man, and we will do it. We after the convict, and a hell-hound, as likely as not, after us. Come on! We'll see it through if all the fiends of the pit were loose upon the moor."

We stumbled slowly along in the darkness, with the black loom of the craggy hills around us, and the yellow speck of light burning steadily in front. There is nothing so deceptive as the distance of a light upon a pitch-dark night, and sometimes the glimmer seemed to be far away upon the horizon and sometimes it might have been within a few yards of us. But at last we could see whence it came, and then we knew that we were indeed very close. A guttering candle was stuck in a crevice of the rocks which flanked it on each side so as to keep the wind from it and also to prevent it from being visible, save in the direction of Baskerville Hall. A boulder of granite concealed our approach, and crouching behind it we gazed over it at the signal light. It was strange to see this single candle burning.
there in the middle of the moor, with no sign of life near it—just the one straight yellow flame and the gleam of the rock on each side of it.

"What shall we do now?" whispered Sir Henry.

"Wait here. He must be near his light. Let us see if we can get a glimpse of him."

The words were hardly out of my mouth when we both saw him. Over the rocks, in the crevice of which the candle burned, there was thrust out an evil yellow face, a terrible animal face, all seamed and scored with vile passions. Foul with mire, with a bristling beard, and hung with matted hair, it might well have belonged to one of those old savages who dwell in the burrows on the hillsides. The light beneath him was reflected in his small, cunning eyes which peered fiercely to right and left through the darkness like a crafty and savage animal who has heard the steps of the hunters.

Something had evidently aroused his suspicions. It may have been that Barrymore had some private signal which we had neglected to give, or the fellow may have had some other reason for thinking that all was not well, but I could read his fears upon his wicked face. Any instant he might dash out the light and vanish in the darkness. I sprang forward therefore, and Sir Henry did the same. At the same moment the convict screamed out a curse at us and hurled a rock which splintered up against the boulder which had sheltered us. I caught one glimpse of his short, squat, strongly built figure as he sprang to his feet and turned to run. At the same moment by a lucky chance the moon broke through the clouds. We rushed over the brow of the hill, and there was our man running with great speed down the other side, springing over the stones in his way with the activity of a mountain goat. A lucky long shot of my revolver might have crippled him, but I had brought it only to defend myself if attacked and not to shoot an unarmed man who was running away.

We were both swift runners and in fairly good training, but we soon found that we had no chance of overtaking him. We saw him for a long time in the moonlight until he was only a small speck moving swiftly among the boulders upon the side of a distant hill. We ran and ran until we were completely blown, but the space between us grew ever wider. Finally we stopped and sat panting on two rocks, while we watched him disappearing in the distance.

And it was at this moment that there occurred a most strange and unexpected thing. We had risen from our rocks and were turning to go home, having abandoned the hopeless chase. The moon was low upon the right, and the jagged pinnacle of a granite tor stood up against the lower curve of its silver disc. There, outlined as black as an ebony statue on that shining background, I saw the figure of a man upon the tor. Do not think that it was a delusion, Holmes. I assure you that I have never in my life seen anything more clearly. As far as I could judge, the figure was that of a tall, thin man. He stood with his legs a little separated, his arms folded, his head bowed, as if he were brooding over that enormous wilderness of peat and granite which lay before him. He might have been the very spirit of that terrible place. It was not the convict. This man was far from the place where the latter had disappeared. Besides, he was a much taller man. With a cry of surprise I pointed him out to the baronet, but in the instant during which I had turned to grasp his arm the man was gone. There was the sharp pinnacle of granite still cutting the lower edge of the moon, but its peak bore no trace of that silent and motionless figure.

I wished to go in that direction and to search the tor, but it was some distance away. The baronet's nerves were still quivering from that cry, which recalled the dark story of his family, and he was not in the mood for fresh adventures. He had not seen this lonely man upon the tor and could not feel the thrill which his strange presence and his commanding attitude had given to me. "A warder, no doubt," said he. "The moor has been thick with them since this fellow escaped." Well, perhaps his explanation may be the right one, but I should like to have some further proof of it. Today we mean to communicate to the Princetown people where they should look for their missing man, but it is hard lines that we have not actually had the triumph of bringing him back as our own prisoner. Such are the adventures of last night, and you must acknowledge, my dear Holmes, that I have done you very well in the matter of a report. Much of what I tell you is no doubt quite irrelevant, but still I feel that it is best that I should let you have all the facts and leave you to select for yourself those which will be of most service to you in helping you to your conclusions. We are certainly making some progress. So far as the Barrymores go we have found the motive of their actions, and that has cleared up the situation very much. But the moor with its mysteries and its strange inhabitants remains as inscrutable as ever. Perhaps in my next I may be able to throw some light upon this also. Best of all would it be if you could come down to us. In any case you will hear from me again in the course of the next few days.

Chapter 10 Extract from the Diary of Dr. Watson

So far I have been able to quote from the reports which I have forwarded during these early days to Sherlock Holmes. Now, however, I have arrived at a point in my narrative where I am compelled to abandon this method and to trust once more to my recollections, aided by the diary which I kept at the time. A few extracts from the latter will carry me on to those scenes which are indelibly fixed in every detail upon my memory. I proceed, then, from the
morning which followed our abortive chase of the convict and our other strange experiences upon the moor.

October 16th. A dull and foggy day with a drizzle of rain. The house is banked in with rolling clouds, which rise now and then to show the dreary curves of the moor, with thin, silver veins upon the sides of the hills, and the distant boulders gleaming where the light strikes upon their wet faces. It is melancholy outside and in. The baronet is in a black reaction after the excitements of the night. I am conscious myself of a weight at my heart and a feeling of impending danger--ever present danger, which is the more terrible because I am unable to define it.

And have I not cause for such a feeling? Consider the long sequence of incidents which have all pointed to some sinister influence which is at work around us. There is the death of the last occupant of the Hall, fulfilling so exactly the conditions of the family legend, and there are the repeated reports from peasants of the appearance of a strange creature upon the moor. Twice I have with my own ears heard the sound which resembled the distant baying of a hound. It is incredible, impossible, that it should really be outside the ordinary laws of nature. A spectral hound which leaves material footmarks and fills the air with its howling is surely not to be thought of. Stapleton may fall in with such a superstition, and Mortimer also, but if I have one quality upon earth it is common sense, and nothing will persuade me to believe in such a thing. To do so would be to descend to the level of these poor peasants, who are not content with a mere fiend dog but must needs describe him with hell-fire shooting from his mouth and eyes. Holmes would not listen to such fancies, and I am his agent. But facts are facts, and I have twice heard this crying upon the moor. Suppose that there were really some huge hound loose upon it; that would go far to explain everything. But where could such a hound lie concealed, where did it get its food, where did it come from, how was it that no one saw it by day? It must be confessed that the natural explanation offers almost as many difficulties as the other. And always, apart from the hound, there is the fact of the human agency in London, the man in the cab, and the letter which warned Sir Henry against the moor. This at least was real, but it might have been the work of a protecting friend as easily as of an enemy. Where is that friend or enemy now? Has he remained in London, or has he followed us down here? Could he--could he be the stranger whom I saw upon the tor?

It is true that I have had only the one glance at him, and yet there are some things to which I am ready to swear. He is no one whom I have seen down here, and I have now met all the neighbours. The figure was far taller than that of Stapleton, far thinner than that of Frankland. Barrymore it might possibly have been, but we had left him behind us, and I am certain that he could not have followed us. A stranger then is still dogging us, just as a stranger dogged us in London. We have never shaken him off. If I could lay my hands upon that man, then at last we might find ourselves at the end of all our difficulties. To this one purpose I must now devote all my energies.

My first impulse was to tell Sir Henry all my plans. My second and wisest one is to play my own game and speak as little as possible to anyone. He is silent and distrait. His nerves have been strangely shaken by that sound upon the moor. I will say nothing to add to his anxieties, but I will take my own steps to attain my own end.

We had a small scene this morning after breakfast. Barrymore asked leave to speak with Sir Henry, and they were closeted in his study some little time. Sitting in the billiard-room I more than once heard the sound of voices raised, and I had a pretty good idea what the point was which was under discussion. After a time the baronet opened his door and called for me. "Barrymore considers that he has a grievance," he said. "He thinks that it was unfair on our part to hunt his brother-in-law down when he, of his own free will, had told us the secret."

The butler was standing very pale but very collected before us.

"I may have spoken too warmly, sir," said he, "and if I have, I am sure that I beg your pardon. At the same time, I was very much surprised when I heard you two gentlemen come back this morning and learned that you had been chasing Selden. The poor fellow has enough to fight against without my putting more upon his track."

"If you had told us of your own free will it would have been a different thing," said the baronet, "you only told us, or rather your wife only told us, when it was forced from you and you could not help yourself."

"I didn't think you would have taken advantage of it, Sir Henry-- indeed I didn't."

"The man is a public danger. There are lonely houses scattered over the moor, and he is a fellow who would stick at nothing. You only want to get a glimpse of his face to see that. Look at Mr. Stapleton's house, for example, with no one but himself to defend it. There's no safety for anyone until he is under lock and key."

"He'll break into no house, sir. I give you my solemn word upon that. But he will never trouble anyone in this country again. I assure you, Sir Henry, that in a very few days the necessary arrangements will have been made and he will be on his way to South America. For God's sake, sir, I beg of you not to let the police know that he is still on the moor. They have given up the chase there, and he can lie quiet until the ship is ready for him. You can't tell on him without getting my wife and me into trouble. I beg you, sir, to say nothing to the police."

"What do you say, Watson?"

I shrugged my shoulders. "If he were safely out of the country it would relieve the tax-payer of a burden."

"But how about the chance of his holding someone up before he goes?"

"He would not do anything so mad, sir. We have provided him with all that he can want. To commit a crime
"That is true," said Sir Henry. "Well, Barrymore--"

"God bless you, sir, and thank you from my heart! It would have killed my poor wife had he been taken again."

"I guess we are aiding and abetting a felony, Watson? But, after what we have heard I don't feel as if I could give the man up, so there is an end of it. All right, Barrymore, you can go."

With a few broken words of gratitude the man turned, but he hesitated and then came back.

"You've been so kind to us, sir, that I should like to do the best I can for you in return. I know something, Sir Henry, and perhaps I should have said it before, but it was long after the inquest that I found it out. I've never breathed a word about it yet to mortal man. It's about poor Sir Charles's death."

The baronet and I were both upon our feet. "Do you know how he died?"

"No, sir, I don't know that."

"What then?"

"I know why he was at the gate at that hour. It was to meet a woman."

"To meet a woman! He?"

"Yes, sir."

"And the woman's name?"

"I can't give you the name, sir, but I can give you the initials. Her initials were L. L."

"How do you know this, Barrymore?"

"Well, Sir Henry, your uncle had a letter that morning. He had usually a great many letters, for he was a public man and well known for his kind heart, so that everyone who was in trouble was glad to turn to him. But that morning, as it chanced, there was only this one letter, so I took the more notice of it. It was from Coombe Tracey, and it was addressed in a woman's hand."

"Well?"

"Well, sir, I thought no more of the matter, and never would have done had it not been for my wife. Only a few weeks ago she was cleaning out Sir Charles's study--it had never been touched since his death--and she found the ashes of a burned letter in the back of the grate. The greater part of it was charred to pieces, but one little slip, the end of a page, hung together, and the writing could still be read, though it was gray on a black ground. It seemed to us to be a postscript at the end of the letter and it said: Please, please, as you are a gentleman, burn this letter, and be at the gate by ten o'clock. Beneath it were signed the initials L. L."

"Have you got that slip?"

"No, sir, it crumbled all to bits after we moved it."

"Had Sir Charles received any other letters in the same writing?"

"Well, sir, I took no particular notice of his letters. I should not have noticed this one, only it happened to come alone."

"And you have no idea who L. L. is?"

"No, sir. No more than you have. But I expect if we could lay our hands upon that lady we should know more about Sir Charles's death."

"I cannot understand, Barrymore, how you came to conceal this important information."

"Well, sir, it was immediately after that our own trouble came to us. And then again, sir, we were both of us very fond of Sir Charles, as we well might be considering all that he has done for us. To rake this up couldn't help our poor master, and it's well to go carefully when there's a lady in the case. Even the best of us--"

"You thought it might injure his reputation?"

"Well, sir, I thought no good could come of it. But now you have been kind to us, and I feel as if it would be treating you unfairly not to tell you all that I know about the matter."

"Very good, Barrymore; you can go." When the butler had left us Sir Henry turned to me. "Well, Watson, what do you think of this new light?"

"It seems to leave the darkness rather blacker than before."

"So I think. But if we can only trace L. L. it should clear up the whole business. We have gained that much. We know that there is someone who has the facts if we can only find her. What do you think we should do?"

"Let Holmes know all about it at once. It will give him the clue for which he has been seeking. I am much mistaken if it does not bring him down."

I went at once to my room and drew up my report of the morning's conversation for Holmes. It was evident to me that he had been very busy of late, for the notes which I had from Baker Street were few and short, with no comments upon the information which I had supplied and hardly any reference to my mission. No doubt his blackmailing case is absorbing all his faculties. And yet this new factor must surely arrest his attention and renew his interest. I wish that he were here.
October 17th. All day today the rain poured down, rustling on the ivy and dripping from the eaves. I thought of
the convict out upon the bleak, cold, shelterless moor. Poor devil! Whatever his crimes, he has suffered something to
atone for them. And then I thought of that other one--the face in the cab, the figure against the moon. Was he also
out in that deluged--the unseen watcher, the man of darkness? In the evening I put on my waterproof and I walked
far upon the sodden moor, full of dark imaginings, the rain beating upon my face and the wind whistling about my
ears. God help those who wander into the great mire now, for even the firm uplands are becoming a morass. I found
the black tor upon which I had seen the solitary watcher, and from its craggy summit I looked out myself across the
melancholy downs. Rain squalls drifted across their russet face, and the heavy, slate-coloured clouds hung low over
the landscape, trailing in gray wreaths down the sides of the fantastic hills. In the distant hollow on the left, half
hidden by the mist, the two thin towers of Baskerville Hall rose above the trees. They were the only signs of human
life which I could see, save only those prehistoric huts which lay thickly upon the slopes of the hills. Nowhere was
there any trace of that lonely man whom I had seen on the same spot two nights before.

As I walked back I was overtaken by Dr. Mortimer driving in his dog-cart over a rough moorland track which
led from the outlying farmhouse of Foulmire. He has been very attentive to us, and hardly a day has passed that he
has not called at the Hall to see how we were getting on. He insisted upon my climbing into his dog-cart, and he
gave me a lift homeward. I found him much troubled over the disappearance of his little spaniel. It had wandered on
to the moor and had never come back. I gave him such consolation as I might, but I thought of the pony on the
Grimpen Mire, and I do not fancy that he will see his little dog again.

"By the way, Mortimer," said I as we jolted along the rough road, "I suppose there are few people living within
driving distance of this whom you do not know?"

"Hardly any, I think."

"Can you, then, tell me the name of any woman whose initials are L. L.?"

He thought for a few minutes.

"No," said he. "There are a few gipsies and labouring folk for whom I can't answer, but among the farmers or
gentry there is no one whose initials are those. Wait a bit though," he added after a pause. "There is Laura Lyons--
her initials are L. L.--but she lives in Coombe Tracey."

"Who is she?" I asked.

"She is Frankland's daughter."

"What! Old Frankland the crank?"

"Exactly. She married an artist named Lyons, who came sketching on the moor. He proved to be a blackguard
and deserted her. The fault from what I hear may not have been entirely on one side. Her father refused to have
anything to do with her because she had married without his consent and perhaps for one or two other reasons as
well. So, between the old sinner and the young one the girl has had a pretty bad time."

"How does she live?"

"I fancy old Frankland allows her a pittance, but it cannot be more, for his own affairs are considerably involved.
Whatever she may have deserved one could not allow her to go hopelessly to the bad. Her story got about, and
several of the people here did something to enable her to earn an honest living. Stapleton did for one, and Sir
Charles for another. I gave a trifle myself. It was to set her up in a typewriting business."

He wanted to know the object of my inquiries, but I managed to satisfy his curiosity without telling him too
much, for there is no reason why we should take anyone into our confidence. Tomorrow morning I shall find my
way to Coombe Tracey, and if I can see this Mrs. Laura Lyons, of equivocal reputation, a long step will have been
made towards clearing one incident in this chain of mysteries. I am certainly developing the wisdom of the serpent,
for when Mortimer pressed his questions to an inconvenient extent I asked him casually to what type Frankland's
skull belonged, and so heard nothing but craniology for the rest of our drive. I have not lived for years with Sherlock
Holmes for nothing.

I have only one other incident to record upon this tempestuous and melancholy day. This was my conversation
with Barrymore just now, which gives me one more strong card which I can play in due time.

Mortimer had stayed to dinner, and he and the baronet played ecarte afterwards. The butler brought me my
coffee into the library, and I took the chance to ask him a few questions.

"Well," said I, "has this precious relation of yours departed, or is he still lurking out yonder?"

"I don't know, sir. I hope to heaven that he has gone, for he has brought nothing but trouble here! I've not heard
of him since I left out food for him last, and that was three days ago."

"Did you see him then?"

"No, sir, but the food was gone when next I went that way."

"Then he was certainly there?"

"So you would think, sir, unless it was the other man who took it."
I sat with my coffee-cup halfway to my lips and stared at Barrymore.

"You know that there is another man then?"

"Yes, sir; there is another man upon the moor."

"Have you seen him?"

"No, sir."

"How do you know of him then?"

"Selden told me of him, sir, a week ago or more. He's in hiding, too, but he's not a convict as far as I can make out. I don't like it, Dr. Watson--I tell you straight, sir, that I don't like it." He spoke with a sudden passion of earnestness.

"Now, listen to me, Barrymore! I have no interest in this matter but that of your master. I have come here with no object except to help him. Tell me, frankly, what it is that you don't like."

Barrymore hesitated for a moment, as if he regretted his outburst or found it difficult to express his own feelings in words.

"It's all these goings-on, sir," he cried at last, waving his hand towards the rain-lashed window which faced the moor. "There's foul play somewhere, and there's black villainy brewing, to that I'll swear! Very glad I should be, sir, to see Sir Henry on his way back to London again!"

"But what is it that alarms you?"

"Look at Sir Charles's death! That was bad enough, for all that the coroner said. Look at the noises on the moor at night. There's not a man would cross it after sundown if he was paid for it. Look at this stranger hiding out yonder, and watching and waiting! What's he waiting for? What does it mean? It means no good to anyone of the name of Baskerville, and very glad I shall be to be quit of it all on the day that Sir Henry's new servants are ready to take over the Hall."

"But about this stranger," said I. "Can you tell me anything about him? What did Selden say? Did he find out where he hid, or what he was doing?"

"He saw him once or twice, but he is a deep one and gives nothing away. At first he thought that he was the police, but soon he found that he had some lay of his own. A kind of gentleman he was, as far as he could see, but what he was doing he could not make out."

"And where did he say that he lived?"

"Among the old houses on the hillside--the stone huts where the old folk used to live."

"But how about his food?"

"Selden found out that he has got a lad who works for him and brings all he needs. I dare say he goes to Coombe Tracey for what he wants."

"Very good, Barrymore. We may talk further of this some other time." When the butler had gone I walked over to the black window, and I looked through a blurred pane at the driving clouds and at the tossing outline of the wind-swept trees. It is a wild night indoors, and what must it be in a stone hut upon the moor. What passion of hatred can it be which leads a man to lurk in such a place at such a time! And what deep and earnest purpose can he have which calls for such a trial? There, in that hut upon the moor, seems to lie the very centre of that problem which has vexed me so sorely. I swear that another day shall not have passed before I have done all that man can do to reach the heart of the mystery.

Chapter 11 The Man on the Tor

The extract from my private diary which forms the last chapter has brought my narrative up to the eighteenth of October, a time when these strange events began to move swiftly towards their terrible conclusion. The incidents of the next few days are indelibly graven upon my recollection, and I can tell them without reference to the notes made at the time. I start them from the day which succeeded that upon which I had established two facts of great importance, the one that Mrs. Laura Lyons of Coombe Tracey had written to Sir Charles Baskerville and made an appointment with him at the very place and hour that he met his death, the other that the lurking man upon the moor was to be found among the stone huts upon the hillside. With these two facts in my possession I felt that either my intelligence or my courage must be deficient if I could not throw some further light upon these dark places.

I had no opportunity to tell the baronet what I had learned about Mrs. Lyons upon the evening before, for Dr. Mortimer remained with him at cards until it was very late. At breakfast, however, I informed him about my discovery and asked him whether he would care to accompany me to Coombe Tracey. At first he was very eager to come, but on second thoughts it seemed to both of us that if I went alone the results might be better. The more formal we made the visit the less information we might obtain. I left Sir Henry behind, therefore, not without some prickings of conscience, and drove off upon my new quest.

When I reached Coombe Tracey I told Perkins to put up the horses, and I made inquiries for the lady whom I had come to interrogate. I had no difficulty in finding her rooms, which were central and well appointed. A maid showed
me in without ceremony, and as I entered the sitting-room a lady, who was sitting before a Remington typewriter, sprang up with a pleasant smile of welcome. Her face fell, however, when she saw that I was a stranger, and she sat down again and asked me the object of my visit.

The first impression left by Mrs. Lyons was one of extreme beauty. Her eyes and hair were of the same rich hazel colour, and her cheeks, though considerably freckled, were flushed with the exquisite bloom of the brunette, the dainty pink which lurks at the heart of the sulphur rose. Admiration was, I repeat, the first impression. But the second was criticism. There was something subtly wrong with the face, some coarseness of expression, some hardness, perhaps, of eye, some looseness of lip which marred its perfect beauty. But these, of course, are afterthoughts. At the moment I was simply conscious that I was in the presence of a very handsome woman, and that she was asking me the reasons for my visit. I had not quite understood until that instant how delicate my mission was.

"I have the pleasure," said I, "of knowing your father."

It was a clumsy introduction, and the lady made me feel it. "There is nothing in common between my father and me," she said. "I owe him nothing, and his friends are not mine. If it were not for the late Sir Charles Baskerville and some other kind hearts I might have starved for all that my father cared."

"It was about the late Sir Charles Baskerville that I have come here to see you."

The freckles started out on the lady's face.

"What can I tell you about him?" she asked, and her fingers played nervously over the stops of her typewriter.

"You knew him, did you not?"

"I have already said that I owe a great deal to his kindness. If I am able to support myself it is largely due to the interest which he took in my unhappy situation."

"Did you correspond with him?"

The lady looked quickly up with an angry gleam in her hazel eyes.

"What is the object of these questions?" she asked sharply.

"The object is to avoid a public scandal. It is better that I should ask them here than that the matter should pass outside our control."

She was silent and her face was still very pale. At last she looked up with something reckless and defiant in her manner.

"Well, I'll answer," she said. "What are your questions?"

"Did you correspond with Sir Charles?"

"I certainly wrote to him once or twice to acknowledge his delicacy and his generosity."

"Have you the dates of those letters?"

"No."

"Have you ever met him?"

"Yes, once or twice, when he came into Coombe Tracey. He was a very retiring man, and he preferred to do good by stealth."

"But if you saw him so seldom and wrote so seldom, how did he know enough about your affairs to be able to help you, as you say that he has done?"

She met my difficulty with the utmost readiness.

"There were several gentlemen who knew my sad history and united to help me. One was Mr. Stapleton, a neighbour and intimate friend of Sir Charles's. He was exceedingly kind, and it was through him that Sir Charles learned about my affairs."

I knew already that Sir Charles Baskerville had made Stapleton his almoner upon several occasions, so the lady's statement bore the impress of truth upon it.

"Did you ever write to Sir Charles asking him to meet you?" I continued.

Mrs. Lyons flushed with anger again. "Really, sir, this is a very extraordinary question."

"I am sorry, madam, but I must repeat it."

"Then I answer, certainly not."

"Not on the very day of Sir Charles's death?"

The flush had faded in an instant, and a deathly face was before me. Her dry lips could not speak the "No" which I saw rather than heard.

"Surely your memory deceives you," said I. "I could even quote a passage of your letter. It ran 'Please, please, as you are a gentleman, burn this letter, and be at the gate by ten o'clock.'"

I thought that she had fainted, but she recovered herself by a supreme effort.

"Is there no such thing as a gentleman?" she gasped.

"You do Sir Charles an injustice. He did burn the letter. But sometimes a letter may be legible even when
burned. You acknowledge now that you wrote it?"
   "Yes, I did write it," she cried, pouring out her soul in a torrent of words. "I did write it. Why should I deny it? I have no reason to be ashamed of it. I wished him to help me. I believed that if I had an interview I could gain his help, so I asked him to meet me."
   "But why at such an hour?"
   "Because I had only just learned that he was going to London next day and might be away for months. There were reasons why I could not get there earlier."
   "But why a rendezvous in the garden instead of a visit to the house?"
   "Do you think a woman could go alone at that hour to a bachelor's house?"
   "Well, what happened when you did get there?"
   "I never went."
   "Mrs. Lyons!"
   "No, I swear it to you on all I hold sacred. I never went. Something intervened to prevent my going."
   "What was that?"
   "That is a private matter. I cannot tell it."
   "You acknowledge then that you made an appointment with Sir Charles at the very hour and place at which he met his death, but you deny that you kept the appointment."
   "That is the truth."
   Again and again I cross-questioned her, but I could never get past that point.
   "Mrs. Lyons," said I as I rose from this long and inconclusive interview, "you are taking a very great responsibility and putting yourself in a very false position by not making an absolutely clean breast of all that you know. If I have to call in the aid of the police you will find how seriously you are compromised. If your position is innocent, why did you in the first instance deny having written to Sir Charles upon that date?"
   "Because I feared that some false conclusion might be drawn from it and that I might find myself involved in a scandal."
   "And why were you so pressing that Sir Charles should destroy your letter?"
   "If you have read the letter you will know."
   "I did not say that I had read all the letter."
   "You quoted some of it."
   "I quoted the postscript. The letter had, as I said, been burned and it was not all legible. I ask you once again why it was that you were so pressing that Sir Charles should destroy this letter which he received on the day of his death."
   "The matter is a very private one."
   "The more reason why you should avoid a public investigation."
   "I will tell you, then. If you have heard anything of my unhappy history you will know that I made a rash marriage and had reason to regret it."
   "I have heard so much."
   "My life has been one incessant persecution from a husband whom I abhor. The law is upon his side, and every day I am faced by the possibility that he may force me to live with him. At the time that I wrote this letter to Sir Charles I had learned that there was a prospect of my regaining my freedom if certain expenses could be met. It meant everything to me--peace of mind, happiness, self-respect--everything. I knew Sir Charles's generosity, and I thought that if he heard the story from my own lips he would help me."
   "Then how is it that you did not go?"
   "Because I received help in the interval from another source."
   "Why then, did you not write to Sir Charles and explain this?"
   "So I should have done had I not seen his death in the paper next morning."
   The woman's story hung coherently together, and all my questions were unable to shake it. I could only check it by finding if she had, indeed, instituted divorce proceedings against her husband at or about the time of the tragedy.
   It was unlikely that she would dare to say that she had not been to Baskerville Hall if she really had been, for a trap would be necessary to take her there, and could not have returned to Coombe Tracey until the early hours of the morning. Such an excursion could not be kept secret. The probability was, therefore, that she was telling the truth, or, at least, a part of the truth. I came away baffled and disheartened. Once again I had reached that dead wall which seemed to be built across every path by which I tried to get at the object of my mission. And yet the more I thought of the lady's face and of her manner the more I felt that something was being held back from me. Why should she turn so pale? Why should she fight against every admission until it was forced from her? Why should she have been so reticent at the time of the tragedy? Surely the explanation of all this could not be as innocent as she would have
me believe. For the moment I could proceed no farther in that direction, but must turn back to that other clue which was to be sought for among the stone huts upon the moor.

And that was a most vague direction. I realized it as I drove back and noted how hill after hill showed traces of the ancient people. Barrymore's only indication had been that the stranger lived in one of these abandoned huts, and many hundreds of them are scattered throughout the length and breadth of the moor. But I had my own experience for a guide since it had shown me the man himself standing upon the summit of the Black Tor. That, then, should be the centre of my search. From there I should explore every hut upon the moor until I lighted upon the right one. If this man were inside it I should find out from his own lips, at the point of my revolver if necessary, who he was and why he had dogged us so long. He might slip away from us in the crowd of Regent Street, but it would puzzle him to do so upon the lonely moor. On the other hand, if I should find the hut and its tenant should not be within it I must remain there, however long the vigil, until he returned. Holmes had missed him in London. It would indeed be a triumph for me if I could run him to earth where my master had failed.

Luck had been against us again and again in this inquiry, but now at last it came to my aid. And the messenger of good fortune was none other than Mr. Frankland, who was standing, gray-whiskered and red-faced, outside the gate of his garden, which opened on to the highroad along which I travelled.

"Good-day, Dr. Watson," cried he with unwonted good humour, "you must really give your horses a rest and come in to have a glass of wine and to congratulate me."

My feelings towards him were very far from being friendly after what I had heard of his treatment of his daughter, but I was anxious to send Perkins and the wagonette home, and the opportunity was a good one. I alighted and sent a message to Sir Henry that I should walk over in time for dinner. Then I followed Frankland into his dining-room.

"It is a great day for me, sir--one of the red-letter days of my life," he cried with many chuckles. "I have brought off a double event. I mean to teach them in these parts that law is law, and that there is a man here who does not fear to invoke it. I have established a right of way through the centre of old Middleton's park, slap across it, sir, within a hundred yards of his own front door. What do you think of that? We'll teach these magnates that they cannot ride roughshod over the rights of the commoners, confound them! And I've closed the wood where the Fernworthy folk used to picnic. These infernal people seem to think that there are no rights of property, and that they can swarm where they like with their papers and their bottles. Both cases decided, Dr. Watson, and both in my favour. I haven't had such a day since I had Sir John Morland for trespass because he shot in his own warren."

"How on earth did you do that?"

"Look it up in the books, sir. It will repay reading--Frankland v. Morland, Court of Queen's Bench. It cost me 200 pounds, but I got my verdict."

"Did it do you any good?"

"None, sir, none. I am proud to say that I had no interest in the matter. I act entirely from a sense of public duty. I have no doubt, for example, that the Fernworthy people will burn me in effigy tonight. I told the police last time they did it that they should stop these disgraceful exhibitions. The County Constabulary is in a scandalous state, sir, and it has not afforded me the protection to which I am entitled. The case of Frankland v. Regina will bring the matter before the attention of the public. I told them that they would have occasion to regret their treatment of me, and already my words have come true."

"How so?" I asked.

The old man put on a very knowing expression. "Because I could tell them what they are dying to know; but nothing would induce me to help the rascals in any way."

I had been casting round for some excuse by which I could get away from his gossip, but now I began to wish to hear more of it. I had seen enough of the contrary nature of the old sinner to understand that any strong sign of interest would be the surest way to stop his confidences.

"Some poaching case, no doubt?" said I with an indifferent manner.

"Ha, ha, my boy, a very much more important matter than that! What about the convict on the moor?"

I stared. "You don't mean that you know where he is?" said I.

"I may not know exactly where he is, but I am quite sure that I could help the police to lay their hands on him. Has it never struck you that the way to catch that man was to find out where he got his food and so trace it to him?"

He certainly seemed to be getting uncomfortably near the truth. "No doubt," said I; "but how do you know that he is anywhere upon the moor?"

"I know it because I have seen with my own eyes the messenger who takes him his food."

My heart sank for Barrymore. It was a serious thing to be in the power of this spiteful old busybody. But his next remark took a weight from my mind.

"You'll be surprised to hear that his food is taken to him by a child. I see him every day through my telescope
upon the roof. He passes along the same path at the same hour, and to whom should he be going except to the convict?"

Here was luck indeed! And yet I suppressed all appearance of interest. A child! Barrymore had said that our unknown was supplied by a boy. It was on his track, and not upon the convict's, that Frankland had stumbled. If I could get his knowledge it might save me a long and weary hunt. But incredulity and indifference were evidently my strongest cards.

"I should say that it was much more likely that it was the son of one of the moorland shepherds taking out his father's dinner."

The least appearance of opposition struck fire out of the old autocrat. His eyes looked malignantly at me, and his gray whiskers bristled like those of an angry cat.

"Indeed, sir!" said he, pointing out over the wide-stretching moor. "Do you see that Black Tor over yonder? Well, do you see the low hill beyond with the thornbush upon it? It is the stoniest part of the whole moor. Is that a place where a shepherd would be likely to take his station? Your suggestion, sir, is a most absurd one."

I meekly answered that I had spoken without knowing all the facts. My submission pleased him and led him to further confidences.

"You may be sure, sir, that I have very good grounds before I come to an opinion. I have seen the boy again and again with his bundle. Every day, and sometimes twice a day, I have been able--but wait a moment, Dr. Watson. Do my eyes deceive me, or is there at the present moment something moving upon that hillside?"

It was several miles off, but I could distinctly see a small dark dot against the dull green and gray.

"Come, sir, come!" cried Frankland, rushing upstairs. "You will see with your own eyes and judge for yourself."

The telescope, a formidable instrument mounted upon a tripod, stood upon the flat leads of the house. Frankland clapped his eye to it and gave a cry of satisfaction.

"Quick, Dr. Watson, quick, before he passes over the hill!"

There he was, sure enough, a small urchin with a little bundle upon his shoulder, toiling slowly up the hill. When he reached the crest I saw the ragged uncouth figure outlined for an instant against the cold blue sky. He looked round him with a furtive and stealthy air, as one who dreads pursuit. Then he vanished over the hill.

"Well! Am I right?"

"Certainly, there is a boy who seems to have some secret errand."

"And what the errand is even a county constable could guess. But not one word shall they have from me, and I bind you to secrecy also, Dr. Watson. Not a word! You understand!"

"Just as you wish."

"They have treated me shamefully--shamefully. When the facts come out in Frankland v. Regina I venture to think that a thrill of indignation will run through the country. Nothing would induce me to help the police in any way. For all they cared it might have been me, instead of my effigy, which these rascals burned at the stake. Surely you are not going! You will help me to empty the decanter in honour of this great occasion!"

But I resisted all his solicitations and succeeded in dissuading him from his announced intention of walking home with me. I kept the road as long as his eye was on me, and then I struck off across the moor and made for the stony hill over which the boy had disappeared. Everything was working in my favour, and I swore that it should not be through lack of energy or perseverance that I should miss the chance which fortune had thrown in my way.

The sun was already sinking when I reached the summit of the hill, and the long slopes beneath me were all golden-green on one side and gray shadow on the other. A haze lay low upon the farthest sky-line, out of which jutted the fantastic shapes of Belliver and Vixen Tor. Over the wide expanse there was no sound and no movement. One great gray bird, a gull or curlew, soared aloft in the blue heaven. He and I seemed to be the only living things between the huge arch of the sky and the desert beneath it. The barren scene, the sense of loneliness, and the mystery and urgency of my task all struck a chill into my heart. The boy was nowhere to be seen. But down beneath me in a cleft of the hills there was a circle of the old stone huts, and in the middle of them there was one which retained sufficient roof to act as a screen against the weather. My heart leaped within me as I saw it. This must be the burrow where the stranger lurked. At last my foot was on the threshold of his hiding place--his secret was within my grasp.

As I approached the hut, walking as warily as Stapleton would do when with poised net he drew near the settled butterfly, I satisfied myself that the place had indeed been used as a habitation. A vague pathway among the boulders led to the dilapidated opening which served as a door. All was silent within. The unknown might be lurking there, or he might be prowling on the moor. My nerves tingled with the sense of adventure. Throwing aside my cigarette, I closed my hand upon the butt of my revolver and, walking swiftly up to the door, I looked in. The place was empty.

But there were ample signs that I had not come upon a false scent. This was certainly where the man lived. Some
blankets rolled in a waterproof lay upon that very stone slab upon which Neolithic man had once slumbered. The ashes of a fire were heaped in a rude grate. Beside it lay some cooking utensils and a bucket half-full of water. A litter of empty tins showed that the place had been occupied for some time, and I saw, as my eyes became accustomed to the checkered light, a pannikin and a half-full bottle of spirits standing in the corner. In the middle of the hut a flat stone served the purpose of a table, and upon this stood a small cloth bundle—the same, no doubt, which I had seen through the telescope upon the shoulder of the boy. It contained a loaf of bread, a tinned tongue, and two tins of preserved peaches. As I set it down again, after having examined it, my heart leaped to see that beneath it there lay a sheet of paper with writing upon it. I raised it, and this was what I read, roughly scrawled in pencil: "Dr. Watson has gone to Coombe Tracey."

For a minute I stood there with the paper in my hands thinking out the meaning of this curt message. It was I, then, and not Sir Henry, who was being dogged by this secret man. He had not followed me himself, but he had set an agent—the boy, perhaps—upon my track, and this was his report. Possibly I had taken no step since I had been upon the moor which had not been observed and reported. Always there was this feeling of an unseen force, a fine net drawn round us with infinite skill and delicacy, holding us so lightly that it was only at some supreme moment that one realized that one was indeed entangled in its meshes.

If there was one report there might be others, so I looked round the hut in search of them. There was no trace, however, of anything of the kind, nor could I discover any sign which might indicate the character or intentions of the man who lived in this singular place, save that he must be of Spartan habits and cared little for the comforts of life. When I thought of the heavy rains and looked at the gaping roof I understood how strong and immutable must be the purpose which had kept him in that inhospitable abode. Was he our malignant enemy, or was he by chance our guardian angel? I swore that I would not leave the hut until I knew.

Outside the sun was sinking low and the west was blazing with scarlet and gold. Its reflection was shot back in ruddy patches by the distant pools which lay amid the great Grimpen Mire. There were the two towers of Baskerville Hall, and there a distant blur of smoke which marked the village of Grimpen. Between the two, behind the hill, was the house of the Stapletons. All was sweet and mellow and peaceful in the golden evening light, and yet as I looked at them my soul shared none of the peace of Nature but quivered at the vagueness and the terror of that interview which every instant was bringing nearer. With tingling nerves but a fixed purpose, I sat in the dark recess of the hut and waited with sombre patience for the coming of its tenant.

And then at last I heard him. Far away came the sharp clink of a boot striking upon a stone. Then another and yet another, coming nearer and nearer. I shrank back into the darkest corner and cocked the pistol in my pocket, determined not to discover myself until I had an opportunity of seeing something of the stranger. There was a long pause which showed that he had stopped. Then once more the footsteps approached and a shadow fell across the opening of the hut.

"It is a lovely evening, my dear Watson," said a well-known voice. "I really think that you will be more comfortable outside than in."

Chapter 12 Death on the Moor

For a moment or two I sat breathless, hardly able to believe my ears. Then my senses and my voice came back to me, while a crushing weight of responsibility seemed in an instant to be lifted from my soul. That cold, incisive, ironical voice could belong to but one man in all the world.

"Holmes!" I cried—"Holmes!"

"Come out," said he, "and please be careful with the revolver."

I stooped under the rude lintel, and there he sat upon a stone outside, his gray eyes dancing with amusement as they fell upon my astonished features. He was thin and worn, but clear and alert, his keen face bronzed by the sun and roughened by the wind. In his tweed suit and cloth cap he looked like any other tourist upon the moor, and he had contrived, with that catlike love of personal cleanliness which was one of his characteristics, that his chin should be as smooth and his linen as perfect as if he were in Baker Street.

"I never was more glad to see anyone in my life," said I as I wrung him by the hand.

"Or more astonished, eh?"

"Well, I must confess to it."

"The surprise was not all on one side, I assure you. I had no idea that you had found my occasional retreat, still less that you were inside it, until I was within twenty paces of the door."

"My footprint, I presume?"

"No, Watson, I fear that I could not undertake to recognize your footprint amid all the footprints of the world. If you seriously desire to deceive me you must change your tobacconist; for when I see the stub of a cigarette marked Bradley, Oxford Street, I know that my friend Watson is in the neighbourhood. You will see it there beside the path. You threw it down, no doubt, at that supreme moment when you charged into the empty hut."
"Exactly."

"I thought as much--and knowing your admirable tenacity I was convinced that you were sitting in ambush, a
weapon within reach, waiting for the tenant to return. So you actually thought that I was the criminal?"

"I did not know who you were, but I was determined to find out."

"Excellent, Watson! And how did you localize me? You saw me, perhaps, on the night of the convict hunt, when
I was so imprudent as to allow the moon to rise behind me?"

"Yes, I saw you then."

"And have no doubt searched all the huts until you came to this one?"

"No, your boy had been observed, and that gave me a guide where to look."

"The old gentleman with the telescope, no doubt. I could not make it out when first I saw the light flashing upon
the lens." He rose and peeped into the hut. "Ha, I see that Cartwright has brought up some supplies. What's this
paper? So you have been to Coombe Tracey, have you?"

"Yes."

"To see Mrs. Laura Lyons?"

"Exactly."

"Well done! Our researches have evidently been running on parallel lines, and when we unite our results I expect
we shall have a fairly full knowledge of the case."

"Well, I am glad from my heart that you are here, for indeed the responsibility and the mystery were both
becoming too much for my nerves. But how in the name of wonder did you come here, and what have you been
doing? I thought that you were in Baker Street working out that case of blackmailing."

"That was what I wished you to think."

"Then you use me, and yet do not trust me!" I cried with some bitterness. "I think that I have deserved better at
your hands, Holmes."

"My dear fellow, you have been invaluable to me in this as in many other cases, and I beg that you will forgive
me if I have seemed to play a trick upon you. In truth, it was partly for your own sake that I did it, and it was my
appreciation of the danger which you ran which led me to come down and examine the matter for myself. Had I
been with Sir Henry and you it is confident that my point of view would have been the same as yours, and my
presence would have warned our very formidable opponents to be on their guard. As it is, I have been able to get
about as I could not possibly have done had I been living in the Hall, and I remain an unknown factor in the
business, ready to throw in all my weight at a critical moment."

"But why keep me in the dark?"

"For you to know could not have helped us and might possibly have led to my discovery. You would have
wished to tell me something, or in your kindness you would have brought me out some comfort or other, and so an
unnecessary risk would be run. I brought Cartwright down with me--you remember the little chap at the express
office--and he has seen after my simple wants: a loaf of bread and a clean collar. What does man want more? He has
given me an extra pair of eyes upon a very active pair of feet, and both have been invaluable."

"Then my reports have all been wasted!" --My voice trembled as I recalled the pains and the pride with which I
had composed them.

Holmes took a bundle of papers from his pocket.

"Here are your reports, my dear fellow, and very well thumbed, I assure you. I made excellent arrangements, and
they are only delayed one day upon their way. I must compliment you exceedingly upon the zeal and the intelligence
which you have shown over an extraordinarily difficult case."

I was still rather raw over the deception which had been practised upon me, but the warmth of Holmes's praise
drove my anger from my mind. I felt also in my heart that he was right in what he said and that it was really best for
our purpose that I should not have known that he was upon the moor.

"That's better," said he, seeing the shadow rise from my face. "And now tell me the result of your visit to Mrs.
Laura Lyons-- it was not difficult for me to guess that it was to see her that you had gone, for I am already aware
that she is the one person in Coombe Tracey who might be of service to us in the matter. In fact, if you had not gone
today it is exceedingly probable that I should have gone tomorrow."

The sun had set and dusk was settling over the moor. The air had turned chill and we withdrew into the hut for
warmth. There, sitting together in the twilight, I told Holmes of my conversation with the lady. So interested was he
that I had to repeat some of it twice before he was satisfied.

"This is most important," said he when I had concluded. "It fills up a gap which I had been unable to bridge in
this most complex affair. You are aware, perhaps, that a close intimacy exists between this lady and the man
Stapleton?"

"I did not know of a close intimacy."
"There can be no doubt about the matter. They meet, they write, there is a complete understanding between them. Now, this puts a very powerful weapon into our hands. If I could only use it to detach his wife--"

"His wife?"

"I am giving you some information now, in return for all that you have given me. The lady who has passed here as Miss Stapleton is in reality his wife."

"Good heavens, Holmes! Are you sure of what you say? How could he have permitted Sir Henry to fall in love with her?"

"Sir Henry's falling in love could do no harm to anyone except Sir Henry. He took particular care that Sir Henry did not make love to her, as you have yourself observed. I repeat that the lady is his wife and not his sister."

"But why this elaborate deception?"

"Because he foresaw that she would be very much more useful to him in the character of a free woman."

All my unspoken instincts, my vague suspicions, suddenly took shape and centred upon the naturalist. In that impassive colourless man, with his straw hat and his butterfly-net, I seemed to see something terrible--a creature of infinite patience and craft, with a smiling face and a murderous heart.

"It is he, then, who is our enemy--it is he who dogged us in London?"

"So I read the riddle."

"And the warning--it must have come from her!"

"Exactly."

The shape of some monstrous villainy, half seen, half guessed, loomed through the darkness which had girt me so long.

"But are you sure of this, Holmes? How do you know that the woman is his wife?"

"Because he so far forgot himself as to tell you a true piece of autobiography upon the occasion when he first met you, and I dare say he has many a time regretted it since. He was once a schoolmaster in the north of England. Now, there is no one more easy to trace than a schoolmaster. There are scholastic agencies by which one may identify any man who has been in the profession. A little investigation showed me that a school had come to grief under atrocious circumstances, and that the man who had owned it--the name was different--had disappeared with his wife. The descriptions agreed. When I learned that the missing man was devoted to entomology the identification was complete."

The darkness was rising, but much was still hidden by the shadows.

"If this woman is in truth his wife, where does Mrs. Laura Lyons come in?" I asked.

"That is one of the points upon which your own researches have shed a light. Your interview with the lady has cleared the situation very much. I did not know about a projected divorce between herself and her husband. In that case, regarding Stapleton as an unmarried man, she counted no doubt upon becoming his wife."

"And when she is undeceived?"

"Why, then we may find the lady of service. It must be our first duty to see her--both of us--tomorrow. Don't you think, Watson, that you are away from your charge rather long? Your place should be at Baskerville Hall."

The last red streaks had faded away in the west and night had settled upon the moor. A few faint stars were gleaming in a violet sky.

"One last question, Holmes," I said as I rose. "Surely there is no need of secrecy between you and me. What is the meaning of it all? What is he after?"

Holmes's voice sank as he answered:

"It is murder, Watson--refined, cold-blooded, deliberate murder. Do not ask me for particulars. My nets are closing upon him, even as his are upon Sir Henry, and with your help he is already almost at my mercy. There is but one danger which can threaten us. It is that he should strike before we are ready to do so. Another day--two at the most--and I have my case complete, but until then guard your charge as closely as ever a fond mother watched her ailing child. Your mission today has justified itself, and yet I could almost wish that you had not left his side. Hark!"

A terrible scream--a prolonged yell of horror and anguish--burst out of the silence of the moor. That frightful cry turned the blood to ice in my veins.

"Oh, my God!" I gasped. "What is it? What does it mean?"

Holmes had sprung to his feet, and I saw his dark, athletic outline at the door of the hut, his shoulders stooping, his head thrust forward, his face peering into the darkness.

"Hush!" he whispered. "Hush!"

The cry had been loud on account of its vehemence, but it had pealed out from somewhere far off on the shadowy plain. Now it burst upon our ears, nearer, louder, more urgent than before.

"Where is it?" Holmes whispered; and I knew from the thrill of his voice that he, the man of iron, was shaken to the soul. "Where is it, Watson?"
"There, I think." I pointed into the darkness.

"No, there!"

Again the agonized cry swept through the silent night, louder and much nearer than ever. And a new sound mingled with it, a deep, muttered rumble, musical and yet menacing, rising and falling like the low, constant murmur of the sea.

"The hound!" cried Holmes. "Come, Watson, come! Great heavens, if we are too late!"

He had started running swiftly over the moor, and I had followed at his heels. But now from somewhere among the broken ground immediately in front of us there came one last despairing yell, and then a dull, heavy thud. We halted and listened. Not another sound broke the heavy silence of the windless night.

I saw Holmes put his hand to his forehead like a man distracted. He stamped his feet upon the ground.

"He has beaten us, Watson. We are too late."

"No, no, surely not!"

"Fool that I was to hold my hand. And you, Watson, see what comes of abandoning your charge! But, by Heaven, if the worst has happened we'll avenge him!"

Blindly we ran through the gloom, blundering against boulders, forcing our way through gorse bushes, panting up hills and rushing down slopes, heading always in the direction whence those dreadful sounds had come. At every rise Holmes looked eagerly round him, but the shadows were thick upon the moor, and nothing moved upon its dreary face.

"Can you see anything?"

"Nothing."

"But, hark, what is that?"

A low moan had fallen upon our ears. There it was again upon our left! On that side a ridge of rocks ended in a sheer cliff which overlooked a stone-strewn slope. On its jagged face was spread-eagled some dark, irregular object. As we ran towards it the vague outline hardened into a definite shape. It was a prostrate man face downward upon the ground, the head doubled under him at a horrible angle, the shoulders rounded and the body hunched together as if in the act of throwing a somersault. So grotesque was the attitude that I could not for the instant realize that that moan had been the passing of his soul. Not a whisper, not a rustle, rose now from the dark figure over which we stooped. Holmes laid his hand upon him and held it up again with an exclamation of horror. The gleam of the match which he struck shone upon his clotted fingers and upon the ghastly pool which widened slowly from the crushed skull of the victim. And it shone upon something else which turned our hearts sick and faint within us--the body of Sir Henry Baskerville!

There was no chance of either of us forgetting that peculiar ruddy tweed suit--the very one which he had worn on the first morning that we had seen him in Baker Street. We caught the one clear glimpse of it, and then the match flickered and went out, even as the hope had gone out of our souls. Holmes groaned, and his face glimmered white through the darkness.

"The brute! The brute!" I cried with clenched hands. "Oh Holmes, I shall never forgive myself for having left him to his fate."

"I am more to blame than you, Watson. In order to have my case well rounded and complete, I have thrown away the life of my client. It is the greatest blow which has befallen me in my career. But how could I know--how could I know--that he would risk his life alone upon the moor in the face of all my warnings?"

"That we should have heard his screams--my God, those screams!--and yet have been unable to save him! Where is this brute of a hound which drove him to his death? It may be lurking among these rocks at this instant. And Stapleton, where is he? He shall answer for this deed."

"He shall. I will see to that. Uncle and nephew have been murdered--the one frightened to death by the very sight of a beast which he thought to be supernatural, the other driven to his end in his wild flight to escape from it. But now we have to prove the connection between the man and the beast. Save from what we heard, we cannot even swear to the existence of the latter, since Sir Henry has evidently died from the fall. But, by heavens, cunning as he is, the fellow shall be in my power before another day is past!"

We stood with bitter hearts on either side of the mangled body, overwhelmed by this sudden and irrevocable disaster which had brought all our long and weary labours to so piteous an end. Then as the moon rose we climbed to the top of the rocks over which our poor friend had fallen, and from the summit we gazed out over the shadowy moor, half silver and half gloom. Far away, miles off, in the direction of Grimpen, a single steady yellow light was shining. It could only come from the lonely abode of the Stapletons. With a bitter curse I shook my fist at it as I gazed.

"Why should we not seize him at once?"

"Our case is not complete. The fellow is wary and cunning to the last degree. It is not what we know, but what
we can prove. If we make one false move the villain may escape us yet."

"What can we do?"

"There will be plenty for us to do tomorrow. Tonight we can only perform the last offices to our poor friend."

Together we made our way down the precipitous slope and approached the body, black and clear against the silvered stones. The agony of those contorted limbs struck me with a spasm of pain and blurred my eyes with tears.

"We must send for help, Holmes! We cannot carry him all the way to the Hall. Good heavens, are you mad?"

He had uttered a cry and bent over the body. Now he was dancing and laughing and wringing my hand. Could this be my stern, self-contained friend? These were hidden fires, indeed!

"A beard! A beard! The man has a beard!"

"A beard?"

"It is not the baronet--it is--why, it is my neighbour, the convict!"

With feverish haste we had turned the body over, and that dripping beard was pointing up to the cold, clear moon. There could be no doubt about the beetling forehead, the sunken animal eyes. It was indeed the same face which had glared upon me in the light of the candle from over the rock--the face of Selden, the criminal.

Then in an instant it was all clear to me. I remembered how the baronet had told me that he had handed his old wardrobe to Barrymore. Barrymore had passed it on in order to help Selden in his escape. Boots, shirt, cap--it was all Sir Henry's. The tragedy was still black enough, but this man had at least deserved death by the laws of his country. I told Holmes how the matter stood, my heart bubbling over with thankfulness and joy.

"Then the clothes have been the poor devil's death," said he. "It is clear enough that the hound has been laid on from some article of Sir Henry's--the boot which was abstracted in the hotel, in all probability--and so ran this man down. There is one very singular thing, however: How came Selden, in the darkness, to know that the hound was on his trail?"

"He heard him."

"To hear a hound upon the moor would not work a hard man like this convict into such a paroxysm of terror that he would risk recapture by screaming wildly for help. By his cries he must have run a long way after he knew the animal was on his track. How did he know?"

"A greater mystery to me is why this hound, presuming that all our conjectures are correct--"

"I presume nothing."

"Well, then, why this hound should be loose tonight. I suppose that it does not always run loose upon the moor. Stapleton would not let it go unless he had reason to think that Sir Henry would be there."

"My difficulty is the more formidable of the two, for I think that we shall very shortly get an explanation of yours, while mine may remain forever a mystery. The question now is, what shall we do with this poor wretch's body? We cannot leave it here to the foxes and the ravens."

"I suggest that we put it in one of the huts until we can communicate with the police."

"Exactly. I have no doubt that you and I could carry it so far. Halloa, Watson, what's this? It's the man himself, by all that's wonderful and audacious! Not a word to show your suspicions--not a word, or my plans crumble to the ground."

A figure was approaching us over the moor, and I saw the dull red glow of a cigar. The moon shone upon him, and I could distinguish the dapper shape and jaunty walk of the naturalist. He stopped when he saw us, and then came on again.

"Why, Dr. Watson, that's not you, is it? You are the last man that I should have expected to see out on the moor at this time of night. But, dear me, what's this? Somebody hurt? Not--don't tell me that it is our friend Sir Henry!"

He hurried past me and stooped over the dead man. I heard a sharp intake of his breath and the cigar fell from his fingers.

"Who--who's this?" he stammered.

"It is Selden, the man who escaped from Princetown."

Stapleton turned a ghastly face upon us, but by a supreme effort he had overcome his amazement and his disappointment. He looked sharply from Holmes to me. "Dear me! What a very shocking affair! How did he die?"

"He appears to have broken his neck by falling over these rocks. My friend and I were strolling on the moor when we heard a cry."

"I heard a cry also. That was what brought me out. I was uneasy about Sir Henry."

"Why about Sir Henry in particular?" I could not help asking.

"Because I had suggested that he should come over. When he did not come I was surprised, and I naturally became alarmed for his safety when I heard cries upon the moor. By the way--his eyes darted again from my face to Holmes's--"did you hear anything else besides a cry?"

"No," said Holmes; "did you?"
"No."
"What do you mean, then?"
"Oh, you know the stories that the peasants tell about a phantom hound, and so on. It is said to be heard at night
upon the moor. I was wondering if there were any evidence of such a sound tonight."
"We heard nothing of the kind," said I.
"And what is your theory of this poor fellow's death?"
"I have no doubt that anxiety and exposure have driven him off his head. He has rushed about the moor in a
crazy state and eventually fallen over here and broken his neck."
"That seems the most reasonable theory," said Stapleton, and he gave a sigh which I took to indicate his relief.
"What do you think about it, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"
My friend bowed his compliments. "You are quick at identification," said he.
"We have been expecting you in these parts since Dr. Watson came down. You are in time to see a tragedy."
"Yes, indeed. I have no doubt that my friend's explanation will cover the facts. I will take an unpleasant
remembrance back to London with me tomorrow."
"Oh, you return tomorrow?"
"That is my intention."
"I hope your visit has cast some light upon those occurrences which have puzzled us?"
Holmes shrugged his shoulders.
"One cannot always have the success for which one hopes. An investigator needs facts and not legends or
rumours. It has not been a satisfactory case."
My friend spoke in his frankest and most unconcerned manner. Stapleton still looked hard at him. Then he
turned to me.
"I would suggest carrying this poor fellow to my house, but it would give my sister such a fright that I do not
feel justified in doing it. I think that if we put something over his face he will be safe until morning."
And so it was arranged. Resisting Stapleton's offer of hospitality, Holmes and I set off to Baskerville Hall,
leaving the naturalist to return alone. Looking back we saw the figure moving slowly away over the broad moor, and
behind him that one black smudge on the silvered slope which showed where the man was lying who had come so
horribly to his end.

Chapter 13 Fixing the Nets

"We're at close grips at last," said Holmes as we walked together across the moor. "What a nerve the fellow has!
How he pulled himself together in the face of what must have been a paralyzing shock when he found that the wrong
man had fallen a victim to his plot. I told you in London, Watson, and I tell you now again, that we have never had a
foeman more worthy of our steel."
"I am sorry that he has seen you."
"And so was I at first. But there was no getting out of it."
"What effect do you think it will have upon his plans now that he knows you are here?"
"It may cause him to be more cautious, or it may drive him to desperate measures at once. Like most clever
criminals, he may be too confident in his own cleverness and imagine that he has completely deceived us."
"Why should we not arrest him at once?"
"My dear Watson, you were born to be a man of action. Your instinct is always to do something energetic. But
supposing, for argument's sake, that we had him arrested tonight, what on earth the better off should we be for that?
We could prove nothing against him. There's the devilish cunning of it! If he were acting through a human agent we
could get some evidence, but if we were to drag this great dog to the light of day it would not help us in putting a
rope round the neck of its master."
"Surely we have a case."
"Not a shadow of one--only surmise and conjecture. We should be laughed out of court if we came with such a
story and such evidence."
"There is Sir Charles's death."
"Found dead without a mark upon him. You and I know that he died of sheer fright, and we know also what
frightened him, but how are we to get twelve stolid jurymen to know it? What signs are there of a hound? Where are
the marks of its fangs? Of course we know that a hound does not bite a dead body and that Sir Charles was dead
before ever the brute overtook him. But we have to prove all this, and we are not in a position to do it."
"Well, then, tonight?"
"We are not much better off tonight. Again, there was no direct connection between the hound and the man's
death. We never saw the hound. We heard it, but we could not prove that it was running upon this man's trail. There
is a complete absence of motive. No, my dear fellow; we must reconcile ourselves to the fact that we have no case at
present, and that it is worth our while to run any risk in order to establish one."

"And how do you propose to do so?"

"I have great hopes of what Mrs. Laura Lyons may do for us when the position of affairs is made clear to her.
And I have my own plan as well. Sufficient for tomorrow is the evil thereof; but I hope before the day is past to have
the upper hand at last."

I could draw nothing further from him, and he walked, lost in thought, as far as the Baskerville gates.

"Are you coming up?"

"Yes; I see no reason for further concealment. But one last word, Watson. Say nothing of the hound to Sir
Henry. Let him think that Selden's death was as Stapleton would have us believe. He will have a better nerve for the
ordeal which he will have to undergo tomorrow, when he is engaged, if I remember your report aright, to dine with
these people."

"And so am I."

"Then you must excuse yourself and he must go alone. That will be easily arranged. And now, if we are too late
for dinner, I think that we are both ready for our suppers."

Sir Henry was more pleased than surprised to see Sherlock Holmes, for he had for some days been expecting
that recent events would bring him down from London. He did raise his eyebrows, however, when he found that my
friend had neither any luggage nor any explanations for its absence. Between us we soon supplied his wants, and
then over a belated supper we explained to the baronet as much of our experience as it seemed desirable that he
should know. But first I had the unpleasant duty of breaking the news to Barrymore and his wife. To him it may
have been an unmitigated relief, but she wept bitterly in her apron. To all the world he was the man of violence, half
animal and half demon; but to her he always remained the little wilful boy of her own girlhood, the child who had
clung to her hand. Evil indeed is the man who has not one woman to mourn him.

"I've been moping in the house all day since Watson went off in the morning," said the baronet. "I guess I should
have some credit, for I have kept my promise. If I hadn't sworn not to go about alone I might have had a more lively
evening, for I had a message from Stapleton asking me over there."

"I have no doubt that you would have had a more lively evening," said Holmes drily. "By the way, I don't
suppose you appreciate that we have been mourning over you as having broken your neck?"

Sir Henry opened his eyes. "How was that?"

"This poor wretch was dressed in your clothes. I fear your servant who gave them to him may get into trouble
with the police."

"That is unlikely. There was no mark on any of them, as far as I know."

"That's lucky for him—in fact, it's lucky for all of you, since you are all on the wrong side of the law in this
matter. I am not sure that as a conscientious detective my first duty is not to arrest the whole household. Watson's
reports are most incriminating documents."

"But how about the case?" asked the baronet. "Have you made anything out of the tangle? I don't know that
Watson and I are much the wiser since we came down."

"I think that I shall be in a position to make the situation rather more clear to you before long. It has been an
exceedingly difficult and most complicated business. There are several points upon which we still want light—but it
is coming all the same."

"We've had one experience, as Watson has no doubt told you. We heard the hound on the moor, so I can swear
that it is not all empty superstition. I had something to do with dogs when I was out West, and I know one when I
hear one. If you can muzzle that one and put him on a chain I'll be ready to swear you are the greatest detective of all
time."

"I think I will muzzle him and chain him all right if you will give me your help."

"Whatever you tell me to do I will do."

"Very good; and I will ask you also to do it blindly, without always asking the reason."

"Just as you like."

"If you will do this I think the chances are that our little problem will soon be solved. I have no doubt—"

He stopped suddenly and stared fixedly up over my head into the air. The lamp beat upon his face, and so intent
was it and so still that it might have been that of a clear-cut classical statue, a personification of alertness and
expectation.

"What is it?" we both cried.

I could see as he looked down that he was repressing some internal emotion. His features were still composed,
but his eyes shone with amused exultation.

"Excuse the admiration of a connoisseur," said he as he waved his hand towards the line of portraits which
covered the opposite wall. "Watson won't allow that I know anything of art but that is mere jealousy because our
views upon the subject differ. Now, these are a really very fine series of portraits."

"Well, I'm glad to hear you say so," said Sir Henry, glancing with some surprise at my friend. "I don't pretend to know much about these things, and I'd be a better judge of a horse or a steer than of a picture. I didn't know that you found time for such things."

"I know what is good when I see it, and I see it now. That's a Kneller, I'll swear, that lady in the blue silk over yonder, and the stout gentleman with the wig ought to be a Reynolds. They are all family portraits, I presume?"

"Every one."

"Do you know the names?"

"Barrymore has been coaching me in them, and I think I can say my lessons fairly well."

"Who is the gentleman with the telescope?"

"That is Rear-Admiral Baskerville, who served under Rodney in the West Indies. The man with the blue coat and the roll of paper is Sir William Baskerville, who was Chairman of Committees of the House of Commons under Pitt."

"And this Cavalier opposite to me--the one with the black velvet and the lace?"

"Ah, you have a right to know about him. That is the cause of all the mischief, the wicked Hugo, who started the Hound of the Baskervilles. We're not likely to forget him."

I gazed with interest and some surprise upon the portrait.

"Dear me!" said Holmes, "he seems a quiet, meek-mannered man enough, but I dare say that there was a lurking devil in his eyes. I had pictured him as a more robust and ruffianly person."

"There's no doubt about the authenticity, for the name and the date, 1647, are on the back of the canvas."

Holmes said little more, but the picture of the old roysterer seemed to have a fascination for him, and his eyes were continually fixed upon it during supper. It was not until later, when Sir Henry had gone to his room, that I was able to follow the trend of his thoughts. He led me back into the banqueting-hall, his bedroom candle in his hand, and he held it up against the time-stained portrait on the wall.

"Do you see anything there?"

I looked at the broad plumed hat, the curling love-locks, the white lace collar, and the straight, severe face which was framed between them. It was not a brutal countenance, but it was prim, hard, and stern, with a firm-set, thin-lipped mouth, and a coldly intolerant eye.

"Is it like anyone you know?"

"There is something of Sir Henry about the jaw."

"Just a suggestion, perhaps. But wait an instant!" He stood upon a chair, and, holding up the light in his left hand, he curved his right arm over the broad hat and round the long ringlets.

"Good heavens!" I cried in amazement.

The face of Stapleton had sprung out of the canvas.

"Ha, you see it now. My eyes have been trained to examine faces and not their trimmings. It is the first quality of a criminal investigator that he should see through a disguise."

"But this is marvellous. It might be his portrait."

"Yes, it is an interesting instance of a throwback, which appears to be both physical and spiritual. A study of family portraits is enough to convert a man to the doctrine of reincarnation. The fellow is a Baskerville--that is evident."

"With designs upon the succession."

"Exactly. This chance of the picture has supplied us with one of our most obvious missing links. We have him, Watson, we have him, and I dare swear that before tomorrow night he will be fluttering in our net as helpless as one of his own butterflies. A pin, a cork, and a card, and we add him to the Baker Street collection!" He burst into one of his rare fits of laughter as he turned away from the picture. I have not heard him laugh often, and it has always boded ill to somebody.

I was up betimes in the morning, but Holmes was afoot earlier still, for I saw him as I dressed, coming up the drive.

"Yes, we should have a full day today," he remarked, and he rubbed his hands with the joy of action. "The nets are all in place, and the drag is about to begin. We'll know before the day is out whether we have caught our big, leanjawed pike, or whether he has got through the meshes."

"Have you been on the moor already?"

"I have sent a report from Grimpen to Princetown as to the death of Selden. I think I can promise that none of you will be troubled in the matter. And I have also communicated with my faithful Cartwright, who would certainly have pined away at the door of my hut, as a dog does at his master's grave, if I had not set his mind at rest about my safety."
"What is the next move?"
"To see Sir Henry. Ah, here he is!"
"Good-morning, Holmes," said the baronet. "You look like a general who is planning a battle with his chief of the staff."
"That is the exact situation. Watson was asking for orders."
"And so do I."
"Very good. You are engaged, as I understand, to dine with our friends the Stapletons tonight."
"I hope that you will come also. They are very hospitable people, and I am sure that they would be very glad to see you."
"I fear that Watson and I must go to London."
"To London?"
"Yes, I think that we should be more useful there at the present juncture."
The baronet's face perceptibly lengthened.
"I hoped that you were going to see me through this business. The Hall and the moor are not very pleasant places when one is alone."
"My dear fellow, you must trust me implicitly and do exactly what I tell you. You can tell your friends that we should have been happy to have come with you, but that urgent business required us to be in town. We hope very soon to return to Devonshire. Will you remember to give them that message?"
"If you insist upon it."
"There is no alternative, I assure you."
I saw by the baronet's clouded brow that he was deeply hurt by what he regarded as our desertion.
"When do you desire to go?" he asked coldly.
"Immediately after breakfast. We will drive in to Coombe Tracey, but Watson will leave his things as a pledge that he will come back to you. Watson, you will send a note to Stapleton to tell him that you regret that you cannot come."
"I have a good mind to go to London with you," said the baronet. "Why should I stay here alone?"
"Because it is your post of duty. Because you gave me your word that you would do as you were told, and I tell you to stay."
"All right, then, I'll stay."
"One more direction! I wish you to drive to Merripit House. Send back your trap, however, and let them know that you intend to walk home."
"To walk across the moor?"
"Yes."
"But that is the very thing which you have so often cautioned me not to do."
"This time you may do it with safety. If I had not every confidence in your nerve and courage I would not suggest it, but it is essential that you should do it."
"Then I will do it."
"And as you value your life do not go across the moor in any direction save along the straight path which leads from Merripit House to the Grimpen Road, and is your natural way home."
"I will do just what you say."
"Very good. I should be glad to get away as soon after breakfast as possible, so as to reach London in the afternoon."

I was much astounded by this programme, though I remembered that Holmes had said to Stapleton on the night before that his visit would terminate next day. It had not crossed my mind however, that he would wish me to go with him, nor could I understand how we could both be absent at a moment which he himself declared to be critical. There was nothing for it, however, but implicit obedience; so we bade good-bye to our rueful friend, and a couple of hours afterwards we were at the station of Coombe Tracey and had dispatched the trap upon its return journey. A small boy was waiting upon the platform.
"Any orders, sir?"
"You will take this train to town, Cartwright. The moment you arrive you will send a wire to Sir Henry Baskerville, in my name, to say that if he finds the pocketbook which I have dropped he is to send it by registered post to Baker Street."
"Yes, sir."
"And ask at the station office if there is a message for me."
The boy returned with a telegram, which Holmes handed to me. It ran:
Wire received. Coming down with unsigned warrant. Arrive five- forty. Lestrade.
"That is in answer to mine of this morning. He is the best of the professionals, I think, and we may need his assistance. Now, Watson, I think that we cannot employ our time better than by calling upon your acquaintance, Mrs. Laura Lyons."

His plan of campaign was beginning to be evident. He would use the baronet in order to convince the Stapletons that we were really gone, while we should actually return at the instant when we were likely to be needed. That telegram from London, if mentioned by Sir Henry to the Stapletons, must remove the last suspicions from their minds. Already I seemed to see our nets drawing closer around that leanjawed pike.

Mrs. Laura Lyons was in her office, and Sherlock Holmes opened his interview with a frankness and directness which considerably amazed her.

"I am investigating the circumstances which attended the death of the late Sir Charles Baskerville," said he. "My friend here, Dr. Watson, has informed me of what you have communicated, and also of what you have withheld in connection with that matter."

"What have I withheld?" she asked defiantly.

"You have confessed that you asked Sir Charles to be at the gate at ten o'clock. We know that that was the place and hour of his death. You have withheld what the connection is between these events."

"There is no connection."

"In that case the coincidence must indeed be an extraordinary one. But I think that we shall succeed in establishing a connection, after all. I wish to be perfectly frank with you, Mrs. Lyons. We regard this case as one of murder, and the evidence may implicate not only your friend Mr. Stapleton but his wife as well."

The lady sprang from her chair.

"His wife!" she cried.

"The fact is no longer a secret. The person who has passed for his sister is really his wife."

Mrs. Lyons had resumed her seat. Her hands were grasping the arms of her chair, and I saw that the pink nails had turned white with the pressure of her grip.

"His wife!" she said again. "His wife! He is not a married man."

Sherlock Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"Prove it to me! Prove it to me! And if you can do so--!"

The fierce flash of her eyes said more than any words.

"I have come prepared to do so," said Holmes, drawing several papers from his pocket. "Here is a photograph of the couple taken in York four years ago. It is indorsed 'Mr. and Mrs. Vandeleur,' but you will have no difficulty in recognizing him, and her also, if you know her by sight. Here are three written descriptions by trustworthy witnesses of Mr. and Mrs. Vandeleur, who at that time kept St. Oliver's private school. Read them and see if you can doubt the identity of these people."

She glanced at them, and then looked up at us with the set, rigid face of a desperate woman.

"Mr. Holmes," she said, "this man had offered me marriage on condition that I could get a divorce from my husband. He has lied to me, the villain, in every conceivable way. Not one word of truth has he ever told me. And why--why? I imagined that all was for my own sake. But now I see that I was never anything but a tool in his hands. Why should I preserve faith with him who never kept any with me? Why should I try to shield him from the consequences of his own wicked acts? Ask me what you like, and there is nothing which I shall hold back. One thing I swear to you, and that is that when I wrote the letter I never dreamed of any harm to the old gentleman, who had been my kindest friend."

"I entirely believe you, madam," said Sherlock Holmes. "The recital of these events must be very painful to you, and perhaps it will make it easier if I tell you what occurred, and you can check me if I make any material mistake. The sending of this letter was suggested to you by Stapleton?"

"He dictated it."

"I presume that the reason he gave was that you would receive help from Sir Charles for the legal expenses connected with your divorce?"

"Exactly."

"And then after you had sent the letter he dissuaded you from keeping the appointment?"

"He told me that it would hurt his self-respect that any other man should find the money for such an object, and that though he was a poor man himself he would devote his last penny to removing the obstacles which divided us."

"He appears to be a very consistent character. And then you heard nothing until you read the reports of the death in the paper?"

"No."

"And he made you swear to say nothing about your appointment with Sir Charles?"

"He did. He said that the death was a very mysterious one, and that I should certainly be suspected if the facts
came out. He frightened me into remaining silent."
"Quite so. But you had your suspicions?"
She hesitated and looked down.
"I knew him," she said. "But if he had kept faith with me I should always have done so with him."
"I think that on the whole you have had a fortunate escape," said Sherlock Holmes. "You have had him in your power and he knew it, and yet you are alive. You have been walking for some months very near to the edge of a precipice. We must wish you good-morning now, Mrs. Lyons, and it is probable that you will very shortly hear from us again."
"Our case becomes rounded off, and difficulty after difficulty thins away in front of us," said Holmes as we stood waiting for the arrival of the express from town. "I shall soon be in the position of being able to put into a single connected narrative one of the most singular and sensational crimes of modern times. Students of criminology will remember the analogous incidents in Godno, in Little Russia, in the year '66, and of course there are the Anderson murders in North Carolina, but this case possesses some features which are entirely its own. Even now we have no clear case against this very wily man. But I shall be very much surprised if it is not clear enough before we go to bed this night."

Chapter 14 The Hound of the Baskervilles

One of Sherlock Holmes's defects—if, indeed, one may call it a defect—was that he was exceedingly loath to communicate his full plans to any other person until the instant of their fulfilment. Partly it came no doubt from his own masterful nature, which loved to dominate and surprise those who were around him. Partly also from his professional caution, which urged him never to take any chances. The result, however, was very trying for those who were acting as his agents and assistants. I had often suffered under it, but never more so than during that long drive in the darkness. The great ordeal was in front of us; at last we were about to make our final effort, and yet Holmes had said nothing, and I could only surmise what his course of action would be. My nerves thrilled with anticipation when at last the cold wind upon our faces and the dark, void spaces on either side of the narrow road told me that we were back upon the moor once again. Every stride of the horses and every turn of the wheels was taking us nearer to our supreme adventure.

Our conversation was hampered by the presence of the driver of the hired wagonette, so that we were forced to talk of trivial matters when our nerves were tense with emotion and anticipation. It was a relief to me, after that unnatural restraint, when we at last passed Frankland's house and knew that we were drawing near to the Hall and to the scene of action. We did not drive up to the door but got down near the gate of the avenue. The wagonette was paid off and ordered to return to Coombe Tracey forthwith, while we started to walk to Merripit House.
"Are you armed, Lestrade?"
The little detective smiled. "As long as I have my trousers I have a hip-pocket, and as long as I have my hip-pocket I have something in it."
"Good! My friend and I are also ready for emergencies."
"You're mighty close about this affair, Mr. Holmes. What's the game now?"
"A waiting game."
"My word, it does not seem a very cheerful place," said the detective with a shiver, glancing round him at the gloomy slopes of the hill and at the huge lake of fog which lay over the Grimpen Mire. "I see the lights of a house ahead of us."
"That is Merripit House and the end of our journey. I must request you to walk on tiptoe and not to talk above a whisper."
We moved cautiously along the track as if we were bound for the house, but Holmes halted us when we were about two hundred yards from it.
"This will do," said he. "These rocks upon the right make an admirable screen."
"We are to wait here?"
"Yes, we shall make our little ambush here. Get into this hollow, Lestrade. You have been inside the house, have
you not, Watson? Can you tell the position of the rooms? What are those latticed windows at this end?"

"I think they are the kitchen windows."

"And the one beyond, which shines so brightly?"

"That is certainly the dining-room."

"The blinds are up. You know the lie of the land best. Creep forward quietly and see what they are doing—but for
heaven's sake don't let them know that they are watched!"

I tiptoed down the path and stooped behind the low wall which surrounded the stunted orchard. Creeping in its
shadow I reached a point whence I could look straight through the uncurtained window.

There were only two men in the room, Sir Henry and Stapleton. They sat with their profiles towards me on either
side of the round table. Both of them were smoking cigars, and coffee and wine were in front of them. Stapleton was
talking with animation, but the baronet looked pale and distracted. Perhaps the thought of that lonely walk across the
ill-omened moor was weighing heavily upon his mind.

As I watched them Stapleton rose and left the room, while Sir Henry filled his glass again and leaned back in his
chair, puffing at his cigar. I heard the creak of a door and the crisp sound of boots upon gravel. The steps passed
along the path on the other side of the wall under which I crouched. Looking over, I saw the naturalist pause at the
door of an out-house in the corner of the orchard. A key turned in a lock, and as he passed in there was a curious
scuffling noise from within. He was only a minute or so inside, and then I heard the key turn once more and he
passed me and reentered the house. I saw him rejoin his guest, and I crept quietly back to where my companions
were waiting to tell them what I had seen.

"You say, Watson, that the lady is not there?" Holmes asked when I had finished my report.

"No."

"Where can she be, then, since there is no light in any other room except the kitchen?"

"I cannot think where she is."

I have said that over the great Grimpen Mire there hung a dense, white fog. It was drifting slowly in our
direction and banked itself up like a wall on that side of us, low but thick and well defined. The moon shone on it,
and it looked like a great shimmering ice-field, with the heads of the distant tors as rocks borne upon its surface.
Holmes's face was turned towards it, and he muttered impatiently as he watched its sluggish drift.

"It's moving towards us, Watson."

"Is that serious?"

"Very serious, indeed—the one thing upon earth which could have disarranged my plans. He can't be very long,
now. It is already ten o'clock. Our success and even his life may depend upon his coming out before the fog is over
the path."

The night was clear and fine above us. The stars shone cold and bright, while a half-moon bathed the whole
scene in a soft, uncertain light. Before us lay the dark bulk of the house, its serrated roof and bristling chimneys hard
outlined against the silver-spangled sky. Broad bars of golden light from the lower windows stretched across the
orchard and the moor. One of them was suddenly shut off. The servants had left the kitchen. There only remained
the lamp in the dining-room where the two men, the murderous host and the unconscious guest, still chatted over
their cigars.

Every minute that white woolly plain which covered one-half of the moor was drifting closer and closer to the
house. Already the first thin wisps of it were curling across the golden square of the lighted window. The farther
wall of the orchard was already invisible, and the trees were standing out of a swirl of white vapour. As we watched
it the fog-wreaths came crawling round both corners of the house and rolled slowly into one dense bank on which
the upper floor and the roof floated like a strange ship upon a shadowy sea. Holmes struck his hand passionately
upon the rock in front of us and stamped his feet in his impatience.

"If he isn't out in a quarter of an hour the path will be covered. In half an hour we won't be able to see our hands
in front of us."

"Shall we move farther back upon higher ground?"

"Yes, I think it would be as well."

So as the fog-bank flowed onward we fell back before it until we were half a mile from the house, and still that
dense white sea, with the moon silvering its upper edge, swept slowly and inexorably on.

"We are going too far," said Holmes. "We dare not take the chance of his being overtaken before he can reach
us. At all costs we must hold our ground where we are." He dropped on his knees and clapped his ear to the ground.

"Thank God, I think that I hear him coming."

A sound of quick steps broke the silence of the moor. Crouching among the stones we stared intently at the
silver-tipped bank in front of us. The steps grew louder, and through the fog, as through a curtain, there stepped the
man whom we were awaiting. He looked round him in surprise as he emerged into the clear, starlit night. Then he
came swiftly along the path, passed close to where we lay, and went on up the long slope behind us. As he walked he glanced continually over either shoulder, like a man who is ill at ease.

"Hist!" cried Holmes, and I heard the sharp click of a cocking pistol. "Look out! It's coming!"

There was a thin, crisp, continuous patter from somewhere in the heart of that crawling bank. The cloud was within fifty yards of where we lay, and we glared at it, all three, uncertain what horror was about to break from the heart of it. I was at Holmes's elbow, and I glanced for an instant at his face. It was pale and exultant, his eyes shining brightly in the moonlight. But suddenly they started forward in a rigid, fixed stare, and his lips parted in amazement. At the same instant Lestrade gave a yell of terror and threw himself face downward upon the ground. I sprang to my feet, my inert hand grasping my pistol, my mind paralyzed by the dreadful shape which had sprung out upon us from the shadows of the fog. A hound it was, an enormous coal-black hound, but not such a hound as mortal eyes have ever seen. Fire burst from its open mouth, its eyes glowed with a smouldering glare, its muzzle and hackles and dewlap were outlined in flickering flame. Never in the delirious dream of a disordered brain could anything more savage, more appalling, more hellish be conceived than that dark form and savage face which broke upon us out of the wall of fog.

With long bounds the huge black creature was leaping down the track, following hard upon the footsteps of our friend. So paralyzed were we by the apparition that we allowed him to pass before we had recovered our nerve. Then Holmes and I both fired together, and the creature gave a hideous howl, which showed that one at least had hit him. He did not pause, however, but bounded onward. Far away on the path we saw Sir Henry looking back, his face white in the moonlight, his hands raised in horror, glaring helplessly at the frightful thing which was hunting him down. But that cry of pain from the hound had blown all our fears to the winds. If he was vulnerable he was mortal, and if we could wound him we could kill him. Never have I seen a man run as Holmes ran that night. I am reckoned fleet of foot, but he outpaced me as much as I outpaced the little professional. In front of us as we flew up the track we heard scream after scream from Sir Henry and the deep roar of the hound. I was in time to see the beast spring upon its victim, hurl him to the ground, and worry at his throat. But the next instant Holmes had emptied five barrels of his revolver into the creature's flank. With a last howl of agony and a vicious snap in the air, it rolled upon its back, four feet pawing furiously, and then fell limp upon its side. I stooped, panting, and pressed my pistol to the dreadful, shimmering head, but it was useless to press the trigger. The giant hound was dead.

Sir Henry lay insensible where he had fallen. We tore away his collar, and Holmes breathed a prayer of gratitude when we saw that there was no sign of a wound and that the rescue had been in time. Already our friend's eyelids shivered and he made a feeble effort to move. Lestrade thrust his brandy-flask between the baronet's teeth, and two frightened eyes were looking up at us.

"My God!" he whispered. "What was it? What, in heaven's name, was it?"

"It's dead, whatever it is," said Holmes. "We've laid the family ghost once and forever."

In mere size and strength it was a terrible creature which was lying stretched before us. It was not a pure bloodhound and it was not a pure mastiff; but it appeared to be a combination of the two—gaunt, savage, and as large as a small lioness. Even now in the stillness of death, the huge jaws seemed to be dripping with a bluish flame and the small, deep-set, cruel eyes were ringed with fire. I placed my hand upon the glowing muzzle, and as I held them up my own fingers smouldered and gleamed in the darkness.

"Phosphorus," I said.

"A cunning preparation of it," said Holmes, sniffing at the dead animal. "There is no smell which might have interfered with his power of scent. We owe you a deep apology, Sir Henry, for having exposed you to this fright. I was prepared for a hound, but not for such a creature as this. And the fog gave us little time to receive him."

"You have saved my life."

"Having first endangered it. Are you strong enough to stand?"

"Give me another mouthful of that brandy and I shall be ready for anything. So! Now, if you will help me up. What do you propose to do?"

"To leave you here. You are not fit for further adventures tonight. If you will wait, one or other of us will go back with you to the Hall."

He tried to stagger to his feet; but he was still ghastly pale and trembling in every limb. We helped him to a rock, where he sat shivering with his face buried in his hands.

"We must leave you now," said Holmes. "The rest of our work must be done, and every moment is of importance. We have our case, and now we only want our man."

"It's a thousand to one against our finding him at the house," he continued as we retraced our steps swiftly down the path. "Those shots must have told him that the game was up."

"We were some distance off, and this fog may have deadened them."

"He followed the hound to call him off—of that you may be certain. No, no, he's gone by this time! But we'll
search the house and make sure."

The front door was open, so we rushed in and hurried from room to room to the amazement of a doddering old manservant, who met us in the passage. There was no light save in the dining-room, but Holmes caught up the lamp and left no corner of the house unexplored. No sign could we see of the man whom we were chasing. On the upper floor, however, one of the bedroom doors was locked.

"There's someone in here," cried Lestrade. "I can hear a movement. Open this door!"

A faint moaning and rustling came from within. Holmes struck the door just over the lock with the flat of his foot and it flew open. Pistol in hand, we all three rushed into the room.

But there was no sign within it of that desperate and defiant villain whom we expected to see. Instead we were faced by an object so strange and so unexpected that we stood for a moment staring at it in amazement.

The room had been fashioned into a small museum, and the walls were lined by a number of glass-topped cases full of that collection of butterflies and moths the formation of which had been the relaxation of this complex and dangerous man. In the centre of this room there was an upright beam, which had been placed at some period as a support for the old worm-eaten baulk of timber which spanned the roof. To this post a figure was tied, so swathed and muffled in the sheets which had been used to secure it that one could not for the moment tell whether it was that of a man or a woman. One towel passed round the throat and was secured at the back of the pillar. Another covered the lower part of the face, and over it two dark eyes—eyes full of grief and shame and a dreadful questioning—stared back at us. In a minute we had torn off the gag, unswathed the bonds, and Mrs. Stapleton sank upon the floor in front of us. As her beautiful head fell upon her chest I saw the clear red weal of a whiplash across her neck.

"The brute!" cried Holmes. "Here, Lestrade, your brandy-bottle! Put her in the chair! She has fainted from ill-usage and exhaustion."

She opened her eyes again.

"Is he safe?" she asked. "Has he escaped?"

"He cannot escape us, madam."

"No, no, I did not mean my husband. Sir Henry? Is he safe?"

"Yes."

"And the hound?"

"It is dead."

She gave a long sigh of satisfaction.

"Thank God! Thank God! Oh, this villain! See how he has treated me!" She shot her arms out from her sleeves, and we saw with horror that they were all mottled with bruises. "But this is nothing—nothing! It is my mind and soul that he has tortured and defiled. I could endure it all, ill-usage, solitude, a life of deception, everything, as long as I could still cling to the hope that I had his love, but now I know that in this also I have been his dupe and his tool."

She broke into passionate sobbing as she spoke.

"You bear him no good will, madam," said Holmes. "Tell us then where we shall find him. If you have ever aided him in evil, help us now and so avenge."

"There is but one place where he can have fled," she answered. "There is an old tin mine on an island in the heart of the mire. It was there that he kept his hound and there also he had made preparations so that he might have a refuge. That is where he would fly."

The fog-bank lay like white wool against the window. Holmes held the lamp towards it.

"See," said he. "No one could find his way into the Grimpen Mire tonight."

She laughed and clapped her hands. Her eyes and teeth gleamed with fierce merriment.

"He may find his way in, but never out," she cried. "How can he see the guiding wands tonight? We planted them together, he and I, to mark the pathway through the mire. Oh, if I could only have plucked them out today. Then indeed you would have had him at your mercy!"

It was evident to us that all pursuit was in vain until the fog had lifted. Meanwhile we left Lestrade in possession of the house while Holmes and I went back with the baronet to Baskerville Hall. The story of the Stapletons could no longer be withheld from him, but he took the blow bravely when he learned the truth about the woman whom he had loved. But the shock of the night's adventures had shattered his nerves, and before morning he lay delirious in a high fever under the care of Dr. Mortimer. The two of them were destined to travel together round the world before Sir Henry had become once more the hale, hearty man that he had been before he became master of that ill-omened estate.

And now I come rapidly to the conclusion of this singular narrative, in which I have tried to make the reader share those dark fears and vague surmises which clouded our lives so long and ended in so tragic a manner. On the morning after the death of the hound the fog had lifted and we were guided by Mrs. Stapleton to the point where they had found a pathway through the bog. It helped us to realize the horror of this woman's life when we saw the
eagerness and joy with which she laid us on her husband's track. We left her standing upon the thin peninsula of firm, peaty soil which tapered out into the widespread bog. From the end of it a small wand planted here and there showed where the path zigzagged from tuft to tuft of rushes among those green-scummed pits and foul quagmires which barred the way to the stranger. Rank reeds and lush, slimy water-plants sent an odour of decay and a heavy miasmatic vapour onto our faces, while a false step plunged us more than once thigh-deep into the dark, quivering mire, which shook for yards in soft undulations around our feet. Its tenacious grip plucked at our heels as we walked, and when we sank into it it was as if some malignant hand was tugging us down into those obscene depths, so grim and purposeful was the clutch in which it held us. Once only we saw a trace that someone had passed that perilous way before us. From amid a tuft of cotton grass which bore it up out of the slime some dark thing was projecting. Holmes sank to his waist as he stepped from the path to seize it, and had we not been there to drag him out he could never have set his foot upon firm land again. He held an old black boot in the air. "Meyers, Toronto," was printed on the leather inside.

"It is worth a mud bath," said he. "It is our friend Sir Henry's missing boot."

"Thrown there by Stapleton in his flight."

"Exactly. He retained it in his hand after using it to set the hound upon the track. He fled when he knew the game was up, still clutching it. And he hurled it away at this point of his flight. We know at least that he came so far in safety."

But more than that we were never destined to know, though there was much which we might surmise. There was no chance of finding footsteps in the mire, for the rising mud oozed swiftly in upon them, but as we at last reached firmer ground beyond the morass we all looked eagerly for them. But no slightest sign of them ever met our eyes. If the earth told a true story, then Stapleton never reached that island of refuge towards which he struggled through the fog upon that last night. Somewhere in the heart of the great Grimpen Mire, down in the foul slime of the huge morass which had sucked him in, this cold and cruel-hearted man is forever buried.

Many traces we found of him in the bog-girt island where he had hid his savage ally. A huge driving-wheel and a shaft half-filled with rubbish showed the position of an abandoned mine. Beside it were the crumbling remains of the cottages of the miners, driven away no doubt by the foul reek of the surrounding swamp. In one of these a staple and chain with a quantity of gnawed bones showed where the animal had been confined. A skeleton with a tangle of brown hair adhering to it lay among the debris.

"A dog!" said Holmes. "By Jove, a curly-haired spaniel. Poor Mortimer will never see his pet again. Well, I do not know that this place contains any secret which we have not already fathomed. He could hide his hound, but he could not hush its voice, and hence came those cries which even in daylight were not pleasant to hear. On an emergency he could keep the hound in the out-house at Merripit, but it was always a risk, and it was only on the supreme day, which he regarded as the end of all his efforts, that he dared do it. This paste in the tin is no doubt the luminous mixture with which the creature was daubed. It was suggested, of course, by the story of the family hell-hound, and by the desire to frighten old Sir Charles to death. No wonder the poor devil of a convict ran and screamed, even as our friend did, and as we ourselves might have done, when he saw such a creature bounding through the darkness of the moor upon his track. It was a cunning device, for, apart from the chance of driving your victim to his death, what peasant would venture to inquire too closely into such a creature should he get sight of it, as many have done, upon the moor? I said it in London, Watson, and I say it again now, that never yet have we helped to hunt down a more dangerous man than he who is lying yonder"--he swept his long arm towards the huge mottled expanse of green-spotted bog which stretched away until it merged into the russet slopes of the moor.

Chapter 15 A Retrospection

It was the end of November, and Holmes and I sat, upon a raw and foggy night, on either side of a blazing fire in our sitting-room in Baker Street. Since the tragic upshot of our visit to Devonshire he had been engaged in two affairs of the utmost importance, in the first of which he had exposed the atrocious conduct of Colonel Upwood in connection with the famous card scandal of the Nonpareil Club, while in the second he had defended the unfortunate Mme. Montpensier from the charge of murder which hung over her in connection with the death of her step-daughter, Mlle. Carere, the young lady who, as it will be remembered, was found six months later alive and married in New York. My friend was in excellent spirits over the success which had attended a succession of difficult and important cases, so that I was able to induce him to discuss the details of the Baskerville mystery. I had waited patiently for the opportunity for I was aware that he would never permit cases to overlap, and that his clear and logical mind would not be drawn from its present work to dwell upon memories of the past. Sir Henry and Dr. Mortimer were, however, in London, on their way to that long voyage which had been recommended for the restoration of his shattered nerves. They had called upon us that very afternoon, so that it was natural that the subject should come up for discussion.

"The whole course of events," said Holmes, "from the point of view of the man who called himself Stapleton
was simple and direct, although to us, who had no means in the beginning of knowing the motives of his actions and could only learn part of the facts, it all appeared exceedingly complex. I have had the advantage of two conversations with Mrs. Stapleton, and the case has now been so entirely cleared up that I am not aware that there is anything which has remained a secret to us. You will find a few notes upon the matter under the heading B in my indexed list of cases."

"Perhaps you would kindly give me a sketch of the course of events from memory."

"Certainly, though I cannot guarantee that I carry all the facts in my mind. Intense mental concentration has a curious way of blotting out what has passed. The barrister who has his case at his fingers' ends and is able to argue with an expert upon his own subject finds that a week or two of the courts will drive it all out of his head once more. So each of my cases displaces the last, and Mlle. Carere has blurred my recollection of Baskerville Hall. Tomorrow some other little problem may be submitted to my notice which will in turn dispossess the fair French lady and the infamous Upwood. So far as the case of the hound goes, however, I will give you the course of events as nearly as I can, and you will suggest anything which I may have forgotten."

"My inquiries show beyond all question that the family portrait did not lie, and that this fellow was indeed a Baskerville. He was a son of that Rodger Baskerville, the younger brother of Sir Charles, who fled with a sinister reputation to South America, where he was said to have died unmarried. He did, as a matter of fact, marry, and had one child, this fellow, whose real name is the same as his father's. He married Beryl Garcia, one of the beauties of Costa Rica, and, having purloined a considerable sum of public money, he changed his name to Vandeleur and fled to England, where he established a school in the east of Yorkshire. His reason for attempting this special line of business was that he had struck up an acquaintance with a consumptive tutor upon the voyage home, and that he had used this man's ability to make the undertaking a success. Fraser, the tutor, died however, and the school which had begun well sank from disrepute into infamy. The Vandeleurs found it convenient to change their name to Stapleton, and he brought the remains of his fortune, his schemes for the future, and his taste for entomology to the south of England. I learned at the British Museum that he was a recognized authority upon the subject, and that the name of Vandeleur has been permanently attached to a certain moth which he had, in his Yorkshire days, been the first to describe.

"We now come to that portion of his life which has proved to be of such intense interest to us. The fellow had evidently made inquiry and found that only two lives intervened between him and a valuable estate. When he went to Devonshire his plans were, I believe, exceedingly hazy, but that he meant mischief from the first is evident from the way in which he took his wife with him in the character of his sister. The idea of using her as a decoy was clearly already in his mind, though he may not have been certain how the details of his plot were to be arranged. He meant in the end to have the estate, and he was ready to use any tool or run any risk for that end. His first act was to establish himself as near to his ancestral home as he could, and his second was to cultivate a friendship with Sir Charles Baskerville and with the neighbours."

"The baronet himself told him about the family hound, and so prepared the way for his own death. Stapleton, as I will continue to call him, knew that the old man's heart was weak and that a shock would kill him. So much he had learned from Dr. Mortimer. He had heard also that Sir Charles was superstitious and had taken this grim legend very seriously. His ingenious mind instantly suggested a way by which the baronet could be done to death, and yet it would be hardly possible to bring home the guilt to the real murderer."

"Having conceived the idea he proceeded to carry it out with considerable finesse. An ordinary schemer would have been content to work with a savage hound. The use of artificial means to make the creature diabolical was a flash of genius upon his part. The dog he bought in London from Ross and Mangles, the dealers in Fulham Road. It was the strongest and most savage in their possession. He brought it down by the North Devon line and walked a great distance over the moor so as to get it home without exciting any remarks. He had already on his insect hunts learned to penetrate the Grimpen Mire, and so had found a safe hiding-place for the creature. Here he kennelled it and waited his chance."

"But it was some time coming. The old gentleman could not be decoyed outside of his grounds at night. Several times Stapleton lurked about with his hound, but without avail. It was during these fruitless quests that he, or rather his ally, was seen by peasants, and that the legend of the demon dog received a new confirmation. He had hoped that his wife might lure Sir Charles to his ruin, but here she proved unexpectedly independent. She would not endeavour to entangle the old gentleman in a sentimental attachment which might deliver him over to his enemy. Threats and even, I am sorry to say, blows refused to move her. She would have nothing to do with it, and for a time Stapleton was at a deadlock."

"He found a way out of his difficulties through the chance that Sir Charles, who had conceived a friendship for him, made him the minister of his charity in the case of this unfortunate woman, Mrs. Laura Lyons. By representing himself as a single man he acquired complete influence over her, and he gave her to understand that in the event of
her obtaining a divorce from her husband he would marry her. His plans were suddenly brought to a head by his knowledge that Sir Charles was about to leave the Hall on the advice of Dr. Mortimer, with whose opinion he himself pretended to coincide. He must act at once, or his victim might get beyond his power. He therefore put pressure upon Mrs. Lyons to write this letter, imploring the old man to give her an interview on the evening before his departure for London. He then, by a specious argument, prevented her from going, and so had the chance for which he had waited.

"Driving back in the evening from Coombe Tracey he was in time to get his hound, to treat it with his infernal paint, and to bring the beast round to the gate at which he had reason to expect that he would find the old gentleman waiting. The dog, incited by its master, sprang over the wicket-gate and pursued the unfortunate baronet, who fled screaming down the yew alley. In that gloomy tunnel it must indeed have been a dreadful sight to see that huge black creature, with its flaming jaws and blazing eyes, bounding after its victim. He fell dead at the end of the alley from heart disease and terror. The hound had kept upon the grassy border while the baronet had run down the path, so that no track but the man's was visible. On seeing him lying still the creature had probably approached to sniff at him, but finding him dead had turned away again. It was then that it left the print which was actually observed by Dr. Mortimer. The hound was called off and hurried away to its lair in the Grimpen Mire, and a mystery was left which puzzled the authorities, alarmed the countryside, and finally brought the case within the scope of our observation.

"So much for the death of Sir Charles Baskerville. You perceive the devilish cunning of it, for really it would be almost impossible to make a case against the real murderer. His only accomplice was one who could never give him away, and the grotesque, inconceivable nature of the device only served to make it more effective. Both of the women concerned in the case, Mrs. Stapleton and Mrs. Laura Lyons, were left with a strong suspicion against Stapleton. Mrs. Stapleton knew that he had designs upon the old man, and also of the existence of the hound. Mrs. Lyons knew neither of these things, but had been impressed by the death occurring at the time of an uncalled appointment which was only known to him. However, both of them were under his influence, and he had nothing to fear from them. The first half of his task was successfully accomplished but the more difficult still remained.

"It is possible that Stapleton did not know of the existence of an heir in Canada. In any case he would very soon learn it from his friend Dr. Mortimer, and he was told by the latter all details about the arrival of Henry Baskerville. Stapleton's first idea was that this young stranger from Canada might possibly be done to death in London without coming down to Devonshire at all. He distrusted his wife ever since she had refused to help him in laying a trap for the old man, and he dared not leave her long out of his sight for fear he should lose his influence over her. It was for this reason that he took her to London with him. They lodged, I find, at the Mexborough Private Hotel, in Craven Street, which was actually one of those called upon by my agent in search of evidence. Here he kept his wife imprisoned in her room while he, disguised in a beard, followed Dr. Mortimer to Baker Street and afterwards to the station and to the Northumberland Hotel. His wife had some inkling of his plans; but she had such a fear of her husband--a fear founded upon brutal ill-treatment--that she dare not write to warn the man whom she knew to be in danger. If the letter should fall into Stapleton's hands her own life would not be safe. Eventually, as we know, she adopted the expedient of cutting out the words which would form the message, and addressing the letter in a disguised hand. It reached the baronet, and gave him the first warning of his danger.

"It was very essential for Stapleton to get some article of Sir Henry's attire so that, in case he was driven to use the dog, he might always have the means of setting him upon his track. With characteristic promptness and audacity he set about this at once, and we cannot doubt that the boots or chamber-maid of the hotel was well bribed to help him in his design. By chance, however, the first boot which was procured for him was a new one and, therefore, useless for his purpose. He then had it returned and obtained another--a most instructive incident, since it proved conclusively to my mind that we were dealing with a real hound, as no other supposition could explain this anxiety to obtain an old boot and this indifference to a new one. The more outre and grotesque an incident is the more carefully it deserves to be examined, and the very point which appears to complicate a case is, when duly considered and scientifically handled, the one which is most likely to elucidate it.

"Then we had the visit from our friends next morning, shadowed always by Stapleton in the cab. From his knowledge of our rooms and of my appearance, as well as from his general conduct, I am inclined to think that Stapleton's career of crime has been by no means limited to this single Baskerville affair. It is suggestive that during the last three years there have been four considerable burglaries in the west country, for none of which was any criminal ever arrested. The last of these, at Folkestone Court, in May, was remarkable for the cold-blooded pistolling of the page, who surprised the masked and solitary burglar. I cannot doubt that Stapleton recruited his waning resources in this fashion, and that for years he has been a desperate and dangerous man.

"We had an example of his readiness of resource that morning when he got away from us so successfully, and also of his audacity in sending back my own name to me through the cabman. From that moment he understood that
I had taken over the case in London, and that therefore there was no chance for him there. He returned to Dartmoor and awaited the arrival of the baronet.

"One moment!" said I. "You have, no doubt, described the sequence of events correctly, but there is one point which you have left unexplained. What became of the hound when its master was in London?"

"I have given some attention to this matter and it is undoubtedly of importance. There can be no question that Stapleton had a confidant, though it is unlikely that he ever placed himself in his power by sharing all his plans with him. There was an old manservant at Merripit House, whose name was Anthony. His connection with the Stapletons can be traced for several years, as far back as the schoolmastering days, so that he must have been aware that his master and mistress were really husband and wife. This man has disappeared and has escaped from the country. It is suggestive that Anthony is not a common name in England, while Antonio is so in all Spanish or Spanish-American countries. The man, like Mrs. Stapleton herself, spoke good English, but with a curious lisping accent. I have myself seen this old man cross the Grimpen Mire by the path which Stapleton had marked out. It is very probable, therefore, that in the absence of his master it was he who cared for the hound, though he may never have known the purpose for which the beast was used.

"The Stapletons then went down to Devonshire, whither they were soon followed by Sir Henry and you. One word now as to how I stood myself at that time. It may possibly recur to your memory that when I examined the paper upon which the printed words were fastened I made a close inspection for the water-mark. In doing so I held it within a few inches of my eyes, and was conscious of a faint smell of the scent known as white jessamine. There are seventy-five perfumes, which it is very necessary that a criminal expert should be able to distinguish from each other, and cases have more than once within my own experience depended upon their prompt recognition. The scent suggested the presence of a lady, and already my thoughts began to turn towards the Stapletons. Thus I had made certain of the hound, and had guessed at the criminal before ever we went to the west country.

"It was my game to watch Stapleton. It was evident, however, that I could not do this if I were with you, since he would be keenly on his guard. I deceived everybody, therefore, yourself included, and I came down secretly when I was supposed to be in London. My hardships were not so great as you imagined, though such trifling details must never interfere with the investigation of a case. I stayed for the most part at Coombe Tracey, and only used the hut upon the moor when it was necessary to be near the scene of action. Cartwright had come down with me, and in his disguise as a country boy he was of great assistance to me. I was dependent upon him for food and clean linen. When I was watching Stapleton, Cartwright was frequently watching you, so that I was able to keep my hand upon all the strings.

"I have already told you that your reports reached me rapidly, being forwarded instantly from Baker Street to Coombe Tracey. They were of great service to me, and especially that one incidentally truthful piece of biography of Stapleton's. I was able to establish the identity of the man and the woman and knew at last exactly how I stood. The case had been considerably complicated through the incident of the escaped convict and the relations between him and the Barrymores. This also you cleared up in a very effective way, though I had already come to the same conclusions from my own observations.

"By the time that you discovered me upon the moor I had a complete knowledge of the whole business, but I had not a case which could go to a jury. Even Stapleton's attempt upon Sir Henry that night which ended in the death of the unfortunate convict did not help us much in proving murder against our man. There seemed to be no alternative but to catch him red-handed, and to do so we had to use Sir Henry, alone and apparently unprotected, as a bait. We did so, and at the cost of a severe shock to our client we succeeded in completing our case and driving Stapleton to his destruction. That Sir Henry should have been exposed to this is, I must confess, a reproach to my management of the case, but we had no means of foreseeing the terrible and paralyzing spectacle which the beast presented, nor could we predict the fog which enabled him to burst upon us at such short notice. We succeeded in our object at a cost which both the specialist and Dr. Mortimer assure me will be a temporary one. A long journey may enable our friend to recover not only from his shattered nerves but also from his wounded feelings. His love for the lady was deep and sincere, and to him the saddest part of all this black business was that he should have been deceived by her.

"It only remains to indicate the part which she had played throughout. There can be no doubt that Stapleton exercised an influence over her which may have been love or may have been fear, or very possibly both, since they are by no means incompatible emotions. It was, at least, absolutely effective. At his command she consented to pass as his sister, though he found the limits of his power over her when he endeavoured to make her the direct accessory to murder. She was ready to warn Sir Henry so far as she could without implicating her husband, and again and again she tried to do so. Stapleton himself seems to have been capable of jealousy, and when he saw the baronet paying court to the lady, even though it was part of his own plan, still he could not help interrupting with a passionate outburst which revealed the fiery soul which his self-contained manner so cleverly concealed. By encouraging the intimacy he made it certain that Sir Henry would frequently come to Merripit House and that he
would sooner or later get the opportunity which he desired. On the day of the crisis, however, his wife turned
suddenly against him. She had learned something of the death of the convict, and she knew that the hound was being
kept in the outhouse on the evening that Sir Henry was coming to dinner. She taxed her husband with his intended
crime, and a furious scene followed in which he showed her for the first time that she had a rival in his love. Her
fidelity turned in an instant to bitter hatred, and he saw that she would betray him. He tied her up, therefore, that she
might have no chance of warning Sir Henry, and he hoped, no doubt, that when the whole countryside put down the
baronet's death to the curse of his family, as they certainly would do, he could win his wife back to accept an
accomplished fact and to keep silent upon what she knew. In this I fancy that in any case he made a miscalculation,
and that, if we had not been there, his doom would none the less have been sealed. A woman of Spanish blood does
not condone such an injury so lightly. And now, my dear Watson, without referring to my notes, I cannot give you a
more detailed account of this curious case. I do not know that anything essential has been left unexplained."

"He could not hope to frighten Sir Henry to death as he had done the old uncle with his bogie hound."

"The beast was savage and half-starved. If its appearance did not frighten its victim to death, at least it would
paralyze the resistance which might be offered."

"No doubt. There only remains one difficulty. If Stapleton came into the succession, how could he explain the
fact that he, the heir, had been living unannounced under another name so close to the property? How could he claim
it without causing suspicion and inquiry?"

"It is a formidable difficulty, and I fear that you ask too much when you expect me to solve it. The past and the
present are within the field of my inquiry, but what a man may do in the future is a hard question to answer. Mrs.
Stapleton has heard her husband discuss the problem on several occasions. There were three possible courses. He
might claim the property from South America, establish his identity before the British authorities there and so obtain
the fortune without ever coming to England at all, or he might adopt an elaborate disguise during the short time that
he need be in London; or, again, he might furnish an accomplice with the proofs and papers, putting him in as heir,
and retaining a claim upon some proportion of his income. We cannot doubt from what we know of him that he
would have found some way out of the difficulty. And now, my dear Watson, we have had some weeks of severe
work, and for one evening, I think, we may turn our thoughts into more pleasant channels. I have a box for 'Les
Huguenots.' Have you heard the De Reszkes? Might I trouble you then to be ready in half an hour, and we can stop
at Marcini's for a little dinner on the way?"

Go to Start
by Arthur Conan Doyle

The Adventure of The Empty House
The Adventure of The Norwood Builder
The Adventure of The Dancing Men
The Adventure of The Solitary Cyclist
The Adventure of The Priory School
The Adventure of Black Peter
The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton
The Adventure of The Six Napoleons
The Adventure of The Three Students
The Adventure of The Golden Pince-nez
The Adventure of The Missing Three-quarter
The Adventure of The Abbey Grange
The Adventure of The Second Stain

THE ADVENTURE OF THE EMPTY HOUSE

It was in the spring of the year 1894 that all London was interested, and the fashionable world dismayed, by the murder of the Honourable Ronald Adair under most unusual and inexplicable circumstances. The public has already learned those particulars of the crime which came out in the police investigation, but a good deal was suppressed upon that occasion, since the case for the prosecution was so overwhelmingly strong that it was not necessary to bring forward all the facts. Only now, at the end of nearly ten years, am I allowed to supply those missing links which make up the whole of that remarkable chain. The crime was of interest in itself, but that interest was as nothing to me compared to the inconceivable sequel, which afforded me the greatest shock and surprise of any event in my adventurous life. Even now, after this long interval, I find myself thrilling as I think of it, and feeling once more that sudden flood of joy, amazement, and incredulity which utterly submerged my mind. Let me say to that public, which has shown some interest in those glimpses which I have occasionally given them of the thoughts and actions of a very remarkable man, that they are not to blame me if I have not shared my knowledge with them, for I should have considered it my first duty to do so, had I not been barred by a positive prohibition from his own lips, which was only withdrawn upon the third of last month.

It can be imagined that my close intimacy with Sherlock Holmes had interested me deeply in crime, and that after his disappearance I never failed to read with care the various problems which came before the public. And I even attempted, more than once, for my own private satisfaction, to employ his methods in their solution, though with indifferent success. There was none, however, which appealed to me like this tragedy of Ronald Adair. As I read the evidence at the inquest, which led up to a verdict of willful murder against some person or persons unknown, I realized more clearly than I had ever done the loss which the community had sustained by the death of Sherlock Holmes. There were points about this strange business which would, I was sure, have alarmed the first criminal agent in Europe. All day, as I drove upon my round, I turned over the case in my mind and found no explanation which appeared to me to be adequate. At the risk of telling a twice-told tale, I will recapitulate the facts as they were known to the public at the conclusion of the inquest.

The Honourable Ronald Adair was the second son of the Earl of Maynooth, at that time governor of one of the Australian colonies. Adair's mother had returned from Australia to undergo the operation for cataract, and she, her son Ronald, and her daughter Hilda were living together at 427 Park Lane. The youth moved in the best society--had, so far as was known, no enemies and no particular vices. He had been engaged to Miss Edith Woodley, of Carstairs, but the engagement had been broken off by mutual consent some months before, and there was no sign that it had left any very profound feeling behind it. For the rest (sic) the man's life moved in a narrow and conventional circle, for his habits were quiet and his nature unemotional. Yet it was upon this easy-going young aristocrat that death came, in most strange and unexpected form, between the hours of ten and eleven-twenty on the night of March 30, 1894.

Ronald Adair was fond of cards--playing continually, but never for such stakes as would hurt him. He was a member of the Baldwin, the Cavendish, and the Bagatelle card clubs. It was shown that, after dinner on the day of
his death, he had played a rubber of whist at the latter club. He had also played there in the afternoon. The evidence of those who had played with him—Mr. Murray, Sir John Hardy, and Colonel Moran—showed that the game was whist, and that there was a fairly equal fall of the cards. Adair might have lost five pounds, but not more. His fortune was a considerable one, and such a loss could not in any way affect him. He had played nearly every day at one club or other, but he was a cautious player, and usually rose a winner. It came out in evidence that, in partnership with Colonel Moran, he had actually won as much as four hundred and twenty pounds in a sitting, some weeks before, from Godfrey Milner and Lord Balmoral. So much for his recent history as it came out at the inquest.

On the evening of the crime, he returned from the club exactly at ten. His mother and sister were out spending the evening with a relation. The servant deposed that she heard him enter the front room on the second floor, generally used as his sitting-room. She had lit a fire there, and as it smoked she had opened the window. No sound was heard from the room until eleven-twenty, the hour of the return of Lady Maynooth and her daughter. Desiring to say good-night, she attempted to enter her son's room. The door was locked on the inside, and no answer could be got to their cries and knocking. Help was obtained, and the door forced. The unfortunate young man was found lying near the table. His head had been horribly mutilated by an expanding revolver bullet, but no weapon of any sort was to be found in the room. On the table lay two banknotes for ten pounds each and seventeen pounds ten in silver and gold, the money arranged in little piles of varying amount. There were some figures also upon a sheet of paper, with the names of some club friends opposite to them, from which it was conjectured that before his death he was endeavouring to make out his losses or winnings at cards.

A minute examination of the circumstances served only to make the case more complex. In the first place, no reason could be given why the young man should have fastened the door upon the inside. There was the possibility that the murderer had done this, and had afterwards escaped by the window. The drop was at least twenty feet, however, and a bed of crocuses in full bloom lay beneath. Neither the flowers nor the earth showed any sign of having been disturbed, nor were there any marks upon the narrow strip of grass which separated the house from the road. Apparently, therefore, it was the young man himself who had fastened the door. But how did he come by his death? No one could have climbed up to the window without leaving traces. Suppose a man had fired through the window, he would indeed be a remarkable shot who could with a revolver inflict so deadly a wound. Again, Park Lane is a frequented thoroughfare; there is a cab stand within a hundred yards of the house. No one had heard a shot. And yet there was the dead man and there the revolver bullet, which had mushroomed out, as soft-nosed bullets will, and so inflicted a wound which must have caused instantaneous death. Such were the circumstances of the Park Lane Mystery, which were further complicated by entire absence of motive, since, as I have said, young Adair was not known to have any enemy, and no attempt had been made to remove the money or valuables in the room.

All day I turned these facts over in my mind, endeavouring to hit upon some theory which could reconcile them all, and to find that line of least resistance which my poor friend had declared to be the starting-point of every investigation. I confess that I made little progress. In the evening I strolled across the Park, and found myself about six o'clock at the Oxford Street end of Park Lane. A group of loafers upon the pavements, all staring up at a particular window, directed me to the house which I had come to see. A tall, thin man with coloured glasses, whom I strongly suspected of being a plain-clothes detective, was pointing out some theory of his own, while the others crowded round to listen to what he said. I got as near him as I could, but his observations seemed to me to be absurd, so I withdrew again in some disgust. As I did so I struck against an elderly, deformed man, who had been behind me, and I knocked down several books which he was carrying. I remember that as I picked them up, I observed the title of one of them, THE ORIGIN OF TREE WORSHIP, and it struck me that the fellow must be some poor bibliophile, who, either as a trade or as a hobby, was a collector of obscure volumes. I endeavoured to apologize for the accident, but it was evident that these books which I had so unfortunately maltreated were very precious objects in the eyes of their owner. With a snarl of contempt he turned upon his heel, and I saw his curved back and white side-whiskers disappear among the throng.

"You're surprised to see me, sir," said he, in a strange, croaking voice.

I acknowledged that I was.

"Well, I've a conscience, sir, and when I chanced to see you go into this house, as I came hobbling after you, I thought to myself, I'll just step in and see that kind gentleman, and tell him that if I was a bit gruff in my manner..."
there was not any harm meant, and that I am much obliged to him for picking up my books."

"You make too much of a trifle," said I. "May I ask how you knew who I was?"

"Well, sir, if it isn't too great a liberty, I am a neighbour of yours, for you'll find my little bookshop at the corner of Church Street, and very happy to see you, I am sure. Maybe you collect yourself, sir. Here's BRITISH BIRDS, and CATULLUS, and THE HOLY WAR--a bargain, every one of them. With five volumes you could just fill that gap on that second shelf. It looks untidy, does it not, sir?"

I moved my head to look at the cabinet behind me. When I turned again, Sherlock Holmes was standing smiling at me across my study table. I rose to my feet, stared at him for some seconds in utter amazement, and then it appears that I must have fainted for the first and the last time in my life. Certainly a gray mist swirled before my eyes, and when it cleared I found my collar-ends undone and the tingling after-taste of brandy upon my lips. Holmes was bending over my chair, his flask in his hand.

"My dear Watson," said the well-remembered voice, "I owe you a thousand apologies. I had no idea that you would be so affected."

I gripped him by the arms.

"Holmes!" I cried. "Is it really you? Can it indeed be that you are alive? Is it possible that you succeeded in climbing out of that awful abyss?"

"Wait a moment," said he. "Are you sure that you are really fit to discuss things? I have given you a serious shock by my unnecessarily dramatic reappearance."

"I am all right, but indeed, Holmes, I can hardly believe my eyes. Good heavens! to think that you--you of all men--should be standing in my study."

"And all right, Watson, and all right."

"This is, indeed, like the old days. We shall have time for a mouthful of dinner before we need go. Well, then, about that chasm. I had no serious difficulty in getting out of it, for the very simple reason that I never was in it."

"You never were in it?"

"No, Watson, I never was in it. My note to you was absolutely genuine. I had little doubt that I had come to the end of my career when I perceived the somewhat sinister figure of the late Professor Moriarty standing upon the narrow pathway which led to safety. I read an inexorable purpose in his gray eyes. I exchanged some remarks with him, therefore, and obtained his courteous permission to write the short note which you afterwards received. I left it with my cigarette-box and my stick, and I walked along the pathway, Moriarty still at my heels. When I reached the end I stood at bay. He drew no weapon, but he rushed at me and threw his long arms around me. He knew that his own game was up, and was only anxious to revenge himself upon me. We tottered together upon the brink of the fall. I have some knowledge, however, of baritsu, or the Japanese system of wrestling, which has more than once been very useful to me. I slipped through his grip, and he with a horrible scream kicked madly for a few seconds, and clawed the air with both his hands. But for all his efforts he could not get his balance, and over he went. With my face over the brink, I saw him fall for a long way. Then he struck a rock, bounded off, and splashed into the water."

I listened with amazement to this explanation, which Holmes delivered between the puffs of his cigarette.

"But the tracks!" I cried. "I saw, with my own eyes, that two went down the path and none returned."

"It came about in this way. The instant that the Professor had disappeared, it struck me what a really extraordinarily lucky chance Fate had placed in my way. I knew that Moriarty was not the only man who had sworn my death. There were at least three others whose desire for vengeance upon me would only be increased by the death of their leader. They were all most dangerous men. One or other would certainly get me. On the other hand, if all the world was convinced that I was dead they would take liberties, these men, they would soon lay themselves open, and sooner or later I could destroy them. Then it would be time for me to announce that I was still in the land
of the living. So rapidly does the brain act that I believe I had thought this all out before Professor Moriarty had reached the bottom of the Reichenbach Fall.

"I stood up and examined the rocky wall behind me. In your picturesque account of the matter, which I read with great interest some months later, you assert that the wall was sheer. That was not literally true. A few small footholds presented themselves, and there was some indication of a ledge. The cliff is so high that to climb it all was an obvious impossibility, and it was equally impossible to make my way along the wet path without leaving some tracks. I might, it is true, have reversed my boots, as I have done on similar occasions, but the sight of three sets of tracks in one direction would certainly have suggested a deception. On the whole, then, it was best that I should risk the climb. It was not a pleasant business, Watson. The fall roared beneath me. I am not a fanciful person, but I give you my word that I seemed to hear Moriarty's voice screaming at me out of the abyss. A mistake would have been fatal. More than once, as tufts of grass came out in my hand or my foot slipped in the wet notches of the rock, I thought that I was done. But I struggled upward, and at last I reached a ledge several feet deep and covered with soft green moss, where I could lie unseen, in the most perfect comfort. There I was stretched, when you, my dear Watson, and all your following were investigating in the most sympathetic and inefficient manner the circumstances of my death.

"At last, when you had all formed your inevitable and totally erroneous conclusions, you departed for the hotel, and I was left alone. I had imagined that I had reached the end of my adventures, but a very unexpected occurrence showed me that there were surprises still in store for me. A huge rock, falling from above, boomed past me, struck the path, and bounded over into the chasm. For an instant I thought that it was an accident, but a moment later, looking up, I saw a man's head against the darkening sky, and another stone struck the very ledge upon which I was stretched, within a foot of my head. Of course, the meaning of this was obvious. Moriarty had not been alone. A confederate--and even that one glance had told me how dangerous a man that confederate was--had kept guard while the Professor had attacked me. From a distance, unseen by me, he had been a witness of his friend's death and of my escape. He had waited, and then making his way round to the top of the cliff, he had endeavoured to succeed where his comrade had failed.

"I did not take long to think about it, Watson. Again I saw that grim face look over the cliff, and I knew that it was the precursor of another stone. I scrambled down on to the path. I don't think I could have done it in cold blood. It was a hundred times more difficult than getting up. But I had no time to think of the danger, for another stone sang past me as I hung by my hands from the edge of the ledge. Halfway down I slipped, but, by the blessing of God, I landed, torn and bleeding, upon the path. I took to my heels, did ten miles over the mountains in the darkness, and a week later I found myself in Florence, with the certainty that no one in the world knew what had become of me.

"I had only one confidant--my brother Mycroft. I owe you many apologies, my dear Watson, but it was all-important that it should be thought I was dead, and it is quite certain that you would not have written so convincing an account of my unhappy end had you not yourself thought that it was true. Several times during the last three years I have taken up my pen to write to you, but always I feared lest your affectionate regard for me should tempt you to some indiscretion which would betray my secret. For that reason I turned away from you this evening when you upset my books, for I was in danger at the time, and any show of surprise and emotion upon your part might have drawn attention to my identity and led to the most deplorable and irreparable results. As to Mycroft, I had to confide in him in order to obtain the money which I needed. The course of events in London did not run so well as I had hoped, for the trial of the Moriarty gang left two of its most dangerous members, my own most vindictive enemies, at liberty. I travelled for two years in Tibet, therefore, and amused myself by visiting Lhassa, and spending some days with the head lama. You may have read of the remarkable explorations of a Norwegian named Sigerson, but I am sure that it never occurred to you that you were receiving news of your friend. I then passed through Persia, looked in at Mecca, and paid a short but interesting visit to the Khalifa at Khartoum the results of which I have communicated to the Foreign Office. Returning to France, I spent some months in a research into the coal-tar derivatives, which I conducted in a laboratory at Montpellier, in the south of France. Having concluded this to my satisfaction and learning that only one of my enemies was now left in London, I was about to return when my movements were hastened by the news of this very remarkable Park Lane Mystery, which not only appealed to me by its own merits, but which seemed to offer some most peculiar personal opportunities. I came over at once to London, called in my own person at Baker Street, threw Mrs. Hudson into violent hysterics, and found that Mycroft had preserved my rooms and my papers exactly as they had always been. So it was, my dear Watson, that at two o'clock to-day I found myself in my old armchair in my own old room, and only wishing that I could have seen my old friend Watson in the other chair which he has so often adorned."

Such was the remarkable narrative to which I listened on that April evening--a narrative which would have been utterly incredible to me had it not been confirmed by the actual sight of the tall, spare figure and the keen, eager face, which I had never thought to see again. In some manner he had learned of my own sad bereavement, and his
sympathy was shown in his manner rather than in his words. "Work is the best antidote to sorrow, my dear Watson," said he; "and I have a piece of work for us both to-night which, if we can bring it to a successful conclusion, will in itself justify a man's life on this planet." In vain I begged him to tell me more. "You will hear and see enough before morning," he answered. "We have three years of the past to discuss. Let that suffice until half-past nine, when we start upon the notable adventure of the empty house."

It was indeed like old times when, at that hour, I found myself seated beside him in a hansom, my revolver in my pocket, and the thrill of adventure in my heart. Holmes was cold and stern and silent. As the gleam of the street-lamps flashed upon his austere features, I saw that his brows were drawn down in thought and his thin lips compressed. I knew not what wild beast we were about to hunt down in the dark jungle of criminal London, but I was well assured, from the bearing of this master huntsman, that the adventure was a most grave one--while the sardonic smile which occasionally broke through his ascetic gloom boded little good for the object of our quest.

I had imagined that we were bound for Baker Street, but Holmes stopped the cab at the corner of Cavendish Square. I observed that as he stepped out he gave a most searching glance to right and left, and at every subsequent street corner he took the utmost pains to assure that he was not followed. Our route was certainly a singular one. Holmes's knowledge of the byways of London was extraordinary, and on this occasion he passed rapidly and with an assured step through a network of mews and stables, the very existence of which I had never known. We emerged at last into a small road, lined with old, gloomy houses, which led us into Manchester Street, and so to Blandford Street. Here he turned swiftly down a narrow passage, passed through a wooden gate into a deserted yard, and then opened with a key the back door of a house. We entered together, and he closed it behind us.

The place was pitch dark, but it was evident to me that it was an empty house. Our feet creaked and crackled over the bare planking, and my outstretched hand touched a wall from which the paper was hanging in ribbons. Holmes's cold, thin fingers closed round my wrist and led me forward down a long hall, until I dimly saw the murky fanlight over the door. Here Holmes turned suddenly to the right and we found ourselves in a large, square, empty room, heavily shadowed in the corners, but faintly lit in the centre from the lights of the street beyond. There was no lamp near, and the window was thick with dust, so that we could only just discern each other's figures within. My companion put his hand upon my shoulder and his lips close to my ear.

"Do you know where we are?" he whispered.

"Surely that is Baker Street," I answered, staring through the dim window.

"Exactly. We are in Camden House, which stands opposite to our own old quarters."

"But why are we here?"

"Because it commands so excellent a view of that picturesque pile. Might I trouble you, my dear Watson, to draw a little nearer to the window, taking every precaution not to show yourself, and then to look up at our old rooms--the starting-point of so many of your little fairy-tales? We will see if my three years of absence have entirely taken away my power to surprise you."

I crept forward and looked across at the familiar window. As my eyes fell upon it, I gave a gasp and a cry of amazement. The blind was down, and a strong light was burning in the room. The shadow of a man who was seated in a chair within was thrown in hard, black outline upon the luminous screen of the window. There was no mistaking the poise of the head, the squareness of the shoulders, the sharpness of the features. The face was turned half-round, and the effect was that of one of those black silhouettes which our grandparents loved to frame. It was a perfect reproduction of Holmes. So amazed was I that I threw out my hand to make sure that the man himself was standing beside me. He was quivering with silent laughter.

"Well?" said he.

"Good heavens!" I cried. "It is marvellous."

"I trust that age doth not wither nor custom stale my infinite variety," said he, and I recognized in his voice the joy and pride which the artist takes in his own creation. "It really is rather like me, is it not?"

"I should be prepared to swear that it was you."

"The credit of the execution is due to Monsieur Oscar Meunier, of Grenoble, who spent some days in doing the moulding. It is a bust in wax. The rest I arranged myself during my visit to Baker Street this afternoon."

"But why?"

"Because, my dear Watson, I had the strongest possible reason for wishing certain people to think that I was there when I was really elsewhere."

"And you thought the rooms were watched?"

"I KNEW that they were watched."

"By whom?"

"By my old enemies, Watson. By the charming society whose leader lies in the Reichenbach Fall. You must remember that they knew, and only they knew, that I was still alive. Sooner or later they believed that I should come
back to my rooms. They watched them continuously, and this morning they saw me arrive."

"How do you know?"

"Because I recognized their sentinel when I glanced out of my window. He is a harmless enough fellow, Parker by name, a garrotter by trade, and a remarkable performer upon the jew's-harp. I cared nothing for him. But I cared a great deal for the much more formidable person who was behind him, the bosom friend of Moriarty, the man who dropped the rocks over the cliff, the most cunning and dangerous criminal in London. That is the man who is after me to-night Watson, and that is the man who is quite unaware that we are after him."

My friend's plans were gradually revealing themselves. From this convenient retreat, the watchers were being watched and the trackers tracked. That angular shadow up yonder was the bait, and we were the hunters. In silence we stood together in the darkness and watched the hurrying figures who passed and repassed in front of us. Holmes was silent and motionless; but I could tell that he was keenly alert, and that his eyes were fixed intently upon the stream of passers-by. It was a bleak and boisterous night and the wind whistled shrilly down the long street. Many people were moving to and fro, most of them muffled in their coats and cravats. Once or twice it seemed to me that I had seen the same figure before, and I especially noticed two men who appeared to be sheltering themselves from the wind in the doorway of a house some distance up the street. I tried to draw my companion's attention to them; but he gave a little ejaculation of impatience, and continued to stare into the street. More than once he fidgeted with his feet and tapped rapidly with his fingers upon the wall. It was evident to me that he was becoming uneasy, and that his plans were not working out altogether as he had hoped. At last, as midnight approached and the street gradually cleared, he paced up and down the room in uncontrollable agitation. I was about to make some remark to him, when I raised my eyes to the lighted window, and again experienced almost as great a surprise as before. I clutched Holmes's arm, and pointed upward.

"The shadow has moved!" I cried.

It was indeed no longer the profile, but the back, which was turned towards us.

Three years had certainly not smoothed the asperities of his temper or his impatience with a less active intelligence than his own.

"Of course it has moved," said he. "Am I such a farcical bungler, Watson, that I should erect an obvious dummy, and expect that some of the sharpest men in Europe would be deceived by it? We have been in this room two hours, and Mrs. Hudson has made some change in that figure eight times, or once in every quarter of an hour. She works it from the front, so that her shadow may never be seen. Ah!" He drew in his breath with a shrill, excited intake. In the dim light I saw his head thrown forward, his whole attitude rigid with attention. Outside the street was absolutely deserted. Those two men might still be crouching in the doorway, but I could no longer see them. All was still and dark, save only that brilliant yellow screen in front of us with the black figure outlined upon its centre. Again in the utter silence I heard that thin, sibilant note which spoke of intense suppressed excitement. An instant later he pulled me back into the blackest corner of the room, and I felt his warning hand upon my lips. The fingers which clutched me were quivering. Never had I known my friend more moved, and yet the dark street still stretched lonely and motionless before us.

But suddenly I was aware of that which his keener senses had already distinguished. A low, stealthy sound came to my ears, not from the direction of Baker Street, but from the back of the very house in which we lay concealed. A door opened and shut. An instant later steps crept down the passage--steps which were meant to be silent, but which reverberated harshly through the empty house. Holmes crouched back against the wall, and I did the same, my hand closing upon the handle of my revolver. Peering through the gloom, I saw the vague outline of a man, a shade blacker than the blackness of the open door. He stood for an instant, and then he crept forward, crouching, menacing, into the room. He was within three yards of us, this sinister figure, and I had braced myself to meet his spring, before I realized that he had no idea of our presence. He passed close beside us, stole over to the window, and very softly and noiselessly raised it for half a foot. As he sank to the level of this opening, the light of the street, no longer dimmed by the dusty glass, fell full upon his face. The man seemed to be beside himself with excitement. His two eyes shone like stars, and his features were working convulsively. He was an elderly man, with a thin, projecting nose, a high, bald forehead, and a huge grizzled moustache. An opera hat was pushed to the back of his head, and an evening dress shirt-front gleamed out through his open overcoat. His face was gaunt and swarthy, scored with deep, savage lines. In his hand he carried what appeared to be a stick, but as he laid it down upon the floor it gave a metallic clang. Then from the pocket of his overcoat he drew a bulky object, and he busied himself in some task which ended with a loud, sharp click, as if a spring or bolt had fallen into its place. Still kneeling upon the floor he bent forward and threw all his weight and strength upon some lever, with the result that there came a long, whirling, grinding noise, ending once more in a powerful click. He straightened himself then, and I saw that what he held in his hand was a sort of gun, with a curiously misshapen butt. He opened it at the breech, put something in, and snapped the breech-lock. Then, crouching down, he rested the end of the barrel upon the ledge of the open window,
and I saw his long moustache droop over the stock and his eye gleam as it peered along the sights. I heard a little
sigh of satisfaction as he cuddled the butt into his shoulder; and saw that amazing target, the black man on the
yellow ground, standing clear at the end of his foresight. For an instant he was rigid and motionless. Then his finger
tightened on the trigger. There was a strange, loud whiz and a long, silvery tinkle of broken glass. At that instant
Holmes sprang like a tiger on to the marksman's back, and hurled him flat upon his face. He was up again in a
moment, and with convulsive strength he seized Holmes by the throat, but I struck him on the head with the butt of
my revolver, and he dropped again upon the floor. I fell upon him, and as I held him my comrade blew a shrill call
upon a whistle. There was the clatter of running feet upon the pavement, and two policemen in uniform, with one
plain-clothes detective, rushed through the front entrance and into the room.

"That you, Lestrade?" said Holmes.
"Yes, Mr. Holmes. I took the job myself. It's good to see you back in London, sir."
"I think you want a little unofficial help. Three undetected murders in one year won't do, Lestrade. But you
handled the Molesey Mystery with less than your usual--that's to say, you handled it fairly well."

We had all risen to our feet, our prisoner breathing hard, with a stalwart constable on each side of him. Already a
few loiterers had begun to collect in the street. Holmes stepped up to the window, closed it, and dropped the blinds.
Lestrade had produced two candles, and the policemen had uncovered their lanterns. I was able at last to have a
good look at our prisoner.

It was a tremendously virile and yet sinister face which was turned towards us. With the brow of a philosopher
above and the jaw of a sensualist below, the man must have started with great capacities for good or for evil. But
one could not look upon his cruel blue eyes, with their drooping, cynical lids, or upon the fierce, aggressive nose and
the threatening, deep-lined brow, without reading Nature's plainest danger-signals. He took no heed of any of us, but
his eyes were fixed upon Holmes's face with an expression in which hatred and amazement were equally blended.
"You fiend!" he kept on muttering. "You clever, clever fiend!"

"Ah, Colonel!" said Holmes, arranging his rumpled collar. "Journeys end in lovers' meetings,' as the old play
says. I don't think I have had the pleasure of seeing you since you favoured me with those attentions as I lay on the
ledge above the Reichenbach Fall."

The colonel still stared at my friend like a man in a trance. "You cunning, cunning fiend!" was all that he could
say.

"I have not introduced you yet," said Holmes. "This, gentlemen, is Colonel Sebastian Moran, once of Her
Majesty's Indian Army, and the best heavy-game shot that our Eastern Empire has ever produced. I believe I am
correct Colonel, in saying that your bag of tigers still remains unrivalled?"

The fierce old man said nothing, but still glared at my companion. With his savage eyes and bristling moustache
he was wonderfully like a tiger himself.

"I wonder that my very simple stratagem could deceive so old a SHIKARI," said Holmes. "It must be very
familiar to you. Have you not tethered a young kid under a tree, lain above it with your rifle, and waited for the bait
to bring up your tiger? This empty house is my tree, and you are my tiger. You have possibly had other guns in
reserve in case there should be several tigers, or in the unlikely supposition of your own aim failing you. These," he
pointed around, "are my other guns. The parallel is exact."

Colonel Moran sprang forward with a snarl of rage, but the constables dragged him back. The fury upon his face
was terrible to look at.

"I confess that you had one small surprise for me;" said Holmes. "I did not anticipate that you would yourself
make use of this empty house and this convenient front window. I had imagined you as operating from the street,
where my friend, Lestrade and his merry men were awaiting you. With that exception, all has gone as I expected."

Colonel Moran turned to the official detective.
"You may or may not have just cause for arresting me," said he, "but at least there can be no reason why I should
submit to the gibes of this person. If I am in the hands of the law, let things be done in a legal way."

"Well, that's reasonable enough," said Lestrade. "Nothing further you have to say, Mr. Holmes, before we go?"

Holmes had picked up the powerful air-gun from the floor, and was examining its mechanism.

"An admirable and unique weapon," said he, "noiseless and of tremendous power: I knew Von Herder, the blind
German mechanic, who constructed it to the order of the late Professor Moriarty. For years I have been aware of its
existence though I have never before had the opportunity of handling it. I commend it very specially to your
attention, Lestrade and also the bullets which fit it."

"You can trust us to look after that, Mr. Holmes," said Lestrade, as the whole party moved towards the door.

"Anything further to say?"
"Only to ask what charge you intend to prefer?"
"What charge, sir? Why, of course, the attempted murder of Mr. Sherlock Holmes."
"Not so, Lestrade. I do not propose to appear in the matter at all. To you, and to you only, belongs the credit of
the remarkable arrest which you have effected. Yes, Lestrade, I congratulate you! With your usual happy mixture of
cunning and audacity, you have got him."

"Got him! Got whom, Mr. Holmes?"

"The man that the whole force has been seeking in vain--Colonel Sebastian Moran, who shot the Honourable
Ronald Adair with an expanding bullet from an air-gun through the open window of the second-floor front of No.
427 Park Lane, upon the thirtieth of last month. That's the charge, Lestrade. And now, Watson, if you can endure the
draught from a broken window, I think that half an hour in my study over a cigar may afford you some profitable
amusement."

Our old chambers had been left unchanged through the supervision of Mycroft Holmes and the immediate care
of Mrs. Hudson. As I entered I saw, it is true, an unwonted tidiness, but the old landmarks were all in their place.
There were the chemical corner and the acid-stained, deal-topped table. There upon a shelf was the row of
formidable scrap-books and books of reference which many of our fellow-citizens would have been so glad to burn.
The diagrams, the violin-case, and the pipe-rack--even the Persian slipper which contained the tobacco--all met my
eyes as I glanced round me. There were two occupants of the room--one, Mrs. Hudson, who beamed upon us both as
we entered--the other, the strange dummy which had played so important a part in the evening's adventures. It was a
wax-coloured model of my friend, so admirably done that it was a perfect facsimile. It stood on a small pedestal
table with an old dressing-gown of Holmes's so draped round it that the illusion from the street was absolutely
perfect.

"I hope you observed all precautions, Mrs. Hudson?" said Holmes.

"I went to it on my knees, sir, just as you told me."

"Excellent. You carried the thing out very well. Did you observe where the bullet went?"

"Yes, sir. I'm afraid it has spoilt your beautiful bust, for it passed right through the head and flattened itself on
the wall. I picked it up from the carpet. Here it is!"

Holmes held it out to me. "A soft revolver bullet, as you perceive, Watson. There's genius in that, for who would
expect to find such a thing fired from an airgun? All right, Mrs. Hudson. I am much obliged for your assistance. And
now, Watson, let me see you in your old seat once more, for there are several points which I should like to discuss
with you."

He had thrown off the seedy frockcoat, and now he was the Holmes of old in the mouse-coloured dressing-gown
which he took from his effigy.

"The old SHIKARI'S nerves have not lost their steadiness, nor his eyes their keenness," said he, with a laugh, as
he inspected the shattered forehead of his bust.

"Plumb in the middle of the back of the head and smack through the brain. He was the best shot in India, and I
expect that there are few better in London. Have you heard the name?"

"No, I have not."

"Well, well, such is fame! But, then, if I remember right, you had not heard the name of Professor James
Moriarty, who had one of the great brains of the century. Just give me down my index of biographies from the
shelf."

He turned over the pages lazily, leaning back in his chair and blowing great clouds from his cigar.

"My collection of M's is a fine one," said he. "Moriarty himself is enough to make any letter illustrious, and here
is Morgan the poisoner, and Merridew of abominable memory, and Mathews, who knocked out my left canine in the
waiting-room at Charing Cross, and, finally, here is our friend of to-night."

He handed over the book, and I read:

MORAN, SEBASTIAN, COLONEL. Unemployed. Formerly 1st Bangalore Pioneers. Born London, 1840. Son
of Sir Augustus Moran, C. B., once British Minister to Persia. Educated Eton and Oxford. Served in Jowaki
Campaign, Afghan Campaign, Charasiab (despatches), Sherpur, and Cabul. Author of HEAVY GAME OF THE
WESTERN HIMALAYAS (1881); THREE MONTHS IN THE JUNGLE (1884). Address: Conduit Street. Clubs:
The Anglo-Indian, the Tankerville, the Bagatelle Card Club.

On the margin was written, in Holmes's precise hand:

The second most dangerous man in London.

"This is astonishing," said I, as I handed back the volume. "The man's career is that of an honourable soldier."

"It is true," Holmes answered. "Up to a certain point he did well. He was always a man of iron nerve, and the
story is still told in India how he crawled down a drain after a wounded man-eating tiger. There are some trees,
Watson, which grow to a certain height, and then suddenly develop some unsightly eccentricity. You will see it
often in humans. I have a theory that the individual represents in his development the whole procession of his
ancestors, and that such a sudden turn to good or evil stands for some strong influence which came into the line of
his pedigree. The person becomes, as it were, the epitome of the history of his own family."

"It is surely rather fanciful."

"Well, I don't insist upon it. Whatever the cause, Colonel Moran began to go wrong. Without any open scandal, he still made India too hot to hold him. He retired, came to London, and again acquired an evil name. It was at this time that he was sought out by Professor Moriarty, to whom for a time he was chief of the staff. Moriarty supplied him liberally with money, and used him only in one or two very high-class jobs, which no ordinary criminal could have undertaken. You may have some recollection of the death of Mrs. Stewart, of Lauder, in 1887. Not? Well, I am sure Moran was at the bottom of it, but nothing could be proved. So cleverly was the colonel concealed that, even when the Moriarty gang was broken up, we could not incriminate him. You remember at that date, when I called upon you in your rooms, how I put up the shutters for fear of air-guns? No doubt you thought me fanciful. I knew exactly what I was doing, for I knew of the existence of this remarkable gun, and I knew also that one of the best shots in the world would be behind it. When we were in Switzerland he followed us with Moriarty, and it was undoubtedly he who gave me that evil five minutes on the Reichenbach ledge.

"You may think that I read the papers with some attention during my sojourn in France, on the look-out for any chance of laying him by the heels. So long as he was free in London, my life would really not have been worth living. Night and day the shadow would have been over me, and sooner or later his chance must have come. What could I do? I could not shoot him at sight, or I should myself be in the dock. There was no use appealing to a magistrate. They cannot interfere on the strength of what would appear to them to be a wild suspicion. So I could do nothing. But I watched the criminal news, knowing that sooner or later I should get him. Then came the death of this Ronald Adair. My chance had come at last. Knowing what I did, was it not certain that Colonel Moran had done it? He had played cards with the lad, he had followed him home from the club, he had shot him through the open window. There was not a doubt of it. The bullets alone are enough to put his head in a noose. I came over at once. I was seen by the sentinel, who would, I knew, direct the colonel's attention to my presence. He could not fail to connect my sudden return with his crime, and to be terribly alarmed. I was sure that he would make an attempt to get me out of the way AT once, and would bring round his murderous weapon for that purpose. I left him an excellent mark in the window, and, having warned the police that they might be needed--by the way, Watson, you spotted their presence in that doorway with unerring accuracy--I took up what seemed to me to be a judicious post for observation, never dreaming that he would choose the same spot for his attack. Now, my dear Watson, does anything remain for me to explain?"

"Yes," said I. "You have not made it clear what was Colonel Moran's motive in murdering the Honourable Ronald Adair?"

"Ah! my dear Watson, there we come into those realms of conjecture, where the most logical mind may be at fault. Each may form his own hypothesis upon the present evidence, and yours is as likely to be correct as mine."

"You have formed one, then?"

"I think that it is not difficult to explain the facts. It came out in evidence that Colonel Moran and young Adair had, between them, won a considerable amount of money. Now, undoubtedly played foul--of that I have long been aware. I believe that on the day of the murder Adair had discovered that Moran was cheating. Very likely he had spoken to him privately, and had threatened to expose him unless he voluntarily resigned his membership of the club, and promised not to play cards again. It is unlikely that a youngster like Adair would at once make a hideous scandal by exposing a well known man so much older than himself. Probably he acted as I suggest. The exclusion from his clubs would mean ruin to Moran, who lived by his ill-gotten card-gains. He therefore murdered Adair, who at the time was endeavouring to work out how much money he should himself return, since he could not profit by his partner's foul play. He locked the door lest the ladies should surprise him and insist upon knowing what he was doing with these names and coins. Will it pass?"

"I have no doubt that you have hit upon the truth."

"It will be verified or disproved at the trial. Meanwhile, come what may, Colonel Moran will trouble us no more. The famous air-gun of Von Herder will embellish the Scotland Yard Museum, and once again Mr. Sherlock Holmes is free to devote his life to examining those interesting little problems which the complex life of London so plentifully presents."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE NORWOOD BUILDER

"From the point of view of the criminal expert," said Mr. Sherlock Holmes, "London has become a singularly uninteresting city since the death of the late lamented Professor Moriarty."

"I can hardly think that you would find many decent citizens to agree with you," I answered.

"Well, well, I must not be selfish," said he, with a smile, as he pushed back his chair from the breakfast-table. "The community is certainly the gainer, and no one the loser, save the poor out-of-work specialist, whose occupation has gone. With that man in the field, one's morning paper presented infinite possibilities. Often it was only the
smallest trace, Watson, the faintest indication, and yet it was enough to tell me that the great malignant brain was there, as the gentlest tremors of the edges of the web remind one of the foul spider which lurks in the centre. Petty thefts, wanton assaults, purposeless outrage—to the man who held the clue all could be worked into one connected whole. To the scientific student of the higher criminal world, no capital in Europe offered the advantages which London then possessed. But now----" He shrugged his shoulders in humorous depreciation of the state of things which he had himself done so much to produce.

At the time of which I speak, Holmes had been back for some months, and I at his request had sold my practice and returned to share the old quarters in Baker Street. A young doctor, named Verner, had purchased my small Kensington practice, and given with astonishingly little demur the highest price that I ventured to ask—an incident which only explained itself some years later, when I found that Verner was a distant relation of Holmes, and that it was my friend who had really found the money.

Our months of partnership had not been so uneventful as he had stated, for I find, on looking over my notes, that this period includes the case of the papers of ex-President Murillo, and also the shocking affair of the Dutch steamship FRIESLAND, which so nearly cost us both our lives. His cold and proud nature was always averse, however, from anything in the shape of public applause, and he bound me in the most stringent terms to say no further word of himself, his methods, or his successes—a prohibition which, as I have explained, has only now been removed.

Mr. Sherlock Holmes was leaning back in his chair after his whimsical protest, and was unfolding his morning paper in a leisurely fashion, when our attention was arrested by a tremendous ring at the bell, followed immediately by a hollow drumming sound, as if someone were beating on the outer door with his fist. As it opened there came a tumultuous rush into the hall, rapid feet clattered up the stair, and an instant later a wild-eyed and frantic young man, pale, disheveled, and palpitating, burst into the room. He looked from one to the other of us, and under our gaze of inquiry he became conscious that some apology was needed for this unceremonious entry.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Holmes," he cried. "You mustn't blame me. I am nearly mad. Mr. Holmes, I am the unhappy John Hector McFarlane." He made the announcement as if the name alone would explain both his visit and its manner, but I could see, by my companion's unresponsive face, that it meant no more to him than to me.

"Have a cigarette, Mr. McFarlane," said he, pushing his case across. "I am sure that, with your symptoms, my friend Dr. Watson here would prescribe a sedative. The weather has been so very warm these last few days. Now, if you feel a little more composed, I should be glad if you would sit down in that chair, and tell us very slowly and quietly who you are, and what it is that you want. You mentioned your name, as if I should recognize it, but I assure you that, beyond the obvious facts that you are a bachelor, a solicitor, a Freemason, and an asthmatic, I know nothing whatever about you."

Familiar as I was with my friend's methods, it was not difficult for me to follow his deductions, and to observe the untidiness of attire, the sheaf of legal papers, the watch-charm, and the breathing which had prompted them. Our client, however, stared in amazement.

"Yes, I am all that, Mr. Holmes; and, in addition, I am the most unfortunate man at this moment in London. For heaven's sake, don't abandon me, Mr. Holmes! If they come to arrest me before I have finished my story, make them give me time, so that I may tell you the whole truth. I could go to jail happy if I knew that you were working for me outside."

"Arrest you!" said Holmes. "This is really most grati--most interesting. On what charge do you expect to be arrested?"

"Upon the charge of murdering Mr. Jonas Oldacre, of Lower Norwood."

My companion's expressive face showed a sympathy which was not, I am afraid, entirely unmixed with satisfaction.

"Dear me," said he, "it was only this moment at breakfast that I was saying to my friend, Dr. Watson, that sensational cases had disappeared out of our papers."

Our visitor stretched forward a quivering hand and picked up the DAILY TELEGRAPH, which still lay upon Holmes's knee.

"If you had looked at it, sir, you would have seen at a glance what the errand is on which I have come to you this morning. I feel as if my name and my misfortune must be in every man's mouth." He turned it over to expose the central page. "Here it is, and with your permission I will read it to you. Listen to this, Mr. Holmes. The headlines are: 'Mysterious Affair at Lower Norwood. Disappearance of a Well Known Builder. Suspicion of Murder and Arson. A Clue to the Criminal.' That is the clue which they are already following, Mr. Holmes, and I know that it leads infallibly to me. I have been followed from London Bridge Station, and I am sure that they are only waiting for the warrant to arrest me. It will break my mother's heart--it will break her heart!" He wrung his hands in an agony of
apprehension, and swayed backward and forward in his chair.

I looked with interest upon this man, who was accused of being the perpetrator of a crime of violence. He was flaxen-haired and handsome, in a washed-out negative fashion, with frightened blue eyes, and a clean-shaven face, with a weak, sensitive mouth. His age may have been about twenty-seven, his dress and bearing that of a gentleman. From the pocket of his light summer overcoat protruded the bundle of indorsed papers which proclaimed his profession.

"We must use what time we have," said Holmes. "Watson, would you have the kindness to take the paper and to read the paragraph in question?"

Underneath the vigorous headlines which our client had quoted, I read the following suggestive narrative:

"Late last night, or early this morning, an incident occurred at Lower Norwood which points, it is feared, to a serious crime. Mr. Jonas Oldacre is a well known resident of that suburb, where he has carried on his business as a builder for many years. Mr. Oldacre is a bachelor, fifty-two years of age, and lives in Deep Dene House, at the Sydenham end of the road of that name. He has had the reputation of being a man of eccentric habits, secretive and retiring. For some years he has practically withdrawn from the business, in which he is said to have amassed considerable wealth. A small timber-yard still exists, however, at the back of the house, and last night, about twelve o'clock, an alarm was given that one of the stacks was on fire. The engines were soon upon the spot, but the dry wood burned with great fury, and it was impossible to arrest the conflagration until the stack had been entirely consumed. Up to this point the incident bore the appearance of an ordinary accident, but fresh indications seem to point to serious crime. Surprise was expressed at the absence of the master of the establishment from the scene of the fire, and an inquiry followed, which showed that he had disappeared from the house. An examination of his room revealed that the bed had not been slept in, that a safe which stood in it was open, that a number of important papers were scattered about the room, and finally, that there were signs of a murderous struggle, slight traces of blood being found within the room, and an oaken walking-stick, which also showed stains of blood upon the handle. It is known that Mr. Jonas Oldacre had received a late visitor in his bedroom upon that night, and the stick found has been identified as the property of this person, who is a young London solicitor named John Hector McFarlane, junior partner of Graham and McFarlane, of 426 Gresham Buildings, E. C. The police believe that they have evidence in their possession which supplies a very convincing motive for the crime, and altogether it cannot be doubted that sensational developments will follow.

"LATER.--It is rumoured as we go to press that Mr. John Hector McFarlane has actually been arrested on the charge of the murder of Mr. Jonas Oldacre. It is at least certain that a warrant has been issued. There have been further and sinister developments in the investigation at Norwood. Besides the signs of a struggle in the room of the unfortunate builder it is now known that the French windows of his bedroom (which is on the ground floor) were found to be open, that there were marks as if some bulky object had been dragged across to the wood-pile, and, finally, it is asserted that charred remains have been found among the charcoal ashes of the fire. The police theory is that a most sensational crime has been committed, that the victim was clubbed to death in his own bedroom, his papers rifled, and his dead body dragged across to the wood-stack, which was then ignited so as to hide all traces of the crime. The conduct of the criminal investigation has been left in the experienced hands of Inspector Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, who is following up the clues with his accustomed energy and sagacity."

Sherlock Holmes listened with closed eyes and fingertips together to this remarkable account.

"The case has certainly some points of interest," said he, in his languid fashion. "May I ask, in the first place, Mr. McFarlane, how it is that you are still at liberty, since there appears to be enough evidence to justify your arrest?"

"I live at Torrington Lodge, Blackheath, with my parents, Mr. Holmes, but last night, having to do business very late with Mr. Jonas Oldacre, I stayed at an hotel in Norwood, and came to my business from there. I knew nothing of this affair until I was in the train, when I read what you have just heard. I at once saw the horrible danger of my position, and I hurried to put the case into your hands. I have no doubt that I should have been arrested either at my city office or at my home. A man followed me from London Bridge Station, and I have no doubt--Great heaven! what is that?"

It was a clang of the bell, followed instantly by heavy steps upon the stair. A moment later, our old friend Lestrade appeared in the doorway. Over his shoulder I caught a glimpse of one or two uniformed policemen outside.

"Mr. John Hector McFarlane?" said Lestrade.

Our unfortunate client rose with a ghastly face.

"I arrest you for the wilful murder of Mr. Jonas Oldacre, of Lower Norwood."

McFarlane turned to us with a gesture of despair, and sank into his chair once more like one who is crushed.

"One moment, Lestrade," said Holmes. "Half an hour more or less can make no difference to you, and the gentleman was about to give us an account of this very interesting affair, which might aid us in clearing it up."

"I think there will be no difficulty in clearing it up," said Lestrade, grimly.
"None the less, with your permission, I should be much interested to hear his account."

"Well, Mr. Holmes, it is difficult for me to refuse you anything, for you have been of use to the force once or twice in the past, and we owe you a good turn at Scotland Yard," said Lestrade. "At the same time I must remain with my prisoner, and I am bound to warn him that anything he may say will appear in evidence against him."

"I wish nothing better," said our client. "All I ask is that you should hear and recognize the absolute truth."

Lestrade looked at his watch. "I'll give you half an hour," said he.

"I must explain first," said McFarlane, "that I knew nothing of Mr. Jonas Oldacre. His name was familiar to me, for many years ago my parents were acquainted with him, but they drifted apart. I was very much surprised therefore, when yesterday, about three o'clock in the afternoon, he walked into my office in the city. But I was still more astonished when he told me the object of his visit. He had in his hand several sheets of a notebook, covered with scribbled writing--here they are--and he laid them on my table.

"Here is my will," said he. 'I want you, Mr. McFarlane, to cast it into proper legal shape. I will sit here while you do so.'

"I set myself to copy it, and you can imagine my astonishment when I found that, with some reservations, he had left all his property to me. He was a strange little ferret-like man, with white eyelashes, and when I looked up at him I found his keen gray eyes fixed upon me with an amused expression. I could hardly believe my own as I read the terms of the will; but he explained that he was a bachelor with hardly any living relation, that he had known my parents in his youth, and that he had always heard of me as a very deserving young man, and was assured that his money would be in worthy hands. Of course, I could only stammer out my thanks. The will was duly finished, signed, and witnessed by my clerk. This is it on the blue paper, and these slips, as I have explained, are the rough draft. Mr. Jonas Oldacre then informed me that there were a number of documents--building leases, title-deeds, mortgages, scrip, and so forth--which it was necessary that I should see and understand. He said that his mind would not be easy until the whole thing was settled, and he begged me to come out to his house at Norwood that night, bringing the will with me, and to arrange matters. 'Remember, my boy, not one word to your parents about the affair until everything is settled. We will keep it as a little surprise for them.' He was very insistent upon this point, and made me promise it faithfully.

"You can imagine, Mr. Holmes, that I was not in a humour to refuse him anything that he might ask. He was my benefactor, and all my desire was to carry out his wishes in every particular. I sent a telegram home, therefore, to say that I had important business on hand, and that it was impossible for me to say how late I might be. Mr. Oldacre had told me that he would like me to have supper with him at nine, as he might not be home before that hour. I had some difficulty in finding his house, however, and it was nearly half-past before I reached it. I found him----"

"One moment!" said Holmes. "Who opened the door?"

"A middle-aged woman, who was, I suppose, his housekeeper."

"And it was she, I presume, who mentioned your name?"

"Exactly," said McFarlane.

"Pray proceed."

McFarlane wiped his damp brow, and then continued his narrative:

"I was shown by this woman into a sitting-room, where a frugal supper was laid out. Afterwards, Mr. Jonas Oldacre led me into his bedroom, in which there stood a heavy safe. This he opened and took out a mass of documents, which we went over together. It was between eleven and twelve when we finished. He remarked that we must not disturb the housekeeper. He showed me out through his own French window, which had been open all this time."

"Was the blind down?" asked Holmes.

"I will not be sure, but I believe that it was only half down. Yes, I remember how he pulled it up in order to swing open the window. I could not find my stick, and he said, 'Never mind, my boy, I shall see a good deal of you now, I hope, and I will keep your stick until you come back to claim it.' I left him there, the safe open, and the papers made up in packets upon the table. It was so late that I could not get back to Blackheath, so I spent the night at the Anerley Arms, and I knew nothing more until I read of this horrible affair in the morning."

"Anything more that you would like to ask, Mr. Holmes?" said Lestrade, whose eyebrows had gone up once or twice during this remarkable explanation.

"Not until I have been to Blackheath."

"You mean to Norwood," said Lestrade.

"Oh, yes, no doubt that is what I must have meant," said Holmes, with his enigmatical smile. Lestrade had learned by more experiences than he would care to acknowledge that that brain could cut through that which was impenetrable to him. I saw him look curiously at my companion.

"I think I should like to have a word with you presently, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said he. "Now, Mr. McFarlane,
two of my constables are at the door, and there is a four-wheeler waiting." The wretched young man arose, and with a last beseeching glance at us walked from the room. The officers conducted him to the cab, but Lestrade remained.

Holmes had picked up the pages which formed the rough draft of the will, and was looking at them with the keenest interest upon his face.

"There are some points about that document, Lestrade, are there not?" said he, pushing them over.

The official looked at them with a puzzled expression.

"I can read the first few lines and these in the middle of the second page, and one or two at the end. Those are as clear as print," said he, "but the writing in between is very bad, and there are three places where I cannot read it at all."

"What do you make of that?" said Holmes.

"Well, what do YOU make of it?"

"That it was written in a train. The good writing represents stations, the bad writing movement, and the very bad writing passing over points. A scientific expert would pronounce at once that this was drawn up on a suburban line, since nowhere save in the immediate vicinity of a great city could there be so quick a succession of points. Granting that his whole journey was occupied in drawing up the will, then the train was an express, only stopping once between Norwood and London Bridge."

Lestrade began to laugh.

"You are too many for me when you begin to get on your theories, Mr. Holmes," said he. "How does this bear on the case?"

"Well, it corroborates the young man's story to the extent that the will was drawn up by Jonas Oldacre in his journey yesterday. It is curious--is it not?--that a man should draw up so important a document in so haphazard a fashion. It suggests that he did not think that it was going to be of much practical importance. If a man drew up a will which he did not intend ever to be effective, he might do it so."

"Well, he drew up his own death warrant at the same time," said Lestrade.

"Oh, you think so?"

"Don't you?"

"Well, it is quite possible, but the case is not clear to me yet."

"Not clear? Well, if that isn't clear, what COULD be clear? Here is a young man who learns suddenly that, if a certain older man dies, he will succeed to a fortune. What does he do? He says nothing to anyone, but he arranges that he shall go out on some pretext to see his client that night. He waits until the only other person in the house is in bed, and then in the solitude of a man's room he murders him, burns his body in the wood-pile, and departs to a neighbouring hotel. The blood-stains in the room and also on the stick are very slight. It is probable that he imagined his crime to be a bloodless one, and hoped that if the body were consumed it would hide all traces of the method of his death--traces which, for some reason, must have pointed to him. Is not all this obvious?"

"It strikes me, my good Lestrade, as being just a trifle too obvious," said Holmes. "You do not add imagination to your other great qualities, but if you could for one moment put yourself in the place of this young man, would you choose the very night after the will had been made to commit your crime? Would it not seem dangerous to you to make so very close a relation between the two incidents? Again, would you choose an occasion when you are known to be in the house, when a servant has let you in? And, finally, would you take the great pains to conceal the body, and yet leave your own stick as a sign that you were the criminal? Confess, Lestrade, that all this is very unlikely."

"As to the stick, Mr. Holmes, you know as well as I do that a criminal is often flurried, and does such things, which a cool man would avoid. He was very likely afraid to go back to the room. Give me another theory that would fit the facts."

"I could very easily give you half a dozen," said Holmes. "Here for example, is a very possible and even probable one. I make you a free present of it. The older man is showing documents which are of evident value. A passing tramp sees them through the window, the blind of which is only half down. Exit the solicitor. Enter the tramp! He seizes a stick, which he observes there, kills Oldacre, and departs after burning the body."

"Why should the tramp burn the body?"

"For the matter of that, why should McFarlane?"

"To hide some evidence."

"Possibly the tramp wanted to hide that any murder at all had been committed."

"And why did the tramp take nothing?"

"Because they were papers that he could not negotiate."

Lestrade shook his head, though it seemed to me that his manner was less absolutely assured than before.

"Well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you may look for your tramp, and while you are finding him we will hold on to our man. The future will show which is right. Just notice this point, Mr. Holmes: that so far as we know, none of the
papers were removed, and that the prisoner is the one man in the world who had no reason for removing them, since he was heir-at-law, and would come into them in any case."

My friend seemed struck by this remark.

"I don't mean to deny that the evidence is in some ways very strongly in favour of your theory," said he. "I only wish to point out that there are other theories possible. As you say, the future will decide. Good-morning! I dare say that in the course of the day I shall drop in at Norwood and see how you are getting on."

When the detective departed, my friend rose and made his preparations for the day's work with the alert air of a man who has a congenial task before him.

"My first movement Watson," said he, as he bustled into his frockcoat, "must, as I said, be in the direction of Blackheath."

"And why not Norwood?"

"Because we have in this case one singular incident coming close to the heels of another singular incident. The police are making the mistake of concentrating their attention upon the second, because it happens to be the one which is actually criminal. But it is evident to me that the logical way to approach the case is to begin by trying to throw some light upon the first incident--the curious will, so suddenly made, and so suddenly made, and to so unexpected an heir. It may do something to simplify what followed. No, my dear fellow, I don't think you can help me. There is no prospect of danger, or I should not dream of stirring out without you. I trust that when I see you in the evening, I will be able to report that I have been able to do something for this unfortunate youngster, who has thrown himself upon my protection."

It was late when my friend returned, and I could see, by a glance at his haggard and anxious face, that the high hopes with which he had started had not been fulfilled. For an hour he droned away upon his violin, endeavouring to soothe his own ruffled spirits. At last he flung down the instrument, and plunged into a detailed account of his misadventures.

"It's all going wrong, Watson--all as wrong as it can go. I kept a bold face before Lestrade, but, upon my soul, I believe that for once the fellow is on the right track and we are on the wrong. All my instincts are one way, and all the facts are the other, and I much fear that British juries have not yet attained that pitch of intelligence when they will give the preference to my theories over Lestrade's facts."

"Did you go to Blackheath?"

"Yes, Watson, I went there, and I found very quickly that the late lamented Oldacre was a pretty considerable blackguard. The father was away in search of his son. The mother was at home--a little, fluffy, blue-eyed person, in a tremor of fear and indignation. Of course, she would not admit even the possibility of his guilt. But she would not express either surprise or regret over the fate of Oldacre. On the contrary, she spoke of him with such bitterness that she was unconsciously considerably strengthening the case of the police for, of course, if her son had heard her speak of the man in this fashion, it would predispose him towards hatred and violence. 'He was more like a malignant and cunning ape than a human being,' said she, 'and he always was, ever since he was a young man.'"

"You knew him at that time?" said I.

"Yes, I knew him well, in fact, he was an old suitor of mine. Thank heaven that I had the sense to turn away from him and to marry a better, if poorer, man. I was engaged to him, Mr. Holmes, when I heard a shocking story of how he had turned a cat loose in an aviary, and I was so horrified at his brutal cruelty that I would have nothing more to do with him.' She rummaged in a bureau, and presently she produced a photograph of a woman, shamefully defaced and mutilated with a knife. 'That is my own photograph,' she said. 'He sent it to me in that state, upon my wedding morning."

"Well,' said I, 'at least he has forgiven you now, since he has left all his property to your son.'"

"Neither my son nor I want anything from Jonas Oldacre, dead or alive!' she cried, with a proper spirit. 'There is a God in heaven, Mr. Holmes, and that same God who has punished that wicked man will show, in His own good time, that my son's hands are guiltless of his blood.'

"Well, I tried one or two leads, but could get at nothing which would help our hypothesis, and several points which would make against it. I gave it up at last and off I went to Norwood.

"This place, Deep Dene House, is a big modern villa of staring brick, standing back in its own grounds, with a laurel-clumped lawn in front of it. To the right and some distance back from the road was the timber-yard which had been the scene of the fire. Here's a rough plan on a leaf of my notebook. This window on the left is the one which opens into Oldacre's room. You can look into it from the road, you see. That is about the only bit of consolation I have had to-day. Lestrade was not there, but his head constable did the honours. They had just found a great treasure-trove. They had spent the morning raking among the ashes of the burned wood-pile, and besides the charred organic remains they had secured several discoloured metal discs. I examined them with care, and there was no doubt that they were trouser buttons. I even distinguished that one of them was marked with the name of 'Hyams,'
who was Oldacres tailor. I then worked the lawn very carefully for signs and traces, but this drought has made everything as hard as iron. Nothing was to be seen save that some body or bundle had been dragged through a low privet hedge which is in a line with the wood-pile. All that, of course, fits in with the official theory. I crawled about the lawn with an August sun on my back, but I got up at the end of an hour no wiser than before.

"Well, after this fiasco I went into the bedroom and examined that also. The blood-stains were very slight, mere smears and discolourations, but undoubtedly fresh. The stick had been removed, but there also the marks were slight. There is no doubt about the stick belonging to our client. He admits it. Footmarks of both men could be made out on the carpet, but none of any third person, which again is a trick for the other side. They were piling up their score all the time and we were at a standstill.

"Only one little gleam of hope did I get--and yet it amounted to nothing. I examined the contents of the safe, most of which had been taken out and left on the table. The papers had been made up into sealed envelopes, one or two of which had been opened by the police. They were not, so far as I could judge, of any great value, nor did the bank-book show that Mr. Oldacre was in such very affluent circumstances. But it seemed to me that all the papers were not there. There were allusions to some deeds--possibly the more valuable--which I could not find. This, of course, if we could definitely prove it, would turn Lestrade's argument against himself, for who would steal a thing if he knew that he would shortly inherit it?

"Finally, having drawn every other cover and picked up no scent, I tried my luck with the housekeeper. Mrs. Lexington is her name--a little, dark, silent person, with suspicious and sidelong eyes. She could tell us something if she would--I am convinced of it. But she was as close as wax. Yes, she had let Mr. McFarlane in at half-past nine. She wished her hand had withered before she had done so. She had gone to bed at half-past ten. Her room was at the other end of the house, and she could hear nothing of what had passed. Mr. McFarlane had left his hat, and to the best of her had been awakened by the alarm of fire. Her poor, dear master had certainly been murdered. Had he any enemies? Well, every man had enemies, but Mr. Oldacre kept himself very much to himself, and only met people in the way of business. She had seen the buttons, and was sure that they belonged to the clothes which he had worn last night. The wood-pile was very dry, for it had not rained for a month. It burned like tinder, and by the time she reached the spot, nothing could be seen but flames. She and all the firemen smelled the burned flesh from inside it. She knew nothing of the papers, nor of Mr. Oldacre's private affairs.

"So, my dear Watson, there's my report of a failure. And yet--and yet--" he clenched his thin hands in a paroxysm of conviction--"I KNOW it's all wrong. I feel it in my bones. There is something that has not come out, and that housekeeper knows it. There was a sort of sulkily defiance in her eyes, which only goes with guilty knowledge. However, there's no good talking any more about it, Watson; but unless some lucky chance comes our way I fear that the Norwood Disappearance Case will not figure in that chronicle of our successes which I foresee that a patient public will sooner or later have to endure."

"Surely," said I, "the man's appearance would go far with any jury?"

"That is a dangerous argument my dear Watson. You remember that terrible murderer, Bert Stevens, who wanted us to get him off in '87? Was there ever a more mild-mannered, Sunday-school young man?"

"It is true."

"Unless we succeed in establishing an alternative theory, this man is lost. You can hardly find a flaw in the case which can now be presented against him, and all further investigation has served to strengthen it. By the way, there is one curious little point about those papers which may serve us as the starting-point for an inquiry. On looking over the bank-book I found that the low state of the balance was principally due to large checks which have been made out during the last year to Mr. Cornelius. I confess that I should be interested to know who this Mr. Cornelius may be with whom a retired builder has such very large transactions. Is it possible that he has had a hand in the affair? Cornelius might be a broker, but we have found no scrip to correspond with these large payments. Failing any other indication, my researches must now take the direction of an inquiry at the bank for the gentleman who has cashed these checks. But I fear, my dear fellow, that our case will end ingloriously by Lestrade hanging our client, which will certainly be a triumph for Scotland Yard."

I do not know how far Sherlock Holmes took any sleep that night, but when I came down to breakfast I found him pale and harassed, his bright eyes the brighter for the dark shadows round them. The carpet round his chair was littered with cigarette-ends and with the early editions of the morning papers. An open telegram lay upon the table.

"What do you think of this, Watson?" he asked, tossing it across.

It was from Norwood, and ran as follows:

Important fresh evidence to hand. McFarlane's guilt definitely established. Advise you to abandon case. LESTRADE.

"This sounds serious," said I.

"It is Lestrade's little cock-a-doodle of victory," Holmes answered, with a bitter smile. "And yet it may be
premature to abandon the case. After all, important fresh evidence is a two-edged thing, and may possibly cut in a
very different direction to that which Lestrade imagines. Take your breakfast, Watson, and we will go out together
and see what we can do. I feel as if I shall need your company and your moral support today."

My friend had no breakfast himself, for it was one of his peculiarities that in his more intense moments he would
permit himself no food, and I have known him presume upon his iron strength until he has fainted from pure
inanition. "At present I cannot spare energy and nerve force for digestion," he would say in answer to my medical
remonstrances. I was not surprised, therefore, when this morning he left his untouched meal behind him, and started
with me for Norwood. A crowd of morbid sightseers were still gathered round Deep Dene House, which was just
such a suburban villa as I had pictured. Within the gates Lestrade met us, his face flushed with victory, his manner
grossly triumphant.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, have you proved us to be wrong yet? Have you found your tramp?" he cried.

"I have formed no conclusion whatever," my companion answered.

"But we formed ours yesterday, and now it proves to be correct, so you must acknowledge that we have been a
little in front of you this time, Mr. Holmes."

"You certainly have the air of something unusual having occurred," said Holmes.

Lestrade laughed loudly.

"You don't like being beaten any more than the rest of us do," said he. "A man can't expect always to have it his
own way, can he, Dr. Watson? Step this way, if you please, gentlemen, and I think I can convince you once for all
that it was John McFarlane who did this crime."

He led us through the passage and out into a dark hall beyond.

"This is where young McFarlane must have come out to get his hat after the crime was done," said he. "Now
look at this." With dramatic suddenness he struck a match, and by its light exposed a stain of blood upon the
whitewashed wall. As he held the match nearer, I saw that it was more than a stain. It was the well-marked print of a
thumb.

"Look at that with your magnifying glass, Mr. Holmes."

"Yes, I am doing so."

"You are aware that no two thumb-marks are alike?"

"I have heard something of the kind."

"Well, then, will you please compare that print with this wax impression of young McFarlane's right thumb,
taken by my orders this morning?"

As he held the waxen print close to the blood-stain, it did not take a magnifying glass to see that the two were
undoubtedly from the same thumb. It was evident to me that our unfortunate client was lost.

"That is final," said Lestrade.

"Yes, that is final," I involuntarily echoed.

"It is final," said Holmes.

Something in his tone caught my ear, and I turned to look at him. An extraordinary change had come over his
face. It was writhing with inward merriment. His two eyes were shining like stars. It seemed to me that he was
making desperate efforts to restrain a convulsive attack of laughter.

"Dear me! Dear me!" he said at last. "Well, now, who would have thought it? And how deceptive appearances
may be, to be sure! Such a nice young man to look at! It is a lesson to us not to trust our own judgment, is it not,
Lestrade?"

"Yes, some of us are a little too much inclined to be cock-sure, Mr. Holmes," said Lestrade. The man's insolence
was maddening, but we could not resent it.

"What a providential thing that this young man should press his right thumb against the wall in taking his hat
from the peg! Such a very natural action, too, if you come to think of it." Holmes was outwardly calm, but his whole
body gave a wriggle of suppressed excitement as he spoke.

"By the way, Lestrade, who made this remarkable discovery?"

"It was the housekeeper, Mrs. Lexington, who drew the night constable's attention to it."

"Where was the night constable?"

"He remained on guard in the bedroom where the crime was committed, so as to see that nothing was touched."

"But why didn't the police see this mark yesterday?"

"Well, we had no particular reason to make a careful examination of the hall. Besides, it's not in a very
prominent place, as you see."

"No, no--of course not. I suppose there is no doubt that the mark was there yesterday?"

Lestrade looked at Holmes as if he thought he was going out of his mind. I confess that I was myself surprised
both at his hilarious manner and at his rather wild observation.
"I don't know whether you think that McFarlane came out of jail in the dead of the night in order to strengthen
the evidence against himself," said Lestrade. "I leave it to any expert in the world whether that is not the mark of his
thumb."

"It is unquestionably the mark of his thumb."

"There, that's enough," said Lestrade. "I am a practical man, Mr. Holmes, and when I have got my evidence I
come to my conclusions. If you have anything to say, you will find me writing my report in the sitting-room."
Holmes had recovered his equanimity, though I still seemed to detect gleams of amusement in his expression.

"Dear me, this is a very sad development, Watson, is it not?" said he. "And yet there are singular points about it
which hold out some hopes for our client."

"I am delighted to hear it," said I, heartily. "I was afraid it was all up with him."

"I would hardly go so far as to say that, my dear Watson. The fact is that there is one really serious flaw in this
evidence to which our friend attaches so much importance."

"Indeed, Holmes! What is it?"

"Only this: that I KNOW that that mark was not there when I examined the hall yesterday. And now, Watson, let
us have a little stroll round in the sunshine."

With a confused brain, but with a heart into which some warmth of hope was returning, I accompanied my friend
in a walk round the garden. Holmes took each face of the house in turn, and examined it with great interest. He then
led the way inside, and went over the whole building from basement to attic. Most of the rooms were unfurnished,
but none the less Holmes inspected them all minutely. Finally, on the top corridor, which ran outside three
untenanted bedrooms, he again was seized with a spasm of merriment.

"There are really some very unique features about this case, Watson," said he. "I think it is time now that we
took our friend Lestrade into our confidence. He has had his little smile at our expense, and perhaps we may do as
much by him, if my reading of this problem proves to be correct. Yes, yes, I think I see how we should approach it."

The Scotland Yard inspector was still writing in the parlour when Holmes interrupted him.

"I understood that you were writing a report of this case," said he.

"So I am."

"Don't you think it may be a little premature? I can't help thinking that your evidence is not complete."
Lestrade knew my friend too well to disregard his words. He laid down his pen and looked curiously at him.

"What do you mean, Mr. Holmes?"

"Only that there is an important witness whom you have not seen."

"Can you produce him?"

"I think I can."

"Then do so."

"I will do my best. How many constables have you?"

"There are three within call."

"Excellent!" said Holmes. "May I ask if they are all large, able-bodied men with powerful voices?"

"I have no doubt they are, though I fail to see what their voices have to do with it."

"Perhaps I can help you to see that and one or two other things as well," said Holmes. "Kindly summon your
men, and I will try."

Five minutes later, three policemen had assembled in the hall.

"In the outhouse you will find a considerable quantity of straw," said Holmes. "I will ask you to carry in two
bundles of it. I think it will be of the greatest assistance in producing the witness whom I require. Thank you very
much. I believe you have some matches in your pocket Watson. Now, Mr. Lestrade, I will ask you all to accompany
me to the top landing."

As I have said, there was a broad corridor there, which ran outside three empty bedrooms. At one end of the
corridor we were all marshalled by Sherlock Holmes, the constables grinning and Lestrade staring at my friend with
amazement, expectation, and derision chasing each other across his features. Holmes stood before us with the air of
a conjurer who is performing a trick.

"Would you kindly send one of your constables for two buckets of water? Put the straw on the floor here, free
from the wall on either side. Now I think that we are all ready."

Lestrade's face had begun to grow red and angry. "I don't know whether you are playing a game with us, Mr.
Sherlock Holmes," said he. "If you know anything, you can surely say it without all this tomfoolery."

"I assure you, my good Lestrade, that I have an excellent reason for everything that I do. You may possibly
remember that you chaffed me a little, some hours ago, when the sun seemed on your side of the hedge, so you must
not grudge me a little pomp and ceremony now. Might I ask you, Watson, to open that window, and then to put a
match to the edge of the straw?"
I did so, and driven by the draught a coil of gray smoke swirled down the corridor, while the dry straw crackled and flamed.

"Now we must see if we can find this witness for you, Lestrade. Might I ask you all to join in the cry of 'Fire'?

Now then; one, two, three----"

"Fire!" we all yelled.

"Thank you. I will trouble you once again."

"Fire!"

"Just once more, gentlemen, and all together."

"Fire!" The shout must have rung over Norwood.

It had hardly died away when an amazing thing happened. A door suddenly flew open out of what appeared to be solid wall at the end of the corridor, and a little, wizened man darted out of it, like a rabbit out of its burrow.

"Capital!" said Holmes, calmly. "Watson, a bucket of water over the straw. That will do! Lestrade, allow me to present you with your principal missing witness, Mr. Jonas Oldacre."

The detective stared at the newcomer with blank amazement. The latter was blinking in the bright light of the corridor, and peering at us and at the smouldering fire. It was an odious face--crafty, vicious, malignant, with shifty, light-gray eyes and white lashes.

"What's this, then?" said Lestrade, at last. "What have you been doing all this time, eh?"

Oldacre gave an uneasy laugh, shrinking back from the furious red face of the angry detective.

"I have done no harm."

"No harm? You have done your best to get an innocent man hanged. If it wasn't for this gentleman here, I am not sure that you would not have succeeded."

The wretched creature began to whimper.

"I am sure, sir, it was only my practical joke."

"Oh! a joke, was it? You won't find the laugh on your side, I promise you. Take him down, and keep him in the sitting-room until I come. Mr. Holmes," he continued, when they had gone, "I could not speak before the constables, but in the presence of Dr. Watson, that this is the brightest thing that you have done yet, though it is a mystery to me how you did it. You have saved an innocent man's life, and you have prevented a very grave scandal, which would have ruined my reputation in the Force."

Holmes smiled, and clapped Lestrade upon the shoulder.

"Instead of being ruined, my good sir, you will find that your reputation has been enormously enhanced. Just make a few alterations in that report which you were writing, and they will understand how hard it is to throw dust in the eyes of Inspector Lestrade."

"And you don't want your name to appear?"

"Not at all. The work is its own reward. Perhaps I shall get the credit also at some distant day, when I permit my zealous historian to lay out his foolscap once more--eh, Watson? Well, now, let us see where this rat has been lurking."

A lath-and-plaster partition had been run across the passage six feet from the end, with a door cunningly concealed in it. It was lit within by slits under the eaves. A few articles of furniture and a supply of food and water were within, together with a number of books and papers.

"There's the advantage of being a builder," said Holmes, as we came out. "He was able to fix up his own little hiding-place without any confederate--save, of course, that precious housekeeper of his, whom I should lose no time in adding to your bag, Lestrade."

"I'll take your advice. But how did you know of this place, Mr. Holmes?"

"I made up my mind that the fellow was in hiding in the house. When I paced one corridor and found it six feet shorter than the corresponding one below, it was pretty clear where he was. I thought he had not the nerve to lie quiet before an alarm of fire. We could, of course, have gone in and taken him, but it amused me to make him reveal himself. Besides, I owed you a little mystification, Lestrade, for your chaff in the morning."

"Well, sir, you certainly got equal with me on that. But how in the world did you know that he was in the house at all?"

"The thumb-mark, Lestrade. You said it was final; and so it was, in a very different sense. I knew it had not been there the day before. I pay a good deal of attention to matters of detail, as you may have observed, and I had examined the hall, and was sure that the wall was clear. Therefore, it had been put on during the night."

"But how?"

"Very simply. When those packets were sealed up, Jonas Oldacre got McFarlane to secure one of the seals by putting his thumb upon the soft wax. It would be done so quickly and so naturally, that I daresay the young man himself has no recollection of it. Very likely it just so happened, and Oldacre had himself no notion of the use he
would put it to. Brooding over the case in that den of his, it suddenly struck him what absolutely damning evidence he could make against McFarlane by using that thumb-mark. It was the simplest thing in the world for him to take a wax impression from the seal, to moisten it in as much blood as he could get from a pin-prick, and to put the mark upon the wall during the night, either with his own hand or with that of his housekeeper. If you examine among those documents which he took with him into his retreat, I will lay you a wager that you find the seal with the thumb-mark upon it."

"Wonderful!" said Lestrade. "Wonderful! It's all as clear as crystal, as you put it. But what is the object of this deep deception, Mr. Holmes?"

It was amusing to me to see how the detective's overbearing manner had changed suddenly to that of a child asking questions of its teacher.

"Well, I don't think that is very hard to explain. A very deep, malicious, vindictive person is the gentleman who is now waiting us downstairs. You know that he was once refused by McFarlane's mother? You don't! I told you that you should go to Blackheath first and Norwood afterwards. Well, this injury, as he would consider it, has rankled in his wicked, scheming brain, and all his life he has longed for vengeance, but never seen his chance. During the last year or two, things have gone against him--secret speculation, I think--and he finds himself in a bad way. He determines to swindle his creditors, and for this purpose he pays large checks to a certain Mr. Cornelius, who is, I imagine, himself under another name. I have not traced these checks yet, but I have no doubt that they were banked under that name at some provincial town where Oldacre from time to time led a double existence. He intended to change his name altogether, draw this money, and vanish, starting life again elsewhere."

"Well, that's likely enough."

"It would strike him that in disappearing he might throw all pursuit off his track, and at the same time have an ample and crushing revenge upon his old sweetheart, if he could give the impression that he had been murdered by her only child. It was a masterpiece of villainy, and he carried it out like a master. The idea of the will, which would give an obvious motive for the crime, the secret visit unknown to his own parents, the retention of the stick, the blood, and the animal remains and buttons in the wood-pile, all were admirable. It was a net from which it seemed to me, a few hours ago, that there was no possible escape. But he had not that supreme gift of the artist, the knowledge of when to stop. He wished to improve that which was already perfect--to draw the rope tighter yet round the neck of his unfortunate victim--and so he ruined all. Let us descend, Lestrade. There are just one or two questions that I would ask him."

The malignant creature was seated in his own parlour, with a policeman upon each side of him.

"It was a joke, my good sir--a practical joke, nothing more," he whined incessantly. "I assure you, sir, that I simply concealed myself in order to see the effect of my disappearance, and I am sure that you would not be so unjust as to imagine that I would have allowed any harm to befall poor young Mr. McFarlane."

"That's for a jury to decide," said Lestrade. "Anyhow, we shall have you on a charge of conspiracy, if not for attempted murder."

"And you'll probably find that your creditors will impound the banking account of Mr. Cornelius," said Holmes. The little man started, and turned his malignant eyes upon my friend.

"I have to thank you for a good deed," said he. "Perhaps I'll pay my debt some day."

Holmes smiled indulgently.

"I fancy that, for some few years, you will find your time very fully occupied," said he. "By the way, what was it you put into the wood-pile besides your old trousers? A dead dog, or rabbits, or what? You won't tell? Dear me, how very unkind of you! Well, well, I daresay that a couple of rabbits would account both for the blood and for the charred ashes. If ever you write an account, Watson, you can make rabbits serve your turn."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE DANCING MEN

Holmes had been seated for some hours in silence with his long, thin back curved over a chemical vessel in which he was brewing a particularly malodorous product. His head was sunk upon his breast, and he looked from my point of view like a strange, lank bird, with dull gray plumage and a black top-knot.

"So, Watson," said he, suddenly, "you do not propose to invest in South African securities?"

I gave a start of astonishment. Accustomed as I was to Holmes's curious faculties, this sudden intrusion into my most intimate thoughts was utterly inexplicable.

"How on earth do you know that?" I asked.

He wheeled round upon his stool, with a steaming test-tube in his hand, and a gleam of amusement in his deep-set eyes.

"Now, Watson, confess yourself utterly taken aback," said he.

"I am."

"I ought to make you sign a paper to that effect."
"Why?"

"Because in five minutes you will say that it is all so absurdly simple."

"I am sure that I shall say nothing of the kind."

"You see, my dear Watson,"—he propped his test-tube in the rack, and began to lecture with the air of a professor addressing his class—"it is not really difficult to construct a series of inferences, each dependent upon its predecessor and each simple in itself. If, after doing so, one simply knocks out all the central inferences and presents one's audience with the starting-point and the conclusion, one may produce a startling, though possibly a meretricious, effect. Now, it was not really difficult, by an inspection of the groove between your left forefinger and thumb, to feel sure that you did NOT propose to invest your small capital in the gold fields."

"I see no connection."

"Very likely not; but I can quickly show you a close connection. Here are the missing links of the very simple chain: 1. You had chalk between your left finger and thumb when you returned from the club last night. 2. You put chalk there when you play billiards, to steady the cue. 3. You never play billiards except with Thurston. 4. You told me, four weeks ago, that Thurston had an option on some South African property which would expire in a month, and which he desired you to share with him. 5. Your check book is locked in my drawer, and you have not asked for the key. 6. You do not propose to invest your money in this manner."

"How absurdly simple!" I cried.

"Quite so!" said he, a little nettled. "Every problem becomes very childish when once it is explained to you. Here is an unexplained one. See what you can make of that, friend Watson." He tossed a sheet of paper upon the table, and turned once more to his chemical analysis.

I looked with amazement at the absurd hieroglyphics upon the paper.

"Why, Holmes, it is a child's drawing," I cried.

"Oh, that's your idea!"

"What else should it be?"

"That is what Mr. Hilton Cubitt, of Riding Thorpe Manor, Norfolk, is very anxious to know. This little conundrum came by the first post, and he was to follow by the next train. There's a ring at the bell, Watson. I should not be very much surprised if this were he."

A heavy step was heard upon the stairs, and an instant later there entered a tall, ruddy, clean-shaven gentleman, whose clear eyes and florid cheeks told of a life led far from the fogs of Baker Street. He seemed to bring a whiff of his strong, fresh, bracing, east-coast air with him as he entered. Having shaken hands with each of us, he was about to sit down, when his eye rested upon the paper with the curious markings, which I had just examined and left upon the table.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, what do you make of these?" he cried. "They told me that you were fond of queer mysteries, and I don't think you can find a queerer one than that. I sent the paper on ahead, so that you might have time to study it before I came."

"It is certainly rather a curious production," said Holmes. "At first sight it would appear to be some childish prank. It consists of a number of absurd little figures dancing across the paper upon which they are drawn. Why should you attribute any importance to so grotesque an object?"

"I never should, Mr. Holmes. But my wife does. It is frightening her to death. She says nothing, but I can see terror in her eyes. That's why I want to sift the matter to the bottom."
Holmes examined it for some time, and then, folding it carefully up, he placed it in his pocketbook.

"This promises to be a most interesting and unusual case," said he. "You gave me a few particulars in your letter, Mr. Hilton Cubitt, but I should be very much obliged if you would kindly go over it all again for the benefit of my friend, Dr. Watson."

"I'm not much of a story-teller," said our visitor, nervously clasping and unclasping his great, strong hands. "You'll just ask me anything that I don't make clear. I'll begin at the time of my marriage last year, but I want to say first of all that, though I'm not a rich man, my people have been at Riding Thorpe for a matter of five centuries, and there is no better known family in the County of Norfolk. Last year I came up to London for the Jubilee, and I stopped at a boarding-house in Russell Square, because Parker, the vicar of our parish, was staying in it. There was an American young lady there--Patrick was the name--Elsie Patrick. In some way we became friends, until before my month was up I was as much in love as man could be. We were quietly married at a registry office, and we returned to Norfolk a wedded couple. You'll think it very mad, Mr. Holmes, that a man of a good old family should marry a wife in this fashion, knowing nothing of her past or of her people, but if you saw her and knew her, it would help you to understand.

"She was very straight about it, was Elsie. I can't say that she did not give me every chance of getting out of it if I wished to do so. 'I have had some very disagreeable associations in my life,' said she, 'I wish to forget all about them. I would rather never allude to the past, for it is very painful to me. If you take me, Hilton, you will take a woman who has nothing that she need be personally ashamed of, but you will have to be content with my word for it, and to allow me to be silent as to all that passed up to the time when I became yours. If these conditions are too hard, then go back to Norfolk, and leave me to the lonely life in which you found me.' It was only the day before our wedding that she said those very words to me. I told her that I was content to take her on her own terms, and I have been as good as my word.

"We have been married now for a year, and very happy we have been. But about a month ago, at the end of June, I saw for the first time signs of trouble. One day my wife received a letter from America. I saw the American stamp. She turned deadly white, read the letter, and threw it into the fire. She made no allusion to it afterwards, and I made none, for a promise is a promise, but she has never known an easy hour from that moment. There is always a look of fear upon her face--a look as if she were waiting and expecting. She would do better to trust me. She would find that I was her best friend. But until she speaks, I can say nothing. Mind you, she is a truthful woman, Mr. Holmes, and whatever trouble there may have been in her past life it has been no fault of hers. I am only a simple Norfolk squire, but there is not a man in England who ranks his family honour more highly than I do. She knows it well, and she knew it well before she married me. She would never bring any stain upon it--of that I am sure.

"Well, now I come to the queer part of my story. About a week ago--it was the Tuesday of last week--I found on one of the window-sills a number of absurd little dancing figures like these upon the paper. They were scrawled with chalk. I thought that it was the stable-boy who had drawn them, but the lad swore he knew nothing about it. Anyhow, they had come there during the night. I had them washed out, and I only mentioned the matter to my wife afterwards. To my surprise, she took it very seriously, and begged me if any more came to let her see them. None did come for a week, and then yesterday morning I found this paper lying on the sundial in the garden. I showed it to Elsie, and down she dropped in a dead faint. Since then she has looked like a woman in a dream, half dazed, and with terror always lurking in her eyes. It was then that I wrote and sent the paper to you, Mr. Holmes. It was not a thing that I could take to the police, for they would have laughed at me, but you will tell me what to do. I am not a rich man, but if there is any danger threatening my little woman, I would spend my last copper to shield her."

He was a fine creature, this man of the old English soil--simple, straight, and gentle, with his great, earnest blue eyes and broad, comely face. His love for his wife and his trust in her shone in his features. Holmes had listened to his story with the utmost attention, and now he sat for some time in silent thought.

"Don't you think, Mr. Cubitt," said he, at last, "that your best plan would be to make a direct appeal to your wife, and to ask her to share her secret with you?"

Hilton Cubitt shook his massive head.

"A promise is a promise, Mr. Holmes. If Elsie wished to tell me she would. If not, it is not for me to force her confidence. But I am justified in taking my own line--and I will."

"Then I will help you with all my heart. In the first place, have you heard of any strangers being seen in your neighbourhood?"

"No."

"I presume that it is a very quiet place. Any fresh face would cause comment?"
"In the immediate neighbourhood, yes. But we have several small watering-places not very far away. And the farmers take in lodgers."

"These hieroglyphics have evidently a meaning. If it is a purely arbitrary one, it may be impossible for us to solve it. If, on the other hand, it is systematic, I have no doubt that we shall get to the bottom of it. But this particular sample is so short that I can do nothing, and the facts which you have brought me are so indefinite that we have no basis for an investigation. I would suggest that you return to Norfolk, that you keep a keen lookout, and that you take an exact copy of any fresh dancing men which may appear. It is a thousand pities that we have not a reproduction of those which were done in chalk upon the window-sill. Make a discreet inquiry also as to any strangers in the neighbourhood. When you have collected some fresh evidence, come to me again. That is the best advice which I can give you, Mr. Hilton Cubitt. If there are any pressing fresh developments, I shall be always ready to run down and see you in your Norfolk home."

The interview left Sherlock Holmes very thoughtful, and several times in the next few days I saw him take his slip of paper from his notebook and look long and earnestly at the curious figures inscribed upon it. He made no allusion to the affair, however, until one afternoon a fortnight or so later. I was going out when he called me back.

"You had better stay here, Watson."

"Why?"

"Because I had a wire from Hilton Cubitt this morning. You remember Hilton Cubitt, of the dancing men? He was to reach Liverpool Street at one-twenty. He may be here at any moment. I gather from his wire that there have been some new incidents of importance."

We had not long to wait, for our Norfolk squire came straight from the station as fast as a hansom could bring him. He was looking worried and depressed, with tired eyes and a lined forehead.

"It's getting on my nerves, this business," said he, as he sank, like a wearied man, into an armchair. "It's bad enough to feel that you are surrounded by unseen, unknown folk, who have some kind of design upon you, but when, in addition to that, you know that it is just killing your wife by inches, then it becomes as much as flesh and blood can endure. She's wearing away under it--just wearing away before my eyes."

"Has she said anything yet?"

"No, Mr. Holmes, she has not. And yet there have been times when the poor girl has wanted to speak, and yet could not quite bring herself to take the plunge. I have tried to help her, but I daresay I did it clumsily, and scared her from it. She has spoken about my old family, and our reputation in the county, and our pride in our unsullied honour, and I always felt it was leading to the point, but somehow it turned off before we got there."

"But you have found out something for yourself?"

"A good deal, Mr. Holmes. I have several fresh dancing-men pictures for you to examine, and, what is more important, I have seen the fellow."

"What, the man who draws them?"

"Yes, I saw him at his work. But I will tell you everything in order. When I got back after my visit to you, the very first thing I saw next morning was a fresh crop of dancing men. They had been drawn in chalk upon the black wooden door of the tool-house, which stands beside the lawn in full view of the front windows. I took an exact copy, and here it is."

He unfolded a paper and laid it upon the table. Here is a copy of the hieroglyphics:

GRAPHIC

"Excellent!" said Holmes. "Excellent! Pray continue."

"When I had taken the copy, I rubbed out the marks, but, two mornings later, a fresh inscription had appeared. I have a copy of it here:"

Holmes rubbed his hands and chuckled with delight.

"Our material is rapidly accumulating," said he.

"Three days later a message was left scrawled upon paper, and placed under a pebble upon the sundial. Here it is. The characters are, as you see, exactly the same as the last one. After that I determined to lie in wait, so I got out my revolver and I sat up in my study, which overlooks the lawn and garden. About two in the morning I was seated by the window, all being dark save for the moonlight outside, when I heard steps behind me, and there was my wife in her dressing-gown. She implored me to come to bed. I told her frankly that I wished to see who it was who played such absurd tricks upon us. She answered that it was some senseless practical joke, and that I should not take any notice of it.

"If it really annoys you, Hilton, we might go and travel, you and I, and so avoid this nuisance."

"What, be driven out of our own house by a practical joker?" said I. "Why, we should have the whole county
laughing at us.'

"Well, come to bed,' said she, 'and we can discuss it in the morning.'

"Suddenly, as she spoke, I saw her white face grow whiter yet in the moonlight, and her hand tightened upon my shoulder. Something was moving in the shadow of the tool-house. I saw a dark, creeping figure which crawled round the corner and squatted in front of the door. Seizing my pistol, I was rushing out, when my wife threw her arms round me and held me with convulsive strength. I tried to throw her off, but she clung to me most desperately. At last I got clear, but by the time I had opened the door and reached the house the creature was gone. He had left a trace of his presence, however, for there on the door was the very same arrangement of dancing men which had already twice appeared, and which I have copied on that paper. There was no other sign of the fellow anywhere, though I ran all over the grounds. And yet the amazing thing is that he must have been there all the time, for when I examined the door again in the morning, he had scrawled some more of his pictures under the line which I had already seen."

"Have you that fresh drawing?"

"Yes, it is very short, but I made a copy of it, and here it is."

Again he produced a paper. The new dance was in this form:

£££ £££ £££ £££

"Tell me," said Holmes--and I could see by his eyes that he was much excited--"was this a mere addition to the first or did it appear to be entirely separate?"

"It was on a different panel of the door."

"Excellent! This is far the most important of all for our purpose. It fills me with hopes. Now, Mr. Hilton Cubitt, please continue your most interesting statement."

"I have nothing more to say, Mr. Holmes, except that I was angry with my wife that night for having held me back when I might have caught the skulking rascal. She said that she feared that I might come to harm. For an instant it had crossed my mind that perhaps what she really feared was that HE might come to harm, for I could not doubt that she knew who this man was, and what he meant by these strange signals. But there is a tone in my wife's voice, Mr. Holmes, and a look in her eyes which forbid doubt, and I am sure that it was indeed my own safety that was in her mind. There's the whole case, and now I want your advice as to what I ought to do. My own inclination is to put half a dozen of my farm lads in the shrubbery, and when this fellow comes again to give him such a hiding that he will leave us in peace for the future."

"I fear it is too deep a case for such simple remedies," said Holmes. "How long can you stay in London?"

"I must go back to-day. I would not leave my wife alone all night for anything. She is very nervous, and begged me to come back."

"I daresay you are right. But if you could have stopped, I might possibly have been able to return with you in a day or two. Meanwhile you will leave me these papers, and I think that it is very likely that I shall be able to pay you a visit shortly and to throw some light upon your case."

Sherlock Holmes preserved his calm professional manner until our visitor had left us, although it was easy for me, who knew him so well, to see that he was profoundly excited. The moment that Hilton Cubitt's broad back had disappeared through the door my comrade rushed to the table, laid out all the slips of paper containing dancing men in front of him, and threw himself into an intricate and elaborate calculation. For two hours I watched him as he covered sheet after sheet of paper with figures and letters, so completely absorbed in his task that he had evidently forgotten my presence. Sometimes he was making progress and whistled and sang at his work; sometimes he was puzzled, and would sit for long spells with a furrowed brow and a vacant eye. Finally he sprang from his chair with a cry of satisfaction, and walked up and down the room rubbing his hands together. Then he wrote a long telegram upon a cable form. "If my answer to this is as I hope, you will have a very pretty case to add to your collection, Watson," said he. "I expect that we shall be able to go down to Norfolk tomorrow, and to take our friend some very definite news as to the secret of his annoyance."

I confess that I was filled with curiosity, but I was aware that Holmes liked to make his disclosures at his own time and in his own way, so I waited until it should suit him to take me into his confidence.

But there was a delay in that answering telegram, and two days of impatience followed, during which Holmes pricked up his ears at every ring of the bell. On the evening of the second there came a letter from Hilton Cubitt. All was quiet with him, save that a long inscription had appeared that morning upon the pedestal of the sundial. He inclosed a copy of it, which is here reproduced:
Holmes bent over this grotesque frieze for some minutes, and then suddenly sprang to his feet with an exclamation of surprise and dismay. His face was haggard with anxiety.

"We have let this affair go far enough," said he. "Is there a train to North Walsham to-night?"

I turned up the time-table. The last had just gone.

"Then we shall breakfast early and take the very first in the morning," said Holmes. "Our presence is most urgently needed. Ah! here is our expected cablegram. One moment, Mrs. Hudson, there may be an answer. No, that is quite as I expected. This message makes it even more essential that we should not lose an hour in letting Hilton Cubitt know how matters stand, for it is a singular and a dangerous web in which our simple Norfolk squire is entangled."

So, indeed, it proved, and as I come to the dark conclusion of a story which had seemed to me to be only childish and bizarre, I experience once again the dismay and horror with which I was filled. Would that I had some brighter ending to communicate to my readers, but these are the chronicles of fact, and I must follow to their dark crisis the strange chain of events which for some days made Riding Thorpe Manor a household word through the length and breadth of England.

We had hardly alighted at North Walsham, and mentioned the name of our destination, when the station-master hurried towards us. "I suppose that you are the detectives from London?" said he.

A look of annoyance passed over Holmes's face.

"What makes you think such a thing?"

"Because Inspector Martin from Norwich has just passed through. But maybe you are the surgeons. She's not dead—or wasn't by last accounts. You may be in time to save her yet—though it be for the gallows."

Holmes's brow was dark with anxiety.

"We are going to Riding Thorpe Manor," said he, "but we have heard nothing of what has passed there."

"It's a terrible business," said the stationmaster. "They are shot, both Mr. Hilton Cubitt and his wife. She shot him and then herself—so the servants say. He's dead and her life is despaired of. Dear, dear, one of the oldest families in the county of Norfolk, and one of the most honoured."

Without a word Holmes hurried to a carriage, and during the long seven miles' drive he never opened his mouth. Seldom have I seen him so utterly despondent. He had been uneasy during all our journey from town, and I had observed that he had turned over the morning papers with anxious attention, but now this sudden realization of his worst fears left him in a blank melancholy. He leaned back in his seat, lost in gloomy speculation. Yet there was much around to interest us, for we were passing through as singular a countryside as any in England, where a few scattered cottages represented the population of to-day, while on every hand enormous square-towered churches bristled up from the flat green landscape and told of the glory and prosperity of old East Anglia. At last the violet rim of the German Ocean appeared over the green edge of the Norfolk coast, and the driver pointed with his whip to two old brick and timber gables which projected from a grove of trees. "That's Riding Thorpe Manor," said he.

As we drove up to the porticoed front door, I observed in front of it, beside the tennis lawn, the black tool-house and the pedestalled sundial with which we had such strange associations. A dapper little man, with a quick, alert manner and a waxed moustache, had just descended from a high dog-cart. He introduced himself as Inspector Martin, of the Norfolk Constabulary, and he was considerably astonished when he heard the name of my companion.

"Why, Mr. Holmes, the crime was only committed at three this morning. How could you hear of it in London and get to the spot as soon as I?"

"I anticipated it. I came in the hope of preventing it."

"Then you must have important evidence, of which we are ignorant, for they were said to be a most united couple."

"I have only the evidence of the dancing men," said Holmes. "I will explain the matter to you later. Meanwhile, since it is too late to prevent this tragedy, I am very anxious that I should use the knowledge which I possess in order to insure that justice be done. Will you associate me in your investigation, or will you prefer that I should act independently?"

"I should be proud to feel that we were acting together, Mr. Holmes," said the inspector, earnestly.
"In that case I should be glad to hear the evidence and to examine the premises without an instant of unnecessary delay."

Inspector Martin had the good sense to allow my friend to do things in his own fashion, and contented himself with carefully noting the results. The local surgeon, an old, white-haired man, had just come down from Mrs. Hilton Cubitt's room, and he reported that her injuries were serious, but not necessarily fatal. The bullet had passed through the front of her brain, and it would probably be some time before she could regain consciousness. On the question of whether she had been shot or had shot herself, he would not venture to express any decided opinion. Certainly the bullet had been discharged at very close quarters. There was only the one pistol found in the room, two barrels of which had been emptied. Mr. Hilton Cubitt had been shot through the heart. It was equally conceivable that he had shot her and then himself, or that she had been the criminal, for the revolver lay upon the floor midway between them.

"Has he been moved?" asked Holmes.
"We have moved nothing except the lady. We could not leave her lying wounded upon the floor."
"How long have you been here, Doctor?"
"Since four o'clock."
"Anyone else?"
"Yes, the constable here."
"And you have touched nothing?"
"Nothing."
"You have acted with great discretion. Who sent for you?"
"The housemaid, Saunders."
"Was it she who gave the alarm?"
"She and Mrs. King, the cook."
"Where are they now?"
"In the kitchen, I believe."
"Then I think we had better hear their story at once."

The old hall, oak-panelled and high-windowed, had been turned into a court of investigation. Holmes sat in a great, old-fashioned chair, his inexorable eyes gleaming out of his haggard face. I could read in them a set purpose to devote his life to this quest until the client whom he had failed to save should at last be avenged. The trim Inspector Martin, the old, gray-headed country doctor, myself, and a stolid village policeman made up the rest of that strange company.

The two women told their story clearly enough. They had been aroused from their sleep by the sound of an explosion, which had been followed a minute later by a second one. They slept in adjoining rooms, and Mrs. King had rushed in to Saunders. Together they had descended the stairs. The door of the study was open, and a candle was burning upon the table. Their master lay upon his face in the centre of the room. He was quite dead. Near the window his wife was crouching, her head leaning against the wall. She was horribly wounded, and the side of her face was red with blood. She breathed heavily, but was incapable of saying anything. The passage, as well as the room, was full of smoke and the smell of powder. The window was certainly shut and fastened upon the inside. Both women were positive upon the point. They had at once sent for the doctor and for the constable. Then, with the aid of the groom and the stable-boy, they had conveyed their injured mistress to her room. Both she and her husband had occupied the bed. She was clad in her dress—he in his dressing-gown, over his night-clothes. Nothing had been moved in the study. So far as they knew, there had never been any quarrel between husband and wife. They had always looked upon them as a very united couple.

These were the main points of the servants' evidence. In answer to Inspector Martin, they were clear that every door was fastened upon the inside, and that no one could have escaped from the house. In answer to Holmes, they both remembered that they were conscious of the smell of powder from the moment that they ran out of their rooms upon the top floor. "I commend that fact very carefully to your attention," said Holmes to his professional colleague. "And now I think that we are in a position to undertake a thorough examination of the room."

The study proved to be a small chamber, lined on three sides with books, and with a writing-table facing an ordinary window, which looked out upon the garden. Our first attention was given to the body of the unfortunate squire, whose huge frame lay stretched across the room. His disordered dress showed that he had been hastily aroused from sleep. The bullet had been fired at him from the front, and had remained in his body, after penetrating the heart. His death had certainly been instantaneous and painless. There was no powder-marking either upon his dressing-gown or on his hands. According to the country surgeon, the lady had stains upon her face, but none upon her hand.

"The absence of the latter means nothing, though its presence may mean everything," said Holmes. "Unless the
powder from a badly fitting cartridge happens to spurt backward, one may fire many shots without leaving a sign. I would suggest that Mr. Cubitt's body may now be removed. I suppose, Doctor, you have not recovered the bullet which wounded the lady?"

"A serious operation will be necessary before that can be done. But there are still four cartridges in the revolver. Two have been fired and two wounds inflicted, so that each bullet can be accounted for."

"So it would seem," said Holmes. "Perhaps you can account also for the bullet which has so obviously struck the edge of the window?"

He had turned suddenly, and his long, thin finger was pointing to a hole which had been drilled right through the lower window-sash, about an inch above the bottom.

"By George!" cried the inspector. "How ever did you see that?"

"Because I looked for it."

"Wonderful!" said the country doctor. "You are certainly right, sir. Then a third shot has been fired, and therefore a third person must have been present. But who could that have been, and how could he have got away?"

"That is the problem which we are now about to solve," said Sherlock Holmes. "You remember, Inspector Martin, when the servants said that on leaving their room they were at once conscious of a smell of powder, I remarked that the point was an extremely important one?"

"Yes, sir; but I confess I did not quite follow you."

"It suggested that at the time of the firing, the window as well as the door of the room had been open. Otherwise the fumes of powder could not have been blown so rapidly through the house. A draught in the room was necessary for that. Both door and window were only open for a very short time, however."

"How do you prove that?"

"Because the candle was not guttered."

"Capital!" cried the inspector. "Capital!"

"Feeling sure that the window had been open at the time of the tragedy, I conceived that there might have been a third person in the affair, who stood outside this opening and fired through it. Any shot directed at this person might hit the sash. I looked, and there, sure enough, was the bullet mark!"

"But how came the window to be shut and fastened?"

"The woman's first instinct would be to shut and fasten the window. But, halloa! What is this?"

It was a lady's hand-bag which stood upon the study table—a trim little handbag of crocodile-skin and silver. Holmes opened it and turned the contents out. There were twenty fifty-pound notes of the Bank of England, held together by an india-rubber band—nothing else.

"This must be preserved, for it will figure in the trial," said Holmes, as he handed the bag with its contents to the inspector. "It is now necessary that we should try to throw some light upon this third bullet, which has clearly, from the splintering of the wood, been fired from inside the room. I should like to see Mrs. King, the cook, again. You said, Mrs. King, that you were awakened by a LOUD explosion. When you said that, did you mean that it seemed to you to be louder than the second one?"

"Well, sir, it wakened me from my sleep, so it is hard to judge. But it did seem very loud."

"You don't think that it might have been two shots fired almost at the same instant?"

"I am sure I couldn't say, sir."

"I believe that it was undoubtedly so. I rather think, Inspector Martin, that we have now exhausted all that this room can teach us. If you will kindly step round with me, we shall see what fresh evidence the garden has to offer."

A flower-bed extended up to the study window, and we all broke into an exclamation as we approached it. The flowers were trampled down, and the soft soil was imprinted all over with footmarks. Large, masculine feet they were, with peculiarly long, sharp toes. Holmes hunted about among the grass and leaves like a retriever after a wounded bird. Then, with a cry of satisfaction, he bent forward and picked up a little brazen cylinder.

"I thought so," said he, "the revolver had an ejector, and here is the third cartridge. I really think, Inspector Martin, that our case is almost complete."

The country inspector's face had shown his intense amazement at the rapid and masterful progress of Holmes's investigation. At first he had shown some disposition to assert his own position, but now he was overcome with admiration, and ready to follow without question wherever Holmes led.

"Whom do you suspect?" he asked.

"I'll go into that later. There are several points in this problem which I have not been able to explain to you yet. Now that I have got so far, I had best proceed on my own lines, and then clear the whole matter up once and for all."

"Just as you wish, Mr. Holmes, so long as we get our man."

"I have no desire to make mysteries, but it is impossible at the moment of action to enter into long and complex explanations. I have the threads of this affair all in my hand. Even if this lady should never recover consciousness,
we can still reconstruct the events of last night and insure that justice be done. First of all, I wish to know whether there is any inn in this neighbourhood known as 'Elrige's'?

The servants were cross-questioned, but none of them had heard of such a place. The stable-boy threw a light upon the matter by remembering that a farmer of that name lived some miles off, in the direction of East Ruston.

"Is it a lonely farm?"

"Very lonely, sir."

"Perhaps they have not heard yet of all that happened here during the night?"

"Maybe not, sir."

Holmes thought for a little, and then a curious smile played over his face.

"Saddle a horse, my lad," said he. "I shall wish you to take a note to Elrige's Farm."

He took from his pocket the various slips of the dancing men. With these in front of him, he worked for some time at the study-table. Finally he handed a note to the boy, with directions to put it into the hands of the person to whom it was addressed, and especially to answer no questions of any sort which might be put to him. I saw the outside of the note, addressed in straggling, irregular characters, very unlike Holmes's usual precise hand. It was consigned to Mr. Abe Slaney, Elriges Farm, East Ruston, Norfolk.

"I think, Inspector," Holmes remarked, "that you would do well to telegraph for an escort, as, if my calculations prove to be correct, you may have a particularly dangerous prisoner to convey to the county jail. The boy who takes this note could no doubt forward your telegram. If there is an afternoon train to town, Watson, I think we should do well to take it, as I have a chemical analysis of some interest to finish, and this investigation draws rapidly to a close."

When the youth had been dispatched with the note, Sherlock Holmes gave his instructions to the servants. If any visitor were to call asking for Mrs. Hilton Cubitt, no information should be given as to her condition, but he was to be shown at once into the drawing-room. He impressed these points upon them with the utmost earnestness. Finally he led the way into the drawing-room, with the remark that the business was now out of our hands, and that we must while away the time as best we might until we could see what was in store for us. The doctor had departed to his patients, and only the inspector and myself remained.

"I think that I can help you to pass an hour in an interesting and profitable manner," said Holmes, drawing his chair up to the table, and spreading out in front of him the various papers upon which were recorded the antics of the dancing men. "As to you, friend Watson, I owe you every atonement for having allowed your natural curiosity to remain so long unsatisfied. To you, Inspector, the whole incident may appeal as a remarkable professional study. I must tell you, first of all, the interesting circumstances connected with the previous consultations which Mr. Hilton Cubitt has had with me in Baker Street." He then shortly recapitulated the facts which have already been recorded. "I have here in front of me these singular productions, at which one might smile, had they not proved themselves to be the forerunners of so terrible a tragedy. I am fairly familiar with all forms of secret writings, and am myself the author of a trifling monograph upon the subject, in which I analyze one hundred and sixty separate ciphers, but I confess that this is entirely new to me. The object of those who invented the system has apparently been to conceal that these characters convey a message, and to give the idea that they are the mere random sketches of children.

"Having once recognized, however, that the symbols stood for letters, and having applied the rules which guide us in all forms of secret writings, the solution was easy enough. The first message submitted to me was so short that it was impossible for me to do more than to say, with some confidence, that the symbol stood for E. As you are aware, E is the most common letter in the English alphabet, and it predominates to so marked an extent that even in a short sentence one would expect to find it most often. Out of fifteen symbols in the first message, four were the same, so it was reasonable to set this down as E. It might be 'sever,' or 'lever,' or 'never.' There can be no question that the latter as a reply to an
appeal is far the most probable, and the circumstances pointed to its being a reply written by the lady. Accepting it as correct, we are now able to say that the symbols stand respectively for N, V, and R.

"Even now I was in considerable difficulty, but a happy thought put me in possession of several other letters. It occurred to me that if these appeals came, as I expected, from someone who had been intimate with the lady in her early life, a combination which contained two E's with three letters between might very well stand for the name 'ELSLIE.' On examination I found that such a combination formed the termination of the message which was three times repeated. It was certainly some appeal to 'Elsie.' In this way I had got my L, S, and I. But what appeal could it be? There were only four letters in the word which preceded 'Elsie,' and it ended in E. Surely the word must be 'COME.' I tried all other four letters ending in E, but could find none to fit the case. So now I was in possession of C, O, and M, and I was in a position to attack the first message once more, dividing it into words and putting dots for each symbol which was still unknown. So treated, it worked out in this fashion:

.M .ERE .E SL.NE.

"Now the first letter CAN only be A, which is a most useful discovery, since it occurs no fewer than three times in this short sentence, and the H is also apparent in the second word. Now it becomes:

AM HERE A.E SLANE.

Or, filling in the obvious vacancies in the name:

AM HERE ABE SLANEY.

I had so many letters now that I could proceed with considerable confidence to the second message, which worked out in this fashion:

A. ELRI. ES.

Here I could only make sense by putting T and G for the missing letters, and supposing that the name was that of some house or inn at which the writer was staying."

Inspector Martin and I had listened with the utmost interest to the full and clear account of how my friend had produced results which had led to so complete a command over our difficulties.

"What did you do then, sir?" asked the inspector.

"I had every reason to suppose that this Abe Slaney was an American, since Abe is an American contraction, and since a letter from America had been the starting-point of all the trouble. I had also every cause to think that there was some criminal secret in the matter. The lady's allusions to her past, and her refusal to take her husband into her confidence, both pointed in that direction. I therefore cabled to my friend, Wilson Hargreave, of the New York Police Bureau, who has more than once made use of my knowledge of London crime. I asked him whether the name of Abe Slaney was known to him. Here is his reply: 'The most dangerous crook in Chicago.' On the very evening upon which I had his answer, Hilton Cubitt sent me the last message from Slaney. Working with known letters, it took this form:

ELSIE .RE.ARE TO MEET THY GO.

The addition of a P and a D completed a message which showed me that the rascal was proceeding from persuasion to threats, and my knowledge of the crooks of Chicago prepared me to find that he might very rapidly put his words into action. I at once came to Norfolk with my friend and colleague, Dr. Watson, but, unhappily, only in time to find that the worst had already occurred."

"It is a privilege to be associated with you in the handling of a case," said the inspector, warmly. "You will excuse me, however, if I speak frankly to you. You are only answerable to yourself, but I have to answer to my superiors. If this Abe Slaney, living at Elrige's, is indeed the murderer, and if  he has made his escape while I am seated here, I should certainly get into serious trouble."

"You need not be uneasy. He will not try to escape."

"How do you know?"

"To fly would be a confession of guilt."

"Then let us go arrest him."

"I expect him here every instant."

"But why should he come."

"Because I have written and asked him."

"But this is incredible, Mr. Holmes! Why should he come because you have asked him? Would not such a request rather rouse his suspicions and cause him to fly?"

"I think I have known how to frame the letter," said Sherlock Holmes. "In fact, if I am not very much mistaken, here is the gentleman himself coming up the drive."

A man was striding up the path which led to the door. He was a tall, handsome, swarthy fellow, clad in a suit of
gray flannel, with a Panama hat, a bristling black beard, and a great, aggressive hooked nose, and flourishing a cane as he walked. He swaggered up a path as if as if the place belonged to him, and we heard his loud, confident peal at the bell.

"I think, gentlemen," said Holmes, quietly, "that we had best take up our position behind the door. Every precaution is necessary when dealing with such a fellow. You will need your handcuffs, Inspector. You can leave the talking to me."

We waited in silence for a minute--one of those minutes which one can never forget. Then the door opened and the man stepped in. In an instant Holmes clapped a pistol to his head, and Martin slipped the handcuffs over his wrists. It was all done so swiftly and deftly that the fellow was helpless before he knew that he was attacked. He glared from one to the other of us with a pair of blazing black eyes. Then he burst into a bitter laugh.

"Well, gentlemen, you have the drop on me this time. I seem to have knocked up against something hard. But I came here in answer to a letter from Mrs. Hilton Cubitt. Don't tell me that she is in this? Don't tell me that she helped to set a trap for me?"

"Mrs. Hilton Cubitt was seriously injured, and is at death's door."

"You're crazy!" he cried, fiercely. "It was he that was hurt, not she. Who would have hurt little Elsie? I may have threatened her--God forgive me!--but I would not have touched a hair of her pretty head. Take it back--you! Say that she is not hurt!"

"She was found badly wounded, by the side of her dead husband."

He sank with a deep groan on the settee and buried his face in his manacled hands. For five minutes he was silent. Then he raised his face once more, and spoke with the cold composure of despair.

"I have nothing to hide from you, gentlemen," said he. "If I shot the man he had his shot at me, and there's no murder in that. But if you think I could have hurt that woman, then you don't know either me or her. I tell you, there was never a man in this world loved a woman more than I loved her. I had a right to her. She was pledged to me years ago. Who was this Englishman that he should come between us? I tell you, that I had the first right to her, and that I was only claiming my own.

"She broke away from your influence when she found the man that you are," said Holmes, sternly. "She fled from America to avoid you, and she married an honourable gentleman in England. You dogged her and followed her and made her life a misery to her, in order to induce her to abandon the husband whom she loved and respected in order to fly with you, whom she feared and hated. You have ended by bringing about the death of a noble man and driving his wife to suicide. That is your record in this business, Mr. Abe Slaney, and you will answer for it to the law."

"If Elsie dies, I care nothing what becomes of me," said the American. "I guess the very best case I can make for myself is the absolute naked truth."

"I ask nothing better," said the American. "I guess the very best case I can make for myself is the absolute naked truth."

"It is my duty to warn you that it will be used against you," cried the inspector, with the magnificent fair play of the British criminal law.

Slaney shrugged his shoulders.

"I'll chance that," said he. "First of all, I want you gentlemen to understand that I have known this lady since she was a child. There were seven of us in a gang in Chicago, and Elsie's father was the boss of the Joint. He was a clever man, was old Patrick. It was he who invented that writing, which would pass as a child's scrawl unless you just happened to have the key to it. Well, Elsie learned some of our ways, but she couldn't stand the business, and she had a bit of honest money of her own, so she gave us all the slip and got away to London. She had been engaged to me, and she would have married me, I believe, if I had taken over another profession, but she would have nothing
to do with anything on the cross. It was only after her marriage to this Englishman that I was able to find out where she was. I wrote to her, but got no answer. After that I came over, and, as letters were no use, I put my messages where she could read them.

Slaney is arrested.

"Well, I have been here a month now. I lived in that farm, where I had a room down below, and could get in and out every night, and no one the wiser. I tried all I could to coax Elsie away. I knew that she read the messages, for once she wrote an answer under one of them. Then my temper got the better of me, and I began to threaten her. She sent me a letter then, imploring me to go away, and saying that it would break her heart if any scandal should come upon her husband. She said that she would come down when her husband was asleep at three in the morning, and speak with me through the end window, if I would go away afterwards and leave her in peace. She came down and brought money with her, trying to bribe me to go. This made me mad, and I caught her arm and tried to pull her through the window. At that moment in rushed the husband with his revolver in his hand. Elsie had sunk down upon the floor, and we were face to face. I was heeled also, and I held up my gun to scare him off and let me get away. He fired and missed me. I pulled off almost at the same instant, and down he dropped. I made away across the garden, and as I went I heard the window shut behind me. That's God's truth, gentlemen, every word of it, and I heard no more about it until that lad came riding up with a note which made me walk in here, like a jay, and give myself into your hands."

A cab had driven up whilst the American had been talking. Two uniformed policemen sat inside. Inspector Martin rose and touched his prisoner on the shoulder.

"It is time for us to go."

"Can I see her first?"

"No, she is not conscious. Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I only hope that if ever again I have an important case, I shall have the good fortune to have you by my side."

We stood at the window and watched the cab drive away. As I turned back, my eye caught the pellet of paper which the prisoner had tossed upon the table. It was the note with which Holmes had decoyed him.

"See if you can read it, Watson," said he, with a smile.

It contained no word, but this little line of dancing men

"If you use the code which I have explained," said Holmes, "you will find that it simply means 'Come here at once.' I was convinced that it was an invitation which he would not refuse, since he could never imagine that it could come from anyone but the lady. And so, my dear Watson, we have ended by turning the dancing men to good when they have so often been the agents of evil, and I think that I have fulfilled my promise of giving you something unusual for your notebook. Three-forty is our train, and I fancy we should be back in Baker Street for dinner."

Only one word of epilogue. The American, Abe Slaney, was condemned to death at the winter assizes at Norwich, but his penalty was changed to penal servitude in consideration of mitigating circumstances, and the certainty that Hilton Cubitt had fired the first shot. Of Mrs. Hilton Cubitt I only know that I have heard she recovered entirely, and that she still remains a widow, devoting her whole life to the care of the poor and to the administration of her husband's estate.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SOLITARY CYCLIST

From the years 1894 to 1901 inclusive, Mr. Sherlock Holmes was a very busy man. It is safe to say that there was no public case of any difficulty in which he was not consulted during those eight years, and there were hundreds of private cases, some of them of the most intricate and extraordinary character, in which he played a prominent
part. Many startling successes and a few unavoidable failures were the outcome of this long period of continuous work. As I have preserved very full notes of all these cases, and was myself personally engaged in many of them, it may be imagined that it is no easy task to know which I should select to lay before the public. I shall, however, preserve my former rule, and give the preference to those cases which derive their interest not so much from the brutality of the crime as from the ingenuity and dramatic quality of the solution. For this reason I will now lay before the reader the facts connected with Miss Violet Smith, the solitary cyclist of Charlington, and the curious sequel of our investigation, which culminated in unexpected tragedy. It is true that the circumstance did not admit of any striking illustration of those powers for which my friend was famous, but there were some points about the case which made it stand out in those long records of crime from which I gather the material for these little narratives.

On referring to my notebook for the year 1895, I find that it was upon Saturday, the 23rd of April, that we first heard of Miss Violet Smith. Her visit was, I remember, extremely unwelcome to Holmes, for he was immersed at the moment in a very abstruse and complicated problem concerning the peculiar persecution to which John Vincent Harden, the well known tobacco millionaire, had been subjected. My friend, who loved above all things precision and concentration of thought, resented anything which distracted his attention from the matter in hand. And yet, without a harshness which was foreign to his nature, it was impossible to refuse to listen to the story of the young and beautiful woman, tall, graceful, and queenly, who presented herself at Baker Street late in the evening, and implored his assistance and advice. It was vain to urge that his time was already fully occupied, for the young lady had come with the determination to tell her story, and it was evident that nothing short of force could get her out of the room until she had done so. With a resigned air and a somewhat weary smile, Holmes begged the beautiful intruder to take a seat, and to inform us what it was that was troubling her.

"At least it cannot be your health," said he, as his keen eyes darted over her, "so ardent a bicyclist must be full of energy."

She glanced down in surprise at her own feet, and I observed the slight roughening of the side of the sole caused by the friction of the edge of the pedal.

"Yes, I bicycle a good deal, Mr. Holmes, and that has something to do with my visit to you to-day."

My friend took the lady's ungloved hand, and examined it with as close an attention and as little sentiment as a scientist would show to a specimen.

"You will excuse me, I am sure. It is my business," said he, as he dropped it. "I nearly fell into the error of supposing that you were typewriting. Of course, it is obvious that it is music. You observe the spatulate finger-ends, Watson, which is common to both professions? There is a spirituality about the face, however"--she gently turned it towards the light--"which the typewriter does not generate. This lady is a musician."

"Yes, Mr. Holmes, I teach music."
"In the country, I presume, from your complexion."
"Yes, sir, near Farnham, on the borders of Surrey."

"A beautiful neighbourhood, and full of the most interesting associations. You remember, Watson, that it was near there that we took Archie Stamford, the forger. Now, Miss Violet, what has happened to you, near Farnham, on the borders of Surrey?"

The young lady, with great clearness and composure, made the following curious statement:

"My father is dead, Mr. Holmes. He was James Smith, who conducted the orchestra at the old Imperial Theatre. My mother and I were left without a relation in the world except one uncle, Ralph Smith, who went to Africa twenty-five years ago, and we have never had a word from him since. When father died, we were left very poor, but one day we were told that there was an advertisement in the TIMES, inquiring for our whereabouts. You can imagine how excited we were, for we thought that someone had left us a fortune. We went at once to the lawyer whose name was given in the paper. There we, met two gentlemen, Mr. Carruthers and Mr. Woodley, who were home on a visit from South Africa. They said that my uncle was a friend of theirs, that he had died some months before in great poverty in Johannesburg, and that he had asked them with his last breath to hunt up his relations, and see that they were in no want. It seemed strange to us that Uncle Ralph, who took no notice of us when he was alive, should be so careful to look after us when he was dead, but Mr. Carruthers explained that the reason was that my uncle had just heard of the death of his brother, and so felt responsible for our fate."

"Excuse me," said Holmes. "When was this interview?"
"Last December--four months ago."
"Pray proceed."

"Mr. Woodley seemed to me to be a most odious person. He was for ever making eyes at me--a coarse, puffy-faced, red-moustached young man, with his hair plastered down on each side of his forehead. I thought that he was perfectly hateful--and I was sure that Cyril would not wish me to know such a person."

"Oh, Cyril is his name!" said Holmes, smiling.
The young lady blushed and laughed.

"Yes, Mr. Holmes, Cyril Morton, an electrical engineer, and we hope to be married at the end of the summer. Dear me, how did I get talking about him? What I wished to say was that Mr. Woodley was perfectly odious, but that Mr. Carruthers, who was a much older man, was more agreeable. He was a dark, sallow, clean-shaven, silent person, but he had polite manners and a pleasant smile. He inquired how we were left, and on finding that we were very poor, he suggested that I should come and teach music to his only daughter, aged ten. I said that I did not like to leave my mother, on which he suggested that I should go home to her every week-end, and he offered me a hundred a year, which was certainly splendid pay. So it ended by my accepting, and I went down to Chiltern Grange, about six miles from Farnham. Mr. Carruthers was a widower, but he had engaged a lady housekeeper, a very respectable, elderly person, called Mrs. Dixon, to look after his establishment. The child was a dear, and everything promised well. Mr. Carruthers was very kind and very musical, and we had most pleasant evenings together. Every week-end I went home to my mother in town.

"The first flaw in my happiness was the arrival of the red-moustached Mr. Woodley. He came for a visit of a week, and oh! it seemed three months to me. He was a dreadful person—a bully to everyone else, but to me something infinitely worse. He made odious love to me, boasted of his wealth, said that if I married him I could have the finest diamonds in London, and finally, when I would have nothing to do with him, he seized me in his arms one day after dinner—he was hideously strong—and swore that he would not let me go until I had kissed him. Mr. Carruthers came in and tore him from me, on which he turned upon his own host, knocking him down and cutting his face open. That was the end of his visit, as you can imagine. Mr. Carruthers apologized to me next day, and assured me that I should never be exposed to such an insult again. I have not seen Mr. Woodley since.

"And now, Mr. Holmes, I come at last to the special thing which has caused me to ask your advice to-day. You must know that every Saturday forenoon I ride on my bicycle to Farnham Station, in order to get the 12:22 to town. The road from Chiltern Grange is a lonely one, and at one spot it is particularly so, for it lies for over a mile between Charleston Heath upon one side and the woods which lie round Charleston Hall upon the other. You could not find a more lonely tract of road anywhere, and it is quite rare to meet so much as a cart, or a peasant, until you reach the high road near Crooksby Hill. Two weeks ago I was passing this place, when I chanced to look back over my shoulder, and about two hundred yards behind me I saw a man, also on a bicycle. He seemed to be a middle-aged man, with a short, dark beard. I looked back before I reached Farnham, but the man was gone, so I thought no more about it. But you can imagine how surprised I was, Mr. Holmes, when, on my return on the Monday, I saw the same man on the same stretch of road. My astonishment was increased when the incident occurred again, exactly as before, on the following Saturday and Monday. He always kept his distance and did not molest me in any way, but still it certainly was very odd. I mentioned it to Mr. Carruthers, who seemed interested in what I said, and told me that he had ordered a horse and trap, so that in future I should not pass over these lonely roads without some companion.

"The horse and trap were to have come this week, but for some reason they were not delivered, and again I had to cycle to the station. That was this morning. You can think that I looked out when I came to Charleston Heath, and there, sure enough, was the man, exactly as he had been the two weeks before. He always kept so far from me that I could not clearly see his face, but it was certainly someone whom I did not know. He was dressed in a dark suit with a cloth cap. The only thing about his face that I could clearly see was his dark beard. To-day I was not alarmed, but I was filled with curiosity, and I determined to find out who he was and what he wanted. I slowed down my machine, but he slowed down his. Then I stopped altogether, but he stopped also. Then I laid a trap for him. There is a sharp turning of the road, and I pedalled very quickly round this, and then I stopped and waited. I expected him to shoot round and pass me before he could stop. But he never appeared. Then I went back and looked round the corner. I could see a mile of road, but he was not on it. To make it the more extraordinary, there was no side road at this point down which he could have gone."

Holmes chuckled and rubbed his hands. "This case certainly presents some features of its own," said he. "How much time elapsed between your turning the corner and your discovery that the road was clear?"

"Two or three minutes."

"Then he could not have retreated down the road, and you say that there are no side roads?"

"None."

"Then he certainly took a footpath on one side or the other."

"It could not have been on the side of the heath, or I should have seen him."

"So, by the process of exclusion, we arrive at the fact that he made his way toward Charleston Hall, which, as I understand, is situated in its own grounds on one side of the road. Anything else?"

"Nothing, Mr. Holmes, save that I was so perplexed that I felt I should not be happy until I had seen you and had your advice."
Holmes sat in silence for some little time.
"Where is the gentleman to whom you are engaged?" he asked at last.
"He is in the Midland Electrical Company, at Coventry."
"He would not pay you a surprise visit?"
"Oh, Mr. Holmes! As if I should not know him!"
"Have you had any other admirers?"
"Several before I knew Cyril."
"And since?"
"There was this dreadful man, Woodley, if you can call him an admirer."
"No one else?"
Our fair client seemed a little confused.
"Who was he?" asked Holmes.
"Oh, it may be a mere fancy of mine; but it had seemed to me sometimes that my employer, Mr. Carruthers, takes a great deal of interest in me. We are thrown rather together. I play his accompaniments in the evening. He has never said anything. He is a perfect gentleman. But a girl always knows."
"Ha!" Holmes looked grave. "What does he do for a living?"
"He is a rich man."
"No carriages or horses?"
"Well, at least he is fairly well-to-do. But he goes into the city two or three times a week. He is deeply interested in South African gold shares."
"You will let me know any fresh development, Miss Smith. I am very busy just now, but I will find time to make some inquiries into your case. In the meantime, take no step without letting me know. Good-bye, and I trust that we shall have nothing but good news from you."
"It is part of the settled order of Nature that such a girl should have followers," said Holmes, he pulled at his meditative pipe, "but for choice not on bicycles in lonely country roads. Some secretive lover, beyond all doubt. But there are curious and suggestive details about the case, Watson."
"That he should appear only at that point?"
"Exactly. Our first effort must be to find who are the tenants of Charlington Hall. Then, again, how about the connection between Carruthers and Woodley, since they appear to be men of such a different type? How came they BOTH to be so keen upon looking up Ralph Smith's relations? One more point. What sort of a menage is it which pays double the market price for a governess but does not keep a horse, although six miles from the station? Odd, Watson--very odd!"
"You will go down?"
"No, my dear fellow, YOU will go down. This may be some trifling intrigue, and I cannot break my other important research for the sake of it. On Monday you will arrive early at Farnham; you will conceal yourself near Charlington Heath; you will observe these facts for yourself, and act as your own judgment advises. Then, having inquired as to the occupants of the Hall, you will come back to me and report. And now, Watson, not another word of the matter until we have a few solid stepping-stones on which we may hope to get across to our solution."
We had ascertained from the lady that she went down upon the Monday by the train which leaves Waterloo at 9:50, so I started early and caught the 9:13. At Farnham Station I had no difficulty in being directed to Charlington Heath. It was impossible to mistake the scene of the young lady's adventure, for the road runs between the open heath on one side and an old yew hedge upon the other, surrounding a park which is studded with magnificent trees. There was a main gateway of lichen-studded stone, each side pillar surmounted by mouldering heraldic emblems, but besides this central carriage drive I observed several points where there were gaps in the hedge and paths leading through them. The house was invisible from the road, but the surroundings all spoke of gloom and decay.
The heath was covered with golden patches of flowering gorse, gleaming magnificently in the light of the bright spring sunshine. Behind one of these clumps I took up my position, so as to command both the gateway of the Hall and a long stretch of the road upon either side. It had been deserted when I left it, but now I saw a cyclist riding down it from the opposite direction to that in which I had come. He was clad in a dark suit, and I saw that he had a black beard. On reaching the end of the Charlington grounds, he sprang from his machine and led it through a gap in the hedge, disappearing from my view.
A quarter of an hour passed, and then a second cyclist appeared. This time it was the young lady coming from the station. I saw her look about her as she came to the Charlington hedge. An instant later the man emerged from his hiding-place, sprang upon his cycle, and followed her. In all the broad landscape those were the only moving figures, the graceful girl sitting very straight upon her machine, and the man behind her bending low over his handle-bar with a curiously furtive suggestion in every movement. She looked back at him and slowed her pace. He
slowed also. She stopped. He at once stopped, too, keeping two hundred yards behind her. Her next movement was as unexpected as it was spirited. She suddenly whisked her wheels round and dashed straight at him. He was as quick as she, however, and darted off in desperate flight. Presently she came back up the road again, her head haughtily in the air, not deigning to take any further notice of her silent attendant. He had turned also, and still kept his distance until the curve of the road hid them from my sight.

I remained in my hiding-place, and it was well that I did so, for presently the man reappeared, cycling slowly back. He turned in at the Hall gates, and dismounted from his machine. For some minutes I could see him standing among the trees. His hands were raised, and he seemed to be settling his necktie. Then he mounted his cycle, and rode away from me down the drive towards the Hall. I ran across the heath and peered through the trees. Far away I could catch glimpses of the old gray building with its bristling Tudor chimneys, but the drive ran through a dense shrubbery, and I saw no more of my man.

However, it seemed to me that I had done a fairly good morning's work, and I walked back in high spirits to Farnham. The local house agent could tell me nothing about Charlington Hall, and referred me to a well known firm in Pall Mall. There I halted on my way home, and met with courtesy from the representative. No, I could not have Charlington Hall for the summer. I was just too late. It had been let about a month ago. Mr. Williamson was the name of the tenant. He was a respectable, elderly gentleman. The polite agent was afraid he could say no more, as the affairs of his clients were not matters which he could discuss.

Mr. Sherlock Holmes listened with attention to the long report which I was able to present to him that evening, but it did not elicit that word of curt praise which I had hoped for and should have valued. On the contrary, his austere face was even more severe than usual as he commented upon the things that I had done and the things that I had not.

"Your hiding-place, my dear Watson, was very faulty. You should have been behind the hedge, then you would have had a close view of this interesting person. As it is, you were some hundreds of yards away and can tell me even less than Miss Smith. She thinks she does not know the man; I am convinced she does. Why, otherwise, should he be so desperately anxious that she should not get so near him as to see his features? You describe him as bending over the handle-bar. Concealment again, you see. You really have done remarkably badly. He returns to the house, and you want to find out who he is. You come to a London house agent!"

"What should I have done?" I cried, with some heat.

"Gone to the nearest public-house. That is the centre of country gossip. They would have told you every name, from the master to the scullery-maid. Williamson? It conveys nothing to my mind. If he is an elderly man he is not this active cyclist who sprints away from that young lady's athletic pursuit. What have we gained by your expedition? The knowledge that the girl's story is true. I never doubted it. That there is a connection between the cyclist and the Hall. I never doubted that either. That the Hall is tenanted by Williamson. Who's the better for that? Well, well, my dear sir, don't look so depressed. We can do little more until next Saturday, and in the meantime I may make one or two inquiries myself."

Next morning, we had a note from Miss Smith, recounting shortly and accurately the very incidents which I had seen, but the pith of the letter lay in the postscript:

I am sure that you will respect my confidence, Mr. Holmes, when I tell you that my place here has become difficult, owing to the fact that my employer has proposed marriage to me. I am convinced that his feelings are most deep and most honourable. At the same time, my promise is of course given. He took my refusal very seriously, but also very gently. You can understand, however, that the situation is a little strained. "Our young friend seems to be getting into deep waters," said Holmes, thoughtfully, as he finished the letter. "The case certainly presents more features of interest and more possibility of development than I had originally thought. I should be none the worse for a quiet, peaceful day in the country, and I am inclined to run down this afternoon and test one or two theories which I have formed."

Holmes's quiet day in the country had a singular termination, for he arrived at Baker Street late in the evening, with a cut lip and a discoloured lump upon his forehead, besides a general air of dissipation which would have made his own person the fitting object of a Scotland Yard investigation. He was immensely tickled by his own adventures and laughed heartily as he recounted them.

"I get so little active exercise that it is always a treat," said he. "You are aware that I have some proficiency in the good old British sport of boxing. Occasionally, it is of service, to-day, for example, I should have come to very ignominious grief without it."

I begged him to tell me what had occurred.

"I found that country pub which I had already recommended to your notice, and there I made my discreet inquiries. I was in the bar, and a garrulous landlord was giving me all that I wanted. Williamson is a white-bearded man, and he lives alone with a small staff of servants at the Hall. There is some rumor that he is or has been a..."
clergyman, but one or two incidents of his short residence at the Hall struck me as peculiarly unecclesiastical. I have already made some inquiries at a clerical agency, and they tell me that there WAS a man of that name in orders, whose career has been a singularly dark one. The landlord further informed me that there are usually week-end visitors--a warm lot, sir--at the Hall, and especially one gentleman with a red moustache, Mr. Woodley by name, who was always there. We had got as far as this, when who should walk in but the gentleman himself, who had been drinking his beer in the tap-room and had heard the whole conversation. Who was he? What did I want? What did I mean by asking questions? He had a fine flow of language, and his adjectives were very vigorous. He ended a string of abuse by a vicious backhander, which I failed to entirely avoid. The next few minutes were delicious. It was a straight left against a slogging ruffian. I emerged as you see me. Mr. Woodley went home in a cart. So ended my country trip, and it must be confessed that, however enjoyable, my day on the Surrey border has not been much more profitable than your own."

The Thursday brought us another letter from our client.

You will not be surprised, Mr. Holmes [said she] to hear that I am leaving Mr. Carruthers's employment. Even the high pay cannot reconcile me to the discomforts of my situation. On Saturday I come up to town, and I do not intend to return. Mr. Carruthers has got a trap, and so the dangers of the lonely road, if there ever were any dangers, are now over.

As to the special cause of my leaving, it is not merely the strained situation with Mr. Carruthers, but it is the reappearance of that odious man, Mr. Woodley. He was always hideous, but he looks more awful than ever now, for he appears to have had an accident and he is much disfigured. I saw him out of the window, but I am glad to say I did not meet him. He had a long talk with Mr. Carruthers, who seemed much excited afterwards. Woodley must be staying in the neighbourhood, for he did not sleep here, and yet I caught a glimpse of him again this morning, slinking about in the shrubbery. I would sooner have a savage wild animal loose about the place. I loathe and fear him more than I can say. How CAN Mr. Carruthers endure such a creature for a moment? However, all my troubles will be over on Saturday.

"So I trust, Watson, so I trust," said Holmes, gravely. "There is some deep intrigue going on round that little woman, and it is our duty to see that no one molests her upon that last journey. I think, Watson, that we must spare time to run down together on Saturday morning and make sure that this curious and inclusive investigation has no untoward ending."

I confess that I had not up to now taken a very serious view of the case, which had seemed to me rather grotesque and bizarre than dangerous. That a man should lie in wait for and follow a very handsome woman is no unheard-of thing, and if he has so little audacity that he not only dared not address her, but even fled from her approach, he was not a very formidable assailant. The ruffian Woodley was a very different person, but, except on one occasion, he had not molested our client, and now he visited the house of Carruthers without intruding upon her presence. The man on the bicycle was doubtless a member of those week-end parties at the Hall of which the publican had spoken, but who he was, or what he wanted, was as obscure as ever. It was the severity of Holmes's manner and the fact that he slipped a revolver into his pocket before leaving our rooms which impressed me with the feeling that tragedy might prove to lurk behind this curious train of events.

A rainy night had been followed by a glorious morning, and the heath-covered countryside, with the glowing clumps of flowering gorse, seemed all the more beautiful to eyes which were weary of the duns and drabs and slate grays of London. Holmes and I walked along the broad, sandy road inhaling the fresh morning air and rejoicing in the music of the birds and the fresh breath of the spring. From a rise of the road on the shoulder of Crooksbury Hill, we could see the grim Hall bristling out from amidst the ancient oaks, which, old as they were, were still younger than the building which they surrounded. Holmes pointed down the long tract of road which wound, a reddish yellow band, between the brown of the heath and the budding green of the woods. Far away, a black dot, we could see a vehicle moving in our direction. Holmes gave an exclamation of impatience.

"I have given a margin of half an hour," said he. "If that is her trap, she must be making for the earlier train. I fear, Watson, that she will be past Charlington before we can possibly meet her."

From the instant that we passed the rise, we could no longer see the vehicle, but we hastened onward at such a pace that my sedentary life began to tell upon me, and I was compelled to fall behind. Holmes, however, was always in training, for he had inexhaustible stores of nervous energy upon which to draw. His springy step never slowed until suddenly, when he was a hundred yards in front of me, he halted, and I saw him throw up his hand with a gesture of grief and despair. At the same instant an empty dog-cart, the horse cantering, the reins trailing, appeared round the curve of the road and rattled swiftly towards us.

"Too late, Watson, too late!" cried Holmes, as I ran panting to his side. "Fool that I was not to allow for that earlier train! It's abduction, Watson--abduction! Murder! Heaven knows what! Block the road! Stop the horse! That's right. Now, jump in, and let us see if I can repair the consequences of my own blunder."
We had sprung into the dog-cart, and Holmes, after turning the horse, gave it a sharp cut with the whip, and we flew back along the road. As we turned the curve, the whole stretch of road between the Hall and the heath was opened up. I grasped Holmes's arm.

"That's the man!" I gasped. A solitary cyclist was coming towards us. His head was down and his shoulders rounded, as he put every ounce of energy that he possessed on to the pedals. He was flying like a racer. Suddenly he raised his bearded face, saw us close to him, and pulled up, springing from his machine. That coal-black beard was in singular contrast to eyes were as bright as if he had a fever. He stared at us and at the dog-cart. Then a look of amazement came over his face.

"Halloa! Stop there!" he shouted, holding his bicycle to block our road. "Where did you get that dog-cart? Pull up, man!" he yelled, drawing a pistol from his side "Pull up, I say, or, by George, I'll put a bullet into your horse."

Holmes threw the reins into my lap and sprang down from the cart.

"You're the man we want to see. Where is Miss Violet Smith?" he said, in his quick, clear way.

"That's what I'm asking you. You're in her dog-cart. You ought to know where she is."

"We met the dog-cart on the road. There was no one in it. We drove back to help the young lady."

"Good Lord! Good Lord! What shall I do?" cried the stranger, in an ecstasy of despair. "They've got her, that hell-hound Woodley and the blackguard parson. Come, man, come, if you really are her friend. Stand by me and we'll save her, if I have to leave my carcass in Charlington Wood."

He ran distractedly, his pistol in his hand, towards a gap in the hedge. Holmes followed him, and I, leaving the horse grazing beside the road, followed Holmes.

"This is where they came through," said he, pointing to the marks of several feet upon the muddy path. "Halloa! Stop a minute! Who's this in the bush?"

It was a young fellow about seventeen, dressed like an ostler, with leather cords and gaiters. He lay upon his back, his knees drawn up, a terrible cut upon his head. He was insensible, but alive. A glance at his wound told me that it had not penetrated the bone.

"That's Peter, the groom," cried the stranger. "He drove her. The beasts have pulled him off and clubbed him. Let him lie; we can't do him any good, but we may save her from the worst fate that can befall a woman."

We ran frantically down the path, which wound among the trees. We had reached the shrubbery which surrounded the house when Holmes pulled up.

"They didn't go to the house. Here are their marks on the left--here, beside the laurel bushes. Ah! I said so."

As he spoke, a woman's shrill scream--a scream which vibrated with a frenzy of horror--burst from the thick, green clump of bushes in front of us. It ended suddenly on its highest note with a choke and a gurgle.

"This way! This way! They are in the bowling-alley," cried the stranger, darting through the bushes. "Ah, the cowardly dogs! Follow me, gentlemen! Too late! too late! by the living Jingo!"

We had broken suddenly into a lovely glade of greensward surrounded by ancient trees. On the farther side of it, under the shadow of a mighty oak, there stood a singular group of three people. One was a woman, our client, drooping and faint, a handkerchief round her mouth. Opposite her stood a brutal, heavy-faced, red-moustached young man, his gaitered legs parted wide, one arm akimbo, the other waving a riding crop, his whole attitude suggestive of triumphant bravado. Between them an elderly, gray-bearded man, wearing a short surplice over a light tweed suit, had evidently just completed the wedding service, for he pocketed his prayer-book as we appeared, and slapped the sinister bridegroom upon the back in jovial congratulation.

"They're married!" I gasped.

"Come on!" cried our guide, "come on!" He rushed across the glade, Holmes and I at his heels. As we approached, the lady staggered against the trunk of the tree for support. Williamson, the ex-clergyman, bowed to us with mock politeness, and the bully, Woodley, advanced with a shout of brutal and exultant laughter.

"You can take your beard off, Bob," said he. "I know you, right enough. Well, you and your pals have just come in time for me to be able to introduce you to Mrs. Woodley."

Our guide's answer was a singular one. He snatched off the dark beard which had disguised him and threw it on the ground, disclosing a long, sallow, clean-shaven face below it. Then he raised his revolver and covered the young ruffian, who was advancing upon him with his dangerous riding-crop swinging in his hand.

"Yes," said our ally, "I am Bob Carruthers, and I'll see this woman righted, if I have to swing for it. I told you what I'd do if you molested her, and, by the Lord! I'll be as good as my word."

"You're too late. She's my wife."

"No, she's your widow."

His revolver cracked, and I saw the blood spurt from the front of Woodley's waistcoat. He spun round with a scream and fell upon his back, his hideous red face turning suddenly to a dreadful mottled pallor. The old man, still clad in his surplice, burst into such a string of foul oaths as I have never heard, and pulled out a revolver of his own,
but, before he could raise it, he was looking down the barrel of Holmes's weapon.

"Enough of this," said my friend, coldly. "Drop that pistol! Watson, pick it up! Hold it to his head. Thank you. You, Carruthers, give me that revolver. We'll have no more violence. Come, hand it over!"

"Who are you, then?"
"My name is Sherlock Holmes."
"Good Lord!"
"You have heard of me, I see. I will represent the official police until their arrival. Here, you!" he shouted to a frightened groom, who had appeared at the edge of the glade. "Come here. Take this note as hard as you can ride to Farnham." He scribbled a few words upon a leaf from his notebook. "Give it to the superintendent at the police-station. Until he comes, I must detain you all under my personal custody."

The strong, masterful personality of Holmes dominated the tragic scene, and all were equally puppets in his hands. Williamson and Carruthers found themselves carrying the wounded Woodley into the house, and I gave my arm to the frightened girl. The injured man was laid on his bed, and at Holmes's request I examined him. I carried my report to where he sat in the old tapestry-hung dining-room with his two prisoners before him.

"He will live," said I.

"What!" cried Carruthers, springing out of his chair. "I'll go upstairs and finish him first. Do you tell me that that angel, is to be tied to Roaring Jack Woodley for life?"

"You need not concern yourself about that," said Holmes. "There are two very good reasons why she should, under no circumstances, be his wife. In the first place, we are very safe in questioning Mr. Williamson's right to solemnize a marriage."

"I have been ordained," cried the old rascal."
"And also unfrocked.

"Once a clergyman, always a clergyman."

"I think not. How about the license?"

"We had a license for the marriage. I have it here in my pocket."

"Then you got it by trick. But, in any case a forced marriage is no marriage, but it is a very serious felony, as you will discover before you have finished. You'll have time to think the point out during the next ten years or so, unless I am mistaken. As to you, Carruthers, you would have done better to keep your pistol in your pocket."

"I begin to think so, Mr. Holmes, but when I thought of all the precaution I had taken to shield this girl—for I loved her, Mr. Holmes, and it is the only time that ever I knew what love was—it fairly drove me mad to think that she was in the power of the greatest brute and bully in South Africa—a man whose name is a holy terror from Kimberley to Johannesburg. Why, Mr. Holmes, you'll hardly believe it, but ever since that girl has been in my employment I never once let her go past this house, where I knew the rascals were lurking, without following her on my bicycle, just to see that she came to no harm. I kept my distance from her, and I wore a beard, so that she should not recognize me, for she is a good and high-spirited girl, and she wouldn't have stayed in my employment long if she had thought that I was following her about the country roads."

"Why didn't you tell her of her danger?"

"Because then, again, she would have left me, and I couldn't bear to face that. Even if she couldn't love me, it was a great deal to me just to see her dainty form about the house, and to hear the sound of her voice."

"Well," said I, "you call that love, Mr. Carruthers, but I should call it selfishness."

"Maybe the two things go together. Anyhow, I couldn't let her go. Besides, with this crowd about, it was well that she should have someone near to look after her. Then, when the cable came, I knew they were bound to make a move."

"What cable?"

Carruthers took a telegram from his pocket "That's it," said he.

It was short and concise:

The old man is dead.

"Hum!" said Holmes. "I think I see how things worked, and I can understand how this message would, as you say, bring them to a head. But while you wait, you might tell me what you can."

The old reprobate with the surplice burst into a volley of bad language.

"By heaven!" said he, "if you squeal on us, Bob Carruthers, I'll serve you as you served Jack Woodley. You can bleat about the girl to your heart's content, for that's your own affair, but if you round on your pals to this plain-clothes copper, it will be the worst day's work that ever you did."

"Your reverence need not be excited," said Holmes, lighting a cigarette. "The case is clear enough against you, and all I ask is a few details for my private curiosity. However, if there's any difficulty in your telling me, I'll do the talking, and then you will see how far you have a chance of holding back your secrets. In the first place, three of you
came from South Africa on this game--you Williamson, you Carruthers, and Woodley."

"Lie number one," said the old man; "I never saw either of them until two months ago, and I have never been in
Africa in my life, so you can put that in your pipe and smoke it, Mr. Busybody Holmes!"

"What he says is true," said Carruthers.

"Well, well, two of you came over. His reverence is our own homemade article. You had known Ralph Smith in
South Africa. You had reason to believe he would not live long. You found out that his niece would inherit his
fortune. How's that--eh?"

Carruthers nodded and Williamson swore.

"She was next of kin, no doubt, and you were aware that the old fellow would make no will."

"Couldn't read or write," said Carruthers.

"So you came over, the two of you, and hunted up the girl. The idea was that one of you was to marry her, and
the other have a share of the plunder. For some reason, Woodley was chosen as the husband. Why was that?"

"We played cards for her on the voyage. He won."

"I see. You got the young lady into your service, and there Woodley was to do the courting. She recognized the
drunken brute that he was, and would have nothing to do with him. Meanwhile, your arrangement was rather upset
by the fact that you had yourself fallen in love with the lady. You could no longer bear the idea of this ruffian
owning her?"

"No, by George, I couldn't!"

"There was a quarrel between you. He left you in a rage, and began to make his own plans independently of
you."

"It strikes me, Williamson, there isn't very much that we can tell this gentleman," cried Carruthers, with a bitter
laugh. "Yes, we quarreled, and he knocked me down. I am level with him on that, anyhow. Then I lost sight of him.
That was when he picked up with this outcast padre here. I found that they had set up housekeeping together at this
place on the line that she had to pass for the station. I kept my eye on her after that, for I knew there was some
devilry in the wind. I saw them from time to time, for I was anxious to know what they were after. Two days ago
Woodley came up to my house with this cable, which showed that Ralph Smith was dead. He asked me if I would
stand by the bargain. I said I would not. He asked me if I would marry the girl myself and give him a share. I said I
would willingly do so, but that she would not have me. He said, 'Let us get her married first and after a week or two
she may see things a bit different.' I said I would have nothing to do with violence. So he went off cursing, like the
foul-mouthed blackguard that he was, and swearing that he would have her yet. She was leaving me this week-end,
and I had got a trap to take her to the station, but I was so uneasy in my mind that I followed her on my bicycle. She
had got a start, however, and before I could catch her, the mischief was done. The first thing I knew about it was
when I saw you two gentlemen driving back in her dog-cart."

Holmes rose and tossed the end of his cigarette into the grate. "I have been very obtuse, Watson," said he.

"When in your report you said that you had seen the cyclist as you thought arrange his necktie in the shrubbery, that
alone should have told me all. However, we may congratulate ourselves upon a curious and, in some respects, a
unique case. I perceive three of the county constabulary in the drive, and I am glad to see that the little ostler is able
to keep pace with them, so it is likely that neither he nor the interesting bridegroom will be permanently damaged by
their morning's adventures. I think, Watson, that in your medical capacity, you might wait upon Miss Smith and tell
her that if she is sufficiently recovered, we shall be happy to escort her to her mother's home. If she is not quite
convalescent you will find that a hint that we were about to telegraph to a young electrician in the Midlands would
probably complete the cure. As to you, Mr. Carruthers, I think that you have done what you could to make amends
for your share in an evil plot. There is my card, sir, and if my evidence can be of help in your trial, it shall be at your
disposal."

In the whirl of our incessant activity, it has often been difficult for me, as the reader has probably observed, to
round off my narratives, and to give those final details which the curious might expect. Each case has been the
prelude to another, and the crisis once over, the actors have passed for ever out of our busy lives. I find, however, a
short note at the end of my manuscript dealing with this case, in which I have put it upon record that Miss Violet
Smith did indeed inherit a large fortune, and that she is now the wife of Cyril Morton, the senior partner of Morton
& Kennedy, the famous Westminster electricians. Williamson and Woodley were both tried for abduction and
assault, the former getting seven years the latter ten. Of the fate of Carruthers, I have no record, but I am sure that
his assault was not viewed very gravely by the court, since Woodley had the reputation of being a most dangerous
ruffian, and I think that a few, months were sufficient to satisfy the demands of justice.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE PRIORY SCHOOL

We have had some dramatic entrances and exits upon our small stage at Baker Street, but I cannot recollect
anything more sudden and startling than the first appearance of Thorneycroft Huxtable, M.A., Ph.D., etc. His card,
which seemed too small to carry the weight of his academic distinctions, preceded him by a few seconds, and then he entered himself—so large, so pompous, and so dignified that he was the very embodiment of self-possession and solidity. And yet his first action, when the door had closed behind him, was to stagger against the table, whence he slipped down upon the floor, and there was that majestic figure prostrate and insensible upon our bearskin hearthrug.

We had sprung to our feet, and for a few moments we stared in silent amazement at this ponderous piece of wreckage, which told of some sudden and fatal storm far out on the ocean of life. Then Holmes hurried with a cushion for his head, and I with brandy for his lips. The heavy, white face was seamed with lines of trouble, the hanging pouches under the closed eyes were leaden in colour, the loose mouth drooped dolorously at the corners, the rolling chins were unshaven. Collar and shirt bore the grime of a long journey, and the hair bristled unkempt from the well-shaped head. It was a sorely stricken man who lay before us.

"What is it, Watson?" asked Holmes.

"Absolute exhaustion—possibly mere hunger and fatigue," said I, with my finger on the thready pulse, where the stream of life trickled thin and small.

"Return ticket from Mackleton, in the north of England," said Holmes, drawing it from the watch-pocket. "It is not twelve o'clock yet. He has certainly been an early starter."

The puckered eyelids had begun to quiver, and now a pair of vacant gray eyes looked up at us. An instant later the man had scrambled on to his feet, his face crimson with shame.

"Forgive this weakness, Mr. Holmes, I have been a little overwrought. Thank you, if I might have a glass of milk and a biscuit, I have no doubt that I should be better. I came personally, Mr. Holmes, in order to insure that you would return with me. I feared that no telegram would convince you of the absolute urgency of the case."

"When you are quite restored—"

"I am quite well again. I cannot imagine how I came to be so weak. I wish you, Mr. Holmes, to come to Mackleton with me by the next train."

My friend shook his head.

"My colleague, Dr. Watson, could tell you that we are very busy at present. I am retained in this case of the Ferrers Documents, and the Abergavenny murder is coming up for trial. Only a very important issue could call me from London at present."

"Important!" Our visitor threw up his hands. "Have you heard nothing of the abduction of the only son of the Duke of Holdernesse?"

"What! the late Cabinet Minister?"

"Exactly. We had tried to keep it out of the papers, but there was some rumor in the GLOBE last night. I thought it might have reached your ears."

Holmes shot out his long, thin arm and picked out Volume "H" in his encyclopaedia of reference.

"Holdernesse, 6th Duke, K.G., P.C.,—half the alphabet! 'Baron Beverley, Earl of Carston'—dear me, what a list! Lord Lieutenant of Hallamshire since 1900. Married Edith, daughter of Sir Charles Appledore, 1888. Heir and only child, Lord Saltire. Owns about two hundred and fifty thousand acres. Minerals in Lancashire and Wales. Address: Carlton House Terrace; Holdernesse Hall, Hallamshire; Carston Castle, Bangor, Wales. Lord of the Admiralty, 1872; Chief Secretary of State for—— Well, well, this man is certainly one of the greatest subjects of the Crown!"

"The greatest and perhaps the wealthiest. I am aware, Mr. Holmes, that you take a very high line in professional matters, and that you are prepared to work for the work's sake. I may tell you, however, that his Grace has already intimated that a check for five thousand pounds will be handed over to the person who can tell him where his son is, and another thousand to him who can name the man or men who have taken him."

"It is a princely offer," said Holmes. "Watson, I think that we shall accompany Dr. Huxtable back to the north of England. And now, Dr. Huxtable, when you have consumed that milk, you will kindly tell me what has happened, when it happened, how it happened, and, finally, what Dr. Thorneycroft Huxtable, of the Priory School, near Mackleton, has to do with the matter, and why he comes three days after an event—the state of your chin gives the date—to ask for my humble services."

Our visitor had consumed his milk and biscuits. The light had come back to his eyes and the colour to his cheeks, as he set himself with great vigour and lucidity to explain the situation.

"I must inform you, gentlemen, that the Priory is a preparatory school, of which I am the founder and principal. HUXTABLE'S SIDELIGHTS ON HORACE may possibly recall my name to your memories. The Priory is, without exception, the best and most select preparatory school in England. Lord Leverstoke, the Earl of Blackwater, Sir Cathcart Soames—they all have intrusted their sons to me. But I felt that my school had reached its zenith when, weeks ago, the Duke of Holdernesse sent Mr. James Wilder, his secretary, with intimation that young Lord Saltire, ten years old, his only son and heir, was about to be committed to my charge. Little did I think that this would be the
prelude to the most crushing misfortune of my life.

"On May 1st the boy arrived, that being the beginning of the summer term. He was a charming youth, and he soon fell into our ways. I may tell you--I trust that I am not indiscreet, but half-confidences are absurd in such a case--that he was not entirely happy at home. It is an open secret that the Duke's married life had not been a peaceful one, and the matter had ended in a separation by mutual consent, the Duchess taking up her residence in the south of France. This had occurred very shortly before, and the boy's sympathies are known to have been strongly with his mother. He moped after her departure from Holdernesse Hall, and it was for this reason that the Duke desired to send him to my establishment. In a fortnight the boy was quite at home with us and was apparently absolutely happy.

"He was last seen on the night of May 13th--that is, the night of last Monday. His room was on the second floor and was approached through another larger room, in which two boys were sleeping. These boys saw and heard nothing, so that it is certain that young Saltire did not pass out that way. His window was open, and there is a stout ivy plant leading to the ground. We could trace no footmarks below, but it is sure that this is the only possible exit.

"His absence was discovered at seven o'clock on Tuesday morning. His bed had been slept in. He had dressed himself fully, before going off, in his usual school suit of black Eton jacket and dark gray trousers. There were no signs that anyone had entered the room, and it is quite certain that anything in the nature of cries or ones struggle would have been heard, since Caunter, the elder boy in the inner room, is a very light sleeper.

"When Lord Saltire's disappearance was discovered, I at once called a roll of the whole establishment--boys, masters, and servants. It was then that we ascertained that Lord Saltire had not been alone in his flight. Heidegger, the German master, was missing. His room was on the second floor, at the farther end of the building, facing the same way as Lord Saltire's. His bed had also been slept in, but he had apparently gone away partly dressed, since his shirt and socks were lying on the floor. He had undoubtedly let himself down by the ivy, for we could see the marks of his feet where he had landed on the lawn. His bicycle was kept in a small shed beside this lawn, and it also was gone.

"He had been with me for two years, and came with the best references, but he was a silent, morose man, not very popular either with masters or boys. No trace could be found of the fugitives, and now, on Thursday morning, we are as ignorant as we were on Tuesday. Inquiry was, of course, made at once at Holdernesse Hall. It is only a few miles away, and we imagined that, in some sudden attack of homesickness, he had gone back to his father, but nothing had been heard of him. The Duke is greatly agitated, and, as to me, you have seen yourselves the state of nervous prostration to which the suspense and the responsibility have reduced me. Mr. Holmes, if ever you put forward your full powers, I implore you to do so now, for never in your life could you have a case which is more worthy of them."

Sherlock Holmes had listened with the utmost intensionst to the statement of the unhappy schoolmaster. His drawn brows and the deep frown between them showed that he needed no exhortation to concentrate all his attention upon a problem which, apart from the tremendous interests involved must appeal so directly to his love of the complex and the unusual. He now drew out his notebook and jotted down one or two memoranda.

"You have been very remiss in not coming to me sooner," said he, severely. "You start me on my investigation with a very serious handicap. It is inconceivable, for example, that this ivy and this lawn would have yielded nothing to an expert observer."

"I am not to blame, Mr. Holmes. His Grace was extremely desirous to avoid all public scandal. He was afraid of his family unhappiness being dragged before the world. He has a deep horror of anything of the kind."

"But there has been some official investigation?"

"Yes, sir, and it has proved most disappointing. An apparent clue was at once obtained, since a boy and a young man were reported to have been seen leaving a neighbouring station by an early train. Only last night we had news that the couple had been hunted down in Liverpool, and they prove to have no connection whatever with the matter in hand. Then it was that in my despair and disappointment, after a sleepless night, I came straight to you by the early train."

"I suppose the local investigation was relaxed while this false clue was being followed up?"

"It was entirely dropped."

"So that three days have been wasted. The affair has been most deplorably handled."

"I feel it and admit it."

"And yet the problem should be capable of ultimate solution. I shall be very happy to look into it. Have you been able to trace any connection between the missing boy and this German master?"

"None at all."

"Was he in the master's class?"

"No, he never exchanged a word with him, so far as I know."
"That is certainly very singular. Had the boy a bicycle?"
"No."
"Was any other bicycle missing?"
"No."
"Is that certain?"
"Quite."
"Well, now, you do not mean to seriously suggest that this German rode off upon a bicycle in the dead of the night, bearing the boy in his arms?"
"Certainly not."
"Then what is the theory in your mind?"
"The bicycle may have been a blind. It may have been hidden somewhere, and the pair gone off on foot."
"Quite so, but it seems rather an absurd blind, does it not? Were there other bicycles in this shed?"
"Several."
"Would he not have hidden a couple, had he desired to give the idea that they had gone off upon them?"
"I suppose he would."
"Of course he would. The blind theory won't do. But the incident is an admirable starting-point for an investigation. After all, a bicycle is not an easy thing to conceal or to destroy. One other question. Did anyone call to see the boy on the day before he disappeared?"
"No."
"Did he get any letters?"
"Yes, one letter."
"From whom?"
"From his father."
"Do you open the boys' letters?"
"No."
"How do you know it was from the father?"
"The coat of arms was on the envelope, and it was addressed in the Duke's peculiar stiff hand. Besides, the Duke remembers having written."
"When had he a letter before that?"
"Not for several days."
"Had he ever one from France?"
"No, never."
"You see the point of my questions, of course. Either the boy was carried off by force or he went of his own free will. In the latter case, you would expect that some prompting from outside would be needed to make so young a lad do such a thing. If he has had no visitors, that prompting must have come in letters; hence I try to find out who were his correspondents."
"I fear I cannot help you much. His only correspondent, so far as I know, was his own father."
"Who wrote to him on the very day of his disappearance. Were the relations between father and son very friendly?"
"His Grace is never very friendly with anyone. He is completely immersed in large public questions, and is rather inaccessible to all ordinary emotions. But he was always kind to the boy in his own way."
"But the sympathies of the latter were with the mother?"
"Yes."
"Did he say so?"
"No."
"The Duke, then?"
"Good heaven, no!"
"Then how could you know?"
"I have had some confidential talks with Mr. James Wilder, his Graces secretary. It was he who gave me the information about Lord Saltire's feelings."
"I see. By the way, that last letter of the Dukes--was it found in the boy's room after he was gone?"
"No, he had taken it with him. I think, Mr. Holmes, it is time that we were leaving for Euston."
"I will order a four-wheeler. In a quarter of an hour, we shall be at your service. If you are telegraphing home, Mr. Huxtable, it would be well to allow the people in your neighbourhood to imagine that the inquiry is still going on in Liverpool, or wherever else that red herring led your pack. In the meantime I will do a little quiet work at your own doors, and perhaps the scent is not so cold but that two old hounds like Watson and myself may get a sniff of
That evening found us in the cold, bracing atmosphere of the Peak country, in which Dr. Huxtable’s famous school is situated. It was already dark when we reached it. A card was lying on the hall table, and the butler whispered something to his master, who turned to us with agitation in every heavy feature.

"The Duke is here," said he. "The Duke and Mr. Wilder are in the study. Come, gentlemen, and I will introduce you."

I was, of course, familiar with the pictures of the famous statesman, but the man himself was very different from his representation. He was a tall and stately person, scrupulously dressed, with a drawn, thin face, and a nose which was grotesquely curved and long. His complexion was of a dead pallor, which was more startling by contrast with a long, dwindling beard of vivid red, which flowed down over his white waistcoat with his watch-chain gleaming through its fringe. Such was the stately presence who looked stonily at us from the centre of Dr. Huxtable’s hearthrug. Beside him stood a very young man, whom I understood to be Wilder, the private secretary. He was small, nervous, alert with intelligent light-blue eyes and mobile features. It was he who at once, in an incisive and positive tone, opened the conversation.

"I called this morning, Dr. Huxtable, too late to prevent you from starting for London. I learned that your object was to invite Mr. Sherlock Holmes to undertake the conduct of this case. His Grace is surprised, Dr. Huxtable, that you should have taken such a step without consulting him."

"When I learned that the police had failed----"  
"His Grace is by no means convinced that the police have failed."

"But surely, Mr. Wilder----"  
"You are well aware, Dr. Huxtable, that his Grace is particularly anxious to avoid all public scandal. He prefers to take as few people as possible into his confidence."

"The matter can be easily remedied," said the brow-beaten doctor; "Mr. Sherlock Holmes can return to London by the morning train."

"Hardly that, Doctor, hardly that," said Holmes, in his blandest voice. "This northern air is invigorating and pleasant, so I propose to spend a few days upon your moors, and to occupy my mind as best I may. Whether I have the shelter of your roof or of the village inn is, of course, for you to decide."

I could see that the unfortunate doctor was in the last stage of indecision, from which he was rescued by the deep, sonorous voice of the red-bearded Duke, which boomed out like a dinner-gong.

"I agree with Mr. Wilder, Dr. Huxtable, that you would have done wisely to consult me. But since Mr. Holmes has already been taken into your confidence, it would indeed be absurd that we should not avail ourselves of his services. Far from going to the inn, Mr. Holmes, I should be pleased if you would come and stay with me at Holdernesse Hall."

"I thank your Grace. For the purposes of my investigation, I think that it would be wiser for me to remain at the scene of the mystery."

"Just as you like, Mr. Holmes. Any information which Mr. Wilder or I can give you is, of course, at your disposal."

"It will probably be necessary for me to see you at the Hall," said Holmes. "I would only ask you now, sir, whether you have formed any explanation in your own mind as to the mysterious disappearance of your son?"

"No sir I have not."

"Excuse me if I allude to that which is painful to you, but I have no alternative. Do you think that the Duchess had anything to do with the matter?"

The great minister showed perceptible hesitation.

"I do not think so," he said, at last.

"The other most obvious explanation is that the child has been kidnapped for the purpose of levying ransom. You have not had any demand of the sort?"

"No, sir."

"One more question, your Grace. I understand that you wrote to your son upon the day when this incident occurred."

"No, I wrote upon the day before."

"Exactly. But he received it on that day?"

"Yes."

"Was there anything in your letter which might have unbalanced him or induced him to take such a step?"

"No, sir, certainly not."

"Did you post that letter yourself?"

The nobleman’s reply was interrupted by his secretary, who broke in with some heat.
"His Grace is not in the habit of posting letters himself," said he. "This letter was laid with others upon the study table, and I myself put them in the post-bag."
"You are sure this one was among them?"
"Yes, I observed it."
"How many letters did your Grace write that day?"
"Twenty or thirty. I have a large correspondence. But surely this is somewhat irrelevant?"
"Not entirely," said Holmes.
"For my own part," the Duke continued, "I have advised the police to turn their attention to the south of France. I have already said that I do not believe that the Duchess would encourage so monstrous an action, but the lad had the most wrong-headed opinions, and it is possible that he may have fled to her, aided and abetted by this German. I think, Dr. Huxtable, that we will now return to the Hall."

I could see that there were other questions which Holmes would have wished to put, but the nobleman's abrupt manner showed that the interview was at an end. It was evident that to his intensely aristocratic nature this discussion of his intimate family affairs with a stranger was most abhorrent, and that he feared lest every fresh question would throw a fiercer light into the discreetly shadowed corners of his ducal history.

When the nobleman and his secretary had left, my friend flung himself at once with characteristic eagerness into the investigation.

The boy's chamber was carefully examined, and yielded nothing save the absolute conviction that it was only through the window that he could have escaped. The German master's room and effects gave no further clue. In his case a trailer of ivy had given way under his weight, and we saw by the light of a lantern the mark on the lawn where his heels had come down. That one dint in the short, green grass was the only material witness left of this inexplicable nocturnal flight.

Sherlock Holmes left the house alone, and only returned after eleven. He had obtained a large ordnance map of the neighbourhood, and this he brought into my room, where he laid it out on the bed, and, having balanced the lamp in the middle of it, he began to smoke over it, and occasionally to point out objects of interest with the reeking amber of his pipe.

"This case grows upon me, Watson," said he. "There are decidedly some points of interest in connection with it. In this early stage, I want you to realize those geographical features which may have a good deal to do with our investigation.

"Look at this map. This dark square is the Priory School. I'll put a pin in it. Now, this line is the main road. You see that it runs east and west past the school, and you see also that there is no side road for a mile either way. If these two folk passed away by road, it was THIS road."

"Exactly."

"By a singular and happy chance, we are able to some extent to check what passed along this road during the night in question. At this point, where my pipe is now resting, a county constable was on duty from twelve to six. It is, as you perceive, the first cross-road on the east side. This man declares that he was not absent from his post for an instant, and he is positive that neither boy nor man could have gone that way unseen. I have spoken with this policeman to-night and he appears to me to be a perfectly reliable person. That blocks this end. We have now to deal with the other. There is an inn here, the Red Bull, the landlady of which was ill. She had sent to Mackleton for a doctor, but he did not arrive until morning, being absent at another case. The people at the inn were alert all night, awaiting his coming, and one or other of them seems to have continually had an eye upon the road. They declare that no one passed. If their evidence is good, then we are fortunate enough to be able to block the west, and also to be
able to say that the fugitives did NOT use the road at all."

"But the bicycle?" I objected.

"Quite so. We will come to the bicycle presently. To continue our reasoning: if these people did not go by the road, they must have traversed the country to the north of the house or to the south of the house. That is certain. Let us weigh the one against the other. On the south of the house is, as you perceive, a large district of arable land, cut up into small fields, with stone walls between them. There, I admit that a bicycle is impossible. We can dismiss the idea. We turn to the country on the north. Here there lies a grove of trees, marked as the 'Ragged Shaw,' and on the farther side stretches a great rolling moor, Lower Gill Moor, extending for ten miles and sloping gradually upward. Here, at one side of this wilderness, is Holdernesse Hall, ten miles by road, but only six across the moor. It is a peculiarly desolate plain. A few moor farmers have small holdings, where they rear sheep and cattle. Except these, the plover and the curlew are the only inhabitants until you come to the Chesterfield high road. There is a church there, you see, a few cottages, and an inn. Beyond that the hills become precipitous. Surely it is here to the north that our quest must lie."

"But the bicycle?" I persisted.

"Well, well!" said Holmes, impatiently. "A good cyclist does not need a high road. The moor is intersected with paths, and the moon was at the full. Halloa! what is this?"

There was an agitated knock at the door, and an instant afterwards Dr. Huxtable was in the room. In his hand he held a blue cricket-cap with a white chevron on the peak.

"At last we have a clue!" he cried. "Thank heaven! at last we are on the dear boy's track! It is his cap."

"Where was it found?"

"In the van of the gipsies who camped on the moor. They left on Tuesday. To-day the police traced them down and examined their caravan. This was found."

"How do they account for it?"

"They shuffled and lied—said that they found it on the moor on Tuesday morning. They know where he is, the rascals! Thank goodness, they are all safe under lock and key. Either the fear of the law or the Duke's purse will certainly get out of them all that they know."

"So far, so good," said Holmes, when the doctor had at last left the room. "It at least bears out the theory that it is on the side of the Lower Gill Moor that we must hope for results. The police have really done nothing locally, save the arrest of these gipsies. Look here, Watson! There is a watercourse across the moor. You see it marked here in the map. In some parts it widens into a morass. This is particularly so in the region between Holdernesse Hall and the school. It is vain to look elsewhere for tracks in this dry weather, but at THAT point there is certainly a chance of some record being left. I will call you early to-morrow morning, and you and I will try if we can throw some little light upon the mystery."

The day was just breaking when I woke to find the long, thin form of Holmes by my bedside. He was fully dressed, and had apparently already been out.

"I have done the lawn and the bicycle shed," said he. "I have also had a rumble through the Ragged Shaw. Now, Watson, there is cocoa ready in the next room. I must beg you to hurry, for we have a great day before us."

His eyes shone, and his cheek was flushed with the exhilaration of the master workman who sees his work lie ready before him. A very different Holmes, this active, alert man, from the introspective and pallid dreamer of Baker Street. I felt, as I looked upon that supple, figure, alive with nervous energy, that it was indeed a strenuous day that awaited us.

And yet it opened in the blackest disappointment. With high hopes we struck across the peaty, russet moor, intersected with a thousand sheep paths, until we came to the broad, light-green belt which marked the morass between us and Holdernesse. Certainly, if the lad had gone homeward, he must have passed this, and he could not pass it without leaving his traces. But no sign of him or the German could be seen. With a darkening face my friend strode along the margin, eagerly observant of every muddy stain upon the mossy surface. Sheep-marks there were in profusion, and at one place, some miles down, cows had left their tracks. Nothing more.

"Check number one," said Holmes, looking gloomily over the rolling expanse of the moor. "There is another morass down yonder, and a narrow neck between. Halloa! halloa! halloa! what have we here?"

We had come on a small black ribbon of pathway. In the middle of it, clearly marked on the sodden soil, was the track of a bicycle.

"Hurrah!" I cried. "We have it."

But Holmes was shaking his head, and his face was puzzled and expectant rather than joyous.

"A bicycle, certainly, but not THE bicycle," said he. "I am familiar with forty-two different impressions left by tires. This, as you perceive, is a Dunlop, with a patch upon the outer cover. Heidegger's tires were Palmer's, leaving longitudinal stripes. Aveling, the mathematical master, was sure upon the point. Therefore, it is not Heidegger's
"The boy's, then?"

"Possibly, if we could prove a bicycle to have been in his possession. But this we have utterly failed to do. This track, as you perceive, was made by a rider who was going from the direction of the school."

"Or towards it?"

"No, no, my dear Watson. The more deeply sunk impression is, of course, the hind wheel, upon which the weight rests. You perceive several places where it has passed across and obliterated the more shallow mark of the front one. It was undoubtedly heading away from the school. It may or may not be connected with our inquiry, but we will follow it backwards before we go any farther."

We did so, and at the end of a few hundred yards lost the tracks as we emerged from the boggy portion of the moor. Following the path backwards, we picked out another spot, where a spring trickled across it. Here, once again, was the mark of the bicycle, though nearly obliterated by the hoofs of cows. After that there was no sign, but the path ran right on into Ragged Shaw, the wood which backed on to the school. From this wood the cycle must have emerged. Holmes sat down on a boulder and rested his chin in his hands. I had smoked two cigarettes before he moved.

"Well, well," said he, at last. "It is, of course, possible that a cunning man might change the tires of his bicycle in order to leave unfamiliar tracks. A criminal who was capable of such a thought is a man whom I should be proud to do business with. We will leave this question undecided and hark back to our morass again, for we have left a good deal unexplored."

We continued our systematic survey of the edge of the sodden portion of the moor, and soon our perseverance was gloriously rewarded. Right across the lower part of the bog lay a miry path. Holmes gave a cry of delight as he approached it. An impression like a fine bundle of telegraph wires ran down the centre of it. It was the Palmer tires.

"Here is Herr Heidegger, sure enough!" cried Holmes, exultantly. "My reasoning seems to have been pretty sound, Watson."

"I congratulate you."

"But we have a long way still to go. Kindly walk clear of the path. Now let us follow the trail. I fear that it will not lead very far."

We found, however, as we advanced that this portion of the moor is intersected with soft patches, and, though we frequently lost sight of the track, we always succeeded in picking it up once more.

"Do you observe," said Holmes, "that the rider is now undoubtedly forcing the pace? There can be no doubt of it. Look at this impression, where you get both tires clear. The one is as deep as the other. That can only mean that the rider is throwing his weight on to the handle-bar, as a man does when he is sprinting. By Jove! he has had a fall."

There was a broad, irregular smudge covering some yards of the track. Then there were a few footmarks, and the tire reappeared once more.


Holmes held up a crumpled branch of flowering gorse. To my horror I perceived that the yellow blossoms were all dabbled with crimson. On the path, too, and among the heather were dark stains of clotted blood.

"Bad!" said Holmes. "Bad! Stand clear, Watson! Not an unnecessary footstep! What do I read here? He fell wounded—he stood up—he remounted—he proceeded. But there is no other track. Cattle on this side path. He was surely not gored by a bull? Impossible! But I see no traces of anyone else. We must push on, Watson. Surely, with stains as well as the track to guide us, he cannot escape us now."

Our search was not a very long one. The tracks of the tire began to curve fantastically upon the wet and shining path. Suddenly, as I looked ahead, the gleam of metal caught my eye from amid the thick gorse-bushes. Out of them we dragged a bicycle, Palmer-tired, one pedal bent, and the whole front of it horribly smeared and slobbered with blood. On the other side of the bushes a shoe was projecting. We ran round, and there lay the unfortunate rider. He was a tall man, full-bearded, with spectacles, one glass of which had been knocked out. The cause of his death was a frightful blow upon the head, which had crushed in part of his skull. That he could have gone on after receiving such an injury said much for the vitality and courage of the man. He wore shoes, but no socks, and his open coat disclosed a nightshirt beneath it. It was undoubtedly the German master.

Holmes turned the body over reverently, and examined it with great attention. He then sat in deep thought for a time, and I could see by his ruffled brow that this grim discovery had not, in his opinion, advanced us much in our inquiry.

"It is a little difficult to know what to do, Watson," said he, at last. "My own inclinations are to push this inquiry on, for we have already lost so much time that we cannot afford to waste another hour. On the other hand, we are bound to inform the police of the discovery, and to see that this poor fellow's body is looked after."

"I could take a note back."
"But I need your company and assistance. Wait a bit! There is a fellow cutting peat up yonder. Bring him over here, and he will guide the police."

I brought the peasant across, and Holmes dispatched the frightened man with a note to Dr. Huxtable.

"Now, Watson," said he, "we have picked up two clues this morning. One is the bicycle with the Palmer tire, and we see what that has led to. The other is the bicycle with the patched Dunlop. Before we start to investigate that, let us try to realize what we do know, so as to make the most of it, and to separate the essential from the accidental."

"First of all, I wish to impress upon you that the boy certainly left of his own free-will. He got down from his window and he went off, either alone or with someone. That is sure."

I assented.

"Well, now, let us turn to this unfortunate German master. The boy was fully dressed when he fled. Therefore, he foresaw what he would do. But the German went without his socks. He certainly acted on very short notice."

"Undoubtedly."

"Why did he go? Because, from his bedroom window, he saw the flight of the boy, because he wished to overtake him and bring him back. He seized his bicycle, pursued the lad, and in pursuing him met his death."

"So it would seem."

"Now I come to the critical part of my argument. The natural action of a man in pursuing a little boy would be to run after him. He would know that he could overtake him. But the German does not do so. He turns to his bicycle. I am told that he was an excellent cyclist. He would not do this, if he did not see that the boy had some swift means of escape."

"The other bicycle."

"Let us continue our reconstruction. He meets his death five miles from the school--not by a bullet, mark you, which even a lad might conceivably discharge, but by a savage blow dealt by a vigorous arm. The lad, then, HAD a companion in his flight. And the flight was a swift one, since it took five miles before an expert cyclist could overtake them. Yet we survey the ground round the scene of the tragedy. What do we find? A few cattle-tracks, nothing more. I took a wide sweep round, and there is no path within fifty yards. Another cyclist could have had nothing to do with the actual murder, nor were there any human foot-marks."

"Holmes," I cried, "this is impossible."

"Admirable!" he said. "A most illuminating remark. It IS impossible as I state it, and therefore I must in some respect have stated it wrong. Yet you saw for yourself. Can you suggest any fallacy?"

"He could not have fractured his skull in a fall?"

"In a morass, Watson?"

"I am at my wit's end."

"Tut, tut, we have solved some worse problems. At least we have plenty of material, if we can only use it. Come, then, and, having exhausted the Palmer, let us see what the Dunlop with the patched cover has to offer us."

We picked up the track and followed it onward for some distance, but soon the moor rose into a long, heather-tufted curve, and we left the watercourse behind us. No further help from tracks could be hoped for. At the spot where we saw the last of the Dunlop tire it might equally have led to Holdernesse Hall, the stately towers of which rose some miles to our left, or to a low, gray village which lay in front of us and marked the position of the Chesterfield high road.

As we approached the forbidding and squalid inn, with the sign of a game-cock above the door, Holmes gave a sudden groan, and clutched me by the shoulder to save himself from falling. He had had one of those violent strains of the ankle which leave a man helpless. With difficulty he limped up to the door, where a squat, dark, elderly man was smoking a black clay pipe.

"How are you, Mr. Reuben Hayes?" said Holmes.

"Who are you, and how do you get my name so pat?" the countryman answered, with a suspicious flash of a pair of cunning eyes.

"Well, it's printed on the board above your head. It's easy to see a man who is master of his own house. I suppose you haven't such a thing as a carriage in your stables?"

"No, I have not."

"I can hardly put my foot to the ground."

"Don't put it to the ground."

"But I can't walk."

"Well, then hop."

Mr. Reuben Hayes's manner was far from gracious, but Holmes took it with admirable good-humour.

"Look here, my man," said he. "This is really rather an awkward fix for me. I don't mind how I get on."

"Neither do I," said the morose landlord.
"The matter is very important. I would offer you a sovereign for the use of a bicycle."

The landlord pricked up his ears.

"Where do you want to go?"

"To Holdernesse Hall."

"Pals of the Dook, I suppose?" said the landlord, surveying our mud-stained garments with ironical eyes.

Holmes laughed good-naturedly.

"He'll be glad to see us, anyhow."

"Why?"

"Because we bring him news of his lost son."

The landlord gave a very visible start.

"What, you're on his track?"

"He has been heard of in Liverpool. They expect to get him every hour."

Again a swift change passed over the heavy, unshaven face. His manner was suddenly genial.

"I've less reason to wish the Dook well than most men," said he, "for I was head coachman once, and cruel bad he treated me. It was him that sacked me without a character on the word of a lying corn-chandler. But I'm glad to hear that the young lord was heard of in Liverpool, and I'll help you to take the news to the Hall."

"Thank you," said Holmes. "Well have some food first. Then you can bring round the bicycle."

"I haven't got a bicycle."

Holmes held up a sovereign.

"I tell you, man, that I haven't got one. I'll let you have two horses as far as the Hall."

"Well, well," said Holmes, "well talk about it when we've had something to eat."

When we were left alone in the stone-flagged kitchen, it was astonishing how rapidly that sprained ankle recovered. It was nearly nightfall, and we had eaten nothing since early morning, so that we spent some time over our meal. Holmes was lost in thought, and once or twice he walked over to the window and stared earnestly out. It opened on to a squalid courtyard. In the far corner was a smithy, where a grimy lad was at work. On the other side were the stables. Holmes had sat down again after one of these excursions, when he suddenly sprang out of his chair with a loud exclamation.

"By heaven, Watson, I believe that I've got it!" he cried. "Yes, yes, it must be so. Watson, do you remember seeing any cow-tracks to-day?"

"Yes, several."

"Were?"

"Well, everywhere. They were at the morass, and again on the path, and again near where poor Heidegger met his death."

"Exactly. Well, now, Watson, how many cows did you see on the moor?"

"I don't remember seeing any."

"Strange, Watson, that we should see tracks all along our line, but never a cow on the whole moor. Very strange, Watson, eh?"

"Yes, it is strange."

"Now, Watson, make an effort, throw your mind back. Can you see those tracks upon the path?"

"Yes, I can."

"Can you recall that the tracks were sometimes like that, Watson,"--he arranged a number of bread-crumbs in this fashion--: : : : :--"and sometimes like this"--: : : : : :--"and occasionally like this"--: : : : : : : . "Can you remember that?"

"No, I cannot."

"But I can. I could swear to it. However, we will go back at our leisure and verify it. What a blind beetle I have been, not to draw my conclusion."

"And what is your conclusion?"

"Only that it is a remarkable cow which walks, canters, and gallops. By George! Watson, it was no brain of a country publican that thought out such a blind as that. The coast seems to be clear, save for that lad in the smithy. Let us slip out and see what we can see."

There were two rough-haired, unkempt horses in the tumble-down stable. Holmes raised the hind leg of one of them and laughed aloud.

"Old shoes, but newly shod--old shoes, but new nails. This case deserves to be a classic. Let us go across to the smithy."

The lad continued his work without regarding us. I saw Holmes's eye darting to right and left among the litter of iron and wood which was scattered about the floor. Suddenly, however, we heard a step behind us, and there was the
landlord, his heavy eyebrows drawn over his savage eyes, his swarthy features convulsed with passion. He held a short, metal-headed stick in his hand, and he advanced in so menacing a fashion that I was right glad to feel the revolver in my pocket.

"You infernal spies!" the man cried. "What are you doing there?"

"Why, Mr. Reuben Hayes," said Holmes, coolly, "one might think that you were afraid of our finding something out."

The man mastered himself with a violent effort, and his grim mouth loosened into a false laugh, which was more menacing than his frown.

"You're welcome to all you can find out in my smithy," said he. "But look here, mister, I don't care for folk poking about my place without my leave, so the sooner you pay your score and get out of this the better I shall be pleased."

"All right, Mr. Hayes, no harm meant," said Holmes. "We have been having a look at your horses, but I think I'll walk, after all. It's not far, I believe."

"Not more than two miles to the Hall gates. That's the road to the left." He watched us with sullen eyes until we had left his premises.

We did not go very far along the road, for Holmes stopped the instant that the curve hid us from the landlord's view.

"We were warm, as the children say, at that inn," said he. "I seem to grow colder every step that I take away from it. No, no, I can't possibly leave it."

"I am convinced," said I, "that this Reuben Hayes knows all about it. A more self-evident villain I never saw."

"Oh! he impressed you in that way, did he? There are the horses, there is the smithy. Yes, it is an interesting place, this Fighting Cock. I think we shall have another look at it in an unobtrusive way."

A long, sloping hillside, dotted with gray limestone boulders, stretched behind us. We had turned off the road, and were making our way up the hill, when, looking in the direction of Holdernesse Hall, I saw a cyclist coming swiftly along.

"Get down, Watson!" cried Holmes, with a heavy hand upon my shoulder. We had hardly sunk from view when the man flew past us on the road. Amid a rolling cloud of dust, I caught a glimpse of a pale, agitated face--a face with horror in every lineament, the mouth open, the eyes staring wildly in front. It was like some strange caricature of the dapper James Wilder whom we had seen the night before.


We scrambled from rock to rock, until in a few moments we had made our way to a point from which we could see the front door of the inn. Wilder's bicycle was leaning against the wall beside it. No one was moving about the house, nor could we catch a glimpse of any faces at the windows. Slowly the twilight crept down as the sun sank behind the high towers of Holdernesse Hall. Then, in the gloom, we saw the two side-lamps of a trap light up in the stable-yard of the inn, and shortly afterwards heard the rattle of hoofs, as it wheeled out into the road and tore off at a furious pace in the direction of Chesterfield.

"What do you make of that, Watson?" Holmes whispered.

"It looks like a flight."

"A single man in a dog-cart, so far as I could see. Well, it certainly was not Mr. James Wilder, for there he is at the door."

A red square of light had sprung out of the darkness. In the middle of it was the black figure of the secretary, his head advanced, peering out into the night. It was evident that he was expecting someone. Then at last there were steps in the road, a second figure was visible for an instant against the light, the door shut, and all was black once more. Five minutes later a lamp was lit in a room upon the first floor.

"It seems to be a curious class of custom that is done by the Fighting Cock," said Holmes.

"The bar is on the other side."

"Quite so. These are what one may call the private guests. Now, what in the world is Mr. James Wilder doing in that den at this hour of night, and who is the companion who comes to meet him there? Come, Watson, we must really take a risk and try to investigate this a little more closely."

Together we stole down to the road and crept across to the door of the inn. The bicycle still leaned against the wall. Holmes struck a match and held it to the back wheel, and I heard him chuckle as the light fell upon a patched Dunlop tire. Up above us was the lighted window.

"I must have a peep through that, Watson. If you bend your back and support yourself upon the wall, I think that I can manage."

An instant later, his feet were on my shoulders, but he was hardly up before he was down again.

"Come, my friend," said he, "our day's work has been quite long enough. I think that we have gathered all that
we can. It's a long walk to the school, and the sooner we get started the better."

He hardly opened his lips during that weary trudge across the moor, nor would he enter the school when he reached it, but went on to Mackleton Station, whence he could send some telegrams. Late at night I heard him consoling Dr. Huxtable, prostrated by the tragedy of his master's death, and later still he entered my room as alert and vigorous as he had been when he started in the morning. "All goes well, my friend," said he. "I promise that before to-morrow evening we shall have reached the solution of the mystery."

At eleven o'clock next morning my friend and I were walking up the famous yew avenue of Holdernesse Hall. We were ushered through the magnificent Elizabethan doorway and into his Grace's study. There we found Mr. James Wilder, demure and courtly, but with some trace of that wild terror of the night before still lurking in his furtive eyes and in his twitching features.

"You have come to see his Grace? I am sorry, but the fact is that the Duke is far from well. He has been very much upset by the tragic news. We received a telegram from Dr. Huxtable yesterday afternoon, which told us of your discovery."

"I must see the Duke, Mr. Wilder." "But he is in his room." "Then I must go to his room." "I believe he is in his bed." "I will see him there."

Holmes's cold and inexorable manner showed the secretary that it was useless to argue with him.

"Very good, Mr. Holmes, I will tell him that you are here."

After an hour's delay, the great nobleman appeared. His face was more cadaverous than ever, his shoulders had rounded, and he seemed to me to be an altogether older man than he had been the morning before. He greeted us with a stately courtesy and seated himself at his desk, his red beard streaming down on the table.

"Well, Mr. Holmes?" said he.

But my friend's eyes were fixed upon the secretary, who stood by his master's chair. "I think, your Grace, that I could speak more freely in Mr. Wilder's absence."

The man turned a shade paler and cast a malignant glance at Holmes. "If your Grace wishes----" "Yes, yes, you had better go. Now, Mr. Holmes, what have you to say?"

My friend waited until the door had closed behind the retreating secretary. "The fact is, your Grace," said he, "that my colleague, Dr. Watson, and myself had an assurance from Dr. Huxtable that a reward had been offered in this case. I should like to have this confirmed from your own lips."

"Certainly, Mr. Holmes."

"It amounted, if I am correctly informed, to five thousand pounds to anyone who will tell you where your son is?"

"Exactly."

"And another thousand to the man who will name the person or persons who keep him in custody?"

"Exactly."

"Under the latter heading is included, no doubt, not only those who may have taken him away, but also those who conspire to keep him in his present position?"

"Yes, yes," cried the Duke, impatiently. "If you do your work well, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, you will have no reason to complain of niggardly treatment."

My friend rubbed his thin hands together with an appearance of avidity which was a surprise to me, who knew his frugal tastes.

"I fancy that I see your Grace's check-book upon the table," said he. "I should be glad if you would make me out a check for six thousand pounds. It would be as well, perhaps, for you to cross it. The Capital and Counties Bank, Oxford Street branch are my agents."

His Grace sat very stern and upright in his chair and looked stonily at my friend. "Is this a joke, Mr. Holmes? It is hardly a subject for pleasantry."

"Not at all, your Grace. I was never more earnest in my life."

"What do you mean, then?"

"I mean that I have earned the reward. I know where your son is, and I know some, at least, of those who are holding him."

The Duke's beard had turned more aggressively red than ever against his ghastly white face. "Where is he?" he gasped.

"He is, or was last night, at the Fighting Cock Inn, about two miles from your park gate."
The Duke fell back in his chair.
"And whom do you accuse?"
Sherlock Holmes's answer was an astounding one. He stepped swiftly forward and touched the Duke upon the shoulder.
"I accuse YOU," said he. "And now, your Grace, I'll trouble you for that check."
Never shall I forget the Duke's appearance as he sprang up and clawed with his hands, like one who is sinking into an abyss. Then, with an extraordinary effort of aristocratic self-command, he sat down and sank his face in his hands. It was some minutes before he spoke.
"How much do you know?" he asked at last, without raising his head.
"I saw you together last night."
"Does anyone else beside your friend know?"
"I have spoken to no one."
The Duke took a pen in his quivering fingers and opened his check-book.
"I shall be as good as my word, Mr. Holmes. I am about to write your check, however unwelcome the information which you have gained may be to me. When the offer was first made, I little thought the turn which events might take. But you and your friend are men of discretion, Mr. Holmes?"
"I hardly understand your Grace."
"I must put it plainly, Mr. Holmes. If only you two know of this incident, there is no reason why it should go any farther. I think twelve thousand pounds is the sum that I owe you, is it not?"
But Holmes smiled and shook his head.
"I fear, your Grace, that matters can hardly be arranged so easily. There is the death of this schoolmaster to be accounted for."
"But James knew nothing of that. You cannot hold him responsible for that. It was the work of this brutal ruffian whom he had the misfortune to employ."
"I must take the view, your Grace, that when a man embarks upon a crime, he is morally guilty of any other crime which may spring from it."
"Morally, Mr. Holmes. No doubt you are right. But surely not in the eyes of the law. A man cannot be condemned for a murder at which he was not present, and which he loathes and abhors as much as you do. The instant that he heard of it he made a complete confession to me, so filled was he with horror and remorse. He lost not an hour in breaking entirely with the murderer. Oh, Mr. Holmes, you must save him--you must save him! I tell you that you must save him!" The Duke had dropped the last attempt at self-command, and was pacing the room with a convulsed face and with his clenched hands raving in the air. At last he mastered himself and sat down once more at his desk. "I appreciate your conduct in coming here before you spoke to anyone else," said he. "At least, we may take counsel how far we can minimize this hideous scandal."
"Exactly," said Holmes. "I think, your Grace, that this can only be done by absolute frankness between us. I am disposed to help your Grace to the best of my ability, but, in order to do so, I must understand to the last detail how the matter stands. I realize that your words applied to Mr. James Wilder, and that he is not the murderer."
"No, the murderer has escaped."
Sherlock Holmes smiled demurely.
"Your Grace can hardly have heard of any small reputation which I possess, or you would not imagine that it is so easy to escape me. Mr. Reuben Hayes was arrested at Chesterfield, on my information, at eleven o'clock last night. I had a telegram from the head of the local police before I left the school this morning."
The Duke leaned back in his chair and stared with amazement at my friend.
"You seem to have powers that are hardly human," said he. "So Reuben Hayes is taken? I am right glad to hear it, if it will not react upon the fate of James."
"Your secretary?"
"No, sir, my son."
It was Holmes's turn to look astonished.
"I confess that this is entirely new to me, your Grace. I must beg you to be more explicit."
"I will conceal nothing from you. I agree with you that complete frankness, however painful it may be to me, is the best policy in this desperate situation to which James's folly and jealousy have reduced us. When I was a very young man, Mr. Holmes, I loved with such a love as comes only once in a lifetime. I offered the lady marriage, but she refused it on the grounds that such a match might mar my career. Had she lived, I would certainly never have married anyone else. She died, and left this one child, whom for her sake I have cherished and cared for. I could not acknowledge the paternity to the world, but I gave him the best of educations, and since he came to manhood I have kept him near my person. He surprised my secret, and has presumed ever since upon the claim which he has upon
me, and upon his power of provoking a scandal which would be abhorrent to me. His presence had something to do with the unhappy issue of my marriage. Above all, he hated my young legitimate heir from the first with a persistent hatred. You may well ask me why, under these circumstances, I still kept James under my roof. I answer that it was because I could see his mother's face in his, and that for her dear sake there was no end to my long-suffering. All her pretty ways too--there was not one of them which he could not suggest and bring back to my memory. I COULD not send him away. But I feared so much lest he should do Arthur--that is, Lord Saltire--a mischief, that I dispatched him for safety to Dr. Huxtable's school.

"James came into contact with this fellow Hayes, because the man was a tenant of mine, and James acted as agent. The fellow was a rascal from the beginning, but, in some extraordinary way, James became intimate with him. He had always a taste for low company. When James determined to kidnap Lord Saltire, it was of this man's service that he availed himself. You remember that I wrote to Arthur upon that last day. Well, James opened the letter and inserted a note asking Arthur to meet him in a little wood called the Ragged Shaw, which is near to the school. He used the Duchess's name, and in that way got the boy to come. That evening James bicycled over--I am telling you what he has himself confessed to me--and he told Arthur, whom he met in the wood, that his mother longed to see him, that she was awaiting him on the moor, and that if he would come back into the wood at midnight he would find a man with a horse, who would take him to her. Poor Arthur fell into the trap. He came to the appointment, and found this fellow Hayes with a led pony. Arthur mounted, and they set off together. It appears--though this James only heard yesterday--that they were pursued, that Hayes struck the pursuer with his stick, and that the man died of his injuries. Hayes brought Arthur to his public-house, the Fighting Cock, where he was confined in an upper room, under the care of Mrs. Hayes, who is a kindly woman, but entirely under the control of her brutal husband.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, that was the state of affairs when I first saw you two days ago. I had no more idea of the truth than you. You will ask me what was James's motive in doing such a deed. I answer that there was a great deal which was unreasoning and fanatical in the hatred which he bore my heir. In his view he should himself have been heir of all my estates, and he deeply resented those social laws which made it impossible. At the same time, he had a definite motive also. He was eager that I should break the entail, and he was of opinion that it lay in my power to do so. He intended to make a bargain with me--to restore Arthur if I would break the entail, and so make it possible for the estate to be left to him by will. He knew well that I should never willingly invoke the aid of the police against him. I say that he would have proposed such a bargain to me, but he did not actually do so, for events moved too quickly for him, and he had not time to put his plans into practice.

"What brought all his wicked scheme to wreck was your discovery of this man Heidegger's dead body. James was seized with horror at the news. It came to us yesterday, as we sat together in this study. Dr. Huxtable had sent a telegram. James was so overwhelmed with grief and agitation that my suspicions, which had never been entirely absent, rose instantly to a certainty, and I taxed him with the deed. He made a complete voluntary confession. Then he implored me to keep his secret for three days longer, so as to give his wretched accomplice a chance of saving his guilty life. I yielded--as I have always yielded--to his prayers, and instantly James hurried off to the Fighting Cock to warn Hayes and give him the means of flight. I could not go there by daylight without provoking comment, but as soon as night fell I hurried off to see my dear Arthur. I found him safe and well, but horrified beyond expression by the dreadful deed he had witnessed. In deference to my promise, and much against my will, I consented to leave him there for three days, under the charge of Mrs. Hayes, since it was evident that it was impossible to inform the police where he was without telling them also who was the murderer, and I could not see how that murderer could be punished without ruin to my unfortunate James. You asked for frankness, Mr. Holmes, and I have taken you at your word, for I have now told you everything without an attempt at circumlocution or concealment. Do you in turn be as frank with me."

"I will," said Holmes. "In the first place, your Grace, I am bound to tell you that you have placed yourself in a most serious position in the eyes of the law. You have condoned a felony, and you have aided the escape of a murderer, for I cannot doubt that any money which was taken by James Wilder to aid his accomplice in his flight came from your Grace's purse."

The Duke bowed his assent.

"This is, indeed, a most serious matter. Even more culpable in my opinion, your Grace, is your attitude towards your younger son. You leave him in this den for three days."

"Under solemn promises--"

"What are promises to such people as these? You have no guarantee that he will not be spirited away again. To humour your guilty elder son, you have exposed your innocent younger son to imminent and unnecessary danger. It was a most unjustifiable action."

The proud lord of Holdernesse was not accustomed to be so rated in his own ducal hall. The blood flushed into
his high forehead, but his conscience held him dumb.

"I will help you, but on one condition only. It is that you ring for the footman and let me give such orders as I like."

Without a word, the Duke pressed the electric bell. A servant entered.

"You will be glad to hear," said Holmes, "that your young master is found. It is the Duke's desire that the carriage shall go at once to the Fighting Cock Inn to bring Lord Saltire home.

"Now," said Holmes, when the rejoicing lackey had disappeared, "having secured the future, we can afford to be more lenient with the past. I am not in an official position, and there is no reason, so long as the ends of justice are served, why I should disclose all that I know. As to Hayes, I say nothing. The gallows awaits him, and I would do nothing to save him from it. What he will divulge I cannot tell, but I have no doubt that your Grace could make him understand that it is to his interest to be silent. From the police point of view he will have kidnapped the boy for the purpose of ransom. If they do not themselves find it out, I see no reason why I should prompt them to take a broader point of view. I would warn your Grace, however, that the continued presence of Mr. James Wilder in your household can only lead to misfortune."

"I understand that, Mr. Holmes, and it is already settled that he shall leave me forever, and go to seek his fortune in Australia."

"In that case, your Grace, since you have yourself stated that any unhappiness in your married life was caused by his presence I would suggest that you make such amends as you can to the Duchess, and that you try to resume those relations which have been so unhappily interrupted."

"That also I have arranged, Mr. Holmes. I wrote to the Duchess this morning."

"In that case," said Holmes, rising, "I think that my friend and I can congratulate ourselves upon several most happy results from our little visit to the North. There is one other small point upon which I desire some light. This fellow Hayes had shod his horses with shoes which counterfeited the tracks of cows. Was it from Mr. Wilder that he learned so extraordinary a device?"

The Duke stood in thought for a moment, with a look of intense surprise on his face. Then he opened a door and showed us into a large room furnished as a museum. He led the way to a glass case in a corner, and pointed to the inscription.

"These shoes," it ran, "were dug up in the moat of Holderness Hall. They are for the use of horses, but they are shaped below with a cloven foot of iron, so as to throw pursuers off the track. They are supposed to have belonged to some of the marauding Barons of Holderness in the Middle Ages."

Holmes opened the case, and moistening his finger he passed it along the shoe. A thin film of recent mud was left upon his skin.

"Thank you," said he, as he replaced the glass. "It is the second most interesting object that I have seen in the North."

"And the first?"

Holmes folded up his check and placed it carefully in his notebook. "I am a poor man," said he, as he patted it affectionately, and thrust it into the depths of his inner pocket.

**THE ADVENTURE OF BLACK PETER**

I have never known my friend to be in better form, both mental and physical, than in the year '95. His increasing fame had brought with it an immense practice, and I should be guilty of an indiscretion if I were even to hint at the identity of some of the illustrious clients who crossed our humble threshold in Baker Street. Holmes, however, like all great artists, lived for his art's sake, and, save in the case of the Duke of Holderness, I have seldom known him claim any large reward for his inestimable services. So unworlidy was he—or so capricious—that he frequently refused his help to the powerful and wealthy where the problem made no appeal to his sympathies, while he would devote weeks of most intense application to the affairs of some humble client whose case presented those strange and dramatic qualities which appealed to his imagination and challenged his ingenuity.

In this memorable year '95, a curious and incongruous succession of cases had engaged his attention, ranging from his famous investigation of the sudden death of Cardinal Tosca—an inquiry which was carried out by him at the express desire of His Holiness the Pope—down to his arrest of Wilson, the notorious canary-trainer, which removed a plague-spot from the East End of London. Close on the heels of these two famous cases came the tragedy of Woodman's Lee, and the very obscure circumstances which surrounded the death of Captain Peter Carey. No record of the doings of Mr. Sherlock Holmes would be complete which did not include some account of this very unusual affair.

During the first week of July, my friend had been absent so often and so long from our lodgings that I knew he had something on hand. The fact that several rough-looking men called during that time and inquired for Captain Basil made me understand that Holmes was working somewhere under one of the numerous disguises and names
with which he concealed his own formidable identity. He had at least five small refuges in different parts of London, in which he was able to change his personality. He said nothing of his business to me, and it was not my habit to force a confidence. The first positive sign which he gave me of the direction which his investigation was taking was an extraordinary one. He had gone out before breakfast, and I had sat down to mine when he strode into the room, his hat upon his head and a huge barbed-headed spear tucked like an umbrella under his arm.

"Good gracious, Holmes!" I cried. "You don't mean to say that you have been walking about London with that thing?"

"I drove to the butcher's and back."

"The butcher's?"

"And I return with an excellent appetite. There can be no question, my dear Watson, of the value of exercise before breakfast. But I am prepared to bet that you will not guess the form that my exercise has taken."

"I will not attempt it."

He chuckled as he poured out the coffee.

"If you could have looked into Allardyce's back shop, you would have seen a dead pig swung from a hook in the ceiling, and a gentleman in his shirt sleeves furiously stabbing at it with this weapon. I was that energetic person, and I have satisfied myself that by no exertion of my strength can I transfix the pig with a single blow. Perhaps you would care to try?"

"Not for worlds. But why were you doing this?"

"Because it seemed to me to have an indirect bearing upon the mystery of Woodman's Lee. Ah, Hopkins, I got your wire last night, and I have been expecting you. Come and join us."

Our visitor was an exceedingly alert man, thirty years of age, dressed in a quiet tweed suit, but retaining the erect bearing of one who was accustomed to official uniform. I recognized him at once as Stanley Hopkins, a young police inspector, for whose future Holmes had high hopes, while he in turn professed the admiration and respect of a pupil for the scientific methods of the famous amateur. Hopkins's brow was clouded, and he sat down with an air of deep dejection.

"No, thank you, sir. I breakfasted before I came round. I spent the night in town, for I came up yesterday to report."

"And what had you to report?"

"Failure, sir, absolute failure."

"You have made no progress?"

"None."

"Dear me! I must have a look at the matter."

"I wish to heavens that you would, Mr. Holmes. It's my first big chance, and I am at my wit's end. For goodness' sake, come down and lend me a hand."

"Well, well, it just happens that I have already read all the available evidence, including the report of the inquest, with some care. By the way, what do you make of that tobacco pouch, found on the scene of the crime? Is there no clue there?"

Hopkins looked surprised.

"It was the man's own pouch, sir. His initials were inside it. And it was of sealskin,--and he was an old sealer."

"But he had no pipe."

"No, sir, we could find no pipe. Indeed, he smoked very little, and yet he might have kept some tobacco for his friends."

"No doubt. I only mention it because, if I had been handling the case, I should have been inclined to make that the starting-point of my investigation. However, my friend, Dr. Watson, knows nothing of this matter, and I should be none the worse for hearing the sequence of events once more. Just give us some short sketches of the essentials."

Stanley Hopkins drew a slip of paper from his pocket.

"I have a few dates here which will give you the career of the dead man, Captain Peter Carey. He was born in '45--fifty years of age. He was a most daring and successful seal and whale fisher. In 1883 he commanded the steam sealer SEA UNICORN, of Dundee. He had then had several successful voyages in succession, and in the following year, 1884, he retired. After that he travelled for some years, and finally he bought a small place called Woodman's Lee, near Forest Row, in Sussex. There he has lived for six years, and there he died just a week ago to-day."

"There were some most singular points about the man. In ordinary life, he was a strict Puritan--a silent, gloomy fellow. His household consisted of his wife, his daughter, aged twenty, and two female servants. These last were continually changing, for it was never a very cheery situation, and sometimes it became past all bearing. The man was an intermittent drunkard, and when he had the fit on him he was a perfect fiend. He has been known to drive his wife and daughter out of doors in the middle of the night and flog them through the park until the whole village
outside the gates was aroused by their screams.

"He was summoned once for a savage assault upon the old vicar, who had called upon him to remonstrate with him upon his conduct. In short, Mr. Holmes, you would go far before you found a more dangerous man than Peter Carey, and I have heard that he bore the same character when he commanded his ship. He was known in the trade as Black Peter, and the name was given him, not only on account of his swarthy features and the colour of his huge beard, but for the humours which were the terror of all around him. I need not say that he was loathed and avoided by every one of his neighbours, and that I have not heard one single word of sorrow about his terrible end.

"You must have read in the account of the inquest about the man's cabin, Mr. Holmes, but perhaps your friend here has not heard of it. He had built himself a wooden outhouse--he always called it the 'cabin'--a few hundred yards from his house, and it was here that he slept every night. It was a little, single-roomed hut, sixteen feet by ten. He kept the key in his pocket, made his own bed, cleaned it himself, and allowed no other foot to cross the threshold. There are small windows on each side, which were covered by curtains and never opened. One of these windows was turned towards the high road, and when the light burned in it at night the folk used to point it out to each other and wonder what Black Peter was doing in there. That's the window, Mr. Holmes, which gave us one of the few bits of positive evidence that came out at the inquest.

"You remember that a stonemason, named Slater, walking from Forest Row about one o'clock in the morning--two days before the murder--stopped as he passed the grounds and looked at the square of light still shining among the trees. He swears that the shadow of a man's head turned sideways was clearly visible on the blind, and that this shadow was certainly not that of Peter Carey, whom he knew well. It was that of a bearded man, but the beard was short and bristled forward in a way very different from that of the captain. So he says, but he had been two hours in the public-house, and it is some distance from the road to the window. Besides, this refers to the Monday, and the crime was done upon the Wednesday.

"On the Tuesday, Peter Carey was in one of his blackest moods, flushed with drink and as savage as a dangerous wild beast. He roamed about the house, and the women ran for it when they heard him coming. Late in the evening, he went down to his own hut. About two o'clock the following morning, his daughter, who slept with her window open, heard a most fearful yell from that direction, but it was no unusual thing for him to bawl and shout when he was in drink, so no notice was taken. On rising at seven, one of the maids noticed that the door of the hut was open, but so great was the terror which the man caused that it was midday before anyone would venture down to see what had become of him. Peeping into the open door, they saw a sight which sent them flying, with white faces, into the village. Within an hour, I was on the spot and had taken over the case.

"Well, I have fairly steady nerves, as you know, Mr. Holmes, but I give you my word, that I got a shake when I put my head into that little house. It was droning like a harmonium with the flies and bluebottles, and the floor and walls were like a slaughter-house. He had called it a cabin, and a cabin it was, sure enough, for you would have thought that you were in a ship. There was a bunk at one end, a sea-chest, maps and charts, a picture of the SEA UNICORN, a line of logbooks on a shelf, all exactly as one would expect to find it in a captain's room. And there, in the middle of it, was the man himself--his face twisted like a lost soul in torment, and his great brindled beard stuck upward in his agony. Right through his broad breast a steel harpoon had been driven, and it had sunk deep into the wood of the wall behind him. He was pinned like a beetle on a card. Of course, he was quite dead, and had been so from the instant that he had uttered that last yell of agony.

"I know your methods, sir, and I applied them. Before I permitted anything to be moved, I examined most carefully the ground outside, and also the floor of the room. There were no footmarks."

"Meaning that you saw none?"

"I assure you, sir, that there were none."

"My good Hopkins, I have investigated many crimes, but I have never yet seen one which was committed by a flying creature. As long as the criminal remains upon two legs so long must there be some indentation, some abrasion, some trifling displacement which can be detected by the scientific searcher. It is incredible that this blood-bespattered room contained no trace which could have aided us. I understand, however, from the inquest that there were some objects which you failed to overlook?"

The young inspector winced at my companion's ironical comments.

"I was a fool not to call you in at the time Mr. Holmes. However, that's past praying for now. Yes, there were several objects in the room which called for special attention. One was the harpoon with which the deed was committed. It had been snatched down from a rack on the wall. Two others remained there, and there was a vacant place for the third. On the stock was engraved 'SS. SEA UNICORN, Dundee.' This seemed to establish that the crime had been done in a moment of fury, and that the murderer had seized the first weapon which came in his way. The fact that the crime was committed at two in the morning, and yet Peter Carey was fully dressed, suggested that he had an appointment with the murderer, which is borne out by the fact that a bottle of rum and two dirty glasses
stood upon the table."

"Yes," said Holmes; "I think that both inferences are permissible. Was there any other spirit but rum in the
room?"

"Yes, there was a tantalus containing brandy and whisky on the sea-chest. It is of no importance to us, however,
since the decanters were full, and it had therefore not been used."

"For all that, its presence has some significance," said Holmes. "However, let us hear some more about the
objects which do seem to you to bear upon the case."

"There was this tobacco-pouch upon the table."

"What part of the table?"

"It lay in the middle. It was of coarse sealskin—the straight-haired skin, with a leather thong to bind it. Inside was
'P.C.' on the flap. There was half an ounce of strong ship's tobacco in it."

"Excellent! What more?"

Stanley Hopkins drew from his pocket a drab-covered notebook. The outside was rough and worn, the leaves
discoloured. On the first page were written the initials "J.H.N." and the date "1883." Holmes laid it on the table and
examined it in his minute way, while Hopkins and I gazed over each shoulder. On the second page were the printed
letters "C.P.R.," and then came several sheets of numbers. Another heading was "Argentine," another "Costa Rica,"
and another "San Paulo," each with pages of signs and figures after it.

"What do you make of these?" asked Holmes.

"They appear to be lists of Stock Exchange securities. I thought that 'J.H.N.' were the initials of a broker, and
that 'C.P.R.' may have been his client."

"Try Canadian Pacific Railway," said Holmes.

Stanley Hopkins swore between his teeth, and struck his thigh with his clenched hand.

"What a fool I have been!" he cried. 'Of course, it is as you say. Then 'J.H.N.' are the only initials we have to
solve. I have already examined the old Stock Exchange lists, and I can find no one in 1883, either in the house or
among the outside brokers, whose initials correspond with these. Yet I feel that the clue is the most important one
that I hold. You will admit, Mr. Holmes, that there is a possibility that these initials are those of the second person
who was present—in other words, of the murderer. I would also urge that the introduction into the case of a
document relating to large masses of valuable securities gives us for the first time some indication of a motive for
the crime."

Sherlock Holmes's face showed that he was thoroughly taken aback by this new development.

"I must admit both your points," said he. "I confess that this notebook, which did not appear at the inquest,
modifies any views which I may have formed. I had come to a theory of the crime in which I can find no place for
this. Have you endeavoured to trace any of the securities here mentioned?"

"Inquiries are now being made at the offices, but I fear that the complete register of the stockholders of these
South American concerns is in South America, and that some weeks must elapse before we can trace the shares."

Holmes had been examining the cover of the notebook with his magnifying lens.

"Surely there is some discolouration here," said he.

"Yes, sir, it is a blood-stain. I told you that I picked the book off the floor."

"Was the blood-stain above or below?"

"On the side next the boards."

"Which proves, of course, that the book was dropped after the crime was committed."

"Exactly, Mr. Holmes. I appreciated that point, and I conjectured that it was dropped by the murderer in his
hurried flight. It lay near the door."

"I suppose that none of these securities have been found among the property of the dead man?"

"No, sir."

"Have you any reason to suspect robbery?"

"No, sir. Nothing seemed to have been touched."

"Dear me, it is certainly a very interesting case. Then there was a knife, was there not?"

"A sheath-knife, still in its sheath. It lay at the feet of the dead man. Mrs. Carey has identified it as being her
husband's property."

Holmes was lost in thought for some time.

"Well," said he, at last, "I suppose I shall have to come out and have a look at it."

Stanley Hopkins gave a cry of joy.

"Thank you, sir. That will, indeed, be a weight off my mind."

Holmes shook his finger at the inspector.

"It would have been an easier task a week ago," said he. "But even now my visit may not be entirely fruitless.
Watson, if you can spare the time, I should be very glad of your company. If you will call a four-wheeler, Hopkins, we shall be ready to start for Forest Row in a quarter of an hour."

Alighting at the small wayside station, we drove for some miles through the remains of widespread woods, which were once part of that great forest which for so long held the Saxon invaders at bay--the impenetrable "weald," for sixty years the bulwark of Britain. Vast sections of it have been cleared, for this is the seat of the first iron-works of the country, and the trees have been felled to smelt the ore. Now the richer fields of the North have absorbed the trade, and nothing save these ravaged groves and great scars in the earth show the work of the past. Here, in a clearing upon the green slope of a hill, stood a long, low, stone house, approached by a curving drive running through the fields. Nearer the road, and surrounded on three sides by bushes, was a small outhouse, one window and the door facing in our direction. It was the scene of the murder.

Holmes, Watson and Inspector Hopkins.

Stanley Hopkins led us first to the house, where he introduced us to a haggard, gray-haired woman, the widow of the murdered man, whose gaunt and deep-lined face, with the furtive look of terror in the depths of her red-rimmed eyes, told of the years of hardship and ill-usage which she had endured. With her was her daughter, a pale, fair-haired girl, whose eyes blazed defiantly at us as she told us that she was glad that her father was dead, and that she blessed the hand which had struck him down. It was a terrible household that Black Peter Carey had made for himself, and it was with a sense of relief that we found ourselves in the sunlight again and making our way along a path which had been worn across the fields by the feet of the dead man.

The outhouse was the simplest of dwellings, wooden-walled, shingle-roofed, one window beside the door and one on the farther side. Stanley Hopkins drew the key from his pocket and had stooped to the lock, when he paused with a look of attention and surprise upon his face.

"Someone has been tampering with it," he said.

There could be no doubt of the fact. The woodwork was cut, and the scratches showed white through the paint, as if they had been that instant done. Holmes had been examining the window.

"Someone has tried to force this also. Whoever it was has failed to make his way in. He must have been a very poor burglar."

"This is a most extraordinary thing," said the inspector, "I could swear that these marks were not here yesterday evening."

"Some curious person from the village, perhaps," I suggested.

"Very unlikely. Few of them would dare to set foot in the grounds, far less try to force their way into the cabin. What do you think of it, Mr. Holmes?"

"I think that fortune is very kind to us."

"You mean that the person will come again?"

"It is very probable. He came expecting to find the door open. He tried to get in with the blade of a very small penknife. He could not manage it. What would he do?"

"Come again next night with a more useful tool."

"So I should say. It will be our fault if we are not there to receive him. Meanwhile, let me see the inside of the cabin."

The traces of the tragedy had been removed, but the furniture within the little room still stood as it had been on the night of the crime. For two hours, with most intense concentration, Holmes examined every object in turn, but his face showed that his quest was not a successful one. Once only he paused in his patient investigation.
"Have you taken anything off this shelf, Hopkins?"
"No, I have moved nothing."

"Something has been taken. There is less dust in this corner of the shelf than elsewhere. It may have been a book lying on its side. Well, well, I can do nothing more. Let us walk in these beautiful woods, Watson, and give a few hours to the birds and the flowers. We shall meet you here later, Hopkins, and see if we can come to closer quarters with the gentleman who has paid this visit in the night."

It was past eleven o'clock when we formed our little ambuscade. Hopkins was for leaving the door of the hut open, but Holmes was of the opinion that this would rouse the suspicions of the stranger. The lock was a perfectly simple one, and only a strong blade was needed to push it back. Holmes also suggested that we should wait, not inside the hut, but outside it, among the bushes which grew round the farther window. In this way we should be able to watch our man if he struck a light, and see what his object was in this stealthy nocturnal visit.

It was a long and melancholy vigil, and yet brought with it something of the thrill which the hunter feels when he lies beside the water-pool, and waits for the coming of the thirsty beast of prey. What savage creature was it which might steal upon us out of the darkness? Was it a fierce tiger of crime, which could only be taken fighting hard with flashing fang and claw, or would it prove to be some skulking jackal, dangerous only to the weak and unguarded?

In absolute silence we crouched amongst the bushes, waiting for whatever might come. At first the steps of a few belated villagers, or the sound of voices from the village, lightened our vigil, but one by one these interruptions died away, and an absolute stillness fell upon us, save for the chimes of the distant church, which told us of the progress of the night, and for the rustle and whisper of a fine rain falling amid the foliage which roofed us in.

Half-past two had chimed, and it was the darkest hour which precedes the dawn, when we all started as a low but sharp click came from the direction of the gate. Someone had entered the drive. Again there was a long silence, and I had begun to fear that it was a false alarm, when a stealthy step was heard upon the other side of the hut, and a moment later a metallic scraping and clinking. The man was trying to force the lock. This time his skill was greater or his tool was better, for there was a sudden snap and the creak of the hinges. Then a match was struck, and next instant the steady light from a candle filled the interior of the hut. Through the gauze curtain our eyes were all riveted upon the scene within.

The nocturnal visitor was a young man, frail and thin, with a black moustache, which intensified the deadly pallor of his face. He could not have been much above twenty years of age. I have never seen any human being who appeared to be in such a pitiable fright, for his teeth were visibly chattering, and he was shaking in every limb. He was dressed like a gentleman, in Norfolk jacket and knickerbockers, with a cloth cap upon his head. We watched him staring round with frightened eyes. Then he laid the candle-end upon the table and disappeared from our view into one of the corners. He returned with a large book, one of the logbooks which formed a line upon the shelves. Leaning on the table, he rapidly turned over the leaves of this volume until he came to the entry which he sought. Then, with an angry gesture of his clenched hand, he closed the book, replaced it in the corner, and put out the light. He had hardly turned to leave the hut when Hopkin's hand was on the fellow's collar, and I heard his loud gasp of terror as he understood that he was taken. The candle was relit, and there was our wretched captive, shivering and cowering in the grasp of the detective. He sank down upon the sea-chest, and looked helplessly from one of us to the other.

"Now, my fine fellow," said Stanley Hopkins, "who are you, and what do you want here?"
"You are detectives, I suppose?" said he. "You imagine I am connected with the death of Captain Peter Carey. I assure you that I am innocent."
"We'll see about that," said Hopkins. "First of all, what is your name?"
"It is John Hopley Neligan."
I saw Holmes and Hopkins exchange a quick glance.
"What are you doing here?"
"Can I speak confidentially?"
"No, certainly not."
"Why should I tell you?"
"If you have no answer, it may go badly with you at the trial."
The young man winced.
"Well, I will tell you," he said. "Why should I not? And yet I hate to think of this old scandal gaining a new lease of life. Did you ever hear of Dawson and Neligan?"
I could see, from Hopkins's face, that he never had, but Holmes was keenly interested.
"You mean the West Country bankers," said he. "They failed for a million, ruined half the county families of
Cornwall, and Neligan disappeared."

"Exactly. Neligan was my father."

At last we were getting something positive, and yet it seemed a long gap between an absconding banker and Captain Peter Carey pinned against the wall with one of his own harpoons. We all listened intently to the young man's words.

"It was my father who was really concerned. Dawson had retired. I was only ten years of age at the time, but I was old enough to feel the shame and horror of it all. It has always been said that my father stole all the securities and fled. It is not true. It was his belief that if he were given time in which to realize them, all would be well and every creditor paid in full. He started in his little yacht for Norway just before the warrant was issued for his arrest. I can remember that last night when he bade farewell to my mother. He left us a list of the securities he was taking, and he swore that he would come back with his honour cleared, and that none who had trusted him would suffer. Well, no word was ever heard from him again. Both the yacht and he vanished utterly. We believed, my mother and I, that he and it, with the securities that he had taken with him, were at the bottom of the sea. We had a faithful friend, however, who is a business man, and it was he who discovered some time ago that some of the securities which my father had with him had reappeared on the London market. You can imagine our amazement. I spent months in trying to trace them, and at last, after many doubtings and difficulties, I discovered that the original seller had been Captain Peter Carey, the owner of this hut.

"Naturally, I made some inquiries about the man. I found that he had been in command of a whaler which was due to return from the Arctic seas at the very time when my father was crossing to Norway. The autumn of that year was a stormy one, and there was a long succession of southerly gales. My father's yacht may well have been blown to the north, and there met by Captain Peter Carey's ship. If that were so, what had become of my father? In any case, if I could prove from Peter Carey's evidence how these securities came on the market it would be a proof that my father had not sold them, and that he had no view to personal profit when he took them.

"I came down to Sussex with the intention of seeing the captain, but it was at this moment that his terrible death occurred. I read at the inquest a description of his cabin, in which it stated that the old logbooks of his vessel were preserved in it. It struck me that if I could see what occurred in the month of August, 1883, on board the SEA UNICORN, I might settle the mystery of my father's fate. I tried last night to get at these logbooks, but was unable to open the door. To-night I tried again and succeeded, but I find that the pages which deal with that month have been torn from the book. It was at that moment I found myself a prisoner in your hands."

"Is that all?" asked Hopkins.

"Yes, that is all." His eyes shifted as he said it.

"You have nothing else to tell us?"

He hesitated.

"No, there is nothing."

"You have not been here before last night?"

"No."

"Then how do you account for THAT?" cried Hopkins, as he held up the damning notebook, with the initials of our prisoner on the first leaf and the blood-stain on the cover.

The wretched man collapsed. He sank his face in his hands, and trembled all over.

"Where did you get it?" he groaned. "I did not know. I thought I had lost it at the hotel."

"That is enough," said Hopkins, sternly. "Whatever else you have to say, you must say in court. You will walk down with me now to the police-station. Well, Mr. Holmes, I am very much obliged to you and to your friend for coming down to help me. As it turns out your presence was unnecessary, and I would have brought the case to this successful issue without you, but, none the less, I am grateful. Rooms have been reserved for you at the Brambletye Hotel, so we can all walk down to the village together."

"Well, Watson, what do you think of it?" asked Holmes, as we travelled back next morning.

"I can see that you are not satisfied."

"Oh, yes, my dear Watson, I am perfectly satisfied. At the same time, Stanley Hopkins's methods do not commend themselves to me. I am disappointed in Stanley Hopkins. I had hoped for better things from him. One should always look for a possible alternative, and provide against it. It is the first rule of criminal investigation."

"What, then, is the alternative?"

"The line of investigation which I have myself been pursuing. It may give us nothing. I cannot tell. But at least I shall follow it to the end."

Several letters were waiting for Holmes at Baker Street. He snatched one of them up, opened it, and burst out into a triumphant chuckle of laughter.

"Excellent, Watson! The alternative develops. Have you telegraph forms? Just write a couple of messages for
me: 'Sumner, Shipping Agent, Ratcliff Highway. Send three men on, to arrive ten to-morrow morning.--Basil.' That's my name in those parts. The other is: 'Inspector Stanley Hopkins, 46 Lord Street, Brixton. Come breakfast to-morrow at nine-thirty. Important. Wire if unable to come.--Sherlock Holmes.' There, Watson, this infernal case has haunted me for ten days. I hereby banish it completely from my presence. To-morrow, I trust that we shall hear the last of it forever."

Sharp at the hour named Inspector Stanley Hopkins appeared, and we sat down together to the excellent breakfast which Mrs. Hudson had prepared. The young detective was in high spirits at his success.

"You really think that your solution must be correct?" asked Holmes.

"I could not imagine a more complete case."

"It did not seem to me conclusive."

"You astonish me, Mr. Holmes. What more could one ask for?"

"Does your explanation cover every point?"

"Undoubtedly. I find that young Neligan arrived at the Brambletye Hotel on the very day of the crime. He came on the pretence of playing golf. His room was on the ground-floor, and he could get out when he liked. That very night he went down to Woodman's Lee, saw Peter Carey at the hut, quarrelled with him, and killed him with the harpoon. Then, horrified by what he had done, he fled out of the hut, dropping the notebook which he had brought with him in order to question Peter Carey about these different securities. You may have observed that some of them were marked with ticks, and the others--the great majority--were not. Those which are ticked have been traced on the London market, but the others, presumably, were still in the possession of Carey, and young Neligan, according to his own account, was anxious to recover them in order to do the right thing by his father's creditors. After his flight he did not dare to approach the hut again for some time, but at last he forced himself to do so in order to obtain the information which he needed. Surely that is all simple and obvious?"

John Hopley Neligan is discovered.

Holmes smiled and shook his head. "It seems to me to have only one drawback, Hopkins, and that is that it is intrinsically impossible. Have you tried to drive a harpoon through a body? No? Tut, tut my dear sir, you must really pay attention to these details. My friend Watson could tell you that I spent a whole morning in that exercise. It is no easy matter, and requires a strong and practised arm. But this blow was delivered with such violence that the head of the weapon sank deep into the wall. Do you imagine that this anaemic youth was capable of so frightful an assault? Is he the man who hobnobbed in rum and water with Black Peter in the dead of the night? Was it his profile that was seen on the blind two nights before? No, no, Hopkins, it is another and more formidable person for whom we must seek."

The detective's face had grown longer and longer during Holmes's speech. His hopes and his ambitions were all crumbling about him. But he would not abandon his position without a struggle.

"You can't deny that Neligan was present that night, Mr. Holmes. The book will prove that. I fancy that I have evidence enough to satisfy a jury, even if you are able to pick a hole in it. Besides, Mr. Holmes, I have laid my hand upon MY man. As to this terrible person of yours, where is he?"

"I rather fancy that he is on the stair," said Holmes, serenely. "I think, Watson, that you would do well to put that revolver where you can reach it." He rose and laid a written paper upon a side-table. "Now we are ready," said he.

There had been some talking in gruff voices outside, and now Mrs. Hudson opened the door to say that there were three men inquiring for Captain Basil.

"Show them in one by one," said Holmes.
"The first who entered was a little Ribston pippin of a man, with ruddy cheeks and fluffy white side-whiskers. Holmes had drawn a letter from his pocket.

"What name?" he asked.
"James Lancaster."

"I am sorry, Lancaster, but the berth is full. Here is half a sovereign for your trouble. Just step into this room and wait there for a few minutes."

The second man was a long, dried-up creature, with lank hair and sallow cheeks. His name was Hugh Pattins. He also received his dismissal, his half-sovereign, and the order to wait.

The third applicant was a man of remarkable appearance. A fierce bull-dog face was framed in a tangle of hair and beard, and two bold, dark eyes gleamed behind the cover of thick, tufted, overhung eyebrows. He saluted and stood sailor-fashion, turning his cap round in his hands.

"Your name?" asked Holmes.
"Patrick Cairns."
"Harpooner?"
"Yes, sir. Twenty-six voyages."
"Dundee, I suppose?"
"Yes, sir."
"And ready to start with an exploring ship?"
"Yes, sir."
"What wages?"
"Eight pounds a month."
"Could you start at once?"
"As soon as I get my kit."
"Have you your papers?"
"Yes, sir." He took a sheaf of worn and greasy forms from his pocket. Holmes glanced over them and returned them.

"You are just the man I want," said he. "Here's the agreement on the side-table. If you sign it the whole matter will be settled."

The seaman lurched across the room and took up the pen.
"Shall I sign here?" he asked, stooping over the table.

Holmes leaned over his shoulder and passed both hands over his neck.

"This will do," said he.

I heard a click of steel and a bellow like an enraged bull. The next instant Holmes and the seaman were rolling on the ground together. He was a man of such gigantic strength that, even with the handcuffs which Holmes had so deftly fastened upon his wrists, he would have very quickly overpowered my friend had Hopkins and I not rushed to his rescue. Only when I pressed the cold muzzle of the revolver to his temple did he at last understand that resistance was vain. We lashed his ankles with cord, and rose breathless from the struggle.

"I must really apologize, Hopkins," said Sherlock Holmes. "I fear that the scrambled eggs are cold. However, you will enjoy the rest of your breakfast all the better, will you not, for the thought that you have brought your case to a triumphant conclusion."

Stanley Hopkins was speechless with amazement.

"I don't know what to say, Mr. Holmes," he blurted out at last, with a very red face. "It seems to me that I have been making a fool of myself from the beginning. I understand now, what I should never have forgotten, that I am the pupil and you are the master. Even now I see what you have done, but I don't know how you did it or what it signifies."

"Well, well," said Holmes, good-humouredly. "We all learn by experience, and your lesson this time is that you should never lose sight of the alternative. You were so absorbed in young Neligan that you could not spare a thought to Patrick Cairns, the true murderer of Peter Carey."

The hoarse voice of the seaman broke in on our conversation.

"See here, mister," said he, "I make no complaint of being man-handled in this fashion, but I would have you call things by their right names. You say I murdered Peter Carey, I say I KILLED Peter Carey, and there's all the difference. Maybe you don't believe what I say. Maybe you think I am just slingin' you a yarn."

"Not at all," said Holmes. "Let us hear what you have to say."

"It's soon told, and, by the Lord, every word of it is truth. I knew Black Peter, and when he pulled out his knife I whipped a harpoon through him sharp, for I knew that it was him or me. That's how he died. You can call it murder. Anyhow, I'd as soon die with a rope round my neck as with Black Peter's knife in my heart."
"How came you there?" asked Holmes.

"I'll tell you from the beginning. Just sit me up a little, so as I can speak easy. It was in '83 that it happened--August of that year. Peter Carey was master of the SEA UNICORN, and I was spare harpooner. We were coming out of the ice-pack on our way home, with head winds and a week's southerly gale, when we picked up a little craft that had been blown north. There was one man on her--a landsman. The crew had thought she would founder and had made for the Norwegian coast in the dinghy. I guess they were all drowned. Well, we took him on board, this man, and he and the skipper had some long talks in the cabin. All the baggage we took off with him was one tin box. So far as I know, the man's name was never mentioned, and on the second night he disappeared as if he had never been. It was given out that he had either thrown himself overboard or fallen overboard in the heavy weather that we were having. Only one man knew what had happened to him, and that was me, for, with my own eyes, I saw the skipper tip up his heels and put him over the rail in the middle watch of a dark night, two days before we sighted the Shetland Lights. Well, I kept my knowledge to myself, and waited to see what would come of it. When we got back to Scotland it was easily hushed up, and nobody asked any questions. A stranger died by accident and it was nobody's business to inquire. Shortly after Peter Carey gave up the sea, and it was long years before I could find where he was. I guessed that he had done the deed for the sake of what was in that tin box, and that he could afford now to pay me well for keeping my mouth shut. I found out where he was through a sailor man that had met him in London, and down I went to squeeze him. The first night he was reasonable enough, and was ready to give me what would make me free of the sea for life. We were to fix it all two nights later. When I came, I found him three parts drunk and in a vile temper. We sat down and we drank and we yawned about old times, but the more he drank the less I liked the look on his face. I spotted that harpoon upon the wall, and I thought I might need it before I was through. Then at last he broke out at me, spitting and cursing, with murder in his eyes and a great clasp-knife in his hand. He had not time to get it from the sheath before I had the harpoon through him. Heavens! what a yell he gave! and his face gets between me and my sleep. I stood there, with his blood splashing round me, and I waited for a bit, but all was quiet, so I took heart once more. I looked round, and there was the tin box on the shelf. I had as much right to it as Peter Carey, anyhow, so I took it with me and left the hut. Like a fool I left my baccy-pouch upon the table.

"Now I'll tell you the queerest part of the whole story. I had hardly got outside the hut when I heard someone coming, and I hid among the bushes. A man came slinking along, went into the hut, gave a cry as if he had seen a ghost, and legged it as hard as he could run until he was out of sight. Who he was or what he wanted is more than I can tell. For my part I walked ten miles, got a train at Tunbridge Wells, and so reached London, and no one the wiser.

"Well, when I came to examine the box I found there was no money in it, and nothing but papers that I would not dare to sell. I had lost my hold on Black Peter and was stranded in London without a shilling. There was only my trade left. I saw these advertisements about harpooners, and high wages, so I went to the shipping agents, and they sent me here. That's all I know, and I say again that if I killed Black Peter, the law should give me thanks, for I saved them the rice of a hempen rope."

"A very clear statement said Holmes," rising and lighting his pipe. "I think, Hopkins, that you should lose no time in conveying your prisoner to a place of safety. This room is not well adapted for a cell, and Mr. Patrick Cairns occupies too large a proportion of our carpet."

"Mr. Holmes," said Hopkins, "I do not know how to express my gratitude. Even now I do not understand how you attained this result."

"Simply by having the good fortune to get the right clue from the beginning. It is very possible if I had known about this notebook it might have led away my thoughts, as it did yours. But all I heard pointed in the one direction. The amazing strength, the skill in the use of the harpoon, the rum and water, the sealskin tobacco-pouch with the coarse tobacco--all these pointed to a seaman, and one who had been a whaler. I was convinced that the initials 'P.C.' upon the pouch were a coincidence, and not those of Peter Carey, since he seldom smoked, and no pipe was found in his cabin. You remember that I asked whether whisky and brandy were in the cabin. You said they were. How many landsmen are there who would drink rum when they could get these other spirits? Yes, I was certain it was a seaman."

"And how did you find him?"

"My dear sir, the problem had become a very simple one. If it were a seaman, it could only be a seaman who had been with him on the SEA UNICORN. So far as I could learn he had sailed in no other ship. I spent three days in wiring to Dundee, and at the end of that time I had ascertained the names of the crew of the SEA UNICORN in 1883. When I found Patrick Cairns among the harpooners, my research was nearing its end. I argued that the man was probably in London, and that he would desire to leave the country for a time. I therefore spent some days in the East End, devised an Arctic expedition, put forth tempting terms for harpooners who would serve under Captain
Basil—and behold the result!"

"Wonderful!" cried Hopkins. "Wonderful!"

"You must obtain the release of young Neligan as soon as possible," said Holmes. "I confess that I think you
owe him some apology. The tin box must be returned to him, but, of course, the securities which Peter Carey has
sold are lost forever. There's the cab, Hopkins, and you can remove your man. If you want me for the trial, my
address and that of Watson will be somewhere in Norway—I'll send particulars later."

THE ADVENTURE OF CHARLES AUGUSTUS MILVERTON

It is years since the incidents of which I speak took place, and yet it is with diffidence that I allude to them. For a
long time, even with the utmost discretion and reticence, it would have been impossible to make the facts public, but
now the principal person concerned is beyond the reach of human law, and with due suppression the story may be
told in such fashion as to injure no one. It records an absolutely unique experience in the career both of Mr. Sherlock
Holmes and of myself. The reader will excuse me if I conceal the date or any other fact by which he might trace the
actual occurrence.

We had been out for one of our evening rambles, Holmes and I, and had returned about six o'clock on a cold,
frosty winter's evening. As Holmes turned up the lamp the light fell upon a card on the table. He glanced at it, and
then, with an ejaculation of disgust, threw it on the floor. I picked it up and read:

CHARLES AUGUSTUS MILVERTON, Appledore Towers, Hampstead. Agent.

"Who is he?" I asked.

"The worst man in London," Holmes answered, as he sat down and stretched his legs before the fire. "Is
anything on the back of the card?"

I turned it over.

"Will call at 6:30--C.A.M.," I read.

"Hum! He's about due. Do you feel a creeping, shrinking sensation, Watson, when you stand before the serpents
in the Zoo, and see the slithery, gliding, venomous creatures, with their deadly eyes and wicked, flattened faces?
Well, that's how Milverton impresses me. I've had to do with fifty murderers in my career, but the worst of them
never gave me the repulsion which I have for this fellow. And yet I can't get out of doing business with him--indeed,
he is here at my invitation."

"But who is he?"

"I'll tell you, Watson. He is the king of all the blackmailers. Heaven help the man, and still more the woman,
whose secret and reputation come into the power of Milverton! With a smiling face and a heart of marble, he will
squeeze and squeeze until he has drained them dry. The fellow is a genius in his way, and would have made his
mark in some more savoury trade. His method is as follows: He allows it to be known that he is prepared to pay very
high sums for letters which compromise people of wealth and position. He receives these wares not only from
treachery valets or maids, but frequently from genteel ruffians, who have gained the confidence and affection of
trusting women. He deals with no niggard hand. I happen to know that he paid seven hundred pounds to a footman
for a note two lines in length, and that the ruin of a noble family was the result. Everything which is in the market
goes to Milverton, and there are hundreds in this great city who turn white at his name. No one knows where his grip
may fall, for he is as cunning as the Evil One. I have said that he is the worst man in London, and I would ask you how
could one compare the ruffian, who in hot blood bludgeons his mate, with this man, who
methodically and at his leisure tortures the soul and wrings the nerves in order to add to his already swollen money-
bags?"

I had seldom heard my friend speak with such intensity of feeling.

"But surely," said I, "the fellow must be within the grasp of the law?"

"Technically, no doubt, but practically not. What would it profit a woman, for example, to get him a few months'
imprisonment if her own ruin must immediately follow? His victims dare not hit back. If ever he blackmailed an
innocent person, then indeed we should have him, but he is as cunning as the Evil One. No, no, we must find other
ways to fight him."

"And why is he here?"

"Because an illustrious client has placed her piteous case in my hands. It is the Lady Eva Blackwell, the most
beautiful debutante of last season. She is to be married in a fortnight to the Earl of Dovercourt. This fiend has
several imprudent letters—imprudent, Watson, nothing worse—which were written to an impecunious young squire
in the country. They would suffice to break off the match. Milverton will send the letters to the Earl unless a large
sum of money is paid him. I have been commissioned to meet him, and—to make the best terms I can."

At that instant there was a clatter and a rattle in the street below. Looking down I saw a stately carriage and pair,
the brilliant lamps gleaming on the glossy haunches of the noble chestnuts. A footman opened the door, and a small,
stout man in a shaggy astrakhan overcoat descended. A minute later he was in the room.

Charles Augustus Milverton was a man of fifty, with a large, intellectual head, a round, plump, hairless face, a perpetual frozen smile, and two keen gray eyes, which gleamed brightly from behind broad, gold-rimmed glasses. There was something of Mr. Pickwick's benevolence in his appearance, marred only by the insincerity of the fixed smile and by the hard glitter of those restless and penetrating eyes. His voice was as smooth and suave as his countenance, as he advanced with a plump little hand extended, murmuring his regret for having missed us at his first visit. Holmes disregarded the outstretched hand and looked at him with a face of granite. Milverton's smile broadened, he shrugged his shoulders removed his overcoat, folded it with great deliberation over the back of a chair, and then took a seat.

"This gentleman?" said he, with a wave in my direction. "Is it discreet? Is it right?"
"Dr. Watson is my friend and partner."
"Very good, Mr. Holmes. It is only in your client's interests that I protested. The matter is so very delicate----"
"Dr. Watson has already heard of it."
"Then we can proceed to business. You say that you are acting for Lady Eva. Has she empowered you to accept my terms?"
"What are your terms?"
"Seven thousand pounds."
"And the alternative?"
"My dear sir, it is painful for me to discuss it, but if the money is not paid on the 14th, there certainly will be no marriage on the 18th." His insufferable smile was more complacent than ever.

Holmes thought for a little.
"You appear to me," he said, at last, "to be taking matters too much for granted. I am, of course, familiar with the contents of these letters. My client will certainly do what I may advise. I shall counsel her to tell her future husband the whole story and to trust to his generosity."

Milverton chuckled.
"You evidently do not know the Earl," said he.
From the baffled look upon Holmes's face, I could see clearly that he did.
"What harm is there in the letters?" he asked.
"They are sprightly--very sprightly," Milverton answered. "The lady was a charming correspondent. But I can assure you that the Earl of Dovercourt would fail to appreciate them. However, since you think otherwise, we will let it rest at that. It is purely a matter of business. If you think that it is in the best interests of your client that these letters should be placed in the hands of the Earl, then you would indeed be foolish to pay so large a sum of money to regain them." He rose and seized his astrakhan coat.

Holmes was gray with anger and mortification.
"Wait a little," he said. "You go too fast. We should certainly make every effort to avoid scandal in so delicate a matter."

Milverton relapsed into his chair.
"I was sure that you would see it in that light," he purred.
"At the same time," Holmes continued, "Lady Eva is not a wealthy woman. I assure you that two thousand pounds would be a drain upon her resources, and that the sum you name is utterly beyond her power. I beg, therefore, that you will moderate your demands, and that you will return the letters at the price I indicate, which is, I assure you, the highest that you can get."

Milverton's smile broadened and his eyes twinkled humorously.
"I am aware that what you say is true about the lady's resources," said he. "At the same time you must admit that the occasion of a lady's marriage is a very suitable time for her friends and relatives to make some little effort upon her behalf. They may hesitate as to an acceptable wedding present. Let me assure them that this little bundle of letters would give more joy than all the candelabra and butter-dishes in London."
"It is impossible," said Holmes.
"Dear me, dear me, how unfortunate!" cried Milverton, taking out a bulky pocketbook. "I cannot help thinking that ladies are ill-advised in not making an effort. Look at this!" He held up a little note with a coat-of-arms upon the envelope. "That belongs to--well, perhaps it is hardly fair to tell the name until to-morrow morning. But at that time it will be in the hands of the lady's husband. And all because she will not find a beggarly sum which she could get by turning her diamonds into paste. It IS such a pity! Now, you remember the sudden end of the engagement between the Honourable Miss Miles and Colonel Dorking? Only two days before the wedding, there was a paragraph in the MORNING POST to say that it was all off. And why? It is almost incredible, but the absurd sum of twelve hundred pounds would have settled the whole question. Is it not pitiful? And here I find you, a man of sense, boggling about
terms, when your client's future and honour are at stake. You surprise me, Mr. Holmes."

Holmes, Watson and Charles Augustus Milverton.

"What I say is true," Holmes answered. "The money cannot be found. Surely it is better for you to take the substantial sum which I offer than to ruin this woman's career, which can profit you in no way?"

"There you make a mistake, Mr. Holmes. An exposure would profit me indirectly to a considerable extent. I have eight or ten similar cases maturing. If it was circulated among them that I had made a severe example of the Lady Eva, I should find all of them much more open to reason. You see my point?"

Holmes sprang from his chair.

"Get behind him, Watson! Don't let him out! Now, sir, let us see the contents of that notebook."

Milverton had glided as quick as a rat to the side of the room and stood with his back against the wall.

"Mr. Holmes, Mr. Holmes," he said, turning the front of his coat and exhibiting the butt of a large revolver, which projected from the inside pocket. "I have been expecting you to do something original. This has been done so often, and what good has ever come from it? I assure you that I am armed to the teeth, and I am perfectly prepared to use my weapons, knowing that the law will support me. Besides, your supposition that I would bring the letters here in a notebook is entirely mistaken. I would do nothing so foolish. And now, gentlemen, I have one or two little interviews this evening, and it is a long drive to Hampstead." He stepped forward, took up his coat, laid his hand on his revolver, and turned to the door. I picked up a chair, but Holmes shook his head, and I laid it down again. With bow, a smile, and a twinkle, Milverton was out of the room, and a few moments after we heard the slam of the carriage door and the rattle of the wheels as he drove away.

Holmes sat motionless by the fire, his hands buried deep in his trouser pockets, his chin sunk upon his breast, his eyes fixed upon the glowing embers. For half an hour he was silent and still. Then, with the gesture of a man who has taken his decision, he sprang to his feet and passed into his bedroom. A little later a rakish young workman, with a goatee beard and a swagger, lit his clay pipe at the lamp before descending into the street. "I'll be back some time, Watson," said he, and vanished into the night. I understood that he had opened his campaign against Charles Augustus Milverton, but I little dreamed the strange shape which that campaign was destined to take.

For some days Holmes came and went at all hours in this attire, but beyond a remark that his time was spent at Hampstead, and that it was not wasted, I knew nothing of what he was doing. At last, however, on a wild, tempestuous evening, when the wind screamed and rattled against the windows, he returned from his last expedition, and having removed his disguise he sat before the fire and laughed heartily in his silent inward fashion.

"You would not call me a marrying man, Watson?"

"No, indeed!"

"You'll be interested to hear that I'm engaged."

"My dear fellow! I congrat----"

"To Milverton's housemaid."

"Good heavens, Holmes!"

"I wanted information, Watson."

"Surely you have gone too far?"

"It was a most necessary step. I am a plumber with a rising business, Escott, by name. I have walked out with her each evening, and I have talked with her. Good heavens, those talks! However, I have got all I wanted. I know Milverton's house as I know the palm of my hand."

"But the girl, Holmes?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"You can't help it, my dear Watson. You must play your cards as best you can when such a stake is on the table. However, I rejoice to say that I have a hated rival, who will certainly cut me out the instant that my back is turned."
What a splendid night it is!"

"You like this weather?"

"It suits my purpose. Watson, I mean to burgle Milverton's house to-night."

I had a catching of the breath, and my skin went cold at the words, which were slowly uttered in a tone of concentrated resolution. As a flash of lightning in the night shows up in an instant every detail of a wild landscape, so at one glance I seemed to see every possible result of such an action—the detection, the capture, the honoured career ending in irreparable failure and disgrace, my friend himself lying at the mercy of the odious Milverton.

"For heaven's sake, Holmes, think what you are doing," I cried.

"My dear fellow, I have given it every consideration. I am never precipitate in my actions, nor would I adopt so energetic and, indeed, so dangerous a course, if any other were possible. Let us look at the matter clearly and fairly. I suppose that you will admit that the action is morally justifiable, though technically criminal. To burgle his house is no more than to forcibly take his pocketbook—an action in which you were prepared to aid me."

I turned it over in my mind.

"Yes," I said, "it is morally justifiable so long as our object is to take no articles save those which are used for an illegal purpose."

"Exactly. Since it is morally justifiable, I have only to consider the question of personal risk. Surely a gentleman should not lay much stress upon this, when a lady is in most desperate need of his help?"

"You will be in such a false position."

"Well, that is part of the risk. There is no other possible way of regaining these letters. The unfortunate lady has not the money, and there are none of her people in whom she could confide. To-morrow is the last day of grace, and unless we can get the letters to-night, this villain will be as good as his word and will bring about her ruin. I must, therefore, abandon my client to her fate or I must play this last card. Between ourselves, Watson, it's a sporting duel between this fellow Milverton and me. He had, as you saw, the best of the first exchanges, but my self-respect and my reputation are concerned to fight it to a finish."

"Well, I don't like it, but I suppose it must be," said I. "When do we start?"

"You are not coming."

"Then you are not going," said I. "I give you my word of honour—and I never broke it in my life—that I will take a cab straight to the police-station and give you away, unless you let me share this adventure with you."

"You can't help me."

"How do you know that? You can't tell what may happen. Anyway, my resolution is taken. Other people besides you have self-respect, and even reputations."

Holmes had looked annoyed, but his brow cleared, and he clapped me on the shoulder.

"Well, well, my dear fellow, be it so. We have shared this same room for some years, and it would be amusing if we ended by sharing the same cell. You know, Watson, I don't mind confessing to you that I have always had an idea that I would have made a highly efficient criminal. This is the chance of my lifetime in that direction. See here!" He took a neat little leather case out of a drawer, and opening it he exhibited a number of shining instruments.

"This is a first-class, up-to-date burgling kit, with nickel-plated jemmy, diamond-tipped glass-cutter, adaptable keys, and every modern improvement which the march of civilization demands. Here, too, is my dark lantern. Everything is in order. Have you a pair of silent shoes?"

"I have rubber-soled tennis shoes."

"Excellent! And a mask?"

"I can make a couple out of black silk."

"I can see that you have a strong, natural turn for this sort of thing. Very good, do you make the masks. We shall have some cold supper before we start. It is now nine-thirty. At eleven we shall drive as far as Church Row. We shall be at work before midnight. Milverton is a heavy sleeper, and retires punctually at ten-thirty. With any luck we should be back here by two, with the Lady Eva's letters in my pocket."

Holmes and I put on our dress-clothes, so that we might appear to be two theatre-goers homeward bound. In Oxford Street we picked up a hansom and drove to an address in Hampstead. Here we paid off our cab, and with our great coats buttoned up, for it was bitterly cold, and the wind seemed to blow through us, we walked along the edge of the heath.

"It's a business that needs delicate treatment," said Holmes. "These documents are contained in a safe in the fellow's study, and the study is the ante-room of his bed-chamber. On the other hand, like all these stout, little men who do themselves well, he is a plethoric sleeper. Agatha— that's my fiancée—says it is a joke in the servants' hall that it's impossible to wake the master. He has a secretary who is devoted to his interests, and never budges from the study all day. That's why we are going at night. Then he has a beast of a dog which roams the garden. I met Agatha
late the last two evenings, and she locks the brute up so as to give me a clear run. This is the house, this big one in
its own grounds. Through the gate--now to the right among the laurels. We might put on our masks here, I think.
You see, there is not a glimmer of light in any of the windows, and everything is working splendidly."

With our black silk face-coverings, which turned us into two of the most truculent figures in London, we stole up
to the silent, gloomy house. A sort of tiled veranda extended along one side of it, lined by several windows and two
doors.

"That's his bedroom," Holmes whispered. "This door opens straight into the study. It would suit us best, but it is
bolted as well as locked, and we should make too much noise getting in. Come round here. There's a greenhouse
which opens into the drawing-room."

The place was locked, but Holmes removed a circle of glass and turned the key from the inside. An instant
afterwards he had closed the door behind us, and we had become felons in the eyes of the law. The thick, warm air
of the conservatory and the rich, choking fragrance of exotic plants took us by the throat. He seized my hand in the
darkness and led me swiftly past banks of shrubs which brushed against our faces. Holmes had remarkable powers,
carefully cultivated, of seeing in the dark. Still holding my hand in one of his, he opened a door, and I was vaguely
conscious that we had entered a large room in which a cigar had been smoked not long before. He felt his way
among the furniture, opened another door, and closed it behind us. Putting out my hand I felt several coats hanging
from the wall, and I understood that I was in a passage. We passed along it and Holmes very gently opened a door
upon the right-hand side. Something rushed out at us and my heart sprang into my mouth, but I could have laughed
when I realized that it was the cat. A fire was burning in this new room, and again the air was heavy with tobacco
smoke. Holmes entered on tiptoe, waited for me to follow, and then very gently closed the door. We were in
Milverton's study, and a portiere at the farther side showed the entrance to his bedroom.

It was a good fire, and the room was illuminated by it. Near the door I saw the gleam of an electric switch, but it
was unnecessary, even if it had been safe, to turn it on. At one side of the fireplace was a heavy curtain which
covered the bay window we had seen from outside. On the other side was the door which communicated with the
veranda. A desk stood in the centre, with a turning-chair of shining red leather. Opposite was a large bookcase, with
a marble bust of Athene on the top. In the corner, between the bookcase and the wall, there stood a tall, green safe,
the firelight flashing back from the polished brass knobs upon its face. Holmes stole across and looked at it. Then he
crept to the door of the bedroom, and stood with slanting head looking intently. No sound came from within.
Meanwhile it had struck me that it would be wise to secure our retreat through the outer door, so I examined it. To
my amazement, it was neither locked nor bolted. I touched Holmes on the arm, and he turned his masked face in that
direction. I saw him start, and he was evidently as surprised as I.

"I don't like it," he whispered, putting his lips to my very ear. "I can't quite make it out. Anyhow, we have no
time to lose."

"Can I do anything?"

"Yes, stand by the door. If you hear anyone come, bolt it on the inside, and we can get away as we came. If they
come the other way, we can get through the door if our job is done, or hide behind these window curtains if it is not.
Do you understand?"

I nodded, and stood by the door. My first feeling of fear had passed away, and I thrilled now with a keener zet
than I had ever enjoyed when we were the defenders of the law instead of its defiers. The high object of our mission,
the consciousness that it was unselfish and chivalrous, the villainous character of our opponent, all added to the
sporting interest of the adventure. Far from feeling guilty, I rejoiced and exulted in our dangers. With a glow of
admiration I watched Holmes unrolling his case of instruments and choosing his tool with the calm, scientific
accuracy of a surgeon who performs a delicate operation. I knew that the opening of safes was a particular hobby
with him, and I understood the joy which it gave him to be confronted with this green and gold monster, the dragon
which held in its maw the reputations of many fair ladies. Turning up the cuffs of his dress-coat--he had placed his
overcoat on a chair--Holmes laid out two drills, a jemmy, and several skeleton keys. I stood at the centre door with
my eyes glancing at each of the others, ready for any emergency, though, indeed, my plans were somewhat vague as
to what I should do if we were interrupted. For half an hour, Holmes worked with concentrated energy, laying down
one tool, picking up another, handling each with the strength and delicacy of the trained mechanic. Finally I heard a
click, the broad green door swung open, and inside I had a glimpse of a number of paper packets, each tied, sealed,
and inscribed. Holmes picked one out, but it was as hard to read by the flickering fire, and he drew out his little dark
lantern, for it was too dangerous, with Milverton in the next room, to switch on the electric light. Suddenly I saw
him halt, listen intently, and then in an instant he had swung the door of the safe to, picked up his coat, stuffed his
tools into the pockets, and darted behind the window curtain, motioning me to do the same.

It was only when I had joined him there that I heard what had alarmed his quicker senses. There was a noise
somewhere within the house. A door slammed in the distance. Then a confused, dull murmur broke itself into the
measured thud of heavy footsteps rapidly approaching. They were in the passage outside the room. They paused at
the door. The door opened. There was a sharp snick as the electric light was turned on. The door closed once more,
and the pungent reek of a strong cigar was borne to our nostrils. Then the footsteps continued backward and
forward, backward and forward, within a few yards of us. Finally there was a creak from a chair, and the footsteps
ceased. Then a key clicked in a lock, and I heard the rustle of papers.

So far I had not dared to look out, but now I gently parted the division of the curtains in front of me and peeped
through. From the pressure of Holmes's shoulder against mine, I knew that he was sharing my observations. Right in
front of us, and almost within our reach, was the broad, rounded back of Milverton. It was evident that we had
entirely miscalculated his movements, that he had never been to his bedroom, but that he had been sitting up in some
smoking or billiard room in the farther wing of the house, the windows of which we had not seen. His broad,
grizzled head, with its shining patch of baldness, was in the immediate foreground of our vision. He was leaning far
back in the red leather chair, his legs outstretched, a long, black cigar projecting at an angle from his mouth. He
wore a semi-military smoking jacket, claret-coloured, with a black velvet collar. In his hand he held a long, legal
document which he was reading in an indolent fashion, blowing rings of tobacco smoke from his lips as he did so.
There was no promise of a speedy departure in his composed bearing and his comfortable attitude.

I felt Holmes's hand steal into mine and give me a reassuring shake, as if to say that the situation was within his
powers, and that he was easy in his mind. I was not sure whether he had seen what was only too obvious from my
position, that the door of the safe was imperfectly closed, and that Milverton might at any moment observe it. In my
own mind I had determined that if I were sure, from the rigidity of his gaze, that it had caught his eye, I would at
once spring out, throw my great coat over his head, pinion him, and leave the rest to Holmes. But Milverton never
looked up. He was languidly interested by the papers in his hand, and page after page was turned as he followed the
argument of the lawyer. At least, I thought, when he has finished the document and the cigar he will go to his room,
but before he had reached the end of either, there came a remarkable development, which turned our thoughts into
quite another channel.

Several times I had observed that Milverton looked at his watch, and once he had risen and sat down again, with
a gesture of impatience. The idea, however, that he might have an appointment at so strange an hour never occurred
to me until a faint sound reached my ears from the veranda outside. Milverton dropped his papers and sat rigid in his
chair. The sound was repeated, and then there came a gentle tap at the door. Milverton rose and opened it.

"Well," said he, curtly, "you are nearly half an hour late."

So this was the explanation of the unlocked door and of the nocturnal vigil of Milverton. There was the gentle
rustle of a woman's dress. I had closed the slit between the curtains as Milverton's face had turned in our direction,
but now I ventured very carefully to open it once more. He had resumed his seat, the cigar still projecting at an
insolent angle from the corner of his mouth. In front of him, in the full glare of the electric light, there stood a tall,
slim, dark woman, a veil over her face, a mantle drawn round her chin. Her breath came quick and fast, and every
inch of the lithe figure was quivering with strong emotion.

"Well," said Milverton, "you made me lose a good night's rest, my dear. I hope you'll prove worth it. You
couldn't come any other time--eh?"

The woman shook her head.

"Well, if you couldn't you couldn't. If the Countess is a hard mistress, you have your chance to get level with her
now. Bless the girl, what are you shivering about? That's right. Pull yourself together. Now, let us get down to
business." He took a notebook from the drawer of his desk. "You say that you have five letters which compromise
the Countess d'Albert. You want to sell them. I want to buy them. So far so good. It only remains to fix a price. I
should want to inspect the letters, of course. If they are really good specimens--Great heavens, is it you?"

The woman, without a word, had raised her veil and dropped the mantle from her chin. It was a dark, handsome,
clear-cut face which confronted Milverton--a face with a curved nose, strong, dark eyebrows shading hard, glittering
eyes, and a straight, thin-lipped mouth set in a dangerous smile.

"It is I," she said, "the woman whose life you have ruined."

Milverton laughed, but fear vibrated in his voice. "You were so very obstinate," said he. "Why did you drive me
to such extremities? I assure you I wouldn't hurt a fly of my own accord, but every man has his business, and what
was I to do? I put the price well within your means. You would not pay."

"So you sent the letters to my husband, and he--the noblest gentleman that ever lived, a man whose boots I was
never worthy to lace--he broke his gallant heart and died. You remember that last night, when I came through that
door, I begged and prayed you for mercy, and you laughed in my face as you are trying to laugh now, only your
coward heart cannot keep your lips from twitching. Yes, you never thought to see me here again, but it was that
night which taught me how I could meet you face to face, and alone. Well, Charles Milverton, what have you to
say?"
"Don't imagine that you can bully me," said he, rising to his feet. "I have only to raise my voice and I could call my servants and have you arrested. But I will make allowance for your natural anger. Leave the room at once as you came, and I will say no more."

The woman stood with her hand buried in her bosom, and the same deadly smile on her thin lips.

"You will ruin no more lives as you have ruined mine. You will wring no more hearts as you wrung mine. I will free the world of a poisonous thing. Take that, you hound--and that!--and that!--and that!"

She had drawn a little gleaming revolver, and emptied barrel after barrel into Milverton's body, the muzzle within two feet of his shirt front. He shrank away and then fell forward upon the table, coughing furiously and clawing among the papers. Then he staggered to his feet, received another shot, and rolled upon the floor. "You've done me," he cried, and lay still. The woman looked at him intently, and ground her heel into his upturned face. She looked again, but there was no sound or movement. I heard a sharp rustle, the night air blew into the heated room, and the avenger was gone.

No interference upon our part could have saved the man from his fate, but, as the woman poured bullet after bullet into Milverton's shrinking body I was about to spring out, when I felt Holmes's cold, strong grasp upon my wrist. I understood the whole argument of that firm, restraining grip--that it was no affair of ours, that justice had overtaken a villain, that we had our own duties and our own objects, which were not to be lost sight of. But hardly had the woman rushed from the room when Holmes, with swift, silent steps, was over at the other door. He turned the key in the lock. At the same instant we heard voices in the house and the sound of hurrying feet. The revolver shots had roused the household. With perfect coolness Holmes slipped across to the safe, filled his two arms with bundles of letters, and poured them all into the fire. Again and again he did it, until the safe was empty. Someone turned the handle and beat upon the outside of the door. Holmes looked swiftly round. The letter which had been the messenger of death for Milverton lay, all mottled with his blood, upon the table. Holmes tossed it in among the blazing papers. Then he drew the key from the outer door, passed through after me, and locked it on the outside. "This way, Watson," said he, "we can scale the garden wall in this direction."

I could not have believed that an alarm could have spread so swiftly. Looking back, the huge house was one blaze of light. The front door was open, and figures were rushing down the drive. The whole garden was alive with people, and one fellow raised a view-halloa as we emerged from the veranda and followed hard at our heels. Holmes seemed to know the grounds perfectly, and he threaded his way swiftly among a plantation of small trees, I close at his heels, and our foremost pursuer panting behind us. It was a six-foot wall which barred our path, but he sprang to the top and over. As I did the same I felt the hand of the man behind me grab at my ankle, but I kicked myself free and scrambled over a grass-strewn coping. I fell upon my face among some bushes, but Holmes had me on my feet in an instant, and together we dashed away across the huge expanse of Hampstead Heath. We had run two miles, I suppose, before Holmes at last halted and listened intently. All was absolute silence behind us. We had shaken off our pursuers and were safe.

We had breakfasted and were smoking our morning pipe on the day after the remarkable experience which I have recorded, when Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, very solemn and impressive, was ushered into our modest sitting-room.

"Good-morning, Mr. Holmes," said he; "good-morning. May I ask if you are very busy just now?"

"Not too busy to listen to you."

"I thought that, perhaps, if you had nothing particular on hand, you might care to assist us in a most remarkable case, which occurred only last night at Hampstead."

"Dear me!" said Holmes. "What was that?"

"A murder--a most dramatic and remarkable murder. I know how keen you are upon these things, and I would take it as a great favour if you would step down to Appledore Towers, and give us the benefit of your advice. It is no ordinary crime. We have had our eyes upon this Mr. Milverton for some time, and, between ourselves, he was a bit of a villain. He is known to have held papers which he used for blackmailing purposes. These papers have all been burned by the murderers. No article of value was taken, as it is probable that the criminals were men of good position, whose sole object was to prevent social exposure."

"Criminals?" said Holmes. "Plural?"

"Yes, there were two of them. They were as nearly as possible captured red-handed. We have their footmarks, we have their description, it's ten to one that we trace them. The first fellow was a bit too active, but the second was caught by the under-gardener, and only got away after a struggle. He was a middle-sized, strongly built man--square jaw, thick neck, moustache, a mask over his eyes."

"That's rather vague," said Sherlock Holmes. "My, it might be a description of Watson!"

"It's true," said the inspector, with amusement. "It might be a description of Watson."

"Well, I'm afraid I can't help you, Lestrade," said Holmes. "The fact is that I knew this fellow Milverton, that I
considered him one of the most dangerous men in London, and that I think there are certain crimes which the law cannot touch, and which therefore, to some extent, justify private revenge. No, it's no use arguing. I have made up my mind. My sympathies are with the criminals rather than with the victim, and I will not handle this case."

Milverton killed

Holmes had not said one word to me about the tragedy which we had witnessed, but I observed all the morning that he was in his most thoughtful mood, and he gave me the impression, from his vacant eyes and his abstracted manner, of a man who is striving to recall something to his memory. We were in the middle of our lunch, when he suddenly sprang to his feet. "By Jove, Watson, I've got it!" he cried. "Take your hat! Come with me!" He hurried at his top speed down Baker Street and along Oxford Street, until we had almost reached Regent Circus. Here, on the left hand, there stands a shop window filled with photographs of the celebrities and beauties of the day. Holmes's eyes fixed themselves upon one of them, and following his gaze I saw the picture of a regal and stately lady in Court dress, with a high diamond tiara upon her noble head. I looked at that delicately curved nose, at the marked eyebrows, at the straight mouth, and the strong little chin beneath it. Then I caught my breath as I read the time-honoured title of the great nobleman and statesman whose wife she had been. My eyes met those of Holmes, and he put his finger to his lips as we turned away from the window.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SIX NAPOLEONS

It was no very unusual thing for Mr. Lestrade, of Scotland Yard, to look in upon us of an evening, and his visits were welcome to Sherlock Holmes, for they enabled him to keep in touch with all that was going on at the police headquarters. In return for the news which Lestrade would bring, Holmes was always ready to listen with attention to the details of any case upon which the detective was engaged, and was able occasionally, without any active interference, to give some hint or suggestion drawn from his own vast knowledge and experience.

On this particular evening, Lestrade had spoken of the weather and the newspapers. Then he had fallen silent, puffing thoughtfully at his cigar. Holmes looked keenly at him.

"Anything remarkable on hand?" he asked.
"Oh, no, Mr. Holmes--nothing very particular."
"Then tell me about it."
Lestrade laughed.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, there is no use denying that there IS something on my mind. And yet it is such an absurd business, that I hesitated to bother you about it. On the other hand, although it is trivial, it is undoubtedly queer, and I know that you have a taste for all that is out of the common. But, in my opinion, it comes more in Dr. Watson's line than ours."

"Disease?" said I.
"Madness, anyhow. And a queer madness, too. You wouldn't think there was anyone living at this time of day who had such a hatred of Napoleon the First that he would break any image of him that he could see."

Holmes sank back in his chair.
"That's no business of mine," said he.
"Exactly. That's what I said. But then, when the man commits burglary in order to break images which are not his own, that brings it away from the doctor and on to the policeman."
Holmes sat up again.
"Burglary! This is more interesting. Let me hear the details."
Lestrade took out his official notebook and refreshed his memory from its pages.
"The first case reported was four days ago," said he. "It was at the shop of Morse Hudson, who has a place for
the sale of pictures and statues in the Kennington Road. The assistant had left the front shop for an instant, when he heard a crash, and hurrying in he found a plaster bust of Napoleon, which stood with several other works of art upon the counter, lying shivered into fragments. He rushed out into the road, but, although several passers-by declared that they had noticed a man run out of the shop, he could neither see anyone nor could he find any means of identifying the rascal. It seemed to be one of those senseless acts of Hooliganism which occur from time to time, and it was reported to the constable on the beat as such. The plaster cast was not worth more than a few shillings, and the whole affair appeared to be too childish for any particular investigation.

"The second case, however, was more serious, and also more singular. It occurred only last night.

"In Kennington Road, and within a few hundred yards of Morse Hudson's shop, there lives a well-known medical practitioner, named Dr. Barnicot, who has one of the largest practices upon the south side of the Thames. His residence and principal consulting-room is at Kennington Road, but he has a branch surgery and dispensary at Lower Brixton Road, two miles away. This Dr. Barnicot is an enthusiastic admirer of Napoleon, and his house is full of books, pictures, and relics of the French Emperor. Some little time ago he purchased from Morse Hudson two duplicate plaster casts of the famous head of Napoleon by the French sculptor, Devine. One of these he placed in his hall in the house at Kennington Road, and the other on the mantelpiece of the surgery at Lower Brixton. Well, when Dr. Barnicot came down this morning he was astonished to find that his house had been burgled during the night, but that nothing had been taken save the plaster head from the hall. It had been carried out and had been dashed savagely against the garden wall, under which its splintered fragments were discovered."

Holmes rubbed his hands.

"This is certainly very novel," said he.

"I thought it would please you. But I have not got to the end yet. Dr. Barnicot was due at his surgery at twelve o'clock, and you can imagine his amazement when, on arriving there, he found that the window had been opened in the night and that the broken pieces of his second bust were strewn all over the room. It had been smashed to atoms where it stood. In neither case were there any signs which could give us a clue as to the criminal or lunatic who had done the mischief. Now, Mr. Holmes, you have got the facts."

"They are singular, not to say grotesque," said Holmes. "May I ask whether the two busts smashed in Dr. Barnicot's rooms were the exact duplicates of the one which was destroyed in Morse Hudson's shop?"

"They were taken from the same mould."

"Such a fact must tell against the theory that the man who breaks them is influenced by any general hatred of Napoleon. Considering how many hundreds of statues of the great Emperor must exist in London, it is too much to suppose such a coincidence as that a promiscuous iconoclast should chance to begin upon three specimens of the same bust."

"Well, I thought as you do," said Lestrade. "On the other hand, this Morse Hudson is the purveyor of busts in that part of London, and these three were the only ones which had been in his shop for years. So, although, as you say, there are many hundreds of statues in London, it is very probable that these three were the only ones in that district. Therefore, a local fanatic would begin with them. What do you think, Dr. Watson?"

"There are no limits to the possibilities of monomania," I answered. "There is the condition which the modern French psychologists have called the 'IDEE FIXE,' which may be trifling in character, and accompanied by complete sanity in every other way. A man who had read deeply about Napoleon, or who had possibly received some hereditary family injury through the great war, might conceivably form such an IDEE FIXE and under its influence be capable of any fantastic outrage."

"That won't do, my dear Watson," said Holmes, shaking his head, "for no amount of IDEE FIXE would enable your interesting monomaniac to find out where these busts were situated."

"Well, how do YOU explain it?"

"I don't attempt to do so. I would only observe that there is a certain method in the gentleman's eccentric proceedings. For example, in Dr. Barnicot's hall, where a sound might arouse the family, the bust was taken outside before being broken, whereas in the surgery, where there was less danger of an alarm, it was smashed where it stood. The affair seems absurdly trifling, and yet I dare call nothing trivial when I reflect that some of my most classic cases have had the least promising commencement. You will remember, Watson, how the dreadful business of the Abernetty family was first brought to my notice by the depth which the parsley had sunk into the butter upon a hot day. I can't afford, therefore, to smile at your three broken busts, Lestrade, and I shall be very much obliged to you if you will let me hear of any fresh development of so singular a chain of events."

The development for which my friend had asked came in a quicker and an infinitely more tragic form than he could have imagined. I was still dressing in my bedroom the next morning, when there was a tap at the door and Holmes entered, a telegram in his hand. He read it aloud:

"Come instantly, 131 Pitt Street, Kensington."
"LESTRADE."
"What is it, then?" I asked.
"Don't know—may be anything. But I suspect it is the sequel of the story of the statues. In that case our friend the image-breaker has begun operations in another quarter of London. There's coffee on the table, Watson, and I have a cab at the door."

In half an hour we had reached Pitt Street, a quiet little backwater just beside one of the briskest currents of London life. No. 131 was one of a row, all flat-chested, respectable, and most unromantic dwellings. As we drove up, we found the railings in front of the house lined by a curious crowd. Holmes whistled.

"By George! It's attempted murder at the least. Nothing less will hold the London message-boy. There's a deed of violence indicated in that fellow's round shoulders and outstretched neck. What's this, Watson? The top steps swilled down and the other ones dry. Footsteps enough, anyhow! Well, well, there's Lestrade at the front window, and we shall soon know all about it."

The official received us with a very grave face and showed us into a sitting-room, where an exceedingly unkempt and agitated elderly man, clad in a flannel dressing-gown, was pacing up and down. He was introduced to us as the owner of the house—Mr. Horace Harker, of the Central Press Syndicate.

"It's the Napoleon bust business again," said Lestrade. "You seemed interested last night, Mr. Holmes, so I thought perhaps you would be glad to be present now that the affair has taken a very much graver turn."

"What has it turned to, then?"
"To murder. Mr. Harker, will you tell these gentlemen exactly what has occurred?"

The man in the dressing-gown turned upon us with a most melancholy face.

"It's an extraordinary thing," said he, "that all my life I have been collecting other people's news, and now that a real piece of news has come my own way I am so confused and bothered that I can't put two words together. If I had come in here as a journalist, I should have interviewed myself and had two columns in every evening paper. As it is, I am giving away valuable copy by telling my story over and over to a string of different people, and I can make no use of it myself. However, I've heard your name, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and if you'll only explain this queer business, I shall be paid for my trouble in telling you the story."

Holmes sat down and listened.

"It all seems to centre round that bust of Napoleon which I bought for this very room about four months ago. I picked it up cheap from Harding Brothers, two doors from the High Street Station. A great deal of my journalistic work is done at night, and I often write until the early morning. So it was to-day. I was sitting in my den, which is at the back of the top of the house, about three o'clock, when I was convinced that I heard some sounds downstairs. I listened, but they were not repeated, and I concluded that they came from outside. Then suddenly, about five minutes later, there came a most horrible yell--the most dreadful sound, Mr. Holmes, that ever I heard. I shall see him in my dreams. I had just time to blow my police-whistle, and then I must have fainted, for I knew nothing more until I found the policeman standing over me in the hall."

"Well, who was the murdered man?" asked Holmes.

"There's nothing to show who he was," said Lestrade. "You shall see the body at the mortuary, but we have made nothing of it up to now. He is a tall man, sunburned, very powerful, not more than thirty. He is poorly dressed, and yet does not appear to be a labourer. A horn-handled clasp knife was lying in a pool of blood beside him. Whether it was the weapon which did the deed, or whether it belonged to the dead man, I do not know. There was no name on his clothing, and nothing in his pockets save an apple, some string, a shilling map of London, and a photograph. Here it is."

The official handed us the photograph, which was evidently taken by a snapshot from a small camera. It represented an alert, sharp-featured simian man, with thick eyebrows and a very peculiar projection of the lower part of the face, like the muzzle of a baboon.

"And what became of the bust?" asked Holmes, after a careful study of this picture.

"We had news of it just before you came. It has been found in the front garden of an empty house in Campden House Road. It was broken into fragments. I am going round now to see it. Will you come?"

"Certainly. I must just take one look round." He examined the carpet and the window. "The fellow had either
very long legs or was a most active man," said he. "With an area beneath, it was no mean feat to reach that window ledge and open that window. Getting back was comparatively simple. Are you coming with us to see the remains of your bust, Mr. Harker?"

The disconsolate journalist had seated himself at a writing-table.

"I must try and make something of it," said he, "though I have no doubt that the first editions of the evening papers are out already with full details. It's like my luck! You remember when the stand fell at Doncaster? Well, I was the only journalist in the stand, and my journal the only one that had no account of it, for I was too shaken to write it. And now I'll be too late with a murder done on my own doorstep."

As we left the room, we heard his pen travelling shrilly over the foolscap.

The spat where the fragments of the bust had been found was only a few hundred yards away. For the first time our eyes rested upon this presentment of the great emperor, which seemed to raise such frantic and destructive hatred in the mind of the unknown. It lay scattered, in splintered shards, upon the grass. Holmes picked up several of them and examined them carefully. I was convinced, from his intent face and his purposeful manner, that at last he was upon a clue.

"Well?" asked Lestrade.

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"We have a long way to go yet," said he. "And yet--and yet--well, we have some suggestive facts to act upon. The possession of this trifling bust was worth more, in the eyes of this strange criminal, than a human life. That is one point. Then there is the singular fact that he did not break it in the house, or immediately outside the house, if to break it was his sole object."

"He was rattled and bustled by meeting this other fellow. He hardly knew what he was doing."

"Well, that's likely enough. But I wish to call your attention very particularly to the position of this house, in the garden of which the bust was destroyed."

Lestrade looked about him.

"It was an empty house, and so he knew that he would not be disturbed in the garden."

"Yes, but there is another empty house farther up the street which he must have passed before he came to this one. Why did he not break it there, since it is evident that every yard that he carried it increased the risk of someone meeting him?"

"I give it up," said Lestrade.

Holmes pointed to the street lamp above our heads.

"He could see what he was doing here, and he could not there. That was his reason."

"By Jove! that's true," said the detective. "Now that I come to think of it, Dr. Barnicot's bust was broken not far from his red lamp. Well, Mr. Holmes, what are we to do with that fact?"

"To remember it--to docket it. We may come on something later which will bear upon it. What steps do you propose to take now, Lestrade?"

"The most practical way of getting at it, in my opinion, is to identify the dead man. There should be no difficulty about that. When we have found who he is and who his associates are, we should have a good start in learning what he was doing in Pitt Street last night, and who it was who met him and killed him on the doorstep of Mr. Horace Harker. Don't you think so?"

"No doubt; and yet it is not quite the way in which I should approach the case."

"What would you do then?"

"Oh, you must not let me influence you in any way. I suggest that you go on your line and I on mine. We can compare notes afterwards, and each will supplement the other."

"Very good," said Lestrade.

"If you are going back to Pitt Street, you might see Mr. Horace Harker. Tell him for me that I have quite made up my mind, and that it is certain that a dangerous homicidal lunatic, with Napoleonic delusions, was in his house last night. It will be useful for his article."

Lestrade stared.

"You don't seriously believe that?"

Holmes smiled.

"Don't I? Well, perhaps I don't. But I am sure that it will interest Mr. Horace Harker and the subscribers of the Central Press Syndicate. Now, Watson, I think that we shall find that we have a long and rather complex day's work before us. I should be glad, Lestrade, if you could make it convenient to meet us at Baker Street at six o'clock this evening. Until then I should like to keep this photograph, found in the dead man's pocket. It is possible that I may have to ask your company and assistance upon a small expedition which will have be undertaken to-night, if my chain of reasoning should prove to be correct. Until then good-bye and good luck!"
Sherlock Holmes and I walked together to the High Street, where we stopped at the shop of Harding Brothers, whence the bust had been purchased. A young assistant informed us that Mr. Harding would be absent until afternoon, and that he was himself a newcomer, who could give us no information. Holmes's face showed his disappointment and annoyance.

"Well, well, we can't expect to have it all our own way, Watson," he said, at last. "We must come back in the afternoon, if Mr. Harding will not be here until then. I am, as you have no doubt surmised, endeavouring to trace these busts to their source, in order to find if there is not something peculiar which may account for their remarkable fate. Let us make for Mr. Morse Hudson, of the Kennington Road, and see if he can throw any light upon the problem."

A drive of an hour brought us to the picture-dealer's establishment. He was a small, stout man with a red face and a peppery manner.

"Yes, sir. On my very counter, sir," said he. "What we pay rates and taxes for I don't know, when any ruffian can come in and break one's goods. Yes, sir, it was I who sold Dr. Barnicot his two statues. Disgraceful, sir! A Nihilist plot—that's what I make it. No one but an anarchist would go about breaking statues. Red republicans—that's what I call 'em. Who did I get the statues from? I don't see what that has to do with it. Well, if you really want to know, I got them from Gelder & Co., in Church Street, Stepney. They are a well-known house in the trade, and have been this twenty years. How many had I? Three—two and one are three—two of Dr. Barnicot's, and one smashed in broad daylight on my own counter. Do I know that photograph? No, I don't. Yes, I do, though. Why, it's Beppo. He was a kind of Italian piece-work man, who made himself useful in the shop. He could carve a bit, and gild and frame, and do odd jobs. The fellow left me last week, and I've heard nothing of him since. No, I don't know where he came from nor where he went to. I had nothing against him while he was here. He was gone two days before the bust was smashed."

"Well, that's all we could reasonably expect from Morse Hudson," said Holmes, as we emerged from the shop. "We have this Beppo as a common factor, both in Kennington and in Kensington, so that is worth a ten-mile drive. Now, Watson, let us make for Gelder & Co., of Stepney, the source and origin of the busts. I shall be surprised if we don't get some help down there."

In rapid succession we passed through the fringe of fashionable London, hotel London, theatrical London, literary London, commercial London, and, finally, maritime London, till we came to a riverside city of a hundred thousand souls, where the tenement houses swelter and reek with the outcasts of Europe. Here, in a broad thoroughfare, once the abode of wealthy City merchants, we found the sculpture works for which we searched. Outside was a considerable yard full of monumental masonry. Inside was a large room in which fifty workers were carving or moulding. The manager, a big blond German, received us civilly and gave a clear answer to all Holmes's questions. A reference to his books showed that hundreds of casts had been taken from a marble copy of Devine's head of Napoleon, but that the three which had been sent to Morse Hudson a year or so before had been half of a batch of six, the other three being sent to Harding Brothers, of Kensington. There was no reason why those six should be different from any of the other casts. He could suggest no possible cause why anyone should wish to destroy them—in fact, he laughed at the idea. Their wholesale price was six shillings, but the retailer would get twelve or more. The cast was taken in two moulds from each side of the face, and then these two profiles of plaster of Paris were joined together to make the complete bust. The work was usually done by Italians, in the room we were in. When finished, the busts were put on a table in the passage to dry, and afterwards stored. That was all he could tell us.

But the production of the photograph had a remarkable effect upon the manager. His face flushed with anger, and his brows knotted over his blue Teutonic eyes.

"Ah, the rascal!" he cried. "Yes, indeed, I know him very well. This has always been a respectable establishment, and the only time that we have ever had the police in it was over this very fellow. It was more than a year ago now. He knifed another Italian in the street, and then he came to the works with the police on his heels, and he was taken here. Beppo was his name—his second name I never knew. Serve me right for engaging a man with such a face. But he was a good workman—one of the best."

"What did he get?"

"The man lived and he got off with a year. I have no doubt he is out now, but he has not dared to show his nose here. We have a cousin of his here, and I daresay he could tell you where he is."

"No, no," cried Holmes, "not a word to the cousin—not a word, I beg of you. The matter is very important, and the farther I go with it, the more important it seems to grow. When you referred in your ledger to the sale of those casts I observed that the date was June 3rd of last year. Could you give me the date when Beppo was arrested?"

"I could tell you roughly by the pay-list," the manager answered. "Yes," he continued, after some turning over of pages, "he was paid last on May 20th."
"Thank you," said Holmes. "I don't think that I need intrude upon your time and patience any more." With a last word of caution that he should say nothing as to our researches, we turned our faces westward once more.

The afternoon was far advanced before we were able to snatch a hasty luncheon at a restaurant. A news-bill at the entrance announced "Kensington Outrage. Murder by a Madman," and the contents of the paper showed that Mr. Horace Harker had got his account into print after all. Two columns were occupied with a highly sensational and flowery rendering of the whole incident. Holmes propped it against the cruet-stand and read it while he ate. Once or twice he chuckled.

"This is all right, Watson," said he. "Listen to this:

"It is satisfactory to know that there can be no difference of opinion upon this case, since Mr. Lestrade, one of the most experienced members of the official force, and Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the well known consulting expert, have each come to the conclusion that the grotesque series of incidents, which have ended in so tragic a fashion, arise from lunacy rather than from deliberate crime. No explanation save mental aberration can cover the facts.

"The Press, Watson, is a most valuable institution, if you only know how to use it. And now, if you have quite finished, we will hark back to Kensington and see what the manager of Harding Brothers has to say on the matter."

The founder of that great emporium proved to be a brisk, crisp little person, very dapper and quick, with a clear head and a ready tongue.

"Yes, sir, I have already read the account in the evening papers. Mr. Horace Harker is a customer of ours. We supplied him with the bust some months ago. We ordered three busts of that sort from Gelder & Co., of Stepney. They are all sold now. To whom? Oh, I daresay by consulting our sales book we could very easily tell you. Yes, we have the entries here. One to Mr. Harker you see, and one to Mr. Josiah Brown, of Laburnum Lodge, Laburnum Vale, Chiswick, and one to Mr. Sandeford, of Lower Grove Road, Reading. No, I have never seen this face which you show me in the photograph. You would hardly forget it, would you, sir, for I've seldom seen an uglier. Have we any Italians on the staff? Yes, sir, we have several among our workpeople and cleaners. I daresay they might get a peep at that sales book if they wanted to. There is no particular reason for keeping a watch upon that book. Well, we, any Italians on the staff? Yes, sir, we have several among our workpeople and cleaners. I daresay they might get a peep at that sales book if they wanted to. There is no particular reason for keeping a watch upon that book. Well, it's a very strange business, and I hope that you will let me know if anything comes of your inquiries."

Holmes had taken several notes during Mr. Harding's evidence, and I could see that he was thoroughly satisfied by the turn which affairs were taking. He made no remark, however, save that, unless we hurried, we should be late for our appointment with Lestrade. Sure enough, when we reached Baker Street the detective was already there, and we found him pacing up and down in a fever of impatience. His look of importance showed that his day's work had not been in vain.

"Well?" he asked. "What luck, Mr. Holmes?"

"We have had a very busy day, and not entirely a wasted one," my friend explained. "We have seen both the retailers and also the wholesale manufacturers. I can trace each of the busts now from the beginning."

"The busts," cried Lestrade. "Well, well, you have your own methods, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and it is not for me to say a word against them, but I think I have done a better day's work than you. I have identified the dead man."

"You don't say so?"

"And found a cause for the crime."

"Splendid!"

"We have an inspector who makes a specialty of Saffron Hill and the Italian Quarter. Well, this dead man had some Catholic emblem round his neck, and that, along with his colour, made me think he was from the South. Inspector Hill knew him the moment he caught sight of him. His name is Pietro Venucci, from Naples, and he is one of the greatest cut-throats in London. He is connected with the Mafia, which, as you know, is a secret political society, enforcing its decrees by murder. Now, you see how the affair begins to clear up. The other fellow is probably an Italian also, and a member of the Mafia. He has broken the rules in some fashion. Pietro is set upon his track. Probably the photograph we found in his pocket is the man himself, so that he may not knife the wrong person. He dogs the fellow, he sees him enter a house, he waits outside for him, and in the scuffle he receives his own death-wound. How is that, Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"

Holmes clapped his hands approvingly.

"Excellent, Lestrade, excellent!" he cried. "But I didn't quite follow your explanation of the destruction of the busts."

"The busts! You never can get those busts out of your head. After all, that is nothing; petty larceny, six months at the most. It is the murder that we are really investigating, and I tell you that I am gathering all the threads into my hands."

"And the next stage?"

"Is a very simple one. I shall go down with Hill to the Italian Quarter, find the man whose photograph we have got, and arrest him on the charge of murder. Will you come with us?"
"I think not. I fancy we can attain our end in a simpler way. I can't say for certain, because it all depends--well, it all depends upon a factor which is completely outside our control. But I have great hopes--in fact, the betting is exactly two to one--that if you will come with us to-night I shall be able to help you to lay him by the heels."

"In the Italian Quarter?"

"No, I fancy Chiswick is an address which is more likely to find him. If you will come with me to Chiswick to-night, Lestrade, I'll promise to go to the Italian Quarter with you to-morrow, and no harm will be done by the delay. And now I think that a few hours' sleep would do us all good, for I do not propose to leave before eleven o'clock, and it is unlikely that we shall be back before morning. You'll dine with us, Lestrade, and then you are welcome to the sofa until it is time for us to start. In the meantime, Watson, I should be glad if you would ring for an express messenger, for I have a letter to send and it is important that it should go at once."

Holmes spent the evening in rummaging among the files of the old daily papers with which one of our lumber-rooms was packed. When at last he descended, it was with triumph in his eyes, but he said nothing to either of us as to the result of his researches. For my own part, I had followed step by step the methods by which he had traced the various windings of this complex case, and, though I could not yet perceive the goal which we would reach, I understood clearly that Holmes expected this grotesque criminal to make an attempt upon the two remaining busts, one of which, I remembered, was at Chiswick. No doubt the object of our journey was to catch him in the very act, and I could not but admire the cunning with which my friend had inserted a wrong clue in the evening paper, so as to give the fellow the idea that he could continue his scheme with impunity. I was not surprised when Holmes suggested that I should take my revolver with me. He had himself picked up the loaded hunting-crop, which was his favourite weapon.

A four-wheeler was at the door at eleven, and in it we drove to a spot at the other side of Hammersmith Bridge. Here the cabman was directed to wait. A short walk brought us to a secluded road fringed with pleasant houses, each standing in its own grounds. In the light of a street lamp we read "Laburnum Villa" upon the gate-post of one of them. The occupants had evidently retired to rest, for all was dark save for a fanlight over the hall door, which shed a single blurred circle on to the garden path. The wooden fence which separated the grounds from the road threw a dense black shadow upon the inner side, and here it was that we crouched.

"I fear that you'll have a long wait," Holmes whispered. "We may thank our stars that it is not raining. I don't think we can even venture to smoke to pass the time. However, it's a two to one chance that we get something to pay us for our trouble."

It proved, however, that our vigil was not to be so long as Holmes had led us to fear, and it ended in a very sudden and singular fashion. In an instant, without the least sound to warn us of his coming, the garden gate swung open, and a lithe, dark figure, as swift and active as an ape, rushed up the garden path. We saw it whisk past the light thrown from over the door and disappear against the black shadow of the house. There was a long pause, during which we held our breath, and then a very gentle creaking sound came to our ears. The window was being opened. The noise ceased, and again there was a long silence. The fellow was making his way into the house. We saw the sudden flash of a dark lantern inside the room. What he sought was evidently not there, for again we saw the flash through another blind, and then through another.

"Let us get to the open window. We will nab him as he climbs out," Lestrade whispered.

But before we could move, the man had emerged again. As he came out into the glistening patch of light, we saw that he carried something white under his arm. He looked stealthily all round him. The silence of the deserted street reassured him. Turning his back upon us he laid down his burden, and the next instant there was the sound of a sharp tap, followed by a clatter and rattle. The man was so intent upon what he was doing that he never heard our steps as we stole across the grass plot. With the bound of a tiger Holmes was on his back, and an instant later Lestrade and I had him by either wrist, and the handcuffs had been fastened. As we turned him over I saw a hideous, sallow face, with writhing, furious features, glaring up at us, and I knew that it was indeed the man of the photograph whom we had secured.

But it was not our prisoner to whom Holmes was giving his attention. Squatted on the doorstep, he was engaged in most carefully examining that which the man had brought from the house. It was a bust of Napoleon, like the one which we had seen that morning, and it had been broken into similar fragments. Carefully Holmes held each separate shard to the light, but in no way did it differ from any other shattered piece of plaster. He had just completed his examination when the hall lights flew up, the door opened, and the owner of the house, a jovial, rotund figure in shirt and trousers, presented himself.

"Mr. Josiah Brown, I suppose?" said Holmes.

"Yes, sir; and you, no doubt, are Mr. Sherlock Holmes? I had the note which you sent by the express messenger, and I did exactly what you told me. We locked every door on the inside and awaited developments. Well, I'm very glad to see that you have got the rascal. I hope, gentlemen, that you will come in and have some refreshment."
However, Lestrade was anxious to get his man into safe quarters, so within a few minutes our cab had been summoned and we were all four upon our way to London. Not a word would our captive say, but he glared at us from the shadow of his matted hair, and once, when my hand seemed within his reach, he snapped at it like a hungry wolf. We stayed long enough at the police-station to learn that a search of his clothing revealed nothing save a few shillings and a long sheath knife, the handle of which bore copious traces of recent blood.

"That's all right," said Lestrade, as we parted. "Hill knows all these gentry, and he will give a name to him. You'll find that my theory of the Mafia will work out all right. But I'm sure I am exceedingly obliged to you, Mr. Holmes, for the workmanlike way in which you laid hands upon him. I don't quite understand it all yet."

"I fear it is rather too late an hour for explanations," said Holmes. "Besides, there are one or two details which are not finished off, and it is one of those cases which are worth working out to the very end. If you will come round once more to my rooms at six o'clock to-morrow, I think I shall be able to show you that even now you have not grasped the entire meaning of this business, which presents some features which make it absolutely original in the history of crime. If ever I permit you to chronicle any more of my little problems, Watson, I foresee that you will enliven your pages by an account of the singular adventure of the Napoleonic busts."

When we met again next evening, Lestrade was furnished with much information concerning our prisoner. His name, it appeared, was Beppo, second name unknown. He was a well-known ne'er-do-well among the Italian colony. He had once been a skilful sculptor and had earned an honest living, but he had taken to evil courses and had twice already been in jail—once for a petty theft, and once, as we had already heard, for stabbing a fellow-countryman. He could talk English perfectly well. His reasons for destroying the busts were still unknown, and he refused to answer any questions upon the subject, but the police had discovered that these same busts might very well have been made by his own hands, since he was engaged in this class of work at the establishment of Gelder & Co. To all this information, much of which we already knew, Holmes listened with polite attention, but I, who knew him so well, could clearly see that his thoughts were elsewhere, and I detected a mixture of mingled uneasiness and expectation beneath that mask which he was wont to assume. At last he started in his chair, and his eyes brightened. There had been a ring at the bell. A minute later we heard steps upon the stairs, and an elderly red-faced man with grizzled side-whiskers was ushered in. In his right hand he carried an old-fashioned carpet-bag, which he placed upon the table.

"Is Mr. Sherlock Holmes here?"

My friend bowed and smiled. "Mr. Sandeford, of Reading, I suppose?" said he.

"Yes, sir, I fear that I am a little late, but the trains were awkward. You wrote to me about a bust that is in your possession."

"Certainly."

"I have your letter here. You said, 'I desire to possess a copy of Devine's Napoleon, and am prepared to pay you ten pounds for the one which is in your possession.' Is that right?"

"Exactly."

"I was very much surprised at your letter, for I could not imagine how you knew that I owned such a thing."

"Of course you must have been surprised, but the explanation is very simple. Mr. Harding, of Harding Brothers, said that they had sold you their last copy, and he gave me your address."

"Oh, that was it, was it? Did he tell you what I paid for it?"

"No, he did not."

"Well, I am an honest man, though not a very rich one. I only gave fifteen shillings for the bust, and I think you ought to know that before I take ten pounds from you."

"I am sure the scruple does you honour, Mr. Sandeford. But I have named that price, so I intend to stick to it."

"Well, it is very handsome of you, Mr. Holmes. I brought the bust up with me, as you asked me to do. Here it is!" He opened his bag, and at last we saw placed upon our table a complete specimen of that bust which we had already seen more than once in fragments.

Holmes took a paper from his pocket and laid a ten-pound note upon the table.

"You will kindly sign that paper, Mr. Sandeford, in the presence of these witnesses. It is simply to say that you transfer every possible right that you ever had in the bust to me. I am a methodical man, you see, and you never know what turn events might take afterwards. Thank you, Mr. Sandeford; here is your money, and I wish you a very good evening."

When our visitor had disappeared, Sherlock Holmes's movements were such as to rivet our attention. He began by taking a clean white cloth from a drawer and laying it over the table. Then he placed his newly acquired bust in the centre of the cloth. Finally, he picked up his hunting-crop and struck Napoleon a sharp blow on the top of the head. The figure broke into fragments, and Holmes bent eagerly over the shattered remains. Next instant, with a loud shout of triumph he held up one splinter, in which a round, dark object was fixed like a plum in a pudding.
"Gentlemen," he cried, "let me introduce you to the famous black pearl of the Borgias."

Lestrade and I sat silent for a moment, and then, with a spontaneous impulse, we both broke at clapping, as at the well-wrought crisis of a play. A flush of colour sprang to Holmes's pale cheeks, and he bowed to us like the master dramatist who receives the homage of his audience. It was at such moments that for an instant he ceased to be a reasoning machine, and betrayed his human love for admiration and applause. The same singularly proud and reserved nature which turned away with disdain from popular notoriety was capable of being moved to its depths by spontaneous wonder and praise from a friend.

"Yes, gentlemen," said he, "it is the most famous pearl now existing in the world, and it has been my good fortune, by a connected chain of inductive reasoning, to trace it from the Prince of Colonna's bedroom at the Dacre Hotel, where it was lost, to the interior of this, the last of the six busts of Napoleon which were manufactured by Gelder & Co., of Stepney. You will remember, Lestrade, the sensation caused by the disappearance of this valuable jewel and the vain efforts of the London police to recover it. I was myself consulted upon the case, but I was unable to throw any light upon it. Suspicion fell upon the maid of the Princess, who was an Italian, and it was proved that she had a brother in London, but we failed to trace any connection between them. The maid's name was Lucretia Venucci, and there is no doubt in my mind that this Pietro who was murdered two nights ago was the brother. I have been looking up the dates in the old files of the paper, and I find that the disappearance of the pearl was exactly two days before the arrest of Beppo, for some crime of violence—an event which took place in the factory of Gelder & Co., at the very moment when these busts were being made. Now you clearly see the sequence of events, though you see them, of course, in the inverse order to the way in which they presented themselves to me. Beppo had the pearl in his possession. He may have stolen it from Pietro, he may have been Pietro's confederate, he may have been the go-between of Pietro and his sister. It is of no consequence to us which is the correct solution.

"The main fact is that he HAD the pearl, and at that moment, when it was on his person, he was pursued by the police. He made for the factory in which he worked, and he knew that he had only a few minutes in which to conceal this enormously valuable prize, which would otherwise be found on him when he was searched. Six plaster casts of Napoleon were drying in the passage. One of them was still soft. In an instant Beppo, a skilful workman, made a small hole in the wet plaster, dropped in the pearl, and with a few touches covered over the aperture once more. It was an admirable hiding-place. No one could possibly find it. But Beppo was condemned to a year's imprisonment, and in the meanwhile his six busts were scattered over London. He could not tell which contained his treasure. Only by breaking them could he see. Even shaking would tell him nothing, for as the plaster was wet it was probable that the pearl would adhere to it—as, in fact, it has done. Beppo did not despair, and he conducted his search with considerable ingenuity and perseverance. Through a cousin who works with Gelder, he found out the retail firms who had bought the busts. He managed to find employment with Morse Hudson, and in that way tracked down three of them. The pearl was not there. Then, with the help of some Italian employee, he succeeded in finding out where the other three busts had gone. The first was at Harker's. There he was dogged by his confederate, who held Beppo responsible for the loss of the pearl, and he stabbed him in the scuffle which followed."

"If he was his confederate, why should he carry his photograph?" I asked.

"As a means of tracing him, if he wished to inquire about him from any third person. That was the obvious reason. Well, after the murder I calculated that Beppo would probably hurry rather than delay his movements. He would fear that the police would read his secret, and so he hastened on before they should get ahead of him. Of course, I could not say that he had not found the pearl in Harker's bust. I had not even concluded for certain that it was the pearl, but it was evident to me that he was looking for something, since he carried the bust past the other houses in order to break it in the garden which had a lamp overlooking it. Since Harker's bust was one in three, the chances were exactly as I told you—two to one against the pearl being inside it. There remained two busts, and it was obvious that he would go for the London one first. I warned the inmates of the house, so as to avoid a second tragedy, and we went down, with the happiest results. By that time, of course, I knew for certain that it was the Borgia pearl that we were after. The name of the murdered man linked the one event with the other. There only remained a single bust—the Reading one—and the pearl must be there. I bought it in your presence from the owner—and there it lies."

We sat in silence for a moment.

"Well," said Lestrade, "I've seen you handle a good many cases, Mr. Holmes, but I don't know that I ever knew a more workmanlike one than that. We're not jealous of you at Scotland Yard. No, sir, we are very proud of you, and if you come down to-morrow, there's not a man, from the oldest inspector to the youngest constable, who wouldn't be glad to shake you by the hand."

"Thank you!" said Holmes. "Thank you!" and as he turned away, it seemed to me that he was more nearly moved by the softer human emotions than I had ever seen him. A moment later he was the cold and practical thinker once more. "Put the pearl in the safe, Watson," said he, "and get out the papers of the Conk-Singleton forgery case.
Good-bye, Lestrade. If any little problem comes your way, I shall be happy, if I can, to give you a hint or two as to its solution."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE THREE STUDENTS

Holmes, Watson, Soames and Bannister. by Sidney Paget

It was in the year '95 that a combination of events, into which I need not enter, caused Mr. Sherlock Holmes and myself to spend some weeks in one of our great university towns, and it was during this time that the small but instructive adventure which I am about to relate befell us. It will be obvious that any details which would help the reader exactly to identify the college or the criminal would be injudicious and offensive. So painful a scandal may well be allowed to die out. With due discretion the incident itself may, however, be described, since it serves to illustrate some of those qualities for which my friend was remarkable. I will endeavour, in my statement, to avoid such terms as would serve to limit the events to any particular place, or give a clue as to the people concerned.

We were residing at the time in furnished lodgings close to a library where Sherlock Holmes was pursuing some laborious researches in early English charters--researches which led to results so striking that they may be the subject of one of my future narratives. Here it was that one evening we received a visit from an acquaintance, Mr. Hilton Soames, tutor and lecturer at the College of St. Luke's. Mr. Soames was a tall, spare man, of a nervous and excitable temperament. I had always known him to be restless in his manner, but on this particular occasion he was in such a state of uncontrollable agitation that it was clear something very unusual had occurred.

"I trust, Mr. Holmes, that you can spare me a few hours of your valuable time. We have had a very painful incident at St. Luke's, and really, but for the happy chance of your being in town, I should have been at a loss what to do."

"I am very busy just now, and I desire no distractions," my friend answered. "I should much prefer that you called in the aid of the police."

"No, no, my dear sir; such a course is utterly impossible. When once the law is evoked it cannot be stayed again, and this is just one of those cases where, for the credit of the college, it is most essential to avoid scandal. Your discretion is as well known as your powers, and you are the one man in the world who can help me. I beg you, Mr. Holmes, to do what you can."

My friend's temper had not improved since he had been deprived of the congenial surroundings of Baker Street. Without his scrapbooks, his chemicals, and his homely untidiness, he was an uncomfortable man. He shrugged his shoulders in ungracious acquiescence, while our visitor in hurried words and with much excitable gesticulation poured forth his story.

"I must explain to you, Mr. Holmes, that to-morrow is the first day of the examination for the Fortescue Scholarship. I am one of the examiners. My subject is Greek, and the first of the papers consists of a large passage of Greek translation which the candidate has not seen. This passage is printed on the examination paper, and it would naturally be an immense advantage if the candidate could prepare it in advance. For this reason, great care is taken to keep the paper secret.

"To-day, about three o'clock, the proofs of this paper arrived from the printers. The exercise consists of half a chapter of Thucydides. I had to read it over carefully, as the text must be absolutely correct. At four-thirty my task was not yet completed. I had, however, promised to take tea in a friend's rooms, so I left the proof upon my desk. I was absent rather more than an hour.

"You are aware, Mr. Holmes, that our college doors are double--a green baize one within and a heavy oak one without. As I approached my outer door, I was amazed to see a key in it. For an instant I imagined that I had left my own there, but on feeling in my pocket I found that it was all right. The only duplicate which existed, so far as I knew, was that which belonged to my servant, Bannister--a man who has looked after my room for ten years, and whose honesty is absolutely above suspicion. I found that the key was indeed his, that he had entered my room to
know if I wanted tea, and that he had very carelessly left the key in the door when he came out. His visit to my room must have been within a very few minutes of my leaving it. His forgetfulness about the key would have mattered little upon any other occasion, but on this one day it has produced the most deplorable consequences.

"The moment I looked at my table, I was aware that someone had rummaged among my papers. The proof was in three long slips. I had left them all together. Now, I found that one of them was lying on the floor, one was on the side table near the window, and the third was where I had left it."

Holmes stirred for the first time.

"The first page on the floor, the second in the window, the third where you left it," said he.

"Exactly, Mr. Holmes. You amaze me. How could you possibly know that?"

"Pray continue your very interesting statement."

"For an instant I imagined that Bannister had taken the unpardonable liberty of examining my papers. He denied it, however, with the utmost earnestness, and I am convinced that he was speaking the truth. The alternative was that someone passing had observed the key in the door, had known that I was out, and had entered to look at the papers. A large sum of money is at stake, for the scholarship is a very valuable one, and an unscrupulous man might very well run a risk in order to gain an advantage over his fellows.

"Bannister was very much upset by the incident. He had nearly fainted when we found that the papers had undoubtedly been tampered with. I gave him a little brandy and left him collapsed in a chair, while I made a most careful examination of the room. I soon saw that the intruder had left other traces of his presence besides the rumpled papers. On the table in the window were several shreds from a pencil which had been sharpened. A broken tip of lead was lying there also. Evidently the rascal had copied the paper in a great hurry, had broken his pencil, and had been compelled to put a fresh point to it."

"Excellent!" said Holmes, who was recovering his good-humour as his attention became more engrossed by the case. "Fortune has been your friend."

"This was not all. I have a new writing-table with a fine surface of red leather. I am prepared to swear, and so is Bannister, that it was smooth and unstained. Now I found a clean cut in it about three inches long—not a mere scratch, but a positive cut. Not only this, but on the table I found a small ball of black dough or clay, with specks of something which looks like sawdust in it. I am convinced that these marks were left by the man who rifled the papers. There were no footmarks and no other evidence as to his identity. I was at my wit's end, when suddenly the happy thought occurred to me that you were in the town, and I came straight round to put the matter into your hands. Do help me, Mr. Holmes. You see my dilemma. Either I must find the man or else the examination must be postponed until fresh papers are prepared, and since this cannot be done without explanation, there will ensue a hideous scandal, which will throw a cloud not only on the college, but on the university. Above all things, I desire to settle the matter quietly and discreetly."

"I shall be happy to look into it and to give you such advice as I can," said Holmes, rising and putting on his overcoat. "The case is not entirely devoid of interest. Had anyone visited you in your room after the papers came to you?"

"Yes, young Daulat Ras, an Indian student, who lives on the same stair, came in to ask me some particulars about the examination."

"For which he was entered?"

"Yes."

"And the papers were on your table?"

"To the best of my belief, they were rolled up."

"But might be recognized as proofs?"

"Possibly."

"No one else in your room?"

"No."

"Did anyone know that these proofs would be there?"

"No one save the printer."

"Did this man Bannister know?"

"No, certainly not. No one knew."

"Where is Bannister now?"

"He was very ill, poor fellow. I left him collapsed in the chair. I was in such a hurry to come to you."

"You left your door open?"

"I locked up the papers first."

"Then it amounts to this, Mr. Soames: that, unless the Indian student recognized the roll as being proofs, the man who tampered with them came upon them accidentally without knowing that they were there."
"So it seems to me."
Holmes gave an enigmatic smile.
"Well," said he, "let us go round. Not one of your cases, Watson--mental, not physical. All right; come if you want to. Now, Mr. Soames--at your disposal!"

The sitting-room of our client opened by a long, low, latticed window on to the ancient lichen-tinted court of the old college. A Gothic arched door led to a worn stone staircase. On the ground floor was the tutor's room. Above were three students, one on each story. It was already twilight when we reached the scene of our problem. Holmes halted and looked earnestly at the window. Then he approached it, and, standing on tiptoe with his neck craned, he looked into the room.

"He must have entered through the door. There is no opening except the one pane," said our learned guide.
"Dear me!" said Holmes, and he smiled in a singular way as he glanced at our companion. "Well, if there is nothing to be learned here, we had best go inside."

The lecturer unlocked the outer door and ushered us into his room. We stood at the entrance while Holmes made an examination of the carpet.
"I am afraid there are no signs here," said he. "One could hardly hope for any upon so dry a day. Your servant seems to have quite recovered. You left him in a chair, you say. Which chair?"
"By the window there."
"I see. Near this little table. You can come in now. I have finished with the carpet. Let us take the little table first. Of course, what has happened is very clear. The man entered and took the papers, sheet by sheet, from the central table. He carried them over to the window table, because from there he could see if you came across the courtyard, and so could effect an escape."
"As a matter of fact, he could not," said Soames, "for I entered by the side door."
"Ah, that's good! Well, anyhow, that was in his mind. Let me see the three strips. No finger impressions--no! Well, he carried over this one first, and he copied it. How long would it take him to do that, using every possible contraction? A quarter of an hour, not less. Then he tossed it down and seized the next. He was in the midst of that when your return caused him to make a very hurried retreat--VERY hurried, since he had not time to replace the papers which would tell you that he had been there. You were not aware of any hurrying feet on the stair as you entered the outer door?"
"No, I can't say I was."
"Well, he wrote so furiously that he broke his pencil, and had, as you observe, to sharpen it again. This is of interest, Watson. The pencil was not an ordinary one. It was above the usual size, with a soft lead, the outer colour was dark blue, the maker's name was printed in silver lettering, and the piece remaining is only about an inch and a half long. Look for such a pencil, Mr. Soames, and you have got your man. When I add that he possesses a large and very blunt knife, you have an additional aid."

Mr. Soames was somewhat overwhelmed by this flood of information. "I can follow the other points," said he, "but really, in this matter of the length----"

Holmes held out a small chip with the letters NN and a space of clear wood after them.
"You see?"
"No, I can't say I was."
"Watson, I have always done you an injustice. There are others. What could this NN be? It is at the end of a word. You are aware that Johann Faber is the most common maker's name. Is it not clear that there is just as much of the pencil left as usually follows the Johann?" He held the small table sideways to the electric light. "I was hoping that if the paper on which he wrote was thin, some trace of it might come through upon this polished surface. No, I see nothing. I don't think there is anything more to be learned here. Now for the central table. This small pellet is, I presume, the black, doughy mass you spoke of. Roughly pyramidal in shape and hollowed out, I perceive. As you say, there appear to be grains of sawdust in it. Dear me, this is very interesting. And the cut--a positive tear, I see. It began with a thin scratch and ended in a jagged hole. I am much indebted to you for directing my attention to this case, Mr. Soames. Where does that door lead to?"
"To my bedroom."
"Have you been in it since your adventure?"
"No, I came straight away for you."
"I should like to have a glance round. What a charming, old-fashioned room! Perhaps you will kindly wait a minute, until I have examined the floor. No, I see nothing. What about this curtain? You hang your clothes behind it. If anyone were forced to conceal himself in this room he must do it there, since the bed is too low and the wardrobe too shallow. No one there, I suppose?"

As Holmes drew the curtain I was aware, from some little rigidity and alertness of his attitude, that he was
prepared for an emergency. As a matter of fact, the drawn curtain disclosed nothing but three or four suits of clothes hanging from a line of pegs. Holmes turned away, and stooped suddenly to the floor.

"Halloa! What's this?" said he.

It was a small pyramid of black, putty-like stuff, exactly like the one upon the table of the study. Holmes held it out on his open palm in the glare of the electric light.

"Your visitor seems to have left traces in your bedroom as well as in your sitting-room, Mr. Soames."

"What could he have wanted there?"

"I think it is clear enough. You came back by an unexpected way, and so he had no warning until you were at the very door. What could he do? He caught up everything which would betray him, and he rushed into your bedroom to conceal himself."

"Good gracious, Mr. Holmes, do you mean to tell me that, all the time I was talking to Bannister in this room, we had the man prisoner if we had only known it?"

"So I read it."

"Surely there is another alternative, Mr. Holmes. I don't know whether you observed my bedroom window?"

"Lattice-paned, lead framework, three separate windows, one swinging on hinge, and large enough to admit a man."

"Exactly. And it looks out on an angle of the courtyard so as to be partly invisible. The man might have effected his entrance there, left traces as he passed through the bedroom, and finally, finding the door open, have escaped that way."

Holmes shook his head impatiently.

"Let us be practical," said he. "I understand you to say that there are three students who use this stair, and are in the habit of passing your door?"

"Yes, there are."

"And they are all in for this examination?"

"Yes."

"Have you any reason to suspect any one of them more than the others?"

Soames hesitated.

"It is a very delicate question," said he. "One hardly likes to throw suspicion where there are no proofs."

"Let us hear the suspicions. I will look after the proofs."

"I will tell you, then, in a few words the character of the three men who inhabit these rooms. The lower of the three is Gilchrist, a fine scholar and athlete, plays in the Rugby team and the cricket team for the college, and got his Blue for the hurdles and the long jump. He is a fine, manly fellow. His father was the notorious Sir Jabez Gilchrist, who ruined himself on the turf. My scholar has been left very poor, but he is hard-working and industrious. He will do well.

"The second floor is inhabited by Daulat Ras, the Indian. He is a quiet, inscrutable fellow; as most of those Indians are. He is well up in his work, though his Greek is his weak subject. He is steady and methodical.

"The top floor belongs to Miles McLaren. He is a brilliant fellow when he chooses to work--one of the brightest intellects of the university; but he is wayward, dissipated, and unprincipled. He was nearly expelled over a card scandal in his first year. He has been idling all this term, and he must look forward with dread to the examination."

"Then it is he whom you suspect?"

"I dare not go so far as that. But, of the three, he is perhaps the least unlikely."

"Exactly. Now, Mr. Soames, let us have a look at your servant, Bannister."

He was a little, white-faced, clean-shaven, grizzly-haired fellow of fifty. He was still suffering from this sudden disturbance of the quiet routine of his life. His plump face was twitching with his nervousness, and his fingers could not keep still.

"We are investigating this unhappy business, Bannister," said his master.

"Yes, sir."

"I understand," said Holmes, "that you left your key in the door?"

"Yes, sir."

"Was it not very extraordinary that you should do this on the very day when there were these papers inside?"

"It was most unfortunate, sir. But I have occasionally done the same thing at other times."

"When did you enter the room?"

"It was about half-past four. That is Mr. Soames' tea time."

"How long did you stay?"

"When I saw that he was absent, I withdrew at once."

"Did you look at these papers on the table?"
"No, sir--certainly not."
"How came you to leave the key in the door?"
"I had the tea-tray in my hand. I thought I would come back for the key. Then I forgot."
"Has the outer door a spring lock?"
"No, sir."
"Then it was open all the time?"
"Yes, sir."
"Anyone in the room could get out?"
"Yes, sir."
"When Mr. Soames returned and called for you, you were very much disturbed?"
"Yes, sir. Such a thing has never happened during the many years that I have been here. I nearly fainted, sir."
"So I understand. Where were you when you began to feel bad?"
"Where was I, sir? Why, here, near the door."
"That is singular, because you sat down in that chair over yonder near the corner. Why did you pass these other chairs?"
"I don't know, sir, it didn't matter to me where I sat."
"I really don't think he knew much about it, Mr. Holmes. He was looking very bad--quite ghastly."
"You stayed here when your master left?"
"Only for a minute or so. Then I locked the door and went to my room."
"Whom do you suspect?"
"Oh, I would not venture to say, sir. I don't believe there is any gentleman in this university who is capable of profiting by such an action. No, sir, I'll not believe it."
"Thank you, that will do," said Holmes. "Oh, one more word. You have not mentioned to any of the three gentlemen whom you attend that anything is amiss?"
"No, sir—not a word."
"You haven't seen any of them?"
"No, sir."
"Very good. Now, Mr. Soames, we will take a walk in the quadrangle, if you please."
Three yellow squares of light shone above us in the gathering gloom.
"Your three birds are all in their nests," said Holmes, looking up. "Halloa! What's that? One of them seems restless enough."
It was the Indian, whose dark silhouette appeared suddenly upon his blind. He was pacing swiftly up and down his room.
"I should like to have a peep at each of them," said Holmes. "Is it possible?"
"No difficulty in the world," Soames answered. "This set of rooms is quite the oldest in the college, and it is not unusual for visitors to go over them. Come along, and I will personally conduct you."
"No names, please!" said Holmes, as we knocked at Gilchrist's door. A tall, flaxen-haired, slim young fellow opened it, and made us welcome when he understood our errand. There were some really curious pieces of mediaeval domestic architecture within. Holmes was so charmed with one of them that he insisted on drawing it in his notebook, broke his pencil, had to borrow one from our host and finally borrowed a knife to sharpen his own. The same curious accident happened to him in the rooms of the Indian--a silent, little, hook-nosed fellow, who eyed us askance, and was obviously glad when Holmes's architectural studies had come to an end. I could not see that in either case Holmes had come upon the clue for which he was searching. Only at the third did our visit prove abortive. The outer door would not open to our knock, and nothing more substantial than a torrent of bad language came from behind it. "I don't care who you are. You can go to blazes!" roared the angry voice. "Tomorrow's the exam, and I won't be drawn by anyone."
"A rude fellow," said our guide, flushing with anger as we withdrew down the stair. "Of course, he did not realize that it was I who was knocking, but none the less his conduct was very uncourteous, and, indeed, under the circumstances rather suspicious."
Holmes's response was a curious one.
"Can you tell me his exact height?" he asked.
"Really, Mr. Holmes, I cannot undertake to say. He is taller than the Indian, not so tall as Gilchrist. I suppose five foot six would be about it."
"That is very important," said Holmes. "And now, Mr. Soames, I wish you good-night."
Our guide cried aloud in his astonishment and dismay. "Good gracious, Mr. Holmes, you are surely not going to leave me in this abrupt fashion! You don't seem to realize the position. To-morrow is the examination. I must take
some definite action to-night. I cannot allow the examination to be held if one of the papers has been tampered with. The situation must be faced."

"You must leave it as it is. I shall drop round early to-morrow morning and chat the matter over. It is possible that I may be in a position then to indicate some course of action. Meanwhile, you change nothing--nothing at all."

"Very good, Mr. Holmes."

"You can be perfectly easy in your mind. We shall certainly find some way out of your difficulties. I will take the black clay with me, also the pencil cuttings. Good-bye."

When we were out in the darkness of the quadrangle, we again looked up at the windows. The Indian still paced his room. The others were invisible.

"Well, Watson, what do you think of it?" Holmes asked, as we came out into the main street. "Quite a little parlour game--sort of three-card trick, is it not? There are your three men. It must be one of them. You take your choice. Which is yours?"

"The foul-mouthed fellow at the top. He is the one with the worst record. And yet that Indian was a sly fellow also. Why should he be pacing his room all the time?"

"There is nothing in that. Many men do it when they are trying to learn anything by heart."

"He looked at us in a queer way."

"So would you, if a flock of strangers came in on you when you were preparing for an examination next day, and every moment was of value. No, I see nothing in that. Pencils, too, and knives--all was satisfactory. But that fellow does puzzle me."

"Who?"

"Why, Bannister, the servant. What's his game in the matter?"

"He impressed me as being a perfectly honest man."

"So he did me. That's the puzzling part. Why should a perfectly honest man--Well, well, here's a large stationer's. We shall begin our researches here."

There were only four stationers of any consequences in the town, and at each Holmes produced his pencil chips, and bid high for a duplicate. All were agreed that one could be ordered, but that it was not a usual size of pencil and that it was seldom kept in stock. My friend did not appear to be depressed by his failure, but shrugged his shoulders in half-humorous resignation.

"No good, my dear Watson. This, the best and only final clue, has run to nothing. But, indeed, I have little doubt that we can build up a sufficient case without it. By Jove! my dear fellow, it is nearly nine, and the landlady babbled of green peas at seven-thirty. What with your eternal tobacco, Watson, and your irregularity at meals, I expect that you will get notice to quit, and that I shall share your downfall--not, however, before we have solved the problem of the nervous tutor, the careless servant, and the three enterprising students."

Holmes made no further allusion to the matter that day, though he sat lost in thought for a long time after our belated dinner. At eight in the morning, he came into my room just as I finished my toilet.

"Well, Watson," said he, "it is time we went down to St. Luke's. Can you do without breakfast?"

"Certainly."

"Soames will be in a dreadful fidget until we are able to tell him something positive."

"Have you anything positive to tell him?"

"I think so."

"You have formed a conclusion?"

"Yes, my dear Watson, I have solved the mystery."

"But what fresh evidence could you have got?"

"Aha! It is not for nothing that I have turned myself out of bed at the untimely hour of six. I have put in two hours' hard work and covered at least five miles, with something to show for it. Look at that!

He held out his hand. On the palm were three little pyramids of black, doughy clay.

"Why, Holmes, you had only two yesterday."

"And one more this morning. It is a fair argument that wherever No. 3 came from is also the source of Nos. 1 and 2. Eh, Watson? Well, come along and put friend Soames out of his pain."

The unfortunate tutor was certainly in a state of pitiable agitation when we found him in his chambers. In a few hours the examination would commence, and he was still in the dilemma between making the facts public and allowing the culprit to compete for the valuable scholarship. He could hardly stand still so great was his mental agitation, and he ran towards Holmes with two eager hands outstretched.

"Thank heaven that you have come! I feared that you had given it up in despair. What am I to do? Shall the examination proceed?"

"Yes, let it proceed, by all means."
"But this rascal?"
"He shall not compete."
"You know him?"

"I think so. If this matter is not to become public, we must give ourselves certain powers and resolve ourselves into a small private court-martial. You there, if you please, Soames! Watson you here! I'll take the armchair in the middle. I think that we are now sufficiently imposing to strike terror into a guilty breast. Kindly ring the bell!"

Bannister entered, and shrank back in evident surprise and fear at our judicial appearance.
"You will kindly close the door," said Holmes. "Now, Bannister, will you please tell us the truth about yesterday's incident?"

The man turned white to the roots of his hair.
"I have told you everything, sir."
"Nothing to add?"
"Nothing at all, sir."

"Well, then, I must make some suggestions to you. When you sat down on that chair yesterday, did you do so in order to conceal some object which would have shown who had been in the room?"

Bannister's face was ghastly.
"No, sir, certainly not."

"It is only a suggestion," said Holmes, suavely. "I frankly admit that I am unable to prove it. But it seems probable enough, since the moment that Mr. Soames's back was turned, you released the man who was hiding in that bedroom."

Bannister licked his dry lips.
"There was no man, sir."

"Ah, that's a pity, Bannister. Up to now you may have spoken the truth, but now I know that you have lied."

The man's face set in sullen defiance.
"There was no man, sir."
"Come, come, Bannister!"
"No, sir, there was no one."

"In that case, you can give us no further information. Would you please remain in the room? Stand over there near the bedroom door. Now, Soames, I am going to ask you to have the great kindness to go up to the room of young Gilchrist, and to ask him to step down into yours."

An instant later the tutor returned, bringing with him the student. He was a fine figure of a man, tall, lithe, and agile, with a springy step and a pleasant, open face. His troubled blue eyes glanced at each of us, and finally rested with an expression of blank dismay upon Bannister in the farther corner.

"Just close the door," said Holmes. "Now, Mr. Gilchrist, we are all quite alone here, and no one need ever know one word of what passes between us. We can be perfectly frank with each other. We want to know, Mr. Gilchrist, how you, an honourable man, ever came to commit such an action as that of yesterday?"

The unfortunate young man staggered back, and cast a look full of horror and reproach at Bannister.
"No, no, Mr. Gilchrist, sir, I never said a word—never one word!" cried the servant.

"No, but you have now," said Holmes. "Now, sir, you must see that after Bannister's words your position is hopeless, and that your only chance lies in a frank confession."

For a moment Gilchrist, with upraised hand, tried to control his writhing features. The next he had thrown himself on his knees beside the table, and burying his face in his hands, he had burst into a storm of passionate sobbing.
"Come, come," said Holmes, kindly, "it is human to err, and at least no one can accuse you of being a callous criminal. Perhaps it would be easier for you if I were to tell Mr. Soames what occurred, and you can check me where I am wrong. Shall I do so? Well, well, don't trouble to answer. Listen, and see that I do you no injustice.

"From the moment, Mr. Soames, that you said to me that no one, not even Bannister, could have told that the papers were in your room, the case began to take a definite shape in my mind. The printer one could, of course, dismiss. He could examine the papers in his own office. The Indian I also thought nothing of. If the proofs were in a roll, he could not possibly know what they were. On the other hand, it seemed an unthinkable coincidence that a man should dare to enter the room, and that by chance on that very day the papers were on the table. I dismissed that. The man who entered knew that the papers were there. How did he know?

"When I approached your room, I examined the window. You amused me by supposing that I was contemplating the possibility of someone having in broad daylight, under the eyes of all these opposite rooms, forced himself through it. Such an idea was absurd. I was measuring how tall a man would need to be in order to see, as he passed, what papers were on the central table. I am six feet high, and I could do it with an effort. No one less than that would have a chance. Already you see I had reason to think that, if one of your three students was a man of unusual height, he was the most worth watching of the three.

"I entered, and I took you into my confidence as to the suggestions of the side table. Of the centre table I could make nothing, until in your description of Gilchrist you mentioned that he was a long-distance jumper. Then the whole thing came to me in an instant, and I only needed certain corroborative proofs, which I speedily obtained.

"What happened with (sic) this: This young fellow had employed his afternoon at the athletic grounds, where he had been practising the jump. He returned carrying his jumping-shoes, which are provided, as you are aware, with several sharp spikes. As he passed your window he saw, by means of his great height, these proofs upon your table, and conjectured what they were. No harm would have been done had it not been that, as he passed your door, he perceived the key which had been left by the carelessness of your servant. A sudden impulse came over him to enter, and see if they were indeed the proofs. It was not a dangerous exploit for he could always pretend that he had simply looked in to ask a question.

"Well, when he saw that they were indeed the proofs, it was then that he yielded to temptation. He put his shoes on the table. What was it you put on that chair near the window?"

"Gloves," said the young man.

Holmes looked triumphantly at Bannister. "He put his gloves on the chair, and he took the proofs, sheet by sheet, to copy them. He thought the tutor must return by the main gate and that he would see him. As we know, he came back by the side gate. Suddenly he heard him at the very door. There was no possible escape. He forgot his gloves but he caught up his shoes and darted into the bedroom. You observe that the scratch on that table is slight at one side, but deepens in the direction of the bedroom door. That in itself is enough to show us that the shoe had been drawn in that direction, and that the culprit had taken refuge there. The earth round the spike had been left on the table, and a second sample was loosened and fell in the bedroom. I may add that I walked out to the athletic grounds this morning, saw that tenacious black clay is used in the jumping-pit and carried away a specimen of it, together with some of the fine tan or sawdust which is strewn over it to prevent the athlete from slipping. Have I told the truth, Mr. Gilchrist?"

The student had drawn himself erect.

"Yes, sir, it is true," said he.

"Good heavens! have you nothing to add?" cried Soames.
"Yes, sir, I have, but the shock of this disgraceful exposure has bewildered me. I have a letter here, Mr. Soames, which I wrote to you early this morning in the middle of a restless night. It was before I knew that my sin had found me out. Here it is, sir. You will see that I have said, 'I have determined not to go in for the examination. I have been offered a commission in the Rhodesian Police, and I am going out to South Africa at once.'"

"I am indeed pleased to hear that you did not intend to profit by your unfair advantage," said Soames. "But why did you change your purpose?"

Gilchrist pointed to Bannister.

"There is the man who set me in the right path," said he.

"Come now, Bannister," said Holmes. "It will be clear to you, from what I have said, that only you could have let this young man out, since you were left in the room, and must have locked the door when you went out. As to his escaping by that window, it was incredible. Can you not clear up the last point in this mystery, and tell us the reasons for your action?"

"It was simple enough, sir, if you only had known, but, with all your cleverness, it was impossible that you could know. Time was, sir, when I was butler to old Sir Jabez Gilchrist, this young gentleman's father. When he was ruined I came to the college as servant, but I never forgot my old employer because he was down in the world. I watched his son all I could for the sake of the old days. Well, sir, when I came into this room yesterday, when the alarm was given, the very first thing I saw was Mr. Gilchrist's tan gloves a-lying in that chair. I knew those gloves well, and I understood their message. If Mr. Soames saw them, the game was up. I flopped down into that chair, and nothing would budge me until Mr. Soames he went for you. Then out came my poor young master, whom I had dandled on my knee, and confessed it all to me. Wasn't it natural, sir, that I should save him, and wasn't it natural also that I should try to speak to him as his dead father would have done, and make him understand that he could not profit by such a deed? Could you blame me, sir?"

"No, indeed," said Holmes, heartily, springing to his feet. "Well, Soames, I think we have cleared your little problem up, and our breakfast awaits us at home. Come, Watson! As to you, sir, I trust that a bright future awaits you in Rhodesia. For once you have fallen low. Let us see, in the future, how high you can rise."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE GOLDEN PINCE-NEZ

When I look at the three massive manuscript volumes which contain our work for the year 1894, I confess that it is very difficult for me, out of such a wealth of material, to select the cases which are most interesting in themselves, and at the same time most conducive to a display of those peculiar powers for which my friend was famous. As I turn over the pages, I see my notes upon the repulsive story of the red leech and the terrible death of Crosby, the banker. Here also I find an account of the Addleton tragedy, and the singular contents of the ancient British barrow. The famous Smith-Mortimer succession case comes also within this period, and so does the tracking and arrest of Huret, the Boulevard assassin—an exploit which won for Holmes an autograph letter of thanks from the French President and the Order of the Legion of Honour. Each of these would furnish a narrative, but on the whole I am of opinion that none of them unites so many singular points of interest as the episode of Yoxley Old Place, which includes not only the lamentable death of young Willoughby Smith, but also those subsequent developments which threw so curious a light upon the causes of the crime.

It was a wild, tempestuous night, towards the close of November. Holmes and I sat together in silence all the evening, he engaged with a powerful lens deciphering the remains of the original inscription upon a palimpsest, I deep in a recent treatise upon surgery. Outside the wind howled down Baker Street, while the rain beat fiercely against the windows. It was strange there, in the very depths of the town, with ten miles of man's handiwork on every side of us, to feel the iron grip of Nature, and to be conscious that to the huge elemental forces all London was no more than the molehills that dot the fields. I walked to the window, and looked out on the deserted street. The occasional lamps gleamed on the expanse of muddy road and shining pavement. A single cab was splashing its way from the Oxford Street end.

"Well, Watson, it's as well we have not to turn out to-night," said Holmes, laying aside his lens and rolling up the palimpsest. "I've done enough for one sitting. It is trying work for the eyes. So far as I can make out, it is nothing more exciting than an Abbey's accounts dating from the second half of the fifteenth century. Halloa! halloa! halloa! What's this?"

Amid the droning of the wind there had come the stamping of a horse's hoofs, and the long grind of a wheel as it rasped against the curb. The cab which I had seen had pulled up at our door.

"What can he want?" I ejaculated, as a man stepped out of it.

"Want? He wants us. And we, my poor Watson, want overcoats and cravats and goloshes, and every aid that man ever invented to fight the weather. Wait a bit, though! There's the cab off again! There's hope yet. He'd have kept it if he had wanted us to come. Run down, my dear fellow, and open the door, for all virtuous folk have been long in bed."
When the light of the hall lamp fell upon our midnight visitor, I had no difficulty in recognizing him. It was young Stanley Hopkins, a promising detective, in whose career Holmes had several times shown a very practical interest.

"Is he in?" he asked, eagerly.

"Come up, my dear sir," said Holmes's voice from above. "I hope you have no designs upon us such a night as this."

The detective mounted the stairs, and our lamp gleamed upon his shining waterproof. I helped him out of it, while Holmes knocked a blaze out of the logs in the grate.

"Now, my dear Hopkins, draw up and warm your toes," said he. "Here's a cigar, and the doctor has a prescription containing hot water and a lemon, which is good medicine on a night like this. It must be something important which has brought you out in such a gale."

"It is indeed, Mr. Holmes. I've had a bustling afternoon, I promise you. Did you see anything of the Yoxley case in the latest editions?"

"I've seen nothing later than the fifteenth century to-day."

"Well, it was only a paragraph, and all wrong at that, so you have not missed anything. I haven't let the grass grow under my feet. It's down in Kent, seven miles from Chatham and three from the railway line. I was wired for at 3:15, reached Yoxley Old Place at 5, conducted my investigation, was back at Charing Cross by the last train, and straight to you by cab."

"Which means, I suppose, that you are not quite clear about your case?"

"It means that I can make neither head nor tail of it. So far as I can see, it is just as tangled a business as ever I handled, and yet at first it seemed so simple that one couldn't go wrong. There's no motive, Mr. Holmes. That's what bothers me--I can't put my hand on a motive. Here's a man dead--there's no denying that--but, so far as I can see, no reason on earth why anyone should wish him harm."

Holmes lit his cigar and leaned back in his chair.

"Let us hear about it," said he.

"I've got my facts pretty clear," said Stanley Hopkins. "All I want now is to know what they all mean. The story, so far as I can make it out, is like this. Some years ago this country house, Yoxley Old Place, was taken by an elderly man, who gave the name of Professor Coram. He was an invalid, keeping his bed half the time, and the other half hobbling round the house with a stick or being pushed about the grounds by the gardener in a Bath chair. He was well liked by the few neighbours who called upon him, and he has the reputation down there of being a very learned man. His household used to consist of an elderly housekeeper, Mrs. Marker, and of a maid, Susan Tarlton. These have both been with him since his arrival, and they seem to be women of excellent character. The professor is writing a learned book, and he found it necessary, about a year ago, to engage a secretary. The first two that he tried were not successes, but the third, Mr. Willoughby Smith, a very young man straight from the university, seems to have been just what his employer wanted. His work consisted in writing all the morning to the professor's dictation, and he usually spent the evening in hunting up references and passages which bore upon the next day's work. This Willoughby Smith has nothing against him, either as a boy at Uppingham or as a young man at Cambridge. I have seen his testimonials, and from the first he was a decent, quiet, hard-working fellow, with no weak spot in him at all. And yet this is the lad who has met his death this morning in the professor's study under circumstances which can point only to murder."

The wind howled and screamed at the windows. Holmes and I drew closer to the fire, while the young inspector slowly and point by point developed his singular narrative.

"If you were to search all England," said he, "I don't suppose you could find a household more self-contained or freer from outside influences. Whole weeks would pass, and not one of them go past the garden gate. The professor was buried in his work and existed for nothing else. Young Smith knew nobody in the neighbourhood, and lived very much as his employer did. The two women had nothing to take them from the house. Mortimer, the gardener, who wheels the Bath chair, is an army pensioner--an old Crimean man of excellent character. He does not live in the house, but in a three-roomed cottage at the other end of the garden. These are the only people that you would find within the grounds of Yoxley Old Place. At the same time, the gate of the garden is a hundred yards from the main London to Chatham road. It opens with a latch, and there is nothing to prevent anyone from walking in.

"Now I will give you the evidence of Susan Tarlton, who is the only person who can say anything positive about the matter. It was in the forenoon, between eleven and twelve. She was engaged at the moment in hanging some curtains in the upstairs front bedroom. Professor Coram was still in bed, for when the weather is bad he seldom rises before midday. The housekeeper was busied with some work in the back of the house. Willoughby Smith had been in his bedroom, which he uses as a sitting-room, but the maid heard him at that moment pass along the passage and descend to the study immediately below her. She did not see him, but she says that she could not be mistaken in his
quick, firm tread. She did not hear the study door close, but a minute or so later there was a dreadful cry in the room below. It was a wild, hoarse scream, so strange and unnatural that it might have come either from a man or a woman. At the same instant there was a heavy thud, which shook the old house, and then all was silence. The maid stood petrified for a moment, and then, recovering her courage, she ran downstairs. The study door was shut and she opened it. Inside, young Mr. Willoughby Smith was stretched upon the floor. At first she could see no injury, but as she tried to raise him she saw that blood was pouring from the underside of his neck. It was pierced by a very small but very deep wound, which had divided the carotid artery. The instrument with which the injury had been inflicted lay upon the carpet beside him. It was one of those small sealing-wax knives to be found on old-fashioned writing-tables, with an ivory handle and a stiff blade. It was part of the fittings of the professor's own desk.

"At first the maid thought that young Smith was already dead, but on pouring some water from the carafe over his forehead he opened his eyes for an instant. 'The professor,' he murmured--'it was she.' The maid is prepared to swear that those were the exact words. He tried desperately to say something else, and he held his right hand up in the air. Then he fell back dead.

"In the meantime the housekeeper had also arrived upon the scene, but she was just too late to catch the young man's dying words. Leaving Susan with the body, she hurried to the professors room. He was sitting up in bed, horribly agitated, for he had heard enough to convince him that something terrible had occurred. Mrs. Marker is prepared to swear that those were the exact words. He tried desperately to say something else, and he held his right hand up in the air. Then he fell back dead."

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"It has been pouring rain and blowing a hurricane ever since," said he. "It will be harder to read now than that palimpsest. Well, well, it can't be helped. What did you do, Hopkins, after you had made certain that you had made certain of nothing?"

"I think I made certain of a good deal, Mr. Holmes. I knew that someone had entered the house cautiously from without. I next examined the corridor. It is lined with cocoanut matting and had taken no impression of any kind. This brought me into the study itself. It is a scantily furnished room. The main article is a large writing-table with a fixed bureau. This bureau consists of a double column of drawers, with a central small cupboard between them. The drawers were open, the cupboard locked. The drawers, it seems, were always open, and nothing of value was kept in them. There were some papers of importance in the cupboard, but there were no signs that this had been tampered with, and the professor assures me that nothing was missing. It is certain that no robbery has been committed.

"I come now to the body of the young man. It was found near the bureau, and just to the left of it, as marked upon that chart. The stab was on the right side of the neck and from behind forward, so that it is almost impossible that it could have been self-inflicted."

"Unless he fell upon the knife," said Holmes.

"Exactly. The idea crossed my mind. But we found the knife some feet away from the body, so that seems impossible. Then, of course, there are the man's own dying words. And, finally, there was this very important piece of evidence which was found clasped in the dead man's right hand."

From his pocket Stanley Hopkins drew a small paper packet. He unfolded it and disclosed a golden pince-nez, with two broken ends of black silk cord dangling from the end of it. "Willoughby Smith had excellent sight," he added. "There can be no question that this was snatched from the face or the person of the assassin."

Sherlock Holmes took the glasses into his hand, and examined them with the utmost attention and interest. He held them on his nose, endeavoured to read through them, went to the window and stared up the street with them, looked at them most minutely in the full light of the lamp, and finally, with a chuckle, seated himself at the table and wrote a few lines upon a sheet of paper, which he tossed across to Stanley Hopkins.

"That's the best I can do for you," said he. "It may prove to be of some use."

The astonished detective read the note aloud. It ran as follows:

"Wanted, a woman of good address, attired like a lady. She has a remarkably thick nose, with eyes which are set close upon either side of it. She has a puckered forehead, a peering expression, and probably rounded shoulders. There are indications that she has had recourse to an optician at least twice during the last few months. As her glasses are of remarkable strength, and as opticians are not very numerous, there should be no difficulty in tracing her."

Holmes smiled at the astonishment of Hopkins, which must have been reflected upon my features. "Surely my deductions are simplicity itself," said he. "It would be difficult to name any articles which afford a finer field for inference than a pair of glasses, especially so remarkable a pair as these. That they belong to a woman I infer from their delicacy, and also, of course, from the last words of the dying man. As to her being a person of refinement and well dressed, they are, as you perceive, handsomely mounted in solid gold, and it is inconceivable that anyone who wore such glasses could be slatternly in other respects. You will find that the clips are too wide for your nose, showing that the lady's nose was very broad at the base. This sort of nose is usually a short and coarse one, but there is a sufficient number of exceptions to prevent me from being dogmatic or from insisting upon this point in my description. My own face is a narrow one, and yet I find that I cannot get my eyes into the centre, nor near the centre, of these glasses. Therefore, the lady's eyes are set very near to the sides of the nose. You will perceive, Watson, that the glasses are concave and of unusual strength. A lady whose vision has been so extremely contracted all her life is sure to have the physical characteristics of such vision, which are seen in the forehead, the eyelids, and the shoulders."

"Yes," I said, "I can follow each of your arguments. I confess, however, that I am unable to understand how you arrive at the double visit to the optician."

Holmes took the glasses in his hand.

"You will perceive," he said, "that the clips are lined with tiny bands of cork to soften the pressure upon the nose. One of these is discoloured and worn to some slight extent, but the other is new. Evidently one has fallen off and been replaced. I should judge that the older of them has not been there more than a few months. They exactly correspond, so I gather that the lady went back to the same establishment for the second."

"By George, it's marvellous!" cried Hopkins, in an ecstasy of admiration. "To think that I had all that evidence in my hand and never knew it! I had intended, however, to go the round of the London opticians."

"Of course you would. Meanwhile, have you anything more to tell us about the case?"

"Nothing, Mr. Holmes. I think that you know as much as I do now--probably more. We have had inquiries made as to any stranger seen on the country roads or at the railway station. We have heard of none. What beats me is the
utter want of all object in the crime. Not a ghost of a motive can anyone suggest."

"Ah! there I am not in a position to help you. But I suppose you want us to come out to-morrow?"

"If it is not asking too much, Mr. Holmes. There's a train from Charing Cross to Chatham at six in the morning, and we should be at Yoxley Old Place between eight and nine."

"Then we shall take it. Your case has certainly some features of great interest, and I shall be delighted to look into it. Well, it's nearly one, and we had best get a few hours' sleep. I daresay you can manage all right on the sofa in front of the fire. I'll light my spirit lamp, and give you a cup of coffee before we start."

The gale had blown itself out next day, but it was a bitter morning when we started upon our journey. We saw the cold winter sun rise over the dreary marshes of the Thames and the long, sullen reaches of the river, which I shall ever associate with our pursuit of the Andaman Islander in the earlier days of our career. After a long and weary journey, we alighted at a small station some miles from Chatham. While a horse was being put into a trap at the local inn, we snatched a hurried breakfast, and so we were all ready for business when we at last arrived at Yoxley Old Place. A constable met us at the garden gate.

Holmes asking about one mark in the bureau.

"Well, Wilson, any news?"

"No, sir--nothing."

"No reports of any stranger seen?"

"No, sir. Down at the station they are certain that no stranger either came or went yesterday."

"Have you had inquiries made at inns and lodgings?"

"Yes, sir: there is no one that we cannot account for."

"Well, it's only a reasonable walk to Chatham. Anyone might stay there or take a train without being observed. This is the garden path of which I spoke, Mr. Holmes. I'll pledge my word there was no mark on it yesterday."

"On which side were the marks on the grass?"

"This side, sir. This narrow margin of grass between the path and the flower-bed. I can't see the traces now, but they were clear to me then."

"Yes, yes: someone has passed along," said Holmes, stooping over the grass border. "Our lady must have picked her steps carefully, must she not, since on the one side she would leave a track on the path, and on the other an even clearer one on the soft bed?"

"Yes, sir, she must have been a cool hand."

I saw an intent look pass over Holmes's face.

"You say that she must have come back this way?"

"Yes, sir, there is no other."

"On this strip of grass?"

"Certainly, Mr. Holmes."

"Hum! It was a very remarkable performance--very remarkable. Well, I think we have exhausted the path. Let us go farther. This garden door is usually kept open, I suppose? Then this visitor had nothing to do but to walk in. The idea of murder was not in her mind, or she would have provided herself with some sort of weapon, instead of having to pick this knife off the writing-table. She advanced along this corridor, leaving no traces upon the cocoanut matting. Then she found herself in this study. How long was she there? We have no means of judging."

"Not more than a few minutes, sir. I forgot to tell you that Mrs. Marker, the housekeeper, had been in there tidying not very long before--about a quarter of an hour, she says."

"Well, that gives us a limit. Our lady enters this room, and what does she do? She goes over to the writing-table. What for? Not for anything in the drawers. If there had been anything worth her taking, it would surely have been locked up. No, it was for something in that wooden bureau. Halloa! what is that scratch upon the face of it? Just hold a match, Watson. Why did you not tell me of this, Hopkins?"

The mark which he was examining began upon the brass-work on the right-hand side of the keyhole, and extended for about four inches, where it had scratched the varnish from the surface.
"I noticed it, Mr. Holmes, but you'll always find scratches round a keyhole."

"This is recent, quite recent. See how the brass shines where it is cut. An old scratch would be the same colour as the surface. Look at it through my lens. There's the varnish, too, like earth on each side of a furrow. Is Mrs. Marker there?"

A sad-faced, elderly woman came into the room.

"Did you dust this bureau yesterday morning?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did you notice this scratch?"

"No, sir, I did not."

"I am sure you did not, for a duster would have swept away these shreds of varnish. Who has the key of this bureau?"

"The Professor keeps it on his watch-chain."

"Is it a simple key?"

"No, sir, it is a Chubb's key."

"Very good. Mrs. Marker, you can go. Now we are making a little progress. Our lady enters the room, advances to the bureau, and either opens it or tries to do so. While she is thus engaged, young Willoughby Smith enters the room. In her hurry to withdraw the key, she makes this scratch upon the door. He seizes her, and she, snatching up the nearest object, which happens to be this knife, strikes at him in order to make him let go his hold. The blow is a fatal one. He falls and she escapes, either with or without the object for which she has come. Is Susan, the maid, there? Could anyone have got away through that door after the time that you heard the cry, Susan?"

"No sir, it is impossible. Before I got down the stair, I'd have seen anyone in the passage. Besides, the door never opened, or I would have heard it."

"That settles this exit. Then no doubt the lady went out the way she came. I understand that this other passage leads only to the professor's room. There is no exit that way?"

"No, sir."

"We shall go down it and make the acquaintance of the professor. Halloa, Hopkins! this is very important, very important indeed. The professor's corridor is also lined with cocoanut matting."

"Well, sir, what of that?"

"Don't you see any bearing upon the case? Well, well. I don't insist upon it. No doubt I am wrong. And yet it seems to me to be suggestive. Come with me and introduce me."

We passed down the passage, which was of the same length as that which led to the garden. At the end was a short flight of steps ending in a door. Our guide knocked, and then ushered us into the professor's bedroom.

It was a very large chamber, lined with innumerable volumes, which had overflowed from the shelves and lay in piles in the corners, or were stacked all round at the base of the cases. The bed was in the centre of the room, and in it, propped up with pillows, was the owner of the house. I have seldom seen a more remarkable-looking person. It was a gaunt, aquiline face which was turned towards us, with piercing dark eyes, which lurked in deep hollows under overhung and tufted brows. His hair and beard were white, save that the latter was curiously stained with yellow around his mouth. A cigarette glowed amid the tangle of white hair, and the air of the room was fetid with stale tobacco smoke. As he held out his hand to Holmes, I perceived that it was also stained with yellow nicotine.

"A smoker, Mr. Holmes?" said he, speaking in well-chosen English, with a curious little mincing accent. "Pray take a cigarette. And you, sir? I can recommend them, for I have them especially prepared by Ionides, of Alexandria. He sends me a thousand at a time, and I grieve to say that I have to arrange for a fresh supply every fortnight. Bad, sir, very bad, but an old man has few pleasures. Tobacco and my work--that is all that is left to me."

Holmes had lit a cigarette and was shooting little darting glances all over the room.

"Tobacco and my work, but now only tobacco," the old man exclaimed. "Alas! what a fatal interruption! Who could have foreseen such a terrible catastrophe? So estimable a young man! I assure you that, after a few months' training, he was an admirable assistant. What do you think of the matter, Mr. Holmes?"

"I have not yet made up my mind."

"I shall indeed be indebted to you if you can throw a light where all is so dark to us. To a poor bookworm and invalid like myself such a blow is paralyzing. I seem to have lost the faculty of thought. But you are a man of action--you are a man of affairs. It is part of the everyday routine of your life. You can preserve your balance in every emergency. We are fortunate, indeed, in having you at our side."

Holmes was pacing up and down one side of the room whilst the old professor was talking. I observed that he was smoking with extraordinary rapidity. It was evident that he shared our host's liking for the fresh Alexandrian cigarettes.

"Yes, sir, it is a crushing blow," said the old man. "That is my MAGNUM OPUS--the pile of papers on the side
table yonder. It is my analysis of the documents found in the Coptic monasteries of Syria and Egypt, a work which will cut deep at the very foundation of revealed religion. With my enfeebled health I do not know whether I shall ever be able to complete it, now that my assistant has been taken from me. Dear me! Mr. Holmes, why, you are even a quicker smoker than I am myself."

Holmes smiled.

"I am a connoisseur," said he, taking another cigarette from the box--his fourth--and lighting it from the stub of that which he had finished. "I will not trouble you with any lengthy cross-examination, Professor Coram, since I gather that you were in bed at the time of the crime, and could know nothing about it. I would only ask this: What do you imagine that this poor fellow meant by his last words: 'The professor--it was she'?"

The professor shook his head.

"Susan is a country girl," said he, "and you know the incredible stupidity of that class. I fancy that the poor fellow murmured some incoherent delirious words, and that she twisted them into this meaningless message."

"I see. You have no explanation yourself of the tragedy?"

"Possibly an accident, possibly--I only breathe it among ourselves--a suicide. Young men have their hidden troubles--some affair of the heart, perhaps, which we have never known. It is a more probable supposition than murder."

"But the eyeglasses?"

"Ah! I am only a student--a man of dreams. I cannot explain the practical things of life. But still, we are aware, my friend, that love-gages may take strange shapes. By all means take another cigarette. It is a pleasure to see anyone appreciate them so. A fan, a glove, glasses--who knows what article may be carried as a token or treasured when a man puts an end to his life? This gentleman speaks of footsteps in the grass, but, after all, it is easy to be mistaken on such a point. As to the knife, it might well be thrown far from the unfortunate man as he fell. It is possible that I speak as a child, but to me it seems that Willoughby Smith has met his fate by his own hand."

Holmes seemed struck by the theory thus put forward, and he continued to walk up and down for some time, lost in thought and consuming cigarette after cigarette.

"Tell me, Professor Coram," he said, at last, "what is in that cupboard in the bureau?"

"Nothing that would help a thief. Family papers, letters from my poor wife, diplomas of universities which have done me honour. Here is the key. You can look for yourself."

Holmes picked up the key, and looked at it for an instant, then he handed it back.

"No, I hardly think that it would help me," said he. "I should prefer to go quietly down to your garden, and turn the whole matter over in my head. There is something to be said for the theory of suicide which you have put forward. We must apologize for having intruded upon you, Professor Coram, and I promise that we won't disturb you until after lunch. At two o'clock we will come again, and report to you anything which may have happened in the interval."

Holmes was curiously distraint, and we walked up and down the garden path for some time in silence.

"Have you a clue?" I asked, at last.

"It depends upon those cigarettes that I smoked," said he. "It is possible that I am utterly mistaken. The cigarettes will show me."

"My dear Holmes," I exclaimed, "how on earth----"

"Well, well, you may see for yourself. If not, there's no harm done. Of course, we always have the optician clue to fall back upon, but I take a short cut when I can get it. Ah, here is the good Mrs. Marker! Let us enjoy five minutes of instructive conversation with her."

I may have remarked before that Holmes had, when he liked, a peculiarly ingratiating way with women, and that he very readily established terms of confidence with them. In half the time which he had named, he had captured the housekeeper's goodwill and was chatting with her as if he had known her for years.

"Yes, Mr. Holmes, it is as you say, sir. He does smoke something terrible. All day and sometimes all night, sir. I've seen that room of a morning--well, sir, you'd have thought it was a London fog. Poor young Mr. Smith, he was a smoker also, but not as bad as the professor. His health--well, I don't know that it's better nor worse for the smoking."

"Ah!" said Holmes, "but it kills the appetite."

"Well, I don't know about that, sir."

"I suppose the professor eats hardly anything?"

"Well, he is variable. I'll say that for him."

"I'll wager he took no breakfast this morning, and won't face his lunch after all the cigarettes I saw him consume."

"Well, you're out there, sir, as it happens, for he ate a remarkable big breakfast this morning. I don't know when
I've known him make a better one, and he's ordered a good dish of cutlets for his lunch. I'm surprised myself, for since I came into that room yesterday and saw young Mr. Smith lying there on the floor, I couldn't bear to look at food. Well, it takes all sorts to make a world, and the professor hasn't let it take his appetite away."

We loitered the morning away in the garden. Stanley Hopkins had gone down to the village to look into some rumours of a strange woman who had been seen by some children on the Chatham Road the previous morning. As to my friend, all his usual energy seemed to have deserted him. I had never known him handle a case in such a half-hearted fashion. Even the news brought back by Hopkins that he had found the children, and that they had undoubtedly seen a woman exactly corresponding with Holmes's description, and wearing either spectacles or eyeglasses, failed to rouse any sign of keen interest. He was more attentive when Susan, who waited upon us at lunch, volunteered the information that she believed Mr. Smith had been out for a walk yesterday morning, and that he had only returned half an hour before the tragedy occurred. I could not myself see the bearing of this incident, but I clearly perceived that Holmes was weaving it into the general scheme which he had formed in his brain. Suddenly he sprang from his chair and glanced at his watch. "Two o'clock, gentlemen," said he. "We must go up and have it out with our friend, the professor."

The old man had just finished his lunch, and certainly his empty dish bore evidence to the good appetite with which his housekeeper had credited him. He was, indeed, a weird figure as he turned his white mane and his glowing eyes towards us. The eternal cigarette smouldered in his mouth. He had been dressed and was seated in an armchair by the fire.

"Well, Mr. Holmes, have you solved this mystery yet?" He shoved the large tin of cigarettes which stood on a table beside him towards my companion. Holmes stretched out his hand at the same moment, and between them they tipped the box over the edge. For a minute or two we were all on our knees retrieving stray cigarettes from impossible places. When we rose again, I observed Holmes's eyes were shining and his cheeks tinged with colour. Only at a crisis have I seen those battle-signals flying.

"Yes," said he, "I have solved it."

Stanley Hopkins and I stared in amazement. Something like a sneer quivered over the gaunt features of the old professor.

"Indeed! In the garden?"
"No, here."
"Here! When?"
"This instant."
"You are surely joking, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. You compel me to tell you that this is too serious a matter to be treated in such a fashion."

"I have forged and tested every link of my chain, Professor Coram, and I am sure that it is sound. What your motives are, or what exact part you play in this strange business, I am not yet able to say. In a few minutes I shall probably hear it from your own lips. Meanwhile I will reconstruct what is past for your benefit, so that you may know the information which I still require.

"A lady yesterday entered your study. She came with the intention of possessing herself of certain documents which were in your bureau. She had a key of her own. I have had an opportunity of examining yours, and I do not find that slight discolouration which the scratch made upon the varnish would have produced. You were not an accessory, therefore, and she came, so far as I can read the evidence, without your knowledge to rob you."

The professor blew a cloud from his lips. "This is most interesting and instructive," said he. "Have you no more to add? Surely, having traced this lady so far, you can also say what has become of her."

"I will endeavour to do so. In the first place she was seized by your secretary, and stabbed him in order to escape. This catastrophe I am inclined to regard as an unhappy accident, for I am convinced that the lady had no intention of inflicting so grievous an injury. An assassin does not come unarmed. Horrified by what she had done, she rushed wildly away from the scene of the tragedy. Unfortunately for her, she had lost her glasses in the scuffle, and as she was extremely short-sighted she was really helpless without them. She ran down a corridor, which she imagined to be that by which she had come--both were lined with cocoanut matting--and it was only when it was too late that she understood that she had taken the wrong passage, and that her retreat was cut off behind her. What was she to do? She could not go back. She could not remain where she was. She must go on. She went on. She mounted a stair, pushed open a door, and found herself in your room."

The old man sat with his mouth open, staring wildly at Holmes. Amazement and fear were stamped upon his expressive features. Now, with an effort, he shrugged his shoulders and burst into insincere laughter.

"All very fine, Mr. Holmes," said he. "But there is one little flaw in your splendid theory. I was myself in my room, and I never left it during the day."

"I am aware of that, Professor Coram."
"And you mean to say that I could lie upon that bed and not be aware that a woman had entered my room?"
"I never said so. You WERE aware of it. You spoke with her. You recognized her. You aided her to escape."
Again the professor burst into high-keyed laughter. He had risen to his feet, and his eyes glowed like embers.
"You are mad!" he cried. "You are talking insanely. I helped her to escape? Where is she now?"
"She is there," said Holmes, and he pointed to a high bookcase in the corner of the room.
I saw the old man throw up his arms, a terrible convulsion passed over his grim face, and he fell back in his chair. At the same instant the bookcase at which Holmes pointed swung round upon a hinge, and a woman rushed out into the room. "You are right!" she cried, in a strange foreign voice. "You are right! I am here."
She was brown with the dust and draped with the cobwebs which had come from the walls of her hiding-place. Her face, too, was streaked with grime, and at the best she could never have been handsome, for she had the exact physical characteristics which Holmes had divined, with, in addition, a long and obstinate chin. What with her natural blindness, and what with the change from dark to light, she stood as one dazed, blinking about her to see where and who we were. And yet, in spite of all these disadvantages, there was a certain nobility in the woman's bearing--a gallantry in the defiant chin and in the upraised head, which compelled something of respect and admiration.
Stanley Hopkins had laid his hand upon her arm and claimed her as his prisoner, but she waved him aside gently, and yet with an over-mastering dignity which compelled obedience. The old man lay back in his chair with a twitching face, and stared at her with brooding eyes.
"Yes, sir, I am your prisoner," she said. "From where I stood I could hear everything, and I know that you have learned the truth. I confess it all. It was I who killed the young man. But you are right--you who say it was an accident. I did not even know that it was a knife which I held in my hand, for in my despair I snatched anything from the table and struck at him to make him let me go. It is the truth that I tell."
"Madam," said Holmes, "I am sure that it is the truth. I fear that you are far from well."
She had turned a dreadful colour, the more ghastly under the dark dust-streaks upon her face. She seated herself on the side of the bed; then she resumed.
"I have only a little time here," she said, "but I would have you to know the whole truth. I am this man's wife. He is not an Englishman. He is a Russian. His name I will not tell."
For the first time the old man stirred. "God bless you, Anna!" he cried. "God bless you!"
She cast a look of the deepest disdain in his direction. "Why should you cling so hard to that wretched life of yours, Sergius?" said she. "It has done harm to many and good to none--not even to yourself. However, it is not for me to cause the frail thread to be snapped before God's time. I have enough already upon my soul since I crossed the threshold of this cursed house. But I must speak or I shall be too late.
"I have said, gentlemen, that I am this man's wife. He was fifty and I a foolish girl of twenty when we married. It was in a city of Russia, a university--I will not name the place."
"God bless you, Anna!" murmured the old man again.
"We were reformers--revolutionists--Nihilists, you understand. He and I and many more. Then there came a time of trouble, a police officer was killed, many were arrested, evidence was wanted, and in order to save his own life and to earn a great reward, my husband betrayed his own wife and his companions. Yes, we were all arrested upon his confession. Some of us found our way to the gallows, and some to Siberia. I was among these last, but my term was not for life. My husband came to England with his ill-gotten gains and has lived in quiet ever since, knowing well that if the Brotherhood knew where he was not a week would pass before justice would be done."
The old man reached out a trembling hand and helped himself to a cigarette. "I am in your hands, Anna," said he. "You were always good to me."
"I have not yet told you the height of his villainy," said she. "Among our comrades of the Order, there was one who was the friend of my heart. He was noble, unselfish, loving--all that my husband was not. He hated violence. We were all guilty--if that is guilt--but he was not. He wrote forever dissuading us from such a course. These letters would have saved him. So would my diary, in which, from day to day, I had entered both my feelings towards him and the view which each of us had taken. My husband found and kept both diary and letters. He hid them, and he tried hard to swear away the young man's life. In this he failed, but Alexis was sent a convict to Siberia, where now, at this moment, he works in a salt mine. Think of that, you villain, you villain!--now, now, at this very moment, Alexis, a man whose name you are not worthy to speak, works and lives like a slave, and yet I have your life in my hands, and I let you go."
"You were always a noble woman, Anna," said the old man, puffing at his cigarette.
She had risen, but she fell back again with a little cry of pain.
"I must finish," she said. "When my term was over I set myself to get the diary and letters which, if sent to the Russian government, would procure my friend's release. I knew that my husband had come to England. After
months of searching I discovered where he was. I knew that he still had the diary, for when I was in Siberia I had a
letter from him once, reproaching me and quoting some passages from its pages. Yet I was sure that, with his
revengeful nature, he would never give it to me of his own free-will. I must get it for myself. With this object I
engaged an agent from a private detective firm, who entered my husband's house as a secretary--it was your second
secretary, Sergius, the one who left you so hurriedly. He found that papers were kept in the cupboard, and he got an
impression of the key. He would not go farther. He furnished me with a plan of the house, and he told me that in the
forenoon the study was always empty, as the secretary was employed up here. So at last I took my courage in both
hands, and I came down to get the papers for myself. I succeeded; but at what a cost!
"I had just taken the paper; and was locking the cupboard, when the young man seized me. I had seen him
already that morning. He had met me on the road, and I had asked him to tell me where Professor Coram lived, not
knowing that he was in his employ."

"Exactly! Exactly!" said Holmes. "The secretary came back, and told his employer of the woman he had met. Then,
in his last breath, he tried to send a message that it was she--the she whom he had just discussed with him."

"You must let me speak," said the woman, in an imperative voice, and her face contracted as if in pain. "When
he had fallen I rushed from the room, chose the wrong door, and found myself in my husband's room. He spoke of
giving me up. I showed him that if he did so, his life was in my hands. If he gave me to the law, I could give him to
the Brotherhood. It was not that I wished to live for my own sake, but it was that I desired to accomplish my
purpose. He knew that I would do what I said--that his own fate was involved in mine. For that reason, and for no
other, he shielded me. He thrust me into that dark hiding-place--a relic of old days, known only to himself. He took
his meals in his own room, and so was able to give me part of his food. It was agreed that when the police left the
house I should slip away by night and come back no more. But in some way you have read our plans." She tore from
the bosom of her dress a small packet. "These are my last words," said she; "here is the packet which will save
Alexis. I confide it to your honour and to your love of justice. Take it! You will deliver it at the Russian Embassy.
Now, I have done my duty, and----"

"Stop her!" cried Holmes. He had bounded across the room and had wrenched a small phial from her hand.

"Too late!" she said, sinking back on the bed. "Too late! I took the poison before I left my hiding-place. My head
swims! I am going! I charge you, sir, to remember the packet."

"A simple case, and yet, in some ways, an instructive one," Holmes remarked, as we travelled back to town. "It
hinged from the outset upon the pince-nez. But for the fortunate chance of the dying man having seized these, I am
not sure that we could ever have reached our solution. It was clear to me, from the strength of the glasses, that the
wearer must have been very blind and helpless when deprived of them. When you asked me to believe that she
walked along a narrow strip of grass without once making a false step, I remarked, as you may remember, that it was
an impossible performance. In my mind I set it down as a noteworthy performance. In my mind I set it down as an impossible performance, save in the unlikely case that she
had a second pair of glasses. I was forced, therefore, to consider seriously the hypothesis that she had remained
within the house. On perceiving the similarity of the two corridors, it became clear that she might very easily have
made such a mistake, and, in that case, it was evident that she must have entered the professor's room. I was keenly
on the alert, therefore, for whatever would bear out this supposition, and I examined the room narrowly for anything
in the shape of a hiding-place. The carpet seemed continuous and firmly nailed, so I dismissed the idea of a trap-
doors. There might well be a recess behind the books. As you are aware, such devices are common in old libraries. I
observed that books were piled on the floor at all other points, but that one bookcase was left clear. This, then, might
be the door. I could see no marks to guide me, but the carpet was of a dun colour, which lends itself very well to
examination. I therefore smoked a great number of those excellent cigarettes, and I dropped the ash all over the
space in front of the suspected bookcase. It was a simple trick, but exceedingly effective. I then went downstairs,
and I ascertained, in your presence, Watson, without your perceiving the drift of my remarks, that Professor Coram's
consumption of food had increased--as one would expect when he is supplying a second person. We then ascended
to the room again, when, by upsetting the cigarette-box, I obtained a very excellent view of the floor, and was able
to see quite clearly, from the traces upon the cigarette ash, that the prisoner had in our absence come out from her
retreat. Well, Hopkins, here we are at Charing Cross, and I congratulate you on having brought your case to a
successful conclusion. You are going to headquarters, no doubt. I think, Watson, you and I will drive together to the
Russian Embassy."

THE ADVENTURE OF THE MISSING THREE-QUARTER

We were fairly accustomed to receive weird telegrams at Baker Street, but I have a particular recollection of one
which reached us on a gloomy February morning, some seven or eight years ago, and gave Mr. Sherlock Holmes a
puzzled quarter of an hour. It was addressed to him, and ran thus:

"Please await me. Terrible misfortune. Right wing three-quarter missing, indispensable to-morrow. OVERTON.
"Strand postmark, and dispatched ten thirty-six," said Holmes, reading it over and over. "Mr. Overton was
evidently considerably excited when he sent it, and somewhat incoherent in consequence. Well, well, he will be
here, by the time I have looked through the TIMES, and then we shall know all about it. Even the most
insignificant problem would be welcome in these stagnant days."

Things had indeed been very slow with us, and I had learned to dread such periods of inaction, for I knew by
experience that my companion's brain was so abnormally active that it was dangerous to leave it without material
upon which to work. For years I had gradually weaned him from that drug mania which had threatened once to
check his remarkable career. Now I knew that under ordinary conditions he no longer craved for this artificial
stimulus, but I was well aware that the fiend was not dead but sleeping, and I have known that the sleep was a light
one and the waking near when in periods of idleness I have seen the drawn look upon Holmes's ascetic face, and the
brooding of his deep-set and inscrutable eyes. Therefore I blessed this Mr. Overton whoever he might be, since he
had come with his enigmatic message to break that dangerous calm which brought more peril to my friend than all
the storms of his tempestuous life.

As we had expected, the telegram was soon followed by its sender, and the card of Mr. Cyril Overton, Trinity
College, Cambridge, announced the arrival of an enormous young man, sixteen stone of solid bone and muscle, who
spanned the doorway with his broad shoulders, and looked from one of us to the other with a comely face which was
haggard with anxiety.

"Mr. Sherlock Holmes?"
My companion bowed.

"I've been down to Scotland Yard, Mr. Holmes. I saw Inspector Stanley Hopkins. He advised me to come to you.
He said the case, so far as he could see, was more in your line than in that of the regular police."

"Pray sit down and tell me what is the matter."

"It's awful, Mr. Holmes—simply awful I wonder my hair isn't gray. Godfrey Staunton—you've heard of him, of
course? He's simply the hinge that the whole team turns on. I'd rather spare two from the pack, and have Godfrey for
my three-quarter line. Whether it's passing, or tackling, or dribbling, there's no one to touch him, and then, he's got
the head, and can hold us all together. What am I to do? That's what I ask you, Mr. Holmes. There's Moorhouse, first
reserve, but he is trained as a half, and he always edges right in on to the scrum instead of keeping out on the
touchline. He's a fine place-kick, it's true, but then he has no judgment, and he can't sprint for nuts. Why, Morton or
Johnson, the Oxford fliers, could romp round him. Stevenson is fast enough, but he couldn't drop from the twenty-
five line, and a three-quarter who can't either punt or drop isn't worth a place for pace alone. No, Mr. Holmes, we are
done unless you can help me to find Godfrey Staunton."

My friend had listened with amused surprise to this long speech, which was poured forth with extraordinary
vigour and earnestness, every point being driven home by the slapping of a brawny hand upon the speaker's knee.
When our visitor was silent Holmes stretched out his hand and took down letter "S" of his commonplace book. For
once he dug in vain into that mine of varied information.

"There is Arthur H. Staunton, the rising young forger," said he, "and there was Henry Staunton, whom I helped
to hang, but Godfrey Staunton is a new name to me."

It was our visitor's turn to look surprised.

"Why, Mr. Holmes, I thought you knew things," said he. "I suppose, then, if you have never heard of Godfrey
Staunton, you don't know Cyril Overton either?"

Holmes shook his head good humouredly.

"Great Scott!" cried the athlete. "Why, I was first reserve for England against Wales, and I've skippered the
'Varsity all this year. But that's nothing! I didn't think there was a soul in England who didn't know Godfrey
Staunton, the crack three-quarter, Cambridge, Blackheath, and five Internationals. Good Lord! Mr. Holmes, where
HAVE you lived?"

Holmes laughed at the young giant's naive astonishment.

"You live in a different world to me, Mr. Overton--a sweeter and healthier one. My ramifications stretch out into
many sections of society, but never, I am happy to say, into amateur sport, which is the best and soundest thing in England. However, your unexpected visit this morning shows me that even in that world of fresh air and fair play, there may be work for me to do. So now, my good sir, I beg you to sit down and to tell me, slowly and quietly, exactly what it is that has occurred, and how you desire that I should help you."

Young Overton's face assumed the bothered look of the man who is more accustomed to using his muscles than his wits, but by degrees, with many repetitions and obscurities which I may omit from his narrative, he laid his strange story before us.

"It's this way, Mr. Holmes. As I have said, I am the skipper of the Rugger team of Cambridge 'Varsity, and Godfrey Staunton is my best man. To-morrow we play Oxford. Yesterday we all came up, and we settled at Bentley's private hotel. At ten o'clock I went round and saw that all the fellows had gone to roost, for I believe in strict training and plenty of sleep to keep a team fit. I had a word or two with Godfrey before he turned in. He seemed to me to be pale and bothered. I asked him what was the matter. He said he was all right--just a touch of headache. I bade him good-night and left him. Half an hour later, the porter tells me that a rough-looking man with a beard called with a note for Godfrey. He had not gone to bed, and the note was taken to his room. Godfrey read it, and fell back in a chair as if he had been pole-axed. The porter was so scared that he was going to fetch me, but Godfrey stopped him, had a drink of water, and pulled himself together. Then he went downstairs, said a few words to the man who was waiting in the hall, and the two of them went off together. The last that the porter saw of them, they were almost running down the street in the direction of the Strand. This morning Godfrey's room was empty, his bed had never been slept in, and his things were all just as I had seen them the night before. He had gone off at a moment's notice with this stranger, and no word has come from him since. I don't believe he will ever come back. He was a sportsman, was Godfrey, down to his marrow, and he wouldn't have stopped his training and let in his skipper if it were not for some cause that was too strong for him. No: I feel as if he were gone for good, and we should never see him again."

Sherlock Holmes listened with the deepest attention to this singular narrative.

"What did you do?" he asked.

"I wired to Cambridge to learn if anything had been heard of him there. I have had an answer. No one has seen him."

"Could he have got back to Cambridge?"

"Yes, there is a late train--quarter-past eleven."

"But, so far as you can ascertain, he did not take it?"

"No, he has not been seen."

"What did you do next?"

"I wired to Lord Mount-James."

"Why to Lord Mount-James?"

"Godfrey is an orphan, and Lord Mount-James is his nearest relative--his uncle, I believe."

"Indeed. This throws new light upon the matter. Lord Mount-James is one of the richest men in England."

"So I've heard Godfrey say."

"And your friend was closely related?"

"Yes, he was his heir, and the old boy is nearly eighty--cram full of gout, too. They say he could chalk his billiard-cue with his knuckles. He never allowed Godfrey a shilling in his life, for he is an absolute miser, but it will all come to him right enough."

"Have you heard from Lord Mount-James?"

"No."

"What motive could your friend have in going to Lord Mount-James?"

"Well, something was worrying him the night before, and if it was to do with money it is possible that he would make for his nearest relative, who had so much of it, though from all I have heard he would not have much chance of getting it. Godfrey was not fond of the old man. He would not go if he could help it."

"Well, we can soon determine that. If your friend was going to his relative, Lord Mount-James, you have then to explain the visit of this rough-looking fellow at so late an hour, and the agitation that was caused by his coming."

Cyril Overton pressed his hands to his head. "I can make nothing of it," said he.

"Well, well, I have a clear day, and I shall be happy to look into the matter," said Holmes. "I should strongly recommend you to make your preparations for your match without reference to this young gentleman. It must, as you say, have been an overpowering necessity which tore him away in such a fashion, and the same necessity is likely to hold him away. Let us step round together to the hotel, and see if the porter can throw any fresh light upon the matter."

Sherlock Holmes was a past-master in the art of putting a humble witness at his ease, and very soon, in the
privacy of Godfrey Staunton's abandoned room, he had extracted all that the porter had to tell. The visitor of the night before was not a gentleman, neither was he a workingman. He was simply what the porter described as a "medium-looking chap," a man of fifty, beard grizzled, pale face, quietly dressed. He seemed himself to be agitated. The porter had observed his hand trembling when he had held out the note. Godfrey Staunton had crammed the note into his pocket. Staunton had not shaken hands with the man in the hall. They had exchanged a few sentences, of which the porter had only distinguished the one word "time." Then they had hurried off in the manner described. It was just half-past ten by the hall clock.

"Let me see," said Holmes, seating himself on Staunton's bed. "You are the day porter, are you not?"
"Yes, sir, I go off duty at eleven."
"The night porter saw nothing, I suppose?"
"No, sir, one theatre party came in late. No one else."
"Were you on duty all day yesterday?"
"Yes, sir."
"Did you take any messages to Mr. Staunton?"
"Yes, sir, one telegram."
"Ah! that's interesting. What o'clock was this?"
"About six."
"Where was Mr. Staunton when he received it?"
"Here in his room."
"Were you present when he opened it?"
"Yes, sir, I waited to see if there was an answer."
"Well, was there?"
"Yes, sir, he wrote an answer."
"Did you take it?"
"No, he took it himself."
"But he wrote it in your presence."
"Yes, sir. I was standing by the door, and he with his back turned at that table. When he had written it, he said: 'All right, porter, I will take this myself.'"
"What did he write it with?"
"A pen, sir."
"Was the telegraphic form one of these on the table?"
"Yes, sir, it was the top one."

Holmes rose. Taking the forms, he carried them over to the window and carefully examined that which was uppermost.

"It is a pity he did not write in pencil," said he, throwing them down again with a shrug of disappointment. "As you have no doubt frequently observed, Watson, the impression usually goes through--a fact which has dissolved many a happy marriage. However, I can find no trace here. I rejoice, however, to perceive that he wrote with a broad-pointed quill pen, and I can hardly doubt that we will find some impression upon this blotting-pad. Ah, yes, surely this is the very thing!"

He tore off a strip of the blotting-paper and turned towards us the following hieroglyphic:

GRAPHIC

Cyril Overton was much excited. "Hold it to the glass!" he cried.
"That is unnecessary," said Holmes. "The paper is thin, and the reverse will give the message. Here it is." He turned it over, and we read:

GRAPHIC [Stand by us for God's sake]

"So that is the tail end of the telegram which Godfrey Staunton dispatched within a few hours of his disappearance. There are at least six words of the message which have escaped us; but what remains--'Stand by us for God's sake!'--proves that this young man saw a formidable danger which approached him, and from which someone else could protect him. 'US,' mark you! Another person was involved. Who should it be but the pale-faced, bearded man, who seemed himself in so nervous a state? What, then, is the connection between Godfrey Staunton and the bearded man? And what is the third source from which each of them sought for help against pressing danger? Our inquiry has already narrowed down to that."

"We have only to find to whom that telegram is addressed," I suggested.

"Exactly, my dear Watson. Your reflection, though profound, had already crossed my mind. But I daresay it may have come to your notice that, counterfoil of another man's message, there may be some disinclination on the part of the officials to oblige you. There is so much red tape in these matters. However, I have no doubt that with a little
delicacy and finesse the end may be attained. Meanwhile, I should like in your presence, Mr. Overton, to go through these papers which have been left upon the table."

There were a number of letters, bills, and notebooks, which Holmes turned over and examined with quick, nervous fingers and darting, penetrating eyes. "Nothing here," he said, at last. "By the way, I suppose your friend was a healthy young fellow--nothing amiss with him?"

"Sound as a bell."
"Have you ever known him ill?"
"Not a day. He has been laid up with a hack, and once he slipped his knee-cap, but that was nothing."
"Perhaps he was not so strong as you suppose. I should think he may have had some secret trouble. With your assent, I will put one or two of these papers in my pocket, in case they should bear upon our future inquiry."

"One moment--one moment!" cried a querulous voice, and we looked up to find a queer little old man, jerking and twitching in the doorway. He was dressed in rusty black, with a very broad-brimmed top-hat and a loose white necktie--the whole effect being that of a very rustic parson or of an undertaker's mute. Yet, in spite of his shabby and even absurd appearance, his voice had a sharp crackle, and his manner a quick intensity which commanded attention.

"Who are you, sir, and by what right do you touch this gentleman's papers?" he asked.
"I am a private detective, and I am endeavouring to explain his disappearance."
"Oh, you are, are you? And who instructed you, eh?"
"This gentleman, Mr. Staunton's friend, was referred to me by Scotland Yard."
"Who are you, sir?"
"I am Cyril Overton."
"Then it is you who sent me a telegram. My name is Lord Mount-James. I came round as quickly as the Bayswater bus would bring me. So you have instructed a detective?"

"Yes, sir."
"And are you prepared to meet the cost?"
"I have no doubt, sir, that my friend Godfrey, when we find him, will be prepared to do that."
"But if he is never found, eh? Answer me that!"
"In that case, no doubt his family----"

"Nothing of the sort, sir!" screamed the little man. "Don't look to me for a penny--not a penny! You understand that, Mr. Detective! I am all the family that this young man has got, and I tell you that I am not responsible. If he has any expectations it is due to the fact that I have never wasted money, and I do not propose to begin to do so now. As to those papers with which you are making so free, I may tell you that in case there should be anything of any value among them, you will be held strictly to account for what you do with them."

"Very good, sir," said Sherlock Holmes. "May I ask, in the meanwhile, whether you have yourself any theory to account for this young man's disappearance?"

"No, sir, I have not. He is big enough and old enough to look after himself, and if he is so foolish as to lose himself, I entirely refuse to accept the responsibility of hunting for him."

"I quite understand your position," said Holmes, with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes. "Perhaps you don't quite understand mine. Godfrey Staunton appears to have been a poor man. If he has been kidnapped, it could not have been for anything which he himself possesses. The fame of your wealth has gone abroad, Lord Mount-James, and it is entirely possible that a gang of thieves have secured your nephew in order to gain from him some information as to your house, your habits, and your treasure."

The face of our unpleasant little visitor turned as white as his neckcloth.

"Heavens, sir, what an idea! I never thought of such villainy! What inhuman rogues there are in the world! But Godfrey is a fine lad--a staunch lad. Nothing would induce him to give his old uncle away. I'll have the plate moved over to the bank this evening. In the meantime spare no pains, Mr. Detective! I beg you to leave no stone untturned to bring him safely back. As to money, well, so far as a fiver or even a tenner goes you can always look to me."

Even in his chastened frame of mind, the noble miser could give us no information which could help us, for he knew little of the private life of his nephew. Our only clue lay in the truncated telegram, and with a copy of this in his hand Holmes set forth to find a second link for his chain. We had shaken off Lord Mount-James, and Overton had gone to consult with the other members of his team over the misfortune which had befallen them.

There was a telegraph-office at a short distance from the hotel. We halted outside it.

"It's worth trying, Watson," said Holmes. "Of course, with a warrant we could demand to see the counterfoils, but we have not reached that stage yet. I don't suppose they remember faces in so busy a place. Let us venture it."

"I am sorry to trouble you," said he, in his blandest manner, to the young woman behind the grating; "there is some small mistake about a telegram I sent yesterday. I have had no answer, and I very much fear that I must have
omitted to put my name at the end. Could you tell me if this was so?"

"The young woman turned over a sheaf of counterfoils.

"What o'clock was it?" she asked.

"A little after six."

"Whom was it to?"

Holmes put his finger to his lips and glanced at me. "The last words in it were 'For God's sake,'" he whispered, confidentially; "I am very anxious at getting no answer."

The young woman separated one of the forms.

"This is it. There is no name," said she, smoothing it out upon the counter.

"Then that, of course, accounts for my getting no answer," said Holmes. "Dear me, how very stupid of me, to be sure! Good-morning, miss, and many thanks for having relieved my mind." He chuckled and rubbed his hands when we found ourselves in the street once more.

"Well?" I asked.

"We progress, my dear Watson, we progress. I had seven different schemes for getting a glimpse of that telegram, but I could hardly hope to succeed the very first time."

"And what have you gained?"

"A starting-point for our investigation." He hailed a cab. "King's Cross Station," said he.

"We have a journey, then?"

"Yes, I think we must run down to Cambridge together. All the indications seem to me to point in that direction."

"Tell me," I asked, as we rattled up Gray's Inn Road, "have you any suspicion yet as to the cause of the disappearance? I don't think that among all our cases I have known one where the motives are more obscure. Surely you don't really imagine that he may be kidnapped in order to give information against his wealthy uncle?"

"I confess, my dear Watson, that that does not appeal to me as a very probable explanation. It struck me, however, as being the one which was most likely to interest that exceedingly unpleasant old person."

"It certainly did that; but what are your alternatives?"

"I could mention several. You must admit that it is curious and suggestive that this incident should occur on the eve of this important match, and should involve the only man whose presence seems essential to the success of the side. It may, of course, be a coincidence, but it is interesting. Amateur sport is free from betting, but a good deal of outside betting goes on among the public, and it is possible that it might be worth someone's while to get at a player as the ruffians of the turf get at a race-horse. There is one explanation. A second very obvious one is that this young man really is the heir of a great property, however modest his means may at present be, and it is not impossible that a plot to hold him for ransom might be concocted."

"These theories take no account of the telegram."

"Quite true, Watson. The telegram still remains the only solid thing with which we have to deal, and we must not permit our attention to wander away from it. It is to gain light upon the purpose of this telegram that we are now upon our way to Cambridge. The path of our investigation is at present obscure, but I shall be very much surprised if before evening we have not cleared it up, or made a considerable advance along it."

It was already dark when we reached the old university city. Holmes took a cab at the station and ordered the man to drive to the house of Dr. Leslie Armstrong. A few minutes later, we had stopped at a large mansion in the busiest thoroughfare. We were shown in, and after a long wait were at last admitted into the consulting-room, where we found the doctor seated behind his table.

It argues the degree in which I had lost touch with my profession that the name of Leslie Armstrong was unknown to me. Now I am aware that he is not only one of the heads of the medical school of the university, but a thinker of European reputation in more than one branch of science. Yet even without knowing his brilliant record one could not fail to be impressed by a mere glance at the man, the square, massive face, the brooding eyes under the thatched brows, and the granite moulding of the inflexible jaw. A man of deep character, a man with an alert mind, grim, ascetic, self-contained, formidable--so I read Dr. Leslie Armstrong. He held my friend's card in his hand, and he looked up with no very pleased expression upon his dour features.

"I have heard your name, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, and I am aware of your profession--one of which I by no means approve."

"In that, Doctor, you will find yourself in agreement with every criminal in the country," said my friend, quietly.

"So far as your efforts are directed towards the suppression of crime, sir, they must have the support of every reasonable member of the community, though I cannot doubt that the official machinery is amply sufficient for the purpose. Where your calling is more open to criticism is when you pry into the secrets of private individuals, when you rake up family matters which are better hidden, and when you incidentally waste the time of men who are more busy than yourself. At the present moment, for example, I should be writing a treatise instead of conversing with
"No doubt, Doctor; and yet the conversation may prove more important than the treatise. Incidentally, I may tell you that we are doing the reverse of what you very justly blame, and that we are endeavouring to prevent anything like public exposure of private matters which must necessarily follow when once the case is fairly in the hands of the official police. You may look upon me simply as an irregular pioneer, who goes in front of the regular forces of the country. I have come to ask you about Mr. Godfrey Staunton."

"What about him?"
"You know him, do you not?"
"He is an intimate friend of mine."
"You are aware that he has disappeared?"
"Ah, indeed!" There was no change of expression in the rugged features of the doctor.
"He left his hotel last night—he has not been heard of."
"No doubt he will return."
"To-morrow is the 'Varsity football match."
"I have no sympathy with these childish games. The young man's fate interests me deeply, since I know him and like him. The football match does not come within my horizon at all."

"I claim your sympathy, then, in my investigation of Mr. Staunton's fate. Do you know where he is?"
"Certainly not."
"You have not seen him since yesterday?"
"No, I have not."
"Was Mr. Staunton a healthy man?"
"Absolutely."
"Did you ever know him ill?"
"Never."

Holmes popped a sheet of paper before the doctor's eyes. "Then perhaps you will explain this receipted bill for thirteen guineas, paid by Mr. Godfrey Staunton last month to Dr. Leslie Armstrong, of Cambridge. I picked it out from among the papers upon his desk."

The doctor flushed with anger.
"I do not feel that there is any reason why I should render an explanation to you, Mr. Holmes."

Holmes replaced the bill in his notebook. "If you prefer a public explanation, it must come sooner or later," said he. "I have already told you that I can hush up that which others will be bound to publish, and you would really be wiser to take me into your complete confidence."

"I know nothing about it."
"Did you hear from Mr. Staunton in London?"
"Certainly not."
"Dear me, dear me—the postoffice again!" Holmes sighed, wearily. "A most urgent telegram was dispatched to you from London by Godfrey Staunton at six-fifteen yesterday evening—a telegram which is undoubtedly associated with his disappearance—and yet you have not had it. It is most culpable. I shall certainly go down to the office here and register a complaint."

Dr. Leslie Armstrong sprang up from behind his desk, and his dark face was crimson with fury.
"I'll trouble you to walk out of my house, sir," said he. "You can tell your employer, Lord Mount-James, that I do not wish to have anything to do either with him or with his agents. No, sir—not another word!" He rang the bell furiously. "John, show these gentlemen out!" A pompous butler ushered us severely to the door, and we found ourselves in the street. Holmes burst out laughing.

"Dr. Leslie Armstrong is certainly a man of energy and character," said he. "I have not seen a man who, if he turns his talents that way, was more calculated to fill the gap left by the illustrious Moriarty. And now, my poor Watson, here we are, stranded and friendless in this inhospitable town, which we cannot leave without abandoning our case. This little inn just opposite Armstrong's house is singularly adapted to our needs. If you would engage a front room and purchase the necessaries for the night, I may have time to make a few inquiries."

These few inquiries proved, however, to be a more lengthy proceeding than Holmes had imagined, for he did not return to the inn until nearly nine o'clock. He was pale and dejected, stained with dust, and exhausted with hunger and fatigue. A cold supper was ready upon the table, and when his needs were satisfied and his pipe alight he was ready to take that half comic and wholly philosophic view which was natural to him when his affairs were going awry. The sound of carriage wheels caused him to rise and glance out of the window. A brougham and pair of grays, under the glare of a gas-lamp, stood before the doctor's door.

"It's been out three hours," said Holmes; "started at half-past six, and here it is back again. That gives a radius of
ten or twelve miles, and he does it once, or sometimes twice, a day."

"No unusual thing for a doctor in practice."

"But Armstrong is not really a doctor in practice. He is a lecturer and a consultant, but he does not care for general practice, which distracts him from his literary work. Why, then, does he make these long journeys, which must be exceedingly irksome to him, and who is it that he visits?"

"His coachman----"

"My dear Watson, can you doubt that it was to him that I first applied? I do not know whether it came from his own innate depravity or from the promptings of his master, but he was rude enough to set a dog at me. Neither dog nor man liked the look of my stick, however, and the matter fell through. Relations were strained after that, and further inquiries out of the question. All that I have learned I got from a friendly native in the yard of our own inn. It was he who told me of the doctor's habits and of his daily journey. At that instant, to give point to his words, the carriage came round to the door."

"Could you not follow it?"

"Excellent, Watson! You are scintillating this evening. The idea did cross my mind. There is, as you may have observed, a bicycle shop next to our inn. Into this I rushed, engaged a bicycle, and was able to get started before the carriage was quite out of sight. I rapidly overtook it, and then, keeping at a discreet distance of a hundred yards or so, I followed its lights until we were clear of the town. We had got well out on the country road, when a somewhat mortifying incident occurred. The carriage stopped, the doctor alighted, walked swiftly back to where I had also halted, and told me in an excellent sardonic fashion that he feared the road was narrow, and that he hoped his carriage did not impede the passage of my bicycle. Nothing could have been more admirable than his way of putting it. I at once rode past the carriage, and, keeping to the main road, I went on for a few miles, and then halted in a convenient place to see if the carriage passed. There was no sign of it, however, and so it became evident that it had turned down one of several side roads which I had observed. I rode back, but again saw nothing of the carriage, and now, as you perceive, it has returned after me. Of course, I had at the outset no particular reason to connect these journeys with the disappearance of Godfrey Staunton, and was only inclined to investigate them on the general grounds that everything which concerns Dr. Armstrong is at present of interest to us, but, now that I find he keeps so keen a look-out upon anyone who may follow him on these excursions, the affair appears more important, and I shall not be satisfied until I have made the matter clear."

"We can follow him to-morrow."

"Can we? It is not so easy as you seem to think. You are not familiar with Cambridgeshire scenery, are you? It does not lend itself to concealment. All this country that I passed over to-night is as flat and clean as the palm of your hand, and the man we are following is no fool, as he very clearly showed to-night. I have wired to Overton to let us know any fresh London developments at this address, and in the meantime we can only concentrate our attention upon Dr. Armstrong, whose name the obliging young lady at the office allowed me to read upon the counterfoil of Staunton's urgent message. He knows where the young man is--to that I'll swear, and if he knows, then it must be our own fault if we cannot manage to know also. At present it must be admitted that the odd trick is in his possession, and, as you are aware, Watson, it is not my habit to leave the game in that condition."

And yet the next day brought us no nearer to the solution of the mystery. A note was handed in after breakfast, which Holmes passed across to me with a smile.

SIR [it ran]:

I can assure you that you are wasting your time in dogging my movements. I have, as you discovered last night, a window at the back of my brougham, and if you desire a twenty-mile ride which will lead you to the spot from which you started, you have only to follow me. Meanwhile, I can inform you that no snooping upon me can in any way help Mr. Godfrey Staunton, and I am convinced that the best service you can do to that gentleman is to return at once to London and to report to your employer that you are unable to trace him. Your time in Cambridge will certainly be wasted. Yours faithfully, LESLIE ARMSTRONG.

"An outspoken, honest antagonist is the doctor," said Holmes. "Well, well, he excites my curiosity, and I must really know before I leave him."

"His carriage is at his door now," said I. "There he is stepping into it. I saw him glance up at our window as he did so. Suppose I try my luck upon the bicycle?"

"No, no, my dear Watson! With all respect for your natural acumen, I do not think that you are quite a match for the worthy doctor. I think that possibly I can attain our end by some independent explorations of my own. I am afraid that I must leave you to your own devices, as the appearance of TWO inquiring strangers upon a sleepy countryside might excite more gossip than I care for. No doubt you will find some sights to amuse you in this venerable city, and I hope to bring back a more favourable report to you before evening."

Once more, however, my friend was destined to be disappointed. He came back at night weary and unsuccessful.
"I have had a blank day, Watson. Having got the doctor's general direction, I spent the day in visiting all the villages upon that side of Cambridge, and comparing notes with publicans and other local news agencies. I have covered some ground. Chesterton, Histon, Waterbeach, and Oakington have each been explored, and have each proved disappointing. The daily appearance of a brougham and pair could hardly have been overlooked in such Sleepy Hollows. The doctor has scored once more. Is there a telegram for me?"

"Yes, I opened it. Here it is:

"Ask for Pompey from Jeremy Dixon, Trinity College."

"I don't understand it."

"Oh, it is clear enough. It is from our friend Overton, and is in answer to a question from me. I'll just send round a note to Mr. Jeremy Dixon, and then I have no doubt that our luck will turn. By the way, is there any news of the match?"

"Yes, the local evening paper has an excellent account in its last edition. Oxford won by a goal and two tries. The last sentences of the description say:

"The defeat of the Light Blues may be entirely attributed to the unfortunate absence of the crack International, Godfrey Staunton, whose want was felt at every instant of the game. The lack of combination in the three-quarter line and their weakness both in attack and defence more than neutralized the efforts of a heavy and hard-working pack."

"Then our friend Overton's forebodings have been justified," said Holmes. "Personally I am in agreement with Dr. Armstrong, and football does not come within my horizon. Early to bed to-night, Watson, for I foresee that to-morrow may be an eventful day."

I was horrified by my first glimpse of Holmes next morning, for he sat by the fire holding his tiny hypodermic syringe. I associated that instrument with the single weakness of his nature, and I feared the worst when I saw it glittering in his hand. He laughed at my expression of dismay and laid it upon the table.

"No, no, my dear fellow, there is no cause for alarm. It is not upon this occasion the instrument of evil, but it will rather prove to be the key which will unlock our mystery. On this syringe I base all my hopes. I have just returned from a small scouting expedition, and everything is favourable. Eat a good breakfast, Watson, for I propose to get upon Dr. Armstrong's trail to-day, and once on it I will not stop for rest or food until I run him to his burrow."

"In that case," said I, "we had best carry our breakfast with us, for he is making an early start. His carriage is at the door."

"Never mind. Let him go. He will be clever if he can drive where I cannot follow him. When you have finished, come downstairs with me, and I will introduce you to a detective who is a very eminent specialist in the work that lies before us."

When we descended I followed Holmes into the stable yard, where he opened the door of a loose-box and led out a squat, lop-eared, white-and-tan dog, something between a beagle and a foxhound.

"Let me introduce you to Pompey," said he. "Pompey is the pride of the local draghounds--no very great flier, as his build will show, but a staunch hound on a scent. Well, Pompey, you may not be fast, but I expect you will be too fast for a couple of middle-aged London gentlemen, so I will take the liberty of fastening this leather leash to your collar. Now, boy, come along, and show what you can do." He led him across to the doctor's door. The dog sniffed round for an instant, and then with a shrill whine of excitement started off down the street, tugging at his leash in his efforts to go faster. In half an hour, we were clear of the town and hastening down a country road.

"What have you done, Holmes?" I asked.

"A threadbare and venerable device, but useful upon occasion. I walked into the doctor's yard this morning, and shot my syringe full of aniseed over the hind wheel. A draghound will follow aniseed from here to John o'Groat's, and our friend, Armstrong, would have to drive through the Cam before he would shake Pompey off his trail. Oh, the cunning rascal! This is how he gave me the slip the other night."

The dog had suddenly turned out of the main road into a grass-grown lane. Half a mile farther this opened into another broad road, and the trail turned hard to the right in the direction of the town, which we had just quitted. The road took a sweep to the south of the town, and continued in the opposite direction to that in which we started.

"This DETOUR has been entirely for our benefit, then?" said Holmes. "No wonder that my inquiries among those villagers led to nothing. The doctor has certainly played the game for all it is worth, and one would like to know the reason for such elaborate deception. This should be the village of Trumpington to the right of us. And, by Jove! here is the brougham coming round the corner. Quick, Watson--quick, or we are done!"

He sprang through a gate into a field, dragging the reluctant Pompey after him. We had hardly got under the shelter of the hedge when the carriage rattled past. I caught a glimpse of Dr. Armstrong within, his shoulders bowed, his head sunk on his hands, the very image of distress. I could tell by my companion's graver face that he also had seen.
"I fear there is some dark ending to our quest," said he. "It cannot be long before we know it. Come, Pompey! Ah, it is the cottage in the field!"

There could be no doubt that we had reached the end of our journey. Pompey ran about and whined eagerly outside the gate, where the marks of the brougham's wheels were still to be seen. A footpath led across to the lonely cottage. Holmes tied the dog to the hedge, and we hastened onward. My friend knocked at the little rustic door, and knocked again without response. And yet the cottage was not deserted, for a low sound came to our ears—a kind of drone of misery and despair which was indescribably melancholy. Holmes paused irresolute, and then he glanced back at the road which he had just traversed. A brougham was coming down it, and there could be no mistaking those gray horses.

"By Jove, the doctor is coming back!" cried Holmes. "That settles it. We are bound to see what it means before he comes."

He opened the door, and we stepped into the hall. The droning sound swelled louder upon our ears until it became one long, deep wail of distress. It came from upstairs. Holmes darted up, and I followed him. He pushed open a half-closed door, and we both stood appalled at the sight before us.

A woman, young and beautiful, was lying dead upon the bed. Her calm pale face, with dim, wide-opened blue eyes, looked upward from amid a great tangle of golden hair. At the foot of the bed, half sitting, half kneeling, his face buried in the clothes, was a young man, whose frame was racked by his sobs. So absorbed was he by his bitter grief, that he never looked up until Holmes's hand was on his shoulder.

"Are you Mr. Godfrey Staunton?"

"Yes, yes, I am—but you are too late. She is dead."

The man was so dazed that he could not be made to understand that we were anything but doctors who had been sent to his assistance. Holmes was endeavouring to utter a few words of consolation and to explain the alarm which had been caused to his friends by his sudden disappearance when there was a step upon the stairs, and there was the heavy, stern, questioning face of Dr. Armstrong at the door.

"So, gentlemen," said he, "you have attained your end and have certainly chosen a particularly delicate moment for your intrusion. I would not brawl in the presence of death, but I can assure you that if I were a younger man your monstrous conduct would not pass with impunity."

"Excuse me, Dr. Armstrong, I think we are a little at cross-purposes," said my friend, with dignity. "If you could step downstairs with us, we may each be able to give some light to the other upon this miserable affair."

A minute later, the grim doctor and ourselves were in the sitting-room below.

"Well, sir?" said he.

"I wish you to understand, in the first place, that I am not employed by Lord Mount-James, and that my sympathies in this matter are entirely against that nobleman. When a man is lost it is my duty to ascertain his fate, but having done so the matter ends so far as I am concerned, and so long as there is nothing criminal I am much more anxious to hush up private scandals than to give them publicity. If, as I imagine, there is no breach of the law in this matter, you can absolutely depend upon my discretion and my cooperation in keeping the facts out of the papers."

Dr. Armstrong took a quick step forward and wrung Holmes by the hand.

"You are a good fellow," said he. "I had misjudged you. I thank heaven that my compunction at leaving poor Staunton all alone in this plight caused me to turn my carriage back and so to make your acquaintance. Knowing as much as you do, the situation is very easily explained. A year ago Godfrey Staunton lodged in London for a time and became passionately attached to his landlady's daughter, whom he married. She was as good as she was beautiful and as intelligent as she was good. No man need be ashamed of such a wife. But Godfrey was the heir to this crabbed old nobleman, and it was quite certain that the news of his marriage would have been the end of his inheritance. I knew the lad well, and I loved him for his many excellent qualities. I did all I could to help him to keep things straight. We did our very best to keep the thing from everyone, for, when once such a whisper gets about, it is not long before everyone has heard it. Thanks to this lonely cottage and his own discretion, Godfrey has up to now succeeded. Their secret was known to no one save to me and to one excellent servant, who has at present gone for assistance to Trumpington. But at last there came a terrible blow in the shape of dangerous illness to his wife. It was consumption of the most virulent kind. The poor boy was half crazed with grief, and yet he had to go to London to play this match, for he could not get out of it without explanations which would expose his secret. I tried to cheer him up by wire, and he sent me one in reply, imploring me to do all I could. This was the telegram which you appear in some inexplicable way to have seen. I did not tell him how urgent the danger was, for I knew that he could do no good here, but I sent the truth to the girl's father, and he very injudiciously communicated it to Godfrey. The result was that he came straight away in a state bordering on frenzy, and has remained in the same state, kneeling at the end of her bed, until this morning death put an end to her sufferings. That is all, Mr. Holmes, and I
am sure that I can rely upon your discretion and that of your friend."

Holmes grasped the doctor's hand.

"Come, Watson," said he, and we passed from that house of grief into the pale sunlight of the winter day.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE ABBEY GRANGE

It was on a bitterly cold and frosty morning, towards the end of the winter of '97, that I was awakened by a tugging at my shoulder. It was Holmes. The candle in his hand shone upon his eager, stooping face, and told me at a glance that something was amiss.

"Come, Watson, come!" he cried. "The game is afoot. Not a word! Into your clothes and come!"

Ten minutes later we were both in a cab, and rattling through the silent streets on our way to Charing Cross Station. The first faint winter's dawn was beginning to appear, and we could dimly see the occasional figure of an early workman as he passed us, blurred and indistinct in the opalescent London reek. Holmes nestled in silence into his heavy coat, and I was glad to do the same, for the air was most bitter, and neither of us had broken our fast.

It was not until we had consumed some hot tea at the station and taken our places in the Kentish train that we were sufficiently thawed, he to speak and I to listen. Holmes drew a note from his pocket, and read aloud:

Abbey Grange, Marsham, Kent, 3:30 A.M. MY DEAR MR. HOLMES:

I should be very glad of your immediate assistance in what promises to be a most remarkable case. It is something quite in your line. Except for releasing the lady I will see that everything is kept exactly as I have found it, but I beg you not to lose an instant, as it is difficult to leave Sir Eustace there. Yours faithfully, STANLEY HOPKINS.

"Hopkins has called me in seven times, and on each occasion his summons has been entirely justified," said Holmes. "I fancy that every one of his cases has found its way into your collection, and I must admit, Watson, that you have some power of selection, which atones for much which I deplore in your narratives. Your fatal habit of looking at everything from the point of view of a story instead of as a scientific exercise has ruined what might have been an instructive and even classical series of demonstrations. You slur over work of the utmost finesse and delicacy, in order to dwell upon sensational details which may excite, but cannot possibly instruct, the reader."

"Why do you not write them yourself?" I said, with some bitterness.

"I will, my dear Watson, I will. At present I am, as you know, fairly busy, but I propose to devote my declining years to the composition of a textbook, which shall focus the whole art of detection into one volume. Our present research appears to be a case of murder."

"You think this Sir Eustace is dead, then?"

"I should say so. Hopkins's writing shows considerable agitation, and he is not an emotional man. Yes, I gather there has been violence, and that the body is left for our inspection. A mere suicide would not have caused him to send for me. As to the release of the lady I will see that everything is kept exactly as I have found it, but I beg you not to lose an instant, as it is difficult to leave Sir Eustace there. Yours faithfully, STANLEY HOPKINS."

"By an inspection of the trains, and by reckoning the time. The local police had to be called in, they had to communicate with Scotland Yard, Hopkins had to go out, and he in turn had to send for me. All that makes a fair night's work. Well, here we are at Chiselhurst Station, and we shall soon set our doubts at rest."

A drive of a couple of miles through narrow country lanes brought us to a park gate, which was opened for us by an old lodge-keeper, whose haggard face bore the reflection of some great disaster. The avenue ran through a noble park, between lines of ancient elms, and ended in a low, widespread house, pillared in front after the fashion of Palladio. The central part was evidently of a great age and shrouded in ivy, but the large windows showed that modern changes had been carried out, and one wing of the house appeared to be entirely new. The youthful figure and alert, eager face of Inspector Stanley Hopkins confronted us in the open doorway.

"I'm very glad you have come, Mr. Holmes. And you, too, Dr. Watson. But, indeed, if I had my time over again, I should not have troubled you, for since the lady has come to herself, she has given so clear an account of the affair that there is not much left for us to do. You remember that Lewisham gang of burglars?"

"What, the three Randalls?"

"Exactly; the father and two sons. It's their work. I have not a doubt of it. They did a job at Sydenham a fortnight ago and were seen and described. Rather cool to do another so soon and so near, but it is they, beyond all doubt. It's a hanging matter this time."

"Sir Eustace is dead, then?"

"Yes, his head was knocked in with his own poker."

"Sir Eustace Brackenstall, the driver tells me."
"Exactly--one of the richest men in Kent--Lady Brackenstall is in the morning-room. Poor lady, she has had a most dreadful experience. She seemed half dead when I saw her first. I think you had best see her and hear her account of the facts. Then we will examine the dining-room together."

Lady Brackenstall was no ordinary person. Seldom have I seen so graceful a figure, so womanly a presence, and so beautiful a face. She was a blonde, golden-haired, blue-eyed, and would no doubt have had the perfect complexion which goes with such colouring, had not her recent experience left her drawn and haggard. Her sufferings were physical as well as mental, for over one eye rose a hideous, plum-coloured swelling, which her maid, a tall, austere woman, was bathing assiduously with vinegar and water. The lady lay back exhausted upon a couch, but her quick, observant gaze, as we entered the room, and the alert expression of her beautiful features, showed that neither her wits nor her courage had been shaken by her terrible experience. She was enveloped in a loose dressing-gown of blue and silver, but a black sequin-covered dinner-dress lay upon the couch beside her.

"I have told you all that happened, Mr. Hopkins," she said, wearily. "Could you not repeat it for me? Well, if you think it necessary, I will tell these gentlemen what occurred. Have they been in the dining-room yet?"

"I thought they had better hear your ladyship's story first."

"I shall be glad when you can arrange matters. It is horrible to me to think of him still lying there." She shuddered and buried her face in her hands. As she did so, the loose gown fell back from her forearms. Holmes uttered an exclamation.

"You have other injuries, madam! What is this?" Two vivid red spots stood out on one of the white, round limbs. She hastily covered it.

"It is nothing. It has no connection with this hideous business to-night. If you and your friend will sit down, I will tell you all I can.

"I am the wife of Sir Eustace Brackenstall. I have been married about a year. I suppose that it is no use my attempting to conceal that our marriage has not been a happy one. I fear that all our neighbours would tell you that, even if I were to attempt to deny it. Perhaps the fault may be partly mine. I was brought up in the freer, less conventional atmosphere of South Australia, and this English life, with its proprieties and its primness, is not congenial to me. But the main reason lies in the one fact, which is notorious to everyone, and that is that Sir Eustace was a confirmed drunkard. To be with such a man for an hour is unpleasant. Can you imagine what it means for a sensitive and high-spirited woman to be tied to him for day and night? It is a sacrilege, a crime, a villainy to hold that such a marriage is binding. I say that these monstrous laws of yours will bring a curse upon the land--God will not let such wickedness endure." For an instant she sat up, her cheeks flushed, and her eyes blazing from under the terrible mark upon her brow. Then the strong, soothing hand of the austere maid drew her head down on to the cushion, and the wild anger died away into passionate sobbing. At last she continued:

"I will tell you about last night. You are aware, perhaps, that in this house all the servants sleep in the modern wing. This central block is made up of the dwelling-rooms, with the kitchen behind and our bedroom above. My maid, Theresa, sleeps above my room. There is no one else, and no sound could alarm those who are in the farther wing. This must have been well known to the robbers, or they would not have acted as they did.

"Sir Eustace retired about half-past ten. The servants had already gone to their quarters. Only my maid was up, and she had remained in her room at the top of the house until I needed her services. I sat until after eleven in this room, absorbed in a book. Then I walked round to see that all was right before I went upstairs. It was my custom to do this myself, for, as I have explained, Sir Eustace was not always to be trusted. I went into the kitchen, the butler's pantry, the gun-room, the billiard-room, the drawing-room, and finally the dining-room. As I approached the window, which is covered with thick curtains, I suddenly felt the wind blow upon my face and realized that it was open. I flung the curtain aside and found myself face to face with a broad-shouldered elderly man, who had just stepped into the room. The window is a long French one, which really forms a door leading to the lawn. I held my bedroom candle lit in my hand, and, by its light, behind the first man I saw two others, who were in the act of entering. I stepped back, but the fellow was on me in an instant. He caught me first by the wrist and then by the throat. I opened my mouth to scream, but he struck me a savage blow with his fist over the eye, and felled me to the ground. I must have been unconscious for a few minutes, for when I came to myself, I found that they had torn down the bell-rope, and had secured me tightly to the oaken chair which stands at the head of the dining-table. I was so firmly bound that I could not move, and a handkerchief round my mouth prevented me from uttering a sound. It was at this instant that my unfortunate husband entered the room. He had evidently heard some suspicious sounds, and he came prepared for such a scene as he found. He was dressed in nightshirt and trousers, with his favourite blackthorn cudgel in his hand. He rushed at the burglars, but another--it was an elderly man--stooped, picked the poker out of the grate and struck him a horrible blow as he passed. He fell with a groan and never moved again. I fainted once more, but again it could only have been for a very few minutes during which I was insensible. When I opened my eyes I found that they had collected the silver from the sideboard, and they had drawn a bottle of wine
which stood there. Each of them had a glass in his hand. I have already told you, have I not, that one was elderly, with a beard, and the others young, hairless lads. They might have been a father with his two sons. They talked together in whispers. Then they came over and made sure that I was securely bound. Finally they withdrew, closing the window after them. It was quite a quarter of an hour before I got my mouth free. When I did so, my screams brought the maid to my assistance. The other servants were soon alarmed, and we sent for the local police, who instantly communicated with London. That is really all that I can tell you, gentlemen, and I trust that it will not be necessary for me to go over so painful a story again."

"Any questions, Mr. Holmes?" asked Hopkins.

"I will not impose any further tax upon Lady Brackenstall's patience and time," said Holmes. "Before I go into the dining-room, I should like to hear your experience." He looked at the maid.

"I saw the men before ever they came into the house," said she. "As I sat by my bedroom window I saw three men in the moonlight down by the lodge gate yonder, but I thought nothing of it at the time. It was more than an hour after that I heard my mistress scream, and down I ran, to find her, poor lamb, just as she says, and him on the floor, with his blood and brains over the room. It was enough to drive a woman out of her wits, tied there, and her very dress spotted with him, but she never wanted courage, did Miss Mary Fraser of Adelaide and Lady Brackenstall of Abbey Grange hasn't learned new ways. You've questioned her long enough, you gentlemen, and now she is coming to her own room, just with her old Theresa, to get the rest that she badly needs."

With a motherly tenderness the gaunt woman put her arm round her mistress and led her from the room.

"She has been with her all her life," said Hopkins. "Nursed her as a baby, and came with her to England when they first left Australia, eighteen months ago. Theresa Wright is her name, and the kind of maid you don't pick up nowadays. This way, Mr. Holmes, if you please!"

The keen interest had passed out of Holmes's expressive face, and I knew that with the mystery all the charm of the case had departed. There still remained an arrest to be effected, but what were these commonplace rogues that he should soil his hands with them? An abstruse and learned specialist who finds that he has been called in for a case of measles would experience something of the annoyance which I read in my friend's eyes. Yet the scene in the dining-room of the Abbey Grange was sufficiently strange to arrest his attention and to recall his waning interest.

It was a very large and high chamber, with carved oak ceiling, oaken panelling, and a fine array of deer's heads and ancient weapons around the walls. At the further end from the door was the high French window of which we had heard. Three smaller windows on the right-hand side filled the apartment with cold winter sunshine. On the left was a large, deep fireplace, with a massive, overhanging oak mantelpiece. Beside the fireplace was a heavy oaken chair with arms and cross-bars at the bottom. In and out through the open woodwork was woven a crimson cord, which was secured at each side to the crosspiece below. In releasing the lady, the cord had been slipped off her, but the knots with which it had been secured still remained. These details only struck our attention afterwards, for our thoughts were entirely absorbed by the terrible object which lay upon the tiger skin hearthrug in front of the fire.
had struck him down. Beside him lay the heavy poker, bent into a curve by the concussion. Holmes examined both it
and the indescribable wreck which it had wrought.

"He must be a powerful man, this elder Randall," he remarked.

"Yes," said Hopkins. "I have some record of the fellow, and he is a rough customer."

"You should have no difficulty in getting him."

"Not the slightest. We have been on the look-out for him, and there was some idea that he had got away to
America. Now that we know that the gang are here, I don't see how they can escape. We have the news at every
seaport already, and a reward will be offered before evening. What beats me is how they could have done so mad a
thing, knowing that the lady could describe them and that we could not fail to recognize the description."

"Exactly. One would have expected that they would silence Lady Brackenstall as well."

"They may not have realized," I suggested, "that she had recovered from her faint."

"That is likely enough. If she seemed to be senseless, they would not take her life. What about this poor fellow,
Hopkins? I seem to have heard some queer stories about him."

"He was a good-hearted man when he was sober, but a perfect fiend when he was drunk, or rather when he was
half drunk, for he seldom really went the whole way. The devil seemed to be in him at such times, and he was
capable of anything. From what I hear, in spite of all his wealth and his title, he very nearly came our way once or
twice. There was a scandal about his drenching a dog with petroleum and setting it on fire--her ladyship's dog, to
make the matter worse--and that was only hushed up with difficulty. Then he threw a decanter at that maid, Theresa
Wright--there was trouble about that. On the whole, and between ourselves, it will be a brighter house without him.

What are you looking at now?"

Holmes was down on his knees, examining with great attention the knots upon the red cord with which the lady
had been secured. Then he carefully scrutinized the broken and frayed end where it had snapped off when the
burglar had dragged it down.

"When this was pulled down, the bell in the kitchen must have rung loudly," he remarked.

"No one could hear it. The kitchen stands right at the back of the house."

"How did the burglar know no one would hear it? How dared he pull at a bell-rope in that reckless fashion?"

"Exactly, Mr. Holmes, exactly. You put the very question which I have asked myself again and again. There can
be no doubt that this fellow must have known the house and its habits. He must have perfectly understood that the
servants would all be in bed at that comparatively early hour, and that no one could possibly hear a bell ring in the
kitchen. Therefore, he must have been in close league with one of the servants. Surely that is evident. But there are
eight servants, and all of good character."

"Other things being equal," said Holmes, "one would suspect the one at whose head the master threw a decanter.
And yet that would involve treachery towards the mistress to whom this woman seems devoted. Well, well, the point
is a minor one, and when you have Randall you will probably find no difficulty in securing his accomplice. The
lady's story certainly seems to be corroborated, if it needed corroborate, by every detail which we see before us."

He walked to the French window and threw it open. "There are no signs here, but the ground is iron hard, and one
would not expect them. I see that these candles in the mantelpiece have been lighted."

"Yes, it was by their light and that of the lady's bedroom candle, that the burglars saw their way about."

"And what did they take?"

"Well, they did not take much--only half a dozen articles of plate off the sideboard. Lady Brackenstall thinks that
they were themselves so disturbed by the death of Sir Eustace that they did not ransack the house, as they would
otherwise have done."

"No doubt that is true, and yet they drank some wine, I understand."

"To steady their nerves."

"Exactly. These three glasses upon the sideboard have been untouched, I suppose?"

"Yes, and the bottle stands as they left it."

"Let us look at it. Halloa, halloa! What is this?"

The three glasses were grouped together, all of them tinged with wine, and one of them containing some dregs of
beeswing. The bottle stood near them, two-thirds full, and beside it lay a long, deeply stained cork. Its appearance
and the dust upon the bottle showed that it was no common vintage which the murderers had enjoyed.

A change had come over Holmes's manner. He had lost his listless expression, and again I saw an alert light of
interest in his keen, deep-set eyes. He raised the cork and examined it minutely.

"How did they draw it?" he asked.

Hopkins pointed to a half-opened drawer. In it lay some table linen and a large corkscrew.

"Did Lady Brackenstall say that screw was used?"

"No, you remember that she was senseless at the moment when the bottle was opened."
"Quite so. As a matter of fact, that screw was not used. This bottle was opened by a pocket screw, probably contained in a knife, and not more than an inch and a half long. If you will examine the top of the cork, you will observe that the screw was driven in three times before the cork was extracted. It has never been transfixed. This long screw would have transfixed it and drawn it up with a single pull. When you catch this fellow, you will find that he has one of these multiplex knives in his possession."

"Excellent!" said Hopkins.

"But these glasses do puzzle me, I confess. Lady Brackenstall actually SAW the three men drinking, did she not?"

"Yes; she was clear about that."

"Then there is an end of it. What more is to be said? And yet, you must admit, that the three glasses are very remarkable, Hopkins. What? You see nothing remarkable? Well, well, let it pass. Perhaps, when a man has special knowledge and special powers like my own, it rather encourages him to seek a complex explanation when a simpler one is at hand. Of course, it must be a mere chance about the glasses. Well, good-morning, Hopkins. I don't see that I can be of any use to you, and you appear to have your case very clear. You will let me know when Randall is arrested, and any further developments which may occur. I trust that I shall soon have to congratulate you upon a successful conclusion. Come, Watson, I fancy that we may employ ourselves more profitably at home."

During our return journey, I could see by Holmes's face that he was much puzzled by something which he had observed. Every now and then, by an effort, he would throw off the impression, and talk as if the matter were clear, but then his doubts would settle down upon him again, and his knitted brows and abstracted eyes would show that his thoughts had gone back once more to the great dining-room of the Abbey Grange, in which this midnight tragedy had been enacted. At last, by a sudden impulse, just as our train was crawling out of a suburban station, he sprang on to the platform and pulled me out after him.

"Excuse me, my dear fellow," said he, as we watched the rear carriages of our train disappearing round a curve, "I am sorry to make you the victim of what may seem a mere whim, but on my life, Watson, I simply CAN'T leave that case in this condition. Every instinct that I possess cries out against it. It's wrong--it's all wrong--I'll swear that it's wrong. And yet the lady's story was complete, the maid's corroboration was sufficient, the detail was fairly exact. What have I to put up against that? Three wine-glasses, that is all. But if I had not taken things for granted, if I had examined everything with the care which I should have shown had we approached the case DE NOVO and had no cut-and-dried story to warp my mind, should I not then have found something more definite to go upon? Of course I should. Sit down on this bench, Watson, until a train for Chiselhurst arrives, and allow me to lay the evidence before you, imploring you in the first instance to dismiss from your mind the idea that anything which the maid or her mistress may have said must necessarily be true. The lady's charming personality must not be permitted to warp our judgment.

"Surely there are details in her story which, if we looked at in cold blood, would excite our suspicion. These burglars made a considerable haul at Sydenham a fortnight ago. Some account of them and of their appearance was in the papers, and would naturally occur to anyone who wished to invent a story in which imaginary robbers should play a part. As a matter of fact, burglars who have done a good stroke of business are, as a rule, only too glad to enjoy the proceeds in peace and quiet without embarking on another perilous undertaking. Again, it is unusual for burglars to operate at so early an hour, it is unusual for burglars to strike a lady to prevent her screaming, since one would imagine that was the sure way to make her scream, it is unusual for them to commit murder when their numbers are sufficient to overpower one man, it is unusual for them to be content with a limited plunder when there was much more within their reach, and finally, I should say, that it was very unusual for such men to leave a bottle half empty. How do all these usuals strike you, Watson?"

"Their cumulative effect is certainly considerable, and yet each of them is quite possible in itself. The most unusual thing of all, as it seems to me, is that the lady should be tied to the chair."

"Well, I am not so clear about that, Watson, for it is evident that they must either kill her or else secure her in such a way that she could not give immediate notice of their escape. But at any rate I have shown, have I not, that there is a certain element of improbability about the lady's story? And now, on the top of this, comes the incident of the wineglasses."

"What about the wineglasses?"

"Can you see them in your mind's eye?"

"I see them clearly."

"We are told that three men drank from them. Does that strike you as likely?"

"Why not? There was wine in each glass."

"Exactly, but there was beeswing only in one glass. You must have noticed that fact. What does that suggest to your mind?"
"The last glass filled would be most likely to contain beeswing."

"Not at all. The bottle was full of it, and it is inconceivable that the first two glasses were clear and the third heavily charged with it. There are two possible explanations, and only two. One is that after the second glass was filled the bottle was violently agitated, and so the third glass received the beeswing. That does not appear probable. No, no, I am sure that I am right."

"What, then, do you suppose?"

"That only two glasses were used, and that the dregs of both were poured into a third glass, so as to give the false impression that three people had been here. In that way all the beeswing would be in the last glass, would it not? Yes, I am convinced that this is so. But if I have hit upon the true explanation of this one small phenomenon, then in an instant the case rises from the commonplace to the exceedingly remarkable, for it can only mean that Lady Brackenstall and her maid have deliberately lied to us, that not one word of their story is to be believed, that they have some very strong reason for covering the real criminal, and that we must construct our case for ourselves without any help from them. That is the mission which now lies before us, and here, Watson, is the Sydenham train."

The household at the Abbey Grange were much surprised at our return, but Sherlock Holmes, finding that Stanley Hopkins had gone off to report to headquarters, took possession of the dining-room, locked the door upon the inside, and devoted himself for two hours to one of those minute and laborious investigations which form the solid basis on which his brilliant edifices of deduction were reared. Seated in a corner like an interested student who observes the demonstration of his professor, I followed every step of that remarkable research. The window, the curtains, the chair, the rope--each in turn was minutely examined and duly pondered. The body of the unfortunate baronet had been removed, and all else remained as we had seen it in the morning. Finally, to my astonishment, Holmes climbed up on to the massive mantelpiece. Far above his head hung the few inches of red cord which were still attached to the wire. For a long time he gazed upward at it, and then in an attempt to get nearer to it he rested his knee upon a wooden bracket on the wall. This brought his hand within a few inches of the broken end of the rope, but it was not this so much as the bracket itself which seemed to engage his attention. Finally, he sprang down with an ejaculation of satisfaction.

"It's all right, Watson," said he. "We have got our case--one of the most remarkable in our collection. But, dear me, how slow-witted I have been, and how nearly I have committed the blunder of my lifetime! Now, I think that, with a few missing links, my chain is almost complete."

"You have got your men?"

"Man, Watson, man. Only one, but a very formidable person. Strong as a lion--witness the blow that bent that poker! Six foot three in height, active as a squirrel, dexterous with his fingers, finally, remarkably quick-witted, for this whole ingenious story is of his concoction. Yes, Watson, we have come upon the handiwork of a very remarkable individual. And yet, in that bell-rope, he has given us a clue which should not have left us a doubt."

"Where was the clue?"

"Well, if you were to pull down a bell-rope, Watson, where would you expect it to break? Surely at the spot where it is attached to the wire. Why should it break three inches from the top, as this one has done?"

"Because it is frayed there?"

"Exactly. This end, which we can examine, is frayed. He was cunning enough to do that with his knife. But the other end is not frayed. You could not observe that from here, but if you were on the mantelpiece you would see that it is cut clean off without any mark of fraying whatever. You can reconstruct what occurred. The man needed the rope. He would not tear it down for fear of giving the alarm by ringing the bell. What did he do? He sprang up on the mantelpiece, could not quite reach it, put his knee on the bracket--you will see the impression in the dust--and so got his knee to bear upon the cord. He could not reach the place by at least three inches--from which I infer that he is at least three inches a bigger man than I. Look at that mark upon the seat of the oaken chair! What is it?"

"Blood."

"Undoubtedly it is blood. This alone puts the lady's story out of court. If she were seated on the chair when the crime was done, how comes that mark? No, no, she was placed in the chair AFTER the death of her husband. I'll wager that the black dress shows a corresponding mark to this. We have not yet met our Waterloo, Watson, but this is our Marengo, for it begins in defeat and ends in victory. I should like now to have a few words with the nurse, Theresa. We must be wary for a while, if we are to get the information which we want."
will not even tell me all that he has done to her. She never told me of those marks on her arm that you saw this
morning, but I know very well that they come from a stab with a hatpin. The sly devil--God forgive me that I should
speak of him so, now that he is dead! But a devil he was, if ever one walked the earth. He was all honey when first
we met him--only eighteen months ago, and we both feel as if it were eighteen years. She had only just arrived in
London. Yes, it was her first voyage--she had never been from home before. He won her with his title and his
money and his false London ways. If she made a mistake she has paid for it, if ever a woman did. What month did
we meet him? Well, I tell you it was just after we arrived. We arrived in June, and it was July. They were married in
January of last year. Yes, she is down in the morning-room again, and I have no doubt she will see you, but you
must not ask too much of her, for she has gone through all that flesh and blood will stand."

Lady Brackenstall was reclining on the same couch, but looked brighter than before. The maid had entered with
us, and began once more to foment the bruise upon her mistress's brow.

"I hope," said the lady, "that you have not come to cross-examine me again?"

"No," Holmes answered, in his gentlest voice, "I will not cause you any unnecessary trouble, Lady Brackenstall,
and my whole desire is to make things easy for you, for I am convinced that you are a much-tried woman. If you
will treat me as a friend and trust me, you may find that I will justify your trust."

"What do you want me to do?"

"To tell me the truth."

"Mr. Holmes!"

"No, no, Lady Brackenstall--it is no use. You may have heard of any little reputation which I possess. I will
stake it all on the fact that your story is an absolute fabrication."

Mistress and maid were both staring at Holmes with pale faces and frightened eyes.

"You are an impudent fellow!" cried Theresa. "Do you mean to say that my mistress has told a lie?"

Holmes rose from his chair.

"Have you nothing to tell me?"

"I have told you everything."

"Think once more, Lady Brackenstall. Would it not be better to be frank?"

For an instant there was hesitation in her beautiful face. Then some new strong thought caused it to set like a
mask.

"I have told you all I know."

Holmes took his hat and shrugged his shoulders. "I am sorry," he said, and without another word we left the
room and the house. There was a pond in the park, and to this my friend led the way. It was frozen over, but a single
hole was left for the convenience of a solitary swan. Holmes gazed at it, and then passed on to the lodge gate. There
he scribbled a short note for Stanley Hopkins, and left it with the lodge-keeper.

"It may be a hit, or it may be a miss, but we are bound to do something for friend Hopkins, just to justify this
second visit," said he. "I will not quite take him into my confidence yet. I think our next scene of operations must be
the shipping office of the Adelaide-Southampton line, which stands at the end of Pall Mall, if I remember right.
There is a second line of steamers which connect South Australia with England, but we will draw the larger cover
first."

Holmes's card sent in to the manager ensured instant attention, and he was not long in acquiring all the
information he needed. In June of '95, only one of their line had reached a home port. It was the ROCK OF
GIBRALTAR, their largest and best boat. A reference to the passenger list showed that Miss Fraser, of Adelaide,
with her maid had made the voyage in her. The boat was now somewhere south of the Suez Canal on her way to
Australia. Her officers were the same as in '95, with one exception. The first officer, Mr. Jack Crocker, had been
made a captain and was to take charge of their new ship, the BASS ROCK, sailing in two days' time from
Southampton. He lived at Sydenham, but he was likely to be in that morning for instructions, if we cared to wait for
him.

No, Mr. Holmes had no desire to see him, but would be glad to know more about his record and character.

His record was magnificent. There was not an officer in the fleet to touch him. As to his character, he was
reliable on duty, but a wild, desperate fellow off the deck of his ship--hot-headed, excitable, but loyal, honest, and
kind-hearted. That was the pith of the information with which Holmes left the office of the Adelaide-Southampton
company. Thence he drove to Scotland Yard, but, instead of entering, he sat in his cab with his brows drawn down,
lost in profound thought. Finally he drove round to the Charing Cross telegraph office, sent off a message, and then,
at last, we made for Baker Street once more.

"No, I couldn't do it, Watson," said he, as we reentered our room. "Once that warrant was made out, nothing on
earth would save him. Once or twice in my career I feel that I have done more real harm by my discovery of the
criminal than ever he had done by his crime. I have learned caution now, and I had rather play tricks with the law of
England than with my own conscience. Let us know a little more before we act."

Before evening, we had a visit from Inspector Stanley Hopkins. Things were not going very well with him.

"I believe that you are a wizard, Mr. Holmes. I really do sometimes think that you have powers that are not human. Now, how on earth could you know that the stolen silver was at the bottom of that pond?"

"I didn't know it."

"But you told me to examine it."

"You got it, then?"

"Yes, I got it."

"I am very glad if I have helped you."

"But you haven't helped me. You have made the affair far more difficult. What sort of burglars are they who steal silver and then throw it into the nearest pond?"

"It was certainly rather eccentric behaviour. I was merely going on the idea that if the silver had been taken by persons who did not want it—who merely took it for a blind, as it were—then they would naturally be anxious to get rid of it."

"But why should such an idea cross your mind?"

"Well, I thought it was possible. When they came out through the French window, there was the pond with a tempting little hole in the ice, right in front of their noses. Could there be a better hiding-place?"

"Ah, a hiding-place—that is better!" cried Stanley Hopkins. "Yes, yes, I see it all now! It was early, there were folk upon the roads, they were afraid of being seen with the silver, so they sank it in the pond, intending to return for it when the coast was clear. Excellent, Mr. Holmes—that is better than your idea of a blind."

"Quite so, you have got an admirable theory. I have no doubt that my own ideas were quite wild, but you must admit that they have ended in discovering the silver."

"Yes, sir—yes. It was all your doing. But I have had a bad setback."

"A setback?"

"Yes, Mr. Holmes. The Randall gang were arrested in New York this morning."

"Dear me, Hopkins! That is certainly rather against your theory that they committed a murder in Kent last night."

"It is fatal, Mr. Holmes—absolutely fatal. Still, there are other gangs of three besides the Randall, or it may be some new gang of which the police have never heard."

"Quite so, it is perfectly possible. What, are you off?"

"Yes, Mr. Holmes, there is no rest for me until I have got to the bottom of the business. I suppose you have no hint to give me?"

"I have given you one."

"Which?"

"Well, I suggested a blind."

"But why, Mr. Holmes, why?"

"Ah, that's the question, of course. But I commend the idea to your mind. You might possibly find that there was something in it. You won't stop for dinner? Well, good-bye, and let us know how you get on."

Dinner was over, and the table cleared before Holmes alluded to the matter again. He had lit his pipe and held his slippered feet to the cheerful blaze of the fire. Suddenly he looked at his watch.

"I expect developments, Watson."

"When?"

"Now—within a few minutes. I dare say you thought I acted rather badly to Stanley Hopkins just now?"

"I trust your judgment."

"A very sensible reply, Watson. You must look at it this way: what I know is unofficial, what he knows is official. I have the right to private judgment, but he has none. He must disclose all, or he is a traitor to his service. In a doubtful case I would not put him in so painful a position, and so I reserve my information until my own mind is clear upon the matter."

"But when will that be?"

"The time has come. You will now be present at the last scene of a remarkable little drama."

There was a sound upon the stairs, and our door was opened to admit as fine a specimen of manhood as ever passed through it. He was a very tall young man, golden-moustached, blue-eyed, with a skin which had been burned by tropical suns, and a springy step, which showed that the huge frame was as active as it was strong. He closed the door behind him, and then he stood with clenched hands and heaving breast, choking down some overpowering emotion.
Holmes, Watson and Captain Croker.

"Sit down, Captain Crocker. You got my telegram?"

Our visitor sank into an armchair and looked from one to the other of us with questioning eyes.

"I got your telegram, and I came at the hour you said. I heard that you had been down to the office. There was no getting away from you. Let's hear the worst. What are you going to do with me? Arrest me? Speak out, man! You can't sit there and play with me like a cat with a mouse."

"Give him a cigar," said Holmes. "Bite on that, Captain Crocker, and don't let your nerves run away with you. I should not sit here smoking with you if I thought that you were a common criminal, you may be sure of that. Be frank with me and we may do some good. Play tricks with me, and I'll crush you."

"What do you wish me to do?"

"To give me a true account of all that happened at the Abbey Grange last night--a TRUE account, mind you, with nothing added and nothing taken off. I know so much already that if you go one inch off the straight, I'll blow this police whistle from my window and the affair goes out of my hands forever."

The sailor thought for a little. Then he struck his leg with his great sunburned hand.

"I'll chance it," he cried. "I believe you are a man of your word, and a white man, and I'll tell you the whole story. But one thing I will say first. So far as I am concerned, I regret nothing and I fear nothing, and I would do it all again and be proud of the job. Damn the beast, if he had as many lives as a cat, he would owe them all to me! But it's the lady, Mary--Mary Fraser--for never will I call her by that accursed name. When I think of getting her into trouble, I who would give my life just to bring one smile to her dear face, it's that that turns my soul into water. And yet--and yet--what less could I do? I'll tell you my story, gentlemen, and then I'll ask you, as man to man, what less could I do?

"I must go back a bit. You seem to know everything, so I expect that you know that I met her when she was a passenger and I was first officer of the ROCK OF GIBRALTAR. From the first day I met her, she was the only woman to me. Every day of that voyage I loved her more, and many a time since have I kneeled down in the darkness of the night watch and kissed the deck of that ship because I knew her dear feet had trod it. She was never engaged to me. She treated me as fairly as ever a woman treated a man. I have no complaint to make. It was all love on my side, and all good comradeship and friendship on hers. When we parted she was a free woman, but I could never again be a free man.

"Next time I came back from sea, I heard of her marriage. Well, why shouldn't she marry whom she liked? Title and money--who could carry them better than she? She was born for all that is beautiful and dainty. I didn't grieve over her marriage. I was not such a selfish hound as that. I just rejoiced that good luck had come her way, and that she had not thrown herself away on a penniless sailor. That's how I loved Mary Fraser.

"Well, I never thought to see her again, but last voyage I was promoted, and the new boat was not yet launched, so I had to wait for a couple of months with my people at Sydenham. One day out in a country lane I met Theresa Wright, her old maid. She told me all about her, about him, about everything. I tell you, gentlemen, it nearly drove me mad. This drunken hound, that he should dare to raise his hand to her, whose boots he was not worthy to lick! I met Theresa again. Then I met Mary herself--and met her again. Then she would meet me no more. But the other day I had a notice that I was to start on my voyage within a week, and I determined that I would see her once before I left. Theresa was always my friend, for she loved Mary and hated this villain almost as much as I did. From her I learned the ways of the house. Mary used to sit up reading in her own little room downstairs. I crept round there last night and scratched at the window. At first she would not open to me, but in her heart I know that now she loves me, and she could not leave me in the frosty night. She whispered to me to come round to the big front window, and I found it open before me, so as to let me into the dining-room. Again I heard from her own lips things that made my blood boil, and again I cursed this brute who mishandled the woman I loved. Well, gentlemen, I was standing with
her just inside the window, in all innocence, as God is my judge, when he rushed like a madman into the room, called her the vilest name that a man could use to a woman, and welted her across the face with the stick he had in his hand. I had sprung for the poker, and it was a fair fight between us. See here, on my arm, where his first blow fell. Then it was my turn, and I went through him as if he had been a rotten pumpkin. Do you think I was sorry? Not I! It was his life or mine, but far more than that, it was his life or hers, for how could I leave her in the power of this madman? That was how I killed him. Was I wrong? Well, then, what would either of you gentlemen have done, if you had been in my position?"

"She had screamed when he struck her, and that brought old Theresa down from the room above. There was a bottle of wine on the sideboard, and I opened it and poured a little between Mary's lips, for she was half dead with shock. Then I took a drop myself. Theresa was as cool as ice, and it was her plot as much as mine. We must make it appear that burglars had done the thing. Theresa kept on repeating our story to her mistress, while I swarmed up and cut the rope of the bell. Then I lashed her in her chair, and frayed out the end of the rope to make it look natural, else they would wonder how in the world a burglar could have got up there to cut it. Then I gathered up a few plates and pots of silver, to carry out the idea of the robbery, and there I left them, with orders to give the alarm when I had a quarter of an hour's start. I dropped the silver into the pond, and made off for Sydenham, feeling that for once in my life I had done a real good night's work. And that's the truth and the whole truth, Mr. Holmes, if it costs me my neck."

Holmes smoked for some time in silence. Then he crossed the room, and shook our visitor by the hand.

"That's what I think," said he. "I know that every word is true, for you have hardly said a word which I did not know. No one but an acrobat or a sailor could have got up to that bell-rope from the bracket, and no one but a sailor could have made the knots with which the cord was fastened to the chair. Only once had this lady been brought into contact with sailors, and that was on her voyage, and it was someone of her own class of life, since she was trying hard to shield him, and so showing that she loved him. You see how easy it was for me to lay my hands upon you when once I had started upon the right trail."

"I thought the police never could have seen through our dodge."

"And the police haven't, nor will they, to the best of my belief. Now, look here, Captain Crocker, this is a very serious matter, though I am willing to admit that you acted under the most extreme provocation to which any man could be subjected. I am not sure that in defence of your own life your action will not be pronounced legitimate. However, that is for a British jury to decide. Meanwhile I have so much sympathy for you that, if you choose to disappear in the next twenty-four hours, I will promise you that no one will hinder you."

"And then it will all come out?"

"Certainly it will come out."

The sailor flushed with anger.

"What sort of proposal is that to make a man? I know enough of law to understand that Mary would be held as accomplice. Do you think I would leave her alone to face the music while I slunk away? No, sir, let them do their worst upon me, but for heaven's sake, Mr. Holmes, find some way of keeping my poor Mary out of the courts."

Holmes for a second time held out his hand to the sailor.

"I was only testing you, and you ring true every time. Well, it is a great responsibility that I take upon myself, but I have given Hopkins an excellent hint and if he can't avail himself of it I can do no more. See here, Captain Crocker, we'll do this in due form of law. You are the prisoner. Watson, you are a British jury, and I never met a man who was more eminently fitted to represent one. I am the judge. Now, gentleman of the jury, you have heard the evidence. Do you find the prisoner guilty or not guilty?"

"Not guilty, my lord," said I.

"VOX POPULI, VOX DEI. You are acquitted, Captain Crocker. So long as the law does not find some other victim you are safe from me. Come back to this lady in a year, and may her future and yours justify us in the judgment which we have pronounced this night!"

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SECOND STAIN

I had intended "The Adventure of the Abbey Grange" to be the last of those exploits of my friend, Mr. Sherlock Holmes, which I should ever communicable to the public. This resolution of mine was not due to any lack of material, since I have notes of many hundreds of cases to which I have never alluded, nor was it caused by any waning interest on the part of my readers in the singular personality and unique methods of this remarkable man. The real reason lay in the reluctance which Mr. Holmes has shown to the continued publication of his experiences. So long as he was in actual professional practice the records of his successes were of some practical value to him, but since he has definitely retired from London and betaken himself to study and bee-farming on the Sussex Downs, notoriety has become hateful to him, and he has peremptorily requested that his wishes in this matter should be strictly observed. It was only upon my representing to him that I had given a promise that "The Adventure of the Second
"Stain" should be published when the times were ripe, and pointing out to him that it is only appropriate that this long series of episodes should culminate in the most important international case which he has ever been called upon to handle, that I at last succeeded in obtaining his consent that a carefully guarded account of the incident should at last be laid before the public. If in telling the story I seem to be somewhat vague in certain details, the public will readily understand that there is an excellent reason for my reticence.

It was, then, in a year, and even in a decade, that shall be nameless, that upon one Tuesday morning in autumn we found two visitors of European fame within the walls of our humble room in Baker Street. The one, austere, high-nosed, eagle-eyed, and dominant, was none other than the illustrious Lord Bellinger, twice Premier of Britain. The other, dark, clear-cut, and elegant, hardly yet of middle age, and endowed with every beauty of body and of mind, was the Right Honourable Trelawney Hope, Secretary for European Affairs, and the most rising statesman in the country. They sat side by side upon our paper-littered settee, and it was easy to see from their worn and anxious faces that it was business of the most pressing importance which had brought them. The Premier's thin, blue-veined hands were clasped tightly over the ivory head of his umbrella, and his gaunt, ascetic face looked gloomily from Holmes to me. The European Secretary pulled nervously at his moustache and fidgeted with the seals of his watch-chain.

"When I discovered my loss, Mr. Holmes, which was at eight o'clock this morning, I at once informed the Prime Minister. It was at his suggestion that we have both come to you."

"Have you informed the police?"

"No, sir," said the Prime Minister, with the quick, decisive manner for which he was famous. "We have not done so, nor is it possible that we should do so. To inform the police must, in the long run, mean to inform the public. This is what we particularly desire to avoid."

"And why, sir?"

"Because the document in question is of such immense importance that its publication might very easily--I might almost say probably--lead to European complications of the utmost moment. It is not too much to say that peace or war may hang upon the issue. Unless its recovery can be attended with the utmost secrecy, then it may as well not be recovered at all, for all that is aimed at by those who have taken it is that its contents should be generally known."

"I understand. Now, Mr. Trelawney Hope, I should be much obliged if you would tell me exactly the circumstances under which this document disappeared."

"That can be done in a very few words, Mr. Holmes. The letter--for it was a letter from a foreign potentate--was received six days ago. It was of such importance that I have never left it in my safe, but have taken it across each evening to my house in Whitehall Terrace, and kept it in my bedroom in a locked despatch-box. It was there last night. Of that I am certain. I actually opened the box while I was dressing for dinner and saw the document inside. This morning it was gone. The despatch-box had stood beside the glass upon my dressing-table all night. I am a light sleeper, and so is my wife. We are both prepared to swear that no one could have entered the room during the night. And yet I repeat that the paper is gone."

"What time did you dine?"

"Half-past seven."

"How long was it before you went to bed?"

"My wife had gone to the theatre. I waited up for her. It was half-past eleven before we went to our room."

"Then for four hours the despatch-box had lain unguarded?"

"No one is ever permitted to enter that room save the house-maid in the morning, and my valet, or my wife's maid, during the rest of the day. They are both trusty servants who have been with us for some time. Besides, neither of them could possibly have known that there was anything more valuable than the ordinary departmental papers in my despatch-box."

"Who did know of the existence of that letter?"

"No one in the house."

"Surely your wife knew?"

"No, sir. I had said nothing to my wife until I missed the paper this morning."

The Premier nodded approvingly.

"I have long known, sir, how high is your sense of public duty," said he. "I am convinced that in the case of a secret of this importance it would rise superior to the most intimate domestic ties."

The European Secretary bowed.

"You do me no more than justice, sir. Until this morning I have never breathed one word to my wife upon this matter."

"Could she have guessed?"

"No, Mr. Holmes, she could not have guessed--nor could anyone have guessed."
"Have you lost any documents before?"
"No, sir."
"Who is there in England who did know of the existence of this letter?"
"Each member of the Cabinet was informed of it yesterday, but the pledge of secrecy which attends every Cabinet meeting was increased by the solemn warning which was given by the Prime Minister. Good heavens, to think that within a few hours I should myself have lost it!" His handsome face was distorted with a spasm of despair, and his hands tore at his hair. For a moment we caught a glimpse of the natural man, impulsive, ardent, keenly sensitive. The next the aristocratic mask was replaced, and the gentle voice had returned. "Besides the members of the Cabinet there are two, or possibly three, departmental officials who know of the letter. No one else in England, Mr. Holmes, I assure you."
"But abroad?"
"I believe that no one abroad has seen it save the man who wrote it. I am well convinced that his Ministers--that the usual official channels have not been employed."
Holmes considered for some little time.
"Now, sir, I must ask you more particularly what this document is, and why its disappearance should have such momentous consequences?"
The two statesmen exchanged a quick glance and the Premier's shaggy eyebrows gathered in a frown.
"Mr. Holmes, the envelope is a long, thin one of pale blue colour. There is a seal of red wax stamped with a crouching lion. It is addressed in large, bold handwriting to----"
"I fear, sir," said Holmes, "that, interesting and indeed essential as these details are, my inquiries must go more to the root of things. What WAS the letter?"
"That is a State secret of the utmost importance, and I fear that I cannot tell you, nor do I see that it is necessary. If by the aid of the powers which you are said to possess you can find such an envelope as I describe with its enclosure, you will have deserved well of your country, and earned any reward which it lies in our power to bestow."
Sherlock Holmes rose with a smile.
"You are two of the most busy men in the country," said he, "and in my own small way I have also a good many calls upon me. I regret exceedingly that I cannot help you in this matter, and any continuation of this interview would be a waste of time."
The Premier sprang to his feet with that quick, fierce gleam of his deep-set eyes before which a Cabinet has cowered. "I am not accustomed, sir," he began, but mastered his anger and resumed his seat. For a minute or more we all sat in silence. Then the old statesman shrugged his shoulders.
"We must accept your terms, Mr. Holmes. No doubt you are right, and it is unreasonable for us to expect you to act unless we give you our entire confidence."
"I agree with you," said the younger statesman.
"Then I will tell you, relying entirely upon your honour and that of your colleague, Dr. Watson. I may appeal to your patriotism also, for I could not imagine a greater misfortune for the country than that this affair should come out."
"You may safely trust us."
"The letter, then, is from a certain foreign potentate who has been ruffled by some recent Colonial developments of this country. It has been written hurriedly and upon his own responsibility entirely. Inquiries have shown that his Ministers know nothing of the matter. At the same time it is couched in so unfortunate a manner, and certain phrases in it are of so provocative a character, that its publication would undoubtedly lead to a most dangerous state of feeling in this country. There would be such a ferment, sir, that I do not hesitate to say that within a week of the publication of that letter this country would be involved in a great war."
Holmes wrote a name upon a slip of paper and handed it to the Premier.
"Exactly. It was he. And it is this letter--this letter which may well mean the expenditure of a thousand millions and the lives of a hundred thousand men--which has become lost in this unaccountable fashion."
"Have you informed the sender?"
"Yes, sir, a cipher telegram has been despatched."
"Perhaps he desires the publication of the letter."
"No, sir, we have strong reason to believe that he already understands that he has acted in an indiscreet and hot-headed manner. It would be a greater blow to him and to his country than to us if this letter were to come out."
"If this is so, whose interest is it that, the letter should come out? Why should anyone desire to steal it or to publish it?"
"There, Mr. Holmes, you take me into regions of high international politics. But if you consider the European
situation you will have no difficulty in perceiving the motive. The whole of Europe is an armed camp. There is a
double league which makes a fair balance of military power. Great Britain holds the scales. If Britain were driven
into war with one confederacy, it would assure the supremacy of the other confederacy, whether they joined in the
war or not. Do you follow?"

"Very clearly. It is then the interest of the enemies of this potentate to secure and publish this letter, so as to
make a breach between his country and ours?"

"Yes, sir."

"And to whom would this document be sent if it fell into the hands of an enemy?"

"To any of the great Chancelleries of Europe. It is probably speeding on its way thither at the present instant as
fast as steam can take it."

Mr. Trelawney Hope dropped his head on his chest and groaned aloud. The Premier placed his hand kindly upon
his shoulder.

"It is your misfortune, my dear fellow. No one can blame you. There is no precaution which you have neglected.
Now, Mr. Holmes, you are in full possession of the facts. What course do you recommend?"

Holmes shook his head mournfully.

"You think, sir, that unless this document is recovered there will be war?"

"I think it is very probable."

"Then, sir, prepare for war."

"That is a hard saying, Mr. Holmes."

"Consider the facts, sir. It is inconceivable that it was taken after eleven-thirty at night, since I understand that
Mr. Hope and his wife were both in the room from that hour until the loss was found out. It was taken, then,
yesterday evening between seven-thirty and eleven-thirty, probably near the earlier hour, since whoever took it
evidently knew that it was there and would naturally secure it as early as possible. Now, sir, if a document of this
importance were taken at that hour, where can it be now? No one has any reason to retain it. It has been passed
rapidly on to those who need it. What chance have we now to overtake or even to trace it? It is beyond our reach."

The Prime Minister rose from the settee.

"What you say is perfectly logical, Mr. Holmes. I feel that the matter is indeed out of our hands."

"Let us presume, for argument's sake, that the document was taken by the maid or by the valet----"

"They are both old and tried servants."

"I understand you to say that your room is on the second floor, that there is no entrance from without, and that
from within no one could go up unobserved. It must, then, be somebody in the house who has taken it. To whom
would the thief take it? To one of several international spies and secret agents, whose names are tolerably familiar to
me. There are three who may be said to be the heads of their profession. I will begin my research by going round
and finding if each of them is at his post. If one is missing--especially if he has disappeared since last night--we will
have some indication as to where the document has gone."

"Why should he be missing?" asked the European Secretary. "He would take the letter to an Embassy in London,
as likely as not."

"I fancy not. These agents work independently, and their relations with the Embassies are often strained."

The Prime Minister nodded his acquiescence.

"I believe you are right, Mr. Holmes. He would take so valuable a prize to headquarters with his own hands. I
think that your course of action is an excellent one. Meanwhile, Hope, we cannot neglect all our other duties on
account of this one misfortune. Should there be any fresh developments during the day we shall communicate with
you, and you will no doubt let us know the results of your own inquiries."

The two statesmen bowed and walked gravely from the room.

When our illustrious visitors had departed Holmes lit his pipe in silence and sat for some time lost in the deepest
thought. I had opened the morning paper and was immersed in a sensational crime which had occurred in London
the night before, when my friend gave an exclamation, sprang to his feet, and laid his pipe down upon the
mantelpiece.

"Yes," said he, "there is no better way of approaching it. The situation is desperate, but not hopeless. Even now,
if we could be sure which of them has taken it, it is just possible that it has not yet passed out of his hands. After all,
it is a question of money with these fellows, and I have the British treasury behind me. If it's on the market I'll buy
it--if it means another penny on the income-tax. It is conceivable that the fellow might hold it back to see what bids
come from this side before he tries his luck on the other. There are only those three capable of playing so bold a
game--there are Oberstein, La Rothiere, and Eduardo Lucas. I will see each of them."

I glanced at my morning paper.

"Is that Eduardo Lucas of Godolphin Street?"
"Yes."
"You will not see him."
"Why not?"
"He was murdered in his house last night."

My friend has so often astonished me in the course of our adventures that it was with a sense of exultation that I realized how completely I had astonished him. He stared in amazement, and then snatched the paper from my hands. This was the paragraph which I had been engaged in reading when he rose from his chair.

MURDER IN WESTMINSTER

A crime of mysterious character was committed last night at 16 Godolphin Street, one of the old-fashioned and secluded rows of eighteenth century houses which lie between the river and the Abbey, almost in the shadow of the great Tower of the Houses of Parliament. This small but select mansion has been inhabited for some years by Mr. Eduardo Lucas, well known in society circles both on account of his charming personality and because he has the well-deserved reputation of being one of the best amateur tenors in the country. Mr. Lucas is an unmarried man, thirty-four years of age, and his establishment consists of Mrs. Pringle, an elderly housekeeper, and of Mitton, his valet. The former retires early and sleeps at the top of the house. The valet was out for the evening, visiting a friend at Hammersmith. From ten o'clock onward Mr. Lucas had the house to himself. What occurred during that time has not yet transpired, but at a quarter to twelve Police-constable Barrett, passing along Godolphin Street observed that the door of No. 16 was ajar. He knocked, but received no answer. Perceiving a light in the front room, he advanced into the passage and again knocked, but without reply. He then pushed open the door and entered. The room was in a state of wild disorder, the furniture being all swept to one side, and one chair lying on its back in the centre. Beside this chair, and still grasping one of its legs, lay the unfortunate tenant of the house. He had been stabbed to the heart and must have died instantly. The knife with which the crime had been committed was a curved Indian dagger, plucked down from a trophy of Oriental arms which adorned one of the walls. Robbery does not appear to have been the motive of the crime, for there had been no attempt to remove the valuable contents of the room. Mr. Eduardo Lucas was so well known and popular that his violent and mysterious fate will arouse painful interest and intense sympathy in a widespread circle of friends.

"Well, Watson, what do you make of this?" asked Holmes, after a long pause.

"It is an amazing coincidence."

"A coincidence! Here is one of the three men whom we had named as possible actors in this drama, and he meets a violent death during the very hours when we know that that drama was being enacted. The odds are enormous against its being coincidence. No figures could express them. No, my dear Watson, the two events are connected--MUST be connected. It is for us to find the connection."

"But now the official police must know all."

"Not at all. They know all they see at Godolphin Street. They know--and shall know--nothing of Whitehall Terrace. Only WE know of both events, and can trace the relation between them. There is one obvious point which would, in any case, have turned my suspicions against Lucas. Godolphin Street, Westminster, is only a few minutes' walk from Whitehall Terrace. The other secret agents whom I have named live in the extreme West End. It was easier, therefore, for Lucas than for the others to establish a connection or receive a message from the European Secretary's household--a small thing, and yet where events are compressed into a few hours it may prove essential. Halloa! what have we here?"

Mrs. Hudson had appeared with a lady's card upon her salver. Holmes glanced at it, raised his eyebrows, and handed it over to me.

"Ask Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope if she will be kind enough to step up," said he.

A moment later our modest apartment, already so distinguished that morning, was further honoured by the entrance of the most lovely woman in London. I had often heard of the beauty of the youngest daughter of the Duke of Belminster, but no description of it, and no contemplation of colourless photographs, had prepared me for the subtle, delicate charm and the beautiful colouring of that exquisite head. And yet as we saw it that autumn morning, it was not its beauty which would be the first thing to impress the observer. The cheek was lovely but it was paled with emotion, the eyes were bright but it was the brightness of fever, the sensitive mouth was tight and drawn in an effort after self-command. Terror--not beauty--was what sprang first to the eye as our fair visitor stood framed for an instant in the open door.

"Has my husband been here, Mr. Holmes?"

"Yes, madam, he has been here."

"Mr. Holmes. I implore you not to tell him that I came here." Holmes bowed coldly, and motioned the lady to a chair.

"Your ladyship places me in a very delicate position. I beg that you will sit down and tell me what you desire,
but I fear that I cannot make any unconditional promise."

She swept across the room and seated herself with her back to the window. It was a queenly presence--tall, graceful, and intensely womanly. "Mr. Holmes," she said--and her white-gloved hands clasped and unclasped as she spoke--"I will speak frankly to you in the hopes that it may induce you to speak frankly in return. There is complete confidence between my husband and me on all matters save one. That one is politics. On this his lips are sealed. He tells me nothing. Now, I am aware that there was a most deplorable occurrence in our house last night. I know that a paper has disappeared. But because the matter is political my husband refuses to take me into his complete confidence. Now it is essential--essential, I say—that I should thoroughly understand it. You are the only other person, save only these politicians, who knows the true facts. I beg you then, Mr. Holmes, to tell me exactly what has happened and what it will lead to. Tell me all, Mr. Holmes. Let no regard for your client's interests keep you silent, for I assure you that his interests, if he would only see it, would be best served by taking me into his complete confidence. What was this paper which was stolen?"

"Madam, what you ask me is really impossible."

She groaned and sank her face in her hands.

"You must see that this is so, madam. If your husband thinks fit to keep you in the dark over this matter, is it for me, who has only learned the true facts under the pledge of professional secrecy, to tell what he has withheld? It is not fair to ask it. It is him whom you must ask."

"I have asked him. I come to you as a last resource. But without your telling me anything definite, Mr. Holmes, you may do a great service if you would enlighten me on one point."

"What is it, madam?"

"Is my husband's political career likely to suffer through this incident?"

"Well, madam, unless it is set right it may certainly have a very unfortunate effect."

"Ah!" She drew in her breath sharply as one whose doubts are resolved.

"One more question, Mr. Holmes. From an expression which my husband dropped in the first shock of this disaster I understood that terrible public consequences might arise from the loss of this document."

"If he said so, I certainly cannot deny it."

"Of what nature are they?"

"Nay, madam, there again you ask me more than I can possibly answer."

"Then I will take up no more of your time. I cannot blame you, Mr. Holmes, for having refused to speak more freely, and you on your side will not, I am sure, think the worse of me because I desire, even against his will, to share my husband's anxieties. Once more I beg that you will say nothing of my visit."

She looked back at us from the door, and I had a last impression of that beautiful haunted face, the startled eyes, and the drawn mouth. Then she was gone.

"Now, Watson, the fair sex is your department," said Holmes, with a smile, when the dwindling frou-frou of skirts had ended in the slam of the front door. "What was the fair lady's game? What did she really want?"

"Surely her own statement is clear and her anxiety very natural."

"Hum! Think of her appearance, Watson--her manner, her suppressed excitement, her restlessness, her tenacity in asking questions. Remember that she comes of a caste who do not lightly show emotion."

"She was certainly much moved."

"Remember also the curious earnestness with which she assured us that it was best for her husband that she should know all. What did she mean by that? And you must have observed, Watson, how she manoeuvred to have the light at her back. She did not wish us to read her expression."

"Yes, she chose the one chair in the room."

"And yet the motives of women are so inscrutable. You remember the woman at Margate whom I suspected for the same reason. No powder on her nose--that proved to be the correct solution. How can you build on such a quicksand? Their most trivial action may mean volumes, or their most extraordinary conduct may depend upon a hairpin or a curling tong. Good-morning, Watson."

"You are off?"

"Yes, I will while away the morning at Godolphin Street with our friends of the regular establishment. With Eduardo Lucas lies the solution of our problem, though I must admit that I have not an inkling as to what form it may take. It is a capital mistake to theorize in advance of the facts. Do you stay on guard, my good Watson, and receive any fresh visitors. I'll join you at lunch if I am able."

All that day and the next and the next Holmes was in a mood which his friends would call taciturn, and others morose. He ran out and ran in, smoked incessantly, played snatches on his violin, sank into reveries, devoured sandwiches at irregular hours, and hardly answered the casual questions which I put to him. It was evident to me that things were not going well with him or his quest. He would say nothing of the case, and it was from the papers that I
learned the particulars of the inquest, and the arrest with the subsequent release of John Mitton, the valet of the deceased. The coroner's jury brought in the obvious Wilful Murder, but the parties remained as unknown as ever. No motive was suggested. The room was full of articles of value, but none had been taken. The dead man's papers had not been tampered with. They were carefully examined, and showed that he was a keen student of international politics, an indefatigable gossip, a remarkable linguist, and an untiring letter writer. He had been on intimate terms with the leading politicians of several countries. But nothing sensational was discovered among the documents which filled his drawers. As to his relations with women, they appeared to have been promiscuous but superficial. He had many acquaintances among them, but few friends, and no one whom he loved. His habits were regular, his conduct inoffensive. His death was an absolute mystery and likely to remain so.

As to the arrest of John Mitton, the valet, it was a council of despair as an alternative to absolute inaction. But no case could be sustained against him. He had visited friends in Hammersmith that night. The ALIBI was complete. It is true that he started home at an hour which should have brought him to Westminster before the time when the crime was discovered, but his own explanation that he had walked part of the way seemed probable enough in view of the fineness of the night. He had actually arrived at twelve o'clock, and appeared to be overwhelmed by the unexpected tragedy. He had always been on good terms with his master. Several of the dead man's possessions—notably a small case of razors—had been found in the valet's boxes, but he explained that they had been presents from the deceased, and the housekeeper was able to corroborate the story. Mitton had been in Lucas's employment for three years. It was noticeable that Lucas did not take Mitton on the Continent with him. Sometimes he visited Paris for three months on end, but Mitton was left in charge of the Godolphin Street house. As to the housekeeper, she had heard nothing on the night of the crime. If her master had a visitor he had himself admitted him.

So for three mornings the mystery remained, so far as I could follow it in the papers. If Holmes knew more, he kept his own counsel, but, as he told me that Inspector Lestrade had taken him into him into his confidence in the case, I knew that he was in close touch with every development. Upon the fourth day there appeared a long telegram from Paris which seemed to solve the whole question.

A discovery has just been made by the Parisian police [said the DAILY TELEGRAPH] which raises the veil which hung round the tragic fate of Mr. Eduardo Lucas, who met his death by violence last Monday night at Godolphin Street, Westminster. Our readers will remember that the deceased gentleman was found stabbed in his room, and that some suspicion attached to his valet, but that the case broke down on an ALIBI. Yesterday a lady, who has been known as Mme. Henri Fournaye, occupying a small villa in the Rue Austerlitz, was reported to the authorities by her servants as being insane. An examination showed she had indeed developed mania of a dangerous and permanent form. On inquiry, the police have discovered that Mme. Henri Fournaye only returned from a journey to London on Tuesday last, and there is evidence to connect her with the crime at Westminster. A comparison of photographs has proved conclusively that M. Henri Fournaye and Eduardo Lucas were really one and the same person, and that the deceased had for some reason lived a double life in London and Paris. Mme. Fournaye, who is of Creole origin, is of an extremely excitable nature, and has suffered in the past from attacks of jealousy which have amounted to frenzy. It is conjectured that it was in one of these that she committed the terrible crime which has caused such a sensation in London. Her movements upon the Monday night have not yet been traced, but it is undoubted that a woman answering to her description attracted much attention at Charing Cross Station on Tuesday morning by the wildness of her appearance and the violence of her gestures. It is probable, therefore, that the crime was either committed when insane, or that its immediate effect was to drive the unhappy woman out of her mind. At present she is unable to give any coherent account of the past, and the doctors hold out no hopes of the reestablishment of her reason. There is evidence that a woman, who might have been Mme. Fournaye, was seen for some hours upon Monday night watching the house in Godolphin Street.

"What do you think of that, Holmes?" I had read the account aloud to him, while he finished his breakfast.

"My dear Watson," said he, as he rose from the table and paced up and down the room, "You are most long-suffering, but if I have told you nothing in the last three days, it is because there is nothing to tell. Even now this report from Paris does not help us much."

"Surely it is final as regards the man's death."

"The man's death is a mere incident—a trivial episode—in comparison with our real task, which is to trace this document and save a European catastrophe. Only one important thing has happened in the last three days, and that is that nothing has happened. I get reports almost hourly from the government, and it is certain that nowhere in Europe is there any sign of trouble. Now, if this letter were loose--no, it CAN'T be loose--but if it isn't loose, where can it be? Who has it? Why is it held back? That's the question that beats in my brain like a hammer. Was it, indeed, a coincidence that Lucas should meet his death on the night when the letter disappeared? Did the letter ever reach him? If so, why is it not among his papers? Did this mad wife of his carry it off with her? If so, is it in her house in Paris? How could I search for it without the French police having their suspicions aroused? It is a case, my dear
Watson, where the law is as dangerous to us as the criminals are. Every man's hand is against us, and yet the interests at stake are colossal. Should I bring it to a successful conclusion, it will certainly represent the crowning glory of my career. Ah, here is my latest from the front!" He glanced hurriedly at the note which had been handed in. "Halloa! Lestrade seems to have observed something of interest. Put on your hat, Watson, and we will stroll down together to Westminster."

It was my first visit to the scene of the crime—a high, dingy, narrow-chested house, prim, formal, and solid, like the century which gave it birth. Lestrade's bulldog features gazed out at us from the front window, and he greeted us warmly when a big constable had opened the door and let us in. The room into which we were shown was that in which the crime had been committed, but no trace of it now remained save an ugly, irregular stain upon the carpet. This carpet was a small square drugget in the centre of the room, surrounded by a broad expanse of beautiful, old-fashioned wood-flooring in square blocks, highly polished. Over the fireplace was a magnificent trophy of weapons, one of which had been used on that tragic night. In the window was a sumptuous writing-desk, and every detail of the apartment, the pictures, the rugs, and the hangings, all pointed to a taste which was luxurious to the verge of effeminacy.

"Seen the Paris news?" asked Lestrade.
Holmes nodded.
"Our French friends seem to have touched the spot this time. No doubt it's just as they say. She knocked at the door—surprise visit, I guess, for he kept his life in water-tight compartments—he let her in, couldn't keep her in the street. She told him how she had traced him, reproached him. One thing led to another, and then with that dagger so handy the end soon came. It wasn't all done in an instant, though, for these chairs were all swept over yonder, and he had one in his hand as if he had tried to hold her off with it. We've got it all clear as if we had seen it."

Holmes raised his eyebrows.
"And yet you have sent for me?"

"Ah, yes, that's another matter—a mere trifle, but the sort of thing you take an interest in—queer, you know, and what you might call freakish. It has nothing to do with the main fact—can't have, on the face of it."

"What is it, then?"

"Well, you know, after a crime of this sort we are very careful to keep things in their position. Nothing has been moved. Officer in charge here day and night. This morning, as the man was buried and the investigation over—so far as this room is concerned—we thought we could tidy up a bit. This carpet. You see, it is not fastened down, only just laid there. We had occasion to raise it. We found—"

"Yes? You found—"

Holmes's face grew tense with anxiety.
"Well, I'm sure you would never guess in a hundred years what we did find. You see that stain on the carpet? Well, a great deal must have soaked through, must it not?"

"Undoubtedly it must."

"Well, you will be surprised to hear that there is no stain on the white woodwork to correspond."

"No stain! But there must—"

"Yes, so you would say. But the fact remains that there isn't."
He took the corner of the carpet in his hand and, turning it over, he showed that it was indeed as he said.
"But the under side is as stained as the upper. It must have left a mark."
Lestrade chuckled with delight at having puzzled the famous expert.
"Now, I'll show you the explanation. There IS a second stain, but it does not correspond with the other. See for yourself." As he spoke he turned over another portion of the carpet, and there, sure enough, was a great crimson spill upon the square white facing of the old-fashioned floor. "What do you make of that, Mr. Holmes?"

"Why, it is simple enough. The two stains did correspond, but the carpet has been turned round. As it was square and unfastened it was easily done."

"The official police don't need you, Mr. Holmes, to tell them that the carpet must have been turned round. That's clear enough, for the stains lie above each other—if you lay it over this way. But what I want to know is, who shifted the carpet, and why?"

I could see from Holmes's rigid face that he was vibrating with inward excitement.
"Look here, Lestrade," said he, "has that constable in the passage been in charge of the place all the time?"

"Yes, he has."

"Well, take my advice. Examine him carefully. Don't do it before us. Well wait here. You take him into the back room. You'll be more likely to get a confession out of him alone. Ask him how he dared to admit people and leave them alone in this room. Don't ask him if he has done it. Take it for granted. Tell him you KNOW someone has been here. Press him. Tell him that a full confession is his only chance of forgiveness. Do exactly what I tell you!"
"By George, if he knows I'll have it out of him!" cried Lestrade. He darted into the hall, and a few moments later his bullying voice sounded from the back room.

"Now, Watson, now!" cried Holmes with frenzied eagerness. All the demoniacal force of the man masked behind that listless manner burst out in a paroxysm of energy. He tore the drugget from the floor, and in an instant was down on his hands and knees clawing at each of the squares of wood beneath it. One turned sideways as he dug his nails into the edge of it. It hinged back like the lid of a box. A small black cavity opened beneath it. Holmes plunged his eager hand into it and drew it out with a bitter snarl of anger and disappointment. It was empty.

"Quick, Watson, quick! Get it back again!" The wooden lid was replaced, and the drugget had only just been drawn straight when Lestrade's voice was heard in the passage. He found Holmes leaning languidly against the mantelpiece, resigned and patient, endeavouring to conceal his irrepressible yawns.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Mr. Holmes, I can see that you are bored to death with the whole affair. Well, he has confessed, all right. Come in here, MacPherson. Let these gentlemen hear of your most inexcusable conduct."

The big constable, very hot and penitent, sidled into the room.

"I meant no harm, sir, I'm sure. The young woman came to the door last evening--mistook the house, she did. And then we got talking. It's lonesome, when you're on duty here all day."

"Well, what happened then?"

"She wanted to see where the crime was done--had read about it in the papers, she said. She was a very respectable, well-spoken young woman, sir, and I saw no harm in letting her have a peep. When she saw that mark on the carpet, down she dropped on the floor, and lay as if she were dead. I ran to the back and got some water, but I could not bring her to. Then I went round the corner to the Ivy Plant for some brandy, and by the time I had brought it back the young woman had recovered and was off--ashamed of herself, I daresay, and dared not face me."

"How about moving that drugget?"

"Well, sir, it was a bit rumpled, certainly, when I came back. You see, she fell on it and it lies on a polished floor with nothing to keep it in place. I straightened it out afterwards."

"It's a lesson to you that you can't deceive me, Constable MacPherson," said Lestrade, with dignity. "No doubt you thought that your breach of duty could never be discovered, and yet a mere glance at that drugget was enough to convince me that someone had been admitted to the room. It's lucky for you, my man, that nothing is missing, or you would find yourself in Queer Street. I'm sorry to have called you down over such a petty business, Mr. Holmes, but I thought the point of the second stain not corresponding with the first would interest you."

"Certainly, it was most interesting. Has this woman only been here once, constable?"

"Yes, sir, only once."

"Who was she?"

"Don't know the name, sir. Was answering an advertisement about typewriting and came to the wrong number--very pleasant, genteel young woman, sir."

"Tall? Handsome?"

"Yes, sir, she was a well-grown young woman. I suppose you might say she was handsome. Perhaps some would say she was very handsome. 'Oh, officer, do let me have a peep!' says she. She had pretty, coaxing ways, as you might say, and I thought there was no harm in letting her just put her head through the door."

"How was she dressed?"

"Quiet, sir--a long mantle down to her feet."

"What time was it?"

"It was just growing dusk at the time. They were lighting the lamps as I came back with the brandy."

"Very good," said Holmes. "Come, Watson, I think that we have more important work elsewhere."

As we left the house Lestrade remained in the front room, while the repentant constable opened the door to let us out. Holmes turned on the step and held up something in his hand. The constable stared intently.

"Good Lord, sir!" he cried, with amazement on his face. Holmes put his finger on his lips, replaced his hand in his breast pocket, and burst out laughing as we turned down the street. "Excellent!" said he. "Come, friend Watson, the curtain rings up for the last act. You will be relieved to hear that there will be no war, that the Right Honourable Trelawney Hope will suffer no setback in his brilliant career, that the indiscreet Sovereign will receive no punishment for his indiscretion, that the Prime Minister will have no European complication to deal with, and that with a little tact and management upon our part nobody will be a penny the worse for what might have been a very ugly incident."

My mind filled with admiration for this extraordinary man.

"You have solved it!" I cried.

"Hardly that, Watson. There are some points which are as dark as ever. But we have so much that it will be our own fault if we cannot get the rest. We will go straight to Whitehall Terrace and bring the matter to a head."
When we arrived at the residence of the European Secretary it was for Lady Hilda Trelawney Hope that Sherlock Holmes inquired. We were shown into the morning-room.

"Mr. Holmes!" said the lady, and her face was pink with her indignation. "This is surely most unfair and ungenerous upon your part. I desired, as I have explained, to keep my visit to you a secret, lest my husband should think that I was intruding into his affairs. And yet you compromise me by coming here and so showing that there are business relations between us."

"Unfortunately, madam, I had no possible alternative. I have been commissioned to recover this immensely important paper. I must therefore ask you, madam, to be kind enough to place it in my hands."

The lady sprang to her feet, with the colour all dashed in an instant from her beautiful face. Her eyes glazed--she tottered--I thought that she would faint. Then with a grand effort she rallied from the shock, and a supreme astonishment and indignation chased every other expression from her features.

"You--you insult me, Mr. Holmes."

"Come, come, madam, it is useless. Give up the letter."

She darted to the bell.

"The butler shall show you out."

"Do not ring, Lady Hilda. If you do, then all my earnest efforts to avoid a scandal will be frustrated. Give up the letter and all will be set right. If you will work with me I can arrange everything. If you work against me I must expose you."

She stood grandly defiant, a queenly figure, her eyes fixed upon his as if she would read his very soul. Her hand was on the bell, but she had forborne to ring it.

"You are trying to frighten me. It is not a very manly thing, Mr. Holmes, to come here and browbeat a woman. You say that you know something. What is it that you know?"

"Pray sit down, madam. You will hurt yourself there if you fall. I will not speak until you sit down. Thank you."

"I give you five minutes, Mr. Holmes."

"One is enough, Lady Hilda. I know of your visit to Eduardo Lucas, of your giving him this document, of your ingenious return to the room last night, and of the manner in which you took the letter from the hiding-place under the carpet."

She stared at him with an ashen face and gulped twice before she could speak.

"You are mad, Mr. Holmes--you are mad!" she cried, at last.

He drew a small piece of cardboard from his pocket. It was the face of a woman cut out of a portrait.

"I have carried this because I thought it might be useful," said he. "The policeman has recognized it."

She gave a gasp, and her head dropped back in the chair.

"Come, Lady Hilda. You have the letter. The matter may still be adjusted. I have no desire to bring trouble to you. My duty ends when I have returned the lost letter to your husband. Take my advice and be frank with me. It is your only chance."

Her courage was admirable. Even now she would not own defeat.

"I tell you again, Mr. Holmes, that you are under some absurd illusion."

"I am sorry for you, Lady Hilda. I have done my best for you. I can see that it is all in vain."

He rang the bell. The butler entered.

"Is Mr. Trelawney Hope at home?"

"He will be home, sir, at a quarter to one."

"What a stroke of luck! Quick, madam, bring it here!" A moment later she had appeared with a red flat box in
"How did you open it before? You have a duplicate key? Yes, of course you have. Open it!"

From out of her bosom Lady Hilda had drawn a small key. The box flew open. It was stuffed with papers. Holmes thrust the blue envelope deep down into the heart of them, between the leaves of some other document. The box was shut, locked, and returned to the bedroom.

"Now we are ready for him," said Holmes. "We have still ten minutes. I am going far to screen you, Lady Hilda. In return you will spend the time in telling me frankly the real meaning of this extraordinary affair."

"Mr. Holmes, I will tell you everything," cried the lady. "Oh, Mr. Holmes, I would cut off my right hand before I gave him a moment of sorrow! There is no woman in all London who loves her husband as I do, and yet if he knew how I have acted--how I have been compelled to act--he would never forgive me. For his own honour stands so high that he could not forget or pardon a lapse in another. Help me, Mr. Holmes! My happiness, his happiness, our very lives are at stake!"

"Quick, madam, the time grows short!"

"It was a letter of mine, Mr. Holmes, an indiscreet letter written before my marriage--a foolish letter, a letter of an impulsive, loving girl. I meant no harm, and yet he would have thought it criminal. Had he read that letter his confidence would have been forever destroyed. It is years since I wrote it. I had thought that the whole matter was forgotten. Then at last I heard from this man, Lucas, that it had passed into his hands, and that he would lay it before my husband. I implored his mercy. He said that he would return my letter if I would bring him a certain document which he described in my husband's despatch-box. He had some spy in the office who had told him of its existence. He assured me that no harm could come to my husband. Put yourself in my position, Mr. Holmes! What was I to do?"

"Take your husband into your confidence."

"I could not, Mr. Holmes, I could not! On the one side seemed certain ruin, on the other, terrible as it seemed to take my husband's, still in a matter of politics I could not understand the consequences, while in a matter of love and trust they were only too clear to me. I did it, Mr. Holmes! I took an impression of his key. This man, Lucas, furnished a duplicate. I opened his despatch-box, took the paper, and conveyed it to Godolphin Street."

"What happened there, madam?"

"I tapped at the door as agreed. Lucas opened it. I followed him into his room, leaving the hall door ajar behind me, for I feared to be alone with the man. I remember that there was a woman outside as I entered. Our business was soon done. He had my letter on his desk, I handed him the document. He gave me the letter. At this instant there was a sound at the door. There were steps in the passage. Lucas quickly turned back the drugget, thrust the document into some hiding-place there, and covered it over.

"What happened after that is like some fearful dream. I have a vision of a dark, frantic face, of a woman's voice, which screamed in French, 'My waiting is not in vain. At last, at last I have found you with her!' There was a savage struggle. I saw him with a chair in his hand, a knife gleamed in hers. I rushed from the horrible scene, ran from the house, and only next morning in the paper did I learn the dreadful result. That night I was happy, for I had my letter, and I had not seen yet what the future would bring."

"It was the next morning that I realized that I had only exchanged one trouble for another. My husband's anguish at the loss of his paper went to my heart. I could hardly prevent myself from there and then kneeling down at his feet and telling him what I had done. But that again would mean a confession of the past. I came to you that morning in order to understand the full enormity of my offence. From the instant that I grasped it my whole mind was turned to the one thought of getting back my husband's paper. It must still be where Lucas had placed it, for it was concealed before this dreadful woman entered the room. If it had not been for her coming, I should not have known where his hiding-place was. How was I to get into the room? For two days I watched the place, but the door was never left open. Last night I made a last attempt. What I did and how I succeeded, you have already learned. I brought the paper back with me, and thought of destroying it, since I could see no way of returning it without confessing my guilt to my husband. Heavens, I hear his step upon the stair!"

The European Secretary burst excitedly into the room. "Any news, Mr. Holmes, any news?" he cried.

"I have some hopes."

"Ah, thank heaven!" His face became radiant. "The Prime Minister is lunching with me. May he share your hopes? He has nerves of steel, and yet I know that he has hardly slept since this terrible event. Jacobs, will you ask the Prime Minister to come up? As to you, dear, I fear that this is a matter of politics. We will join you in a few minutes in the dining-room."

The Prime Minister's manner was subdued, but I could see by the gleam of his eyes and the twitchings of his bony hands that he shared the excitement of his young colleague.

"I understand that you have something to report, Mr. Holmes?"
"Purely negative as yet," my friend answered. "I have inquired at every point where it might be, and I am sure that there is no danger to be apprehended."

"But that is not enough, Mr. Holmes. We cannot live forever on such a volcano. We must have something definite."

"I am in hopes of getting it. That is why I am here. The more I think of the matter the more convinced I am that the letter has never left this house."

"Mr. Holmes!"

"If it had it would certainly have been public by now."

"But why should anyone take it in order to keep it in his house?"

"I am not convinced that anyone did take it."

"Then how could it leave the despatch-box?"

"I am not convinced that it ever did leave the despatch-box."

"Mr. Holmes, this joking is very ill-timed. You have my assurance that it left the box."

"Have you examined the box since Tuesday morning?"

"No. It was not necessary."

"You may conceivably have overlooked it."

"Impossible, I say."

"But I am not convinced of it. I have known such things to happen. I presume there are other papers there. Well, it may have got mixed with them."

"It was on the top."

"Someone may have shaken the box and displaced it."

"No, no, I had everything out."

"Surely it is easily, decided, Hope," said the Premier. "Let us have the despatch-box brought in."

The Secretary rang the bell.

"Jacobs, bring down my despatch-box. This is a farcical waste of time, but still, if nothing else will satisfy you, it shall be done. Thank you, Jacobs, put it here. I have always had the key on my watch-chain. Here are the papers, you see. Letter from Lord Merrow, report from Sir Charles Hardy, memorandum from Belgrade, note on the Russo-German grain taxes, letter from Madrid, note from Lord Flowers----Good heavens! what is this? Lord Bellinger! Lord Bellinger!"

The Premier snatched the blue envelope from his hand.

"Yes, it is it--and the letter is intact. Hope, I congratulate you."

"Thank you! Thank you! What a weight from my heart. But this is inconceivable--impossible. Mr. Holmes, you are a wizard, a sorcerer! How did you know it was there?"

"Because I knew it was nowhere else."

"I cannot believe my eyes!" He ran wildly to the door. "Where is my wife? I must tell her that all is well. Hilda! Hilda!" we heard his voice on the stairs.

The Premier looked at Holmes with twinkling eyes.

"Come, sir," said he. "There is more in this than meets the eye. How came the letter back in the box?"

Holmes turned away smiling from the keen scrutiny of those wonderful eyes.

"We also have our diplomatic secrets," said he and, picking up his hat, he turned to the door.

THE END
The Valley of Fear

by Arthur Conan Doyle

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Part 1 - The Tragedy of Birlstone
Chapter 1 - The Warning

"I am inclined to think--" said I.

"I should do so," Sherlock Holmes remarked impatiently.

I believe that I am one of the most long-suffering of mortals; but I'll admit that I was annoyed at the sardonic interruption. "Really, Holmes," said I severely, "you are a little trying at times."

He was too much absorbed with his own thoughts to give any immediate answer to my remonstrance. He leaned upon his hand, with his untasted breakfast before him, and he stared at the slip of paper which he had just drawn from its envelope. Then he took the envelope itself, held it up to the light, and very carefully studied both the exterior and the flap.

"It is Porlock's writing," said he thoughtfully. "I can hardly doubt that it is Porlock's writing, though I have seen it only twice before. The Greek e with the peculiar top flourish is distinctive. But if it is Porlock, then it must be something of the very first importance."

He was speaking to himself rather than to me; but my vexation disappeared in the interest which the words awakened.

"Who then is Porlock?" I asked.

"Porlock, Watson, is a nom-de-plume, a mere identification mark; but behind it lies a shifty and evasive personality. In a former letter he frankly informed me that the name was not his own, and defied me ever to trace him among the teeming millions of this great city. Porlock is important, not for himself, but for the great man with whom he is in touch. Picture to yourself the pilot fish with the shark, the jackal with the lion--anything that is insignificant in companionship with what is formidable: not only formidable, Watson, but sinister--in the highest degree sinister. That is where he comes within my purview. You have heard me speak of Professor Moriarty?"

"The famous scientific criminal, as famous among crooks as--"

"My blushes, Watson!" Holmes murmured in a deprecating voice.

"A touch! A distinct touch!" cried Holmes. "You are developing a certain unexpected vein of pawky humour, Watson, against which I must learn to guard myself. But in calling Moriarty a criminal you are uttering libel in the eyes of the law--and there lie the glory and the wonder of it! The greatest schemer of all time, the organizer of every deviltry, the controlling brain of the underworld, a brain which might have made or marred the destiny of nations--that's the man! But so aloof is he from general suspicion, so immune from criticism, so admirable in his management and self-effacement, that for those very words that you have uttered he could hale you to a court and emerge with your year's pension as a solatium for his wounded character. Is he not the celebrated author of The Dynamics of an Asteroid, a book which ascends to such rarefied heights of pure mathematics that it is said that there was no man in the scientific press capable of criticizing it? Is this a man to traduce? Foul-mouthed doctor and slandered professor--such would be your respective roles! That's genius, Watson. But if I am spared by lesser men, our day will surely come."

"May I be there to see!" I exclaimed devoutly. "But you were speaking of this man Porlock."

"Ah, yes--the so-called Porlock is a link in the chain some little way from its great attachment. Porlock is not quite a sound link--between ourselves. He is the only flaw in that chain so far as I have been able to test it."

"But no chain is stronger than its weakest link."

"Exactly, my dear Watson! Hence the extreme importance of Porlock. Led on by some rudimentary aspirations towards right, and encouraged by the judicious stimulation of an occasional ten-pound note sent to him by devious methods, he has once or twice given me advance information which has been of value--that highest value which anticipates and prevents rather than avenges crime. I cannot doubt that, if we had the cipher, we should find that this communication is of the nature that I indicate."
Again Holmes flattened out the paper upon his unused plate. I rose and, leaning over him, stared down at the curious inscription, which ran as follows:

534 C2 13 127 36 31 4 17 21 41 DOUGLAS 109 293 5 37 BIRLSTONE 26 BIRLSTONE 9 47 171

"What do you make of it, Holmes?"

"It is obviously an attempt to convey secret information."

"But what is the use of a cipher message without the cipher?"

"In this instance, none at all."

"Why do you say 'in this instance'?"

"Because there are many ciphers which I would read as easily as I do the apocrypha of the agony column: such crude devices amuse the intelligence without fatiguing it. But this is different. It is clearly a reference to the words in a page of some book. Until I am told which page and which book I am powerless."

"But why 'Douglas' and 'Birlstone'?"

"Clearly because those are words which were not contained in the page in question."

"Then why has he not indicated the book?"

"Your native shrewdness, my dear Watson, that innate cunning which is the delight of your friends, would surely prevent you from inclosing cipher and message in the same envelope. Should it miscarry, you are undone. As it is, both have to go wrong before any harm comes from it. Our second post is now overdue, and I shall be surprised if it does not bring us either a further letter of explanation, or, as is more probable, the very volume to which these figures refer."

Holmes's calculation was fulfilled within a very few minutes by the appearance of Billy, the page, with the very letter which we were expecting.

"The same writing," remarked Holmes, as he opened the envelope, "and actually signed," he added in an exultant voice as he unfolded the epistle. "Come, we are getting on, Watson." His brow clouded, however, as he glanced over the contents.

"Dear me, this is very disappointing! I fear, Watson, that all our expectations come to nothing. I trust that the man Porlock will come to no harm.

"DEAR MR. HOLMES [he says]:

"I will go no further in this matter. It is too dangerous--he suspects me. I can see that he suspects me. He came to me quite unexpectedly after I had actually addressed this envelope with the intention of sending you the key to the cipher. I was able to cover it up. If he had seen it, it would have gone hard with me. But I read suspicion in his eyes. Please burn the cipher message, which can now be of no use to you.

FRED PORLOCK."

Holmes sat for some little time twisting this letter between his fingers, and frowning, as he stared into the fire.

"After all," he said at last, "there may be nothing in it. It may be only his guilty conscience. Knowing himself to be a traitor, he may have read the accusation in the other's eyes."

"The other being, I presume, Professor Moriarty."

"No less! When any of that party talk about 'He' you know whom they mean. There is one predominant 'He' for all of them."

"But what can he do?"

"Hum! That's a large question. When you have one of the first brains of Europe up against you, and all the powers of darkness at his back, there are infinite possibilities. Anyhow, Friend Porlock is evidently scared out of his senses--kindly compare the writing in the note to that upon its envelope; which was done, he tells us, before this ill-omened visit. The one is clear and firm. The other hardly legible."

"Why did he write at all? Why did he not simply drop it?"

"Because he feared I would make some inquiry after him in that case, and possibly bring trouble on him."

"No doubt," said I. "Of course." I had picked up the original cipher message and was bending my brows over it.

"It's pretty maddening to think that an important secret may lie here on this slip of paper, and that it is beyond human power to penetrate it."

Sherlock Holmes had pushed away his untasted breakfast and lit the unsavoury pipe which was the companion of his deepest meditations. "I wonder!" said he, leaning back and staring at the ceiling. "Perhaps there are points which have escaped your Machiavellian intellect. Let us consider the problem in the light of pure reason. This man's reference is to a book. That is our point of departure."

"A somewhat vague one."

"Let us see then if we can narrow it down. As I focus my mind upon it, it seems rather less impenetrable. What indications have we as to this book?"

"None."
"Well, well, it is surely not quite so bad as that. The cipher message begins with a large 534, does it not? We may take it as a working hypothesis that 534 is the particular page to which the cipher refers. So our book has already become a LARGE book, which is surely something gained. What other indications have we as to the nature of this large book? The next sign is C2. What do you make of that, Watson?"

"Chapter the second, no doubt."

"Hardly that, Watson. You will, I am sure, agree with me that if the page be given, the number of the chapter is immaterial. Also that if page 534 finds us only in the second chapter, the length of the first one must have been really intolerable."

"Column!" I cried.

"Brilliant, Watson. You are scintillating this morning. If it is not column, then I am very much deceived. So now, you see, we begin to visualize a large book printed in double columns which are each of a considerable length, since one of the words is numbered in the document as the two hundred and ninety-third. Have we reached the limits of what reason can supply?"

"I fear that we have."

"Surely you do yourself an injustice. One more coruscation, my dear Watson--yet another brain-wave! Had the volume been an unusual one, he would have sent it to me. Instead of that, he had intended, before his plans were nipped, to send me the clue in this envelope. He says so in his note. This would seem to indicate that the book is one which he thought I would have no difficulty in finding for myself. He had it--and he imagined that I would have it, too. In short, Watson, it is a very common book."

"What you say certainly sounds plausible."

"So we have contracted our field of search to a large book, printed in double columns and in common use."

"The Bible!" I cried triumphantly.

"Good, Watson, good! But not, if I may say so, quite good enough! Even if I accepted the compliment for myself I could hardly name any volume which would be less likely to lie at the elbow of one of Moriarty's associates. Besides, the editions of Holy Writ are so numerous that he could hardly suppose that two copies would have the same pagination. This is clearly a book which is standardized. He knows for certain that his page 534 will exactly agree with my page 534."

"But very few books would correspond with that."

"Exactly. Therein lies our salvation. Our search is narrowed down to standardized books which anyone may be supposed to possess."

"Bradshaw!"

"There are difficulties, Watson. The vocabulary of Bradshaw is nervous and terse, but limited. The selection of words would hardly lend itself to the sending of general messages. We will eliminate Bradshaw. The dictionary is, I fear, inadmissible for the same reason. What then is left?"

"An almanac!"

"Excellent, Watson! I am very much mistaken if you have not touched the spot. An almanac! Let us consider the claims of Whitaker's Almanac. It is in common use. It has the requisite number of pages. It is in double column. Though reserved in its earlier vocabulary, it becomes, if I remember right, quite garrulous towards the end." He picked the volume from his desk. "Here is page 534, column two, a substantial block of print dealing, I perceive, with the trade and resources of British India. Jot down the words, Watson! Number thirteen is 'Maharatta.' Not, I fear, a very auspicious beginning. Number one hundred and twenty-seven is 'Government'; which at least makes sense, though somewhat irrelevant to ourselves and Professor Moriarty. Now let us try again. What does the Maharatta government do? Alas! the next word is 'pig's-brisles.' We are undone, my good Watson! It is finished!"

He had spoken in jesting vein, but the twitching of his bushy eyebrows bespoke his disappointment and irritation. I sat helpless and unhappy, staring into the fire. A long silence was broken by a sudden exclamation from Holmes, who dashed at a cupboard, from which he emerged with a second yellow-covered volume in his hand.

"We pay the price, Watson, for being too up-to-date!" he cried. "We are before our time, and suffer the usual penalties. Being the seventh of January, we have very properly laid in the new almanac. It is more than likely that Porlock took his message from the old one. No doubt he would have told us so had his letter of explanation been written. Now let us see what page 534 has in store for us. Number thirteen is 'There,' which is much more promising. Number one hundred and twenty-seven is 'is'--'There is'--Holmes's eyes were gleaming with excitement, and his thin, nervous fingers twitched as he counted the words--"danger." Ha! Ha! Capital! Put that down, Watson. 'There is danger--may--come--very--soon--one.' Then we have the name 'Douglas'--'rich--country--now--at--Birlstone--House--Birlstone--confidence--is--pressing.' There, Watson! What do you think of pure reason and its fruit? If the green-grocer had such a thing as a laurel wreath, I should send Billy round for it."

I was staring at the strange message which I had scrawled, as he deciphered it, upon a sheet of foolscap on my
"What a queer, scrambling way of expressing his meaning!" said I.

"On the contrary, he has done quite remarkably well," said Holmes. "When you search a single column for words with which to express your meaning, you can hardly expect to get everything you want. You are bound to leave something to the intelligence of your correspondent. The purport is perfectly clear. Some devilry is intended against one Douglas, whoever he may be, residing as stated, a rich country gentleman. He is sure---'confidence' was as near as he could get to 'confident'---that it is pressing. There is our result--and a very workmanlike little bit of analysis it was!"

Holmes had the impersonal joy of the true artist in his better work, even as he mourned darkly when it fell below the high level to which he aspired. He was still chuckling over his success when Billy swung open the door and Inspector MacDonald of Scotland Yard was ushered into the room.

Those were the early days at the end of the '80's, when Alec MacDonald was far from having attained the national fame which he has now achieved. He was a young but trusted member of the detective force, who had distinguished himself in several cases which had been intrusted to him. His tall, bony figure gave promise of exceptional physical strength, while his great cranium and deep-set, lustrous eyes spoke no less clearly of the keen intelligence which twinkled out from behind his bushy eyebrows. He was a silent, precise man with a dour nature and a hard Aberdonian accent.

Twice already in his career had Holmes helped him to attain success, his own sole reward being the intellectual joy of the problem. For this reason the affection and respect of the Scotchman for his amateur colleague were profound, and he showed them by the frankness with which he consulted Holmes in every difficulty. Mediocrity knows nothing higher than itself; but talent instantly recognizes genius, and MacDonald had talent enough for his profession to enable him to perceive that there was no humiliation in seeking the assistance of one who already stood alone in Europe, both in his gifts and in his experience. Holmes was not prone to friendship, but he was tolerant of the big Scotchman, and smiled at the sight of him.

"You are an early bird, Mr. Mac," said he. "I wish you luck with your worm. I fear this means that there is some mischief afoot."

"If you said 'hope' instead of 'fear,' it would be nearer the truth, I'm thinking, Mr. Holmes," the inspector answered, with a knowing grin. "Well, maybe a wee nip would keep out the raw morning chill. No, I won't smoke, I thank you. I'll have to be pushing on my way; for the early hours of a case are the precious ones, as no man knows better than your own self. But--but--"

The inspector had stopped suddenly, and was staring with a look of absolute amazement at a paper upon the table. It was the sheet upon which I had scrawled the enigmatic message.

"Douglas!" he stammered. "Birlstone! What's this, Mr. Holmes? Man, it's witchcraft! Where in the name of all that is wonderful did you get those names?"

"It is a cipher that Dr. Watson and I have had occasion to solve. But why--what's amiss with the names?"

The inspector looked from one to the other of us in dazed astonishment. "Just this," said he, "that Mr. Douglas of Birlstone Manor House was horribly murdered last night!"

Chapter 2 - Sherlock Holmes Discourses

It was one of those dramatic moments for which my friend existed. It would be an overstatement to say that he was shocked or even excited by the amazing announcement. Without having a tinge of cruelty in his singular composition, he was undoubtedly callous from long overstimulation. Yet, if his emotions were dulled, his intellectual perceptions were exceedingly active. There was no trace then of the horror which I had myself felt at this curt declaration; but his face showed rather the quiet and interested composure of the chemist who sees the crystals falling into position from his oversaturated solution.

"Remarkable!" said he. "Remarkable!"

"You don't seem surprised."

"Interested, Mr. Mac, but hardly surprised. Why should I be surprised? I receive an anonymous communication from a quarter which I know to be important, warning me that danger threatens a certain person. Within an hour I learn that this danger has actually materialized and that the person is dead. I am interested; but, as you observe, I am not surprised."

In a few short sentences he explained to the inspector the facts about the letter and the cipher. MacDonald sat with his chin on his hands and his great sandy eyebrows bunched into a yellow tangle.

"I was going down to Birlstone this morning," said he. "I had come to ask you if you cared to come with me--you and your friend here. But from what you say we might perhaps be doing better work in London."

"I rather think not," said Holmes.

"Hang it all, Mr. Holmes!" cried the inspector. "The papers will be full of the Birlstone mystery in a day or two;
but where's the mystery if there is a man in London who prophesied the crime before ever it occurred? We have only to lay our hands on that man, and the rest will follow."

"No doubt, Mr. Mac. But how do you propose to lay your hands on the so-called Porlock?"

MacDonald turned over the letter which Holmes had handed him. "Posted in Camberwell—that doesn't help us much. Name, you say, is assumed. Not much to go on, certainly. Didn't you say that you have sent him money?"

"Twice."

"And how?"

"In notes to Camberwell post office."

"Did you ever trouble to see who called for them?"

"No."

The inspector looked surprised and a little shocked. "Why not?"

"Because I always keep faith. I had promised when he first wrote that I would not try to trace him."

"You think there is someone behind him?"

"I know there is."

"This professor that I've heard you mention?"

"Exactly!"

Inspector MacDonald smiled, and his eyelid quivered as he glanced towards me. "I won't conceal from you, Mr. Holmes, that we think in the C.I.D. that you have a wee bit of a bee in your bonnet over this professor. I made some inquiries myself about the matter. He seems to be a very respectable, learned, and talented sort of man."

"I'm glad you've got so far as to recognize the talent."

"Man, you can't but recognize it! After I heard your view I made it my business to see him. I had a chat with him on eclipses. How the talk got that way I canna think; but he had out a reflector lantern and a globe, and made it all clear in a minute. He lent me a book; but I don't mind saying that it was a bit above my head, though I had a good Aberdeen upbringing. He'd made a grand meenister with his thin face and gray hair and solemn-like way of talking. When he put his hand on my shoulder as we were parting, it was like a father's blessing before you go out into the cold, cruel world."

Holmes chuckled and rubbed his hands. "Great!" he said. "Great! Tell me, Friend MacDonald, this pleasing and touching interview was, I suppose, in the professor's study?"

"That's so."

"A fine room, is it not?"

"Very fine -- very handsome indeed, Mr. Holmes."

"You sat in front of his writing desk?"

"Just so."

"Sun in your eyes and his face in the shadow?"

"Well, it was evening; but I mind that the lamp was turned on my face."

"It would be. Did you happen to observe a picture over the professor's head?"

"I don't miss much, Mr. Holmes. Maybe I learned that from you. Yes, I saw the picture—a young woman with her head on her hands, peeping at you sideways."

"That painting was by Jean Baptiste Greuze."

The inspector endeavoured to look interested.

"Jean Baptiste Greuze," Holmes continued, joining his finger tips and leaning well back in his chair, "was a French artist who flourished between the years 1750 and 1800. I allude, of course to his working career. Modern criticism has more than indorsed the high opinion formed of him by his contemporaries."

The inspector's eyes grew abstracted. "Hadn't we better---" he said.

"We are doing so," Holmes interrupted. "All that I am saying has a very direct and vital bearing upon what you have called the Birlstone Mystery. In fact, it may in a sense be called the very centre of it."

MacDonald smiled feebly, and looked appealingly to me. "Your thoughts move a bit too quick for me, Mr. Holmes. You leave out a link or two, and I can't get over the gap. What in the whole wide world can be the connection between this dead painting man and the affair at Birlstone?"

"All knowledge comes useful to the detective," remarked Holmes. "Even the trivial fact that in the year 1865 a picture by Greuze entitled La Jeune Fille a l'Agneau fetched one million two hundred thousand francs—more than forty thousand pounds—at the Portalis sale may start a train of reflection in your mind."

It was clear that it did, The inspector looked honestly interested.

"I may remind you," Holmes continued, "that the professor's salary can be ascertained in several trustworthy books of reference. It is seven hundred a year."

"Then how could he buy---"
"Quite so! How could he?"
"Ay, that's remarkable," said the inspector thoughtfully. "Talk away, Mr. Holmes. I'm just loving it. It's fine!"

Holmes smiled. He was always warmed by genuine admiration--the characteristic of the real artist. "What about Birlstone?" he asked.

"We've time yet," said the inspector, glancing at his watch. "I've a cab at the door, and it won't take us twenty minutes to Victoria. But about this picture: I thought you told me once, Mr. Holmes, that you had never met Professor Moriarty."

"No, I never have."
"Then how do you know about his rooms?"
"Ah, that's another matter. I have been three times in his rooms, twice waiting for him under different pretexts and leaving before he came. Once--well, I can hardly tell about the once to an official detective. It was on the last occasion that I took the liberty of running over his papers--with the most unexpected results."

"You found something compromising?"
"Absolutely nothing. That was what amazed me. However, you have now seen the point of the picture. It shows him to be a very wealthy man. How did he acquire wealth? He is unmarried. His younger brother is a station master in the west of England. His chair is worth seven hundred a year. And he owns a Greuze."

"Well?"
"Surely the inference is plain."
"You mean that he has a great income and that he must earn it in an illegal fashion?"

"Exactly. Of course I have other reasons for thinking so--dozens of exiguous threads which lead vaguely up towards the centre of the web where the poisonous, motionless creature is lurking. I only mention the Greuze because it brings the matter within the range of your own observation."

"Well, Mr. Holmes, I admit that what you say is interesting: it's more than interesting--it's just wonderful. But let us have it a little clearer if you can. Is it forgery, coining, burglary--where does the money come from?"

"Have you ever read of Jonathan Wild?"
"Well, the name has a familiar sound. Someone in a novel, was he not? I don't take much stock of detectives in novels--chaps that do things and never let you see how they do them. That's just inspiration: not business."

"Jonathan Wild wasn't a detective, and he wasn't in a novel. He was a master criminal, and he lived last century--1750 or thereabouts."

"Then he's no use to me. I'm a practical man."

"Mr. Mac, the most practical thing that you ever did in your life would be to shut yourself up for three months and read twelve hours a day at the annals of crime. Everything comes in circles--even Professor Moriarty. Jonathan Wild was the hidden force of the London criminals, to whom he sold his brains and his organization on a fifteen per cent. commission. The old wheel turns, and the same spoke comes up. It's all been done before, and will be again. I'll tell you one or two things about Moriarty which may interest you."

"You'll interest me, right enough."

"I happen to know who is the first link in his chain--a chain with this Napoleon-gone-wrong at one end, and a hundred broken fighting men, pickpockets, blackmailers, and card sharpers at the other, with every sort of crime in between. His chief of staff is Colonel Sebastian Moran, as aloof and guarded and inaccessible to the law as himself. What do you think he pays him?"

"I'd like to hear."

"Six thousand a year. That's paying for brains, you see--the American business principle. I learned that detail quite by chance. It's more than the Prime Minister gets. That gives you an idea of Moriarty's gains and of the scale on which he works. Another point: I made it my business to hunt down some of Moriarty's checks lately--just common innocent checks that he pays his household bills with. They were drawn on six different banks. Does that make any impression on your mind?"

"Queer, certainly! But what do you gather from it?"

"That he wanted no gossip about his wealth. No single man should know what he had. I have no doubt that he has twenty banking accounts; the bulk of his fortune abroad in the Deutsche Bank or the Credit Lyonnais as likely as not. Sometime when you have a year or two to spare I commend to you the study of Professor Moriarty."

Inspector MacDonald had grown steadily more impressed as the conversation proceeded. He had lost himself in his interest. Now his practical Scotch intelligence brought him back with a snap to the matter in hand.

"He can keep, anyhow," said he. "You've got us side-tracked with your interesting anecdotes, Mr. Holmes. What really counts is your remark that there is some connection between the professor and the crime. That you get from the warning received through the man Porlock. Can we for our present practical needs get any further than that?"

"We may form some conception as to the motives of the crime. It is, as I gather from your original remarks, an
inexplicable, or at least an unexplained, murder. Now, presuming that the source of the crime is as we suspect it to be, there might be two different motives. In the first place, I may tell you that Moriarty rules with a rod of iron over his people. His discipline is tremendous. There is only one punishment in his code. It is death. Now we might suppose that this murdered man—this Douglas whose approaching fate was known by one of the arch-criminal's subordinates—had in some way betrayed the chief. His punishment followed, and would be known to all—if only to put the fear of death into them."

"Well, that is one suggestion, Mr. Holmes."

"The other is that it has been engineered by Moriarty in the ordinary course of business. Was there any robbery?"

"I have not heard."

"If so, it would, of course, be against the first hypothesis and in favour of the second. Moriarty may have been engaged to engineer it on a promise of part spoils, or he may have been paid so much down to manage it. Either is possible. But whichever it may be, or if it is some third combination, it is down at Birlstone that we must seek the solution. I know our man too well to suppose that he has left anything up here which may lead us to him."

"Then to Birlstone we must go!" cried MacDonald, jumping from his chair. "My word! it's later than I thought. I can give you, gentlemen, five minutes for preparation, and that is all."

"And ample for us both," said Holmes, as he sprang up and hastened to change from his dressing gown to his coat. "While we are on our way, Mr. Mac, I will ask you to be good enough to tell me all about it."

"All about it" proved to be disappointingly little, and yet there was enough to assure us that the case before us might well be worthy of the expert's closest attention. He brightened and rubbed his thin hands together as he listened to the meagre but remarkable details. A long series of sterile weeks lay behind us, and here at last there was a fitting object for those remarkable powers which, like all special gifts, become irksome to their owner when they are not in use. That razor brain blunted and rusted with inaction.

Sherlock Holmes's eyes glistened, his pale cheeks took a warmer hue, and his whole eager face shone with an inward light when the call for work reached him. Leaning forward in the cab, he listened intently to MacDonald's short sketch of the problem which awaited us in Sussex. The inspector was himself dependent, as he explained to us, upon a scribbled account forwarded to him by the milk train in the early hours of the morning. White Mason, the local officer, was a personal friend, and hence MacDonald had been notified much more promptly than is usual at Scotland Yard when provincials need their assistance. It is a very cold scent upon which the Metropolitan expert is generally asked to run.

"DEAR INSPECTOR MACDONALD [said the letter which he read to us]:

"Official requisition for your services is in separate envelope. This is for your private eye. Wire me what train in the morning you can get for Birlstone, and I will meet it—or have it met if I am too occupied. This case is a snorter. Don't waste a moment in getting started. If you can bring Mr. Holmes, please do so; for he will find something after his own heart. We would think the whole had been fixed up for theatrical effect if there wasn't a dead man in the middle of it. My word! it IS a snorter."

"Your friend seems to be no fool," remarked Holmes."

"No, sir, White Mason is a very live man, if I am any judge."

"Well, have you anything more?"

"Only that he will give us every detail when we meet."

"Then how did you get at Mr. Douglas and the fact that he had been horribly murdered?"

"That was in the inclosed official report. It didn't say 'horrible': that's not a recognized official term. It gave the name John Douglas. It mentioned that his injuries had been in the head, from the discharge of a shotgun. It also mentioned the hour of the alarm, which was close on to midnight last night. It added that the case was undoubtedly one of murder, but that no arrest had been made, and that the case was one which presented some very perplexing and extraordinary features. That's absolutely all we have at present, Mr. Holmes."

"Then, with your permission, we will leave it at that, Mr. Mac. The temptation to form premature theories upon insufficient data is the bane of our profession. I can see only two things for certain at present—a great brain in London, and a dead man in Sussex. It's the chain between that we are going to trace."

Chapter 3 - The Tragedy of Birlstone

Now for a moment I will ask leave to remove my own insignificant personality and to describe events which occurred before we arrived upon the scene by the light of knowledge which came to us afterwards. Only in this way can I make the reader appreciate the people concerned and the strange setting in which their fate was cast.

The village of Birlstone is a small and very ancient cluster of half-timbered cottages on the northern border of the county of Sussex. For centuries it had remained unchanged; but within the last few years its picturesque appearance and situation have attracted a number of well-to-do residents, whose villas peep out from the woods around. These woods are locally supposed to be the extreme fringe of the great Weald forest, which thins away until
it reaches the northern chalk downs. A number of small shops have come into being to meet the wants of the increased population; so there seems some prospect that Birlstone may soon grow from an ancient village into a modern town. It is the centre for a considerable area of country, since Tunbridge Wells, the nearest place of importance, is ten or twelve miles to the eastward, over the borders of Kent.

About half a mile from the town, standing in an old park famous for its huge beech trees, is the ancient Manor House of Birlstone. Part of this venerable building dates back to the time of the first crusade, when Hugo de Capus built a fortalice in the centre of the estate, which had been granted to him by the Red King. This was destroyed by fire in 1543, and some of its smoke-blackened corner stones were used when, in Jacobean times, a brick country house rose upon the ruins of the feudal castle.

The Manor House, with its many gables and its small diamond-paned windows, was still much as the builder had left it in the early seventeenth century. Of the double moats which had guarded its more warlike predecessor, the outer had been allowed to dry up, and served the humble function of a kitchen garden. The inner one was still there, and lay forty feet in breadth, though now only a few feet in depth, round the whole house. A small stream fed it and continued beyond it, so that the sheet of water, though turbid, was never ditchlike or unhealthy. The ground floor windows were within a foot of the surface of the water.

The only approach to the house was over a drawbridge, the chains and windlass of which had long been rusted and broken. The latest tenants of the Manor House had, however, with characteristic energy, set this right, and the drawbridge was not only capable of being raised, but actually was raised every evening and lowered every morning. By thus renewing the custom of the old feudal days the Manor House was converted into an island during the night—a fact which had a very direct bearing upon the mystery which was soon to engage the attention of all England.

The house had been untenanted for some years and was threatening to moulder into a picturesque decay when the Douglases took possession of it. This family consisted of only two individuals—John Douglas and his wife. Douglas was a remarkable man, both in character and in person. In age he may have been about fifty, with a strong-jawed, rugged face, a grizzling moustache, peculiarly keen gray eyes, and a wiry, vigorous figure which had lost nothing of the strength and activity of youth. He was cheery and genial to all, but somewhat offhand in his manners, giving the impression that he had seen life in social strata on some far lower horizon than the county society of Sussex.

Yet, though looked at with some curiosity and reserve by his more cultivated neighbours, he soon acquired a great popularity among the villagers, subscribing handsomely to all local objects, and attending their smoking concerts and other functions, where, having a remarkably rich tenor voice, he was always ready to oblige with an excellent song. He appeared to have plenty of money, which was said to have been gained in the California gold fields, and it was clear from his own talk and that of his wife that he had spent a part of his life in America.

The good impression which had been produced by his generosity and by his democratic manners was increased by a reputation gained for utter indifferency to danger. Though a wretched rider, he turned out at every meet, and took the most amazing falls in his determination to hold his own with the best. When the vicarage caught fire he distinguished himself also by the fearlessness with which he reentered the building to save property, after the local fire brigade had given it up as impossible. Thus it came about that John Douglas of the Manor House had within five years won himself quite a reputation in Birlstone.

His wife, too, was popular with those who had made her acquaintance; though, after the English fashion, the callers upon a stranger who settled in the county without introductions were few and far between. This mattered the less to her, as she was retiring by disposition, and very much absorbed, to all appearance, in her husband and her domestic duties. It was known that she was an English lady who had met Mr. Douglas in London, he being at that time a widower. She was a beautiful woman, tall, dark, and slender, some twenty years younger than her husband; a disparity which seemed in no wise to mar the contentment of their family life.

It was remarked sometimes, however, by those who knew them best, that the confidence between the two did not appear to be complete, since the wife was either very reticent about her husband's past life, or else, as seemed more likely, was imperfectly informed about it. It had also been noted and commented upon by a few observant people that there were signs sometimes of some nerve-strain upon the part of Mrs. Douglas, and that she would display acute uneasiness if her absent husband should ever be particularly late in his return. On a quiet countryside, where all gossip is welcome, this weakness of the lady of the Manor House did not pass without remark, and it bulked larger upon people's memory when the events arose which gave it a very special significance.

There was yet another individual whose residence under that roof was, it is true, only an intermittent one, but whose presence at the time of the strange happenings which will now be narrated brought his name prominently before the public. This was Cecil James Barker, of Hales Lodge, Hampstead.

Cecil Barker's tall, loose-jointed figure was a familiar one in the main street of Birlstone village; for he was a frequent and welcome visitor at the Manor House. He was the more noticed as being the only friend of the past
unknown life of Mr. Douglas who was ever seen in his new English surroundings. Barker was himself an undoubted Englishman; but by his remarks it was clear that he had first known Douglas in America and had there lived on intimate terms with him. He appeared to be a man of considerable wealth, and was reputed to be a bachelor.

In age he was rather younger than Douglas--forty-five at the most--a tall, straight, broad-chested fellow with a clean-shaved, prize-fighter face, thick, strong, black eyebrows, and a pair of masterful black eyes which might, even without the aid of his very capable hands, clear a way for him through a hostile crowd. He neither rode nor shot, but spent his days in wandering round the old village with his pipe in his mouth, or in driving with his host, or in his absence with his hostess, over the beautiful countryside. "An easy-going, free-handed gentleman," said Ames, the butler. "But, my word! I had rather not be the man that crossed him!" He was cordial and intimate with Douglas, and he was no less friendly with his wife--a friendship which more than once seemed to cause some irritation to the husband, so that even the servants were able to perceive his annoyance. Such was the third person who was one of the family when the catastrophe occurred.

As to the other denizens of the old building, it will suffice out of a large household to mention the prim, respectable, and capable Ames, and Mrs. Allen, a buxom and cheerful person, who relieved the lady of some of her household cares. The other six servants in the house bear no relation to the events of the night of January 6th.

It was at eleven forty-five that the first alarm reached the small local police station, in charge of Sergeant Wilson of the Sussex Constabulary. Cecil Barker, much excited, had rushed up to the door and pealed furiously upon the bell. A terrible tragedy had occurred at the Manor House, and John Douglas had been murdered. That was the breathless burden of his message. He had hurried back to the house, followed within a few minutes by the police sergeant, who arrived at the scene of the crime a little after twelve o'clock, after taking prompt steps to warn the county authorities that something serious was afoot.

On reaching the Manor House, the sergeant had found the drawbridge down, the windows lighted up, and the whole household in a state of wild confusion and alarm. The white-faced servants were huddling together in the hall, with the frightened butler wringing his hands in the doorway. Only Cecil Barker seemed to be master of himself and his emotions; he had opened the door which was nearest to the entrance and he had beckoned to the sergeant to follow him. At that moment there arrived Dr. Wood, a brisk and capable general practitioner from the village. The three men entered the fatal room together, while the horror-stricken butler followed at their heels, closing the door behind him to shut out the terrible scene from the maid servants.

The dead man lay on his back, sprawling with outstretched limbs in the centre of the room. He was clad only in a pink dressing gown, which covered his night clothes. There were carpet slippers on his bare feet. The doctor knelt beside him and held down the hand lamp which had stood on the table. One glance at the victim was enough to show the healer that his presence could be dispensed with. The man had been horribly injured. Lying across his chest was a curious weapon, a shotgun with the barrel sawed off a foot in front of the triggers. It was clear that this had been fired at close range and that he had received the whole charge in the face, blowing his head almost to pieces. The triggers had been wired together, so as to make the simultaneous discharge more destructive.

The country policeman was unnerved and troubled by the tremendous responsibility which had come so suddenly upon him. "We will touch nothing until my superiors arrive," he said in a hushed voice, staring in horror at the dreadful head.

"Nothing has been touched up to now," said Cecil Barker. "I'll answer for that. You see it all exactly as I found it."

"When was that?" The sergeant had drawn out his notebook.

"It was just half-past eleven. I had not begun to undress, and I was sitting by the fire in my bedroom when I heard the report. It was not very loud--it seemed to be muffled. I rushed down--I don't suppose it was thirty seconds before I was in the room."

"Was the door open?"

"Yes, it was open. Poor Douglas was lying as you see him. His bedroom candle was burning on the table. It was I who lit the lamp some minutes afterward."

"Did you see no one?"

"No. I heard Mrs. Douglas coming down the stair behind me, and I rushed out to prevent her from seeing this dreadful sight. Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, came and took her away. Ames had arrived, and we ran back into the room once more."

"But surely I have heard that the drawbridge is kept up all night."

"Yes, it was until I lowered it."

"Then how could any murderer have got away? It is out of the question! Mr. Douglas must have shot himself."

"That was our first idea. But see!" Barker drew aside the curtain, and showed that the long, diamond-paned window was open to its full extent. "And look at this!" He held the lamp down and illuminated a smudge of blood.
like the mark of a boot-sole upon the wooden sill. “Someone has stood there in getting out.”

“You mean that someone waded across the moat?”

“Exactly!”

“Then if you were in the room within half a minute of the crime, he must have been in the water at that very moment.”

“I have not a doubt of it. I wish to heaven that I had rushed to the window! But the curtain screened it, as you can see, and so it never occurred to me. Then I heard the step of Mrs. Douglas, and I could not let her enter the room. It would have been too horrible.”

“Horrible enough!” said the doctor, looking at the shattered head and the terrible marks which surrounded it. “I've never seen such injuries since the Birlstone railway smash.”

“But, I say,” remarked the police sergeant, whose slow, bucolic common sense was still pondering the open window. “It's all very well your saying that a man escaped by wading this moat, but what I ask you is, how did he ever get into the house at all if the bridge was up?”

“Ah, that's the question,” said Barker.

“At what o'clock was it raised?”

“It was nearly six o'clock,” said Ames, the butler.

“I've heard,” said the sergeant, “that it was usually raised at sunset. That would be nearer half-past four than six at this time of year.”

“Mrs. Douglas had visitors to tea,” said Ames. “I couldn't raise it until they went. Then I wound it up myself.”

“Then it comes to this,” said the sergeant: “If anyone came from outside--IF they did--they must have got in across the bridge before six and been in hiding ever since, until Mr. Douglas came into the room after eleven.”

“That is so! Mr. Douglas went round the house every night the last thing before he turned in to see that the lights were right. That brought him in here. The man was waiting and shot him. Then he got away through the window and left his gun behind him. That's how I read it; for nothing else will fit the facts.”

The sergeant picked up a card which lay beside the dead man on the floor. The initials V.V. and under them the number 341 were rudely scrawled in ink upon it.

“What's this?” he asked, holding it up.

“V.V.--341. I can make no sense of that.”

The sergeant kept turning it over in his big fingers. “What's V.V.? Somebody's initials, maybe. What have you got there, Dr. Wood?”

It was a good-sized hammer which had been lying on the rug in front of the fireplace--a substantial, workmanlike hammer. Cecil Barker pointed to a box of brass-headed nails upon the mantelpiece.

“Mr. Douglas was altering the pictures yesterday,” he said. “I saw him myself, standing upon that chair and fixing the big picture above it. That accounts for the hammer.”

“We'd best put it back on the rug where we found it,” said the sergeant, scratching his puzzled head in his perplexity. “It will want the best brains in the force to get to the bottom of this thing. It will be a London job before it is finished.” He raised the hand lamp and walked slowly round the room. “Hullo!” he cried, excitedly, drawing the window curtain to one side. “What o'clock were those curtains drawn?”

“When the lamps were lit,” said the butler. “It would be shortly after four.”

“Someone had been hiding here, sure enough.” He held down the light, and the marks of muddy boots were very visible in the corner. “I'm bound to say this bears out your theory, Mr. Barker. It looks as if the man got into the house after four when the curtains were drawn, and before six when the bridge was raised. He slipped into this room, because it was the first that he saw. There was no other place where he could hide, so he popped in behind this curtain. That all seems clear enough. It is likely that his main idea was to burglar the house; but Mr. Douglas chanced to come upon him, so he murdered him and escaped.”

“That's how I read it,” said Barker. “But, I say, aren't we wasting precious time? Couldn't we start out and scout the country before the fellow gets away?”

The sergeant considered for a moment.

“There are no trains before six in the morning; so he can't get away by rail. If he goes by road with his legs all dripping, it's odds that someone will notice him. Anyhow, I can't leave here myself until I am relieved. But I think none of you should go until we see more clearly how we all stand.”

The doctor had taken the lamp and was narrowly scrutinizing the body. “What's this mark?” he asked. “Could this have any connection with the crime?”

The dead man's right arm was thrust out from his dressing gown, and exposed as high as the elbow. About
halfway up the forearm was a curious brown design, a triangle inside a circle, standing out in vivid relief upon the lard-coloured skin.

"It's not tattooed," said the doctor, peering through his glasses. "I never saw anything like it. The man has been branded at some time as they brand cattle. What is the meaning of this?"

"I don't profess to know the meaning of it," said Cecil Barker; "but I have seen the mark on Douglas many times this last ten years."

"And so have I," said the butler. "Many a time when the master has rolled up his sleeves I have noticed that very mark. I've often wondered what it could be."

"Then it has nothing to do with the crime, anyhow," said the sergeant. "But it's a rum thing all the same. Everything about this case is rum. Well, what is it now?"

The butler had given an exclamation of astonishment and was pointing at the dead man's outstretched hand.

"They've taken his wedding ring!" he gasped.

"What!"

"Yes, indeed. Master always wore his plain gold wedding ring on the little finger of his left hand. That ring with the rough nugget on it was above it, and the twisted snake ring on the third finger. There's the nugget and there's the snake, but the wedding ring is gone."

"He's right," said Barker.

"Do you tell me," said the sergeant, "that the wedding ring was BELOW the other?"

"Always!"

"Then the murderer, or whoever it was, first took off this ring you call the nugget ring, then the wedding ring, and afterwards put the nugget ring back again."

"That is so!"

The worthy country policeman shook his head. "Seems to me the sooner we get London on to this case the better," said he. "White Mason is a smart man. No local job has ever been too much for White Mason. It won't be long now before he is here to help us. But I expect we'll have to look to London before we are through. Anyhow, I'm not ashamed to say that it is a deal too thick for the likes of me."

Chapter 4 - Darkness

At three in the morning the chief Sussex detective, obeying the urgent call from Sergeant Wilson of Birlstone, arrived from headquarters in a light dog-cart behind a breathless trotter. By the five-forty train in the morning he had sent his message to Scotland Yard, and he was at the Birlstone station at twelve o'clock to welcome us. White Mason was a quiet, comfortable-looking person in a loose tweed suit, with a clean-shaved, ruddy face, a stoutish body, and powerful bandy legs adorned with gaiters, looking like a small farmer, a retired gamekeeper, or anything upon earth except a very favourable specimen of the provincial criminal officer.

"A real downright snorter, Mr. MacDonald!" he kept repeating. "We'll have the pressmen down like flies when they understand it. I'm hoping we will get our work done before they get poking their noses into it and messing up all the trails. There has been nothing like this that I can remember. There are some bits that will come home to you, Mr. Holmes, or I am mistaken. And you also, Dr. Watson; for the medicos will have a word to say before we finish. Your room is at the Westville Arms. There's no other place; but I hear that it is clean and good. The man will carry your bags. This way, gentlemen, if you please."

He was a very bustling and genial person, this Sussex detective. In ten minutes we had all found our quarters. In ten more we were seated in the parlour of the inn and being treated to a rapid sketch of those events which have been outlined in the previous chapter. MacDonald made an occasional note; while Holmes sat absorbed, with the expression of surprised and reverent admiration with which the botanist surveys the rare and precious bloom.

"Remarkable!" he said, when the story was unfolded, "most remarkable! I can hardly recall any case where the features have been more peculiar."

"I thought you would say so, Mr. Holmes," said White Mason in great delight. "We're well up with the times in Sussex. I've told you now how matters were, up to the time when I took over from Sergeant Wilson between three and four this morning. My word! I made the old mare go! But I need not have been in such a hurry, as it turned out; for there was nothing immediate that I could do. Sergeant Wilson had all the facts. I checked them and considered them and maybe added a few of my own."

"What were they?" asked Holmes eagerly.

"Well, I first had the hammer examined. There was Dr. Wood there to help me. We found no signs of violence upon it. I was hoping that if Mr. Douglas defended himself with the hammer, he might have left his mark upon the murderer before he dropped it on the mat. But there was no stain."

"That, of course, proves nothing at all," remarked Inspector MacDonald. "There has been many a hammer murder and no trace on the hammer."
"Quite so. It doesn't prove it wasn't used. But there might have been stains, and that would have helped us. As a matter of fact there were none. Then I examined the gun. They were buckshot cartridges, and, as Sergeant Wilson pointed out, the triggers were wired together so that, if you pulled on the hinder one, both barrels were discharged. Whoever fixed that up had made up his mind that he was going to take no chances of missing his man. The sawed gun was not more than two foot long--one could carry it easily under one's coat. There was no complete maker's name; but the printed letters P-E-N were on the fluting between the barrels, and the rest of the name had been cut off by the saw."

"A big P with a flourish above it, E and N smaller?" asked Holmes.

"Exactly."


White Mason gazed at my friend as the little village practitioner looks at the Harley Street specialist who by a word can solve the difficulties that perplex him.

"That is very helpful, Mr. Holmes. No doubt you are right. Wonderful! Wonderful! Do you carry the names of all the gun makers in the world in your memory?"

Holmes dismissed the subject with a wave.

"No doubt it is an American shotgun," White Mason continued. "I seem to have read that a sawed-off shotgun is a weapon used in some parts of America. Apart from the name upon the barrel, the idea had occurred to me. There is some evidence then, that this man who entered the house and killed its master was an American."

MacDonald shook his head. "Man, you are surely travelling overfast," said he. "I have heard no evidence yet that any stranger was ever in the house at all."

"The open window, the blood on the sill, the queer card, the marks of boots in the corner, the gun!"

"Nothing there that could not have been arranged. Mr. Douglas was an American, or had lived long in America. So had Mr. Barker. You don't need to import an American from outside in order to account for American doings."

"Ames, the butler--"

"What about him? Is he reliable?"

"Ten years with Sir Charles Chandos--as solid as a rock. He has been with Douglas ever since he took the Manor House five years ago. He has never seen a gun of this sort in the house."

"The gun was made to conceal. That's why the barrels were sawed. It would fit into any box. How could he swear there was no such gun in the house?"

"Well, anyhow, he had never seen one."

MacDonald shook his obstinate Scotch head. "I'm not convinced yet that there was ever anyone in the house," said he. "I'm asking you to conseedar" (his accent became more Aberdonian as he lost himself in his argument) "I'm asking you to conseedar what it involves if you suppose that this gun was ever brought into the house, and that all these strange things were done by a person from outside. Oh, man, it's just inconceivable! It's clean against common sense! I put it to you, Mr. Holmes, judging it by what we have heard."

"Well, state your case, Mr. Mac," said Holmes in his most judicial style.

"The man is not a burglar, supposing that he ever existed. The ring business and the card point to premeditated murder for some private reason. Very good. Here is a man who slips into a house with the deliberate intention of committing murder. He knows, if he knows anything, that he will have a deeficulty in making his escape, as the house is surrounded with water. What weapon would he choose? You would say the most silent in the world. Then he could hope when the deed was done to slip quickly from the window, to wade the moat, and to get away at his leisure. That's understandable. But is it understandable that he should go out of his way to bring with him the most noisy weapon he could select, knowing well that it will fetch every human being in the house to the spot as quick as they can run, and that it is all odds that he will be seen before he can get across the moat? Is that credible, Mr. Holmes?"

"Well, you put the case strongly," my friend replied thoughtfully. "It certainly needs a good deal of justification. May I ask, Mr. White Mason, whether you examined the farther side of the moat at once to see if there were any signs of the man having climbed out from the water?"

"There were no signs, Mr. Holmes. But it is a stone ledge, and one could hardly expect them."

"No tracks or marks?"

"None."

"Ha! Would there be any objection, Mr. White Mason, to our going down to the house at once? There may possibly be some small point which might be suggestive."

"I was going to propose it, Mr. Holmes; but I thought it well to put you in touch with all the facts before we go. I suppose if anything should strike you--" White Mason looked doubtfully at the amateur.

"I have worked with Mr. Holmes before," said Inspector MacDonald. "He plays the game."
"My own idea of the game, at any rate," said Holmes, with a smile. "I go into a case to help the ends of justice and the work of the police. If I have ever separated myself from the official force, it is because they have first separated themselves from me. I have no wish ever to score at their expense. At the same time, Mr. White Mason, I claim the right to work in my own way and give my results at my own time--complete rather than in stages."

"I am sure we are honoured by your presence and to show you all we know," said White Mason cordially. "Come along, Dr. Watson, and when the time comes we'll all hope for a place in your book."

We walked down the quaint village street with a row of pollarded elms on each side of it. Just beyond were two ancient stone pillars, weather-stained and lichen-blotched, bearing upon their summits a shapeless something which had once been the rampant lion of Capus of Birlstone. A short walk along the winding drive with such sward and oaks around it as one only sees in rural England, then a sudden turn, and the long, low Jacobean house of dingy, liver-coloured brick lay before us, with an old-fashioned garden of cut yews on each side of it. As we approached it, there was the wooden drawbridge and the beautiful broad moat as still and luminous as quicksilver in the cold, winter sunshine.

Three centuries had flowed past the old Manor House, centuries of births and of homecomings, of country dances and of the meetings of fox hunters. Strange that now in its old age this dark business should have cast its shadow upon the venerable walls! And yet those strange, peaked roofs and quaint, overhung gables were a fitting covering to grim and terrible intrigue. As I looked at the deep-set windows and the long sweep of the dull-coloured, water-lapped front, I felt that no more fitting scene could be set for such a tragedy.

"That's the window," said White Mason, "that one on the immediate right of the drawbridge. It's open just as it was found last night."

"It looks rather narrow for a man to pass."

"Well, it wasn't a fat man, anyhow. We don't need your deductions, Mr. Holmes, to tell us that. But you or I could squeeze through all right."

Holmes walked to the edge of the moat and looked across. Then he examined the stone ledge and the grass border beyond it.

"I've had a good look, Mr. Holmes," said White Mason. "There is nothing there, no sign that anyone has landed--but why should he leave any sign?"

"Exactly. Why should he? Is the water always turbid?"

"Generally about this colour. The stream brings down the clay."

"How deep is it?"

"About two feet at each side and three in the middle."

"So we can put aside all idea of the man having been drowned in crossing."

"No, a child could not be drowned in it."

We walked across the drawbridge, and were admitted by a quaint, gnarled, dried-up person, who was the butler, Ames. The poor old fellow was white and quivering from the shock. The village sergeant, a tall, formal, melancholy man, still held his vigil in the room of Fate. The doctor had departed.

"Anything fresh, Sergeant Wilson?" asked White Mason.

"No, sir."

"Then you can go home. You've had enough. We can send for you if we want you. The butler had better wait outside. Tell him to warn Mr. Cecil Barker, Mrs. Douglas, and the housekeeper that we may want a word with them presently. Now, gentlemen, perhaps you will allow me to give you the views I have formed first, and then you will be able to arrive at your own."

He impressed me, this country specialist. He had a solid grip of fact and a cool, clear, common-sense brain, which should take him some way in his profession. Holmes listened to him intently, with no sign of that impatience which the official exponent too often produced.

"Is it suicide, or is it murder--that's our first question, gentlemen, is it not? If it were suicide, then we have to believe that this man began by taking off his wedding ring and concealing it; that he then came down here in his dressing gown, trampled mud into a corner behind the curtain in order to give the idea someone had waited for him, opened the window, put blood on the--"

"We can surely dismiss that," said MacDonald.

"So I think. Suicide is out of the question. Then a murder has been done. What we have to determine is, whether it was done by someone outside or inside the house."

"Well, let's hear the argument."

"There are considerable difficulties both ways, and yet one or the other it must be. We will suppose first that some person or persons inside the house did the crime. They got this man down here at a time when everything was still and yet no one was asleep. They then did the deed with the queerest and noisiest weapon in the world so as to
tell everyone what had happened—a weapon that was never seen in the house before. That does not seem a very
likely start, does it?"
"No, it does not."
"Well, then, everyone is agreed that after the alarm was given only a minute at the most had passed before the
whole household—not Mr. Cecil Barker alone, though he claims to have been the first, but Ames and all of them
were on the spot. Do you tell me that in that time the guilty person managed to make footmarks in the corner, open
the window, mark the sill with blood, take the wedding ring off the dead man's finger, and all the rest of it? It's
impossible!"
"You put it very clearly," said Holmes. "I am inclined to agree with you."
"Well, then, we are driven back to the theory that it was done by someone from outside. We are still faced with
some big difficulties; but anyhow they have ceased to be impossibilities. The man got into the house between four-
thirty and six; that is to say, between dusk and the time when the bridge was raised. There had been some visitors,
and the door was open; so there was nothing to prevent him. He may have been a common burglar, or he may have
had some private grudge against Mr. Douglas. Since Mr. Douglas has spent most of his life in America, and this
shotgun seems to be an American weapon, it would seem that the private grudge is the more likely theory. He
slipped into this room because it was the first he came to, and he hid behind the curtain. There he remained until past
eleven at night. At that time Mr. Douglas entered the room. It was a short interview, if there were any interview at
all; for Mrs. Douglas declares that her husband had not left her more than a few minutes when she heard the shot."
"The candle shows that," said Holmes."
"Exactly. The candle, which was a new one, is not burned more than half an inch. He must have placed it on the
table before he was attacked; otherwise, of course, it would have fallen when he fell. This shows that he was not
attacked the instant that he entered the room. When Mr. Barker arrived the candle was lit and the lamp was out."
"That's all clear enough."
"Well, now, we can reconstruct things on those lines. Mr. Douglas enters the room. He puts down the candle. A
man appears from behind the curtain. He is armed with this gun. He demands the wedding ring—Heaven only knows
why, but so it must have been. Mr. Douglas gave it up. Then either in cold blood or in the course of a struggle--
Douglas may have gripped the hammer that was found upon the mat—he shot Douglas in this horrible way. He
dropped his gun and also it would seem this queer card—V.V. 341, whatever that may mean—and he made his escape
through the window and across the moat at the very moment when Cecil Barker was discovering the crime. How's
that, Mr. Holmes?"
"Very interesting, but just a little unconvincing."
"Man, it would be absolute nonsense if it wasn't that anything else is even worse!" cried MacDonald. "Somebody
killed the man, and whoever it was I could clearly prove to you that he should have done it some other way. What
does he mean by allowing his retreat to be cut off like that? What does he mean by using a shotgun when silence
was his one chance of escape? Come, Mr. Holmes, it's up to you to give us a lead, since you say Mr. White Mason's
theory is unconvincing."
Holmes had sat intently observant during this long discussion, missing no word that was said, with his keen eyes
darting to right and to left, and his forehead wrinkled with speculation.
"I should like a few more facts before I get so far as a theory, Mr. Mac," said he, kneeling down beside the body.
"Dear me! these injuries are really appalling. Can we have the butler in for a moment... Ames, I understand that you
have often seen this very unusual mark—a branded triangle inside a circle—upon Mr. Douglas's forearm?"
"Frequently, sir."
"You never heard any speculation as to what it meant?"
"No, sir."
"It must have caused great pain when it was inflicted. It is undoubtedly a burn. Now, I observe, Ames, that there
is a small piece of plaster at the angle of Mr. Douglas's jaw. Did you observe that in life?"
"Yes, sir, he cut himself in shaving yesterday morning."
"Did you ever know him to cut himself in shaving before?"
"Not for a very long time, sir."
"Suggestive!" said Holmes. "It may, of course, be a mere coincidence, or it may point to some nervousness
which would indicate that he had reason to apprehend danger. Had you noticed anything unusual in his conduct,
yesterday, Ames?"
"It struck me that he was a little restless and excited, sir."
"Ha! The attack may not have been entirely unexpected. We do seem to make a little progress, do we not?
Perhaps you would rather do the questioning, Mr. Mac?"
"No, Mr. Holmes, it's in better hands than mine."
"Well, then, we will pass to this card--V.V. 341. It is rough cardboard. Have you any of the sort in the house?"

"I don't think so."

Holmes walked across to the desk and dabbed a little ink from each bottle on to the blotting paper. "It was not printed in this room," he said; "this is black ink and the other purplish. It was done by a thick pen, and these are fine. No, it was done elsewhere, I should say. Can you make anything of the inscription, Ames?"

"No, sir, nothing."

"What do you think, Mr. Mac?"

"It gives me the impression of a secret society of some sort; the same with his badge upon the forearm."

"That's my idea, too," said White Mason.

"Well, we can adopt it as a working hypothesis and then see how far our difficulties disappear. An agent from such a society makes his way into the house, waits for Mr. Douglas, blows his head nearly off with this weapon, and escapes by wading the moat, after leaving a card beside the dead man, which will, when mentioned in the papers, tell other members of the society that vengeance has been done. That all hangs together. But why this gun, of all weapons?"

"Exactly."

"And why the missing ring?"

"Quite so."

"And why no arrest? It's past two now. I take it for granted that since dawn every constable within forty miles has been looking out for a wet stranger?"

"That is so, Mr. Holmes."

"Well, unless he has a burrow close by or a change of clothes ready, they can hardly miss him. And yet they HAVE missed him up to now!" Holmes had gone to the window and was examining with his lens the blood mark on the sill. "It is clearly the tread of a shoe. It is remarkably broad; a splay-foot, one would say. Curious, because, so far as one can trace any footmark in this mud-stained corner, one would say it was a more shapely sole. However, they are certainly very indistinct. What's this under the side table?"

"Mr. Douglas's dumb-bells," said Ames.

"Dumb-bell--there's only one. Where's the other?"

"I don't know, Mr. Holmes. There may have been only one. I have not noticed them for months."

"One dumb-bell--" Holmes said seriously; but his remarks were interrupted by a sharp knock at the door.

A tall, sunburned, capable-looking, clean-shaved man looked in at us. I had no difficulty in guessing that it was the Cecil Barker of whom I had heard. His masterful eyes travelled quickly with a questioning glance from face to face.

"Sorry to interrupt your consultation," said he, "but you should hear the latest news."

"An arrest?"

"No such luck. But they've found his bicycle. The fellow left his bicycle behind him. Come and have a look. It is within a hundred yards of the hall door."

We found three or four grooms and idlers standing in the drive inspecting a bicycle which had been drawn out from a clump of evergreens in which it had been concealed. It was a well used Rudge-Whitworth, splashed as from a considerable journey. There was a saddlebag with spanner and oilcan, but no clue as to the owner.

"It would be a grand help to the police," said the inspector, "if these things were numbered and registered. But we must be thankful for what we've got. If we can't find where he went to, at least we are likely to get where he came from. But what in the name of all that is wonderful made the fellow leave it behind? And how in the world has he got away without it? We don't seem to get a gleam of light in the case, Mr. Holmes."

"Don't we?" my friend answered thoughtfully. "I wonder!"

Chapter 5 - The People of the Drama

"Have you seen all you want of the study?" asked White Mason as we reentered the house.

"For the time," said the inspector, and Holmes nodded.

"Then perhaps you would now like to hear the evidence of some of the people in the house. We could use the dining room, Ames. Please come yourself first and tell us what you know."

The butler's account was a simple and a clear one, and he gave a convincing impression of sincerity. He had been engaged five years before, when Douglas first came to Birlstone. He understood that Mr. Douglas was a rich gentleman who had made his money in America. He had been a kind and considerate employer--not quite what Ames was used to, perhaps; but one can't have everything. He never saw any signs of apprehension in Mr. Douglas: on the contrary, he was the most fearless man he had ever known. He ordered the drawbridge to be pulled up every night because it was the ancient custom of the old house, and he liked to keep the old ways up.

Mr. Douglas seldom went to London or left the village; but on the day before the crime he had been shopping at
Tunbridge Wells. He (Ames) had observed some restlessness and excitement on the part of Mr. Douglas that day; for he had seemed impatient and irritable, which was unusual with him. He had not gone to bed that night; but was in the pantry at the back of the house, putting away the silver, when he heard the bell ring violently. He heard no shot; but it was hardly possible he would, as the pantry and kitchens were at the very back of the house and there were several closed doors and a long passage between. The housekeeper had come out of her room, attracted by the violent ringing of the bell. They had gone to the front of the house together.

As they reached the bottom of the stairs he had seen Mrs. Douglas coming down it. No, she was not hurrying; it did not seem to him that she was particularly agitated. Just as she reached the bottom of the stair Mr. Barker had rushed out of the study. He had stopped Mrs. Douglas and begged her to go back.

"For God's sake, go back to your room!" he cried. "Poor Jack is dead! You can do nothing. For God's sake, go back!"

After some persuasion upon the stairs Mrs. Douglas had gone back. She did not scream. She made no outcry whatever. Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, had taken her upstairs and stayed with her in the bedroom. Ames and Mr. Barker had then returned to the study, where they had found everything exactly as the police had seen it. The candle was not lit at that time; but the lamp was burning. They had looked out of the window; but the night was very dark and nothing could be seen or heard. They had then rushed out into the hall, where Ames had turned the windlass which lowered the drawbridge. Mr. Barker had then hurried off to get the police.

Such, in its essentials, was the evidence of the butler.

The account of Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, was, so far as it went, a corroboration of that of her fellow servant. The housekeeper's room was rather nearer to the front of the house than the pantry in which Ames had been working. She was preparing to go to bed when the loud ringing of the bell had attracted her attention. She was a little hard of hearing. Perhaps that was why she had not heard the shot; but in any case the study was a long way off. She remembered hearing some sound which she imagined to be the slamming of a door. That was a good deal earlier--half an hour at least before the ringing of the bell. When Mr. Ames ran to the front she went with him. She saw Mr. Barker, very pale and excited, come out of the study. He entreated her to go back, and she answered him, but what she said could not be heard.

"Take her up! Stay with her!" he had said to Mrs. Allen.

She had therefore taken her to the bedroom, and endeavoured to soothe her. She was greatly excited, trembling all over, but made no other attempt to go downstairs. She just sat in her dressing gown by her bedroom fire, with her head sunk in her hands. Mrs. Allen stayed with her most of the night. As to the other servants, they had all gone to bed, and the alarm did not reach them until just before the police arrived. They slept at the extreme back of the house, and could not possibly have heard anything.

So far the housekeeper could add nothing on cross-examination save lamentations and expressions of amazement.

Cecil Barker succeeded Mrs. Allen as a witness. As to the occurrences of the night before, he had very little to add to what he had already told the police. Personally, he was convinced that the murderer had escaped by the window. The bloodstain was conclusive, in his opinion, on that point. Besides, as the bridge was up, there was no other possible way of escaping. He could not explain what had become of the assassin or why he had not taken his bicycle, if it were indeed his. He could not possibly have been drowned in the moat, which was at no place more than three feet deep.

In his own mind he had a very definite theory about the murder. Douglas was a reticent man, and there were some chapters in his life of which he never spoke. He had emigrated to America when he was a very young man. He had prospered well, and Barker had first met him in California, where they had become partners in a successful mining claim at a place called Benito Canon. They had done very well; but Douglas had suddenly sold out and started for England. He was a widower at that time. Barker had afterwards realized his money and come to live in London. Thus they had renewed their friendship.

Douglas had given him the impression that some danger was hanging over his head, and he had always looked upon his sudden departure from California, and also his renting a house in so quiet a place in England, as being connected with this peril. He imagined that some secret society, some implacable organization, was on Douglas's track, which would never rest until it killed him. Some remarks of his had given him this idea; though he had never told him what the society was, nor how he had come to offend it. He could only suppose that the legend upon the placard had some reference to this secret society.

"How long were you with Douglas in California?" asked Inspector MacDonald.

"Five years altogether."

"He was a bachelor, you say?"

"A widower."
"Have you ever heard where his first wife came from?"
"No, I remember his saying that she was of German extraction, and I have seen her portrait. She was a very beautiful woman. She died of typhoid the year before I met him."

"You don't associate his past with any particular part of America?"
"I have heard him talk of Chicago. He knew that city well and had worked there. I have heard him talk of the coal and iron districts. He had travelled a good deal in his time."

"Was he a politician? Had this secret society to do with politics?"
"No, he cared nothing about politics."

"You have no reason to think it was criminal?"
"On the contrary, I never met a straighter man in my life."

"Was there anything curious about his life in California?"

"He liked best to stay and to work at our claim in the mountains. He would never go where other men were if he could help it. That's why I first thought that someone was after him. Then when he left so suddenly for Europe I made sure that it was so. I believe that he had a warning of some sort. Within a week of his leaving half a dozen men were inquiring for him."

"What sort of men?"

"Well, they were a mighty hard-looking crowd. They came up to the claim and wanted to know where he was. I told them that he was gone to Europe and that I did not know where to find him. They meant him no good--it was easy to see that."

"Were these men Americans--Californians?"
"Well, I don't know about Californians. They were Americans, all right. But they were not miners. I don't know what they were, and was very glad to see their backs."

"That was six years ago?"
"Nearer seven."

"And then you were together five years in California, so that this business dates back not less than eleven years at the least?"

"That is so."

"It must be a very serious feud that would be kept up with such earnestness for as long as that. It would be no light thing that would give rise to it."

"I think it shadowed his whole life. It was never quite out of his mind."

"But if a man had a danger hanging over him, and knew what it was, don't you think he would turn to the police for protection?"

"Maybe it was some danger that he could not be protected against. There's one thing you should know. He always went about armed. His revolver was never out of his pocket. But, by bad luck, he was in his dressing gown and had left it in the bedroom last night. Once the bridge was up, I guess he thought he was safe."

"I should like these dates a little clearer," said MacDonald. "It is quite six years since Douglas left California. You followed him next year, did you not?"

"That is so."

"And he had been married five years. You must have returned about the time of his marriage."

"About a month before. I was his best man."

"Did you know Mrs. Douglas before her marriage?"

"No, I did not. I had been away from England for ten years."

"But you have seen a good deal of her since."

Barker looked sternly at the detective. "I have seen a good deal of HIM since," he answered. "If I have seen her, it is because you cannot visit a man without knowing his wife. If you imagine there is any connection--"

"I imagine nothing, Mr. Barker. I am bound to make every inquiry which can bear upon the case. But I mean no offense."

"Some inquiries are offensive," Barker answered angrily. "It's only the facts that we want. It is in your interest and everyone's interest that they should be cleared up. Did Mr. Douglas entirely approve your friendship with his wife?"

Barker grew paler, and his great, strong hands were clasped convulsively together. "You have no right to ask such questions!" he cried. "What has this to do with the matter you are investigating?"

"I must repeat the question."

"Well, I refuse to answer."

"You can refuse to answer; but you must be aware that your refusal is in itself an answer, for you would not refuse if you had not something to conceal."
Barker stood for a moment with his face set grimly and his strong black eyebrows drawn low in intense thought. Then he looked up with a smile. "Well, I guess you gentlemen are only doing your clear duty after all, and I have no right to stand in the way of it. I'd only ask you not to worry Mrs. Douglas over this matter; for she has enough upon her just now. I may tell you that poor Douglas had just one fault in the world, and that was his jealousy. He was fond of me—no man could be fonder of a friend. And he was devoted to his wife. He loved me to come here, and was forever sending for me. And yet if his wife and I talked together or there seemed any sympathy between us, a kind of wave of jealousy would pass over him, and he would be off the handle and saying the wildest things in a moment. More than once I've sworn off coming for that reason, and then he would write me such penitent, imploring letters that I just had to. But you can take it from me, gentlemen, if it was my last word, that no man ever had a more loving, faithful wife—and I can say also no friend could be more loyal than I!"

It was spoken with fervour and feeling, and yet Inspector MacDonald could not dismiss the subject.

"You are aware," said he, "that the dead man's wedding ring has been taken from his finger?"

"So it appears," said Barker.

"What do you mean by 'appears'? You know it as a fact."

The man seemed confused and undecided. "When I said 'appears' I meant that it was conceivable that he had himself taken off the ring."

"The mere fact that the ring should be absent, whoever may have removed it, would suggest to anyone's mind, would it not, that the marriage and the tragedy were connected?"

Barker shrugged his broad shoulders. "I can't profess to say what it means," he answered. "But if you mean to hint that it could reflect in any way upon this lady's honour"—his eyes blazed for an instant, and then with an evident effort he got a grip upon his own emotions—"well, you are on the wrong track, that's all."

"I don't know that I've anything else to ask you at present," said MacDonald, coldly.

"There was one small point," remarked Sherlock Holmes. "When you entered the room there was only a candle lighted on the table, was there not?"

"Yes, that was so."

"By its light you saw that some terrible incident had occurred?"

"Exactly."

"You at once rang for help?"

"Yes."

"And it arrived very speedily?"

"Within a minute or so."

"And yet when they arrived they found that the candle was out and that the lamp had been lighted. That seems very remarkable."

Again Barker showed some signs of indecision. "I don't see that it was remarkable, Mr. Holmes," he answered after a pause. "The candle threw a very bad light. My first thought was to get a better one. The lamp was on the table; so I lit it."

"And blew out the candle?"

"Exactly."

Holmes asked no further question, and Barker, with a deliberate look from one to the other of us, which had, as it seemed to me, something of defiance in it, turned and left the room.

Inspector MacDonald had sent up a note to the effect that he would wait upon Mrs. Douglas in her room; but she had replied that she would meet us in the dining room. She entered now, a tall and beautiful woman of thirty, reserved and self-possessed to a remarkable degree, very different from the tragic and distracted figure I had pictured. It is true that her face was pale and drawn, like that of one who has endured a great shock; but her manner was composed, and the finely moulded hand which she rested upon the edge of the table was as steady as my own. Her sad, appealing eyes travelled from one to the other of us with a curiously inquisitive expression. That questioning gaze transformed itself suddenly into abrupt speech.

"Have you found anything out yet?" she asked.

Was it my imagination that there was an undertone of fear rather than of hope in the question?

"We have taken every possible step, Mrs. Douglas," said the inspector. "You may rest assured that nothing will be neglected."

"Spare no money," she said in a dead, even tone. "It is my desire that every possible effort should be made."

"Perhaps you can tell us something which may throw some light upon the matter."

"I fear not; but all I know is at your service."

"We have heard from Mr. Cecil Barker that you did not actually see—that you were never in the room where the tragedy occurred?"
"No, he turned me back upon the stairs. He begged me to return to my room."
"Quite so. You had heard the shot, and you had at once come down."
"I put on my dressing gown and then came down."
"How long was it after hearing the shot that you were stopped on the stair by Mr. Barker?"
"It may have been a couple of minutes. It is so hard to reckon time at such a moment. He implored me not to go on. He assured me that I could do nothing. Then Mrs. Allen, the housekeeper, led me upstairs again. It was all like some dreadful dream."
"Can you give us any idea how long your husband had been downstairs before you heard the shot?"
"No, I cannot say. He went from his dressing room, and I did not hear him go. He did the round of the house every night, for he was nervous of fire. It is the only thing that I have ever known him nervous of."
"That is just the point which I want to come to, Mrs. Douglas. You have known your husband only in England, have you not?"
"Yes, we have been married five years."
"Have you heard him speak of anything which occurred in America and might bring some danger upon him?"
Mrs. Douglas thought earnestly before she answered. "Yes," she said at last, "I have always felt that there was a danger hanging over him. He refused to discuss it with me. It was not from want of confidence in me--there was the most complete love and confidence between us--but it was out of his desire to keep all alarm away from me. He thought I should brood over it if I knew all, and so he was silent."
"How did you know it, then?"
Mrs. Douglas's face lit with a quick smile. "Can a husband ever carry about a secret all his life and a woman who loves him have no suspicion of it? I knew it by his refusal to talk about some episodes in his American life. I knew it by certain precautions he took. I knew it by certain words he let fall. I knew it by the way he looked at unexpected strangers. I was perfectly certain that he had some powerful enemies, that he believed they were on his track, and that he was always on his guard against them. I was so sure of it that for years I have been terrified if ever he came home later than was expected."
"Might I ask," asked Holmes, "what the words were which attracted your attention?"
"The Valley of Fear," the lady answered. "That was an expression he has used when I questioned him. 'I have been in the Valley of Fear. I am not out of it yet.'--'Are we never to get out of the Valley of Fear?' I have asked him when I have seen him more serious than usual. 'Sometimes I think that we never shall,' he has answered."
"Surely you asked him what he meant by the Valley of Fear?"
"I did; but his face would become very grave and he would shake his head. 'It is bad enough that one of us should have been in its shadow,' he said. 'Please God it shall never fall upon you!' It was some real valley in which he had lived and in which something terrible had occurred to him, of that I am certain; but I can tell you no more."
"And he never mentioned any names?"
"Yes, he was delirious with fever once when he had his hunting accident three years ago. Then I remember that there was a name that came continually to his lips. He spoke it with anger and a sort of horror. McGinty was the name--Bodymaster McGinty. I asked him when he recovered who Bodymaster McGinty was, and whose body he was master of. 'Never of mine, thank God!' he answered with a laugh, and that was all I could get from him. But there is a connection between Bodymaster McGinty and the Valley of Fear."
"There is one other point," said Inspector MacDonald. "You met Mr. Douglas in a boarding house in London, did you not, and became engaged to him there? Was there any romance, anything secret or mysterious, about the wedding?"
"There was romance. There is always romance. There was nothing mysterious."
"He had no rival?"
"No, I was quite free."
"You have heard, no doubt, that his wedding ring has been taken. Does that suggest anything to you? Suppose that some enemy of his old life had tracked him down and committed this crime, what possible reason could he have for taking his wedding ring?"
For an instant I could have sworn that the faintest shadow of a smile flickered over the woman's lips.
"I really cannot tell," she answered. "It is certainly a most extraordinary thing."
"Well, we will not detain you any longer, and we are sorry to have put you to this trouble at such a time," said the inspector. "There are some other points, no doubt; but we can refer to you as they arise."
She rose, and I was again conscious of that quick, questioning glance with which she had just surveyed us.
"What impression has my evidence made upon you?" The question might as well have been spoken. Then, with a bow, she swept from the room.
"She's a beautiful woman--a very beautiful woman," said MacDonald thoughtfully, after the door had closed.
behind her. "This man Barker has certainly been down here a good deal. He is a man who might be attractive to a
woman. He admits that the dead man was jealous, and maybe he knew best himself what cause he had for jealousy.
Then there's that wedding ring. You can't get past that. The man who tears a wedding ring off a dead man's--What
do you say to it, Mr. Holmes?"

My friend had sat with his head upon his hands, sunk in the deepest thought. Now he rose and rang the bell.
"Ames," he said, when the butler entered, "where is Mr. Cecil Barker now?"
"I'll see, sir."
He came back in a moment to say that Barker was in the garden.
"Can you remember, Ames, what Mr. Barker had on his feet last night when you joined him in the study?"
"Yes, Mr. Holmes. He had a pair of bedroom slippers. I brought him his boots when he went for the police."
"Where are the slippers now?"
"They are still under the chair in the hall."
"Very good, Ames. It is, of course, important for us to know which tracks may be Mr. Barker's and which from
outside."
"Yes, sir. I may say that I noticed that the slippers were stained with blood--so indeed were my own."
"That is natural enough, considering the condition of the room. Very good, Ames. We will ring if we want you."

A few minutes later we were in the study. Holmes had brought with him the carpet slippers from the hall. As
Ames had observed, the soles of both were dark with blood.
"Strange!" murmured Holmes, as he stood in the light of the window and examined them minutely. "Very
strange indeed!"

Stooping with one of his quick feline pounces, he placed the slipper upon the blood mark on the sill. It exactly
corresponded. He smiled in silence at his colleagues.

The inspector was transfigured with excitement. His native accent rattled like a stick upon railings.
"Man," he cried, "there's not a doubt of it! Barker has just marked the window himself. It's a good deal broader
than any bootmark. I mind that you said it was a splay-foot, and here's the explanation. But what's the game, Mr.
Holmes--what's the game?"
"Ay, what's the game?" my friend repeated thoughtfully.

White Mason chuckled and rubbed his fat hands together in his professional satisfaction. "I said it was a
snorter!" he cried. "And a real snorter it is!"

Chapter 6 - A Dawning Light

The three detectives had many matters of detail into which to inquire; so I returned alone to our modest quarters
at the village inn. But before doing so I took a stroll in the curious old-world garden which flanked the house. Rows
of very ancient yew trees cut into strange designs girded it round. Inside was a beautiful stretch of lawn with an old
sundial in the middle, the whole effect so soothing and restful that it was welcome to my somewhat jangled nerves.

In that deeply peaceful atmosphere one could forget, or remember only as some fantastic nightmare, that
darkened study with the sprawling, bloodstained figure on the floor. And yet, as I strolled round it and tried to steep
my soul in its gentle balm, a strange incident occurred, which brought me back to the tragedy and left a sinister
impression in my mind.

I have said that a decoration of yew trees circled the garden. At the end farthest from the house they thickened
into a continuous hedge. On the other side of this hedge, concealed from the eyes of anyone approaching from the
direction of the house, there was a stone seat. As I approached the spot I was aware of voices, some remark in the
deep tones of a man, answered by a little ripple of feminine laughter.

An instant later I had come round the end of the hedge and my eyes lit upon Mrs. Douglas and the man Barker
before they were aware of my presence. Her appearance gave me a shock. In the dining-room she had been demure
and discreet. Now all pretense of grief had passed away from her. Her eyes shone with the joy of living, and her face
still quivered with amusement at some remark of her companion. He sat forward, his hands clasped and his forearms
on his knees, with an answering smile upon his bold, handsome face. In an instant--but it was just one instant too
late--they resumed their solemn masks as my figure came into view. A hurried word or two passed between them,
and then Barker rose and came towards me.

"Excuse me, sir," said he, "but am I addressing Dr. Watson?"

I bowed with a coldness which showed, I dare say, very plainly the impression which had been produced upon
my mind.
"We thought that it was probably you, as your friendship with Mr. Sherlock Holmes is so well known. Would
you mind coming over and speaking to Mrs. Douglas for one instant?"

I followed him with a dour face. Very clearly I could see in my mind's eye that shattered figure on the floor.
Here within a few hours of the tragedy were his wife and his nearest friend laughing together behind a bush in the
garden which had been his. I greeted the lady with reserve. I had grieved with her grief in the dining room. Now I met her appealing gaze with an unresponsive eye.

"I fear that you think me callous and hard-hearted," said she.

I shrugged my shoulders. "It is no business of mine," said I.

"Perhaps some day you will do me justice. If you only realized--"

"There is no need why Dr. Watson should realize," said Barker quickly. "As he has himself said, it is no possible business of his."

"Exactly," said I, "and so I will beg leave to resume my walk."

"One moment, Dr. Watson," cried the woman in a pleading voice. "There is one question which you can answer with more authority than anyone else in the world, and it may make a very great difference to me. You know Mr. Holmes and his relations with the police better than anyone else can. Supposing that a matter were brought confidentially to his knowledge, is it absolutely necessary that he should pass it on to the detectives?"

"Yes, that's it," said Barker eagerly. "Is he on his own or is he entirely in with them?"

"I really don't know that I should be justified in discussing such a point."

"I beg--I implore that you will, Dr. Watson! I assure you that you will be helping us--helping me greatly if you will guide us on that point."

There was such a ring of sincerity in the woman's voice that for the instant I forgot all about her levity and was moved only to do her will.

"Mr. Holmes is an independent investigator," I said. "He is his own master, and would act as his own judgment directed. At the same time, he would naturally feel loyalty towards the officials who were working on the same case, and he would not conceal from them anything which would help them in bringing a criminal to justice. Beyond this I can say nothing, and I would refer you to Mr. Holmes himself if you wanted fuller information."

So saying I raised my hat and went upon my way, leaving them still seated behind that concealing hedge. I looked back as I rounded the far end of it, and saw that they were still talking very earnestly together, and, as they were gazing after me, it was clear that it was our interview that was the subject of their debate.

"I wish none of their confidences," said Holmes, when I reported to him what had occurred. He had spent the whole afternoon at the Manor House in consultation with his two colleagues, and returned about five with a ravenous appetite for a high tea which I had ordered for him. "No confidences, Watson; for they are mighty awkward if it comes to an arrest for conspiracy and murder."

"You think it will come to that?"

He was in his most cheerful and debonair humour. "My dear Watson, when I have exterminated that fourth egg I shall be ready to put you in touch with the whole situation. I don't say that we have fathomed it--far from it--but when we have traced the missing dumb-bell--"

"The dumb-bell!"

"Dear me, Watson, is it possible that you have not penetrated the fact that the case hangs upon the missing dumb-bell? Well, well, you need not be downcast; for between ourselves I don't think that either Inspector Mac or the excellent local practitioner has grasped the overwhelming importance of this incident. One dumb-bell, Watson! Consider an athlete with one dumb-bell! Picture to yourself the unilateral development, the imminent danger of a spinal curvature. Shocking, Watson, shocking!"

He sat with his mouth full of toast and his eyes sparkling with mischief, watching my intellectual entanglement. The mere sight of his excellent appetite was an assurance of success; for I had very clear recollections of days and nights without a thought of food, when his baffled mind had chafed before some problem while his thin, eager features became more attenuated with the asceticism of complete mental concentration. Finally he lit his pipe, and sitting in the inglenook of the old village inn he talked slowly and at random about his case, rather as one who thinks aloud than as one who makes a considered statement.

"A lie, Watson--a great, big, thumping, obtrusive, uncompromising lie--that's what meets us on the threshold! There is our starting point. The whole story told by Barker is a lie. But Barker's story is corroborated by Mrs. Douglas. Therefore she is lying also. They are both lying, and in a conspiracy. So now we have the clear problem. Why are they lying, and what is the truth which they are trying so hard to conceal? Let us try, Watson, you and I, if we can get behind the lie and reconstruct the truth.

"How do I know that they are lying? Because it is a clumsy fabrication which simply could not be true. Consider! According to the story given to us, the assassin had less than a minute after the murder had been committed to take that ring, which was under another ring, from the dead man's finger, to replace the other ring--a thing which he would surely never have done--and to put that singular card beside his victim. I say that this was obviously impossible.

"You may argue--but I have too much respect for your judgment, Watson, to think that you will do so--that the
ring may have been taken before the man was killed. The fact that the candle had been lit only a short time shows that there had been no lengthy interview. Was Douglas, from what we hear of his fearless character, a man who would be likely to give up his wedding ring at such short notice, or could we conceive of his giving it up at all? No, no, Watson, the assassin was alone with the dead man for some time with the lamp lit. Of that I have no doubt at all.

"But the gunshot was apparently the cause of death. Therefore the shot must have been fired some time earlier than we are told. But there could be no mistake about such a matter as that. We are in the presence, therefore, of a deliberate conspiracy upon the part of the two people who heard the gunshot--of the man Barker and of the woman Douglas. When on the top of this I am able to show that the blood mark on the windowsill was deliberately placed there by Barker, in order to give a false clue to the police, you will admit that the case grows dark against him.

"Now we have to ask ourselves at what hour the murder actually did occur. Up to half-past ten the servants were moving about the house; so it was certainly not before that time. At a quarter to eleven they had all gone to their rooms with the exception of Ames, who was in the pantry. I have been trying some experiments after you left us this afternoon, and I find that no noise which MacDonald can make in the study can penetrate to me in the pantry when the doors are all shut.

"It is otherwise, however, from the housekeeper's room. It is not so far down the corridor, and from it I could vaguely hear a voice when it was very loudly raised. The sound from a shotgun is to some extent muffled when the discharge is at very close range, as it undoubtedly was in this instance. It would not be very loud, and yet in the silence of the night it should have easily penetrated to Mrs. Allen's room. She is, as she has told us, somewhat deaf; but none the less she mentioned in her evidence that she did hear something like a door slamming half an hour before the alarm was given. Half an hour before the alarm was given would be a quarter to eleven. I have no doubt that what she heard was the report of the gun, and that this was the real instant of the murder.

"If this is so, we have now to determine what Barker and Mrs. Douglas, presuming that they are not the actual murderers, could have been doing from quarter to eleven, when the sound of the shot brought them down, until quarter past eleven, when they rang the bell and summoned the servants. What were they doing, and why did they not instantly give the alarm? That is the question which faces us, and when it has been answered we shall surely have gone some way to solve our problem."

"I am convinced myself," said I, "that there is an understanding between those two people. She must be a heartless creature to sit laughing at some jest within a few hours of her husband's murder."

"Exactly. She does not shine as a wife even in her own account of what occurred. I am not a whole-souled admirer of womankind, as you are aware, Watson, but my experience of life has taught me that there are few wives, having any regard for their husbands, who would let any man's spoken word stand between them and that husband's dead body. Should I ever marry, Watson, I should hope to inspire my wife with some feeling which would prevent her from being walked off by a housekeeper when my corpse was lying within a few yards of her. It was badly stage-managed; for even the rawest investigators must be struck by the absence of the usual feminine ululation. If there had been nothing else, this incident alone would have suggested a prearranged conspiracy to my mind."

"You think then, definitely, that Barker and Mrs. Douglas are guilty of the murder?"

"There is an appalling directness about your questions, Watson," said Holmes, shaking his pipe at me. "They come at me like bullets. If you put it that Mrs. Douglas and Barker know the truth about the murder, and are conspiring to conceal it, then I can give you a whole-souled answer. I am sure they do. But your more deadly proposition is not so clear. Let us for a moment consider the difficulties which stand in the way.

"We will suppose that this couple are united by the bonds of a guilty love, and that they have determined to get rid of the man who stands between them. It is a large supposition; for discreet inquiry among servants and others has failed to corroborate it in any way. On the contrary, there is a good deal of evidence that the Douglases were very attached to each other."

"That, I am sure, cannot be true," said I, thinking of the beautiful smiling face in the garden.

"Well at least they gave that impression. However, we will suppose that they are an extraordinarily astute couple, who deceive everyone upon this point, and conspire to murder the husband. He happens to be a man over forty, who stands in their way."

"We will suppose that this incident alone would have suggested a prearranged conspiracy to my mind."

"We have only their word for that."

Holmes looked thoughtful. "I see, Watson. You are sketching out a theory by which everything they say from the beginning is false. According to your idea, there was never any hidden menace, or secret society, or Valley of Fear, or Boss MacSomebody, or anything else. Well, that is a good sweeping generalization. Let us see what that brings us to. They invent this theory to account for the crime. They then play up to the idea by leaving this bicycle in the park as proof of the existence of some outsider. The stain on the windowsill conveys the same idea. So does the card on the body, which might have been prepared in the house. That all fits into your hypothesis, Watson. But now we come on the nasty, angular, uncompromising bits which won't slip into their places. Why a cut-off shotgun of all
weapons--and an American one at that? How could they be so sure that the sound of it would not bring someone on to them? It's a mere chance as it is that Mrs. Allen did not start out to inquire for the slamming door. Why did your guilty couple do all this, Watson?"

"I confess that I can't explain it."

"Then again, if a woman and her lover conspire to murder a husband, are they going to advertise their guilt by ostentatiously removing his wedding ring after his death? Does that strike you as very probable, Watson?"

"No, it does not."

"And once again, if the thought of leaving a bicycle concealed outside had occurred to you, would it really have seemed worth doing when the dullest detective would naturally say this is an obvious blind, as the bicycle is the first thing which the fugitive needed in order to make his escape."

"I can conceive of no explanation."

"And yet there should be no combination of events for which the wit of man cannot conceive an explanation. Simply as a mental exercise, without any assertion that it is true, let me indicate a possible line of thought. It is, I admit, mere imagination; but how often is imagination the mother of truth?"

"We will suppose that there was a guilty secret, a really shameful secret in the life of this man Douglas. This leads to his murder by someone who is, we will suppose, an avenger, someone from outside. This avenger, for some reason which I confess I am still at a loss to explain, took the dead man's wedding ring. The vendetta might conceivably date back to the man's first marriage, and the ring be taken for some such reason.

"Before this avenger got away, Barker and the wife had reached the room. The assassin convinced them that any attempt to arrest him would lead to the publication of some hideous scandal. They were converted to this idea, and preferred to let him go. For this purpose they probably lowered the bridge, which can be done quite noiselessly, and then raised it again. He made his escape, and for some reason thought that he could do so more safely on foot than on the bicycle. He therefore left his machine where it would not be discovered until he had got safely away. So far we are within the bounds of possibility, are we not?"

"Well, it is possible, no doubt," said I, with some reserve.

"We have to remember, Watson, that whatever occurred is certainly something very extraordinary. Well, now, to continue our supposititious case, the couple--not necessarily a guilty couple--realize after the murderer is gone that they have placed themselves in a position in which it may be difficult for them to prove that they did not themselves either do the deed or connive at it. They rapidly and rather clumsily met the situation. The mark was put by Barker's bloodstained slipper upon the windowsill to suggest how the fugitive got away. They obviously were the two who must have heard the sound of the gun; so they gave the alarm exactly as they would have done, but a good half hour after the event."

"And how do you propose to prove all this?"

"Well, if there were an outsider, he may be traced and taken. That would be the most effective of all proofs. But if not--well, the resources of science are far from being exhausted. I think that an evening alone in that study would help me much."

"An evening alone!"

"I propose to go up there presently. I have arranged it with the estimable Ames, who is by no means wholehearted about Barker. I shall sit in that room and see if its atmosphere brings me inspiration. I'm a believer in the genius loci. You smile, Friend Watson. Well, we shall see. By the way, you have that big umbrella of yours, have you not?"

"It is here."

"Well, I'll borrow that if I may."

"Certainly--but what a wretched weapon! If there is danger--"

"Nothing serious, my dear Watson, or I should certainly ask for your assistance. But I'll take the umbrella. At present I am only awaiting the return of our colleagues from Tunbridge Wells, where they are at present engaged in trying for a likely owner to the bicycle."

It was nightfall before Inspector MacDonald and White Mason came back from their expedition, and they arrived exultant, reporting a great advance in our investigation.

"Man, I'll admet that I had my doubts if there was ever an outsider," said MacDonald, "but that's all past now. We've had the bicycle identified, and we have a description of our man; so that's a long step on our journey."

"It sounds to me like the beginning of the end," said Holmes. "I'm sure I congratulate you both with all my heart."

"Well, I started from the fact that Mr. Douglas had seemed disturbed since the day before, when he had been at Tunbridge Wells. It was at Tunbridge Wells then that he had become conscious of some danger. It was clear, therefore, that if a man had come over with a bicycle it was from Tunbridge Wells that he might be expected to have
come. We took the bicycle over with us and showed it at the hotels. It was identified at once by the manager of the 
Eagle Commercial as belonging to a man named Hargrave, who had taken a room there two days before. This 
bicycle and a small valise were his whole belongings. He had registered his name as coming from London, but had 
given no address. The valise was London made, and the contents were British; but the man himself was undoubtedly 
an American."

"Well, well," said Holmes gleefully, "you have indeed done some solid work while I have been sitting spinning 
theories with my friend! It's a lesson in being practical, Mr. Mac."

"Ay, it's just that, Mr. Holmes," said the inspector with satisfaction.

"But this may all fit in with your theories," I remarked.

"That may or may not be. But let us hear the end, Mr. Mac. Was there nothing to identify this man?"

"So little that it was evident that he had carefully guarded himself against identification. There were no papers or 
letters, and no marking upon the clothes. A cycle map of the county lay on his bedroom table. He had left the hotel 
after breakfast yesterday morning on his bicycle, and no more was heard of him until our inquiries."

"That's what puzzles me, Mr. Holmes," said White Mason. "If the fellow did not want the hue and cry raised 
over him, one would imagine that he would have returned and remained at the hotel as an inoffensive tourist. As it 
is, he must know that he will be reported to the police by the hotel manager and that his disappearance will be 
connected with the murder."

"So one would imagine. Still, he has been justified of his wisdom up to date, at any rate, since he has not been 
taken. But his description--what of that?"

MacDonald referred to his notebook. "Here we have it so far as they could give it. They don't seem to have taken 
any very particular stock of him; but still the porter, the clerk, and the chambermaid are all agreed that this about 
covers the points. He was a man about five foot nine in height, fifty or so years of age, his hair slightly grizzled, a 
grayish moustache, a curved nose, and a face which all of them described as fierce and forbidding."

"Well, bar the expression, that might almost be a description of Douglas himself," said Holmes. "He is just over 
fifty, with grizzled hair and moustache, and about the same height. Did you get anything else?"

"He was dressed in a heavy gray suit with a reefer jacket, and he wore a short yellow overcoat and a soft cap."

"What about the shotgun?"

"It is less than two feet long. It could very well have fitted into his valise. He could have carried it inside his 
overcoat without difficulty."

"And how do you consider that all this bears upon the general case?"

"Well, Mr. Holmes," said MacDonald, "when we have got our man--and you may be sure that I had his 
description on the wires within five minutes of hearing it--we shall be better able to judge. But, even as it stands, we 
have surely gone a long way. We know that an American calling himself Hargrave came to Tunbridge Wells two 
days ago with bicycle and valise. In the latter was a sawed-off shotgun; so he came with the deliberate purpose of 
crime. Yesterday morning he set off for this place on his bicycle, with his gun concealed in his overcoat. No one saw 
him arrive, so far as we can learn; but he need not pass through the village to reach the park gates, and there are 
many cyclists upon the road. Presumably he at once concealed his cycle among the laurels where it was found, and 
possibly lurked there himself, with his eye on the house, waiting for Mr. Douglas to come out. The shotgun is a 
strange weapon to use inside a house; but he had intended to use it outside, and there it has very obvious advantages, 
as it would be impossible to miss with it, and the sound of shots is so common in an English sporting neighbourhood 
that no particular notice would be taken."

"That is all very clear," said Holmes.

"Well, Mr. Douglas did not appear. What was he to do next? He left his bicycle and approached the house in the 
twilight. He found the bridge down and no one about. He took his chance, intending, no doubt, to make some excuse 
if he met anyone. He met no one. He slipped into the first room that he saw, and concealed himself behind the 
curtain. Thence he could see the drawbridge go up, and he knew that his only escape was through the moat. He 
waited until quarter-past eleven, when Mr. Douglas upon his usual nightly round came into the room. He shot him 
and escaped, as arranged. He was aware that the bicycle would be described by the hotel people and be a clue 
against him; so he left it there and made his way by some other means to London or to some safe hiding place which 
he had already arranged. How is that, Mr. Holmes?"

"Well, Mr. Mac, it is very good and very clear so far as it goes. That is your end of the story. My end is that the 
crime was committed half an hour earlier than reported; that Mrs. Douglas and Barker are both in a conspiracy to 
conceal something; that they aided the murderer's escape--or at least that they reached the room before he escaped-- 
and that they fabricated evidence of his escape through the window, whereas in all probability they had themselves 
let him go by lowering the bridge. That's my reading of the first half."

The two detectives shook their heads.
"Well, Mr. Holmes, if this is true, we only tumble out of one mystery into another," said the London inspector.

"And in some ways a worse one," added White Mason. "The lady has never been in America in all her life. What possible connection could she have with an American assassin which would cause her to shelter him?"

"I freely admit the difficulties," said Holmes. "I propose to make a little investigation of my own to-night, and it is just possible that it may contribute something to the common cause."

"Can we help you, Mr. Holmes?"

"No, no! Darkness and Dr. Watson's umbrella--my wants are simple. And Ames, the faithful Ames, no doubt he will stretch a point for me. All my lines of thought lead me back invariably to the one basic question--why should an athletic man develop his frame upon so unnatural an instrument as a single dumb-bell?"

It was late that night when Holmes returned from his solitary excursion. We slept in a double-bedded room, which was the best that the little country inn could do for us. I was already asleep when I was partly awakened by his entrance.

"Well, Holmes," I murmured, "have you found anything out?"

He stood beside me in silence, his candle in his hand. Then the tall, lean figure inclined towards me. "I say, Watson," he whispered, "would you be afraid to sleep in the same room with a lunatic, a man with softening of the brain, an idiot whose mind has lost its grip?"

"Not in the least," I answered in astonishment.

"Ah, that's lucky," he said, and not another word would he utter that night.

Chapter 7 - The Solution

Next morning, after breakfast, we found Inspector MacDonald and White Mason seated in close consultation in the small parlour of the local police sergeant. On the table in front of them were piled a number of letters and telegrams, which they were carefully sorting and docketing. Three had been placed on one side.

"Still on the track of the elusive bicyclist?" Holmes asked cheerfully. "What is the latest news of the ruffian?"

MacDonald pointed ruefully to his heap of correspondence.

"He is at present reported from Leicester, Nottingham, Southampton, Derby, East Ham, Richmond, and fourteen other places. In three of them--East Ham, Leicester, and Liverpool--there is a clear case against him, and he has actually been arrested. The country seems to be full of the fugitives with yellow coats."

"Dear me!" said Holmes sympathetically. "Now, Mr. Mac and you, Mr. White Mason, I wish to give you a very earnest piece of advice. When I went into this case with you I bargained, as you will no doubt remember, that I should not present you with half-proved theories, but that I should retain and work out my own ideas until I had satisfied myself that they were correct. For this reason I am not at the present moment telling you all that is in my mind. On the other hand, I said that I would play the game fairly by you, and I do not think it is a fair game to allow you for one unnecessary moment to waste your energies upon a profitless task. Therefore I am here to advise you this morning, and my advice to you is summed up in three words--abandon the case."

MacDonald and White Mason stared in amazement at their celebrated colleague.

"You consider it hopeless!" cried the inspector.

"I consider your case to be hopeless. I do not consider that it is hopeless to arrive at the truth."

"But this cyclist. He is not an invention. We have his description, his valise, his bicycle. The fellow must be somewhere. Why should we not get him?"

"Yes, yes, no doubt he is somewhere, and no doubt we shall get him; but I would not have you waste your energies in East Ham or Liverpool. I am sure that we can find some shorter cut to a result."

"You are holding something back. It's hardly fair of you, Mr. Holmes." The inspector was annoyed.

"You know my methods of work, Mr. Mac. But I will hold it back for the shortest time possible. I only wish to verify my details in one way, which can very readily be done, and then I make my bow and return to London, leaving my results entirely at your service. I owe you too much to act otherwise; for in all my experience I cannot recall any more singular and interesting study."

"This is clean beyond me, Mr. Holmes. We saw you when we returned from Tunbridge Wells last night, and you were in general agreement with our results. What has happened since then to give you a completely new idea of the case?"

"Well, since you ask me, I spent, as I told you that I would, some hours last night at the Manor House."

"Well, what happened?"

"Ah, I can only give you a very general answer to that for the moment. By the way, I have been reading a short but clear and interesting account of the old building, purchasable at the modest sum of one penny from the local tobacconist."

Here Holmes drew a small tract, embellished with a rude engraving of the ancient Manor House, from his waistcoat pocket.
"It immensely adds to the zest of an investigation, my dear Mr. Mac, when one is in conscious sympathy with the historical atmosphere of one's surroundings. Don't look so impatient; for I assure you that even so bald an account as this raises some sort of picture of the past in one's mind. Permit me to give you a sample. Erected in the fifth year of the reign of James I, and standing upon the site of a much older building, the Manor House of Birlstone presents one of the finest surviving examples of the moated Jacobean residence--"

"You are making fools of us, Mr. Holmes!"

"Tut, tut, Mr. Mac!--the first sign of temper I have detected in you. Well, I won't read it verbatim, since you feel so strongly upon the subject. But when I tell you that there is some account of the taking of the place by a parliamentary colonel in 1644, of the concealment of Charles for several days in the course of the Civil War, and finally of a visit there by the second George, you will admit that there are various associations of interest connected with this ancient house."

"I don't doubt it, Mr. Holmes; but that is no business of ours."

"Is it not? Is it not? Breadth of view, my dear Mr. Mac, is one of the essentials of our profession. The interplay of ideas and the oblique uses of knowledge are often of extraordinary interest. You will excuse these remarks from one who, though a mere connoisseur of crime, is still rather older and perhaps more experienced than yourself."

"I'm the first to admit that," said the detective heartily. "You get to your point, I admit; but you have such a deuced round-the-corner way of doing it."

"Well, well, I'll drop past history and get down to present-day facts. I called last night, as I have already said, at the Manor House. I did not see either Barker or Mrs. Douglas. I saw no necessity to disturb them; but I was pleased to hear that the lady was not visibly pining and that she had partaken of an excellent dinner. My visit was specially made to the good Mr. Ames, with whom I exchanged some amiabilities, which culminated in his allowing me, without reference to anyone else, to sit alone for a time in the study."

"What! With that?" I ejaculated.

"No, no, everything is now in order. You gave permission for that, Mr. Mac, as I am informed. The room was in its normal state, and in it I passed an instructive quarter of an hour."

"What were you doing?"

"Well, not to make a mystery of so simple a matter, I was looking for the missing dumb-bell. It has always bulked rather large in my estimate of the case. I ended by finding it."

"Where?"

"Ah, there we come to the edge of the unexplored. Let me go a little further, a very little further, and I will promise that you shall share everything that I know."

"Well, we're bound to take you on your own terms," said the inspector; "but when it comes to telling us to abandon the case--why in the name of goodness should we abandon the case?"

"For the simple reason, my dear Mr. Mac, that you have not got the first idea what it is that you are investigating."

"We are investigating the murder of Mr. John Douglas of Birlstone Manor."

"Yes, yes, so you are. But don't trouble to trace the mysterious gentleman upon the bicycle. I assure you that it won't help you."

"Then what do you suggest that we do?"

"I will tell you exactly what to do, if you will do it."

"Well, I'm bound to say I've always found you had reason behind all your queer ways. I'll do what you advise."

"And you, Mr. White Mason?"

The country detective looked helplessly from one to the other. Holmes and his methods were new to him. "Well, if it is good enough for the inspector, it is good enough for me," he said at last.

"Capital!" said Holmes. "Well, then, I should recommend a nice, cheery country walk for both of you. They tell me that the views from Birlstone Ridge over the Weald are very remarkable. No doubt lunch could be got at some suitable hostelry; though my ignorance of the country prevents me from recommending one. In the evening, tired but happy--"

"Man, this is getting past a joke!" cried MacDonald, rising angrily from his chair.

"Well, well, spend the day as you like," said Holmes, patting him cheerfully upon the shoulder. "Do what you like and go where you will, but meet me here before dusk without fail--without fail, Mr. Mac."

"That sounds more like sanity."

"All of it was excellent advice; but I don't insist, so long as you are here when I need you. But now, before we part, I want you to write a note to Mr. Barker."

"Well?"

"I'll dictate it, if you like. Ready?
"Dear Sir:

"It has struck me that it is our duty to drain the moat, in the hope that we may find some--"

"It's impossible," said the inspector. "I've made inquiry."  

"Tut, tut! My dear sir, please do what I ask you."

"Well, go on."

"--in the hope that we may find something which may bear upon our investigation. I have made arrangements, and the workmen will be at work early to-morrow morning diverting the stream--"

"Impossible!"

"--diverting the stream; so I thought it best to explain matters beforehand."

"Now sign that, and send it by hand about four o'clock. At that hour we shall meet again in this room. Until then we may each do what we like; for I can assure you that this inquiry has come to a definite pause."

Evening was drawing in when we reassembled. Holmes was very serious in his manner, myself curious, and the detectives obviously critical and annoyed.

"Well, gentlemen," said my friend gravely, "I am asking you now to put everything to the test with me, and you will judge for yourselves whether the observations I have made justify the conclusions to which I have come. It is a chill evening, and I do not know how long our expedition may last; so I beg that you will wear your warmest coats. It is of the first importance that we should be in our places before it grows dark; so with your permission we shall get started at once."

We passed along the outer bounds of the Manor House park until we came to a place where there was a gap in the rails which fenced it. Through this we slipped, and then in the gathering gloom we followed Holmes until we had reached a shrubbery which lies nearly opposite to the main door and the drawbridge. The latter had not been raised. Holmes crouched down behind the screen of laurels, and we all three followed his example.

"Well, what are we to do now?" asked MacDonald with some gruffness.

"Possess our souls in patience and make as little noise as possible," Holmes answered.

"What are we here for at all? I really think that you might treat us with more frankness."

Holmes laughed. "Watson insists that I am the dramatist in real life," said he. "Some touch of the artist wells up within me, and calls insistently for a well-staged performance. Surely our profession, Mr. Mac, would be a drab and sordid one if we did not sometimes set the scene so as to glorify our results. The blunt accusation, the brutal tap upon the shoulder--what can one make of such a denouement? But the quick inference, the subtle trap, the clever forecast of coming events, the triumphant vindication of bold theories--are these not the pride and the justification of our life's work? At the present moment you thrill with the glamour of the situation and the anticipation of the hunt. Where would be that thrill if I had been as definite as a timetable? I only ask a little patience, Mr. Mac, and all will be clear to you."

"Well, I hope the pride and justification and the rest of it will come before we all get our death of cold," said the London detective with comic resignation.

We all had good reason to join in the aspiration; for our vigil was a long and bitter one. Slowly the shadows darkened over the long, sombre face of the old house. A cold, damp reek from the moat chilled us to the bones and set our teeth chattering. There was a single lamp over the gateway and a steady globe of light in the fatal study. Everything else was dark and still.

"How long is this to last?" asked the inspector finally. "And what is it we are watching for?"

"I have no more notion than you how long it is to last," Holmes answered with some asperity. "If criminals would always schedule their movements like railway trains, it would certainly be more convenient for all of us. As to what it is we--Well, THAT'S what we are watching for!"

As he spoke the bright, yellow light in the study was obscured by somebody passing to and fro before it. The laurels among which we lay were immediately opposite the window and not more than a hundred feet from it. Presently it was thrown open with a whining of hinges, and we could dimly see the dark outline of a man's head and shoulders looking out into the gloom. For some minutes he peered forth in furtive, stealthy fashion, as one who wishes to be assured that he is unobserved. Then he leaned forward, and in the intense silence we were aware of the soft lapping of agitated water. He seemed to be stirring up the moat with something which he held in his hand. Then suddenly he hauled something in as a fisherman lands a fish--some large, round object which obscured the light as it was dragged through the open casement.

"Now!" cried Holmes. "Now!"

We were all upon our feet, staggering after him with our stiffened limbs, while he ran swiftly across the bridge and rang violently at the bell. There was the rasping of bolts from the other side, and the amazed Ames stood in the entrance. Holmes brushed him aside without a word and, followed by all of us, rushed into the room which had been occupied by the man whom we had been watching.
The oil lamp on the table represented the glow which we had seen from outside. It was now in the hand of Cecil Barker, who held it towards us as we entered. Its light shone upon his strong, resolute, clean-shaved face and his menacing eyes.

"What the devil is the meaning of all this?" he cried. "What are you after, anyhow?"

Holmes took a swift glance round, and then pounced upon a sodden bundle tied together with cord which lay where it had been thrust under the writing table.

"This is what we are after, Mr. Barker--this bundle, weighted with a dumb-bell, which you have just raised from the bottom of the moat."

Barker stared at Holmes with amazement in his face. "How in thunder came you to know anything about it?" he asked.

"Simply that I put it there."

"You put it there! You!"

"Perhaps I should have said 'replaced it there,'" said Holmes. "You will remember, Inspector MacDonald, that I was somewhat struck by the absence of a dumb-bell. I drew your attention to it; but with the pressure of other events you had hardly the time to give it the consideration which would have enabled you to draw deductions from it. When water is near and a weight is missing it is not a very far-fetched supposition that something has been sunk in the water. The idea was at least worth testing; so with the help of Ames, who admitted me to the room, and the crook of Dr. Watson's umbrella, I was able last night to fish up and inspect this bundle.

"It was of the first importance, however, that we should be able to prove who placed it there. This we accomplished by the very obvious device of announcing that the moat would be dried to-morrow, which had, of course, the effect that whoever had hidden the bundle would most certainly withdraw it the moment that darkness enabled him to do so. We have no less than four witnesses as to who it was who took advantage of the opportunity, and so, Mr. Barker, I think the word lies now with you."

Sherlock Holmes put the sodden bundle upon the table beside the lamp and undid the cord which bound it. From within he extracted a dumb-bell, which he tossed down to its fellow in the corner. Next he drew forth a pair of boots. "American, as you perceive," he remarked, pointing to the toes. Then he laid upon the table a long, deadly, sheathed knife. Finally he unravelled a bundle of clothing, comprising a complete set of underclothes, socks, a gray tweed suit, and a short yellow overcoat.

"The clothes are commonplace," remarked Holmes, "save only the overcoat, which is full of suggestive touches." He held it tenderly towards the light. "Here, as you perceive, is the inner pocket prolonged into the lining in such fashion as to give ample space for the truncated fowling piece. The tailor's tab is on the neck--'Neal, Outfitter, Vermissa, U.S.A.' I have spent an instructive afternoon in the rector's library, and have enlarged my knowledge by adding the fact that Vermissa is a flourishing little town at the head of one of the best known coal and iron valleys in the United States. I have some recollection, Mr. Barker, that you associated the coal districts with Mr. Douglas's first wife, and it would surely not be too far-fetched an inference that the V.V. upon the card by the dead body might stand for Vermissa Valley, or that this very valley which sends forth emissaries of murder may be that Valley of Fear of which we have heard. So much is fairly clear. And now, Mr. Barker, I seem to be standing rather in the way of your explanation."

It was a sight to see Cecil Barker's expressive face during this exposition of the great detective. Anger, amazement, consternation, and indecision swept over it in turn. Finally he took refuge in a somewhat acrid irony.

"You know such a lot, Mr. Holmes, perhaps you had better tell us some more," he sneered.

"I have no doubt that I could tell you a great deal more, Mr. Barker; but it would come with a better grace from you."

"Oh, you think so, do you? Well, all I can say is that if there's any secret here it is not my secret, and I am not the man to give it away."

"Well, if you take that line, Mr. Barker," said the inspector quietly, "we must just keep you in sight until we have the warrant and can hold you."

"You can do what you damn please about that," said Barker defiantly.

The proceedings seemed to have come to a definite end so far as he was concerned; for one had only to look at that granite face to realize that no peine forte et dure would ever force him to plead against his will. The deadlock was broken, however, by a woman's voice. Mrs. Douglas had been standing listening at the half opened door, and now she entered the room.

"You have done enough for now, Cecil," said she. "Whatever comes of it in the future, you have done enough."

"Enough and more than enough," remarked Sherlock Holmes gravely. "I have every sympathy with you, madam, and should strongly urge you to have some confidence in the common sense of our jurisdiction and to take the police voluntarily into your complete confidence. It may be that I am myself at fault for not following up the hint which
you conveyed to me through my friend, Dr. Watson; but, at that time I had every reason to believe that you were directly concerned in the crime. Now I am assured that this is not so. At the same time, there is much that is unexplained, and I should strongly recommend that you ask Mr. Douglas to tell us his own story."

Mrs. Douglas gave a cry of astonishment at Holmes's words. The detectives and I must have echoed it, when we were aware of a man who seemed to have emerged from the wall, who advanced now from the gloom of the corner in which he had appeared. Mrs. Douglas turned, and in an instant her arms were round him. Barker had seized his outstretched hand.

"It's best this way, Jack," his wife repeated; "I am sure that it is best."

"Indeed, yes, Mr. Douglas," said Sherlock Holmes, "I am sure that you will find it best."

The man stood blinking at us with the dazed look of one who comes from the dark into the light. It was a remarkable face, bold gray eyes, a strong, short-clipped, grizzled moustache, a square, projecting chin, and a humorous mouth. He took a good look at us all, and then to my amazement he advanced to me and handed me a bundle of paper.

"I've heard of you," said he in a voice which was not quite English and not quite American, but was altogether mellow and pleasing. "You are the historian of this bunch. Well, Dr. Watson, you've never had such a story as that pass through your hands before, and I'll lay my last dollar on that. Tell it your own way; but there are the facts, and you can't miss the public so long as you have those. I've been cooped up two days, and I've spent the daylight hours-as much daylight as I could get in that rat trap--in putting the thing into words. You're welcome to them--you and your public. There's the story of the Valley of Fear."

"That's the past, Mr. Douglas," said Sherlock Holmes quietly. "What we desire now is to hear your story of the present."

"You'll have it, sir," said Douglas. "May I smoke as I talk? Well, thank you, Mr. Holmes. You're a smoker yourself, if I remember right, and you'll guess what it is to be sitting for two days with tobacco in your pocket and afraid that the smell will give you away." He leaned against the mantelpiece and sucked at the cigar which Holmes had handed him. "I've heard of you, Mr. Holmes. I never guessed that I should meet you. But before you are through with that," he nodded at my papers, "you will say I've brought you something fresh."

Inspector MacDonald had been staring at the newcomer with the greatest amazement. "Well, this fairly beats me!" he cried at last. "If you are Mr. John Douglas of Birlstone Manor, then whose death have we been investigating for these two days, and where in the world have you sprung from now? You seemed to me to come out of the floor like a jack-in-a-box."

"Ah, Mr. Mac," said Holmes, shaking a reproving forefinger, "you would not read that excellent local compilation which described the concealment of King Charles. People did not hide in those days without excellent hiding places, and the hiding place that has once been used may be again. I had persuaded myself that we should find Mr. Douglas under this roof."

"And how long have you been playing this trick upon us, Mr. Holmes?" said the inspector angrily. "How long have you allowed us to waste ourselves upon a search that you knew to be an absurd one?"

"Not one instant, my dear Mr. Mac. Only last night did I form my views of the case. As they could not be put to the proof until this evening, I invited you and your colleague to take a holiday for the day. Pray what more could I do? When I found the suit of clothes in the moat, it at once became apparent to me that the body we had found could not have been the body of Mr. John Douglas at all, but must be that of the bicyclist from Tunbridge Wells. No other conclusion was possible. Therefore I had to determine where Mr. John Douglas himself could be, and the balance of probability was that with the connivance of his wife and his friend he was concealed in a house which had such conveniences for a fugitive, and awaiting quieter times when he could make his final escape."

"Well, you figured it out about right," said Douglas approvingly. "I thought I'd dodge your British law; for I was not sure how I stood under it, and also I saw my chance to throw these hounds once for all off my track. Mind you, from first to last I have done nothing to be ashamed of, and nothing that I would not do again; but you'll judge that for yourselves when I tell you my story. Never mind warning me, Inspector: I'm ready to stand pat upon the truth."

"I'm not going to begin at the beginning. That's all there," he indicated my bundle of papers, "and a mighty queer yarn you'll find it. It all comes down to this: That there are some men that have good cause to hate me and would give their last dollar to know that they had got me. So long as I am alive and they are alive, there is no safety in this world for me. They hunted me from Chicago to California, then they chased me out of America; but when I married and settled down in this quiet spot I thought my last years were going to be peaceable.

"I never explained to my wife how things were. Why should I pull her into it? She would never have a quiet life. She told you all she knew, and so did Barker here; for on the night when this thing happened there was mighty little
time for explanations. She knows everything now, and I would have been a wiser man if I had told her sooner. But it was a hard question, dear," he took her hand for an instant in his own, "and I acted for the best.

"Well, gentlemen, the day before these happenings I was over in Tunbridge Wells, and I got a glimpse of a man in the street. It was only a glimpse; but I have a quick eye for these things, and I never doubted who it was. It was the worst enemy I had among them all--one who has been after me like a hungry wolf after a caribou all these years. I knew there was trouble coming, and I came home and made ready for it. I guessed I'd fight through it all right on my own, my luck was a proverb in the States about '76. I never doubted that it would be with me still.

"I was on my guard all that next day, and never went out into the park. It's as well, or he'd have had the drop on me with that buckshot gun of his before ever I could draw on him. After the bridge was up--my mind was always more restful when that bridge was up in the evenings--I put the thing clear out of my head. I never dreamed of his getting into the house and waiting for me. But when I made my round in my dressing gown, as was my habit, I had no sooner entered the study than I scented danger. I guess when a man has had dangers in his life--and I've had more than most in my time--there is a kind of sixth sense that waves the red flag. I saw the signal clear enough, and yet I couldn't tell you why. Next instant I spotted a boot under the window curtain, and then I saw why plain enough.

"I'd just the one candle that was in my hand; but there was a good light from the hall lamp through the open door. I put down the candle and jumped for a hammer that I'd left on the mantle. At the same moment he sprang at me. I saw the glint of a knife, and I lashed at him with the hammer. I got him somewhere; for the knife tinkled down on the floor. He dodged round the table as quick as an eel, and a moment later he'd got his gun from under his coat. I heard him cock it; but I had got hold of it before he could fire. I had it by the barrel, and we wrestled for it all ends up for a minute or more. It was death to the man that lost his grip.

"He never lost his grip; but he got it butt downward for a moment too long. Maybe it was I that pulled the trigger. Maybe we just jolted it off between us. Anyhow, he got both barrels in the face, and there I was, staring down at all that was left of Ted Baldwin. I'd recognized him in the township, and again when he sprang for me; but his own mother wouldn't recognize him as I saw him then. I'm used to rough work; but I fairly turned sick at the sight of him.

"I was hanging on the side of the table when Barker came hurrying down. I heard my wife coming, and I ran to the door and stopped her. It was no sight for a woman. I promised I'd come to her soon. I said a word or two to Barker--he took it all in at a glance--and we waited for the rest to come along. But there was no sign of them. Then we understood that they could hear nothing, and that all that had happened was known only to ourselves.

"It was at that instant that the idea came to me. I was fairly dazzled by the brilliance of it. The man's sleeve had slipped up and there was the branded mark of the lodge upon his forearm. See here!"

The man whom we had known as Douglas turned up his own coat and cuff to show a brown triangle within a circle exactly like that which we had seen upon the dead man.

"It was the sight of that which started me on it. I seemed to see it all clear at a glance. There were his height and hair and figure, about the same as my own. No one could swear to his face, poor devil! I brought down this suit of clothes, and in a quarter of an hour Barker and I had put my dressing gown on him and he lay as you found him. We tied all his things into a bundle, and I weighted them with the only weight I could find and put them through the window. The card he had meant to lay upon my body was lying beside his own.

"My rings were put on his finger; but when it came to the wedding ring," he held out his muscular hand, "you can see for yourselves that I had struck the limit. I have not moved it since the day I was married, and it would have taken a file to get it off. I don't know, anyhow, that I should have cared to part with it; but if I had wanted to I couldn't. So we just had to leave that detail and take care of itself. On the other hand, I brought a bit of plaster down and put it where I am wearing one myself at this instant. You slipped up there, Mr. Holmes, clever as you are; for if you had chanced to take off that plaster you would have found no cut underneath it.

"Well, that was the situation. If I could lie low for a while and then get away where I could be joined by my 'widow' we should have a chance at last of living in peace for the rest of our lives. These devils would give me no rest so long as I was above ground; but if they saw in the papers that Baldwin had got his man, there would be an end of all my troubles. I hadn't much time to make it all clear to Barker and to my wife; but they understood enough to be able to help me. I knew all about this hiding place, so did Ames; but it never entered his head to connect it with the matter. I retired into it, and it was up to Barker to do the rest.

"I guess you can fill in for yourselves what he did. He opened the window and made the mark on the sill to give an idea of how the murderer escaped. It was a tall order, that; but as the bridge was up there was no other way. Then, when everything was fixed, he rang the bell for all he was worth. What happened afterward you know. And so, gentlemen, you can do what you please; but I've told you the truth and the whole truth, so help me God! What I ask you now is how do I stand by the English law?"

There was a silence which was broken by Sherlock Holmes.
"The English law is in the main a just law. You will get no worse than your deserts from that, Mr. Douglas. But I would ask you how did this man know that you lived here, or how to get into your house, or where to hide to get you?"

"I know nothing of this."

Holmes's face was very white and grave. "The story is not over yet, I fear," said he. "You may find worse dangers than the English law, or even than your enemies from America. I see trouble before you, Mr. Douglas. You'll take my advice and still be on your guard."

And now, my long-suffering readers, I will ask you to come away with me for a time, far from the Sussex Manor House of Birlstone, and far also from the year of grace in which we made our eventful journey which ended with the strange story of the man who had been known as John Douglas. I wish you to journey back some twenty years in time, and westward some thousands of miles in space, that I may lay before you a singular and terrible narrative--so singular and so terrible that you may find it hard to believe that even as I tell it, even so did it occur.

Do not think that I intrude one story before another is finished. As you read on you will find that this is not so. And when I have detailed those distant events and you have solved this mystery of the past, we shall meet once more in those rooms on Baker Street, where this, like so many other wonderful happenings, will find its end.

Part 2 - The Scowrers
Chapter 1 - The Man

It was the fourth of February in the year 1875. It had been a severe winter, and the snow lay deep in the gorges of the Gilmerton Mountains. The steam ploughs had, however, kept the railroad open, and the evening train which connects the long line of coal-mining and iron-working settlements was slowly groaning its way up the steep gradients which lead from Stagville on the plain to Vermissa, the central township which lies at the head of Vermissa Valley. From this point the track sweeps downward to Bartons Crossing, Helmdale, and the purely agricultural county of Merton. It was a single track railroad; but at every siding--and they were numerous--long lines of trucks piled with coal and iron ore told of the hidden wealth which had brought a rude population and a bustling life to this most desolate corner of the United States of America.

For desolate it was! Little could the first pioneer who had traversed it have ever imagined that the fairest prairies and the most lush water pastures were valueless compared to this gloomy land of black crag and tangled forest. Above the dark and often scarcely penetrable woods upon their flanks, the high, bare crowns of the mountains, white snow, and jagged rock towered upon each flank, leaving a long, winding, tortuous valley in the centre. Up this the little train was slowly crawling.

The oil lamps had just been lit in the leading passenger car, a long, bare carriage in which some twenty or thirty people were seated. The greater number of these were workmen returning from their day's toil in the lower part of the valley. At least a dozen, by their grimed faces and the safety lanterns which they carried, proclaimed themselves miners. These sat smoking in a group and conversed in low voices, glancing occasionally at two men on the opposite side of the car, whose uniforms and badges showed them to be policemen.

Several women of the labouring class and one or two travellers who might have been small local storekeepers made up the rest of the company, with the exception of one young man in a corner by himself. It is with this man that we are concerned. Take a good look at him; for he is worth it.

He is a fresh-complexioned, middle-sized young man, not far, one would guess, from his thirtieth year. He has large, shrewd, humorous gray eyes which twinkle inquiringly from time to time as he looks round through his spectacles at the people about him. It is easy to see that he is of a sociable and possibly simple disposition, anxious to be friendly to all men. Anyone could pick him at once as gregarious in his habits and communicative in his nature, with a quick wit and a ready smile. And yet the man who studied him more closely might discern a certain firmness of jaw and grim tightness about the lips which would warn him that there were depths beyond, and that this pleasant, brown-haired young Irishman might conceivably leave his mark for good or evil upon any society to which he was introduced.

Having made one or two tentative remarks to the nearest miner, and receiving only short, gruff replies, the traveller resigned himself to uncongenial silence, staring moodily out of the window at the fading landscape.

It was not a cheering prospect. Through the growing gloom there pulsed the red glow of the furnaces on the sides of the hills. Great heaps of slag and dumps of cinders loomed up on each side, with the high shafts of the collieries towering above them. Huddled groups of mean, wooden houses, the windows of which were beginning to outline themselves in light, were scattered here and there along the line, and the frequent halting places were crowded with their swarthy inhabitants.

The iron and coal valleys of the Vermissa district were no resorts for the leisured or the cultured. Everywhere there were stern signs of the crudest battle of life, the rude work to be done, and the rude, strong workers who did it.

The young traveller gazed out into this dismal country with a face of mingled repulsion and interest, which
showed that the scene was new to him. At intervals he drew from his pocket a bulky letter to which he referred, and on the margins of which he scribbled some notes. Once from the back of his waist he produced something which one would hardly have expected to find in the possession of so mild-mannered a man. It was a navy revolver of the largest size. As he turned it slantwise to the light, the glint upon the rims of the copper shells within the drum showed that it was fully loaded. He quickly restored it to his secret pocket, but not before it had been observed by a working man who had seated himself upon the adjoining bench.

"Hullo, mate!" said he. "You seem heeled and ready."
The young man smiled with an air of embarrassment.
"Yes," said he, "we need them sometimes in the place I come from."
"And where may that be?"
"I'm last from Chicago."
"A stranger in these parts?"
"Yes."
"You may find you need it here," said the workman.
"Ah! is that so?" The young man seemed interested.
"Have you heard nothing of doings hereabouts?"
"Nothing out of the way."
"Why, I thought the country was full of it. You'll hear quick enough. What made you come here?"
"I heard there was always work for a willing man."
"Are you a member of the union?"
"Sure."
"Then you'll get your job, I guess. Have you any friends?"
"Not yet; but I have the means of making them."
"How's that, then?"
"I am one of the Eminent Order of Freemen. There's no town without a lodge, and where there is a lodge I'll find my friends."
The remark had a singular effect upon his companion. He glanced round suspiciously at the others in the car. The miners were still whispering among themselves. The two police officers were dozing. He came across, seated himself close to the young traveller, and held out his hand.
"Put it there," he said.
A hand-grip passed between the two.
"I see you speak the truth," said the workman. "But it's well to make certain." He raised his right hand to his right eyebrow. The traveller at once raised his left hand to his left eyebrow.
"Dark nights are unpleasant," said the workman.
"Yes, for strangers to travel," the other answered.
"That's good enough. I'm Brother Scanlan, Lodge 341, Vermissa Valley. Glad to see you in these parts."
"Thank you. I'm Brother John McMurdo, Lodge 29, Chicago. Bodymaster J.H. Scott. But I am in luck to meet a brother so early."
"Well, there are plenty of us about. You won't find the order more flourishing anywhere in the States than right here in Vermissa Valley. But we could do with some lads like you. I can't understand a spry man of the union finding no work to do in Chicago."
"I found plenty of work to do," said McMurdo.
"Then why did you leave?"
McMurdo nodded towards the policemen and smiled. "I guess those chaps would be glad to know," he said. Scanlan groaned sympathetically. "In trouble?" he asked in a whisper.
"Deep."
"A penitentiary job?"
"And the rest."
"Not a killing!"
"It's early days to talk of such things," said McMurdo with the air of a man who had been surprised into saying more than he intended. "I've my own good reasons for leaving Chicago, and let that be enough for you. Who are you that you should take it on yourself to ask such things?" His gray eyes gleamed with sudden and dangerous anger from behind his glasses.
"All right, mate, no offense meant. The boys will think none the worse of you, whatever you may have done. Where are you bound for now?"
"Vermissa."
"That's the third halt down the line. Where are you staying?"

McMurdo took out an envelope and held it close to the murky oil lamp. "Here is the address--Jacob Shafter, Sheridan Street. It's a boarding house that was recommended by a man I knew in Chicago."

"Well, I don't know it; but Vermissa is out of my beat. I live at Hobson's Patch, and that's here where we are drawing up. But, say, there's one bit of advice I'll give you before we part: If you're in trouble in Vermissa, go straight to the Union House and see Boss McGinty. He is the Bodymaster of Vermissa Lodge, and nothing can happen in these parts unless Black Jack McGinty wants it. So long, mate! Maybe we'll meet in lodge one of these evenings. But mind my words: If you are in trouble, go to Boss McGinty."

Scanlan descended, and McMurdo was left once again to his thoughts. Night had now fallen, and the flames of the frequent furnaces were roaring and leaping in the darkness. Against their lurid background dark figures were bending and straining, twisting and turning, with the motion of winch or of windlass, to the rhythm of an eternal clank and roar.

"I guess hell must look something like that," said a voice.

McMurdo turned and saw that one of the policemen had shifted in his seat and was staring out into the fiery waste.

"For that matter," said the other policeman, "I allow that hell must BE something like that. If there are worse devils down yonder than some we could name, it's more than I'd expect. I guess you are new to this part, young man?"

"Well, what if I am?" McMurdo answered in a surly voice.

"Just this, mister, that I should advise you to be careful in choosing your friends. I don't think I'd begin with Mike Scanlan or his gang if I were you."

"What the hell is it to you who are my friends?" roared McMurdo in a voice which brought every head in the carriage round to witness the altercation. "Did I ask you for your advice, or did you think me such a sucker that I couldn't move without it? You speak when you are spoken to, and by the Lord you'd have to wait a long time if it was me!" He thrust out his face and grinned at the patrolmen like a snarling dog.

The two policemen, heavy, good-natured men, were taken aback by the extraordinary vehemence with which their friendly advances had been rejected.

"No offense, stranger," said one. "It was a warning for your own good, seeing that you are, by your own showing, new to the place."

"I'm new to the place; but I'm not new to you and your kind!" cried McMurdo in cold fury. "I guess you're the same in all places, shoving your advice in when nobody asks for it."

"Maybe we'll see more of you before very long," said one of the patrolmen with a grin. "You're a real hand-picked one, if I am a judge."

"I was thinking the same," remarked the other. "I guess we may meet again."

"I'm not afraid of you, and don't you think it!" cried McMurdo. "My name's Jack McMurdo--see? If you want me, you'll find me at Jacob Shafter's on Sheridan Street, Vermissa; so I'm not hiding from you, am I? Day or night I dare to look the like of you in the face--don't make any mistake about that!"

There was a murmur of sympathy and admiration from the miners at the dauntless demeanour of the newcomer, while the two policemen shrugged their shoulders and renewed a conversation between themselves.

A few minutes later the train ran into the ill-lit station, and there was a general clearing; for Vermissa was by far the largest town on the line. McMurdo picked up his leather gripsack and was about to start off into the darkness, when one of the miners accosted him.

"By Gar, mate! you know how to speak to the cops," he said in a voice of awe. "It was grand to hear you. Let me carry your grip and show you the road. I'm passing Shafter's on the way to my own shack."

There was a chorus of friendly "Good-nights" from the other miners as they passed from the platform. Before ever he had set foot in it, McMurdo the turbulent had become a character in Vermissa.

The country had been a place of terror; but the town was in its way even more depressing. Down that long valley there was at least a certain gloomy grandeur in the huge fires and the clouds of drifting smoke, while the strength and industry of man found fitting monuments in the hills which he had spilled by the side of his monstrous excavations. But the town showed a dead level of mean ugliness and squalor. The broad street was churned up by the traffic into a horrible rutted paste of muddy snow. The sidewalks were narrow and uneven. The numerous gas-lamps served only to show more clearly a long line of wooden houses, each with its veranda facing the street, unkempt and dirty.

As they approached the centre of the town the scene was brightened by a row of well-lit stores, and even more by a cluster of saloons and gaming houses, in which the miners spent their hard-earned but generous wages. "That's the Union House," said the guide, pointing to one saloon which rose almost to the dignity of being a
hotel. "Jack McGinty is the boss there."

"What sort of a man is he?" McMurdo asked.

"What! have you never heard of the boss?"

"How could I have heard of him when you know that I am a stranger in these parts?"

"Well, I thought his name was known clear across the country. It's been in the papers often enough."

"What for?"

"Well," the miner lowered his voice--"over the affairs."

"What affairs?"

"Good Lord, mister! you are queer, if I must say it without offense. There's only one set of affairs that you'll hear of in these parts, and that's the affairs of the Scowrers."

"Why, I seem to have read of the Scowrers in Chicago. A gang of murderers, are they not?"

"Hush, on your life!" cried the miner, standing still in alarm, and gazing in amazement at his companion. "Man, you won't live long in these parts if you speak in the open street like that. Many a man has had the life beaten out of him for less."

"Well, I know nothing about them. It's only what I have read."

"And I'm not saying that you have not read the truth." The man looked nervously round him as he spoke, peering into the shadows as if he feared to see some lurking danger. "If killing is murder, then God knows there is murder and to spare. But don't you dare to breathe the name of Jack McGinty in connection with it, stranger; for every whisper goes back to him, and he is not one that is likely to let it pass. Now, that's the house you're after, that one standing back from the street. You'll find old Jacob Shafter that runs it as honest a man as lives in this township."

"I thank you," said McMurdo, and shaking hands with his new acquaintance he plodded, gripsack in hand, up the path which led to the dwelling house, at the door of which he gave a resounding knock.

It was opened at once by someone very different from what he had expected. It was a woman, young and singularly beautiful. She was of the German type, blonde and fair-haired, with the piquant contrast of a pair of beautiful dark eyes with which she surveyed the stranger with surprise and a pleasing embarrassment which brought a wave of colour over her pale face. Framed in the bright light of the open doorway, it seemed to McMurdo that he had never seen a more beautiful picture; the more attractive for its contrast with the sordid and gloomy surroundings. A lovely violet growing upon one of those black slag-heaps of the mines would not have seemed more surprising. So entranced was he that he stood staring without a word, and it was she who broke the silence.

"I thought it was father," said she with a pleasing little touch of a German accent. "Did you come to see him? He is down town. I expect him back every minute."

McMurdo continued to gaze at her in open admiration until her eyes dropped in confusion before this masterful visitor.

"No, miss," he said at last, "I'm in no hurry to see him. But your house was recommended to me for board. I thought it might suit me--and now I know it will."

"You are quick to make up your mind," said she with a smile.

"Anyone but a blind man could do as much," the other answered.

She laughed at the compliment. "Come right in, sir," she said. "I'm Miss Ettie Shafter, Mr. Shafter's daughter. My mother's dead, and I run the house. You can sit down by the stove in the front room until father comes along--Ah, here he is! So you can fix things with him right away."

A heavy, elderly man came plodding up the path. In a few words McMurdo explained his business. A man of the name of Murphy had given him the address in Chicago. He in turn had had it from someone else. Old Shafter was quite ready. The stranger made no bones about terms, agreed at once to every condition, and was apparently fairly flush of money. For seven dollars a week paid in advance he was to have board and lodging.

So it was that McMurdo, the self-confessed fugitive from justice, took up his abode under the roof of the Shafters, the first step which was to lead to so long and dark a train of events, ending in a far distant land.

Chapter 2 - The Bodymaster

McMurdo was a man who made his mark quickly. Wherever he was the folk around soon knew it. Within a week he had become infinitely the most important person at Shafter's. There were ten or a dozen boarders there; but they were honest foremen or commonplace clerks from the stores, of a very different calibre from the young Irishman. Of an evening when they gathered together his joke was always the readiest, his conversation the brightest, and his song the best. He was a born boon companion, with a magnetism which drew good humour from all around him.

And yet he showed again and again, as he had shown in the railway carriage, a capacity for sudden, fierce anger, which compelled the respect and even the fear of those who met him. For the law, too, and all who were connected with it, he exhibited a bitter contempt which delighted some and alarmed others of his fellow boarders.
From the first he made it evident, by his open admiration, that the daughter of the house had won his heart from the instant that he had set eyes upon her beauty and her grace. He was no backward suitor. On the second day he told her that he loved her, and from then onward he repeated the same story with an absolute disregard of what she might say to discourage him.

"Someone else?" he would cry. "Well, the worse luck for someone else! Let him look out for himself! Am I to lose my life's chance and all my heart's desire for someone else? You can keep on saying no, Ettie: the day will come when you will say yes, and I'm young enough to wait."

He was a dangerous suitor, with his glib Irish tongue, and his pretty, coaxing ways. There was about him also that glamour of experience and of mystery which attracts a woman's interest, and finally her love. He could talk of the sweet valleys of County Monaghan from which he came, of the lovely, distant island, the low hills and green meadows of which seemed the more beautiful when imagination viewed them from this place of grime and snow.

Then he was versed in the life of the cities of the North, of Detroit, and the lumber camps of Michigan, and finally of Chicago, where he had worked in a planing mill. And afterwards came the hint of romance, the feeling that strange things had happened to him in that great city, so strange and so intimate that they might not be spoken of. He spoke wistfully of a sudden leaving, a breaking of old ties, a flight into a strange world, ending in this dreary valley, and Ettie listened, her dark eyes gleaming with pity and with sympathy--those two qualities which may turn so rapidly and so naturally to love.

McMurdo had obtained a temporary job as bookkeeper for he was a well-educated man. This kept him out most of the day, and he had not found occasion yet to report himself to the head of the lodge of the Eminent Order of Freemen. He was reminded of his omission, however, by a visit one evening from Mike Scanlan, the fellow member whom he had met in the train. Scanlan, the small, sharp-faced, nervous, black-eyed man, seemed glad to see him once more. After a glass or two of whisky he broached the object of his visit.

"Say, McMurdo," said he, "I remembered your address, so I made bold to call. I'm surprised that you've not reported to the Bodymaster. Why haven't you seen Boss McGinty yet?"

"Well, I had to find a job. I have been busy."

"You must find time for him if you have none for anything else. Good Lord, man! you're a fool not to have been down to the Union House and registered your name the first morning after you came here! If you run against him--well, you mustn't, that's all!"

McMurdo showed mild surprise. "I've been a member of the lodge for over two years, Scanlan, but I never heard that duties were so pressing as all that."

"Maybe not in Chicago."

"Well, it's the same society here."

"Is it?"

Scanlan looked at him long and fixedly. There was something sinister in his eyes.

"Isn't it?"

"You'll tell me that in a month's time. I hear you had a talk with the patrolmen after I left the train."

"How did you know that?"

"Oh, it got about--things do get about for good and for bad in this district."

"Well, yes. I told the hounds what I thought of them."

"By the Lord, you'll be a man after McGinty's heart!"

"What, does he hate the police too?"

Scanlan burst out laughing. "You go and see him, my lad," said he as he took his leave. "It's not the police but you that he'll hate if you don't! Now, take a friend's advice and go at once!"

It chanced that on the same evening McMurdo had another more pressing interview which urged him in the same direction. It may have been that his attentions to Ettie had been more evident than before, or that they had gradually obtruded themselves into the slow mind of his good German host; but, whatever the cause, the boarding-house keeper beckoned the young man into his private room and started on the subject without any circumlocution.

"It seems to me, mister," said he, "that you are gettin' set on my Ettie. Ain't that so, or am I wrong?"

"Yes, that is so," the young man answered.

"Vell, I vant to tell you right now that it ain't no manner of use. There's someone slipped in afore you."

"She told me so."

"Vell, you can lay that she told you truth. But did she tell you who it vas?"

"No, I asked her; but she wouldn't tell."

"I dare say not, the leetle baggage! Perhaps she did not vish to frighten you away."

"Frighten!" McMurdo was on fire in a moment.

"Ah, yes, my friend! You need not be ashamed to be frightened of him. It is Teddy Baldwin."
"And who the devil is he?"
"He is a boss of Scowrers."
"Scowrers! I've heard of them before. It's Scowrers here and Scowrers there, and always in a whisper! What are you all afraid of? Who are the Scowrers?"

The boarding-house keeper instinctively sank his voice, as everyone did who talked about that terrible society.

"The Scowrers," said he, "are the Eminent Order of Freemen!"

The young man stared. "Why, I am a member of that order myself."

"You! I vould never have had you in my house if I had known it--not if you were to pay me a hundred dollar a week."

"What's wrong with the order? It's for charity and good fellowship. The rules say so."
"Maybe in some places. Not here!"
"What is it here?"
"It's a murder society, that's vat it is." McMurdo laughed incredulously. "How can you prove that?" he asked.

"Prove it! Are there not fifty murders to prove it? Vat about Milman and Van Shorst, and the Nicholson family, and old Mr. Hyam, and little Billy James, and the others? Prove it! Is there a man or a woman in this valley vat does not know it?"

"See here!" said McMurdo earnestly. "I want you to take back what you've said, or else make it good. One or the other you must do before I quit this room. Put yourself in my place. Here am I, a stranger in the town. I belong to a society that I know only as an innocent one. You'll find it through the length and breadth of the States, but always as an innocent one. Now, when I am counting upon joining it here, you tell me that it is the same as a murder society called the Scowrers. I guess you owe me either an apology or else an explanation, Mr. Shafter."

"I can but tell you vat the whole world knows, mister. The bosses of the one are the bosses of the other. If you offend the one, it is the other vat vill strike you. We have proved it too often."

"That's just gossip--I want proof!" said McMurdo. 

"If you live here long you vill get your proof. But I forget that you are yourself one of them. You vill soon be as bad as the rest. But you vill find other lodgings, mister. I cannot have you here. Is it not bad enough that one of these people come courting my Ettie, and that I dare not turn him down, but that I should have another for my boarder? Yes, indeed, you shall not sleep here after to-night!"

McMurdo found himself under sentence of banishment both from his comfortable quarters and from the girl whom he loved. He found her alone in the sitting-room that same evening, and he poured his troubles into her ear.

"Sure, your father is after giving me notice," he said. "It's little I would care if it was just my room, but indeed, Ettie, though it's only a week that I've known you, you are the very breath of life to me, and I can't live without you!"

"Oh, hush, Mr. McMurdo, don't speak so!" said the girl. "I have told you, have I not, that you are too late? There is another, and if I have not promised to marry him at once, at least I can promise no one else."

"Suppose I had been first, Ettie, would I have had a chance?"

The girl sank her face into her hands. "I wish to heaven that you had been first!" she sobbed. McMurdo was down on his knees before her in an instant. "For God's sake, Ettie, let it stand at that!" he cried.

"Will you ruin your life and my own for the sake of this promise? Follow your heart, acushla! 'Tis a safer guide than any promise before you knew what it was that you were saying."

He had seized Ettie's white hand between his own strong brown ones.

"Say that you will be mine, and we will face it out together!"

"Not here?"

"Yes, here."

"No, no, Jack!" His arms were round her now. "It could not be here. Could you take me away?"

A struggle passed for a moment over McMurdo's face; but it ended by setting like granite. "No, here," he said.

"I'll hold you against the world, Ettie, right here where we are!"

"Why should we not leave together?"

"No, Ettie, I can't leave here."

"But why?"

"I'd never hold my head up again if I felt that I had been driven out. Besides, what is there to be afraid of? Are we not free folks in a free country? If you love me, and I you, who will dare to come between?"

"You don't know, Jack. You've been here too short a time. You don't know this Baldwin. You don't know McGinty and his Scowrers."

"No, I don't know them, and I don't fear them, and I don't believe in them!" said McMurdo. "I've lived among
rough men, my darling, and instead of fearing them it has always ended that they have feared me--always, Ettie. It's
mad on the face of it! If these men, as your father says, have done crime after crime in the valley, and if everyone
knows them by name, how comes it that none are brought to justice? You answer me that, Ettie!"
"Because no witness dares to appear against them. He would not live a month if he did. Also because they have
always their own men to swear that the accused one was far from the scene of the crime. But surely, Jack, you must
have read all this. I had understood that every paper in the United States was writing about it."
"Well, I have read something, it is true; but I had thought it was a story. Maybe these men have some reason in
what they do. Maybe they are wronged and have no other way to help themselves."
"Oh, Jack, don't let me hear you speak so! That is how he speaks--the other one!"
"Baldwin--he speaks like that, does he?"
"And that is why I loathe him so. Oh, Jack, now I can tell you the truth. I loathe him with all my heart; but I fear
him also. I fear him for myself; but above all I fear him for father. I know that some great sorrow would come upon
us if I dared to say what I really felt. That is why I have put him off with half-promises. It was in real truth our only
hope. But if you would fly with me, Jack, we could take father with us and live forever far from the power of these
wicked men."

Again there was the struggle upon McMurdo's face, and again it set like granite. "No harm shall come to you,
Ettie--nor to your father either. As to wicked men, I expect you may find that I am as bad as the worst of them
before we're through."
"No, no, Jack! I would trust you anywhere."
McMurdo laughed bitterly. "Good Lord! how little you know of me! Your innocent soul, my darling, could not
even guess what is passing in mine. But, hullo, who's the visitor?"
The door had opened suddenly, and a young fellow came swaggering in with the air of one who is the master. He
was a handsome, dashing young man of about the same age and build as McMurdo himself. Under his broad-
brimmed black felt hat, which he had not troubled to remove, a handsome face with fierce, domineering eyes and a
curved hawk-bill of a nose looked savagely at the pair who sat by the stove.

Ettie had jumped to her feet full of confusion and alarm. "I'm glad to see you, Mr. Baldwin," said she. "You're
earlier than I had thought. Come and sit down."

Baldwin stood with his hands on his hips looking at McMurdo. "Who is this?" he asked curtly.
"It's a friend of mine, Mr. Baldwin, a new boarder here. Mr. McMurdo, may I introduce you to Mr. Baldwin?"
The young men nodded in surly fashion to each other.

"Maybe Miss Ettie has told you how it is with us?" said Baldwin.
"I didn't understand that there was any relation between you."
"Didn't you? Well, you can understand it now. You can take it from me that this young lady is mine, and you'll
find it a very fine evening for a walk."

"Thank you, I am in no humour for a walk."
"Aren't you?" The man's savage eyes were blazing with anger. "Maybe you are in a humour for a fight, Mr.
Boarder!"
"That I am!" cried McMurdo, springing to his feet. "You never said a more welcome word."
"For God's sake, Jack! Oh, for God's sake!" cried poor, distracted Ettie. "Oh, Jack, Jack, he will hurt you!"
"Oh, it's Jack, is it?" said Baldwin with an oath. "You've come to that already, have you?"
"Oh, Ted, be reasonable--be kind! For my sake, Ted, if ever you loved me, be big-hearted and forgiving!"

"I think, Ettie, that if you were to leave us alone we could get this thing settled," said McMurdo quietly. "Or
maybe, Mr. Baldwin, you will take a turn down the street with me. It's a fine evening, and there's some open ground
beyond the next block."
"I'll get even with you without needing to dirty my hands," said his enemy. "You'll wish you had never set foot
in this house before I am through with you!"
"No time like the present," cried McMurdo.

"I'll choose my own time, mister. You can leave the time to me. See here!" He suddenly rolled up his sleeve and
showed upon his forearm a peculiar sign which appeared to have been branded there. It was a circle with a triangle
within it. "D'you know what that means?"
"I neither know nor care!"

"Well, you will know, I'll promise you that. You won't be much older, either. Perhaps Miss Ettie can tell you
something about it. As to you, Ettie, you'll come back to me on your knees--d'ye hear, girl?--on your knees--and
then I'll tell you what your punishment may be. You've sowed--and by the Lord, I'll see that you reap!" He glanced
at them both in fury. Then he turned upon his heel, and an instant later the outer door had banged behind him.

For a few moments McMurdo and the girl stood in silence. Then she threw her arms around him.
"Oh, Jack, how brave you were! But it is no use, you must fly! To-night--Jack--to-night! It's your only hope. He will have your life. I read it in his horrible eyes. What chance have you against a dozen of them, with Boss McGinty and all the power of the lodge behind them?"

McMurdo disengaged her hands, kissed her, and gently pushed her back into a chair. "There, acushla, there! Don't be disturbed or fear for me. I'm a Freeman myself. I'm after telling your father about it. Maybe I am no better than the others; so don't make a saint of me. Perhaps you hate me too, now that I've told you as much?"

"Hate you, Jack? While life lasts I could never do that! I've heard that there is no harm in being a Freeman anywhere but here; so why should I think the worse of you for that? But if you are a Freeman, Jack, why should you not go down and make a friend of Boss McGinty? Oh, hurry, Jack, hurry! Get your word in first, or the hounds will be on your trail."

"I was thinking the same thing," said McMurdo. "I'll go right now and fix it. You can tell your father that I'll sleep here to-night and find some other quarters in the morning."

The bar of McGinty's saloon was crowded as usual; for it was the favourite loafing place of all the rougher elements of the town. The man was popular; for he had a rough, jovial disposition which formed a mask, covering a great deal which lay behind it. But apart from this popularity, the fear in which he was held throughout the township, and indeed down the whole thirty miles of the valley and past the mountains on each side of it, was enough in itself to fill his bar; for none could afford to neglect his good will.

Besides those secret powers which it was universally believed that he exercised in so pitiless a fashion, he was a high public official, a municipal councillor, and a commissioner of roads, elected to the office through the votes of the ruffians who in turn expected to receive favours at his hands. Assessments and taxes were enormous; the public works were notoriously neglected, the accounts were slurred over by bribed auditors, and the decent citizen was terrorized into paying public blackmail, and holding his tongue lest some worse thing befell him.

Thus it was that, year by year, Boss McGinty's diamond pins became more obtrusive, his gold chains more weighty across a more gorgeous vest, and his saloon stretched farther and farther, until it threatened to absorb one whole side of the Market Square.

McMurdo pushed open the swinging door of the saloon and made his way amid the crowd of men within, through an atmosphere blurred with tobacco smoke and heavy with the smell of spirits. The place was brilliantly lighted, and the huge, heavily gilt mirrors upon every wall reflected and multiplied the garish illumination. There were several bartenders in their shirt sleeves, hard at work mixing drinks for the loungers who fringed the broad, brass-trimmed counter.

At the far end, with his body resting upon the bar and a cigar stuck at an acute angle from the corner of his mouth, stood a tall, strong, heavily built man who could be none other than the famous McGinty himself. He was a black-haired giant, bearded to the cheek-bones, and with a shock of raven hair which fell to his collar. His complexion was as swarthy as that of an Italian, and his eyes were of a strange dead black, which, combined with a slight squint, gave them a particularly sinister appearance.

All else in the man--his noble proportions, his fine features, and his frank bearing--fitted in with that jovial, man-to-man manner which he affected. Here, one would say, is a bluff, honest fellow, whose heart would be sound however rude his outspoken words might seem. It was only when those dead, dark eyes, deep and remorseless, were turned upon a man that he shrank within himself, feeling that he was face to face with an infinite possibility of latent evil, with a strength and courage and cunning behind it which made it a thousand times more deadly.

Having had a good look at his man, McMurdo elbowed his way forward with his usual careless audacity, and pushed himself through the little group of courtiers who were fawning upon the powerful boss, laughing uproariously at the smallest of his jokes. The young stranger's bold gray eyes looked back fearlessly through their glasses at the deadly black ones which turned sharply upon him.

"Well, young man, I can't call your face to mind."

"I'm new here, Mr. McGinty."

"You are not so new that you can't give a gentleman his proper title."

"He's Councillor McGinty, young man," said a voice from the group.

"I'm sorry, Councillor. I'm strange to the ways of the place. But I was advised to see you."

"Well, you see me. This is all there is. What d'you think of me?"

"Well, it's early days. If your heart is as big as your body, and your soul as fine as your face, then I'd ask for nothing better," said McMurdo.

"By Gar! you've got an Irish tongue in your head anyhow," cried the saloon-keeper, not quite certain whether to humour this audacious visitor or to stand upon his dignity.

"So you are good enough to pass my appearance?"

"Sure," said McMurdo.
"And you were told to see me?"
"I was."
"And who told you?"
"Brother Scanlan of Lodge 341, Vermissa. I drink your health Councillor, and to our better acquaintance." He raised a glass with which he had been served to his lips and elevated his little finger as he drank it.

McGinty, who had been watching him narrowly, raised his thick black eyebrows. "Oh, it's like that, is it?" said he. "I'll have to look a bit closer into this, Mister--"

"McMurdo."
"A bit closer, Mr. McMurdo; for we don't take folk on trust in these parts, nor believe all we're told neither. Come in here for a moment, behind the bar."

There was a small room there, lined with barrels. McGinty carefully closed the door, and then seated himself on one of them, biting thoughtfully on his cigar and surveying his companion with those disquieting eyes. For a couple of minutes he sat in complete silence. McMurdo bore the inspection cheerfully, one hand in his coat pocket, the other twisting his brown moustache. Suddenly McGinty stooped and produced a wicked-looking revolver.

"See here, my joker," said he, "if I thought you were playing any game on us, it would be short work for you."

"This is a strange welcome," McMurdo answered with some dignity, "for the Bodymaster of a lodge of Freemen to give to a stranger brother."

"Ay, but it's just that same that you have to prove," said McGinty, "and God help you if you fail! Where were you made?"

"Lodge 29, Chicago."
"When?"
"June 24, 1872."
"What Bodymaster?"
"James H. Scott."
"Who is your district ruler?"
"Bartholomew Wilson."
"Hum! You seem glib enough in your tests. What are you doing here?"
"Working, the same as you--but a poorer job."
"You have your back answer quick enough."
"Yes, I was always quick of speech."
"Are you quick of action?"
"I have had that name among those that knew me best."
"Well, we may try you sooner than you think. Have you heard anything of the lodge in these parts?"
"I've heard that it takes a man to be a brother."
"True for you, Mr. McMurdo. Why did you leave Chicago?"
"I'm damned if I tell you that!"

McGinty opened his eyes. He was not used to being answered in such fashion, and it amused him. "Why won't you tell me?"
"Because no brother may tell another a lie."
"Then the truth is too bad to tell?"
"You can put it that way if you like."
"See here, mister, you can't expect me, as Bodymaster, to pass into the lodge a man for whose past he can't answer."

McMurdo looked puzzled. Then he took a worn newspaper cutting from an inner pocket.
"You wouldn't squeal on a fellow?" said he.
"I'll wipe my hand across your face if you say such words to me!" cried McGinty hotly.
"You are right, Councillor," said McMurdo meekly. "I should apologize. I spoke without thought. Well, I know that I am safe in your hands. Look at that clipping."

McGinty glanced his eyes over the account of the shooting of one Jonas Pinto, in the Lake Saloon, Market Street, Chicago, in the New Year week of 1874.
"Your work?" he asked, as he handed back the paper.

McMurdo nodded.
"Why did you shoot him?"
"I was helping Uncle Sam to make dollars. Maybe mine were not as good gold as his, but they looked as well and were cheaper to make. This man Pinto helped me to shove the queer--"

"To do what?"
"Well, it means to pass the dollars out into circulation. Then he said he would split. Maybe he did split. I didn't wait to see. I just killed him and lighted out for the coal country."

"Why the coal country?"

"Cause I'd read in the papers that they weren't too particular in those parts."

McGinty laughed. "You were first a coiner and then a murderer, and you came to these parts because you thought you'd be welcome."

"That's about the size of it," McMurdo answered.

"Well, I guess you'll go far. Say, can you make those dollars yet?"

McMurdo took half a dozen from his pocket. "Those never passed the Philadelphia mint," said he.

"You don't say!" McGinty held them to the light in his enormous hand, which was hairy as a gorilla's. "I can see no difference. Gar! you'll be a mighty useful brother, I'm thinking! We can do with a bad man or two among us, Friend McMurdo: for there are times when we have to take our own part. We'd soon be against the wall if we didn't shove back at those that were pushing us."

"Well, I guess I'll do my share of shoving with the rest of the boys."

"You seem to have a good nerve. You didn't squirm when I shoved this gun at you."

"It was not me that was in danger."

"Who then?"

"It was you, Councillor." McMurdo drew a cocked pistol from the side pocket of his peajacket. "I was covering you all the time. I guess my shot would have been as quick as yours."

"By Gar!" McGinty flushed an angry red and then burst into a roar of laughter. "Say, we've had no such holy terror come to hand this many a year. I reckon the lodge will learn to be proud of you.... Well, what the hell do you want? And can't I speak alone with a gentleman for five minutes but you must butt in on us?"

The bartender stood abashed. "I'm sorry, Councillor, but it's Ted Baldwin. He says he must see you this very minute."

The message was unnecessary; for the set, cruel face of the man himself was looking over the servant's shoulder. He pushed the bartender out and closed the door on him.

"So," said he with a furious glance at McMurdo, "you got here first, did you? I've a word to say to you, Councillor, about this man."

"Then say it here and now before my face," cried McMurdo.

"I'll say it at my own time, in my own way."

"Tut! Tut!" said McGinty, getting off his barrel. "This will never do. We have a new brother here, Baldwin, and it's not for us to greet him in such fashion. Hold out your hand, man, and make it up!"

"Never!" cried Baldwin in a fury.

"I've offered to fight him if he thinks I have wronged him," said McMurdo. "I'll fight him with fists, or, if that won't satisfy him, I'll fight him any other way he chooses. Now, I'll leave it to you, Councillor, to judge between us as a Bodymaster should."

"What is it, then?"

"A young lady. She's free to choose for herself."

"Is she?" cried Baldwin.

"As between two brothers of the lodge I should say that she was," said the Boss.

"Oh, that's your ruling, is it?"

"Yes, it is, Ted Baldwin," said McGinty, with a wicked stare. "Is it you that would dispute it?"

"You would throw over one that has stood by you this five years in favour of a man that you never saw before in your life? You're not Bodymaster for life, Jack McGinty, and by God! when next it comes to a vote--"

The Councillor sprang at him like a tiger. His hand closed round the other's neck, and he hurled him back across one of the barrels. In his mad fury he would have squeezed the life out of him if McMurdo had not interfered.

"Easy, Councillor! For heaven's sake, go easy!" he cried, as he dragged him back.

McGinty released his hold, and Baldwin, cowed and shaken gasping for breath, and shivering in every limb, as one who has looked over the very edge of death, sat up on the barrel over which he had been hurled.

"You've been asking for it this many a day, Ted Baldwin--now you've got it!" cried McGinty, his huge chest rising and falling. "Maybe you think if I was voted down from Bodymaster you would find yourself in my shoes. It's for the lodge to say that. But so long as I am the chief I'll have no man lift his voice against me or my rulings."

"I have nothing against you," mumbled Baldwin, feeling his throat.

"Well, then," cried the other, relapsing in a moment into a bluff joviality, "we are all good friends again and there's an end of the matter."

He took a bottle of champagne down from the shelf and twisted out the cork.
"See now," he continued, as he filled three high glasses. "Let us drink the quarrelling toast of the lodge. After that, as you know, there can be no bad blood between us. Now, then the left hand on the apple of my throat. I say to you, Ted Baldwin, what is the offense, sir?"

"The clouds are heavy," answered Baldwin
"But they will forever brighten."
"And this I swear!"

The men drank their glasses, and the same ceremony was performed between Baldwin and McMurdo

"There!" cried McGinty, rubbing his hands. "That's the end of the black blood. You come under lodge discipline if it goes further, and that's a heavy hand in these parts, as Brother Baldwin knows--and as you will damn soon find out, Brother McMurdo, if you ask for trouble!"

"Faith, I'd be slow to do that," said McMurdo. He held out his hand to Baldwin. "I'm quick to quarrel and quick to forgive. It's my hot Irish blood, they tell me. But it's over for me, and I bear no grudge."

Baldwin had to take the proffered hand; for the baleful eye of the terrible Boss was upon him. But his sullen face showed how little the words of the other had moved him.

McGinty clapped them both on the shoulders. "Tut! These girls! These girls!" he cried. "To think that the same petticoats should come between two of my boys! It's the devil's own luck! Well, it's the colleen inside of them that must settle the question; for it's outside the jurisdiction of a Bodymaster--and the Lord be praised for that! We have enough on us, without the women as well. You'll have to be affiliated to Lodge 341, Brother McMurdo. We have our own ways and methods, different from Chicago. Saturday night is our meeting, and if you come then, we'll make you free forever of the Vermissa Valley."

Chapter 3 - Lodge 341, Vermissa

On the day following the evening which had contained so many exciting events, McMurdo moved his lodgings from old Jacob Shafter's and took up his quarters at the Widow MacNamara's on the extreme outskirts of the town. Scanlan, his original acquaintance aboard the train, had occasion shortly afterwards to move into Vermissa, and the two lodged together. There was no other boarder, and the hostess was an easy-going old Irishwoman who left them to themselves; so that they had a freedom for speech and action welcome to men who had secrets in common.

Shafter had relented to the extent of letting McMurdo come to his meals there when he liked; so that his intercourse with Ettie was by no means broken. On the contrary, it drew closer and more intimate as the weeks went by.

In his bedroom at his new abode McMurdo felt it safe to take out the coining moulds, and under many a pledge of secrecy a number of brothers from the lodge were allowed to come in and see them, each carrying away in his pocket some examples of the false money, so cunningly struck that there was never the slightest difficulty or danger in passing it. Why, with such a wonderful art at his command, McMurdo should condescend to work at all was a perpetual mystery to his companions; though he made it clear to anyone who asked him that if he lived without any visible means it would very quickly bring the police upon his track.

One policeman was indeed after him already; but the incident, as luck would have it, did the adventurer a great deal more good than harm. After the first introduction there were few evenings when he did not find his way to McGinty's saloon, there to make closer acquaintance with "the boys," which was the jovial title by which the dangerous gang who infested the place were known to one another. His dashing manner and fearlessness of speech made him a favourite with them all; while the rapid and scientific way in which he polished off his antagonist in an "all in" bar-room scrap earned the respect of that rough community. Another incident, however, raised him even higher in their estimation.

Just at the crowded hour one night, the door opened and a man entered with the quiet blue uniform and peaked cap of the mine police. This was a special body raised by the railways and colliery owners to supplement the efforts of the ordinary civil police, who were perfectly helpless in the face of the organized ruffianism which terrorized the district. There was a hush as he entered, and many a curious glance was cast at him; but the relations between policemen and criminals are peculiar in some parts of the States, and McGinty himself, standing behind his counter, showed no surprise when the policeman enrolled himself among his customers.

"A straight whisky; for the night is bitter," said the police officer. "I don't think we have met before, Councillor?"

"You'll be the new captain?" said McGinty.
"That's so. We're looking to you, Councillor, and to the other leading citizens, to help us in upholding law and order in this township. Captain Marvin is my name."

"We'd do better without you, Captain Marvin," said McGinty coldly; "for we have our own police of the township, and no need for any imported goods. What are you but the paid tool of the capitalists, hired by them to club or shoot your poorer fellow citizen?"
"Well, well, we won't argue about that," said the police officer good-humouredly. "I expect we all do our duty same as we see it; but we can't all see it the same." He had drunk off his glass and had turned to go, when his eyes fell upon the face of Jack McMurdo, who was scowling at his elbow. "Hullo! Hullo!" he cried, looking him up and down. "Here's an old acquaintance!"

McMurdo shrank away from him. "I was never a friend to you nor any other cursed copper in my life," said he. "An acquaintance isn't always a friend," said the police captain, grinning. "You're Jack McMurdo of Chicago, right enough, and don't you deny it!"

"You've got good cause to be, anyhow."

"What the devil d'you mean by that?" he roared with his fists clenched.

"No, no, Jack, bluster won't do with me. I was an officer in Chicago before ever I came to this darned coal bunker, and I know a Chicago crook when I see one."

McMurdo's face fell. "Don't tell me that you're Marvin of the Chicago Central!" he cried.

"Just the same old Teddy Marvin, at your service. We haven't forgotten the shooting of Jonas Pinto up there."

"I never shot him."

"Did you not? That's good impartial evidence, ain't it? Well, his death came in uncommon handy for you, or they would have had you for shoving the queer. Well, we can let that be bygones; for, between you and me--and perhaps I'm going further than my duty in saying it--they could get no clear case against you, and Chicago's open to you tomorrow." "I'm very well where I am."

"Well, I've given you the pointer, and you're a sulky dog not to thank me for it."

"Well, I suppose you mean well, and I do thank you," said McMurdo in no very gracious manner.

"It's mum with me so long as I see you living on the straight," said the captain. "But, by the Lord! if you get off after this, it's another story! So good-night to you--and good-night, Councillor."

He left the bar-room; but not before he had created a local hero. McMurdo's deeds in far Chicago had been whispered before. He had put off all questions with a smile, as one who did not wish to have greatness thrust upon him. But now the thing was officially confirmed. The bar loafers crowded round him and shook him heartily by the hand. He was free of the community from that time on. He could drink hard and show little trace of it; but that evening, had his mate Scanlan not been at hand to lead him home, the feted hero would surely have spent his night under the bar.

On a Saturday night McMurdo was introduced to the lodge. He had thought to pass in without ceremony as being an initiate of Chicago; but there were particular rites in Vermissa of which they were proud, and these had to be undergone by every postulant. The assembly met in a large room reserved for such purposes at the Union House. Some sixty members assembled at Vermissa; but that by no means represented the full strength of the organization, for there were several other lodges in the valley, and others across the mountains on each side, who exchanged members when any serious business was afoot, so that a crime might be done by men who were strangers to the locality. Altogether there were not less than five hundred scattered over the coal district.

In the bare assembly room the men were gathered round a long table. At the side was a second one laden with bottles and glasses, on which some members of the company were already turning their eyes. McGinty sat at the head with a flat black velvet cap upon his shock of tangled black hair, and a coloured purple stole round his neck, so that he seemed to be a priest presiding over some diabolical ritual. To right and left of him were the higher lodge officials, the cruel, handsome face of Ted Baldwin among them. Each of these wore some scarf or medallion as emblem of his office.

They were, for the most part, men of mature age; but the rest of the company consisted of young fellows from eighteen to twenty-five, the ready and capable agents who carried out the commands of their seniors. Among the older men were many whose features showed the tigerish, lawless souls within; but looking at the rank and file it was difficult to believe that these eager and open-faced young fellows were in very truth a dangerous gang of murderers, whose minds had suffered such complete moral perversion that they took a horrible pride in their proficiency at the business, and looked with deepest respect at the man who had the reputation of making what they called "a clean job."

To their contorted natures it had become a spirited and chivalrous thing to volunteer for service against some man who had never injured them, and whom in many cases they had never seen in their lives. The crime committed, they quarrelled as to who had actually struck the fatal blow, and amused one another and the company by describing the cries and contortions of the murdered man.

At first they had shown some secrecy in their arrangements; but at the time which this narrative describes their proceedings were extraordinarily open, for the repeated failure of the law had proved to them that, on the one hand,
no one would dare to witness against them, and on the other they had an unlimited number of stanch witnesses upon whom they could call, and a well-filled treasure chest from which they could draw the funds to engage the best legal talent in the state. In ten long years of outrage there had been no single conviction, and the only danger that ever threatened the Scowrers lay in the victim himself—who, however outnumbered and taken by surprise, might and occasionally did leave his mark upon his assailants.

McMurdo had been warned that some ordeal lay before him; but no one would tell him in what it consisted. He was led now into an outer room by two solemn brothers. Through the plank partition he could hear the murmur of many voices from the assembly within. Once or twice he caught the sound of his own name, and he knew that they were discussing his candidacy. Then there entered an inner guard with a green and gold sash across his chest.

"The Bodymaster orders that he shall be trussed, blinded, and entered," said he.

The three of them removed his coat, turned up the sleeve of his right arm, and finally passed a rope round above the elbows and made it fast. They next placed a thick black cap right over his head and the upper part of his face, so that he could see nothing. He was then led into the assembly hall.

It was pitch dark and very oppressive under his hood. He heard the rustle and murmur of the people round him, and then the voice of McGinty sounded dull and distant through the covering of his ears.

"John McMurdo," said the voice, "are you already a member of the Ancient Order of Freemen?"

He bowed in assent.

"Is your lodge No. 29, Chicago?"

He bowed again.

"Dark nights are unpleasant," said the voice.

"Yes, for strangers to travel," he answered.

"The clouds are heavy."

"Yes, a storm is approaching."

"Are the brethren satisfied?" asked the Bodymaster.

There was a general murmur of assent.

"We know, Brother, by your sign and by your countersign that you are indeed one of us," said McGinty. "We would have you know, however, that in this county and in other counties of these parts we have certain rites, and also certain duties of our own which call for good men. Are you ready to be tested?"

"I am."

"Are you of stout heart?"

"I am."

"Take a stride forward to prove it."

As the words were said he felt two hard points in front of his eyes, pressing upon them so that it appeared as if he could not move forward without a danger of losing them. None the less, he nerved himself to step resolutely out, and as he did so the pressure melted away. There was a low murmur of applause.

"He is of stout heart," said the voice. "Can you bear pain?"

"As well as another," he answered.

"Test him!"

It was all he could do to keep himself from screaming out, for an agonizing pain shot through his forearm. He nearly fainted at the sudden shock of it; but he bit his lip and clenched his hands to hide his agony.

"I can take more than that," said he.

This time there was loud applause. A finer first appearance had never been made in the lodge. Hands clapped him on the back, and the hood was plucked from his head. He stood blinking and smiling amid the congratulations of the brothers.

"One last word, Brother McMurdo," said McGinty. "You have already sworn the oath of secrecy and fidelity, and you are aware that the punishment for any breach of it is instant and inevitable death?"

"I am," said McMurdo.

"And you accept the rule of the Bodymaster for the time being under all circumstances?"

"I do."

"Then in the name of Lodge 341, Vermissa, I welcome you to its privileges and debates. You will put the liquor on the table, Brother Scanlan, and we will drink to our worthy brother."

McMurdo's coat had been brought to him; but before putting it on he examined his right arm, which still smarted heavily. There on the flesh of the forearm was a circle with a triangle within it, deep and red, as the branding iron had left it. One or two of his neighbours pulled up their sleeves and showed their own lodge marks.

"We've all had it," said one; "but not all as brave as you over it."

"Tut! It was nothing," said he; but it burned and ached all the same.
When the drinks which followed the ceremony of initiation had all been disposed of, the business of the lodge proceeded. McMurdo, accustomed only to the prosaic performances of Chicago, listened with open ears and more surprise than he ventured to show to what followed.

"The first business on the agenda paper," said McGinty, "is to read the following letter from Division Master Windle of Merton County Lodge 249. He says:

"Dear Sir:

"There is a job to be done on Andrew Rae of Rae & Sturmash, coal owners near this place. You will remember that your lodge owes us a return, having had the service of two brethren in the matter of the patrolman last fall. You will send two good men, they will be taken charge of by Treasurer Higgins of this lodge, whose address you know. He will show them when to act and where. Yours in freedom, "J.W. WINdle D.M.A.O.F.

"Windle has never refused us when we have had occasion to ask for the loan of a man or two, and it is not for us to refuse him." McGinty paused and looked round the room with his dull, malevolent eyes. "Who will volunteer for the job?"

Several young fellows held up their hands. The Bodymaster looked at them with an approving smile.

"You'll do, Tiger Cormac. If you handle it as well as you did the last, you won't be wrong. And you, Wilson."

"I've no pistol," said the volunteer, a mere boy in his teens.

"It's your first, is it not? Well, you have to be blooded some time. It will be a great start for you. As to the pistol, you'll find it waiting for you, or I'm mistaken. If you report yourselves on Monday, it will be time enough. You'll get a great welcome when you return."

"Any reward this time?" asked Cormac, a thick-set, dark-faced, brutal-looking young man, whose ferocity had earned him the nickname of "Tiger."

"Never mind the reward. You just do it for the honour of the thing. Maybe when it is done there will be a few odd dollars at the bottom of the box."

"What has the man done?" asked young Wilson.

"Sure, it's not for the likes of you to ask what the man has done. He has been judged over there. That's no business of ours. All we have to do is to carry it out for them, same as they would for us. Speaking of that, two brothers from the Merton lodge are coming over to us next week to do some business in this quarter."

"Who are they?" asked someone.

"Faith, it is wiser not to ask. If you know nothing, you can testify nothing, and no trouble can come of it. But they are men who will make a clean job when they are about it."

"And time, too!" cried Ted Baldwin. "Folk are gettin' out of hand in these parts. It was only last week that three of our men were turned off by Foreman Blaker. It's been owing him a long time, and he'll get it full and proper."

"Get what?" McMurdo whispered to his neighbour.

"The business end of a buckshot cartridge!" cried the man with a loud laugh. "What think you of our ways, Brother?"

McMurdo's criminal soul seemed to have already absorbed the spirit of the vile association of which he was now a member. "I like it well," said he. "'Tis a proper place for a lad of mettle."

Several of those who sat around heard his words and applauded them.

"What's that?" cried the black-maned Bodymaster from the end of the table.

"'Tis our new brother, sir, who finds our ways to his taste."

McMurdo rose to his feet for an instant. "I would say, Eminent Bodymaster, that if a man should be wanted I should take it as an honour to be chosen to help the lodge."

There was great applause at this. It was felt that a new sun was pushing its rim above the horizon. To some of the elders it seemed that the progress was a little too rapid.

"I would move," said the secretary, Harraway, a vulture-faced old graybeard who sat near the chairman, "that Brother McMurdo should wait until it is the good pleasure of the lodge to employ him."

"Sure, that was what I meant; I'm in your hands," said McMurdo.

"Your time will come, Brother," said the chairman. "We have marked you down as a willing man, and we believe that you will do good work in these parts. There is a small matter to-night in which you may take a hand if it so please you."

"I will wait for something that is worth while."

"You can come to-night, anyhow, and it will help you to know what we stand for in this community. I will make the announcement later. Meanwhile," he glanced at his agenda paper, "I have one or two more points to bring before the meeting. First of all, I will ask the treasurer as to our bank balance. There is the pension to Jim Carnaway's widow. He was struck down doing the work of the lodge, and it is for us to see that she is not the loser."

"Jim was shot last month when they tried to kill Chester Wilcox of Marley Creek," McMurdo's neighbour
informed him.

"The funds are good at the moment," said the treasurer, with the bankbook in front of him. "The firms have been generous of late. Max Linder & Co. paid five hundred to be left alone. Walker Brothers sent in a hundred; but I took it on myself to return it and ask for five. If I do not hear by Wednesday, their winding gear may get out of order. We had to burn their breaker last year before they became reasonable. Then the West Section Coalings Company has paid its annual contribution. We have enough on hand to meet any obligations."

"What about Archie Swindon?" asked a brother.

"He has sold out and left the district. The old devil left a note for us to say that he had rather be a free crossing sweeper in New York than a large mine owner under the power of a ring of blackmailers. By Gar! it was as well that he made a break for it before the note reached us! I guess he won't show his face in this valley again."

An elderly, clean-shaved man with a kindly face and a good brow rose from the end of the table which faced the chairman. "Mr. Treasurer," he asked, "may I ask who has bought the property of this man that we have driven out of the district?"

"Yes, Brother Morris. It has been bought by the State & Merton County Railroad Company."

"And who bought the mines of Todman and of Lee that came into the market in the same way last year?"

"The same company, Brother Morris."

"And who bought the ironworks of Manson and of Shuman and of Van Deher and of Atwood, which have all been given up of late?"

"They were all bought by the West Gilmerton General Mining Company."

"I don't see, Brother Morris," said the chairman, "that it matters to us who buys them, since they can't carry them out of the district."

"With all respect to you, Eminent Bodymaster, I think it may matter very much to us. This process has been going on now for ten long years. We are gradually driving all the small men out of trade. What is the result? We find in their places great companies like the Railroad or the General Iron, who have their directors in New York or Philadelphia, and care nothing for our threats. We can take it out of their local bosses; but it only means that others will be sent in their stead. And we are making it dangerous for ourselves. The small men could not harm us. They had not the money nor the power. So long as we did not squeeze them too dry, they would stay on under our power. But if these big companies find that we stand between them and their profits, they will spare no pains and no expense to hunt us down and bring us to court."

There was a hush at these ominous words, and every face darkened as gloomy looks were exchanged. So omnipotent and unchallenged had they been that the very thought that there was possible retribution in the background had been banished from their minds. And yet the idea struck a chill to the most reckless of them.

"It is my advice," the speaker continued, "that we go easier upon the small men. On the day that they have all been driven out the power of this society will have been broken."

Unwelcome truths are not popular. There were angry cries as the speaker resumed his seat. McGinty rose with gloom upon his brow.

"Brother Morris," said he, "you were always a croaker. So long as the members of this lodge stand together there is no power in the United States that can touch them. Sure, have we not tried it often enough in the lawcourts? I expect the big companies will find it easier to pay than to fight, same as the little companies do. And now, Brethren," McGinty took off his black velvet cap and his stole as he spoke, "this lodge has finished its business for the evening, save for one small matter which may be mentioned when we are parting. The time has now come for fraternal refreshment and for harmony."

Strange indeed is human nature. Here were these men, to whom murder was familiar, who again and again had struck down the father of the family, some man against whom they had no personal feeling, without one thought of compunction or of compassion for his weeping wife or helpless children, and yet the tender or pathetic in music could move them to tears. McMurdo had a fine tenor voice, and if he had failed to gain the good will of the lodge before, it could no longer have been withheld after he had thrilled them with "I'm Sitting on the Stile, Mary," and "On the Banks of Allan Water."

In his very first night the new recruit had made himself one of the most popular of the brethren, marked already for advancement and high office. There were other qualities needed, however, besides those of good fellowship, to make a worthy Freeman, and of these he was given an example before the evening was over. The whisky bottle had passed round many times, and the men were flushed and ripe for mischief when their Bodymaster rose once more to address them.

"Boys," said he, "there's one man in this town that wants trimming up, and it's for you to see that he gets it. I'm speaking of James Stanger of the Herald. You've seen how he's been opening his mouth against us again?"

There was a murmur of assent, with many a muttered oath. McGinty took a slip of paper from his waistcoat
"LAW AND ORDER!
That's how he heads it.

"REIGN OF TERROR IN THE COAL AND IRON DISTRICT"

"Twelve years have now elapsed since the first assassinations which proved the existence of a criminal organization in our midst. From that day these outrages have never ceased, until now they have reached a pitch which makes us the opprobrium of the civilized world. Is it for such results as this that our great country welcomes to its bosom the alien who flies from the despotisms of Europe? Is it that they shall themselves become tyrants over the very men who have given them shelter, and that a state of terrorism and lawlessness should be established under the very shadow of the sacred folds of the starry Flag of Freedom which would raise horror in our minds if we read of it as existing under the most effete monarchy of the East? The men are known. The organization is patent and public. How long are we to endure it? Can we forever live--"

"Sure, I've read enough of the slush!" cried the chairman, tossing the paper down upon the table. "That's what he says of us. The question I'm asking you is what shall we say to him?"

"Kill him!" cried a dozen fierce voices.

"I protest against that," said Brother Morris, the man of the good brow and shaved face. "I tell you, Brethren, that our hand is too heavy in this valley, and that there will come a point where in self-defense every man will unite to crush us out. James Stanger is an old man. He is respected in the township and the district. His paper stands for all that is solid in the valley. If that man is struck down, there will be a stir through this state that will only end with our destruction."

"And how would they bring about our destruction, Mr. Standback?" cried McGinty. "Is it by the police? Sure, half of them are in our pay and half of them afraid of us. Or is it by the law courts and the judge? Haven't we tried that before now, and what ever came of it?"

"There is a Judge Lynch that might try the case," said Brother Morris.

A general shout of anger greeted the suggestion.

"I have but to raise my finger," cried McGinty, "and I could put two hundred men into this town that would clear it out from end to end." Then suddenly raising his voice and belling his huge black brows into a terrible frown, "See here, Brother Morris, I have my eye on you, and have had for some time! You've no heart yourself, and you try to take the heart out of others. It will be an ill day for you, Brother Morris, when your own name comes on our agenda paper, and I'm thinking that it's just there that I ought to place it."

Morris had turned deadly pale, and his knees seemed to give way under him as he fell back into his chair. He raised his glass in his trembling hand and drank before he could answer. "I apologize, Eminent Bodymaster, to you and every brother in this lodge if I have said more than I should. I am a faithful member--you all know that--and it is my fear lest evil come to the lodge which makes me speak in anxious words. But I have greater trust in your judgment than in my own, Eminent Bodymaster, and I promise you that I will not offend again."

The Bodymaster's scowl relaxed as he listened to the humble words. "Very good, Brother Morris. It's myself that would be sorry if it were needful to give you a lesson. But so long as I am in this chair we shall be a united lodge in word and in deed. And now, boys," he continued, looking round at the company, "I'll say this much, that if Stanger got his full deserts there would be more trouble than we need ask for. These editors hang together, and every journal in the state would be crying out for police and troops. But I guess you can give him a pretty severe warning. Will you fix it, Brother Baldwin?"

"Sure!" said the young man eagerly.

"How many will you take?"

"Half a dozen, and two to guard the door. You'll come, Gower, and you, Mansel, and you, Scanlan, and the two Willabys."

"I promised the new brother he should go," said the chairman.

Ted Baldwin looked at McMurdo with eyes which showed that he had not forgotten nor forgiven. "Well, he can come if he wants," he said in a surly voice. "That's enough. The sooner we get to work the better."

The company broke up with shouts and yells and snatches of drunken song. The bar was still crowded with revellers, and many of the brethren remained there. The little band who had been told off for duty passed out into the street, proceeding in twos and threes along the sidewalk so as not to provoke attention. It was a bitterly cold night, with a half-moon shining brilliantly in a frosty, star-spangled sky. The men stopped and gathered in a yard which faced a high building. The words, "Vermissa Herald" were printed in gold lettering between the brightly lit windows. From within came the clanking of the printing press.

"Here, you," said Baldwin to McMurdo, "you can stand below at the door and see that the road is kept open for us. Arthur Willaby can stay with you. You others come with me. Have no fears, boys; for we have a dozen witnesses
that we are in the Union Bar at this very moment."

It was nearly midnight, and the street was deserted save for one or two revellers upon their way home. The party crossed the road, and, pushing open the door of the newspaper office, Baldwin and his men rushed in and up the stair which faced them. McMurdo and another remained below. From the room above came a shout, a cry for help, and then the sound of trampling feet and of falling chairs. An instant later a gray-haired man rushed out on the landing.

He was seized before he could get farther, and his spectacles came tinkling down to McMurdo's feet. There was a thud and a groan. He was on his face, and half a dozen sticks were clattering together as they fell upon him. He writhed, and his long, thin limbs quivered under the blows. The others ceased at last; but Baldwin, his cruel face set in an infernal smile, was hacking at the man's head, which he vainly endeavoured to defend with his arms. His white hair was dabbled with patches of blood. Baldwin was still stooping over his victim, putting in a short, vicious blow whenever he could see a part exposed, when McMurdo dashed up the stair and pushed him back.

"You'll kill the man," said he. "Drop it!"

Baldwin looked at him in amazement. "Curse you!" he cried. "Who are you to interfere--you that are new to the lodge? Stand back!" He raised his stick; but McMurdo had whipped his pistol out of his pocket.

"Stand back yourself!" he cried. "I'll blow your face in if you lay a hand on me. As to the lodge, wasn't it the order of the Bodymaster that the man was not to be killed--and what are you doing but killing him?"

"It's truth he says," remarked one of the men.

"By Gar! you'd best hurry yourselves!" cried the man below. "The windows are all lighting up, and you'll have the whole town here inside of five minutes."

There was indeed the sound of shouting in the street, and a little group of compositors and pressmen was forming in the hall below and nerving itself to action. Leaving the limp and motionless body of the editor at the head of the stair, the criminals rushed down and made their way swiftly along the street. Having reached the Union House, some of them mixed with the crowd in McGinty's saloon, whispering across the bar to the Boss that the job had been well carried through. Others, and among them McMurdo, broke away into side streets, and so by devious paths to their own homes.

Chapter 4 - The Valley of Fear

When McMurdo awoke next morning he had good reason to remember his initiation into the lodge. His head ached with the effect of the drink, and his arm, where he had been branded, was hot and swollen. Having his own peculiar source of income, he was irregular in his attendance at his work; so he had a late breakfast, and remained at home for the morning writing a long letter to a friend. Afterwards he read the Daily Herald. In a special column put in at the last moment he read:

OUTRAGE AT THE HERALD OFFICE--EDITOR SERIOUSLY INJURED.

It was a short account of the facts with which he was himself more familiar than the writer could have been. It ended with the statement:

The matter is now in the hands of the police; but it can hardly be hoped that their exertions will be attended by any better results than in the past. Some of the men were recognized, and there is hope that a conviction may be obtained. The source of the outrage was, it need hardly be said, that infamous society which has held this community in bondage for so long a period, and against which the Herald has taken so uncompromising a stand. Mr. Stanger's many friends will rejoice to hear that, though he has been cruelly and brutally beaten, and though he has sustained severe injuries about the head, there is no immediate danger to his life.

Below it stated that a guard of police, armed with Winchester rifles, had been requisitioned for the defense of the office.

McMurdo had laid down the paper, and was lighting his pipe with a hand which was shaky from the excesses of the previous evening, when there was a knock outside, and his landlady brought to him a note which had just been handed in by a lad. It was unsigned, and ran thus:

I should wish to speak to you, but would rather not do so in your house. You will find me beside the flagstaff upon Miller Hill. If you will come there now, I have something which it is important for you to hear and for me to say.

McMurdo read the note twice with the utmost surprise; for he could not imagine what it meant or who was the author of it. Had it been in a feminine hand, he might have imagined that it was the beginning of one of those adventures which had been familiar enough in his past life. But it was the writing of a man, and of a well educated one, too. Finally, after some hesitation, he determined to see the matter through.

Miller Hill is an ill-kept public park in the very centre of the town. In summer it is a favourite resort of the people, but in winter it is desolate enough. From the top of it one has a view not only of the whole straggling, grimy town, but of the winding valley beneath, with its scattered mines and factories blackening the snow on each side of
it, and of the wooded and white-capped ranges flanking it.

McMurdo strolled up the winding path hedged in with evergreens until he reached the deserted restaurant which forms the centre of summer gaiety. Beside it was a bare flagstaff, and underneath it a man, his hat drawn down and the collar of his overcoat turned up. When he turned his face McMurdo saw that it was Brother Morris, he who had incurred the anger of the Bodymaster the night before. The lodge sign was given and exchanged as they met.

"I wanted to have a word with you, Mr. McMurdo," said the older man, speaking with a hesitation which showed that he was on delicate ground. "It was kind of you to come."

"Why did you not put your name to the note?"

"One has to be cautious, mister. One never knows in times like these how a thing may come back to one. One never knows either who to trust or who not to trust."

"Surely one may trust brothers of the lodge."

"No, no, not always," cried Morris with vehemence. "Whatever we say, even what we think, seems to go back to that man McGinty."

"Look here!" said McMurdo sternly. "It was only last night, as you know well, that I swore good faith to our Bodymaster. Would you be asking me to break my oath?"

"If that is the view you take," said Morris sadly, "I can only say that I am sorry I gave you the trouble to come and meet me. Things have come to a bad pass when two free citizens cannot speak their thoughts to each other."

McMurdo, who had been watching his companion very narrowly, relaxed somewhat in his bearing. "Sure I spoke for myself only," said he. "I am a newcomer, as you know, and I am strange to it all. It is not for me to open my mouth, Mr. Morris, and if you think well to say anything to me I am here to hear it."

"And to take it back to Boss McGinty!" said Morris bitterly.

"Indeed, then, you do me injustice there," cried McMurdo. "For myself I am loyal to the lodge, and so I tell you straight; but I would be a poor creature if I were to repeat to any other what you might say to me in confidence. It will go no further than me; though I warn you that you may get neither help nor sympathy."

"I have given up looking for either the one or the other," said Morris. "I may be putting my very life in your hands by what I say; but, bad as you are--and it seemed to me last night that you were shaping to be as bad as the worst--still you are new to it, and your conscience cannot yet be as hardened as theirs. That was why I thought to speak with you."

"Well, what have you to say?"

"If you give me away, may a curse be on you!"

"Sure, I said I would not."

"I would ask you, then, when you joined the Freeman's society in Chicago and swore vows of charity and fidelity, did ever it cross your mind that you might find it would lead you to crime?"

"If you call it crime," McMurdo answered.

"Call it crime!" cried Morris, his voice vibrating with passion. "You have seen little of it if you can call it anything else. Was it crime last night when a man old enough to be your father was beaten till the blood dripped from his white hairs? Was that crime--or what else would you call it?"

"There are some would say it was war," said McMurdo, "a war of two classes with all in, so that each struck as best it could.

"Well, did you think of such a thing when you joined the Freeman's society at Chicago?"

"No, I'm bound to say I did not."

"Nor did I when I joined it at Philadelphia. It was just a benefit club and a meeting place for one's fellows. Then I heard of this place--curse the hour that the name first fell upon my ears!--and I came to better myself! My God! to better myself! My wife and three children came with me. I started a drygoods store on Market Square, and I prospered well. The word had gone round that I was a Freeman, and I was forced to join the local lodge, same as you did last night. I've the badge of shame on my forearm and something worse branded on my heart. I found that I was under the orders of a black villain and caught in a meshwork of crime. What could I do? Every word I said to make things better was taken as treason, same as it was last night. I can't get away; for all I have in the world is in my store. If I leave the society, I know well that it means murder to me, and God knows what to my wife and children. Oh, man, it is awful--awful!" He put his hands to his face, and his body shook with convulsive sobs.

McMurdo shrugged his shoulders. "You were too soft for the job," said he. "You are the wrong sort for such work."

"I had a conscience and a religion; but they made me a criminal among them. I was chosen for a job. If I backed down I knew well what would come to me. Maybe I'm a coward. Maybe it's the thought of my poor little woman and the children that makes me one. Anyhow I went. I guess it will haunt me forever."

"It was a lonely house, twenty miles from here, over the range yonder. I was told off for the door, same as you
were last night. They could not trust me with the job. The others went in. When they came out their hands were
crimson to the wrists. As we turned away a child was screaming out of the house behind us. It was a boy of five who
had seen his father murdered. I nearly fainted with the horror of it, and yet I had to keep a bold and smiling face; for
well I knew that if I did not it would be out of my house that they would come next with their bloody hands and it
would be my little Fred that would be screaming for his father.

"But I was a criminal then, part sharer in a murder, lost forever in this world, and lost also in the next. I am a
good Catholic; but the priest would have no word with me when he heard I was a Scowrer, and I am excommunicated
from my faith. That's how it stands with me. And I see you going down the same road, and I ask
you what the end is to be. Are you ready to be a cold-blooded murderer also, or can we do anything to stop it?"

"What would you do?" asked McMurdo abruptly. "You would not inform?"

"God forbid!" cried Morris. "Sure, the very thought would cost me my life."

"That's well," said McMurdo. "I'm thinking that you are a weak man and that you make too much of the matter."

"Too much! Wait till you have lived here longer. Look down the valley! See the cloud of a hundred chimneys
that overshadows it! I tell you that the cloud of murder hangs thicker and lower than that over the heads of the
people. It is the Valley of Fear, the Valley of Death. The terror is in the hearts of the people from the dusk to the
dawn. Wait, young man, and you will learn for yourself."

"Well, I'll let you know what I think when I have seen more," said McMurdo carelessly. "What is very clear is
that you are not the man for the place, and that the sooner you sell out—if you only get a dime a dollar for what the
business is worth—the better it will be for you. What you have said is safe with me; but, by Gar! if I thought you
were an informer—"

"No, no!" cried Morris piteously.

"Well, let it rest at that. I'll bear what you have said in mind, and maybe some day I'll come back to it. I expect
you meant kindly by speaking to me like this. Now I'll be getting home."

"One word before you go," said Morris. "We may have been seen together. They may want to know what we
have spoken about."

"Ah! that's well thought of."

"I offer you a clerkship in my store."

"And I refuse it. That's our business. Well, so long, Brother Morris, and may you find things go better with you
in the future."

That same afternoon, as McMurdo sat smoking, lost in thought beside the stove of his sitting-room, the door
swung open and its framework was filled with the huge figure of Boss McGinty. He passed the sign, and then
seating himself opposite to the young man he looked at him steadily for some time, a look which was as steadily
returned.

"I'm not much of a visitor, Brother McMurdo," he said at last. "I guess I am too busy over the folk that visit me.
But I thought I'd stretch a point and drop down to see you in your own house."

"I'm proud to see you here, Councillor," McMurdo answered heartily, bringing his whisky bottle out of the
cupboard. "It's an honour that I had not expected."

"How's the arm?" asked the Boss.

McMurdo made a wry face. "Well, I'm not forgetting it," he said; "but it's worth it."

"Yes, it's worth it," the other answered, "to those that are loyal and go through with it and are a help to the lodge.
What were you speaking to Brother Morris about on Miller Hill this morning?"

The question came so suddenly that it was well that he had his answer prepared. He burst into a hearty laugh.

"Morris didn't know I could earn a living here at home. He shan't know either; for he has got too much conscience
for the likes of me. But he's a good-hearted old chap. It was his idea that I was at a loose end, and that he would do
me a good turn by offering me a clerkship in a drygoods store."

"Oh, that was it?"

"Yes, that was it."

"And you refused it?"

"Sure. Couldn't I earn ten times as much in my own bedroom with four hours' work?"

"That's so. But I wouldn't get about too much with Morris."

"Why not?"

"Well, I guess because I tell you not. That's enough for most folk in these parts."

"It may be enough for most folk; but it ain't enough for me, Councillor," said McMurdo boldly. "If you are a
judge of men, you'll know that."

The swarthy giant glared at him, and his hairy paw closed for an instant round the glass as though he would hurl
it at the head of his companion. Then he laughed in his loud, boisterous, insincere fashion.
"You're a queer card, for sure," said he. "Well, if you want reasons, I'll give them. Did Morris say nothing to you against the lodge?"

"No."

"Nor against me?"

"No."

"Well, that's because he daren't trust you. But in his heart he is not a loyal brother. We know that well. So we watch him and we wait for the time to admonish him. I'm thinking that the time is drawing near. There's no room for scabby sheep in our pen. But if you keep company with a disloyal man, we might think that you were disloyal, too. See?"

"There's no chance of my keeping company with him; for I dislike the man," McMurdo answered. "As to being disloyal, if it was any man but you he would not use the word to me twice."

"Well, that's enough," said McGinty, draining off his glass. "I came down to give you a word in season, and you've had it."

"I'd like to know," said McMurdo, "how you ever came to learn that I had spoken with Morris at all?"

McGinty laughed. "It's my business to know what goes on in this township," said he. "I guess you'd best reckon on my hearing all that passes. Well, time's up, and I'll just say--"

But his leavetaking was cut short in a very unexpected fashion. With a sudden crash the door flew open, and three frowning, intent faces glared in at them from under the peaks of police caps. McMurdo sprang to his feet and half drew his revolver; but his arm stopped midway as he became conscious that two Winchester rifles were levelled at his head. A man in uniform advanced into the room, a six-shooter in his hand. It was Captain Marvin, once of Chicago, and now of the Mine Constabulary. He shook his head with a half-smile at McMurdo.

"I thought you'd be getting into trouble, Mr. Crooked McMurdo of Chicago," said he. "Can't keep out of it, can you? Take your hat and come along with us."

"I guess you'll pay for this, Captain Marvin," said McGinty. "Who are you, I'd like to know, to break into a house in this fashion and molest honest, law-abiding men?"

"You're standing out in this deal, Councillor McGinty," said the police captain. "We are not out after you, but after this man McMurdo. It is for you to help, not to hinder us in our duty;"

"He is a friend of mine, and I'll answer for his conduct," said the Boss.

"By all accounts, Mr. McGinty, you may have to answer for your own conduct some of these days," the captain answered. "This man McMurdo was a crook before ever he came here, and he's a crook still. Cover him, Patrolman, while I disarm him."

"There's my pistol," said McMurdo coolly. "Maybe, Captain Marvin, if you and I were alone and face to face you would not take me so easily."

"Where's your warrant?" asked McGinty. "By Gar! a man might as well live in Russia as in Vermissa while folk like you are running the police. It's a capitalist outrage, and you'll hear more of it, I reckon."

"You do what you think is your duty the best way you can, Councillor. We'll look after ours."

"What am I accused of?" asked McMurdo.

"Of being concerned in the beating of old Editor Stanger at the Herald office. It wasn't your fault that it isn't a murder charge."

"Well, if that's all you have against him," cried McGinty with a laugh, "you can save yourself a deal of trouble by dropping it right now. This man was with me in my saloon playing poker up to midnight, and I can bring a dozen to prove it."

"That's your affair, and I guess you can settle it in court to-morrow. Meanwhile, come on, McMurdo, and come quietly if you don't want a gun across your head. You stand wide, Mr. McGinty; for I warn you I will stand no resistance when I am on duty!"

So determined was the appearance of the captain that both McMurdo and his boss were forced to accept the situation. The latter managed to have a few whispered words with the prisoner before they parted.

"What about--" he jerked his thumb upward to signify the coinage plant.

"All right," whispered McMurdo, who had devised a safe hiding place under the floor.

"I'll bid you good-bye," said the Boss, shaking hands. "I'll see Reilly the lawyer and take the defense upon myself. Take my word for it that they won't be able to hold you."

"I wouldn't bet on that. Guard the prisoner, you two, and shoot him if he tries any games. I'll search the house before I leave."

He did so; but apparently found no trace of the concealed plant. When he had descended he and his men escorted McMurdo to headquarters. Darkness had fallen, and a keen blizzard was blowing so that the streets were nearly deserted; but a few loiterers followed the group, and emboldened by invisibility shouted imprecations at the
prisoner.

"Lynch the cursed Scowrer!" they cried. "Lynch him!" They laughed and jeered as he was pushed into the police station. After a short, formal examination from the inspector in charge he was put into the common cell. Here he found Baldwin and three other criminals of the night before, all arrested that afternoon and waiting their trial next morning.

But even within this inner fortress of the law the long arm of the Freemen was able to extend. Late at night there came a jailer with a straw bundle for their bedding, out of which he extracted two bottles of whisky, some glasses, and a pack of cards. They spent a hilarious night, without an anxious thought as to the ordeal of the morning.

Nor had they cause, as the result was to show. The magistrate could not possibly, on the evidence, have held them for a higher court. On the one hand the compositors and pressmen were forced to admit that the light was uncertain, that they were themselves much perturbed, and that it was difficult for them to swear to the identity of the assailants; although they believed that the accused were among them. Cross examined by the clever attorney who had been engaged by McGinty, they were even more nebulous in their evidence.

The injured man had already deposed that he was so taken by surprise by the suddenness of the attack that he could state nothing beyond the fact that the first man who struck him wore a moustache. He added that he knew them to be Scowrers, since no one else in the community could possibly have any enmity to him, and he had long been threatened on account of his outspoken editorials. On the other hand, it was clearly shown by the united and unaltering evidence of six citizens, including that high municipal official, Councillor McGinty, that the men had been at a card party at the Union House until an hour very much later than the commission of the outrage.

Needless to say that they were discharged with something very near to an apology from the bench for the inconvenience to which they had been put, together with an implied censure of Captain Marvin and the police for their officious zeal.

The verdict was greeted with loud applause by a court in which McMurdo saw many familiar faces. Brothers of the lodge smiled and waved. But there were others who sat with compressed lips and brooding eyes as the men filed out of the dock. One of them, a little, dark-bearded, resolute fellow, put the thoughts of himself and comrades into words as the ex-prisoners passed him.

"You damned murderers!" he said. "We'll fix you yet!"

Chapter 5 - The Darkest Hour

If anything had been needed to give an impetus to Jack McMurdo's popularity among his fellows it would have been his arrest and acquittal. That a man on the very night of joining the lodge should have done something which brought him before the magistrate was a new record in the annals of the society. Already he had earned the reputation of a good boon companion, a cheery reveller, and withal a man of high temper, who would not take an insult even from the all-powerful Boss himself. But in addition to this he impressed his comrades with the idea that among them all there was not one whose brain was so ready to devise a bloodthirsty scheme, or whose hand would be more capable of carrying it out. "He'll be the boy for the clean job," said the oldsters to one another, and waited their time until they could set him to his work.

McGinty had instruments enough already; but he recognized that this was a supremely able one. He felt like a man holding a fierce bloodhound in leash. There were curs to do the smaller work; but some day he would slip this creature upon its prey. A few members of the lodge, Ted Baldwin among them, resented the rapid rise of the stranger and hated him for it; but they kept clear of him, for he was as ready to fight as to laugh.

But if he gained favour with his fellows, there was another quarter, one which had become even more vital to him, in which he lost it. Ettie Shafter's father would have nothing more to do with him, nor would he allow him to enter the house. Ettie herself was too deeply in love to give him up altogether, and yet her own good sense warned her of what would come from a marriage with a man who was regarded as a criminal.

One morning after a sleepless night she determined to see him, possibly for the last time, and make one strong endeavour to draw him from those evil influences which were sucking him down. She went to his house, as he had often begged her to do, and made her way into the room which he used as his sitting-room. He was seated at a table, with his back turned and a letter in front of him. A sudden spirit of girlish mischief came over her--she was still only nineteen. He had not heard her when she pushed open the door. Now she tiptoed forward and laid her hand lightly upon his bended shoulders.

If she had expected to startle him, she certainly succeeded; but only in turn to be startled herself. With a tiger spring he turned on her, and his right hand was feeling for her throat. At the same instant with the other hand he crumpled up the paper that lay before him. For an instant he stood glaring. Then astonishment and joy took the place of the ferocity which had convulsed his features--a ferocity which had sent her shrinking back in horror as from something which had never before intruded into her gentle life.

"It's you!" said he, mopping his brow. "And to think that you should come to me, heart of my heart, and I should
find nothing better to do than to want to strangle you! Come then, darling," and he held out his arms, "let me make it up to you."

But she had not recovered from that sudden glimpse of guilty fear which she had read in the man's face. All her woman's instinct told her that it was not the mere fright of a man who is startled. Guilt--that was it--guilt and fear!

"What's come over you, Jack?" she cried. "Why were you so scared of me? Oh, Jack, if your conscience was at ease, you would not have looked at me like that!"

"Sure, I was thinking of other things, and when you came tripping so lightly on those fairy feet of yours--"

"No, no, it was more than that, Jack." Then a sudden suspicion seized her. "Let me see that letter you were writing."

"Ah, Ettie, I couldn't do that."

Her suspicions became certainties. "It's to another woman," she cried. "I know it! Why else should you hold it from me? Was it to your wife that you were writing? How am I to know that you are not a married man--you, a stranger, that nobody knows?"

"I am not married, Ettie. See now, I swear it! You're the only one woman on earth to me. By the cross of Christ I swear it!"

He was so white with passionate earnestness that she could not but believe him.

"Well, then," she cried, "why will you not show me the letter?"

"I'll tell you, acushla," said he. "I'm under oath not to show it, and just as I wouldn't break my word to you so I would keep it to those who hold my promise. It's the business of the lodge, and even to you it's secret. And if I was scared when a hand fell on me, can't you understand it when it might have been the hand of a detective?"

She felt that he was telling the truth. He gathered her into his arms and kissed away her fears and doubts.

"Sit here by me, then. It's a queer throne for such a queen; but it's the best your poor lover can find. He'll do better for you some of these days, I'm thinking. Now your mind is easy once again, is it not?"

"How can it ever be at ease, Jack, when I know that you are a criminal among criminals, when I never know the day that I may hear you are in court for murder? 'McMurdo the Scowrer,' that's what one of our boarders called you yesterday. It went through my heart like a knife."

"Sure, hard words break no bones."

"But they were true."

"Well, dear, it's not so bad as you think. We are but poor men that are trying in our own way to get our rights."

Ettie threw her arms round her lover's neck. "Give it up, Jack! For my sake, for God's sake, give it up! It was to ask you that I came here to-day. Oh, Jack, see--I beg it of you on my bended knees! Kneeling here before you I implore you to give it up!"

He raised her and soothed her with her head against his breast.

"Sure, my darlin', you don't know what it is you are asking. How could I give it up when it would be to break my oath and to desert my comrades? If you could see how things stand with me you could never ask it of me. Besides, if I wanted to, how could I do it? You don't suppose that the lodge would let a man go free with all its secrets?"

"I've thought of that, Jack. I've planned it all. Father has saved some money. He is weary of this place where the fear of these people darkens our lives. He is ready to go. We would fly together to Philadelphia or New York, where we would be safe from them."

McMurdo laughed. "The lodge has a long arm. Do you think it could not stretch from here to Philadelphia or New York?"

"Well, then, to the West, or to England, or to Germany, where father came from--anywhere to get away from this Valley of Fear!"

McMurdo thought of old Brother Morris. "Sure, it is the second time I have heard the valley so named," said he. "The shadow does indeed seem to lie heavy on some of you."

"It darkens every moment of our lives. Do you suppose that Ted Baldwin has ever forgiven us? If it were not that he fears you, what do you suppose our chances would be? If you saw the look in those dark, hungry eyes of his when they fall on me!"

"By Gar! I'd teach him better manners if I caught him at it! But see here, little girl. I can't leave here. I can't--take that from me once and for all. But if you will leave me to find my own way, I will try to prepare a way of getting honourably out of it."

"There is no honour in such a matter."

"Well, well, it's just how you look at it. But if you'll give me six months, I'll work it so that I can leave without being ashamed to look others in the face."

The girl laughed with joy. "Six months!" she cried. "Is it a promise?"

"Well, it may be seven or eight. But within a year at the furthest we will leave the valley behind us."
It was the most that Ettie could obtain, and yet it was something. There was this distant light to illuminate the
gloom of the immediate future. She returned to her father's house more light-hearted than she had ever been since
Jack McMurdo had come into her life.

It might be thought that as a member, all the doings of the society would be told to him; but he was soon to
discover that the organization was wider and more complex than the simple lodge. Even Boss McGinty was ignorant
as to many things; for there was an official named the County Delegate, living at Hobson's Patch farther down the
line, who had power over several different lodges which he wielded in a sudden and arbitrary way. Only once did
McMurdo see him, a sly, little gray-haired rat of a man, with a slinking gait and a sidelong glance which was
charged with malice. Evans Pott was his name, and even the great Boss of Vermissa felt towards him something of
the repulsion and fear which the huge Danton may have felt for the puny but dangerous Robespierre.

One day Scanlan, who was McMurdo's fellow boarder, received a note from McGinty inclosing one from Evans
Pott, which informed him that he was sending over two good men, Lawler and Andrews, who had instructions to act
in the neighbourhood; though it was best for the cause that no particulars as to their objects should be given. Would
the Bodymaster see to it that suitable arrangements be made for their lodgings and comfort until the time for action
should arrive? McGinty added that it was impossible for anyone to remain secret at the Union House, and that,
therefore, he would be obliged if McMurdo and Scanlan would put the strangers up for a few days in their boarding
house.

The same evening the two men arrived, each carrying his gripsack. Lawler was an elderly man, shrewd, silent,
and self-contained, clad in an old black frock coat, which with his soft felt hat and ragged, grizzled beard gave him a
general resemblance to an itinerant preacher. His companion Andrews was little more than a boy, frank-faced and
cheerful, with the breezy manner of one who is out for a holiday and means to enjoy every minute of it. Both men
were total abstainers, and behaved in all ways as exemplary members of the society, with the one simple exception
that they were assassins who had often proved themselves to be most capable instruments for this association of
murder. Lawler had already carried out fourteen commissions of the kind, and Andrews three.

They were, as McMurdo found, quite ready to converse about their deeds in the past, which they recounted with
the half-bashful pride of men who had done good and unselfish service for the community. They were reticent,
however, as to the immediate job in hand.

"They chose us because neither I nor the boy here drink," Lawler explained. "They can count on us saying no
more than we should. You must not take it amiss, but it is the orders of the County Delegate that we obey."

"Sure, we are all in it together," said Scanlan, McMurdo's mate, as the four sat together at supper.

"That's true enough, and we'll talk till the cows come home of the killing of Charlie Williams or of Simon Bird,
or any other job in the past. But till the work is done we say nothing."

"There are half a dozen about here that I have a word to say to," said McMurdo, with an oath. "I suppose it isn't
Jack Knox of Ironhill that you are after. I'd go some way to see him get his deserts."

"No, it's not him yet."

"Or Herman Strauss?"

"No, nor him either."

"Well, if you won't tell us we can't make you; but I'd be glad to know."

Lawler smiled and shook his head. He was not to be drawn.

In spite of the reticence of their guests, Scanlan and McMurdo were quite determined to be present at what they
called "the fun." When, therefore, at an early hour one morning McMurdo heard them creeping down the stairs he
awakened Scanlan, and the two hurried on their clothes. When they were dressed they found that the others had
stolen out, leaving the door open behind them. It was not yet dawn, and by the light of the lamps they could see the
two men some distance down the street. They followed them warily, treading noiselessly in the deep snow.

The boarding house was near the edge of the town, and soon they were at the crossroads which is beyond its
boundary. Here three men were waiting, with whom Lawler and Andrews held a short, eager conversation. Then
they all moved on together. It was clearly some notable job which needed numbers. At this point there are several
trails which lead to various mines. The strangers took that which led to the Crow Hill, a huge business which was in
strong hands which had been able, thanks to their energetic and fearless New England manager, Josiah H. Dunn, to
keep some order and discipline during the long reign of terror.

Day was breaking now, and a line of workmen were slowly making their way, singly and in groups, along the
blackened path.

McMurdo and Scanlan strolled on with the others, keeping in sight of the men whom they followed. A thick mist
lay over them, and from the heart of it there came the sudden scream of a steam whistle. It was the ten-minute signal
before the cages descended and the day's labour began.

When they reached the open space round the mine shaft there were a hundred miners waiting, stamping their feet
and blowing on their fingers; for it was bitterly cold. The strangers stood in a little group under the shadow of the engine house. Scanlan and McMurdo climbed a heap of slag from which the whole scene lay before them. They saw the mine engineer, a great bearded Scotchman named Menzies, come out of the engine house and blow his whistle for the cages to be lowered.

At the same instant a tall, loose-framed young man with a clean-shaven, earnest face advanced eagerly towards the pit head. As he came forward his eyes fell upon the group, silent and motionless, under the engine house. The men had drawn down their hats and turned up their collars to screen their faces. For a moment the presentiment of Death laid its cold hand upon the manager's heart. At the next he had shaken it off and saw only his duty towards intrusive strangers.

"Who are you?" he asked as he advanced. "What are you loitering there for?"

There was no answer; but the lad Andrews stepped forward and shot him in the stomach. The hundred waiting miners stood as motionless and helpless as if they were paralyzed. The manager clapped his two hands to the wound and doubled himself up. Then he staggered away; but another of the assassins fired, and he went down sidewise, kicking and clawing among a heap of clinkers. Menzies, the Scotchman, gave a roar of rage at the sight and rushed with an iron spanner at the murderers; but was met by two balls in the face which dropped him dead at their very feet.

There was a surge forward of some of the miners, and an inarticulate cry of pity and of anger; but a couple of the strangers emptied their six-shooters over the heads of the crowd, and they broke and scattered, some of them rushing wildly back to their homes in Vermissa.

When a few of the bravest had rallied, and there was a return to the mine, the murderous gang had vanished in the mists of morning, without a single witness being able to swear to the identity of these men who in front of a hundred spectators had wrought this double crime.

Scanlan and McMurdo made their way back; Scanlan somewhat subdued, for it was the first murder job that he had seen with his own eyes, and it appeared less funny than he had been led to believe. The horrible screams of the dead manager's wife pursued them as they hurried to the town. McMurdo was absorbed and silent; but he showed no sympathy for the weakening of his companion.

"Sure, it is like a war," he repeated. "What is it but a war between us and them, and we hit back where we best can."

There was high revel in the lodge room at the Union House that night, not only over the killing of the manager and engineer of the Crow Hill mine, which would bring this organization into line with the other blackmailed and terror-stricken companies of the district, but also over a distant triumph which had been wrought by the hands of the lodge itself.

It would appear that when the County Delegate had sent over five good men to strike a blow in Vermissa, he had demanded that in return three Vermissa men should be secretly selected and sent across to kill William Hales of Stake Royal, one of the best known and most popular mine owners in the Gilmerton district, a man who was believed not to have an enemy in the world; for he was in all ways a model employer. He had insisted, however, upon efficiency in the work, and had, therefore, paid off certain drunken and idle employees who were members of the all-powerful society. Coffin notices hung outside his door had not weakened his resolution, and so in a free, civilized country he found himself condemned to death.

The execution had now been duly carried out. Ted Baldwin, who sprawled now in the seat of honour beside the Bodymaster, had been chief of the party. His flushed face and glazed, bloodshot eyes told of sleeplessness and drink. He and his two comrades had spent the night before among the mountains. They were unkempt and weather-stained. But no heroes, returning from a forlorn hope, could have had a warmer welcome from their comrades.

The story was told and retold amid cries of delight and shouts of laughter. They had waited for their man as he drove home at nightfall, taking their station at the top of a steep hill, where his horse must be at a walk. He was so furred to keep out the cold that he could not lay his hand on his pistol. They had pulled him out and shot him again and again. He had screamed for mercy. The screams were repeated for the amusement of the lodge.

"Let's hear again how he squealed," they cried.

None of them knew the man; but there is eternal drama in a killing, and they had shown the Scowrers of Gilmerton that the Vermissa men were to be relied upon.

There had been one contretemps; for a man and his wife had driven up while they were still emptying their revolvers into the silent body. It had been suggested that they should shoot them both; but they were harmless folk who were not connected with the mines, so they were sternly bidden to drive on and keep silent, lest a worse thing befell them. And so the blood-mottled figure had been left as a warning to all such hard-hearted employers, and the three noble avengers had hurried off into the mountains where unbroken nature comes down to the very edge of the furnaces and the slag heaps. Here they were, safe and sound, their work well done, and the plaudits of their
companions in their ears.

It had been a great day for the Scowrers. The shadow had fallen even darker over the valley. But as the wise general chooses the moment of victory in which to redouble his efforts, so that his foes may have no time to steady themselves after disaster, so Boss McGinty, looking out upon the scene of his operations with his brooding and malicious eyes, had devised a new attack upon those who opposed him. That very night, as the half-drunken company broke up, he touched McMurdo on the arm and led him aside into that inner room where they had their first interview.

"See here, my lad," said he, "I've got a job that's worthy of you at last. You'll have the doing of it in your own hands."

"Proud I am to hear it," McMurdo answered.

"You can take two men with you--Manders and Reilly. They have been warned for service. We'll never be right in this district until Chester Wilcox has been settled, and you'll have the thanks of every lodge in the coal fields if you can down him."

"I'll do my best, anyhow. Who is he, and where shall I find him?"

McGinty took his eternal half-chewed, half-smoked cigar from the corner of his mouth, and proceeded to draw a rough diagram on a page torn from his notebook.

"He's the chief foreman of the Iron Dike Company. He's a hard citizen, an old colour sergeant of the war, all scars and grizzle. We've had two tries at him; but had no luck, and Jim Carnaway lost his life over it. Now it's for you to take it over. That's the house--all alone at the Iron Dike crossroad, same as you see here on the map--without another within earshot. It's no good by day. He's armed and shoots quick and straight, with no questions asked. But at night--well, there he is with his wife, three children, and a hired help. You can't pick or choose. It's all or none. If you could get a bag of blasting powder at the front door with a slow match to it--"

"What's the man done?"

"Didn't I tell you he shot Jim Carnaway?"

"Why did he shoot him?"

"What in thunder has that to do with you? Carnaway was about his house at night, and he shot him. That's enough for me and you. You've got to settle the thing right."

"There's these two women and the children. Do they go up too?"

"They have to--else how can we get him?"

"It seems hard on them; for they've done nothing."

"What sort of fool's talk is this? Do you back out?"

"Easy, Councillor, easy! What have I ever said or done that you should think I would be after standing back from an order of the Bodymaster of my own lodge? If it's right or if it's wrong, it's for you to decide."

"You'll do it, then?"

"Of course I will do it."

"When?"

"Well, you had best give me a night or two that I may see the house and make my plans. Then--"

"Very good," said McGinty, shaking him by the hand. "I leave it with you. It will be a great day when you bring us the news. It's just the last stroke that will bring them all to their knees."

McMurdo thought long and deeply over the commission which had been so suddenly placed in his hands. The isolated house in which Chester Wilcox lived was about five miles off in an adjacent valley. That very night he started off all alone to prepare for the attempt. It was daylight before he returned from his reconnaissance. Next day he interviewed his two subordinates, Manders and Reilly, reckless youngsters who were as elated as if it were a deer-hunt.

Two nights later they met outside the town, all three armed, and one of them carrying a sack stuffed with the powder which was used in the quarries. It was two in the morning before they came to the lonely house. The night was a windy one, with broken clouds drifting swiftly across the face of a three-quarter moon. They had been warned to be on their guard against bloodhounds; so they moved forward cautiously, with their pistols cocked in their hands. But there was no sound save the howling of the wind, and no movement but the swaying branches above them.

McMurdo listened at the door of the lonely house; but all was still within. Then he leaned the powder bag against it, ripped a hole in it with his knife, and attached the fuse. When it was well alight he and his two companions took to their heels, and were some distance off, safe and snug in a sheltering ditch, before the shattering roar of the explosion, with the low, deep rumble of the collapsing building, told them that their work was done. No cleaner job had ever been carried out in the bloodstained annals of the society.

But alas that work so well organized and boldly carried out should all have gone for nothing! Warned by the fate of the various victims, and knowing that he was marked down for destruction, Chester Wilcox had moved himself
and his family only the day before to some safer and less known quarters, where a guard of police should watch over them. It was an empty house which had been torn down by the gunpowder, and the grim old colour sergeant of the war was still teaching discipline to the miners of Iron Dike.

"Leave him to me," said McMurdo. "He's my man, and I'll get him sure if I have to wait a year for him."

A vote of thanks and confidence was passed in full lodge, and so for the time the matter ended. When a few weeks later it was reported in the papers that Wilcox had been shot at from an ambush, it was an open secret that McMurdo was still at work upon his unfinished job.

Such were the methods of the Society of Freemen, and such were the deeds of the Scowrers by which they spread their rule of fear over the great and rich district which was for so long a period haunted by their terrible presence. Why should these pages be stained by further crimes? Have I not said enough to show the men and their methods?

These deeds are written in history, and there are records wherein one may read the details of them. There one may learn of the shooting of Policemen Hunt and Evans because they had ventured to arrest two members of the society--a double outrage planned at the Vermissa lodge and carried out in cold blood upon two helpless and disarmed men. There also one may read of the shooting of Mrs. Larbey when she was nursing her husband, who had been beaten almost to death by orders of Boss McGinty. The killing of the elder Jenkins, shortly followed by that of his brother, the mutilation of James Murdoch, the blowing up of the Staphouse family, and the murder of the Stendals all followed hard upon one another in the same terrible winter.

Darkly the shadow lay upon the Valley of Fear. The spring had come with running brooks and blossoming trees. There was hope for all Nature bound so long in an iron grip; but nowhere was there any hope for the men and women who lived under the yoke of the terror. Never had the cloud above them been so dark and hopeless as in the early summer of the year 1875.

Chapter 6 - Danger

It was the height of the reign of terror. McMurdo, who had already been appointed Inner Deacon, with every prospect of some day succeeding McGinty as Bodymaster, was now so necessary to the councils of his comrades that nothing was done without his help and advice. The more popular he became, however, with the Freemen, the blacker were the scowls which greeted him as he passed along the streets of Vermissa. In spite of their terror the citizens were taking heart to band themselves together against their oppressors. Rumours had reached the lodge of secret gatherings in the Herald office and of distribution of firearms among the law-abiding people. But McGinty and his men were undisturbed by such reports. They were numerous, resolute, and well armed. Their opponents were scattered and powerless. It would all end, as it had done in the past, in aimless talk and possibly in impotent arrests. So said McGinty, McMurdo, and all the bolder spirits.

It was a Saturday evening in May. Saturday was always the lodge night, and McMurdo was leaving his house to attend it when Morris, the weaker brother of the order, came to see him. His brow was creased with care, and his kindly face was drawn and haggard.

"Can I speak with you freely, Mr. McMurdo?"

"Sure."

"I can't forget that I spoke my heart to you once, and that you kept it to yourself, even though the Boss himself came to ask you about it."

"What else could I do if you trusted me? It wasn't that I agreed with what you said."

"I know that well. But you are the one that I can speak to and be safe. I've a secret here," he put his hand to his breast, "and it is just burning the life out of me. I wish it had come to any one of you but me. If I tell it, it will mean murder, for sure. If I don't, it may bring the end of us all. God help me, but I am near out of my wits over it!"

McMurdo looked at the man earnestly. He was trembling in every limb. He poured some whisky into a glass and handed it to him. "That's the physic for the likes of you," said he. "Now let me hear of it."

Morris drank, and his white face took a tinge of colour. "I can tell it to you all in one sentence," said he. "There's a detective on our trail."

"We must kill him."
"Ah, it's the first thought that came to you! So it will be up at the lodge. Didn't I say to you that it would end in murder?"

"Sure, what is murder? Isn't it common enough in these parts?"

"It is, indeed; but it's not for me to point out the man that is to be murdered. I'd never rest easy again. And yet it's our own necks that may be at stake. In God's name what shall I do?" He rocked to and fro in his agony of indecision.

But his words had moved McMurdo deeply. It was easy to see that he shared the other's opinion as to the danger, and the need for meeting it. He gripped Morris's shoulder and shook him in his earnestness.

"See here, man," he cried, and he almost screeched the words in his excitement, "you won't gain anything by sitting keening like an old wife at a wake. Let's have the facts. Who is the fellow? Where is he? How did you hear of him? Why did you come to me?"

"I came to you; for you are the one man that would advise me. I told you that I had a store in the East before I came here. I left good friends behind me, and one of them is in the telegraph service. Here's a letter that I had from him yesterday. It's this part from the top of the page. You can read it yourself."

This was what McMurdo read:

How are the Scowrers getting on in your parts? We read plenty of them in the papers. Between you and me I expect to hear news from you before long. Five big corporations and the two railroads have taken the thing up in dead earnest. They mean it, and you can bet they'll get there! They are right deep down into it. Pinkerton has taken hold under their orders, and his best man, Birdy Edwards, is operating. The thing has got to be stopped right now.

"Now read the postscript."

Of course, what I give you is what I learned in business; so it goes no further. It's a queer cipher that you handle by the yard every day and can get no meaning from.

McMurdo sat in silence for some time, with the letter in his listless hands. The mist had lifted for a moment, and there was the abyss before him.

"Does anyone else know of this?" he asked.

"I have told no one else."

"But this man--your friend--has he any other person that he would be likely to write to?"

"Well, I dare say he knows one or two more."

"Of the lodge?"

"It's likely enough."

"I was asking because it is likely that he may have given some description of this fellow Birdy Edwards--then we could get on his trail."

"Well, it's possible. But I should not think he knew him. He is just telling me the news that came to him by way of business. How would he know this Pinkerton man?"

McMurdo gave a violent start.

"By Gar!" he cried, "I've got him. What a fool I was not to know it. Lord! but we're in luck! We will fix him before he can do any harm. See here, Morris, will you leave this thing in my hands?"

"Sure, if you will only take it off mine."

"I'll do that. You can stand right back and let me run it. Even your name need not be mentioned. I'll take it all on myself, as if it were to me that this letter has come. Will that content you?"

"It's just what I would ask."

"Then leave it at that and keep your head shut. Now I'll get down to the lodge, and we'll soon make old man Pinkerton sorry for himself."

"You wouldn't kill this man?"

"The less you know, Friend Morris, the easier your conscience will be, and the better you will sleep. Ask no questions, and let these things settle themselves. I have hold of it now."

Morris shook his head sadly as he left. "I feel that his blood is on my hands," he groaned.

"Self-protection is no murder, anyhow," said McMurdo, smiling grimly. "It's him or us. I guess this man would destroy us all if we left him long in the valley. Why, Brother Morris, we'll have to elect you Bodymaster yet; for you've surely saved the lodge."

And yet it was clear from his actions that he thought more seriously of this new intrusion than his words would show. It may have been his guilty conscience, it may have been the reputation of the Pinkerton organization, it may have been the knowledge that great, rich corporations had set themselves the task of clearing out the Scowrers; but, whatever his reason, his actions were those of a man who is preparing for the worst. Every paper which would incriminate him was destroyed before he left the house. After that he gave a long sigh of satisfaction; for it seemed to him that he was safe. And yet the danger must still have pressed somewhat upon him; for on his way to the lodge he stopped at old man Shafter's. The house was forbidden him; but when he tapped at the window Ettie came out to
him. The dancing Irish deviltry had gone from her lover's eyes. She read his danger in his earnest face.

"Something has happened!" she cried. "Oh, Jack, you are in danger!"

"Sure, it is not very bad, my sweetheart. And yet it may be wise that we make a move before it is worse."

"Make a move?"

"I promised you once that I would go some day. I think the time is coming. I had news to-night, bad news, and I see trouble coming."

"The police?"

"Well, a Pinkerton. But, sure, you wouldn't know what that is, acushla, nor what it may mean to the likes of me. I'm too deep in this thing, and I may have to get out of it quick. You said you would come with me if I went."

"Oh, Jack, it would be the saving of you!"

"I'm an honest man in some things, Ettie. I wouldn't hurt a hair of your bonny head for all that the world can give, nor ever pull you down one inch from the golden throne above the clouds where I always see you. Would you trust me?"

She put her hand in his without a word. "Well, then, listen to what I say, and do as I order you, for indeed it's the only way for us. Things are going to happen in this valley. I feel it in my bones. There may be many of us that will have to look out for ourselves. I'm one, anyhow. If I go, by day or night, it's you that must come with me!"

"I'd come after you, Jack."

"No, no, you shall come WITH me. If this valley is closed to me and I can never come back, how can I leave you behind, and me perhaps in hiding from the police with never a chance of a message? It's with me you must come. I know a good woman in the place I come from, and it's there I'd leave you till we can get married. Will you come?"

"Yes, Jack, I will come."

"God bless you for your trust in me! It's a fiend out of hell that I should be if I abused it. Now, mark you, Ettie, it will be just a word to you, and when it reaches you, you will drop everything and come right down to the waiting room at the depot and stay there till I come for you."

"Day or night, I'll come at the word, Jack."

Somewhat eased in mind, now that his own preparations for escape had been begun, McMurdo went on to the lodge. It had already assembled, and only by complicated signs and countersigns could he pass through the outer guard and inner guard who closed-tiled it. A buzz of pleasure and welcome greeted him as he entered. The long room was crowded, and through the haze of tobacco smoke he saw the tangled black mane of the Bodymaster, the cruel, unfriendly features of Baldwin, the vulture face of Harraway, the secretary, and a dozen more who were among the leaders of the lodge. He rejoiced that they should all be there to take counsel over his news.

"Indeed, it's glad we are to see you, Brother!" cried the chairman. "There's business here that wants a Solomon in judgment to set it right."

"It's Lander and Egan," explained his neighbour as he took his seat. "They both claim the head money given by the lodge for the shooting of old man Crabbe over at Stylestown, and who's to say which fired the bullet?"

McMurdo rose in his place and raised his hand. The expression of his face froze the attention of the audience. There was a dead hush of expectation.

"Eminent Bodymaster," he said, in a solemn voice, "I claim urgency!"

"Brother McMurdo claims urgency," said McGinty. "It's a claim that by the rules of this lodge takes precedence. Now Brother, we attend you."

McMurdo took the letter from his pocket.

"Eminent Bodymaster and Brethren," he said, "I am the bearer of ill news this day; but it is better that it should be known and discussed, than that a blow should fall upon us without warning which would destroy us all. I have information that the most powerful and richest organizations in this state have bound themselves together for our destruction, and that at this very moment there is a Pinkerton detective, one Birdy Edwards, at work in the valley collecting the evidence which may put a rope round the necks of many of us, and send every man in this room into a felon's cell. That is the situation for the discussion of which I have made a claim of urgency."

There was a dead silence in the room. It was broken by the chairman.

"What is your evidence for this, Brother McMurdo?" he asked.

"It is in this letter which has come into my hands," said McMurdo. Me read the passage aloud. "It is a matter of honour with me that I can give no further particulars about the letter, nor put it into your hands; but I assure you that there is nothing else in it which can affect the interests of the lodge. I put the case before you as it has reached me."

"Let me say, Mr. Chairman," said one of the older brethren, "that I have heard of Birdy Edwards, and that he has the name of being the best man in the Pinkerton service."

"Does anyone know him by sight?" asked McGinty.

"Yes," said McMurdo, "I do."
There was a murmur of astonishment through the hall.
"I believe we hold him in the hollow of our hands," he continued with an exulting smile upon his face. "If we act quickly and wisely, we can cut this thing short. If I have your confidence and your help, it is little that we have to fear."

"What have we to fear, anyhow? What can he know of our affairs?"
"You might say so if all were as stanch as you, Councillor. But this man has all the millions of the capitalists at his back. Do you think there is no weaker brother among all our lodges that could not be bought? He will get at our secrets--maybe has got them already. There's only one sure cure."

"That he never leaves the valley," said Baldwin.
McMurdo nodded. "Good for you, Brother Baldwin," he said. "You and I have had our differences, but you have said the true word to-night."

"Where is he, then? Where shall we know him?"
"Eminent Bodymaster," said McMurdo, earnestly, "I would put it to you that this is too vital a thing for us to discuss in open lodge. God forbid that I should throw a doubt on anyone here; but if so much as a word of gossip got to the ears of this man, there would be an end of any chance of our getting him. I would ask the lodge to choose a trusty committee, Mr. Chairman--yourself, if I might suggest it, and Brother Baldwin here, and five more. Then I can talk freely of what I know and of what I advise should be done."

The proposition was at once adopted, and the committee chosen. Besides the chairman and Baldwin there were the vulture-faced secretary, Harraway, Tiger Cormac, the brutal young assassin, Carter, the treasurer, and the brothers Willaby, fearless and desperate men who would stick at nothing.

The usual revelry of the lodge was short and subdued: for there was a cloud upon the men's spirits, and many there for the first time began to see the cloud of avenging Law drifting up in that serene sky under which they had dwelt so long. The horrors they had dealt out to others had been so much a part of their settled lives that the thought of retribution had become a remote one, and so seemed the more startling now that it came so closely upon them. They broke up early and left their leaders to their council.

"Now, McMurdo!" said McGinty when they were alone. The seven men sat frozen in their seats.
"I said just now that I knew Birdy Edwards," McMurdo explained. "I need not tell you that he is not here under that name. He's a brave man, but not a crazy one. He passes under the name of Steve Wilson, and he is lodging at Hobson's Patch."

"How do you know this?"
"Because I fell into talk with him. I thought little of it at the time, nor would have given it a second thought but for this letter; but now I'm sure it's the man. I met him on the cars when I went down the line on Wednesday--a hard case if ever there was one. He said he was a reporter. I believed it for the moment. Wanted to know all he could about the Scowrers and what he called 'the outrages' for a New York paper. Asked me every kind of question so as to get something. You bet I was giving nothing away. 'I'd pay for it and pay well,' said he, 'if I could get some stuff that would suit my editor.' I said what I thought would please him best, and he handed me a twenty-dollar bill for my information. 'There's ten times that for you,' said he, 'if you can find me all that I want.'"

"What did you tell him, then?"
"Any stuff I could make up."
"How do you know he wasn't a newspaper man?"
"I'll tell you. He got out at Hobson's Patch, and so did I. I chanced into the telegraph bureau, and he was leaving it.

"'See here,' said the operator after he'd gone out, 'I guess we should charge double rates for this.'--'I guess you should,' said I. He had filled the form with stuff that might have been Chinese, for all we could make of it. 'He fires a sheet of this off every day,' said the clerk. 'Yes,' said I; 'it's special news for his paper, and he's scared that the others should tap it. That was what the operator thought and what I thought at the time; but I think differently now.'"

"By Gar! I believe you are right," said McGinty. "But what do you allow that we should do about it?"

"Why not go right down now and fix him?" someone suggested.
"Ay, the sooner the better."

"I'd start this next minute if I knew where we could find him," said McMurdo. "He's in Hobson's Patch; but I don't know the house. I've got a plan, though, if you'll only take my advice."

"Well, what is it?"

"I'll go to the Patch to-morrow morning. I'll find him through the operator. He can locate him, I guess. Well, then I'll tell him that I'm a Freeman myself. I'll offer him all the secrets of the lodge for a price. You bet he'll tumble to it. I'll tell him the papers are at my house, and that it's as much as my life would be worth to let him come while folk were about. He'll see that that's horse sense. Let him come at ten o'clock at night, and he shall see everything. That
will fetch him sure."

"Well?"

"You can plan the rest for yourselves. Widow MacNamara's is a lonely house. She's as true as steel and as deaf as a post. There's only Scanlan and me in the house. If I get his promise—and I'll let you know if I do—I'd have the whole seven of you come to me by nine o'clock. We'll get him in. If ever he gets out alive—well, he can talk of Birdy Edwards's luck for the rest of his days!"

"There's going to be a vacancy at Pinkerton's or I'm mistaken. Leave it at that, McMurdo. At nine to-morrow we'll be with you. You once get the door shut behind him, and you can leave the rest with us."

Chapter 7 - The Trapping of Birdy Edwards

As McMurdo had said, the house in which he lived was a lonely one and very well suited for such a crime as they had planned. It was on the extreme fringe of the town and stood well back from the road. In any other case the conspirators would have simply called out their man, as they had many a time before, and emptied their pistols into his body; but in this instance it was very necessary to find out how much he knew, how he knew it, and what had been passed on to his employers.

It was possible that they were already too late and that the work had been done. If that was indeed so, they could at least have their revenge upon the man who had done it. But they were hopeful that nothing of great importance had yet come to the detective's knowledge, as otherwise, they argued, he would not have troubled to write down and forward such trivial information as McMurdo claimed to have given him. However, all this they would learn from his own lips. Once in their power, they would find a way to make him speak. It was not the first time that they had handled an unwilling witness.

McMurdo went to Hobson's Patch as agreed. The police seemed to take particular interest in him that morning, and Captain Marvin—who had claimed the old acquaintance with him at Chicago—actually addressed him as he waited at the station. McMurdo turned away and refused to speak with him. He was back from his mission in the afternoon, and saw McGinty at the Union House.

"He is coming," he said.

"Good!" said McGinty. The giant was in his shirt sleeves, with chains and seals gleaming athwart his ample waistcoat and a diamond twinkling through the fringe of his bristling beard. Drink and politics had made the Boss a very rich as well as powerful man. The more terrible, therefore, seemed that glimpse of the prison or the gallows which had risen before him the night before.

"Do you reckon he knows much?" he asked anxiously.

McMurdo shook his head gloomily. "He's been here some time—six weeks at the least. I guess he didn't come into these parts to look at the prospect. If he has been working among us all that time with the railroad money at his back, I should expect that he has got results, and that he has passed them on."

"There's not a weak man in the lodge," cried McGinty. "True as steel, every man of them. And yet, by the Lord! there is that skunk Morris. What about him? If any man gives us away, it would be he. I've a mind to send a couple of the boys round before evening to give him a beating up and see what they can get from him."

"Well, there would be no harm in that," McMurdo answered. "I won't deny that I have a liking for Morris and would be sorry to see him come to harm. He has spoken to me once or twice over lodge matters, and though he may not see them the same as you or I, he never seemed the sort that squeals. But still it is not for me to stand between him and you."

"I'll fix the old devil!" said McGinty with an oath. "I've had my eye on him this year past."

"Well, you know best about that," McMurdo answered. "But whatever you do must be to-morrow; for we must lie low until the Pinkerton affair is settled up. We can't afford to set the police buzzing, to-day of all days."

"True for you," said McGinty. "And we'll learn from Birdy Edwards himself where he got his news if we have to cut his heart out first. Did he seem to scent a trap?"

McMurdo laughed. "I guess I took him on his weak point," he said. "If he could get on a good trail of the Scowrers, he's ready to follow it into hell. I took his money," McMurdo grinned as he produced a wad of dollar notes, "and as much more when he has seen all my papers."

"What papers?"

"Well, there are no papers. But I filled him up about constitutions and books of rules and forms of membership. He expects to get right down to the end of everything before he leaves."

"Faith, he's right there," said McGinty grimly. "Didn't he ask you why you didn't bring him the papers?"

"As if I would carry such things, and me a suspected man, and Captain Marvin after speaking to me this very day at the depot!"

"Ay, I heard of that," said McGinty. "I guess the heavy end of this business is coming on to you. We could put him down an old shaft when we've done with him; but however we work it we can't get past the man living at
Hobson's Patch and you being there to-day."

McMurdo shrugged his shoulders. "If we handle it right, they can never prove the killing," said he. "No one can see him come to the house after dark, and I'll lay to it that no one will see him go. Now see here, Councillor, I'll show you my plan and I'll ask you to fit the others into it. You will all come in good time. Very well. He comes at ten. He is to tap three times, and me to open the door for him. Then I'll get behind him and shut it. He's our man then."

"That's all easy and plain."

"Yes; but the next step wants considering. He's a hard proposition. He's heavily armed. I've fooled him proper, and yet he is likely to be on his guard. Suppose I show him right into a room with seven men in it where he expected to find me alone. There is going to be shooting, and somebody is going to be hurt."

"That's so."

"And the noise is going to bring every damned copper in the township on top of it."

"I guess you are right."

"This is how I should work it. You will all be in the big room--same as you saw when you had a chat with me. I'll open the door for him, show him into the parlour beside the door, and leave him there while I get the papers. That will give me the chance of telling you how things are shaping. Then I will go back to him with some faked papers. As he is reading them I will jump for him and get my grip on his pistol arm. You'll hear me call and in you will rush. The quicker the better; for he is as strong a man as I, and I may have more than I can manage. But I allow that I can hold him till you come."

"It's a good plan," said McGinty. "The lodge will owe you a debt for this. I guess when I move out of the chair I can put a name to the man that's coming after me."

"Sure, Councillor, I am little more than a recruit," said McMurdo; but his face showed what he thought of the great man's compliment.

When he had returned home he made his own preparations for the grim evening in front of him. First he cleaned, oiled, and loaded his Smith & Wesson revolver. Then he surveyed the room in which the detective was to be trapped. It was a large apartment, with a long deal table in the centre, and the big stove at one side. At each of the other sides were windows. There were no shutters on these: only light curtains which drew across. McMurdo examined these attentively. No doubt it must have struck him that the apartment was very exposed for so secret a meeting. Yet its distance from the road made it of less consequence. Finally he discussed the matter with his fellow lodger. Scanlan, though a Scowrer, was an inoffensive little man who was too weak to stand against the opinion of his comrades, but was secretly horrified by the deeds of blood at which he had sometimes been forced to assist. McMurdo told him shortly what was intended.

"And if I were you, Mike Scanlan, I would take a night off and keep clear of it. There will be bloody work here before morning."

"Well, indeed then, Mac," Scanlan answered. "It's not the will but the nerve that is wanting in me. When I saw Manager Dunn go down at the colliery yonder it was just more than I could stand. I'm not made for it, same as you or McGinty. If the lodge will think none the worse of me, I'll just do as you advise and leave you to yourselves for the evening."

The men came in good time as arranged. They were outwardly respectable citizens, well clad and cleanly; but a judge of faces would have read little hope for Birdy Edwards in those hard mouths and remorseless eyes. There was not a man in the room whose hands had not been reddened a dozen times before. They were as hardened to human murder as a butcher to sheep.

Foremost, of course, both in appearance and in guilt, was the formidable Boss. Harraway, the secretary, was a lean, bitter man with a long, scraggy neck and nervous, jerky limbs, a man of incorruptible fidelity where the finances of the order were concerned, and with no notion of justice or honesty to anyone beyond. The treasurer, Carter, was a middle-aged man, with an impassive, rather sulky expression, and a yellow parchment skin. He was a capable organizer, and the actual details of nearly every outrage had sprung from his plotting brain. The two Willabys were men of action, tall, lithe young fellows with determined faces, while their companion, Tiger Cormac, a heavy, dark youth, was feared even by his own comrades for the ferocity of his disposition. These were the men who assembled that night under the roof of McMurdo for the killing of the Pinkerton detective.

Their host had placed whisky upon the table, and they had fastened to prime themselves for the work before them. Baldwin and Cormac were already half-drunk, and the liquor had brought out all their ferocity. Cormac placed his hands on the stove for an instant--it had been lighted, for the nights were still cold.

"That will do," said he, with an oath.

"Ay," said Baldwin, catching his meaning. "If he is strapped to that, we will have the truth out of him."

"We'll have the truth out of him, never fear," said McMurdo. He had nerves of steel, this man; for though the
whole weight of the affair was on him his manner was as cool and unconcerned as ever. The others marked it and applauded.

"You are the one to handle him," said the Boss approvingly. "Not a warning will he get till your hand is on his throat. It's a pity there are no shutters to your windows."

McMurdo went from one to the other and drew the curtains tighter. "Sure no one can spy upon us now. It's close upon the hour."

"Maybe he won't come. Maybe he'll get a sniff of danger," said the secretary.

"He'll come, never fear," McMurdo answered. "He is as eager to come as you can be to see him. Hark to that!"

They all sat like wax figures, some with their glasses arrested halfway to their lips. Three loud knocks had sounded at the door.

"Hush!" McMurdo raised his hand in caution. An exulting glance went round the circle, and hands were laid upon their weapons.

"Not a sound, for your lives!" McMurdo whispered, as he went from the room, closing the door carefully behind him.

With strained ears the murderers waited. They counted the steps of their comrade down the passage. Then they heard him open the outer door. There were a few words as of greeting. Then they were aware of a strange step inside and of an unfamiliar voice. An instant later came the slam of the door and the turning of the key in the lock. Their prey was safe within the trap. Tiger Cormac laughed horribly, and Boss McGinty clapped his great hand across his mouth.

"Be quiet, you fool!" he whispered. "You'll be the undoing of us yet!"

There was a mutter of conversation from the next room. It seemed interminable. Then the door opened, and McMurdo appeared, his finger upon his lip.

He came to the end of the table and looked round at them. A subtle change had come over him. His manner was as of one who has great work to do. His face had set into granite firmness. His eyes shone with a fierce excitement behind his spectacles. He had become a visible leader of men. They stared at him with eager interest; but he said nothing. Still with the same singular gaze he looked from man to man.

"Well!" cried Boss McGinty at last. "Is he here? Is Birdy Edwards here?"

"Yes," McMurdo answered slowly. "Birdy Edwards is here. I am Birdy Edwards!"

There were ten seconds after that brief speech during which the room might have been empty, so profound was the silence. The hissing of a kettle upon the stove rose sharp and strident to the ear. Seven white faces, all turned upward to this man who dominated them, were set motionless with utter terror. Then, with a sudden shivering of glass, a bristle of glistening rifle barrels broke through each window, while the curtains were torn from their hangings.

At the sight Boss McGinty gave the roar of a wounded bear and plunged for the half-opened door. A levelled revolver met him there with the stern blue eyes of Captain Marvin of the Mine Police gleaming behind the sights. The Boss recoiled and fell back into his chair.

"You're safer there, Councillor," said the man whom they had known as McMurdo. "And you, Baldwin, if you don't take your hand off your pistol, you'll cheat the hangman yet. Pull it out, or by the Lord that made me--There, that will do. There are forty armed men round this house, and you can figure it out for yourself what chance you have. Take their pistols, Marvin!"

There was no possible resistance under the menace of those rifles. The men were disarmed. Sulky, sheepish, and amazed, they still sat round the table.

"I'd like to say a word to you before we separate," said the man who had trapped them. "I guess we may not meet again until you see me on the stand in the courthouse. I'll give you something to think over between now and then. You know me now for what I am. At last I can put my cards on the table. I am Birdy Edwards of Pinkerton's. I was chosen to break up your gang. I had a hard and dangerous game to play. Not a soul, not one soul, not my nearest and dearest, knew that I was playing it. Only Captain Marvin here and my employers knew that. But it's over to-night, thank God, and I am the winner!"

The seven pale, rigid faces looked up at him. There was unappeasable hatred in their eyes. He read the relentless threat.

"Maybe you think that the game is not over yet. Well, I take my chance of that. Anyhow, some of you will take no further hand, and there are sixty more besides yourselves that will see a jail this night. I'll tell you this, that when I was put upon this job I never believed there was such a society as yours. I thought it was paper talk, and that I would prove it so. They told me it was to do with the Freemens; so I went to Chicago and was made one. Then I was surer than ever that it was just paper talk; for I found no harm in the society, but a deal of good.

"Still, I had to carry out my job, and I came to the coal valleys. When I reached this place I learned that I was
wrong and that it wasn't a dime novel after all. So I stayed to look after it. I never killed a man in Chicago. I never minted a dollar in my life. Those I gave you were as good as any others; but I never spent money better. But I knew the way into your good wishes and so I pretended to you that the law was after me. It all worked just as I thought.

"So I joined your infernal lodge, and I took my share in your councils. Maybe they will say that I was as bad as you. They can say what they like, so long as I get you. But what is the truth? The night I joined you beat up old man Stanger. I could not warn him, for there was no time; but I held your hand, Baldwin, when you would have killed him. If ever I have suggested things, so as to keep my place among you, they were things which I knew I could prevent. I could not save Dunn and Menzies, for I did not know enough; but I will see that their murderers are hanged. I gave Chester Wilcox warning, so that when I blew his house in he and his folk were in hiding. There was many a crime that I could not stop; but if you look back and think how often your man came home the other road, or was down in town when you went for him, or stayed indoors when you thought he would come out, you'll see my work."

"You blasted traitor!" hissed McGinty through his closed teeth.

"Ay, John McGinty, you may call me that if it eases your smart. You and your like have been the enemy of God and man in these parts. It took a man to get between you and the poor devils of men and women that you held under your grip. There was just one way of doing it, and I did it. You call me a traitor; but I guess there's many a thousand will call me a deliverer that went down into hell to save them. I've had three months of it. I wouldn't have three such months again if they let me loose in the treasury at Washington for it. I had to stay till I had it all, every man and every secret right here in this hand. I'd have waited a little longer if it hadn't come to my knowledge that my secret was coming out. A letter had come into the town that would have set you wise to it all. Then I had to act and act quickly.

"I've nothing more to say to you, except that when my time comes I'll die the easier when I think of the work I have done in this valley. Now, Marvin, I'll keep you no more. Take them in and get it over."

There is little more to tell. Scanlan had been given a sealed note to be left at the address of Miss Ettie Shafter, a mission which he had accepted with a wink and a knowing smile. In the early hours of the morning a beautiful woman and a much muffled man boarded a special train which had been sent by the railroad company, and made a swift, unbroken journey out of the land of danger. It was the last time that ever either Ettie or her lover set foot in the Valley of Fear. Ten days later they were married in Chicago, with old Jacob Shafter as witness of the wedding.

The trial of the Scowrers was held far from the place where their adherents might have terrified the guardians of the law. In vain they struggled. In vain the money of the lodge--money squeezed by blackmail out of the whole countryside--was spent like water in the attempt to save them. That cold, clear, unimpassioned statement from one who knew every detail of their lives, their organization, and their crimes was unshaken by all the wiles of their defenders. At last after so many years they were broken and scattered. The cloud was lifted forever from the valley.

McGinty met his fate upon the scaffold, cringing and whining when the last hour came. Eight of his chief followers shared his fate. Fifty-odd had various degrees of imprisonment. The work of Birdy Edwards was complete.

And yet, as he had guessed, the game was not over yet. There was another hand to be played, and yet another and another. Ted Baldwin, for one, had escaped the scaffold; so had the Willabys; so had several others of the fiercest spirits of the gang. For ten years they were out of the world, and then came a day when they were free once more--a day which Edwards, who knew his men, was very sure would be an end of his life of peace. They had sworn an oath on all that they thought holy to have his blood as a vengeance for their comrades. And well they strove to keep their vow!

From Chicago he was chased, after two attempts so near success that it was sure that the third would get him. From Chicago he went under a changed name to California, where an English partner named Barker he amassed a fortune. At last there came a warning to him that the bloodhounds were on his track once more, and he cleared--only just in time--for England. And thence came the John Douglas who for a second time married a worthy mate, and lived for five years as a Sussex county gentleman, a life which ended with the strange happenings of which we have heard.

Epilogue

The police trial had passed, in which the case of John Douglas was referred to a higher court. So had the Quarter Sessions, at which he was acquitted as having acted in self-defense.

"Get him out of England at any cost," wrote Holmes to the wife. "There are forces here which may be more dangerous than those he has escaped. There is no safety for your husband in England."

Two months had gone by, and the case had to some extent passed from our minds. Then one morning there came an enigmatic note slipped into our letter box. "Dear me, Mr. Holmes. Dear me!" said this singular epistle. There was
neither superscription nor signature. I laughed at the quaint message; but Holmes showed unwonted seriousness.

"Deviltry, Watson!" he remarked, and sat long with a clouded brow.

Late last night Mrs. Hudson, our landlady, brought up a message that a gentleman wished to see Mr. Holmes, and that the matter was of the utmost importance. Close at the heels of his messenger came Cecil Barker, our friend of the moated Manor House. His face was drawn and haggard.

"I've had bad news--terrible news, Mr. Holmes," said he.
"I feared as much," said Holmes.
"You have not had a cable, have you?"
"I have had a note from someone who has."

"It's poor Douglas. They tell me his name is Edwards; but he will always be Jack Douglas of Benito Canon to me. I told you that they started together for South Africa in the Palmyra three weeks ago."
"Exactly."
"The ship reached Cape Town last night. I received this cable from Mrs. Douglas this morning: Jack has been lost overboard in gale off St. Helena. No one knows how accident occurred. IVY DOUGLAS."
"Ha! It came like that, did it?" said Holmes thoughtfully. "Well, I've no doubt it was well stage-managed."
"You mean that you think there was no accident?"
"None in the world."
"He was murdered?"
"Surely!"
"So I think also. These infernal Scowrers, this cursed vindictive nest of criminals--"
"No, no, my good sir," said Holmes. "There is a master hand here. It is no case of sawed-off shotguns and clumsy six-shooters. You can tell an old master by the sweep of his brush. I can tell a Moriarty when I see one. This crime is from London, not from America."
"But for what motive?"
"Because it is done by a man who cannot afford to fail, one whose whole unique position depends upon the fact that all he does must succeed. A great brain and a huge organization have been turned to the extinction of one man. It is crushing the nut with the triphammer--an absurd extravagance of energy--but the nut is very effectually crushed all the same."
"How came this man to have anything to do with it?"
"I can only say that the first word that ever came to us of the business was from one of his lieutenants. These Americans were well advised. Having an English job to do, they took into partnership, as any foreign criminal could do, this great consultant in crime. From that moment their man was doomed. At first he would content himself by using his machinery in order to find their victim. Then he would indicate how the matter might be treated. Finally, when he read in the reports of the failure of this agent, he would step in himself with a master touch. You heard me warn this man at Birlstone Manor House that the coming danger was greater than the past. Was I right?"

Barker beat his head with his clenched fist in his impotent anger. "Do not tell me that we have to sit down under this? Do you say that no one can ever get level with this king devil?"
"No, I don't say that," said Holmes, and his eyes seemed to be looking far into the future. "I don't say that he can't be beat. But you must give me time--you must give me time!"

We all sat in silence for some minutes while those fateful eyes still strained to pierce the veil.
The Adventure of Wisteria Lodge

I find it recorded in my notebook that it was a bleak and windy day towards the end of March in the year 1892. Holmes had received a telegram while we sat at our lunch, and he had scribbled a reply. He made no remark, but the matter remained in his thoughts, for he stood in front of the fire afterwards with a thoughtful face, smoking his pipe, and casting an occasional glance at the message. Suddenly he turned upon me with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"I suppose, Watson, we must look upon you as a man of letters," said he. "How do you define the word 'grotesque'?

"Strange--remarkable," I suggested.
He shook his head at my definition.
"There is surely something more than that," said he; "some underlying suggestion of the tragic and the terrible. If you cast your mind back to some of those narratives with which you have afflicted a long-suffering public, you will recognize how often the grotesque has deepened into the criminal. Think of that little affair of the red-headed men. That was grotesque enough in the outset, and yet it ended in a desperate attempt at robbery. Or, again, there was that most grotesque affair of the five orange pips, which let straight to a murderous conspiracy. The word puts me on the alert."

"Have you it there?" I asked.
He read the telegram aloud.
"Have just had most incredible and grotesque experience. May I consult you?
"Scott Eccles, "Post Office, Charing Cross."
"Man or woman?" I asked.
"Oh, man, of course. No woman would ever send a reply-paid telegram. She would have come."
"Will you see him?"
"My dear Watson, you know how bored I have been since we locked up Colonel Carruthers. My mind is like a racing engine, tearing itself to pieces because it is not connected up with the work for which it was built. Life is commonplace, the papers are sterile; audacity and romance seem to have passed forever from the criminal world. Can you ask me, then, whether I am ready to look into any new problem, however trivial it may prove? But here, unless I am mistaken, is our client."

A measured step was heard upon the stairs, and a moment later a stout, tall, gray-whiskered and solemnly respectable person was ushered into the room. His life history was written in his heavy features and pompous manner. From his spats to his gold-rimmed spectacles he was a Conservative, a churchman, a good citizen, orthodox and conventional to the last degree. But some amazing experience had disturbed his native composure and left its traces in his bristling hair, his flushed, angry cheeks, and his flurried, excited manner. He plunged instantly into his business.

"I have had a most singular and unpleasant experience, Mr. Holmes," said he. "Never in my life have I been placed in such a situation. It is most improper--most outrageous. I must insist upon some explanation." He swelled and puffed in his anger.
"Pray sit down, Mr. Scott Eccles," said Holmes in a soothing voice. "May I ask, in the first place, why you came to me at all?"
"Well, sir, it did not appear to be a matter which concerned the police, and yet, when you have heard the facts, you must admit that I could not leave it where it was. Private detectives are a class with whom I have absolutely no sympathy, but none the less, having heard your name--"
"Quite so. But, in the second place, why did you not come at once?"
Holmes glanced at his watch.
"It is a quarter-past two," he said. "Your telegram was dispatched about one. But no one can glance at your toilet and attire without seeing that your disturbance dates from the moment of your waking."

Our client smoothed down his unbrushed hair and felt his unshaven chin.
"You are right, Mr. Holmes. I never gave a thought to my toilet. I was only too glad to get out of such a house. But I have been running round making inquiries before I came to you. I went to the house agents, you know, and they said that Mr. Garcia's rent was paid up all right and that everything was in order at Wisteria Lodge."

"Come, come, sir," said Holmes, laughing. "You are like my friend, Dr. Watson, who has a bad habit of telling his stories wrong end foremost. Please arrange your thoughts and let me know, in their due sequence, exactly what those events are which have sent you out unbrushed and unkempt, with dress boots and waistcoat buttoned awry, in search of advice and assistance."

Our client looked down with a rueful face at his own unconventional appearance.
"I'm sure it must look very bad, Mr. Holmes, and I am not aware that in my whole life such a thing has ever happened before. But will tell you the whole queer business, and when I have done so you will admit, I am sure, that there has been enough to excuse me."

But his narrative was nipped in the bud. There was a bustle outside, and Mrs. Hudson opened the door to usher in two robust and official-looking individuals, one of whom was well known to us as Inspector Gregson of Scotland Yard, an energetic, gallant, and, within his limitations, a capable officer. He shook hands with Holmes and introduced his comrade as Inspector Baynes, of the Surrey Constabulary.

"We are hunting together, Mr. Holmes, and our trail lay in this direction." He turned his bulldog eyes upon our visitor. "Are you Mr. John Scott Eccles, of Popham House, Lee?"

"I am."
"We have been following you about all the morning."
"You traced him through the telegram, no doubt," said Holmes.
"Exactly, Mr. Holmes. We picked up the scent at Charing Cross Post-Office and came on here."
"But why do you follow me? What do you want?"
"We wish a statement, Mr. Scott Eccles, as to the events which let up to the death last night of Mr. Aloysius Garcia, of Wisteria Lodge, near Esher."

Our client had sat up with staring eyes and every tinge of colour struck from his astonished face.
"Dead? Did you say he was dead?"
"Yes, sir, he is dead."
"But how? An accident?"
"Murder, if ever there was one upon earth."
"Good God! This is awful! You don't mean—you don't mean that I am suspected?"
"A letter of yours was found in the dead man's pocket, and we know by it that you had planned to pass last night at his house."
"So I did."
"Oh, you did, did you?"
Out came the official notebook.
"Wait a bit, Gregson," said Sherlock Holmes. "All you desire is a plain statement, is it not?"
"And it is my duty to warn Mr. Scott Eccles that it may be used against him."
"Mr. Eccles was going to tell us about it when you entered the room. I think, Watson, a brandy and soda would do him no harm. Now, sir, I suggest that you take no notice of this addition to your audience, and that you proceed with your narrative exactly as you would have done had you never been interrupted."

Our visitor had gulped off the brandy and the colour had returned to his face. With a dubious glance at the inspector's notebook, he plunged at once into his extraordinary statement.
"I am a bachelor," said he, "and being of a sociable turn I cultivate a large number of friends. Among these are
the family of a retired brewer called Melville, living at Abermarle Mansion, Kensington. It was at his table that I met
some weeks ago a young fellow named Garcia. He was, I understood, of Spanish descent and connected in some
way with the embassy. He spoke perfect English, was pleasing in his manners, and as good-looking a man as ever I
saw in my life.

"In some way we struck up quite a friendship, this young fellow and I. He seemed to take a fancy to me from the
first, and within two days of our meeting he came to see me at Lee. One thing led to another, and it ended in his
inviting me out to spend a few days at his house, Wisteria Lodge, between Esher and Oxshott. Yesterday evening I
went to Esher to fulfil this engagement.

"He had described his household to me before I went there. He lived with a faithful servant, a countryman of his
own, who looked after all his needs. This fellow could speak English and did his housekeeping for him. Then there
was a wonderful cook, he said, a half-breed whom he had picked up in his travels, who could serve an excellent
dinner. I remember that he remarked what a queer household it was to find in the heart of Surrey, and that I agreed
with him, though it has proved a good deal queerer than I thought.

"I drove to the place--about two miles on the south side of Esher. The house was a fair-sized one, standing back
from the road, with a curving drive which was banked with high evergreen shrubs. It was an old, tumble-down
building in a crazy state of disrepair. When the trap pulled up on the grass-grown drive in front of the blotched and
weather-stained door, I had doubts as to my wisdom in visiting a man whom I knew so slightly. He opened the door
himself, however, and greeted me with a great show of cordiality. I was handed over to the manservant, a
mournful, swarthy individual, who led the way, my bag in his hand, to my bedroom. The whole place was
depressing. Our dinner was tete-a-tete, and though my host did his best to be entertaining, his thoughts seemed to
continually wander, and he talked so vaguely and wildly that I could hardly understand him. He continually
rummed his fingers on the table, gnawed his nails, and gave other signs of nervous impatience. The dinner itself
was neither well served nor well cooked, and the gloomy presence of the silent servant did not help to enliven us. I
can assure you that many times in the course of the evening I wished that I could invent some excuse which would
take me back to Lee.

"One thing comes back to my memory which may have a bearing upon the business that you two gentlemen are
investigating. I thought nothing of it at the time. Near the end of dinner a note was handed in by the servant. I
noticed that after my host had read it he seemed even more distrait and strange than before. He gave up all pretence
at conversation and sat, smoking endless cigarettes, lost in his own thoughts, but he made no remark as to the
contents. About eleven I was glad to go to bed. Some time later Garcia looked in at my door--the room was dark at
the time--and asked me if I had rung. I said that I had not. He apologized for having disturbed me so late, saying
that it was nearly one o'clock. I dropped off after this and slept soundly all night.

"And now I come to the amazing part of my tale. When I woke it was broad daylight. I glanced at my watch, and
the time was nearly nine. I had particularly asked to be called at eight, so I was very much astonished at this
forgetfulness. I sprang up and rang for the servant. There was no response. I rang again and again, with the same
result. Then I came to the conclusion that the bell was out of order. I huddled on my clothes and hurried downstairs
in an exceedingly bad temper to order some hot water. You can imagine my surprise when I found that there was no
one there. I shouted in the hall. There was no answer. Then I ran from room to room. All were deserted. My host had
shown me which was his bedroom the night before, so I knocked at the door. No reply. I turned the handle and
walked in. The room was empty, and the bed had never been slept in. He had gone with the rest. The foreign host,
the foreign footman, the foreign cook, all had vanished in the night! That was the end of my visit to Wisteria
Lodge."

Sherlock Holmes was rubbing his hands and chuckling as he added this bizarre incident to his collection of
strange episodes.

"Your experience is, so far as I know, perfectly unique," said he. "May I ask, sir, what you did then?"

"I was furious. My first idea was that I had been the victim of some absurd practical joke. I packed my things,
hanged the hall door behind me, and set off for Esher, with my bag in my hand. I called at Allan Brothers', the chief
land agents in the village, and found that it was from this firm that the villa had been rented. It struck me that the
whole proceeding could hardly be for the purpose of making a fool of me, and that the main object must be to get out
of the rent. It is late in March, so quarter-day is at hand. But this theory would not work. The agent was obliged to
me for my warning, but told me that the rent had been paid in advance. Then I made my way to town and called at
the Spanish embassy. The man was unknown there. After this I went to see Melville, at whose house I had first met
Garcia, but I found that he really knew rather less about him than I did. Finally when I got your reply to my wire I
came out to you, since I gather that you are a person who gives advice in difficult cases. But now, Mr. Inspector, I
understand, from what you said when you entered the room, that you can carry the story on, and that some tragedy
had occurred. I can assure you that every word I have said is the truth, and that, outside of what I have told you, I know absolutely nothing about the fate of this man. My only desire is to help the law in every possible way."

"I am sure of it, Mr. Scott Eccles—I am sure of it," said Inspector Gregson in a very amiable tone. "I am bound to say that everything which you have said agrees very closely with the facts as they have come to our notice. For example, there was that note which arrived during dinner. Did you chance to observe what became of it?"

"Yes, I did. Garcia rolled it up and threw it into the fire."

"What do you say to that, Mr. Baynes?"

The country detective was a stout, puffy, red man, whose face was only redeemed from grossness by two extraordinarily bright eyes, almost hidden behind the heavy creases of cheek and brow. With a slow smile he drew a folded and discoloured scrap of paper from his pocket.

"It was a dog-grate, Mr. Holmes, and he overpitched it. I picked this out unburned from the back of it."

Holmes smiled his appreciation.

"You must have examined the house very carefully to find a single pellet of paper."

"I did, Mr. Holmes. It's my way. Shall I read it, Mr. Gregson?"

The Londoner nodded.

"The note is written upon ordinary cream-laid paper without watermark. It is a quarter-sheet. The paper is cut off in two snips with a short-bladed scissors. It has been folded over three times and sealed with purple wax, put on hurriedly and pressed down with some flat oval object. It is addressed to Mr. Garcia, Wisteria Lodge. It says:"

"Our own colours, green and white. Green open, white shut. Main stair, first corridor, seventh right, green baize. Godspeed. D."

"It is a woman's writing, done with a sharp-pointed pen, but the address is either done with another pen or by someone else. It is thicker and bolder, as you see."

"A very remarkable note," said Holmes, glancing it over. "I must compliment you, Mr. Baynes, upon your attention to detail in your examination of it. A few trifling points might perhaps be added. The oval seal is undoubtedly a plain sleeve-link—what else is of such a shape? The scissors were bent nail scissors. Short as the two snips are, you can distinctly see the same slight curve in each."

The country detective chuckled.

"I thought I had squeezed all the juice out of it, but I see there was a little over," he said. "I'm bound to say that I make nothing of the note except that there was something on hand, and that a woman, as usual was at the bottom of it."

Mr. Scott Eccles had fidgeted in his seat during this conversation.

"I am glad you found the note, since it corroborates my story," said he. "But I beg to point out that I have not yet heard what has happened to Mr. Garcia, nor what has become of his household."

"As to Garcia," said Gregson, "that is easily answered. He was found dead this morning upon Oxshott Common, nearly a mile from his home. His head had been smashed to pulp by heavy blows of a sandbag or some such instrument, which had crushed rather than wounded. It is a lonely corner, and there is no house within a quarter of a mile of the spot. He had apparently been struck down first from behind, but his assailant had gone on beating him long after he was dead. It was a most furious assault. There are no footsteps nor any clue to the criminals."

"Robbed?"

"No, there was no attempt at robbery."

"This is very painful—very painful and terrible," said Mr. Scott Eccles in a querulous voice, "but it is really uncommonly hard on me. I had nothing to do with my host going off upon a nocturnal excursion and meeting so sad an end. How do I come to be mixed up with the case?"

"Very simply, sir," Inspector Baynes answered. "The only document found in the pocket of the deceased was a letter from you saying that you would be with him on the night of his death. It was the envelope of this letter which gave us the dead man's name and address. It was after nine this morning when we reached his house and found neither you nor anyone else inside it. I wired to Mr. Gregson to run you down in London while I examined Wisteria Lodge. Then I came into town, joined Mr. Gregson, and here we are."

"I think now," said Gregson, rising, "we had best put this matter into an official shape. You will come round with us to the station, Mr. Scott Eccles, and let us have your statement in writing."

"Certainly, I will come at once. But I retain your services, Mr. Holmes. I desire you to spare no expense and no pains to get at the truth."

My friend turned to the country inspector.

"I suppose that you have no objection to my collaborating with you, Mr. Baynes?"

"Highly honoured, sir, I am sure."

"You appear to have been very prompt and businesslike in all that you have done. Was there any clue, may I ask,
as to the exact hour that the man met his death?"

"He had been there since one o'clock. There was rain about that time, and his death had certainly been before the rain."

"But that is perfectly impossible, Mr. Baynes," cried our client. "His voice is unmistakable. I could swear to it that it was he who addressed me in my bedroom at that very hour."

"Remarkable, but by no means impossible," said Holmes, smiling.

"You have a clue?" asked Gregson.

"On the face of it the case is not a very complex one, though it certainly presents some novel and interesting features. A further knowledge of facts is necessary before I would venture to give a final and definite opinion. By the way, Mr. Baynes, did you find anything remarkable besides this note in your examination of the house?"

The detective looked at my friend in a singular way.

"There were," said he, "one or two VERY remarkable things. Perhaps when I have finished at the police-station you would care to come out and give me your opinion of them."

"In am entirely at your service," said Sherlock Holmes, ringing the bell. "You will show these gentlemen out, Mrs. Hudson, and kindly send the boy with this telegram. He is to pay a five-shilling reply."

We sat for some time in silence after our visitors had left. Holmes smoked hard, with his browns drawn down over his keen eyes, and his head thrust forward in the eager way characteristic of the man.

"Well, Watson," he asked, turning suddenly upon me, "what do you make of it?"

"I can make nothing of this mystification of Scott Eccles.""Well, what is our hypothesis?"

Holmes leaned back in his chair with half-closed eyes.

"You must admit, my dear Watson, that the idea of a joke is impossible. There were grave events afoot, as the sequel showed, and the coaxing of Scott Eccles to Wisteria Lodge had some connection with them."

"But what possible connection?"

"Let us take it link by link. There is, on the face of it, something unnatural about this strange and sudden friendship between the young Spaniard and Scott Eccles. It was the former who forced the pace. He called upon Eccles at the other end of London on the very day after he first met him, and he kept in close touch with him until he got him down to Esher. Now, what did he want with Eccles? What could Eccles supply? I see no charm in the man. He is not particularly intelligent—not a man likely to be congenial to a quick-witted Latin. Why, then, was he picked out from all the other people whom Garcia met as particularly suited to his purpose? Has he any one outstanding quality? I say that he has. He is the very type of conventional British respectability, and the very man as a witness to impress another Briton. You saw yourself how neither of the inspectors dreamed of questioning his statement, extraordinary as it was."

"But what was he to witness?"

"Nothing, as things turned out, but everything had they gone another way. That is how I read the matter."

"I see, he might have proved an alibi."

"Exactly, my dear Watson; he might have proved an alibi. We will suppose, for argument's sake, that the household of Wisteria Lodge are confederates in some design. The attempt, whatever it may be, is to come off, we will say, before one o'clock. By some juggling of the clocks it is quite possible that they may have got Scott Eccles to bed earlier than he thought, but in any case it is likely that when Garcia went out of his way to tell him that it was one it was really not more than twelve. If Garcia could do whatever he had to do and be back by the hour mentioned he had evidently a powerful reply to any accusation. Here was this irreproachable Englishman ready to swear in any court of law that the accused was in the house all the time. It was an insurance against the worst."

"Yes, yes, I see that. But how about the disappearance of the others?"
"I have not all my facts yet, but I do not think there are any insuperable difficulties. Still, it is an error to argue in front of your data. You find yourself insensibly twisting them round to fit your theories."

"And the message?"

"How did it run? 'Our own colours, green and white.' Sounds like racing. 'Green open, white shut.' That is clearly a signal. 'Main stair, first corridor, seventh right, green baize.' This is an assignation. We may find a jealous husband at the bottom of it all. It was clearly a dangerous quest. She would not have said 'Godspeed' had it not been so. 'D'--that should be a guide."

"The man was a Spaniard. I suggest that 'D' stands for Dolores, a common female name in Spain."

"Good, Watson, very good--but quite inadmissible. A Spaniard would write to a Spaniard in Spanish. The writer of this note is certainly English. Well, we can only possess our soul in patience until this excellent inspector come back for us. Meanwhile we can thank our lucky fate which has rescued us for a few short hours from the insufferable fatigues of idleness."

An answer had arrived to Holmes's telegram before our Surrey officer had returned. Holmes read it and was about to place it in his notebook when he caught a glimpse of my expectant face. He tossed it across with a laugh.

"We are moving in exalted circles," said he.

The telegram was a list of names and addresses:

Lord Harringby, The Dingle; Sir George Ffolliott, Oxshott Towers; Mr. Hynes Hynes, J.P., Purdley Place; Mr. James Baker Williams, Forton Old Hall; Mr. Henderson, High Gable; Rev. Joshua Stone, Nether Walsling.

"This is a very obvious way of limiting our field of operations," said Holmes. "No doubt Baynes, with his methodical mind, has already adopted some similar plan."

"I don't quite understand."

"Well, my dear fellow, we have already arrived at the conclusion that the massage received by Garcia at dinner was an appointment or an assignation. Now, if the obvious reading of it is correct, and in order to keep the tryst one has to ascend a main stair and seek the seventh door in a corridor, it is perfectly clear that the house is a very large one. It is equally certain that this house cannot be more than a mile or two from Oxshott, since Garcia was walking in that direction and hoped, according to my reading of the facts, to be back in Wisteria Lodge in time to avail himself of an alibi, which would only be valid up to one o'clock. As the number of large houses close to Oxshott must be limited, I adopted the obvious method of sending to the agents mentioned by Scott Eccles and obtaining a list of them. Here they are in this telegram, and the other end of our tangled skein must lie among them."

It was nearly six o'clock before we found ourselves in the pretty Surrey village of Esher, with Inspector Baynes as our companion.

Holmes and I had taken things for the night, and found comfortable quarters at the Bull. Finally we set out in the company of the detective on our visit to Wisteria Lodge. It was a cold, dark March evening, with a sharp wind and a fine rain beating upon our faces, a fit setting for the wild common over which our road passed and the tragic goal to which it led us.

2. The Tiger of San Pedro

A cold and melancholy walk of a couple of miles brought us to a high wooden gate, which opened into a gloomy avenue of chestnuts. The curved and shadowed drive led us to a low, dark house, pitch-black against a slate-coloured sky. From the front window upon the left of the door there peeped a glimmer of a feeble light.

"There's a constable in possession," said Baynes. "I'll knock at the window." He stepped across the grass plot and tapped with his hand on the pane. Through the fogged glass I dimly saw a man spring up from a chair beside the fire, and heard a sharp cry from within the room. An instant later a white-faced, hard-breathing policeman had opened the door, the candle wavering in his trembling hand.

"What's the matter, Walters?" asked Baynes sharply.

The man mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and agave a long sigh of relief.

"I am glad you have come, sir. It has been a long evening, and I don't think my nerve is as good as it was."

"Your nerve, Walters? I should not have thought you had a nerve in your body."

"Well, sir, it's this lonely, silent house and the queer thing in the kitchen. Then when you tapped at the window I thought it had come again."

"That what had come again?"

"The devil, sir, for all I know. It was at the window."

"What was at the window, and when?"

"It was just about two hours ago. The light was just fading. I was sitting reading in the chair. I don't know what made me look up, but there was a face looking in at me through the lower pane. Lord, sir, what a face it was! I'll see it in my dreams."

"Tut, tut, Walters. This is not talk for a police-constable."
"I know, sir, I know; but it shook me, sir, and there's no use to deny it. It wasn't black, sir, nor was it white, nor any colour that I know but a kind of queer shade like clay with a splash of milk in it. Then there was the size of it--it was twice yours, sir. And the look of it--the great staring goggle eyes, and the line of white teeth like a hungry beast. I tell you, sir, I couldn't move a finger, nor get my breath, till it whisked away and was gone. Out I ran and through the shrubbery, but thank God there was no one there."

"If I didn't know you were a good man, Walters, I should put a black mark against you for this. If it were the devil himself a constable on duty should never thank God that he could not lay his hands upon him. I suppose the whole thing is not a vision and a touch of nerves?"

"That, at least, is very easily settled," said Holmes, lighting his little pocket lantern. "Yes," he reported, after a short examination of the grass bed, "a number twelve shoe, I should say. If he was all on the same scale as his foot he must certainly have been a giant."

"What became of him?"

"He seems to have broken through the shrubbery and made for the road."

"Well," said the inspector with a grave and thoughtful face, "whoever he may have been, and whatever he may have wanted, he's gone for the present, and we have more immediate things to attend to. Now, Mr. Holmes, with your permission, I will show you round the house."

The various bedrooms and sitting-rooms had yielded nothing to a careful search. Apparently the tenants had brought little or nothing with them, and all the furniture down to the smallest details had been taken over with the house. A good deal of clothing with the stamp of Marx and Co., High Holborn, had been left behind. Telegraphic inquiries had been already made which showed that Marx knew nothing of his customer save that he was a good payer. Odds and ends, some pipes, a few novels, two of them in Spanish, and old-fashioned pinfire revolver, and a guitar were among the personal property.

"Nothing in all this," said Baynes, stalking, candle in hand, from room to room. "But now, Mr. Holmes, I invite your attention to the kitchen."

It was a gloomy, high-ceilinged room at the back of the house, with a straw litter in one corner, which served apparently as a bed for the cook. The table was piled with half-eaten dishes and dirty plates, the debris of last night's dinner.

"Look at this," said Baynes. "What do you make of it?"

He held up his candle before an extraordinary object which stood at the back of the dresser. It was so wrinkled and shrunken and withered that it was difficult to say what it might have been. One could but say that it was black and leathery and that it bore some resemblance to a dwarfish, human figure. At first, as I examined it, I thought that it was a mummified negro baby, and then it seemed a very twisted and ancient monkey. Finally I was left in doubt as to whether it was animal or human. A double band of white shells were strung round the centre of it.

"Very interesting--very interesting, indeed!" said Holmes, peering at this sinister relic. "Anything more?"

In silence Baynes led the way to the sink and held forward his candle. The limbs and body of some large, white bird, torn savagely to pieces with the feathers still on, were littered all over it. Holmes pointed to the wattles on the severed head.

"A white cock," said he. "Most interesting! It is really a very curious case."

But Mr. Baynes had kept his most sinister exhibit to the last. >From under the sink he drew a zinc pail which contained a quantity of blood. Then from the table he took a platter heaped with small pieces of charred bone.

"Something has been killed and something has been burned. We raked all these out of the fire. We had a doctor in this morning. He says that they are not human."

Holmes smiled and rubbed his hands.

"I must congratulate you, Inspector, on handling so distinctive and instructive a case. Your powers, if I may say so without offence, seem superior to your opportunities."

Inspector Baynes's small eyes twinkled with pleasure.

"You're right, Mr. Holmes. We stagnate in the provinces. A case of this sort gives a man a chance, and I hope that I shall take it. What do you make of these bones?"

"A lamb, I should say, or a kid."

"And the white cock?"

"Curious, Mr. Baynes, very curious. I should say almost unique."

"Yes, sir, there must have been some very strange people with some very strange ways in this house. One of them is dead. Did his companions follow him and kill him? If they did we should have them, for every port is watched. But my own views are different. Yes, sir, my own views are very different."

"You have a theory then?"

"And I'll work it myself, Mr. Holmes. It's only due to my own credit to do so. Your name is made, but I have still
to make mine. I should be glad to be able to say afterwards that I had solved it without your help."

Holmes laughed good-humorably.

"Well, well, Inspector," said he. "Do you follow your path and I will follow mine. My results are always very much at your service if you care to apply to me for them. I think that I have seen all that I wish in this house, and that my time may be more profitably employed elsewhere. Au revoir and good luck!"

I could tell by numerous subtle signs, which might have been lost upon anyone but myself, that Holmes was on a hot scent. As impassive as ever to the casual observer, there were none the less a subdued eagerness and suggestion of tension in his heightened eyes and brisker manner which assured me that the game was afoot. After his habit he said nothing, and after mine I asked no questions. Sufficient for me to share the sport and lend my humble help to the capture without distracting that intent brain with needless interruption. All would come round to me in due time.

I waited, therefore--but to my ever-deepening disappointment I waited in vain. Day succeeded day, and my friend took no step forward. One morning he spent in town, and I learned from a casual reference that he had visited the British Museum. Save for this one excursion, he spent his days in long and often solitary walks, or in chatting with a number of village gossips whose acquaintance he had cultivated.

"I'm sure, Watson, a week in the country will be invaluable to you," he remarked. "It is very pleasant to see the first green shoots upon the hedges and the catkins on the hazels once again. With a spud, a tin box, and an elementary book on botany, there are instructive days to be spent." He prowled about with this equipment himself, but it was a poor show of plants which he would bring back of an evening.

Occasionally in our rambles we came across Inspector Baynes. His fat, red face wreathed itself in smiles and his small eyes glittered as he greeted my companion. He said little about the case, but from that little we gathered that he also was not dissatisfied at the course of events. I must admit, however, that I was somewhat surprised when, some five days after the crime, I opened my morning paper to find in large letters:

THE OXSHOTT MYSTERY A SOLUTION ARREST OF SUPPOSED ASSASSIN

Holmes sprang in his chair as if he had been stung when I read the headlines.

"By Jove!" he cried. "You don't mean that Baynes has got him?"

"Apparently," said I as I read the following report:

"Great excitement was caused in Esher and the neighbouring district when it was learned late last night that an arrest had been effected in connection with the Oxshott murder. It will be remembered that Mr. Garcia, of Wisteria Lodge, was found dead on Oxshott Common, his body showing signs of extreme violence, and that on the same night his servant and his cook fled, which appeared to show their participation in the crime. It was suggested, but never proved, that the deceased gentleman may have had valuables in the house, and that their abstraction was the motive of the crime. Every effort was made by Inspector Baynes, who has the case in hand, to ascertain the hiding place of the fugitives, and he had good reason to believe that they had not gone far but were lurking in some retreat which had been already prepared. It was certain from the first, however, that they would eventually be detected, as the cook, from the evidence of one or two tradespeople who have caught a glimpse of him through the window, was a man of most remarkable appearance--being a huge and hideous mulatto, with yellowish features of a pronounced negroid type. This man has been seen since the crime, for he was detected and pursued by Constable Walters on the same evening, when he had the audacity to revisit Wisteria Lodge. Inspector Baynes, considering that such a visit must have some purpose in view and was likely, therefore, to be repeated, abandoned the house but left an ambuscade in the shrubbery. The man walked into the trap and was captured last night after a struggle in which Constable Downing was badly bitten by the savage. We understand that when the prison is brought before the magistrates a remand will be applied for by the police, and that great developments are hoped from his capture."

"Really we must see Baynes at once," cried Holmes, picking up his hat. "We will just catch him before he starts." We hurried down the village street and found, as we had expected, that the inspector was just leaving his lodgings.

"You've seen the paper, Mr. Holmes?" he asked, holding one out to us.

"Yes, Baynes, I've seen it. Pray don't think it a liberty if I give you a word of friendly warning."

"Of warning, Mr. Holmes?"

"I have looked into this case with some care, and I am not convinced that you are on the right lines. I don't want you to commit yourself too far unless you are sure."

"You're very kind, Mr. Holmes."

"I assure you I speak for your good."

It seemed to me that something like a wink quivered for an instant over one of Mr. Baynes's tiny eyes.

"We agreed to work on our own lines, Mr. Holmes. That's what I am doing."

"Oh, very good," said Holmes. "Don't blame me."

"No, sir; I believe you mean well by me. But we all have our own systems, Mr. Holmes. You have yours, and
maybe I have mine."

"Let us say no more about it."

"You're welcome always to my news. This fellow is a perfect savage, as strong as a cart-horse and as fierce as
the devil. He chewed Downing's thumb nearly off before they could master him. He hardly speaks a word of
English, and we can get nothing out of him but grunts."

"And you think you have evidence that he murdered his late master?"

"I didn't say so, Mr. Holmes; I didn't say so. We all have our little ways. You try yours and I will try mine. That's
the agreement."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders as we walked away together. "I can't make the man out. He seems to be riding
for a fall. Well, as he says, we must each try our own way and see what comes of it. But there's something in
Inspector Baynes which I can't quite understand."

"Just sit down in that chair, Watson," said Sherlock Holmes when we had returned to our apartment at the Bull.
"I want to put you in touch with the situation, as I may need your help to-night. Let me show you the evolution of
this case so far as I have been able to follow it. Simple as it has been in its leading features, it has none the less
presented surprising difficulties in the way of an arrest. There are gaps in that direction which we have still to fill.

"We will go back to the note which was handed in to Garcia upon the evening of his death. We may put aside
this idea of Baynes's that Garcia's servants were concerned in the matter. The proof of this lies in the fact that it was
HE who had arranged for the presence of Scott Eccles, which could only have been done for the purpose of an alibi.
It was Garcia, then, who had an enterprise, and apparently a criminal enterprise, in hand that night in the course of
which he met his death. I say 'criminal' because only a man with a criminal enterprise desires to establish an alibi.
Who, then, is most likely to have taken his life? Surely the person against whom the criminal enterprise was
directed. So far it seems to me that we are on safe ground.

"We can now see a reason for the disappearance of Garcia's household. They were ALL confederates in the same
unknown crime. If it came off when Garcia returned, any possible suspicion would be warded off by the
Englishman's evidence, and all would be well. But the attempt was a dangerous one, and if Garcia did NOT return
by a certain hour it was probable that his own life had been sacrificed. It had been arranged, therefore, that in such a
case his two subordinates were to make for some prearranged spot where they could escape investigation and be in a
position afterwards to renew their attempt. That would fully explain the facts, would it not?"

The whole inexplicable tangle seemed to straighten out before me. I wondered, as I always did, how it had not
been obvious to me before.

"But why should one servant return?"

"We can imagine that in the confusion of flight something precious, something which he could not bear to part
with, had been left behind. That would explain his persistence, would it not?"

"Well, what is the next step?"

"The next step is the note received by Garcia at the dinner. It indicates a confederate at the other end. Now,
where was the other end? I have already shown you that it could only lie in some large house, and that the number of
large houses is limited. My first days in this village were devoted to a series of walks in which in the intervals of my
botanical researches I made a reconnaissance of all the large houses and an examination of the family history of the
occupants. One house, and only one, riveted my attention. It is the famous old Jacobean grange of High Gable, one
mile on the farther side of Oxshott, and less than half a mile from the scene of the tragedy. The other mansions
belonged to prosaic and respectable people who live far aloof from romance. But Mr. Henderson, of High Gable,
was by all accounts a curious man to whom curious adventures might befall. I concentrated my attention, therefore,
upon him and his household.

"A singular set of people, Watson--the man himself the most singular of them all. I managed to see him on a
plausible pretext, but I seemed to read in his dark, deepset, brooding eyes that he was perfectly aware of my true
business. He is a man of fifty, strong, active, with iron-gray hair, great bunched black eyebrows, the step of a deer
and the air of an emperor--a fierce, masterful man, with a red-hot spirit behind his parchment face. He is either a
foreigner or has lived long in the tropics, for he is yellow and sapless, but tough as whipcord. His friend and
secretary, Mr. Lucas, is undoubtedly a foreigner, chocolate brown, wily, suave, and catlike, with a poisonous
gentleness of speech. You see, Watson, we have come already upon two sets of foreigners--one at Wisteria Lodge
and one at High Gable--so our gaps are beginning to close.

"These two men, close and confidential friends, are the centre of the household; but there is one other person
who for our immediate purpose may be even more important. Henderson has two children--girls of eleven and
thirteen. Their governess is a Miss Burnet, an Englishwoman of forty or thereabouts. There is also one confidential
manservant. This little group forms the real family, for their travel about together, and Henderson is a great traveller,
always on the move. It is only within the last weeks that he has returned, after a year's absence, to High Gable. I may
add that he is enormously rich, and whatever his whims may be he can very easily satisfy them. For the rest, his house is full of butlers, footmen, maidservants, and the usual overfed, underworked staff of a large English country house.

"So much I learned partly from village gossip and partly from my own observation. There are no better instruments than discharged servants with a grievance, and I was lucky enough to find one. I call it luck, but it would not have come my way had I not been looking out for it. As Baynes remarks, we all have our systems. It was my system which enabled me to find John Warner, late gardener of High Gable, sacked in a moment of temper by his imperious employer. He in turn had friends among the indoor servants who unite in their fear and dislike of their master. So I had my key to the secrets of the establishment.

"Curious people, Watson! I don't pretend to understand it all yet, but very curious people anyway. It's a double-winged house, and the servants live on one side, the family on the other. There's no link between the two save for Henderson's own servant, who serves the family's meals. Everything is carried to a certain door, which forms the one connection. Governess and children hardly go out at all, except into the garden. Henderson never by any chance walks alone. His dark secretary is like his shadow. The gossip among the servants is that their master is terribly afraid of something. 'Sold his soul to the devil in exchange for money,' says Warner, 'and expects his creditor to come up and claim his own.' Where they came from, or who they are, nobody has an idea. They are very violent. Twice Henderson has lashed at folk with his dog-whip, and only his long purse and heavy compensation have kept him out of the courts.

"Well, now, Watson, let us judge the situation by this new information. We may take it that the letter came out of this strange household and was an invitation to Garcia to carry out some attempt which had already been planned. Who wrote the note? It was someone within the citadel, and it was a woman. Who then but Miss Burnet, the governess? All our reasoning seems to point that way. At any rate, we may take it as a hypothesis and see what consequences it would entail. I may add that Miss Burnet's age and character make it certain that my first idea that there might be a love interest in our story is out of the question.

"If she wrote the note she was presumably the friend and confederate of Garcia. What, then, might she be expected to do if she heard of his death? If he met it in some nefarious enterprise her lips might be sealed. Still, in her heart, she must retain bitterness and hatred against those who had killed him and would presumably help so far as she could to have revenge upon them. Could we see her, then and try to use her? That was my first thought. But now we come to a sinister fact. Miss Burnet has not been seen by any human eye since the night of the murder. From that evening she has utterly vanished. Is she alive? Has she perhaps met her end on the same night as the friend whom she had summoned? Or is she merely a prisoner? There is the point which we still have to decide.

"You will appreciate the difficulty of the situation, Watson. There is nothing upon which we can apply for a warrant. Our whole scheme might seem fantastic if laid before a magistrate. The woman's disappearance counts for nothing, since in that extraordinary household any member of it might be invisible for a week. And yet she may at the present moment be in danger of her life. All I can do is to watch the house and leave my agent, Warner, on guard at the gates. We can't let such a situation continue. If the law can do nothing we must take the risk ourselves."

"What do you suggest?"

"I know which is her room. It is accessible from the top of an outhouse. My suggestion is that you and I go tonight and see if we can strike at the very heart of the mystery."

It was not, I must confess, a very alluring prospect. The old house with its atmosphere of murder, the singular and formidable inhabitants, the unknown dangers of the approach, and the fact that we were putting ourselves legally in a false position all combined to damp my ardour. But there was something in the ice-cold reasoning of Holmes which made it impossible to shrink from any adventure which he might recommend. One knew that thus, and only thus, could a solution be found. I clasped his hand in silence, and the die was cast.

But it was not destined that our investigation should have so adventurous an ending. It was about five o'clock, and the shadows of the March evening were beginning to fall, when an excited rustic rushed into our room.

"They've gone, Mr. Holmes. They went by the last train. The lady broke away, and I've got her in a cab downstairs."

"Excellent, Warner!" cried Holmes, springing to his feet. "Watson, the gaps are closing rapidly."

In the cab was a woman, half-collapsed from nervous exhaustion. She bore upon her aquiline and emaciated face the traces of some recent tragedy. Her head hung listlessly upon her breast, but as she raised it and turned her dull eyes upon us I saw that her pupils were dark dots in the centre of the broad gray iris. She was drugged with opium.

"I watched at the gate, same as you advised, Mr. Holmes," said our emissary, the discharged gardener. "When the carriage came out I followed it to the station. She was like one walking in her sleep, but when they tried to get her into the train she came to life and struggled. They pushed her into the carriage. She fought her way out again. I took her part, got her into a cab, and here we are. I shan't forget the face at the carriage window as I led her away. I'd
have a short life if he had his way--the black-eyed, scowling, yellow devil."

We carried her upstairs, laid her on the sofa, and a couple of cups of the strongest coffee soon cleared her brain from the mists of the drug. Baynes had been summoned by Holmes, and the situation rapidly explained to him.

"Why, sir, you've got me the very evidence I want," said the inspector warmly, shaking my friend by the hand. "I was on the same scent as you from the first."

"What! You were after Henderson?"

"Why, Mr. Holmes, when you were crawling in the shrubbery at High Gable I was up one of the trees in the plantation and saw you down below. It was just who would get his evidence first."

"Then why did you arrest the mulatto?"

Baynes chuckled.

"I was sure Henderson, as he calls himself, felt that he was suspected, and that he would lie low and make no move so long as he thought he was in any danger. I arrested the wrong man to make him believe that our eyes were off him. I knew he would be likely to clear off then and give us a chance of getting at Miss Burnet."

Baynes laid his hand upon the inspector's shoulder.

"You will rise high in your profession. You have instinct and intuition," said he.

Baynes flushed with pleasure.

"I've had a plain-clothes man waiting at the station all the week. Wherever the High Gable folk go he will keep them in sight. But he must have been hard put to it when Miss Burnet broke away. However, your man picked her up, and it all ends well. We can't arrest without her evidence, that is clear, so the sooner we get a statement the better."

"Every minute she gets stronger," said Holmes, glancing at the governess. "But tell me, Baynes, who is this man Henderson?"

"Henderson," the inspector answered, "is Don Murillo, once call the Tiger of San Pedro."

The Tiger of San Pedro! The whole history of the man came back to me in a flash. He had made his name as the most lewd and bloodthirsty tyrant that had ever governed any country with a pretence to civilization. Strong, fearless, and energetic, he had sufficient virtue to enable him to impose his odious vices upon a cowering people for ten or twelve years. His name was a terror through all Central America. At the end of that time there was a universal rising against him. But he was as cunning as he was cruel, and at the first whisper of coming trouble he had secretly conveyed his treasures aboard a ship which was manned by devoted adherents. It was an empty palace which was stormed by the insurgents next day. The dictator, his two children, his secretary, and his wealth had all escaped them. >From that moment he had vanished from the world, and his identity had been a frequent subject for comment in the European press.

Murillo confining Miss Burnet.

"Yes, sir, Don Murillo, the Tiger of San Pedro," said Baynes. "If you look it up you will find that the San Pedro colours are green and white, same as in the note, Mr. Holmes. Henderson he called himself, but I traced him back, Paris and Rome and Madrid to Barcelona, where his ship came in in '86. They've been looking for him all the time for their revenge, but it is only now that they have begun to find him out."

"They discovered him a year ago," said Miss Burnet, who had sat up and was now intently following the conversation. "Once already his life has been attempted, but some evil spirit shielded him. Now, again, it is the noble, chivalrous Garcia who has fallen, while the monster goes safe. But another will come, and yet another, until some day justice will be done; that is as certain as the rise of to-morrow's sun." Her thin hands clenched, and her worn face blanched with the passion of her hatred.

"But how come you into this matter, Miss Burnet?" asked Holmes. "How can an English lady join in such a murderous affair?"

"I join in it because there is no other way in the world by which justice can be gained. What does the law of England care for the rivers of blood shed years ago in San Pedro, or for the shipload of treasure which this man has
in the background, but it is only on this one that they can be tried."

"No doubt," said Holmes, "he was as you say. I have heard that he was atrocious. But how are you affected?"

"I will tell you it all. This villain's policy was to murder, on one pretext or another, every man who showed such promise that he might in time come to be a dangerous rival. My husband--yes, my real name is Signora Victor Durando--was the San Pedro minister in London. He met me and married me there. A nobler man never lived upon earth. Unhappily, Murillo heard of his excellence, recalled him on some pretext, and had him shot. With a premonition of his fate he had refused to take me with him. His estates were confiscated, and I was left with a pittance and a broken heart.

"Then came the downfall of the tyrant. He escaped as you have just described. But the many whose lives he had ruined, whose nearest and dearest had suffered torture and death at his hands, would not let the matter rest. They banded themselves into a society which should never be dissolved until the work was done. It was my part after we had discovered in the transformed Henderson the fallen despot, to attach myself to his household and keep the others in touch with his movements. This I was able to do by securing the position of governess in his family. He little knew that the woman who faced him at every meal was the woman whose husband he had hurried at an hour's notice into eternity. I smiled on him, did my duty to his children, and bided my time. An attempt was made in Paris and failed. We zigzagged swiftly here and there over Europe to throw off the pursuers and finally returned to this house, which he had taken upon his first arrival in England.

"But here also the ministers of justice were waiting. Knowing that he would return there, Garcia, who is the son of the former highest dignitary in San Pedro, was waiting with two trusty companions of humble station, all three fired with the same reasons for revenge. He could do little during the day, for Murillo took every precaution and never went out save with his satellite Lucas, or Lopez as he was known in the days of his greatness. At night, however, he slept alone, and the avenger might find him. On a certain evening, which had been prearranged, I sent my friend final instructions, for the man was forever on the alert and continually changed his room. I was to see that the doors were open and the signal of a green or white light in a window which faced the drive was to give notice if all was safe or if the attempt had better be postponed.

"But everything went wrong with us. In some way I had excited the suspicion of Lopez, the secretary. He crept up behind me and sprang upon me just as I had finished the note. He and his master dragged me to my room and held judgment upon me as a convicted traitress. Then and there they would have plunged their knives into me could they have seen how to escape the consequences of the deed. Finally, after much debate, they concluded that my murder was too dangerous. But they determined to get rid forever of Garcia. They had gagged me, and Murillo twisted my arm round until I gave him the address. I swear that he might have twisted it off had I understood what it would mean to Garcia. Lopez addressed the note which I had written, sealed it with his sleeve-link, and sent it by the hand of the servant, Jose. How they murdered him I do not know, save that it was Murillo's hand who struck him down, for Lopez had remained to guard me. I believe he must have waited among the gorse bushes through which the path winds and struck him down as he passed. At first they were of a mind to let him enter the house and to kill him as a detected burglar; but they argued that if they were mixed up in an inquiry their own identity would at once be publicly disclosed and they would be open to further attacks. With the death of Garcia, the pursuit might cease, since such a death might frighten others from the task.

"All would now be well for them had it not been for my knowledge of what they had done. I have no doubt that there were times when my life hung in the balance. I was confined to my room, terrorized by the most horrible threats, cruelly ill-used to break my spirit--see this stab on my shoulder and the bruises from end to end of my arms--and a gag was thrust into my mouth on the one occasion when I tried to call from the window. For five days this cruel imprisonment continued, with hardly enough food to hold body and soul together. This afternoon a good lunch was brought me, but the moment after I took it I knew that I had been drugged. In a sort of dream I remember being half-led, half-carried to the carriage; in the same state I was conveyed to the train. Only then, when the wheels were almost moving, did I suddenly realize that my liberty lay in my own hands. I sprang out, they tried to drag me back, and had it not been for the help of this good man, who led me to the cab, I should never have broken away. Now, thank God, I am beyond their power forever."

We had all listened intently to this remarkable statement. It was Holmes who broke the silence.

"Our difficulties are not over," he remarked, shaking his head. "Our police work ends, but our legal work begins."

"Exactly," said I. "A plausible lawyer could make it out as an act of self-defence. There may be a hundred crimes in the background, but it is only on this one that they can be tried."

"Come, come," said Baynes cheerily, "I think better of the law than that. Self-defence is one thing. To entice a
man in cold blood with the object of murdering him is another, whatever danger you may fear from him. No, no, we
shall all be justified when we see the tenants of High Gable at the next Guildford Assizes."

It is a matter of history, however, that a little time was still to elapse before the Tiger of San Pedro should meet
with his deserts. Willy and bold, he and his companion threw their pursuer off their track by entering a lodging-house
in Edmonton Street and leaving by the back-gate into Curzon Square. From that day they were seen no more in
England. Some six months afterwards the Marquess of Montalva and Signor Rulli, his secretary, were both
murdered in their rooms at the Hotel Escurial at Madrid. The crime was ascribed to Nihilism, and the murderers
were never arrested. Inspector Baynes visited us at Baker Street with a printed description of the dark face of the
secretary, and of the masterful features, the magnetic black eyes, and the tufted brows of his master. We could not
doubt that justice, if belated, had come at last.

"A chaotic case, my dear Watson," said Holmes over an evening pipe. "It will not be possible for you to present
in that compact form which is dear to your heart. It covers two continents, concerns two groups of mysterious
persons, and is further complicated by the highly respectable presence of our friend, Scott Eccles, whose inclusion
shows me that the deceased Garcia had a scheming mind and a well-developed instinct of self-preservation. It is
remarkable only for the fact that amid a perfect jungle of possibilities we, with our worthy collaborator, the
inspector, have kept our close hold on the essentials and so been guided along the crooked and winding path. Is there
any point which is not quite clear to you?"

"The object of the mulatto cook's return?"

"I think that the strange creature in the kitchen may account for it. The man was a primitive savage from the
backwoods of San Pedro, and this was his fetish. When his companion and he had fled to some prearranged retreat--
already occupied, no doubt by a confederate—the companion had persuaded him to leave so compromising an article
of furniture. But the mulatto's heart was with it, and he was driven back to it next day, when, on reconnoitering
through the window, he found policeman Walters in possession. He waited three days longer, and then his piety or
his superstition drove him to try once more. Inspector Baynes, who, with his usual astuteness, had minimized the
incident before me, had really recognized its importance and had left a trap into which the creature walked. Any
other point, Watson?"

"The torn bird, the pail of blood, the charred bones, all the mystery of that weird kitchen?"

Holmes smiled as he turned up an entry in his note-book.

"I spent a morning in the British Museum reading up on that and other points. Here is a quotation from
Eckermann's Voodooism and the Negroid Religions:

"'The true voodoo-worshipper attempts nothing of importance without certain sacrifices which are intended to
propitiate his unclean gods. In extreme cases these rites take the form of human sacrifices followed by cannibalism.
The more usual victims are a white cock, which is plucked in pieces alive, or a black goat, whose throat is cut and
body burned.'"

"So you see our savage friend was very orthodox in his ritual. It is grotesque, Watson," Holmes added, as he
slowly fastened his notebook, "but, as I have had occasion to remark, there is but one step from the grotesque to the
horrible."

**The Adventure of the Cardboard Box**

In choosing a few typical cases which illustrate the remarkable mental qualities of my friend, Sherlock Holmes, I
have endeavoured, as far as possible, to select those which presented the minimum of sensationalism, while offering
a fair field for his talents. It is, however, unfortunately impossible entirely to separate the sensational from the
criminal, and a chronicler is left in the dilemma that he must either sacrifice details which are essential to his
statement and so give a false impression of the problem, or he must use matter which chance, and not choice, has
provided him with. With this short preface I shall turn to my notes of what proved to be a strange, though a
peculiarly terrible, chain of events.

It was a blazing hot day in August. Baker Street was like an oven, and the glare of the sunlight upon the yellow
brickwork of the house across the road was painful to the eye. It was hard to believe that these were the same walls
which loomed so gloomily through the fogs of winter. Our blinds were half-drawn, and Holmes lay curled upon the
sofa, reading and re-reading a letter which he had received by the morning post. For myself, my term of service in
India had trained me to stand heat better than cold, and a thermometer at ninety was no hardship. But the morning
paper was uninteresting. Parliament had risen. Everybody was out of town, and I yearned for the glades of the New
Forest or the shingle of Southsea. A depleted bank account had caused me to postpone my holiday, and as to my
companion, neither the country nor the sea presented the slightest attraction to him. He loved to lie in the very center
of five millions of people, with his filaments stretching out and running through them, responsive to every little
rumour or suspicion of unsolved crime. Appreciation of nature found no place among his many gifts, and his only
change was when he turned his mind from the evil-doer of the town to track down his brother of the country.
Finding that Holmes was too absorbed for conversation I had tossed side the barren paper, and leaning back in my chair I fell into a brown study. Suddenly my companion's voice broke in upon my thoughts:

"You are right, Watson," said he. "It does seem a most preposterous way of settling a dispute."

"Most preposterous!" I exclaimed, and then suddenly realizing how he had echoed the inmost thought of my soul, I sat up in my chair and stared at him in blank amazement.

"What is this, Holmes?" I cried. "This is beyond anything which I could have imagined."

He laughed heartily at my perplexity.

"You remember," said he, "that some little time ago when I read you the passage in one of Poe's sketches in which a close reasoner follows the unspoken thoughts of his companion, you were inclined to treat the matter as a mere tour-de-force of the author. On my remarking that I was constantly in the habit of doing the same thing you expressed incredulity."

"Oh, no!"

"Perhaps not with your tongue, my dear Watson, but certainly with your eyebrows. So when I saw you throw down your paper and enter upon a train of thought, I was very happy to have the opportunity of reading it off, and eventually of breaking into it, as a proof that I had been in rapport with you."

But I was still far from satisfied. "In the example which you read to me," said I, "the reasoner drew his conclusions from the actions of the man whom he observed. If I remember right, he stumbled over a heap of stones, looked up at the stars, and so on. But I have been seated quietly in my chair, and what clues can I have given you?"

"You do yourself an injustice. The features are given to man as the means by which he shall express his emotions, and yours are faithful servants."

"Do you mean to say that you read my train of thoughts from my features?"

"Your features and especially your eyes. Perhaps you cannot yourself recall how your reverie commenced?"

"No, I cannot."

"Then I will tell you. After throwing down your paper, which was the action which drew my attention to you, you sat for half a minute with a vacant expression. Then your eyes fixed themselves upon your newly framed picture of General Gordon, and I saw by the alteration in your face that a train of thought had been started. But it did not lead very far. Your eyes flashed across to the unframed portrait of Henry Ward Beecher which stands upon the top of your books. Then you glanced up at the wall, and of course your meaning was obvious. You were thinking that if the portrait were framed it would just cover that bare space and correspond with Gordon's picture there."

"You have followed me wonderfully!" I exclaimed.

"So far I could hardly have gone astray. But now your thoughts went back to Beecher, and you looked hard across as if you were studying the character in his features. Then your eyes ceased to pucker, but you continued to look across, and your face was thoughtful. You were recalling the incidents of Beecher's career. I was well aware that you could not do this without thinking of the mission which he undertook on behalf of the North at the time of the Civil War, for I remember your expressing your passionate indignation at the way in which he was received by the more turbulent of our people. You felt so strongly about it that I knew you could not think of Beecher without thinking of that also. When a moment later I saw your eyes wander away from the picture, I suspected that your mind had now turned to the Civil War, and when I observed that your lips set, your eyes sparkled, and your hands clenched I was positive that you were indeed thinking of the gallantry which was shown by both sides in that desperate struggle. But then, again, your face grew sadder, you shook your head. You were dwelling upon the sadness and horror and useless waste of life. Your hand stole towards your own old wound and a smile quivered on your lips, which showed me that the ridiculous side of this method of settling international questions had forced itself upon your mind. At this point I agreed with you that it was preposterous and was glad to find that all my deductions had been correct."

"Absolutely!" said I. "And now that you have explained it, I confess that I am as amazed as before."

"It was very superficial, my dear Watson, I assure you. I should not have intruded it upon your attention had you not shown some incredulity the other day. But I have in my hands here a little problem which may prove to be more difficult of solution than my small essay I thought reading. Have you observed in the paper a short paragraph referring to the remarkable contents of a packet sent through the post to Miss Cushing, of Cross Street, Croydon?"

"No, I saw nothing."

"Ah! then you must have overlooked it. Just toss it over to me. Here it is, under the financial column. Perhaps you would be good enough to read it aloud."

I picked up the paper which he had thrown back to me and read the paragraph indicated. It was headed, "A Gruesome Packet."

"Miss Susan Cushing, living at Cross Street, Croydon, has been made the victim of what must be regarded as a peculiarly revolting practical joke unless some more sinister meaning should prove to be attached to the incident. At
two o'clock yesterday afternoon a small packet, wrapped in brown paper, was handed in by the postman. A cardboard box was inside, which was filled with coarse salt. On emptying this, Miss Cushing was horrified to find two human ears, apparently quite freshly severed. The box had been sent by parcel post from Belfast upon the morning before. There is no indication as to the sender, and the matter is the more mysterious as Miss Cushing, who is a maiden lady of fifty, has led a most retired life, and has so few acquaintances or correspondents that it is a rare event for her to receive anything through the post. Some years ago, however, when she resided at Penge, she let apartments in her house to three young medical students, whom she was obliged to get rid of on account of their noisy and irregular habits. The police are of opinion that this outrage may have been perpetrated upon Miss Cushing by these youths, who owed her a grudge and who hoped to frighten her by sending her these relics of the dissecting rooms. Some probability is lent to the theory by the fact that one of these students came from the north of Ireland, and, to the best of Miss Cushing's belief, from Belfast. In the meantime, the matter is being actively investigated, Mr. Lestrade, one of the very smartest of our detective officers, being in charge of the case.

Holmes examining the ears.

"So much for the Daily Chronicle," said Holmes as I finished reading. "Now for our friend Lestrade. I had a note from him this morning, in which he says:

"I think that this case is very much in your line. We have every hope of clearing the matter up, but we find a little difficulty in getting anything to work upon. We have, of course, wired to the Belfast post-office, but a large number of parcels were handed in upon that day, and they have no means of identifying this particular one, or of remembering the sender. The box is a half-pound box of honeydew tobacco and does not help us in any way. The medical student theory still appears to me to be the most feasible, but if you should have a few hours to spare I should be very happy to see you out here. I shall be either at the house or in the police-station all day.

"What say you, Watson? Can you rise superior to the heat and run down to Croydon with me on the off chance of a case for your annals?"

"I was longing for something to do."

"You shall have it then. Ring for our boots and tell them to order a cab. I'll be back in a moment when I have changed my dressing-gown and filled my cigar-case."

A shower of rain fell while we were in the train, and the heat was far less oppressive in Croydon than in town. Holmes had sent on a wire, so that Lestrade, as wiry, as dapper, and as ferret like as ever, was waiting for us at the station. A walk of five minutes took us to Cross Street, where Miss Cushing resided.

It was a very long street of two-story brick houses, neat and prim, with whitened stone steps and little groups of aproned women gossiping at the doors. Halfway down, Lestrade stopped and tapped at a door, which was opened by a small servant girl. Miss Cushing was sitting in the front room, into which we were ushered. She was a placid-faced woman, with large, gentle eyes, and grizzled hair curving down over her temples on each side. A worked antimacassar lay upon her lap and a basket of coloured silks stood upon a stool beside her.

"They are in the outhouse, those dreadful things," said she as Lestrade entered. "I wish that you would take them away altogether."

"So I shall, Miss Cushing. I only kept them here until my friend, Mr. Holmes, should have seen them in your presence."

"Why in my presence, sir?"

"In case he wished to ask any questions."

"What is the use of asking me questions when I tell you I know nothing whatever about it?"

"Quite so, madam," said Holmes in his soothing way. "I have no doubt that you have been annoyed more than enough already over this business."

"Indeed I have, sir. I am a quiet woman and live a retired life. It is something new for me to see my name in the papers and to find the police in my house. I won't have those things I here, Mr. Lestrade. If you wish to see them you must go to the outhouse."

It was a small shed in the narrow garden which ran behind the house. Lestrade went in and brought out a yellow
cardboard box, with a piece of brown paper and some string. There was a bench at the end of the path, and we all sat down while Homes examined one by one, the articles which Lestrade had handed to him.

"The string is exceedingly interesting," he remarked, holding it up to the light and sniffing at it. "What do you make of this string, Lestrade?"

"It has been tarred."

"Precisely. It is a piece of tarred twine. You have also, no doubt, remarked that Miss Cushing has cut the cord with a scissors, as can be seen by the double fray on each side. This is of importance."

"I cannot see the importance," said Lestrade.

"The importance lies in the fact that the knot is left intact, and that this knot is of a peculiar character."

"It is very neatly tied. I had already made a note of that effect," said Lestrade complacently.

"So much for the string, then," said Holmes, smiling, "now for the box wrapper. Brown paper, with a distinct smell of coffee. What, did you not observe it? I think there can be no doubt of it. Address printed in rather straggling characters: 'Miss S. Cushing, Cross Street, Croydon.' Done with a broad-pointed pen, probably a J, and with very inferior ink. The word 'Croydon' has been originally spelled with an 'i', which has been changed to 'y'. The parcel was directed, then, by a man--the printing is distinctly masculine--of limited education and unacquainted with the town of Croydon. So far, so good! The box is a yellow, half-pound honeydew box, with nothing distinctive save two thumb marks at the left bottom corner. It is filled with rough salt of the quality used for preserving hides and other of the coarser commercial purposes. And embedded in it are these very singular enclosures."

He took out the two ears as he spoke, and laying a board across his knee he examined them minutely, while Lestrade and I, bending forward on each side of him, glanced alternately at these dreadful relics and at the thoughtful, eager face of our companion. Finally he returned them to the box once more and sat for a while in deep meditation.

"You have observed, of course," said he at last, "that the ears are not a pair."

"Yes, I have noticed that. But if this were the practical joke of some students from the dissecting-rooms, it would be as easy for them to send two odd ears as a pair."

"Precisely. But this is not a practical joke."

"You are sure of it?"

"The presumption is strongly against it. Bodies in the dissecting-rooms are injected with preservative fluid. These ears bear no signs of this. They are fresh, too. They have been cut off with a blunt instrument, which would hardly happen if a student had done it. Again, carbolic or rectified spirits would be the preservatives which would suggest themselves to the medical mind, certainly not rough salt. I repeat that there is no practical joke here, but that we are investigating a serious crime."

A vague thrill ran through me as I listened to my companion's words and saw the stern gravity which had hardened his features. This brutal preliminary seemed to shadow forth some strange and inexplicable horror in the background. Lestrade, however, shook his head like a man who is only half convinced.

"There are objections to the joke theory, no doubt," said he, "but there are much stronger reasons against the other. We know that this woman has led a most quiet and respectable life at Penge and here for the last twenty years. She has hardly been away from her home for a day during that time. Why on earth, then, should any criminal send her the proofs of his guilt, especially as, unless she is a most consummate actress, she understands quite as little of the matter as we do?"

"That is the problem which we have to solve," Holmes answered, "and for my part I shall set about it by presuming that my reasoning is correct, and that a double murder has been committed. One of these ears is a woman's, small, finely formed, and pierced for an earring. The other is a man's, sun-burned, discoloured, and also pierced for an earring. These two people are presumably dead, or we should have heard their story before now. Today is Friday. The packet was posted on Thursday morning. The tragedy, then, occurred on Wednesday or Tuesday, or earlier. If the two people were murdered, who but their murderer would have sent this sign of his work to Miss Cushing? We may take it that the sender of the packet is the man whom we want. But he must have some strong reason for sending Miss Cushing this packet. What reason then? It must have been to tell her that the deed was done! or to pain her, perhaps. But in that case she knows who it is. Does she know? I doubt it. If she knew, why should she call the police in? She might have buried the ears, and no one would have been the wiser. That is what she would have done if she had wished to shield the criminal. But if she does not wish to shield him she would give his name. There is a tangle here which needs straightening to." He had been talking in a high, quick voice, staring blankly up over the garden fence, but now he sprang briskly to his feet and walked towards the house.

"I have a few questions to ask Miss Cushing," said he.

"In that case I may leave you here," said Lestrade, "for I have another small business on hand. I think that I have nothing further to learn from Miss Cushing. You will find me at the police-station."
"We shall look in on our way to the train," answered Holmes. A moment later he and I were back in the front room, where the impassive lady was still quietly working away at her antimacassar. She put it down on her lap as we entered and looked at us with her frank, searching blue eyes.

"I am convinced, sir," she said, "that this matter is a mistake, and that the parcel was never meant for me at all. I have said this several times to the gentlemen from Scotland Yard, but he simply laughs at me. I have not an enemy in the world, as far as I know, so why should anyone play me such a trick?"

"I am coming to be of the same opinion, Miss Cushing," said Holmes, taking a seat beside her. "I think that it is more than probable--" He paused, and I was surprised, on glancing round to see that he was staring with singular intentness at the lady's profile. Surprise and satisfaction were both for an instant to be read upon his eager face, though when she glanced round to find out the cause of his silence he had become as demure as ever. I stared hard myself at her flat, grizzled hair, her trim cap, her little gilt earrings, her placid features; but I could see nothing which could account for my companion's evident excitement.

"There were one or two questions--"

"Oh, I am weary of questions!" cried Miss Cushing impatiently.

"You have two sisters, I believe."

"How could you know that?"

"I observed the very instant that I entered the room that you have a portrait group of three ladies upon the mantelpiece, one of whom is undoubtedly yourself, while the others are so exceedingly like you that there could be no doubt of the relationship."

"Yes, you are quite right. Those are my sisters, Sarah and Mary."

"And here at my elbow is another portrait, taken at Liverpool, of your younger sister, in the company of a man who appears to be a steward by his uniform. I observe that she was unmarried at the time."

"You are very quick at observing."

"That is my trade."

"Well, you are quite right. But she was married to Mr. Browner a few days afterwards. He was on the South American line when that was taken, but he was so fond of her that he couldn't abide to leave her for so long, and he got into the Liverpool and London boats."

"Ah, the Conqueror, perhaps?"

"No, the May Day, when last I heard. Jim came down here to see me once. That was before he broke the pledge; but afterwards he would always take drink when he was ashore, and a little drink would send him stark, staring mad. Ah! it was a bad day that ever he took a glass in his hand again. First he dropped me, then he quarrelled with Sarah, and now that Mary has stopped writing we don't know how things are going with them."

It was evident that Miss Cushing had come upon a subject on which she felt very deeply. Like most people who lead a lonely life, she was shy at first, but ended by becoming extremely communicative. She told us many details about her brother-in-law the steward, and then wandering off on the subject of her former lodgers, the medical students, she gave us a long account of their delinquencies, with their names and those of their hospitals. Holmes listened attentively to everything, throwing in a question from time to time.

"About your second sister, Sarah," said he. "I wonder, since you are both maiden ladies, that you do not keep house together."

"Ah! you don't know Sarah's temper or you would wonder no more. I tried it when I came to Croydon, and we kept on until about two months ago, when we had to part. I don't want to say a word against my own sister, but she was always meddlesome and hard to please, was Sarah."

"You say that she quarrelled with your Liverpool relations."

"Yes, and they were the best of friends at one time. Why, she went up there to live in order to be near them. And now she has no word hard enough for Jim Browner. The last six months that she was here she would speak of nothing but his drinking and his ways. He had caught her meddling, I suspect, and given her a bit of his mind, and that was the start of it."

"Thank you, Miss Cushing," said Holmes, rising and bowing. "Your sister Sarah lives, I think you said, at New Street, Wallington? Good-bye, and I am very sorry that you should have been troubled over a case with which, as you say, you have nothing whatever to do."

There was a cab passing as we came out, and Holmes hailed it.

"How far to Wallington?" he asked.

"Only about a mile, sir."

"Very good. Jump in, Watson. We must strike while the iron is hot. Simple as the case is, there have been one or two very instructive details in connection with it. Just pull up at a telegraph office as you pass, cabby."

Holmes sent off a short wire and for the rest of the drive lay back in the cab, with his hat tilted over his nose to
keep the sun from his face. Our drive pulled up at a house which was not unlike the one which we had just quitted. My companion ordered him to wait, and had his hand upon the knocker, when the door opened and a grave young gentleman in black, with a very shiny hat, appeared on the step.

"Is Miss Cushing at home?" asked Holmes.

"Miss Sarah Cushing is extremely ill," said he. "She has been suffering since yesterday from brain symptoms of great severity. As her medical adviser, I cannot possibly take the responsibility of allowing anyone to see her. I should recommend you to call again in ten days." He drew on his gloves, closed the door, and marched off down the street.

"Well, if we can't we can't," said Holmes, cheerfully.

"Perhaps she could not or would not have told you much."

"I did not wish her to tell me anything. I only wanted to look at her. However, I think that I have got all that I want. Drive us to some decent hotel, cabby, where we may have some lunch, and afterwards we shall drop down upon friend Lestrade at the police-station."

We had a pleasant little meal together, during which Holmes would talk about nothing but violins, narrating with great exultation how he had purchased his own Stradivarius, which was worth at least five hundred guineas, at a Jew broker's in Tottenham Court Road for fifty-five shillings. This led him to Paganini, and we sat for an hour over a bottle of claret while he told me anecdote after anecdote of that extraordinary man. The afternoon was far advanced and the hot glare had softened into a mellow glow before we found ourselves at the police-station. Lestrade was waiting for us at the door.

"A telegram for you, Mr. Holmes," said he.

"Ha! It is the answer!" He tore it open, glanced his eyes over it, and crumpled it into his pocket. "That's all right," said he.

"Have you found out anything?"

"I have found out everything!"

"What!" Lestrade stared at him in amazement. "You are joking."

"I was never more serious in my life. A shocking crime has been committed, and I think I have now laid bare every detail of it."

"And the criminal?"

Holmes scribbled a few words upon the back of one of his visiting cards and threw it over to Lestrade.

"That is the name," he said. "You cannot effect an arrest until to-morrow night at the earliest. I should prefer that you do not mention my name at all in connection with the case, as I choose to be only associated with those crimes which present some difficulty in their solution. Come on, Watson." We strode off together to the station, leaving Lestrade still staring with a delighted face at the card which Holmes had thrown him.

"The case," said Sherlock Holmes as we chatted over or cigars that night in our rooms at Baker Street, "is one where, as in the investigations which you have chronicled under the names of 'A Study in Scarlet' and of 'The Sign of Four,' we have been compelled to reason backward from effects to causes. I have written to Lestrade asking him to supply us with the details which are now wanting, and which he will only get after he had secured his man. That he may be safely trusted to do, for although he is absolutely devoid of reason, he is as tenacious as a bulldog when he once understands what he has to do, and indeed, it is just this tenacity which has brought him to the top at Scotland Yard."

"Your case is not complete, then?" I asked.

"It is fairly complete in essentials. We know who the author of the revolting business is, although one of the victims still escapes us. Of course, you have formed your own conclusions."

"I presume that this Jim Browner, the steward of a Liverpool boat, is the man whom you suspect?"

"Oh! it is more than a suspicion."

"And yet I cannot see anything save very vague indications."

"On the contrary, to my mind nothing could be more clear. Let me run over the principal steps. We approached the case, you remember, with an absolutely blank mind, which is always an advantage. We had formed no theories. We were simply there to observe and to draw inferences from our observations. What did we see first? A very placid and respectable lady, who seemed quite innocent of any secret, and a portrait which showed me that she had two younger sisters. It instantly flashed across my mind that the box might have been meant for one of these. I set the idea aside as one which could be disproved or confirmed at our leisure. Then we went to the garden, as you remember, and we saw the very singular contents of the little yellow box.

"The string was of the quality which is used by sail-makers aboard ship, and at once a whiff of the sea was perceptible in our investigation. When I observed that the knot was one which is popular with sailors, that the parcel had been posted at a port, and that the male ear was pierced for an earring which is so much more common among
sailors than landsmen, I was quite certain that all the actors in the tragedy were to be found among our seafaring classes.

"When I came to examine the address of the packet I observed that it was to Miss S. Cushing. Now, the oldest sister would, of course, be Miss Cushing, and although her initial was 'S' it might belong to one of the others as well. In that case we should have to commence our investigation from a fresh basis altogether. I therefore went into the house with the intention of clearing up this point. I was about to assure Miss Cushing that I was convinced that a mistake had been made when you may remember that I came suddenly to a stop. The fact was that I had just seen something which filled me with surprise and at the same time narrowed the field of our inquiry immensely.

"As a medical man, you are aware, Watson, that there is no part of the body which varies so much as the human ear. Each ear is as a rule quite distinctive and differs from all other ones. In last year's Anthropological Journal you will find two short monographs from my pen upon the subject. I had, therefore, examined the ears in the box with the eyes of an expert and had carefully noted their anatomical peculiarities. Imagine my surprise, then, when on looking at Miss Cushing I perceived that her ear corresponded exactly with the female ear which I had just inspected. The matter was entirely beyond coincidence. There was the same shortening of the pinna, the same broad curve of the upper lobe, the same convolution of the inner cartilage. In all essentials it was the same ear.

"In the first place, her sister's name was Sarah, and her address had until recently been the same, so that it was quite obvious how the mistake had occurred and for whom the packet was meant. Then we heard of this steward, married to the third sister, and learned that he had at one time been so intimate with Miss Sarah that she had actually gone up to Liverpool to be near the Browners, but a quarrel had afterwards divided them. This quarrel had put a stop to all communications for some months, so that if Browner had occasion to address a packet to Miss Sarah, he would undoubtedly have done so to her old address.

"And now the matter had begun to straighten itself out wonderfully. We had learned of the existence of this steward, an impulsive man, of strong passions—you remember that he threw up what must have been a very superior berth in order to be nearer to his wife—subject, too, to occasional fits of hard drinking. We had reason to believe that his wife had been murdered, and that a man—presumably a seafaring man—had been murdered at the same time. Jealousy, of course, at once suggests itself as the motive for the crime. And why should these proofs of the deed be sent to Miss Sarah Cushing? Probably because during her residence in Liverpool she had some hand in bringing about the events which led to the tragedy. You will observe that this line of boats call at Belfast, Dublin, and Waterford; so that, presuming that Browner had committed the deed and had embarked at once upon his steamer, the May Day, Belfast would be the first place at which he could post his terrible packet.

"A second solution was at this stage obviously possible, and although I thought it exceedingly unlikely, I was determined to elucidate it before going further. An unsuccessful lover might have killed Mr. and Mrs. Browner, and the male ear might have belonged to the husband. There were many grave objections to this theory, but it was conceivable. I therefore sent off a telegram to my friend Algar, of the Liverpool force, and asked him to find out if Browner had married to the third sister, and learned that he had at one time been so intimate with Miss Sarah that she had actually gone up to Liverpool to be near the Browners, but a quarrel had afterwards divided them. This quarrel had put a stop to all communications for some months, so that if Browner had occasion to address a packet to Miss Sarah, he would undoubtedly have done so to her old address.

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"I was curious, in the first place, to see how far the family ear had been reproduced in her. Then, of course, she might give us very important information, but I was not sanguine that she would. She must have heard of the business the day before, since all Croydon was ringing with it, and she alone could have understood for whom the packet was meant. If she had been willing to help justice she would probably have communicated with the police already. However, it was clearly our duty to see her, so we went. We found that the news of the arrival of the packet— for her illness dated from that time—had such an effect upon her as to bring on brain fever. It was clearer than ever that she understood its full significance, but equally clear that we should have to wait some time for any assistance from her.

"However, we were really independent of her help. Our answers were waiting for us at the police-station, where I had directed Algar to send them. Nothing could be more conclusive. Mrs. Browner's house had been closed for more than three days, and the neighbours were of opinion that she had gone south to see her relatives. It had been ascertained at the shipping offices that Browner had left aboard of the May Day, and I calculate that she is due in the Thames tomorrow night. When he arrives he will be met by the obtuse but resolute Lestrade, and I have no doubt that we shall have all our details filled in."

Sherlock Holmes was not disappointed in his expectations. Two days later he received a bulky envelope, which contained a short note from the detective, and a typewritten document, which covered several pages of foolscap.

"Lestrade has got him all right," said Holmes, glancing up at me. "Perhaps it would interest you to hear what he says.

"My dear Mr. Holmes:

In accordance with the scheme which we had formed in order to test our theories" ["the 'we' is rather fine,
Watson, is it not?""

"I went down to the Albert Dock yesterday at 6 p.m., and boarded the S.S. May Day, belonging to the Liverpool, Dublin, and London Steam Packet Company. On inquiry, I found that there was a steward on board of the name of James Browner and that he had acted during the voyage in such an extraordinary manner that the captain had been compelled to relieve him of his duties. On descending to his berth, I found him seated upon a chest with his head sunk upon his hands, rocking himself to and fro. He is a big, powerful chap, clean-shaven, and very swarthy--something like Aldrige, who helped us in the bogus laundry affair. He jumped up when he heard my business, and I had my whistle to my lips to call a couple of river police, who were round the corner, but he seemed to have no heart in him, and he held out his hands quietly enough for the darbies. We brought him along to the cells, and his box as well, for we thought there might be something incriminating; but, bar a big sharp knife such as most sailors have, we got nothing for our trouble. However, we find that we shall want no more evidence, for on being brought before the inspector at the station he asked leave to make a statement, which was, of course, taken down, just as he made it, by our shorthand man. We had three copies typewritten, one of which I enclose. The affair proves, as I always thought it would, to be an extremely simple one, but I am obliged to you for assisting me in my investigation. With kind regards,

"Yours very truly,

G. Lestrade.

"Hum! The investigation really was a very simple one," remarked Holmes, "but I don't think it struck him in that light when he first called us in. However, let us see what Jim Browner has to say for himself. This is his statement as made before Inspector Montgomery at the Shadwell Police Station, and it has the advantage of being verbatim."

"Have I anything to say? Yes, I have a deal to say. I have to make a clean breast of it all. You can hang me, or you can leave me alone. I don't care a plug which you do. I tell you I've not shut an eye in sleep since I did it, and I don't believe I ever will again until I get past all waking. Sometimes it's his face, but most generally it's hers. I'm never without one or the other before me. He looks frowning and black-like, but she has a kind o' surprise upon her face. Ay, the white lamb, she might well be surprised when she read death on a face that had seldom looked anything but love upon her before.

"But it was Sarah's fault, and may the curse of a broken man put a blight on her and set the blood rotting in her veins! It's not that I want to clear myself. I know that I went back to drink, like the beast that I was. But she would have forgiven me; she would have stuck as close to me a rope to a block if that woman had never darkened our door. For Sarah Cushing loved me--that's the root of the business--she loved me until all her love turned to poisonous hate when she knew that I thought more of my wife's footmark in the mud than I did of her whole body and soul.

"There were three sisters altogether. The old one was just a good woman, the second was a devil, and the third was an angel. Sarah was thirty-three, and Mary was twenty-nine when I married. We were just as happy as the day was long when we set up house together, and in all Liverpool there was no better woman than my Mary. And then we asked Sarah up for a week, and the week grew into a month, and one thing led to another, until she was just one of ourselves.

"I was blue ribbon at that time, and we were putting a little money by, and all was as bright as a new dollar. My God, whoever would have thought that it could have come to this? Whoever would have dreamed it?

"I used to be home for the week-ends very often, and sometimes if the ship were held back for cargo I would have a whole week at a time, and in this way I saw a deal of my sister-in-law, Sarah. She was a fine tall woman, black and quick and fierce, with a proud way of carrying her head, and a glint from her eye like a spark from a flint. But when little Mary was there I had never a thought of her, and that I swear as I hope for God's mercy.

"It had seemed to me sometimes that she liked to be alone with me, or to coax me out for a walk with her, but I had never thought anything of it. But one evening my eyes were opened. I had come up from the ship and found my wife out, but Sarah at home. "Where's Mary?" I asked. "Oh, she has gone to pay some accounts." I was impatient and paced up and down the room. "Can't you be happy for five minutes without Mary, Jim?" says she. "It's a bad compliment to me that you can't be contented with my society for so short a time." "That's all right, my lass," said I, putting out my hand towards her in a kindly way, but she had it in both hers in an instant, and they burned as if they were in a fever. I looked into her eyes and I read it all there. There was no need for her to speak, nor for me either. I frowned and drew my hand away. Then she stood by my side in silence for a bit, and then put up her hand and patted me on the shoulder. "Steady old Jim!" said she, and with a kind o' mocking laugh, she ran out of the room.

"Well, from that time Sarah hated me with her whole heart and soul, and she is a woman who can hate, too. I was a fool to let her go on biding with us--a besotted fool--but I never said a word to Mary, for I knew it would grieve her. Things went on much as before, but after a time I began to find that there was a bit of a change in Mary herself. She had always been so trusting and so innocent, but now she became queer and suspicious, wanting to know where I had been and what I had been doing, and whom my letters were from, and what I had in my pockets, and a thousand such follies. Day by day she grew queerer and more irritable, and we had ceaseless rows about
nothing. I was fairly puzzled by it all. Sarah avoided me now, but she and Mary were just inseparable. I can see now how she was plotting and scheming and poisoning my wife's mind against me, but I was such a blind beetle that I could not understand it at the time. Then I broke my blue ribbon and began to drink again, but I think I should not have done it if Mary had been the same as ever. She had some reason to be disgusted with me now, and the gap between us began to be wider and wider. And then this Alec Fairbairn chipped in, and things became a thousand times blacker.

"It was to see Sarah that he came to my house first, but soon it was to see us, for he was a man with winning ways, and he made friends wherever he went. He was a dashing, swaggering chap, smart and curled, who had seen half the world and could talk of what he had seen. He was good company, I won't deny it, and he had wonderful polite ways with him for a sailor man, so that I think there must have been a time when he knew more of the poop than the forecastle. For a month he was in and out of my house, and never once did it cross my mind that harm might come of his soft, tricky ways. And then at last something made me suspect, and from that day my peace was gone forever.

"It was only a little thing, too. I had come into the parlour unexpected, and as I walked in at the door I saw a light of welcome on my wife's face. But as she saw who it was it faded again, and she turned away with a look of disappointment. That was enough for me. There was no one but Alec Fairbairn whose step she could have mistaken for mine. If I could have seen him then I should have killed him, for I have always been like a madman when my temper gets loose. Mary saw the devil's light in my eyes, and she ran forward with her hands on my sleeve. "Don't, Jim, don't!" says she. "Where's Sarah?" I asked. "In the kitchen," says she. "Sarah," says I as I went in, "this man Fairbairn is never to darken my door again." "Why not?" says she. "Because I order it." "Oh!" says she, "if my friends are not good enough for this house, then I am not good enough for it either." "You can do what you like," says I, "but if Fairbairn shows his face here again I'll send you one of his ears for a keepsake." She was frightened by my face, I think, for she never answered a word, and the same evening she left my house.

"Well, I don't know now whether it was pure devilry on the part of this woman, or whether she thought that she could turn me against my wife by encouraging her to misbehave. Anyway, she took a house just two streets off and let lodgings to sailors. Fairbairn used to stay there, and Mary would go round to have tea with her sister and him. How often she went I don't know, but I followed her one day, and as I broke in at the door Fairbairn got away over the back garden wall, like the cowardly skunk that he was. I swore to my wife that I would kill her if I found her in his company again, and I led her back with me, sobbing and trembling, and as white as a piece of paper. There was no trace of love between us any longer. I could see that she hated me and feared me, and when the thought of it drove me to drink, then she despised me as well.

"Well, Sarah found that she could not make a living in Liverpool, so she went back, as I understand, to live with her sister in Croydon, and things jogged on much the same as ever at home. And then came this week and all the misery and ruin.

"It was in this way. We had gone on the May Day for a round voyage of seven days, but a hogshead got loose and started one of our plates, so that we had to put back into port for twelve hours. I left the ship and came home, thinking what a surprise it would be for my wife, and hoping that maybe she would be glad to see me so soon. The thought was in my head as I turned into my own street, and at that moment a cab passed me, and there she was, sitting by the side of Fairbairn, the two chatting and laughing, with never a thought for me as I stood watching them from the footpath.

"I tell you, and I give you my word for it, that from that moment I was not my own master, and it is all like a dim dream when I look back on it. I had been drinking hard of late, and the two things together fairly turned my brain. There's something throbbing in my head now, like a docker's hammer, but that morning I seemed to have all Niagara whizzing and buzzing in my ears.

"Well, I took to my heels, and I ran after the cab. I had a heavy oak stick in my hand, and I tell you I saw red from the first; but as I ran I got cunning, too, and hung back a little to see them without being seen. They pulled up soon at the railway station. There was a good crowd round the booking-office, so I got quite close to them without being seen. They took tickets for New Brighton. So did I, but I got in three carriages behind them. When we reached it they walked along the Parade, and I was never more than a hundred yards from them. At last I saw them hire a boat and start for a row, for it was a very hot day, and they thought, no doubt, that it would be cooler on the water.
"It was just as if they had been given into my hands. There was a bit of a haze, and you could not see more than a few hundred yards. I hired a boat for myself, and I pulled after them. I could see the blur of their craft, but they were going nearly as fast as I, and they must have been a long mile from the shore before I caught them up. The haze was like a curtain all round us, and there were we three in the middle of it. My God, shall I ever forget their faces when they saw who was in the boat that was closing in upon them? She screamed out. He swore like a madman and jabbed at me with an oar, for he must have seen death in my eyes. I got past it and got one in with my stick that crushed his head like an egg. I would have spared her, perhaps, for all my madness, but she threw her arms round him, crying out to him, and calling him "Alec." I struck again, and she lay stretched beside him. I was like a wild beast then that had tasted blood. If Sarah had been there, by the Lord, she should have joined them. I pulled out my knife, and--well, there! I've said enough. It gave me a kind of savage joy when I thought how Sarah would feel when she had such signs as these of what her meddling had brought about. Then I tied the bodies into the boat, stove a plank, and stood by until they had sunk. I knew very well that the owner would think that they had lost their bearings in the haze, and had drifted off out to sea. I cleaned myself up, got back to land, and joined my ship without a soul having a suspicion of what had passed. That night I made up the packet for Sarah Cushing, and next day I sent it from Belfast.

"There you have the whole truth of it. You can hang me, or do what you like with me, but you cannot punish me as I have been punished already. I cannot shut my eyes but I see those two faces staring at me--staring at me as they stared when my boat broke through the haze. I killed them quick, but they are killing me slow; and if I have another night of it I shall be either mad or dead before morning. You won't put me alone into a cell, sir? For pity's sake don't, and may you be treated in your day of agony as you treat me now.'

"What is the meaning of it, Watson?" said Holmes solemnly as he laid down the paper. "What object is served by this circle of misery and violence and fear? It must tend to some end, or else our universe is ruled by chance, which is unthinkable. But what end? There is the great standing perennial problem to which human reason is as far from an answer as ever."

The Adventure of the Red Circle

"Well, Mrs. Warren, I cannot see that you have any particular cause for uneasiness, nor do I understand why I, whose time is of some value, should interfere in the matter. I really have other things to engage me." So spoke Sherlock Holmes and turned back to the great scrapbook in which he was arranging and indexing some of his recent material.

But the landlady had the pertinacity and also the cunning of her sex. She held her ground firmly.

"You arranged an affair for a lodger of mine last year," she said--"Mr. Fairdale Hobbs."

"Ah, yes--a simple matter."

"But he would never cease talking of it--your kindness, sir, and the way in which you brought light into the darkness. I remembered his words when I was in doubt and darkness myself. I know you could if you only would."

Holmes was accessible upon the side of flattery, and also, to do him justice, upon the side of kindliness. The two forces made him lay down his gum-brush with a sigh of resignation and push back his chair.

"Well, well, Mrs. Warren, let us hear about it, then. You don't object to tobacco, I take it? Thank you, Watson--the matches! You are uneasy, as I understand, because your new lodger remains in his rooms and you cannot see him. Why, bless you, Mrs. Warren, if I were your lodger you often would not see me for weeks on end."

"No doubt, sir; but this is different. It frightens me, Mr. Holmes. I can't sleep for fright. To hear his quick step moving here and moving there from early morning to late at night, and yet never to catch so much as a glimpse of him--it's more than I can stand. My husband is as nervous over it as I am, but he is out at his work all day, while I get no rest from it. What is he hiding for? What has he done? Except for the girl, I am all alone in the house with him, and it's more than my nerves can stand."

Holmes leaned forward and laid his long, thin fingers upon the woman's shoulder. He had an almost hypnotic power of soothing when he wished. The scared look faded from her eyes, and her agitated features smoothed into
their usual commonplace. She sat down in the chair which he had indicated.

"If I take it up I must understand every detail," said he. "Take time to consider. The smallest point may be the most essential. You say that the man came ten days ago and paid you for a fortnight's board and lodging?"

"He asked my terms, sir. I said fifty shillings a week. There is a small sitting-room and bedroom, and all complete, at the top of the house."

"Well?"

"He said, 'I'll pay you five pounds a week if I can have it on my own terms.' I'm a poor woman, sir, and Mr. Warren earns little, and the money meant much to me. He took out a ten-pound note, and he held it out to me then and there. 'You can have the same every fortnight for a long time to come if you keep the terms,' he said. 'If not, I'll have no more to do with you.'"

"What were the terms?"

"Well, sir, they were that he was to have a key of the house. That was all right. Lodgers often have them. Also, that he was to be left entirely to himself and never, upon any excuse, to be disturbed."

"Nothing wonderful in that, surely?"

"Not in reason, sir. But this is out of all reason. He has been there for ten days, and neither Mr. Warren nor I, nor the girl has once set eyes upon him. We can hear that quick step of his pacing up and down, up and down, night, morning, and noon; but except on that first night he had never once gone out of the house."

"Oh, he went out the first night, did he?"

"Yes, sir, and returned very late--after we were all in bed. He told me after he had taken the rooms that he would do so and asked me not to bar the door. I heard him come up the stair after midnight."

"But his meals?"

"It was his particular direction that we should always, when he rang, leave his meal upon a chair, outside his door. Then he rings again when he has finished, and we take it down from the same chair. If he wants anything else he prints it on a slip of paper and leaves it."

"Prints it?"

"Yes, sir; prints it in pencil. Just the word, nothing more. Here's the one I brought to show you--soap. Here's another--match. This is one he left the first morning--daily gazette. I leave that paper with his breakfast every morning."

"Dear me, Watson," said Homes, staring with great curiosity at the slips of foolscap which the landlady had handed to him, "this is certainly a little unusual. Seclusion I can understand; but why print? Printing is a clumsy process. Why not write? What would it suggest, Watson?"

"That he desired to conceal his handwriting."

"But why? What can it matter to him that his landlady should have a word of his writing? Still, it may be as you say. Then, again, why such laconic messages?"

"I cannot imagine."

"It opens a pleasing field for intelligent speculation. The words are written with a broad-pointed, violet-tinted pencil of a not unusual pattern. You will observe that the paper is torn away at the side here after the printing was done, so that the 's' of 'soap' is partly gone. Suggestive, Watson, is it not?"

"Of caution?"

"Exactly. There was evidently some mark, some thumbprint, something which might give a clue to the person's identity. Now, Mrs. Warren, you say that the man was of middle size, dark, and bearded. What age would he be?"

"Youngish, sir--not over thirty."

"Well, can you give me no further indications?"

"He spoke good English, sir, and yet I thought he was a foreigner by his accent."

"And he was well dressed?"

"Very smartly dressed, sir--quite the gentleman. Dark clothes--nothing you would note."

"He gave no name?"

"No, sir."

"And has had no letters or callers?"

"None."

"But surely you or the girl enter his room of a morning?"

"No, sir; he looks after himself entirely."

"Dear me! that is certainly remarkable. What about his luggage?"

"He had one big brown bag with him--nothing else."

"Well, we don't seem to have much material to help us. Do you say nothing has come out of that room--absolutely nothing?"
The landlady drew an envelope from her bag; from it she shook out two burnt matches and a cigarette-end upon the table.

“They were on his tray this morning. I brought them because I had heard that you can read great things out of small ones.”

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

“There is nothing here,” said he. "The matches have, of course, been used to light cigarettes. That is obvious from the shortness of the burnt end. Half the match is consumed in lighting a pipe or cigar. But, dear me! this cigarette stub is certainly remarkable. The gentleman was bearded and moustached, you say?”

“Yes, sir.”

“I don't understand that. I should say that only a clean-shaven man could have smoked this. Why, Watson, even your modest moustache would have been singed.”

“A holder?” I suggested.

“No, no; the end is matted. I suppose there could not be two people in your rooms, Mrs. Warren?”

“No, sir. He eats so little that I often wonder it can keep life in one.”

“Well, I think we must wait for a little more material. After all, you have nothing to complain of. You have received your rent, and he is not a troublesome lodger, though he is certainly an unusual one. He pays you well, and if he chooses to lie concealed it is no direct business of yours. We have no excuse for an intrusion upon his privacy until we have some reason to think that there is a guilty reason for it. I’ve taken up the matter, and I won't lose sight of it. Report to me if anything fresh occurs, and rely upon my assistance if it should be needed.

“There are certainly some points of interest in this case, Watson,” he remarked when the landlady had left us. "It may, of course, be trivial--individual eccentricity; or it may be very much deeper than appears on the surface. The first thing that strike one is the obvious possibility that the person now in the rooms may be entirely different from the one who engaged them.”

"Why should you think so?”

“Well, apart form this cigarette-end, was it not suggestive that the only time the lodger went out was immediately after his taking the rooms? He came back--or someone came back--when all witnesses were out of the way. We have no proof that the person who came back was the person who went out. Then, again, the man who took the rooms spoke English well. This other, however, prints 'match' when it should have been 'matches.' I can imagine that the word was taken out of a dictionary, which would give the noun but not the plural. The laconic style may be to conceal the absence of knowledge of English. Yes, Watson, there are good reasons to suspect that there has been a substitution of lodgers."

"But for what possible end?”

"Ah! there lies our problem. There is one rather obvious line of investigation.” He took down the great book in which, day by day, he filed the agony columns of the various London journals. "Dear me!” said he, turning over the pages, “what a chorus of groans, cries, and bleatings! What a rag-bag of singular happenings! But surely the most valuable hunting-ground that ever was given to a student of the unusual! This person is alone and cannot be approached by letter without a breach of that absolute secrecy which is desired. How is any news or any message to reach him from without? Obviously by advertisement through a newspaper. There seems no other way, and fortunately we need concern ourselves with the one paper only. Here are the Daily Gazette extracts of the last fortnight. 'Lady with a black boa at Prince's Skating Club'--that we may pass. 'Surely Jimmy will not break his mother's heart'--that appears to be irrelevant. 'If the lady who fainted on Brixton bus'--she does not interest me. 'Every day my heart longs--' Bleat, Watson--unmitigated bleat! Ah, this is a little more possible. Listen to this: 'Be patient. Will find some sure means of communications. Meanwhile, this column. G.' That is two days after Mrs. Warren's lodger arrived. It sounds plausible, does it not? The mysterious one could understand English, even if he could not print it. Let us see if we can pick up the trace again. Yes, here we are--three days later. 'Am making successful arrangements. Patience and prudence. The clouds will pass. G.' Nothing for a week after that. Then comes something much more definite: 'The path is clearing. If I find chance signal message remember code agreed--One A, two B, and so on. You will hear soon. G.' That was in yesterday's paper, and there is nothing in to-day's. It's all very appropriate to Mrs. Warren's lodger. If we wait a little, Watson, I don't doubt that the affair will grow more intelligible.”

So it proved; for in the morning I found my friend standing on the hearthrug with his back to the fire and a smile of complete satisfaction upon his face.

"How's this, Watson?” he cried, picking up the paper from the table. "'High red house with white stone facings. Third floor. Second window left. After dusk. G.' That is definite enough. I think after breakfast we must make a little reconnaissance of Mrs. Warren's neighbourhood. Ah, Mrs. Warren! what news do you bring us this morning?”

Our client had suddenly burst into the room with an explosive energy which told of some new and momentous
"It's a police matter, Mr. Holmes!" she cried. "I'll have no more of it! He shall pack out of there with his baggage. I would have gone straight up and told him so, only I thought it was but fair to you to take your opinion first. But I'm at the end of my patience, and when it comes to knocking my old man about--"

"Knocking Mr. Warren about?"

"Using him roughly, anyway."

"But who used him roughly?"

"Ah! that's what we want to know! It was this morning, sir. Mr. Warren is a timekeeper at Morton and Waylight's, in Tottenham Court Road. He has to be out of the house before seven. Well, this morning he had not gone ten paces down the road when two men came up behind him, threw a coat over his head, and bundled him into a cab that was beside the curb. They drove him an hour, and then opened the door and shot him out. He lay in the roadway so shaken in his wits that he never saw what became of the cab. When he picked himself up he found he was on Hampstead Heath; so he took a bus home, and there he lies now on his sofa, while I came straight round to tell you what had happened."

"Most interesting," said Holmes. "Did he observe the appearance of these men--did he hear them talk?"

"No; he is clean dazed. He just knows that he was lifted up as if by magic and dropped as if by magic. Two a least were in it, and maybe three."

"And you connect this attack with your lodger?"

"Well, we've lived there fifteen years and no such happenings ever came before. I've had enough of him. Money's not everything. I'll have him out of my house before the day is done."

"Wait a bit, Mrs. Warren. Do nothing rash. I begin to think that this affair may be very much more important than appeared at first sight. It is clear now that some danger is threatening your lodger. It is equally clear that his enemies, lying in wait for him near your door, mistook your husband for him in the foggy morning light. On discovering their mistake they released him. What they would have done had it not been a mistake, we can only conjecture."

"Well, what am I to do, Mr. Holmes?"

"I have a great fancy to see this lodger of yours, Mrs. Warren."

"I don't see how that is to be managed, unless you break in the door. I always hear him unlock it as I go down the stair after I leave the tray."

"He has to take the tray in. Surely we could conceal ourselves and see him do it."

The landlady thought for a moment.

"Well, sir, there's the box-room opposite. I could arrange a looking-glass, maybe, and if you were behind the door--"

"Excellent!" said Holmes. "When does he lunch?"

"About one, sir."

"Then Dr. Watson and I will come round in time. For the present, Mrs. Warren, good-bye."

At half-past twelve we found ourselves upon the steps of Mrs. Warren's house—a high, thin, yellow-brick edifice in Great Orme Street, a narrow thoroughfare at the northeast side of the British Museum. Standing as it does near the corner of the street, it commands a view down Howe Street, with its oortentious houses. Holmes pointed with a chuckle to one of these, a row of residential flats, which projected so that they could not fail to catch the eye.

"See, Watson!" said he. "High red house with stone facings. There is the signal station all right. We know the place, and we know the code; so surely our task should be simple. There's a 'to let' card in that window. It is evidently an empty flat to which the confederate has access. Well, Mrs. Warren, what now?"

"I have it all ready for you. If you will both come up and leave your boots below on the landing, I'll put you there now."

It was an excellent hiding-plate which she had arranged. The mirror was so placed that, seated in the dark, we could very plainly see the door opposite. We had hardly settled down in it, and Mrs. Warren left us, when a distant tinkle announced that our mysterious neighbour had rung. Presently the landlady appeared with the tray, laid it down upon a chair beside the closed door, and then, treading heavily, departed. Crouching together in the angle of the door, we kept our eyes fixed upon the mirror. Suddenly, as the landlady's footsteps died away, there was the creak of a turning key, the handle revolved, and two thin hands darted out and lifted the tray form the chair. An instant later it was hurriedly replaced, and I caught a glimpse of a dark, beautiful, horrified face glaring at the narrow opening of the box-room. Then the door crashed to, the key turned once more, and all was silence. Holmes twitched my sleeve, and together we stole down the stair.

"I will call again in the evening," said he to the expectant landlady. "I think, Watson, we can discuss this business better in our own quarters."
“My surmise, as you saw, proved to be correct,” said he, speaking from the depths of his easy-chair. “There has been a substitution of lodgers. What I did not foresee is that we should find a woman, and no ordinary woman, Watson.”

“She saw us.”

“Well, she saw something to alarm her. That is certain. The general sequence of events is pretty clear, is it not? A couple seek refuge in London from a very terrible and instant danger. The measure of that danger is the rigour of their precautions. The man, who has some work which he must do, desires to leave the woman in absolute safety while he does it. It is not an easy problem, but he solved it in an original fashion, and so effectively that her presence was not even known to the landlady who supplies her with food. The printed messages, as is now evident, were to prevent her sex being discovered by her writing. The man cannot come near the woman, or he will guide their enemies to her. Since he cannot communicate with her direct, he has recourse to the agony column of a paper. So far all is clear.”

“But what is at the root of it?”

“Ah, yes, Watson--severely practical, as usual! What is at the root of it all? Mrs. Warren's whimsical problem enlarges somewhat and assumes a more sinister aspect as we proceed. This much we can say: that it is no ordinary love escape. You saw the woman's face at the sign of danger. We have heard, too, of the attack upon the landlord, which was undoubtedly meant for the lodger. These alarms, and the desperate need for secrecy, argue that the matter is one of life or death. The attack upon Mr. Warren further shows that the enemy, whoever they are, are themselves not aware of the substitution of the female lodger for the male. It is very curious and complex, Watson.”

“Why should you go further in it? What have you to gain from it?”

“What, indeed? It is art for art's sake, Watson. I suppose when you doctored you found yourself studying cases without thought of a fee?”

“For my education, Holmes.”

“Education never ends, Watson. It is a series of lessons with the greatest for the last. This is an instructive case. There is neither money nor credit in it, and yet one would wish to tidy it up. When dusk comes we should find ourselves one stage advanced in our investigation.”

When we returned to Mrs. Warren's rooms, the gloom of a London winter evening had thickened into one gray curtain, a dead monotone of colour, broken only by the sharp yellow squares of the windows and the blurred haloes of the gas-lamps. As we peered from the darkened sitting-room of the lodging-house, one more dim light glimmered high up through the obscurity.

“Someone is moving in that room,” said Holmes in a whisper, his gaunt and eager face thrust forward to the window-pane. “Yes, I can see his shadow. There he is again! He has a candle in his hand. Now he is peering across. He wants to be sure that she is on the lookout. Now he is off once more. What do you make of it, Watson?”

“A cipher message, Holmes.”

My companion gave a sudden chuckle of comprehension. "And not a very obscure cipher, Watson," said he. "Why, of course, it is Italian! The A means that it is addressed to a woman. 'Beware! Beware! Beware!' How's that, Watson?

“I believe you have hit it.”

“Not a doubt of it. It is a very urgent message, thrice repeated to make it more so. But beware of what? Wait a bit, he is coming to the window once more.”

Again we saw the dim silhouette of a crouching man and the whisk of the small flame across the window as the signals were renewed. They came mor rapidly than before--so rapid that it was hard to follow them.

"PERICOLO--pericolo--eh, what's that, Watson? 'Danger,' isn't it? Yes, by Jove, it's a danger signal. There he goes again! PERI. Halloa, what on earth--"

The light had suddenly gone out, the glimmering square of window had disappeared, and the third floor formed a dark band round the lofty building, with its tiers of shining casements. That last warning cry had been suddenly cut short. How, and by whom? The same thought occurred on the instant to us both. Holmes sprang up from where he crouched by the window.

"This is serious, Watson," he cried. "There is some devilry going forward! Why should such a message stop in
such a way? I should put Scotland Yard in touch with this business--and yet, it is too pressing for us to leave."

"Shall I go for the police?"

"We must define the situation a little more clearly. It may bear some more innocent interpretation. Come, Watson, let us go across ourselves and see what we can make of it."

As we walked rapidly down Howe Street I glanced back at the building which we had left. There, dimly outlined at the top window, I could see the shadow of a head, a woman's head, gazing tensely, rigidly, out into the night, waiting with breathless suspense for the renewal of that interrupted message. At the doorway of the Howe Street flats a man, muffled in a cravat and greatcoat, was leaning against the railing. He started as the hall-light fell upon our faces.

"Holmes!" he cried.

"Why, Gregson!" said my companion as he shook hands with the Scotland Yard detective. "Journeys end with lovers' meetings. What brings you here?"

"The same reasons that bring you, I expect," said Gregson. "How you got on to it I can't imagine."

"Different threads, but leading up to the same tangle. I've been taking the signals."

"Signals?"

"Yes, from that window. They broke off in the middle. We came over to see the reason. But since it is safe in your hands I see no object in continuing this business."

"Wait a bit!" cried Gregson eagerly. "I'll do you this justice, Mr. Holmes, that I was never in a case yet that I didn't feel stronger for having you on my side. There's only the one exit to these flats, so we have him safe."

"Who is he?"

"Well, well, we score over you for once, Mr. Holmes. You must give us best this time." He struck his stick sharply upon the ground, on which a cabman, his whip in his hand, sauntered over from a four-wheeler which stood on the far side of the street. "May I introduce you to Mr. Sherlock Holmes?" he said to the cabman. "This is Mr. Leverton, of Pinkerton's American Agency."

"The hero of the Long Island cave mystery?" said Holmes. "Sir, I am pleased to meet you."

The American, a quiet, businesslike young man, with a clean-shaven, hatchet face, flushed up at the words of commendation. "I am on the trail of my life now, Mr. Holmes," said he. "If I can get Gorgiano--"

"What! Gorgiano of the Red Circle?"

"Oh, he has a European fame, has he? Well, we've learned all about him in America. We KNOW he is at the bottom of fifty murders, and yet we have nothing positive we can take him on. I tracked him over from New York, and I've been close to him for a week in London, waiting some excuse to get my hand on his collar. Mr. Gregson and I ran him to ground in that big tenement house, and there's only one door, so he can't slip us. There's three folk come out since he went in, but I'll swear he wasn't one of them."

"Mr. Holmes talks of signals," said Gregson. "I expect, as usual, he knows a good deal that we don't."

In a few clear words Holmes explained the situation as it had appeared to us. The American struck his hands together with vexation.

"He's on to us!" he cried.

"Why do you think so?"

"Well, it figures out that way, does it not? Here he is, sending out messages to an accomplice--there are several of his gang in London. Then suddenly, just as by your own account he was telling them that there was danger, he broke short off. What could it mean except that from the window he had suddenly either caught sight of us in the street, or in some way come to understand how close the danger was, and that he must act right away if he was to avoid it? What do you suggest, Mr. Holmes?"

"That we go up at once and see for ourselves."

"But we have no warrant for his arrest."

"He is in unoccupied premises under suspicious circumstances," said Gregson. "That is good enough for the moment. When we have him by the heels we can see if New York can't help us to keep him. I'll take the responsibility of arresting him now."

Our official detectives may blunder in the matter of intelligence, but never in that of courage. Gregson climbed the stair to arrest this desperate murderer with the same absolutely quiet and businesslike bearing with which he would have ascended the official staircase of Scotland Yard. The Pinkerton man had tried to push past him, but Gregson had firmly elbowed him back. London dangers were the privilege of the London force.

The door of the left-hand flat upon the third landing was standing ajar. Gregson pushed it open. Within all was absolute silence and darkness. I struck a match and lit the detective's lantern. As I did so, and as the flicker steadied into a flame, we all gave a gasp of surprise. On the deal boards of the carpetless floor there was outlined a fresh track of blood. The red steps pointed towards us and led away from an inner room, the door of which was closed.
Gregson flung it open and held his light full blaze in front of him, while we all peered eagerly over his shoulders.

In the middle of the floor of the empty room was huddled the figure of an enormous man, his clean-shaven, swarthy face grotesquely horrible in its contortion and his head encircled by a ghastly crimson halo of blood, lying in a broad wet circle upon the white woodwork. His knees were drawn up, his hands thrown out in agony, and from the centre of his broad, brown, upturned throat there projected the white haft of a knife driven blade—deep into his body. Giant as he was, the man must have gone down like a pole-axed ox before that terrific blow. Beside his right hand a most formidable horn-handled, two-edged dagger lay upon the floor, and near it a black kid glove.

"By George! it's Black Gorgiano himself!" cried the American detective. "Someone has got ahead of us this time."

"Here is the candle in the window, Mr. Holmes," said Gregson. "Why, whatever are you doing?"

Holmes had stepped across, had lit the candle, and was passing it backward and forward across the window-panes. Then he peered into the darkness, blew the candle out, and threw it on the floor.

"I rather think that will be helpful," said he. He came over and stood in deep thought while the two professionals were examining the body. "You say that three people came out form the flat while you were waiting downstairs," said he at last. "Did you observe them closely?"

"Yes, I did."

"Was there a fellow about thirty, black-bearded, dark, of middle size?"

"Yes; he was the last to pass me."

"That is your man, I fancy. I can give you his description, and we have a very excellent outline of his footmark. That should be enough for you."

"Not much, Mr. Holmes, among the millions of London."

"Perhaps not. That is why I thought it best to summon this lady to your aid."

We all turned round at the words. There, framed in the doorway, was a tall and beautiful woman—the mysterious lodger of Bloomsbury. Slowly she advanced, her face pale and drawn with a frightful apprehension, her eyes fixed and staring, her terrified gaze riveted upon the dark figure on the floor.

"You have killed him!" she muttered. "Oh, Dio mio, you have killed him!" Then I heard a sudden sharp intake of her breath, and she sprang into the air with a cry of joy. Round and round the room she danced, her hands clapping, her dark eyes gleaming with delighted wonder, and a thousand pretty Italian exclamations pouring from her lips. It was terrible and amazing to see such a woman so convulsed with joy at such a sight. Suddenly she stopped and gazed at us all with a questioning stare.

"But you! You are police, are you not? You have killed Giuseppe Gorgiano. Is it not so?"

"We are police, madam."

She looked round into the shadows of the room.

"But where, then, is Gennaro?" she asked. "He is my husband, Gennaro Lucca. I am Emilia Lucca, and we are both from New York. Where is Gennaro? He called me this moment from this window, and I ran with all my speed."

"It was I who called," said Holmes.

"You! How could you call?"

"Your cipher was not difficult, madam. Your presence here was desirable. I knew that I had only to flash 'Vieni' and you would surely come."

The beautiful Italian looked with awe at my companion.

"I do not understand how you know these things," she said. "Giuseppe Gorgiano--how did he--" She paused, and then suddenly her face lit up with pride and delight. "Now I see it! My Gennaro! My splendid, beautiful Gennaro, who has guarded me safe from all harm, he did it, with his own strong hand he killed the monster! Oh, Gennaro, how wonderful you are! What woman could every be worthy of such a man?"

"Well, Mrs. Lucca," said the prosaic Gregson, laying his hand upon the lady's sleeve with as little sentiment as if she were a Notting Hill hooligan, "I am not very clear yet who you are or what you are; but you've said enough to make it very clear that we shall want you at the Yard."

"One moment, Gregson," said Holmes. "I rather fancy that this lady may be as anxious to give us information as we can be to get it. You understand, madam, that your husband will be arrested and tried for the death of the man who lies before us? What you say may be used in evidence. But if you think that he has acted from motives which are not criminal, and which he would wish to have known, then you cannot serve him better than by telling us the whole story."

"Now that Gorgiano is dead we fear nothing," said the lady. "He was a devil and a monster, and there can be no judge in the world who would punish my husband for having killed him."

"In that case," said Holmes, "my suggestion is that we lock this door, leave things as we found them, go with this lady to her room, and form our opinion after we have heard what it is that she has to say to us."
Half an hour later we were seated, all four, in the small sitting-room of Signora Lucca, listening to her remarkable narrative of those sinister events, the ending of which we had chanced to witness. She spoke in rapid and fluent but very unconventional English, which, for the sake of clearness, I will make grammatical.

"I was born in Posilippo, near Naples," said she, "and was the daughter of Augusto Barelli, who was the chief lawyer and once the deputy of that part. Gennaro was in my father's employment, and I came to love him, as any woman must. He had neither money nor position--nothing but his beauty and strength and energy--so my father forbade the match. We fled together, were married at Bari, and sold my jewels to gain the money which would take us to America. This was four years ago, and we have been in New York ever since.

"Fortune was very good to us at first. Gennaro was able to do a service to an Italian gentleman--he saved him from some ruffians in the place called the Bowery, and so made a powerful friend. His name was Tito Castalotte, and he was the senior partner of the great firm of Castalotte and Zamba, who are the chief fruit importers of New York. Signor Zamba is an invalid, and our new friend Castalotte has all power within the firm, which employs more than three hundred men. He took my husband into his employment, made him head of a department, and showed his good-will towards him in every way. Signor Castalotte was a bachelor, and I believe that he felt as if Gennaro was his son, and both my husband and I loved him as if he were our father. We had taken and furnished a little house in Brooklyn, and our whole future seemed assured when that black cloud appeared which was soon to overspread our sky.

"One night, when Gennaro returned from his work, he brought a fellow-countryman back with him. His name was Gorgiano, and he had come also from Posilippo. He was a huge man, as you can testify, for you have looked upon his corpse. Not only was his body that of a giant but everything about him was grotesque, gigantic, and terrifying. His voice was like thunder in our little house. There was scarce room for the whirl of his great arms as he talked. His thoughts, his emotions, his passions, all were exaggerated and monstrous. He talked, or rather roared, with such energy that others could but sit and listen, cowed with the mighty stream of words. His eyes blazed at you and held you at his mercy. He was a terrible and wonderful man. I thank God that he is dead!

"He came again and again. Yet I was aware that Gennaro was no more happy than I was in his presence. My poor husband would sit pale and listless, listening to the endless raving upon politics and upon social questions which made up or visitor's conversation. Gennaro said nothing, but I, who knew him so well, could read in his face some emotion which I had never seen there before. At first I thought that it was dislike. And then, gradually, I understood that it was more than dislike. It was fear--a deep, secret, shrinking fear. That night--the night that I read his terror--I put my arms round him and I implored him by his love for me and by all that he held dear to hold nothing from me, and to tell me why this huge man overshadowed him so.

"He told me, and my own heart grew cold as ice as I listened. My poor Gennaro, in his wild and fiery days, when all the world seemed against him and his mind was driven half mad by the injustices of life, had joined a Neapolitan society, the Red Circle, which was allied to the old Carbonari. The oaths and secrets of this brotherhood were frightful, but once within its rule no escape was possible. When we had fled to America Gennaro thought that he had cast it all off forever. What was his horror one evening to meet in the streets the very man who had initiated him in Naples, the giant Gorgiano, a man who had earned the name of 'Death' in the south of Italy, for he was red to the elbow in murder! He had come to New York to avoid the Italian police, and he had already planted a branch of this dreadful society in his new home. All this Gennaro told me and showed me a summons which he had received that very day, a Red Circle drawn upon the head of it telling him that a lodge would be held upon a certain date, and that his presence at it was required and ordered.

"That was bad enough, but worse was to come. I had noticed for some time that when Gorgiano came to us, as he constantly did, in the evening, he spoke much to me; and even when his words were to my husband those terrible, glaring, wild-beast eyes of his were always turned upon me. One night his secret came out. I had awakened what he called 'love' within him--the love of a brute--a savage. Gennaro had not yet returned when he came. He pushed his way in, seized me in his mighty arms, hugged me in his bear's embrace, covered me with kisses, and implored me to come away with him. I was struggling and screaming when Gennaro entered and attacked him. He struck Gennaro senseless and fled from the house which he was never more to enter. It was a deadly enemy that we made that night.

"A few days later came the meeting. Gennaro returned from it with a face which told me that something dreadful had occurred. It was worse than we could have imagined possible. The funds of the society were raised by blackmailing rich Italians and threatening them with violence should they refuse the money. It seems that Castalotte, our dear friend and benefactor, had been approached. He had refused to yield to threats, and he had handed the notices to the police. It was resolved now that such an example should be made of them as would prevent any other victim from rebelling. At the meeting it was arranged that he and his house should be blown up with dynamite. There was a drawing of lots as to who should carry out the deed. Gennaro saw our enemy's cruel face smiling at him as he dipped his hand in the bag. No doubt it had been prearranged in some fashion, for it was the fatal disc with the
Red Circle upon it, the mandate for murder, which lay upon his palm. He was to kill his best friend, or he was to expose himself and me to the vengeance of his comrades. It was part of their fiendish system to punish those whom they feared or hated by injuring not only their own persons but those whom they loved, and it was the knowledge of this which hung as a terror over my poor Gennaro's head and drove him nearly crazy with apprehension.

"All that night we sat together, our arms round each other, each strengthening each for the troubles that lay before us. The very next evening had been fixed for the attempt. By midday my husband and I were on our way to London, but not before he had given our benefactor full warning of this danger, and had also left such information for the police as would safeguard his life for the future.

"The rest, gentlemen, you know for yourselves. We were sure that our enemies would be behind us like our own shadows. Gorgiano had his private reasons for vengeance, but in any case we knew how ruthless, cunning, and unyielding he could be. Both Italy and America are full of stories of his dreadful powers. If ever they were exerted it would be now. My darling made use of the few clear days which our start had given us in arranging for a refuge for me in such a fashion that no possible danger could reach me. For his own part, he wished to be free that he might communicate both with the American and with the Italian police. I do not myself know where he lived, or how. All that I learned was through the columns of a newspaper. But once as I looked through my window, I saw two Italians watching the house, and I understood that in some way Gorgiano had found our retreat. Finally Gennaro told me, through the paper, that he would signal to me from a certain window, but when the signals came they were nothing but warnings, which were suddenly interrupted. It is very clear to me now that he knew Gorgiano to be close upon him, and that, thank God! he was ready for him when he came. And now, gentleman, I would ask you whether we have anything to fear from the law, or whether any judge upon earth would condemn my Gennaro for what he has done?"

"Well, Mr. Gregson," said the American, looking across at the official, "I don't know what your British point of view may be, but I guess that in New York this lady's husband will receive a pretty general vote of thanks."

"She will have to come with me and see the chief," Gregson answered. "If what she says is corroborated, I do not think she or her husband has much to fear. But what I can't make head or tail of, Mr. Holmes, is how on earth YOU got yourself mixed up in the matter."

"Education, Gregson, education. Still seeking knowledge at the old university. Well, Watson, you have one more specimen of the tragic and grotesque to add to your collection. By the way, it is not eight o'clock, and a Wagner night at Covent Garden! If we hurry, we might be in time for the second act."

**The Adventure of the Bruce-Partington Plans**

In the third week of November, in the year 1895, a dense yellow fog settled down upon London. From the Monday to the Thursday I doubt whether it was ever possible from our windows in Baker Street to see the loom of the opposite houses. The first day Holmes had spent in cross-indexing his huge book of references. The second and third had been patiently occupied upon a subject which he had recently made his hobby—the music of the Middle Ages. But when, for the fourth time, after pushing back our chairs from breakfast we saw the greasy, heavy brown swirl still drifting past us and condensing in oily drops upon the window-panes, my comrade's impatient and active nature could endure this drab existence no longer. He paced restlessly about our sitting-room in a fever of suppressed energy, biting his nails, tapping the furniture, and chafing against inaction.

"Nothing of interest in the paper, Watson?" he said.

I was aware that by anything of interest, Holmes meant anything of criminal interest. There was the news of a revolution, of a possible war, and of an impending change of government; but these did not come within the horizon of my companion. I could see nothing recorded in the shape of crime which was not commonplace and futile. Holmes groaned and resumed his restless meanderings.

"The London criminal is certainly a dull fellow," said he in the querulous voice of the sportsman whose game has failed him. "Look out this window, Watson. See how the figures loom up, are dimly seen, and then blend once more into the cloud-bank. The thief or the murderer could roam London on such a day as the tiger does the jungle, unseen until he pounces, and then evident only to his victim."

"There have," said I, "been numerous petty thefts."

Holmes snorted his contempt.

"This great and sombre stage is set for something more worthy than that," said he. "It is fortunate for this community that I am not a criminal."

"It is, indeed!" said I heartily.

"Suppose that I were Brooks or Woodhouse, or any of the fifty men who have good reason for taking my life, how long could I survive against my own pursuit? A summons, a bogus appointment, and all would be over. It is well they don't have days of fog in the Latin countries—the countries of assassination. By Jove! here comes something at last to break our dead monotony."
It was the maid with a telegram. Holmes tore it open and burst out laughing.

"Well, well! What next?" said he. "Brother Mycroft is coming round."

"Why not?" I asked. "Why not? It is as if you met a tram-car coming down a country lane. Mycroft has his rails and he runs on them. His Pall Mall lodgings, the Diogenes Club, Whitehall--that is his cycle. Once, and only once, he has been here. What upheaval can possibly have derailed him?"

"Does he not explain?"

Holmes handed me his brother's telegram. Must see you over Cadogen West. Coming at once.

Mycroft.

"Cadogen West? I have heard the name."

"It recalls nothing to my mind. But that Mycroft should break out in this erratic fashion! A planet might as well leave its orbit. By the way, do you know what Mycroft is?"

I had some vague recollection of an explanation at the time of the Adventure of the Greek Interpreter.

"You told me that he had some small office under the British government."

Holmes chuckled.

"I did not know you quite so well in those days. One has to be discreet when one talks of high matters of state. You are right in thinking that he under the British government. You would also be right in a sense if you said that occasionally he IS the British government."

"My dear Holmes!"

"I thought I might surprise you. Mycroft draws four hundred and fifty pounds a year, remains a subordinate, has no ambitions of any kind, will receive neither honour nor title, but remains the most indispensable man in the country."

"But how?"

"Well, his position is unique. He has made it for himself. There has never been anything like it before, nor will be again. He has the tidiest and most orderly brain, with the greatest capacity for storing facts, of any man living. The same great powers which I have turned to the detection of crime he has used for this particular business. The conclusions of every department are passed to him, and he is the central exchange, the clearinghouse, which makes out the balance. All other men are specialists, but his specialism is omniscience. We will suppose that a minister needs information as to a point which involves the Navy, India, Canada and the bimetallic question; he could get his separate advices from various departments upon each, but only Mycroft can focus them all, and say offhand how each factor would affect the other. They began by using him as a short-cut, a convenience; now he has made himself an essential. In that great brain of his everything is pigeon-holed and can be handed out in an instant. Again and again his word has decided the national policy. He lives in it. He thinks of nothing else save when, as an intellectual exercise, he unbends if I call upon him and ask him to advise me on one of my little problems. But Jupiter is descending to-day. What on earth can it mean? Who is Cadogan West, and what is he to Mycroft?"

"I have it," I cried, and plunged among the litter of papers upon the sofa. "Yes, yes, here he is, sure enough! Cadogan West was the young man who was found dead on the Underground on Tuesday morning."

Holmes sat up at attention, his pipe halfway to his lips.

"This must be serious, Watson. A death which has caused my brother to alter his habits can be no ordinary one. What in the world can he have to do with it? The case was featureless as I remember it. The young man had apparently fallen out of the train and killed himself. He had not been robbed, and there was no particular reason to suspect violence. Is that not so?"

"There has been an inquest," said I, "and a good many fresh facts have come out. Looked at more closely, I should certainly say that it was a curious case."

"Judging by its effect upon my brother, I should think it must be a most extraordinary one." He snuggled down in his armchair. "Now, Watson, let us have the facts."

"The man's name was Arthur Cadogan West. He was twenty-seven years of age, unmarried, and a clerk at Woolwich Arsenal."

"Government employ. Behold the link with Brother Mycroft!"

"He left Woolwich suddenly on Monday night. Was last seen by his fiancee, Miss Violet Westbury, whom he left abruptly in the fog about 7:30 that evening. There was no quarrel between them and she can give no motive for his action. The next thing heard of him was when his dead body was discovered by a plate-layer named Mason, just outside Aldgate Station on the Underground system in London."

"When?"

"The body was found at six on Tuesday morning. It was lying wide of the metals upon the left hand of the track.
as one goes eastward, at a point close to the station, where the line emerges from the tunnel in which it runs. The head was badly crushed—an injury which might well have been caused by a fall from the train. The body could only have come on the line in that way. Had it been carried down from any neighbouring street, it must have passed the station barriers, where a collector is always standing. This point seems absolutely certain."

"Very good. The case is definite enough. The man, dead or alive, either fell or was precipitated from a train. So much is clear to me. Continue."

"The trains which traverse the lines of rail beside which the body was found are those which run from west to east, some being purely Metropolitan, and some from Willesden and outlying junctions. It can be stated for certain that this young man, when he met his death, was travelling in this direction at some late hour of the night, but at what point he entered the train it is impossible to state."

"His ticket, of course, would show that."

"There was no ticket in his pockets."

"No ticket! Dear me, Watson, this is really very singular. According to my experience it is not possible to reach the platform of a Metropolitan train without exhibiting one's ticket. Presumably, then, the young man had one. Was it taken from him in order to conceal the station from which he came? It is possible. Or did he drop it in the carriage? That is also possible. But the point is of curious interest. I understand that there was no sign of robbery?"

"Apparently not. There is a list here of his possessions. His purse contained two pounds fifteen. He had also a check-book on the Woolwich branch of the Capital and Counties Bank. Through this his identity was established. There were also two dress-circle tickets for the Woolwich Theatre, dated for that very evening. Also a small packet of technical papers."

Holmes gave an exclamation of satisfaction.

"There we have it at last, Watson! British government--Woolwich. Arsenal--technical papers--Brother Mycroft, the chain is complete. But here he comes, if I am not mistaken, to speak for himself."

A moment later the tall and portly form of Mycroft Holmes was ushered into the room. Heavily built and massive, there was a suggestion of uncouth physical inertia in the figure, but above this unwieldy frame there was perched a head so masterful in its brow, so alert in its steel-gray, deep-set eyes, so firm in its lips, and so subtle in its play of expression, that after the first glance one forgot the gross body and remembered only the dominant mind.

At his heels came our old friend Lestrade, of Scotland Yard--thin and austere. The gravity of both their faces foretold some weighty quest. The detective shook hands without a word. Mycroft Holmes struggled out of his overcoat and subsided into an armchair.

"A most annoying business, Sherlock," said he. "I extremely dislike altering my habits, but the powers that be would take no denial. In the present state of Siam it is most awkward that I should be away from the office. But it is a real crisis. I have never seen the Prime Minister so upset. As to the Admiralty--it is buzzing like an overturned beehive. Have you read up the case?"

"We have just done so. What were the technical papers?"

"Ah, there's the point! Fortunately, it has not come out. The press would be furious if it did. The papers which this wretched youth had in his pocket were the plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine."

Mycroft Holmes spoke with a solemnity which showed his sense of the importance of the subject. His brother and I sat expectant.

"Surely you have heard of it? I thought everyone had heard of it."

"Only as a name."

"Its importance can hardly be exaggerated. It has been the most jealously guarded of all government secrets. You may take it from me that naval warfare becomes impossible within the radius of a Bruce-Partington's operation. Two years ago a very large sum was smuggled through the Estimates and was expended in acquiring a monopoly of the invention. Every effort has been made to keep the secret. The plans, which are exceedingly intricate, comprising some thirty separate patents, each essential to the working of the whole, are kept in an elaborate safe in a confidential office adjoining the arsenal, with burglar-proof doors and windows. Under no conceivable circumstances were the plans to be taken from the office. If the chief constructor of the Navy desired to consult them, even he was forced to go to the Woolwich office for the purpose. And yet here we find them in the pocket of a dead junior clerk in the heart of London. From an official point of view it's simply awful."

"But you have recovered them?"

"No, Sherlock, no! That's the pinch. We have not. Ten papers were taken from Woolwich. There were seven in the pocket of Cadogan West. The three most essential are gone--stolen, vanished. You must drop everything, Sherlock. Never mind your usual petty puzzles of the police-court. It's a vital international problem that you have to solve. Why did Cadogan West take the papers, where are the missing ones, how did he die, how came his body where it was found, how can the evil be set right? Find an answer to all these questions, and you will have done
good service for your country."

"Why do you not solve it yourself, Mycroft? You can see as far as I."

"Possibly, Sherlock. But it is a question of getting details. Give me your details, and from an armchair I will return you an excellent expert opinion. But to run here and run there, to cross-question railway guards, and lie on my face with a lens to my eye--it is not my metier. No, you are the one man who can clear the matter up. If you have a fancy to see your name in the next honours list--"

My friend smiled and shook his head.

"I play the game for the game's own sake," said he. "But the problem certainly presents some points of interest, and I shall be very pleased to look into it. Some more facts, please."

"I have jotted down the more essential ones upon this sheet of paper, together with a few addresses which you will find of service. The actual official guardian of the papers is the famous government expert, Sir James Walter, whose decorations and sub-titles fill two lines of a book of reference. He has grown gray in the service, is a gentleman, a favoured guest in the most exalted houses, and, above all, a man whose patriotism is beyond suspicion. He is one of two who have a key of the safe. I may add that the papers were undoubtedly in the office during working hours on Monday, and that Sir James left for London about three o'clock taking his key with him. He was at the house of Admiral Sinclair at Barclay Square during the whole of the evening when this incident occurred."

"Has the fact been verified?"

"Yes; his brother, Colonel Valentine Walter, has testified to his departure from Woolwich, and Admiral Sinclair to his arrival in London; so Sir James is no longer a direct factor in the problem."

"Who was the other man with a key?"

"The senior clerk and draughtsman, Mr. Sidney Johnson. He is a man of forty, married, with five children. He is a silent, morose man, but he has, on the whole, an excellent record in the public service. He is unpopular with his colleagues, but a hard worker. According to his own account, corroborated only by the word of his wife, he was at home the whole of Monday evening after office hours, and his key has never left the watch-chain upon which it hangs."

"Tell us about Cadogan West."

"He has been ten years in the service and has done good work. He has the reputation of being hot-headed and imperious, but a straight, honest man. We have nothing against him. He was next Sidney Johnson in the office. His duties brought him into daily, personal contact with the plans. No one else had the handling of them."

"Who locked up the plans that night?"

"Mr. Sidney Johnson, the senior clerk."

"Well, it is surely perfectly clear who took them away. They are actually found upon the person of this junior clerk, Cadogan West. That seems final, does it not?"

"It does, Sherlock, and yet it leaves so much unexplained. In the first place, why did he take them?"

"I presume they were of value?"

"He could have got several thousands for them very easily."

"Can you suggest any possible motive for taking the papers to London except to sell them?"

"No, I cannot."

"Then we must take that as our working hypothesis. Young West took the papers. Now this could only be done by having a false key--"

"Several false keys. He had to open the building and the room."

"He had, then, several false keys. He took the papers to London to sell the secret, intending, no doubt, to have the plans themselves back in the safe next morning before they were missed. While in London on this treasonable mission he met his end."

"How?"

"We will suppose that he was travelling back to Woolwich when he was killed and thrown out of the compartment."

"Aldgate, where the body was found, is considerably past the station London Bridge, which would be his route to Woolwich."

"Many circumstances could be imagined under which he would pass London Bridge. There was someone in the carriage, for example, with whom he was having an absorbing interview. This interview led to a violent scene in which he lost his life. Possibly he tried to leave the carriage, fell out on the line, and so met his end. The other closed the door. There was a thick fog, and nothing could be seen."

"No better explanation can be given with our present knowledge; and yet consider, Sherlock, how much you leave untouched. We will suppose, for argument's sake, that young Cadogan West HAD determined to convey these papers to London. He would naturally have made an appointment with the foreign agent and kept his evening clear.
Instead of that he took two tickets for the theatre, escorted his fiancee halfway there, and then suddenly disappeared.

"A blind," said Lestrade, who had sat listening with some impatience to the conversation.

"A very singular one. That is objection No. 1. Objection No. 2: We will suppose that he reaches London and sees the foreign agent. He must bring back the papers before morning or the loss will be discovered. He took away ten. Only seven were in his pocket. What had become of the other three? He certainly would not leave them of his own free will. Then, again, where is the price of his treason? Once would have expected to find a large sum of money in his pocket."

"It seems to me perfectly clear," said Lestrade. "I have no doubt at all as to what occurred. He took the papers to sell them. He saw the agent. They could not agree as to price. He started home again, but the agent went with him. In the train the agent murdered him, took the more essential papers, and threw his body from the carriage. That would account for everything, would it not?"

"Why had he no ticket?"

"The ticket would have shown which station was nearest the agent's house. Therefore he took it from the murdered man's pocket."

"Good, Lestrade, very good," said Holmes. "Your theory holds together. But if this is true, then the case is at an end. On the one hand, the traitor is dead. On the other, the plans of the Bruce-Partington submarine are presumably already on the Continent. What is there for us to do?"

"To act, Sherlock--to act!" cried Mycroft, springing to his feet. "All my instincts are against this explanation. Use your powers! Go to the scene of the crime! See the people concerned! Leave no stone unturned! In all your career you have never had so great a chance of serving your country."

"Well, well!" said Holmes, shrugging his shoulders. "Come, Watson! And you, Lestrade, could you favour us with your company for an hour or two? We will begin our investigation by a visit to Aldgate Station. Good-bye, Mycroft. I shall let you have a report before evening, but I warn you in advance that you have little to expect."

An hour later Holmes, Lestrade and I stood upon the Underground railroad at the point where it emerges from the tunnel immediately before Aldgate Station. A courteous red-faced old gentleman represented the railway company.

"This is where the young man's body lay," said he, indicating a spot about three feet from the metals. "It could not have fallen from above, for these, as you see, are all blank walls. Therefore, it could only have come from a train, and that train, so far as we can trace it, must have passed about midnight on Monday."

"Have the carriages been examined for any sign of violence?"

"There are no such signs, and no ticket has been found."

"No record of a door being found open?"

"None."

"We have had some fresh evidence this morning," said Lestrade. "A passenger who passed Aldgate in an ordinary Metropolitan train about 11:40 on Monday night declares that he heard a heavy thud, as of a body striking the line, just before the train reached the station. There was dense fog, however, and nothing could be seen. He made no report of it at the time. Why, whatever is the matter with Mr. Holmes?"

My friend was standing with an expression of strained intensity upon his face, staring at the railway metals where they curved out of the tunnel. Aldgate is a junction, and there was a network of points. On these his eager, questioning eyes were fixed, and I saw on his keen, alert face that tightening of the lips, that quiver of the nostrils, and concentration of the heavy, tufted brows which I knew so well.

"Points," he muttered; "the points."

"What of it? What do you mean?"

"I suppose there are no great number of points on a system such as this?"

"No; they are very few."

"And a curve, too. Points, and a curve. By Jove! if it were only so."

"What is it, Mr. Holmes? Have you a clue?"

"An idea--an indication, no more. But the case certainly grows in interest. Unique, perfectly unique, and yet why not? I do not see any indications of bleeding on the line."

"There were hardly any."

"But I understand that there was a considerable wound."

"The bone was crushed, but there was no great external injury."

"And yet one would have expected some bleeding. Would it be possible for me to inspect the train which contained the passenger who heard the thud of a fall in the fog?"

"I fear not, Mr. Holmes. The train has been broken up before now, and the carriages redistributed."
"I can assure you, Mr. Holmes," said Lestrade, "that every carriage has been carefully examined. I saw to it myself."

It was one of my friend's most obvious weaknesses that he was impatient with less alert intelligences than his own.

"Very likely," said he, turning away. "As it happens, it was not the carriages which I desired to examine. Watson, we have done all we can here. We need not trouble you any further, Mr. Lestrade. I think our investigations must now carry us to Woolwich."

At London Bridge, Holmes wrote a telegram to his brother, which he handed to me before dispatching it. It ran thus:

See some light in the darkness, but it may possibly flicker out. Meanwhile, please send by messenger, to await return at Baker Street, a complete list of all foreign spies or international agents known to be in England, with full address.

Sherlock.

"That should be helpful, Watson," he remarked as we took our seats in the Woolwich train. "We certainly owe Brother Mycroft a debt for having introduced us to what promises to be a really very remarkable case."

His eager face still wore that expression of intense and high-strung energy, which showed me that some novel and suggestive circumstance had opened up a stimulating line of thought. See the foxhound with hanging ears and drooping tail as it lolls about the kennels, and compare it with the same hound as, with gleaming eyes and straining muscles, it runs upon a breast-high scent—such was the change in Holmes since the morning. He was a different man from the limp and lounging figure in the mouse-coloured dressing-gown who had prowled so restlessly only a few hours before round the fog-girt room.

"There is material here. There is scope," said he. "I am dull indeed not to have understood its possibilities."

"Even now they are dark to me."

"The end is dark to me also, but I have hold of one idea which may lead us far. The man met his death elsewhere, and his body was on the ROOF of a carriage."

"On the roof!"

"Remarkable, is it not? But consider the facts. Is it a coincidence that it is found at the very point where the train pitches and sways as it comes round on the points? Is not that the place where an object upon the roof might be expected to fall off? The points would affect no object inside the train. Either the body fell from the roof, or a very curious coincidence has occurred. But now consider the question of the blood. Of course, there was no bleeding on the line if the body had bled elsewhere. Each fact is suggestive in itself. Together they have a cumulative force."

"And the ticket, too!" I cried.

"Exactly. We could not explain the absence of a ticket. This would explain it. Everything fits together."

"But suppose it were so, we are still as far as ever from unravelling the mystery of his death. Indeed, it becomes not simpler but stranger."

"Perhaps," said Holmes, thoughtfully, "perhaps." He relapsed into a silent reverie, which lasted until the slow train drew up at last in Woolwich Station. There he called a cab and drew Mycroft's paper from his pocket.

"We have quite a little round of afternoon calls to make," said he. "I think that Sir James Walter claims our first attention."

The house of the famous official was a fine villa with green lawns stretching down to the Thames. As we reached it the fog was lifting, and a thin, watery sunshine was breaking through. A butler answered our ring.

"Sir James, sir!" said he with solemn face. "Sir James died this morning."

"Good heavens!" cried Holmes in amazement. "How did he die?"

"Perhaps you would care to step in, sir, and see his brother, Colonel Valentine?"

"Yes, we had best do so."

We were ushered into a dim-lit drawing-room, where an instant later we were joined by a very tall, handsome, light-bearded man of fifty, the younger brother of the dead scientist. His wild eyes, stained cheeks, and unkempt hair all spoke of the sudden blow which had fallen upon the household. He was hardly articulate as he spoke of it.

"It was this horrible scandal," said he. "My brother, Sir James, was a man of very sensitive honour, and he could not survive such an affair. It broke his heart. He was always so proud of the efficiency of his department, and this was a crushing blow."

"We had hoped that he might have given us some indications which would have helped us to clear the matter up."

"I assure you that it was all a mystery to him as it is to you and to all of us. He had already put all his knowledge at the disposal of the police. Naturally he had no doubt that Cadogan West was guilty. But all the rest was inconceivable."
"You cannot throw any new light upon the affair?"

"I know nothing myself save what I have read or heard. I have no desire to be discourteous, but you can understand, Mr. Holmes, that we are much disturbed at present, and I must ask you to hasten this interview to an end."

"This is indeed an unexpected development," said my friend when we had regained the cab. "I wonder if the death was natural, or whether the poor old fellow killed himself! If the latter, may it be taken as some sign of self-reproach for duty neglected? We must leave that question to the future. Now we shall turn to the Cadogan Wests."

A small but well-kept house in the outskirts of the town sheltered the bereaved mother. The old lady was too dazed with grief to be of any use to us, but at her side was a white-faced young lady, who introduced herself as Miss Violet Westbury, the fiancee of the dead man, and the last to see him upon that fatal night.

"I cannot explain it, Mr. Holmes," she said. "I have not shut an eye since the tragedy, thinking, thinking, thinking, night and day, what the true meaning of it can be. Arthur was the most single-minded, chivalrous, patriotic man upon earth. He would have cut his right hand off before he would sell a State secret confided to his keeping. It is absurd, impossible, preposterous to anyone who knew him."

"But the facts, Miss Westbury?"

"Yes, yes; I admit I cannot explain them."

"Was he in any want of money?"

"No; his needs were very simple and his salary ample. He had saved a few hundreds, and we were to marry at the New Year."

"No signs of any mental excitement? Come, Miss Westbury, be absolutely frank with us."

The quick eye of my companion had noted some change in her manner. She coloured and hesitated.

"Yes," she said at last, "I had a feeling that there was something on his mind."

"For long?"

"Only for the last week or so. He was thoughtful and worried. Once I pressed him about it. He admitted that there was something, and that it was concerned with his official life. 'It is too serious for me to speak about, even to you,' said he. I could get nothing more."

Holmes looked grave.

"Go on, Miss Westbury. Even if it seems to tell against him, go on. We cannot say what it may lead to."

"Indeed, I have nothing more to tell. Once or twice it seemed to me that he was on the point of telling me something. He spoke one evening of the importance of the secret, and I have some recollection that he said that no doubt foreign spies would pay a great deal to have it."

My friend's face grew graver still.

"Anything else?"

"He said that we were slack about such matters--that it would be easy for a traitor to get the plans."

"Was it only recently that he made such remarks?"

"Yes, quite recently."

"Now tell us of that last evening."

"We were to go to the theatre. The fog was so thick that a cab was useless. We walked, and our way took us close to the office. Suddenly he darted away into the fog."

"Without a word?"

"He gave an exclamation; that was all. I waited but he never returned. Then I walked home. Next morning, after the office opened, they came to inquire. About twelve o'clock we heard the terrible news. Oh, Mr. Holmes, if you could only, only save his honour! It was so much to him."

Holmes shook his head sadly.

"Come, Watson," said he, "our ways lie elsewhere. Our next station must be the office from which the papers were taken."

"It was black enough before against this young man, but our inquiries make it blacker," he remarked as the cab lumbered off. "His coming marriage gives a motive for the crime. He naturally wanted money. The idea was in his head, since he spoke about it. He nearly made the girl an accomplice in the treason by telling her his plans. It is all very bad."

"But surely, Holmes, character goes for something? Then, again, why should he leave the girl in the street and dart away to commit a felony?"

"Exactly! There are certainly objections. But it is a formidable case which they have to meet."

Mr. Sidney Johnson, the senior clerk, met us at the office and received us with that respect which my companion's card always commanded. He was a thin, gruff, bespectacled man of middle age, his cheeks haggard, and his hands twitching from the nervous strain to which he had been subjected.
"It is bad, Mr. Holmes, very bad! Have you heard of the death of the chief?"
"We have just come from his house."
"The place is disorganized. The chief dead, Cadogan West dead, our papers stolen. And yet, when we closed our door on Monday evening, we were as efficient an office as any in the government service. Good God, it's dreadful to think of! That West, of all men, should have done such a thing!"
"You are sure of his guilt, then?"
"I can see no other way out of it. And yet I would have trusted him as I trust myself."
"At what hour was the office closed on Monday?"
"At five."
"Did you close it?"
"I am always the last man out."
"Where were the plans?"
"In that safe. I put them there myself."
"Is there no watchman to the building?"
"There is, but he has other departments to look after as well. He is an old soldier and a most trustworthy man. He saw nothing that evening. Of course the fog was very thick."
"Suppose that Cadogan West wished to make his way into the building after hours; he would need three keys, would he not, before he could reach the papers?"
"Yes, he would. The key of the outer door, the key of the office, and the key of the safe."
"Only Sir James Walter and you had those keys?"
"I had no keys of the doors--only of the safe."
"Was Sir James a man who was orderly in his habits?"
"Yes, I think he was. I know that so far as those three keys are concerned he kept them on the same ring. I have often seen them there."
"And that ring went with him to London?"
"He said so."
"And your key never left your possession?"
"Never."
"Then West, if he is the culprit, must have had a duplicate. And yet none was found upon his body. One other point: if a clerk in this office desired to sell the plans, would it not be simply to copy the plans for himself than to take the originals, as was actually done?"
"It would take considerable technical knowledge to copy the plans in an effective way."
"But I suppose either Sir James, or you, or West has that technical knowledge?"
"No doubt we had, but I beg you won't try to drag me into the matter, Mr. Holmes. What is the use of our speculating in this way when the original plans were actually found on West?"
"Well, it is certainly singular that he should run the risk of taking originals if he could safely have taken copies, which would have equally served his turn."
"Singular, no doubt--and yet he did so."
"Every inquiry in this case reveals something inexplicable. Now there are three papers still missing. They are, as I understand, the vital ones."
"Yes, that is so."
"Do you mean to say that anyone holding these three papers, and without the seven others, could construct a Bruce-Partington submarine?"
"I reported to that effect to the Admiralty. But to-day I have been over the drawings again, and I am not so sure of it. The double valves with the automatic self-adjusting slots are drawn in one of the papers which have been returned. Until the foreigners had invented that for themselves they could not make the boat. Of course they might soon get over the difficulty."
"But the three missing drawings are the most important?"
"Undoubtedly."
"I think, with your permission, I will now take a stroll round the premises. I do not recall any other question which I desired to ask."

He examined the lock of the safe, the door of the room, and finally the iron shutters of the window. It was only when we were on the lawn outside that his interest was strongly excited. There was a laurel bush outside the window, and several of the branches bore signs of having been twisted or snapped. He examined them carefully with his lens, and then some dim and vague marks upon the earth beneath. Finally he asked the chief clerk to close the iron shutters, and he pointed out to me that they hardly met in the centre, and that it would be possible for anyone
outside to see what was going on within the room.

"The indications are ruined by three days' delay. They may mean something or nothing. Well, Watson, I do not think that Woolwich can help us further. It is a small crop which we have gathered. Let us see if we can do better in London."

Yet we added one more sheaf to our harvest before we left Woolwich Station. The clerk in the ticket office was able to say with confidence that he saw Cadogan West--whom he knew well by sight--upon the Monday night, and that he went to London by the 8:15 to London Bridge. He was alone and took a single third-class ticket. The clerk was struck at the time by his excited and nervous manner. So shaky was he that he could hardly pick up his change, and the clerk had helped him with it. A reference to the timetable showed that the 8:15 was the first train which it was possible for West to take after he had left the lady about 7:30.

"Let us reconstruct, Watson," said Holmes after half an hour of silence. "I am not aware that in all our joint researches we have ever had a case which was more difficult to get at. Every fresh advance which we make only reveals a fresh ridge beyond. And yet we have surely made some appreciable progress.

"The effect of our inquiries at Woolwich has in the main been against young Cadogan West; but the indications at the window would lend themselves to a more favourable hypothesis. Let us suppose, for example, that he had been approached by some foreign agent. It might have been done under such pledges as would have prevented him from speaking of it, and yet would have affected his thoughts in the direction indicated by his remarks to his fiancee. Very good. We will now suppose that as he went to the theatre with the young lady he suddenly, in the fog, caught a glimpse of this same agent going in the direction of the office. He was an impetuous man, quick in his decisions. Everything gave way to his duty. He followed the man, reached the window, saw the abstraction of the documents, and pursued the thief. In this way we get over the objection that no one would take originals when he could make copies. This outsider had to take originals. So far it holds together."

"What is the next step?"

"Then we come into difficulties. One would imagine that under such circumstances the first act of young Cadogan West would be to seize the villain and raise the alarm. Why did he not do so? Could it have been an official superior who took the papers? That would explain West's conduct. Or could the chief have given West the slip in the fog, and West started at once to London to head him off from his own rooms, presuming that he knew where the rooms were? The call must have been very pressing, since he left his girl standing in the fog and made no effort to communicate with her. Our scent runs cold here, and there is a vast gap between either hypothesis and the laying of West's body, with seven papers in his pocket, on the roof of a Metropolitan train. My instinct now is to work from the other end. If Mycroft has given us the list of addresses we may be able to pick our man and follow two tracks instead of one."

Surely enough, a note awaited us at Baker Street. A government messenger had brought it post-haste. Holmes glanced at it and threw it over to me.

There are numerous small fry, but few who would handle so big an affair. The only men worth considering are Adolph Mayer, of 13 Great George Street, Westminster; Louis La Rothiere, of Campden Mansions, Notting Hill; and Hugo Oberstein, 13 Caulfield Gardens, Kensington. The latter was known to be in town on Monday and is now reported as having left. Glad to hear you have seen some light. The Cabinet awaits your final report with the utmost anxiety. Urgent representations have arrived from the very highest quarter. The whole force of the State is at your back if you should need it.

Mycroft.

"I'm afraid," said Holmes, smiling, "that all the queen's horses and all the queen's men cannot avail in this matter." He had spread out his big map of London and leaned eagerly over it. "Well, well," said he presently with an exclamation of satisfaction, "things are turning a little in our direction at last. Why, Watson, I do honestly believe that we are going to pull it off, after all." He slapped me on the shoulder with a sudden burst of hilarity. "I am going out now. It is only a reconnaissance. I will do nothing serious without my trusted comrade and biographer at my elbow. Do you stay here, and the odds are that you will see me again in an hour or two. If time hangs heavy get foolscap and a pen, and begin your narrative of how we saved the State."

I felt some reflection of his elation in my own mind, for I knew well that he would not depart so far from his usual austerity of demeanour unless there was good cause for exultation. All the long November evening I waited, filled with impatience for his return. At last, shortly after nine o'clock, there arrived a messenger with a note:

Am dining at Goldini's Restaurant, Gloucester Road, Kensington. Please come at once and join me there. Bring with you a jemmy, a dark lantern, a chisel, and a revolver.

S.H.

It was a nice equipment for a respectable citizen to carry through the dim, fog-draped streets. I stowed them all discreetly away in my overcoat and drove straight to the address given. There sat my friend at a little round table
near the door of the garish Italian restaurant.

"Have you had something to eat? Then join me in a coffee and curacao. Try one of the proprietor's cigars. They are less poisonous than one would expect. Have you the tools?"

"They are here, in my overcoat."

"Excellent. Let me give you a short sketch of what I have done, with some indication of what we are about to do. Now it must be evident to you, Watson, that this young man's body was PLACED on the roof of the train. That was clear from the instant that I determined the fact that it was from the roof, and not from a carriage, that he had fallen."

"Could it not have been dropped from a bridge?"

"I should say it was impossible. If you examine the roofs you will find that they are slightly rounded, and there is no railing round them. Therefore, we can say for certain that young Cadogan West was placed on it."

"How could he be placed there?"

"That was the question which we had to answer. There is only one possible way. You are aware that the Underground runs clear of tunnels at some points in the West End. I had a vague memory that as I have travelled by it I have occasionally seen windows just above my head. Now, suppose that a train halted under such a window, would there be any difficulty in laying a body upon the roof?"

"It seems most improbable."

"We must fall back upon the old axiom that when all other contingencies fail, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. Here all other contingencies HAVE failed. When I found that the leading international agent, who had just left London, lived in a row of houses which abutted upon the Underground, I was so pleased that you were a little astonished at my sudden frivolity."

"Oh, that was it, was it?"

"Yes, that was it. Mr. Hugo Oberstein, of 13 Caulfield Gardens, had become my objective. I began my operations at Gloucester Road Station, where a very helpful official walked with me along the track and allowed me to satisfy myself not only that the back-stair windows of Caulfield Gardens open on the line but the even more essential fact that, owing to the intersection of one of the larger railways, the Underground trains are frequently held motionless for some minutes at that very spot."

"Splendid, Holmes! You have got it!"

"So far--so far, Watson. We advance, but the goal is afar. Well, having seen the back of Caulfield Gardens, I visited the front and satisfied myself that the bird was indeed flown. It is a considerable house, unfurnished, so far as I could judge, in the upper rooms. Oberstein lived there with a single valet, who was probably a confederate entirely in his confidence. We must bear in mind that Oberstein has gone to the Continent to dispose of his booty, but not with any idea of flight; for he had no reason to fear a warrant, and the idea of an amateur domiciliary visit would certainly never occur to him. Yet that is precisely what we are about to make."

"Could we not get a warrant and legalize it?"

"Hardly on the evidence."

"What can we hope to do?"

"We cannot tell what correspondence may be there."

"I don't like it, Holmes."

"My dear fellow, you shall keep watch in the street. I'll do the criminal part. It's not a time to stick at trifles. Think of Mycroft's note, of the Admiralty, the Cabinet, the exalted person who waits for news. We are bound to go."

My answer was to rise from the table.

"You are right, Holmes. We are bound to go."

He sprang up and shook me by the hand.

"I knew you would not shrink at the last," said he, and for a moment I saw something in his eyes which was nearer to tenderness than I had ever seen. The next instant he was his masterful, practical self once more.

"It is nearly half a mile, but there is no hurry. Let us walk," said he. "Don't drop the instruments, I beg. Your arrest as a suspicious character would be a most unfortunate complication."

Caulfield Gardens was one of those lines of flat-faced pillared, and porticoed houses which are so prominent a product of the middle Victorian epoch in the West End of London. Next door there appeared to be a children's party, for the merry buzz of young voices and the clatter of a piano resounded through the night. The fog still hung about and screened us with its friendly shade. Holmes had lit his lantern and flashed it upon the massive door.

"This is a serious proposition," said he. "It is certainly bolted as well as locked. We would do better in the area. There is an excellent archway down yonder in case a too zealous policeman should intrude. Give me a hand, Watson, and I'll do the same for you."

A minute later we were both in the area. Hardly had we reached the dark shadows before the step of the policeman was heard in the fog above. As its soft rhythm died away, Holmes set to work upon the lower door. I saw
him stoop and strain until with a sharp crash it flew open. We sprang through into the dark passage, closing the area
door behind us. Holmes let the way up the curving, uncarpeted stair. His little fan of yellow light shone upon a low
window.

"Here we are, Watson--this must be the one." He threw it open, and as he did so there was a low, harsh murmur,
growing steadily into a loud roar as a train dashed past us in the darkness. Holmes swept his light along the window-
sill. It was thickly coated with soot from the passing engines, but the black surface was blurred and rubbed in places.

"You can see where they rested the body. Halloa, Watson! what is this? There can be no doubt that it is a blood
mark." He was pointing to faint discolourations along the woodwork of the window. "Here it is on the stone of the
stair also. The demonstration is complete. Let us stay here until a train stops."

We had not long to wait. The very next train roared from the tunnel as before, but slowed in the open, and then,
with a creaking of brakes, pulled up immediately beneath us. It was not four feet from the window-ledge to the roof
of the carriages. Holmes softly closed the window.

"So far we are justified," said he. "What do you think of it, Watson?"

"A masterpiece. You have never risen to a greater height."

"I cannot agree with you there. From the moment that I conceived the idea of the body being upon the roof,
which surely was not a very abstruse one, all the rest was inevitable. If it were not for the grave interests involved
the affair up to this point would be insignificant. Our difficulties are still before us. But perhaps we may find
something here which may help us."

We had ascended the kitchen stair and entered the suite of rooms upon the first floor. One was a dining-room,
severely furnished and containing nothing of interest. A second was a bedroom, which also drew blank. The
remaining room appeared more promising, and my companion settled down to a systematic examination. It was
littered with books and papers, and was evidently used as a study. Swiftly and methodically Holmes turned over the
contents of drawer after drawer and cupboard after cupboard, but no gleam of success came to brighten his austere
face. At the end of an hour he was no further than when he started.

"The cunning dog has covered his tracks," said he. "He has left nothing to incriminate him. His dangerous
correspondence has been destroyed or removed. This is our last chance."

It was a small tin cash-box which stood upon the writing-desk. Holmes pried it open with his chisel. Several rolls
of paper were within, covered with figures and calculations, without any note to show to what they referred. The
recurring words, "water pressure" and "pressure to the square inch" suggested some possible relation to a submarine.
Holmes tossed them all impatiently aside. There only remained an envelope with some small newspaper slips inside
it. He shook them out on the table, and at once I saw by his eager face that his hopes had been raised.

Telegraph agony column by the print and paper. Right-hand top corner of a page. No dates--but messages arrange
themselves. This must be the first:

"Hoped to hear sooner. Terms agreed to. Write fully to address given on card.

"Pierrot.

"Next comes:

"Too complex for description. Must have full report, Stuff awaits you when goods delivered.

"Pierrot.

"Then comes:

"Matter presses. Must withdraw offer unless contract completed. Make appointment by letter. Will confirm by
advertisement.

"Pierrot.

"Finally:

"Monday night after nine. Two taps. Only ourselves. Do not be so suspicious. Payment in hard cash when goods
delivered.

"Pierrot.

"A fairly complete record, Watson! If we could only get at the man at the other end!" He sat lost in thought,
tapping his fingers on the table. Finally he sprang to his feet.

"Well, perhaps it won't be so difficult, after all. There is nothing more to be done here, Watson. I think we might
drive round to the offices of the Daily Telegraph, and so bring a good day's work to a conclusion."

Mycroft Holmes and Lestrade had come round by appointment after breakfast next day and Sherlock Holmes
had recounted to them our proceedings of the day before. The professional shook his head over our confessed
burglary.

"We can't do these things in the force, Mr. Holmes," said he. "No wonder you get results that are beyond us. But
some of these days you'll go too far, and you'll find yourself and your friend in trouble."
"For England, home and beauty—eh, Watson? Martyrs on the altar of our country. But what do you think of it, Mycroft?"

"Excellent, Sherlock! Admirable! But what use will you make of it?"

Holmes picked up the Daily Telegraph which lay upon the table.

"Have you seen Pierrot's advertisement to-day?"

"What? Another one?"

"Yes, here it is:

"To-night. Same hour. Same place. Two taps. Most vitally important. Your own safety at stake.

"Pierrot.

"By George!" cried Lestrade. "If he answers that we've got him!"

"That was my idea when I put it in. I think if you could both make it convenient to come with us about eight o'clock to Caulfield Gardens we might possibly get a little nearer to a solution."

One of the most remarkable characteristics of Sherlock Holmes was his power of throwing his brain out of action and switching all his thoughts on to lighter things whenever he had convinced himself that he could no longer work to advantage. I remember that during the whole of that memorable day he lost himself in a monograph which he had undertaken upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus. For my own part I had none of this power of detachment, and the day, in consequence, appeared to be interminable. The great national importance of the issue, the suspense in high quarters, the direct nature of the experiment which we were trying—all combined to work upon my nerve. It was a relief to me when at last, after a light dinner, we set out upon our expedition. Lestrade and Mycroft met us by appointment at the outside of Gloucester Road Station. The area door of Oberstein's house had been left open the night before, and it was necessary for me, as Mycroft Holmes absolutely and indignantly declined to climb the railings, to pass in and open the hall door. By nine o'clock we were all seated in the study, waiting patiently for our man.

An hour passed and yet another. When eleven struck, the measured beat of the great church clock seemed to sound the dirge of our hopes. Lestrade and Mycroft were fidgeting in their seats and looking twice a minute at their watches. Holmes sat silent and composed, his eyelids half shut, but every sense on the alert. He raised his head with a sudden jerk.

"He is coming," said he.

There had been a furtive step past the door. Now it returned. We heard a shuffling sound outside, and then two sharp taps with the knocker. Holmes rose, motioning us to remain seated. The gas in the hall was a mere point of light. He opened the outer door, and then as a dark figure slipped past him he closed and fastened it. "This way!" we heard him say, and a moment later our man stood before us. Holmes had followed him closely, and as the man turned with a cry of surprise and alarm he caught him by the collar and threw him back into the room. Before our prisoner had recovered his balance the door was shut and Holmes standing with his back against it. The man glared round him, staggered, and fell senseless upon the floor. With the shock, his broad-brimmed hat flew from his head, his cravat slipped sown from his lips, and there were the long light beard and the soft, handsome delicate features of Colonel Valentine Walter.

Holmes gave a whistle of surprise.

"You can write me down an ass this time, Watson," said he. "This was not the bird that I was looking for."

"Who is he?" asked Mycroft eagerly.

"The younger brother of the late Sir James Walter, the head of the Submarine Department. Yes, yes; I see the fall of the cards. He is coming to. I think that you had best leave his examination to me."

We had carried the prostrate body to the sofa. Now our prisoner sat up, looked round him with a horror-stricken face, and passed his hand over his forehead, like one who cannot believe his own senses.

"What is this?" he asked. "I came here to visit Mr. Oberstein."

"Everything is known, Colonel Walter," said Holmes. "How an English gentleman could behave in such a manner is beyond my comprehension. But your whole correspondence and relations with Oberstein are within our knowledge. So also are the circumstances connected with the death of young Cadogan West. Let me advise you to gain at least the small credit for repentance and confession, since there are still some details which we can only learn from your lips."

The man groaned and sank his face in his hands. We waited, but he was silent.

"I can assure you," said Holmes, "that every essential is already known. We know that you were pressed for money; that you took an impress of the keys which your brother held; and that you entered into a correspondence with Oberstein, who answered your letters through the advertisement columns of the Daily Telegraph. We are aware that you went down to the office in the fog on Monday night, but that you were seen and followed by young Cadogan West, who had probably some previous reason to suspect you. He saw your theft, but could not give the
alarm, as it was just possible that you were taking the papers to your brother in London. Leaving all his private
concerns, like the good citizen that he was, he followed you closely in the fog and kept at your heels until you
reached this very house. There he intervened, and then it was, Colonel Walter, that to treason you added the more
terrible crime of murder."

"I did not! I did not! Before God I swear that I did not!" cried our wretched prisoner.

"Tell us, then, how Cadogan West met his end before you laid him upon the roof of a railway carriage."

"I will. I swear to you that I will. I did the rest, I confess it. It was just as you say. A Stock Exchange debt had to
be paid. I needed the money badly. Oberstein offered me five thousand. It was to save myself from ruin. But as to
murder, I am as innocent as you."

"What happened, then?"

"He had his suspicions before, and he followed me as you describe. I never knew it until I was at the very door.
It was thick fog, and one could not see three yards. I had given two taps and Oberstein had come to the door. The
young man rushed up and demanded to know what we were about to do with the papers. Oberstein had a short life-
preserver. He always carried it with him. As West forced his way after us into the house Oberstein struck him on the
head. The blow was a fatal one. He was dead within five minutes. There he lay in the hall, and we were at our wit's
end what to do. Then Oberstein had this idea about the trains which halted under his back window. But first he
examined the papers which I had brought. He said that three of them were essential, and that he must keep them.
'You cannot keep them,' said I. 'There will be a dreadful row at Woolwich if they are not returned.' 'I must keep
them,' said he, 'for they are so technical that it is impossible in the time to make copies.' 'Then they must all go back
together to-night,' said I. He thought for a little, and then he cried out that he had it. 'Three I will keep,' said he. 'The
others we will stuff into the pocket of this young man. When he is found the whole business will assuredly be put to
his account.' I could see no other way out of it, so we did as he suggested. We waited half an hour at the window
before a train stopped. It was so thick that nothing could be seen, and we had no difficulty in lowering West's body
on to the train. That was the end of the matter so far as I was concerned."

"And your brother?"

"He said nothing, but he had caught me once with his keys, and I think that he suspected. I read in his eyes that
he suspected. As you know, he never held up his head again."

There was silence in the room. It was broken by Mycroft Holmes.

"Can you not make reparation? It would ease your conscience, and possibly your punishment."

"What reparation can I make?"

"Where is Oberstein with the papers?"

"I do not know."

"Did he give you no address?"

"He said that letters to the Hotel du Louvre, Paris, would eventually reach him."

"Then reparation is still within your power," said Sherlock Holmes.

"I will do anything I can. I owe this fellow no particular good-will. He has been my ruin and my downfall."

"Here are paper and pen. Sit at this desk and write to my dictation. Direct the envelope to the address given. That
is right. Now the letter:

"Dear Sir:

"With regard to our transaction, you will no doubt have observed by now that one essential detail is missing. I
have a tracing which will make it complete. This has involved me in extra trouble, however, and I must ask you for a
further advance of five hundred pounds. I will not trust it to the post, nor will I take anything but gold or notes. I
would come to you abroad, but it would excite remark if I left the country at present. Therefore I shall expect to
meet you in the smoking-room of the Charing Cross Hotel at noon on Saturday. Remember that only English notes,
or gold, will be taken.

"That will do very well. I shall be very much surprised if it does not fetch our man."

And it did! It is a matter of history--that secret history of a nation which is often so much more intimate and
interesting than its public chronicles--that Oberstein, eager to complete the coup of his lifetime, came to the lure
and was safely engulfed for fifteen years in a British prison. In his trunk were found the invaluable Bruce-Partington
plans, which he had put up for auction in all the naval centres of Europe.

Colonel Walter died in prison towards the end of the second year of his sentence. As to Holmes, he returned
refreshed to his monograph upon the Polyphonic Motets of Lassus, which has since been printed for private
circulation, and is said by experts to be the last word upon the subject. Some weeks afterwards I learned incidentally
that my friend spent a day at Windsor, whence he returned with a remarkably fine emerald tie-pin. When I asked
him if he had bought it, he answered that it was a present from a certain gracious lady in whose interests he had once
been fortunate enough to carry out a small commission. He said no more; but I fancy that I could guess at that lady's
august name, and I have little doubt that the emerald pin will forever recall to my friend's memory the adventure of
the Bruce-Partington plans.

**The Adventure of the Dying Detective**

Mrs. Hudson, the landlady of Sherlock Holmes, was a long-suffering woman. Not only was her first-floor flat invaded at all hours by throngs of singular and often undesirable characters but her remarkable lodger showed an eccentricity and irregularity in his life which must have sorely tried her patience. His incredible untidiness, his addiction to music at strange hours, his occasional revolver practice within doors, his weird and often malodorous scientific experiments, and the atmosphere of violence and danger which hung around him made him the very worst tenant in London. On the other hand, his payments were princely. I have no doubt that the house might have been purchased at the price which Holmes paid for his rooms during the years that I was with him.

The landlady stood in the deepest awe of him and never dared to interfere with him, however outrageous his proceedings might seem. She was fond of him, too, for he had a remarkable gentleness and courtesy in his dealings with women. He disliked and distrusted the sex, but he was always a chivalrous opponent. Knowing how genuine was her regard for him, I listened earnestly to her story when she came to my rooms in the second year of my married life and told me of the sad condition to which my poor friend was reduced.

"He's dying, Dr. Watson," said she. "For three days he has been sinking, and I doubt if he will last the day. He would not let me get a doctor. This morning when I saw his bones sticking out of his face and his great bright eyes looking at me I could stand no more of it. 'With your leave or without it, Mr. Holmes, I am going for a doctor this very hour,' said I. 'Let it be Watson, then,' said he. I wouldn't waste an hour in coming to him, sir, or you may not see him alive."

I was horrified for I had heard nothing of his illness. I need not say that I rushed for my coat and my hat. As we drove back I asked for the details.

"There is little I can tell you, sir. He has been working at a case down at Rotherhithe, in an alley near the river, and he has brought this illness back with him. He took to his bed on Wednesday afternoon and has never moved since. For these three days neither food nor drink has passed his lips."

"Good God! Why did you not call in a doctor?"

"He wouldn't have it, sir. You know how masterful he is. I didn't dare to disobey him. But he's not long for this world, as you'll see for yourself the moment that you set eyes on him."

He was indeed a deplorable spectacle. In the dim light of a foggy November day the sick room was a gloomy spot, but it was that gaunt, wasted face staring at me from the bed which sent a chill to my heart. His eyes had the brightness of fever, there was a hectic flush upon either cheek, and dark crusts clung to his lips; the thin hands upon the coverlet twitched incessantly, his voice was croaking and spasmodic. He lay listlessly as I entered the room, but the sight of me brought a gleam of recognition to his eyes.

"Well, Watson, we seem to have fallen upon evil days," said he in a feeble voice, but with something of his old carelessness of manner.

"My dear fellow!" I cried, approaching him.

"Stand back! Stand right back!" said he with the sharp imperiousness which I had associated only with moments of crisis. "If you approach me, Watson, I shall order you out of the house."

"But why?"

"Because it is my desire. Is that not enough?"

Yes, Mrs. Hudson was right. He was more masterful than ever. It was pitiful, however, to see his exhaustion.

"I only wished to help," I explained.

"Exactly! You will help best by doing what you are told."

"Certainly, Holmes."

He relaxed the austerity of his manner.

"You are not angry?" he asked, gasping for breath.

Poor devil, how could I be angry when I saw him lying in such a plight before me?

"It's for your own sake, Watson," he croaked.

"For MY sake?"

"I know what is the matter with me. It is a coolie disease from Sumatra--a thing that the Dutch know more about than we, though they have made little of it up to date. One thing only is certain. It is infallibly deadly, and it is horribly contagious."

He spoke now with a feverish energy, the long hands twitching and jerking as he motioned me away.

"Contagious by touch, Watson--that's it, by touch. Keep your distance and all is well."

"Good heavens, Holmes! Do you suppose that such a consideration weighs with me of an instant? It would not affect me in the case of a stranger. Do you imagine it would prevent me from doing my duty to so old a friend?"
Again I advanced, but he repulsed me with a look of furious anger.
"If you will stand there I will talk. If you do not you must leave the room."
I have so deep a respect for the extraordinary qualities of Holmes that I have always deferred to his wishes, even when I least understood them. But now all my professional instincts were aroused. Let him be my master elsewhere, I at least was his in a sick room.
"Holmes," said I, "you are not yourself. A sick man is but a child, and so I will treat you. Whether you like it or not, I will examine your symptoms and treat you for them."
He looked at me with venomous eyes.
"If I am to have a doctor whether I will or not, let me at least have someone in whom I have confidence," said he.
"Then you have none in me?"
"In your friendship, certainly. But facts are facts, Watson, and, after all, you are only a general practitioner with very limited experience and mediocre qualifications. It is painful to have to say these things, but you leave me no choice."
I was bitterly hurt.
"Such a remark is unworthy of you, Holmes. It shows me very clearly the state of your own nerves. But if you have no confidence in me I would not intrude my services. Let me bring Sir Jasper Meek or Penrose Fisher, or any of the best men in London. But someone you MUST have, and that is final. If you think that I am going to stand here and see you die without either helping you myself or bringing anyone else to help you, then you have mistaken your man."
"You mean well, Watson," said the sick man with something between a sob and a groan. "Shall I demonstrate your own ignorance? What do you know, pray, of Tapanuli fever? What do you know of the black Formosa corruption?"
"I have never heard of either."
"There are many problems of disease, many strange pathological possibilities, in the East, Watson." He paused after each sentence to collect his failing strength. "I have learned so much during some recent researches which have a medico-criminal aspect. It was in the course of them that I contracted this complaint. You can do nothing."
"Possibly not. But I happen to know that Dr. Ainstree, the greatest living authority upon tropical disease, is now in London. All remonstrance is useless, Holmes, I am going this instant to fetch him." I turned resolutely to the door.
Never have I had such a shock! In an instant, with a tiger-spring, the dying man had intercepted me. I heard the sharp snap of a twisted key. The next moment he had staggered back to his bed, exhausted and panting after his one tremendous outflame of energy.
"You won't take the key from be by force, Watson, I've got you, my friend. Here you are, and here you will stay until I will otherwise. But I'll humour you."
"You've only my own good at heart. Of course I know that very well. You shall have your way, but give me time to get my strength. Not now, Watson, not now. It's four o'clock. At six you can go."
"This is insanity, Holmes."
"Only two hours, Watson. I promise you will go at six. Are you content to wait?"
"I seem to have no choice."
"None in the world, Watson. Thank you, I need no help in arranging the clothes. You will please keep your distance. Now, Watson, there is one other condition that I would make. You will seek help, not from the man you mention, but from the one that I choose."
"By all means."
"The first three sensible words that you have uttered since you entered this room, Watson. You will find some books over there. I am somewhat exhausted; I wonder how a battery feels when it pours electricity into a non-conductor? At six, Watson, we resume our conversation."
But it was destined to be resumed long before that hour, and in circumstances which gave me a shock hardly second to that caused by his spring to the door. I had stood for some minutes looking at the silent figure in the bed. His face was almost covered by the clothes and he appeared to be asleeep. Then, unable to settle down to reading, I walked slowly round the room, examining the pictures of celebrated criminals with which every wall was adorned. Finally, in my aimless perambulation, I came to the mantelpiece. A litter of pipes, tobacco-pouches, syringes, penknives, revolver-cartridges, and other debris was scattered over it. In the midst of these was a small black and white ivory box with a sliding lid. It was a neat little thing, and I had stretched out my hand to examine it more closely when
It was a dreadful cry that he gave--a yell which might have been heard down the street. My skin went cold and my hair bristled at that horrible scream. As I turned I caught a glimpse of a convulsed face and frantic eyes. I stood
paralyzed, with the little box in my hand.

"Put it down! Down, this instant, Watson--this instant, I say!" His head sank back upon the pillow and he gave a
deep sigh of relief as I replaced the box upon the mantelpiece. "I hate to have my things touched, Watson. You know
that I hate it. You fidget me beyond endurance. You, a doctor--you are enough to drive a patient into an asylum. Sit
down, man, and let me have my rest!"

The incident left a most unpleasant impression upon my mind. The violent and causeless excitement, followed
by this brutality of speech, so far removed from his usual suavity, showed me how deep was the disorganization of
his mind. Of all ruins, that of a noble mind is the most deplorable. I sat in silent dejection until the stipulated time
had passed. He seemed to have been watching the clock as well as I, for it was hardly six before he began to talk
with the same feverish animation as before.

"Now, Watson," said he. "Have you any change in your pocket?"

"Yes."

"Any silver?"

"A good deal."

"How many half-crowns?"

"I have five."

"Ah, too few! Too few! How very unfortunate, Watson! However, such as they are you can put them in your
watchpocket. And all the rest of your money in your left trouser pocket. Thank you. It will balance you so much
better like that."

This was raving insanity. He shuddered, and again made a sound between a cough and a sob.

"You will now light the gas, Watson, but you will be very careful that not for one instant shall it be more than
half on. I implore you to be careful, Watson. Thank you, that is excellent. No, you need not draw the blind. Now you
will have the kindness to place some letters and papers upon this table within my reach. Thank you. Now some of
that litter from the mantelpiece. Excellent, Watson! There is a sugar-tongs there. Kindly raise that small ivory box
with its assistance. Place it here among the papers. Good! You can now go and fetch Mr. Culverton Smith, of 13
Lower Burke Street."

To tell the truth, my desire to fetch a doctor had somewhat weakened, for poor Holmes was so obviously
delirious that it seemed dangerous to leave him. However, he was as eager now to consult the person named as he
had been obstinate in refusing.

"I never heard the name," said I.

"Possibly not, my good Watson. It may surprise you to know that the man upon earth who is best versed in this
disease is not a medical man, but a planter. Mr. Culverton Smith is a well-known resident of Sumatra, now visiting
London. An outbreak of the disease upon his plantation, which was distant from medical aid, caused him to study it
himself, with some rather far-reaching consequences. He is a very methodical person, and I did not desire you to
start before six, because I was well aware that you would not find him in his study. If you could persuade him to
come here and give us the benefit of his unique experience of this disease, the investigation of which has been his
dearest hobby, I cannot doubt that he could help me."

I gave Holmes's remarks as a consecutive whole and will not attempt to indicate how they were interrupted by
gaspings for breath and those clutchings of his hands which indicated the pain from which he was suffering. His
appearance had changed for the worse during the few hours that I had been with him. Those hectic spots were more
pronounced, the eyes shone more brightly out of darker hollows, and a cold sweat glimmered upon his brow. He still
retained, however, the jaunty gallantry of his speech. To the last gasp he would always be the master.

"You will tell him exactly how you have left me," said he. "You will convey the very impression which is in
your own mind--a dying man--a dying and delirious man. Indeed, I cannot think why the whole bed of the ocean is
not one solid mass of oysters, so prolific the creatures seem. Ah, I am wondering! Strange how the brain controls the
brain! What was I saying, Watson?"

"My directions for Mr. Culverton Smith."

"Ah, yes, I remember. My life depends upon it. Plead with him, Watson. There is no good feeling between us.
His nephew, Watson--I had suspicions of foul play and I allowed him to see it. The boy died horribly. He has a
grudge against me. You will soften him, Watson. Beg him, pray him, get him here by any means. He can save me--
only he!"

"I will bring him in a cab, if I have to carry him down to it."

"You will do nothing of the sort. You will persuade him to come. And then you will return in front of him. Make
any excuse so as not to come with him. Don't forget, Watson. You won't fail me. You never did fail me. No doubt
there are natural enemies which limit the increase of the creatures. You and I, Watson, we have done our part. Shall
the world, then, be overrun by oysters? No, no; horrible! You'll convey all that is in your mind."
I left him full of the image of this magnificent intellect babbling like a foolish child. He had handed me the key, and with a happy thought I took it with me lest he should lock himself in. Mrs. Hudson was waiting, trembling and weeping, in the passage. Behind me as I passed from the flat I heard Holmes's high, thin voice in some delirious chant. Below, as I stood whistling for a cab, a man came on me through the fog.

"How is Mr. Holmes, sir?" he asked.
It was an old acquaintance, Inspector Morton, of Scotland Yard, dressed in unofficial tweeds.
"He is very ill," I answered.
He looked at me in a most singular fashion. Had it not been too fiendish, I could have imagined that the gleam of the fanlight showed exultation in his face.
"I heard some rumour of it," said he.
The cab had driven up, and I left him.
Lower Burke Street proved to be a line of fine houses lying in the vague borderland between Notting Hill and Kensington. The particular one at which my cabman pulled up had an air of smug and demure respectability in its old-fashioned iron railings, its massive folding-door, and its shining brasswork. All was in keeping with a solemn butler who appeared framed in the pink radiance of a tinted electrical light behind him.
"Yes, Mr. Culverton Smith is in. Dr. Watson! Very good, sir, I will take up your card."
My humble name and title did not appear to impress Mr. Culverton Smith. Through the half-open door I heard a high, petulant, penetrating voice.
"Who is this person? What does he want? Dear me, Staples, how often have I said that I am not to be disturbed in my hours of study?"
There came a gentle flow of soothing explanation from the butler.
"Well, I won't see him, Staples. I can't have my work interrupted like this. I am not at home. Say so. Tell him to come in the morning if he really must see me."
Again the gentle murmur.
"Well, well, give him that message. He can come in the morning, or he can stay away. My work must not be hindered."
I thought of Holmes tossing upon his bed of sickness and counting the minutes, perhaps, until I could bring help to him. It was not a time to stand upon ceremony. His life depended upon my promptness. Before the apologetic butler had delivered his message I had pushed past him and was in the room.

With a shrill cry of anger a man rose from a reclining chair beside the fire. I saw a great yellow face, coarse-grained and greasy, with heavy, double-chin, and two sullen, menacing gray eyes which glared at me from under tufted and sandy brows. A high bald head had a small velvet smoking-cap poised coquettishly upon one side of its pink curve. The skull was of enormous capacity, and yet as I looked down I saw to my amazement that the figure of the man was small and frail, twisted in the shoulders and back like one who has suffered from rickets in his childhood.

"What's this?" he cried in a high, screaming voice. "What is the meaning of this intrusion? Didn't I send you word that I would see you to-morrow morning?"
"I am sorry," said I, "but the matter cannot be delayed. Mr. Sherlock Holmes--"

The mention of my friend's name had an extraordinary effect upon the little man. The look of anger passed in an instant from his face. His features became tense and alert.

"Have you come from Holmes?" he asked.
"I have just left him."
"What about Holmes? How is he?"
"He is desperately ill. That is why I have come."

The man motioned me to a chair, and turned to resume his own. As he did so I caught a glimpse of his face in the mirror over the mantelpiece. I could have sworn that it was set in a malicious and abominable smile. Yet I persuaded myself that it must have been some nervous contraction which I had surprised, for he turned to me an instant later with genuine concern upon his features.

"I am sorry to hear this," said he. "I only know Mr. Holmes through some business dealings which we have had, but I have every respect for his talents and his character. He is an amateur of crime, as I am of disease. For him the villain, for me the microbe. There are my prisons," he continued, pointing to a row of bottles and jars which stood upon a side table. "Among those gelatine cultivations some of the very worst offenders in the world are now doing time."

"It was on account of your special knowledge that Mr. Holmes desired to see you. He has a high opinion of you and thought that you were the one man in London who could help him."

The little man started, and the jaunty smoking-cap slid to the floor.
"Why?" he asked. "Why should Mr. Homes think that I could help him in his trouble?"
"Because of your knowledge of Eastern diseases."
"But why should he think that this disease which he has contracted is Eastern?"
"Because, in some professional inquiry, he has been working among Chinese sailors down in the docks."
Mr. Culverton Smith smiled pleasantly and picked up his smoking-cap.
"Oh, that's it—is it?" said he. "I trust the matter is not so grave as you suppose. How long has he been ill?"
"About three days."
"Is he delirious?"
"Occasionally."
"Tut, tut! This sounds serious. It would be inhuman not to answer his call. I very much resent any interruption to my work, Dr. Watson, but this case is certainly exceptional. I will come with you at once."
I remembered Holmes's injunction.
"I have another appointment," said I.
"Very good. I will go alone. I have a note of Mr. Holmes's address. You can rely upon my being there within half an hour at most."

It was with a sinking heart that I reentered Holmes's bedroom. For all that I knew the worst might have happened in my absence. To my enormous relief, he had improved greatly in the interval. His appearance was as ghastly as ever, but all trace of delirium had left him and he spoke in a feeble voice, it is true, but with even more than his usual crispness and lucidity.
"Well, did you see him, Watson?"
"Yes; he is coming."
"Admirable, Watson! Admirable! You are the best of messengers."
"He wished to return with me."
"That would never do, Watson. That would be obviously impossible. Did he ask what ailed me?"
"I told him about the Chinese in the East End."
"Exactly! Well, Watson, you have done all that a good friend could. You can now disappear from the scene."
"I must wait and hear his opinion, Holmes."
"Of course you must. But I have reasons to suppose that this opinion would be very much more frank and valuable if he imagines that we are alone. There is just room behind the head of my bed, Watson."
"My dear Holmes!"
"I fear there is no alternative, Watson. The room does not lend itself to concealment, which is as well, as it is the less likely to arouse suspicion. But just there, Watson, I fancy that it could be done." Suddenly he sat up with a rigid intenness upon his haggard face. "There are the wheels, Watson. Quick, man, if you love me! And don't budge, whatever happens—whatever happens, do you hear? Don't speak! Don't move! Just listen with all your ears." Then in an instant his sudden access of strength departed, and his masterful, purposeful talk droned away into the low, vague murmurings of a semi-delirious man.

>From the hiding-place into which I had been so swiftly hustled I heard the footfalls upon the stair, with the opening and the closing of the bedroom door. Then, to my surprise, there came a long silence, broken only by the heavy breathings and gaspings of the sick man. I could imagine that our visitor was standing by the bedside and looking down at the sufferer. At last that strange hush was broken.
"Holmes!" he cried. "Holmes!" in the insistent tone of one who awakens a sleeper. "Can't you hear me, Holmes?" There was a rustling, as if he had shaken the sick man roughly by the shoulder.
"Is that you, Mr. Smith?" Holmes whispered. "I hardly dared hope that you would come."
The other laughed.
"I should imagine not," he said. "And yet, you see, I am here. Coals of fire, Holmes—coals of fire!"
"It is very good of you—very noble of you. I appreciate your special knowledge."
Our visitor sniggered.
"You do. You are, fortunately, the only man in London who does. Do you know what is the matter with you?"
"The same," said Holmes.
"Ah! You recognize the symptoms?"
"Only too well."
"Well, I shouldn't be surprised, Holmes. I shouldn't be surprised if it WERE the same. A bad lookout for you if it is. Poor Victor was a dead man on the fourth day—a strong, hearty young fellow. It was certainly, as you said, very surprising that he should have contracted and out-of-the-way Asiatic disease in the heart of London—a disease, too, of which I had made such a very special study. Singular coincidence, Holmes. Very smart of you to notice it, but rather uncharitable to suggest that it was cause and effect."
"I knew that you did it."

"Oh, you did, did you? Well, you couldn't prove it, anyhow. But what do you think of yourself spreading reports about me like that, and then crawling to me for help the moment you are in trouble? What sort of a game is that--eh?"

I heard the rasping, laboured breathing of the sick man. "Give me the water!" he gasped.

"You're precious near your end, my friend, but I don't want you to go till I have had a word with you. That's why I give you water. There, don't slop it about! That's right. Can you understand what I say?"

Holmes groaned.

"Do what you can for me. Let bygones be bygones," he whispered. "I'll put the words out of my head--I swear I will. Only cure me, and I'll forget it."

"Forget what?"

"Well, about Victor Savage's death. You as good as admitted just now that you had done it. I'll forget it."

"You can forget it or remember it, just as you like. I don't see you in the witnessbox. Quite another shaped box, my good Holmes, I assure you. It matters nothing to me that you should know how my nephew died. It's not him we are talking about. It's you."

"Yes, yes."

"The fellow who came for me--I've forgotten his name--said that you contracted it down in the East End among the sailors."

"I could only account for it so."

"You are proud of your brains, Holmes, are you not? Think yourself smart, don't you? You came across someone who was smarter this time. Now cast your mind back, Holmes. Can you think of no other way you could have got this thing?"

"I can't think. My mind is gone. For heaven's sake help me!"

"Yes, I will help you. I'll help you to understand just where you are and how you got there. I'd like you to know before you die."

"Give me something to ease my pain."

"Painful, is it? Yes, the coolies used to do some squealing towards the end. Takes you as cramp, I fancy."

"Yes, yes; it is cramp."

"Well, you can hear what I say, anyhow. Listen now! Can you remember any unusual incident in your life just about the time your symptoms began?"

"No, no; nothing."

"Think again."

"I'm too ill to think."

"Well, then, I'll help you. Did anything come by post?"

"By post?"

"A box by chance?"

"I'm fainting--I'm gone!"

"Listen, Holmes!" There was a sound as if he was shaking the dying man, and it was all that I could do to hold myself quiet in my hiding-place. "You must hear me. You SHALL hear me. Do you remember a box--an ivory box? It came on Wednesday. You opened it--do you remember?"

"Yes, yes, I opened it. There was a sharp spring inside it. Some joke--"

"It was no joke, as you will find to your cost. You fool, you would have it and you have got it. Who asked you to cross my path? If you had left me alone I would not have hurt you."

"I remember," Holmes gasped. "The spring! It drew blood. This box--this on the table."

"The very one, by George! And it may as well leave the room in my pocket. There goes your last shred of evidence. But you have the truth now, Holmes, and you can die with the knowledge that I killed you. You knew too much of the fate of Victor Savage, so I have sent you to share it. You are very near your end, Holmes. I will sit here and I will watch you die."

Holmes's voice had sunk to an almost inaudible whisper.

"What is that?" said Smith. "Turn up the gas? Ah, the shadows begin to fall, do they? Yes, I will turn it up, that I may see you the better." He crossed the room and the light suddenly brightened. "Is there any other little service that I can do you, my friend?"

"A match and a cigarette."

I nearly called out in my joy and my amazement. He was speaking in his natural voice--a little weak, perhaps, but the very voice I knew. There was a long pause, and I felt that Culverton Smith was standing in silent amazement looking down at his companion.
"What's the meaning of this?" I heard him say at last in a dry, rasping tone.

"The best way of successfully acting a part is to be it," said Holmes. "I give you my word that for three days I have tasted neither food nor drink until you were good enough to pour me out that glass of water. But it is the tobacco which I find most irksome. Ah, here ARE some cigarettes." I heard the striking of a match. "That is very much better. Halloa! halloa! Do I hear the step of a friend?"

There were footfalls outside, the door opened, and Inspector Morton appeared. "All is in order and this is your man," said Holmes.

The officer gave the usual cautions.

"I arrest you on the charge of the murder of one Victor Savage," he concluded.

"And you might add of the attempted murder of one Sherlock Holmes," remarked my friend with a chuckle. "To save an invalid trouble, Inspector, Mr. Culverton Smith was good enough to give our signal by turning up the gas. By the way, the prisoner has a small box in the right-hand pocket of his coat which it would be as well to remove. Thank you. I would handle it gingerly if I were you. Put it down here. It may play its part in the trial."

There was a sudden rush and a scuffle, followed by the clash of iron and a cry of pain.

"You'll only get yourself hurt," said the inspector. "Stand still, will you?" There was the click of the closing handcuffs.

"A nice trap!" cried the high, snarling voice. "It will bring YOU into the dock, Holmes, not me. He asked me to come here to cure him. I was sorry for him and I came. Now he will pretend, no doubt, that I have said anything which he may invent which will corroborate his insane suspicions. You can lie as you like, Holmes. My word is always as good as yours."

"Good heavens!" cried Holmes. "I had totally forgotten him. My dear Watson, I owe you a thousand apologies. To think that I should have overlooked you! I need not introduce you to Mr. Culverton Smith, since I understand that you met somewhat earlier in the evening. Have you the cab below? I will follow you when I am dressed, for I may be of some use at the station."

"I never needed it more," said Holmes as he refreshed himself with a glass of claret and some biscuits in the intervals of his toilet. "However, as you know, my habits are irregular, and such a feat means less to me than to most men. It was very essential that I should impress Mrs. Hudson with the reality of my condition, since she was to convey it to you, and you in turn to him. You won't be offended, Watson? You will realize that among your many talents dissimulation finds no place, and that if you had shared my secret you would never have been able to impress Smith with the urgent necessity of his presence, which was the vital point of the whole scheme. Knowing his vindictive nature, I was perfectly certain that he would come to look upon his handiwork."

"But your appearance, Holmes--your ghastly face?"

"Three days of absolute fast does not improve one's beauty, Watson. For the rest, there is nothing which a sponge may not cure. With vaseline upon one's forehead, belladonna in one's eyes, rouge over the cheek-bones, and crusts of beeswax round one's lips, a very satisfying effect can be produced. Malingering is a subject upon which I have sometimes thought of writing a monograph. A little occasional talk about half-crowns, oysters, or any other extraneous subject produces a pleasing effect of delirium."

"But why would you not let me near you, since there was in truth no infection?"

"Can you ask, my dear Watson? Do you imagine that I have no respect for your medical talents? Could I fancy that your astute judgment would pass a dying man who, however weak, had no rise of pulse or temperature? At four yards, I could deceive you. If I failed to do so, who would bring my Smith within my grasp? No, Watson, I would not touch that box. You can just see if you look at it sideways where the sharp spring like a viper's tooth emerges as you open it. I dare say it was by some such device that poor Savage, who stood between this monster and a reversion, was done to death. My correspondence, however, is a varied one, and I am somewhat upon my guard against any packages which reach me. It was clear to me, however, that by pretending that he had really succeeded in his design I might surprise a confession. That pretence I have carried out with the thoroughness of the true artist. Thank you, Watson, you must help me on with my coat. When we have finished at the police-station I think that something nutritious at Simpson's would not be out of place."

The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

"But why 'Turkish?'" asked Mr. Sherlock Holmes, gazing fixedly at my boots. I was reclining in a cane-backed chair at the moment, and my protruded feet had attracted his ever-active attention.

"English," I answered in some surprise. "I got them at Latimer's, in Oxford Street."

Holmes smiled with an expression of weary patience.

"The bath!" he said; "the bath! Why the relaxing and expensive Turkish rather than the invigorating home-made article?"

"Because for the last few days I have been feeling rheumatic and old. A Turkish bath is what we call an
alterative in medicine—a fresh starting-point, a cleanser of the system.

"By the way, Holmes," I added, "I have no doubt the connection between my boots and a Turkish bath is a
perfectly self-evident one to a logical mind, and yet I should be obliged to you if you would indicate it."

"The train of reasoning is not very obscure, Watson," said Holmes with a mischievous twinkle. "It belongs to the
same elementary class of deduction which I should illustrate if I were to ask you who shared your cab in your drive
this morning."

"I don't admit that a fresh illustration is an explanation," said I with some asperity.

"Bravo, Watson! A very dignified and logical remonstrance. Let me see, what were the points? Take the last one
first—the cab. You observe that you have some splashes on the left sleeve and shoulder of your coat. Had you sat in
the centre of a hansom you would probably have had no splashes, and if you had they would certainly have been
symmetrical. Therefore it is clear that you sat at the side. Therefore it is equally clear that you had a companion."

"That is very evident."

"Absurdly commonplace, is it not?"

"But the boots and the bath?"

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

"What is that?"

"You say that you have had it because you need a change. Let me suggest that you take one. How would
Lausanne do, my dear Watson—first-class tickets and all expenses paid on a princely scale?"

"Splendid! But why?"

Holmes leaned back in his armchair and took his notebook from his pocket.

"One of the most dangerous classes in the world," said he, "is the drifting and friendless woman. She is the most
harmless and often the most useful of mortals, but she is the inevitable inciter of crime in others. She is helpless. She
is migratory. She has sufficient means to take her from country to country and from hotel to hotel. She is lost, as
often as not, in a maze of obscure pensions and boardinghouses. She is a stray chicken in a world of foxes. When
she is gobbled up she is hardly missed. I much fear that some evil has come to the Lady Frances Carfax."

I was relieved at this sudden descent from the general to the particular. Holmes consulted his notes.

"Lady Frances," he continued, "is the sole survivor of the direct family of the late Earl of Rufton. The estates
went, as you may remember, in the male line. She was left with limited means, but with some very remarkable old
Spanish jewellery of silver and curiously cut diamonds to which she was fondly attached—too attached, for she
refused to leave them with her banker and always carried them about with her. A rather pathetic figure, the Lady
Frances, a beautiful woman, still in fresh middle age, and yet, by a strange change, the last derelict of what only
twenty years ago was a goodly fleet."

"What has happened to her, then?"

"Ah, what has happened to the Lady Frances? Is she alive or dead? There is our problem. She is a lady of precise
habits, and for four years it has been her invariable custom to write every second week to Miss Dobney, her old
governess, who has long retired and lives in Camberwell. It is this Miss Dobney who has consulted me. Nearly five
weeks have passed without a word. The last letter was from the Hotel National at Lausanne. Lady Frances seems to
have left there and given no address. The family are anxious, and as they are exceedingly wealthy no sum will be
spared if we can clear the matter up."

"Is Miss Dobney the only source of information? Surely she had other correspondents?"

"There is one correspondent who is a sure draw, Watson. That is the bank. Single ladies must live, and their
passbooks are compressed diaries. She banks at Silvester's. I have glanced over her account. The last check but one
paid her bill at Lausanne, but it was a large one and probably left her with cash in hand. Only one check has been
drawn since."

"To whom, and where?"

"To Miss Marie Devine. There is nothing to show where the check was drawn. It was cashed at the Credit
Lyonnais at Montpellier less than three weeks ago. The sum was fifty pounds."

"And who is Miss Marie Devine?"

"That also I have been able to discover. Miss Marie Devine was the maid of Lady Frances Carfax. Why she
should have paid her this check we have not yet determined. I have no doubt, however, that your researches will
soon clear the matter up."

"MY researches!"
"Hence the health-giving expedition to Lausanne. You know that I cannot possibly leave London while old
Abrahams is in such mortal terror of his life. Besides, on general principles it is best that I should not leave the
country. Scotland Yard feels lonely without me, and it causes an unhealthy excitement among the criminal classes.
Go, then, my dear Watson, and if my humble counsel can ever be valued at so extravagant a rate as two pence a
word, it waits your disposal night and day at the end of the Continental wire."

Two days later found me at the Hotel National at Lausanne, where I received every courtesy at the hands of M.
Moser, the well-known manager. Lady Frances, as he informed me, had stayed there for several weeks. She had
been much liked by all who met her. Her age was not more than forty. She was still handsome and bore every sign
of having in her youth been a very lovely woman. M. Moser knew nothing of any valuable jewellery, but it had been
remarked by the servants that the heavy trunk in the lady's bedroom was always scrupulously locked. Marie Devine,
the maid, was as popular as her mistress. She was actually engaged to one of the head waiters in the hotel, and there
was no difficulty in getting her address. It was 11 Rue de Trajan, Montpellier. All this I jotted down and felt that
Holmes himself could not have been more adroit in collecting his facts.

Only one corner still remained in the shadow. No light which I possessed could clear up the cause for the lady's
sudden departure. She was very happy at Lausanne. There was every reason to believe that she intended to remain
for the season in her luxurious rooms overlooking the lake. And yet she had left at a single day's notice, which
involved her in the useless payment of a week's rent. Only Jules Vibart, the lover of the maid, had any suggestion to
offer. He connected the sudden departure with the visit to the hotel a day or two before of a tall, dark, bearded man.
"Un sauvage--un veritable sauvage!" cried Jules Vibart. The man had rooms somewhere in the town. He had been
seen talking earnestly to Madame on the promenade by the lake. Then he had called. She had refused to see him. He
was English, but of his name there was no record. Madame had left the place immediately afterwards. Jules Vibart,
and, what was of more importance, Jules Vibart's sweetheart, thought that this call and the departure were cause and
effect. Only one thing Jules would not discuss. That was the reason why Marie had left her mistress. Of that he
could or would say nothing. If I wished to know, I must go to Montpellier and ask her.

So ended the first chapter of my inquiry. The second was devoted to the place which Lady Frances Carfax had
sought when she left Lausanne. Concerning this there had been some secrecy, which confirmed the idea that she had
gone with the intention of throwing someone off her track. Otherwise why should not her luggage have been openly
labelled for Baden? Both she and it reached the Rhenish spa by some circuitous route. This much I gathered from
the manager of Cook's local office. So to Baden I went, after dispatching to Holmes an account of all my
proceedings and receiving in reply a telegram of half-humorous commendation.

At Baden the track was not difficult to follow. Lady Frances had stayed at the Englischer Hof for a fortnight.
While there she had made the acquaintance of a Dr. Shlessinger and his wife, a missionary from South America.
Like most lonely ladies, Lady Frances found her comfort and occupation in religion. Dr. Shlessinger's remarkable
personality, his whole hearted devotion, and the fact that he was recovering from a disease contracted in the exercise
of his apostolic duties affected her deeply. She had helped Mrs. Shlessinger in the nursing of the convalescent saint.
He spent his day, as the manager described it to me, upon a lounge-chair on the veranda, with an attendant lady upon
either side of him. He was preparing a map of the Holy Land, with special reference to the kingdom of the
Midianites, upon which he was writing a monograph. Finally, having improved much in health, he and his wife had
returned to London, and Lady Frances had started thither in their company. This was just three weeks before, and
the manager had heard nothing since. As to the maid, Marie, she had gone off some days beforehand in floods of
tears, after informing the other maids that she was leaving service forever. Dr. Shlessinger had paid the bill of the
whole party before his departure.

"By the way," said the landlord in conclusion, "you are not the only friend of Lady Frances Carfax who is
inquiring after her just now. Only a week or so ago we had a man here upon the same errand."

"Did he give a name?" I asked.

"None; but he was an Englishman, though of an unusual type."

"A savage?" said I, linking my facts after the fashion of my illustrious friend.

"Exactly. That describes him very well. He is a bulky, bearded, sunburned fellow, who looks as if he would be
more at home in a farmers' inn than in a fashionable hotel. A hard, fierce man, I should think, and one whom I
should be sorry to offend."

Already the mystery began to define itself, as figures grow clearer with the lifting of a fog. Here was this good
and pious lady pursued from place to place by a sinister and unrelenting figure. She feared him, or she would not
have fled from Lausanne. He had still followed. Sooner or later he would overtake her. Had he already overtaken
her? Was THAT the secret of her continued silence? Could the good people who were her companions not screen
her from his violence or his blackmail? What horrible purpose, what deep design, lay behind this long pursuit?
There was the problem which I had to solve.
To Holmes I wrote showing how rapidly and surely I had got down to the roots of the matter. In reply I had a telegram asking for a description of Dr. Shlessinger's left ear. Holmes's ideas of humour are strange and occasionally offensive, so I took no notice of his ill-timed jest--indeed, I had already reached Montpellier in my pursuit of the maid, Marie, before his message came.

I had no difficulty in finding the ex-servant and in learning all that she could tell me. She was a devoted creature, who had only left her mistress because she was sure that she was in good hands, and because her own approaching marriage made a separation inevitable in any case. Her mistress had, as she confessed with distress, shown some irritability of temper towards her during their stay in Baden, and had even questioned her once as if she had suspicions of her honesty, and this had made the parting easier than it would otherwise have been. Lady Frances had given her fifty pounds as a wedding-present. Like me, Marie viewed with deep distrust the stranger who had driven her mistress from Lausanne. With her own eyes she had seen him seize the lady's wrist with great violence on the public promenade by the lake. He was a fierce and terrible man. She believed that it was out of dread of him that Lady Frances had accepted the escort of the Shlessingers to London. She had never spoken to Marie about it, but many little signs had convinced the maid that her mistress lived in a state of continual nervous apprehension. So far she had got in her narrative, when suddenly she sprang from her chair and her face was convulsed with surprise and fear. "See!" she cried. "The miscreant follows still! There is the very man of whom I speak."

Through the open sitting-room window I saw a huge, swarthy man with a bristling black beard walking slowly down the centre of the street and staring eagerly at he numbers of the houses. It was clear that, like myself, he was on the track of the maid. Acting upon the impulse of the moment, I rushed out and accosted him.

"You are an Englishman," I said.
"What if I am?" he asked with a most villainous scowl.
"May I ask what your name is?"
"No, you may not," said he with decision.

The situation was awkward, but the most direct way is often the best.
"Where is the Lady Frances Carfax?" I asked.
He stared at me with amazement.
"What have you done with her? Why have you pursued her? I insist upon an answer!" said I.

The fellow gave a below of anger and sprang upon me like a tiger. I have held my own in many a struggle, but the man had a grip of iron and the fury of a fiend. His hand was on my throat and my senses were nearly gone before an unshaven French ouvrier in a blue blouse darted out from a cabaret opposite, with a cudgel in his hand, and struck my assailant a sharp crack over the forearm, which made him leave go his hold. He stood for an instant fuming with rage and uncertain whether he should not renew his attack. Then, with a snarl of anger, he left me and entered the cottage from which I had just come. I turned to thank my preserver, who stood beside me in the roadway.

"Well, Watson," said he, "a very pretty hash you have made of it! I rather think you had better come back with me to London by the night express."

An hour afterwards, Sherlock Holmes, in his usual garb and style, was seated in my private room at the hotel. His explanation of his sudden and opportune appearance was simplicity itself, for, finding that he could get away from London, he determined to head me off at the next obvious point of my travels. In the disguise of a workingman he had sat in the cabaret waiting for my appearance.

"And a singularly consistent investigation you have made, my dear Watson," said he. "I cannot at the moment recall any possible blunder which you have omitted. The total effect of your proceeding has been to give the alarm everywhere and yet to discover nothing."
"Perhaps you would have done no better," I answered bitterly.
"There is no 'perhaps' about it. I HAVE done better. Here is the Hon. Philip Green, who is a fellow-lodger with you in this hotel, and we may find him the starting-point for a more successful investigation."

A card had come up on a salver, and it was followed by the same bearded ruffian who had attacked me in the street. He started when he saw me.

"What is this, Mr. Holmes?" he asked. "I had your note and I have come. But what has this man to do with the matter?"

"This is my old friend and associate, Dr. Watson, who is helping us in this affair."

The stranger held out a huge, sunburned hand, with a few words of apology.
"I hope I didn't harm you. When you accused me of hurting her I lost my grip of myself. Indeed, I'm not responsible in these days. My nerves are like live wires. But this situation is beyond me. What I want to know, in the first place, Mr. Holmes, is, how in the world you came to hear of my existence at all."

"I am in touch with Miss Dobney, Lady Frances's governess."

"Old Susan Dobney with the mob cap! I remember her well."
"And she remembers you. It was in the days before--before you found it better to go to South Africa."

"Ah, I see you know my whole story. I need hide nothing from you. I swear to you, Mr. Holmes, that there never was in this world a man who loved a woman with a more wholehearted love than I had for Frances. I was a wild youngster, I know--not worse than others of my class. But her mind was pure as snow. She could not bear a shadow of coarseness. So, when she came to hear of things that I had done, she would have no more to say to me. And yet she loved me—that is the wonder of it!—loved me well enough to remain single all her sainted days just for my sake alone. When the years had passed and I had made my money at Barberton I thought perhaps I could seek her out and soften her. I had heard that she was still unmarried, I found her at Lausanne and tried all I knew. She weakened, I think, but her will was strong, and when next I called she had left the town. I traced her to Baden, and then after a time heard that her maid was here. I'm a rough fellow, fresh from a rough life, and when Dr. Watson spoke to me as he did I lost hold of myself for a moment. But for God's sake tell me what has become of the Lady Frances."

"That is for us to find out," said Sherlock Holmes with peculiar gravity. "What is your London address, Mr. Green?"

"The Langham Hotel will find me."

"Then may I recommend that you return there and be on hand in case I should want you? I have no desire to encourage false hopes, but you may rest assured that all that can be done will be done for the safety of Lady Frances. I can say no more for the instant. I will leave you this card so that you may be able to keep in touch with us. Now, Watson, if you will pack your bag I will cable to Mrs. Hudson to make one of her best efforts for two hungry travellers at 7:30 to-morrow."

A telegram was awaiting us when we reached our Baker Street rooms, which Holmes read with an exclamation of interest and threw across to me. "Jagged or torn," was the message, and the place of origin, Baden.

"What is this?" I asked.

"It is everything," Holmes answered. "You may remember my seemingly irrelevant question as to this clerical gentleman's left ear. You did not answer it."

"I had left Baden and could not inquire."

"Exactly. For this reason I sent a duplicate to the manager of the Englischer Hof, whose answer lies here."

"What does it show?"

"It shows, my dear Watson, that we are dealing with an exceptionally astute and dangerous man. The Rev. Dr. Shlessinger, missionary from South America, is none other than Holy Peters, one of the most unscrupulous rascals that Australia has ever evolved—and for a young country it has turned out some very finished types. His particular specialty is the beguiling of lonely ladies by playing upon their religious feelings, and his so-called wife, an Englishwoman named Fraser, is a worthy helpmate. The nature of his tactics suggested his identity to me, and this physical peculiarity—he was badly bitten in a saloon-fight at Adelaide in '89—confirmed my suspicion. This poor lady is in the hands of a most infernal couple, who will stick at nothing, Watson. That she is already dead is a very likely supposition. If not, she is undoubtedly in some sort of confinement and unable to write to Miss Dobney or her other friends. It is always possible that she never reached London, or that she has passed through it, but the former is improbable, as, with their system of registration, it is not easy for foreigners to play tricks with the Continental police; and the latter is also unlikely, as these rouges could not hope to find any other place where it would be as easy to keep a person under restraint. All my instincts tell me that she is in London, but as we have at present no possible means of telling where, we can only take the obvious steps, eat our dinner, and possess our souls in patience. Later in the evening I will stroll down and have a word with friend Lestrade at Scotland Yard."

But neither the official police nor Holmes's own small but very efficient organization sufficed to clear away the mystery. Amid the crowded millions of London the three persons we sought were as completely obliterated as if they had never lived. Advertisements were tried, and failed. Clues were followed, and led to nothing. Every criminal resort which Shlessinger might frequent was drawn in vain. His old associates were watched, but they kept clear of him. And then suddenly, after a week of helpless suspense there came a flash of light. A silver-and-brilliant pendant of old Spanish design had been pawned at Bovington's, in Westminster Road. The pawner was a large, clean-shaven man of clerical appearance. His name and address were demonstrably false. The ear had escaped notice, but the description was surely that of Shlessinger.

Three times had our bearded friend from the Langham called for news—the third time within an hour of this fresh development. His clothes were getting looser on his great body. He seemed to be wilting away in his anxiety. "If you will only give me something to do!" was his constant wail. At last Holmes could oblige him.

"He has begun to pawn the jewels. We should get him now."

"But does this mean that any harm has befallen the Lady Frances?"

Holmes shook his head very gravely.

"Supposing that they have held her prisoner up to now, it is clear that they cannot let her loose without their own
destruction. We must prepare for the worst."

"What can I do?"

"These people do not know you by sight?"

"No."

"It is possible that he will go to some other pawnbroker in the future. in that case, we must begin again. On the other hand, he has had a fair price and no questions asked, so if he is in need of ready-money he will probably come back to Bovington's. I will give you a note to them, and they will let you wait in the shop. If the fellow comes you will follow him home. But no indiscretion, and, above all, no violence. I put you on your honour that you will take no step without my knowledge and consent."

For two days the Hon. Philip Green (he was, I may mention, the son of the famous admiral of that name who commanded the Sea of Azof fleet in the Crimean War) brought us no news. On the evening of the third he rushed into our sitting-room, pale, trembling, with every muscle of his powerful frame quivering with excitement.

"We have him! We have him!" he cried.

He was incoherent in his agitation. Holmes soothed him with a few words and thrust him into an armchair.

"Come, now, give us the order of events," said he.

"She came only an hour ago. It was the wife, this time, but the pendant she brought was the fellow of the other. She is a tall, pale woman, with ferret eyes."

"That is the lady," said Holmes.

"She left the office and I followed her. She walked up the Kennington Road, and I kept behind her. Presently she went into a shop. Mr. Holmes, it was an undertaker's."

My companion started. "Well?" he asked in that vibrant voice which told of the fiery soul behind the cold gray face.

"She was talking to the woman behind the counter. I entered as well. 'It is late,' I heard her say, or words to that effect. The woman was excusing herself. 'It should be there before now,' she answered. 'It took longer, being out of the ordinary.' They both stopped and looked at me, so I asked some questions and then left the shop."

"You did excellently well. What happened next?"

"The woman came out, but I had hid myself in a doorway. Her suspicions had been aroused, I think, for she looked round her. Then she called a cab and got in. I was lucky enough to get another and so to follow her. She got down at last at No. 36, Poultney Square, Brixton. I drove past, left my cab at the corner of the square, and watched the house."

"Did you see anyone?"

"The windows were all in darkness save one on the lower floor. The blind was down, and I could not see in. I was standing there, wondering what I should do next, when a covered van drove up with two men in it. They descended, took something out of the van, and carried it up the steps to the hall door. Mr. Holmes, it was a coffin."

"Ah!"

"For an instant I was on the point of rushing in. The door had been opened to admit the men and their burden. It was the woman who had opened it. But as I stood there she caught a glimpse of me, and I think that she recognized me. I saw her start, and she hastily closed the door. I remembered my promise to you, and here I am."

"You have done excellent work," said Holmes, scribbling a few words upon a half-sheet of paper. "We can do nothing legal without a warrant, and you can serve the cause best by taking this note down to the authorities and getting one. There may be some difficulty, but I should think that the sale of the jewellery should be sufficient. Lestrade will see to all details."

"But they may murder her in the meanwhile. What could the coffin mean, and for whom could it be but for her?"

"We will do all that can be done, Mr. Green. Not a moment will be lost. Leave it in our hands. Now Watson," he added as our client hurried away, "he will set the regular forces on the move. We are, as usual, the irregulars, and we must take our own line of action. The situation strikes me as so desperate that the most extreme measures are justified. Not a moment is to be lost in getting to Poultney Square."

"Let us try to reconstruct the situation," said he as we drove swiftly past the Houses of Parliament and over Westminster Bridge. "These villains have coaxed this unhappy lady to London, after first alienating her from her faithful maid. If she has written any letters they have been intercepted. Through some confederate they have engaged a furnished house. Once inside it, they have made her a prisoner, and they have become possessed of the valuable jewellery which has been their object from the first. Already they have begun to sell part of it, which seems safe enough to them, since they have no reason to think that anyone is interested in the lady's fate. When she is released she will, of course, denounce them. Therefore, she must not be released. But they cannot keep her under lock and key forever. So murder is their only solution."

"That seems very clear."
"Now we will take another line of reasoning. When you follow two disparate chains of thought, Watson, you will find some point of intersection which should approximate to the truth. We will start now, not from the lady but from the coffin and argue backward. That incident proves, I fear, beyond all doubt that the lady is dead. It points also to an orthodox burial with proper accompaniment of medical certificate and official sanction. Had the lady been obviously murdered, they would have buried her in a hole in the back garden. But here all is open and regular. What does this mean? Surely that they have done her to death in some way which has deceived the doctor and simulated a natural end--poisoning, perhaps. And yet how strange that they should ever let a doctor approach her unless he were a confederate, which is hardly a credible proposition."

"Could they have forged a medical certificate?"

"Dangerous, Watson, very dangerous. No, I hardly see them doing that. Pull up, cabby! This is evidently the undertaker's, for we have just passed the pawnbroker's. Would go in, Watson? Your appearance inspires confidence. Ask what hour the Poultney Square funeral takes place to-morrow."

The woman in the shop answered me without hesitation that it was to be at eight o'clock in the morning. "You see, Watson, no mystery; everything above-board! In some way the legal forms have undoubtedly been complied with, and they think that they have little to fear. Well, there's nothing for it now but a direct frontal attack. Are you armed?"

"My stick!"

"Well, well, we shall be strong enough. 'Thrice is he armed who hath his quarrel just.' We simply can't afford to wait for the police or to keep within the four corners of the law. You can drive off, cabby. Now, Watson, we'll just take our luck together, as we have occasionally in the past."

He had rung loudly at the door of a great dark house in the centre of Poultney Square. It was opened immediately, and the figure of a tall woman was outlined against the dim-lit hall.

"Well, what do you want?" she asked sharply, peering at us through the darkness.

"I want to speak to Dr. Shlessinger," said Holmes.

"There is no such person here," she answered, and tried to close the door, but Holmes had jammed it with his foot.

"Well, I want to see the man who lives here, whatever he may call himself," said Holmes firmly.

She hesitated. Then she threw open the door. "Well, come in!" said she. "My husband is not afraid to face any man in the world." She closed the door behind us and showed us into a sitting-room on the right side of the hall, turning up the gas as she left us. "Mr. Peters will be with you in an instant," she said.

Her words were literally true, for we had hardly time to look around the dusty and moth-eaten apartment in which we found ourselves before the door opened and a big, clean-shaven bald-headed man stepped lightly into the room. He had a large red face, with pendulous cheeks, and a general air of superficial benevolence which was marred by a cruel, vicious mouth.

"There is surely some mistake here, gentlemen," he said in an unctuous, make-everything-easy voice. "I fancy that you have been misdirected. Possibly if you tried farther down the street--"

"That will do; we have no time to waste," said my companion firmly. "You are Henry Peters, of Adelaide, late the Rev. Dr. Shlessinger, of Baden and South America. I am as sure of that as that my own name is Sherlock Holmes."

Peters, as I will now call him, started and stared hard at his formidable pursuer. "I guess your name does not frighten me, Mr. Holmes," said he coolly. "When a man's conscience is easy you can't rattle him. What is your business in my house?"

"I want to know what you have done with the Lady Frances Carfax, whom you brought away with you from Baden."

"I'd be very glad if you could tell me where that lady may be," Peters answered coolly. "I've a bill against her for nearly a hundred pounds, and nothing to show for it but a couple of trumpery pendants that the dealer would hardly look at. She attached herself to Mrs. Peters and me at Baden--it is a fact that I was using another name at the time--and she stuck on to us until we came to London. I paid her bill and her ticket. Once in London, she gave us the slip, and, as I say, left these out-of-date jewels to pay her bills. You find her, Mr. Holmes, and I'm your debtor."

In MEAN to find her," said Sherlock Holmes. "I'm going through this house till I do find her."

"Where is your warrant?"

Holmes half drew a revolver from his pocket. "This will have to serve till a better one comes."

"Why, you're a common burglar."

"So you might describe me," said Holmes cheerfully. "My companion is also a dangerous ruffian. And together we are going through your house."

Our opponent opened the door.
"Fetch a policeman, Annie!" said he. There was a whisk of feminine skirts down the passage, and the hall door was opened and shut.

"Our time is limited, Watson," said Holmes. "If you try to stop us, Peters, you will most certainly get hurt. Where is that coffin which was brought into your house?"

"What do you want with the coffin? It is in use. There is a body in it."

"I must see the body."

"Never with my consent."

"Then without it." With a quick movement Holmes pushed the fellow to one side and passed into the hall. A door half opened stood immediately before us. We entered. It was the dining-room. On the table, under a half-lit chandelier, the coffin was lying. Holmes turned up the gas and raised the lid. Deep down in the recesses of the coffin lay an emaciated figure. The glare from the lights above beat down upon an aged and withered face. By no possible process of cruelty, starvation, or disease could this wornout wreck be the still beautiful Lady Frances. Holmes's face showed his amazement, and also his relief.

"Thank God!" he muttered. "It's someone else."

"Ah, you've blundered badly for once, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said Peters, who had followed us into the room. "Who is the dead woman?"

"Well, if you really must know, she is an old nurse of my wife's, Rose Spender by name, whom we found in the Brixton Workhouse Infirmary. We brought her round here, called in Dr. Horsom, of 13 Firbank Villas—mind you take the address, Mr. Holmes—and had her carefully tended, as Christian folk should. On the third day she died—certificate says senile decay—but that's only the doctor's opinion, and of course you know better. We ordered her funeral to be carried out by Stimson and Co., of the Kennington Road, who will bury her at eight o'clock to-morrow morning. Can you pick any hole in that, Mr. Holmes? You've made a silly blunder, and you may as well own up to it. I'd give something for a photograph of your gaping, staring face when you pulled aside that lid expecting to see the Lady Frances Carfax and only found a poor old woman of ninety."

Holmes's expression was as impassive as ever under the jeers of his antagonist, but his clenched hands betrayed his acute annoyance.

"I am going through your house," said he.

"Are you, though!" cried Peters as a woman's voice and heavy steps sounded in the passage. "We'll soon see about that. This way, officers, if you please. These men have forced their way into my house, and I cannot get rid of them. Help me to put them out."

A sergeant and a constable stood in the doorway. Holmes drew his card from his case.

"This is my name and address. This is my friend, Dr. Watson."

"Bless you, sir, we know you very well," said the sergeant, "but you can't stay here without a warrant."

"Of course not. I quite understand that."

"Arrest him!" cried Peters.

"We know where to lay our hands on this gentleman if he is wanted," said the sergeant majestically, "but you'll have to go, Mr. Holmes."

"Yes, Watson, we shall have to go."

A minute later we were in the street once more. Holmes was as cool as ever, but I was hot with anger and humiliation. The sergeant had followed us.

"Sorry, Mr. Holmes, but that's the law."

"Exactly, Sergeant, you could not do otherwise."

"I expect there was good reason for your presence there. If there is anything I can do—"

"It's a missing lady, Sergeant, and we think she is in that house. I expect a warrant presently."

"Then I'll keep my eye on the parties, Mr. Holmes. If anything comes along, I will surely let you know."

It was only nine o'clock, and we were off full cry upon the trail at once. First we drove to Brixton Workhouse Infirmary, where we found that it was indeed the truth that a charitable couple had called some days before, that they had claimed an imbecile old woman as a former servant, and that they had obtained permission to take her away with them. No surprise was expressed at the news that she had since died.

The doctor was our next goal. He had been called in, had found the woman dying of pure senility, had actually seen her pass away, and had signed the certificate in due form. "I assure you that everything was perfectly normal and there was no room for foul play in the matter," said he. Nothing in the house had struck him as suspicious save that for people of their class it was remarkable that they should have no servant. So far and no further went the doctor.

Finally we found our way to Scotland Yard. There had been difficulties of procedure in regard to the warrant. Some delay was inevitable. The magistrate's signature might not be obtained until next morning. If Holmes would
call about nine he could go down with Lestrade and see it acted upon. So ended the day, save that near midnight our friend, the sergeant, called to say that he had seen flickering lights here and there in the windows of the great dark house, but that no one had left it and none had entered. We could but pray for patience and wait for the morrow.

Sherlock Holmes was too irritable for conversation and too restless for sleep. I left him smoking hard, with his heavy, dark brows knotted together, and his long, nervous fingers tapping upon the arms of his chair, as he turned over in his mind every possible solution of the mystery. Several times in the course of the night I heard him prowling about the house. Finally, just after I had been called in the morning, he rushed into my room. He was in his dressing-gown, but his pale, hollow-eyed face told me that his night had been a sleepless one.

"What time was the funeral? Eight, was it not?" he asked eagerly. "Well, it is 7:20 now. Good heavens, Watson, what has become of any brains that God has given me? Quick, man, quick! It's life or death—a hundred chances on death to one on life. I'll never forgive myself, never, if we are too late!"

Five minutes had not passed before we were flying in a hansom down Baker Street. But even so it was twenty-five to eight as we passed Big Ben, and eight struck as we tore down the Brixton Road. But others were late as well as we. Ten minutes after the hour the hearse was still standing at the door of the house, and even as our foaming horse came to a halt the coffin, supported by three men, appeared on the threshold. Holmes darted forward and barred their way.

"Take it back!" he cried, laying his hand on the breast of the foremost. "Take it back this instant!"

"What the devil do you mean? Once again I ask you, where is your warrant?" shouted the furious Peters, his big red face glaring over the farther end of the coffin.

"The warrant is on its way. The coffin shall remain in the house until it comes."

The authority in Holmes's voice had its effect upon the bearers. Peters had suddenly vanished into the house, and they obeyed these new orders. "Quick, Watson, quick! Here is a screw-driver!" he shouted as the coffin was replaced upon the table. "Here's one for you, my man! A sovereign if the lid comes off in a minute! Ask no questions—work away! That's good! Another! And another! Now pull all together! It's giving! It's giving! Ah, that does it at last."

With a united effort we tore off the coffin-lid. As we did so there came from the inside a stupefying and overpowering smell of chloroform. A body lay within, its head all wreathed in cotton-wool, which had been soaked in the narcotic. Holmes plucked it off and disclosed the statuesque face of a handsome and spiritual woman of middle age. In an instant he had passed his arm round the figure and raised her to a sitting position.

"Is she gone, Watson? Is there a spark left? Surely we are not too late!"

For half an hour it seemed that we were. What with actual suffocation, and what with the poisonous fumes of the chloroform, the Lady Frances seemed to have passed the last point of recall. And then, at last, with artificial respiration, with injected ether, and with every device that science could suggest, some flutter of life, some quiver of the eyelids, some dimming of a mirror, spoke of the slowly returning life. A cab had driven up, and Holmes, parting the blind, looked out at it. "Here is Lestrade with his warrant," said he. "He will find that his birds have flown. And here," he added as a heavy step hurried along the passage, "is someone who has a better right to nurse this lady than we have. Good morning, Mr. Green; I think that the sooner we can move the Lady Frances the better. Meanwhile, the funeral may proceed, and the poor old woman who still lies in that coffin may go to her last resting-place alone."

"Should you care to add the case to your annals, my dear Watson," said Holmes that evening, "it can only be as an example of that temporary eclipse to which even the best-balanced mind may be exposed. Such slips are common to all mortals, and the greatest is he who can recognize and repair them. To this modified credit I may, perhaps, make some claim. My night was haunted by the thought that somewhere a clue, a strange sentence, a curious observation, had come under my notice and had been too easily dismissed. Then, suddenly, in the gray of the morning, the words came back to me. It was the remark of the undertaker's wife, as reported by Philip Green. She had said, 'It should be there before now. It took longer, being out of the ordinary.' It was the coffin of which she spoke. It had been out of the ordinary. That could only mean that it had been made to some special measurement. But why? Why? Then in an instant I remembered the deep sides, and the little wasted figure at the bottom. Why so large a coffin for so small a body? To leave room for another body. Both would be buried under the one certificate. It had all been so clear, if only my own sight had not been dimmed. At eight the Lady Frances would be buried. Our one chance was to stop the coffin before it left the house.

"It was a desperate chance that we might find her alive, but it WAS a chance, as the result showed. These people had never, to my knowledge, done a murder. They might shrink from actual violence at the last. The could bury her with no sign of how she met her end, and even if she were exhumed there was a chance for them. I hoped that such considerations might prevail with them. You can reconstruct the scene well enough. You saw the horrible den upstairs, where the poor lady had been kept so long. They rushed in and overpowered her with their chloroform, carried her down, poured more into the coffin to insure against her waking, and then screwed down the lid. A clever
device, Watson. It is new to me in the annals of crime. If our ex-missionary friends escape the clutches of Lestrade, I shall expect to hear of some brilliant incidents in their future career."

**The Adventure of the Devil's Foot**

In recording from time to time some of the curious experiences and interesting recollections which I associate with my long and intimate friendship with Mr. Sherlock Holmes, I have continually been faced by difficulties caused by his own aversion to publicity. To his sombre and cynical spirit all popular applause was always abhorrent, and nothing amused him more at the end of a successful case than to hand over the actual exposure to some orthodox official, and to listen with a mocking smile to the general chorus of misplaced congratulation. It was indeed this attitude upon the part of my friend and certainly not any lack of interesting material which has caused me of late years to lay very few of my records before the public. My participation in some if his adventures was always a privilege which entailed discretion and reticence upon me.

It was, then, with considerable surprise that I received a telegram from Homes last Tuesday--he has never been known to write where a telegram would serve--in the following terms:

> Why not tell them of the Cornish horror--strangest case I have handled.

I have no idea what backward sweep of memory had brought the matter fresh to his mind, or what freak had caused him to desire that I should recount it; but I hasten, before another cancelling telegram may arrive, to hunt out the notes which give me the exact details of the case and to lay the narrative before my readers.

It was, then, in the spring of the year 1897 that Holmes's iron constitution showed some symptoms of giving way in the face of constant hard work of a most exacting kind, aggravated, perhaps, by occasional indiscretions of his own. In March of that year Dr. Moore Agar, of Harley Street, whose dramatic introduction to Holmes I may some day recount, gave positive injunctions that the famous private agent lay aside all his cases and surrender himself to complete rest if he wished to avert an absolute breakdown. The state of his health was not a matter in which he himself took the faintest interest, for his mental detachment was absolute, but he was induced at last, on the threat of being permanently disqualified from work, to give himself a complete change of scene and air. Thus it was that in the early spring of that year we found ourselves together in a small cottage near Poldhu Bay, at the further extremity of the Cornish peninsula.

It was a singular spot, and one peculiarly well suited to the grim humour of my patient. From the windows of our little whitewashed house, which stood high upon a grassy headland, we looked down upon the whole sinister semicircle of Mounts Bay, that old death trap of sailing vessels, with its fringe of black cliffs and surge-swept reefs on which innumerable seamen have met their end. With a northerly breeze it lies placid and sheltered, inviting the storm-tossed craft to tack into it for rest and protection.

Then come the sudden swirl round of the wind, the blistering gale from the south-west, the dragging anchor, the lee shore, and the last battle in the creaming breakers. The wise mariner stands far out from that evil place.

On the land side our surroundings were as sombre as on the sea. It was a country of rolling moors, lonely and dun-colored, with an occasional church tower to mark the site of some old-world village. In every direction upon these moors there were traces of some vanished race which had passed utterly away, and left as it sole record strange monuments of stone, irregular mounds which contained the burned ashes of the dead, and curious earthworks which hinted at prehistoric strife. The glamour and mystery of the place, with its sinister atmosphere of forgotten nations, appealed to the imagination of my friend, and he spent much of his time in long walks and solitary meditations upon the moor. The ancient Cornish language had also arrested his attention, and he remembered, conceived the idea that it was akin to the Chaldean, and had been largely derived from the Phoenician traders in tin. He had received a consignment of books upon philology and was settling down to develop this thesis when suddenly, to my sorrow and to his unfeigned delight, we found ourselves, even in that land of dreams, plunged into a problem at our very doors which was more intense, more engrossing, and infinitely more mysterious than any of those which had driven us from London. Our simple life and peaceful, healthy routine were violently interrupted, and we were precipitated into the midst of a series of events which caused the utmost excitement not only in Cornwall but throughout the whole west of England. Many of my readers may retain some recollection of what was called at the time "The Cornish Horror," though a most imperfect account of the matter reached the London press. Now, after thirteen years, I will give the true details of this inconceivable affair to the public.

I have said that scattered towers marked the villages which dotted this part of Cornwall. The nearest of these was the hamlet of Tredannick Wollas, where the cottages of a couple of hundred inhabitants clustered round an ancient, moss-grown church. The vicar of the parish, Mr. Roundhay, was something of an archaeologist, and as such Holmes had made his acquaintance. He was a middle-aged man, portly and affable, with a considerable fund of local lore. At his invitation we had taken tea at the vicarage and had come to know, also, Mr. Mortimer Tregennis, an independent gentleman, who increased the clergyman's scanty resources by taking rooms in his large, straggling house. The vicar, being a bachelor, was glad to come to such an arrangement, though he had little in common with his lodger,
who was a thin, dark, spectacled man, with a stoop which gave the impression of actual, physical deformity. I remember that during our short visit we found the vicar garrulous, but his lodger strangely reticent, a sad-faced, introspective man, sitting with averted eyes, brooding apparently upon his own affairs.

These were the two men who entered abruptly into our little sitting-room on Tuesday, March the 16th, shortly after our breakfast hour, as we were smoking together, preparatory to our daily excursion upon the moors.

"Mr. Holmes," said the vicar in an agitated voice, "the most extraordinary and tragic affair has occurred during the night. It is the most unheard-of business. We can only regard it as a special Providence that you should chance to be here at the time, for in all England you are the one man we need."

I glared at the intrusive vicar with no very friendly eyes; but Holmes took his pipe from his lips and sat up in his chair like an old hound who hears the view-halloa. He waved his hand to the sofa, and our palpitating visitor with his agitated companion sat side by side upon it. Mr. Mortimer Tregennis was more self-contained than the clergyman, but the twitching of his thin hands and the brightness of his dark eyes showed that they shared a common emotion.

"Shall I speak or you?" he asked of the vicar.

"Well, as you seem to have made the discovery, whatever it may be, and the vicar to have had it second-hand, perhaps you had better do the speaking," said Holmes.

I glanced at the hastily clad clergyman, with the formally dressed lodger seated beside him, and was amused at the surprise which Holmes's simple deduction had brought to their faces.

"Perhaps I had best say a few words first," said the vicar, "and then you can judge if you will listen to the details from Mr. Tregennis, or whether we should not hasten at once to the scene of this mysterious affair. I may explain, then, that our friend here spent last evening in the company of his two brothers, Owen and George, and of his sister Brenda, at their house of Tredannick Wartha, which is near the old stone cross upon the moor. He left them shortly after ten o'clock, playing cards round the dining-room table, in excellent health and spirits. This morning, being an early riser, he walked in that direction before breakfast and was overtaken by the carriage of Dr. Richards, who explained that he had just been sent for on a most urgent call to Tredannick Wartha. Mr. Mortimer Tregennis naturally went with him. When he arrived at Tredannick Wartha he found an extraordinary state of things. His two brothers and his sister were seated round the table exactly as he had left them, the cards still spread in front of them and the candles burned down to their sockets. The sister lay back stone-dead in her chair, while the two brothers sat on each side of her laughing, shouting, and singing, the senses stricken clean out of them. All three of them, the dead woman and the two demented men, retained upon their faces an expression of the utmost horror--a convulsion of terror which was dreadful to look upon. There was no sign of the presence of anyone in the house, except Mrs. Porter, the old cook and housekeeper, who declared that she had slept deeply and heard no sound during the night. Nothing had been stolen or disarranged, and there is absolutely no explanation of what the horror can be which has frightened a woman to death and two strong men out of their senses. There is the situation, Mr. Holmes, in a nutshell, and if you can help us to clear it up you will have done a great work."

I had hoped that in some way I could coax my companion back into the quiet which had been the object of our journey; but one glance at his intense face and contracted eyebrows told me how vain was now the expectation. He sat for some little time in silence, absorbed in the strange drama which had broken in upon our peace.

"I will look into this matter," he said at last. "On the face of it, it would appear to be a case of a very exceptional nature. Have you been there yourself, Mr. Roundhay?"

"No, Mr. Holmes. Mr. Tregennis brought back the account to the vicarage, and I at once hurried over with him to consult you."

"How far is it to the house where this singular tragedy occurred?"

"About a mile inland."

"Then we shall walk over together. But before we start I must ask you a few questions, Mr. Mortimer Tregennis."

The other had been silent all this time, but I had observed that his more controlled excitement was even greater than the obtrusive emotion of the clergyman. He sat with a pale, drawn face, his anxious gaze fixed upon Holmes, and his thin hands clasped convulsively together. His pale lips quivered as he listened to the dreadful experience which had befallen his family, and his dark eyes seemed to reflect something of the horror of the scene.

"Ask what you like, Mr. Holmes," said he eagerly. "It is a bad thing to speak of, but I will answer you the truth."

"Tell me about last night."

"Well, Mr. Holmes, I supped there, as the vicar has said, and my elder brother George proposed a game of whist afterwards. We sat down about nine o'clock. It was a quarter-past ten when I moved to go. I left them all round the table, as merry as could be."

"Who let you out?"
"Mrs. Porter had gone to bed, so I let myself out. I shut the hall door behind me. The window of the room in which they sat was closed, but the blind was not drawn down. There was no change in door or window this morning, or any reason to think that any stranger had been to the house. Yet there they sat, driven clean mad with terror, and Brenda lying dead of fright, with her head hanging over the arm of the chair. I'll never get the sight of that room out of my mind so long as I live."

"The facts, as you state them, are certainly most remarkable," said Holmes. "I take it that you have no theory yourself which can in any way account for them?"

"It's devilish, Mr. Holmes, devilish!" cried Mortimer Tregennis. "It is not of this world. Something has come into that room which has dashed the light of reason from their minds. What human contrivance could do that?"

"I fear," said Holmes, "that if the matter is beyond humanity it is certainly beyond me. Yet we must exhaust all natural explanations before we fall back upon such a theory as this. As to yourself, Mr. Tregennis, I take it you were divided in some way from your family, since they lived together and you had rooms apart?"

"That is so, Mr. Holmes, though the matter is past and done with. We were a family of tin-miners at Redruth, but we sold our venture to a company, and so retired with enough to keep us. I won't deny that there was some feeling about the division of the money and it stood between us for a time, but it was all forgiven and forgotten, and we were the best of friends together."

"Looking back at the evening which you spent together, does anything stand out in your memory as throwing any possible light upon the tragedy? Think carefully, Mr. Tregennis, for any clue which can help me."

"There is nothing at all, sir."

"Your people were in their usual spirits?"

"Never better."

"Were they nervous people? Did they ever show any apprehension of coming danger?"

"Nothing of the kind."

"You have nothing to add then, which could assist me?"

Mortimer Tregennis considered earnestly for a moment.

"There is one thing occurs to me," said he at last. "As we sat at the table my back was to the window, and my brother George, he being my partner at cards, was facing it. I saw him once look hard over my shoulder, so I turned round and looked also. The blind was up and the window shut, but I could just make out the bushes on the lawn, and it seemed to me for a moment that I saw something moving among them. I couldn't even say if it was man or animal, but I just thought there was something there. When I asked him what he was looking at, he told me that he had the same feeling. That is all that I can say."

"Did you not investigate?"

"No; the matter passed as unimportant."

"You left them, then, without any premonition of evil?"

"None at all."

"I am not clear how you came to hear the news so early this morning."

"I am an early riser and generally take a walk before breakfast. This morning I had hardly started when the doctor in his carriage overtook me. He told me that old Mrs. Porter had sent a boy down with an urgent message. I sprang in beside him and we drove on. When we got there we looked into that dreadful room. The candles and the fire must have burned out hours before, and they had been sitting there in the dark until dawn had broken. The doctor said Brenda must have been dead at least six hours. There were no signs of violence. She just lay across the arm of the chair with that look on her face. George and Owen were singing snatches of songs and gibbering like two great apes. Oh, it was awful to see! I couldn't stand it, and the doctor was as white as a sheet. Indeed, he fell into a chair in a sort of faint, and we nearly had him on our hands as well."

"Remarkable--most remarkable!" said Holmes, rising and taking his hat. "I think, perhaps, we had better go down to Tredannick Wartha without further delay. I confess that I have seldom known a case which at first sight presented a more singular problem."

Our proceedings of that first morning did little to advance the investigation. It was marked, however, at the outset by an incident which left the most sinister impression upon my mind. The approach to the spot at which the tragedy occurred is down a narrow, winding, country lane. While we made our way along it we heard the rattle of a carriage coming towards us and stood aside to let it pass. As it drove by us I caught a glimpse through the closed window of a horribly contorted, grinning face glaring out at us. Those staring eyes and gnashing teeth flashed past us like a dreadful vision.

"My brothers!" cried Mortimer Tregennis, white to his lips. "They are taking them to Helston."

We looked with horror after the black carriage, lumbering upon its way. Then we turned our steps towards this ill-omened house in which they had met their strange fate.
It was a large and bright dwelling, rather a villa than a cottage, with a considerable garden which was already, in that Cornish air, well filled with spring flowers. Towards this garden the window of the sitting-room fronted, and from it, according to Mortimer Tregennis, must have come that thing of evil which had by sheer horror in a single instant blasted their minds. Holmes walked slowly and thoughtfully among the flower-plots and along the path before we entered the porch. So absorbed was he in his thoughts, I remember, that he stumbled over the water-pot, upset its contents, and deluged both our feet and the garden path. Inside the house we were met by the elderly Cornish housekeeper, Mrs. Porter, who, with the aid of a young girl, looked after the wants of the family. She readily answered all Holmes's questions. She had heard nothing in the night. Her employers had all been in excellent spirits lately, and she had never known them more cheerful and prosperous. She had fainted with horror upon entering the room in the morning and seeing that dreadful company round the table. She had, when she recovered, thrown open the window to let the morning air in, and had run down to the lane, whence she sent a farm-lad for the doctor. The lady was on her bed upstairs if we dared to see her. It took four strong men to get the brothers into the asylum carriage. She would not herself stay in the house another day and was starting that very afternoon to rejoin her family at St. Ives.

We ascended the stairs and viewed the body. Miss Brenda Tregennis had been a very beautiful girl, though now verging upon middle age. Her dark, clear-cut face was handsome, even in death, but there still lingered upon it something of that convulsion of horror which had been her last human emotion. From her bedroom we descended to the sitting-room, where this strange tragedy had actually occurred. The charred ashes of the overnight fire lay in the grate. On the table were the four guttered and burned-out candles, with the cards scattered over its surface. The chairs had been moved back against the walls, but all else was as it had been the night before. Holmes paced with light, swift steps about the room; he sat in the various chairs, drawing them up and reconstructing their positions. He tested how much of the garden was visible; he examined the floor, the ceiling, and the fireplace; but never once did I see that sudden brightening of his eyes and tightening of his lips which would have told me that he saw some gleam of light in this utter darkness.

"Why a fire?" he asked once. "Had they always a fire in this small room on a spring evening?"

Mortimer Tregennis explained that the night was cold and damp. For that reason, after his arrival, the fire was lit. "What are you going to do now, Mr. Holmes?" he asked.

My friend smiled and laid his hand upon my arm. "I think, Watson, that I shall resume that course of tobacco-poisoning which you have so often and so justly condemned," said he. "With your permission, gentlemen, we will now return to our cottage, for I am not aware that any new factor is likely to come to our notice here. I will turn the facts over in my mind, Mr. Tregennis, and should anything occur to me I will certainly communicate with you and the vicar. In the meantime I wish you both good-morning."

It was not until long after we were back in Poldhu Cottage that Holmes broke his complete and absorbed silence. He sat coiled in his armchair, his haggard and ascetic face hardly visible amid the blue swirl of his tobacco smoke, his black brows drawn down, his forehead contracted, his eyes vacant and far away. Finally he laid down his pipe and sprang to his feet.

"It won't do, Watson!" said he with a laugh. "Let us walk along the cliffs together and search for flint arrows. We are more likely to find them than clues to this problem. To let the brain work without sufficient material is like racing an engine. It racks itself to pieces. The sea air, sunshine, and patience, Watson--all else will come."

"Now, let us calmly define our position, Watson," he continued as we skirted the cliffs together. "Let us get a firm grip of the very little which we DO know, so that when fresh facts arise we may be ready to fit them into their places. I take it, in the first place, that neither of us is prepared to admit diabolical intrusions into the affairs of men. Let us begin by ruling that entirely out of our minds. Very good. There remain three persons who have been grievously stricken by some conscious or unconscious human agency. That is firm ground. Now, when did this occur? Evidently, assuming his narrative to be true, it was immediately after Mr. Mortimer Tregennis had left the room. That is a very important point. The presumption is that it was within a few minutes afterwards. The cards still lay upon the table. It was already past their usual hour for bed. Yet they had not changed their position or pushed back their chairs. I repeat, then, that the occurrence was immediately after his departure, and not later than eleven o'clock last night.

"Our next obvious step is to check, so far as we can, the movements of Mortimer Tregennis after he left the room. In this there is no difficulty, and they seem to be above suspicion. Knowing my methods as you do, you were, of course, conscious of the somewhat clumsy water-pot expedient by which I obtained a clearer impress of his foot than might otherwise have been possible. The wet, sandy path took it admirably. Last night was also wet, you will remember, and it was not difficult--having obtained a sample print--to pick out his track among others and to follow his movements. He appears to have walked away swiftly in the direction of the vicarage."

"If, then, Mortimer Tregennis disappeared from the scene, and yet some outside person affected the card-players,
how can we reconstruct that person, and how was such an impression of horror conveyed? Mrs. Porter may be eliminated. She is evidently harmless. Is there any evidence that someone crept up to the garden window and in some manner produced so terrific an effect that he drove those who saw it out of their senses? The only suggestion in this direction comes from Mortimer Tregennis himself, who says that his brother spoke about some movement in the garden. That is certainly remarkable, as the night was rainy, cloudy, and dark. Anyone who had the design to alarm these people would be compelled to place his very face against the glass before he could be seen. There is a three-foot flower- border outside this window, but no indication of a footmark. It is difficult to imagine, then, how an outsider could have made so terrible an impression upon the company, nor have we found any possible motive for so strange and elaborate an attempt. You perceive our difficulties, Watson?"

"They are only too clear," I answered with conviction.

"And yet, with a little more material, we may prove that they are not insurmountable," said Holmes. "I fancy that among your extensive archives, Watson, you may find some which were nearly as obscure. Meanwhile, we shall put the case aside until more accurate data are available, and devote the rest of our morning to the pursuit of neolithic man."

I may have commented on my friend's power of mental detachment, but never have I wondered at it more than upon that spring morning in Cornwall when for two hours he discoursed upon celts, arrowheads, and shards, as lightly as if no sinister mystery were waiting for his solution. It was not until we had returned in the afternoon to our cottage that we found a visitor awaiting us, who soon brought our minds back to the matter in hand. Neither of us needed to be told that visitor was. The huge body, the craggy and deeply seamed face with the fierce eyes and hawk-like nose, the grizzled hair which nearly brushed our cottage ceiling, the beard--golden at the fringes and white near the lips, save for the nicotine stain from his perpetual cigar--all these were as well known in London as in Africa, and could only be associated with the tremendous personality of Dr. Leon Sterndale, the great lion-hunter and explorer.

We had heard of his presence in the district and had once or twice caught sight of his tall figure upon the moorland paths. He made no advances to us, however, nor would we have dreamed of doing so to him, as it was well known that it was his love of seclusion which caused him to spend the greater part of the intervals between his journeys in a small bungalow buried in the lonely wood of Beauchamp Arriance. Here, amid his books and his maps, he lived an absolutely lonely life, attending to his own simple wants and paying little apparent heed to the affairs of his neighbours. It was a surprise to me, therefore, to hear him asking Holmes in an eager voice whether he had made any advance in his reconstruction of this mysterious episode. "The county police are utterly at fault," said he, "but perhaps your wider experience has suggested some conceivable explanation. My only claim to being taken into your confidence is that during my many residences here I have come to know this family of Tregennis very well--indeed, upon my Cornish mother's side I could call them cousins--and their strange fate has naturally been a great shock to me. I may tell you that I had got as far as Plymouth upon my way to Africa, but the news reached me this morning, and I came straight back again to help in the inquiry."

Holmes raised his eyebrows.
"Did you lose your boat through it?"
"I will take the next."
"Dear me! that is friendship indeed."
"I tell you they were relatives."
"Quite so--cousins of your mother. Was your baggage aboard the ship?"
"Some of it, but the main part at the hotel."
"I see. But surely this event could not have found its way into the Plymouth morning papers."
"No, sir; I had a telegram."
"Might I ask from whom?"
A shadow passed over the gaunt face of the explorer.
"You are very inquisitive, Mr. Holmes."
"It is my business."

With an effort Dr. Sterndale recovered his ruffled composure.
"I have no objection to telling you," he said. "It was Mr. Roundhay, the vicar, who sent me the telegram which recalled me."

"Thank you," said Holmes. "I may say in answer to your original question that I have not cleared my mind entirely on the subject of this case, but that I have every hope of reaching some conclusion. It would be premature to say more."

"Perhaps you would not mind telling me if your suspicions point in any particular direction?"

"No, I can hardly answer that."
"Then I have wasted my time and need not prolong my visit." The famous doctor strode out of our cottage in considerable ill-humour, and within five minutes Holmes had followed him. I saw him no more until the evening, when he returned with a slow step and haggard face which assured me that he had made no great progress with his investigation. He glanced at a telegram which awaited him and threw it into the grate.

"From the Plymouth hotel, Watson," he said. "I learned the name of it from the vicar, and I wired to make certain that Dr. Leon Sterndale's account was true. It appears that he did indeed spend last night there, and that he has actually allowed some of his baggage to go on to Africa, while he returned to be present at this investigation. What do you make of that, Watson?"

"He is deeply interested."

"Deeply interested--yes. There is a thread here which we had not yet grasped and which might lead us through the tangle. Cheer up, Watson, for I am very sure that our material has not yet all come to hand. When it does we may soon leave our difficulties behind us."

Little did I think how soon the words of Holmes would be realized, or how strange and sinister would be that new development which opened up an entirely fresh line of investigation. I was shaving at my window in the morning when I heard the rattle of hoofs and, looking up, saw a dog-cart coming at a gallop down the road. It pulled up at our door, and our friend, the vicar, sprang from it and rushed up our garden path. Holmes was already dressed, and we hastened down to meet him.

Our visitor was so excited that he could hardly articulate, but at last in gasps and bursts his tragic story came out of him.

"We are devil-ridden, Mr. Holmes! My poor parish is devil-ridden!" he cried. "Satan himself is loose in it! We are given over into his hands!" He danced about in his agitation, a ludicrous object if it were not for his ashy face and startled eyes. Finally he shot out his terrible news.

"Mr. Mortimer Tregennis died during the night, and with exactly the same symptoms as the rest of his family."

Holmes sprang to his feet, all energy in an instant.

"Can you fit us both into your dog-cart?"

"Yes, I can."

"Then, Watson, we will postpone our breakfast. Mr. Roundhay, we are entirely at your disposal. Hurry--hurry, before things get disarranged."

The lodger occupied two rooms at the vicarage, which were in an angle by themselves, the one above the other. Below was a large sitting-room; above, his bedroom. They looked out upon a croquet lawn which came up to the windows. We had arrived before the doctor or the police, so that everything was absolutely undisturbed. Let me describe exactly the scene as we saw it upon that misty March morning. It has left an impression which can never be effaced from my mind.

The atmosphere of the room was of a horrible and depressing stuffiness. The servant had first entered had thrown up the window, or it would have been even more intolerable. This might partly be due to the fact that a lamp stood flaring and smoking on the centre table. Beside it sat the dead man, leaning back in his chair, his thin beard projecting, his spectacles pushed up on to his forehead, and his lean dark face turned towards the window and twisted into the same distortion of terror which had marked the features of his dead sister. His limbs were convulsed and his fingers contorted as though he had died in a very paroxysm of fear. He was fully clothed, though there were signs that his dressing had been done in a hurry. We had already learned that his bed had been slept in, and that the tragic end had come to him in the early morning.

One realized the red-hot energy which underlay Holmes's phlegmatic exterior when one saw the sudden change which came over him from the moment that he entered the fatal apartment. In an instant he was tense and alert, his eyes shining, his face set, his limbs quivering with eager activity. He was out on the lawn, in through the window, round the room, and up into the bedroom, for all the world like a dashing foxhound drawing a cover. In the bedroom he made a rapid cast around and ended by throwing open the window, which appeared to give him some fresh cause for excitement, for he leaned out of it with loud ejaculations of interest and delight. Then he rushed down the stair, out through the open window, threw himself upon his face on the lawn, sprang up and into the room once more, all with the energy of the hunter who is at the very heels of his quarry. The lamp, which was an ordinary standard, he examined with minute care, making certain measurements upon its bowl. He carefully scrutinized with his lens the talc shield which covered the top of the chimney and scraped off some ashes which adhered to its upper surface, putting some of them into an envelope, which he placed in his pocketbook. Finally, just as the doctor and the official police put in an appearance, he beckoned to the vicar and we all three went out upon the lawn.

"I am glad to say that my investigation has not been entirely barren," he remarked. "I cannot remain to discuss the matter with the police, but I should be exceedingly obliged, Mr. Roundhay, if you would give the inspector my compliments and direct his attention to the bedroom window and to the sitting-room lamp. Each is suggestive, and
together they are almost conclusive. If the police would desire further information I shall be happy to see any of
them at the cottage. And now, Watson, I think that, perhaps, we shall be better employed elsewhere."

It may be that the police resented the intrusion of an amateur, or that they imagined themselves to be upon some
hopeful line of investigation; but it is certain that we heard nothing from them for the next two days. During this
time Holmes spent some of his time smoking and dreaming in the cottage; but a greater portion in country walks
which he undertook alone, returning after many hours without remark as to where he had been. One experiment
served to show me the line of his investigation. He had bought a lamp which was the duplicate of the one which had
burned in the room of Mortimer Tregennis on the morning of the tragedy. This he filled with the same oil as that
used at the vicarage, and he carefully timed the period which it would take to be exhausted. Another experiment
which he made was of a more unpleasant nature, and one which I am not likely ever to forget.

"You will remember, Watson," he remarked one afternoon, "that there is a single common point of resemblance
in the varying reports which have reached us. This concerns the effect of the atmosphere of the room in each case
upon those who had first entered it. You will recollect that Mortimer Tregennis, in describing the episode of his last
visit to his brother's house, remarked that the doctor on entering the room fell into a chair? You had forgotten? Well
I can answer for it that it was so. Now, you will remember also that Mrs. Porter, the housekeeper, told us that she
herself fainted upon entering the room and had afterwards opened the window. In the second case--that of Mortimer
Tregennis himself--you cannot have forgotten the horrible stuffiness of the room when we arrived, though the
servant had thrown open the window. That servant, I found upon inquiry, was so ill that she had gone to her bed.
You will admit, Watson, that these facts are very suggestive. In each case there is evidence of a poisonous
atmosphere. In each case, also, there is combustion going on in the room--in the one case a fire, in the other a lamp.
The fire was needed, but the lamp was lit--as a comparison of the oil consumed will show--long after it was broad
daylight. Why? Surely because there is some connection between three things--the burning, the stuffy atmosphere,
and, finally, the madness or death of those unfortunate people. That is clear, is it not?"

"It would appear so."

"At least we may accept it as a working hypothesis. We will suppose, then, that something was burned in each
case which produced an atmosphere causing strange toxic effects. Very good. In the first instance--that of the
Tregennis family--this substance was placed in the fire. Now the window was shut, but the fire would naturally carry
fumes to some extent up the chimney. Hence one would expect the effects of the poison to be less than in the second
case, where there was less escape for the vapour. The result seems to indicate that it was so, since in the first case
only the woman, who had presumably the more sensitive organism, was killed, the others exhibiting that temporary
or permanent lunacy which is evidently the first effect of the drug. In the second case the result was complete. The
facts, therefore, seem to bear out the theory of a poison which worked by combustion.

"With this train of reasoning in my head I naturally looked about in Mortimer Tregennis's room to find some
remains of this substance. The obvious place to look was the talc shelf or smoke-guard of the lamp. There, sure
enough, I perceived a number of flaky ashes, and round the edges a fringe of brownish powder, which had not yet
been consumed. Half of this I took, as you saw, and I placed it in an envelope."

"Why half, Holmes?"

"It is not for me, my dear Watson, to stand in the way of the official police force. I leave them all the evidence
which I found. The poison still remained upon the talc had they the wit to find it. Now, Watson, we will light our
lamp; we will, however, take the precaution to open our window to avoid the premature decease of two deserving
members of society, and you will seat yourself near that open window in an armchair unless, like a sensible man,
you determine to have nothing to do with the affair. Oh, you will see it out, will you? I thought I knew my Watson.
This chair I will place opposite yours, so that we may be the same distance from the poison and face to face. The
door we will leave ajar. Each is now in a position to watch the other and to bring the experiment to an end should the
symptoms seem alarming. Is that clear? Well, then, I take our powder--or what remains of it--from the envelope,
and I lay it above the burning lamp. So! Now, Watson, let us sit down and await developments."

They were not long in coming. I had hardly settled in my chair before I was conscious of a thick, musky odour,
subtle and nauseous. At the very first whiff of it my brain and my imagination were beyond all control. A thick,
black cloud swirled before my eyes, and my mind told me that in this cloud, unseen as yet, but about to spring out
upon my appalled senses, lurked all that was vaguely horrible, all that was monstrous and inconceivably wicked in
the universe. Vague shapes swirled and swam amid the dark cloud-bank, each a menace and a warning of something
coming, the advent of some unspeakable dweller upon the threshold, whose very shadow would blast my soul. A
freezing horror took possession of me. I felt that my hair was rising, that my eyes were protruding, that my mouth
was opened, and my tongue like leather. The turmoil within my brain was such that something must surely snap. I
tried to scream and was vaguely aware of some hoarse croak which was my own voice, but distant and detached
from myself. At the same moment, in some effort of escape, I broke through that cloud of despair and had a glimpse
of Holmes's face, white, rigid, and drawn with horror--the very look which I had seen upon the features of the dead. It was that vision which gave me an instant of sanity and of strength. I dashed from my chair, threw my arms round Holmes, and together we lurched through the door, and an instant afterwards had thrown ourselves down upon the grass plot and were lying side by side, conscious only of the glorious sunshine which was bursting its way through the hellish cloud of terror which had girt us in. Slowly it rose from our souls like the mists from a landscape until peace and reason had returned, and we were sitting upon the grass, wiping our clammy foreheads, and looking with apprehension to other each other to mark the last traces of that terrific experience which we had undergone.

"Upon my word, Watson!" said Holmes at last with an unsteady voice, "I owe you both my thanks and an apology. It was an unjustifiable experiment even for one's self, and doubly so for a friend. I am really very sorry."

"You know," I answered with some emotion, for I have never seen so much of Holmes's heart before, "that it is my greatest joy and privilege to help you."

He relapsed at once into the half-humorous, half-cynical vein which was his habitual attitude to those about him. "It would be superfluous to drive us mad, my dear Watson," said he. "A candid observer would certainly declare that we were so already before we embarked upon so wild an experiment. I confess that I never imagined that the effect could be so sudden and so severe." He dashed into the cottage, and, reappearing with the burning lamp held at full arm's length, he threw it among a bank of brambles. "We must give the room a little time to clear. I take it, Watson, that you have no longer a shadow of a doubt as to how these tragedies were produced?"

"None whatever."

"But the cause remains as obscure as before. Come into the arbour here and let us discuss it together. That villainous stuff seems still to linger round my throat. I think we must admit that all the evidence points to this man, Mortimer Tregennis, having been the criminal in the first tragedy, though he was the victim in the second one. We must remember, in the first place, that there is some story of a family quarrel, followed by a reconciliation. How bitter that quarrel may have been, or how hollow the reconciliation we cannot tell. When I think of Mortimer Tregennis, with the foxy face and the small shrewd, beady eyes behind the spectacles, he is not a man whom I should judge to be of a particularly forgiving disposition. Well, in the next place, you will remember that this idea of someone moving in the garden, which took our attention for a moment from the real cause of the tragedy, emanated from him. He had a motive in misleading us. Finally, if he did not throw the substance into the fire at the moment of leaving the room, who did do so? The affair happened immediately after his departure. Had anyone else come in, the family would certainly have risen from the table. Besides, in peaceful Cornwall, visitors did not arrive after ten o'clock at night. We may take it, then, that all the evidence points to Mortimer Tregennis as the culprit."

"Then his own death was suicide!"

"Well, Watson, it is on the face of it a not impossible supposition. The man who had the guilt upon his soul of having brought such a fate upon his own family might well be driven by remorse to inflict it upon himself. There are, however, some cogent reasons against it. Fortunately, there is one man in England who knows all about it, and I have made arrangements by which we shall hear the facts this afternoon from his own lips. Ah! he is a little before his time. Perhaps you would kindly step this way, Dr. Leon Sterndale. We have been conducting a chemical experiment indoors which has left our little room hardly fit for the reception of so distinguished a visitor."

I had heard the click of the garden gate, and now the majestic figure of the great African explorer appeared upon the path. He turned in some surprise towards the rustic arbour in which we sat.

"You sent for me, Mr. Holmes. I had your note about an hour ago, and I have come, though I really do not know why I should obey your summons."

"Perhaps we can clear the point up before we separate," said Holmes. "Meanwhile, I am much obliged to you for your courteous acquiescence. You will excuse this informal reception in the open air, but my friend Watson and I have nearly furnished an additional chapter to what the papers call the Cornish Horror, and we prefer a clear atmosphere for the present. Perhaps, since the matters which we have to discuss will affect you personally in a very intimate fashion, it is as well that we should talk where there can be no eavesdropping."

The explorer took his cigar from his lips and gazed sternly at my companion.

"I am at a loss to know, sir," he said, "what you can have to speak about which affects me personally in a very intimate fashion."

"The killing of Mortimer Tregennis," said Holmes.

For a moment I wished that I were armed. Sterndale's fierce face turned to a dusky red, his eyes glared, and the knotted, passionate veins started out in his forehead, while he sprang forward with clenched hands towards my companion. Then he stopped, and with a violent effort he resumed a cold, rigid calmness, which was, perhaps, more suggestive of danger than his hot-headed outburst.

"I have lived so long among savages and beyond the law," said he, "that I have got into the way of being a law to myself. You would do well, Mr. Holmes, not to forget it, for I have no desire to do you an injury."
"Nor have I any desire to do you an injury, Dr. Sterndale. Surely the clearest proof of it is that, knowing what I know, I have sent for you and not for the police."

Sterndale sat down with a gasp, overawed, perhaps, the first time in his adventurous life. There was a calm assurance of power in Holmes's manner which could not be withstood. Our visitor stammered for a moment, his great hands opening and shutting in his agitation.

"What do you mean?" he asked at last. "If this is bluff upon your part, Mr. Holmes, you have chosen a bad man for your experiment. Let us have no more beating about the bush. What DO you mean?"

"I will tell you," said Holmes, "and the reason why I tell you is that I hope frankness may beget frankness. What my next step may be will depend entirely upon the nature of your own defence."

"My defence?"
"Yes, sir."
"My defence against what?"
"Against the charge of killing Mortimer Tregennis."

Sterndale mopped his forehead with his handkerchief. "Upon my word, you are getting on," said he. "Do all your successes depend upon this prodigious power of bluff?"

"The bluff," said Holmes sternly, "is upon your side, Dr. Leon Sterndale, and not upon mine. As a proof I will tell you some of the facts upon which my conclusions are based. Of your return from Plymouth, allowing much of your property to go on to Africa, I will say nothing save that it first informed me that you were one of the factors which had to be taken into account in reconstructing this drama--"

"I came back--"

"I have heard your reasons and regard them as unconvincing and inadequate. We will pass that. You came down here to ask me whom I suspected. I refused to answer you. You then went to the vicarage, waited outside it for some time, and finally returned to your cottage."

"How do you know that?"
"I followed you."
"I saw no one."

"That is what you may expect to see when I follow you. You spent a restless night at your cottage, and you formed certain plans, which in the early morning you proceeded to put into execution. Leaving your door just as day was breaking, you filled your pocket with some reddish gravel that was lying heaped beside your gate."

Sterndale gave a violent start and looked at Holmes in amazement.

"You then walked swiftly for the mile which separated you from the vicarage. You were wearing, I may remark, the same pair of ribbed tennis shoes which are at the present moment upon your feet. At the vicarage you passed through the orchard and the side hedge, coming out under the window of the lodger Tregennis. It was now daylight, but the household was not yet stirring. You drew some of the gravel from your pocket, and you threw it up at the window above you."

Sterndale sprang to his feet.

"I believe that you are the devil himself!" he cried.

Holmes smiled at the compliment. "It took two, or possibly three, handfuls before the lodger came to the window. You beckoned him to come down. He dressed hurriedly and descended to his sitting-room. You entered by the window. There was an interview--a short one--during which you walked up and down the room. Then you passed out and closed the window, standing on the lawn outside smoking a cigar and watching what occurred. Finally, after the death of Tregennis, you withdrew as you had come. Now, Dr. Sterndale, how do you justify such conduct, and what were the motives for your actions? If you prevaricate or trifle with me, I give you my assurance that the matter will pass out of my hands forever."

Our visitor's face had turned ashen gray as he listened to the words of his accuser. Now he sat for some time in thought with his face sunk in his hands. Then with a sudden impulsive gesture he plucked a photograph from his breast-pocket and threw it on the rustic table before us.

"That is why I have done it," said he.

It showed the bust and face of a very beautiful woman. Holmes stooped over it.

"Brenda Tregennis," said he.

"Yes, Brenda Tregennis," repeated our visitor. "For years I have loved her. For years she has loved me. There is the secret of that Cornish seclusion which people have marvelled at. It has brought me close to the one thing on earth that was dear to me. I could not marry her, for I have a wife who has left me for years and yet whom, by the deplorable laws of England, I could not divorce. For years Brenda waited. For years I waited. And this is what we have waited for." A terrible sob shook his great frame, and he clutched his throat under his brindled beard. Then with an effort he mastered himself and spoke on:
"The vicar knew. He was in our confidence. He would tell you that she was an angel upon earth. That was why he telegraphed to me and I returned. What was my baggage or Africa to me when I learned that such a fate had come upon my darling? There you have the missing clue to my action, Mr. Holmes."

"Proceed," said my friend.

Dr. Sterndale drew from his pocket a paper packet and laid it upon the table. On the outside was written "Radix pedis diaboli" with a red poison label beneath it. He pushed it towards me. "I understand that you are a doctor, sir. Have you ever heard of this preparation?"

"Devil's-foot root! No, I have never heard of it."

"It is no reflection upon your professional knowledge," said he, "for I believe that, save for one sample in a laboratory at Buda, there is no other specimen in Europe. It has not yet found its way either into the pharmacopoeia or into the literature of toxicology. The root is shaped like a foot, half human, half goatlike; hence the fanciful name given by a botanical missionary. It is used as an ordeal poison by the medicine-men in certain districts of West Africa and is kept as a secret among them. This particular specimen I obtained under very extraordinary circumstances in the Ubangi country." He opened the paper as he spoke and disclosed a heap of reddish-brown, snuff-like powder.

"Well, sir?" asked Holmes sternly.

"I am about to tell you, Mr. Holmes, all that actually occurred, for you already know so much that it is clearly to my interest that you should know all. I have already explained the relationship in which I stood to the Tregennis family. For the sake of the sister I was friendly with the brothers. There was a family quarrel about money which estranged this man Mortimer, but it was supposed to be made up, and I afterwards met him as I did the others. He was a sly, subtle, scheming man, and several things arose which gave me a suspicion of him, but I had no cause for any positive quarrel.

"One day, only a couple of weeks ago, he came down to my cottage and I showed him some of my African curiosities. Among other things I exhibited this powder, and I told him of its strange properties, how it stimulates those brain centres which control the emotion of fear, and how either madness or death is the fate of the unhappy native who is subjected to the ordeal by the priest of his tribe. I told him also how powerless European science would be to detect it. How he took it I cannot say, for I never left the room, but there is no doubt that it was then, while I was opening cabinets and stooping to boxes, that he managed to abstract some of the devil's-foot root. I well remember how he plied me with questions as to the amount and the time that was needed for its effect, but I little dreamed that he could have a personal reason for asking.

"I thought no more of the matter until the vicar's telegram reached me at Plymouth. This villain had thought that I would be at sea before the news could reach me, and that I should be lost for years in Africa. But I returned at once. Of course, I could not listen to the details without feeling assured that my poison had been used. I came round to see you on the chance that some other explanation had suggested itself to you. But there could be none. I was convinced that Mortimer Tregennis was the murderer; that for the sake of money, and with the idea, perhaps, that if the other members of his family were all insane he would be the sole guardian of their joint property, he had used the devil's-foot powder upon them, driven two of them out of their senses, and killed his sister Brenda, the one human being whom I have ever loved or who has ever loved me. There was his crime; what was to be his punishment?

"Should I appeal to the law? Where were my proofs? I knew that the facts were true, but could I help to make a jury of countrymen believe so fantastic a story? I might or I might not. But I could not afford to fail. My soul cried out for revenge. I have said to you once before, Mr. Holmes, that I have spent much of my life outside the law, and that I have come at last to be a law to myself. So it was even now. I determined that the fate which he had given to others should be shared by himself. Either that or I would do justice upon him with my own hand. In all England there can be no man who sets less value upon his own life than I do at the present moment.

"Now I have told you all. You have yourself supplied the rest. I did, as you say, after a restless night, set off early from my cottage. I foresaw the difficulty of arousing him, so I gathered some gravel from the pile which you have mentioned, and I used it to throw up to his window. He came down and admitted me through the window of the sitting-room. I laid his offence before him. I told him that I had come both as judge and executioner. The wretch sank into a chair, paralyzed at the sight of my revolver. I lit the lamp, put the powder above it, and stood outside the window, ready to carry out my threat to shoot him should he try to leave the room. In five minutes he died. My God! how he died! But my heart was flint, for he endured nothing which my innocent darling had not felt before him. There is my story, Mr. Holmes. Perhaps, if you loved a woman, you would have done as much yourself. At any rate, I am in your hands. You can take what steps you like. As I have already said, there is no man living who can fear death less than I do."

Holmes sat for some little time in silence.
"What were your plans?" he asked at last.
"I had intended to bury myself in central Africa. My work there is but half finished."
"Go and do the other half," said Holmes. "I, at least, am not prepared to prevent you."
Dr. Sterndale raised his giant figure, bowed gravely, and walked from the arbour. Holmes lit his pipe and handed me his pouch.
"Some fumes which are not poisonous would be a welcome change," said he. "I think you must agree, Watson, that it is not a case in which we are called upon to interfere. Our investigation has been independent, and our action shall be so also. You would not denounce the man?"
"Certainly not," I answered.
"I have never loved, Watson, but if I did and if the woman I loved had met such an end, I might act even as our lawless lion-hunter has done. Who knows? Well, Watson, I will not offend your intelligence by explaining what is obvious. The gravel upon the window-sill was, of course, the starting-point of my research. It was unlike anything in the vicarage garden. Only when my attention had been drawn to Dr. Sterndale and his cottage did I find its counterpart. The lamp shining in broad daylight and the remains of powder upon the shield were successive links in a fairly obvious chain. And now, my dear Watson, I think we may dismiss the matter from our mind and go back with a clear conscience to the study of those Chaldean roots which are surely to be traced in the Cornish branch of the great Celtic speech."

His Last Bow - The War Service of Sherlock Holmes

It was nine o'clock at night upon the second of August--the most terrible August in the history of the world. One might have thought already that God's curse hung heavy over a degenerate world, for there was an awesome hush and a feeling of vague expectancy in the sultry and stagnant air. The sun had long set, but one blood-red gash like an open wound lay low in the distant west. Above, the stars were shining brightly, and below, the lights of the shipping glimmered in the bay. The two famous Germans stood beside the stone parapet of the garden walk, with the long, low, heavily gabled house behind them, and they looked down upon the broad sweep of the beach at the foot of the great chalk cliff in which Von Bork, like some wandering eagle, had perched himself four years before. They stood with their heads close together, talking in low, confidential tones. From below the two glowing ends of their cigars might have been the smouldering eyes of some malignant fiend looking down in the darkness.

A remarkable man this Von Bork--a man who could hardly be matched among all the devoted agents of the Kaiser. It was his talents which had first recommended him for the English mission, the most important mission of all, but since he had taken it over those talents had become more and more manifest to the half-dozen people in the world who were really in touch with the truth. One of these was his present companion, Baron Von Herling, the chief secretary of the legation, whose huge 100-horse-power Benz car was blocking the country lane as it waited to waft its owner back to London.

"So far as I can judge the trend of events, you will probably be back in Berlin within the week," the secretary was saying. "When you get there, my dear Von Bork, I think you will be surprised at the welcome you will receive. I happen to know what is thought in the highest quarters of your work in this country." He was a huge man, the secretary, deep, broad, and tall, with a slow, heavy fashion of speech which had been his main asset in his political career.

Von Bork laughed.
"They are not very hard to deceive," he remarked. "A more docile, simple folk could not be imagined."
"I don't know about that," said the other thoughtfully. "They have strange limits and one must learn to observe them. It is that surface simplicity of theirs which makes a trap for the stranger. One's first impression is that they are entirely soft. Then one comes suddenly upon something very hard, and you know that you have reached the limit and must adapt yourself to the fact. They have, for example, their insular conventions which simply MUST be observed."
"Meaning 'good form' and that sort of thing?" Von Bork sighed as one who had suffered much.
"Meaning British prejudice in all its queer manifestations. As an example I may quote one of my own worst blunders--I can afford to talk of my blunders, for you know my work well enough to be aware of my successes. It was on my first arrival. I was invited to a week-end gathering at the country house of a cabinet minister. The conversation was amazingly indiscreet."

Von Bork nodded. "I've been there," said he dryly.
"Exactly. Well, I naturally sent a resume of the information to Berlin. Unfortunately our good chancellor is a little heavy-handed in these matters, and he transmitted a remark which showed that he was aware of what had been said. This, of course, took the trail straight up to me. You've no idea the harm that it did me. There was nothing soft about our British hosts on that occasion, I can assure you. I was two years living it down. Now you, with this sporting pose of yours--"
"No, no, don't call it a pose. A pose is an artificial thing. This is quite natural. I am a born sportsman. I enjoy it."
"Well, that makes it the more effective. You yacht against them, you hunt with them, you play polo, you match them in every game, your four-in-hand takes the prize at Olympia. I have even heard that you go the length of boxing with the young officers. What is the result? Nobody takes you seriously. You are a 'good old sport' 'quite a decent fellow for a German,' a hard-drinking, night-club, knock-about-town, devil-may-care young fellow. And all the time this quiet country house of yours is the centre of half the mischief in England, and the sporting squire the most astute secret-service man in Europe. Genius, my dear Von Bork--genius!"
"You flatter me, Baron. But certainly I may claim my four years in this country have not been unproductive. I've never shown you my little store. Would you mind stepping in for a moment?"

The door of the study opened straight on to the terrace. Von Bork pushed it back, and, leading the way, he clicked the switch of the electric light. He then closed the door behind the bulky form which followed him and carefully adjusted the heavy curtain over the latticed window. Only when all these precautions had been taken and tested did he turn his sunburned aquiline face to his guest.

"Some of my papers have gone," said he. "When my wife and the household left yesterday for Flushing they took the less important with them. I must, of course, claim the protection of the embassy for the others."
"Your name has already been files as one of the personal suite. There will be no difficulties for you or your baggage. Of course, it is just possible that we may not have to go. England may leave France to her fate. We are sure that there is no binding treaty between them."
"And Belgium?"
"Yes, and Belgium, too."

Von Bork shook his head. "I don't see how that could be. There is a definite treaty there. She could never recover from such a humiliation."
"She would at least have peace for the moment."
"But her honor?"
"Tut, my dear sir, we live in a utilitarian age. Honour is a mediaeval conception. Besides England is not ready. It is an inconceivable thing, but even our special war tax of fifty million, which one would think made our purpose as clear as if we had advertised it on the front page of the Times, has not roused these people from their slumbers. Here and there one hears a question. It is my business to find an answer. Here and there also there is an irritation. It is my business to soothe it. But I can assure you that so far as the essentials go--the storage of munitions, the preparation for submarine attack, the arrangements for making high explosives--nothing is prepared. How, then, can England come in, especially when we have stirred he up such a devil's brew of Irish civil war, window-breaking Furies, and God knows what to keep her thoughts at home."
"She must think of her future."
"Ah, that is another matter. I fancy that in the future we have our own very definite plans about England, and that your information will be very vital to us. It is to-day or to-morrow with Mr. John Bull. If he prefers to-day we are perfectly ready. If it is to-morrow we shall be more ready still. I should think they would be wiser to fight with allies than without them, but that is their own affair. This week is their week of destiny. But you were speaking of your papers."

The large oak-panelled, book-lined room had a curtain hung in the future corner. When this was drawn it disclosed a large, brass-bound safe. Von Bork detached a small key from his watch chain, and after some considerable manipulation of the lock he swung open the heavy door.
"Look!" said he, standing clear, with a wave of his hand.

The light shone vividly into the opened safe, and the secretary of the embassy gazed with an absorbed interest at the rows of stuffed pigeon-holes with which it was furnished. Each pigeon-hole had its label, and his eyes as he glanced along them read a long series of such titles as "Fords," "Harbour-defences," "Aeroplanes," "Ireland," "Egypt," "Portsmouth forts," "The Channel," "Rosythe," and a score of others. Each compartment was bristling with papers and plans.
"Colossal!" said the secretary. Putting down his cigar he softly clapped his fat hands.
"And all in four years, Baron. Not such a bad show for the hard-drinking, hard-riding country squire. But the gem of my collection is coming and there is the setting all ready for it." He pointed to a space over which "Naval Signals" was printed.
"But you have a good dossier there already."
"Out of date and waste paper. The Admiralty in some way got the alarm and every code has been changed. It was a blow, Baron--the worst setback in my whole campaign. But thanks to my check-book and the good Altamont all will be well to-night."
The Baron looked at his watch and gave a guttural exclamation of disappointment. "Well, I really can wait no longer. You can imagine that things are moving at present in Carlton Terrace and that we have all to be at our posts. I had hoped to be able to bring news of your great coup. Did Altamont name no hour?"

Von Bork pushed over a telegram.  
Will come without fail to-night and bring new sparking plugs.  
Altamont.  
"Sparking plugs, eh?"

"You see he poses as a motor expert and I keep a full garage. In our code everything likely to come up is named after some spare part. If he talks of a radiator it is a battleship, of an oil pump a cruiser, and so on. Sparking plugs are naval signals."

"From Portsmouth at midday," said the secretary, examining the superscription. "By the way, what do you give him?"

"Five hundred pounds for this particular job. Of course he has a salary as well."

"The greedy rouge. They are useful, these traitors, but I grudge them their blood money."

"I grudge Altamont nothing. He is a wonderful worker. If I pay him well, at least he delivers the goods, to use his own phrase. Besides he is not a traitor. I assure you that our most pan-Germanic Junker is a sucking dove in his feelings towards England as compared with a real bitter Irish-American."

"Oh, an Irish-American?"

"If you heard him talk you would not doubt it. Sometimes I assure you I can hardly understand him. He seems to have declared war on the King's English as well as on the English king. Must you really go? He may be here any moment."

"No. I'm sorry, but I have already overstayed my time. We shall expect you early to-morrow, and when you get that signal book through the little door on the Duke of York's steps you can put a triumphant finis to your record in England. What! Tokay!" He indicated a heavily sealed dust-covered bottle which stood with two high glasses upon a salver.

"May I offer you a glass before your journey?"

"No, thanks. But it looks like revelry."

"Altamont has a nice taste in wines, and he took a fancy to my Tokay. He is a touchy fellow and needs humouring in small things. I have to study him, I assure you. "They had strolled out on to the terrace again, and along it to the further end where at a touch from the Baron's chauffeur the great car shivered and chuckled. "Those are the lights of Harwich, I suppose," said the secretary, pulling on his dust coat. "How still and peaceful it all seems. There may be other lights within the week, and the English coast a less tranquil place! The heavens, too, may not be quite so peaceful if all that the good Zeppelin promises us comes true. By the way, who is that?"

Only one window showed a light behind them; in it there stood a lamp, and beside it, seated at a table, was a dear old ruddy-faced woman in a country cap. She was bending over her knitting and stopping occasionally to stroke a large black cat upon a stool beside her.

"That is Martha, the only servant I have left."

The secretary chuckled.

"She might almost personify Britannia," said he, "with her complete self-absorption and general air of comfortable somnolence. Well, au revoir, Von Bork!" With a final wave of his hand he sprang into the car, and a moment later the two golden cones from the headlights shot through the darkness. The secretary lay back in the cushions of the luxurious limousine, with his thoughts so full of the impending European tragedy that he hardly observed that as his car swung round the village street it nearly passed over a little Ford coming in the opposite direction.

Von Bork walked slowly back to the study when the last gleams of the motor lamps had faded into the distance. As he passed he observed that his old housekeeper had put out her lamp and retired. It was a new experience to him, the silence and darkness of his widespread house, for his family and household had been a large one. It was a relief to him, however, to think that they were all in safety and that, but for that one old woman who had lingered in the kitchen, he had the whole place to himself. There was a good deal of tidying up to do inside his study and he set himself to do it until his keen, handsome face was flushed with the heat of the burning papers. A leather valise stood beside his table, and into this he began to pack very neatly and systematically the precious contents of his safe. He had hardly got started with the work, however, when his quick ears caught the sounds of a distant car. Instantly he gave an exclamation of satisfaction, strapped up the valise, shut the safe, locked it, and hurried out on to the terrace. He was just in time to see the lights of a small car come to a halt at the gate. A passenger sprang out of it and advanced swiftly towards him, while the chauffeur, a heavily built, elderly man with a gray moustache, settled down
like one who resigns himself to a long vigil.

"Well?" asked Von Bork eagerly, running forward to meet his visitor.
For answer the man waved a small brown-paper parcel triumphantly above his head.
"You can give me the glad hand to-night, mister," he cried. "I'm bringing home the bacon at last."
"The signals?"
"Same as I said in my cable. Every last one of them, semaphore, lamp code, Marconi--a copy, mind you, not the original. That was too dangerous. But it's the real goods, and you can lay to that." He slapped the German upon the shoulder with a rough familiarity from which the other winced.

"Come in," he said. "I'm all alone in the house. I was only waiting for this. Of course a copy is better than the original. If an original were missing they would change the whole thing. You think it's all safe about the copy?"

The Irish-American had entered the study and stretched his long limbs from the armchair. He was a tall, gaunt man of sixty, with clear-cut features and a small goatee beard which gave him a general resemblance to the caricatures of Uncle Sam. A half-smoked, sodden cigar hung from the corner of his mouth, and as he sat down he struck a match and relit it. "Making ready for a move?" he remarked as he looked round him. "Say, mister," he added, as his eyes fell upon the safe from which the curtain was now removed, "you don't tell me you keep your papers in that?"
"Why not?"
"Gosh, in a wide-open contraption like that! And they reckon you to be some spy. Why, a Yankee crook would be into that with a can-opener. If I'd known that any letter of mine was goin' to lie loose in a thing like that I'd have been a mug to write to you at all."
"It would puzzle any crook to force that safe," Von Bork answered. "You won't cut that metal with any tool."
"But the lock?"
"No, it's a double combination lock. You know what that is?"
"Search me," said the American.
"Well, you need a word as well as a set of figures before you can get the lock to work." He rose and showed a double-radiating disc round the keyhole. "This outer one is for the letters, the inner one for the figures."
"Well, well, that's fine."
"So it's nit quite as simple as you thought. It was four years ago that I had it made, and what do you think I chose for the word and figures?"
"It's beyond me."
"Well, I chose August for the word, and 1914 for the figures, and here we are."
The American's face showed his surprise and admiration.
"My, but that was smart! You had it down to a fine thing."
"Yes, a few of us even then could have guessed the date. Here it is, and I'm shutting down to-morrow morning."
"Well, I guess you'll have to fix me up also. I'm not staying is this gol-darned country all on my lonesome. In a week or less, from what I see, John Bull will be on his hind legs and fair ramping. I'd rather watch him from over the water."
"But you're an American citizen?"
"Well, so was Jack James an American citizen, but he's doing time in Portland all the same. It cuts no ice with a British copper to tell him you're an American citizen. It's British law and order over here,' says he. By the way, mister, talking of Jack James, it seems to me you don't do much to cover your men."
"What do you mean?" Von Bork asked sharply.
"Well, you are their employer, ain't you? It's up to you to see that they don't fall down. But they do fall down, and when did you ever pick them up? There's James--"
"It was James's own fault. You know that yourself. He was too self-willed for the job."
"James was a bonehead--I give you that. Then there was Hollis."
"The man was mad."
"Well, he went a bit woozy towards the end. It's enough to make a man bug-house when he has to play a part from morning to night with a hundred guys all ready to set the coppers wise to him. But now there is Steiner--"
Von Bork started violently, and his ruddy face turned a shade paler.
"What about Steiner?"
"Well, they've got him, that's all. They raided his store last night, and he and his papers are all in Portsmouth jail. You'll go off and he, poor devil, will have to stand the racket, and lucky if he gets off with his life. That's why I want to get over the water as soon as you do."
Von Bork was a strong, self-contained man, but it was easy to see that the news had shaken him.
"How could they have got on to Steiner?" he muttered. "That's the worst blow yet."
"Well, you nearly had a worse one, for I believe they are not far off me."
"You don't mean that!"
"Sure thing. My landlady down Fratton way had some inquiries, and when I heard of it I guessed it was time for me to hustle. But what I want to know, mister, is how the coppers know these things? Steiner is the fifth man you've lost since I signed on with you, and I know the name of the sixth if I don't get a move on. How do you explain it, and ain't you ashamed to see your men go down like this?"

Von Bork flushed crimson.
"How dare you speak in such a way!"
"If I didn't dare things, mister, I wouldn't be in your service. But I'll tell you straight what is in my mind. I've heard that with you German politicians when an agent has done his work you are not sorry to see him put away."

Von Bork sprang to his feet.
"Do you dare to suggest that I have given away my own agents!"
"I don't stand for that, mister, but there's a stool pigeon or a cross somewhere, and it's up to you to find out where it is. Anyhow I am taking no more chances. It's me for little Holland, and the sooner the better."

Von Bork had mastered his anger.
"We have been allies too long to quarrel now at the very hour of victory," he said. "You've done splendid work and taken risks, and I can't forget it. By all means go to Holland, and you can get a boat from Rotterdam to New York. No other line will be safe a week from now. I'll take that book and pack it with the rest."

The American held the small parcel in his hand, but made no motion to give it up.
"What about the dough?" he asked.
"The what?"
"The boodle. The reward. The 500 pounds. The gunner turned damned nasty at the last, and I had to square him with an extra hundred dollars or it would have been nitsky for you and me. 'Nothin' doin'!' says he, and he meant it, too, but the last hundred did it. It's cost me two hundred pound from first to last, so it isn't likely I'd give it up without gettin' my wad."

Von Bork smiled with some bitterness. "You don't seem to have a very high opinion of my honour," said he, "you want the money before you give up the book."
"Well, mister, it is a business proposition."
"All right. Have your way." He sat down at the table and scribbled a check, which he tore from the book, but he refrained from handing it to his companion. "After all, since we are to be on such terms, Mr. Altamont," said he, "I don't see why I should trust you any more than you trust me. Do you understand?" he added, looking back over his shoulder at the American. "There's the check upon the table. I claim the right to examine that parcel before you pick the money up."

The American passed it over without a word. Von Bork undid a winding of string and two wrappers of paper. Then he sat dazing for a moment in silent amazement at a small blue book which lay before him. Across the cover was printed in golden letters Practical Handbook of Bee Culture. Only for one instant did the master spy glare at this strangely irrelevant inscription. The next he was gripped at the back of his neck by a grasp of iron, and a chloroformed sponge was held in front of his writhing face.

"Another glass, Watson!" said Mr. Sherlock Holmes as he extended the bottle of Imperial Tokay.

The thickset chauffeur, who had seated himself by the table, pushed forward his glass with some eagerness.
"It is a good wine, Holmes."

"A remarkable wine, Watson. Our friend upon the sofa has assured me that it is from Franz Josef's special cellar at the Schoenbrunn Palace. Might I trouble you to open the window, for chloroform vapour does not help the palate."

The safe was ajar, and Holmes standing in front of it was removing dossier after dossier, swiftly examining each, and then packing it neatly in Von Bork's valise. The German lay upon the sofa sleeping stertorously with a strap round his upper arms and another round his legs.
"We need not hurry ourselves, Watson. We are safe from interruption. Would you mind touching the bell? There is no one in the house except old Martha, who has played her part to admiration. I got her the situation here when first I took the matter up. Ah, Martha, you will be glad to hear that all is well."

The pleasant old lady had appeared in the doorway. She curtseyed with a smile to Mr. Holmes, but glanced with some apprehension at the figure upon the sofa.
"It is all right, Martha. He has not been hurt at all."
"I am glad of that, Mr. Holmes. According to his lights he has been a kind master. He wanted me to go with his wife to Germany yesterday, but that would hardly have suited your plans, would it, sir?"

"No, indeed, Martha. So long as you were here I was easy in my mind. We waited some time for your signal to-
"It was the secretary, sir."
"I know. His car passed ours."
"I thought he would never go. I knew that it would not suit your plans, sir, to find him here."
"No, indeed. Well, it only meant that we waited half an hour or so until I saw your lamp go out and knew that the coast was clear. You can report to me to-morrow in London, Martha, at Claridge's Hotel."
"Very good, sir."
"I suppose you have everything ready to leave."
"Yes, sir. He posted seven letters to-day. I have the addresses as usual."
"Very good, Martha. I will look into them to-morrow. Good-night. These papers," he continued as the old lady vanished, "are not of very great importance, for, of course, the information which they represent has been sent off long ago to the German government. These are the originals which cold not safely be got out of the country."
"Then they are of no use."
"I should not go so far as to say that, Watson. They will at least show our people what is known and what is not. I may say that a good many of these papers have come through me, and I need not add are thoroughly untrustworthy. It would brighten my declining years to see a German cruiser navigating the Solent according to the mine-field plans which I have furnished. But you, Watson"--he stopped his work and took his old friend by the shoulders--"I've hardly seen you in the light yet. How have the years used you? You look the same blithe boy as ever."
"I feel twenty years younger, Holmes. I have seldom felt so happy as when I got your wire asking me to meet you at Harwich with the car. But you, Holmes--you have changed very little--save for that horrible goatee."
"These are the sacrifices one makes for one's country, Watson," said Holmes, pulling at his little tuft. "To-morrow it will be but a dreadful memory. With my hair cut and a few other superficial changes I shall no doubt reappear at Claridge's to-morrow as I was before this American stunt--I beg your pardon, Watson, my well of English seems to be permanently defiled--before this American job came my way."
"But you have retired, Holmes. We heard of you as living the life of a hermit among your bees and your books in a small farm upon the South Downs."
"Exactly, Watson. Here is the fruit of my leisured ease, the magnum opus of my latter years!" He picked up the volume from the table and read out the whole title, Practical Handbook of Bee Culture, with Some Observations upon the Segregation of the Queen. "Alone I did it. Behold the fruit of pensive nights and laborious days when I watched the little working gangs as once I watched the criminal world of London."
"But how did you get to work again?"
"Ah, I have often marvelled at it myself. The Foreign Minister alone I could have withstood, but when the Premier also deigned to visit my humble roof--! The fact is, Watson, that this gentleman upon the sofa was a bit too good for our people. He was in a class by himself. Things were going wrong, and no one could understand why they were going wrong. Agents were suspected or even caught, but there was evidence of some strong and secret central force. It was absolutely necessary to expose it. Strong pressure was brought upon me to look into the matter. It has cost me two years, Watson, but they have not been devoid of excitement. When I say that I started my pilgrimage at Chicago, graduated in an Irish secret society at Buffalo, gave serious trouble to the constabulary at Skibbereen, and so eventually caught the eye of a subordinate agent of Von Bork, who recommended me as a likely man, you will realize that the matter was complex. Since then I have been honoured by his confidence, which has not prevented most of his plans going subtly wrong and five of his best agents being in prison. I watched them, Watson, and I picked them as they ripened. Well, sir, I hope that you are none the worse!"

The last remark was addressed to Von Bork himself, who after much gasping and blinking had lain quietly listening to Holmes's statement. He broke out now into a furious stream of German invective, his face convulsed with passion. Holmes continued his swift investigation of documents while his prisoner cursed and swore.

"Though unmusical, German is the most expressive of all languages," he observed when Von Bork had stopped from pure exhaustion. "Hullo! Hullo!" he added as he looked hard at the corner of a tracing before putting it in the box. "This should put another bird in the cage. I had no idea that the paymaster was such a rascal, though I have long had an eye upon him. Mister Von Bork, you have a great deal to answer for."

The prisoner had raised himself with some difficulty upon the sofa and was staring with a strange mixture of amazement and hatred at his captor.

"I shall get level with you, Altamont," he said, speaking with slow deliberation. "If it takes me all my life I shall get level with you!"

"The old sweet song," said Holmes. "How often have I heard it in days gone by. It was a favorite ditty of the late lamented Professor Moriarty. Colonel Sebastian Moran has also been known to warble it. And yet I live and keep bees upon the South Downs."
"Curse you, you double traitor!" cried the German, straining against his bonds and glaring murder from his furious eyes.

"No, no, it is not so bad as that," said Holmes, smiling. "As my speech surely shows you, Mr. Altamont of Chicago had no existence in fact. I used him and he is gone."

"Then who are you?"

"It is really immaterial who I am, but since the matter seems to interest you, Mr. Von Bork, I may say that this is not my first acquaintance with the members of your family. I have done a good deal of business in Germany in the past and my name is probably familiar to you."

"I would wish to know it," said the Prussian grimly.

"It was I who brought about the separation between Irene Adler and the late King of Bohemia when your cousin Heinrich was the Imperial Envoy. It was I also who saved from murder, by the Nihilist Klopman, Count Von und Zu Grafenstein, who was your mother's elder brother. It was I--"

Von Bork sat up in amazement.

"There is only one man," he cried.

"Exactly," said Holmes.

Von Bork groaned and sank back on the sofa. "And most of that information came through you," he cried. "What is it worth? What have I done? It is my ruin forever!"

"It is certainly a little untrustworthy," said Holmes. "It will require some checking and you have little time to check it. Your admiral may find the new guns rather larger than he expects, and the cruisers perhaps a trifle faster."

Von Bork clutched at his own throat in despair.

"There are a good many other points of detail which will, no doubt, come to light in good time. But you have one quality which is very rare in a German, Mr. Von Bork: you are a sportsman and you will bear me no ill-will when you realize that you, who have outwitted so many other people, have at last been outwitted yourself. After all, you have done your best for your country, and I have done my best for mine, and what could be more natural? Besides," he added, not unkindly, as he laid his hand upon the shoulder of the prostrate man, "it is better than to fall before some ignoble foe. These papers are now ready, Watson. If you will help me with our prisoner, I think that we may get started for London at once."

It was no easy task to move Von Bork, for he was a strong and a desperate man. Finally, holding either arm, the two friends walked him very slowly down the garden walk which he had trod with such proud confidence when he received the congratulations of the famous diplomatist only a few hours before. After a short, final struggle he was hoisted, still bound hand and foot, into the spare seat of the little car. His precious valise was wedged in beside him.

"I trust that you are as comfortable as circumstances permit," said Holmes when the final arrangements were made. "Should I be guilty of a liberty if I lit a cigar and placed it between your lips?"

But all amenities were wasted upon the angry German.

"I suppose you realize, Mr. Sherlock Holmes," said he, "that if your government bears you out in this treatment it becomes an act of war."

"What about your government and all this treatment?" said Holmes, tapping the valise.

"You are a private individual. You have no warrant for my arrest. The whole proceeding is absolutely illegal and outrageous."

"Absolutely," said Holmes.

"Kidnapping a German subject."

"And stealing his private papers."

"Well, you realize your position, you and your accomplice here. If I were to shout for help as we pass through the village--"

"My dear sir, if you did anything so foolish you would probably enlarge the two limited titles of our village inns by giving us 'The Dangling Prussian' as a signpost. The Englishman is a patient creature, but at present his temper is a little inflamed, and it would be as well not to try him too far. No, Mr. Von Bork, you will go with us in a quiet, sensible fashion to Scotland Yard, whence you can send for your friend, Baron Von Herling, and see if even now you may not fill that place which he has reserved for you in the ambassadorial suite. As to you, Watson, you are joining us with your old service, as I understand, so London won't be out of your way. Stand with me here upon the terrace, for it may be the last quiet talk that we shall ever have."

The two friends chatted in intimate converse for a few minutes, recalling once again the days of the past, while their prisoner vainly wriggled to undo the bonds that held him. As they turned to the car Holmes pointed back to the moonlit sea and shook a thoughtful head.

"There's an east wind coming, Watson."

"I think not, Holmes. It is very warm."
"Good old Watson! You are the one fixed point in a changing age. There's an east wind coming all the same, such a wind as never blew on England yet. It will be cold and bitter, Watson, and a good many of us may wither before its blast. But it's God's own wind none the less, and a cleaner, better, stronger land will lie in the sunshine when the storm has cleared. Start her up, Watson, for it's time that we were on our way. I have a check for five hundred pounds which should be cashed early, for the drawer is quite capable of stopping it if he can."

Go to Start
The Case-Book of Sherlock Holmes

- "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone" (told in third-person)
- "The Problem of Thor Bridge"
- "The Adventure of the Creeping Man"
- "The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire"
- "The Adventure of the Three Garridebs"
- "The Adventure of the Illustrious Client"
- "The Adventure of the Three Gables"
- "The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier" (narrated by Holmes)
- "The Adventure of the Lion's Mane" (narrated by Holmes)
- "The Adventure of the Retired Colourman"
- "The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger"
- "The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place"

The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone

It was pleasant to Dr. Watson to find himself once more in the untidy room of the first floor in Baker Street which had been the starting-point of so many remarkable adventures. He looked round him at the scientific charts upon the wall, the acid-charred bench of chemicals, the violin-case leaning in the corner, the coal-scuttle, which contained of old the pipes and tobacco. Finally, his eyes came round to the fresh and smiling face of Billy, the young but very wise and tactful page, who had helped a little to fill up the gap of loneliness and isolation which surrounded the saturnine figure of the great detective.

"It all seems very unchanged, Billy. You don't change, either. I hope the same can be said of him?"

Billy glanced with some solicitude at the closed door of the bedroom.

"I think he's in bed and asleep," he said.

It was seven in the evening of a lovely summer's day, but Dr. Watson was sufficiently familiar with the irregularity of his old friend's hours to feel no surprise at the idea.

"That means a case, I suppose?"

"Yes, sir, he is very hard at it just now. I'm frightened for his health. He gets paler and thinner, and he eats nothing. 'When will you be pleased to dine, Mr. Holmes?' Mrs. Hudson asked. 'Seven-thirty, the day after tomorrow,' said he. You know his way when he is keen on a case."

"Yes, Billy, I know."

"He's following someone. Yesterday he was out as a workman looking for a job. To-day he was an old woman. Fairly took me in, he did, and I ought to know his ways by now." Billy pointed with a grin to a very baggy parasol which leaned against the sofa. "That's part of the old woman's outfit," he said.

"But what is it all about, Billy?"

Billy sank his voice, as one who discusses great secrets of State. "I don't mind telling you, sir, but it should go no farther. It's this case of the Crown diamond."

"What -- the hundred-thousand-pound burglary?"

"Yes, sir. They must get it back, sir. Why, we had the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary both sitting on that very sofa. Mr. Holmes was very nice to them. He soon put them at their ease and promised he would do all he could. Then there is Lord Cantlemere --"

"Ah!"

"Yes, sir, you know what that means. He's a stiff'un, sir, if I may say so. I can get along with the Prime Minister, and I've nothing against the Home Secretary, who seemed a civil, obliging sort of man, but I can't stand his Lordship. Neither can Mr. Holmes, sir. You see, he don't believe in Mr. Holmes and he was against employing him. He'd rather he failed."

"And Mr. Holmes knows it?"

"Mr. Holmes always knows whatever there is to know."

"Well, we'll hope he won't fail and that Lord Cantlemere will be confounded. But I say, Billy, what is that curtain for across the window?"

"Mr. Holmes had it put up there three days ago. We've got something funny behind it."

Billy advanced and drew away the drapery which screened the alcove of the bow window.

Dr. Watson could not restrain a cry of amazement. There was a facsimile of his old friend, dressing-gown and
all, the face turned three-quarters towards the window and downward, as though reading an invisible book, while the body was sunk deep in an armchair. Billy detached the head and held it in the air.

"We put it at different angles, so that it may seem more lifelike. I wouldn't dare touch it if the blind were not down. But when it's up you can see this from across the way."

"We used something of the sort once before."

"Before my time," said Billy. He drew the window curtains apart and looked out into the street. "There are folk who watch us from over yonder. I can see a fellow now at the window. Have a look for yourself."

Watson had taken a step forward when the bedroom door opened, and the long, thin form of Holmes emerged, his face pale and drawn, but his step and bearing as active as ever. With a single spring he was at the window, and had drawn the blind once more.

"That will do, Billy," said he. "You were in danger of your life then, my boy, and I can't do without you just yet. Well, Watson, it is good to see you in your old quarters once again. You come at a critical moment."

"So I gather."

"You can go, Billy. That boy is a problem, Watson. How far am I justified in allowing him to be in danger?"

"Danger of what, Holmes?"

"Of sudden death. I'm expecting something this evening."

"Expecting what?"

"To be murdered, Watson."

"No, no, you are joking, Holmes!"

"Even my limited sense of humour could evolve a better joke than that. But we may be comfortable in the meantime, may we not? Is alcohol permitted? The gasogene and cigars are in the old place. Let me see you once more in the customary armchair. You have not, I hope, learned to despise my pipe and my lamentable tobacco? It has to take the place of food these days."

"But why not eat?"

"Because the faculties become refined when you starve them. Why, surely, as a doctor, my dear Watson, you must admit that what your digestion gains in the way of blood supply is so much lost to the brain. I am a brain, Watson. The rest of me is a mere appendix. Therefore, it is the brain I must consider."

"But this danger, Holmes?"

"Ah. yes, in case it should come off, it would perhaps be as well that you should burden your memory with the name and address of the murderer. You can give it to Scotland Yard, with my love and a parting blessing. Sylvius is the name -- Count Negretto Sylvius. Write it down, man, write it down! 136 Moorside Gardens, N. W. Got it?"

Watson's honest face was twitching with anxiety. He knew only too well the immense risks taken by Holmes and was well aware that what he said was more likely to be under-statement than exaggeration. Watson was always the man of action, and he rose to the occasion.

"Count me in, Holmes. I have nothing to do for a day or two."

"Your morals don't improve, Watson. You have added fibbing to your other vices. You bear every sign of the busy medical man, with calls on him every hour."

"Not such important ones. But can't you have this fellow arrested?"

"Yes, Watson, I could. That's what worries him so."

"But why don't you?"

"Because I don't know where the diamond is."

"Ah! Billy told me -- the missing Crown jewel!"

"Yes, the great yellow Mazarin stone. I've cast my net and I have my fish. But I have not got the stone. What is the use of taking them? We can make the world a better place by laying them by the heels. But that is not what I am out for. It's the stone I want."

"And is this Count Sylvius one of your fish?"

"Yes, and he's a shark. He bites. The other is Sam Merton the boxer. Not a bad fellow, Sam, but the Count has used him. Sam's not a shark. He is a great big silly bull-headed gudgeon. But he is flopping about in my net all the same."

"Where is this Count Sylvius?"

"I've been at his very elbow all the morning. You've seen me as an old lady, Watson. I was never more convincing. He actually picked up my parasol for me once. 'By your leave, madame,' said he -- half-Italian, you know, and with the Southern graces of manner when in the mood, but a devil incarnate in the other mood. Life is full of whimsical happenings, Watson."

"It might have been tragedy."

"Well, perhaps it might. I followed him to old Straubenzee's workshop in the Minories. Straubenzee made the
air-gun -- a very pretty bit of work, as I understand, and I rather fancy it is in the opposite window at the present moment. Have you seen the dummy? Of course, Billy showed it to you. Well, it may get a bullet through its beautiful head at any moment. Ah, Billy, what is it?"

The boy had reappeared in the room with a card upon a tray. Holmes glanced at it with raised eyebrows and an amused smile.

"The man himself. I had hardly expected this. Grasp the nettle, Watson! A man of nerve. Possibly you have heard of his reputation as a shooter of big game. It would indeed be a triumphant ending to his excellent sporting record if he added me to his bag. This is a proof that he feels my toe very close behind his heel."

"Send for the police."

"I probably shall. But not just yet. Would you glance carefully out of the window, Watson, and see if anyone is hanging about in the street?"

Watson looked warily round the edge of the curtain.

"Yes, there is one rough fellow near the door."

"That will be Sam Merton -- the faithful but rather fatuous Sam. Where is this gentleman, Billy?"

"In the waiting-room, sir."

"Show him up when I ring."

"Yes, sir."

"If I am not in the room, show him in all the same."

"Yes, sir."

Watson waited until the door was closed, and then he turned earnestly to his companion.

"Look here, Holmes, this is simply impossible. This is a desperate man, who sticks at nothing. He may have come to murder you."

"I should not be surprised."

"I insist upon staying with you."

"You would be horribly in the way."

"In his way?"

"No, my dear fellow -- in my way."

"Well, I can't possibly leave you."

"Yes, you can, Watson. And you will, for you have never failed to play the game. I am sure you will play it to the end. This man has come for his own purpose, but he may stay for mine."

Holmes took out his notebook and scribbled a few lines. "Take a cab to Scotland Yard and give this to Youghal of the C. I. D. Come back with the police. The fellow's arrest will follow."

"I'll do that with joy."

"Before you return I may have just time enough to find out where the stone is." He touched the bell. "I think we will go out through the bedroom. This second exit is exceedingly useful. I rather want to see my shark without his seeing me, and I have, as you will remember, my own way of doing it."

It was, therefore, an empty room into which Billy, a minute later, ushered Count Sylvius. The famous game-shot, sportsman, and man-about-town was a big, swarthy fellow, with a formidable dark moustache shading a cruel, thinned mouth, and surmounted by a long, curved nose like the beak of an eagle. He was well dressed, but his brilliant necktie, shining pin, and glittering rings were flamboyant in their effect. As the door closed behind him he looked round him with fierce, startled eyes, like one who suspects a trap at every turn. Then he gave a violent start as he saw the impassive head and the collar of the dressing-gown which projected above the armchair in the window. At first his expression was one of pure amazement. Then the light of a horrible hope gleamed in his dark, murderous eyes. He took one more glance round to see that there were no witnesses, and then, on tiptoe, his thick stick half raised, he approached the silent figure. He was crouching for his final spring and blow when a cool, sardonic voice greeted him from the open bedroom door:

"Don't break it, Count! Don't break it!"

The assassin staggered back, amazement in his convulsed face. For an instant he half raised his loaded cane once more, as if he would turn his violence from the effigy to the original; but there was something in that steady gray eye and mocking smile which caused his hand to sink to his side.

"It's a pretty little thing," said Holmes, advancing towards the image. "Tavernier, the French modeller, made it. He is as good at waxworks as your friend Straubenzee is at air-guns."

"Air-guns, sir! What do you mean?"

"Put your hat and stick on the side-table. Thank you! Pray take a seat. Would you care to put your revolver out also? Oh, very good, if you prefer to sit upon it. Your visit is really most opportune, for I wanted badly to have a few minutes' chat with you."
The Count scowled, with heavy, threatening eyebrows.
"I, too, wished to have some words with you, Holmes. That is why I am here. I won't deny that I intended to
assault you just now."
Holmes swung his leg on the edge of the table.
"I rather gathered that you had some idea of the sort in your head," said he. "But why these personal attentions?"
"Because you have gone out of your way to annoy me. Because you have put your creatures upon my track."
"My creatures! I assure you no!"
"Nonsense! I have had them followed. Two can play at that game, Holmes."
"It is a small point, Count Sylvius, but perhaps you would kindly give me my prefix when you address me. You
can understand that, with my routine of work, I should find myself on familiar terms with half the rogues' gallery,
and you will agree that exceptions are invidious."
"Well, Mr. Holmes, then."
"Excellent! But I assure you are mistaken about my alleged agents."
Count Sylvius laughed contemptuously.
"Other people can observe as well as you. Yesterday there was an old sporting man. To-day it was an elderly
woman. They held me in view all day."
"Really, sir, you compliment me. Old Baron Dowson said the night before he was hanged that in my case what
the law had gained the stage had lost. And now you give my little impersonations your kindly praise?"
"It was you -- you yourself?"
Holmes shrugged his shoulders. "You can see in the corner the parasol which you so politely handed to me in the
Minories before you began to suspect."
"If I had known, you might never --"
"Have seen this humble home again. I was well aware of it. We all have neglected opportunities to deplore. As it
happens, you did not know, so here we are!"
The Count's knotted brows gathered more heavily over his menacing eyes. "What you say only makes the matter
worse. It was not your agents but your play-acting, busybody self! You admit that you have dogged me. Why?"
"Come now, Count. You used to shoot lions in Algeria."
"Well?"
"But why?"
"Why? The sport -- the excitement -- the danger!"
"And, no doubt, to free the country from a pest?"
"Exactly!"
"My reasons in a nutshell!"
The Count sprang to his feet, and his hand involuntarily moved back to his hip-pocket.
"Sit down, sir, sit down! There was another, more practical, reason. I want that yellow diamond!"
Count Sylvius lay back in his chair with an evil smile.
"Upon my word!" said he.
"You knew that I was after you for that. The real reason why you are here to-night is to find out how much I
know about the matter and how far my removal is absolutely essential. Well, I should say that, from your point of
view, it is absolutely essential, for I know all about it, save only one thing, which you are about to tell me."
"Oh, indeed! And pray, what is this missing fact?"
"Where the Crown diamond now is."
The Count looked sharply at his companion. "Oh, you want to know that, do you? How the devil should I be able
to tell you where it is?"
"You can, and you will."
"Indeed!"
"You can't bluff me, Count Sylvius." Holmes's eyes, as he gazed at him, contracted and lightened until they were
like two menacing points of steel. "You are absolute plate-glass. I see to the very back of your mind."
"Then, of course, you see where the diamond is!"
Holmes clapped his hands with amusement, and then pointed a derisive finger. "Then you do know. You have
admitted it!"
"I admit nothing."
"Now, Count, if you will be reasonable we can do business. If not, you will get hurt."
Count Sylvius threw up his eyes to the ceiling. "And you talk about bluff!" said he.
Holmes looked at him thoughtfully like a master chess-player who meditates his crowning move. Then he threw
open the table drawer and drew out a squat notebook.
"Do you know what I keep in this book?"
"No, sir, I do not!"
"You!"
"Me!"
"Yes, sir, you! You are all here -- every action of your vile and dangerous life."
"Damn you, Holmes!" cried the Count with blazing eyes. "There are limits to my patience!"
"It's all here, Count. The real facts as to the death of old Mrs. Harold, who left you the Blymer estate, which you so rapidly gambled away."
"You are dreaming!"
"And the complete life history of Miss Minnie Warrender."
"Tut! You will make nothing of that!"
"Plenty more here, Count. Here is the robbery in the train de-luxe to the Riviera on February 13, 1892. Here is the forged check in the same year on the Credit Lyonnais."
"No, you're wrong there."
"Then I am right on the others! Now, Count, you are a card-player. When the other fellow has all the trumps, it saves time to throw down your hand."
"What has all this talk to do with the jewel of which you spoke?"
"Gently, Count. Restrain that eager mind! Let me get to the points in my own humdrum fashion. I have all this against you; but, above all, I have a clear case against both you and your fighting bully in the case of the Crown diamond."
"Indeed!"
"I have the cabman who took you to Whitehall and the cabman who brought you away. I have the commissionaire who saw you near the case. I have Ikey Sanders, who refused to cut it up for you. Ikey has peached, and the game is up."

The veins stood out on the Count's forehead. His dark, hairy hands were clenched in a convulsion of restrained emotion. He tried to speak, but the words would not shape themselves.

"That's the hand I play from," said Holmes. "I put it all upon the table. But one card is missing. It's the king of diamonds. I don't know where the stone is."
"You never shall know."

"No? Now, be reasonable, Count. Consider the situation. You are going to be locked up for twenty years. So is Sam Merton. What good are you going to get out of your diamond? None in the world. But if you hand it over -- well, I'll compound a felony. We don't want you or Sam. We want the stone. Give that up, and so far as I am concerned you can go free so long as you behave yourself in the future. If you make another slip well, it will be the last. But this time my commission is to get the stone, not you."
"But if I refuse?"
"Why, then -- alas! -- it must be you and not the stone."

Billy had appeared in answer to a ring.

"I think, Count, that it would be as well to have your friend Sam at this conference. After all, his interests should be represented. Billy, you will see a large and ugly gentleman outside the front door. Ask him to come up."
"If he won't come, sir?"

"No violence, Billy. Don't be rough with him. If you tell him that Count Sylvius wants him he will certainly come."

"What are you going to do now?" asked the Count as Billy disappeared.

"My friend Watson was with me just now. I told him that I had a shark and a gudgeon in my net; now I am drawing the net and up they come together."

The Count had risen from his chair, and his hand was behind his back. Holmes held something half protruding from the pocket of his dressing-gown.

"You won't die in your bed, Holmes."

"I have often had the same idea. Does it matter very much? After all, Count, your own exit is more likely to be perpendicular than horizontal. But these anticipations of the future are morbid. Why not give ourselves up to the unrestrained enjoyment of the present?"

A sudden wild-beast light sprang up in the dark, menacing eyes of the master criminal. Holmes's figure seemed to grow taller as he grew tense and ready.

"It is no use your fingering your revolver, my friend," he said in a quiet voice. "You know perfectly well that you dare not use it, even if I gave you time to draw it. Nasty, noisy things, revolvers, Count. Better stick to air-guns. Ah! I think I hear the fairy footstep of your estimable partner. Good day, Mr. Merton. Rather dull in the street, is it
The prize-fighter, a heavily built young man with a stupid, obstinate, slab-sided face, stood awkwardly at the door, looking about him with a puzzled expression. Holmes's debonair manner was a new experience, and though he vaguely felt that it was hostile, he did not know how to counter it. He turned to his more astute comrade for help.

"What's the game now, Count? What's this fellow want? What's up?" His voice was deep and raucous.

The Count shrugged his shoulders, and it was Holmes who answered.

"If I may put it in a nutshell, Mr. Merton, I should say it was all up."

The boxer still addressed his remarks to his associate.

"Is this cove trying to be funny, or what? I'm not in the funny mood myself."

"No, I expect not," said Holmes. "I think I can promise you that you will feel even less humorous as the evening advances. Now, look here, Count Sylvius. I'm a busy man and I can't waste time. I'm going into that bedroom. Pray make yourselves quite at home in my absence. You can explain to your friend how the matter lies without the restraint of my presence. I shall try over the Hoffman 'Barcarole' upon my violin. In five minutes I shall return for your final answer. You quite grasp the alternative, do you not? Shall we take you, or shall we have the stone?"

Holmes withdrew, picking up his violin from the corner as he passed. A few moments later the long-drawn, wailing notes of that most haunting of tunes came faintly through the closed door of the bedroom.

"What is it, then?" asked Merton anxiously as his companion turned to him. "Does he know about the stone?"

"He knows a damned sight too much about it. I'm not sure that he doesn't know all about it."

"Good Lord!" The boxer's sallow face turned a shade whiter.

"Ikey Sanders has split on us."

"He has, has he? I'll do him down a thick un for that if I swing for it."

"That won't help us much. We've got to make up our minds what to do."

"Half a mo,'" said the boxer, looking suspiciously at the bedroom door. "He's a leary cove that wants watching. I suppose he's not listening?"

"How can he be listening with that music going?"

"That's right. Maybe somebody's behind a curtain. Too many curtains in this room."

"He knows a damned sight too much about it. I'm not sure that he doesn't know all about it."

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"How can he be listening with that music going?"

"That's right. Maybe somebody's behind a curtain. Too many curtains in this room." As he looked round he suddenly saw for the first time the effigy in the window, and stood staring and pointing, too amazed for words.

"Tut! it's only a dummy," said the Count.

"A fake, is it? Well, strike me! Madame Tussaud ain't in it. It's the living spit of him, gown and all. But them curtains Count!"

"Oh, confound the curtains! We are wasting our time, and there is none too much. He can lag us over this stone."

"The deuce he can!"

"But he'll let us slip if we only tell him where the swag is."

"What! Give it up? Give up a hundred thousand quid?"

"It's one or the other."

Merton scratched his short-cropped pate.

"He's alone in there. Let's do him in. If his light were out we should have nothing to fear."

"He's alone in there. Let's do him in. If his light were out we should have nothing to fear."

The Count shook his head.

"He is armed and ready. If we shot him we could hardly get away in a place like this. Besides, it's likely enough that the police know whatever evidence he has got. Hallo! What was that?"

There was a vague sound which seemed to come from the window. Both men sprang round, but all was quiet.

Save for the one strange figure seated in the chair, the room was certainly empty.

"Something in the street," said Merton. "Now look here, guv'nor, you've got the brains. Surely you can think a way out of it. If slugging is no use then it's up to you."

"I've fooled better men than he," the Count answered. "The stone is here in my secret pocket. I take no chances leaving it about. It can be out of England to-night and cut into four pieces in Amsterdam before Sunday. He knows nothing of Van Seddar."

"I thought Van Seddar was going next week."

"He was. But now he must get off by the next boat. One or other of us must slip round with the stone to Lime Street and tell him."

"But the false bottom ain't ready."

"Well, he must take it as it is and chance it. There's not a moment to lose." Again, with the sense of danger which becomes an instinct with the sportsman, he paused and looked hard at the window. Yes, it was surely from the street that the faint sound had come.

"As to Holmes," he continued, "we can fool him easily enough. You see, the damned fool won't arrest us if he can get the stone. Well, we'll promise him the stone. We'll put him on the wrong track about it, and before he finds
that it is the wrong track it will be in Holland and we out of the country."

"That sounds good to me!" cried Sam Merton with a grin.

"You go on and tell the Dutchman to get a move on him. I'll see this sucker and fill him up with a bogus confession. I'll tell him that the stone is in Liverpool. Confound that whining music; it gets on my nerves! By the time he finds it isn't in Liverpool it will be in quarters and we on the blue water. Come back here, out of a line with that keyhole. Here is the stone."

"I wonder you dare carry it."

"Where could I have it safer? If we could take it out of Whitehall someone else could surely take it out of my lodgings."

"Let's have a look at it."

Count Sylvius cast a somewhat unflattering glance at his associate and disregarded the unwashed hand which was extended towards him.

"What -- d'ye think I'm going to snatch it off you? See here, mister, I'm getting a bit tired of your ways."

"Well, well, no offence, Sam. We can't afford to quarrel. Come over to the window if you want to see the beauty properly. Now hold it to the light! Here!"

"Thank you!"

With a single spring Holmes had leaped from the dummy's chair and had grasped the precious jewel. He held it now in one hand, while his other pointed a revolver at the Count's head. The two villains staggered back in utter amazement. Before they had recovered Holmes had pressed the electric bell.

"No violence, gentlemen -- no violence, I beg of you! Consider the furniture! It must be very clear to you that your position is an impossible one. The police are waiting below."

The Count's bewilderment overmastered his rage and fear.

"But how the deuce --?" he gasped.

"Your surprise is very natural. You are not aware that a second door from my bedroom leads behind that curtain. I fancied that you must have heard me when I displaced the figure, but luck was on my side. It gave me a chance of listening to your racy conversation which would have been painfully constrained had you been aware of my presence."

The Count gave a gesture of resignation.

"We give you best, Holmes. I believe you are the devil himself."

"Not far from him, at any rate," Holmes answered with a polite smile.

Sam Merton's slow intellect had only gradually appreciated the situation. Now, as the sound of heavy steps came from the stairs outside, he broke silence at last.

"A fair cop!" said he. "But, I say, what about that bloomin' fiddle! I hear it yet."

"Tut, tut!" Holmes answered. "You are perfectly right. Let it play! These modern gramophones are a remarkable invention."

There was an inrush of police, the handcuffs clicked and the criminals were led to the waiting cab. Watson lingered with Holmes, congratulating him upon this fresh leaf added to his laurels. Once more their conversation was interrupted by the imperturbable Billy with his card-tray.

"Lord Cantlemere sir."

"Show him up, Billy. This is the eminent peer who represents the very highest interests," said Holmes. "He is an excellent and loyal person, but rather of the old regime. Shall we make him unbend? Dare we venture upon a slight liberty? He knows, we may conjecture, nothing of what has occurred."

The door opened to admit a thin, austere figure with a hatchet face and drooping mid-Victorian whiskers of a glossy blackness which hardly corresponded with the rounded shoulders and feeble gait. Holmes advanced affably, and shook an unresponsive hand.

"How do you do, Lord Cantlemere? It is chilly for the time of year, but rather warm indoors. May I take your overcoat?"

"No, I thank you; I will not take it off."

Holmes laid his hand insistently upon the sleeve.

"Pray allow me! My friend Dr. Watson would assure you that these changes of temperature are most insidious."

His Lordship shook himself free with some impatience.

"I am quite comfortable, sir. I have no need to stay. I have simply looked in to know how your self-appointed task was progressing."

"It is difficult -- very difficult."

"I feared that you would find it so."

There was a distinct sneer in the old courtier's words and manner.
"Every man finds his limitations, Mr. Holmes, but at least it cures us of the weakness of self-satisfaction."
"Yes, sir, I have been much perplexed."
"No doubt."
"Especially upon one point. Possibly you could help me upon
"You apply for my advice rather late in the day. I thought that you had your own all-sufficient methods. Still, I am ready to help you."
"You see, Lord Cantlemere, we can no doubt frame a case against the actual thieves."
"When you have caught them."
"Exactly. But the question is -- how shall we proceed against the receiver?"
"Is this not rather premature?"
"It is as well to have our plans ready. Now, what would you regard as final evidence against the receiver?"
"The actual possession of the stone."
"You would arrest him upon that?"
"Most undoubtedly."
Holmes seldom laughed, but he got as near it as his old friend Watson could remember. 
"In that case, my dear sir, I shall be under the painful necessity of advising your arrest."
Lord Cantlemere was very angry. Some of the ancient fires flickered up into his sallow cheeks.
"You take a great liberty, Mr. Holmes. In fifty years of official life I cannot recall such a case. I am a busy man, sir engaged upon important affairs, and I have no time or taste for foolish jokes. I may tell you frankly, sir, that I have never been a believer in your powers, and that I have always been of the opinion that the matter was far safer in the hands of the regular police force. Your conduct confirms all my conclusions. I have the honour, sir, to wish you good-evening."
Holmes had swiftly changed his position and was between the peer and the door. 
"One moment, sir," said he. "To actually go off with the Mazarin stone would be a more serious offence than to be found in temporary possession of it."
"Sir, this is intolerable! Let me pass."
"Put your hand in the right-hand pocket of your overcoat."
"What do you mean, sir?"
"Come -- come, do what I ask.
An instant later the amazed peer was standing, blinking and stammering, with the great yellow stone on his shaking palm.
"What! What! How is this, Mr. Holmes?"
"Too bad, Lord Cantlemere, too bad!" cried Holmes. "My old friend here will tell you that I have an impish habit of practical joking. Also that I can never resist a dramatic situation. I took the liberty -- the very great liberty, I admit -- of putting the stone into your pocket at the beginning of our interview."
The old peer stared from the stone to the smiling face before him.
"Sir, I am bewildered. But -- yes -- it is indeed the Mazarin stone. We are greatly your debtors, Mr. Holmes. Your sense of humour may, as you admit, be somewhat perverted, and its exhibition remarkably untimely, but at least I withdraw any reflection I have made upon your amazing professional powers. But how --"
"The case is but half finished; the details can wait. No doubt, Lord Cantlemere, your pleasure in telling of this successful result in the exalted circle to which you return will be some small atonement for my practical joke. Billy, you will show his Lordship out, and tell Mrs. Hudson that I should be glad if she would send up dinner for two as soon as possible."

The Problem of Thor Bridge

Somewhere in the vaults of the bank of Cox and Co., at Charing Cross, there is a travel-worn and battered tin dispatchbox with my name, John H. Watson, M. D., Late Indian Army, painted upon the lid. It is crammed with papers, nearly all of which are records of cases to illustrate the curious problems which Mr. Sherlock Holmes had at various times to examine. Some, and not the least interesting, were complete failures, and as such will hardly bear narrating, since no final explanation is forthcoming. A problem without a solution may interest the student, but can hardly fail to annoy the casual reader. Among these unfinished tales is that of Mr. James Phillimore, who, stepping back into his own house to get his umbrella, was never more seen in this world. No less remarkable is that of the cutter Alicia, which sailed one spring morning into a small patch of mist from where she never again emerged, nor was anything further ever heard of herself and her crew. A third case worthy of note is that of Isadora Persano, the well-known journalist and duellist, who was found stark staring mad with a match box in front of him which contained a remarkable worm said to be unknown to science. Apart from these unfathomed cases, there are some which involve the secrets of private families to an extent which would mean consternation in many exalted quarters.
if it were thought possible that they might find their way into print. I need not say that such a breach of confidence is unthinkable, and that these records will be separated and destroyed now that my friend has time to turn his energies to the matter. There remain a considerable residue of cases of greater or less interest which I might have edited before had I not feared to give the public a surfeit which might react upon the reputation of the man whom above all others I revere. In some I was myself concerned and can speak as an eye-witness, while in others I was either not present or played so small a part that they could only be told as by a third person. The following narrative is drawn from my own experience.

It was a wild morning in October, and I observed as I was dressing how the last remaining leaves were being whirled from the solitary plane tree which graces the yard behind our house. I descended to breakfast prepared to find my companion in depressed spirits, for, like all great artists, he was easily impressed by his surroundings. On the contrary, I found that he had nearly finished his meal, and that his mood was particularly bright and joyous, with that somewhat sinister cheerfulness which was characteristic of his lighter moments.

"You have a case, Holmes?" I remarked.

"The faculty of deduction is certainly contagious, Watson," he answered. "It has enabled you to probe my secret. Yes, I have a case. After a month of trivialities and stagnation the wheels move once more."

"Might I share it?"

"There is little to share, but we may discuss it when you have consumed the two hard-boiled eggs with which our new cook has favoured us. Their condition may not be unconnected with the copy of the Family Herald which I observed yesterday upon the hall-table. Even so trivial a matter as cooking an egg demands an attention which is conscious of the passage of time and incompatible with the love romance in that excellent periodical."

A quarter of an hour later the table had been cleared and we were face to face. He had drawn a letter from his pocket.

"You have heard of Neil Gibson, the Gold King?" he said.

"You mean the American Senator?"

"Well, he was once Senator for some Western state, but is better known as the greatest gold-mining magnate in the world."

"Yes, I know of him. He has surely lived in England for some time. His name is very familiar."

"Yes, he bought a considerable estate in Hampshire some five years ago. Possibly you have already heard of the tragic end of his wife?"

"Of course. I remember it now. That is why the name is familiar. But I really know nothing of the details."

Holmes waved his hand towards some papers on a chair. "I had no idea that the case was coming my way or I should have had my extracts ready," said he. "The fact is that the problem, though exceedingly sensational, appeared to present no difficulty. The interesting personality of the accused does not obscure the clearness of the evidence. That was the view taken by the coroner's jury and also in the police-court proceedings. It is now referred to the Assizes at Winchester. I fear it is a thankless business. I can discover facts, Watson, but I cannot change them. Unless some entirely new and unexpected ones come to light I do not see what my client can hope for."

"Your client?"

"Ah, I forgot I had not told you. I am getting into your involved habit, Watson, of telling a story backward. You had best read this first."

The letter which he handed to me, written in a bold, masterful hand, ran as follows:

CLARIDGE'S HOTEL,

October 3rd.

DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES:

I can't see the best woman God ever made go to her death without doing all that is possible to save her. I can't explain things -- I can't even try to explain them, but I know beyond all doubt that Miss Dunbar is innocent. You know the facts -- who doesn't? It has been the gossip of the country. And never a voice raised for her! It's the damned injustice of it all that makes me crazy. That woman has a heart that wouldn't let her kill a fly. Well, I'll come at eleven to-morrow and see if you can get some ray of light in the dark. Maybe I have a clue and don't know it. Anyhow, all I know and all I have and all I am are for your use if only you can save her. If ever in your life you showed your powers, put them now into this case.

Yours faithfully,

J. NEIL GIBSON.

"There you have it," said Sherlock Holmes, knocking out the ashes of his after-breakfast pipe and slowly refilling it. "That is the gentleman I await. As to the story, you have hardly time to master all these papers, so I must give it to you in a nutshell if you are to take an intelligent interest in the proceedings. This man is the greatest financial power in the world, and a man, as I understand, of most violent and formidable character. He married a
wife, the victim of this tragedy, of whom I know nothing save that she was past her prime, which was the more unfortunate as a very attractive governess superintended the education of two young children. These are the three people concerned, and the scene is a grand old manor house, the centre of a historical English state. Then as to the tragedy. The wife was found in the grounds nearly half a mile from the house, late at night, clad in her dinner dress, with a shawl over her shoulders and a revolver bullet through her brain. No weapon was found near her and there was no local clue as to the murder. No weapon near her, Watson -- mark that! The crime seems to have been committed late in the evening, and the body was found by a gamekeeper about eleven o'clock, when it was examined by the police and by a doctor before being carried up to the house. Is this too condensed, or can you follow it clearly?"

"It is all very clear. But why suspect the governess?"

"Well, in the first place there is some very direct evidence. A revolver with one discharged chamber and a calibre which corresponded with the bullet was found on the floor of her wardrobe." His eyes fixed and he repeated in broken words, "On -- the -- floor -- of -- her -- wardrobe." Then he sank into silence, and I saw that some train of thought had been set moving which I should be foolish to interrupt. Suddenly with a start he emerged into brisk life once more. "Yes, Watson, it was found. Pretty damning, eh? So the two juries thought. Then the dead woman had a note upon her making an appointment at that very place and signed by the governess. How's that? Finally there is the motive. Senator Gibson is an attractive person. If his wife dies, who more likely to succeed her than the young lady who had already by all accounts received pressing attentions from her employer? Love, fortune, power, all depending upon one middleaged life. Ugly, Watson -- very ugly!"

"Yes, indeed, Holmes."

"Nor could she prove an alibi. On the contrary, she had to admit that she was down near Thor Bridge -- that was the scene of the tragedy -- about that hour. She couldn't deny it, for some passing villager had seen her there."

"That really seems final."

"And yet, Watson -- and yet! This bridge -- a single broad span of stone with balustraded sides -- carries the drive over the narrowest part of a long, deep, reed-girt sheet of water. Thor Mere it is called. In the mouth of the bridge lay the dead woman. Such are the main facts. But here, if I mistake not, is our client, considerably before his time."

Billy had opened the door, but the name which he announced was an unexpected one. Mr. Marlow Bates was a stranger to both of us. He was a thin, nervous wisp of a man with frightened eyes and a twitching, hesitating manner -- a man whom my own professional eye would judge to be on the brink of an absolute nervous breakdown.

"You seem agitated, Mr. Bates," said Holmes. "Pray sit down. I fear I can only give you a short time, for I have an appointment at eleven."

"I know you have," our visitor gasped, shooting out short sentences like a man who is out of breath. "Mr. Gibson is coming. Mr. Gibson is my employer. I am manager of his estate. Mr. Holmes, he is a villain -- an infernal villain."

"Strong language, Mr. Bates."

"I have to be emphatic, Mr. Holmes, for the time is so limited. I would not have him find me here for the world. He is almost due now. But I was so situated that I could not come earlier. His secretary, Mr. Ferguson, only told me this morning of his appointment with you."

"And you are his manager?"

"I have given him notice. In a couple of weeks I shall have shaken off his accursed slavery. A hard man, Mr. Holmes, hard to all about him. Those public charities are a screen to cover his private iniquities. But his wife was his chief victim. He was brutal to her -- yes, sir, brutal! How she came by her death I do not know, but I am sure that he had made her life a misery to her. She was a creature of the tropics, a Brazilian by birth, as no doubt you know."

"No, it had escaped me."

"Tropical by birth and tropical by nature. A child of the sun and of passion. She had loved him as such women can love, but when her own physical charms had faded -- I am told that they once were great -- there was nothing to hold him. We all liked her and felt for her and hated him for the way that he treated her. But he is plausible and cunning. That is all I have to say to you. Don't take him at his face value. There is more behind. Now I'll go. No, no, don't detain me! He is almost due."

With a frightened look at the clock our strange visitor literally ran to the door and disappeared.

"Well! Well!" said Holmes after an interval of silence. "Mr. Gibson seems to have a nice loyal household. But the warning is a useful one, and now we can only wait till the man himself appears."

Sharp at the hour we heard a heavy step upon the stairs, and the famous millionaire was shown into the room. As I looked upon him I understood not only the fears and dislike of his manager but also the execrations which so many business rivals have heaped upon his head. If I were a sculptor and desired to idealize the successful man of affairs, iron of nerve and leathery of conscience, I should choose Mr. Neil Gibson as my model. His tall, gaunt, craggy
figure had a suggestion of hunger and rapacity. An Abraham Lincoln keyed to base uses instead of high ones would
give some idea of the man. His face might have been chiselled in granite, hard-set, craggy, remorseless, with deep
lines upon it, the scars of many a crisis. Cold gray eyes, looking shrewdly out from under bristling brows, surveyed
us each in turn. He bowed in perfunctory fashion as Holmes mentioned my name, and then with a masterful air of
possession he drew a chair up to my companion and seated himself with his bony knees almost touching him.

"Let me say right here, Mr. Holmes," he began, "that money is nothing to me in this case. You can burn it if it's
any use in lighting you to the truth. This woman is innocent and this woman has to be cleared, and it's up to you to
do it. Name your figure!"

"My professional charges are upon a fixed scale," said Holmes coldly. "I do not vary them, save when I remit
them altogether."

"Well, if dollars make no difference to you, think of the reputation. If you pull this off every paper in England
and America will be booming you. You'll be the talk of two continents."

"Thank you, Mr. Gibson, I do not think that I am in need of booming. It may surprise you to know that I prefer
to work anonymously, and that it is the problem itself which attracts me. But we are wasting time. Let us get down
to the facts."

"I think that you will find all the main ones in the press reports. I don't know that I can add anything which will
help you. But if there is anything you would wish more light upon -well, I am here to give it."

"Well, there is just one point."
"What is it?"
"What were the exact relations between you and Miss Dunbar?"

The Gold King gave a violent start and half rose from his chair. Then his massive calm came back to him.

"I suppose you are within your rights -- and maybe doing your duty -- in asking such a question, Mr. Holmes."

"We will agree to suppose so," said Holmes.

"Then I can assure you that our relations were entirely and always those of an employer towards a young lady
whom he never conversed with, or ever saw, save when she was in the company of his children."

Holmes rose from his chair.

"I am a rather busy man, Mr. Gibson," said he, "and I have no time or taste for aimless conversations. I wish you
goodmorning."

Our visitor had risen also, and his great loose figure towered above Holmes. There was an angry gleam from
under those bristling brows and a tinge of colour in the sallow cheeks.

"What the devil do you mean by this, Mr. Holmes? Do you dismiss my case?"

"Well, Mr. Gibson, at least I dismiss you. I should have thought my words were plain."

"Plain enough, but what's at the back of it? Raising the price on me, or afraid to tackle it, or what? I've a right to
a plain answer."

"Well, perhaps you have," said Holmes. "I'll give you one. This case is quite sufficiently complicated to start
with without the further difficulty of false information."

"Meaning that I lie."

"Well, I was trying to express it as delicately as I could, but if you insist upon the word I will not contradict
you."

I sprang to my feet, for the expression upon the millionaire's face was fiendish in its intensity, and he had raised
his great knotted fist. Holmes smiled languidly and reached his hand out for his pipe.

"Don't be noisy, Mr. Gibson. I find that after breakfast even the smallest argument is unsettling. I suggest that a
stroll in the morning air and a little quiet thought will be greatly to your advantage."

With an effort the Gold King mastered his fury. I could not but admire him, for by a supreme self-command he
had turned in a minute from a hot flame of anger to a frigid and contemptuous indifference.

"Well, it's your choice. I guess you know how to run your own business. I can't make you touch the case against
your will. You've done yourself no good this morning, Mr. Holmes, for I have broken stronger men than you. No
man ever crossed me and was the better for it."

"So many have said so, and yet here I am," said Holmes, smiling. "Well, good-morning, Mr. Gibson. You have a
good deal yet to learn."

Our visitor made a noisy exit, but Holmes smoked in imperturbable silence with dreamy eyes fixed upon the
ceiling.

"Any views, Watson?" he asked at last.

"Well, Holmes, I must confess that when I consider that this is a man who would certainly brush any obstacle
from his path, and when I remember that his wife may have been an obstacle and an object of dislike, as that man
Bates plainly told us, it seems to me --"
"Exactly. And to me also."

"But what were his relations with the governess, and how did you discover them?"

"Bluff, Watson, bluff! When I considered the passionate, unconventional, unbusinesslike tone of his letter and contrasted it with his self-contained manner and appearance, it was pretty clear that there was some deep emotion which centred upon the accused woman rather than upon the victim. We've got to understand the exact relations of those three people if we are to reach the truth. You saw the frontal attack which I made upon him, and how imperturbably he received it. Then I bluffed him by giving him the impression that I was absolutely certain, when in reality I was only extremely suspicious."

"Perhaps he will come back?"

"He is sure to come back. He must come back. He can't leave it where it is. Ha! isn't that a ring? Yes, there is his footstep. Well, Mr. Gibson, I was just saying to Dr. Watson that you were somewhat overdue."

The Gold King had reentered the room in a more chastened mood than he had left it. His wounded pride still showed in his resentful eyes, but his common sense had shown him that he must yield if he would attain his end.

"I've been thinking it over, Mr. Holmes, and I feel that I have been hasty in taking your remarks amiss. You are justified in getting down to the facts, whatever they may be, and I think the more of you for it. I can assure you, however, that the relations between Miss Dunbar and me don't really touch this case."

"That is for me to decide, is it not?"

"Yes, I guess that is so. You're like a surgeon who wants every symptom before he can give his diagnosis."

"Exactly. That expresses it. And it is only a patient who has an object in deceiving his surgeon who would conceal the facts of his case."

"That may be so, but you will admit, Mr. Holmes, that most men would shy off a bit when they are asked point-blank what their relations with a woman may be -- if there is really some serious feeling in the case. I guess most men have a little private reserve of their own in some corner of their souls where they don't welcome intruders. And you burst suddenly into it. But the object excuses you, since it was to try and save her. Well, the stakes are down and the reserve open, and you can explore where you will. What is it you want?"

"The truth."

The Gold King paused for a moment as one who marshals his thoughts. His grim, deep-lined face had become even sadder and more grave.

"I can give it to you in a very few words, Mr. Holmes," said he at last. "There are some things that are painful as well as difficult to say, so I won't go deeper than is needful. I met my wife when I was gold-hunting in Brazil. Maria Pinto was the daughter of a government official at Manaos, and she was very beautiful. I was young and ardent in those days, but even now, as I look back with colder blood and a more critical eye, I can see that she was rare and wonderful in her beauty. It was a deep rich nature, too, passionate, whole-hearted, tropical, ill-balanced, very different from the American women whom I had known. Well, to make a long story short, I loved her and I married her. It was only when the romance had passed -- and it lingered for years -- that I realized that we had nothing -- absolutely nothing -- in common. My love faded. If hers had faded also it might have been easier. But you know the wonderful way of women! Do what I might, nothing could turn her from me. If I have been harsh to her, even brutal as some have said, it has been because I knew that if I could kill her love, or if it turned to hate, it would be easier for both of us. But nothing changed her. She adored me in those English woods as she had adored me twenty years ago on the banks of the Amazon. Do what I might, she was as devoted as ever.

"Then came Miss Grace Dunbar. She answered our advertisement and became governess to our two children. Perhaps you have seen her portrait in the papers. The whole world has proclaimed that she also is a very beautiful woman. Now, I make no pretence to be more moral than my neighbours, and I will admit to you that I could not live under the same roof with such a woman and in daily contact with her without feeling a passionate regard for her. Do you blame me, Mr. Holmes?"

"I do not blame you for feeling it. I should blame you if you expressed it, since this young lady was in a sense under your protection."

"Well, maybe so," said the millionaire, though for a moment the reproach had brought the old angry gleam into his eyes. "I'm not pretending to be any better than I am. I guess all my life I've been a man that reached out his hand for what he wanted, and I never wanted anything more than the love and possession of that woman. I told her so."

"Oh, you did, did you?"

Holmes could look very formidable when he was moved.

"I said to her that if I could marry her I would, but that it was out of my power. I said that money was no object and that all I could do to make her happy and comfortable would be done."

"Very generous, I am sure," said Holmes with a sneer.

"See here, Mr. Holmes. I came to you on a question of evidence, not on a question of morals. I'm not asking for
"It is only for the young lady's sake that I touch your case at all," said Holmes sternly. "I don't know that anything she is accused of is really worse than what you have yourself admitted, that you have tried to ruin a defenceless girl who was under your roof. Some of you rich men have to be taught that all the world cannot be bribed into condoning your offences."

To my surprise the Gold King took the reproof with equanimity.

"That's how I feel myself about it now. I thank God that my plans did not work out as I intended. She would have none of it, and she wanted to leave the house instantly."

"Why did she not?"

"Well, in the first place, others were dependent upon her, and it was no light matter for her to let them all down by sacrificing her living. When I had sworn -- as I did -- that she should never be molested again, she consented to remain. But there was another reason. She knew the influence she had over me, and that it was stronger than any other influence in the world. She wanted to use it for good."

"How?"

"Well, she knew something of my affairs. They are large, Mr. Holmes -- large beyond the belief of an ordinary man. I can make or break -- and it is usually break. It wasn't individuals only. It was communities, cities, even nations. Business is a hard game, and the weak go to the wall. I played the game for all it was worth. I never squealed myself, and I never cared if the other fellow squealed. But she saw it different. I guess she was right. She believed and said that a fortune for one man that was more than he needed should not be built on ten thousand ruined men who were left without the means of life. That was how she saw it, and I guess she could see past the dollars to something that was more lasting. She found that I listened to what she said, and she believed she was serving the world by influencing my actions. So she stayed -- and then this came along."

"Can you throw any light upon that?"

The Gold King paused for a minute or more, his head sunk in his hands, lost in deep thought.

"It's very black against her. I can't deny that. And women lead an inward life and may do things beyond the judgment of a man. At first I was so rattled and taken aback that I was ready to think she had been led away in some extraordinary fashion that was clean against her usual nature. One explanation came into my head. I give it to you, Mr. Holmes, for what it is worth. There is no doubt that my wife was bitterly jealous. There is a soul-jealousy that can be as frantic as any body-jealousy, and though my wife had no cause -- and I think she understood this -- for the latter, she was aware that this English girl exerted an influence upon my mind and my acts that she herself never had. It was an influence for good, but that did not mend the matter. She was crazy with hatred and the heat of the Amazon was always in her blood. She might have planned to murder Miss Dunbar -- or we will say to threaten her with a gun and so frighten her into leaving us. Then there might have been a scuffle and the gun gone off and shot the woman who held it."

"That possibility had already occurred to me," said Holmes. "Indeed, it is the only obvious alternative to deliberate murder."

"But she utterly denies it."

"Well, that is not final -- is it? One can understand that a woman placed in so awful a position might hurry home still in her bewilderment holding the revolver. She might even throw it down among her clothes, hardly knowing what she was doing, and when it was found she might try to lie her way out by a total denial, since all explanation was impossible. What is against such a supposition?"

"Miss Dunbar herself."

"Well, perhaps."

Holmes looked at his watch. "I have no doubt we can get the necessary permits this morning and reach Winchester by the evening train. When I have seen this young lady it is very possible that I may be of more use to you in the matter, though I cannot promise that my conclusions will necessarily be such as you desire."

There was some delay in the official pass, and instead of reaching Winchester that day we went down to Thor Place, the Hampshire estate of Mr. Neil Gibson. He did not accompany us himself, but we had the address of Sergeant Coventry, of the local police, who had first examined into the affair. He was a tall, thin, cadaverous man, with a secretive and mysterious manner which conveyed the idea that he knew or suspected a very great deal more than he dared say. He had a trick, too, of suddenly sinking his voice to a whisper as if he had come upon something of vital importance, though the information was usually commonplace enough. Behind these tricks of manner he soon showed himself to be a decent, honest fellow who was not too proud to admit that he was out of his depth and would welcome any help.

"Anyhow, I'd rather have you than Scotland Yard, Mr. Holmes," said he. "If the Yard gets called into a case, then the local loses all credit for success and may be blamed for failure. Now, you play straight, so I've heard."
"I need not appear in the matter at all," said Holmes to the evident relief of our melancholy acquaintance. "If I can clear it up I don't ask to have my name mentioned."

"Well, it's very handsome of you, I am sure. And your friend, Dr. Watson, can be trusted, I know. Now, Mr. Holmes, as we walk down to the place there is one question I should like to ask you. I'd breathe it to no soul but you." He looked round as though he hardly dare utter the words. "Don't you think there might be a case against Mr. Neil Gibson himself?"

"I have been considering that."

"You've not seen Miss Dunbar. She is a wonderful fine woman in every way. He may well have wished his wife out of the road. And these Americans are readier with pistols than our folk are. It was his pistol, you know."

"Was that clearly made out?"

"Yes, sir. It was one of a pair that he had."

"One of a pair? Where is the other?"

"Well, the gentleman has a lot of firearms of one sort and another. We never quite matched that particular pistol but the box was made for two.

"If it was one of a pair you should surely be able to match it."

"Well, we have them all laid out at the house if you would care to look them over."

"Later, perhaps. I think we will walk down together and have a look at the scene of the tragedy."

This conversation had taken place in the little front room of Sergeant Coventry's humble cottage which served as the local police-station. A walk of half a mile or so across a wind-swept heath, all gold and bronze with the fading ferns, brought us to a side-gate opening into the grounds of the Thor Place estate. A path led us through the pheasant preserves, and then from a clearing we saw the widespread, half-timbered house, half Tudor and half Georgian, upon the crest of the hill. Beside us there was a long, reedy pool, constricted in the centre where the main carriage drive passed over a stone bridge, but swelling into small lakes on either side. Our guide paused at the mouth of this bridge, and he pointed to the ground.

"That was where Mrs. Gibson's body lay. I marked it by that stone."

"I understand that you were there before it was moved?"

"Yes, they sent for me at once."

"Who did?"

"Mr. Gibson himself. The moment the alarm was given and he had rushed down with others from the house, he insisted that nothing should be moved until the police should arrive."

"That was sensible. I gathered from the newspaper report that the shot was fired from close quarters."

"Yes, sir, very close."

"Near the right temple?"

"Just behind it, sir."

"How did the body lie?"

"On the back, sir. No trace of a struggle. No marks. No weapon. The short note from Miss Dunbar was clutched in her left hand."

"Clutched, you say?"

"Yes, sir, we could hardly open the fingers."

"That is of great importance. It excludes the idea that anyone could have placed the note there after death in order to furnish a false clue. Dear me! The note, as I remember, was quite short:

"I will be at Thor Bridge at nine o'clock."

"G. DUNBAR."

"Was that not so?"

"Yes, sir."

"Did Miss Dunbar admit writing it?"

"Yes, sir."

"What was her explanation?"

"Her defence was reserved for the Assizes. She would say nothing."

"The problem is certainly a very interesting one. The point of the letter is very obscure, is it not?"

"Well, sir," said the guide, "it seemed, if I may be so bold as to say so, the only really clear point in the whole case."

Holmes shook his head.

"Granting that the letter is genuine and was really written, it was certainly received some time before -- say one hour or two. Why, then, was this lady still clapping it in her left hand? Why should she carry it so carefully? She did not need to refer to it in the interview. Does it not seem remarkable?"
"Well, sir, as you put it, perhaps it does."
"I think I should like to sit quietly for a few minutes and think it out." He seated himself upon the stone ledge of the bridge, and I could see his quick gray eyes darting their questioning glances in every direction. Suddenly he sprang up again and ran across to the opposite parapet, whipped his lens from his pocket, and began to examine the stonework.

"This is curious," said he.
"Yes, sir, we saw the chip on the ledge. I expect it's been done by some passer-by."

The stonework was gray, but at this one point it showed white for a space not larger than a sixpence. When examined closely one could see that the surface was chipped as by a sharp blow.

"It took some violence to do that," said Holmes thoughtfully. With his cane he struck the ledge several times without leaving a mark. "Yes, it was a hard knock. In a curious place, too. It was not from above but from below, for you see that it is on the lower edge of the parapet."

"But it is at least fifteen feet from the body."
"Yes, it is fifteen feet from the body. It may have nothing to do with the matter, but it is a point worth noting. I do not think that we have anything more to learn here. There were no footsteps, you say?"

"The ground was iron hard, sir. There were no traces at all."

"Then we can go. We will go up to the house first and look over these weapons of which you speak. Then we shall get on to Winchester, for I should desire to see Miss Dunbar before we go farther."

Mr. Neil Gibson had not returned from town, but we saw in the house the neurotic Mr. Bates who had called upon us in the morning. He showed us with a sinister relish the formidable array of firearms of various shapes and sizes which his employer had accumulated in the course of an adventurous life.

"Mr. Gibson has his enemies, as anyone would expect who knew him and his methods," said he. "He sleeps with a loaded revolver in the drawer beside his bed. He is a man of violence, sir, and there are times when all of us are afraid of him. I am sure that the poor lady who has passed was often terrified."

"Did you ever witness physical violence towards her?"
"No, I cannot say that. But I have heard words which were nearly as bad -- words of cold, cutting contempt, even before the servants."

"Our millionaire does not seem to shine in private life," remarked Holmes as we made our way to the station. "Well, Watson, we have come on a good many facts, some of them new ones, and yet I seem some way from my conclusion. In spite of the very evident dislike which Mr. Bates has to his employer, I gather from him that when the alarm came he was undoubtedly in his library. Dinner was over at 8:30 and all was normal up to then. It is true that the alarm was somewhat late in the evening, but the tragedy certainly occurred about the hour named in the note. There is no evidence at all that Mr. Gibson had been out of doors since his return from town at five o'clock. On the other hand, Miss Dunbar, as I understand it, admits that she had made an appointment to meet Mrs. Gibson at the bridge. Beyond this she would say nothing, as her lawyer had advised her to reserve her defence. We have several very vital questions to ask that young lady, and my mind will not be easy until we have seen her. I must confess that the case would seem to me to be very black against her if it were not for one thing."

"And what is that, Holmes?"

"The finding of the pistol in her wardrobe."

"Dear me, Holmes!" I cried, "that seemed to me to be the most damning incident of all."

"Not so, Watson. It had struck me even at my first perfunctory reading as very strange, and now that I am in closer touch with the case it is my only firm ground for hope. We must look for consistency. Where there is a want of it we must suspect deception."

"I hardly follow you."

"Well now, Watson, suppose for a moment that we visualize you in the character of a woman who, in a cold, premeditated fashion, is about to get rid of a rival. You have planned it. A note has been written. The victim has come. You have your weapon. The crime is done. It has been workmanlike and complete. Do you tell me that after carrying out so crafty a crime you would now ruin your reputation as a criminal by forgetting to fling your weapon into those adjacent reed-beds which would forever cover it, but you must needs carry it carefully home and put it in your own wardrobe, the very first place that would be searched? Your best friends would hardly call you a schemer, Watson, and yet I could not picture you doing anything so crude as that."

"In the excitement of the moment"

"No, no, Watson, I will not admit that it is possible. Where a crime is coolly premeditated, then the means of covering it are coolly premeditated also. I hope, therefore, that we are in the presence of a serious misconception."

"But there is so much to explain."

"Well, we shall set about explaining it. When once your point of view is changed, the very thing which was so
damning becomes a clue to the truth. For example, there is this revolver. Miss Dunbar disclaims all knowledge of it. On our new theory she is speaking truth when she says so. Therefore, it was placed in her wardrobe. Who placed it there? Someone who wished to incriminate her. Was not that person the actual criminal? You see how we come at once upon a most fruitful line of inquiry."

We were compelled to spend the night at Winchester, as the formalities had not yet been completed, but next morning, in the company of Mr. Joyce Cummings, the rising barrister who was entrusted with the defence, we were allowed to see the young lady in her cell. I had expected from all that we had heard to see a beautiful woman, but I can never forget the effect which Miss Dunbar produced upon me. It was no wonder that even the masterful millionaire had found in her something so powerful than himself -- something which could control and guide him. One felt, too, as one looked at the strong, clear-cut, and yet sensitive face, that even should she be capable of some impetuous deed, none the less there was an innate nobility of character which would make her influence always for the good. She was a brunette, tall, with a noble figure and commanding presence, but her dark eyes had in them the appealing, helpless expression of the hunted creature who feels the nets around it, but can see no way out from the toils. Now, as she realized the presence and the help of my famous friend, there came a touch of colour in her wan cheeks and a light of hope began to glimmer in the glance which she turned upon us.

"Perhaps Mr. Neil Gibson has told you something of what occurred between us?" she asked in a low, agitated voice.

"Yes," Holmes answered, "you need not pain yourself by entering into that part of the story. After seeing you, I am prepared to accept Mr. Gibson's statement both as to the influence which you had over him and as to the innocence of your relations with him. But why was the whole situation not brought out in court?"

"It seemed to me incredible that such a charge could be sustained. I thought that if we waited the whole thing must clear itself up without our being compelled to enter into painful details of the inner life of the family. But I understand that far from clearing it has become even more serious."

"My dear young lady," cried Holmes earnestly, "I beg you to have no illusions upon the point. Mr. Cummings here would assure you that all the cards are at present against us, and that we must do everything that is possible if we are to win clear. It would be a cruel deception to pretend that you are not in very great danger. Give me all the help you can, then, to get at the truth."

"I will conceal nothing."

"Tell us, then, of your true relations with Mr. Gibson's wife."

"She hated me, Mr. Holmes. She hated me with all the fervour of her tropical nature. She was a woman who would do nothing by halves, and the measure of her love for her husband was the measure also of her hatred for me. It is probable that she misunderstood our relations. I would not wish to wrong her, but she loved so vividly in a physical sense that she could hardly understand the mental, and even spiritual, tie which held her husband to me, or imagine that it was only my desire to influence his power to good ends which kept me under his roof. I can see now that I was wrong. Nothing could justify me in remaining where I was a cause of unhappiness, and yet it is certain that the unhappiness would have remained even if I had left the house."

"Now, Miss Dunbar," said Holmes, "I beg you to tell us exactly what occurred that evening."

"I can tell you the truth so far as I know it, Mr. Holmes, but I am in a position to prove nothing, and there are points -- the most vital points -- which I can neither explain nor can I imagine any explanation."

"If you will find the facts, perhaps others may find the explanation."

"With regard, then, to my presence at Thor Bridge that night, I received a note from Mrs. Gibson in the morning. It lay on the table of the schoolroom, and it may have been left there by her own hand. It implored me to see her there after dinner, said she had something important to say to me, and asked me to leave an answer on the sundial in the garden, as she desired no one to be in our confidence. I saw no reason for such secrecy, but I did as she asked, accepting the appointment. She asked me to destroy her note and I burned it in the schoolroom grate. She was very much afraid of her husband, who treated her with a harshness for which I frequently reproached him, and I could only imagine that she acted in this way because she did not wish him to know of our interview."

"Yet she kept your reply very carefully?"

"Yes. I was surprised to hear that she had it in her hand when she died."

"Well, what happened then?"

"I went down as I had promised. When I reached the bridge she was waiting for me. Never did I realize till that moment how this poor creature hated me. She was like a mad woman -- indeed, I think she was a mad woman, subtly mad with the deep power of deception which insane people may have. How else could she have met me with unconcern every day and yet had so raging a hatred of me in her heart? I will not say what she said. She poured her whole wild fury out in burning and horrible words. I did not even answer -- I could not. It was dreadful to see her. I put my hands to my ears and rushed away. When I left her she was standing, still shrieking out her curses at me, in
the mouth of the bridge."

"Where she was afterwards found?"
"Within a few yards from the spot."

"And yet, presuming that she met her death shortly after you left her, you heard no shot?"

"No, I heard nothing. But, indeed, Mr. Holmes, I was so agitated and horrified by this terrible outbreak that I rushed to get back to the peace of my own room, and I was incapable of noticing anything which happened."

"You say that you returned to your room. Did you leave it again before next morning?"

"Yes, when the alarm came that the poor creature had met her death I ran out with the others."

"Did you see Mr. Gibson?"

"Yes, he had just returned from the bridge when I saw him. He had sent for the doctor and the police."

"Did he seem to you much perturbed?"

"Mr. Gibson is a very strong, self-contained man. I do not think that he would ever show his emotions on the surface. But I, who knew him so well, could see that he was deeply concerned."

"Then we come to the all-important point. This pistol that was found in your room. Had you ever seen it before?"

"Never, I swear it."

"When was it found?"

"Next morning, when the police made their search."

"Among your clothes?"

"Yes, on the floor of my wardrobe under my dresses."

"You could not guess how long it had been there?"

"It had not been there the morning before."

"How do you know?"

"Because I tidied out the wardrobe."

"That is final. Then someone came into your room and placed the pistol there in order to inculpate you."

"It must have been so."

"And when?"

"It could only have been at meal-time, or else at the hours when I would be in the schoolroom with the children."

"As you were when you got the note?"

"Yes, from that time onward for the whole morning."

"Thank you, Miss Dunbar. Is there any other point which could help me in the investigation?"

"I can think of none."

"There was some sign of violence on the stonework of the bridge -- a perfectly fresh chip just opposite the body. Could you suggest any possible explanation of that?"

"Surely it must be a mere coincidence."

"Curious, Miss Dunbar, very curious. Why should it appear at the very time of the tragedy, and why at the very place?"

"But what could have caused it? Only great violence could have such an effect."

Holmes did not answer. His pale, eager face had suddenly assumed that tense, far-away expression which I had learned to associate with the supreme manifestations of his genius. So evident was the crisis in his mind that none of us dared to speak, and we sat, barrister, prisoner, and myself, watching him in a concentrated and absorbed silence. Suddenly he sprang from his chair, vibrating with nervous energy and the pressing need for action.

"Come, Watson, come!" he cried.

"What is it, Mr. Holmes?"

"Never mind, my dear lady. You will hear from me, Mr. Cummings. With the help of the god of justice I will give you a case which will make England ring. You will get news by to-morrow, Miss Dunbar, and meanwhile take my assurance that the clouds are lifting and that I have every hope that the light of truth is breaking through."

It was not a long journey from Winchester to Thor Place, but it was long to me in my impatience, while for Holmes it was evident that it seemed endless; for, in his nervous restlessness he could not sit still, but paced the carriage or drummed with his long, sensitive fingers upon the cushions beside him. Suddenly, however, as we neared our destination he seated himself opposite to me -- we had a first-class carriage to ourselves -- and laying a hand upon each of my knees he looked into my eyes with the peculiarly mischievous gaze which was characteristic of his more imp-like moods.

"Watson," said he, "I have some recollection that you go armed upon these excursions of ours."

It was as well for him that I did so, for he took little care for his own safety when his mind was once absorbed by a problem so that more than once my revolver had been a good friend in need. I reminded him of the fact.

"Yes, yes, I am a little absent-minded in such matters. But have you your revolver on you?"
I produced it from my hip-pocket, a short, handy, but very serviceable little weapon. He undid the catch, shook out the cartridges, and examined it with care.

"It's heavy -- remarkably heavy," said he.

"Yes, it is a solid bit of work."

He mused over it for a minute.

"Do you know, Watson," said he, "I believe your revolver is going to have a very intimate connection with the mystery which we are investigating."

"My dear Holmes, you are joking."

"No, Watson, I am very serious. There is a test before us. If the test comes off, all will be clear. And the test will depend upon the conduct of this little weapon. One cartridge out. Now we will replace the other five and put on the safety-catch. So! That increases the weight and makes it a better reproduction."

I had no glimmer of what was in his mind, nor did he enlighten me, but sat lost in thought until we pulled up in the little Hampshire station. We secured a ramshackle trap, and in a quarter of an hour were at the house of our confidential friend, the sergeant.

"A clue, Mr. Holmes? What is it?"

"It all depends upon the behaviour of Dr. Watson's revolver," said my friend. "Here it is. Now, officer, can you give me ten yards of string?"

The village shop provided a ball of stout twine.

"I think that this is all we will need," said Holmes. "Now, if you please, we will get off on what I hope is the last stage of our journey."

The sun was setting and turning the rolling Hampshire moor into a wonderful autumnal panorama. The sergeant, with many critical and incredulous glances, which showed his deep doubts of the sanity of my companion, lurched along beside us. As we approached the scene of the crime I could see that my friend under all his habitual coolness was in truth deeply agitated.

"Yes," he said in answer to my remark, "you have seen me miss my mark before, Watson. I have an instinct for such things, and yet it has sometimes played me false. It seemed a certainty when first it flashed across my mind in the cell at Winchester, but one drawback of an active mind is that one can always conceive alternative explanations which would make our scent a false one. And yet -- and yet -- Well, Watson, we can but try."

As he walked he had firmly tied one end of the string to the handle of the revolver. We had now reached the scene of the tragedy. With great care he marked out under the guidance of the policeman the exact spot where the body had been stretched. He then hunted among the heather and the ferns until he found a considerable stone. This he secured to the other end of his line of string, and he hung it over the parapet of the bridge so that it swung clear above the water. He then stood on the fatal spot, some distance from the edge of the bridge, with my revolver in his hand, the string being taut between the weapon and the heavy stone on the farther side.

"Now for it!" he cried.

At the words he raised the pistol to his head, and then let go his grip. In an instant it had been whisked away by the weight of the stone, had struck with a sharp crack against the parapet, and had vanished over the side into the water. It had hardly gone before Holmes was kneeling beside the stonework, and a joyous cry showed that he had found what he expected.

"Was there ever a more exact demonstration?" he cried. "See, Watson, your revolver has solved the problem!"

As he spoke he pointed to a second chip of the exact size and shape of the first which had appeared on the under edge of the stone balustrade.

"We'll stay at the inn to-night," he continued as he rose and faced the astonished sergeant. "You will, of course, get a grappling-hook and you will easily restore my friend's revolver. You will also find beside it the revolver, string and weight with which this vindictive woman attempted to disguise her own crime and to fasten a charge of murder upon an innocent victim. You can let Mr. Gibson know that I will see him in the morning, when steps can be taken for Miss Dunbar's vindication."

Late that evening, as we sat together smoking our pipes in the village inn, Holmes gave me a brief review of what had passed.

"I fear, Watson," said he, "that you will not improve any reputation which I may have acquired by adding the case of the Thor Bridge mystery to your annals. I have been sluggish in mind and wanting in that mixture of imagination and reality which is the basis of my art. I confess that the chip in the stonework was a sufficient clue to suggest the true solution, and that I blame myself for not having attained it sooner.

"It must be admitted that the workings of this unhappy woman's mind were deep and subtle, so that it was no very simple matter to unravel her plot. I do not think that in our adventures we have ever come across a stranger example of what perverted love can bring about. Whether Miss Dunbar was her rival in a physical or in a merely
mental sense seems to have been equally unforgivable in her eyes. No doubt she blamed this innocent lady for all those harsh dealings and unkind words with which her husband tried to repel her too demonstrative affection. Her first resolution was to end her own life. Her second was to do it in such a way as to involve her victim in a fate which was worse far than any sudden death could be.

"We can follow the various steps quite clearly, and they show a remarkable subtlety of mind. A note was extracted very cleverly from Miss Dunbar which would make it appear that she had chosen the scene of the crime. In her anxiety that it should be discovered she somewhat overdid it by holding it in her hand to the last. This alone should have excited my suspicions earlier than it did.

"Then she took one of her husband's revolvers -- there was, as you saw, an arsenal in the house -- and kept it for her own use. A similar one she concealed that morning in Miss Dunbar's wardrobe after discharging one barrel, which she could easily do in the woods without attracting attention. She then went down to the bridge where she had contrived this exceedingly ingenious method for getting rid of her weapon. When Miss Dunbar appeared she used her last breath in pouring out her hatred, and then, when she was out of hearing, carried out her terrible purpose. Every link is now in its place and the chain is complete. The papers may ask why the mere was not dragged in the first instance, but it is easy to be wise after the event, and in any case the expanse of a reed-filled lake is no easy matter to drag unless you have a clear perception of what you are looking for and where. Well, Watson, we have helped a remarkable woman, and also a formidable man. Should they in the future join their forces, as seems not unlikely, the financial world may find that Mr. Neil Gibson has learned something in that schoolroom of sorrow where our earthly lessons are taught."

The Adventure of the Creeping Man

Mr. Sherlock Holmes was always of opinion that I should publish the singular facts connected with Professor Presbury, if only to dispel once for all the ugly rumours which some twenty years ago agitated the university and were echoed in the learned societies of London. There were, however, certain obstacles in the way, and the true history of this curious case remained entombed in the tin box which contains so many records of my friend's adventures. Now we have at last obtained permission to ventilate the facts which formed one of the very last cases handled by Holmes before his retirement from practice. Even now a certain reticence and discretion have to be observed in laying the matter before the public.

It was one Sunday evening early in September of the year 1903 that I received one of Holmes's laconic messages:

Come at once if convenient -- if inconvenient come all the same. S. H.

The relations between us in those latter days were peculiar. He was a man of habits, narrow and concentrated habits, and I had become one of them. As an institution I was like the violin, the shag tobacco, the old black pipe, the index books, and others perhaps less excusable. When it was a case of active work and a comrade was needed upon whose nerve he could place some reliance, my role was obvious. But apart from this I had uses. I was a whetstone for his mind. I stimulated him. He liked to think aloud in my presence. His remarks could hardly be said to be made to me -- many of them would have been as appropriately addressed to his bedstead -- but none the less, having formed the habit, it had become in some way helpful that I should register and interject. If I irritated him by a certain methodical slowness in my mentality, that irritation served only to make his own flame-like intuitions and impressions flash up the more vividly and swiftly. Such was my humble role in our alliance.

When I arrived at Baker Street I found him huddled up in his armchair with updrawn knees, his pipe in his mouth and his brow furrowed with thought. It was clear that he was in the throes of some vexatious problem. With a wave of his hand he indicated my old armchair, but otherwise for half an hour he gave no sign that he was aware of my presence. Then with a start he seemed to come from his reverie, and with his usual whimsical smile he greeted me back to what had once been my home.

"You will excuse a certain abstraction of mind, my dear Watson," said he. "Some curious facts have been submitted to me within the last twenty-four hours, and they in turn have given rise to some speculations of a more general character. I have serious thoughts of writing a small monograph upon the uses of dogs in the work of the detective."

"But surely, Holmes, this has been explored," said I. "Bloodhounds -- sleuth-hounds --"

"No, no, Watson, that side of the matter is, of course, obvious. But there is another which is far more subtle. You may recollect that in the case which you, in your sensational way, coupled with the Copper Beeches, I was able, by watching the mind of the child, to form a deduction as to the criminal habits of the very smug and respectable father."

"Yes, I remember it well."

"My line of thoughts about dogs is analogous. A dog reflects the family life. Whoever saw a frisky dog in a
gloomy family, or a sad dog in a happy one? Snarling people have snarling dogs, dangerous people have dangerous
ones. And their passing moods may reflect the passing moods of others."

I shook my head. "Surely, Holmes, this is a little far-fetched," said I.

He had refilled his pipe and resumed his seat, taking no notice of my comment.

"The practical application of what I have said is very close to the problem which I am investigating. It is a
tangled skein, you understand. and I am looking for a loose end. One possible loose end lies in the question: Why
does Professor Presbury's wolfhound, Roy, endeavour to bite him?"

I sank back in my chair in some disappointment. Was it for so trivial a question as this that I had been
summoned from my work? Holmes glanced across at me.

"The same old Watson!" said he. "You never learn that the gravest issues may depend upon the smallest things.
But is it not on the face of it strange that a staid, elderly philosopher -- you've heard of Presbury, of course, the
famous Camford physiologist? -that such a man, whose friend has been his devoted wolfhound, should now have
been twice attacked by his own dog? What do you make of it?"

"The dog is ill."

"Well, that has to be considered. But he attacks no one else, nor does he apparently molest his master, save on
very special occasions. Curious, Watson -- very curious. But young Mr. Bennett is before his time if that is his ring.
I had hoped to have a longer chat with you before he came."

There was a quick step on the stairs, a sharp tap at the door and a moment later the new client presented himself.
He was a tall, handsome youth about thirty, well dressed and elegant, but with something in his bearing which
suggested the shyness of the student rather than the self-possession of the man of the world. He shook hands with
Holmes, and then looked with some surprise at me.

"This matter is very delicate, Mr. Holmes," he said. "Consider the relation in which I stand to Professor Presbury
both privately and publicly. I really can hardly justify myself if I speak before any third person."

"Have no fear, Mr. Bennett. Dr. Watson is the very soul of discretion, and I can assure you that this is a matter in
which I am very likely to need an assistant."

"As you like, Mr. Holmes. You will, I am sure, understand my having some reserves in the matter."

"You will appreciate it, Watson, when I tell you that this gentleman, Mr. Trevor Bennett, is professional assistant
to the great scientist, lives under his roof, and is engaged to his only daughter. Certainly we must agree that the
professor has every claim upon his loyalty and devotion. But it may best be shown by taking the necessary steps to
clear up this strange mystery."

"I hope so, Mr. Holmes. That is my one object. Does Dr. Watson know the situation?"

"I have not had time to explain it."

"Then perhaps I had better go over the ground again before explaining some fresh developments."

"I will do so myself," said Holmes, "in order to show that I have the events in their due order. The professor,
Watson, is a man of European reputation. His life has been academic. There has never been a breath of scandal. He
is a widower with one daughter, Edith. He is, I gather, a man of very virile and positive, one might almost say
combative, character. So the matter stood until a very few months ago.

"Then the current of his life was broken. He is sixty-one years of age, but he became engaged to the daughter of
Professor Morphy, his colleague in the chair of comparative anatomy. It was not, as I understand, the reasoned
courting of an elderly man but rather the passionate frenzy of youth, for no one could have shown himself a more
devoted lover. The lady, Alice Morphy, was a very perfect girl both in mind and body, so that there was every
excuse for the professor's infatuation. None the less, it did not meet with full approval in his own family."

"We thought it rather excessive," said our visitor.

"Exactly. Excessive and a little violent and unnatural. Professor Presbury was rich, however, and there was no
objection upon the part of the father. The daughter, however, had other views, and there were already several
candidates for her hand, who, if they were less eligible from a worldly point of view, were at least more of an age.
The girl seemed to like the professor in spite of his eccentricities. So the matter stood until a very few months ago.

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ever. But always there was something new, something sinister and unexpected. His daughter, who was devoted to
him, tried again and again to resume the old relations and to penetrate this mask which her father seemed to have put
on. You, sir, as I understand, did the same -- but all was in vain. And now, Mr. Bennett, tell in your own words the
incident of the letters."

"You must understand, Dr. Watson, that the professor had no secrets from me. If I were his son or his younger
brother I could not have more completely enjoyed his confidence. As his secretary I handled every paper which
came to him, and I opened and subdivided his letters. Shortly after his return all this was changed. He told me that
certain letters might come to him from London which would be marked by a cross under the stamp. These were to
be set aside for his own eyes only. I may say that several of these did pass through my hands, that they had the E. C.
mark, and were in an illiterate handwriting. If he answered them at all the answers did not pass through my hands
nor into the letterbasket in which our correspondence was collected."

"And the box," said Holmes.

"Ah, yes, the box. The professor brought back a little wooden box from his travels. It was the one thing which
suggested a Continental tour, for it was one of those quaint carved things which one associates with Germany. This
he placed in his instrument cupboard. One day, in looking for a canula, I took up the box. To my surprise he was
very angry, and reproved me in words which were quite savage for my curiosity. It was the first time such a thing
had happened, and I was deeply hurt. I endeavoured to explain that it was a mere accident that I had touched the
box, but all the evening I was conscious that he looked at me harshly and that the incident was rankling in his mind."

Mr. Bennett drew a little diary book from his pocket. "That was on July 2d," said he.

"You are certainly an admirable witness," said Holmes. "I may need some of these dates which you have noted."

"I learned method among other things from my great teacher. From the time that I observed abnormality in his
behaviour I felt that it was my duty to study his case. Thus I have it here that it was on that very day, July 2d, that
Roy attacked the professor as he came from his study into the hall. Again, on July 11th, there was a scene of the
same sort, and then I have a note of yet another upon July 20th. After that we had to banish Roy to the stables. He
was a dear, affectionate animal -- but I fear I weary you."

Mr. Bennett spoke in a tone of reproach, for it was very clear that Holmes was not listening. His face was rigid
and his eyes gazed abstractedly at the ceiling. With an effort he recovered himself.

"Singular! Most singular!" he murmured. "These details were new to me, Mr. Bennett. I think we have now
fairly gone over the old ground, have we not? But you spoke of some fresh developments."

The pleasant, open face of our visitor clouded over, shadowed by some grim remembrance. "What I speak of
occurred the night before last," said he. "I was lying awake about two in the morning, when I was aware of a dull
muffled sound coming from the passage. I opened my door and peeped out. I should explain that the professor sleeps
at the end of the passage --"

"The date being?" asked Holmes.

Our visitor was clearly annoyed at so irrelevant an interruption.

"I have said, sir, that it was the night before last -- that is, September 4th."

Holmes nodded and smiled.

"Pray continue," said he.

"He sleeps at the end of the passage and would have to pass my door in order to reach the staircase. It was a
really terrifying experience, Mr. Holmes. I think that I am as strong-nerved as my neighbours, but I was shaken by
what I saw. The passage was dark save that one window halfway along it threw a patch of light. I could see that
something was coming along the passage, something dark and crouching. Then suddenly it emerged into the light,
and I saw that it was he. He was crawling, Mr. Holmes -- crawling! He was not quite on his hands and knees. I
should rather say on his hands and feet, with his face sunk between his hands. Yet he seemed to move with ease. I
was so paralyzed by the sight that it was not until he had reached my door that I was able to step forward and ask if I
could assist him. His answer was extraordinary. He sprang up, spat out some atrocious word at me, and hurried on
past me, and down the staircase. I waited about for an hour, but he did not come back. It must have been daylight
before he regained his room."

"Well, Watson, what make you of that?" asked Holmes with the air of the pathologist who presents a rare
specimen.

"Lumbago, possibly. I have known a severe attack make a man walk in just such a way, and nothing would be
more trying to the temper."

"Good, Watson! You always keep us flat-footed on the ground. But we can hardly accept lumbago, since he was
able to stand erect in a moment."

"He was never better in health," said Bennett. "In fact, he is stronger than I have known him for years. But there
are the facts, Mr. Holmes. It is not a case in which we can consult the police, and yet we are utterly at our wit's end
as to what to do, and we feel in some strange way that we are drifting towards disaster. Edith -- Miss Presbury --
feels as I do, that we cannot wait passively any longer."

"It is certainly a very curious and suggestive case. What do you think, Watson?"

"Speaking as a medical man," said I, "it appears to be a case for an alienist. The old gentleman's cerebral
processes were disturbed by the love affair. He made a journey abroad in the hope of breaking himself of the
passion. His letters and the box may be connected with some other private transaction -- a loan, perhaps, or share
certificates, which are in the box."

"And the wolfhound no doubt disapproved of the financial bargain. No, no, Watson, there is more in it than this.
Now, I can only suggest --"

What Sherlock Holmes was about to suggest will never be known, for at this moment the door opened and a
young lady was shown into the room. As she appeared Mr. Bennett sprang up with a cry and ran forward with his
hands out to meet those which she had herself outstretched.

"Edith, dear! Nothing the matter, I hope?"

"I felt I must follow you. Oh, Jack, I have been so dreadfully frightened! It is awful to be there alone."

"Mr. Holmes, this is the young lady I spoke of. This is my fiancée."

"We were gradually coming to that conclusion, were we not, Watson?" Holmes answered with a smile. "I take it,
Miss Presbury, that there is some fresh development in the case, and that you thought we should know?"

Our new visitor, a bright, handsome girl of a conventional English type, smiled back at Holmes as she seated
herself beside Mr. Bennett.

"When I found Mr. Bennett had left his hotel I thought I should probably find him here. Of course, he had told
me that he would consult you. But, oh, Mr. Holmes, can you do nothing for my poor father?"

"I have hopes, Miss Presbury, but the case is still obscure. Perhaps what you have to say may throw some fresh
light upon it."

"It was last night, Mr. Holmes. He had been very strange all day. I am sure that there are times when he has no
recollection of what he does. He lives as in a strange dream. Yesterday was such a day. It was not my father with
whom I lived. His outward shell was there, but it was not really he."

"Tell me what happened."

"I was awakened in the night by the dog barking most furiously. Poor Roy, he is chained now near the stable. I
may say that I always sleep with my door locked; for, as Jack -- as Mr. Bennett -- will tell you, we all have a feeling
of impending danger. My room is on the second floor. It happened that the blind was up in my window, and there
was bright moonlight outside. As I lay with my eyes fixed upon the square of light, listening to the frenzied barkings
of the dog, I was amazed to see my father's face looking in at me. Mr. Holmes, I nearly died of surprise and horror.
There it was pressed against the windowpane, and one hand seemed to be raised as if to push up the window. If that
window had opened, I think I should have gone mad. It was no delusion, Mr. Holmes. Don't deceive yourself by
thinking so. I dare say it was twenty seconds or so that I lay paralyzed and watched the face. Then it vanished, but I
could not -- I could not spring out of bed and look out after it. I lay cold and shivering till morning. At breakfast he
was sharp and fierce in manner, and made no allusion to the adventure of the night. Neither did I, but I gave an
excuse for coming to town -and here I am."

Holmes looked thoroughly surprised at Miss Presbury's narrative.

"My dear young lady, you say that your room is on the second floor. Is there a long ladder in the garden?"

"No, Mr. Holmes, that is the amazing part of it. There is no possible way of reaching the window -- and yet he
was there."

"The date being September 5th," said Holmes. "That certainly complicates matters."

It was the young lady's turn to look surprised. "This is the second time that you have alluded to the date, Mr.
Holmes," said Bennett. "Is it possible that it has any bearing upon the case?"

"It is possible -- very possible -- and yet I have not my full material at present."

"Possibly you are thinking of the connection between insanity and phases of the moon?"

"No, I assure you. It was quite a different line of thought. Possibly you can leave your notebook with me, and I
will check the dates. Now I think, Watson, that our line of action is perfectly clear. This young lady has informed us
-- and I have the greatest confidence in her intuition -- that her father remembers little or nothing which occurs upon
certain dates. We will therefore call upon him as if he had given us an appointment upon such a date. He will put it
down to his own lack of memory. Thus we will open our campaign by having a good close view of him."

"That is excellent," said Mr. Bennett. "I warn you, however, that the professor is irascible and violent at times."

Holmes smiled. "There are reasons why we should come at once -- very cogent reasons if my theories hold good.
To-morrow, Mr. Bennett, will certainly see us in Camford. There is, if I remember right, an inn called the Chequers
where the port used to be above mediocrity and the linen was above reproach. I think, Watson, that our lot for the
next few days might lie in less pleasant places."

Monday morning found us on our way to the famous university town -- an easy effort on the part of Holmes, who had no roots to pull up, but one which involved frantic planning and hurrying on my part, as my practice was by this time not inconsiderable. Holmes made no allusion to the case until after we had deposited our suitcases at the ancient hostel of which he had spoken.

"I think, Watson, that we can catch the professor just before lunch. He lectures at eleven and should have an interval at home."

"What possible excuse have we for calling?"

Holmes glanced at his notebook.

"There was a period of excitement upon August 26th. We will assume that he is a little hazy as to what he does at such times. If we insist that we are there by appointment I think he will hardly venture to contradict us. Have you the effrontery necessary to put it through?"

"We can but try."

"Excellent, Watson! Compound of the Busy Bee and Excelsior. We can but try -- the motto of the firm. A friendly native will surely guide us."

Such a one on the back of a smart hansom swept us past a row of ancient colleges and, finally turning into a tree-lined drive, pulled up at the door of a charming house, girt round with lawns and covered with purple wistaria. Professor Presbury was certainly surrounded with every sign not only of comfort but of luxury. Even as we pulled up, a grizzled head appeared at the front window, and we were aware of a pair of keen eyes from under shaggy brows which surveyed us through large horn glasses. A moment later we were actually in his sanctum, and the mysterious scientist, whose vagaries had brought us from London, was standing before us. There was certainly no sign of eccentricity either in his manner or appearance, for he was a portly, large-featured man, grave, tall, and frock-coated, with the dignity of bearing which a lecturer needs. His eyes were his most remarkable feature, keen, observant, and clever to the verge of cunning.

He looked at our cards. "Pray sit down, gentlemen. What can I do for you?"

Mr. Holmes smiled amiably.

"It was the question which I was about to put to you, Professor."

"To me, sir!"

"Possibly there is some mistake. I heard through a second person that Professor Presbury of Camford had need of my services."

"Oh, indeed!" It seemed to me that there was a malicious sparkle in the intense gray eyes. "You heard that, did you? May I ask the name of your informant?"

"I am sorry, Professor, but the matter was rather confidential. If I have made a mistake there is no harm done. I can only express my regret."

"Not at all. I should wish to go further into this matter. It interests me. Have you any scrap of writing, any letter or telegram, to bear out your assertion?"

"No, I have not."

"I presume that you do not go so far as to assert that I summoned you?"

"I would rather answer no questions," said Holmes.

"No, I dare say not," said the professor with asperity. "However, that particular one can be answered very easily without your aid."

He walked across the room to the bell. Our London friend Mr. Bennett, answered the call.

"Come in, Mr. Bennett. These two gentlemen have come from London under the impression that they have been summoned. You handle all my correspondence. Have you a note of anything going to a person named Holmes?"

"No, sir," Bennett answered with a flush.

"That is conclusive," said the professor, glaring angrily at my companion. "Now, sir" -- he leaned forward with his two hands upon the table --"it seems to me that your position is a very questionable one."

Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"I can only repeat that I am sorry that we have made a needless intrusion."

"Hardly enough, Mr. Holmes!" the old man cried in a high screaming voice, with extraordinary malignancy upon his face. He got between us and the door as he spoke, and he shook his two hands at us with furious passion. "You can hardly get out of it so easily as that. His face was convulsed, and he grinned and gibbered at us in his senseless rage. I am convinced that we should have had to fight our way out of the room if Mr. Bennett had not intervened.

"My dear Professor," he cried, "consider your position! Consider the scandal at the university! Mr. Holmes is a well-known man. You cannot possibly treat him with such discourtesy."

Sulkily our host -- if I may call him so -- cleared the path to the door. We were glad to find ourselves outside the
house and in the quiet of the tree-lined drive. Holmes seemed greatly amused by the episode.

"Our learned friend's nerves are somewhat out of order," said he. "Perhaps our intrusion was a little crude, and yet we have gained that personal contact which I desired. But, dear me, Watson, he is surely at our heels. The villain still pursues us."

There were the sounds of running feet behind, but it was, to my relief, not the formidable professor but his assistant who appeared round the curve of the drive. He came panting up to us.

"I am so sorry, Mr. Holmes. I wished to apologize."

"My dear sir, there is no need. It is all in the way of professional experience."

"I have never seen him in a more dangerous mood. But he grows more sinister. You can understand now why his daughter and I are alarmed. And yet his mind is perfectly clear."

"Too clear!" said Holmes. "That was my miscalculation. It is evident that his memory is much more reliable than I had thought. By the way, can we, before we go, see the window of Miss Presbury's room?"

Mr. Bennett pushed his way through some shrubs, and we had a view of the side of the house.

"It is there. The second on the left."

"Dear me, it seems hardly accessible. And yet you will observe that there is a creeper below and a water-pipe above which give some foothold."

"I could not climb it myself," said Mr. Bennett.

"Very likely. It would certainly be a dangerous exploit for any normal man."

"There was one other thing I wish to tell you, Mr. Holmes. I have the address of the man in London to whom the professor writes. He seems to have written this morning, and I got it from his blotting-paper. It is an ignoble position for a trusted secretary, but what else can I do?"

Holmes glanced at the paper and put it into his pocket.

"Dorak -- a curious name. Slavonic, I imagine. Well, it is an important link in the chain. We return to London this afternoon, Mr. Bennett. I see no good purpose to be served by our remaining. We cannot arrest the professor because he has done no crime, nor can we place him under constraint, for he cannot be proved to be mad. No action is as yet possible."

"Then what on earth are we to do?"

"A little patience, Mr. Bennett. Things will soon develop. Unless I am mistaken, next Tuesday may mark a crisis. Certainly we shall be in Camford on that day. Meanwhile, the general position is undeniably unpleasant, and if Miss Presbury can prolong her visit"

"That is easy."

"Then let her stay till we can assure her that all danger is past. Meanwhile, let him have his way and do not cross him. So long as he is in a good humour all is well."

"There he is!" said Bennett in a startled whisper. Looking between the branches we saw the tall, erect figure emerge from the hall door and look around him. He stood leaning forward, his hands swinging straight before him, his head turning from side to side. The secretary with a last wave slipped off among the trees, and we saw him presently rejoin his employer, the two entering the house together in what seemed to be animated and even excited conversation.

"I expect the old gentleman has been putting two and two together," said Holmes as we walked hotelward. "He struck me as having a particularly clear and logical brain from the little I saw of him. Explosive, no doubt, but then from his point of view he has something to explode about if detectives are put on his track and he suspects his own household of doing it. I rather fancy that friend Bennett is in for an uncomfortable time."

Holmes stopped at a post-office and sent off a telegram on our way. The answer reached us in the evening, and he tossed it across to me.

"Have visited the Commercial Road and seen Dorak. Suave person, Bohemian, elderly. Keeps large general store.

MERCER."

"Mercer is since your time," said Holmes. "He is my general utility man who looks up routine business. It was important to know something of the man with whom our professor was so secretly corresponding. His nationality connects up with the Prague visit."

"Thank goodness that something connects with something," said I. "At present we seem to be faced by a long series of inexplicable incidents with no bearing upon each other. For example, what possible connection can there be between an angry wolfhound and a visit to Bohemia, or either of them with a man crawling down a passage at night? As to your dates, that is the biggest mystification of all."

Holmes smiled and rubbed his hands. We were, I may say, seated in the old sitting-room of the ancient hotel, with a bottle of the famous vintage of which Holmes had spoken on the table between us.
"Well, now, let us take the dates first," said he, his fingertips together and his manner as if he were addressing a class. "This excellent young man's diary shows that there was trouble upon July 2d, and from then onward it seems to have been at nine-day intervals, with, so far as I remember, only one exception. Thus the last outbreak upon Friday was on September 3d, which also falls into the series, as did August 26th, which preceded it. The thing is beyond coincidence."

I was forced to agree.

"Let us, then, form the provisional theory that every nine days the professor takes some strong drug which has a passing but highly poisonous effect. His naturally violent nature is intensified by it. He learned to take this drug while he was in Prague, and is now supplied with it by a Bohemian intermediary in London. This all hangs together, Watson!"

"But the dog, the face at the window, the creeping man in the passage?"

"Well, well, we have made a beginning. I should not expect any fresh developments until next Tuesday. In the meantime we can only keep in touch with friend Bennett and enjoy the amenities of this charming town."

In the morning Mr. Bennett slipped round to bring us the latest report. As Holmes had imagined, times had not been easy with him. Without exactly accusing him of being responsible for our presence, the professor had been very rough and rude in his speech, and evidently felt some strong grievance. This morning he was quite himself again, however, and had delivered his usual brilliant lecture to a crowded class. "Apart from his queer fits," said Bennett, "he has actually more energy and vitality than I can ever remember, nor was his brain ever clearer. But it's not he -- it's never the man whom we have known."

"I don't think you have anything to fear now for a week at least," Holmes answered. "I am a busy man, and Dr. Watson has his patients to attend to. Let us agree that we meet here at this hour next Tuesday, and I shall be surprised if before we leave you again you are not able to explain, even if we cannot perhaps put an end to, your troubles. Meanwhile, keep us posted in what occurs."

I saw nothing of my friend for the next few days, but on the following Monday evening I had a short note asking me to meet him next day at the train. From what he told me as we travelled up to Camford all was well, the peace of the professor's house had been unruffled, and his own conduct perfectly normal. This also was the report which was given us by Mr. Bennett himself when he called upon us that evening at our old quarters in the Chequers. "He heard from his London correspondent to-day. There was a letter and there was a small packet, each with the cross under the stamp which warned me not to touch them. There has been nothing else."

"That may prove quite enough," said Holmes grimly. "Now, Mr. Bennett, we shall, I think, come to some conclusion tonight. If my deductions are correct we should have an opportunity of bringing matters to a head. In order to do so it is necessary to hold the professor under observation. I would suggest, therefore, that you remain awake and on the lookout. Should you hear him pass your door, do not interrupt him, but follow him as discreetly as you can. Dr. Watson and I will not be far off. By the way, where is the key of that little box of which you spoke?"

"Upon his watch-chain."

"I fancy our researches must lie in that direction. At the worst the lock should not be very formidable. Have you any other able-bodied man on the premises?"

"There is the coachman, Macphail."

"Where does he sleep?"

"Over the stables."

"We might possibly want him. Well, we can do no more until we see how things develop, Good-bye -- but I expect that we shall see you before morning."

It was nearly midnight before we took our station among some bushes immediately opposite the hall door of the professor. It was a fine night, but chilly, and we were glad of our warm overcoats. There was a breeze, and clouds were scudding across the sky, obscuring from time to time the half-moon. It would have been a dismal vigil were it not for the expectation and excitement which carried us along, and the assurance of my comrade that we had probably reached the end of the strange sequence of events which had engaged our attention.

"If the cycle of nine days holds good then we shall have the professor at his worst to-night," said Holmes. "The fact that these strange symptoms began after his visit to Prague, that he is in secret correspondence with a Bohemian dealer in London, who presumably represents someone in Prague, and that he received a packet from him this very day, all point in one direction. What he takes and why he takes it are still beyond our ken, but that it emanates in some way from Prague is clear enough. He takes it under definite directions which regulate this ninth-day system, which was the first point which attracted my attention. But his symptoms are most remarkable. Did you observe his knuckles?"

I had to confess that I did not.

"Thick and horny in a way which is quite new in my experience. Always look at the hands first, Watson. Then
cuffs, trouserknees, and boots. Very curious knuckles which can only be explained by the mode of progression observed by --" Holmes paused and suddenly clapped his hand to his forehead. "Oh, Watson, Watson, what a fool I have been! It seems incredible, and yet it must be true. All points in one direction. How could I miss seeing the connection of ideas? Those knuckles how could I have passed those knuckles? And the dog! And the ivy! It's surely time that I disappeared into that little farm of my dreams. Look out, Watson! Here he is! We shall have the chance of seeing for ourselves."

The hall door had slowly opened, and against the lamplit background we saw the tall figure of Professor Presbury. He was clad in his dressing gown. As he stood outlined in the doorway he was erect but leaning forward with dangling arms, as when we saw him last.

Now he stepped forward into the drive, and an extraordinary change came over him. He sank down into a crouching position and moved along upon his hands and feet, skipping every now and then as if he were overflowing with energy and vitality. He moved along the face of the house and then round the corner. As he disappeared Bennett slipped through the hall door and softly followed him.

"Come, Watson, come!" cried Holmes, and we stole as softly as we could through the bushes until we had gained a spot whence we could see the other side of the house, which was bathed in the light of the half-moon. The professor was clearly visible crouching at the foot of the ivy-covered wall. As we watched him he suddenly began with incredible agility to ascend it. From branch to branch he sprang, sure of foot and firm of grasp, climbing apparently in mere joy at his own powers, with no definite object in view. With his dressing-gown flapping on each side of him, he looked like some huge bat glued against the side of his own house, a great square dark patch upon the moonlit wall. Presently he tired of this amusement, and, dropping from branch to branch, he squatted down into the old attitude and moved towards the stables, creeping along in the same strange way as before. The wolfhound was out now, barking furiously, and more excited than ever when it actually caught sight of its master. It was straining on its chain and quivering with eagerness and rage. The professor squatted down very deliberately just out of reach of the hound and began to provoke it in every possible way. He took handfuls of pebbles from the drive and threw them in the dog's face, prodded him with a stick which he had picked up, flicked his hands about only a few inches from the gaping mouth, and endeavoured in every way to increase the animal's fury, which was already beyond all control. In all our adventures I do not know that I have ever seen a more strange sight than this impassive and still dignified figure crouching frog-like upon the ground and goading to a wilder exhibition of passion the maddened hound, which ramped and raged in front of him, by all manner of ingenious and calculated cruelty.

And then in a moment it happened! It was not the chain that broke, but it was the collar that slipped, for it had been made for a thick-necked Newfoundland. We heard the rattle of falling metal, and the next instant dog and man were rolling on the ground together, the one roaring in rage, the other screaming in a strange shrill falsetto of terror. It was a very narrow thing for the professor's life. The savage creature had him fairly by the throat, its fangs had bitten deep, and he was senseless before we could reach them and drag the two apart. It might have been a dangerous task for us, but Bennett's voice and presence brought the great wolfdhound instantly to reason. The uproar was made for a thick-necked Newfoundland. We heard the rattle of falling metal, and the next instant dog and man were rolling on the ground together, the one roaring in rage, the other screaming in a strange shrill falsetto of terror.

"I think a first-class surgeon should see him," said I.

"For God's sake, no!" cried Bennett. "At present the scandal is confined to our own household. It is safe with us. If it gets beyond these walls it will never stop. Consider his position at the university, his European reputation, the feelings of his daughter."

"Quite so," said Holmes. "I think it may be quite possible to keep the matter to ourselves, and also to prevent its recurrence now that we have a free hand. The key from the watch-chain, Mr. Bennett. Macphail will guard the patient and let us know if there is any change. Let us see what we can find in the professor's mysterious box."

There was not much, but there was enough -- an empty phial, another nearly full, a hypodermic syringe, several letters in a crabbed, foreign hand. The marks on the envelopes showed that they were those which had disturbed the routine of the secretary, and each was dated from the Commercial Road and signed "A. Dorak." They were mere invoices to say that a fresh bottle was being sent to Professor Presbury, or receipt to acknowledge money. There was one other envelope, however, in a more educated hand and bearing the Austrian stamp with the postmark of Prague. "Here we have our material!" cried Holmes as he tore out the enclosure.

HONOURED COLLEAGUE [it ran]:

[72x102]one other envelope, however, in a more educated hand and bearing the Austrian stamp with the postmark of Prague.
Since your esteemed visit I have thought much of your case, and though in your circumstances there are some special reasons for the treatment, I would none the less enjoin caution, as my results have shown that it is not without danger of a kind.

It is possible that the serum of anthropoid would have been better. I have, as I explained to you, used black-faced langur because a specimen was accessible. Langur is, of course, a crawler and climber, while anthropoid walks erect and is in all ways nearer.

I beg you to take every possible precaution that there be no premature revelation of the process. I have one other client in England, and Dorak is my agent for both.

Weekly reports will oblige.

Yours with high esteem,
H. LOWENSTEIN.

Lowenstein! The name brought back to me the memory of some snippet from a newspaper which spoke of an obscure scientist who was striving in some unknown way for the secret of rejuvenescence and the elixir of life. Lowenstein of Prague! Lowenstein with the wondrous strength-giving serum, tabooed by the profession because he refused to reveal its source. In a few words I said what I remembered. Bennett had taken a manual of zoology from the shelves. " 'Langur.' " he read. " 'the great black-faced monkey of the Himalayan slopes, biggest and most human of climbing monkeys. Many details are added. Well, thanks to you, Mr. Holmes, it is very clear that we have traced the evil to its source."

"The real source," said Holmes, "lies, of course, in that untimely love affair which gave our impetuous professor the idea that he could only gain his wish by turning himself into a younger man. When one tries to rise above Nature one is liable to fall below it. The highest type of man may revert to the animal if he leaves the straight road of destiny." He sat musing for a little with the phial in his hand, looking at the clear liquid within. "When I have written to this man and told him that I hold him criminally responsible for the poisons which he circulates, we will have no more trouble. But it may recur. Others may find a better way. There is danger there -- a very real danger to humanity. Consider, Watson, that the material, the sensual, the worldly would all prolong their worthless lives. The spiritual would not avoid the call to something higher. It would be the survival of the least fit. What sort of cesspool may not our poor world become?" Suddenly the dreamer disappeared, and Holmes, the man of action, sprang from his chair. "I think there is nothing more to be said, Mr. Bennett. The various incidents will now fit themselves easily into the general scheme. The dog, of course, was aware of the change far more quickly than you. His smell would insure that. It was the monkey, not the professor, whom Roy attacked, just as it was the monkey who teased Roy.

Climbing was a joy to the creature, and it was a mere chance, I take it, that the pastime brought him to the young lady's window. There is an early train to town, Watson, but I think we shall just have time for a cup of tea at the Chequers before we catch it."

The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire

Holmes had read carefully a note which the last post had brought him. Then, with the dry chuckle which was his nearest approach to a laugh, he tossed it over to me.

"For a mixture of the modern and the mediaeval, of the practical and of the wildly fanciful, I think this is surely the limit," said he. "What do you make of it, Watson?"

I read as follows:

46, OLD JEWRY,
Nov. 19th.
Re Vampires
SIR:

Our client, Mr. Robert Ferguson, of Ferguson and Muirhead, tea brokers, of Mincing Lane, has made some inquiry from us in a communication of even date concerning vampires. As our firm specializes entirely upon the assessment of machinery the matter hardly comes within our purview, and we have therefore recommended Mr. Ferguson to call upon you and lay the matter before you. We have not forgotten your successful action in the case of
Matilda Briggs.
We are, sir,
Faithfully yours,
MORRISON, MORRISON, AND DODD.
per E. J. C.

"Matilda Briggs was not the name of a young woman, Watson," said Holmes in a reminiscent voice. "It was a ship which is associated with the giant rat of Sumatra, a story for which the world is not yet prepared. But what do we know about vampires? Does it come within our purview either? Anything is better than stagnation, but really we seem to have been switched on to a Grimm's fairy tale. Make a long arm, Watson, and see what V has to say."

I leaned back and took down the great index volume to which he referred. Holmes balanced it on his knee, and his eyes moved slowly and lovingly over the record of old cases, mixed with the accumulated information of a lifetime.

"Voyage of the Gloria Scott," he read. "That was a bad business. I have some recollection that you made a record of it, Watson, though I was unable to congratulate you upon the result. Victor Lynch, the forger. Venomous lizard or gila. Remarkable case, that! Vittoria, the circus belle. Vanderbilt and the Yeggman. Vigor, the Hammersmith wonder. Hullo! Hullo! Good old index. You can't beat it. Listen to this, Watson. Vampirism in Hungary. And again, Vampires in Transylvania." He turned over the pages with eagerness, but after a short intent perusal he threw down the great book with a snarl of disappointment.

"Rubbish, Watson, rubbish! What have we to do with walking corpses who can only be held in their grave by stakes driven through their hearts? It's pure lunacy."

"But surely," said I, "the vampire was not necessarily a dead man? A living person might have the habit. I have read, for example, of the old sucking the blood of the young in order to retain their youth."

"You are right, Watson. It mentions the legend in one of these references. But are we to give serious attention to such things? This agency stands flat-footed upon the ground, and there it must remain. The world is big enough for us. No ghosts need apply. I fear that we cannot take Mr. Robert Ferguson very seriously. Possibly this note may be from him and may throw some light upon what is worrying him."

He took up a second letter which had lain unnoticed upon the table while he had been absorbed with the first. This he began to read with a smile of amusement upon his face which gradually faded away into an expression of intense interest and concentration. When he had finished he sat for some little time lost in thought with the letter dangling from his fingers. Finally, with a start, he aroused himself from his reverie.

"Cheeseman's, Lamberley. Where is Lamberley, Watson?"

"It is in Sussex, South of Horsham."

"Not very far, eh? And Cheeseman's?"

"I know that country, Holmes. It is full of old houses which are named after the men who built them centuries ago. You get Odley's and Harvey's and Carriton's -- the folk are forgotten but their names live in their houses."

"Precisely," said Holmes coldly. It was one of the peculiarities of his proud, self-contained nature that though he docketed any fresh information very quietly and accurately in his brain, he seldom made any acknowledgment to the giver. "I rather fancy we shall know a good deal more about Cheeseman's, Lamberley, before we are through. The letter is, as I had hoped, from Robert Ferguson. By the way, he claims acquaintance with you."

"With me!"

"You had better read it."

He handed the letter across. It was headed with the address quoted.

DEAR MR HOLMES [it said]:

I have been recommended to you by my lawyers, but indeed the matter is so extraordinarily delicate that it is most difficult to discuss. It concerns a friend for whom I am acting. This gentleman married some five years ago a Peruvian lady the daughter of a Peruvian merchant, whom he had met in connection with the importation of nitrates. The lady was very beautiful, but the fact of her foreign birth and of her alien religion always caused a separation of interests and of feelings between husband and wife, so that after a time his love may have cooled towards her and he may have come to regard their union as a mistake. He felt there were sides of her character which he could never explore or understand. This was the more painful as she was as loving
a wife as a man could have -- to all appearance absolutely devoted. 
Now for the point which I will make more plain when we meet. Indeed, this note is merely to give you a general idea of the situation and to ascertain whether you would care to interest yourself in the matter. The lady began to show some curious traits quite alien to her ordinarily sweet and gentle disposition. The gentleman had been married twice and he had one son by the first wife. This boy was now fifteen, a very charming and affectionate youth, though unhappily injured through an accident in childhood. Twice the wife was caught in the act of assaulting this poor lad in the most unprovoked way. Once she struck him with a stick and left a great weal on his arm. This was a small matter, however, compared with her conduct to her own child, a dear boy just under one year of age. On one occasion about a month ago this child had been left by its nurse for a few minutes. A loud cry from the baby, as of pain, called the nurse back. As she ran into the room she saw her employer, the lady, leaning over the baby and apparently biting his neck. There was a small wound in the neck from which a stream of blood had escaped. The nurse was so horrified that she wished to call the husband, but the lady implored her not to do so and actually gave her five pounds as a price for her silence. No explanation was ever given, and for the moment the matter was passed over. It left, however, a terrible impression upon the nurse’s mind, and from that time she began to watch her mistress closely and to keep a closer guard upon the baby, whom she tenderly loved. It seemed to her that even as she watched the mother, so the mother watched her, and that every time she was compelled to leave the baby alone the mother was waiting to get at it. Day and night the nurse covered the child, and day and night the silent, watchful mother seemed to be lying in wait as a wolf waits for a lamb. It must read most incredible to you, and yet I beg you to take it seriously, for a child’s life and a man’s sanity may depend upon it. At last there came one dreadful day when the facts could no longer be concealed from the husband. The nurse’s nerve had given way; she could stand the strain no longer, and she made a clean breast of it all to the man. To him it seemed as wild a tale as it may now seem to you. He knew his wife to be a loving wife, and, save for the assaults upon her stepson, a loving mother. Why, then, should she wound her own dear little baby? He told the nurse that she was dreaming, that her suspicions were those of a lunatic, and that such libels upon her mistress were not to be tolerated. While they were talking a sudden cry of pain was heard. Nurse and master rushed together to the nursery. Imagine his feelings, Mr. Holmes, as he saw his wife rise from a kneeling position beside the cot and saw blood upon the child’s exposed neck and upon the sheet. With a cry of horror, he turned his wife’s face to the light and saw blood all round her lips. It was she -- she beyond all question -- who had drunk the poor baby's blood.
So the matter stands. She is now confined to her room. There has been no explanation. The husband is half demented. He knows, and I know, little of vampirism beyond the name. We had thought it was some wild tale of foreign parts. And yet here in the very heart of the English Sussex -- well, all this can be discussed with you in the morning. Will you see me? Will you use your great powers in aiding a distracted man? If so, kindly wire to Ferguson, Cheeseman's, Lamberley, and I will be at your rooms by ten o'clock.

Yours faithfully,
ROBERT FERGUSON.

P. S. I believe your friend Watson played Rugby for Blackheath when I was three-quarter for Richmond. It is the only personal introduction which I can give.

"Of course I remembered him," said I as I laid down the letter. "Big Bob Ferguson, the finest three-quarter Richmond ever had. He was always a good-natured chap. It's like him to be so concerned over a friend's case."

Holmes looked at me thoughtfully and shook his head.

"I never get your limits, Watson," said he. "There are unexplored possibilities about you. Take a wire down, like a good fellow. 'Will examine your case with pleasure.' "

"Your case!"

"We must not let him think that this agency is a home for the weak-minded. Of course it is his case. Send him that wire and let the matter rest till morning."

Promptly at ten o'clock next morning Ferguson strode into our room. I had remembered him as a long, slab-sided man with loose limbs and a fine turn of speed which had carried him round many an opposing back. There is surely nothing in life more painful than to meet the wreck of a fine athlete whom one has known in his prime. His great frame had fallen in, his flaxen hair was scanty, and his shoulders were bowed. I fear that I roused corresponding emotions in him.

"Hullo, Watson," said he, and his voice was still deep and hearty. "You don't look quite the man you did when I threw you over the ropes into the crowd at the Old Deer Park. I expect I have changed a bit also. But it's this last day or two that has aged me. I see by your telegram, Mr. Holmes, that it is no use my pretending to be anyone's deputy."

"It is simpler to deal direct," said Holmes.

"Of course it is. But you can imagine how difficult it is when you are speaking of the one woman whom you are bound to protect and help. What can I do? How am I to go to the police with such a story? And yet the kiddies have got to be protected. Is it madness, Mr. Holmes? Is it something in the blood? Have you any similar case in your experience? For God's sake, give me some advice, for I am at my wit's end."

"Very naturally, Mr. Ferguson. Now sit here and pull yourself together and give me a few clear answers. I can assure you that I am very far from being at my wit's end, and that I am confident we shall find some solution. First of all, tell me what steps you have taken. Is your wife still near the children?"

"We had a dreadful scene. She is a most loving woman, Mr. Holmes. If ever a woman loved a man with all her heart and soul, she loves me. She was cut to the heart that I should have discovered this horrible, this incredible, secret. She would not even speak. She gave no answer to my reproaches, save to gaze at me with a sort of wild, despairing look in her eyes. Then she rushed to her room and locked herself in. Since then she has refused to see me. She has a maid who was with her before her marriage, Dolores by name -- a friend rather than a servant. She takes her food to her."

"Then the child is in no immediate danger?"

"Mrs. Mason, the nurse, has sworn that she will not leave it night or day. I can absolutely trust her. I am more uneasy about poor little Jack, for, as I told you in my note, he has twice been assaulted by her."

"But never wounded?"

"No, she struck him savagely. It is the more terrible as he is a poor little inoffensive cripple." Ferguson's gaunt features softened as he spoke of his boy. "You would think that the dear lad's condition would soften anyone's heart. A fall in childhood and a twisted spine, Mr. Holmes. But the dearest, most loving heart within."

Holmes had picked up the letter of yesterday and was reading it over. "What other inmates are there in your house, Mr. Ferguson?"

"Two servants who have not been long with us. One stablehand, Michael, who sleeps in the house. My wife, myself, my boy Jack, baby, Dolores, and Mrs. Mason. That is all."
"I gather that you did not know your wife well at the time of your marriage?"
"I had only known her a few weeks."
"How long had this maid Dolores been with her?"
"Some years."
"Then your wife's character would really be better known by Dolores than by you?"
"Yes, you may say so."
Holmes made a note.
"I fancy," said he, "that I may be of more use at Lamberley than here. It is eminently a case for personal investigation. If the lady remains in her room, our presence could not annoy or inconvenience her. Of course, we would stay at the inn."
Ferguson gave a gesture of relief.
"It is what I hoped, Mr. Holmes. There is an excellent train at two from Victoria if you could come."
"Of course we could come. I can give you my undivided energies. Watson, of course, comes with us. But there are one or two points upon which I wish to be very sure before I start. This unhappy lady, as I understand it, has appeared to assault both the children, her own baby and your little son?"
"That is so."
"But the assaults take different forms, do they not? She has beaten your son."
"Once with a stick and once very savagely with her hands."
"Did she give no explanation why she struck him?"
"None save that she hated him. Again and again she said so."
"Well, that is not unknown among stepmothers. A posthumous jealousy, we will say. Is the lady jealous by nature?"
"Yes, she is very jealous -- jealous with all the strength of her fiery tropical love."
"But the boy -- he is fifteen, I understand, and probably very developed in mind, since his body has been circumscribed in action. Did he give you no explanation of these assaults?"
"No, he declared there was no reason."
"Were they good friends at other times?"
"No, there was never any love between them."
"Yet you say he is affectionate?"
"Never in the world could there be so devoted a son. My life is his life. He is absorbed in what I say or do."
Once again Holmes made a note. For some time he sat lost in thought.
"No doubt you and the boy were great comrades before this second marriage. You were thrown very close together, were you not?"
"Very much so."
"And the boy, having so affectionate a nature, was devoted, no doubt, to the memory of his mother?"
"Most devoted."
"He would certainly seem to be a most interesting lad. There is one other point about these assaults. Were the strange attacks upon the baby and the assaults upon yow son at the same period?"
"In the first case it was so. It was as if some frenzy had seized her, and she had vented her rage upon both. In the second case it was only Jack who suffered. Mrs. Mason had no complaint to make about the baby."
"That certainly complicates matters."
"I don't quite follow you, Mr. Holmes."
"Possibly not. One forms provisional theories and waits for time or fuller knowledge to explode them. A bad habit, Mr. Ferguson, but human nature is weak. I fear that your old friend here has given an exaggerated view of my scientific methods. However, I will only say at the present stage that your problem does not appear to me to be insoluble, and that you may expect to find us at Victoria at two o'clock."

It was evening of a dull, foggy November day when, having left our bags at the Chequers, Lamberley, we drove through the Sussex clay of a long winding lane and finally reached the isolated and ancient farmhouse in which Ferguson dwelt. It was a large, straggling building, very old in the centre, very new at the wings with towering Tudor chimneys and a lichen-spotted, high-pitched roof of Horsham slabs. The doorsteps were worn into curves, and the ancient tiles which lined the porch were marked with the rebus of a cheese and a man after the original builder. Within, the ceilings were corrugated with heavy oaken beams, and the uneven floors sagged into sharp curves. An odour of age and decay pervaded the whole crumbling building.

There was one very large central room into which Ferguson led us. Here, in a huge old-fashioned fireplace with an iron screen behind it dated 1670, there blazed and sputtered a splendid log fire.

The room, as I gazed round, was a most singular mixture of dates and of places. The half-panelled walls may
well have belonged to the original yeoman farmer of the seventeenth century. They were ornamented, however, on
the lower part by a line of well-chosen modern water-colours; while above, where yellow plaster took the place of
oak, there was hung a fine collection of South American utensils and weapons, which had been brought, no doubt,
by the Peruvian lady upstairs. Holmes rose, with that quick curiosity which sprang from his eager mind, and
examined them with some care. He returned with his eyes full of thought.

"Hullo!" he cried. "Hullo!"

A spaniel had lain in a basket in the corner. It came slowly forward towards its master, walking with difficulty.
Its hind legs moved irregularly and its tail was on the ground. It licked Ferguson's hand.

"What is it, Mr. Holmes?"

"The dog. What's the matter with it?"

"That's what puzzled the vet. A sort of paralysis. Spinal meningitis, he thought. But it is passing. He'll be all
right soon -- won't you, Carlo?"

A shiver of assent passed through the drooping tail. The dog's mournful eyes passed from one of us to the other.
He knew that we were discussing his case.

"Did it come on suddenly?"

"In a single night."

"How long ago?"

"It may have been four months ago."

"Very remarkable. Very suggestive."

"What do you see in it, Mr. Holmes?"

"A confirmation of what I had already thought."

"For God's sake, what do you think, Mr. Holmes? It may be a mere intellectual puzzle to you, but it is life and
death to me! My wife a would-be murderer -- my child in constant danger! Don't play with me, Mr. Holmes. It is too
terrribly serious."

The big Rugby three-quarter was trembling all over. Holmes put his hand soothingly upon his arm.

"I fear that there is pain for you, Mr. Ferguson, whatever the solution may be," said he. "I would spare you all I
can. I cannot say more for the instant, but before I leave this house I hope I may have something definite."

"Please God you may! If you will excuse me, gentlemen, I will go up to my wife's room and see if there has been
any change."

He was away some minutes, during which Holmes resumed his examination of the curiosities upon the wall.
When our host returned it was clear from his downcast face that he had made no progress. He brought with him a
tall, slim, brown-faced girl.

"The tea is ready, Dolores," said Ferguson. "See that your mistress has everything she can wish."

"She verra ill," cried the girl, looking with indignant eyes at her master. "She no ask for food. She verra ill. She
need doctor. I frightened stay alone with her without doctor."

Ferguson looked at me with a question in his eyes.

"I should be so glad if I could be of use."

"Would your mistress see Dr. Watson?"

"I take him. I no ask leave. She needs doctor."

"Then I'll come with you at once."

I followed the girl, who was quivering with strong emotion, up the staircase and down an ancient corridor. At the
end was an iron-clamped and massive door. It struck me as I looked at it that if Ferguson tried to force his way to his
wife he would find it no easy matter. The girl drew a key from her pocket, and the heavy oaken planks creaked upon
their old hinges. I passed in and she swiftly followed, fastening the door behind her.

On the bed a woman was lying who was clearly in a high fever. She was only half conscious, but as I entered she
raised a pair of frightened but beautiful eyes and glared at me in apprehension. Seeing a stranger, she appeared to be
relieved and sank back with a sigh upon the pillow. I stepped up to her with a few reassuring words, and she lay still
while I took her pulse and temperature. Both were high, and yet my impression was that the condition was rather
that of mental and nervous excitement than of any actual seizure.

"She lie like that one day, two day. I 'fraid she die," said the girl.

The woman turned her flushed and handsome face towards me.

"Where is my husband?"

"He is below and would wish to see you."

"I will not see him. I will not see him." Then she seemed to wander off into delirium. "A fiend! A fiend! Oh,
what shall I do with this devil?"

"Can I help you in any way?"
"No. No one can help. It is finished. All is destroyed. Do what I will, all is destroyed."

The woman must have some strange delusion. I could not see honest Bob Ferguson in the character of fiend or devil.

"Madame," I said, "your husband loves you dearly. He is deeply grieved at this happening."

Again she turned on me those glorious eyes.

"He loves me. Yes. But do I not love him? Do I not love him even to sacrifice myself rather than break his dear heart? That is how I love him. And yet he could think of me -- he could speak of me so."

"He is full of grief, but he cannot understand."

"No, he cannot understand. But he should trust."

"Will you not see him?" I suggested.

"No, no, I cannot forget those terrible words nor the look upon his face. I will not see him. Go now. You can do nothing for me. Tell him only one thing. I want my child. I have a right to my child. That is the only message I can send him." She turned her face to the wall and would say no more.

I returned to the room downstairs, where Ferguson and Holmes still sat by the fire. Ferguson listened moodily to my account of the interview.

"How can I send her the child?" he said. "How do I know what strange impulse might come upon her? How can I ever forget how she rose from beside it with its blood upon her lips?" He shuddered at the recollection. "The child is safe with Mrs. Mason, and there he must remain."

A smart maid, the only modern thing which we had seen in the house, had brought in some tea. As she was serving it the door opened and a youth entered the room. He was a remarkable lad, pale-faced and fair-haired, with excitable light blue eyes which blazed into a sudden flame of emotion and joy as they rested upon his father. He rushed forward and threw his arms round his neck with the abandon of a loving girl.

"Oh, daddy," he cried, "I did not know that you were due yet. I should have been here to meet you. Oh, I am so glad to see you!"

Ferguson gently disengaged himself from the embrace with some little show of embarrassment.

"Dear old chap," said he, patting the flaxen head with a very tender hand. "I came early because my friends, Mr. Holmes and Dr. Watson, have been persuaded to come down and spend an evening with us."

"Is that Mr. Holmes, the detective?"

"Yes."

The youth looked at us with a very penetrating and, as it seemed to me, unfriendly gaze.

"What about your other child, Mr. Ferguson?" asked Holmes. "Might we make the acquaintance of the baby?"

"Ask Mrs. Mason to bring baby down," said Ferguson. The boy went off with a curious, shambling gait which told my surgical eyes that he was suffering from a weak spine. Presently he returned, and behind him came a tall, gaunt woman bearing in her arms a very beautiful child, dark-eyed, golden-haired, a wonderful mixture of the Saxon and the Latin. Ferguson was evidently devoted to it, for he took it into his arms and fondled it most tenderly.

"Fancy anyone having the heart to hurt him," he muttered as he glanced down at the small, angry red pucker upon the cherub throat.

It was at this moment that I chanced to glance at Holmes and saw a most singular intentness in his expression. His face was as set as if it had been carved out of old ivory, and his eyes, which had glanced for a moment at father and child, were now fixed with eager curiosity upon something at the other side of the room. Following his gaze I could only guess that he was looking out through the window at the melancholy, dripping garden. It is true that a shutter had half closed outside and obstructed the view, but none the less it was certainly at the window that Holmes was fixing his concentrated attention. Then he smiled, and his eyes came back to the baby. On its chubby neck there was this small puckered mark. Without speaking, Holmes examined it with care. Finally he shook one of the dimpled fists which waved in front of him.

"Good-bye, little man. You have made a strange start in life. Nurse, I should wish to have a word with you in private."

He took her aside and spoke earnestly for a few minutes. I only heard the last words, which were: "Your anxiety will soon, I hope, be set at rest." The woman, who seemed to be a sour, silent kind of creature, withdrew with the child.

"What is Mrs. Mason like?" asked Holmes.

"Not very prepossessing externally, as you can see, but a heart of gold, and devoted to the child."

"Do you like her, Jack?" Holmes turned suddenly upon the boy. His expressive mobile face shadowed over, and he shook his head.

"Jacky has very strong likes and dislikes," said Ferguson, putting his arm round the boy. "Luckily I am one of his likes."
The boy cooed and nestled his head upon his father's breast. Ferguson gently disengaged him. "Run away, little Jacky," said he, and he watched his son with loving eyes until he disappeared. "Now, Mr. Holmes," he continued when the boy was gone, "I really feel that I have brought you on a fool's errand, for what can you possibly do save give me your sympathy? It must be an exceedingly delicate and complex affair from your point of view."

"It is certainly delicate," said my friend with an amused smile, "but I have not been struck up to now with its complexity. It has been a case for intellectual deduction, but when this original intellectual deduction is confirmed point by point by quite a number of independent incidents, then the subjective becomes objective and we can say confidently that we have reached our goal. I had, in fact, reached it before we left Baker Street, and the rest has merely been observation and confirmation."

Ferguson put his big hand to his furrowed forehead. "For heaven's sake, Holmes," he said hoarsely; "if you can see the truth in this matter, do not keep me in suspense. How do I stand? What shall I do? I care nothing as to how you have found your facts so long as you have really got them."

"Certainly I owe you an explanation, and you shall have it. But you will permit me to handle the matter in my own way? Is the lady capable of seeing us, Watson?"

"She is ill, but she is quite rational."

"Very good. It is only in her presence that we can clear the matter up. Let us go up to her."

"She will not see me," cried Ferguson.

"Oh, yes, she will," said Holmes. He scribbled a few lines upon a sheet of paper. "You at least have the entree, Watson. Will you have the goodness to give the lady this note?"

I ascended again and handed the note to Dolores, who cautiously opened the door. A minute later I heard a cry from within, a cry in which joy and surprise seemed to be blended. Dolores looked out.

"She will see them. She will leesten," said she.

At my summons Ferguson and Holmes came up. As we entered the room Ferguson took a step or two towards his wife, who had raised herself in the bed, but she held out her hand to repulse him. He sank into an armchair, while Holmes seated himself beside him, after bowing to the lady, who looked at him with wide-eyed amazement.

"I think we can dispense with Dolores," said Holmes. "Oh, very well, madame, if you would rather she stayed I can see no objection. Now, Mr. Ferguson, I am a busy man with many calls, and my methods have to be short and direct. The swiftest surgery is the least painful. Let me first say what will ease your mind. Your wife is a very good, a very loving, and a very ill-used woman."

Ferguson sat up with a cry of joy.

"Prove that, Mr. Holmes, and I am your debtor forever."

"I will do so, but in doing so I must wound you deeply in another direction."

"I care nothing so long as you clear my wife. Everything on earth is insignificant compared to that."

"Let me tell you, then, the train of reasoning which passed through my mind in Baker Street. The idea of a vampire was to me absurd. Such things do not happen in criminal practice in England. And yet your observation was precise. You had seen the lady rise from beside the child's cot with the blood upon her lips."

"I did."

"Did it not occur to you that a bleeding wound may be sucked for some other purpose than to draw the blood from it? Was there not a queen in English history who sucked such a wound to draw poison from it?"

"Poison!"

"A South American household. My instinct felt the presence of those weapons upon the wall before my eyes ever saw them. It might have been other poison, but that was what occurred to me. When I saw that little empty quiver beside the small birdbow, it was just what I expected to see. If the child were pricked with one of those arrows dipped in curare or some other devilish drug, it would mean death if the venom were not sucked out."

"And the dog! If one were to use such a poison, would one not try it first in order to see that it had not lost its power? I did not foresee the dog, but at least I understand him and he fitted into my reconstruction.

"Now do you understand? Your wife feared such an attack. She saw it made and saved the child's life, and yet she shrank from telling you all the truth, for she knew how you loved the boy and feared lest it break your heart."

"Jacky!"

"I watched him as you fondled the child just now. His face was clearly reflected in the glass of the window where the shutter formed a background. I saw such jealousy, such cruel hatred, as I have seldom seen in a human face."

"My Jacky!"

"You have to face it, Mr. Ferguson. It is the more painful because it is a distorted love, a maniacal exaggerated
love for you, and possibly for his dead mother, which has prompted his action. His very soul is consumed with hatred for this splendid child, whose health and beauty are a contrast to his own weakness."

"Good God! It is incredible!"

"Have I spoken the truth, madame?"

The lady was sobbing, with her face buried in the pillows. Now she turned to her husband.

"How could I tell you, Bob? I felt the blow it would be to you. It was better that I should wait and that it should come from other lips than mine. When this gentleman, who seems to have powers of magic, wrote that he knew all, I was glad."

"I think a year at sea would be my prescription for Master Jacky," said Holmes, rising from his chair. "Only one thing is still clouded, madame. We can quite understand your attacks upon Master Jacky. There is a limit to a mother's patience. But how did you dare to leave the child these last two days?"

"I had told Mrs. Mason. She knew."

"Exactly. So I imagined."

Ferguson was standing by the bed, choking, his hands outstretched and quivering.

"This, I fancy, is the time for our exit, Watson," said Holmes in a whisper. "If you will take one elbow of the too faithful Dolores, I will take the other. There, now," he added as he closed the door behind him, "I think we may leave them to settle the rest among themselves."

I have only one further note of this case. It is the letter which Holmes wrote in final answer to that with which the narrative begins. It ran thus:

Baker Street,

Nov. 21st.

Re Vampires

Sir:

Referring to your letter of the 19th, I beg to state that I have looked into the inquiry of your client, Mr. Robert Ferguson, of Ferguson and Muirhead, tea brokers, of Mincing Lane, and that the matter has been brought to a satisfactory conclusion. With thanks for your recommendation, I am, sir,

Faithfully yours,

Sherlock Holmes.

The Adventure of the Three Garridebs

It may have been a comedy, or it may have been a tragedy. It cost one man his reason, it cost me a blood-letting, and it cost yet another man the penalties of the law. Yet there was certainly an element of comedy. Well, you shall judge for yourselves.

I remember the date very well, for it was in the same month that Holmes refused a knighthood for services which may perhaps some day be described. I only refer to the matter in passing, for in my position of partner and confidant I am obliged to be particularly careful to avoid any indiscretion. I repeat, however, that this enables me to fix the date, which was the latter end of June, 1902, shortly after the conclusion of the South African War. Holmes had spent several days in bed, as was his habit from time to time, but he emerged that morning with a long foolscap document in his hand and a twinkle of amusement in his austere gray eyes.

"There is a chance for you to make some money, friend Watson," said he. "Have you ever heard the name of Garrideb?"

I admitted that I had not.

"Well, if you can lay your hand upon a Garrideb, there's money in it."

"Why?"

"Ah, that's a long story -- rather a whimsical one, too. I don't think in all our explorations of human complexities we have ever come upon anything more singular. The fellow will be here presently for cross-examination, so I won't open the matter up till he comes. But, meanwhile, that's the name we want."

The telephone directory lay on the table beside me, and I turned over the pages in a rather hopeless quest. But to my amazement there was this strange name in its due place. I gave a cry of triumph.

"Here you are, Holmes! Here it is!"

Holmes took the book from my hand.

"Garrideb, N.," he read, "136 Little Ryder Street, W. 'Sorry to disappoint you, my dear Watson, but this is the man himself. That is the address upon his letter. We want another to match him.'

Mrs. Hudson had come in with a card upon a tray. I took it up and glanced at it.
"Why, here it is!" I cried in amazement. "This is a different initial. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, Moorville, Kansas, U. S. A."

Holmes smiled as he looked at the card. "I am afraid you must make yet another effort, Watson," said he. "This gentleman is also in the plot already, though I certainly did not expect to see him this morning. However, he is in a position to tell us a good deal which I want to know."

A moment later he was in the room. Mr. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law, was a short, powerful man with the round, fresh, clean-shaven face characteristic of so many American men of affairs. The general effect was chubby and rather childlike, so that one received the impression of quite a young man with a broad set smile upon his face. His eyes, however, were arresting. Seldom in any human head have I seen a pair which bespoke a more intense inward life, so bright were they, so alert, so responsive to every change of thought. His accent was American, but was not accompanied by any eccentricity of speech.

"Mr. Holmes?" he asked, glancing from one to the other. "Ah, yes! Your pictures are not unlike you, sir, if I may say so. I believe you have had a letter from my namesake, Mr. Nathan Garrideb, have you not?"

"Pray sit down," said Sherlock Holmes. "We shall, I fancy, have a good deal to discuss." He took up his sheets of foolscap. "You are, of course, the Mr. John Garrideb mentioned in this document. But surely you have been in England some time?"

"Why do you say that, Mr. Holmes?" I seemed to read sudden suspicion in those expressive eyes.

"Your whole outfit is English."

Mr. Garrideb forced a laugh. "I've read of your tricks, Mr. Holmes, but I never thought I would be the subject of them. Where do you read that?"

"The shoulder cut of your coat, the toes of your boots -- could anyone doubt it?"

"Well, well, I had no idea I was so obvious a Britisher. But business brought me over here some time ago, and so, as you say, my outfit is nearly all London. However, I guess your time is of value, and we did not meet to talk about the cut of my socks. What about getting down to that paper you hold in your hand?"

Holmes had in some way ruffled our visitor, whose chubby face had assumed a far less amiable expression.

"Patience! Patience, Mr. Garrideb!" said my friend in a soothing voice. "Dr. Watson would tell you that these little digressions of mine sometimes prove in the end to have some bearing on the matter. But why did Mr. Nathan Garrideb not come with you?"

"Why did he ever drag you into it at all?" asked our visitor with a sudden outflame of anger. "What in thunder had you to do with it? Here was a bit of professional business between two gentlemen, and one of them must needs call in a detective! I saw him this morning, and he told me this fool-trick he had played me, and that's why I am here. But I feel bad about it, all the same."

"There was no reflection upon you, Mr. Garrideb. It was simply zeal upon his part to gain your end -- an end which is, I understand, equally vital for both of you. He knew that I had means of getting information, and, therefore, it was very natural that he should apply to me."

Our visitor's angry face gradually cleared.

"Well, that puts it different," said he. "When I went to see him this morning and he told me he had sent to a detective, I just asked for your address and came right away. I don't want police butting into a private matter. But if you are content just to help us find the man, there can be no harm in that."

"Well, that is just how it stands," said Holmes. "And now, sir, since you are here, we had best have a clear account from your own lips. My friend here knows nothing of the details."

Mr. Garrideb surveyed me with not too friendly a gaze.

"Need he know?" he asked.

"We usually work together."

"Well, there's no reason it should be kept a secret. I'll give you the facts as short as I can make them. If you came from Kansas I would not need to explain to you who Alexander Hamilton Garrideb was. He made his money in real estate, and afterwards in the wheat pit at Chicago, but he spent it in buying up as much land as would make one of your counties, lying along the Arkansas River, west of Fort Dodge. It's grazing-land and lumber-land and arable-land and mineralized-land, and just every sort of land that brings dollars to the man that owns it."

"He had no kith nor kin -- or, if he had, I never heard of it. But he took a kind of pride in the queerness of his name. That was what brought us together. I was in the law at Topeka, and one day I had a visit from the old man, and he was tickled to death to meet another man with his own name. It was his pet fad, and he was dead set to find out if there were any more Garridebs in the world. 'Find me another!' said he. I told him I was a busy man and could not spend my life hiking round the world in search of Garridebs. 'None the less,' said he, 'that is just what you will do if things pan out as I planned them.' I thought he was joking, but there was a powerful lot of meaning in the words, as I was soon to discover."
"For he died within a year of saying them, and he left a will behind him. It was the queerest will that has ever been filed in the State of Kansas. His property was divided into three parts and I was to have one on condition that I found two Garridebs who would share the remainder. It's five million dollars for each if it is a cent, but we can't lay a finger on it until we all three stand in a row.

"It was so big a chance that I just let my legal practice slide and I set forth looking for Garridebs. There is not one in the United States. I went through it, sir, with a fine-toothed comb and never a Garrideb could I catch. Then I tried the old country. Sure enough there was the name in the London telephone directory. I went after him two days ago and explained the whole matter to him. But he is a lone man, like myself, with some women relations, but no men. It says three adult men in the will. So you see we still have a vacancy, and if you can help to fill it we will be very ready to pay your charges."

"Well, Watson," said Holmes with a smile, "I said it was rather whimsical, did I not? I should have thought, sir, that your obvious way was to advertise in the agony columns of the papers."

"I have done that, Mr. Holmes. No replies."

"Dear me! Well, it is certainly a most curious little problem. I may take a glance at it in my leisure. By the way, it is curious that you should have come from Topeka. I used to have a correspondent -- he is dead now -- old Dr. Lysander Starr, who was mayor in 1890." "Good old Dr. Starr!" said our visitor. "His name is still honoured. Well, Mr. Holmes, I suppose all we can do is to report to you and let you know how we progress. I reckon you will hear within a day or two." With this assurance our American bowed and departed.

Holmes had lit his pipe, and he sat for some time with a curious smile upon his face.

"Well?" I asked at last.

"I am wondering, Watson -- just wondering!"

"At what?"

Holmes took his pipe from his lips.

"I was wondering, Watson, what on earth could be the object of this man in telling us such a rigmarole of lies. I nearly asked him so -- for there are times when a brutal frontal attack is the best policy -- but I judged it better to let him think he had fooled us. Here is a man with an English coat frayed at the elbow and trousers bagged at the knee with a year's wear, and yet by this document and by his own account he is a provincial American lately landed in London. There have been no advertisements in the agony columns. You know that I miss nothing there. They are my favourite covert for putting up a bird, and I would never have overlooked such a cock pheasant as that. I never knew a Dr. Lysander Starr, of Topeka. Touch him where you would he was false. I think the fellow is really an American, but he has worn his accent smooth with years of London. What is his game, then, and what motive lies behind this preposterous search for Garridebs? It's worth our attention, for, granting that the man is a rascal, he is certainly a complex and ingenious one. We must now find out if our other correspondent is a fraud also. Just ring him up, Watson."

I did so, and heard a thin, quavering voice at the other end of the line.

"Yes, yes, I am Mr. Nathan Garrideb. Is Mr. Holmes there? I should very much like to have a word with Mr. Holmes."

My friend took the instrument and I heard the usual syncopated dialogue.

"Yes, he has been here. I understand that you don't know him.... How long? ... Only two days! ... Yes, yes, of course, it is a most captivating prospect. Will you be at home this evening? I suppose your namesake will not be there? ... Very good, we will come then, for I would rather have a chat without him.... Dr. Watson will come with me.... I understand from your note that you did not go out often.... Well, we shall be round about six. You need not mention it to the American lawyer.... Very good. Good-bye!"

It was twilight of a lovely spring evening, and even Little Ryder Street, one of the smaller offshoots from the Edgware Road, within a stone-cast of old Tyburn Tree of evil memory, looked golden and wonderful in the slanting rays of the setting sun. The particular house to which we were directed was a large, old-fashioned, Early Georgian edifice, with a flat brick face broken only by two deep bay windows on the ground floor. It was on this ground floor that our client lived, and, indeed, the low windows proved to be the front of the huge room in which he spent his waking hours. Holmes pointed as we passed to the small brass plate which bore the curious name.

"Up some years, Watson," he remarked, indicating its discoloured surface. "It's his real name, anyhow, and that is something to note."

The house had a common stair, and there were a number of names painted in the hall, some indicating offices and some private chambers. It was not a collection of residential flats, but rather the abode of Bohemian bachelors. Our client opened the door for us himself and apologized by saying that the woman in charge left at four o'clock. Mr. Nathan Garrideb proved to be a very tall, loosejointed, round-backed person, gaunt and bald, some sixty-odd
years of age. He had a cadaverous face, with the dull dead skin of a man to whom exercise was unknown. Large round spectacles and a small projecting goat's beard combined with his stooping attitude to give him an expression of peering curiosity. The general effect, however, was amiable, though eccentric.

The room was as curious as its occupant. It looked like a small museum. It was both broad and deep, with cupboards and cabinets all round, crowded with specimens, geological and anatomical. Cases of butterflies and moths flanked each side of the entrance. A large table in the centre was littered with all sorts of debris, while the tall brass tube of a powerful microscope bristled up among them. As I glanced round I was surprised at the universality of the man's interests. Here was a case of ancient coins. There was a cabinet of flint instruments. Behind his central table was a large cupboard of fossil bones. Above was a line of plaster skulls with such names as "Neanderthal," "Heidelberg," "Cro-Magnon" printed beneath them. It was clear that he was a student of many subjects. As he stood in front of us now, he held a piece of chamois leather in his right hand with which he was polishing a coin.

"Syracusan -- of the best period," he explained, holding it up. "They degenerated greatly towards the end. At their best I hold them supreme, though some prefer the Alexandrian school. You will find a chair here, Mr. Holmes. Pray allow me to clear these bones. And you, sir -- ah, yes, Dr. Watson -- if you would have the goodness to put the Japanese vase to one side. You see round me my little interests in life. My doctor lectures me about never going out, but why should I go out when I have so much to hold me here? I can assure you that the adequate cataloguing of one of those cabinets would take me three good months."

Holmes looked round him with curiosity.

"But do you tell me that you never go out?" he said.

"Now and again I drive down to Sotheby's or Christie's. Otherwise I very seldom leave my room. I am not too strong, and my researches are very absorbing. But you can imagine, Mr. Holmes, what a terrific shock -- pleasant but terrific -- it was for me when I heard of this unparalleled good fortune. It only needs one more Garrideb to complete the matter, and surely we can find one. I had a brother, but he is dead, and female relatives are disqualified. But there must surely be others in the world. I had heard that you handled strange cases, and that was why I sent to you. Of course, this American gentleman is quite right, and I should have taken his advice first, but I acted for the best."

"I think you acted very wisely indeed," said Holmes. "But are you really anxious to acquire an estate in America?"

"Certainly not, sir. Nothing would induce me to leave my collection. But this gentleman has assured me that he will buy me out as soon as we have established our claim. Five million dollars was the sum named. There are a dozen specimens in the market at the present moment which fill gaps in my collection, and which I am unable to purchase for want of a few hundred pounds. Just think what I could do with five million dollars. Why, I have the nucleus of a national collection. I shall be the Hans Sloane of my age."

His eyes gleamed behind his great spectacles. It was very clear that no pains would be spared by Mr. Nathan Garrideb in finding a namesake.

"I merely called to make your acquaintance, and there is no reason why I should interrupt your studies," said Holmes. "I prefer to establish personal touch with those with whom I do business. There are few questions I need ask, for I have your very clear narrative in my pocket, and I filled up the blanks when this American gentleman called. I understand that up to this week you were unaware of his existence."

"That is so. He called last Tuesday."

"Did he tell you of our interview to-day?"

"Yes, he came straight back to me. He had been very angry."

"Why should he be angry?"

"He seemed to think it was some reflection on his honour. But he was quite cheerful again when he returned."

"Did he suggest any course of action?"

"No, sir, he did not."

"Has he had, or asked for, any money from you?"

"No, sir, never!"

"You see no possible object he has in view?"

"None, except what he states."

"Did you tell him of our telephone appointment?"

"Yes, sir, I did."

Holmes was lost in thought. I could see that he was puzzled.

"Have you any articles of great value in your collection?"

"No, sir. I am not a rich man. It is a good collection, but not a very valuable one."

"You have no fear of burglars?"
"Not the least."
"How long have you been in these rooms?"
"Nearly five years."

Holmes's cross-examination was interrupted by an imperative knocking at the door. No sooner had our client unatched it than the American lawyer burst excitedly into the room.

"Here you are!" he cried, waving a paper over his head. "I thought I should be in time to get you. Mr. Nathan Garrideb, my congratulations! You are a rich man, sir. Our business is happily finished and all is well. As to you, Mr. Holmes, we can only say we are sorry if we have given you any useless trouble."

He handed over the paper to our client, who stood staring at a marked advertisement. Holmes and I leaned forward and read it over his shoulder. This is how it ran:

**HOWARD GARRIDEB**
**CONSTRUCTOR OF AGRICULTURAL MACHINERY**
Binders, reapers, steam and hand plows, drills, harrows, farmer's carts, buckboards, and all other appliances.
Estimates for Artesian Wells
Apply Grosvenor Buildings, Aston

"Glorious!" gasped our host. "That makes our third man."

"I had opened up inquiries in Birmingham," said the American, "and my agent there has sent me this advertisement from a local paper. We must hustle and put the thing through. I have written to this man and told him that you will see him in his office to-morrow afternoon at four o'clock."

"You want me to see him?"

"What do you say, Mr. Holmes? Don't you think it would be wiser? Here am I, a wandering American with a wonderful tale. Why should he believe what I tell him? But you are a Britisher with solid references, and he is bound to take notice of what you say. I would go with you if you wished, but I have a very busy day to-morrow, and I could always follow you if you are in any trouble."

"Well, I have not made such a journey for years."

"It is nothing, Mr. Garrideb. I have figured out our connections. You leave at twelve and should be there soon after two. Then you can be back the same night. All you have to do is to see this man, explain the matter, and get an affidavit of his existence. By the Lord!" he added hotly, "considering I've come all the way from the centre of America, it is surely little enough if you go a hundred miles in order to put this matter through."

"Quite so," said Holmes. "I think what this gentleman says is very true."

Mr. Nathan Garrideb shrugged his shoulders with a disconsolate air. "Well, if you insist I shall go," said he. "It is certainly hard for me to refuse you anything, considering the glory of hope that you have brought into my life."

"Then that is agreed," said Holmes, "and no doubt you will let me have a report as soon as you can."

"I'll see to that," said the American. "Well," he added looking at his watch, "I'll have to get on. I'll call to-morrow, Mr. Nathan, and see you off to Birmingham. Coming my way, Mr. Holmes? Well, then, good-bye, and we may have good news for you to-morrow night."

I noticed that my friend's face cleared when the American left the room, and the look of thoughtful perplexity had vanished.

"I wish I could look over your collection, Mr. Garrideb," said he. "In my profession all sorts of odd knowledge comes useful, and this room of yours is a storehouse of it."

Our client shone with pleasure and his eyes gleamed from behind his big glasses.

"I had always heard, sir, that you were a very intelligent man," said he. "I could take you round now if you have the time."

"Unfortunately, I have not. But these specimens are so well labelled and classified that they hardly need your personal explanation. If I should be able to look in to-morrow, I presume that there would be no objection to my glancing over them?"

"None at all. You are most welcome. The place will, of course, be shut up, but Mrs. Saunders is in the basement up to four o'clock and would let you in with her key."

"Well, I happen to be clear to-morrow afternoon. If you would say a word to Mrs. Saunders it would be quite in order. By the way, who is your house-agent?"

Our client was amazed at the sudden question.

"Holloway and Steele, in the Edgware Road. But why?"

"I am a bit of an archaeologist myself when it comes to houses," said Holmes, laughing. "I was wondering if this was Queen Anne or Georgian."

"Georgian, beyond doubt."
"Really. I should have thought a little earlier. However, it is easily ascertained. Well, good-bye, Mr. Garrideb, and may you have every success in your Birmingham journey."

The house-agent's was close by, but we found that it was closed for the day, so we made our way back to Baker Street. It was not till after dinner that Holmes reverted to the subject.

"Our little problem draws to a close," said he. "No doubt you have outlined the solution in your own mind."

"I can make neither head nor tail of it."

"The head is surely clear enough and the tail we should see to-morrow. Did you notice nothing curious about that advertisement?"

"I saw that the word 'plough' was misspelt."

"Oh, you did notice that, did you? Come, Watson, you improve all the time. Yes, it was bad English but good American. The printer had set it up as received. Then the buckboards. That is American also. And artesian wells are commoner with them than with us. It was a typical American advertisement, but purporting to be from an English firm. What do you make of that?"

"I can only suppose that this American lawyer put it in himself. What his object was I fail to understand."

"Well, there are alternative explanations. Anyhow, he wanted to get this good old fossil up to Birmingham. That is very clear. I might have told him that he was clearly going on a wild-goose chase, but, on second thoughts, it seemed better to clear the stage by letting him go. To-morrow, Watson -- well, to-morrow will speak for itself."

Holmes was up and out early. When he returned at luncheon I noticed that his face was very grave.

"This is a more serious matter than I had expected, Watson," said he. "It is fair to tell you so, though I know it will only be an additional reason to you for running your head into danger. I should know my Watson by now. But there is danger, and you should know it."

"Well, it is not the first we have shared, Holmes. I hope it may not be the last. What is the particular danger this time?"

"We are up against a very hard case. I have identified Mr. John Garrideb, Counsellor at Law. He is none other than 'Killer' Evans, of sinister and murderous reputation."

"I fear I am none the wiser."

"Ah, it is not part of your profession to carry about a portable Newgate Calendar in your memory. I have been down to see friend Lestrade at the Yard. There may be an occasional want of imaginative intuition down there, but they lead the world for thoroughness and method. I had an idea that we might get on the track of our American friend in their records. Sure enough, I found his chubby face smiling up at me from the rogues' portrait gallery. 'James Winter, alias Morecroft, alias Killer Evans,' was the inscription below."

Holmes drew an envelope from his pocket. "I scribbled down a few points from his dossier: Aged forty-four. Native of Chicago. Known to have shot three men in the States. Escaped from penitentiary through political influence. Came to London in 1893. Shot a man over cards in a night-club in the Waterloo Road in January, 1895. Man died, but he was shown to have been the aggressor in the row. Dead man was identified as Rodger Prescott, famous as forger and coiner in Chicago. Killer Evans released in 1901. Has been under police supervision since, but so far as known has led an honest life. Very dangerous man, usually carries arms and is prepared to use them. That is our bird, Watson -- a sporting bird, as you must admit."

"But what is his game?"

"Well, it begins to define itself. I have been to the houseagent's. Our client, as he told us, has been there five years. It was unlet for a year before then. The previous tenant was a gentleman at large named Waldron. Waldron's appearance was well remembered at the office. He had suddenly vanished and nothing more been heard of him. He was a tall, bearded man with very dark features. Now, Prescott, the man whom Killer Evans had shot, was, according to Scotland Yard, a tall, dark man with a beard. As a working hypothesis, I think we may take it that Prescott, the American criminal, used to live in the very room which our innocent friend now devotes to his museum. So at last we get a link, you see."

"And the next link?"

"Well, we must go now and look for that."

He took a revolver from the drawer and handed it to me.

"I have my old favourite with me. If our Wild West friend tries to live up to his nickname, we must be ready for him. I'll give you an hour for a siesta, Watson, and then I think it will be time for our Ryder Street adventure."

It was just four o'clock when we reached the curious apartment of Nathan Garrideb. Mrs. Saunders, the caretaker, was about to leave, but she had no hesitation in admitting us, for the door shut with a spring lock, and Holmes promised to see that all was safe before we left. Shortly afterwards the outer door closed, her bonnet passed the bow window, and we knew that we were alone in the lower floor of the house. Holmes made a rapid examination of the premises. There was one cupboard in a dark corner which stood out a little from the wall. It was behind this
that we eventually crouched while Holmes in a whisper outlined his intentions.

"He wanted to get our amiable friend out of his room -- that is very clear, and, as the collector never went out, it took some planning to do it. The whole of this Garrideb invention was apparently for no other end. I must say, Watson, that there is a certain devilish ingenuity about it, even if the queer name of the tenant did give him an opening which he could hardly have expected. He wove his plot with remarkable cunning.

"But what did he want?"

"Well, that is what we are here to find out. It has nothing whatever to do with our client, so far as I can read the situation. It is something connected with the man he murdered -- the man who may have been his confederate in crime. There is some guilty secret in the room. That is how I read it. At first I thought our friend might have something in his collection more valuable than he knew -- something worth the attention of a big criminal. But the fact that Rodger Prescott of evil memory inhabited these rooms points to some deeper reason. Well, Watson, we can but possess our souls in patience and see what the hour may bring."

That hour was not long in striking. We crouched closer in the shadow as we heard the outer door open and shut. Then came the sharp, metallic snap of a key, and the American was in the room. He closed the door softly behind him, took a sharp glance around him to see that all was safe, threw off his overcoat, and walked up to the central table with the brisk manner of one who knows exactly what he has to do and how to do it. He pushed the table to one side, tore up the square of carpet on which it rested, rolled it completely back, and then, drawing a jemmy from his inside pocket, he knelt down and worked vigorously upon the floor. Presently we heard the sound of sliding boards, and an instant later a square had opened in the planks. Killer Evans struck a match, lit a stump of candle, and vanished from our view.

Clearly our moment had come. Holmes touched my wrist as a signal, and together we stole across to the open trap-door. Gently as we moved, however, the old floor must have creaked under our feet, for the head of our American, peering anxiously round, emerged suddenly from the open space. His face turned upon us with a glare of baffled rage, which gradually softened into a rather shamefaced grin as he realized that two pistols were pointed at his head.

"Well, well!" said he coolly as he scrambled to the surface. "I guess you have been one too many for me, Mr. Holmes. Saw through my game, I suppose, and played me for a sucker from the first. Well, sir, I hand it to you; you have me beat and --"

In an instant he had whisked out a revolver from his breast and had fired two shots. I felt a sudden hot sear as if a red-hot iron had been pressed to my thigh. There was a crash as Holmes's pistol came down on the man's head. I had a vision of him sprawling upon the floor with blood running down his face while Holmes rummaged him for weapons. Then my friend's wiry arms were round me, and he was leading me to a chair.

"You're not hurt, Watson? For God's sake, say that you are not hurt!"

It was worth a wound -- it was worth many wounds -- to know the depth of loyalty and love which lay behind that cold mask. The clear, hard eyes were dimmed for a moment, and the firm lips were shaking. For the one and only time I caught a glimpse of a great heart as well as of a great brain. All my years of humble but single-minded service culminated in that moment of revelation.

"It's nothing, Holmes. It's a mere scratch."

He had ripped up my trousers with his pocket-knife.

"You are right," he cried with an immense sigh of relief. "It is quite superficial." His face set like flint as he glared at our prisoner, who was sitting up with a dazed face. "By the Lord, it is as well for you. If you had killed Watson, you would not have got out of this room alive. Now, sir, what have you to say for yourself?"

He had nothing to say for himself. He only sat and scowled. I leaned on Holmes's arm, and together we looked down into the small cellar which had been disclosed by the secret flap. It was still illuminated by the candle which Evans had taken down with him. Our eyes fell upon a mass of rusted machinery, great rolls of paper, a litter of bottles, and, neatly arranged upon a small table, a number of neat little bundles.

"A printing press -- a counterfeiter's outfit," said Holmes.

"Yes, sir," said our prisoner, staggering slowly to his feet and then sinking into the chair. "The greatest counterfeiter London ever saw. That's Prescott's machine, and those bundles on the table are two thousand of Prescott's notes worth a hundred each and fit to pass anywhere. Help yourselves, gentlemen. Call it a deal and let me beat it."

Holmes laughed.

"We don't do things like that, Mr. Evans. There is no bolthole for you in this country. You shot this man Prescott, did you not?"

"Yes, sir, and got five years for it, though it was he who pulled on me. Five years -- when I should have had a medal the size of a soup plate. No living man could tell a Prescott from a Bank of England, and if I hadn't put him
out he would have flooded London with them. I was the only one in the world who knew where he made them. Can you wonder that I wanted to get to the place? And can you wonder that when I found this crazy boob of a bug-hunter with the queer name squatting right on the top of it, and never quitting his room, I had to do the best I could to shift him? Maybe I would have been wiser if I had put him away. It would have been easy enough, but I'm a soft-hearted guy that can't begin shooting unless the other man has a gun also. But say, Mr. Holmes, what have I done wrong, anyhow? I've not used this plant. I've not hurt this old stiff. Where do you get me?"

"Only attempted murder, so far as I can see," said Holmes. "But that's not our job. They take that at the next stage. What we wanted at present was just your sweet self. Please give the Yard a call, Watson. It won't be entirely unexpected."

So those were the facts about Killer Evans and his remarkable invention of the three Garridebs. We heard later that our poor old friend never got over the shock of his dissipated dreams. When his castle in the air fell down, it buried him beneath the ruins. He was last heard of at a nursing-home in Brixton. It was a glad day at the Yard when the Prescott outfit was discovered, for, though they knew that it existed, they had never been able, after the death of the man, to find out where it was. Evans had indeed done great service and caused several worthy C. I. D. men to sleep the sounder, for the counterfeiter stands in a class by himself as a public danger. They would willingly have subscribed to that soup-plate medal of which the criminal had spoken, but an unappreciative bench took a less favourable view, and the Killer returned to those shades from which he had just emerged.

The Adventure of the Illustrious Client

"It can't hurt now," was Mr. Sherlock Holmes's comment when, for the tenth time in as many years, I asked his leave to reveal the following narrative. So it was that at last I obtained permission to put on record what was, in some ways, the supreme moment of my friend's career.

Both Holmes and I had a weakness for the Turkish bath. It was over a smoke in the pleasant lassitude of the drying-room that I have found him less reticent and more human than anywhere else. On the upper floor of the Northumberland Avenue establishment there is an isolated corner where two couches lie side by side, and it was on these that we lay upon September 3, 1902, the day when my narrative begins. I had asked him whether anything was stirring, and for answer he had shot his long, thin, nervous arm out of the sheets which enveloped him and had drawn an envelope from the inside pocket of the coat which hung beside him.

"It may be some fussy, self-important fool; it may be a matter of life or death," said he as he handed me the note. "I know no more than this message tells me."

It was from the Carlton Club and dated the evening before. This is what I read:

Sir James Damery presents his compliments to Mr. Sherlock Holmes and will call upon him at 4:30 to-morrow. Sir James begs to say that the matter upon which he desires to consult Mr. Holmes is very delicate and also very important. He trusts, therefore, that Mr. Holmes will make every effort to grant this interview, and that he will confirm it over the telephone to the Carlton Club.

"I need not say that I have confirmed it, Watson," said Holmes as I returned the paper. "Do you know anything of this man Damery?"

"Only that this name is a household word in society."

"Well, I can tell you a little more than that. He has rather a reputation for arranging delicate matters which are to be kept out of the papers. You may remember his negotiations with Sir George Lewis over the Hammerford Will case. He is a man of the world with a natural turn for diplomacy. I am bound, therefore, to hope that it is not a false scent and that he has some real need for our assistance."

"Our?"

"Well, if you will be so good, Watson."

"I shall be honoured."

"Then you have the hour -- 4:30. Until then we can put the matter out of our heads."

I was living in my own rooms in Queen Anne Street at the time, but I was round at Baker Street before the time named. Sharp to the half-hour, Colonel Sir James Damery was announced. It is hardly necessary to describe him, for many will remember that large, bluff, honest personality, that broad, clean-shaven face, and, above all, that pleasant, mellow voice. Frankness shone from his gray Irish eyes, and good humour played round his mobile, smiling lips. His lucent top-hat, his dark frock-coat, indeed, every detail, from the pearl pin in the black satin cravat to the lavender spats over the varnished shoes, spoke of the meticulous care in dress for which he was famous. The big, masterful aristocrat dominated the little room.

"Of course, I was prepared to find Dr. Watson," he remarked with a courteous bow. "His collaboration may be very necessary, for we are dealing on this occasion, Mr. Holmes, with a man to whom violence is familiar and who
"I have had several opponents to whom that flattering term has been applied," said Holmes with a smile. "Don't you smoke? Then you will excuse me if I light my pipe. If your man is more dangerous than the late Professor Moriarty, or than the living Colonel Sebastian Moran, then he is indeed worth meeting. May I ask his name?"

"Have you ever heard of Baron Gruner?"

"You mean the Austrian murderer?"

Colonel Damery threw up his kid-gloved hands with a laugh. "There is no getting past you, Mr. Holmes! Wonderful! So you have already sized him up as a murderer?"

"It is my business to follow the details of Continental crime. Who could possibly have read what happened at Prague and have any doubts as to the man's guilt! It was a purely technical legal point and the suspicious death of a witness that saved him! I am as sure that he killed his wife when the so-called 'accident' happened in the Splügen Pass as if I had seen him do it. I knew, also, that he had come to England and had a presentiment that sooner or later he would find me some work to do. Well, what has Baron Gruner been up to? I presume it is not this old tragedy which has come up again?"

"No, it is more serious than that. To revenge crime is important, but to prevent it is more so. It is a terrible thing, Mr. Holmes, to see a dreadful event, an atrocious situation, preparing itself before your eyes, to clearly understand whither it will lead and yet to be utterly unable to avert it. Can a human being be placed in a more trying position?"

"Perhaps not."

"Then you will sympathize with the client in whose interests I am acting."

"I did not understand that you were merely an intermediary. Who is the principal?"

"Mr. Holmes, I must beg you not to press that question. It is important that I should be able to assure him that his honoured name has been in no way dragged into the matter. His motives are, to the last degree, honourable and chivalrous, but he prefers to remain unknown. I need not say that your fees will be assured and that you will be given a perfectly free hand. Surely the actual name of your client is immaterial?"

"I am sorry," said Holmes. "I am accustomed to have mystery at one end of my cases, but to have it at both ends is too confusing. I fear, Sir James, that I must decline to act."

Our visitor was greatly disturbed. His large, sensitive face was darkened with emotion and disappointment.

"You hardly realize the effect of your own action, Mr. Holmes," said he. "You place me in a most serious dilemma for I am perfectly certain that you would be proud to take over the case if I could give you the facts, and yet a promise forbids me from revealing them all. May I, at least, lay all that I can before you?"

"By all means, so long as it is understood that I commit myself to nothing."

"That is understood. In the first place, you have no doubt heard of General de Merville?"

"De Merville of Khyber fame? Yes, I have heard of him."

"He has a daughter, Violet de Merville, young, rich, beautiful, accomplished, a wonder-woman in every way. It is this daughter, this lovely, innocent girl, whom we are endeavouring to save from the clutches of a fiend."

"Baron Gruner has some hold over her, then?"

"The strongest of all holds where a woman is concerned -- the hold of love. The fellow is, as you may have heard, extraordinarily handsome, with a most fascinating manner. a gentle voice and that air of romance and mystery which means so much to a woman. He is said to have the whole sex at his mercy and to have made ample use of the fact."

"But how came such a man to meet a lady of the standing of Miss Violet de Merville?"

"It was on a Mediterranean yachting voyage. The company, though select, paid their own passages. No doubt the promoters hardly realized the Baron's true character until it was too late. The villain attached himself to the lady, and with such effect that he has completely and absolutely won her heart. To say that she loves him hardly expresses it. She dotes upon him, she is obsessed by him. Outside of him there is nothing on earth. She will not hear one word against him. Everything has been done to cure her of her madness, but in vain. To sum up, she proposes to marry him next month. As she is of age and has a will of iron, it is hard to know how to prevent her."

"Does she know about the Austrian episode?"

"The cunning devil has told her every unsavoury public scandal of his past life, but always in such a way as to make himself out to be an innocent martyr. She absolutely accepts his version and will listen to no other."

"Dear me! But surely you have inadvertently let out the name of your client? It is no doubt General de Merville."

Our visitor fidgeted in his chair.

"I could deceive you by saying so, Mr. Holmes, but it would not be true. De Merville is a broken man. The strong soldier has been utterly demoralized by this incident. He has lost the nerve which never failed him on the battlefield and has become a weak, doddering old man, utterly incapable of contending with a brilliant, forceful rascal like this Austrian. My client however is an old friend, one who has known the General intimately for many
years and taken a paternal interest in this young girl since she wore short frocks. He cannot see this tragedy consummated without some attempt to stop it. There is nothing in which Scotland Yard can act. It was his own suggestion that you should be called in, but it was, as I have said, on the express stipulation that he should not be personally involved in the matter. I have no doubt, Mr. Holmes, with your great powers you could easily trace my client back through me, but I must ask you, as a point of honour, to refrain from doing so, and not to break in upon his incognito."

Holmes gave a whimsical smile.

"I think I may safely promise that," said he. "I may add that your problem interests me, and that I shall be prepared to look into it. How shall I keep in touch with you?"

"The Carlton Club will find me. But in case of emergency, there is a private telephone call, 'XX.31.' "

Holmes noted it down and sat, still smiling, with the open memorandum-book upon his knee.

"The Baron's present address, please?"

"Vernon Lodge, near Kingston. It is a large house. He has been fortunate in some rather shady speculations and is a rich man, which naturally makes him a more dangerous antagonist."

"Is he at home at present?"

"Yes."

"Apart from what you have told me, can you give me any further information about the man?"

"He has expensive tastes. He is a horse fancier. For a short time he played polo at Hurlingham, but then this Prague affair got noise about and he had to leave. He collects books and pictures. He is a man with a considerable artistic side to his nature. He is, I believe, a recognized authority upon Chinese pottery and has written a book upon the subject."

"A complex mind," said Holmes. "All great criminals have that. My old friend Charlie Peace was a violin virtuoso. Wainwright was no mean artist. I could quote many more. Well, Sir James, you will inform your client that I am turning my mind upon Baron Gruner. I can say no more. I have some sources of information of my own, and I dare say we may find some means of opening the matter up."

When our visitor had left us Holmes sat so long in deep thought that it seemed to me that he had forgotten my presence. At last, however, he came briskly back to earth.

"Well, Watson, any views?" he asked.

"I should think you had better see the young lady herself."

"My dear Watson, if her poor old broken father cannot move her, how shall I, a stranger, prevail? And yet there is something in the suggestion if all else fails. But I think we must begin from a different angle. I rather fancy that Shinwell Johnson might be a help."

I have not had occasion to mention Shinwell Johnson in these memoirs because I have seldom drawn my cases from the latter phases of my friend's career. During the first years of the century he became a valuable assistant. Johnson, I grieve to say, made his name first as a very dangerous villain and served two terms at Parkhurst. Finally he repented and allied himself to Holmes, acting as his agent in the huge criminal underworld of London and obtaining information which often proved to be of vital importance. Had Johnson been a "nark" of the police he would soon have been exposed, but as he dealt with cases which never came directly into the courts, his activities were never realized by his companions. With the glamour of his two convictions upon him, he had the entree of every night-club, doss house, and gambling den in the town, and his quick observation and active brain made him an ideal agent for gaining information. It was to him that Sherlock Holmes now proposed to turn.

It was not possible for me to follow the immediate steps taken by my friend, for I had some pressing professional business of my own, but I met him by appointment that evening at Simpson's, where, sitting at a small table in the front window and looking down at the rushing stream of life in the Strand, he told me something of what had passed.

"Johnson is on the prowl," said he. "He may pick up some garbage in the darker recesses of the underworld, for it is down there, amid the black roots of crime, that we must hunt for this man's secrets."

"But if the lady will not accept what is already known, why should any fresh discovery of yours turn her from her purpose?"

"Who knows, Watson? Woman's heart and mind are insoluble puzzles to the male. Murder might be condoned or explained, and yet some smaller offence might rankle. Baron Gruner remarked to me --"

"He remarked to you!"

"Oh, to be sure, I had not told you of my plans. Well, Watson, I love to come to close grips with my man. I like to meet him eye to eye and read for myself the stuff that he is made of. When I had given Johnson his instructions I took a cab out to Kingston and found the Baron in a most affable mood."

"Did he recognize you?"

"There was no difficulty about that, for I simply sent in my card. He is an excellent antagonist, cool as ice, silky
voiced and soothing as one of your fashionable consultants, and poisonous as a cobra. He has breeding in him -- a real aristocrat of crime with a superficial suggestion of afternoon tea and all the cruelty of the grave behind it. Yes, I am glad to have had my attention called to Baron Adelbert Gruner."

"You say he was affable?"

"A purring cat who thinks he sees prospective mice. Some people's affability is more deadly than the violence of coarser souls. His greeting was characteristic. 'I rather thought I should see you sooner or later, Mr. Holmes,' said he. 'You have been engaged, no doubt by General de Merville, to endeavour to stop my marriage with his daughter, Violet. That is so, is it not?'

"I acquiesced.

"'My dear man,' said he, 'you will only ruin your own well-deserved reputation. It is not a case in which you can possibly succeed. You will have barren work, to say nothing of incurring some danger. Let me very strongly advise you to draw off at once.'

"'It is curious,' I answered, 'but that was the very advice which I had intended to give you. I have a respect for your brains, Baron, and the little which I have seen of your personality has not lessened it. Let me put it to you as man to man. No one wants to rake up your past and make you unduly uncomfortable. It is over, and you are now in smooth waters, but if you persist in this marriage you will raise up a swarm of powerful enemies who will never leave you alone until they have made England too hot to hold you. Is the game worth it? Surely you would be wiser if you left the lady alone. It would not be pleasant for you if these facts of your past were brought to her notice.'

"The Baron has little waxed tips of hair under his nose, like the short antennae of an insect. These quivered with amusement as he listened, and he finally broke into a gentle chuckle.

"'Excuse my amusement, Mr. Holmes,' said he, 'but it is really funny to see you trying to play a hand with no cards in it. I don't think anyone could do it better, but it is rather pathetic all the same. Not a colour card there, Mr. Holmes, nothing but the smallest of the small.'

"'So you think.'

"'So I know. Let me make the thing clear to you, for my own hand is so strong that I can afford to show it. I have been fortunate enough to win the entire affection of this lady. This was given to me in spite of the fact that I told her very clearly of all the unhappy incidents in my past life. I also told her that certain wicked and designing persons -- I hope you recognize yourself -- would come to her and tell her these things. and I warned her how to treat them. You have heard of post-hypnotic suggestion. Mr. Holmes ' Well you will see how it works for a man of personality can use hypnotism without any vulgar passes or tomfoolery. So she is ready for you and, I have no doubt, would give you an appointment, for she is quite amenable to her father's will -- save only in the one little matter.'

"Well, Watson, there seemed to be no more to say, so I took my leave with as much cold dignity as I could summon, but, as I had my hand on the door-handle, he stopped me.

"'By the way, Mr. Holmes,' said he, 'did you know Le Brun, the French agent?'

"'Yes,' said I.

"'Do you know what befell him?'

"'I heard that he was beaten by some Apaches in the Montmartre district and crippled for life.'

"'Quite true, Mr. Holmes. By a curious coincidence he had been inquiring into my affairs only a week before. Don't do it, Mr. Holmes; it's not a lucky thing to do. Several have found that out. My last word to you is, go your own way and let me go mine. Good-bye!'

"'So there you are, Watson. You are up to date now.'

"'The fellow seems dangerous.'

"'Mighty dangerous. I disregard the blusterer, but this is the sort of man who says rather less than he means.'

"'Must you interfere? Does it really matter if he marries the girl?"

"'Considering that he undoubtedly murdered his last wife, I should say it mattered very much. Besides, the client! Well, well, we need not discuss that. When you have finished your coffee you had best come home with me, for the blithe Shinwell will be there with his report.'

We found him sure enough, a huge, coarse, red-faced, scorbutic man, with a pair of vivid black eyes which were the only external sign of the very cunning mind within. It seems that he had dived down into what was peculiarly his kingdom, and beside him on the settee was a brand which he had brought up in the shape of a slim, flame-like young woman with a pale, intense face, youthful, and yet so worn with s½ in and sorrow that one read the terrible years which had left their leprous mark upon her.

"This is Miss Kitty Winter," said Shinwell Johnson, waving his fat hand as an introduction. "What she don't know -- well, there, she'll speak for herself. Put my hand right on her, Mr. Holmes, within an hour of your message."

"I'm easy to find," said the young woman. "Hell, London, gets me every time. Same address for Porky Shinwell. We're old mates, Porky, you and I. But, by cripes! there is another wht to be down in a lower hell than we if there
was any justice in the world! That is the man you are after, Mr. Holmes."

Holmes smiled. "I gather we have your good wishes, Miss Winter."

"If I can help to put him where he belongs, I'm yours to the rattle," said our visitor with fierce energy. There was an intensity of hatred in her white, set face and her blazing eyes such as woman seldom and man never can attain.

"You needn't go into my past, Mr. Holmes. That's neither here nor there. But what I am Adelbert Gruner made me. If I could pull him down!" She clutched frantically with her hands into the air. "Oh, if I could only pull him into the pit where he has pushed so many!"

"You know how the matter stands?"

"Porky Shinwell has been telling me. He's after some other poor fool and wants to marry her this time. You want to stop it. Well, you surely know enough about this devil to prevent any decent girl in her senses wanting to be in the same parish with him."

"She is not in her senses. She is madly in love. She has been told all about him. She cares nothing."

"Told about the murder?"

"Yes."

"My Lord, she must have a nerve!"

"She puts them all down as slanders."

"Couldn't you lay proofs before her silly eyes?"

"Well, can you help us do so?"

"Ain't I a proof myself? If I stood before her and told her how he used me --"

"Would you do this?"

"Would I? Would I not!"

"Well, it might be worth trying. But he has told her most of his sins and had pardon from her, and I understand she will not reopen the question."

"I'll lay he didn't tell her all," said Miss Winter. "I caught a glimpse of one or two murders besides the one that made such a fuss. He would speak of someone in his velvet way and then look at me with a steady eye and say: 'He died within a month.' It wasn't hot air, either. But I took little notice -you see, I loved him myself at that time. Whatever he did went with me, same as with this poor fool! There was just one thing that shook me. Yes, by cripes! if it had not been for his poisonous, lying tongue that explains and soothes. I'd have left him that very night. It's a book he has -- a brown leather book with a lock, and his arms in gold on the outside. I think he was a bit drunk that night, or he would not have shown it to me."

"What was it, then?"

"I tell you. Mr. Holmes. this man collects women, and takes a pride in his collection. as some men collect moths or butterflies. He had it all in that book. Snapshot photographs. names, details, everything about them. It was a beastly book -- a book no man, even if he had come from the gutter, could have put together. But it was Adelbert Gruner's book all the same. 'Souls I have ruined.' He could have put that on the outside if he had been so minded. However, that's neither here nor there, for the book would not serve you, and, if it would, you can't get it."

"Where is it?"

"How can I tell you where it is now? It's more than a year since I left him. I know where he kept it then. He's a precise, tidy cat of a man in many of his ways, so maybe it is still in the pigeon-hole of the old bureau in the inner study. Do you know his house?"

"I've been in the study," said Holmes.

"Have you. though? You haven't been slow on the job if you only started this morning. Maybe dear Adelbert has met his match this time. The outer study is the one with the Chinese crockery in it -- big glass cupboard between the windows. Then behind his desk is the door that leads to the inner study -- a small room where he keeps papers and things."

"Is he not afraid of burglars?"

"Adelbert is no coward. His worst enemy couldn't say that of him. He can look after himself. There's a burglar alarm at night. Besides, what is there for a burglar -- unless they got away with all this fancy crockery?"

"No good," said Shinwell Johnson with the decided voice of the expert. "No fence wants stuff of that sort that you can neither melt nor sell."

"Quite so," said Holmes. "Well, now, Miss Winter. if you would call here tomorrow evening at five. I would consider in the meanwhile whether your suggestion of seeing this lady personally may not be arranged. I am exceedingly obliged to you for your cooperation. I need not say that my clients will consider liberally --"

"None of that, Mr. Holmes," cried the young woman. "I am not out for money. Let me see this man in the mud, and I've got all I've worked for -- in the mud with my foot on his cursed face. That's my price. I'm with you tomorrow or any other day so long as you are on his track. Porky here can tell you always where to find me."
I did not see Holmes again until the following evening when we dined once more at our Strand restaurant. He shrugged his shoulders when I asked him what luck he had had in his interview. Then he told the story, which I would repeat in this way. His hard, dry statement needs some little editing to soften it into the terms of real life.

"There was no difficulty at all about the appointment," said Holmes, "for the girl glories in showing abject filial obedience in all secondary things in an attempt to atone for her flagrant breach of it in her engagement. The General phoned that all was ready, and the fiery Miss W. turned up according to schedule, so that at half-past five a cab deposited us outside 104 Berkeley Square, where the old soldier resides -- one of those awful gray London castles which would make a church seem frivolous. A footman showed us into a great yellow-curtained drawing-room, and there was the lady awaiting us, demure, pale, self-contained, as inflexible and remote as a snow image on a mountain.

"I don't quite know how to make her clear to you, Watson. Perhaps you may meet her before we are through, and you can use your own gift of words. She is beautiful, but with the ethereal other-world beauty of some fanatic whose thoughts are set on high. I have seen such faces in the pictures of the old masters of the Middle Ages. How a beastman could have laid his vile paws upon such a being of the beyond I cannot imagine. You may have noticed how extremes call to each other, the spiritual to the animal, the cave-man to the angel. You never saw a worse case than this.

"She knew what we had come for, of course -- that villain had lost no time in poisoning her mind against us. Miss Winter's advent rather amazed her, I think, but she waved us into our respective chairs like a reverend abbess receiving two rather leprous mendicants. If your head is inclined to swell. my dear Watson, take a course of Miss Violet de Merville.

"Well, sir," said she in a voice like the wind from an iceberg, 'your name is familiar to me. You have called. as I understand, to malign my fiance, Baron Gruner. It is only by my father's request that I see you at all, and I warn you in advance that anything you can say could not possibly have the slightest effect upon my mind.'

"I was sorry for her, Watson. I thought of her for the moment as I would have thought of a daughter of my own. I am not often eloquent. I use my head, not my heart. But I really did plead with her with all the warmth of words that I could find in my nature. I pictured to her the awful position of the woman who only wakes to a man's character after she is his wife -- a woman who has to submit to be caressed by bloody hands and lecherous lips. I spared her nothing -- the shame, the fear, the agony, the hopelessness of it all. All my hot words could not bring one tinge of colour to those ivory cheeks or one gleam of emotion to those abstracted eyes. I thought of what the rascal had said about a post-hypnotic influence. One could really believe that she was living above the earth in some ecstatic dream. Yet there was nothing indefinite in her replies.

"I have listened to you with patience, Mr. Holmes," said she. 'The effect upon my mind is exactly as predicted. I am aware that Adelbert, that my fiance, has had a stormy life in which he has incurred bitter hatreds and most unjust aspersions. You are only the last of a series who have brought their slanders before me. Possibly you mean well, though I learn that you are a paid agent who would have been equally willing to act for the Baron as against him. But in any case I wish you to understand once for all that I love him and that he loves me, and that the opinion of all the world is no more to me than the twitter of those birds outside the window. If his noble nature has ever for an instant fallen, it may be that I have been specially sent to raise it to its true and lofty level. I am not clear' -- here she turned eyes upon my companion -- ' who this young lady may be.'

"I was about to answer when the girl broke in like a whirlwind. If ever you saw flame and ice face to face, it was those two women.

"I'll tell you who I am,' she cried, springing out of her chair, her mouth all twisted with passion -- 'I am his last mistress. I am one of a hundred that he has tempted and used and ruined and thrown into the refuse heap, as he will you also. Your refuse heap is more likely to be a grave, and maybe that's the best. I tell you, you foolish woman, if you marry this man he'll be the death of you. It may be a broken heart or it may be a broken neck, but he'll have you one way or the other. It's not out of love for you I'm speaking. I don't care a tinker's curse whether you live or die. It's out of hate for him and to spite him and to get back on him for what he did to me. But it's all the same, and you needn't look at me like that, my fine lady, for you may be lower than I am before you are through with it.'

"I should prefer not to discuss such matters,' said Miss de Merville coldly. 'Let me say once for all that I am aware of three passages in my fiance's life in which he became entangled with designing women, and that I am assured of his hearty repentance for any evil that he may have done.'

"Three passages!' screamed my companion. 'You fool! You unutterable fool!'

"Mr. Holmes, I beg that you will bring this interview to an end,' said the icy voice. 'I have obeyed my father's wish in seeing you, but I am not compelled to listen to the ravings of this person.'

"With an oath Miss Winter darted forward, and if I had not caught her wrist she would have clutched this maddening woman by the hair. I dragged her towards the door and was lucky to get her back into the cab without a
public scene, for she was beside herself with rage. In a cold way I felt pretty furious myself, Watson, for there was
something indescribably annoying in the calm aloofness and supreme self-complaisance of the woman whom we
were trying to save. So now once again you know exactly how we stand, and it is clear that I must plan some fresh
opening move, for this gambit won't work. I'll keep in touch with you, Watson, for it is more than likely that you
will have your part to play, though it is just possible that the next move may lie with them rather than with us."

And it did. Their blow fell -- or his blow rather, for never could I believe that the lady was privy to it. I think I
could show you the very paving-stone upon which I stood when my eyes fell upon the placard, and a pang of horror
passed through my very soul. It was between the Grand Hotel and Charing Cross Station, where a one-legged news-
vendor displayed his evening papers. The date was just two days after the last conversation. There, black upon
yellow, was the terrible news-sheet:

MURDEROUS ATTACK UPON
SHERLOCK HOLMES

I think I stood stunned for some moments. Then I have a confused recollection of snatching at a paper of the
remonstrance of the man, whom I had not paid, and, finally, of standing in the doorway of a chemist's shop while I
turned up the fateful paragraph. This was how it ran:

We learn with regret that Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the well-known private
detective, was the victim this morning of a murderous assault which has
left him in a precarious position. There are no exact details to hand,
but the event seems to have occurred about twelve o'clock in Regent
Street, outside the Cafe Royal. The attack was made by two men armed with
sticks, and Mr. Holmes was beaten about the head and body, receiving
injuries which the doctors describe as most serious. He was carried to
Charing Cross Hospital and afterwards insisted upon being taken to his
rooms in Baker Street. The miscreants who attacked him appear to have
been respectfully dressed men, who escaped from the bystanders by
passing through the Cafe Royal and out into Glasshouse Street behind it.
No doubt they belonged to that criminal fraternity which has so often had
occasion to bewail the activity and ingenuity of the injured man.

I need not say that my eyes had hardly glanced over the paragraph before I had sprung into a hansom and was on
my way to Baker Street. I found Sir Leslie Oakshott, the famous surgeon, in the hall and his brougham waiting at the
curb.

"No immediate danger," was his report. "Two lacerated scalp wounds and some considerable bruises. Several
stitches have been necessary. Morphine has been injected and quiet is essential, but an interview of a few minutes
would not be absolutely forbidden."

With this permission I stole into the darkened room. The sufferer was wide awake, and I heard my name in a
hoarse whisper. The blind was three-quarters down, but one ray of sunlight slanted through and struck the bandaged
head of the injured man. A crimson patch had soaked through the white linen compress. I sat beside him and bent
my head.

"All right, Watson. Don't look so scared," he muttered in a very weak voice. "It's not as bad as it seems."
"Thank God for that!"
"I'm a bit of a single-stick expert. as you know. I took most of them on my guard. It was the second man that was
too much for me."
"What can I do, Holmes? Of course, it was that damned fellow who set them on. I'll go and thrash the hide off
him if you give the word."
"Good old Watson! No, we can do nothing there unless the police lay their hands on the men. But their get-away
had been well prepared. We may be sure of that. Wait a little. I have my plans. The first thing is to exaggerate my
injuries. They'll come to you for news. Put it on thick, Watson. Lucky if I live the week out concussion delirium --
what you like! You can't overdo it."
"But Sir Leslie Oakshott?"
"Oh, he's all right. He shall see the worst side of me. I'll look after that."
"Anything else?"
"Yes. Tell Shinwell Johnson to get that girl out of the way. Those beauties will be after her now. They know, of
course, that she was with me in the case. If they dared to do me in it is not likely they will neglect her. That is
urgent. Do it to-night."
"I'll go now. Anything more?"
"Put my pipe on the table -- and the tobacco-slipper. Right! Come in each morning and we will plan our
campaign."

I arranged with Johnson that evening to take Miss Winter to a quiet suburb and see that she lay low until the danger was past.

For six days the public were under the impression that Holmes was at the door of death. The bulletins were very grave and there were sinister paragraphs in the papers. My continual visits assured me that it was not so bad as that. His wiry constitution and his determined will were working wonders. He was recovering fast, and I had suspicions at times that he was really finding himself faster than he pretended even to me. There was a curious secretive streak in the man which led to many dramatic effects, but left even his closest friend guessing as to what his exact plans might be. He pushed to an extreme the axiom that the only safe plotter was he who plotted alone. I was nearer him than anyone else, and yet I was always conscious of the gap between.

On the seventh day the stitches were taken out, in spite of which there was a report of erysipelas in the evening papers. The same evening papers had an announcement which I was bound, sick or well, to carry to my friend. It was simply that among the passengers on the Cunard boat Ruritania, starting from Liverpool on Friday, was the Baron Adelbert Gruner, who had some important financial business to settle in the States before his impending wedding to Miss Violet de Merville, only daughter of, etc., etc. Holmes listened to the news with a cold, concentrated look upon his pale face, which told me that it hit him hard.

"Friday!" he cried. "Only three clear days. I believe the rascal wants to put himself out of danger's way. But he won't, Watson! By the Lord Harry, he won't! Now, Watson, I want you to do something for me."

"I am here to be used, Holmes."

"Well, then, spend the next twenty-four hours in an intensive study of Chinese pottery."

He gave no explanations and I asked for none. By long experience I had learned the wisdom of obedience. But when I had left his room I walked down Baker Street, revolving in my head how on earth I was to carry out so strange an order. Finally I drove to the London Library in St. James's Square, put the matter to my friend Lomax, the sublibrarian, and departed to my rooms with a goodly volume under my arm.

It is said that the barrister who crams up a case with such care that he can examine an expert witness upon the Monday has forgotten all his forced knowledge before the Saturday. Certainly I should not like now to pose as an authority upon ceramics. And yet all that evening, and all that night with a short interval for rest, and all next morning, I was sucking in knowledge and committing names to memory. There I learned of the hall-marks of the great artist-decorators, of the mystery of cyclical dates, the marks of the Hung-wu and the beauties of the Yung-lo, the writings of Tang-ying, and the glories of the primitive period of the Sung and the Yuan. I was charged with all this information when I called upon Holmes next evening. He was out of bed now, though you would not have guessed it from the published reports, and he sat with his much-bandaged head resting upon his hand in the depth of his favourite armchair.

"Why, Holmes," I said, "if one believed the papers, you are dying."

"That," said he, "is the very impression which I intended to convey. And now, Watson, have you learned your lessons?"

"At least I have tried to."

"Good. You could keep up an intelligent conversation on the subject?"

"I believe I could."

"Then hand me that little box from the mantelpiece."

He opened the lid and took out a small object most carefully wrapped in some fine Eastern silk. This he unfolded, and disclosed a delicate little saucer of the most beautiful deep-blue colour.

"It needs careful handling, Watson. This is the real egg-shell pottery of the Ming dynasty. No finer piece ever passed through Christie's. A complete set of this would be worth a king's ransom -- in fact, it is doubtful if there is a complete set outside the imperial palace of Peking. The sight of this would drive a real connoisseur wild."

"What am I to do with it?"

Holmes handed me a card upon which was printed: "Dr. Hill Barton, 369 Half Moon Street."

"That is your name for the evening, Watson. You will call upon Baron Gruner. I know something of his habits, and at half-past eight he would probably be disengaged. A note will tell him in advance that you are about to call, and you will say that you are bringing him a specimen of an absolutely unique set of Ming china. You may as well be a medical man, since that is a part which you can play without duplicity. You are a collector this set has come your way, you have heard of the Baron's interest in the subject, and you are not averse to selling at a price."

"What price?"

"Well asked, Watson. You would certainly fall down badly if you did not know the value of your own wares. This saucer was got for me by Sir James, and comes, I understand, from the collection of his client. You will not exaggerate if you say that it could hardly be matched in the world."
"I could perhaps suggest that the set should be valued by an expert."

"Excellent, Watson! You scintillate to-day. Suggest Christie or Sotheby. Your delicacy prevents your putting a price for yourself."

"But if he won't see me?"

"Oh, yes, he will see you. He has the collection mania in its most acute form -- and especially on this subject, on which he is an acknowledged authority. Sit down, Watson, and I will dictate the letter. No answer needed. You will merely say that you are coming, and why."

It was an admirable document, short, courteous, and stimulating to the curiosity of the connoisseur. A district messenger was duly dispatched with it. On the same evening, with the precious saucer in my hand and the card of Dr. Hill Barton in my pocket, I set off on my own adventure.

The beautiful house and grounds indicated that Baron Gruner was, as Sir James had said, a man of considerable wealth. A long winding drive, with banks of rare shrubs on either side, opened out into a great gravelled square adorned with statues. The place had been built by a South African gold king in the days of the great boom, and the long, low house with the turrets at the corners, though an architectural nightmare, was imposing in its size and solidity. A butler, who would have adorned a bench of bishops, showed me in and handed me over to a plush-clad footman, who ushered me into the Baron's presence.

He was standing at the open front of a great case which stood between the windows and which contained part of his Chinese collection. He turned as I entered with a small brown vase in his hand.

"Pray sit down, Doctor," said he. "I was looking over my own treasures and wondering whether I could really afford to add to them. This little Tang specimen, which dates from the seventh century, would probably interest you. I am sure you never saw finer workmanship or a richer glaze. Have you the Ming saucer with you of which you spoke?"

I carefully unpacked it and handed it to him. He seated himself at his desk, pulled over the lamp, for it was growing dark, and set himself to examine it. As he did so the yellow light beat upon his own features, and I was able to study them at my ease.

He was certainly a remarkably handsome man. His European reputation for beauty was fully deserved. In figure he was not more than of middle size, but was built upon graceful and active lines. His face was swarthy, almost Oriental, with large, dark, languorous eyes which might easily hold an irresistible fascination for women. His hair and moustache were raven black, the latter short, pointed, and carefully waxed. His features were regular and pleasing, save only his straight, thin-lipped mouth. If ever I saw a murderer's mouth it was there -- a cruel, hard gash in the face, compressed, inexorable, and terrible. He was ill-advised to train his moustache away from it, for it was Nature's danger-signal, set as a warning to his victims. His voice was engaging and his manners perfect. In age I should have put him at little over thirty, though his record afterwards showed that he was forty-two.

"Very fine -- very fine indeed!" he said at last. "And you say you have a set of six to correspond. What puzzles me is that I should not have heard of such magnificent specimens. I only know of one in England to match this, and it is certainly not likely to be in the market. Would it be indiscreet if I were to ask you, Dr. Hill Barton, how you obtained this?"

"Does it really matter?" I asked with as careless an air as I could muster.

"You can see that the piece is genuine, and, as to the value, I am content to take an expert's valuation."

"Very mysterious," said he with a quick, suspicious flash of his dark eyes. "In dealing with objects of such value, one naturally wishes to know all about the transaction. That the piece is genuine is certain. I have no doubts at all about that. But suppose -- I am bound to take every possibility into account -- that it should prove afterwards that you had no right to sell?"

"I would guarantee you against any claim of the son."

"That, of course, would open up the question as to what your guarantee was worth."

"My bankers would answer that."

"Quite so. And yet the whole transaction strikes me as rather unusual."

"You can do business or not," said I with indifference. "I have given you the first offer as I understood that you were a connoisseur, but I shall have no difficulty in other quaerers."

"Who told you I was a connoisseur?"

"I was aware that you had written a book upon the subject."

"Have you read the book?"

"No."

"Dear me, this becomes more and more difficult for me to understand! You are a connoisseur and collector with a very valuable piece in your collection, and yet you have never troubled to consult the one book which would have told you of the real meaning and value of what you held. How do you explain that?"
"I am a very busy man. I am a doctor in practice."

"That is no answer. If a man has a hobby he follows it up, whatever his other pursuits may be. You said in your note that you were a connoisseur."

"So I am."

"Might I ask you a few questions to test you? I am obliged to tell you, Doctor -- if you are indeed a doctor -- that the incident becomes more and more suspicious. I would ask you what do you know of the Emperor Shomu and how do you associate him with the Shoso-in near Nara? Dear me, does that puzzle you? Tell me a little about the Nonhern Wei dynasty and its place in the history of ceramics."

I sprang from my chair in simulated anger.

"This is intolerable, sir," said I. "I came here to do you a favour, and not to be examined as if I were a schoolboy. My knowledge on these subjects may be second only to your own, but I certainly shall not answer questions which have been put in so offensive a way."

He looked at me steadily. The languor had gone from his eyes. They suddenly glared. There was a gleam of teeth from between those cruel lips.

"What is the game? You are here as a spy. You are an emissary of Holmes. This is a trick that you are playing upon me. The fellow is dying I hear, so he sends his tools to keep watch upon me. You've made your way in here without leave, and, by God! you may find it harder to get out than to get in."

He had sprung to his feet, and I stepped back, bracing myself for an attack, for the man was beside himself with rage. He may have suspected me from the first; certainly this cross-examination had shown him the truth; but it was clear that I could not hope to deceive him. He dived his hand into a side-drawer and rummaged furiously. Then something struck upon his ear, for he stood listening intently.

"Ah!" he cried. "Ah!" and dashed into the room behind him.

Two steps took me to the open door, and my mind will ever carry a clear picture of the scene within. The window leading out to the garden was wide open. Beside it, looking like some terrible ghost, his head gin with bloody bandages, his face drawn and white, stood Sherlock Holmes. The next instant he was through the gap, and I heard the crash of his body among the laurel bushes outside. With a howl of rage the master of the house rushed after him to the open window.

And then! It was done in an instant, and yet I clearly saw it. An arm -- a woman's arm -- shot out from among the leaves. At the same instant the Baron uttered a horrible cry -- a yell which will always ring in my memory. He clapped his two hands to his face and rushed round the room, beating his head horribly against the walls. Then he fell upon the carpet, rolling and writhing, while scream after scream resounded through the house.

"Water! For God's sake, water!" was his cry.

I seized a carafe from a side-table and rushed to his aid. At the same moment the butler and several footmen ran in from the hall. I remember that one of them fainted as I knelt by the injured man and turned that awful face to the light of the lamp. The vitriol was eating into it everywhere and dripping from the ears and the chin. One eye was already white and glazed. The other was red and inflamed. The features which I had admired a few minutes before were now like some beautiful painting over which the artist has passed a wet and foul sponge. They were blurred, discoloured, inhuman, terrible.

In a few words I explained exactly what had occurred, so far as the vitriol attack was concerned. Some had climbed through the window and others had rushed out on to the lawn, but it was dark and it had begun to rain. Between his screams the victim raged and raved against the avenger. "It was that hell-cat, Kitty Winter!" he cried. "Oh, the she-devil! She shall pay for it! She shall pay! Oh, God in heaven, this pain is more than I can bear!"

I bathed his face in oil, put cotton wadding on the raw surfaces, and administered a hypodermic of morphia. All suspicion of me had passed from his mind in the presence of this shock, and he clung to my hands as if I might have the power even yet to clear those dead-fish eyes which glazed up at me. I could have wept over the ruin had I not remembered very clearly the vile life which had led up to so hideous a change. It was loathsome to feel the pawing of his burning hands, and I was relieved when his family surgeon, closely followed by a specialist, came to relieve me of my charge. An inspector of police had also arrived, and to him I handed my real card. It would have been useless as well as foolish to do otherwise, for I was nearly as well known by sight at the Yard as Holmes himself. Then I left that house of gloom and terror. Within an hour I was at Baker Street.

Holmes was seated in his familiar chair, looking very pale and exhausted. Apart from his injuries, even his iron nerves had been shocked by the events of the evening, and he listened with horror to my account of the Baron's transformation.

"The wages of sin, Watson -- the wages of sin!" said he. "Sooner or later it will always come. God knows, there was sin enough," he added, taking up a brown volume from the table. "Here is the book the woman talked of. If this will not break off the marriage, nothing ever could. But it will, Watson. It must. No self-respecting woman could
"It is his love diary?"

"Or his lust diary. Call it what you will. The moment the woman told us of it I realized what a tremendous weapon was there if we could but lay our hands on it. I said nothing at the time to indicate my thoughts, for this woman might have given it away. But I brooded over it. Then this assault upon me gave me the chance of letting the Baron think that no precautions need be taken against me. That was all to the good. I would have waited a little longer, but his visit to America forced my hand. He would never have left so compromising a document behind him. Therefore we had to act at once. Burglary at night is impossible. He takes precautions. But there was a chance in the evening if I could only be sure that his attention was engaged. That was where you and your blue saucer came in. But I had to be sure of the position of the book, and I knew I had only a few minutes in which to act, for my time was limited by your knowledge of Chinese pottery. Therefore I gathered the girl up at the last moment. How could I guess what the little packet was that she carried so carefully under her cloak? I thought she had come altogether on my business, but it seems she had some of her own."

"He guessed I came from you."

"I feared he would. But you held him in play just long enough for me to get the book, though not long enough for an unobserved escape. Ah, Sir James, I am very glad you have come!"

Our courtly friend had appeared in answer to a previous summons. He listened with the deepest attention to Holmes's account of what had occurred.

"You have done wonders -- wonders!" he cried when he had heard the narrative. "But if these injuries are as terrible as Dr. Watson describes, then surely our purpose of thwarting the marriage is sufficiently gained without the use of this horrible book."

Holmes shook his head.

"Women of the De Merville type do not act like that. She would love him the more as a disfigured martyr. No, no. It is his moral side, not his physical, which we have to destroy. That book will bring her back to earth -- and I know nothing else that could. It is in his own writing. She cannot get past it."

Sir James carried away both it and the precious saucer. As I was myself overdue, I went down with him into the street. A brougham was waiting for him. He sprang in, gave a hurried order to the cockaded coachman, and drove swiftly away. He flung his overcoat half out of the window to cover the armorial bearings upon the panel, but I had seen them in the glare of our fanlight none the less. I gasped with surprise. Then I turned back and ascended the stair to Holmes's room.

"I have found out who our client is," I cried, bursting with my great news. "Why, Holmes, it is --"

"It is a loyal friend and a chivalrous gentleman," said Holmes, holding up a restraining hand. "Let that now and forever be enough for us."

I do not know how the incriminating book was used. Sir James may have managed it. Or it is more probable that so delicate a task was entrusted to the young lady's father. The effect, at any rate, was all that could be desired.

Three days later appeared a paragraph in the Morning Post to say that the marriage between Baron Adelbert Gruner and Miss Violet de Merville would not take place. The same paper had the first police-court hearing of the proceedings against Miss Kitty Winter on the grave charge of vitriol-throwing. Such extenuating circumstances came out in the trial that the sentence, as will be remembered was the lowest that was possible for such an offence. Sherlock Holmes was threatened with a prosecution for burglary, but when an object is good and a client is sufficiently illustrious, even the rigid British law becomes human and elastic. My friend has not yet stood in the dock.

The Adventure of the Three Gables

I don't think that any of my adventures with Mr. Sherlock Holmes opened quite so abruptly, or so dramatically, as that which I associate with The Three Gables. I had not seen Holmes for some days and had no idea of the new channel into which his activities had been directed. He was in a chatty mood that morning, however, and had just settled me into the well-worn low armchair on one side of the fire, while he had curled down with his pipe in his mouth upon the opposite chair, when our visitor arrived. If I had said that a mad bull had arrived it would give a clearer impression of what occurred.

The door had flown open and a huge negro had burst into the room. He would have been a comic figure if he had not been terrific, for he was dressed in a very loud gray check suit with a flowing salmon-coloured tie. His broad face and flattened nose were thrust forward, as his sullen dark eyes, with a smouldering gleam of malice in them, turned from one of us to the other.

"Which of you gen'l'men is Masser Holmes?" he asked.

Holmes raised his pipe with a languid smile.

"Oh! it's you, is it?" said our visitor, coming with an unpleasant, stealthy step round the angle of the table. "See
here, Masser Holmes, you keep your hands out of other folks' business. Leave folks to manage their own affairs. Got that, Masser Holmes?"

"Keep on talking," said Holmes. "It's fine."

"Oh! it's fine, is it?" growled the savage. "It won't be so damn fine if I have to trim you up a bit. I've handled your kind before now, and they didn't look fine when I was through with them. Look at that, Masser Holmes!"

He swung a huge knotted lump of a fist under my friend's nose. Holmes examined it closely with an air of great interest.

"Were you born so?" he asked. "Or did it come by degrees?"

It may have been the icy coolness of my friend, or it may have been the slight clatter which I made as I picked up the poker. In any case, our visitor's manner became less flamboyant.

"Well, I've given you fair warnin'," said he. "I've a friend that's interested out Harrow way -- you know what I'm meaning -and he don't intend to have no buttin' in by you. Got that? You ain't the law, and I ain't the law either, and if you come in I'll be on hand also. Don't you forget it."

"I've wanted to meet you for some time," said Holmes. "I won't ask you to sit down, for I don't like the smell of you, but aren't you Steve Dixie, the bruise?"

"That's my name, Masser Holmes, and you'll get put through it for sure if you give me any lip."

"It is certainly the last thing you need," said Holmes, staring at our visitor's hideous mouth. "But it was the killing of young Perkins outside the Holborn -- Bar What! you're not going?"

The negro had sprung back, and his face was leaden. "I won't listen to no such talk," said he. "What have I to do with this 'ere Perkins, Masser Holmes? I was trainin' at the Bull Ring in Birmingham when this boy done gone get into trouble."

"Yes, you'll tell the magistrate about it, Steve," said Holmes. "I've been watching you and Barney Stockdale --"

"So help me the Lord! Masser Holmes --"

"That's enough. Get out of it. I'll pick you up when I want you."

"Good-mornin', Masser Holmes. I hope there ain't no hard feelin's about this 'ere visit?"

"There will be unless you tell me who sent you."

"Why, there ain't no secret about that, Masser Holmes. It was that same gen'l'man that you have just done gone mention."

"And who set him on to it?"

"S'elp me, I don't know, Masser Holmes. He just say, 'Steve, you go see Mr. Holmes, and tell him his life ain't safe if he go down Harrow way.' That's the whole truth." Without waiting for any further questioning, our visitor bolted out of the room almost as precipitately as he had entered. Holmes knocked out the ashes of his pipe with a quiet chuckle.

"I am glad you were not forced to break his woolly head, Watson. I observed your manoeuvres with the poker. But he is really rather a harmless fellow, a great muscular, foolish, blustering baby, and easily cowed, as you have seen. He is one of the Spencer John gang and has taken part in some dirty work of late which I may clear up when I have time. His immediate principal, Barney, is a more astute person. They specialize in assaults, intimidation, and the like. What I want to know is, who is at the back of them on this particular occasion?"

"But why do they want to intimidate you?"

"It is this Harrow Weald case. It decides me to look into the matter, for if it is worth anyone's while to take so much trouble, there must be something in it."

"But what is it?"

"I was going to tell you when we had this comic interlude. Here is Mrs. Maberley's note. If you care to come with me we will wire her and go out at once."

DEAR MR. SHERLOCK HOLMES [I read]:
I have had a succession of strange incidents occur to me in connection with this house, and I should much value your advice. You would find me at home any time to-morrow. The house is within a short walk of the Weald Station. I believe that my late husband, Mortimer Maberley, was one of your early clients.

Yours faithfully,

MARY MABERLEY.

The address was "The Three Gables, Harrow Weald."

"So that's that!" said Holmes. "And now, if you can spare the time, Watson, we will get upon our way."

A short railway journey, and a shorter drive, brought us to the house, a brick and timber villa, standing in its own
acre of undeveloped grassland. Three small projections above. the upper windows made a feeble attempt to justify
its name. Behind was a grove of melancholy, half-grown pines, and the whole aspect of the place was poor and
depressing. None the less, we found the house to be well furnished, and the lady who received us was a most
engaging elderly person, who bore every mark of refinement and culture.

"I remember your husband well, madam," said Holmes, "though it is some years since he used my services in
some trifling matter."

"Probably you would be more familiar with the name of my son Douglas."

Holmes looked at her with great interest.

What a magnificent creature he was! Where is he now?"

"Dead, Mr. Holmes, dead! He was attache at Rome, and he died there of pneumonia last month."

"I am sorry. One could not connect death with such a man. I have never known anyone so vitally alive. He lived
intensely -every fibre of him!"

"Too intensely, Mr. Holmes. That was the ruin of him. You remember him as he was -- debonair and splendid.
You did not see the moody, morose, brooding creature into which he developed. His heart was broken. In a single
month I seemed to see my gallant boy turn into a worn-out cynical man."

"A love affair -- a woman?"

"Or a fiend. Well, it was not to talk of my poor lad that I asked you to come, Mr. Holmes."

"Dr. Watson and I are at your service."

"There have been some very strange happenings. I have been in this house more than a year now, and as I
wished to lead a retired life I have seen little of my neighbours. Three days ago I had a call from a man who said that
he was a house agent. He said that this house would exactly suit a client of his, and that if I would part with it money
would be no object. It seemed to me very strange as there are several empty houses on the market which appear to
be equally eligible, but naturally I was interested in what he said. I therefore named a price which was five hundred
pounds more than I gave. He at once closed with the offer, but added that his client desired to buy the furniture as
well and would I put a price upon it. Some of this furniture is from my old home, and it is, as you see, very good, so
that I named a good round sum. To this also he at once agreed. I had always wanted to travel, and the bargain was so
good a one that it really seemed that I should be my own mistress for the rest of my life.

"Yesterday the man arrived with the agreement all drawn out. Luckily I showed it to Mr. Sutro, my lawyer, who
lives in Harrow. He said to me, 'This is a very strange document. Are you aware that if you sign it you could not
legally take anything out of the house -- not even your own private possessions?' When the man came again in the
evening I pointed this out, and I said that I meant only to sell the furniture.

"'No, no, everything,' said he.

"'But my clothes? My jewels?'

"'Well, well, some concession might be made for your personal effects. But nothing shall go out of the house
unchecked. My client is a very liberal man, but he has his fads and his own way of doing things. It is everything or
nothing with him.'"

"'Then it must be nothing,' said I. And there the matter was left, but the whole thing seemed to me to be so
unusual that I thought --"\n
Here we had a very extraordinary interruption.

Holmes raised his hand for silence. Then he strode across the room, flung open the door, and dragged in a great
gaunt woman whom he had seized by the shoulder. She entered with ungainly struggle like some huge awkward
chicken, torn, squawking, out of its coop.

"Leave me alone! What are you a-doin' of?" she screeched.

"Why, Susan, what is this?"

"Well, ma'am, I was comin' in to ask if the visitors was stayin' for lunch when this man jumped out at me."

"I have been listening to her for the last five minutes, but did not wish to interrupt your most interesting
narrative. Just a little wheezy, Susan, are you not? You breathe too heavily for that kind of work."

Susan turned a sulky but amazed face upon her captor. "Who be you, anyhow, and what right have you a-pullin'
me about like this?"

"It was merely that I wished to ask a question in your presence. Did you, Mrs. Maberley, mention to anyone that
you were going to write to me and consult me?"

"No, Mr. Holmes, I did not."

"Who posted your letter?"

"Susan did."

"Exactly. Now, Susan, to whom was it that you wrote or sent a message to say that your mistress was asking
It's a lie. I sent no message.

"Now, Susan, wheezy people may not live long, you know. It's a wicked thing to tell fibs. Whom did you tell?"

"Susan!" cried her mistress, "I believe you are a bad, treacherous woman. I remember now that I saw you speaking to someone over the hedge.

"That was my own business," said the woman sullenly.

"Suppose I tell you that it was Barney Stockdale to whom you spoke?" said Holmes.

"Well, if you know, what do you want to ask for?"

"I was not sure, but I know now. Well now, Susan, it will be worth ten pounds to you if you will tell me who is at the back of Barney."

"Someone that could lay down a thousand pounds for every ten you have in the world."

"So, a rich man? No; you smiled -- a rich woman. Now we have got so far, you may as well give the name and earn the tenner."

"I'll see you in hell first."

"Oh, Susan! Language!"

"I am clearing out of here. I've had enough of you all. I'll send for my box to-morrow." She flounced for the door.

"Good-bye, Susan. Paregoric is the stuff.... Now," he continued, turning suddenly from lively to severe when the door had closed behind the flushed and angry woman, "this gang means business. Look how close they play the game. Your letter to me had the 10 P.M. postmark. And yet Susan passes the word to Barney. Barney has time to go to his employer and get instructions; he or she -- I incline to the latter from Susan's grin when she thought I had blundered -- forms a plan. Black Steve is called in, and I am warned off by eleven o'clock next morning. That's quick work, you know."

"But what do they want?"

"Yes, that's the question. Who had the house before you?"

"A retired sea captain called Ferguson."

"Anything remarkable about him?"

"Not that ever I heard of."

"I was wondering whether he could have buried something. Of course, when people bury treasure nowadays they do it in the Post-Office bank. But there are always some lunatics about. It would be a dull world without them. At first I thought of some buried valuable. But why, in that case, should they want your furniture? You don't happen to have a Raphael or a first folio Shakespeare without knowing it?"

"No, I don't think I have anything rarer than a Crown Derby tea-set."

"That would hardly justify all this mystery. Besides, why should they not openly state what they want? If they covet your tea-set, they can surely offer a price for it without buying you out, lock, stock, and barrel. No, as I read it, there is something which you do not know that you have, and which you would not give up if you did know."

"That is how I read it," said I.

"Dr. Watson agrees, so that settles it."

"Well, Mr. Holmes, what can it be?"

"Let us see whether by this purely mental analysis we can get it to a finer point. You have been in this house a year."

"Nearly two."

"All the better. During this long period no one wants anything from you. Now suddenly within three or four days you have urgent demands. What would you gather from that?"

"It can only mean," said I, "that the object, whatever it may be, has only just come into the house."

"Settled once again," said Holmes. "Now, Mrs. Maberley has any object just arrived?"

"No, I have bought nothing new this year."

"Indeed! That is very remarkable. Well, I think we had best let matters develop a little further until we have clearer data. Is that lawyer of yours a capable man?"

"Mr. Sutro is most capable."

"Have you another maid, or was the fair Susan, who has just banged your front door alone?"

"I have a young girl."

"Try and get Sutro to spend a night or two in the house. You might possibly want protection."

"Against whom?"

"Who knows? The matter is certainly obscure. If I can't find what they are after, I must approach the matter from the other end and try to get at the principal. Did this house-agent man give any address?"
"Simply his card and occupation. Haines-Johnson, Auctioneer and Valuer."
"I don't think we shall find him in the directory. Honest business men don't conceal their place of business. Well, you will let me know any fresh development. I have taken up your case, and you may rely upon it that I shall see it through."

As we passed through the hall Holmes's eyes, which missed nothing, lighted upon several trunks and cases which were piled in a corner. The labels shone out upon them.
"'Milano.' 'Lucerne.' These are from Italy."
"They are poor Douglas's things."
"You have not unpacked them? How long have you had them?"
"They arrived last week."
"But you said -- why, surely this might be the missing link. How do we know that there is not something of value there?"
"There could not possibly be, Mr. Holmes. Poor Douglas had only his pay and a small annuity. What could he have of value?"

Holmes was lost in thought.
"Delay no longer, Mrs. Maberley," he said at last. "Have these things taken upstairs to your bedroom. Examine them as soon as possible and see what they contain. I will come tomorrow and hear your report."

It was quite evident that The Three Gables was under very close surveillance, for as we came round the high hedge at the end of the lane there was the negro prize-fighter standing in the shadow. We came on him quite suddenly, and a grim and menacing figure he looked in that lonely place. Holmes clapped his hand to his pocket.
"Lookin' for your gun, Masser Holmes?"
"No, for my scent-bottle, Steve."
"You are funny, Masser Holmes, ain't you?"
"It won't be funny for you, Steve, if I get after you. I gave you fair warning this morning."
"Well, Masser Holmes, I done gone think over what you said, and I don't want no more talk about that affair of Masser Perkins. S'pose I can help you, Masser Holmes, I will."
"Well, then, tell me who is behind you on this job."
"So help me the Lord! Masser Holmes, I told you the truth before. I don't know. My boss Barney gives me orders and that's all."
"Well, just bear in mind, Steve, that the lady in that house, and everything under that roof, is under my protection. Don't forget it."
"All right, Masser Holmes. I'll remember."
"I've got him thoroughly frightened for his own skin, Watson," Holmes remarked as we walked on. "I think he would double-cross his employer if he knew who he was. It was lucky I had some knowledge of the Spencer John crowd, and that Steve was one of them. Now, Watson, this is a case for Langdale Pike, and I am going to see him now. When I get back I may be clearer in the matter."

I saw no more of Holmes during the day, but I could well imagine how he spent it, for Langdale Pike was his human book of reference upon all matters of social scandal. This strange, languid creature spent his waking hours in the bow window of a St. James's Street club and was the receiving station as well as the transmitter for all the gossip of the metropolis. He made, it was said, a four-figure income by the paragraphs which he contributed every week to the garbage papers which cater to an inquisitive public. If ever, far down in the turbid depths of London life, there was some strange swirl or eddy, it was marked with automatic exactness by this human dial upon the surface. Holmes discreetly helped Langdale to knowledge, and on occasion was helped in turn.

When I met my friend in his room early next morning, I was conscious from his bearing that all was well, but none the less a most unpleasant surprise was awaiting us. It took the shape of the following telegram.

Please come out at once. Client's house burgled in the night. Police in possession.

SUTRO.

Holmes whistled. "The drama has come to a crisis, and quicker than I had expected. There is a great driving-power at the back of this business, Watson, which does not surprise me after what I have heard. This Sutro, of course, is her lawyer. I made a mistake, I fear, in not asking you to spend the night on guard. This fellow has clearly proved a broken reed. Well, there is nothing for it but another journey to Harrow Weald."

We found The Three Gables a very different establishment to the orderly household of the previous day. A small group of idlers had assembled at the garden gate, while a couple of constables were examining the windows and the geranium beds. Within we met a gray old gentleman, who introduced himself as the lawyer together with a bustling, rubicund inspector, who greeted Holmes as an old friend.
"Well, Mr. Holmes, no chance for you in this case, I'm afraid. Just a common, ordinary burglary, and well within the capacity of the poor old police. No experts need apply."

"I am sure the case is in very good hands," said Holmes. "Merely a common burglary, you say?"

"Quite so. We know pretty well who the men are and where to find them. It is that gang of Barney Stockdale, with the big nigger in it -- they've been seen about here."

"Excellent! What did they get?"

"Well, they don't seem to have got much. Mrs. Maberley was chloroformed and the house was -- Ah! here is the lady herself."

Our friend of yesterday, looking very pale and ill, had entered the room, leaning upon a little maidservant.

"You gave me good advice, Mr. Holmes," said she, smiling ruefully. "Alas, I did not take it! I did not wish to trouble Mr. Sutro, and so I was unprotected."

"I only heard of it this morning," the lawyer explained.

"Mr. Holmes advised me to have some friend in the house. I neglected his advice, and I have paid for it."

"You look wretchedly ill," said Holmes. "Perhaps you are hardly equal to telling me what occurred."

"It is all here," said the inspector, tapping a bulky notebook.

"Still, if the lady is not too exhausted --"

"There is really so little to tell. I have no doubt that wicked Susan had planned an entrance for them. They must have known the house to an inch. I was conscious for a moment of the chloroform rag which was thrust over my mouth, but I have no notion how long I may have been senseless. When I woke, one man was at the bedside and another was rising with a bundle in his hand from among my son's baggage, which was partially opened and littered over the floor. Before he could get away I sprang up and seized him."

"You took a big risk," said the inspector.

"I clung to him, but he shook me off, and the other may have struck me, for I can remember no more. Mary the maid heard the noise and began screaming out of the window. That brought the police, but the rascals had got away."

"What did they take?"

"Well, I don't think there is anything of value missing. I am sure there was nothing in my son's trunks."

"Did the men leave no clue?"

"There was one sheet of paper which I may have torn from the man that I grasped. It was lying all crumpled on the floor. It is in my son's handwriting."

"Which means that it is not of much use," said the inspector. "Now if it had been in the burglar's --"

"Exactly," said Holmes. "What rugged common sense! None the less, I should be curious to see it."

The inspector drew a folded sheet of foolscap from his pocketbook.

"I never pass anything, however trifling," said he with some pomposity. "That is my advice to you, Mr. Holmes. In twentyfive years' experience I have learned my lesson. There is always the chance of finger-marks or something."

Holmes inspected the sheet of paper.

"What do you make of it, Inspector?"

"Seems to be the end of some queer novel, so far as I can see."n

"It may certainly prove to be the end of a queer tale," said Holmes. "You have noticed the number on the top of the page. It is two hundred and forty-five. Where are the odd two hundred and forty-four pages?"

"Well, I suppose the burglars got those. Much good may it do them!"

"It seems a queer thing to break into a house in order to steal such papers as that. Does it suggest anything to you, Inspector?"

"Yes, sir, it suggests that in their hurry the rascals just grabbed at what came first to hand. I wish them joy of what they got."

"Why should they go to my son's things?" asked Mrs. Maberley.

"Well, they found nothing valuable downstairs, so they tried their luck upstairs. That is how I read it. What do you make of it, Mr. Holmes?"

"I must think it over, Inspector. Come to the window, Watson." Then, as we stood together, he read over the fragment of paper. It began in the middle of a sentence and ran like this:

"... face bled considerably from the cuts and blows, but it was nothing to the bleeding of his heart as he saw that lovely face, the face for which he had been prepared to sacrifice his very life, looking out at his agony and humiliation. She smiled -- yes, by Heaven! she smiled, like the heartless fiend she was, as he looked up at her. It was at
that moment that love died and hate was born. Man must
live for something. If it is not for your embrace, my lady,
then it shall surely be for your undoing and my complete
revenge."

"Queer grammar!" said Holmes with a smile as he handed the paper back to the inspector. "Did you notice how
the 'he' suddenly changed to 'my'? The writer was so carried away by his own story that he imagined himself at the
supreme moment to be the hero."

"It seemed mighty poor stuff," said the inspector as he replaced it in his book. "What! are you off, Mr. Holmes?"

"I don't think there is anything more for me to do now that the case is in such capable hands. By the way, Mrs.
Maberley, did you say you wished to travel?"

"It has always been my dream, Mr. Holmes."

"Where would you like to go -- Cairo, Madeira, the Riviera?"

"Oh if I had the money I would go round the world."

"Quite so. Round the world. Well, good-morning. I may drop you a line in the evening."

"Now, Watson, we are at the last lap of our little journey," said Holmes when we were back in the roar of central
London once more. "I think we had best clear the matter up at once, and it would be well that you should come with
me, for it is safer to have a witness when you are dealing with such a lady as Isadora Klein."

We had taken a cab and were speeding to some address in Grosvenor Square. Holmes had been sunk in thought,
but he roused himself suddenly.

"By the way, Watson, I suppose you see it all clearly?"

"No, I can't say that I do. I only gather that we are going to see the lady who is behind all this mischief."

"Exactly! But does the name Isadora Klein convey nothing to you? She was, of course, the celebrated beauty.
There was never a woman to touch her. She is pure Spanish, the real blood of the masterful Conquistadors, and her
people have been leaders in Pernambuco for generations. She married the aged German sugar king, Klein, and
presently found herself the richest as well as the most lovely widow upon earth. Then there was an interval of
adventure when she pleased her own tastes. She had several lovers, and Douglas Maberley, one of the most striking
men in London, was one of them. It was by all accounts more than an adventure with him. He was not a society
butterfly but a strong, proud man who gave and expected all. But she is the 'belle dame sans merci' of fiction. When
her caprice is satisfied the matter is ended, and if the other party in the matter can't take her word for it she knows
how to bring it home to him."

"Then that was his own story --"

"Ah! you are piecing it together now. I hear that she is about to marry the young Duke of Lomond, who might
almost be her son. His Grace's ma might overlook the age, but a big scandal would be a different matter, so it is
imperative -- Ah! here we are."

It was one of the finest corner-houses of the West End. A machine-like footman took up our cards and returned
with word that the lady was not at home. "Then we shall wait until she is," said Holmes cheerfully.

The machine broke down.

"Not at home means not at home to you," said the footman.

"Good," Holmes answered. "That means that we shall not have to wait. Kindly give this note to your mistress."

He scribbled three or four words upon a sheet of his notebook, folded it, and handed it to the man.

"What did you say, Holmes?" I asked.

"I simply wrote: 'Shall it be the police, then?' I think that should pass us in."

It did -- with amazing celerity. A minute later we were in an Arabian Nights drawing-room, vast and wonderful,
in a half gloom, picked out with an occasional pink electric light. The lady had come, I felt, to that time of life when
even the proudest beauty finds the half light more welcome. She rose from a settee as we entered: tall, queenly, a
perfect figure, a lovely mask-like face, with two wonderful Spanish eyes which looked murder at us both.

"What is this intrusion -- and this insulting message?" she asked, holding up the slip of paper.

"I need not explain, madame. I have too much respect for your intelligence to do so -- though I confess that
intelligence has been surprisingly at fault of late."

"How so, sir?"

"By supposing that your hired bullies could frighten me from my work. Surely no man would take up my
profession if it were not that danger attracts him. It was you, then, who forced me to examine the case of young
Maberley."

"I have no idea what you are talking about. What have I to do with hired bullies?"
Holmes turned away wearily.
"Yes, I have underrated your intelligence. Well, good-afternoon!"
"Stop! Where are you going?"
"To Scotland Yard."
We had not got halfway to the door before she had overtaken us and was holding his arm. She had turned in a
moment from steel to velvet.
"Come and sit down, gentlemen. Let us talk this matter over. I feel that I may be frank with you, Mr. Holmes. You
have the feelings of a gentleman. How quick a woman's instinct is to find it out. I will treat you as a friend."
"I cannot promise to reciprocate, madame. I am not the law, but I represent justice so far as my feeble powers go. I
am ready to listen, and then I will tell you how I will act."
"No doubt it was foolish of me to threaten a brave man like yourself."
"What was really foolish, madame, is that you have placed yourself in the power of a band of rascals who may
blackmail or give you away."
"No, no! I am not so simple. Since I have promised to be frank, I may say that no one, save Barney Stockdale and
Susan, his wife, have the least idea who their employer is. As to them, well, it is not the first --" She smiled and
nodded with a charming coquettish intimacy.
"I see. You've tested them before."
"They are good hounds who run silent."
"Such hounds have a way sooner or later of biting the hand that feeds them. They will be arrested for this
burglary. The police are already after them."
"They will take what comes to them. That is what they are paid for. I shall not appear in the matter."
"Unless I bring you into it."
"No, no, you would not. You are a gentleman. It is a woman's secret."
"In the first place, you must give back this manuscript."
She broke into a ripple of laughter and walked to the fireplace. There was a calcined mass which she broke up
with the poker. "Shall I give this back?" she asked. So roguish and exquisite did she look as she stood before us with
a challenging smile that I felt of all Holmes's criminals this was the one whom he would find it hardest to face.
However, he was immune from sentiment.
"That seals your fate," he said coldly. "You are very prompt in your actions, madame, but you have overdone it
on this occasion."
She threw the poker down with a clatter.
"How hard you are!" she cried. "May I tell you the whole story?"
"I fancy I could tell it to you."
"But you must look at it with my eyes, Mr. Holmes. You must realize it from the point of view of a woman who
sees all her life's ambition about to be ruined at the last moment. Is such a woman to be blamed if she protects
herself?"
"The original sin was yours."
"Yes, yes! I admit it. He was a dear boy, Douglas, but it so chanced that he could not fit into my plans. He
wanted marriage -marriage, Mr. Holmes -- with a penniless commoner. Nothing less would serve him. Then he
became pertinacious. Because I had given he seemed to think that I still must give, and to him only. It was
intolerable. At last I had to make him realize it."
"By hiring ruffians to beat him under your own window."
"You do indeed seem to know everything. Well, it is true. Barney and the boys drove him away, and were, I
admit, a little rough in doing so. But what did he do then? Could I have believed that a gentleman would do such an
act? He wrote a book in which he described his own story. I, of course, was the wolf; he the lamb. It was all there,
under different names, of course; but who in all London would have failed to recognize it? What do you say to that,
Mr. Holmes?"
"Well, he was within his rights."
"It was as if the air of Italy had got into his blood and brought with it the old cruel Italian spirit. He wrote to me
and sent me a copy of his book that I might have the torture of anticipation. There were two copies, he said -- one
for me, one for his publisher."
"How did you know the publisher's had not reached him?"
"I knew who his publisher was. It is not his only novel, you know. I found out that he had not heard from Italy.
Then came Douglas's sudden death. So long as that other manuscript was in the world there was no safety for me. Of
course, it must be among his effects, and these would be returned to his mother. I set the gang at work. One of them
got into the house as servant. I wanted to do the thing honestly. I really and truly did. I was ready to buy the house
and everything in it. I offered any price she cared to ask. I only tried the other way when everything else had failed.

Now, Mr. Holmes, granting that I was too hard on Douglas -- and, God knows, I am sorry for it! -- what else could I do with my whole future at stake?"

Sherlock Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, well," said he, "I suppose I shall have to compound a felony as usual. How much does it cost to go round the world in first-class style?"

The lady stared in amazement.

"Could it be done on five thousand pounds?"

"Well, I should think so, indeed!"

"Very good. I think you will sign me a check for that, and I will see that it comes to Mrs. Maberley. You owe her a little change of air. Meantime, lady" -- he wagged a cautionary forefinger -- "have a care! Have a care! You can't play with edged tools forever without cutting those dainty hands."

The Adventure of the Blanched Soldier

The ideas of my friend Watson, though limited, are exceedingly pertinacious. For a long time he has worried me to write an experience of my own. Perhaps I have rather invited this persecution, since I have often had occasion to point out to him how superficial are his own accounts and to accuse him of pandering to popular taste instead of confining himself rigidly to facts and figures. "Try it yourself, Holmes!" he has retorted, and I am compelled to admit that, having taken my pen in my hand, I do begin to realize that the matter must be presented in such a way as may interest the reader. The following case can hardly fail to do so, as it is among the strangest happenings in my collection though it chanced that Watson had no note of it in his collection. Speaking of my old friend and biographer, I would take this opportunity to remark that if I burden myself with a companion in my various little inquiries it is not done out of sentiment or caprice, but it is that Watson has some remarkable characteristics of his own to which in his modesty he has given small attention amid his exaggerated estimates of my own performances. A confederate who foresees your conclusions and course of action is always dangerous, but one to whom each development comes as a perpetual surprise, and to whom the future is always a closed book, is indeed an ideal helpmate.

I find from my notebook that it was in January, 1903, just after the conclusion of the Boer War, that I had my visit from Mr. James M. Dodd, a big, fresh, sunburned, upstanding Briton. The good Watson had at that time deserted me for a wife, the only selfish action which I can recall in our association. I was alone.

It is my habit to sit with my back to the window and to place my visitors in the opposite chair, where the light falls full upon them. Mr. James M. Dodd seemed somewhat at a loss how to begin the interview. I did not attempt to help him, for his silence gave me more time for observation. I have found it wise to impress clients with a sense of power, and so I gave him some of my conclusions.

"From South Africa, sir, I perceive."

"Yes, sir," he answered, with some surprise.

"Imperial Yeomanry, I fancy."

"Exactly."

"Middlesex Corps, no doubt."

"That is so. Mr. Holmes, you are a wizard."

I smiled at his bewildered expression.

"When a gentleman of virile appearance enters my room with such tan upon his face as an English sun could never give, and with his handkerchief in his sleeve instead of in his pocket, it is not difficult to place him. You wear a short beard, which shows that you were not a regular. You have the cut of a riding-man. As to Middlesex, your card has already shown me that you are a stockbroker from Throgmorton Street. What other regiment would you join?"

"You see everything."

"I see no more than you, but I have trained myself to notice what I see. However, Mr. Dodd, it was not to discuss the science of observation that you called upon me this morning. What has been happening at Tuxbury Old Park?"

"Mr. Holmes --!"

"My dear sir, there is no mystery. Your letter came with that heading, and as you fixed this appointment in very pressing terms it was clear that something sudden and important had occurred."

"Yes, indeed. But the letter was written in the afternoon, and a good deal has happened since then. If Colonel Emsworth had not kicked me out --"

"Kicked you out!"

"Well, that was what it amounted to. He is a hard nail, is Colonel Emsworth. The greatest martinet in the Army in his day, and it was a day of rough language, too. I couldn't have stuck the colonel if it had not been for Godfrey's
"Perhaps you will explain what you are talking about."

My client grinned mischievously.

"I had got into the way of supposing that you knew everything without being told," said he. "But I will give you the facts, and I hope to God that you will be able to tell me what they mean. I've been awake all night puzzling my brain, and the more I think the more incredible does it become.

"When I joined up in January, 1901 -- just two years ago -- young Godfrey Emsworth had joined the same squadron. He was Colonel Emsworth's only son -- Emsworth the Crimean V. C. -- and he had the fighting blood in him, so it is no wonder he volunteered. There was not a finer lad in the regiment. We formed a friendship -- the sort of friendship which can only be made when one lives the same life and shares the same joys and sorrows. He was my mate -- and that means a good deal in the Army. We took the rough and the smooth together for a year of hard fighting. Then he was hit with a bullet from an elephant gun in the action near Diamond Hill outside-Pretoria. I got one letter from the hospital at Cape Town and one from Southampton. Since then not a word -- not one word, Mr. Holmes, for six months and more, and he my closest pal.

"Well, when the war was over, and we all got back, I wrote to his father and asked where Godfrey was. No answer. I waited a bit and then I wrote again. This time I had a reply, short and gruff. Godfrey had gone on a voyage round the world, and it was not likely that he would be back for a year. That was all.

"I wasn't satisfied, Mr. Holmes. The whole thing seemed to me so damned unnatural. He was a good lad, and he would not drop a pal like that. It was not like him. Then, again, I happened to know that he was heir to a lot of money, and also that his father and he did not always hit it off too well. The old man was sometimes a bully, and young Godfrey had too much spirit to stand it. No, I wasn't satisfied, and I determined that I would get to the root of the matter. It happened, however, that my own affairs needed a lot of straightening out, after two years' absence, and so it is only this week that I have been able to take up Godfrey's case again. But since I have taken it up I mean to drop everything in order to see it through."

Mr. James M. Dodd appeared to be the sort of person whom it would be better to have as a friend than as an enemy. His blue eyes were stern and his square jaw had set hard as he spoke.

"Well, what have you done?" I asked.

"My first move was to get down to his home, Tuxbury Old Park, near Bedford, and to see for myself how the ground lay. I wrote to the mother, therefore -- I had had quite enough of the curmudgeon of a father -- and I made a clean frontal attack: Godfrey was my chum, I had a great deal of interest which I might tell her of our common experiences, I should be in the neighbourhood, would there be any objection, et cetera? In reply I had quite an amiable answer from her and an offer to put me up for the night. That was what took me down on Monday.

"Tuxbury Old Hall is inaccessible -- five miles from anywhere. There was no trap at the station, so I had to walk, carrying my suitcase, and it was nearly dark before I arrived. It is a great wandering house, standing in a considerable park. I should judge it was of all sorts of ages and styles, starting on a half-timbered Elizabethan foundation and ending in a Victorian portico. Inside it was all panelling and tapestry and half-effaced old pictures, a house of shadows and mystery. There was a butler, old Ralph, who seemed about the same age as the house, and there was his wife, who might have been older. She had been Godfrey's nurse, and I had heard him speak of her as second only to his mother in his affections, so I was drawn to her in spite of her queer appearance. The mother I liked also -- a gentle little white mouse of a woman. It was only the colonel himself whom I barred.

"We had a bit of barney right away, and I should have walked back to the station if I had not felt that it might be playing his game for me to do so. I was shown straight into his study, and there I found him, a huge, bow-backed man with a smoky skin and a straggling gray beard, seated behind his littered desk. A red-veined nose jutted out like a vulture's beak, and two fierce gray eyes glared at me from under tufted brows. I could understand now why Godfrey seldom spoke of his father.

"Well, sir," said he in a rasping voice, 'I should be interested to know the real reasons for this visit.'

"I answered that I had explained them in my letter to his wife.

"Yes, yes, you said that you had known Godfrey in Africa. We have, of course, only your word for that.'

"I have his letters to me in my pocket.'

"Kindly let me see them.'

"He glanced at the two which I handed him, and then he tossed them back.

"Well, what then?" he asked.

"I was fond of your son Godfrey, sir. Many ties and memories united us. Is it not natural that I should wonder at his sudden silence and should wish to know what has become of him?"

"I have some recollections, sir, that I had already corresponded with you and had told you what had become of
him. He has gone upon a voyage round the world. His health was in a poor way after his African experiences, and both his mother and I were of opinion that complete rest and change were needed. Kindly pass that explanation on to any other friends who may be interested in the matter.

"Certainly," I answered. 'But perhaps you would have the goodness to let me have the name of the steamer and of the line by which he sailed, together with the date. I have no doubt that I should be able to get a letter through to him.'

"My request seemed both to puzzle and to irritate my host. His great eyebrows came down over his eyes, and he tapped his fingers impatiently on the table. He looked up at last with the expression of one who has seen his adversary make a dangerous move at chess, and has decided how to meet it.

"Many people, Mr. Dodd,' said he, 'would take offence at your infernal pertinacity and would think that this insistence had reached the point of damned impertinence.'

"You must put it down, sir, to my real love for your son.'

"Exactly. I have already made every allowance upon that score. I must ask you, however, to drop these inquiries. Every family has its own inner knowledge and its own motives, which cannot always be made clear to outsiders, however well-intentioned. My wife is anxious to hear something of Godfrey's past which you are in a position to tell her, but I would ask you to let the present and the future alone. Such inquiries serve no useful purpose, sir, and place us in a delicate and difficult position.'

"So I came to a dead end, Mr. Holmes. There was no getting past it. I could only pretend to accept the situation and register a vow inwardly that I would never rest until my friend's fate had been cleared up. It was a dull evening. We dined quietly, the three of us, in a gloomy, faded old room. The lady questioned me eagerly about her son, but the old man seemed morose and depressed. I was so bored by the whole proceeding that I made an excuse as soon as I decently could and retired to my bedroom. It was a large, bare room on the ground floor, as gloomy as the rest of the house, but after a year of sleeping upon the veldt, Mr. Holmes, one is not too particular about one's quarters. I opened the curtains and looked out into the garden, remarking that it was a fine night with a bright half-moon. Then I sat down by the roaring fire with the lamp on a table beside me, and endeavoured to distract my mind with a novel. I was interrupted, however, by Ralph, the old butler, who came in with a fresh supply of coals.

"I thought you might run short in the night-time, sir. It is bitter weather and these rooms are cold.'

"He hesitated before leaving the room, and when I looked round he was standing facing me with a wistful look upon his wrinkled face.

"Beg your pardon, sir, but I could not help hearing what you said of young Master Godfrey at dinner. You know, sir, that my wife nursed him, and so I may say I am his foster-father. It's natural we should take an interest. And you say he carried himself well, sir?'

"There was no braver man in the regiment. He pulled me out once from under the rifles of the Boers, or maybe I should not be here.'

"The old butler rubbed his skinny hands.

"Yes, sir, yes, that is Master Godfrey all over. He was always courageous. There's not a tree in the park, sir, that he has not climbed. Nothing would stop him. He was a fine boy -- and oh, sir, he was a fine man.'

"I sprang to my feet.

"Look here! I cried. 'You say he was. You speak as if he were dead. What is all this mystery? What has become of Godfrey Emsworth?'

"I gripped the old man by the shoulder, but he shrank away.

"I don't know what you mean, sir. Ask the master about Master Godfrey. He knows. It is not for me to interfere.'

"He was leaving the room, but I held his arm

"'Listen,' I said. 'You are going to answer one question before you leave if I have to hold you all night. Is Godfrey dead?'

"He could not face my eyes. He was like a man hypnotized The answer was dragged from his lips. It was a terrible and unexpected one.

"I wish to God he was!' he cried, and, tearing himself free he dashed from the room.

"You will think, Mr. Holmes, that I returned to my chair in no very happy state of mind. The old man's words seemed to me to bear only one interpretation. Clearly my poor friend had become involved in some criminal or, at the least, disreputable transaction which touched the family honour. That stern old man had sent his son away and hidden him from the world lest some scandal should come to light. Godfrey was a reckless fellow. He was easily influenced by those around him. No doubt he had fallen into bad hands and been misled to his ruin. It was a piteous business, if it was indeed so, but even now it was my duty to hunt him out and see if I could aid him. I was anxiously pondering the matter when I looked up, and there was Godfrey Emsworth standing before me."
My client had paused as one in deep emotion.
"Pray continue," I said. "Your problem presents some very unusual features."

"He was outside the window, Mr. Holmes, with his face pressed against the glass. I have told you that I looked out at the night. When I did so I left the curtains partly open. His figure was framed in this gap. The window came down to the ground and I could see the whole length of it, but it was his face which held my gaze. He was deadly pale -- never have I seen a man so white. I reckon ghosts may look like that; but his eyes met mine, and they were the eyes of a living man. He sprang back when he saw that I was looking at him, and he vanished into the darkness.

"There was something shocking about the man, Mr. Holmes. It wasn't merely that ghastly face glimmering as white as cheese in the darkness. It was more subtle than that -- something slinking, something furtive, something guilty -- something very unlike the frank, manly lad that I had known. It left a feeling of horror in my mind.

"But when a man has been soldiering for a year or two with brother Boer as a playmate, he keeps his nerve and acts quickly. Godfrey had hardly vanished before I was at the window. There was an awkward catch, and I was some little time before I could throw it up. Then I nipped through and ran down the garden path in the direction that I thought he might have taken.

"It was a long path and the light was not very good, but it seemed to me something was moving ahead of me. I ran on and called his name, but it was no use. When I got to the end of the path there were several others branching in different directions to various outhouses. I stood hesitating, and as I did so I heard distinctly the sound of a closing door. It was not behind me in the house, but ahead of me, somewhere in the darkness. That was enough, Mr. Holmes, to assure me that what I had seen was not a vision. Godfrey had run away from me, and he had shut a door behind him. Of that I was certain.

"There was nothing more I could do, and I spent an uneasy night turning the matter over in my mind and trying to find some theory which would cover the facts. Next day I found the colonel rather more conciliatory, and as his wife remarked that there were some places of interest in the neighbourhood, it gave me an opening to ask whether my presence for one more night would incommode them. A somewhat grudging acquiescence from the old man gave me a clear day in which to make my observations. I was already perfectly convinced that Godfrey was in hiding somewhere near, but where and why remained to be solved.

"The house was so large and so rambling that a regiment might be hid away in it and no one the wiser. If the secret lay there it was difficult for me to penetrate it. But the door which I had heard close was certainly not in the house. I must explore the garden and see what I could find. There was no difficulty in the way, for the old people were busy in their own fashion and left me to my own devices.

"There were several small outhouses, but at the end of the garden there was a detached building of some size -- large enough for a gardener's or a gamekeeper's residence. Could this be the place whence the sound of that shutting door had come? I approached it in a careless fashion as though I were strolling aimlessly round the grounds. As I did so, a small, brisk, bearded man in a black coat and bowler hat -- not at all the gardener type -- came out of the door. To my surprise, he locked it after him and put the key in his pocket. Then he looked at me with some surprise on his face.

"'Are you a visitor here?' he asked.

"I explained that I was and that I was a friend of Godfrey's.

"'What a pity that he should be away on his travels, for he would have so liked to see me,' I continued.

"'Quite so. Exactly,' said he with a rather guilty air. 'No doubt you will renew your visit at some more propitious time.' He passed on, but when I turned I observed that he was standing watching me, half-concealed by the laurels at the far end of the garden.

"I had a good look at the little house as I passed it, but the windows were heavily curtained, and, so far as one could see, it was empty. I might spoil my own game and even be ordered off the premises if I were too audacious, for I was still conscious that I was being watched. Therefore, I strolled back to the house and waited for night before I went on with my inquiry. When all was dark and quiet I slipped out of my window and made my way as silently as possible to the mysterious lodge.

"I have said that it was heavily curtained, but now I found that the windows were shuttered as well. Some light, however, was breaking through one of them, so I concentrated my attention upon this. I was in luck, for the curtain had not been quite closed, and there was a crack in the shutter, so that I could see the inside of the room. It was a cheery place enough, a bright lamp and a blazing fire. Opposite to me was seated the little man whom I had seen in the morning. He was smoking a pipe and reading a paper."

"What paper?" I asked.

My client seemed annoyed at the interruption of his narrative.
"Can it matter?" he asked.
"It is most essential."
"I really took no notice."

"Possibly you observed whether it was a broad-leafed paper or of that smaller type which one associates with weeklies."

"Now that you mention it, it was not large. It might have been the Spectator. However, I had little thought to spare upon such details, for a second man was seated with his back to the window, and I could swear that this second man was Godfrey. I could not see his face, but I knew the familiar slope of his shoulders. He was leaning upon his elbow in an attitude of great melancholy, his body turned towards the fire. I was hesitating as to what I should do when there was a sharp tap on my shoulder, and there was Colonel Emsworth beside me.

"This way, sir!" said he in a low voice. He walked in silence to the house, and I followed him into my own bedroom. He had picked up a time-table in the hall.

"There is a train to London at 8:30," said he. "The trap will be at the door at eight."

"He was white with rage, and, indeed, I felt myself in so difficult a position that I could only stammer out a few incoherent apologies in which I tried to excuse myself by urging my anxiety for my friend.

"The matter will not bear discussion," said he abruptly. "You have made a most damnable intrusion into the privacy of our family. You were here as a guest and you have become a spy. I have nothing more to say, sir, save that I have no wish ever to see you again."

"At this I lost my temper, Mr. Holmes, and I spoke with some warmth."

"I have seen your son, and I am convinced that for some reason of your own you are concealing him from the world. I have no idea what your motives are in cutting him off in this fashion, but I am sure that he is no longer a free agent. I warn you, Colonel Emsworth, that until I am assured as to the safety and well-being of my friend I shall never desist in my efforts to get to the bottom of the mystery, and I shall certainly not allow myself to be intimidated by anything which you may say or do."

"The old fellow looked diabolical, and I really thought he was about to attack me. I have said that he was a gaunt, fierce old giant, and though I am no weakling I might have been hard put to it to hold my own against him. However, after a long glare of rage he turned upon his heel and walked out of the room. For my part, I took the appointed train in the morning, with the full intention of coming straight to you and asking for your advice and assistance at the appointment for which I had already written."

Such was the problem which my visitor laid before me. It presented, as the astute reader will have already perceived, few difficulties in its solution, for a very limited choice of alternatives must get to the root of the matter. Still, elementary as it was, there were points of interest and novelty about it which may excuse my placing it upon record. I now proceeded, using my familiar method of logical analysis, to narrow down the possible solutions.

"The servants," I asked; "how many were in the house?"

"To the best of my belief there were only the old butler and his wife. They seemed to live in the simplest fashion."

"There was no servant, then, in the detached house?"

"None, unless the little man with the beard acted as such. He seemed, however, to be quite a superior person."

"That seems very suggestive. Had you any indication that food was conveyed from the one house to the other?"

"Now that you mention it, I did see old Ralph carrying a basket down the garden walk and going in the direction of this house. The idea of food did not occur to me at the moment."

"Did you make any local inquiries?"

"Yes, I did. I spoke to the station-master and also to the innkeeper in the village. I simply asked if they knew anything of my old comrade, Godfrey Emsworth. Both of them assured me that he had gone for a voyage round the world. He had come home and then had almost at once started off again. The story was evidently universally accepted."

"You said nothing of your suspicions?"

"Nothing."

"That was very wise. The matter should certainly be inquired into. I will go back with you to Tuxbury Old Park."

"To-day?"

It happened that at the moment I was clearing up the case which my friend Watson has described as that of the Abbey School, in which the Duke of Greyminster was so deeply involved. I had also a commission from the Sultan of Turkey which called for immediate action, as political consequences of the gravest kind might arise from its neglect. Therefore it was not until the beginning of the next week, as my diary records, that I was able to start forth on my mission to Bedfordshire in company with Mr. James M. Dodd. As we drove to Eustonn we picked up a grave and tacitum gentleman of iron-gray aspect, with whom I had made the necessary arrangements.

"This is an old friend," said I to Dodd. "It is possible that his presence may be entirely unnecessary, and, on the other hand, it may be essential. It is not necessary at the present stage to go further into the matter."
The narratives of Watson have accustomed the reader, no doubt, to the fact that I do not waste words or disclose my thoughts while a case is actually under consideration. Dodd seemed surprised, but nothing more was said, and the three of us continued our journey together. In the train I asked Dodd one more question which I wished our companion to hear.

"You say that you saw your friend's face quite clearly at the window, so clearly that you are sure of his identity?"
"I have no doubt about it whatever. His nose was pressed against the glass. The lamplight shone full upon him."
"It could not have been someone resembling him?"
"No, no, it was he."
"But you say he was changed?"
"Only in colour. His face was -- how shall I describe it? -- it was of a fish-belly whiteness. It was bleached."
"Was it equally pale all over?"
"I think not. It was his brow which I saw so clearly as it was pressed against the window."
"Did you call to him?"
"I was too startled and horrified for the moment. Then I pursued him, as I have told you, but without result."

My case was practically complete, and there was only one small incident needed to round it off. When, after a considerable drive, we arrived at the strange old rambling house which my client had described, it was Ralph, the elderly butler, who opened the door. I had requisitioned the carriage for the day and had asked my elderly friend to remain within it unless we should summon him. Ralph, a little wrinkled old fellow, was in the conventional costume of black coat and pepper-and-salt trousers, with only one curious variant. He wore brown leather gloves, which at sight of us he instantly shuffled off, laying them down on the hall-table as we passed in. I have, as my friend Watson may have remarked, an abnormally acute set of senses, and a faint but incisive scent was apparent. It seemed to centre on the hall table. I turned, placed my hat there, knocked it off, stooped to pick it up, and contrived to bring my nose within a foot of the gloves. Yes, it was undoubtedly from them that the curious tarry odour was oozing. I passed on into the study with my case complete. Alas, that I should have to show my hand so when I tell my own story! It was by concealing such links in the chain that Watson was enabled to produce his meretricious finales.

Colonel Emsworth was not in his room, but he came quickly enough on receipt of Ralph's message. We heard his quick, heavy step in the passage. The door was flung open and he rushed in with bristling beard and twisted features, as terrible an old man as ever I have seen. He held our cards in his hand, and he tore them up and stamped on the fragments.

"Have I not told you, you infernal busybody, that you are warned off the premises? Never dare to show your damned face here again. If you enter again without my leave I shall be within my rights if I use violence. I'll shoot you, sir! By God, I will! As to you, sir," turning upon me, "I extend the same warning to you. I am familiar with your ignoble profession, but you must take your reputed talents to some other field. There is no opening for them here."

"I cannot leave here," said my client firmly, "until I hear from Godfrey's own lips that he is under no restraint."

Our involuntary host rang the bell.

"Ralph," he said, "telephone down to the county police and ask the inspector to send up two constables. Tell him there are burglars in the house."

"One moment," said I. "You must be aware, Mr. Dodd, that Colonel Emsworth is within his rights and that we have no legal status within his house. On the other hand, he should recognize that your action is prompted entirely by solicitude for his son. I venture to hope that if I were allowed to have five minutes conversation with Colonel Emsworth I could certainly alter his view of the matter."

"I am not so easily altered," said the old soldier. "Ralph, do what I have told you. What the devil are you waiting for? Ring up the police!"

"Nothing of the sort," I said, putting my back to the door. "Any police interference would bring about the very catastrophe which you dread." I took out my notebook and scribbled one word upon a loose sheet. "That," said I as I handed it to Colonel Emsworth, "is what has brought us here."

He stared at the writing with a face from which every expression save amazement had vanished.

"How do you know?" he gasped, sitting down heavily in his chair.

"It is my business to know things. That is my trade."

He sat in deep thought, his gaunt hand tugging at his straggling beard. Then he made a gesture of resignation.

"Well, if you wish to see Godfrey, you shall. It is no doing of mine, but you have forced my hand. Ralph, tell Mr. Godfrey and Mr. Kent that in five minutes we shall be with them."

At the end of that time we passed down the garden path and found ourselves in front of the mystery house at the end. A small bearded man stood at the door with a look of considerable astonishment upon his face.

"This is very sudden, Colonel Emsworth," said he. "This will disarrange all our plans."
"I can't help it, Mr. Kent. Our hands have been forced. Can Mr. Godfrey see us?"

"Yes, he is waiting inside." He turned and led us into a large plainly furnished front room. A man was standing with his back to the fire, and at the sight of him my client sprang forward with outstretched hand.

"Why, Godfrey, old man, this is fine!"

But the other waved him back.

"Don't touch me, Jimmie. Keep your distance. Yes, you may well stare! I don't quite look the smart Lance-Corporal Emsworth, of B Squadron, do I?"

His appearance was certainly extraordinary. One could see that he had indeed been a handsome man with clear-cut features sunburned by an African sun, but mottled in patches over this darker surface were curious whitish patches which had bleached his skin.

"That's why I don't court visitors," said he. "I don't mind you, Jimmie, but I could have done without your friend. I suppose there is some good reason for it, but you have me at a disadvantage."

"I wanted to be sure that all was well with you, Godfrey. I saw you that night when you looked into my window, and I could not let the matter rest till I had cleared things up."

"Old Ralph told me you were there, and I couldn't help taking a peep at you. I hoped you would not have seen me, and I had to run to my burrow when I heard the window go up."

"But what in heaven's name is the matter?"

"Well, it's not a long story to tell," said he, lighting a cigarette. "You remember that morning fight at Buffelsspruit, outside Pretoria, on the Eastern railway line? You heard I was hit?"

"Yes, I heard that but I never got particulars."

"Three of us got separated from the others. It was very broken country, you may remember. There was Simpson -- the fellow we called Baldy Simpson -- and Anderson, and I. We were clearing brother Boer, but he lay low and got the three of us. The other two were killed. I got an elephant bullet through my shoulder. I stuck on to my horse, however, and he galloped several miles before I fainted and rolled off the saddle.

"When I came to myself it was nightfall, and I raised myself up, feeling very weak and ill. To my surprise there was a house close beside me, a fairly large house with a broad stoep and many windows. It was deadly cold. You remember the kind of numb cold which used to come at evening, a deadly, sickening sort of cold, very different from a crisp healthy frost. Well, I was chilled to the bone, and my only hope seemed to lie in reaching that house. I staggered to my feet and dragged myself along, hardly conscious of what I did. I have a dim memory of slowly ascending the steps, entering a wide-opened door, passing into a large room which contained several beds, and throwing myself down with a gasp of satisfaction upon one of them. It was unmade, but that troubled me not at all. I drew the clothes over my shivering body and in a moment I was in a deep sleep.

"It was morning when I wakened, and it seemed to me that instead of coming out into a world of sanity I had emerged into some extraordinary nightmare. The African sun flooded through the big, curtainless windows, and every detail of the great, bare, whitewashed dormitory stood out hard and clear. In front of me was standing a small, dwarf-like man with a huge, bulbous head, who was jabbering excitedly in Dutch, waving two horrible hands which looked to me like brown sponges. Behind him stood a group of people who seemed to be intensely amused by the situation, but a chill came over me as I looked at them. Not one of them was a normal human being. Every one was twisted or swollen or disfigured in some strange way. The laughter of these strange monstrosities was a dreadful thing to hear.

"It seemed that none of them could speak English, but the situation wanted clearing up, for the creature with the big head was growing furiously angry, and, uttering wild-beast cries, he had laid his deformed hands upon me and was dragging me out of bed, regardless of the fresh flow of blood from my wound. The little monster was as strong as a bull, and I don't know what he might have done to me had not an elderly man who was clearly in authority been attracted to the room by the hubbub; He said a few stern words in Dutch, and my persecutor shrank away. Then he turned upon me, gazing at me in the utmost amazement.

"'How in the world did you come here?' he asked in amazement. 'Wait a bit! I see that you are tired out and that wounded shoulder of yours wants looking after. I am a doctor, and I'll soon have you tied up. But, man alive! you are in far greater danger here than ever you were on the battlefield. You are in the Leper Hospital, and you have slept in a leper's bed.'"

"Need I tell you more, Jimmie? It seems that in view of the approaching battle all these poor creatures had been evacuated the day before. Then, as the British advanced, they had been brought back by this, their medical superintendent, who assured me that, though he believed he was immune to the disease, he would none the less never have dared to do what I had done. He put me in a private room, treated me kindly, and within a week or so I was removed to the general hospital at Pretoria.

"So there you have my tragedy. I hoped against hope, but it was not until I had reached home that the terrible
signs which you see upon my face told me that I had not escaped. What was I to do? I was in this lonely house. We had two servants whom we could utterly trust. There was a house where I could live. Under pledge of secrecy, Mr. Kent, who is a surgeon, was prepared to stay with me. It seemed simple enough on those lines. The alternative was a dreadful one -- segregation for life among strangers with never a hope of release. But absolute secrecy was necessary, or even in this quiet countryside there would have been an outcry, and I should have been dragged to my horrible doom. Even you, Jimmie -- even you had to be kept in the dark. Why my father has relented I cannot imagine."

Colonel Emsworth pointed to me. "This is the gentleman who forced my hand." He unfolded the scrap of paper on which I had written the word "Leprosy." "It seemed to me that if he knew so much as that it was safer that he should know all."

"And so it was," said I. "Who knows but good may come of it? I understand that only Mr. Kent has seen the patient. May I ask, sir, if you are an authority on such complaints, which are, I understand, tropical or semi-tropical in their nature?"

"I have the ordinary knowledge of the educated medical man," he observed with some stiffness.

"I have no doubt, sir, that you are fully competent, but I am sure that you will agree that in such a case a second opinion is valuable. You have avoided this, I understand, for fear that pressure should be put upon you to segregate the patient."

"That is so," said Colonel Emsworth. "I foresaw this situation," I explained, "and I have brought with me a friend whose discretion may absolutely be trusted. I was able once to do him a professional service, and he is ready to advise as a friend rather than as a specialist. His name is Sir James Saunders."

The prospect of an interview with Lord Roberts would not have excited greater wonder and pleasure in a raw subaltern than was now reflected upon the face of Mr. Kent.

"I shall indeed be proud," he murmured.

"Then I will ask Sir James to step this way. He is at present in the carriage outside the door. Meanwhile, Colonel Emsworth, we may perhaps assemble in your study, where I could give the necessary explanations."

And here it is that I miss my Watson. By cunning questions and ejaculations of wonder he could elevate my simple art, which is but systematized common sense, into a prodigy. When I tell my own story I have no such aid. And yet I will give my process of thought even as I gave it to my small audience, which included Godfrey's mother in the study of Colonel Emsworth.

"That process," said I, "starts upon the supposition that when you have eliminated all which is impossible, then whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth. It may well be that several explanations remain, in which case one tries test after test until one or other of them has a convincing amount of support. We will now apply this principle to the case in point. As it was first presented to me, there were three possible explanations of the seclusion or incarceration of this gentleman in an outhouse of his father's mansion. There was the explanation that he was in hiding for a crime, or that he was mad and that they wished to avoid an asylum, or that he had some disease which caused his segregation. I could think of no other adequate solutions. These, then, had to be sifted and balanced against each other.

"The criminal solution would not bear inspection. No unsolved crime had been reported from that district. I was sure of that. If it were some crime not yet discovered, then clearly it would be to the interest of the family to get rid of the delinquent and send him abroad rather than keep him concealed at home. I could see no explanation for such a line of conduct.

"Insanity was more plausible. The presence of the second person in the outhouse suggested a keeper. The fact that he locked the door when he came out strengthened the supposition and gave the idea of constraint. On the other hand, this constraint could not be severe or the young man could not have got loose and come down to have a look at his friend. You will remember, Mr. Dodd, that I felt round for points, asking you, for example, about the paper which Mr. Kent was reading. Had it been the Lancet or the British Medical Journal it would have helped me. It is not illegal, however, to keep a lunatic upon private premises so long as there is a qualified person in attendance and that the authorities have been duly notified. Why, then, all this desperate desire for secrecy? Once again I could not get the theory to fit the facts.

"There remained the third possibility, into which, rare and unlikely as it was, everything seemed to fit. Leprosy is not uncommon in South Africa. By some extraordinary chance this youth might have contracted it. His people would be placed in a very dreadful position, since they would desire to save him from segregation. Great secrecy would be needed to prevent rumours from getting about and subsequent interference by the authorities. A devoted medical man, if sufficiently paid, would easily be found to take charge of the sufferer. There would be no reason why the latter should not be allowed freedom after dark. Bleaching of the skin is a common result of the disease."
The case was a strong one -- so strong that I determined to act as if it were actually proved. When on arriving here I noticed that Ralph, who carries out the meals, had gloves which are impregnated with disinfectants, my last doubts were removed. A single word showed you, sir, that your secret was discovered, and if I wrote rather than said it, it was to prove to you that my discretion was to be trusted."

I was finishing this little analysis of the case when the door was opened and the austere figure of the great dermatologist was ushered in. But for once his sphinx-like features had relaxed and there was a warm humanity in his eyes. He strode up to Colonel Emsworth and shook him by the hand.

"It is often my lot to bring ill-tidings and seldom good," said he. "This occasion is the more welcome. It is not leprosy."

"What?"

"A well-marked case of pseudo-leprosy or ichthyosis, a scale-like affection of the skin, unsightly, obstinate, but possibly curable, and certainly noninfective. Yes, Mr. Holmes, the coincidence is a remarkable one. But is it coincidence? Are there not subtle forces at work of which we know little? Are we assured that the apprehension from which this young man has no doubt suffered terribly since his exposure to its contagion may not produce a physical effect which simulates that which it fears? At any rate, I pledge my professional reputation -- But the lady has fainted! I think that Mr. Kent had better be with her until she recovers from this joyous shock."

The Adventure of the Lion’s Mane

It is a most singular thing that a problem which was certainly as abstruse and unusual as any which I have faced in my long professional career should have come to me after my retirement, and be brought, as it were, to my very door. It occurred after my withdrawal to my little Sussex home, when I had given myself up entirely to that soothing life of Nature for which I had so often yearned during the long years spent amid the gloom of London. At this period of my life the good Watson had passed almost beyond my ken. An occasional week-end visit was the most that I ever saw of him. Thus I must act as my own chronicler. Ah! had he but been with me, how much he might have made of so wonderful a happening and of my eventual triumph against every difficulty! As it is, however, I must needs tell my tale in my own plain way, showing by my words each step upon the difficult road which lay before me as I searched for the mystery of the Lion’s Mane.

My villa is situated upon the southern slope of the downs, commanding a great view of the Channel. At this point the coast-line is entirely of chalk cliffs, which can only be descended by a single, long, tortuous path, which is steep and slippery. At the bottom of the path lie a hundred yards of pebbles and shingle, even when the tide is at full. Here and there, however, there are curves and hollows which make splendid swimmingpools filled afresh with each flow. This admirable beach extends for some miles in each direction, save only at one point where the little cove and village of Fulworth break the line.

My house is lonely. I, my old housekeeper, and my bees have the estate all to ourselves. Half a mile off, however, is Harold Stackhurst’s well-known coaching establishment, The Gables, quite a large place, which contains some score of young fellows preparing for various professions, with a staff of several masters. Stackhurst himself was a well-known rowing Blue in his day, and an excellent all-round scholar. He and I were always friendly from the day I came to the coast, and he was the one man who was on such terms with me that we could drop in on each other in the evenings without an invitation.

Towards the end of July, 1907, there was a severe gale, the wind blowing up-channel, heaping the seas to the base of the cliffs and leaving a lagoon at the turn of the tide. On the morning of which I speak the wind had abated, and all Nature was newly washed and fresh. It was impossible to work upon so delightful a day, and I strolled out before breakfast to enjoy the exquisite air. I walked along the cliff path which led to the steep descent to the beach. As I walked I heard a shout behind me, and there was Harold Stackhurst waving his hand in cheery greeting.

"What a morning, Mr. Holmes! I thought I should see you out."

"Going for a swim, I see."

"At your old tricks again," he laughed, patting his bulging pocket. "Yes. McPherson started early, and I expect I may find him there."

Fitzroy McPherson was the science master, a fine upstanding young fellow whose life had been crippled by heart trouble following rheumatic fever. He was a natural athlete, however, and excelled in every game which did not throw too great a strain upon him. Summer and winter he went for his swim, and, as I am a swimmer myself, I have often joined him.

At this moment we saw the man himself. His head showed above the edge of the cliff where the path ends. Then his whole figure appeared at the top, staggering like a drunken man. The next instant he threw up his hands and, with a terrible cry, fell upon his face. Stackhurst and I rushed forward -- it may have been fifty yards -- and turned him on his back. He was obviously dying. Those glazed sunken eyes and dreadful livid cheeks could mean nothing else. One glimmer of life came into his face for an instant, and he uttered two or three words with an eager air of
warning. They were slurred and indistinct, but to my ear the last of them, which burst in a shriek from his lips, were "the Lion's Mane." It was utterly irrelevant and unintelligible, and yet I could twist the sound into no other sense. Then he half raised himself from the ground, threw his arms into the air, and fell forward on his side. He was dead.

My companion was paralyzed by the sudden horror of it, but I, as may well be imagined, had every sense on the alert. And I had need, for it was speedily evident that we were in the presence of an extraordinary case. The man was dressed only in his Burberry overcoat, his trousers, and an unlaced pair of canvas shoes. As he fell over, his Burberry, which had been simply thrown round his shoulders, slipped off, exposing his trunk. We stared at it in amazement. His back was covered with dark red lines as though he had been terribly flogged by a thin wire scourge. The instrument with which this punishment had been inflicted was clearly flexible, for the long, angry weals curved round his shoulders and ribs. There was blood dripping down his chin, for he had bitten through his lower lip in the paroxysm of his agony. His drawn and distorted face told how terrible that agony had been.

I was kneeling and Stackhurst standing by the body when a shadow fell across us, and we found that Ian Murdoch was by our side. Murdoch was the mathematical coach at the establishment, a tall, dark, thin man, so taciturn and aloof that none can be said to have been his friend. He seemed to live in some high abstract region of surds and conic sections, with little to connect him with ordinary life. He was looked upon as an oddity by the students, and would have been their butt, but there was some strange outlandish blood in the man, which showed itself not only in his coal-black eyes and swarthy face but also in occasional outbreaks of temper, which could only be described as ferocious. On one occasion, being plagued by a little dog belonging to McPherson, he had caught the creature up and hurled it through the plate-glass window, an action for which Stackhurst would certainly have given him his dismissal had he not been a very valuable teacher. Such was the strange complex man who now appeared beside us. He seemed to be honestly shocked at the sight before him, though the incident of the dog may show that there was no great sympathy between the dead man and himself.

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow! What can I do? How can I help?"
"Were you with him? Can you tell us what has happened?"
"No, no, I was late this morning. I was not on the beach at all. I have come straight from The Gables. What can I do?"

"You can hurry to the police-station at Fulworth. Report the matter at once."

Without a word he made off at top speed, and I proceeded to take the matter in hand, while Stackhurst, dazed at this tragedy, remained by the body. My first task naturally was to note who was on the beach. From the top of the path I could see the whole sweep of it, and it was absolutely deserted save that two or three dark figures could be seen far away moving towards the village of Fulworth. Having satisfied myself upon this point, I walked slowly down the path. There was clay or soft marl mixed with the chalk, and every here and there I saw the same footstep, both ascending and descending. No one else had gone down to the beach by this track that morning. At one place I observed the print of an open hand with the fingers towards the incline. This could only mean that poor McPherson had fallen as he ascended. There were rounded depressions, too, which suggested that he had come down upon his knees more than once. At the bottom of the path was the considerable lagoon left by the retreating tide. At the side of it McPherson had undressed, for there lay his towel on a rock. It was folded and dry, so that it would seem that, after all, he had never entered the water. Once or twice as I hunted round amid the hard shingle I came on little patches of sand where the print of his canvas shoe, and also of his naked foot, could be seen. The latter fact proved that he had made all ready to bathe, though the towel indicated that he had not actually done so.

And here was the problem clearly defined -- as strange a one as had ever confronted me. The man had not been on the beach more than a quarter of an hour at the most. Stackhurst had followed him from The Gables, so there could be no doubt about that. He had gone to bathe and had stripped, as the naked footsteps showed. Then he had suddenly huddled on his clothes again -- they were all dishevelled and unfastened -- and he had returned without bathing, or at any rate without drying himself. And the reason for his change of purpose had been that he had been scourged in some savage, inhuman fashion, tortured until he bit his lip through in his agony, and was left with only strength enough to crawl away and to die. Who had done this barbarous deed? There were, it is true, small grottos and caves in the base of the cliffs, but the low sun shone directly into them, and there was no place for concealment. Then, again, there were those distant figures on the beach. They seemed too far away to have been connected with the crime, and the broad lagoon in which McPherson had intended to bathe lay between him and them, lapping up to the rocks. On the sea two or three fishingboats were at no great distance. Their occupants might be examined at our leisure. There were several roads for inquiry, but none which led to any very obvious goal.

When I at last returned to the body I found that a little group of wondering folk had gathered round it. Stackhurst was, of course, still there, and Ian Murdoch had just arrived with Anderson, the village constable, a big, ginger-moustached man of the slow, solid Sussex breed -- a breed which covers much good sense under a heavy, silent exterior. He listened to everything, took note of all we said, and finally drew me aside.
"I'd be glad of your advice, Mr. Holmes. This is a big thing for me to handle, and I'll hear of it from Lewes if I go wrong."

I advised him to send for his immediate superior, and for a doctor; also to allow nothing to be moved, and as few fresh footmarks as possible to be made, until they came. In the meantime I searched the dead man's pockets. There were his handkerchief, a large knife, and a small folding card-case. From this projected a slip of paper, which I unfolded and handed to the constable. There was written on it in a scrawling, feminine hand:

I will be there, you may be sure.

MAUDIE.

It read like a love affair, an assignation, though when and where were a blank. The constable replaced it in the card-case and returned it with the other things to the pockets of the Burberry. Then, as nothing more suggested itself, I walked back to my house for breakfast, having first arranged that the base of the cliffs should be thoroughly searched.

Stackhurst was round in an hour or two to tell me that the body had been removed to The Gables, where the inquest would be held. He brought with him some serious and definite news. As I expected, nothing had been found in the small caves below the cliff, but he had examined the papers in McPherson's desk and there were several which showed an intimate correspondence with a certain Miss Maud Bellamy, of Fulworth. We had then established the identity of the writer of the note.

"The police have the letters," he explained. "I could not bring them. But there is no doubt that it was a serious love affair. I see no reason, however, to connect it with that horrible happening save, indeed, that the lady had made an appointment with him."

"But hardly at a bathing-pool which all of you were in the habit of using," I remarked.

"It is mere chance," said he, "that several of the students were not with McPherson."

"Was it mere chance?"

Stackhurst knit his brows in thought.

"Ian Murdoch held them back," said he, "He would insist upon some algebraic demonstration before breakfast. Poor chap, he is dreadfully cut up about it all."

"And yet I gather that they were not friends."

"At one time they were not. But for a year or more Murdoch has been as near to McPherson as he ever could be to anyone. He is not of a very sympathetic disposition by nature."

"So I understand. I seem to remember your telling me once about a quarrel over the ill-usage of a dog."

"That blew over all right."

"But left some vindictive feeling, perhaps."

"No, no, I am sure they were real friends."

"Well, then, we must explore the matter of the girl. Do you know her?"

"Everyone knows her. She is the beauty of the neighbourhood - a real beauty, Holmes, who would draw attention everywhere. I knew that McPherson was attracted by her, but I had no notion that it had gone so far as these letters would seem to indicate."

"But who is she?"

"She is the daughter of old Tom Bellamy who owns all the boats and bathing-cots at Fulworth. He was a fisherman to start with, but is now a man of some substance. He and his son William run the business."

"Shall we walk into Fulworth and see them?"

"On what pretext?"

"Oh, we can easily find a pretext. After all, this poor man did not ill-use himself in this outrageous way. Some human hand was on the handle of that scourge, if indeed it was a scourge which inflicted the injuries. His circle of acquaintances in this lonely place was surely limited. Let us follow it up in every direction and we can hardly fail to come upon the motive, which in turn should lead us to the criminal."

It would have been a pleasant walk across the thyme-scented downs had our minds not been poisoned by the tragedy we had witnessed. The village of Fulworth lies in a hollow curving in a semicircle round the bay. Behind the old-fashioned hamlet several modern houses have been built upon the rising ground. It was to one of these that Stackhurst guided me.

"That's The Haven, as Bellamy called it. The one with the corner tower and slate roof. Not bad for a man who started with nothing but -- By Jove, look at that!"

The garden gate of The Haven had opened and a man had emerged. There was no mistaking that tall, angular, straggling figure. It was Ian Murdoch, the mathematician. A moment later we confronted him upon the road.

"Hullo!" said Stackhurst. The man nodded, gave us a sideways glance from his curious dark eyes, and would have-passed us, but his principal pulled him up.
"What were you doing there?" he asked.
Murdoch's face flushed with anger. "I am your subordinate, sir, under your roof. I am not aware that I owe you any account of my private actions."

Stackhurst's nerves were near the surface after all he had endured. Otherwise, perhaps, he would have waited. Now he lost his temper completely.

"In the circumstances your answer is pure impertinence, Mr. Murdoch."
"Your own question might perhaps come under the same heading."
"This is not the first time that I have had to overlook your insubordinate ways. It will certainly be the last. You will kindly make fresh arrangements for your future as speedily as you can."

"I had intended to do so. I have lost to-day the only person who made The Gables habitable."

He strode off upon his way, while Stackhurst, with angry eyes, stood glaring after him. "Is he not an impossible, intolerable man?" he cried.

The one thing that impressed itself forcibly upon my mind was that Mr. Ian Murdoch was taking the first chance to open a path of escape from the scene of the crime. Suspicion, vague and nebulous, was now beginning to take outline in my mind. Perhaps the visit to the Bellamys might throw some further light upon the matter. Stackhurst pulled himself together, and we went forward to the house.

Mr. Bellamy proved to be a middle-aged man with a flaming red beard. He seemed to be in a very angry mood, and his face was soon as florid as his hair.

"No, sir, I do not desire any particulars. My son here" -indicating a powerful young man, with a heavy, sullen face, in the corner of the sitting-room -- "is of one mind with me that Mr. McPherson's attentions to Maud were insulting. Yes, sir, the word 'marriage' was never mentioned, and yet there were letters and meetings, and a great deal more of which neither of us could approve. She has no mother, and we are her only guardians. We are determined -"

But the words were taken from his mouth by the appearance of the lady herself. There was no gainsaying that she would have graced any assembly in the world. Who could have imagined that so rare a flower would grow from such a root and in such an atmosphere? Women have seldom been an attraction to me, for my brain has always governed my heart, but I could not look upon her perfect clear-cut face, with all the soft freshness of the downlands in her delicate colouring, without realizing that no young man would cross her path unscathed. Such was the girl who had pushed open the door and stood now, wide-eyed and intense, in front of Harold Stackhurst.

"I know already that Fitzroy is dead," she said. "Do not be afraid to tell me the particulars."
"This other gentleman of yours let us know the news," explained the father.
"There is no reason why my sister should be brought into the matter," growled the younger man.

The sister turned a sharp, fierce look upon him. "This is my business, William. Kindly leave me to manage it in my own way. By all accounts there has been a crime committed. If I can help to show who did it, it is the least I can do for him who is gone."

She listened to a short account from my companion, with a composed concentration which showed me that she possessed strong character as well as great beauty. Maud Bellamy will always remain in my memory as a most complete and remarkable woman. It seems that she already knew me by sight, for she turned to me at the end.

"Bring them to justice, Mr. Holmes. You have my sympathy and my help, whoever they may be. It seemed to me that she glanced defiantly at her father and brother as she spoke.

"Thank you," said I. "I value a woman's instinct in such matters. You use the word 'they.' You think that more than one was concerned?"

"I knew Mr. McPherson well enough to be aware that he was a brave and a strong man. No single person could ever have inflicted such an outrage upon him."
"Might I have one word with you alone?"
"I tell you, Maud, not to mix yourself up in the matter," cried her father angrily.
She looked at me helplessly. "What can I do?"
"The whole world will know the facts presently, so there can be no harm if I discuss them here," said I. "I should have preferred privacy, but if your father will not allow it he must share the deliberations." Then I spoke of the note which had been found in the dead man's pocket. "It is sure to be produced at the inquest. May I ask you to throw any light upon it that you can?"

"I see no reason for mystery," she answered. "We were engaged to be married, and we only kept it secret because Fitzroy's uncle, who is very old and said to be dying, might have disinherited him if he had married against his wish. There was no other reason."
"You could have told us," growled Mr. Bellamy.
"So I would, father, if you had ever shown sympathy."
"I object to my girl picking up with men outside her own station."
"It was your prejudice against him which prevented us from telling you. As to this appointment" -- she fumbled in her dress and produced a crumpled note -- "it was in answer to this."

DEAREST [ran the message]:
The old place on the beach just after sunset on Tuesday.
It is the only time I can get away.
F.M.

"Tuesday was to-day, and I had meant to meet him to-night."
I turned over the paper. "This never came by post. How did you get it?"
"I would rather not answer that question. It has really nothing to do with the matter which you are investigating. But anything which bears upon that I will most freely answer."

She was as good as her word, but there was nothing which was helpful in our investigation. She had no reason to think that her fiancé had any hidden enemy, but she admitted that she had had several warm admirers.

"May I ask if Mr. Ian Murdoch was one of them?"
She blushed and seemed confused.
"There was a time when I thought he was. But that was all changed when he understood the relations between Fitzroy and myself."

Again the shadow round this strange man seemed to me to be taking more definite shape. His record must be examined. His rooms must be privately searched. Stackhurst was a willing collaborator, for in his mind also suspicions were forming. We returned from our visit to The Haven with the hope that one free end of this tangled skein was already in our hands.

A week passed. The inquest had thrown no light upon the matter and had been adjourned for further evidence. Stackhurst had made discreet inquiry about his subordinate, and there had been a superficial search of his room, but without result. Personally, I had gone over the whole ground again, both physically and mentally, but with no new conclusions. In all my chronicles the reader will find no case which brought me so completely to the limit of my powers. Even my imagination could conceive no solution to the mystery. And then there came the incident of the dog.

It was my old housekeeper who heard of it first by that strange wireless by which such people collect the news of the countryside.

"Sad story this, sir, about Mr. McPherson's dog," said she one evening.
I do not encourage such conversations, but the words arrested my attention.
"What of Mr. McPherson's dog?"
"Dead, sir. Died of grief for its master."
"Who told you this?"
"Why, sir, everyone is talking of it. It took on terrible, and has eaten nothing for a week. Then to-day two of the young gentlemen from The Gables found it dead--down on the beach, sir, at the very place where its master met his end."

"At the very place." The words stood out clear in my memory. Some dim perception that the matter was vital rose in my mind. That the dog should die was after the beautiful, faithful nature of dogs. But "in the very place"! Why should this lonely beach be fatal to it? Was it possible that it also had been sacrificed to some revengeful feud? Was it possible --? Yes, the perception was dim, but already something was building up in my mind. In a few minutes I was on my way to The Gables, where I found Stackhurst in his study. At my request he sent for Sudbury and Blount, the two students who had found the dog.

"Yes, it lay on the very edge of the pool," said one of them. "It must have followed the trail of its dead master."

I saw the faithful little creature, an Airedale terrier, laid out upon the mat in the hall. The body was stiff and rigid, the eyes projecting, and the limbs contorted. There was agony in every line of it.

From The Gables I walked down to the bathing-pool. The sun had sunk and the shadow of the great cliff lay black across the water, which glimmered dully like a sheet of lead. The place was deserted and there was no sign of life save for two sea-birds circling and screaming overhead. In the fading light I could dimly make out the little dog's spoor upon the sand round the very rock on which his master's towel had been laid. For a long time I stood in deep meditation while the shadows grew darker around me. My mind was filled with racing thoughts. You have known what it was to be in a nightmare in which you feel that there is some all-important thing for which you search and which you know is there, though it remains forever just beyond your reach. That was how I felt that evening as I stood alone by that place of death. Then at last I turned and walked slowly homeward.

I had just reached the top of the path when it came to me. Like a flash, I remembered the thing for which I had so eagerly and vainly grasped. You will know, or Watson has written in vain, that I hold a vast store of out-of-the-way
knowledge without scientific system, but very available for the needs of my work. My mind is like a crowded box-
room with packets of all sorts stowed away therein -- so many that I may well have but a vague perception of what
was there. I had known that there was something which might bear upon this matter. It was still vague, but at least I
knew how I could make it clear. It was monstrous, incredible, and yet it was always a possibility. I would test it to
the full.

There is a great garret in my little house which is stuffed with books. It was into this that I plunged and
rummaged for an hour. At the end of that time I emerged with a little chocolate and silver volume. Eagerly I turned
up the chapter of which I had a dim remembrance. Yes, it was indeed a far-fetched and unlikely proposition, and yet
I could not be at rest until I had made sure if it might, indeed, be so. It was late when I retired, with my mind eagerly
awaiting the work of the morrow.

But that work met with an annoying interruption. I had hardly swallowed my early cup of tea and was starting
for the beach when, I had a call from Inspector Bardle of the Sussex Constabulary -- a steady, solid, bovine man
with thoughtful eyes, which looked at me now with a very troubled expression.

"I know your immense experience, sir," said he. "This is quite unofficial, of course, and need go no farther. But I
am fairly up against it in this McPherson case. The question is, shall I make an arrest, or shall I not?"

"Meaning Mr. Ian Murdoch?"

"Yes, sir. There is really no one else when you come to think of it. That's the advantage of this solitude. We
narrow it down to a very small compass. If he did not do it, then who did?"

"What have you against him?"

He had gleaned along the same furrows as I had. There was Murdoch's character and the mystery which seemed
to hang round the man. His furious bursts of temper, as shown in the incident of the dog. The fact that he had
quarrelled with McPherson in the past, and that there was some reason to think that he might have resented his
attentions to Miss Bellamy. He had all my points, but no fresh ones, save that Murdoch seemed to be making every
preparation for departure.

"What would my position be if I let him slip away with all this evidence against him?" The burly, phlegmatic
man was sorely troubled in his mind.

"Consider," I said, "all the essential gaps in your case. On the morning of the crime he can surely prove an alibi.
He had been with his scholars till the last moment, and within a few minutes of McPherson's appearance he came
upon us from behind. Then bear in mind the absolute impossibility that he could single-handed have inflicted this
outrage upon a man quite as strong as himself. Finally, there is this question of the instrument with which these
injuries were inflicted."

"What could it be but a scourge or flexible whip of some sort?"

"Have you examined the marks?" I asked.

"I have seen them. So has the doctor."

"But I have examined them very carefully with a lens. They have peculiarities."

"What are they, Mr. Holmes?"

I stepped to my bureau and brought out an enlarged photograph. "This is my method in such cases," I explained.
"You certainly do things thoroughly, Mr. Holmes."

"I should hardly be what I am if I did not. Now let us consider this weal which extends round the right shoulder.
Do you observe nothing remarkable?"

"I can't say I do."

"Surely it is evident that it is unequal in its intensity. There is a dot of extravasated blood here, and another there.
There are similar indications in this other weal down here. What can that mean?"

"I have no idea. Have you?"

"Perhaps I have. Perhaps I haven't. I may be able to say more soon. Anything which will define what made that
mark will bring us a long way towards the criminal."

"It is, of course, an absurd idea," said the policeman, "but if a red-hot net of wire had been laid across the back,
than these better marked points would represent where the meshes crossed each other."

"A most ingenious comparison. Or shall we say a very stiff cat-o'-nine-tails with small hard knots upon it?"

"By Jove, Mr. Holmes, I think you have hit it."

"Or there may be some very different cause, Mr. Bardle. But your case is far too weak for an arrest. Besides, we
have those last words -- the 'Lion's Mane.' "

"I have wondered whether Ian --"

"Yes, I have considered that. If the second word had borne any resemblance to Murdoch -- but it did not. He
gave it almost in a shriek. I am sure that it was 'Mane.' "

"Have you no alternative, Mr. Holmes?"
"Perhaps I have. But I do not care to discuss it until there is something more solid to discuss."

"And when will that be?"

"In an hour -- possibly less."

The inspector rubbed his chin and looked at me with dubious eyes.

"I wish I could see what was in your mind, Mr. Holmes. Perhaps it's those fishing-boats."

"No, no, they were too far out."

"Well, then, is it Bellamy and that big son of his? They were not too sweet upon Mr. McPherson. Could they have done him a mischief?"

"No, no, you won't draw me until I am ready," said I with a smile. "Now, Inspector, we each have our own work to do. Perhaps if you were to meet me here at midday --"

So far we had got when there came the tremendous interruption which was the beginning of the end.

My outer door was flung open, there were blundering footsteps in the passage, and Ian Murdoch staggered into the room, pallid, dishevelled, his clothes in wild disorder, clawing with his bony hands at the furniture to hold himself erect. "Brandy! Brandy!" he gasped, and fell groaning upon the sofa.

He was not alone. Behind him came Stackhurst, hatless and panting, almost as distraught as his companion.

"Yes, yes, brandy!" he cried. "The man is at his last gasp. It was all I could do to bring him here. He fainted twice upon the way."

Half a tumbler of the raw spirit brought about a wondrous change. He pushed himself up on one arm and swung his coat from his shoulders. "For God's sake oil, opium, morphia!" he cried. "Anything to ease this infernal agony!"

The inspector and I cried out at the sight. There, crisscrossed upon the man's naked shoulder, was the same strange reticulated pattern of red, inflamed lines which had been the death-mark of Fitzroy McPherson.

The pain was evidently terrible and was more than local, for the sufferer's breathing would stop for a time, his face would turn black, and then with loud gasps he would clap his hand to his heart, while his brow dropped beads of sweat. At any moment he might die. More and more brandy was poured down his throat, each fresh dose bringing him back to life. Pads of cotton-wool soaked in salad-oil seemed to take the agony from the strange wounds. At last his head fell heavily upon the cushion. Exhausted Nature had taken refuge in its last storehouse of vitality. It was half a sleep and half a faint, but at least it was ease from pain.

To question him had been impossible, but the moment we were assured of his condition Stackhurst turned upon me.

"My God!" he cried, "what is it, Holmes? What is it?"

"Where did you find him?"

"Down on the beach. Exactly where poor McPherson met his end. If this man's heart had been weak as McPherson's was, he would not be here now. More than once I thought he was gone as I brought him up. It was too far to The Gables, so I made for you."

"Did you see him on the beach?"

"I was walking on the cliff when I heard his cry. He was at the edge of the water, reeling about like a drunken man. I ran down, threw some clothes about him, and brought him up. For heaven's sake, Holmes, use all the powers you have and spare no pains to lift the curse from this place, for life is becoming unendurable. Can you, with all your world-wide reputation, do nothing for us?"

"I think I can, Stackhurst. Come with me now! And you, Inspector, come along! We will see if we cannot deliver this murderer into your hands."

Leaving the unconscious man in the charge of my housekeeper, we all three went down to the deadly lagoon. On the shingle there was piled a little heap of towels and clothes left by the stricken man. Slowly I walked round the edge of the water, my comrades in Indian file behind me. Most of the pool was quite shallow, but under the cliff where the beach was hollowed out it was four or five feet deep. It was to this part that a swimmer would naturally go, for it formed a beautiful pellucid green pool as clear as crystal. A line of rocks lay above it at the base of the cliff, and along this I led the way, peering eagerly into the depths beneath me. I had reached the deepest and stillest pool when my eyes caught that for which they were searching, and I burst into a shout of triumph.

"Cyanea!" I cried. "Cyanea! Behold the Lion's Mane!"

The strange object at which I pointed did indeed look like a tangled mass torn from the mane of a lion. It lay upon a rocky shelf some three feet under the water, a curious waving, vibrating, hairy creature with streaks of silver among its yellow tresses. It pulsed with a slow, heavy dilation and contraction.

"It has done mischief enough. Its day is over!" I cried. "Help me, Stackhurst! Let us end the murderer forever."

There was a big boulder just above the ledge, and we pushed it until it fell with a tremendous splash into the water. When the ripples had cleared we saw that it had settled upon the ledge below. One flapping edge of yellow membrane showed that our victim was beneath it. A thick oily scum oozed out from below the stone and stained the
water round, rising slowly to the surface.

"Well, this gets me!" cried the inspector. "What was it, Mr. Holmes? I'm born and bred in these parts, but I never saw such a thing. It don't belong to Sussex."

"Just as well for Sussex," I remarked. "It may have been the southwest gale that brought it up. Come back to my house, both of you, and I will give you the terrible experience of one who has good reason to remember his own meeting with the same peril of the seas."

When we reached my study we found that Murdoch was so far recovered that he could sit up. He was dazed in mind, and every now and then was shaken by a paroxysm of pain. In broken words he explained that he had no notion what had occurred to him, save that terrific pangs had suddenly shot through him, and that it had taken all his fortitude to reach the bank.

"Here is a book," I said, taking up the little volume, "which first brought light into what might have been forever dark. It is Out of Doors, by the famous observer, J. G. Wood. Wood himself very nearly perished from contact with this vile creature, so he wrote with a very full knowledge. Cyanea capillata is the miscreant's full name, and he can be as dangerous to life as, and far more painful than, the bite of the cobra. Let me briefly give this extract.

"If the bather should see a loose roundish mass of tawny membranes and fibres, something like very large handfuls of lion's mane and silver paper, let him beware, for this is the fearful stinger, Cyanea capillata.

Could our sinister acquaintance be more clearly described?

"He goes on to tell of his own encounter with one when swimming off the coast of Kent. He found that the creature radiated almost invisible filaments to the distance of fifty feet, and that anyone within that circumference from the deadly centre was in danger of death. Even at a distance the effect upon Wood was almost fatal.

"The multitudinous threads caused light scarlet lines upon the skin which on closer examination resolved into minute dots or pustules, each dot charged as it were with a red-hot needle making its way through the nerves.

"The local pain was, as he explains, the least part of the exquisite torment.

"Pangs shot through the chest, causing me to fall as if struck by a bullet. The pulsation would cease, and then the heart would give six or seven leaps as if it would force its way through the chest.

"It nearly killed him, although he had only been exposed to it in the disturbed ocean and not in the narrow calm waters of a bathing-pool. He says that he could hardly recognize himself afterwards, so white, wrinkled and shrivelled was his face. He gulped down brandy, a whole bottleful, and it seems to have saved his life. There is the book, Inspector. I leave it with you, and you cannot doubt that it contains a full explanation of the tragedy of poor McPherson."

"And incidentally exonerates me," remarked Ian Murdoch with a wry smile. "I do not blame you, Inspector, nor you, Mr. Holmes, for your suspicions were natural. I feel that on the very eve of my arrest I have only cleared myself by sharing the fate of my poor friend."

"No, Mr. Murdoch. I was already upon the track, and had I been out as early as I intended I might well have saved you from this terrific experience."

"But how did you know, Mr. Holmes?"

"I am an omnivorous reader with a strangely retentive memory for trifles. That phrase 'the Lion's Mane' haunted my mind. I knew that I had seen it somewhere in an unexpected context. You have seen that it does describe the creature. I have no doubt that it was floating on the water when McPherson saw it, and that this phrase was the only one by which he could convey to us a warning as to the creature which had been his death."

"Then I, at least, am cleared," said Murdoch, rising slowly to his feet. "There are one or two words of explanation which I should give, for I know the direction in which your inquiries have run. It is true that I loved this lady, but from the day when she chose my friend McPherson my one desire was to help her to happiness. I was well content to stand aside and act as their go-between. Often I carried their messages, and it was because I was in their confidence and because she was so dear to me that I hastened to tell her of my friend's death, lest someone should forestall me in a more sudden and heartless manner. She would not tell you, sir, of our relations lest you should disapprove and I might suffer. But with your leave I must try to get back to The Gables, for my bed will be very welcome."

Stackhurst held out his hand. "Our nerves have all been at concert-pitch," said he. "Forgive what is past, Murdoch. We shall understand each other better in the future." They passed out together with their arms linked in
friendly fashion. The inspector remained, staring at me in silence with his ox-like eyes.

"Well, you've done it!" he cried at last. "I had read of you, but I never believed it. It's wonderful!"

I was forced to shake my head. To accept such praise was to lower one's own standards.

"I was slow at the outset -- culpably slow. Had the body been found in the water I could hardly have missed it. It was the towel which misled me. The poor fellow had never thought to dry himself, and so I in turn was led to believe that he had never been in the water. Why, then, should the attack of any water creature suggest itself to me? That was where I went astray. Well, well, Inspector, I often ventured to chaff you gentlemen of the police force, but Cyanea capillata very nearly avenged Scotland Yard."

The Adventure of the Retired Colourman

Sherlock Holmes was in a melancholy and philosophic mood that morning. His alert practical nature was subject to such reactions.

"Did you see him?" he asked.

"You mean the old fellow who has just gone out?"

"Precisely."

"Yes, I met him at the door."

"What did you think of him?"

"A pathetic, futile, broken creature."

"Exactly, Watson. Pathetic and futile. But is not all life pathetic and futile? Is not his story a microcosm of the whole? We reach. We grasp. And what is left in our hands at the end? A shadow. Or worse than a shadow -- misery."

"Is he one of your clients?"

"Well, I suppose I may call him so. He has been sent on by the Yard. Just as medical men occasionally send their incurables to a quack. They argue that they can do nothing more, and that whatever happens the patient can be no worse than he is."

"What is the matter?"

Holmes took a rather soiled card from the table. "Josiah Amberley. He says he was junior partner of Brickfall and Amberley, who are manufacturers of artistic materials. You will see their names upon paint-boxes. He made his little pile, retired from business at the age of sixty-one, bought a house at Lewisham. and settled down to rest after a life of ceaseless grind. One would think his future was tolerably assured."

"Yes, indeed."

Holmes glanced over some notes which he had scribbled upon the back of an envelope.

"Retired in 1896, Watson. Early in 1897 he married a woman twenty years younger than himself -- a good-looking woman, too, if the photograph does not flatter. A competence, a wife, leisure -- it seemed a straight road which lay before him. And yet within two years he is, as you have seen, as broken and miserable a creature as crawls beneath the sun."

"But what has happened?"

"The old story, Watson. A treacherous friend and a fickle wife. It would appear that Amberley has one hobby in life, and it is chess. Not far from him at Lewisham there lives a young doctor who is also a chess-player. I have noted his name as Dr. Ray Ernest. Ernest was frequently in the house, and an intimacy between him and Mrs. Amberley was a natural sequence, for you must admit that our unfortunate client has few outward graces, whatever his inner virtues may be. The couple went off together last week -- destination untraced. What is more, the faithless spouse carried off the old man's deed-box as her personal luggage with a good part of his life's savings within. Can we find the lady? Can we save the money? A commonplace problem so far as it has developed, and yet a vital one for Josiah Amberley."

"What will you do about it?"

"Well, the immediate question, my dear Watson, happens to be, What will you do? -- if you will be good enough to understudy me. You know that I am preoccupied with this case of the two Coptic Patriarchs, which should come to a head to-day. I really have not time to go out to Lewisham, and yet evidence taken on the spot has a special value. The old fellow was quite insistent that I should go, but I explained my difficulty. He is prepared to meet a representative."

"By all means," I answered. "I confess I don't see that I can be of much service, but I am willing to do my best." And so it was that on a summer afternoon I set forth to Lewisham, little dreaming that within a week the affair in which I was engaging would be the eager debate of all England.

It was late that evening before I returned to Baker Street and gave an account of my mission. Holmes lay with his gaunt figure stretched in his deep chair, his pipe curling forth slow wreaths of acrid tobacco, while his eyelids drooped over his eyes so lazily that he might almost have been asleep were it not that at any halt or questionable
passage of my narrative they half lifted, and two gray eyes, as bright and keen as rapiers, transfixed me with their searching glance.

"The Haven is the name of Mr. Josiah Amberley's house," I explained. "I think it would interest you, Holmes. It is like some penurious patrician who has sunk into the company of his inferiors. You know that particular quarter, the monotonous brick streets, the weary suburban highways. Right in the middle of them, a little island of ancient culture and comfort, lies this old home, surrounded by a high sun-baked wall mottled with lichens and topped with moss, the sort of wall --"

"Cut out the poetry, Watson," said Holmes severely. "I note that it was a high brick wall."

"Exactly. I should not have known which was The Haven had I not asked a lounguer who was smoking in the street. I have a reason for mentioning him. He was a tall, dark, heavily moustached, rather military-looking man. He nodded in answer to my inquiry and gave me a curiously questioning glance, which came back to my memory a little later.

"I had hardly entered the gateway before I saw Mr. Amberley coming down the drive. I only had a glimpse of him this morning, and he certainly gave me the impression of a strange creature, but when I saw him in full light his appearance was even more abnormal."

"I have, of course, studied it, and yet I should be interested to have your impression," said Holmes.

"He seemed to me like a man who was literally bowed down by care. His back was curved as though he carried a heavy burden. Yet he was not the weakling that I had at first imagined, for his shoulders and chest have the framework of a giant, though his figure tapers away into a pair of spindled legs."

"Left shoe wrinkled, right one smooth."

"I did not observe that."

"No, you wouldn't. I spotted his artificial limb. But proceed."

"I was struck by the snaky locks of grizzled hair which curled from under his old straw hat, and his face with its fierce, eager expression and the deeply lined features."

"Very good, Watson. What did he say?"

"He began pouring out the story of his grievances. We walked down the drive together, and of course I took a good look round. I have never seen a worse-kept place. The garden was all running to seed, giving me an impression of wild neglect in which the plants had been allowed to find the way of Nature rather than of art. How any decent woman could have tolerated such a state of things, I don't know. The house, too, was slatternly to the last degree, but the poor man seemed himself to be aware of it and to be trying to remedy it, for a great pot of green paint stood in the centre of the hall, and he was carrying a thick brush in his left hand. He had been working on the woodwork.

"He took me into his dingy sanctum, and we had a long chat. Of course, he was disappointed that you had not come yourself. 'I hardly expected,' he said, 'that so humble an individual as myself, especially after my heavy financial loss, could obtain the complete attention of so famous a man as Mr. Sherlock Holmes.'"

"I assured him that the financial question did not arise. 'No of course, it is art for art's sake with him,' said he, 'but even on the artistic side of crime he might have found something here to study. And human nature, Dr. Watson -- the black ingratitude of it all! When did I ever refuse one of her requests? Was ever a woman so pampered? And that young man -- he might have been my own son. He had the run of my house. And yet see how they have treated me! Oh, Dr. Watson, it is a dreadful, dreadful world!'

"That was the burden of his song for an hour or more. He had, it seems, no suspicion of an intrigue. They lived alone save for a woman who comes in by the day and leaves every evening at six. On that particular evening old Amberley, wishing to give his wife a treat, had taken two upper circle seats at the Haymarket Theatre. At the last moment she had complained of a headache and had refused to go. He had gone alone. There seemed to be no doubt about the fact, for he produced the unused ticket which he had taken for his wife."

"That is remarkable -- most remarkable," said Holmes, whose interest in the case seemed to be rising. "Pray continue, Watson. I find your narrative most arresting. Did you personally examine this ticket? You did not, perchance, take the number?"

"It so happens that I did," I answered with some pride. "It chanced to be my old school number, thirty-one, and so is stuck in my head."

"Excellent, Watson! His seat, then, was either thirty or thirty-two."

"Quite so," I answered with some mystification. "And on B row."

"That is most satisfactory. What else did he tell you?"

"He showed me his strong-room, as he called it. It really is a strong-room -- like a bank -- with iron door and shutter -- burglarproof, as he claimed. However, the woman seems to have had a duplicate key, and between them they had carried off some seven thousand pounds' worth of cash and securities."

"Securities! How could they dispose of those?"
"He said that he had given the police a list and that he hoped they would be unsaleable. He had got back from the
theatre about midnight and found the place plundered, the door and window open, and the fugitives gone. There was
no letter or message, nor has he heard a word since. He at once gave the alarm to the police."

Holmes brooded for some minutes.
"You say he was painting. What was he painting?"
"Well, he was painting the passage. But he had already painted the door and woodwork of this room I spoke of."
"Does it not strike you as a strange occupation in the circumstances?"
"One must do something to ease an aching heart. That was his own explanation. It was eccentric, no doubt, but
he is clearly an eccentric man. He tore up one of his wife's photographs in my presence -- tore it up furiously in a
tempest of passion. I never wish to see her damned face again,' he shrieked."
"Anything more, Watson?"
"Yes, one thing which struck me more than anything else. I had driven to the Blackheath Station and had caught
my train there when, just as it was starting, I saw a man dart into the carriage next to my own. You know that I have
a quick eye for faces, Holmes. It was undoubtedly the tall, dark man whom I had addressed in the street. I saw him
once more at London Bridge, and then I lost him in the crowd. But I am convinced that he was following me."

"No doubt! No doubt!" said Holmes. "A tall, dark, heavily moustached man, you say, with gray-tinted sun-
glasses?"

"Holmes, you are a wizard. I did not say so, but he had gray-tinted sun-glasses."
"And a Masonic tie-pin?"
"Holmes!"

"Quite simple, my dear Watson. But let us get down to what is practical. I must admit to you that the case, which
seemed to me to be so absurdly simple as to be hardly worth my notice, is rapidly assuming a very different aspect.
It is true that though in your mission you have missed everything of importance, yet even those things which have
obtruded themselves upon your notice give rise to serious thought."

"What have I missed?"
"Don't be hurt, my dear fellow. You know that I am quite impersonal. No one else would have done better. Some
possibly not so well. But clearly you have missed some vital points. What is the opinion of the neighbours about this
man Amberley and his wife? That surely is of importance. What of Dr. Ernest? Was he the gay Lothario one would
expect? With your natural advantages, Watson, every lady is your helper and accomplice. What about the girl at the
post-office, or the wife of the greengrocer? I can picture you whispering soft nothings with the young lady at the
Blue Anchor, and receiving hard somethings in exchange. All this you have left undone."

"It can still be done."

"It has been done. Thanks to the telephone and the help of the Yard, I can usually get my essentials without
leaving this room. As a matter of fact, my information confirms the man's story. He has the local repute of being a
miser as well as a harsh and exacting husband. That he had a large sum of money in that strong-room of his is
certain. So also is it that young Dr. Ernest, an unmarried man, played chess with Amberley, and probably played the
fool with his wife. All this seems plain sailing, and one would think that there was no more to be said -- and yet! -
and yet!"

"Where lies the difficulty?"
"In my imagination, perhaps. Well, leave it there, Watson. Let us escape from this weary workaday world by the
side door of music. Carina sings to-night at the Albert Hall, and we still have time to dress, dine, and enjoy."

In the morning I was up betimes, but some toast crumbs and two empty eggshells told me that my companion
was earlier still. I found a scribbled note upon the table.

DEAR WATSON:
There are one or two points of contact which I should
wish to establish with Mr. Josiah Amberley. When I have
done so we can dismiss the case -- or not. I would only ask
you to be on hand about three o'clock, as I conceive it
possible that I may want you.
S.H.

I saw nothing of Holmes all day, but at the hour named he returned, grave, preoccupied, and aloof. At such times
it was wiser to leave him to himself.
"Has Amberley been here yet?"
"No."
"Ah! I am expecting him."

He was not disappointed, for presently the old fellow arrived with a very worried and puzzled expression upon
his austere face.
"I've had a telegram, Mr. Holmes. I can make nothing of it." He handed it over, and Holmes read it aloud.
"Come at once without fail. Can give you information as to your recent loss.
"ELMAN.
"The Vicarage.
"Dispatched at 2:10 from Little Purlington," said Holmes. "Little Purlington is in Essex, I believe, not far from Frinton. Well, of course you will start at once. This is evidently from a responsible person, the vicar of the place. Where is my Crockford? Yes, here we have him: 'J. C. Elman, M. A., Living of Moosmoor cum Little Purlington.' Look up the trains, Watson."
"There is one at 5:20 from Liverpool Street."
"Excellent. You had best go with him, Watson. He may need help or advice. Clearly we have come to a crisis in this affair."
But our client seemed by no means eager to start.
"It's perfectly absurd, Mr. Holmes," he said. "What can this man possibly know of what has occurred? It is waste of time and money."
"He would not have telegraphed to you if he did not know something. Wire at once that you are coming."
"I don't think I shall go."
Holmes assumed his sternest aspect.
"It would make the worst possible impression both on the police and upon myself, Mr. Amberley, if when so obvious a clue arose you should refuse to follow it up. We should feel that you were not really in earnest in this investigation."
Our client seemed horrified at the suggestion.
"Why, of course I shall go if you look at it in that way," said he. "On the face of it, it seems absurd to suppose that this parson knows anything, but if you think --"
"I do think," said Holmes with emphasis, "and so we were launched upon our journey. Holmes took me aside before we left the room and gave me one word of counsel, which showed that he considered the matter to be of importance. "Whatever you do, see that he really does go," said he. "Should he break away or return, get to the nearest telephone exchange and send the single word 'Bolted.' I will arrange here that it shall reach me wherever I am."
Little Purlington is not an easy place to reach, for it is on a branch line. My remembrance of the journey is not a pleasant one, for the weather was hot, the train slow, and my companion sullen and silent, hardly talking at all save to make an occasional sardonic remark as to the futility of our proceedings. When we at last reached the little station it was a two-mile drive before we came to the Vicarage, where a big, solemn, rather pompous clergyman received us in his study. Our telegram lay before him.
"Well, gentlemen," he asked, "what can I do for you?"
"We came," I explained, "in answer to your wire."
"My wire! I sent no wire."
"I mean the wire which you sent to Mr. Josiah Amberley about his wife and his money."
"If this is a joke, sir, it is a very questionable one," said the vicar angrily. "I have never heard of the gentleman you name, and I have not sent a wire to anyone."
Our client and I looked at each other in amazement.
"Perhaps there is some mistake," said I; "are there perhaps two vicarages? Here is the wire itself, signed Elman and dated from the Vicarage."
"There is only one vicarage, sir, and only one vicar, and this wire is a scandalous forgery, the origin of which shall certainly be investigated by the police. Meanwhile, I can see no possible object in prolonging this interview."
So Mr. Amberley and I found ourselves on the roadside in what seemed to me to be the most primitive village in England. We made for the telegraph office, but it was already closed. There was a telephone, however, at the little Railway Arms, and by it I got into touch with Holmes, who shared in our amazement at the result of our journey.
"Most singular!" said the distant voice. "Most remarkable! I much fear, my dear Watson, that there is no return train to-night. I have unwittingly condemned you to the horrors of a country inn. However, there is always Nature, Watson -- Nature and Josiah Amberley -- you can be in close commune with both." I heard his dry chuckle as he turned away.
It was soon apparent to me that my companion's reputation as a miser was not undeserved. He had grumbled at the expense of the journey, had insisted upon travelling third-class, and was now clamorous in his objections to the hotel bill. Next morning, when we did at last arrive in London, it was hard to say which of us was in the worse
humour.
"You had best take Baker Street as we pass," said I. "Mr. Holmes may have some fresh instructions."
"If they are not worth more than the last ones they are not of much use," said Amberley with a malevolent scowl. None the less, he kept me company. I had already warned Holmes by telegram of the hour of our arrival, but we found a message waiting that he was at Lewisham and would expect us there. That was a surprise, but an even greater one was to find that he was not alone in the sitting-room of our client. A stern-looking, impassive man sat beside him, a dark man with gray-tinted glasses and a large Masonic pin projecting from his tie.
"This is my friend Mr. Barker," said Holmes. "He has been interesting himself also in your business, Mr. Josiah Amberley, though we have been working independently. But we both have the same question to ask you!"
Mr. Amberley sat down heavily. He sensed impending danger. I read it in his straining eyes and his twitching features.
"What is the question, Mr. Holmes?"
"Only this: What did you do with the bodies?"
The man sprang to his feet with a hoarse scream. He clawed into the air with his bony hands. His mouth was open, and for the instant he looked like some horrible bird of prey. In a flash we got a glimpse of the real Josiah Amberley, a misshapen demon with a soul as distorted as his body. As he fell back into his chair he clapped his hand to his lips as if to stifle a cough. Holmes sprang at his throat like a tiger and twisted his face towards the ground. A white pellet fell from between his gasping lips.
"No short cuts, Josiah Amberley. Things must be done decently and in order. What about it, Barker?"
"I have a cab at the door," said our taciturn companion.
"It is only a few hundred yards to the station. We will go together. You can stay here, Watson. I shall be back within half an hour."
The old colourman had the strength of a lion in that great trunk of his, but he was helpless in the hands of the two experienced man-handlers. Wriggling and twisting he was dragged to the waiting cab, and I was left to my solitary vigil in the ill-omened house. In less time than he had named, however, Holmes was back, in company with a smart young police inspector.
"I've left Barker to look after the formalities," said Holmes. "You had not met Barker, Watson. He is my hated rival upon the Surrey shore. When you said a tall dark man it was not difficult for me to complete the picture. He has several good cases to his credit, has he not, Inspector?"
"He has certainly interfered several times," the inspector answered with reserve.
"His methods are irregular, no doubt, like my own. The irregulars are useful sometimes, you know. You, for example, with your compulsory warning about whatever he said being used against him, could never have bluffed this rascal into what is virtually a confession."
"Perhaps not. But we get there all the same, Mr. Holmes. Don't imagine that we had not formed our own views of this case, and that we would not have laid our hands on our man. You will excuse us for feeling sore when you jump in with methods which we cannot use, and so rob us of the credit."
"There shall be no such robbery, MacKinnon. I assure you that I efface myself from now onward, and as to Barker, he has done nothing save what I told him."
The inspector seemed considerably relieved.
"That is very handsome of you, Mr. Holmes. Praise or blame can matter little to you, but it is very different to us when the newspapers begin to ask questions."
"Quite so. But they are pretty sure to ask questions anyhow, so it would be as well to have answers. What will you say, for example, when the intelligent and enterprising reporter asks you what the exact points were which aroused your suspicion, and finally gave you a certain conviction as to the real facts?"
The inspector looked puzzled.
"We don't seem to have got any real facts yet, Mr. Holmes. You say that the prisoner, in the presence of three witnesses, practically confessed by trying to commit suicide, that he had murdered his wife and her lover. What other facts have you?"
"Have you arranged for a search?"
"There are three constables on their way."
"Then you will soon get the clearest fact of all. The bodies cannot be far away. Try the cellars and the garden. It should not take long to dig up the likely places. This house is older than the water-pipes. There must be a disused well somewhere. Try your luck there."
"But how did you know of it, and how was it done?"
"I'll show you first how it was done, and then I will give the explanation which is due to you, and even more to my longsuffering friend here, who has been invaluable throughout. But, first, I would give you an insight into this
man's mentality. It is a very unusual one -- so much so that I think his destination is more likely to be Broadmoor than the scaffold. He has, to a high degree, the sort of mind which one associates with the mediaeval Italian nature rather than with the modern Briton. He was a miserable miser who made his wife so wretched by his niggardly ways that she was a ready prey for any adventurer. Such a one came upon the scene in the person of this chess-playing doctor. Amberley excelled at chess -- one mark, Watson, of a scheming mind. Like all misers, he was a jealous man, and his jealousy became a frantic mania. Rightly or wrongly, he suspected an intrigue. He determined to have his revenge, and he planned it with diabolical cleverness. Come here!"

Holmes led us along the passage with as much certainty as if he had lived in the house and halted at the open door of the strong-room.

"Pooh! What an awful smell of paint!" cried the inspector.

"That was our first clue," said Holmes. "You can thank Dr. Watson's observation for that, though he failed to draw the inference. It set my foot upon the trail. Why should this man at such a time be filling his house with strong odours? Obviously, to cover some other smell which he wished to conceal -- some guilty smell which would suggest suspicions. Then came the idea of a room such as you see here with iron door and shutter -- a hermetically sealed room. Put those two facts together, and whither do they lead? I could only determine that by examining the house myself. I was already certain that the case was serious, for I had examined the box-office chart at the Haymarket Theatre -- another of Dr. Watson's bull's-eyes -- and ascertained that neither B thirty nor thirty-two of the upper circle had been occupied that night. Therefore, Amberley had not been to the theatre, and his alibi fell to the ground. He made a bad slip when he allowed my astute friend to notice the number of the seat taken for his wife. The question now arose how I might be able to examine the house. I sent an agent to the most impossible village I could think of, and summoned my man to it at such an hour that he could not possibly get back. To prevent any miscarriage, Dr. Watson accompanied him. The good vicar's name I took, of course, out of my Crockford. Do I make it all clear to you?"

"It is masterly," said the inspector in an awed voice.

"There being no fear of interruption I proceeded to burgle the house. Burglary has always been an alternative profession had I cared to adopt it, and I have little doubt that I should have come to the front. Observe what I found. You see the gas-pipe along the skirting here. Very good. It rises in the angle of the wall, and there is a tap here in the corner. The pipe runs out into the strong-room, as you can see, and ends in that plaster rose in the centre of the ceiling, where it is concealed by the ornamentation. That end is wide open. At any moment by turning the outside tap the room could be flooded with gas. With door and shutter closed and the tap full on I would not give two minutes of conscious sensation to anyone shut up in that little chamber. By what devilish device he decoyed them there I do not know, but once inside the door they were at his mercy."

The inspector examined the pipe with interest. "One of our officers mentioned the smell of gas," said he, "but of course the window and door were open then, and the paint -- or some of it -- was already about. He had begun the work of painting the day before, according to his story. But what next, Mr. Holmes?"

"Well, then came an incident which was rather unexpected to myself. I was slipping through the pantry window in the early dawn when I felt a hand inside my collar, and a voice said: 'Now, you rascal, what are you doing in there?' When I could twist my head round I looked into the tinted spectacles of my friend and rival, Mr. Barker. It was a curious foregathering and set us both smiling. It seems that he had been engaged by Dr. Ray Ernest's family to make some investigations and had come to the same conclusion as to foul play. He had watched the house for some days and had spotted Dr. Watson as one of the obviously suspicious characters who had called there. He could hardly arrest Watson, but when he saw a man actually climbing out of the pantry window there came a limit to his restraint. Of course, I told him how matters stood and we continued the case together."

"Why him? Why not us?"

"Because it was in my mind to put that little test which answered so admirably. I fear you would not have gone so far."

The inspector smiled.

"Well, maybe not. I understand that I have your word, Mr. Holmes, that you step right out of the case now and that you turn all your results over to us."

"Certainly, that is always my custom."

"Well, in the name of the force I thank you. It seems a clear case, as you put it, and there can't be much difficulty over the bodies."

"I'll show you a grim little bit of evidence," said Holmes, "and I am sure Amberley himself never observed it. You'll get results, Inspector, by always putting yourself in the other fellow's place, and thinking what you would do yourself. It takes some imagination, but it pays. Now, we will suppose that you were shut up in this little room, had not two minutes to live, but wanted to get even with the fiend who was probably mocking at you from the other side
of the door. What would you do?"

"Write a message."

"Exactly. You would like to tell people how you died. No use writing on paper. That would be seen. If you wrote
on the wall someone might rest upon it. Now, look here! Just above the skirting is scribbled with a purple indelible
pencil: 'We we --' That's all.

"What do you make of that?"

"Well, it's only a foot above the ground. The poor devil was on the floor dying when he wrote it. He lost his
senses before he could finish."

"He was writing, 'We were murdered.' "

"That's how I read it. If you find an indelible pencil on the body --"

"We'll look out for it, you may be sure. But those securities? Clearly there was no robbery at all. And yet he did
possess those bonds. We verified that."

"You may be sure he has them hidden in a safe place. When the whole elopement had passed into history, he
would suddenly discover them and announce that the guilty couple had relented and sent back the plunder or had
dropped it on the way."

"You certainly seem to have met every difficulty," said the inspector. "Of course, he was bound to call us in, but
why he should have gone to you I can't understand."

"Pure swank!" Holmes answered. "He felt so clever and so sure of himself that he imagined no one could touch
him. He could say to any suspicious neighbour, 'Look at the steps I have taken. I have consulted not only the police
but even Sherlock Holmes.' "

The inspector laughed.

"We must forgive you your 'even,' Mr. Holmes," said he "it's as workmanlike a job as I can remember."

A couple of days later my friend tossed across to me a copy of the bi-weekly North Surrey Observer. Under a
series of flaming headlines, which began with "The Haven Horror" and ended with "Brilliant Police Investigation,"
there was a packed column of print which gave the first consecutive account of the affair. The concluding paragraph
is typical of the whole. It ran thus:

The remarkable acumen by which Inspector MacKinnon
deduced from the smell of paint that some other smell, that
of gas, for example, might be concealed; the bold deduction
that the strong-room might also be the death-chamber, and
the subsequent inquiry which led to the discovery of the
bodies in a disused well, cleverly concealed by a dog
kennel, should live in the history of crime as a standing
example of the intelligence of our professional detectives.

"Well, well, MacKinnon is a good fellow," said Holmes with a tolerant smile. "You can file it in our archives,
Watson. Some day the true story may be told."

The Adventure of the Veiled Lodger

When one considers that Mr. Sherlock Holmes was in active practice for twenty-three years, and that during
seventeen of these I was allowed to cooperate with him and to keep notes of his doings, it will be clear that I have a
mass of material at my command. The problem has always been not to find but to choose. There is the long row of
year-books which fill a shelf and there are the dispatch-cases filled with documents, a perfect quarry for the student
not only of crime but of the social and official scandals of the late Victorian era. Concerning these latter, I may say
that the writers of agonized letters, who beg that the honour of their families or the reputation of famous forebears
may not be touched, have nothing to fear. The discretion and high sense of professional honour which have always
distinguished my friend are still at work in the choice of these memoirs, and no confidence will be abused. I
deprecate, however, in the strongest way the attempts which have been made lately to get at and to destroy these
papers. The source of these outrages is known, and if they are repeated I have Mr. Holmes's authority for saying that
the whole story concerning the politician, the lighthouse, and the trained cormorant will be given to the public.
There is at least one reader who will understand.

It is not reasonable to suppose that every one of these cases gave Holmes the opportunity of showing those
curious gifts of instinct and observation which I have endeavoured to set forth in these memoirs. Sometimes he had
with much effort to pick the fruit, sometimes it fell easily into his lap. But the most terrible human tragedies were
often involved in those cases which brought him the fewest personal opportunities, and it is one of these which I
now desire to record. In telling it, I have made a slight change of name and place, but otherwise the facts are as
stated.

One forenoon -- it was late in 1896 -- I received a hurried note from Holmes asking for my attendance. When I
arrived I found him seated in a smoke-laden atmosphere, with an elderly, motherly woman of the buxom landlady type in the corresponding chair in front of him.

"This is Mrs. Merrilow, of South Brixton," said my friend with a wave of the hand. "Mrs. Merrilow does not object to tobacco, Watson, if you wish to indulge your filthy habits. Mrs. Merrilow has an interesting story to tell which may well lead to further developments in which your presence may be useful."

"Anything I can do --"

"You will understand, Mrs. Merrilow, that if I come to Mrs. Ronder I should prefer to have a witness. You will make her understand that before we arrive."

"Lord bless you, Mr. Holmes," said our visitor, "she is that anxious to see you that you might bring the whole parish at your heels!"

"Then we shall come early in the afternoon. Let us see that we have our facts correct before we start. If we go over them it will help Dr. Watson to understand the situation. You say that Mrs. Ronder has been your lodger for seven years and that you have only once seen her face."

"And I wish to God I had not!" said Mrs. Merrilow.

"It was, I understand, terribly mutilated."

"Well, Mr. Holmes, you would hardly say it was a face at all. That's how it looked. Our milkman got a glimpse of her once peeping out of the upper window, and he dropped his tin and the milk all over the front garden. That is the kind of face it is. When I saw her -- I happened on her unawares -- she covered up quick, and then she said, 'Now, Mrs. Merrilow, you know at last why it is that I never raise my veil.'"

"Do you know anything about her history?"

"Nothing at all."

"Did she give references when she came?"

"No, sir, but she gave hard cash, and plenty of it. A quarter's rent right down on the table in advance and no arguing about terms. In these times a poor woman like me can't afford to turn down a chance like that."

"Did she give any reason for choosing your house?"

"Mine stands well back from the road and is more private than most. Then, again, I only take the one, and I have no family of my own. I reckon she had tried others and found that mine suited her best. It's privacy she is after, and she is ready to pay for it."

"You say that she never showed her face from first to last save on the one accidental occasion. Well, it is a very remarkable story, most remarkable, and I don't wonder that you want it examined."

"I don't, Mr. Holmes. I am quite satisfied so long as I get my rent. You could not have a quieter lodger, or one who gives less trouble."

"Then what has brought matters to a head?"

"Her health, Mr. Holmes. She seems to be wasting away. And there's something terrible on her mind. 'Murder!' she cries. 'Murder!' And once I heard her: 'You cruel beast! You monster!' she cried. It was in the night, and it fair rang through the house and sent the shivers through me. So I went to her in the morning. 'Mrs. Ronder,' I says, 'if you have anything that is troubling your soul, there's the clergy,' I says, 'and there's the police. Between them you should get some help.' 'For God's sake, not the police!' says she, 'and the clergy can't change what is past. And yet,' she says, 'it would ease my mind if someone knew the truth before I died.' 'Well,' says I, 'if you won't have the regulars, there is this detective man what we read about - beggin' your pardon, Mr. Holmes. And she, she fair jumped at it. 'That's the man,' says she. 'I wonder I never thought of it before. Bring him here, Mrs. Merrilow, and if he won't come, tell him I am the wife of Ronder's wild beast show. Say that, and give him the name Abbas Parva. Here it is as she wrote it, Abbas Parva. 'That will bring him if he's the man I think he is.'"

"And it will, too," remarked Holmes. "Very good, Mrs. Merrilow. I should like to have a little chat with Dr. Watson. That will carry us till lunch-time. About three o'clock you may expect to see us at your house in Brixton."

Our visitor had no sooner waddled out of the room -- no other verb can describe Mrs. Merrilow's method of progression -- than Sherlock Holmes threw himself with fierce energy upon the pile of commonplace books in the corner. For a few minutes there was a constant swish of the leaves, and then with a grunt of satisfaction he came upon what he sought. So excited was he that he did not rise, but sat upon the floor like some strange Buddha, with crossed legs, the huge books all round him, and one open upon his knees.

"The case worried me at the time, Watson. Here are my marginal notes to prove it. I confess that I could make nothing of it. And yet I was convinced that the coroner was wrong. Have you no recollection of the Abbas Parva tragedy?"

"None, Holmes."

"And yet you were with me then. But certainly my own impression was very superficial. For there was nothing to go by, and none of the parties had engaged my services. Perhaps you would care to read the papers?"
"Could you not give me the points?"

"That is very easily done. It will probably come back to your memory as I talk. Ronder, of course, was a household word. He was the rival of Wombwell, and of Sanger, one of the greatest showmen of his day. There is evidence, however, that he took to drink, and that both he and his show were on the down grade at the time of the great tragedy. The caravan had halted for the night at Abbas Parva, which is a small village in Berkshire, when this horror occurred. They were on their way to Wimbledon, travelling by road, and they were simply camping and not exhibiting, as the place is so small a one that it would not have paid them to open.

"They had among their exhibits a very fine North African lion. Sahara King was its name, and it was the habit, both of Ronder and his wife, to give exhibitions inside its cage. Here, you see, is a photograph of the performance by which you will perceive that Ronder was a huge porcine person and that his wife was a very magnificent woman. It was deposed at the inquest that there had been some signs that the lion was dangerous, but, as usual, familiarity begat contempt, and no notice was taken of the fact.

"It was usual for either Ronder or his wife to feed the lion at night. Sometimes one went, sometimes both, but they never allowed anyone else to do it, for they believed that so long as they were the food-carriers he would regard them as benefactors and would never molest them. On this particular night, seven years ago, they both went, and a very terrible happening followed, the details of which have never been made clear.

"It seems that the whole camp was roused near midnight by the roars of the animal and the screams of the woman. The different groomsmen and employees rushed from their tents, carrying lanterns, and by their light an awful sight was revealed. Ronder lay, with the back of his head crushed in and deep claw-marks across his scalp, some ten yards from the cage, which was open. Close to the door of the cage lay Mrs. Ronder upon her back, with the creature squatting and snarling above her. It had torn her face in such a fashion that it was never thought that she could live. Several of the circus men, headed by Leonardo, the strong man, and Griggs, the clown, drove the creature off with poles, upon which it sprang back into the cage and was at once locked in. How it had got loose was a mystery. It was conjectured that the pair intended to enter the cage, but that when the door was loosed the creature bounded out upon them. There was no other point of interest in the evidence save that the woman in a delirium of agony kept screaming, 'Coward! Coward!' as she was carried back to the van in which they lived. It was six months before she was fit to give evidence, but the inquest was duly held, with the obvious verdict of death from misadventure."

"What alternative could be conceived?" said I.

"You may well say so. And yet there were one or two points which worried young Edmunds, of the Berkshire Constabulary. A smart lad that! He was sent later to Allahabad. That was how I came into the matter, for he dropped in and smoked a pipe or two over it."

"A thin, yellow-haired man?"

"Exactly. I was sure you would pick up the trail presently."

"But what worried him?"

"Well, we were both worried. It was so deucedly difficult to reconstruct the affair. Look at it from the lion's point of view. He is liberated. What does he do? He takes half a dozen bounds forward, which brings him to Ronder. Ronder turns to fly -- the claw-marks were on the back of his head -- but the lion strikes him down. Then, instead of bounding on and escaping, he returns to the woman, who was close to the cage, and he knocks her over and chews her face up. Then, again, those cries of hers would seem to imply that her husband had in some way failed her. What could the poor devil have done to help her? You see the difficulty?"

"Quite."

"And then there was another thing. It comes back to me now as I think it over. There was some evidence that just at the time the lion roared and the woman screamed, a man began shouting in terror."

"This man Ronder, no doubt."

"Well, if his skull was smashed in you would hardly expect to hear from him again. There were at least two witnesses who spoke of the cries of a man being mingled with those of a woman."

"I should think the whole camp was crying out by then. As to the other points, I think I could suggest a solution."

"I should be glad to consider it."

"The two were together, ten yards from the cage, when the lion got loose. The man turned and was struck down. The woman conceived the idea of getting into the cage and shutting the door. It was her only refuge. She made for it, and just as she reached it the beast bounded after her and knocked her over. She was angry with her husband for having encouraged the beast's rage by turning. If they had faced it they might have cowed it. Hence her cries of 'Coward!'"

"Brilliant, Watson! Only one flaw in your diamond."

"What is the flaw, Holmes?"

"If they were both ten paces from the cage, how came the beast to get loose?"
"Is it possible that they had some enemy who loosed it?"

"And why should it attack them savagely when it was in the habit of playing with them, and doing tricks with them inside the cage?"

"Possibly the same enemy had done something to enrage it."

Holmes looked thoughtful and remained in silence for some moments.

"Well, Watson, there is this to be said for your theory. Ronder was a man of many enemies. Edmunds told me that in his cups he was horrible. A huge bully of a man, he cursed and slashed at everyone who came in his way. I expect those cries about a monster, of which our visitor has spoken, were nocturnal reminiscences of the dear departed. However, our speculations are futile until we have all the facts. There is a cold partridge on the sideboard, Watson, and a bottle of Montrachet. Let us renew our energies before we make a fresh call upon them."

When our hansom deposited us at the house of Mrs. Merrilow, we found that plump lady blocking up the open door of her humble but retired abode. It was very clear that her chief preoccupation was lest she should lose a valuable lodger, and she implored us, before showing us up, to say and do nothing which could lead to so undesirable an end. Then, having reassured her, we followed her up the straight, badly carpeted staircase and were shown into the room of the mysterious lodger.

It was a close, musty, ill-ventilated place, as might be expected, since its inmate seldom left it. From keeping beasts in a cage, the woman seemed, by some retribution of fate, to have become herself a beast in a cage. She sat now in a broken armchair in the shadowy corner of the room. Long years of inaction had coarsened the lines of her figure, but at some period it must have been beautiful, and was still full and voluptuous. A thick dark veil covered her face, but it was cut off close at her upper lip and disclosed a perfectly shaped mouth and a delicately rounded chin. I could well conceive that she had indeed been a very remarkable woman. Her voice, too, was well modulated and pleasing.

"My name is not unfamiliar to you, Mr. Holmes," said she. "I thought that it would bring you."

"That is so, madam, though I do not know how you are aware that I was interested in your case."

"I learned it when I had recovered my health and was examined by Mr. Edmunds, the county detective. I fear I lied to him. Perhaps it would have been wiser had I told the truth."

"It is usually wiser to tell the truth. But why did you lie to him?"

"Because the fate of someone else depended upon it. I know that he was a very worthless being, and yet I would not have his destruction upon my conscience. We had been so close -- so close!"

"But has this impediment been removed?"

"Yes, sir. The person that I allude to is dead."

"Then why should you not now tell the police anything you know?"

"Because there is another person to be considered. That other person is myself. I could not stand the scandal and publicity which would come from a police examination. I have not long to live, but I wish to die undisturbed. And yet I wanted to find one man of judgment to whom I could tell my terrible story, so that when I am gone all might be understood."

"You compliment me, madam. At the same time, I am a responsible person. I do not promise you that when you have spoken I may not myself think it my duty to refer the case to the police."

"I think not, Mr. Holmes. I know your character and methods too well, for I have followed your work for some years. Reading is the only pleasure which fate has left me, and I miss little which passes in the world. But in any case, I will take my chance of the use which you may make of my tragedy. It will ease my mind to tell it."

"My friend and I would be glad to hear it."

The woman rose and took from a drawer the photograph of a man. He was clearly a professional acrobat, a man of magnificent physique, taken with his huge arms folded across his swollen chest and a smile breaking from under his heavy moustache -- the self-satisfied smile of the man of many conquests.

"That is Leonardo," she said.

"Leonardo, the strong man, who gave evidence?"

"The same. And this -- this is my husband."

It was a dreadful face -- a human pig, or rather a human wild boar, for it was formidable in its bestiality. One could imagine that vile mouth champing and foaming in its rage, and one could conceive those small, vicious eyes darting pure malignancy as they looked forth upon the world. Ruffian, bully, beast -- it was all written on that heavy-jowled face.

"Those two pictures will help you, gentlemen, to understand the story. I was a poor circus girl brought up on the sawdust, and doing springs through the hoop before I was ten. When I became a woman this man loved me, if such lust as his can be called love, and in an evil moment I became his wife. From that day I was in hell, and he the devil who tormented me. There was no one in the show who did not know of his treatment. He deserted me for others. He
tied me down and lashed me with his ridingwhip when I complained. They all pitied me and they all loathed him, but what could they do? They feared him, one and all. For he was terrible at all times, and murderous when he was drunk. Again and again he was had up for assault, and for cruelty to the beasts, but he had plenty of money and the fines were nothing to him. The best men all left us, and the show began to go downhill. It was only Leonardo and I who kept it up -- with little Jimmy Griggs, the clown. Poor devil, he had not much to be funny about, but he did what he could to hold things together.

"Then Leonardo came more and more into my life. You see what he was like. I know now the poor spirit that was hidden in that splendid body, but compared to my husband he seemed like the angel Gabriel. He pitied me and helped me, till at last our intimacy turned to love -- deep, deep, passionate love, such love as I had dreamed of but never hoped to feel. My husband suspected it, but I think that he was a coward as well as a bully, and that Leonardo was the one man that he was afraid of. He took revenge in his own way by torturing me more than ever. One night my cries brought Leonardo to the door of our van. We were near tragedy that night, and soon my lover and I understood that it could not be avoided. My husband was not fit to live. We planned that he should die.

"Leonardo had a clever, scheming brain. It was he who planned it. I do not say that to blame him, for I was ready to go with him every inch of the way. But I should never have had the wit to think of such a plan. We made a club -- Leonardo made it -- and in the leaden head he fastened five long steel nails, the points outward, with just such a spread as the lion's paw. This was to give my husband his death-blow, and yet to leave the evidence that it was the lion which we would loose who had done the deed.

"It was a pitch-dark night when my husband and I went down, as was our custom, to feed the beast. We carried with us the raw meat in a zinc pail. Leonardo was waiting at the corner of the big van which we should have to pass before we reached the cage. He was too slow, and we walked past him before he could strike, but he followed us on tiptoe and I heard the crash as the club smashed my husband's skull. My heart leaped with joy at the sound. I sprang forward, and I undid the catch which held the door of the great lion's cage.

"And then the terrible thing happened. You may have heard how quick these creatures are to scent human blood, and how it excites them. Some strange instinct had told the creature in one instant that a human being had been slain. As I slipped the bars it bounded out and was on me in an instant. Leonardo could have saved me. If he had rushed forward and struck the beast with his club he might have cowed it. But the man lost his nerve. I heard him shout in his terror, and then I saw him turn and fly. At the same instant the teeth of the lion met in my face. Its hot, filthy breath had already poisoned me and I was hardly conscious of pain. With the palms of my hands I tried to push the great steaming, blood-stained jaws away from me, and I screamed for help. I was conscious that the camp was stirring, and then dimly I remembered a group of men. Leonardo, Griggs, and others, dragging me from under the creature's paws. That was my last memory, Mr. Holmes, for many a weary month. When I came to myself and saw myself in the mirror, I cursed that lion -- oh, how I cursed him! -- not because he had torn away my beauty but because he had not torn away my life. I had but one desire, Mr. Holmes, and I had enough money to gratify it. It was that I should cover myself so that my poor face should be seen by none, and that I should dwell where none whom I had ever known should find me. That was all that was left to me to do -- and that is what I have done. A poor wounded beast that has crawled into its hole to die -- that is the end of Eugenia Ronder."

We sat in silence for some time after the unhappy woman had told her story. Then Holmes stretched out his long arm and patted her hand with such a show of sympathy as I had seldom known him to exhibit.

"Poor girl!" he said. "Poor girl! The ways of fate are indeed hard to understand. If there is not some compensation hereafter, then the world is a cruel jest. But what of this man Leonardo?"

"I never saw him or heard from him again. Perhaps I have been wrong to feel so bitterly against him. He might as soon have loved one of the freaks whom we carried round the country as the thing which the lion had left. But a woman's love is not so easily set aside. He had left me under the beast's claws, he had deserted me in my need, and yet I could not bring myself to give him to the gallows. For myself, I cared nothing what became of me. What could be more dreadful than my actual life? But I stood between Leonardo and his fate."

"And he is dead?"

"He was drowned last month when bathing near Margate. I saw his death in the paper."

"And what did he do with this five-clawed club, which is the most singular and ingenius part of all your story?"

"I cannot tell, Mr. Holmes. There is a chalk-pit by the camp, with a deep green pool at the base of it. Perhaps in the depths of that pool --"

"Well, well, it is of little consequence now. The case is closed."

"Yes," said the woman, "the case is closed."

We had risen to go, but there was something in the woman's voice which arrested Holmes's attention. He turned swiftly upon her.

"Your life is not your own," he said. "Keep your hands off it."
"What use is it to anyone?"

"How can you tell? The example of patient suffering is in itself the most precious of all lessons to an impatient world."

The woman's answer was a terrible one. She raised her veil and stepped forward into the light.

"I wonder if you would bear it," she said.

It was horrible. No words can describe the framework of a face when the face itself is gone. Two living and beautiful brown eyes looking sadly out from that grisly ruin did but make the view more awful. Holmes held up his hand in a gesture of pity and protest, and together we left the room.

Two days later, when I called upon my friend, he pointed with some pride to a small blue bottle upon his mantelpiece. I picked it up. There was a red poison label. A pleasant almondy odour rose when I opened it.

"Prussic acid?" said I.

"Exactly. It came by post. 'I send you my temptation. I will follow your advice.' That was the message. I think, Watson, we can guess the name of the brave woman who sent it."

The Adventure of Shoscombe Old Place

Sherlock Holmes had been bending for a long time over a low-power microscope. Now he straightened himself up and looked round at me in triumph.

"It is glue, Watson," said he. "Unquestionably it is glue. Have a look at these scattered objects in the field!"

I stooped to the eyepiece and focussed for my vision.

"Those hairs are threads from a tweed coat. The irregular gray masses are dust. There are epithelial scales on the left. Those brown blobs in the centre are undoubtedly glue."

"Well," I said, laughing, "I am prepared to take your word for it. Does anything depend upon it?"

"It is a very fine demonstration," he answered. "In the St. Pancras case you may remember that a cap was found beside the dead policeman. The accused man denies that it is his. But he is a picture-frame maker who habitually handles glue."

"Is it one of your cases?"

"No; my friend, Merivale, of the Yard, asked me to look into the case. Since I ran down that coiner by the zinc and copper filings in the seam of his cuff they have begun to realize the importance of the microscope." He looked impatiently at his watch. "I had a new client calling, but he is overdue. By the way, Watson, you know something of racing?"

"I ought to. I pay for it with about half my wound pension."

"Then I'll make you my 'Handy Guide to the Turf.' What about Sir Robert Norberton? Does the name recall anything?"

"Well, I should say so. He lives at Shoscombe Old Place, and I know it well, for my summer quarters were down there once. Norberton nearly came within your province once."

"How was that?"

"It was when he horsewhipped Sam Brewer, the well-known Curzon Street money-lender, on Newmarket Heath. He nearly killed the man."

"Ah, he sounds interesting! Does he often indulge in that way?"

"Well, he has the name of being a dangerous man. He is about the most daredevil rider in England -- second in the Grand National a few years back. He is one of those men who have overshot their true generation. He should have been a buck in the days of the Regency -- a boxer, an athlete, a plunger on the turf, a lover of fair ladies, and, by all account, so far down Queer Street that he may never find his way back again."

"Capital, Watson! A thumb-nail sketch. I seem to know the man. Now, can you give me some idea of Shoscombe Old Place?"

"Only that it is in the centre of Shoscombe Park, and that the famous Shoscombe stud and training quarters are to be found there."

"And the head trainer," said Holmes, "is John Mason. You need not look surprised at my knowledge, Watson, for this is a letter from him which I am unfolding. But let us have some more about Shoscombe. I seem to have struck a rich vein."

"There are the Shoscombe spaniels," said I. "You hear of them at every dog show. The most exclusive breed in England. They are the special pride of the lady of Shoscombe Old Place."

"Sir Robert Norberton's wife, I presume!"

"Sir Robert has never married. Just as well, I think, considering his prospects. He lives with his widowed sister, Lady Beatrice Falder."

"You mean that she lives with him?"

"No, no. The place belonged to her late husband, Sir James. Norberton has no claim on it at all. It is only a life
interest and reverts to her husband's brother. Meantime, she draws the rents every year."

"And brother Robert, I suppose, spends the said rents?"

"That is about the size of it. He is a devil of a fellow and must lead her a most uneasy life. Yet I have heard that she is devoted to him. But what is amiss at Shoscombe?"

"Ah, that is just what I want to know. And here, I expect, is the man who can tell us."

The door had opened and the page had shown in a tall, clean-shaven man with the firm, austere expression which is only seen upon those who have to control horses or boys. Mr. John Mason had many of both under his sway, and he looked equal to the task. He bowed with cold self-possession and seated himself upon the chair to which Holmes had waved him.

"You had my note, Mr. Holmes?"

"Yes, but it explained nothing."

"It was too delicate a thing for me to put the details on paper. And too complicated. It was only face to face I could do it."

"Well, we are at your disposal."

"First of all, Mr. Holmes, I think that my employer, Sir Robert, has gone mad."

Holmes raised his eyebrows. "This is Baker Street, not Harley Street," said he. "But why do you say so?"

"Well, sir, when a man does one queer thing, or two queer things, there may be a meaning to it, but when everything he does is queer, then you begin to wonder. I believe Shoscombe Prince and the Derby have turned his brain."

"That is a colt you are running?"

"The best in England, Mr. Holmes. I should know, if anyone does. Now, I'll be plain with you, for I know you are gentlemen of honour and that it won't go beyond the room. Sir Robert has got to win this Derby. He's up to the neck, and it's his last chance. Everything he could raise or borrow is on the horse—and at fine odds, too! You can get forties now, but it was nearer the hundred when he began to back him."

"But how is that if the horse is so good?"

"The public don't know how good he is. Sir Robert has been too clever for the touts. He has the Prince's half-brother out for spins. You can't tell 'em apart. But there are two lengths in a furlong between them when it comes to a gallop. He thinks of nothing but the horse and the race. His whole life is on it. He's holding off the Jews till then. If the Prince fails him he is done."

"It seems a rather desperate gamble, but where does the madness come in?"

"Well, first of all, you have only to look at him. I don't believe he sleeps at night. He is down at the stables at all hours. His eyes are wild. It has all been too much for his nerves. Then there is his conduct to Lady Beatrice!"

"Ah! What is that?"

"They have always been the best of friends. They had the same tastes, the two of them, and she loved the horses as much as he did. Every day at the same hour she would drive down to see them—and, above all, she loved the Prince. He would prick up his ears when he heard the wheels on the gravel, and he would trot out each morning to the carriage to get his lump of sugar. But that's all over, too. He never goes near her. And she takes it to heart. She is brooding and sulky and drinking, Mr. Holmes—a fish."

"Did she drink before this estrangement?"

"Well, she seems to have lost all interest in the horses. For a week now she has driven past the stables with never so much as 'Good-morning!'"

"You think there has been a quarrel?"

"And a bitter, savage, spiteful quarrel at that. Why else would he give away her pet spaniel that she loved as if he were her child? He gave it a few days ago to old Barnes, what keeps the Green Dragon, three miles off, at Crendall."

"That certainly did seem strange."

"Of course, with her weak heart and dropsy one couldn't expect that she could get about with him, but he spent two hours every evening in her room. He might well do what he could, for she has been a rare good friend to him. But that's all over, too. He never goes near her. And she takes it to heart. She is brooding and sulky and drinking, Mr. Holmes—a fish."

"Did she drink before this estrangement?"

"Well, she took her glass, but now it is often a whole bottle of an evening. So Stephens, the butler, told me. It's all changed, Mr. Holmes, and there is something damned rotten about it. But then, again, what is master doing down at the old church crypt at night? And who is the man that meets him there?"

Holmes rubbed his hands.

"Go on, Mr. Mason. You get more and more interesting."

"It was the butler who saw him go. Twelve o'clock at night and raining hard. So next night I was up at the house and, sure enough, master was off again. Stephens and I went after him, but it was jumpy work, for it would have
been a bad job if he had seen us. He's a terrible man with his fists if he gets started, and no respecter of persons. So we were shy of getting too near, but we marked him down all light. It was the haunted crypt that he was making for, and there was a man waiting for him there.”

“What is this haunted crypt?”

“Well, sir, there is an old ruined chapel in the park. It is so old that nobody could fix its date. And under it there's a crypt which has a bad name among us. It is a dark, damp, lonely place by day, but there are few in that county that would have the nerve to go near it at night. But master's not afraid. He never feared anything in his life. But what is he doing there in the night-time?”

“Wait a bit!” said Holmes. "You say there is another man there. It must be one of your own stablemen, or someone from the house! Surely you have only to spot who it is and question him?"

"It's no one I know."

“How can you say that?”

“Because I have seen him, Mr. Holmes. It was on that second night. Sir Robert turned and passed us -- me and Stephens, quaking in the bushes like two bunny-rabbits, for there was a bit of moon that night. But we could hear the other moving about behind. We were not afraid of him. So we up when Sir Robert was gone and pretended we were just having a walk like in the moonlight, and so we came right on him as casual and innocent as you please. 'Hullo, mate! who may you be?' says I. I guess he had not heard us coming, so he looked over his shoulder with a face as if he had seen the devil coming out of hell. He let out a yell, and away he went as hard as he could lick it in the darkness. He could run! -- I'll give him that. In a minute he was out of sight and hearing, and who he was, or what he was, we never found."

“But you saw him clearly in the moonlight?”

“Yes, I would swear to his yellow face -- a mean dog, I should say. What could he have in common with Sir Robert?”

Holmes sat for some time lost in thought.

"Who keeps Lady Beatrice Falder company?” he asked at last.

"There is her maid, Carrie Evans. She has been with her this five years."

“And is, no doubt, devoted?"

Mr. Mason shuffled uncomfortably.

"She's devoted enough,” he answered at last. "But I won't say to whom."

"Ah!” said Holmes.

"I can't tell tales out of school."

“I quite understand, Mr. Mason. Of course, the situation is clear enough. From Dr. Watson's description of Sir Robert I can realize that no woman is safe from him. Don't you think the quarrel between brother and sister may lie there?”

“Well, the scandal has been pretty clear for a long time."

“But she may not have seen it before. Let us suppose that she has suddenly found it out. She wants to get rid of the woman. Her brother will not permit it. The invalid, with her weak heart and inability to get about, has no means of enforcing her will. The hated maid is still tied to her. The lady refuses to speak, sulks, takes to drink. Sir Robert in his anger takes her pet spaniel away from her. Does not all this hang together?”

“Well, it might do -- so far as it goes.”

“Exactly! As far as it goes. How would all that bear upon the visits by night to the old crypt? We can't fit that into our plot.”

“No, sir, and there is something more that I can't fit in. Why should Sir Robert want to dig up a dead body?”

Holmes sat up abruptly.

“We only found it out yesterday -- after I had written to you. Yesterday Sir Robert had gone to London, so Stephens and I went down to the crypt. It was all in order, sir, except that in one corner was a bit of a human body.”

“You informed the police, I suppose?”

Our visitor smiled grimly.

“Well, sir, I think it would hardly interest them. It was just the head and a few bones of a mummy. It may have been a thousand years old. But it wasn't there before. That I'll swear, and so will Stephens. It had been stowed away in a corner and covered over with a board, but that corner had always been empty before.”

“What did you do with it?”

“Well, we just left it there.”

“That was wise. You say Sir Robert was away yesterday. Has he returned?”

“We expect him back to-day.”

“When did Sir Robert give away his sister's dog?”
"It was just a week ago to-day. The creature was howling outside the old wellhouse, and Sir Robert was in one of his tantrums that morning. He caught it up, and I thought he would have killed it. Then he gave it to Sandy Bain, the jockey, and told him to take the dog to old Barnes at the Green Dragon, for he never wished to see it again."

Holmes sat for some time in silent thought. He had lit the oldest and foulest of his pipes.

"I am not clear yet what you want me to do in this matter, Mr. Mason," he said at last. "Can't you make it more definite?"

"Perhaps this will make it more definite, Mr. Holmes," said our visitor.
He took a paper from his pocket, and, unwrapping it carefully, he exposed a charred fragment of bone.

Holmes examined it with interest.

"Where did you get it?"

"There is a central heating furnace in the cellar under Lady Beatrice's room. It's been off for some time, but Sir Robert complained of cold and had it on again.

"Harvey runs it -- he's one of my lads. This very morning he came to me with this which he found raking out the cinders. He didn't like the look of it."

"Nor do I," said Holmes. "What do you make of it, Watson?"

It was burned to a black cinder, but there could be no question as to its anatomical significance.

"It's the upper condyle of a human femur," said I.

"Exactly!" Holmes had become very serious. "When does this lad tend to the furnace?"

"He makes it up every evening and then leaves it."

"Then anyone could visit it during the night?"

"Yes, sir."

"Can you enter it from outside?"

"There is one door from outside. There is another which leads up by a stair to the passage in which Lady Beatrice's room is situated."

"These are deep waters, Mr. Mason; deep and rather dirty. You say that Sir Robert was not at home last night?"

"No, sir."

"Then, whoever was burning bones, it was not he."

"That's true, sir."

"What is the name of that inn you spoke of?"

"The Green Dragon."

"Is there good fishing in that part of Berkshire?" The honest trainer showed very clearly upon his face that he was convinced that yet another lunatic had come into his harassed life.

"Well, sir, I've heard there are trout in the mill-stream and pike in the Hall lake."

"That's good enough. Watson and I are famous fishermen - are we not, Watson? You may address us in future at the Green Dragon. We should reach it to-night. I need not say that we don't want to see you, Mr. Mason, but a note will reach us, and no doubt I could find you if I want you. When we have gone a little farther into the matter I will let you have a considered opinion."

Thus it was that on a bright May evening Holmes and I found ourselves alone in a first-class carriage and bound for the little "halt-on-demand" station of Shoscombe. The rack above us was covered with a formidable litter of rods, reels, and baskets. On reaching our destination a short drive took us to an old-fashioned tavern, where a sporting host, Josiah Barnes, entered eagerly into our plans for the extirpation of the fish of the neighbourhood.

"What about the Hall lake and the chance of a pike?" said Holmes. The face of the innkeeper clouded.

"That wouldn't do, sir. You might chance to find yourself in the lake before you were through."

"How's that, then?"

"It's Sir Robert, sir. He's terrible jealous of touts. If you two strangers were as near his training quarters as that he'd be after you as sure as fate. He ain't taking no chances, Sir Robert ain't."

"I've heard he has a horse entered for the Derby."

"Yes, and a good colt, too. He carries all our money for the race, and all Sir Robert's into the bargain. By the way" -- he looked at us with thoughtful eyes -- "I suppose you ain't on the turf yourselves?"

"No, indeed. Just two weary Londoners who badly need some good Berkshire air."

"Well, you are in the right place for that. There is a deal of it lying about. But mind what I have told you about Sir Robert. He's the sort that strikes first and speaks afterwards. Keep clear of the park."

"Surely, Mr. Barnes! We certainly shall. By the way, that was a most beautiful spaniel that was whining in the hall."

"I should say it was. That was the real Shoscombe breed. There ain't a better in England."
"I am a dog-fancier myself," said Holmes. "Now, if it is a fair question, what would a prize dog like that cost?"

"More than I could pay, sir. It was Sir Robert himself who gave me this one. That's why I have to keep it on a lead. It would be off to the Hall in a jiffy if I gave it its head."

"We are getting some cards in our hand, Watson," said Holmes when the landlord had left us. "It's not an easy one to play, but we may see our way in a day or two. By the way, Sir Robert is still in London, I hear. We might, perhaps, enter the sacred domain to-night without fear of bodily assault. There are one or two points on which I should like reassurance."

"Have you any theory, Holmes?"

"Only this, Watson, that something happened a week or so ago which has cut deep into the life of the Shoscombe household. What is that something? We can only guess at it from its effects. They seem to be of a curiously mixed character. But that should surely help us. It is only the colourless, uneventful case which is hopeless.

"Let us consider our data. The brother no longer visits the beloved invalid sister. He gives away her favourite dog. Her dog, Watson! Does that suggest nothing to you?"

"Nothing but the brother's spite."

"Well, it might be so. Or -- well, there is an alternative. Now to continue our review of the situation from the time that the quarrel, if there is a quarrel, began. The lady keeps her room, alters her habits, is not seen save when she drives out with her maid, refuses to stop at the stables to greet her favourite horse and apparently takes to drink. That covers the case, does it not?"

"Save for the business in the crypt."

"That is another line of thought. There are two, and I beg you will not tangle them. Line A, which concerns Lady Beatrice, has a vaguely sinister flavour, has it not?"

"I can make nothing of it."

"Well, now, let us take up line B, which concerns Sir Robert. He is mad keen upon winning the Derby. He is in the hands of the Jews, and may at any moment be sold up and his racing stables seized by his creditors. He is a daring and desperate man. He derives his income from his sister. His sister's maid is his willing tool. So far we seem to be on fairly safe ground, do we not?"

"But the crypt?"

"Ah, yes, the crypt! Let us suppose, Watson -- it is merely a scandalous supposition, a hypothesis put forward for argument's sake -- that Sir Robert has done away with his sister."

"My dear Holmes, it is out of the question."

"Very possibly, Watson. Sir Robert is a man of an honourable stock. But you do occasionally find a carrion crow among the eagles. Let us for a moment argue upon this supposition. He could not fly the country until he had realized his fortune, and that fortune could only be realized by bringing off this coup with Shoscombe Prince. Therefore, he has still to stand his ground. To do this he would have to dispose of the body of his victim, and he would also have to find a substitute who would impersonate her. With the maid as his confidante that would not be impossible. The woman's body might be conveyed to the crypt, which is a place so seldom visited, and it might be secretly destroyed at night in the furnace, leaving behind it such evidence as we have already seen. What say you to that, Watson?"

"Well, it is all possible if you grant the original monstrous supposition."

"I think that there is a small experiment which we may try to-morrow, Watson, in order to throw some light on the matter. Meanwhile, if we mean to keep up our characters, I suggest that we have our host in for a glass of his own wine and hold some high converse upon eels and dace, which seems to be the straight road to his affections. We may chance to come upon some useful local gossip in the process."

In the morning Holmes discovered that we had come without our spoon-bait for jack, which absolved us from fishing for the day. About eleven o'clock we started for a walk, and he obtained leave to take the black spaniel with us.

"This is the place," said he as we came to two high park gates with heraldic griffins towering above them. "About midday, Mr Barnes informs me, the old lady takes a drive, and the carriage must slow down while the gates are opened. When it comes through, and before it gathers speed, I want you, Watson, to stop the coachman with some question. Never mind me. I shall stand behind this holly-bush and see what I can see."

It was not a long vigil. Within a quarter of an hour we saw the big open yellow barouche coming down the long avenue, with two splendid, high-stepping gray carriage horses in the shafts. Holmes crouched behind his bush with the dog. I stood unconcernedly swinging a cane in the roadway. A keeper ran out and the gates swung open.

The carriage had slowed to a walk, and I was able to get a good look at the occupants. A highly coloured young woman with flaxen hair and impudent eyes sat on the left. At her right was an elderly person with rounded back and a huddle of shawls about her face and shoulders which proclaimed the invalid. When the horses reached the
highroad I held up my hand with an authoritative gesture, and as the coachman pulled up I inquired if Sir Robert was at Shoscombe Old Place.

At the same moment Holmes stepped out and released the spaniel. With a joyous cry it dashed forward to the carriage and sprang upon the step. Then in a moment its eager greeting changed to furious rage, and it snapped at the black skirt above it.

"Drive on! Drive on!" shrieked a harsh voice. The coachman lashed the horses, and we were left standing in the roadway.

"Well, Watson, that's done it," said Holmes as he fastened the lead to the neck of the excited spaniel. "He thought it was his mistress, and he found it was a stranger. Dogs don't make mistakes."

"But it was the voice of a man!" I cried.

"Exactly! We have added one card to our hand, Watson, but it needs careful playing, all the same."

My companion seemed to have no further plans for the day, and we did actually use our fishing tackle in the mill-stream with the result that we had a dish of trout for our supper. It was only after that meal that Holmes showed signs of renewed activity. Once more we found ourselves upon the same road as in the morning, which led us to the park gates. A tall, dark figure was awaiting us there, who proved to be our London acquaintance, Mr. John Mason, the trainer.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said he. "I got your note, Mr. Holmes. Sir Robert has not returned yet, but I hear that he is expected to-night."

"How far is this crypt from the house?" asked Holmes.

"A good quarter of a mile."

"Then I think we can disregard him altogether."

"I can't afford to do that, Mr. Holmes. The moment he arrives he will want to see me to get the last news of Shoscombe Prince."

"I see! In that case we must work without you, Mr. Mason. You can show us the crypt and then leave us."

It was pitch-dark and without a moon, but Mason led us over the grass-lands until a dark mass loomed up in front of us which proved to be the ancient chapel. We entered the broken gap which was once the porch, and our guide, stumbling among heaps of loose masonry, picked his way to the corner of the building, where a steep stair led down into the crypt. Striking a match, he illuminated the melancholy place -- dismal and evil-smelling, with ancient crumbling walls of rough-hewn stone, and piles of coffins, some of lead and some of stone, extending upon one side right up to the arched and groined roof which lost itself in the shadows above our heads. Holmes had lit his lantern, which shot a tiny tunnel of vivid yellow light upon the mournful scene. Its rays were reflected back from the coffin-plates, many of them adorned with the griffin and coronet of this old family which carried its honours even to the gate of Death.

"You spoke of some bones, Mr. Mason. Could you show them before you go?"

"They are here in this corner." The trainer strode across and then stood in silent surprise as our light was turned upon the place. "They are gone," said he.

"So I expected," said Holmes, chuckling. "I fancy the ashes of them might even now be found in that oven which had already consumed a part."

"But why in the world would anyone want to burn the bones of a man who has been dead a thousand years?" asked John Mason.

"That is what we are here to find out," said Holmes. "It may mean a long search, and we need not detain you. I fancy that we shall get our solution before morning."

When John Mason had left us, Holmes set to work making a very careful examination of the graves, ranging from a very ancient one, which appeared to be Saxon, in the centre, through a long line of Norman Hugos and Odos, until we reached the Sir William and Sir Denis Falder of the eighteenth century. It was an hour or more before Holmes came to a leaden coffin standing on end before the entrance to the vault. I heard his little cry of satisfaction and was aware from his hurried but purposeful movements that he had reached a goal. With his lens he was eagerly examining the edges of the heavy lid. Then he drew from his pocket a short jemmy, a box-opener, which he thrust into a chink, leveraging back the whole front, which seemed to be secured by only a couple of clamps. There was a rending, tearing sound as it gave way, but it had hardly hinged back and partly revealed the contents before we had an unforeseen interruption.

Someone was walking in the chapel above. It was the firm, rapid step of one who came with a definite purpose and knew well the ground upon which he walked. A light streamed down the stairs, and an instant later the man who bore it was framed in the Gothic archway. He was a terrible figure, huge in stature and fierce in manner. A large stable-lantern which he held in front of him shone upward upon a strong, heavily moustached face and angry eyes, which glared round him into every recess of the vault, finally fixing themselves with a deadly stare upon my
"Who the devil are you?" he thundered. "And what are you doing upon my property?" Then, as Holmes returned no answer he took a couple of steps forward and raised a heavy stick which he carried. "Do you hear me?" he cried. "Who are you? What are you doing here?" His cudgel quivered in the air.

But instead of shrinking Holmes advanced to meet him.

"I also have a question to ask you, Sir Robert," he said in his sternest tone. "Who is this? And what is it doing here?"

He turned and tore open the coffin-lid behind him. In the glare of the lantern I saw a body swathed in a sheet from head to foot with dreadful, witch-like features, all nose and chin, projecting at one end, the dim, glazed eyes staring from a discoloured and crumbling face.

The baronet had staggered back with a cry and supported himself against a stone sarcophagus.

"How came you to know of this?" he cried. And then, with some return of his truculent manner: "What business is it of yours?"

"My name is Sherlock Holmes," said my companion. "Possibly it is familiar to you. In any case, my business is that of every other good citizen -- to uphold the law. It seems to me that you have much to answer for."

Sir Robert glared for a moment, but Holmes's quiet voice and cool, assured manner had their effect.

"Fore God, Mr. Holmes, it's all right," said he. "Appearances are against me, I'll admit, but I could act no otherwise."

"I should be happy to think so, but I fear your explanations must be before the police."

Sir Robert shrugged his broad shoulders.

"Well, if it must be, it must. Come up to the house and you can judge for yourself how the matter stands."

A quarter of an hour later we found ourselves in what I judge, from the lines of polished barrels behind glass covers, to be the gun-room of the old house. It was comfortably furnished, and here Sir Robert left us for a few moments. When he returned he had two companions with him; the one, the florid young woman whom we had seen in the carriage; the other, a small rat-faced man with a disagreeably furtive manner. These two wore an appearance of utter bewilderment, which showed that the baronet had not yet had time to explain to them the turn events had taken.

"There," said Sir Robert with a wave of his hand, "are Mr. and Mrs. Norlett. Mrs. Norlett, under her maiden name of Evans, has for some years been my sister's confidential maid. I have brought them here because I feel that my best course is to explain the true position to you, and they are the two people upon earth who can substantiate what I say."

"Is this necessary, Sir Robert? Have you thought what you are doing?" cried the woman.

"As to me, I entirely disclaim all responsibility," said her husband.

Sir Robert gave him a glance of contempt. "I will take all responsibility," said he. "Now, Mr. Holmes, listen to a plain statement of the facts."

"You have clearly gone pretty deeply into my affairs or I should not have found you where I did. Therefore, you know already, in all probability, that I am running a dark horse for the Derby and that everything depends upon my success. If I win, all is easy. If I lose -- well, I dare not think of that!"

"I understand the position," said Holmes.

"I am dependent upon my sister, Lady Beatrice, for everything. But it is well known that her interest in the estate is for her own life only. For myself, I am deeply in the hands of the Jews. I have always known that if my sister were to die my creditors would be on to my estate like a flock of vultures. Everything would be seized -- my stables, my horses -- everything. Well, Mr. Holmes, my sister did die just a week ago."

"And you told no one!"

"What could I do? Absolute ruin faced me. If I could stave things off for three weeks all would be well. Her maid's husband -- this man here -- is an actor. It came into our heads -- it came into my head -- that he could for that short period personate my sister. It was but a case of appearing daily in the carriage, for no one need enter her room save the maid. It was not difficult to arrange. My sister died of the dropsy which had long afflicted her."

"That will be for a coroner to decide."

"Her doctor would certify that for months her symptoms have threatened such an end."

"Well, what did you do?"

"The body could not remain there. On the first night Norlett and I carried it out to the old well-house, which is now never used. We were followed, however, by her pet spaniel, which yapped continually at the door, so I felt some safer place was needed. I got rid of the spaniel, and we carried the body to the crypt of the church. There was no indignity or irreverence, Mr. Holmes. I do not feel that I have wronged the dead."

"Your conduct seems to me inexcusable, Sir Robert."
The baronet shook his head impatiently. "It is easy to preach," said he. "Perhaps you would have felt differently if you had been in my position. One cannot see all one's hopes and all one's plans shattered at the last moment and make no effort to save them. It seemed to me that it would be no unworthy resting-place if we put her for the time in one of the coffins of her husband's ancestors lying in what is still consecrated ground. We opened such a coffin, removed the contents, and placed her as you have seen her. As to the old relics which we took out, we could not leave them on the floor of the crypt. Norlett and I removed them, and he descended at night and burned them in the central furnace. There is my story, Mr. Holmes, though how you forced my hand so that I have to tell it is more than I can say."

Holmes sat for some time lost in thought.

"There is one flaw in your narrative, Sir Robert," he said at last. "Your bets on the race, and therefore your hopes for the future, would hold good even if your creditors seized your estate."

"The horse would be part of the estate. What do they care for my bets? As likely as not they would not run him at all. My chief creditor is, unhappily, my most bitter enemy -- a rascally fellow, Sam Brewer, whom I was once compelled to horsewhip on Newmarket Heath. Do you suppose that he would try to save me?"

"Well, Sir Robert," said Holmes, rising, "this matter must, of course, be referred to the police. It was my duty to bring the facts to light, and there I must leave it. As to the morality or decency of your conduct, it is not for me to express an opinion. It is nearly midnight, Watson, and I think we may make our way back to our humble abode."

It is generally known now that this singular episode ended upon a happier note than Sir Robert's actions deserved. Shoscombe Prince did win the Derby, the sporting owner did net eighty thousand pounds in bets, and the creditors did hold their hand until the race was over, when they were paid in full, and enough was left to reestablish Sir Robert in a fair position in life. Both police and coroner took a lenient view of the transaction, and beyond a mild censure for the delay in registering the lady's decease, the lucky owner got away scatheless from this strange incident in a career which has now outlived its shadows and promises to end in an honoured old age.
THE MYSTERY OF CLOOMBER

CHAPTER I
THE HEGIRA OF THE WESTS FROM EDINBURGH

I John Fothergill West, student of law in the University of St. Andrews, have endeavoured in the ensuing pages to lay my statement before the public in a concise and business-like fashion.

It is not my wish to achieve literary success, nor have I any desire by the graces of my style, or by the artistic ordering of my incidents, to throw a deeper shadow over the strange passages of which I shall have to speak. My highest ambition is that those who know something of the matter should, after reading my account, be able to conscientiously indorse it without finding a single paragraph in which I have either added to or detracted from the truth.

Should I attain this result, I shall rest amply satisfied with the outcome of my first, and probably my last, venture in literature.

It was my intention to write out the sequence of events in due order, depending on trustworthy hearsay when I was describing that which was beyond my own personal knowledge. I have now, however, through the kind cooperation of friends, hit upon a plan which promises to be less onerous to me and more satisfactory to the reader. This is nothing less than to make use of the various manuscripts which I have by me bearing upon the subject, and to add to them the first-hand evidence contributed by those who had the best opportunities of knowing Major-General J. B. Heatherstone.

In pursuance of this design I shall lay before the public the testimony of Israel Stakes, formerly coachman at Cloomber Hall, and of John Easterling, F.R.C.P. Edin., now practising at Stranraer, in Wigtownshire. To these I shall add a verbatim account extracted from the journal of the late John Berthier Heatherstone, of the events which occurred in the Thul Valley in the autumn of '41 towards the end of the first Afghan War, with a description of the skirmish in the Terada defile, and of the death of the man Ghoolab Shah.

To myself I reserve the duty of filling up all the gaps and chinks which may be left in the narrative. By this arrangement I have sunk from the position of an author to that of a compiler, but on the other hand my work has ceased to be a story and has expanded into a series of affidavits.

My Father, John Hunter West, was a well known Oriental and Sanskrit scholar, and his name is still of weight with those who are interested in such matters. He it was who first after Sir William Jones called attention to the great value of early Persian literature, and his translations from the Hafiz and from Ferideddin Atar have earned the warmest commendations from the Baron von Hammer-Purgstall, of Vienna, and other distinguished Continental critics.

In the issue of the _Orientalisches_Scienzblatt_ for January, 1861, he is described as _"Der_beruhmte_und_sehr_gelhernte_Hunter_West_von Edinburgh"_--a passage which I well remember that he cut out and stowed away, with a pardonable vanity, among the most revered family archives.

He had been brought up to be a solicitor, or Writer to the Signet, as it is termed in Scotland, but his learned hobby absorbed so much of his time that he had little to devote to the pursuit of his profession.

When his clients were seeking him at his chambers in George Street, he was buried in the recesses of the Advocates' Library, or poring over some mouldy manuscript at the Philosophical Institution, with his brain more exercised over the code which Menu propounded six hundred years before the birth of Christ than over the knotty problems of Scottish law in the nineteenth century. Hence it can hardly be wondered at that as his learning accumulated his practice dissolved, until at the very moment when he had attained the zenith of his celebrity he had also reached the nadir of his fortunes.

There being no chair of Sanscrit in any of his native universities, and no demand anywhere for the only mental wares which he had to dispose of, we should have been forced to retire into genteel poverty, consoling ourselves with the aphorisms and precepts of Firdousi, Omar Khayyam, and others of his Eastern favourites, had it not been for the kindness and liberality of his half-brother William Farintosh, the Laird of Branksome, in Wigtownshire.

This William Farintosh was the proprietor of a landed estate, the acreage which bore, unfortunately, a most disproportional relation to its value, for it formed the bleakest and most barren tract of land in the whole of a bleak and barren shire. As a bachelor, however, his expenses had been small, and he had contrived from the rents of his scattered cottages, and the sale of the Galloway nags, which he bred upon the moors, not only to live as a laird should, but to put by a considerable sum in the bank.

We had heard little from our kinsman during the days of our comparative prosperity, but just as we were at our
wit's end, there came a letter like a ministering angel, giving us assurance of sympathy and succour. In it the Laird of Branksome told us that one of his lungs had been growing weaker for some time, and that Dr. Easterling, of Stranraer, had strongly advised him to spend the few years which were left to him in some more genial climate. He had determined, therefore to set out for the South of Italy, and he begged that we should take up our residence at Branksome in his absence, and that my father should act as his land steward and agent at a salary which placed us above all fear of want.

Our mother had been dead for some years, so that there were only myself, my father, and my sister Esther to consult, and it may be readily imagined that it did not take us long to decide upon the acceptance of the laird's generous offer. My father started for Wigtown that very night, while Esther and I followed a few days afterwards, bearing with us two potato-sacksful of learned books, and such other of our household effects that were worth the trouble and expense of transport.

Chapter II

OF THE STRANGE MANNER IN WHICH A TENANT CAME TO CLOOMBER

Branksome might have appeared a poor dwelling-place when compared with the house of an English squire, but to us, after our long residence in stuffy apartments, it was of regal magnificence.

The building was broad-spread and low, with red-tiled roof, diamond-paned windows, and a profusion of dwelling rooms with smoke-blackened ceilings and oaken wainscots. In front was a small lawn, girt round with a thin fringe of haggard and ill grown beeches, all gnarled and withered from the effects of the sea-spray. Behind lay the scattered hamlet of Branksome-Bere—a dozen cottages at most— inhabited by rude fisher-folk who looked upon the laird as their natural protector.

To the west was the broad, yellow beach and the Irish Sea, while in all other directions the desolate moors, greyish-green in the foreground and purple in the distance, stretched away in long, low curves to the horizon.

Very bleak and lonely it was upon this Wigtown coast. A man might walk many a weary mile and never see a living thing except the white, heavy- flapping kittiwakes, which screamed and cried to each other with their shrill, sad voices.

Very lonely and very bleak! Once out of sight of Branksome and there was no sign of the works of man save only where the high, white tower of Cloomber Hall shot up, like a headstone of some giant grave, from amid the firs and larches which girt it round.

This great house, a mile or more from our dwelling, had been built by a wealthy Glasgow merchant of strange tastes and lonely habits, but at the time of our arrival it had been untenanted for many years, and stood with weather-blotted walls and vacant, staring windows looking blankly out over the hill side.

Empty and mildewed, it served only as a landmark to the fishermen, for they had found by experience that by keeping the laird's chimney and the white tower of Cloomber in a line they could steer their way through the ugly reef which raises its jagged back, like that of some sleeping monster, above the troubled waters of the wind-swept bay.

To this wild spot it was that Fate had brought my father, my sister, and myself. For us its loneliness had no terrors. After the hubbub and bustle of a great city, and the weary task of upholding appearances upon a slender income, there was a grand, soul-soothing serenity in the long sky-line and the eager air. Here at least there was no neighbour to pry and chatter.

The laird had left his phaeton and two ponies behind him, with the aid of which my father and I would go the round of the estate doing such light duties as fall to an agent, or "factor" as it was there called, while our gentle Esther looked to our household needs, and brightened the dark old building.

Such was our simple, uneventful existence, until the summer night when an unlooked-for incident occurred which proved to be the herald of those strange doings which I have taken up my pen to describe.

It had been my habit to pull out of an evening in the laird's skiff and to catch a few whiting which might serve for our supper. On this well-remembered occasion my sister came with me, sitting with her book in the stern-sheets of the boat, while I hung my lines over the bows.

The sun had sunk down behind the rugged Irish coast, but a long bank of flushed cloud still marked the spot, and cast a glory upon the waters. The whole broad ocean was seamed and scarred with crimson streaks. I had risen in the boat, and was gazing round in delight at the broad panorama of shore and sea and sky, when my sister plucked at my sleeve with a little, sharp cry of surprise.

"See, John," she cried, "there is a light in Cloomber Tower!".

I turned my head and stared back at the tall, white turret which peeped out above the belt of trees. As I gazed I distinctly saw at one of the windows the glint of a light, which suddenly vanished, and then shone out once more from another higher up. There it flickered for some time, and finally flashed past two successive windows underneath before the trees obscured our view of it. It was clear that some one bearing a lamp or a candle had
climbed up the tower stairs and had then returned into the body of the house.

"Who in the world can it be?" I exclaimed, speaking rather to myself than to Esther, for I could see by the surprise upon her face that she had no solution to offer. "Maybe some of the folk from Branksome-Bere have wanted to look over the place."

My sister shook her head.

"There is not one of them would dare to set foot within the avenue gates," she said. "Besides, John, the keys are kept by the house-agent at Wigtown. Were they ever so curious, none of our people could find their way in."

When I reflected upon the massive door and ponderous shutters which guarded the lower storey of Cloomber, I could not but admit the force of my sister's objection. The untimely visitor must either have used considerable violence in order to force his way in, or he must have obtained possession of the keys.

Piqued by the little mystery, I pulled for the beach, with the determination to see for myself who the intruder might be, and what were his intentions. Leaving my sister at Branksome, and summoning Seth Jamieson, an old man-o'-war's-man and one of the stoutest of the fishermen, I set off across the moor with him through the gathering darkness.

"It hasna a guid name after dark, yon hoose," remarked my companion, slackening his pace perceptibly as I explained to him the nature of our errand. "It's no for naething that him wha owns it wunna gang within a Scotch mile o't."

"Well, Seth, there is some one who has no fears about going into it," said I, pointing to the great, white building which flickered up in front of us through the gloom.

The light which I had observed from the sea was moving backwards and forward past the lower floor windows, the shutters of which had been removed. I could now see that a second fainter light followed a few paces behind the other. Evidently two individuals, the one with a lamp and the other with a candle or rushlight, were making a careful examination of tile building.

"Let ilka man blaw his ain parritch," said Seth Jamieson doggedly, coming to a dead stop. "What is it tae us if a wraith or a bogle minds tae tak' a fancy tae Cloomber? It's no canny tae meddle wi' such things."

"Why, man," I cried, "you don't suppose a wraith came here in a gig? What are those lights away yonder by the avenue gates?"

"The lamps o' a gig, sure enough!" exclaimed my companion in a less lugubrious voice. "Let's steer for it, Master West, and speer where she hails frae."

By this time night had closed in save for a single long, narrow slit in the westward. Stumbling across the moor together, we made our way into the Wigtown Road, at the point where the high stone pillars mark the entrance to the Cloomber avenue. A tall dog-cart stood in front of the gateway, the horse browsing upon the thin border of grass which skirted the road.

"It's a' richt!" said Jamieson, taking a close look at the deserted vehicle. "I ken it weel. It belongs tae Maister McNeil, the factor body frae Wigtown--him wha keeps the keys."

"Then we may as well have speech with him now that we are here," I answered. "They are coming down, if I am not mistaken."

As I spoke we heard the slam of the heavy door and within a few minutes two figures, the one tall and angular, the other short and thick came towards us through the darkness. They were talking so earnestly that they did not observe us until they had passed through the avenue gate.

"Good evening, Mr. McNeil," said I, stepping forward and addressing the Wigtown factor, with whom I had some slight acquaintance.

The smaller of the two turned his face towards me as I spoke, and showed me that I was not mistaken in his identity, but his taller companion sprang back and showed every sign of violent agitation.

"What is this, McNeil?" I heard him say, in a gasping, choking voice. "Is this your promise? What is the meaning of it?"

"Don't be alarmed, General! Don't be alarmed!" said the little fat factor in a soothing fashion, as one might speak to a frightened child. "This is young Mr. Fothergill West, of Branksome, though what brings him up here tonight is more than I can understand. However, as you are to be neighbours, I can't do better than take the opportunity to introduce you to each other. Mr. West, this is General Heatherstone, who is about to take a lease of Cloomber Hall."

I held out my hand to the tall man, who look it in a hesitating, half-reluctant fashion.

"I came up," I explained, "because I saw your lights in the windows, and I bought that something might be wrong. I am very glad I did so, since it has given me the chance of making the general's acquaintance."

Whilst I was talking, I was conscious that the new tenant of Cloomber Hall was peering at me very closely through the darkness. As I concluded, he stretched out a long, tremulous arm, and turned the gig-lamp in such a way as to throw a flood of light upon my face.
"Good Heavens, McNeil!" he cried, in the same quivering voice as before, "the fellow's as brown as chocolate. He's not an Englishman. You're not an Englishman--you, sir?"

"I'm a Scotchman, born and bred," said I, with an inclination to laugh, which was only checked by my new acquaintance's obvious terror.

"A Scotchman, eh?" said he, with a sigh of relief. "It's all one nowadays. You must excuse me, Mr.--Mr. West. I'm nervous, infernally nervous. Come along, McNeil, we must be back in Wigtown in less than an hour. Good-night, gentlemen, good-night!"

The two clambered into their places; the factor cracked his whip, and the high dog-cart clattered away through the darkness, casting a brilliant tunnel of yellow light on either side of it, until the rumble of its wheels died away in the distance.

"What do you think of our new neighbour, Jamieson?" I asked, after a long silence.

"'Deed, Mr. West, he seems, as he says himsel', to be vera nervous. Maybe his conscience is oot o' order."

"His liver, more likely," said I. "He looks as if he had tried his constitution a bit. But it's blowing chill, Seth, my lad, and it's time both of us were indoors."

I bade my companion good-night, and struck off across the moors for the cheery, ruddy light which marked the parlour windows of Branksome.

CHAPTER III
OF OUR FURTHER ACQUAINTANCE WITH MAJOR-GENERAL J. B. HEATHERSTONE

There was, as may well be imagined, much stir amongst our small community at the news that the Hall was to be inhabited once more, and considerable speculation as to the new tenants, and their object in choosing this particular part of the country for their residence.

It speedily became apparent that, whatever their motives might be, they had definitely determined upon a lengthy stay, for relays of plumbers and of joiners came down from Wigtown, and there was hammering and repairing going on from morning till night.

It was surprising how quickly the signs of the wind and weather were effaced, until the great, square-set house was all as spick-and-span as though it had been erected yesterday. There were abundant signs that money was no consideration to General Heatherstone, and that it was not on the score of retrenchment that he had taken up his abode among us.

"It may be that he is devoted to study," suggested my father, as we discussed the question round the breakfast table. "Perhaps he has chosen this secluded spot to finish some magnum opus upon which he is engaged. If that is the case I should be happy to let him have the run of my library."

Esther and I laughed at the grandiloquent manner in which he spoke of the two potato-sacksful of books.

"It may be as you say," said I, "but the general did not strike me during our short interview as being a man who was likely to have any very pronounced literary tastes. If I might hazard a guess, I should say that he is here upon medical advice, in the hope that the complete quiet and fresh air may restore his shattered nervous system. If you had seen how he glared at me, and the twitching of his fingers, you would have thought it needed some restoring."

"I do wonder whether he has a wife and a family," said my sister. "Poor souls, how lonely they will be! Why, excepting ourselves, there is not a family that they could speak to for seven miles and more."

"General Heatherstone is a very distinguished soldier," remarked my father.

"Why, papa, however came you to know anything about him?"

"Ah, my dears," said my father, smiling at us over his coffee-cup, "you were laughing at my library just now, but you see it may be very useful at times." As he spoke he took a red-covered volume from a shelf and turned over the pages. "This is an Indian Army List of three years back," he explained, "and here is the very gentleman we want--Heatherstone, J. B., Commander of the Bath, my dears, and 'V.C.', think of that, 'V.C.'--formerly colonel in the Indian Infantry, 41st Bengal Foot, but now retired with the rank of major-general. In this other column is a record of his services--'capture of Ghuznee and defence of Jellalabad, Sobraon 1848, Indian Mutiny and reduction of Oudh. Five times mentioned in dispatches.' I think, my dears, that we have cause to be proud of our new neighbour."

"It doesn't mention there whether he is married or not, I suppose?" asked Esther.

"No," said my father, wagging his white head with a keen appreciation of his own humour. "It doesn't include that under the heading of 'daring actions'--though it very well might, my dear, it very well might."

All our doubts, however, upon this head were very soon set at rest, for on the very day that the repairing and the furnishing had been completed I had occasion to ride into Wigtown, and I met upon the way a carriage which was bearing General Heatherstone and his family to their new home. An elderly lady, worn and sickly-looking, was by his side, and opposite him sat a young fellow about my own age and a girl who appeared to be a couple of years younger.

I raised my hat, and was about to pass them, when the general shouted to his coachman to pull up, and held out
his hand to me. I could see now in the daylight that his face, although harsh and stern, was capable of assuming a not unkindly expression.

"How are you, Mr. Fothergill West?" he cried. "I must apologise to you if I was a little brusque the other night—you will excuse an old soldier who has spent the best part of his life in harness—All the same, you must confess that you are rather dark-skinned for a Scotchman."

"We have a Spanish strain in our blood," said I, wondering at his recurrence to the topic.

"That would, of course, account for it," he remarked. "My dear," to his wife, "allow me to introduce Mr. Fothergill West to you. This is my son and my daughter. We have come here in search of rest, Mr. West—complete rest."

"And you could not possibly have come to a better place," said I.

"Oh, you think so?" he answered. "I suppose it is very quiet indeed, and very lonely. You might walk through these country lanes at night, I dare say, and never meet a soul, eh?"

"Well, there are not many about after dark," I said.

"And you are not much troubled with vagrants or wandering beggars, eh? Not many tinkers or tramps or rascally gipsies—no vermin of that sort about?"

"I find it rather cold," said Mrs. Heatherstone, drawing her thick sealskin mantle tighter round her figure. "We are detaining Mr. West, too."

"So we are, my dear, so we are. Drive on, coachman. Good-day, Mr. West."

The carriage rattled away towards the Hall, and I trotted thoughtfully onwards to the little country metropolis.

As I passed up the High Street, Mr. McNeil ran out from his office and beckoned to me to stop.

"Our new tenants have gone out," he said. "They drove over this morning."

"I met them on the way," I answered.

As I looked down at the little factor, I could see that his face was flushed and that he bore every appearance of having had an extra glass.

"Give me a real gentleman to do business with," he said, with a burst of laughter. "They understand me and I understand them. 'What shall I fill it up for?' says the general, taking a blank cheque out o' his pouch and laying it on the table. 'Two hundred,' says I, leaving a bit o' a margin for my own time and trouble."

"I thought that the landlord had paid you for that," I remarked.

"Aye, aye, but it's well to have a bit margin. He filled it up and threw it over to me as if it had been an auld postage stamp. That's the way business should be done between honest men—though it wouldna do if one was inclined to take an advantage. Will ye not come in, Mr. West, and have a taste of my whisky?"

"No, thank you," said I, "I have business to do."

"Well, well, business is the chief thing. It's well not to drink in the morning, too. For my own part, except a drop before breakfast to give me an appetite, and maybe a glass, or even twa, afterwards to promote digestion, I never touch spirits before noon. What d'ye think o' the general, Mr. West?"

"Why, I have hardly had an opportunity of judging," I answered.

Mr. McNeil tapped his forehead with his forefinger.

"That's what I think of him," he said in a confidential whisper, shaking his head at me. "He's gone, sir, gone, in my estimation. Now what would you take to be a proof of madness, Mr. West?"

"Why, offering a blank cheque to a Wigtown house-agent," said I.

"Ah, you're aye at your jokes. But between oorsel's now, if a man asked ye how many miles it was frae a seaport, and whether ships come there from the East, and whether there were tramps on the road, and whether it was against the lease for him to build a high wall round the grounds, what would ye make of it, eh?"

"I should certainly think him eccentric," said I.

"If every man had his due, our friend would find himsel' in a house with a high wall round the grounds, and that without costing him a farthing," said the agent.

"Where then?" I asked, humouring his joke.

"Why, in the Wigtown County Lunatic Asylum," cried the little man, with a bubble of laughter, in the midst of which I rode on my way, leaving him still chuckling over his own facetiousness.

The arrival of the new family at Cloomber Hall had no perceptible effect in relieving the monotony of our secluded district, for instead of entering into such simple pleasures as the country had to offer, or interesting themselves, as we had hoped, in our attempts to improve the lot of our poor crofters and fisherfolk, they seemed to shun all observation, and hardly ever to venture beyond the avenue gates.

We soon found, too, that the factor's words as to the inclosing of the grounds were founded upon fact, for gangs of workmen were kept hard at work from early in the morning until late at night in erecting a high, wooden fence round the whole estate.
When this was finished and topped with spikes, Cloomber Park became impregnable to any one but an exceptionally daring climber. It was as if the old soldier had been so imbued with military ideas that, like my Uncle Toby, he could not refrain even in times of peace from standing upon the defensive.

Stranger still, he had victualled the house as if for a siege, for Begbie, the chief grocer of Wigtown, told me himself in a rapture of delight and amazement that the general had sent him an order for hundreds of dozens of every imaginable potted meat and vegetable.

It may be imagined that all these unusual incidents were not allowed to pass without malicious comment. Over the whole countryside and as far away as the English border there was nothing but gossip about the new tenants of Cloomber Hall and the reasons which had led them to come among us.

The only hypothesis, however, which the bucolic mind could evolve, was that which had already occurred to Mr. McNeil, the factor--namely, that the old general and his family were one and all afflicted with madness, or, as an alternative conclusion, that he had committed some heinous offence and was endeavouring to escape the consequences of his misdeeds.

These were both natural suppositions under the circumstances, but neither of them appeared to me to commend itself as a true explanation of the facts.

It is true that General Heatherstone's behaviour on the occasion of our first interview was such as to suggest some suspicion of mental disease, but no man could have been more reasonable or more courteous than he had afterwards shown himself to be.

Then, again, his wife and children led the same secluded life that he did himself, so that the reason could not be one peculiar to his own health.

As to the possibility of his being a fugitive from justice, that theory was even more untenable. Wigtownshire was bleak and lonely, but it was not such an obscure corner of the world that a well-known soldier could hope to conceal himself there, nor would a man who feared publicity set every one's tongue wagging as the general had done.

On the whole, I was inclined to believe that the true solution of the enigma lay in his own allusion to the love of quiet, and that they had taken shelter here with an almost morbid craving for solitude and repose. We very soon had an instance of the great lengths to which this desire for isolation would carry them.

My father had come down one morning with the weight of a great determination upon his brow.

"You must put on your pink frock to-day, Esther," said he, "and you, John, you must make yourself smart, for I have determined that the three of us shall drive round this afternoon and pay our respects to Mrs. Heatherstone and the general."

"A visit to Cloomber," cried Esther, clapping her hands.

"I am here," said my father, with dignity, "not only as the laird's factor, but also as his kinsman. In that capacity I am convinced that he would wish me to call upon these newcomers and offer them any politeness which is in our power. At present they must feel lonely and friendless. What says the great Firdousi? 'The choicest ornaments to a man's house are his friends.'"

My sister and I knew by experience that when the old man began to justify his resolution by quotations from the Persian poets there was no chance of shaking it. Sure enough that afternoon saw the phaeton at the door, with my father perched upon the seat, with his second-best coat on and a pair of new driving-gloves.

"Jump in, my dears," he cried, cracking his whip briskly, "we shall show the general that he has no cause to be ashamed of his neighbours."

Alas! pride always goes before a fall. Our well-fed ponies and shining harness were not destined that day to impress the tenants of Cloomber with a sense of our importance.

We had reached the avenue gate, and I was about to get out and open it, when our attention was arrested by a very large wooden placard, which was attached to one of the trees in such a manner that no one could possibly pass without seeing it. On the white surface of this board was printed in big, black letters the following hospitable inscription:

GENERAL AND MRS. HEATHERSTONE HAVE NO WISH TO INCREASE THE CIRCLE OF THEIR ACQUAINTANCE.

We all sat gazing at this announcement for some moments in silent astonishment. Then Esther and I, tickled by the absurdity of the thing, burst out laughing, but my father pulled the ponies' heads round, and drove home with compressed lips and the cloud of much wrath upon his brow. I have never seen the good man so thoroughly moved, and I am convinced that his anger did not arise from any petty feeling of injured vanity upon his own part, but from the thought that a slight had been offered to the Laird of Branksome, whose dignity he represented.

CHAPTER IV
OF A YOUNG MAN WITH A GREY HEAD

If I had any personal soreness on account of this family snub, it was a very passing emotion, and one which was
soon effaced from my mind. It chanced that on the very next day after the episode I had occasion to pass that way, and stopped to have another look at the obnoxious placard. I was standing staring at it and wondering what could have induced our neighbours to take such an outrageous step, when I became suddenly aware of a sweet, girlish face which peeped out at me from between the bars of the gate, and of a white hand which eagerly beckoned me to approach. As I advanced to her I saw that it was the same young lady whom I had seen in the carriage.

"Mr. West," she said, in a quick whisper, glancing from side to side as she spoke in a nervous, hasty manner, "I wish to apologise to you for the indigence to which you and your family were subjected yesterday. My brother was in the avenue and saw it all, but he is powerless to interfere. I assure you, Mr. West, that if that hateful thing," pointing up at the placard, "has given you any annoyance, it has given my brother and myself far more."

"Why, Miss Heatherstone," said I, putting the matter off with a laugh, "Britain is a free country, and if a man chooses to warn off visitors from his premises there is no reason why he should not."

"It is nothing less than brutal," she broke out, with a petulant stamp of the foot. "To think that your sister, too, should have such a unprovoked insult offered to her! I am ready to sink with shame at the very thought."

"Pray do not give yourself one moment's uneasiness upon the subject," said I earnestly, for I was grieved at her evident distress. "I am sure that your father has some reason unknown to us for taking this step."

"Heaven knows he has!" she answered, with ineffable sadness in her voice, "and yet I think it would be more manly to face a danger than to fly from it. However, he knows best, and it is impossible for us to judge. But who is this?" she exclaimed, anxiously, peering up the dark avenue. "Oh, it is my brother Mordaunt. Mordaunt," she said, as the young man approached us. "I have been apologising to Mr. West for what happened yesterday, in your name as well as my own."

"I am very, very glad to have the opportunity of doing it in person," said he courteously. "I only wish that I could see your sister and your father as well as yourself, to tell them how sorry I am. I think you had better run up to the house, little one, for it's getting near tiffin-time. No--don't you go Mr. West. I want to have a word with you."

Miss Heatherstone waved her hand to me with a bright smile, and tripped up the avenue, while her brother unbolted the gate, and, passing through, closed it again, locking it upon the outside.

"I'll have a stroll down the road with you, if you have no objection. Have a manilla." He drew a couple of cheroots from his pocket and handed one to me. "You'll find they are not bad," he said. "I became a connoisseur in tobacco when I was in India. I hope I am not interfering with your business in coming along with you?"

"Not at all," I answered "I am very glad to have your company."

"I'll tell you a secret," said my companion. "This is the first time that I have been outside the grounds since we have been down here."

"And your sister?"

"She has never been out, either," he answered. "I have given the governor the slip to-day, but he wouldn't half like it if he knew. It's a whim of his that we should keep ourselves entirely to ourselves. At least, some people would call it a whim, for my own part I have reason to believe that he has solid grounds for all that he does--though perhaps in this matter he may be a little too exacting."

"You must surely find it very lonely," said I, thinking in my heart that my new acquaintance made rather too much of his own troubles and too little of those of his companion.

"Yes; poor Gabriel feels it, no doubt," he answered carelessly, "but it's a more unnatural thing for a young man of my age to be cooped up in this way than for a woman. Look at me, now. I am three-and-twenty next March, and yet I have never been to a university, nor to a school for that matter. I am as complete an ignoramus as any of these clodhoppers. It seems strange to you, no doubt, and yet it is so. Now, don't you think I deserve a better fate?"

He stopped as he spoke, and faced round to me, throwing his palms forward in appeal. As I looked at him, with the sun shining upon his face, he certainly did seem a strange bird to be cooped up in such a cage. Tall and muscular, with a keen, dark face, and sharp, finely cut features, he might have stepped out of a canvas of Murillo or Velasquez. There were latent energy and power in his firm-set mouth, his square eyebrows, and the whole pose of his elastic, well-knit figure.

"There is the learning to be got from books and the learning to be got from experience," said I sententiously. "If you have less of your share of the one, perhaps you have more of the other. I cannot believe you have spent all your life in mere idleness and pleasure."

"Pleasure!" he cried. "Pleasure! Look at this!" He pulled off his hat, and I saw that his black hair was all decked
and dashed with streaks of grey. "Do you imagine that this came from pleasure?" he asked, with a bitter laugh.

"You must have had some great shock," I said, astonished at the sight, "some terrible illness in your youth. Or perhaps it arises from a more chronic cause--a constant gnawing anxiety. I have known men as young as you whose hair was as grey."

"Poor brutes!" he muttered. "I pity them."

"If you can manage to slip down to Branksome at times," I said, "perhaps you could bring Miss Heatherstone with you. I know that my father and my sister would be delighted to see her, and a change, if only for an hour or two, might do her good."

"It would be rather hard for us both to get away together," he answered, "However, if I see a chance I shall bring her down. It might be managed some afternoon perhaps, for the old man indulges in a siesta occasionally."

We had reached the head of the winding lane which branches off from the high road and leads to the laird's house, so my companion pulled up.

"I must go back," he said abruptly, "or they will miss me. It's very kind of you, West, to take this interest in us. I am very grateful to you, and so will Gabriel be when she hears of your kind invitation. It's a real heaping of coals of fire after that infernal placard of my father's."

He shook my hand and set off down the road, but he came running after me presently, calling me to stop.

"I was just thinking," he said, "that you must consider us a great mystery up there at Cloomber. I dare say you have come to look upon it as a private lunatic asylum, and I can't blame you. If you are interested in the matter, I feel it is unfriendly upon my part not to satisfy your curiosity, but I have promised my father to be silent about it. And indeed if I were to tell you all that I know you might not be very much the wiser after all. I would have you understand this, however--that my father is as sane as you or I, and that he has very good reasons for living the life which he does. I may add that his wish to remain secluded does not arise from any unworthy or dishonourable motives, but merely from the instinct of self-preservation."

"He is in danger, then?" I ejaculated.

"Yes; he is in constant danger."

"But why does he not apply to the magistrates for protection?" I asked. "If he is afraid of any one, he has only to name him and they will bind him over to keep the peace."

"My dear West," said young Heatherstone, "the danger with which my father is threatened is one that cannot be averted by any human intervention. It is none the less very real, and possibly very imminent."

"You don't mean to assert that it is supernatural," I said incredulously.

"Well, hardly that, either," he answered with hesitation. "There." he continued, "I have said rather more than I should, but I know that you will not abuse my confidence. Good-bye!"

He looked to his heels and was soon out of sight round a curve in the country road.

A danger which was real and imminent, not to be averted by human means, and yet hardly supernatural--here was a conundrum indeed!

I had come to look upon the inhabitants of the Hall as mere eccentrics, but after what young Mordaunt Heatherstone had just told me, I could no longer doubt that some dark and sinister meaning underlay all their actions. The more I pondered over the problem, the more unanswerable did it appear, and yet I could not get the matter out of my thoughts.

The lonely, isolated Hall, and the strange, impending catastrophe which hung over its inmates, appealed forcibly to my imagination. All that evening, and late into the night, I sat moodily by the fire, pondering over what I had heard, and revolving in my mind the various incidents which might furnish me with some clue to the mystery.

CHAPTER V

HOW FOUR OF US CAME TO BE UNDER THE SHADOW OF CLOOMBER

I trust that my readers will not set me down as an inquisitive busybody when I say that as the days and weeks went by I found my attention and my thoughts more and more attracted to General Heatherstone and the mystery which surrounded him.

It was in vain that I endeavoured by hard work and a strict attention to the laird's affairs to direct my mind into some more healthy channel. Do what I would, on land or on the water, I would still find myself puzzling over this one question, until it obtained such a hold upon me that I felt it was useless for me to attempt to apply myself to anything until I had come to some satisfactory solution of it.

I could never pass the dark line of five-foot fencing, and the great iron gate, with its massive lock, without pausing and racking my brain as to what the secret might be which was shut in by that inscrutable barrier. Yet, with all my conjectures and all my observations, I could never come to any conclusion which could for a moment be accepted as an explanation of the facts.

My sister had been out for a stroll one night, visiting a sick peasant or performing some other of the numerous
acts of charity by which she had made herself beloved by the whole countryside.

"John," she said when she returned, "have you seen Cloomber Hall at night?"

"No," I answered, laying down the book which I was reading. "Not since that memorable evening when the general and Mr. McNeil came over to make an inspection."

"Well, John, will you put your hat on and come a little walk with me?"

I could see by her manner that something had agitated or frightened her.

"Why, bless the girl!" cried I boisterously, "what is the matter? The old Hall is not on fire, surely? You look as grave as if all Wigtown were in a blaze."

"Not quite so bad as that," she said, smiling. "But do come out, Jack. I should very much like you to see it."

I had always refrained from saying anything which might alarm my sister, so that she knew nothing of the interest which our neighbours' doings had for me. At her request I took my hat and followed her out into the darkness. She led the way along a little footpath over the moor, which brought us to some rising ground, from which we could look down upon the Hall without our view being obstructed by any of the fir-trees which had been planted round it.

"Look at that!" said my sister, pausing at the summit of this little eminence.

Cloomber lay beneath us in a blaze of light. In the lower floors the shutters obscured the illumination, but above, from the broad windows of the second storey to the thin slits at the summit of the tower, there was not a chink or an aperture which did not send forth a stream of radiance. So dazzling was the effect that for a moment I was persuaded that the house was on fire, but the steadiness and clearness of the light soon freed me from that apprehension. It was clearly the result of many lamps placed systematically all over the building.

It added to the strange effect that all these brilliantly illuminated rooms were apparently untenanted, and some of them, so far as we could judge, were not even furnished. Through the whole great house there was no sign of movement or of life--nothing but the clear, unwinking flood of yellow light.

I was still lost in wonder at the sight when I heard a short, quick sob at my side.

"What is it, Esther, dear?" I asked, looking down at my companion.

"I feel so frightened. Oh, John, John, take me home, I feel so frightened!"

She clung to my arm, and pulled at my coat in a perfect frenzy of fear.

"It's all safe, darling," I said soothingly. "There is nothing to fear. What has upset you so?"

"I am afraid of them, John; I am afraid of the Heatherstones. Why is their house lit up like this every night? I have heard from others that it is always so. And why does the old man run like a frightened hare if any one comes upon him. There is something wrong about it, John, and it frightens me."

I pacified her as well as I could, and led her home with me, where I took care that she should have some hot port negus before going to bed. I avoided the subject of the Heatherstones for fear of exciting her, and she did not recur to it of her own accord. I was convinced, however, from what I had heard from her, that she had for some time back been making her own observations upon our neighbours, and that in doing so she had put a considerable strain upon her nerves.

I could see that the mere fact of the Hall being illuminated at night was not enough to account for her extreme agitation, and that it must have derived its importance in her eyes from being one in a chain of incidents, all of which had left a weird or unpleasant impression upon her mind.

That was the conclusion which I came to at the time, and I have reason to know now that I was right, and that my sister had even more cause than I had myself for believing that there was something uncanny about the tenants of Cloomber.

Our interest in the matter may have arisen at first from nothing higher than curiosity, but events soon look a turn which associated us more closely with the fortunes of the Heatherstone family.

Mordaunt had taken advantage of my invitation to come down to the laird's house, and on several occasions he brought with him his beautiful sister. The four of us would wander over the moors together, or perhaps if the day were fine set sail upon our little skiff and stand off into the Irish Sea.

On such excursions the brother and sister would be as merry and as happy as two children. It was a keen pleasure to them to escape from their dull fortress, and to see, if only for a few hours, friendly and sympathetic faces round them.

There could be but one result when four young people were brought together in sweet, forbidden intercourse. Acquaintance-ship warmed into friendship, and friendship flamed suddenly into love.

Gabriel sits beside me now as I write, and she agrees with me that, dear as is the subject to ourselves, the whole story of our mutual affection is of too personal a nature to be more than touched upon in this statement. Suffice it to say that, within a few weeks of our first meeting Mordaunt Heatherstone had won the heart of my clear sister, and Gabriel had given me that pledge which death itself will not be able to break.
I have alluded in this brief way to the double tie which sprang up between the two families, because I have no wish that this narrative should degenerate into anything approaching to romance, or that I should lose the thread of the facts which I have set myself to chronicle. These are connected with General Heatherstone, and only indirectly with my own personal history.

It is enough if I say that after our engagement the visits to Branksome became more frequent, and that our friends were able sometimes to spend a whole day with us when business had called the general to Wigtown, or when his gout confined him to his room.

As to our good father, he was ever ready to greet us with many small jests and tags of Oriental poems appropriate to the occasion, for we had no secrets from him, and he already looked upon us all as his children.

There were times when on account of some peculiarly dark or restless fit of the general's it was impossible for weeks on end for either Gabriel or Mordaunt to get away from the grounds. The old man would even stand on guard, a gloomy and silent sentinel, at the avenue gate, or pace up and down the drive as though he suspected that attempts had been made to penetrate his seclusion.

Passing of an evening I have seen his dark, grim figure flitting about in the shadow of the trees, or caught a glimpse of his hard, angular, swarthy face peering out suspiciously at me from behind the bars.

My heart would often sadden for him as I noticed his uncouth, nervous movements, his furtive glances and twitching features. Who would have believed that this slinking, cowering creature had once been a dashing officer, who had fought the battles of his country and had won the palm of bravery among the host of brave men around him?

In spite of the old soldier's vigilance, we managed to hold communication with our friends.

Immediately behind the Hall there was a spot where the fencing had been so carelessly erected that two of the rails could be removed without difficulty, leaving a broad gap, which gave us the opportunity for many a stolen interview, though they were necessarily short, for the general's movements were erratic, and no part of the grounds was secure from his visitations.

How vividly one of these hurried meetings rises before me! It stands out clear, peaceful, and distinct amid the wild, mysterious incidents which were destined to lead up to the terrible catastrophe which has cast a shade over our lives.

I can remember that as I walked through the fields the grass was damp with the rain of the morning, and the air was heavy with the smell of the fresh-turned earth. Gabriel was waiting for me under the hawthorn tree outside the gap, and we stood hand-in-hand looking down at the long sweep of moorland and at the broad blue channel which encircled it with its fringe of foam.

Far away in the north-west the sun glinted upon the high peak of Mount Throston. From where we stood we could see the smoke of the steamers as they ploughed along the busy water-way which leads to Belfast.

"Is it not magnificent?" Gabriel cried, clasping her hands round my arm. "Ah, John, why are we not free to sail away over these waves together, and leave all our troubles behind us on the shore?"

"And what are the troubles which you would leave behind you, dear one?" I asked. "May I not know them, and help you to bear them?"

"I have no secrets from you, John," she answered, "Our chief trouble is, as you may guess, our poor father's strange behaviour. Is it not a sad thing for all of us that a man who has played such a distinguished part in the world should skulk from one obscure corner of the country to another, and should defend himself with locks and barriers as though he were a common thief flying from justice? This is a trouble, John, which it is out of your power to alleviate."

"But why does he do it, Gabriel?" I asked.

"I cannot tell," she answered frankly. "I only know that he imagines some deadly danger to be hanging over his head, and that this danger was incurred by him during his stay in India. What its nature may be I have no more idea than you have."

"Then your brother has," I remarked. "I am sure from the way in which he spoke to me about it one day that he knows what it is, and that he looks upon it as real."

"Yes, he knows, and so does my mother," she answered, "but they have always kept it secret from me. My poor father is very excited at present. Day and night he is in an agony of apprehension, but it will soon be the fifth of October, and after that he will be at peace."

"How do you know that?" I asked in surprise.

"By experience," she answered gravely. "On the fifth of October these fears of his come to a crisis. For years back he has been in the habit of locking Mordaunt and myself up in our rooms on that date, so that we have no idea what occurs, but we have always found that he has been much relieved afterwards, and has continued to be comparatively in peace until that day begins to draw round again."
"Then you have only ten days or so to wait," I remarked, for September was drawing to a close. "By the way, dearest, why is it that you light up all your rooms at night?"

"You have noticed it, then?" she said. "It comes also from my father's fears. He does not like to have one dark corner in the whole house. He walks about a good deal at night, and inspects everything, from the attics right down to the cellars. He has large lamps in every room and corridor, even the empty ones, and he orders the servants to light them all at dusk."

"I am rather surprised that you manage to keep your servants," I said, laughing. "The maids in these parts are a superstitious class, and their imaginations are easily excited by anything which they don't understand."

"The cook and both housemaids are from London, and are used to our ways. We pay them on a very high scale to make up for any inconvenience to which they may be put. Israel Stakes, the coachman, is the only one who comes from this part of the country, and he seems to be a stolid, honest fellow, who is not easily scared."

"Poor little girl," I exclaimed, looking down at the slim, graceful figure by my side. "This is no atmosphere for you to live in. Why will you not let me rescue you from it? Why won't you allow me to go straight and ask the general for your hand? At the worst he could only refuse."

She turned quite haggard and pale at the very thought.

"For Heaven's sake, John," she cried earnestly, "do nothing of the kind. He would whip us all away in the dead of the night, and within a week we should be settling down again in some wilderness where we might never have a chance of seeing or hearing from you again. Besides, he never would forgive us for venturing out of the grounds."

"I don't think that he is a hard-hearted man," I remarked. "I have seen a kindly look in his eyes, for all his stern face."

"He can be the kindest of fathers," she answered. "But he is terrible when opposed or thwarted. You have never seen him so, and I trust you never will. It was that strength of will and impatience of opposition which made him such a splendid officer. I assure you that in India every one thought a great deal of him. The soldiers were afraid of him, but they would have followed him anywhere."

"And had he these nervous attacks then?"

"Occasionally, but not nearly so acutely. He seems to think that the danger--whatever it may be--becomes more imminent every year. Oh, John, it is terrible to be waiting like this with a sword over our heads--and all the more terrible to me since I have no idea where the blow is to come from."

"Dear Gabriel," I said, taking her hand and drawing her to my side, "look over all this pleasant countryside and the broad blue sea. Is it not all peaceful and beautiful? In these cottages, with their red-tiled roofs peeping out from the grey moor, there live none but simple, God-fearing men, who toil hard at their crafts and bear enmity to no man. Within seven miles of us is a large town, with every civilised appliance for the preservation of order. Ten miles farther there is a garrison quartered, and a telegram would at any time bring down a company of soldiers. Now, I ask you, dear, in the name of common-sense, what conceivable danger could threaten you in this secluded neighbourhood, with the means of help so near? You assure me that the peril is not connected with your father's health?"

"No, I am sure of that. It is true that Dr. Easterling, of Stranraer, has been over to see him once or twice, but that was merely for some small indisposition. I can assure you that the danger is not to be looked for in that direction."

"Then I can assure you," said I, laughing, "that there is no danger at all. It must be some strange monomania or hallucination. No other hypothesis will cover the facts."

"Would my father's monomania account for the fact of my brother's hair turning grey and my mother wasting away to a mere shadow?"

"Undoubtedly," I answered, "The long continued worry of the general's restlessness and irritability would produce those effects on sensitive natures."

"No, no!" she said, shaking her head sadly, "I have been exposed to his restlessness and irritability, but they have had no such effect upon me. The difference between us lies in the fact that they know this awful secret and I do not."

"My dear girl," said I, "the days of family apparitions and that kind of thing are gone. Nobody is haunted nowadays, so we can put that supposition out of the question. Having done so, what remains? There is absolutely no other theory which could even be suggested. Believe me, the whole mystery is that the heat of India has been too much for your poor father's brain."

What she would have answered I cannot tell, for at that moment she gave a start as if some sound had fallen upon her ear. As she looked round apprehensively, I suddenly saw her features become rigid and her eyes fixed and dilated.

Following the direction of her gaze, I felt a sudden thrill of fear pass through me as I perceived a human face surveying us from behind one of the trees—a man's face, every feature of which was distorted by the most malignant hatred and anger. Finding himself observed, he stepped out and advanced towards us, when I saw that it was none
other than the general himself. His beard was all a-bristle with fury, and his deepset eyes glowed from under their heavily veined lids with a most sinister and demoniacal brightness.

CHAPTER VI

HOW I CAME TO BE ENLISTED AS ONE OF THE GARRISON OF CLOOMBER

"To your room, girl!" he cried in a hoarse, harsh voice, stepping in between us and pointing authoritatively towards the house.

He waited until Gabriel, with a last frightened glance at me, had passed through the gap, and then he turned upon me with an expression so murderous that I stepped back a pace or two, and tightened my grasp upon my oak stick.

"You-you--" he spluttered, with his hand twitching at his throat, as though his fury were choking him. "You have dared to intrude upon my privacy! Do you think I built this fence that all the vermin in the country might congregate round it? Oh, you have been very near your death, my fine fellow! You will never be nearer until your time comes. Look at this!" he pulled a squat, thick pistol out of his bosom. "If you had passed through that gap and set foot on my land I'd have let daylight into you. I'll have no vagabonds here. I know how to treat gentry of that sort, whether their faces are black or white."

"Sir," said I, "I meant no harm by coming here, and I do not know how I have deserved this extraordinary outburst. Allow me to observe, however, that you are still covering me with your pistol, and that, as your hand is rather tremulous, it is more than possible that it may go off. If you don't turn the muzzle down I shall be compelled in self-defence to strike you over the wrist with my stick."

"What the deuce brought you here, then?" he asked, in a more composed voice, putting his weapon back into his bosom. "Can't a gentleman live quietly without your coming to peep and pry? Have you no business of your own to look after, eh? And my daughter? how came you to know anything of her? and what have you been trying to squeeze out of her? It wasn't chance that brought you here."

"No," said I boldly, "it was not chance which brought me here. I have had several opportunities of seeing your daughter and of appreciating her many noble qualities. We are engaged to be married to each other, and I came up with the express intention of seeing her."

Instead of blazing into a fury, as I had expected, the general gave a long whistle of astonishment, and then leant up against the railings, laughing softly to himself.

"English terriers are fond of nosing worms," he remarked at last. "When we brought them out to India they used to trot off into the jungle and begin sniffing at what, they imagined to be worms there. But the worm turned out to be a venomous snake, and so poor doggy played no more. I think you'll find yourself in a somewhat analogous position if you don't look out."

"You surely don't mean to cast an aspersion upon your own daughter?" I said, flushing with indignation.

"Oh, Gabriel is all right," he answered carelessly. "Our family is not exactly one, however, which I should recommend a young fellow to marry into. And pray how is it that I was not informed of this snug little arrangement of yours?"

"We were afraid, sir, that you might separate us," I replied, feeling that perfect candour was the best policy under the circumstances. "It is possible that we were mistaken. Before coming to any final decision, I implore you to remember that the happiness of both of us is at stake. It is in your power to divide our bodies, but our souls shall be for ever united."

"My good fellow," said the general, in a not unkindly tone, "you don't know what you are asking for. There is a gulf between you and any one of the blood of Heatherstone which can never be bridged over."

All trace of anger had vanished now from his manner, and given place to an air of somewhat contemptuous amusement.

My family pride took fire at his words. "The gulf may be less than you imagine," I said coldly. "We are not clodhoppers because we live in this out-of-the-way place. I am of noble descent on one side, and my mother was a Buchan of Buchan, I assure you that there is no such disparity between us as you seem to imagine."

"You misunderstand me," the general answered. "It is on our side that the disparity lies. There are reasons why my daughter Gabriel should live and die single. It would not be to your advantage to marry her."

"But surely, sir," I persisted, "I am the best judge of my own interests and advantages. Since you take this ground all becomes easy, for I do assure you that the one interest which overrides all others is that I should have the woman I love for my wife. If this is your only objection to our match you may surely give us your consent, for any danger or trial which I may incur in marrying Gabriel will not weigh with me one featherweight."

"Here's a young bantam!" exclaimed the old soldier, smiling at my warmth. "It's easy to defy danger when you don't know what the danger is."

"What is it, then?" I asked, hotly. "There is no earthly peril which will drive me from Gabriel's side. Let me know what it is and test me."
"No, no. That would never do," he answered with a sigh, and then, thoughtfully, as if speaking his mind aloud: "He has plenty of pluck and is a well-grown lad, too. We might do worse than make use of him."

He went on mumbling to himself with a vacant stare in his eyes as if he had forgotten my presence.

"Look here, West," he said presently. "You'll excuse me if I spoke hastily a little time ago. It is the second time that I have had occasion to apologise to you for the same offence. It shan't occur again. I am rather over-particular, no doubt, in my desire for complete isolation, but I have good reasons for insisting on the point. Rightly or wrongly, I have got it into my head that some day there might be an organised raid upon my grounds. If anything of the sort should occur I suppose I might reckon upon your assistance?"

"With all my heart."

"So that if ever you got a message such as 'Come up,' or even 'Cloomber,' you would know that it was an appeal for help, and would hurry up immediately, even if it were in the dead of the night?"

"Most certainly I should," I answered. "But might I ask you what the nature of the danger is which you apprehend?"

"There would be nothing gained by your knowing. Indeed, you would hardly understand it if I told you. I must bid you good day now, for I have stayed with you too long. Remember, I count upon you as one of the Cloomber garrison now."

"One other thing, sir," I said hurriedly, for he was turning away," I hope that you will not be angry with your daughter for anything which I have told you. It was for my sake that she kept it all secret from you."

"All right," he said, with his cold, inscrutable smile. "I am not such an ogre in the bosom of my family as you seem to think. As to this marriage question, I should advise you as a friend to let it drop altogether, but if that is impossible I must insist that it stand over completely for the present. It is impossible to say what unexpected turn events may take. Good-bye."

He plunged into the wood and was quickly out of sight among the dense plantation.

Thus ended this extraordinary interview, in which this strange man had begun by pointing a loaded pistol at my breast and had ended, by partially acknowledging the possibility of my becoming his future son-in-law. I hardly knew whether to be cast down or elated over it.

On the one hand he was likely, by keeping a closer watch over his daughter, to prevent us from communicating as freely as we had done hitherto. Against this there was the advantage of having obtained an implied consent to the renewal of my suit at some future date. On the whole, I came to the conclusion as I walked thoughtfully home that I had improved my position by the incident.

But this danger--this shadowy, unspeakable danger--which appeared to rise up at every turn, and to hang day and night over the towers of Cloomber! Rack my brain as I would, I could not conjure up any solution to the problem which was not puerile and inadequate.

One fact struck me as being significant. Both the father and the son had assured me, independently of each other, that if I were told what the peril was, I would hardly realise its significance. How strange and bizarre must the fear be which can scarcely be expressed in intelligible language!

I held up my hand in the darkness before I turned to sleep that night, and I swore that no power of man or devil should ever weaken my love for the woman whose pure heart I had had the good fortune to win.

CHAPTER VII
OF CORPORAL RUFUS SMITH AND HIS COMING TO CLOOMBER

In making this statement I have purposely couched it in bald and simple language, for fear I should be accused of colouring my narrative for the sake of effect. If, however, I have told my story with any approach to realism, the reader will understand me when I say that by this time the succession of dramatic incidents which had occurred had arrested my attention and excited my imagination to the exclusion of all minor topics.

How could I plod through the dull routine of an agent's work, or interest myself in the thatch of this tenant's bothy or the sails of that one's boat, when my mind was taken up by the chain of events which I have described, and was still busy seeking an explanation for them.

Go where I would over the countryside, I could see the square, white tower shooting out from among the trees, and beneath that tower this ill-fated family were watching and waiting, waiting and watching--and for what? That was still the question which stood like an impassable barrier at the end of every train of thought.

Regarded merely as an abstract problem, this mystery of the Heatherstone family had a lurid fascination about it, but when the woman whom I loved a thousandfold better than I did myself proved to be so deeply interested in the solution, I felt that it was impossible to turn my thoughts to anything else until it had been finally cleared up.

My good father had received a letter from the laird, dated from Naples, which told us that he had derived much benefit from the change, and that he had no intention of returning to Scotland for some time. This was satisfactory to all of us, for my father had found Branksome such an excellent place for study that it would have been a sore trial to
him to return to the noise and tumult of a city. As to my dear sister and myself, there were, as I have shown, stronger reasons still to make us love the Wigtownshire moors.

In spite of my interview with the general--or perhaps I might say on account of it--I took occasion at least twice a day to walk towards Cloomber and satisfy myself that all was well there. He had begun by resenting my intrusion, but he had ended by taking me into a sort of half-confidence, and even by asking my assistance, so I felt that I stood upon a different footing with him than I had done formerly, and that he was less likely to be annoyed by my presence. Indeed, I met him pacing round the inclosure a few days afterwards, and his manner towards me was civil, though he made no allusion to our former conversation.

He appeared to be still in an extreme state of nervousness, starting from time to time, and gazing furtively about him, with little frightened, darting glances to the right and the left. I hoped that his daughter was right in naming the fifth of October as the turning point of his complaint, for it was evident to me as I looked at his gleaming eyes and quivering hands, that a man could not live long in such a state of nervous tension.

I found on examination that he had had the loose rails securely fastened so as to block up our former trysting-place, and though I prowled round the whole long line of fencing, I was unable to find any other place where an entrance could be effected.

Here and there between the few chinks left in the barrier I could catch glimpses of the Hall, and once I saw a rough-looking, middle-aged man standing at a window on the lower floor, whom I supposed to be Israel Stakes, the coachman. There was no sign, however, of Gabriel or of Mordaunt, and their absence alarmed me. I was convinced that, unless they were under some restraint, they would have managed to communicate with my sister or myself. My fears became more and more acute as day followed day without our seeing or hearing anything of them.

One morning--it was the second day of October--I was walking towards the Hall, hoping that I might be fortunate enough to learn some news of my darling, when I observed a man perched upon a stone at the side of the road.

As I came nearer to him I could see that he was a stranger, and from his dusty clothes and dilapidated appearance he seemed to have come from a distance. He had a great hunch of bread on his knee and a clasp-knife in his hand, but he had apparently just finished his breakfast, for he brushed the crumbs off his lap and rose to his feet when he perceived me.

Noticing the great height of the fellow and that he still held his weapon, I kept well to the other side of the road, for I knew that destitution makes men desperate and that the chain that glittered on my waistcoat might be too great a temptation to him upon this lonely highway. I was confirmed in my fears when I saw him step out into the centre of the road and bar my progress.

"Well, my lad," I said, affecting an ease which I by no means felt, "what can I do for you this morning?"

The fellow's face was the colour of mahogany with exposure to the weather, and he had a deep scar from the corner of his mouth to his ear, which by no means improved his appearance. His hair was grizzled, but his figure was stalwart, and his fur cap was cocked on one side so as to give him a rakish, semi-military appearance. Altogether he gave me the impression of being one of the most dangerous types of tramp that I had ever fallen in with.

Instead of replying to my question, he eyed me for some time in silence with sullen, yellow-shot eyes, and then closed his knife with a loud snick.

"You're not a beak," he said, "too young for that, I guess. They had me in chokey at Paisley and they had me in chokey at Wigtown, but by the living thunder if another of them lays a hand on me I'll make him remember Corporal Rufus Smith! It's a damned fine country this, where they won't give a man work, and then lay him by the heels for having no visible means of subsistence."

"I am sorry to see an old soldier so reduced," said I. "What corps did you serve in?"

"H Battery, Royal Horse Artillery. Bad cess to the Service and every one in it! Here I am nigh sixty years of age, with a beggarly pension of thirty-eight pound ten--not enough to keep me in beer and baccy."

"I should have thought thirty-eight pound ten a year would have been a nice help to you in your old age," I remarked.

"Would you, though?" he answered with a sneer, pushing his weather-beaten face forward until it was within a foot of my own.

"How much d'ye think that slash with a tulwar is worth? And my foot with all the bones rattling about like a bagful of dice where the trail of the gun went across it. What's that worth, eh? And a liver like a sponge, and ague whenever the wind comes round to the east--what's the market value of that? Would you take the lot for a dirty forty pound a year--would you now?"

"We are poor folk in this part of the country," I answered. "You would pass for a rich man down here."

"They are fool folk and they have fool tastes," said he, drawing a black pipe from his pocket and stuffing it with
tobacco. "I know what good living is, and, by cripes! while I have a shilling in my pocket I like to spend it as a shilling should be spent. I've fought for my country and my country has done darned little for me. I'll go to the Rooshians, so help me! I could show them how to cross the Himalayas so that it would puzzle either Afghans or British to stop 'em. What's that secret worth in St. Petersburg, eh, mister?"

"I am ashamed to hear an old soldier speak so, even in jest," said I sternly.

"Jest, indeed!" He cried, with a great, roaring oath. "I'd have done it years ago if the Rooshians had been game to take it up. Skobeloff was the best of the bunch, but he's been snuffed out. However, that's neither here nor there. What I want to ask you is whether you've ever heard anything in this quarter of a man called Heatherstone, the same who used to be colonel of the 41st Bengalis? They told me at Wigtown that he lived somewhere down this way."

"He lives in that large house over yonder," said I, pointing to Cloomber Tower. "You'll find the avenue gate a little way down the road, but the general isn't over fond of visitors."

The last part of my speech was lost upon Corporal Rufus Smith; for the instant that I pointed out the gate he set off hopping down the road.

His mode of progression was the most singular I have ever seen, for He would only put his right foot to the ground once in every half-dozen strides, while he worked so hard and attained such a momentum with the other limb that he got over the ground at an astonishing speed.

I was so surprised that I stood in the roadway gazing after this hulking figure until the thought suddenly struck me that some serious result might come from a meeting between a man of such blunt speech and the choleric, hot-headed general. I therefore followed him as he hopped along like some great, clumsy bird, and overtook him at the avenue gate, where he stood grasping the ironwork and peering through at the dark carriage-drive beyond.

"He's a sly old jackal," he said, looking round at me and nodding his head in the direction of the Hall. "He's a deep old dog. And that's his bungalow, is it, among the trees?"

"That is his house," I answered; "but I should advise you to keep a more civil tongue in your head if you intend to speak with the general. He is not a man to stand any nonsense."

"Right you are. He was always a hard nut to crack. But isn't this him coming down the avenue?"

I looked through the gate and saw that it was indeed the general, who, having either seen us or been attracted by our voices, was hurrying down towards us. As he advanced he would stop from time to time and peer at us through the dark shadow thrown by the trees, as if he were irresolute whether to come on or no.

"He's reconnoitering!" whispered my companion with a hoarse chuckle. "He's afraid--and I know what he's afraid of. He won't be caught in a trap if he can help it, the old 'un. He's about as fly as they make 'em, you bet!"

Then suddenly standing on his tip-toes and waving his hand through the bars of the gate, he shouted at the top of his voice:

"Come on, my gallant commandant! Come on! The coast's clear, and no enemy in sight."

This familiar address had the effect of reassuring the general, for he came right for us, though I could tell by his heightened colour that his temper was at boiling point.

"What, you here, Mr. West?" he said, as his eye fell upon me. "What is it you want, and why have you brought this fellow with you?"

"I have not brought him with me, sir," I answered, feeling rather disgusted at being made responsible for the presence of the disreputable-looking vagabond beside me. "I found him on the road here, and he desired to be directed to you, so I showed him the way. I know nothing of him myself."

"What do you want with me, then?" the general asked sternly, turning to his companion.

"If you please, sir," said the ex-corporal, speaking in a whining voice, and touching his moleskin cap with a humility which contrasted strangely with the previous rough independence of his bearing, "I'm an old gunner in the Queen's service, sir, and knowing your name by hearing it in India I thought that maybe you would take me as your groom or gardener, or give me any other place as happened to be vacant."

"I am sorry that I cannot do anything for you, my man," the general answered impressively.

"Then you'll give me a little just to help me on my way, sir," said he cringing mendicant. "You won't see an old comrade go to the bad for the sake of a few rupees? I was with Sale's brigade in the Passes, sir, and I was at the second taking of Cabul."

General Heatherstone looked keenly at the supplicant, but was silent to his appeal.

"I was in Ghuznee with you when the walls were all shook down by an earthquake, and when we found forty thousand Afghans within gunshot of us. You ask me about it, and you'll see whether I'm lying or not. We went through all this when we were young, and now that we are old you are to live in a fine bungalow, and I am to starve by the roadside. It don't seem to me to be fair."

"You are an impertinent scoundrel," said the general. "If you had been a good soldier you would never need to ask for help. I shall not give you a farthing."
"One word more, sir," cried the tramp, for the other was turning away, "I've been in the Tarada Pass."
The old soldier sprang round as if the words had been a pistol-shot.
"What--what d'ye mean?" he stammered. "I've been in the Tarada Pass, sir, and I knew a man there called
Ghoolab Shah."
These last were hissed out in an undertone, and a malicious grin overspread the face of the speaker.
Their effect upon the general was extraordinary. He fairly staggered back from the gateway, and his yellow
countenance blanched to a livid, mottled grey. For a moment he was too overcome to speak. At last he gasped out:
"Ghoolab Shah! Who are you who know Ghoolab Shah?"
"Take another look," said the tramp, "your sight is not as keen as it was forty years ago."
The general took a long, earnest look at the unkempt wanderer in front of him, and as he gazed I saw the light of
recognition spring up in his eyes.
"God bless my soul!" he cried. "Why, it's Corporal Rufus Smith."
"You've come on it at last," said the other, chuckling to himself. "I was wondering how long it would be before
you knew me. And, first of all, just unlock this gate, will you? It's hard to talk through a grating. It's too much like
ten minutes with a visitor in the cells."
The general, whose face still bore evidences of his agitation, undid the bolts with nervous, trembling fingers. The
recognition of Corporal Rufus Smith had, I fancied, been a relief to him, and yet he plainly showed by his manner
that he regarded his presence as by no means an unmixed blessing.
"Why, Corporal," he said, as the gate swung open, "I have often wondered whether you were dead or alive, but I
never expected to see you again. How have you been all these long years?"
"How have I been?" the corporal answered gruffly. "Why, I have been drunk for the most part. When I draw my
money I lay it out in liquor, and as long as that lasts I get some peace in life. When I'm cleaned out I go upon tramp,
partly in the hope of picking up the price of a dram, and partly in order to look for you."
"You'll excuse us talking about these private matters, West," the general said, looking round at me, for I was
beginning to move away. "Don't leave us. You know something of this matter already, and may find yourself
entirely in the swim with us some of these days."
Corporal Rufus Smith looked round at me in blank astonishment.
"In the swim with us?" he said. "How did he get there?"
"Voluntarily, voluntarily," the general explained, hurriedly sinking his voice. "He is a neighbour of mine, and he
has volunteered his help in case I should ever need it."
This explanation seemed, if anything, to increase the big stranger's surprise.
"Well, if that don't lick cock-fighting!" he exclaimed, contemplating me with admiration. "I never heard tell of
such a thing."
"And now you have found me, Corporal Smith," said the tenant of Cloomber, "what is it that you want of me?"
"Why, everything. I want a roof to cover me, and clothes to wear, and food to eat, and, above all, brandy to
drink."
"Well, I'll take you in and do what I can for you," said the general slowly. "But look here, Smith, we must have
discipline. I'm the general and you are the corporal; I am the master and you are the man. Now, don't let me have to
remind you of that again."
The tramp drew himself up to his full height and raised his right hand with the palm forward in a military salute.
"I can take you on as gardener and get rid of the fellow I have got. As to brandy, you shall have an allowance
and no more. We are not deep drinkers at the Hall."
"Don't you take opium, or brandy, or nothing yourself, sir?" asked Corporal Rufus Smith.
"Nothing," the general said firmly.
"Well, all I can say is, that you've got more nerve and pluck than I shall ever have. I don't wonder now at your
winning that Cross in the Mutiny. If I was to go on listening night after night to them things without ever taking a
drop of something to cheer my heart--why, it would drive me silly."
General Heatherstone put his hand up, as though afraid that his companion might say too much.
"I must thank you, Mr. West," he said, "for having shown this man my door. I would not willingly allow an old
comrade, however humble, to go to the bad, and if I did not acknowledge his claim more readily it was simply
because I had my doubts as to whether he was really what he represented himself to be. Just walk up to the Hall,
Corporal, and I shall follow you in a minute."
"Poor fellow!" he continued, as he watched the newcomer hobbling up the avenue in the ungainly manner which
I have described. "He got a gun over his foot, and it crushed the bones, but the obstinate fool would not let the
doctors take it off. I remember him now as a smart young soldier in Afghanistan. He and I were associated in some
queer adventures, which I may tell you of some day, and I naturally feel sympathy towards him, and would befriend
him. Did he tell you anything about me before I came?"

"Not a word," I replied.

"Oh," said the general carelessly, but with an evident expression of relief, "I thought perhaps he might have said something of old times. Well, I must go and look after him, or the servants will be frightened, for he isn't a beauty to look at. Good-bye!"

With a wave of the hand the old man turned away from me and hurried up the drive after this unexpected addition to his household, while I strolled on round the high, black paling, peering through every chink between the planks, but without seeing a trace either of Mordaunt or of his sister.

I have now brought this statement down to the coming of Corporal Rufus Smith, which will prove to be the beginning of the end.

I have set down soberly and in order the events which brought us to Wigtownshire, the arrival of the Heatherstones at Cloomber, the many strange incidents which excited first our curiosity and finally our intense interest in that family, and I have briefly touched upon the circumstances which brought my sister and myself into a closer and more personal relationship with them. I think that there cannot be a better moment than this to hand the narrative over to those who had means of knowing something of what was going on inside Cloomber during the months that I was observing it from without.

Israel Stakes, the coachman, proved to be unable to read or write, but Mr. Mathew Clark, the Presbyterian Minister of Stoneykirk, has copied down his deposition, duly attested by the cross set opposite to his name. The good clergyman has, I fancy, put some slight polish upon the narrator's story, which I rather regret, as it might have been more interesting, if less intelligible, when reported verbatim. It still preserves, however, considerable traces of Israel's individuality, and may be regarded as an exact record of what he saw and did while in General Heatherstone's service.

CHAPTER VIII
STATEMENT OF ISRAEL STAKES
[Copied and authenticated by the Reverend Mathew Clark, Presbyterian Minister of Stoneykirk, in Wigtownshire]

Maister Fothergill West and the meenister say that I maun tell all I can aboot General Heatherstone and his hoose, but that I maunna say muckle aboot mysel' because the readers wouldna care to hear aboot me or my affairs. I am na sae sure o' that, for the Stakes is a family weel kenned and respecked on baith sides o' the Border, and there's mony in Nithsdale and Annandale as would be gey pleased to hear news o' the son o' Archie Stakes, o' Ecclefechan.

I maun e'en do as I'm tauld, however, for Mr. West's sake, hoping he'll no forget me when I chance to hae a favour tae ask.[1] I'm no able tae write mysel' because my feyther sent me oot to scare craws instead o' sendin' me tae school, but on the ither hond he brought me up in the principles and practice o' the real kirk o' the Covenant, for which may the Lord be praised!

It way last May twel'month that the factor body, Maister McNeil, cam ower tae me in the street and speered whether I was in want o' a place as a coachman and gairdner. As it fell oot I chanced tae be on the look oot for something o' the sort mysel' at the time, but I wasna ower quick to let him see that I wanted it.

"Ye can tak it or leave it," says he sharp like. "It's a guid place, and there's mony would be glad o'it. If ye want it ye can come up tae my office at twa the morn and put your ain questions tae the gentleman."

That was a' I could get frae him, for he's a close man and a hard one at a bargain--which shall profit him leetle in the next life, though he lay by a store o' siller in this. When the day comes there'll be a hantle o' factors on the left hand o' the throne, and I shouldna be surprised if Maister McNeil found himsel' amang them.

Weel, on the morn I gaed up to the office and there I found the factor and a lang, thin, doum man wi' grey hair and a face as brown and crinkled as a walnut. He looked hard at me wi' a store o' siller in this. When the day comes there'll be a hantle o' factors on the left hand o' the throne, and I shouldna be surprised if Maister McNeil found himsel' amang them.

Weel, on the morn I gaed up to the office and there I found the factor and a lang, thin, doum man wi' grey hair and a face as brown and crinkled as a walnut. He looked hard at me wi' a pair o' een that glowed like twa spunks, and then he says, says he:

"You've been born in these pairs, I understan'?"

"Aye," says I, "and never left them neither."

"Never been oot o' Scotland?" he speers.

"Twice to Carlisle fair," says I, for I am a man wha loves the truth; and besides I kenned that the factor would mind my gaeing there, for I bargained fur twa steers and a stirk that he wanted for the stockin' o' the Drumleugh Fairm.

"I learn frae Maister McNeil," says General Heatherstone--for him it was and nane ither--"that ye canna write."

"Na," says I.

"Nor read?"

"Na," says I.

"It seems tae me," says he, turnin' tae the factor, "that this is the vera man I want. Servants is spoilt noo-a-days,"
says he, "by ower muckle eddication. I hae nae doobt, Stakes, that ye will suit me well enough. Ye'll hae three pund a month and a' foond, but I shall resairve the right o' givin' ye twenty-four hoors' notice at any time. How will that suit ye?"

"It's vera different frae my last place," says I, discontented-like.

And the words were true enough, for auld Fairmer Scott only gave me a pund a month and parritch twice a day.

"Weel, weel," says he, "maybe we'll gie ye a rise if ye suit. Meanwhile here's the han'sel shillin' that Maister McNeil tells me it's the custom tae give, and I shall expec' tae see ye at Cloomber on Monday."

When the Monday cam roond I walked oot tae Cloomber, and a great muckle hoose it is, wi' a hunderd windows or mair, and space enough tae hide awa' half the parish.

As tae gairdening, there was no gairden for me tae work at, and the horse was never taken oot o' the stables frae week's end tae week's end. I was busy enough for a' that, for there was a deal o' fencing tae be put up, and one thing or anither, forbye cleanin' the knives and brushin' the boots and such-like jobs as is mair fit for an auld wife than for a grown man.

There was twa besides mysel' in the kitchen, the cook Eliza, and Mary the hoosemaid, puir, benighted beings baith o' them, wha had wasted a' their lives in London, and kenned leetle aboot the warld or the ways o' the flesh.

I hadna muckle tae say to them, for they were simple folk who could scarce understand English, and had hardly mair regard for their ain souls than the tods on the moor. When the cook said she didna think muckle o' John Knox, and the ither that she wouldna give saxpence tae hear the discourse o' Maister Donald McSnaw o' the true kirk, I kenned it was time for me tae leave them tae a higher Judge.

There was four in family, the general, my leddy, Maister Mordaunt, and Miss Gabriel, and it wasna long before I found that a' wasna just exactly as it should be. My leddy was as thin and as white as a ghaist, and many's the time as I've come on her and found her yammerin' and greetin' all by hersel'. I've watched her walkin' up and doon in the wood where she thought nane could see her and wrin'gin' her honds like one demented.

There was the young gentleman, tae, and his sister--they baith seemed to hae some trouble on their minds, and the general maist of a', for the ither was up ane day and down anither; but he was aye the same, wi' a face as dour and sad as a felon when he feels the tow roond his neck.

I speered o' the hussies in the kitchen whether they kenned what was amiss wi' the family, but the cook she answered me back that it wasna for her tae inquire into the affairs o' her superiors, and that it was naething to her as lang as she did her work and had her wages. They were puir, feckless bodies, the twa o' them, and would scarce gie an answer tae a ceevil question, though they could clack lood eneugh when they had a mind.

Well, weeks passed into months and a' things grew waur instead o' better in the Hall. The general he got mair nairvous, and his leddy mair melancholy every day, and yet there wasna any quarrel or bickering between them, for when they've been togither in the breakfast room I used often tae gang round and prune the rose-tree alongside o' the window, so that I couldna help hearin' a great pairt o' their conversation, though I could never gather from their words what it was that they were afeared o'.

I've heard the general say mair than ance that he wasna frighted o' death, or any danger that he could face and have done wi', but that it was the lang, weary waitin' and the uncertainty that had taken a' the strength and the mettle oot o' him. Then my leddy would console him and tell him that maybe it wasna as bad as he thocht, and that a' would come richt in the end--but a' her cheery words were clean throwed away upon him.

As tae the young folks, I kenned weel that they dinna bide in the groonds, and that they were awa' whenever they got a chance wi' Maister Fothergill West tae Branksome, but the general was too fu' o' his ain troubles tae ken aboot it, and it dinna seem tae me that it was pairt o' my duties either as coachman or as gairdner tae mind the bairns.

The Lord foond that oot in the gairden o' Paradise, and there's no muckle change between the folk in Eden and the folk in Wigtown.

There's ane thing that I havena spoke aboot yet, but that should be set doon.

The general dinna share his room wi' his wife, but slept a' alane in a chamber at the far end o' the hoose, as distant as possible frae every one else. This room was aye lockit when he wasna in it, and naebody was ever allowed tae gang into it. He would mak' his ain bed, and red it up and dust it a' by himsel', but he wouldna so much as allow one o' us to set fut on the passage that led tae it.

At nicht he would walk a' ower the hoose, and he had lamps hung in every room and corner, so that no pairt should be dark.

Many's the time frae my room in the garret I've heard his futsteps comin' and gangin', comin' and gangin' doon one passage and up anither frae midnight till cockcraw. It was weary wark to lie listenin' tae his clutter and
wonderin' whether he was clean daft, or whether maybe he'd lairnt pagan and idolatrous tricks oot in India, and that his conscience noo was like the worm which gnaweth and dieth not. I'd ha' speered frae him whether it wouldna ease him to speak wi' the holy Donald McSnaw, but it might ha' been a mistake, and the general wasna a man that you'd care tae mak' a mistake wi'.

Ane day I was workin' at the grass border when he comes up and he says, says he:
"Did ye ever have occasion tae fire a pistol, Israel?"
"Godsakes!" says I, "I never had siccan a thing in my honds in my life."
"Then you'd best not begin noo," says he. "Every man tae his ain weepon," he says. "Now I warrant ye could do something wi' a guid crab-tree cudgel!"
"Aye, could I," I answered blithely, "as well as ony lad on the Border."

This is a lonely hoose," says he, "and we might be molested by some rascals. It's weel tae be ready for whatever may come. Me and you and my son Mordaunt and Mr. Fothergill West of Branksome, who would come if he was required, ought tae be able tae show a bauld face--what think ye?"
"Deed, sir," I says, "feastin' is aye better than fechtin'--but if ye'll raise me a pund a month, I'll no' shirk my share o' either."

"We won't quarrel ower that," says he, and agreed tae the extra twal' pund a year as easy as though it were as many bawbee. Far be it frae me tae think evil, but I couldna help surmisin' at the time that money that was so lightly pairted wi' was maybe no' so very honestly cam by.

I'm no' a curious or a pryin' mun by nature, but I was sair puzzled in my ain mind tae tell why it was that the general walked aboot at nicht and what kept him frae his sleep.

Weel, ane day I was cleanin' doon the passages when my e'e fell on a great muckle heap o' curtains and auld cairpets and sic' like things that were piled away in a corner, no vera far frae the door o' the general's room. A' o' a sudden a thocht came intae my heid and I says tae mysel':
"Israel, laddie," says I, "what's tae stop ye frae hidin' behind that this vera nicht and seein' the auld mun when he doesna ken human e'e is on him?"

The mair I thocht o't the mair seemple it appeared, and I made up my mind tae put the idea intae instant execution.

When the nicht cam roond I tauld the women-folk that I was bad wi' the jawache, and would gang airly tae my room. I kenned fine when once I got there that there was na chance o' ony ane disturbin' me, so I waited a wee while, and then when a' was quiet, I slippit aff my boots and ran doon the ither stair until I cam tae the heap o' auld clothes, and there I lay doon wi' e'e peepin' through a kink and a' the rest covered up wi' a great, ragged cairpet.

There I bided as quiet as a mouse until the general passed me on his road tae bed, and a' was still in the hoose.

My certie! I wouldna gang through wi' it again for a' the siller at the Union Bank of Dumfries, I canna think o'it noo without feelin' cauld a' the way doon my back.

It was just awfu' lynin' there in the deid silence, waitin' and waitin' wi' never a soond tae break the monotony, except the heavy tickin' o' an auld clock somewhere doon the passage.

First I would look doon the corridor in the one way, and syne I'd look doon in t'ither, but it aye seemed to me as though there was something coming up frae the side that I wasna lookin' at. I had a cauldsweat on my broo, and my hair was beatin' twice tae ilka tick o' the clock, and what feared me most of a' was that the dust frae the curtains and things was aye gettin' doon intae my lungs, and it was a' I could dae tae keep mysel' frae coughin'.

Godsakes! I wonder my hair wasna grey wi' a' that I went through. I wouldna dae it again to be made Lord Provost o' Glasgie.

Weel, it may have been twa o'clock in the mornin' or maybe a little mair, and I was just thinkin' that I wasna tae see onything after a'--and I wasna very sorry neither--when all o' a sudden a soond cam tae my ears clear and distinct through the stillness o' the nicht.

I've been asked afore noo tae describe that soond, but I've aye foond that it's no' vera easy tae gie a clear idea o'it, though it was unlike any other soond that I ever hearkened at. I had a cauldsweat on my broo, and my hair was beatin' twice tae ilka tick o' the clock, and what feared me most of a' was that the dust frae the curtains and things was aye gettin' doon intae my lungs, and it was a' I could dae tae keep mysel' frae coughin'.

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I've been asked afore noo tae describe that soond, but I've aye foond that it's no' vera easy tae gie a clear idea o'it, though it was unlike any other soond that I ever hearkened at. It was a shairp, ringin' clang, like what could be caused by flippin' the rim o' a wineglass, but it was far higher and thinner than that, and had in it, tae, a kind o' splash, like the tinkle o' a rain-drop intae a water-butt.

In my fear I sat up amang my cairpets, like a puddock among gowan-leaves, and I listened wi' a' my ears. A' was still again noo, except for the dull tickin' o' the distant clock.

Suddenly the soond cam again, as clear, as shrill, as shairp as ever, and this time the general heard it, for I heard him gie a kind o' groan, as a tired man might wha has been roosed oot o' his sleep.

He got up frae his bed, and I could make oot a rustling noise, as though he were dressin' himsel', and presently his footfa' as he began tae walk up and doon in his room.

Mysakes! it didna tak lang for me tae drap doon amang the cairpets again and cover mysel' ower. There I lay
rubies, I shook the dust o' Cloomber frae my feet for ever.

pairtin' words tae the cook and the wench wi' reference tae the wrath tae come and the treasure that is richer than
never clapped een either on the ane or the ither. My money was sent oot tae me in an envelope, and havin' said a few
notice."

naething tae complain of wi' ye, but circumstances have arisen which will cause me tae change my arrangements.

Then turnin' tae me--"You won't be wanted after to-day, Israel," he says; "you have been a guid servant, and I ha'
hadna drawn my snickersnee. You shouldna keep siccan an auld savage on your premises."

drive and foond us. Tae my surprise he began tae talk tae the stranger as if he'd kenned him a' his days.

wasna struck deid where he stood.

lang knife frae his pocket and swore wi' the most awfu' oaths that if I d'na stan' back he'd be the death o' me.

aboot, so withoot mair ado I fetched oot my bit stick with the intention o' tryin' it upon the limmer's heid. He seed
me comin' towards him, and readin' my intention frae my look maybe, or frae the stick in my hand, he pu'ed oot a

When I clapped my een on him I thocht that maybe this was ane of the rascals that the maister had been speakin'
aboout, so without mair ado I fetched oot my bit stick with the intention o' tryin' it upon the limmer's heid. He seed
me comin' towards him, and readin' my intention frae my look maybe, or frae the stick in my hand, he pu'ed oot a
lang knife frae his pocket and swore wi' the most awfu' oaths that if I d'na stan' back he'd be the death o' me.

Ma conscience! the words the chiel used was eneugh tae mak' the hair stand straight on your heid. I wonder he
wasna struck deid where he stood.

We were still standin' opposite each ither--he wi' his knife and me wi' the stick--when the general he cam up the
drive and foond us. Tae my surprise he began tae talk tae the stranger as if he'd kenned him a' his days.

"Put your knife in your pocket, Corporal," says he. "Your fears have turned your brain."

"Blood an' wounds!" says the other. "He'd ha' turned my brain tae some purpose wi' that muckle stick o' his if I
hada drawn my snickersnee. You shouldna keep siccan an auld savage on your premises."

The maister he frooned and looked black at him, as though he d'na relish advice comin' frae such a source. Then turnin' tae me--"'You won't be wanted after to-day, Israel," he says; "you have been a guid servant, and I ha'
aething tae complain o' wi' ye, but circumstances have arisen which will cause me tae change my arrangements."

"Vera guid, sir," says I.

"You can go this evening," says he, "and you shall have an extra month's pay tae mak' up t'ye for this short
notice."

Wi' that he went intae the hoose, followed by the man that he ca'ed the corporal, and frae that day tae this I have
never clapped een either on the ane or the ither. My money was sent oot tae me in an envelope, and havin' said a few
paintin' words tae the cook and the wench wi' reference tae the wrath tae come and the treasure that is richer than
rubies, I shook the dust o' Cloomber frae my feet for ever.

Maister Fothergill West says I maunna express an opeenion as tae what cam aboot afterwards, but maun confine
myself tae what I saw myself. Nae doubt he has his reasons for this—and far be it frae me tae hint that they are no’ guid anes—but I maun say this, that what happened didna surprise me. It was just as I expeckit, and so I said tae Maister Donald McNaw.

I’ve tauld ye a’ aboot it noo, and I havena a word tae add or tae withdraw. I’m muckle obleeged tae Maister Mathew Clairk for puttin’ it a’ doon in writin’ for me, and if there’s ony wi wish tae speer anything mair o’ me I’m well kenned and respeckit in Ecclefechan, and Maister McNeil, the factor o’ Wigtown, can aye tell where I am tae be fond.

[1] The old rascal was well paid for his trouble, so he need not have made such a favour of it.—J.F.W.

CHAPTER IX
NARRATIVE OF JOHN EASTERLING, F.R.C.P.EDIN.

Having given the statement of Israel Stakes _in extenso_, I shall append a short memorandum from Dr. Easterling, now practising at Stranraer. It is true that the doctor was only once within the walls of Cloomber during its tenancy by General Heatherstone, but there were some circumstances connected with this visit which made it valuable, especially when considered as a supplement to the experiences which I have just submitted to the reader.

The doctor has found time amid the calls of a busy country practice to jot down his recollections, and I feel that I cannot do better than subjoin them exactly as they stand.

I have very much pleasure in furnishing Mr. Fothergill West with an account of my solitary visit to Cloomber Hall, not only on account of the esteem which I have formed for that gentleman ever since his residence at Branksome, but also because it is my conviction that the facts in the case of General Heatherstone are of such a singular nature that it is of the highest importance that they should be placed before the public in a trustworthy manner.

It was about the beginning of September of last year that I received a note from Mrs. Heatherstone, of Cloomber Hall, desiring me to make a professional call upon her husband, whose health, she said, had been for some time in a very unsatisfactory state.

I had heard something of the Heatherstones and of the strange seclusion in which they lived, so that I was very much pleased at this opportunity of making their closer acquaintance, and lost no time in complying with her request.

I had known the Hall in the old days of Mr. McVittie, the original proprietor, and I was astonished on arriving at the avenue gate to observe the changes which had taken place.

The gate itself, which used to yawn so hospitably upon the road, was now barred and locked, and a high wooden fence, with nails upon the top, encircled the whole grounds. The drive itself was leaf-strewn and uncared-for, and the whole place had a depressing air of neglect and decay.

I had to knock twice before a servant-maid opened the door and showed me through a dingy hall into a small room, where sat an elderly, careworn lady, who introduced herself as Mrs. Heatherstone. With her pale face, her grey hair, her sad, colourless eyes, and her faded silk dress, she was in perfect keeping with her melancholy surroundings.

"You find us in much trouble, doctor," she said, in a quiet, refined voice. "My poor husband has had a great deal to worry him, and his nervous system for a long time has been in a very weak state. We came to this part of the country in the hope that the bracing air and the quiet would have a good effect upon him. Instead of improving, however, he has seemed to grow weaker, and this morning he is in a high fever and a little inclined to be delirious. The children and I were so frightened that we sent for you at once. If you will follow me I will take you to the general's bedroom."

She led the way down a series of corridors to the chamber of the sick man, which was situated in the extreme wing of the building.

It was a carpetless, bleak-looking room, scantily furnished with a small truckle bed, a campaigning chair, and a plain deal table, on which were scattered numerous papers and books. In the centre of this table there stood a large object of irregular outline, which was covered over with a sheet of linen.

All round the walls and in the corners were arranged a very choice and varied collection of arms, principally swords, some of which were of the straight pattern in common use in the British Army, while among the others were scimitars, tulwars, cuchurries, and a score of other specimens of Oriental workmanship. Many of these were richly mounted, with inlaid sheaths and hilts sparkling with precious stones, so that there was a piquant contrast between the simplicity of the apartment and the wealth which glittered on the walls.

I had little time, however, to observe the general's collection, since the general himself lay upon the couch and was evidently in sore need of my services.

He was lying with his head turned half away from us. Breathing heavily, and apparently unconscious of our presence. His bright, staring eyes and the deep, hectic flush upon his cheek showed that his fever was at its height.
I advanced to the bedside, and, stooping over him, I placed my fingers upon his pulse, when immediately he sprang up into the sitting position and struck at me frenziedly with his clenched hands. I have never seen such intensity of fear and horror stamped upon a human face as appeared upon that which was now glaring up at me.

"Bloodhound!" he yelled; "let me go--let me go, I say! Keep your hands off me! Is it not enough that my life has been ruined? When is it all to end? How long am I to endure it?"

"Hush, dear, hush!" said his wife in a soothing voice, passing her cool hand over his heated forehead. "This is Doctor Easterling, from Stranraer. He has not come to harm you, but to do you good."

The general dropped wearily back upon his pillow, and I could see by the changed expression of his face that his delirium had left him, and that he understood what had been said.

I slipped my clinical thermometer into his armpit and counted his pulse rate. It amounted to 120 per minute, and his temperature proved to be 104 degrees. Clearly it was a case of remittent fever, such as occurs in men who have spent a great part of their lives in the tropics.

"There is no danger," I remarked. "With a little quinine and arsenic we shall very soon overcome the attack and restore his health."

"No danger, eh?" he said. "There never is any danger for me. I am as hard to kill as the Wandering Jew. I am quite clear in the head now, Mary; so you may leave me with the doctor."

Mrs. Heatherstone left the room—rather unwillingly, as I thought—and I sat down by the bedside to listen to anything which my patient might have to communicate.

"I want you to examine my liver," he said when the door was closed. "I used to have an abscess there, and Brodie, the staff-surgeon, said that it was ten to one that it would carry me off. I have not felt much of it since I left the East. This is where it used to be, just under the angle of the ribs."

"I can find the place," said I, after making a careful examination; "but I am happy to tell you that the abscess has either been entirely absorbed, or has turned calcareous, as these solitary abscesses will. There is no fear of its doing you any harm now."

He seemed to be by no means overjoyed at the intelligence.

"Things always happen so with me," he said moodily. "Now, if another fellow was feverish and delirious he would surely be in some danger, and yet you will tell me that I am in none. Look at this, now." He bared his chest and showed me a puckered wound over the region of the heart. "That's where the jezail bullet of a Hillman went in. You would think that was in the right spot to settle a man, and yet what does it do but glance upon a rib, and go clean round and out at the back, without so much as penetrating what you medicos call the pleura. Did ever you hear of such a thing?"

"You were certainly born under a lucky star," I observed, with a smile.

"That's a matter of opinion," he answered, shaking his head. "Death has no terrors for me, if it will but come in some familiar form, but I confess that the anticipation of some strange, some preternatural form of death is very terrible and unnerving."

"You mean," said I, rather puzzled at his remark, "that you would prefer a natural death to a death by violence?"

"No, I don't mean that exactly," he answered. "I am too familiar with cold steel and lead to be afraid of either. Do you know anything about odyllic force, doctor?"

"No, I do not," I replied, glancing sharply at him to see if there were any signs of his delirium returning. His expression was intelligent, however, and the feverish flush had faded from his cheeks.

"Ah, you Western scientific men are very much behind the day in some things," he remarked. "In all that is material and conducive to the comfort of the body you are pre-eminent, but in what concerns the subtle forces of Nature and the latent powers of the human spirit your best men are centuries behind the humblest coolies of India. Countless generations of beef-eating, comfort loving ancestors have given our animal instincts the command over our spiritual ones. The body, which should have been a mere tool for the use of the soul, has now become a degrading prison in which it is confined. The Oriental soul and body are not so welded together as ours are, and there is far less wrench when they part in death."

"They do not appear to derive much benefit from this peculiarity in their organisation," I remarked incredulously.

"Merely the benefit of superior knowledge," the general answered. "If you were to go to India, probably the very first thing you would see in the way of amusement would be a native doing what is called the mango trick. Of course you have heard or read of it. The fellow plants a mango seed, and makes passes over it until it sprouts and bears leaves and fruit—all in the space of half-an-hour. It is not really a trick—it is a power. These men know more than your Tyndalls or Huxleys do about Nature's processes, and they can accelerate or retard her workings by subtle means of which we have no conception. These low-caste conjurers—as they are called—are mere vulgar dabblers, but the men who have trod the higher path are as far superior to us in knowledge as we are to the Hottentots or
"You speak as if you were well acquainted with them," I remarked.

"To my cost, I am," he answered. "I have been brought in contact with them in a way in which I trust no other poor chap ever will be. But, really, as regards odyllic force, you ought to know something of it, for it has a great future before it in your profession. You should read Reichcnbach's 'Researches on Magnetism and Vital Force,' and Gregory's 'Letters on Animal Magnetism.' These, supplemented by the twenty-seven Aphorisms of Mesmer, and the works of Dr. Justinus Kerner, of Weinsberg, would enlarge your ideas."

I did not particularly relish having a course of reading prescribed for me on a subject connected with my own profession, so I made no comment, but rose to take my departure. Before doing so I felt his pulse once more, and found that the fever had entirely left him in the sudden, unaccountable fashion which is peculiar to these malarious types of disease.

I turned my face towards him to congratulate him upon his improvement, and stretched out my hand at the same time to pick my gloves from the table, with the result that I raised not only my own property, but also the linen cloth which was arranged over some object in the centre.

I might not have noticed what I had done had I not seen an angry look upon the invalid's face and heard him utter an impatient exclamation. I at once turned, and replaced the cloth so promptly that I should have been unable to say what was underneath it, beyond having a general impression that it looked like a bride-cake.

"All right, doctor," the general said good-humouredly, perceiving how entirely accidental the incident was. "There is no reason why you should not see it," and stretching out his hand, he pulled away the linen covering for the second time.

I then perceived that what I had taken for a bride-cake was really an admirably executed model of a lofty range of mountains, whose snow-clad peaks were not unlike the familiar sugar pinnacles and minarets.

"These are the Himalayas, or at least the Surinam branch of them," he remarked, "showing the principal passes between India and Afghanistan. It is an excellent model. This ground has a special interest for me, because it is the scene of my first campaign. There is the pass opposite Kalabagh and the Thul valley, where I was engaged during the summer of 1841 in protecting the convoys and keeping the Afridis in order. It wasn't a sinecure, I promise you."

"And this," said I, indicating a blood-red spot which had been marked on one side of the pass which he had pointed out--"this is the scene of some fight in which you were engaged."

"Yes, we had a skirmish there," he answered, leaning forward and looking at the red mark. "We were attacked by--"

At this moment he fell back upon his pillow as if he had been shot, while the same look of horror came over his face which I had observed when I first entered the room. At the same instant there came, apparently from the air immediately above his bed, a sharp, ringing, tinkling sound, which I can only compare with the noise made by a bicycle alarm, though it differed from this in having a distinctly throbbing character. I have never, before or since, heard any sound which could be confounded with it.

I stared round in astonishment, wondering where it could have come from, but without perceiving anything to which it could be ascribed.

"It's all right, doctor," the general said with a ghastly smile. "It's only my private gong. Perhaps you had better step downstairs and write my prescription in the dining-room."

He was evidently anxious to get rid of me, so I was forced to take my departure, though I would gladly have stayed a little longer, in the hope of learning something as to the origin of the mysterious sound.

I drove away from the house with the full determination of calling again upon my interesting patient, and endeavouring to elicit some further particulars as to his past life and his present circumstances. I was destined, however, to be disappointed, for I received that very evening a note from the general himself, enclosing a handsome fee for my single visit, and informing me that my treatment had done him so much good that he considered himself to be convalescent, and would not trouble me to see him again.

This was the last and only communication which I ever received from the tenant of Cloomber.

I have been asked frequently by neighbours and others who were interested in the matter whether he gave me the impression of insanity. To this I must unhesitatingly answer in the negative. On the contrary, his remarks gave me the idea of a man who had both read and thought deeply.

I observed, however, during our single interview, that his reflexes were feeble, his arcus senilis well marked, and his arteries atheromatous--all signs that his constitution was in an unsatisfactory condition, and that a sudden crisis might be apprehended.

CHAPTER X
OF THE LETTER WHICH CAME FROM THE HALL
Having thrown this side-light upon my narrative, I can now resume the statement of my own personal
experiences. These I had brought down, as the reader will doubtless remember, to the date of the arrival of the savage-looking wanderer who called himself Corporal Rufus Smith. This incident occurred about the beginning of the month of October, and I find upon a comparison of dates that Dr. Easterling's visit to Cloomber preceded it by three weeks or more.

During all this time I was in sore distress of mind, for I had never seen anything either of Gabriel or of her brother since the interview in which the general had discovered the communication which was kept up between us. I had no doubt that some sort of restraint had been placed upon them; and the thought that we had brought trouble on their heads was a bitter one both to my sister and myself.

Our anxiety, however, was considerably mitigated by the receipt, a couple of days after my last talk with the general, of a note from Mordaunt Heatherstone. This was brought us by a little, ragged urchin, the son of one of the fishermen, who informed us that it had been handed to him at the avenue gate by an old woman—who, I expect, must have been the Cloomber cook.

"MY DEAREST FRIENDS," it ran, "Gabriel and I have grieved to think how concerned you must be at having neither heard from nor seen us. The fact is that we are compelled to remain in the house. And this compulsion is not physical but moral.

"Our poor father, who gets more and more nervous every day, has entreated us to promise him that we will not go out until after the fifth of October, and to allay his fears we have given him the desired pledge. On the other hand, he has promised us that after the fifth—that is, in less than a week—we shall be as free as air to come or go as we please, so we have something to look forward to.

"Gabriel says that she has explained to you that the governor is always a changed man after this particular date, on which his fears reach a crisis. He apparently has more reason than usual this year to anticipate that trouble is brewing for this unfortunate family, for I have never known him to take so many elaborate precautions or appear so thoroughly unnerved. Who would ever think, to see his bent form and his shaking hands, that he is the same man who used some few short years ago to shoot tigers on foot among the jungles of the Terai, and would laugh at the more timid sportsmen who sought the protection of their elephant's howdah?

"You know that he has the Victoria Cross, which he won in the streets of Delhi, and yet here he is shivering with terror and starting at every noise, in the most peaceful corner of the world. Oh, the pity of it. West! Remember what I have already told you— that it is no fanciful or imaginary peril, but one which we have every reason to suppose to be most real. It is, however, of such a nature that it can neither be averted nor can it profitably be expressed in words. If all goes well, you will see us at Branksome on the sixth.

"With our fondest love to both of you, I am ever, my dear friends, your attached 

"MORDAUNT."

This letter was a great relief to us as letting us know that the brother and sister were under no physical restraint, but our powerlessness and inability even to comprehend what the danger was which threatened those whom we had come to love better than ourselves was little short of maddening.

Fifty times a day we asked ourselves and asked each other from what possible quarter this peril was to be expected, but the more we thought of it the more hopeless did any solution appear.

In vain we combined our experiences and pieced together every word which had fallen from the lips of any inmate of Cloomber which might be supposed to bear directly or indirectly upon the subject.

At last, weary with fruitless speculation, we were fain to try to drive the matter from our thoughts, consoling ourselves with the reflection that in a few more days all restrictions would be removed, and we should be able to learn from our friends' own lips.

Those few intervening days, however, would, we feared, be dreary, long ones. And so they would have been, had it not been for a new and most unexpected incident, which diverted our minds from our own troubles and gave them something fresh with which to occupy themselves.

CHAPTER XI
OF THE CASTING AWAY OF THE BARQUE "BELINDA"

The third of October had broken auspiciously with a bright sun and a cloudless sky. There had in the morning been a slight breeze, and a few little white wreaths of vapour drifted here and there like the scattered feathers of some gigantic bird, but, as the day wore on, such wind as there was fell completely away, and the air became close and stagnant.

The sun blazed down with a degree of heat which was remarkable so late in the season, and a shimmering haze lay upon the upland moors and concealed the Irish mountains on the other side of the Channel.

The sea itself rose and fell in a long, heavy, oily roll, sweeping slowly landward, and breaking sullenly with a dull, monotonous booming upon the rock-girt shore. To the inexperienced all seemed calm and peaceful, but to those who are accustomed to read Nature's warnings there was a dark menace in air and sky and sea.
My sister and I walked out in the afternoon, sauntering slowly along the margin of the great, sandy spit which shoots out into the Irish Sea, flanking upon one side the magnificent Bay of Luce, and on the other the more obscure inlet of Kirkmaiden, on the shores of which the Branksome property is situated.

It was too sultry to go far, so we soon seated ourselves upon one of the sandy hillocks, overgrown with faded grass-tufts, which extend along the coast-line, and which form Nature's dykes against the encroachments of the ocean.

Our rest was soon interrupted by the scrunching of heavy boots upon the shingle, and Jamieson, the old man-o'-war's man whom I have already had occasion to mention, made his appearance, with the flat, circular net upon his back which he used for shrimp-catching. He came towards us upon seeing us, and said in his rough, kindly way that he hoped we would not take it amiss if he sent us up a dish of shrimps for our tea at Branksome.

"I aye make a good catch before a storm," he remarked.

"You think there is going to be a storm, then?" I asked.

"Why, even a marine could see that," he answered, sticking a great wedge of tobacco into his cheek. "The moors over near Cloomber are just white wi' gulls and kittiwakes. What d'ye think they come ashore for except to escape having all the feathers blown out o' them? I mind a day like this when I was wi' Charlie Napier off Cronstadt. It well-nigh blew us under the guns of the forts, for all our engines and propellers."

"Have you ever known a wreck in these parts?" I asked.

"Lord love ye, sir, it's a famous place for wrecks. Why, in that very bay down there two o' King Philip's first-rates foundered wi' all hands in the days o' the Spanish war. If that sheet o' water and the Bay o' Luce round the corner could tell their ain tale they'd have a gey lot to speak of. When the Judgment Day comes round that water will be just bubbling wi' the number o' folks that will be coming up frae the bottom."

"I trust that there will be no wrecks while we are here," said Esther earnestly.

The old man shook his grizzled head and looked distrustfully at the hazy horizon.

"If it blows from the west," he said, "it's a famous place for wrecks. Why, in that very bay down there two o' King Philip's first-rates foundered wi' all hands in the days o' the Spanish war. If that sheet o' water and the Bay o' Luce round the corner could tell their ain tale they'd have a gey lot to speak of. When the Judgment Day comes round that water will be just bubbling wi' the number o' folks that will be coming up frae the bottom."

"She seems to be absolutely motionless," I remarked, looking at the vessel in question, whose black hull and gleaming sails rose and fell slowly with the throbbing of the giant pulse beneath her. "Perhaps, Jamieson, we are wrong, and there will be no storm after all."

The old sailor chuckled to himself with an air of superior knowledge, and shuffled away with his shrimp-net, while my sister and I walked slowly homewards through the hot and stagnant air.

I went up to my father's study to see if the old gentleman had any instructions as to the estate, for he had become engrossed in a new work upon Oriental literature, and the practical management of the property had in consequence devolved entirely upon me.

I found him seated at his square library table, which was so heaped with books and papers that nothing of him was visible from the door except a tuft of white hair.

"My dear son," he said to me as I entered, "it is a great grief to me that you are not more conversant with Sanscrit. When I was your age, I could converse not only in that noble language, but also in the Tamulic, Lohitic, Gangelic, Taic, and Malaic dialects, which are all offshoots from the Turanian branch."

"I regret extremely, sir," I answered, "that I have not inherited your wonderful talents as a polyglot."

"I have set myself a task," he explained, "which, if it could only be continued from generation to generation in our own family until it was completed, would make the name of West immortal. This is nothing less than to publish an English translation of the Buddhist Djarmas, with a preface giving an idea of the position of Brahminism before the coming of Sakyamuni. With diligence it is possible that I might be able myself to complete part of the preface before I die."

"And pray, sir," I asked, "how long would the whole work be when it was finished?"

"The abridged edition in the Imperial Library of Pekin," said my father, rubbing his hands together, "consists of 325 volumes of an average weight of five pounds. Then tile preface, which must embrace some account of the Rigveda, the Sama-veda, the Yagur-veda, and the Atharva-veda, with the Brahmanas, could hardly be completed in less than ten volumes. Now, if we apportion one volume to each year, there is every prospect of the family coming to an end of its task about the date 2250, the twelfth generation completing the work, while the thirteenth might occupy itself upon the index."

"And how are our descendants to live, sir," I asked, with a smile, "during the progress of this great undertaking?"

"That's the worst of you, Jack," my father cried petulantly. "There is nothing practical about you. Instead of confining your attention to the working out of my noble scheme, you begin raising all sorts of absurd objections. It is a mere matter of detail how our descendants live, so long as they stick to the Djarmas. Now, I want you to go up
to the bothy of Fergus McDonald and see about the thatch, and Willie Fullerton has written to say that his milk-cow is bad. You might took in upon your way and ask after it."

I started off upon my errands, but before doing so I took a look at the barometer upon the wall. The mercury had sunk to the phenomenal point of twenty-eight inches. Clearly the old sailor had not been wrong in his interpretation of Nature's signs.

As I returned over the moors in the evening, the wind was blowing in short, angry puffs, and the western horizon was heaped with sombre clouds which stretched their long, ragged tentacles right up to the zenith.

Against their dark background one or two livid, sulphur-coloured splotches showed up malignant and menacing, while the surface of the sea had changed from the appearance of burnished quicksilver to that of ground glass. A low, moaning sound rose up from the ocean as if it knew that trouble was in store for it.

Far out in the Channel I saw a single panting, eager steam vessel making its way to Belfast Lough, and the large barque which I had observed in the morning still beating about in the offing, endeavouring to pass to the northward.

At nine o'clock a sharp breeze was blowing, at ten it had freshened into a gale, and before midnight the most furious storm was raging which I can remember upon that weather-beaten coast.

I sat for some time in our small, oak-panelled sitting-room listening to the screeching and howling of the blast and to the rattle of the gravel and pebbles as they pattered against the window. Nature's grim orchestra was playing its world-old piece with a compass which ranged from the deep diapason of the thundering surge to the thin shriek of the scattered shingle and the keen piping of frightened sea birds.

Once for an instant I opened the lattice window, but a gust of wind and rain came blustering through, bearing with it a great sheet of seaweed, which flapped down upon the table. It was all I could do to close it again with a thrust of my shoulder in the face of the blast.

My sister and father had retired to their rooms, but my thoughts were too active for sleep, so I continued to sit and to smoke by the smouldering fire.

What was going on in the Hall now, I wondered? What did Gabriel think of the storm, and how did it affect the old man who wandered about in the night? Did he welcome these dread forces of Nature as being of the same order of things as his own tumultuous thoughts?

It was only two days now from the date which I had been assured was to mark a crisis in his fortunes. Would he regard this sudden tempest as being in any way connected with the mysterious fate which threatened him?

Over all these things and many more I pondered as I sat by the glowing embers until they died gradually out, and the chill night air warned me that it was time to retire.

I may have slept a couple of hours when I was awakened by some one tugging furiously at my shoulder. Sitting up in bed, I saw by the dim light that my father was standing half-clad by my bedside, and that it was his grasp which I felt on my night-shirt.

"Get up, Jack, get up!" he was crying excitedly. "There's a great ship ashore in the bay, and the poor folk will all be drowned. Come down, my boy, and let us see what we can do."

The good old man seemed to be nearly beside himself with excitement and impatience. I sprang from my bed, and was huddling on a few clothes, when a dull, booming sound made itself heard above the howling of the wind and the thunder of the breakers.

"There it is again!" cried my father. "It is their signal gun, poor creatures! Jamieson and the fishermen are below. Put your oil-skin coat on and the Glengarry hat. Come, come, every second may mean a human life!"

We hurried down together and made our way to the beach, accompanied by a dozen or so of the inhabitants of Branksome.

The gale had increased rather than moderated, and the wind screamed all round us with an infernal clamour. So great was its force that we had to put our shoulders against it, and bore our way through it, while the sand and gravel tingly up against our faces.

There was just light enough to make out the scudding clouds and the white gleam of the breakers, but beyond that all was absolute darkness.

We stood ankle deep in the shingle and seaweed, shading our eyes with our hands and peering out into the inky obscurity.

It seemed to me as I listened that I could hear human voices loud in intreaty and terror, but amid the wild turmoil of Nature it was difficult to distinguish one sound from another.

Suddenly, however, a light glimmered in the heart of the tempest, and next instant the beach and sea and wide, tossing bay were brilliantly illuminated by the wild glare of a signal light.

The ship lay on her beam-ends right in the centre of the terrible Hansel reef, hauled over to such an angle that I could see all the planking of her deck. I recognised her at once as being the same three-masted barque which I had observed in the Channel in the morning, and the Union Jack which was nailed upside down to the jagged slump of
her mizzen proclaimed her nationality.

Every spar and rope and writhing piece of cordage showed up hard and clear under the vivid light which spluttered and flickered from the highest portion of the forecastle. Beyond the doomed ship, out of the great darkness came the long, rolling lines of big waves, never ending, never tiring, with a petulant tuft of foam here and there upon their crests. Each as it reached the broad circle of unnatural light appeared to gather strength and volume and to hurry on more impetuously until with a roar and a jarring crash it sprang upon its victim.

Clinging to the weather shrouds we could distinctly see ten or a dozen frightened seamen who, when the light revealed our presence, turned their white faces towards us and waved their hands imploringly. The poor wretches had evidently taken fresh hope from our presence, though it was clear that their own boats had either been washed away or so damaged as to render them useless.

The sailors who clung to the rigging were not, however, the only unfortunates on board. On the breaking poop there stood three men who appeared to be both of a different race and nature from the cowering wretches who implored our assistance.

Leaning upon the shattered taff-rail they seemed to be conversing together as quietly and unconcernedly as though they were unconscious of the deadly peril which surrounded them.

As the signal light flickered over them, we could see from the shore that these immutable strangers wore red fezes, and that their faces were of a swarthy, large-featured type, which proclaimed an Eastern origin.

There was little time, however, for us to take note of such details. The ship was breaking rapidly, and some effort must be made to save the poor, sodden group of humanity who implored our assistance.

The nearest lifeboat was in the Bay of Luce, ten long miles away, but here was our own broad, roomy craft upon the shingle, and plenty of brave fisher lads to form a crew. Six of us sprang to the oars, the others pushed us off, and we fought our way through the swirling, raging waters, staggering and recoiling before the great, sweeping billows, but still steadily decreasing the distance between the barque and ourselves.

It seemed, however, that our efforts were fated to be in vain.

As we mounted upon a surge I saw a giant wave, topping all the others, and coming after them like a driver following a flock, sweep down upon the vessel, curling its great, green arch over the breaking deck.

With a rending, riving sound the ship split in two where the terrible, serrated back of the Hansel reef was sawing into her keel. The after-part, with the broken mizzen and the three Orientals, sank backwards into deep water and vanished, while the fore-half oscillated helplessly about, retaining its precarious balance upon the rocks.

A wail of fear went up from the wreck and was echoed from the beach, but by the blessing of Providence she kept afloat until we made our way under her bowsprit and rescued every man of the crew.

We had not got half-way upon our return, however, when another great wave swept the shattered forecastle off the reef, and, extinguishing the signal light, hid the wild denouement from our view.

Our friends upon the shore were loud in congratulation and praise, nor were they backward in welcoming and comforting the castaways. They were thirteen in all, as cold and cowed a set of mortals as ever slipped through Death's fingers, save, indeed, their captain, who was a hardy, robust man, and who made light of the affair.

Some were taken off to this cottage and some to that, but the greater part came back to Branksome with us, where we gave them such dry clothes as we could lay our hands on, and served them with beef and beer by the kitchen fire. The captain, whose name was Meadows, compressed his bulky form into a suit of my own, and came down to the parlour, where he mixed himself some grog and gave my father and myself an account of the disaster.

"If it hadn't been for you, sir, and your brave fellows," he said, smiling across at me, "we should be ten fathoms deep by this time. As to the _Belinda_, she was a leaky old tub and well insured, so neither the owners nor I are likely to break our hearts over her."

"I am afraid," said my father sadly, "that we shall never see your three passengers again. I have left men upon the beach in case they should be washed up, but I fear it is hopeless. I saw them go down when the vessel split, and no man could have lived for a moment among that terrible surge."

"Who were they?" I asked. "I could not have believed that it was possible for men to appear so unconcerned in the face of such imminent peril."

"As to who they are or were," the captain answered, puffing thoughtfully at his pipe, "that is by no means easy to say. Our last port was Kurrachee, in the north of India, and there we took them aboard as passengers for Glasgow. Ram Singh was the name of the younger, and it is only with him that I have come in contact, but they all appeared to be quiet, inoffensive gentlemen. I never inquired their business, but I should judge that they were Parsee merchants from Hyderabad whose trade took them to Europe. I could never see why the crew should fear them, and the mate, too, he should have had more sense."

"Fear them I!" I ejaculated in surprise.

"Yes, they had some preposterous idea that they were dangerous shipmates. I have no doubt if you were to go
down into the kitchen now you would find that they are all agreed that our passengers were the cause of the whole disaster."

As the captain was speaking the parlour door opened and the mate of the barque, a tall, red-bearded sailor, stepped in. He had obtained a complete rig-out from some kind-hearted fisherman, and looked in his comfortable jersey and well-greased seaboots a very favourable specimen of a shipwrecked mariner.

With a few words of grateful acknowledgment of our hospitality, he drew a chair up to the fire and warmed his great, brown hands before the blaze.

"What d'ye think now, Captain Meadows?" he asked presently, glancing up at his superior officer. "Didn't I warn you what would be the upshot of having those niggers on board the _Belinda_?"

The captain leant back in his chair and laughed heartily.

"Didn't I tell you?" he cried, appealing to us. "Didn't I tell you?"

"It might have been no laughing matter for us," the other remarked petulantly. "I have lost a good sea-kit and nearly my life into the bargain."

"Do I understand you to say," said I, "that you attribute your misfortunes to your ill-fated passengers?"

The mate opened his eyes at the adjective.

"Why ill-fated, sir?" he asked.

"Because they are most certainly drowned," I answered.

He sniffed incredulously and went on warming his hands.

"Men of that kind are never drowned," he said, after a pause. "Their father, the devil, looks after them. Did you see them standing on the poop and rolling cigarettes at the time when the mizzen was carried away and the quarter-boats stove? That was enough for me. I'm not surprised at you landsmen not being able to take it in, but the captain here, who's been sailing since he was the height of the binnacle, ought to know by this time that a cat and a priest are the worst cargo you can carry. If a Christian priest is bad, I guess an idolatrous pagan one is fifty times worse. I stand by the old religion, and be d--d to it!"

My father and I could not help laughing at the rough sailor's very unorthodox way of proclaiming his orthodoxy. The mate, however, was evidently in deadly earnest, and proceeded to state his case, marking off the different points upon the rough, red fingers of his left hand.

"It was at Kurrachee, directly after they come that I warned ye," he said reproachfully to the captain. "There was three Buddhist Lascars in my watch, and what did they do when them chaps come aboard? Why, they down on their stomachs and rubbed their noses on the deck—that's what they did. They wouldn't ha' done as much for an admiral of the R'yal Navy. They know who's who—these niggers do; and I smelt mischief the moment I saw them on their faces. I asked them afterwards in your presence, Captain, why they had done it, and they answered that the passengers were holy men. You heard 'em yourself."

"Well, there's no harm in that, Hawkins," said Captain Meadows.

"I don't know that," the mate said doubtfully. "The holiest Christian is the one that's nearest God, but the holiest nigger is, in my opinion, the one that's nearest the devil. Then you saw yourself, Captain Meadows, how they went on during the voyage, reading books that was writ on wood instead o' paper, and sitting up right through the night to jabber together on the quarter-deck. What did they want to have a chart of their own for and to mark the course of the vessel every day?"

"They didn't," said the captain.

"Indeed they did, and if I did not tell you sooner it was because you were always ready to laugh at what I said about them. They had instruments o' their own—when they used them I can't say—but every day at noon they worked out the latitude and longitude, and marked out the vessel's position on a chart that was pinned on their cabin table. I saw them at it, and so did the steward from his pantry."

"Well, I don't see what you prove from that," the captain remarked, "though I confess it is a strange thing."

"I'll tell you another strange thing," said the mate impressively. "Do you know the name of this bay in which we are cast away?"

"I have learnt from our kind friends here that we are upon the Wigtownshire coast," the captain answered, "but I have not heard the name of the bay."

"The mate leant forward with a grave face.

"It is the Bay of Kirkmaiden," he said.

If he expected to astonish Captain Meadows he certainly succeeded, for that gentleman was fairly bereft of speech for a minute or more.

"This is really marvellous," he said, after a time, turning to us. "These passengers of ours cross-questioned us early in the voyage as to the existence of a bay of that name. Hawkins here and I denied all knowledge of one, for on the chart it is included in the Bay of Luce. That we should eventually be blown into it and destroyed is an
extraordinary coincidence."

"Too extraordinary to be a coincidence," growled the mate. "I saw them during the calm yesterday morning, pointing to the land over our starboard quarter. They knew well enough that that was the port they were making for."

"What do you make of it all, then, Hawkins?" asked the captain, with a troubled face. "What is your own theory on the matter?"

"Why, in my opinion," the mate answered, "them three swabs have no more difficulty in raising a gale o' wind than I should have in swallowing this here grog. They had reasons o' their own for coming to this God-forsaken--saving your presence, sirs--this God-forsaken bay, and they took a short cut to it by arranging to be blown ashore there. That's my idea o' the matter, though what three Buddhist priests could find to do in the Bay of Kirkmaiden is clean past my comprehension."

My father raised his eyebrows to indicate the doubt which his hospitality forbade him from putting into words.

"I think, gentlemen," he said, "that you are both sorely in need of rest after your perilous adventures. If you will follow me I shall lead you to your rooms."

He conducted them with old-fashioned ceremony to the laird's best spare bedroom, and then, returning to me in the parlour, proposed that we should go down together to the beach and learn whether anything fresh had occurred.

The first pale light of dawn was just appearing in the east when we made our way for the second time to the scene of the shipwreck. The gale had blown itself out, but the sea was still very high, and all inside the breakers was a seething, gleaming line of foam, as though the fierce old ocean were gnashing its white fangs at the victims who had escaped from its clutches.

All along the beach fishermen and crofters were hard at work hauling up spars and barrels as fast as they were tossed ashore. None of them had seen any bodies, however, and they explained to us that only such things as could float had any chance of coming ashore, for the undercurrent was so strong that whatever was beneath the surface must infallibly be swept out to sea.

As to the possibility of the unfortunate passengers having been able to reach the shore, these practical men would not hear of it for a moment, and showed us conclusively that if they had not been drowned they must have been dashed to pieces upon the rocks.

"We did all that could be done," my father said sadly, as we returned home. "I am afraid that the poor mate has had his reason affected by the suddenness of the disaster. Did you hear what he said about Buddhist priests raising a gale?"

"Yes, I heard him," said I. "It was very painful to listen to him," said my father. "I wonder if he would object to my putting a small mustard plaster under each of his ears. It would relieve any congestion of the brain. Or perhaps it would be best to wake him up and give him two antibilious pills. What do you think, Jack?"

"I think," said I, with a yawn, "that you had best let him sleep, and go to sleep yourself. You can physic him in the morning if he needs it."

So saying I stumbled off to my bedroom, and throwing myself upon the couch was soon in a dreamless slumber.

CHAPTER XII

OF THE THREE FOREIGN MEN UPON THE COAST

It must have been eleven or twelve o'clock before I awoke, and it seemed to me in the flood of golden light which streamed into my chamber that the wild, tumultuous episodes of the night before must have formed part of some fantastic dream.

It was hard to believe that the gentle breeze which whispered so softly among the ivy-leaves around my window was caused by the same element which had shaken the very house a few short hours before. It was as if Nature had repented of her momentary passion and was endeavouring to make amends to an injured world by its warmth and its sunshine. A chorus of birds in the garden below filled the whole air with their wonder and congratulations.

Down in the hall I found a number of the shipwrecked sailors, looking all the better for their night's repose, who set up a buzz of pleasure and gratitude upon seeing me.

Arrangements had been made to drive them to Wigtown, whence they were to proceed to Glasgow by the evening train, and my father had given orders that each should be served with a packet of sandwiches and hard-boiled eggs to sustain him on the way.

Captain Meadows thanked us warmly in the name of his employers for the manner in which we had treated them, and he called for three cheers from his crew, which were very heartily given. He and the mate walked down with us after we had broken our fast to have a last look at the scene of the disaster.

The great bosom of the bay was still heaving convulsively, and its waves were breaking into sobs against the rocks, but there was none of that wild turmoil which we had seen in the early morning. The long, emerald ridges, with their little, white crests of foam, rolled slowly and majestically in, to break with a regular rhythm--the panting of a tired monster.
A cable length from the shore we could see the mainmast of the barque floating upon the waves, disappearing at

times in the trough of the sea, and then shooting up towards Heaven like a giant javelin, shining and dripping as the

rollers tossed it about. Other smaller pieces of wreckage dotted the waters, while innumerable spars and packages

were littered over the sands. These were being drawn up and collected in a place of safety by gangs of peasants. I

noticed that a couple of broad-winged gulls were hovering and skimming over the scene of the shipwreck, as though

many strange things were visible to them beneath the waves. At times we could hear their raucous voices as they

cried to one another of what they saw.

"She was a leaky old craft," said the captain, looking sadly out to sea, "but there's always a feeling of sorrow

when we see the last of a ship we have sailed in. Well, well, she would have been broken up in any case, and sold

for firewood."

"It looks a peaceful scene," I remarked. "Who would imagine that three men lost their lives last night in those

very waters?"

"Poor fellows," said the captain, with feeling, "Should they be cast up after our departure, I am sure, Mr. West,

that you will have them decently interred."

I was about to make some reply when the mate burst into a loud guffaw, slapping his thigh and choking with

merriment.

"If you want to bury them," he said, "you had best look sharp, or they may clear out of the country. You

remember what I said last night? Just look at the top of that 'ere hillock, and tell me whether I was in the right or

not?"

There was a high sand dune some little distance along the coast, and upon the summit of this the figure was

standing which had attracted the mate's attention. The captain threw up his hands in astonishment as his eyes rested

upon it.

"By the eternal," he shouted, "it's Ram Singh himself! Let us overhaul him!"

Taking to his heels in his excitement he raced along the beach, followed by the mate and myself, as well as by

one or two of the fishermen who had observed the presence of the stranger.

The latter, perceiving our approach, came down from his post of observation and walked quietly in our direction,

with his head sunk upon his breast, like one who is absorbed in thought.

I could not help contrasting our hurried and tumultuous advance with the gravity and dignity of this lonely

Oriental, nor was the matter mended when he raised a pair of steady, thoughtful dark eyes and inclined his head in a

graceful, sweeping salutation. It seemed to me that we were like a pack of schoolboys in the presence of a master.

The stranger's broad, unruffled brow, his clear, searching gaze, firm-set yet sensitive mouth, and clean-cut,

resolute expression, all combined to form the most imposing and noble presence which I had ever known. I could

not have imagined that such imperturbable calm and at the same time such a consciousness of latent strength could

have been expressed by any human face.

He was dressed in a brown velveteen coat, loose, dark trousers, with a shirt that was cut low in the collar, so as

to show the muscular, brown neck, and he still wore the red fez which I had noticed the night before.

I observed with a feeling of surprise, as we approached him, that none of these garments showed the slightest

indication of the rough treatment and wetting which they must have received during their wearer's submersion and

struggle to the shore.

"So you are none the worse for your ducking," he said in a pleasant, musical voice, looking from the captain to

the mate. "I hope that your poor sailors have found pleasant quarters."

"We are all safe," the captain answered. "But we had given you up for lost--you and your two friends. Indeed, I

was just making arrangements for your burial with Mr. West here."

The stranger looked at me and smiled.

"We won't give Mr. West that trouble for a little time yet," he remarked; "my friends and I came ashore all safe,

and we have found shelter in a hut a mile or so along the coast. It is lonely down there, but we have everything

which we can desire."

"We start for Glasgow this afternoon," said the captain; "I shall be very glad if you will come with us. If you

have not been in England before you may find it awkward travelling alone."

"We are very much indebted to you for your thoughtfulness," Ram Singh answered; "but we will not take

advantage of your kind offer. Since Nature has driven us here we intend to have a look about us before we leave."

"As you like," the captain said, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't think you are likely to find very much to interest

you in this hole of a place."

"Very possibly not," Ram Singh answered with an amused smile. "You remember Milton's lines:

'The mind is its own place, and in itself Can make a hell of Heaven, a heaven of Hell.'

I dare say we can spend a few days here comfortably enough. Indeed, I think you must be wrong in considering
"My father is, indeed, a well-known Sanscrit scholar," I answered in astonishment. "The presence of such a man," observed the stranger slowly, "changes a wilderness into a city. One great mind is surely a higher indication of civilisation than are incalculable leagues of bricks and mortar.

"Your father is hardly so profound as Sir William Jones, or so universal as the Baron Von Hammer-Purgstall, but he combines many of the virtues of each. You may tell him, however, from me that he is mistaken in the analogy which he has traced between the Samoyede and Tamulic word roots."

"If you have determined to honour our neighbourhood by a short stay," said I, "you will offend my father very much if you do not put up with him. He represents the laird here, and it is the laird's privilege, according to our Scottish custom, to entertain all strangers of repute who visit this parish."

My sense of hospitality prompted me to deliver this invitation, though I could feel the mate twitching at my sleeves as if to warn me that the offer was, for some reason, an objectionable one. His fears were, however, unnecessary, for the stranger signified by a shake of the head that it was impossible for him to accept it.

"My friends and I are very much obliged to you," he said, "but we have our own reasons for remaining where we are. The hut which we occupy is deserted and partly ruined, but we Easterns have trained ourselves to do without most of those things which are looked upon as necessaries in Europe, believing firmly in that wise axiom that a man is rich, not in proportion to what he has, but in proportion to what he can dispense with. A good fisherman supplies us with bread and with herbs, we have clean, dry straw for our couches; what could man wish for more?"

"But you must feel the cold at night, coming straight from the tropics," remarked the captain. "Perhaps our bodies are cold sometimes. We have not noticed it. We have all three spent many years in the Upper Himalayas on the border of the region of eternal snow, so we are not very sensitive to inconveniences of the sort."

"At least," said I, "you must allow me to send you over some fish and some meat from our larder."

"We are not Christians," he answered, "but Buddhists of the higher school. We do not recognise that man has a moral right to slay an ox or a fish for the gross use of his body. He has not put life into them, and has assuredly no mandate from the Almighty to take life from them save under most pressing need. We could not, therefore, use your gift if you were to send it."

"But, sir," I remonstrated, "if in this changeable and inhospitable climate you refuse all nourishing food your vitality will fail you--you will die."

"We shall die then," he answered, with an amused smile. "And now, Captain Meadows, I must bid you adieu, thanking you for your kindness during the voyage, and you, too, good-bye--you will command a ship of your own before the year is out. I trust, Mr. West, that I may see you again before I leave this part of the country. Farewell!"

He raised his red fez, inclined his noble head with the stately grace which characterised all his actions, and strode away in the direction from which he had come.

"Let me congratulate you, Mr. Hawkins," said the captain to the mate as we walked homwards. "You are to command your own ship within the year."

"No such luck!" the mate answered, with a pleased smile upon his mahogany face, "still, there's no saying how things may come out. What d'ye think of him, Mr. West?"

"Why," said I, "I am very much interested in him. What a magnificent head and bearing he has for a young man. I suppose he cannot be more than thirty."

"Forty," said the mate.

"Sixty, if he is a day," remarked Captain Meadows. "Why, I have heard him talk quite familiarly of the first Afghan war. He was a man then, and that is close on forty years ago."

"Wonderful!" I ejaculated. "His skin is as smooth and his eyes are as clear as mine are. He is the superior priest of the three, no doubt."

"The inferior," said the captain confidently. "That is why he does all the talking for them. Their minds are too elevated to descend to mere worldly chatter."

"They are the strangest pieces of flotsam and jetsam that were ever thrown upon this coast," I remarked. "My father will be mightily interested in them."

"Indeed, I think the less you have to do with them the better for you," said the mate. "If I do command my own ship I'll promise you that I never carry live stock of that sort on board of her. But here we are all aboard and the anchor tripped, so we must bid you good-bye."

The wagonette had just finished loading up when we arrived, and the chief places, on either side of the driver, had been reserved for my two companions, who speedily sprang into them. With a chorus of cheers the good fellows whirled away down the road, while my father, Esther, and I stood upon the lawn and waved our hands to them until they disappeared behind the Cloomber woods, _en_route_ for the Wigtown railway station. Barque and crew had
both vanished now from our little world, the only relic of either being the heaps of _debris_ upon the beach, which were to lie there until the arrival of an agent from Lloyd's.

CHAPTER XIII

IN WHICH I SEE THAT WHICH HAS BEEN SEEN BY FEW

At dinner that evening I mentioned to my father the episode of the three Buddhist priests, and found, as I had expected, that he was very much interested by my account of them.

When, however, he heard of the high manner in which Ram Singh had spoken of him, and the distinguished position which he had assigned him among philologists, he became so excited that it was all we could do to prevent him from setting off then and there to make his acquaintance.

Esther and I were relieved and glad when we at last succeeded in abstracting his boots and manoeuvring him to his bedroom, for the exciting events of the last twenty-four hours had been too much for his weak frame and delicate nerves.

I was sitting at the open porch in the gloaming, turning over in my mind the unexpected events which had occurred so rapidly--the gale, the wreck, the rescue, and the strange character of the castaways--when my sister came quietly over to me and put her hand in mine.

"Don't you think, Jack," she said, in her low, sweet voice, "that we are forgetting our friends over at Cloomber? Hasn't all this excitement driven their fears and their danger out of our heads?"

"Out of our heads, but never out of our hearts," said I, laughing. "However, you are right, little one, for our attention has certainly been distracted from them. I shall walk up in the morning and see if I can see anything of them. By the way, to-morrow is the fateful 5th of October--one more day, and all will be well with us."

"Or ill," said my sister gloomily.

"Why, what a little croaker you are, to be sure!" I cried. "What in the world is coming over you?"

"I feel nervous and low-spirited," she answered, drawing closer to my side and shivering. "I feel as if some great peril were hanging over the heads of those we love. Why should these strange men wish to stay upon the coast?"

"What, the Buddhists?" I said lightly. "Oh, these fellows have continual feast-days and religious rites of all sorts. They have some very good reason for staying, you may be sure."

"Don't you think," said Esther, in an awe-struck whisper, "that it is very strange that these priests should arrive here all the way from India just at the present moment? Have you not gathered from all you have heard that the general's fears are in some way connected with India and the Indians?"

The remark made me thoughtful.

"Why, now that you mention it," I answered, "I have some vague impression that the mystery is connected with some incident which occurred in that country. I am sure, however, that your fears would vanish if you saw Ram Singh. He is the very personification of wisdom and benevolence. He was shocked at the idea of our killing a sheep, or even a fish for his benefit--said he would rather die than have a hand in taking the life of an animal."

"It is very foolish of me to be so nervous," said my sister bravely. "But you must promise me one thing, Jack. You will go up to Cloomber in the morning, and if you can see any of them you must tell them of these strange neighbours of ours. They are better able to judge than we are whether their presence has any significance or not."

"All right, little one," I answered, as we went indoors. "You have been over-excited by all these wild doings, and you need a sound night's rest to compose you. I'll do what you suggest, however, and our friends shall judge for themselves whether these poor fellows should be sent about their business or not."

I made the promise to allay my sister's apprehensions, but in the bright sunlight of morning it appeared less than absurd to imagine that our poor vegetarian castaways could have any sinister intentions, or that their advent could have any effect upon the tenant of Cloomber.

I was anxious, myself, however, to see whether I could see anything of the Heatherstones, so after breakfast I walked up to the Hall. In their seclusion it was impossible for them to have learnt anything of the recent events. I felt, therefore, that even if I should meet the general he could hardly regard me as an intruder while I had so much news to communicate.

The place had the same dreary and melancholy appearance which always characterised it. Looking through between the thick iron bars of the main gateway there was nothing to be seen of any of the occupants. One of the great Scotch firs had been blown down in the gale, and its long, ruddy trunk lay right across the grass-grown avenue; but no attempt had been made to remove it.

Everything about the property had the same air of desolation and neglect, with the solitary exception of the massive and impenetrable fencing, which presented as unbroken and formidable an obstacle as ever to the would-be trespasser.

I walked round this barrier as far as our old trysting-place without finding any flaw through which I could get a glimpse of the house, for the fence had been repaired with each rail overlapping the last, so as to secure absolute
privacy for those inside, and to block those peep-holes which I had formerly used.

At the old spot, however, where I had had the memorable interview with the general on the occasion when he surprised me with his daughter, I found that the two loose rails had been refixed in such a manner that there was a gap of two inches or more between them.

Through this I had a view of the house and of part of the lawn in front of it, and, though I could see no signs of life outside or at any of the windows, I settled down with the intention of sticking to my post until I had a chance of speaking to one or other of the inmates. Indeed, the cold, dead aspect of the house had struck such a chill into my heart that I determined to scale the fence at whatever risk of incurring the general's displeasure rather than return without news of the Heatherstones.

Happily there was no need of this extreme expedient, for I had not been there half-an-hour before I heard the harsh sound of an opening lock, and the general himself emerged from the main door.

To my surprise he was dressed in a military uniform, and that not the uniform in ordinary use in the British Army. The red coat was strangely cut and stained with the weather. The trousers had originally been white, but had now faded to a dirty yellow. With a red sash across his chest and a straight sword hanging from his side, he stood the living example of a bygone type--the John Company's officer of forty years ago.

He was followed by the ex-tramp, Corporal Rufus Smith, now well-clad and prosperous, who limped along beside his master, the two pacing up and down the lawn absorbed in conversation. I observed that from time to time one or other of them would pause and glance furtively all about them, as though guarding keenly against a surprise. I should have preferred communicating with the general alone, but since there was no dissociating him from his companion, I beat loudly on the fencing with my stick to attract their attention. They both faced round in a moment, and I could see from their gestures that they were disturbed and alarmed.

I then elevated my stick above the barrier to show them where the sound proceeded from. At this the general began to walk in my direction with the air of a man who is bracing himself up for an effort, but the other caught him by the wrist and endeavoured to dissuade him.

It was only when I shouted out my name and assured them that I was alone that I could prevail upon them to approach. Once assured of my identity the general ran eagerly towards me and greeted me with the utmost cordiality.

"This is truly kind of you, West," he said. "It is only at such times as these that one can judge who is a friend and who not. It would not be fair to you to ask you to come inside or to stay any time, but I am none the less very glad to see you."

"I have been anxious about you all," I said, "for it is some little time since I have seen or heard from any of you. How have you all been keeping?"

"Why, as well as could be expected. But we will be better tomorrow--we will be different men to-morrow, eh, Corporal?"

"Yes, sir," said the corporal, raising his hand to his forehead in a military salute. "We'll be right as the bank to-morrow."

"The corporal and I are a little disturbed in our minds just now," the general explained, "but I have no doubt that all will come right. After all, there is nothing higher than Providence, and we are all in His hands. And how have you been, eh?"

"We have been very busy for one thing," said I. "I suppose you have heard nothing of the great shipwreck?"

"Not a word," the general answered listlessly.

"I thought the noise of the wind would prevent you hearing the signal guns. She came ashore in the bay the night before last--a great barque from India."

"From India!" ejaculated the general.

"Yes. Her crew were saved, fortunately, and have all been sent on to Glasgow."

"All sent on!" cried the general, with a face as bloodless as a corpse.

"All except three rather strange characters who claim to be Buddhist priests. They have decided to remain for a few days upon the coast."

The words were hardly out of my mouth when the general dropped upon his knees with his long, thin arms extended to Heaven.

"Thy will be done!" he cried in a cracking voice. "Thy blessed will be done!"

I could see through the crack that Corporal Rufus Smith's face had turned to a sickly yellow shade, and that he was wiping the perspiration from his brow.

"It's like my luck!" he said. "After all these years, to come when I have got a snug billet."

"Never mind, my lad," the general said, rising, and squaring his shoulders like a man who braces himself up for an effort. "Be it what it may we'll face it as British soldiers should. D'ye remember at Chillianwallah, when you had
to run from your guns to our square, and the Sikh horse came thundering down on our bayonets? We didn't flinch then, and we won't flinch now. It seems to me that I feel better than I have done for years. It was the uncertainty that was killing me."

"And the infernal jingle-jangle," said the corporal. "Well, we all go together—that's some consolation."

"Good-bye, West," said the general. "Be a good husband to Gabriel, and give my poor wife a home. I don't think she will trouble you long. Good-bye! God bless you!"

"Look here, General," I said, peremptorily breaking off a piece of wood to make communication more easy, "this sort of thing has been going on too long. What are these hints and allusions and innuendoes? It is time we had a little plain speaking. What is it you fear? Out with it! Are you in dread of these Hindoos? If you are, I am able, on my father's authority, to have them arrested as rogues and vagabonds."

"No, no, that would never do," he answered, shaking his head. "You will learn about the wretched business soon enough. Mordaunt knows where to lay his hand upon the papers bearing on the matter. You can consult him about it to-morrow."

"But surely," I cried, "if the peril is so imminent something may be done to avert it. If you would but tell me what you fear I should know how to act."

"My dear friend," he said, "there is nothing to be done, so calm yourself, and let things take their course. It has been folly on my part to shelter myself behind mere barriers of wood and stone. The fact is, that inaction was terrible to me, and I felt that to do anything, however futile, in the nature of a precaution, was better than passive resignation. My humble friend here and I have placed ourselves in a position in which, I trust, no poor fellow will ever find himself again. We can only recommend ourselves to the unfailing goodness of the Almighty, and trust that what we have endured in this world may lessen our atonement in the world to come. I must leave you now, for I have many papers to destroy and much to arrange. Good-bye!"

He pushed his hand through the hole which I had made, and grasped mine in a solemn farewell, after which he walked back to the Hall with a firm and decided step, still followed by the crippled and sinister corporal.

I walked back to Branksome much disturbed by this interview, and extremely puzzled as to what course I should pursue.

It was evident now that my sister's suspicions were correct, and that there was some very intimate connection between the presence of the three Orientals and the mysterious peril which hung over the towers of Cloomber. It was difficult for me to associate the noble-faced Ram Singh's gentle, refined manner and words of wisdom with any deed of violence, yet now that I thought of it I could see that a terrible capacity for wrath lay behind his shaggy brows and dark, piercing eyes.

I felt that of all men whom I had ever met he was the one whose displeasure I should least care to face. But how could two men so widely dissociated as the foul-mouthed old corporal of artillery and the distinguished Anglo-Indian general have each earned the ill-will of these strange castaways? And if the danger were a positive physical one, why should he not consent to my proposal to have the three men placed under custody—though I confess it would have gone much against my grain to act in so inhospitable a manner upon such vague and shadowy grounds.

These questions were absolutely unanswerable, and yet the solemn words and the terrible gravity which I had seen in the faces of both the old soldiers forbade me from thinking that their fears were entirely unfounded.

It was all a puzzle—an absolutely insoluble puzzle.

One thing at least was clear to me—and that was that in the present state of my knowledge, and after the general's distinct prohibition, it was impossible for me to interfere in any way. I could only wait and pray that, whatever the danger might be, it might pass over, or at least that my dear Gabriel and her brother might be protected against it.

I was walking down the lane lost in thought, and had got as far as the wicket gate which opens upon the Branksome lawn, when I was surprised to hear my father's voice raised in most animated and excited converse.

The old man had been of late so abstracted from the daily affairs of the world, and so absorbed in his own special studies, that it was difficult to engage his attention upon any ordinary, mundane topic. Curious to know what it was that had drawn him so far out of himself, I opened the gate softly, and walking quietly round the laurel bushes, found him sitting, to my astonishment, with none other than the very man who was occupying my thoughts, Ram Singh, the Buddhist.

The two were sitting upon a garden bench, and the Oriental appeared to be laying down some weighty proposition, checking every point upon his long, quivering, brown fingers, while my father, with his hands thrown abroad and his face awry, was loud in protestation and in argument.

So absorbed were they in their controversy, that I stood within a hand-touch of them for a minute or more before they became conscious of my presence.

On observing me the priest sprang to his feet and greeted me with the same lofty courtesy and dignified grace which had so impressed me the day before.
"I promised myself yesterday," he said, "the pleasure of calling upon your father. You see I have kept my word. I have even been daring enough to question his views upon some points in connection with the Sanscrit and Hindoo tongues, with the result that we have been arguing for an hour or more without either of us convincing the other. Without pretending to as deep a theoretical knowledge as that which has made the name of James Hunter West a household word among Oriental scholars, I happen to have given considerable attention to this one point, and indeed I am in a position to say that I know his views to be unsound. I assure you, sir, that up to the year 700, or even later, Sanscrit was the ordinary language of the great bulk of the inhabitants of India."

"And I assure you, sir," said my father warmly, "that it was dead and forgotten at that date, save by the learned, who used it as a vehicle for scientific and religious works--just as Latin was used in the Middle Ages long after it had ceased to be spoken by any European nation."

"If you consult the puranas you will find," said Ram Singh, "that this theory, though commonly received, is entirely untenable."

"And if you will consult the Ramayana, and more particularly the canonical books on Buddhist discipline," cried my father, "you will find that the theory is unassailable."

"But look at the Kullavagga," said our visitor earnestly.

"And look at King Asoka," shouted my father triumphantly. "When, in the year 300 before the Christian era--before, mind you--he ordered the laws of Buddha to be engraved upon the rocks, what language did he employ, eh? Was it Sanscrit?--no! And why was it not Sanscrit? Because the lower orders of his subjects would not have been able to understand a word of it. Ha, ha! That was the reason. How are you going to get round King Asoka's edicts, eh?"

"He carved them in the various dialects," Ram Singh answered. "But energy is too precious a thing to be wasted in mere wind in this style. The sun has passed its meridian, and I must return to my companions."

"I am sorry that you have not brought them to see us," said my father courteously. He was, I could see, uneasy lest in the eagerness of debate he had overstepped the bounds of hospitality.

"They do not mix with the world," Ram Singh answered, rising to his feet. "They are of a higher grade than I, and more sensitive to contaminating influences. They are immersed in a six months' meditation upon the mystery of the third incarnation, which has lasted with few intermissions from the time that we left the Himalayas. I shall not see you again, Mr. Hunter West, and I therefore bid you farewell. Your old age will be a happy one, as it deserves to be, and your Eastern studies will have a lasting effect upon the knowledge and literature of your own country. Farewell!"

"And am I also to see no more of you?" I asked.

"Unless you will walk with me along the sea-shore," he answered. "But you have already been out this morning, and may be tired. I ask too much of you."

"Nay, I should be delighted to come," I responded from my heart, and we set off together, accompanied for some little distance by my father, who would gladly, I could see, have reopened the Sanscrit controversy, had not his stock of breath been too limited to allow of his talking and walking at the same time.

"He is a learned man," Ram Singh remarked, after we had left him behind, "but, like many another, he is intolerant towards opinions which differ from his own. He will know better some day."

I made no answer to this observation, and we trudged along for a time in silence, keeping well down to the water's edge, where the sands afforded a good foothold.

The sand dunes which lined the coast formed a continuous ridge upon our left, cutting us off entirely from all human observation, while on the right the broad Channel stretched away with hardly a sail to break its silvery uniformity. The Buddhist priest and I were absolutely alone with Nature.

I could not help reflecting that if he were really the dangerous man that the mate affected to consider him, or that might be inferred from the words of General Heatherstone, I had placed myself completely in his power. Yet such was the majestic benignity of the man's aspect, and the unruffled serenity of his deep, dark eyes, that I could afford in his presence to let fear and suspicion blow past me as lightly as the breeze which whistled round us. His face might be stern, and even terrible, but I felt that he could never be unjust.

As I glanced from time to time at his noble profile and the sweep of his jet-black beard, his rough-spun tweed travelling suit struck me with an almost painful sense of incongruity, and I re-clothed him in my imagination with the grand, sweeping Oriental costume which is the fitting and proper frame for such a picture--the only garb which does not detract from the dignity and grace of the wearer.

The place to which he led me was a small fisher cottage which had been deserted some years before by its tenant, but still stood gaunt and bare, with the thatch partly blown away and the windows and doors in sad disrepair. This dwelling, which the poorest Scotch beggar would have shrunk from, was the one which these singular men had preferred to the proffered hospitality of the laird's house. A small garden, now a mass of tangled brambles, stood
round it, and through this my acquaintance picked his way to the ruined door. He glanced into the house and then waved his hand for me to follow him.

"You have now an opportunity," he said, in a subdued, reverential voice, "of seeing a spectacle which few Europeans have had the privilege of beholding. Inside that cottage you will find two Yogis--men who are only one remove from the highest plane of adeptship. They are both wrapped in an ecstatic trance, otherwise I should not venture to obtrude your presence upon them. Their astral bodies have departed from them, to be present at the feast of lamps in the holy Lamasery of Rudok in Tibet. Tread lightly lest by stimulating their corporeal functions you recall them before their devotions are completed."

Walking slowly and on tiptoe, I picked my way through the weed-grown garden, and peered through the open doorway.

There was no furniture in the dreary interior, nor anything to cover the uneven floor save a litter of fresh straw in a corner.

Among this straw two men were crouching, the one small and wizened, the other large-boned and gaunt, with their legs crossed in Oriental fashion and their heads sunk upon their breasts. Neither of them looked up, or took the smallest notice of our presence.

They were so still and silent that they might have been two bronze statues but for the slow and measured rhythm of their breathing. Their faces, however, had a peculiar, ashen-grey colour, very different from the healthy brown of my companion's, and I observed, on, stooping my head, that only the whites of their eyes were visible, the balls being turned upwards beneath the lids.

In front of them upon a small mat lay an earthenware pitcher of water and half-a-loaf of bread, together with a sheet of paper inscribed with certain cabalistic characters. Ram Singh glanced at these, and then, motioning to me to withdraw, followed me out into the garden.

"I am not to disturb them until ten o'clock," he said. "You have now seen in operation one of the grandest results of our occult philosophy, the dissociation of spirit from body. Not only are the spirits of these holy men standing at the present moment by the banks of the Ganges, but those spirits are clothed in a material covering so identical with their real bodies that none of the faithful will ever doubt that Lal Hoomi and Mowdar Khan are actually among them. This is accomplished by our power of resolving an object into its 'chemical atoms, of conveying these atoms with a speed which exceeds that of lightning to any given spot, and of there re-precipitating them and compelling them to retake their original form. Of old, in the days of our ignorance, it was necessary to convey the whole body in this way, but we have since found that it was as easy and more convenient to transmit material enough merely to build up an outside shell or semblance. This we have termed the astral body."

"But if you can transmit your spirits so readily," I observed, "why should they be accompanied by any body at all?"

"In communicating with brother initiates we are able to employ our spirits only, but when we wish to come in contact with ordinary mankind it is essential that we should appear in some form which they can see and comprehend."

"You have interested me deeply in all that you have told me," I said, grasping the hand which Ram Singh had held out to me as a sign that our interview was at an end. "I shall often think of our short acquaintance."

"You will derive much benefit from it," he said slowly, still holding my hand and looking gravely and sadly into my eyes. "You must remember that what will happen in the future is not necessarily bad because it does not fall in with your preconceived ideas of right. Be not hasty in your judgments. There are certain great rules which must be carried out, at whatever cost to individuals. Their operation may appear to you to be harsh and cruel, but that is as nothing compared with the dangerous precedent which would be established by not enforcing them. The ox and the sheep are safe from us, but the man with the blood of the highest upon his hands should not and shall not live."

He threw up his arms at the last words with a fierce, threatening gesture, and, turning away from me, strode back to the ruined hut.

I stood gazing after him until he disappeared through the doorway, and then started off for home, revolving in my mind all that I had heard, and more particularly this last outburst of the occult philosopher.

Far on the right I could see the tall, white tower of Cloomber standing out clear-cut and sharp against a dark cloud-bank which rose behind it. I thought how any traveller who chanced to pass that way would envy in his heart the tenant of that magnificent building, and how little they would guess the strange terrors, the nameless dangers, which were gathering about his head. The black cloud-wrack was but the image, I reflected, of the darker, more sombre storm which was about to burst.

"Whatever it all means, and however it happens," I ejaculated, "God grant that the innocent be not confounded with the guilty."

My father, when I reached home, was still in a ferment over his learned disputation with the stranger.
"I trust, Jack," he said, "that I did not handle him too roughly. I should remember that I am _in_loco_magistri_, and be less prone to argue with my guests. Yet, when he took up this most untenable position, I could not refrain from attacking him and hurling him out of it, which indeed I did, though you, who are ignorant of the niceties of the question, may have failed to perceive it. You observed, however, that my reference to King Asoka's edicts was so conclusive that he at once rose and took his leave."

"You held your own bravely," I answered, "but what is your impression of the man now that you have seen him?" "Why," said my father, "he is one of those holy men who, under the various names of Sannasis, Yogis, Sevras, Qukalanders, Hakims, and Cufis have devoted their lives to the study of the mysteries of the Buddhist faith. He is, I take it, a theosophist, or worshipper of the God of knowledge, the highest grade of which is the adept. This man and his companions have not attained this high position or they could not have crossed the sea without contamination. It is probable that they are all advanced chelas who hope in time to attain to the supreme honour of adeptship."

"But, father," interrupted my sister, "this does not explain why men of such sanctity and attainments should choose to take up their quarters on the shores of a desolate Scotch bay."

"Ah, there you get beyond me," my father answered. "I may suggest, however, that it is nobody's business but their own, so long as they keep the peace and are amenable to the law of the land."

"Have you ever heard," I asked, "that these higher priests of whom you speak have powers which are unknown to us?"

"Why, Eastern literature is full of it. The Bible is an Eastern book, and is it not full of the record of such powers from cover to cover? It is unquestionable that they have in the past known many of Nature's secrets which are lost to us. I cannot say, however, from my own knowledge that the modern theosophists really possess the powers that they claim."

"Are they a vindictive class of people?" I asked. "Is there any offence among them which can only be expiated by death?"

"Not that I know of," my father answered, raising his white eyebrows in surprise. "You appear to be in an inquisitive humour this afternoon-- what is the object of all these questions? Have our Eastern neighbours aroused your curiosity or suspicion in any way?"

I parried the question as best I might, for I was unwilling to let the old man know what was in my mind. No good purpose could come from his enlightenment; his age and his health demanded rest rather than anxiety; and indeed, with the best will in the world I should have found it difficult to explain to another what was so very obscure to myself. For every reason I felt that it was best that he should be kept in the dark.

Never in all my experience had I known a day pass so slowly as did that eventful 5th of October. In every possible manner I endeavoured to while away the tedious hours, and yet it seemed as if darkness would never arrive. I tried to read, I tried to write, I paced about the lawn, I walked to the end of the lane, I put new flies upon my fishing-hooks, I began to index my father's library--in a dozen ways I endeavoured to relieve the suspense which was becoming intolerable. My sister, I could see, was suffering from the same feverish restlessness.

Again and again our good father remonstrated with us in his mild way for our erratic behaviour and the continual interruption of his work which arose from it.

At last, however, the tea was brought, and the tea was taken, the curtains were drawn, the lamps lit, and after another interminable interval the prayers were read and the servants dismissed to their rooms. My father compounded and swallowed his nightly jorum of toddy, and then shuffled off to his room, leaving the two of us in the parlour with our nerves in a tingle and our minds full of the most vague and yet terrible apprehensions.

CHAPTER XIV

OF THE VISITOR WHO RAN DOWN THE ROAD IN THE NIGHT-TIME

It was a quarter past ten o'clock by the parlour timepiece when my father went off to his room, and left Esther and myself together. We heard his slow steps dying away up the creaking staircase, until the distant slamming of a door announced that he had reached his sanctum.

The simple oil lamp upon the table threw a weird, uncertain light over the old room, flickering upon the carved oak panelling, and casting strange, fantastic shadows from the high-elbowed, straight-backed furniture. My sister's white, anxious face stood out in the obscurity with a startling exactness of profile like one of Rembrandt's portraits.

We sat opposite to each other on either side of the table with no sound breaking the silence save the measured ticking of the clock and the intermittent chirping of a cricket beneath the grate.

There was something awe-inspiring in the absolute stillness. The whistling of a belated peasant upon the high road was a relief to us, and we strained our ears to catch the last of his notes as he plodded steadily homewards.

At first we had made some pretence--she of knitting and I of reading-- but we soon abandoned the useless deception, and sat uneasily waiting, starting and glancing at each other with questioning eyes whenever the faggot
crackled in the fire or a rat scampered behind the wainscot. There was a heavy electrical feeling in the air, which weighed us down with a foreboding of disaster.

I rose and flung the hall door open to admit the fresh breeze of the night. Ragged clouds swept across the sky, and the moon peeped out at times between their hurrying fringes, bathing the whole countryside in its cold, white radiance. From where I stood in the doorway I could see the edge of the Cloomber wood, though the house itself was only visible from the rising ground some little distance off. At my sister's suggestion we walked together, she with her shawl over her head, as far as the summit of this elevation, and looked out in the direction of the Hall.

There was no illumination of the windows tonight. From roof to basement not a light twinkled in any part of the great building. Its huge mass loomed up dark and sullen amid the trees which surrounded it, looking more like some giant sarcophagus than a human habitation.

To our overwrought nerves there was something of terror in its mere bulk and its silence. We stood for some little time peering at it through the darkness, and then we made our way back to the parlour again, where we sat waiting—waiting, we knew not for what, and yet with absolute conviction that some terrible experience was in store for us.

It was twelve o'clock or thereabout when my sister suddenly sprang to her feet and held up her fingers to bespeak attention.

"Do you hear nothing?" she asked.
I strained my ears, but without success.
"Look," she cried, with a trembling voice. "Look! Do you hear anything?"

In the deep silence of the night I distinctly heard a dull, murmuring, clattering sound, continuous apparently, but very faint and low.
"What is it?" I asked, in a subdued voice.
"It's the sound of a man running towards us," she answered, and then, suddenly dropping the last semblance of self-command, she fell upon her knees beside the table and began praying aloud with that frenzied earnestness which intense, overpowering fear can produce, breaking off now and again into half-hysterical whimperings.

I could distinguish the sound clearly enough now to know that her quick, feminine perception had not deceived her, and that it was indeed caused by a running man.

On he came, and on down the high road, his footfalls ringing out clearer and sharper every moment. An urgent messenger he must be, for he neither paused nor slackened his pace.

The quick, crisp rattle was changed suddenly to a dull, muffled murmur. He had reached the point where sand had been recently laid down for a hundred yards or so. In a few moments, however, he was back on hard ground again and his flying feet came nearer and ever nearer.

He must, I reflected, be abreast of the head of the lane now. Would he hold on? Or would he turn down to Branksome?

The thought had hardly crossed my mind when I heard by the difference of the sound that the runner had turned the corner, and that his goal was beyond all question the laird's house.

Rushing down to the gate of the lawn, I reached it just as our visitor dashed it open and fell into my arms. I could see in the moonlight that it was none other than Mordaunt Heatherstone.

"What has happened?" I cried. "What is amiss, Mordaunt?"
"My father!" he gasped—"my father!"

His hat was gone, his eyes dilated with terror, and his face as bloodless as that of a corpse. I could feel that the hands which clasped my arms were quivering and shaking with emotion.

"Your father?" I asked. "What of him?"
"He is gone."
"Gone!"
"Yes; he is gone; and so is Corporal Rufus Smith. We shall never set eyes upon them again."

"But where have they gone?" I cried. "This is unworthy of you, Mordaunt. What right have we to sit here, allowing our private feelings to overcome us, while there is a possibility of succouring your father? Up, man! Let us follow him. Tell me only what direction he took."
"It's no use," young Heatherstone answered, burying his face in his hands. "Don't reproach me, West, for you don't know all the circumstances. What can we do to reverse the tremendous and unknown laws which are acting against us? The blow has long been hanging over us, and now it has fallen. God help us!"

"In Heaven's name tell me what has happened?" said I excitedly. "We must not yield to despair."

"We can do nothing until daybreak," he answered. "We shall then endeavour to obtain some trace of them. It is hopeless at present."

"And how about Gabriel and Mrs. Heatherstone?" I asked. "Can we not bring them down from the Hall at once? Your poor sister must be distracted with terror."

"She knows nothing of it," Mordaunt answered. "She sleeps at the other side of the house, and has not heard or seen anything. As to my poor mother, she has expected some such event for so long a time that it has not come upon her as a surprise. She is, of course, overwhelmed with grief, but would, I think, prefer to be left to herself for the present. Her firmness and composure should be a lesson to me, but I am constitutionally excitable, and this catastrophe coming after our long period of suspense deprived me of my very reason for a time."

"If we can do nothing until the morning," I said, "you have time to tell us all that has occurred."

"I will do so," he answered, rising and holding his shaking hands to the fire. "You know already that we have had reason for some time—for many years in fact—to fear that a terrible retribution was hanging over my father's head for a certain action of his early life. In this action he was associated with the man known as Corporal Rufus Smith, so that the fact of the latter finding his way to my father was a warning to us that the time had come, and that this 5th of October—the anniversary of the misdeed—would be the day of its atonement. I told you of our fears in my letter, and, if I am not mistaken, my father also had some conversation with you, John, upon the subject. When I saw yesterday morning that he had hunted out the old uniform which he had always retained since he wore it in the Afghan war, I was sure that the end was at hand, and that our forebodings would be realised.

"He appeared to be more composed in the afternoon than I have seen him for years, and spoke freely of his life in India and of the incidents of his youth. About nine o'clock he requested us to go up to our own rooms, and locked us in there—a precaution which he frequently took when the dark fit way upon him. It was always his endeavour, poor soul, to keep us clear of the curse which had fallen upon his own unfortunate head. Before parting from us he tenderly embraced my mother and Gabriel, and he afterwards followed me to my room, where he clasped my hand affectionately and gave into my charge a small packet addressed to yourself."

"To me?" I interrupted.

"To you. I shall fulfill my commission when I have told you my story. I conjured him to allow me to sit up with him and share any danger which might arise, but he implored me with irresistible earnestness not to add to his troubles by thwarting his arrangements. Seeing that I was really distressing him by my pertinacity, I at last allowed him to close the door and to turn the key upon the outside. I shall always reproach myself for my want of firmness. But what can you do when your own father refuses your assistance or co-operation? You cannot force yourself upon him."

"I am sure that you did all you could do," my sister said.

"I meant to, dear Esther, but, God help me, it was hard to tell what was right. He left me, and I heard his footsteps die away down the long corridor. It was then about ten o'clock, or a little after. For a time I paced up and down the room, and then, carrying the lamp to the head of my bed, I lay down without undressing, reading St. Thomas a Kempis, and praying from my heart that the night might pass safely over us.

"I had at last fallen into a troubled sleep when I was suddenly aroused by a loud, sonorous sound ringing in my ears. I sat up bewildered, but all was silent again. The lamp was burning low, and my watch showed me that it was going on to midnight. I blundered to my feet, and was striking a match with the intention of lighting the candles, when the sharp, vehement cry broke out again so loud and so clear that it might have been in the very room with me. My chamber is in the front of the house, while those of my mother and sister are at the back, so that I am the only one who commands a view of the avenue.

"Rushing to the window I drew the blind aside and looked out. You know that the gravel-drive opens up so as to form a broad stretch immediately in front of the house. Just in the centre of this clear space there stood three men looking up at the house.

"The moon shone full upon them, glistening on their upturned eyeballs, and by its light I could see that they were swarthy-faced and black-haired, of a type that I was familiar with among the Sikhs and Afridis. Two of them were thin, with eager, aesthetic countenances, while the third was kinglike and majestic, with a noble figure and flowing beard."

"Ram Singh!" I ejaculated.

"What, you know of them?" exclaimed Mordaunt in great surprise. "You have met them?"

"I know of them. They are Buddhist priests," I answered, "but go on."
"They stood in a line," he continued, "sweeping their arms upwards and downwards, while their lips moved as if repeating some prayer or incantation. Suddenly they ceased to gesticulate, and broke out for the third time into the wild, weird, piercing cry which had roused me from my slumber. Never shall I forget that shrill, dreadful summons swelling and reverberating through the silent night with an intensity of sound which is still ringing in my ears."

"As it died slowly away, there was a rasping and creaking as of keys and bolts, followed by the clang of an opening door and the clatter of hurrying feet. From my window I saw my father and Corporal Rufus Smith rush frantically out of the house hatless and unkempt, like men who are obeying a sudden and overpowering impulse. The three strangers laid no hands on them, but all five swept swiftly down the avenue and vanished among the trees. I am positive that no force was used, or constraint of any visible kind, and yet I am as sure that my poor father and his companion were helpless prisoners as if I had seen them dragged away in manacles."

"All this took little time in the acting. From the first summons which disturbed my sleep to the last shadowy glimpse which I had of them between the tree trunks could hardly have occupied more than five minutes of actual time. So sudden was it, and so strange, that when the drama was over and they were gone I could have believed that it was all some terrible nightmare, some delusion, had I not felt that the impression was too real, too vivid, to be imputed to fancy."

"I threw my whole weight against my bedroom door in the hope of forcing the lock. It stood firm for a while, but I flung myself upon it again and again, until something snapped and I found myself in the passage."

"My first thought was for my mother, I rushed to her room and turned the key in her door. The moment that I did so she stepped out into the corridor in her dressing-gown, and held up a warning finger."

"'No noise,' she said, 'Gabriel is asleep. They have been called away?'

"'They have,' I answered.

"'God's will be done!' she cried. 'Your poor father will be happier in the next world than he has ever been in this. Thank Heaven that Gabriel is asleep. I gave her chloral in her cocoa.'"

"'What am I to do?' I said distractedly.

"Where have they gone? How can I help him? We cannot let him go from us like this, or leave these men to do what they will with him. Shall I ride into Wigtown and arouse the police?'"

"Anything rather than that, my mother said earnestly. 'He has begged me again and again to avoid it. My son, we shall never set eyes upon your father again. You may marvel at my dry eyes, but if you knew as I know the peace which death would bring him, you could not find it in your heart to mourn for him. All pursuit is, I feel, vain, and yet some pursuit there must be. Let it be as private as possible. We cannot serve him better than by consulting his wishes.'"

"But every minute is precious,' I cried. 'Even now he may be calling upon us to rescue him from the clutches of those dark-skinned fiends.'"

"The thought so maddened me that I rushed out of the house and down to the high road, but once there I had no indication in which direction to turn. The whole wide moor lay before me, without a sign of movement upon its broad expanse. I listened, but not a sound broke the perfect stillness of the night."

"It was then, my dear friends, as I stood, not knowing in which direction to turn, that the horror and responsibility broke full upon me. I felt that I was combating against forces of which I knew nothing. All was strange and dark and terrible."

"The thought of you, and of the help which I might look for from your advice and assistance, was a beacon of hope to me. At Branksome, at least, I should receive sympathy, and, above all, directions as to what I should do, for my mind is in such a whirl that I cannot trust my own judgment. My mother was content to be alone, my sister asleep, and no prospect of being able to do anything until daybreak. Under those circumstances what more natural than that I should fly to you as fast as my feet would carry me? You have a clear head, Jack; speak out, man, and tell me what I should do. Esther, what should I do?"

He turned from one to the other of us with outstretched hands and eager, questioning eyes.

"You can do nothing while the darkness lasts," I answered. "We must report the matter to the Wigtown police, but we need not send our message to them until we are actually starting upon the search, so as to comply with the law and yet have a private investigation, as your mother wishes. John Fullarton, over the hill, has a lurcher dog which is as good as a bloodhound. If we set him on the general's trail he will run him down if he had to follow him to John o' Groat's."

"It is terrible to wait calmly here while he may need our assistance."

"I fear our assistance could under any circumstances do him little good. There are forces at work here which are beyond human intervention. Besides, there is no alternative. We have, apparently, no possible clue as to the direction which they have taken, and for us to wander aimlessly over the moor in the darkness would be to waste the strength which may be more profitably used in the morning. It will be daylight by five o'clock. In an hour or so we
can walk over the hill together and get Fullarton's dog."

"Another hour!" Mordaunt groaned, "every minute seems an age."

"Lie down on the sofa and rest yourself," said I. "You cannot serve your father better than by laying up all the strength you can, for we may have a weary trudge before us. But you mentioned a packet which the general had intended for me."

"It is here," he answered, drawing a small, flat parcel from his pocket and handing it over to me, "you will find, no doubt, that it will explain all which has been so mysterious."

The packet was sealed at each end with black wax, bearing the impress of the flying griffin, which I knew to be the general's crest. It was further secured by a band of broad tape, which I cut with my pocket-knife. Across the outside was written in bold handwriting: "J. Fothergill West, Esq.," and underneath: "To be handed to that gentleman in the event of the disappearance or decease of Major-General J. B. Heatherstone, V.C., C.B., late of the Indian Army."

So at last I was to know the dark secret which had cast a shadow over our lives. Here in my hands I held the solution of it.

With eager fingers I broke the seals and undid the wrapper. A note and a small bundle of discoloured paper lay within. I drew the lamp over to me and opened the former. It was dated the preceding afternoon, and ran in this way:

MY DEAR WEST,--

I should have satisfied your very natural curiosity on the subject which we have had occasion to talk of more than once, but I refrained for your own sake. I knew by sad experience how unsettling and unnerving it is to be for ever waiting for a catastrophe which you are convinced must befall, and which you can neither avert nor accelerate.

Though it affects me specially, as being the person most concerned, I am still conscious that the natural sympathy which I have observed in you, and your regard for Gabriel's father, would both combine to render you unhappy if you knew the hopelessness and yet the vagueness of the fate which threatens me. I feared to disturb your mind, and I was therefore silent, though at some cost to myself, for my isolation has not been the least of the troubles which have weighed me down.

Many signs, however, and chief among them the presence of the Buddhists upon the coast as described by you this morning, have convinced me that the weary waiting is at last over and that the hour of retribution is at hand. Why I should have been allowed to live nearly forty years after my offence is more than I can understand, but it is possible that those who had command over my fate know that such a life is the greatest of all penalties to me.

Never for an hour, night or day, have they suffered me to forget that they have marked me down as their victim. Their accursed astral bell has been ringing my knell for two-score years, reminding me ever that there is no spot upon earth where I can hope to be in safety. Oh, the peace, the blessed peace of dissolution! Come what may on the other side of the tomb, I shall at least be quit of that thrice terrible sound.

There is no need for me to enter into the wretched business again, or to detail at any length the events of October 5th, 1841, and the various circumstances which led up to the death of Ghoolab Shah, the arch adept.

I have torn a sheaf of leaves from my old journal, in which you will find a bald account of the matter, and an independent narrative was furnished by Sir Edward Elliott, of the Artillery, to the Star of India some years ago—in which, however, the names were suppressed.

I have reason to believe that many people, even among those who knew India well, thought that Sir Edward was romancing, and that he had evolved his incidents from his imagination. The few faded sheets which I send you will show you that this is not the case, and that our men of science must recognise powers and laws which can and have been used by man, but which are unknown to European civilisation.

I do not wish to whine or to whimper, but I cannot help feeling that I have had hard measure dealt me in this world. I would not, God knows, take the life of any man, far less an aged one, in cold blood. My temper and nature, however, were always fiery and headstrong, and in action when my blood is up, I have no knowledge of what I am about. Neither the corporal nor I would have laid a finger upon Ghoolab Shah had we not seen that the tribesmen were rallying behind him. Well, well, it is an old story now, and there is no profit in discussing it. May no other poor fellow ever have the same evil fortune!

I have written a short supplement to the statements contained in my journal for your information and that of any one else who may chance to be interested in the matter.

And now, adieu! Be a good husband to Gabriel, and, if your sister be brave enough to marry into such a devil-ridden family as ours, by all means let her do so. I have left enough to keep my poor wife in comfort.

When she rejoins me I should wish it to be equally divided between the children. If you hear that I am gone, do not pity, but congratulate

Your unfortunate friend,

JOHN BERTHIER HEATHERSTONE.
I threw aside the letter and picked up the roll of blue foolscap which contained the solution of the mystery. It was all ragged and frayed at the inner edge, with traces of gum and thread still adhering to it, to show that it had been torn out of a strongly bound volume. The ink with which it had been written was faded somewhat, but across the head of the first page was inscribed in bold, clear characters, evidently of later date than the rest: "Journal of Lieutenant J. B. Heatherstone in the Thull Valley during the autumn of 1841," and then underneath:

This extract contains some account of the events of the first week of October of that year, including the skirmish of the Terada ravine and the death of the man Ghoolab Shah.

I have the narrative lying before me now, and I copy it verbatim. If it contains some matter which has no direct bearing upon the question at issue, I can only say that I thought it better to publish what is irrelevant than by cutting and clipping to lay the whole statement open to the charge of having been tampered with.

CHAPTER XV
THE DAY-BOOK OF JOHN BERTHIER HEATHERSTONE

Thull Valley, Oct. 1, 1841.--The Fifth Bengal and Thirty-third Queen's passed through this morning on their way to the Front. Had tiffin with the Bengalese. Latest news from home that two attempts had been made on the Queen's life by semi-maniacs named Francis and Bean.

It promises to be a hard winter. The snow-line has descended a thousand feet upon the peaks, but the passes will be open for weeks to come, and, even if they were blocked, we have established so many depots in the country that Pollock and Nott will have no difficulty in holding their own. They shall not meet with the fate of Elphinstone's army. One such tragedy is enough for a century.

Elliott of the Artillery, and I, are answerable for the safety of the communications for a distance of twenty miles or more, from the mouth of the valley to this side of the wooden bridge over the Lotar. Goodenough, of the Rifles, is responsible on the other side, and Lieutenant-Colonel Sidney Herbert of the Engineers, has a general supervision over both sections.

Our force is not strong enough for the work which has to be done. I have a company and a half of our own regiment, and a squadron of Sowars, who are of no use at all among the rocks. Elliott has three guns, but several of his men are down with cholera, and I doubt if he has enough to serve more than two.

[Note: capsicum for cholera--tried it]

On the other hand, each convoy is usually provided with some guard of its own, though it is often absurdly inefficient. These valleys and ravines which branch out of the main pass are alive with Afridis and Pathans, who are keen robbers as well as religious fanatics. I wonder they don't swoop down on some of our caravans. They could plunder them and get back to their mountain fastnesses before we could interfere or overtake them. Nothing but fear will restrain them.

If I had my way I would hang one at the mouth of every ravine as a warning to the gang. They are personifications of the devil to look at, hawk-nosed, full-lipped, with a mane of tangled hair, and most Satanic sneer.

No news today from the Front.

October 2.--I must really ask Herbert for another company at the very least. I am convinced that the communications would be cut off if any serious attack were made upon us.

Now, this morning two urgent messages were sent me from two different points more than sixteen miles apart, to say that there were signs of a descent of the tribes.

Elliott, with one gun and the Sowars, went to the farther ravine, while I, with the infantry, hurried to the other, but we found it was a false alarm. I saw no signs of the Hillmen, and though we were greeted by a splutter of jezail bullets we were unable to capture any of the rascals.

Woe betide them if they fall into my hands. I would give them as short a shrift as ever a Highland cateran got from a Glasgow judge. These continued alarms may mean nothing or they may be an indication that the Hillmen are assembling and have some plan in view.

We have had no news from the Front for some time, but to-day a convoy of wounded came through with the intelligence that Nott had taken Ghuznee. I hope he warmed up any of the black rascals that fell into his hands.

No word of Pollock.

An elephant battery came up from the Punjab, looking in very good condition. There were several convalescents with it going up to rejoin their regiments. Knew none of them except Mostyn of the Hussars and young Blakesley, who was my fag at Charterhouse, and whom I have never seen since.

Punch and cigars _al_fresco_ up to eleven o'clock.

Letters to-day from Wills & Co. about their little bill forwarded on from Delhi. Thought a campaign freed a man from these annoyances. Wills says in his note that, since his written applications have been in vain, he must call upon me in person. If he calls upon me now he will assuredly be the boldest and most persevering of tailors.

A line from Calcutta Daisy and another from Hobhouse to say that Matilda comes in for all the money under the
will. I am glad of it.

October 3.--Glorious news from the Front today. Barclay, of the Madras Cavalry, galloped through with dispatches. Pollock entered Cabul triumphantly on the 16th of last month, and, better still, Lady Sale has been rescued by Shakespear, and brought safe into the British camp, together with the other hostages. _Te Deum laudamus!_

This should end the whole wretched business—this and the sack of the city. I hope Pollock won't be squeamish, or truckle to the hysterical party at home. The towns should be laid in ashes and the fields sown with salt. Above all, the Residency and the Palace must come down. So shall Burnes, McNaghten, and many another gallant fellow know that his countrymen could avenge if they could not save him!

It is hard when others are gaining glory and experience to be stuck in this miserable valley. I have been out of it completely, bar a few petty skirmishes. However, we may see some service yet.

A jemidar of ours brought in a Hillman today, who says that the tribes are massing in the Terada ravine, ten miles to the north of us, and intend attacking the next convoy. We can't rely on information of this sort, but there may prove to be some truth in it. Proposed to shoot our informant, so as to prevent his playing the double traitor and reporting our proceedings. Elliott demurred.

If you are making war you should throw no chance away. I hate half-and-half measures. The Children of Israel seem to have been the only people who ever carried war to its logical conclusion—except Cromwell in Ireland. Made a compromise at last by which the man is to be detained as a prisoner and executed if his information prove to be false. I only hope we get a fair chance of showing what we can do.

No doubt these fellows at the Front will have C.B.'s and knighthoods showering upon them thick and fast, while we poor devils, who have had most of the responsibility and anxiety, will be passed over completely. Elliott has a whitlow.

The last convoy left us a large packet of sauces, but as they forgot to leave anything to eat with them, we have handed them over to the Sowars, who drink them out of their pannikins as if they were liqueurs. We hear that another large convoy may be expected from the plains in the course of a day or two. Took nine to four on Cleopatra for the Calcutta Cup.

October 4.--The Hillmen really mean business this time, I think. We have had two of our spies come in this morning with the same account about the gathering in the Terada quarter. That old rascal Zemaun is at the head of it, and I had recommended the Government to present him with a telescope in return for his neutrality! There will be no Zemaun to present it to if I can but lay hands upon him.

We expect the convoy tomorrow morning, and need anticipate no attack until it comes up, for these fellows fight for plunder, not for glory, though, to do them justice, they have plenty of pluck when they get started. I have devised an excellent plan, and it has Elliott's hearty support. By Jove! if we can only manage it, it will be as pretty a ruse as ever I heard of.

Our intention is to give out that we are going down the valley to meet the convoy and to block the mouth of a pass from which we profess to expect an attack. Very good. We shall make a night-march to-night and reach their camp. Once there I shall conceal my two hundred men in the waggons and travel up with the convoy again.

Our friends the enemy, having heard that we intended to go south, and seeing the caravan going north without us, will naturally swoop down upon it under the impression that we are twenty miles away. We shall teach them such a lesson that they would as soon think of stopping a thunderbolt as of interfering again with one of Her Britannic Majesty's provision trains. I am all on thorns to be off.

Elliott has rigged up two of his guns so ingeniously that they look more like costermongers' barrows than anything else. To see artillery ready for action in the convoy might arouse suspicion. The artillerists will be in the waggons next the guns, all ready to unlimber and open fire. Infantry in front and rear. Have told our confidential and discreet Sepoy servants the plan which we do not intend to adopt. N.B.—If you wish a thing to be noised over a whole province always whisper it under a vow of secrecy to your confidential native servant.

8.45 P.M.—Just starting for the convoy. May luck go with us!

October 5.—Seven o'clock in the evening. _Io triumphi!_ Crown us with laurel—Elliott and myself! Who can compare with us as vermin killers?

I have only just got back, tired and weary, stained with blood and dust, but I have sat down before either washing or changing to have the satisfaction of seeing our deeds set forth in black and white—if only in my private log for no eye but my own. I shall describe it all fully as a preparation for an official account, which must be drawn up when Elliott gets back. Billy Dawson used to say that there were three degrees of comparison—a prevarication, a lie, and an official account. We at least cannot exaggerate our success, for it would be impossible to add anything to it.

We set out, then, as per programme, and came upon the camp near the head of the valley. They had two weak
companies of the 54th with them who might no doubt have held their own with warning, but an unexpected rush of wild Hillmen is a very difficult thing to stand against. With our reinforcements, however, and on our guard, we might defy the rascals.

Chamberlain was in command--a fine young fellow. We soon made him understand the situation, and were all ready for a start by daybreak though his waggons were so full that we were compelled to leave several tons of fodder behind in order to make room for my Sepoys and for the artillery.

About five o'clock we inspanned, to use an Africanism, and by six we were well on our way, with our escort as straggling and unconcerned as possible--as helpless-looking a caravan as ever invited attack.

I could soon see that it was to be no false alarm this time, and that the tribes really meant business.

From my post of observation, under the canvas screens of one of the waggons, I could make out turbaned heads popping up to have a look at us from among the rocks, and an occasional scout hurrying northward with the news of our approach.

It was not, however, until we came abreast of the Terada Pass, a gloomy defile bounded by gigantic cliffs, that the Afridis began to show in force, though they had ambushed themselves so cleverly that, had we not been keenly on the look-out for them, we might have walked right into the trap. As it was, the convoy halted, upon which the Hillmen, seeing that they were observed, opened a heavy but ill-directed fire upon us.

I had asked Chamberlain to throw out his men in skirmishing order, and to give them directions to retreat slowly upon the waggons so as to draw the Afridis on. The ruse succeeded to perfection.

As the redcoats steadily retired, keeping behind cover as much as possible, the enemy followed them up with yells of exultation, springing from rock to rock, waving their jezails in the air, and howling like a pack of demons.

With their black, contorted, mocking faces, their fierce gestures, and their fluttering garments, they would have made a study for any painter who wished to portray Milton's conception of the army of the damned.

From every side they pressed in until, seeing, as they thought, nothing between them and victory, they left the shelter of the rocks and came rushing down, a furious, howling throng, with the green banner of the Prophet in their van.

Now was our chance, and gloriously we utilised it.

From every cranny and slit of the waggons came a blaze of fire, every shot of which told among the close-packed mob. Two or three score rolled over like rabbits and the rest reeled for a moment, and then, with their chiefs at their head, came on again in a magnificent rush.

It was useless, however, for undisciplined men to attempt to face such a well-directed fire. The leaders were bowled over, and the others, after hesitating for a few moments, turned and made for the rocks.

It was our turn now to assume the offensive. The guns were unlimbered and grape poured into them, while our little infantry force advanced at the double, shooting and stabbing all whom they overtook.

Never had I known the tide of battle turn so rapidly and so decisively. The sullen retreat became a flight, and the flight a panic-stricken rout, until there was nothing left of the tribesmen except a scattered, demoralised rabble flying wildly to their native fastnesses for shelter and protection.

I was by no means inclined to let them off cheaply now that I had them in my power. On the contrary, I determined to teach them such a lesson that the sight of a single scarlet uniform would in future be a passport in itself.

We followed hard upon the track of the fugitives and entered the Terada defile at their very heels. Having detached Chamberlain and Elliott with a company on either side to protect my wings, I pushed on with my Sepoys and a handful of artillerymen, giving the enemy no time to rally or to recover themselves. We were so handicapped, however, by our stiff European uniforms and by our want of practice in climbing, that we should have been unable to overtake any of the mountaineers had it not been for a fortunate accident.

There is a smaller ravine which opens into the main pass, and in their hurry and confusion some of the fugitives rushed down this. I saw sixty or seventy of them turn down, but I should have passed them by and continued in pursuit of the main body had not one of my scouts come rustling up to inform me that the smaller ravine was a cul-de-sac, and that the Afridis who had gone up it had no possible means of getting out again except by cutting their way through our ranks.

Here was an opportunity of striking terror into the tribes. Leaving Chamberlain and Elliott to continue the pursuit of the main body, I wheeled my Sepoys into the narrow path and proceeded slowly down it in extended order, covering the whole ground from cliff to cliff. Not a jackal could have passed us unseen. The rebels were caught like rats in a trap.

The defile in which we found ourselves was the most gloomy and majestic that I have ever seen. On either side naked precipices rose sheer up for a thousand feet or more, converging upon each other so as to leave a very narrow slit of daylight above us, which was further reduced by the feathery fringe of palm trees and aloes which hung over
each lip of the chasm.

The cliffs were not more than a couple of hundred yards apart at the entrance, but as we advanced they grew nearer and nearer, until a half company in close order could hardly march abreast.

A sort of twilight reigned in this strange valley, and the dim, uncertain light made the great, basalt rocks loom up vague and fantastic. There was no path, and the ground was most uneven, but I pushed on briskly, cautioning my fellows to have their fingers on their triggers, for I could see that we were nearing the point where the two cliffs would form an acute angle with each other.

At last we came in sight of the place. A great pile of boulders was heaped up at the very end of the pass, and among these our fugitives were skulking, entirely demoralised apparently, and incapable of resistance. They were useless as prisoners, and it was out of the question to let them go, so there was no choice but to polish them off.

Waving my sword, I was leading my men on, when we had a most dramatic interruption of a sort which I have seen once or twice on the boards of Drury Lane, but never in real life.

In the side of the cliff, close to the pile of stones where the Hillmen were making their last stand, there was a cave which looked more like the lair of some wild beast than a human habitation.

Out of this dark archway there suddenly emerged an old man--such a very, very old man that all the other veterans whom I have seen were as chickens compared with him. His hair and beard were both as white as snow, and each reached more than half-way to his waist. His face was wrinkled and brown and ebony, a cross between a monkey and a mummy, and so thin and emaciated were his shrivelled limbs that you would hardly have given him credit for having any vitality left, were it not for his eyes, which glittered and sparkled with excitement, like two diamonds in a setting of mahogany.

This apparition came rushing out of the cave, and, throwing himself between the fugitives and our fellows, motioned us back with as imperious a sweep of the hand as ever an emperor used to his slaves.

"Men of blood," he cried, in a voice of thunder, speaking excellent English, too--"this is a place for prayer and meditation, not for murder. Desist, lest the wrath of the gods fall upon you."

"Stand aside, old man," I shouted. "You will meet with a hurt if you don't get out of the way."

I could see that the Hillmen were taking heart, and that some of my Sepoys were flinching, as if they did not relish this new enemy. Clearly, I must act promptly if I wished to complete our success.

I dashed forward at the head of the white artillerymen who had stuck to me. The old fellow rushed at us with his arms out as if to stop us, but it was not time to stick at trifles, so I passed my sword through his body at the same moment that one of the gunners brought his carbine down upon his head. He dropped instantly, and the Hillmen, at the sight of his fall, set up the most unearthly howl of horror and consternation.

The Sepoys, who had been inclined to hang back, came on again the moment he was disposed of, and it did not take us long to consummate our victory. Hardly a man of the enemy got out of the defile alive.

What could Hannibal or Caesar have done more? Our own loss in the whole affair has been insignificant--three killed and about fifteen wounded. Got their banner, a green wisp of a thing with a sentence of the Koran engraved upon it.

I looked, after the action, for the old chap, but his body had disappeared, though how or whither I have no conception. His blood be upon his own head! He would be alive now if he had not interfered, as the constables say at home, "with an officer in the execution of his duty."

The scouts tell me that his name was Ghoolab Shah, and that he was one of the highest and holiest of the Buddhists. He had great fame in the district as a prophet and worker of miracles--hence the hubbub when he was cut down. They tell me that he was living in this very cave when Tamerlane passed this way in 1399, with a lot more bosh of that sort.

I went into the cave, and how any man could live in it a week is a mystery to me, for it was little more than four feet high, and as damp and dismal a grotto as ever was seen. A wooden settle and a rough table were the sole furniture, with a lot of parchment scrolls with hieroglyphics.

Well, he has gone where he will learn that the gospel of peace and good will is superior to all his Pagan lore. Peace go with him.

Elliott and Chamberlain never caught the main body--I knew they wouldn't--so the honours of the day rest with me. I ought to get a step for it, anyhow, and perhaps, who knows? some mention in the Gazette. What a lucky chance! I think Zemaun deserves his telescope after all for giving it to me. Shall have something to eat now, for I am half starved. Glory is an excellent thing, but you cannot live upon it.

October 6, 11 A.M.--Let me try to set down as calmly and as accurately as I can all that occurred last night. I have never been a dreamer or a visionary, so I can rely upon my own senses, though I am bound to say that if any other fellow had told me the same thing I should have doubted him. I might even have suspected that I was deceived at the time had I not heard the bell since. However, I must narrate what happened.
Elliott was in my tent with me having a quiet cheroot until about ten o'clock. I then walked the rounds with my jemidar, and having seen that all was right I turned in a little before eleven.

I was just dropping off to sleep, for I was dog-tired after the day's work, when I was aroused by some slight noise, and, looking round, I saw a man dressed in Asiatic costume standing at the entrance of my tent. He was motionless when I saw him, and he had his eyes fixed upon me with a solemn and stern expression.

My first thought was that the fellow was some Ghazi or Afghan fanatic who had stolen in with the intention of stabbing me, and with this idea in my mind I had all the will to spring from my couch and defend myself, but the power was unaccountably lacking.

An overpowering languor and want of energy possessed me. Had I seen the dagger descending upon my breast I could not have made an effort to avert it. I suppose a bird when it is under the influence of a snake feels very much as I did in the presence of this gloomy-faced stranger. My mind was clear enough, but my body was as torpid as though I were still asleep.

I shut my eyes once or twice and tried to persuade myself that the whole thing was a delusion, but every time that I opened them there was the man still regarding me with the same stony, menacing stare.

The silence became unendurable. I felt that I must overcome my languor so far as to address him. I am not a nervous man, and I never knew before what Virgil meant when he wrote "adhoesit faucibus ora." At last I managed to stammer out a few words, asking the intruder who he was and what he wanted.

"Lieutenant Heatherstone," he answered, speaking slowly and gravely, "you have committed this day the foulest sacrilege and the greatest crime which it is possible for man to do. You have slain one of the thrice blessed and reverend ones, an arch adept of the first degree, an elder brother who has trod the higher path for more years than you have numbered months. You have cut him off at a time when his labours promised to reach a climax and when he was about to attain a height of occult knowledge which would have brought man one step nearer to his Creator. All this you have done without excuse, without provocation, at a time when he was pleading the cause of the helpless and distressed. Listen now to me, John Heatherstone.

"When first the occult sciences were pursued many thousands of years ago, it was found by the learned that the short tenure of human existence was too limited to allow a man to attain the loftiest heights of inner life. The inquirers of those days directed their energies in the first place, therefore, to the lengthening of their own days in order that they might have more scope for improvement.

"By their knowledge of the secret laws of Nature they were enabled to fortify their bodies against disease and old age. It only remained to protect themselves against the assaults of wicked and violent men who are ever ready to destroy what is wiser and nobler than themselves. There was no direct means by which this protection could be effected, but it was in some measure attained by arranging the occult forces in such a way that a terrible and unavoidable retribution should await the offender.

"It was irrevocably ordained by laws which cannot be reversed that any one who should shed the blood of a brother who had attained a certain degree of sanctity should be a doomed man. Those laws are extant to this day, John Heatherstone, and you have placed yourself in their power. King or emperor would be helpless before the forces which you have called into play. What hope, then, is there for you?

"In former days these laws acted so instantaneously that the slayer perished with his victim. It was judged afterwards that this prompt retribution prevented the offender from having time to realise the enormity of his offence.

"It was therefore ordained that in all such cases the retribution should be left in the hands of the _chelas_, or immediate disciples of the holy man, with power to extend or shorten it at their will, exacting it either at the time or at any future anniversary of the day when the crime was committed.

"Why punishment should come on those days only it does not concern you to know. Suffice it that you are the murderer of Ghoolab Shah, the thrice blessed, and that I am the senior of his three _chelas_ commissioned to avenge his death.

"It is no personal matter between us. Amid our studies we have no leisure or inclination for personal matters. It is an immutable law, and it is as impossible for us to relax it as it is for you to escape from it Sooner or later we shall come to you and claim your life in atonement for the one which you have taken.

"The same fate shall be meted out to the wretched soldier, Smith, who, though less guilty than yourself, has incurred the same penalty by raising his sacrilegious hand against the chosen of Buddha. If your life is prolonged, it is merely that you may have time to repent of your misdeed and to feel the full force of your punishment.

"And lest you should be tempted to cast it out of your mind and to forget it, our bell--our astral bell, the use of which is one of our occult secrets--shall ever remind you of what have been and what is to be. You shall hear it by day and you shall hear it by night, and it will be a sign to you that do what you may and go where you will, you can never shake yourself clear of the _chelas_ of Ghoolab Shah.
"You will never see me more, accursed one, until the day when we come for you. Live in fear, and in that anticipation which is worse than death."

With a menacing wave of the hand the figure turned and swept out of my tent into the darkness. The instant that the fellow disappeared from my sight I recovered from my lethargy which had fallen upon me. Springing to my feet, I rushed to the opening and looked out. A Sepoy sentry was standing leaning upon his musket, a few paces off.

"You dog," I said in Hindustani. "What do you mean by letting people disturb me in this way?"

The man stared at me in amazement. "Has any one disturbed the sahib?" he asked.

"This instant--this moment. You must have seen him pass out of my tent."

"Surely the Burra Sahib is mistaken," the man answered, respectfully but firmly. "I have been here for an hour, and no one has passed from the tent."

Puzzled and disconcerted, I was sitting by the side of my couch wondering whether the whole thing were a delusion, brought on by the nervous excitement of our skirmish, when a new marvel overtook me. From over my head there suddenly sounded a sharp, tinkling sound, like that produced by an empty glass when flipped by the nail, only louder and more intense.

I looked up, but nothing was to be seen. I examined the whole interior of the tent carefully, but without discovering any cause for the strange sound. At last, worn out with fatigue, I gave the mystery up, and throwing myself on the couch was soon fast asleep.

When I awoke this morning I was inclined to put the whole of my yesternight's experiences down to imagination, but I was soon disabused of the idea, for I had hardly risen before the same strange sound was repeated in my very ear as loudly, and to all appearance as causelessly, as before. What it is or where it comes from I cannot conceive. I have not heard it since.

Can the fellow's threats have something in them and this be the warning bell of which he spoke? Surely it is impossible. Yet his manner was indescribably impressive.

I have tried to set down what he said as accurately as I can, but I fear I have omitted a good deal. What is to be the end of this strange affair? I must go in for a course of religion and holy water. Not a word to Chamberlain or Elliott. They tell me I am looking like a ghost this morning.

_Evening_.--Have managed to compare notes with Gunner Rufus Smith of the Artillery, who knocked the old fellow over with the butt of his gun. His experience has been the same as mine. He has heard the sound, too. What is the meaning of it all? My brain is in a whirl.

Oct. 10 (four days later).--God help us!

This last laconic entry terminated the journal. It seemed to me that, coming as it did after four days' complete silence, it told a clearer tale of shaken nerve and a broken spirit than could any more elaborate narrative. Pinned on to the journal was a supplementary statement which had evidently been recently added by the general.

"From that day to this," it said, "I have had no night or day free from the intrusion of that dreadful sound with its accompanying train of thought. Time and custom have brought me no relief, but on the contrary, as the years pass over my head my physical strength decreases and my nerves become less able to bear up against the continual strain.

"I am a broken man in mind and body. I live in a state of tension, always straining my ears for the hated sound, afraid to converse with my fellows for fear of exposing my dreadful condition to them, with no comfort or hope of comfort on this side of the grave. I should be willing. Heaven knows, to die, and yet as each 5th of October comes round, I am prostrated with fear because I do not know what strange and terrible experience may be in store for me.

"Forty years have passed since I slew Ghoolab Shah, and forty times I have gone through all the horrors of death, without attaining the blessed peace which lies beyond.

"I have no means of knowing in what shape my fate will come upon me. I have immured myself in this lonely country, and surrounded myself with barriers, because in my weaker moments my instincts urge me to take some steps for self-protection, but I know well in my heart how futile it all is. They must come quickly now, for I grow old, and Nature will forestall them unless they make haste.

"I take credit to myself that I have kept my hands off the prussic-acid or opium bottle. It has always been in my power to checkmate my occult persecutors in that way, but I have ever held that a man in this world cannot desert his post until he has been relieved in due course by the authorities. I have had no scruples, however, about exposing myself to danger, and, during the Sikh and Sepoy wars, I did all that a man could do to court Death. He passed me by, however, and picked out many a young fellow to whom life was only opening and who had everything to live for, while I survived to win crosses and honours which had lost all relish for me.

"Well, well, these things cannot depend upon chance, and there is no doubt some deep reason for it all.

"One compensation Providence has made me in the shape of a true and faithful wife, to whom I told my dreadful secret before the wedding, and who nobly consented to share my lot. She has lifted half the burden from my shoulders, but with the effect, poor soul, of crushing her own life beneath its weight!
"My children, too, have been a comfort to me. Mordaunt knows all, or nearly all. Gabriel we have endeavoured to keep in the dark, though we cannot prevent her from knowing that there is something amiss.

"I should like this statement to be shown to Dr. John Easterling", of Stranraer. He heard on one occasion this haunting sound. My sad experience may show him that I spoke truth when I said that there was much knowledge in the world which has never found its way to England.

"J. B. HEATHERSTONE."

It was going on for dawn by the time that I had finished this extraordinary narrative, to which my sister and Mordaunt Heatherstone listened with the most absorbed attention. Already we could see through the window that the stars had begun to fade and a grey light to appear in the east. The crofter who owned the lurcher dog lived a couple of miles off, so it was time for us to be on foot. Leaving Esther to tell my father the story in such fashion as she might, we thrust some food in our pockets and set off upon our solemn and eventful errand.

CHAPTER XVI
AT THE HOLE OF CREE

It was dark enough when we started to make it no easy matter to find our way across the moors, but as we advanced it grew lighter and lighter, until by the time we reached Fullarton's cabin it was broad daylight.

Early as it was, he was up and about, for the Wigtown peasants are an early rising race. We explained our mission to him in as few words as possible, and having made his bargain--what Scot ever neglected that preliminary?--he agreed not only to let us have the use of his dog but to come with us himself.

Mordaunt, in his desire for privacy, would have demurred at this arrangement, but I pointed out to him that we had no idea what was in store for us, and the addition of a strong, able-bodied man to our party might prove to be of the utmost consequence.

Again, the dog was less likely to give us trouble if we had its master to control it. My arguments carried the day, and the biped accompanied us as well as his four-footed companion.

There was some little similarity between the two, for the man was a towsy-headed fellow with a great mop of yellow hair and a straggling beard, while the dog was of the long-haired, unkempt breed looking like an animated bundle of oakum.

All our way to the Hall its owner kept retailing instances of the creature's sagacity and powers of scent, which, according to his account, were little less than miraculous. His anecdotes had a poor audience, I fear, for my mind was filled with the strange story which I had been reading, while Mordaunt strode on with wild eyes and feverish cheeks, without a thought for anything but the problem which we had to solve.

Again and again as we topped an eminence I saw him look eagerly round him in the faint hope of seeing some trace of the absentee, but over the whole expanse of moorland there was no sign of movement or of life. All was dead and silent and deserted.

Our visit to the Hall was a very brief one, for every minute now was of importance. Mordaunt rushed in and emerged with an old coat of his father's, which he handed to Fullarton, who held it out to the dog.

The intelligent brute sniffed at it all over, then ran whining a little way down the avenue, came back to sniff the coat again, and finally elevating its stump of a tail in triumph, uttered a succession of sharp yelps to show that it was satisfied that it had struck the trail. Its owner tied a long cord to its collar to prevent it from going too fast for us, and we all set off upon our search, the dog tugging and training at its leash in its excitement as it followed in the general's footsteps.

Our way lay for a couple of hundred yards along the high road, and then passed through a gap In the hedge and on to the moor, across which we were led in a bee-line to the northward.

The sun had by this time risen above the horizon, and the whole countryside looked so fresh and sweet, from the blue, sparkling sea to the purple mountains, that it was difficult to realise how weird and uncanny was the enterprise upon which we were engaged.

The scent must have lain strongly upon the ground, for the dog never hesitated nor stopped, dragging its master along at a pace which rendered conversation impossible.

At one place, in crossing a small stream, we seemed to get off the trail for a few minutes, but our keen-nosed ally soon picked it up on the other side and followed it over the trackless moor, whining and yelping all the time in its eagerness. Had we not all three been fleet of foot and long of wind, we could not have persisted in the continuous, rapid journey over the roughest of ground, with the heather often well-nigh up to our waists.

For my own part, I have no idea now, looking back, what goal it was which I expected to reach at the end of our pursuit. I can remember that my mind was full of the vaguest and most varying speculations.

Could it be that the three Buddhists had had a craft in readiness off the coast, and had embarked with their prisoners for the East? The direction of their track seemed at first to favour this supposition, for it lay in the line of the upper end of the bay, but it ended by branching off and striking directly inland. Clearly the ocean was not to be
our terminus.

By ten o'clock we had walked close upon twelve miles, and were compelled to call a halt for a few minutes to
recover our breath, for the last mile or two we had been breathing the long, wearying slope of the Wigtown hills.

From the summit of this range, which is nowhere more than a thousand feet in height, we could see, looking
northward, such a scene of bleakness and desolation as can hardly be matched in any country.

Right away to the horizon stretched the broad expanse of mud and of water, mingled and mixed together in the
wildest chaos, like a portion of some world in the process of formation. Here and there on the dun-coloured surface
of this great marsh there had burst out patches of sickly yellow reeds and of livid, greenish scum, which only served
to heighten and intensify the gloomy effect of the dull, melancholy expanse.

On the side nearest to us some abandoned peat-cuttings showed that ubiquitous man had been at work there, but
beyond these few petty scars there was no sign anywhere of human life. Not even a crow nor a seagull flapped its
way over that hideous desert.

This is the great Bog of Cree. It is a salt-water marsh formed by an inroad of the sea, and so intersected is it with
dangerous swamps and treacherous pitfalls of liquid mud, that no man would venture through it unless he had the
guidance of one of the few peasants who retain the secret of its paths.

As we approached the fringe of rushes which marked its border, a foul, dank smell rose up from the stagnant
wilderness, as from impure water and decaying vegetation—an earthy, noisome smell which poisoned the fresh
upland air.

So forbidding and gloomy was the aspect of the place that our stout crofter hesitated, and it was all that we could
do to persuade him to proceed. Our lurcher, however, not being subject to the delicate impressions of our higher
organisation, still ran yelping along with its nose on the ground and every fibre of its body quivering with
excitement and eagerness.

There was no difficulty about picking our way through the morass, for wherever the five could go we three could
follow.

If we could have had any doubts as to our dog's guidance they would all have been removed now, for in the soft,
black, oozing soil we could distinctly trace the tracks of the whole party. From these we could see that they had
walked abreast, and, furthermore, that each was about equidistant from the other. Clearly, then, no physical force
had been used in taking the general and his companion along. The compulsion had been psychical and not material.

Once within the swamp, we had to be careful not to deviate from the narrow track, which offered a firm
foothold.

On each side lay shallow sheets of stagnant water overlying a treacherous bottom of semi-fluid mud, which rose
above the surface here and there in moist, sweltering banks, mottled over with occasional patches of unhealthy
vegetation. Great purple and yellow fungi had broken out in a dense eruption, as though Nature were afflicted with a
foul disease, which manifested itself by this crop of plague spots.

Here and there dark, crab-like creatures scuttled across our path, and hideous, flesh-coloured worms wriggled
and writhed amid the sickly reeds. Swarms of buzzing, piping insects rose up at every step and formed a dense cloud
around our heads, settling on our hands and faces and inoculating us with their filthy venom. Never had I ventured
into so pestilent and forbidding a place.

Mordaunt Heatherstone strode on, however, with a set purpose upon his swarthy brow, and we could but follow
him, determined to stand by him to the end of the adventure. As we advanced, the path grew narrower and narrower
until, as we saw by the tracks, our predecessors had been compelled to walk in single file. Fullarton was leading us
with the dog, Mordaunt behind him, while I brought up the rear. The peasant had been sulky and surly for a little
time back, hardly answering when spoken to, but he now stopped short and positively refused to go a step farther.

"It's no' canny," he said, "besides I ken where it will lead us tae"
"Where, then?" I asked.
"Tae the Hole o' Cree," he answered. "It's no far frae here, I'm thinking."
"The Hole of Cree! What is that, then?"
"It's a great, muckle hole in the ground that gangs awa' doon so deep that naebody could ever reach the bottom.
Indeed there are folk wha says that it's just a door leadin' intae the bottomless pit itsel'"
"You have been there, then?" I asked.
"Been there!" he cried. "What would I be doin' at the Hole o' Cree? No, I've never been there, nor any other man
in his senses."
"How do you know about it, then?"
"My great-grandfeyther had been there, and that's how I ken," Fullarton answered. "He was fou' one Saturday
nicht and he went for a bet. He dinna like tae talk aboot it afterwards, and he wouldn'a tell a' what befell him, but he
was aye feared o' the very name. He's the first Fullarton that's been at the Hole o' Cree, and he'll be the last for me. If
ye'll tak' my advice ye'll just gie the matter up and gang name again, for there's na guid tae be got oot o' this place."

"We shall go on with you or without you," Mordaunt answered. "Let us have your dog and we can pick you up on our way back."

"Na, na," he cried, "I'll no' hae my dog scared wi' bogles, and running down Auld Nick as if he were a hare. The dog shall bide wi' me."

"The dog shall go with us," said my companion, with his eyes blazing. "We have no time to argue with you. Here's a five-pound note. Let us have the dog, or, by Heaven, I shall take it by force and throw you in the bog if you hinder us."

I could realise the Heatherstone of forty years ago when I saw the fierce and sudden wrath which lit up the features of his son.

Either the bribe or the threat had the desired effect, for the fellow grabbed at the money with one hand while with the other he surrendered the leash which held the lurcher. Leaving him to retrace his steps, we continued to make our way into the utmost recesses of the great swamp.

The tortuous path grew less and less defined as we proceeded, and was even covered in places with water, but the increasing excitement of the hound and the sight of the deep footmarks in the mud stimulated us to push on. At last, after struggling through a grove of high bulrushes, we came on a spot the gloomy horror of which might have furnished Dante with a fresh terror for his "Inferno."

The whole bog in this part appeared to have sunk in, forming a great, funnel-shaped depression, which terminated in the centre in a circular rift or opening about forty feet in diameter. It was a whirlpool--a perfect maelstrom of mud, sloping down on every side to this silent and awful chasm.

Clearly this was the spot which, under the name of the Hole of Cree, bore such a sinister reputation among the rustics. I could not wonder at its impressing their imagination, for a more weird or gloomy scene, or one more worthy of the avenue which led to it, could not be conceived.

The steps passed down the declivity which surrounded the abyss, and we followed them with a sinking feeling in our hearts, as we realised that this was the end of our search.

A little way from the downward path was the return trail made by the feet of those who had come back from the chasm's edge. Our eyes fell upon these tracks at the same moment, and we each gave a cry of horror, and stood gazing speechlessly at them. For there, in those blurred footmarks, the whole drama was revealed.

_Five had gone down, but only three had returned._

None shall ever know the details of that strange tragedy. There was no mark of struggle nor sign of attempt at escape. We knelt at the edge of the Hole and endeavoured to pierce the unfathomable gloom which shrouded it. A faint, sickly exhalation seemed to rise from its depths, and there was a distant hurrying, clattering sound as of waters in the bowels of the earth.

A great stone lay embedded in the mud, and this I hurled over, but we never heard thud or splash to show that it had reached the bottom.

As we hung over the noisome chasm a sound did at last rise to our ears out of its murky depths. High, clear, and throbbing, it tinkled for an instant out of the abyss, to be succeeded by the same deadly stillness which had preceded it. I did not wish to appear superstitious, or to put down to extraordinary causes that which may have a natural explanation. That one keen note may have been some strange water sound produced far down in the bowels of the earth. It may have been that or it may have been that sinister bell of which I had heard so much. Be this as it may, it was the only sign that rose to us from the last terrible resting-place of the two who had paid the debt which had so long been owing.

We joined our voices in a call with the unreasoning obstinacy with which men will cling to hope, but no answer came back to us save a hollow moaning from the depths beneath. Footsore and heart-sick, we retraced our steps and climbed the slimy slope once more.

"What shall we do, Mordaunt?" I asked, in a subdued voice. "We can but pray that their souls may rest in peace."

Young Heatherstone looked at me with flashing eyes.

"This may be all according to occult laws," he cried, "but we shall see what the laws of England have to say upon it. I suppose a _chela_ may be hanged as well as any other man. It may not be too late yet to run them down. Here, good dog, good dog—here!"

He pulled the hound over and set it on the track of the three men. The creature sniffed at it once or twice, and then, falling upon its stomach, with bristling hair and protruding tongue, it lay shivering and trembling, a very embodiment of canine terror.

"You see," I said, "it is no use contending against those who have powers at their command to which we cannot even give a name. There is nothing for it but to accept the inevitable, and to hope that these poor men may meet with
some compensation in another world for all that they have suffered in this."

"And be free from all devilish religions and their murderous worshippers!" Mordaunt cried furiously.

Justice compelled me to acknowledge in my own heart that the murderous spirit had been set on foot by the Christian before it was taken up by the Buddhists, but I forbore to remark upon it, for fear of irritating my companion.

For a long time I could not draw him away from the scene of his father's death, but at last, by repeated arguments and reasonings, I succeeded in making him realise how useless and unprofitable any further efforts on our part must necessarily prove, and in inducing him to return with me to Cloomber.

Oh, the wearisome, tedious journey! It had seemed long enough when we had some slight flicker of hope, or at least of expectation, before us, but now that our worst fears were fulfilled it appeared interminable.

We picked up our peasant guide at the outskirts of the marsh, and having restored his dog we let him find his own way home, without telling him anything of the results of our expedition. We ourselves plodded all day over the moors with heavy feet and heavier hearts until we saw the ill-omened tower of Cloomber, and at last, as the sun was setting, found ourselves once more beneath its roof.

There is no need for me to enter into further details, nor to describe the grief which our tidings conveyed to mother and to daughter. Their long expectation of some calamity was not sufficient to prepare them for the terrible reality.

For weeks my poor Gabriel hovered between life and death, and though she came round at last, thanks to the nursing of my sister and the professional skill of Dr. John Easterling, she has never to this day entirely recovered her former vigour. Mordaunt, too, suffered much for some time, and it was only after our removal to Edinburgh that he rallied from the shock which he had undergone.

As to poor Mrs. Heatherstone, neither medical attention nor change of air can ever have a permanent effect upon her. Slowly and surely, but very placidly, she has declined in health and strength, until it is evident that in a very few weeks at the most she will have rejoined her husband and restored to him the one thing which he must have grudged to leave behind.

The Laird of Branksome came home from Italy restored in health, with the result that we were compelled to return once more to Edinburgh.

The change was agreeable to us, for recent events had cast a cloud over our country life and had surrounded us with unpleasant associations. Besides, a highly honourable and remunerative appointment in connection with the University library had become vacant, and had, through the kindness of the late Sir Alexander Grant, been offered to my father, who, as may be imagined, lost no time in accepting so congenial a post.

In this way we came back to Edinburgh very much more important people than we left it, and with no further reason to be uneasy about the details of housekeeping. But, in truth, the whole household has been dissolved, for I have been married for some months to my dear Gabriel, and Esther is to become Mrs. Heatherstone upon the 23rd of the month. If she makes him as good a wife as his sister has made me, we may both set ourselves down as fortunate men.

These mere domestic episodes are, as I have already explained, introduced only because I cannot avoid alluding to them.

My object in drawing up this statement and publishing the evidence which corroborates it, was certainly not to parade my private affairs before the public, but to leave on record an authentic narrative of a most remarkable series of events. This I have endeavoured to do in as methodical a manner as possible, exaggerating nothing and suppressing nothing.

The reader has now the evidence before him, and can form his own opinions unaided by me as to the causes of the disappearance and death of Rufus Smith and of John Berthier Heatherstone, V.C., C.B.

There is only one point which is still dark to me. Why the _chelas_ of Ghoolab Shah should have removed their victims to the desolate Hole of Cree instead of taking their lives at Cloomber, is, I confess, a mystery to me.

In dealing with occult laws, however, we must allow for our own complete ignorance of the subject. Did we know more we might see that there was some analogy between that foul bog and the sacrilege which had been committed, and that their ritual and customs demanded that just such a death was the one appropriate to the crime.

On this point I should be sorry to be dogmatic, but at least we must allow that the Buddhist priests must have had some very good cause for the course of action which they so deliberately carried out.

Months afterwards I saw a short paragraph in the _Star_of_India_ announcing that three eminent Buddhists—Lal Hoomi, Mowdar Khan, and Ram Singh—had just returned in the steamship _Deccan_ from a short trip to Europe. The very next item was devoted to an account of the life and services of Major-General Heatherstone, "who has lately disappeared from his country house in Wigtownshire, and who, there is too much reason to fear, has been drowned."
I wonder if by chance there was any other human eye but mine which traced a connection between these paragraphs. I never showed them to my wife or to Mordaunt, and they will only know of their existence when they read these pages.

I don't know that there is any other point which needs clearing up. The intelligent reader will have already seen the reasons for the general's fear of dark faces, of wandering men (not knowing how his pursuers might come after him), and of visitors (from the same cause and because his hateful bell was liable to sound at all times).

His broken sleep led him to wander about the house at night, and the lamps which he burnt in every room were no doubt to prevent his imagination from peopling the darkness with terrors. Lastly, his elaborate precautions were, as he has himself explained, rather the result of a feverish desire to do something than in the expectation that he could really ward off his fate.

Science will tell you that there are no such powers as those claimed by the Eastern mystics. I, John Fothergill West, can confidently answer that science is wrong.

For what is science? Science is the consensus of opinion of scientific men, and history has shown that it is slow to accept a truth. Science sneered at Newton for twenty years. Science proved mathematically that an iron ship could not swim, and science declared that a steamship could not cross the Atlantic.

Like Goethe's Mephistopheles, our wise professor's forte is "stets verneinen." Thomas Didymus is, to use his own jargon, his prototype. Let him learn that if he will but cease to believe in the infallibility of his own methods, and will look to the East, from which all great movements come, he will find there a school of philosophers and of savants who, working on different lines from his own, are many thousand years ahead of him in all the essentials of knowledge.

THE END
TO THE WONDERFUL WOMAN

MISS ISABEL THORNE

All the world rubs elbows in Washington. Outwardly it is merely a city of evasion, of conventionalities, sated with the commonplace pleasures of life, listless, blase even, and always exquisitely, albeit frigidly, courteous; but beneath the still, suave surface strange currents play at cross purposes, intrigue is endless, and the merciless war of diplomacy goes on unceasingly. Occasionally, only occasionally, a bubble comes to the surface, and when it bursts the echo goes crashing around the earth. Sometimes a dynasty is shaken, a nation trembles, a ministry topples over; but the ripple moves and all is placid again. No man may know all that happens there, for then he would be diplomatic master of the world.

"There is plenty of red blood in Washington," remarked a jesting legislative gray-beard, once upon a time, "but it's always frozen before they put it in circulation. Diplomatic negotiations are conducted in the drawing-room, but long before that the fight is fought down cellar. The diplomatists meet at table and there isn't any broken crockery, but you can always tell what the player thinks of the dealer by the way he draws three cards. Everybody is after results; and lots of monarchs of Europe sit up nights polishing their crowns waiting for word from Washington."

So, this is Washington! And here at dinner are the diplomatic representatives of all the nations. That is the British ambassador, that stolid-faced, distinguished-looking, elderly man; and this is the French ambassador, dapper, volatile, plus-correct; here Russia's highest representative wags a huge, blond beard; and yonder is the phlegmatic German ambassador. Scattered around the table, brilliant splotches of color, are the uniformed envoys of the Orient-the smaller the country the more brilliant the splotch. It is a state dinner, to be followed by a state ball, and they are all present.

The Italian ambassador, Count di Rosini, was trying to interpret a French _bon mot_ into English for the benefit of the dainty, doll-like wife of the Chinese minister—who was educated at Radcliffe—when a servant leaned over him and laid a sealed envelope beside his plate. The count glanced around at the servant, excused himself to Mrs. Quong Li Wi, and opened the envelope. Inside was a single sheet of embassy note paper, and a terse line signed by his secretary:

"A lady is waiting for you here. She says she must see you immediately, on a matter of the greatest importance."

The count read the note twice, with wrinkled brow, then scribbled on it in pencil:

"Impossible to-night. Tell her to call at the embassy to-morrow morning at half-past ten o'clock."

He folded the note, handed it to the servant, and resumed his conversation with Mrs. Wi.

Half an hour later the same servant placed a second sealed envelope beside his plate. Recognizing the superscription, the ambassador impatiently shoved it aside, intending to disregard it. But irritated curiosity finally triumphed, and he opened it. A white card on which was written this command was his reward:

"It is necessary that you come to the embassy at once."

There was no signature. The handwriting was unmistakably that of a woman, and just as unmistakably strange to him. He frowned a little as he stared at it wonderingly, then idly turned the card over. There was no name on the reverse side—only a crest. Evidently the count recognized this, for his impassive face reflected surprise for an instant, and this was followed by a keen, bewildered interest. Finally he arose, made his apologies, and left the room. His automobile was at the door.
"To the embassy," he directed the chauffeur.
And within five minutes he was there. His secretary met him in the hall.
"The lady is waiting in your office," he explained apologetically. "I gave her your message, but she said she
must see you and would write you a line herself. I sent it."

"Quite correct," commented the ambassador. "What name did she give?"
"None," was the reply. "She said none was necessary."
The ambassador laid aside hat and coat and entered his office with a slightly puzzled expression on his face.
Standing before a window, gazing idly out into the light-spangled night, was a young woman, rather tall and
severely gowned in some rich, glistening stuff which fell away sheerly from her splendid bare shoulders. She turned
and he found himself looking into a pair of clear, blue-gray eyes, frank enough and yet in their very frankness
possessing an alluring, indefinable subtlety. He would not have called her pretty, yet her smile, slight as it was, was
singularly charming, and there radiated from her a something--personality, perhaps--which held his glance. He
bowed low, and closed the door.

"I am at your service, Madam," he said in a tone of deep respect. "Please pardon my delay in coming to you."

"It is unfortunate that I didn't write the first note," she apologized graciously. "It would at least have saved a little
time. You have the card?"
He produced it silently, crest down, and handed it to her. She struck a match, lighted the card, and it crumbled up
in her gloved hand. The last tiny scrap found refuge in a silver tray, where she watched it burn to ashes, then she
turned to the ambassador with a brilliant smile. He was still standing.

"The dinner isn't over yet?" she inquired.
"No, Madam, not for another hour, perhaps."
"Then there's no harm done," she went on lightly. "The dinner isn't of any consequence, but I should like very
much to attend the ball afterward. Can you arrange it for me?"

"I don't know just how I would proceed, Madam," the ambassador objected diffidently. "It would be rather
unusual, difficult, I may say, and--"

"But surely you can arrange it some way?" she interrupted demurely. "The highest diplomatic representative of a
great nation should not find it difficult to arrange so simple a matter as--as this?" She was smiling.

"Pardon me for suggesting it, Madam," the ambassador persisted courteously, "but anything out of the usual
attracts attention in Washington. I dare say, from the manner of your appearance to-night, that you would not care to
attract attention to yourself."

She regarded him with an enigmatic smile.
"I'm afraid you don't know women, Count," she said slowly, at last. "There's nothing dearer to a woman's heart
than to attract attention to herself." She laughed--a throaty, silvery note that was charming. "And if you hesitate now,
then to-morrow--why, to-morrow I am going to ask that you open to me all this Washington world--this brilliant
world of diplomatic society. You see what I ask now is simple."
The ambassador was respectfully silent and deeply thoughtful for a time. There was, perhaps, something of
resentment struggling within him, and certainly there was an uneasy feeling of rebellion at this attempt to thrust him
forward against all precedent.

"Your requests are of so extraordinary a nature that--" he began in courteous protestation.
There was no trace of impatience in the woman's manner; she was still smiling.

"It is necessary that I attend the ball to-night," she explained, "you may imagine how necessary when I say I
sailed from Liverpool six days ago, reaching New York at half-past three o'clock this afternoon; and at half-past four
I was on my way here. I have been here less than one hour. I came from Liverpool especially that I might be present;
and I even dressed on the train so there would be no delay. Now do you see the necessity of it?"

Diplomatic procedure is along well-oiled grooves, and the diplomatist who steps out of the rut for an instant
happens upon strange and unexpected obstacles. Knowing this, the ambassador still hesitated. The woman apparently understood.

"I had hoped that this would not be necessary," she remarked, and she produced a small, sealed envelope. "Please read it."

The ambassador received the envelope with uplifted brows, opened it and read what was written on a folded sheet of paper. Some subtle working of his brain brought a sudden change in the expression of his face. There was wonder in it, and amazement, and more than these. Again he bowed low.

"I am at your service, Madam," he repeated. "I shall take pleasure in making any arrangements that are necessary. Again, I beg your pardon."

"And it will not be so very difficult, after all, will it?" she inquired, and she smiled tauntingly.

"It will not be at all difficult, Madam," the ambassador assured her gravely. "I shall take steps at once to have an invitation issued to you for to-night; and to-morrow I shall be pleased to proceed as you may suggest."

She nodded. He folded the note, replaced it in the envelope and returned it to her with another deep bow. She drew her skirts about her and sat down; he stood.

"It will be necessary for your name to appear on the invitation," the ambassador went on to explain. "If you will give me your name I'll have my secretary--"

"Oh, yes, my name," she interrupted gaily. "Why, Count, you embarrass me. You know, really, I have no name. Isn't it awkward?"

"I understand perfectly, Madam," responded the count. "I should have said _a_ name."

She meditated a moment.

"Well, say--Miss Thorne--Miss Isabel Thorne," she suggested at last. "That will do very nicely, don't you think?"

"Very nicely, Miss Thorne," and the ambassador bowed again. "Please excuse me a moment, and I'll give my secretary instructions how to proceed. There will be a delay of a few minutes."

He opened the door and went out. For a minute or more Miss Thorne sat perfectly still, gazing at the blank wooden panels, then she rose and went to the window again. In the distance, hazy in the soft night, the dome of the capitol rose mistily; over to the right was the congressional library, and out there where the lights sparkled lay Pennsylvania Avenue, a thread of commerce. Miss Thorne saw it all, and suddenly stretched out her arms with an all-enveloping gesture. She stood so for a minute, then they fell beside her, and she was motionless.

Count di Rosini entered.

"Everything is arranged, Miss Thorne," he announced. "Will you go with me in my automobile, or do you prefer to go alone?"

"I'll go alone, please," she answered after a moment. "I shall be there about eleven."

The ambassador bowed himself out.

And so Miss Isabel Thorne came to Washington!

II

MR. CAMPBELL AND THE CABLE

Just as it is one man's business to manufacture watches, and another man's business to peddle shoe-strings, so it was Mr. Campbell's business to know things. He was a human card index, a governmental ready reference posted to the minute and backed by all the tremendous resources of a nation. From the little office in the Secret Service Bureau, where he sat day after day, radiating threads connected with the huge outer world, and enabled him to keep a firm hand on the diplomatic and departmental pulse of Washington. Perhaps he came nearer knowing everything that happened there than any other man living; and no man realized more perfectly than he just how little of all of it he did know.

In person Mr. Campbell was not unlike a retired grocer who had shaken the butter and eggs from his soul and settled back to enjoy a life of placid idleness. He was a little beyond middle age, pleasant of face, white of hair, and blessed with guileless blue eyes. His genius had no sparkle to it; it consisted solely of detail and system and indefatigability, coupled with a memory that was well nigh infallible. His brain was as serene and orderly as a cash register; one almost expected to hear it click.

He sat at his desk intently studying a cable despatch which lay before him. It was in the Secret Service code. Leaning over his shoulder was Mr. Grimm--_the_ Mr. Grimm of the bureau. Mr. Grimm was an utterly different type from his chief. He was younger, perhaps thirty-one or two, physically well proportioned, a little above the average height, with regular features and listless, purposeless eyes--a replica of a hundred other young men who dawdle idly in the windows of their clubs and watch the world hurry by. His manner was languid; his dress showed fastidious care.

Sentence by sentence the bewildering intricacies of the code gave way before the placid understanding of Chief Campbell, and word by word, from the chaos of it, a translation took intelligible form upon a sheet of paper under
his right hand. Mr. Grimm, looking on, exhibited only a most perfunctory interest in the extraordinary message he was reading; the listless eyes narrowed a little, that was all. It was a special despatch from Lisbon dated that morning, and signed simply “Gault.” Completely translated it ran thus:

"Secret offensive and defensive alliance of the Latin against the English-speaking nations of the world is planned. Italy, France, Spain and two South American republics will soon sign compact in Washington. Proposition just made to Portugal, and may be accepted. Special envoys now working in Mexico and Central and South America. Germany invited to join, but refuses as yet, giving, however, tacit support; attitude of Russia and Japan unknown to me. Prince Benedetto d’Abruuzzi, believed to be in Washington at present, has absolute power to sign for Italy, France and Spain. Profound secrecy enjoined and preserved. I learned of it by underground. Shall I inform our minister? Cable instructions."

"So much!" commented Mr. Campbell.

He clasped his hands behind his head, lay back in his chair and sat for a long time, staring with steadfast, thoughtful eyes into the impassive face of his subordinate. Mr. Grimm perched himself on the edge of the desk and with his legs dangling read the despatch a second time, and a third.

"If," he observed slowly, "if any other man than Gault had sent that I should have said he was crazy."

"The peace of the world is in peril, Mr. Grimm," said Campbell impressively, at last. "It had to come, of course, the United States and England against a large part of Europe and all of Central and South America. It had to come, and yet--!"

He broke off abruptly, and picked up the receiver of his desk telephone.

"The White House, please," he requested curtly, and then, after a moment: "Hello! Please ask the president if he will receive Mr. Campbell immediately. Yes, Mr. Campbell of the Secret Service." There was a pause. Mr. Grimm removed his immaculate person from the desk, and took a chair. "Hello! In half an hour? So much!"

The pages of the Almanac de Gotha fluttered through his fingers, and finally he leaned forward and studied a paragraph of it closely. When he raised his eyes again there was that in them which Mr. Grimm had never seen before--a settled, darkening shadow.

"The world-war has long been a chimera, Mr. Grimm," he remarked at last, "but now--now! Think of it! Of course, the Central and South American countries, taken separately, are inconsequential, and that is true, too, of the Latin countries of Europe, except France, but taken in combination, under one directing mind, the allied navies would be--would be formidable, at least. Backed by the moral support of Germany, and perhaps Japan--! Don't you see? Don't you see?"

He lapsed into silence. Mr. Grimm opened his lips to ask a question: Mr. Campbell anticipated it unerringly:

"The purpose of such an alliance? It is not too much to construe it into the first step toward a world-war--a war of reprisal and conquest beside which the other great wars of the world would seem trivial. For the fact has at last come home to the nations of the world that ultimately the English-speaking peoples will dominate it--dominate it, because they are the practical peoples. They have given to the world all its great practical inventions--the railroad, the steamship, electricity, the telegraph and cable--all of them; they are the great civilizing forces, rounding the world up to new moral understanding, for what England has done in Africa and India we have done in a smaller way in the Philippines and Cuba and Porto Rico; they are the great commercial peoples, slowly but surely winning the market-places of the earth; wherever the English or the American flag is planted there the English tongue is being spoken, and there the peoples are being taught the sanity of right living and square dealing.

"It requires no great effort of the imagination, Mr. Grimm, to foresee that day when the traditional power of Paris, and Berlin, and St. Petersburg, and Madrid will by honey-combed by the steady encroachment of our methods. This alliance would indicate that already that day has been foreseen; that there is now a resentment which is about to find expression in one great, desperate struggle for world supremacy. A few hundred years ago Italy--or Rome--was stripped of her power; only recently the United States dispelled the illusion that Spain was anything but a shell; and France--! One can't help but wonder if the power she boasts is not principally on paper. But if their forces are combined? Do you see? It would be an enormous power to reckon with, with a hundred bases of supplies right at our doors."

He rose suddenly and walked over to the window, where he stood for a moment, staring out with unseeing eyes.

"Given a yard of canvas, Mr. Grimm," he went on finally, "a Spanish boy will waste it, a French boy will paint a picture on it, an English boy will built a sail-boat, and an American boy will erect a tent. That fully illustrates the difference in the races."

He abandoned the didactic tone, and returned to the material matter in hand. Mr. Grimm passed him the despatch and he sat down again.

"Will soon sign compact in Washington," he read musingly. "Now I don't know that the signing of that compact can be prevented, but the signing of it on United States soil can be prevented. You will see to that, Mr. Grimm."
"Very well," the young man agreed carelessly. The magnitude of such a task made, apparently, not the slightest impression on him. He languidly drew on his gloves.

"And meanwhile I shall take steps to ascertain the attitude of Russian and Japanese representatives in this city."

Mr. Grimm nodded.

"And now, for Prince Benedetto d'Abruzzi," Mr. Campbell went on slowly. "Officially he is not in Washington, nor the United States, for that matter. Naturally, on such a mission, he would not come as a publicly accredited agent, therefore, I imagine, he is to be sought under another name."

"Of course," Mr. Grimm acquiesced.

"And he would avoid the big hotels."

"Certainly."

Mr. Campbell permitted his guileless blue eyes to linger inquiringly upon those of the young man for half a minute. He caught himself wondering, sometimes, at the perfection of the deliberate indifference with which Mr. Grimm masked his emotions. In his admiration of this quality he quite overlooked the remarkable mask of benevolence behind which he himself hid.

"And the name, D'Abruzzi," he remarked, after a time. "What does it mean to you, Mr. Grimm?"

"It means that I am to deal with a prince of the royal blood of Italy," was the unhesitating response. Mr. Grimm picked up the Almanac de Gotha and glanced at the open page. "Of course, the first thing to do is to find him; the rest will be simple enough." He perused the page carelessly. "I will begin work at once."

III

THE LANGUAGE OF THE FAN

Mr. Grimm was chatting idly with Senorita Rodriguez, daughter of the minister from Venezuela, the while he permitted his listless eyes to wander aimlessly about the spacious ball-room of the German embassy, ablaze with festooned lights, and brilliant with a multi-colored chaos of uniforms. Gleaming pearl-white, translucent in the mass, were the bare shoulders of women; and from far off came the plaintive whine of an orchestra, a pulsing sense rather than a living sound, of music, pointed here and there by the staccato cry of a flute. A zephyr, perfumed with the clean, fresh odor of lilacs, stirred the draperies of the archway which led into the conservatory and rustled the bending branches of palms and ferns.

For a scant instant Mr. Grimm's eyes rested on a young woman who sat a dozen feet away, talking, in playful animation, with an undersecretary of the British embassy--a young woman severely gowned in some glistening stuff which fell away sheerly from her splendid bare shoulders. She glanced up, as if in acknowledgment of his look, and her eyes met his. Frank, blue-gray eyes they were, stirred to their depths now by amusement. She smiled at Senorita Rodriguez, in token of recognition.

"Aren't they wonderful?" asked Senorita Rodriguez with the quick, bubbling enthusiasm of her race.

"What?" asked Mr. Grimm.

"Her eyes," was the reply. "Every person has one dominant feature--with Miss Thorne it is her eyes."

"Miss Thorne?" Mr. Grimm repeated.

"Haven't you met her?" the senorita went on. "Miss Isabel Thorne? She only arrived a few days ago--the night of the state ball. She's my guest at the legation. When an opportunity comes I shall present you to her."

She ran on, about other things, with only an occasional remark from Mr. Grimm, who was thoughtfully nursing his knee. Somewhere through the chatter and effervescent gaiety, mingling with the sound of the pulsing music, he had a singular impression of a rhythmical beat, an indistinct tattoo, noticeable, perhaps, only because of its monotonity. After a moment he shot a quick glance at Miss Thorne and understood; it was the tapping of an exquisitely wrought ivory fan against one of her tapering, gloved fingers. She was talking and smiling.

"Dot-dash-dot! Dot-dash-dot! Dot-dash-dot!" said the fan.

Mr. Grimm twisted around in his seat and regaled his listless eyes with a long stare into the senorita's pretty face. Behind the careless ease of repose he was mechanically isolating the faint clatter of the fan.

"Dot-dash-dot! Dot-dash-dot! Dot-dash-dot!" Mr. Grimm continued to stare, and then his listless eyes swept the ball-room, pausing involuntarily at the scarlet splendor of the minister from Turkey.

"I beg your pardon," he apologized contritely. There was a pause. "The minister from Turkey looks like a barn on fire, doesn't he?"

Senorita Rodriguez laughed, and Mr. Grimm glanced idly toward Miss Thorne. She was still talking, her face alive with interest; and the fan was still tapping rhythmically, steadily, now on the arm of her chair.

"Dot-dash-dot! Dot-dash-dot! Dot-dash-dot! Dot-dash-dot!"

"Pretty women who don't want to be stared at should go with their faces swathed," Mr. Grimm suggested...
indolently. "Haroun el Raschid there would agree with me on that point, I have no doubt. What a shock he would get if he should happen up at Atlantic City for a week-end in August!"

"Dot-dash-dot! Dot-dash-dot! Dot-dash-dot!"

Mr. Grimm read it with perfect understanding; it was "F--F--F" in the Morse code, the call of one operator to another. Was it accident? Mr. Grimm wondered, and wondering he went on talking lazily:

"Curious, isn't it, the smaller the nation the more color it crowds into the uniforms of its diplomatists? The British ambassador, you will observe, is clothed sanely and modestly, as befits the representative of a great nation; but coming on down by way of Spain and Italy, they get more gorgeous. However, I dare say as stout a heart beats beneath a sky-blue sash as behind the unembellished black of evening dress."

"F--F--F," the fan was calling insistently.

And then the answer came. It took the unexpectedly prosaic form of a violent sneeze, a vociferous outburst on a bench directly behind Mr. Grimm. Senorita Rodriguez jumped, then laughed nervously.

"It startled me," she explained.

"I think there must be a draft from the conservatory," said a man's voice apologetically. "Do you ladies feel it? No? Well, if you'll excuse me--?"

Mr. Grimm glanced back languidly. The speaker was Charles Winthrop Rankin, a brilliant young American lawyer who was attached to the German embassy in an advisory capacity. Among other things he was a Heidelberg man, having spent some dozen years of his life in Germany, where he established influential connections. Mr. Grimm knew him only by sight.

And now the rhythmical tapping of Miss Thorne's fan underwent a change. There was a flutter of gaiety in her voice the while the ivory fan tapped steadily.

"Dot-dot-dot! Dash! Dash-dash-dash! Dot-dot-dot-dot! Dash!"

"S--t--5--u--t," Mr. Grimm read in Morse. He laughed pleasantly at some remark of his companion.

"Dash-dot! Dash-dot-dot-dot!" said the fan.

"M--a--n," Mr. Grimm spelled it out, the while his listless eyes roved aimlessly over the throng. "S--t--5--u--t m-a--n!" Was it meant for "stout man?" Mr. Grimm wondered.

"Dot-dot-dot-dot! Dot! Dash-dot-dot-dot!

"F--e--d," that was.


"Q--a--j--e!" Mr. Grimm was puzzled a little now, but there was not a wrinkle, nor the tiniest indication of perplexity in his face. Instead he began talking of Raphael's cherubs, the remark being called into life by the high complexion of a young man who was passing. Miss Thorne glanced at him once keenly, her splendid eyes fairly aglow, and the fan rattled on in the code.


"N--e--a--f." Mr. Grimm was still spelling it out.

Then came a perfect jumble. Mr. Grimm followed it with difficulty, a difficulty utterly belied by the quizzical lines about his mouth. As he caught it, it was like this: "J--5--n--s--e--f--v--a--t--5--f," followed by an arbitrary signal which is not in the Morse code: "Dash-dot-dash-dash-!"

Mr. Grimm carefully stored that jumble away in some recess of his brain, along with the unknown signal.

"D--5--5--f," he read, and then, on to the end: "B--f--i--n--g 5--v--e--f w--h--e--n g g--5--e--s."

That was all, apparently. The soft clatter of the fan against the arm of the chair ran on meaninglessly after that.

"May I bring you an ice?" Mr. Grimm asked at last.

"If you will, please," responded the senorita, "and when you come back I'll reward you by presenting you to Miss Thorne. You'll find her charming; and Mr. Cadwallader has monopolized her long enough."

Mr. Grimm bowed and left her. He had barely disappeared when Mr. Rankin lounged along in front of Miss Thorne. He glanced at her, paused and greeted her effusively.

"Why, Miss Thorne!" he exclaimed. "I'm delighted to see you here. I understood you would not be present, and--"

Their hands met in a friendly clasp as she rose and moved away, with a nod of excuse to Mr. Cadwallader. A thin slip of paper, thrice folded, passed from Mr. Rankin to her. She tugged at her glove, and thrust the little paper, still folded, inside the palm.

"Is it yes, or no?" Miss Thorne asked in a low tone.

"Frankly, I can't say," was the reply.

"He read the message," she explained hastily, "and now he has gone to decipher it."

She gathered up her trailing skirts over one arm, and together they glided away through the crowd to the strains of a Strauss waltz.
"I'm going to faint in a moment," she said quite calmly to Mr. Rankin. "Please have me sent to the ladies' dressing-room."

"I understand," he replied quietly.

IV

THE FLEEING WOMAN

Mr. Grimm went straight to a quiet nook of the smoking-room and there, after a moment, Mr. Campbell joined him. The bland benevolence of the chief's face was disturbed by the slightest questioning uplift of his brows as he dropped into a seat opposite Mr. Grimm, and lighted a cigar. Mr. Grimm raised his hand, and a servant who stood near, approached them.

"An ice--here," Mr. Grimm directed tersely.

The servant bowed and disappeared, and Mr. Grimm hastily scribbled something on a sheet of paper and handed it to his chief.

"There is a reading, in the Morse code, of a message that seems to be unintelligible," Mr. Grimm explained. "I have reason to believe it is in the Continental code. You know the Continental--I don't."

Mr. Campbell read this:

"St5ut man fed qaje neaf j5nsefvat5f," and then came the unknown, dash-dot-dash-dot. "That," he explained, "is Y in the Continental code." It went on: "d55f bfting 5vef when g g5es."

The chief read it off glibly:

"Stout man, red face, near conservatory door. Bring over when G goes."

"Very well!" commented Mr. Grimm ambiguously.

With no word of explanation, he rose and went out, pausing at the door to take the ice which the servant was bringing in. The seat where he had left Senorita Rodriguez was vacant; so was the chair where Miss Thorne had been. He glanced about inquiringly, and a servant who stood stolidly near the conservatory door approached him.

"Pardon, sir, but the lady who was sitting here," and he indicated the chair where Miss Thorne had been sitting, "fainted while dancing, and the lady who was with you went along when she was removed to the ladies' dressing-room, sir."

Mr. Grimm's teeth closed with a little snap.

"Did you happen to notice any time this evening a stout gentleman, with red face, near the conservatory door?" he asked.

The servant pondered a moment, then shook his head.

"No, sir."

"Thank you."

Mr. Grimm was just turning away, when there came the sharp, vibrant cra-a-sh! of a revolver, somewhere off to his left. The president! That was his first thought. One glance across the room to where the chief executive stood, in conversation with two other gentlemen, reassured him. The choleric blue eyes of the president had opened a little at the sound, then he calmly resumed the conversation. Mr. Grimm impulsively started toward the little group, but already a cordon was being drawn there--a cordon of quiet-faced, keen-eyed men, unobtrusively forcing their way through the crowd. There was Johnson, and Hastings, and Blair, and half a dozen others.

The room had been struck dumb. The dancers stopped, with tense, inquiring looks, and the plaintive whine of the orchestra, far away, faltered, then ceased. There was one brief instant of utter silence in which white-faced women clung to the arms of their escorts, and a brilliant galaxy of colors halted. Then, after a moment, there came clearly through the stillness, the excited, guttural command of the German ambassador.

"Keep on blaying, you tam fools! Keep on blaying!"

The orchestra started again tremulously. Mr. Grimm nodded a silent approval of the ambassador's command, then turned away toward his left, in the direction of the shot. After the first dismay, there was a general movement of the crowd in that direction, a movement which was checked by Mr. Campbell's appearance upon a chair, with a smile on his bland face.

"No harm done," he called. "One of the officers present dropped his revolver, and it was accidently discharged. No harm done."

There was a moment's excited chatter, deep-drawn breaths of relief, the orchestra swung again into the interrupted rhythm, and the dancers moved on. Mr. Grimm went straight to his chief, who had stepped down from the chair. Two other Secret Service men stood behind him, blocking the doorway that opened into a narrow hall.

"This way," directed the chief tersely.

Mr. Grimm walked along beside him. They skirted the end of the ball-room until they came to another door opening into the hall. Chief Campbell pushed it open, and entered. One of his men stood just inside.

"What was it, Gray?" asked the chief.
"Senor Alvarez, of the Mexican legation, was shot," was the reply.

"Dead?"

"Only wounded. He's in that room," and he indicated a door a little way down the hall. "Fairchild, two servants, and a physician are with him."

"Who shot him?"

"Don't know. We found him lying in the hall here."

Still followed by Mr. Grimm, the chief entered the room, and together they bent over the wounded man. The bullet had entered the torso just below the ribs on the left side.

"It's a clean wound," the physician was explaining. "The bullet passed through. There's no immediate danger."

Senor Alvarez opened his eyes, and stared about him in bewilderment; then alarm overspread his face, and he made spasmodic efforts to reach the inside breast pocket of his coat. Mr. Grimm obligingly thrust his hand into the pocket and drew out its contents, while Senor Alvarez struggled frantically.

"Just a moment," Mr. Grimm advised quietly. "I'm only going to let you see if it is here. Is it?"

He held the papers, one by one, in front of the wounded man, and each time a shake of the head was his answer.

At the last Senor Alvarez closed his eyes again.

"What sort of paper was it?" inquired Mr. Grimm.

"None of your business," came the curt answer.

"Who shot you?"

"None of your business."

"A man?"

"Senor Alvarez was silent."

"A woman?"

Still silence.

With some new idea Mr. Grimm turned away suddenly and started out into the hall. He met a maid-servant at the door, coming in. Her face was blanched, and she stuttered through sheer excitement.

"A lady, sir--a lady--" she began babblingly.

Mr. Grimm calmly closed the door, shutting in the wounded man, Chief Campbell and the others. Then he caught the maid sharply by the arm and shook some coherence into her disordered brain.

"A lady--she ran away, sir," the girl went on, in blank surprise.

"What lady?" demanded Mr. Grimm coldly. "Where did she run from? Why did she run?" The maid stared at him with mouth agape. "Begin at the beginning."

"I was in that room, farther down the hall, sir," the maid explained. "The door was open. I heard the shot, and it frightened me so--I don't know--I was afraid to look out right away, sir. Then, an instant later, a lady come running along the hall, sir--that way," and she indicated the rear of the house. "Then I came to the door and looked out to see who it was, and what was the matter, sir. I was standing there when a man--a man came along after the lady, and banged the door in my face, sir. The door had a spring lock, and I was so--so frightened and excited I couldn't open it right away, sir, and--and when I did I came here to see what was the matter." She drew a deep breath and stopped.

"That all?" demanded Mr. Grimm.

"Yes, sir, except--except the lady had a pistol in her hand, sir--"

Mr. Grimm regarded her in silence for a moment.

"Who was the lady?" he asked at last.

"I forget her name, sir. She was the lady who--who fainted in the ball-room, sir, just a few minutes ago."

Whatever emotion may have been aroused within Mr. Grimm it certainly found no expression in his face. When he spoke again his voice was quite calm.

"Miss Thorne, perhaps?"

"Yes, sir, that's the name--Miss Thorne. I was in the ladies' dressing-room when she was brought in, sir, and I remember some one called her name."

Mr. Grimm took the girl, still a-quiver with excitement, and led her along the hall to where Gray stood.

"Take this girl in charge, Gray," he directed. "Lock her up, if necessary. Don't permit her to say one word to anybody--anybody you understand, except the chief."

Mr. Grimm left them there. He passed along the hall, glancing in each room as he went, until he came to a short flight of stairs leading toward the kitchen. He went on down silently. The lights were burning, but the place was still, deserted. All the servants who belonged there were evidently, for the moment, transferred to other posts. He passed on through the kitchen and out the back door into the street.

A little distance away, leaning against a lamp-post, a man was standing. He might have been waiting for a car. Mr. Grimm approached him.
"Beg pardon," he said, "did you see a woman come out of the back door, there?"

"Yes, just a moment or so ago," replied the stranger. "She got into an automobile at the corner. I imagine this is hers," and he extended a handkerchief, a dainty, perfumed trifle of lace. "I picked it up immediately after she passed."

Mr. Grimm took the handkerchief and examined it under the light. For a time he was thoughtful, with lowered eyes, which, finally raised, met those of the stranger with a scrutinizing stare.

"Why," asked Mr. Grimm slowly and distinctly, "why did you slam the door in the girl's face?"

"Why did I--what?" came the answering question.

"Why did you slam the door in the girl's face?" Mr. Grimm repeated slowly.

The stranger stared in utter amazement--an amazement so frank, so unacted, so genuine, that Mr. Grimm was satisfied.

"Did you see a man come out the door?" Mr. Grimm pursued.

"No. Say, young fellow, I guess you've had a little too much to drink, haven't you?"

But by that time Mr. Grimm was turning the corner.

V

A VISIT TO THE COUNT

The bland serenity of Mr. Campbell's face was disturbed by thin, spidery lines of perplexity, and the guileless blue eyes were vacant as he stared at the top of his desk. Mr. Grimm was talking.

"From the moment Miss Thorne turned the corner I lost all trace of her," he said. "Either she had an automobile in waiting, or else she was lucky enough to find one immediately she came out. She did not return to the embassy ball last night--that much is certain." He paused reflectively. "She is a guest of Senorita Inez Rodriguez at the Venezuelan legation," he added.

"Yes, I know," his chief nodded.

"I didn't attempt to see her there last night for two reasons," Mr. Grimm continued. "First, she can have no possible knowledge of the fact that she is suspected, unless perhaps the man who slammed the door--" He paused.

"Anyhow, she will not attempt to leave Washington; I am confident of that. Again, it didn't seem wise to me to employ the ordinary crude police methods in the case--that is, go to the Venezuelan legation and kick up a row."

For a long time Campbell was silent; the perplexed lines still furrowed his benevolent forehead.

"The president is very anxious that we get to facts in this reported Latin alliance as soon as possible," he said at last, irrelevantly. "He mentioned the matter last night, and he has been keeping in constant communication with Gault, in Lisbon, who, however, has not been able to add materially to the original despatch. Under all the circumstances don't you think it would be best for me to relieve you of the investigation of this shooting affair so that you can concentrate on this greater and more important thing?"

"Will Senor Alvarez die?" asked Mr. Grimm in turn.

"His condition is serious, although the wound is not necessarily fatal," was the reply.

Mr. Grimm arose, stretched his long legs and stood for a little while gazing out the window. Finally he turned to his chief:

"What do we know, here in the bureau, about Miss Thorne?"

"Thus far the reports on her are of the usual perfunctory nature," Mr. Campbell explained. He drew a card from a pigeonhole of his desk and glanced at it. "She arrived in Washington two weeks and two days ago from New York, off the _Lusitania_, from Liverpool. She brought some sort of an introduction to Count di Rosini, the Italian ambassador, and he obtained for her a special invitation to the state ball, which was held that night. Until four days ago she was a guest at the Italian embassy, but now, as you know, is a guest at the Venezuelan legation. Since her arrival here she has been prominently pushed forward into society; she has gone everywhere, and been received everywhere in the diplomatic set. We have no knowledge of her beyond this."

There was a question in Mr. Grimm's listless eyes as they met those of his chief. The same line of thought was running in both their minds, born, perhaps, of the association of ideas--Italy as one of three great nations known to be in the Latin compact; Prince Benedetto d'Abruzzi, of Italy, the secret envoy of three countries; the sudden appearance of Miss Thorne at the Italian embassy. And in the mind of the younger man there was more than this--a definite knowledge of a message cunningly transmitted to Mr. Rankin, of the German embassy, by Miss Thorne there in the ball-room.

"Can you imagine--" he asked slowly, "can you imagine a person who would be of more value to the Latin governments in Washington right at this stage of the negotiations than a brilliant woman agent?"

"I most certainly can not," was the chief's unhesitating response.

"In that case I _don't_ think it would be wise to transfer the investigation of the shooting affair to another man," said Mr. Grimm emphatically, reverting to his chief's question. "I think, on the contrary, we should find out more
about Miss Thorne.

"Precisely," Campbell agreed.

"Ask all the great capitals about her--Madrid, Paris and Rome, particularly; then, perhaps, London and Berlin
and St. Petersburg."

Mr. Campbell thoughtfully scribbled the names of the cities on a slip of paper.

"Do you intend to arrest Miss Thorne for the shooting?" he queried.

"I don't know," replied Mr. Grimm frankly. "I don't know," he repeated musingly. "If I _do_ arrest her
immediately I may cut off a clue which will lead to the other affair. I don't know," he concluded.

"Use your own judgment, and bear in mind that a man--_a man_ slammed the door in the maid's face."

"I shall not forget him," Mr. Grimm answered. "Now I'm going over to talk to Count di Rosini for a while."

The young man went out, thoughtfully tugging at his gloves. The Italian ambassador received him with an
inquiring uplift of his dark brows.

"I came to make some inquiries in regard to Miss Thorne--Miss Isabel Thorne," Mr. Grimm informed him
frankly.

The count was surprised, but it didn't appear in his face.

"As I understand it," the young man pursued, "you are sponsor for her in Washington?"

The count, evasively diplomatic, born and bred in a school of caution, considered the question from every
standpoint.

"It may be that I am so regarded," he admitted at last.

"May I inquire if the sponsorship is official, personal, social, or all three?" Mr. Grimm continued.

There was silence for a long time.

"I don't see the trend of your questioning," said the ambassador finally. "Miss Thorne is worthy of my protection
in every way."

"Let's suppose a case," suggested Mr. Grimm blandly. "Suppose Miss Thorne had--had, let us say, shot a man,
and he was about to die, would you feel justified in withdrawing that--that protection, as you call it?"

"Such a thing is preposterous!" exclaimed the ambassador. "The utter absurdity of such a charge would impel me
to offer her every assistance."

Mr. Grimm nodded.

"And if it were proved to your satisfaction that she _did_ shoot him?" he went on evenly.

The count's lips were drawn together in a straight line.

"Whom, may I ask," he inquired frigidly, "are we supposing that Miss Thorne shot?"

"No one, particularly," Mr. Grimm assured him easily. "Just suppose that she _had_ shot anybody--me, say, or
Senor Alvarez?"

"I can't answer a question so ridiculous as that."

"And suppose we go a little further," Mr. Grimm insisted pleasantly, "and assume that you _knew_ she _had_
shot some one, say Senor Alvarez, and you _could_ protect her from the consequences, _would_ you?"

"I decline to suppose anything so utterly absurd," was the rejoinder.

Mr. Grimm sat with his elbows on his knees, idly twisting a seal ring on his little finger. The searching eyes of
the ambassador found his face blankly inscrutable.

"Diplomatic representatives in Washington have certain obligations to this government," the young man
reminded him. "We--that is, the government of the United States--undertake to guarantee the personal safety of
every accredited representative; in return for that protection we must insist upon the name and identity of a
dangerous person who may be known to any foreign representative. Understand, please, I'm not asserting that Miss
Thorne is a dangerous person. You are sponsor for her here. Is she, in every way, worthy of your protection?"

"Yes," said the ambassador flatly.

"I can take it, then, that the introduction she brought to you is from a person whose position is high enough to
insure Miss Thorne's position?"

"That is correct."

"Very well!"

And Mr. Grimm went away.

VI

REVELATIONS

Some vague, indefinable shadow darkened Miss Thorne's clear, blue-gray eyes, in sharp contrast to the glow of
radiant health in her cheeks, as she stepped from an automobile in front of the Venezuelan legation, and ran lightly
up the steps. A liveried servant opened the door.

"A gentleman is waiting for you, Madam," he announced. "His card is here on the--"
"I was expecting him," she interrupted.
"Which room, please?"
"The blue room, Madam."
Miss Thorne passed along the hallway which led to a suite of small drawing-rooms opening on a garden in the rear, pushed aside the portieres, and entered.
"I'm sorry I've kept you--" she began, and then, in a tone of surprise: "I beg your pardon."
A gentleman rose and bowed gravely.
"I am Mr. Grimm of the Secret Service," he informed her with frank courtesy. "I am afraid you were expecting some one else; I handed my card to the footman."
For an instant the blue-gray eyes opened wide in astonishedness, and then some quick, subtle change swept over Miss Thorne's face. She smiled graciously and motioned him to a seat.
"This is quite a different meeting from the one Senorita Rodriguez had planned, isn't it?" she asked.
There was a taunting curve on her scarlet lips; the shadow passed from her eyes; her slim, white hands lay idle in her lap. Mr. Grimm regarded her reflectively. There was a determination of steel back of this charming exterior; there was an indomitable will, a keen brain, and all of a woman's intuition to reckon with. She was silent, with a questioning upward slant of her arched brows.
"I am not mistaken in assuming that you are a secret agent of the Italian government, am I?" he queried finally.
"No," she responded readily.
"In that event I may speak with perfect frankness?" he went on. "It would be as useless as it would be absurd to approach the matter in any other manner?" It was a question.
Miss Thorne was still smiling, but again the vague, indefinable shadow, momentarily lifted, darkened her eyes.
"You may be frank, of course," she said pleasantly. "Please go on."
"Senor Alvarez was shot at the German Embassy Ball last night," Mr. Grimm told her.
Miss Thorne nodded, as if in wonder.
"Did you, or did you not, shoot him?"
It was quite casual. She received the question without change of countenance, but involuntarily she caught her breath. It might have been a sigh of relief.
"Why do you come to me with such a query?" she asked in turn.
"I beg your pardon," interposed Mr. Grimm steadily. "Did you, or did you not, shoot him?"
"No, of course I didn't shoot him," was the reply. If there was any emotion in the tone it was merely impatience.
"Why do you come to me?" she repeated.
"Why do I come to you?" Mr. Grimm echoed the question, while his listless eyes rested on her face. "I will be absolutely frank, as I feel sure you would be under the same circumstances." He paused a moment; she nodded.
"Well, immediately after the shooting you ran along the hallway with a revolver in your hand; you ran down the steps into the kitchen, and out through the back door, where you entered an automobile. That is not conjecture; it is susceptible of proof by eye witnesses."
Miss Thorne rose suddenly with a queer, helpless little gesture of her arms, and walked to the window. She stood there for a long time with her hands clasped behind her back.
"That brings us to another question," Mr. Grimm continued mercilessly. "If you did not shoot Senor Alvarez, do you know who did?"
There was another long pause.
"I want to believe you, Miss Thorne," he supplemented.
She turned quickly with something of defiance in her attitude.
"Yes, I know," she said slowly. "It were useless to deny it."
"Who was it?"
"I won't tell you."
Mr. Grimm leaned forward in his chair, and spoke earnestly.
"Understand, please, that by that answer you assume equal guilt with the person who actually did the shooting," he explained. "If you adhere to it you compel me to regard you as an accomplice." His questioning took a different line.
"Will you explain how the revolver came into your possession?"
"Oh, I--I picked it up in the hallway there," she replied vaguely.
"I want to believe you, Miss Thorne," Mr. Grimm said again.
"You may. I picked it up in the hallway," she repeated. "I saw it lying there and picked it up."
"Why that, instead of giving an alarm?"
"No alarm was necessary. The shot itself was an alarm."
"Then why," Mr. Grimm persisted coldly, "did you run along the hallway and escape by way of the kitchen? If you did not do the shooting, why the necessity of escape, carrying the revolver?"

There was that in the blue-gray eyes which brought Mr. Grimm to his feet. His hands gripped each other cruelly; his tone was calm as always.

"Why did you take the revolver?" he asked.

Miss Thorne's head drooped forward a little, and she was silent.

"There are only two possibilities, of course," he went on. "First, that you, in spite of your denial, did the shooting."

"I did not!" The words fairly burst from her tightly closed lips.

"Or that you knew the revolver, and took it to save the person, man or woman, who fired the shot. I will assume, for the moment, that this is correct. Where is the revolver?"

From the adjoining room there came a slight noise, a faint breath of sound; or it might have been only an echo of silence. Their eyes were fixed each upon the others unwaveringly, with not a flicker to indicate that either had heard.

After a moment Miss Thorne returned to her chair and sat down.

"It's rather a singular situation, isn't it, Mr. Grimm?" she inquired irrelevantly. "You, Mr. Grimm of the Secret Service of the United States; I, Isabel Thorne, a secret agent of Italy together here, one accusing the other of a crime, and perhaps with good reason."

"Where is the revolver?" Mr. Grimm insisted.

"If you were any one else but you! I could not afford to be frank with you and--"

"If you had been any one else but you I should have placed you under arrest when I entered the room."

She smiled, and inclined her head.

"I understand," she said pleasantly. "For the reason that you are Mr. Grimm of the Secret Service I shall tell you the truth. I _did_ take the revolver because I knew who had fired the shot. Believe me when I tell you that that person did not act with my knowledge or consent. You do believe that? You do?" She was pleading, eager to convince him.

After a while Mr. Grimm nodded.

"The revolver is beyond your reach and shall remain so," she resumed. "According to your laws I suppose I am an accomplice. That is my misfortune. It will in no way alter my determination to keep silent. If I am arrested I can't help it." She studied his face with hopeful eyes. "Am I to be arrested?"

"Where is the paper that was taken from Senor Alvarez immediately after he was shot?" Mr. Grimm queried.

"I don't know," she replied frankly.

"As I understand it, then, the motive for the shooting was to obtain possession of that paper? For your government?"

"The individual who shot Senor Alvarez _did_ obtain the paper, yes. And now, please, am I to be arrested?"

"And just what was the purpose, may I inquire, of the message you telegraphed with your fan in the ball-room?"

"You read that?" exclaimed Miss Thorne in mock astonishment. "You read that?"

"And the man who read that message? Perhaps he shot the senor?"

"Perhaps," she taunted.

For a long time Mr. Grimm stood staring at her, staring, staring. She, too, rose, and faced him quietly.

"Am I to be arrested?" she asked again.

"Why do you make me do it?" he demanded.

"That is my affair."

Mr. Grimm laid a hand upon her arm, a hand that had never known nervousness. A moment longer he stared, and then:

"Madam, you are my prisoner for the attempted murder of Senor Alvarez!"

The rings on the portieres behind him clicked sharply, and the draperies parted. Mr. Grimm stood motionless, with his hand on Miss Thorne's arm.

"You were inquiring a moment ago for a revolver," came in a man's voice. "Here it is!"

Mr. Grimm found himself inspecting the weapon from the barrel end. After a moment his glance shifted to the blazing eyes of the man who held it—a young man, rather slight, with clean-cut, aristocratic features, and of the pronounced Italian type.
"My God!" The words came from Miss Thorne's lips almost in a scream. "Don't--!"

"I did make some inquiries about a revolver, yes," Mr. Grimm interrupted quietly. "Is this the one?"

He raised his hand quite casually, and his fingers closed like steel around the weapon. Behind his back Miss Thorne made some quick emphatic gesture, and the new-comer released the revolver.

"I shall ask you, please, to free Miss Thorne," he requested courteously. "I shot Senor Alvarez. I, too, am a secret agent of the Italian government, willing and able to defend myself. Miss Thorne has told you the truth; she had nothing whatever to do with it. She took the weapon and escaped because it was mine. Here is the paper that was taken from Senor Alvarez," and he offered a sealed envelope. "I have read it; it is not what I expected. You may return it to Senor Alvarez with my compliments."

After a moment Mr. Grimm's hand fell away from Miss Thorne's arm, and he regarded the new-comer with an interest in which admiration, even, played a part.

"Your name?" he asked finally.

"Pietro Petrozinni," was the ready reply. "As I say, I accept all responsibility."

A few minutes later Mr. Grimm and his prisoner passed out of the legation side by side, and strolled down the street together, in amicable conversation. Half an hour later Senor Alvarez identified Pietro Petrozinni as the man who shot him; and the maid servant expressed a belief that he was the man who slammed the door in her face.

VII

THE SIGNAL

"And the original question remains unanswered," remarked Mr. Campbell.

"The original question?" repeated Mr. Grimm.

"Where is Prince Benedetto d'Abruzzi, the secret envoy?" his chief reminded him.

"I wonder!" mused the young man.

"If the Latin compact is signed in the United States--?"

"The Latin compact will not be signed in the United States," Mr. Grimm interrupted. And then, after a moment: "Have we received any further reports on Miss Thorne? I mean reports from our foreign agents?"

The chief shook his head.

"Inevitably, by some act or word, she will lead us to the prince," declared Mr. Grimm, "and the moment he is known to us everything becomes plain sailing. We know she is a secret agent--I expected a denial, but she was quite frank about it. And I had no intention whatever of placing her under arrest. I knew some one was in the adjoining room because of a slight noise in there, and I knew she knew it. She raised her voice a little, obviously for the benefit of whoever was there. From that point everything I said and did was to compel that person, whoever it was, to show himself."

His chief nodded, understandingly. Mr. Grimm was silent for a little, then went on:

"The last possibility in my mind at that moment," he confessed, "was that the person in there was the man who shot Senor Alvarez. Frankly I had half an idea that--that it might be the prince in person." Suddenly his mood changed: "And now our lady of mystery may come and go as she likes because I know, even if a dozen of our men have ransacked Washington in vain for the prince, she will inevitably lead us to him. And that reminds me: I should like to borrow Blair, and Hastings, and Johnson. Please plant them so they may keep constant watch on Miss Thorne. Let them report to you, and, wherever I am, I will reach you over the 'phone."

"By the way, what was in that sealed packet that was taken from Senor Alvarez?" Campbell inquired curiously.

"It had something to do with some railroad franchises," responded Mr. Grimm as he rose. "I sealed it again and returned it to the senor. Evidently it was not what Signor Petrozinni expected to find--in fact, he admitted it wasn't what he was looking for."

For a little while the two men gazed thoughtfully, each into the eyes of the other, then Mr. Grimm entered his private office where he sat for an hour with his immaculate boots on his desk, thinking. A world-war--he had been thrust forward by his government to prevent it--subtle blue-gray eyes--his Highness, Prince Benedetto d'Abruzzi--a
haunting smile and scarlet lips.

At about the moment he rose to go out, Miss Thorne, closely veiled, left the Venezuelan legation and walked rapidly down the street to a corner, where, without a word, she entered a waiting automobile. The wheels spun and the car leaped forward. For a mile or more it wound aimlessly in and out, occasionally bisecting its own path; finally Miss Thorne leaned forward and touched the chauffeur on the arm.

"Now!" she said.

The car straightened out into a street of stately residences and scuttled along until the placid bosom of the Potomac came into view; beside that for a few minutes, then over the bridge to the Virginia side, in the dilapidated little city of Alexandria. The car did not slacken its speed, but wound in and out through dingy streets, past tumble-down negro huts, for half an hour before it came to a standstill in front of an old brick mansion.

"This is number ninety-seven," the chauffeur announced.

Miss Thorne entered the house with a key and was gone for ten minutes, perhaps. She was readjusting her veil when she came out and stepped into the car silently. Again it moved forward, on to the end of the dingy street, and finally into the open country. Three, four, five miles, perhaps, out the old Baltimore Road, and again the car stopped, this time in front of an ancient colonial farm-house.

Outwardly the place seemed to be deserted. The blinds, battered and stripped of paint by wind and rain, were all closed, and one corner of the small veranda had crumbled away from age and neglect. A narrow path, strewn with pine needles, led tortuously up to the door. In the rear of the house, rising from an old barn, a thin pole with a cup-like attachment at the apex, thrust its point into the open above the dense, odorous pines. It appeared to be a wireless mast. Miss Thorne passed around the house, and entered the barn.

A man came forward and kissed her—a thin, little man of indeterminate age—drying his hands on a piece of cotton waste. His face was pale with the pallor of one who knows little outdoor life, his eyes deep-set and a-glitter with some feverish inward fire, and the thin lips were pressed together in a sharp line. Behind him was a long bench on which were scattered tools of various sorts, fantastically shaped chemical apparatus, two or three electric batteries of odd sizes, and ranged along one end of it, in a row, were a score or more metal spheroids, a shade larger than a one-pound shell. From somewhere in the rear came the clatter of a small gasoline engine, and still farther away was an electric dynamo.

"Is the test arranged, Rosa?" the little man queried eagerly in Italian.

"The date is not fixed yet," she replied in the same language. "It will be, I hope, within the next two weeks. And then--"

"Fame and fortune for both of us," he interrupted with quick enthusiasm. "Ah, Rosa, I have worked and waited so long for this, and now it will come, and with it the dominion of the world again by our country. How will I know when the date is fixed? It would not be well to write me here."

My lady of mystery stroked the slender, nervous hand caressingly, and a great affection shone in the blue-gray eyes.

"At eight o'clock on the night of the test," she explained, still speaking Italian, "a single light will appear at the apex of the capitol dome in Washington. That is the signal agreed upon; it can be seen by all in the city, and is visible here from the window of your bedroom."

"Yes, yes," he exclaimed. The feverish glitter in his eyes deepened.

"If there is a fog, of course you will not attempt the test," she went on.

"No, not in a fog," he put in quickly. "It must be clear."

"And if it is clear you can see the light in the dome without difficulty."

"And all your plans are working out well?"

"Yes. And yours?"

"I don't think there is any question but that both England and the United States will buy. Do you know what it means? Do you know what it means?" He was silent a moment, his hands working nervously. Then, with an effort:

"And his Highness?"

"His Highness is safe." The subtle eyes grew misty, thoughtful for a moment, then cleared again. "He is safe," she repeated.

"Mexico and Venezuela were--?" he began.

"We don't know, yet, what they will do. The Venezuelan answer is locked in the safe at the legation; I will know what it is within forty-eight hours." She was silent a little. "Our difficulty now, our greatest difficulty, is the hostility of the French ambassador to the compact. His government has not yet notified him of the presence of Prince d' Abruzzi; he does not believe in the feasibility of the plan, and we have to--to proceed to extremes to prevent him working against us."

"But they _must_ see the incalculable advantages to follow upon such a compact, with the vast power that will
be given to them over the whole earth by this." He indicated the long, littered work-table. "They _must_ see it."

"They will see it, Luigi," said Miss Thorne gently. "And now, how are you? Are you well? Are you comfortable? It's such a dreary old place here."

"I suppose so," he replied, and he met the solicitous blue-gray eyes for an instant. "Yes, I am quite comfortable," he added. "I have no time to be otherwise with all the work I must do. It will mean so much!"

They were both silent for a time. Finally Miss Thorne walked over to the long table and curiously lifted one of the spheroids. It was a sinister looking thing, nickeled, glittering. At one end of it was a delicate, vibratory apparatus, not unlike the transmitter of a telephone, and the other end was threaded, as if the spheroid was made as an attachment to some other device.

"With that we control the world!" exclaimed the man triumphantly. "And it's mine, Rosa, mine!"

"It's wonderful!" she mused softly. "Wonderful! And now I must go. I may not see you again until after the test, because I shall be watched and followed wherever I go. If I get an opportunity I shall reach you by telephone, but not even that unless it is necessary. There is always danger, always danger!" she repeated thoughtfully. She was thinking of Mr. Grimm.

"I understand," said the man simply.

"And look out for the signal--the light in the apex of the capitol dome," she went on. "I understand the night must be perfectly clear; and _you_ understand that the test is to be made promptly at three o'clock by your chronometer?"

"At three o'clock," he repeated.

For a moment they stood with their arms around each other, then tenderly his visitor kissed him, and went out. He remained looking after her vacantly until the chug-chug of her automobile, as it moved off down the road, was lost in the distance, then turned again to the long work-table.

VIII

MISS THORNE AND NOT MISS THORNE

From a pleasant, wide-open bay-window of her apartments on the second floor, Miss Thorne looked out upon the avenue with inscrutable eyes. Behind the closely drawn shutters of another bay-window, farther down the avenue, on the corner, she knew a man named Hastings was hiding; she knew that for an hour or more he had been watching her as she wrote. In the other direction, in a house near the corner, another man named Blair was similarly ensconced, and he, too, had been watching as she wrote. There should be a third man, Johnson. Miss Thorne curiously studied the face of each passer-by, seeking therein something to remember.

She sat at the little mahogany desk and a note with the ink yet wet upon it lay face up before her. It was addressed to Signor Pietro Petrozinni in the district prison, and read:

"My Dear Friend:

"I have been waiting to write you with the hope that I could report Senor Alvarez out of danger, but his condition, I regret to say, remains unchanged. Shall I send an attorney to you? Would you like a book of any kind? Or some delicacy sent in from a restaurant? Can I be of any service to you in any way? If I can please drop me a line.

"Sincerely,

"Isabel Thorne."

At last she rose and standing in the window read the note over, folded it, placed it in an envelope and sealed it. A maid came in answer to her ring, and there at the window, under the watchful eyes of Blair and Hastings--and, perhaps, Johnson--she handed the note to the maid with instructions to mail it immediately. Two minutes later she saw the maid go out along the avenue to a post-box on the corner.

Then she drew back into the shadow of the room, slipped on a dark-colored wrap, and, standing away from the window, safe beyond the reach of prying eyes, waited patiently for the postman. He appeared about five o'clock and simultaneously another man turned the corner near the post-box and spoke to him. Then, together, they disappeared from view around the corner.

"So that's Johnson, is it?" mused Miss Thorne, and she smiled a little. "Mr. Grimm certainly pays me the compliment of having me carefully watched."

A few minutes later she dropped into the seat at the desk again. The dark wrap had been thrown aside and Hastings and Blair from their hiding-places could see her distinctly. After a while they saw her rise quickly, as an automobile turned into the avenue, and lean toward the window eagerly looking out. The car came to a standstill in front of the legation, and Mr. Cadwallader, an under-secretary of the British embassy, who was alone in the car, raised his cap. She nodded and smiled, then disappeared in the shadows of the room again.

Mr. Cadwallader went to the door, spoke to the servant there, then returned and busied himself about the car. Hastings and Blair watched intently both the door and the window for a long time; finally a closely veiled and
muffled figure appeared at the bay-window, and waved a gloved hand at Mr. Cadwallader, who again lifted his cap. A minute later the veiled woman came out of the front door, shook hands with Mr. Cadwallader, and got in the car. He also climbed in, and the car moved slowly away.

Simultaneously the front door of the house on the corner, where Hastings had been hiding, and the front door of the house near the corner, where Blair had been hiding, opened and two heads peered out. As the car approached Hastings' hiding-place he withdrew into the hallway; but Blair came out and hurried past the legation in the direction of the rapidly disappearing motor. Hastings joined him; they spoke together, then turned the corner.

It was about ten o'clock that night when Hastings reported to Mr. Campbell at his home.

"We followed the car in a rented automobile from the time it turned the corner, out through Alexandria, and along the old Baltimore Road into the city of Baltimore," he explained. "It was dark by the time we reached Alexandria, but we stuck to the car ahead, running without lights until we came in sight of Druid Hill Park, and then we had to show lights or be held up. We covered those forty miles going in less than two hours.

"After the car passed Druid Hill it slowed up a little, and ran off the turnpike into North Avenue, then into North Charles Street, and slowly along that as if they were looking for a number. At last it stopped and Miss Thorne got out and entered a house. She was gone for more than half an hour, leaving Mr. Cadwallader with the car. While she was gone I made some inquiries and learned that the house was occupied by a Mr. Thomas Q. Griswold. I don't know anything else about him; Blair may have learned something.

"Now comes the curious part of it," and Hastings looked a little sheepish. "When Miss Thorne came out of the house she was not Miss Thorne at all--she was Senorita Inez Rodriguez, daughter of the Venezuelan minister. She wore the same clothing Miss Thorne had worn going, but her veil was lifted. Veiled and all muffled up one would have taken oath it was the same woman. She and Cadwallader are back in Washington now, or are coming. That's all, except Blair is still in Baltimore, awaiting orders. I caught the train from the Charles Street station and came back. Johnson, you know--"

"Yes, I've seen Johnson," interrupted Campbell. "Are you absolutely positive that the woman you saw get into the automobile with Mr. Cadwallader was Miss Thorne?"

"Absolutely," replied Hastings without hesitation. "I saw her in her own room with her wraps on, then saw her come down and get into the car."

"That's all," said the chief. "Good night." For an hour or more he sat in a great, comfortable chair in the smoking-room of his own home, the guileless blue eyes vacant, staring, and spidery lines in the benevolent forehead.

* * * * *

On the morning of the second day following, Senor Rodriguez, the minister from Venezuela, reported to the Secret Service Bureau the disappearance of fifty thousand dollars in gold from a safe in his private office at the legation.

IX

FIFTY THOUSAND DOLLARS

Mr. Campbell was talking.

"For several months past," he said, "the International Investment Company, through its representative, Mr. Cressy, has been secretly negotiating with Senor Rodriguez for certain asphalt properties in Venezuela. Three days ago these negotiations were successfully concluded, and yesterday afternoon Mr. Cressy, in secret, paid to Senor Rodriguez, fifty thousand dollars in American gold, the first of four payments of similar sums. This gold was to have been shipped to Philadelphia by express to-day to catch a steamer for Venezuela." Mr. Grimm nodded.

"The fact that this gold was in Senor Rodriguez's possession could not have been known to more than half a dozen persons, as the negotiations throughout have been in strict secrecy," and Mr. Campbell smiled benignly. "So much! Now, Senor Rodriguez has just telephoned asking that I send a man to the legation at once. The gold was kept there over night; or perhaps I should say that the senor intended to keep it there over night." Mr. Campbell stared at Mr. Grimm for a moment, then: "Miss Thorne, you know, is a guest at the legation, that is why I am referring the matter to you."

"I understand," said Mr. Grimm.

And ten minutes later Mr. Grimm presented himself to Senor Rodriguez. The minister from Venezuela, bubbling with excitement, was pacing forth and back across his office, ruffling his gray-black hair with nervous, twining fingers. Mr. Grimm sat down.

"Senor," he inquired placidly, "fifty thousand dollars in gold would weigh nearly two hundred pounds, wouldn't it?"

Senor Rodriguez stared at him blankly.

"_Si, Senor_," he agreed absently. And then, in English: "Yes, I should imagine so."

"Well, was all of it stolen, or only a part of it?" Mr. Grimm went on.
The minister gazed into the listless eyes for a time, then, apparently bewildered, walked forth and back across the room again. Finally he sat down.

"All of it," he admitted. "I can't understand it. No one, not a soul in this house, except myself, knew it was here."

"In addition to this weight of, say two hundred pounds, fifty thousand dollars would make considerable bulk," mused Mr. Grimm. "Very well! Therefore it would appear that the person, or persons, who got it must have gone away from here heavily laden?"

Senor Rodriguez nodded.

"And now, Senor," Mr. Grimm continued, "if you will kindly state the circumstances immediately preceding and following the theft?"

A slight frown which had been growing upon the smooth brow of the diplomatist was instantly dissipated.

"The money--fifty thousand dollars in gold coin--was paid to me yesterday afternoon about four o'clock," he began slowly, in explanation.

"By Mr. Cressy of the International Investment Company," supplemented Mr. Grimm. "Yes. Go on."

The diplomatist favored the young man with one sharp, inquiring glance, and continued:

"The gentleman who paid the money remained here from four until nine o'clock while I, personally, counted it. As I counted it I placed it in canvas bags and when he had gone I took these bags from this room into that," he indicated a closed door to his right, "and personally stowed them away in the safe. I closed and locked the door of the safe myself; I _know_ that it _was_ locked. And that's all, except this morning the money was gone--every dollar of it."

"Safe blown?" inquired Mr. Grimm.

"No, Senor!" exclaimed the diplomatist with sudden violence. "No, the safe was not blown! It was _closed and locked_ exactly as I had left it!"

Mr. Grimm was idly twisting the seal ring on his little finger.

"Just as I left it!" Senor Rodriguez repeated excitedly. "Last night after I locked the safe door I tried it to make certain that it _was_ locked. I happened to notice then that the pointer on the dial had stopped precisely at number forty-five. This morning, when I unlocked the safe--and, of course, I didn't know then that the money had been taken--the pointer was still at number forty-five."

He paused with one hand in the air; Mr. Grimm continued to twist the seal ring.

"It was all like--like some trick on the stage," the minister went on, "like the magician's disappearing lady, or--or--! It was as though I had not put the money into the safe at all!"

"Did you?" inquired Mr. Grimm amiably.

"Did I?" blazed Senor Rodriguez. "Why, Senor--I did!" he concluded meekly.

Mr. Grimm believed him.

"Who else knows the combination of the safe?" he queried.

"No one, Senor--not a living soul."

"Your secretary, for instance?"

"Not even my secretary."

"Some servant--some member of your family?"

"I tell you, Senor, not one person in all the world knew that combination except myself," Senor Rodriguez insisted.

"Your secretary--a servant--some member of your family might have seen you unlock the safe some time, and thus learned the combination?"

Senor Rodriguez did not quite know whether to be annoyed at Mr. Grimm's persistence, or to admire the tenacity with which he held to this one point.

"You must understand, Senor Grimm, that many state documents are kept in the safe," he said finally, "therefore it is not advisable that any one should know the combination. I have made it an absolute rule, as did my predecessors here, never to unlock the safe in the presence of another person."

"State documents!" Mr. Grimm's lips silently repeated the words. Then aloud: "Perhaps there's a record of the combination somewhere? If you had died suddenly, for instance, how would the safe have been opened?"

"There would have been only one way, Senor--blow it open. There is no record."

"Well, if we accept all that as true," observed Mr. Grimm musingly, "it would seem that you either didn't put the money into the safe at all, or--please sit down, there's nothing personal in this--or else the money was taken out of the safe without it being unlocked. This last would have been a miracle, and this is not the day of miracles, therefore--!"

Mr. Grimm's well modulated voice trailed off into silence. Senor Rodriguez came to his feet with a blaze of anger in his eyes; Mr. Grimm was watching him curiously.
"I understand then, Senor," said the minister deliberately, "that you believe that I--!"

"I believe that you have told the truth," interrupted Mr. Grimm placidly, "that is the truth so far as you know it. But you have stated one thing in error. Somebody besides yourself _does_ know the combination. Whether they knew it or not at this time yesterday I can't say, but somebody knows it now."

Senor Rodriguez drew a deep breath of relief. The implied accusation had been withdrawn as pleasantly and frankly as it had been put forward.

"I ran across a chap in New York once, for instance," Mr. Grimm took the trouble to explain, "who could unlock any safe—that is, any safe of the kind used at that time—twelve or fourteen years ago. So you see. I doubt if he would be so successful with the new models, with all their improvements, but then--! You know he would have made an ideal burglar, that chap. Now, Senor, who lives here in the legation with you?"

"My secretary, Senor Diaz, my daughter Inez, and just at the moment, a Miss Thorne—Miss Isabel Thorne," the senor informed him. "Also four servants—two men and two women."

"I've had the pleasure of meeting your daughter and Miss Thorne," Mr. Grimm informed him. "Now, suppose we take a look at the safe?"

"Certainly."

Senor Rodriguez started toward the closed door just as there came a timid knock from the hall. He glanced at Mr. Grimm, who nodded, then he called:

"Come in!"

The door opened, and Miss Thorne entered. She was clad in some filmy, gossamer-like morning gown with her radiant hair caught up on her white neck. At sight of Mr. Grimm the blue-gray eyes opened as if in surprise, and she paused irresolutely.

"I beg your pardon, Senor," she said, addressing the diplomatist. "I did not know you were engaged. And Mr. Grimm!" She extended a slim, white hand, and the young man bowed low over it. "We are old friends," she explained, smilingly, to the minister. Then: "I think I must have dropped my handkerchief when I was in here yesterday with Inez. Perhaps you found it?"

"_Si, Senorita_," replied Senor Rodriguez gallantly. "It is on my desk in here. Just a moment."

He opened the door and passed into the adjoining room. Mr. Grimm's eyes met those of Miss Isabel Thorne, and there was no listlessness in them now, only interest. She smiled at him tauntingly and lowered her lids. Senor Rodriguez appeared from the other room with the handkerchief.

"_Mil gracias, Senor_," she thanked him.

"_No hay de que, Senorita_," he returned, as he opened the door for her.

"_Monsieur Grimm, au revoir!_" She dropped a little curtsy, and still smiling, went out.

"She is charming, Senor," the diplomatist assured him enthusiastically, albeit irrelevantly. "Such vivacity, such personality, such—such—she is charming."

"The safe, please," Mr. Grimm reminded him.

**X**

**A SAFE OPENING**

Together they entered the adjoining room, which was small compared to the one they had just left. Senor Rodriguez used it as a private office. His desk was on their right between two windows overlooking the same pleasant little garden which was visible from the suite of tiny drawing-rooms farther along. The safe, a formidable looking receptacle of black enameled steel, stood at their left, closed and locked. The remaining wall space of the room was given over to oak cabinets, evidently a storage place for the less important legation papers.

"Has any one besides yourself been in this room to-day?" Mr. Grimm inquired.

"Not a soul, Senor," was the reply.

Mr. Grimm went over and examined the windows. They were both locked inside; and there were no marks of any sort on the sills.

"They are just as I left them last night," explained Senor Rodriguez. "I have not touched them to-day."

"And there's only one door," mused Mr. Grimm, meaning that by which they had entered. "So it would appear that whoever was here last night passed through that room. Very well."

He walked around the room once, opening and shutting the doors of the cabinets as he passed, and finally paused in front of the safe. A brief examination of the nicked dial and handle and of the enameled edges of the heavy door satisfied him that no force had been employed—the safe had merely been unlocked. Whereupon he sat himself down, cross-legged on the floor, in front of it.

"What are the first and second figures of the combination?" he asked.

"Thirty-six, then back to ten."

Mr. Grimm set the dial at thirty-six, and then, with his ear pressed closely against the polished door, turned the
dial slowly back. Senor Rodriguez stood looking on helplessly, but none the less intently. The pointer read ten, then
nine, eight, seven, five. Mr. Grimm gazed at it thoughtfully, after which he did it all over again, placidly and without
haste.

"Now, we'll look inside, please," he requested, rising.

Senor Rodriguez unlocked the safe the while Mr. Grimm respectfully turned his eyes away, then pulled the door
wide open. The books had been piled one on top of another and thrust into various pigeonholes at the top. Mr.
Grimm understood that this disorder was the result of making room at the bottom for the bulk of gold, and asked no
questions. Instead, he sat down upon the floor again.

"The lock on this private compartment at the top is broken," he remarked after a moment.

"_Si, Senor. _" the diplomatist agreed. "Evidently the robbers were not content with only fifty thousand dollars in
gold--they imagined that something else of value was hidden there."

"Was there?" asked Mr. Grimm naively. He didn't look around.

"Nothing of monetary value," the senor explained. "There were some important state papers in there--they are
there yet--but no money."

"None of the papers was stolen?"

"No, Senor. There were only nine packets--they are there yet."

"Contents all right?"

"Yes. I personally looked them over."

Mr. Grimm drew out the packets of papers, one by one. They were all unsealed save the last. When he reached
for that, Senor Rodriguez made a quick, involuntary motion toward it with his hand.

"This one's sealed," commented Mr. Grimm. "It doesn't happen that you opened it and sealed it again?"

Senor Rodriguez stood staring at him blankly for a moment, then some sudden apprehension was aroused, for a
startled look came into his eyes, and again he reached for the packet.

"_Dios mio!_ " he exclaimed, "let me see, Senor."

"Going to open it?" asked Mr. Grimm.

"Yes, Senor. I had not thought of it before."

Mr. Grimm rose and walked over to the window where the light was better. He scrutinized the sealed packet
closely. There were three red splotches of wax upon it, each impressed with the legation seal; the envelope was
without marks otherwise. He turned and twisted it aimlessly, and peered curiously at the various seals, after which
he handed it to the frankly impatient diplomatist.

Senor Rodriguez opened it, with nervous, twitching fingers. Mr. Grimm had turned toward the safe again, but he
heard the crinkle of parchment as some document was drawn out of the envelope, and then came a deep sigh of
relief. Having satisfied his sudden fears for the safety of the paper, whatever it was, the senor placed it in another
envelope and sealed it again with elaborate care. Mr. Grimm dropped into the swivel chair at the desk.

"Senor," he inquired pleasantly, "your daughter and Miss Thorne were in this room yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes," replied the diplomatist as if surprised at the question.

"What time, please?"

"About three o'clock. They were going out driving. Why?"

"And just where, please, did you find that handkerchief?" continued Mr. Grimm.

"Handkerchief?" repeated the diplomatist. "You mean Miss Thorne's handkerchief?" He paused and regarded
Mr. Grimm keenly. "Senor, what am I to understand from that question?"

"It was plain enough," replied Mr. Grimm. "Where did you find that handkerchief?" There was silence for an
instant. "In this room?"

"Yes," replied Senor Rodriguez at last.

"Near the safe?" Mr. Grimm persisted.

"Yes," came the slow reply, again. "Just here," and he indicated a spot a little to the left of the safe.

"And when did you find it? Yesterday afternoon? Last night? This morning?"

"This morning," and without any apparent reason the diplomatist's face turned deathly white.

"But, Senor--Senor, you are mistaken! There can be nothing--! A woman! Two hundred pounds of gold! Senor!"

Mr. Grimm was still pleasant about it; his curiosity was absolutely impersonal; his eyes, grown listless again,
were turned straight into the other's face.

"If that handkerchief had been there last night, Senor," he resumed quietly, "wouldn't you have noticed it when
you placed the gold in the safe?"

Senor Rodriguez stared at him a long time.

"I don't know," he said, at last. He dropped back into a chair with his face in his hands. "Senor," he burst out
suddenly, impetuously, after a moment, "if the gold is not recovered I am ruined. You understand that better than I
can tell you. It's the kind of thing that could not be explained to my government." He rose suddenly and faced the impassive young man, with merciless determination in his face. "You must find the gold, Senor," he said.

"No matter who may be--who may suffer?" inquired Mr. Grimm.

"Find the gold, Senor!"

"Very well," commented Mr. Grimm, without moving. "Do me the favor, please, to regain possession of the handkerchief you just returned to Miss Thorne, and to send to me here your secretary, Senor Diaz, and your servants, one by one. I shall question them alone. No, don't be alarmed. Unless they know of the robbery they shall get no inkling of it from me. First, be good enough to replace the packet in the safe, and lock it."

Senor Rodriguez replaced the packet without question, afterward locking the door, then went out. A moment later Senor Diaz appeared. He remained with Mr. Grimm for just eight minutes. Senor Rodriguez entered again as his secretary passed on, and laid a lace handkerchief on the desk. Mr. Grimm stared at it curiously for a long time.

"It's the same handkerchief?"

"_Si, Senor._"

"There's no doubt whatever about it?"

"No, Senor, I got it by--!

"It's of no consequence," interrupted Mr. Grimm. "Now the servants, please--the men first."

The first of the men servants was in the room two minutes; the second--the butler--was there five minutes; one of the women was not questioned at all; the other remained ten minutes. Mr. Grimm followed her into the hall; Senor Rodriguez stood there helpless, impatient.

"Well?" he demanded eagerly.

"I'm going out a little while," replied Mr. Grimm placidly. "No one has even an intimation of the affair--please keep the matter absolutely to yourself until I return."

That was all. The door opened and closed, and he was gone.

At the end of an hour he returned, passed on through to the diplomatist's private office, sat down in front of the locked safe again, and set the dial at thirty-six. Senor Rodriguez looked on, astonished, as Mr. Grimm pressed the soft rubber sounder of a stethoscope against the safe door and began turning the dial back toward ten, slowly, slowly. Thirty-five minutes later the lock clicked. Mr. Grimm rose, turned the handle, and pulled the safe door open.

"That's how it was done," he explained to the amazed diplomatist. "And now, please, have a servant hand my card to Miss Thorne."

XI

THE LACE HANDBERCHIEF

Still wearing the graceful, filmy morning gown, with an added touch, of scarlet in her hair--a single red rose--Miss Thorne came into the drawing-room where Mr. Grimm sat waiting. There was curiosity in her manner, thinly veiled, but the haunting smile still lingered about her lips. Mr. Grimm bowed low, and placed a chair for her, after which he stood for a time staring down at one slim, white hand at rest on the arm of the seat. At last, he, too, sat down.

"I believe," he said slowly, without preliminaries, "this is your handkerchief?"

He offered the lacy trifle, odd in design, unique in workmanship, obviously of foreign texture, and she accepted it.

"Yes," she agreed readily, "I must have dropped it again."

"That is the one handed to you by Senor Rodriguez," Mr. Grimm told her. "I think you said you lost it in his office yesterday afternoon?"

"Yes?" She nodded inquiringly.

"It may interest you to know that Senor Rodriguez's butler positively identifies it as one he restored to you twice at dinner last evening, between seven and nine o'clock," Mr. Grimm went on dispassionately.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Miss Thorne.

"The senor identifies it as one he found this morning in his office," Mr. Grimm explained obligingly. "During the night fifty thousand dollars in gold were stolen from his safe."

There was not the slightest change of expression in her face; the blue-gray eyes were still inquiring in their gaze, the white hands still at rest, the scarlet lips still curled slightly, an echo of a smile.

"No force was used in opening the safe," Mr. Grimm resumed. "It was unlocked. It's an old model and I have demonstrated how it could have been opened either with the assistance of a stethoscope, which catches the sound of the tumbler in the lock, or by a person of acute hearing."

Miss Thorne sat motionless, waiting.

"All this means--what?" she inquired, at length.

"I'll trouble you, please, to return the money," requested Mr. Grimm courteously. "No reason appears why you
should have taken it. But I'm not seeking reasons, nor am I seeking disagreeable publicity--only the money."

"It seems to me you attach undue importance to the handkerchief," she objected.

"That's a matter of opinion," Mr. Grimm remarked. "It would be useless, even tedious, to attempt to disprove a
burglar theory, but against it is the difficulty of entrance, the weight of the gold, the ingenious method of opening
the safe, and the assumption that not more than six persons knew the money was in the safe; while a person in the
house _might_ have learned it in any of a dozen ways. And, in addition, is the fact that the handkerchief is odd,
therefore noticeable. A lace expert assures me there's probably not another like it in the world."

He stopped. Miss Thorne's eyes sparkled and a smile seemed to be tugging at the corners of her mouth. She
spread out the handkerchief on her knees.

"You could identify this again, of course?" she queried.

"Yes."

She thoughtfully crumpled up the bit of lace in both hands, then opened them. There were two handkerchiefs
now--they were identical.

"Which is it, please?" she asked.

If Mr. Grimm was disappointed there was not a trace of it on his face. She laughed outright, gleefully,
mockingly, then, demurely:

"Pardon me! You see, it's absurd. The handkerchief the butler restored to me at dinner, after I lost one in the
senor's office, might have been either of these, or one of ten other duplicates in my room, all given to me by her
Maj--I mean," she corrected quickly, "by a friend in Europe." She was silent for a moment. "Is that all?"

"No," replied Mr. Grimm gravely, decisively. "I'm not satisfied. I shall insist upon the return of the money, and if
it is not forthcoming I dare say Count di Rosini, the Italian ambassador, would be pleased to give his personal check
rather than have the matter become public." She started to interrupt; he went on. "In any event you will be requested
to leave the country."

Then, and not until then, a decided change came over Miss Thorne's face. A deeper color leaped to her cheeks,
the smile faded from her lips, and there was a flash of uneasiness in her eyes.

"But if I am innocent?" she protested.

"You must prove it," continued Mr. Grimm mercilessly. "Personally, I am convinced, and Count di Rosini has
practically assured me that--"

"It's unjust!" she interrupted passionately. "It's--it's--you have proved nothing. It's unheard of! It's beyond--!"

Suddenly she became silent. A minute, two minutes, three minutes passed; Mr. Grimm waited patiently.

"Will you give me time and opportunity to prove my innocence?" she demanded finally. "And if I _do_ convince
you--?"

"I should be delighted to believe that I have made a mistake," Mr. Grimm assured her. "How much time? One
day? Two days?"

"I will let you know within an hour at your office," she told him.

Mr. Grimm rose.

"And meanwhile, in case of accident, I shall look to Count di Rosini for adjustment," he added pointedly. "Good
morning."

One hour and ten minutes later he received this note, unsigned:

"Closed carriage will stop for you at southeast corner of Pennsylvania Avenue and Fourteenth Street to-night at
one."

He was there; the carriage was on time; and my lady of mystery was inside. He stepped in and they swung out
into Pennsylvania Avenue, noiselessly over the asphalt.

"Should the gold be placed in your hands now, within the hour," she queried solicitously, "would it be necessary
for you to know who was the--the thief?"

"It would," Mr. Grimm responded without hesitation.

"Even if it destroyed a reputation?" she pleaded.

"The Secret Service rarely destroys a reputation, Miss Thorne, although it holds itself in readiness to do so. I
dare say in this case there would be no arrest or prosecution, because of--of reasons which appear to be good."

"There wouldn't?" and there was a note of eagerness in her voice. "The identity of the guilty person would never
appear?"

"It would become a matter of record in our office, but beyond that I think not--at least in this one instance."

Miss Thorne sat silent for a block or more.

"You'll admit, Mr. Grimm, that you have forced me into a most remarkable position. You seemed convinced of
my guilt, and, if you'll pardon me, without reason; then you made it compulsory upon me to establish my innocence.
The only way for me to do that was to find the guilty one. I have done it, and I'm sorry, because it's a little tragedy."
Mr. Grimm waited.

"It's a girl high in diplomatic society. Her father's position is an honorable rather than a lucrative one; he has no fortune. This girl moves in a certain set devoted to bridge, and stakes are high. She played and won, and played and won, and on and on, until her winnings were about eight thousand dollars. Then luck turned. She began to lose. Her money went, but she continued to play desperately. Finally some old family jewels were pawned without her father's knowledge, and ultimately they were lost. One day she awoke to the fact that she owed some nine or ten thousand dollars in bridge debts. They were pressing and there was no way to meet them. This meant exposure and utter ruin, and women do strange things, Mr. Grimm, to postpone such an ending to social aspirations. I know this much is true, for she related it all to me herself.

"At last, in some way--a misplaced letter, perhaps, or a word overheard--she learned that fifty thousand dollars would be in the legation safe overnight, and evidently she learned the precise night." She paused a moment. "Here is the address of a man in Baltimore, Thomas Q. Griswold," and she passed a card to Mr. Grimm, who sat motionless, listening. "About four years ago the combination on the legation safe was changed. This man was sent here to make the change, therefore some one besides Senor Rodriguez _does_ know the combination. I have communicated with this man to-day, for I saw the possibility of just such a thing as this instead of your stethoscope. By a trick and a forged letter this girl obtained the combination from this man."

Mr. Grimm drew a long breath.

"She intended to take, perhaps, only what she desperately needed--but at sight of it all--do you see what must have been the temptation then? We get out here."

There were many unanswered questions in Mr. Grimm's mind. He repressed them for the time, stepped out and assisted Miss Thorne to alight. The carriage had turned out of Pennsylvania Avenue, and at the moment he didn't quite place himself. A narrow passageway opened before them--evidently the rear entrance to a house possibly in the next street. Miss Thorne led the way unhesitatingly, cautiously unlocked the door, and together they entered a hall. Then there was a short flight of stairs, and they stepped into a room, one of a suite. She closed the door and turned on the lights.

"The bags of gold are in the next room," she said with the utmost composure.

Mr. Grimm dragged them out of a dark closet, opened one--there were ten--and allowed the coins to dribble through his fingers. Finally he turned and stared at Miss Thorne, who, pallid and weary, stood looking on.

"Where are we?" he asked. "What house is this?"

"The Venezuelan legation," she answered. "We are standing less than forty feet from the safe that was robbed. You see how easy--!"

"And whose room?" inquired Mr. Grimm slowly.

"Must I answer?" she asked appealingly.

"You must!"

"Senorita Rodriguez--my hostess! Don't you see what you've made me do? She and Mr. Cadwallader made the trip to Baltimore in his automobile, and--and--!" She stopped. "He knows nothing of it," she added.

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Grimm.

He stood looking at her in silence for a moment, staring deeply into the pleading eyes; and a certain tense expression about his lips passed. For an instant her hand trembled on his arm, and he caught the fragrance of her hair.

"Where is she now?" he asked.

"Playing bridge," replied Miss Thorne, with a sad little smile. "It is always so--at least twice a week, and she rarely returns before two or half-past." She extended both hands impetuously, entreatingly. "Please be generous, Mr. Grimm. You have the gold; don't destroy her."

Senor Rodriguez, the minister from Venezuela, found the gold in his safe on the following morning, with a brief note from Mr. Grimm, in which there was no explanation of how or where it had been found. And two hours later Monsieur Boisseguer, ambassador from France to the United States, disappeared from the embassy, vanished!

XII

THE VANISHING DIPLOMATIST

It was three days after the ambassador's disappearance that Monsieur Rigolot, secretary of the French embassy and temporary _charge-d'affaires_, reported the matter to Chief Campbell in the Secret Service Bureau, adding thereto a detailed statement of several singular incidents following close upon it. He told it in order, concisely and to the point, while Grimm and his chief listened.

"Monsieur Boisseguer, the ambassador, you understand, is a man whose habits are remarkably regular," he began. "He has made it a rule to be at his desk every morning at ten o'clock, and between that time and one o'clock he dictates his correspondence, and clears up whatever routine work there is before him. I have known him for many
years, and have been secretary of the embassy under him in Germany and Japan and this country. I have never known him to vary this general order of work unless because of illness, or necessary absence.

"Well, Monsieur, last Tuesday--this is Friday--the ambassador was at his desk as usual. He dictated a dozen or more letters, and had begun another--a private letter to his sister in Paris. He was well along in this letter when, without any apparent reason, he rose from his desk and left the room, closing the door behind him. His stenographer's impression was that some detail of business had occurred to him, and he had gone into the general office farther down the hall to attend to it. I may say, Monsieur, that this impression seemed strengthened by the fact that he left a fresh cigarette burning in his ash tray, and his pen was behind his ear. It was all as if he had merely stepped out, intending to return immediately--the sort of thing, Monsieur, that any man might have done.

"It so happened that when he went out he left a sentence of his letter incomplete. I tell you this to show that the impulse to go must have been a sudden one, yet there was nothing in his manner, so his stenographer says, to indicate excitement, or any other than his usual frame of mind. It was about five minutes of twelve o'clock--high noon--when he went out. When he didn't return immediately the stenographer began transcribing the letters. At one o'clock Monsieur Boissegur still had not returned and his stenographer went to luncheon."

As he talked some inbred excitement seemed to be growing upon him, due, perhaps, to his recital of the facts, and he paused at last to regain control of himself. Incidentally he wondered if Mr. Grimm was taking the slightest interest in what he was saying. Certainly there was nothing in his impassive face to indicate it.

"Understand, Monsieur," the secretary continued, after a moment, "that I knew nothing whatever of all this until late that afternoon--that is, Tuesday afternoon about five o'clock. I was engaged all day upon some important work in my own office, and had had no occasion to see Monsieur Boissegur since a word or so when he came in at ten o'clock. My attention was called to the affair finally by his stenographer, Monsieur Netterville, who came to me for instructions. He had finished the letters and the ambassador had not returned to sign them. At this point I began an investigation, Monsieur, and the further I went the more uneasy I grew.

"Now, Monsieur, there are only two entrances to the embassy--the front door, where a servant is in constant attendance from nine in the morning until ten at night, and the rear door, which can only be reached through the kitchen. Neither of the two men who had been stationed at the front door had seen the ambassador since breakfast, therefore he could not have gone out that way. _Comprenez_? It seemed ridiculous, Monsieur, but then I went to the kitchen. The _chef_ had been there all day, and he had not seen the ambassador at all. I inquired further. No one in the embassy, not a clerk, nor a servant, nor a member of the ambassador's family had seen him since he left his office."

Again he paused and ran one hand across his troubled brow.

"Monsieur," he went on, and there was a tense note in his voice, "the ambassador of France had disappeared, gone, vanished! We searched the house from the cellar to the servants' quarters, even the roof, but there was no trace of him. The hat he usually wore was in the hall, and all his other hats were accounted for. You may remember, Monsieur, that Tuesday was cold, but all his top-coats were found in their proper places. So it seems, Monsieur," and repression ended in a burst of excitement, "if he left the embassy he did not go out by either door, and he went without hat or coat!"

He stopped helplessly and his gaze alternated inquiringly between the benevolent face of the chief and the expressionless countenance of Mr. Grimm.

"_If_ he left the embassy?" Mr. Grimm repented. "If your search of the house proved conclusively that he wasn't there, he _did_ leave it, didn't he?"

Monsieur Rigolot stared at him blankly for a moment, then nodded.

"And there are windows, you know," Mr. Grimm went on, then: "As I understand it, Monsieur, no one except you and the stenographer saw the ambassador after ten o'clock in the morning?"

"_Oui, Monsieur. C'est--_" Monsieur Rigolot began excitedly. "I beg pardon. I believe that is correct."

"You saw him about ten, you say; therefore no one except the stenographer saw him after ten o'clock?"

"That is also true, as far as I know."


"I made inquiries in that direction, Monsieur," was the reply, "I have the words of the servants at the door and of the stenographer that there were no callers, and the statement of the stenographer that there were no telephone calls or telegrams. There were only four letters for him personally. He left them all on his desk--here they are."

Mr. Grimm looked them over leisurely. They were commonplace enough, containing nothing that might be construed into a reason for the disappearance.

"The letters Monsieur Boissegur had dictated were laid on his desk by the stenographer," Monsieur Rigolot rushed on volubly, excitedly. "In the anxiety and uneasiness following the disappearance they were allowed to remain there overnight. On Wednesday morning, Monsieur"--and he hesitated impressively--"_those letters bore his
signature in his own handwriting!"

Mr. Grimm turned his listless eyes full upon Monsieur Rigolot’s perturbed face for one scant instant.

"No doubt of it being his signature?" he queried.

"_Non, Monsieur, non!_" the secretary exclaimed emphatically. "_Vous avez_,--that is, I have known his signature for years. There is no doubt. The letters were not of a private nature. If you would care to look at copies of them?"

He offered the duplicates tentatively. Mr. Grimm read them over slowly, the while Monsieur Rigolot sat nervously staring at him. They, too, seemed meaningless as bearing on the matter in hand. Finally, Mr. Grimm nodded, and Monsieur Rigolot resumed:

"And Wednesday night, Monsieur, another strange thing happened. Monsieur Boissegur smokes many cigarettes, of a kind made especially for him in France, and shipped to him here. He keeps them in a case on his dressing-table. On Thursday morning his valet reported to me that _this case of cigarettes had disappeared!_"

"Of course," observed Mr. Grimm, "Monsieur Boissegur has a latch-key to the embassy?"

"Of course."

"Anything unusual happen last night--that is, Thursday night?"

"Nothing, Monsieur--that is, nothing we can find."

Mr. Grimm was silent for a time and fell to twisting the seal ring on his finger. Mr. Campbell turned around and moved a paper weight one inch to the left, where it belonged, while Monsieur Rigolot, disappointed at their amazing apathy, squirmed uneasily in his chair.

"It would appear, then," Mr. Grimm remarked musingly, "that after his mysterious disappearance the ambassador has either twice returned to his house at night, or else sent some one there, first to bring the letters to him for signature, and later to get his cigarettes?"

"_Certainement, Monsieur._--I mean, that seems to be true. But where is he? Why should he not come back? What does it mean? Madame Boissegur is frantic, prostrated! She wanted me to go to the police, but I did not think it wise that it should become public, so I came here."

"Very well," commented Mr. Grimm. "Let it rest as it is. Meanwhile you may reassure madame. Point out to her that if Monsieur Boissegur signed the letters Tuesday night he was, at least, alive; and if he came or sent for the cigarettes Wednesday night, he was still alive. I shall call at the embassy this afternoon. No, it isn't advisable to go with you now. Give me your latch-key, please."

Monsieur Rigolot produced the key and passed it over without a word.

"And one other thing," Mr. Grimm continued, "please collect all the revolvers that may be in the house and take charge of them yourself. If any one, by chance, heard a burglar prowling around there to-night he might shoot, and in that event either kill Monsieur Boissegur or--or me!"

When the secretary had gone Mr. Campbell idly drummed on his desk as he studied the face of his subordinate.

"So much!" he commented finally.

"It's Miss Thorne again," said the young man as if answering a question.

"Perhaps these reports I have received to-day from the Latin capitals may aid you in dispelling that mystery," Campbell suggested, and Mr. Grimm turned to them eagerly. "Meanwhile our royal visitor, Prince Benedetto d' Abruzzi, remains unknown?"

"The young man's teeth closed with a snap.

"It's only a question of time, Chief," he said abruptly. "I'll find him--I'll find him!"

And he sat down to read the reports.

XIII

A CONFERENCE IN THE DARK

The white rays of a distant arc light filtered through the half-drawn velvet hangings and laid a faintly illumined path across the ambassador's desk; the heavy leather chairs were mere impalpable splotches in the shadows; the cut-glass knobs of a mahogany cabinet caught the glint of light and reflected it dimly. Outside was the vague, indefinable night drone of a city asleep, unbroken by any sound that was distinguishable, until finally there came the distant boom of a clock. It struck twice.

Seated on a couch in one corner of the ambassador's office was Mr. Grimm. He was leaning against the high arm of leather, with his feet on the seat, thoughtfully nursing his knees. If his attitude indicated anything except sheer comfort, it was that he was listening. He had been there for two hours, wide-awake, and absolutely motionless. Five, ten, fifteen minutes more passed, and then Mr. Grimm heard the grind and whir of an automobile a block or so away, coming toward the embassy. Now it was in front.

"Honk! Hon-on-onk!" it called plaintively. "Hon-on-onk! Honk!"

The signal! At last! The automobile went rushing on, full tilt, while Mr. Grimm removed his feet from the seat
and dropped them noiselessly to the floor. Thus, with his hands on his knees, and listening, listening with every faculty strained, he sat motionless, peering toward the open door that led into the hall. The car was gone now, the sound of it was swallowed up in the distance, still he sat there. It was obviously some noise in the house for which he was waiting.

Minute after minute passed, and still nothing. There was not even the whisper of a wind-stirred drapery. He was about to rise when, suddenly, with no other noise than that of the sharp click of the switch, the electric lights in the room blazed up brilliantly. The glare dazzled Mr. Grimm with its blinding flood, but he didn't move. Then softly, almost in a whisper:

"Good evening, Mr. Grimm."

It was a woman's voice, pleasant, unsurprised, perfectly modulated. Mr. Grimm certainly did not expect it now, but he knew it instantly--there was not another quite like it in the wide, wide world--and though he was still blinking a little, he came to his feet courteously.

"Good morning, Miss Thorne," he corrected gravely.

Now his vision was clearing, and he saw her, a graceful figure, silhouetted against the rich green of the wall draperies. Her lips were curled the least bit, as if she might have been smiling, and her wonderful eyes reflected a glint of--of--was it amusement? The folds of her evening dress fell away from her, and one bare, white arm was extended, as her hand still rested on the switch.

"And you didn't hear me?" still in the half whisper. "I didn't think you would. Now I'm going to put out the lights for an instant, while you pull the shades down, and then--then we must have a--a conference."

The switch snapped. The lights died as suddenly as they had been born, and Mr. Grimm, moving noiselessly, visited each of the four windows in turn. Then the lights blazed brilliantly again.

"Just for a moment," Miss Thorne explained to him quietly, and she handed him a sheet of paper. "I want you to read this--read it carefully--then I shall turn out the lights again. They are dangerous. After that we may discuss the matter at our leisure."

Mr. Grimm read the paper while Miss Thorne's eyes questioned his impassive face. At length he looked up indolently, listlessly, and the switch snapped. She crossed the room and sat down; Mr. Grimm sat beside her.

"I think," Miss Thorne suggested tentatively, "that that accounts perfectly for Monsieur Boissegur's disappearance."

"It gives one explanation, at least," Mr. Grimm assented musingly. "Kidnapped--held prisoner--fifty thousand dollars demanded for his safety and release." A pause. "And to whom, may I ask, was this demand addressed?"

"To Madame Boissegur," replied Miss Thorne. "I have the envelope in which it came. It was mailed at the general post-office at half-past one o'clock this afternoon, so the canceling stamp shows, and the envelope was addressed, as the letter was written, on a typewriter."

"And how," inquired Mr. Grimm, after a long pause, "how did it come into your possession?" He waited a little. "Why didn't Monsieur Rigolot report this development to me this afternoon when I was here?"

"Monsieur Rigolot did not inform you of it because he didn't know of it himself," she replied, answering the last question first. "It came into my possession directly from the hands of Madame Boissegur--she gave it to me."

"Why?"

Mr. Grimm was peering through the inscrutable darkness, straight into her face--a white daub in the gloom, shapeless, indistinct.

"I have known Madame Boissegur for half a dozen years," Miss Thorne continued, in explanation. "We have been friends that long. I met her first in Tokio, later in Berlin, and within a few weeks, here in Washington. You see I have traveled in the time I have been an agent for my government. Well, Madame Boissegur received this letter about half-past four o'clock this afternoon; and about half-past five she sent for me and placed it in my hands, together with all the singular details following upon the ambassador's disappearance. So, it would seem that you and I are allies for this once, and the problem is already solved. There merely remains the task of finding and releasing the ambassador."

Mr. Grimm sat perfectly still.

"And why," he asked slowly, "are you here now?"

"For the same reason that you are here," she replied readily, "to see for myself if the--the person who twice came here at night--once for the ambassador's letters and once for his cigarettes--would, by any chance, make another trip. I knew you were here, of course."

"You knew I was here," repeated Mr. Grimm musingly. "And, may I--?"

"Just as you knew that I, or some one, at least, had entered this house a few minutes ago," she interrupted. "The automobile horn outside was a signal, wasn't it? Hastings was in the car? Or was it Blair or Johnson?"

Mr. Grimm did not say.
"Didn't you anticipate any personal danger when you entered?" he queried instead. "Weren't you afraid I might shoot?"

"No."

There was a long silence. Mr. Grimm still sat with his elbows on his knees, staring, staring at the vague white splotch which was Miss Thorne's face and bare neck. One of her white arms hung at her side like a pallid serpent, and her hand was at rest on the seat of the couch.

"It seems, Miss Thorne," he said at length, casually, quite casually, "that our paths of duty are inextricably tangled. Twice previously we have met under circumstances that were more than strange, and now--this! Whatever injustice I may have done you in the past by my suspicions has, I hope, been forgiven; and in each instance we were able to work side by side toward a conclusion. I am wondering now if this singular affair will take a similar course."

He paused. Miss Thorne started to speak, but he silenced her with a slight gesture of his hand.

"It is only fair to you to say that we--that is, the Secret Service--have learned many things about you," he resumed in the same casual tone. "We have, through our foreign agents, traced you step by step from Rome to Washington. We know that you are, in a way, a representative of a sovereign of Europe; we know that you were on a secret mission to the Spanish court, perhaps for this sovereign, and remained in Madrid for a month; we know that from there you went to Paris, also on a secret mission--perhaps the same--and remained there for three weeks; we know that you met diplomatic agents of those governments later in London. We know all this; we know the manner of your coming to this country; of your coming to Washington. But we don't know _why_ you are here."

Again she started to speak, and again he stopped her.

"We don't know your name, but that is of no consequence. We _do_ know that in Spain you were Senora Cassavant, in Paris Madeemoiselle d'Aubinon, in London Miss Jane Kellog, and here Miss Isabel Thorne. We realize that exigencies arise in your calling, and mine, which make changes of name desirable, necessary even, and there is no criticism of that. Now as the representative of your government--rather _a_ government--you have a right to be here, although unaccredited; you have a right to remain here as long as your acts are consistent with our laws; you have a right to your secrets as long as they do not, directly or indirectly, threaten the welfare of this country. Now, why are you here?"

He received no answer; he expected none. After a moment he went on:

"Admitting that you are a secret agent of Italy, admitting everything that you claim to be, you haven't convinced me that you are not the person who came here for the letters and cigarettes. You have said nothing to prove to my satisfaction that you are not the individual I was waiting for to-night."

"You don't mean that you suspect--?" she began in a tone of amazement.

"I don't mean that I suspect anything," he interposed. "I mean merely that you haven't convinced me. There's nothing inconsistent in the fact that you are what you say you are, and that in spite of that, you came to-night for--"

He was interrupted by a laugh, a throaty, silvery note that he remembered well. His idle hands closed spasmodically, only to be instantly relaxed.

"Suppose, Mr. Grimm, I should tell you that immediately after Madame Boissegur placed the matter in my hands this afternoon I went straight to your office to show this letter to you and to ask your assistance?" she inquired.

"Suppose that I left my card for you with a clerk there on being informed that you were out--remember I knew you were on the case from Madame Boissegur--would that indicate anything except that I wanted to put the matter squarely before you, and work with you?"

"We will suppose that much," Mr. Grimm agreed.

"That is a statement of fact," Miss Thorne added. "My card, which you will find at your office, will show that. And when I left your office I went to the hotel where you live, with the same purpose. You were not there, and I left a card for you. And _that_ is a statement of fact. It was not difficult, owing to the extraordinary circumstances, to imagine that you would be here to-night--just as you are--and I came here. My purpose, still, was to inform you of what I knew, and work with you. Does that convince you?"

"And how did you enter the embassy?" Mr. Grimm persisted.

"Not with a latch-key, as you did," she replied. "Madame Boissegur, at my suggestion, left the French window in the hall there unfastened, and I came in that way--the way, I may add, that _Monsieur l'Ambassadeur_ went out when he disappeared."

"Very well!" commented Mr. Grimm, and finally: "I think, perhaps, I owe you an apology, Miss Thorne--another one. The circumstances now, as they were at our previous meetings, are so unusual that--is it necessary to go on?" There was a certain growing deference in his tone. "I wonder if you account for Monsieur Boissegur's disappearance as I do?" he inquired.

"I dare say," and Miss Thorne leaned toward him with sudden eagerness in her manner and voice. "Your theory is--?" she questioned.
"If we believe the servants we know that Monsieur Boissegur did not go out either by the front door or rear," Mr. Grimm explained. "That being true the French window by which you entered seems to have been the way."

"Yes, yes," Miss Thorne interpolated. "And the circumstances attending the disappearance? How do you account for the fact that he went, evidently of his own will?"

"Precisely as you must account for it if you have studied the situation here as I have," responded Mr. Grimm. "For instance, sitting at his desk there"--and he turned to indicate it--"he could readily see out the windows overlooking the street. There is only a narrow strip of lawn between the house and the sidewalk. Now, if some one on the sidewalk, or--or--"

"In a carriage?" promptly suggested Miss Thorne.

"Or in a carriage," Mr. Grimm supplemented, "had attracted his attention--some one he knew--it is not at all unlikely that he rose, for no apparent reason, as he did do, passed along the hall--"

"And through the French window, across the lawn to the carriage, and not a person in the house would have seen him go out? Precisely! There seems no doubt that was the way," she mused. "And, of course, he must have entered the carriage of his own free will?"

"In other words, on some pretext or other, he was lured in, then made prisoner, and--!"

He paused suddenly and his hand met Miss Thorne's warningly. The silence of the night was broken by the violent clatter of footsteps, apparently approaching the embassy. The noise was unmistakable--some one was running.

"The window!" Miss Thorne whispered.

She rose quickly and started to cross the room, to look out; Mr. Grimm sat motionless, listening. An instant later and there came a tremendous crash of glass--the French window in the hallway by the sound--then rapid footsteps, still running, along the hall. Mr. Grimm moved toward the door unruffled, perfectly self-possessed; there was only a narrowing of his eyes at the abruptness and clatter of it all. And then the electric lights in the hall flashed up.

Before Mr. Grimm stood a man, framed by the doorway, staring unseeingly into the darkened room. His face was haggard and white as death; his mouth agape as if from exertion, and the lips bloodless; his eyes were widely distended as if from fright--clothing disarranged, collar unfastened and dangling.

"The ambassador!" Miss Thorne whispered thrillingly.

XIV

A RESCUE AND AN ESCAPE

Miss Thorne's voice startled Mr. Grimm a little, but he had no doubts. It was Monsieur Boissegur. Mr. Grimm was going toward the enframed figure when, without any apparent reason, the ambassador turned and ran along the hall; and at that instant the lights went out again. For one moment Grimm stood still, dazed and blinded by the sudden blackness, and again he started toward the door. Miss Thorne was beside him.

"The lights!" he whispered tensely. "Find the switch!"

He heard the rustle of her skirts as she moved away, and stepped out into the hall, feeling with both his hands along the wall. A few feet away, in the direction the ambassador had gone, there seemed to be a violent struggle in progress--there was the scuffling of feet, and quick-drawn breaths as muscle strained against muscle. The lights! If he could only find the switch! Then, as his hands moved along the wall, they came in contact with another hand--a hand pressed firmly against the plastering, barring his progress. A light blow in the face caused him to step back quickly.

The scuffling sound suddenly resolved itself into moving footsteps, and the front door opened and closed with a bang. Mr. Grimm's listless eyes snapped, and his white teeth came together sharply as he started toward the front door. But fate seemed to be against him still. He stumbled over a chair, and his own impetus forward sent him sprawling; his head struck the wall with a resounding whack; and then, over the house, came utter silence. From outside he heard the clatter of a cab. Finally that died away in the distance.

"Miss Thorne?" he inquired quietly.

"I'm here," she answered in a despairing voice. "But I can't find the switch."

"Are you hurt?"

"No."

And then she found the switch; the lights flared up. Mr. Grimm was sitting thoughtfully on the floor.

"That simplifies the matter considerably," he observed complacently, as he rose. "The men who signaled to me when you entered the embassy will never let that cab get out of their sight."

Miss Thorne stood leaning forward a little, eagerly gazing at him with those wonderful blue-gray eyes, and an expression of--of--perhaps it was admiration on her face.

"Are you sure?" she demanded, at last.

"I know it," was his response.
And just then Monsieur Rigolot, secretary of the embassy, thrust an inquisitive head timidly around the corner of the stairs. The crash of glass had aroused him.

"What happened?" he asked breathlessly.

"We don't know just yet," replied Mr. Grimm. "If the noise aroused any one else please assure them that there's nothing the matter. And you might inform Madame Boissegur that the ambassador will return home to-morrow. Good night!"

At his hotel, when he reached there, Mr. Grimm found Miss Thorne's card--and he drew a long breath; at his office he found another of her cards, and he drew another long breath. He did like corroborative details, did Mr. Grimm, and, of course, this--! On the following day Miss Thorne accompanied him to Alexandria, and they were driven in a closed carriage out toward the western edge of the city. Finally the carriage stopped at a signal from Mr. Grimm, and he assisted Miss Thorne out, after which he turned and spoke to some one remaining inside--a man.

"The house is two blocks west, along that street there," he explained, and he indicated an intersecting thoroughfare just ahead. "It is number ninety-seven. Five minutes after we enter you will drive up in front of the door and wait. If we don't return in fifteen minutes--come in after us!"

"Do you anticipate danger?" Miss Thorne queried quickly.

"If I had anticipated danger," replied Mr. Grimm, "I should not have permitted you to come with me."

They entered the house--number ninety-seven--with a key which Mr. Grimm produced, and a minute or so later walked into a room where three men were sitting. One of them was of a coarse, repulsive type, large and heavy; another rather dapper, of superficial polish, evidently a foreigner, and the third--the third was Ambassador Boissegur!

"Good morning, gentlemen!" Mr. Grimm greeted them, then ceremoniously: "Monsieur Boissegur, your carriage is at the door."

The three men came to their feet instantly, and one of them--he of the heavy face--drew a revolver. Mr. Grimm faced him placidly.

"Do you know what would happen to you if you killed me?" he inquired pleasantly. "You wouldn't live three minutes. Do you imagine I came in here blindly? There are a dozen men guarding the entrances to the house--a pistol shot would bring them in. Put down the gun!"

Eyes challenged eyes for one long tense instant, and the man carefully laid the weapon on the table. Mr. Grimm strolled over and picked it up, after which he glanced inquiringly at the other man--the ambassador's second guard.

"And you are the gentleman, I dare say, who made the necessary trips to the ambassador's house, probably using his latch-key?" he remarked interrogatively. "First for the letters to be signed, and again for the cigarettes?"

There was no answer and Mr. Grimm turned questioningly to Monsieur Boissegur, silent, white of face, motionless.

"Yes, Monsieur," the ambassador burst out suddenly. His eyes were fixed unwaveringly on Miss Thorne.

"And your escape, Monsieur?" continued Mr. Grimm.

"I did escape, Monsieur, last night," the ambassador explained, "but they knew it immediately--they pursued me into my own house, these two and another--and dragged me back here! _Mon Dieu, Monsieur, c'est--!_"

"That's all that's necessary," remarked Mr. Grimm. "You are free to go now."

"But there are others," Monsieur Boissegur interposed desperately, "two more somewhere below, and they will not allow--they will attack--!"

Mr. Grimm's listless eyes narrowed slightly and he turned to Miss Thorne. She was a little white, but he saw enough in her face to satisfy him.

"I shall escort Monsieur Boissegur to his carriage, Miss Thorne," he said calmly. "These men will remain here until I return. Take the revolver. If either of them so much as wags his head--_shoot_! You are not--not afraid?"

"No." She smiled faintly. "I am not afraid."

Mr. Grimm and the ambassador went down the stairs, and out the front door. Mr. Grimm was just turning to reenter the house when from above came a muffled, venomous cra-as-ash!--a shot! He took the steps going up, two at a time. Miss Thorne was leaning against the wall as if dazed; the revolver lay at her feet. A door in a far corner of the room stood open; and the clatter of footsteps echoed through the house.

"One of them leaped at me and I fired," she gasped in explanation. "He struck me, but I'm--I'm not hurt."

She stooped quickly, picked up the revolver and made as if to follow the dying footsteps. Mr. Grimm stopped her.

"It doesn't matter," he said quietly. "Let them go." And after a while, earnestly: "If I had dreamed of such a--such a thing as this I should never have consented to allow you--!"

"I understand," she interrupted, and for one instant her outstretched hand rested on his arm. "The ambassador?"

"Perfectly safe," responded Mr. Grimm. "Two of my men are with him."
XV
MASTER OF THE SITUATION

As the women rose and started out, leaving the gentlemen over their coffee and cigars, Miss Thorne paused at
the door and the blue-gray eyes flashed some subtle message to the French ambassador who, after an instant, nodded
comprehendingly, then resumed his conversation. As he left the room a few minutes later he noticed that Mr. Grimm
had joined a group of automaniacs of which Mr. Cadwallader was the enthusiastic center. He spoke to his hostess,
the wife of the minister from Portugal, for a moment, then went to Miss Thorne and dropped into a seat beside her.
She greeted him with a smile and was still smiling as she talked.

"I believe, Monsieur," she said in French, "you sent a code message to the cable office this afternoon?"

His eyes questioned hers quickly.

"And please bear in mind that we probably are being watched as we talk," she went on pleasantly. "Mr. Grimm
is the man to be afraid of. Smile--don't look so serious!" She laughed outright.

"Yes, I sent a code message," he replied.

"It was your resignation?"

"Yes."

"Well, it wasn't sent, of course," she informed him, and her eyes were sparkling as if something amusing had
been said. "One of my agents stopped it. I may add that it will not be sent."

The ambassador's eyes grew steely, then blank again.

"Mademoiselle, what am I to understand from that?" he demanded.

"You are to understand that I am absolute master of the situation in Washington at this moment," she replied
positively. The smile on her lips and the tone of her voice were strangely at variance. "From the beginning I let you
understand that ultimately you would receive your instructions from Paris; now I know they will reach you by cable
to-morrow. Within a week the compact will be signed. Whether you approve of it or not it will be signed for your
country by a special envoy whose authority is greater than yours--his Highness, the Prince Benedetto d'Abruzzi."

"Has he reached Washington?"

"He is in Washington. He has been here for some time, incognito." She was silent a moment. "You have been a
source of danger to our plans," she added. "If it had not been for an accident you would still have been comfortably
kept out in Alexandria where Mr. Grimm and I found you. Please remember, Monsieur, that we will accomplish
what we set out to do. Nothing can stop us--nothing."

At just about the same moment the name of Prince d'Abruzzi had been used in the dining-room, but in a different
connection. Mr. Cadwallader was reciting some incident of an automobile trip in Italy when he had been connected
with the British embassy there.

"The prince was driving," he said, "and one of the best I ever saw. Corking chap, the prince; democratic, you
know, and all that sort of thing. He was one scion of royalty who didn't mind soiling his hands by diving in under a
car and fixing it himself. At that time he was inclined to be wild--that was eight or nine years ago--but they say now
he has settled down to work, and is one of the real diplomatic powers of Italy. I haven't seen him for a half dozen
years."

"How old a man is he?" asked Mr. Grimm carelessly.

"Thirty-five, thirty-eight, perhaps; I don't know," replied Mr. Cadwallader. "It's odd, you know, the number of
princes and blue-bloods and all that sort of thing one can find knocking about in Italy and Germany and Spain. One
never hears of half of them. I never had heard of the Prince d'Abruzzi until I went to Italy, and I've heard jolly well
little of him since, except indirectly."

Mr. Cadwallader lapsed into silence as he sat staring at a large group photograph which was framed on a wall of
the dining-room.

"Isn't that the royal family of Italy?" he asked. He rose and went over to it. "By Jove, it is, and here is the prince
in the group. The picture was taken, I should say, about the time I knew him."

Mr. Grimm strolled over idly and stood for a long time staring at the photograph.

"He can drive a motor, you know," said Mr. Cadwallader admiringly. "And Italy is the place to drive them. They
forgot to make any speed laws over there, and if a chap gets in your way and you knock him silly they arrest him for
obstructing traffic, you know. Over here if a chap really starts to go any place in a hurry some bally idiot holds him
up."

"Have you ever been held up?" queried Mr. Grimm.

"No, but I expect to be every day," was the reply. "I've got a new motor, you know, and I've never been able to
see how fast it is. The other evening I ran up to Baltimore with it in an hour and thirty-seven minutes from
Alexandria to Druid Hill Park, and that's better than forty miles. I never did let the motor out, you know, because we
ran in the dark most of the way."
Mr. Grimm was still gazing at the photograph. "Did you go alone?" he asked.

"There's no fun motoring alone, you know. Senorita Rodriguez was with me. Charming girl, what?"

A little while later Mr. Grimm sauntered out into the drawing-room and made his way toward Miss Thorne and the French ambassador. Monsieur Boissegur rose, and offered his hand cordially.

"I hope, Monsieur," said Mr. Grimm, "that you are no worse off for your--your unpleasant experience?"

"Not at all, thanks to you," was the reply. "I have just thanked Miss Thorne for her part in the affair, and--"

"I'm glad to have been of service," interrupted Mr. Grimm lightly.

The ambassador bowed ceremoniously and moved away. Mr. Grimm dropped into the seat he had just left.

"You've left the legation, haven't you?" he asked.

"You drove me out," she laughed.

"Drove you out?" he repeated. "Drove you out?"

"Why, it was not only uncomfortable, but it was rather conspicuous because of the constant espionage of your Mr. Blair and your Mr. Johnson and your Mr. Hastings," she explained, still laughing. "So I have moved to the Hotel Hilliard."

Mr. Grimm was twisting the seal ring on his little finger.

"I'm sorry if I've made it uncomfortable for you," he apologized. "You see it's necessary to--"

"No explanation," Miss Thorne interrupted. "I understand."

"I'm glad you do," he replied seriously. "How long do you intend to remain in the city?"

"Really I don't know--two, three, four weeks, perhaps. Why?"

"I was just wondering."

Senorita Rodriguez came toward them.

"We're going to play bridge," she said, "and we need you, Isabel, to make the four. Come. I hate to take her away, Mr. Grimm."

Mr. Grimm and Miss Thorne rose together. For an instant her slim white hand rested on Mr. Grimm's sleeve and she stared into his eyes understandingly with a little of melancholy in her own. They left Mr. Grimm there.

XVI

LETTERS FROM JAIL

For two weeks Signor Pietro Petrozinni, known to the Secret Service as an unaccredited agent of the Italian government, and the self-confessed assailant of Senor Alvarez of the Mexican legation, had been taking his ease in a cell. He had been formally arraigned and committed without bail to await the result of the bullet wound which had been inflicted upon the diplomatist from Mexico at the German Embassy Ball, and, since then, undisturbed and apparently careless of the outcome, he had spent his time in reading and smoking. He had answered questions with only a curt yes or no when he deigned to answer them at all; and there had been no callers or inquiries for him. He had abruptly declined a suggestion of counsel.

Twice each day, morning and night, he had asked a question of the jailer who brought his simple meals. "How is Senor Alvarez?"

"He is still in a critical condition." The answer was always the same.

Whereupon the secret agent would return to his reading with not a shadow of uneasiness or concern on his face.

Occasionally there came a courteous little note from Miss Thorne, which he read without emotion, afterward casting them aside or tearing them up. He never answered them. And then one day there came another note which, for no apparent reason, seemed to stir him from his lethargy. Outwardly it was like all the others, but when Signor Petrozinni scanned the sheet his eyes lighted strangely, and he stood staring down at it as though to hide a sudden change of expression in his face. His gaze was concentrated on two small splotches of ink where, it seemed, the pen had scratched as Miss Thorne signed her name.

The guard stood at the barred door for a moment, then started to turn away. The prisoner stopped him with a quick gesture.

"Oh, Guard, may I have a glass of milk, please?" he asked. "No ice. I prefer it tepid."

He thrust a small coin between the bars; the guard accepted it and passed on. Then, still standing at the door, the prisoner read the note again:

"MY DEAR FRIEND:

"I understand, from an indirect source, that there has been a marked improvement in Senor Alvarez's condition, and I am hastening to send you the good news. There is every hope that within a short while, if he continues to improve, we can arrange a bail bond, and you will be free until the time of trial anyway.

"Might it not be well for you to consult an attorney at once? Drop me a line to let me know you received this.

"Sincerely,
"ISABEL THORNE."

Finally the prisoner tossed the note on a tiny table in a corner of his cell, and resumed his reading. After a time the guard returned with the milk.

"Would it be against the rules for me to write an answer to this?" queried Signor Petrozinni, and he indicated the note.

"Certainly not," was the reply.

"If I might trouble you, then, for pen and ink and paper?" suggested the signor and he smiled a little. "Believe me, I would prefer to get them for myself."

"I guess that's right," the guard grinned good-naturedly.

Again he went away and the prisoner sat thoughtfully sipping the milk. He took half of it, then lighted a cigarette, puffed it once or twice and permitted the light to die. After a little there came again the clatter of the guard's feet on the cement pavement, and the writing materials were thrust through the bars.

"Thank you," said the prisoner.

The guard went on, with a nod, and a moment later the signor heard the clangor of a steel door down the corridor as it was closed and locked. He leaned forward in his chair with half-closed eyes, listening for a long time, then rose and noiselessly approached the cell door. Again he listened intently, after which he resumed his seat. He tossed away the cigarette he had and lighted a fresh one, afterward holding the note over the flame of the match. Here and there, where the paper charred in the heat, a letter or word stood out from the bare whiteness of the paper, and finally, a message complete appeared between the innocuous ink-written lines. The prisoner read it greedily:

"Am privately informed there is little chance of Alvarez's recovery. Shall I arrange escape for you, or have ambassador intercede? Would advise former, as the other might take months, and meeting to sign treaty alliance would be dangerously delayed."

Signor Petrozinni permitted the sputtering flame to ignite the paper, and thoughtfully watched the blaze destroy it. The last tiny scrap dropped on the floor, burned out, and he crushed the ashes under his heel. Then he began to write:

"My Dear Miss Thorne:

"Many thanks for your courteous little note. I am delighted to know of the improvement in Senor Alvarez's condition. I had hoped that my impulsive act in shooting him would not end in a tragedy. Please keep me informed of any further change in his condition. As yet I do not see the necessity of consulting an attorney, but later I may be compelled to do so.

"Respectfully,

"Pietro Petrozinni."

This done the secret agent carefully cleaned the ink from the pen, wiping it dry with his handkerchief, then thrust it into the half empty glass of milk. The fluid clung to the steel nib thinly; he went on writing with it, between the lines of ink:

"I am in no danger. I hold credentials to United States, which, when presented, will make me responsible only to the Italian government as special envoy, according to international law. Arrange escape for one week from to-night; use any money necessary. Make careful arrangements for the test and signing of compact for two nights after."

Again the prisoner cleaned the steel nib, after which he put it back in the bottle of ink, leaving it there. He tossed the sheet of paper back and forth to dry it, and at last scrutinized it minutely, standing under the light from the high-up window of his cell. Letter by letter the milk evaporated, leaving the sheet perfectly clean and white except for the ink-written message. This sheet he folded, placed in an envelope, and addressed.

Later the guard passed along the corridor, and Signor Petrozinni thrust the letter out to him.

"Be good enough to post that, please," he requested. "It isn't sealed. I don't know if your prison rules require you to read the letters that go out. If so, read it, or have it read, then seal it."

For answer the guard dampened the flap of the envelope, sealed it, thrust it into his pocket and passed on. The secret agent sat down again, and sipped his milk meditatively.

One hour later Mr. Grimm, accompanied by Johnson, came out of a photographer's dark room in Pennsylvania Avenue with a developed negative which he set on a rack to dry. At the end of another hour he was sitting at his desk studying, under a magnifying glass, a finished print of the negative. Word by word he was writing on a slip of paper what his magnifying glass gave him and so, curiously enough, it came to pass that Miss Thorne and Chief Campbell of the Secret Service were reading the hidden, milk-written message at almost the identical moment.

"Johnson got Petrozinni's letter from the postman," Mr. Grimm was explaining. "I opened it, photographed it, sealed it again and remailed it. There was not more than half an hour's delay; and Miss Thorne can not possibly know of it." He paused a moment. "It's an odd thing that writing such as that is absolutely invisible to the naked eye, and yet when photographed becomes decipherable in the negative."
"What do you make of it?" Mr. Campbell asked. The guileless blue eyes were alive with eagerness.

"Well, he's right, of course, about not being in danger," said Mr. Grimm. "If he came with credentials as special envoy this government must respect them, even if Senor Alvarez dies, and leave it to his own government to punish him. If we were officially aware that he has such credentials I doubt if we would have the right to keep him confined; we would merely have to hand him over to the Italian embassy and demand his punishment. And, of course, all that makes him more dangerous than ever."

"Yes, I know that," said the chief a little impatiently. "But who is this man?"

"Who is this man?" Mr. Grimm repeated as if surprised at the question. "I was looking for Prince Benedetto d'Abruzzi, of Italy. I have found him."

Mr. Campbell's clock-like brain ticked over the situation in detail.

"It's like this," Mr. Grimm elucidated. "He has credentials which he knows will free him if he is forced to present them, but I imagine they were given to him more for protection in an emergency like this than for introducing him to our government. As the matter stands he can't afford to discover himself by using those credentials, and yet, if the Latin compact is signed, he must be free. Remember, too, that he is accredited from three countries--Italy, France and Spain." He was silent for a moment. "Naturally his escape from prison would preserve his incognito, and at the same time permit him to sign the compact."

There was silence for a long time.

"I believe the situation is without precedent," said Mr. Campbell slowly. "The special envoy of three great powers held for attempted--!"

"Officially we are not aware of his purpose, or his identity," Mr. Grimm reminded him. "If he escaped it would clarify the situation tremendously."

"If he escaped!" repeated Mr. Campbell musingly.

"But, of course, the compact would not be signed, at least in this country," Mr. Grimm went on tentatively.

Mr. Campbell gazed straight into the listless eyes of the young man for a minute or more, and gradually full understanding came home to him. Finally he nodded his head.

"Use your own judgment, Mr. Grimm," he directed.

XVII
A CALL ON THE WARDEN

The restful silence of night lay over the great prison. Here and there in the grim corridors a guard dozed in the glare of an electric light; and in the office, too, a desk light glimmered where the warden sat at his desk, poring over a report. Once he glanced up at the clock--it was five minutes of eleven--and then he went on with his reading.

After a little the silence was broken by the whir of the clock and the first sharp stroke of the hour; and at just that moment the door from the street opened and a man entered. He was rather tall and slender, and a sinister black mask hid his face from the quickly raised eyes of the warden. For a bare fraction of a second the two men stared at each other, then, instinctively, the warden's right hand moved toward the open drawer of his desk where a revolver lay, and his left toward several electrically connected levers. The intruder noted both gestures, and, unarmed himself, stood silent. The warden was first to speak.

"Well, what is it?"

"You have a prisoner here, Pietro Petrozinni," was the reply, in a pleasant voice. "I have come to demand his release."

The warden's right hand was raised above the desk top, and the revolver in it clicked warningly.

"You have come to demand his release, eh?" he queried. He still sat motionless, with his eyes fixed on the black mask. "How did you pass the outside guard?"

"He was bribed," was the ready response. "Now, Warden," the masked intruder continued pacifically, "it would be much more pleasant all around and there would be less personal danger in it for both of us if you would release Signor Petrozinni without question. I may add that no bribe was offered to you because your integrity was beyond question."

"Thank you," said the warden grimly, "and it shall remain so as long as I have this." He tapped on the desk with the revolver.

"Oh, that isn't loaded," said the masked man quietly.

One quick glance at the weapon showed the warden that the cartridges had been drawn! His teeth closed with a snap at the treachery of it, and with his left hand he pulled back one of the levers--that which should arouse the jailers, turnkeys and guards. Instead of the insistent clangor which he expected, there was silence.

"That wire has been cut," the stranger volunteered.

With clenched teeth the warden pulled the police alarm.

"And that wire was cut, too," the stranger explained.
The warden came to his feet with white face, and nails biting into the palms of his hands. He still held the revolver as he advanced upon the masked man threateningly.

"Not too close, now," warned the intruder, with a sudden hardening of his voice. "Believe me, it would be best for you to release this man, because it must be done, pleasantly or otherwise. I have no desire to injure you, still less do I intend that you shall injure me; and it would be needless for either of us to make a personal matter of it. I want your prisoner, Signor Petrozinni--you will release him at once! That's all!"

The warden paused, dazed, incredulous before the audacity of it, while he studied two calm eyes which peered at him through the slits of the mask.

"And if I _don't_ release him?" he demanded at last, fiercely.

"Then I shall take him," was the reply. "It has been made impossible for you to give an alarm," the stranger went on. "The very men on whom you most depended have been bought, and even if they were within sound of your voice now they wouldn't respond. One of your assistants who has been here for years unloaded the revolver in the desk there, and less than an hour ago cut the prison alarm wire. I, personally, cut the police alarm outside the building. So you see!"

As yet there was no weapon in sight, save the unloaded revolver in the warden's hand; at no time had the stranger's voice been raised. His tone was a perfectly normal one.

"Besides yourself there are only five other men employed here who are now awake," the masked man continued. "These are four inner guards and the outer guard. They have all been bought--the turnkeys at five thousand dollars each, and the outer guard at seven thousand. The receipt of all of this money is conditional upon the release of Signor Petrozinni, therefore it is to their interest to aid me as against you. I am telling you all this, frankly and fully, to make you see how futile any resistance would be."

"But who--who is this Signor Petrozinni, that such powerful influences should be brought to bear in his behalf?" demanded the bewildered warden.

"He is a man who can command a vast fortune--and Senor Alvarez is at the point of death. That, I think, makes it clear. Now, if you'll sit down, please!"

"Sit down?" bellowed the warden.

Suddenly he was seized by a violent, maddening rage. He took one step forward and raised the empty revolver to strike. The masked man moved slightly to one side and his clenched fist caught the warden on the point of the chin.

The official went down without a sound and lay still, inert. A moment later the door leading into the corridor of the prison opened, and Signor Petrozinni, accompanied by one of the guards, entered the warden's office. The masked man glanced around at them, and with a motion of his head indicated the door leading to the street. They passed through, closing the door behind them.

For a little time the intruder stood staring down at the still body, then he went to the telephone and called police headquarters.

"There has been a jail delivery at the prison," he said in answer to the "hello" of the desk-sergeant at the other end of the wire. "Better send some of your men up to investigate."

"Who is that?" came the answering question.

The stranger replaced the receiver on the hook, stripped off his black mask, dropped it on the floor beside the motionless warden, and went out. It was Mr. Grimm!

XVIII
NOTICE TO LEAVE

At fifteen minutes of midnight when Miss Thorne, followed by Signor Petrozinni, entered the sitting-room of her apartments in the hotel and turned up the light they found Mr. Grimm already there. He rose courteously. At sight of him Miss Thorne's face went deathly white, and the escaped prisoner turned toward the door again.

"I would advise that you stay, your Highness," said Mr. Grimm coldly. Signor Petrozinni paused, amazed. "You will merely subject yourself to the humiliation of arrest if you attempt to leave. The house is guarded by a dozen men."

"Your Highness?" Miss Thorne repeated blankly. "You are assuming a great deal, aren't you, Mr. Grimm?"

"I don't believe," and Mr. Grimm's listless eyes were fixed on those of the escaped prisoner, "I don't believe that Prince Benedetto d'Abruzzi will deny his identity?"

There was one of those long tense silences when eye challenges eye, when wit is pitted against wit, and mind is hauled around to a new, and sometimes unattractive, view of a situation. Miss Thorne stood silent with rigid features, colorless as marble; but slowly a sneer settled about the lips of Signor Petrozinni that was, and he sat down.
"You seem to know everything, Mr. Grimm," he taunted.

"I _try_ to know everything, your Highness," was the reply. Mr. Grimm was still standing. "I know, for instance, that one week ago the plot which had your freedom for its purpose was born; I know the contents of every letter that passed between you and Miss Thorne here, notwithstanding the invisible ink; I know that four days ago several thousand dollars was smuggled in to you concealed in a basket of fruit; I know, with that money, you bribed your way out, while Miss Thorne or one of her agents bribed the guard in front; I know that the escape was planned for to-night, and that the man who was delegated to take charge of it is now locked in my office under guard. It may interest you to know that it was I who took his place and made the escape possible. I know that much!"

"You-- _you_--!" the prince burst out suddenly. " _You_ aided me to escape?"

Miss Thorne was staring, staring at them with her eyes widely distended, and her red lips slightly parted.

" _Why_ did you assist him?" she demanded.

"Details are tiresome, Miss Thorne," replied Mr. Grimm with the utmost courtesy. "There is one other thing I know—that the Latin compact will not be signed in the United States."

The prince's eyes met Miss Thorne's inquiringly, and she shook her head. The sneer was still playing about his mouth.

"Anything else of special interest that you know?" he queried.

"Yes, of interest to both you and Miss Thorne. That is merely if the Latin compact is signed anywhere, the English-speaking countries of the world might construe it as a _casus belli_, and strike soon enough, and hard enough, to put an end to it once for all."

Again there was silence for a little while. Slowly the prince's eyes were darkening, and a shadow flitted across Miss Thorne's face. The prince rose impatiently.

"Well, what is the meaning of all this? Are you going to take me back to prison?"

"No," said Mr. Grimm. He glanced at his watch. "I will give each of you one-half hour to pack your belongings.

We must catch a train at one o'clock."
baggage the prince went over to the telegraph booth and began to write a message on a blank. Mr. Grimm appeared at his elbow.

"No," he said.

"Can't I send a telegram if I like?" demanded the prince sharply.

"No, nor a note, nor a letter, nor may you speak to any one," Mr. Grimm informed him quietly.

"Why, it's an outrage!" flamed the prince.

"It depends altogether on the view-point, your Highness," said Mr. Grimm courteously. "If you will pardon me I might suggest that it is needless to attract attention by your present attitude. You may--I say you _may_--compel me to humiliate you." The prince glared at him angrily. "I mean handcuff you," Mr. Grimm added gratuitously.

"Handcuff _me_?"

"I shouldn't hesitate, your Highness, if it was necessary."

After a moment Miss Thorne signified her readiness, and they started out. At the door Mr. Grimm stopped and turned back to the desk, as if struck by some sudden thought, leaving them together.

"Oh, Miss Thorne left a message for some one," Mr. Grimm was saying to the clerk. "She's decided it is unnecessary." He turned and glanced toward her, and the clerk's eyes followed his. "Please give it to me."

It was passed over without comment. It was a sealed envelope addressed to Mr. Charles Winthrop Rankin. Mr. Grimm glanced at the superscription, tore the envelope into bits and dropped it into a basket. A minute later he was assisting Miss Thorne and the prince into an automobile that was waiting in front. As the car moved away two other automobiles appeared from corners near-by and trailed along behind to the station. There a private compartment-car was in readiness for them.

It was a long, dreary ride—a ride of utter silence save for the roar and clatter of the moving train. Mr. Grimm, vigilant, implacable, sat at ease; Miss Thorne, resigned to the inevitable, whatever it might be, studied the calm, quiet face from beneath drooping lids; and the prince, sullen, scowling, nervously wriggled in his seat. Philadelphia was passed, and Trenton, and then the dawn began to break through the night. It was quite light when they rolled into Jersey City.

"I'm sorry for all the inconvenience I have caused," Mr. Grimm apologized to Miss Thorne as he assisted her to alight. "You must be exhausted."

"If it were only that!" she replied, with a slight smile. "And is it too early to ask where we are going?"

The prince turned quickly at the question.

"We take the _Lusitania_ for Liverpool at ten o'clock," said Mr. Grimm obligingly. "Meanwhile let's get some coffee and a bite to eat."

"Are you going to make the trip with us?" asked the prince.

Mr. Grimm shrugged his shoulders.

Weary and spiritless they went aboard the boat, and a little while later they steamed out into the stream and threaded their way down the bay. Miss Thorne stood at the rail gazing back upon the city they were leaving. Mr. Grimm stood beside her; the prince, still sullen, still scowling, sat a dozen feet away.

"This is a wonderful thing you have done," Mr. Grimm apologized to Miss Thorne as he assisted her to alight. "You must be exhausted."

"If it were only that!" she replied, with a slight smile. "And is it too early to ask where we are going?"

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"This is a wonderful thing you have done, Mr. Grimm," said Miss Thorne at last.

"Thank you," he said simply. "It was a destructive thing that you intended to do. Did you ever see a more marvelous thing than that?" and he indicated the sky-line of New York. "It's the most marvelous bit of mechanism in the world; the dynamo of the western hemisphere. You would have destroyed it, because in the world-war that would have been the first point of attack."

She raised her eyebrows, but was silent.

"Somehow," he went on after a moment, "I could never associate a woman with destructiveness, with wars and with violence."

"That is an unjust way of saying it," she interposed. And then, musingly: "Isn't it odd that you and I--standing here by the rail--have, in a way, held the destinies of the whole great earth in our hands? And now your remark makes me feel that you alone have stood for peace and the general good, and I for destruction and evil."

"I didn't mean that," Mr. Grimm said quickly. "You have done your duty as you saw it, and--"

"Failed!" she interrupted.

"And I have done my duty as I saw it."

"And won!" she added. She smiled a little sadly. "I think, perhaps you and I might have been excellent friends if it had not been for all this."

"I know we should have," said Mr. Grimm, almost eagerly. "I wonder if you will ever forgive me for--for--?"

"Forgive you?" she repeated. "There is nothing to forgive. One must do one's duty. But I wish it could have been otherwise."

The Statue of Liberty slid by, and Governor's Island and Fort Hamilton; then, in the distance, Sandy Hook light
came into view.

"I'm going to leave you here," said Mr. Grimm, and for the first time there was a tense, strained note in his voice.

Miss Thorne's blue-gray eyes had grown mistily thoughtful; the words startled her a little and she turned to face him.

"It may be that you and I shall never meet again," Mr. Grimm went on.

"We _will_ meet again," she said gravely. "When and where I don't know, but it will come."

"And perhaps then we may be friends?" He was pleading now.

"Why, we are friends now, aren't we?" she asked, and again the smile curled her scarlet lips. "Surely we are friends, aren't we?"

"We are," he declared positively.

As they started forward a revenue cutter which had been hovering about Sandy Hook put toward them, flying some signal at her masthead. Slowly the great boat on which they stood crept along, then the clang of a bell in the engine-room brought her to a standstill, and the revenue cutter came alongside.

"I leave you here," Mr. Grimm said again. "It's good-by."

"Good-by," she said softly. "Good-by, till we meet once more."

She extended both hands impulsively and he stood for an instant staring into the limpid gray eyes, then, turning, went below. From the revenue cutter he waved a hand at her as the great _Lusitania_, moving again, sped on her way. The prince joined Miss Thorne at the rail. The scowl was still on his face.

"And now what?" he demanded abruptly. "This man has treated us as if we were a pair of children."

"He's a wonderful man," she replied.

"That may be--but we have been fools to allow him to do all this."

Miss Thorne turned flatly and faced him.

"We are not beaten yet," she said slowly. "If all things go well we--we are not beaten yet."

The _Lusitania_ was rounding Montauk Point when the wireless brought her to half-speed with a curt message:

"Isabel Thorne and Pietro Petrozinni aboard _Lusitania_ wanted on warrants charging conspiracy. Tug-boat will take them off, intercepting you beyond Montauk Point.

"CAMPBELL, Secret Service."

"What does _that_ mean?" asked the prince, bewildered.

"It means that the compact will be signed in Washington in spite of Mr. Grimm," and there was the glitter of triumph in her eyes. "With the aid of one of the maids in the depot at Jersey City I managed to get a telegram of explanation and instruction to De Foe in New York, and this is the result. He signed Mr. Campbell's name, I suppose, to give weight to the message."

An hour later a tug-boat came alongside, and they went aboard.

XX

THE LIGHT IN THE DOME

From where he sat, in a tiny alcove which jutted out and encroached upon the line of the sidewalk, Mr. Grimm looked down on Pennsylvania Avenue, the central thread of Washington, ever changing, always brilliant, splashed at regular intervals with light from high-flung electric arcs. The early theater crowd was in the street, well dressed, well fed, careless for the moment of all things save physical comfort and amusement; automobiles, carriages, cabs, cars flowed past endlessly; and yet Mr. Grimm saw naught of it. In the distance, at one end of the avenue the dome of the capitol cleft the shadows of night, and a single light sparkled at its apex; in the other direction, at the left of the treasury building which abruptly blocks the wide thoroughfare, were the shimmering windows of the White House.

Motionless, moody, thoughtful, Mr. Grimm sat staring, staring straight ahead, comprehending none of these things which lay before him as in a panorama. Instead, his memory was conjuring up a pair of subtle, blue-gray eyes, now pleading, now coquettish, now frankly defiant; two slim, white, wonderful hands; the echo of a pleasant, throaty laugh; a splendid, elusive, radiant-haired phantom. Truly, a woman of mystery! Who was this Isabel Thorne who, for months past, had been the storm-center and directing mind of a vast international intrigue which threatened the world with war? Who, this remarkable young woman who with ease and assurance commanded ambassadors and played nations as pawns?

Now that she was safely out of the country Mr. Grimm had leisure to speculate. Upon him had devolved the duty of blocking her plans, and he had done so--merciless alike of his own feeling and of hers. Hesitation or evasion had never occurred to him. It was a thing to be done, and he did it. He wondered if she had understood, there at the last beside the rail? He wondered if she knew the struggle it had cost him deliberately to send her out of his life? Or had even surmised that her expulsion from the country, by his direct act, was wholly lacking in the exaltation of triumph to him; that it struck deeper than that, below the listless, official exterior, into his personal happiness? And wondering, he knew that she _did_ understand.
A silent shod waiter came and placed the coffee things at his elbow. He didn't heed. The waiter poured a demi-
tasse, and inquiringly lifted a lump of sugar in the silver tongs. Still Mr. Grimm didn't heed. At last the waiter
deposited the sugar on the edge of the fragile saucer, and moved away as silently as he had come. A newspaper
which Mr. Grimm had placed on the end of the table when he sat down, rattled a little as a breeze from the open
window caught it, then the top sheet slid off and fell to the floor. Mr. Grimm was still staring out the window.

Slowly the room behind him was thinning of its crowd as the theater-bound diners went out in twos and threes.
The last of these disappeared finally, and save for Mr. Grimm there were not more than a dozen persons left in the
place. Thus for a few minutes, and then the swinging doors leading from the street clicked, and a gentleman entered.
He glanced around, as if seeking a seat near a window, then moved along in Mr. Grimm's direction, between the
rows of tables. His gaze lingered on Mr. Grimm for an instant, and when he came opposite he stooped and picked up
the fallen newspaper sheet.

"Your paper?" he inquired courteously.
Mr. Grimm was still gazing dreamily out of the window.
"I beg pardon," insisted the new-comer pleasantly. He folded the paper once and replaced it on the table. One
hand lingered for just the fraction of a moment above Mr. Grimm's coffee-cup.
Aroused by the remark, Mr. Grimm glanced around.
"Oh, thank you," he apologized hastily. "I didn't hear you at first. Thank you."
The new-comer nodded, smiled and passed on, taking a seat two or three tables down.
Apparently this trifling courtesy had broken the spell of reverie, for Mr. Grimm squared around to the table
again, drew his coffee-cup toward him, and dropped in the single lump of sugar. He idly stirred it for a moment, as
his eyes turned again toward the open window, then he lifted the tiny cup and emptied it.

Again he sat motionless for a long time, and thrice the new-comer, only a few feet away, glanced at him
narrowly. And now, it seemed, a peculiar drowsiness was overtaking Mr. Grimm. Once he caught himself nodding
and raised his head with a jerk. Then he noticed that the arc lights in the street were wobbling curiously, and he fell
to wondering why that single flame sparkled at the apex of the capitol dome. Things around him grew hazy, vague,
unreal, and then, as if realizing that something was the matter with him, he came to his feet.

He took one step forward into the space between the tables, reeled, attempted to steady himself by holding on to
a chair, then everything grew black about him, and he pitched forward on the floor. His face was dead white; his
fingers moved a little, nervously, weakly, then they were still.
Several people rose at the sound of the falling body, and the new-comer hurried forward. His coat sleeve caught
the empty demi-tasse, as he stooped, and swept it to the floor, where it was shattered. The head waiter and another
came, pell-mell, and those diners who had risen came more slowly.
"What's the matter?" asked the head waiter anxiously.
Already the new-comer was supporting Mr. Grimm on his knee, and flicking water in his face.
"Nothing serious, I fancy," he answered shortly. "He's subject to these little attacks."
"What are they? Who is he?"
The stranger tore at Mr. Grimm's collar until it came loose, then he fell to chafing the still hands.
"He is a Mr. Grimm, a government employee--I know him," he answered again. "I imagine it's nothing more
serious than indigestion."

A little knot had gathered about them, with offers of assistance.
"Waiter, hadn't you better send for a physician?" some one suggested.
"I'm a physician," the stranger put in impatiently. "Have some one call a cab, and I'll see that he's taken home.
It happens that we live in the same apartment house, just a few blocks from here."

Obedient to the crisply-spoken directions, a cab was called, and five minutes later Mr. Grimm, still insensible,
was lifted into it. The stranger took a seat beside him, the cabby touched his horse with a whip, and the vehicle fell
into the endless, moving line.

A SLIP OF PAPER

When the light of returning consciousness finally pierced the black lethargy that enshrouded him, Mr. Grimm's
mind was a chaos of vagrant, absurd fantasies; then slowly, slowly, realization struggled back to its own, and he
came to know things. First was the knowledge that he was lying flat on his back, on a couch, it seemed; then, that he
was in the dark--an utter, abject darkness. And finally came an overwhelming sense of silence.

For a while he lay motionless, with not even the movement of an eye-lash to indicate consciousness, wrapped in
a delicious languor. Gradually this passed and the feeble flutter of his heart grew into a steady, rhythmic beat. The
keen brain was awakening; he was beginning to remember. What had happened? He knew only that in some manner
a drug had been administered to him, a bitter dose tasting of opium; that speechlessly, he had fought against it, that
he had risen from the table in the restaurant, and that he had fallen. All the rest was blank.

With eyes still closed, and nerveless hands inert at his sides he listened, the while he turned the situation over in speculative mood. The waiter had administered the drug, of course, unless--unless it had been the courteous stranger who had replaced the newspaper on the table! That thought opened new fields of conjecture. Mr. Grimm had no recollection of ever having seen him before; and he had paid only the enforced attention of politeness to him. And why had the drug been administered? Vaguely, incoherently, Mr. Grimm imagined that in some way it had to do with the great international plot of war in which Miss Thorne was so delicate and vital an instrument.

Where was he? Conjecture stopped there. Evidently he was where the courteous gentleman in the restaurant wanted him to be. A prisoner? Probably. In danger? Long, careful attention to detail work in the Secret Service had convinced Mr. Grimm that he was always in danger. That was one reason--and the best--why he had lain motionless, without so much as lifting a finger, since that first glimmer of consciousness had entered his brain. He was probably under scrutiny, even in the darkness, and for the present it was desirable to accommodate any chance watcher by remaining apparently unconscious.

And so for a long time he lay, listening. Was there another person in the room? Mr. Grimm's ears were keenly alive for the inadvertent shuffling of a foot; or the sound of breathing. Nothing. Even the night roar of the city was missing; the silence was oppressive. At last he opened his eyes. A pall of gloom encompassed him--a pall without one rift of light. His fingers, moving slowly, explored the limits of the couch whereon he lay.

Confident, at last, that wherever he was, he was unwatched, Mr. Grimm was on the point of concluding that further inaction was useless, when his straining ears caught the faint grating of metal against metal--perhaps the insertion of a key in the lock. His hands grew still; his eyes closed. And after a moment a door creaked slightly on its hinges, and a breath of cool air informed Mr. Grimm that that open door, wherever it was, led to the outside, and freedom.

There was another faint creaking as the door was shut. Mr. Grimm's nerveless hands closed involuntarily, and his lips were set together tightly. Was it to be a knife thrust in the dark? If not--then what? He expected the flare of a match; instead there was a soft tread, and the rustle of skirts. A woman! Mr. Grimm's caution was all but forgotten in his surprise. As the steps drew nearer his clenched fingers loosened; he waited.

Two hands stretched forward in the dark, touched him simultaneously--one on the face, one on the breast. A singular thrill shot through him, but there was not the flicker of an eye or the twitching of a finger. The woman--it _was_ a woman--seemed now to be bending over him, then he heard her drop on her knees beside him, and she pressed an inquiring ear to his left side. It was the heart test.

"Thank God!" she breathed softly.

It was only by a masterful effort that Mr. Grimm held himself limp and inert, for a strange fragrance was enveloping him--a fragrance he well knew.

The hands were fumbling at his breast again, and there was the sharp crackle of paper. At first he didn't understand, then he knew that the woman had pinned a paper to the lapel of his coat. Finally she straightened up, and took two steps away from him, after which came a pause. His keenly attuned ears caught her faint breathing, then the rustle of her skirts as she turned back. She was leaning over him again--her lips touched his forehead, barely; again there was a quick rustling of skirts, the door creaked, and--silence, deep, oppressive, overwhelming silence.

Isabel! Was he dreaming? And then he ceased wondering and fell to remembering her kiss--light as air--and the softly spoken "Thank God!" She did care, then! She _had_ understood, that day!

The kiss of a woman beloved is a splendid heart tonic. Mr. Grimm straightened up suddenly on the couch, himself again. He touched the slip of paper which she had pinned to his coat to make sure it was not all a dream, after which he recalled the fact that while he had heard the door creak before she went out he had not heard it creak afterward. Therefore, the door was open. She had left it open. Purposely? That was beside the question at the moment.

And why--how--was she in Washington? Pondering that question, Mr. Grimm's excellent teeth clicked sharply together and he rose. He knew the answer. The compact was to be signed--the alliance which would array the civilized world in arms. He had failed to block that, as he thought. If Miss Thorne had returned, then Prince Benedetto d'Abruzzi, who held absolute power to sign the compact for Italy, France and Spain, had also returned.

Stealthily, feeling his way as he went, Mr. Grimm moved toward the door leading to freedom, guided by the fresh draft of air. He reached the door--it was standing open--and a moment later stepped out into the star-lit night. It was open country here, with a thread of white road just ahead, and farther along a fringe of shrubbery. Mr. Grimm reached the road. Far down it, a pin point in the night, a light flickered through interlacing branches. The tail lamp of an automobile, of course!

Mr. Grimm left the road and skirted a sparse hedge in the direction of the light. After a moment he heard the
engine of an automobile, and saw a woman—barely discernible—step into the car. As it started forward he staked
everything on one bold move, and won, his reward being a narrow sitting space in the rear of the car, hidden from its
occupants by the tonneau. One mile, two miles, three miles they charged through the night, and still he clung on. At
last there came relief.

"That's the place, where the lights are--just ahead."

There was no mistaking that voice raised above the clamor of the engine. The car slackened speed, and Mr.
Grimm dropped off and darted behind some convenient bushes. And the first thing he did there was to light a match,
and read what was written on the slip of paper pinned to his coat. It was, simply:

"My Dear Mr. Grimm:

"By the time you read this the compact will have been signed, and your efforts to prevent it, splendid as they
were, futile. It is a tribute to you that it was unanimously agreed that you must be accounted for at the time of the
signing, hence the drugging in the restaurant; it was only an act of kindness that I should come here to see that all
was well with you, and leave the door open behind me.

"Believe me when I say that you are one man in whom I have never been disappointed. Accept this as my
farewell, for now I assume again the name and position rightfully mine. And know, too, that I shall always cherish
the belief that you will remember me as

"Your friend,

"ISABEL THORNE.

"P. S. The prince and I left the steamer at Montauk Point, on a tug-boat."

Mr. Grimm kissed the note twice, then burned it.

XXII

THE COMPACT

A room, low-ceilinged, dim, gloomy, sinister as an inquisition chamber; a single large table in the center,
holding a kerosene lamp, writing materials and a metal spheroid a shade larger than a one-pound shell; and around it
a semicircle of silent, masked and cowled figures. There were twelve of them, eleven men and a woman. In the
shadows, which grew denser at the far end of the room, was a squat, globular object, a massive, smooth-sided, black,
threatening thing of iron.

One of the men glanced at his watch--it was just two o'clock--then rose and took a position beside the table,
facing the semicircle. He placed the timepiece on the table in front of him.

"Gentlemen," he said, and there was the faintest trace of a foreign accent, "I shall speak English because I know
that whatever your nationality all of you are familiar with that tongue. And now an apology for the theatric aspect of
all this--the masks, the time and place of meeting, and the rest of it." He paused a moment. "There is only one person
living who knows the name and position of all of you," and by a sweep of his hand he indicated the motionless
figure of the woman. "It was by her decision that masks are worn, for, while we all know the details of the Latin
compact, there is a bare chance that some one will not sign, and it is not desirable that the identity of that person be
known to all of us. The reason for the selection of this time and place is obvious, for an inkling of the proposed
signing has reached the Secret Service. I will add the United States was chosen as the birthplace of this new epoch in
history for several reasons, one being the proximity to Central and South America; and another the inadequate police
system which enables greater freedom of action."

He stopped and drew from his pocket a folded parchment. He tapped the tips of his fingers with it from time to
time as he talked.

"The Latin compact, gentlemen, is not the dream, of a night, nor of a decade. As long as fifty years ago it was
suggested, and whatever differences the Latin countries of the world have had among themselves, they have always
realized that ultimately they must stand together against--against the other nations of the world. This idea
germinated into action three years ago, and since that time agents have covered the world in its interest. This
meeting is the fruition of all that work, and this," he held the parchment aloft, "is the instrument that will unite us.
Never has a diplomatic secret been kept as this has been kept; never has a greater reprisal been planned. It means,
gentlemen, the domination of the world--socially, spiritually, commercially and artistically; it means that England
and the United States, whose sphere of influence has extended around the globe, will be beaten back, that the flag of
the Latin countries will wave again over lost possessions. It means all of that, and more."

His voice had risen as he talked until it had grown vibrant with enthusiasm; and his hands pointed his remarks
with quick, sharp gestures.

"All this," he went on, "was never possible until three years ago, when the navies of the world were given over
into the hands of one nation--my country. Five years ago a fellow-countryman of mine happened to be present at an
electrical exhibition in New York City, and there he witnessed an interesting experiment--practical demonstration of
the fact that a submarine mine may be exploded by the use of the Marconi wireless system. He was a practical
electrician himself, and the idea lingered in his mind. For two years he experimented, and finally this resulted." He picked up the metal spheroid and held it out for their inspection. "As it stands it is absolutely perfect and gives a world's supremacy to the Latin countries because it places all the navies of the world at our mercy. It is a variation of the well-known percussion cap or fuse by which mines and torpedoes are exploded.

"The theory of it is simple, as are the theories of all great inventions; the secret of its construction is known only to its inventor--a man of whom you never heard. It is merely that the mechanism of the cap is so delicate that the Marconi wireless waves--and only those--will fire the cap. In other words, this cap is tuned, if I may use the word, to a certain number of vibrations and half-vibrations; a wireless instrument of high power, with a modifying addition which the inventor has added, has only to be set in motion to discharge it at any distance up to twenty-five miles. High power wireless waves recognize no obstacle, so the explosion of a submarine mine is as easily brought about as would be the explosion of a mine on dry land. You will readily see its value as a protective agency for our seaports."

He replaced the spheroid on the table.

"But its chief value is not in that," he resumed. "Its chief value to the Latin compact, gentlemen, is that the United States and England are now concluding negotiations, unknown to each other, by which they will protect their seaports by means of mines primed with this cap. The tuning of the caps which we will use is known only to us; the tuning of the caps which they will use is also known to us! The addition to the wireless apparatus which they will use is such that they can not, even by accident, explode a mine guarding our seaports; but, on the other hand, the addition to the wireless apparatus which we will use permits of the extreme high charge which will explode their mines. To make it clearer, we could send a navy against such a city as New York or Liverpool, and explode every mine in front of us as we went; and meanwhile our mines are impervious.

"Another word, and I have finished. Five gentlemen, whom I imagine are present now, have witnessed a test of this cap, by direct command of their home governments. For the benefit of the others of you a simple test has been arranged for to-night. This cap on the table is charged; its inventor is at his wireless instrument, fifteen miles away. At three o'clock he will turn on the current that will explode it."

"It is now seventeen minutes past two. I am instructed, for the purposes of the test, to place this cap anywhere you may select--in this house or outside of it, in a box, sealed, or under water. The purpose is merely to demonstrate its efficacy; to prove to your complete satisfaction that it can be exploded under practically any conditions."

His entire manner underwent a change; he drew a chair up to the table, and stood for an instant with his hand resting on the back.

"The compact is written in three languages--English, French and Italian. I shall ask you to sign, after reading either or all, precisely as the directions you have received from your home government instruct. On behalf of the three greatest Latin countries, as special envoy of each, I will sign first."

He dropped into the chair, signed each of the three parchment pages three times, then rose and offered the pen to the cowled figure at one end of the semicircle. The man came forward, read the English transcript, studied the three signatures already there with a certain air of surprise, then signed. The second man signed, the third man, and the fourth.

The fifth had just risen to go forward when the door opened silently and Mr. Grimm entered. Without a glance either to right or left, he went straight toward the table, and extended a hand to take the compact.

For an instant there had come amazement, a dumb astonishment, at the intrusion. It passed, and the hand of the man who had done the talking darted out, seized the compact, and held it behind him.

"If you will be good enough to give that to me, your Highness," suggested Mr. Grimm quietly.

For half a minute the masked man stared straight into the listless eyes of the intruder, and then:

"Mr. Grimm, you are in very grave danger."

"That is beside the question," was the reply. "Be good enough to give me that document."

He backed away as he spoke, kicked the door closed with one heel, then leaned against it, facing them.

"Or better yet," he went on after a moment, "burn it. There is a lamp in front of you." He paused for an answer.

"It would be absurd of me to attempt to take it by force," he added.

XXIII

THE PERCUSSION CAP

There was a long, tense silence. The cowled figures had risen ominously; Miss Thorne paled behind her mask, and her fingers gripped her palms fiercely, still she sat motionless. Prince d'Abruzzi broke the silence. He seemed perfectly calm and self-possessed.

"How did you get in?" he demanded.

"Throttled your guard at the front door, took him down cellar and locked him in the coal-bin," replied Mr. Grimm tersely. "I am waiting for you to burn it."
"And how did you escape from--from the other place?"
Mr. Grimm shrugged his shoulders.
"The lamp is in front of you," he said.
"And find your way here?" the prince pursued.
Again Mr. Grimm shrugged his shoulders. For an instant longer the prince gazed straight into his inscrutable
face, then turned accusing eyes on the masked figures about him.
"Is there a traitor?" he demanded suddenly. His gaze settled on Miss Thorne and lingered there.
"I can relieve your mind on that point--there is not," Mr. Grimm assured him. "Just a final word, your Highness,
if you will permit me. I have heard everything that has been said here for the last fifteen minutes. The details of your
percussion cap are interesting. I shall lay them before my government and my government may take it upon itself to
lay them before the British government. You yourself said a few minutes ago that this compact was not possible
before this cap was invented and perfected. It isn't possible the minute my government is warned against its use.
That will be my first duty."
"You are giving some very excellent reasons, Mr. Grimm," was the deliberate reply, "why you should not be
permitted to leave this room alive."
"Further," Mr. Grimm resumed in the same tone, "I have been ordered to prevent the signing of that compact, at
least in this country. It seems that I am barely in time. In it is signed--and it will be useless now on your own
statement unless you murder me--every man who signs it will have to reckon with the highest power of this country.
Will you destroy it? I don't want to know what countries already stand committed by the signatures there."
"I will not," was the steady response. And then, after a little: "Mr. Grimm, the inventor of this little cap,
isignificant as it seems, will receive millions for it. Your silence would be worth--just how much?"
Mr. Grimm's face turned red, then white again.
"Which would you prefer? An independence by virtue of a great fortune, or--or the other thing?"
Suddenly Miss Thorne tore the mask from her face and came forward. Her cheeks were scarlet, and anger
flamed in the blue-gray eyes.
"Mr. Grimm has no price--I happen to know that," she declared hotly. "Neither money nor a consideration for his
own personal safety will make him turn traitor." She stared coldly into the prince's eyes. "And we are not assassins
here," she added.
"Miss Thorne has stated the matter fairly, I believe, your Highness," and Mr. Grimm permitted his eyes to linger
a moment on the flushed face of this woman who, in a way, was defending him. "But there is only one thing to do,
Miss Thorne." He was talking to her now. "There is no middle course. It is a problem that has only one possible
answer--the destruction of that document, and the departure of you, and you, your Highness, for Italy under my
personal care all the way. I imagined this matter had ended that day on the steamer; it _will_ end here, now, to-
night."
The prince glanced again at his watch, then thoughtfully weighed the percussion cap in his hand, after which,
with a curious laugh, he walked over to the squat iron globe in an opposite corner of the room. He bent over it half a
minute, then straightened up.
"That cap, Mr. Grimm, has one disadvantage," he remarked casually. "When it is attached to a mine or torpedo it
can not be disconnected without firing it. It is attached." He turned to the others. "It is needless to discuss the matter
further just now. If you will follow me? We will leave Mr. Grimm here."
With a strange little cry, neither anger nor anguish, yet oddly partaking of the quality of each, Isabel went
quickly to the prince.
"How dare you do such a thing?" she demanded fiercely. "It is murder."
"This is not a time, Miss Thorne, for your interference," replied the prince coldly. "It has all passed beyond the
point where the feelings of any one person, even the feelings of the woman who has engineered the compact, can be
considered. A single life can not be permitted to stand in the way of the consummation of this world project. Mr.
Grimm alive means the compact would be useless, if not impossible; Mr. Grimm dead means the fruition of all our
plans and hopes. You have done your duty and you have done it well; but now your authority ends, and I, the special
envoy of--"
"Just a moment, please," Mr. Grimm interrupted courteously. "As I understand it, your Highness, the mine there
in the corner is charged?"
"Yes. It just happened to be here for purposes of experiment."
"The cap is attached?"
"Quite right." The prince laughed.
"And at three o'clock, by your watch, the mine will be fired by a wireless operator fifteen miles from here?"
"Something like that; yes, very much like that," assented the prince.
"Thank you. I merely wanted to understand it." Mr. Grimm pulled a chair up against the door and sat down, crossing his legs. On his knees rested the barrel of a revolver, glittering, fascinating, in the semi-darkness. "Now, gentlemen," and he glanced at his watch, "it's twenty-one minutes of three o'clock. At three that mine will explode. We will all be in the room when it happens, unless his Highness sees fit to destroy the compact."

Eyes sought eyes, and the prince removed his mask with a sudden gesture. His face was bloodless. "If any man," and Mr. Grimm gave Miss Thorne a quick glance, "I should say, _any person_, attempts to leave this room I _know_ he will die; and there's a bare chance that the percussion cap will fail to work. I can account for six of you, if there is a rush."

"But, man, if that mine explodes we shall all be killed--blown to pieces!" burst from one of the cowled figures. "If the percussion cap works," supplemented Mr. Grimm.

Mingled emotions struggled in the flushed face of Isabel as she studied Mr. Grimm's impassive countenance. "I have never disappointed you yet, Miss Thorne," he remarked as if it were an explanation. "I shall not now."

She turned to the prince. "Your Highness, I think it needless to argue further," she said. "We have no choice in the matter; there is only one course--destroy the compact."

"No!" was the curt answer.

"I believe I know Mr. Grimm better than you do," she argued. "You think he will weaken; I know he will not. I am not arguing for him, nor for myself; I am arguing against the frightful loss that will come here in this room if the compact is not destroyed."

[Illustration: "You think he will weaken; I know he will not."]

"It's absurd to let one man stand in the way," declared the prince angrily.

"It might not be an impertinent question, your Highness," commented Mr. Grimm, "for me to ask how you are going to _prevent_ one man standing in the way?"

A quick change came over Miss Thorne's face. The eyes hardened, the lips were set, and lines Mr. Grimm had never seen appeared about the mouth. Here, in a flash, the cloak of dissimulation was cast aside, and the woman stood forth, this keen, brilliant, determined woman who did things.

"The compact will be destroyed," she said.

"No," declared the prince.

"It _must_ be destroyed."

"_Must? Must?_ Do you say _must_ to me?_"

"Yes, _must_," she repeated steadily.

"And by what authority, please, do--"

"By that authority!" She drew a tiny, filigreed gold box from her bosom and cast it upon the table; the prince stared at it. "In the name of your sovereign-- _must_!" she said again.

The prince turned away and began pacing, back and forth across the room with the parchment crumpled in his hand. For a minute or more Isabel stood watching him.

"Thirteen minutes!" Mr. Grimm announced coldly.

And now broke out an excited chatter, a babel of French, English, Italian, Spanish; those masked and cowled ones who had held silence for so long all began talking at once. One of them snatched at the crumpled compact in the prince's hand, while all crowded around him arguing. Mr. Grimm sat perfectly still with the revolver barrel resting on his knees.

"Eleven minutes!" he announced again.

Suddenly the prince turned violently on Miss Thorne with rage-distorted face.

"Do you know what it means to you if I do as you say?" he demanded savagely. "It means you will be branded as traitor, that your name, your property--"

"If you will pardon me, your Highness," she interrupted, "the power that I have used was given to me to use; I have used it. It is a matter to be settled between me and my government, and as far as it affects my person is of no consequence now. You will destroy the compact."
"Nine minutes!" said Mr. Grimm monotonously.
Again the babel broke out.
"Do we understand that you want to see the compact?" one of the cowled men asked suddenly of Mr. Grimm as he turned.
"No, I don't want to see it. I'd prefer not to see it."
With hatred blazing in his eyes the prince made his way toward the lamp, holding a parchment toward the blaze.
"There's nothing else to be done," he exclaimed savagely.
"Just a moment, please," Mr. Grimm interposed quickly. "Miss Thorne, is that the compact?"
She glanced at it, nodded her head, and then the flame caught the fringed edge of paper. It crackled, flashed, flamed, and at last, a thing of ashes, was scattered on the floor. Mr. Grimm rose.
"That is all, gentlemen," he announced courteously. "You are free to go. You, your Highness, and Miss Thorne, will accompany me."
He held open the door and there was almost a scramble to get out. The prince and Miss Thorne waited until the last.
"And, Miss Thorne, if you will give us a lift in your car?" Mr. Grimm suggested. "It is now four minutes of three."
The automobile came in answer to a signal and the three in silence entered it. The car trembled and had just begun to move when Mr. Grimm remembered something, and leaped out.
"Wait for me!" he called. "There's a man locked in the coal-bin!"
He disappeared into the house, and Miss Thorne, with a gasp of horror sank back in her seat with face like chalk.
The prince glanced uneasily at his watch, then spoke curtly to the chauffeur.
"Run the car up out of danger; there'll be an explosion there in a moment."
They had gone perhaps a hundred feet when the building they had just left seemed to be lifted bodily from the ground by a great spurt of flame which tore through its center, then collapsed like a thing of cards. The prince, unmove, glanced around at Miss Thorne; she lay in a dead faint beside him.
"Go ahead," he commanded. "Baltimore."

XXIV

THE PERSONAL EQUATION

Mr. Campbell ceased talking and the deep earnestness that had settled on his face passed, leaving instead the blank, inscrutable mask of benevolence behind which his clock-like genius was habitually hidden. The choleric blue eyes of the president of the United States shifted inquiringly to the thoughtful countenance of the secretary of state at his right, thence along the table around which the official family was gathered. It was a special meeting of the cabinet called at the suggestion of Chief Campbell, and for more than an hour he had done the talking. There had been no interruption.
"So much!" he concluded, at last. "If there is any point I have not made clear Mr. Grimm is here to explain it in person."
Mr. Grimm rose at the mention of his name and stood with his hands clasped behind his back. His eyes met those of the chief executive listlessly.
"We understand, Mr. Grimm," the president began, and he paused for an instant to regard the tall, clean-cut young man with a certain admiration, "we understand that there does not actually exist such a thing as a Latin compact against the English-speaking peoples?"
"On paper, no," was the reply.
"You personally prevented the signing of the compact?"
"I personally caused the destruction of the compact after several signatures had been attached," Mr. Grimm amended. "Throughout I have acted under the direction of Mr. Campbell, of course."
"You were in very grave personal danger?" the president went on.
"It was of no consequence," said Mr. Grimm simply.
The president glanced at Mr. Campbell and the chief shrugged his shoulders.
"You are certain, Mr. Grimm," and the president spoke with great deliberation, "you are certain that the representatives of the Latin countries have not met since and signed the compact?"
"I am not certain--no," replied Mr. Grimm promptly. "I am certain, however, that the backbone of the alliance was broken--its only excuse for existence destroyed--when they permitted me to learn of the wireless percussion cap which would have placed the navies of the world at their mercy. Believe me, gentlemen, if they had kept their secret it would have given them dominion of the earth. They made one mistake," he added in a most matter-of-fact tone. "They should have killed me; it was their only chance."
The president seemed a little startled at the suggestion.
"That would have been murder," he remarked.

"True," Mr. Grimm acquiesced, "but it seems an absurd thing that they should have permitted the life of one man to stand between them and the world power for which they had so long planned and schemed. His Highness, Prince Benedetto d'Abruzzi believed as I do, and so expressed himself." He paused a moment; there was a hint of surprise in his manner. "I expected to be killed, of course. It seemed to me the only thing that could happen."

"They must have known of the far-reaching consequences which would follow upon your escape, Mr. Grimm. Why didn't they kill you?"

Mr. Grimm made a little gesture with both hands and was silent.

"May they not yet attempt it?" the president insisted.

"It's too late now," Mr. Grimm explained. "They had everything to gain by killing me there as I stood in the room where I had interrupted the signing of the compact, because that would have been before I had placed the facts in the hands of my government. I was the only person outside of their circle who knew all of them. Only the basest motive could inspire them to attempt my life now."

There was a pause. The secretary of state glanced from Mr. Grimm to Mr. Campbell with a question in his deep-set eyes.

"Do I understand that you placed a Miss Thorne and the prince under--that is, you detained them?" he queried.

"If so, where are they now?"

"I don't know," was the reply. "Just before the explosion the three of us entered an automobile together, and then as we were starting away I remembered something which made it necessary for me to reenter the house. When I came out again, just a few seconds before the explosion, the prince and Miss Thorne had gone."

The secretary's lips curled down in disapproval.

"Wasn't it rather unusual, to put it mildly, to leave your prisoners to their own devices that way?" he asked.

"Well, yes," Mr. Grimm admitted. "But the circumstances were unusual. When I entered the house I had locked a man in the cellar. I had to go back to save his life, otherwise--"

"Oh, the guard at the door, you mean?" came the interruption. "Who was it?"

Mr. Grimm glanced at his chief, who nodded.

"It was Mr. Charles Winthrop Rankin of the German embassy," said the young man.

"Mr. Rankin of the German embassy was on guard at the door?" demanded the president quickly.

"Yes. We got out safely."

"And that means that Germany was--!"

The president paused and startled glances passed around the table. After a moment of deep abstraction the secretary went on:

"So Miss Thorne and the prince escaped. Are they still in this country?"

"That I don't know," replied Mr. Grimm. He stood silent a moment, staring at the president. Some subtle change crept into the listless eyes, and his lips were set. "Perhaps I had better explain here that the personal equation enters largely into an affair of this kind," he said at last, slowly. "It happens that it entered into this. Unless I am ordered to pursue the matter further I think it would be best for all concerned to accept the fact of Miss Thorne's escape, and--"

He stopped.

There was a long, thoughtful silence. Every man in the room was studying Mr. Grimm's impassive face.

"Personal equation," mused the president. "Just how, Mr. Grimm, does the personal equation enter into the affair?"

The young man's lips closed tightly, and then:

"There are some people, Mr. President, whom we meet frankly as enemies, and we deal with them accordingly; and there are others who oppose us and yet are not enemies. It is merely that our paths of duty cross. We may have the greatest respect for them and they for us, but purposes are unalterably different. In other words there is a personal enmity and a political enmity. You, for instance, might be a close personal friend of the man whom you defeated for president. There might"--he stopped suddenly.

"Go on," urged the president.

"I think every man meets once in his life an individual with whom he would like to reckon personally," the young man continued. "That reckoning may not be a severe one; it may be less severe than the law would provide; but it would be a personal reckoning. There is one individual in this affair with whom I should like to reckon, hence the personal equation enters very largely into the case."

For a little while the silence of the room was unbroken, save for the steady tick-tock of a great clock in one corner. Mr. Grimm's eyes were fixed unwaveringly upon those of the chief executive. At last the secretary of war crumpled a sheet of paper impatiently and hitched his chair up to the table.

"Coming down to the facts it's like this, isn't it?" he demanded briskly. "The Latin countries, by an invention of
their own which the United States and England were to be duped into purchasing, would have had power to explode every submarine mine before attacking a port? Very well. This thing, of course, would have given them the freedom of the seas as long as we were unable to explode their submarines as they were able to explode ours. And this is the condition which made the Latin compact possible, isn't it?"

He looked straight at Mr. Grimm, who nodded.
"Therefore," he went on, "if the Latin compact is not a reality on paper; if the United States and England do not purchase this--this wireless percussion cap, we are right back where we were before it all happened, aren't we? Every possible danger from that direction has passed, hasn't it? The world-war of which we have been talking is rendered impossible, isn't it?"

"That's a question," answered Mr. Grimm. "If you will pardon me for suggesting it, I would venture to say that as long as there is an invention of that importance in the hands of nations whom we now know have been conspiring against us for fifty years, there is always danger. It seems to me, if you will pardon me again, that for the sake of peace we must either get complete control of that invention or else understand it so well that there can be no further danger. And again, please let me call your attention to the fact that the brain which brought this thing into existence is still to be reckoned with. There may, some day, come a time when our submarines may be exploded at will regardless of this percussion cap."

The secretary of war turned flatly upon Chief Campbell.
"This woman who is mixed up in this affair?" he demanded. "This Miss Thorne. Who is she?"
"Who is she?" repeated the chief. "She's a secret agent of Italy, one of the most brilliant, perhaps, that has ever operated in this or any other country. She is the pivot around which the intrigue moved. We know her by a dozen names; any one of them may be correct."

The brows of the secretary of war were drawn down in thought as he turned to the president.
"Mr. Grimm was speaking of the personal equation," he remarked pointedly. "I think perhaps his meaning is clear when we know there is a woman in the case. We know that Mr. Grimm has done his duty to the last inch in this matter; we know that alone and unaided, practically, he has done a thing that no living man of his relative position has ever done before--prevented a world-war. But there is further danger--he himself has called our attention to it--therefore, I would suggest that Mr. Grimm be relieved of further duty in this particular case. This is not a moment when the peace of the world may be imperiled by personal feelings of--of kindliness for an individual."

Mr. Grimm received the blow without a tremor. His hands were still idly clasped behind his back; the eyes fastened upon the president's face were still listless; the mouth absolutely without expression.

"As Mr. Grimm has pointed out," the secretary went on, "we have been negotiating for this wireless percussion cap. I have somewhere in my office the name and address of the individual with whom these negotiations have been conducted. Through that it is possible to reach the inventor, and then--! I suggest that we vote our thanks to Mr. Grimm and relieve him of this particular case."

The choleric eyes of the president softened a little, and grew grave as they studied the impassive face of the young man.
"It's a strange situation, Mr. Grimm," he said evenly. "What do you say to withdrawing?"

"I am at your orders, Mr. President," was the reply.

"No one knows better what you have done than the gentlemen here at this table," the president went on slowly. "No one questions that you have done more than any other man could have done under the circumstances. We understand, I think, that indirectly you are asking immunity for an individual. I don't happen to know the liability of that individual under our law, but we can't make any mistake now, Mr. Grimm, and so--and so--" He stopped and was silent.

"I had hoped, Mr. President, that what I have done so far--and I don't underestimate it--would have, at least, earned for me the privilege of remaining in this case until its conclusion," said Mr. Grimm steadily. "If it is to be otherwise, of course I am at--"

"History tells us, Mr. Grimm," interrupted the president irrelevantly, "that the frou-frou of a woman's skirt has changed the map of the world. Do you believe," he went on suddenly, "that a man can mete out justice fairly, severely if necessary, to one for whom he has a personal regard?"

"I do, sir."

"Perhaps even to one--to a woman whom he might love?"

"I do, sir."

The president rose.
"Please wait in the anteroom for a few minutes," he directed.

Mr. Grimm bowed himself out. At the end of half an hour he was again summoned into the cabinet chamber. The president met him with outstretched hand. There was more than mere perfunctory thanks in this--there was the
understanding of man and man.

"You will proceed with the case to the end, Mr. Grimm," he instructed abruptly. "If you need assistance ask for it; if not, proceed alone. You will rely upon your own judgment entirely. If there are circumstances which make it
inadvisable to move against an individual by legal process, even if that individual is amenable to our laws, you are
not constrained so to do if your judgment is against it. There is one stipulation: You will either secure the complete
rights of the wireless percussion cap to this government or learn the secret of the invention so that at no future time
can we be endangered by it."

"Thank you," said Mr. Grimm quietly. "I understand."

"I may add that it is a matter of deep regret to me," and the president brought one vigorous hand down on the
young man's shoulder, "that our government has so few men of your type in its service. Good day."

XXV

WE TWO

Mr. Grimm turned from Pennsylvania Avenue into a cross street, walked along half a block or so, climbed a
short flight of stairs and entered an office.

"Is Mr. Howard in?" he queried of a boy in attendance.

"Name, please."

Mr. Grimm handed over a sealed envelope which bore the official imprint of the Department of War in the upper
left hand corner; and the boy disappeared into a room beyond. A moment later he emerged and held open the door
for Mr. Grimm. A gentleman--Mr. Howard--rose from his seat and stared at him as he entered.

"This note, Mr. Grimm, is surprising," he remarked.

"It is only a request from the secretary of war that I be permitted to meet the inventor of the wireless percussion
cap," Mr. Grimm explained carelessly. "The negotiations have reached a point where the War Department must have
one or two questions answered directly by the inventor. Simple enough, you see."

"But it has been understood, and I have personally impressed it upon the secretary of war that such a meeting is
impossible," objected Mr. Howard. "All negotiations have been conducted through me, and I have, as attorney for
the inventor, the right to answer any question that may properly be answered. This now is a request for a personal
interview with the inventor."

"The necessity for such an interview has risen unexpectedly, because of a pressing need of either closing the deal
or allowing it to drop," Mr. Grimm stated. "I may add that the success of the deal depends entirely on this
interview."

Mr. Howard was leaning forward in his chair with wrinkled brow intently studying the calm face of the young
man. Innocent himself of all the intrigue and international chicanery back of the affair, representing only an
individual in these secret negotiations, he saw in the statement, as Mr. Grimm intended that he should, the possible
climax of a great business contract. His greed was aroused; it might mean hundreds of thousands of dollars to him.

"Do you think the deal can be made?" he asked at last.

"I have no doubt there will be some sort of a deal," replied Mr. Grimm. "As I say, however, it is absolutely
dependent on an interview between the inventor and myself at once--this afternoon."

Mr. Howard thoughtfully drummed on his desk for a little while. From the first, save in so far as the patent rights
were concerned, he had seen no reasons for the obligations of utter secrecy which had been enforced upon him.
Perhaps, if he laid it before the inventor in this new light, with the deal practically closed, the interview would be
possible!

"I have no choice in the matter, Mr. Grimm," he said at last. "I shall have to put it to my client, of course. Can
you give me, say, half an hour to communicate with him?"

"Certainly," and Mr. Grimm rose obligingly. "Shall I wait outside here or call again?"

"You may wait if you don't mind," said Mr. Howard. "I'll be able to let you know in a few minutes, I hope."

Mr. Grimm bowed and passed out. At the end of twenty-five minutes the door of Mr. Howard's private office
opened and he appeared. His face was violently red, evidently from anger, and perspiration stood on his forehead.

"I can't do anything with him," he declared savagely. "He says simply that negotiations must be conducted
through me or not at all."

Mr. Grimm had risen; he bowed courteously.

"Very well," he said placidly. "You understand, of course, as the note says, that this refusal of his terminates the
negotiations, so--"

"But just a moment--" interposed Mr. Howard quickly.

"Good day," said Mr. Grimm.

The door opened and closed; he was gone. Three minutes later he stepped into a telephone booth at a near-by
corner and took down the receiver.
"Hello, central!" he called, and then: "This is Mr. Grimm of the Secret Service. What number was Mr. Howard talking to?"

"Eleven double-nought six, Alexandria," was the reply.

"Where is the connection? In whose name?"

"The connection is five miles out from Alexandria in a farm-house on the old Baltimore Road," came the crisp, business-like answer. "The name is Murdock Williams."

"Thank you," said Mr. Grimm. "Good-by."

A moment later he was standing by the curb waiting for a car, when Howard, still angry, and with an expression of deep chagrin on his face, came bustling up.

"If you can give me until to-morrow afternoon, then--" he began.

Mr. Grimm glanced around at him, and with a slight motion of his head summoned two men who had been chatting near-by. One of them was Blair, and the other Hastings.

"Take this man in charge," he directed. "Hold him in solitary confinement until you hear from me. Don't talk to him, don't let any one else talk to him, and don't let him talk. If any person speaks to him before he is locked up, take that person in charge also. He is guilty of no crime, but a single word from him now will endanger my life."

That was all. It was said and done so quickly that Howard, dazed, confused and utterly unable to account for anything, was led away without a protest. Mr. Grimm, musing gently on the stupidity of mankind in general and the ease with which it is possible to lead even a clever individual into a trap, if the bait appeals to greed, took a car and went up town.

Some three hours later he walked briskly along a narrow path strewn with pine needles, which led tortuously up to an old colonial farmhouse. Outwardly the place seemed to be deserted. The blinds, battered and stripped of paint by wind and rain, were all closed and one corner of the small veranda had crumbled away from age and neglect. In the rear of the house, rising from an old barn, a thin pole with a cup-like attachment at the apex, thrust its point into the open above the dense, odorous pines. Mr. Grimm noted these things as he came along.

He stepped up quietly on the veranda and had just extended one hand to rap on the door when it was opened from within, and Miss Thorne stood before him. He was not surprised; intuition had told him he would meet her again, perhaps here in hiding. A sudden quick tenderness lighted the listless eyes. For an instant she stood staring, her face pallid against the gloom of the hallway beyond, and she drew a long breath of relief, as she pressed one hand to her breast. The blue-gray eyes were veiled by drooping lids, then she recovered herself and they opened into his. In them he saw anxiety, apprehension, fear even.

"Miss Thorne!" he greeted, and he bowed low over the white hand which she impulsively thrust toward him.

"I--I knew some one was coming," she stammered in a half whisper. "I didn't know it was you; I hadn't known definitely until this instant that you were safe from the explosion. I am glad--glad, you understand; glad that you were not--" She stopped and fought back her emotions, then went on: "But you must not come in; you must go away at once. Your--your life is in danger here."

"How_ did you know I was coming?" inquired Mr. Grimm.

"From the moment Mr. Howard telephoned," she replied, still hastily, still in the mysterious half whisper. "I knew that it could only be some one from your bureau, and I hoped that it was you. I saw how you forced him to call us up here, and that was all you needed. It was simple, of course, to trace the telephone call. Both of her hands closed over one of his nerveless hands. For an instant some strange, softening light flickered in the young man's eyes, then it passed.

"I have no choice, Miss Thorne," he said gravely at last. "I am honor bound by my government to do one of two things. If I fail in the first of those--the greater--it can only be because--"

He stopped; hope flamed up in her eyes and she leaned forward eagerly studying the impassive face.

"Because--?" she repeated.

"It can only be because I am killed," he added quietly. Suddenly his whole manner changed. "I should like to see the--the inventor?"

"But don't you see--don't you see you will be killed if--?" she began tensely.

"May I see the inventor, please?" Mr. Grimm interrupted.

For a little time she stood, white and rigid, staring at him. Then her lids fluttered down wearily, as if to veil some crushing agony within her, and she stepped aside. Mr. Grimm entered and the door closed noiselessly behind him. After a moment her hand rested lightly on his arm, and he was led into a room to his left. This door, too, she closed, immediately turning to face him.
"We may talk here a few minutes without interruption," she said in a low tone. Her voice was quite calm now.

"If you will be--?"

"Please understand, Miss Thorne," he interposed mercilessly, "that I must see the inventor, whoever he is. What assurance have I that this is not some ruse to permit him to escape?"

"You have my word of honor," she said quite simply.

"Please go on." He sat down.

"You will see him too soon, I fear," she continued slowly. "If you had not come to him he would have gone to you." She swayed a little and pressed one hand to her eyes. "I would to God it were in my power to prevent that meeting!" she exclaimed desperately. Then, with an effort: "There are some things I want to explain to you. It may be that you will be willing to go then of your own free will. If I lay bare to you every step I have taken since I have been in Washington; if I make clear to you every obscure point in this hideous intrigue; if I confess to you that the Latin compact has been given up for all time, won't that be enough? Won't you go then?"

Mr. Grimm's teeth closed with a snap.

"I don't want that--from you," he declared.

"But if I should tell it all to you?" she pleaded.

"I won't listen, Miss Thorne. You once paid me the compliment of saying that I was one man you knew in whom you had never been disappointed." The listless eyes were blazing into her own now. "I have never been disappointed in you. I will not permit you to disappoint me now. The secrets of your government are mine if I can get them but I won't allow you to tell them to me."

"My government!" Miss Thorne repeated, and her lips curled sadly. "I have no government. I have been cast off by that government, stripped of my rank, and branded as a traitor!"

"Traitor!" Mr. Grimm's lips formed the word silently.

"I failed, don't you see?" she rushed on. "Ignominy is the reward of failure. Prince d'Abruzzi went on to New York that night, cabled a full account of the destruction of the compact to my government, and sailed home on the following day. I was the responsible one, and now it all comes back on me. For a moment she was silent. "It's so singular, Mr. Grimm. The fight from the first was between us--we two; and you won."

XXVI

IN WHICH THEY BOTH WIN

Mr. Grimm dropped into a chair with his teeth clenched, and his face like chalk. For a minute or more he sat there turning it all over in his mind. Truly the triumph had been robbed of its splendor when the blow fell here--here upon a woman he loved.

"There's no shame in the confession of one who is fairly beaten," Isabel went on softly, after a little. "There are many things that you don't understand. I came to Washington with an authority from my sovereign higher even than that vested in the ambassador; I came as I did and compelled Count di Rosini to obtain an invitation to the state ball for me in order that I might meet a representative of Russia there that night and receive an answer as to whether or not they would join the compact. I received that answer; its substance is of no consequence now.

"And you remember where I first met you? It was while you were investigating the shooting of Senor Alvarez in the German embassy. That shooting, as you know, was done by Prince d'Abruzzi, so almost from the beginning my plans went wrong because of the assumption of authority by the prince. The paper he took from Senor Alvarez after the shooting was supposed to bear vitally upon Mexico's attitude toward our plan, but, as it developed, it was about another matter entirely."

"Yes, I know," said Mr. Grimm.

"The event of that night which you did not learn was that Germany agreed to join the compact upon conditions. Mr. Rankin, who was attached to the German embassy in an advisory capacity, delivered the answer to me, and I pretended to faint in order that I might reasonably avoid you."

"I surmised that much," remarked Mr. Grimm.

"The telegraphing I did with my fan was as much to distract your attention as anything else, and at the same time to identify myself to Mr. Rankin, whom I had never met. You knew him, of course; I didn't."

She was silent a while as her eyes steadily met those of Mr. Grimm. Finally she went on:

"When next I met you it was in the Venezuelan legation; you were investigating the theft of the fifty thousand dollars in gold from the safe. I thrust myself into that case, because I was afraid of you; and mercilessly destroyed a woman's name in your eyes to further my plans. I made you believe that Senorita Rodriguez stole that fifty thousand dollars, and I returned it to you, presumably, while we stood in her room that night. Only it was not her room—it was mine! I stole the fifty thousand dollars! All the details, even to her trip to see Mr. Griswold in Baltimore in company with Mr. Cadwallader, had been carefully worked out; and she did bring me the combination of the safe from Mr. Griswold on the strength of a forged letter. But she didn't know it. There was no theft, of course. I had no
intention of keeping the money. It was necessary to take it to distract attention from the thing I _did_ do—break a 
lock inside the safe to get a sealed packet that contained Venezuela's answer to our plan. I sealed that packet again, 
and there was never a suspicion that it had been opened."

"Only a suspicion," Mr. Grimm corrected.

"Then came the abduction of Monsieur Boissegur, the French ambassador. I plunged into that case as I did in the 
other because I was afraid of you and had to know just how much you knew. It was explained to you as an attempt at 
extortion with details which I carefully supplied. As a matter of fact, Monsieur Boissegur opposed our plans, even 
edangered them; and it was not advisable to have him recalled or even permit him to resign at the moment. So we 
abducted him, intending to hold him until direct orders could reach him from Paris. Understand, please, that all these 
things were made possible by the aid and cooperation of dozens, scores, of agents who were under my orders; every 
person who appeared in that abduction was working at my direction. The ambassador's unexpected escape 
disarranged our plans; but he was taken out of the embassy by force the second time under your very eyes. The 
darkness which made this possible was due to the fact that while you were looking for the switch, and I was 
apparently aiding, I was holding my hand over it all the time to keep you from turning on the light. You remember 
that?"

Mr. Grimm nodded.

"All the rest of it you know," she concluded wearily. "You compelled me to leave the Venezuelan legation by 
your espionage, but in the crowded hotel to which I moved I had little difficulty avoiding your Mr. Hastings, your 
Mr. Blair and your Mr. Johnson, so I came and went freely without your knowledge. The escape of the prince from 
prison you arranged, so you understand all of that, as well as the meeting and attempted signing of the compact, and 
the rapid recovery of Senor Alvarez. And, after all, it was my fault that our plans failed, because if I had not been--
been uneasy as to your condition and had not made the mistake of going to the deserted little house where you were 
a prisoner, the plans would have succeeded, the compact been signed."

"I'm beginning to understand," said Mr. Grimm gravely, and a wistful, tender look crept into his eyes. "If it had 
not been for that act of--consideration and kindness to me--"

"We would have succeeded in spite of you," explained Isabel. "We were afraid of you, Mr. Grimm. It was a 
compliment to you that we considered it necessary to account for your whereabouts at the time of the signing of the 
compact."

"And if you had succeeded," remarked Mr. Grimm, "the whole civilized world would have come to war."

"I never permitted myself to think of that way," she replied frankly. "There is something splendid to me in a 
battle of brains; there is exaltation, stimulation, excitement in it. It has always possessed the greatest fascination for 
me. I have always won, you know, until now. I failed! And my reward is 'Traitor!'"

"Just a word of assurance now," she went on after a moment. "The Latin compact has been definitely given up; 
the plan has been dismissed, thanks to you; the peace of the world is unbroken. And who am I? I know you have 
wondered; I know your agents have scoured the world to find out. I am the daughter of a former Italian ambassador 
to the Court of St. James. My mother was an English woman. I was born and received my early education in 
England, hence my perfect knowledge of that tongue. In Rome I am, or have been, alas, the Countess Rosa d'Orsetti; 
now I am an exile with a price on my head. That is all, except for several years I was a trusted agent of my 
government, and a friend of my queen."

She rose and extended both hands graciously. Mr. Grimm seized the slender white fingers and stood with eyes 
fixed upon hers. Slowly a flush crept into her pallid cheeks, and she bowed her head.

"Wonderful woman!" he said softly.

"I shall ask a favor of you now," she went on gently. "Let all this that you have learned take the place of 
whatever you expected to learn, and go. Believe me, there can only be one result if you meet--if you meet the 
inventor of the wireless cap upon which so much was staked, and so much lost." She shuddered a little, then raised 
the blue-gray eyes beseechingly to his face. "Please go."

Go! The word straightened Mr. Grimm in his tracks and he allowed her hands to fall limply. Suddenly his face 
grew hard. In the ecstasy of adoration he had momentarily forgotten his purpose here. His eyes lost their ardor; his 
nerveneless hands dropped beside him.

"No," he said.

"You must--you must," she urged gently. "I know what it means to you. You feel it your duty to unravel the 
secret of the percussion cap? You can't; no man can. No one knows the inventor more intimately than I, and even I 
couldn't get it from him. There are no plans for it in existence, and even if there were he would no more sell them 
than you would have accepted a fortune at the hands of Prince d'Abruzzi to remain silent. The compact has failed; 
you did that. The agents have scattered--gone to other duties. That is enough."

"No," said Mr. Grimm. There was a strange fear tearing at his heart.--"No one knows the inventor more
"intimately than I." "No," he said again. "I won from my government a promise to be made good upon a condition--I must fulfil that condition."

"But there is nothing, promotion, honor, reward, that would compensate you for the loss of your life," she entreated. "There is still time." She was pleading now, with her slim white hands resting on his shoulders, and the blue-gray eyes fixed upon his face.

"It's more than all that," he said. "That condition is you--your safety."

"For me?" she repeated. "For me? Then, won't you go for--for my sake?"

"No."

"Won't you go if you know you will be killed," and suddenly her face turned scarlet, "and that your life is dear to me?"

"No."

Isabel dropped upon her knees before him.

"This inventor--this man whom you insist on seeing is half insane with disappointment and anger," she rushed on desperately. "Remember that a vast fortune, honor, fame were at his finger tips when you--you placed them beyond his reach by the destruction of the compact. He has sworn to kill you."

"I can't go!"

"If you _know_ that when you meet one of you will die?"

"No." The answer came fiercely, through clenched teeth. Mr. Grimm disengaged his right hand and drew his revolver; the barrel clicked under his fingers as it spun.

"If I tell you that of the two human beings in this world whom I love this man is one?"

"No."

A shuffling step sounded in the hallway just outside. Mr. Grimm stepped back from the kneeling figure, and turned to face the door with his revolver ready.

"Great God!" It was a scream of agony. "He is my brother! Don't you see?"

She came to her feet and went staggering across to the door. The key clicked in the lock.

"Your brother!" exclaimed Mr. Grimm.

"He wouldn't listen to me--_you_ wouldn't listen to me, and now--and _now_! God have mercy!"

There was a sharp rattling, a clamor at the door, and Isabel turned to Mr. Grimm mutely, with arms outstretched. The revolver barrel clicked under his hand, then, after a moment, he replaced the weapon in his pocket.

"Please open the door," he requested quietly.

"He'll kill you!" she screamed.

Exhausted, helpless, she leaned against a chair with her face in her hands. Mr. Grimm went to her suddenly, tore the hands from her face, and met the tear-stained eyes.

"I love you," he said. "I want you to know that!"

"And I love you--that's why it matters so."

Leaving her there, Mr. Grimm strode straight to the door and threw it open. He saw only the outline of a thin little man of indeterminate age, then came a blinding flash under his eyes, and he leaped forward. There was a short, sharp struggle, and both went down. The revolver! He must get that! He reached for it with the one idea of disarming this madman. The muzzle was thrust toward him, he threw up his arm to protect his head, and then came a second flash. Instantly he felt the figure in his arms grow limp; and after a moment he rose. The face of the man on the floor was pearly gray; and a thin, scarlet thread flowed from his temple.

He turned toward Isabel. She lay near the chair, a little crumpled heap. In a stride he was beside her, and had lifted her head to his knee. The blue-gray eyes opened into his once, then they closed. She had fainted. The first bullet had pierced her arm; it was only a flesh wound. He lifted her gently and placed her on a couch, after which he disappeared into another room. In a little while there came the cheerful ting-a-ling of a telephone bell.

"Is this the county constable's office?" he inquired. "Well, there's been a little shooting accident at the Murdock Williams' place, five miles out from Alexandria on the old Baltimore Road. Please send some of your men over to
take charge. Two hours from now call up Mr. Grimm at Secret Service headquarters in Washington and he will explain. Good-by."

And a few minutes later Mr. Grimm walked along the road toward an automobile a hundred yards away, bearing Miss Thorne in his arms. The chauffeur cranked the machine and climbed to his seat.

"Washington!" directed Mr. Grimm. "Never mind the speed laws."

THE END

Go to Start
I

Practically all those letters remaining in the alphabet after Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen was named were afterward acquired by that gentleman in the course of a brilliant scientific career, and, being honorably acquired, were tacked on to the other end. His name, therefore, taken with all that belonged to it, was a wonderfully imposing structure. He was a Ph.D., an L.L.D., an F.R.S., an M.D., and an M.D.S. He was also some other things -- just what he himself couldn't say -- through recognition of his ability by various foreign educational and scientific institutions.

In appearance he was no less striking than in nomenclature. He was slender with the droop of the student in his thin shoulders and the pallor of a close, sedentary life on his clean-shaven face. His eyes wore a perpetual, forbidding squint -- the squint of a man who studies little things -- and when they could be seen at all through his thick spectacles, were mere slits of watery blue. But above his eyes was his most striking feature. This was a tall, broad brow, almost abnormal in height and width, crowned by a heavy shock of bushy, yellow hair. All these things conspired to give him a peculiar, almost grotesque, personality.

Professor Van Dusen was remotely German. For generations his ancestors had been noted in the sciences; he was the logical result, the master mind. First and above all he was a logician. At least thirty-five years of the half-century or so of his existence had been devoted exclusively to proving that two and two always equal four, except in unusual cases, where they equal three or five, as the case may be. He stood broadly on the general proposition that all things that start must go somewhere, and was able to bring the concentrated mental force of his forefathers to bear on a given problem. Incidentally it may be remarked that Professor Van Dusen wore a No. 8 hat.

The world at large had heard vaguely of Professor Van Dusen as the Thinking Machine. It was a newspaper catch-phrase applied to him at the time of a remarkable exhibition at chess; he had demonstrated then that a stranger to the game might, by the force of inevitable logic, defeat a champion who had devoted a lifetime to its study. The Thinking Machine! Perhaps that more nearly described him than all his honorary initials, for he spent week after week, month after month, in the seclusion of his small laboratory from which had gone forth thoughts that staggered scientific associates and deeply stirred the world at large.

It was only occasionally that The Thinking Machine had visitors, and these were usually men who, themselves high in the sciences, dropped in to argue a point and perhaps convince themselves. Two of these men, Dr. Charles Ransome and Alfred Fielding, called one evening to discuss some theory which is not of consequence here.

"Such a thing is impossible," declared Dr. Ransome emphatically, in the course of the conversation.

"Nothing is impossible," declared The Thinking Machine with equal emphasis. He always spoke petulantly. "The mind is master of all things. When science fully recognizes that fact a great advance will have been made."

"How about the airship?" asked Dr. Ransome.

"That's not impossible at all," asserted The Thinking Machine. "It will be invented some time. I'd do it myself, but I'm busy."

Dr. Ransome laughed tolerantly.

"I've heard you say such things before," he said. "But they mean nothing. Mind may be master of matter, but it hasn't yet found a way to apply itself. There are some things that can't be thought out of existence, or rather which would not yield to any amount of thinking."

"What, for instance?" demanded The Thinking Machine.

Dr. Ransome was thoughtful for a moment as he smoked.

"Well, say prison walls," he replied. "No man can think himself out of a cell. If he could, there would be no prisoners."

"A man can so apply his brain and ingenuity that he can leave a cell, which is the same thing," snapped The Thinking Machine.

Dr. Ransome was slightly amused.

"Let's suppose a case," he said, after a moment. "Take a cell where prisoners under sentence of death are confined -- men who are desperate and, maddened by fear, would take any chance to escape -- suppose you were locked in such a cell. Could you escape?"

"Certainly," declared The Thinking Machine.

"Of course," said Mr. Fielding, who entered the conversation for the first time, "you might wreck the cell with an explosive -- but inside, a prisoner, you couldn't have that."
"There would be nothing of that kind," said The Thinking Machine. "You might treat me precisely as you treated prisoners under sentence of death, and I would leave the cell."
"Not unless you entered it with tools prepared to get out," said Dr. Ransome.
The Thinking Machine was visibly annoyed and his blue eyes snapped.
"Lock me in any cell in any prison anywhere at any time, wearing only what is necessary, and I'll escape in a week," he declared, sharply.
Dr. Ransome sat up straight in the chair, interested. Mr. Fielding lighted a new cigar.
"You mean you could actually think yourself out?" asked Dr. Ransome.
"I would get out," was the response.
"Are you serious?"
"Certainly I am serious."
Dr. Ransome and Mr. Fielding were silent for a long time.
"Would you be willing to try it?" asked Mr. Fielding, finally.
"Certainly," said Professor Van Dusen, and there was a trace of irony in his voice. "I have done more asinine things than that to convince other men of less important truths."
The tone was offensive and there was an undercurrent strongly resembling anger on both sides. Of course it was an absurd thing, but Professor Van Dusen reiterated his willingness to undertake the escape and it was decided upon.
"To begin now," added Dr. Ransome.
"I'd prefer that it begin to-morrow," said The Thinking Machine, "because --"
"No, now," said Mr. Fielding, flatly. "You are arrested, figuratively, of course, without any warning locked in a cell with no chance to communicate with friends, and left there with identically the same care and attention that would be given to a man under sentence of death. Are you willing?"
"All right, now, then," said the Thinking Machine, and he arose.
"Say, the death-cell in Chisholm Prison."
"The death-cell in Chisholm Prison."
"And what will you wear?"
"As little as possible," said The Thinking Machine. "Shoes, stockings, trousers and a shirt."
"You will permit yourself to be searched, of course?"
"I am to be treated precisely as all prisoners are treated," said The Thinking Machine. "No more attention and no less."
There were some preliminaries to be arranged in the matter of obtaining permission for the test, but all three were influential men and everything was done satisfactorily by telephone, albeit the prison commissioners, to whom the experiment was explained on purely scientific grounds, were sadly bewildered. Professor Van Dusen would be the most distinguished prisoner they had ever entertained.
When The Thinking Machine had donned those things which he was to wear during his incarceration he called the little old woman who was his housekeeper, cook and maid servant all in one.
"Martha," he said, "it is now twenty-seven minutes past nine o'clock. I am going away. One week from to-night, at half-past nine, these gentlemen and one, possibly two, others will take supper with me here. Remember Dr. Ransome is very fond of artichokes."
The three men were driven to Chisholm Prison, where the Warden was awaiting them, having been informed of the matter by telephone. He understood merely that the eminent Professor Van Dusen was to be his prisoner, if he could keep him, for one week; that he had committed no crime, but that he was to be treated as all other prisoners were treated.
"Search him," instructed Dr. Ransome.
The Thinking Machine was searched. Nothing was found on him; the pockets of the trousers were empty; the white, stiff-bosomed shirt had no pocket. The shoes and stockings were removed, examined, then replaced. As he watched all these preliminaries -- the rigid search and noted the pitiful, childlike physical weakness of the man, the colorless face, and the thin, white hands -- Dr. Ransome almost regretted his part in the affair.
"Are you sure you want to do this?" he asked.
"Would you be convinced if I did not?" inquired The Thinking Machine in turn.
"No."
"All right. I'll do it."
What sympathy Dr. Ransome had was dissipated by the tone. It nettled him, and he resolved to see the experiment to the end; it would be a stinging reproof to egotism.
"It will be impossible for him to communicate with anyone outside?" he asked.
"Absolutely impossible," replied the warden. "He will not be permitted writing materials of any sort."
"And your jailers, would they deliver a message from him?"
"Not one word, directly or indirectly," said the warden. "You may rest assured of that. They will report anything he might say or turn over to me anything he might give them."
"That seems entirely satisfactory," said Mr. Fielding, who was frankly interested in the problem.
"Of course, in the event he fails," said Dr. Ransome, "and asks for his liberty, you understand you are to set him free?"
"I understand," replied the warden.
The Thinking Machine stood listening, but had nothing to say until this was all ended, then:
"I should like to make three small requests. You may grant them or not, as you wish."
"No special favors, now," warned Mr. Fielding.
"I am asking none," was the stiff response. "I would like to have some tooth powder -- buy it yourself to see that it is tooth powder -- and I should like to have one five-dollar and two ten-dollar bills."
Dr. Ransome, Mr. Fielding and the warden exchanged astonished glances. They were not surprised at the request for tooth powder, but were at the request for money.
"Is there any man with whom our friend would come in contact that he could bribe with twenty-five dollars?" asked Dr. Ransome of the warden.
"Not for twenty-five hundred dollars," was the positive reply.
"Well, let him have them," said Mr. Fielding. "I think they are harmless enough."
"And what is the third request?" asked Dr. Ransome.
"I should like to have my shoes polished."
Again the astonished glances were exchanged. This last request was the height of absurdity, so they agreed to it.
These things all being attended to, The Thinking Machine was led back into the prison from which he had undertaken to escape.
"Here is Cell 13," said the warden, stopping three doors down the steel corridor. "This is where we keep condemned murderers. No one can leave it without my permission; and no one in it can communicate with the outside. I'll stake my reputation on that. It's only three doors back of my office and I can readily hear any unusual noise."
"Will this cell do, gentlemen?" asked The Thinking Machine. There was a touch of irony in his voice.
"Admirably," was the reply.
The heavy steel door was thrown open, there was a great scurrying and scampering of tiny feet, and The Thinking Machine passed into the gloom of the cell. Then the door was closed and double locked by the warden.
"What is that noise in there?" asked Dr. Ransome, through the bars.
"Rats -- dozens of them," replied The Thinking Machine, tersely.
The three men, with final good-nights, were turning away when The Thinking Machine called:
"What time is it exactly, warden?"
"Eleven seventeen," replied the warden.
"Thanks. I will join you gentlemen in your office at half-past eight o'clock one week from to-night," said The Thinking Machine.
"And if you do not?"
"There is no 'if' about it."

II

Chisholm Prison was a great, spreading structure of granite, four stories in all, which stood in the center of acres of open space. It was surrounded by a wall of solid masonry eighteen feet high, and so smoothly finished inside and out as to offer no foothold to a climber, no matter how expert. Atof this fence, as a further precaution, was a five-foot fence of steel rods, each terminating in a keen point. This fence in itself marked an absolute deadline between freedom and imprisonment, for, even if a man escaped from his cell, it would seem impossible for him to pass the wall.
The yard, which on all sides of the prison building was twenty-five feet wide, that being the distance from the building to the wall, was by day an exercise ground for those prisoners to whom was granted the boon of occasional semi-liberty. But that was not for those in Cell 13. At all times of the day there were armed guards in the yard, four of them, one patrolling each side of the prison building.
By night the yard was almost as brilliantly lighted as by day. On each of the four sides was a great arc light which rose above the prison wall and gave to the guards a clear sight. The lights, too, brightly illuminated the spiked top of the wall. The wires which fed the arc lights ran up the side of the prison building on insulators and from the top story led out to the poles supporting the arc lights.
All these things were seen and comprehended by The Thinking Machine, who was only enabled to see out his
closely barred cell window by standing on his bed. This was on the morning following his incarceration. He gathered, too, that the river lay over there beyond the wall somewhere, because he heard faintly the pulsation of a motor boat and high up in the air saw a river bird. From that same direction came the shouts of boys at play and the occasional crack of a batted ball. He knew then that between the prison wall and the river was an open space, a playground.

Chisholm Prison was regarded as absolutely safe. No man had ever escaped from it. The Thinking Machine, from his perch on the bed, seeing what he saw, could readily understand why. The walls of the cell, though built he judged twenty years before, were perfectly solid, and the window bars of new iron had not a shadow of rust on them. The window itself, even with the bars out, would be a difficult mode of egress because it was small.

Yet, seeing these things, The Thinking Machine was not discouraged. Instead, he thoughtfully squinted at the great arc light -- there was bright sunlight now -- and traced with his eyes the wire which led from it to the building. That electric wire, he reasoned, must come down the side of the building not a great distance from his cell. That might be worth knowing.

Cell 13 was on the same floor with the offices of the prison -- that is, not in the basement, nor yet upstairs. There were only four steps up to the office floor, therefore the level of the floor must be only three or four feet above the ground. He couldn't see the ground directly beneath his window, but he could see it further out toward the wall. It would be an easy drop from the window. Well and good.

Then The Thinking Machine fell to remembering how he had come to the cell. First, there was the outside guard's booth, a part of the wall. There were two heavily barred gates there, both of steel. At this gate was one man always on guard. He admitted persons to the prison after much clanking of keys and locks, and let them out when ordered to do so. The warden's office was in the prison building, and in order to reach that official from the prison yard one had to pass a gate of solid steel with only a peep-hole in it. Then coming from that inner office to Cell 13, where he was now, one must pass a heavy wooden door and two steel doors into the corridors of the prison; and always there was the double-locked door of Cell 13 to reckon with.

There were then, The Thinking Machine recalled, seven doors to be overcome before one could pass from Cell 13 into the outer world, a free man. But against this was the fact that he was rarely interrupted. A jailer appeared at his cell door at six in the morning with a breakfast of prison fare; he would come again at noon, and again at six in the afternoon. At nine o'clock at night would come the inspection tour. That would be all.

"It's admirably arranged, this prison system," was the mental tribute paid by The Thinking Machine. "I'll have to study it a little when I get out. I had no idea there was such great care exercised in the prisons."

There was nothing, positively nothing, in his cell, except his iron bed, so firmly put together that no man could tear it to pieces save with sledges or a file. He had neither of these. There was not even a chair, or a small table, or a bit of tin or crockery. Nothing! The jailer stood by when he ate, then took away the wooden spoon and bowl which he had used.

One by one these things sank into the brain of The Thinking Machine. When the last possibility had been considered he began an examination of his cell. From the roof, down the walls on all sides, he examined the stones and the cement between them. He stamped over the floor carefully after time, but it was cement, perfectly solid. After the examination he sat on the edge of the iron bed and was lost in thought for a long time. For Professor Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen, The Thinking Machine, had something to think about.

He was disturbed by a rat, which ran across his foot, then scampered away into a dark corner of the cell, frightened at its own daring. After awhile The Thinking Machine, squinting steadily into the darkness of the corner where the rat had gone, was able to make out in the gloom many little beady eyes staring at him. He counted six pair, and there were perhaps others; he didn't see very well.

Then The Thinking Machine, from his seat on the bed, noticed for the first time the bottom of his cell door. There was an opening there of two inches between the steel bar and the floor. Still looking steadily at this opening, The Thinking Machine backed suddenly into the corner where he had seen the beady eyes. There was a great scampering of tiny feet, several squeaks of frightened rodents, and then silence.

None of the rats had gone out the door, yet there were none in the cell. Therefore there must be another way out of the cell, however small. The Thinking Machine, on hands and knees, started a search for this spot, feeling in the darkness with his long, slender fingers.

At last his search was rewarded. He came upon a small opening in the floor, level with the cement. It was perfectly round and somewhat larger than a silver dollar. This was the way the rats had gone. He put his fingers deep into the opening; it seemed to be a disused drainage pipe and was dry and dusty.

Having satisfied himself on this point, he sat on the bed again for an hour, then made another inspection of his surroundings through the small cell window. One of the outside guards stood directly opposite, beside the wall, and happened to be looking at the window of Cell 13 when the head of The Thinking Machine appeared. But the
scientist didn't notice the guard.

Noon came and the jailer appeared with the prison dinner of repulsively plain food. At home The Thinking Machine merely ate to live; here he took what was offered without comment. Occasionally he spoke to the jailer who stood outside the door watching him.

"Any improvements made here in the last few years?" he asked.
"Nothing particularly," replied the jailer. "New wall was built four years ago."
"Anything done to the prison proper?"
"Painted the woodwork outside, and I believe about seven years ago a new system of plumbing was put in."
"Ah!" said the prisoner. "How far is the river over there?"
"About three hundred feet. The boys have a baseball ground between the wall and the river."

The Thinking Machine had nothing further to say just then, but when the jailer was ready to go he asked for some water.

"I get very thirsty here," he explained. "Would it be possible for you to leave a little water in a bowl for me?"
"I'll ask the warden," replied the jailer, and he went away. Half an hour later he returned with water in a small earthen bowl.

"The warden says you may keep this bowl," he informed the prisoner. "But you must show it to me when I ask for it. If it is broken, it will be the last."
"Thank you," said The Thinking Machine. "I shan't break it."

The jailer went on about his duties. For just the fraction of a second it seemed that The Thinking Machine wanted to ask a question, but he didn't.

Two hours later this same jailer, in passing the door of Cell No. 13, heard a noise inside and stopped. The Thinking Machine was down on his hands and knees in a corner of the cell, and from that same corner came several frightened squeaks. The jailer looked on interestedly.

"Ah, I've got you," he heard the prisoner say.
"Got what?" he asked, sharply.
"One of these rats," was the reply. "See?" And between the scientist's long fingers the jailer saw a small gray rat struggling. The prisoner brought it over to the light and looked at it closely. "It's a water rat," he said.

"Ain't you got anything better to do than to catch rats?" asked the jailer.

"It's disgraceful that they should be here at all," was the irritated reply. "Take this one away and kill it. There are dozens more where it came from."

The jailer took the wriggling, squirmy rodent and flung it down on the floor violently. It gave one squeak and lay still. Later he reported the incident to the warden, who only smiled.

Still later that afternoon the outside armed guard on Cell 13 side of the prison looked up again at the window and saw the prisoner looking out. He saw a hand raised to the barred window and then something white fluttered to the ground, directly under the window of Cell 13. It was a little roll of linen, evidently of white shirting material, and tied around it was a five-dollar bill. The guard looked up at the window again, but the face had disappeared.

With a grim smile he took the little linen roll and the five-dollar bill to the warden's office. There together they deciphered something which was written on it with a queer sort of ink, frequently blurred. On the outside was this:
"Finder of this please deliver to Dr. Charles Ransome."

"Ah," said the warden, with a chuckle. "Plan of escape number one has gone wrong." Then, as an afterthought:
"But why did he address it to Dr. Ransome?"

"And where did he get the pen and ink to write with?" asked the guard.

The warden looked at the guard and the guard looked at the warden. There was no apparent solution of that mystery. The warden studied the writing carefully, then shook his head.

"Well, let's see what he was going to say to Dr. Ransome," he said at length, still puzzled, and he unrolled the inner piece of linen.

"Well, if that -- what -- what do you think of that?" he asked, dazed.

The guard took the bit of linen and read this:
"Epa cseot d'net niiy awe httbo n'si siih. "T."

III

The warden spent an hour wondering what sort of a cipher it was, and half an hour wondering why his prisoner should attempt to communicate with Dr. Ransome, who was the cause of him being there. After this the warden devoted some thought to the question of where the prisoner got writing materials., and what sort of writing materials he had. With the idea of illuminating this point, he examined the linen again. It was a torn part of a white shirt and had ragged edges.

Now it was possible to account for the linen, but what the prisoner had used to write with was another matter.
The warden knew it would have been impossible for him to have either pen or pencil, and, besides, neither pen nor pencil had been used in this writing. What, then? The warden decided to personally investigate. The Thinking Machine was his prisoner; he had orders to hold his prisoners; if this one sought to escape by sending cipher messages to persons outside, he would stop it, as he would have stopped it in the case of any other prisoner.

The warden went back to Cell 13 and found The Thinking Machine on his hands and knees on the floor, engaged in nothing more alarming than catching rats. The prisoner heard the warden's step and turned to him quickly.

"It's disgraceful," he snapped, "these rats. There are scores of them."

"Other men have been able to stand them," said the warden. "Here is another shirt for you -- let me have the one you have on."

"Why?" demanded The Thinking Machine, quickly. His tone was hardly natural, his manner suggested actual perturbation.

"You have attempted to communicate with Dr. Ransome," said the warden severely. "As my prisoner, it is my duty to put a stop to it."

The Thinking Machine was silent for a moment.

"All right," he said, finally. "Do your duty."

The warden smiled grimly. The prisoner arose from the floor and removed the white shirt, putting on instead a striped convict shirt the warden had brought. The warden took the white shirt eagerly, and then there compared the pieces of linen on which was written the cipher with certain torn places in the shirt. The Thinking Machine looked on curiously.

"The guard brought you those, then?" he asked.

"He certainly did," replied the warden triumphantly. "And that ends your first attempt to escape."

The Thinking Machine watched the warden as he, by comparison, established to his own satisfaction that only two pieces of linen had been torn from the white shirt.

"What did you write this with?" demanded the warden.

"I should think it a part of your duty to find out," said The Thinking Machine, irritably.

The warden started to say some harsh things, then restrained himself and made a minute search of the cell and of the prisoner instead. He found absolutely nothing; not even a match or toothpick which might have been used for a pen. The same mystery surrounded the fluid with which the cipher had been written. Although the warden left Cell 13 visibly annoyed, he took the torn shirt in triumph.

"Well, writing notes on a shirt won't get him out, that's certain," he told himself with some complacency. He put the linen scraps into his desk to await developments. "If that man escapes from that cell I'll -- hang it -- I'll resign."

On the third day of his incarceration The Thinking Machine openly attempted to bribe his way out. The jailer had brought his dinner and was leaning against the barred door, waiting, when The Thinking Machine began the conversation.

"The drainage pipes of the prison lead to the river, don't they?" he asked.

"Yes," said the jailer.

"I suppose they are very small?"

"Too small to crawl through, if that's what you're thinking about," was the grinning response.

There was silence until The Thinking Machine finished his meal. Then:

"You know I'm not a criminal, don't you?"

"Yes."

"And that I've a perfect right to be freed if I demand it?"

"Yes."

"Well, I came here believing that I could make my escape," said the prisoner, and his squint eyes studied the face of the jailer.

"Would you consider a financial reward for aiding me to escape?"

The jailer, who happened to be an honest man, looked at the slender, weak figure of the prisoner, at the large head with its mass of yellow hair, and was almost sorry.

"I guess prisons like these were not built for the likes of you to get out of," he said, at last.

"But would you consider a proposition to help me get out?" the prisoner insisted, almost beseechingly.

"No," said the jailer, shortly.

"Five hundred dollars," urged The Thinking Machine. "I am not a criminal."

"No," said the jailer.

"A thousand?"

"No," again said the jailer, and he started away hurriedly to escape further temptation. Then he turned back. "If you should give me ten thousand dollars I couldn't get you out. You'd have to pass through seven doors, and I only
have the keys to two."

Then he told the warden all about it.

"Plan number two fails," said the warden, smiling grimly. "First a cipher, then bribery."

When the jailer was on his way to Cell 13 at six o'clock, again bearing food to The Thinking Machine, he paused, startled by the unmistakable scrape, scrape of steel against steel. It stopped at the sound of his steps, then craftily the jailer, who was beyond the prisoner's range of vision, resumed his tramping, the sound being apparently that of a man going away from Cell 13. As a matter of fact he was in the same spot.

After a moment there came again the steady scrape, scrape, and the jailer crept cautiously on tiptoes to the door and peered between the bars. The Thinking Machine was standing on the iron bed working at the bars of the little window. He was using a file, judging from the backward and forward swing of his arms.

Cautiously the jailer crept back to the office, summoned the warden in person, and they returned to Cell 13 on tiptoes. The steady scrape was still audible. The warden listened to satisfy himself and then suddenly appeared at the door.

"Well?" he demanded, and there was a smile on his face.

The Thinking Machine glanced back from his perch on the bed and leaped suddenly to the floor, making frantic efforts to hide something. The warden went in, with hand extended.

"Give it up," he said.

"No," said the prisoner, sharply.

"Come, give it up," urged the warden. "I don't want to have to search you again."

"No," repeated the prisoner.

"What was it, a file?" asked the warden.

The Thinking Machine was silent and stood squinting at the warden with something very nearly approaching disappointment on his face -- nearly, but not quite. The warden was almost sympathetic.

"Plan number three fails, eh?" he asked, goodnaturedly. "Too bad, isn't it?"

The prisoner didn't say.

"Search him," instructed the warden.

The jailer searched the prisoner carefully. At last, artfully concealed in the waist band of the trousers, he found a piece of steel about two inches long, with one side curved like a half moon.

"Ah," said the warden, as he received it from the jailer. "From your shoe heel," and he smiled pleasantly.

The jailer continued his search and on the other side of the trousers waist band found another piece of steel identical with the first. The edges showed where they had been worn against the bars of the window.

"You couldn't saw a way through those bars with these," said the warden.

"I could have," said The Thinking Machine firmly.

"In six months, perhaps," said the warden, goodnaturedly.

The warden shook his head slowly as he gazed into the slightly flushed face of his prisoner.

"Ready to give it up?" he asked.

"I haven't started yet," was the prompt reply.

Then came another exhaustive search of the cell. Carefully the two men went over it, finally turning out the bed and searching that. Nothing. The warden in person climbed upon the bed and examined the bars of the window where the prisoner had been sawing. When he looked he was amused.

"Just made it a little bright by hard rubbing," he said to the prisoner, who stood looking on with a somewhat crestfallen air. The warden grasped the iron bars in his strong hands and tried to shake them. They were immovable, set firmly in the solid granite. He examined each in turn and found them all satisfactory. Finally he climbed down from the bed.

"Give it up, professor," he advised.

The Thinking Machine shook his head and the warden and jailer passed on again. As they disappeared down the corridor The Thinking Machine sat on the edge of the bed with his head in his hands.

"He's crazy to try to get out of that cell," commented the jailer.

"Of course he can't get out," said the warden. "But he's clever. I would like to know what he wrote that cipher with."

It was four o'clock next morning when an awful, heart-racking shriek of terror resounded through the great prison. It came from a cell somewhere about the center, and its tone told a tale of horror, agony, terrible fear. The warden heard and with three of his men rushed into the long corridor leading to Cell 13.

As they ran there came again that awful cry. It died away in a sort of wail. The white faces of prisoners appeared at cell doors upstairs and down, staring out wonderingly, frightened.
"It's that fool in Cell 13," grumbled the warden.

He stopped and stared in as one of the jailers flashed a lantern. "That fool in Cell 13" lay comfortably on his cot, flat on his back with his mouth open, snoring. Even as they looked there came again the piercing cry, from somewhere above. The warden's face blanched a little as he started up the stairs. There on the top floor he found a man in Cell 43, directly above Cell 13, but two floors higher, cowering in a corner of his cell.

"What's the matter?" demanded the warden.
"Thank God you've come," exclaimed the prisoner, and he cast himself against the bars of his cell.
"What is it?" demanded the warden again.

He threw open the door and went in. The prisoner dropped on his knees and clasped the warden about the body. His face was white with terror, his eyes were widely distended, and he was shuddering. His hands, icy cold, clutched at the warden's.

"Take me out of this cell, please take me out," he pleaded.
"What's the matter with you, anyhow?" insisted the warden, impatiently.
"I heard something -- something," said the prisoner, and his eyes roved nervously around the cell.
"What did you hear?"
"I -- I can't tell you," stammered the prisoner. Then, in a sudden burst of terror: "Take me out of this cell -- put me anywhere -- but take me out of here."

The warden and the three jailers exchanged glances.

"Who is this fellow? What's he accused of?" asked the warden.
"Joseph Ballard," said one of the jailers. "He's accused of throwing acid in a woman's face. She died from it."
"But they can't prove it," gasped the prisoner. "They can't prove it. Please put me in some other cell."

He was still clinging to the warden, and that official threw his arms off roughly. Then for a time he stood looking at the cowering wretch, who seemed possessed of all the wild, unreasoning terror of a child.

"Look here, Ballard," said the warden, finally, "if you heard anything, I want to know what it was. Now tell me."
"I can't, I can't," was the reply. He was sobbing.
"Where did it come from?"
"I don't know. Everywhere -- nowhere. I just heard it."
"What was it -- a voice?"
"Please don't make me answer," pleaded the prisoner.
"You must answer," said the warden, sharply.
"It was a voice -- but -- but it wasn't human," was the sobbing reply.
"Voice, but not human?" repeated the warden, puzzled.
"It sounded muffled and -- and far away -- and ghostly," explained the man.
"Did it come from inside or outside the prison?"
"It didn't seem to come from anywhere -- it was just here, here, everywhere. I heard it. I heard it."

For an hour the warden tried to get the story, but Ballard had become suddenly obstinate and would say nothing - - only pleaded to be placed in another cell, or to have one of the jailers remain near him until daylight. These requests were gruffly refused.

"And see here," said the warden, in conclusion, "if there's any more of this screaming, I'll put you in the padded cell."

Then the warden went his way, a sadly puzzled man. Ballard sat at his cell door until daylight, his face, drawn and white with terror, pressed against the bars, and looked out into the prison with wide, staring eyes.

That day, the fourth since the incarceration of The Thinking Machine, was enlivened considerably by the volunteer prisoner, who spent most of his time at the little window of his cell. He began proceedings by throwing another piece of linen down to the guard, who picked it up dutifully and took it to the warden. On it was written:

"Only three days more."

The warden was in no way surprised at what he read; he understood that The Thinking Machine meant only three days more of his imprisonment, and he regarded the note as a boast. But how was the thing written? Where had The Thinking Machine found this new piece of linen? Where? How? He carefully examined the linen. It was white, of fine texture, shirt material. He took the shirt which he had taken and carefully fitted the two original pieces of the linen to the torn places. This third piece was entirely superfluous; it didn't fit anywhere, and yet it was unmistakably the same goods.

"And where -- where does he get anything to write with?" demanded the warden of the world at large.

Still later on the fourth day The Thinking Machine, through the window of his cell, spoke to the armed guard outside.

"What day of the month is it?" he asked.
"The fifteenth," was the answer.

The Thinking Machine made a mental astronomical calculation and satisfied himself that the moon would not rise until after nine o'clock that night. Then he asked another question: "Who attends to those arc lights?"

"Man from the company."

"You have no electricians in the building?"

"No."

"I should think you could save money if you had your own man." "None of my business," replied the guard.

The guard noticed The Thinking Machine at the cell window frequently during that day, but always the face seemed listless and there was a certain wistfulness in the squint eyes behind the glasses. After a while he accepted the presence of the leonine head as a matter of course. He had seen other prisoners do the same thing; it was the longing for the outside world.

That afternoon, just before the day guard was relieved, the head appeared at the window again, and The Thinking Machine's hand held something out between the bars. It fluttered to the ground and the guard picked it up. It was a five-dollar bill.

"That's for you," called the prisoner.

As usual, the guard took it to the warden. That gentleman looked at it suspiciously; he looked at everything that came from Cell 13 with suspicion.

"He said it was for me," explained the guard.

"It's a sort of a tip, I suppose," said the warden. "I see no particular reason why you shouldn't accept --""

Suddenly he stopped. He had remembered that The Thinking Machine had gone into Cell 13 with one five-dollar bill and two ten-dollar bills; twenty-five dollars in all. Now a five-dollar bill had been tied around the first pieces of linen that came from the cell. The warden still had it, and to convince himself he took it out and looked at it. It was five dollars; yet here was another five dollars, and The Thinking Machine had only had ten-dollar bills.

"Perhaps somebody changed one of the bills for him," he thought at last, with a sigh of relief.

But then and there he made up his mind. He would search Cell 13 as a cell was never before searched in this world. When a man could write at will, and change money, and do other wholly inexplicable things, there was something radically wrong with his prison. He planned to enter the cell at night -- three o'clock would be an excellent time. The Thinking Machine must do all the weird things he did sometime. Night seemed the most reasonable.

Thus it happened that the warden stealthily descended upon Cell 13 that night at three-o'clock. He paused at the door and listened. There was no sound save the steady, regular breathing of the prisoner. The keys unfastened the double locks with scarcely a clank, and the warden entered, locking the door behind him. Suddenly he flashed his dark-lantern in the face of the recumbent figure.

If the warden had planned to startle The Thinking Machine he was mistaken, for that individual merely opened his eyes quietly, reached for his glasses and inquired, in a most matter-of-fact tone:

"Who is it?"

It would be useless to describe the search that the warden made. It was minute. Not one inch of the cell or the bed was overlooked. He found the round hole in the floor, and with a flash of inspiration thrust his thick fingers into it. After a moment of fumbling there he drew up something and looked at it in the light of his lantern.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed.

The thing he had taken out was a rat -- a dead rat. His inspiration fled as a mist before the sun. But he continued the search. The Thinking Machine, without a word, arose and kicked the rat out of the cell into the corridor.

The warden climbed on the bed and tried the steel bars in the tiny window. They were perfectly rigid; every bar of the door was the same.

Then the warden searched the prisoner's clothing, beginning at the shoes. Nothing hidden in them! Then the trousers waist band. Still nothing! Then the pockets of the trousers. From one side he drew out some paper money and examined it.

"Five one-dollar bills," he gasped.

"That's right," said the prisoner.

"But the -- you had two tens and a five -- what the -- how do you do it?"

"That's my business," said the Thinking Machine.

"Did any of my men change this money for you -- on your word of honor?"

The Thinking Machine paused just a fraction of a second.

"No," he said.

"Well, do you make it?" asked the warden. He was prepared to believe anything.

"That's my business," again said the prisoner.
The warden glared at the eminent scientist fiercely. He felt -- he knew -- that this man was making a fool of him, yet he didn't know how. If he were a real prisoner he would get the truth -- but, then, perhaps, those inexplicable things which had happened would not have been brought before him so sharply. Neither of the men spoke for a long time, then suddenly the warden turned fiercely and left the cell, slamming the door behind him. He didn't dare to speak, then.

He glanced at the clock. It was ten minutes to four. He had hardly settled himself in bed when again came that heart-breaking shriek through the prison. With a few muttered words, which, while not elegant, were highly expressive, he relighted his lantern and rushed through the prison again to the cell on the upper floor.

Again Ballard was crushing himself against the steel door, shrieking, shrieking at the top of his voice. He stopped only when the warden flashed his lamp in the cell.

"Take me out, take me out," he screamed. "I did it, I did it, I killed her. Take it away."

"Take what away?" asked the warden.

"I threw the acid in her face -- I did it -- I confess. Take me out of here."

Ballard's condition was pitiable; it was only an act of mercy to let him out into the corridor. There he crouched in a corner, like an animal at bay, and clasped his hands to his ears. It took half an hour to calm him sufficiently for him to speak. Then he told incoherently what had happened. On the night before at four o'clock he had heard a voice -- a sepulchral voice, muffled and wailing in tone.

"What did it say?" asked the warden, curiously.

"Acid -- acid -- acid!" gasped the prisoner. "It accused me. Acid! I threw the acid, and the woman died. Oh!" It was a long, shuddering wail of terror.

"Acid?" echoed the warden, puzzled. The case was beyond him.

"Acid. That's all I heard -- that one word, repeated several times. There were other things, too, but I didn't hear them."

"That was last night, eh?" asked the warden. "What happened to-night -- what frightened you just now?"

"It was the same thing," gasped the prisoner. "Acid -- acid -- acid!" He covered his face with his hands and sat shivering. "It was acid I used on her, but I didn't mean to kill her. I just heard the words. It was something accusing me -- accusing me."

"Did you hear anything else?"

"Yes -- but I couldn't understand -- only a little bit -- just a word or two."

"Well, what was it?"

"I heard 'acid' three times, then I heard a long, moaning sound, then -- then -- I heard 'No. 8 hat.' I heard that twice."

"No. 8 hat," repeated the warden. "What the devil -- No. 8 hat? Accusing voices of conscience have never talked about No. 8 hats, so far as I ever heard."

"He's insane," said one of the jailers, with an air of finality.

"I believe you," said the warden. "He must be. He probably heard something and got frightened. He's trembling now. No. 8 hat! What the--"

When the fifth day of The Thinking Machine's imprisonment rolled around the warden was wearing a hunted look. He was anxious for the end of the thing. He could not help but feel that his distinguished prisoner had been amusing himself. And if this were so, The Thinking Machine had lost none of his sense of humor. For on this fifth day he flung down another linen note to the outside guard, bearing the words: "Only two days more." Also he flung down half a dollar.

Now the warden knew -- he knew -- that the man in Cell 13 didn't have any half dollars -- he couldn't have any half dollars, no more than he could have pen and ink and linen, and yet he did have them. It was a condition, not a theory; that is one reason why the warden was wearing a hunted look.

That ghastly, uncanny thing, too, about "Acid" and "No. 8 hat" clung to him tenaciously. They didn't mean anything, of course, merely the ravings of an insane murderer who had been driven by fear to confess his crime, still there were so many things that "didn't mean anything" happening in the prison now since The Thinking Machine was there.

On the sixth day the warden received a postal stating that Dr. Ransome and Mr. Fielding would be at Chisholm Prison on the following evening, Thursday, and in the event Professor Van Dusen had not yet escaped -- and they presumed he had not because they had not heard from him -- they would meet him there.

"In the event he had not yet escaped!" The warden smiled grimly. Escaped!

The Thinking Machine enlivened this day for the warden with three notes. They were on the usual linen and bore generally on the appointment at half-past eight o'clock Thursday night, which appointment the scientist had made at
the time of his imprisonment.

On the afternoon of the seventh day the warden passed Cell 13 and glanced in. The Thinking Machine was lying on the iron bed, apparently sleeping lightly. The cell appeared precisely as it always did to a casual glance. The warden would swear that no man was going to leave it between that hour -- it was then four o'clock -- and half-past eight o'clock that evening.

On his way back past the cell the warden heard the steady breathing again, and coming close to the door looked in. He wouldn't have done so if The Thinking Machine had been looking, but now -- well, it was different.

A ray of light came through the high window and fell on the face of the sleeping man. It occurred to the warden for the first time that his prisoner appeared haggard and weary. Just then The Thinking Machine stirred slightly and the warden hurried on up the corridor guiltily. That evening after six o'clock he saw the jailer.

"Everything all right in Cell 13?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," replied the jailer. "He didn't eat much, though."

It was with a feeling of having done his duty that the warden received Dr. Ransome and Mr. Fielding shortly after seven o'clock. He intended to show them the linen notes and lay before them the full story of his woes, which was a long one. But before this came to pass, the guard from the river side of the prison yard entered the office.

"The arc light in my side of the yard won't light," he informed the warden.

"Confound it, that man's a hoodoo," thundered the official. "Everything has happened since he's been here."

The guard went back to his post in the darkness, and the warden phoned to the electric light company.

"This is Chisholm Prison," he said through the phone. "Send three or four men down here quick, to fix an arc light."

The reply was evidently satisfactory, for the warden hung up the receiver and passed out into the yard. While Dr. Ransome and Mr. Fielding sat waiting the guard at the outer gate came in with a special delivery letter. Dr. Ransome happened to notice the address, and, when the guard went out, looked at the letter more closely.

"By George!" he exclaimed.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Fielding.

Silently the doctor offered the letter. Mr. Fielding examined it closely.

"Coincidence," he said. "It must be."

It was nearly eight o'clock when the warden returned to his office. The electricians had arrived in a wagon, and were now at work. The warden pressed the buzz-button communicating with the man at the outer gate in the wall.

"How many electricians came in?" he asked, over the short 'phone. "Four? Three workmen in jumpers and overalls and the manager? Frock coat and silk hat? All right. Be certain that only four go out. That's all."

He turned to Dr. Ransome and Mr. Fielding. "We have to be careful here -- particularly," and there was broad sarcasm in his tone, "since we have scientists locked up."

The warden picked up the special delivery letter carelessly, and then began to open it.

"When I read this I want to tell you gentlemen something about how -- Great Caesar!" he ended, suddenly, as he glanced at the letter. He sat with mouth open, motionless, from astonishment.

"What is it?" asked Mr. Fielding.

"A special delivery from Cell 13," gasped the warden. "An invitation to supper."

"What?" and the two others arose, unanimously.

The warden sat dazed, staring at the letter for a moment, then called sharply to a guard outside in the corridor.

"Run down to Cell 13 and see if that man's in there."

The guard went as directed, while Dr. Ransome and Mr. Fielding examined the letter.

"It's Van Dusen's handwriting; there's no question of that," said Dr. Ransome. "I've seen too much of it."

Just then the buzz on the telephone from the outer gate sounded, and the warden, in a semi-trance, picked up the receiver.

"Hello! Two reporters, eh? Let 'em come in." He turned suddenly to the doctor and Mr. Fielding. "Why, the man can't be out. He must be in his cell."

Just at that moment the guard returned.

"He's still in his cell, sir," he reported. "I saw him. He's lying down."

"There, I told you so," said the warden, and he breathed freely again. "But how did he mail that letter?"

There was a rap on the steel door which led from the jail yard into the warden's office.

"It's the reporters," said the warden. "Let them in," he instructed the guard; then to the other two gentlemen:

"Don't say anything about this before them, because I'd never hear the last of it."

The door opened, and the two men from the front gate entered.

"Good-evening, gentlemen," said one. That was Hutchinson Hatch; the warden knew him well.

"Well?" demanded the other, irritably. "I'm here."
That was The Thinking Machine.

He squinted belligerently at the warden, who sat with mouth agape. For the moment that official had nothing to
say. Dr. Ransome and Mr. Fielding were amazed, but they didn’t know what the warden knew. They were only
amazed; he was paralyzed. Hutchinson Hatch, the reporter, took in the scene with greedy eyes.

“How -- how -- how did you do it?” gasped the warden, finally.

“Come back to the cell,” said The Thinking Machine, in the irritated voice which his scientific associates knew
so well.

The warden, still in a condition bordering on trance, led the way.

“Flash your light in there,” directed The Thinking Machine.

The warden did so. There was nothing unusual in the appearance of the cell, and there -- there on the bed lay the
figure of The Thinking Machine. Certainly! There was the yellow hair! Again the warden looked at the man beside
him and wondered at the strangeness of his own dreams.

With trembling hands he unlocked the cell door and The Thinking Machine passed inside.

“See here,” he said.

He kicked at the steel bars in the bottom of the cell door and three of them were pushed out of place. A fourth
broke off and rolled away in the corridor.

“And here, too,” directed the erstwhile prisoner as he stood on the bed to reach the small window. He swept his
hand across the opening and every bar came out.

“What’s this in the bed?” demanded the warden, who was slowly recovering.

“A wig,” was the reply. “Turn down the cover.”

The warden did so. Beneath it lay a large coil of strong rope, thirty feet or more, a dagger, three files, ten feet of
electric wire, a thin, powerful pair of steel pliers, a small tack hammer with its handle, and -- and a Derringer pistol.

“How did you do it?” demanded the warden.

“You gentlemen have an engagement to supper with me at halfpast nine o’clock,” said The Thinking Machine.

“Come on, or we shall be late.”

“But how did you do it?” insisted the warden.

“Don’t ever think you can hold any man who can use his brain,” said The Thinking Machine. “Come on; we shall
be late.”

VI

It was an impatient supper party in the rooms of Professor Van Dusen and a somewhat silent one. The guests
were Dr. Ransome, Albert Fielding, the warden, and Hutchinson Hatch, reporter. The meal was served to the
minute, in accordance with Professor Van Dusen’s instructions of one week before; Dr. Ransome found the
artichokes delicious. At last the supper was finished and The Thinking Machine turned full on Dr. Ransome and
squinted at him fiercely.

“Do you believe it now?” he demanded.

“I do,” replied Dr. Ransome.

“Do you admit that it was a fair test?”

“I do.”

With the others, particularly the warden, he was waiting anxiously for the explanation.

“Suppose you tell us how -- ” began Mr. Fielding.

“Yes, tell us how,” said the warden.

The Thinking Machine readjusted his glasses, took a couple of preparatory squints at his audience, and began the
story. He told it from the beginning logically; and no man ever talked to more interested listeners.

“My agreement was,” he began, “to go into a cell, carrying nothing except what was necessary to wear, and to
leave that cell within a week. I had never seen Chisholm Prison. When I went into the cell I asked for tooth powder,
two ten and one five-dollar bills, and also to have my shoes blacked. Even if these requests had been refused it
would not have mattered seriously. But you agreed to them.”

“I knew there would be nothing in the cell which you thought I might use to advantage. So when the warden
locked the door on me I was apparently helpless, unless I could turn three seemingly innocent things to use. They
were things which would have been permitted any prisoner under sentence of death, were they not, warden?”

“ Tooth powder and polished shoes, yes, but not money,” replied the warden.

“Anything is dangerous in the hands of a man who knows how to use it,” went on The Thinking Machine. “I did
nothing that first night but sleep and chase rats.” He glared at the warden. “When the matter was broached I knew I
could do nothing that night, so suggested next day. You gentlemen thought I wanted time to arrange an escape with
outside assistance, but this was not true. I knew I could communicate with whom I pleased, when I pleased.”

The warden stared at him a moment, then went on smoking solemnly.
"I was aroused next morning at six o'clock by the jailer with my breakfast," continued the scientist. "He told me dinner was at twelve and supper at six. Between these times, I gathered, I would be pretty much to myself. So immediately after breakfast I examined my outside surroundings from my cell window. One look told me it would be useless to try to scale the wall, even should I decide to leave my cell by the window, for my purpose was to leave not only the cell, but the prison. Of course, I could have gone over the wall, but it would have taken me longer to lay my plans that way. Therefore, for the moment, I dismissed all idea of that.

"From this first observation I knew the river was on that side of the prison, and that there was also a playground there. Subsequently these surmises were verified by a keeper. I knew then one important thing -- that anyone might approach the prison wall from that side if necessary without attracting any particular attention. That was well to remember. I remembered it.

"But the outside thing which most attracted my attention was the feed wire to the arc light which ran within a few feet -- probably three or four -- of my cell window. I knew that would be valuable in the event I found it necessary to cut off that arc light."

"Oh, you shut it off to-night, then?" asked the warden.

"Having learned all I could from that window," resumed The Thinking Machine, without heeding the interruption, "I considered the idea of escaping through the prison proper. I recalled just how I had come into the cell, which I knew would be the only way. Seven doors lay between me and the outside. So, also for the time being I gave up the idea of escaping that way. And I couldn't go through the solid granite walls of the cell."

The Thinking Machine paused for a moment and Dr. Ransome lighted a new cigar. For several minutes there was silence, then the scientific jail-breaker went on:

"While I was thinking about these things a rat ran across my foot. It suggested a new line of thought. There were at least half a dozen rats in the cell -- I could see their beady eyes. Yet I had noticed none come under the cell door. I frightened them purposely and watched the cell door to see if they went out that way. They did not, but they were gone. Obviously they went another way. Another way meant another opening.

"I searched for this opening and found it. It was an old drain pipe, long unused and partly choked with dirt and dust. But this was the way the rats had come. They came from somewhere. Where? Drain pipes usually lead outside prison grounds. This one probably led to the river, or near it. The rats must therefore come from that direction. If they came a part of the way, I reasoned that they came all the way, because it was extremely unlikely that a solid iron or lead pipe would have any hole in it except at the exit.

"When the jailer came with my luncheon he told me two important things, although he didn't know it. One was that a new system of plumbing had been put in the prison seven years before; another that the river was only three hundred feet away. Then I knew positively that the pipe was a part of an old system; I knew, too, that it slanted generally toward the river. But did the pipe end in the water or on land?

"This was the next question to be decided. I decided it by catching several of the rats in the cell. My jailer was surprised to see me engaged in this work. I examined at least a dozen of them. They were perfectly dry; they had come through the pipe, and, most important of all, they were not house rats, but field rats. The other end of the pipe was on land, then, outside the prison walls. So far, so good.

"Then, I knew that if I worked freely from this point I must attract the warden's attention in another direction. You see, by telling the warden that I had come there to escape you made the test more severe, because I had to trick him by false scents."

The warden looked up with a sad expression in his eyes.

"The first thing was to make him think I was trying to communicate with you, Dr. Ransome. So I wrote a note on a piece of linen I tore from my shirt, addressed it to Dr. Ransome, tied a five-dollar bill around it and threw it out of the window. I knew the guard would take it to the warden, but I rather hoped the warden would send it as addressed. Have you that first linen note, warden?"

The warden produced the cipher.

"What the deuce does it mean, anyhow?" he asked.

"Read it backward, beginning with the 'T' signature and disregard the division into words," instructed The Thinking Machine.

The warden did so.

"T - h - i - s, this," he spelled, studied it a moment, then read it off, grinning:

"This is not the way I intend to escape."

"Well, now what do you think o' that?" he demanded, still grinning.

"I knew that would attract your attention, just as it did," said The Thinking Machine, "and if you really found out what it was, it would be a sort of gentle rebuke."

"What did you write it with?" asked Dr. Ransome, after he had examined the linen and passed it to Mr. Fielding.
"This," said the erstwhile prisoner, and he extended his foot. On it was the shoe he had worn in prison, though the polish was gone -- scraped off clean. "The shoe blacking, moistened with water, was my ink; the metal tip of the shoe lace made a fairly good pen."

The warden looked up and suddenly burst into a laugh, half of relief, half of amusement.

"You're a wonder," he said, admiringly. "Go on."

"That precipitated a search of my cell by the warden, as I had intended," continued The Thinking Machine. "I was anxious to get the warden into the habit of searching my cell, so that finally, constantly finding nothing, he would get disgusted and quit. This at last happened, practically."

The warden blushed.

"He then took my white shirt away and gave me a prison shirt. He was satisfied that those two pieces of the shirt were all that was missing. But while he was searching my cell I had another piece of that same shirt, about nine inches square, rolled into a small ball in my mouth."

"Nine inches off that shirt?" demanded the warden. "Where did it come from?"

"The bosoms of all stiff white shirts are of triple thickness," was the explanation. "I tore out the inside thickness, leaving the bosom only two thicknesses. I knew you wouldn't see it. So much for that."

There was a little pause, and the warden looked from one to another of the men with a sheepish grin.

"Having disposed of the warden for the time being by giving him something else to think about, I took my first serious step toward freedom," said Professor Van Dusen. "I knew, within reason, that the pipe led somewhere to the playground outside; I knew a great many boys played there; I knew that rats came into my cell from out there. Could I communicate with someone outside with these things at hand?"

"First was necessary, I saw, a long and fairly reliable thread, so -- but here," he pulled up his trousers legs and showed that the tops of both stockings, of fine, strong lisle, were gone. "I unraveled those -- after I got them started it wasn't difficult -- and I had easily a quarter of a mile of thread that I could depend on.

"Then on half of my remaining linen I wrote, laboriously enough I assure you, a letter explaining my situation to this gentleman here," and he indicated Hutchinson Hatch. "I knew he would assist me for the value of the newspaper story. I tied firmly to this linen letter a ten-dollar bill -- there is no surer way of attracting the eye of anyone -- and wrote on the linen: 'Finder of this deliver to Hutchinson Hatch, Daily American, who will give another ten dollars for the information.'"

"The next thing was to get this note outside on that playground where a boy might find it. There were two ways, but I chose the best. I took one of the rats -- I became adept in catching them -- tied the linen and money firmly to one leg, fastened my lisle thread to another, and turned him loose in the drain pipe. I reasoned that the natural fright of the rodent would make him run until he was outside the pipe and then out on earth he would probably stop to gnaw off the linen and money."

"From the moment the rat disappeared into that dusty pipe I became anxious. I was taking so many chances. The rat might gnaw the string, of which I held one end; other rats might gnaw it; the rat might run out of the pipe and leave the linen and money where they would never be found; a thousand other things might have happened. So began some nervous hours, but the fact that the rat ran on until only a few feet of the string remained in my cell made me think he was outside the pipe. I had carefully instructed Mr. Hatch what to do in case the note reached him. The question was: Would it reach him?"

"This done, I could only wait and make other plans in case this one failed. I openly attempted to bribe my jailer, and learned from him that he held the keys to only two of seven doors between me and freedom. Then I did something else to make the warden nervous. I took the steel supports out of the heels of my shoes and made a pretense of sawing the bars of my cell window. The warden raised a pretty row about that. He developed, too, the habit of shaking the bars of my cell window to see if they were solid. They were -- then."

Again the warden grinned. He had ceased being astonished.

"With this one plan I had done all I could and could only wait to see what happened," the scientist went on. "I couldn't know whether my note had been delivered or even found, or whether the rat had gnawed it up. And I didn't dare to draw back through the pipe that one slender thread which connected me with the outside."

"When I went to bed that night I didn't sleep, for fear there would come the slight signal twitch at the thread which was to tell me that Mr. Hatch had received the note. At half-past three o'clock, I judge, I felt this twitch, and no prisoner actually under sentence of death ever welcomed a thing more heartily."

The Thinking Machine stopped and turned to the reporter.

"You'd better explain just what you did," he said.

"The linen note was brought to me by a small boy who had been playing baseball," said Mr. Hatch. "I immediately saw a big story in it, so I gave the boy another ten dollars, and got several spools of silk, some twine, and a roll of light, pliable wire. The professor's note suggested that I have the finder of the note show me just where
it was picked up, and told me to make my search from there, beginning at two o'clock in the morning. If I found the other end of the thread I was to twitch it gently three times, then a fourth.

"I began the search with a small bulb electric light. It was an hour and twenty minutes before I found the end of the drain pipe, half hidden in weeds. The pipe was very large there, say twelve inches across. Then I found the end of the lisle thread, twitched it as directed and immediately I got an answering twitch.

"Then I fastened the silk to this and Professor Van Dusen began to pull it into his cell. I nearly had heart disease for fear the string would break. To the end of the silk I fastened the twine, and when that had been pulled in, I tied on the wire. Then that was drawn into the pipe and we had a substantial line, which rats couldn't gnaw, from the mouth of the drain into the cell."

The Thinking Machine raised his hand and Hatch stopped.

"All this was done in absolute silence," said the scientist. "But when the wire reached my hand I could have shouted. Then we tried another experiment, which Mr. Hatch was prepared for. I tested the pipe as a speaking tube. Neither of us could hear very clearly, but I dared not speak loud for fear of attracting attention in the prison. At last I made him understand what I wanted immediately. He seemed to have great difficulty in understanding when I asked for nitric acid, and I repeated the word 'acid' several times.

"Then I heard a shriek from a cell above me. I knew instantly that some one had overheard, and when I heard you coming, Mr. Warden, I feigned sleep. If you had entered my cell at that moment that whole plan of escape would have ended there. But you passed on. That was the nearest I ever came to being caught.

"Having established this improvised trolley it is easy to see how I got things in the cell and made them disappear at will. I merely dropped them back into the pipe. You, Mr. Warden, could not have reached the connecting wire with your fingers; they are too large. My fingers, you see, are longer and more slender. In addition I guarded the top of that pipe with a rat -- you remember how."

"I remember," said the warden, with a grimace.

"I thought that if any one were tempted to investigate that hole the rat would dampen his ardor. Mr. Hatch could not send me anything useful through the pipe until next night, although he did send me change for ten dollars as a test, so I proceeded with other parts of my plan. Then I evolved the method of escape, which I finally employed.

"In order to carry this out successfully it was necessary for the guard in the yard to get accustomed to seeing me at the cell window. I arranged this by dropping linen notes to him, boastful in tone, to make the warden believe, if possible, one of his assistants was communicating with the outside for me. I would stand at my window for hours gazing out, so the guard could see, and occasionally I spoke to him. In that way I learned that the prison had no electricians of its own, but was dependent upon the lighting company if anything should go wrong.

"That cleared the way to freedom perfectly. Early in the evening of the last day of my imprisonment, when it was dark, I planned to cut the feed wire which was only a few feet from my window, reaching it with an acid-tipped wire I had. That would make that side of the prison perfectly dark while the electricians were searching for the break. That would also bring Mr. Hatch into the prison yard.

"There was only one more thing to do before I actually began the work of setting myself free. This was to arrange final details with Mr. Hatch through our speaking tube. I did this within half an hour after the warden left my cell on the fourth night of my imprisonment. Mr. Hatch again had serious difficulty in understanding me, and I repeated the word 'acid' to him several times, and later the words: 'Number eight hat' -- that's my size -- and these were the things which made a prisoner upstairs confess to murder, so one of the jailers told me next day. This prisoner heard our voices, confused of course, through the pipe, which also went to his cell. The cell directly over were the things which made a prisoner upstairs confess to murder, so one of the jailers told me next day. This prisoner heard our voices, confused of course, through the pipe, which also went to his cell. The cell directly over

"Of course the actual work of cutting the steel bars out of the window and door was comparatively easy with nitric acid, which I got through the pipe in thin bottles, but it took time. Hour after hour on the fifth and sixth and seven days the guard below was looking at me as I worked on the bars of the window with the acid on a piece of wire. I used the tooth powder to prevent the acid spreading. I looked away abstractedly as I worked and each minute I gave the acid cut deeper into the metal. I noticed that the jailers always tried the door by shaking the upper part, never the lower bars, therefore I cut the lower bars, leaving them hanging in place by thin strips of metal. But that was a bit of dare-deviltry. I could not have gone that way so easily."

The Thinking Machine sat silent for several minutes.

"I think that makes everything clear," he went on. "Whatever points I have not explained were merely to confuse the warden and jailers. These things in my bed I brought in to please Mr. Hatch, who wanted to improve the story. Of course, the wig was necessary in my plan. The special delivery letter I wrote and directed in my cell with Mr. Hatch's fountain pen, then sent it out to him and he mailed it. That's all, I think."

"But your actually leaving the prison grounds and then coming in through the outer gate to my office?" asked the warden.
"Perfectly simple," said the scientist. "I cut the electric light wire with acid, as I said, when the current was off. Therefore when the current was turned on, the arc light didn't light. I knew it would take some time to find out what was the matter and make repairs. When the guard went to report to you the yard was dark. I crept out the window -- it was a tight fit, too -- replaced the bars by standing on a narrow ledge and remained in a shadow until the force of electricians arrived. Mr. Hatch was one of them.

"When I saw him I spoke and he handed me a cap, a jumper and overalls, which I put on within ten feet of you, Mr. Warden, while you were in the yard. Later Mr. Hatch called me, presumably as a workman, and together we went out the gate to get something out of the wagon. The gate guard let us pass out readily as two workmen who had just passed in. We changed our clothing and reappeared, asking to see you. We saw you. That's all."

There was silence for several minutes. Dr. Ransome was first to speak.
"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Perfectly amazing."
"How did Mr. Hatch happen to come with the electricians?" asked Mr. Fielding.
"His father is manager of the company," replied The Thinking Machine.
"But what if there had been no Mr. Hatch outside to help?"
"Every prisoner has one friend outside who would help him escape if he could."
"Suppose -- just suppose -- there had been no old plumbing system there?" asked the warden, curiously.
"There were two other ways out," said The Thinking Machine, enigmatically.

Ten minutes later the telephone bell rang. It was a request for the warden.
"Light all right, eh?" the warden asked, through the 'phone. "Good. Wire cut beside Cell 13? Yes, I know. One electrician too many? What's that? Two came out?"

The warden turned to the others with a puzzled expression.
"He only let in four electricians, he has let out two and says there are three left."
"I was the odd one," said The Thinking Machine.
"Oh," said the warden. "I see." Then through the 'phone: "Let the fifth man go. He's all right."

Go to Start
AGATHA WEBB

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN (MRS. CHARLES ROHLFS)

BOOK I

I

A CRY ON THE HILL

The dance was over. From the great house on the hill the guests had all departed and only the musicians remained. As they filed out through the ample doorway, on their way home, the first faint streak of early dawn became visible in the east. One of them, a lank, plain-featured young man of ungainly aspect but penetrating eye, called the attention of the others to it.

"Look!" said he; "there is the daylight! This has been a gay night for Sutherlandtown."

"Too gay," muttered another, starting aside as the slight figure of a young man coming from the house behind them rushed hastily by. "Why, who's that?"

As they one and all had recognised the person thus alluded to, no one answered till he had dashed out of the gate and disappeared in the woods on the other side of the road. Then they all spoke at once.

"It's Mr. Frederick!"

"He seems in a desperate hurry."

"He trod on my toes."

"Did you hear the words he was muttering as he went by?"

As only the last question was calculated to rouse any interest, it alone received attention.

"No; what were they? I heard him say something, but I failed to catch the words."

"He wasn't talking to you, or to me either, for that matter; but I have ears that can hear an eye wink. He said: 'Thank God, this night of horror is over!' Think of that! After such a dance and such a spread, he calls the night horrible and thanks God that it is over. I thought he was the very man to enjoy this kind of thing."

"So did I."

"And so did I."

The five musicians exchanged looks, then huddled in a group at the gate.

"He has quarrelled with his sweetheart," suggested one.

"I'm not surprised at that," declared another. "I never thought it would be a match."

"Shame if it were!" muttered the ungainly youth who had spoken first.

As the subject of this comment was the son of the gentleman whose house they were just leaving, they necessarily spoke low; but their tones were rife with curiosity, and it was evident that the topic deeply interested them. One of the five who had not previously spoken now put in a word:

"I saw him when he first led out Miss Page to dance, and I saw him again when he stood up opposite her in the last quadrille, and I tell you, boys, there was a mighty deal of difference in the way he conducted himself toward her in the beginning of the evening and the last. You wouldn't have thought him the same man. Reckless young fellows like him are not to be caught by dimples only. They want cash."

"Or family, at least; and she hasn't either. But what a pretty girl she is! Many a fellow as rich as he and as well connected would be satisfied with her good looks alone."

"Good looks!" High scorn was observable in this exclamation, which was made by the young man whom I have before characterised as ungainly. "I refuse to acknowledge that she has any good looks. On the contrary, I consider her plain."

"Oh! Oh!" burst in protest from more than one mouth. "And why does she have every fellow in the room dangling after her, then?" asked the player on the flageolet.

"She hasn't a regular feature."
What difference does that make when it isn't her features you notice, but herself?

"I don't like her."

A laugh followed this.

"That won't trouble her, Sweetwater. Sutherland does, if you don't, and that's much more to the point. And he'll marry her yet; he can't help it. Why, she'd witch the devil into leading her to the altar if she took a notion to have him for her bridegroom."

"There would be consistency in that," muttered the fellow just addressed. "But Mr. Frederick--"

"Hush! There's some one on the doorstep. Why, it's she!"

They all glanced back. The graceful figure of a young girl dressed in white was to be seen leaning toward them from the open doorway. Behind her shone a blaze of light—the candles not having been yet extinguished in the hall—and against this brilliant background her slight form, with all its bewitching outlines, stood out in plain relief.

"Who was that?" she began in a high, almost strident voice, totally out of keeping with the sensuous curves of her strange, sweet face. But the question remained unanswered, for at that moment her attention, as well as that of the men lingering at the gate, was attracted by the sound of hurrying feet and confused cries coming up the hill.

"Murder! Murder!" was the word panted out by more than one harsh voice; and in another instant a dozen men and boys came rushing into sight in a state of such excitement that the five musicians recoiled from the gate, and one of them went so far as to start back toward the house. As he did so he noticed a curious thing. The young woman whom they had all perceived standing in the door a moment before had vanished, yet she was known to possess the keenest curiosity of any one in town.

"Murder! Murder!" A terrible and unprecedented cry in this old, God-fearing town. Then came in hoarse explanation from the jostling group as they stopped at the gate: "Mrs. Webb has been killed! Stabbed with a knife! Tell Mr. Sutherland!"

Mrs. Webb!

As the musicians heard this name, so honoured and so universally beloved, they to a man uttered a cry. Mrs. Webb! Why, it was impossible. Shouting in their turn for Mr. Sutherland, they all crowded forward.

"Not Mrs. Webb!" they protested. "Who could have the daring or the heart to kill HER?"

"God knows," answered a voice from the highway. "But she's dead—the we've just seen her!"

"Then it's the old man's work," quavered a piping voice. "I've always said he would turn on his best friend some day. Sylum's the best place for folks as has lost their wits. I--"

But here a hand was put over his mouth, and the rest of the words was lost in an inarticulate gurgle. Mr. Sutherland had just appeared on the porch.

He was a superb-looking man, with an expression of mingled kindness and dignity that invariably awakened both awe and admiration in the spectator. No man in the country—I was going to say no woman was more beloved, or held in higher esteem. Yet he could not control his only son, as everyone within ten miles of the hill well knew.

At this moment his face showed both pain and shock.

"What name are you shouting out there?" he brokenly demanded. "Agatha Webb? Is Agatha Webb hurt?"

"Yes, sir; killed," repeated a half-dozen voices at once. "We've just come from the house. All the town is up. Some say her husband did it."

"No, no!" was Mr. Sutherland's decisive though half-inaudible response. "Philemon Webb might end his own life, but not Agatha's. It was the money—"

Here he caught himself up, and, raising his voice, addressed the crowd of villagers more directly.

"Wait," said he, "and I will go back with you. Where is Frederick?" he demanded of such members of his own household as stood about him.

No one knew.

"I wish some one would find my son. I want him to go into town with me."

"He's over in the woods there," volunteered a voice from without.

"In the woods!" repeated the father, in a surprised tone.

"Yes, sir; we all saw him go. Shall we sing out to him?"

"No, no; I will manage very well without him." And taking up his hat Mr. Sutherland stepped out again upon the porch.

Suddenly he stopped. A hand had been laid on his arm and an insinuating voice was murmuring in his ear:

"Do you mind if I go with you? I will not make any trouble."

It was the same young lady we have seen before.

The old gentleman frowned—she who never frowned and remarked shortly:

"A scene of murder is no place for women."

The face upturned to his remained unmoved.
"I think I will go," she quietly persisted. "I can easily mingle with the crowd."

He said not another word against it. Miss Page was under pay in his house, but for the last few weeks no one had undertaken to contradict her. In the interval since her first appearance on the porch, she had exchanged the light dress in which she had danced at the ball, for a darker and more serviceable one, and perhaps this token of her determination may have had its influence in silencing him. He joined the crowd, and together they moved downhill. This was too much for the servants of the house. One by one they too left the house till it stood absolutely empty. Jerry snuffed out the candles and shut the front door, but the side entrance stood wide open, and into this entrance, as the last footstep died out on the hillside, passed a slight and resolute figure. It was that of the musician who had questioned Miss Page's attractions.

II
ONE NIGHT'S WORK

Sutherlandtown was a seaport. The village, which was a small one, consisted of one long street and numerous cross streets running down from the hillside and ending on the wharves. On one of the corners thus made, stood the Webb house, with its front door on the main street and its side door on one of the hillside lanes. As the group of men and boys who had been in search of Mr. Sutherland entered this last-mentioned lane, they could pick out this house from all the others, as it was the only one in which a light was still burning. Mr. Sutherland lost no time in entering upon the scene of tragedy. As his imposing figure emerged from the darkness and paused on the outskirts of the crowd that was blocking up every entrance to the house, a murmur of welcome went up, after which a way was made for him to the front door.

But before he could enter, some one plucked him by the sleeve.

"Look up!" whispered a voice into his ear.

He did so, and saw a woman's body hanging half out of an upper window. It hung limp, and the sight made him sick, notwithstanding his threescore years of experience.

"Who's that?" he cried. "That's not Agatha Webb."

"No, that's Batsy, the cook. She's dead as well as her mistress. We left her where we found her for the coroner to see."

"But this is horrible," murmured Mr. Sutherland. "Has there been a butcher here?"

As he uttered these words, he felt another quick pressure on his arm. Looking down, he saw leaning against him the form of a young woman, but before he could address her she had started upright again and was moving on with the throng. It was Miss Page.

"It was the sight of this woman hanging from the window which first drew attention to the house," volunteered a man who was standing as a sort of guardian at the main gateway. "Some of the sailors' wives who had been to the wharves to see their husbands off on the ship that sailed at daybreak, saw it as they came up the lane on their way home, and gave the alarm. Without that we might not have known to this hour what had happened."

"But Mrs. Webb?"

"Come in and see."

There was a board fence about the simple yard within which stood the humble house forever after to be pointed out as the scene of Sutherlandtown's most heartrending tragedy. In this fence was a gate, and through this gate now passed Mr. Sutherland, followed by his would-be companion, Miss Page. A path bordered by lilac bushes led up to the house, the door of which stood wide open. As soon as Mr. Sutherland entered upon this path a man approached him from the doorway. It was Amos Fenton, the constable.

"Ah, Mr. Sutherland," said he, "sad business, a very sad business! But what little girl have you there?"

"This is Miss Page, my housekeeper's niece. She would come. Inquisitiveness the cause. I do not approve of it."

"Miss Page must remain on the doorstep. We allow no one inside excepting yourself," he said respectfully, in recognition of the fact that nothing of importance was ever undertaken in Sutherland town without the presence of Mr. Sutherland.

"Ah, Mr. Sutherland," said he, "sad business, a very sad business! But what little girl have you there?"

"This is Miss Page, my housekeeper's niece. She would come. Inquisitiveness the cause. I do not approve of it."

"Miss Page must remain on the doorstep. We allow no one inside excepting yourself," he said respectfully, in recognition of the fact that nothing of importance was ever undertaken in Sutherland town without the presence of Mr. Sutherland.

Miss Page curtsied, looking so bewitching in the fresh morning light that the tough old constable scratched his chin in grudging admiration. But he did not reconsider his determination. Seeing this, she accepted her defeat gracefully, and moved aside to where the bushes offered her more or less protection from the curiosity of those about her. Meanwhile Mr. Sutherland had stepped into the house.

He found himself in a small hall with a staircase in front and an open door at the left. On the threshold of this open door a man stood, who as sight of him doffed his hat. Passing by this man, Mr. Sutherland entered the room beyond. A table spread with eatables met his view, beside which, in an attitude which struck him at the moment as peculiar, sat Philemon Webb, the well-known master of the house.

Astonished at seeing his old friend in this room and in such a position, he was about to address him, when Mr. Fenton stopped him.
"Wait!" said he. "Take a look at poor Philemon before you disturb him. When we broke into the house a half-hour ago he was sitting just as you see him now, and we have let him be for reasons you can easily appreciate. Examine him closely, Mr. Sutherland; he won't notice it."

"But what ails him? Why does he sit crouched against the table? Is he hurt too?"

"No; look at his eyes."

Mr. Sutherland stooped and pushed aside the long grey locks that half concealed the countenance of his aged friend.

"Why," he cried, startled, "they are closed! He isn't dead?"

"No, he is asleep."

"Asleep?"

"Yes. He was asleep when we came in and he is asleep yet. Some of the neighbours wanted to wake him, but I would not let them. His wits are not strong enough to bear a sudden shock."

"No, no, poor Philemon! But that he should sit sleeping here while she--But what do these bottles mean and this parade of supper in a room they were not accustomed to eat in?"

"We don't know. It has not been eaten, you see. He has swallowed a glass of port, but that is all. The other glasses have had no wine in them, nor have the victuals been touched."

"Seats set for three and only one occupied," murmured Mr. Sutherland. "Strange! Could he have expected guests?"

"It looks like it. I didn't know that his wife allowed him such privileges; but she was always too good to him, and I fear has paid for it with her life."

"Nonsense! he never killed her. Had his love been anything short of the worship it was, he stood in too much awe of her to lift his hand against her, even in his most demented moments."

"I don't trust men of uncertain wits," returned the other. "You have not noticed everything that is to be seen in this room."

Mr. Sutherland, recalled to himself by these words, looked quickly about him. With the exception of the table and what was on and by it there was nothing else in the room. Naturally his glance returned to Philemon Webb.

"I don't see anything but this poor sleeping man," he began.

"Look at his sleeve."

Mr. Sutherland, with a start, again bent down. The arm of his old friend lay crooked upon the table, and on its blue cotton sleeve there was a smear which might have been wine, but which was-- blood.

As Mr. Sutherland became assured of this, he turned slightly pale and looked inquiringly at the two men who were intently watching him.

"This is bad," said he. "Any other marks of blood below stairs?"

"No; that one smear is all."

"Oh, Philemon!" burst from Mr. Sutherland, in deep emotion. Then, as he looked long and shudderingly at his friend, he added slowly:

"He has been in the room where she was killed; so much is evident. But that he understood what was done there I cannot believe, or he would not be sleeping here like a log. Come, let us go up-stairs."

Fenton, with an admonitory gesture toward his subordinate, turned directly toward the staircase. Mr. Sutherland followed him, and they at once proceeded to the upper hall and into the large front room which had been the scene of the tragedy.

It was the parlour or sitting-room of this small and unpretentious house. A rag carpet covered the floor and the furniture was of the plainest kind, but the woman who lay outstretched on the stiff, old-fashioned lounge opposite the door was far from being in accord with the homely type of her surroundings. Though the victim of a violent death, her face and form, both of a beauty seldom to be found among women of any station, were so majestic in their calm repose, that Mr. Sutherland, accustomed as he was to her noble appearance, experienced a shock of surprise that found vent in these words:

"Murdered! she? You have made some mistake, my friends. Look at her face!"

But even in the act of saying this his eyes fell on the blood which had dyed her cotton dress and he cried:

"Where was she struck and where is the weapon which has made this ghastly wound?"

"She was struck while standing or sitting at this table," returned the constable, pointing to two or three drops of blood on its smooth surface. "The weapon we have not found, but the wound shows that it was inflicted by a three-sided dagger."

"A three-sided dagger?"

"Yes."

"I didn't know there was such a thing in town. Philemon could have had no dagger."
"It does not seem so, but one can never tell. Simple cottages like these often contain the most unlooked-for articles."

"I cannot imagine a dagger being among its effects," declared Mr. Sutherland. "Where was the body of Mrs. Webb lying when you came in?"

"Where you see it now. Nothing has been moved or changed."

"She was found here, on this lounge, in the same position in which we see her now?"

"Yes, sir."

"But that is incredible. Look at the way she lies! Hands crossed, eyes closed, as though made ready for her burial. Only loving hands could have done this. What does it mean?"

"It means Philemon; that is what it means Philemon."

Mr. Sutherland shuddered, but said nothing. He was dumbfounded by these evidences of a crazy man's work. Philemon Webb always seemed so harmless, though he had been failing in mind for the last ten years.

"But" cried Mr. Sutherland, suddenly rousing, "there is another victim. I saw old woman Batsy hanging from a window ledge, dead."

"Yes, she is in this other room; but there is no wound on Batsy."

"How was she killed, then?"

"That the doctors must tell us."

Mr. Sutherland, guided by Mr. Fenton's gesture, entered a small room opening into the one in which they stood. His attention was at once attracted by the body of the woman he had seen from below, lying half in and half out of the open window. That she was dead was evident; but, as Mr. Fenton had said, no wound was to be seen upon her, nor were there any marks of blood on or about the place where she lay.

"This is a dreadful business," groaned Mr. Sutherland, "the worst I have ever had anything to do with. Help me to lift the woman in; she has been long enough a show for the people outside."

There was a bed in this room (indeed, it was Mrs. Webb's bedroom), and upon this poor Batsy was laid. As the face came uppermost both gentlemen started and looked at each other in amazement. The expression of terror and alarm which it showed was in striking contrast to the look of exaltation to be seen on the face of her dead mistress.

III

THE EMPTY DRAWER

As they re-entered the larger room, they were astonished to come upon Miss Page standing in the doorway. She was gazing at the recumbent figure of the dead woman, and for a moment seemed unconscious of their presence.

"How did you get in? Which of my men was weak enough to let you pass, against my express instructions?" asked the constable, who was of an irritable and suspicious nature.

She let the hood drop from her head, and, turning, surveyed him with a slow smile. There was witchery in that smile sufficient to affect a much more cultivated and callous nature than his, and though he had been proof against it once he could not quite resist the effect of its repetition.

"I insisted upon entering," said she. "Do not blame the men; they did not want to use force against a woman."

She had not a good voice and she knew it; but she covered up this defect by a choice of intonations that carried her lightest speech to the heart. Hard-visaged Amos Fenton gave a grunt, which was as near an expression of approval as he ever gave to anyone.

"Well! well!" he growled, but not ill-naturedly, "it's a morbid curiosity that brings you here. Better drop it, girl; it won't do you any good in the eyes of sensible people."

"Thank you," was her demure reply, her lips dimpling at the corners in a way to shock the sensitive Mr. Sutherland.

Glancing from her to the still outlines of the noble figure on the couch, he remarked with an air of mild reproof:

"I do not understand you, Miss Page. If this solemn sight has no power to stop your coquetries, nothing can. As for your curiosity, it is both ill-timed and unwomanly. Let me see you leave this house at once, Miss Page; and if in the few hours which must elapse before breakfast you can find time to pack your trunks, you will still farther oblige me."

"Oh, don't send me away, I entreat you."

It was a cry from her inner heart, which she probably regretted, for she instantly sought to cover up her inadvertent self-betrayal by a submissive bend of the head and a step backward. Neither Mr. Fenton nor Mr. Sutherland seemed to hear the one or see the other, their attention having returned to the more serious matter in hand.

"The dress which our poor friend wears shows her to have been struck before retiring," commented Mr. Sutherland, after another short survey of Mrs. Webb's figure. "If Philemon--"

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted the voice of the young man who had been left in the hall, "the lady is listening to
what you say. She is still at the head of the stairs."

"She is, is she!" cried Fenton, sharply, his admiration for the fascinating stranger having oozed out at his companion's rebuff. "I will soon show her--" But the words melted into thin air as he reached the door. The young girl had disappeared, and only a faint perfume remained in the place where she had stood.

"A most extraordinary person," grumbled the constable, turning back, but stopping again as a faint murmur came up from below.

"The gentleman is waking," called up a voice whose lack of music was quite perceptible at a distance.

With a bound Mr. Fenton descended the stairs, followed by Mr. Sutherland.

Miss Page stood before the door of the room in which sat Philemon Webb. As they reached her side, she made a little bow that was half mocking, half deprecatory, and slipped from the house. An almost unbearable sensation of incongruity vanished with her, and Mr. Sutherland, for one, breathed like a man relieved.

"I wish the doctor would come," Fenton said, as they watched the slow lifting of Philemon Webb's head. "Our fastest rider has gone for him, but he's out Portchester way, and it may be an hour yet before he can get here."

"Philemon!"

Mr. Sutherland had advanced and was standing by his old friend's side.

"Philemon, what has become of your guests? You've waited for them here until morning."

The old man with a dazed look surveyed the two plates set on either side of him and shook his head.

"James and John are getting proud," said he, "or they forget, they forget."

James and John. He must mean the Zabels, yet there were many others answering to these names in town. Mr. Sutherland made another effort.

"Philemon, where is your wife? I do not see any place set here for her!"

"Agatha's sick, Agatha's cross; she don't care for a poor old man like me."

"Agatha's dead and you know it," thundered back the constable, with ill-judged severity. "Who killed her? tell me that. Who killed her?"

A sudden quenching of the last spark of intelligence in the old man's eye was the dreadful effect of these words. Laughing with that strange gurgle which proclaims an utterly irresponsible mind, he cried:

"The pussy cat! It was the pussy cat. Who's killed? I'm not killed. Let's go to Jericho."

Mr. Sutherland took him by the arm and led him up-stairs. Perhaps the sight of his dead wife would restore him. But he looked at her with the same indifference he showed to everything else.

"I don't like her calico dresses," said he. "She might have worn silk, but she wouldn't. Agatha, will you wear silk to my funeral?"

The experiment was too painful, and they drew him away. But the constable's curiosity had been roused, and after they had found some one to take care of him, he drew Mr. Sutherland aside and said:

"What did the old man mean by saying she might have worn silk? Are they better off than they seem?" Mr. Sutherland closed the door before replying.

"They are rich," he declared, to the utter amazement of the other. "That is, they were; but they may have been robbed; if so, Philemon was not the wretch who killed her. I have been told that she kept her money in an old-fashioned cupboard. Do you suppose they alluded to that one?"

He pointed to a door set in the wall over the fireplace, and Mr. Fenton, perceiving a key sticking in the lock, stepped quickly across the floor and opened it. A row of books met his eyes, but on taking them down a couple of drawers were seen at the back.

"Are they locked?" asked Mr. Sutherland.

"One is and one is not."

"Open the one that is unlocked."

Mr. Fenton did so.

"It is empty," said he.

Mr. Sutherland cast a look toward the dead woman, and again the perfect serenity of her countenance struck him.

"I do not know whether to regard her as the victim of her husband's imbecility or of some vile robber's cupidity. Can you find the key to the other drawer?"

"I will try."

"Suppose you begin, then, by looking on her person. It should be in her pocket, if no marauder has been here."

"It is not in her pocket."

"Hanging to her neck, then, by a string?"

"No; there is a locket here, but no key. A very handsome locket, Mr. Sutherland, with a child's lock of golden hair--"

"Never mind, we will see that later; it is the key we want just now."
"Good heavens!"
"What is it?"
"It is in her hand; the one that lies underneath."
"Ah! A point, Fenton."
"A great point."
"Stand by her, Fenton. Don't let anyone rob her of that key till the coroner comes, and we are at liberty to take it."
"I will not leave her for an instant."
"Meanwhile, I will put back these books."
He had scarcely done so when a fresh arrival occurred. This time it was one of the village clergymen.

IV
THE FULL DRAWER
This gentleman had some information to give. It seems that at an early hour of this same night he had gone by this house on his way home from the bedside of a sick parishioner. As he was passing the gate he was run into by a man who came rushing out of the yard, in a state of violent agitation. In this man's hand was something that glittered, and though the encounter nearly upset them both, he had not stopped to utter an apology, but stumbled away out of sight with a hasty but infirm step, which showed he was neither young nor active. The minister had failed to see his face, but noticed the ends of a long beard blowing over his shoulder as he hurried away.

Philemon was a clean-shaven man.

Asked if he could give the time of this encounter, he replied that it was not far from midnight, as he was in his own house by half-past twelve.

"Did you glance up at these windows in passing?" asked Mr. Fenton.
"I must have; for I now remember they were both lighted."
"Were the shades up?"
"I think not. I would have noticed it if they had been."
"How were the shades when you broke into the house this morning?" inquired Mr. Sutherland of the constable.
"Just as they are now; we have moved nothing. The shades were both down--one of them over an open window."
"Well, we may find this encounter of yours with this unknown man a matter of vital importance, Mr. Crane."
"I wish I had seen his face."
"What do you think the object was you saw glittering in his hand?"
"I should not like to say; I saw it but an instant."
"Could it have been a knife or an old-fashioned dagger?"
"It might have been."
"Alas! poor Agatha! That she, who so despised money, should fall a victim to man's cupidity! Unhappy life, unhappy death! Fenton, I shall always mourn for Agatha Webb."

"Yet she seems to have found peace at last," observed the minister. "I have never seen her look so contented."
And leading Mr. Sutherland aside, he whispered: "What is this you say about money? Had she, in spite of appearances, any considerable amount? I ask, because in spite of her humble home and simple manner of living, she always put more on the plate than any of her neighbours. Besides which, I have from time to time during my pastorate received anonymously certain contributions, which, as they were always for sick or suffering children--"

"Yes, yes; they came from her, I have no doubt of it. She was by no means poor, though I myself never knew the extent of her means till lately. Philemon was a good business man once; but they evidently preferred to live simply, having no children living--"

"They have lost six, I have been told."
"So the Portchester folks say. They probably had no heart for display or for even the simplest luxuries. At all events, they did not indulge in them."
"Philemon has long been past indulging in anything."
"Oh, he likes his comfort, and he has had it too. Agatha never stinted him."
"But why do you think her death was due to her having money?"
"She had a large sum in the house, and there are those in town who knew this."
"And is it gone?"
"That we shall know later."
As the coroner arrived at this moment, the minister's curiosity had to wait. Fortunately for his equanimity, no one had the presumption to ask him to leave the room.

The coroner was a man of but few words, and but little given to emotion. Yet they were surprised at his first question:
"Who is the young woman standing outside there, the only one in the yard?"

Mr. Sutherland, moving rapidly to the window, drew aside the shade.

"It is Miss Page, my housekeeper's niece," he explained. "I do not understand her interest in this affair. She followed me here from the house and could hardly be got to leave this room, into which she intruded herself against my express command."

"But look at her attitude!" It was Mr. Fenton who spoke. "She's crazier than Philemon, it seems to me."

There was some reason for this remark. Guarded by the high fence from the gaze of the pushing crowd without, she stood upright and immovable in the middle of the yard, like one on watch. The hood, which she had dropped from her head when she thought her eyes and smile might be of use to her in the furtherance of her plans, had been drawn over it again, so that she looked more like a statue in grey than a living, breathing woman. Yet there was menace in her attitude and a purpose in the solitary stand she took in that circle of board-girded grass, which caused a thrill in the breasts of those who looked at her from that chamber of death.

"A mysterious young woman," muttered the minister.

"And one that I neither countenance nor under-stand," interpolated Mr. Sutherland. "I have just shown my displeasure at her actions by dismissing her from my house."

The coroner gave him a quick look, seemed about to speak, but changed his mind and turned toward the dead woman.

"We have a sad duty before us," said he.

The investigations which followed elicited one or two new facts. First, that all the doors of the house were found unlocked; and, secondly, that the constable had been among the first to enter, so that he could vouch that no disarrangement had been made in the rooms, with the exception of Batsy's removal to the bed. Then, his attention being drawn to the dead woman, he discovered the key in her tightly closed hand.

"Where does this key belong?" he asked.

They showed him the drawers in the cupboard.

"One is empty," remarked Mr. Sutherland. "If the other is found to be in the same condition, then her money has been taken. That key she holds should open both these drawers."

"Then let it be made use of at once. It is important that we should know whether theft has been committed here as well as murder." And drawing the key out, he handed it to Mr. Fenton.

The constable immediately unlocked the drawer and brought it and its contents to the table.

"No money here," said he.

"But papers as good as money," announced the doctor. "See! here are deeds and more than one valuable bond. I judge she was a richer woman than any of us knew."

Mr. Sutherland, meantime, was looking with an air of disappointment into the now empty drawer.

"Just as I feared," said he. "She has been robbed of her ready money. It was doubtless in the other drawer."

"How came she by the key, then?"

"That is one of the mysteries of the affair; this murder is by no means a simple one. I begin to think we shall find it full of mysteries."

"Batsy's death, for instance?"

"O yes, Batsy! I forgot that she was found dead too."

"Without a wound, doctor."

"She had heart disease. I doctored her for it. The fright has killed her."

"The look of her face confirms that."

"Let me see! So it does; but we must have an autopsy to prove it."

"I would like to explain before any further measures are taken, how I came to know that Agatha Webb had money in her house," said Mr. Sutherland, as they stepped back into the other room. "Two days ago, as I was sitting with my family at table, old gossip Judy came in. Had Mrs. Sutherland been living, this old crone would not have presumed to intrude upon us at mealtime, but as we have no one now to uphold our dignity, this woman rushed into our presence panting with news, and told us all in one breath how she had just come from Mrs. Webb; that she had heard Agatha stepping overhead and had gone up; and finding the door of the sitting-room ajar, had looked in, and seen Agatha crossing the room with her hands full of bills; that these bills were big bills, for she heard Agatha cry, as she locked them up in the cupboard behind the book-shelves, 'A thousand dollars! That is too much money to have in one's house'; that she, Judy, thought so too, and being frightened at what she had seen, had crept away as silently as she had entered and run away to tell the neighbours. Happily, I was the first she found up that morning, but I have no doubt that, in spite of my express injunctions, she has since related the news to half the people in town."
"Was the young woman down yonder present when Judy told this story?" asked the coroner, pointing towards the yard.

Mr. Sutherland pondered. "Possibly; I do not remember. Frederick was seated at the table with me, and my housekeeper was pouring out the coffee, but it was early for Miss Page. She has been putting on great airs of late."

"Can it be possible he is trying to blind himself to the fact that his son Frederick wishes to marry this girl?" muttered the clergyman into the constable's ear.

The constable shook his head. Mr. Sutherland was one of those debonair men, whose very mildness makes them impenetrable.

A SPOT ON THE LAWN

The coroner, on leaving the house, was followed by Mr. Sutherland. As the fine figures of the two men appeared on the doorstep, a faint cheer was heard from the two or three favoured persons who were allowed to look through the gate. But to this token of welcome neither gentleman responded by so much as a look, all their attention being engrossed by the sight of the solitary figure of Miss Page, who still held her stand upon the lawn. Motionless as a statue, but with her eyes fixed upon their faces, she awaited their approach. When they were near her she thrust one hand from under her cloak, and pointing to the grass at her feet, said quietly:

"See this?"

They hastened towards her and bent down to examine the spot she indicated.

"What do you find there?" cried Mr. Sutherland, whose eyesight was not good.

"Blood," responded the coroner, plucking up a blade of grass and surveying it closely.

"Blood," echoed Miss Page, with so suggestive a glance that Mr. Sutherland stared at her in amazement, not understanding his own emotion.

"How were you able to discern a stain so nearly imperceptible?" asked the coroner.

"Imperceptible? It is the only thing I see in the whole yard," she retorted, and with a slight bow, which was not without its element of mockery, she turned toward the gate.

"A most unaccountable girl," commented the doctor. "But she is right about these stains. Abel," he called to the man at the gate, "bring a box or barrel here and cover up this spot. I don't want it disturbed by trampling feet."

Abel started to obey, just as the young girl laid her hand on the gate to open it.

"Won't you help me?" she asked. "The crowd is so great they won't let me through."

"Won't they?" The words came from without. "Just slip out as I slip in, and you'll find a place made for you."

Not recognising the voice, she hesitated for a moment, but seeing the gate swaying, she pushed against it just as a young man stepped through the gap. Necessarily they came face to face.

"Ah, it's you," he muttered, giving her a sharp glance.

"I do not know you," she haughtily declared, and slipped by him with such dexterity she was out of the gate before he could respond.

But he only snapped his finger and thumb mockingly at her, and smiled knowingly at Abel, who had lingered to watch the end of this encounter.

"Supple as a willow twig, eh?" he laughed. "Well, I have made whistles out of willows before now, and hallo! where did you get that?"

He was pointing to a rare flower that hung limp and faded from Abel's buttonhole.

"This? Oh, I found it in the house yonder. It was lying on the floor of the inner room, almost under Batsy's skirts. Curious sort of flower. I wonder where she got it?"

The intruder betrayed at once an unaccountable emotion. There was a strange glitter in his light green eyes that made Abel shift rather uneasily on his feet. "Was that before this pretty minx you have just let out came in here with Mr. Sutherland?"

"O yes; before anyone had started for the hill at all. Why, what has this young lady got to do with a flower dropped by Batsy?"

"She? Nothing. Only—and I have never given you bad advice, Abel-- don't let that thing hang any longer from your buttonhole. Put it into an envelope and keep it, and if you don't hear from me again in regard to it, write me out a fool and forget we were ever chums when little shavers."

The man called Abel smiled, took out the flower, and went to cover up the grass as Dr. Talbot had requested. The stranger took his place at the gate, toward which the coroner and Mr. Sutherland were now advancing, with an air that showed his great anxiety to speak with them. He was the musician whom we saw secretly entering the last-mentioned gentleman's house after the departure of the servants.

As the coroner paused before him he spoke. "Dr. Talbot," said he, dropping his eyes, which were apt to betray his thoughts too plainly, "you have often promised that you would give me a job if any matter came up where any
nice detective work was wanted. Don't you think the time has come to remember me?"

"You, Sweetwater? I'm afraid the affair is too deep for an inexperienced man's first effort. I shall have to send to
Boston for an expert. Another time, Sweetwater, when the complications are less serious."

The young fellow, with a face white as milk, was turning away.
"But you'll let me stay around here?" he pleaded, pausing and giving the other an imploring look.
"O yes," answered the good-natured coroner. "Fenton will have work enough for you and half a dozen others. Go
and tell him I sent you."
"Thank you," returned the other, his face suddenly losing its aspect of acute disappointment. "Now I shall see
where that flower fell," he murmured.

VI
"BREAKFAST IS SERVED, GENTLEMEN!"

Mr. Sutherland returned home. As he entered the broad hall he met his son, Frederick. There was a look on the
young man's face such as he had not seen there in years.
"Father," faltered the youth, "may I have a few words with you?"
The father nodded kindly, though it is likely he would have much preferred his breakfast; and the young man led
him into a little sitting-room littered with the faded garlands and other tokens of the preceding night's festivities.
"I have an apology to make," Frederick began, "or rather, I have your forgiveness to ask. For years" he went on,
stumbling over his words, though he gave no evidence of a wish to restrain them--"for years I have gone
contrariwise to your wishes and caused my mother's heart to ache and you to wish I had never been born to be a
curse to you and her."

He had emphasised the word mother, and spoke altogether with force and deep intensity. Mr. Sutherland stood
petrified; he had long ago given up this lad as lost.
"I--I wish to change. I wish to be as great a pride to you as I have been a shame and a dishonour. I may not
succeed at once; but I am in earnest, and if you will give me your hand--"
The old man's arms were round the young man's shoulders at once.
"Frederick!" he cried, "my Frederick!"
"Do not make me too much ashamed," murmured the youth, very pale and strangely discomposed. "With no
excuse for my past, I suffer intolerable apprehension in regard to my future, lest my good intentions should fail or
my self-control not hold out. But the knowledge that you are acquainted with my resolve, and regard it with an
undeserved sympathy, may suffice to sustain me, and I should certainly be a base poltroon if I should disappoint you
or her twice."

He paused, drew himself from his father's arms, and glanced almost solemnly out of the window. "I swear that I
will henceforth act as if she were still alive and watching me."

There was strange intensity in his manner. Mr. Sutherland regarded him with amazement. He had seen him in
every mood natural to a reckless man, but never in so serious a one, never with a look of awe or purpose in his face.
It gave him quite a new idea of Frederick.
"Yes," the young man went on, raising his right hand, but not removing his eyes from the distant prospect on
which they were fixed, "I swear that I will henceforth do nothing to discredit her memory. Outwardly and inwardly,
I will act as though her eye were still upon me and she could again suffer grief at my failures or thrill with pleasure
at my success."

A portrait of Mrs. Sutherland, painted when Frederick was a lad of ten, hung within a few feet of him as he
spoke. He did not glance at it, but Mr. Sutherland did, and with a look as if he expected to behold a responsive light
beam from those pathetic features.
"She loved you very dearly," was his slow and earnest comment. "We have both loved you much more deeply
than you have ever seemed to realise, Frederick."
"I believe it," responded the young man, turning with an expression of calm resolve to meet his father's eye. "As
proof that I am no longer insensible to your affection, I have made up my mind to forego for your sake the one of the
dearest wishes of my heart. Father" he hesitated before he spoke the word, but he spoke it firmly at last,--"am I right
in thinking you would not like Miss Page for a daughter?"
"You did not do justice to my selfishness, father. I did mean to marry her, but I have given up living solely for
myself, and she could never help me to live for others. Father, Amabel Page must not remain in this house to cause
division between you and me."
"I have already intimated to her the desirability of her quitting a home where she is no longer respected," the old
gentleman declared. "She leaves on the 10.45 train. Her conduct this morning at the house of Mrs. Webb--who perhaps you do not know was most cruelly and foully murdered last night--was such as to cause comment and make her an undesirable adjunct to any gentleman's family."

Frederick paled. Something in these words had caused him a great shock. Mr. Sutherland was fond enough to believe that it was the news of this extraordinary woman's death. But his son's words, as soon as lie could find any, showed that his mind was running on Amabel, whom he perhaps had found it difficult to connect even in the remotest way with crime.

"She at this place of death? How could that be? Who would take a young girl there?"

The father, experiencing, perhaps, more compassion for this soon-to-be-disillusioned lover than he thought it incumbent upon him to show, answered shortly, but without any compromise of the unhappy truth:

"She went; she was not taken. No one, not even myself, could keep her back after she had heard that a murder had been committed in the town. She even intruded into the house; and when ordered out of the room of death took up her stand in the yard in front, where she remained until she had the opportunity of pointing out to us a stain of blood on the grass, which might otherwise have escaped our attention."

"Impossible!" Frederick's eye was staring; he looked like a man struck dumb by surprise or fear. "Amabel do this? You are mocking me, sir, or I may be dreaming, which may the good God grant."

His father, who had not looked for so much emotion, eyed his son in surprise, which rapidly changed to alarm as the young man faltered and fell back against the wall.

"You are ill, Frederick; you are really ill. Let me call down Mrs. Harcourt. But no, I cannot summon her. She is this girl's aunt."

Frederick made an effort and stood up.

"Do not call anybody," he entreated. "I expect to suffer some in casting this fascinating girl out of my heart. Ultimately I will conquer the weakness; indeed I will. As for her interest in Mrs. Webb's death--how low his voice sank and how he trembled!" she may have been better friends with her than we had any reason to suppose. I can think of no other motive for her conduct. Admiration for Mrs. Webb and horror--"

"Breakfast is served, gentlemen!" cried a thrilling voice behind them. Amabel Page stood smiling in the doorway.

VII

"MARRY ME"

"Wait a moment, I must speak to you." It was Amabel who was holding Frederick back. She had caught him by the arm as he was about leaving the room with his father, and he felt himself obliged to stop and listen.

"I start for Springfield to-day," she announced. "I have another relative there living at the house. When shall I have the pleasure of seeing you in my new home?"

"Never." It was said regretfully, and yet with a certain brusqueness, occasioned perhaps by over-excited feeling. "Hard as it is for me to say it, Amabel, it is but just for me to tell you that after our parting here to-day we will meet only as strangers. Friendship between us would be mockery, and any closer relationship has become impossible."

It had cost him an immense effort to say these words, and he expected, fondly expected, I must admit, to see her colour change and her head droop. But instead of this she looked at him steadily for a moment, then slipped her hand down his arm till she reached his palm, which she pressed with sudden warmth, drawing him into the room as she did so, and shutting the door behind him. He was speechless, for she never had looked so handsome or so glowing. Instead of showing depression or humiliation even, she confronted him with a smile more dangerous than any display of grief, for it contained what it had hitherto lacked, positive and irresistible admiration. Her words were equally dangerous.

"I kiss your hand, as the Spaniards say." And she almost did so, with a bend of her head, which just allowed him to catch a glimpse of two startling dimples.

He was astounded. He thought he knew this woman well, but at this moment she was as incomprehensible to him as if he had never made a study of her caprices and sought an explanation for her ever-shifting expressions.

"I am sensible of the honour," said he, "but hardly understand how I have earned it."

Still that incomprehensible look of admiration continued to illumine her face.

"I did not know I could ever think so well of you," she declared. "If you do not take care, I shall end by loving you some day."

"Ah!" he ejaculated, his face contracting with sudden pain; "your love, then, is but a potentiality. Very well, Amabel, keep it so and you will be spared much misery. As for me, who have not been as wise as you--"

"Frederick!" She had come so near he did not have the strength to finish. Her face, with its indefinable charm, was raised to his, as she dropped these words one by one from her lips in lingering cadence: "Frederick--do you love me, then, so very much?"
He was angry; possibly because he felt his resolution failing him. "You know!" he hotly began, stepping back. Then with a sudden burst of feeling, that was almost like prayer, he resumed: "Do not tempt me, Amabel. I have trouble enough, without lamenting the failure of my first steadfast purpose."

"Ah!" she said, stopping where she was, but drawing him toward her by every witchery of which her mobile features were capable; "your generous impulse has strengthened into a purpose, has it? Well, I'm not worth it, Frederick."

More and more astounded, understanding her less than ever, but charmed by looks that would have moved an anchorite, he turned his head away in a vain attempt to escape an influence that was so rapidly undermining his determination.

She saw the movement, recognised the weakness it bespoke, and in the triumph of her heart allowed a low laugh to escape her.

Her voice, as I have before said, was unmusical though effective; but her laugh was deliciously sweet, especially when it was restrained to a mere ripple, as now.

"You will come to Springfield soon," she avowed, slipping from before him so as to leave the way to the door open.

"Amabel!" His voice was strangely husky, and the involuntary opening and shutting of his hands revealed the emotion under which he was labouring. "Do you love me? You have acknowledged it now and then, but always as if you did not mean it. Now you acknowledge that you may some day, and this time as if you did mean it. What is the truth? Tell me, without coquetry or dissembling, for I am in dead earnest, and—" He paused, choked, and turned toward the window where but a few minutes before he had taken that solemn oath. The remembrance of it seemed to come back with the movement. Flushing with a new agitation, he wheeled upon her sharply. "No, no," he prayed, "say nothing. If you swore you did not love me I should not believe it, and if you swore that you did I should only find it harder to repeat what must again be said, that a union between us can never take place. I have given my solemn promise to—"

"Well, well. Why do you stop? Am I so hard to talk to that the words will not leave your lips?"

"I have promised my father I will never marry you. He feels that he has grounds of complaint against you, and as I owe him everything—"

He stopped amazed. She was looking at him intently, that same low laugh still on her lips.

"Tell the truth," she whispered. "I know to what extent you consider your father's wishes. You think you ought not to marry me after what took place last night. Frederick, I like you for this evidence of consideration on your part, but do not struggle too relentlessly with your conscience. I can forgive much more in you than you think, and if you really love me—"

"Stop! Let us understand each other." He had turned mortally pale, and met her eyes with something akin to alarm. "What do you allude to in speaking of last night? I did not know there was anything said by us in our talk together—"

"I do not allude to our talk."

"Or—or in the one dance we had—"

"Frederick, a dance is innocent."

The word seemed to strike him with the force of a blow.

"Innocent," he repeated, "innocent?" becoming paler still as the full weight of her meaning broke gradually upon him.

"I followed you into town," she whispered, coming closer, and breathing the words into his ear. "But what I saw you do there will not prevent me from obeying you if you say: 'Follow me wherever I go, Amabel; henceforth our lives are one.'"

"My God!"

It was all he said, but it seemed to create a gulf between them. In the silence that followed, the evil spirit latent beneath her beauty began to make itself evident even in the smile which no longer called into view the dimples which belong to guileless mirth, while upon his face, after the first paralysing effect of her words had passed, there appeared an expression of manly resistance that betrayed a virtue which as yet had never appeared in his selfish and altogether reckless life.

That this was more than a passing impulse he presently made evident by lifting his hand and pushing her slowly back.

"I do not know what you saw me do," said he; "but whatever it was, it can make no difference in our relations."

Her whisper, which had been but a breath before, became scarcely audible.

"I did not pause at the gate you entered," said she. "I went in after you."

A gasp of irresistible feeling escaped him, but he did not take his eyes from her face.
"It was a long time before you came out," she went on, "but previous to that time the shade of a certain window was thrust aside, and---"

"Hush!" he commanded, in uncontrollable passion, pressing his hand with impulsive energy against her mouth. "Not another word of that, or I shall forget you are a woman or that I have ever loved you."

Her eyes, which were all she had remaining to plead with, took on a peculiar look of quiet satisfaction, and power. Seeing it, he let his hand fall and for the first time began to regard her with anything but a lover's eyes.

"I was the only person in sight at that time," she continued. "You have nothing to fear from the world at large."

"Fear?"

The word made its own echo; she had no need to emphasise it even by a smile. But she watched him as it sunk into his consciousness with an intentness it took all his strength to sustain. Suddenly her bearing and expression changed. The few remains of sweetness in her face vanished, and even the allurement which often lasts when the sweetness is gone, disappeared in the energy which now took possession of her whole threatening and inflexible personality.

"Marry me," she cried, "or I will proclaim you to be the murderer of Agatha Webb."

She had seen the death of love in his eyes.

VIII

"A DEVIL THAT UNDERSTANDS MEN"

Frederick Sutherland was a man of finer mental balance than he himself, perhaps, had ever realised. After the first few moments of stupefaction following the astounding alternative which had been given him, he broke out with the last sentence she probably expected to hear:

"What do you hope from a marriage with me, that to attain your wishes you thus sacrifice every womanly instinct?"

She met him on his own ground.

"What do I hope?" She actually glowed with the force of her secret desire. "Can you ask a poor girl like me, born in a tenement house, but with tastes and ambitions such as are usually only given to those who can gratify them? I want to be the rich Mr. Sutherland's daughter; acknowledged or unacknowledged, the wife of one who can enter any house in Boston as an equal. With a position like that I can rise to anything. I feel that I have the natural power and aptitude. I have felt it since I was a small child."

"And for that---" he began.

"And for that," she broke in, "I am quite willing to overlook a blot on your record. Confident that you will never repeat the risk of last night, I am ready to share the burden of your secret through life. If you treat me well, I am sure I can make that burden light for you."

With a quick flush and an increase of self-assertion, probably not anticipated by her, he faced the daring girl with a desperate resolution that showed how handsome he could be if his soul once got control of his body.

"Woman," he cried, "they were right; you are little less than a devil."

Did she regard it as a compliment? Her smile would seem to say so.

"A devil that understands men," she answered, with that slow dip of her dimples that made her smile so dangerous. "You will not hesitate long over this matter; a week, perhaps."

"I shall not hesitate at all. Seeing you as you are, makes my course easy. You will never share any burden with me as my wife."

Still she was not abashed.

"It is a pity," she whispered; "it would have saved you such unnecessary struggle. But a week is not long to wait. I am certain of you then. This day week at twelve o'clock, Frederick."

He seized her by the arm, and lost to everything but his rage, shook her with a desperate hand.

"Do you mean it?" he cried, a sudden horror showing itself in his face, notwithstanding his efforts to conceal it.

"I mean it so much," she assured him, "that before I came home just now I paid a visit to the copse over the way. A certain hollow tree, where you and I have held more than one tryst, conceals within its depths a package containing over one thousand dollars. Frederick, I hold your life in my hands."

The grasp with which he held her relaxed; a mortal despair settled upon his features, and recognising the impossibility of further concealing the effect of her words upon him, he sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands. She viewed him with an air of triumph, which brought back some of her beauty. When she spoke it was to say:

"If you wish to join me in Springfield before the time I have set, well and good. I am willing that the time of our separation should be shortened, but it must not be lengthened by so much as a day. Now, if you will excuse me, I will go and pack my trunks."

He shuddered; her voice penetrated him to the quick.
Drawing herself up, she looked down on him with a strange mixture of passion and elation.
"You need fear no indiscretion on my part, so long as our armistice lasts," said she. "No one can drag the truth
from me while any hope remains of your doing your duty by me in the way I have suggested."

And still he did not move.
"Frederick?"

Was it her voice that was thus murmuring his name? Can the tiger snarl one moment and fawn the next?
"Frederick, I have a final word to say--a last farewell. Up to this hour I have endured your attentions, or, let us
say, accepted them, for I always found you handsome and agreeable, if not the master of my heart. But now it is love
that I feel, love; and love with me is no fancy, but a passion--do you hear?--a passion which will make life a heaven
or hell for the man who has inspired it. You should have thought of this when you opposed me."

And with a look in which love and hatred contended for mastery, she bent and imprinted a kiss upon his
forehead. Next moment she was gone.

Or so he thought. But when, after an interval of nameless recoil, he rose and attempted to stagger from the place,
he discovered that she had been detained in the hall by two or three men who had just come in by the front door.

"Is this Miss Page?" they were asking.

"Yes, I am Miss Page--Amabel Page" she replied with suave politeness. "If you have any business with me, state
it quickly, for I am about to leave town."

"That is what we wish to prevent," declared a tall, thin young man who seemed to take the lead. "Till the inquest
has been held over the remains of Mrs. Webb, Coroner Talbot wishes you to regard yourself as a possible witness."

"Me?" she cried, with an admirable gesture of surprise and a wide opening of her brown eyes that made her look
like an astonished child. "What have I got to do with it?"

"You pointed out a certain spot of blood on the grass, and--well, the coroner's orders have to be obeyed, miss. You
cannot leave the town without running the risk of arrest."

"Then I will stay in it," she smiled. "I have no liking for arrests," and the glint of her eye rested for a moment on
Frederick. "Mr. Sutherland," she continued, as that gentleman appeared at the dining-room door, "I shall have to
impose upon your hospitality for a few days longer. These men here inform me that my innocent interest in pointing
out to you that spot of blood on Mrs. Webb's lawn has awakened some curiosity, and that I am wanted as a witness
by the coroner."

Mr. Sutherland, with a quick stride, lessened the distance between himself and these unwelcome intruders. "The
coroners wishes are paramount just now," said he, but the look he gave his son was not soon forgotten by the
spectators.

IX
A GRAND WOMAN

There was but one topic discussed in the country-side that day, and that was the life and character of Agatha
Webb.

Her history had not been a happy one. She and Philemon had come from Portchester some twenty or more years
before to escape the sorrows associated with their native town. They had left behind them six small graves in
Portchester churchyard; but though evidences of their affliction were always to be seen in the countenances of either,
they had entered with so much purpose into the life of their adopted town that they had become persons of note there
till Philemon's health began to fail, when Agatha quit all outside work and devoted herself exclusively to him. Of her
character and winsome personality we can gather some idea from the various conversations carried on that day from
Portchester Green to the shipyards in Sutherlandtown.

In Deacon Brainerd's cottage, the discussion was concerning Agatha's lack of vanity; a virtue not very common
at that time among the women of this busy seaport.

"For a woman so handsome," the good deacon was saying "(and I think I can safely call her the finest-featured
woman who ever trod these streets), she showed as little interest in dress as anyone I ever knew. Calico at home and
calico at church, yet she looked as much of a lady in her dark-sprigged gowns as Mrs. Webster in her silks or Mrs.
Parsons in her thousand-dollar sealskin."

As this was a topic within the scope of his eldest daughter's intelligence she at once spoke up: "I never thought
she needed to dress so plainly. I don't believe in such a show of poverty myself. If one is too poor to go decent, all
right; but they say she had more money than most anyone in town. I wonder who is going to get the benefit of it?"

"Why, Philemon, of course; that is, as long as he lives. He doubtless had the making of it."

"Is it true that he's gone clean out of his head since her death?" interposed a neighbour who had happened in.

"So they say. I believe widow Jones has taken him into her house."

"Do you think," asked a second daughter with becoming hesitation, "that he had anything to do with her death?
Some of the neighbours say he struck her while in one of his crazy fits, while others declare she was killed by some
stranger, equally old and almost as infirm."

"We won't discuss the subject," objected the deacon. "Time will show who robbed us of the greatest-hearted and most capable woman in these parts."

"And will time show who killed Batsy?" It was a morsel of a girl who spoke; the least one of the family, but the brightest. "I'm sorry for Batsy; she always gave me cookies when I went to see Mrs. Webb."

"Batsy was a good girl for a Swede," allowed the deacon's wife, who had not spoken till now. "When she first came into town on the spars of that wrecked ship we all remember, there was some struggle between Agatha and me as to which of us should have her. But I didn't like the task of teaching her the name of every pot and pan she had to use in the kitchen, so I gave her up to Agatha; and it was fortunate I did, for I've never been able to understand her talk to this day."

"I could talk with her right well," lisped the little one. "She never called things by their Swedish names unless she was worried; and I never worried her."

"I wonder if she would have worshipped the ground under your feet, as she did that under Agatha's?" asked the deacon, eying his wife with just the suspicion of a malicious twinkle in his eye.

"I am not the greatest-hearted and most capable woman in town," retorted his wife, clicking her needles as she went on knitting.

In Mr. Sprague's house on the opposite side of the road, Squire Fisher was relating some old tales of bygone Portchester days. "I knew Agatha when she was a girl," he avowed. "She had the grandest manners and the most enchanting smile of any rich or poor man's daughter between the coast and Springfield. She did not dress in calico then. She wore the gayest clothes her father could buy. her, and old Jacob was not without means to make his daughter the leading figure in town. How we young fellows did adore her, and what lengths we went to win one of her glorious smiles! Two of us, John and James Zabel, have lived bachelors for her sake to this very day; but I hadn't courage enough for that; I married and"-- something between a sigh and a chuckle filled out the sentence.

"What made Philemon carry off the prize? His good looks?"

"Yes, or his good luck. It wasn't his snap; of that you may be sure. James Zabel had the snap, and he was her first choice, too, but he got into some difficulty--I never knew just what it was, but it was regarded as serious at the time--and that match was broken off. Afterwards she married Philemon. You see, I was out of it altogether; had never been in it, perhaps; but there were three good years of my life in which I thought of little else than Agatha. I admired her spirit, you see. There was something more taking in her ways than in her beauty, wonderful as that was. She ruled us with a rod of iron, and yet we worshipped her. I have wondered to see her so meek of late. I never thought she would be satisfied with a brick-floored cottage and a husband of failing wits. But no one, to my knowledge, has ever heard a complaint from her lips; and the dignity of her afflicted wife-hood has far transcended the haughtiness of those days when she had but to smile to have all the youth of Portchester at her feet."

"I suppose it was the loss of so many children that reconciled her to a quiet life. A woman cannot close the eyes of six children, one after the other, without some modification taking place in her character."

"Yes, she and Philemon have been unfortunate; but she was a splendid looking girl, boys. I never see such grand-looking women now."

In a little one-storied cottage on the hillside a woman was nursing a baby and talking at the same time of Agatha Webb.

"I shall never forget the night my first baby fell sick," she faltered; "I was just out of bed myself, and having no nearer neighbours then than now, I was all alone on the hillside, Alec being away at sea. I was too young to know much about sickness, but something told me that I must have help before morning or my baby would die. Though I could just walk across the floor, I threw a shawl around me, took my baby in my arms, and opened the door. A blinding gust of rain blew in. A terrible storm was raging and I had not noticed it, I was so taken up with the child.

"I could not face that gale. Indeed, I was so weak I fell on my knees as it struck me and became dripping wet before I could drag myself inside. The baby began to moan and everything was turning dark before me, when I heard a strong, sweet voice cry out in the roadway:

"'Is there room in this house for me till the storm has blown by? I cannot see my way down the hillside.'"

"With a bursting heart I looked up. A woman was standing in the doorway, with the look of an angel in her eyes. I did not know her, but her face was one to bring comfort to the saddest heart. Holding up my baby, I cried:

"'My baby is dying; I tried to go for the doctor, but my knees bent under me. Help me, as you are a mother--I---'"

"'I must have fallen again, for the next thing I remember I was lying by the hearth, looking up into her face, which was bending over me. She was white as the rag I had tied about my baby's throat, and by the way her breast heaved she was either very much frightened or very sorry.

"'I wish you had the help of anyone else,' said she. 'Babies perish in my arms and wither at my breast. I cannot touch it, much as I yearn to. But let me see its face; perhaps I can tell you what is the matter with it.'"
"I showed her the baby's face, and she bent over it, trembling very much, almost as much indeed as myself. "It is very sick,' she said, 'but if you will use the remedies I advise, I think you can save it.' And she told me what to do, and helped me all she could; but she did not lay a finger on the little darling, though from the way she watched it I saw that her heart was set on his getting better. And he did; in an hour he was sleeping peacefully, and the terrible weight was gone from my heart and from hers. When the storm stopped, and she could leave the house, she gave me a kiss; but the look she gave him meant more than kisses. God must have forgotten her goodness to me that night when He let her die so pitiable a death."

At the minister's house they were commenting upon the look of serenity observable in her dead face.

"I have known her for thirty years," her pastor declared, "and never before have I seen her wear a look of real peace. It is wonderful, considering the circumstances. Do you think she was so weary of her life's long struggle that she hailed any release from it, even that of violence?"

A young man, a lawyer, visiting them from New York, was the only one to answer.

"I never saw the woman you are talking about," said he, "and know nothing of the circumstances of her death beyond what you have told me. But from the very incongruity between her expression and the violent nature of her death, I argue that there are depths to this crime which have not yet been sounded."

"What depths? It is a simple case of murder followed by theft. To be sure we do not yet know the criminal, but money was his motive; that is clear enough."

"Are you ready to wager that that is all there is to it?"

This was a startling proposition to the minister.

"You forget my cloth," said he.

The young man smiled. "That is true. Pardon me. I was only anxious to show how strong my conviction was against any such easy explanation of a crime marked by such contradictory features."

Two children on the Portchester road were exchanging boyish confidences.

"Do you know what I think about it?" asked one.

"Naw! How should I?"

"Well, I think old Mrs. Webb got the likes of what she sent. Don't you know she had six children once, and that she killed every one of them?"

"Killed'em--she?"

"Yes, I heard her tell granny once all about it. She said there was a blight on her house--I don't know what that is; but I guess it's something big and heavy--and that it fell on every one of her children, as fast as they came, and killed 'em."

"Then I'm glad I ben't her child."

Very different were the recollections interchanged between two middle-aged Portchester women.

"She was drinking tea at my house when her sister Sairey came running in with the news that the baby she had left at home wasn't quite right. That was her first child, you know."

"Yes, yes, for I was with her when that baby came," broke in the other, "and such joy as she showed when they told her it was alive and well I never saw. I do not know why she didn't expect it to be alive, but she didn't, and her happiness was just wonderful to see."

"Well, she didn't enjoy it long. The poor little fellow died young. But I was telling you of the night when she first heard he was ailing. Philemon had been telling a good story, and we were all laughing, when Sairey came in. I can see Agatha now. She always had the most brilliant eyes in the county, but that day they were superbly dazzling. They changed, though, at the sight of Sairey's face, and she jumped to meet her just as if she knew what Sairey was going to say before ever a word left her lips. 'My baby!' (I can hear her yet.) 'Something is the matter with the baby!' And though Sairey made haste to tell her that he was only ailing and not at all ill, she turned upon Philemon with a look none of us ever quite understood; he changed so completely under it, just as she had under Sairey's; and to neither did the old happiness ever return, for the child died within a week, and when the next came it died also, and the next, till six small innocents lay buried in yonder old graveyard."

"I know; and sad enough it was too, especially as she and Philemon were both fond of children. Well, well, the ways of Providence are past rinding out! And now she is gone and Philemon---"

"Ah, he'll follow her soon; he can't live without Agatha."

Nearer home, the old sexton was chattering about the six gravestones raised in Portchester churchyard to these six dead infants. He had been sent there to choose a spot in which to lay the mother, and was full of the shock it gave him to see that line of little stones, telling of a past with which the good people of Sutherlandtown found it hard to associate Philemon and Agatha Webb.

"I'm a digger of graves," he mused, half to himself and half to his old wife watching him from the other side of the hearthstone. "I spend a good quarter of my time in the churchyard; but when I saw those six little mounds, and
... read the inscriptions over them, I couldn't help feeling queer. Think of this! On the first tiny headstone I read these words:

STEPHEN,
Son of Philemon and Agatha Webb,
Died, Aged Six Weeks.
God be merciful to me a sinner!
"Now what does that mean? Did you ever hear anyone say?"
"No," was his old wife's answer. "Perhaps she was one of those Calvinist folks who believe babies go to hell if they are not baptised."

"But her children were all baptised. I've been told so; some of them before she was well out of her bed. 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' And the chick not six weeks old! Something queer about that, dame, if it did happen more than thirty years ago."

"What did you see over the grave of the child who was killed in her arms by lightning?"

"This:
"And he was not, for God took him."

Farmer Waite had but one word to say:

"She came to me when my Sissy had the smallpox; the only person in town who would enter my doors. More than that; when Sissy was up and I went to pay the doctor's bill I found it had been settled. I did not know then who had enough money and compassion to do this for me; now I do."

Many an act of kindness which had been secretly performed in that town during the last twenty years came to light on that day, the most notable of which was the sending of a certain young lad to school and his subsequent education as a minister.

But other memories of a sweeter and more secret nature still came up likewise, among them the following:

A young girl, who was of a very timid but deeply sensitive nature, had been urged into an engagement with a man she did not like. Though the conflict this occasioned her and the misery which accompanied it were apparent to everybody, nobody stirred in her behalf but Agatha. She went to see her, and, though it was within a fortnight of the wedding, she did not hesitate to advise the girl to give him up, and when the poor child said she lacked the courage, Agatha herself went to the man and urged him into a display of generosity which saved the poor, timid thing from a life of misery. They say this was no easy task for Agatha, and that the man was sullen for a year. But the girl's gratitude was boundless.

Of her daring, which was always on the side of right and justice, the stories were numerous; so were the accounts, mostly among the women, of her rare tenderness and sympathy for the weak and the erring. Never was a man talked to as she talked to Jake Cobleigh the evening after he struck his mother, and if she had been in town on the day when Clarissa Mayhew ran away with that Philadelphia adventurer many said it would never have happened, for no girl could stand the admonition, or resist the pleading, of this childless mother.

It was reserved for Mr. Halliday and Mr. Sutherland to talk of her mental qualities. Her character was so marked and her manner so simple that few gave attention to the intellect that was the real basis of her power. The two mentioned gentlemen, however, appreciated her to the full, and it was while listening to their remarks that Frederick was suddenly startled by some one saying to him:

"You are the only person in town who have nothing to say about Agatha Webb. Didn't you ever exchange any words with her?--for I can hardly believe you could have met her eye to eye without having some remark to make about her beauty or her influence."

The speaker was Agnes Halliday, who had come in with her father for a social chat. She was one of Frederick's earliest playmates, but one with whom he had never assimilated and who did not like him. He knew this, as did everyone else in town, and it was with some hesitation he turned to answer her.

"I have but one recollection," he began, and for the moment got no farther, for in turning his head to address his young guest he had allowed his gaze to wander through the open window by which she sat, into the garden beyond, where Amabel could be seen picking flowers. As he spoke, Amabel lifted her face with one of her suggestive looks. She had doubtless heard Miss Halliday's remark.

Recovering himself with an effort, he repeated his words: "I have but one recollection of Mrs. Webb that I can give you. Years ago when I was a lad I was playing on the green with several other boys. We had had some dispute about a lost ball, and I was swearing angrily and loud when I suddenly perceived before me the tall form and compassionate face of Mrs. Webb. She was dressed in her usual simple way, and had a basket on her arm, but she looked so superior to any other woman I had ever met that I did not know whether to hide my face in her skirts or to follow my first impulse and run away. She saw the emotion she had aroused, and lifting up my face by the chin, she said: 'Little boy, I have buried six children, all of them younger than you, and now my husband and myself live..."
alone. Often and often have I wished that one at least of these darling infants might have been spared us. But had God given me the choice of having them die young and innocent, or of growing up to swear as I have heard you to-day, I should have prayed God to take them, as He did. You have a mother. Do not break her heart by taking in vain the name of the God she reveres.' And with that she kissed me, and, strange as it may seem to you, in whatever folly or wickedness I have indulged, I have never made use of an oath from that day to this--and I thank God for it."

There was such unusual feeling in his voice, a feeling that none had ever suspected him capable of before, that Miss Halliday regarded him with astonishment and quite forgot to indulge in her usual banter. Even the gentlemen sat still, and there was a momentary silence, through which there presently broke the incongruous sound of a shrill and mocking laugh.

It came from Amabel, who had just finished gathering her bouquet in the garden outside.

**X**

**DETECTIVE KNAPP ARRIVES**

Meanwhile, in a small room at the court-house, a still more serious conversation was in progress. Dr. Talbot, Mr. Fenton, and a certain able lawyer in town by the name of Harvey, were in close discussion. The last had broken the silence of years, and was telling what he knew of Mrs. Webb's affairs.

He was a shrewd man, of unblemished reputation. When called upon to talk, he talked well, but he much preferred listening, and was, as now appeared, the safest repository of secrets to be found in all that region. He had been married three times, and could still count thirteen children around his board, one reason, perhaps, why he had learned to cultivate silence to such a degree. Happily, the time had come for him to talk, and he talked. This is what he said:

"Some fifteen years ago Philemon Webb came to me with a small sum of money, which he said he wished to have me invest for his wife. It was the fruit of a small speculation of his and he wanted it given unconditionally to her without her knowledge or that of the neighbours. I accordingly made out a deed of gift, which he signed with joyful alacrity, and then after due thought and careful investigation, I put the money into a new enterprise then being started in Boston. It was the best stroke of business I ever did in my life. At the end of a year it paid double, and after five had rolled away the accumulated interest had reached such a sum that both Philemon and myself thought it wisest to let her know what she was worth and what was being done with the money. I was in hopes it would lead her to make some change in her mode of living, which seemed to me out of keeping with her appearance and mental qualifications; while he, I imagine, looked for something more important still--a smile on the face which had somehow lost the trick of merriment, though it had never acquired that of ill nature. But we did not know Agatha; at least I did not. When she learned that she was rich, she looked at first awestruck and then heart-pierced. Forgetting me, or ignoring me, it makes no matter which, she threw herself into Philemon's arms and wept, while he, poor faithful fellow, looked as distressed as if he had brought news of failure instead of triumphant success. I suppose she thought of her buried children, and what the money would have been to her if they had lived; but she did not speak of them, nor am I quite sure they were in her thoughts when, after the first excitement was over, she drew back and said quietly, but in a tone of strong feeling, to Philemon: 'You meant me a happy surprise, and you must not be disappointed. This is heart money; we will use it to make our townsfolk happy.' I saw him glance at her dress, which was a purple calico. I remember it because of that look and because of the sad smile with which she followed his glance. 'Can we not afford now,' he ventured, 'a little show of luxury, or at least a ribbon or so for this beautiful throat of yours?' She did not answer him; but her look had a rare compassion in it, a compassion, strange to say, that seemed to be expended upon him rather than upon herself. Philemon swallowed his disappointment. 'Agatha is right,' he said to me. 'We do not need luxury. I do not know how I so far forgot myself as to mention it.' That was ten years ago, and every day since then her property has increased. I did not know then, and I do not know now, why they were both so anxious that all knowledge of their good fortune should be kept from those about them; but that it was to be &o kept was made very evident to me; and, notwithstanding all temptations to the contrary, I have refrained from uttering a word likely to give away their secret. The money, which to all appearance was the cause of her tragic and untimely death, was interest money which I was delegated to deliver her. I took it to her day before yesterday, and it was all in crisp new notes, some of them twenties, but most of them tens and fives. I am free to say there was not such another roll of fresh money in town."

"Warn all shopkeepers to keep a sharp lookout for new bills in the money they receive," was Dr. Talbot's comment to the constable. "Fresh ten-and twenty-dollar bills are none too common in this town. And now about her will. Did you draw that up, Harvey?"

"No. I did not know she had made one. I often spoke to her about the advisability of her doing so, but she always put me off. And now it seems that she had it drawn up in Boston. Could not trust her old friend with too many secrets, I suppose."

"So you don't know how her money has been left?"
"No more than you do."

Here an interruption occurred. The door opened and a slim young man, wearing spectacles, came in. At sight of him they all rose.

"Well?" eagerly inquired Dr. Talbot.

"Nothing new," answered the young man, with a consequential air. "The elder woman died from loss of blood consequent upon a blow given by a small, three-sided, slender blade; the younger from a stroke of apoplexy, induced by fright."

"Good! I am glad to hear my instincts were not at fault. Loss of blood, eh? Death, then, was not instantaneous?"

"No."

"Strange!" fell from the lips of his two listeners. "She lived, yet gave no alarm."

"None that was heard," suggested the young doctor, who was from another town.

"Or, if heard, reached no ears but Philemon's," observed the constable. "Something must have taken him upstairs."

"I am not so sure," said the coroner, "that Philemon is not answerable for the whole crime, notwithstanding our failure to find the missing money anywhere in the house. How else account for the resignation with which she evidently met her death? Had a stranger struck her, Agatha Webb would have struggled. There is no sign of struggle in the room."

"She would have struggled against Philemon had she had strength to struggle. I think she was asleep when she was struck."

"Ah! And was not standing by the table? How about the blood there, then?"

"Shaken from the murderer's fingers in fright or disgust."

"There was no blood on Philemon's fingers."

"No; he wiped them on his sleeve."

"If he was the one to use the dagger against her, where is the dagger? Should we not be able to find it somewhere about the premises?"

"He may have buried it outside. Crazy men are super naturally cunning."

"When you can produce it from any place inside that board fence, I will consider your theory. At present I limit my suspicions of Philemon to the half-unconscious attentions which a man of disordered intellect might give a wife bleeding and dying under his eyes. My idea on the subject is---"

"Would you be so kind as not to give utterance to your ideas until I have been able to form some for myself?" interrupted a voice from the doorway.

As this voice was unexpected, they all turned. A small man with sleek dark hair and expressionless features stood before them. Behind him was Abel, carrying a hand-bag and umbrella.

"The detective from Boston," announced the latter. Coroner Talbot rose.

"You are in good time," he remarked. "We have work of no ordinary nature for you."

The man failed to look interested. But then his countenance was not one to show emotion.

"My name is Knapp," said he. "I have had my supper, and am ready to go to work. I have read the newspapers; all I want now is any additional facts that have come to light since the telegraphic dispatches were sent to Boston. Facts, mind you; not theories. I never allow myself to be hampered by other persons' theories."

Not liking his manner, which was brusque and too self-important for a man of such insignificant appearance, Coroner Talbot referred him to Mr. Fenton, who immediately proceeded to give him the result of such investigations as he and his men had been able to make; which done, Mr. Knapp put on his hat and turned toward the door.

"I will go to the house and see for myself what is to be learned there," said he. "I may ask the privilege of going alone?" he added, as Mr. Fenton moved. "Abel will see that I am given admittance."

"Show me your credentials," said the coroner. He did so. "They seem all right, and you should be a man who understands his business. Go alone, if you prefer, but bring your conclusions here. They may need some correcting."

"Oh, I will return," Knapp nonchalantly remarked, and went out, having made anything but a favourable impression upon the assembled gentlemen.

"I wish we had shown more grit and tried to handle this thing ourselves," observed Mr. Fenton. "I cannot bear to think of that cold, bloodless creature hovering over our beloved Agatha."

"I wonder at Carson. Why should he send us such a man? Could he not see the matter demanded extraordinary skill and judgment?"

"Oh, this fellow may have skill. But he is so unpleasant. I hate to deal with folks of such fish-like characteristics. But who is this?" he asked as a gentle tap was heard at the door. "Why, it's Loton. What can he want here?"

The man whose presence in the doorway had called out this exclamation started at the sound of the doctor's heavy voice, and came very hesitatingly forward. He was of a weak, irritable type, and seemed to be in a state of
great excitement.

"I beg pardon," said he, "for showing myself. I don't like to intrude into such company, but I have something to
tell you which may be of use, sirs, though it isn't any great thing, either."

"Something about the murder which has taken place?" asked the coroner, in a milder tone. He knew Loton well,
and realised the advisability of encouragement in his case.

"The murder! Oh, I wouldn't presume to say anything about the murder. I'm not the man to stir up any such
subject as that. It's about the money--or some money--more money than usually falls into my till. It--it was rather
queer, sirs, and I have felt the flutter of it all day. Shall I tell you about it? It happened last night, late last night, sirs,
so late that I was in bed with my wife, and had been snoring, she said, four hours."

"What money? New money? Crisp, fresh bills, Loton?" eagerly questioned Mr. Fenton.

Loton, who was the keeper of a small confectionery and bakery store on one of the side streets leading up the
hill, shifted uneasily between his two interrogators, and finally addressed himself to the coroner:

"It was new money. I thought it felt so at night, but I was sure of it in the morning. A brand-new bill, sir, a--But
that isn't the queerest thing about it. I was asleep, sir, sound asleep, and dreaming of my courting days (for I asked
Sally at the circus, sirs, and the band playing on the hill made me think of it), when I was suddenly shook awake by
Sally herself, who says she hadn't slept a wink for listening to the music and wishing she was a girl again. 'There's a
man at the shop door,' cries she. 'He's a-calling of you; go and see what he wants.' I was mad at being wakened.
Dreaming is pleasant, specially when clowns and kissing get mixed up in it, but duty is duty, and so into the shop I
stumbled, swearing a bit perhaps, for I hadn't stopped for a light and it was as dark as double shutters could make it.
The hammering had become deafening. No let up till I reached the door, when it suddenly ceased.

"What is it?" I cried. 'Who's there and what do you want?'

'A trembling voice answered me. 'Let me in,' it said. 'I want to buy something to eat. For God's sake, open the
door!'

'I don't know why I obeyed, for it was late, and I did not know the voice, but something in the impatient rattling
of the door which accompanied the words affected me in spite of myself, and I slowly opened my shop to this
midnight customer.

'You must be hungry,' I began. But the person who had crowded in as soon as the opening was large enough
wouldn't let me finish.

'Bread! I want bread, or crackers, or anything that you can find easiest,' he gasped, like a man who had been
running. 'Here's money'; and he poked into my hand a bill so stiff that it rattled. 'It's more than enough,' he hastened
to say, as I hesitated over it, 'but never mind that; I'll come for the change in the morning."

"Who are you? I cried. 'You are not Blind Willy, I'm sure.'

'But his only answer was 'Bread!' while he leaned so hard against the counter I felt it shake.

'I could not stand that cry of 'Bread!' so I groped about in the dark, and found him a stale loaf, which I put into
his arms, with a short, 'There! Now tell me what your name is.'

'But at this he seemed to shrink into himself; and muttering something that might pass for thanks, he stumbled
towards the door and rushed hastily out. Running after him, I listened eagerly to his steps. They went up the hill."

'And the money? What about the money?' asked the coroner. 'Didn't he come back for the change?'

'No. I put it in the till, thinking it was a dollar bill. But when I came to look at it in the morning, it was a twenty;
yes, sirs, a twenty!"

This was startling. The coroner and the constable looked at each other before looking again at him.

"And where is that bill now?" asked the former. "Have you brought it with you?"

'I have, sir. It's been in and out of the till twenty times to- day. I haven't known what to do with it. I don't like to
think wrong of anybody, but when I heard that Mrs. Webb (God bless her!) was murdered last night for money, I
couldn't rest for the weight of this thing on my conscience. Here's the bill, sir. I wish I had let the old man rap on my
door till morning before I had taken it from him."

They did not share this feeling. A distinct and valuable clew seemed to be afforded them by the fresh, crisp bill
they saw in his hand. Silently Dr. Talbot took it, while Mr. Fenton, with a shrewd look, asked:

'What reasons have you for calling this mysterious customer old? I thought it was so dark you could not see
him."

The man, who looked relieved since he had rid himself of the bill, eyed the constable in some perplexity.

'I didn't see a feature of his face," said he, "and yet I'm sure he was old. I never thought of him as being anything
else."

"Well, we will see. And is that all you have to tell us?"

His nod was expressive, and they let him go.

An hour or so later Detective Knapp made his reappearance.
"Well," asked the coroner, as he came quietly in and closed the door behind him, "what's your opinion?"
"Simple case, sir. Murdered for money. Find the man with a flowing beard."

XI
THE MAN WITH A BEARD

There were but few men in town who wore long beards. A list was made of these and handed to the coroner, who regarded it with a grim smile.
"Not a man whose name is here would be guilty of a misdemeanour, let alone a crime. You must look outside of our village population for the murderer of Agatha Webb."
"Very likely, but tell me something first about these persons," urged Knapp. "Who is Edward Hope?"
"A watch repairer; a man of estimable character."
"And Sylvester Chubb?"
"A farmer who, to support his mother, wife, and seven children, works from morning till sundown on his farm, and from sundown till 11 o'clock at night on little fancy articles he cuts out from wood and sells in Boston."
"John Barker, Thomas Elder, Timothy Sinn?"
"All good men; I can vouch for every one of them."
"And John Zabel, James Zabel?"
"Irreproachable, both of them. Famous shipbuilders once, but the change to iron shipbuilding has thrown them out of business. Pity, too, for they were remarkable builders. By the by, Fenton, we don't see them at church or on the docks any more."
"No, they keep very much to themselves; getting old, like ourselves, Talbot."
"Lively boys once. We must hunt them up, Fenton. Can't bear to see old friends drop away from good company. But this isn't business. You need not pause over their names, Knapp."

But Knapp had slipped out.

We will follow him.

Walking briskly down the street, he went up the steps of a certain house and rang the bell. A gentleman with a face not entirely unknown to us came to the door.

The detective did not pause for preliminaries.
"Are you Mr. Crane?" he asked, "the gentleman who ran against a man coming out of Mrs. Webb's house last night?"
"I am Mr. Crane," was the slightly surprised rejoinder, "and I was run against by a man there, yes."
"Very well," remarked the detective, quietly, "my name is Knapp. I have been sent from Boston to look into this matter, and I have an idea that you can help me more than any other man here in Sutherlandtown. Who was this person who came in contact with you so violently? You know, even if you have been careful not to mention any names."
"You are mistaken. I don't know; I can't know. He wore a sweeping beard, and walked and acted like a man no longer young, but beyond that—"
"Mr. Crane, excuse me, but I know men. If you had no suspicion as to whom that person was you would not look so embarrassed. You suspect, or, at least, associate in your own mind a name with the man you met. Was it either of these you see written here?"

Mr. Crane glanced at the card on which the other had scribbled a couple of names, and started perceptibly.
"You have me," said he; "you must be a man of remarkable perspicacity."
The detective smiled and pocketed his card. The names he thus concealed were John Zabel, James Zabel.
"You have not said which of the two it was," Knapp quietly suggested.
"No," returned the minister, "and I have not even thought. Indeed, I am not sure that I have not made a dreadful mistake in thinking it was either. A glimpse such as I had is far from satisfactory; and they are both such excellent men—"
"Eight! You did make a mistake, of course, I have not the least doubt of it. So don't think of the matter again. I will find out who the real man was; rest easy."

And with the lightest of bows, Knapp drew off and passed as quickly as he could, without attracting attention, round the corner to the confectioner's.

Here his attack was warier. Sally Loton was behind the counter with her husband, and they had evidently been talking the matter over very confidentially. But Knapp was not to be awed by her small, keen eye or strident voice, and presently succeeded in surprising a knowing look on the lady's face, which convinced him that in the confidences between husband and wife a name had been used which she appeared to be less unwilling to impart than he. Knapp, consequently, turned his full attention towards her, using in his attack that oldest and subtlest weapon against the sex-- flattery.
"My dear madam," said he, "your good heart is apparent; your husband has confided to you a name which you, out of fear of some mistake, hesitate to repeat. A neighbourly spirit, ma'am, a very neighbourly spirit; but you should not allow your goodness to defeat the ends of justice. If you simply told us whom this man resembled we would be able to get some idea of his appearance."

"He didn't resemble anyone I know," growled Loton. "It was too dark for me to see how he looked."

"His voice, then? People are traced by their voices."

"I didn't recognise his voice."

Knapp smiled, his eye still on the woman.

"Yet you have thought of someone he reminded you of?"

The man was silent, but the wife tossed her head ever so lightly.

"Now, you must have had your reasons for that. No one thinks of a good and respectable neighbour in connection with the buying of a loaf of bread at mid-night with a twenty-dollar bill, without some positive reason."

"The man wore a beard. I felt it brush my hand as he took the loaf."

"Good! That is a point."

"Which made me think of other men who wore beards."

"As, for instance---"

The detective had taken from his pocket the card which he had used with such effect at the minister's, and as he said these words twirled it so that the two names written upon it fell under Sally Loton's inquisitive eyes. The look with which she read them was enough. John Zabel, James Zabel.

"Who told you it was either of these men?" she asked.

"You did," he retorted, pocketing the card with a smile.

"La, now! Samuel, I never spoke a word," she insisted, in anxious protest to her husband, as the detective slid quietly from the store.

XII

WATTLES COMES

The Hallidays lived but a few rods from the Sutherlands. Yet as it was dusk when Miss Halliday rose to depart, Frederick naturally offered his services as her escort.

She accepted them with a slight blush, the first he had ever seen on her face, or at least had ever noted there. It caused him such surprise that he forgot Amabel's presence in the garden till they came upon her at the gate.

"A pleasant evening," observed that young girl in her high, unmusical voice.

"Very," was Miss Halliday's short reply; and for a moment the two faces were in line as he held open the gate before his departing guest.

They were very different faces in feature and expression, and till that night he had never thought of comparing them. Indeed, the fascination which beamed from Amabel Page's far from regular features had put all others out of his mind, but now, as he surveyed the two girls, the candour and purity which marked Agnes's countenance came out so strongly under his glance that Amabel lost all attraction for him, and he drew his young neighbour hastily away.

Amabel noted the movement and smiled. Her contempt for Agnes Halliday's charms amounted to disdain.

She might have felt less confidence in her own had she been in a position to note the frequent glances Frederick cast at his old playmate as they proceeded slowly up the road. Not that there was any passion in them—he was too full of care for that; but the curiosity which could prompt him to turn his head a dozen times in the course of so short a walk, to see why Agnes Halliday held her face so persistently away from him, had an element of feeling in it that was more or less significant. As for Agnes, she was so unlike her accustomed self as to astonish even herself. Whereas she had never before walked a dozen steps with him without indulging in some sharp saying, she found herself disinclined to speak at all, much less to speak lightly. In mutual silence, then, they reached the gateway leading into the Halliday grounds. But Agnes having passed in, they both stopped and for the first time looked squarely at each other. Her eyes fell first, perhaps because his had changed in his contemplation of her. He smiled as he saw this, and in a half-careless, half-wistful tone, said quietly:

"Agnes, what would you think of a man who, after having committed little else but folly all his life, suddenly made up his mind to turn absolutely toward the right and to pursue it in face of every obstacle and every discouragement?"

"I should think," she slowly replied, with one quick lift of her eyes toward his face, "that he had entered upon the noblest effort of which man is capable, and the hardest. I should have great sympathy for that man, Frederick."

"Would you?" he said, recalling Amabel's face with bitter aversion as he gazed into the womanly countenance he had hitherto slighted as uninteresting. "It is the first kind word you have ever given me, Agnes. Possibly it is the first I have ever deserved."
And without another word he doffed his hat, saluted her, and vanished down the hillside.

She remained; remained so long that it was nearly nine when she entered the family parlour. As she came in her mother looked up and was startled at her unaccustomed pallor.

"Why, Agnes," cried her mother, "what is the matter?"

Her answer was inaudible. What was the matter? She dreaded, even feared, to ask herself.

Meantime a strange scene was taking place in the woods toward which she had seen Frederick go. The moon, which was particularly bright that night, shone upon a certain hollow where a huge tree lay. Around it the underbrush was thick and the shadow dark, but in this especial place the opening was large enough for the rays to enter freely. Into this circket of light Frederick Sutherland had come. Alone and without the restraint imposed upon him by watching eyes, he showed a countenance so wan and full of trouble that it was well it could not be seen by either of the two women whose thoughts were at that moment fixed upon him. To Amabel it would have given a throb of selfish hope, while to Agnes it would have brought a pang of despair which might have somewhat too suddenly interpreted to her the mystery of her own sensations.

He had bent at once to the hollow space made by the outspreading roots just mentioned, and was feeling with an air of confidence along the ground for something he had every reason to expect to find, when the shock of a sudden distrust seized him, and he flung himself down in terror, feeling and feeling again among the fallen leaves and broken twigs, till a full realisation of his misfortune reached him, and he was obliged to acknowledge that the place was empty.

Overwhelmed at his loss, aghast at the consequences it must entail upon him, he rose in a trembling sweat, crying out in his anger and dismay:

"She has been here! She has taken it!" And realising for the first time the subtlety and strength of the antagonist pitted against him, he forgot his new resolutions and even that old promise made in his childhood to Agatha Webb, and uttered oath after oath, cursing himself, the woman, and what she had done, till a casual glance at the heavens overhead, in which the liquid moon hung calm and beautiful, recalled him to himself. With a sense of shame, the keener that it was a new sensation in his breast, he ceased his vain repinings, and turning from the unhallowed spot, made his way with deeper and deeper misgivings toward a home made hateful to him now by the presence of the woman who was thus bent upon his ruin.

He understood her now. He rated at its full value both her determination and her power, and had she been so unfortunate as to have carried her imprudence to the point of surprising him by her presence, it would have taken more than the memory of that day's solemn resolves to have kept him from using his strength against her. But she was wise, and did not intrude upon him in his hour of anger, though who could say she was not near enough to hear the sigh which broke irresistibly from his lips as he emerged from the wood and approached his father's house?

A lamp was still burning in Mr. Sutherland's study over the front door, and the sight of it seemed to change for a moment the current of Frederick's thoughts. Pausing at the gate, he considered with himself, and then with a freer countenance and a lighter step was about to proceed inward, when he heard the sound of a heavy breather coming up the hill, and hesitated--why he hardly knew, except that every advancing step occasioned him more or less apprehension.

The person, whoever it was, stopped before reaching the brow of the hill, and, panting heavily, muttered an oath which Frederick heard. Though it was no more profane than those which had just escaped his own lips in the forest, it produced an effect upon him which was only second in intensity to the terror of the discovery that the money he had so safely hidden was gone.

Trembling in every limb, he dashed down the hill and confronted the person standing there.

"You!" he cried, "you!" And for a moment he looked as if he would like to fell to the ground the man before him.

But this man was a heavyweight of no ordinary physical strength and adroitness, and only smiled at Frederick's heat and threatening attitude.

"I thought I would be made welcome," he smiled, with just the hint of sinister meaning in his tone. Then, before Frederick could speak: "I have merely saved you a trip to Boston; why so much anger, friend? You have the money; of that I am positive."

"Hush! We can't talk here," whispered Frederick. "Come into the grounds, or, what would be better, into the woods over there."

"I don't go into any woods with you," laughed the other; "not after last night, my friend. But I will talk low; that's no more than fair; I don't want to put you into any other man's power, especially if you have the money."

"Wattles,"--Frederick's tone was broken, almost unintelligible,-- "what do you mean by your allusion to last night? Have you dared to connect me--"

"Pooh! Pooh!" interrupted the other, good-humouredly. "Don't let us waste words over a chance expression I
may have dropped. I don't care anything about last night's work, or who was concerned in it. That's nothing to me. All I want, my boy, is the money, and that I want devilish bad, or I would not have run up here from Boston, when I might have made half a hundred off a countryman Lewis brought in from the Canada wilds this morning."

"Wattles, I swear---"

But the hand he had raised was quickly drawn down by the other.

"Don't," said the older man, shortly. "It won't pay, Sutherland. Stage-talk never passed for anything with me. Besides, your white face tells a truer story than your lips, and time is precious. I want to take the 11 o'clock train back. So down with the cash. Nine hundred and fifty-five it is, but, being friends, we will let the odd five go."

"Wattles, I was to bring it to you to-morrow, or was it the next day? I do not want to give it to you to-night; indeed, I cannot, but--Wattles, wait, stop! Where are you going?"

"To see your father. I want to tell him that his son owes me a debt; that this debt was incurred in a way that lays him liable to arrest for forgery; that, bad as he thinks you, there are facts which can be picked up in Boston which would render Frederick Sutherland's continued residence under the parental roof impossible; that, in fact, you are a scamp of the first water, and that only my friendship for you has kept you out of prison so long. Won't that make a nice story for the old gentleman's ears!"

"Wattles--I--oh, my God! Wattles, stop a minute and listen to me. I have not got the money. I had enough this morning to pay you, had it legitimately, Wattles, but it has been stolen from me and--."

"I will also tell him," the other broke in, as quietly as if Frederick had not uttered a word, "that in a certain visit to Boston you lost five hundred dollars on one hand; that you lost it unfairly, not having a dollar to pay with; that to prevent scandal I be came your security, with the understanding that I was to be paid at the end of ten days from that night; that you thereupon played again and lost four hundred and odd more, so that your debt amounted to nine hundred and fifty-five dollars; that the ten days passed without payment; that, wanting money, I pressed you and even resorted to a threat or two; and that, seeing me in earnest, you swore that the dollars should be mine within five days; that instead of remaining in Boston to get them, you came here; and that this morning at a very early hour you telegraphed that the funds were to hand and that you would bring them down to me to-morrow. The old gentleman may draw conclusions from this, Sutherland, which may make his position as your father anything but grateful to him. He may even--Ah, you would try that game, would you?"

The young man had flung himself at the older man's throat as if he would choke off the words he saw trembling on his lips. But the struggle thus begun was short. In a moment both stood panting, and Frederick, with lowered head, was saying humbly:

"I beg pardon, Wattles, but you drive me mad with your suggestions and conclusions. I have not got the money, but I will try and get it. Wait here."

"For ten minutes, Sutherland; no longer! The moon is bright, and I can see the hands of my watch distinctly. At a quarter to ten, you will return here with the amount I have mentioned, or I will seek it at your father's hands in his own study."

Frederick made a hurried gesture and vanished up the walk. Next moment he was at his father's study door.

XIII

WATTLES GOES

Mr. Sutherland was busily engaged with a law paper when his son entered his presence, but at sight of that son's face, he dropped the paper with an alacrity which Frederick was too much engaged with his own thoughts to notice.

"Father," he began without preamble or excuse, "I am in serious and immediate need of nine hundred and fifty dollars. I want it so much that I ask you to make me a check for that amount to-night, conscious though I am that you have every right to deny me this request, and that my debt to you already passes the bound of presumption on my part and indulgence on yours. I cannot tell you why I want it or for what. That belongs to my past life, the consequences of which I have not yet escaped, but I feel bound to state that you will not be the loser by this material proof of confidence in me, as I shall soon be in a position to repay all my debts, among which this will necessarily stand foremost."

The old gentleman looked startled and nervously fingered the paper he had let fall. "Why do you say you will soon be in a position to repay me? What do you mean by that?"

The flash, which had not yet subsided from the young man's face, ebbed slowly away as he encountered his father's eye.

"I mean to work," he murmured. "I mean to make a man of myself as soon as possible."

The look which Mr. Sutherland gave him was more inquiring than sympathetic.

"And you need this money for a start?" said he.

Frederick bowed; he seemed to be losing the faculty of speech. The clock over the mantel had told off five of the precious moments.
"I will give it to you," said his father, and drew out his check-book. But he did not hasten to open it; his eyes still rested on his son.

"Now," murmured the young man. "There is a train leaving soon. I wish to get it away on that train."

His father frowned with natural distrust.

"I wish you would confide in me," said he.

Frederick did not answer. The hands of the clock were moving on.

"I will give it to you; but I should like to know what for."

"It is impossible for me to tell you," groaned the young man, starting as he heard a step on the walk without.

"Your need has become strangely imperative," proceeded the other. "Has Miss Page---"

Frederick took a step forward and laid his hand on his father's arm.

"It is not for her," he whispered. "It goes into other hands."

Mr. Sutherland, who had turned over the document as his son approached, breathed more easily. Taking up his pen, he dipped it in the ink. Frederick watched him with constantly whitening cheek. The step on the walk had mounted to the front door.

"Nine hundred and fifty?" inquired the father.

"Nine hundred and fifty," answered the son.

The judge, with a last look, stooped over the book. The hands of the clock pointed to a quarter to ten.

"Father, I have my whole future in which to thank you," cried Frederick, seizing the check his father held out to him and making rapidly for the door. "I will be back before midnight." And he flung himself down-stairs just as the front door opened and Wattles stepped in.

"Ah," exclaimed the latter, as his eye fell on the paper fluttering in the other's hand, "I expected money, not paper."

"The paper is good," answered Frederick, drawing him swiftly out of the house. "It has my father's signature upon it."

"Your father's signature?"

"Yes."

Wattles gave it a look, then slowly shook his head at Frederick.

"Is it as well done as the one you tried to pass off on Brady?"

Frederick cringed, and for a moment looked as if the struggle was too much for him. Then he rallied and eying Wattles firmly, said:

"You have a right to distrust me, but you are on the wrong track, Wattles. What I did once, I can never do again; and I hope I may live to prove myself a changed man. As for that check, I will soon prove its value in your eyes. Follow me up-stairs to my father."

His energy—the energy of despair, no doubt seemed to make an impression on the other.

"You might as well proclaim yourself a forger outright, as to force your father to declare this to be his signature," he observed.

"I know it," said Frederick.

"Yet you will run that risk?"

"If you oblige me."

Wattles shrugged his shoulders. He was a magnificent-looking man and towered in that old colonial hall like a youthful giant.

"I bear you no ill will," said he. "If this represents money, I am satisfied, and I begin to think it does. But listen, Sutherland. Something has happened to you. A week ago you would have put a bullet through my head before you would have been willing to have so compromised yourself. I think I know what that something is. To save yourself from being thought guilty of a big crime you are willing to incur suspicion of a small one. It's a wise move, my boy, but look out! No tricks with me or my friendship may not hold. Meantime, I cash this check to-morrow." And he swung away through the night with a grand-opera selection on his lips.

XIV

A FINAL TEMPTATION

Frederick looked like a man thoroughly exhausted when the final echo of this hateful voice died away on the hillside. For the last twenty hours he had been the prey of one harrowing emotion after another, and human nature could endure no more without rest.

But rest would not come. The position in which he found himself, between Amabel and the man who had just left, was of too threatening a nature for him to ignore. But one means of escape presented itself. It was a cowardly one; but anything was better than to make an attempt to stand his ground against two such merciless antagonists; so he resolved upon flight.
Packing up a few necessaries and leaving a letter behind him for his father, he made his way down the stairs of the now darkened house to a door opening upon the garden. To his astonishment he found it unlocked, but, giving little heed to this in his excitement, he opened it with caution, and, with a parting sigh for the sheltering home he was about to leave forever, stepped from the house he no longer felt worthy to inhabit.

His intention was to take the train at Portchester, and that he might reach that place without inconvenient encounters, he decided to proceed by a short cut through the fields. This led him north along the ridge that overlooks the road running around the base of the hill. He did not think of this road, however, or of anything, in fact, but the necessity of taking the very earliest train out of Portchester. As this left at 3.30 A.M., he realised that he must hasten in order to reach it. But he was not destined to take it or any other train out of Portchester that night, for when he reached the fence dividing Mr. Sutherland's grounds from those of his adjoining neighbour, he saw, drawn up in the moonlight just at the point where he had intended to leap the fence, the form of a woman with one hand held out to stop him.

It was Amabel.

Confounded by this check and filled with an anger that was nigh to dangerous, he fell back and then immediately sprang forward.

"What are you doing here?" he cried. "Don't you know that it is eleven o'clock and that my father requires the house to be closed at that hour?"

"And you?" was her sole retort; "what are you doing here? Are you searching for flowers in the woods, and is that valise you carry the receptacle in which you hope to put your botanical specimens?"

With a savage gesture he dropped the valise and took her fiercely by the shoulders.

"Where have you hidden my money?" he hissed. "Tell me, or---"

"Or what?" she asked, smiling into his face in a way that made him lose his grip.

"Or--or I cannot answer for myself," he proceeded, stammering. "Do you. think I can endure everything from you because you are a woman? No; I will have those bills, every one of them, or show myself your master. Where are they, you incarnate fiend?"

It was an unwise word to use, but she did not seem to heed it.

"Ah," she said softly, and with a lingering accent, as if his grasp of her had been a caress to which she was not entirely averse. "I did not think you would discover its loss so soon. When did you go to the woods, Frederick? And was Miss Halliday with you?"

He had a disposition to strike her, but controlled himself. Blows would not avail against the softness of this suave, yet merciless, being. Only a will as strong as her own could hope to cope with this smiling fury; and this he was determined to show, though, alas! he had everything to lose in a struggle that robbed her of nothing but a hope which was but a baseless fabric at best; for he was more than ever determined never to marry her.

"A man does not need to wait long to miss his own," said he. "And if you have taken this money, which, you do not deny, you have shown yourself very short-sighted, for danger lies closer to the person holding this money than to the one you vilify by your threats. This you will find, Amabel, when you come to make use of the weapon with which you have thought to arm yourself."

"Tut, tut!" was her contemptuous reply. "Do you consider me a child? Do I look like a babbling infant, Frederick?"

Her face, which had been lifted to his in saying this, was so illumined, both by her smile, which was strangely enchanting for one so evil, and by the moon-light, which so etherealises all that it touches, that he found himself forced to recall that other purer, truer face he had left at the honeysuckle porch to keep down a last wild impulse toward her, which would have been his undoing, both in this world and the next, as he knew.

"Or do I look simply like a woman?" she went on, seeing the impression she had made, and playing upon it. "A woman who understands herself and you and all the secret perils of the game we are both playing? If I am a child, treat me as a child; but if I am a woman----"

"Stand out of my way!" he cried, catching up his valise and striding furiously by her. "Woman or child, know that I will not be your plaything to be damned in this world and in the next."

"Are you bound for the city of destruction?" she laughed, not moving, but showing such confidence in her power to hold him back that he stopped in spite of himself. "If so, you are taking the direct road there and have only to hasten. But you had better remain in your father's house; even if you are something of a prisoner there, like my very insignificant self. The outcome will be more satisfactory, even if you have to share your future with me."

"And what course will you take," he asked, pausing with his hand on the fence, "if I decide to choose destruction without you, rather than perdition with you?"

"What course? Why, I shall tell Dr. Talbot just enough to show you to be as desirable a witness in the impending inquest as myself. The result I leave to your judgment. But you will not drive me to this extremity. You will come
"Woman, I will never come back. I shall have to dare your worst in a week and will begin by daring you now. I--"

But he did not leap the fence, though he made a move to do so, for at that moment a party of men came hurrying by on the lower road, one of whom was heard to say:

"I will bet my head that we will put our hand on Agatha Webb's murderer to-night. The man who shoves twenty-dollar bills around so heedlessly should not wear a beard so long it leads to detection."

It was the coroner, the constable, Knapp, and Abel on their way to the forest road on which lived John and James Zabel.

Frederick and Amabel confronted each other, and after a moment's silence returned as if by a common impulse towards the house.

"What have they got in their heads?" queried she. "Whatever it is, it may serve to occupy them till the week of your probation is over."

He did not answer. A new and overwhelming complication had been added to the difficulties of his situation.

XV

THE ZABELS VISITED

Let us follow the party now winding up the hillside.

In a deeply wooded spot on a side road stood the little house to which John and James Zabel had removed when their business on the docks had terminated. There was no other dwelling of greater or lesser pretension on the road, which may account for the fact that none of the persons now approaching it had been in that neighbourhood for years, though it was by no means a long walk from the village in which they all led such busy lives.

The heavy shadows cast by the woods through which the road meandered were not without their effect upon the spirits of the four men passing through them, so that long before they reached the opening in which the Zabel cottage stood, silence had fallen upon the whole party. Dr. Talbot especially looked as if he little relished this late visit to his old friends, and not till they caught a glimpse of the long sloping roof and heavy chimney of the Zabel cottage did he shake off the gloom incident to the nature of his errand.

"Gentlemen," said he, coming to a sudden halt, "let us understand each other. We are about to make a call on two of our oldest and most respectable townsfolk. If in the course of that call I choose to make mention of the twenty-dollar bill left with Loton, well and good, but if not, you are to take my reticence as proof of my own belief that they had nothing to do with it."

Two of the party bowed; Knapp, only, made no sign.

"There is no light in the window," observed Abel. "What if we find them gone to bed?"

"We will wake them," said the constable. "I cannot go back without being myself assured that no more money like that given to Loton remains in the house."

"Very well," remarked Knapp, and going up to the door before him, he struck a resounding knock sufficiently startling in that place of silence.

But loud as the summons was it brought no answer. Not only the moon-lighted door, but the little windows on each side of it remained shut, and there was no evidence that the knock had been heard.

"Zabel! John Zabel!" shouted the constable, stepping around the side of the house. "Get up, my good friends, and let an old crony in. James! John! Late as it is, we have business with you. Open the door; don't stop to dress."

But this appeal received no more recognition than the first, and after rapping on the window against which he had flung the words, he came back and looked up and down the front of the house.

It had a solitary aspect and was much less comfortable-looking than he had expected. Indeed, there were signs of poverty, or at least of neglect, about the place that astonished him. Not only had the weeds been allowed to grow over the doorstep, but from the unpainted front itself bits of boards had rotted away, leaving great gaps about the window-ledges and at the base of the sunken and well-nigh toppling chimney. The moon flooding the roof showed up all these imperfections with pitiless insistence, and the torn edges of the green paper shades that half concealed the rooms within were plainly to be seen, as well as the dismantled knocker which hung by one nail to the old cracked door. The vision of Knapp with his ear laid against this door added to the forlorn and sinister aspect of the scene, and gave to the constable, who remembered the brothers in their palmy days when they were the life and pride of the town, a by no means agreeable sensation, as he advanced toward the detective and asked him what they should do now.

"Break down the door!" was the uncompromising reply. "Or, wait! The windows of country houses are seldom fastened; let me see if I cannot enter by some one of them."

"Better not," said the coroner, with considerable feeling. "Let us exhaust all other means first." And he took hold of the knob of the door to shake it, when to his surprise it turned and the door opened. It had not been locked.
Rather taken aback by this, he hesitated. But Knapp showed less scruple. Without waiting for any man's permission, he glided in and stepped cautiously, but without any delay, into a room the door of which stood wide open before him. The constable was about to follow when he saw Knapp come stumbling back.

"Devilish work," he muttered, and drew the others in to see.

Never will any of these men forget the sight that there met their eyes.

On the floor near the entrance lay one brother, in a streak of moonlight, which showed every feature of his worn and lifeless face, and at a table drawn up in the centre of the room sat the other, rigid in death, with a book clutched in his hand.

Both, had been dead some time, and on the faces and in the aspects of both was visible a misery that added its own gloom to the pitiable and gruesome scene, and made the shining of the great white moon, which filled every corner of the bare room, seem a mockery well-nigh unendurable to those who contemplated it. John, dead in his chair! James, dead on the floor!

Knapp, who of all present was least likely to feel the awesome nature of the tragedy, was naturally the first to speak.

"Both wear long beards," said he, "but the one lying on the floor was doubtless Loton's customer. Ah!" he cried, pointing at the table, as he carefully crossed the floor. "Here is the bread, and- -" Even he had his moments of feeling. The appearance of that loaf had stunned him; one corner of it had been gnawed off.

"A light! let us have a light!" cried Mr. Fenton, speaking for the first time since his entrance. "These moonbeams are horrible; see how they cling to the bodies as if they delighted in lighting up these wasted and shrunk forms."

"Could it have been hunger?" began Abel, tremblingly following Knapp's every movement as he struck a match and lit a lantern which he had brought in his pocket.

"God help us all if it was!" said Fenton, in a secret remorse no one but Dr. Talbot understood. "But who could have believed it of men who were once so prosperous? Are you sure that one of them has gnawed this bread? Could it not have been--"

"These are the marks of human teeth," observed Knapp, who was examining the loaf carefully. "I declare, it makes me very uncomfortable, notwithstanding it's in the line of regular experiences." And he laid the bread down hurriedly.

Meantime, Mr. Fenton, who had been bending over another portion of the table, turned and walked away to the window.

"I am glad they are dead," he muttered. "They have at least shared the fate of their victims. Take a look under that old handkerchief lying beside the newspaper, Knapp."

The detective did so. A three-edged dagger, with a curiously wrought handle, met his eye. It had blood dried on its point, and was, as all could see, the weapon with which Agatha Webb had been killed.

XVI

LOCAL TALENT AT WORK

"Gentlemen, we have reached the conclusion of this business sooner than I expected," announced Knapp. "If you will give me just ten minutes I will endeavour to find that large remainder of money we have every reason to think is hidden away in this house."

"Stop a minute," said the coroner. "Let me see what book John is holding so tightly. Why," he exclaimed, drawing it out and giving it one glance, "it is a Bible."

Laying it reverently down he met the detective's astonished glance and seriously remarked:

"There is some incongruity between the presence of this book and the deed we believe to have been performed down yonder."

"None at all," quoth the detective. "It was not the man in the chair, but the one on the floor, who made use of that dagger. But I wish you had left it to me to remove that book, sir."

"You? and why? What difference would it have made?"

"I would have noticed between what pages his finger was inserted. Nothing like making yourself acquainted with every detail in a case like this."

Dr. Talbot gazed wistfully at the book. He would have liked to know himself on what especial passage his friend's eyes had last rested.

"I will stand aside," said he, "and hear your report when you are done."

The detective had already begun his investigations.

"Here is a spot of blood," said he. "See! on the right trouser leg of the one you call James. This connects him indisputably with the crime in which this dagger was used. No signs of violence on his body. She was the only one to receive a blow. His death is the result of God's providence."

"Or man's neglect," muttered the constable.
"There is no money in any of their pockets, or on either wasted figure," the detective continued, after a few minutes of silent search. "It must be hidden in the room, or--look through that Bible, sirs."

The coroner, glad of an opportunity to do something, took up the book, and ran hurriedly through its leaves, then turned it and shook it out over the table. Nothing fell out; the bills must be looked for elsewhere.

"The furniture is scanty," Abel observed, with an inquiring look about him.

"Very, very scanty," assented the constable, still with that biting remorse at his heart.

"There is nothing in this cupboard," pursued the detective, swinging open a door in the wall, "but a set of old china more or less nicked."

Abel started. An old recollection had come up. Some weeks before, he had been present when James had made an effort to sell this set. They were all in Warner's store, and James Zabel (he could see his easy attitude yet, and hear the off-hand tones with which he tried to carry the affair off) had said, quite as if he had never thought of it before: "By the by, I have a set of china at the house which came over in the Mayflower. John likes it, but it has grown to be an eyesore to me, and if you hear of anybody who has a fancy for such things, send him up to the cottage. I will let it go for a song." Nobody answered, and James disappeared. It was the last time, Abel remembered, that he had been seen about town.

"I can't stand it," cried the lad. "I can't stand it. If they died of hunger I must know it. I am going to take a look at their larder." And before anyone could stop him he dashed to the rear of the house.

The constable would have liked to follow him, but he looked about the walls of the room instead. John and James had been fond of pictures and had once indulged their fancy to the verge of extravagance, but there were no pictures on the walls now, nor was there so much as a candlestick on the empty and dust-covered mantel. Only on a bracket in one corner there was a worthless trinket made out of cloves and beads which had doubtless been given them by some country damsel in their young bachelor days. But nothing of any value anywhere, and Mr. Fenton felt that he now knew why they had made so many visits to Boston at one time, and why they always returned with a thinner valise than they took away. He was still dwelling on the thought of the depths of misery to which highly respectable folks can sink without the knowledge of the nearest neighbours, when Abel came back looking greatly troubled.

"It is the saddest thing I ever heard of," said he. "These men must have been driven wild by misery. This room is sumptuous in comparison to the ones at the back; and as for the pantry, there is not even a scrap there a mouse could eat. I struck a match and glanced into the flour barrel. It looked as if it had been licked. I declare, it makes a fellow feel sick."

The constable, with a shudder, withdrew towards the door.

"The atmosphere here is stifling," said he. "I must have a breath of out-door air."

But he was not destined to any such immediate relief. As he moved down the hall the form of a man darkened the doorway and he heard an anxious voice exclaim:

"Ah, Mr. Fenton, is that you? I have been looking for you everywhere."

It was Sweetwater, the young man who had previously shown so much anxiety to be of service to the coroner.

Mr. Fenton looked displeased.

"And how came you to find me here?" he asked.

"Oh, some men saw you take this road, and I guessed the rest."

"Oh, ah, very good. And what do you want, Sweetwater?"

The young man, who was glowing with pride and all alive with an enthusiasm which he had kept suppressed for hours, slipped up to the constable and whispered in his ear: "I have made a discovery, sir. I know you will excuse the presumption, but I couldn't bring myself to keep quiet and follow in that other fellow's wake. I had to make investigations on my own account, and--and"--stammering in his eagerness "they have been successful, sir. I have found out who was the murderer of Agatha Webb."

The constable, compassionating the disappointment in store for him, shook his head, with a solemn look toward the room from which he had just emerged. "You are late, Sweetwater," said he. "We have found him out ourselves, and he lies there, dead."

It was dark where they stood and Sweetwater's back was to the moonlight, so that the blank look which must have crossed his face at this announcement was lost upon the constable. But his consternation was evident from the way he thrust out either hand to steady himself against the walls of the narrow passageway, and Mr. Fenton was not at all surprised to hear him stammer out:

"Dead! He! Whom do you mean by he, Mr. Fenton?"

"The man in whose house we now are," returned the other. "Is there anyone else who can be suspected of this crime?"

Sweetwater gave a gulp that seemed to restore him to himself.
"There are two men living here, both very good men, I have heard. Which of them do you mean, and why do you think that either John or James Zabel killed Agatha Webb?"

For reply Mr. Fenton drew him toward the room in which such a great heart-tragedy had taken place.

"Look," said he, "and see what can happen in a Christian land, in the midst of Christian people living not fifty rods away. These men are dead, Sweetwater, dead from hunger. The loaf of bread you see there came too late. It was bought with a twenty-dollar bill, taken from Agatha Webb's cupboard drawer."

Sweetwater, to whom the whole scene seemed like some horrible nightmare, stared at the figure of James lying on the floor, and then at the figure of John seated at the table, as if his mind had failed to take in the constable's words.

"Dead!" he murmured. "Dead! John and James Zabel. What will happen next? Is the town under a curse?" And he fell on his knees before the prostrate form of James, only to start up again as he saw the eyes of Knapp resting on him.

"Ah," he muttered, "the detective!" And after giving the man from Boston a close look he turned toward Mr. Fenton.

"You said something about this good old man having killed Agatha Webb. What was it? I was too dazed to take it in."

Mr. Fenton, not understanding the young man's eagerness, but willing enough to enlighten him as to the situation, told him what reasons there were for ascribing the crime in the Webb cottage to the mad need of these starving men. Sweetwater listened with open eyes and confused bearing, only controlling himself when his eyes by chance fell upon the quiet figure of the detective, now moving softly to and fro through the room.

"But why murder when he could have had his loaf for the asking?" remonstrated Sweetwater. "Agatha Webb would have gone without a meal any time to feed a wandering tramp; how much more to supply the necessities of two of her oldest and dearest friends!"

"Yes," remarked Fenton, "but you forget or perhaps never knew that the master passion of these men was pride. James Zabel ask for bread! I can much sooner imagine him stealing it; yes, or striking a blow for it, so that the blow shut forever the eyes that saw him do it."

"You don't believe your own words, Mr. Fenton. How can you?" Sweetwater's hand was on the breast of the accused man as he spoke, and his manner was almost solemn. "You must not take it for granted," he went on, his green eyes twinkling with a curious light, "that all wisdom comes from Boston. We in Sutherlandtown have some sparks of it, if they have not yet been recognised. You are satisfied"--here he addressed himself to Knapp--"that the blow which killed Agatha Webb was struck by this respectable old man?"

Knapp smiled as if a child had asked him this question; but he answered him good-humouredly enough.

"You see the dagger lying here with which the deed was done, and you see the bread that was bought from Loton with a twenty-dollar bill of Agatha Webb's money. In these you can read my answer."

"Good evidence," acknowledged Sweetwater--"very good evidence, especially when we remember that Mr. Crane met an old man rushing from her gateway with something glittering in his hand. I never was so beat in my life, and yet--and yet--if I could have a few minutes of quiet thought all by myself I am certain I could show you that there is more to this matter than you think. Indeed, I know that there is, but I do not like to give my reasons till I have conquered the difficulties presented by these men having had the twenty-dollar bill."

"What fellow is this?" suddenly broke in Knapp.

"A fiddler, a nobody," quietly whispered Mr. Fenton in his ear.

Sweetwater heard him and changed in a twinkling from the uncertain, half-baffled, wholly humble person they had just seen, to a man with a purpose strong enough to make him hold up his head with the best.

"I am a musician," he admitted, "and I play on the violin for money whenever the occasion offers, something which you will yet congratulate yourselves upon if you wish to reach the root of this mysterious and dastardly crime. But that I am a nobody I deny, and I even dare to hope that you will agree with me in this estimate of myself before this very night is over. Only give me an opportunity for considering this subject, and the permission to walk for a few minutes about this house."

"That is my prerogative," protested the detective firmly, but without any display of feeling. "I am the man employed to pick up whatever clews the place may present."

"Have you picked up all that are to be found in this room?" asked Sweetwater calmly.

Knapp shrugged his shoulders. He was very well satisfied with himself.

"Then give me a chance," prayed Sweetwater. "Mr. Fenton," he urged more earnestly, "I am not the fool you take me for. I feel, I know, I have a genius for this kind of thing, and though I am not prepossessing to look at, and though I do play the fiddle, I swear there are depths to this affair which none of you have as yet sounded. Sirs, where are the nine hundred and eighty dollars in bills which go to make up the clean thousand that was taken from the
small drawer at the back of Agatha Webb's cupboard?"

"They are in some secret hiding-place, no doubt, which we will presently come upon as we go through the house," answered Knapp.

"Umph! Then I advise you to put your hand on them as soon as possible," retorted Sweetwater. "I will confine myself to going over the ground you have already investigated." And with a sudden ignoring of the others' presence, which could only have sprung from an intense egotism or from an overwhelming belief in his own theory, he began an investigation of the room that threw the other's more commonplace efforts entirely in the shade.

Knapp, with a slight compression of his lips, which was the sole expression of anger he ever allowed himself, took up his hat and made his bow to Mr. Fenton.

"I see," said he, "that the sympathy of those present is with local talent. Let local talent work, then, sir, and when you feel the need of a man of training and experience, send to the tavern on the docks, where I will be found till I am notified that my services are no longer required."

"No, no!" protested Mr. Fenton. "This boy's enthusiasm will soon evaporate. Let him fuss away if he will. His petty business need not interrupt us."

"But he understands himself," whispered Knapp. "I should think he had been on our own force for years."

"All the more reason to see what he's up to. Wait, if only to satisfy your curiosity. I shan't let many minutes go by before I pull him up."

Knapp, who was really of a cold and unimpressionable temperament, refrained from further argument, and confined himself to watching the young man, whose movements seemed to fascinate him.

"Astonishing!" Mr. Fenton heard him mutter to himself. "He's more like an eel than a man." And indeed the way Sweetwater wound himself out and in through that room, seeing everything that came under his eye, was a sight well worth any professional's attention. Pausing before the dead man on the floor, he held the lantern close to the white, worn face. "Ha!" said he, picking something from the long beard, "here's a crumb of that same bread. Did you see that, Mr. Knapp?"

The question was so sudden and so sharp that the detective came near replying to it; but he bethought himself, and said nothing.

"That settles which of the two gnawed the loaf," continued Sweetwater.

The next minute he was hovering over the still more pathetic figure of John, sitting in the chair.

"Sad! Sad!" he murmured.

Suddenly he laid his finger on a small rent in the old man's faded vest. "You saw this, of course," said he, with a quick glance over his shoulder at the silent detective.

No answer, as before.

"It's a new slit," declared the officious youth, looking closer, "and--yes--there's blood on its edges. Here, take the lantern, Mr. Fenton, I must see how the skin looks underneath. Oh, gentlemen, no shirt! The poorest dockhand has a shirt! Brocaded vest and no shirt; but he's past our pity now. Ah, only a bruise over the heart. Sirs, what did you make out of this?"

As none of them had even seen it, Knapp was not the only one to remain silent.

"Shall I tell you what I make out of it?" said the lad, rising hurriedly from the floor, which he had as hurriedly examined. "This old man has tried to take his life with the dagger already wet with the blood of Agatha Webb. But his arm was too feeble. The point only pierced the vest, wiping off a little blood in its passage, then the weapon fell from his hand and struck the floor, as you will see by the fresh dent in the old board I am standing on. Have you anything to say against these simple deductions?"

Again the detective opened his lips and might have spoken, but Sweetwater gave him no chance.

"Where is the letter he was writing?" he demanded. "Have any of you seen any paper lying about here?"

"He was not writing," objected Knapp; "he was reading; reading in that old Bible you see there."

Sweetwater caught up the book, looked it over, and laid it down, with that same curious twinkle of his eye they had noted in him before.

"He was writing," he insisted. "See, here is his pencil." And he showed them the battered end of a small lead-pencil lying on the edge of his chair.

"Writing at some time," admitted Knapp.

"Writing just before the deed," insisted Sweetwater. "Look at the fingers of his right hand. They have not moved since the pencil fell out of them."

"The letter, or whatever it was, shall be looked for," declared the constable.

Sweetwater bowed, his eyes roving restlessly into every nook and corner of the room.

"James was the stronger of the two," he remarked; "yet there is no evidence that he made any attempt at suicide."

"How do you know that it was suicide John attempted?" asked someone. "Why might not the dagger have fallen
from James's hand in an effort to kill his brother?"

"Because the dent in the floor would have been to the right of the chair instead of to the left," he returned. "Besides, James's hand would not have failed so utterly, since he had strength to pick up the weapon afterward and lay it where you found it."

"True, we found it lying on the table," observed Abel, scratching his head in forced admiration of his old schoolmate.

"All easy, very easy," Sweetwater remarked, seeing the wonder in every eye. "Matters like those are for a child's reading, but what is difficult, and what I find hard to come by, is how the twenty-dollar bill got into the old man's hand. He found it here, but how--"

"Found it here? How do you know that?"

"Gentlemen, that is a point I will make clear to you later, when I have laid my hand on a certain clew I am anxiously seeking. You know this is new work for me and I have to advance warily. Did any of you gentlemen, when you came into this room, detect the faintest odour of any kind of perfume?"

"Perfume?" echoed Abel, with a glance about the musty apartment. "Rats, rather."

Sweetwater shook his head with a discouraged air, but suddenly brightened, and stepping quickly across the floor, paused at one of the windows. It was that one in which the shade had been drawn.

Peering at this shade he gave a grunt.

"You must excuse me for a minute," said he; "I have not found what I wanted in this room and now must look outside for it. Will someone bring the lantern?"

"I will," volunteered Knapp, with grim good humour. Indeed, the situation was almost ludicrous to him.

"Bring it round the house, then, to the ground under this window," ordered Sweetwater, without giving any sign that he noticed or even recognised the other's air of condescension. "And, gentlemen, please don't follow. It's footsteps I am after, and the fewer we make ourselves, the easier will it be for me to establish the clew I am after."

Mr. Fenton stared. What had got into the fellow?

The lantern gone, the room resumed its former appearance.

Abel, who had been much struck by Sweetwater's mysterious manoeuvres, drew near Dr. Talbot and whispered in his ear: "We might have done without that fellow from Boston."

To which the coroner replied:

"Perhaps so, and perhaps not. Sweetwater has not yet proved his case; let us wait till he explains himself." Then, turning to the constable, he showed him an old-fashioned miniature, which he had found lying on James's breast, when he made his first examination. It was set with pearls and backed with gold and was worth many meals, for the lack of which its devoted owner had perished.

"Agatha Webb's portrait," explained Talbot, "or rather Agatha Gilchrist's; for I presume this was painted when she and James were lovers."

"She was certainly a beauty," commented Fenton, as he bent over the miniature in the moonlight. "I do not wonder she queened it over the whole country."

"He must have worn it where I found it for the last forty years," mused the doctor. "And yet men say that love is a fleeting passion. Well, after coming upon this proof of devotion, I find it impossible to believe James Zabel accountable for the death of one so fondly remembered. Sweetwater's instinct was truer than Knapp's."

"Or ours," muttered Fenton.

"Gentlemen," interposed Abel, pointing to a bright spot that just then made its appearance in the dark outline of the shade before alluded to, "do you see that hole? It was the sight of that prick in the shade which sent Sweetwater outside looking for footprints. See! Now his eye is to it" (as the bright spot became suddenly eclipsed). "We are under examination, sirs, and the next thing we will hear is that he's not the only person who's been peering into this room through that hole."

He was so far right that the first words of Sweetwater on his re-entrance were: "It's all O. K., sirs. I have found my missing clew. James Zabel was not the only person who came up here from the Webb cottage last night. And turning to Knapp, who was losing some of his supercilious manner, he asked, with significant emphasis: "If, of the full amount stolen from Agatha Webb, you found twenty dollars in the possession of one man and nine hundred and eighty dollars in the possession of another, upon which of the two would you fix as the probable murderer of the good woman?"

"Upon him who held the lion's share, of course."

"Very good; then it is not in this cottage you will find the person most wanted. You must look--But there! first let me give you a glimpse of the money. Is there anyone here ready to accompany me in search of it? I shall have to take him a quarter of a mile farther up-hill."

"You have seen the money? You know where it is?" asked Dr. Talbot and Mr. Fenton in one breath.
"Gentlemen, I can put my hand on it in ten minutes."

At this unexpected and somewhat startling statement Knapp looked at Dr. Talbot and Dr. Talbot looked at the constable, but only the last spoke.

"That is saying a good deal. But no matter. I am willing to credit the assertion. Lead on, Sweetwater; I'll go with you."

Sweetwater seemed to grow an inch taller in his satisfied vanity. "And Dr. Talbot?" he suggested.

But the coroner's duty held him to the house and he decided not to accompany them. Knapp and Abel, however, yielded to the curiosity which had been aroused by these extraordinary promises, and presently the four men mentioned started on their small expedition up the hill.

Sweetwater headed the procession. He had admonished silence, and his wish in this regard was so well carried out that they looked more like a group of spectres moving up the moon-lighted road, than a party of eager and impatient men. Not till they turned into the main thoroughfare did anyone speak. Then Abel could no longer restrain himself and he cried out:

"We are going to Mr. Sutherland's."

But Sweetwater quickly undeceived him.

"No," said he, "only into the woods opposite his house."

But at this Mr. Fenton drew him back.

"Are you sure of yourself?" he said. "Have you really seen this money and is it concealed in this forest?"

"I have seen the money," Sweetwater solemnly declared, "and it is hidden in these woods."

Mr. Fenton dropped his arm, and they moved on till their way was blocked by the huge trunk of a fallen tree.

"It is here we are to look," cried Sweetwater, pausing and motioning Knapp to turn his lantern on the spot where the shadows lay thickest. "Now, what do you see?" he asked.

"The upturned roots of a great tree," said Mr. Fenton.

"And under them?"

"A hole, or, rather, the entrance to one."

"Very good; the money is in that hole. Pull it out, Mr. Fenton."

The assurance with which Sweetwater spoke was such that Mr. Fenton at once stooped and plunged his hand into the hole. But when, after a hurried search, he drew it out again, there was nothing in it; the place was empty. Sweetwater stared at Mr. Fenton amazed.

"Don't you find anything?" he asked. "Isn't there a roll of bills in that hole?"

"No," was the gloomy answer, after a renewed attempt and a second disappointment. "There is nothing to be found here. You are labouring under some misapprehension, Sweetwater."

"But I can't be. I saw the money; saw it in the hand of the person who hid it there. Let me look for it, constable. I will not give up the search till I have turned the place topsy-turvy."

Kneeling down in Mr. Fenton's place, he thrust his hand into the hole. On either side of him peered the faces of Mr. Fenton and Knapp. (Abel had slipped away at a whisper from Sweetwater.) They were lit with a similar expression of anxious interest and growing doubt. His own countenance was a study of conflicting and by no means cheerful emotions. Suddenly his aspect changed. With a quick twist of his lithe, if awkward, body, he threw himself lengthwise on the ground, and began tearing at the earth inside the hole, like a burrowing animal.

"I cannot be mistaken. Nothing will make me believe it is not here. It has simply been buried deeper than I thought. Ah! What did I tell you? See here! And see here!"

Bringing his hands into the full blaze of the light, he showed two rolls of new, crisp bills.

"They were lying under half a foot of earth," said he, "but if they had been buried as deep as Grannie Fuller's well, I'd have unearthed them."

Meantime Mr. Fenton was rapidly counting one roll and Knapp the other. The result was an aggregate sum of nine hundred and eighty dollars, just the amount Sweetwater had promised to show them.

"A good stroke of business," cried Mr. Fenton. "And now, Sweetwater, whose is the hand that buried this treasure? Nothing is to be gained by preserving silence on this point any longer."

Instantly the young man became very grave. With a quick glance around which seemed to embrace the secret recesses of the forest rather than the eager faces bending towards him, he lowered his voice and quietly said:

"The hand that buried this money under the roots of this old tree is the same which you saw pointing downward at the spot of blood in Agatha Webb's front yard."

"You do not mean Annabel Page!" cried Mr. Fenton, with natural surprise.

"Yes, I do; and I am glad it is you who have named her."

XVII

THE SLIPPERS, THE FLOWER, AND WHAT SWEETWATER MADE OF THEM
A half-hour later these men were all closeted with Dr. Talbot in the Zabel kitchen. Abel had rejoined them, and Sweetwater was telling his story with great earnestness and no little show of pride.

"Gentlemen, when I charge a young woman of respectable appearance and connections with such a revolting crime as murder, I do so with good reason, as I hope presently to make plain to you all.

"Gentlemen, on the night and at the hour Agatha Webb was killed, I was playing with four other musicians in Mr. Sutherland's hallway. From the place where I sat I could see what went on in the parlour and also have a clear view of the passageway leading down to the garden door. As the dancing was going on in the parlour I naturally looked that way most, and this is how I came to note the eagerness with which, during the first part of the evening, Frederick Sutherland and Amabel Page came together in the quadrilles and country dances. Sometimes she spoke as she passed him, and sometimes he answered, but not always, although he never failed to show he was pleased with her or would have been if something--perhaps it was his lack of confidence in her, sirs--had not stood in the way of a perfect understanding. She seemed to notice that he did not always respond, and after a while showed less inclination to speak herself, though she did not fail to watch him, and that intently. But she did not watch him any more closely than I did her, though I little thought at the time what would come of my espionage. She wore a white dress and white shoes, and was as coquetish and seductive as the evil one makes them. Suddenly I missed her. She was in the middle of the dance one minute and entirely out of it the next. Naturally I supposed her to have slipped aside with Frederick Sutherland, but he was still in sight, looking so pale and so abstracted, however, I was sure the young miss was up to some sort of mischief. But what mischief? Watching and waiting, but no longer confining my attention to the parlour, I presently espied her stealing along the passageway I have mentioned, carrying a long cloak which she rolled up and hid behind the open door. Then she came back humming a gay little song which didn't deceive me for a moment. 'Good!' thought I, 'she and that cloak will soon join company.' And they did. As we were playing the Harebell mazurka I again caught sight of her stealthy white figure in that distant doorway. Seizing the cloak, she wrapped it round her, and with just one furtive look backwards, seen, I warrant, by no one but myself, she vanished in the outside dark. 'Now to note who follows her!' But nobody followed her. This struck me as strange, and having a natural love for detective work, in spite of my devotion to the arts, I consulted the clock at the foot of the stairs, and noting that it was half-past eleven, scribbled the hour on the margin of my music, with the intention of seeing how long my lady would linger outside alone. Gentlemen, it was two hours before I saw her face again. How she got back into the house I do not know. It was not by the garden door, for my eye seldom left it; yet at or near half-past one I heard her voice on the stair above me and saw her descend and melt into the crowd as if she had not been absent from it for more than five minutes. A half-hour later I saw her with Frederick again. They were dancing, but not with the same spirit as before, and even while I watched them they separated. Now where was Miss Page during those two long hours? I think I know, and it is time I unburdened myself to the police.

"But first I must inform you of a small discovery I made while the dance was still in progress. Miss Page had descended the stairs, as I have said, from what I now know to have been her own room. Her dress was, in all respects, the same as before, with one exception--her white slippers had been exchanged for blue ones. This seemed to show that they had been rendered unserviceable, or at least unsightly, by the walk she had taken. This in itself was not remarkable nor would her peculiar escapade have made more than a temporary impression upon my curiosity if she had not afterward shown in my presence such an unaccountable and extraordinary interest in the murder which had taken place in the town below during the very hours of her absence from Mr. Sutherland's ball. This, in consideration of her sex, and her being a stranger to the person attacked, was remarkable, and, though perhaps I had no business to do what I did, I no sooner saw the house emptied of master and servants than I stole softly back, and climbed the stairs to her room. Had no good followed this intrusion, which, I am quite ready to acknowledge, was a trifle presumptuous, I would have held my peace in regard to it; but as I did make a discovery there, which has, as I believe, an important bearing on this affair, I have forced myself to mention it. The lights in the house having been left burning, I had no difficulty in finding her apartment. I knew it by the folderols scattered about. But I did not stop to look at them. I was on a search for her slippers, and presently came upon them, thrust behind an old picture in the dimmest corner of the room. Taking them down, I examined them closely. They were not only soiled, gentlemen, but dreadfully cut and rubbed. In short, they were ruined, and, thinking that the young lady herself would be glad to be rid of them, I quietly put them into my pocket, and carried them to my own home. Abel has just been for them, so you can see them for yourselves, and if your judgment coincides with mine, you will discover something more on them than mud."

Dr. Talbot, though he stared a little at the young man's confessed theft, took the slippers Abel was holding out and carefully turned them over. They were, as Sweetwater had said, grievously torn and soiled, and showed, beside several deep earth-stains, a mark or two of a bright red colour, quite unmistakable in its character.

"Blood," declared the coroner. "There is no doubt about it. Miss Page was where blood was spilled last night."

"I have another proof against her," Sweetwater went on, in full enjoyment of his prominence amongst these men,
who, up to now, had barely recognised his existence. "When, full of the suspicion that Miss Page had had a hand in
the theft which had taken place at Mrs. Webb's house, if not in the murder that accompanied it, I hastened down to
the scene of the tragedy, I met this young woman issuing from the front gate. She had just been making herself
conspicuous by pointing out a trail of blood on the grass plot. Dr. Talbot, who was there, will remember how she
looked on that occasion; but I doubt if he noticed how Abel here looked, or so much as remarked the faded flower
the silly boy had stuck in his buttonhole."

"--me if I did!" ejaculated the coroner.

"Yet that flower has a very important bearing on this case. He had found it, as he will tell you, on the floor near
Batsy's skirts, and as soon as I saw it in his coat, I bade him take it out and keep it, for, gentlemen, it was a very
uncommon flower, the like of which can only be found in this town in Mr. Sutherland's conservatory. I remember
seeing such a one in Miss Page's hair, early in the evening. Have you that flower about you, Abel?"

Abel had, and being filled with importance too, showed it to the doctor and to Mr. Fenton. It was withered and
faded in hue, but it was unmistakably an orchid of the rarest description.

"It was lying near Batsy," explained Abel. "I drew Mr. Fenton's attention to it at the time, but he scarcely noticed
it."

"I will make up for my indifference now," said that gentleman.

"I should have been shown that flower," put in Knapp.

"So you should," acknowledged Sweetwater, "but when the detective instinct is aroused it is hard for a man to be
just to his rivals; besides, I was otherwise occupied. I had Miss Page to watch. Happily for me, you had decided that
she should not be allowed to leave town till after the inquest, and so my task became easy. This whole day I have
spent in sight of Mr. Sutherland's house, and at nightfall I was rewarded by detecting her end a prolonged walk in
the garden by a hurried dash into the woods opposite. I followed her and noted carefully all that she did. As she had
just seen Frederick Sutherland and Miss Halliday disappear up the road together, she probably felt free to do as she
liked, for she walked very directly to the old tree we have just come from, and kneeling down beside it pulled from
the hole underneath something which rattled in her hand with that peculiar sound we associate with fresh bank-
notes. I had approached her as near as I dared, and was peering around a tree trunk, when she stooped down again
and plunged both hands into the hole. She remained in this position so long that I did not know what to make of it.
But she rose at last and turned toward home, laughing to herself in a wicked but pleased way that did not tend to
make me think any more of her. The moon was shining very brightly by this time and I could readily perceive every
detail of her person. She held her hands out before her and shook them more than once as she trod by me, so I was
sure there was nothing in them, and this is why I was so confident we should find the money still in the hole.

"When I saw her enter the house, I set out to find you, but the court-house room was empty, and it was a long
time before I learned where to look for you. But at last a fellow at Brighton's corner said he saw four men go by on
their way to Zabel's cottage, and on the chance of finding you amongst them, I turned down here. The shock you
gave me in announcing that you had discovered the murderer of Agatha Webb knocked me over for a moment, but
now I hope you realise, as I do, that this wretched man could never have had an active hand in her death,
notwithstanding the fact that one of the stolen bills has been found in his possession. For, and here is my great point,
the proof is not wanting that Miss Page visited this house as well as Mrs. Webb's during her famous escapade; or at
least stood under the window beneath which I have just been searching. A footprint can be seen there, sirs, a very
plain footprint, and if Dr. Talbot will take the trouble to compare it with the slipper he holds in his hand, he will find
it to have been made by the foot that wore that slipper."

The coroner, with a quick glance from the slipper in his hand up to Sweetwater's eager face, showed a decided
disposition to make the experiment thus suggested. But Mr. Fenton, whose mind was full of the Zabel tragedy,
interrupted them with the question:

"But how do you explain by this hypothesis the fact of James Zabel trying to pass one of the twenty-dollar bills
stolen from Mrs. Webb's cupboard? Do you consider Miss Page generous enough to give him that money?"

"You ask ME that, Mr. Fenton. Do you wish to know what _I_ think of the connection between these two great
tragedies?"

"Yes; you have earned a voice in this matter; speak, Sweetwater."

"Well, then, I think Miss Page has made an effort to throw the blame of her own misdoing on one or both of
these unfortunate old men. She is sufficiently cold-blooded and calculating to do so; and circumstances certainly
favoured her. Shall I show how?"

Mr. Fenton consulted Knapp, who nodded his head. The Boston detective was not without curiosity as to how
Sweetwater would prove the case.

"Old James Zabel had seen his brother sinking rapidly from inanition; this their condition amply shows. He was
weak himself, but John was weaker, and in a moment of desperation he rushed out to ask a crumb of bread from
Agatha Webb, or possibly—for I have heard some whispers of an old custom of theirs to join Philemon at his yearly merry-making and so obtain in a natural way the bite for himself and brother he perhaps had not the courage to ask for outright. But death had been in the Webb cottage before him, which awful circumstance, acting on his already weakened nerves, drove him half insane from the house and sent him wandering blindly about the streets for a good half-hour before he reappeared in his own house. How do I know this? From a very simple fact. Abel here has been to inquire, among other things, if Mr. Crane remembers the tune we were playing at the great house when he came down the main street from visiting old widow Walker. Fortunately he does, for the trip, trip, trip in it struck his fancy, and he has found himself humming it over more than once since. Well, that waltz was played by us at a quarter after midnight, which fixes the time of the encounter at Mrs. Webb's gateway pretty accurately. But, as you will soon see, it was ten minutes to one before James Zabel knocked at Loton's door. How do I know this? By the same method of reasoning by which I determined the time of Mr. Crane's encounter. Mrs. Loton was greatly pleased with the music played that night, and had all her windows open in order to hear it, and she says we were playing 'Money Musk' when that knocking came to disturb her. Now, gentlemen, we played 'Money Musk' just before we were called out to supper, and as we went to supper promptly at one, you can see just how my calculation was made. Thirty-five minutes, then, passed between the moment James Zabel was seen rushing from Mrs. Webb's gateway and in that which he appeared at Loton's bakery, demanding a loaf of bread, and offering in exchange one of the bills which had been stolen from the murdered woman's drawer. Thirty-five minutes! And he and his brother were starving. Does it look, then, as if that money was in his possession when he left Mrs. Webb's house? Would any man who felt the pangs of hunger as he did, or who saw a brother perishing for food before his eyes, allow thirty-five minutes to elapse before he made use of the money that rightfully or wrongfully had come into his hand? No; and so I say that he did not have it when Mr. Crane met him. That, instead of committing crime to obtain it, he found it in his own home, lying on his table, when, after his frenzied absence, he returned to tell his dreadful news to the brother he had left behind him. But how did it come there? you ask. Gentlemen, remember the footprints under the window. Amabel Page brought it. Having seen or perhaps met this old man roaming in or near the Webb cottage during the time she was there herself, she conceived the plan of throwing upon him the onus of the crime she had herself committed, and with a slyness to be expected from one so crafty, stole up to his home, made a hole in the shade hanging over an open window, looked into the room where John sat, saw that he was there alone and asleep, and, creeping in by the front door, laid on the table beside him the twenty-dollar bill and the bloody dagger with which she had just slain Agatha Webb. Then she stole out again, and in twenty minutes more was leading the dance in Mr. Sutherland's parlour."

"Well reasoned!" murmured Abel, expecting the others to echo him. But, though Mr. Fenton and Dr. Talbot looked almost convinced, they said nothing, while Knapp, of course, was quiet as an oyster.

Sweetwater, with an easy smile calculated to hide his disappointment, went on as if perfectly satisfied.

"Meanwhile John awakes, sees the dagger, and thinks to end his misery with it, but finds himself too feeble. The cut in his vest, the dent in the floor, prove this, but if you call for further proof, a little fact, which some, if not all, of you seem to have overlooked, will amply satisfy you that this one at least of my conclusions is correct. Open the Bible, Abel; open it, not to shake it for what will never fall from between its leaves, but to find in the Bible itself the lines I have declared to you he wrote as a dying legacy with that tightly clutched pencil. Have you found them?"

"No," was Abel's perplexed retort; "I cannot see any sign of writing on flyleaf or margin."

"Are those the only blank places in the sacred book? Search the leaves devoted to the family record. Now! what do you find there?"

Knapp, who was losing some of his indifferance, drew nearer and read for himself the scrawl which now appeared to every eye on the discoloured page which Abel here turned uppermost.

"Almost illegible," he said; "one can just make out these words: 'Forgive me, James--tried to use dagger--found lying--but hand wouldn't--dying without--don't grieve--true men--haven't disgraced ourselves--God bless--' That is all."

"The effort must have overcome him," resumed Sweetwater in a voice from which he carefully excluded all signs of secret triumph, "and when James returned, as he did a few minutes later, he was evidently unable to ask questions, even if John was in a condition to answer them. But the fallen dagger told its own story, for James picked it up and put it back on the table, and it was at this minute he saw, what John had not, the twenty-dollar bill lying there with its promise of life and comfort. Hope revives; he catches up the bill, flies down to Loton's, procures a loaf of bread, and comes frantically back, gnawing it as he runs; for his own hunger is more than he can endure. Re-entering his brother's presence, he rushes forward with the bread. But the relief has come too late; John has died in his absence; and James, dizzy with the shock, reels back and succumbs to his own misery. Gentlemen, have you anything to say in contradiction to these various suppositions?"

For a moment Dr. Talbot, Mr. Fenton, and even Knapp stood silent; then the last remarked, with pardonable
"All this is ingenious, but, unfortunately, it is upset by a little fact which you yourself have overlooked. Have you examined attentively the dagger of which you have so often spoken, Mr. Sweetwater?"

"Not as I would like to, but I noticed it had blood on its edge, and was of the shape and size necessary to inflict the wound from which Mrs. Webb died."

"Very good, but there is something else of interest to be observed on it. Fetch it, Abel."

Abel, hurrying from the room, soon brought back the weapon in question. Sweetwater, with a vague sense of disappointment disturbing him, took it eagerly and studied it very closely. But he only shook his head.

"Bring it nearer to the light," suggested Knapp, "and examine the little scroll near the top of the handle."

Sweetwater did so, and at once changed colour. In the midst of the scroll were two very small but yet perfectly distinct letters; they were J. Z.

"How did Amabel Page come by a dagger marked with the Zabel initials?" questioned Knapp. "Do you think her foresight went so far as to provide herself with a dagger ostensibly belonging to one of these brothers? And then, have you forgotten that when Mr. Crane met the old man at Mrs. Webb's gateway he saw in his hand something that glistened? Now what was that, if not this dagger?"

Sweetwater was more disturbed than he cared to acknowledge.

"That just shows my lack of experience," he grumbled. "I thought I had turned this subject so thoroughly over in my mind that no one could bring an objection against it."

Knapp shook his head and smiled. "Young enthusiasts like yourself are great at forming theories which well-seasoned men like myself must regard as fantastical. However," he went on, "there is no doubt that Miss Page was a witness to, even if she has not profited by, the murder we have been considering. But, with this palpable proof of the Zabels' direct connection with the affair, I would not recommend her arrest as yet."

"She should be under surveillance, though," intimated the coroner.

"Most certainly," acquiesced Knapp.

As for Sweetwater, he remained silent till the opportunity came for him to whisper apart to Dr. Talbot, when he said:

"For all the palpable proof of which Mr. Knapp speaks--the J. Z. on the dagger, and the possibility of this being the object he was seeing coming out of Philemon Webb's gate--I maintain that this old man in his moribund condition never struck the blow that killed Agatha Webb. He hadn't strength enough, even if his lifelong love for her had not been sufficient to prevent him."

The coroner looked thoughtful.

"You are right," said he; "he hadn't strength enough. But don't expend too much energy in talk. Wait and see what a few direct questions will elicit from Miss Page."

XVIII

SOME LEADING QUESTIONS

Frederick rose early. He had slept but little. The words he had overheard at the end of the lot the night before were still ringing in his ears. Going down the back stairs, in his anxiety to avoid Amabel, he came upon one of the stablemen.

"Been to the village this morning?" he asked.

"No, sir, but Lem has. There's great news there. I wonder if anyone has told Mr. Sutherland."

"What news, Jake? I don't think my father is up yet."

"Why, sir, there were two more deaths in town last night--the brothers Zabel; and folks do say (Lem heard it a dozen times between the grocery and the fish market) that it was one of these old men who killed Mrs. Webb. The dagger has been found in their house, and most of the money. Why, sir, what's the matter? Are you sick?"

Frederick made an effort and stood upright. He had nearly fallen.

"No; that is, I am not quite myself. So many horrors, Jake. What did they die of? You say they are both dead--both?"

"Yes, sir, and it's dreadful to think of, but it was hunger, sir. Bread came too late. Both men are mere skeletons to look at. They have kept themselves close for weeks now, and nobody knew how bad off they were. I don't wonder it upset you, sir. We all feel it a bit, and I just dread to tell Mr. Sutherland."

Frederick staggered away. He had never in his life been so near mental and physical collapse. At the threshold of the sitting-room door he met his father. Mr. Sutherland was looking both troubled and anxious; more so, Frederick thought, than when he signed the check for him on the previous night. As their eyes met, both showed embarrassment, but Frederick, whose nerves had been highly strung by what he had just heard, soon controlled himself, and surveying his father with forced calmness, began:

"This is dreadful news, sir."
But his father, intent on his own thought, hurriedly interrupted him.

"You told me yesterday that everything was broken off between you and Miss Page. Yet I saw you reenter the
house together last night a little while after I gave you the money you asked for."

"I know, and it must have had a bad appearance. I entreat you, however, to believe that this meeting between
Miss Page and myself was against my wish, and that the relations between us have not been affected by anything
that passed between us."

"I am glad to hear it, my son. You could not do worse by yourself than to return to your old devotion."

"I agree with you, sir." And then, because he could not help it, Frederick inquired if he had heard the news.

Mr. Sutherland, evidently startled, asked what news; to which Frederick replied:

"The news about the Zabels. They are both dead, sir,—dead from hunger. Can you imagine it!"

This was something so different from what his father had expected to hear, that he did not take it in at first.
When he did, his surprise and grief were even greater than Frederick had anticipated. Seeing him so affected,
Frederick, who thought that the whole truth would be no harder to bear than the half, added the suspicion which had
been attached to the younger one's name, and then stood back, scarcely daring to be a witness to the outraged
feelings which such a communication could not fail to awaken in one of his father's temperament.

But though he thus escaped the shocked look which crossed his father's countenance, he could not fail to hear the
indignant exclamation which burst from his lips, nor help perceiving that it would take more than the most complete
circumstantial evidence to convince his father of the guilt of men he had known and respected for so many years.

For some reason Frederick experienced great relief at this, and was bracing himself to meet the fire of questions
which his statement must necessarily call forth, when the sound of approaching steps drew the attention of both
towards a party of men coming up the hillside.

Among them was Mr. Courtney, Prosecuting Attorney for the district, and as Mr. Sutherland recognised him he
sprang forward, saying, "There's Courtney; he will explain this."

Frederick followed, anxious and bewildered, and soon had the doubtful pleasure of seeing his father enter his
study in company with the four men considered to be most interested in the elucidation of the Webb mystery.

As he was lingering in an undecided mood in the small passageway leading up-stairs he felt the pressure of a
finger on his shoulder. Looking up, he met the eyes of Amabel, who was leaning toward him over the banisters. She
was smiling, and, though her face was not without evidences of physical languor, there was a charm about her
person which would have been sufficiently enthralling to him twenty-four hours before, but which now caused him
such a physical repulsion that he started back in the effort to rid his shoulder from her disturbing touch.

She frowned. It was an instantaneous expression of displeasure which was soon lost in one of her gurgling
laughs.

"Is my touch so burdensome?" she demanded. "If the pressure of one finger is so unbearable to your sensitive
nerves, how will you relish the weight of my whole hand?"

There was a fierceness in her tone, a purpose in her look, that for the first time in his struggle with her revealed
the full depth of her dark nature. Shrinking from her appalled, he put up his hand in protest, at which she changed
again in a twinkling, and with a cautious gesture toward the room into which Mr. Sutherland and his friends had
disappeared, she whispered significantly:

"We may not have another chance to confer together. Understand, then, that it will not be necessary for you to
tell me, in so many words, that you are ready to link your fortunes to mine; the taking off of the ring you wear and
your slow putting of it on again, in my presence, will be understood by me as a token that you have reconsidered
your present attitude and desire my silence and--myself."

Frederick could not repress a shudder.

For an instant he was tempted to succumb on the spot and have the long agony over. Then his horror of the
woman rose to such a pitch that he uttered an execration, and, turning away from her face, which was rapidly
-growing loathsome to him, he ran out of the passageway into the garden, seeing as he ran a persistent vision of
himself pulling off the ring and putting it back again, under the spell of a look he rebelled against even while he
yielded to its influence.

"I will not wear a ring, I will not subject myself to the possibility of obeying her behest under a sudden stress of
fear or fascination," he exclaimed, pausing by the well-curb and looking over it at his reflection in the water beneath.
"If I drop it here I at least lose the horror of doing what she suggests, under some involuntary impulse." But the
thought that the mere absence of the ring from his finger would not stand in the way of his going through the
motions to which she had just given such significance, deterred him from the sacrifice of a valuable family jewel,
and he left the spot with an air of frenzy such as a man displays when he feels himself on the verge of a doom he can
neither meet nor avert.

As he re-entered the house, he felt himself enveloped in the atmosphere of a coming crisis. He could hear voices
in the upper hall, and amongst them he caught the accents of her he had learned so lately to fear. Impelled by something deeper than curiosity and more potent even than dread, he hastened toward the stairs. When half-way up, he caught sight of Amabel. She was leaning back against the balustrade that ran across the upper hall, with her hands gripping the rail on either side of her and her face turned toward the five men who had evidently issued from Mr. Sutherland’s study to interview her.

As her back was to Frederick he could not judge of the expression of that face save by the effect it had upon the different men confronting her. But to see them was enough. From their looks he could perceive that this young girl was in one of her baffling moods, and that from his father down, not one of the men present knew what to make of her.

At the sound his feet made, a relaxation took place in her body and she lost something of the defiant attitude she had before maintained. Presently he heard her voice:

“I am willing to answer any questions you may choose to put to me here; but I cannot consent to shut myself in with you in that small study; I should suffocate.”

Frederick could perceive the looks which passed between the five men assembled before her, and was astonished to note that the insignificant fellow they called Sweetwater was the first to answer.

“Very well,” said he; “if you enjoy the publicity of the open hall, no one here will object. Is not that so, gentlemen?”

Her two little fingers, which were turned towards Frederick, ran up and down the rail, making a peculiar rasping noise, which for a moment was the only sound to be heard. Then Mr. Courtney said:

“How came you to have the handling of the money taken from Agatha Webb’s private drawer?”

It was a startling question, but it seemed to affect Amabel less than it did Frederick. It made him start, but she only turned her head a trifle aside, so that the peculiar smile with which she prepared to answer could be seen by anyone standing below.

“Suppose you ask something less leading than that, to begin with,” she suggested, in her high, unmusical voice. “From the searching nature of this inquiry, you evidently believe I have information of an important character to give you concerning Mrs. Webb’s unhappy death. Ask me about that; the other question I will answer later.”

The aplomb with which this was said, mixed as it was with a feminine allurement of more than ordinary subtlety, made Mr. Sutherland frown and Dr. Talbot look perplexed, but it did not embarrass Mr. Courtney, who made haste to respond in his driest accents:

“Very well, I am not particular as to what you answer first. A flower worn by you at the dance was found near Batsy’s skirts, before she was lifted up that morning. Can you explain this, or, rather, will you?”

“You are not obliged to, you know,” put in Mr. Sutherland, with his inexorable sense of justice. “Still, if you would, it might rob these gentlemen of suspicions you certainly cannot wish them to entertain.”

“What I say,” she remarked slowly, “will be as true to the facts as if I stood here on my oath. I can explain how a flower from my hair came to be in Mrs. Webb’s unhappy death. Ask me about that; the other question I will answer later.”

There was suavity in her tone now, not unmixed with candour. Sweetwater did not seem to relish this, for he moved uneasily and lost a shade of his self-satisfied attitude. He had still to be made acquainted with all the ins and outs of this woman’s remarkable nature.

“We are waiting,” suggested Dr. Talbot.

She turned to face this new speaker, and Frederick was relieved from the sight of her tantalising smile.

“I will tell my story simply,” said she, “with the simple suggestion that you believe me; otherwise you will make a mistake. While I was resting from a dance the other night, I heard two of the young people talking about the Zabels. One of them was laughing at the old men, and the other was trying to relate some half-forgotten story of early love which had been the cause, she thought, of their strange and melancholy lives. I was listening to them, but I did not take in much of what they were saying till I heard behind me an irascible voice exclaiming: ‘You laugh, do you? I wonder if you would laugh so easily if you knew that these two poor old men haven’t had a decent meal in a fortnight?’ I didn’t know the speaker, but I was thrilled by his words. Not had a good meal, these men, for a fortnight! I felt as if personally guilty of their suffering, and, happening to raise my eyes at this minute and seeing
through an open door the bountiful refreshments prepared for us in the supper room, I felt guiltier than ever. Suddenly I took a resolution. It was a queer one, and may serve to show you some of the oddities of my nature. Though I was engaged for the next dance, and though I was dressed in the flimsy garments suitable to the occasion, I decided to leave the ball and carry some sandwiches down to these old men. Procuring a bit of paper, I made up a bundle and stole out of the house without having said a word to anybody of my intention. Not wishing to be seen, I went out by the garden door, which is at the end of the dark hall--"

"Just as the band was playing the Harebell mazurka," interpolated Sweetwater.

Startled for the first time from her careless composure by an interruption of which it was impossible for her at that time to measure either the motive or the meaning, she ceased to play with her fingers on the balustrade and let her eyes rest for a moment on the man who had thus spoken, as if she hesitated between her desire to annihilate him for his impertinence and a fear of the cold hate she saw actuating his every word and look. Then she went on, as if no one had spoken:

"I ran down the hill recklessly. I was bent on my errand and not at all afraid of the dark. When I reached that part of the road where the streets branch off, I heard footsteps in front of me. I had overtaken someone. Slackening my pace, so that I should not pass this person, whom I instinctively knew to be a man, I followed him till I came to a high board fence. It was that surrounding Agatha Webb's house, and when I saw it I could not help connecting the rather stealthy gait of the man in front of me with a story I had lately heard of the large sum of money she was known to keep in her house. Whether this was before or after this person disappeared round the corner I cannot say, but no sooner had I become certain that he was bent upon entering this house than my impulse to follow him became greater than my precaution, and turning aside from the direct path to the Zabels', I hurried down High Street just in time to see the man enter Mrs. Webb's front gateway.

"It was a late hour for visiting, but as the house had lights in both its lower and upper stories, I should by good rights have taken it for granted that he was an expected guest and gone on my way to the Zabels'. But I did not. The softness with which this person stepped and the skulking way in which he hesitated at the front gate aroused my worst fears, and after he had opened that gate and slid in, I was so pursued by the idea that he was there for no good that I stepped inside the gate myself and took my stand in the deep shadow cast by the old pear tree on the right-hand side of the walk. Did anyone speak?"

There was an unanimous denial from the five gentlemen before her, yet she did not look satisfied.

"I thought I heard someone make a remark," she repeated, and paused again for a half-minute, during which her smile was a study, it was so cold and in such startling contrast to the vivid glances she threw everywhere except behind her on the landing where Frederick stood listening to her every word.

"We are very much interested," remarked Mr. Courtney. "Pray, go on."

Drawing her left hand from the balustrade where it had rested, she looked at one of her fingers with an odd backward gesture.

"I will," she said, and her tone was hard and threatening. "Five minutes, no longer, passed, when I was startled by a loud and terrible cry from the house, and looking up at the second-story window from which the sound proceeded, I saw a woman's figure hanging out in a seemingly pulseless condition. Too terrified to move, I clung trembling to the tree, hearing and not hearing the shouts and laughter of a dozen or more men, who at that minute passed by the corner on their way to the wharves. I was dazed, I was choking, and only came to myself when, sooner or later, I do not know how soon or how late, a fresh horror happened. The woman whom I had just seen fall almost from the window was a serving woman, but when I heard another scream I knew that the mistress of the house was being attacked, and riveting my eyes on those windows, I beheld the shade of one of them thrown back and a hand appear, flinging out something which fell in the grass on the opposite side of the lawn. Then the shade fell again, and hearing nothing further, I ran to where the object flung out had fallen, and feeling for it, found and picked up an old-fashioned dagger, dripping with blood. Horrified beyond all expression, I dropped the weapon and retreated into my former place of concealment.

"But I was not satisfied to remain there. A curiosity, a determination even, to see the man who had committed this dastardly deed, attacked me with such force that I was induced to leave my hiding-place and even to enter the house where in all probability he was counting the gains he had just obtained at the price of so much precious blood. The door, which he had not perfectly closed behind him, seemed to invite me in, and before I had realised my own temerity, I was standing in the hall of this ill-fated house."

The interest, which up to this moment had been breathless, now expressed itself in hurried ejaculations and broken words; and Mr. Sutherland, who had listened like one in a dream, exclaimed eagerly, and in a tone which proved that he, for the moment at least, believed this more than improbable tale:

"Then you can tell us if Philemon was in the little room at the moment when you entered the house?"

As everyone there present realised the importance of this question, a general movement took place and each and
all drew nearer as she met their eyes and answered placidly:
"Yes; Mr. Webb was sitting in a chair asleep. He was the only person I saw."
"Oh, I know he never committed this crime," gasped his old friend, in a relief so great that one and all seemed to share it.
"Now I have courage for the rest. Go on, Miss Page."
But Miss Page paused again to look at her finger, and give that sideways toss to her head that seemed so uncalled for by the situation to any who did not know of the compact between herself and the listening man below.
"I hate to go back to that moment," said she; "for when I saw the candles burning on the table, and the husband of the woman who at that very instant was possibly breathing her last breath in the room overhead, sitting there in unconscious apathy, I felt something rise in my throat that made me deathly sick for a moment. Then I went right in where he was, and was about to shake his arm and wake him, when I detected a spot of blood on my finger from the dagger I had handled. That gave me another turn, and led me to wipe off my finger on his sleeve."
"It's a pity you did not wipe off your slippers too," murmured Sweetwater.
Again she looked at him, again her eyes opened in terror upon the face of this man, once so plain and insignificant in her eyes, but now so filled with menace she inwardly quaked before it, for all her apparent scorn.
"Slippers," she murmured.
"Did not your feet as well as your hands pass through the blood on the grass?"
She disdained to answer him.
"I have accounted for the blood on my hand," she said, not looking at him, but at Mr. Courtney. "If there is any on my slippers it can be accounted for in the same way." And she rapidly resumed her narrative. "I had no sooner made my little finger clean I never thought of anyone suspecting the old gentleman when I heard steps on the stairs and knew that the murderer was coming down, and in another instant would pass the open door before which I stood.

"Though I had been courageous enough up to that minute, I was seized by a sudden panic at the prospect of meeting face to face one whose hands were perhaps dripping with the blood of his victim. To confront him there and then might mean death to me, and I did not want to die, but to live, for I am young, sirs, and not without a prospect of happiness before me. So I sprang back, and seeing no other place of concealment in the whole bare room, crouched down in the shadow of the man you call Philemon. For one, two minutes, I knelt there in a state of mortal terror, while the feet descended, paused, started to enter the room where I was, hesitated, turned, and finally left the house."
"Miss Page, wait, wait," put in the coroner. "You saw him; you can tell who this man was?"
The eagerness of this appeal seemed to excite her. A slight colour appeared in her cheeks and she took a step forward, but before the words for which they so anxiously waited could leave her lips, she gave a start and drew back with, an ejaculation which left a more or less sinister echo in the ears of all who heard it.
Frederick had just shown himself at the top of the staircase.
"Good-morning, gentlemen," said he, advancing into their midst with an air whose unexpected manliness disguised his inward agitation. "The few words I have just heard Miss Page say interest me so much, I find it impossible not to join you."
Amabel, upon whose lips a faint complacent smile had appeared as he stepped by her, glanced up at these words in secret astonishment at the indifference they showed, and then dropped her eyes to his hands with an intent gaze which seemed to affect him unpleasantly, for he thrust them immediately behind him, though he did not lower his head or lose his air of determination.
"Is my presence here undesirable?" he inquired, with a glance towards his father.
Sweetwater looked as if he thought it was, but he did not presume to say anything, and the others being too interested in the developments of Miss Page's story to waste any time on lesser matters, Frederick remained, greatly to Miss Page's evident satisfaction.
"Did you see this man's face?" Mr. Courtney now broke in, in urgent inquiry.
Her answer came slowly, after another long look in Frederick's direction.
"No, I did not dare to make the effort. I was obliged to crouch too close to the floor. I simply heard his footsteps."
"See, now!" muttered Sweetwater, but in so low a tone she did not hear him. "She condemns herself. There isn't a woman living who would fail to look up under such circumstances, even at the risk of her life."
Knapp seemed to agree with him, but Mr. Courtney, following his one idea, pressed his former question, saying:
"Was it an old man's step?"
"It was not an agile one."
"And you did not catch the least glimpse of the man's face or figure?"
"Not a glimpse."
"So you are in no position to identify him?"
"If by any chance I should hear those same footsteps coming down a flight of stairs, I think I should be able to
recognise them," she allowed, in the sweetest tones at her command.
"She knows it is too late for her to hear those of the two dead Zabels," growled the man from Boston.
"We are no nearer the solution of this mystery than we were in the beginning," remarked the coroner.
"Gentlemen, I have not yet finished my story," intimated Amabel, sweetly. "Perhaps what I have yet to tell may
give you some clue to the identity of this man."

"Ah, yes; go on, go on. You have not yet explained how you came to be in possession of Agatha's money."

"Just so," she answered, with another quick look at Frederick, the last she gave him for some time. "As soon,
then, as I dared, I ran out of the house into the yard. The moon, which had been under a cloud, was now shining
brightly, and by its light I saw that the space before me was empty and that I might venture to enter the street. But
before doing so I looked about for the dagger I had thrown from me before going in, but I could not find it. It had
been picked up by the fugitive and carried away. Annoyed at the cowardice which had led me to lose such a
valuable piece of evidence through a purely womanish emotion, I was about to leave the yard, when my eyes fell on
the little bundle of sandwiches which I had brought down from the hill and which I had let fall under the pear tree,
at the first scream I had heard from the house. It had burst open and two or three of the sandwiches lay broken on the
ground. But those that were intact I picked up, and being more than ever anxious to cover up by some ostensible
errand my absence from the party, I rushed away toward the lonely road where these brothers lived, meaning to
leave such fragments as remained on the old doorstep, beyond which I had been told such suffering existed.

"It was now late, very late, for a girl like myself to be out, but, under the excitement of what I had just seen and
heard, I became oblivious to fear, and rushed into those dismal shadows as into transparent daylight. Perhaps the
shouts and stray sounds of laughter that came up from the wharves where a ship was getting under way gave me a
certain sense of companionship. Perhaps--but it is folly for me to dilate upon my feelings; it is my errand you are
interested in, and what happened when I approached the Zabels' dreary dwelling."

The look with which she paused, ostensibly to take breath, but in reality to weigh and criticise the looks of those
about her, was one of those wholly indescribable ones with which she was accustomed to control the judgment of
men who allowed themselves to watch too closely the ever-changing expression of her weird yet charming face. But
it fell upon men steeled against her fascinations, and realising her inability to move them, she proceeded with her
story before even the most anxious of her hearers could request her to do so.

"I had come along the road very quietly," said she, "for my feet were lightly shod, and the moonlight was too
bright for me to make a misstep. But as I cleared the trees and came into the open place where the house stands I
stumbled with surprise at seeing a figure crouching on the doorstep I had anticipated finding as empty as the road. It
was an old man's figure, and as I paused in my embarrassment he slowly and with great feebleness rose to his feet
and began to grope about for the door. As he did so, I heard a sharp tinkling sound, as of something metallic falling
on the doorstone, and, taking a quick step forward, I looked over his shoulder and espied in the moonlight at his feet
a dagger so like the one I had lately handled in Mrs. Webb's yard that I was overwhelmed with astonishment, and
surveyed the aged and feeble form of the man who had dropped it with a sensation difficult to describe. The next
moment he was stooping for the weapon, with a startled air that has impressed itself distinctly upon my memory,
and when, after many feeble attempts, he succeeded in grasping it, he vanished into the house so suddenly that I
could not be sure whether or not he had seen me standing there.

"All this was more than surprising to me, for I had never thought of associating an old man with this crime.
Indeed, I was so astonished to find him in possession of this weapon that I forgot all about my errand and only
wondered how I could see and know more. Fearing detection, I slid in amongst the bushes and soon found myself
under one of the windows. The shade was down and I was about to push it aside when I heard someone moving
about inside and stopped. But I could not restrain my curiosity, so pulling a hairpin from my hair, I worked a little
hole in the shade and through this I looked into a room brightly illumined by the moon which shone in through an
adjoining window. And what did I see there?" Her eye turned on Frederick. His right hand had stolen toward his left,
but it paused under her look and remained motionless. "Only an old man sitting at a table and--" Why did she pause,
and why did she cover up that pause with a wholly inconsequential sentence? Perhaps Frederick could have told,
Frederick, whose hand had now fallen at his side. But Frederick volunteered nothing, and no one, not even
Sweetwater, guessed all that lay beyond that AND which was left hovering in the air to be finished---when? Alas!
had she not set the day and the hour?

What she did say was in seeming explanation of her previous sentence. "It was not the same old man I had seen
on the doorstep, and while I was looking at him I became aware of someone leaving the house and passing me on
the road up-hill. Of course this ended my interest in what went on within, and turning as quickly as I could I hurried
into the road and followed the shadow I could just perceive disappearing in the woods above me. I was bound, gentlemen, as you see, to follow out my adventure to the end. But my task now became very difficult, for the moon was high and shone down upon the road so distinctly that I could not follow the person before me as closely as I wished without running the risk of being discovered by him. I therefore trusted more to my ear than to my eye, and as long as I could hear his steps in front of me I was satisfied. But presently, as we turned up this very hill, I ceased to hear these steps and so became confident that he had taken to the woods. I was so sure of this that I did not hesitate to enter them myself, and, knowing the paths well, as I have every opportunity of doing, living, as we do, directly opposite this forest, I easily found my way to the little clearing that I have reason to think you gentlemen have since become acquainted with. But though from the sounds I heard I was assured that the person I was following was not far in advance of me, I did not dare to enter this brilliantly illumined space, especially as there was every indication of this person having completed whatever task he had set for himself. Indeed, I was sure that I heard his steps coming back. So, for the second time, I crouched down in the darkest place I could find and let this mysterious person pass me. When he had quite disappeared, I made my own retreat, for it was late, and I was afraid of being missed at the ball. But later, or rather the next day, I recrossed the road and began a search for the money which I was confident had been left in the woods opposite, by the person I had been following. I found it, and when the man here present who, though a mere fiddler, has presumed to take a leading part in this interview, came upon me with the bills in my hand, I was but burying deeper the ill-gotten gains I had come upon."

"Ah, and so making them your own," quoth Sweetwater, stung by the sarcasm in that word fiddler.

But with a suavity against which every attack fell powerless, she met his significant look with one fully as significant, and quietly said:

"If I had wanted the money for myself I would not have risked leaving it where the murderer could find it by digging up a few handfuls of mould and a bunch of sodden leaves. No, I had another motive for my action, a motive with which few, if any, of you will be willing to credit me. I wished to save the murderer, whom I had some reason, as you see, for thinking I knew, from the consequences of his own action."

Mr. Courtney, Dr. Talbot, and even Mr. Sutherland, who naturally believed she referred to Zabel, and who, one and all, had a lingering tenderness for this unfortunate old man, which not even this seeming act of madness on his part could quite destroy, felt a species of reaction at this, and surveyed the singular being before them with, perhaps, the slightest shade of relenting in their severity. Sweetwater alone betrayed restlessness, Knapp showed no feeling at all, while Frederick stood like one petrified, and moved neither hand nor foot.

"Crime is despicable when it results from cupidity only," she went on, with a deliberateness so hard that the more susceptible of her auditors shuddered. "But crime that springs from some imperative and overpowering necessity of the mind or body might well awaken sympathy, and I am not ashamed of having been sorry for this frenzied and suffering man. Weak and impulsive as you may consider me, I did not want him to suffer on account of a moment's madness, as he undoubtedly would if he were ever found with Agatha Webb's money in his possession, so I plunged it deeper into the soil and trusted to the confusion which crime always awakens even in the strongest mind, for him not to discover its hiding-place till the danger connected with it was over."

"Ha! wonderful! Devilish subtle, eh? Clever, too clever!" were some of the whispered exclamations which this curious explanation on her part brought out. Yet only Sweetwater showed his open and entire disbelief of the story, the others possibly remembering that for such natures as hers there is no governing law and no commonplace interpretation.

To Sweetwater, however, this was but so much display of feminine resource and subtlety. Though he felt he should keep still in the presence of men so greatly his superiors, he could not resist saying:

"Truth is sometimes stranger than fiction. I should never have attributed any such motive as you mention to the young girl I saw leaving this spot with many a backward glance at the hole from which we afterwards extracted the large sum of money in question. But say that this reburying of stolen funds was out of consideration for the feeble old man you describe as having carried them there, do you not see that by this act you can be held as an accessory after the fact?"

Her eyebrows went up and the delicate curve of her lips was not without menace as she said:

"You hate me, Mr. Sweetwater. Do you wish me to tell these gentlemen why?"

The flush which, notwithstanding this peculiar young man's nerve, instantly crimsoned his features, was a surprise to Frederick. So was it to the others, who saw in it a possible hint as to the real cause of his persistent pursuit of this young girl, which they had hitherto ascribed entirely to his love of justice. Slighted love makes some hearts venomous. Could this ungainly fellow have once loved and been disdained by this bewitching piece of unreliability?

It was a very possible assumption, though Sweetwater's blush was the only answer he gave to her question, which nevertheless had amply served its turn.
To fill the gap caused by his silence, Mr. Sutherland made an effort and addressed her himself.

"Your conduct," said he, "has not been that of a strictly honourable person. Why did you fail to give the alarm when you re-entered my house after being witness to this double tragedy?"

Her serenity was not to be disturbed.

"I have just explained," she reminded him, "that I had sympathy for the criminal."

"We all have sympathy for James Zabel, but--"

"I do not believe one word of this story," interposed Sweetwater, in reckless disregard of proprieties. "A hungry, feeble old man, like Zabel, on the verge of death, could not have found his way into these woods. You carried the money there yourself, miss; you are the--"

"Hush!" interposed the coroner, authoritatively; "do not let us go too fast--yet. Miss Page has an air of speaking the truth, strange and unaccountable as it may seem. Zabel was an admirable man once, and if he was led into theft and murder, it was not until his faculties had been weakened by his own suffering and that of his much-loved brother."

"Thank you," was her simple reply; and for the first time every man there thrilled at her tone. Seeing it, all the dangerous fascination of her look and manner returned upon her with double force. "I have been unwise," said she, "and let my sympathy run away with my judgment. Women have impulses of this kind sometimes, and men blame them for it, till they themselves come to the point of feeling the need of just such blind devotion. I am sure I regret my short-sightedness now, for I have lost esteem by it, while he--" With a wave of the hand she dismissed the subject, and Dr. Talbot, watching her, felt a shade of his distrust leave him, and in its place a species of admiration for the lithe, graceful, bewitching personality before them, with her childish impulses and womanly wit which half mystified and half imposed upon them.

Mr. Sutherland, on the contrary, was neither charmed from his antagonism nor convinced of her honesty. There was something in this matter that could not be explained away by her argument, and his suspicion of that something he felt perfectly sure was shared by his son, toward whose cold, set face he had frequently cast the most uneasy glances. He was not ready, however, to probe into the subject more deeply, nor could he, for the sake of Frederick, urge on to any further confession a young woman whom his unhappy son professed to love, and in whose discretion he had so little confidence. As for Sweetwater, he had now fully recovered his self-possession, and bore himself with great discretion when Dr. Talbot finally said:

"Well, gentlemen, we have got more than we expected when we came here this morning. There remains, however, a point regarding which we have received no explanation. Miss Page, how came that orchid, which I am told you wore in your hair at the dance, to be found lying near the hem of Batsy's skirts? You distinctly told us that you did not go up-stairs when you were in Mrs. Webb's house."

"Ah, that's so!" acquiesced the Boston detective dryly. "How came that flower on the scene of the murder?"

She smiled and seemed equal to the emergency.

"That is a mystery for us all to solve," she said quietly, frankly meeting the eyes of her questioner.

"A mystery it is your business to solve," corrected the district attorney. "Nothing that you have told us in support of your innocence would, in the eyes of the law, weigh for one instant against the complicity shown by that one piece of circumstantial evidence against you."

Her smile carried a certain high-handed denial of this to one heart there, at least. But her words were humble enough.

"I am aware of that," said she. Then, turning to where Sweetwater stood lowering upon her from out his half-closed eyes, she impetuously exclaimed: "You, sir, who, with no excuse an honourable person can recognise, have seen fit to arrogate to yourself duties wholly out of your province, prove yourself equal to your presumption by ferreting out, alone and unassisted, the secret of this mystery. It can be done, for, mark, _I_ did not carry that flower into the room where it was found. This I am ready to assert before God and before man!"

Her hand was raised, her whole attitude spoke defiance and--hard as it was for Sweetwater to acknowledge it--truth. He felt that he had received a challenge, and with a quick glance at Knapp, who barely responded by a shrug, he shifted over to the side of Dr. Talbot.

Amabel at once dropped her hand.

"May I go?" she now cried appealingly to Mr. Courtney. "I really have no more to say, and I am tired."

"Did you see the figure of the man who brushed by you in the wood? Was it that of the old man you saw on the doorstep?"

At this direct question Frederick quivered in spite of his dogged self-control. But she, with her face upturned to meet the scrutiny of the speaker, showed only a childish kind of wonder. "Why do you ask that? Is there any doubt about its being the same?"

What an actress she was! Frederick stood appalled. He had been amazed at the skill with which she had
manipulated her story so as to keep her promise to him, and yet leave the way open for that further confession which
would alter the whole into a denunciation of himself which he would find it difficult, if not impossible, to meet. But
this extreme dissimulation made him lose heart. It showed her to be an antagonist of almost illimitable resource and
secret determination.

"I did not suppose there could be any doubt," she added, in such a natural tone of surprise that Mr. Courtney
dropped the subject, and Dr. Talbot turned to Sweetwater, who for the moment seemed to have robbed Knapp of his
rightful place as the coroner's confidant.

"Shall we let her go for the present?" he whispered. "She does look tired, poor girl."

The public challenge which Sweetwater had received made him wary, and his reply was a guarded one:

"I do not trust her, yet there is much to confirm her story. Those sandwiches, now. She says she dropped them in
Mrs. Webb's yard under the pear tree, and that the bag that held them burst open. Gentlemen, the birds were so busy
there on the morning after the murder that I could not but notice them, notwithstanding my absorption in greater
matters. I remember wondering what they were all pecking at so eagerly. But how about the flower whose presence
on the scene of guilt she challenges me to explain? And the money so deftly reburied by her? Can any explanation
make her other than accessory to a crime on whose fruits she lays her hand in a way tending solely to concealment?
No, sirs; and so I shall not relax my vigilance over her, even if, in order to be faithful to it, I have to suggest that a
warrant be made out for her imprisonment."

"You are right," acquiesced the coroner, and turning to Miss Page, he told her she was too valuable a witness to
be lost sight of, and requested her to prepare to accompany him into town.

She made no objection. On the contrary her cheeks dimpled, and she turned away with alacrity towards her
room. But before the door closed on her she looked back, and, with a persuasive smile, remarked that she had told
all she knew, or thought she knew at the time. But that perhaps, after thinking the matter carefully over, she might
remember some detail that would throw some extra light on the subject.

"Call her back!" cried Mr. Courtney. "She is withholding something. Let us hear it all."

But Mr. Sutherland, with a side look at Frederick, persuaded the district attorney to postpone all further
examination of this artful girl until they were alone. The anxious father had noted, what the rest were too
preoccupied to observe, that Frederick had reached the limit of his strength and could not be trusted to preserve his
composure any longer in face of this searching examination into the conduct of a woman from whom he had so
 lately detached himself.

XIX
POOR PHILEMON

The next day was the day of Agatha's funeral. She was to be buried in Portchester, by the side of her six children,
and, as the day was fine, the whole town, as by common consent, assembled in the road along which the humble
cortege was to make its way to the spot indicated.

From the windows of farmhouses, from between the trees of the few scattered thickets along the way, saddened
and curious faces looked forth till Sweetwater, who walked as near as he dared to the immediate friends of the
deceased, felt the impossibility of remembering them all and gave up the task in despair.

Before one house, about a mile out of town, the procession paused, and at a gesture from the minister everyone
within sight took off their hats, amid a hush which made almost painfully apparent the twittering of birds and the
other sounds of animate and inanimate nature, which are inseparable from a country road. They had reached widow
Jones's cottage in which Philemon was then staying.

The front door was closed, and so were the lower windows, but in one of the upper casements a movement was
perceptible, and in another instant there came into view a woman and man, supporting between them the impassive
form of Agatha's husband. Holding him up in plain sight of the almost breathless throng below, the woman pointed
to where his darling lay and appeared to say something to him.

Then there was to be seen a strange sight. The old man, with his thin white locks fluttering in the breeze, leaned
forward with a smile, and holding out his arms, cried in a faint but joyful tone: "Agatha!" Then, as if realising for the
first time that it was death he looked upon, and that the crowd below was a funeral procession, his face altered and
he fell back with a low heartbroken moan into the arms of those who supported him.

As his white head disappeared from sight, the procession moved on, and from only one pair of lips went up that
groan of sorrow with which every heart seemed surcharged. One groan. From whose lips did it come? Sweetwater
endeavoured to ascertain, but was not able, nor could anyone inform him, unless it was Mr. Sutherland, whom he
dared not approach.

This gentleman was on foot like the rest, with his arm fast linked in that of his son Frederick. He had meant to
ride, for the distance was long for men past sixty; but finding the latter resolved to walk, he had consented to do the
same rather than be separated from his son.
He had fears for Frederick—he could hardly have told why; and as the ceremony proceeded and Agatha was solemnly laid away in the place prepared for her, his sympathies grew upon him to such an extent that he found it difficult to quit the young man for a moment, or even to turn his eyes away from the face he had never seemed to know till now. But as friends and strangers were now leaving the yard, he controlled himself, and assuming a more natural demeanour, asked his son if he were now ready to ride back. But, to his astonishment, Frederick replied that he did not intend to return to Sutherland town at present; that he had business in Portchester, and that he was doubtful as to when he would be ready to return. As the old gentleman did not wish to raise a controversy, he said nothing, but as soon as he saw Frederick disappear up the road, he sent back the carriage he had ordered, saying that he would return in a Portchester gig as soon as he had settled some affairs of his own, which might and might not detain him there till evening.

Then he proceeded to a little inn, where he hired a room with windows that looked out on the high-road. In one of these windows he sat all day, watching for Frederick, who had gone farther up the road.

But no Frederick appeared, and with vague misgivings, for which as yet he had no name, he left the window and set out on foot for home.

It was now dark, but a silvery gleam on the horizon gave promise of the speedy rising of a full moon. Otherwise he would not have attempted to walk over a road proverbially dark and dismal.

The churchyard in which they had just laid away Agatha lay in his course. As he approached it he felt his heart fail, and stopping a moment at the stone wall that separated it from the highroad, he leaned against the trunk of a huge elm that guarded the gate of entrance. As he did so he heard a sound of repressed sobbing from some spot not very far away, and, moved by some undefinable impulse stronger than his will, he pushed open the gate and entered the sacred precincts.

Instantly the weirdness and desolation of the spot struck him. He wished, yet dreaded, to advance. Something in the grief of the mourner whose sobs he had heard had seized upon his heart-strings, and yet, as he hesitated, the sounds came again, and forgetting that his intrusion might not prove altogether welcome, he pressed forward, till he came within a few feet of the spot from which the sobs issued.

He had moved quietly, feeling the awesomeness of the place, and when he paused it was with a sensation of dread, not to be entirely explained by the sad and dismal surroundings. Dark as it was, he discerned the outline of a form lying stretched in speechless misery across a grave; but when, impelled by an almost irresistible compassion, he strove to speak, his tongue clung to the roof of his mouth and he only drew back farther into the shadow.

He had recognised the mourner and the grave. The mourner was Frederick and the grave that of Agatha Webb.

A few minutes later Mr. Sutherland reappeared at the door of the inn, and asked for a gig and driver to take him back to Sutherlandtown. He said, in excuse for his indecision, that he had undertaken to walk, but had found his strength inadequate to the exertion. He was looking very pale, and trembled so that the landlord, who took his order, asked him if he were ill. But Mr. Sutherland insisted that he was quite well, only in a hurry, and showed the greatest impatience till he was again started upon the road.

For the first half-mile he sat perfectly silent. The moon was now up, and the road stretched before them, flooded with light. As long as no one was to be seen on this road, or on the path running beside it, Mr. Sutherland held himself erect, his eyes fixed before him, in an attitude of anxious inquiry. But as soon as any sound came to break the silence, or there appeared in the distance ahead of them the least appearance of a plodding wayfarer, he drew back, and hid himself in the recesses of the vehicle. This happened several times. Then his whole manner changed. They had just passed Frederick, walking, with bowed head, toward Sutherlandtown.

But he was not the only person on the road at this time. A few minutes previously they had passed another man walking in the same direction. As Mr. Sutherland mused over this he found himself peering through the small window at the back of the buggy, striving to catch another glimpse of the two men plodding behind him. He could see them both, his son's form throwing its long shadow over the moonlit road, followed only too closely by the man whose ungainly shape he feared to acknowledge to himself was growing only too familiar in his eyes.

Falling into a troubled reverie, he beheld the well-known houses, and the great trees under whose shadow he had grown from youth to manhood, flit by him like phantoms in a dream. But suddenly one house and one place drew his attention with a force that startled him again into an erect attitude, and seizing with one hand the arm of the driver, he pointed with the other at the door of the cottage they were passing, saying in choked tones:

"See! see! Something dreadful has happened since we passed by here this morning. That is crape, Samuel, crape, hanging from the doorpost yonder!"

"Yes, it is crape," answered the driver, jumping out and running up the path to look. "Philemon must be dead; the good Philemon."

Here was a fresh blow. Mr. Sutherland bowed before it for a moment, then he rose hurriedly and stepped down into the road beside the driver.
"Get in again," said he, "and drive on. Ride a half-mile, then come back for me. I must see the widow Jones."

The driver, awed both by the occasion and the feeling it had called up in Mr. Sutherland, did as he was bid and drove away. Mr. Sutherland, with a glance back at the road he had just traversed, walked painfully up the path to Mrs. Jones's door.

A moment's conversation with the woman who answered his summons proved the driver's supposition to be correct. Philemon had passed away. He had never rallied from the shock he had received. He had joined his beloved Agatha on the day of her burial, and the long tragedy of their mutual life was over.

"It is a mercy that no inheritor of their misfortune remains," quoth the good woman, as she saw the affliction her tidings caused in this much-revered friend.

The assent Mr. Sutherland gave was mechanical. He was anxiously studying the road leading toward Portchester.

Suddenly he stepped hastily into the house.

"Will you be so good as to let me sit down in your parlour for a few minutes?" he asked. "I should like to rest there for an instant alone. This final blow has upset me."

The good woman bowed. Mr. Sutherland's word was law in that town. She did not even dare to protest against the ALONE which he had so pointedly emphasised, but left him after making him, as she said, comfortable, and went back to her duties in the room above.

It was fortunate she was so amenable to his wishes, for no sooner had her steps ceased to be heard than Mr. Sutherland rose from the easy-chair in which he had been seated, and, putting out the lamp widow Jones had insisted on lighting, passed directly to the window, through which he began to peer with looks of the deepest anxiety.

A man was coming up the road, a young man, Frederick. As Mr. Sutherland recognised him he leaned forward with increased anxiety, till at the appearance of his son in front his scrutiny grew so strained and penetrating that it seemed to exercise a magnetic influence upon Frederick, causing him to look up.

The glance he gave the house was but momentary, but in that glance the father saw all that he had secretly dreaded. As his son's eye fell on that fluttering bit of crape, testifying to another death in this already much-bereaved community, he staggered wildly, then in a pause of doubt drew nearer and nearer till his fingers grasped this symbol of mourning and clung there. Next moment he was far down the road, plunging toward home in a state of great mental disorder.

A half-hour afterwards Mr. Sutherland reached home. He had not overtaken Frederick again, or even his accompanying shadow. Ascertaining at his own door that his son had not yet come in, but had been seen going farther up the hill, he turned back again into the road and proceeded after him on foot.

The next place to his own was occupied by Mr. Halliday. As he approached it he caught sight of a man standing half in and half out of the honeysuckle porch, whom he at first thought to be Frederick. But he soon saw that it was the fellow who had been following his son all the way from Portchester, and, controlling his first movement of dislike, he stepped up to him and quietly said:

"Sweetwater, is this you?"

The young man fell back and showed a most extraordinary agitation, quickly suppressed, however. "Yes, sir, it is no one else. Do you know what I am doing here?"

"I fear I do. You have been to Portchester. You have seen my son--"

Sweetwater made a hurried, almost an entreating, gesture.

"Never mind that, Mr. Sutherland. I had rather you wouldn't say anything about that. I am as much broken up by what I have seen as you are. I never suspected him of having any direct connection with this murder; only the girl to whom he has so unfortunately attached himself. But after what I have seen, what am I to think? what am I to do? I honour you; I would not grieve you; but--but-- oh, sir, perhaps you can help me out of the maze into which I have stumbled. Perhaps you can assure me that Mr. Frederick did not leave the ball at the time she did. I missed him from among the dancers. I did not see him between twelve and three, but perhaps you did; and--and--"

His voice broke. He was almost as profoundly agitated as Mr. Sutherland. As for the latter, who found himself unable to reassure the other on this very vital point, having no remembrance himself of having seen Frederick among his guests during those fatal hours, he stood speechless, lost in abysses, the depth and horror of which only a father can appreciate. Sweetwater respected his anguish and for a moment was silent himself. Then he burst out:

"I had rather never lived to see this day than be the cause of shame or suffering to you. Tell me what to do. Shall I be deaf, dumb--"

Here Mr. Sutherland found voice.

"You make too much of what you saw," said he. "My boy has faults and has lived anything but a satisfactory life, but he is not as bad as you would intimate. He can never have taken life. That would be incredible, monstrous, in one brought up as he has been. Besides, if he were so far gone in evil as to be willing to attempt crime, he had no
motive to do so; Sweetwater, he had no motive. A few hundred dollars but these he could have got from me, and did, but--"

Why did the wretched father stop? Did he recall the circumstances under which Frederick had obtained these last hundreds from him? They were not ordinary circumstances, and Frederick had been in no ordinary strait. Mr. Sutherland could not but acknowledge to himself that there was something in this whole matter which contradicted the very plea he was making, and not being able to establish the conviction of his son's innocence in his own mind, he was too honourable to try to establish it in that of another. His next words betrayed the depth of his struggle:

"It is that girl who has ruined him, Sweetwater. He loves but doubts her, as who could help doing after the story she told us day before yesterday? Indeed, he has doubted her ever since that fatal night, and it is this which has broken his heart, and not-- not--" Again the old gentleman paused; again he recovered himself, this time with a touch of his usual dignity and self-command. "Leave me," he cried. "Nothing that you have seen has escaped me; but our interpretations of it may differ. I will watch over my son from this hour, and you may trust my vigilance."

Sweetwater bowed.

"You have a right to command me," said he. "You may have forgotten, but I have not, that I owe my life to you. Years ago-- perhaps you can recall it--it was at the Black Pond--I was going down for the third time and my mother was screaming in terror on the bank, when you plunged in and--Well, sir, such things are never forgotten, and, as I said before, you have only to command me." He turned to go, but suddenly came back. There were signs of mental conflict in his face and voice. "Mr. Sutherland, I am not a talkative man. If I trust your vigilance you may trust my discretion. Only I must have your word that you will convey no warning to your son."

Mr. Sutherland made an indefinable gesture, and Sweetwater again disappeared, this time not to return. As for Mr. Sutherland, he remained standing before Mr. Halliday's door. What had the young man meant by this emphatic repetition of his former suggestion? That he would be quiet, also, and not speak of what he had seen? Why, then-- But to the hope thus given, this honest-hearted gentleman would yield no quarter, and seeing a duty before him, a duty he dare not shirk, he brought his emotions, violent as they were, into complete and absolute subjection, and, opening Mr. Halliday's door, entered the house. They were old neighbours, and ceremony was ignored between them.

Finding the hall empty and the parlour door open he walked immediately into the latter room. The sight that met his eyes never left his memory. Agnes, his little Agnes, whom he had always loved and whom he had vainly longed to call by the endearing name of daughter, sat with her face towards him, looking up at Frederick. That young gentleman had just spoken to her, or she had just received something from his hand for her own was held out and her expression was one of gratitude and acceptance. She was not a beautiful girl, but she had a beautiful look, and at this moment it was exalted by a feeling the old gentleman had once longed, but now dreaded inexpressibly, to see there. What could it mean? Why did she show at this unhappy crisis, interest, devotion, passion almost, for one she had regarded with open scorn when it was the dearest wish of his heart to see them united? It was one of the contradictions of our mysterious human nature, and at this crisis and in this moment of secret heart-break and miserable doubt it made the old gentleman shrink, with his first feeling of actual despair.

The next moment Agnes had risen and they were both facing him.

"Good-evening, Agnes."

Mr. Sutherland forced himself to speak lightly.

"Ah, Frederick, do I find you here?" The latter question had more constraint in it.

Frederick smiled. There was an air of relief about him, almost of cheerfulness.

"I was just leaving," said he. "I was the bearer of a message to Miss Halliday." He had always called her Agnes before.

Mr. Sutherland, who had found his faculties confused by the expression he had surprised on the young girl's face, answered with a divided attention:

"And I have a message to give you. Wait outside on the porch for me, Frederick, till I exchange a word with our little friend here."

Agnes, who had thrust something she held into a box that lay beside her on a table, turned with a confused blush to listen.

Mr. Sutherland waited till Frederick had stepped into the hall. Then he drew Agnes to one side and remorselessly, persistently, raised her face toward him till she was forced to meet his benevolent but searching regard.

"Do you know," he whispered, in what he endeavoured to make a bantering tone, "how very few days it is since that unhappy boy yonder confessed his love for a young lady whose name I cannot bring myself to utter in your presence?"

The intent was kind, but the effect was unexpectedly cruel. With a droop of her head and a hurried gasp which
conveyed a mixture of entreaty and reproach, Agnes drew back in a vague endeavour to hide her sudden uneasiness. He saw his mistake, and let his hands drop.

"Don't, my dear," he whispered. "I had no idea it would hurt you to hear this. You have always seemed indifferent, hard even, toward my scapegrace son. And this was right, for--for--" What could he say, how express one-tenth of that with which his breast was labouring! He could not, he dared not, so ended, as we have intimated, by a confused stammering.

Agnes, who had never before seen this object of her lifelong admiration under any serious emotion, felt an impulse of remorse, as if she herself had been guilty of occasioning him embarrassment. Plucking up her courage, she wistfully eyed him.

"Did you imagine," she murmured, "that I needed any warning against Frederick, who has never honoured me with his regard, as he has the young lady you cannot mention? I'm afraid you don't know me, Mr. Sutherland, notwithstanding I have sat on your knee and sometimes plucked at your beard in my infantile insistence upon attention."

"I am afraid I don't know you," he answered. "I feel that I know nobody now, not even my son."

"Will my little girl think me very curious and very impertinent if I ask her what my son Frederick was saying when I came into the room?"

She looked up now, and with visible candour answered him immediately and to the point:

"Frederick is in trouble, Mr. Sutherland. He has felt the need of a friend who could appreciate this, and he has asked me to be that friend. Besides, he brought me a packet of letters which he entreated me to keep for him. I took them, Mr. Sutherland, and I will keep them as he asked me to do, safe from everybody's inspection, even my own."

Oh! why had he questioned her? He did not want to know of these letters; he did not want to know that Frederick possessed anything which he was afraid to retain in his own possession.

"My son did wrong," said he, "to confide anything to your care which he did not desire to retain in his own home. I feel that I ought to see these letters, for if my son is in trouble, as you say, I, his father, ought to know it."

"I am not sure about that," she smiled. "His trouble may be of a different nature than you imagine. Frederick has led a life that he regrets. I think his chief source of suffering lies in the fact that it is so hard for him to make others believe that he means to do differently in the future."

"Does he mean to do differently?"

She flushed. "He says so, Mr. Sutherland. And I, for one, cannot help believing him. Don't you see that he begins to look like another man?"

Mr. Sutherland was taken aback. He had noticed this fact, and had found it a hard one to understand. To ascertain what her explanation of it might be, he replied at once:

"There is a change in him--a very evident change. What is the occasion of it? To what do you ascribe it, Agnes?"

How breathlessly he waited for her answer! Had she any suspicion of the awful doubts which were so deeply agitating himself that night? She did not appear to have.

"I hesitate," she faltered, "but not from any doubt of Frederick, to tell you just what I think lies at the bottom of the sudden change observable in him. Miss Page (you see, I can name her, if you cannot) has proved herself so unworthy of his regard that the shock he has received has opened his eyes to certain failings of his own which made his weakness in her regard possible. I do not know of any other explanation. Do you?"

At this direct question, breathed though it was by tender lips, and launched in ignorance of the barb which carried it to his heart, Mr. Sutherland recoiled and cast an anxious look upon the door. Then with forced composure he quietly said: "If you who are so much nearer his age, and, let me hope, his sympathy, do not feel sure of his real feelings, how should I, who am his father, but have never been his confidant?"

"Oh," she cried, holding out her hands, "such a good father! Some day he will appreciate that fact as well as others. Believe it, Mr. Sutherland, believe it." And then, ashamed of her glowing interest, which was a little more pronounced than became her simple attitude of friend toward a man professedly in love with another woman, she faltered and cast the shyest of looks upward at the face she had never seen turned toward her with anything but kindness. "I have confidence in Frederick's good heart," she added, with something like dignity.

"Would God that I could share it!" was the only answer she received. Before she could recover from the shock of these words, Mr. Sutherland was gone.

Agnes was more or less disconcerted by this interview. There was a lingering in her step that night, as she trod the little white-embowered chamber sacred to her girlish dreams, which bespake an overcharged heart; a heart that, before she slept, found relief in these few words whispered by her into the night air, laden with the sweetness of honeysuckles:

"Can it be that he is right? Did I need such a warning,--I, who have hated this man, and who thought that it was
my hatred which made it impossible for me to think of anything or anybody else since we parted from each other last night? O me, if it is so!"

And from the great, wide world without, tremulous with moonlight, the echo seemed to come back:
"Woe to thee, Agnes Halliday, if this be so!"

XX

A SURPRISE FOR MR. SUTHERLAND

Meanwhile Mr. Sutherland and Frederick stood facing each other in the former's library. Nothing had been said during their walk down the hill, and nothing seemed likely to proceed from Frederick now, though his father waited with great and growing agitation for some explanation that would relieve the immense strain on his heart. At last he himself spoke, dryly, as we all speak when the heart is fullest and we fear to reveal the depth of our emotions.

"What papers were those you gave into Agnes Halliday's keeping? Anything which we could not have more safely, not to say discreetly, harboured in our own house?"

Frederick, taken aback, for he had not realised that his father had seen these papers, hesitated for a moment; then he boldly said:
"They were letters—old letters—which I felt to be better out of this house than in it. I could not destroy them, so I gave them into the guardianship of the most conscientious person I know. I hope you won't demand to see those letters. Indeed, sir, I hope you won't demand to see them. They were not written for your eye, and I would rather rest under your displeasure than have them in any way made public."

Frederick showed such earnestness, rather than fear, that Mr. Sutherland was astonished.
"When were these letters written?" he asked. "Lately, or before-- You say they are old; how old?"

Frederick's breath came easier.
"Some of them were written years ago—most of them, in fact. It is a personal matter—every man has such. I wish I could have destroyed them. You will leave them with Agnes, sir?"

"You astonish me," said Mr. Sutherland, relieved that he could at least hope that these letters were in nowise connected with the subject of his own frightful suspicions. "A young girl, to whom you certainly were most indifferent a week ago, is a curious guardian of letters you decline to show your father."

"I know it," was Frederick's sole reply.

Somehow the humility with which this was uttered touched Mr. Sutherland and roused hopes he had supposed dead. He looked his son for the first time directly in the eye, and with a beating heart said:
"Your secrets, if you have such, might better be entrusted to your father. You have no better friend—" and there he stopped with a horrified, despairing feeling of inward weakness. If Frederick had committed a crime, anything would be better than knowing it. Turning partially aside, he fingered the papers on the desk before which he was standing. A large envelope, containing some legal document, lay before him. Taking it up mechanically, he opened it. Frederick as mechanically watched him.

"I know," said the latter, "that I have no better friend. You have been too good, too indulgent. What is it, father? You change colour, look ill, what is there in that paper?"

Mr. Sutherland straightened himself; there was a great reserve of strength in this broken-down man yet. Fixing Frederick with a gaze more penetrating than any he had yet bestowed upon him, he folded his hands behind him with the document held tightly between them, and remarked:
"When you borrowed that money from me you did it like a man who expected to repay it. Why? Whence did you expect to receive the money with which to repay me? Answer, Frederick; this is your hour for confession."

Frederick turned so pale his father dropped his eyes in mercy.
"Confess?" he repeated. "What should I confess? My sins? They are too many. As for that money, I hoped to return it as any son might hope to reimburse his father for money advanced to pay a gambler's debt. I said I meant to work. My first money earned shall be offered to you. I--"

"Well? Well?" His father was holding the document he had just read, opened out before his eyes.
"Didn't you expect THIS?" he asked. "Didn't you know that that poor woman, that wretchedly murdered, most unhappy woman, whose death the whole town mourns, had made you her heir? That by the terms of this document, seen by me here and now for the first time, I am made executor and you the inheritor of the one hundred thousand dollars or more left by Agatha Webb?"

"No!" cried Frederick, his eyes glued to the paper, his whole face and form expressing something more akin to terror than surprise. "Has she done this? Why should she? I hardly knew her."

"No, you hardly knew her. And she? She hardly knew you; if she had she would have abhorred rather than enriched you. Frederick, I had rather see you dead than stand before me the inheritor of Philemon and Agatha Webb's hard-earned savings."

"You are right; it would be better," murmured Frederick, hardly heeding what he said. Then, as he encountered
his father's eye resting upon him with implacable scrutiny, he added, in weak repetition: "Why should she give her
money to me? What was I to her that she should will me her fortune?"

The father's finger trembled to a certain line in the document, which seemed to offer some explanation of this;
but Frederick did not follow it. He had seen that his father was expecting a reply to the question he had previously
put, and he was casting about in his mind how to answer it.

"When did you know of this will?" Mr. Sutherland now repeated. "For know of it you did before you came to me
for money."

Frederick summoned up his full courage and confronted his father resolutely.

"No," said he, "I did not know of it. It is as much of a surprise to me as it is to you."

He lied. Mr. Sutherland knew that he lied and Frederick knew that he knew it. A shadow fell between them,
which the older, with that unspeakable fear upon him roused by Sweetwater's whispered suspicions, dared no longer
attempt to lift.

After a few minutes in which Frederick seemed to see his father age before his eyes, Mr. Sutherland coldly
remarked:

"Dr. Talbot must know of this will. It has been sent here to me from Boston by a lawyer who drew it up two
years ago. The coroner may not as yet have heard of it. Will you accompany me to his office to-morrow? I should
like to have him see that we wish to be open with him in an affair of such importance."

"I will accompany you gladly," said Frederick, and seeing that his father neither wished nor was able to say
anything further, he bowed with distant ceremony as to a stranger and quietly withdrew. But when the door had
closed between them and only the memory of his father's changed countenance remained to trouble him, he paused
and laid his hand again on the knob, as if tempted to return. But he left without doing so, only to turn again at the
end of the hall and gaze wistfully back. Yet he went on.

As he opened his own door and disappeared within, he said half audibly:

"Easy to destroy me now, Amabel. One word and I am lost!"

BOOK II

THE MAN OF NO REPUTATION

XXI

SWEETWATER REASONS

And what of Sweetwater, in whose thoughts and actions the interest now centres?

When he left Mr. Sutherland it was with feelings such as few who knew him supposed him capable of
experiencing. Unattractive as he was in every way, ungainly in figure and unprepossessing of countenance, this butt
of the more favoured youth in town had a heart whose secret fires were all the warmer for being so persistently
covered, and this heart was wrung with trouble and heavy with a struggle that bade fair to leave him without rest that
night, if not for many nights to come. Why? One word will explain. Unknown to the world at large and almost
unknown to himself, his best affections were fixed upon the man whose happiness he thus unexpectedly saw himself
destined to destroy. He loved Mr. Sutherland.

The suspicion which he now found transferred in his own mind from the young girl whose blood-stained slippers
he had purloined during the excitement of the first alarm, to the unprincipled but only son of his one benefactor, had
not been lightly embraced or thoughtlessly expressed. He had had time to think it out in all its bearings. During that
long walk from Porchester churchyard to Mr. Halliday's door, he had been turning over in his mind everything that
he had heard and seen in connection with this matter, till the dim vision of Frederick's figure going on before him
was not more apparent to his sight than was the guilt he so deplored to his inward understanding.

He could not help but recognise him as the active party in the crime he had hitherto charged Amabel with. With
the clew offered by Frederick's secret anguish at the grave of Agatha, he could read the whole story of this detestable
crime as plainly as if it had been written in letters of fire on the circle of the surrounding darkness. Such anguish
under such circumstances on the part of such a man could mean but one thing—remorse; and remorse in the breast of
one so proverbially careless and corrupt, over the death of a woman who was neither relative nor friend, could have
but one interpretation, and that was guilt.

No other explanation was possible. Could one be given, or if any evidence could be adduced in contradiction of
this assumption, he would have dismissed his new suspicion with more heartiness even than he had embraced his
former one. He did not wish to believe Frederick guilty. He would have purchased an inner conviction of his
innocence almost at the price of his own life, not because of any latent interest in the young man himself, but
because he was Charles Sutherland's son, and the dear, if unworthy, centre of all that noble man's hopes, aims, and
happiness. But he could come upon no fact capable of shaking his present belief. Taking for truth Amabel's account
of what she had seen and done on that fatal night—something which he had hesitated over the previous day, but
which he now found himself forced to accept or do violence to his own secret convictions—and adding to it such
facts as had come to his own knowledge in his self-imposed role of detective, he had but to test the events of that
night by his present theory of Frederick's guilt, to find them hang together in a way too complete for mistake.

For what had been his reasons for charging Amabel herself with the guilt of a crime she only professed to have
been a partial witness to?

They were many.

First--The forced nature of her explanations in regard to her motive for leaving a merry ball and betaking herself
to the midnight road in her party dress and slippers. A woman of her well-known unsympathetic nature might use
the misery of the Zabels as a pretext for slipping into town at night, but never would be influenced by it as a motive.

Second--The equally unsatisfactory nature of the reasons she gave for leaving the course she had marked out for
herself and entering upon the pursuit of an unknown man into a house in which she had no personal interest and
from which she had just seen a bloody dagger thrown out. The most callous of women would have shrank from
letting her curiosity carry her thus far.

Third--The poverty of her plea that, after having braved so much in her desire to identify this criminal, she was
so frightened at his near approach as to fail to lift her head when the opportunity was given her to recognise him.

Fourth--Her professed inability to account for the presence of the orchid from her hair being found in the room
with Batsy.

Fifth--Her evident attempt to throw the onus of the crime on an old man manifestly incapable from physical
causes of committing it.

Sixth--The improbability, which she herself should have recognised, of this old man, in his extremely weak
condition, ignoring the hiding-places offered by the woods back of his own house, for the sake of one not only
involving a long walk, but situated close to a much-frequented road, and almost in view of the Sutherland mansion.

Seventh--The transparent excuse of sympathy for the old man and her desire to save him from the consequences
of his crime, which she offered in extenuation of her own criminal avowal of having first found and then reburied
the ill-gotten gains she had come upon in her persistent pursuit of the flying criminal. So impulsive an act might be
consistent with the blind compassion of some weak-headed but warm-hearted woman, but not with her self-
interested nature, incapable of performing any heroic deed save from personal motives or the most headlong
passion.

Lastly--The weakness of her explanation in regard to the cause which led her to peer into the Zabel cottage
through a hole made in the window-shade. Curiosity has its limits even in a woman's breast, and unless she hoped to
see more than was indicated by her words, her action was but the precursor of a personal entrance into a room where
we have every reason to believe the twenty-dollar bill was left.

A telling record and sufficient to favour the theory of her personal guilt if, after due thought, certain facts in
contradiction to this assumption had not offered themselves to his mind even before he thought of Frederick as the
unknown man she had followed down the hillside, as, for instance:

This crime, if committed by her, was done deliberately and with a premeditation antedating her departure from
the ballroom. Yet she went upon this errand in slippers, white slippers at that, something which so cool and
calculating a woman would have avoided, however careless she might have shown herself in other regards.

Again, guilt awakens cunning, even in the dullest breast; but she, keen beyond most men even, and so self-
poised that the most searching examination could not shake her self-control, betrayed an utter carelessness as to
what she did with these slippers on her return, thrusting them into a place easily accessible to the most casual search.
Had she been conscious of guilt and thus amenable to law, the sight of blood and mud-stains on those slippers would
have appalled her, and she would have made some attempt to destroy them, and not put them behind a picture and
forgotten them.

Again, would she have been so careless with a flower she knew to be identified with herself? A woman who
deliberately involves herself in crime has quick eyes; she would have seen that flower fall. At all events, if she had
been immediately responsible for its being on the scene of crime she would, with her quick wit, have found some
excuse or explanation for it, instead of defying her examiners with some such words as these: "It is a fact for you to
explain. I only know that I did not carry this flower into that room of death."

Again, had she been actuated in her attempt to fix the crime on old James Zabel by a personal consciousness of
guilt and a personal dread, she would not have stopped at suggestion in her allusions to the person she watched
burying the treasure in the woods. Instead of speaking of him as a shadow whose flight she had followed at a
distance, she would have described his figure as that of the same old man she had seen enter the Zabel cottage a few
minutes before, there being no reason for indefiniteness on this point, her conscience being sufficiently elastic for
any falsehood that would further her ends. And lastly, her manner, under the examination to which she had been
subjected, was not that of one who felt herself under a personal attack. It was a strange, suggestive, hesitating
manner, baffling alike to him who had more or less sounded her strange nature and to those who had no previous
knowledge of her freaks and subtle intellectual power, and only reaching its height of hateful charm and mysterious
daring when Frederick appeared on the scene and joined, or seemed to join, himself to the number of her examiners.

Now, let all suspicion of her as an active agent in this crime be dropped, assume Frederick to be the culprit and
she the simple accessory after the fact, and see how inconsistencies vanish, and how much more natural the whole
conduct of this mysterious woman appears.

Amabel Page left a merry dance at midnight and stole away into the Sutherland garden in her party dress and
slippers—why? Not to fulfil an errand which anyone who knows her cold and unsympathetic nature can but regard as
a pretext, but because she felt it imperative to see if her lover (with whose character, temptations, and necessities she
was fully acquainted, and in whose excited and preoccupied manner she had probably discovered signs of a secretly
growing purpose) meant indeed to elude his guests and slip away to town on the dangerous and unholy enterprise
suggested by their mutual knowledge of the money to be obtained there by one daring enough to enter a certain
house open like their own to midnight visitors.

She followed at such an hour and into such a place, not an unknown man casually come upon, but her lover,
whom she had tracked from the garden of his father's house, where she had lain in wait for him. It took courage to
do this, but a courage no longer beyond the limit of feminine daring, for her fate was bound up in his and she could
not but feel the impulse to save him from the consequences of crime, if not from the crime itself.

As for the aforementioned flower, what more natural than that Frederick should have transferred it from her hair
to his buttonhole during some of their interviews at the ball, and that it should have fallen from its place to the floor
in the midst of his possible struggle with Batsy?

And with this assumption of her perfect knowledge as to who the man was who had entered Mrs. Webb's house,
how much easier it is to understand why she did not lift her head when she heard him descend the stairs! No woman,
even one so depraved as she, would wish to see the handsome face of her lover in the glare of a freshly committed
crime, and besides she might very easily be afraid of him, for a man has but a blow for the suddenly detected
witness of his crime unless that witness is his confidant, which from every indication Sweetwater felt bound to
believe Amabel was not.

Her flight to the Zabel cottage, after an experience which would madden most women, can now be understood.
She was still following her lover. The plan of making Agatha's old and wretched friend amenable for her death
originated with Frederick and not with Amabel. It was he who first started for the Zabel cottage. It was he who left
the bank bill there. This is all clear, and even the one contradictory fact of the dagger having been seen in the old
man's hand was not a stumbling-block to Sweetwater. With the audacity of one confident of his own insight, he
explained it to himself thus: The dagger thrown from the window by the assassin, possibly because he knew of
Zabel's expected visit there that night, fell on the grass and was picked up by Amabel, only to be flung down again
in the brightest part of the lawn. It was lying there then, when, a few minutes later and before either Frederick or
Amabel had left the house, the old man entered the yard in a state of misery bordering on frenzy. He and his brother
were starving, had been starving for days. He was too proud to own his want, and too loyal to his brother to leave
him for the sake of the food prepared for them both at Agatha's house, and this was why he had hesitated over his
duty till this late hour, when his own secret misery or, perhaps, the hope of relieving his brother drove him to enter
the gate he had been accustomed to see open before him in glad hospitality. He finds the lights burning in the house
above and below, and encouraged by the welcome they seem to hold out, he stagger's up the path, ignorant of the
tragedy which was at that very moment being enacted behind those lighted windows. But half-way toward the house
he stops, the courage which has brought him so far suddenly fails, and in one of those quick visions which
sometimes visit men in extremity, he foresees the astonishment which his emaciated figure is likely to cause in these
two old friends, and burying his face in his hands he stops and bitterly communes with himself before venturing
farther. Fatal stop! fatal communing! for as he stands there he sees a dagger, his own old dagger, how lost or how
found he probably did not stop to ask, lying on the grass and offering in its dumb way suggestions as to how he
might end this struggle without any further suffering. Dizzy with the new hope, preferring death to the humiliation
he saw before him in Agatha's cottage, he dashes out of the yard, almost upsetting Mr. Crane, who was passing by
on his homeward way from an errand of mercy. A little while later Amabel comes upon him lying across his own
doorstep. He has made an effort to enter, but his long walk and the excitement of this last bitter hour have been too
much for him. As she watches him he gains strength and struggles to his feet, while she, aghast at the sight of the
dagger she had herself flung down in Agatha's yard, and dreading the encounter between this old man and the lover
she had been following to this place, creeps around the house and looks into the first window she finds open. What
does she expect to see? Frederick brought face to face with this desperate figure with its uplifted knife. But instead
of that she beholds another old man seated at a table and—and Amabel had paused when she reached that AND—and
Sweetwater had not then seen how important this pause was, but now he understood it. Now he saw that if she had
not had a subtle purpose in view, that if she had wished to tell the truth rather than produce false inferences in the
minds of those about her calculated to save the criminal as she called him, she would have completed her sentence thus: "I saw an old man seated at a table and Frederick Sutherland standing over him." For Sweetwater had no longer a doubt that Frederick was in that room at that moment. What further she saw, whether she was witness to an encounter between this intruder and James, or whether by some lingering on the latter's part Frederick was able to leave the house without running across him, was a matter of comparative unimportance. What is of importance is that he did leave it and that Amabel, knowing it was Frederick, strove to make her auditors believe it was Zabel, who carried the remainder of the money into the woods. Yet she did not say so, and if her words on this subject could be carefully recalled, one would see that it was still her lover she was following and no old man, tottering on the verge of the grave and only surviving because of the task he was bent on performing.

Amabel's excuse for handling the treasure, and for her reburial of the same, comes now within the bounds of possibility. She hoped to share this money some day, and her greed was too great for her to let such an amount lie there untouched, while her caution led her to bury it deeper, even at the risk of the discovery she was too inexperienced to fear.

That she should forget to feign surprise when the alarm of murder was raised was very natural, and so was the fact that a woman with a soul so blunted to all delicate instincts, and with a mind so intent upon perfecting the scheme entered into by the murderer of throwing the blame upon the man whose dagger had been made use of, should persist in visiting the scene of crime and calling attention to the spot where that dagger had fallen. And so with her manner before her examiners. Baffling as that manner was, it still showed streaks of consistency, when you thought of it as the cloak of a subtle, unprincipled woman, who sees amongst her interlocutors the guilty man whom by a word she can destroy, but whom she exerts herself to save, even at the cost of a series of bizarre explanations. She was playing with a life, a life she loved, but not with sincerity sufficient to rob the game of a certain delicate, if inconceivable, intellectual enjoyment. [Footnote: That Sweetwater in his hate, and with no real clew to the real situation, should come so near the truth as in this last supposition, shows the keenness of his insight.]

And Frederick? Had there been anything in his former life or in his conduct since the murder to give the lie to these heavy doubts against him? On the contrary. Though Sweetwater knew little of the dark record which had made this young man the disgrace of his family, what he did know was so much against him that he could well see that the distance usually existing between simple dissipation and desperate crime might be easily bridged by some great necessity for money. Had there been such a necessity? Sweetwater found it easy to believe so. And Frederick's manner? Was it that of an honest man simply shocked by the suspicions which had fallen upon the woman he loved? Had he, Sweetwater, not observed certain telltale moments in his late behaviour that required a deeper explanation even than this?

The cry, for instance, with which he had rushed from the empty ballroom into the woods on the opposite side of the road! Was it a natural cry or an easily explainable one? "Thank God! this terrible night is over!" Strange language to be uttered by this man at such a time and in such a place, if he did not already know what was to make this night of nights memorable through all this region. He did know, and this cry which had struck Sweetwater strangely at the time and still more strangely when he regarded it simply as a coincidence, now took on all the force of a revelation and the irresistible bubbling up in Frederick's breast of that remorse which had just found its full expression on Agatha's grave.

To some that remorse and all his other signs of suffering might be explained by his passion for the real criminal. But to Sweetwater it was only too evident that an egotist like Frederick Sutherland cannot suffer for another to such an extent as this, and that a personal explanation must be given for so personal a grief, even if that explanation involves the dreadful charge of murder.

It was when Sweetwater reached this point in his reasoning that Frederick disappeared beneath Mr. Halliday's porch, and Mr. Sutherland came up behind him. After the short conversation in which Sweetwater saw his own doubts more than reflected in the uneasy consciousness of this stricken father, he went home and the struggle of his life began.

XXII

SWEETWATER ACTS

Sweetwater had promised Mr. Sutherland that he would keep counsel in regard to his present convictions concerning Frederick's guilt; but this he knew he could not do if he remained in Sutherlandtown and fell under the pitiless examination of Mr. Courtney, the shrewd and able prosecuting attorney of the district. He was too young, too honest, and had made himself too conspicuous in this affair to succeed in an undertaking requiring so much dissimulation, if not actual falsehood. Indeed, he was not sure that in his present state of mind he could hear Frederick's name mentioned without flushing, and slight as such a hint might be, it would be enough to direct attention to Frederick, which once done could but lead to discovery and permanent disgrace to all who bore the name of Sutherland.
What was he to do then? How avoid a consequence he found himself absolutely unable to face? It was a problem which this night must solve for him. But how? As I have said, he went down to his house to think.

Sweetwater was not a man of absolute rectitude. He was not so much high-minded as large-hearted. He had, besides, certain foibles. In the first place, he was vain, and vanity in a very plain man is all the more acute since it centres in his capabilities, rather than in his appearance. Had Sweetwater been handsome, or even passably attractive, he might have been satisfied with the approbation of demure maidens and a comradeship with his fellows. But being one who could hope for nothing of this kind, not even for a decent return to the unreasoning heart-worship he felt himself capable of paying, and which he had once paid for a few short days till warned of his presumption by the insolence of the recipient, he had fixed his hope and his ambition on doing something which would rouse the admiration of those about him and bring him into that prominence to which he felt himself entitled. That he, a skilful musician, should desire to be known as a brilliant detective, is only one of the anomalies of human nature which it would be folly and a waste of time on our part to endeavour to explain. That, having chosen to exercise his wits in this way, he should so well succeed that he dared not for his life continue in the work he had so publicly undertaken, occasioned in him a pang of disappointment almost as insufferable as that brought by the realisation of what his efforts were likely to bring upon the man to whose benevolence he owed his very life. Hence his struggle, which must be measured by the extent of his desires and the limitations which had been set to his nature by his surroundings and the circumstances of his life and daily history.

If we enter with him into the humble cottage where he was born and from which he had hardly strayed more than a dozen miles in the twenty-two years of his circumscribed life, we may be able to understand him better.

It was an unpainted house perched on an arid hillside, with nothing before it but the limitless sea. He had found his way to it mechanically, but as he approached the narrow doorway he paused and turned his face towards the stretch of heaving waters, whose low or loud booming had been first his cradle song and then the ceaseless accompaniment of his later thoughts and aspirations. It was heaving yet, ceaselessly heaving, and in its loud complaint there was a sound of moaning not always to be found there, or so it seemed to Sweetwater in his present troubled mood.

Sighing as this sound reached his ear, and shuddering as its meaning touched his heart, Sweetwater pushed open the door of his small house, and entered.

"It is I, mamsie!" he shouted, in what he meant to be his usual voice; but to a sensitive ear--and what ear is so sensitive as a mother's?--there was a tremble in it that was not wholly natural.

"Is anything the matter, dear?" called out that mother, in reply.

The question made him start, though he replied quickly enough, and in more guarded tones:

"No, mamsie. Go to sleep. I'm tired, that's all."

Would to God that was all! He recalled with envy the days when he dragged himself into the house at sundown, after twelve long hours of work on the docks. As he paused in the dark hallway and listened till he heard the breathing of her who had called him DEAR--the only one in the world who ever had or ever would call him DEAR--he had glimpses of that old self which made him question if his self-tutoring on the violin, and the restless ambition which had driven him out of the ways of his ancestors into strange attempts for which he was not prepared by any previous discipline, had brought him happiness or improved his manhood. He was forced to acknowledge that the sleep of those far-distant nights of his busy boyhood was sweeter than the wakefulness of these later days, and that it would have been better for him, and infinitely better for her, if he had remained at the carpenter's bench and been satisfied with a repetition of his father's existence.

His mother was the only person sharing that small house with him, and once assured that she was asleep, he lighted a lamp in the empty kitchen and sat down.

It was just twelve o'clock. This, to anyone accustomed to this peculiar young man's habits, had nothing unusual in it. He was accustomed to come home late and sit thus by himself for a short time before going up-stairs. But, to one capable of reading his sharp and none too mobile countenance, there was a change in the character of the brooding into which he now sank, which, had that mother been awake to watch him, would have made every turn of his eye and movement of his hand interesting and important.

In the first place, the careless attitude into which he had fallen was totally at variance with the restless glance which took in every object in that well-known room so associated with his mother and her daily work that he could not imagine her in any other surroundings, and wondered sometimes if she would seem any longer his mother if he had pieced together in his earliest years and presented to his mother in a gush of pride greater than any he had since
experienced. She had never used it, but it always hung upon the one nail in the one place, as a symbol of his love and of hers. And there, higher up on the end of the shelf barren enough of ornaments, God wot, were a broken toy and a much-defaced primer, mementos likewise of his childhood; and farther along the wall, on a sort of raised bench, a keg, the spigot of which he was once guilty of turning on in his infantile longing for sweets, only to find he could not turn it back again until all the floor was covered with molasses, and his appetite for the forbidden gratified to the full. And yonder, dangling from a peg, never devoted to any other use, hung his father’s old hat, just where he had placed it on the fatal morning when he came in and lay down on the sitting-room lounge for the last time; and close to it, lovingly close to it, Sweetwater thought, his mother’s apron, the apron he had seen her wear at supper, and which he would see her wear at breakfast, with all its suggestions of ceaseless work and patient every-day thrift.

Somehow, he could not bear the sight of that apron. With the expectation now forming in his mind, of leaving this home and leaving this mother, this symbol of humble toil became an intolerable grief to him. Jumping up, he turned in another direction; but now another group of objects equally eloquent came under his eye. It was his mother’s work-basket he saw, with a piece of sewing in it intended for him, and as if this were not enough, the table set for two, and at his place a little covered dish which held the one sweetmeat he craved for breakfast. The spectacles lying beside her plate told him how old she was, and as he thought of her failing strength and enfeebled ways, he jumped up again and sought another corner. But here his glances fell on his violin, and a new series of emotions awakened within him. He loved the instrument and played as much from natural intuition as acquired knowledge, but in the plan of action he had laid out for himself his violin could have no part. He would have to leave it behind. Feeling that his regrets were fast becoming too much for him, he left the humble kitchen and went up-stairs. But not to sleep. Locking the door (something he never remembered doing before in all his life), he began to handle over his clothes and other trivial belongings. Choosing out a certain strong suit, he laid it out on the bed and then went to a bureau drawer and drew out an old-fashioned wallet. This he opened, but after he had counted the few bills it contained he shook his head and put them all back, only retaining a little silver, which he slipped into one of the pockets of the suit he had chosen. Then he searched for and found a little Bible which his mother had once given him. He was about to thrust that into another pocket, but he seemed to think better of this, too, for he ended by putting it back into the drawer and taking instead a bit from one of his mother’s old aprons which he had chanced upon upon the stairway. This he placed as carefully in his watch pocket as if it had been the picture of a girl he loved. Then he undressed and went to bed.

Mrs. Sweetwater said afterwards that she never knew Caleb to talk so much and eat so little as he did that next morning at breakfast. Such plans as he detailed for unmasking the murderer of Mrs. Webb! Such business for the day! So many people to see! It made her quite dizzy, she said. And, indeed, Sweetwater was more than usually voluble that morning,—perhaps because he could not bear his mother’s satisfied smile; and when he went out of the house it was with a laugh and a cheery “Good-bye, mamsie” that was in spiking contrast to the irrepressible exclamation of grief which escaped him when the door was closed between them. Ah, when should he enter those four walls again, and when should he see the old mother?

He proceeded immediately to town. A ship was preparing to sail that morning for the Brazils, and the wharves were alive with bustle. He stopped a moment to contemplate the great hulk rising and falling at her moorings, then he passed on and entered the building where he had every reason to expect to find Dr. Talbot and Knapp in discussion. It was very important to him that morning to learn just how they felt concerning the great matter under discussion. It was very important to him that morning to learn just how they felt concerning the great matter absorbing him, for if suspicion was taking the direction of Frederick, or if he saw it was at all likely to do so, then would his struggle be cut short and all necessity for leaving town be at an end. It was to save Frederick from this danger that he was prepared to cut all the ties binding him to this place, and nothing short of the prospect of accomplishing this would make him willing to undergo such a sacrifice.

"Well, Sweetwater, any news, eh?" was the half-jeering, half-condescending greeting he received from the coroner.

Sweetwater, who had regained entire control over his feelings as soon as he found himself under the eye of this man and the supercilious detective he had attempted to rival, gave a careless shrug and passed the question on to Knapp. "Have you any news?" he asked.

Knapp, who would probably not have acknowledged it if he had, smiled the indulgent smile of a self-satisfied superior and uttered a few equivocal sentences. This was gall and wormwood to Sweetwater, but he kept his temper admirably and, with an air of bravado entirely assumed for the occasion, said to Dr. Talbot:

"I think I shall have something to tell you soon which will materially aid you in your search for witnesses. By to-morrow, at least, I shall know whether I am right or wrong in thinking I have discovered an important witness in quite an unexpected quarter."

Sweetwater knew of no new witness, but it was necessary for him not only to have a pretext for the move he contemplated, but to so impress these men with an idea of his extreme interest in the approaching proceedings, that
no suspicion should ever arise of his having premeditated an escape from them. He wished to appear the victim of accident; and this is why he took nothing from his home which would betray any intention of leaving it.

"Ha! indeed!" ejaculated the coroner with growing interest. "And may I ask----"

"Please," urged Sweetwater, with a side look at Knapp, "do not ask me anything just yet. This afternoon, say, after I have had a certain interview with--What, are they setting sails on the Hesper already?" he burst out, with a quick glance from the window at the great ship riding at anchor a little distance from them in the harbour. "There is a man on her I must see. Excuse me--Oh, Mr. Sutherland!"

He fell back in confusion. That gentleman had just entered the room in company with Frederick.

XXIII

A SINISTER PAIR

"I beg your pardon," stammered Sweetwater, starting aside and losing on the instant all further disposition to leave the room.

Indeed, he had not the courage to do so, even if he had had the will. The joint appearance of these two men in this place, and at an hour so far in advance of that which usually saw Mr. Sutherland enter the town, was far too significant in his eyes for him to ignore it. Had any explanation taken place between them, and had Mr. Sutherland's integrity triumphed over personal considerations to the point of his bringing Frederick here to confess?

Meanwhile Dr. Talbot had risen with a full and hearty greeting which proved to Sweetwater's uneasy mind that notwithstanding Knapp's disquieting reticence no direct suspicion had as yet fallen on the unhappy Frederick. Then he waited for what Mr. Sutherland had to say, for it was evident he had come there to say something. Sweetwater waited, too, frozen almost into immobility by the fear that it would be something injudicious, for never had he seen any man so changed as Mr. Sutherland in these last twelve hours, nor did it need a highly penetrating eye to detect that the relations between him and Frederick were strained to a point that made it almost impossible for them to more than assume their old confidential attitude. Knapp, knowing them but superficially, did not perceive this, but Dr. Talbot was not blind to it, as was shown by the inquiring look he directed towards them both while waiting.

Mr. Sutherland spoke at last.

"Pardon me for interrupting you so early," said he, with a certain tremble in his voice which Sweetwater quaked to hear. "For certain reasons, I should be very glad to know, WE should be very glad to know, if during your investigations into the cause and manner of Agatha Webb's death, you have come upon a copy of her will."

"No."

Talbot was at once interested, so was Knapp, while Sweetwater withdrew further into his corner in anxious endeavour to hide his blanching cheek. "We have found nothing. We do not even know that she has made a will."

"I ask," pursued Mr. Sutherland, with a slight glance toward Frederick, who seemed, at least in Sweetwater's judgment, to have braced himself up to bear this interview unmoved, "because I have not only received intimation that she made such a will, but have even been entrusted with a copy of it as chief executor of the same. It came to me in a letter from Boston yesterday. Its contents were a surprise to me. Frederick, hand me a chair. These accumulated misfortunes--for we all suffer under the afflictions which have beset this town--have made me feel my years."

Sweetwater drew his breath more freely. He thought he might understand by this last sentence that Mr. Sutherland had come here for a different cause than he had at first feared. Frederick, on the contrary, betrayed a failing ability to hide his emotion. He brought his father a chair, placed it, and was drawing back out of sight when Mr. Sutherland prevented him by a mild command to hand the paper he had brought to the coroner.

There was something in his manner that made Sweetwater lean forward and Frederick look up, so that the father's and son's eyes met under that young man's scrutiny. But while he saw meaning in both their regards, there was nothing like collusion, and, baffled by these appearances, which, while interesting, told him little or nothing, he transferred his attention to Dr. Talbot and Knapp, who had drawn together to see what this paper contained.

"As I have said, the contents of this will are a surprise to me," faltered Mr. Sutherland. "They are equally so to my son. He can hardly be said to have been a friend even of the extraordinary woman who thus leaves him her whole fortune."

"I never spoke with her but twice," exclaimed Frederick with a studied coldness, which was so evidently the cloak of inner agitation that Sweetwater trembled for its effect, notwithstanding the state of his own thoughts, which were in a ferment. Frederick, the inheritor of Agatha Webb's fortune! Frederick, concerning whom his father had said on the previous night that he possessed no motive for wishing this good woman's death! Was it the discovery that such a motive existed which had so aged this man in the last twelve hours? Sweetwater dared not turn again to see. His own face might convey too much of his own fears, doubts, and struggle.

But the coroner, for whose next words Sweetwater listened with acute expectancy, seemed to be moved simply by the unexpectedness of the occurrence. Glancing at Frederick with more interest than he had ever before shown
him, he cried with a certain show of enthusiasm:

"A pretty fortune! A very pretty fortune!" Then with a deprecatory air natural to him in addressing Mr. Sutherland, "Would it be indiscreet for me to ask to what our dear friend Agatha alludes in her reference to your late lamented wife?" His finger was on a clause of the will and his lips next minute mechanically repeated what he was pointing at:

"In remembrance of services rendered me in early life by Marietta Sutherland, wife of Charles Sutherland of Sutherlandtown, I bequeath to Frederick, sole child of her affection, all the property, real and personal, of which I die possessed. Services rendered! They must have been very important ones," suggested Dr. Talbot.

Mr. Sutherland's expression was one of entire perplexity and doubt.

"I do not remember my wife ever speaking of any special act of kindness she was enabled to show Agatha Webb. They were always friends, but never intimate ones. However, Agatha could be trusted to make no mistake. She doubtless knew to what she referred. Mrs. Sutherland was fully capable of doing an extremely kind act in secret."

For all his respect for the speaker, Dr. Talbot did not seem quite satisfied. He glanced at Frederick and fumbled the paper uneasily.

"Perhaps you were acquainted with the reason for this legacy--this large legacy," he emphasised.

Frederick, thus called upon, nay, forced to speak, raised his head, and without perhaps bestowing so much as a thought on the young man behind him who was inwardly quivering in anxious expectancy of some betrayal on his part which would precipitate disgrace and lifelong sorrow on all who bore the name of Sutherland, met Dr. Talbot's inquiring glance with a simple earnestness surprising to them all, and said:

"My record is so much against me that I am not surprised that you wonder at my being left with Mrs. Webb's fortune. Perhaps she did not fully realise the lack of estimation in which I am deservedly held in this place, or perhaps, and this would be much more like her, she hoped that the responsibility of owing my independence to so good and so unfortunate a woman might make a man of me."

There was a manliness in Frederick's words and bearing that took them all by surprise. Mr. Sutherland's dejection visibly lightened, while Sweetwater, conscious of the more than vital interests hanging upon the impression which might be made by this event upon the minds of the men present, turned slightly so as to bring their faces into the line of his vision.

The result was a conviction that as yet no real suspicion of Frederick had seized upon either of their minds. Knapp's face was perfectly calm and almost indifferent, while the good coroner, who saw this and every other circumstance connected with this affair through the one medium of his belief in Amabel's guilt, was surveying Frederick with something like sympathy.

"I fear," said he, "that others were not as ignorant of your prospective good fortune as you were yourself," at which Frederick's cheek turned a dark red, though he said nothing, and Sweetwater, with a sudden involuntary gesture indicative of resolve, gazed for a moment breathlessly at the ship, and then with an unexpected and highly impetuous movement dashed from the room crying loudly:

"I've seen him! I've seen him! he's just going on board the ship. Wait for me, Dr. Talbot. I'll be back in fifteen minutes with such a witness--"

Here the door slammed. But they could hear his hurrying footsteps as he plunged down the stairs and rushed away from the building.

It was an unexpected termination to an interview fast becoming unbearable to the two Sutherlands, but no one, not even the old gentleman himself, took in its full significance.

He was, however, more than agitated by the occurrence and could hardly prevent himself from repeating aloud Sweetwater's final word, which after their interview at Mr. Halliday's gate, the night before, seemed to convey to him at once a warning and a threat. To keep himself from what he feared might prove a self- betrayal, he faltered out in very evident dismay:

"What is the matter? What has come over the lad?"

"Oh!" cried Dr. Talbot, "he's been watching that ship for an hour. He is after some man he has just seen go aboard her. Says he's a new and important witness in this case. Perhaps he is. Sweetwater is no man's fool, for all his small eyes and retreating chin. If you want proof of it, wait till he comes back. He'll be sure to have something to say."

Meanwhile they had all pressed forward to the window. Frederick, who carefully kept his face out of his father's view, bent half-way over the sill in his anxiety to watch the flying figure of Sweetwater, who was making straight for the dock, while Knapp, roused at last, leaned over his shoulder and pointed to the sailors on the deck, who were pulling in the last ropes, preparatory to sailing.

"He's too late: they won't let him aboard now. What a fool to hang around here till he saw his man, instead of
being at the dock to nab him! That comes of trusting a country bumpkin. I knew he'd fail us at the pinch. They lack training, these would-be detectives. See, now! He's run up against the mate, and the mate pushes him back. His cake is all dough, unless he's got a warrant. Has he a warrant, Dr. Talbot?"

"No," said the coroner, "he didn't ask for one. He didn't even tell me whom he wanted. Can it be one of those two passengers you see on the forward deck, there?"

It might well be. Even from a distance these two men presented a sinister appearance that made them quite marked figures among the crowd of hurrying sailors and belated passengers.

"One of them is peering over the rail with a very evident air of anxiety. His eye is on Sweetwater, who is dancing with impatience. See, he is gesticulating like a monkey, and--By the powers, they are going to let him go aboard!"

Mr. Sutherland, who had been leaning heavily against the window-jamb in the agitation of doubt and suspense which Sweetwater's unaccountable conduct had evoked, here crossed to the other side and stole a determined look at Frederick. Was his son personally interested in this attempt of the amateur detective? Did he know whom Sweetwater sought, and was he suffering as much or more than himself from the uncertainty and fearful possibilities of the moment? He thought he knew Frederick's face, and that he had read dread there, but Frederick had changed so completely since the commission of this crime that even his father could no longer be sure of the correct meaning either of his words or expression.

The torture of the moment continued.

"He climbs like a squirrel," remarked Dr. Talbot, with a touch of enthusiasm. "Look at him now--he's on the quarterdeck and will be down in the cabins before you can say Jack Robinson. I warrant they have told him to hurry. Captain Dunlap isn't the man to wait five minutes after the ropes are pulled in."

"Those two men have shrunk away behind some mast or other," cried Knapp. "They are the fellows he's after. But what can they have to do with the murder? Have you ever seen them here about town, Dr. Talbot?"

"Not that I remember; they have a foreign air about them. Look like South Americans."

"Well, they're going to South America. Sweetwater can't stop them. He has barely time to get off the ship himself. There goes the last rope! Have they forgotten him? They're drawing up the ladder."

"No: the mate stops them; see, he's calling the fellow. I can hear his voice, can't you? Sweetwater's game is up. He'll have to leave in a hurry. What's the rumpus now?"

"Nothing, only they've scattered to look for him; the fox is down in the cabins and won't come up, laughing in his sleeve, no doubt, at keeping the vessel waiting while he hunts up his witness."

"If it's one of those two men he's laying a trap for he won't snare him in a hurry. They're sneaks, those two, and--Why, the sailors are coming back shaking their heads. I can almost hear from here the captain's oaths."

"And such a favourable wind for getting out of the harbour! Sweetwater, my boy, you are distinguishing yourself. If your witness don't pan out well you won't hear the last of this in a hurry."

"It looks as if they meant to sail without waiting to put him ashore," observed Frederick in a low tone, too carefully modulated not to strike his father as unnatural.

"By jingoes, so it does!" ejaculated Knapp. "There go the sails! The pilot's hand is on the wheel, and Dr. Talbot, are you going to let your cunning amateur detective and his important witness slip away from you like this?"

"I cannot help myself," said the coroner, a little dazed himself at this unexpected chance. "My voice wouldn't reach them from this place; besides they wouldn't heed me if it did. The ship is already under way and we won't see Sweetwater again till the pilot's boat comes back."

Mr. Sutherland moved from the window and crossed to the door like a man in a dream. Frederick, instantly conscious of his departure, turned to follow him, but presently stopped and addressing Knapp for the first time, observed quietly:

"This is all very exciting, but I think your estimate of this fellow Sweetwater is just. He's a busybody and craves notoriety above everything. He had no witness on board, or, if he had, it was an imaginary one. You will see him return quite crestfallen before night, with some trumped-up excuse of mistaken identity."

The shrug which Knapp gave dismissed Sweetwater as completely from the affair as if he had never been in it.

"I think I may now regard myself as having this matter in my sole charge," was his curt remark, as he turned away, while Frederick, with a respectful bow to Dr. Talbot, remarked in leaving:

"I am at your service, Dr. Talbot, if you require me to testify at the inquest in regard to this will. My testimony can all be concentrated into the one sentence, 'I did not expect this bequest, and have no theories to advance in explanation of it.' But it has made me feel myself Mrs. Webb's debtor, and given me a justifiable interest in the inquiry which, I am told, you open to-morrow into the cause and manner of her death. If there is a guilty person in this case, I shall raise no barrier in the way of his conviction."

And while the coroner's face still showed the embarrassment which this last sentence called up, his mind being
now, as ever, fixed on Amabel, Frederick offered his arm to his father, whose condition was not improved by the excitement of the last half-hour, and proceeded to lead him from the building.

Whatever they thought, or however each strove to hide their conclusions from the other, no words passed between them till they came in full sight of the sea, on a distant billow of which the noble-ship bound for the Brazils rode triumphantly on its outward course. Then Mr. Sutherland remarked, with a suggestive glance at the vessel:

"The young man who has found an unexpected passage on that vessel will not come back with the pilot."

Was the sigh which was Frederick's only answer one of relief? It certainly seemed so.

XXIV
IN THE SHADOW OF THE MAST

Mr. Sutherland was right. Sweetwater did not return with the pilot. According to the latter there was no Sweetwater on board the ship to return. At all events the minutest search had not succeeded in finding him in the cabins, though no one had seen him leave the vessel, or, indeed, seen him at all after his hasty dash below decks. It was thought on board that he had succeeded in reaching shore before the ship set sail, and the pilot was suitably surprised at learning this was not so. So were Sweetwater's friends and associates with the exception of a certain old gentleman living on the hill, and Knapp the detective. He, that is the latter, had his explanation at his tongue's end:

"Sweetwater is a fakir. He thought he could carry off the honours from the regular force, and when he found he couldn't he quietly disappeared. We shall hear of him again in the Brazils."

An opinion that speedily gained ground, so that in a few hours Sweetwater was all but forgotten, save by his mother, whose heart was filled with suspense, and by Mr. Sutherland, whose breast was burdened by gratitude. The amazing fact of Frederick, the village scapegrace and Amabel's reckless, if aristocratic, lover, having been made the legatee of the upright Mrs. Webb's secret savings had something to do with this. With such a topic at hand, not only the gossips, but those who had the matter of Agatha's murder in hand, found ample material to occupy their thoughts and tongues, without wasting time over a presumptuous busybody, who had not wits enough to know that five minutes before sailing-time is an unfortunate moment in which to enter a ship.

And where was Sweetwater, that he could not be found on the shore or on the ship? We will follow him and see. Accustomed from his youth to ramble over the vessels while in port, he knew this one as well as he did his mother's house. It was, therefore, a surprise to the sailors when, shortly after the departure of the pilot, they came upon him lying in the hold, half buried under a box which had partially fallen upon him. He was unconscious, or appeared to be so, and when brought into open light showed marks of physical distress and injury; but his eye was clear and his expression hardly as rueful as one would expect in a man who finds himself en route for the Brazils with barely a couple of dollars in his pocket and every prospect of being obliged to work before the mast to earn his passage. Even the captain noticed this and eyed him with suspicion. But Sweetwater, rousing to the necessities of the occasion, forthwith showed such a mixture of discouragement and perplexity that the honest sailor was deceived and abated half at least of his oaths. He gave Sweetwater a hammock and admitted him to the mess, but told him that as soon as his bruises allowed him to work he should show himself on deck or expect the rough treatment commonly bestowed on stowaways.

It was a prospect to daunt some men, but not Sweetwater. Indeed it was no more than he had calculated upon when he left his savings behind with his old mother and entered upon this enterprise with only a little change in his pocket. He had undertaken out of love and gratitude to Mr. Sutherland to rid Frederick of a dangerous witness and felt able to complete the sacrifice. More than that, he was even strangely happy for a time. The elation of the willing victim was his, that is for a few short hours, then he began to think of his mother. How had she borne his sudden departure? What would she think had befallen him, and how long would he have to wait before he could send her word of his safety? If he was to be of real service to the man he venerated, he must be lost long enough for the public mind to have become settled in regard to the mysteries of the Webb murder and for his own boastful send her word of his safety? If he was to be of real service to the man he venerated, he must be lost long enough for the public mind to have become settled in regard to the mysteries of the Webb murder and for his own boastful
waves? He had boasted of possessing a witness. Would they believe that boast and send a detective in search of him, or would they take his words for the bombast they really were and proceed with their investigations in happy relief at the loss of his intrusive assistance?

As this was a question impossible for him to answer, he turned to other thoughts and fretted himself for a while with memories of Amabel's disdain and Frederick's careless acceptance of a sacrifice he could never know the cost of, mixed strangely with relief at being free of it all and on the verge of another life. As the dark settled, his head fell farther and farther forward on the rail he was leaning against, till he became to any passing eye but a blurred shadow mixing with other shadows equally immovable.

Unlike them, however, his shadow suddenly shifted. Two men had drawn near him, one speaking pure Spanish and the other English. The English was all that Sweetwater could understand, and this half of the conversation was certainly startling enough. Though he could not, of course, know to what or whom it referred, and though it certainly had nothing to do with him, or any interest he represented or understood, he could not help listening and remembering every word. The English-speaking man uttered the first sentence he comprehended. It was this:

"Shall it be to-night?"

The answer was in Spanish.

Again the English voice:

"He has come up. I saw him distinctly as he passed the second mast."

More Spanish; then English:

"You may if you want to, but I'll never breathe easy while he's on the ship. Are you sure he's the fellow we fear?"

A rapid flow of words from which Sweetwater got nothing. Then slowly and distinctly in the sinister tones he had already begun to shiver at:

"Very good. The R. F. A. should pay well for this," with the quick addition following a hurried whisper: "All right! I'd send a dozen men to the bottom for half that money. But 'ware there! Here's a fellow watching us! If he has heard--"

Sweetwater turned, saw two desperate faces projected toward him, realised that something awful, unheard of, was about to happen, and would have uttered a yell of dismay, but that the very intensity of his fright took away his breath. The next minute he felt himself launched into space and enveloped in the darkness of the chilling waters. He had been lifted bodily and flung headlong into the sea.

XXV
IN EXTREMITY

Sweetwater's one thought as he sank was, "Now Mr. Sutherland need fear me no longer."

But the instinct of life is strong in every heart, and when he found himself breathing the air again he threw out his arms wildly and grasped a spar.

It was life to him, hope, reconnection with his kind. He clutched, clung, and, feeling himself floating, uttered a shout of mingled joy and appeal that unhappily was smothered in the noise of the waters and the now rapidly rising wind.

Whence had come this spar in his desperate need? He never knew, but somewhere in his remote consciousness an impression remained of a shock to the waves following his own plunge into the water, which might mean that this spar had been thrown out after him, perhaps by the already repentant hands of the wretches who had tossed him to his death. However it came, or from whatever source, it had at least given him an opportunity to measure his doom and realise the agonies of hope when it alternates with despair.

The darkness was impenetrable. It was no longer that of heaven, but of the nether world, or so it seemed to this dazed soul, plunged suddenly from dreams of exile into the valley of the shadow of death. And such a death! As he realised its horrors, as he felt the chill of night and the oncoming storm strike its piercing fangs into his marrow, and knew that his existence and the hope of ever again seeing the dear old face at the fireside rested upon the strength of his will and the tenacity of his life-clutch, he felt his heart fail, and the breath that was his life cease in a gurgle of terror. But he clung on, and, though no comfort came, still clung, while vague memories of long-ago shipwrecks, and stories told in his youth of men, women, and children tossing for hours on a drifting plank, flashed through his benumbed brain, and lent their horror to his own sensations of apprehension and despair.

He wanted to live. Now that the dread spectre had risen out of the water and had its clutch on his hair, he realised that the world held much for him, and that even in exile he might work and love and enjoy God's heaven and earth, the green fields and the blue sky. Not such skies as were above him now. No, this was not sky that overarched him, but a horrible vault in which the clouds, rising in torn masses, had the aspect of demons stooping to contend for him with those other demons that with long arms and irresistible grip were dragging at him from below. He was alone on a whirling spar in the midst of a midnight ocean, but horror and a pitiless imagination made this conflict
more than that of the elements, and his position an isolation beyond that of man removed from his fellows. He was almost mad. Yet he clung.

Suddenly a better frame of mind prevailed. The sky was no lighter, save as the lightning came to relieve the overwhelming darkness by a still more overwhelming glare, nor were the waves less importunate or his hold on the spar more secure; but the horror seemed to have lifted, and the practical nature of the man reasserted itself. Other men had gone through worse dangers than these and survived to tell the tale, as he might survive to tell his. The will was all--will and an indomitable courage; and he had will and he had courage, or why had he left his home to dare a hard and threatening future purely from a sentiment of gratitude? Could he hold on long enough, daylight would come; and if, as he now thought possible, he had been thrown into the sea within twenty hours after leaving Sutherlandtown, then he must be not far from Cape Cod, and in the direct line of travel from New York to Boston. Rescue would come, and if the storm which was breaking over his head more and more furiously made it difficult for him to retain his hold, it certainly would not wreck his spar or drench him more than he was already drenched, while every blast would drive him shoreward. The clinging was all, and filial love would make him do that, even in the semi-unconsciousness which now and then swept over him. Only, would it not be better for Mr. Sutherland if he should fail and drop away into the yawning chasms of the unknown world beneath? There were moments when he thought so, and then his clutch perceptibly weakened; but only once did he come near losing his hold altogether. And that was when he thought he heard a laugh. A laugh, here in the midst of ocean! in the midst of storm! a laugh! Were demons a reality, then? Yes; but the demon he had heard was of his own imagination; it had a face of Medusa sweetness and the laugh--Only Amabel's rang out so thrillingly false, and with such diabolic triumph. Amabel, who might be laughing in her dreams at this very moment of his supreme misery, and who assuredly would laugh if conscious of his suffering and aware of the doom to which his self-sacrifice had brought him. Amabel! the thought of her made the night more dark, the waters more threatening, the future less promising. Yet he would hold on if only to spite her who hated him and whom he hated almost as much as he loved Mr. Sutherland.

It was his last conscious thought for hours. When morning broke he was but a nerveless figure, with sense enough to cling, and that was all.

XXVI

THE ADVENTURE OF THE PARCEL

"A man! Haul him in! Don't leave a poor fellow drifting about like that."

The speaker, a bluff, hearty skipper, whose sturdy craft had outridden one of the worst storms of the season, pointed to our poor friend Sweetwater, whose head could just be seen above the broken spar he clung to. In another moment a half-dozen hands were stretched for him, and the insensible form was drawn in and laid on a deck which still showed the results of the night's fierce conflict with the waters.

"Damn it! how ugly he is!" cried one of the sailors, with a leer at the half-drowned man's face. "I'd like to see the lass we'd please in saving him. He's only fit to poison a devil-fish!"

But though more than one laugh rang out, they gave him good care, and when Sweetwater came to life and realised that his blood was pulsing warmly again through his veins, and that a grey sky had taken the place of darkness, and a sound board supported limbs which for hours had yielded helplessly to the rocking billows, he saw a ring of hard but good-natured faces about him and realised quite well what had been done for him when one of them said:

"There! he'll do now; all hands on deck! We can get into New Bedford in two days if this wind holds. Nor' west!" shouted the skipper to the man at the tiller. "We'll sup with our old women in forty-eight hours!"

New Bedford! It was the only word Sweetwater heard. So, he was no farther away from Sutherlandtown than that. Evidently Providence had not meant him to escape. Or was it his fortitude that was being tried? A man as humble as he might easily be lost even in a place as small as New Bedford. It was his identity he must suppress. With that unrecognised he might remain in the next village to Sutherlandtown without fear of being called up as a witness against Frederick. But could he suppress it? He thought he could. At all events he meant to try.

"What's your name?" were the words he now heard shouted in his ear.

"Jonathan Briggs," was his mumbled reply. "I was blown off a ship's deck in the gale last night."

"What ship?"

"The Proserpine." It was the first name that suggested itself to him.

"Oh, I thought it might have been the Hesper; she foundered off here last night."

"Foundered? The Hesper?" The hot blood was shooting now through his veins.

"Yes, we just picked up her name-board. That was before we got a hold on you."

Foundered! The ship from which he had been so mercilessly thrown! And all on board lost, perhaps. He began to realise the hand of Providence in his fate.

"It was the Hesper I sailed on. I'm not just clear yet in my head. My first voyage was made on the Proserpine.
Well, bless the gale that blew me from that deck!"

He seemed incoherent, and they left him again for a little while. When they came back he had his story all ready, which imposed upon them just so far as it was for their interest. Their business on this coast was not precisely legitimate, and when they found he simply wanted to be set on shore, they were quite willing to do thus much for him. Only they regretted that he had barely two dollars and his own soaked clothing to give in exchange for the motley garments they tramped up among them for his present comfort. But he, as well as they, made the best of a bad bargain, he especially, as his clothes, which would be soon scattered among half a dozen families, were the only remaining clew connecting him with his native town. He could now be Jonathan Briggs indeed. Only who was Jonathan Briggs, and how was he to earn a living under these unexpected conditions?

At the end of a couple of days he was dexterously landed on the end of a long pier, which they passed without stopping, on their way to their own obscure anchorage. As he jumped from the rail to the pier and felt again the touch of terra firma he drew a long breath of uncontrollable elation. Yet he had not a cent in the world, no friends, and certainly no prospects. He did not even know whether to turn to the right or the left as he stepped out upon the docks, and when he had decided to turn to the right as being on the whole more lucky, he did not know whether to risk his fortune in the streets of the town or to plunge into one of the low-browed drinking houses whose signs confronted him on this water-lane.

He decided that his prospects for a dinner were slim in any case, and that his only hope of breaking fast that day lay in the use he might make of one of his three talents. Either he must find a fiddle to play on, a carpenter's bench to work at, or a piece of detective shadowing to do. The last would bring him before the notice of the police, which was just the thing he must avoid; so it was fiddling or carpentry he must seek, either of which would be difficult to obtain in his present garb. But of difficulties Sweetwater was not a man to take note. He had undertaken out of pure love for a good man to lose himself. He had accomplished this, and now was he to complain because in doing so he was likely to go hungry for a day or two? No; Amabel might laugh at him, or he might fancy she did, while struggling in the midst of rapidly engulfing waters, but would she laugh at him now? He did not think she would. She was of the kind who sometimes go hungry themselves in old age. Some premonition of this might give her a fellow feeling.

He came to a stand before a little child sitting on an ill-kept doorstep. Smiling at her kindly, he waited for her first expression to see how he appeared in the eyes of innocence. Not so bad a man, it seemed, though his naturally plain countenance was not relieved by the seaman's cap and knitted shirt he wore. For she laughed as she looked at him, and only ran away because there wasn't room for him to pass beside her.

Comforted a little, he sauntered on, glancing here and there with that sharp eye of his for a piece of work to be done. Suddenly he came to a halt. A market-woman had got into an altercation with an oysterman, and her stall had been upset in the contention, and her vegetables were rolling here and there. He righted her stall, picked up her vegetables, and in return got two apples and a red herring he would not have given to a dog at home. Yet it was the sweetest morsel he had ever tasted, and the apples might have been grown in the garden of the Hesperides from the vegetables, and in return got two apples and a red herring he would not have given to a dog at home. Yet it was the best food he had ever tasted, and the apples might have been grown in the garden of the Hesperides from the delight and pleasure they gave this hungry man. Then, refreshed, he dashed into the town. It should now go hard but he would earn a night's lodging.

The day was windy and he was going along a narrow street, when something floated down from a window above past his head. It was a woman's veil, and as he looked up to see where it came from he met the eyes of its owner looking down from an open casement above him. She was gesticulating, and seemed to point to someone up the street. It made him wonder, and only ran away because there wasn't room for him to pass beside her.

"That man down there!" she cried; "the one in a long black coat going up the street. Keep after him and stop him; tell him the telegram has come. Quick, quick, before he gets around the corner! He will pay you; run!"

Sweetwater, with joy in his heart,—for five cents was a boon to him in the present condition of his affairs,—rushed after the man she had pointed out and hastily stopped him.

"Someone," he added, "a woman in a window back there, bade me run after you and say the telegram has come. She told me you would pay me," he added, for he saw the man was turning hastily back, without thinking of the messenger. "I need the money, and the run was a sharp one."

With a preoccupied air, the man thrust his hand into his pocket, pulled out a coin, and handed it to him. Then he walked hurriedly off. Evidently the news was welcome to him. But Sweetwater stood rooted to the ground. The man had given him a five-dollar gold piece instead of the nickel he had evidently intended.

How hungrily Sweetwater eyed that coin! In it was lodging, food, perhaps a new article or so of clothing. But after a moment of indecision which might well be forgiven him, he followed speedily after the man and overtook him just as he reached the house from which the woman's veil had floated.

"Sir, pardon me; but you gave me five dollars instead of five cents. It was a mistake; I cannot keep the money."

The man, who was not just the sort from whom kindness would be expected, looked at the money in
Sweetwater's palm, then at the miserable, mud-bespattered clothes he wore (he had got that mud helping the poor market-woman), and stared hard at the face of the man who looked so needy and yet returned him five dollars.

"You're an honest fellow," he declared, not offering to take back the gold piece. Then, with a quick glance up at the window, "Would you like to earn that money?"

Sweetwater broke out into a smile, which changed his whole countenance.

"Wouldn't I, sir?"

The man eyed him for another minute with scrutinising intensity. Then he said shortly: "Come up-stairs with me."

They entered the house, went up a flight or two, and stopped at a door which was slightly ajar.

"We are going into the presence of a lady," remarked the man. "Wait here until I call you."

Sweetwater waited, the many thoughts going through his mind not preventing him from observing all that passed.

The man, who had left the door wide open, approached the lady who was awaiting him, and who was apparently the same one who had sent Sweetwater on his errand, and entered into a low but animated conversation. She held a telegram in her hand which she showed him, and then after a little earnest parley and a number of pleading looks from them both toward the waiting Sweetwater, she disappeared into another room, from which she brought a parcel neatly done up, which she handed to the man with a strange gesture. Another hurried exchange of words and a meaning look which did not escape the sharp eye of the watchful messenger, and the man turned and gave the parcel into Sweetwater's hands.

"You are to carry this," said he, "to the town hall. In the second room to the right on entering you will see a table surrounded by chairs, which at this hour ought to be empty. At the head of the table you will find an arm-chair. On the table directly in front of this you will lay this packet. Mark you, directly before the chair and not too far from the edge of the table. Then you are to come out. If you see anyone, say you came to leave some papers for Mr. Gifford. Do this and you may keep the five dollars and welcome."

Sweetwater hesitated. There was something in the errand or in the manner of the man and woman that he did not like.

"Don't potter!" spoke up the latter, with an impatient look at her watch. "Mr. Gifford will expect those papers."

Sweetwater's sensitive fingers closed on the package he held. It did not feel like papers.

"Are you going?" asked the man.

Sweetwater looked up with a smile. "Large pay for so slight a commission," he ventured, turning the packet over and over in his hand.

"But then you will execute it at once, and according to the instructions I have given you," retorted the man. "It is your trustworthiness I pay for. Now go."

Sweetwater turned to go. After all it was probably all right, and five dollars easily earned is doubly five dollars. As he reached the staircase he stumbled. The shoes he wore did not fit him.

"Be careful, there!" shouted the woman, in a shrill, almost frightened voice, while the man stumbled back into the room in a haste which seemed wholly uncalled for. "If you let the packet fall you will do injury to its contents. Go softly, man, go softly!"

Yet they had said it held papers!

Troubled, yet hardly knowing what his duty was, Sweetwater hastened down the stairs, and took his way up the street. The town hall should be easy to find; indeed, he thought he saw it in the distance. As he went, he asked himself two questions: Could he fail to deliver the package according to instructions, and yet earn his money? And was there any way of so delivering it without risk to the recipient or dereliction of duty to the man who had intrusted it to him and whose money he wished to earn? To the first question his conscience at once answered no; to the second the reply came more slowly, and before fixing his mind determinedly upon it he asked himself why he felt that this was no ordinary commission. He could answer readily enough. First, the pay was too large, arguing that either the packet or the placing of the packet in a certain position on Mr. Gifford's table was of uncommon importance to this man or this woman. Secondly, the woman, though plainly and inconspicuously clad, had the face of a more than ordinarily unscrupulous adventuress, while her companion was one of those saturnine-faced men we sometimes meet, whose first look puts us on our guard and whom, if we hope nothing from him, we instinctively shun. Third, they did not look like inhabitants of the house and rooms in which he found them. Nothing beyond the necessary articles of furniture was to be seen there; not a trunk, not an article of clothing, nor any of the little things that mark a woman's presence in a spot where she expects to spend a day or even an hour. Consequently they were transients and perhaps already in the act of flight. Then he was being followed. Of this he felt sure. He had followed people himself, and something in his own sensations assured him that his movements were under surveillance. It would, therefore, not do to show any consciousness of this, and he went on directly and as straight to his goal as his
rather limited knowledge of the streets would allow. He was determined to earn this money and to earn it without
disadvantage to anyone. And he thought he saw his way.

At the entrance of the town hall he hesitated an instant. An officer was standing in the doorway, it would be easy
to call his attention to the packet he held and ask him to keep his eye on it. But this might involve him with the
police, and this was something, as we know, which he was more than anxious to avoid. He reverted to his first idea.

Mixing with the crowd just now hurrying to and fro through the long corridors, he reached the room designated
and found it, as he had been warned he should, empty.

Approaching the table, he laid down the packet just as he had been directed, in front of the big arm chair, and
then, casting a hurried look towards the door and failing to find anyone watching him, he took up a pencil lying
near-by and scrawled hastily across the top of the packet the word "Suspicious." This he calculated would act as a
warning to Mr. Gifford in case there was anything wrong about the package, and pass as a joke with him, and even
the sender, if there was not. And satisfied that he had both earned his money and done justice to his own
apprehensions, he turned to retrace his steps. As before, the corridors were alive with hurrying men of various ages
and appearance, but only two attracted his notice. One of these was a large, intellectual-looking man, who turned
into the room from which he had just emerged, and the other a short, fair man, with a countenance he had known
from boyhood. Mr. Stone of Sutherlandtown was within ten paces of him, and he was as well known to the good
postmaster as the postmaster was to him. Could anyone have foreseen such a chance!

Turning his back with a slow slouch, he made for a rear door he saw swinging in and out before him. As he
passed through he cast a quick look behind him. He had not been recognised. In great relief he rushed on, knocking
against a man standing against one of the outside pillars.

"Halloo!" shouted this man.
Sweetwater stopped. There was a tone of authority in the voice which he could not resist.

THE ADVENTURE OF THE SCRAP OF PAPER AND THE THREE WORDS

"What are you trying to do? Why do you fall over a man like that? Are you drunk?"
Sweetwater drew himself up, made a sheepish bow, and muttered pantingly:
"Excuse me, sir. I'm in a hurry; I'm a messenger."
The man who was not in a hurry seemed disposed to keep him for a moment. He had caught sight of
Sweetwater's eye, which was his one remarkable feature, and he had also been impressed by that word messenger,
for he repeated it with some emphasis.

"A messenger, eh? Are you going on a message now?"
Sweetwater, who was anxious to get away from the vicinity of Mr. Stone, shrugged his shoulders in careless
denial, and was pushing on when the gentleman again detained him.

"Do you know," said he, "that I like your looks? You are not a beauty, but you look like a fellow who, if he
promised to do a thing, would do it and do it mighty well too."
Sweetwater could not restrain a certain movement of pride. He was honest, and he knew it, but the fact had not
always been so openly recognised.

"I have just earned five dollars by doing a commission for a man," said he, with a straightforward look. "See, sir.
It was honestly earned."
The man, who was young and had a rather dashing but inscrutable physiognomy, glanced at the coin Sweetwater
showed him and betrayed a certain disappointment.

"So you're flush," said he. "Don't want another job?"
"Oh, as to that," said Sweetwater, edging slowly down the street, "I'm always ready for business. Five dollars
won't last forever, and, besides, I'm in need of new togs."
"Well, rather," retorted the other, carelessly following him. "Do you mind going up to Boston?"
Boston! Another jump toward home.
"No," said Sweetwater, hesitatingly, "not if it's made worth my while. Do you want your message delivered to-
day?"
"At once. That is, this evening. It's a task involving patience and more or less shrewd judgment. Have you these
qualities, my friend? One would not judge it from your clothes."
"My clothes!" laughed Sweetwater. Life was growing very interesting all at once. "I know it takes patience to
WEAR them, and as for any lack of judgment I may show in their choice, I should just like to say I did not choose
them myself, sir; they fell to me promiscuous-like as a sort of legacy from friends. You'll see what I'll do in that way
if you give me the chance to earn an extra ten."
"Ah, it's ten dollars you want. Well, come in here and have a drink and then we'll see."
They were before a saloon house of less than humble pretensions, and as he followed the young gentleman in it
struck him that it was himself rather than his well-dressed and airy companion who would be expected to drink here. But he made no remark, though he intended to surprise the man by his temperance.

"Now, look here," said the young gentleman, suddenly seating himself at a dingy table in a very dark corner and motioning Sweetwater to do the same; "I've been looking for a man all day to go up to Boston for me, and I think you'll do. You know Boston?"

Sweetwater had great command over himself, but he flushed slightly at this question, though it was so dark where he sat with this man that it made very little difference.

"I have been there," said he.

"Very well, then, you will go again to-night. You will arrive there about seven, you will go the rounds of some half-dozen places whose names I will give you, and when you come across a certain gentleman whom I will describe to you, you will give him--"

"Not a package?" Sweetwater broke out with a certain sort of dread of a repetition of his late experience.

"No, this slip on which two words are written. He will want one more word, but before you give it to him you must ask for your ten dollars. You'll get them," he answered in response to a glance of suspicion from Sweetwater. Sweetwater was convinced that he had got hold of another suspicious job. It made him a little serious. "Do I look like a go-between for crooks?" he asked himself. "I'm afraid I'm not so much of a success as I thought myself." But he said to the man before him: "Ten dollars is small pay for such business. Twenty-five would be nearer the mark."

"Very well, he will give you twenty-five dollars. I forgot that ten dollars was but little in advance of your expenses."

"Twenty-five if I find him, and he is in funds. What if I don't?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Except your ticket; that I'll give you."

Sweetwater did not know what to say. Like the preceding job it might be innocent and it might not. And then, he did not like going to Boston, where he was liable to meet more than one who knew him.

"There is no harm in the business," observed the other, carelessly, pushing a glass of whiskey which had just been served him toward Sweetwater. "I would even be willing to do it myself, if I could leave New Bedford to-night, but I can't. Come! It's as easy as crooking your elbow."

"Just now you said it wasn't," growled Sweetwater, drinking from his glass. "But no matter about that, go ahead, I'll do it. Shall I have to buy other clothes?"

"I'd buy a new pair of trousers," suggested the other. "The rest you can get in Boston. You don't want to be too much in evidence, you know."

Sweetwater agreed with him. To attract attention was what he most dreaded. "When does the train start?" he asked.

The young man told him.

"Well, that will give me time to buy what I want. Now, what are your instructions?"

The young man gave him a memorandum, containing four addresses. "You will find him at one of these places," said he. "And now to know your man when you see him. He is a large, handsome fellow, with red hair and a moustache like the devil. He has been hurt, and wears his left hand in a sling, but he can play cards, and will be found playing cards, and in very good company too. You will have to use your discretion in approaching him. When once he sees this bit of paper, all will be easy. He knows what these two words mean well enough, and the third one, the one that is worth twenty-five dollars to you, is FREDERICK."

Sweetwater, who had drunk half his glass, started so at this word, which was always humming in his brain, that he knocked over his tumbler and spilled what was left in it.

"I hope I won't forget that word," he remarked, in a careless tone, intended to carry off his momentary show of feeling.

"If you do, then don't expect the twenty-five dollars," retorted the other, finishing his own glass, but not offering to renew Sweetwater's.

Sweetwater laughed, said he thought he could trust his memory, and rose. In a half-hour he was at the depot, and in another fifteen minutes speeding out of New Bedford on his way to Boston.

He had had but one anxiety—that Mr. Stone might be going up to Boston too. But, once relieved of this apprehension, he settled back, and for the first time in twelve hours had a minute in which to ask himself who he was, and what he was about. Adventure had followed so fast upon adventure that he was in a more or less dazed condition, and felt as little capable of connecting event with event as if he had been asked to recall the changing pictures of a kaleidoscope. That affair of the packet, now, was it or was it not serious, and would he ever know what it meant or how it turned out?
Like a child who had been given a pebble, and told to throw it over the wall, he had thrown and run, giving a shout of warning, it is true, but not knowing, nor ever likely to know, where the stone had fallen, or what it was meant to do. Then this new commission on which he was bent--was it in any way connected with the other, or merely the odd result of his being in the right place at the right moment? He was inclined to think the latter. And yet how odd it was that one doubtful errand should be followed by another, in a town no larger than New Bedford, forcing him from scene to scene, till he found himself speeding toward the city he least desired to enter, and from which he had the most to fear!

But brooding over a case like this brings small comfort. He felt that he had been juggled with, but he neither knew by whose hand nor in what cause. If the hand was that of Providence, why he had only to go on following the beck of the moment, while if it was that of Fate, the very uselessness of struggling with it was apparent at once. Poor reasoning, perhaps, but no other offered, and satisfied that whatever came his intentions were above question, he settled himself at last for a nap, of which he certainly stood in good need. When he awoke he was in Boston.

The first thing he did was to show his list of addresses and inquire into what quarter they would lead him. To his surprise he found it to be the fashionable quarter. Two of them were names of well-known club-houses, a third that of a first-class restaurant, and the fourth that of a private house on Commonwealth Avenue. Heigho! and he was dressed like a tramp, or nearly so!

"Queer messenger, I, for such kind of work," thought he. "I wonder why he lighted on such a rough-looking customer. He must have had his reasons. I wonder if he wished the errand to fail. He bore himself very nonchalantly at the depot. When I last saw him his face and attitude were those of a totally unconcerned man. Have I been sent on a fool's chase after all?"

The absurdity of this conclusion struck him, however, as he reasoned: "Why, then, should he have paid my fare? Not as a benefit to me, of course, but for his own ends, whatever they might be. Let us see, then, what those ends are. So now for the gentleman of the red hair who plays cards with one arm in a sling."

He thought that he might get entrance into the club-houses easily enough. He possessed a certain amount of insinuation when necessity required, and, if hard-featured, had a good expression which in unprejudiced minds defied criticism. Of porters and doorkeepers he was not afraid, and these were the men he must first encounter.

At the first club-house he succeeded easily enough in getting word with the man waiting in the large hall, and before many minutes learned that the object of his search was not to be found there that evening. He also learned his name, which was a great step towards the success of his embassy. It was Wattles, Captain Wattles, a marked man evidently, even in this exclusive and aristocratic club.

Armed with this new knowledge, he made his way to the second building of the kind and boldly demanded speech with Captain Wattles. But Captain Wattles had not yet arrived and he went out again this time to look him up at the restaurant.

He was not there. As Sweetwater was going out two gentlemen came in, one of whom said to the other in passing:

"Sick, do you say? I thought Wattles was made of iron."

"So he was," returned the other, "before that accident to his arm. Now the least thing upsets him. He's down at Haberstow's."

That was all; the door was swung to between them. Sweetwater had received his clew, but what a clew! Haberstow's? Where was that?

Thinking the bold course the best one, he re-entered the restaurant and approached the gentlemen he had just seen enter.

"I heard you speak the name of Captain Wattles," said he. "I am hunting for Captain Wattles. Can you tell me where he is?"

He soon saw that he had struck the wrong men for information. They not only refused to answer him, but treated him with open disdain. Unwilling to lose time, he left them, and having no other resource, hastened to the last place mentioned on his list.

It was now late, too late to enter a private house under ordinary circumstances, but this house was lighted up, and a carriage stood in front of it; so he had the courage to run up the steps and consult the large door-plate visible from the sidewalk. It read thus:

HABERSTOW.

Fortune had favoured him better than he expected.

He hesitated a moment, then decided to ring the bell. But before he had done so, the door opened and an old gentleman appeared seeing a younger man out. The latter had his arm in a sling, and bore himself with a fierceness that made his appearance somewhat alarming; the other seemed to be in an irate state of mind.

"No apologies!" the former was saying. "I don't mind the night air; I'm not so ill as that. When I'm myself again
we'll have a little more talk. My compliments to your daughter, sir. I wish you a very good evening, or rather night."

The old gentleman bowed, and as he did so Sweetwater caught a glimpse (it was the shortest glimpse in the world) of a sweet face beaming from a doorway far down the hall. There was pain in it and a yearning anxiety that made it very beautiful; then it vanished, and the old gentleman, uttering some few sarcastic words, closed the door, and Sweetwater found himself alone and in darkness.

The kaleidoscope had been given another turn.

Dashing down the stoop, he came upon the gentleman who had preceded him, just as he was seating himself in the carriage.

"Pardon me," he gasped, as the driver caught up the reins; "you have forgotten something." Then, as Captain Wattles looked hastily out, "You have forgotten me."

The oath that rang out from under that twitching red moustache was something to startle even him. But he clung to the carriage window and presently managed to say:

"A messenger, sir, from New Bedford. I have been on the hunt for you for two hours. It won't keep, sir, for more than a half-hour longer. Where shall I find you during that time?"

Captain Wattles, on whom the name New Bedford seemed to have made some impression, pointed up at the coachman's box with a growl, in which command mingled strangely with menace. Then he threw himself back. Evidently the captain was not in very good humour.

Sweetwater, taking this as an order to seat himself beside the driver, did so, and the carriage drove off. It went at a rapid pace, and before he had time to propound more than a question or two to the coachman, it stopped before a large apartment-house in a brilliantly lighted street.

Captain Wattles got out, and Sweetwater followed him. The former, who seemed to have forgotten Sweetwater, walked past him and entered the building with a stride and swing that made the plain, lean, insignificant-looking messenger behind him feel smaller than ever. Indeed, he had never felt so small, for not only was the captain a man of superb proportions and conspicuous bearing, but he possessed, in spite of his fiery hair and fierce moustache, that beaute de diable which is at once threatening and imposing. Added to this, he was angry and so absorbed in his own thoughts that he would be very apt to visit punishment of no light character upon anyone who interfered with him. A pleasing prospect for Sweetwater, who, however, kept on with the dogged determination of his character up the first flight of stairs and then up another till they stopped, Captain Wattles first and afterwards his humble follower, before a small door into which the captain endeavoured to fit a key. The oaths which followed his failure to do this were not very encouraging to the man behind, nor was the kick which he gave the door after the second more successful attempt calculated to act in a very reassuring way upon anyone whose future pay for a doubtful task rested upon this man's good nature.

The darkness which met them both on the threshold of this now open room was speedily relieved by a burst of electric light, that flooded the whole apartment and brought out the captain's swaggering form and threatening features with startling distinctness. He had thrown off his hat and was relieving himself of a cloak in a furious way that caused Sweetwater to shrink back, and, as the French say, efface himself as much as possible behind a clothes-tree standing near the door. That the captain had entirely forgotten him was evident, and for the present moment that gentleman was too angry to care or even notice if a dozen men stood at the door. As he was talking all this time, or rather jerking out sharp sentences, as men do when in a towering rage, Sweetwater was glad to be left unnoticed, for much can be gathered from scattered sentences, especially when a man is in too reckless a frame of mind to weigh them. He, therefore, made but little movement and listened; and these are some of the ejaculations and scraps of talk he heard:

"The old purse-proud fool! Honoured by my friendship, but not ready to accept me as his daughter's suitor! As if I would lounge away hours that mean dollars to me in his stiff old drawing-room, just to hear his everlasting drone about stocks up and stocks down, and politics gone all wrong. He has heard that I play cards, and--How pretty she looked! I believe I half like that girl, and when I think she has a million in her own right--Damn it, if I cannot win her openly and with papa's consent, I will carry her off with only her own. She's worth the effort, doubly worth it, and when I have her and her money--Eh! Who are you?"

He had seen Sweetwater at last, which was not strange, seeing that he had turned his way, and was within two feet of him.

"What are you doing here, and who let you in? Get out, or--"

"A message, Captain Wattles! A message from New Bedford. You have forgotten, sir; you bade me follow you."

It was curious to see the menace slowly die out of the face of this flushed and angry man as he met Sweetwater's calm eye and unabashed front, and noticed, as he had not done at first, the slip of paper which the latter resolutely held out.

"New Bedford; ah, from Campbell, I take it. Let me see!" And the hand which had shook with rage now
trembled with a very different sort of emotion as he took the slip, cast his eyes over it, and then looked back at Sweetwater.

Now, Sweetwater knew the two words written on that paper. He could see out of the back of his head at times, and he had been able to make out these words when the man in New Bedford was writing them.

"Happenings; Afghanistan," with the figures 2000 after the latter.

Not much sense in them singly or in conjunction, but the captain, muttering them over to himself, consulted a little book which he took from his breast pocket and found, or seemed to, a clew to their meaning. It could only have been a partial one, however, for in another instant he turned on Sweetwater with a sour look and a thundering oath.

"Is this all?" he shouted. "Does he call this a complete message?"

"There is another word," returned Sweetwater, "which he bade me give you by word of mouth; but that word don't go for nothing. It's worth just twenty-five dollars. I've earned it, sir. I came up from New Bedford on purpose to deliver it to you."

Sweetwater expected a blow, but he only got a stare.

"Twenty-five dollars," muttered the captain. "Well, it's fortunate that I have them. And who are you?" he asked.

"Not one of Campbell's pick-ups, surely?"

"I am a confidential messenger," smiled Sweetwater, amused against his will at finding a name for himself. "I carry messages and execute commissions that require more or less discretion in the handling. I am paid well. Twenty-five dollars is the price of this job."

"So you have had the honour of informing me before," blustered the other with an attempt to hide some serious emotion. "Why, man, what do you fear? Don't you see I'm hurt? You could knock me over with a feather if you touched my game arm."

"Twenty-five dollars," repeated Sweetwater.

The captain grew angrier. "Dash it! aren't you going to have them? What's the word?"

But Sweetwater wasn't going to be caught by chaff.

"C. O. D.," he insisted firmly, standing his ground, though certain that the blow would now fall. But no, the captain laughed, and tugging away with his one free hand at his pocket, he brought out a pocketbook, from which he managed deftly enough to draw out three bills. "There," said he, laying them on the table, but keeping one long vigorous finger on them. "Now, the word."

Sweetwater laid his own hand on the bills.

"Frederick," said he.

"Ah!" said the other thoughtfully, lifting his finger and proceeding to stride up and down the room. "He's a stiff one. What he says, he will do. Two thousand dollars! and soon, too, I warrant. Well, I'm in a devil of a fix at last." He had again forgotten the presence of Sweetwater.

Suddenly he turned or rather stopped. His eye was on the messenger, but he did not even see him. "One Frederick must offset the other," he cried. "It's the only loophole out," and he threw himself into a chair from which he immediately sprang up again with a yell. He had hurt his wounded arm.

Pandemonium reigned in that small room for a minute, then his eye fell again on Sweetwater, who, under the fascination of the spectacle offered him, had only just succeeded in finding the knob of the door. This time there was recognition in his look.

"Wait!" he cried. "I may have use for you too. Confidential messengers are hard to come by, and one that Campbell would employ must be all right. Sit down there! I'll talk to you when I'm ready."

Sweetwater was not slow in obeying this command. Business was booming with him. Besides, the name of Frederick acted like a charm upon him. There seemed to be so many Fredericks in the world, and one of them lay in such a curious way near his heart.

Meanwhile the captain reseated himself, but more carefully. He had a plan or method of procedure to think out, or so it seemed, for he sat a long time in rigid immobility, with only the scowl of perplexity or ill-temper on his brow to show the nature of his thoughts. Then he drew a sheet of paper toward him, and began to write a letter. He was so absorbed over this letter and the manipulation of it, having but one hand to work with, that Sweetwater determined upon a hazardous stroke. The little book which the captain had consulted, and which had undoubtedly furnished him with a key to those two incongruous words, lay on the floor not far from him, having been flung from its owner's hand during the moments of passion and suffering I have above mentioned. To reach this book with his foot, to draw it toward him, and, finally, to get hold of it with his hand, was not difficult for one who aspired to be a detective, and had already done some good work in that direction. But it was harder to turn the leaves and find the words he sought without attracting the attention of his fierce companion. He, however, succeeded in doing this at last, the long list of words he found on every page being arranged alphabetically. It was a private code for telegraphic or cable messages, and he soon found that "Happenings" meant: "Our little game discovered; play
straight until I give you the wink." And that "Afghanistan" stood for: "Hush money." As the latter was followed by the figures I have mentioned, the purport of the message needed no explanation, but the word "Frederick" did. So he searched for that, only to find that it was not in the book. There was but one conclusion to draw. This name was perfectly well known between them, and was that of the person, no doubt, who laid claim to the two thousand dollars.

Satisfied at holding this clew to the riddle, he dropped the book again at his side and skilfully kicked it far out into the room. Captain Wattles had seen nothing. He was a man who took in only one thing at a time.

The penning of that letter went on laboriously. It took so long that Sweetwater dozed, or pretended to, and when it was at last done, the clock on the mantelpiece had struck two.

"Halloo there, now!" suddenly shouted the captain, turning on the messenger. "Are you ready for another journey?"

"That depends," smiled Sweetwater, rising sleepily and advancing. "Haven't got over the last one yet, and would rather sleep than start out again."

"Oh, you want pay? Well, you'll get that fast enough if you succeed in your mission. This letter" he shook it with an impatient hand--"should be worth two thousand five hundred dollars to me. If you bring me back that money or its equivalent within twenty-four hours, I will give you a clean hundred of it. Good enough pay, I take it, for five hours' journey. Better than sleep, eh? Besides, you can doze on the cars."

Sweetwater agreed with him in all these assertions. Putting on his cap, he reached for the letter. He didn't like being made an instrument for blackmail, but he was curious to see to whom he was about to be sent. But the captain had grown suddenly wary.

"This is not a letter to be dropped in the mailbox," said he. "You brought me a line here whose prompt delivery has prevented me from making a fool of myself to-night. You must do as much with this one. It is to be carried to its destination by yourself, given to the person whose name you will find written on it, and the answer brought back before you sleep, mind you, unless you snatch a wink or so on the cars. That it is night need not disturb you. It will be daylight before you arrive at the place to which this is addressed, and if you cannot get into the house at so early an hour, whistle three times like this--listen and one of the windows will presently fly up. You have had no trouble finding me; you'll have no trouble finding him. When you return, hunt me up as you did to-night. Only you need not trouble yourself to look for me at Haberstow's," he added under his breath in a tone that was no doubt highly satisfactory to himself. "I shall not be there. And now, off with you!" he shouted. "You've your hundred dollars to make before daylight, and it's already after two."

Sweetwater, who had stolen a glimpse at the superscription on the letter he held, stumbled as he went out of the door. It was directed, as he had expected, to a Frederick, probably to the second one of whom Captain Wattles had spoken, but not, as he had expected, to a stranger. The name on the letter was Frederick Sutherland, and the place of his destination was Sutherlandtown.

XXVIII

"WHO ARE YOU?"

The round had come full circle. By various chances and a train of circumstances for which he could not account, he had been turned from his first intention and was being brought back stage by stage to the very spot he had thought it his duty to fly from. Was this fate? He began to think so, and no longer so much as dreamed of struggling against it. But he felt very much dazed, and walked away through the now partially deserted streets with an odd sense of failure that was only compensated by the hope he now cherished of seeing his mother again, and being once more Caleb Sweetwater of Sutherlandtown.

He was clearer, however, after a few blocks of rapid walking, and then he began to wonder over the contents of the letter he held, and how they would affect its recipient. Was it a new danger he was bringing him? Instead of aiding Mr. Sutherland in keeping his dangerous secret, was he destined to bring disgrace upon him, not only by his testimony before the coroner, but by means of this letter, which, whatever it contained, certainly could not bode good to the man from whom it was designed to wrest two thousand five hundred dollars?

The fear that he was destined to do so grew up in him rapidly, and the temptation to open the letter and make himself master of its contents before leaving town at last became so strong that his sense of honour paled before it, and he made up his mind that before he ventured into the precincts of Sutherlandtown he would know just what sort of a bombshell he was carrying into the Sutherland family. To do this he stopped at the first respectable lodging-house he encountered and hired a room. Calling for hot water "piping hot," he told them--he subjected the letter to the effects of steam and presently had it open. He was not disappointed in its contents, save that they were even more dangerous than he had anticipated. Captain Wattles was an old crony of Frederick's and knew his record better than anyone else in the world. From this fact and the added one that Frederick had stood in special need of money at the time of Agatha Webb's murder, the writer had no hesitation in believing him guilty of the crime which opened
his way to a fortune, and though under ordinary circumstances he would, as his friend Frederick already knew, be perfectly willing to keep his opinions to himself, he was just now under the same necessity for money that Frederick had been at that fatal time, and must therefore see the colour of two thousand five hundred dollars before the day was out if Frederick desired to have his name kept out of the Boston papers. That it had been kept out up to this time argued that the crime had been well enough hidden to make the alternative thus offered an important one.

There was no signature.

Sweetwater, affected to an extent he little expected, resealed the letter, made his excuses to the landlord, and left the house. Now he could see why he had not been allowed to make his useless sacrifice. Another man than himself suspected Frederick, and by a word could precipitate the doom he already saw hung too low above the devoted head of Mr. Sutherland's son to be averted.

"Yet I'll attempt that too," burst impetuously from his lips. "If I fail, I can but go back with a knowledge of this added danger. If I succeed, why I must still go back. From some persons and from some complications it is useless to attempt flight."

Returning to the club-house he had first entered in his search for Captain Wattles, he asked if that gentleman had yet come in. This time he was answered by an affirmative, though he might almost as well have not been, for the captain was playing cards in a private room and would not submit to any interruption.

"He will submit to mine," retorted Sweetwater to the man who had told him this. "Or wait; hand him back this letter and say that the messenger refuses to deliver it."

This brought the captain out, as he had fully expected it would.

"Why, what--" began that gentleman in a furious rage.

But Sweetwater, laying his hand on the arm he knew to be so sensitive, rose on tiptoe and managed to whisper in the angry man's ear:

"You are a card-sharp, and it will be easy enough to ruin you. Threaten Frederick Sutherland and in two weeks you will be boycotted by every club in this city. Twenty-five hundred dollars won't pay you for that."

This from a nondescript fellow with no grains of a gentleman about him in form, feature, or apparel! The captain stared nonplussed, too much taken aback to be even angry.

Suddenly he cried:

"How do you know all this? How do you know what is or is not in the letter I gave you?"

Sweetwater, with a shrug that in its quiet significance seemed to make him at once the equal of his interrogator, quietly pressed the quivering limb under his hand and calmly replied:

"I know because I have read it. Before putting my head in the lion's mouth, I make it a point to count his teeth," and lifting his hand, he drew back, leaving the captain reeling.

"What is your name? Who are you?" shouted out Wattles as Sweetwater was drawing off.

It was the third time he had been asked that question within twenty-four hours, but not before with this telling emphasis. "Who are you, I say, and what can you do to me--?"

"I am--But that is an insignificant detail unworthy of your curiosity. As to what I can do, wait and see. But first burn that letter."

And turning his back he fled out of the building, followed by oaths which, if not loud, were certainly deep and very far-reaching.

It was the first time Captain Wattles had met his match in audacity.

XXIX

HOME AGAIN

On his way to the depot, Sweetwater went into the Herald office and bought a morning paper. At the station he opened it. There was one column devoted to the wreck of the Hesper, and a whole half-page to the proceedings of the third day's inquiry into the cause and manner of Agatha Webb's death. Merely noting that his name was mentioned among the lost, in the first article, he began to read the latter with justifiable eagerness. The assurance given in Captain Wattles's letter was true. No direct suspicion had as yet fallen on Frederick. As the lover of Amabel Page, his name was necessarily mentioned, but neither in the account of the inquest nor in the editorials on the subject could he find any proof that either the public or police had got hold of the great idea that he was the man who had preceded Amabel to Agatha's cottage. Relieved on this score, Sweetwater entered more fully into the particulars, and found that though the jury had sat three days, very little more had come to light than was known on the morning he made that bold dash into the Hesper. Most of the witnesses had given in their testimony, Amabel's being the chief, and though no open accusation had been made, it was evident from the trend of the questions put to the latter that Amabel's connection with the affair was looked upon as criminal and as placing her in a very suspicious light. Her replies, however, as once before, under a similar but less formal examination, failed to convey any recognition on her part either of this suspicion or of her own position; yet they were not exactly frank, and
Sweetwater saw, or thought he saw (naturally failing to have a key to the situation), that she was still working upon her old plan of saving both herself and Frederick, by throwing whatever suspicion her words might raise upon the deceased Zabel. He did not know, and perhaps it was just as well that he did not at this especial juncture, that she was only biding her time—now very nearly at hand—and that instead of loving Frederick, she hated him, and was determined upon his destruction. Reading, as a final clause, that Mr. Sutherland was expected to testify soon in explanation of his position as executor of Mrs. Webb's will, Sweetwater grew very serious, and, while no change took place in his mind as to his present duty, he decided that his return must be as unobtrusive as possible, and his only too timely reappearance on the scene of the inquiry kept secret till Mr. Sutherland had given his evidence and retired from under the eyes of his excited fellow-citizens.

"The sight of me might unnerve him," was Sweetwater's thought, "precipitating the very catastrophe we dread. One look, one word on his part indicative of his inner apprehensions that his son had a hand in the crime which has so benefited him, and nothing can save Frederick from the charge of murder. Not Knapp's skill, my silence, or Amabel's finesse. The young man will be lost."

He did not know, as we do, that Amabel's finesse was devoted to winning a husband for herself, and that, in the event of failure, the action she threatened against her quondam lover would be precipitated that very day at the moment when the clock struck twelve.

. . . . . .

Sweetwater arrived home by the way of Portchester. He had seen one or two persons he knew, but, so far, had himself escaped recognition. The morning light was dimly breaking when he strode into the outskirts of Sutherlandtown and began to descend the hill. As he passed Mr. Halliday's house he looked up, and was astonished to see a light burning in one deeply embowered window. Alas! he did not know how early one anxious heart woke during those troublous days. The Sutherland house was dark, but as he crept very close under its overhanging eaves he heard a deep sigh uttered over his head, and knew that someone was up here also in anxious expectation of a day that was destined to hold more than even he anticipated.

Meanwhile, the sea grew rosy, and the mother's cottage was as yet far off. Hurrying on, he came at last under the eye of more than one of the early risers of Sutherlandtown.

"What, Sweetwater! Alive and well!"
"Hey, Sweetwater, we thought you were lost on the Hesper!"
"Halloo! Home in time to see the pretty Amabel arrested?" Phrases like these met him at more than one corner; but he eluded them all, stopping only to put one hesitating question. Was his mother well?

Home fears had made themselves felt with his near approach to that humble cottage door.

BOOK III
HAD BATSY LIVED!
XXX
WHAT FOLLOWED THE STEIKING OF THE CLOCK

It was the last day of the inquest, and to many it bade fair to be the least interesting. All the witnesses who had anything to say had long ago given in their testimony, and when at or near noon Sweetwater slid into the inconspicuous seat he had succeeded in obtaining near the coroner, it was to find in two faces only any signs of the eagerness and expectancy which filled his own breast to suffocation. But as these faces were those of Agnes Halliday and Amabel Page, he soon recognised that his own judgment was not at fault, and that notwithstanding outward appearances and the languid interest shown in the now lagging proceedings, the moment presaged an event full of unseen but vital consequence.

Frederick was not visible in the great hall; but that he was near at hand soon became evident from the change Sweetwater now saw in Amabel. For while she had hitherto sat under the universal gaze with only the faint smile of conscious beauty on her inscrutable features, she roused as the hands of the clock moved toward noon, and glanced at the great door of entrance with an evil expectancy that startled even Sweetwater, so little had he really understood the nature of the passions labouring in that venomous breast.

Next moment the door opened, and Frederick and his father came in. The air of triumphant satisfaction with which Amabel sank back into her seat was as marked in its character as her previous suspense. What did it mean? Sweetwater, noting it, and the vivid contrast it offered to Frederick's air of depression, felt that his return had been well timed.

Mr. Sutherland was looking very feeble. As he took the chair offered him, the change in his appearance was apparent to all who knew him, and there were few there who did not know him. And, startled by these evidences of suffering which they could not understand and feared to interpret even to themselves, more than one devoted friend stole uneasy glances at Frederick to see if he too were under the cloud which seemed to envelop his father almost beyond recognition.
But Frederick was looking at Amabel, and his erect head and determined aspect made him a conspicuous figure in the room. She who had called up this expression, and alone comprehended it fully, smiled as she met his eye, with that curious slow dipping of her dimples which had more than once confounded the coroner, and rendered her at once the admiration and abhorrence of the crowd who for so long a time had had the opportunity of watching her.

Frederick, to whom this smile conveyed a last hope as well as a last threat, looked away as soon as possible, but not before her eyes had fallen in their old inquiring way to his hands, from which he had removed the ring which up to this hour he had invariably worn on his third finger. In this glance of hers and this action of his began the struggle that was to make that day memorable in many hearts.

After the first stir occasioned by the entrance of two such important persons the crowd settled back into its old quietude under the coroner's hand. A tedious witness was having his slow say, and to him a full attention was being given in the hope that some real enlightenment would come at last to settle the questions which had been raised by Amabel's incomplete and unsatisfactory testimony. But no man can furnish what he does not possess, and the few final minutes before noon passed by without any addition being made to the facts which had already been presented for general consideration.

As the witness sat down the clock began to strike. As the slow, hesitating strokes rang out, Sweetwater saw Frederick yield to a sudden but most profound emotion. The old fear, which we understand, if Sweetwater did not, had again seized the victim of Amabel's ambition, and under her eye, which was blazing full upon him now with a fell and steady purpose, he found his right hand stealing toward the left in the significant action she expected. Better to yield than fall headlong into the pit one word of hers would open. He had not meant to yield, but now that the moment had come, now that he must at once and forever choose between a course that led simply to personal unhappiness and one that involved not only himself, but those dearest to him, in disgrace and sorrow, he felt himself weaken to the point of clutching at whatever would save him from the consequences of confession. Moral strength and that tenacity of purpose which only comes from years of self-control were too lately awakened in his breast to sustain him now. As stroke after stroke fell on the ear, he felt himself yielding beyond recovery, and had almost touched his finger in the significant action of assent which Amabel awaited with breathless expectation, when--was it miracle or only the suggestion of his better nature?--the memory of a face full of holy pleading rose from the past before his eyes and with an inner cry of "Mother!" he flung his hand out and clutched his father's arm in a way to break the charm of his own dread and end forever the effects of the intolerable fascination that was working upon him. Next minute the last stroke of noon rang out, and the hour was up which Amabel had set as the limit of her silence.

A pause, which to their two hearts if to no others seemed strangely appropriate, followed the cessation of these sounds, then the witness was dismissed, and Amabel, taking advantage of the movement, was about to lean toward Mr. Courtney, when Frederick, leaping with a bound to his feet, drew all eyes towards himself with the cry:

"Let me be put on my oath. I have testimony to give of the utmost importance in this case."

The coroner was astounded; everyone was astounded. No one had expected anything from him, and instinctively every eye turned towards Amabel to see how she was affected by his action.

Strangely, evidently, for the look with which she settled back in her seat was one which no one who saw it ever forgot, though it conveyed no hint of her real feelings, which were somewhat chaotic.

Frederick, who had forgotten her now that he had made up his mind to speak, waited for the coroner's reply.

"If you have testimony," said that gentleman after exchanging a few hurried words with Mr. Courtney and the surprised Knapp, "you can do no better than give it to us at once. Mr. Frederick Sutherland, will you take the stand?"

With a noble air from which all hesitation had vanished, Frederick started towards the place indicated, but stopped before he had taken a half-dozen steps and glanced back at his father, who was visibly succumbing under this last shock.

"Go!" he whispered, but in so thrilling a tone it was heard to the remotest corner of the room. "Spare me the anguish of saying what I have to say in your presence. I could not bear it. You could not bear it. Later, if you will wait for me in one of these rooms, I will repeat my tale in your ears, but go now. It is my last entreaty."

There was a silence; no one ventured a dissent, no one so much as made a gesture of disapproval. Then Mr. Sutherland struggled to his feet, cast one last look around him, and disappeared through a door which had opened like magic before him. Then and not till then did Frederick move forward.

The moment was intense. The coroner seemed to share the universal excitement, for his first question was a leading one and brought out this startling admission:

"I have obtruded myself into this inquiry and now ask to be heard by this jury, because no man knows more than I do of the manner and cause of Agatha Webb's death. This you will believe when I tell you that _I_ was the person Miss Page followed into Mrs. Webb's house and whom she heard descend the stairs during the moment she crouched behind the figure of the sleeping Philemon."
It was more, infinitely more, than anyone there had expected. It was not only an acknowledgment but a
confession, and the shock, the surprise, the alarm, which it occasioned even to those who had never had much
confidence in this young man's virtue, was almost appalling in its intensity. Had it not been for the consciousness of
Mr. Sutherland's near presence the feeling would have risen to outbreak; and many voices were held in subjection by
the remembrance of this venerated man's last look, that otherwise would have made themselves heard in despite of
the restrictions of the place and the authority of the police.

To Frederick it was a moment of immeasurable grief and humiliation. On every face, in every shrinking form, in
subdued murmurs and open cries, he read instant and complete condemnation, and yet in all his life from boyhood
up to this hour, never had he been so worthy of their esteem and consideration. But though he felt the iron enter his
soul, he did not lose his determined attitude. He had observed a change in Amabel and a change in Agnes, and if
only to disappoint the vile triumph of the one and raise again the drooping courage of the other, he withstood the
clamour and began speaking again, before the coroner had been able to fully restore quiet.

"I know," said he, "what this acknowledgment must convey to the minds of the jury and people here assembled.
But if anyone who listens to me thinks me guilty of the death I was so unfortunate as to have witnessed, he will be
doing me a wrong which Agatha Webb would be the first to condemn. Dr. Talbot, and you, gentlemen of the jury, in
the face of God and man, I here declare that Mrs. Webb, in my presence and before my eyes, gave to herself the
blow which has robbed us all of a most valuable life. She was not murdered."

It was a solemn assertion, but it failed to convince the crowd before him. As by one impulse men and women
broke into a tumult. Mr. Sutherland was forgotten and cries of "Never! She was too good! It's all calumnny! A
wretched lie!" broke in unrestrictament from every part of the large room. In vain the coroner smote with
his gavel, in vain the local police endeavoured to restore order; the tide was up and over-swept everything for an
instant till silence was suddenly restored by the sight of Amabel smoothing out the folds of her crisp white frock
with an incredulous, almost insulting, smile that at once fixed attention again on Frederick. He seized the occasion
and spoke up in a tone of great resolve.

"I have made an assertion," said he, "before God and before this jury. To make it seem a credible one I shall
have to tell my own story from the beginning. Am I allowed to do so, Mr. Coroner?"

"You are," was the firm response.

"Then, gentlemen," continued Frederick, still without looking at Amabel, whose smile had acquired a mockery
that drew the eyes of the jury toward her more than once during the following recital, "you know, and the public
generally now know, that Mrs. Webb has left me the greater portion of the money of which she died possessed. I
have never before acknowledged to anyone, not even to the good man who awaits this jury's verdict on the other side
of that door yonder, that she had reasons for this, good reasons, reasons of which up to the very evening of her death
I was myself ignorant, as I was ignorant of her intentions in my regard, or that I was the special object of her
attention, or that we were under any mutual obligations in any way. Why, then, I should have thought of going to her
in the great strait in which I found myself on that day, I cannot say. I knew she had money in her house; this I had
unhappily been made acquainted with in an accidental way, and I knew she was of kindly disposition and quite
capable of doing a very unselfish act. Still, this would not seem to be reason enough for me to intrude upon her late
at night with a plea for a large loan of money, had I not been in a desperate condition of mind, which made any
attempt seem reasonable that promised relief from the unendurable burden of a pressing and disreputable debt. I was
obliged to have money, a great deal of money, and I had to have it at once; and while I know that this will not serve
to lighten the suspicion I have brought upon myself by my late admissions, it is the only explanation I can give you
for leaving the ball at my father's house and hurrying down secretly and alone into town to the little cottage where,
as I had been told early in the evening, a small entertainment was being given, which would insure its being open
even at so late an hour as midnight. Miss Page, who will, I am sure, pardon the introduction of her name into this
narrative, has taken pains to declare to you that in the expedition she herself made into town that evening, she
followed some person's steps down-hill. This is very likely true, and those steps were probably mine, for after
leaving the house by the garden door, I came directly down the main road to the corner of the lane running past Mrs.
Webb's cottage. Having already seen from the hillside the light burning in her upper windows, I felt encouraged to
proceed, and so hastened on till I came to the gate on High Street. Here I had a moment of hesitation, and thoughts
bitter enough for me to recall them at this moment came into my mind, making that instant, perhaps, the very worst
in my life; but they passed, thank God, and with no more desperate feeling than a sullen intention of having my own
way about this money, I lifted the latch of the front door and stepped in.

"I had expected to find a jovial group of friends in her little ground parlour, or at least to hear the sound of merry
voices and laughter in the rooms above; but no sounds of any sort awaited me; indeed the house seemed strangely
silent for one so fully lighted, and, astonished at this, I pushed the door ajar at my left and looked in. An unexpected
and pitiful sight awaited me. Seated at a table set with abundance of untasted food, I saw the master of the house
with his head sunk forward on his arms, asleep. The expected guests had failed to arrive, and he, tired out with waiting, had fallen into a doze at the board.

"This was a condition of things for which I was not prepared. Mrs. Webb, whom I wished to see, was probably upstairs, and while I might summon her by a sturdy rap on the door beside which I stood, I had so little desire to wake her husband, of whose mental condition I was well aware, that I could not bring myself to make any loud noise within his hearing. Yet I had not the courage to retreat. All my hope of relief from the many difficulties that menaced me lay in the generosity of this great-hearted woman, and if out of pusillanimity I let this hour go by without making my appeal, nothing but shame and disaster awaited me. Yet how could I hope to lure her downstairs without noise? I could not, and so, yielding to the impulse of the moment, without any realisation, I here swear, of the effect which my unexpected presence would have on the noble woman overhead, I slipped up the narrow staircase, and catching at that moment the sound of her voice calling out to Batsy, I stepped up to the door I saw standing open before me and confronted her before she could move from the table before which she was sitting, counting over a large roll of money.

"My look (and it was doubtless not a common look, for the sight of a mass of money at that moment, when money was everything to me, roused every lurking demon in my breast) seemed to appall, if it did not frighten her, for she rose, and meeting my eye with a gaze in which shock and some strange and poignant agony totally incomprehensible to me were strangely blended, she cried out:

"'No, no, Frederick! You don't know what you are doing. If you want my money, take it; if you want my life, I will give it to you with my own hand. Don't stain yours--don't--'

"I did not understand her. I did not know until I thought it over afterward that my hand was thrust convulsively into my breast in a way which, taken with my wild mien, made me look as if I had come to murder her for the money over which she was hovering. I was blind, deaf to everything but that money, and bending madly forward in a state of mental intoxication awful enough for me to remember now, I answered her frenzied words by some such broken exclamations as these:

"'Give, then! I want hundreds--thousands--now, now, to save myself! Disgrace, shame, prison await me if I don't have them. Give, give!' And my hand went out toward it, not toward her; but she mistook the action, mistook my purpose, and, with a heart- broken cry, to save me, ME, from crime, the worst crime of which humanity is capable, she caught up a dagger lying only too near her hand in the open drawer against which she leaned, and in a moment of fathomless anguish which we who can never know more than the outward seeming of her life can hardly measure, plunged against it and--I can tell you no more. Her blood and Batsy's shriek from the adjoining room swam through my consciousness, and then she fell, as I supposed, dead upon the floor, and I, in scarcely better case, fell also.

"This, as God lives, is the truth concerning the wound found in the breast of this never-to-be-forgotten woman."

The feeling, the pathos, the anguish even, to be found in his tone made this story, strange and incredible as it seemed, appear for the moment plausible.

"And Batsy?" asked the coroner.

"Must have fallen when we did, for I never heard her voice after the first scream. But I shall speak of her again. What I must now explain is how the money in Mrs. Webb's drawer came into my possession, and how the dagger she had planted in her breast came to be found on the lawn outside. When I came to myself, and that must have been very soon, I found that the blow of which I had been such a horrified witness had not yet proved fatal. The eyes I had seen close, as I had supposed, forever, were now open, and she was looking at me with a smile that has never left my memory, and never will.

"'There is no blood on you,' she murmured. 'You did not strike the blow. Was it money only that you wanted, Frederick? If so, you could have had it without crime. There are five hundred dollars on that table. Take them and let them pave your way to a better life. My death will help you to remember.' Do these words, this action of hers, seem incredible to you, sirs? Alas! alas! they will not when I tell you"--and here he cast one anxious, deeply anxious, glance at the room in which Mr. Sutherland was hidden--"that unknown to me, unknown to anyone living but herself, unknown to that good man from whom it can no longer be kept hidden, Agatha Webb was my mother. I am Philemon's son and not the offspring of Charles and Marietta Sutherland!"

XXXI

A WITNESS LOST

Impossible! Incredible!

Like a wave suddenly lifted the whole assemblage rose in surprise if not in protest. But there was no outburst. The very depth of the feelings evoked made all ebullition impossible, and as one sees the billow pause ere it breaks, and gradually subside, so this crowd yielded to its awe, and man by man sank back into his seat till quiet was again restored, and only a circle of listening faces confronted the man who had just stirred a whole roomful to its depths. Seeing this, and realising his opportunity, Frederick at once entered into the explanations for which each heart there
panted.

"This will be overwhelming news to him who has cared for me since infancy. You have heard him call me son; with what words shall I overthrow his confidence in the truth and rectitude of his long-buried wife and make him know in his old age that he has wasted years of patience upon one who was not of his blood or lineage? The wonder, the incredulity you manifest are my best excuse for my long delay in revealing the secret entrusted to me by this dying woman."

An awed silence greeted these words. Never was the interest of a crowd more intense or its passions held in greater restraint. Yet Agnes's tears flowed freely, and Amabel's smiles—well, their expression had changed; and to Sweetwater, who alone had eyes for her now, they were surcharged with a tragic meaning, strange to see in one of her callous nature.

Frederick's voice broke as he proceeded in his self-imposed task.

"The astounding fact which I have just communicated to you was made known by my mother, with the dagger still plunged in her breast. She would not let me draw it out. She knew that death would follow that act, and she prized every moment remaining to her because of the bliss she enjoyed of seeing and having near her her only living child. The love, the passion, the boundless devotion she showed in those last few minutes transformed me in an instant from a selfish brute into a deeply repentant man. I knelt before her in anguish. I made her feel that, wicked as I had been, I was not the conscienceless wretch she had imagined, and that she was mistaken as to the motives which led me into her presence. And when I saw, by her clearing brow and peaceful look, that I had fully persuaded her of this, I let her speak what words she would, and tell, as she was able, the secret tragedy of her life.

"It is a sacred story to me, and if you must know it, let it be from her own words in the letters she left behind her. She only told me that to save me from the fate of the children who had preceded me, the five little girls and boys who had perished almost at birth in her arms, she had parted from me in early infancy to Mrs. Sutherland, then mourning the sudden death of her only child; that this had been done secretly and under circumstances calculated to deceive Mr. Sutherland, consequently he had never known I was not his own child, and in terror of the effect which the truth might have upon him she enjoined me not to enlighten him now, if by any sacrifice on my part I could rightfully avoid it; that she was happy in having me hear the truth before she died; that the joy which this gave her was so great she did not regret her fatal act, violent and uncalled for as it was, for it had showed her my heart and allowed me to read hers. Then she talked of my father, by whom I mean you call Philemon; and she made me promise I would care for him to the last with tenderness, saying that I would be able to do this without seeming impropriety, since she had willed me all her fortune under this proviso. Finally, she gave me a key, and pointing out where the money lay hidden, bade me carry it away as her last gift, together with the package of letters I would find with it. And when I had taken these and given her back the key, she told me that but for one thing she would die happy. And though her strength and breath were fast failing her, she made me understand that she was worried about the Zabels, who had not come according to a sacred custom between them, to celebrate the anniversary of her wedding, and prayed me to see the two old gentlemen before I slept, since nothing but death or dire distress would have kept them from gratifying the one whim of my father's failing mind. I promised, and with perfect peace in her face, she pointed to the dagger in her breast.

"But before I could lay my hand upon it she called for Batsy. 'I want her to hear me declare before I go,' said she, 'that this stroke was delivered by myself upon myself.' But when I rose to look for Batsy I found that the shock of her mistress's fatal act had killed her and that only her dead body was lying across the window-sill of the adjoining room. It was a chance that robbed me of the only witness who could testify to my innocence, in case my presence in this house of death should become known, and realising all the danger in which it threw me, I did not dare to tell my mother, for fear it would make her last moments miserable. So I told her that the poor woman had understood what I would make her last moments miserable. So I told her that the poor woman had understood what she wished, but was too terrified to move or speak; and this satisfied my mother and made her last breath one of trust and contented love. She died as I drew the dagger from her breast, and seeing this, I was seized with horror of the truth might have upon him she enjoined me not to enlighten him now, if by any sacrifice on my part I could rightly avoid it; that she was happy in having me hear the truth before she died; that the joy which this gave her was so great she did not regret her fatal act, violent and uncalled for as it was, for it had showed her my heart and allowed me to read hers. Then she talked of my father, by whom I mean you call Philemon; and she made me promise I would care for him to the last with tenderness, saying that I would be able to do this without seeming impropriety, since she had willed me all her fortune under this proviso. Finally, she gave me a key, and pointing out where the money lay hidden, bade me carry it away as her last gift, together with the package of letters I would find with it. And when I had taken these and given her back the key, she told me that but for one thing she would die happy. And though her strength and breath were fast failing her, she made me understand that she was worried about the Zabels, who had not come according to a sacred custom between them, to celebrate the anniversary of her wedding, and prayed me to see the two old gentlemen before I slept, since nothing but death or dire distress would have kept them from gratifying the one whim of my father's failing mind. I promised, and with perfect peace in her face, she pointed to the dagger in her breast.

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He paused, and the awe occasioned by the scene he had described was so deep and the silence so prolonged that a shudder passed over the whole assemblage when from some unknown quarter a single cutting voice arose in this one short, mocking comment:

"Oh, the fairy tale!"

Was it Amabel who spoke? Some thought so and looked her way, but they only beheld a sweet, tear-stained face turned with an air of moving appeal upon Frederick as if begging pardon for the wicked doubts which had driven him to this defence.

Frederick met that look with one so severe it partook of harshness; then, resuming his testimony, he said:
"It is of the Zabel brothers I must now speak, and of how one of them, James by name, came to be involved in this affair.

"When I left my dead mother's side I was in such a state of mind that I passed with scarcely so much as a glance the room where my new-found father sat sleeping. But as I hastened on toward the quarter where the Zabels lived, I was seized by such compunction for his desolate state that I faltered in my rapid flight and did not arrive at the place of my destination as quickly as I intended. When I did I found the house dark and the silence sepulchral. But I did not turn away. Remembering my mother's anxiety, an anxiety so extreme it disturbed her final moments, I approached the front door and was about to knock when I found it open. Greatly astonished, I at once passed in, and, seeing my way perfectly in the moonlight, entered the room on the left, the door of which also stood open. It was the second house I had entered unannounced that night, and in this as in the other I encountered a man sitting asleep by the table.

"It was John, the elder of the two, and, perceiving that he was suffering for food and in a condition of extreme misery, I took out the first bill my hand encountered in my overfull pockets and laid it on the table by his side. As I did so he gave a sigh, but did not wake; and satisfied that I had done all that was wise and all that even my mother would expect of me under the circumstances, and fearing to encounter the other brother if I lingered, I hastened away and took the shortest path home. Had I been more of a man, or if my visit to Mrs. Webb had been actuated by a more communicable motive, I would have gone at once to the good man who believed me to be of his own flesh and blood, and told him of the strange and heart-rending adventure which had changed the whole tenor of my thoughts and life, and begged his advice as to what I had better do under the difficult circumstances in which I found myself placed. But the memory of a thousand past ingratiations, together with the knowledge of the shock which he could not fail to receive on learning at this late day, and under conditions at once so tragic and full of menace, that the child which his long-buried wife had once placed in his arms as his own was neither of her blood nor his, rose up between us and caused me not only to attempt silence, but to secrete in the adjoining woods the money I had received, in the vain hope that all visible connection between myself and my mother's tragic death would thus be lost. You see I had not calculated on Miss Amabel Page."

The flash he here received from that lady's eyes startled the crowd, and gave Sweetwater, already suffering under shock after shock of mingled surprise and wonder, his first definite idea that he had never rightly understood the relations between these two, and that something besides justice had actuated Amabel in her treatment of this young man. This feeling was shared by others, and a reaction set in in Frederick's favour, which even affected the officials who were conducting the inquiry. This was shown by the difference of manner now assumed by the coroner and by the more easily impressed Sweetwater, who had not yet learned the indispensable art of hiding his feelings. Frederick himself felt the change and showed it by the look of relief and growing confidence he cast at Agnes.

Of the questions and answers which now passed between him and the various members of the jury I need give no account. They but emphasised facts already known, and produced but little change in the general feeling, which was now one of suppressed pity for all who had been drawn into the meshes of this tragic mystery. When he was allowed to resume his seat, the name of Miss Amabel Page was again called.

She rose with a bound. Nought that she had anticipated had occurred; facts of which she could know nothing had changed the aspect of affairs and made the position of Frederick something so remote from any she could have imagined, that she was still in the maze of the numberless conflicting emotions which these revelations were calculated to call out in one who had risked all on the hazard of a die and lost. She did not even know at this moment whether she was glad or sorry he could explain so cleverly his anomalous position. She had caught the look he had cast at Agnes, and while this angered her, it did not greatly modify her opinion that he was destined for herself. For, however other people might feel, she did not for a moment believe his story. She had not a pure enough heart to do so. To her all self-sacrifice was an anomaly. No woman of the mental or physical strength of Agatha Webb would plant a dagger in her own breast just to prevent another person from committing a crime, were he lover, husband, or son. So Amabel believed and so these others believe also when once relieved of the magnetic personality of this extraordinary witness. Yet how thrilling it had been to hear him plead his cause so well! It was almost worth the loss of her revenge to meet his look of hate, and dream of the possibility of turning it later into the old look of love. Yes, yes, she loved him now; not for his position, for that was gone; not even for his money, for she could contemplate its loss; but for himself, who had so boldly shown that he was stronger than she and could triumph over her by the sheer force of his masculine daring.

With such feelings, what should she say to these men; how conduct herself under questions which would be much more searching now than before? She could not even decide in her own mind. She must let impulse have its way.

Happily, she took the right stand at first. She did not endeavour to make any corrections in her former testimony, only acknowledging that the flower whose presence on the scene of death had been such a mystery, had fallen from
her hair at the ball and that she had seen Frederick pick it up and put it in his buttonhole. Beyond this, and the
inferences it afterward awakened in her mind, she would not go, though many present, and among them Frederick,
felt confident that her attitude had been one of suspicion from the first, and that it was to follow him rather than to
supply the wants of the old man, Zabel, she had left the ball and found her way to Agatha Webb's cottage.

XXXII

WHY AGATHA WEBB WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN IN SUTHERLANDTOWN

Meanwhile Sweetwater had been witness to a series of pantomimic actions that interested him more than
Amabel's conduct under this final examination. Frederick, who had evidently some request to make or direction to
give, had sent a written line to the coroner, who, on reading it, had passed it over to Knapp, who a few minutes later
was to be seen in conference with Agnes Halliday. As a result, the latter rose and left the room, followed by the
detective. She was gone a half-hour, then simultaneously with her reappearance, Sweetwater saw Knapp hand a
bundle of letters to the coroner, who, upon opening them, chose out several which he proceeded to read to the jury.
They were the letters referred to by Frederick as having been given to him by his mother. The first was dated thirty-
five years previously and was in the handwriting of Agatha herself. It was directed to James Zabel, and was read
amid a profound hush.

DEAR JAMES:

You are too presumptuous. When I let you carry me away from John in that maddening reel last night, I did not
mean you to draw the inference you did. That you did draw it argues a touch of vanity in a man who is not alone in
the field where he imagines himself victor. John, who is humbler, sees some merit in--well, in Frederick Snow, let
us say. So do I, but merit does not always win, any more than presumption. When we meet, let it be as friends, but
as friends only. A girl cannot be driven into love. To ride on your big mare, Judith, is bliss enough for my twenty
years. Why don't you find it so too? I think I hear you say you do, but only when she stops at a certain gate on
Portchester highway. Folly! there are other roads and other gates, though if I should see you enter one--There! my
pen is galloping away with me faster than Judith ever did, and it is time I drew rein. Present my regards to John--But
no; then he would know I had written you a letter, and that might hurt him. How could he guess it was only a
scolding letter, such as it would grieve him to receive, and that it does not count for anything! Were it to Frederick
Snow, now-- There! some horses are so hard to pull up--and so are some pens. I will come to a standstill, but not
before your door.

Respectfully your neighbour,
AGATHA GILCHRIST.

DEAR JAMES:

I know I have a temper, a wicked temper, and now you know it too. When it is roused, I forget love, gratitude,
and everything else that should restrain me, and utter words I am myself astonished at. But I do not get roused often,
and when all is over I am not averse to apologising or even to begging forgiveness. My father says my temper will
undo me, but I am much more afraid of my heart than I am of my temper. For instance, here I am writing to you
again just because I raised my riding-whip and said--But you know what I said, and I am not fond of recalling the
words, for I cannot do so without seeing your look of surprise and contrasting it with that of Philemon's. Yours had
judgment in it, while Philemon's held only indulgence. Yet I liked yours best, or should have liked it best if it were
not for the insufferable pride which is a part of my being. Temper such as mine OUGHT to surprise you, yet would I
be Agatha Gilchrist without it? I very much fear not. And not being Agatha Gilchrist, should I have your love?
Again I fear not. James, forgive me. When I am happier, when I know my own heart, I will have less provocation.
Then, if that heart turns your way, you will find a great and bountiful serenity where now there are lowering and
thunderous tempests. Philemon said last night that he would be content to have my fierce word o' mornings, if only I
would give him one drop out of the honey of my better nature when the sun went down and twilight brought
reflection and love. But I did not like him any the better for saying this. YOU would not halve the day so. The cup
with which you would refresh yourself must hold no bitterness. Will it not have to be proffered, then, by other hands
than those of
AGATHA GILCHRIST.
MR. PHILEMON WEBB.

Respected Sir:

You are persistent. I am willing to tell YOU, though I shall never confide so much to another, that it will take a
stronger nature than yours, and one that loves me less, to hold me faithful and make me the happy, devoted wife
which I must be if I would not be a demon. I cannot, I dare not, marry where I am not held in a passionate, self-
forgetful subjection. I am too proud, too sensitive, too little mistress of myself when angry or aroused. If, like some
strong women, I loved what was weaker than myself, and could be controlled by goodness and unlimited kindness, I
might venture to risk living at the side of the most indulgent and upright man I know. But I am not of that kind.
Strength only can command my admiration or subdue my pride. I must fear where I love, and own for husband him
who has first shown himself my master.

So do not fret any more for me, for you, less than any man I know, will ever claim my obedience or command
my love. Not that I will not yield my heart to you, but that I cannot; and, knowing that I cannot, feel it honest to say
so before any more of your fine, young manhood is wasted. Go your ways, then, Philemon, and leave me to the
rouger paths my feet were made to tread. I like you now and feel something like a tender regard for your goodness,
but if you persist in a courtship which only my father is inclined to smile upon, you will call up an antagonism that
can lead to nothing but evil, for the serpent that lies coiled in my breast has deadly fangs, and is to be feared, as you
should know who have more than once seen me angry.

Do not blame John or James Zabel, or Frederick Snow, or even Samuel Barton for this. It would be the same if
none of these men existed. I was not made to triumph over a kindly nature, but to yield the haughtiest heart in all this
county to the gentle but firm control of its natural master. Do you want to know who that master is? I cannot tell
you, for I have not yet named him to myself.

DEAR JAMES:
I am going away. I am going to leave Portchester for several months. I am going to see the world. I did not tell
you this last night for fear of weakening under your entreaties, or should I say commands? Lately I have felt myself
weakening more than once, and I want to know what it means. Absence will teach me, absence and the sight of new
faces. Do you quarrel with this necessity? Do you think I should know my mind without any such test? Alas! James,
it is not a simple mind and it baffles me at times. Let us then give it a chance. If the glow and glamour of elegant
city life can make me forget certain snatches of talk at our old gate, or that night when you drew my hand through
your arm and softly kissed my fingertips, then I am no mate for you, whose love, however critical, has never
wavered, but has made itself felt, even in rebuke, as the strongest, sweetest thing that has entered my turbulent life.
Because I would be worthy of you, I submit to a separation which will either be a permanent one or the last that will
ever take place between you and me. John will not bear this as well as you, yet he does not love me as well, possibly
because to him I am simply a superior being, while to you I am a loving but imperfect woman who wishes to do
right but can only do so under the highest guidance.

DEAR JOHN:
I feel that I owe you a letter because you have been so patient. You may show it to James if you like, but I mean
it for you as an old and dear friend who will one day dance at my wedding.

I am living in a whirl of enjoyment. I am seeing and tasting of pleasures I have only dreamed about till now.
From a farmhouse kitchen to Mrs. Andrews's drawing-room is a lively change for a girl who loves dress and show
only less than daily intercourse with famous men and brilliant women. But I am bearing it nobly and have developed
tastes I did not know I possessed; expensive tastes, John, which I fear may unfit me for the humble life of a
Portchester matron. Can you imagine me dressed in rich brocade, sitting in the midst of Washington's choicest
citizens and exchanging sallies with senators and judges? You may find it hard, yet so it is, and no one seems to
think I am out of place, nor do I feel so, only--do not tell James--there are movements in my heart at times which
make me shut my eyes when the lights are brightest, and dream, if but for an instant, of home and the tumble-down
gateway where I have so often leaned when someone (you know who it is now, John, and I shall not hurt you too
deeply by mentioning him) was saying good-night and calling down the blessings of Heaven upon a head not worthy
to receive them.

Does this argue my speedy return? Perhaps. Yet I do not know. There are fond hearts here also, and a life in this
country's centre would be a great life for me if only I could forget the touch of a certain restraining hand which has
great power over me even as a memory. For the sake of that touch shall I give up the grandeur and charm of this
broad life? Answer, John. You know him and me well enough now to say.

DEAR JOHN:
I do not understand your letter. You speak in affectionate terms of everybody, yet you beg me to wait and not be
in a hurry to return. Why? Do you not realise that such words only make me the more anxious to see old Portchester
again? If there is anything amiss at home, or if James is learning to do without me--but you do not say that; you only
intimate that perhaps I will be better able to make up my mind later than now, and hint of great things to come if I
will only hold my affections in check a little longer. This is all very ambiguous and demands a fuller explanation. So
write to me once more, John, or I shall sever every engagement I have made here and return.

DEAR JOHN:
Your letter is plain enough this time. James read the letter I wrote you about my pleasure in the life here and was
displeased at it. He thinks I am growing worldly and losing that simplicity which he has always looked upon as my
most attractive characteristic. So! so! Well, James is right; I am becoming less the country girl and more the woman
of the world every day I remain here. That means I am becoming less worthy of him. So--But whatever else I have
to say on this topic must be said to him. For this you will pardon me like the good brother you are. I cannot help my preference. He is nearer my own age; besides, we were made for each other.

DEAR JAMES:

I am not worldly; I am not carried away by the pleasures and satisfactions of this place,—at least not to the point of forgetting what is dearer and better. I have seen Washington, I have seen gay life; I like it, but I LOVE Portchester. Consequently I am going to return to Portchester, and that very soon. Indeed I cannot stay away much longer, and if you are glad of this, and if you wish to be convinced that a girl who has been wearing brocade and jewels can content herself quite gaily again with calico, come up to the dear old gate a week from now and you will have the opportunity. Do you object to flowers? I may wear a flower in my hair.

Your wayward but ever-constant

AGATHA.

DEAR JAMES:

Why must I write? Why am I not content with the memory of last night? When one's cup is quite full, a cup that has been so long in filling,—must some few drops escape just to show that a great joy like mine is not satisfied to be simply quiescent? I have suffered so long from uncertainty, have tried you and tried myself with so tedious an indecision, that, now I know no other man can ever move my heart as you have done, the ecstasy of it makes me over-demonstrative. I want to tell you that I love you; that I do not simply accept your love, but give you back in fullest measure all the devotion you have heaped upon me in spite of my many faults and failings. You took me to your heart last night, and seemed satisfied; but it does not satisfy me that I just let you do it without telling you that I am proud and happy to be the chosen one of your heart, and that as I saw your smile and the proud passion which lit up your face, I felt how much sweeter was the dear domestic bliss you promised me than the more brilliant but colder life of a statesman's wife in Washington.

I missed the flower from my hair when I went back to my room last night. Did you take it, dear? If so, do not cherish it. I hate to think of anything withering on your breast. My love is deathless, James, and owns no such symbol as that. But perhaps you are not thinking of my love, but of my faults. If so, let the flower remain where you have put it; and when you gaze on it say, "Thus is it with the defects of my darling; once in full bloom, now a withered remembrance. When I gathered her they began to fade." O James, I feel as if I never could feel anger again.

DEAR JAMES:

I do not, I cannot, believe it. Though you said to me on going out, "Your father will explain," I cannot content myself with his explanations and will never believe what he said of you except you confirm his accusations by your own act. If, after I have told you exactly what passed between us, you return me this and other letters, then I shall know that I have leaned my weight on a hollow staff, and that henceforth I am to be without protector or comforter in this world.

O James, were we not happy! I believed in you and felt that you believed in me. When we stood heart to heart under the elm tree (was it only last night?) and you swore that if it lay in the power of earthly man to make me happy, I should taste every sweet that a woman's heart naturally craved, I thought my heaven had already come and that now it only remained for me to create yours. Yet that very minute my father was approaching us, and in another instant we heard these words:

"James, I must talk with you before you make my daughter forget herself any further." Forget herself! What had happened? This was not the way my father had been accustomed to talk, much as he had always favoured the suit of Philemon Webb, and pleased as he would have been had my choice fallen on him. Forget herself! I looked at you to see how these insulting words would affect you. But while you turned pale, or seemed to do so in the fading moonlight, you were not quite so unprepared for them as I was myself, and instead of showing anger, followed my father into the house, leaving me shivering in a spot which had held no chill for me a moment before. You were gone--how long? To me it seemed an hour, and perhaps it was. It would seem to take that long for a man's face to show such change as yours did when you confronted me again in the moonlight. Yet a lightning stroke makes quick work, and perhaps my countenance in that one minute showed as great a change as yours. Else why did you shudder away from me, and to my passionate appeal reply with this one short phrase: "Your father will explain"? Did you think any other words than yours would satisfy me, or that I could believe even him when he accused you of a base and dishonest act? Much as I have always loved and revered my father, I find it impossible not to hope that in his wish to see me united to Philemon he has resorted to an unworthy subterfuge to separate us; therefore I give you our interview word for word. May it shock you as much as it shocked me. Here is what he said first:

"Agatha, you cannot marry James Zabel. He is not an honest man. He has defrauded me, ME, your father, of several thousand dollars. In a clever way, too, showing him to be as subtle as he is unprincipled. Shall I tell you the wretched story, my girl? He has left me to do so. He sees as plainly as I do that any communication between you two after the discovery I have this day made would be but an added offence. He is at least a gentleman, which is
something, considering how near he came to being my son-in-law."

I may have answered. People do cry out when they are stabbed, sometimes, but I rather think I did not say a word, only looked a disdain which at that minute was as measureless as my belief in you. YOU dishonest? YOU--Or perhaps I laughed; that would have been truer to my feeling; yes, I must have laughed.

My father's next words indicated that I did something.

"You do not believe in his guilt," he went on, and there was a kindness in his tone which gave me my first feeling of real terror. "I can readily comprehend that, Agatha. He has been in my office and acted under my eye for several years now, and I had almost as much confidence in him as you had, notwithstanding the fact that I liked him much better as my confidential clerk than as your probable or prospective husband. He has never held the key to my heart; would God he never had to yours! But he was a good and reliable man in the office, or so I thought, and I gave into his hands much of the work I ought to have done myself, especially since my health has more or less failed me. My trust he abused. A month ago--it was during that ill turn you remember I received a letter from a man I had never expected to hear from again. He was in my debt some ten thousand dollars, and wrote that he had brought with him as much of this sum as he had been able to save in the last five years, to Sutherlandtown, where he was now laid up with a dangerous illness from which he had small hope of recovering. Would I come there and get it? He was a stranger and wished to take no one into his confidence, but he had the money and would be glad to place it in my hands. He added that as he was a lone man, without friends or relatives to inherit from him, he felt a decided pleasure at the prospect of satisfying his only creditor, and devoutly hoped he would be well enough to realise the transaction and receive my receipt. But if his fever increased and he should be delirious or unconscious when I reached him, then I was to lift up the left-hand corner of the mattress on which he lay and take from underneath his head a black wallet in which I would find the money promised me. He had elsewhere enough to pay all his expenses, so that the full contents of the wallet were mine.

"I remembered the man and I wanted the money; so, not being able to go for it myself, I authorised James Zabel to collect it for me. He started at once for Sutherlandtown, and in a few hours returned with the wallet alluded to. Though I was suffering intensely at the time, I remember distinctly the air with which he laid it down and the words with which he endeavoured to carry off a certain secret excitement visible in him. 'Mr. Orr was alive, sir, and fully conscious; but he will not outlive the night. He seemed quite satisfied with the messenger and gave up the wallet without any hesitation.' I roused up and looked at him. 'What has shaken you up so?' I asked. He was silent a moment before replying. 'I have ridden fast,' said he; then more slowly, 'One feels sorry for a man dying alone and amongst strangers.' I thought he showed an unnecessary emotion, but paid no further heed to it at the time.

"The wallet held two thousand and more dollars, which was less than I expected, but yet a goodly sum and very welcome. As I was counting it over I glanced at the paper accompanying it. It was an acknowledgment of debt and mentioned the exact sum I should find in the wallet--$2753.67. Pointing them out to James, I remarked, 'The figures are in different ink from the words. How do you account for that?' I thought his answer rather long in coming, though when it did come it was calm, if not studied. 'I presume,' said he, 'that the sum was inserted at Sutherlandtown, after Mr. Orr was quite sure just how much he could spare for the liquidation of this old debt.' 'Very likely,' I assented, not bestowing another thought upon the matter.

"But to-day it has been forced back upon my attention in a curious if not providential way. I was over in Sutherlandtown for the first time since my illness, and having some curiosity about my unfortunate but honest debtor, went to the hotel and asked to see the room in which he died. It being empty they at once showed it to me; and satisfied that he had been made comfortable in his last hours, I was turning away, when I espied on a table in one corner an inkstand and what seemed to be an old copy-book. Why I stopped and approached this table I do not know, but once in front of it I remembered what Zabel had said about the figures, and taking up the pen I saw there, I dipped it in the ink-pot and attempted to scribble a number or two on a piece of loose paper I found in the copy-book. The ink was thick and the pen corroded, so that it was not till after several ineffectual efforts that I succeeded in making any strokes that were at all legible. But when I did, they were so exactly similar in colour to the numbers inserted in Mr. Orr's memorandum (which I had fortunately brought with me) that I was instantly satisfied this special portion of the writing had been done, as James had said, in this room, and with the very pen I was then handling. As there was nothing extraordinary in this, I was turning away, when a gust of wind from the open window lifted the loose sheet of paper I had been scribbling on and landed it, the other side up, on the carpet. As I stooped for it I saw figures on it, and feeling sure that they had been scrawled there by Mr. Orr in his attempt to make the pen write, I pulled out the memorandum again and compared the two minutely. They were the work of the same hand, but the figures on the stray leaf differed from those in the memorandum in a very important particular. Those in the memorandum began with a 2, while those on the stray sheet began with a 7--a striking difference. Look, Agatha, here is the piece of paper just as I found it. You see here, there, and everywhere the one set of figures, 7753.67. Here it is hardly legible, here it is blotted with too much ink, here it is faint but sufficiently distinct, and
here--well, there can be no mistake about these figures, 7753.67; yet the memorandum reads, $2753.67, and the money returned to me amounts to $2753.67--a clean five thousand dollars' difference."

Here, James, my father paused, perhaps to give me a commiserating look, though I did not need it; perhaps to give himself a moment in which to regain courage for what he still had to say. I did not break the silence; I was too sure of your integrity; besides, my tongue could not have moved if it would; all my faculties seemed frozen except that instinct which cried out continually within me: "No! there is no fault in James. He has done no wrong. No one but himself shall ever convince me that he has robbed anyone of anything except poor me of my poor heart." But inner cries of this kind are inaudible and after a moment's interval my father went on:

"Five thousand dollars is no petty sum, and the discrepancy in the two sets of figures which seemed to involve me in so considerable a loss set me thinking. Convinced that Mr. Orr would not be likely to scribble one number over so many times if it was not the one then in his mind, I went to Mr. Forsyth's office and borrowed a magnifying-glass, through which I again subjected the figures in the memorandum to a rigid scrutiny. The result was a positive conviction that they had been tampered with after their first writing, either by Mr. Orr himself or by another whom I need not name. The 2 had originally been a 7, and I could even see where the top line of the 7 had been given a curl and where a horizontal stroke had been added at the bottom.

"Agatha, I came home as troubled a man as there was in all these parts. I remembered the suppressed excitement which had been in James Zabel's face when he handed me over the money, and I remembered also that you loved him, or thought you did, and that, love or no love, you were pledged to marry him. If I had not recalled all this I might have proceeded more warily. As it was, I took the bold and open course and gave James Zabel an opportunity to explain himself. Agatha, he did not embrace it. He listened to my accusations and followed my finger when I pointed out the discrepancy between the two sets of figures, but he made no protestations of innocence, nor did he show me the front of an honest man when I asked if he expected me to believe that the wallet had held only two thousand and over when Mr. Orr handed it over to him. On the contrary he seemed to shrink into himself like a person whose life has been suddenly blasted, and replying that he would expect me to believe nothing except his extreme contrition at the abuse of confidence of which he had been guilty, begged me to wait till to-morrow before taking any active steps in the matter. I replied that I would show him that much consideration if he would immediately drop all pretensions to your hand. This put him in a bad way; but he left, as you see, with just a simple injunction to you to seek from me an explanation of his strange departure. Does that look like innocence or does it look like guilt?"

I found my tongue at this and passionately cried: "James Zabel's life, as I have known it, shows him to be an honest man. If he has done what you suggest, given you but a portion of the money entrusted to him and altered the figures in the memorandum to suit the amount he brought you, then there is a discrepancy between this act and all the other acts of his life which I find it more difficult to reconcile than you did the two sets of figures in Mr. Orr's handwriting. Father, I must hear from his own lips a confirmation of your suspicions before I will credit them."

And this is why I write you so minute an account of what passed between my father and myself last night. If his account of the matter is a correct one, and you have nothing to add to it in way of explanation, then the return of this letter will be token enough that my father has been just in his accusations and that the bond between us must be broken. But if--O James, if you are the true man I consider you, and all that I have heard is a fabrication or mistake, then come to me at once; do not delay, but come at once, and the sight of your face at the gate will be enough to establish your innocence in my eyes.

AGATHA. The letter that followed this was very short:

DEAR JAMES:
The package of letters has been received. God help me to bear this shock to all my hopes and the death of all my girlish beliefs. I am not angry. Only those who have something left to hold on to in life can be angry.

My father tells me he has received a packet too. It contained five thousand dollars in ten five-hundred-dollar notes. James! James! was not my love enough, that you should want my father's money too?

I have begged my father, and he has promised me, to keep the cause of this rupture secret. No one shall know from either of us that James Zabel has any flaw in his nature.

The next letter was dated some months later. It is to Philemon:

DEAR PHILEMON:
The gloves are too small; besides, I never wear gloves. I hate their restraint and do not feel there is any good reason for hiding my hands, in this little country town where everyone knows me. Why not give them to Hattie Weller? She likes such things, while I have had my fill of finery. A girl whose one duty is to care for a dying father has no room left in her heart for vanities.

DEAR PHILEMON:
It is impossible. I have had my day of love and my heart is quite dead. Show your magnanimity by ceasing to
urge me any longer to forget the past. It is all you can do for
AGATHA.
DEAR PHILEMON:
You WILL have my hand though I have told you that my heart does not go with it. It is hard to understand such
persistence, but if you are satisfied to take a woman of my strength against her will, then God have mercy upon you,
for I will be your wife.
But do not ask me to go to Sutherlandtown. I will live here. And do not expect to keep up your intimacy with the
Zabels. There is no tie of affection remaining between James and myself, but if I am to shed that half-light over your
home which is all I can promise and all that you can hope to receive, then keep me from all influence but your own.
That this in time may grow sweet and dear to me is my earnest prayer to-day, for you are worthy of a true wife.
AGATHA.
DEAR JOHN:
I am going to be married. My father exacts it and there is no good reason why I should not give him this final
satisfaction. At least I do not think there is; but if you or your brother differ from me--
Say good-bye to James from me. I pray that his life may be peaceful. I know that it will be honest.
AGATHA.
DEAR PHILEMON:
My father is worse. He fears that if we wait till Tuesday he will not be able to see us married. Decide, then, what
our duty is; I am ready to abide by your pleasure.
AGATHA.
The following is from John Zabel to his brother James, and is dated one day after the above:
DEAR JAMES:
When you read this I will be far away, never to look in your face again, unless you bid me. Brother, brother, I
meant it for the best, but God was not with me and I have made four hearts miserable without giving help to anyone.
When I read Agatha's letter--the last for more reasons than one that I shall ever receive from her--I seemed to
feel as never before what I had done to blast your two lives. For the first time I realised to the full that but for me she
might have been happy and you the respected husband of the one grand woman to be found in Portchester. That I
had loved her so fiercely myself came back to me in reproach, and the thought that she perhaps suspected that the
blame had fallen where it was not deserved roused me to such a pitch that I took the sudden and desperate resolution
of telling her the truth before she gave her hand to Philemon. Why the daily sight of your misery should not have
driven me before to this act, I cannot tell. Some remnants of the old jealousy may have been still festering in my
heart; or the sense of the great distance between your self-sacrificing spirit and the selfishness of my weaker nature
risen like a barrier between me and the only noble act left for a man in my position. Whatever the cause, it was not
till to-day the full determination came to brave the obloquy of a full confession; but when it did come I did not pause
till I reached Mr. Gilchrist's house and was ushered into his presence.
He was lying on the sitting-room lounge, looking very weak and exhausted, while on one side of him stood
Agatha and on the other Philemon, both contemplating him with ill-concealed anxiety. I had not expected to find
Philemon there, and for a moment I suffered the extreme agony of a man who has not measured the depth of the
plunge he is about to take; but the sight of Agatha trembling under the shock of my unexpected presence restored me
to myself and gave me firmness to proceed. Advancing with a bow, I spoke quickly the one word I had come there
to say.
"Agatha, I have done you a great wrong and I am here to undo it. For months I have felt driven to confession, but
not till to-day have I possessed the necessary courage. NOW, nothing shall hinder me."
I said this because I saw in both Mr. Gilchrist and Philemon a disposition to stop me where I was. Indeed Mr.
Gilchrist had risen on his elbow and Philemon was making that pleading gesture of his which we know so well.
Agatha alone looked eager. "What is it?" she cried. "I have a right to know." I went to the door, shut it, and stood
with my back against it, a figure of shame and despair; suddenly the confession burst from me. "Agatha," said I,
"why did you break with my brother James? Because you thought him guilty of theft; because you believed he took
the five thousand dollars out of the sum entrusted to him by Mr. Orr for your father. Agatha, it was not James who
did this it was I; and James knew it, and bore the blame of my misdoing because he was always a loyal soul and took
account of my weakness and knew, alas! too well, that open shame would kill me."
It was a weak plea and merited no reply. But the silence was so dreadful and lasted so long that I felt first
crushed and then terrified. Raising my head, for I had not dared to look any of them in the face, I cast one glance at
the group before me and dropped my head again, startled. Only one of the three was looking at me, and that was
Agatha. The others had their heads turned aside, and I thought, or rather the passing fancy took me, that they shrank
from meeting her gaze with something of the same shame and dread I myself felt. But she! Can I ever hope to make
you realise her look, or comprehend the pang of utter self-abasement with which I succumbed before it? It was so terrible that I seemed to hear her utter words, though I am sure she did not speak; and with some wild idea of stemming the torrent of her reproaches, I made an effort at explanation, and impetuously cried: "It was not for my own good, Agatha, not for self altogether, I did this. I too loved you, madly, despairingly, and, good brother as I seemed, I was jealous of James and hoped to take his place in your regard if I could show a greater prosperity and get for you those things his limited prospects denied him. You enjoy money, beauty, ease; I could see that by your letters, and if James could not give them to you and I could--Oh, do not look at me like that! I see now that millions could not have bought you."

"Despicable!" was all that came from her lips. At which I shuddered and groped about for the handle of the door. But she would not let me go. Subduing with an unexpected grand self-restraint the emotions which had hitherto swelled too high in her breast for either speech or action, she thrust out one arm to stay me and said in short, commanding tones: "How was this thing done? You say you took the money, yet it was James who was sent to collect it--or so my father says." Here she tore her looks from me and cast one glance at her father. What she saw I cannot say, but her manner changed and henceforth she glanced his way as much as mine and with nearly as much emotion. "I am waiting to hear what you have to say," she exclaimed, laying her hand on the door over my head so as to leave me no opportunity for escape. I bowed and attempted an explanation.

"Agatha," said I, "the commission was given to James and he rode to Sutherlandtown to perform it. But it was on the day when he was accustomed to write to you, and he was not easy in his mind, for he feared he would miss sending you his usual letter. When, then, he came to the hotel and saw me in Philemon's room--I was often there in those days, often without Philemon's knowing it--he saw, or thought he did, a way out of his difficulties. Entering where I was, he explained to me his errand, and we being then--though never, alas! since--one in everything but the secret hopes he enjoyed, he asked me if I would go in his stead to Mr. Orr's room, present my credentials, and obtain the money while he wrote the letter with which his mind was full. Though my jealousy was aroused and I hated the letter he was about to write, I did not see how I could refuse him; so after receiving such credentials as he himself carried, and getting full instructions how to proceed, I left him writing at Philemon's table and hastened down the hall to the door he had pointed out. If Providence had been on the side of guilt, the circumstances could not have been more favourable for the deception I afterwards played. No one was in the hall, no one was with Mr. Orr to note that it was I instead of James who executed Mr. Gilchrist's commission. But I was thinking of no deception then. I proceeded quite innocently on my errand, and when the feeble voice of the invalid bade me enter, I experienced nothing but a feeling of compassion for a man dying in this desolate way, alone. Of course Mr. Orr was surprised to see a stranger, but after reading Mr. Gilchrist's letter which I handed him, he seemed quite satisfied and himself drew out the wallet at the head of his bed and handed it over. 'You will find,' said he, 'a memorandum inside of the full amount, $7758.67. I should like to have returned Mr. Gilchrist the full ten thousand which I owe him, but this is all I possess, barring a hundred dollars which I have kept for my final expenses.' 'Mr. Gilchrist will be satisfied,' I assured him. 'Shall I make you out a receipt?' He shook his head with a sad smile. 'I shall be dead in twenty-four hours. What good will a receipt do me?' But it seemed unbusinesslike not to give it, so I went over to the table, where I saw a pen and paper, and recognising the necessity of counting the money before writing a receipt, I ran my eye over the bills, which were large, and found the wallet contained just the amount he had named. Then I glanced at the memorandum. It had evidently been made out by him at some previous time, for the body of the writing was in firm characters and the ink blue, while the figures were faintly inscribed in muddy black. The 7 especially was little more than a straight line, and as I looked at it the devil that is in every man's nature whispered at first carelessly, then with deeper and deeper insistence: 'How easy it would be to change that 7 to a 2! Only a little mark at the top and the least additional stroke at the bottom and these figures would stand for five thousand less. It might be a temptation to some men.' It presently became a temptation to me; for, glancing furtively up, I discovered that Mr. Orr had fallen either into a sleep or into a condition of insensibility which made him oblivious to my movements. Five thousand dollars! just the sum of the ten five-hundred-dollar bills that made the bulk of the amount I had counted. In this village and at my age this sum would raise me at once to comparative independence. The temptation was too strong for resistance. I succumbed to it, and seizing the pen before me, I made the fatal marks. When I went back to James the wallet was in my hand, and the ten five-hundred-dollar bills in my breast pocket."

Agatha had begun to shudder. She shook so she rattled the door against which I leaned.

"And when you found that Providence was not so much upon your side as you thought, when you saw that the fraud was known and that your brother was suspected of it--""

"Don't!" I pleaded, "don't make me recall that hour!"

But she was inexorable. "Recall that and every hour," she commanded. "Tell me why he sacrificed himself, why he sacrificed me, to a cur--"
She feared her own tongue, she feared her own anger, and stopped. “Speak,” she whispered, and it was the most ghastly whisper that ever left mortal lips. I was but a foot from her and she held me as by a strong enchantment. I could not help obeying her.

“To make it all clear,” I pursued, “I must go back to the time I rejoined James in Philemon’s room. He had finished his letter when I entered and was standing with it, sealed, in his hand. I may have cast it a disdainful glance. I may have shown that I was no longer the same man I had been when I left him a half-hour before, for he looked curiously at me for a moment previous to saying:

“Is that the wallet you have there? Was Mr. Orr conscious, and did he give it to you himself?” Mr. Orr was conscious,’ I returned,--and I didn’t like the sound of my own voice, careful as I was to speak naturally,--’ but he fainted just before I came out, and I think you had better ask the clerk as you go down to send someone up to him.’

James was weighing the pocket-book in his hand. ‘How much do you think there is in here? The debt was ten thousand.’ I had turned carelessly away and was looking out of the window. ‘The memorandum inside gives the figures as two thousand,’ I declared. ‘He apologises for not sending the full amount. He hasn’t it.’ Again I felt James looking at me. Why? Could he see that guilty wad of bills lying on my breast? ‘How came you to read the memorandum?’ he asked. ‘Mr. Orr wished me to. I looked at it to please him.’ This was a lie—the first I had ever uttered. James’s eyes had not moved. ‘John,’ said he, ‘this little bit of business seems to have disturbed you. I ought to have attended to it myself. Agatha might better have waited.’ Then he went out; but I remained till Philemon came home. My brother and myself were no longer companions; a crime divided us,—a crime he could not suspect, yet which made itself felt in both our hearts and prepared him for the revelation made to him by Mr. Gilchrist some weeks after. That night he came to Sutherlandtown, where I was, and entered my bedroom—not in the fraternal way of the old days, but as an elder enters the presence of a younger. ‘John,’ he said, without any preamble or preparation, ’where are the five thousand dollars you kept back from Mr. Gilchrist? The memorandum said seven and you delivered to me only two.’ There are death-knells sounded in every life; those words sounded mine, or would have if he had not immediately added: ‘There! I knew you had no stamina. I have taken your crime on myself, who am really to blame for it, since I delegated my duty to another, and you will only have to bear the disgrace of having James Zabel for a brother. In exchange, give me the money; it shall be returned to-morrow. You cannot have disposed of it already. After which, you, or rather I, will be in the eyes of the world only a thief in intent, not in fact.’ Had he only stopped there!—but he went on: ‘Agatha is lost to me, John. In return, be to me the brother I always thought you up to the unhappy day the sin of Achan came between us.’

“YOU were lost to him! It was all I heard. YOU were lost to him! Then, if I acknowledged the crime I should not only take up my own burden of disgrace, but see him restored to his rights over the only woman I had ever loved. The sacrifice was great and my virtue was not equal to it. I gave him back the money, but I did not offer to assume the responsibility of my own crime.”

“And since?”

In what a hard tone she spoke!

“I have had to see Philemon gradually assume the rights James once enjoyed.”

“John,” she asked,—she was under violent self-restraint,—“why do you come now?”

I cast my eyes at Philemon. He was standing, as before, with his eyes turned away. There was discouragement in his attitude, mingled with a certain grand patience. Seeing that he was better able to bear her loss than either you or myself, I said to her very low, “I thought you ought to know the truth before you gave your final word. I am late, but I would have been TOO LATE a week from now.”

Her hand fell from the door, but her eyes remained fixed on my face. Never have I sustained such a look; never will I encounter such another.

“It is too late NOW,” she murmured. ”The clergyman has just gone who united me to Philemon.”

The next minute her back was towards me; she had faced her father and her new-made husband.

“Father, you knew this thing!” Keen, sharp, incisive, the words rang out. “I saw it in your face when he began to speak.”

Mr. Gilchrist drooped slightly; lie was a very sick man and the scene had been a trying one.

“If I did,” was his low response, “it was but lately. You were engaged then to Philemon. Why break up this second match?”

She eyed him as if she found it difficult to credit her ears. Such indifference to the claims of innocence was incredible to her. I saw her grand profile quiver, then the slow ebbing from her cheek of every drop of blood indignation had summoned there.
"And you, Philemon?" she suggested, with a somewhat softened aspect. "You committed this wrong ignorantly. Never having heard of this crime, you could not know on what false grounds I had been separated from James."

I had started to escape, but stopped just beyond the threshold of the door as she uttered these words. Philemon was not as ignorant as she supposed. This was evident from his attitude and expression.

"Agatha," he began, but at this first word, and before he could clasp the hands held helplessly out before her, she gave a great cry, and staggering back, eyed both her father and himself in a frenzy of indignation that was all the more uncontrollable from the superhuman effort which she had hitherto made to suppress it.

"You too!" she shrieked. "You too! and I have just sworn to love, honour, and obey you! Love YOU! Honour YOU! the unconscionable wretch who--"

But here Mr. Gilchrist rose. Weak, tottering, quivering with something more than anger, he approached his daughter and laid his finger on her lips.

"Be quiet!" he said. "Philemon is not to blame. A month ago he came to me and prayed that as a relief to his mind I would tell him why you had separated yourself from James. He had always thought the match, had fallen through on account of some foolish quarrel or incompatibility, but lately he had feared there was something more than he suspected in this break, something that he should know. So I told him why you had dismissed James; and whether he knew James better than we did, or whether he had seen something in his long acquaintance with these brothers which influenced his judgment, he said at once: 'This cannot be true of James. It is not in his nature to defraud any man; but John--I might believe it of John. Isn't there some complication here?' I had never thought of John, and did not see how John could be mixed up with an affair I had supposed to be a secret between James and myself, but when we came to locate the day, Philemon remembered that on returning to his room that night, he had found John awaiting him. As his room was not five doors from that occupied by Mr. Orr, he was convinced that there was more to this matter than I had suspected. But when he laid the matter before James, he did not deny that John was guilty, but was peremptory in wishing you not to be told before your marriage. He knew that you were engaged to a good man, a man that your father approved, a man that could and would make you happy. He did not want to be the means of a second break, and besides, and this, I think, was at the bottom of the stand he took, for James Zabel was always the proudest man I ever knew,--he never could bear, he said, to give to one like Agatha a name which he knew and she knew was not entirely free from reproach. It would stand in the way of his happiness and ultimately of hers; his brother's dishonour was his. So while he still loved you, his only prayer was that after you were safely married and Philemon was sure of your affection, he should tell you that the man you once regarded so favourably was not unworthy of that regard. To obey him, Philemon has kept silent, while I-- Agatha, what are you doing? Are you mad, my child?"

She looked so for the moment. Tearing off the ring which she had worn but an hour, she flung it on the floor. Then she threw her arms high up over her head and burst out in an awful voice:

"Curses on the father, curses on the husband, who have combined to make me rue the day I was born! The father I cannot disown, but the husband--"

"Hush!"

It was Mr. Gilchrist who dared her fury. Philemon said nothing.

"Hush! he may be the father of your children. Don't curse--"

But she only towered the higher and her beauty, from being simply majestic, became appalling.

"Children!" she cried. "If ever I bear children to this man, may the blight of Heaven strike them as it has struck me this day. May they die as my hopes have died, or, if they live, may they bruise his heart as mine is bruised, and curse their father as--"

Here I fled the house. I was shaking as if this awful denunciation had fallen on my own head. But before the door closed behind me, a different cry called me back. Mr. Gilchrist was lying lifeless on the floor, and Philemon, the patient, tender Philemon, had taken Agatha to his breast and was soothing her there as if the words she had showered upon him had been blessings instead of the most fearful curses which had ever left the lips of mortal woman.

The next letter was in Agatha's handwriting. It was dated some months later and was stained and crumpled more than any other in the whole packet. Could Philemon once have told why? Were these blotted lines the result of his tears falling fast upon them, tears of forty years ago, when he and she were young and love had been, doubtful? Was the sheet so yellowed and so seamed because it had been worn on his breast and folded and unfolded so often? Philemon, thou art in thy grave, sleeping sweetly at last by thy deeply idolised one, but these marks of feeling still remain indissolubly connected with the words that gave them birth.

DEAR PHILEMON:

You are gone for a day and a night only, but it seems a lengthened absence to me, meriting a little letter. You have been so good to me, Philemon, ever since that dreadful hour following our marriage, that sometimes--I hardly
dare yet to say always—I feel that I am beginning to love you and that God did not deal with me so harshly when He cast me into your arms. Yesterday I tried to tell you this when you almost kissed me at parting. But I was afraid it was a momentary sentimentality and so kept still. But to-day such a warm well-spring of joy rises in my heart when I think that to-morrow the house will be bright again, and that in place of the empty wall opposite me at table I shall see your kindly and forbearing face, I know that the heart I had thought impregnable has begun to yield, and that daily gentleness, and a boundless consideration from one who had excuse for bitter thoughts and recrimination, are doing what all of us thought impossible a few short months ago.

Oh, I am so happy, Philemon, so happy to love where it is now my duty to love; and if it were not for that dreadful memory of a father dying with harsh words in his ears, and the knowledge that you, my husband, yet not my husband, are bearing ever about with you echoes of words that in another nature would have turned tenderness into gall, I could be merry also and sing as I go about the house making it pleasant and comfortable against your speedy return. As it is I can but lay my hand softly on my heart as its beatings grow too impetuous and say, "God bless my absent Philemon and help him to forgive me! I forgive him and love him as I never thought I could."

That you may see that these are not the weak outpourings of a lonely woman, I will here write that I heard to-day that John and James Zabel have gone into partnership in the ship-building business, John's uncle having left him a legacy of several thousand dollars. I hope they will do well. James, they say, is full of business and is, to all appearance, perfectly cheerful. This relieves me from too much worry in his regard. God certainly knew what kind of a husband I needed. May you find yourself equally blessed in your wife.

Another letter to Philemon, a year later:

DEAR PHILEMON:

Hasten home, Philemon; I do not like these absences. I am just now too weak and fearful. Since we knew the great hope before us, I have looked in your face for a sign that you remembered what this hope cannot but recall to my shuddering memory. Philemon, Philemon, was I mad? When I think what I said in my rage, and then feel the little life stirring about my heart, I wonder that God did not strike me dead rather than bestow upon me the greatest blessing that can come to woman. Philemon, Philemon, if anything should happen to the child! I think of it by day, I think of it by night. I know you think of it too, though you show me such a cheerful countenance and make such great plans for the future. "Will God remember my words, or will He forget? It seems as if my reason hung upon this question."

A note this time in answer to one from John Zabel:

DEAR JOHN:

Thank you for words which could have come from nobody else. My child is dead. Could I expect anything different? If I did, God has rebuked me.

Philemon thinks only of me. We understand each other so perfectly now that our greatest suffering comes in seeing each other's pain. My load I can bear, but HIS—Come and see me, John; and tell James our house is open to him. We have all done wrong, and are caught in one net of misfortune. Let it make us friends again.

Below this in Philemon's hand:

My wife is superstitious. Strong and capable as she is, she has regarded this sudden taking off of our first-born as a sign that certain words uttered by her on her marriage day, unhappily known to you and, as I take it, to James also, have been remembered by the righteous God above us. This is a weakness which I cannot combat. Can you, who alone of all the world beside know both it and its cause, help me by a renewed friendship, whose cheerful and natural character may gradually make her forget? If so, come like old neighbours, and dine with us on our wedding day. If God sees that we have buried the past and are ready to forgive each other the faults of our youth, perhaps He will further spare this good woman. I think she will be able to bear it. That alone can henceforth stir the deepest recesses of her heart.

After this, a gap of years. One, two, three, four, five children were laid away to rest in Portchester churchyard, then Philemon and she came to Sutherlandtown; but not till after a certain event had occurred, best made known by this last letter to Philemon:

DEAREST HUSBAND:

Our babe is born, our sixth and our dearest, and the reproach of its first look had to be met by me alone. Oh, why did I leave you and come to this great Boston where I have no friend but Mrs. Sutherland? Did I think I could break the spell of fate or providence by giving birth to my last darling among strangers? I shall have to do something more than that if I would save this child to our old age. It is borne in upon me like fate that never will a child prosper at my breast or survive the clasp of my arms. If it is to live it must be reared by others. Some woman who has not brought down the curse of Heaven upon her by her own blasphemies must nourish the tender frame and receive the blessing of its growing love. Neither I nor you can hope to see recognition in our babe's eye. Before it can turn upon us with love, it will close in its last sleep and we will be left desolate. What shall we do, then, with this little son? To
whose guardianship can we entrust it? Do you know a man good enough or a woman sufficiently tender? I do not, but if God wills that our little Frederick should live, He will raise up someone. By the pang of possible separation already tearing my heart, I believe that He WILL raise up someone. Meanwhile I do not dare to kiss the child, lest I should blight it. He is so sturdy, Philemon, so different from all the other five.

I open this to add that Mrs. Sutherland has just been in—with her five-weeks-old infant. His father is away, too, and has not yet seen his boy; and this is their first after ten years of marriage. Oh, that my future opened before me as brightly as hers!

The next letter opens with a cry:

Philemon! Come to me, Philemon! I have done what I threatened. I have made the sacrifice. Our child is no longer ours, and now, perhaps, he may live. But oh, my breaking heart! my empty arms! Help me to bear my desolation, for it is for life. We will never have another child.

And where is it? Ah, that is the wonder of it. Near you, Philemon, yet not too near. Mrs. Sutherland has it, and you may have seen its little face through the car window if you were in the station last night when the express passed through to Sutherlandtown. Ah! but she has her burden to bear too. An awful, secret burden like my own, only she will have the child—for, Philemon, she has taken it in lieu of her own, which died last night in my sight; and Mr. Sutherland does not know what she has done, and never will, if you keep the secret as I shall, for the sake of the life our little innocent has thus won.

What do I mean and how was it all? Philemon, it was God's work, all but the deception, and that is for the good of all, and to save four broken hearts. Listen. Yesterday, only yesterday,—it seems a month ago,—Mrs. Sutherland came again to see me with her baby in her arms. Mr. Sutherland is expected home, as you know, this week, and she was about to start out for Sutherlandtown so as to be in her own house when he came. The baby was looking well and she was the happiest of women; for the one wish of his heart and hers had been fulfilled and she was soon going to have the bliss of showing the child to his father. My own babe was on the bed asleep, and I, who am feeling wonderfully strong, was sitting up in a little chair as far away from him as possible, not out of hatred or indifference—oh, no!—but because he seemed to rest better when left entirely by himself and not under the hungry look of my eye. Mrs. Sutherland went over to look at it. "Oh, he is fair like my baby," she said, "and almost as sturdy, though mine is a month older." And she stooped down and kissed him. Philemon, he smiled for her, though he never had for me. I saw it with a greedy longing that almost made me cry out. Then I turned to her and we talked.

Of what? I cannot remember now. At home we had never been intimate friends. She is from Sutherlandtown and I am from Portchester, and the distance of nine miles is enough to estrange people. But here, each with a husband absent and a darling infant lying asleep under our eyes, interests we have never thought identical drew us to one another and we chatted with ever-increasing pleasure—when suddenly Mrs. Sutherland jumped up in a terrible fright. The infant she had been rocking on her breast was blue; the next minute it shuddered; the next—in the bed, and the long-drawn sigh with which she finally bent down and wept over our darling told me that my cause was won. The rest was easy. When the clothes of the two children had been exchanged, she took our baby in her arms and prepared to leave. Then I stopped her. "Swear," I cried, holding her by the arm and lifting my other hand to heaven, "swear you will be a mother to this child! Swear you will love it as your own and rear it in the paths of truth and righteousness!" The convulsive clasp with which she drew the baby to her breast assured me more than her shuddering "I swear!" that her heart had already opened to it. I dropped her arm and covered my face with my
hands. I could not see my darling go; it was worse than death for the moment it was worse than death. "O God, save him!" I groaned. "God, make him an honour--" But here she caught me by the arm. Her clutch was frenzied, her teeth were chattering. "Swear in your turn!" she gasped. "Swear that if I do a mother's duty by this boy, you will keep my secret and never, never reveal to my husband, to the boy, or to the world that you have any claims upon him!" It was like tearing the heart from my breast with my own hand, but I swore, Philemon, and she in her turn drew back. But suddenly she faced me again, terror and doubt in all her looks. "Your husband!" she whispered. "Can you keep such a secret from him? You will breathe it in your dreams." "I shall tell him," I answered. "Tell him!" The hair seemed to rise on her forehead and she shook so that I feared she would drop the babe. "Be careful!" I cried. "See! you frighten the babe. My husband has but one heart with me. What I do he will subscribe to. Do not fear Philemon." So I promised in your name. Gradually she grew calmer. When I saw she was steady again, I motioned her to go. Even my more than mortal strength was failing, and the baby--Philemon, I had never kissed it and I did not kiss it then. I heard her feet draw slowly towards the door, I heard her hand fall on the knob, heard it turn, uttered one cry, and then--

They found me an hour after, lying along the floor, clasping the dead infant in my arms. I was in a swoon, and they all think I fell with the child, as perhaps I did, and that its little life went out during my insensibility. Of its features, like and yet unlike our boy's, no one seems to take heed. The nurse who cared for it is gone, and who else would know that little face but me? They are very good to me, and are full of self-reproaches for leaving me so long in my part of the building alone. But though they watch me now, I have contrived to write this letter, which you will get with the one telling of the baby's death and my own dangerous condition. Destroy it, Philemon, and then COME. Nothing in all the world will give me comfort but your hand laid under my head and your true eyes looking into mine. Ah, we must love each other now, and live humbly! All our woe has come from my early girlish delight in gay and elegant things. From this day on I eschew all vanities and find in your affection alone the solace which Heaven will not deny to our bewildered hearts. Perhaps in this way the blessing that has been denied us will be visited on our child, who will live. I am now sure, to be the delight of our hearts and the pride of our eyes, even though we are denied the bliss of his presence and affection.

Mrs. Sutherland was not seen to enter or go out of my rooms. Being on her way to the depot, she kept on her way, and must be now in her own home. Her secret is safe, but ours--oh, you will help me to preserve it! Help me not to betray--tell them I have lost five babies before this one--delirious--there may be an inquest--she must not be mentioned--let all the blame fall on me if there is blame--I fell--there is a bruise on the baby's forehead--and--and--I am growing incoherent--I will try and direct this and then love--love--O God!

[A scrawl for the name.]

Under it these words:

Though bidden to destroy this, I have never dared to do so. Some day it may be of inestimable value to us or our boy, PHILEMON WEBB.

This was the last letter found in the first packet. As it was laid down, sobs were heard all over the room, and Frederick, who for some time now had been sitting with his head in his hands, ventured to look up and say: "Do you wonder that I endeavoured to keep this secret, bought at such a price and sealed by the death of her I thought my mother and of her who really was? Gentlemen, Mr. Sutherland loved his wife and honoured her memory. To tell him, as I shall have to within the hour, that the child she placed in his arms twenty-five years ago was an alien, and that all his love, his care, his disappointment, and his sufferings had been lavished on the son of a neighbour, required greater courage than to face doubt on the faces of my fellow-townsmen, or anything, in short, but absolute arraignment on the charge of murder. Hence my silence, hence my indecision, till this woman"--here he pointed a scornful finger at Amabel, now shrinking in her chair--"drove me to it by secretly threatening me with a testimony which would have made me the murderer of my mother and the lasting disgrace of a good man who alone has been without blame from the beginning to the end of this desperate affair. She was about to speak when I forestalled her. My punishment, if I deserve such, will be to sit and hear in your presence the reading of the letters still remaining in the coroner's hands."

These letters were certain ones written by Agatha to her unacknowledged son. They had never been sent. The first one dated from his earliest infancy, and its simple and touching hopefulness sent a thrill through every heart. It read as follows:

Three years old, my darling! and the health flush has not faded from your cheek nor the bright gold from your hair.

Oh, how I bless Mrs. Sutherland that she did not rebuke me when your father and I came to Sutherlandtown and set up our home where I could at least see your merry form toddling through the streets, holding on to the hand of her who now claims your love. My darling, my pride, my angel, so near and yet so far removed, will you ever know, even in the heaven to which we all look for joy after our weary pilgrimage is over, how often in this troublous
world, and in these days of your early infancy, I have crept out of my warm bed, dressed myself, and, without a word to your father, whose heart it would break, gone out and climbed the steep hillside just to look at the window of your room to see if it were light or dark and you awake or sleeping? To breathe the scent of the eglantine which climbs up to your nursery window, I have braved the night-damps and the watching eyes of Heaven; but you have a child's blissful ignorance of all this; you only grow and grow and live, my darling, LIVE!--which is the only boon I crave, the only recompense I ask.

Have I but added another sin to my account and brought a worse vengeance on myself than that of seeing you die in your early infancy? Frederick, my son, my son, I heard you swear to-day! Not lightly, thoughtlessly, as boys sometimes will in imitation of their elders, but bitterly, revengefully, as if the seeds of evil passions were already pushing to life in the boyish breast I thought so innocent. Did you wonder at the strange woman who stopped you? Did you realise the awful woe from which my commonplace words sprang? No, no, what grown mind could take that in, least of all a child's? To have forsworn the bliss of motherhood and entered upon a life of deception for THIS! Truly Heaven is implacable and my last sin is to be punished more inexorably than my first.

There are worse evils than death. This I have always heard, but now I know it. God was merciful when He slew my babes, and I, presumptuous in my rebellion, and the efforts with which I tried to prevent His work. Frederick, you are weak, dissipated, and without conscience. The darling babe, the beautiful child, has grown into a reckless youth whose impulses Mr. Sutherland will find it hard to restrain, and over whom his mother--do I call her your mother?--has little influence, though she tries hard to do a mother's part and save herself and myself from boundless regret. My boy, my boy, do you feel the lack of your own mother's vigour? Might you have lived under my care and owned a better restraint and learned to work and live a respectable life in circumstances less provocative of self-indulgence? Such questions, when they rise, are maddening. When I see them form themselves in Philemon's eyes I drive them out with all the force of my influence, which is still strong over him. But when they make way in my own breast, I can find no relief, not even in prayer. Frederick, were I to tell you the truth about your parentage, would the shock of such an unexpected revelation make a man of you? I have been tempted to make the trial, at times. Deep down in my heart I have thought that perhaps I should best serve the good man who is growing grey under your waywardness, by opening up before you the past and present agonies of which you are the unconscious centre. But I cannot do this while SHE lives. The look she gave me one day when I approached you a step too near at the church door, proves that it would be the killing of her to reveal her long-preserved secret now. I must wait her death, which seems near, and then--

No, I cannot do it. Mr. Sutherland has but one staff to lean on, and that is you. It may be a poor one, a breaking one, but it is still a staff. I dare not take it away--I dare not. Ah, if Philemon was the man he was once, he might counsel me, but he is only a child now; just as if God had heard my cry for children and had given me--HIM.

More money, and still more money! and I hate it except for what it will do for the poor and incapable about me. How strange are the ways of Providence! To us who have no need of aught beyond a competence, money pours in almost against our will, while to those who long and labour for it, it comes not, or comes so slowly the life wears out in the waiting and the working. The Zabels, now! Once well-to-do ship-builders, with a good business and a home full of curious works of art, they now appear to find it hard to obtain even the necessities of life. Such are the freaks of fortune; or should I say, the dealings of an inscrutable Providence? Once I tried to give something out of my abundance to these old friends, but their pride stood in the way and the attempt failed. Worse than that. As if to show that benefits should proceed from them to me rather than from me to them, James bestowed on me a gift. It is a strange one,--nothing more nor less than a quaint Florentine dagger which I had often admired for its exquisite workmanship. Was it the last treasure he possessed? I am almost afraid so. At all events it shall lie here in my table-drawer where I alone can see it. Such sights are not good for Philemon. He must have cheerful objects before him, happy faces such as mine tries to be. But ah!

I would gladly give my life if I could once hold you in my arms, my erring but beloved son. Will the day ever come when I can? Will you have strength enough to hear my story and preserve your peace and let me go down to the grave with the memory of one look, one smile, that is for me alone? Sometimes I foresee this hour and am happy for a few short minutes; and then some fresh story of your recklessness is wafted through the town and--

What stopped her at this point we shall never know. Some want of Philemon's, perhaps. At all events she left off here and the letter was never resumed. It was the last secret outpouring of her heart. With this broken sentence Agatha's letters terminated.

That afternoon, before the inquiry broke up, the jury brought in their verdict. It was: "Death by means of a wound inflicted upon herself in a moment of terror and misapprehension."

It was all his fellow-townsmen could do for Frederick.

XXXIII
But Frederick's day of trial was not yet over. There was a closed door to open and a father to see (as in his heart he still called Mr. Sutherland). Then there were friends to face, and foes, under conditions he better than anyone else, knew were in some regards made worse rather than better by the admissions and revelations of this eventful day--Agnes, for instance. How could he meet her pure gaze? But it was his father he must first confront, his father to whom he would have to repeat in private the tale which robbed the best of men of a past, and took from him a son, almost a wife, without leaving him one memory calculated to console him. Frederick was so absorbed in this anticipation that he scarcely noticed the two or three timid hands stretched out in encouragement toward him, and was moving slowly toward the door behind which his father had disappeared so many hours before, when he was recalled to the interests of the moment by a single word, uttered not very far from him. It was simply, "Well?" But it was uttered by Knapp and repeated by Mr. Courtney.

Frederick shuddered, and was hurrying on when he found himself stopped by a pitiful figure that, with appealing eyes and timid gestures, stepped up before him. It was Amabel.

"Forgive!" she murmured, looking like a pleading saint. "I did not know--I never dreamed--you were so much of a man, Frederick: that you bore such a heart, cherished such griefs, were so worthy of love and a woman's admiration. If I had--"

Her expression was eloquent, more eloquent than he had ever seen it, for it had real feeling in it; but he put her coldly by.

"When my father's white hairs become black again, and the story of my shame is forgotten in this never-forgetting world, then come back and I will forgive you."

And he was passing on when another touch detained him. He turned, this time in some impatience, only to meet the frank eyes of Sweetwater. As he knew very little of this young man, save that he was the amateur detective who had by some folly of his own been carried off on the Hesper, and who was probably the only man saved from its wreck, he was about to greet him with some commonplace phrase of congratulation, when Sweetwater interrupted him with the following words:

"I only wanted to say that it may be easier for you to approach your father with the revelations you are about to make if you knew that in his present frame of mind he is much more likely to be relieved by such proofs of innocence as you can give him than overwhelmed by such as show the lack of kinship between you. For two weeks Mr. Sutherland has been bending under the belief of your personal criminality in this matter. This was his secret, which was shared by me."

"By you?"

"Yes, by me! I am more closely linked to this affair than you can readily imagine. Some day I may be able to explain myself, but not now. Only remember what I have said about your father--pardon me, I should perhaps say Mr. Sutherland--and act accordingly. Perhaps it was to tell you this that I was forced back here against my will by the strangest series of events that ever happened to a man. But," he added, with a sidelong look at the group of men still hovering about the coroner's table, "I had rather think it was for some more important office still. But this the future will show,--the future which I seem to see lowering in the faces over there."

And, waiting for no reply, he melted into the crowd.

Frederick passed at once to his father.

No one interrupted them during this solemn interview, but the large crowd that in the halls and on the steps of the building awaited Frederick's reappearance showed that the public interest was still warm in a matter affecting so deeply the heart and interests of their best citizen. When, therefore, that long-closed door finally opened and Frederick was seen escorting Mr. Sutherland on his arm, the tide of feeling which had not yet subsided since Agatha's letters were read vented itself in one great sob of relief. For Mr. Sutherland's face was calmer than when they had last seen it, and his step more assured, and he leaned, or made himself lean, on Frederick's arm, as if to impress upon all who saw them that the ties of years cannot be shaken off so easily, and that he still looked upon Frederick as his son.

But he was not contented with this dumb show, eloquent as it was. As the crowd parted and these two imposing figures took their way down the steps to the carriage which had been sent for them, Mr. Sutherland cast one deep and long glance about him on faces he knew and on faces he did not know, on those who were near and those who were far, and raising his voice, which did not tremble as much as might have been expected, said deliberately:

"My son accompanies me to his home. If he should afterwards be wanted, he will be found at his own fireside. Good-day, my friends. I thank you for the goodwill you have this day shown us both."

Then he entered the carriage.

The solemn way in which Frederick bared his head in acknowledgment of this public recognition of the hold he still retained on this one faithful heart, struck awe into the hearts of all who saw it. So that the carriage rolled off in
silence, closing one of the most thrilling and impressive scenes ever witnessed in that time-worn village.

XXXIV

"NOT WHEN THEY ARE YOUNG GIRLS"

But, alas! all tides have their ebb as well as flow, and before Mr. Sutherland and Frederick were well out of the main street the latter became aware that notwithstanding the respect with which his explanations had been received by the jury, there were many of his fellow-townsmen who were ready to show dissatisfaction at his being allowed to return in freedom to that home where he had still every prospect of being called the young master. Doubt, that seed of ramifying growth, had been planted in more than one breast, and while it failed as yet to break out into any open manifestation, there were evidences enough in the very restraint visible in such groups of people as they passed that suspicion had not been suppressed or his innocence established by the over-favourable verdict of the coroner's jury.

To Mr. Sutherland, suffering now from the reaction following all great efforts, much, if not all, of this quiet but significant display of public feeling passed unnoticed. But to Frederick, alive to the least look, the least sign that his story had not been accepted unquestioned, this passage through the town was the occasion of the most poignant suffering.

For not only did these marks of public suspicion bespeak possible arraignment in the future, but through them it became evident that even if he escaped open condemnation in the courts, he could never hope for complete reinstatement before the world, nor, what was to him a still deeper source of despair, anticipate a day when Agnes's love should make amends to him for the grief and errors of his more than wayward youth. He could never marry so pure a being while the shadow of crime separated him from the mass of human beings. Her belief in his innocence and the exact truth of his story (and he was confident she did believe him) could make no difference in this conclusion. While he was regarded openly or in dark corners or beside the humblest fireside as a possible criminal, neither Mr. Sutherland nor her father, nor his own heart even, would allow him to offer her anything but a friend's gratitude, or win from her anything but a neighbour's sympathy; yet in bidding good-bye to larger hopes and more importunate desires, he parted with the better part of his heart and the only solace remaining in this world for the boundless griefs and tragic experiences of his still young life. He had learned to love through suffering, only to realise that the very nature of his suffering forbade him to indulge in love.

And this seemed a final judgment, even in this hour of public justification. He had told his story and been for the moment believed, but what was there in his life, what was there in the facts as witnessed by others, what was there in his mother's letters and the revelation of their secret relationship, to corroborate his assertions, or to prove that her hand and not his had held the weapon when the life-blood gushed from her devoted breast? Nothing, nothing; only his word to stand against all human probabilities and natural inference; only his word and the generous nature of the great-hearted woman who had thus perished! Though a dozen of his fellow-citizens had by their verdict professed their belief in his word and given him the benefit of a doubt involving his life as well as his honour, he, as well as they, knew that neither the police nor the general public were given to sentimentality, and that the question of his guilt still lay open and must remain so till his dying day. For from the nature of things no proof of the truth was probable. Batsy being dead, only God and his own heart could know that the facts of that awful half-hour were as he had told them.

Had God in His justice removed in this striking way his only witness, as a punishment for his sins and his mad indulgence in acts so little short of crime as to partake of its guilt and merit its obloquy?

He was asking himself this question as he bent to fasten the gate. His father had passed in, the carriage had driven off, and the road was almost solitary--but not quite. As he leaned his arm over the gate and turned to take a final glance down the hillside, he saw, with what feelings no one will ever know, the light figure of Agnes advancing on the arm of her father.

Frederick found his voice first.

"Agnes," said he, "I am glad of this opportunity for expressing my gratitude. You have acted like a friend and have earned my eternal consideration, even if we never speak again."

There was a momentary silence. Her head, which had drooped under his greeting, rose again. Her eyes, humid with feeling, sought his face.

"Why do you speak like that?" said she. "Why shouldn't we meet? Does not everyone recognise your innocence, and will not the whole world soon see, as I have, that you have left the old life behind and have only to be your new self to win everyone's regard?"

"Agnes," returned Frederick, smiling sadly as he observed the sudden alarm visible in her father's face at these
enthusiastic words, “you know me perhaps better than others do and are prepared to believe my words and my more than unhappy story. But there are few like you in the world. People in general will not acquit me, and if there was only one person who doubted ——Mr. Halliday began to look relieved——I would fail to give any promise of the new life you hope to see me lead, if I allowed the shadow under which I undoubtedly rest to fall in the remotest way across yours. You and I have been friends and will continue such, but we will hold little intercourse in future, hard as I find it to say so. Does not Mr. Halliday consider this right? As your father he must.”

Agnes’s eyes, leaving Frederick’s for a moment, sought her father’s. Alas! there was no mistaking their language. Sighing deeply, she again hung her head.

"Too much care for people’s opinion,” she murmured, "and too little for what is best and noblest in us. I do not recognise the necessity of a farewell between us any more than I recognise that anyone who saw and heard you to-day can believe in your guilt."

"But there are so many who did not hear and see me. Besides” (here he turned a little and pointed to the garden in his rear), "for the past week a man—-I need not state who, nor under what authority he acts—has been in hiding under that arbour, watching my every movement, and almost counting my sighs. Yesterday he left for a short space, but to-day he is back. What does that argue, dear friend? Innocence, completely recognised, does not call for such guardianship."

The slight frame of the young girl bending so innocently toward him shuddered involuntarily at this, and her eyes, frightened and flashing, swept over the arbour before returning to his face.

"If there is a watcher there, and if such a fact proves you to be in danger of arrest for a crime you never committed, then it behooves your friends to show where they stand in this matter, and by lending their sympathy give you courage and power to meet the trials before you."

"Not when they are young girls,” murmured Frederick, and casting a glance at Mr. Halliday, he stepped softly back.

Agnes flushed and yielded to her father’s gentle pressure. "Good- bye, my friend," she said, the quiver in her tones sinking deep into Frederick’s heart. "Some day it will be good-morrow," and her head, turned back over her shoulder, took on a beautiful radiance that fixed itself forever in the hungry heart of him who watched it disappear.

When she was quite gone, a man not the one whom Frederick had described, as lying in hiding in the arbour, but a different one, in fact, no other than our old friend the constable—advanced around the corner of the house and presented a paper to him.

It was the warrant for his arrest on a charge of murder.

XXXV

SWEETWATER PAYS HIS DEBT AT LAST TO MR. SUTHERLAND

Frederick’s arrest had been conducted so quietly that no hint of the matter reached the village before the next morning. Then the whole town broke into uproar, and business was not only suspended, but the streets and docks overflowed with gesticulating men and excited women, carrying on in every corner and across innumerable doorsteps the endless debate which such an action on the part of the police necessarily opened.

But the most agitated face, though the stillest tongue, was not to be seen in town that morning, but in a little cottage on an arid hill-slope overlooking the sea. Here Sweetwater sat and communed with his great monitor, the ocean, and only from his flashing eye and the firm set of his lips could the mother of Sweetwater see that the crisis of her son's life was rapidly approaching, and that on the outcome of this long brooding rested not only his own self-satisfaction, but the interests of the man most dear to them.

Suddenly, from that far horizon upon which Sweetwater's eye rested with a look that was almost a demand, came an answer that flushed him with a hope as great as it was unexpected. Bounding to his feet, he confronted his mother with eager eyes and outstretched hand.

"Give me money, all the money we have in the house. I have an idea that may be worth all I can ever make or can ever hope to have. If it succeeds, we save Frederick Sutherland; if it fails, I have only to meet another of Knapp’s scornful looks. But it won’t fail; the inspiration came from the sea, and the sea, you know, is my second mother!"

What this inspiration was he did not say, but it carried him presently into town and landed him in the telegraph office.

The scene later in the day, when Frederick entered the village under the guardianship of the police, was indescribable. Mr. Sutherland had insisted upon accompanying him, and when the well-loved figure and white head were recognised, the throng, which had rapidly collected in the thoroughfare leading to the depot, succumbed to the feelings occasioned by this devotion, and fell into a wondering silence.

Frederick had never looked better. There is something in the extremity of fate which brings out a man's best characteristics, and this man, having much that was good in him, showed it at that moment as never before in his
short but over-eventful life. As the carriage stopped before the court-house on its way to the train, a glimpse was
given of his handsome head to those who had followed him closest, and as there became visible for the first time in
his face, so altered under his troubles, a likeness to their beautiful and commanding Agatha, a murmur broke out
around him that was half a wail and half a groan, and which affected him so that he turned from his father, whose
hand he was secretly holding, and taking the whole scene in with one flash of his eye, was about to speak, when a
sudden hubbub broke out in the direction of the telegraph office, and a man was seen rushing down the street
holding a paper high over his head. It was Sweetwater.

"News!" he cried. "News! A cablegram from the Azores! A Swedish sailor--"

But here a man with more authority than the amateur detective pushed his way to the carriage and took off his
hat to Mr. Sutherland.

"I beg your pardon," said he, "but the prisoner will not leave town to-day. Important evidence has just reached
us."

Mr. Sutherland saw that it was in Frederick's favour and fainted on his son's neck. As the people beheld his head
fall forward, and observed the look with which Frederick received him in his arms, they broke into a great shout.

"News!" they shrieked. "News! Frederick Sutherland is innocent! See! the old man has fainted from joy!" And
caps went up and tears fell, before a mother's son of them knew what grounds he had for his enthusiasm.

Later, they found they were good and substantial ones. Sweetwater had remembered the group of sailors who
had passed by the corner of Agatha's house just as Batsy fell forward on the window-sill, and cabling to the captain
of the vessel, at the first port at which they were likely to put in, was fortunate enough to receive in reply a
communication from one of the men, who remembered the words she shouted. They were in Swedish and none of
his mates had understood them, but he recalled them well. They were:

"Hjelp! Hjelp! Frun haller pa alb doda sig. Hon har en knif. Hjelp! Hjelp!"

In English:

"Help! Help! My mistress kills herself. She has a knife. Help! Help!"

The impossible had occurred. Batsy was not dead, or at least her testimony still remained and had come at
Sweetwater's beck from the other side of the sea to save her mistress's son.

Sweetwater was a made man. And Frederick? In a week he was the idol of the town. In a year--but let Agnes's
contented face and happy smile show what he was then. Sweet Agnes, who first despised, then encouraged, then
loved him, and who, next to Agatha, commanded the open worship of his heart.

Agatha is first, must be first, as anyone can see who beholds him, on a certain anniversary of each year, bury his
face in the long grass which covers the saddest and most passionate heart which ever yielded to the pressure of life's
deepest tragedy.

THE END
by Anna Katharine Green

AS SEEN BY TWO STRANGERS

I

"A remarkable man!"

It was not my husband speaking, but some passerby. However, I looked up at George with a smile, and found him looking down at me with much the same humour. We had often spoken of the odd phrases one hears in the street, and how interesting it would be sometimes to hear a little more of the conversation.

"That's a case in point," he laughed, as he guided me through the crowd of theatre-goers which invariably blocks this part of Broadway at the hour of eight. "We shall never know whose eulogy we have just heard. 'A remarkable man!' There are not many of them."

"No," was my somewhat indifferent reply. It was a keen winter night and snow was packed upon the walks in a way to throw into sharp relief the figures of such pedestrians as happened to be walking alone. "But it seems to me that, so far as general appearance goes, the one in front answers your description most admirably."

I pointed to a man hurrying around the corner just ahead of us.

"Yes, he's remarkably well built. I noticed him when he came out of the Clermont." This was a hotel we had just passed.

"But it's not only that. It's his height, his very striking features, his expression--" I stopped suddenly, gripping George's arm convulsively in a surprise he appeared to share. We had turned the corner immediately behind the man of whom we were speaking and so had him still in full view.

"What's he doing?" I asked, in a low whisper. We were only a few feet behind. "Look! look! don't you call that curious?"

My husband stared, then uttered a low, "Rather." The man ahead of us, presenting in every respect the appearance of a gentleman, had suddenly stooped to the kerb and was washing his hands in the snow, furtively, but with a vigour and purpose which could not fail to arouse the strangest conjectures in any chance onlooker.

"Pilate!" escaped my lips, in a sort of nervous chuckle. But George shook his head at me.

"I don't like it," he muttered, with unusual gravity. "Did you see his face?" Then as the man rose and hurried away from us down the street, "I should like to follow him. I do believe--"

But here we became aware of a quick rush and sudden clamour around the corner we had just left, and turning quickly, saw that something had occurred on Broadway which was fast causing a tumult.

"What's the matter?" I cried. "What can have happened? Let's go see, George. Perhaps it has something to do with our man."

My husband, with a final glance down the street at the fast disappearing figure, yielded to my importunity, and possibly to some new curiosity of his own.

"I'd like to stop that man first," said he. "But what excuse have I? He may be nothing but a crank, with some crack-brained idea in his head. We'll soon know; for there's certainly something wrong there on Broadway."

"He came out of the Clermont," I suggested.

"I know. If the excitement isn't there, what we've just seen is simply a coincidence." Then, as we retraced our steps to the corner "Whatever we hear or see, don't say anything about this man. It's after eight, remember, and we promised Adela that we would be at the house before nine."

"I'll be quiet."

"Remember."

It was the last word he had time to speak before we found ourselves in the midst of a crowd of men and women, jostling another in curiosity or in the consternation following a quick alarm. All were looking one way, and, as this was towards the entrance of the Clermont, it was evident enough to us that the alarm had indeed had its origin in the very place we had anticipated. I felt my husband's arm press me closer to his side as we worked our way towards the entrance, and presently caught a warning sound from his lips as the oaths and confused cries everywhere surrounding us were broken here and there by articulate words and we heard:
"Is it murder?"
"The beautiful Miss Challoner!"
"A millionairess in her own right!"
"Killed, they say."
"No, no! suddenly dead; that's all."
"George, what shall we do?" I managed to cry into my husband's ear.
"Get out of this. There is no chance of our reaching that door, and I can't have you standing round any longer in this icy slush."
"But—but is it right?" I urged, in an importunate whisper. "Should we go home while he—"
"Hush! My first duty is to you. We will go make our visit; but to-morrow—"
"I can't wait till to-morrow," I pleaded, wild to satisfy my curiosity in regard to an event in which I naturally felt a keen personal interest.

He drew me as near to the edge of the crowd as he could. There were new murmurs all about us.
"If it's a case of heart-failure, why send for the police?" asked one.
"It is better to have an officer or two here," grumbled another.
"Here comes a cop."
"Well, I'm going to vamoose."
"I'll tell you what I'll do," whispered George, who, for all his bluster was as curious as myself. "We will try the rear door where there are fewer persons. Possibly we can make our way in there, and if we can, Slater will tell us all we want to know."

Slater was the assistant manager of the Clermont, and one of George's oldest friends.
"Then hurry," said I. "I am being crushed here."

George did hurry, and in a few minutes we were before the rear entrance of the great hotel. There was a mob gathered here also, but it was neither so large nor so rough as the one on Broadway. Yet I doubt if we should have been able to work our way through it if Slater had not, at that very instant, shown himself in the doorway, in company with an officer to whom he was giving some final instructions. George caught his eye as soon as he was through with the man, and ventured on what I thought a rather uncalled for plea.
"Let us in, Slater," he begged. "My wife feels a little faint; she has been knocked about so by the crowd."

The manager glanced at my face, and shouted to the people around us to make room. I felt myself lifted up, and that is all I remember of this part of our adventure. For, affected more than I realised by the excitement of the event, I no sooner saw the way cleared for our entrance than I made good my husband's words by fainting away in earnest.

When I came to, it was suddenly and with perfect recognition of my surroundings. The small reception room to which I had been taken was one I had often visited, and its familiar features did not hold my attention for a moment. What I did see and welcome was my husband's face bending close over me, and to him I spoke first. My words must have sounded oddly to those about. "Have they told you anything about it?" I asked. "Did he—""

A quick pressure on my arm silenced me, and then I noticed that we were not alone. Two or three ladies stood near, watching me, and one had evidently been using some restorative, for she held a small vinaigrette in her hand. To this lady, George made haste to introduce me, and from her I presently learned the cause of the disturbance in the hotel.

It was of a somewhat different nature from what I expected, and during the recital, I could not prevent myself from casting furtive and inquiring glances at George.

Edith, the well-known daughter of Moses Challoner, had fallen suddenly dead on the floor of the mezzanine. She was not known to have been in poor health, still less in danger of a fatal attack, and the shock was consequently great to her friends, several of whom were in the building. Indeed, it was likely to prove a shock to the whole community, for she had great claims to general admiration, and her death must be regarded as a calamity to persons in all stations of life.

I realised this myself, for I had heard much of the young lady's private virtues, as well as of her great beauty and distinguished manner. A heavy loss, indeed, but--
"Was she alone when she fell?" I asked.
"Virtually alone. Some persons sat on the other side of the room, reading at the big round table. They did not even hear her fall. They say that the band was playing unusually loud in the musicians' gallery."
"Are you feeling quite well, now?"
"Quite myself," I gratefully replied as I rose slowly from the sofa. Then, as my kind informer stepped aside, I turned to George with the proposal we should go now.

He seemed as anxious as myself to leave and together we moved towards the door, while the hum of excited comment which the intrusion of a fainting woman had undoubtedly interrupted, recommenced behind us till the
whole room buzzed.

In the hall we encountered Mr. Slater, whom I have before mentioned. He was trying to maintain order while himself in a state of great agitation. Seeing us, he could not refrain from whispering a few words into my husband's ear.

"The doctor has just gone up--her doctor, I mean. He's simply dumbfounded. Says that she was the healthiest woman in New York yesterday--I think--don't mention it, that he suspects something quite different from heart failure."

"What do you mean?" asked George, following the assistant manager down the broad flight of steps leading to the office. Then, as I pressed up close to Mr. Slater's other side, "She was by herself, wasn't she, in the half floor above?"

"Yes, and had been writing a letter. She fell with it still in her hand."

"Have they carried her to her room?" I eagerly inquired, glancing fearfully up at the large semi-circular openings overlooking us from the place where she had fallen.

"Not yet. Mr. Hammond insists upon waiting for the coroner." (Mr. Hammond was the proprietor of the hotel.) "She is lying on one of the big couches near which she fell. If you like, I can give you a glimpse of her. She looks beautiful. It's terrible to think that she is dead."

I don't know why we consented. We were under a spell, I think. At all events, we accepted his offer and followed him up a narrow staircase open to very few that night. At the top, he turned upon us with a warning gesture which I hardly think we needed, and led us down a narrow hall flanked by openings corresponding to those we had noted from below. At the furthest one he paused and, beckoning us to his side, pointed across the lobby into the large writing-room which occupied the better part of the mezzanine floor.

We saw people standing in various attitudes of grief and dismay about a couch, one end of which only was visible to us at the moment. The doctor had just joined them, and every head was turned towards him and every body bent forward in anxious expectation. I remember the face of one grey haired old man. I shall never forget it. He was probably her father. Later, I knew him to be so. Her face, even her form, was entirely hidden from us, but as we watched (I have often thought with what heartless curiosity) a sudden movement took place in the whole group--and for one instant a startling picture presented itself to our gaze. Miss Challoner was stretched out upon the couch. She was dressed as she came from dinner, in a gown of ivory-tinted satin, relieved at the breast by a large bouquet of scarlet poinsettias. I mention this adornment, because it was what first met and drew our eyes and the eyes of every one about her, though the face, now quite revealed, would seem to have the greater attraction. But the cause was evident and one not to be resisted. The doctor was pointing at these poinsettias in horror and with awful meaning, and though we could not hear his words, we knew almost instinctively, both from his attitude and the cries which burst from the lips of those about him, that something more than broken petals and disordered laces had met his eyes; that blood was there--slowly oozing drops from the heart--which for some reason had escaped all eyes till now.

Miss Challoner was dead, not from unsuspected disease, but from the violent attack of some murderous weapon; As the realisation of this brought fresh panic and bowed the old father's head with emotions even more bitter than those of grief, I turned a questioning look up at George's face.

It was fixed with a purpose I had no trouble in understanding.

II

"I KNOW THE MAN"

Yet he made no effort to detain Mr. Slater, when that gentleman, under this renewed excitement, hastily left us. He was not the man to rush into anything impulsively, and not even the presence of murder could change his ways.

"I want to feel sure of myself," he explained. "Can you bear the strain of waiting around a little longer, Laura? I mustn't forget that you fainted just now."

"Yes, I can bear it; much better than I could bear going to Adela's in my present state of mind. Don't you think the man we saw had something to do with this? Don't you believe--"

"Hush! Let us listen rather than talk. What are they saying over there? Can you hear?"

"No. And I cannot bear to look. Yet I don't want to go away. It's all so dreadful."

"It's devilish. Such a beautiful girl! Laura, I must leave you for a moment. Do you mind?"

"No, no; yet--"

I did mind; but he was gone before I could take back my word. Alone, I felt the tragedy much more than when he was with me. Instead of watching, as I had hitherto done, every movement in the room opposite, I drew back against the wall and hid my eyes, waiting feverishly for George's return.

He came, when he did come, in some haste and with certain marks of increased agitation.

"Laura," said he, "Slater says that we may possibly be wanted and proposes that we stay here all night. I have telephoned Adela and have made it all right at home. Will you come to your room? This is no place for you."
Nothing could have pleased me better; to be near and yet not the direct observer of proceedings in which we took so secret an interest! I showed my gratitude by following George immediately. But I could not go without casting another glance at the tragic scene I was leaving. A stir was perceptible there, and I was just in time to see its cause. A tall, angular gentleman was approaching from the direction of the musicians' gallery, and from the manner of all present, as well as from the whispered comment of my husband, I recognised in him the special official for whom all had been waiting.

"Are you going to tell him?" was my question to George as we made our way down to the lobby.

"That depends. First, I am going to see you settled in a room quite remote from this business."

"I shall not like that."

"I know, my dear, but it is best."

I could not gainsay this.

Nevertheless, after the first few minutes of relief, I found it very lonesome upstairs. The pictures which crowded upon me of the various groups of excited and wildly gesticulating men and women through which we had passed on our way up, mingled themselves with the solemn horror of the scene in the writing-room, with its fleeting vision of youth and beauty lying pulseless in sudden death. I could not escape the one without feeling the immediate impress of the other, and if by chance they both yielded for an instant to that earlier scene of a desolate Street, with its solitary lamp shining down on the crouched figure of a man washing his shaking hands in a drift of freshly fallen snow, they immediately rushed back with a force and clearness all the greater for the momentary lapse.

I was still struggling with these fancies when the door opened, and George came in. There was news in his face as I rushed to meet him.

"Tell me--tell," I begged.

He tried to smile at my eagerness, but the attempt was ghastly.

"I've been listening and looking," said he, "and this is all I have learned. Miss Challoner died, not from a stroke or from disease of any kind, but from a wound reaching the heart. No one saw the attack, or even the approach or departure of the person inflicting this wound. If she was killed by a pistol-shot, it was at a distance, and almost over the heads of the persons sitting at the table we saw there. But the doctors shake their heads at the word pistol-shot, though they refuse to explain themselves or to express any opinion till the wound has been probed. This they are going to do at once, and when that question is decided, I may feel it my duty to speak and may ask you to support my story."

"I will tell what I saw," said I.

"Very good. That is all that will be required. We are strangers to the parties concerned, and only speak from a sense of justice. It may be that our story will make no impression, and that we shall be dismissed with but few thanks. But that is nothing to us. If the woman has been murdered, he is the murderer. With such a conviction in my mind, there can be no doubt as to my duty."

"We can never make them understand how he looked."

"No. I don't expect to."

"Or his manner as he fled."

"Nor that either."

"We can only describe what we saw him do."

"That's all."

"Oh, what an adventure for quiet people like us! George, I don't believe he shot her."

"He must have."

"But they would have seen--have heard--the people around, I mean."

"So they say; but I have a theory--but no matter about that now. I'm going down again to see how things have progressed. I'll be back for you later. Only be ready."

Be ready! I almost laughed,--a hysterical laugh, of course, when I recalled the injunction. Be ready! This lonely sitting by myself, with nothing to do but think was a fine preparation for a sudden appearance before those men--some of them police-officers, no doubt.

But that's enough about myself; I'm not the heroine of this story. In a half hour or an hour--I never knew which--George reappeared only to tell me that no conclusions had as yet been reached; an element of great mystery involved the whole affair, and the most astute detectives on the force had been sent for. Her father, who had been her constant companion all winter, had not the least suggestion to offer in way of its solution. So far as he knew--and he believed himself to have been in perfect accord with his daughter --she had injured no one. She had just lived the even, happy and useful life of a young woman of means, who sees duties beyond those of her own household and immediate surroundings. If, in the fulfillment of those duties, she had encountered any obstacle to content, he did not know it; nor could he mention a friend of hers --he would even say lovers, since that was what he meant--who to his
knowledge could be accused of harbouring any such passion of revenge as was manifested in this secret and
diabolical attack. They were all gentlemen and respected her as heartily as they appeared to admire her. To no living
being, man or woman, could he point as possessing any motive for such a deed. She had been the victim of some
mistake, his lovely and ever kindly disposed daughter, and while the loss was irreparable he would never make it
unendurable by thinking otherwise.

Such was the father's way of looking at the matter, and I own that it made our duty a trifle hard. But George's
mind, when once made up, was persistent to the point of obstinacy, and while he was yet talking he led me out of the
room and down the hall to the elevator.

"Mr. Slater knows we have something to say, and will manage the interview before us in the very best manner," he
confided to me now with an encouraging air. "We are to go to the blue reception room on the parlour floor."

I nodded, and nothing more was said till we entered the place mentioned. Here we came upon several gentlemen,
standing about, of a more or less professional appearance. This was not very agreeable to one of my retiring
disposition, but a look from George brought back my courage, and I found myself waiting rather anxiously for the
questions I expected to hear put.

Mr. Slater was there according to his promise, and after introducing us, briefly stated that we had some evidence
to give regarding the terrible occurrence which had just taken place in the house.

George bowed, and the chief spokesman--I am sure he was a police-officer of some kind--asked him to tell what
it was.

George drew himself up--George is not one of your tall men, but he makes a very good appearance at times.
Then he seemed suddenly to collapse. The sight of their expectation made him feel how flat and childish his story
would sound. I, who had shared his adventure, understood his embarrassment, but the others were evidently at a loss
to do so, for they glanced askance at each other as he hesitated, and only looked back when I ventured to say:

"It's the peculiarity of the occurrence which affects my husband. The thing we saw may mean nothing."

"Let us hear what it was and we will judge."

Then my husband spoke up, and related our little experience. If it did not create a sensation, it was because these
men were well accustomed to surprises of all kinds.

"Washed his hands--a gentleman--out there in the snow--just after the alarm was raised here?" repeated one.
"And you saw him come out of this house?" another put in.
"Yes, sir; we noticed him particularly."
"Can you describe him?"

It was Mr. Slater who put this question; he had less control over himself, and considerable eagerness could be
heard in his voice.

"He was a very fine-looking man; unusually tall and unusually striking both in his dress and appearance. What I
could see of his face was bare of beard, and very expressive. He walked with the swing of an athlete, and only
looked mean and small when he was stooping and dabbling in the snow."

"His clothes. Describe his clothes." There was an odd sound in Mr. Slater's voice.
"He wore a silk hat and there was fur on his overcoat. I think the fur was black."
Mr. Slater stepped back, then moved forward again with a determined air.
"I know the man," said he.

III
THE MAN
"You know the man?"
"I do; or rather, I know a man who answers to this description. He comes here once in a while. I do not know
whether or not he was in the building to-night, but Clausen can tell you; no one escapes Clausen's eye."

"His name."
"Brotherson. A very uncommon person in many respects; quite capable of such an eccentricity, but incapable, I
should say, of crime. He's a gifted talker and so well read that he can hold one's attention for hours. Of his tastes, I
can only say that they appear to be mainly scientific. But he is not averse to society, and is always very well
dressed."

"A taste for science and for fine clothing do not often go together."
"This man is an exception to all rules. The one I'm speaking of, I mean. I don't say that he's the fellow seen
pottering in the snow."
"Call up Clausen."

The manager stepped to the telephone.

Meanwhile, George had advanced to speak to a man who had beckoned to him from the other side of the room,
and with whom in another moment I saw him step out. Thus deserted, I sank into a chair near one of the windows.
Never had I felt more uncomfortable. To attribute guilt to a totally unknown person—a person who is little more to you than a shadowy silhouette against a background of snow—is easy enough and not very disturbing to the conscience. But to hear that person named; given positive attributes; lifted from the indefinite into a living, breathing actuality, with a man’s hopes, purposes and responsibilities, is an entirely different proposition. This Brotherson might be the most innocent person alive; and, if so, what had we done? Nothing to congratulate ourselves upon, certainly. And George was not present to comfort and encourage me. He was—

Where was he? The man who had carried him off was the youngest in the group. What had he wanted of George? Those who remained showed no interest in the matter. They had enough to say among themselves. But I was interested—naturally so, and, in my uneasiness, glanced restlessly from the window, the shade of which was up. The outlook was a very peaceful one. This room faced a side street, and, as my eyes fell upon the whitened pavements, I received an answer to one, and that the most anxious, of my queries. This was the street into which we had turned, in the wake of the handsome stranger they were trying at this very moment to identify with Brotherson. George had evidently been asked to point out the exact spot where the man had stopped, for I could see from my vantage point two figures bending near the kerb, and even pawing at the snow which lay there. It gave me a slight turn when one of them—I do not think it was George—began to rub his hands together in much the way the unknown gentleman had done, and, in my excitement, I probably uttered some sort of an ejaculation, for I was suddenly conscious of a silence in the room, and when I turned saw all the men about me looking my way.

I attempted to smile, but instead, shuddered painfully, as I raised my hand and pointed down at the street.

"They are imitating the man," I cried; "my husband and—and the person he went out with. It looked dreadful to me; that is all."

One of the gentlemen immediately said some kind words to me, and another smiled in a very encouraging way. But their attention was soon diverted, and so was mine by the entrance of a man in semi-uniform, who was immediately addressed as Clausen.

I knew his face. He was one of the doorkeepers; the oldest employee about the hotel, and the one best liked. I had often exchanged words with him myself.

Mr. Slater at once put his question:

"Has Mr. Brotherson passed your door at any time to-night?"

"Mr. Brotherson! I don’t remember, really I don’t," was the unexpected reply. "It’s not often I forget. But so many people came rushing in during those few minutes, and all so excited—"

"Before the excitement, Clausen. A little while before, possibly just before."

"Oh, now I recall him! Yes, Mr. Brotherson went out of my door not many minutes before the cry upstairs. I forgot because I had stepped back from the door to hand a lady the muff she had dropped, and it was at that minute he went out. I just got a glimpse of his back as he passed into the street."

"But you are sure of that back?"

"I don’t know another like it, when he wears that big coat of his. But Jim can tell you, sir. He was in the cafe up to that minute, and that’s where Mr. Brotherson usually goes first."

"Very well; send up Jim. Tell him I have some orders to give him."

The old man bowed and went out.

Meanwhile, Mr. Slater had exchanged some words with the two officials, and now approached me with an expression of extreme consideration. They were about to excuse me from further participation in this informal inquiry. This I saw before he spoke. Of course they were right. But I should greatly have preferred to stay where I was till George came back.

However, I met him for an instant in the hall before I took the elevator, and later I heard in a round-about way what Jim and some others about the house had to say of Mr. Brotherson.

He was an habitue of the hotel, to the extent of dining once or twice a week in the cafe, and smoking, afterwards, in the public lobby. When he was in the mood for talk, he would draw an ever-enlarging group about him, but at other times he would be seen sitting quite alone and morosely indifferent to all who approached him. There was no mystery about his business. He was an inventor, with one or two valuable patents already on the market. But this was not his only interest. He was an all round sort of man, moody but brilliant in many ways—a character which at once attracted and repelled, odd in that he seemed to set little store by his good looks, yet was most careful to dress himself in a way to show them to advantage. If he had means beyond the ordinary no one knew it, nor could any man say that he had not. On all personal matters he was very close-mouthed, though he would talk about other men’s riches in a way to show that he cherished some very extreme views.

This was all which could be learned about him off-hand, and at so late an hour. I was greatly interested, of course, and had plenty to think of till I saw George again and learned the result of the latest investigations.

Miss Challoner had been shot, not stabbed. No other deduction was possible from such facts as were now
known, though the physicians had not yet handed in their report, or even intimated what that report would be. No assailant could have approached or left her, without attracting the notice of some one, if not all of the persons seated at a table in the same room. She could only have been reached by a bullet sent from a point near the head of a small winding staircase connecting the mezzanine floor with a coat-room adjacent to the front door. This has already been insisted on, as you will remember, and if you will glance at the diagram which George hastily scrawled for me, you will see why.

A. B., as well as C. D., are half circular openings into the office lobby. E. F. are windows giving upon Broadway, and G. the party wall, necessarily unbroken by window, door or any other opening.

It follows then that the only possible means of approach to this room lies through the archway H., or from the elevator door. But the elevator made no stop at the mezzanine on or near the time of the attack upon Miss Challoner; nor did any one leave the table or pass by it in either direction till after the alarm given by her fall.

But a bullet calls for no approach. A man at X. might raise and fire his pistol without attracting any attention to himself. The music, which all acknowledge was at its full climax at this moment, would drown the noise of the explosion, and the staircase, out of view of all but the victim, afford the same means of immediate escape, which it must have given of secret and unseen approach. The coat-room into which it descended communicated with the lobby very near the main entrance, and if Mr. Brotherson were the man, his sudden appearance there would thus be accounted for.

To be sure, this gentleman had not been noticed in the coatroom by the man then in charge, but if the latter had been engaged at that instant, as he often was, in hanging up or taking down a coat from the rack, a person might easily pass by him and disappear into the lobby without attracting his attention. So many people passed that way from the dining-room beyond, and so many of these were tall, fine-looking and well-dressed.

It began to look bad for this man, if indeed he were the one we had seen under the street-lamp; and, as George and I reviewed the situation, we felt our position to be serious enough for us severally to set down our impressions of this man before we lost our first vivid idea. I do not know what George wrote, for he sealed his words up as soon as he had finished writing, but this is what I put on paper while my memory was still fresh and my excitement unabated:

He had the look of a man of powerful intellect and determined will, who shudders while he triumphs; who outwardly washes his hands of a deed over which he inwardly gloats. This was when he first rose from the snow. Afterwards he had a moment of fear; plain, human, everyday fear. But this was evanescent. Before he had turned to go, he showed the self-possession of one who feels himself so secure, or is so well-satisfied with himself, that he is no longer conscious of other emotions.

"Poor fellow," I commented aloud, as I folded up these words; "he reckoned without you, George. By to-morrow he will be in the hands of the police."

"Poor fellow?" he repeated. "Better say 'Poor Miss Challoner!' They tell me she was one of those perfect women who reconcile even the pessimist to humanity and the age we live in. Why any one should want to kill her is a mystery; but why this man should --There! no one professes to explain it. They simply go by the facts. To-morrow surely must bring strange revelations."

And with this sentence ringing in my mind, I lay down and endeavoured to sleep. But it was not till very late that rest came. The noise of passing feet, though muffled beyond their wont, roused me in spite of myself. These footsteps might be those of some late arrival, or they might be those of some wary detective intent on business far removed from the usual routine of life in this great hotel.
I recalled the glimpse I had had of the writing-room in the early evening, and imagined it as it was with Miss Challoner's body removed and the incongruous flitting of strange and busy figures across its fatal floors, measuring distances and peering into corners, while hundreds slept above and about them in undisturbed repose.

Then I thought of him, the suspected and possibly guilty one. In visions over which I had little if any control, I saw him in all the restlessness of a slowly dying down excitement—the surroundings strange and unknown to me, the figure not—seeking for quiet; facing the past; facing the future; knowing, perhaps, for the first time in his life what it was for crime and remorse to murder sleep. I could not think of him as lying still—slumbering like the rest of mankind, in the hope and expectation of a busy morrow. Crime perpetrated looms so large in the soul, and this man had a soul as big as his body; of that I was assured. That its instincts were cruel and inherently evil, did not lessen its capacity for suffering. And he was suffering now; I could not doubt it, remembering the lovely face and fragrant memory of the noble woman he had, under some unknown impulse, sent to an unmerited doom.

At last I slept, but it was only to rouse again with the same quick realisation of my surroundings, which I had experienced on my recovery from my fainting fit of hours before. Someone had stopped at our door before hurrying by down the hall. Who was that someone? I rose on my elbow, and endeavoured to peer through the dark. Of course, I could see nothing. But when I woke a second time, there was enough light in the room, early as it undoubtedly was, for me to detect a letter lying on the carpet just inside the door.

Instantly I was on my feet. Catching the letter up, I carried it to the window. Our two names were on it—Mr. and Mrs. George Anderson: the writing, Mr. Slater's.

I glanced over at George. He was sleeping peacefully. It was too early to wake him, but I could not lay that letter down unread; was not my name on it? Tearing it open, I devoured its contents,—the exclamation I made on reading it, waking George.

The writing was in Mr. Slater's hand, and the words were:

"I must request, at the instance of Coroner Heath and such of the police as listened to your adventure, that you make no further mention of what you saw in the street under our windows last night. The doctors find no bullet in the wound. This clears Mr. Brotherson."

IV

SWEET LITTLE MISS CLARKE

When we took our seats at the breakfast-table, it was with the feeling of being no longer looked upon as connected in any way with this case. Yet our interest in it was, if anything, increased, and when I saw George casting furtive glances at a certain table behind me, I leaned over and asked him the reason, being sure that the people whose faces I saw reflected in the mirror directly before us had something to do with the great matter then engrossing us. His answer conveyed the somewhat exciting information that the four persons seated in my rear were the same four who had been reading at the round table in the mezzanine at the time of Miss Challoner's death.

Instantly they absorbed all my attention, though I dared not give them a direct look, and continued to observe them only in the glass.

"Is it one family?" I asked.

"Yes, and a very respectable one. Transients, of course, but very well known in Denver. The lady is not the mother of the boys, but their aunt. The boys belong to the gentleman, who is a widower."

"Their word ought to be good."

George nodded.

"The boys look wide-awake enough if the father does not. As for the aunt, she is sweetness itself. Do they still insist that Miss Challoner was the only person in the room with them at this time?"

"They did last night. I don't know how they will meet this statement of the doctor's."

"George?"

He leaned nearer.

"Have you ever thought that she might have been a suicide? That she stabbed herself?"

"No, for in that case a weapon would have been found."

"And are you sure that none was?"

"Positive. Such a fact could not have been kept quiet. If a weapon had been picked up there would be no mystery, and no necessity for further police investigation."

"And the detectives are still here?"

"I just saw one."

"George?"

Again his head came nearer.

"Have they searched the lobby? I believe she had a weapon."

"Laura!"
"I know it sounds foolish, but the alternative is so improbable. A family like that cannot be leagued together in a conspiracy to hide the truth concerning a matter so serious. To be sure, they may all be short-sighted, or so little given to observation that they didn't see what passed before their eyes. The boys look wide-awake enough, but who can tell? I would sooner believe that--"

I stopped short so suddenly that George looked startled. My attention had been caught by something new I saw in the mirror upon which my attention was fixed. A man was looking in from the corridor behind, at the four persons we were just discussing. He was watching them intently, and I thought I knew his face.

"What kind of a looking person was the man who took you outside last night?" I inquired of George, with my eyes still on this furtive watcher.

"A fellow to make you laugh. A perfect character, Laura; hideously homely but agreeable enough. I took quite a fancy to him. Why?"

"I am looking at him now."

"Very likely. He's deep in this affair. Just an everyday detective, but ambitious, I suppose, and quite alive to the importance of being thorough."

"He is watching those people. No, he isn't. How quickly he disappeared!"

"Yes, he's mercurial in all his movements. Laura, we must get out of this. There happens to be something else in the world for me to do than to sit around and follow up murder clues."

But we began to doubt if others agreed with him, when on passing out we were stopped in the lobby by this same detective, who had something to say to George, and drew him quickly aside.

"What does he want?" I asked, as soon as George had returned to my side.

"He wants me to stand ready to obey any summons the police may send me."

"Then they still suspect Brotherson?"

"They must."

My head rose a trifle as I glanced up at George.

"Then we are not altogether out of it?" I emphasised, complacently.

He smiled which hardly seemed apropos. Why does George sometimes smile when I am in my most serious moods.

As we stepped out of the hotel, George gave my arm a quiet pinch which served to direct my attention to an elderly gentleman who, was just alighting from a taxicab at the kerb. He moved heavily and with some appearance of pain, but from the crowd collected on the sidewalk many of whom nudged each other as he passed, he was evidently a person of some importance, and as he disappeared within the hotel entrance, I asked George who this kind-faced, bright-eyed old gentleman could be.

He appeared to know, for he told me at once that he was Detective Gryce; a man who had grown old in solving just such baffling problems as these.

"He gave up work some time ago, I have been told," my husband went on; "but evidently a great case still has its allurement for him. The trail here must be a very blind one for them to call him in. I wish we had not left so soon. It would have been quite an experience to see him at work."

"I doubt if you would have been given the opportunity. I noticed that we were slightly de trop towards the last."

"I wouldn't have minded that; not on my own account, that is. It might not have been pleasant for you. However, the office is waiting. Come, let me put you on the car."

That night I bided his coming with an impatience I could not control. He was late, of course, but when he did appear, I almost forgot our usual greeting in my hurry to ask him if he had seen the evening papers.

"No," he grumbled, as he hung up his overcoat. "Been pushed about all day. No time for anything."

"Then let me tell you--"

But he would have dinner first.

However, a little later we had a comfortable chat. Mr. Gryce had made a discovery, and the papers were full of it. It was one which gave me a small triumph over George. The suggestion he had laughed at was not so entirely foolish as he had been pleased to consider it. But let me tell the story of that day, without any further reference to myself.

The opinion had become quite general with those best acquainted with the details of this affair, that the mystery was one of those abnormal ones for which no solution would ever be found, when the aged detective showed himself in the building and was taken to the room, where an Inspector of Police awaited him. Their greeting was cordial, and the lines on the latter's face relaxed a little as he met the still bright eye of the man upon whose instinct and judgment so much reliance had always been placed.

"This is very good of you," he began, glancing down at the aged detective's bundled up legs, and gently pushing a chair towards him. "I know that it was a great deal to ask, but we're at our wits' end, and so I telephoned. It's the
most inexplicable--There! you have heard that phrase before. But clews--there are absolutely none. That is, we have not been able to find any. Perhaps you can. At least, that is what we hope. I've known you more than once to succeed where others have failed."

The elderly man thus addressed, glanced down at his legs, now propped up on a stool which someone had brought him, and smiled, with the pathos of the old who sees the interests of a lifetime slipping gradually away.

"I am not what I was. I can no longer get down on my hands and knees to pick up threads from the nap of a rug, or spy out a spot of blood in the crimson woof of a carpet."

"You shall have Sweetwater here to do the active work for you. What we want of you is the directing mind--the infallible instinct. It's a case in a thousand, Gryce. We've never had anything just like it. You've never had anything at all like it. It will make you young again."

The old man's eyes shot fire and unconsciously one foot slipped to the floor. Then he bethought himself and painfully lifted it back again.

"What are the points? What's the difficulty?" he asked. "A woman has been shot--"

"No, not shot, stabbed. We thought she had been shot, for that was intelligible and involved no impossibilities. But Drs. Heath and Webster, under the eye of the Challoners' own physician, have made an examination of the wound--an official one, thorough and quite final so far as they are concerned, and they declare that no bullet is to be found in the body. As the wound extends no further than the heart, this settles one great point, at least."

"Dr. Heath is a reliable man and one of our ablest coroners."

"Yes. There can be no question as to the truth of his report. You know the victim? Her name, I mean, and the character she bore?"

"Yes; so much was told me on my way down."

"A fine girl unspoiled by riches and seeming independence. Happy, too, to all appearance, or we should be more ready to consider the possibility of suicide."

"Suicide by stabbing calls for a weapon. Yet none has been found, I hear."

"None."

"Yet she was killed that way?"

"Undoubtedly, and by a long and very narrow blade, larger than a needle but not so large as the ordinary stiletto."

"Stabbed while by herself, or what you may call by herself? She had no companion near her?"

"None, if we can believe the four members of the Parrish family who were seated at the other end of the room."

"And you do believe them?"

"Would a whole family lie--and needlessly? They never knew the woman--father, maiden aunt and two boys, clear-eyed, jolly young chaps whom even the horror of this tragedy, perpetrated as it were under their very nose, cannot make serious for more than a passing moment."

"It wouldn't seem so."

"Yet they swear up and down that nobody crossed the room towards Miss Challoner."

"So they tell me."

"She fell just a few feet from the desk where she had been writing. No word, no cry, just a collapse and sudden fall. In olden days they would have said, struck by a bolt from heaven. But it was a bolt which drew blood; not much blood, I hear, but sufficient to end life almost instantly. She never looked up or spoke again. What do you make of it, Gryce?"

"It's a tough one, and I'm not ready to venture an opinion yet. I should like to see the desk you speak of, and the spot where she fell."

A young fellow who had been hovering in the background at once stepped forward. He was the plain-faced detective who had spoken to George.

"Will you take my arm, sir?"

Mr. Gryce's whole face brightened. This Sweetwater, as they called him, was, I have since understood, one of his proteges and more or less of a favourite.

"Have you had a chance at this thing?" he asked. "Been over the ground--studied the affair carefully?"

"Yes, sir; they were good enough to allow it."

"Very well, then, you're in a position to pioneer me. You've seen it all and won't be in a hurry."

"No; I'm at the end of my rope. I haven't an idea, sir."

"Well, well, that's honest at all events." Then, as he slowly rose with the other's careful assistance, "There's no crime without its clew. The thing is to recognise that clew when seen. But I'm in no position, to make promises. Old days don't return for the asking."

Nevertheless, he looked ten years younger than when he came in, or so thought those who knew him.
The mezzanine was guarded from all visitors save such as had official sanction. Consequently, the two remained quite uninterrupted while they moved about the place in quiet consultation. Others had preceded them; had examined the plain little desk and found nothing; had paced off the distances; had looked with longing and inquiring eyes at the elevator cage and the open archway leading to the little staircase and the musicians' gallery. But this was nothing to the old detective. The locale was what he wanted, and he got it. Whether he got anything else it would be impossible to say from his manner as he finally sank into a chair by one of the openings, and looked down on the lobby below. It was full of people coming and going on all sorts of business, and presently he drew back, and, leaning on Sweetwater's arm, asked him a few questions.

"Who were the first to rush in here after the Parrishes gave the alarm?"

"One or two of the musicians from the end of the hall. They had just finished their programme and were preparing to leave the gallery. Naturally they reached her first."

"Good! their names?"

"Mark Sowerby and Claus Hennerberg. Honest Germans--men who have played here for years."

"And who followed them? Who came next on the scene?"

"Some people from the lobby. They heard the disturbance and rushed up pell-mell. But not one of these touched her. Later her father came."

"Who did touch her? Anybody, before the father came in?"

"Yes; Miss Clarke, the middle-aged lady with the Parrishes. She had run towards Miss Challoner as soon as she heard her fall, and was sitting there with the dead girl's head in her lap when the musicians showed themselves."

"I suppose she has been carefully questioned?"

"Very, I should say."

"And she speaks of no weapon?"

"No. Neither she nor any one else at that moment suspected murder or even a violent death. All thought it a natural one--sudden, but the result of some secret disease."

"Father and all?"

"Yes."

"But the blood? Surely there must have been some show of blood?"

"They say not. No one noticed any. Not till the doctor came--her doctor who was happily in his office in this very building. He saw the drops, and uttered the first suggestion of murder."

"How long after was this? Is there any one who has ventured to make an estimate of the number of minutes which elapsed from the time she fell, to the moment when the doctor first raised the cry of murder?"

"Yes. Mr. Slater, the assistant manager, who was in the lobby at the time, says that ten minutes at least must have elapsed."

"Ten minutes and no blood! The weapon must still have been there. Some weapon with a short and inconspicuous handle. I think they said there were flowers over and around the place where it struck."

"Yes, great big scarlet ones. Nobody noticed--nobody looked. A panic like that seems to paralyse people."

"Ten minutes! I must see every one who approached her during those ten minutes. Every one, Sweetwater, and I must myself talk with Miss Clarke."

"You will like her. You will believe every word she says."

"No doubt. All the more reason why I must see her. Sweetwater, someone drew that weapon out. Effects still have their causes, notwithstanding the new cult. The question is who? We must leave no stone unturned to find that out."

"The stones have all been turned over once."

"By you?"

"Not altogether by me."

"Then they will bear being turned over again. I want to be witness of the operation."

"Where will you see Miss Clarke?"

"Wherever she pleases--only I can't walk far."

"I think I know the place. You shall have the use of this elevator. It has not been running since last night or it would be full of curious people all the time, hustling to get a glimpse of this place. But they'll put a man on for you."

"Very good; manage it as you will. I'll wait here till you're ready. Explain yourself to the lady. Tell her I'm an old and rheumatic invalid who has been used to asking his own questions. I'll not trouble her much. But there is one point she must make clear to me."

Sweetwater did not presume to ask what point, but he hoped to be fully enlightened when the time came.

And he was. Mr. Gryce had undertaken to educate him for this work, and never missed the opportunity of giving him a lesson. The three met in a private sitting-room on an upper floor, the detectives entering first and the lady
coming in soon after. As her quiet figure appeared in the doorway, Sweetwater stole a glance at Mr. Gryce. He was not looking her way, of course; he never looked directly at anybody; but he formed his impressions for all that, and Sweetwater was anxious to make sure of these impressions. There was no doubting them in this instance. Miss Clarke was not a woman to rouse an unfavourable opinion in any man's mind. Of slight, almost frail build, she had that peculiar animation which goes with a speaking eye and a widely sympathetic nature. Without any substantial claims to beauty, her expression was so womanly and so sweet that she was invariably called lovely.

Mr. Gryce was engaged at the moment in shifting his cane from the right hand to the left, but his manner was never more encouraging or his smile more benevolent.

"Pardon me," he apologised, with one of his old-fashioned bows, "I'm sorry to trouble you after all the distress you must have been under this morning. But there is something I wish especially to ask you in regard to the dreadful occurrence in which you played so kind a part. You were the first to reach the prostrate woman, I believe."

"Yes. The boys jumped up and ran towards her, but they were frightened by her looks and left it for me to put my hands under her and try to lift her up."

"Did you manage it?"
"I succeeded in getting her head into my lap, nothing more."
"And sat so?"
"For some little time. That is, it seemed long, though I believe it was not more than a minute before two men came running from the musicians' gallery. One thinks so fast at such a time--and feels so much."
"You knew she was dead, then?"
"I felt her to be so."
"How felt?"
"I was sure--I never questioned it."
"You have seen women in a faint?"
"Yes, many times."
"What made the difference? Why should you believe Miss Challoner dead simply because she lay still and apparently lifeless?"
"I cannot tell you. Possibly, death tells its own story. I only know how I felt."
"Perhaps there was another reason? Perhaps, that, consciously or unconsciously, you laid your palm upon her heart?"

Miss Clarke started, and her sweet face showed a moment's perplexity.

"Did I?" she queried, musingly. Then with a sudden access of feeling, "I may have done so, indeed, I believe I did. My arms were around her; it would not have been an unnatural action."
"No; a very natural one, I should say. Cannot you tell me positively whether you did this or not?"
"Yes, I did. I had forgotten it, but I remember now." And the glance she cast him while not meeting his eye showed that she understood the importance of the admission. "I know," she said, "what you are going to ask me now. Did I feel anything there but the flowers and the tulle? No, Mr. Gryce, I did not. There was no poniard in the wound."

Mr. Gryce felt around, found a chair and sank into it.
"You are a truthful woman," said he. "And," he added more slowly, "composed enough in character I should judge not to have made any mistake on this very vital point."
"I think so, Mr. Gryce. I was in a state of excitement, of course; but the woman was a stranger to me, and my feelings were not unduly agitated."
"Sweetwater, we can let my suggestion go in regard to those ten minutes I spoke of. The time is narrowed down to one, and in that one, Miss Clarke was the only person to touch her."
"The only one," echoed the lady, catching perhaps the slight rising sound of query in his voice. "I will trouble you no further."
"I will trouble you no further. So said the old detective, thoughtfully. "Sweetwater, help me out of this." His eye was dull and his manner betrayed exhaustion. But vigour returned to him before he had well reached the door, and he showed some of his old spirit as he thanked Miss Clarke and turned to take the elevator.

"But one possibility remains," he confided to Sweetwater, as they stood waiting at the elevator door. "Miss Challoner died from a stab. The next minute she was in this lady's arms. No weapon protruded from the wound, nor was any found on or near her in the mezzanine. What follows? She struck the blow herself, and the strength of purpose which led her to do this, gave her the additional force to pull the weapon out and fling it from her. It did not fall upon the floor around her; therefore, it flew through one of those openings into the lobby, and there it either will be, or has been found."

It was this statement, otherwise worded, which gave me my triumph over George.
THE RED CLOAK

"What results? Speak up, Sweetwater."

"None. Every man, woman and boy connected with the hotel has been questioned; many of them routed out of their beds for the purpose, but not one of them picked up anything from the floor of the lobby, or knows of any one who did."

"There now remain the guests."

"And after them--(pardon me, Mr. Gryce) the general public which rushed in rather promiscuously last night."

"I know it; it's a task, but it must be carried through. Put up bulletins, publish your wants in the papers;--do anything, only gain your end."

A bulletin was put up.

Some hours later, Sweetwater re-entered the room, and, approaching Mr. Gryce with a smile, blurted out:

"The bulletin is a great go. I think--of course, I cannot be sure --that it's going to do the business. I've watched every one who stopped to read it. Many showed interest and many, emotion; she seems to have had a troop of friends. But embarrassment! only one showed that. I thought you would like to know."

"Embarrassment? Humph! a man?"

"No, a woman; a lady, sir; one of the transients. I found out in a jiffy all they could tell me about her."

"A woman! We didn't expect that. Where is she? Still in the lobby?"

"No, sir. She took the elevator while I was talking with the clerk."

"There's nothing in it. You mistook her expression."

"I don't think so. I had noticed her when she first came into the lobby. She was talking to her daughter who was with her, and looked natural and happy. But no sooner had she seen and read that bulletin, than the blood shot up into her face and her manner became furtive and hasty. There was no mistaking the difference, sir. Almost before I could point her out, she had seized her daughter by the arm and hurried her towards the elevator. I wanted to follow her, but you may prefer to make your own inquiries. Her room is on the seventh floor, number 712, and her name is Watkins. Mrs. Horace Watkins of Nashville."

Mr. Gryce nodded thoughtfully, but made no immediate effort to rise.

"Is that all you know about her?" he asked.

"Yes; this is the first time she has stopped at this hotel. She came yesterday. Took a room indefinitely. Seems all right; but she did blush, sir. I ever saw its beat in a young girl."

"Call the desk. Say that I'm to be told if Mrs. Watkins of Nashville rings up during the next ten minutes. We'll give her that long to take some action. If she fails to make any move, I'll make my own approaches."

Sweetwater did as he was bid, then went back to his place in the lobby.

But he returned almost instantly.

"Mrs. Watkins has just telephoned down that she is going to--to leave, sir."

"To leave?"

The old man struggled to his feet. "No. 712, do you say? Seven stories," he sighed. But as he turned with a hobble, he stopped. "There are difficulties in the way of this interview," he remarked. "A blush is not much to go upon. I'm afraid we shall have to resort to the shadow business and that is your work, not mine."

But here the door opened and a boy brought in a line which had been left at the desk. It related to the very matter then engaging them, and ran thus:

"I see that information is desired as to whether any person was seen to stoop to the lobby floor last night at or shortly after the critical moment of Miss Challoner's fall in the half story above. I can give such information. I was in the lobby at the time, and in the height of the confusion following this alarming incident, I remember seeing a lady,--one of the new arrivals (there were several coming in at the time)--stoop quickly down and pick up something from the floor. I thought nothing of it at the time, and so paid little attention to her appearance. I can only recall the suddenness with which she stooped and the colour of the cloak she wore. It was red, and the whole garment was voluminous. If you wish further particulars, though in truth, I have no more to give, you can find me in 356."

"HENRY A. MCELROY."

"Humph! This should simplify our task," was Mr. Gryce's comment, as he handed the note over to Sweetwater.

"You can easily find out if the lady, now on the point of departure, can be identified with the one described by Mr. McElroy. If she can, I am ready to meet her anywhere."

"Here goes then!" cried Sweetwater, and quickly left the room.

When he returned, it was not with his most hopeful air.

"The cloak doesn't help," he declared. "No one remembers the cloak. But the time of Mrs. Watkins' arrival was all right. She came in directly on the heels of this catastrophe."

"She did! Sweetwater, I will see her. Manage it for me at once."
"The clerk says that it had better be upstairs. She is a very sensitive woman. There might be a scene, if she were intercepted on her way out."

"Very well." But the look which the old detective threw at his bandaged legs was not without its pathos.

And so it happened that just as Mrs. Watkins was watching the wheeling out of her trunks, there appeared in the doorway before her, an elderly gentleman, whose expression, always benevolent, save at moments when benevolence would be quite out of keeping with the situation, had for some reason, so marked an effect upon her, that she coloured under his eye, and, indeed, showed such embarrassment, that all doubt of the propriety of his intrusion vanished from the old man's mind, and with the ease of one only too well accustomed to such scenes, he kindly remarked:

"Am I speaking to Mrs. Watkins of Nashville?"

"You are," she faltered, with another rapid change of colour. "I--I am just leaving. I hope you will excuse me. I--"

"I wish I could," he smiled, hobbling in and confronting her quietly in her own room. "But circumstances make it quite imperative that I should have a few words with you on a topic which need not be disagreeable to you, and probably will not be. My name is Gryce. This will probably convey nothing to you, but I am not unknown to the management below, and my years must certainly give you confidence in the propriety of my errand. A beautiful and charming young woman died here last night. May I ask if you knew her?"

"I?" She was trembling violently now, but whether with indignation or some other more subtle emotion, it would be difficult to say. "No, I'm from the South. I never saw the young lady. Why do you ask? I do not recognise your right. I--I--"

Certainly her emotion must be that of simple indignation. Mr. Gryce made one of his low bows, and propping himself against the table he stood before, remarked civilly:--

"I had rather not force my rights. The matter is so very ordinary. I did not suppose you knew Miss Challoner, but one must begin somehow, and as you came in at the very moment when the alarm was raised in the lobby, I thought perhaps you could tell me something which would aid me in my effort to elicit the real facts of the case. You were crossing the lobby at the time--"

"Yes." She raised her head. "So were a dozen others--"

"Madam,"--the interruption was made in his kindliest tones, but in a way which nevertheless suggested authority. "Something was picked up from the floor at that moment. If the dozen you mention were witnesses to this act we do not know it. But we do know that it did not pass unobserved by you. Am I not correct? Didn't you see a certain person--I will mention no names--stoop and pick up something from the lobby floor?"

"No." The word came out with startling violence. "I was conscious of nothing but the confusion." She was facing him with determination and her eyes were fixed boldly on his face. But her lips quivered, and her cheeks were white, too white now for simple indignation.

"Then I have made a big mistake," apologised the ever-courteous detective. "Will you pardon me? It would have settled a very serious question if it could be found that the object thus picked up was the weapon which killed Miss Challoner. That is my excuse for the trouble I have given you."

He was not looking at her; he was looking at her hand which rested on the table before which he himself stood. Did the fingers tighten a little and dig into the palm they concealed? He thought so, and was very slow in turning limply about towards the door. Meanwhile, would she speak? No. The silence was so marked, he felt it an excuse for stealing another glance in her direction. She was not looking his way but at a door in the partition wall on her right; and the look was one very akin to anxious fear. The next moment he understood it. The door burst open, and a young girl bounded into the room, with the merry cry:

"All ready, mother. I'm glad we are going to the Clarendon. I hate hotels where people die almost before your eyes."

What the mother said at this outburst is immaterial. What the detective did is not. Keeping on his way, he reached the door, but not to open it wider; rather to close it softly but with unmistakable decision. The cloak which enveloped the girl was red, and full enough to be called voluminous.

"Who is this?" demanded the girl, her indignant glances flashing from one to the other.

"I don't know," faltered the mother in very evident distress. "He says he has a right to ask us questions and he has been asking questions about--about--"

"Not about me," laughed the girl, with a toss of her head Mr. Gryce would have corrected in one of his grandchildren. "He can have nothing to say about me." And she began to move about the room in an aimless, half-insolent way.

Mr. Gryce stared hard at the few remaining belongings of the two women, lying in a heap on the table, and half musingly, half deprecatingly, remarked:
"The person who stooped wore a long red cloak. Probably you preceded your daughter, Mrs. Watkins."

The lady thus brought to the point made a quick gesture towards the girl who suddenly stood still, and, with a rising colour in her cheeks, answered, with some show of resolution on her own part:

"You say your name is Gryce and that you have a right to address me thus pointedly on a subject which you evidently regard as serious. That is not exact enough for me. Who are you, sir? What is your business?"

"I think you have guessed it. I am a detective from Headquarters. What I want of you I have already stated. Perhaps this young lady can tell me what you cannot. I shall be pleased if this is so."

"Caroline"--Then the mother broke down. "Show the gentleman what you picked up from the lobby floor last night."

The girl laughed again, loudly and with evident bravado, before she threw the cloak back and showed what she had evidently been holding in her hand from the first, a sharp-pointed, gold-handled paper-cutter.

"It was lying there and I picked it up. I don't see any harm in that."

"You probably meant none. You couldn't have known the part it had just played in this tragic drama," said the old detective looking carefully at the cutter which he had taken in his hand, but not so carefully that he failed to note that the look of distress was not lifted from the mother's face either by her daughter's words or manner.

"You have washed this?" he asked.

"No. Why should I wash it? It was clean enough. I was just going down to give it in at the desk. I wasn't going to carry it away." And she turned aside to the window and began to hum, as though done with the whole matter.

The old detective rubbed his chin, glanced again at the paper-cutter, then at the girl in the window, and lastly at the mother, who had lifted her head again and was facing him bravely.

"It is very important," he observed to the latter, "that your daughter should be correct in her statement as to the condition of this article when she picked it up. Are you sure she did not wash it?"

"I don't think she did. But I'm sure she will tell you the truth about that. Caroline, this is a police matter. Any mistake about it may involve us in a world of trouble and keep you from getting back home in time for your coming-out party. Did you--did you wash this cutter when you got upstairs, or--or--" she added, with a propitiatory glance at Mr. Gryce--"wipe it off at any time between then and now? Don't answer hastily. Be sure. No one can blame you for that act. Any girl, as thoughtless as you, might do that."

"Mother, how can I tell what I did?" flashed out the girl, wheeling round on her heel till she faced them both. "I don't remember doing a thing to it. I just brought it up. A thing found like that belongs to the finder. You needn't hold it out towards me like that. I don't want it now; I'm sick of it. Such a lot of talk about a paltry thing which couldn't have cost ten dollars." And she wheeled back.

"It isn't the value." Mr. Gryce could be very patient. "It's the fact that we believe it to have been answerable for Miss Challoner's death--that is, if there was any blood on it when you picked it up."

"Blood!" The girl was facing them again, astonishment struggling with disgust on her plain but mobile features. "Blood! is that what you mean. No wonder I hate it. Take it away," she cried.

"Oh, mother, I'll never pick up anything again which doesn't belong to me! Blood!" she repeated in horror, flinging herself into her mother's arms.

Mr. Gryce thought he understood the situation. Here was a little kleptomaniac whose weakness the mother was struggling to hide. Light was pouring in. He felt his body's weight less on that miserable foot of his.

"Does that frighten you? Are you so affected by the thought of blood?"

"Don't ask me. And I put the thing under my pillow! I thought it was so--so pretty."

"Mrs. Watkins," Mr. Gryce from that moment ignored the daughter, "did you see it there?"

"Yes; but I didn't know where it came from. I had not seen my daughter stoop. I didn't know where she got it till I read that bulletin."

"Never mind that. The question agitating me is whether any stain was left under that pillow. We want to be sure of the connection between this possible weapon and the death by stabbing which we all deplore--if there is a connection."

"I didn't see any stain, but you can look for yourself. The bed has been made up, but there was no change of linen. We expected to remain here; I see no good to be gained by hiding any of the facts now."

"None whatever, Madam."

"Come, then. Caroline, sit down and stop crying. Mr. Gryce believes that your only fault was in not taking this object at once to the desk."

"Yes, that's all," acquiesced the detective after a short study of the shaking figure and distorted features of the girl. "You had no idea, I'm sure, where this weapon came from, or for what it had been used. That's evident."

Her shudder, as she seated herself, was very convincing. She was too young to simulate so successfully emotions of this character.
"I'm glad of that," she responded, half fretfully, half gratefully, as Mr. Gryce followed her mother into the adjoining room. "I've had a bad enough time of it without being blamed for what I didn't know and didn't do."

Mr. Gryce laid little stress upon these words, but much upon the lack of curiosity she showed in the minute and careful examination he now made of her room. There was no stain on the pillow-cover and none on the bureau-spread where she might very naturally have laid the cutter down on first coming into her room. The blade was so polished that it must have been rubbed off somewhere, either purposely or by accident. Where then, since not here? He asked to see her gloves--the ones she had worn the previous night.

"They are the same she is wearing now," the anxious mother assured him. "Wait, and I will get them for you."

"No need. Let her hold out her hands in token of amity. I shall soon see."

They returned to where the girl still sat, wrapped in her cloak, sobbing still, but not so violently.

"Caroline, you may take off your things," said the mother, drawing the pins from her own hat. "We shall not go to-day."

The child shot her mother one disappointed look, then proceeded to follow suit. When her hat was off, she began to take off her gloves. As soon as they were on the table, the mother pushed them over to Mr. Gryce. As he looked at them, the girl lifted off her cloak.

"Will—will he tell?" she whispered behind its ample folds into her mother's ear.

The answer came quickly, but not in the mother's tones. Mr. Gryce's ears had lost none of their ancient acuteness.

"I do not see that I should gain much by doing so. The one discovery which would link this find of yours indissolubly with Miss Challoner's death, I have failed to make. If I am equally unsuccessful below—if I can establish no closer connection there than here between this cutter and the weapon which killed Miss Challoner, I shall have no cause to mention the matter. It will be too extraneous to the case. Do you remember the exact spot where you stooped, Miss Watkins?"

"No, no. Somewhere near those big chairs; I didn't have to step out of my way; I really didn't."

Mr. Gryce's answering smile was a study. It seemed to convey a two-fold message, one for the mother and one for the child, and both were comforting. But he went away, disappointed. The clew which promised so much was, to all appearance, a false one.

He could soon tell.

VI
INTEGRITY

Mr. Gryce's fears were only too well founded. Though Mr. McElroy was kind enough to point out the exact spot where he saw Miss Watkins stoop, no trace of blood was found upon the rug which had lain there, nor had anything of the kind been washed up by the very careful man who scrubbed the lobby floor in the early morning. This was disappointing, as its presence would have settled the whole question. When, these efforts all exhausted, the two detectives faced each other again in the small room given up to their use, Mr. Gryce showed his discouragement. To be certain of a fact you cannot prove has not the same alluring quality for the old that it has for the young. Sweetwater watched him in some concern, then with the persistence which was one of his strong points, ventured finally to remark:

"I have but one idea left on the subject."

"And what is that?" Old as he was, Mr. Gryce was alert in a moment.

"The girl wore a red cloak. If I mistake not, the lining was also red. A spot on it might not show to the casual observer. Yet it would mean much to us."

"Sweetwater!"

A faint blush rose to the old man's cheek.

"Shall I request the privilege of looking that garment over?"

"Yes."

The young fellow ducked and left the room. When he returned, it was with a downcast air.

"Nothing doing," said he.

And then there was silence.

"We only need to find out now that this cutter was not even Miss Challoner's property," remarked Mr. Gryce, at last, with a gesture towards the object named, lying openly on the table before him.

"That should be easy. Shall I take it to their rooms and show it to her maid?"

"If you can do so without disturbing the old gentleman."

But here they were themselves disturbed. A knock at the door was followed by the immediate entrance of the very person just mentioned. Mr. Challoner had come in search of the inspector, and showed some surprise to find his place occupied by an unknown old man.
But Mr. Gryce, who discerned tidings in the bereaved father's face, was all alacrity in an instant. Greeting his visitor with a smile which few could see without trusting the man, he explained the inspector's absence and introduced himself in his own capacity.

Mr. Challoner had heard of him. Nevertheless, he did not seem inclined to speak.

Mr. Gryce motioned Sweetwater from the room. With a woeful look the young detective withdrew, his last glance cast at the cutter still lying in full view on the table.

Mr. Gryce, not unmindful himself of this object, took it up, then laid it down again, with an air of seeming abstraction.

The father's attention was caught.

"What is that?" he cried, advancing a step and bestowing more than an ordinary glance at the object thus brought casually, as it were, to his notice. "I surely recognise this cutter. Does it belong here or--"

Mr. Gryce, observing the other's emotion, motioned him to a chair. As his visitor sank into it, he remarked, with all the consideration exacted by the situation:

"It is unknown property, Mr. Challoner. But we have some reason to think it belonged to your daughter. Are we correct in this surmise?"

"I have seen it, or one like it, often in her hand." Here his eyes suddenly dilated and the hand stretched forth to grasp it quickly drew back. "Where--where was it found?" he hoarsely demanded. "O God! am I to be crushed to the very earth by sorrow!"

Mr. Gryce hastened to give him such relief as was consistent with the truth.

"It was picked up--last night--from the lobby floor. There is seemingly nothing to connect it with her death. Yet--"

The pause was eloquent. Mr. Challoner gave the detective an agonised look and turned white to the lips. Then gradually, as the silence continued, his head fell forward, and he muttered almost unintelligibly:

"I honestly believe her the victim of some heartless stranger. I do now; but--but I cannot mislead the police. At any cost I must retract a statement I made under false impressions and with no desire to deceive. I said that I knew all of the gentlemen who admired her and aspired to her hand, and that they were all reputable men and above committing a crime of this or any other kind. But it seems that I did not know her secret heart as thoroughly as I had supposed. Among her effects I have just come upon a batch of letters --love letters I am forced to acknowledge--signed by initials totally strange to me. The letters are manly in tone--most of them --but one--"

"What about the one?"

"Shows that the writer was displeased. It may mean nothing, but I could not let the matter go without setting myself right with the authorities. If it might be allowed to rest here--if those letters can remain sacred, it would save me the additional pang of seeing her inmost concerns--the secret and holiest recesses of a woman's heart, laid open to the public. For, from the tenor of most of these letters, she--she was not averse to the writer."

Mr. Gryce moved a little restlessly in his chair and stared hard at the cutter so conveniently placed under his eye. Then his manner softened and he remarked:

"We will do what we can. But you must understand that the matter is not a simple one. That, in fact, it contains mysteries which demand police investigation. We do not dare to trifle with any of the facts. The inspector, and, if not he, the coroner, will have to be told about these letters and will probably ask to see them."

"They are the letters of a gentleman."

"With the one exception."

"Yes, that is understood." Then in a sudden heat and with an almost sublime trust in his daughter notwithstanding the duplicity he had just discovered:

"Nothing--not the story told by these letters, or the sight of that sturdy paper-cutter with its long and very slender blade, will make me believe that she willingly took her own life. You do not know, cannot know, the rare delicacy of her nature. She was a lady through and through. If she had meditated death--if the breach suggested by the one letter I have mentioned, should have so preyed upon her spirits as to lead her to break her old father's heart and outrage the feelings of all who knew her, she could not, being the woman she was, choose a public place for such an act--an hotel writing-room--in face of a lobby full of hurrying men. It was out of nature. Every one who knows her will tell you so. The deed was an accident--incredible--but still an accident."

Mr. Gryce had respect for this outburst. Making no attempt to answer it, he suggested, with some hesitation, that Miss Challoner had been seen writing a letter previous to taking those fatal steps from the desk which ended so tragically. Was this letter to one of her lady friends, as reported, and was it as far from suggesting the awful tragedy which followed, as he had been told?

"It was a cheerful letter. Such a one as she often wrote to her little protegees here and there. I judge that this was written to some girl like that, for the person addressed was not known to her maid, any more than she was to me. It
expressed an affectionate interest, and it breathed encouragement—encouragement! and she meditating her own
death at the moment! Impossible! That letter should exonerate her if nothing else does.”

Mr. Gryce recalled the incongruities, the inconsistencies and even the surprising contradictions which had often
marked the conduct of men and women, in his lengthy experience with the strange, the sudden, and the tragic things
of life, and slightly shook his head. He pitied Mr. Challoner, and admired even more his courage in face of the
appalling grief which had overwhelmed him, but he dared not encourage a false hope. The girl had killed herself and
with this weapon. They might not be able to prove it absolutely, but it was nevertheless true, and this broken old
man would some day be obliged to acknowledge it. But the detective said nothing of this, and was very patient with
the further arguments the other advanced to prove his point and the lofty character of the girl to whom, misled by
appearance, the police seemed inclined to attribute the awful sin of self-destruction.

But when, this topic exhausted, Mr. Challoner rose to leave the room, Mr. Gryce showed where his own
thoughts still centred, by asking him the date of the correspondence discovered between his daughter and her
unknown admirer.

“Some of the letters were dated last summer, some this fall. The one you are most anxious to hear about only a
month back,” he added, with unconquerable devotion to what he considered his duty.

Mr. Gryce would like to have carried his inquiries further, but desisted. His heart was full of compassion for this
childless old man, doomed to have his choicest memories disturbed by cruel doubts which possibly would never be
removed to his own complete satisfaction.

But when he was gone, and Sweetwater had returned, Mr. Gryce made it his first duty to communicate to his
superiors the hitherto unsuspected fact of a secret romance in Miss Challoner's seemingly calm and well-guarded
life. She had loved and been loved by one of whom her family knew nothing. And the two had quarrelled, as certain
letters lately found could be made to show.

VII

THE LETTERS

Before a table strewn with papers, in the room we have already mentioned as given over to the use of the police,
sat Dr. Heath in a mood too thoughtful to notice the entrance of Mr. Gryce and Sweetwater from the dining-room
where they had been having dinner.

However as the former's tread was somewhat lumbering, the coroner's attention was caught before they had quite
crossed the room, and Sweetwater, with his quick eye, noted how his arm and hand immediately fell so as to cover
up a portion of the papers lying nearest to him.

“Well, Gryce, this is a dark case,” he observed, as at his bidding the two detectives took their seats.

Mr. Gryce nodded; so did Sweetwater.

“The darkest that has ever come to my knowledge,” pursued the coroner.

Mr. Gryce again nodded; but not so, Sweetwater. For some reason this simple expression of opinion seemed to
have given him a mental start.

“She was not shot. She was not struck by any other hand; yet she lies dead from a mortal wound in the breast.
Though there is no tangible proof of her having inflicted this wound upon herself, the jury will have no alternative, I
fear, than to pronounce the case one of suicide.”

“I'm sorry that I've been able to do so little,” remarked Mr. Gryce.

The coroner darted him a quick look.

“You are not satisfied? You have some different idea?” he asked.

The detective frowned at his hands crossed over the top of his cane, then shaking his head, replied:

“The verdict you mention is the only natural one, of course. I see that you have been talking with Miss
Challoner's former maid?”

“Yes, and she has settled an important point for us. There was a possibility, of course, that the paper-cutter which
you brought to my notice had never gone with her into the mezzanine. That she, or some other person, had dropped
it in passing through the lobby. But this girl assures me that her mistress did not enter the lobby that night. That she
accompanied her down in the elevator, and saw her step off at the mezzanine. She can also swear that the cutter was
in a book she carried—the book we found lying on the desk. The girl remembers distinctly seeing its peculiarly
chased handle projecting from its pages. Could anything be more satisfactory if ~I was going to say, if the young
lady had been of the impulsive type and the provocation greater. But Miss Challoner's nature was calm, and were it
not for these letters~” here his arm shifted a little~“I should not be so sure of my jury's future verdict. Love~” he
went on, after a moment of silent consideration of a letter he had chosen from those before him, “disturbs the most
equable natures. When it enters as a factor, we can expect anything ~as you know. And Miss Challoner evidently
was much attached to her correspondent, and naturally felt the reproach conveyed in these lines.”

And Dr. Heath read:
"Dear Miss Challoner:
"Only a man of small spirit could endure what I endured from you the other day. Love such as mine would be respectable in a clod-hopper, and I think that even you will acknowledge that I stand somewhat higher than that. Though I was silent under your disapprobation, you shall yet have your answer. It will not lack point because of its necessary delay."

"A threat!"

The words sprang from Sweetwater, and were evidently involuntary. Dr. Heath paid no notice, but Mr. Gryce, in shifting his hands on his cane top, gave them a sidelong look which was not without a hint of fresh interest in a case concerning which he had believed himself to have said his last word.

"It is the only letter of them all which conveys anything like a reproach," proceeded the coroner. "The rest are ardent enough and, I must acknowledge that, so far as I have allowed myself to look into them, sufficiently respectful. Her surprise must consequently have been great at receiving these lines, and her resentment equally so. If the two met afterwards--But I have not shown you the signature. To the poor father it conveyed nothing--some facts have been kept from him--but to us--" here he whirled the letter about so that Sweetwater, at least, could see the name, "it conveys a hope that we may yet understand Miss Challoner."

"Brotherson!" exclaimed the young detective in loud surprise. "Brotherson! The man who--"

"The man who left this building just before or simultaneously with the alarm caused by Miss Challoner's fall. It clears away some of the clouds befogging us. She probably caught sight of him in the lobby, and in the passion of the moment forgot her usual instincts and drove the sharp-pointed weapon into her heart."

"Brotherson!" The word came softly now, and with a thoughtful intonation. "He saw her die."

"Why do you say that?"

"Would he have washed his hands in the snow if he had been in ignorance of the occurrence? He was the real, if not active, cause of her death and he knew it. Either he--Excuse me, Dr. Heath and Mr. Gryce, it is not for me to obtrude my opinion."

"Have you settled it beyond dispute that Brotherson is really the man who was seen doing this?"

"No, sir. I have not had a minute for that job, but I'm ready for the business any time you see fit to spare me."

"Let it be to-morrow, or, if you can manage it, to-night. We want the man even if he is not the hero of that romantic episode. He wrote these letters, and he must explain the last one. His initials, as you see, are not ordinary ones, and you will find them at the bottom of all these sheets. He was brave enough or arrogant enough to sign the questionable one with his full name. This may speak well for him, and it may not. It is for you to decide that. Where will you look for him, Sweetwater? No one here knows his address."

"Not Miss Challoner's maid?"

"No; the name is a new one to her. But she made it very evident that she was not surprised to hear that her mistress was in secret correspondence with a member of the male sex. Much can be hidden from servants, but not that."

"I'll find the man; I have a double reason for doing that now; he shall not escape me."

Dr. Heath expressed his satisfaction, and gave some orders. Meanwhile, Mr. Gryce had not uttered a word.

VIII

STRANGE DOINGS FOR GEORGE

That evening George sat so long over the newspapers that in spite of my absorbing interest in the topic engrossing me, I fell asleep in my cozy little rocking chair. I was awakened by what seemed like a kiss falling very softly on my forehead, though, to be sure, it may have been only the flap of George's coat sleeve as he stooped over me.

"Wake up, little woman," I heard, "and trot away to bed. I'm going out and may not be in till daybreak."

"You! going out! at ten o'clock at night, tired as you are--as we both are! What has happened--Oh!"

This broken exclamation escaped me as I perceived in the dim background by the sitting-room door, the figure of a man who called up recent, but very thrilling experiences.

"Mr. Sweetwater," explained George. "We are going out together. It is necessary, or you may be sure I should not leave you."

I was quite wide awake enough by now to understand. "Oh, I know. You are going to hunt up the man. How I wish--"

But George did not wait for me to express my wishes. He gave me a little good advice as to how I had better employ my time in his absence, and was off before I could find words to answer.

This ends all I have to say about myself; but the events of that night carefully related to me by George are important enough for me to describe them, with all the detail which is their rightful due. I shall tell the story as I have already been led to do in other portions of this narrative, as though I were present and shared the adventure.
As soon as the two were in the street, the detective turned towards George and said:

"Mr. Anderson, I have a great deal to ask of you. The business before us is not a simple one, and I fear that I shall have to subject you to more inconvenience than is customary in matters like this. Mr. Brotherson has vanished; that is, in his own proper person, but I have an idea that I am on the track of one who will lead us very directly to him if we manage the affair carefully. What I want of you, of course, is mere identification. You saw the face of the man who washed his hands in the snow, and would know it again, you say. Do you think you could be quite sure of yourself, if the man were differently dressed and differently occupied?"

"I think so. There's his height and a certain strong look in his face. I cannot describe it."

"You don't need to. Come! we're all right. You don't mind making a night of it?"

"Not if it is necessary."

"That we can't tell yet." And with a characteristic shrug and smile, the detective led the way to a taxicab which stood in waiting at the corner.

A quarter of an hour of rather fast riding brought them into a tangle of streets on the East side. As George noticed the swarming sidewalks and listened to the noises incident to an over-populated quarter, he could not forbear, despite the injunction he had received, to express his surprise at the direction of their search.

"Surely," said he, "the gentleman I have described can have no friends here." Then, bethinking himself, he added: "But if he has reasons to fear the law, naturally he would seek to lose himself in a place as different as possible from his usual haunts."

"Yes, that would be some men's way," was the curt, almost indifferent, answer he received. Sweetwater was looking this way and that from the window beside him, and now, leaning out gave some directions to the driver which altered their course.

When they stopped, which was in a few minutes, he said to George:

"We shall have to walk now for a block or two. I'm anxious to attract no attention, nor is it desirable for you to do so. If you can manage to act as if you were accustomed to the place and just leave all the talking to me, we ought to get along first-rate. Don't be astonished at anything you see, and trust me for the rest; that's all."

They alighted, and he dismissed the taxicab. Some clock in the neighbourhood struck the hour of ten. "Good! we shall be in time," muttered the detective, and led the way down the street and round a corner or so, till they came to a block darker than the rest, and much less noisy.

It had a sinister look, and George, who is brave enough under all ordinary circumstances, was glad that his companion wore a badge and carried a whistle. He was also relieved when he caught sight of the burly form of a policeman in the shadow of one of the doorways. Yet the houses he saw before him were not so very different from those they had already passed. His uneasiness could not have sprung from them. They had even an air of positive respectability, as though inhabited by industrious workmen. Then, what was it which made the close companionship of a member of the police so uncommonly welcome? Was it a certain aspect of solitariness which clung to the block, or was it the sudden appearance here and there of strangely gliding figures, which no sooner loomed up against the snowy perspective, than they disappeared again in some unseen doorway?

"There's a meeting on to-night, of the Associated Brotherhood of the Awl, the Plane and the Trowel (whatever that means), and it is the speaker we want to see; the man who is to address them promptly at ten o'clock. Do you object to meetings?"

"Is this a secret one?"

"It wasn't advertised."

"Are we carpenters or masons that we can count on admittance?"

"I am a carpenter. Don't you think you can be a mason for the occasion?"

"I doubt it, but--"

"Hush! I must speak to this man."

George stood back, and a few words passed between Sweetwater and a shadowy figure which seemed to have sprung up out of the sidewalk.

"Balked at the outset," were the encouraging words with which the detective rejoined George. "It seems that a pass-word is necessary, and my friend has been unable to get it. Will the speaker pass out this way?" he inquired of the shadowy figure still lingering in their rear.

"He didn't go in by it; yet I believe he's safe enough inside," was the muttered answer.

Sweetwater had no relish for disappointments of this character, but it was not long before he straightened up and allowed himself to exchange a few more words with this mysterious person. These appeared to be of a more encouraging nature than the last, for it was not long before the detective returned with renewed alacrity to George, and, wheeling him about, began to retrace his steps to the corner.

"Are we going back? Are you going to give up the job?" George asked.
"No; we're going to take him from the rear. There's a break in the fence--Oh, we'll do very well. Trust me."

George laughed. He was growing excited, but not altogether agreeably so. He says that he has seen moments of more pleasant anticipation. Evidently, my good husband is not cut out for detective work.

Where they went under this officer's guidance, he cannot tell. The tortuous tangle of alleys through which he now felt himself led was dark as the nether regions to his unaccustomed eyes. There was snow under his feet and now and then he brushed against some obstructing object, or stumbled against a low fence; but beyond these slight miscalculations on his own part, he was a mere automaton in the hands of his eager guide, and only became his own man again when they suddenly stepped into an open yard and he could discern plainly before him the dark walls of a building pointed out by Sweetwater as their probable destination. Yet even here they encountered some impediment which prohibited a close approach. A wall or shed cut off their view of the building's lower storey; and though somewhat startled at being left unceremoniously alone after just a whispered word of encouragement from the ever ready detective, George could quite understand the necessity which that person must feel for a quiet reconnoitering of the surroundings before the two of them ventured further forward in their possibly hazardous undertaking. Yet the experience was none too pleasing to George, and he was very glad to hear Sweetwater's whisper again at his ear, and to feel himself rescued from the pool of slush in which he had been left to stand.

"The approach is not all that can be desired," remarked the detective as they entered what appeared to be a low shed. "The broken board has been put back and securely nailed in place, and if I am not very much mistaken there is a fellow stationed in the yard who will want the pass-word too. Looks shady to me. I'll have something to tell the chief when I get back."

"But we! What are we going to do if we cannot get in front or rear?"

"We're going to wait right here in the hopes of catching a glimpse of our man as he comes out," returned the detective, drawing George towards a low window overlooking the yard he had described as sentinelled. "He will have to pass directly under this window on his way to the alley," Sweetwater went on to explain, "and if I can only raise it--but the noise would give us away. I can't do that."

"Perhaps it swings on hinges," suggested George. "It looks like that sort of a window."

"If it should--well! it does. We're in great luck, sir. But before I pull it open, remember that from the moment I unlatch it, everything said or done here can be heard in the adjoining yard. So no whispers and no unnecessary movements. When you hear him coming, as sooner or later you certainly will, fall carefully to your knees and lean out just far enough to catch a glimpse of him before he steps down from the porch. If he stops to light his cigar or to pass a few words with some of the men he will leave behind, you may get a plain enough view of his face or figure to identify him. The light is burning low in that rear hall, but it will do. If it does not,--if you can't see him or if you do, don't hang out of the window more than a second. Duck after your first look. I don't want to be caught at this job with no better opportunity for escape than we have here. Can you remember all that?"

George pinched his arm encouragingly, and Sweetwater, with an amused grunt, softly unlatched the window and pulled it wide open.

A fine sleet flew in, imperceptible save for the sensation of damp it gave, and the slight haze it diffused through the air. Enlarged by this haze, the building they were set to watch rose in magnified proportions at their left. The yard between, piled high in the centre with snow-heaps or other heaps covered with snow, could not have been more than forty feet square. The window from which they peered, was half-way down this yard, so that a comparatively short distance separated them from the porch where George had been told to look for the man he was expected to identify. All was dark there at present, but he could hear from time to time some sounds of restless movement, as the guard posted inside shifted in his narrow quarters, or struck his benumbed feet softly together.

But what came to them from above was more interesting than anything to be heard or seen below. A man's voice, raised to a wonderful pitch by the passion of oratory, had burst the barriers of the closed hall in that towering third storey and was carrying its tale to other ears than those within. Had it been summer and the windows open, a fellow stationed in the yard who will want the pass-word too. Looks shady to me. I'll have something to tell the chief when I get back."

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But what came to them from above was more interesting than anything to be heard or seen below. A man's voice, raised to a wonderful pitch by the passion of oratory, had burst the barriers of the closed hall in that towering third storey and was carrying its tale to other ears than those within. Had it been summer and the windows open, both George and Sweetwater might have heard every word; for the tones were exceptionally rich and penetrating, and the speaker intent only on the impression he was endeavouring to make upon his audience. That he had not mistaken his power in this direction was evinced by the applause which rose from time to time from innumerable hands and feet. But this uproar would be speedily silenced, and the mellow voice ring out again, clear and commanding. What could the subject be to rouse such enthusiasm in the Associated Brotherhood of the Awl, the Plane and the Trowel? There was a moment when our listening friends expected to be enlightened. A shutter was thrown back in one of those upper windows, and the window hurriedly raised, during which words took the place of sounds and they heard enough to whet their appetite for more. But only that. The shutter was speedily restored to place, and the window again closed. A wise precaution, or so thought George if they wished to keep their doubtful proceedings secret.

A tirade against the rich and a loud call to battle could be gleaned from the few sentences they had heard. But its
virulence and pointed attack was not that of the second-rate demagogue or business agent, but of a man whose intellect and culture rang in every tone, and informed each sentence.

Sweetwater, in whom satisfaction was fast taking the place of impatience and regret, pushed the window to before asking George this question:

"Did you hear the voice of the man whose action attracted, your attention outside the Clermont?"

"No."

"Did you note just now the large shadow dancing on the ceiling over the speaker's head?"

"Yes, but I could judge nothing from that."

"Well, he's a rum one. I shan't open this window again till he gives signs of reaching the end of his speech. It's too cold."

But almost immediately he gave a start and, pressing George's arm, appeared to listen, not to the speech which was no longer audible, but to something much nearer--a step or movement in the adjoining yard. At least, so George interpreted the quick turn which this impetuous detective made, and the pains he took to direct George's attention to the walk running under the window beneath which they crouched. Someone was stealing down upon the house at their left, from the alley beyond. A big man, whose shoulder brushed the window as he went by. George felt his hand seized again and pressed as this happened, and before he had recovered from this excitement, experienced another quick pressure and still another as one, two, three additional figures went slipping by. Then his hand was suddenly dropped, for a cry had shot up from the door where the sentinel stood guard, followed by a sudden loud slam, and the noise of a shooting bolt, which, proclaiming as it did that the invaders were not friends but enemies to the cause which was being vaunted above, so excited Sweetwater that he pulled the window wide open and took a bold look out. George followed his example and this was what they saw:

Three men were standing flat against the fence leading from the shed directly to the porch. The fourth was crouching within the latter, and in another moment they heard his fist descend upon the door inside in a way to rouse the echoes. Meantime, the voice in the audience hall above had ceased, and there could be heard instead the scramble of hurrying feet and the noise of overturning benches. Then a window flew up and a voice called down:

"Who's that? What do you want down there?"

But before an answer could be shouted back, this man was drawn fiercely inside, and the scramble was renewed, amid which George heard Sweetwater's whisper at his ear:

"It's the police. The chief has got ahead of me. Was that the man who shouted down?"

"No. Neither was he the speaker. The voices are very different."

"We want the speaker. If the boys get him, we're all right; but if they don't--wait, I must make the matter sure."

And with a bound he vaulted through the window, whistling in a peculiar way. George, thus left quite alone, had the pleasure of seeing his sole protector mix with the boys, as he called them, and ultimately crowd in with them through the door which had finally been opened for their admittance. Then came a wait, and then the quiet reappearance of the detective alone and in no very, amiable mood.

"Well?" inquired George, somewhat breathlessly. "Do you want me? They don't seem to be coming out."

"No; they've gone the other way. It was a red hot anarchist meeting, and no mistake. They have arrested one of the speakers, but the other escaped. How, we have not yet found out; but I think there's a way out somewhere by which he got the start of us. He was the man I wanted you to see. Bad luck, Mr. Anderson, but I'm not at the end of my resources. If you'll have patience with me and accompany me a little further, I promise you that I'll only risk one more failure. Will you be so good, sir?"

IX

THE INCIDENT OF THE PARTLY LIFTED SHADE

The fellow had a way with him, hard to resist. Cold as George was and exhausted by an excitement of a kind to which he was wholly unaccustomed, he found himself acceding to the detective's request; and after a quick lunch and a huge cup of coffee in a restaurant which I wish I had time to describe, the two took a car which eventually brought them into one of the oldest quarters of the Borough of Brooklyn. The sleet which had stung their faces in the streets of New York had been left behind them somewhere on the bridge, but the chill was not gone from the air, and George felt greatly relieved when Sweetwater paused in the middle of a long block before a lofty tenement house of mean appearance, and signified that here they were to stop, and that from now on, mum was to be their watchword.

George was relieved I say, but he was also more astonished than ever. What kind of haunts were these for the cultured gentleman who spent his evenings at the Clermont? It was easy enough in these days of extravagant sympathies, to understand such a man addressing the uneasy spirits of lower New York--he had been called an enthusiast, and an enthusiast is very often a social agitator--but to trace him afterwards to a place like this was certainly a surprise. A tenement--such a tenement as this--meant home--home for himself or for those he counted his friends, and such a supposition seemed inconceivable to my poor husband, with the memory of the gorgeous
parlour of the Clermont in his mind. Indeed, he hinted something of the kind to his affable but strangely reticent companion, but all the answer he got was a peculiar smile whose humorous twist he could barely discern in the semi-darkness of the open doorway into which they had just plunged.

"An adventure! certainly an adventure!" flashed through poor George's mind, as he peered, in great curiosity down the long hall before him, into a dismal rear, opening into a still more dismal court. It was truly a novel experience for a business man whose philanthropy was carried on entirely by proxy—that is, by his wife. Should he be expected to penetrate into those dark, ill-smelling recesses, or would he be led up the long flights of naked stairs, so feebly illuminated that they gave the impression of extending indefinitely into dimmer and dimmer heights of decay and desolation?

Sweetwater seemed to decide for the rear, for leaving George, he stepped down the hall into the court beyond, where George could see him casting inquiring glances up at the walls above him. Another tenement, similar to the one whose rear end he was contemplating, towered behind but he paid no attention to that. He was satisfied with the look he had given and came quickly back, joining George at the foot of the staircase, up which he silently led the way.

It was a rude, none-too-well-cared-for building, but it seemed respectable enough and very quiet, considering the mass of people it accommodated. There were marks of poverty everywhere, but no squalor. One flight—two flights—three—and then George's guide stopped, and, looking back at him, made a gesture. It appeared to be one of caution, but when the two came together at the top of the staircase, Sweetwater spoke quite naturally as he pointed out a door in their rear:

"That's the room. We'll keep a sharp watch and when any man, no matter what his dress or appearance comes up these stairs and turns that way, give him a sharp look. You understand?"

"Yes; but—"

"Oh, he hasn't come in yet. I took pains to find that out. You saw me go into the court and look up. That was to see if his window was lighted. Well, it wasn't."

George felt non-plussed.

"But surely," said he, "the gentleman named Brotherson doesn't live here."

"The inventor does."

"Oh!"

"And—but I will explain later."

The suppressed excitement contained in these words made George stare. Indeed, he had been wondering for some time at the manner of the detective which showed a curious mixture of several opposing emotions. Now, the fellow was actually in a tremble of hope or impatience;—and, not content with listening, he peered every few minutes down the well of the staircase, and when he was not doing that, tramped from end to end of the narrow passage-way separating the head of the stairs from the door he had pointed out, like one to whom minutes were hours. All this time he seemed to forget George who certainly had as much reason as himself for finding the time long. But when, after some half hour of this tedium and suspense, there rose from below the faint clatter of ascending footsteps, he remembered his meek companion and beckoning him to one side, began a studied conversation with him, showing him a note-book in which he had written such phrases as these:

Don't look up till he is fairly in range with the light.
There's nothing to fear; he doesn't know either of us.
If it is a face you have seen before;—if it is the one we are expecting to see, pull your necktie straight. It's a little on one side.

These rather startling injunctions were read by George, with no very perceptible diminution of the uneasiness which it was only natural for him to feel at the oddity of his position. But only the demand last made produced any impression on him. The man they were waiting for was no further up than the second floor, but instinctively George's hand had flown to his necktie, and he was only stopped from its premature re-arrangement by a warning look from Sweetwater.

"Not unless you know him," whispered the detective; and immediately launched out into an easy talk about some totally different business which George neither understood, nor was expected to, I dare say.

Suddenly the steps below paused, and George heard Sweetwater draw in his breath in irrepressible dismay. But they were immediately resumed, and presently the head and shoulders of a workingman of uncommon proportions appeared in sight on the stairway.

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George cast him a keen look, and his hand rose doubtfully to his neck and then fell back again. The approaching man was tall, very well-proportioned and easy of carriage; but the face—such of it as could be seen between his cap and the high collar he had pulled up about his ears, conveyed no exact impression to George's mind, and he did not dare to give the signal Sweetwater expected from him. Yet as the man went by with a dark and sidelong glance at
them both, he felt his hand rise again, though he did not complete the action, much to his own disgust and to the
evident disappointment of the watchful detective.

"You're not sure?" he now heard, oddly interpolated in the stream of half-whispered talk with which the other
endeavoured to carry off the situation.

George shook his head. He could not rid himself of the old impression he had formed of the man in the snow.

"Mr. Dunn, a word with you," suddenly spoke up Sweetwater, to the man who had just passed them. "That's your
name, isn't it?"

"Yes, that is my name," was the quiet response, in a voice which was at once rich and resonant; a voice which
George knew—the voice of the impassioned speaker he had heard resounding through the sleet as he cowered within
hearing in the shed behind the Avenue A tenement. "Who are you who wish to speak to me at so late an hour?"

He was returning to them from the door he had unlocked and left slightly ajar.

"Well, we are—you know what," smiled the ready detective, advancing half-way to greet him. "We're not
members of the Associated Brotherhood, but possibly have hopes of being so. At all events, we should like to talk
the matter over, if, as you say, it's not too late."

"I have nothing to do with the club—"

"But you spoke before it."

"Yes."

"Then you can give us some sort of an idea how we are to apply for membership."

Mr. Dunn met the concentrated gaze of his two evidently unwelcome visitors with a frankness which dashed
George's confidence in himself, but made little visible impression upon his daring companion.

"I should rather see you at another time," said he. "But—" his hesitation was inappreciable save to the nicest ear—
"if you will allow me to be brief, I will tell you what I know—which is very little."

Sweetwater was greatly taken aback. All he had looked for, as he was careful to tell my husband later, was a
sufficiently prolonged conversation to enable George to mark and study the workings of the face he was not yet sure
of. Nor did the detective feel quite easy at the readiness of his reception; nor any too well pleased to accept the
invitation which this man now gave them to enter his room.

But he suffered no betrayal of his misgivings to escape him, though he was careful to intimate to George, as they
waited in the doorway for the other to light up, that he should not be displeased at his refusal to accompany him
further in this adventure, and even advised him to remain in the hall till he received his summons to enter.

But George had not come as far as this to back out now, and as soon as he saw Sweetwater advance into the now
well-lighted interior, he advanced too and began to look around him.

The room, like many others in these old-fashioned tenements, had a jog just where the door was, so that on
entering they had to take several steps before they could get a full glimpse of its four walls. When they did, both
showed surprise. Comfort, if not elegance, confronted them, which impression, however, was immediately lost in
the evidences of work, manual, as well as intellectual, which were everywhere scattered about.

The man who lived here was not only a student, as was evinced by a long wall full of books, but he was an art-
lover, a musician, an inventor and an athlete.

So much could be learned from the most cursory glance. A more careful one picked up other facts fully as
startling and impressive. The books were choice; the invention to all appearance a practical one; the art of a high
order and the music, such as was in view, of a character of which the nicest taste need not be ashamed. George
began to feel quite conscious of the intrusion of which they had been guilty, and was amazed at the ease with which
the detective carried himself in the presence of such manifestations of culture and good, hard work. He was trying to
recall the exact appearance of the figure he had seen stooping in the snowy street two nights before, when he found
himself staring at the occupant of the room, who had taken up his stand before them and was regarding them while
they were regarding the room.

He had thrown aside his hat and rid himself of his overcoat, and the fearlessness of his aspect seemed to daunt
the hitherto dauntless Sweetwater, who, for the first time in his life, perhaps, hunted in vain for words with which to
start conversation.

Had he made an awful mistake? Was this Mr. Dunn what he seemed an unknown and careful genius, battling
with great odds in his honest struggle to give the world something of value in return for what it had given him? The
quick, almost deprecatory glance he darted at George betrayed his dismay; a dismay which George had begun to
share, notwithstanding his growing belief that the man's face was not wholly unknown to him even if he could not
recognise it as the one he had seen outside the Clermont.

"You seem to have forgotten your errand," came in quiet, if not good-natured, sarcasm from their patiently
waiting host.

"It's the room," muttered Sweetwater, with an attempt at his old-time ease which was not as fully successful as
usual. "What an all-fired genius you must be. I never saw the like. And in a tenement house too! You ought to be in one of those big new studio buildings in New York where artists be and everything you see is beautiful. You'd appreciate it, you would."

The detective started, George started, at the gleam which answered him from a very uncommon eye. It was a temporary flash, however, and quickly veiled, and the tone in which this Dunn now spoke was anything but an encouraging one.

"I thought you were desirous of joining a socialistic fraternity," said he; "a true aspirant for such honours don't care for beautiful things unless all can have them. I prefer my tenement. How is it with you, friends?"

Sweetwater found some sort of a reply, though the thing which this man now did must have startled him, as it certainly did George. They were so grouped that a table quite full of anomalous objects stood at the back of their host, and consequently quite beyond their own reach. As Sweetwater began to speak, he whom he had addressed by the name of Dunn, drew a pistol from his breast pocket and laid it down barrel towards them on this table top. Then he looked up courteously enough, and listened till Sweetwater was done. A very handsome man, but one not to be trifled with in the slightest degree. Both recognised this fact, and George, for one, began to edge towards the door.

"Now I feel easier," remarked the giant, swelling out his chest. He was unusually tall, as well as unusually muscular. "I never like to carry arms; but sometimes it is unavoidable. Damn it, what hands!" He was looking at his own, which certainly showed soil. "Will you pardon me?" he pleasantly apologised, stepping towards a washstand and plunging his hands into the basin. "I cannot think with dirt on me like that. Humph, hey! did you speak?"

He turned quickly on George who had certainly uttered an ejaculation, but receiving no reply, went on with his task, completing it with a care and a disregard of their presence which showed him up in still another light.

But even his hardihood showed shock, when, upon turning round with a brisk, "Now I'm ready to talk," he encountered again the clear eye of Sweetwater. For, in the person of this none too welcome intruder, he saw a very different man from the one upon whom he had just turned his back with so little ceremony; and there appeared to be no good reason for the change. He had not noted in his preoccupation, how George, at sight of his stooping figure, had made a sudden significant movement, and if he had, the pulling of a necktie straight, would have meant nothing to him. But to Sweetwater it meant every thing, and it was in the tone of one fully at ease with himself that he now dryly remarked: "Mr. Brotherson, if you feel quite clean; and if you have sufficiently warmed yourself, I would suggest that we start out at once, unless you prefer to have me share this room with you till the morning."

There was silence. Mr. Dunn thus addressed attempted no answer; not for a full minute. The two men were measuring each other--George felt that he did not count at all--and they were quite too much occupied with this task to heed the passage of time. To George, who knew little, if anything, of what this silent struggle meant to either, it seemed that the detective stood no show before this Samson of physical strength and intellectual power, backed by a pistol just within reach of his hand. But as George continued to look and saw the figure of the smaller man gradually dilate, while that of the larger, the more potent and the better guarded, gave unmistakable signs of secret wavering, he slowly changed his mind and, ranging himself with the detective, waited for the word or words which should explain this situation and render intelligible the triumph gradually becoming visible in the young detective's eyes.

But he was not destined to have his curiosity satisfied so far. He might witness and hear, but it was long before he understood.

"Brotherson?" repeated their host, after the silence had lasted to the breaking-point. "Why do you call me that?"

"Because it is your name."

"You called me Dunn a minute ago."

"That is true."

"Why Dunn if Brotherson is my name?"

"Because you spoke under the name of Dunn at the meeting to-night, and if I don't mistake, that is the name by which you are known here."

"And you? By what name are you known?"

"It is late to ask, isn't it? But I'm willing to speak it now, and I might not have been so a little earlier in our conversation. I am Detective Sweetwater of the New York Department of Police, and my errand here is a very simple one. Some letters signed by you have been found among the papers of the lady whose mysterious death at the hotel Clermont is just now occupying the attention of the New York authorities. If you have any information to give which will in any way explain that death, your presence will be welcome at Coroner Heath's office in New York. If you have not, your presence will still be welcome. At all events, I was told to bring you. You will be on hand to accompany me in the morning, I am quite sure, pardoning the unconventional means I have taken to make sure of my man?"

The humour with which this was said seemed to rob it of anything like attack, and Mr. Brotherson, as we shall hereafter call him, smiled with an odd acceptance of the same, as he responded:
"I will go before the police certainly. I haven't much to tell, but what I have is at their service. It will not help you, but I have no secrets. What are you doing?"

He bounded towards Sweetwater, who had simply stepped to the window, lifted the shade and looked across at the opposing tenement.

"I wanted to see if it was still snowing," explained the detective, with a smile, which seemed to strike the other like a blow. "If it was a liberty, please pardon it."

Mr. Brotherson drew back. The cold air of self-possession which he now assumed, presented such a contrast to the unwarranted heat of the moment before that George wondered greatly over it, and later, when he recapitulated to me the whole story of this night, it was this incident of the lifted shade, together with the emotion it had caused, which he acknowledged as being for him the most inexplicable event of the evening and the one he was most anxious to hear explained.

As this ends our connection with this affair, I will bid you my personal farewell. I have often wished that circumstances had made it possible for me to accompany you through the remaining intricacies of this remarkable case.

But you will not lack a suitable guide.

BOOK II

AS SEEN BY DETECTIVE SWEETWATER

A DIFFERENCE OF OPINION

At an early hour the next morning, Sweetwater stood before the coroner's desk, urging a plea he feared to hear refused. He wished to be present at the interview soon to be held with Mr. Brotherson, and he had no good reason to advance why such a privilege should be allotted him.

"It's not curiosity," said he. "There's a question I hope to see settled. I can't communicate it--you would laugh at me; but it's an important one, a very important one, and I beg that you will let me sit in one of the corners and hear what he says. I won't bother and I'll be very still, so still that he'll hardly notice me. Do grant me this favour, sir."

The coroner, who had had some little experience with this man, surveyed him with a smile less forbidding than the poor fellow expected.

"You seem to lay great store by it," said he; "if you want to sort those papers over there, you may."

"Thank you. I don't understand the job, but I promise you not to increase the confusion. If I do; if I rattle the leaves too loudly, it will mean, 'Press him further on this exact point,' but I doubt if I rattle them, sir. No such luck."

The last three words were uttered sotto voce, but the coroner heard him, and followed his ungainly figure with a glance of some curiosity, as he settled himself at the desk on the other side of the room.

"Is the man--" he began, but at this moment the man entered, and Dr. Heath forgot the young detective, in his interest in the new arrival.

Neither dressed with the elegance known to the habitues of the Clermont, nor yet in the workman's outfit in which he had thought best to appear before the Associated Brotherhood, the newcomer advanced, with an aspect of open respect which could not fail to make a favourable impression upon the critical eye of the official awaiting him. So favourable, indeed, was this impression that that gentleman half rose, infusing a little more consideration into his greeting than he was accustomed to show to his prospective witnesses. Such a fearless eye he had seldom encountered, nor was it often his pleasure to confront so conspicuous a specimen of physical and intellectual manhood.

"Mr. Brotherson, I believe," said he, as he motioned his visitor to sit.

"That is my name, sir."

"Orlando Brotherson?"

"The same, sir."

"I'm glad we have made no mistake," smiled the doctor. "Mr. Brotherson, I have sent for you under the supposition that you were a friend of the unhappy lady lately dead at the Hotel Clermont."

"Miss Challoner?"

"Certainly; Miss Challoner."

"I knew the lady. But--" here the speaker's eye took on a look as questioning as that of his interlocutor--"but in a way so devoid of all publicity that I cannot but feel surprised that the fact should be known."

At this, the listening Sweetwater hoped that Dr. Heath would ignore the suggestion thus conveyed and decline the explanation it apparently demanded. But the impression made by the gentleman's good looks had been too strong for this coroner's proverbial caution, and, handing over the slip of a note which had been found among Miss Challoner's effects by her father, he quietly asked:

"Do you recognise the signature?"
"Yes, it is mine."

"Then you acknowledge yourself the author of these lines?"

"Most certainly. Have I not said that this is my signature?"

"Do you remember the words of this note, Mr. Brotherson?"

"Hardly. I recollect its tenor, but not the exact words."

"Read them."

"Excuse me, I had rather not. I am aware that they were bitter and should be the cause of great regret. I was angry when I wrote them."

"That is evident. But the cause of your anger is not so clear, Mr. Brotherson. Miss Challoner was a woman of lofty character, or such was the universal opinion of her friends. What could she have done to a gentleman like yourself to draw forth such a tirade?"

"You ask that?"

"I am obliged to. There is mystery surrounding her death;--the kind of mystery which demands perfect frankness on the part of all who were near her on that evening, or whose relations to her were in any way peculiar. You acknowledge that your friendship was of such a guarded nature that it surprised you greatly to hear it recognised. Yet you could write her a letter of this nature. Why?"

"Because--" the word came glibly; but the next one was long in following. "Because," he repeated, letting the fire of some strong feeling disturb for a moment his dignified reserve, "I offered myself to Miss Challoner, and she dismissed me with great disdain."

"Ah! and so you thought a threat was due her?"

"A threat?"

"These words contain a threat, do they not?"

"They may. I was hardly master of myself at the time. I may have expressed myself in an unfortunate manner."

"Read the words, Mr. Brotherson. I really must insist that you do so."

There was no hesitancy now. Rising, he leaned over the table and read the few words the other had spread out for his perusal. Then he slowly rose to his full height, as he answered, with some slight display of compunction:

"I remember it perfectly now. It is not a letter to be proud of. I hope--"

"Pray finish, Mr. Brotherson."

"That you are not seeking to establish a connection between this letter and her violent death?"

"Letters of this sort are often very mischievous, Mr. Brotherson. The harshness with which this is written might easily rouse emotions of a most unhappy nature in the breast of a woman as sensitive as Miss Challoner."

"Pardon me, Dr. Heath; I cannot flatter myself so far. You overrate my influence with the lady you name."

"You believe, then, that she was sincere in her rejection of your addresses?"

A start, too slight to be noted by any one but the watchful Sweetwater, showed that this question had gone home. But the self-poise and mental control of this man were perfect, and in an instant he was facing the coroner again, with a dignity which gave no clew to the disturbance into which his thoughts had just been thrown. Nor was this disturbance apparent in his tones when he made his reply:

"I have never allowed myself to think otherwise. I have seen no reason why I should. The suggestion you would convey by such a question is hardly welcome, now. I pray you to be careful in your judgment of such a woman's impulses. They often spring from sources not to be sounded even by her dearest friends."

"Yet; but how cold! Dr. Heath, eyeing him with admiration rather than sympathy, hesitated how to proceed; while Sweetwater, peering up from his papers, sought in vain for some evidence of the bereaved lover in the impressive but wholly dispassionate figure of him who had just spoken. Had pride got the better of his heart? or had that organ always been subordinate to the will in this man of instincts so varying, that at one time he impressed you simply as a typical gentleman of leisure; at another, as no more than a fiery agitator with powers absorbed by, if not limited to the one cause he advocated; and again--and this seemed the most contradictory of all--just the ardent inventor, living in a tenement, with Science for his goddess and work always under his hand? As the young detective weighed these possibilities and marvelled over the contradictions they offered, he forgot the papers now lying quiet under his hand. He was too interested to remember his own part --something which could not often be said of Sweetwater.

Meantime, the coroner had collected his thoughts. With an apology for the extremely personal nature of his inquiry, he asked Mr. Brotherson if he would object to giving him some further details of his acquaintance with Miss Challoner; where he first met her and under what circumstances their friendship had developed.

"Not at all," was the ready reply. "I have nothing to conceal in the matter. I only wish that her father were present that he might listen to the recital of my acquaintance with his daughter. He might possibly understand her better and regard with more leniency the presumption into which I was led by my ignorance of the pride inherent
in great families."

"Your wish can very easily be gratified," returned the official, pressing an electric button on his desk;

"Mr. Challoner is in the adjoining room." Then, as the door communicating with the room he had mentioned
swung ajar and stood so, Dr. Heath added, without apparent consciousness of the dramatic character of this episode,
"You will not need to raise your voice beyond its natural pitch. He can hear perfectly from where he sits."

"Thank you. I am glad to speak in his presence," came in undisturbed self-possession from this not easily
surprised witness. "I shall relate the facts exactly as they occurred, adding nothing and concealing nothing. If I
mistook my position, or Miss Challoner's position, it is not for me to apologise. I never hid my business from her,
nor the moderate extent of my fortune. If she knew me at all, she knew me for what I am; a man of the people who
honors in work and who has risen by it to a position somewhat unique in this city. I feel no lack of equality even
with such a woman as Miss Challoner."

A most unnecessary preamble, no doubt, and of doubtful efficacy in smoothing his way to a correct
understanding with the deeply bereaved father. But he looked so handsome as he thus asserted himself and made so
much of his inches and the noble poise of his head—though cold of eye and always cold of manner—that those who
saw, as well as heard him, forgave this display of egotism in consideration of its honesty and the dignity it imparted
to his person.

"I first met Miss Challoner in the Berkshires," he began, after a moment of quiet listening for any possible sound
from the other room. 'I had been on the tramp, and had stopped at one of the great hotels for a seven days' rest. I will
acknowledge that I chose this spot at the instigation of a relative who knew my tastes and how perfectly they might
be gratified there. That I should mingle with the guests may not have been in his thought, any more than it was in
mine at the beginning of my stay. The panorama of beauty spread out before me on every side was sufficient in itself
for my enjoyment, and might have continued so to the end if my attention had not been very forcibly drawn on one
memorable morning to a young lady—Miss Challoner—by the very earnest look she gave me as I was crossing the
office from one verandah to another. I must insist on this look, even if it shock the delicacy of my listeners, for
without the interest it awakened in me, I might not have noticed the blush with which she turned aside to join her
friends on the verandah. It was an overwhelming blush which could not have sprung from any slight embarrassment,
and, though I hate the pretensions of those egotists who see in a woman's smile more than it by right conveys, I
could not help being moved by this display of feeling in one so gifted with every grace and attribute of the perfect
woman. With less caution than I usually display, I approached the desk where she had been standing and, meeting
the eyes of the clerk, asked the young lady's name. He gave it, and waited for me to express the surprise he expected
it to evoke. But I felt none and showed none. Other feelings had seized me. I had heard of this gracious woman from
many sources, in my life among the suffering masses of New York, and now that I had seen her and found her to be
not only my ideal of personal loveliness but seemingly approachable and not uninterested in myself, I allowed my
fancy to soar and my heart to become touched. A fact which the clerk now confided to me naturally deepened the
impression. Miss Challoner had seen my name in the guest-book and asked to have me pointed out to her. Perhaps
she had heard my name spoken in the same quarter where I had heard hers. We have never exchanged confidences
on the subject, and I cannot say. I can only give you my reason for the interest I felt in Miss Challoner and why I
forgot, in the glamour of this episode, the aims and purposes of a not unambitious life and the distance which the
world and the so-called aristocratic class put between a woman of her wealth and standing and a simple worker like
myself.

"I must be pardoned. She had smiled upon me once, and she smiled again. Days before we were formally
presented, I caught her softened look turned my way, as we passed each other in hall or corridor. We were friends,
or so it appeared to me, before ever a word passed between us, and when fortune favoured us and we were duly
introduced, our minds met in a strange sympathy which made this one interview a memorable one to me. Unhappily,
as I then considered it, this was my last day at the hotel, and our conversation, interrupted frequently by passing
acquaintances, was never resumed. I exchanged a few words with her by way of good-bye but nothing more. I came
to New York, and she remained in Lenox. A month after and she too came to New York."

"This good-bye—do you remember it? The exact language, I mean?"

"I do; it made a great impression on me. 'I shall hope for our further acquaintance,' she said. 'We have one very
strong interest in common.' And if ever a human face spoke eloquently, it was hers at that moment. The interest, as I
understood it, was our mutual sympathy for our toiling, half-starved, down-trodden brothers and sisters in the lower
streets of this city; but the eloquence— that I probably mistook. I thought it sprang from personal interest, and it gave
me courage to pursue the intention which had taken the place of every other feeling and ambition by which I had
hitherto been moved. Here was a woman in a thousand; one who could make a man of me indeed. If she could
ignore the social gulf between us, I felt free to take the leap. Cowardice had never been a fault of mine. But I was no
fool even then. I realised that I must first let her see the manner of man I was and what life meant to me and must
mean to her if the union I contemplated should become an actual fact. I wrote letters to her, but I did not give her my address or even request a reply. I was not ready for any word from her. I am not like other men and I could wait. And I did, for weeks, then I suddenly appeared at her hotel."

The change of voice--the bitterness which he infused into this final sentence made every one look up. Hitherto he had spoken calmly, almost monotonously, as if no present heart-beat responded to this tale of vanished love; but with the words, "Then I suddenly appeared at her hotel," he showed himself human again, and betrayed a passion which though curbed was of the fiery quality, befitting his extraordinary attributes of mind and person.

"This was when?" put in Dr. Heath, anxious to bridge the pause which must have been very painful to the listening father.

"The week after Thanksgiving. I did not see her the first day, and only casually the second. But she knew I was in the building, and when I came upon her one evening seated at the very desk in the mezzanine which we all have such bitter cause to remember, I could not forbear expressing myself in a way she could not misunderstand. The result was of a kind to drive a man like myself to an extremity of self-condemnation and rage. She rose up as if insulted, and flung me one sentence and one sentence only before she hailed the elevator and left my presence. A cur could not have been dismissed with less ceremony."

"That is not like my daughter. What was the sentence you allude to? Let me hear the very words." Mr. Challoner had come forward and now stood awaiting his reply, a dignified but pathetic figure, which all must view with respect.

"I hate the memory of them, but since you demand it, I will repeat them just as they fell from her lips," was Mr. Brotherson's bitter retort. "She said, 'You of all men should recognise the unseemliness of these proposals. Had your letters given me any hint of the feelings you have just expressed, you would never have had this opportunity of approaching me.' That was all; but her indignation was scathing. Ladies who have supped exclusively off silver, show a fine scorn for the common ware of the cottager."

Mr. Challoner bowed. "There is some mistake," said he. "My daughter might be averse to your addresses, but she would never show indignation to any aspirant for her hand, simply on account of extraneous conditions. She had wide sympathies--wider than I often approved. Something in your conduct or the confidence you showed shocked her nicer sense; not your lack of the luxuries she often misprised. This much I feel obliged to say, out of justice to her character, which was uniformly considerate."

"You have seen her with men of her own world and yours," was the harsh response. "She had another side to her nature for the man of a different sphere. And it killed my love--that you can see --and led to my sending her the injudicious letter with which you have confronted me. The hurt bull utters one bellow before he dies. I bellowed, and bellowed loudly, but I did not die. I'm my own man still and mean to remain so."

The assertive boldness--some would call it bravado--with which he thus finished the story of his relations with the dead heiress, seemed to be more than Mr. Challoner could stand. With a look of extreme pain and perplexity he vanished from the doorway, and it fell to Dr. Heath to inquire:

"Is this letter--a letter of threat you will remember--the only communication which passed between you and Miss Challoner after this unfortunate passage of arms at the Clermont?"

"Yes. I had no wish to address her again. I had exhausted in this one outburst whatever humiliation I felt."

"And she? Did she give no sign, make you no answer?"

"None whatever." Then, as if he found it impossible to hide this hurt to his pride, "She did not even seem to consider me worthy the honour of an added rebuke. Such arrogance is, no doubt, commendable in a Challoner."

This time his bitterness did not pass unrebuked by the coroner:

"Remember the grey hairs of the only Challoner who can hear you, and respect his grief."

Mr. Brotherson bowed.

"I have finished," said he. "I shall have nothing more to say on the subject." And he drew himself up in expectation of the dismissal he evidently thought pending.

But the coroner was not done with him by any means. He had a theory in regard to this lamentable suicide which he hoped to establish by this man's testimony, and, in pursuit of this plan, he not only motioned to Mr. Brotherson to reseat himself, but began at once to open a fresh line of examination by saying:

"You will pardon me, if I press this matter. I have been given to understand that notwithstanding your break with Miss Challoner, you have kept up your visits to the Clermont and were even on the spot at the time of her death."

"On the spot?"

"In the hotel, I mean."

"There you are right; I was in the hotel."

"At the time of her death?"

"Very near the time. I remember hearing some disturbance in the lobby behind me, just as I was passing out at
the Broadway entrance."

"You did, and did not return?"

"Why should I return? I am not a man of much curiosity. There was no reason why I should connect a sudden alarm in the lobby of the Clermont with any cause of special interest to myself."

This was so true and the look which accompanied the words was so frank that the coroner hesitated a moment before he said:

"Certainly not, unless--well, to be direct, unless you had just seen Miss Challoner and knew her state of mind and what was likely to follow your abrupt departure."

"I had no interview with Miss Challoner."

"But you saw her? Saw her that evening and just before the accident?"

Sweetwater’s papers rattled; it was the only sound to be heard in that moment of silence. Then--"What do you mean by those words?" inquired Mr. Brotherson, with studied composure. "I have said that I had no interview with Miss Challoner. Why do you ask me then, if I saw her?"

"Because I believe that you did. From a distance possibly, but yet directly and with no possibility of mistake."

"Do you put that as a question?"

"I do. Did you see her figure or face that night?"

"I did."

Nothing—not even the rattling of Sweetwater’s papers—disturbed the silence which followed this admission.

"From where?" Dr. Heath asked at last.

"From a point far enough away to make any communication between us impossible. I do not think you will require me to recall the exact spot."

"If it were one which made it possible for her to see you as clearly as you could see her, I think it would be very advisable for you to say so."

"It was--such--a spot."

"Then I think I can locate it for you, or do you prefer to locate it yourself?"

"I will locate it myself. I had hoped not to be called upon to mention what I cannot but consider a most unfortunate coincidence. As a gentleman you will understand my reticence and also why it is a matter of regret to me that with an acumen worthy of your position, you should have discovered a fact which, while it cannot explain Miss Challoner's death, will drag our little affair before the public, and possibly give it a prominence in some minds which I am sure does not belong to it. I met Miss Challoner's eye for one instant from the top of the little staircase running up to the mezzanine. I had yielded thus far to an impulse I had frequently combated, to seek by another interview to retrieve the bad effect which must have been made upon her by my angry note. I knew that she frequently wrote letters in the mezzanine at this hour, and got as far as the top of the staircase in my effort to join her. But got no further. When I saw her on her feet, with her face turned my way, I remembered the scorn with which she had received my former heart-felt proposals and, without taking another step forward, I turned away from her and fled down the steps and so out of the building by the main entrance. She saw me, for her hand flew up with a startled gesture, but I cannot think that my presence on the same floor with her could have caused her to strike the blow which terminated her life. Why should I? No woman sacrifices her life out of mere regret for the disdain she has shown a man she has taken no pains to understand."

His tone and his attitude seemed to invite the concurrence of Dr. Heath in this statement. But the richness of the one and the grace of the other showed the handsome speaker off to such advantage that the coroner was rather inclined to consider how a woman, even of Miss Challoner's fine taste and careful breeding, might see in such a situation much for regret, if not for active despair and the suicidal act. He gave no evidence of his thought, however, but followed up the one admission made by Mr. Brotherson which he and others must naturally view as of the first importance.

"You saw Miss Challoner lift her hand, you say. Which hand, and what was in it? Anything?"

"She lifted her right hand, but it would be impossible for me to tell you whether there was anything in it or not. I simply saw the movement before I turned away. It looked like one of alarm to me. I felt that she had some reason for this. She could not know that it was in repentance I came rather than in fulfilment of my threat."

A sigh from the adjoining room. Mr. Brotherson rose, as he heard it, and in doing so met the clear eye of Sweetwater fixed upon his own. Its language was, no doubt, peculiar and it seemed to fascinate him for a moment, for he started as if to approach the detective, but forsook this intention almost immediately, and addressing the coroner, gravely remarked:

"Her death following so quickly upon this abortive attempt of mine at an interview startled me by its coincidence as much as it does you. If in the weakness of her woman’s nature, it was more than this—if the scorn she had previously shown me was a cloak she instinctively assumed to hide what she was not ready to disclose, my remorse
will be as great as any one here could wish. But the proof of all this will have to be very convincing before my present convictions will yield to it. Some other and more poignant source will have to be found for that instant's impulsive act than is supplied by this story of my unfortunate attachment."

Dr. Heath was convinced, but he was willing to concede something to the secret demand made upon him by Sweetwater, who was bundling up his papers with much clatter.

Looking up with a smile which had elements in it he was hardly conscious of perhaps himself, he asked in an off-hand way:

"Then why did you take such pains to wash your hands of the affair the moment you had left the hotel?"
"I do not understand."
"You passed around the corner into--street, did you not?"
"Very likely. I could go that way as well as another."
"And stopped at the first lamp-post?"
"Oh, I see. Someone saw that childish action of mine."
"What did you mean by it?"
"Just what you have suggested. I did go through the pantomime of washing my hands of an affair I considered definitely ended. I had resisted an irrepressible impulse to see and talk with Miss Challoner again, and was pleased with my firmness. Unaware of the tragic blow which had just fallen, I was full of self-congratulations at my escape from the charm which had lured me back to this hotel again and again in spite of my better judgment, and I wished to symbolise my relief by an act of which I was, in another moment, ashamed. Strange that there should have been a witness to it. (Here he stole a look at Sweetwater.) Stranger still, that circumstances by the most extraordinary of coincidences, should have given so unforeseen a point to it."

"You are right, Mr. Brotherson. The whole occurrence is startling and most strange. But life is made up of the unexpected, as none know better than we physicians, whether our practice be of a public or private character."

As Mr. Brotherson left the room, the curiosity to which he had yielded once before, led him to cast a glance of penetrating inquiry behind him full at Sweetwater, and if either felt embarrassment, it was not the hunted but the hunter.

But the feeling did not last.
"I've simply met the strongest man I've ever encountered," was Sweetwater's encouraging comment to himself. "All the more glory if I can find a joint in his armour or a hidden passage to his cold, secretive heart."

XI

ALIKE IN ESSENTIALS

"Mr. Gryce, I am either a fool or the luckiest fellow going. You must decide which."

The aged detective, thus addressed, laid down his evening paper and endeavoured to make out the dim form he could just faintly discern standing between him and the library door.

"Sweetwater, is that you?"
"No one else. Sweetwater, the fool, or Sweetwater, much too wise for his own good. I don't know which. Perhaps you can find out and tell me."

A grunt from the region of the library table, then the sarcastic remark:
"I'm just in the mood to settle that question. This last failure to my account ought to make me an excellent judge of another's folly. I've meddled with the old business for the last time, Sweetwater. You'll have to go it lone from now on. The Department has no more work for Ebenezar Gryce, or rather Ebenezar Gryce will make no more fool attempts to please them. Strange that a man don't know when his time has come to quit. I remember low I once scored Yeardsley for hanging on after he had lost his grip; and here am I doing the same thing. But what's the matter with you? Speak out, my boy. Something new in the wind?"
"No, Mr. Gryce; nothing new. It's the same old business. But, if what I suspect is true, this same old business offers opportunities for some very interesting and unusual effort. You're not satisfied with the coroner's verdict in the Challoner case?"

"No. I'm satisfied with nothing that leaves all ends dangling. Suicide was not proved. It seemed the only presumption possible, but it was not proved. There was no blood-stain on that cutter-point."

"Nor any evidence that it had ever been there."
"No. I'm not proud of the chain which lacks a link where it should be strongest."
"We shall never supply that link."
"I quite agree with you."
"That chain we must throw away."
"And forge another?"

Sweetwater approached and sat down.
"Yes; I believe we can do it; yet I have only one indisputable fact for a starter. That is why I want you to tell me whether I'm growing daft or simply adventurous. Mr. Gryce, I don't trust Brotherson. He has pulled the wool over Dr. Heath's eyes and almost over those of Mr. Challoner. But he can't pull it over mine. Though he should tell a story ten times more plausible than the one with which he has satisfied the coroner's jury, I would still listen to him with more misgiving than confidence. Yet I have caught him in no misstatement, and his eye is steadier than my own. Perhaps it is simply a deeply rooted antipathy on my part, or the rage one feels at finding he has placed his finger on the wrong man. Again it may be--"

"What, Sweetwater?"

"A well-founded distrust. Mr. Gryce, I'm going to ask you a question."

"Ask away. Ask fifty if you want to."

"No; the one may involve fifty, but it is big enough in itself to hold our attention for a while. Did you ever hear of a case before, that in some of its details was similar to this?"

"No, it stands alone. That's why it is so puzzling."

"You forget. The wealth, beauty and social consequence of the present victim has blinded you to the strong resemblance which her case bears to one you know, in which the sufferer had none of the worldly advantages of Miss Challoner. I allude to--"

"Wait! the washerwoman in Hicks Street! Sweetwater, what have you got up your sleeve? You do mean that Brooklyn washerwoman, don't you?"

"The same. The Department may have forgotten it, but I haven't. Mr. Gryce, there's a startling similarity in the two cases if you study the essential features only. Startling, I assure you."

"Yes, you are right there. But what if there is? We were no more successful in solving that case than we have been in solving this. Yet you look and act like a hound which has struck a hot scent. The young man smoothed his features with an embarrassed laugh.

"I shall never learn," said he, "not to give tongue till the hunt is fairly started. If you will excuse me we'll first make sure of the similarity I have mentioned. Then I'll explain myself. I have some notes here, made at the time it was decided to drop the Hicks Street case as a wholly inexplicable one. As you know, I never can bear to say 'die,' and I sometimes keep such notes as a possible help in case any such unfinished matter should come up again. Shall I read them?"

"Do. Twenty years ago it would not have been necessary. I should have remembered every detail of an affair so puzzling. But my memory is no longer entirely reliable. So fire away, my boy, though I hardly see your purpose or what real bearing the affair in Hicks Street has upon the Clermont one. A poor washerwoman and the wealthy Miss Challoner! True, they were not unlike in their end."

"The connection will come later," smiled the young detective, with that strange softening of his features which made one at times forget his extreme plainness. "I'm sure you will not consider the time lost if I ask you to consider the comparison I am about to make, if only as a curiosity in criminal annals."

And he read:

"On the afternoon of December Fourth, 1910, the strong and persistent screaming of a young child in one of the rooms of a rear tenement in Hicks Street, Brooklyn, drew the attention of some of the inmates and led them, after several ineffectual efforts to gain an entrance, to the breaking in of the door which had been fastened on the inside by an old-fashioned door-button.

"The tenant whom all knew for an honest, hard-working woman, had not infrequently fastened her door in this manner, in order to safeguard her child who was abnormally active and had a way of rattling the door open when it was not thus secured. But she had never refused to open before, and the child's cries were pitiful.

"This was no longer a matter of wonder, when, the door having been wrenched from its hinges, they all rushed in. Across a tub of steaming clothes lifted upon a bench in the open window, they saw the body of this good woman, lying inert and seemingly dead; the frightened child tugging at her skirts. She was of a robust make, fleshy and fair, and had always been considered a model of health and energy, but at the sight of her helpless figure, thus stricken while at work, the one cry was 'A stroke! till she had been lifted off and laid upon the floor. Then some discoloration in the water at the bottom of the tub led to a closer examination of her body, and the discovery of a bullet-hole in her breast directly over the heart.

"As she had been standing with face towards the window, all crowded that way to see where the shot had come from. As they were on the fourth storey it could not have come from the court upon which the room looked. It could only have come from the front tenement, towering up before them some twenty feet away. A single window of the innumerable ones confronting them stood open, and this was the one directly opposite.

"Nobody was to be seen there or in the room beyond, but during the excitement, one man ran off to call the police and another to hunt up the janitor and ask who occupied this room.
**His reply threw them all into confusion. The tenant of that room was the best, the quietest and most respectable man in either building.**

**Then he must be simply careless and the shot an accidental one. A rush was made for the stairs and soon the whole building was in an uproar. But when this especial room was reached, it was found locked and on the door a paper pinned up, on which these words were written: Gone to New York. Will be back at 6:30! Words that recalled a circumstance to the janitor. He had seen the gentleman go out an hour before. This terminated all inquiry in this direction, though some few of the excited throng were for battering down this door just as they had the other one. But they were overruled by the janitor, who saw no use in such wholesale destruction, and presently the arrival of the police restored order and limited the inquiry to the rear building, where it undoubtedly belonged.'

"Mr. Gryce," (here Sweetwater laid by his notes that he might address the old gentleman more directly), "I was with the boys when they made their first official investigation. This is why you can rely upon the facts as here given. I followed the investigation closely and missed nothing which could in any way throw light on the case. It was a mysterious one from the first, and lost nothing by further inquiry into the details.

"The first fact to startle us as we made our way up through the crowd which blocked halls and staircases was this:--A doctor had been found and, though he had been forbidden to make more than a cursory examination of the body till the coroner came, he had not hesitated to declare after his first look, that the wound had not been made by a bullet but by some sharp and slender weapon thrust home by a powerful hand. (You mark that, Mr. Gryce.) As this seemed impossible in face of the fact that the door had been found buttoned on the inside, we did not give much credit to his opinion and began our work under the obvious theory of an accidental discharge of some gun from one of the windows across the court. But the doctor was nearer right than we supposed. When the coroner came to look into the matter, he discovered that the wound was not only too small to have been made by the ordinary bullet, but that there was no bullet to be found in the woman's body or anywhere else. Her heart had been reached by a thrust and not by a shot from a gun. Mr. Gryce, have you not heard a startling repetition of this report in a case nearer at hand?"

"But to go back. This discovery, so important if true, was as yet--that is, at the time of our entering the room,--limited to the off-hand declaration of an irresponsible physician, but the possibility it involved was of so astonishing a nature that it influenced us unconsciously in our investigation and led us almost immediately into a consideration of the difficulties attending an entrance into, as well as an escape from, a room situated as this was.

"Up three flights from the court, with no communication with the adjoining rooms save through a door guarded on both sides by heavy pieces of furniture no one person could handle, the hall door buttoned on the inside, and the fire-escape some fifteen feet to the left, this room of death appeared to be as removed from the approach of a murderous outsider as the spot in the writing-room of the Clermont where Miss Challoner fell.

"Otherwise, the place presented the greatest contrast possible to that scene of splendour and comfort. I had not entered the Clermont at that time, and no, such comparison could have struck my mind. But I have thought of it since, and you, with your experience, will not find it difficult to picture the room where this poor woman lived and worked. Bare walls, with just a newspaper illustration pinned up here and there, a bed--tragically occupied at this moment--a kitchen stove on which a boiler, half-filled with steaming clothes still bubbled and foamed,--an old bureau,--a large pine wardrobe against an inner door which we later found to have been locked for months, and the key lost,--some chairs--and most pronounced of all, because of its position directly before the window, a pine bench supporting a wash-tub of the old sort.

"As it was here the woman fell, this tub naturally received the closest examination. A board projected from its further side, whither it had evidently been pushed by the weight of her falling body; and from its top hung a wet cloth, marking with its lugubrious drip on the boards beneath the first heavy moments of silence which is the natural accompaniment of so serious a survey. On the floor to the right lay a half-used cake of soap just as it had slipped from her hand. The window was closed, for the temperature was at the freezing-point, but it had been found up, and it was put up now to show the height at which it had then stood. As we all took our look at the house wall opposite, a sound of shouting came up from below. A dozen children were sliding on barrel staves down a slope of heaped-up snow. They had been engaged in this sport all the afternoon and were our witnesses later that no one had made a hazardous escape by means of the ladder of the fire-escape, running, as I have said, at an almost unattainable distance towards the left.

"Of her own child, whose cries had roused the neighbours, nothing was to be seen. The woman in the extreme rear had carried it off to her room; but when we came to see it later, no doubt was felt by any of us that this child was too young to talk connectedly, nor did I ever hear that it ever said anything which could in any way guide investigation.

"And that is as far as we ever got. The coroner's jury brought in a verdict of death by means of a stab from some unknown weapon in the hand of a person also unknown, but no weapon was ever found, nor was it ever settled how
the attack could have been made or the murderer escape under the conditions described. The woman was poor, her friends few, and the case seemingly inexplicable. So after creating some excitement by its peculiarities, it fell of its own weight. But I remembered it, and in many a spare hour have tried to see my way through the non-thoroughfare it presented. But quite in vain. To-day, the road is as blind as ever, but--" here Sweetwater's face sharpened and his eyes burned as he leaned closer and closer to the older detective--"but this second case, so unlike the first in non-essentials but so exactly like it in just those points which make the mystery, has dropped a thread from its tangled skein into my hand, which may yet lead us to the heart of both. Can you guess--have you guessed--what this thread is? But how could you without the one clew I have not given you? Mr. Gryce, the tenement where this occurred is the same I visited the other night in search of Mr. Brotherson. And the man characterised at that time by the janitor as the best, the quietest and most respectable tenant in the whole building, and the one you remember whose window opened directly opposite the spot where this woman lay dead, was Mr. Dunn himself, or, in other words, our late redoubtable witness, Mr. Orlando Brotherson."

XII

Mr. GRYCE FINDS AN ANTIDOTE FOR OLD AGE

"I thought I should make you sit up. I really calculated upon doing so, sir. Yes, I have established the plain fact that this Brotherson was near to, if not in the exact line of the scene of crime in each of these extraordinary and baffling cases. A very odd coincidence, is it not?" was the dry conclusion of our eager young detective.

"Odd enough if you are correct in your statement. But I thought it was conceded that the man Brotherson was not personally near,--was not even in the building at the time of the woman's death in Hicks Street; that he was out and had been out for hours, according to the janitor."

"And so the janitor thought, but he didn't quite know his man. I'm not sure that I do. But I mean to make his acquaintance and make it thoroughly before I let him go. The hero--well, I will say the possible hero of two such adventures--deserves some attention from one so interested in the abnormal as myself."

"Sweetwater, how came you to discover that Mr. Dunn of this ramshackle tenement in Hicks Street was identical with the elegantly equipped admirer of Miss Challoner?"

"Just this way. The night before Miss Challoner's death I was brooding very deeply over the Hicks Street case. It had so possessed me that I had taken this street in on my way from Flatbush; as if staring at the house and its swarming courtyard was going to settle any such question as that! I walked by the place and I looked up at the windows. No inspiration. Then I sauntered back and entered the house with the fool intention of crossing the courtyard and wandering into the rear building where the crime had occurred. But my attention was diverted and my mind changed by seeing a man coming down the stairs before me, of so fine a figure that I involuntarily stopped to look at him. Had he moved a little less carelessly, had he worn his workman's clothes a little less naturally, I should have thought him some college bred man out on a slumming expedition. But he was entirely too much at home and too unconscious of his jeans for any such conclusion on my part, and when he had passed out I had enough curiosity to ask who he was.

"My interest, you may believe, was in no wise abated when I learned that he was that highly respectable tenant whose window had been open at the time when half the inmates of the two buildings had rushed up to his door, only to find a paper on it displaying these words: Gone to New York; will be back at 6:30. Had he returned at that hour? I don't think anybody had ever asked; and what reason had I for such interference now? But an idea once planted in my brain sticks tight, and I kept thinking of this man all the way to the Bridge. Instinctively and quite against my will, I found myself connecting him with some previous remembrance in which I seemed to see his tall form and strong features under the stress of some great excitement. But there my memory stopped, till suddenly as I was entering the subway, it all came back to me. I had met him the day I went with the boys to investigate the case in Hicks Street. He was coming down the staircase of the rear tenement then, very much as I had just seen him coming down the one in front. Only the Dunn of to-day seemed to have all his wits about him, while the huge fellow who brushed so rudely by me on that occasion had the peculiar look of a man struggling with horror or some other grave agitation. This was not surprising, of course, under the circumstances. I had met more than one man and woman in those halls who had worn the same look; but none of them had put up a sign on his door that he had left for New York and would not be back till 6:30, and then changed his mind so suddenly that he was back in the tenement at three, sharing the curiosity and the terrors of its horrified inmates.

"But the discovery, while possibly suggestive, was not of so pressing a nature as to demand instant action; and more immediate duties coming up, I let the matter slip from my mind, to be brought up again the next day, you may well believe, when all the circumstances of the death at the Clermont came to light and I found myself confronted by a problem very nearly the counterpart of the one then occupying me.

"But I did not see any real connection between the two cases, until, in my hunt for Mr. Brotherson, I came upon the following facts: that he was not always the gentleman he appeared: that the apartment in which he was supposed
to live was not his own but a friend's; and that he was only there by spells. When he was there, he dressed like a prince and it was while so clothed he ate his meals in the cafe of the Hotel Clermont.

"But there were times when he had been seen to leave this apartment in a very different garb, and while there was no one to insinuate that he was slack in paying his debts or was given to dissipation or any overt vice, it was generally conceded by such as casually knew him, that there was a mysterious side to his life which no one understood. His friend--a seemingly candid and open-minded gentleman--explained these contradictions by saying that Mr. Brotherson was a humanitarian and spent much of his time in the slums. That while so engaged he naturally dressed to suit the occasion, and if he was to be criticised at all, it was for his zeal which often led him to extremes and kept him to his task for days, during which time none of his up-town friends saw him. Then this enthusiastic gentleman called him the great intellectual light of the day, and--well, if ever I want a character I shall take pains to insinuate myself into the good graces of this Mr. Conway.

"Of Brotherson himself I saw nothing. He had come to Mr. Conway's apartment the night before--the night of Miss Challoner's death, you understand but had remained only long enough to change his clothes. Where he went afterwards is unknown to Mr. Conway, nor can he tell us when to look for his return. When he does show up, my message will be given, etc., etc. I have no fault to find with Mr. Conway.

"But I had an idea in regard to this elusive Brotherson. I had heard enough about him to be mighty sure that together with his other accomplishments he possessed the golden tongue and easy speech of an orator. Also, that his tendencies were revolutionary and that for all his fine clothes and hankering after table luxuries and the like, he cherished a spite against wealth which made his words under certain moods cut like a knife. But there was another man, known to us of the ---- Precinct, who had very nearly these same gifts, and this man was going to speak at a secret meeting that very evening. This we had been told by a disgruntled member of the Associated Brotherhood. Suspecting Brotherson, I had this prospective speaker described, and thought I recognised my man. But I wanted to be positive in my identification, so I took Anderson with me, and--but I'll cut that short. We didn't see the orator and that 'go' went for nothing; but I had another string to my bow in the shape of the workman Dunn who also answered to the description which had been given me; so I lugged poor Anderson over into Hicks Street.

"It was late for the visit I proposed, but not too late, if Dunn was also the orator who, surprised by a raid I had not been let into, would be making for his home, if only to establish an alibi. The subway was near, and I calculated on his using it, but we took a taxicab and so arrived in Hicks Street some few minutes before him. The result you know. Anderson recognised the man as the one whom he saw washing his hands in the snow outside of the Clermont, and the man, seeing himself discovered, owned himself to be Brotherson and made no difficulty about accompanying us the next day to the coroner's office.

"You have heard how he bore himself; what his explanations were and how completely they fitted in with the preconceived notions of the Inspector and the District Attorney. In consequence, Miss Challoner's death is looked upon as a suicide--the impulsive act of a woman who sees the man she may have scouted but whom she secretly loves, turn away from her in all probability forever. A weapon was in her hand--she impulsively used it, and another deplorable suicide was added to the melancholy list. Had I put in my oar at the conference held in the coroner's office; had I recalled to Dr. Heath the curious case of Mrs. Spotts, and then identified Brotherson as the man whose window fronted hers from the opposite tenement, a diversion might have been created and the outcome been different. But I feared the experiment. I'm not sufficiently in with the Chief as yet, nor yet with the Inspector. They might not have called me a fool--you may; but that's different--and they might have listened, but it would doubtless have been with an air I could not have held up against, with that fellow's eyes fixed mockingly on mine. For he and I are pitted for a struggle, and I do not want to give him the advantage of even a momentary triumph. He's the most complete master of himself of any man I ever met, and it will take the united brain and resolution of the whole force to bring him to book--if he ever is brought to book, which I doubt. What do you think about it?"

"That you have given me an antidote against old age," was the ringing and unexpected reply, as the thoughtful, half-puzzled aspect of the old man yielded impulsively to a burst of his early enthusiasm. "If we can get a good grip on the thread you speak of, and can work ourselves along by it, though it be by no more than an inch at a time, we shall yet make our way through this labyrinth of undoubted crime and earn for ourselves a triumph which will make some of these raw and inexperienced young fellows about us stare. Sweetwater, coincidences are possible. We run upon them every day. But coincidence in crime! that should make work for a detective, and we are not afraid of work. There's my hand for my end of the business."

"And here's mine."

Next minute the two heads were closer than ever together, and the business had begun.

XIII

TIME, CIRCUMSTANCE, AND A VILLAIN'S HEART

"Our first difficulty is this. We must prove motive. Now, I do not think it will be so very hard to show that this
Brotherson cherished feelings of revenge towards Miss Challoner. But I have to acknowledge right here and now that the most skilful and vigorous pumping of the janitor and such other tenants of the Hicks Street tenement as I have dared to approach, fails to show that he has ever held any communication with Mrs. Spotts, or even knew of her existence until her remarkable death attracted his attention. I have spent all the afternoon over this, and with no result. A complete break in the chain at the very start.

"Humph! we will set that down, then, as so much against us."

"The next, and this is a bitter pill too, is the almost insurmountable difficulty already recognised of determining how a man, without approaching his victim, could manage to inflict a mortal stab in her breast. No cloak of complete invisibility has yet been found, even by the cleverest criminals."

"True. The problem is such as a nightmare offers. For years my dreams have been haunted by a gnome who proposes just such puzzles."

"But there's an answer to everything, and I'm sure there's an answer to this. Remember his business. He's an inventor, with startling ideas. So much I've seen for myself. You may stretch probabilities a little in his case; and with this conceded, we may add by way of off-set to the difficulties you mention, coincidences of time and circumstance, and his villainous heart. Oh, I know that I am prejudiced; but wait and see! Miss Challoner was well rid of him even at the cost of her life."

"She loved him. Even her father believes that now. Some lately discovered letters have come to light to prove that she was by no means so heart free as he supposed. One of her friends, it seems, has also confided to him that once, while she and Miss Challoner were sitting together, she caught Miss Challoner in the act of scribbling capitals over a sheet of paper. They were all B's with the exception of here and there a neatly turned O, and when her friend twitted her with her fondness for these two letters, and suggested a pleasing monogram, Miss Challoner answered, 'O. B. (transferring the letters, as you see) are the initials of the finest man in the world.'"

"Gosh! has he heard this story?"

"Who?"

"The gentleman in question."

"Mr. Brotherson?"

"Yes."

"I don't think so. It was told me in confidence."

"Told you, Mr. Gryce? Pardon my curiosity."

"By Mr. Challoner."

"Oh! by Mr. Challoner."

"He is greatly distressed at having the disgraceful suggestion of suicide attached to his daughter's name. Notwithstanding the circumstances,—not—withstanding his full recognition of her secret predilection for a man of whom he had never heard till the night of her death, he cannot believe that she struck the blow she did, intentionally. He sent for me in order to inquire if anything could be done to reinstate her in public opinion. He dared not insist that another had wielded the weapon which laid her low so suddenly, but he asked if, in my experience, it had never been known that a woman, hyper-sensitive to some strong man's magnetic influence, should so follow his thought as to commit an act which never could have arisen in her own mind, uninfluenced. He evidently does not like Brotherson either."

"And what--what did you--say?" asked Sweetwater, with a halting utterance and his face full of thought.

"I simply quoted the latest authority on hypnotism that no person even in hypnotic sleep could be influenced by another to do what was antagonistic to his natural instincts."

"Latest authority. That doesn't mean a final one. Supposing that it was hypnotism! But that wouldn't account for Mrs. Spotts' death. Her wound certainly was not a self-inflicted one."

"How can you be sure?"

"There was no weapon found in the room, or in the court. The snow was searched and the children too. No weapon, Mr. Gryce, not even a paper-cutter. Besides--but how did Mr. Challoner take what you said? Was he satisfied with this assurance?"

"He had to be. I didn't dare to hold out any hope based on so unsubstantial a theory. But the interview had this effect upon me. If the possibility remains of fixing guilt elsewhere than on Miss Challoner's inconsiderate impulse, I am ready to devote any amount of time and strength to the work. To see this grieving father relieved from the worst part of his burden is worth some effort and now you know why I have listened so eagerly to you. Sweetwater, I will go with you to the Superintendent. We may not gain his attention and again we may. If we don't—but we won't cross that bridge prematurely. When will you be ready for this business?"

"I must be at Headquarters to-morrow."

"Good, then let it be to-morrow. A taxicab, Sweetwater. The subway for the young. I can no longer manage the
"It is true; there seems to be something extraordinary in the coincidence."

Thus Mr. Brotherson, in the presence of the Inspector.

"But that is all there is to it," he easily proceeded. "I knew Miss Challoner and I have already said how much and how little I had to do with her death. The other woman I did not know at all; I did not even know her name. A prosecution based on grounds so flimsy as those you advance would savour of persecution, would it not?"

"I am ready. But what am I called upon to explain? I really cannot see, sir. Knowing nothing more about either case than you do, I fear that I shall not add much to your enlightenment."

"You can tell us why with your seeming culture and obvious means, you choose to spend so much time in a second-rate tenement like the one in Hicks Street."

"Have you seen my room there? It is piled to the ceiling with books. When I was a poor man, I chose the abode suited to my purse and my passion for first-rate reading. As I grew better off, my time became daily more valuable. I have never seen the hour when I felt like moving that precious collection. Besides, I am a man of the people. I like the working class, and am willing to be thought one of them. I can find time to talk to a hard-pushed mechanic as easily as to such members of the moneyed class as I encounter on stray evenings at the Hotel Clermont. I have led--I may say that I am leading--a double life; but of neither am I ashamed, nor have I cause to be. Love drove me to ape the gentleman in the halls of the Clermont; a broad human interest in the work of the world, to live as a fellow among the mechanics of Hicks Street."

"But why make use of one name as a gentleman of leisure and quite a different one as the honest workman?"

"Ah, there you touch upon my real secret. I have a reason for keeping my identity quiet till my invention is completed.".

"A reason connected with your anarchistic tendencies?"

"Possibly." But the word was uttered in a way to carry little conviction. "I am not much of an anarchist," he now took the trouble to declare, with a careless lift of his shoulders. "I like fair play, but I shall never give you much trouble by my manner of insuring it. I have too much at stake. My invention is dearer to me than the overthrow of present institutions. Nothing must stand in the way of its success, not even the satisfaction of inspiring terror in minds shut to every other species of argument. I have uttered my last speech; you can rely on me for that."

"We are glad to hear it, Mr. Dunn. Physical overthrow carries more than the immediate sufferer with it."

If this were meant as an irritant, it did not act successfully. The social agitator, the political demagogue, the orator whose honeyed tones had rung with biting invective in the ears of the United Brotherhood of the Awl, the Plane and the Trowel, simply bowed and calmly waited for the next attack.

Perhaps it was of a nature to surprise even him.

"We have no wish," continued the Inspector, "to probe too closely into concerns seemingly quite removed from the main issue. You say that you are ready, nay more, are even eager to answer all questions. You will probably be anxious then to explain away a discrepancy between your word and your conduct, which has come to our attention. You were known to have expressed the intention of spending the afternoon of Mrs. Spotts' death in New York and were supposed to have done so, yet you were certainly seen in the crowd which invaded that rear building at the first alarm. Are you conscious of possessing a double, or did you fail to cross the river as you expected to?"

"I am glad this has come up." The tone was one of self-congratulation which would have shaken Sweetwater sorely had he been admitted to this unofficial examination. "I have never confided to any one the story of my doings on that unhappy afternoon, because I knew of no one who would take any interest in them. But this is what occurred. I did mean to go to New York and I even started on my walk to the Bridge at the hour mentioned. But I got into a small crowd on the corner of Fulton Street, in which a poor devil who had robbed a vendor's cart of a few oranges, was being hustled about. There was no policeman within sight, and so I busied myself there for a minute paying for the oranges and dragging the poor wretch away into an alley, where I could have the pleasure of seeing him eat them. When I came out of the alley the small crowd had vanished, but a big one was collecting up the street very
near my home. I always think of my books when I see anything suggesting fire, and naturally I returned, and equally naturally, when I heard what had happened, followed the crowd into the court and so up to the poor woman's doorway. But my curiosity satisfied, I returned at once to the street and went to New York as I had planned."

"Do you mind telling us where you went in New York?"

"Not at all. I went shopping. I wanted a certain very fine wire, for an experiment I had on hand, and I found it in a little shop in Fourth Avenue. If I remember rightly, the name over the door was Grippus. Its oddity struck me."

There was nothing left to the Inspector but to dismiss him. He had answered all questions willingly, and with a countenance inexpressive of guile. He even indulged in a parting shot on his own account, as full of frank acceptance of the situation as it was fearless in its attack. As he halted in the doorway before turning his back upon the room, he smiled for the third time as he quietly said:

"I have ceased visiting my friend's apartment in upper New York. If you ever want me again, you will find me amongst my books. If my invention halls and other interests stale, you have furnished me this day with a problem which cannot fail to give continual occupation to my energies. If I succeed in solving it first, I shall be happy to share my knowledge with you. Till then, trust the laws of nature. No man when once on the outside of a door can button it on the inside, nor could any one without the gift of complete invisibility, make a leap of over fifteen feet from the sill of a fourth story window on to an adjacent fire escape, without attracting the attention of some of the many children playing down below."

He was half-way out the door, but his name quickly spoken by the Inspector drew him back.

"Anything more?" he asked.

The Inspector smiled.

"You are a man of considerable analytic power, as I take it, Mr. Brotherson. You must have decided long ago how this woman died."

"Is that a question, Inspector?"

"You may take it as such."

"Then I will allow myself to say that there is but one common-sense view to take of the matter. Miss Challoner's death was due to suicide; so was that of the washerwoman. But there I stop. As for the means--the motive--such mysteries may be within your province but they are totally outside mine! God help us all! The world is full of misery. Again I wish you good-day."

The air seemed to have lost its vitality and the sun its sparkle when he was gone.

"Now, what do you think, Gryce?"

The old man rose and came out of his corner.

"This: that I'm up against the hardest proposition of my lifetime. Nothing in the man's appearance or manner evinces guilt, yet I believe him guilty. I must. Not to, is to strain probability to the point of breakage. But how to reach him is a problem and one of no ordinary nature. Years ago, when I was but little older than Sweetwater, I had just such a conviction concerning a certain man against whom I had even less to work on than we have here. A murder had been committed by an envenomed spring contained in a toy puzzle. I worked upon the conscience of the suspect in that case, by bringing constantly before his eyes a facsimile of that spring. It met him in the folded napkin which he opened at his restaurant dinner. He stumbled upon it in the street, and found it lying amongst his papers at home. I gave him no relief and finally he succumbed. He had been almost driven mad by remorse. But this man has no conscience. If he is not innocent as the day, he's as hard as unquarried marble. He might be confronted with reminders of his crime at every turn without weakening or showing by loss of appetite or interrupted sleep any effect upon his nerves. That's my opinion of the gentleman. He is either that, or a man of uncommon force and self-restraint."

"I'm inclined to believe him the latter."

"And so give the whole matter the go-by?"

"Possibly."

"It will be a terrible disappointment to Sweetwater."

"That's nothing."

"And to me."

"That's different. I'm disposed to consider you, Gryce--after all these years."

"Thank you; I have done the state some service."

"What do you want? You say the mine is unworkable."

"Yes, in a day, or in a week, possibly in a month. But persistence and a protean adaptability to meet his moods might accomplish something. I don't say will, I only say might. If Sweetwater had the job, with unlimited time in which to carry out any plan he may have, or even for a change of plans to suit a changed idea, success might be his, and both time, effort and outlay justified."
"The outlay? I am thinking of the outlay."
"Mr. Challoner will see to that. I have his word that no reasonable amount will daunt him."
"But this Brotherson is suspicious. He has an inventor's secret to hide, if none other. We can't saddle him with a
guy of Sweetwater's appearance and abnormal loquaciousness."
"Not readily, I own. But time will bring counsel. Are you willing to help the boy, to help me and possibly
yourself by this venture in the dark? The Department shan't lose money by it; that's all I can promise."
"But it's a big one. Gryce, you shall have your way. You'll be the only loser if you fail; and you will fail; take my
word for it."

"I wish I could speak as confidently to the contrary, but I can't. I can give you my hand though, Inspector, and
Sweetwater's thanks. I can meet the boy now. An hour ago I didn't know how I was to do it."

XV

THAT'S THE QUESTION

"How many times has he seen you?"
"Twice."
"So that he knows your face and figure?"
"I'm afraid so. He cannot help remembering the man who faced him in his own room."
"That's unfortunate."
"Damned unfortunate; but one must expect some sort of a handicap in a game like this. Before I'm done with
him, he'll look me full in the face and wonder if he's ever seen me before. I wasn't always a detective. I was a
carpenter once, as you know, and I'll take to the tools again. As soon as I'm handy with them I'll hunt up lodgings in
Hicks Street. He may suspect me at first, but he won't long; I'll be such a confounded good workman. I only wish I
hadn't such pronounced features. They've stood awfully in my way, Mr. Gryce. I don't like to talk about my
appearance, but I'm so confounded plain that people remember me. Why couldn't I have had one of those putty faces
which don't mean anything? It would have been a deuced sight more convenient."
"You've done very well as it is."
"But I want to do better. I want to deceive him to his face. He's clever, this same Brotherson, and there's glory to
be got in making a fool of him. Do you think it could be done with a beard? I've never worn a beard. While I'm
settling back into my old trade, I can let the hair grow."
"Do. It'll make you look as weak as water. It'll be blonde, of course."
"And silky and straggling. Charming addition to my beauty. But it'll take half an inch off my nose, and it'll cover
my mouth, which means a lot in my case. Then my complexion! It must be changed naturally. I'll consult a doctor
about that. No sort of make-believe will go with this man. If my eyes look weak, they must really be so. If I walk
slowly and speak huskily, it must be because I cannot help it. I can bear the slight inconvenience of temporary ill-
health in a cause like this; and if necessary the cough will be real, and the headache positive.

"Sweetwater! We'd better give the task to another man--to someone Brotherson has never seen and won't be
suspicious of?"

"He'll be suspicious of everybody who tries to make friends with him now; only a little more so with me; that's
all. But I've got to meet that, and I'll do it by being, temporarily, of course, exactly the man I seem. My health will
not be good for the next few weeks, I'm sure of that. But I'll be a model workman, neat and conscientious with just a
suspicion of dash where dash is needed. He knows the real thing when he sees it, and there's not a fellow living more
alive to shams. I won't be a sham. I'll be it. You'll see."

"But the doubt. Can you do all this in doubt of the issue?"
"No; I must have confidence in the end, and I must believe in his guilt. Nothing else will carry me through. I
must believe in his guilt."
"Yes, that's essential."
"And I do. I never was surer of anything than I am of that. But I'll have the deuce of a time to get evidence
enough for a grand jury. That's plainly to be seen, and that's why I'm so dead set on the business. It's such an even
toss-up."

"I don't call it even. He's got the start of you every way. You can't go to his tenement; the janitor there would
recognise you even if he didn't."

"Now I will give you a piece of good news. They're to have a new janitor next week. I learned that yesterday.
The present one is too easy. He'll be out long before I'm ready to show myself there; and so will the woman who
took care of the poor washerwoman's little child. I'd not have risked her curiosity. Luck isn't all against us. How
does Mr. Challoner feel about it?"

"Not very confident; but willing to give you any amount of rope. Sweetwater, he let me have a batch of letters
written by his daughter which he found in a secret drawer. They are not to be read, or even opened, unless a great
necessity arises. They were written for Brotherson’s eye—or so the father says—but she never sent them; too exuberant perhaps. If you ever want them—I cannot give them to you to-night, and wouldn't if I could,—don't go to Mr. Challoner --you must never be seen at his hotel—and don't come to me, but to the little house in West Twenty-ninth Street, where they will be kept for you, tied up in a package with your name on it. By the way, what name are you going to work under?"
"My mother's—Zugg."
"Good! I'll remember. You can always write or even telephone to Twenty-ninth Street. I'm in constant communication with them there, and it's quite safe."
"Thanks. You're sure the Superintendent is with me?"
"Yes, but not the Inspector. He sees nothing but the victim of a strange coincidence in Orlando Brotherson."
"Again the scales hang even. But they won't remain so. One side is bound to rise. Which? That's the question, Mr. Gryce."

XVI

OPPOSED

There was a new tenant in the Hicks Street tenement. He arrived late one afternoon and was shown two rooms, one in the rear building and another in the front one. Both were on the fourth floor. He demurred at the former, thought it gloomy but finally consented to try it. The other, he said, was too expensive. The janitor—new to the business—was not much taken with him and showed it, which seemed to offend the newcomer, who was evidently an irritable fellow owing to ill health.

However, they came to terms as I have said, and the man went away, promising to send in his belongings the next day. He smiled as he said this and the janitor who had rarely seen such a change take place in a human face, looked uncomfortable for a moment and seemed disposed to make some remark about the room they were leaving. But, thinking better of it, locked the door and led the way downstairs. As the prospective tenant followed, he may have noticed, probably did, that the door they had just left was a new one—the only new thing to be seen in the whole shabby place.

The next night that door was locked on the inside. The young man had taken possession. As he put away the remnants of a meal he had cooked for himself, he cast a look at his surroundings, and imperceptibly sighed. Then he brightened again, and sitting down on his solitary chair, he turned his eyes on the window which, uncurtained and without shade, stared open-mouthed, as it were, at the opposite wall rising high across the court.

In that wall, one window only seemed to interest him and that was on a level with his own. The shade of this window was up, but there was no light back of it and so nothing of the interior could be seen. But his eye remained fixed upon it, while his hand, stretched out towards the lamp burning near him, held itself in readiness to lower the light at a minute's notice.

Did he see only the opposite wall and that unillumined window? Was there no memory of the time when, in a previous contemplation of those dismal panes, he beheld stretching between them and himself, a long, low bench with a plain wooden tub upon it, from which a dripping cloth beat out upon the boards beneath a dismal note, monotonous as the ticking of a clock?

One might judge that such memories were indeed his, from the rapid glance he cast behind him at the place where the bed had stood in those days. It was placed differently now.

But if he saw, and if he heard these suggestions from the past, he was not less alive to the exactions of the present, for, as his glance flew back across the court, his finger suddenly moved and the flame it controlled sputtered and went out. At the same instant, the window opposite sprang into view as the lamp was lit within, and for several minutes the whole interior remained visible --the books, the work-table, the cluttered furniture, and, most interesting of all, its owner and occupant. It was upon the latter that the newcomer fixed his attention, and with an absorption equal to that he saw expressed in the countenance opposite.

But his was the absorption of watchfulness; that of the other of introspection. Mr. Brotherson—(we will no longer call him Dunn even here where he is known by no other name)—had entered the room clad in his heavy overcoat and, not having taken it off before lighting his lamp, still stood with it on, gazing eagerly down at the model occupying the place of honour on the large centre table. He was not touching it,—not at this moment—but that his thoughts were with it, that his whole mind was concentrated on it, was evident to the watcher across the court; and, as this watcher took in this fact and noticed the loving care with which the enthusiastic inventor finally put out his finger to re-arrange a thread or twirl a wheel, his disappointment found utterance in a sigh which echoed sadly through the dull and cheerless room. Had he expected this stern and self-contained man to show an open indifference to work and the hopes of a lifetime? If so, this was the first of the many surprises awaiting him.

He was gifted, however, with the patience of an automaton and continued to watch his fellow tenant as long as the latter's shade remained up. When it fell, he rose and took a few steps up and down, but not with the celerity and
precision which usually accompanied his movements. Doubt disturbed his mind and impeded his activity. He had caught a fair glimpse of Brotherson's face as he approached the window, and though it continued to show abstraction, it equally displayed serenity and a complete satisfaction with the present if not with the future. Had he mistaken his man after all? Was his instinct, for the first time in his active career, wholly at fault?

He had succeeded in getting a glimpse of his quarry in the privacy of his own room, at home with his thoughts and unconscious of any espionage, and how had he found him? Cheerful, and natural in all his movements.

But the evening was young. Retrospect comes with later and more lonely hours. There will be opportunities yet for studying this impassive countenance under much more telling and productive circumstances than these. He would await these opportunities with cheerful anticipation. Meanwhile, he would keep up the routine watch he had planned for this night. Something might yet occur. At all events he would have exhausted the situation from this standpoint.

And so it came to pass that at an hour when all the other hard-working people in the building were asleep, or at least striving to sleep, these two men still sat at their work, one in the light, the other in the darkness, facing each other, consciously to the one, unconsciously to the other, across the hollow well of the now silent court. Eleven o'clock! Twelve! No change on Brotherson's part or in Brotherson's room; but a decided one in the place where Sweetwater sat. Objects which had been totally indistinguishable even to his penetrating eye could now be seen in ever brightening outline. The moon had reached the open space above the court, and he was getting the full benefit of it. But it was a benefit he would have been glad to dispense with. Darkness was like a shield to him. He did not feel quite sure that he wanted this shield removed. With no curtain to the window and no shade, and all this brilliance pouring into the room, he feared the disclosure of his presence there, or, if not that, some effect on his own mind of those memories he was more anxious to see mirrored in another's discomfiture than in his own.

Was it to escape any lack of concentration which these same memories might bring, that he rose and stepped to the window? Or was it under one of those involuntary impulses which move us in spite of ourselves to do the very thing our judgment disapproves?

No sooner had he approached the sill than Mr. Brotherson's shade flew way up and he, too, looked out. Their glances met, and for an instant the hardly detective experienced that involuntary stagnation of the blood which follows an inner shock. He felt that he had been recognised. The moonlight lay full upon his face, and the other had seen and known him. Else, why the constrained attitude and sudden rigidity observable in this confronting figure, with its partially lifted hand? A man like Brotherson makes no pause in any action however trivial, without a reason. Either he had been transfixed by this glimpse of his enemy on watch, or daring thought! had seen enough of sepulchral suggestion in the wan face looking forth from this fatal window to shake him from his composure and let loose the grinning devil of remorse from its iron prison-house? If so, the movement was a memorable one, and the hazard quite worth while. He had gained—no! he had gained nothing. He had been the fool of his own wishes. No one, let alone Brotherson, could have mistaken his face for that of a woman. He had forgotten his newly-grown beard. Some other cause must be found for the other's attitude. It savoured of shock, if not fear. If it were fear, then had he roused an emotion which might rebound upon himself in sharp reprisal. Death had been known to strike people standing where he stood; mysterious death of a species quite unrecognisable. What warranty had he that it would not strike him, and now? None.

Yet it was Brotherson who moved first. With a shrug of the shoulder plainly visible to the man opposite, he turned away from the window and without lowering the shade began gathering up his papers for the night, and later banking up his stove with ashes.

Sweetwater, with a breath of decided relief, stepped back and threw himself on the bed. It had really been a trial for him to stand there under the other's eye, though his mind refused to formulate his fear, or to give him any satisfaction when he asked himself what there was in the situation suggestive of death to the woman or harm to himself.

Nor did morning light bring counsel, as is usual in similar cases. He felt the mystery more in the hubbub and restless turmoil of the day than in the night's silence and inactivity. He was glad when the stroke of six gave him an excuse to leave the room, and gladder yet when in doing so, he ran upon an old woman from a neighbouring room, who no sooner saw him than she leered at him and eagerly remarked:

"Not much sleep, eh? We didn't think you'd like it. Did you see anything?"

Now this gave him the one excuse he wanted.

"See anything?" he repeated, apparently with all imaginable innocence. "What do you mean by that?"

"Don't you know what happened in that room?"

"Don't tell me!" he shouted out. "I don't want to hear any nonsense. I haven't time. I've got to be at the shop at seven and I don't feel very well. What did happen?" he mumbled in drawing off, just loud enough for the woman to hear. "Something unpleasant I'm sure." Then he ran downstairs.
At half past six he found the janitor. He was, to all appearance, in a state of great excitement and he spoke very fast.

"I won't stay another night in that room," he loudly declared, breaking in where the family were eating breakfast by lamplight. "I don't want to make any trouble and I don't want to give my reasons; but that room don't suit me. I'd rather take the dark one you talked about yesterday. There's the money. Have my things moved to-day, will ye?"

"But your moving out after one night's stay will give that room a bad name," stammered the janitor, rising awkwardly. "There'll be talk and I won't be able to let that room all winter."

"Nonsense! Every man hasn't the nerves I have. You'll let it in a week. But let or not let, I'm going front into the little dark room. I'll get the boss to let me off at half past four. So that's settled."

He waited for no reply and got none; but when he appeared promptly at a quarter to five, he found his few belongings moved into a middle room on the fourth floor of the front building, which, oddly perhaps, chanced to be next door to the one he had held under watch the night before.

The first page of his adventure in the Hicks Street tenement had been turned, and he was ready to start upon another.

XVII
IN WHICH A BOOK PLAYS A LEADING PART

When Mr. Brotherson came in that night, he noticed that the door of the room adjoining his own stood open. He did not hesitate. Making immediately for it, he took a glance inside, then spoke up with a ringing intonation:

"Halloo! coming to live in this hole?"

The occupant a young man, evidently a workman and somewhat sickly if one could judge from his complexion--turned around from some tinkering he was engaged in and met the intruder fairly, face to face. If his jaw fell, it seemed to be from admiration. No other emotion would have so lighted his eye as he took in the others proportions and commanding features. No dress--Brotherson was never seen in any other than the homeliest garb in these days--could make him look common or akin to his surroundings. Whether seen near or far, his presence always caused surprise, and surprise was what the young man showed, as he answered briskly:

"Yes, this is to be my castle. Are you the owner of the buildings? If so--"

"I am not the owner. I live next door. Haven't I seen you before, young man?"

Never was there a more penetrating eye than Orlando Brotherson's. As he asked this question it took some effort on the part of the other to hold his own and laugh with perfect naturalness as he replied:

"If you ever go up Henry Street it's likely enough that you've seen me not once, but many times. I'm the fellow who works at the bench next the window in Schuper's repairing shop. Everybody knows me."

Audacity often carries the day when subtler means would fail. Brotherson stared at the youth, then ventured another question:

"A carpenter, eh?"

"Yes, and I'm an A1 man at my job. Excuse my brag. It's my one card of introduction."

"I've seen you. I've seen you somewhere else than in Schuper's shop. Do you remember me?"

"No, sir; I'm sorry to be imperlite but I don't remember you at all. Won't you sit down? It's not very cheerful, but I'm so glad to get out of the room I was in last night that this looks all right to me. Back there, other building," he whispered. "I didn't know, and took the room which had a window in it; but--" The stop was significant; so was his smile which had a touch of sickliness in it, as well as humour.

But Brotherson was not to be caught.

"You slept in the building last night? In the other half, I mean?"

"Yes, I--slept."

The strong lip of the other man curled disdainfully.

"I saw you," said he. "You were standing in the window overlooking the court. You were not sleeping then. I suppose you know that a woman died in that room?"

"Yes; they told me so this morning."

"Was that the first you'd heard of it?"

"Sure!" The word almost jumped at the questioner. "Do you suppose I'd have taken the room if--"

But here the intruder, with a disdainful grunt, turned and went out, disgust in every feature,--plain, unmistakable, downright disgust, and nothing more!

This was what gave Sweetwater his second bad night; this and a certain discovery he made. He had counted on hearing what went on in the neighbouring room through the partition running back of his own closet. But he could hear nothing, unless it was the shutting down of a window, a loud sneeze, or the rattling of coals as they were put on the fire. And these possessed no significance. What he wanted was to catch the secret sigh, the muttered word, the involuntary movement. He was too far removed from this man still.
How should he manage to get nearer him—at the door of his mind—of his heart? Sweetwater stared all night from his miserable cot into the darkness of that separating closet, and with no result. His task looked hopeless; no wonder that he could get no rest.

Next morning he felt ill, but he rose all the same, and tried to get his own breakfast. He had but partially succeeded and was sitting on the edge of his bed in wretched discomfort, when the very man he was thinking of appeared at his door.

"I've come to see how you are," said Brotherson. "I noticed that you did not look well last night. Won't you come in and share my pot of coffee?"

"I—I can't eat," mumbled Sweetwater, for once in his life thrown completely off his balance. "You're very kind, but I'll manage all right. I'd rather. I'm not quite dressed, you see, and I must get to the shop." Then he thought--"What an opportunity I'm losing. Have I any right to turn tail because he plays his game from the outset with trumps? No, I've a small trump somewhere about me to lay on this trick. It isn't an ace, but it'll show I'm not chicane." And smiling, though not with his usual cheerfulness, Sweetwater added, "Is the coffee all made? I might take a drop of that. But you mustn't ask me to eat—I just couldn't."

"Yes, the coffee is made and it isn't bad either. You'd better put on your coat; the hall's draughty." And waiting till Sweetwater did so, he led the way back to his own room. Brotherson's manner expressed perfect ease. Sweetwater's not. He knew himself changed in looks, in bearing, in feeling, even; but was he changed enough to deceive this man on the very spot where they had confronted each other a few days before in a keen moral struggle? The looking-glass he passed on his way to the table where the simple breakfast was spread out, showed him a figure so unlike the alert, business-like chap he had been that night, that he felt his old assurance revive in time to ease a situation which had no counterpart in his experience.

"I'm going out myself to-day, so we'll have to hurry a bit," was Brotherson's first remark as they seated themselves at table. "Do you like your coffee plain or with milk in it?"

"Plain. Gosh! what pictures! Where do you get 'em? You must have a lot of coin." Sweetwater was staring at the row of photographs, mostly of a very high order, tacked along the wall separating the two rooms. They were unframed, but they were mostly copies of great pictures, and the effect was rather imposing in contrast to the shabby furniture and the otherwise homely fittings.

"Yes, I've enough for that kind of thing," was his host's reply. But the tone was reserved, and Sweetwater did not presume again along this line. Instead, he looked well at the books piled upon the shelves under these photographs, and wondered aloud at their number and at the man who could waste such a lot of time in reading them. But he made no more direct remarks. Was he cowed by the penetrating eye he encountered whenever he yielded to the fascination exerted by Mr. Brotherson's personality and looked his way? He hated to think so, yet something held him in check and made him listen, open-mouthed, when the other chose to speak.

Yet there was one cheerful moment. It was when he noticed the careless way in which those books were arranged upon their shelves. An idea had come to him. He hid his relief in his cup, as he drained the last drops of the coffee which really tasted better than he had expected.

When he returned from work that afternoon it was with an auger under his coat and a conviction which led him to empty out the contents of a small phial which he took down from a shelf. He had told Mr. Gryce that he was eager for the business because of its difficulties, but that was when he was feeling fine and up to any game which might come his way. Now he felt weak and easily discouraged. This would not do. He must regain his health at all hazards, for the business because of its difficulties, but that was when he was feeling fine and up to any game which might come his way. Now he felt weak and easily discouraged. This would not do. He must regain his health at all hazards.

"You're better this evening," he heard in those kindly tones which so confused and irritated him.

"Yes," was the surly admission. "But it's stifling here. If I have to live long in this hole I'll dry up from want of air. It's near the shop or I wouldn't stay out the week." Twice this day he had seen Brotherson's tall figure stop before the window of this shop and look in at him at his bench. But he said nothing about that.

"Yes," agreed the other, "it's no way to live. But you're alone. Upstairs there's a whole family huddled into a room just like this. Two of the kids sleep in the closet. It's things like that which have made me the friend of the poor, and the mortal enemy of men and women who spread themselves over a dozen big rooms and think themselves ill-used if the gas burns poorly or a fireplace smokes. I'm off for the evening; anything I can do for you?"

"Show me how I can win my way into such rooms as you've just talked about. Nothing less will make me look up. I'd like to sleep in one to-night. In the best bedroom, sir. I'm ambitious; I am."

A poor joke, though they both laughed. There Mr. Brotherson passed on, and Sweetwater listened till he was sure that his too attentive neighbour had really gone down the three flights between him and the street. Then he took up his auger again and shut himself up in his closet.
There was nothing peculiar about this closet. It was just an ordinary one with drawers and shelves on one side, and an open space on the other for the hanging up of clothes. Very few clothes hung there at present; but it was in this portion of the closet that he stopped and began to try the wall of Brotherson's room, with the butt end of the tool he carried.

The sound seemed to satisfy him, for very soon he was boring a hole at a point exactly level with his ear; but not without frequent pauses and much attention given to the possible return of those departed foot-steps. He remembered that Mr. Brotherson had a way of coming back on unexpected errands after giving out his intention of being absent for hours.

Sweetwater did not want to be caught in any such trap as that; so he carefully followed every sound that reached him from the noisy halls. But he did not forsake his post; he did not have to. Mr. Brotherson had been sincere in his good-bye, and the auger finished its job and was withdrawn without any interruption from the man whose premises had been thus audaciously invaded.

"Neat as well as useful," was the gay comment with which Sweetwater surveyed his work, then laid his ear to the hole. Whereas previously he could barely hear the rattling of coals from the coal-scuttle, he was now able to catch the sound of an ash falling into the ash-pit.

His next move was to test the depth of the partition by inserting his finger in the hole he had made. He found it stopped by some obstacle before it had reached half its length, and anxious to satisfy himself of the nature of this obstacle, he gently moved the tip of his finger to and fro over what was certainly the edge of a book.

This proved that his calculations had been correct and that the opening so accessible on his side, was completely veiled on the other by the books he had seen packed on the shelves. As these shelves had no other backing than the wall, he had feared striking a spot not covered by a book. But he had not undertaken so risky a piece of work without first noting how nearly the tops of the books approached the line of the shelf above them, and the consequent unlikelihood of his striking the space between, at the height he planned the hole. He had even been careful to assure himself that all the volumes at this exact point stood far enough forward to afford room behind them for the chips and plaster he must necessarily push through with his auger, and also--important consideration--for the free passage of the sounds by which he hoped to profit.

As he listened for a moment longer, and then stooped to gather up the debris which had fallen on his own side of the partition, he muttered, in his old self-congratulatory way:

"If the devil don't interfere in some way best known to himself, this opportunity I have made for myself of listening to this arrogant fellow's very heartbeats should give me some clew to his secret. As soon as I can stand it, I'll spend my evenings at this hole."

But it was days before he could trust himself so far. Meanwhile their acquaintance ripened, though with no very satisfactory results. The detective found himself led into telling stories of his early home-life to keep pace with the man who always had something of moment and solid interest to impart. This was undesirable, for instead of calling out a corresponding confidence from Brotherson, it only seemed to make his conversation more coldly impersonal.

In consequence, Sweetwater suddenly found himself quite well and one evening, when he was sure that his neighbour was at home, he slid softly into his closet and laid his ear to the opening he had made there. The result was unexpected. Mr. Brotherson was pacing the floor, and talking softly to himself.

At first, the cadence and full music of the tones conveyed nothing to our far from literary detective. The victim of his secret machinations was expressing himself in words, words--;that was the point which counted with him. But as he listened longer and gradually took in the sense of these words, his heart went down lower and lower till it reached his boots. His inscrutable and ever disappointing neighbour was not indulging in self-communings of any kind. He was reciting poetry, and what was worse, poetry which he only half remembered and was trying to recall--;an incredible occupation for a man weighted with a criminal secret.

Sweetwater was disgusted, and was withdrawing in high indignation from his vantage-point when something occurred of a startling enough nature to hold him where he was in almost breathless expectation.

The hole which in the darkness of the closet was always faintly visible, even when the light was not very strong in the adjoining room, had suddenly become a bright and shining loop-hole, with a suggestion of movement in the space beyond. The book which had hid this hole on Brotherson's side had been taken down--the one book in all those hundreds whose removal threatened Sweetwater's schemes, if not himself.

For an instant the thwarted detective listened for the angry shout or the smothered oath which would naturally follow the discovery by Brotherson of this attempted interference with his privacy.

But all was still on his side of the wall. A rustling of leaves could be heard, as the inventor searched for the poem he wanted, but nothing more. In withdrawing the book, he had failed to notice the hole in the plaster back of it. But he could hardly fail to see it when he came to put the book back. Meantime, suspense for Sweetwater.

It was several minutes before he heard Mr. Brotherson's voice again, then it was in triumphant repetition of the
lines which had escaped his memory. They were great words surely and Sweetwater never forgot them, but the impression which they made upon his mind, an impression so forcible that he was able to repeat them, months afterward to Mr. Gryce, did not prevent him from noting the tone in which they were uttered, nor the thud which followed as the book was thrown down upon the floor.

"Fool!" The word rang out in bitter irony from his irate neighbour's lips. "What does he know of woman! Woman! Let him court a rich one and see—but that's all over and done with. No more harping on that string, and no more reading of poetry. I'll never,—" The rest was lost in his throat and was quite unintelligible to the anxious listener.

Self-revealing words, which an instant before would have aroused Sweetwater's deepest interest! But they had suddenly lost all force for the unhappy listener. The sight of that hole still shining brightly before his eyes had distracted his thoughts and roused his liveliest apprehensions. If that book should be allowed to lie where it had fallen, then he was in for a period of uncertainty he shrank from contemplating. Any moment his neighbour might look up and catch sight of this hole bored in the backing of the shelves before him. Could the man who had been guilty of submitting him to this outrage stand the strain of waiting indefinitely for the moment of discovery? He doubted it, if the suspense lasted too long.

Shifting his position, he placed his eye where his ear had been. He could see very little. The space before him, limited as it was to the width of the one volume withdrawn, precluded his seeing aught but what lay directly before him. Happily, it was in this narrow line of vision that Mr. Brotherson stood. He had resumed work upon his model and was so placed that while his face was not visible, his hands were, and as Sweetwater watched these hands and noticed the delicacy of their manipulation, he was enough of a workman to realise that work so fine called for an undivided attention. He need not fear the gaze shifting, while those hands moved as warily as they did now.

Relieved for the moment, he left his post and, sitting down on the edge of his cot, gave himself up to thought.

He deserved this mischance. Had he profited properly by Mr. Gryce's teachings, he would not have been caught like this; he would have calculated not upon the nine hundred and ninety-nine chances of that book being left alone, but upon the thousandth one of its being the very one to be singled out and removed. Had he done this,—had he taken pains to so roughen and discolour the opening he had made, that it would look like an ancient rat hole instead of showing a clean bore, he would have some answer to give Brotherson when he came to question him in regard to it. But now the whole thing seemed up! He had shown himself a fool and by good rights ought to acknowledge his defeat and return to Headquarters. But he had too much spirit for that. He would rather,—yes, he would rather face the pistol he had once seen in his enemy's hand. Yet it was hard to sit here waiting, waiting,—Suddenly he started upright. He would go meet his fate—he present in the room itself when the discovery was made which threatened to upset all his plans. He was not ashamed of his calling, and Brotherson would think twice before attacking him when once convinced that he had the Department behind him.

"Excuse me, comrade," were the words with which he endeavoured to account for his presence at Brotherson's door. "My lamp smells so, and I've made such a mess of my work to-day that I've just stepped in for a chat. If I'm not wanted, say so. I don't want to bother you, but you do look pleasant here. I hope the thing I'm turning over in my head—will be a success some day. I'd like a big room like this, and a lot of books, and—and pictures."

Craning his neck, he took a peep at the shelves, with an air of open admiration which effectually concealed his real purpose. What he wanted was to catch one glimpse of that empty space from his present standpoint, and he was both astonished and relieved to note how narrow and inconspicuous it looked. Certainly, he had less to fear than he supposed, and when, upon Mr. Brotherson's invitation, he stepped into the room, it was with a dash of his former audacity, which gave him, unfortunately, perhaps, a quick, strong and unexpected likeness to his old self.

But if Brotherson noticed this, nothing in his manner gave proof of the fact. Though usually averse to visitors, especially when employed as at present on his precious model, he quite warmed towards his unexpected guest, and even led the way to where it stood uncovered on the table.

"You find me at work," he remarked. "I don't suppose you understand any but your own?"

"If you mean to ask if I understand what you're trying to do there, I'm free to say that I don't. I couldn't tell now, off-hand, whether it's an air-ship you're planning, a hydraulic machine or—or—or." He stopped, with a laugh and turned towards the book-shelves. "Now here's what I like. These books just take my eye."

"Look at them, then. I like to see a man interested in books. Only, I thought if you knew how to handle wire, I would get you to hold this end while I work with the other."

"I guess I know enough for that," was Sweetwater's gay rejoinder. But when he felt that communicating wire in his hand and experienced for the first time the full influence of the other's eye, it took all his hardihood to hide the hypnotic thrill it gave him. Though he smiled and chatted, he could not help asking himself between whiles, what had killed the poor washerwoman across the court, and what had killed Miss Challoner. Something visible or
something invisible? Something which gave warning of attack, or something which struck in silence. He found himself gazing long and earnestly at this man's hand, and wondering if death lay under it. It was a strong hand, a deft, clean-cut member, formed to respond to the slightest hint from the powerful brain controlling it. But was this its whole story. Had he said all when he had said this?

Fascinated by the question, Sweetwater died a hundred deaths in his awakened fancy, as he followed the sharp short instructions which fell with cool precision from the other's lips. A hundred deaths, I say, but with no betrayal of his folly. The anxiety he showed was that of one eager to please, which may explain why on the conclusion of his task, Mr. Brotherson gave him one of his infrequent smiles and remarked, as he buried the model under its cover, "You're handy and you're quiet at your job. Who knows but that I shall want you again. Will you come if I call you?"

"Won't I?" was the gay retort, as the detective thus released, stooped for the book still lying on the floor. "Paolo and Francesca," he read, from the back, as he laid it on the table. "Poetry?" he queried.

"Rot," scornfully returned the other, as he moved to take down a bottle and some glasses from a cupboard let into another portion of the wall.

Sweetwater taking advantage of the moment, sidled towards the shelf where that empty space still gaped with the tell-tale hole at the back. He could easily have replaced the missing book before Mr. Brotherson turned. But the issue was too doubtful. He was dealing with no absent-minded fool, and it behooved him to avoid above all things calling attention to the book or to the place on the shelf where it belonged.

But there was one thing he could do and did. Reaching out a finger as deft as Brotherson's own, he pushed a second volume into the place of the one that was gone. This veiled the auger-hole completely; a fact which so entirely relieved his mind that his old smile came back like sunshine to his lips, and it was only by a distinct effort that he kept the dancing humour from his eyes as he prepared to refuse the glass which Brotherson now brought forward:

"None of that!" said he. "You mustn't tempt me. The doctor has shut down on all kinds of spirits for two months more, at least. But don't let me hinder you. I can bear to smell the stuff. My turn will come again some day."

But Brotherson did not drink. Setting down the glass he carried, he took up the book lying near, weighed it in his hand and laid it down again, with an air of thoughtful inquiry. Then he suddenly pushed it towards Sweetwater. "Do you want it?" he asked.

Sweetwater was too taken aback to answer immediately. This was a move he did not understand. Want it, he? What he wanted was to see it put back in its place on the shelf. Did Brotherson suspect this? The supposition was incredible; yet who could read a mind so mysterious?

Sweetwater, debating the subject, decided that the risk of adding to any such possible suspicion was less to be dreaded than the continued threat offered by that unoccupied space so near the hole which testified so unmistakably of the means he had taken to spy upon this suspected man's privacy. So, after a moment of awkward silence, he calmly refused the present as he had the glass.

Unhappily he was not rewarded by seeing the despised volume restored to its shelf. It still lay where its owner had pushed it, when, with some awkwardly muttered thanks, the discomfited detective withdrew to his own room.

XVIII

WHAT AM I TO DO NOW

Early morning saw Sweetwater peering into the depths of his closet. The hole was hardly visible. This meant that the book he had pushed across it from the other side had not been removed.

Greatly re-assured by the sight, he awaited his opportunity, and as soon as a suitable one presented itself, prepared the hole for inspection by breaking away its edges and begriming it well with plaster and old dirt. This done, he left matters to arrange themselves; which they did, after this manner.

Mr. Brotherson suddenly developed a great need of him, and it became a common thing for him to spend the half and, sometimes, the whole of the evening in the neighbouring room. This was just what he had worked for, and his constant intercourse with the man whose show he sought to surprise should have borne fruit. But it did not. Nothing in the eager but painstaking inventor showed a distracted mind or a heavily-burdened soul. Indeed, he was so calm in all his ways, so precise and so self-contained, that Sweetwater often wondered what had become of the fiery agitator and eloquent propagandist of new and startling doctrines.

Then, he thought he understood the riddle. The model was reaching its completion, and Brotherson's extreme interest in it and the confidence he had in its success swallowed up all lesser emotions. Were the invention to prove a failure--but there was small hope of this. The man was of too well-poised a mind to over-estimate his work or miscalculate its place among modern improvements. Soon he would reach the goal of his desires, be praised, feted, made much of by the very people he now professedly scorned. There was no thoroughfare for Sweetwater here. Another road must be found; some secret, strange and unforeseen method of reaching a soul inaccessible to all
ordinary or even extraordinary impressions.

Would a night of thought reveal such a method? Night! the very word brought inspiration. A man is not his full self at night. Secrets which, under the ordinary circumstances of everyday life, lie too deep for surprise, creep from their hiding-places in the dismal hours of universal quiet, and lips which are dumb to the most subtle of questioners break into strange and self-revealing mutterings when sleep lies heavy on ear and eye and the forces of life and death are released to play with the rudderless spirit.

It was in different words from these that Sweetwater reasoned, no doubt, but his conclusions were the same, and as he continued to brood over them, he saw a chance—a fool's chance, possibly, (but fools sometimes win where wise men fail) of reaching those depths he still believed in, notwithstanding his failure to sound them.

Addressing a letter to his friend in Twenty-ninth Street, he awaited reply in the shape of a small package he had ordered sent to the corner drug-store. When it came, he carried it home in a state of mingled hope and misgiving. Was he about to cap his fortnight of disappointment by another signal failure; end the matter by disclosing his hand; lose all, or win all by an experiment as daring and possibly as fanciful as were his continued suspicions of this seemingly upright and undoubtedly busy man?

He made no attempt to argue the question. The event called for the exercise of the most dogged elements in his character and upon these he must rely. He would make the effort he contemplated, simply because he was minded to do so. That was all there was to it. But any one noting him well that night, would have seen that he ate little and consulted his watch continually. Sweetwater had not yet passed the line where work becomes routine and the feelings remain totally under control.

Brotherson was unusually active and alert that evening. He was anxious to fit one delicate bit of mechanism into another, and he was continually interrupted by visitors. Some big event was on in the socialistic world, and his presence was eagerly demanded by one brotherhood after another. Sweetwater, posted at his loop-hole, heard the arguments advanced by each separate spokesman, followed by Brotherson's unvarying reply: that when his work was done and he had proved his right to approach them with a message, they might look to hear from him again; but not before. His patience was inexhaustible, but he showed himself relieved when the hour grew too late for further interruption. He began to whistle—a token that all was going well with him, and Sweetwater, who had come to understand some of his moods, looked forward to an hour or two of continuous work on Brotherson's part and of dreary and impatient waiting on his own. But, as so many times before, he misread the man. Earlier than common—much earlier, in fact, Mr. Brotherson laid down his tools and gave himself up to a restless pacing of the floor. This was not usual with him. Nor did he often indulge himself in playing on the piano as he did to-night, beginning with a few heavenly strains and ending with a bang that made the key-board jump. Certainly something was amiss in the quarter where peace had hitherto reigned undisturbed. Had the depths begun to heave, or were physical causes alone responsible for these unwonted ebullitions of feeling?

The question was immaterial. Either would form an excellent preparation for the coup planned by Sweetwater; and when, after another hour of uncertainty, perfect silence greeted him from his neighbour's room, hope had soared again on exultant wing, far above all former discouragements.

Mr. Brotherson's bed was in a remote corner from the loop-hole made by Sweetwater; but in the stillness now pervading the whole building, the latter could hear his even breathing very distinctly. He was in a deep sleep.

The young detective's moment had come.

Taking from his breast a small box, he placed it on a shelf close against the partition. An instant of quiet listening, then he touched a spring in the side of the box and laid his ear, in haste, to his loop-hole.

A strain of well-known music broke softly, from the box and sent its vibrations through the wall.

It was answered instantly by a stir within; then, as the noble air continued, awakening memories of that fatal instant when it crashed through the corridors of the Hotel Clermont, drowning Miss Challoner's cry if not the sound of her fall, a word burst from the sleeping man's lips which carried its own message to the listening detective.

It was Edith! Miss Challoner's first name, and the tone bespoke a shaken soul.

Sweetwater, gasping with excitement, caught the box from the shelf and silenced it. It had done its work and it was no part of Sweetwater's plan to have this strain located, or even to be thought real. But its echo still lingered in Brotherson's otherwise unconscious ears; for another "Edith!" escaped his lips, followed by a smothered but forceful utterance of these five words, "You know I promised you--"

Promised her what? He did not say. Would he have done so had the music lasted a trifle longer? Would he yet complete his sentence? Sweetwater trembled with eagerness and listened breathlessly for the next sound. Brotherson was awake. He was tossing in his bed. Now he has leaped to the floor. Sweetwater hears him groan, then comes another silence, broken at last by the sound of his body falling back upon the bed and the troubled ejaculation of "Good God!" wrung from lips no torture could have forced into complaint under any daytime conditions.

Sweetwater continued to listen, but he had heard all, and after some few minutes longer of fruitless waiting, he
withdraw from his post. The episode was over. He would hear no more that night.

Was he satisfied? Certainly the event, puerile as it might seem to some, had opened up strange vistas to his aroused imagination. The words "Edith, you know I promised you--" were in themselves provocative of strange and doubtful conjectures. Had the sleeper under the influence of a strain of music indissolubly associated with the death of Miss Challoner, been so completely forced back into the circumstances and environment of that moment that his mind had taken up and his lips repeated the thoughts with which that moment of horror was charged? Sweetwater imagined the scene--saw the figure of Brotherson hesitating at the top of the stairs--saw hers advancing from the writing-room, with startled and uplifted hand--heard the music--the crash of that great finale--and decided, without hesitation, that the words he had just heard were indeed the thoughts of that moment. "Edith, you know I promised you--" What had he promised? What she received was death! Had this been in his mind? Would this have been the termination of the sentence had he wakened less soon to consciousness and caution?

Sweetwater dared to believe it. He was no nearer comprehending the mystery it involved than he had been before, but he felt sure that he had been given one true and positive glimpse into this hassayed soul which showed its deeply hidden secret to be both deadly and fearsome; and happy to have won his way so far into the mystic labyrinth he had sworn to pierce, he rested in happy unconsciousness till morning when--

Could it be? Was it he who was dreaming now, or was the event of the night a mere farce of his own imagining? Mr. Brotherson was whistling in his room, gaily and with ever increasing verve, and the tune which filled the whole floor with music was the same grand finale from William Tell which had seemed to work such magic in the night. As Sweetwater caught the mellow but indifferent notes sounding from those lips of brass, he dragged forth the music-box he held hidden in his coat pocket, and flinging it on the floor stamped upon it.

"The man is too strong for me," he cried. "His heart is granite; he meets my every move. What am I to do now?"

XIX

THE DANGER MOMENT

For a day Sweetwater acknowledged himself to be mentally crushed, disillusioned and defeated. Then his spirits regained their poise. It would take a heavy weight indeed to keep them down permanently.

His opinion was not changed in regard to his neighbour's secret guilt. A demeanour of this sort suggested bravado rather than bravery to the ever suspicious detective. But he saw, very plainly by this time, that he would have to employ more subtle methods yet ere his hand would touch the goal which so tantalisingly eluded him.

His work at the bench suffered that week; he made two mistakes. But by Saturday night he had satisfied himself that he had reached the point where he would be justified in making use of Miss Challoner's letters. So he telephoned his wishes to New York, and awaited the promised developments with an anxiety we can only understand by realising how much greater were his chances of failure than of success. To ensure the latter, every factor in his scheme must work to perfection. The medium of communication (a young, untried girl) must do her part with all the skill of artist and author combined. Would she disappoint them? He did not think so. Women possess a marvellous adaptability for this kind of work and this one was French, which made the case still more hopeful.

But Brotherson! In what spirit would he meet the proposed advances? Would he even admit the girl, and, if he did, would the interview bear any such fruit as Sweetwater hoped for? The man who could mock the terrors of the night by a careless repetition of a strain instinct with the most sacred memories, was not to be depended upon to show much feeling at sight of a departed woman's writing. But no other hope remained, and Sweetwater faced the attempt with heroic determination.

The day was Sunday, which ensured Brotherson's being at home. Nothing would have lured Sweetwater out for a moment, though he had no reason to expect that the affair he was anticipating would come off till early evening.

But it did. Late in the afternoon he heard the expected steps go by his door--a woman's steps. But they were not alone. A man's accompanied them. What man? Sweetwater hastened to satisfy himself on this point by laying his ear to the partition.

Instantly the whole conversation became audible. "An errand? Oh, yes, I have an errand!" explained the evidently unwelcome intruder, in her broken English. "This is my brother Pierre. My name is Celeste; Celeste Ledru. I understand English ver well. I have worked much in families. But he understands nothing. He is all French. He accompanies me for--for the--what you call it? Ies convenances. He knows nothing of the beesiness."

Sweetwater in the darkness of his closet laughed in his gleeful appreciation.

"Great!" was his comment. "Just great! She has thought of everything--or Mr. Gryce has."

Meanwhile, the girl was proceeding with increased volubility.

"What is this beesiness, monsieur? I have something to sell--so you Americans speak. Something you will want much--ver sacred, ver precious. A souvenir from the tomb, monsieur. Will you give ten--no, that is too leetle--fifteen dollars for it? It is worth--Oh, more, much more to the true lover. Pierre, tu es bete. Teins-tu droit sur ta chaise. M.
Brotherson est un monsieur comme il faut."

This adjuration, uttered in sharp reprimand and with but little of the French grace, may or may not have been understood by the unsympathetic man they were meant to impress. But the name which accompanied them--his own name, never heard but once before in this house, undoubtedly caused the silence which almost reached the point of embarrassment, before he broke it with the harsh remark:

"Your French may be good, but it does not go with me. Yet is it more intelligible than your English. What do you want here? What have you in that bag you wish to open; and what do you mean by the sentimental trash with which you offer it?"

"Ah, monsieur has not memory of me," came in the sweetest tones of a really seductive voice. "You astonish me, monsieur. I thought you knew--everybody else does--Oh, tout le monde, monsieur, that I was Miss Challoner's maid--near her when other people were not--near her the very day she died."

A pause; then an angry exclamation from some one. Sweetwater thought from the brother, who may have misinterpreted some look or gesture on Brotherson's part. Brotherson himself would not be apt to show surprise in any such noisy way.

"I saw many things--Oh many things--" the girl proceeded with an admirable mixture of suggestion and reserve. "That day and other days too. She did not talk--Oh, no, she did not talk, but I saw --Oh, yes, I saw that she--that you--I'll have to say it, monsieur, that you were tres bons amis after that week in Lenox."

"Well?" His utterance of this word was vigorous, but not tender. "What are you coming to? What can you have to show me in this connection that I will believe in for a moment?"

"I have these--is monsieur certaine that no one can hear? I wouldn't have anybody hear what I have to tell you, for the world--for all the world."

"No one can overhear."

For the first time that day Sweetwater breathed a full, deep breath. This assurance had sounded heartfelt.

"Blessings on her cunning young head. She thinks of everything."

"You are unhappy. You have thought Miss Challoner cold;--that she had no response for your ver ardent passion. But--" these words were uttered sotto voce and with telling pauses "--but--I--know--ver much better than that. She was ver proud. She had a right; she was no poor girl like me--but she spend hours--hours in writing letters she--nevaire send. I saw one, just once, for a leetle minute; while you could breathe so short as that; and began with Cheri, or your English for that, and ended with words--Oh, ver much like these: You may nevaire see these lines, which was ver interesting, veree so, and made one want to see what she did with letters she wrote and nevaire mail; so I watch and look, and one day I see them. She had a leetle ivory box--Oh, ver nice, ver pretty. I thought it was jewels she kept locked up so tight. But, non, non, non. It was letters--these letters. I heard them rattle, rattle, not once but many times. You believe me, monsieur?"

"I believe you to have taken every advantage possible to spy upon your mistress. I believe that, yes."

"Self-interest."

"As monsieur pleases. But it was strange, ver strange for a grande dame like that to write letters--sheets on sheets--and then not send them, nevaire. I dreamed of those letters--I could not help it, no; and when she died so quick--with no word for any one, no word at all, I thought of those writings so secret, so of the heart, and when no one noticed--or thought about this box, or--or the key she kept shut tight, oh, always tight in her leetle gold purse, I --Monsieur, do you want to see those letters?" asked the girl, with a gulp. Evidently his appearance frightened her--or had her acting reached this point of extreme finish? "I had nevaire the chance to put them back. And--and they belong to monsieur. They are his--all his--and so beautiful! Ah, just like poetry."

"I don't consider them mine. I haven't a particle of confidence in you or in your story. You are a thief--self-convicted; or you're an agent of the police whose motives I neither understand nor care to investigate. Take up your bag and go. I haven't a cent's worth of interest in its contents."

She started to her feet. Sweetwater heard her chair grate on the painted floor, as she pushed it back in rising. The brother rose too, but more calmly. Brotherson did not stir. Sweetwater felt his hopes rapidly dying down--down into ashes, when suddenly her voice broke forth in pants:

"And Marie said--everybody said--that you loved our great lady; that you, of the people, common, common, working with the hands, living with men and women working with the hands, that you had soul, sentiment--what you will of the good and the great, and that you would give your eyes for her words, si fines, si spirituelles, so like des vers de poete. False! false! all false! She was an angel. You are--read that!" she vehemently broke in, opening her bag and whisking a paper down before him. "Read and understand my proud and lovely lady. She did right to die. You are hard --hard. You would have killed her if she had not--"

"Silence, woman! I will read nothing!" came hissing from the strong man's teeth, set in almost ungovernable
anger. "Take back this letter, as you call it, and leave my room."

"Nevaire! You will not read? But you shall, you shall. Behold another! One, two, three, four!" Madly they flew from her hand. Madly she continued her vituperative attack. "Beast! beast! That she should pour out her innocent heart to you, you! I do not want your money, Monsieur of the common street, of the common house. It would be dirt. Pierre, it would be dirt. Ah, bah! je m'oublie tout a fait. Pierre, il est bete. Il refuse de les toucher. Mais il faut qu'il les touche, si je les laisse sur le plancher. Va-t'en! Je me moque de lui. Canaille! L'homme du peuple, tout a fait du peuple!"

A loud slam—the skurrying of feet through the hall, accompanied by the slower and heavier tread of the so-called brother, then silence, and such silence that Sweetwater fancied he could catch the sound of Brotherson's heavy breathing. His own was silenced to a gasp. What a treasure of a girl! How natural her indignation! What an instinct she showed and what comprehension! This high and mighty handling of a most difficult situation and a most difficult man, had imposed on Brotherson, had almost imposed upon himself. Those letters so beautiful, so spirituelle! Yet, the odds were that she had never read them, much less abstracted them. The minx! the ready, resourceful, wily, daring minx!

But had she imposed on Brotherson? As the silence continued, Sweetwater began to doubt. He understood quite well the importance of his neighbour's first movement. Were he to tear those letters into shreds! He might be thus tempted. All depended on the strength of his present mood and the real nature of the secret which lay buried in his heart.

Was that heart as flinty as it seemed? Was there no place for doubt or even for curiosity, in its impenetrable depths? Seemingly, he had not moved foot or hand since his unwelcome visitors had left. He was doubtless still staring at the scattered sheets lying before him; possibly battling with unaccustomed impulses; possibly weighing deeds and consequences in those slow moving scales of his in which no man could cast a weight with any certainty how far its even balance would be disturbed.

There was a sound as of settling coal. Only at night would one expect to hear so slight a sound as that in a tenement full of noisy children. But the moment chanced to be propitious, and it not only attracted the attention of Sweetwater on his side of the wall, but it struck the ear of Brotherson also. With an ejaculation as bitter as it was impatient, he roused himself and gathered up the letters. Sweetwater could hear the successive rustlings as he bundled them up in his hand. Then came another silence—then the lifting of a stove lid.

Sweetwater had not been wrong in his secret apprehension. His identification with his unimpressionable neighbour's mood had shown him what to expect. These letters—these innocent and precious outpourings of a rare and womanly soul—the only conceivable open sesame to the hard-locked nature he found himself pitted against, would soon be resolved into a vanishing puff of smoke.

But the lid was thrust back, and the letters remained in hand. Mortal strength has its limits. Even Brotherson could not shut down that lid on words which might have been meant for him, harshly as he had repelled the idea.

The pause which followed told little; but when Sweetwater heard the man within move with characteristic energy to the door, turn the key and step back again to his place at the table, he knew that the danger moment had passed and that those letters were about to be read, not casually, but seriously, as indeed their contents merited.

This caused Sweetwater to feel serious himself. Upon what result might he calculate? What would happen to this Hardy soul, when the fact he so scornfully repudiated, was borne in upon him, and he saw that the disdain which had antagonised him was a mere device—a cloak to hide the secret heart of love and eager womanly devotion? Her death—little as Brotherson would believe it up till now—had been his personal loss the greatest which can befall a man. When he came to see this—when the modest fervour of her unusual nature began to dawn upon him in these self-revelations, would the result be remorse, or just the deadening and final extinction of whatever tenderness he may have retained for her memory?

Impossible to tell. The balance of probability hung even. Sweetwater recognised this, and clung, breathless, to his loop-hole. Fain would he have seen, as well as heard.

Mr. Brotherson read the first letter, standing. As it soon became public property, I will give it here, just as it afterwards appeared in the columns of the greedy journals:

"Beloved:"

"When I sit, as I often do, in perfect quiet under the stars, and dream that you are looking at them too, not for hours as I do, but for one full moment in which your thoughts are with me as wholly as mine are with you, I feel that the bond between us, unseen by the world, and possibly not wholly recognised by ourselves, is instinct with the same power which links together the eternities.

"It seems to have always been; to have known no beginning, only a budding, an efflorescence, the visible product of a hidden but always present reality. A month ago and I was ignorant, even, of your name. Now, you seem the best known to me, the best understood, of God's creatures. One afternoon of perfect companionship—one flash of
strong emotion, with its deep, true insight into each other's soul, and the miracle was wrought. We had met, and henceforth, parting would mean separation only, and not the severing of a mutual bond. One hand, and one only, could do that now. I will not name that hand. For us there is nought ahead but life.

"Thus do I ease my heart in the silence which conditions impose upon us. Some day I shall hear your voice again, and then-

The paper dropped from the reader's hand. It was several minutes before he took up another.

This one, as it happened, antedated the other, as will appear on reading it:

"My friend:

"I said that I could not write to you--that we must wait. You were willing; but there is much to be accomplished, and the silence may be long. My father is not an easy man to please, but he desires my happiness and will listen to my plea when the right hour comes. When you have won your place--when you have shown yourself to be the man I feel you to be, then my father will recognise your worth, and the way will be cleared, despite the obstacles which now intervene.

"But meantime! Ah, you will not know it, but words will rise --the heart must find utterance. What the lip cannot utter, nor the looks reveal, these pages shall hold in sacred trust for you till the day when my father will place my hand in yours, with heart-felt approval.

"Is it a folly? A woman's weak evasion of the strong silence of man? You may say so some day; but somehow, I doubt it;--I doubt it."

The creaking of a chair;--the man within had seated himself. There was no other sound; a soul in turmoil wakens no echoes. Sweetwater envied the walls surrounding the unsympathetic reader. They could see. He could only listen.

A little while; then that slight rustling again of the unfolding sheet. The following was read, and then the fourth and last:

"Dearest:

"Did you think I had never seen you till that day we met in Lenox? I am going to tell you a secret--a great, great secret--such a one as a woman hardly whispers to her own heart.

"One day, in early summer, I was sitting in St. Bartholomew's Church on Fifth Avenue, waiting for the services to begin. It was early and the congregation was assembling. While idly watching the people coming in, I saw a gentleman pass by me up the aisle, who made me forget all the others. He had not the air of a New Yorker; he was not even dressed in city style, but as I noted his face and expression, I said way down in my heart, 'That is the kind of man I could love; the only man I have ever seen who could make me forget my own world and my own people.' It was a passing thought, soon forgotten. But when in that hour of embarrassment and peril on Greylock Mountain, I looked up into the face of my rescuer and saw again that countenance which so short a time before had called into life impulses till then utterly unknown, I knew that my hour was come. And that was why my confidence was so spontaneous and my belief in the future so absolute.

"I trust your love which will work wonders; and I trust my own, which sprang at a look but only gathered strength and permanence when I found that the soul of the man I loved bettered his outward attractions, making the ideal of my foolish girlhood seem as unsubstantial and evanescent as a dream in the glowing noontide."

"My Own:

"I can say so now; for you have written to me, and I have the dancing words with which to silence any unsought doubt which might subdue the exuberance of these secret outpourings.

"I did not expect this. I thought that you would remain as silent as myself. But men's ways are not our ways. They cannot exhaust longings in purposeless words on scraps of soulless paper, and I am glad that they cannot. I love you for your impatience; for your purpose, and for the manliness which will win for you yet all that you covet of fame, accomplishment and love. You expect no reply, but there are ways in which one can keep silent and yet speak. Won't you be surprised when your answer comes in a manner you have never thought of?"

XX

CONFUSION

In his interest in what was going on on the other side of the wall, Sweetwater had forgotten himself. Daylight had declined, but in the darkness of the closet this change had passed unheeded. Night itself might come, but that should not force him to leave his post so long as his neighbour remained behind his locked door, brooding over the words of love and devotion which had come to him, as it were from the other world.

But was he brooding? That sound of iron clattering upon iron! That smothered exclamation and the laugh which ended it! Anger and determination rang in that laugh. It had a hideous sound which prepared Sweetwater for the smell which now reached his nostrils. The letters were burning; this time the lid had been lifted from the stove with unrelenting purpose. Poor Edith Challoner's touching words had met, a different fate from any which she, in her ignorance of this man's nature,--a nature to which she had ascribed untold perfections--could possibly have
conceived.

As Sweetwater thought of this, he stirred nervously in the darkness, and broke into silent invective against the man who could so insult the memory of one who had perished under the blight of his own coldness and misunderstanding. Then he suddenly started back surprised and apprehensive. Brotherson had unlocked his door, and was coming rapidly his way. Sweetwater heard his step in the hall and had hardly time to bound from his closet, when he saw his own door burst in and found himself face to face with his redoubtable neighbour, in a state of such rage as few men could meet without quailing, even were they of his own stature, physical vigour and prowess; and Sweetwater was a small man.

However, disappointment such as he had just experienced brings with it a desperation which often outdoes courage, and the detective, smiling with an air of gay surprise, shouted out:

"Well, what's the matter now? Has the machine busted, or tumbled into the fire or sailed away to lands unknown out of your open window?"

"You were coming out of that closet," was the fierce rejoinder. "What have you got there? Something which concerns me, or why should your face go pale at my presence and your forehead drip with sweat? Don't think that you've deceived me for a moment as to your business here. I recognised you immediately. You've played the stranger well, but you've a nose and an eye nobody could forget. I have known all along that I had a police spy for a neighbour; but it didn't faze me. I've nothing to conceal, and wouldn't mind a regiment of you fellows if you'd only play a straight game. But when it comes to foisting upon me a parcel of letters to which I have no right, and then setting a fellow like you to count my groans or whatever else they expected to hear, I have a right to defend myself, and defend myself I will, by God! But first, let me be sure that my accusations will stand. Come into this closet with me. It abuts on the wall of my room and has its own secret, I know. What is it? I have you at an advantage now, and you shall tell."

He did have Sweetwater at an advantage, and the detective knew it and disdained a struggle which would have only called up a crowd, friendly to the other but inimical to himself. Allowing Brotherson to drag him into the closet, he stood quiescent, while the determined man who held him with one hand, felt about with the other over the shelves and along the partitions till he came to the hole which had offered such a happy means of communication between the two rooms. Then, with a laugh almost as bitter in tone as that which rang from Brotherson's lips, he acknowledged that business had its necessities and that apologies from him were in order; adding, as they both stepped out into the rapidly darkening room:

"We've played a bout, we two; and you've come out ahead. Allow me to congratulate you, Mr. Brotherson. You've cleared yourself so far as I am concerned. I leave this ranch to-night."

The frown had come back to the forehead of the indignant man who confronted him.

"So you listened," he cried; "listened when you weren't sneaking under my eye! A fine occupation for a man who can dove-tail a corner like an adept. I wish I had let you join the brotherhood you were good enough to mention. They would know how to appreciate your double gifts and how to reward your excellence in the one, if not in the other. What did the police expect to learn about me that they should consider it necessary to call into exercise such extraordinary talents?"

"I'm not good at conundrums. I was given a task to perform, and I performed it," was Sweetwater's sturdy reply. Then slowly, with his eye fixed directly upon his antagonist, "I guess they thought you a man. And so did I until I heard you burn those letters. Fortunately we have copies."

"Letters!" Fury thickened the speaker's voice, and lent a savage gleam to his eye. "Forgeries! Make believes! Miss Challoner never wrote the drivel you dare to designate as letters. It was concocted at Police Headquarters. They made me tell my story and then they found some one who could wield the poetic pen. I'm obliged to them for the confidence they show in my credulity. I credit Miss Challoner with such words as have been given me to read here to-day? I knew the lady, and I know myself. Nothing that passed between us, not an event in which we were both concerned, has been forgotten by me, and no feature of our intercourse fits the language you have ascribed to her. On the contrary, there is a lamentable contradiction between facts as they were and the fancies you have made her indulge in. And this, as you must acknowledge, not only proves their falsity, but exonerates Miss Challoner from all possible charge of sentimentality."

"Yet she certainly wrote those letters. We had them from Mr. Challoner. The woman who brought them was really her maid. We have not deceived you in this."

"I do not believe you."

It was not offensively said; but the conviction it expressed was absolute. Sweetwater recognised the tone, as one of truth, and inwardly laid down his arms. He could never like the man; there was too much iron in his fibre; but he had to acknowledge that as a foe he was invulnerable and therefore admirable to one who had the good sense to appreciate him.
"I do not want to believe you." Thus did Brotherson supplement his former sentence. "For if I were to attribute those letters to her, I should have to acknowledge that they were written to another man than myself. And this would be anything but agreeable to me. Now I am going to my room and to my work. You may spend the rest of the evening or the whole night, if you will, listening at that hole. As heretofore, the labour will be all yours, and the indifference mine."

With a satirical play of feature which could hardly be called a smile, he nodded and left the room.

XXI
A CHANGE

"It's all up. I'm beaten on my own ground." Thus confessed Sweetwater, in great dejection, to himself. "But I'm going to take advantage of the permission he's just given me and continue the listening act. Just because he told me to and just because he thinks I won't. I'm sure it's no worse than to spend hours of restless tossing in bed, trying to sleep."

But our young detective did neither.

As he was putting his supper dishes away, a messenger boy knocked at his door and handed him a note. It was from Mr. Gryce and ran thus:

"Steal off, if you can, and as soon as you can, and meet me in Twenty-ninth Street. A discovery has been made which alters the whole situation."

XXII
O. B. AGAIN

"What's happened? Something very important. I ought to hope so after this confounded failure."

"Failure? Didn't he read the letters?"

"Yes, he read them. Had to, but--"

"Didn't weaken? Eh?"

"No, he didn't weaken. You can't get water out of a millstone. You may squeeze and squeeze; but it's your fingers which suffer, not it. He thinks we manufactured those letters ourselves on purpose to draw him."

"Humph! I knew we had a reputation for finesse, but I didn't know that it ran that high."

"He denies everything. Said she would never have written such letters to him; even goes so far to declare that if she did write them--(he must be strangely ignorant of her handwriting) they were meant for some other man than himself. All rot, but--" A hitch of the shoulder conveyed Sweetwater's disgust. His uniform good nature was strangely disturbed.

But Mr. Gryce's was not. The faint smile with which he smoothed with an easy, circling movement, the already polished top of his ever present cane conveyed a secret complacency which called up a flash of discomfiture to his greatly irritated companion.

"He says that, does he? You found him on the whole tolerably straightforward, eh? A hard nut; but hard nuts are usually sound ones. Come, now! prejudice aside, what's your honest opinion of the man you've had under your eye and ear for three solid weeks? Hasn't there been the best of reasons for your failure? Speak up, my boy. Squarely, now."

"I can't. I hate the fellow. I hate any one who makes me look ridiculous. He--well, well, if you'll have it, sir, I will say this much. If it weren't for that blasted coincidence of the two deaths equally mysterious, equally under his eye, I'd stake my life on his honesty. But that coincidence stumps me and--and a sort of feeling I have here."

It is to be hoped that the slap he gave his breast, at this point, carried off some of his superfluous emotion. "You can't account for a feeling, Mr. Gryce. The man has no heart. He's as hard as rocks."

"A not uncommon lack where the head plays so big a part. We can't hang him on any such argument as that. You've found no evidence against him?"

"N--no." The hesitating admission was only a proof of Sweetwater's obstinacy.

"Then listen to this. The test with the letters failed, because what he said about them was true. They were not meant for him. Miss Challoner had another lover."

"Only another? I thought there were a half-dozen, at least."

"Another whom she favoured. The letters found in her possession --not the ones she wrote herself, but those which were written to her over the signature O. B. were not all from the same hand. Experts have been busy with them for a week, and their reports are unanimous. The O. B. who wrote the threatening lines acknowledged to by Orlando Brotherson, was not the O. B. who penned all of those love letters. The similarity in the writing misled us at first, but once the doubt was raised by Mr. Challoner's discovery of an allusion in one of them which pointed to another writer than Mr. Brotherson, and experts had no difficulty in reaching the decision I have mentioned."

"Two O. B.s! Isn't that incredible, Mr. Gryce?"

"Yes, it is incredible; but the incredible is not the impossible. The man you've been shadowing denies that these
expressive effusions of Miss Challoner were meant for him. Let us see, then, if we can find the man they were meant for."

"The second O. B. ?"
"Yes."
Sweetwater's face instantly lit up.
"Do you mean that I--after my egregious failure--am not to be kept on the dunce's seat? That you will give me this new job?"
"Yes. We don't know of a better man. It isn't your fault, you said it yourself, that water couldn't be squeezed out of a millstone."
"The Superintendent--how does he feel about it?"
"He was the first one to mention you."
"And the Inspector?"
"Is glad to see us on a new tack."
A pause, during which the eager light in the young detective's eye clouded over. Presently he remarked:
"How will the finding of another O. B. alter Mr. Brotherson's position? He still will be the one person on the spot, known to have cherished a grievance against the victim of this mysterious killing. To my mind, this discovery of a more favoured rival, brings in an element of motive which may rob our self-reliant friend of some of his complacency. We may further, rather than destroy, our case against Brotherson by locating a second O.B."
Mr. Gryce's eyes twinkled.
"That won't make your task any more irksome," he smiled. "The loop we thus throw out is as likely to catch Brotherson as his rival. It all depends upon the sort of man we find in this second O. B.; and whether, in some way unknown to us, he gave her cause for the sudden and overwhelming rush of despair which alone supports this general theory of suicide."
"The prospect grows pleasing. Where am I to look for my man?"
"Your ticket is bought to Derby, Pennsylvania. If he is not employed in the great factories there, we do not know where to find him. We have no other clew."
"I see. It's a short journey I have before me."
"It'll bring the colour to your cheeks."
"Oh, I'm not kicking."
"You will start to-morrow."
"Wish it were to-day."
"And you will first inquire, not for O. B., that's too indefinite; but for a young girl by the name of Doris Scott. She holds the clew; or rather she is the clew to this second O. B."

"Another woman!"
"No, a child;--well, I won't say child exactly; she must be sixteen."
"Doris Scott."
"She lives in Derby. Derby is a small place. You will have no trouble in finding this child. It was to her Miss Challoner's last letter was addressed. The one--"
"I begin to see."
"No, you don't, Sweetwater. The affair is as blind as your hat; nobody sees. We're just feeling along a thread. O. B.'s letters --the real O. B., I mean, are the manliest effusions possible. He's no more of a milksop than this Brotherson; and unlike your indomitable friend he seems to have some heart. I only wish he'd given us some facts; they would have been serviceable. But the letters reveal nothing except that he knew Doris. He writes in one of them: 'Doris is learning to embroider. It's like a fairy weaving a cobweb!' Doris isn't a very common name. She must be the same little girl to whom Miss Challoner wrote from time to time."
"Was this letter signed O. B.?"
"Yes; they all are. The only difference between his letters and Brotherson's is this: Brotherson's retain the date and address; the second O. B.'s do not."
"How not? Torn off, do you mean?"
"Yes, or rather, neatly cut away; and as none of the envelopes were kept, the only means by which we can locate the writer is through this girl Doris."
"If I remember rightly Miss Challoner's letter to this child was free from all mystery."
"Quite so. It is as open as the day. That is why it has been mentioned as showing the freedom of Miss Challoner's mind five minutes before that fatal thrust."
Sweetwater took up the sheet Mr. Gryce pushed towards him and re-read these lines:
"Dear Little Doris:
"It is a snowy night, but it is all bright inside and I feel no chill in mind or body. I hope it is so in the little cottage in Derby; that my little friend is as happy with harsh winds blowing from the mountains as she was on the summer day she came to see me at this hotel. I like to think of her as cheerful and beaming, rejoicing in tasks which make her so womanly and sweet. She is often, often in my mind.

"Affectionately your friend, "EDITH A. CHALLONER."
"That to a child of sixteen!"
"Just so."
"D-o-r-i-s spells something besides Doris."
"Yet there is a Doris. Remember that O. B. says in one of his letters, 'Doris is learning to embroider.'"
"Yes, I remember that."
"So you must first find Doris."
"Very good, sir."
"And as Miss Challoner's letter was directed to Derby, Pennsylvania, you will go to Derby."
"Yes, sir."
"Anything more?"
"I've been reading this letter again."
"It's worth it."
"The last sentence expresses a hope."
"That has been noted."

Sweetwater's eyes slowly rose till they rested on Mr. Gryce's face: "I'll cling to the thread you've given me. I'll work myself through the labyrinth before us till I reach HIM."

Mr. Gryce smiled; but there was more age, wisdom and sympathy for youthful enthusiasm in that smile than there was confidence or hope.

BOOK III
THE HEART OF MAN
XXIII
DORIS
"A young girl named Doris Scott?"

The station-master looked somewhat sharply at the man he was addressing, and decided to give the direction asked.

"There is but one young girl in town of that name," he declared, "and she lives in that little house you see just beyond the works. But let me tell you, stranger," he went on with some precipitation--

But here he was called off, and Sweetwater lost the conclusion of his warning, if warning it was meant to be. This did not trouble the detective. He stood a moment, taking in the prospect; decided that the Works and the Works alone made the town, and started for the house which had been pointed out to him. His way lay through the chief business street, and greatly preoccupied by his errand, he gave but a passing glance to the rows on rows of workmen's dwellings stretching away to the left in seemingly endless perspective. Yet in that glance he certainly took in the fact that the sidewalks were blocked with people and wondered if it were a holiday. If so, it must be an enforced one, for the faces showed little joy. Possibly a strike was on. The anxiety he everywhere saw pictured on young faces and old, argued some trouble; but if the trouble was that, why were all heads turned indifferently from the Works, and why were the Works themselves in full blast?

These questions he may have asked himself and he may not. His attention was entirely centred on the house he saw before him and on the possible developments awaiting him there. Nothing else mattered. briskly he stepped out along the sandy road, and after a turn or two which led him quite away from the Works and its surrounding buildings, he came out upon the highway and this house.

It was a low and unpretentious one, and had but one distinguishing feature. The porch which hung well over the doorstep was unique in shape and gave an air of picturesque-hood to an otherwise simple exterior; a picturesque-hood which was much enhanced in its effect by the background of illimitable forest, which united the foreground of this pleasing picture with the great chain of hills which held the Works and town in its ample basin.

As he approached the doorstep, his mind involuntarily formed an anticipatory image of the child whose first stitches in embroidery were like a fairy's weaving to the strong man who worked in ore and possibly figured out bridges. That she would prove to be of the anemic type, common among working girls gifted with an imagination they have but scant opportunity to exercise, he had little doubt.

He was therefore greatly taken aback, when at his first step upon the porch, the door before him flew open and he beheld in the dark recess beyond a young woman of such bright and blooming beauty that he hardly noticed her expression of extreme anxiety, till she lifted her hand and laid an admonitory finger softly on her lip:
"Hush!" she whispered, with an earnestness which roused him from his absorption and restored him to the full meaning of this encounter. "There is sickness in the house and we are very anxious. Is your errand an important one? If not--" The faltering break in the fresh, young voice, the look she cast behind her into the darkened interior, were eloquent with the hope that he would recognise her impatience and pass on.

And so he might have done,--so he would have done under all ordinary circumstances. But if this was Doris--and he did not doubt the fact after the first moment of startled surprise--how dare he forego this opportunity of settling the question which had brought him here.

With a slight stammer but otherwise giving no evidence of the effect made upon him by the passionate intensity with which she had urged this plea, he assured her that his errand was important, but one so quickly told that it would delay her but a moment. "But first," said he, with very natural caution, "let me make sure that it is to Miss Doris Scott I am speaking. My errand is to her and her only."

Without showing any surprise, perhaps too engrossed in her own thoughts to feel any, she answered with simple directness, "Yes, I am Doris Scott." Whereupon he became his most persuasive self, and pulling out a folded paper from his pocket, opened it and held it before her, with these words:

"Then will you be so good as to glance at this letter and tell me if the person whose initials you will find at the bottom happens to be in town at the present moment?"

In some astonishment now, she glanced down at the sheet thus boldly thrust before her, and recognising the O and the B of a well-known signature, she flashed a look back at Sweetwater in which he read a confusion of emotions for which he was hardly prepared.

"Ah," thought he, "it's coming. In another moment I shall hear what will repay me for the trials and disappointments of all these months."

But the moment passed and he had heard nothing. Instead, she dropped her hands from the door-jamb and gave such unmistakable evidences of intended flight, that but one alternative remained to him; he became abrupt.

Thrusting the paper still nearer, he said, with an emphasis which could not fail of making an impression, "Read it. Read the whole letter. You will find your name there. This communication was addressed to Miss Challoner, but--"

Oh, now she found words! With a low cry, she put out her hand in quick entreaty, begging him to desist and not speak that name on any pretext or for any purpose. "He may rouse and hear," she explained, with another quick look behind her. "The doctor says that this is the critical day. He may become conscious any minute. If he should and were to hear that name, it might kill him."

"He!" Sweetwater perked up his ears. "Who do you mean by he?"

"Mr. Brotherson, my patient, he whose letter--" But here her impatience rose above every other consideration. Without attempting to finish her sentence, or yielding in the least to her curiosity or interest in this man's errand, she cried out with smothered intensity, "Go! go! I cannot stay another moment from his bedside."

But a thunderbolt could not have moved Sweetwater after the hearing of that name. "Mr. Brotherson!" he echoed. "Brotherson! Not Orlando?"

"No, no; his name is Oswald. He's the manager of these Works. He's sick with typhoid. We are caring for him. If you belonged here you would know that much. There! that's his voice you hear. Go, if you have any mercy." And she began to push to the door.

But Sweetwater was impervious to all hint. With eager eyes straining into the shadowy depths just visible over her shoulder, he listened eagerly for the disjointed words now plainly to be heard in some near-by but unseen chamber.

"The second O. B.!' he inwardly declared. "And he's a Brotherson also, and--sick! Miss Scott," he whisperingly entreated as her hand fell in manifest despair from the door, "don't send me away yet. I've a question of the greatest importance to put you, and one minute more cannot make any difference to him. Listen! those cries are the cries of delirium; he cannot miss you; he's not even conscious."

"He's calling out in his sleep. He's calling her, just as he has called for the last two weeks. But he will wake conscious--or he will not wake at all."

The anguish trembling in that latter phrase would have attracted Sweetwater's earnest, if not pitiful, attention at any other time, but now he had ears only for the cry which at that moment came ringing shrilly from within--"Edith! Edith!"

The living shouting for the dead! A heart still warm sending forth its longing to the pierced and pulseless one, hidden in a far-off tomb! To Sweetwater, who had seen Miss Challoner buried, this summons of distracted love came with weird force.

Then the present regained its sway. He heard her name again, and this time it sounded less like a call and more like the welcoming cry of meeting spirits. Was death to end this separation? Had he found the true O. B., only to
behold another and final seal fall upon this closely folded mystery? In his fear of this possibility, he caught at Doris' hand as she was about to bound away, and eagerly asked:

"When was Mr. Brotherson taken ill? Tell me, I entreat you; the exact day and, if you can, the exact hour. More depends upon this than you can readily realise."

She wrenched her hand from his, panting with impatience and a vague alarm. But she answered him distinctly:

"On the Twenty-fifth of last month, just an hour after he was made manager. He fell in a faint at the Works."

"The day--the very day of Miss Challoner's death!"

"Had he heard--did you tell him then or afterwards what happened in New York on that very date?"

"No, no, we have not told him. It would have killed him--and may yet."

"Edith! Edith!" came again through the hush, a hush so deep that Sweetwater received the impression that the house was empty save for patient and nurse.

This discovery had its effects upon him. Why should he subject this young and loving girl to further pain? He had already learned more than he had expected to. The rest would come with time. But at the first intimation he gave of leaving, she lost her abstracted air and turned with absolute eagerness towards him.

"One moment," said she. "You are a stranger and I do not know your name or your purpose here. But I cannot let you go without begging you not to mention to any one in this town that Mr. Brotherson has any interest in the lady whose name we must not speak. Do not repeat that delirious cry you have heard or betray in any way our intense and fearful interest in this young lady's strange death. You have shown me a letter. Do not speak of that letter, I entreat you. Help us to retain our secret a little longer. Only the doctor and myself know what awaits Mr. Brotherson if he lives. I had to tell the doctor, but a doctor reveals nothing. Promise that you will not either, at least till this crisis is passed. It will help my father and it will help me; and we need all the help we can get."

Sweetwater allowed himself one minute of thought, then he earnestly replied:

"I will keep your secret for to-day, and longer, if possible."

"Thank you," she cried; "thank you. I thought I saw kindness in your face." And she again prepared to close the door.

But Sweetwater had one more question to ask. "Pardon me," said he, as he stepped down on the walk, "you say that this is a critical day with your patient. Is that why every one whom I have seen so far wears such a look of anxiety?"

"Yes, yes," she cried, giving him one other glimpse of her lovely, agitated face. "There's but one feeling in town to-day, but one hope, and, as I believe, but one prayer. That the man whom every one loves and every one trusts may live to run these Works."

"Edith! Edith!" rose in ceaseless reiteration from within.

But it rang but faintly now in the ears of our detective. The door had fallen to, and Sweetwater's share in the anxieties of that household was over.

Slowly he moved away. He was in a confused yet elated condition of mind. Here was food for a thousand new thoughts and conjectures. An Orlando Brotherson and an Oswald Brotherson--relatives possibly, strangers possibly; but whether relatives or strangers, both given to signing their letters with their initials simply; and both the acknowledged admirers of the deceased Miss Challoner. But she had loved only one, and that one, Oswald. It not difficult to recognise the object of this high hearted woman's affections in this man whose struggle with the master-destroyer had awakened the solicitude of a whole town.

XXIV

SUSPENSE

Ten minutes after Sweetwater's arrival in the village streets, he was at home with the people he found there. His conversation with Doris in the doorway of her home had been observed by the curious and far-sighted, and the questions asked and answered had made him friends at once. Of course, he could tell them nothing, but that did not matter, he had seen and talked with Doris and their idolised young manager was no worse and might possibly soon be better.

Of his own affairs--of his business with Doris and the manager, they asked nothing. All ordinary interests were lost in the stress of their great suspense.

It was the same in the bar-room of the one hotel. Without resorting to more than a question or two, he readily learned all that was generally known of Oswald Brotherson. Every one was talking about him, and each had some story to tell illustrative of his kindness, his courage and his quick mind. The Works had never produced a man of such varied capabilities and all round sympathies. To have him for manager meant the greatest good which could befall this little community.

His rise had been rapid. He had come from the east three years before, new to the work. Now, he was the one man there. Of his relationships east, family or otherwise, nothing was said. For them his life began and ended in
you wish, or Mr. Challoner can. You may have confidence in my reply; it will not mislead you."

favour of a quick recovery; but we never can be sure. You had better return to New York. Later, you can write me if
Challoner's business will have to wait."

weakened state, I should fear a relapse, with all its attendant dangers. What then, if any intimation should be given
condition of things to be disturbed, --were the faintest rumour of sorrow or disaster to reach him in his present
recovery is the fact that he is ignorant of his trouble or that he has any cause for doubt or dread. Were this happy
name I have simply to mention, for you to understand that my business is with Mr. Brotherson whom I am sorry to
realised the hopelessness of the whole situation."

"That I see; but if I knew when I might speak--"

"I can give you no date. Typhoid is a treacherous complaint; he has the best of nurses and the chances are in
favour of a quick recovery; but we never can be sure. You had better return to New York. Later, you can write me if
you wish, or Mr. Challoner can. You may have confidence in my reply; it will not mislead you."

Sweetwater muttered his thanks and rose. Then he slowly sat down again.
"Dr. Fenton," he began, "you are a man to be trusted. I'm in a devil of a fix, and there is just a possibility that you may be able to help me out. It is the general opinion in New York, as you may know, that Miss Challoner committed suicide. But the circumstances do not fully bear out this theory, nor can Mr. Challoner be made to accept it. Indeed, he is so convinced of its falsehood, that he stands ready to do anything, pay anything, suffer anything, to have this distressing blight removed from his daughter's good name. Mr. Brotherson was her dearest friend, and as such may have the clew to this mystery, but Mr. Brotherson may not be in a condition to speak for several weeks. Meanwhile, Mr. Challoner must suffer from great suspense unless--" a pause during which he searched the doctor's face with a perfectly frank and inquiring expression--"unless some one else can help us out. Dr. Fenton, can you?"

The doctor did not need to speak; his expression conveyed his answer.

"No more than another," said he. "Except for what Doris felt compelled to tell me, I know as little as yourself. Mr. Brotherson's delirium took the form of calling continually upon one name. I did not know this name, but Doris did, also the danger lurking in the fact that he had yet to hear of the tragedy which had robbed him of this woman to whom he was so deeply attached. So she told me just this much. That the Edith whose name rung so continuously in our ears was no other than the Miss Challoner of New York of whose death and its tragic circumstances the papers have been full; that their engagement was a secret one unshared so far as she knew by any one but herself. That she begged me to preserve this secret and to give her all the help I could when the time came for him to ask questions. Especially did she entreat me to be with her at the crisis. I was, but his waking was quite natural. He did not ask for Miss Challoner; he only inquired how long he had been ill and whether Doris had received a letter during that time. She had not received one, a fact which seemed to disappoint him; but she carried it off so gaily (she is a wonderful girl, Mr. Sweetwater--the darling of all our hearts), saying that he must not be so egotistical as to think that the news of his illness had gone beyond Derby, that he soon recovered his spirits and became a very promising convalescent. That is all I know about the matter; little more, I take it, than you know yourself."

Sweetwater nodded; he had expected nothing from the doctor, and was not disappointed at his failure. There were two strings to his bow, and the one proving valueless, he proceeded to test the other.

"You have mentioned Miss Scott, as the confidante--and only confidante of this unhappy pair," said he. "Would it be possible--can you make it possible for me to see her?"

It was a daring proposition; he understood this at once from the doctor's expression; and, fearing a hasty rebuff, he proceeded to supplement his request with a few added arguments, urged with such unexpected address and show of reason that Dr. Fenton's aspect visibly softened and in the end he found himself ready to promise that he would do what he could to secure his visitor the interview he desired if he would come to the house the next day at the time of his own morning visit.

This was as much as the young detective could expect, and having expressed his thanks, he took his leave in anything but a discontented frame of mind. With so powerful an advocate as the doctor, he felt confident that he should soon be able to conquer this young girl's reticence and learn all that was to be learned from any one but Mr. Brotherson himself. In the time which must elapse between that happy hour and the present, he would circulate and learn what he could about the prospective manager. But he soon found that he could not enter the Works without a permit, and this he was hardly in a position to demand; so he strolled about the village instead, and later wandered away into the forest.

Struck by the inviting aspect of a narrow and little used road opening from the highway shortly above the house where his interests were just then centred, he strolled into the heart of the spring woods till he came to a depression where a surprise awaited him, in the shape of a peculiar structure rising from its midst where it just fitted, or so nearly fitted that one could hardly walk about it without brushing the surrounding tree trunks. Of an oval shape, with its door facing the approach, it nestled there, a wonder to the eye and the occasion of considerable speculation to his inquiring mind. It had not been long built, as was shown very plainly by the fresh appearance of the unpainted boards of which it was constructed; and while it boasted of a door, as I've already said, there were no evidences visible of any other break in the smooth, neatly finished walls. A wooden ellipse with a roof but no windows; such it appeared and such it proved to be. A mystery to Sweetwater's eyes, and like all mysteries, interesting. For what purpose had it been built and why this isolation? It was too flimsy for a reservoir and too expensive for the wild freak of a crank.

A nearer view increased his curiosity. In the projection of the roof over the curving sides he found fresh food for inquiry. As he examined it in the walk he made around the whole structure, he came to a place where something like a hinge became visible and further on another. The roof was not simply a roof; it was also a lid capable of being raised for the air and light which the lack of windows necessitated. This was an odd discovery indeed, giving to the uncanny structure the appearance of a huge box, the cover of which could be raised or lowered at pleasure. And again he asked himself for what it could be intended? What enterprise, even of the great Works, could demand a secrecy so absolute that such pains as these should be taken to shut out all possibility of a prying eye. Nothing in his
experience supplied him with an answer.

He was still looking up at these hinges, with a glance which took in at the same time the nearness and extreme height of the trees by which this sylvan mystery was surrounded, when a sound from the road on the opposite side of the hollow brought his conjectures to a standstill and sent him hurrying on to the nearest point from which that road became visible.

A team was approaching. He could hear the heavy tread of horses working their laborious way through trees whose obstructing branches swished before and behind them. They were bringing in a load for this shed, whose uses he would consequently soon understand. Grateful for his good luck—for his was a curiosity which could not stand defeat—he took a few steps into the wood, and from the vantage point of a concealing cluster of bushes, fixed his eyes upon the spot where the road opened into the hollow.

Something blue moved there, and in another moment, to his great amazement, there stepped into view the spirited form of Doris Scott, who if he had given the matter a thought he would have supposed to be sitting just then by the bedside of her patient, a half mile back on the road.

She was dressed for the woods in a blue skirt and jacket and moved like a leader in front of a heavily laden wagon now coming to a standstill before the closely shut shed—if such we may call it.

"I have a key," so she called out to the driver who had paused for orders. "When I swing the doors wide, drive straight in."

Sweetwater took a look at the wagon. It was piled high with large wooden boxes on more than one of which he could see scrawled the words: O. Brotherson, Derby, Pa.

This explained her presence, but the boxes told nothing. They were of all sizes and shapes, and some of them so large that the assistance of another man was needed to handle them. Sweetwater was about to offer his services when a second man appeared from somewhere in the rear, and the detective's attention being thus released from the load out of which he could make nothing, he allowed it to concentrate upon the young girl who had it in charge and who, for many reasons, was the one person of supreme importance to him.

She had swung open the two wide doors, and now stood waiting for horse and wagon to enter. With locks flying free—she wore no bonnet—she presented a picture of ever increasing interest to Sweetwater. Truly she was a very beautiful girl, buoyant, healthy and sweet; as unlike as possible his preconceived notions of Miss Challoner's humble little protegee. Her brown hair of a rich chestnut hue, was in itself a wonder. On no head, even in the great city he had just left, had he seen such abundance, held in such modest restraint. Nature had been partial to this little working girl and given her the chevelure of a queen.

But this was nothing. No one saw this aureole when once the eye had rested on her features and caught the full nobility of their expression and the lurking sweetness underlying her every look. She herself made the charm and whether placed high or placed low, must ever attract the eye and afterwards lure the heart, by an individuality which hardly needed perfect features in which to express itself.

Young yet, but gifted, as girls of her class often are, with the nicest instincts and purest aspirations, she showed the elevation of her thoughts both in her glance and the poise with which she awaited events. Sweetwater watched her with admiration as she superintended the unloading of the wagon and the disposal of the various boxes on the floor within; but as nothing she said during the process was calculated to afford the least enlightenment in regard to their contents, he presently wearied of his inaction and turned back towards the highway, comforting himself with the reflection that in a few short hours he would have her to himself when nothing but a blunder on his part should hinder him from sounding her young mind and getting such answers to his questions as the affair in which he was so deeply interested, demanded.

XXVI

SWEETWATER RETURNS

"You see me again, Miss Scott. I hope that yesterday's intrusion has not prejudiced you against me."

"I have no prejudices," was her simple but firm reply. "I am only hurried and very anxious. The doctor is with Mr. Brotherson just now; but he has several other equally sick patients to visit and I dare not keep him here too long."

"Then you will welcome my abruptness. Miss Scott, here is a letter from Mr. Challoner. It will explain my position. As you will see, his only desire is to establish the fact that his daughter did not commit suicide. She was all he had in the world, and the thought that she could, for any reason, take her own life is unbearable to him. Indeed, he will not believe she did so, evidence or no evidence. May I ask if you agree with him? You have seen Miss Challoner, I believe. Do you think she was the woman to plunge a dagger in her heart in a place as public as a hotel reception room?"

"No, Mr. Sweetwater. I'm a poor working girl, with very little education and almost no knowledge of the world and such ladies as she. But something tells me for all that, that she was too nice to do this. I saw her once and it
made me want to be quiet and kind and beautiful like her. I never shall think she did anything so horrible. Nor will Mr. Brotherson ever believe it. He could not and live. You see, I am talking to you as if you knew him,—the kind of man he is and just how he feels towards Miss Challoner. He is—" Her voice trailed off and a look, uncommon and almost elevated, illumined her face. "I will not tell you what he is; you will know, if you ever see him."

"If the favourable opinion of a whole town makes a good fellow, he ought to be of the best," returned Sweetwater, with his most honest smile. "I hear but one story of him wherever I turn."

"There is but one story to tell," she smiled, and her head drooped softly, but with no air of self-consciousness.

Sweetwater watched her for a moment, and then remarked: "I'm going to take one thing for granted; that you are as anxious as we are to clear Miss Challoner's memory."

"O yes, O yes."

"More than that, that you are ready and eager to help us. Your very looks show that."

"You are right; I would do anything to help you. But what can a girl like me do? Nothing; nothing. I know too little. Mr. Challoner must see that when you tell him I'm only the daughter of a foreman."

"And a friend of Mr. Brotherson," supplemented Sweetwater.

"Yes," she smiled, "he would want me to say so. But that's his goodness. I don't deserve the honour."

"His friend and therefore his confidante," Sweetwater continued. "He has talked to you about Miss Challoner?"

"He had to. There was nobody else to whom he could talk; and then, I had seen her and could understand."

"Where did you see her?"

"In New York. I was there once with father, who took me to see her. I think she had asked Mr. Brotherson to send his little friend to her hotel if ever we came to New York."

"That was some time ago?"

"We were there in June."

"And you have corresponded ever since with Miss Challoner?"

"She has been good enough to write, and I have ventured at times to answer her."

The suspicion which might have come to some men found no harbour in Sweetwater's mind. This young girl was beautiful, there was no denying that, beautiful in a somewhat startling and quite unusual way; but there was nothing in her bearing, nothing in Miss Challoner's letters to indicate that she had been a cause for jealousy in the New York lady's mind. He, therefore, ignored this possibility, pursuing his inquiry along the direct lines he had already laid out for himself. Smiling a little, but in a very earnest fashion, he pointed to the letter she still held and quietly said:

"Remember that I'm not speaking for myself, Miss Scott, when I seem a little too persistent and inquiring. You have corresponded with Miss Challoner; you have been told the fact of her secret engagement to Mr. Brotherson and you have been witness to his conduct and manner for the whole time he has been separated from her. Do you, when you think of it carefully, recall anything in the whole story of this romance which would throw light upon the cruel tragedy which has so unexpectedly ended it? Anything, Miss Scott? Straws show which way the stream flows."

She was vehement, instantly vehement, in her disclaimer.

"I can answer at once," said she, "because I have thought of nothing else for all these weeks. Here all was well. Mr. Brotherson was hopeful and happy and believed in her happiness and willingness to wait for his success. And this success was coming so fast! Oh, how can we ever tell him! How can we ever answer his questions even, or keep him satisfied and calm until he is strong enough to hear the truth. I've had to acknowledge already that I have had no letter from her for weeks. She never wrote to him directly, you know, and she never sent him messages, but he knew that a letter to me, was also a letter to him and I can see that he is troubled by this long silence, though he says I was right not to let her know of his illness and that I must continue to keep her in ignorance of it till he is quite well again and can write to her herself. It is hard to hear him talk like this and not look sad or frightened."

Sweetwater remembered Miss Challoner's last letter, and wished he had it here to give her. In default of this, he said:

"Perhaps this not hearing may act in the way of a preparation for the shock which must come to him sooner or later. Let us hope so, Miss Scott."

Her eyes filled.

"Nothing can prepare him," said she. Then added, with a yearning accent, "I wish I were older or had more experience. I should not feel so helpless. But the gratitude I owe him will give me strength when I need it most. Only I wish the suffering might be mine rather than his."

Unconsciously of any self-betrayal, she lifted her eyes, startling Sweetwater by the beauty of her look. "I don't think I'm so sorry for Oswald Brotherson," he murmured to himself as he left her. "He's a more fortunate man than he knows, however deeply he may feel the loss of his first sweetheart."

That evening the disappointed Sweetwater took the train for New York. He had failed to advance the case in hand one whit, yet the countenance he showed Mr. Gryce at their first interview was not a wholly gloomy one.
"Fifty dollars to the bad!" was his first laconic greeting. "All I have learned is comprised in these two statements. The second O. B. is a fine fellow; and not intentionally the cause of our tragedy. He does not even know about it. He's down with the fever at present and they haven't told him. When he's better we may hear something; but I doubt even that."

"Tell me about it."

Sweetwater complied; and such is the unconsciousness with which we often encounter the pivotal circumstance upon which our future or the future of our most cherished undertaking hangs, he omitted from his story, the sole discovery which was of any real importance in the unravelling of the mystery in which they were so deeply concerned. He said nothing of his walk in the woods or of what he saw there.

"A meagre haul," he remarked at the close.

"But that's as it should be, if you and I are right in our impressions and the clew to this mystery lies here in the character and daring of Orlando Brotherson. That's why I'm not down in the mouth. Which goes to show what a grip my prejudices have on me."

"As prejudiced as a bulldog."

"Exactly. By the way, what news of the gentleman I've just mentioned? Is he as serene in my absence as when under my eye?"

"More so; he looks like a man on the verge of triumph. But I fear the triumph he anticipates has nothing to do with our affairs. All his time and thought is taken up with his invention."

"You discourage me, sir. And now to see Mr. Challoner. Small comfort can I carry him."

XXVII

THE IMAGE OF DREAD

In the comfortable little sitting-room of the Scott cottage Doris stood, looking eagerly from the window which gave upon the road. Behind her on the other side of the room, could be seen through a partly opened door, a neatly spread bed, with a hand lying quietly on the patched coverlet. It was a strong looking hand which, even when quiescent, conveyed the idea of purpose and vitality. As Doris said, the fingers never curled up languidly, but always with the hint of a clench. Several weeks had passed since the departure of Sweetwater and the invalid was fast gaining strength. To-morrow, he would be up.

Was Doris thinking of him? Undoubtedly, for her eyes often flashed his way; but her main attention was fixed upon the road, though no one was in sight at the moment. Some one had passed for whose return she looked; some one whom, if she had been asked to describe, she would have called a tall, fine-looking man of middle age, of a cultivated appearance seldom seen in this small manufacturing town; seldom seen, possibly, in any town. He had glanced up at the window as he went by, in a manner too marked not to excite her curiosity. Would he look up again when he came back? She was waiting there to see. Why, she did not know. She was not used to indulging in petty suppositions of this kind; her life was too busy, her anxieties too keen. The great dread looming ever before her,--the dread of that hour when she must speak,--left her very little heart for anything dissociated with this coming event. For a girl of seventeen she was unusually thoughtful. Life had been hard in this little cottage since her mother died, or rather she had felt its responsibilities keenly.

Life itself could not be hard where Oswald Brotherson lived; neither to man, nor woman. The cheer of some natures possesses a divine faculty. If it can help no other way, it does so by the aid of its own light. Such was the character of this man's temperament. The cottage was a happy place; only--she never fathomed the depths of that only. If in these days she essayed at times to do so, she gave full credit to the Dread which rose ever before her,--the dread of that hour when she must speak,--left her very little heart for anything dissociated with this coming event. For a girl of seventeen she was unusually thoughtful. Life had been hard in this little cottage since her mother died, or rather she had felt its responsibilities keenly.

But her interest had been caught to-day, caught by this stranger, and when during her eager watch the small messenger from the Works came to the door with the usual daily supply of books and magazines for the patient, she stepped out on the porch to speak to him and to point out the gentleman who was now rapidly returning from his stroll up the road.

"Who is that, Johnny?" she asked. "You know everybody who comes to town. What is the name of the gentleman you see coming?"

The boy looked, searched his memory, not without some show of misgiving.

"A queer name," he admitted at last. "I never heard the likes of it here before. Shally something. Shally--Shally--"

"Challoner?"

"Yes, that's it. How could you guess? He's from New York. Nobody knows why he's here. Don't seem to have no business."

"Well, never mind. Run on, Johnny. And don't forget to come earlier to-morrow; Mr. Brotherson gets tired
"Does he? I'll come quick then; quick as I can run." And he sped off at a pace which promised well for the morrow.

Challoner! There was but one Challoner in the world for Doris Scott,—Edith's father. Was this he? It must be, or why this haunting sense of something half remembered as she caught a glimpse of his face. Edith's father! and he was approaching, approaching rapidly, on his way back to town. Would he stop this time? As the possibility struck her, she trembled and drew back, entering the house, but pausing in the hall with her ear turned to the road. She had not closed the door; something within—a hope or a dread—had prevented that. Would he take it as an invitation to come in? No, no; she was not ready for such an encounter yet. He might speak Edith's name; Oswald might hear and—with a gasp she recognised the closeness of his step; heard it lag, almost halt just where the path to the house ran into the roadside. But it passed on. He was not going to force an interview yet. She could hear him retreating further and further away. The event was not for this day, thank God! She would have one night at least in which to prepare herself.

With a sense of relief so great that she realised, for one shocked moment, the full extent of her fears, she hastened back into the sitting-room, with her collection of books and pamphlets. A low voice greeted her. It came from the adjoining room.

"Doris, come here, sweet child. I want you."

How she would have bounded joyously at the summons, had not that Dread raised its bony finger in every call from that dearly loved voice. As it was, her feet moved slowly, lingering at the sound. But they carried her to his side at last, and once there, she smiled.

"See what an armful," she cried in joyous greeting, as she held out the bundle she had brought. "You will be amused all day. Only, do not tire yourself."

"I do not want the papers, Doris; not yet. There's something else which must come first. Doris, I have decided to let you write to her. I'm so much better now, she will not feel alarmed. I must—must get a word from her. I'm starving for it. I lie here and can think of nothing else. A message—one little message of six short words would set me on my feet again. So get your paper and pen, dear child, and write her one of your prettiest letters."

Had he loved her, he would have perceived the chill which shook her whole body, as he spoke. But his first thought, his penetrating thought, was not for her and he saw only the answering glance, the patient smile. She had not expected him to see more. She knew that she was quite safe from the divining look; otherwise, he would have known her secret long ago.

"I'm ready," said she. But she did not lay down her bundle. She was not ready for her task, poor child. She quailed before it. She quailed so much that she feared to stir lest he should see that she had no command over her movements.

The man who watched without seeing wondered that she stood so still and spoke so briefly. But only for a moment. He thought he understood her hesitation, and a look of great earnestness replaced his former one of grave decision.

"I know that in doing this I am going beyond my sacred compact with Miss Challoner," he said. "I never thought of illness,—at least, of illness on my part. I never dreamt that I, always so well, always so full of life, could know such feebleness as this, feebleness which is all of the body, Doris, leaving the mind free to dream and long. Talk of her, child. Tell me all over again just how she looked and spoke that day you saw her in New York."

"Would it not be better for me to write my letter first? Papa will be coming soon and Truda can never cook your bird as you like it."

Surprised now by something not quite natural in her manner, he caught at her hand and held her as she was moving away.

"You are tired," said he. "I've wearied you with my commission and complaints. Forgive me, dear child, and—"

"You are mistaken," she interrupted softly. "I am not tired; I only wished to do the important thing first. Shall I get my desk? Do you really wish me to write?"

"Yes," said he, softly dropping her hand. "I wish you to write. It will ensure me good sleep, and sleep will make me strong. A few words, Doris; just a few words."

She nodded; turning quickly away to hide her tears. His smile had gone to her very soul. It was always a beautiful one, his chief personal attraction, but at this moment it seemed to concentrate within it the unspoken fervours and the boundless expectations of a great love, and she who was the aim and cause of all this sweetness lay in unresponsive silence in a distant tomb!

But Doris' own smile was not lacking in encouragement and beauty when she came back a few minutes later and sat down by his side to write. His melted before it, leaving his eyes very earnest as he watched her bending figure and the hard-worked little hand at its unaccustomed task.
"I must give her daily exercises," he decided within himself. "That look of pain shows how difficult this work is for her. It must be made easy at any cost to my time. Such beauty calls for accomplishment. I must not neglect so plain a duty."

Meantime, she was struggling to find words in face of that great Dread. She had written Dear Miss Challoner and was staring in horror at the soulless words. Only her sense of duty upheld her. Gladly would she have torn the sheet in two and rushed away. How could she add sentences to this hollow phrase, the mere employment of which seemed a sacrifice. Dear Miss Challoner. Oh, she was dear, but--

Unconsciously the young head drooped, and the pen slid from her hand.

"I cannot," she murmured, "I cannot think what to say."

"Shall I help you?" came softly from the bed. "I'll try and not forget that it is Doris writing."

"If you will be so good," she answered, with renewed courage. "I can put the words down if you will only find them for me."

"Write then. 'Dear Miss Challoner!'"

"I have already written that."

"Why do you shudder?"

"I'm cold. I've been cold all day. But never mind that, Mr. Brotherson. Tell me how to begin my letter."

"This way. 'I've not been able to answer your kind letter, because I have had to play nurse for some three or four weeks to a very fretful and exacting patient.' Have you written that?"

"No," said Doris, bending over her desk till her curls fell in a tangle over her white cheeks. "I do not like to," she protested at last, with an attempt at naivete which seemed real enough to him.

"Well, leave out the fretful if you must, but keep in the exacting. I have been exacting, you know."

Silence, broken only by the scratching of the stubborn, illy-directed pen.

"It's down," she whispered. She said, afterward, that it was like writing with a ghost looking over one's shoulder.

"Then add, 'Mr. Brotherson has had a slight attack of fever, but he is getting well fast, and will soon--, Do I run on too quickly?"

"No, no, I can follow."

"But not without losing breath; eh, Doris?"

As he laughed, she smiled. There was a heroism in that smile, Oswald Brotherson, of which you knew nothing.

"You might speak a little more slowly," she admitted.

Quietly he repeated the last phrase. "'But he is getting well fast and will soon be ready to take up the management of the Works which was given him just before he was taken ill.' That will show her that I am working up," he brightly remarked as Doris carefully penned the last word. "Of myself you need say nothing more, unless--" he paused and his face took on a wistful look which Doris dared not meet; "unless--but no, no, she must think it has been only a passing indisposition. If she knew I had been really ill, she would suffer, and perhaps act imprudently or suffer and not dare to act at all, which might be sadder for her still. Leave it where it is and begin about yourself. Write a good deal about yourself, so that she will see that you are not worried and that all is well with us here. Cannot you do that without assistance? Surely you can tell her about that last piece of embroidery you showed me. She will be glad to hear--why, Doris!"

"Oh, Mr. Brotherson," the poor child burst out, "you must let me cry! I'm so glad to see you better and interested in all sorts of things. These are not tears of grief. I--I--but I'm forgetting what the doctor told me. You are growing excited, and I was to see that you were calm, always calm. I will take my desk away. I will write the rest in the other room, while you look at the magazines."

"But bring your letter back for me to seal. I want to see it in its envelope. Oh, Doris, you are a good little girl!"

She shook her head, and hastened to hide herself from him in the other room; and it was a long time before she came back with the letter folded and in its envelope. When she did, her face was composed and her manner natural. She had quite made up her mind what her duty was and how she was going to perform it.

"Here is the letter," said she, laying it in his outstretched hand. Then she turned her back. She knew, with a woman's unerring instinct why he wished to handle it before it went. She felt that kiss he folded away in it, in every fibre of her aroused and sympathetic heart, but the hardest part of the ordeal was over and her eyes beamed softly when she turned again to take it from his hand and affix the stamp.

"You will mail it yourself?" she asked. "I should like to have you put it into the box with your own hand."

"I will put it in to-night, after supper," she promised him.

His smile of contentment assured her that this trial of her courage and self-control was not without one blessed result. He would rest for several days in the pleasure of what he had done or thought he had done. She need not cringe before that image of Dread for two, three days at least. Meanwhile, he would grow strong in body, and she, perhaps, in spirit. Only one precaution she must take. No hint of Mr. Challoner's presence in town must reach him.
He must be guarded from a knowledge of that fact as certainly as from the more serious one which lay behind it.

XXVIII
I HOPE NEVER TO SEE THAT MAN

That this would be a difficult thing to do, Doris was soon to realise. Mr. Challoner continued to pass the house twice a day and the time finally came when he ventured up the walk.

Doris was in the window and saw him coming. She slipped softly out and intercepted him before he had stepped upon the porch. She had caught up her hat as she passed through the hall, and was fitting it to her head as he looked up and saw her.

"Miss Scott?" he asked.
"Yes, Mr. Challoner."

"You know me?" he went on, one foot on the step and one still on the walk.

Before replying she closed the door behind her. Then as she noted his surprise she carefully explained:

"Mr. Brotherson, our boarder, is just recovering from typhoid. He is still weak and acutely susceptible to the least noise. I was afraid that our voices might disturb him. Do you mind walking a little way up the road? That is, if your visit was intended for me."

Her flush, the beauty which must have struck even him, but more than all else her youth, seemed to reconcile him to this unconventional request. Bowing, he took his foot from the step, saying, as she joined him:

"Yes, you are the one I wanted to see; that is, to-day. Later, I hope to have the privilege of a conversation with Mr. Brotherson."

She gave him one quick look, trembling so that he offered her his arm with a fatherly air.

"I see that you understand my errand here," he proceeded, with a grave smile, meant as she knew for her encouragement. "I am glad, because we can go at once to the point. Miss Scott," he continued in a voice from which he no longer strove to keep back the evidences of deep feeling, "I have the strongest interest in your patient that one man can have in another, where there is no personal acquaintanceship. You who have every reason to understand my reasons for this, will accept the statement, I hope, as frankly as it is made."

She nodded. Her eyes were full of tears, but she did not hesitate to raise them. She had the greatest desire to see the face of the man who could speak like this to-day, and yet of whose pride and sense of superiority his daughter had stood in such awe, that she had laid a seal upon the impulses of her heart, and imposed such tasks and weary waiting upon her lover. Doris forgot, in meeting his softened glance and tender, almost wistful, expression, the changes which can be made by a great grief, and only wondered why her sweet benefactress had not taken him into her confidence and thus, possibly, averted the doom which Doris felt had in some way grown out of this secrecy.

"Why should she have feared the disapproval of this man?" she inwardly queried, as she cast him a confiding look which pleased him greatly, as his tone now showed.

"When I lost my daughter, I lost everything," he declared, as they walked slowly up the road. "Nothing excites my interest, save that which once excited hers. I am told that the deepest interest of her life lay here. I am also told that it was an interest quite worthy of her. I expect to find it so. I hope with all my heart to find it so, and that is why I have come to this town and expect to linger till Mr. Brotherson has recovered sufficiently to see me. I hope that this will be agreeable to him. I hope that I am not presuming too much in cherishing these expectations."

Doris turned her candid eyes upon him.

"I cannot tell; I do not know," said she. "Nobody knows, not even the doctor, what effect the news we so dread to give him will have upon Mr. Brotherson. You will have to wait--we all shall have to wait the results of that revelation. It cannot be kept from him much longer. When I return, I shall shrink from his first look, in the fear of seeing it betray this dreadful knowledge. Yet I have a faithful woman there to keep every one out of his room."

"You have had much to carry for one so young," was Mr. Challoner's sympathetic remark. "You must let me help you when that awful moment comes. I am at the hotel and shall stay there till Mr. Brotherson is pronounced quite well. I have no other duty now in life but to sustain him through his trouble and then, with what aid he can give, search out and find the cause of my daughter's death which I will never admit without the fullest proof, to have been one of suicide."

Doris trembled.

"It was not suicide," she declared, vehemently. "I have always felt sure that it was not; but to-day I KNOW."

Her hand fell clenched on her breast and her eyes gleamed strangely. Mr. Challoner was himself greatly startled. What had happened --what could have happened since yesterday that she should emphasise that now?

"I've not told any one," she went on, as he stopped short in the road, in his anxiety to understand her. "But I will tell you. Only, not here, not with all these people driving past; most of whom know me. Come to the house later--this evening, after Mr. Brotherson's room is closed for the night. I have a little sitting-room on the other side of the hall where we can talk without being heard. Would you object to doing that? Am I asking too much of you?"
"No, not at all," he assured her. "Expect me at eight. Will that be too early?"

"No, no. Oh, how those people stared! Let us hasten back or they may connect your name with what we want kept secret."

He smiled at her fears, but gave in to her humour; he would see her soon again and possibly learn something which would amply repay him, both for his trouble and his patience.

But when evening came and she turned to face him in that little sitting-room where he had quietly followed her, he was conscious of a change in her manner which forbade these high hopes. The gleam was gone from her eyes; the tremulous eagerness from her mobile and sensitive mouth. She had been thinking in the hours which had passed, and had lost the confidence of that one impetuous moment. Her greeting betrayed embarrassment and she hesitated painfully before she spoke.

"I don't know what you will think of me," she ventured at last, motioning to a chair but not sitting herself. "You have had time to think over what I said and probably expect something real, --something you could tell people. But it isn't like that. It's a feeling--a belief. I'm so sure--"

"Sure of what, Miss Scott?"

She gave a glance at the door before stepping up nearer. He had not taken the chair she preferred.

"Sure that I have seen the face of the man who murdered her. It was in a dream," she whisperingly completed, her great eyes misty with awe.

"A dream, Miss Scott?" He tried to hide his disappointment.

"Yes; I knew that it would sound foolish to you; it sounds foolish to me. But listen, sir. Listen to what I have to tell and then you can judge. I was very much agitated yesterday. I had to write a letter at Mr. Brotherson's dictation--a letter to her. You can understand my horror and the effort I made to hide my emotion. I was quite unnerved. I could not sleep till morning, and then--and then--I saw--I hope I can describe it."

Grasping at a near-by chair, she leaned on it for support, closing her eyes to all but that inner vision. A breathless moment followed, then she murmured in strained monotonous tones:

"I see it again--just as I saw it in the early morning--but even more plainly, if that is possible. A hall--(I should call it a hall, though I don't remember seeing any place like it before), with a little staircase at the side, up which there comes a man, who stops just at the top and looks intently my way. There is fierceness in his face--a look which means no good to anybody --and as his hand goes to his overcoat pocket, drawing out something which I cannot describe, but which he handles as if it were a pistol, I feel a horrible fear, and--and--" The child was staggering, and the hand which was free had sought her heart where it lay clenched, the knuckles showing white in the dim light.

Mr. Challoner watched her with dilated eyes, the spell under which she spoke falling in some degree upon him. Had she finished? Was this all? No; she is speaking again, but very low, almost in a whisper.

"There is music--a crash--but I plainly see his other hand approach the object he is holding. He takes something from the end--the object is pointed my way--I am looking into--into--what? I do not know. I cannot even see him now. The space where he stood is empty. Everything fades, and I wake with a loud cry in my ears and a sense of death here." She had lifted her hand and struck at her heart, opening her eyes as she did so. "Yet it was not I who had been shot," she added softly.

Mr. Challoner shuddered. This was like the reopening of his daughter's grave. But he had entered upon the scene with a full appreciation of the ordeal awaiting him and he did not lose his calmness, or the control of his judgment.

"Be seated, Miss Scott," he entreated, taking a chair himself. "You have described the spot and some of the circumstances of my daughter's death as accurately as if you had been there. But you have doubtless read a full account of those details in the papers; possibly seen pictures which would make the place quite real to you. The mind is a strange storehouse. We do not always know what lies hidden within it."

"That's true," she admitted. "But the man! I had never seen the man, or any picture of him, and his face was clearest of all. I should know it if I saw it anywhere. It is imprinted on my memory as plainly as yours. Oh, I hope never to see that man!"

Mr. Challoner sighed; he had really anticipated something from the interview. The disappointment was keen. A moment of expectation; the thrill which comes to us all under the shadow of the supernatural, and then--this! a young and imaginative girl's dream, convincing to herself but supplying nothing which had not already been supplied both by the facts and his own imagination! A man had stood at the staircase, and this man had raised his arm. She said that she had seen something like a pistol in his hand, but his daughter had not been shot. This he thought it well to point out to her.

Leaning toward her that he might get her full attention, he waited till her eyes met his, then quietly asked:

"Have you ever named this man to yourself?"

She started and dropped her eyes.

"I do not dare to," said she.
"Why?"
"Because I've read in the papers that the man who stood there had the same name as--"
"Tell me, Miss Scott."
"As Mr. Brotherson's brother."
"But you do not think it was his brother?"
"I do not know."
"You've never seen his brother?"
"Never."
"Nor his picture?"
"No, Mr. Brotherson has none."
"Aren't they friends? Does he never mention Orlando?"
"Very, very rarely. But I've no reason to think they are not on good terms. I know they correspond."
"Miss Scott?"
"Yes, Mr. Challoner."
"You must not rely too much upon your dream."
Her eyes flashed to his and then fell again.
"Dreams are not revelations; they are the reproduction of what already lies hidden in the mind. I can prove that your dream is such."
"How?" She looked startled.
"You speak of seeing something being leveled at you which made you think of a pistol."
"Yes, I was looking directly into it."
"But my daughter was not shot. She died from a stab."
Doris' lovely face, with its tender lines and girlish curves, took on a strange look of conviction which deepened, rather than melted under his indulgent, but penetrating gaze.
"I know that you think so;--but my dream says no. I saw this object. It was pointed directly towards me--above all, I saw his face. It was the face of one whose finger is on the trigger and who means death; and I believe my dream."
Well, it was useless to reason further. Gentle in all else, she was immovable so far as this idea was concerned and, seeing this, he let the matter go and prepared to take his leave.
She seemed to be quite ready for this. Anxiety about her patient had regained its place in her mind and her glance sped constantly toward the door. Taking her hand in his, he said some kind words, then crossed to the door and opened it. Instantly her finger flew to her lips and, obedient to its silent injunction, he took up his hat in silence, and was proceeding down the hall, when the bell rang, startling them both and causing him to step quickly back.
"Who is it?" she asked. "Father's in and visitors seldom come so late."
"Shall I see?"
She nodded, looking strangely troubled as the door swung open, revealing the tall, strong figure of a man facing them from the porch.
"A stranger," formed itself upon her lips, and she was moving forward, when the man suddenly stepped into the glare of the light, and she stopped, with a murmur of dismay which pierced Mr. Challoner's heart and prepared him for the words which now fell shudderingly from her lips:
"It is he! it is he! I said that I should know him wherever I saw him." Then with a quiet turn towards the intruder, "Oh, why, why, did you come here!"
XXIX
DO YOU KNOW MY BROTHER
Her hands were thrust out to repel, her features were fixed; her beauty something wonderful. Orlando Brotherson, thus met, stared for a moment at the vision before him, then slowly and with effort withdrawing his gaze, he sought the face of Mr. Challoner with the first sign of open disturbance that gentleman had ever seen in him.
"Ah," said he, "my welcome is readily understood. I see you far from home, sir." And with an ironical bow he turned again to Doris, who had dropped her hands, but in whose cheeks the pallor still lingered in a way to check the easy flow of words with which he might have sought to carry off the situation. "Am I in Oswald Brotherson's house?" he asked. "I was directed here. But possibly there may be some mistake."
"It is here he lives," said she; moving back automatically till she stood again by the threshold of the small room in which she had received Mr. Challoner. "Do you wish to see him to-night? If so, I fear it is impossible. He has been very ill and is not allowed to receive visits from strangers."
"I am not a stranger," announced the newcomer, with a smile few could see unmoved, it offered such a contrast
to his stern and dominating figure. "I thought I heard some words of recognition which would prove your knowledge of that fact."

She did not answer. Her lips had parted, but her thought or at least the expression of her thought hung suspended in the terror of this meeting for which she was not at all prepared. He seemed to note this terror, whether or not he understood its cause, and smiled again, as he added:

"Mr. Brotherson must have spoken of his brother Orlando. I am he, Miss Scott. Will you let me come in now?"

Her eyes sought those of Mr. Challoner, who quietly nodded. Immediately she stepped from before the door which her figure had guarded and, motioning him to enter, she begged Mr. Challoner, with an imploring look, to sustain her in the interview she saw before her. He had no desire for this encounter, especially as Mr. Brotherson's glance in his direction had been anything but conciliatory. He was quite convinced that nothing was to be gained by it, but he could not resist her appeal, and followed them into the little room whose limited dimensions made the tall Orlando look bigger and stronger and more lordly in his self-confidence than ever.

"I am sorry it is so late," she began, contemplating his intrusive figure with forced composure. "We have to be very quiet in the evenings so as not to disturb your brother's first sleep which is of great importance to him."

"Then I'm not to see him to-night?"

"I pray you to wait. He's--he's been a very sick man."

"Dangerously so?"

"Yes."

Orlando continued to regard her with a peculiar awakening gaze, showing, Mr. Challoner thought, more interest in her than in his brother, and when he spoke it was mechanically and as if in sole obedience to the proprieties of the occasion.

"I did not know he was ill till very lately. His last letter was a cheerful one, and I supposed that all was right till chance revealed the truth. I came on at once. I was intending to come anyway. I have business here, as you probably know, Miss Scott."

She shook her head. "I know very little about business," said she.

"My brother has not told you why he expected me?"

"He has not even told me that he expected you."

"No?" The word was highly expressive; there was surprise in it and a touch of wonder, but more than all, satisfaction. "Oswald was always close-mouthed," he declared. "It's a good fault; I'm obliged to the boy."

These last words were uttered with a lightness which imposed upon his two highly agitated hearers, causing Mr. Challoner to frown and Doris to shrink back in indignation at the man who could indulge in a sportive suggestion in presence of such fears, if not of such memories, as the situation evoked. But to one who knew the strong and self-contained man--to Sweetwater possibly, had he been present, --there was in this very attempt--in his quiet manner and in the strange and fitful flash of his ordinarily quick eye, that which showed he was labouring--and had been labouring almost from his first entrance, under an excitement of thought and feeling which in one of his powerfully organised nature must end and that soon in an outburst of mysterious passion which would carry everything before it. But he did not mean that it should happen here. He was too accustomed to self-command to forget himself in this presence. He would hold these rampant dogs in leash till the hour of solitude; then--a glittering smile twisted his lips as he continued to gaze, first at the girl who had just entered his life, and then at the man he had every reason to distrust, and with that firm restraint upon himself still in full force, remarked, with a courteous inclination:

"The hour is late for further conversation. I have a room at the hotel and will return to it at once. In the morning I hope to see my brother."

He was going, Doris not knowing what to say, Mr. Challoner not desirous of detaining him, when there came the sound of a little tinkle from the other side of the hall, blanching the young girl's cheeks and causing Orlando Brotherson's brows to rise in peculiar satisfaction.

"My brother?" he asked.

"Yes," came in faltering reply. "He has heard our voices; I must go to him."

"Say that Orlando wishes him a good night," smiled her heart's enemy, with a bow of infinite grace.

She shuddered, and was hastening from the room when her glance fell on Mr. Challoner. He was pale and looked greatly disturbed. The prospect of being left alone with a man whom she had herself denounced to him as his daughter's murderer, might prove a tax to his strength to which she had no right to subject him. Pausing with an appealing air, she made him a slight gesture which he at once understood.

"I will accompany you into the hall," said he. "Then if anything is wrong, you have but to speak my name."

But Orlando Brotherson, displeased by this move, took a step which brought him between the two.

"You can hear her from here if she chooses to speak. There's a point to be settled between us before either of us leaves this house, and this opportunity is as good as another. Go to my brother, Miss Scott; we will await your
return."

A flash from the proud banker's eye; but no demur, rather a gesture of consent. Doris, with a look of deep anxiety, sped away, and the two men stood face to face.

It was one of those moments which men recognise as memorable. What had the one to say or the other to hear, worthy of this preamble and the more than doubtful relation in which they stood each to each? Mr. Challoner had more time than he expected in which to wonder and gird himself for whatever suffering or shock awaited him. For, Orlando Brotherson, unlike his usual self, kept him waiting while he collected his own wits, which, strange to say, seemed to have vanished with the girl.

But the question finally came.
"Mr. Challoner, do you know my brother?"
"I have never seen him."
"Do you know him? Does he know you?"
"Not at all. We are strangers."

It was said honestly. They did not know each other. Mr. Challoner was quite correct in his statement.

But the other had his doubts. Why shouldn't he have? The coincidence of finding this mourner if not avenger of Edith Challoner, in his own direct radius again, at a spot so distant, so obscure and so disconnected with any apparent business reason, was certainly startling enough unless the tie could be found in his brother's name and close relationship to himself.

He, therefore, allowed himself to press the question:
"Men sometimes correspond who do not know each other. You knew that a Brotherson lived here?"
"Yes."
"And hoped to learn something about me?"
"No; my interest was solely with your brother."

"With my brother? With Oswald? What interest can you have in him apart from me? Oswald is--"

Suddenly a thought name--an unimaginable one; one with power to blanch even his hardy cheek and shake a soul unassailable by all small emotions.
"Oswald Brotherson!" he repeated; adding in unintelligible tones to himself--"O. B. The same initials! They are following up these initials. Poor Oswald." Then aloud: "It hardly becomes me, perhaps, to question your motives in this attempt at making my brother's acquaintance. I think I can guess them; but your labour will be wasted. Oswald's interests do not extend beyond this town; they hardly extend to me. We are strangers, almost. You will learn nothing from him on the subject which naturally engrosses you."

Mr. Challoner simply bowed. "I do not feel called upon," said he, "to explain my reasons for wishing to know your brother. I will simply satisfy you upon a point which may well rouse your curiosity. You remember that--that my daughter's last act was the writing of a letter to a little protegee of hers. Miss Scott was that protegee. In seeking her, I came upon him. Do you require me to say more on this subject? Wait till I have seen Mr. Oswald Brotherson and then perhaps I can do so."

Receiving no answer to this, Mr. Challoner turned again to the man who was the object of his deepest suspicions, to find him still in the daze of that unimaginable thought, battling with it, scoffing at it, succumbing to it and all without a word. Mr. Challoner was without clue to this struggle, but the might of it and the mystery of it, drove him in extreme agitation from the room. Though proof was lacking, though proof might never come, nothing could ever alter his belief from this moment on that Doris was right in her estimate of this man's guilt, however unsubstantial her reasoning might appear.

How far he might have been carried by this new conviction; whether he would have left the house without seeing Doris again or exchanging another word with the man whose very presence stifled him, he had no opportunity to show, for before he had taken another step, he encountered the hurrying figure of Doris, who was returning to her guests with an air of marked relief.

"He does not know that you are here," she whispered to Mr. Challoner, as she passed him. Then, as she again confronted Orlando who hastened to dismiss his trouble at her approach, she said quite gaily, "Mr. Brotherson heard your voice, and is glad to know that you're here. He bade me give you this key and say that you would have found things in better shape if he had been in condition to superintend the removal of the boxes to the place he had prepared for you before he became ill. I was the one to do that," she added, controlling her aversion with manifest effort. "When Mr. Brotherson came to himself he asked if I had heard about any large boxes having arrived at the station shipped to his name. I said that several notices of such had come to the house. At which he requested me to see that they were carried at once to the strange looking shed he had had put up for him in the woods. I thought that they were for him, and I saw to the thing myself. Two or three others have come since and been taken to the same place. I think you will find nothing broken or disturbed; Mr. Brotherson's wishes are usually respected."
"That is fortunate for me," was the courteous reply.

But Orlando Brotherson was not himself, not at all himself as he bowed a formal adieu and past the drawn-up sentinel-like figure of Mr. Challoner, without a motion on his part or on the part of that gentleman to lighten an exit which had something in it of doom and dread preseage.

XXX

CHAOS

It is not difficult to understand Mr. Challoner's feelings or even those of Doris at the moment of Mr. Brotherson's departure. But why this change in Brotherson himself? Why this sense of something new and terrible rising between him and the suddenly beclouded future? Let us follow him to his lonely hotel-room and see if we can solve the puzzle.

But first, does he understand his own trouble? He does not seem to. For when, his hat thrown aside, he stops, erect and frowning under the flaring gas-jet he had no recollection of lighting, his first act was to lift his hand to his head in a gesture of surprising helplessness for him, while snatches of broken sentences fell from his lips among which could be heard:

"What has come to me? Undone in an hour! Doubly undone! First by a face and then by this thought which surely the devils have whispered to me. Mr. Challoner and Oswald! What is the link between them? Great God! what is the link? Not myself? Who then or what?"

Flinging himself into a chair, he buried his face in his hands. There were two demons to fight—the first in the guise of an angel. Doris! Unknown yesterday, unknown an hour ago; but now! Had there ever been a day—an hour—when she had not been as the very throb of his heart, the light of his eyes, and the crown of all imaginable blisses?

This was no passing admiration of youth for a captivating woman. This was not even the love he had given to Edith Challoner. This was something springing full-born out of nothing! a force which, for the first time in his life, made him complaisant to the natural weaknesses of man! a dream and yet a reality strong enough to blot out the past, remake the present, change the aspect of all his hopes, and outline a new fate. He did not know himself. There was nothing in his whole history to give him an understanding of such feelings as these.

Can a man be seized as it were by the hair, and swung up on the slopes of paradise or down the steeps of hell—without a forewarning, without the chance even to say whether he wished such a cataclysm in his life or no?

He, Orlando Brotherson, had never thought much of love. Science had been his mistress; ambition his lode-star. Such feeling as he had acknowledged to had been for men—struggling men, men who were down-trodden and gasping in the narrow bounds of poverty and helplessness. Miss Challoner had roused—well, his pride. He could see that now. The might of this new emotion made plain many things he had passed by as useless, puerile, unworthy of a man of mental calibre and might. He had never loved Edith Challoner at any moment of their acquaintance, though he had been sincere in thinking that he did. Doris' beauty, the hour he had just passed with her, had undeceived him.

Did he hail the experience? It was not likely to bring him joy. This young girl whose image floated in light before his eyes, would never love him. She loved his brother. He had heard their names mentioned together before he had been in town an hour. Oswald, the cleverest man, Doris, the most beautiful girl in Western Pennsylvania.

He had accepted the gossip then; he had not seen her and it all seemed very natural; hardly worth a moment's thought. But now!

And here, the other Demon sprang erect and grappled with him before the first one had let go his hold. Oswald and Challoner! The secret, unknown something which had softened that hard man's eye when his brother's name was mentioned! He had noted it and realised the mystery; a mystery before which sleep and rest must fly; a mystery to which he must now give his thought, whatever the cost, whatever the loss to those heavenly dreams the magic of which was so new it seemed to envelope him in the balm of Paradise. Away, then, image of light! Let the faculties thou hast dazed, act again. There is more than Fate's caprice in Challoner's interest in a man he never saw. Ghosts of old memories rise and demand a hearing. Facts, trivial and commonplace enough to have been lost in oblivion with the day which gave them birth, throng again from the past, proving that nought dies without a possibility of resurrection. Their power over this brooding man is shown by the force with which his fingers crush against his bowed forehead. Oswald and Challoner! Had he found the connecting link? Had it been—could it have been Edith? The preposterous is sometimes true; could it be true in this case?

He recalled the letters read to him as hers in that room of his in Brooklyn. He had hardly noted them then, he was so sure of their being forgeries, gotten up by the police to mislead him. Could they have been real, the effusions of her mind, the breathings of her heart, directed to an actual O. B., and that O. B., his brother? They had not been
meant for him. He had read enough of the mawkish lines to be sure of that. None of the allusions fitted in with the facts of their mutual intercourse. But they might with those of another man; they might with the possible acts and affections of Oswald whose temperament was wholly different from his and who might have loved her, should it ever be shown that they had met and known each other. And this was not an impossibility. Oswald had been east, Oswald had even been in the Berkshires before himself. Oswald --Why it was Oswald who had suggested that he should go there--go where she still was. Why this second coincidence, if there were no tie--if the Challoners and Oswald were as far apart as they seemed and as conventionalities would naturally place them. Oswald was a sentimentalist, but very reserved about his sentimentalities. If these suppositions were true, he had had a sentimentalist's motive for what he did. As Orlando realised this, he rose from his seat, aghast at the possibilities confronting him from this line of thought. Should he contemplate them? Risk his reason by dwelling on a supposition which might have no foundation in fact? No. His brain was too full--his purposes too important for any unnecessary strain to be put upon his faculties. No thinking! investigation first. Mr. Challoner should be able to settle this question. He would see him. Even at this late hour he ought to be able to find him in one of the rooms below; and, by the force of an irresistible demand, learn in a moment whether he had to do with a mere chimera of his own overwrought fancy, or with a fact which would call into play all the resources of an hitherto unconquered and undaunted nature.

There was a wood-fire burning in the sitting-room that night, and around it was grouped a number of men with their papers and pipes. Mr. Brotherson, entering, naturally looked that way for the man he was in search of, and was disappointed not to find him there; but on casting his glances elsewhere, he was relieved to see him standing in one of the windows overlooking the street. His back was to the room and he seemed to be lost in a fit of abstraction.

As Orlando crossed to him, he had time to observe how much whiter was this man's head than in the last interview he had held with him in the coroner's office in New York. But this evidence of grief in one with whom he had little, if anything, in common, neither touched his feelings nor deterred his step. The awakening of his heart to new and profound emotions had not softened him towards the sufferings of others if those others stood without the pale he had previously raised as the legitimate boundary of a just man's sympathies.

He was, as I have said, an extraordinary specimen of manly vigour in body and in mind, and his presence in any company always attracted attention and roused, if it never satisfied, curiosity. Conversation accordingly ceased as he strode up to Mr. Challoner's side, so that his words were quite audible as he addressed that gentleman with a somewhat curt:

"You see me again, Mr. Challoner. May I beg of you a few minutes' further conversation? I will not detain you long."

The grey head turned, and the many eyes watching showed surprise at the expression of dislike and repulsion with which this New York gentleman met the request thus emphatically urged. But his answer was courteous enough. If Mr. Brotherson knew a place where they would be left undisturbed, he would listen to him if he would be very brief.

For reply, the other pointed to a small room quite unoccupied which opened out of the one in which they then stood. Mr. Challoner bowed and in an other moment the door closed upon them, to the infinite disappointment of the men about the hearth.

"What do you wish to ask?" was Mr. Challoner's immediate inquiry.

"This; I make no apologies and expect in answer nothing more than an unequivocal yes or no. You tell me that you have never met my brother. Can that be said of the other members of your family --of your deceased daughter, in fact?"

"No."

"She was acquainted with Oswald Brotherson?"

"She was."

"Without your knowledge?"

"Entirely so."

"Corresponded with him?"

"Not exactly."

"How, not exactly?"

"He wrote to her--occasionally. She wrote to him frequently--but she never sent her letters."

"Ah!"

The exclamation was sharp, short and conveyed little. Yet with its escape, the whole scaffolding of this man's hold upon life and his own fate went down in indistinguishable chaos. Mr. Challoner realised a sense of havoc, though the eyes bent upon his countenance had not wavered, nor the stalwart figure moved.

"I have read some of those letters," the inventor finally acknowledged. "The police took great pains to place
under my eye, supposing them to have been meant for me because of the initials written on the wrapper. But they were meant for Oswald. You believe that now?"

"I know it."

"And that is why I found you in the same house with him."

"It is. Providence has robbed me of my daughter; if this brother of yours should prove to be the man I am led to expect, I shall ask him to take that place in my heart and life which was once hers."

A quick recoil, a smothered exclamation on the part of the man he addressed. A barb had been hidden in this simple statement which had reached some deeply-hidden but vulnerable spot in Brotherson's breast, which had never been pierced before. His eye which alone seemed alive, still rested piercingly upon that of Mr. Challoner, but its light was fast fading, and speedily became lost in a dimness in which the other seemed to see extinguished the last upflaring embers of those inner fires which feed the aspiring soul. It was a sight no man could see unmoved. Mr. Challoner turned sharply away, in dread of the abyss which the next word he uttered might open between them.

But Orlando Brotherson possessed resources of strength of which, possibly, he was not aware himself. When Mr. Challoner, still more affected by the silence than by the dread I have mentioned, turned to confront him again, it was to find his features composed and his glance clear. He had conquered all outward manifestation of the mysterious emotion which for an instant had laid his proud spirit low.

"You are considerate of my brother," were the words with which he re-opened this painful conversation. "You will not find your confidence misplaced. Oswald is a straightforward fellow, of few faults."

"I believe it. No man can be so universally beloved without some very substantial claims to regard. I am glad to see that your opinion, though given somewhat coldly, coincides with that of his friends."

"I am not given to exaggeration," was the even reply.

The flush which had come into Mr. Challoner's cheek under the effort he had made to sustain with unflinching heroism this interview with the man he looked upon as his mortal enemy, slowly faded out till he looked the wraith of himself even to the unsympathetic eyes of Orlando Brotherson. A duty lay before him which would tax to its utmost extent his already greatly weakened self-control. Nothing which had yet passed showed that this man realised the fact that Oswald had been kept in ignorance of Miss Challoner's death. If these brothers were to meet on the morrow, it must be with the full understanding that this especial topic was to be completely avoided. But in what words could he urge such a request upon this man? None suggested themselves, yet he had promised Miss Scott that he would ensure his silence in this regard, and it was with this difficulty and no other he had been struggling when Mr. Brotherson came upon him in the other room.

"You have still something to say," suggested the latter, as an oppressive silence swallowed up that icy sentence I have already recorded.

"I have," returned Mr. Challoner, regaining his courage under the exigencies of the moment. "Miss Scott is very anxious to have your promise that you will avoid all disagreeable topics with your brother till the doctor pronounces him strong enough to meet the trouble which awaits him."

"You mean--"

"He is not as unhappy as we. He knows nothing of the affliction which has befallen him. He was taken ill--" The rest was almost inaudible.

But Orlando Brotherson had no difficulty in understanding him, and for the second time in this extraordinary interview, he gave evidences of agitation and of a mind shaken from its equipoise. But only for an instant. He did not shun the other's gaze or even maintain more than a momentary silence. Indeed, he found strength to smile, in a curious, sardonic way, as he said:

"Do you think I should be apt to broach this subject with any one, let alone with him, whose connection with it I shall need days to realise? I'm not so given to gossip. Besides, he and I have other topics of interest. I have an invention ready with which I propose to experiment in a place he has already prepared for me. We can talk about that."

The irony, the hardy self-possession with which this was said struck Mr. Challoner to the heart. Without a word he wheeled about towards the door. Without a word, Brotherson stood, watching him go till he saw his hand fall on the knob when he quietly prevented his exit by saying:

"Unhappy truths cannot be long concealed. How soon does the doctor think my brother can bear these inevitable revelations?"

"He said this morning that if his patient were as well to-morrow as his present condition gives promise of, he might be told in another week."

Orlando bowed his appreciation of this fact, but added quickly:

"Who is to do the telling?"

"Doris. Nobody else could be trusted with so delicate a task."
"I wish to be present."
Mr. Challoner looked up, surprised at the feeling with which this request was charged.
"As his brother—the only remaining relative, I have that right. Do you think that Dor—Miss Scott, can be trusted not to forestall that moment by any previous hint of what awaits him?"
"If she so promises. But will you exact this from her? It surely cannot be necessary for me to say that your presence will add infinitely to the difficulty of her task."
"Yet it is a duty I cannot shirk. I will consult the doctor about it. I will make him see that I both understand and shall insist upon my rights in this matter. But you may tell Miss Doris that I will sit out of sight, and that I shall not obtrude myself unless my name is brought up in an undesirable way."
The hand on the door-knob made a sudden movement.
"Mr. Brotherson, I can bear no more to-night. With your permission, I will leave this question to be settled by others." And with a repetition of his former bow, the bereaved father withdrew.

Orlando watched him till the door closed, then he too dropped his mask.

But it was on again, when in a little while he passed through the sitting-room on his way upstairs.

No other day in his whole life had been like this to the hardy inventor; for in it both his heart and his conscience had been awakened, and up to this hour he had not really known that he possessed either.

XXXI
WHAT IS HE MAKING

Other boxes addressed to O. Brotherson had been received at the station, and carried to the mysterious shed in the woods; and now, with locked door and lifted top, the elder brother contemplated his stores and prepared himself for work.

He had been allowed a short interview with Oswald, and he had indulged himself in a few words with Doris. But he had left those memories behind with other and more serious matters. Nothing that could unnerve his hand or weaken his insight should enter this spot sacred to his great hope. Here genius reigned. Here he was himself wholly and without flaw;—a Titan with his grasp on a mechanical idea by means of which he would soon rule the world.

Not so happy were the other characters in this drama. Oswald's thoughts, disturbed for a short time by the somewhat constrained interview he had held with his brother, had flown eastward again, in silent love and longing; while Doris, with a double dread now in her heart, went about her daily tasks, praying for strength to endure the horrors of this week, without betraying the anxieties secretly devouring her. And she was only seventeen and quite alone in her trouble. She must bear it all unassisted and smile, which she did with heavenly sweetness, when the magic threshold was passed and she stood in her invalid's presence, overshadowed though it ever was by the great Dread.

And Mr. Challoner? Let those endless walks of his through the woods and over the hills tell his story if they can; or his rapidly whitening hair, and lagging step. He had been a strong man before his trouble, and had the stroke which laid him low been limited to one quick, sharp blow he might have risen above it after a while and been ready to encounter life again. But this long drawn out misery was proving too much for him. The sight of Brotherson, though they never really met, acted like acid upon a wound, and it was not till six days had passed and the dreaded Sunday was at hand, that he slept with any sense of rest or went his way about the town without that halting at the corners which betrayed his perpetual apprehension of a most undesirable encounter.

The reason for this change will be apparent in the short conversation he held with a man he had come upon one evening in the small park just beyond the workmen's dwellings.

"You see I am here," was the stranger's low greeting.

"Thank God," was Mr. Challoner's reply. "I could not have faced to-morrow alone and I doubt if Miss Scott could have found the requisite courage. Does she know that you are here?"

"I stopped at her door."

"Was that safe?"

"I think so. Mr. Brotherson—the Brooklyn one,—is up in his shed. He sleeps there now, I am told, and soundly too I've no doubt."

"What is he making?"

"What half the inventors on both sides of the water are engaged upon just now. A monoplane, or a biplane, or some machine for carrying men through the air. I know, for I helped him with it. But you'll find that if he succeeds in this undertaking, and I believe he will, nothing short of fame awaits him. His invention has startling points. But I'm not going to give them away. I'll be true enough to him for that. As an inventor he has my sympathy; but—Well, we will see what we shall see, to-morrow. You say that he is bound to be present when Miss Scott relates her tragic story. He won't be the only unseen listener. I've made my own arrangements with Miss Scott. If he feels the need of watching her and his brother Oswald, I feel the need of watching him."
"You take a burden of intolerable weight from my shoulders. Now I shall feel easier about that interview. But I should like to ask you this: Do you feel justified in this continued surveillance of a man who has so frequently, and with such evident sincerity, declared his innocence?"

"I do that. If he's as guiltless as he says he is, my watchfulness won't hurt him. If he's not, then, Mr. Challoner, I've but one duty; to match his strength with my patience. That man is the one great mystery of the day, and mysteries call for solution. At least, that's the way a detective looks at it."

"May Heaven help your efforts!"

"I shall need its assistance," was the dry rejoinder. Sweetwater was by no means blind to the difficulties awaiting him.

XXXII

TELL ME, TELL IT ALL

The day was a grey one, the first of the kind in weeks. As Doris stepped into the room where Oswald sat, she felt how much a ray of sunshine would have encouraged her and yet how truly these leaden skies and this dismal atmosphere expressed the gloom which soon must fall upon this hopeful, smiling man.

He smiled because any man must smile at the entrance of so lovely a woman, but it was an abstracted smile, and Doris, seeing it, felt her courage falter for a moment, though her steps did not, nor her steady compassionate gaze. Advancing slowly, and not answering because she did not hear some casual remark of his, she took her stand by his side and then slowly and with her eyes on his face, sank down upon her knees, still without speaking, almost without breathing.

His astonishment was evident, for her air was strange and full of presage,—as, indeed, she had meant it to be. But he remained as silent as she, only reached out his emaciated hand and, laying it on her head, smiled again but this time far from abstractedly. Then, as he saw her cheeks pale in terror of the task before her, he ventured to ask gently:

"What is the matter, child? So weary, eh? Nothing worse than that, I hope."

"Are you quite strong this morning? Strong enough to listen to my troubles; strong enough to bear your own if God sees fit to send them?" came hesitatingly from her lips as she watched the effect of each word, in breathless anxiety.

"Troubles? There can be but one trouble for me," was his unexpected reply. "That I do not fear—will not fear in my hour of happy recovery. So long as Edith is well—Doris! Doris! You alarm me. Edith is not ill—no ill?"

The poor child could not answer save with her sympathetic look and halting, tremulous breath; and these signs, he would not, could not read, his own words had made such an echo in his ears.

"Ill! I cannot imagine Edith ill. I always see her in my thoughts, as I saw her on that day of our first meeting; a perfect, animated woman with the joyous look of a glad, harmonious nature. Nothing has ever clouded that vision. If she were ill I would have known it. We are so truly one that—Doris, Doris, you do not speak. You know the depth of my love, the terror of my thoughts. Is Edith ill?"

The eyes gazing wildly into his, slowly left his face and raised themselves aloft, with a sublime look. Would he understand? Yes, he understood, and the cry which rang from his lips stopped for a moment the beating of more than one heart in that little cottage.

"Dead!" he shrieked out, and fell back fainting in his chair, his lips still murmuring in semi-unconsciousness, "Dead! dead!"

Doris sprang to her feet, thinking of nothing but his wavering, slipping life till she saw his breath return, his eyes refill with light. Then the horror of what was yet to come—the answer which must be given to the how she saw trembling on his lips, caused her to sink again upon her knees in an unconscious appeal for strength. If that one sad revelation had been all!

But the rest must be told; his brother exacted it and so did the situation. Further waiting, further hiding of the truth would be insupportable after this. But oh, the bitterness of it! No wonder that she turned away from those frenzied, wildly-demanding eyes.

"Doris?"

She trembled and looked behind her. She had not recognised his voice. Had another entered? Had his brother dared—No, they were alone; seemingly so, that is. She knew,—no one better—that they were not really alone, that witnesses were within hearing, if not within sight.

"Doris," he urged again, and this time she turned in his direction and gazed, aghast. If the voice were strange, what of the face which now confronted her. The ravages of sickness had been marked, but they were nothing to those made in an instant by a blasting grief. She was startled, although expecting much, and could only press his hands while she waited for the question he was gathering strength to utter. It was simple when it came; just two words:

"How long?"
She answered them as simply.
"Just as long as you have been ill," said she; then, with no attempt to break the inevitable shock, she went on:
"Miss Challoner was struck dead and you were taken down with typhoid on the self-same day."
"Struck dead! Why do you use that word, struck? Struck dead! she, a young woman. Oh, Doris, an accident! My
darling has been killed in an accident!"
"They do not call it accident. They call it what it never was. What it never was," she insisted, pressing him back
with frightened hands, as he strove to rise. "Miss Challoner was--" How nearly the word shot had left her lips. How
fiercely above all else, in that harrowing moment had risen the desire to fling the accusation of that word into the
ears of him who listened from his secret hiding-place. But she refrained out of compassion for the man she loved,
and declared instead, "Miss Challoner died from a wound; how given, why given, no one knows. I had rather have
died myself than have to tell you this. Oh, Mr. Brotherson, speak, sob, do anything but--"
She started back, dropping his hands as she did so. With quick intuition she saw that he must be left to himself if
he were to meet this blow without succumbing. The body must have freedom if the spirit would not go mad.
C coupon, or perhaps not conscious, of his release from her restraining hand, albeit profiting by it, he staggered to
his feet, murmuring that word of doom: "Wound! wound! my darling died of a wound! What kind of a wound?" he
suddenly thundered out. "I cannot understand what you mean by wound. Make it clear to me. Make it clear to me at
once. If I must bear this grief, let me know its whole depth. Leave nothing to my imagination or I cannot answer for
myself. Tell it all, Doris."
And Doris told him:
"She was on the mezzanine floor of the hotel where she lives. She was seemingly happy and had been writing a
letter--a letter to me which they never forwarded. There was no one else by but some strangers--good people whom
one must believe. She was crossing the floor when suddenly she threw up her hands and fell. A thin, narrow paper-
cutter was in her grasp; and it flew into the lobby. Some say she struck herself with that cutter; for when they picked
her up they found a wound in her breast which that cutter might have made."
"Edith? never!"
The words were chokingly said; he was swaying, almost falling, but he steadied himself.
"Who says that?" he asked.
"It was the coroner's verdict."
"And she died that way--died?"
"Immediately."
"After writing to you?"
"Yes."
"What was in that letter?"
"Nothing of threat, they say. Only just cheer and expressions of hope. Just like the others, Mr. Brotherson."
"And they accuse her of taking her own life? Their verdict is a lie. They did not know her."
Then, after some moments of wild and confused feeling, he declared, with a desperate effort at self-control:
"You said that some believe this. Then there must be others who do not. What do they say?"
"Nothing. They simply feel as you do. They see no reason for the act and no evidence of her having meditated it.
Her father and her friend insist besides, that she was incapable of such a horror. The mystery of it is killing us all;
me above others, for I've had to show you a cheerful face, with my brain reeling and my heart like lead in my
bosom."
She held out her hands. She tried to draw his attention to herself; not from any sentiment of egotism, but to
break, if she could, the strain of these insupportable horrors where so short a time before Hope sang and Life
revelled in re-awakened joys.
Perhaps some faint realisation of this reached him, for presently he caught her by the hands and bowed his head
upon her shoulder and finally let her seat him again, before he said:
"Do they know of--of my interest in this?"
"Yes; they know about the two O. B.s."
"The two--" He was on his feet again, but only for a moment; his weakness was greater than his will power.
"Orlando and Oswald Brotherson," she explained, in answer to his broken appeal. "Your brother wrote letters to
her as well as you, and signed them just as you did, with his initials only. These letters were found in her desk, and
he was supposed, for a time, to have been the author of all that were so signed. But they found out the difference
after awhile. Yours were easily recognised after they learned there was another O. B. who loved her."
The words were plain enough, but the stricken listener did not take them in. They carried no meaning to him.
How should they? The very idea she sought to impress upon him by this seemingly careless allusion was an
incredible one. She found it her dreadful task to tell him the hard, bare truth.
"Your brother," said she, "was devoted to Miss Challoner, too. He even wanted to marry her. I cannot keep back this fact. It is known everywhere, and by everybody but you."

"Orlando?" His lips took an ironical curve, as he uttered the word. This was a young girl's imaginative fancy to him. "Why Orlando never knew her, never saw her, never--"

"He met her at Lenox."

The name produced its effect. He stared, made an effort to think, repeated Lenox over to himself; then suddenly lost his hold upon the idea which that word suggested, struggled again for it, seized it in an instant of madness and shouted out:

"Yes, yes, I remember. I sent him there--" and paused, his mind blank again.

Poor Doris, frightened to her very soul, looked blindly about for help; but she did not quit his side; she did not dare to, for his lips had reopened; the continuity of his thoughts had returned; he was going to speak.

"I sent him there." The words came in a sort of shout. "I was so hungry to hear of her and I thought he might mention her in his letter. Insane! Insane! He saw her and--What's that you said about his loving her? He couldn't have loved her; he's not of the loving sort. They've deceived you with strange tales. They've deceived the whole world with fancies and mad dreams. He may have admired her, but loved her,--no! or if he had, he would have respected my claims."

"He did not know them."

A laugh; a laugh which paled Doris' cheek; then his tones grew even again, memory came back and he muttered faintly:

"That is true. I said nothing to him. He had the right to court her--and he did, you say; wrote to her; imposed himself upon her, drove her mad with importunities she was forced to rebuke; and--and what else? There is something else. Tell me; I will know it all."

He was standing now, his feebleness all gone, passion in every lineament and his eye alive and feverish, with emotion. "Tell me," he repeated, with unrestrained vehemence. "Tell me all. Kill me with sorrow but save me from being unjust."

"He wrote her a letter; it frightened her. He followed it up by a visit--"

Doris paused; the sentence hung suspended. She had heard a step--a hand on the door.

Orlando had entered the room.

XXXIII

ALONE

Oswald had heard nothing, seen nothing. But he took note of Doris' silence, and turning towards her in frenzy saw what had happened, and so was in a measure prepared for the stern, short sentence which now rang through the room:

"Wait, Miss Scott! you tell the story badly. Let him listen to me. From my mouth only shall he hear the stern and seemingly unnatural part I played in this family tragedy."

The face of Oswald hardened. Those pliant features--beloved for their gracious kindliness--set themselves in lines which altered them almost beyond recognition; but his voice was not without some of its natural sweetness, as, after a long and hollow look at the other's composed countenance, he abruptly exclaimed:

"Speak! I am bound to listen; you are my brother."

Orlando turned towards Doris. She was slipping away.

"Don't go," said he.

But she was gone.

Slowly he turned back.

Oswald raised his hand and checked the words with which he would have begun his story.

"Never mind the beginnings," said he. "Doris has told all that. You saw Miss Challoner in Lenox--admired her--offered yourself to her and afterwards wrote her a threatening letter because she rejected you."

"It is true. Other men have followed just such unworthy impulses --and been ashamed and sorry afterwards. I was sorry and I was ashamed, and as soon as my first anger was over went to tell her so. But she mistook my purpose and--"

"And what?"

Orlando hesitated. Even his iron nature trembled before the misery he saw--a misery he was destined to augment rather than soothe. With pains altogether out of keeping with his character, he sought in the recesses of his darkened mind for words less bitter and less abrupt than those which sprang involuntarily to his lips. But he did not find them. Though he pitied his brother and wished to show that he did, nothing but the stern language suitable to the stern fact he wished to impart, would leave his lips.

"And ended the pitiful struggle of the moment with one quick, unpremeditated blow," was what he said. "There
is no other explanation possible for this act, Oswald. Bitter as it is for me to acknowledge it, I am thus far guilty of this beloved woman's death. But, as God hears me, from the moment I first saw her, to the moment I saw her last, I did not know, nor did I for a moment dream that she was anything to you or to any other man of my stamp and station. I thought she despised my country birth, my mechanical attempts, my lack of aristocratic pretensions and traditions."

"Edith?"

"Now that I know she had other reasons for her contempt—that the words she wrote were in rebuke to the brother rather than to the man, I feel my guilt and deplore my anger. I cannot say more. I should but insult your grief by any lengthy expressions of regret and sorrow."

A groan of intolerable anguish from the sick man's lips, and then the quick thrust of his re-awakened intelligence rising superior to the overthrow of all his hopes.

"For a woman of Edith's principle to seek death in a moment of desperation, the provocation must have been very great. Tell me if I'm to hate you through life—yea through all eternity—or if I must seek in some unimaginable failure of my own character or conduct the cause of her intolerable despair."

"Oswald!" The tone was controlling, and yet that of one strong man to another. "Is it for us to read the heart of any woman, least of all of a woman of her susceptibilities and keen inner life? The wish to end all comes to some natures like a lightning flash from a clear sky. It comes, it goes, often without leaving a sign. But if a weapon chances to be near—(here it was in hand)—then death follows the impulse which, given an instant of thought, would have vanished in a back sweep of other emotions. Chance was the real accessory to this death by suicide. Oswald, let us realise it as such and accept our sorrow as a mutual burden and turn to what remains to us of life and labour. Work is grief's only consolation. Then let us work."

But of all this Oswald had caught but the one word.

"Chance?" he repeated. "Orlando, I believe in God."

"Then seek your comfort there. I find it in harnessing the winds; in forcing the powers of nature to do my bidding."

The other did not speak, and the silence grew heavy. It was broken, when it was broken, by a cry from Oswald:

"No more," said he, "no more." Then, in a yearning accent, "Send Doris to me."

Orlando started. This name coming so close upon that word comfort produced a strange effect upon him. But another look at Oswald and he was ready to do his bidding. The bitter ordeal was over; let him have his solace if it was in her power to give it to him.

Orlando, upon leaving his brother's room, did not stop to deliver that brother's message directly to Doris; he left this for Truda to do, and retired immediately to his hangar in the woods. Locking himself in, he slightly raised the roof and then sat down before the car which was rapidly taking on shape and assuming that individuality and appearance of sentient life which hitherto he had only seen in dreams. But his eye, which had never failed to kindle at this sight before, shone dully in the semi-gloom. The air-car could wait; he would first have his hour in this solitude of his own making. The gaze he dreaded, the words from which he shrank could not penetrate here. He might even shout her name aloud, and only these windowless walls would respond. He was alone with his past, his present and his future.

Alone!

He needed to be. The strongest must pause when the precipice yawns before him. The gulf can be spanned; he feels himself forceful enough for that; but his eyes must take their measurement of it first; he must know its depths and possible dangers. Only a fool would ignore these steeps of jagged rock; and he was no fool, only a man to whom the unexpected had happened, a man who had seen his way clear to the horizon and then had come up against this!

Love, when he thought such folly dead! Remorse, when Glory called for the quiet mind and heart!

He recognised its mordant fang, and knew that its ravages, though only just begun, would last his lifetime. Nothing could stop them now, nothing, nothing. And he laughed, as the thought went home; laughed at the irony of fate and its inexorableness; laughed at his own defeat and his nearness to a barred Paradise. Oswald loved Edith, loved her yet, with a flame time would take long to quench. Doris loved Oswald and he Doris; and not one of them would ever attain the delights each was so fitted to enjoy. Why shouldn't he laugh? What is left to man but mockery when all props fall? Disappointment was the universal lot; and it should go merrily with him if he must take his turn at it. But here the strong spirit of the man re-asserted itself; it should be but a turn. A man's joys are not bounded by his loves or even by the satisfaction of a perfectly untrammelled mind. Performance makes a world of its own for the capable and the strong, and this was still left to him. He, Orlando Brotherson, despair while his great work lay unfinished! That would be to lay stress on the inevitable pains and fears of commonplace humanity. He was not of that ilk. Intellect was his god; ambition his motive power. What would this casual blight upon his supreme contentment be to him, when with the wings of his air-car spread, he should spurn the earth and soar into the heaven
of fame simultaneously with his flight into the open.

He could wait for that hour. He had measured the gulf before him and found it passable. Henceforth no looking back.

Rising, he stood for a moment gazing, with an alert eye now, upon such sections of his car as had not yet been fitted into their places; then he bent forward to his work, and soon the lips which had uttered that sardonic laugh a few minutes before, parted in gentler fashion, and song took the place of curses--a ballad of love and fondest truth. But Orlando never knew what he sang. He had the gift and used it.

Would his tones, however, have rung out with quite so mellow a sweetness had he seen the restless figure even then circling his retreat with eyes darting accusation and arms lifted towards him in wild but impotent threat?

Yes, I think they would; for he knew that the man who thus expressed his helplessness along with his convictions, was no nearer the end he had set himself to attain than on the day he first betrayed his suspicions.

XXXIV

THE HUT CHANGES ITS NAME

That night Oswald was taken very ill. For three days his life hung in the balance, then youth and healthy living triumphed over shock and bereavement, and he came slowly back to his sad and crippled existence.

He had been conscious for a week or more of his surroundings, and of his bitter sorrows as well, when one morning he asked Doris whose face it was he had seen bending over him so often during the last week: "Have you a new doctor? A man with white hair and a comforting smile? Or have I dreamed this face? I have had so many fancies this might easily be one of them."

"No, it is not a fancy," was the quiet reply. "Nor is it the face of a doctor. It is that of friend. One whose heart is bound up in your recovery; one for whom you must live, Mr. Brotherson."

"I don't know him, Doris. It's a strange face to me. And yet, it's not altogether strange. Who is this man and why should he care for me so deeply?"

"Because you share one love and one grief. It is Edith's father whom you see at your bedside. He has helped to nurse you ever since you came down this second time."

"Edith's father! Doris, it cannot be. Edith's father!"

"Yes, Mr. Challoner has been in Derby for the last two weeks. He has only one interest now; to see you well again."

"Why?"

Doris caught the note of pain, if not suspicion, in this query, and smiled as she asked in turn:

"Shall he answer that question himself? He is waiting to come in. Not to talk. You need not fear his talking. He's as quiet as any man I ever saw."

The sick man closed his eyes, and Doris watching, saw the flush rise to his emaciated cheek, then slowly fade away again to a pallor that frightened her. Had she injured where she would heal? Had she pressed too suddenly and too hard on the ever gaping wound in her invalid's breast? She gasped in terror at the thought, then she faintly smiled, for his eyes had opened again and showed a calm determination as he said:

"I should like to see him. I should like him to answer the question I have just put you. I should rest easier and get well faster--or not get well at all."

This latter he half whispered, and Doris, tripping from the room may not have heard it, for her face showed no further shadow as she ushered in Mr. Challoner, and closed the door behind him. She had looked forward to this moment for days. To Oswald, however, it was an unexpected excitement and his voice trembled with something more than physical weakness as he greeted his visitor and thanked him for his attentions.

"Doris says that you have shown me this kindness from the desire you have to see me well again Mr. Challoner. Is this true?"

"Very true. I cannot emphasise the fact too strongly."

Oswald's eyes met his again, this time with great earnestness.

"You must have serious reasons for feeling so--reasons which I do not quite understand. May I ask why you place such value upon a life which, if ever useful to itself or others, has lost and lost forever, the one delight which gave it meaning?"

It was for Mr. Challoner's voice to tremble now, as reaching out his hand, he declared, with unmistakable feeling:

"I have no son. I have no interest left in life, outside this room and the possibilities it contains for me. Your attachment to my daughter has created a bond between us, Mr. Brotherson, which I sincerely hope to see recognised by you."

Startled and deeply moved, the young man stretched out a shaking hand towards his visitor, with the feeble but exulting cry:
"Then you do not blame me for her wretched and mysterious death. You hold me guiltless of the misery which nerved her despairing arm?"

"Quite guiltless."

Oswald's wan and pinched features took on a beautiful expression and Mr. Challoner no longer wondered at his daughter's choice.

"Thank God!" fell from the sick man's lips, and then there was a silence during which their two hands met. It was some minutes before either spoke and then it was Oswald who said:

"I must confide to you certain facts. I honoured your daughter and realised her position fully. Our plight was never made in words, nor should I have presumed to advance any claim to her hand if I had not made good my expectations, Mr. Challoner. I meant to win both her regard and yours by acts, not words. I felt that I had a great deal to do and I was prepared to work and wait. I loved her--" He turned away his head and the silence which filled up the gap, united those two hearts, as the old and young are seldom united.

But when a little later, Mr. Challoner rejoined Doris, in her little sitting-room, he nevertheless showed a perplexity she had hoped to see removed by this understanding with the younger Brotherson.

The cause became apparent as soon as he spoke.

"These brothers hold by each other," said he. "Oswald will hear nothing against Orlando. He says that he has redeemed his fault. He does not even protest that his brother's word is to be believed in this matter. He does not seem to think that necessary. He evidently regards Orlando's personality as speaking as truly and satisfactorily for itself, as his own does. And I dared not undeceive him."

"He does not know all our reasons for distrust. He has heard nothing about the poor washerwoman."

"No, and he must not--not for weeks. He has borne all that he can."

"His confidence in his older brother is sublime. I do not share it; but I cannot help but respect him for it."

It was warmly said, and Mr. Challoner could not forbear casting an anxious look at her upturned face. What he saw there made him turn away with a sigh.

"This confidence has for me a very unhappy side," he remarked. "It shows me Oswald's thought. He who loved her best, accepts the cruel verdict of an unreasoning public."

Doris' large eyes burned with a weird light upon his face.

"He has not had my dream," she murmured, with all the quiet of an unmoved conviction.

Yet as the days went by, even her manner changed towards the busy inventor. It was hardly possible for it not to. The high stand he took; the regard accorded him on every side; his talent; his conversation, which was an education in itself, and, above all, his absorption in a work daily advancing towards completion, removed him so insensibly and yet so decidedly, from the hideous past of tragedy with which his name, if not his honour, was associated, that, unconsciously to herself, she gradually lost her icy air of repulsion and lent him a more or less attentive ear, when he chose to join their small company of an evening. The result was that he turned so bright a side upon her that toleration merged from day to day into admiration and memory lost itself in anticipation of the event which was to prove him a man of men, if not one of the world's greatest mechanical geniuses.

Meantime, Oswald was steadily improving in health, if not in spirits. He had taken his first walk without any unfavourable results, and Orlando decided from this that the time had come for an explanation of his device and his requirements in regard to it. Seated together in Oswald's room, he broached the subject thus:

"Oswald, what is your idea about what I'm making up there?"

"That it will be a success."

"I know; but its character, its use? What do you think it is?"

"I've an idea; but my idea don't fit the conditions."

"How's that?"

"The shed is too closely hemmed in. You haven't room--"

"For what?"

"To start an aeroplane."

"Yet it is certainly a device for flying."

"I supposed so; but--"

"It is an air-car with a new and valuable idea--the idea for which the whole world has been seeking ever since the first aeroplane found its way up from the earth. My car needs no room to start in save that which it occupies. If it did, it would be but the modification of a hundred others."

"Orlando!"

As Oswald thus gave expression to his surprise, their two faces were a study: the fire of genius in the one; the light of sympathetic understanding in the other.

"If this car, now within three days of its completion," Orlando proceeded, "does not rise from the oval of my
hangar like a bird from its nest, and after a wide and circling flight descend again into the self same spot without any swerving from its direct course, then have I failed in my endeavour and must take a back seat with the rest. But it will not fail. I'm certain of success, Oswald. All I want just now is a sympathetic helper--you, for instance; someone who will aid me with the final fittings and hold his peace to all eternity if the impossible occurs and the thing proves a failure."

"Have you such pride as that?"
"Precisely."
"So much that you cannot face failure?"
"Not when attached to my name. You can see how I feel about that by the secrecy I have worked under. No other person living knows what I have just communicated to you. Every part shipped here came from different manufacturing firms; sometimes a part of a part was all I allowed to be made in any one place. My fame, like my ship, must rise with one bound into the air, or it must never rise at all. It was not made for petty accomplishment, or the slow plodding of commonplace minds. I must startle, or remain obscure. That is why I chose this place for my venture, and you for my helper and associate."

"You want me to ascend with you?"
"Exactly."
"At the end of three days?"
"Yes."
"Orlando, I cannot."
"You cannot? Not strong enough yet? I'll wait then,--three days more."
"The time's too short. A month is scarcely sufficient. It would be folly, such as you never show, to trust a nerve so undermined as mine till time has restored its power. For an enterprise like this you need a man of ready strength and resources; not one whose condition you might be obliged to consider at a very critical moment."

Orlando, balked thus at the outset, showed his displeasure.  
"You do not do justice to your will. It is strong enough to carry you through anything."
"It was."
"You can force it to act for you."
"I fear not, Orlando."
"I counted on you and you thwart me at the most critical moment of my life."
Oswald smiled; his whole candid and generous nature bursting into view, in one quick flash.  
"Perhaps," he assented; "but you will thank me when you realise my weakness. Another man must be found--quick, deft, secret, yet honourably alive to the importance of the occasion and your rights as a great original thinker and mechanician."

"Do you know such a man?"
"I don't; but there must be many such among our workmen."
"There isn't one; and I haven't time to send to Brooklyn. I reckoned on you."
"Can you wait a month?"
"No."
"A fortnight, then?"
"No, not ten days."

Oswald looked surprised. He would like to have asked why such precipitation was necessary, but their tone in which this ultimatum was given was of that decisive character which admits of no argument. He, therefore, merely looked his query. But Orlando was not one to answer looks; besides, he had no reply for the same importunate question urged by his own good sense. He knew that he must make the attempt upon which his future rested soon, and without risk of the sapping influence of lengthened suspense and weeks of waiting. He could hold on to those two demons leagued in attack against him, for a definite seven days, but not for an indeterminate time. If he were to be saved from folly,--from himself--events must rush.

He, therefore, repeated his no, with increased vehemence, adding, as he marked the reproach in his brother's eye, "I cannot wait. The test must be made on Saturday evening next, whatever the conditions; whatever the weather. An air-car to be serviceable must be ready to meet lightning and tempest, and what is worse, perhaps, an insufficient crew." Then rising, he exclaimed, with a determination which rendered him majestic, "If help is not forthcoming, I'll do it all myself. Nothing shall hold me back; nothing shall stop me; and when you see me and my car rise above the treetops, you'll feel that I have done what I could to make you forget--"

He did not need to continue. Oswald understood and flashed a grateful look his way before saying:  
"You will make the attempt at night?"
"Certainly."
"And on Saturday?"
"I've said it."
"I will run over in my mind the qualifications of such men as I know and acquaint you with the result tomorrow."
"There are adjustments to be made. A man of accuracy is necessary."
"I will remember."
"And he must be likable. I can do nothing with a man with whom I'm not perfectly in accord."
"I understand that."
"Good-night then." A moment of hesitancy, then, "I wish not only yourself but Miss Scott to be present at this test. Prepare her for the spectacle; but not yet, not till within an hour or two of the occasion."

And with a proud smile in which flashed a significance which startled Oswald, he gave a hurried nod and turned away.

When in an hour afterwards, Doris looked in through the open door, she found Oswald sitting with face buried in his hands, thinking so deeply that he did not hear her. He had sat like this, immovable and absorbed, ever since his brother had left him.

XXXV
SILENCE--AND A KNOCK

Oswald did not succeed in finding a man to please Orlando. He suggested one person after another to the exacting inventor, but none were satisfactory to him and each in turn was turned down. It is not every one we want to have share a world-wide triumph or an ignominious defeat. And the days were passing.

He had said in a moment of elation, "I will do it alone;" but he knew even then that he could not. Two hands were necessary to start the car; afterwards, he might manage it alone. Descent was even possible, but to give the contrivance its first lift required a second mechanician. Where was he to find one to please him? And what was he to do if he did not? Conquer his prejudices against such men as he had seen, or delay the attempt, as Oswald had suggested, till he could get one of his old cronies on from New York. He could do neither. The obstinacy of his nature was such as to offer an invincible barrier against either suggestion. One alternative remained. He had heard of women aviators. If Doris could be induced to accompany him into the air, instead of clinging sodden-like to the weight of Oswald's woe, then would the world behold a triumph which would dwarf the ecstasy of the bird's flight and rob the eagle of his kingly pride. But Doris barely endured him as yet, and the thought was not one to be considered for a moment. Yet what other course remained? He was brooding deeply on the subject, in his hangar one evening—(it was Thursday and Saturday was but two days off) when there came a light knock at the door.

This had never occurred before. He had given strict orders, backed by his brother's authority, that he was never to be intruded upon when in this place; and though he had sometimes encountered the prying eyes of the curious flashing from behind the trees encircling the hangar, his door had never been approached before, or his privacy encroached upon. He started then, when this low but penetrating sound struck across the turmoil of his thoughts, and cast one look in the direction from which it came; but he did not rise, or even change his position on his workman's stool.

Then it came again, still low but with an insistence which drew his brows together and made his hand fall from the wire he had been unconsciously holding through the mental debate which was absorbing him. Still he made no response, and the knocking continued. Should he ignore it entirely, start up his motor and render himself oblivious to all other sounds? At every other point in his career he would have done this, but an unknown, and as yet unnamed, something had entered his heart during this fatal month, which made old ways impossible and oblivion a thing he dared not court too recklessly. Should this be a summons from Doris! Should (inconceivable idea, yet it seized upon him relentlessly and would not yield for the asking) should it be Doris herself!

Taking advantage of a momentary cessation of the ceaseless tap tap, he listened. Silence was never profounder than in this forest on that windless night. Earth and air seemed, to his strained ear, emptied of all sound. The clatter of his own steady, un hastened heart-beat was all that broke upon the stillness. He might be alone in the Universe for all token of life beyond these walls, or so he was saying to himself, when sharp, quick, sinister, the knocking recommenced, demanding admission, insisting upon attention, drawing him against his own will to his feet, and finally, though he made more than one stand against it, to the very door.

"Who's there?" he asked, imperiously and with some show of anger.
No answer, but another quiet knock.
"Speak! or go from my door. No one has the right to intrude here. What is your name and business?"
Continued knocking—nothing more.

With an outburst of wrath, which made the hangar ring, Orlando lifted his fist to answer this appeal in his own fierce fashion from his own side of the door, but the impulse paused at fulfilment, and he let his arm fall again in a
rush of self-hatred which it would have pained his worst enemy, even little Doris, to witness. As it reached his side, the knock came again.

It was too much. With an oath, Orlando reached for his key. But before fitting it into the lock, he cast a look behind him. The car was in plain sight, filling the central space from floor to roof. A single glance from a stranger's eye, and its principal secret would be a secret no longer. He must not run such a risk. Before he answered this call, he must drop the curtain he had rigged up against such emergencies as these. He had but to pull a cord and a veil would fall before his treasure, concealing it as effectually as an Eastern bride is concealed behind her yashmak.

Stepping to the wall, he drew that cord, then with an impatient sigh, returned to the door.

Another quiet but insistent knock greeted him. In no fury now, but with a vague sense of portent which gave an aspect of farewell to the one quick glance he cast about the well-known spot, he fitted the key in the lock, and stood ready to turn it.

"I ask again your name and your business," he shouted out in loud command. "Tell them or--" He meant to say, "or I do not turn this key." But something withheld the threat. He knew that it would perish in the utterance; that he could not carry it out. He would have to open the door now, response or no response. "Speak!" was the word with which he finished his demand.

A final knock.

Pulling a pistol from his pocket, with his left hand, he turned the key with his right.
The door remained unopened.

Stepping slowly back, he stared at its unpainted boards for a moment, then he spoke up quietly, almost courteously:
"Enter."

But the command passed unheeded; the latch was not raised, and only the slightest tap was heard.

With a bound he reached forward and pulled the door open. Then a great silence fell upon him and a rigidity as of the grave seized and stiffened his powerful frame.

The man confronting him from the darkness was Sweetwater.

XXXVI

THE MAN WITHIN AND THE MAN WITHOUT

An instant of silence, during which the two men eyed each other; then, Sweetwater, with an ironical smile directed towards the pistol lightly remarked:
"Mr. Challoner and other men at the hotel are acquainted with my purpose and await my return. I have come--" here he cast a glowering look at the huge curtain cutting off the greater portion of the illy-lit interior--"to offer you my services, Mr. Brotherson. I have no other motive for this intrusion than to be of use. I am deeply interested in your invention, to the development of which I have already lent some aid, and can bring to the test you propose a sympathetic help which you could hardly find in any other person living."

The silence which settled down at the completion of these words had a weight which made that of the previous moment seem light and all athrob with sound. The man within had not yet caught his breath; the man without held his, in an anxiety which had little to do with the direction of the weapon, into which he looked. Then an owl hooted far away in the forest, and Orlando, slowly lowering his arm, asked in an oddly constrained tone:
"How long have you been in town?"

The answer cut clean through any lingering hope he may have had.
"'Ever since the day your brother was told the story of his great misfortune."

"Ah! still at your old tricks! I thought you had quit that business as unprofitable."

"I don't know. I never expect quick returns. He who holds on for a rise sometimes reaps unlooked-for profits."

The arm and fist of Orlando Brotherson ached to hurl this fellow back into the heart of the midnight woods. But they remained quiescent and he spoke instead. "I have buried the business. You will never resuscitate it through me."

Sweetwater smiled. There was no mirth in his smile though there was lightness in his tone as said:
"Then let us go back to the matter in hand. You need a helper; where are you going to find one if you don't take me?"

A growl from Brotherson's set lips. Never had he looked more dangerous than in the one burning instant following this daring repetition of the detective's outrageous request. But as he noted how slight was the figure opposing him from the other side of the threshold, he was swayed by his natural admiration of pluck in the physically weak, and lost his threatening attitude, only to assume one which Sweetwater secretly found it even harder to meet.

"You are a fool," was the stinging remark he heard flung at him. "Do you want to play the police-officer here and arrest me in mid air?"
"Mr. Brotherson, you understand me as little as I am supposed to understand you. Humble as my place is in society and, I may add, in the Department whose interests I serve, there are in me two men. One you know passably well—the detective whose methods, only indifferently clever show that he has very much to learn. Of the other—the workman acquainted with hammer and saw, but with some knowledge too of higher mathematics and the principles upon which great mechanical inventions depend, you know little, and must imagine much. I was playing the gawky when I helped you in the old house in Brooklyn. I was interested in your air-ship—Oh, I recognised it for what it was, notwithstanding its oddity and lack of ostensible means for flying—but I was not caught in the whirl of its idea; the idea by which you doubtless expect, and with very good reason too, to revolutionise the science of aviation. But since then I've been thinking it over, and am so filled with your own hopes that either I must have a hand in the finishing and sailing of the one you have yourself constructed, or go to work myself on the hints you have unconsciously given me, and make a car of my own."

Audacity often succeeds where subtler means fail. Orlando, with a curious twist of his strong lip, took hold of the detective's arm and drew him in, shutting and locking the door carefully behind him.

"Now," said he, "you shall tell me what you think you have discovered, to make any ideas of your own available in the manufacture of a superior self-propelling air-ship."

Sweetwater who had been so violently wheeled about in entering that he stood with his back to the curtain concealing the car, answered without hesitation.

"You have a device, entirely new so far as I can judge, by which this car can leap at once into space, hold its own in any direction, and alight again upon any given spot without shock to the machine or danger to the people controlling it."

"Explain the device."
"I will draw it."
"You can?"
"As I see it."
"As you see it!"
"Yes. It's a brilliant idea; I could never have conceived it."
"You believe—"
"I know."
"Sit here. Let's see what you know."

Sweetwater sat down at the table the other pointed out, and drawing forward a piece of paper, took up a pencil with an easy air. Brotherson approached and stood at his shoulder. He had taken up his pistol again, why he hardly knew, and as Sweetwater began his marks, his fingers tightened on its butt till they turned white in the murky lamplight.

"You see," came in easy tones from the stooping draughtsman, "I have an imagination which only needs a slight fillip from a mind like yours to send it in the desired direction. I shall not draw an exact reproduction of your idea, but I think you will see that I understand it very well. How's that for a start?"

Brotherson looked and hastily drew back. He did not want the other to note his surprise.

"But that is a portion you never saw," he loudly declared.

"No, but I saw this," returned Sweetwater, working busily on some curves; "and these gave me the fillip I mentioned. The rest came easily."

Brotherson, in dread of his own anger, threw his pistol to the other end of the shed:

"You knave! You thief!" he furiously cried.

"How so?" asked Sweetwater smilingly, rising and looking him calmly in the face. "A thief is one who appropriates another man's goods, or, let us say, another man's ideas. I have appropriated nothing yet. I've only shown you how easily I could do so. Mr. Brotherson, take me in as your assistant. I will be faithful to you, I swear it. I want to see that machine go up."

"For how many people have you drawn those lines?" thundered the inexorable voice.
"For nobody; not for myself even. This is the first time they have left their hiding-place in my brain."
"Can you swear to that?"

"I can and will, if you require it. But you ought to believe my word, sir. I am square as a die in all matters not connected—well, not connected with my profession," he smiled in a burst of that whimsical humour, which not even the seriousness of the moment could quite suppress.

"And what surety have I that you do not consider this very matter of mine as coming within the bounds you speak of?"

"None. But you must trust me that far."

Brotherson surveyed him with an irony which conveyed a very different message to the detective than any he
had intended. Then quickly:

"To how many have you spoken, dilating upon this device, and publishing abroad my secret?"
"I have spoken to no one, not even to Mr. Gryce. That shows my honesty as nothing else can."
"You have kept my secret intact?"
"Entirely so, sir."
"So that no one, here or elsewhere, shares our knowledge of the new points in this mechanism?"
"I say so, sir."
"Then if I should kill you," came in ferocious accents, "now --here--"
"You would be the only one to own that knowledge. But you won't kill me."
"Why?"
"Need I go into reasons?"
"Why? I say."
"Because your conscience is already too heavily laden to bear the burden of another unprovoked crime."

Brotherson, starting back, glared with open ferocity upon the man who dared to face him with such an accusation.

"God! why didn't I shoot you on entrance!" he cried. "Your courage is certainly colossal."

A fine smile, without even the hint of humour now, touched the daring detective's lip. Brotherson's anger seemed to grow under it, and he loudly repeated:

"It's more than colossal; it's abnormal and--" A moment's pause, then with ironic pauses--"and quite unnecessary save as a matter of display, unless you think you need it to sustain you through the ordeal you are courting. You wish to help me finish and prepare for flight?"

"I sincerely do."
"You consider yourself competent?"
"I do."

Brotherson's eyes fell and he walked once to the extremity of the oval flooring and back.

"Well, we will grant that. But that's not all that is necessary. My requirements demand a companion in my first flight. Will you go up in the car with me on Saturday night?"

A quick affirmative was on Sweetwater's lips but the glimpse which he got of the speaker's face glowering upon him from the shadows into which Brotherson had withdrawn, stopped its utterance, and the silence grew heavy. Though it may not have lasted long by the clock, the instant of breathless contemplation of each other's features across the intervening space was of incalculable moment to Sweetwater, and, possibly, to Brotherson. As drowning men are said to live over their whole history between their first plunge and their final rise to light and air, so through the mind of the detective rushed the memories of his past and the fast fading glories of his future; and rebelling at the subtle peril he saw in that sardonic eye, he vociferated an impulsive:

"No! I'll not--" and paused, caught by a new and irresistible sensation.

A breath of wind--the first he had felt that night--had swept in through some crevice in the curving wall, flapping the canvas enveloping the great car. It acted like a peal to battle. After all, a man must take some risks in his life, and his heart was in this trial of a redoubtable mechanism in which he had full faith. He could not say no to the prospect of being the first to share a triumph which would send his name to the ends of the earth; and, changing the trend of his sentence, he repeated with a calmness which had the force of a great decision.

"I will not fail you in anything. If she rises--" here his trembling hand fell on the curtain shutting off his view of the ship, "she shall take me with her, so that when she descends I may be the first to congratulate the proud inventor of such a marvel."

"So be it!" shot from the other's lips, his eyes losing their threatening look, and his whole countenance suddenly aglow with the enthusiasm of awakened genius.

Coming from the shadows, he laid his hand on the cord regulating the rise and fall of the concealing curtain.

"Here she is!" he cried and drew the cord.

The canvas shook, gathered itself into great folds and disappeared in the shadows from which he had just stepped.

The air-car stood revealed--a startling, because wholly unique, vision.

Long did Sweetwater survey it, then turning with beaming face upon the watchful inventor, he uttered a loud Hurrah.

Next moment, with everything forgotten between them save the glories of this invention, both dropped simultaneously to the floor and began that minute examination of the mechanism necessary to their mutual work.

XXXVII

HIS GREAT HOUR
Saturday night at eight o'clock.
So the fiat had gone forth, with no concession to be made on account of weather.
As Oswald came from his supper and took a look at the heavens from the small front porch, he was deeply troubled that Orlando remained so obstinate on this point. For there were ominous clouds rolling up from the east, and the storms in this region of high mountains and abrupt valleys were not light, nor without danger even to those with feet well planted upon mother earth.
If the tempest should come up before eight!
Mr. Challoner, who, from some mysterious impulse of bravado on the part of Brotherson, was to be allowed to make the third in this small band of spectators, was equally concerned at this sight, but not for Brotherson. His fears were for Oswald, whose slowly gathering strength could ill bear the strain which this additional anxiety for his brother's life must impose upon him. As for Doris, she was in a state of excitement more connected with the past than with the future. That afternoon she had laid her hand in that of Orlando Brotherson, and wished him well. She! in whose breast still lingered reminiscences of those old doubts which had beclouded his image for her at their first meeting. She had not been able to avoid it. His look was a compelling one, and it had demanded thus much from her; and--a terrible thought to her gentle spirit--he might be going to his death!
It had been settled by the prospective aviator that they were to watch for the ascent from the mouth of the grassy road leading in to the hangar. The three were to meet there at a quarter to eight and await the stroke and the air-cars rise. That time was near, and Mr. Challoner, catching a glimpse of Oswald's pallid and unnaturally drawn features, as he set down the lantern he carried, shuddered with foreboding and wished the hour passed.
Doris' watchful glance never left the face whose lightest change was more to her than all Orlando's hopes. But the result upon her was not to weaken her resolution, but to strengthen it. Whatever the outcome of the next few minutes, she must stand ready to sustain her invalid through it. That the darkness of early evening had deepened to oppression, was unnoticed for the moment. Their attention was too absorbed in what was going on before them, for even a glance overhead.
Suddenly Mr. Challoner spoke.
"Who is the man whom Mr. Brotherson has asked to go up with him?"
"He has never told me. He has kept his own counsel about that as about everything else connected with this matter. He simply advised me that I was not to bother about him any more; that he had found the assistant he wanted."
"Such reticence seems unpardonable. You have--displayed great patience, Oswald."
"Because I understand Orlando. He reads men's natures like a book. The man he trusts, we may trust. Tomorrow, he will speak openly enough. All cause for reticence will be gone."
"You have confidence then in the success of this undertaking?"
"If I hadn't, I should not be here. I could hardly bear to witness his failure, even in a secret test like this. I should find it too hard to face him afterwards."
"I don't understand."
"Orlando has great pride. If this enterprise fails I cannot answer for him. He would be capable of anything. Why, Doris! what is the matter, child? I never saw you look like that before."
She had been down on her knees regulating the lantern, and the sudden flame, shooting up, had shown him her face turned up towards his in an apprehension which verged on horror.
"Do I look frightened?" she asked, remembering herself and lightly rising. "I believe that I am a little frightened. If--if anything should go wrong! If an accident!" But here she remembered herself again and quickly changed her tone. "But your confidence shall be mine. I will believe in his good angel or--or in his self-command and great resolution. I'll not be frightened any more."
But Oswald did not seem satisfied. He continued to look at her in vague concern.
He hardly knew what to make of the intense feeling she had manifested. Had Orlando touched her girlish heart? Had this cold-blooded nature, with its steel-like brilliancy and honourable but stern views of life, moved this warm and sympathetic soul to more than admiration? The thought disturbed him so he forgot the nearness of the moment they were all awaiting till a quick rasping sound from the hangar, followed by the sudden appearance of an ever-widening band of light about its upper rim, drew his attention and awakened them all to a breathless expectation.
The lid was rising. Now it was half-way up, and now, for the first time, it was lifted to its full height and stood a broad oval disc against the background of the forest. The effect was strange. The hangar had been made brilliant by many lamps, and their united glare pouring from its top and illuminating not only the surrounding treetops but the broad face of this uplifted disc, roused in the awed spectator a thrill such as in mythological times might have greeted the sudden sight of Vulcan's smithy blazing on Olympian hills. But the clang of iron on iron would have
attended the flash and gleam of those unexpected fires, and here all was still save for that steady throb never heard in
Olympus or the halls of Valhalla, the pant of the motor eager for flight in the upper air.

As they listened in a trance of burning hope which obliterated all else, this noise and all others near and distant,
was suddenly lost in a loud clatter of writhing and twisting boughs which set the forest in a roar and seemed to
heave the air about them.

A wind had swooped down from the east, bending everything before it and rattling the huge oval on which their
eyes were fixed as though it would tear it from its hinges.

The three caught at each other's hands in dismay. The storm had come just on the verge of the enterprise, and no
one might guess the result.

"Will he dare? Will he dare?" whispered Doris, and Oswald answered, though it seemed next to impossible that
he could have heard her:

"He will dare. But will he survive it? Mr. Challoner," he suddenly shouted in that gentleman's ear, "what time is
it now?"

Mr. Challoner, disengaging himself from their mutual grasp, knelt down by the lantern to consult his watch.

"One minute to eight," he shouted back.

The forest was now a pandemonium. Great boughs, split from their parent trunks, fell crashing to the ground in
all directions. The scream of the wind roused echoes which repeated themselves, here, there and everywhere. No
rain had fallen yet, but the sight of the clouds skurrying pell-mell through the glare thrown up from the shed, created
such havoc in the already overstrained minds of the three onlookers, that they hardly heeded, when with a clatter and
splash which at another time would have startled them into flight, the swaying oval before them was whirled from its
hinges and thrown back against the trees already bending under the onslaught of the tempest. Destruction seemed
the natural accompaniment of the moment, and the only prayer which sprang to Oswald's lips was that the motor
whose throb yet lingered in their blood though no longer taken in by the ear, would either refuse to work or prove
insufficient to lift the heavy car into this seething tumult of warring forces. His brother's life hung in the balance
against his fame, and he could not but choose life for him. Yet, as the multitudinous sounds about him yielded for a
moment to that brother's shout, and he knew that the moment had come, which would soon settle all, he found
himself staring at the elliptical edge of the hangar, with an anticipation which held in it as much terror as joy, for the
end of a great hope or the beginning of a great triumph was compressed into this trembling instant and if--

Great God! he sees it! They all see it! Plainly against that portion of the disc which still lifted itself above the
further wall, a curious moving mass appears, lengthens, takes on shape, then shoots suddenly aloft, clearing the
encircling tops of the bending, twisting and tormented trees, straight into the heart of the gale, where for one
breathless moment it whirls madly about like a thing distraught, then in slow but triumphant obedience to the master
hand that guides it, steadies and mounts majestically upward till it is lost to their view in the depths of impenetrable
darkness.

Orlando Brotherson has accomplished his task. He has invented a mechanism which can send an air-car straight
up from its mooring place. As the three watchers realise this, Oswald utters a cry of triumph, and Doris throws
herself into Mr. Challoner's arms. Then they all stand transfixed again, waiting for a descent which may never come.

But hark! a new sound, mingling its clatter with all the others. It is the rain. Quick, maddening, drenching, it
comes; enveloping them in wet in a moment. Can they hold their faces up against it?

"Orlando?" went up in a shriek. "Orlando?" Oh, for a ray of light in those far-off heavens For a lull in the
tremendous sounds shivering the heavens and shaking the earth! But the tempest rages on, and they can only wait,
five minutes, ten minutes, looking, hoping, fearing, without thought of self and almost without thought of each
other, till suddenly as it had come, the rain ceases and the wind, with one final wail of rage and defeat, rushes away
into the west, leaving behind it a sudden silence which, to their terrified hearts, seems almost more dreadful to bear
than the accumulated noises of the moment just gone.

Orlando was in that shout of natural forces, but he is not in this stillness. They look aloft, but the heavens are
void. Emptiness is where life was. Oswald begins to sway, and Doris, remembering him now and him only, has
thrown her strong young arm about him, when--What is this sound they hear high up, high up, in the rapidly clearing
vault of the heavens! A throb--a steady pant,--drawing near and yet nearer,--entering the circler of great branches
over their heads--descending, slowly descending,--till they catch another glimpse of those hazy outlines which had
no sooner taken shape than the car disappeared from their sight within the elliptical wall open to receive it.

It had survived the gale! It has re-entered its haven, and that, too, without colliding with aught around or any
shock to those within, just as Orlando had promised; and the world was henceforth his! Hail to Orlando Brotherson!

Oswald could hardly restrain his mad joy and enthusiasm. Bounding to the door separating him from this
conqueror of almost invincible forces, he pounded it with impatient fist.

"Let me in!" he cried. "You've done the trick, Orlando, you've done the trick."

"Yes, I have satisfied myself," came back in studied self-control from the other side of the door; and with a quick turning of the lock, Orlando stood before them.

They never forgot him as he looked at that moment. He was drenched, battered, palpitating with excitement; but the majesty of success was in his eye and in the bearing of his incomparable figure.

As Oswald bounded towards him, he reached out his hand, but his glance was for Doris.

"Yes," he went on, in tones of suppressed elation, "there's no flaw in my triumph. I have done all that I set out to do. Now--"

Why did he stop and look hurriedly back into the hangar? He had remembered Sweetwater. Sweetwater, who at that moment was stepping carefully from his seat in some remote portion of the car. The triumph was not complete. He had meant--

But there his thought stopped. Nothing of evil, nothing even of regret should mar his great hour. He was a conqueror, and it was for him now to reap the joy of conquest.

XXXVIII
NIGHT

Three days had passed, and Orlando Brotherson sat in his room at the hotel before a table laden with telegrams, letters and marked newspapers. The news of his achievement had gone abroad, and Derby was, for the moment, the centre of interest for two continents.

His success was an established fact. The second trial which he had made with his car, this time with the whole town gathered together in the streets as witnesses, had proved not only the reliability of its mechanism, but the great advantages which it possessed for a direct flight to any given point. Already he saw Fortune beckoning to him in the shape of an unconditional offer of money from a first-class source; and better still,—for he was a man of untiring energy and boundless resource—that opportunity for new and enlarged effort which comes with the recognition of one's exceptional powers.

All this was his and more. A sweeter hope, a more enduring joy had followed hard upon gratified ambition. Doris had smiled on him; —Doris! She had caught the contagion of the universal enthusiasm and had given him her first ungrudging token of approval. It had altered his whole outlook on life in an instant, for there was an eagerness in this demonstration which proclaimed the relieved heart. She no longer trusted either appearances or her dream. He had succeeded in conquering her doubts by the very force of his personality, and the shadow which had hitherto darkened their intercourse had melted quite away. She was ready to take his word now and Oswald's, after which the rest must follow. Love does not lag far behind an ardent admiration.

Fame! Fortune! Love! What more could a man desire? What more could this man, with his strenuous past and an unlimited capacity for an enlarged future, ask from fate than this. Yet, as he bends over his letters, fingering some, but reading none beyond a line or two, he betrays but a passing elation, and hardly lifts his head when a burst of loud acclaim comes ringing up to his window from some ardent passer-by: "Hurrah for Brotherson! He has put our town on the map!"

Why this despondency? Have those two demons seized him again? It would seem so and with new and overmastering fury. After the hour of triumph comes the hour of reckoning. Orlando Brotherson in his hour of proud attainment stands naked before his own soul's tribunal and the pleader is dumb and the judge inexorable. There is but one Witness to such struggles; but one eye to note the waste and desolation of the devastated soul, when the storm is over past.

Orlando Brotherson has succumbed; the attack was too keen, his forces too shaken. But as the heavy minutes pass, he slowly re-gathers his strength and rises, in the end, a conqueror. Nevertheless, he knows, even in that moment of regained command, that the peace he had thus bought with strain and stress is but momentary; that the battle is on for life: that the days which to other eyes would carry a sense of brilliancy—days teeming with work and outward satisfaction—would hold within their hidden depths a brooding uncertainty which would rob applause of its music and even overshadow the angel face of Love.

He quailed at the prospect, materialist though he was. The days --the interminable days! In his unbroken strength and the glare of the noonday sun, he forgot to take account of the nights looming in black and endless procession before him. It was from the day phantom he shrank, and not from the ghoul which works in the darkness and makes a grave of the heart while happier mortals sleep.

And the former terror seemed formidable enough to him in this his hour of startling realisation, even if he had freed himself for the nonce from its controlling power. To escape all further contemplation of it he would work. These letters deserved attention. He would carry them to Oswald, and in their consideration find distraction for the rest of the day, at least. Oswald was a good fellow. If pleasure were to be gotten from these tokens of good-will, he
should have his share of it. A gleam of Oswald's old spirit in Oswald's once bright eye, would go far towards throttling one of those demons whose talons he had just released from his throat; and if Doris responded too, he would deserve his fate, if he did not succeed in gaining that mastery of himself which would make such hours as these but episodes in a life big with interest and potent with great emotions.

Rising with a resolute air, he made a bundle of his papers and, with them in hand, passed out of his room and down the hotel stairs.

A man stood directly in his way, as he made for the front door. It was Mr. Challoner.

Courtesy demanded some show of recognition between them, and Brotherson was passing with his usual cold bow, when a sudden impulse led him to pause and meet the other's eye, with the sarcastic remark:

"You have expressed, or so I have been told, some surprise at my choice of mechanician. A man of varied accomplishments, Mr. Challoner, but one for whom I have no further use. If, therefore, you wish to call off your watch-dog, you are at liberty to do so. I hardly think he can be serviceable to either of us much longer."

The older gentleman hesitated, seeking possibly for composure, and when he answered it was not only without irony but with a certain forced respect:

"Mr. Sweetwater has just left for New York, Mr. Brotherson. He will carry with him, no doubt, the full particulars of your great success."

Orlando bowed, this time with distinguished grace. Not a flicker of relief had disturbed the calm serenity of his aspect, yet when a moment later, he stepped among his shouting admirers in the street, his air and glance betrayed a bounding joy for which another source must be found than that of gratified pride. A chain had slipped from his spirit, and though the people shrank a little, even while they cheered, it was rather from awe of his bearing and the recognition of that sense of apartness which underlay his smile than from any perception of the man's real nature or of the awesome purpose which at that moment exalted it. But had they known—could they have seen into this tumultuous heart—what a silence would have settled upon these noisy streets; and in what terror and soul-confusion would each man have slunk away from his fellows into the quiet and solitude of his own home.

Brotherson himself was not without a sense of the incongruity underlying this ovation; for, as he slowly worked himself along, the brightness of his look became dimmed with a tinge of sarcasm which in its turn gave way to an expression of extreme melancholy—both quite unbefitting the hero of the hour in the first flush of his new-born glory. Had he seen Doris' youthful figure emerge for a moment from the vine-hung porch he was approaching, bringing with it some doubt of the reception awaiting him? Possibly, for he made a stand before he reached the house, and sent his followers back; after which he advanced with an unhurrying step, so that several minutes elapsed before he finally drew up before Mr. Scott's door and entered through the now empty porch into his brother's sitting-room.

He had meant to see Doris first, but his mind had changed. If all passed off well between himself and Oswald, if he found his brother responsive and wide-awake to the interests and necessities of the hour, he might forego his interview with her till he felt better prepared to meet it. For call it cowardice or simply a reasonable precaution, any delay seemed preferable to him in his present mood of discouragement, to that final casting of the die upon which hung so many and such tremendous issues. It was the first moment of real halt in his whole tumultuous life! Never, as daring experimentalist or agitator, had he shrunk from danger seen or unseen or from threat uttered or unuttered, as he shrunk from this young girl's no; and something of the dread he had felt lest he should encounter her unaware in the hall and so be led on to speak when his own judgment bade him be silent, darkened his features as he entered his brother's presence.

But Oswald was sunk in a bitter revery of his own, and took no heed of these signs of depression. In the reaction following these days of great excitement, the past had re-asserted itself, and all was gloom in his once generous soul. This, Orlando had time to perceive, quick as the change came when his brother really realised who his visitor was. The glad "Orlando!" and the forced smile did not deceive him, and his voice quavered a trifle as he held out his packet with the words:

"I have come to show you what the world says of my invention. We will soon be great men," he emphasised, as Oswald opened the letters. "Money has been offered me and—Read! read!" he urged, with an unconscious dictatorialness, as Oswald paused in his task. "See what the fates have prepared for us; for you shall share all my honours, as you will from this day share my work and enter into all my experiments. Cannot you enthuse a little bit over it? Doesn't the prospect contain any allurement for you? Would you rather stay locked up in this petty town—"?

"Yes; or—die. Don't look like that, Orlando. It was a cowardly speech and I ask your pardon. I'm hardly fit to talk to-day. Edith—"

Orlando frowned.

"Not that name!" he harshly interrupted. "You must not hamper your life with useless memories. That dream of yours may be sacred, but it belongs to the past, and a great reality confronts you. When you have fully recovered
your health, your own manhood will rebel at a weakness unworthy one of our name. Rouse yourself, Oswald. Take account of our prospects. Give me your hand and say, 'Life holds something for me yet. I have a brother who needs me if I do not need him. Together, we can prove ourselves invincible and wrench fame and fortune from the world.'"

But the hand he reached for did not rise at his command, though Oswald started erect and faced him with manly earnestness.

"I should have to think long and deeply," he said, "before I took upon myself responsibilities like these. I am broken in mind and heart, Orlando, and must remain so till God mercifully delivers me. I should be a poor assistant to you--a drag, rather than a help. Deeply as I deplore it, hard as it may be for one of your temperament to understand so complete an overthrow, I yet must acknowledge my condition and pray you not to count upon me in any plans you may form. I know how this looks--I know that as your brother and truest admirer, I should respond, and respond strongly, to such overtures as these, but the motive for achievement is gone. She was my all; and while I might work, it would be mechanically. The lift, the elevating thought is gone."

Orlando stood a moment studying his brother's face; then he turned shortly about and walked the length of the room. When he came back, he took up his stand again directly before Oswald, and asked, with a new note in his voice:

"Did you love Edith Challoner so much as that?"
A glance from Oswald's eye, sadder than any tear.
"So that you cannot be reconciled?"
A gesture. Oswald's words were always few.
Orlando's frown deepened.
"Such grief I partly understand," said he. "But time will cure it. Some day another lovely face--"
"We'll not talk of that, Orlando."
"No, we'll not talk of that," acquiesced the inventor, walking away again, this time to the window. "For you there's but one woman;--and she's a memory."
"Killed!" broke from his brother's lips. "Slain by her own hand under an impulse of wildness and terror! Can I ever forget that? Do not expect it, Orlando."
"Then you do blame me?" Orlando turned and was looking full at Oswald.
"I blame your unreasonableness and your overweening pride."

Orlando stood a moment, then moved towards the door. The heaviness of his step smote upon Oswald's ear and caused him to exclaim:

"Forgive me, Orlando." But the other cut him short with an imperative:
"Thanks for your candour! If her spirit is destined to stand like an immovable shadow between you and me, you do right to warn me. But this interview must end all allusion to the subject. I will seek and find another man to share my fortunes; (as he said this he approached suddenly, and took his papers from the other's hand) or--" Here he hastily retraced his steps to the door which he softly opened. "Or" he repeated--But though Oswald listened for the rest, it did not come. While he waited, the other had given him one deeply concentrated look and passed out.

No heartfelt understanding was possible between these two men. Crossing the hall, Orlando knocked at the door of Doris' little sitting-room.

No answer, yet she was there. He knew it in every throbbing fibre of his body. She was there and quite aware of his presence; of this he felt sure; yet she did not bid him enter. Should he knock again? Never! but he would not quit the threshold, not if she kept him waiting there for hours. Perhaps she realised this. Perhaps she had meant to open the door to him from the very first, who can tell? What avails is that she did ultimately open it, and he, meeting her soft eye, wished from his very heart that his impulse had led him another way, even if that way had been to the edge of the precipice--and over.

For the face he looked upon was serene, and there was no serenity in him; rather a confusion of unloosed passions fearful of barrier and yearning tumultuously for freedom. But, whatever his revolt, the secret revolt which makes no show in look or movement, he kept his ground and forced a smile of greeting. If her face was quiet, it was also lovely;--too lovely, he felt, for a man to leave it, whatever might come of his lingering.

Nothing in all his life had ever affected him like it. For him there was no other woman in the past, the present or the future, and, realising this--taking in to the full what her affection and her trust might be to him in those fearsome days to come, he so dreaded a rebuff--he, who had been the courted of women and the admired of men ever since he could remember,--that he failed to respond to her welcome and the simple congratulations she felt forced to repeat. He could neither speak the commonplace, nor listen to it. This was his crucial hour. He must find support here, or yield hopelessly to the maelstrom in whose whirl he was caught.

She saw his excitement and faltered back a step--a move which she regretted the next minute, for he took advantage of it to enter and close behind him the door which she would never have shut of her own accord. Then he
spoke, abruptly, passionately, but in those golden tones which no emotion could render other than alluring:

"I am an unhappy man, Miss Scott. I see that my presence here is not welcome, yet am sure that it would be so if it were not for a prejudice which your generous nature should be the first to cast aside, in face of the outspoken confidence of my brother: Oswald. Doris, little Doris, I love you. I have loved you from the moment of our first meeting. Not to many men is it given to find his heart so late, and when he does, it is for his whole life; no second passion can follow it. I know that I am premature in saying this; that you are not prepared to hear such words from me and that it might be wiser for me to withhold them, but I must leave Derby soon, and I cannot go until I know whether there is the least hope that you will yet lend a light to my career or whether that career must burn itself to ashes at your feet. Oswald—nay, hear me out—Oswald lives in his memories; but I must have an active hope --a tangible expectation--if I am to be the man I was meant to be. Will you, then, coldly dismiss me, or will you let my whole future life prove to you the innocence of my past? I will not hasten anything; all I ask is some indulgence. Time will do the rest."

"Impossible," she murmured.

But that was a word for which he had no ear. He saw that she was moved, unexpectedly so; that while her eyes wandered restlessly at times towards the door, they ever came back in girlish wonder, if not fascination, to his face, emboldening him so that he ventured at last, to add:

"Doris, little Doris, I will teach you a marvellous lesson, if you will only turn your dainty ear my way. Love such as mine carries infinite treasure with it. Will you have that treasure heaped, piled before your feet? Your lips say no, but your eyes—the truest eyes I ever saw—whisper a different language. The day will come when you will find your joy in the breast of him you are now afraid to trust." And not waiting for disclaimer or even a glance of reproach from the eyes he had so wilfully misread, he withdrew with a movement as abrupt as that with which he had entered.

Why, then, with the memory of this exultant hour to fend off all shadows, did the midnight find him in his solitary hangar in the moonlit woods, a deeply desponding figure again. Beside him, swung the huge machine which represented a life of power and luxury; but he no longer saw it. It called to him with many a creak and quiet snap,—sounds to start his blood and fire his eye a week—nay, a day ago. But he was deaf to this music now; the call went unheeded; the future had no further meaning, for him, nor did he know or think whether he sat in light or in darkness; whether the woods were silent about him, or panting with life and sound. His demon had gripped him again and the final battle was on. There would never be another. Mighty as he felt himself to be, there were limits even to his capacity for endurance. He could sustain no further conflict. How then would it end? He never had a doubt himself! Yet he sat there.

Around him in the forest, the night owls screeched and innumerable small things without a name, skurried from lair to lair.

He heard them not.

Above, the moon rode, flecking the deepest shadows with the silver from her half-turned urn, but none of the soft and healing drops fell upon him. Nature was no longer a goddess, but an avenger; light a revealer, not a solace. Darkness the only boon.

Nor had time a meaning. From early eve to early morn he sat there and knew not if it were one hour or twelve. Earth was his no longer. He roused, when the sun made everything light about him, but he did not think about it. He rose, but was not conscious that he rose. He unlocked the door and stepped out into the forest; but he could never remember doing this. He only knew later that he had been in the woods and now was in his room at the hotel; all the rest was phantasmagoria, agony and defeat.

He had crossed the Rubicon of this world's hopes and fears, but he had been unconscious of the passage.

XXXIX

THE AVENGER

"Dear Mr. Challoner:

"With every apology for the intrusion, may I request a few minutes of private conversation with you this evening at seven o'clock? Let it be in your own room.

"Yours truly, "ORLANDO BROTHERSON."

Mr. Challoner had been called upon to face many difficult and heartrending duties since the blow which had desolated his home fell upon him.

But from none of them had he shrunken as he did from the interview thus demanded. He had supposed himself rid of this man. He had dismissed him from his life when he had dismissed Sweetwater. His face, accordingly, wore anything but a propitiatory look, when promptly at the hour of seven, Orlando Brotherson entered his apartments.

His pleasure or his displeasure was, however, a matter of small consequence to his self-invited visitor. He had come there with a set purpose, and nothing in heaven or earth could deter him from it now. Declining the offer of a seat, with the slightest of acknowledgments in the way of a bow, he took a careful survey of the room before saying:
"Are we alone, Mr. Challoner, or is that man Sweetwater lurking somewhere within hearing?"

"Mr. Sweetwater is gone, as I had the honour of telling you yesterday," was the somewhat stiff reply. "There are no witnesses to this conference, if that is what you wish to know."

"Thank you, but you will pardon my insistence if I request the privilege of closing that door." He pointed to the one communicating with the bedroom. "The information I have to give you is not such as I am willing to have shared, at least for the present."

"You may close the door," said Mr. Challoner coldly. "But is it necessary for you to give me the information you mention, to-night? If it is of such a nature that you cannot accord me the privilege of sharing it, as yet, with others, why not spare me till you can? I have gone through much, Mr. Brotherson."

"You have," came in steady assent as the man thus addressed stepped to the door he had indicated and quietly closed it. "But," he continued, as he crossed back to his former position, "would it be easier for you to go through the night now in anticipation of what I have to reveal than to hear it at once from my lips while I am in the mood to speak?"

The answer was slow in coming. The courage which had upheld this rapidly aging man through so many trying interviews, seemed inadequate for the test put so cruelly upon it. He faltered and sank heavily into a chair, while the stern man watching him, gave no signs of responsive sympathy or even interest, only a patient and icy-tempered resolve.

"I cannot live in uncertainty;" such were finally Mr. Challoner's words. "What you have to say concerns Edith?"

The pause he made was infinitesimal in length, but it was long enough for a quick disclaimer. But no such disclaimer came. "I will hear it," came in reluctant finish.

Mr. Brotherson took a step forward. His manner was as cold as the heart which lay like a stone in his bosom. "Will you pardon me if I ask you to rise?" said he. "I have my weaknesses too." (He gave no sign of them.) "I cannot speak down from such a height to the man I am bound to hurt."

As if answering to the constraint of a will quite outside his own, Mr. Challoner rose. Their heads were now more nearly on a level and Mr. Brotherson's voice remained low, as he proceeded, with quiet intensity. "There has been a time--and it may exist yet, God knows--when you thought me in some unknown and secret way the murderer of your daughter. I do not quarrel with the suspicion; it was justified, Mr. Challoner. I did kill your daughter, and with this hand! I can no longer deny it."

The wretched father swayed, following the gesture of the hand thus held out; but he did not fall, nor did a sound leave his lips.

Brotherson went coldly on: "I did it because I regarded her treatment of my suit as insolent. I have no mercy for any such display of intolerance on the part of the rich and the fortunate. I hated her for it; I hated her class, herself and all she stood for. To strike the dealer of such a hurt I felt to be my right. Though a man of small beginnings and of a stock which such as you call common, I have a pride which few of your blood can equal. I could not work, or sleep or eat with such a sting in my breast as she had planted there. To rid myself of it, I determined to kill her, and I did. How? Oh, that was easy, though it has proved a great stumbling-block to the detectives, as I knew it would! I shot her--but not with an ordinary bullet. My charge was a small icicle made deliberately for the purpose. It had strength enough to penetrate, but it left no trace behind it. 'A bullet of ice for a heart of ice,' I had said in the torment of my rage. But the word was without knowledge, Mr. Challoner. I see it now; I have seen it for two whole weeks. I did not misjudge her condemnation of me, but I misjudged its cause. It was not to the comparatively poor, the comparatively obscure man she sought to show contempt, but to the brother of Oswald whose claims she saw insulted. A woman I should have respected, not killed. A woman of no pride of station; a woman who loved a man not only of my own class but of my own blood--a woman, to avenge whose unmerited death I stand here before you a self-condemned criminal. That is but justice, Mr. Challoner. I see it now; I have seen it for two whole weeks. I did not misjudge her condemnation of me, but I misjudged its cause. It was not to the comparatively poor, the comparatively obscure man she sought to show contempt, but to the brother of Oswald whose claims she saw insulted. A woman I should have respected, not killed. A woman of no pride of station; a woman who loved a man not only of my own class but of my own blood--a woman, to avenge whose unmerited death I stand here before you a self-condemned criminal. That is but justice, Mr. Challoner. That is the way I look at things. Though no sentimentalist; and dead to all beliefs save the eternal truths of science, I have that in me which will not let me profit, now that I know myself unworthy, by the great success I have earned. Hence this confession, Mr. Challoner. It has not come easily, nor do I shut my eyes in the least to the results which must follow. But I can not do differently. To-morrow, you may telegraph to New York. Till then I desire to be left undisturbed. I have many things to dispose of in the interim."

Mr. Challoner, very white by now, pointed to the door before he sank again into his chair. Brotherson took it for dismissal and stepped slowly back. Then their eyes met again and Mr. Challoner spoke his first word: "There was another--a poor woman--she died suddenly--and her wound was not unlike that inflicted upon Edith. Did you--?"

"I did." The answer came without a tremour. "You may say and so may others that I was less justified in this attack than in the other; but I do not see it that way. A theory does not always work in practice. I wished to test the unusual means I contemplated, and the woman I saw before me across the court was hard-working and with nothing
in life to look forward to, so--"

A cry of bitter execration from Mr. Challoner cut him short. Turning with a shrug he was about to lift his hand to the door, when he gave a violent start and fell hastily back before a quickly entering figure of such passion and fury as neither of these men had ever seen before.

It was Oswald! Oswald, the kindly! Oswald, the lover of men and the adorer of women! Oswald, with the words of the dastardly confession he had partly overheard searing hot within his brain! Oswald, raised in a moment from the desponding invalid to a terrifying ministrant of retributive justice.

Orlando could scarcely raise his hand before the other's was upon his throat.

"Murderer! doubly-dyed murderer of innocent women!" was hissed in the strong man's ears. "Not with the law but with me you must reckon, and may God and the spirit of my mother nerve my arm!"

XL

DESOLATE

The struggle was fierce but momentary. Oswald with his weakened powers could not long withstand the steady exertion of Orlando's giant strength, and ere long sank away from the contest into Mr. Challoner's arms.

"You should not have summoned the shade of our mother to your aid," observed the other with a smile, in which the irony was lost in terrible presage. "I was always her favourite."

Oswald shuddered. Orlando had spoken truly; she had always been blindly, arrogantly trustful of her eldest son. No fault could she see in him; and now--

Impetuously Oswald struggled with his weakness, raised himself in Mr. Challoner's arms and cried in loud revolt:

"But God is just. He will not let you escape. If He does, I will not. I will hound you to the ends of this earth and, if necessary, into the eternities. Not with the threat of my arm--you are my master there, but with the curse of a brother who believed you innocent of his darling's blood and would have believed you so in face of everything but your own word."

"Peace!" adjured Orlando. "There is no account I am not ready to settle. I have robbed you of the woman you love, but I have despoiled myself. I stand desolate in the world, who but an hour ago could have chosen my seat among the best and greatest. What can your curses do after that?"

"Nothing." The word came slowly like a drop wrung from a nearly spent heart. "Nothing; nothing. Oh, Orlando, I wish we were both dead and buried and that there were no further life for either of us."

The softened tone, the wistful prayer which would blot out an immortality of joy for the one, that it might save the other from an immortality of retribution, touched some long unsounded chord in Orlando's extraordinary nature.

Advancing a step, he held out his hand--the left one. "We'll leave the future to itself, Oswald, and do what we can with the present," said he. "I've made a mess of my life and spoiled a career which might have made us both kings. Forgive me, Oswald. I ask for nothing else from God or man. I should like that. It would strengthen me for to-morrow."

But Oswald, ever kindly, generous and more ready to think of others than of himself, had yet some of Orlando's tenacity. He gazed at that hand and a flush swept up over his cheek which instantly became ghastly again.

"I cannot," said he--"not even the left one. May God forgive me!"

Orlando, struck silent for a moment, dropped his hand and slowly turned away. Mr. Challoner felt Oswald stiffen in his arms, and break suddenly away, only to stop short before he had taken one of the half dozen steps between himself and his departing brother.

"Where are you going?" he demanded in tones which made Orlando turn.

"I might say, To the devil," was the sarcastic reply. "But I doubt if he would receive me. No," he added, in more ordinary tones as the other shivered and again started forward, "you will have no trouble in finding me in my own room to-night. I have letters to write and--other things. A man like me cannot drop out without a ripple. You may go to bed and sleep. I will keep awake for two."

"Orlando!" Visions were passing before Oswald's eyes, soul-crushing visions such as in his blameless life he never thought could enter into his consciousness or blast his tranquil outlook upon life. "Orlando!" he again appealed, covering his eyes in a frenzied attempt to shut out these horrors, "I cannot let you go like this. To-morrow--"

"To-morrow, in every niche and corner of this world, wherever Edith Challoner's name has gone, wherever my name has gone, it will be known that the discoverer of a practical air-ship, is a man whom they can no longer honour. Do you think that is not hell enough for me; or that I do not realise the hell it will be for you? I've never wearied you or any man with my affection; but I'm not all demon. I would gladly have spared you this additional anguish; but that was impossible. You are my brother and must suffer from the connection whether we would have it so or not. If it promises too much misery--and I know no misery like that of shame--come with me where I go to-
morrow. There will be room for two."

Oswald, swaying with weakness, but maddened by the sight of an overthrow which carried with it the stifled affections and the admiration of his whole life, gave a bound forward, opened his arms and--fell.

Orlando stopped short. Gazing down on his prostrate brother, he stood for a moment with a gleam of something like human tenderness showing through the flare of dying passions and perishing hopes; then he swung open the door and passed quietly out, and Mr. Challoner could hear the laughing remark with which he met and dismissed the half-dozen men and women who had been drawn to this end of the hall by what had sounded to them like a fracas between angry men.

XLI

FIVE O'CLOCK IN THE MORNING

The clock in the hotel office struck three. Orlando Brotherson counted the strokes; then went on writing. His transom was partly open and he had just heard a step go by his door. This was nothing new. He had already heard it several times before that night. It was Mr. Challoner's step, and every time it passed, he had rustled his papers or scratched vigorously with his pen. "He is keeping watch for Oswald," was his thought. "They fear a sudden end to this. No one, not the son of my mother knows me. Do I know myself?"

Four o'clock! The light was still burning, the pile of letters he was writing increasing.

Five o'clock! A rattling shade betrays an open window. No other sound disturbs the quiet of the room. It is empty now; but Mr. Challoner, long since satisfied that all was well, goes by no more. Silence has settled upon the hotel;--that heavy silence which precedes the dawn.

There was silence in the streets also. The few who were abroad, crept quietly along. An electric storm was in the air and the surcharged clouds hung heavy and low, biding the moment of outbreak. A man who had left a place of many shadows for the more open road, paused and looked up at these clouds; then went calmly on.

Suddenly the shriek of an approaching train tears through the valley. Has it a call for this man? No. Yet he pauses in the midst of the street he is crossing and watches, as a child might watch, for the flash of its lights at the end of the darkened vista. It comes--filling the empty space at which he stalks with moving life--engine, baggage car and a long string of Pullmans. Then all is dark again and only the noise of its slackening wheels comes to him through the night. It has stopped at the station. A minute longer and it has started again, and the quickly lessening rumble of its departure is all that remains of this vision of man's activity and ceaseless expectancy. When it is quite gone and all is quiet, a sigh falls from the man's lips and he moves on, but this time, for some unexplainable reason, in the direction of the station. With lowered head he passes along, noting little till he arrives within sight of the depot where some freight is being handled, and a trunk or two wheeled down the platform. No sight could be more ordinary or unsuggestive, but it has its attraction for him, for he looks up as he goes by and follows the passage of that truck down the platform till it has reached the corner and disappeared. Then he sighs again and again moves on.

A cluster of houses, one of them open and lighted, was all which lay between him now and the country road. He was hurrying past, for his step had unconsciously quickened as he turned his back upon the station, when he was seized again by that mood of curiosity and stepped up to the door from which a light issued and looked in. A common eating-room lay before him, with rudely spread tables and one very sleepy waiter taking orders from a new arrival who sat with his back to the door. Why did the lonely man on the sidewalk start as his eye fell on the latter's commonplace figure, a hungry man demanding breakfast in a cheap, country restaurant? His own physique was powerful while that of the other looked slim and frail. But fear was in the air, and the brooding of a tempest affects some temperaments in a totally unexpected manner. As the man inside turns slightly and looks up, the master figure on the sidewalk vanishes, and his step, if any one had been interested enough to listen, rings with a new note as it turns into the country road it has at last reached.

But no one heeded. The new arrival munches his roll and waits impatiently for his coffee, while without, the clouds pile soundlessly in the sky, one of them taking the form of a huge hand with clutching fingers reaching down into the hollow void beneath.

XLII

AT SIX

Mr. Challoner had been honest in his statement regarding the departure of Sweetwater. He had not only paid and dismissed our young detective, but he had seen him take the train for New York. And Sweetwater had gone away in good faith, too, possibly with his convictions undisturbed, but acknowledging at last that he had reached the end of his resources. But the brain does not lose its hold upon its work as readily as the hand does. He was halfway to New York and had consciously hidden farewell to the whole subject, when he suddenly startled those about him by rising impetuously to his feet. He sat again immediately, but with a light in his small grey eye which Mr. Gryce would have understood and revelled in. The idea for which he had searched industriously for months had come at last, unbidden; thrown up from some remote recess of the mind which had seemingly closed upon the subject
forever.

"I have it. I have it," he murmured in ceaseless reiteration to himself. "I will go back to Mr. Challoner and let him decide if the idea is worth pursuing. Perhaps an experiment may be necessary. It was bitter cold that night; I wish it were icy weather now. But a chemist can help us out. Good God! if this should be the explanation of the mystery, alas for Orlando and alas for Oswald!"

But his sympathies did not deter him. He returned to Derby at once, and as soon as he dared, presented himself at the hotel and asked for Mr. Challoner.

He was amazed to find that gentleman already up and in a state of agitation that was very disquieting. But he brightened wonderfully at sight of his visitor, and drawing him inside the room, observed with trembling eagerness:

"I do not know why you have come back, but never was man more welcome. Mr. Brotherson has confessed."

"Confessed!"

"Yes, he killed both women; my daughter and his neighbour, the washerwoman, with a--"

"Wait," broke in Sweetwater, eagerly, "let me tell you." And stooping, he whispered something in the other's ear. Mr. Challoner stared at him amazed, then slowly nodded his head.

"How came you to think--" he began; but Sweetwater in his great anxiety interrupted him with a quick:

"Explanations will keep, Mr. Challoner. What of the man himself? Where is he? That's the important thing now."

"He was in his room till early this morning writing letters, but he is not there now. The door is unlocked and I went in. From appearances I fear the worst. That is why your presence relieves me so. Where do you think he is?"

"In his hangar in the woods. Where else would he go to--"

"I have thought of that. Shall we start out alone or take witnesses with us?"

"We will go alone. Does Oswald anticipate--"

"He is sure. But he lacks strength to move. He lies on my bed in there. Doris and her father are with him."

"We will not wait a minute. How the storm holds off. I hope it will hold off for another hour."

Mr. Challoner made no reply. He had spoken because he felt compelled to speak, but it had not been easy for him, nor could any trifles move him now.

The town was up by this time and, though they chose the least frequented streets, they had to suffer from some encounters. It was a good half hour before they found themselves in the forest and in sight of the hangar. One look that way, and Sweetwater turned to see what the effect was upon Mr. Challoner.

A murmur of dismay greeted him. The oval of that great lid stood up against the forest background.

"He has escaped," cried Mr. Challoner.

But Sweetwater, laying a finger on his lip, advanced and laid his ear against the door. Then he cast a quick look aloft. Nothing was to be seen there. The darkness of storm in the heavens but nothing more.--Yes! now, a flash of vivid and destructive lightning!

The two men drew back and their glances crossed.

"Let us return to the highroad," whispered Sweetwater; "we can see nothing here."

Mr. Challoner, trembling very much, wheeled slowly about.

"Wait," enjoined Sweetwater. "First let me take a look inside."

Running to the nearest tree, he quickly climbed it, worked himself along a protruding branch and looked down into the open hangar. It was now so dark that details escaped him, but one thing was certain. The air-ship was not there.

Descending, he drew Mr. Challoner hastily along. "He's gone," said he. "Let us reach the high ground as quickly as we can. I'm glad that Mr. Oswald Brotherson is not with us or--or Miss Doris."

But this expression of satisfaction died on his lips. At the point where the forest road debouches into the highway, he had already caught a glimpse of their two figures. They were waiting for news, and the brother spoke up the instant he saw Sweetwater:

"Where is he? You've not found him or you wouldn't be coming alone. He cannot have gone up. He cannot manage it without an assistant. We must seek him somewhere else; in the forest or in our house at home. Ah!"

The lightning had forked again.

"He's not in the forest and he's not in your home," returned Sweetwater. "He's aloft; the air-ship is not in the shed. And he can go up alone now." Then more slowly: "But he cannot come down."

They strained their eyes in a maddening search of the heavens. But the darkness had so increased that they could be sure of nothing. Doris sank upon her knees.

Suddenly the lightning flashed again, this time so vividly and so near that the whole heaven burst into fiery illumination above them and the thunder, crashing almost simultaneously, seemed for a moment to rock the world and bow the heavens towards them. Then a silence; then Sweetwater's whisper in Mr. Challoner's ear:

"Take them away! I saw him; he was falling like a shot."
Mr. Challoner threw out his arms, then steadied himself. Oswald was reeling; Oswald had seen too. But Doris was there. When the lightning flashed again, she was standing and Oswald was weeping on her bosom.
"HUSH! THERE IS NO DOUBT ON THAT TOPIC; THE CHILD IS DEAD. LET THAT BE UNDERSTOOD BETWEEN US."

I

TWO LITTLE SHOES

The morning of August eighteenth, 190-, was a memorable one to me. For two months I had had a run of bad luck. During that time I had failed to score in at least three affairs of unusual importance, and the result was a decided loss in repute as well as great financial embarrassment. As I had a mother and two sisters to support and knew but one way to do it, I was in a state of profound discouragement. This was before I took up the morning papers. After I had opened and read them, not a man in New York could boast of higher hopes or greater confidence in his power to rise by one bold stroke from threatened bankruptcy to immediate independence.

The paragraph which had occasioned this amazing change must have passed under the eyes of many of you. It created a wide-spread excitement at the time and raised in more than one breast the hope of speedy fortune. It was attached to, or rather introduced, the most startling feature of the week, and it ran thus:

A FORTUNE FOR A CHILD.

By cable from Southampton.

A reward of five thousand dollars is offered, by Philo Ocumpaugh, to whoever will give such information as will lead to the recovery, alive or dead, of his six-year-old daughter, Gwendolen, missing since the afternoon of August the 16th, from her home in ----- on-the-Hudson, New York, U. S. A.

Fifty thousand dollars additional and no questions asked if she is restored unharmed within the week to her mother at Homewood.

All communications to be addressed to Samuel Atwater, ----- on-the-Hudson.

A minute description of the child followed, but this did not interest me, and I did not linger over it. The child was no stranger to me. I knew her well and consequently was quite aware of her personal characteristics. It was the great amount offered for her discovery and restoration which moved me so deeply. Fifty thousand dollars! A fortune for any man. More than a fortune to me, who stood in such need of ready money. I was determined to win this extraordinary sum. I had my reason for hope and, in the light of this unexpectedly munificent reward, decided to waive all the considerations which had hitherto prevented me from stirring in the matter.

There were other reasons less selfish which gave impetus to my resolve. I had done business for the Ocumpaugh's before and been well treated in the transaction. I recognized and understood both Mr. Ocumpaugh's peculiarities and those of his admired and devoted wife. As man and woman they were kindly, honorable and devoted to many more interests than those connected with their own wealth. I also knew their hearts to be wrapped up in this child,--the sole offspring of a long and happy union, and the actual as well as prospective inheritor of more millions than I shall ever see thousands, unless I am fortunate enough to solve the mystery now exercising the sympathies of the whole New York public.

You have all heard of this child under another name. From her birth she has been known as the Millionaire Baby, being the direct heir to three fortunes, two of which she had already received. I saw her first when she was
three years old—a cherubic little being, lovely to look upon and possessing unusual qualities for so young a child. Indeed, her picturesque beauty and appealing ways would have attracted all eyes and won all hearts, even if she had not represented in her small person the wealth both of the Ocumpaugh and Rathbone families. There was an individuality about her, combined with sensibilities of no ordinary nature, which fully accounted for the devoted affection with which she was universally regarded; and when she suddenly disappeared, it was easy to comprehend, if one did not share, the thrill of horror which swept from one end of our broad continent to the other. Those who knew the parents, and those who did not, suffered an equal pang at the awful thought of this petted innocent lost in the depths of the great unknown, with only the false caresses of her abductors to comfort her for the deprivation of all those delights which love and unlimited means could provide to make a child of her years supremely happy.

Her father—and this was what gave the keen edge of horror to the whole occurrence—was in Europe when she disappeared. He had been cabled at once and his answer was the proffered reward with which I have opened this history. An accompanying despatch to his distracted wife announced his relinquishment of the project which had taken him abroad and his immediate return on the next steamer sailing from Southampton. As this chanced to be the fastest on the line, we had reason to expect him in six days; meanwhile—

But to complete my personal recapitulations. When the first news of this startling abduction flashed upon my eyes from the bulletin boards, I looked on the matter as one of too great magnitude to be dealt with by any but the metropolitan police; but as time passed and further details of the strange and seemingly inexplicable affair came to light, I began to feel the stirring of the detective instinct within me (did I say that I was connected with a private detective agency of some note in the metropolis?) and a desire, quite apart from any mere humane interest in the event itself, to locate the intelligence back of such a desperate crime: an intelligence so keen that, up to the present moment, if we may trust the published accounts of the affair, not a clue had been unearthed by which its author could be traced, or the means employed for carrying off this petted object of a thousand cares.

To be sure, there was a theory which eliminated all crime from the occurrence as well as the intervention of any one in the child's fate: she might have strayed down to the river and been drowned. But the probabilities were so opposed to this supposition, that the police had refused to embrace it, although the mother had accepted it from the first, and up to the present moment, or so it was stated, had refused to consider any other. As she had some basis for this conclusion—I am still quoting the papers, you understand—I was not disposed to ignore it in the study I proceeded to make of the situation. The details, as I ran them over in the hurried trip I now made up the river to ----, were as follows:

On the afternoon of Wednesday, August sixteenth, 190—, the guests assembled in Mrs. Ocumpaugh's white and gold music-room were suddenly thrown into confusion by the appearance among them of a young girl in a state of great perturbation, who, running up to the startled hostess, announced that Gwendolen, the petted darling of the house, was missing from the bungalow where she had been lying asleep, and could not be found, though a dozen men had been out on search.

The wretched mother, who, as it afterward transpired, had not only given the orders by which the child had been thus removed from the excitement up at the house, but had actually been herself but a few moments before to see that the little one was well cared for and happy, seemed struck as by a mortal blow at these words and, uttering a heart-rending scream, ran out on the lawn. A crowd of guests rushed after her, and as they followed her flying figure across the lawn to the small copse in which lay hidden this favored retreat, they could hear, borne back on the wind, the wild protests of the young nurse, that she had left the child for a minute only and then to go no farther than the bench running along the end of the bungalow facing the house; that she had been told she could sit there and listen to the music, but that she never would have left the child's side for a minute if she had not supposed she would hear her least stir—protests which the mother scarcely seemed to heed, and which were presently lost in the deep silence which fell on all, as, brought to a stand in the thick shrubbery surrounding the bungalow, they saw the mother stagger up to the door, look in and turn toward them with death in her face.

"The river!" she gasped, "the river!" and heedless of all attempt to stop her, heedless even of the efforts made by the little one's nurse to draw her attention to the nearness of a certain opening in the high hedge marking off the Ocumpaugh grounds on this side, she ran down the bank in the direction of the railway, but fainted before she had more than cleared the thicket. When they lifted her up, they all saw the reason for this. She had come upon a little shoe which she held with frantic clutch against her breast—her child's shoe, which, as she afterward acknowledged, she had loosened with her own hand on the little one's foot.

Of course, after this the whole hillside was searched down to the fence which separated it from the railroad track. But no further trace of the missing child was found, nor did it appear possible to any one that she could have strayed away in this direction. For not only was the bank exceedingly steep and the fence at its base impassable, but a gang of men, working as good fortune would have it, at such a point on the road below as to render it next to impossible for her to have crossed the track within a half-mile either way without being observed, had one and all declared that
not one of them had seen her or any other person descend the slope.

This, however, made but little impression on the mother. She would listen to no hints of abduction, but persisted in her declaration that the river had swallowed her darling, and would neither rest nor turn her head from its waters till some half a dozen men about the place had been set systematically to work to drag the stream.

Meanwhile, the police had been notified and the whole town aroused. The search, which had been carried on up to this time in a frantic but desultory way, now became methodical. Nor was it confined to the Ocuppaugh estate. All the roads and byways within half a mile either way were covered by a most careful investigation. All the near-by houses were entered, especially those which the child was most in the habit of frequenting, but no one had seen her, nor could any trace of her presence be found. At five o'clock all hope of her return was abandoned and, much against Mrs. Ocuppaugh’s wish, who declared that the news of the child’s death would affect her father far less than the dreadful possibilities of an abduction, the exact facts of the case had been cabled to Mr. Ocuppaugh.

The night and another day passed, bringing but little relief to the situation. Not an eye had as yet been closed in Homewood, nor had the search, ceased for an instant. Not an inch of the great estate had been overlooked, yet men could still be seen beating the bushes and peering into all the secluded spots which once had formed the charm of this delightful place. As on the land, so on the river. All the waters in the dock had been dragged, yet the work went on, some said under the very eye of Mrs. Ocuppaugh. But there was no result as yet.

In the city the interest was intense. The telegraph at police headquarters had been clicking incessantly for thirty-six hours under the direction, some said, of the superintendent himself. Everything which could be done had been done, but as yet the papers were able to report nothing beyond some vague stories of a child, with its face very much bound up, having been seen at the heels of a woman in the Grand Central Station in New York, and hints of a covered wagon, with a crying child inside, which had been driven through Westchester County at a great pace shortly before sunset on the previous day, closely followed by a buggy with the storm-apron up, though the sun shone and there was not a cloud in the sky; but nothing definite, nothing which could give hope to the distracted mother or do more than divide the attention of the police between two different but equally tenable theories. Then came the cablegram from Mr. Ocuppaugh, which threw amateur as well as professional detectives into the field. Among the latter was myself; which naturally brings me back once more to my own conclusions.

Of one thing I felt sure. Very early in my cogitations, before we had quitted the Park Avenue tunnel in fact, I had decided in my own mind that if I were to succeed in locating the lost heiress, it must be by subtler methods than lay open to the police. I was master of such methods (in this case at least), and though one of many owning to similar hopes on this very train which was rushing me through to Homewood, I had no feeling but that of confidence in a final success. How well founded this confidence was, will presently appear.

The number of seedy-looking men with a mysterious air who alighted in my company at ---- station and immediately proceeded to make their way up the steep street toward Homewood, warned me that it would soon be extremely difficult for any one to obtain access to the parties most interested in the child’s loss. Had I not possessed the advantage of being already known to Mrs. Ocuppaugh, I should have immediately given up all hope of ever obtaining access to her presence; and even with this fact to back me, I approached the house with very little confidence in my ability to win my way through the high iron gates I had so frequently passed before without difficulty.

And indeed I found them well guarded. As I came nearer, I could see man after man being turned away, and not till my card had been handed in, and a hurried note to boot, did I obtain permission to pass the first boundary. Another note secured me admission to the house, but there my progress stopped. Mrs. Ocuppaugh had already been interviewed by five reporters and a special agent from the New York police. She could see no one else at present. If, however, my business was of importance, an opportunity would be given me to see Miss Porter. Miss Porter was her companion and female factotum.

As I had calculated upon having a half-dozen words with the mother herself, I was greatly thrown out by this; but going upon the principle that “half a loaf was better than no bread,” I was about to express a desire to see Miss Porter, when an incident occurred which effectually changed my mind in this regard.

The hall in which I was standing and which communicated with the side door by which I had entered, ended in a staircase, leading, as I had reason to believe, to the smaller and less pretentious rooms in the rear of the house. While I hesitated what reply to give the girl awaiting my decision, I caught the sound of soft weeping from the top of this staircase, and presently beheld the figure of a young woman coming slowly down, clad in coat and hat and giving every evidence both in dress and manner of leaving for good. It was Miss Graham, a young woman who held the position of nursery-governess to the child. I had seen her before, and had no small admiration for her, and the sensations I experienced at the sight of her leaving the house where her services were apparently no longer needed, proved to me, possibly for the first time, that I had more heart in my breast than I had ever before realized. But it was not this which led me to say to the maid standing before me that I preferred to see Mrs. Ocuppaugh herself, and
would call early the next day. It was the thought that this sorrowing girl would have to pass the gauntlet of many prying eyes on her way to the station and that she might be glad of an escort whom she knew and had shown some trust in. Also,—but the reasons behind that also will soon become sufficiently apparent.

I was right in supposing that my presence on the porch outside would be a pleasing surprise to her. Though her tears continued to flow she accepted my proffered companionship with gratitude, and soon we were passing side by side across the lawn toward a short cut leading down the bank to the small flag-station used by the family and by certain favored neighbors. As we threaded the shrubbery, which is very thick about the place, she explained to me the cause of her abrupt departure. The sight of her, it seems, had become insupportable to Mrs. Ocumpaugh. Though no blame could be rightfully attached to her, it was certainly true that the child had been carried off while in her charge, and however hard it might be for _her_, few could blame the mother for wishing her removed from the house desolated by her lack of vigilance. But she was a good girl and felt the humiliation of her departure almost in the light of a disgrace.

As we came again into an open portion of the lawn, she stopped short and looked back.

"Oh!" she cried, gripping me by the arm, "there is Mrs. Ocumpaugh still at the window. All night she has stood there, except when she flew down to the river at the sound of some imaginary call from the boats. She believes, she really believes, that they will yet come upon Gwendolen's body in the dock there."

Following the direction of her glance, I looked up. Was that Mrs. Ocumpaugh--that haggard, intent figure with eyes fixed in awful expectancy on the sinister group I could picture to myself down at the water's edge? Never could I have imagined such a look on features I had always considered as cold as they were undeniably beautiful. As I took in the misery it expressed, that awful waiting for an event momentarily anticipated, and momentarily postponed, I found myself, without reason and simply in response to the force of her expression, unconsciously sharing her expectation, and with a momentary forgetfulness of all the probabilities, was about to turn toward the spot upon which her glances were fixed, when a touch on my arm recalled me to myself.

"Come!" whispered my trembling companion. "She may look down and see us here."

I yielded to her persuasion and turned away into the cluster of trees that lay between us and that opening in the hedge through which our course lay. Had I been alone I should not have budged till I had seen some change—any change—in the face whose appearance had so deeply affected me.

"Mrs. Ocumpaugh certainly believes that the body of her child lies in the water," I remarked, as we took our way onward as rapidly as possible. "Do you know her reasons for this?"

"She says, and I think she is right so far, that the child has been bent for a long time on fishing; that she has heard her father talk repeatedly of his great luck in Canada last year and wished to try the sport for herself; that she has been forbidden to go to the river, but must have taken the first opportunity when no eye was on her to do so; and—and—Mrs. Ocumpaugh shows a bit of string which she found last night in the bushes alongside the tracks when she ran down, as I have said, at some imaginary shout from the boats—a string which she declares she saw rolled up in Gwendolen's hand when she went into the bungalow to look at her. Of course, it may not be the same, but Mrs. Ocumpaugh thinks it is, and—"

"Do you think it possible, after all, that the child did stray down to the water?"

"No," was the vehement disclaimer. "Gwendolen's feet were excessively tender. She could not have taken three steps in only one shoe. I should have heard her cry out."

"What if she went in some one's arms?"

"A stranger's? She had a decided instinct against strangers. Never could any one she did not know and like have carried her so far as that without her waking. Then those men on the track,—they would have seen her. No, Mr. Trevitt, it was not in _that_ direction she went."

The force of her emphasis convinced me that she had an opinion of her own in regard to this matter. Was it one she was ready to impart?

"In what direction, then?" I asked, with a gentleness I hoped would prove effective.

Her impulse was toward a frank reply. I saw her lips part and her eyes take on the look which precedes a direct avowal, but, as chance would have it, we came at that moment upon the thicket inclosing the bungalow, and the sight of its picturesque walls, showing brown through the verdure of the surrounding shrubbery, seemed to act as a check upon her, for, with a quick look and a certain dry accent quite new in her speech, she suddenly inquired if I did not want to see the place from which Gwendolen had disappeared.

Naturally I answered in the affirmative and followed her as she turned aside into the circular path which embraces this hidden retreat; but I had rather have heard her answer to my question, than to have gone anywhere or seen anything at that moment. Yet, when in full view of the bungalow's open door, she stopped to point out to me the nearness of the place to that opening in the hedge we had just been making for, and when she even went so far as to indicate the tangled little path by which that opening could be reached directly from the farther end of the
bungalow, I considered that my question had been answered, though in another way than I anticipated, even before I noted the slight flush which rose to her cheek under my earnest scrutiny.

As it is important for the exact location of the bungalow to be understood, I subjoin a diagram of this part of the ground:

![Diagram of the area with labels: A The Ocumpaugh mansion, B The Bungalow, C Mrs. Carew's house, D Private path, E Gap in hedge leading to the Ocumpaugh grounds, F Gap leading into Mrs. Carew's grounds, G Bench at end of bungalow.]

As I took this all in, I ventured to ask some particulars of the family living so near the Ocumpaugh's.

"Who occupies that house?" I asked, pointing to the sloping roofs and ornamental chimneys arising just beyond us over the hedge-rows.

"Oh, that is Mrs. Carew's home. She is a widow and Mrs. Ocumpaugh's dearest friend. How she loved Gwendolen! How we all loved her! And now, that _wretch_--"

She burst into tears. They were genuine ones, so was her grief.

I waited till she was calm again, then I inquired very softly:

"What wretch?"

"You have not been inside," she suggested, pointing sharply to the bungalow.

I took the implied rebuke and entered the door she indicated. A man was sitting within, but he rose and went out when he saw us. He wore a policeman's badge and evidently recognized her or possibly myself. I noted, however, that he did not go far from the doorway.

"It is only a den," remarked Miss Graham.

I looked about me. She had described it perfectly: a place to lounge in on an August day like the present. Walls of Georgia pine across one of which hung a series of long dark rugs; a long, low window looking toward the house, a few articles of bamboo furniture describe the place. Among the latter was a couch. It was drawn up underneath the window, on the other side of which ran the bench where my companion declared she had been sitting while listening to the music.

"Wouldn't you think my attention would have been caught by the sound of any one moving about here?" she cried, pointing to the couch and then to the window. "But the window was closed and the door, as you see, is round the corner from the bench."

"A person with a very stealthy step, apparently."

"Very," she admitted. "Oh, how can I ever forgive myself! how can I ever, ever forgive myself!"

As she stood wringing her hands in sight of that empty couch, I cast a scrutinizing glance about me, which led me to remark:

"This interior looks new; much newer than the outside. It has quite a modern air."

"Yes, the bungalow is old, very old; but this room, or den, or whatever you might call it, was all remodeled and fitted up as you see it now when the new house went up. It had long been abandoned as a place of retreat, and had fallen into such decay that it was a perfect eyesore to all who saw it. Now it is likely to be abandoned again, and for what a reason! Oh, the dreadful place! How I hate it, now Gwendolen is gone!"

"One moment. I notice another thing. This room does not occupy the whole of the bungalow."

Either she did not hear me or thought it unnecessary to reply; and perceiving that her grief had now given way to an impatience to be gone, I did not press the matter, but led the way myself to the door. As we entered the little path which runs directly to that outlet in the hedge marked E, I ventured to speak again:

"You have reasons, or so it appears, for believing that the child was carried off through this very path?"

The reply was impetuous:

"How else could she have been spirited away so quickly? Besides,--" here her eye stole back at me over her shoulder,--"I have since remembered that as I ran out of the bungalow in my fright at finding the child gone, I heard
the sound of wheels on Mrs. Carew's driveway. It did not mean much to me then, for I expected to find the child somewhere about the grounds; but _now_, when I come to think, it means everything, for a child's cry mingled with it (or I imagined that it did) and that child--"

"But," I forcibly interposed, "the police should know this."

"They do; and so does Mrs. Ocumpaugh; but she has only the one idea, and nothing can move her."

I remembered the wagon with the crying child inside which had been seen on the roads the previous evening, and my heart fell a little in spite of myself.

"Couldn't Mrs. Carew tell us something about this?" I asked, with a gesture toward the house we were now passing.

"No. Mrs. Carew went to New York that morning and had only just returned when we missed Gwendolen. She had been for her little nephew, who has lately been made an orphan, and she was too busy making him feel at home to notice if a carriage had passed through her grounds."

"Her servants then?"

"She had none. All had been sent away. The house was quite empty."

I thought this rather odd, but having at this moment reached the long flight of steps leading down the embankment, I made no reply till we reached the foot. Then I observed:

"I thought Mrs. Carew was very intimate with Mrs. Ocumpaugh."

"She is; they are more like sisters than mere friends."

"Yet she goes to New York the very day her friend gives a musicale."

"Oh, she had good reasons for that. Mrs. Carew is planning to sail this week for Europe, and this was her only opportunity for getting her little nephew, who is to go with her. But I don't know as she will sail, now. She is wild with grief over Gwendolen's loss, and will not feel like leaving Mrs. Ocumpaugh till she knows whether we shall ever see the dear child again. But, I shall miss my train."

Here her step visibly hastened.

As it was really very nearly due, I had not the heart to detain her. But as I followed in her wake I noticed that for all her hurry a curious hesitancy crept into her step at times, and I should not have been surprised at any moment to see her stop and confront me on one of the two remaining long flights of steps leading down the steep hillside.

But we both reached the base without her having yielded to this impulse, and presently we found ourselves in full view of the river and the small flag-station located but a few rods away toward the left. As we turned toward the latter, we both cast an involuntary look back at the Ocumpaugh dock, where a dozen men could be seen at work dragging the river-bed with grappling irons. It made a sadly suggestive picture, and the young girl at my side shuddered violently as we noted the expression of morbid curiosity on the faces of such onlookers, men and women, as were drawn up at the end of the small point on which the boat-house stood.

But I had another reason than this for urging her on. I had noticed how, at the sight of her slight figure descending the slope, some half-dozen men or so had separated themselves from this group, with every appearance of intending to waylay and question her. She noticed this too, and drawing up more closely to my side, exclaimed with marked feeling:

"Save me from these men and I will tell you something that no one--"

But here she stopped, here our very thoughts stopped. A shout had risen from the group at the water-edge; a shout which made us both turn, and even caused the men who had started to follow us to wheel about and rush back to the dock with every appearance of intense excitement.

"What is it? What can it be?" faltered my greatlyalarmed companion.

"They have found something. See! what is that the man in the boat is holding up? It looks like--"

But she was already half-way to the point, outstripping the very men whose importunities she had shrunk from a moment before. I was not far behind her, and almost immediately we found ourselves wedged among the agitated group leaning over the little object which had been tossed ashore into the first hand outstretched to receive it.

It was a second little shoe--filled with sand and dripping with water, but recognizable as similar to the one already found on the preceding day high up on the bank. As this fact was borne in on us all, a groan of pity broke from more than one pair of lips, and eye after eye stole up the hillside to that far window in the great pile above us where the mother's form could be dimly discerned swaying in an agitation caught from our own excitement.

But there was one amongst us whose glance never left that little shoe. The train she had been so anxious to take whistled and went thundering by, but she never moved or noticed. Suddenly she reached out her hand.

"Let me see it, please," she entreated. "I was her nurse; let me take it in my hand."

The man who held it passed it over. She examined it long and closely.

"Yes, it is hers," said she. But in another moment she had laid it down with what I thought was a very peculiar look.
Instantly it was caught up and carried with a rush up the slope to where Mrs. Ocumpaugh could be seen awaiting it with outstretched arms. But I did not linger to mark her reception of it. Miss Graham had drawn me to one side and was whispering in my ear:

"I must talk to you. I can not keep back another moment what I think or what I feel. Some one is playing with Mrs. Ocumpaugh's fears. That shoe is Gwendolen's, but it is not the mate of the one found on the bank above. That was for the left foot _and so is this one_. Did you not notice?"

II

"A FEARSOME MAN"

The effect of this statement upon me was greater than even she had contemplated.

"You thought the child had been stolen for the reward she would bring?" she continued. "She was not; she was taken out of pure hate, and that is why I suffer so. What may they not do to her! In what hole hide her! My darling, O my darling!"

She was going off into hysterics, but the look and touch I gave her recalled her to herself.

"We need to be calm," I urged. "You, because you have something of importance to impart, and I, because of the action I must take as soon as the facts you have concealed become known to me. What gives you such confidence in this belief, which I am sure is not shared by the police, and who is the _some one_ who, as you say, is playing upon Mrs. Ocumpaugh's fears? A short time ago it was as _the wretch_ you spoke of him. Are not _some one_ and _the wretch_ one and the same person, and can you not give him now a name?"

We had been moving all this time in the direction of the station and had now reached the foot of the platform. Pausing, she cast a last look up the bank. The trees were thick and hid from our view the Ocumpaugh mansion, but in imagination she beheld the mother moaning over that little shoe.

"I shall never return there," she muttered; "why do I hesitate so to speak!" Then in a burst, as I watched her in growing excitement: "She--Mrs. Ocumpaugh--begged me not to tell what she believed had nothing to do with our Gwendolen's loss. But I can not keep silence. This proof of a conspiracy against herself certainly relieves me from any promise I may have made her. Mr. Trevitt, I am positive that I know who carried off Gwendolen."

This was becoming interesting, intensely interesting to me. Glancing about and noting that the group down at the water-edge had become absorbed again in renewed efforts toward further discoveries, I beckoned her to follow me into the station. It was but a step, but it gave me time to think. What was I encouraging this young girl to do? To reveal to _me_, who had no claim upon her but that of friendship, a secret which had not been given to the police? True, it might not be worth much, but it was also true that it might be worth a great deal. Did she know how much? I wanted money--few wanted it more--but I felt that I could not listen to her story till I had fairly settled this point. I therefore hastened to interpose a remark:

"Miss Graham, you are good enough to offer to reveal some fact hitherto concealed. Do you do this because you have no closer friend than myself, or because you do not know what such knowledge may be worth to the person you give it to--in money, I mean?"

"In money? I am not thinking of money," was her amazed reply; "I am thinking of Gwendolen."

"I understand, but you should think of the practical results as well. Have you not heard of the enormous reward offered by Mr. Ocumpaugh?"

"No; I--"

"Five thousand dollars for information; and fifty thousand to the one who will bring her back within the week unharmed. Mr. Ocumpaugh cabled to that effect yesterday."

"It is a large sum," she faltered, and for a moment she hesitated. Then, with a sweet and candid look which sank deep into my heart, she added gravely: "I had rather not think of money in connection with Gwendolen. If what I have to tell leads to her recovery, you can be trusted, I know, to do what is right toward me. Mr. Trevitt, the man who stole her from her couch and carried her away through Mrs. Carew's grounds in a wagon or otherwise, is a long-haired, heavily whiskered man of sixty or more years of age. His face is deeply wrinkled, but chiefly marked by a long scar running down between his eyebrows, which are so shaggy that they would quite hide his eyes if they were not lit up with an extraordinary expression of resolution, carried almost to the point of frenzy; a fearsome man, making your heart stand still when he pauses to speak to you."

Startled as I had seldom been, for reasons which will hereafter appear, I surveyed her in mingled wonder and satisfaction.

"His name?" I demanded.
"I do not know his name."

Again I stopped to look at her.
"Does Mrs. Ocumpaugh?"

"I do not think so. She only knows what I told her."
"And what did you tell her?"
"Ah! who are these?"

Two or three persons had entered the station, probably to wait for the next train.

"No one who will molest you."

But she was not content till we had withdrawn to where the time-table hung up on the opposite wall. Turning about as if to consult it, she told the following story. I never see a time-table now but I think of her expression as she stood there looking up as if her mind were fixed on what she probably did not see at all.

"Last Wednesday--no, it was on the Wednesday preceding--I was taking a ride with Gwendolen on one of the side roads branching off toward Fordham. We were in her own little pony cart, and as we seldom rode together like this, she had been chattering about a hundred things till her eyes danced in her head and she looked as lovely as I had ever seen her. But suddenly, just as we were about to cross a small wooden bridge, I saw her turn pale and her whole sensitive form quiver. 'Some one I don't like,' she cried. 'There is some one about whom I don't like. Drive on, Ellie, drive on.' But before I could gather up the reins a figure which I had not noticed before stepped from behind a tree at the farther end of the bridge, and advancing into the middle of the road with arms thrown out, stopped our advance. I have told you how he looked, but I can give you no idea of the passionate fury lighting up his eyes, or the fiery dignity with which he held his place and kept us subdued to his will till he had looked the shrinking child all over, and laughed, not as a madman laughs, oh, much too slow and ironically for that! but like one who takes an unholy pleasure in mocking the happy present with evil prophecy. Nothing that I can say will make you see him as I saw him in that one instant, and though there was much in the circumstance to cause fear, I think it was more awe than fright we felt, so commanding was his whole appearance and so forcible the assurance with which he held us there till he was ready to move. Gwendolen cried out, but the imploring sound had no effect upon him; it only reawakened his mirth and led him to say, in a clear, cold, mocking tone which I hear yet, 'Cry out, little one, for your short day is nearly over. Silks and feathers and carriages and servants will soon be a half-forgotten memory to you; and right it is that it should be so. Ten days, little one, only ten days more.' And with that he moved, and, slipping aside behind the tree, allowed us to drive on. Mr. Trevitt, yesterday saw the end of those ten days, and where is she now? Only that man knows. He is one man in a thousand. Can not you find him?"

She turned; a train was coming, a train which it was very evident she felt it her duty to take. I had no right to detain her, but I found time for a question or two.

"And you told Mrs. Ocumpaugh this?"
"The moment we arrived home."
"And she? What did she think of it?"

"Mrs. Ocumpaugh is not a talkative woman. She grew very white and clasped the child passionately in her arms. But the next minute she had to all appearance dismissed the whole occurrence from her thoughts. 'Some socialistic fanatic,' she called him and merely advised me to stop driving with Gwendolen for the present."

"Didn't you recall the matter to her when you found the child missing?"

"Yes; but then she appeared to regard it in a superstitious way only. It was a warning of death, she said, and the man an irresponsible clairvoyant. When I tried to urge my own idea upon her and describe how I thought he might have obtained access to the bungalow and carried her off, while still asleep, to some vehicle awaiting them in Mrs. Carew's grounds, she only rebuked me for my folly and bade me keep still about the whole occurrence, saying that I should only be getting some poor half-demented old wretch into trouble for something for which he was not in the least responsible."

"A very considerate woman," I remarked; to which Miss Graham made reply as the train came storming up:

"Nobody knows how considerate, even if she has dismissed me rather suddenly from her service. Don't let that wretch--again she used the word--'deceive her or you into thinking that the little one perished in the water. Gwendolen is alive, I say. Find him and you will find her. I saw his resolution in his eye.'"

Here she made a rush for the cars, and I had time only to get her future address before the train started and all further opportunity of conversation between us was over for that day.

I remained behind because I was by no means through with my investigations. What she had told me only convinced me of the necessity I had already recognized of making myself master of all that could be learned at Homewood before undertaking the very serious business of locating the child or even the aged man just described to me, and who I was now sure had been the chief, if not the sole, instrument in her abduction.

III

A CHARMING WOMAN

Stopping only long enough to send a telegram to my partner in New York, (for which purpose I had to walk along the tracks to the main station) I returned by the short cut to Homewood. My purpose in doing this was twofold. I should have a chance of seeing if the men were still at work in the river, and I should also have the added
opportunity of quietly revisiting the bungalow, on the floor of which I had noted some chalk-marks, which I felt
called for a closer examination than I had given them. As I came in view of the dock, I saw that the men were still
busy, but at a point farther out in the river, as if all hope had been abandoned of their discovering anything more
inshore. But the chalk-marks in the bungalow were almost forgotten by me in the interest I experienced in a certain
adventure which befell me on my way there.

I had just reached the opening in the hedge communicating with Mrs. Carew's grounds, when I heard steps on
the walk inside and a woman's rich voice saying:

"There, that will do. You must play on the other side of the house, Harry. And Dinah, see that he does so, and
that he does not cross the hall again till I come back. The sight of so merry a child might kill Mrs. Ocumpaugh if she
happened to look this way."

Moved by the tone, which was one in a thousand, I involuntarily peered through the outlet I was passing, in the
hope of catching a glimpse of its owner, and thus was favored with the sight of a face which instantly fixed itself in
my memory as one of the most enchanting I had ever encountered. Not from its beauty, yet it may have been
beautiful; nor from its youth, for the woman before me was not youthful, but from the extraordinary eloquence of its
expression caught at a rare moment when the heart, which gave it life, was full. She was standing half-way down the
path, throwing kisses to a little boy who was leaning toward her from an upper window. The child was laughing
with glee, and it was this laugh she was trying to check; but her countenance, as she made the effort, was almost as
merry as his, and yet was filled with such solemn joy--such ecstasy of motherhood I should be inclined to call it, if I
had not been conscious that this must be Mrs. Carew and the child her little nephew--that in my admiration for this
exhibition of pure feeling, I forgot to move on as she advanced into the hedge-row, and so we came face to face. The
result was as extraordinary to me as all the rest. Instantly all the gay abandonment left her features, and she showed
me a grave, almost troubled, countenance, more in keeping with her severe dress, which was as nearly like mourning
as it could be and not be made of crape.

It was such a sudden change and of so complete a character, that I was thrown off my guard for a moment and
probably betrayed the curiosity I undoubtedly felt; for she paused as she reached me, and, surveying me very quietly
but very scrutinizingly too, raised again that marvelous voice of hers and pointedly observed:

"This is a private path, sir. Only the friends of Mrs. Ocumpaugh or of myself pass here."

This was a speech calculated to restore my self-possession. With a bow which evidently surprised her, I
answered with just enough respect to temper my apparent presumption:

"I am here in the interests of Mrs. Ocumpaugh, to assist her in finding her child. Moments are precious; so I
ventured to approach by the shorter way."

"Pardon me!" The words did not come instantly, but after some hesitation, during which she kept her eyes on my
face in a way to rob me of all thought save that she possessed a very strong magnetic quality, to which it were well
for a man like myself to yield. "You will be my friend, too, if you succeed in restoring Gwendolen." Then quickly,
as she crossed to the Ocumpaugh grounds: "You do not look like a member of the police. Are you here at Mrs.
Ocumpaugh's bidding, and has she at last given up all expectation of finding her child in the river?"

I, too, thought a minute before answering, then I put on my most candid expression, for was not this woman on
her way to Mrs. Ocumpaugh, and would she not be likely to repeat what she heard me say?

"I do not know how Mrs. Ocumpaugh feels at present. But I know what her dearest wish is--to see her child
again alive and well. That wish I shall do my best to gratify. It is true that I am not a police detective, but I have an
agency of my own, well-known to both Mrs. and Mr. Ocumpaugh. All its resources will be devoted to this business
and I hope to succeed, madam. If, as I suspect, you are on your way to Mrs. Ocumpaugh, please tell her that Robert
Trevitt, of Trevitt and Jupp, hopes to succeed."

"I _will_," she emphasized. Then stepping back to me in all the grace of her thrilling personality, she eagerly
added: "If there is any information I can give, do not be afraid to ask me. I love children, and would give anything in
the world to see Mrs. Ocumpaugh as happy with Gwendolen again as I am with my little nephew. Are you quite sure
that there is any possibility of this? I was told that the child's shoe has been found in the river; but almost
immediately following this information came the report that there was something odd about this shoe, and that Mrs.
Ocumpaugh had gone into hysterics. Do _you_ know what they meant by that? I was just going over to see."

I did know what they meant, but I preferred to seem ignorant.

"I have not seen Mrs. Ocumpaugh," I evasively rejoined. "But _I_ don't look for the child to be drawn from the
water."

"Nor I," she repeated, with a hoarse catch in her breath. "It is thirty-six hours since we lost her. Time enough for
the current to have carried her sweet little body far away from here."

I surveyed the lady before me in amazement.

"Then _you_ think she strayed down to the water?"
"Yes; it would madden me to believe otherwise; loving her so well, and her parents so well, I dare not think of a worse fate."

Taking advantage of her amiability and the unexpected opportunity it offered for a leading question, I hereupon ventured to say: "You were not at home, I hear, when she vanished from the bungalow."

"No; that is, if it happened before three o'clock. I arrived from the station just as the clock was striking the hour, and having my little nephew with me, I was too much occupied in reconciling him to his new home, to hear or see anything outside. Most unfortunate!" she mourned, "most unfortunate! I shall never cease reproaching myself. A tragedy at my door"--here she glanced across the shrubbery at the bungalow--"and I occupied with my own affairs!"

With a flush, the undoubted result of her own earnestness, she turned as if to go. But I could not let her depart without another question:

"Excuse me, Mrs. Carew, but you gave me permission to seem importunate. With the exception of her nurse, you were the one person nearest the bungalow at the time. Didn't you hear a carriage drive through your grounds at about the hour the alarm was first started? I know you have been asked this before, but not by me; and it is a very important fact to have settled; very important for those who wish to discover this child at once."

For reply she gave me a look of very honest amazement.

"Of course I did," she replied. "I came in a carriage myself from the station and naturally heard it drive away."

At her look, at her word, the thread which I had seized with such avidity seemed to slip from my fingers. Had little Miss Graham's theory no better foundation than this? and were the wheels she heard only those of Mrs. Carew's departing carriage? I resolved to press the matter even if I ran the risk of displeasing her.

"Mrs. Carew--for it must be Mrs. Carew I am addressing--did your little nephew cry when you first brought him to the house?"

"I think he did," she admitted slowly; "I think he did."

I must have given evidence of the sudden discouragement this brought me, for her lips parted and her whole frame trembled with sudden earnestness.

"Did you think--did any one think--that those cries came from Gwendolen? That she was carried out through my grounds? Could any one have thought that?"

"I have been told that the nursery-governess did."

"Little Miss Graham? Poor girl! she is but defending herself from despair. She is ready to believe everything but that the child is dead."

Was it so? Was I following the false light of a will-o' the-wisp? No, no; the strange coincidence of the threat made on the bridge with the disappearance of the child on the day named, was at least real. The thread had not altogether escaped from my hands. It was less tangible, but it was still there.

"You may be right," I acquiesced, for I saw that her theories were entirely opposed to those of Miss Graham. "But we must try everything, _everything_."

I was about to ask whether she had ever seen in the adjoining grounds, or on the roads about, an old man with long hair and a remarkable scar running down between his eyebrows, when a young girl in the cap and apron of a maid-servant came running through the shrubbery from the Ocumpaugh house, and, seeing Mrs. Carew, panted out:

"Oh, do come over to the house, Mrs. Carew. Mrs. Ocumpaugh has been told that the two shoes which have been found, one on the bank and the other in the river, are not mates, and it has quite distracted her. She has gone to her room and will let no one else in. We can hear her moaning and crying, but we can do nothing. Perhaps she will see you. She called for you, I know, before she shut her door."

"I will go." Mrs. Carew had turned quite pale, and from standing upright in the road, had moved so as to gain support from one of the hedges.

I expected to see her turn and go as soon as her trembling fit was over, but she did not, though she waved the girl away as if she intended to follow her. Had I not learned to distrust my own impression of people's motives from their manners and conduct, I should have said that she was waiting for me to precede her.

"Two shoes and not mates!" she finally exclaimed. "What does she mean?"

"Simply that another shoe has been drawn up from the river-bottom which does not mate the one picked up near the bungalow. Both are for the left foot."

"Ah!" gasped this sympathetic woman. "And what inference can we draw from that?"

I should not have answered her; but the command in her eyes or the thrilling effect of her manner compelled me, and I spoke the truth at once, just as I might have done to Mrs. Ocumpaugh, or, better still, to Mr. Ocumpaugh, if either had insisted.

"But one," said I. "There is a conspiracy on the part of one or more persons to delude Mrs. Ocumpaugh into believing the child dead. They blundered over it, but they came very near succeeding."

"Who blundered, and what is the meaning of the conspiracy you hint at? Tell me. Tell me what such men as you
think."

Her plastic features had again shown a change. She was all anxiety now; cheeks burning, eyes blazing—a very beautiful woman.

"We think that the case looks serious. We think from the very mystery it displays, that there is a keen intelligence back of this crime. I can not go any further than that. The affair is as yet too obscure."

"You amaze me!" she faltered, making an effort to collect her thoughts. "I have always thought, just as Mrs. Ocumpaugh has, that the child had somehow found her way to the water and was drowned. But if all this is true we shall have to face a worse evil. A conspiracy against such a tender little being as that! A conspiracy, and for what? Not to extort money, or why these blundering efforts to make the child appear dead?"

She was the same sympathetic woman, agitated by real feeling as before, yet at this moment—I do not understand now just why—I became aware of an inner movement of caution against too great a display of candor on my own part.

"Madam, it is all a mystery at present. I am sure that the police will tell you the same. But another day may bring developments."

"Let us hope so!" was her ardent reply, accompanied by a gesture, the freedom of which suited her style and person as it would not have done those of a less impressionable woman. And, seeing that I had no intention of leaving the spot where I stood, she moved at last from where she held herself upright against the hedge, and entered the Ocumpaugh grounds. "Will you call in to see me to-morrow?" she asked, pausing to look back at a turn in the path. "I shall not sleep to-night for thinking of those possible developments."

"Since you permit me," I returned; "that is, if I am still here. Affairs may call me away at any moment."

"Yes, and so with me. Affairs may call me away also. I was to sail on Saturday for Liverpool. Only Mrs. Ocumpaugh's distress detains me. If the situation lightens, if we hear any good news to-night, or even early to-morrow, I shall continue my preparations, which will take me again to New York."

"I will call if you are at home."

She gave me a slight nod and vanished.

Why did I stand a good three minutes where she had left me, thinking, but not getting anything from my thoughts, save that I was glad that I had not been betrayed into speaking of the old man Miss Graham had met on the bridge? Yet it might have been well, after all, if I had done so, if only to discover whether Mrs. Ocumpaugh had confided this occurrence to her most intimate friend.

IV

CHALK-MARKS

My next move was toward the bungalow. Those chalk-marks still struck me as being worthy of investigation, and not only they, but the bungalow itself. That certainly merited a much closer inspection than I had been able to give it under Miss Graham's eye.

It was not quite a new place to me, nor was I so ignorant of its history (and it had a history as I had appeared to be in my conversation with Miss Graham). Originally it had been a stabling place for horses; and tradition said that it had once harbored for a week the horse of General Washington. This was when the house on the knoll above had been the seat and home of one of our most famous Revolutionary generals. Later, as the trees grew up around this building, it attracted the attention of a new owner, William Ocumpaugh, the first of that name to inhabit Homewood, and he, being a man of reserved manners and very studious habits, turned it into what we would now call, as Miss Graham did, a den, but which he styled a pavilion, and used as a sort of study or reading-room.

His son, who inherited it, Judge Philo Ocumpaugh, grandfather of the present Philo, was as studious as his father, but preferred to read and write in the quaint old library up at the house, famous for its wide glass doors opening on to the lawn, and its magnificent view of the Hudson. His desk, which many remember (it has a place in the present house, I believe), was so located that for forty years or more he had this prospect ever before him, a prospect which included the sight of his own pavilion, around which, for no cause apparent to his contemporaries, he had caused a high wall to be built, effectually shutting in both trees and building.

This wall has since been removed; but I have often heard it spoken of, and always with a certain air of mystery; possibly because, as I have said, there seemed no good reason for its erection, the place holding no treasure and the gate standing always open; possibly because of its having been painted, in defiance of all harmony with everything about the place, a dazzling white; and possibly because it had not been raised till after the death of the judge's first wife, who, some have said, breathed her last within the precincts it inclosed.

However that may be, there seems to be no doubt that this place exerted, very likely against his will, for he never visited it, a singular fascination over the secretive mind of this same upright but strangely taciturn ancestor of the Ocumpaughs. For during the forty years in which he wrote and read at this desk, the shutters guarding the door overlooking those decaying walls were never drawn to, or so the tradition runs; and when he died, it was found that,
by a clause in his will, this pavilion, hut or bungalow, all of which names it bore at different stages of its existence, was recommended to the notice of his heirs as an object which they were at liberty to leave in its present forsaken condition, though he did not exact this, but which was never, under any circumstances or to serve any purpose, to be removed from its present site, or even to suffer any demolition save such as came with time and the natural round of the seasons, to whose tender mercies he advised it to be left. In other words, it was to stand, and to stand unmolested, till it fell of its own accord, or was struck to the earth by lightning—a tragic alternative in the judgment of those who knew it for a structure of comparative insignificance, and one which, in the minds of many, and perhaps I may say in my own, appeared to point to some serious and unrevealed cause not unlinked with the almost forgotten death of that young wife to which I have just alluded.

This was years ago, far back in the fifties, and his son, who was a minor at his death, grew up and assumed his natural proprietorship. The hut—it was nothing but a hut now—had remained untouched—a ruin no longer habitable. The spirit, as well as the letter, of that particular clause in his father's will had so far been literally obeyed. The walls being of stone, had withstood decay, and still rose straight and firm; but the roof had begun to sag, and whatever of woodwork yet remained about it had rotted and fallen away, till the building was little more than a skeleton, with holes for its windows and an open gap for its door.

As for the surrounding wall, it no longer stood out, an incongruous landmark, from its background of trees and shrubbery. Young shoots had started up and old branches developed till brick and paint alike were almost concealed from view by a fresh girdle of greenery.

And now comes the second mystery.

Sometime after this latter Ocumpaugh had attained his majority—his name was Edwin, and he was, as you already imagine, the father of the present Philo—he made an attempt—a daring one it was afterward called—to brighten this neglected spot and restore it to some sort of use, by giving a supper to his friends within its broken-down walls.

This supper was no orgy, nor were the proprieties in any way transgressed by so harmless a festivity; yet from this night a singular change was observed in this man. Pleasure no longer charmed him, and instead of repeating the experiment I have just described, he speedily evinced such an antipathy to the scene of his late revel that only from the greatest necessity would he ever again visit that part of the grounds.

What did it mean? What had occurred on that night of innocent enjoyment to disturb or alarm him? Had some note in his own conscience been struck by an act which, in his soberer moments, he may have looked upon as a species of sacrilege? Or had some whisper from the past reached him amid the feasting, the laughing and the jesting, to render these old walls henceforth intolerable to him? He never said, but whatever the cause of this sudden aversion, the effect was deep and promised to be lasting. For, one morning, not long after this event, a party of workmen was seen leaving these grounds at daybreak, and soon it was noised about that a massive brick partition had been put up across the interior of this same pavilion, completely shutting off, for no reason that any one could see, some ten feet of what had been one long and undivided room.

It was a strange act enough; but when, a few days later, it was followed by one equally mysterious, and they saw the encircling wall which had been so carefully raised by Judge Ocumpaugh ruthlessly pulled down, and every sign of its former presence there destroyed, wonder filled the highway and the curiosity of neighbors and friends passed all bounds.

But no explanations were volunteered then or ever. People might query and peer, but they learned nothing. What was left open to view told no tales beyond the old one, and as for the single window which was the sole opening into the shut-off space, it was then, as now, so completely blocked up by a network of closely impacted vines, that it offered little more encouragement than the wall itself to the eyes of such curiosity-mongers as crept in by way of the hedge-rows to steal a look at the hut, and if possible gain a glimpse of an interior which had suddenly acquired, by the very means taken to shut it off from every human eye, a new importance pointing very decidedly toward the tragic.

But soon even this semblance of interest died out or was confined to strange tales whispered under breath on weird nights at neighboring firesides, and the old neglect prevailed once more. The whole place—new brick and old stone—seemed doomed to a common fate under the hand of time, when the present Philo Ocumpaugh, succeeding to the property, brought new wealth and business enterprise into the family, and the old house on the hill was replaced by the marble turrets of Homewood, and this hut—or rather the portion open to improvement—was restored to some sort of comfort, and rechristened the bungalow.

Was fate to be appeased by this effort at forgetfulness? No. In emulation of the long abandoned portion so hopelessly cut off by that dividing wall, this brightly-furnished adjunct to the great house had linked itself in the minds of men to a new mystery—the mystery which I had come there to solve, if wit and patience could do it, aided by my supposedly unshared knowledge of a fact connecting me with this family's history in a way it little dreamed
of.

Naturally, my first look was at the building itself. I have described its location and the room from which the child was lost. What I wanted to see now, after studying those chalk-marks, was whether that partition which had been put in, was as impassable as was supposed.

The policeman on guard having strolled a few feet away, I approached the open doorway without hindrance, and at once took that close look I had promised myself, of the marks which I had observed scrawled broadly across the floor just inside the threshold. They were as interesting and fully as important as I had anticipated. Though nearly obliterated by the passing of the policeman's feet across them, I was still enabled to read the one word which appeared to me significant.

If you will glance at the following reproduction of a snap-shot which I took of this scrawl, you will see what I mean.

![Image](https://example.com/16.png)

The significant character was the 16. Taken with the "ust," there could be no doubt that the whole writing had been a record of the date on which the child had disappeared: August 16, 190-.

This in itself was of small consequence if the handwriting had not possessed those marked peculiarities which I believed belonged to but one man—a man I had once known—a man of reverend aspect, upright carriage and a strong distinguishing mark, like an old-time scar, running straight down between his eyebrows. This had been my thought when I first saw it. It was doubly so on seeing it again after the doubts expressed by Miss Graham of a threatening old man who possessed similar characteristics.

Satisfied on this point, I turned my attention to what still more seriously occupied it. The three or four long rugs, which hung from the ceiling across the whole wall at my left, evidently concealed the mysterious partition put up in Mr. Ocumpaugh's father's time directly across this portion of the room. Was it a totally unbroken partition? I had been told so; but I never accept such assertions without a personal investigation.

Casting a glance through the doorway and seeing that it would take my dreaming friend, the policeman, some two or three minutes yet to find his way back to his post, I hastily lifted these rugs aside, one after the other, and took a look behind them. A stretch of Georgia pine, laid, as I readily discovered by more than one rap of my knuckles, directly over the bricks it was intended to conceal, was visible under each; from end to end a plain partition with no indications of its having been tampered with since the alterations were first made.

Dismissing from my mind one of those vague possibilities, which add such interest to the calling of a detective, I left the place, with my full thought concentrated on the definite clue I had received from the chalk-marks.

But I had not walked far before I met with a surprise which possibly possessed a significance equal to anything I had already observed, if only I could have fully understood it.

On the path into which I now entered, I encountered again the figure of Mrs. Carew. Her face was turned full on mine, and she had evidently retraced her steps to have another instant's conversation with me. The next moment I was sure of this. Her eyes, always magnetic, shone with increasing brightness as I advanced to meet her, and her manner, while grave, was that of a woman quite conscious of the effect she produced by her least word or action.

"I have returned to tell you," said she, "that I have more confidence in your efforts than in those of the police officers around here. If Gwendolen's fate is determined by any one it will be by you. So I want to be of aid to you if I can. Remember that. I may have said this to you before, but I wish to impress it upon you."

There was a flutter in her movements which astonished me. She was surveying me in a straightforward way, and I could not but feel the fire and force of her look. Happily she was no longer a young woman or I might have misunderstood the disturbance which took place in my own breast as I waited for the musical tones to cease.

"You are very good," I rejoined. "I need help, and shall be only too glad to receive your assistance."

Yet I did question her, though I presently found myself walking toward the house at her side. She may not have expected me to presume so far. Certainly she showed no dissatisfaction when, at a parting in the path, I took my leave of her and turned my face in the direction of the gates. A strange sweet woman, with a power quite apart from the physical charms which usually affect men of my age, but one not easily read nor parted from unless one had an imperative errand, as I had.

This errand was to meet and forestall the messenger boy whom I momentarily expected with the answer to my telegram. That an opportunity for gossip was likewise afforded by the motley group of men and boys drawn up near one of the gate-posts, gave an added interest to the event which I was quite ready to appreciate. Approaching this group, I assimilated myself with it as speedily as possible, and, having some tact for this sort of thing, soon found myself the recipient of various gratuitous opinions as to the significance of the find which had offered such a problem both to the professional and unprofessional detective. Two mis-mated shoes! Had Gwendolen Ocumpaugh
by any chance worn such? No--or the ones mating them would have been found in her closet, and this, some one shouted out, had not been done. Only the one corresponding to that fished up from the waters of the dock had come to light; the other, the one which the child must really have worn, was no nearer being found than the child herself. What did it all mean? No one knew; but all attempted some sort of hazardous guess which I was happy to see fell entirely short of the mark.

There was not a word of the vindictive old man described by Miss Graham, till I myself introduced the topic. My reason or rather my excuse for introducing it was this:

On the gate-post near me I had observed the remnants of a strip of paper which had been pasted there and afterward imperfectly torn off. It had an unsightly look, but I did not pay much attention to it till some movement in the group forced me a little nearer to the post, when I was surprised enough to see that this scrap of paper showed signs of words, and that these words gave evidence of being a date written in the very hand I now had no difficulty in recognizing as that of the old man uppermost in my own mind, even if he were not the one whom Miss Graham had seen on the bridge. This date--strange to say--was the same significant one already noted on the floor of the bungalow--a fact which I felt merited an explanation if any one about me could give it.

Waiting, therefore, for a lull in the remarks passing between the stable-men and other employees about the place, I drew the attention of the first man who would listen, to the half torn-off strip of paper on the post, and asked if that was the way the Ocumpaughns gave notice of their entertainments.

He started, then turned his back on me.

"That wasn't put there for the entertainment," he growled; "that was pasted up there by some one who wanted to show off his writin'. There don't seem to be no other reason."

As the man who spoke these words had thereby proved himself a blockhead, I edged away from him as soon as possible toward a very decent looking fellow who appeared to have more brains than speech.

"Do you know who pasted that date upon the post?" I inquired.

He answered very directly.

"No, or I should have been laying for him long before this. Why, it is not only there you can see it. I found it pinned to the carriage cushions one day just as I was going to drive Mrs. Ocumpaugh out." (Evidently I had struck upon the coachman.) "And not only that. One of the girls up at the house--one as I knows pretty well--tells me--I don't care who hears it now--that it was written across a card which was left at the door for Mrs. Ocumpaugh, and all in the same handwriting, which is not a common one, as you can see. This means something, seeing it was the date when our bad luck fell on us."

He had noted that.

"You don't mean to say that these things were written and put about before the date you see on them."

"But I do. Would we have noticed since? But who are you, sir, if I may ask? One of them detective fellows? If so, I have a word to say: Find that child or Mrs. Ocumpaugh's blood will be on your head! She'll not live till Mr. Ocumpaugh comes home unless she can show him his child."

"Wait!" I called out, for he was turning away toward the stable. "You know who wrote those slips?"

"Not a bit of it. No one does. Not that anybody thinks much about them but me."

"The police must," I ventured.

"May be, but they don't say anything about it. Somehow it looks to me as if they were all at sea."

"Possibly they are," I remarked, letting him go as I caught sight of a small boy coming up the road with several telegrams in his hand.

"Is one of those directed to Robert Trevitt?" I asked, crowding up with the rest, as his small form was allowed to slip through the gate.

"Spec's there is," he replied, looking them over and handing me one.

I carried it to one side and hastily tore it open. It was, as I expected, from my partner, and read as follows:

Man you want has just returned after two days' absence. Am on watch. Saw him just alight from buggy with what looked like sleeping child in his arms. Closed and fastened front door after him. Safe for to-night.

Did I allow my triumph to betray itself? I do not think so. The question which kept down my elation was this: Would I be the first man to get there?

THE OLD HOUSE IN YONKERS

The old man whose handwriting I had now positively identified was a former employer of mine. I had worked in his office when a lad. He was a doctor of very fair reputation in Westchester County, and I recognized every characteristic of his as mentioned by Miss Graham, save the frenzy which she described as accompanying his address.

In those days he was calm and cold and, while outwardly scrupulous, capable of forgetting his honor as a
physician under a sufficiently strong temptation. I had left him when new prospects opened, and in the years which
had elapsed had contented myself with the knowledge that his shingle still hung out in Yonkers, though his practice
was nothing to what it used to be when I was in his employ. Now I was going to see him again.

That his was the hand which had stolen Gwendolen seemed no longer open to doubt. That she was under his care
in the curious old house I remembered in the heart of Yonkers, seemed equally probable; but why so sordid a man--
one who loved money above everything else in the world--should retain the child one minute after the publication of
the bountiful reward offered by Mr. Ocumpaugh, was what I could not at first understand. Miss Graham's theory of
hate had made no impression on me. He was heartless and not likely to be turned aside from any project he had
formed, but he was not what I considered vindictive where nothing was to be gained. Yet my comprehension of him
had been but a boy's comprehension, and I was now prepared to put a very different estimate on one whose character
had never struck me as being an open one, even when my own had been most credulous.

That my enterprise, even with the knowledge I possessed of this man, promised well or held out any prospects of
easy fulfilment, I no longer allowed myself to think. If money was his object--and what other could influence a man
of his temperament?--the sum offered by Mr. Ocumpaugh, large though it was, had apparently not sufficed to satisfy
his greed. He was holding back the child, or so I now believed, in order to wring a larger, possibly a double, amount
from the wretched mother. Fifty thousand was a goodly sum, but one hundred thousand was better; and this man had
gigantic ideas where his cupidity was concerned. I remember how firmly he had once stood out for ten thousand
dollars when he had been offered five; and I began to see, though in an obscure way as yet, how it might very easily
be a part of his plan to work Mrs. Ocumpaugh up to a positive belief in the child's death before he came down upon
her for the immense reward he had fixed his heart upon. The date he had written all over the place might thus find
some explanation in a plan to weaken her nerve before pressing his exorbitant claims upon her.

Nothing was clear, yet everything was possible in such a nature; and anxious to enter upon the struggle both for
my own sake and that of the child of whose condition under that terrible eye I scarcely dared to think, I left
Homewood in haste and took the first train for Yonkers. Though the distance was not great, I had fully arranged my
plans before entering the town where so many of my boyish years had been spent. I knew the old fox well enough,
or thought I did, to be certain that I should have anything but an easy entrance into his house, in case it still harbored
the child whom my partner had seen carried in there. I anticipated difficulties, but was concerned about none but the
possibility of not being able to bring myself face to face with him. Once in his presence, the knowledge which I
secretly possessed of an old but doubtful transaction of his, would serve to make him mine even to the point of
yielding up the child he had forcibly abducted. But would he accord me an interview? Could I, without appeal to the
police--and you can readily believe I was not anxious to allow them to put their fingers in my pie--force him to open
his door and let me into his house, which, as I well recalled, he locked up at nine--after which he would receive no
one, not even a patient?

It was not nine yet, but it was very near that hour. I had but twenty minutes in which to mount the hill to the old
house marked by the doctor's sign and by another peculiarity of so distinct a nature that it would serve to
characterize a dwelling in a city as large as New York--though I doubt if New York can show its like from the
Battery to the Bronx. The particulars of this I will mention later. I have first to relate the relief I felt when, on
entering the old neighborhood, I heard in response to a few notes of a certain popular melody which I had allowed to
leave my lips, an added note or two which warned me that my partner was somewhere hidden among the alleys of
this very unaristocratic quarter. Indeed, from the sound, I judged him to be in the rear of the doctor's house and,
being anxious to hear what he had to say before advancing upon the door which might open my way to easy fortune
or complete defeat, I paused a few steps off and waited for his appearance.

He was at my elbow before I had either seen or heard him. He was always light of foot, but this time he seemed
to have no tread at all.
"Still here," was his comforting assurance.
"Both?" I whispered back.
"Both."
"Any one else?"
"No. A boy drove away the buggy and has not come back. Sawbones keeps no girl."
"Is the child quiet? Has there been no alarm?"
"Not a breath."
"No cops in the neighborhood? No spies around?"
"Not one. We've got it all this time. But--"
"Hush!"
"There's nobody."
"Yes, the doctor; he's fastening up his house. I must hasten; nothing would induce me to let that innocent remain
under his roof all night."
    "It's not the windows he is at."
    "What then?"
    "The door, the big front door."
    "The--"
    "Yes."
    I gave my partner a surprised look, undoubtedly lost in the darkness, and drew a step nearer the house.
    "It's just the same old gloom-box," I exclaimed, and paused for an instant to mark the changes which had taken place in the surroundings. They were very few and I turned back to fix my eye on the front door where a rattling sound could be heard, as of some one fingerling the latch. It was this door which formed the peculiarity of the house. In itself it was like any other that was well-fashioned and solid, but it opened upon space—that is, if it was ever opened, which I doubted. The stoop and even the railing which had once guarded it, had all been removed, leaving a bare front, with this inhospitable entrance shut against every one who had not the convenience for mounting to it by a ladder. There was another way in, but this was round on one side, and did not present itself to the eye unless one approached from the west end of the street; so that to half the passers-by the house looked like a deserted one till they came abreast of the flagged path which led to the office door. As the windows had never been unclosed in my day and were not now, I took it for granted that they had remained thus inhospitably shut during all the years of my absence, which certainly offered but little encouragement to a man bent on an errand which would soon take him into those dismal precincts.

    "What goes on behind those shuttered windows?" thought I. "I know of one thing, but what else?" The one thing was the counting of money and the arranging of innumerable gold pieces on the great top of a baize-covered table in what I should now describe as the back parlor. I remembered how he used to do it. I caught him at it once, having crept up one windy night from my little room off the office to see what kept the doctor up so late.

    As I now stood listening in the dark street to those strange touches on a door disused for years, I recalled the tremor with which I rounded the top of the stair that night of long ago and the mingled fear and awe with which I recognized, not only such a mint of money as I had never seen out of the bank before, but the greedy and devouring passion with which he pushed the glittering coins about and handled the bank-notes and gloated over the pile it all made when drawn together by his hooked fingers, till the sound, perhaps, of my breathing in the dark hall startled him with a thought of discovery, and his two hands came together over that pile with a gesture more eloquent even than the look with which he seemed to penetrate the very shadows in the silent space wherein I stood. It was a vision short, but inexpressibly vivid, of the miser incarnate, and having seen it and escaped detection, as was my undeserved luck that night, I needed never to ask again why he had been willing to accept risks from which most men shrink from fear if not from conscience. He loved money, not as the spender loves it, openly and with luxurious instincts, but secretly and with a knavish dread of discovery which spoke of treasure ill acquired.

    And now he was seeking to add to his gains, and I stood on the outside of his house listening to sounds I did not understand, instead of attempting to draw him to the office-door by ringing the bell he never used to disconnect till nine.

    "Do you know that I don't quite like the noises which are being made up there?" came in a sudden whisper to my ear. "Supposing it was the child trying to get out! She does not know there is no stoop; she seemed sleeping or half-dead when he carried her in, and if by any chance she has got hold of the key and the door should open--"

    "Hush!" I cried, starting forward in horror of the thought he had suggested. "It _is_ opening. I see a thread of light. What does it mean, Jupp? The child? No; there is more than a child's strength in that push. Hist!" Here I drew him flat against the wall. The door above had swung back and some one was stamping on the threshold over our heads in what appeared to be an outburst of ungovernable fury.

    That it was the doctor I could not doubt. But why this anger; why this mad gasping after breath and the half-growl, half-cry, with which he faced the night and the quiet of a street which to his glance, passing as it did over our heads, must have appeared altogether deserted? We were consulting each other's faces for some explanation of this unlooked-for outbreak, when the door above us suddenly slammed to and we heard a renewal of that fumbling with lock and key which had first drawn our attention. But the hand was not sure or the hall was dark, for the key did not turn in the lock. Suddenly awake to my opportunity, I wheeled Jupp about and, making use of his knee and back, climbed up till I was enabled to reach the knob and turn it just as the man within had stepped back, probably to procure more light.

    The result was that the door swung open and I stumbled in, falling almost face downward on the marble floor faintly checkered off to my sight in the dim light of a lamp set far back in a bare and dismal hall. I was on my feet again in an instant and it was in this manner, and with all the disadvantages of a hatless head and a disordered countenance, that I encountered again my old employer after five years of absence.
He did not recognize me. I saw it by the look of alarm which crossed his features and the involuntary opening of his lips in what would certainly have been a loud cry if I had not smiled and cried out with false gaiety:

"Excuse me, doctor, I never came in by that door before. Pardon my awkwardness. The step is somewhat high from the street."

My smile is my own, they say; at all events it served to enlighten him.

"Bob Trevitt," he exclaimed, but with a growl of displeasure I could hardly condemn under the circumstances.

I hastened to push my advantage, for he was looking very threateningly toward the door which was swaying gently and in an inviting way to a man who if old, had more power in his arms than I had in my whole body.

"Mr. Trevitt," I corrected; "and on a very important errand. I am here on behalf of Mrs. Ocumpaugh, whose child you have at this moment under your roof."

VI

DOCTOR POOL

It was a direct attack and for a minute I doubted if I had not made a mistake in making it so suddenly and without gloves. His face purpled, the veins on his forehead started out, his great form shook with an ire that in such domineering natures as his can only find relief in a blow. But the right hand did not rise nor the heavy fist fall. With admirable self-restraint he faced me for a moment, without attempting either protest or denial. Then his blazing eyes cooled down, and with a sudden gesture which at once relaxed his extreme tension of nerve and muscle, he pointed toward the end of the hall and remarked with studied politeness:

"My office is below, as you know. Will you oblige me by following me there?"

I feared him, for I saw that studiously as he sought to hide his impressions, he too regarded the moment as one of critical significance. But I assumed an air of perfect confidence, merely observing as I left the neighborhood of the front door and the proximity of Jupp:

"I have friends on the outside who are waiting for me; so you must not keep me too long."

He was bending to take up the lamp from a small table near the basement stair as I threw out these words in apparent carelessness, and the flash which shot from under his shaggy brows was thus necessarily heightened by the glare in which he stood. Yet with all allowances made I marked him down in my own mind as dangerous, and was correspondingly surprised when he turned on the top step of the narrow staircase I remembered so vividly from the experience I have before named, and in the mildest of accents remarked:

"These stairs are a trifle treacherous. Be careful to grasp the hand-rail as you come down."

Was the game deeper than I thought? In all my remembrance of him I had never before seen him look benevolent, and it alarmed me, coming as it did after the accusation I had made. I felt tempted to make a stand and demand that the interview be held then and there. For I knew his subterranean office very well, and how difficult it would be to raise a cry there which could be heard by any one outside. Still, with a muttered, "Thank you," I proceeded to follow him down, only stopping once in the descent to listen for some sound by which I could determine in which room of the many I knew to be on this floor the little one lay, on whose behalf I was incurring a possible bullet from the pistol I once saw lurking amongst bottles and corks in one of the innumerable drawers of the doctor's table. But all was still around and overhead; too still for my peace of mind, in which dreadful visions began to rise of a drugged or dying child, panting out its innocent breath in darkness and solitude. Yet no. With those thousands to be had for the asking, any man would be a fool to injure or even seriously to frighten a child upon whose good condition they depended; much less a miser whose whole heart was fixed on money.

The clock struck as I put foot on the landing; so much can happen in twenty minutes when events crowd and the passions of men reach their boiling-point! I expected to see the old man try that door, even to double bolt it as in the years gone by. But he merely threw a look that way and proceeded on down the three or four steps which led into the species of basement where he had chosen to fix his office. In another moment that dim and dismal room broke upon my view under the vague light of the small and poorly-trimmed lamp he carried. I saw again its musty walls covered with books, where there were shelves laden with bottles and a loose array of miscellaneous objects I had often handled but out of which I never could make any meaning. I recognized it all and detected but few changes. But these were startling ones. The old lounge standing under the two barred windows which I had often likened in my own mind to those of a jail, had been recovered; and lying on the table, which I had always regarded with a mixture of awe and apprehension, I perceived something which I had never seen there before: a Bible, with its edges worn and its leaves rumpled as if often and eagerly handled.

I was so struck by this last discovery that I stopped, staring, in the doorway, looking from the sacred volume to his worn but vigorous figure drawn up in the middle of the room, with the lamp still in his hand and his small but brilliant eyes fixed upon mine with a certain ironical glitter in them, which gave me my first distrust of the part I had come there to play.

"We will waste no words," said he, setting down the lamp, and seizing with his disengaged hand the long locks
of his flowing beard. "In what respect are you a messenger from Mrs. Ocumpaugh, and what makes you think I have her child in this house?"

I found it easier to answer the last question first.

"I know the child is here," I replied, "because my partner saw you bring her in. I have gone into the detective business since leaving you."

"Ah!"

There was an astonishing edge to his smile and I felt that I should have to make the most of that old discovery of mine, if I were to hold my own with this man.

"And may I ask," he coldly continued, "how you have succeeded in connecting me with this young child's disappearance?"

"It's straight as a string," I retorted. "You threatened the child to its face in the hearing of its nurse some two weeks ago, on a certain bridge where you stopped them. You even set the day when the little Gwendolen should pass from luxury to poverty." Here I cast an involuntary glance about the room where the only sign of comfort was the newly upholstered lounge. "That day was the sixteenth, and we all know what happened on that date. If this is not plain enough--" I had seen his lip curl--"allow me to add, by way of explanation, that you have seen fit to threaten Mrs. Ocumpaugh herself with this date, for I know well the hand which wrote _August 16_ on the bungalow floor and in various other places about Homewood where her eye was likely to fall." And I let my own fall on a sort of manuscript lying open not far from the Bible, which still looked so out of place to me on this pagan-hearted old miser's table. "Such chirography as yours is not to be mistaken," I completed, with a short gesture toward the disordered sheets he had left spread out to every eye.

"I see. A detective without doubt. Did you play the detective here?"

The last question leaped like a shot from his lips.

"You have not denied the threats to which I have just called your attention," was my cautious reply.

"What need of that?" he retorted. "Are you not a--_detective_?"

There was sarcasm, as well as taunt in the way he uttered that last word. I was conscious of being at a loss, but put a bold front on the matter and proceeded as if conscious of no secret misgiving.

"Can you deny as well that you have been gone two days from this place? That during this time a doctor's buggy, drawn by a horse I should know by description, having harnessed him three times a day for two years, was seen by more than one observer in the wake of a mysterious wagon from the interior of which a child's crying could be heard? The wagon did not drive up to this house to-night, but the buggy did, and from it you carried a child which you brought with you into this house."

With a sudden down-bringing of his old but powerful hand on the top of the table before him, he seemed about to utter an oath or some angry invective. But again he controlled himself, and eying me without any show of shame or even of desire to contradict any of my assertions, he quietly declared:

"You are after that reward, I observe. Well, you won't get it. Like many others of your class you can follow a trail, but the insight to start right and to end in triumphant success is given only to a genius, and you are not a genius."

With a blush I could not control, I advanced upon him, crying:

"You have forestalled me. You have telegraphed or telephoned to Mr. Atwater--"

"I have not left my house since I came in here three hours ago."

"Then--" I began.

But he hushed me with a look.

"It is not a matter of money," he declared almost with dignity. "Those who think to reap dollars from the distress which has come upon the Ocumpaugh family will eat ashes for their pains. Money will be spent, but none of it earned, unless you, or such as you, are hired at so much an hour to--follow trails."

Greatly astounded not only by the attitude he took, but by the calm and almost indifferent way in which he mentioned what I had every reason to believe to be the one burning object of his existence, I surveyed him with undisguised astonishment till another thought, growing out of the silence of the many-roomed house above us, gripped me with secret dread; and I exclaimed aloud and without any attempt at subterfuge:

"She is dead, then! the child is dead!"

"I do not know," was his reply.

The four words were uttered with undeniable gloom.

"You do not know?" I echoed, conscious that my jaw had fallen, and that I was staring at him with fright in my eyes.

"No. I wish I did. I would give half of my small savings to know where that innocent baby is to-night. Sit down!" he vehemently commanded. "You do not understand me, I see. You confound the old Doctor Pool with the
"I confound nothing," I violently retorted in strong revulsion against what I had now come to look upon as the attempt of a subtile actor to turn aside my suspicions and brave out a dangerous situation by a ridiculous subterfuge. "I understand the miser whom I have beheld gloating over his hoard in the room above, and I understand the doctor who for money could lend himself to a fraud, the secret results of which are agitating the whole country at this moment."

"So!" The word came with difficulty. "So you _did_ play the detective, even as a boy. Pity I had not recognized your talents at the time. But no--" he contradicted himself with great rapidity; "I was not a redeemed soul then; I might have done you harm. I might have had more if not worse sins to atone for than I have now." And with scant appearance of having noted the doubtful manner in which I had received this astonishing outburst, he proceeded to cry aloud and with a commanding gesture: "Quit this. You have undertaken more than you can handle. You, a messenger from Mrs. Ocumpaugh? Never. You are but the messenger of your own cupidity; and cupidity leads by the straightest of roads directly down to hell."

"This you proved six long years ago. Lead me to the child I believe to be in this house or I will proclaim aloud the pact you entered into then--a pact to which I was an involuntary witness whose word, however, will not go for less on that account. Behind the curtain still hanging over that old closet I stood while--"

His hand had seized my arm with a grip few could have proceeded under.

"Do you mean--"

The rest was whispered in my ear.

I nodded and felt that he was mine now. But the laugh which the next minute broke from his lips dashed my assurance.

"Oh, the ways of the world!" he cried. Then in a different tone and not without reverence: "Oh, the ways of God!"

I made no reply. For every reason I felt that the next word must come from him.

It was an unexpected one.

"That was Doctor Pool unregenerate and more heedful of the things of this world than of those of the world to come. You have to deal with quite a different man now. It is of that very sin I am now repenting in sackcloth and ashes. I live but to expiate it. Something has been done toward accomplishing this, but not enough. I have been played upon, used. This I will avenge. New sin is a poor apology for an old one."

I scarcely heeded him. I was again straining my ears to catch a smothered sob or a frightened moan.

"What are you listening for?" he asked.

"For the sound of little Gwendolen's voice. It is worth fifty thousand dollars, you remember. Why shouldn't I listen for it? Besides, I have a real and uncontrollable sympathy for the child. I am determined to restore her to her home. Your blasphemous babble of a changed heart does not affect me. You are after a larger haul than the sum offered by Mr. Ocumpaugh. You want some of Mrs. Ocumpaugh's fortune. I have suspected it from the first."

"I want? Little you know what I want"--then quickly, convincingly: "You are strangely deceived. Little Miss Ocumpaugh is not here."

"What is that I hear, then?" was the quick retort with which I hailed the sigh, unmistakably from infantile lips, which now rose from some place very much nearer us than the hollow regions overhead toward which my ears had been so long turned.

"That!" He flashed with uncontrollable passion, and if I am not mistaken clenched his hands so violently as to bury his nails in his flesh. "Would you like to see what that is? Come!"--and taking up the lamp, he moved, much to my surprise as well as to my intense interest, toward the door of the small cupboard where I had myself slept when in his service.

That he still meditated some deviltry which would call for my full presence of mind to combat successfully, I did not in the least doubt. Yet the agitation under which I crossed the floor was more the result of an immediate anticipation of seeing--and in this place of all others in the world--the child about whom my thoughts had clung so persistently for forty-two hours, than of any results to myself in the way of injury or misfortune. Though the room was small and my passage across it necessarily short, I had time to remember Mrs. Ocumpaugh's pitiful countenance as I saw it gazing in agony of expectation from her window overlooking the river, and to catch again the sounds, less true and yet strangely thrilling, of Mrs. Carew's voice as she said: "A tragedy at my doors and I occupied with my own affairs!" Nor was this all. A recollection of Miss Graham's sorrow came up before my eyes also, and, truest of all, most penetrating to me of all the loves which seemed to encompass this rare and winsome infant, the infinite tenderness with which I once saw Mr. Ocumpaugh lift her to his breast, during one of my interviews with him at Homewood.

All this before the door had swung open. Afterward, I saw nothing and thought of nothing but the small figure
lying in the spot where I had once pillowed my own head, and with no more luxuries or even comforts about her than had been my lot under this broad but by no means hospitable roof.

A bare wall, a narrow cot, a table with a bottle and glass on it and the child in the bed—that was all. But God knows, it was enough to me at that breathless moment; and advancing eagerly, I was about to stoop over the little head sunk deep in its pillow, when the old man stepped between and with a short laugh remarked:

"There's no such hurry. I have something to say first, in explanation of the anger you have seen me display; an anger which is unseemly in a man professing to have conquered the sins and passions of lost humanity. I did follow this child. You were right in saying that it was my horse and buggy which were seen in the wake of the wagon which came from the region of Homewood and lost itself in the cross-roads running between the North River and the Sound. For two days and a night I followed it, through more difficulties than I could relate in an hour, stopping in lonely woods, or at wretched taverns, watching, waiting for the transfer of the child, whose destination I was bound to know even if it cost me a week of miserable travel without comfortable food or decent lodging. I could hear the child cry out from time to time—an assurance that I was not following a will-o’-the-wisp—but not till to-day, not till very late to-day, did any words pass between me and the man and woman who drove the wagon. At Fordham, just as I suspected them of making final efforts to escape me, they came to a halt and I saw the man get out.

"I immediately got out too. As we faced each other, I demanded what the matter was. He appeared reckless. 'Are you a doctor?' he asked. I assured him that I was. At which he blurted out: 'I don't know why you've been following us so long, and I don't care. I've got a job for you. A child in our wagon is ill.'"

With a start I attempted to look over the old man's shoulder toward the bed. But the deep, if irregular, breathing of the child reassured me, and I turned to hear the doctor out.

"This gave me my chance. 'Let me see her,' I cried. The man's eye lowered. I did not like his face at all. 'If it's anything serious,' he growled, 'I shall cut. It isn't my flesh and blood nor yet my old woman's there. You'll have to find some place for the brat besides my wagon if it's anything that won't get cured without nu'ssin'. So come along and have a look.' I followed him, perfectly determined to take the child under my own care, sick or well. 'Where were you going to take her?' I asked. I didn't ask who she was; why should I? 'I don't know as I am obliged to tell,' was his surly reply. 'Where we are going oursel's,' he reluctantly added. 'But not to nu'ss. I've no time for nu'ssin' brats, nor my wife neither. We have a journey to make. Sarah!'--this to his wife, for by this time we were beside the wagon,--'lift up the flap and hold the youngster's hand out. Here's a doctor who will tell us if it's fever or not.' A puny hand and wrist were thrust out. I felt the pulse and then held out my arms. 'Give me the child,' I commanded. 'She's sick enough for a hospital.' A grunt from the woman within, an oath from the man, and a bundle was presently put in my arms, from which a little moan escaped as I strode with it toward my buggy. 'I do not ask your name,' I called back to the man who reluctantly followed me. 'Mine is Doctor Pool and I live in Yonkers.' He muttered something about not peachin' on a poor man who was really doin' an unfortunate a kindness, and then slunk hurriedly back and was gone, wagon, wife and all, by the time I had whipped up my tired old nag and turned about toward Yonkers. But I had the child safe and sound in my arms, and my fears of its fate were relieved. It was not well, but I anticipated nothing serious. When it moaned I pressed it a little closer to my breast and that was all. In three-quarters of an hour we were in Yonkers. In fifteen minutes I had it on this bed, and had begun to unroll the shawl in which it was closely wrapped. Did you ever see the child about whom there has been all this coil?"

"Yes, about three years ago."

"Three years! I have seen her within a fortnight; yet I could carry that young one in my arms for a whole hour without the least suspicion that I was making a fool of myself."

Quickly slipping aside, he allowed me to approach the bed and take my first look at the sleeping child's face. It was a sweet one but I did not need the hint he had given me to find the features strange, and lacking every characteristic of those of Gwendolen Ocumpaugh. Yet as the cutting off of the hair will often change the whole aspect of the face—and this child's hair was short—I was stooping in great excitement to notice more particularly the contour of cheek and chin which had given individuality to the little heiress, when the doctor touched me on the arm and drew my attention to a pair of little trousers and a shirt which were hanging on the door behind me.

"Those are the clothes I came upon under that great shawl. The child I have been following and whom I have brought into my house under the impression it was Gwendolen Ocumpaugh is not even a girl."

VII

"FIND THE CHILD!"

I could well understand the wrath to which this man had given way, by the feeling which now took hold of my own breast.

"A boy!" I exclaimed.

"A boy."
Still incredulous, I leaned over the child and lifted into the full light of the lamp one of the little hands I saw lying outside of the coverlet. There was no mistaking it for a girl's hand, let alone a little lady's.

"So we are both fools!" I vociferated in my unbounded indignation, careful however to lay the small hand gently back on the panting breast. And turning away both from the doctor and his small patient, I strolled back into the office.

The bubble whose gay colors I had followed with such avidity had burst in my face with a vengeance.

But once from under the influence of the doctor's sarcastic eye, my better nature reasserted itself. Wheeling about, I threw this question back:

"If that is a boy and a stranger, where is Gwendolen Ocumpaugh?"

A moan from the bed and a hurried movement on the part of the doctor, who took this opportunity to give the child another dose of medicine, were my sole response. Waiting till the doctor had finished his task and drawn back from the bedside, I repeated the question and with increased emphasis:

"Where, then, is Gwendolen Ocumpaugh?"

Still the doctor did not answer, though he turned my way and even stepped forward; his long visage, cadaverous from fatigue and the shock of his disappointment, growing more and more somber as he advanced. But once from under the influence of the doctor's sarcastic eye, my better nature reasserted itself. Wheeling about, I threw this question back:

"Where is the child idolized by Mr. Ocumpaugh and mourned to such a degree by his almost maddened wife that they say she will die if the little girl is not found?"

The threat in my tones brought a response at last,—a response which astonished me.

"Have I not said that I do not know? Do you not believe me? Do you think me as blind to-day to truth and honor as I was six years ago? Have you no idea of repentance and regeneration from sin? You are a detective. Find me that child. You shall have money--hundreds--thousands--if you can bring me proofs of her being yet alive. If the Hudson has swallowed her--" here his figure rose, dilated and took on a majesty which impressed itself upon me through all my doubts--"I will have vengeance on whoever has thus dared the laws of God and man as I would on the foulest murderer in the foulest slums of that city which breeds wickedness in high places as in low. I lock hands no longer with Belial. Find me the child, or make me at least to know the truth!"

There was no doubting the passion which drove these words hot from his lips. I recognized at last the fanatic whom Miss Graham had so graphically described in relating her extraordinary adventure on the bridge; and met him with this one question, which was certainly a vital one:

"Who dropped a shoe from the little one's closet, into the water under the dock? Did you?"

"No." His reply came quick and sharp.

"But," I insisted, "you have had something to do with this child's disappearance."

He did not answer. A sullen look was displacing the fire of resolve in the eyes I saw sinking slowly before mine.

"I will not acknowledge it," he muttered; adding, however, in what was little short of a growl: "Not yet, not till it becomes my duty to avenge innocent blood."

"You foretold the date."

"Drop it."

"You were in league with the abductor," I persisted. "I declare to your face, in spite of all the vaunted scruples with which you seek to blind me to your guilt, that you were in league with the abductor, knowing what money Mrs. Ocumpaugh would pay. Only he was too smart for you, and perhaps too unscrupulous. You would stop short of murder, now that you have got religion. But his conscience is not so nice and so you fear--"

"You do not know what I fear and I am not going to tell you. It is enough that I am conscious of my own uprightness and that I say, Find the child! You have incentive enough."

It was true and it was growing stronger every minute.

"Confine yourself to such clues as are apparent to every eye," he now admonished me with an eagerness that seemed real. "If they are pointed by some special knowledge you believe yourself to have gained, that is all the better--perhaps. I do not propose to say."

I saw that he had uttered his ultimatum.

"Very good," said I. "I have, nevertheless, one more question to ask which relates to those very clues. You can not refuse to answer it if you are really desirous of aiding me in my efforts. Where did you first come upon the wagon which you followed so many hours in the belief that it held Gwendolen Ocumpaugh?"

He mused a moment with downcast head, his nervous frame trembling with the force with which he threw his whole weight on the hand he held outspread on the table before him. Then he calmly replied:

"I will tell you that. At the gate of Mrs. Carew's grounds. You know them? They adjoin the Ocumpaugh's on the left."

My surprise made me lower my head but not so quickly that I did not catch the oblique glint of his eye as he
mentioned the name which I was so little prepared to hear in this connection.

"I was in my buggy on the highroad," he continued. "There was a constant passing by of all kinds of vehicles on their way to and from the Ocumpaugh entertainment, but none that attracted my attention till I caught sight of the covered wagon I have endeavored to describe, being driven out of the adjoining grounds. Then I pricked up my ears, for a child was crying inside in the smothered way that tells of a hand laid heavily over the mouth. I thought I knew what child this was, but you have been a witness to my disappointment after forty-eight hours of travel behind that wretched wagon."

"It came out of Mrs. Carew's grounds?" I repeated, ignoring everything but the one important fact. "And during the time, you say, when Mrs. Ocumpaugh's guests were assembling? Did you see any other vehicle leave by the same gate at or before that time?"

"Yes, a carriage. It appeared to have no one in it. Indeed, I know that it was empty, for I peered into it as it rolled by me down the street. Of course I do not know what might have been under the seats."

"Nothing," was my sharp retort. "That was the carriage in which Mrs. Carew had come up from the train. Did it pass out before the wagon?"

"Yes, by some minutes."

"There is nothing, then, to be gained by that."

"There does not seem to be."

Was his accent in uttering this simple phrase peculiar? I looked up to make sure. But his face, which had been eloquent with one feeling or another during every minute of this long interview till the present instant, looked strangely impassive, and I did not know how to press the question hovering on my lips.

"You have given me a heavy task," I finally remarked, "and you offer very little assistance in the way of conjecture. Yet you must have formed some."

He toyed with his beard, combing it with his nervous, muscular fingers, and as I watched how he lingered over the tips, caressing them before he dropped them, I felt that he was toying with my perplexities in much the same fashion and with an equal satisfaction. Angry and out of all patience with him, I blurted out:

"I will do without your aid. I will solve this mystery and earn your money if not that of Mr. Ocumpaugh, with no assistance save that afforded by my own wits."

"I expect you will," he retorted; and for the first time since I burst in upon him like one dropping from the clouds through the unapproachable doorway on the upper floor, he lost that look of extreme tension which had nerved his aged figure into something of the aspect of youth. With it vanished his impressiveness. It was simply a tired old man I now followed upstairs to the side door. As I paused to give him a final nod and an assurance of intended good faith toward him, he made a kindly enough gesture in the direction of my old room below and said:

"Don't worry about the little fellow down there. He'll come out all right. I shan't visit on him the extravagance of my own folly. I am a Christian now." And with this encouraging remark he closed the door and I found myself alone in the dark alley.

My first sense of relief came from the coolness of the night air on my flushed forehead and cheeks. After the stifling atmosphere of this underground room, reeking with the fumes of the lamp and the heat of a struggle which his dogged confidence in himself had made so unequal, it was pleasurable just to sense the quiet and the cool of the night and feel myself released from the bondage of a presence from which I had frequently recoiled but had never thoroughly felt the force of till to-night; my next, from the touch and voice of my partner who at that moment rose from before the basement windows where he had evidently been lying for a long time outstretched.

"What have you two been doing down there?" was his very natural complaint. "I tried to listen, I tried to see; but beyond a few scattered words when your voices rose to an excited pitch, I have learned nothing but that you were in no danger save from the overthrow of your scheme. That has failed, has it not? You would have interrupted me long ago if you had found the child."

"Yes," I acknowledged, drawing him down the alley, "I have failed for to-night, but I start afresh to-morrow. Though how I can rest idle for nine hours, not knowing under what roof, if under any, that doomed innocent may be lying, I do not know."

"You must rest; you are staggering with fatigue now."

"Not a bit of it, only with uncertainty. I don't see my way. Let us go down street and see if any news has come over the wires since I left Homewood."

"But first, what a spooky old house that is! And what did the old gentleman have to say of your tumbling in on him from space without a 'By your leave' or even an 'Excuse me'? Tell me about it."

I told him enough to allay his curiosity. That was all I thought necessary,—and he seemed satisfied. Jupp is a good fellow, quite willing to confine himself to his particular end of the business which does not include the thinking end. Why should it?
There was no news—this we soon learned—only some hints of a contemplated move on the part of the police in a
district where some low characters had been seen dragging along a resisting child of an unexpectedly refined
appearance. As no one could describe this child and as I had refused from the first to look upon this case as one of
ordinary abduction, I laid little stress on the report, destined though it was to appear under startling head-lines on the
morrow, and startled my more credulous partner quite out of his usual equanimity, by ordering him on our arrival at
the station to buy me a ticket for ----, as I was going back to Homewood.

"To Homewood, so late!"

"Exactly. It will not be late there—or if it is, anxious hearts make light sleepers."

His shoulders rose a trifle, but he bought the ticket.

VIII

"PHILO! PHILO! PHILO!"

Never have I felt a weirder sensation than when I stepped from the cars on to the solitary platform from which a
few hours before I had seen the little nursery-governess depart for New York. The train, soon to disappear in the
darkness of the long perspective, was all that gave life and light to the scene, and when it was gone, nothing
remained to relieve the gloom or to break the universal stillness save the quiet lap of the water and the moaning of
the wind through the trees which climbed the heights to Homewood.

I had determined to enter if possible by way of the private path, though I expected to find it guarded against just
such intrusion. In approaching it I was given a full view of the river and thus was in a position to note that the dock
and adjoining banks were no longer bright with lanterns in the hands of eager men bending with fixed eyes over the
flowing waters. The search which had kept so many busy at this spot for well on to two days had been abandoned;
and the darkness seemed doubly dark and the silence doubly oppressive in contrast.

Yet hope spoke in the abandonment; and with renewed spirit and a more than lively courage, I turned toward the
little gate through which I had passed twice before that day. As I expected, a silent figure rose up from the shadows
to prevent me; but it fell back at the mention of my name and business, thus proving the man to be in the confidence
of Mrs. Ocumpaugh or, at the least, in that of Miss Porter.

"I am come for a social chat with the coachman," I explained. "Lights burn late in such extensive stables. Don't
worry about me. The people at the house are in sympathy with my investigation."

Thus we stretch the truth at great crises.

"I know you," was the answer. "But keep away from the house. Our orders are imperative to allow no one to
approach it again to-night, except with the child in hand or with such news as would gain instant admission."

"Trust me," said I, as I went up the steps.

It was so dark between the hedge-rows that my ascent became mere groping. I had a lantern in my pocket which
I had taken from Jupp, but I did not choose to make use of it. I preferred to go on and up, trusting to my instinct to
tell me when I had reached a fresh flight of steps.

A gleam of light from Mrs. Carew's upper windows was the first intimation I received that I was at the top of the
bank, and in another moment I was opposite the gap in the hedge opening upon her grounds.

For no particular reason that I know of, I here paused and took a long survey of what was, after all, nothing but a
cluster of shadows broken here and there by squares of subdued light I felt a vague desire to enter—to see and talk
again with the charming woman whose personality had made such an impression upon me, if only to understand the
peculiar feelings which those indistinguishable walls awakened, and why such a sense of anticipation should disturb
my admiration of this woman and the delight which I had experienced in every accent of her trained and exquisite
voice.

I was standing very still and in almost total darkness. The shock, therefore, was great when, in finally making up
my mind to move, I became conscious of a presence near me, totally indiscernible and as silent as myself.

Whose?

No watchman, or he would have spoken at the rustle I made stumbling back against the hedge-row. Some
marauder, then, or a detective, like myself? I would not waste time in speculating; better to decide the question at
once, for the situation was eery, the person, whoever he was, stood so near and so still, and so directly in the way of
my advance.

Drawing the lantern from my pocket, I pushed open the slide and flashed the light on the immovable figure
before me. The face I beheld staring into mine was one quite unknown to me, but as I took in its expression, my arm
gradually fell, and with it the light from the man's features, till face and form were lost again in the darkness, leaving
in my disturbed mind naught but an impression; but such an impression!

The countenance thus flashed upon my vision must have been a haunting one at any time, but seen as I saw it, at
a moment of extreme self-abandonment, the effect was startling. Yet I had sufficient control over myself to utter a
word or two of apology, which was not answered, if it was even heard.
A more exact description may be advisable. The person whom I thus encountered hesitating before Mrs. Carew's house was a man of meager build, sloping shoulders and handsome but painfully pinched features. That he was a gentleman of culture and the nicest refinement was evident at first glance; that this culture and refinement were at this moment under the dominion of some fierce thought or resolve was equally apparent, giving to his look an absorption which the shock attending the glare I had thus suddenly thrown on his face could not immediately dispel.

Dazed by an encounter for which he seemed even less prepared than myself, he stood with his heart in his face, if I may so speak, and only gradually came to himself as the sense of my proximity forced itself in upon his suffering and engrossed mind. When I saw that he had quite emerged from his dream, I dropped the light. But I did not forget his look; I did not forget the man, though I hastened to leave him, in my desire to fulfill the purpose for which I had entered these grounds at so late an hour.

My plan was, as I have said, to visit the Ocumpaugh stables and have a chat with the coachman. I had no doubt of my welcome and not much doubt of myself. Yet as I left the vicinity of Mrs. Carew's cottage and came upon the great house of the Ocumpaugh's looming in the moonlight above its marble terraces, I felt impressed as never before both by the beauty and magnificence of the noble pile, and shrank with something like shame from the presumption which had led me to pit my wits against a mystery having its birth in so much grandeur and material power. The prestige of great wealth as embodied in this superb structure well-nigh awed me from my task and I was passing the twin pergolas and flower-bordered walks with hesitating foot, when I heard through one of the open windows a cry which made me forget everything but our common heritage of sorrow and the equal hold it has on high and low.

"Philo!" the voice rang out in a misery to wring the heart of the most callous. "Philo! Philo!"

Mr. Ocumpaugh's name called aloud by his suffering wife. Was she in delirium? It would seem so; but why Philo! always Philo! and not once Gwendolen?

With hushed steps, ears ringing and heart palpitating with new and indefinable sensations, I turned into the road to the stables.

There were men about and I caught one glimpse of a maid's pretty head looking from one of the rear windows, but no one stopped me, and I reached the stable just as a man came sauntering out to take his final look at the weather.

It was the fellow I sought, Thomas the coachman.

I had not miscalculated the nature of my man. In ten minutes we were seated together on an open balcony, smoking and beguiling the time with a little harmless gossip. After a free and easy discussion of the great event, mingled with the naturally-to-be-expected criticism of the police, we proceeded under my guidance to those particulars for which I had risked losing this very valuable hour.

He mentioned Mrs. Ocumpaugh; I mentioned Mrs. Carew.

"A beautiful woman," I remarked.

I thought he looked astonished. "She beautiful?" was his doubtful rejoinder. "What do you think of Mrs. Ocumpaugh?"

"She is handsome, too, but in a different way."

"I should think so. I've driven rich and I've driven poor. I've even sat on the box in front of an English duchess, but never have I seen such features as Mrs. Ocumpaugh's. That's why I consent to drive an American millionaire's wife when I might be driving the English nobility."

"A statue!" said I; "cold!"

"True enough, but one you never tire of looking at. Besides, she can light up wonderfully. I've seen her when she was all a-quiver, and lovely as the loveliest. And when do you think that was?"

"When she had her child in her arms."

I spoke in lowered tones as befitted the suggestion and the circumstances.

"No," he drawled, between thoughtful puffs of smoke; "when Mr. Ocumpaugh sat on the seat beside her. This, when I was driving the victoria. I often used to make excuse for turning my head about so as to catch a glimpse of her smile at some fine view and the way she looked up at him to see if he was enjoying it as much as she. I like women who love their husbands."

"And he?"

"Oh, she has nothing to complain of in him. He worships the ground she walks on; and he more than worshiped the child."

"Here _his_ voice fell.

I brought the conversation back as quickly as I could to Mrs. Carew.

"You like pale women," said I. "Now I like a woman who looks plain one minute, and perfectly charming the next."

"That's what people say of Mrs. Carew. I know of lots who admire that kind. The little girl for one."
"Gwendolen? Was she attracted to Mrs. Carew?"

"Attracted? I've seen her go to her from her mother's lap like a bird to its nest. Many a time have I driven the carriage with Mrs. Ocumpaugh sitting up straight inside, and her child curled up in this other woman's arms with not a look or word for her mother."

"How did Mrs. Ocumpaugh seem to like that?" I asked between puffs of my cigar.

"Oh, she's one of the cold ones, you know! At least you say so; but I feel sure that for the last three years--that is, ever since this woman came into the neighborhood--her heart has been slowly breaking. This last blow will kill her."

I thought of the moaning cry of "Philo! Philo!" which at intervals I still seemed to hear issue from that upper window in the great house, and felt that there might be truth in his fears.

But it was of Mrs. Carew I had come to talk and not of Mrs. Ocumpaugh.

"Children's fancies are unaccountable," I sententiously remarked; "but perhaps there is some excuse for this one. Mrs. Carew has what you call magnetism--a personality which I should imagine would be very appealing to a child. I never saw such expression in a human face. Whatever her mood, she impresses each passing feeling upon you as the one reality of her life. I can not understand such changes, but they are very fascinating."

"Oh, they are easy enough to understand in her case. She was an actress once. I myself have seen her on the stage--in London. I used to admire her there."

"An actress!" I repeated, somewhat taken aback.

"Yes, I forget what name she played under. But she's a very great lady now; in with all the swells and rich enough to own a yacht if she wanted to."

"But a widow."

"Oh, yes, a widow."

I let a moment of silence pass, then nonchalantly remarked:

"Why is she going to Europe?"

But this was too much for my simple-hearted friend. He neither knew nor had any conjecture ready. But I saw that he did not deplore her resolve. His reason for this presently appeared.

"If the little one is found, the mother will want all her caresses. Let Mrs. Carew hug the boy that God in his mercy has thrown into her arms and leave other children to their mothers."

I rose to leave, when I bethought me and stopped to ask another question.

"Who is the gentleman I have seen about here--a man with a handsome face, but very pale and thin in his appearance, so much so that it is quite noticeable?"

"Do you mean Mr. Rathbone?"

"I do not know his name. A light complexioned man, who looks as if greatly afflicted by some disease or secret depression."

"Oh, that is Mr. Rathbone, sure. He is sickly-looking enough and not without his trouble, too. They say--but it's all gossip, of course--that he has set his heart on the widow."

"Mrs. Carew?"

"Of course, who else?"

"And she?"

"Why, she would be a fool to care for him, unless--"

"Unless what?"

Thomas laughed--a little uneasily, I could not help thinking.

"I'm afraid we're talking scandal," said he. "You know the relationship?"

"What relationship?"

"Why, his relationship to the family. He is Gwendolen's cousin and I have heard it said that he's named after her in Madam Ocumpaugh's will."

"O, I see! The next heir, eh?"

"Yes, to the Rathbone property."

"So that if she is not found--"

"Your sickly man, in that case, would be well worth the marrying."

"Is Mrs. Carew so fond of money as all that? I thought she was a woman of property."

"She is; but it takes money to make some men interesting. He isn't handsome enough, or independent enough to go entirely on his own merits. Besides, he has a troop of relatives hanging on to him--blood-suckers who more than eat up his salary."

"A business man, then?"

"Yes, in some New York house. He was always very fond of Gwendolen, and I am not surprised to hear that he is very much cut up by our trouble. I always thought well of Mr. Rathbone myself,"--which same ended the
conversation so far as my interest in it was concerned.

IX

THE BUNGALOW

As soon as I could break away and leave him I did, and betook myself to Mrs. Carew's house. My resolve was taken. Late as it was, I would attempt an interview with her. The lights still burning above and below gave me the necessary courage. Yet I was conscious of some embarrassment in presenting my name to the astonished maid, who was in the act of extinguishing the hall-light when my vigorous ring prevented her. Seeing her doubtful look and the hesitation with which she held the door, I told her that I would wait outside on the porch till she had carried up my name to Mrs. Carew. This seemed to relieve her and in a moment I was standing again under the vines waiting for permission to enter the house. It came very soon, and I had to conquer a fresh embarrassment at the sight of Mrs. Carew's nimble and gracious figure descending the stairs in all eagerness to greet me.

"What is it?" she asked, running hastily forward so that we met in the center of the hall. "Good news? Nothing else could have brought you back again so soon--and at an hour so late."

There was a dangerous naivete in the way she uttered the last three words which made me suspect the actress. Indeed I was quite conscious as I met her thrilling and expressive glance, that I should never feel again the same confidence in her sincerity. My judgment had been confounded and my insight rendered helpless by what I had heard of her art, and the fact that she had once been a capable player of "parts."

But I was man enough and detective enough not to betray my suspicion, now that I was brought face to face with her. It had always been latent in my breast, even in the very midst of my greatest admiration for her. Yet I had never acknowledged to myself of what I suspected her, nor did I now--not quite--not enough to give that point to my attack which would have insured me immediate victory or defeat. I was obliged to feel my way and so answered, with every appearance of friendly confidence:

"I fear then that I shall be obliged to ask your pardon. I have no good news; rather what might be called, if not bad, of a very perplexing character. The child has been traced"--here I purposely let my voice halt for an instant--"here."

"Here?" her eyes opened, her lips parted in a look of surprise so ingenuous that involuntarily I felt forced to add, by way of explanation:

"The child, I mean, who was carried screaming along the highway in a wagon and for whom the police--and others--have for two days been looking."

"Oh!" she ejaculated with a slight turn of her head aside as she motioned me toward a chair. "And is that child Gwendolen? Or don't you know?" She was all eagerness as she again faced me.

"That will be known to-morrow," I rejoined, resisting the beautiful brightness of her face with an effort that must have left its mark on my own features; for she smiled with unconscious triumph as she held my eyes for a minute in hers saying softly, "O how you excite me! Tell me more. Where was the wagon found? Who is with it? And how much of all this have you told Mrs. Ocumpaugh?"

With the last question she had risen, involuntarily, it seemed, and as though she would rush to her friend if I did not at once reassure her of that friend's knowledge of a fact which seemed to throw a gleam of hope upon a situation hitherto entirely unrelieved.

"Mrs. Ocumpaugh has been told nothing," I hastily returned, answering the last and most important question first. "Nor must she be; at least not till certainty replaces doubt. She is in a critical state, I am told. To rouse her hopes to-night only to dash them again to-morrow would be cruel policy."

With her eyes still on my face, Mrs. Carew slowly reseated herself. "Then there are doubts," she faltered; "doubts of its being Gwendolen?"

"There is always doubt," I replied, and openly paused in manifest non-committal.

"Oh!" she somewhat wildly exclaimed, covering her face with her hands--beautiful hands covered with jewels--"what suspense! what bitter and cruel suspense! I feel it almost as much as if it were my Harry!" was the final cry with which she dropped them again. And she did feel it. Her features had blanched and her form was shaking. "But you have not answered my questions as to where this wagon is at present and under whose care? Can't you see how anxious I must be about that--if it should prove to be Gwendolen?"

"Mrs. Carew, if I could tell you that, I could tell you more; we shall both have to wait till to-morrow. Meanwhile, I have a favor to ask. Have you by any chance the means of entrance to the bungalow? I have a great and inappeasable desire to see for myself if all the nooks and corners of that place have given up their secrets. It's an egotistical desire, no doubt--and may strike you as folly of the rankest--but we detectives have learned to trust nobody in our investigations, and I shall never be satisfied till I have looked this whole spot over inch by inch for the clue which may yet remain there. If there is a clue I must find it."

"Clue?" She was looking at me a little breathlessly. "Clue to what? Then she wasn't in the wagon; you are still
seeking her--"

"Always seeking her," I put in.

"But surely not in the bungalow!" Mrs. Carew's expression was one of extreme surprise. "What can you find there?"

"I do not know. But I want to look. I can go to the house for a key, but it is late; and it seems unpardonable to disturb Mrs. Ocumpaugh. Yet I shall have to do this if you have not a key; for I shall not sleep till I have satisfied myself that nothing can be discovered on the immediate scene of Gwendolen's disappearance, to help forward the rescue we both are so intent upon."

"You are right," was the hesitating reply I received. "I have a key; I will fetch it and if you do not mind, I will accompany you to the bungalow."

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure," I replied with my best bow; white lies come easy in our trade.

"I will not keep you a minute," she said, rising and going into the hall. But in an instant she was back. "A word to my maid and a covering for my head," she explained, "and I will be with you." Her manner pointed unmistakably to the door.

I had no alternative but to step out on the porch to await her. But she was true to her word and in a moment she had joined me, with the key in her hand.

"Oh, what adventures!" was her breathless cry. "Shall I ever forget this dreadful, this interminable week! But it is dark. Even the moon is clouded over. How shall we see? There are no lights in the bungalow."

"I have a lantern in my pocket. My only hope is that no stray gleam from it may pierce the shrubbery and bring the police upon us."

"Do you fear the police?" she chatted away, almost as a child might.

"No; but I want to do my work alone. There will be little glory or little money in it if they share any of my discoveries."

"Ah!" It was an irrepressible exclamation, or so it seemed: but I should not have noted it if I had not caught, or persuaded myself that I had caught, the oblique glint from her eye which accompanied it. But it was very dark just at this time and I could be sure of nothing but that she kept close to my side and seemed more than once on the point of addressing me in the short distance we traversed before reaching the bungalow. But nothing save inarticulate murmurs left her lips and soon we were too busy, in our endeavors to unlock the door, to think of conversation.

The key she had brought was rusty. Evidently she had not often made use of it. But after a few futile efforts I succeeded in making it work, and we stepped into the small building in a silence that was only less profound than the darkness in which we instantly found ourselves enveloped. Light was under my hand, however, and in another moment there opened before us the small square room whose every feature had taken on a ghostly and unfamiliar air from the strange hour and the unwonted circumstances. I saw how her impressionable nature was affected by the scene, and made haste to assume the offhand air I thought most likely to overcome her apprehension. But the effect of the blank walls before her, relieved, but in no reassuring way, by the long dark folds of the rugs hanging straight down over the mysterious partition, held its own against my well-meant efforts, and I was not surprised to hear her voice falter as she asked what I expected to find there.

I pointed to a chair and said:

"If you will sit down, I will show you, not what I expect to find, but how a detective goes about his work. Whatever our expectations, however small or however great, we pay full attention to details. Now the detail which has worried me in regard to this place is the existence of a certain space in this building unaccounted for by these four walls; in other words, the portion which lies behind these rugs,"--and throwing aside the same, I let the flame from my lantern play over the walled-up space which I had before examined with little satisfaction. "This partition," I continued, "seems as firm as any of the walls, but I want to make sure that it hides nothing. If the child should be in some hole back of this partition, what a horror and what an outrage!"

"But it is impossible!" came almost in a shriek from the woman behind me. "The opening is completely walled up. I have never known of its being otherwise. It looked like that when I came here three years ago. There is no possible passage through that wall."

"Why was it ever closed up? Do you know?"

"Not exactly. The family are very reticent about it. Some fancy of Mr. Ocumpaugh's father, I believe. He was an odd man; they tell all manner of stories about him. If anything offended him, he hid himself of it immediately. He took a distaste to that end of the hut, as they used to call it in the old days before it was remodeled to suit the house, so he had it walled up. That is all we know about it."

"I wish I could see behind that wall," I muttered, dropping back the rug I had all this time held in my hand. "I feel some mystery here which I can not grasp." Then as I flashed my lantern about in every direction with no visible result, added with the effort which accompanies such disappointments: "There is nothing here, Mrs. Carew. Though
it is the scene of the child's disappearance it gives me nothing."

X

TELENTATION

The sharp rustle of her dress as she suddenly rose struck upon my ear.

"Then let us go," she cried, with just a slight quiver of eagerness in her wonderful voice. I comprehended its culture now. "The place is ghostly at this hour of the night. I believe that I am really afraid."

With a muttered reassurance, I allowed the full light of the lantern to fall directly on her face. She was afraid. There was no other explanation possible for her wild staring eyes and blue quivering lips. For the instant I hardly knew her; then her glance rose to mine and she smiled and it was with difficulty I refrained from acknowledging in words my appreciation of her wonderful flexibility of expression.

"You are astonished to see me so affected," she said. "It is not so strange as you think--it is superstition--the horror of what once happened here--the reason for that partition--I know the whole story, for all my attempts to deny it just now. The hour, too, is unfortunate--the darkness--your shifting, mysterious light. It was late like this--and dark--with just the moon to illumine the scene, when she--Mr. Trevitt, do you want to know the story of this place?--the old, much guessed-at, never-really-understood story which led first to its complete abandonment, then to the building of that dividing wall and finally to the restoration of this portion and of this alone? Do you?"

Her eagerness, in such startling contrast to the reticence she had shown on this very subject a few minutes before, affected me peculiarly. I wanted to hear the story--any one would who had listened to the gossip of this neighborhood for years, but--

She evidently did not mean to give me time to understand my own hesitation.

"I have the whole history--the touching, hardly-to-be-believed history--up at my house at this very moment. It was written by--no, I will let you guess."

The naivete of her smile made me forget the force of its late expression.

"Mr. Ocumpaugh?" I ventured.

"Which Mr. Ocumpaugh? There have been so many." She began slowly, naturally, to move toward the door.

"I can not guess."

"Then I shall have to tell you. It was written by the one who--Come! I will tell you outside. I haven't any courage here."

"But I have."

"You haven't read the story."

"Never mind; tell me who the writer was."

"Mr. Ocumpaugh's father; he, by whose orders this partition was put up."

"Oh, you have his story--written--and by himself! You are fortunate, Mrs. Carew."

I had turned the lantern from her face, but not so far that I did not detect the deep flush which dyed her whole countenance at these words.

"I am," she emphatically returned, meeting my eyes with a steady look I was not sufficiently expert with women's ways, or at all events with this woman's ways, to understand. "Seldom has such a tale been written--seldom, let us thank God, has there been an equal occasion for it."

"You interest me," I said.

And she did. Little as this history might have to do with the finding of Gwendolen, I felt an almost imperative necessity of satisfying my curiosity in regard to it, though I knew she had deliberately roused this curiosity for a purpose which, if not comprehensible to me, was of marked importance to her and not altogether for the reason she had been pleased to give me. Possibly it was on account of this last mentioned conviction that I allowed myself to be so interested.

"It is late," she murmured with a final glance towards those dismal hangings which in my present mood I should not have been so greatly surprised to see stir under her look. "However, if you will pardon the hour and accept a seat in my small library, I will show you what only one other person has seen besides myself."

It was a temptation; for several reasons it was a temptation; yet--

"I want you to see why I am frightened of this place," she said, flashing her eyes upon me with an almost girlish appeal.

"I will go," said I; and following her quickly out, I locked the bungalow door, and ignoring the hand she extended toward me, dropped the key into my pocket.

I thought I heard a little gasp--the least, the smallest of sounds possible. But if so, the feeling which prompted it was not apparent in her manner or her voice as she led the way back to her house, and ushered me into a hall full of packing-boxes and the general litter accompanying an approaching departure.

"You will excuse the disorder," she cried as she piloted me through these various encumbrances to a small but
exquisitely furnished room still glorying in its full complement of ornaments and pictures. "This trouble which has
come to one I love has made it very hard for me to do anything. I feel helpless, at times, completely helpless."

The dejection she expressed was but momentary, however. In another instant she was pointing out a chair and
begging me to make myself comfortable while she went for the letter (I think she called it a letter) which I had come
there to read.

What was I to think of her? What was I to think of myself? And what would the story tell me to warrant the loss
of what might have proved a most valuable hour? I had not answered these questions when she reentered with a
bundle in her hand of discolored--I should almost call them mouldered--sheets of much crumpled paper.

"These--" she began; then, seeing me look at them with something like suspicion, she paused until she caught my
eye, when she added gravely, "these came to me from Mrs. Ocumpaugh. How she got them you will have to ask her.
I should say, judging from appearances--" Here she took a seat opposite me at a small table near which I had been
placed--"that they must have been found in some old chest or possibly in some hidden drawer of one of those
curious antique desks of which more than one was discovered in the garrets of the old house when it was pulled
down to give place to the new one."

"Is this letter, as you call it, so old?" I asked.

"It is dated thirty-five years ago."

"The garret must have been a damp one," I remarked.

She flashed me a look--I thought of it more than once afterward--and asked if she should do the reading or I.

"You," I rejoined, all afire with the prospect of listening to her remarkable voice in what I had every reason to
believe would call forth its full expression. "Only let me look at those sheets first, and understand as perfectly as I
may, just what it is you are going to read to me."

"It's an explanation written for his heirs by Mr. Ocumpaugh. The story itself," she went on, handing me over the
papers she held, "begins abruptly. From the way the sheet is torn across at the top, I judge that the narrative itself
was preceded by some introductory words now lacking. When I have read it to you, I will tell you what I think those
introductory words were."

I handed back the sheets. There seemed to be a spell in the air--possibly it arose from her manner, which was one
to rouse expectation even in one whose imagination had not already been stirred by a visit at night and in more than
commonly bewildering company to the place whose dark and hitherto unknown secret I was about to hear.

"I am ready," I said, feeling my strange position, but not anxious to change it just then for any other conceivable
one.

She drew a deep breath; again fixed me with her strange, compelling eyes, and with the final remark:

"The present no longer exists, we are back in the seventies--" began this enthralling tale.

XI
THE SECRET OF THE OLD PAVILION

I was as sane that night as I had ever been in my life. I am quite sure of this, though I had had a merry time
enough earlier in the evening with my friends in the old pavilion (that time-honored retreat of my ancestors), whose
desolation I had thought to dissipate with a little harmless revelry. Wine does not disturb my reason--the little wine I
drank under that unwholesome roof--nor am I a man given to sudden excitements or untoward impulses.

Yet this thing happened to me.

It was after leaving the pavilion. My companions had all ridden away and I was standing on the lawn beyond my
library windows, recalling my pleasure with them and gazing somewhat idly, I own, at that bare portion of the old
wall where the tree fell a year ago (the place where the moon strikes with such a glitter when it rides high, as it did
that night), when--believe it or not, it is all one to me--I became conscious of a sudden mental dread, inexplicable
and alarming, which, seizing me after an hour of unmixed pleasure and gaiety, took such a firm grip upon my
imagination that I fain would have turned my back upon the night and its influences, only my eyes would not leave
that open space of wall where I now saw pass--not the shadow, but the veritable body of a large, black, hungry-
looking dog, which, while I looked, turned into the open gateway connecting with the pavilion and disappeared.

With it went the oppression which held me spell-bound. The ice melted from my blood; I could move my limbs,
and again control my thoughts and exercise my will.

Forcing a laugh, I whistled to that dog. My companions had all ridden away and I was standing on the lawn beyond my
library windows, recalling my pleasure with them and gazing somewhat idly, I own, at that bare portion of the old
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With it went the oppression which held me spell-bound. The ice melted from my blood; I could move my limbs,
and again control my thoughts and exercise my will.

Forcing a laugh, I whistled to that dog. The lights with which the banquet had been illuminated were out, and
every servant had left the place; but the tables had not been entirely cleared; and I could well understand what had
drawn this strange animal thither. Whistling then, and whistled peremptorily; but no dog answered my call. Angry,
for the rules are strict at my stables in regard to wandering brutes, I strode toward the pavilion. Entering the great
gap in the wall where a gate had once hung, I surveyed the dismal interior before me, with feelings I could not but
consider odd in a strong man like myself. Though the wine was scarcely dry in the glass which an hour before I had
raised in this very spot amid cheers and laughter, I found it a difficult matter to reenter there now, in the dead of night, alone and without light.

For this building, harmless as it had always seemed, had been, in a way, cursed. For no reason that he ever gave, my father had doomed this ancient adjunct to our home to perpetual solitude and decay. By his will he had forbidden it to be destroyed—a wish respected by my guardians and afterward by myself—and though there was nothing to hinder its being cared for and in a manner used, the dismal influence which had pervaded the place ever since his death had, under the sensations I have mentioned, deepened into horror and an unspeakable repugnance.

Yet never having had any reason to believe myself a coward, I took boldly enough the few steps necessary to carry me inside its dismal precincts; and meeting with nothing but darkness and silence, began to whistle again for the dog I had certainly seen enter here.

But no dog appeared.

Hastening out, I took my way toward the stables. As I did so I glanced back, and again, my eyes fell on that place in the wall gleaming white in the moonlight. Again I felt the chill, the horror! Again my eyes remained glued to this one spot; and again I beheld the passing of that dog, running with jaws extended and, head held low—fearsome, uncanny, supernaturally horrible; a thing to flee from, if one could only flee instead of standing stock-still on the sward, gazing with eyes that seemed starting from their sockets till it had plunged through that gap in the wall and again disappeared.

The occult and the imaginary have never appealed to me, and the moment I felt myself a man again, I hurried on to the stables to call up my man Jared.

But half-way there I paused, struck by an odd remembrance. This father of mine, Philo Ocumpaugh, had died, or so his old servants had said, under peculiar circumstances. I had forgotten them till now—such stories make poor headway with me—but if I was not mistaken, the facts were these:

He had been ailing long, and his nurses had got used to the sight of his gaunt, white figure sitting propped up, but speechless, in the great bed opposite the stretch of blank wall in the corner bedroom, where a picture of his first wife, the wife of his youth, had once hung, but which, for some years now, had been removed to where there were fewer shadows and more sunlight. He had never been a talkative man, and in all the five years of my own memory of him, I had never heard him raise his voice except in command, or when the duties of hospitality required it. Now, with the shadow of death upon him, he was absolutely speechless, and his nurses were obliged to guess at his wishes by the movement of his hands or the direction of his eyes. Yet he was not morose, and sometimes was seen to struggle with the guards holding his tongue, as though he would fain have loosed himself from their inexorable control. Yet he never succeeded in doing so, and the nurses sat by and saw no difference in him, till suddenly the candle, posed on a table near by, flickered and went out, leaving only moonlight in the room. It was moonlight so brilliant that the place seemed brighter than before, though the beams were all concentrated on one spot, a blank space in the middle of the wall upon which those two dim orbs in the bed were fixed in an expectancy none there understood, for none knew that the summons had come, and that for him the angel of death was at that moment standing in the room.

Yet as moonlight is not the natural light for a sick man's bedside, one amongst them had risen for another candle, when something—I had never stopped to hear them say what—made him pause and look back, when he saw distinctly outlined upon the white wall-space I have mentioned, the figure—the unimaginable figure of a dog, large, fierce and hungry-looking, which dashed by and—was gone. Simultaneously a cry came from the bed, the first words for months—"Aline!"—the name of his girl-wife, dead and gone for years. All sprang; some to chase the dog, one to aid and comfort the sick man. But no dog was there, nor did he need comfort more. He had died with that cry on his lips, and as they gazed at his face, sunk low now in his pillow as if he had started up and fallen back, a dead weight, they felt the terror of the moment grow upon them till they, too, were speechless. For the aged features were drawn into lines of unspeakable anguish and horror.

But as the night passed and morning came, all these lines smoothed out, and when they buried him, those who had known him well talked of the beautiful serenity which illumined the face which, since their first remembrance of him, had carried the secret of a profound and unbroken melancholy. Of the dog, nothing was said, even in whispers, till time had hallowed that grave, and the little children about, grown to be men and women. Then the garrulity of age had its way.

This story, and the images it called up, came like a shock as I halted there, and instead of going on to the stables, I turned my steps toward the house, where I summoned from his bed a certain old servant who had lived longer in the family than myself.

Bidding him bring a lantern, I waited for him on the porch, and when he came, I told him what I had seen. Instantly I knew that it was no new story to him. He turned very pale and set down the lantern, which was shaking very visibly in his hand.
"Did you look up?" he asked; "when you were in the pavilion, I mean?"
"No; why should I? The dog was on the ground. Besides--"
"Let us go down to the pavilion," he whispered. "I want to see for myself if--if--"
"If what, Jared?"

He turned his eyes on me, but did not answer. Stooping, I lifted the lantern and put it in his hand. He was quaking like a leaf, but there was a determination in his face far beyond the ordinary. What made him quake—he who knew of this dog only by hearsay—and what, in spite of this fear, gave him such resolution? I followed in his wake to see what it was.

The moon still shone clear upon the lawn, and it was with a certain renewal of my former apprehensions that I approached the spot on the wall where I had seen what I was satisfied not to see again. But though I glanced that way—what man could have avoided it?—I perceived nothing but the bare paint, and we went on and passed in without a word, Jared leading the way.

But once on the threshold of the pavilion itself, it was for him to show the coward. Turning, he made me a gesture; one I did not understand; and seeing that I did not understand it, he said, after a fearful look around:

"Do not mind the dog; that was but an appearance. Lift your eyes to the ceiling—over there—at the extreme end toward the south—do you see—_what_ do you see?"

"Nothing," I replied, amazed at what struck me as utter folly.

"Nothing?" he repeated in a relieved voice, as he lifted up his lantern. "Ah!" came in a sort of muttered shriek from his lips, as he pointed up, here and there, along the farther ceiling, over which the light now played freely and fully. "What is that spot, and that spot, and that? They were not there to-day. I was in here before the banquet, and I would have seen. What is it? Master, what is it? They call it—"

"Well, well, what do they call it?" I asked impatiently.

"Blood! Do you not see that it is blood? What else is red and shiny and shows in such great drops—"

"Nonsense!" I vociferated, taking the lantern in my own hand. "Blood on the ceiling of my old pavilion? Where could it come from? There was no quarrel, no fight; only hilarity—"

"Where did the dog come from?" he whispered.

I dropped my arm, staring at him in mingled anger and a certain half-understood sympathy.

"You think these stains—" I began.

"Are as unreal as the dog? Yes, master."

Feeling as if I were in a dream, I tossed up the lantern again. The drops were still there, but no longer single or scattered. From side to side, the ceiling at this one end of the building oozed with the thick red moisture to which he had given so dreadful a name.

Stepping back for fear the stains would resolve themselves into rain and drop upon my forehead, I stared at Jared, who had now retreated toward the door.

"What makes you think it blood?" I demanded.

"Because some have smelt and tasted it. We have never talked about it, but this is not an uncommon occurrence. To-morrow all these stains will be gone. They come when the dog circles the wall. Whence, no one knows. It is our mystery. All the old servants have heard of it more than once. The new ones have never been told. Nor would I have told you if you had not seen the dog. It was a matter of honor with us."

I looked at him, saw that he believed every word he said, threw another glance at the ceiling, and led the way out. When we had reached the house again, I said:

"You are acquainted with the tradition underlying these appearances, as you call them. What is it?"

He could not tell me. He knew no more than he had already stated—gossip and old wives' tales. But later, a certain manuscript came into my possession through my lawyer, which I will append to this.

It was written by my unhappy father, some little time before his last illness, and given into the charge of the legal representative of our family, with the express injunction that its seal was to remain intact if for twenty years the apparition which had haunted him did not present itself to the eyes of any of his children. But if within that time his experience should repeat itself in theirs, this document was to be handed over to the occupant of Homewood. Nineteen out of the twenty years had elapsed, without the dog being seen or the ceiling of the pavilion dropping blood. But not the twentieth; hence, the document was mine.

You can easily conceive with what feelings I opened it. It was headed with this simple line:

MY STORY WHICH I CAN WRITE BUT COULD NEVER TELL.

I am cursed with an inability to speak when I am most deeply moved, either by anger or tenderness. This misfortune has wrecked my life. On the verge of old age, the sorrows and the mistakes of my early life fill my thoughts so completely that I see but one face, hear but one voice; yet when she was living—when _she_ could see and hear, my tongue was silent and she never knew. Aline! my Aline!
I married her when I was thirty-five and she eighteen. All the world knows this; but what it does not know is that I loved her--toy, playing that she was--a body without a mind--(or, so I considered her)--while she had but followed the wishes of her relatives in giving her sweet youth to a cold and reticent man who might love, indeed, but who had no power to tell that love, or even to show it in the ways which women like, and which she liked, as I found out when it was too late.

I could not help but love her. It was ingrained within me; a part of the curse of my life to love this gentle, thoughtless, alluring thing to which I had given my name. She had a smile--it did not come often--which tore at my heart-strings as it welled up, just stirring the dimples in her cheeks, and died away again in a strange and moving sweetness. Though I reckoned her at her worth; knew that her charm was all physical; that she neither did nor could understand a passion like mine, much less return it, it was none the less irresistible, and I have known myself to stand before a certain book-shelf in the turn of the stairway for many minutes together, because I knew that she would soon be coming down, and that, when she did, some ribbon from her gown would flutter by me, and I should feel the soft contact and go away happy to my books. Yet, if she stopped to look back at me, I could only return her look with one she doubtless called harsh, for she had not eyes to see below the surface.

I tell you all this, lest you may not understand. She was not your mother and you may begrudge me the affection I felt for her; if so, thrust these leaves into the fire and seek not the explanation of what has surprised you; for there is no word written here which does not find its meaning in the intense love I bore for her, my young girl-wife, and the tragedy which this love has brought into my life. She was slight in body, slight in mind and of slight feeling. I first discovered this last on the day I put my mother's ring on her finger. She laughed as I fitted it close and kissed the little hand. Not from embarrassment or childish impulse; I could have understood that; but indifferently, like one who did not know and never could. Yet I married her, and for six months lived in a fool's paradise. Then came that ball. It was held near here, very near; at one of our neighbor's, in fact. I remember that we walked, and that, coming to the driveway, I lifted her and carried her across. Not with a smile--do not think it. More likely with a frown, though my heart was warm and happy; for when I set her down, she shook herself, and I thought she did it to hide a shudder, and then I could not have spoken a word had my life depended on it.

I little knew what lay back of that shudder. Even after I had seen her dance with him, not only once, but twice, I never dreamed that her thoughts, light though they were, were not all with me. It took that morsel of paper and the plain words it contained to satisfy me of this, and then--But passion is making me incoherent. What do you know of that scrap of paper, hidden from the whole world from the moment I first read it till this hour of full confession? It fluttered from some one's hand during the dance. I did not see whose. I only saw it after it had fallen at my feet, and as it lay there open I naturally read the words. They were written by a man to a woman, urging flight and setting the hour and place for meeting. I was conscious of shame in reading it, and let these last details escape me. As I put it in my pocket I remember thinking, "Some poor devil made miserable!" for there had been hint in it of the husband. But I had no thought--I swear it before God--of who that husband was till I beheld her flit back through the open doorway, with terror in her mien and searching eyes fixed on the floor. Then hell opened before me, and I saw my happiness go down into gulfs I had never before sounded, even in imagination.

But even at that evil hour my countenance scarcely changed--I was opposite a mirror, and I caught a glimpse of myself as I moved. But there must have been some change in my voice--for when I addressed her, she started and turned her face upon me with a wild and pathetic look which knocked so at my heart that I wished I had never read those words, and so could return her the paper with no misgiving as to its contents. But having read it, I could not do this; so, beyond a petty greeting, I said nothing and let the moment pass, and she with it; for couples were dancing and she was soon again in the whirl. I am not a dancing man myself, and I had leisure to think and madden myself with contemplation of my wrecked life and questions as to what I should do to her and to him, and to the world where such things could happen. I had forgotten the details of time and place, or rather had put them out of my mind, and I would not look at the words again--could not. But as the minutes went by, the remembrance returned, startling and convincing, that the hour was two and the place--our old pavilion.

I walked about after that like a man in whose breast the sources of life are frozen. I chatted--I who never chatted--with women, and with men. I even smiled--once. That was when my little white-faced wife asked me if it were not time to go home. Even a man under torture might find strength to smile if the inquisitor should ask if he were not ready to be released.

And we went home.

I did not carry her this time across the driveway; but when we parted in the library, where I always spent an hour before retiring, I picked out a lily from a vase of flowers standing on my desk and held it out to her. She stared at it for a moment, quite as white as the lily, then she slowly put out her hand and took it. I felt no mercy after that, and bade her good-night with the remark that I should have to write far into the morning, and that she need not worry over my light, which I should not probably put out till she was half through with her night's rest.
For answer, she dropped the lily. I found it next morning lying withered and brown in the hall-way.

That light did burn far into the morning; but I was not there to trim it. Before the fatal hour had struck, I had left the house and made my way to the pavilion. As I crossed the sward I saw the gleam of a lantern at the masthead of a small boat riding near our own landing-place, and I understood where he was at this hour, and by what route he hoped to take my darling. "A route she will never travel," thought I, striving to keep out of my mind and conscience the vision of another route, another travel, which that sweet young body might take if my mood held and my purpose strengthened.

There was no moon that night, and the copse in which our pavilion stands was like a blot against the starless heavens. As I drew near it, my dog, the invariable companion of my walks, lifted a short, sharp bark from the stables. But I knew whose hand had fastened him, and I went on without giving him a thought. At the door of the pavilion I stopped. All was dark within as without, and the silence was something to overwhelm the heart. She was not there then, nor was he. But he would be coming soon, and up or down between the double hedge-rows.

I went to meet him. It was a small detail, but possibly a necessary one. In her eyes he was probably handsome and gifted with all that I openly lacked. But he was shallow and small for a man like me to be concerned about. I laughed inwardly and with very conceivable scorn as I heard the faint fall of his footsteps in the darkness. It was nearly two and he meant to be prompt.

Our coming together in that narrow path was very much what I expected it to be. I had put out my arms and touched the hedge on either side, so that he could not escape me. When I heard him drawing close, I found the voice I had not had for her, and observed very quietly and with the cold politeness of a messenger:

"My wife finds herself indisposed since the ball, and begs to be excused from joining you in the pleasant sail you proposed to her."

That, and no more; except that when he started and almost fell into my arms, I found strength to add:

"The wind blows fresh to-night; you will have no difficulty in leaving this shore. The difficulty will be to return."

I had no heart to kill him; he was young and he was frightened. I heard the sob in his throat as I dropped my arm and he went flying down to the river.

This was child's play; the rest--

My portion is to tell it; forty years ago it all befell, and till now no word of it has ever left my lips.

There was no sound of her advancing tread across the lawn as I stepped back into my own grounds to enter the pavilion. But as I left the path and put foot inside the wall, I heard a far, faint sound like the harsh closing of a door in timid hands, followed by another bark from the dog, louder and sharper than the first--for he did not recognize my Aline as mistress, though I had striven for six months to teach him the place she held in my heart.

By this I knew she was coming, and that what preparations I had to make must be made soon. They were not many. Entering the well-known place, I lit the lantern I had brought with me and set it down near the door. It cast a feeble light about the entrance, but left great shadows in the rear. This I had calculated on, and into these shadows I now stepped.

The pavilion, as you remember it, is not what it was then. I had used it little, fancying more my own library up at the house, but it was not utterly without furnishings, and to young eyes might even look attractive, with love, or fancied love, to mellow its harsh lines and lend romance to its solitude. At this hour and under these circumstances it was a dismal hole to me; and as I stood there waiting, I thought how the place fitted the deed--if deed it was to be.

I had always thought her timid, afraid of the night and all threatening things. But as I listened to the sound of her soft footfall at the door, I realized that even her breast could grow strong under the influence of a real or fancied passion. It was a shock--but I did not cry out--only set my teeth together and turned a little so that what light there was would fall on my form rather than on my face.

She entered; I felt rather than heard the tremulous push she gave to the door, and the quick drawing in of her breath as she put her foot across the threshold. These sapped my courage. This fear, this almost hesitation, drew me from thoughts of myself to thoughts of her, and it was in a daze of mingled purposes and regrets that I felt her at last at my side.

"Walter!" fell softly, doubtfully from her lips.

It was the name of him the dip of whose oars as he made for his boat I could now faintly hear in the river below us.

Turning, I looked her in the face.

"You are late," said I. God gave me words in my extremity. "Walter has gone." Then, as the madness of terror replaced love in her eyes, I lifted her forcibly and carried her to the window, where I drew aside the vines. "That is his boat's lantern you see drawing away from the dock. I bade him God-speed. He will not come again."

Without a word she looked, then fell back on my arm. It was not life which forsook her face, and left her whole
sweet body inert--that I could have borne, for did she not merit death who had killed my love, killed me?--but
happiness, the glow of youthful blood, the dreams of a youthful brain. And seeing this, seeing that the heart I
thought a child's heart had gone down in this shipwreck, I felt my anger swell and master me body and soul, and
before I knew it, I was towering over her and she was cowering at my feet, crushed and with hands held up in
defense, hands that had been like rose-leaves in my grasp, futile hands, but raised now in entreaty for her life to me,
to me who had loved her.

Why did they not move me? Why did my muscles tighten instead of relax? I do not know; I had never thought
myself a cruel man, but at that instant I felt that this toy of my strong manhood had done harm far beyond its value,
and that it would comfort me to break it and toss it far aside; only I could not hear the cry which now left her lips:
"I am so young! not yet, not yet, Philo! I am so young! Let me live a little while."

Was it a woman's plea, conscious of the tenderness she appealed to, or only a child's instinctive grasping after
life, just life? If it were the first, it would be easy to finish; but a child's terror, a child's longing--that pulled hard at
my manhood, and under the possibility, my own arm fell.

Instantly her head drooped. No defense did she utter; no further plea did she make; she simply waited.
"You have deserved death." This I managed to utter. "But if you will swear to obey me, you shall not pay your
forfeit till you have had a further taste of life. Not in my house; there is not sufficient freedom within its walls for
you; but in the broad world, where people dance and sing and grow old at their leisure, without duty and without
care. For three months you shall have this, and have it to your heart's content. Then you shall come back to me my
true wife, if your heart so prompts; if not, to tell me of your failure and quit me for ever. But--" Here I fear my voice
grew terrible, for her hands instinctively rose again. "Those three months must be lived unstained. As you are in
God's sight this hour, I demand of you to swear that, if you forget this or disregard it, or for any cause subject my
name to dishonor, that you will return unbidden at the first moment your reason returns to you, to take what
punishment I will. On this condition I send you away to-night. Aline, will you promise?"

She did not answer; but her face rose. I did not understand its look. There was pathos in it, and something else.
That something else troubled me.

"Are you dissatisfied?" I asked. "Is the time too short? Do you want more months for dancing?"
She shook her head and the little hands rose again:
"Do not send me away," she faintly entreated; "I don't know why--but I--had rather stay."
"With me? Impossible. Are you ready to promise, Aline?"
Then she rose and looked me in the eye with courage, almost with resolution.
"As I live!" said she.
And I knew she would keep her word.

The next thing I remember of that night was the sight of her little white, shivering figure looking out at me from
the carriage that was to carry her away. The night was cold, and I had tucked her in with as much care as I might
have done the evening before, when I still worshiped her, still thought her mine, or at least as much mine as she was
any one's. When I had done this and pressed a generous gift into her hand, I stood a minute at the carriage door, in
pity of her aspect. She looked so pinched and pale, so dazed and hopeless. Had she been alone--but the companion
with whom I had provided her was at her side and my tongue was tied. I turned, and the driver started up the horses.

"Philo!" I heard blown by me on the wind.
Was it she who called? No, for there was anguish in the cry, the anguish of a woman, and she was only a
frightened, disheartened child whom I had sent away to--dance.

One month, two months went by, and I began to take up my life. Another, and she would be home for good or
ill. I thought that I could live through that other. I had heard of her; not from her--that I did not require; and the
stories were all of the same character. She was enjoying life in the great city to which I had sent her; radiant at night,
if a little spiritless by day. She was at balls, at concerts and at theaters. She wore jewels and shone with the best; I
might be proud of her conquests and the sweetness and dignity with which she bore herself. Thus her friends wrote.
But she wrote nothing; I had not required it. Once, some one--a visitor at the house--spoke of having seen her.
"She was surrounded with admirers," he had said. "How early our American women ripen!" was his comment. "She
held her head like one who has held sway for years; but I thought her a trifle worn; as if pleasure absorbed too much
of her sleep. You must look out for her, Judge."

And I smiled grimly enough, I own, to think just how I was looking out for her.
Then came the thunderbolt.
"I am told that no one ever sees her in the day-time; that she is always busy, days. But she does not look as if she
took that time for rest. What can your little wife be doing? You ought to hurry up that important opinion of yours
and go see."

He was right; what was she doing? And why shouldn't I go see? There was no obstacle but my own will, but that
is the greatest obstacle a man can have. I remained at Homewood, but the four weeks of our further probation looked like a year.

Meanwhile, I had my way with the pavilion. I have shown you my heart, sometimes at its best, oftenest at its worst. I will show it to you again in this. I had a wall built round it, close against the thicket in which it lay embedded. This wall was painted white, and near it I had lamps placed which were lit at nightfall. Should a figure pass that wall I could see it from my window. No one could enter that doorway now, without running the risk of my seeing him from where I sat at my desk.

Did I feel easier? I do not know that I did. I merely followed an impulse I dared not name to myself.

Two weeks of this final month went by. Then (it was in the evening) some one came running up from the grounds, with the message that Mrs. Ocumpaugh had ridden into the gate, but that she was not ready to enter the house. Would I meet her at the pavilion?

I was in the library, at my desk, with my eyes on the wall, when this was told me. I had just seen the fierce figure of that unmanageable dog of mine run by that white surface, and my lips were open to order him tied up, when he, and everything else in this whole world, was forgotten in this crushing news of her return. For the three months were not up and her presence here could mean but one thing--she had found temptation too much for her, and she had come back to tell me so in obedience to her promise.

"I will go meet Mrs. Ocumpaugh," I said.

The man stared.

"I will go meet Mrs. Ocumpaugh now," I repeated, and tried to rise.

But my limbs refused; death had entered my heart, and it was some few minutes before I found myself upon the lawn outside.

When I got there I was trembling and so uncertain of movement that I tottered at the gate. But seeing signs of her presence within, I straightened myself and went in.

She was standing at the extreme end of the room when I entered, in the full light of the solitary moonbeam which shot in at the western casement. She had thrown aside her hat and coat, and never in all my life had I seen anything so ethereal as the worn face and wasted form she thus disclosed. Had it not been for the haunting and pathetic smile which by some freak of fate gave poignancy to her otherwise infantile beauty, I should not have known the woman who stood there with my name formed on her lips.

"Destroyed!" was my thought; and the rage which I felt that moment against fate flushed my whole being, and my arms went up, not in threat against her, but to an avenging Heaven, when I heard an impetuous rush, an angry growl, and the delicate, trembling figure went down under the leap of the monstrous animal which I had taught to love me, but could never teach to love her.

In horror and unspeakable anguish of soul I called off the dog; and, stooping with bitter cries, I took her in my arms.

"Hurt?" I gasped. "Hurt, Aline?" I looked at her anxiously.

"No," she whispered, "happy." And before I realized my own feelings or the passion with which I drew her to my breast, she had nestled her head against my heart, smiled and died.

The shock of the dog's onslaught had killed her.

I thought myself quite mad; past understanding aright the words addressed to me.

"She wearied--" I began.

"With all her soul for you and Homewood," the young woman repeated. "That is, since her illness developed."

"Her illness?"

"Yes, she has been ill ever since she went away. The cold of that first journey was too much for her. But she kept up for several weeks--doing what no other woman ever did before with so little strength and so little hope. Danced at night and--"
"And--and--what by day, what?" I could hardly get the words out of my mouth.

"Studied. Learned what she thought you would like--French--music--politics. It was to have been a surprise. Poor soul! it took her very life. She did not sleep--Oh, sir, what is it?"

I was standing over her, probably a terrifying figure. Lights were playing before my eyes, strange sounds were in my ears, everything about me seemed resolving itself into chaos.

"What do you mean?" I finally gasped. "She studied--to please _me_? Why did she come back, then, so soon--" I paused, choked. I had been about to give away my secret. "I mean, why did she come thus suddenly, without warning me of what I might expect? I would have gone--"

"I told her so; but she was very determined to come to you herself--to this very pavilion. She had set the time later, but this morning the doctor told her that her symptoms were alarming, and without consulting him or heeding the advice of any of us, she started for home. She was buoyant on the way, and more than once I heard her softly repeating your name. Her heart was very loving--Oh, sir, you are ill!"

"No, no," I cried, crushing my hand against my mouth to keep down the cry of anguish and despair which tore its way up from my heart. "Before other hands touch her, other eyes see her, tell me when she began--I will not say to love me, but to weary for me and--Homewood."

"Perhaps she has told you herself. Here is the letter, sir, she bade me give you if she did not reach here alive. She wrote it this morning, after the doctor told her what I have said."

"Give--give--"

She put it in my hand. I glanced at it in the moonlight, read the first few words, and felt the world reel round me. Thrusting the letter in my breast, I bade the woman, who watched me with fascinated eyes, to go now and rouse the house. When she was gone I stepped back into the shadows, and catching hold of the murderous beast, I dragged him out and about the wall to a thick clump of bushes. Here I left him and went back to my darling. When they came in, they found her in my arms. Her head had fallen back and I was staring, staring, at her white throat.

That night, when all was done for her which could be done, I shut myself into my library and again opened that precious letter. I give it, to show how men may be mistaken when they seek to weigh women's souls:

_My Husband_:  

I love you. As I shall be dead when you read this, I may say so without fear of rebuff. I did not love you then; I did not love anybody; I was thoughtless and fond of pleasure, and craved affectionate words. He saw this and worked on my folly; but when his project failed and I saw his boat creep away, I found that what feeling I had was for the man who had thwarted him, and I felt myself saved.

If I had not taken cold that night I might have lived to prove this. I know that you do not love me very much, but perhaps you would have done so had you seen me grow a little wiser and more like what your wife should be. I was trying when--O Philo, I can not write--I can not think. I am coming to you--I love--forgive--and take me back again, alive or dead. I love you--I love--

As I finished, the light, which had been burning low, suddenly went out. The window which opened before me was still unshuttered. Before me, across the wide spaces of the lawn, shone the pavilion wall, white in the moonlight As I stared in horror at it, a trembling seized my whole body, and the hair on my head rose. The dark figure of a running dog had passed across it--_the dog which lay dead under the bushes_.

"God's punishment," I murmured, and laid my head down on that pathetic letter and sobbed.

The morning found me there. It was not till later that the man sent to bury the dog came to me with the cry, "Something is wrong with the pavilion! When I went in to close the window I found the ceiling at that end of the room strangely dabbled. It looks like blood. And the spots grew as I looked."

Aghast, bruised in spirit and broken of heart, I went down, after that sweet body was laid in its grave, to look. The stains he had spoken of were gone. But I lived to see them reappear,--as you have.

God have mercy on our souls!

XII  

BEHIND THE WALL  

"A most pathetic and awesome history!" I exclaimed, after the pause which instinctively followed the completion of this tale, read as few of its kind have ever been read, by this woman of infinite resources in feeling and expression.

"Is it not? Do you wonder that a visit in the dead of night to a spot associated with such superstitious horrors should frighten me?" she added as she bundled up the scattered sheets with a reckless hand.

"I do not. I am not sure but that I am a little bit frightened myself," I smiled, following with my eye a single sheet which had escaped to the floor. "Allow me," I cried, stooping to lift it. As I did so I observed that it was the first sheet, the torn one--and that a line or so of writing was visible at the top which I was sure had not been amongst those she had read.
"What words are those?" I asked.
"I don't know, they are half gone as you can see. They have nothing to do with the story. I read you the whole of that."

Mistress as she was of her moods and expression I detected traces of some slight confusion.
"The putting up of the partition is not explained," I remarked.
"Oh, that was put up in horror of the stains which from time to time broke out on the ceiling at that end of the room."

I wished to ask her if this was her conclusion or if that line or two I have mentioned was more intelligible than she had acknowledged it to be. But I refrained from a sense of propriety.

If she appreciated my forbearance she did not show it. Rising, she thrust the papers into a cupboard, casting a scarcely perceptible glance at the clock as she did so.

I took the hint and rose. Instantly she was all smiles.
"You have forgotten something, Mr. Trevitt. Surely you do not intend to carry away with you my key to the bungalow."

"I was thinking of it," I returned lightly. "I am not quite through with that key." Then before she could recover from her surprise, I added with such suavity as I had been able to acquire in my intercourse with my more cultivated clients:

"I have to thank you, Mrs. Carew, for an hour of thrilling interest. Absorbed though I am in the present mystery, my mind has room for the old one. Possibly because there is sometimes a marked connection between old family events and new. There may be some such connection in this case. I should like the opportunity of assuring myself there is not."

She said nothing; I thought I understood why. More suavely yet, I continued, with a slight, a very slight movement toward the door: "Rarely have I had the pleasure of listening to such a tale read by such an interpreter. It will always remain in my memory, Mrs. Carew. But the episode is over and I return to my present duty and the bungalow."

"The bungalow! You are going back to the bungalow?"
"Immediately."
"What for? Didn't you see all there was to see?"
"Not quite."
"I don't know what there can be left."
"Nothing of consequence, most likely, but you can not wish me to have any doubts on the subject."
"No, no, of course not."

The carelessness of her tone did not communicate itself to her manner. Seeing that my unexpected proposition had roused her alarm, I grew wary and remarked:

"I was always overscrupulous."

With a lift of her shoulders—a dainty gesture which I congratulated myself I could see unmoved—she held out her hand in a mute appeal for the key, but seeing that I was not to be shaken in my purpose, reached for the wrap she had tossed on a chair and tied it again over her head.

"What are you going to do?" I asked.
"Accompany you," she declared.
"Again? I thought the place frightened you."
"It does," she replied. "I had rather visit any other spot in the whole world; but if it is your intention to go back there, it is mine to go with you."

"You are very good," I replied.

But I was seriously disconcerted notwithstanding. I had reckoned, upon a quiet hour in the bungalow by myself; moreover, I did not understand her motive for never trusting me there alone. Yet as this very distrust was suggestive, I put a good face on the matter and welcomed her company with becoming alacrity. After all, I might gain more than I could possibly lose by having her under my eye for a little longer. Strong as was her self-control there were moments when the real woman showed herself, and these moments were productive.

As we were passing out she paused to extinguish a lamp which was slightly smoking,—I also thought she paused an instant to listen. At all events her ears were turned toward the stairs down which there came the murmur of two voices, one of them the little boy's.

"It is time Harry was asleep," she cried. "I promised to sing to him. You won't be long, will you?"
"You need not be very long," was my significant retort. "I can not speak for myself."

Was I playing with her curiosity or anxieties or whatever it was that affected her? I hardly knew; I spoke as impulse directed and waited in cold blood—or was it hot blood?—to see how she took it.
Carelessly enough, for she was a famous actress except when taken by surprise. Checking an evident desire of
calling out some direction up stairs, she followed me to the door, remarking cheerfully, "You can not be very long
either; the place is not large enough."

My excuse—or rather the one I made to myself for thus returning to a place I had seemingly exhausted, was this.
In the quick turn I had made in leaving on the former occasion, my foot had struck the edge of the large rug nailed
over the center of the floor, and unaccountably loosened it. To rectify this mishap, and also to see how so slight a
shock could have lifted the large brass nails by which it had been held down to the floor, seemed reason enough for
my action. But how to draw her attention to so insignificant a fact without incurring her ridicule I could not decide
in our brief passage back to the bungalow, and consequently was greatly relieved when, upon opening the door and
turning my lantern on the scene, I discovered that in our absence the rug had torn itself still farther free from the
floor and now lay with one of its corners well curled over--the corner farthest from the door and nearest the divan
where little Gwendolen had been lying when she was lifted and carried away--where?

Mrs. Carew saw it too and cast me a startled look which I met with a smile possibly as ambiguous as the feeling
which prompted it.
"Who has been here?" she asked.
"Ourselves."
"Did we do that?"
"I did; or rather my foot struck the edge of the rug as I turned to go out with you. Shall I replace it and press back
the nails?"
"If you will be so good."

Do what she would there was eagerness in her tone. Remark ing this, I decided to give another and closer look at
the floor and the nails. I found the latter had not been properly inserted; or rather that there were two indentations for
every nail, a deep one and one quite shallow. This caused me to make some examination of the others, those which
had not been drawn from the floor, and I found that one or two of them were equally insecure, but not all; only those
about this one corner.

Mrs. Carew, who had paused, confused and faltering in the doorway, in her dismay at seeing me engaged in this
inspection instead of in replacing the rug as I had proposed, now advanced a step, so that our glances met as I looked
up with the remark:
"This rug seems to have been lately raised at this corner. Do you know if the police had it up?"
"I don't. I believe so--oh, Mr. Trevitt," she cried, as I rose to my feet with the corner of the rug in my hand,
"what are you going to do?"
She had run forward impetuously and was now standing close beside me--inconveniently close.
"I am going to raise this rug," I informed her. "That is, just at this corner. Pardon me, I shall have to ask you to
move."
"Certainly, of course," she stammered. "Oh, what is going to happen now?" Then as she watched me: "There is--
there_is_something under it. A door in the floor--a--a--Mrs. Ocumpaugh never told me of this."
"Do you suppose she knew it?" I inquired, looking up into her face, which was very near but not near enough to
be in the full light of the lantern, which was pointed another way.
"This rug appears to have been almost soldered to the floor, everywhere but here. There! it is thrown back. Now,
if you will be very good as to hold the lantern, I will try and lift up the door."
"I can not. See, how my hands shake! What are we about to discover? Nothing, I pray, nothing. Suspense would
be better than that."
"I think you will be able to hold it," I urged, pressing the lantern upon her.
"Yes; I have never been devoid of courage. But--but--don't ask me to descend with you," she prayed, as she
lifted the lantern and turned it dexterously enough on that portion of the door where a ring lay outlined in the depths
of its outermost plank.
"I will not; but you will come just the same; you can not help it," I hazarded, as with the point of my knife-blade
I lifted the small round of wood which filled into the ring and thus made the floor level.
"Now, if this door is not locked, we will have it up," I cried, pulling at the ring with a will. The door was not
locked and it came up readily enough, discovering some half-dozen steps, down which I immediately proceeded to
climb.
"Oh, I can not stay here alone," she protested, and prepared to follow me in haste just as I expected her to do the
moment she saw the light withdrawn.
"Step carefully," I enjoined. "If you will honor me with your hand--" But she was at my side before the words
were well out.
"What is it? What kind of place do you make it out to be; and is there anything here you--do--not--want--to see?"
I flashed the light around and incidentally on her. She was not trembling now. Her cheeks were red, her eyes blazing. She was looking at me, and not at the darksome place about her. But as this was natural, it being a woman's way to look for what she desires to learn in the face of the man who for the moment is her protector, I shifted the light into the nooks and corners of the low, damp cellar in which we now found ourselves.

"Bins for wine and beer," I observed, "but nothing in them." Then as I measured the space before me with my eye, "It runs under the whole house. See, it is much larger than the room above."

"Yes," she mechanically repeated.

I lowered the lantern to the floor but quickly raised it again.

"What is that on the other side?" I queried. "I am sure there is a break in the wall over in that corner."

"I can not see," she gasped; certainly she was very much frightened. "Are you going to cross the floor?"

"Yes; and if you do not wish to follow me, sit down on these steps--"

"No, I will go where you go; but this is very fearful. Why, what is the matter?"

I had stepped aside in order to avoid a trail of footprints I saw extending across the cellar floor.

"Come around this way," I urged. "If you will follow me I will keep you from being too much frightened."

She did as I told her. Softly her steps fell in behind mine; and thus with wary tread and peering eyes we made our way to the remote end, where we found—or rather where I found—that the break which I had noticed in the uniformity of the wall was occasioned by a pile of old boxes, arranged so as to make steps up to a hole cut through the floor above.

With a sharp movement I wheeled upon her.

"Do you see that?" I asked, pointing back over my shoulder.

"Steps," she cried, "going up into that part of the building where--where--"

"Will you attempt them with me? Or will you stay here, in the darkness?"

"I--will--stay--here."

It was said with shortened breath; but she seemed less frightened than when we started to cross the cellar. At all events a fine look of daring had displaced the tremulous aspect which had so changed the character of her countenance a few minutes before.

"I will make short work of it," I assured her as I hastily ran up the steps. "Drop your face into your hands and you will not be conscious of the darkness. Besides, I will talk to you all the time. There! I have worked my way up through the hole. I have placed my lantern on the floor above and I see--What! are you coming?"

"Yes, I am coming."

Indeed, she was close beside me, maintaining her footing on the toppling boxes by a grip on my disengaged arm.

"Can you see?" I asked. "Wait! let me pull you up; we might as well stand on the floor as on these boxes."

Climbing into the room above, I offered her my hand, and in another moment we stood together in the noisome precincts of that abominable spot, with whose doleful story she had just made me acquainted.

A square of impenetrable gloom confronted me at the first glance—what might not be the result of a second? I turned to consult the appearance of the lady beside me before I took this second look. Had she the strength to stand the ordeal? Was she as much moved—or possibly more moved than myself? As a woman, and the intimate friend of the Ocumpaughs, she should be. But I could not perceive that she was. For some reason, once in view of this mysterious place, she was strangely, inexplicably, impassibly calm.

"You can bear it?" I queried.

"I must--only end it quickly."

"I will," I replied, and I held out my lantern.

I am not a superstitious man, but instinctively I looked up before I looked about me. I have no doubt that Mrs. Carew did the same. But no stains were to be seen on those blackened boards now; or rather, they were dark with one continuous stain; and next moment I was examining with eager scrutiny the place itself.

Accustomed to the appearance of the cheerful and well-furnished room on the other side of the partition, it was a shock to me (I will not say what it was to her) to meet the bare decaying walls and mouldering appurtenances of this dismal hole. True, we had just come from a description of the place in all the neglect of its many years of desolation, yet the smart finish of the open portion we had just left poorly prepared us for what we here encountered.

But the first impression over—an impression which was to recur to me many a night afterward in dreams—I remembered the nearer and more imperative cause which had drawn us thither, and turning the light into each and every corner, looked eagerly for what I so much dreaded to find.

A couch to which some old cushions still clung stood against the farther wall. Thank God! it was empty; so were all the corners of the room. Nothing living and—nothing dead!

Turning quickly upon Mrs. Carew, I made haste to assure her that our fears were quite unfounded.

But she was not even looking my way. Her eyes were on the ground, and she seemed merely waiting—in some
impatience, evidently, but yet merely waiting--for me to finish and be gone.

This was certainly odd, for the place was calculated in itself to rouse curiosity, especially in one who knew its story. A table, thick with dust and blurred with dampness, still gave tokens of a bygone festivity--among which a bottle and some glasses stood conspicuous. Cards were there too, dingy and green with mould--some on the tables--some on the floor; while the open lid of a small desk pushed up close to a book-case full of books, still held a rusty pen and the remnants of what looked like the mouldering sheets of unused paper. As for the rest--desolation, neglect, horror--but no _child_.

The relief was enormous.

"It is a dreadful place," I exclaimed; "but it might have been worse. Do you want to see things nearer? Shall we cross the floor?"

"No, no. We have not found Gwendolen; let us go. Oh, let us go!"

A thrill of feeling had crept into her voice. Who could wonder? Yet I was not ready to humor her very natural sensibilities by leaving quite so abruptly. The floor interested me; the cushions of that old couch interested me; the sawn boards surrounding the hole--indeed, many things.

"We will go in a moment," I assured her; "but, first, cast your eyes along the floor. Don't you see that some one has preceded us here; and that not so very long ago? Some one with dainty feet and a skirt that fell on the ground; in short, a woman and--a lady!"

"I don't see," she faltered, very much frightened; then quickly: "Show me, show me."

I pointed out the marks in the heavy dust of the long neglected floor; they were unmistakable.

"Oh!" she cried, "what it is to be a detective! But who could have been here? Who would want to be here? I think it is horrible myself, and if I were alone I should faint from terror and the close air."

"We will not remain much longer," I assured her, going straight to the couch. "I do not like it either, but--"

"What have you found now?"

Her voice seemed to come from a great distance behind me. Was this on account of the state of her nerves or mine? I am willing to think the latter, for at that moment my eye took in two unexpected details. A dent as of a child's head in one of the mangy sofa-pillows and a crushed bit of colored sugar which must once have been a bit of choice confectionery.

"Some one besides a lady has been here," I decided, pointing to the one and bringing back the other. "See! this bit of candy is quite fresh. You must acknowledge that. _This_ was not walled up years ago with the rest of the things we see about us."

Her eyes stared at the sugary morsel I held out toward her in my open palm. Then she made a sudden rush which took her to the side of the couch.

"Gwendolen here?" she moaned, "Gwendolen here?"

"Yes," I began; "do not--"

But she had already left the spot and was backing toward the opening up which we had come. As she met my eye she made a quick turn and plunged below.

"I must have air," she gasped.

With a glance at the floor over which she had so rapidly passed, I hastily followed her, smiling grimly to myself. Intentionally or unintentionally, she had by this quick passage to and fro effectually confused, if not entirely obliterated, those evidences of a former intrusion which, with misguided judgment, I had just pointed out to her. But recalling the still more perfect line of footprints left below to which I had not called her attention, I felt that I could afford to ignore the present mishap.

As I reached the cellar bottom I called to her, for she was already half-way across.

"Did you notice where the boards had been sawed?" I asked. "The sawdust is still on the floor, and it smells as fresh as if the saw had been at work there yesterday."

"No doubt, no doubt," she answered back over her shoulder, still hurrying on so that I had to run lest she should attempt the steps in utter darkness.

When I reached the floor of the bungalow she was in the open door panting. Watching her with one eye, I drew back the trap into place and replaced the rug and the three nails I had loosened. Then I shut the slide of the lantern and joined her where she stood.

"Do you feel better?" I asked. "It was a dismal quarter of an hour. But it was not a lost one."

She drew the door to and locked it before she answered; then it was with a question.

"What do you make of all this, Mr. Trevitt?"

I replied as directly as the circumstances demanded.

"Madam, it is a startling answer to the question you put me before we first left your house. You asked then if the child in the wagon was Gwendolen. How could it have been she with this evidence before us of her having been
concealed here at the very time that wagon was being driven away from--"

"I do not think you have reason enough--" she began and stopped, and did not speak again till we halted at the foot of her own porch. Then with the frank accent most in keeping with her general manner, however much I might distrust both accent and manner, she added as if no interval had intervened: "If those signs you noted are proofs to you that Gwendolen was shut up in that walled-off portion of the bungalow while some were seeking her in the water and others in the wagon, _then where is she now?_"

XIII

"WE SHALL HAVE TO BEGIN AGAIN"

It was a leading question which I was not surprised to see accompanied by a very sharp look from beneath the cloudy wrap she had wound about her head.

"You suspect some one or something," continued Mrs. Carew, with a return of the indefinable manner which had characterized her in the beginning of our interview. "Whom? What?"

I should have liked to answer her candidly, and in the spirit, if not the words, of the prophet of old, but her womanliness disarmed me. With her eyes on me I could get no further than a polite acknowledgment of defeat.

"Mrs. Carew, I am all at sea. We shall have to begin again."

"Yes," she answered like an echo--was it sadly or gladly?--"you will have to begin again." Then with a regretful accent: "And I can not help you, for I am going to sail to-morrow. I positively must go. Cablegrams from the other side hurry me. I shall have to leave Mrs. Ocumpaugh in the midst of her distress."

"What time does your steamer sail, Mrs. Carew?"

"At five o'clock in the afternoon, from the Cunard docks."

"Nearly sixteen hours from now. Perhaps fate--or my efforts--will favor us before then with some solution of this disheartening problem. Let us hope so."

A quick shudder to hide which she was reaching out her hand, when the door behind us opened and a colored girl looked out. Instantly and with the slightest possible loss of self-possession Mrs. Carew turned to motion the intruder back, when the girl suddenly blurted out:

"Oh, Mrs. Carew, Harry is so restless. He is sleepy, he says."

"I will be up instantly. Tell him that I will be up instantly." Then as the girl disappeared, she added, with a quick smile: "You see I haven't any toys for him. Not being a mother I forgot to put them in his trunk."

As though in response to these words the maid again showed herself in the doorway. "Oh, Mrs. Carew," she eagerly exclaimed, "there's a little toy in the hall here, brought over by one of Mrs. Ocumpaugh's maids. The girl said that hearing that the little boy fretted, Mrs. Ocumpaugh had picked out one of her little girl's playthings and sent it over with her love. It's a little horse, ma'am, with curly mane and a long tail. I am sure 'twill just please Master Harry."

Mrs. Carew turned upon me a look brimming with feeling.

"What thoughtfulness! What self-control!" she cried. "Take up the horse, Dinah. It was one of Gwendolen's favorite playthings," she explained to me as the girl vanished.

I did not answer. I was hearing again in my mind that desolate cry of "Philo! Philo! Philo!" which an hour or so before had rung down to me from Mrs. Ocumpaugh's open window. There had been a wildness in the tone, which spoke of a tossing head on a feverish pillow. Certainly an irreconcilable picture with the one just suggested by Mrs. Carew of the considerate friend sending out the toys of her lost one to a neighbor's peevish child.

Mrs. Carew appeared to notice the preoccupation with which I lingered on the lower step.

"You like children," she hazarded. "Or have you interested yourself in this matter purely from business reasons?"

"Business reasons were sufficient," was my guarded reply. "But I like children very much. I should be most happy if I could see this little Harry of yours nearer. I have only seen him from a distance, you know."

She drew back a step; then she met my look squarely in the moonlight. Her face was flushed, but I attempted no apology for a presumption which could have but one excuse. I meant that she should understand me if I did not her.

"You _must_ love children," she remarked, but not with her usual correctness of tone. Then before I could attempt an answer to the implied sarcasm a proud light came into her eyes, and with a gracious bend of her fine figure she met my look with one equally as frank, and cheerfully declared:

"You shall. Come early in the morning."

In another moment she had vanished inside and closed the door. I was defeated for the nonce, or else she was all she appeared to be and I a dreaming fool.

XIV

ESPIONAGE

As I moved slowly away into the night the question thus raised in my own mind assumed greater and more vital consequence. Was she a true woman or what my fears pictured her--the scheming, unprincipled abductor of
Gwendolen Ocumpaugh? She looked true, sometimes acted so; but I had heard and seen what would rouse any man's suspicions, and though I was not in a position to say: "Mrs. Carew, this was not your first visit to that scene of old tragedy. You have been there before, and with Gwendolen in your arms," I was morally certain that this was so; that Mrs. Ocumpaugh's most trusted friend was responsible for the disappearance of her child, and I was not quite sure that the child was not now under her very roof.

It was very late by this time, but I meant, if possible, to settle some of these doubts before I left the neighborhood of the cottage.

How? By getting a glimpse of Mrs. Carew with her mask off; in the company of the child, if I could compass it; if not, then entirely alone with her own thoughts, plans and subtleties.

It was an act more in line with my partner's talents than my own, but I could not afford to let this deter me. I had had my chance with her, face to face. For hours I had been in her company. I had seen her in various stages of emotion, sometimes real and sometimes assumed, but at no moment had I been sure of her, possibly because at no moment had she been sure of me. In our first visit to the bungalow; in her own little library, during the reading of that engrossing tale by which she had so evidently attempted to lull my suspicions awakened by her one irrepressible show of alarm on the scene of Gwendolen's disappearance, and afterward when she saw that they might be so lulled but not dispelled; in the cellar; and, above all, in that walled-off room where we had come across the signs of Gwendolen's presence, which even she could not disavow, she had felt my eyes upon her and made me conscious that she had so felt them. Now she must believe them removed, and if I could but gain the glimpse I speak of I should see this woman as she was.

I thought I could manage this.

I had listened to the maid's steps as she returned up stairs, and I believed I knew in what direction they had tended after she reached the floor above. I would just see if one of the windows on the south side was lighted, and, if so, if it was in any way accessible.

To make my way through the shrubbery without rousing the attention of any one inside or out required a circumspection that tried me greatly. But by dint of strong self-control I succeeded in getting to the vantage-place I sought, without attracting attention or causing a single window to fly up. This reassured me, and perceiving a square of light in the dark mass of wall before me I peered about among the trees overlooking this part of the building for one I could climb without too much difficulty.

The one which looked most feasible was a maple with low-growing branches, and throwing off my coat I was soon half-way to its top and on a level, or nearly so, with the window on which I had fixed my eye.

There were no curtains to this window--the house being half dismantled in anticipation of Mrs. Carew's departure--but it was still protected by a shade, and this was drawn down, nearly to the ledge.

But not quite. A narrow space intervened which, to an eye placed where mine was, offered a peep-hole of more or less satisfactory proportions, and this space, I soon saw, widened perceptibly from time to time as the wind caught at the shade and blew it in.

With utmost caution I shifted my position till I could bring my eye fairly in line with the interior of this room, and finding that the glimpse given revealed little but a blue wall and some snowy linen, I waited for the breeze to blow that I might see more.

It came speedily, and in a gust which lifted the shade and thus disclosed the whole inside of the room. It was an instantaneous glimpse, but in that moment the picture projected upon my eye satisfied me that, despite my doubts, despite my causes for suspicion, I had been doing this woman the greatest injustice in supposing that her relations to the child she had brought into her home were other than she had made out.

She had come up as she had promised, and had seated herself on the bed with her face turned toward the window. I could thus catch its whole expression--an expression this time involuntary and natural as the feelings which prompted it. The child, with his newly-obtained toy clutched in one hand, knelt on the coverlet with his head pressed against her breast, saying his prayers. I could hear his soft murmur, though I could not catch the words.

But sweet as was the sight of his little white-clad form burying its head, with its mass of dusky curls, against the breast in which he most confided, it was not this alone which gave to the moment its almost sacred character. It was the rapturous look with which Mrs. Carew gazed down on this little head--the mother-look, which admits of nothing false, and which when once seen on a woman's face, whether she be mother in fact or mother only in heart--idealizes her in the mind for ever.

Eloquent with love and holy devotion the scene flashed upon my eyes for a moment and was gone. But that moment made its impression, and settled for good and all the question with which I had started upon this adventure. She _was_ the true woman and I was the dreaming fool.

As I realized this I also realized that three days out of the seven were gone.

XV
A PHANTASM

I certainly had every right to conclude that this would end my adventures for the day. But I soon found that I was destined to have yet another experience before returning to my home in New York.

The weather had changed during the last hour and at the moment I emerged from the shadows of the hedge-row into the open space fronting the Ocumpaugh dock, a gleam of lightning shot across the west and by it I saw what looked like the dusky figure of a man leaning against a pile at the extreme end of the boat-house. Something in the immobility maintained by this figure in face of the quick flashes which from time to time lit up the scene, reminded me of the presence I had come upon hours before in front of Mrs. Carew's house; and moved by the instinct of my calling, I took advantage of the few minutes yet remaining before train time, to make my way in its direction, cautiously, of course, and with due allowance for the possible illumination following those fitful bursts of light which brought everything to view in one moment, only to plunge it all back into the profoundest obscurity the next.

I had two motives for my proceeding. One, as I say, sprang from the natural instinct of investigation; the other was kindlier and less personal.

I did not understand the meaning of the posture which this person had now assumed; nor did I like it. Why should this man--why should any man stand like this at the dead of night staring into waters, which, if they had their tale to tell, had not yet told it--unless his interest in the story he read there was linked with emotions such as it was my business to know? For those most openly concerned in Gwendolen's loss, the search had ceased; why, then, this lone and lingering watch on the part of one who might, for all I knew, be some over-zealous detective, but who I was rather inclined to believe was a person much more closely concerned in the child's fate, viz: the next heir-in-law, Mr. Rathbone. If it were he, his presence there savored of mystery or it savored of the tragic. The latter seemed the more likely hypothesis, judging from the expression of his face, as seen by me under the lantern. It behooved me then to approach him, but to approach him in the shadow of the boat-house.

What passed in the next few minutes seemed to me unreal and dreamlike. I was tired, I suppose, and so more than usually susceptible. Night had no unfamiliar effects for me, even night on the borders of this great river; nor was my occupation a new one, or the expectation I felt, as fearful and absorbing as that with which an hour or two before I had raised my lantern in that room in which the doleful mystery of half a century back, trenched upon the still more moving mystery of to-day. Yet, that experience had the sharpness of fact; while this had only the vagueness of a phantasm.

I was very near him but the lightning had ceased to flash, and I found it impossible to discern whether or not the form I had come there to identify, yet lingered in its old position against the pile.

I therefore awaited the next gleam with great anxiety, an anxiety only partly alleviated by the certainty I felt of hearing the faint, scarcely recognizable sound of his breathing. Had the storm passed over? Would no more flashes come? Ah, he is moving--that is a sigh I hear--no detective's exclamation of impatience, but a sufferer's sigh of depression or remorse. What was in the man's mind?

A steamboat or some equally brilliantly illuminated craft was passing, far out in the channel; the shimmer of its lights gave sudden cheer to the distant prospect; the churning of its paddles suggested life and action and irresistibly drew my eyes that way. Would his follow? Would I find his attitude changed?

Ah! the long delayed flash has come and gone. He is standing there yet, but no longer in an attitude of contemplation. On the contrary, he is bending over the waters searching with eager aspect, where so many had searched before him, and, in the instant, as his face and form leaped into sight, I beheld his clenched right hand fall on his breast and heard on his lips the one word--

"Guilty!"

XVI

"AN ALL-CONQUERING BEAUTY"

I was one of the first to procure and read a New York paper next morning. Would I discover in the columns any hint of the preceding day's events in Yonkers, which, if known, must for ever upset the wagon theory? No, that secret was still my secret, only shared by the doctor, who, so far as I understood him, had no intention of breaking his self-imposed silence till his fears of some disaster to the little one had received confirmation. I had therefore several hours before me yet for free work.

The first thing I did was to hunt up Miss Graham.

She met me with eagerness; an eagerness I found it difficult to dispel with my disappointing news in regard to Doctor Pool.

"He is not the man," said I. "Can you think of any other?"

She shook her head, her large gray eyes showing astonishment and what I felt bound to regard as an honest bewilderment.

"I wish to mention a name," said I.
"One I know?" she asked.
"Yes."
"I know of no other person capable of wronging that child."
"You are probably right. But there is a gentleman--one interested in the family--a man with something to gain--"
"Mr. Rathbone? You must not mention him in any such connection. He is one of the best men I know--kind, good, and oh, so sensitive! A dozen fortunes wouldn't tempt a man of his stamp to do any one living a wrong, let alone a little innocent child."
"I know; but there are other temptations greater than money to some men; infinitely greater to one as sensitive as you say he is. What if he loved a woman! What if his only hope of winning her--"
"You must not think that of him," she again interposed. "Nothing could make a villain of _him_. I have seen him too many times in circumstances which show a man's character. He is good through and through, and in all that concerns Gwendolen, honorable to the core. I once saw him save her life at the risk of his own."
"You did? When? Years ago?"
"No, lately; within the last year."
"Tell me the circumstances."
She did. They were convincing. As I listened, the phantasm of the night before assumed fainter and fainter proportions. When she had finished I warmly remarked that I was glad to hear the story of so heroic an act. And I was. Not that I ascribed too deep a significance to the word which had escaped Mr. Rathbone on the dock, but because I was glad to have my instinctive confidence in the man verified by facts. It seemed to clear the way before me.
"Ellie," said I (it seemed both natural and proper to call her by that name now), "what explanation would you give if, under any circumstances (all circumstances are possible, you know), you heard this gentleman speak of feeling guilty in connection with Gwendolen Ocumpaugh?"
"I should have to know the circumstances," was her quiet answer.
"Let me imagine some. Say that it was night, late night, at an hour when the most hardened amongst us are in a peculiarly responsive condition; say that he had been, spending hours near the house of the woman he had long loved but had quite despaired of winning in his greatly hampered condition, and with the fever of this longing upon him, but restrained by emotions the nature of which we can not surmise, had now found his way down to the river--to the spot where boats have clustered and men crouched in the gruesome and unavailing search we know of; say that he hung there long over the water, gazing down in silence, in solitude, alone, as he thought, with his own conscience and the suggestions offered by that running stream where some still think, despite facts, despite all the probabilities, that Gwendolen has found rest, and when his heart was full, should be seen to strike his breast and utter, with a quick turn of his face up the hill, this one word, 'Guilty'?"
"What would I think? This: That being overwrought by the struggle you mention (a struggle we can possibly understand when we consider the unavoidable consciousness which must be his of the great change which would be effected in all his prospects if Gwendolen should not be found), he gave the name of guilt to feelings which some would call simply human."
"Ellie, you are an oracle." This thought of hers had been my thought ever since I had had time really to reflect upon the matter. "I wonder if you will have an equally wise reply to give to my next question?"
"I can not say. I speak from intuition; I am not really wise."
"Intuition is above wisdom. Does your intuition tell you that Mrs. Carew is the true friend she professes to be to Mrs. Ocumpaugh?"
"Ah, that is a different thing!"
The clear brow I loved--there! how words escape a man!--lost its smoothness and her eyes took on a troubled aspect, while her words came slowly.
"I do not know how to answer that offhand. Sometimes I have felt that her very soul was knit to that of Mrs. Ocumpaugh, and again I have had my doubts. But never deep ones; never any such as would make it easy for me to answer the question you have just put me."
"Was her love for Gwendolen sincere?" I asked.
"Oh, yes; oh, yes. That is, I always thought so, and with no qualification, till something in her conduct when she first heard of Gwendolen's disappearance--I can not describe it--gave me a sense of disappointment. She was shocked, of course, and she was grieved, but not hopelessly so. There was something lacking in her manner--we all felt it; Mrs. Ocumpaugh felt it, and let her dear friend go the moment she showed the slightest inclination to do so."
"There were excuses for Mrs. Carew, just at that time," said I. "You forget the new interest which had come into her life. It was natural that she should be preoccupied."
"With thoughts of her little nephew?" replied Miss Graham. "True, true; but she had been so fond of Gwendolen!
You would have thought--But why all this talk about Mrs. Carew? You don't believe--you surely can not believe--"

"That Mrs. Carew is a charming woman? Oh, yes, but I do. Mr. Rathbone shows good taste."

"Ah, is she the one?"

"Did you not know it?"

"No; yet I have seen them together many times. Now I understand much that has always been a mystery to me. He never pressed his suit; he loved, but never harassed her. Oh, he is a good man!" This with emphasis.

"Is she a good woman?"

Miss Graham's eyes suddenly fell, then rose again until they met mine fully and frankly.

"I have no reason," said she, "to believe her otherwise. I have never seen anything in her to hinder my esteem; only--"

"Finish that 'only.'"

"She does not appeal to me as many less gifted women do. Perhaps I am secretly jealous of the extreme fondness Gwendolen has always shown for her. If so, the fault is in me, not in her."

What I said in reply is not germane to this story.

After being assured by a few more discreet inquiries in some other perfectly safe quarters that Miss Graham's opinion of Mr. Rathbone was shared by those who beat knew him, I returned to the one spot most likely to afford me a clue to, if no explanation of, this elusive mystery.

What did I propose to myself? First, to revisit Mrs. Carew and make the acquaintance of the boy Harry. I no longer doubted his being just what she called him, but she had asked me to call for this purpose and I had no excuse for declining the invitation, even if I had desired to do so. Afterward--but first let us finish with Mrs. Carew.

As she entered her reception-room that morning she looked so bright--that is, with the instinctive brightness of a naturally vivacious temperament--that I wondered if I had been mistaken in my thought that she had had no sleep all that night, simply because many of the lights in her house had not been put out till morning. But an inspection of her face revealed lines of care, which only her smile could efface, and she was not quite ready for smiles, affable and gracious as she showed herself.

Her first words, just as I expected, were:

"There is nothing in the papers about the child in the wagon."

"No; everything does not get into the papers."

"Will what we saw and what we found in the bungalow last night?"

"I hardly think so. That is our own special clue, Mrs. Carew--if it is a clue."

"You seem to regard it as such."

With a shrug I declared that we had come upon a mystery of some kind.

"But the child is not dead? That you feel demonstrated--or don't you?"

"As I said last night, I do not know what to think. Ah; is that the little boy?"

"Yes," she gaily responded, as the glad step of a child was heard descending the stairs. "Harry! come here, Harry!" she cried, with that joyous accent which a child's presence seems to call out in some women. "Here is a gentleman who would like to shake hands with you."

A sprite of a child entered; a perfect sunbeam irradiating the whole room. If, under the confidence induced by the vision I had had of him on his knees the night before, any suspicion remained in my mind of his being Gwendolen Ocumpaugh in disguise, it vanished at sight of the fearless head, lifted high in boyish freedom, and the gay swish, swish of the whip in his nervous little hand.

"Harry is playing horse," he cried, galloping toward me in what he evidently considered true jockey style.

I made a gesture and stopped him.

"How do you do, little man? What did you say your name is?"

"Harry," this very stoutly.

"Harry what? Harry Carew?"

"No, Harry; just Harry."

"And how do you like it here?"

"I like it; I like it better than my old home."

"Where was your old home?"

"I don't know. I didn't like it."

"He was with uncongenial people, and he is very sensitive," put in Mrs. Carew, softly.

"I like it here," he repeated, "and I like the big ocean. I am going on the ocean. And I like horses. Get up, Dandy!" and he cracked his whip and was off again on his imaginary trot.

I felt very foolish over the doubts I had so openly evinced. This was not only a boy to the marrow of his bones, but he was, as any eye could see, the near relative she called him. In my embarrassment I rose; at all events I soon
found myself standing near the door with Mrs. Carew.

"A fine fellow!" I enthusiastically exclaimed; "and startlingly like you in expression. He is your nephew, I believe?"

"Yes," she replied, somewhat wistfully I thought.

I felt that I should apologize for—well, perhaps for the change she must have discerned in my manner.

"The likeness caused me a shock. I was not prepared for it, I suppose."

She looked at me quite wonderingly.

"I have never heard any one speak of it before. I am glad that you see it." And she seemed glad, very glad.

But I know that for some reason she was gladder yet when I turned to depart. However, she did not hasten me.

"What are you going to do next?" she inquired, as she courteously led the way through the piles of heaped-up boxes and baskets, the number of which had rather grown than diminished since my visit the evening before.

"Pardon my asking."

"Resort to my last means," said I. "See and talk with Mrs. Ocumpaugh."

An instant of hesitation on her part, so short, however, that I could hardly detect it, then she declared:

"But you can not do that."

"Why not?"

"She is ill; I am sure that they will let no one approach her. One of her maids was in this morning. She did not even ask me to come over."

"I am sorry," said I, "but I shall make the effort. The illness which affects Mrs. Ocumpaugh can be best cured by the restoration of her child."

"But you have not found Gwendolen?" she replied.

"No; but I have discovered footprints on the dust of the bungalow floor, and, as you know, a bit of candy which looks as if it had been crushed in a sleeping child's hand, and I am in need of every aid possible in order to make the most of these discoveries. They may point the way to Gwendolen's present whereabouts and they may not. But they shall be given every chance."

"Whoop! get up! get up!" broke in a childish voice from the upper landing.

"Am I not right?" I asked.

"Always; only I am sorry for Mrs. Ocumpaugh. May I tell you--" as I laid my hand upon the outer door-knob—"just how to approach her?"

"Certainly, if you will be so good."

"I would not ask for Miss Porter. Ask for Celia; she is Mrs. Ocumpaugh's special maid. Let her carry your message—if you feel that it will do any good to disturb her."

"Thank you; the recommendation is valuable. Good morning, Mrs. Carew. I may not see you again; may I wish you a safe journey?"

"Certainly; are we not almost friends?"

Why did I not make my bow and go? There was nothing more to be said—at least by me. Was I held by something in her manner? Doubtless, for while I was thus reasoning with myself she followed me out on to the porch, and with some remark as to the beauty of the morning, led me to an opening in the vines, whence a fine view could be caught of the river.

But it was not for the view she had brought me there. This was evident enough from her manner, and soon she paused in her observations on the beauties of nature, and with a strange ringing emphasis for which I was not altogether prepared, remarked with feeling:

"I may be making a mistake—I was always an unconventional woman—but I think you ought to know something of Mrs. Ocumpaugh's private history before you see her. It is not a common one—at least it has its romantic elements—and an acquaintance with some of its features is almost necessary to you if you expect to approach her on so delicate a matter with any hope of success. But perhaps you are better informed on this subject than I supposed? Detectives are a mine of secret intelligence, I am told; possibly you have already learned from some other source the story of her marriage and homecoming to Homewood and the peculiar circumstances of her early married life?"

"No," I disclaimed in great relief, and I have no doubt with unnecessary vivacity. "On the contrary, I have never heard anything said in regard to it."

"Would you like to? Men have not the curiosity of women, and I do not wish to bore you, but—I see that I shall not do that," she exclaimed. "Sit down, Mr. Trevitt; I shall not detain you long; I have not much time myself."

As she sank into a chair in saying this, I had no alternative but to follow her example. I took pains, however, to choose one which brought me into the shadow of the vines, for I felt some embarrassment at this new turn in the conversation, and was conscious that I should have more or less difficulty in hiding my only too intense interest in all that concerned the lady of whom we were speaking.
"Mrs. Ocumpaugh was a western woman," Mrs. Carew began softly; "the oldest of five daughters. There was not much money in the family, but she had beauty, a commanding, all-conquering beauty; not the beauty you see in her to-day, but that exquisite, persuasive loveliness which seizes upon the imagination as well as moves the heart. I have a picture of her at eighteen--but never mind that."

Was it affection for her friend which made Mrs. Carew's always rich voice so very mellow? I wished I knew; but I was successful, I think, in keeping that wish out of my face, and preserving my manner of the simply polite listener.

"Mr. Ocumpaugh was on a hunting trip," she proceeded, after a slight glance my way. "He had traveled the world over and seen beautiful women everywhere; but there was something in Marion Allison which he had found in no other, and at the end of their first interview he determined to make her his wife. A man of impulses, but also a man of steady resolution, Mr. Trevitt. Perhaps you know this?"


"And a romantic one. He had this intention from the first, as I have said, but he wished to make himself sure of her heart. He knew how his advantages counted; how hard it is for a woman to disassociate the man from his belongings, and having a spirit of some daring, he resolved that this 'pearl of the west'--so I have heard him call her--should marry the man and not his money."

"Was he as wealthy then as now?"

"Almost. Possibly he was not quite such a power in the financial world, but he had Homewood in almost as beautiful a condition as now, though the new house was not put up till after his marriage. He courted her--not as the landscape painter of Tennyson's poem--but as a rising young business man who had made his way sufficiently to give her a good home. This home he did not have to describe, since her own imagination immediately pictured it as much below the one she lived in, as he was years younger than her hardworked father. Delighted with this naiveté, he took pains not to disabuse her mind of the simple prospects with which she was evidently so well satisfied, and succeeded in marrying her and bringing her as far as our station below there, without her having the least suspicion of the splendor she was destined for. And now, Mr. Trevitt, picture, if you can, the scene of that first arrival. I have heard it described by him and I have heard it described by her. He was dressed plainly; so was she; and lest the surprise should come before the proper moment, he had brought her on a train little patronized by his friends. The sumptuousness of the solitary equipage standing at the depot platform must, in consequence, have struck her all the more forcibly, and when he turned and asked her if she did not admire this fine turn-out, you can imagine the lovely smile with which she acknowledged its splendor and then turned away to look up and down for the street-car she expected to take with him to their bridal home.

"He says that he caught her back with the remark that he was glad she liked it because it was hers and many more like it. But she insists that he did not say a word, only smiled in a way to make her see for whom the carriage door was being held open. Such was her entrance into wealth and love and alas! into trouble. For the latter followed hard upon the two first. Mr. Ocumpaugh's mother, who had held sway at Homewood for thirty years or more, was hard as the nether millstone. She was a Rathbone and had brought both wealth and aristocratic connections into the family. She had no sympathy for penniless beauties (she was a very plain woman herself) and made those first few years of her daughter-in-law's life as nearly miserable as any woman's can be who adores her husband. I have heard that it was a common experience for this sharp-tongued old lady to taunt her with the fact that she brought nothing into the family but herself--not even a _towel_; and when two years passed and no child came, the biting criticisms became so frequent that a cloud fell over the young wife's sensitive beauty, which no after happiness has ever succeeded in fully dispelling. Matters went better after Gwendolen came, but in reckoning up the possible defects in Mrs. Ocumpaugh's character you should never forget the twist that may have been given to it by that mother-in-law."

"I have heard of Madam Ocumpaugh," I remarked, rising, anxious to end an interview whose purport was more or less enigmatic to me.

"She is dead now--happily. A woman like that is accountable for much more than she herself ever realizes. But one thing she never succeeded in doing: she never shook Mr. Ocumpaugh's love for his wife or hers for him. Whether it was the result of that early romantic episode of which I have spoken, or whether their natures are peculiarly congenial, the bond between them has been one of exceptional strength and purity."

"It will be their comfort now," I remarked.

Mrs. Carew smiled, but in a dubious way that added to my perplexity and made me question more seriously than ever just what her motive had been in subjecting me to these very intimate reminiscences of one I was about to approach on an errand of whose purport she could have only a general idea.

Had she read my inmost soul? Did she wish to save her friend, or save herself, or even to save me from the result of a blind use of such tools as were the only ones afforded me? Impossible to determine. She was at this present
moment, as she had always been, in fact, an unsolvable problem to me, and it was not at this hurried time and with such serious work before me that I could venture to make any attempt to understand her.

"You will let me know the outcome of your talk with Mrs. Ocumpaugh?" she cried, as I moved to the front of the porch.

It was for me to look dubious now. I could make no such promise as that.

"I will let you know the instant there is any good news," I assured her.

And with that I moved off, but not before hearing the peremptory command with which she entered the house:

"Now, Dinah, quick!"

Evidently, her preparations for departure were to be pushed.

XVII

IN THE GREEN BOUDOIR

So far in this narrative I have kept from the reader nothing but an old experience of which I was now to make use. This experience involved Mrs. Ocumpaugh, and was the cause of the confidence which I had felt from the first in my ability to carry this search through to a successful termination. I believed that in some secret but as yet undiscovered way, it offered a key to this tragedy. And I still believed this, little as I had hitherto accomplished and blind as the way continued to look before me.

Nevertheless, it was with anything but a cheerful heart that I advanced that morning through the shrubbery toward the Ocumpaugh mansion.

I dreaded the interview I had determined to seek. I was young, far too young, to grapple with the difficulties it involved; yet I saw no way of avoiding it, or of saving either Mrs. Ocumpaugh or myself from the suffering it involved.

Mrs. Carew had advised that I should first see the girl called Celia. But Mrs. Carew knew nothing of the real situation. I did not wish to see any girl. I felt that no such intermediary would answer in a case like this. Nor did I choose to trust Miss Porter. Yet to Miss Porter alone could I appeal.

The sight of a doctor's gig standing at the side door gave me my first shock. Mrs. Ocumpaugh was ill, then, really ill. Yet if I came to make her better? I stood irresolute till I saw the doctor come out; then I walked boldly up and asked for Miss Porter.

Just what Mrs. Carew had advised me not to do.

Miss Porter came. She recognized me, but only to express her sorrow that Mrs. Ocumpaugh was totally unfit to see any one to-day.

"Not if he brings news?"

"News?"

"I have news, but of a delicate nature. I should like the privilege of imparting the same to Mrs. Ocumpaugh herself."

"Impossible."

"Excuse me, if I urge it."

"She can not see you. The doctor who has just gone says that at all hazards she must be kept quiet to-day. Won't Mr. Atwater do? Is it--is it good news?"

"That, Mrs. Ocumpaugh alone can say."

"See Mr. Atwater; I will call him."

"I have nothing to say to _him_."

"But--"

"Let me advise you. Leave it to Mrs. Ocumpaugh. Take this paper up to her--it is only a sketch--and inform her that the person who drew it has something of importance to say either to her or to Mr. Atwater, and let her decide which it shall be. You may, if you wish, mention my name."

"I do not understand."

"You hold my credentials," I said and smiled.

She glanced at the paper I had placed in her hand. It was a folded one, fastened something like an envelope.

"I can not conceive,--" she began.

I did not scruple to interrupt her.

"Mrs. Ocumpaugh has a right to the privilege of seeing what I have sketched there," I said with what impressiveness I could, though my heart was heavy with doubt. "Will you believe that what I ask is for the best and take this envelope to her? It may mean the ultimate restoration of her child."

"This paper?"

"Yes, Miss Porter."

She did not try to hide her incredulity.
"I do not see how a picture--yet you seem very much in earnest--and I know she has confidence in you, she and Mr. Ocumpaugh, too. I will take it to her if you can assure me that good will come of it and no more false hopes to destroy the little courage she has left."

"I can not promise that. I believe that she will wish to receive me and hear all I have to say after seeing what that envelope contains. That is as far as I can honestly go."

"It does not satisfy me. If it were not for the nearness of Mr. Ocumpaugh's return, I would have nothing to do with it. He must hear at Sandy Hook that some definite news has been received of his child."

"You are right, Miss Porter, he must."

"He idolized Gwendolen. He is a man of strong feelings; very passionate and much given to follow the impulse of the moment. If his suspense is not ended at the earliest possible instant, the results may be such as I dare not contemplate."

"I know it; that is why I have pushed matters to this point. You will carry that up to her?"

"Yes; and if--"

"No ifs. Lay it before her where she sits and come away. But not beyond call. You are a good woman--I see it in your face--do not watch her as she unfolds this paper. Persons of her temperament do not like to have their emotions observed, and this will cause her emotion. That can not be helped, Miss Porter. Sincerely and honestly I tell you that it is impossible for her best friends to keep her from suffering now; they can only strive to keep that suffering from becoming permanent."

"It is a hard task you have set me," complained the poor woman; "but I will do what I can. Anything must be better for Mrs. Ocumpaugh than the suspense she is now laboring under."

"Remember," I enjoined, with the full force of my secret anxiety, "that no eye but hers must fall upon this drawing. Not that it would convey meaning to anybody but herself, but because it is her affair and her affair only, and you are the woman to respect another person's affairs."

She gave me a final scrutinizing look and left the room.

"God grant that I have made no mistake!" was the inward prayer with which I saw her depart.

My fervency was sincere. I was myself frightened at what I had done.

And what had I done? Sent her a sketch drawn by myself of Doctor Pool and of his office. If it recalled to her, as I felt it must, the remembrance of a certain memorable visit she had once paid there, she would receive me.

When Miss Porter reentered some fifteen minutes later, I saw that my hazardous attempt had been successful.

"Come," said she; but with no cheerful alacrity, rather with an air of gloom.

"Was--was Mrs. Ocumpaugh very much disturbed by what she saw?"

"I fear so. She was half-asleep when I went in, dreaming as it seemed, and pleasantly. It was cruel to disturb her; indeed I had not the heart, so I just laid the folded paper near her hand and waited, but not too near, not within sight of her face. A few minutes later--interminable minutes to me--I heard the paper rattle, but I did not move. I was where she could see me, so she knew that she was not alone and presently I caught the sound of a strange noise from her lips, then a low cry, then the quick inquiry in sharper and more peremptory tones than I had ever before heard from her, 'Where did this come from? Who has dared to send me this?' I advanced quickly. I told her about you and your desire to see her; how you had asked me to bring her up this little sketch so that she would know that you had real business with her; that I regretted troubling her when she felt so weak, but that you promised revelations or some such thing--at which I thought she grew very pale. Are you quite convinced that you have news of sufficient importance to warrant the expectations you have raised in her?"

"Let me see her," I prayed.

She made a sign and we both left the room.

Mrs. Ocumpaugh awaited me in her own boudoir on the second floor. As we went up the main staircase I was afforded short glimpses of room after room of varying richness and beauty, among them one so dainty and delicate in its coloring that I presumed to ask if it were that of the missing child.

Miss Porter's look as she shook her head roused my curiosity.

"I should be glad to see her room," I said.

She stopped, seemed to consider the matter for a moment, then advanced quickly and, beckoning me to follow, led me to a certain door which she quietly opened. One look, and my astonishment became apparent. The room before me, while large and sunny, was as simple, I had almost said as bare, as my sister's at home. No luxurious furnishings here, no draperies of silk and damask, no half-lights drawing richness from stained glass, no gleam of silver or sparkle of glass on bedecked dresser or carved mantel. Not even the tinted muslins I had seen in some nurseries; but a plain set of furniture on a plain carpet with but one object of real adornment within the four walls. That was a picture of the Madonna opposite the bed, and that was beautiful. But the frame was of the cheapest--a simple band of oak.
Catching Miss Porter's eye as we quietly withdrew, I ventured to ask whose taste this was.
The answer was short and had a decided ring of disapproval in it.
"Her mother's. Mrs. Ocumpaugh believes in simple surroundings for children."
"Yet she dressed Gwendolen like a princess."
"Yes, for the world's eye. But in her own room she wore gingham aprons which effectually covered up her ribbons and laces."
The motive for all this was in a way evident to me, but somehow what I had just seen did not add to my courage for the coming interview.

We stopped at the remotest door of this long hall. As Miss Porter opened it I summoned up all my nerve, and the next moment found myself standing in the presence of the imposing figure of Mrs. Ocumpaugh drawn up in the embrasure of a large window overlooking the Hudson. It was the same window, doubtless, in which she had stood for two nights and a day watching for some sign from the boats engaged in dragging the river-bed. Her back was to me and she seemed to find it difficult to break away from her fixed attitude; for several minutes elapsed before she turned slowly about and showed me her face.

When she did, I stood appalled. Not a vestige of color was to be seen on cheek, lip or brow. She was the beautiful Mrs. Ocumpaugh still, but the heart which had sent the hues of life to her features, was beating slow--slow--and the effect was heartbreaking to one who had seen her in her prime and the full glory of her beauty as wife and mother.

"Pardon," I faltered out, bowing my head as if before some powerful rebuke, though her lips were silent and her eyes pleading rather than accusing. Truly, I had ventured far in daring to recall to this woman an hour which at this miserable time she probably would give her very life to forget. "Pardon," I repeated, with even a more humble intonation than before, for she did not speak and I hardly knew how to begin the conversation. Still she said nothing, and at last I found myself forced to break the unbearable silence by some definite remark.

"I have presumed," I therefore continued, advancing but a step toward her who made no advance at all, "to send you a hurried sketch of one who says he knows you, that you might be sure I was not one of the many eager but irresponsible men who offer help in your great trouble without understanding your history or that of the little one to whose seemingly unaccountable disappearance all are seeking a clue."

"My history!"
The words seemed forced from her, but no change in eye or look accompanied them; nor could I catch a motion of her lips when she presently added in a far-away tone inexpressibly affecting, "_Her_ history! Did he bid you say that?"

"Doctor Pool? He has given me no commands other than to find the child. I am not here as an agent of his. I am here in Mr. Ocumpaugh's interest and your own; with some knowledge--a little more knowledge than others have perhaps--to aid me in the business of recovering this child. Madam, the police are seeking her in the holes and slums of the great city and at the hands of desperate characters who make a living out of the terrors and griefs of the rich. But this is not where I should look for Gwendolen Ocumpaugh. I should look nearer, just as you have looked nearer; and I should use means which I am sure have not commended themselves to the police. These means you can doubtless put in my hands. A mother knows many things in connection with her child which she neither thinks to impart nor would, under any ordinary circumstances, give up, especially to a stranger. I am not a stranger; you have seen me in Mr. Ocumpaugh's confidence; will you then pardon me if I ask what may strike you as impertinent questions, but which may lead to the discovery of the motive if not to the method of the little one's abduction?"

"I do not understand--" She was trying to shake off her apathy. "I feel confused, sick, almost like one dying. How can I help? Haven't I done everything? I believe that she strayed to the river and was drowned. I still believe her dead. Otherwise we should have news--real news--and we don't, we don't."
The intensity with which she uttered the last two words brought a line of red into her gasping lips. She was becoming human, and for a minute I could not help drawing a comparison between her and her friend Mrs. Carew as the latter had just appeared to me in her little half-denuded house on the other side of the hedge-row. Both beautiful, but owing their charms to quite different sources, I surveyed this woman, white against the pale green of the curtain before which she stood, and imperceptibly but surely the glowing attractions of the gay-hearted widow who had found a child to love, faded before the cold loveliness of this bereaved mother, wan with suffering and alive with terrors of whose depth I could judge from the clutch with which she still held my little sketch.

Meanwhile I had attempted some kind of answer to Mrs. Ocumpaugh's heart-rending appeal.

"Do not hear because she was not taken from you simply for the money her return would bring. Indeed, after hours of action and considerable thinking, I am beginning to doubt if she was taken for money at all. Can you not think of some other motive? Do you not know of some one who wanted the child from--_love_, let us say?"

"Love?"
Did her lips frame it, or did I see it in her eyes? Certainly I heard no sound, yet I was conscious that she repeated the word in her mind, if not aloud.

"I know I have startled you," I pursued. "But, pardon me--I cannot help my presumption--I must be personal--I must even go so far as to probe the wound I have made. You have a claim to Gwendolen not to be doubted, not to be gainsaid. But isn't there some one else who is conscious of possessing certain claims also? I do not allude to Mr. Ocumpaugh."

"You mean--some relative--aunt--cousin--" She was fully human now, and very keenly alert. "Mr. Rathbone, perhaps?"

"No, Mrs. Ocumpaugh, none of these." Then as the paper rattled in her hand and I saw her eyes fall in terror on it, I said as calmly and respectfully as I could: "You have a secret, Mrs. Ocumpaugh; that secret I share."

The paper trembled from her clasp and fell fluttering downward. I pointed at it and waited till our eyes met, possibly that I might give her some encouragement from my look if not from my words.

"I was a boy in Doctor Pool's employ some five years ago, and one day--"

I paused; she had made me a supplicating gesture.

"Shall I not go on?" I finally asked.

"Give me a minute," was her low entreaty. "O God! O God! that I should have thought myself secure all these years, with two in the world knowing my fatal secret!"

"I learned it by accident," I went on, when I saw her eye turn again on mine. "On a certain night six years ago, I was in the office behind an old curtain--you remember the curtain hanging at the left of the doctor's table over that break in the book-shelves. I had no business there. I had been meddling with things which did not belong to me, and when I heard the doctor's step at the door, was glad to shrink into this refuge and wait for an opportunity to escape. It did not come very soon. First he had one patient, then another. The last one was you; I heard your name and caught a glimpse of your face as you went out. It was a very interesting story you told him--I was touched by it though I hardly understood."

"Oh! oh!"

She was swaying from side to side, swaying so heavily that I instinctively pushed forward a chair.

"Sit," I prayed. "You are not strong enough for this excitement."

She glanced at me vaguely, shook her head, but made no move toward accepting the proffered chair. She submitted, however, when I continued to press it upon her; and I felt less a brute and hard-hearted monster when I saw her sitting with folded hands before me.

"I bring this up," said I, "that you may understand what I mean when I say that some one else--another woman, in fact, may feel her claim upon this child greater than yours."

"You mean the real mother. Is she known? The doctor swore--"

"I do not know the real mother. I only know that you are not; that to win some toleration from your mother-in-law, to make sure of your husband's lasting love, you won the doctor over to a deception which secured a seeming heir to the Ocumpaugh. Whose child was given you, is doubtless known to you--"

"No, no."

I stared, aghast.

"What! You do not know?"

"No, I did not wish to. Nor was she ever to know me or my name."

"Then this hope has also failed. I thought that in this mother, we might find the child's abductor."

XVIII

"YOU LOOK AS IF--AS IF--"

I had studiously avoided looking at her while these last few words passed between us, but as the silence which followed this final outburst continued, I felt forced to glance her way if only to see what my next move should be. I found her gazing straight at me with a bright spot on either cheek, looking as if seared there by a red-hot iron.

"You are a detective," she said, as our regards met. "You have known this shameful secret always, yet have met my husband constantly and have never told."

"No, I saw no reason."

"Did you never, when you saw how completely my husband was deceived, how fortunes were bequeathed to Gwendolen, gifts lavished on her, her small self made almost an idol of, because all our friends, all our relatives saw in her a true Ocumpaugh, think it wicked to hold your peace and let this all go on as if she were the actual offspring of my husband and myself?"

"No; I may have wondered at your happiness; I may have thought of the consequences if ever he found out, but--"

I dared not go on; the quick, the agonizing nerve of her grief and suffering had been touched and I myself
quailed at the result. Stammering some excuse, I waited for her soundless anguish to subside; then, when I thought
she could listen, completed my sentence by saying:

"I did not allow my thoughts to stray quite so far, Mrs. Ocumpaugh. Not till my knowledge of your secret
promised to be of use did I let it rise to any proportion in my mind. I had too much sympathy for your difficulties; I
have to-day."

This hint of comfort, perhaps from the only source which could afford her any, seemed to move her.

"Do you mean that you are my friend?" she cried. "That you would help me, if any help were possible, to keep
my secret and--my husband's love?"

I did not know how to dash the first spark of hope I had seen in her from the beginning of this more than painful
interview. To avoid it, I temporized a trifle and answered with ready earnestness:

"I would do much, Mrs. Ocumpaugh, to make the consequences of your act as ineffective as possible and still be
to the interests of Mr. Ocumpaugh. If the child can be found--you wish that? You loved her?"

"O yes, I loved her." There was no mistaking the wistfulness of her tone. "Too well, far too well; only my
husband more."

"If you can find her--that is the first thing, isn't it?"

"Yes."

It was a faint rejoinder. I looked at her again.

"You do not wish her found," I suddenly declared.

She started, rose to her feet, then suddenly sat again as if she felt that she could not stand.

"What makes you say that? How dare you? how can you say that? My husband loves her, I love her--she is our
own child, if not by birth, by every tie which endears a child to a parent. Has that wicked man--"

"Doctor Pool!" I put in, for she stopped, gasping.

"Yes; Doctor Pool, whom I wish to God I had never seen--has he told you any such lies as that? the man who
swore--"

I put out my hand to calm her. I feared for her reason if not for her life.

"Be careful," I enjoined. "Your walls are thick but tones like yours are penetrating." Then as I saw she would be
answered, I replied to the question still alive in her face: "No; Doctor Pool has not talked of you. I saw it in your
own manner, madam; it or something else. Perhaps it was something else--another secret which I have not shared."

She moistened her lips and, placing her two hands on the knobs of the chair in which she sat, leaned passionately
forward. Who could say she was cold now? Who could see anything but a feeling heart in this woman, beautiful
beyond all precedent in her passion and her woe?

"It is--it was--a secret. I have to confess to the abnormal. The child did not love me; has never loved me. Lavish
as I, have been in my affection and caresses, she has never done aught but endure them. Though she believes me her
own mother, she has shrunk from me with all the might of her nature from the very first. It was God's punishment
for the lie by which I strove to make my husband believe himself the father which in God's providence he was not. I
have borne it; but my life has been a living hell. It was that you saw in my face--nothing else."

I was bound to believe her. The child had made her suffer, but she was bent upon recovering her--of course. I
dared not contemplate any other alternative. Her love for her husband precluded any other desire on her part. And so
I admitted, when after a momentary survey of the task yet before me, I ventured to remark:

"Then we find ourselves once more at the point from which we started. Where shall we look for his child? Mrs.
Ocumpaugh, perhaps it would aid us in deciding this question if you told me, sincerely told me, why you had such
strong belief in Gwendolen's having been drowned in the river. You did believe this--I saw you at the window. You
are not an actress like your friend--you expected to see her body drawn from those waters. For twenty-four hours
you expected it, though every one told you it was impossible. Why?"

She crept a step nearer to me, her tones growing low and husky.

"Don't you see? I--I--thought that to escape me, she might have leaped into the water. She was capable of it.
Gwendolen had a strong nature. The struggle between duty and repulsion made havoc even in her infantile breast.
Besides, we had had a scene that morning--a secret scene in which she showed absolute terror of me. It broke my
heart, and when she disappeared in that mysterious way--and--and--one of her shoes was found on the slope, what
was I to think but that she had chosen to end her misery--this child! this babe I had loved as my own flesh and
blood!--in the river where she had been forbidden to go?"

"Suicide by a child of six! You gave another reason for your persistent belief, at the time, Mrs. Ocumpaugh."

"Was I to give this one?"

"No; no one could expect you to do that, even if there had been no secret to preserve and the child had been your
own. But the child did not go to the river. You are convinced of that now, are you not?"

"Yes."
"Where then did she go? Or rather, to what place was she taken? Somewhere near; somewhere within easy reach, for the alarm soon rose and then she could not be found. Mrs. Ocumpaugh, I am going to ask you an apparently trivial and inconsequent question. Was Gwendolen very fond of sweets?"

"Yes."

She was sitting upright now, staring me in the face in unconcealed astonishment and a little fear.

"What sort of candy--pardon me if I seem impertinent--had you in your house on the Wednesday the child disappeared? Any which she could have got at or the nurse given her?"

"There were the confections brought by the caterer; none other that I know of; I did not indulge her much in sweets."

"Was there anything peculiar about these confections either in taste or appearance?"

"I didn't taste them. In appearance they were mostly round and red, with a brandied cherry inside. Why, sir, why do you ask? What have these miserable lumps of sugar to do with Gwendolen?"

"Madam, do you recognize this?"

I took from my pocket the crushed mass of colored sugar and fruit I had picked up from the musty cushions of the old sofa in the walled-up room of the bungalow.

She took it and looked up, staring.

"It is one of them," she cried. "Where did you get it? You look as if--as if--"

"I had come upon a clue to Gwendolen? Madam, I believe I have. This candy has been held in a hot little hand. Miss Graham or one of the girls must have given it to her as she ran through the dining-room or across the side veranda on her way to the bungalow. She did not eat it offhand; she evidently fell asleep before eating it, but she clutched it very tight, only dropping it, I judge, when her muscles were quite relaxed by sleep; and then not far; the folds of her dress caught it, for--"

"What are you telling me?" The interruption was sudden, imperative. "I saw Gwendolen asleep; she held a string in her hand but no candy, and if she did--"

"Did you examine both hands, madam? Think! Great issues hang on a right settlement of this fact. Can you declare that she did not have this candy in one of her little hands?"

"No, I can not declare that."

"Then I shall always believe she did, and this same sweetmeat, this morsel from the table set for your guests on the afternoon of the sixteenth of this month, I found last night in the disused portion of the bungalow walled up by Mr. Ocumpaugh's father, but made accessible since by an opening let into the floor from the cellar. This latter I was enabled to reach by means of a trap-door concealed under the rug in the open part of this same building."

"I--I am all confused. Say that again," she pleaded, starting once more to her feet, but this time without meeting my eyes. "In the disused part of the bungalow? How came you there? No one ever goes there--it is a forbidden place."

"The child has been there--and lately."

"Oh!" her fingers began to tremble and twist themselves together. "You have something more than this to tell me. Gwendolen has been found and--" her looks became uncertain and wandered, as I thought, toward the river.

"She has not been found, but the woman who carried her into that place will soon be discovered."

"How? Why?"

I had risen by this time and could answer her on a level and face to face.

"Because the trail of her steps leads straight along the cellar floor. We have but to measure these footprints."

"And what?--what?"

"We find the abductor."

A silence, during which one long breath issued from her lips.

"Was it a man's or woman's steps?" she finally asked.

"A woman's, daintily shod; a woman of about the size of--"

"Who? Why do you play with my anguish?"

"Because I hate to mention the name of a friend."

"Ah! What do you know of my friends?"

"Not much. I happened to meet one of them, and as she is a very fine woman with exquisitely shod feet, I naturally think of her."

"What do you mean?" Her hand was on my arm, her face close to mine. "Speak! speak! the name!"

"Mrs. Carew."

I had purposely refrained up to this moment from bringing this lady, even by a hint, into the conversation. I did it now under an inner protest. But I had not dared to leave it out. The footprints I alluded to were startlingly like those left by her in other parts of the cellar floor; besides, I felt it my duty to see how Mrs. Ocumpaugh bore this name,
notwithstanding my almost completely restored confidence in its owner.

She did not bear it well. She flushed and turned quickly from my side, walking away to the window, where she again took up her stand.

"You would have shown better taste by not following your first impulse," she remarked. "Mrs. Carew's footsteps in that old cellar! You presume, sir, and make me lose confidence in your judgment."

"Not at all. Mrs. Carew's feet have been all over that cellar floor. She accompanied me through it last night, at the time I found this crushed bonbon."

I could see that Mrs. Ocumpaugh was amazed, well-nigh confounded, but her manner altered from that moment.

"Tell me about it."

And I did. I related the doubts I had felt concerning the completeness of the police investigation as regarded the bungalow; my visit there at night with Mrs. Carew, and the discoveries we had made. Then I alluded again to the footprints and the important clue they offered.

"But the child?" she interrupted. "Where is the child? If taken there, why wasn't she found there? Don't you see that your conclusions are all wild--incredible? A dream? An impossibility?"

"I go by the signs," I replied. "There seems to be nothing else to go by."

"And you want--you intend, to measure those steps?"

"That is why I am here, Mrs. Ocumpaugh. To request permission to continue this investigation and to ask for the key to the bungalow. Mrs. Carew's is no longer available; or rather, I should prefer to proceed without it."

With sudden impulse she advanced rapidly toward me.

"What is Mrs. Carew doing this morning?" she asked.

"Preparing for departure. She is quite resolved to sail to-day. Do you wish to see her? Do you wish her confirmation of my story? I think she will come, if you send for her."

"There is no need." This after an instant's hesitation. "I have perfect confidence in Mrs. Carew; and in you too," she added, with what she meant for a kind look. She was by nature without coquetry, and this attempt to please, in the midst of an overwhelming distress absorbing all her faculties, struck me as the most pitiful effort I had ever seen.

My feeling for her made it very hard for me to proceed.

"Then I may go on?" I said.

"Of course, of course. I don't know where the key is; I shall have to give orders. You will wait a few minutes, somewhere in one of the adjoining rooms, while I look up Mr. Atwater?"

"Certainly."

She was trembling, feverish, impatient.

"Shall I not look up Mr. Atwater for you?" I asked.

"No. I am feeling better. I can go myself."

In another moment she had left the room, having forgotten her own suggestion that I should await her return in some adjoining apartment.

XIX

FRENZY

Five minutes--ten minutes--elapsed and I became greatly impatient. I walked the floor; I stared from the window; I did everything I could think of to pass away these unendurable moments of suspense with creditable self-possession. But I failed utterly.

As the clock ticked off the quarter hour, and then the half, I grew not only impatient but seriously alarmed, and flinging down the book I had taken up as a last resort, stepped from the room, in the hope of coming across someone in the hall whom I could interrogate.

But the house seemed strangely quiet, and when I had walked the full length of the hall without encountering either maid or mistress, I summoned up courage to return to the room I had left and ring the bell.

No answer, though I waited long for it.

Thinking that I had not pressed the button hard enough, I made a second attempt, but again there was no answer.

Was anything amiss? Had she--

My thought did not complete itself. In sudden apprehension of I knew not what, I dashed from the room and made my way downstairs without further ceremony.

The unnatural stillness which had attracted my attention above was repeated on the floor below. No one in the rooms, no one in the passages.

Disturbed as I had not been yet by anything which had occurred in connection with this harrowing affair, I leaped to the nearest door and stepped out on the lawn.

My first glance was toward the river. All was as usual there. With my worst fears dispelled, but still a prey to doubts for which as yet I had no name, I moved toward the kitchen windows, expecting of course to find some one
there who would explain the situation to me. But not a head appeared at my call. The kitchen, too, was deserted.

"This is not chance," I involuntarily exclaimed, and was turning toward the stables when I perceived a child, the son of one of the gardeners, crossing the lawn at a run, and hailing him, asked where everybody had gone that the house seemed deserted.

He looked back but kept on running, shouting as he did so:

"I guess they're all down at the bungalow! I'm going there. Men are digging up the cellar. Mrs. Ocumpaugh says she's afraid Miss Gwendolen's body is buried there."

Aghast and perhaps a trifle conscience-stricken, I stood stock-still in the sunshine. So this was what I had done! Driven her to frenzy; roused her imagination to such a point that she saw her darling—always her darling even if another woman's child—lying under the clay across which I had attempted simply to prove that she had been carried. Or--no! I would not think that! A detective of my experience outwitted by this stricken, half-dead woman whom I had trembled to see try to stand upon her feet? Impossible! Yet the thought brought the blood to my cheek.

Digging up the bungalow cellar! That meant destroying those footprints before I had secured a single impression of the same. I should have roused her curiosity only, not her terror.

Now all might be lost unless I could arrive in time to--do what? Order the work stopped? With what face could I do that with her standing by in all the authority of motherhood--frenzied motherhood--seeking the possible body of her child! My affair certainly looked dubious. Yet I started for the bungalow like the rest, and on a run, too. Perhaps Providence would favor me and some expedient suggest itself by which I might still save the clue upon which so many hopes hung.

The excitement which had now drawn every person on the place in the one direction, was at its height as I burst through the thicket into the path running immediately about the bungalow. Those who could get in at the door had done so, filling the room whence Gwendolen had disappeared, with awe-struck men and chattering women. Some had been allowed to descend through the yawning trap-door, down which all were endeavoring to peer, and, fortified by this fact, I armed myself with an appearance of authority despite my sense of presumption, and pushed and worked my own way to these steps, saying that I had come to aid Mrs. Ocumpaugh, whose attention I declared I had been the first to direct to this place.

Struck with my manner if not with my argument, they yielded to my importunity and allowed me to pass down. The stroke of the spade and the harsh voice of the man directing the work greeted my disquieted ears. With a bound I cleared the last half-dozen steps and, alighting on the cellar bottom, was soon able, in spite of the semi-darkness, to look about me and get some notion of the scene.

A dozen men were working--the full corps of gardeners without doubt--and a single glance sufficed to show me that such of the surface as had not been upturned by their spades had been harried by their footsteps. Useless now to promulgate my carefully formed theory, with any hope of proof to substantiate it. The crushed bonbon, the piled-up boxes and the freshly sawed hole were enough without doubt to establish the fact that the child had been carried into the walled-up room above, but the link which would have fixed the identity of the person so carrying her was gone from my chain of evidence for ever. She who should have had the greatest interest in establishing this evidence was leaning on the arm of Miss Porter and directing, with wavering finger and a wild air, the movements of the men, who, in a frenzy caught from her own, dug here and dug there as that inexorable finger pointed.

Sobs choked Miss Porter; but Mrs. Ocumpaugh was beyond all such signs of grief. Her eyes moved; her breast heaved; now and then a confused command left her lips, but that was all. Yet to me she was absolutely terrifying, and it took all the courage left from my disappointment for me to move so as to attract her attention. When I saw that I had succeeded in doing this, I regretted the impulse which had led me to break into her mood. The change which my sudden appearance caused in her was too abrupt; too startling. I feared the effects, and put up my hand in silent deprecation as her lips essayed to move in what might be some very disturbing command. If she heeded it I

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"It's the child--I'm looking for the child! She was brought here. You proved that she was brought here. Then why don't we find her, or--or her little innocent body?"

I did not attempt an answer; I dared not--I merely turned away into a corner, where I should be out of the way of the men. A thought was rising in my mind; a thought which might have led to some definite action if her voice had not risen shrilly and with a despairing utterance in these words:

"Useless! It is not here she will be found. I was mad to think it. Pull up your spades and go."

A murmur of relief from one end of the cellar to the other, and every spade was drawn out of the ground.

"I could have told you," ventured one more hardy than the rest, "that there was no use disturbing this old clay for any such purpose. Any one could see that no spade has been at work here before in years."

"I said that I was mad," she repeated, and waved the men away.

Slowly they retreated with clattering spades and a heavy tread. The murmur which greeted them above slowly
died out, and the bungalow was deserted by all but our three selves. When quite sure of this, I turned, and Miss Porter's eyes met mine with a reproachful glance easy enough for me to understand.

"I will go, too," whispered Mrs. Ocumpaugh. "Oh! this has been like losing my darling for the second time!"

Real grief is unmistakable. Recognizing the heartfelt tone in which these words were uttered, I recurred to the idea of frenzy with all the sympathy her situation called for. Yet I felt that I could not let her leave before we had come to some understanding. But how express myself? How say here and now in the presence of a sympathetic but unenlightened third party what it would certainly be difficult enough for me to utter to herself in the privacy of that secluded apartment in which we had met and talked before our confidence was broken into by this impetuous act of hers.

Not seeing at the moment any natural way out of my difficulties, I stood in painful confusion, conscious of Miss Porter's eyes and also conscious that unless some miracle came to my assistance I must henceforth play but a sorry figure in this affair, when my eyes, which had fallen to the ground, chanced upon a morsel of paper so insignificant in size and of such doubtful appearance that the two ladies must have wondered to see me stoop and with ill-concealed avidity pick it up and place it in my pocket.

Mrs. Ocumpaugh, whose false strength was fast leaving her, now muttered some words which were quite unintelligible to me, though they caused Miss Porter to make me a motion very expressive of a dismissal. I did not accept it as such, however, without making one effort to regain my advantage. At the foot of the steps I paused and glanced back at Mrs. Ocumpaugh. She was still looking my way, but her chin had fallen on her breast, and she seemed to sustain herself erect only by a powerful effort. Again her pitiable and humiliating position appealed to me, and it was with some indication of feeling that I finally said:

"Am I not to have an opportunity of finishing the conversation so unhappily interrupted, Mrs. Ocumpaugh? I am not satisfied, and I do not believe you can be, with the partial disclosures I then made. Afford me, I pray, a continuation of that interview, if only to make plain to me your wishes. Otherwise I may fall into some mistake--say or do something which I might regret--for matters can not stand where they are. You know that, do you not, madam?"

"Adele! go! go!" This to Miss Porter. "I must have a few words more with Mr. Trevitt. I had forgotten what I owe him in the frenzy which possessed me."

"Do you wish to talk to him _here_?" asked that lady, with very marked anxiety.

"No, no; it is too cold, too dark. I think I can walk to Mrs. Carew's. Will you join me there, Mr. Trevitt?"

I bowed; but as she passed near me in going out, I whispered in her ear:

"I should suggest that we hold our talk anywhere but at Mrs. Carew's house, since she is liable to be the chief subject of our conversation."

"Now?"

"Now, more than ever. Her share in the child's disappearance was not eliminated or affected in any way by the destruction of her footprints."

"I will go back to the house; I will see him in my own room," Mrs. Ocumpaugh suddenly announced to her greatly disturbed companion. "Mr. Trevitt will follow in a few minutes. I must have time to think--to compose myself--to decide--"

She was evidently thinking aloud. Anxious to save her from any self-betrayal, I hastily interrupted her, saying quietly:

"I will be at your boudoir door in a half-hour from now. I myself have something to think of in the interim."

"Be careful!" It was Miss Porter who stopped to utter this word in my ear. "Be very careful, I entreat. Her heart-strings are strained almost to breaking."

I answered with a look. She could not be more conscious of this than I was.

XX

"WHAT DO YOU KNOW?"

I was glad of that half-hour. I, too, wanted a free moment in which to think and examine the small scrap of paper I had picked up from this cellar floor. In the casual glance I had given it, it had seemed to offer me a fresh clue, quite capable of replacing the old one; and I did not change my mind on a second examination; the shape, the hue, the few words written on it, even the musty smell pervading it, all going to prove it to be the one possible link which could reunite the chain whose continuity I had believed to be gone for ever.

Rejoicing in my good luck, yet conscious of still moving in very troubled waters, I cast a glance in the direction of Mrs. Carew's house, from the door of the bungalow whence I had seen Mrs. Ocumpaugh depart, and asked myself why Mrs. Carew, of all persons in the vicinity, had been the only one to hang back from this scene of excitement. It was not like her to hide herself at such a crisis (how invariably she had followed me in each and every visit I had paid here!), and though I remembered all her reasons for preoccupation, her absence under the present conditions
bore an aspect of guilt which sent my mind working in a direction which was not entirely new to me, but which I had not as yet resolutely faced.

Guilt! The word recalled that other and similar one uttered by Mr. Rathbone in that adventure which had impressed me as so unreal, and still held its place in my mind as something I had dreamed.

He was looking up when he said it, up the hill, up toward Mrs. Carew's house. He had struck his own breast, but he had looked up, not down; and though I had naturally associated the word he had used with himself--and Miss Graham, with a womanly intuition, had supplied me with an explanation of the same which was neither far-fetched nor unnatural, yet all through this day of startling vicissitudes and unimaginable interviews, faint doubts, bidden and unbidden, had visited my mind, which at this moment culminated in what I might call the irresistible question as to whether he might not have had in mind some one nearer and dearer than himself when he uttered that accusing word.

Her position, as I saw it now, did not make this supposition too monstrous for belief; that is, if she secretly loved this man who did not dare, or was too burdened with responsibility, to woo her. And who can penetrate a woman's mind? To give him--possibly without his knowledge--what every one who knew him declared him to stand in special need of--money and relief from too exacting work--might have seemed motive enough to one of her warm and impulsive temperament, for eliminating the child she cared for, but not as she cared for him. It was hard to think it; it would be harder yet to act upon it; but the longer I stood there brooding, the more I felt my conviction grow that from her and from her alone, we should yet obtain definite traces of the missing child, if only Mrs. Ocumpaugh would uphold me in the attempt.

But would Mrs. Ocumpaugh do this? I own that I had my doubts. Some hidden cause or instinct which I had not been able to reach, though I had plunged deep into the most galling secrets of her life, seemed to stand in the way of her full acceptance of the injury I believed her to have received from Mrs. Carew; or rather, in the way of her public acknowledgment of it. Though she would fain have this upturning of the bungalow cellar pass for an act of frenzy, I could not quite bring myself to look upon it as such since taking a final observation of its condition.

Though her professed purpose had been to seek the body of her child, the spades had not gone deeper than their length. It had been harrowing, not digging, she had ordered, and harrowing meant nothing more than an obliteration of the footprints which I had menaced her with comparing with those of Mrs. Carew. Why this show of consideration to one she might call friend, but who could hold no comparison in her mind with the safely or recovery of the child which, if not hers, was the beloved object of her husband's heart and only too deeply cherished by herself? Did she fear her charming neighbor? Was the bond between them founded on something besides love, and did she apprehend that a discovery of Mrs. Carew's connection with Gwendolen's disappearance would only precipitate her own disgrace and open up to public recognition the false relationship she held toward the little heiress? Hard questions these, but ones which must soon be faced and answered; for wretched as was Mrs. Ocumpaugh's position and truly as I sympathized with her misery, I was none the less resolved, to force such acknowledgments from her as would allow me to approach Mrs. Carew with a definite accusation such as even that daring spirit could not withstand.

Thus resolved, and resisting all temptation to hazard an interview with the latter lady before I had seen Mrs. Ocumpaugh again, I made my way up slowly through the grounds and entered by the side door just as my watch told me that the half-hour of my waiting was over.

Miss Porter was in the upper hall, but turned aside at my approach with a meaning gesture in the direction of the boudoir. I thought that her eyes looked red; certainly she was trembling very much; and with this poor preparation for an interview before which the strongest and most experienced man might quail, I advanced for the second time that morning to the door behind which the distracted mother awaited me.

If I knocked I do not remember it. I rather think she opened the door for me herself upon hearing my step in the hall. At all events we were soon standing again face to face, and the battle of our two wills--for it would be nothing less now--had begun.

She was the first to speak. Braving my inquiring look with eyes in whose depths determination struggled with growing despair, she asked me peremptorily, almost wildly:

"Have you told any one? Do you mean to publish my shame to the world? I see decision in your face. Does it mean that? Tell me! Does it mean that?"

"No, madam; far be it from me to harbor such an intention unless driven to it by the greatest necessity. Your secret is your own; my only reason for betraying my knowledge of it was the hope I cherished of its affording us some clue to the identity of Gwendolen's abductor. It has not done so yet, may never do so; then let us leave that topic and return to the clue offered by the carrying of that child into the long-closed room back of the bungalow. Mrs. Ocumpaugh, intentionally or unintentionally, the proof upon which I relied for settling the identity of the person so carrying her has been destroyed."
With a flush which her seemingly bloodless condition made perfectly startling, she drew back, breaking into wild disclaimers:

"I know--I fear--I was too wild--too eager. I thought only of what might lie under that floor."

"In a half-foot of earth, madam? The spades did not enter any deeper."

With a sudden access of courage, born possibly of her despair, she sought neither to attempt denial nor palliate the fact.

"And if this was my intention--though I don't acknowledge it--you must recognize my reason. I do not believe--you can not make me believe--that Gwendolen was carried into that room by Mrs. Carew. But I could see that you believed it, and to save her the shame of such an accusation and all that might follow from it, I--oh, Mr. Trevitt, you do not think this possible! Do you know so little of the impulses of a mind, bewildered as mine has been by intolerable suffering?"

"I can understand madness, and I am willing to think that you were mad just then--especially as no harm has been done and I can still accuse Mrs. Carew of a visit to that room, with the proof in my hand."

"What do you mean?" The steady voice was faltering, but I could not say with what emotion--hope for herself--doubt of me--fear for her friend; it might have been any of these; it might have been all. "Was there a footprint left, then? You say proof. Do you mean proof? A detective does not use that word lightly."

"You may be sure that I would not," I returned. Then in answer to the appeal of her whole attitude and expression: "No, there were no footprints left; but I came upon something else which I have sufficient temerity to believe will answer the same purpose. Remember that my object is first to convince you and afterward Mrs. Carew, that it will be useless for her to deny that she has been in that room. Once that is understood, the rest will come easy; for we know the child was there, and it is not a place she could have found alone."

"The proof!" She had no strength for more than that "The proof! Mr. Trevitt, the proof!"

I put my hand in my pocket, then drew it out again empty, making haste, however, to say:

"Mrs. Ocumpaugh, I do not want to distress you, but I must ask you a few questions first. Do you know the secret of that strangely divided room?"

"Only in a general way. Mr. Ocumpaugh has never told me."

"You have not seen the written account of it?"

"No."

"Nor given into Mrs. Carew's hand such an account?"

"No."

Mrs. Carew's duplicity was assuming definite proportions.

"Yet there is such an account and I have listened to a reading of it."

"You?"

"Yes, madam. Mrs. Carew read it to me last night in her own house. She told me it came to her from your hands. You see she is not always particular in her statements."

A lift of the hand, whether in depreciation or appeal I could not say, was all the answer this received. I saw that I must speak with the utmost directness.

"This account was in the shape of a letter on several sheets of paper. These sheets were very old, and were torn as well as discolored. I had them in my hand and noticed that a piece was lacking from one of them. Mrs. Ocumpaugh, are you ready to repeat that Mrs. Carew did not receive this old letter from you or obtain it in any way you know from of the house we are now in?"

"I had rather not be forced to contradict Mrs. Carew," was the low reply; "but in justice to you I must acknowledge that I hear of this letter for the first time. God grant--but what can any old letter have to do with the agonizing question before us? I am not strong, Mr. Trevitt--I am suffering--do not confuse and burden me, I pray--"

"Pardon, I am not saying one unnecessary word. These old sheets--a secret from the family--did not come from this house. Whence, then, did they come into Mrs. Carew's possession? I see you have forestalled my answer; and if you will now glance at this end of paper, picked up by me in your presence from the cellar floor across which we both know that her footsteps have passed, you will see that it is a proof capable of convicting her of the fact."

I held out the scrap I now took from my pocket.

Mrs. Ocumpaugh's hand refused to take it or her eyes to consult it.

Nevertheless I still held it out.

"Pray read the few words you will find there," I urged. "They are in explanation of the document itself, but they will serve to convince you that the letter to which they were attached, and which is now in Mrs. Carew's hands, came from that decaying room."

"No, no!" The gesture which accompanied this exclamation was more than one of refusal, it was that of repulse.

"I can not see--I do not need to--I am convinced."
"Pardon me, but that is not enough, Mrs. Ocumpaugh. I want you to be certain. Let me read these words. The story they prefaced is unknown to you; let it remain so; all I need to tell you about it is this: that it was written by Mr. Ocumpaugh's father—he who raised this partition and who is the undoubted author of these lines. Remember that they headed the letter:

_"Perish with the room whose ceiling oozes blood! If in time to come any man reads these lines, he will know why I pulled down the encircling wall built by my father, and why I raised a new one across this end of the pavilion."_

Mrs. Ocumpaugh's eyes opened wide in horror.

"Blood!" she repeated. "A ceiling oozing blood!"

"An old superstition, Mrs. Ocumpaugh, quite unworthy your attention at this moment. Do not let your mind dwell upon that portion of what I have read, but on the word '_room_'. 'Perish with the room!' We know what room was meant; there can be but one. I have myself seen the desk from which these sheets were undoubtedly taken—and for them to be in the hand of a certain person argues—" Mrs. Ocumpaugh's hand went up in dissuasion, but I relentlessly finished—"that she has been in that room! Are you more than convinced of this now? Are you sure?"

She did not need to make reply; eyes and attitude spoke for her. But it was the look and attitude of despair, not hope. Evidently she had the very greatest reason to fear Mrs. Carew, who possibly had her hard side as well as her charming one.

To ease the situation, I spoke what was in both our minds.

"I see that you are sure. That makes my duty very plain, Mrs. Ocumpaugh. My next visit must be upon Mrs. Carew."

The spirit which, from the beginning of this later interview, had infused fresh strength into her feeble frame, seemed to forsake her at this simple declaration; her whole form drooped, and the eyes, which had rested on mine, turned in their old way to the river.

I took advantage of this circumstance.

"Some one who knows you well, who knows the child well, dropped the wrong shoe into the river."

A murmur, nothing more, from Mrs. Ocumpaugh's set lips.

"Could it—I do not say that it was—I don't see any reason why it should be—but could it have been Mrs. Carew?"

No sound this time, not a sound.

"She was down at the dock that night. Did you know it?"

A gesture, but whether of assent or dissent I could not tell.

"We know of no other person who was there but the men employed."

_"What do you know?"_

With all her restraint gone—a suffering and despairing woman, Mrs. Ocumpaugh was on her knees, grasping my arm with both hands.

"Quit this torture! tell me that you know it all and leave me to—to—die!"

"Madam!"

I was confounded; and as I looked at her face, strained back in wild appeal, I was more than confounded, I was terrified.

"Madam, what does this mean? Are you—you—"

"Lock the door!" she cried; "no one must come in here now. I have said so much that I must say more. Listen and be my friend; oh, be my friend! _Those were my footsteps you saw in the bungalow. It was I who carried Gwendolen into that secret hole._"

XXI

PROVIDENCE

Had I suspected this? Had all my efforts for the last half-hour been for the purpose of entrapping her into some such avowal? I do not know. My own feelings at the time are a mystery to me; I blundered on, with a blow here and a blow there, till I hit this woman in a vital spot, and achieved the above mentioned result.

I was not happy when I reached it. I felt no elation; scarcely any relief. It all seemed so impossible. She marked the signs of incredulity in my face and spoke up quickly, almost sharply:

"You do not believe me. I will prove the truth of what I say. Wait—wait!"—and running to a closet, she pulled out a drawer—where was her weakness now?—and brought from it a pair of soiled white slippers. "If the house had been ransacked," she proceeded pantingly, "these would have told their own tale. I was shocked when I saw their condition, and kept my guests waiting till I changed them. Oh, they will fit the footprints." Her smile was ghastly. Softly she set the shoes down. "Mrs. Carew helped me; she went for the child at night. Oh, we are in a terrible strait, we two, unless you will stand by us like a friend—and you will do that, won't you, Mr. Trevitt? No one else knows what I have just confessed—not even Doctor Pool, though he suspects me in ways I never dreamed of. Money shall
not stand in the way--I have a fortune of my own now--nothing shall stand in the way, if you will have pity on Mrs. Carew and myself and help us to preserve our secret."

"Madam, what secret? I pray you to make me acquainted with the whole matter in all its details before you ask my assistance."

"Then you do not know it?"

"Not altogether, and I must know it altogether. First, what has become of the child?"

"She is safe and happy. You have seen her; you mentioned doing so just now."

"Harry?"

"Harry."

I rose before her in intense excitement. What a plot! I stood aghast at its daring and the success it had so nearly met with.

"I've had moments of suspicion," I admitted, after a short examination of this beautiful woman's face for the marks of strength which her part in this plot seemed to call for. "But they all vanished before Mrs. Carew's seemingly open manner and the perfect boyishness of the child. Is she an actress too--Gwendolen?"

"Not when she plays horse and Indian and other boyish games. She is only acting out her nature. She has no girl tastes; she is all boy, and it was by means of these instincts that Mrs. Carew won her. She promised her that if she would leave home and go with her to Europe she would cut her hair and call her Harry, and dress her so that every one would think her a boy. And she promised her something else--that she should go to her father--Gwendolen idolizes Mr. Ocumpaugh."

"But--"

"I know. You wonder why, if I loved my husband, I should send away the one cherished object of his life. It is because our love was threatened by this very object. I saw nothing but death and chaos before me if I kept her. My husband adores the child, but he hates and despises a falsehood and my secret was threatened by the one man who knows it--your Doctor Pool. My accomplice once, he declared himself ready to become my accuser if the child remained under the Ocumpaugh roof one day after the date he fixed for her removal."

"Ah!" I ejaculated, with sudden comprehension of the full meaning of the scrawls I had seen in so many parts of the grounds. "And by what right did he demand this? What excuse did he give you? His wish for money, immense money--old miser that he is!"

"No; for money I could have given him. His motive is a less tangible one. He has scruples, he says--religious scruples following a change of heart. Oh, he was a cruel man to meet, determined, inexorable. I could not move or influence him. The proffer of money only hurt my cause. A fraud had been perpetrated, he said, and Mr. Ocumpaugh must know it. Would I confess the truth to him myself? No. Then he would do so for me and bring proofs to substantiate his statements. I thought all was lost--my husband's confidence, his love, his pleasure even in the child, for it was his own blood that he loved in her, and her connection with his family of whose prestige he has an exaggerated idea. Made desperate by the thought, I faced this cruel doctor--(it was in his own office; he had presumed upon that old secret linking us together to summon me there)--and told him solemnly that rather than do this I would kill myself. And he almost bade me, 'Kill!' but refrained when the word had half left his lips and changed it to a demand for the child's immediate removal from the benefits it enjoyed under false pretenses."

And from this Mrs. Ocumpaugh went on to relate how he had told her that Gwendolen had inherited fortunes because she was believed to be an Ocumpaugh; that not being an Ocumpaugh she must never handle those fortunes, winding up with some such language as this: "Manage it how you will, only relieve me from the oppression of feeling myself a party to the grossest of deceptions. Can not the child run away and be lost? I am willing to aid you in that, even to paying for her bringing up in some decent, respectable way, such as would probably have been her lot if you had not interfered to place her in the way of millions." It was a mad thought, half meant and apparently wholly impossible to carry out without raising suspicions as damaging as confession itself. But it took an immediate hold upon the miserable woman he addressed, though she gave little evidence of it, for he proceeded to add in a hard tone: "That or immediate confession to your husband, with me by to substantiate your story. No slippery woman's tricks will go down with me. Fix the date here and now and I promise to stand back and await the result in total silence. Dally with it by so much as an hour, and I am at your gates with a story that all must hear." Is it a matter of wonder that the stricken woman, without counsel and prohibited, from the very nature of her secret, from seeking counsel uttered the first one that came to mind and went home to brood over her position and plan how she could satisfy his demands with the least cost to herself, her husband and the child?

Mr. Ocumpaugh was in Europe. This was her one point of comfort. What was done could be done in his absence, and this fact greatly minimized any risk she was likely to incur. When he returned he would find the house in mourning, for she had already decided within herself that only by apparent death could this child be safely robbed of her endowments as an Ocumpaugh and an heiress. He would grieve, but his grief would lack the sting of shame,
and so in course of time would soften into a lovely memory of one who had been as the living sunshine to him and, like the sunshine, brief in its shining. Thus and thus only could she show her consideration for him. For herself no consideration was possible. It must always be her fate to know the child alive yet absolutely removed from her. This was a sorrow capable of no alleviation, for Gwendolen was passionately dear to her, all the dearer, perhaps, because the mother-thirst had never been satisfied; because she had held the cup in hand but had never been allowed to drink. The child's future--how to rob her of all she possessed, yet secure her happiness and the prospect of an honorable estate--ah, there was the difficulty! and one she quite failed to solve till, in a paroxysm of terror and despair, after five sleepless nights, she took Mrs. Carew into her confidence and implored her aid.

The free, resourceful, cheery nature of the broader-minded woman saw through the difficulty at once. "Give her to me," she cried. "I love little children passionately and have always grieved over my childless condition. I will take Gwendolen, raise her and fill her little heart so full of love she will never miss the magnificence she has been brought to look upon as her birthright. Only I shall have to leave this vicinity--perhaps the country."

"And you would be willing?" asked the poor mother--mother by right of many years of service, if not of blood.

The answer broke her heart though it was only a smile. But such a smile--confident, joyous, triumphant; the smile of a woman who has got her heart's wish, while she, she, must henceforth live childless.

So that was settled, but not the necessary ways and means of accomplishment; those came only with time. The two women had always been friends, so their frequent meetings in the green boudoir did not waken a suspicion. A sudden trip to Europe was decided on by Mrs. Carew and by degrees the whole plot perfected. In her eyes it looked feasible enough and they both anticipated complete success. Having decided that the scheme as planned by them could be best carried out in the confusion of a great entertainment, cards were sent out for the sixteenth, the date agreed upon in the doctor's office as the one which should see a complete change in Gwendolen's prospects. It was also settled that on the same day Mrs. Carew should bring home, from a certain small village in Connecticut, her little nephew who had lately been left an orphan. There was no deception about this nephew. Mrs. Carew had for some time supplied his needs and paid for his board in the farm-house where he had been left, and in the emergency which had just come up, she took care to publish to all her friends that she was going to bring him home and take him with her to Europe. Further, a market-man and woman with whom Mrs. Carew had had dealings for years were persuaded to call at her house shortly after three that afternoon, to take this nephew of hers by a circuitous and prolonged ride through the country to an institution in which she had had him entered under an assumed name. All this in one day.

Meanwhile Mrs. Carew undertook to open with her own hands a passage from the cellar of the bungalow into the long closed room behind the partition. This was to insure such a safe retreat for the child during the first search, that by no possibility could anything be found to contradict the testimony of the little shoe which Mrs. Ocumpaugh purposed presenting to all eyes as found on the slope leading to that great burial-place, the river. Otherwise the child might have been passed over to Mrs. Carew at once. All this being decided upon, each waited to perform the part assigned her--Mrs. Carew in a fever of delight--for she was passionately devoted to Gwendolen and experienced nothing but rapture at the prospect of having this charming child all to herself--Mrs. Ocumpaugh, whose only recompense would be freedom from a threatening exposure which would cost her the only thing she prized, her husband's love, in a condition of cold dread, relieved only by the burning sense of the necessity of impressing upon the whole world, and especially upon Mr. Ocumpaugh, an absolute belief in the child's death.

This was her first care. To this her mind clung with an agony of purpose which was the fittest preparation possible for real display of feeling when the time came. But she forgot one thing--they both forgot one thing--that chance or Providence might ordain that witnesses should be on the road below Homewood to prove that the child did not cross the track at the time of her disappearance. To them it seemed enough to plead the child's love for the water, her desire to be allowed to fish, the opportunity given her to escape, and--the little shoes. Such shortsightedness in face of a great peril could be pardoned Mrs. Ocumpaugh on the verge of delirium under her cold exterior, but Mrs. Carew should have taken this possibility into account; and would have done so, probably, had she not been completely absorbed in the part she would be called upon to play when the exchange of children should be made and Gwendolen be intrusted to her charge within a dozen rods of her own home. This she could dwell on with the whole force of her mind; this she could view in all its relations and make such a study of as to provide herself against all contingencies. But the obvious danger of a gang of men being placed just where they could serve as witnesses, in contradiction of the one fact upon which the whole plot was based, never even struck her imagination.

The nursery-governess whose heart was divided between her duty to the child and her strong love of music, was chosen as their unconscious accomplice in this fraud. As the time for the great musicale approached, she was bidden to amuse Gwendolen in the bungalow, with the understanding that if the child fell asleep she might lay her on the divan and so far leave her as to take her place on the bench outside where the notes of the solo singers could reach her. That Gwendolen would fall asleep and fall asleep soon, the wretched mother well knew, for she had given her a
safe but potent sleeping draft which could not fail to insure a twelve hours' undisturbed slumber to so healthy a child. The fact that the little one had shrunken more than ever from her attentions that morning both hurt and encouraged her. Certainly it would make it easier for Mrs. Carew to influence Gwendolen. In her own mind filled with terrible images of her husband's grief and her long prospective dissimulation, one picture rose in brilliant contrast to the dark one embodying her own miserable future and that of the soon-to-be bereaved father. It was that of the perfect joy of the hungry-hearted child in the arms of the woman she loved best. It brought her cheer--it brought her anguish. It was a salve to her conscience and a mortal thrust in an already festering wound. She shut it from her eyes as much as possible,--and so, the hour came.

We know its results--how far the scheme succeeded and whence its great failure arose. Gwendolen fell asleep almost immediately on reaching the bungalow and Miss Graham, dreaming no harm and having the most perfect confidence in Mrs. Ocumpaugh, took advantage of the permission she had received, and slipped outside to sit on the bench and listen to the music. Presently Mrs. Ocumpaugh appeared, saying that she had left her guests for a moment just to take a look at Gwendolen and see if all were well with her.

As she needed no attendance, Miss Graham might stay where she was. And Miss Graham did, taking great pleasure in the music, which was at its finest she had ever heard. Meanwhile Mrs. Ocumpaugh entered the bungalow, and, untying the child's shoes as she had frequently done before when she found her asleep, she lifted her and carried her just as she was down the trap, the door of which she had previously raised. The darkness lurking in such places, a darkness which had rendered it so impenetrable at midnight, was relieved to some extent in daylight by means of little grated openings in the wall under the beams, so that her chief difficulty lay in holding up her long dress and sustaining the heavy child at the same time. But the exigency of the moment and her apprehension lest Miss Graham should reenter the bungalow before she could finish her task and escape, gave great precision to her movements, and in an incredibly short space of time she had reached those musty precincts which, if they should not prove the death of the child, would safely shelter her from every one's eye, till the first excitement of her loss was over, and the conviction of her death by drowning became a settled fact in every mind.

Mrs. Ocumpaugh's return was a flight. She had brought one of the little shoes with her, concealed in a pocket she had made especially for it in the trimmings of her elaborate gown. She found the bungalow empty, the trap still raised, and Miss Graham, toward whom she cast a hurried look through the window, yet in her place, listening with enthralled attention to the great tenor upon whose magnificent singing Mrs. Ocumpaugh had relied for the successful carrying out of what she and Mrs. Carew considered the most critical part of the plot. So far then, all was well. She had but to drop the trap-door carefully to its place, replace the corner of the carpet she had pulled up, push down with her foot the two or three nails she had previously loosened, and she would be quite at liberty to quit the place and return to her guests.

But she found that this was not as easy as she had imagined. The clogs of a terrible, almost a criminal, consciousness held back her steps. She stumbled as she left the bungalow and stopped to catch her breath as if the oppression of the room in which she had immured her darling had infected the sunny air of this glorious day and made free breathing an impossibility. The weights on her feet were so palpable to her that she unconsciously looked down at them. This was how she came to notice the dust on her shoes. Alive to the story it told, she burst the spell which held her and made a bound toward the house.

Rushing to her room she shook her skirts and changed her shoes, and thus freed from all connecting links with that secret spot, reentered among her guests, as beautiful and probably as wretched a woman as the world contained that day.

Yet not as wretched as she could be. There were depths beneath these depths. If he should ever know! If he should ever come to look at her with horrified, even alienated eyes! Ah, that were the end--that would mean the river for her--the river which all were so soon to think had swallowed the little Gwendolen. Was that Miss Graham coming? Was the stir she now heard outside, the first indication of the hue and cry which would soon ring through the whole place and her shrinking heart as well? No, no, not yet. She could still smile, must smile and smite her two glove-covered hands together in simulated applause of notes and tones she did not even hear. And no one noted that strange in that smile or in that gracious bringing together of hands, which if any one had the impulse to touch--

But no one thought of doing that. A heart may bleed drop by drop to its death in our full sight without our suspecting it, if the eyes above it still beam with natural brightness. And hers did that. She had always been called impassive. God be thanked that no warmth was expected from her and that no one would suspect the death she was dying, if she did not cry out. But the moment came when she did cry out. Miss Graham entered, told her story, and all Mrs. Ocumpaugh's pent-up agony burst its bounds in a scream which to others seemed but the natural outburst of an alarmed mother. She fled to the bungalow, because that seemed the natural thing to do, and never forgetting what was expected of her, cried aloud in presence of its emptiness: "The river! the river!" and went stumbling down the
The shoe was near her hand and she drew it out as she went on. When they found her she had fainted; the excess of excitement has this natural outcome. She did not have to play a part, the humiliation of her own deed and the terrors yet to come were eating up her very soul. Then came the blow, the unexpected, overwhelming blow of finding that the deception planned with such care— a deception upon the success of which the whole safety of the scheme depended—was likely to fail just for the simple reason that a dozen men could swear that the child had never crossed the track. She was dazed—confounded. Mrs. Carew was not by to counsel her; she had her own part in this business to play; and Mrs. Ocumpaugh, conscious of being mentally unfit for any new planning, conscious indeed of not being able to think at all, simply followed her instinct and held to the old cry in face of proof, of persuasion, of reason even; and so, did the very wisest thing possible, no one expecting reason in a mother reeling under such a vital shock.

But the cooler, more subtile and less guilty Mrs. Carew had some judgment left, if her friend had lost hers. Her own part had been well played. She had brought her nephew home without giving any one, not even the maid she had provided herself with, in New York, an opportunity to see his face; and she had passed him over, dressed in quite different clothes, to the couple in the farm-wagon, who had carried him, as she supposed, safely out of reach and any possibility of discovery. You see her calculations failed here also. She did not credit the doctor with even the little conscience he possessed, and, unconscious of his near waiting on the highway in anxious watch for the event concerning which he had his own secret doubts, she deluded herself into thinking that all they had to fear was a continuation of the impression that Gwendolen had not gone down to the river and been drowned.

When, therefore, she had acted out her little part—received the searching party and gone with them all over the house even to the door of the room where she said her little nephew was resting after his journey—(Did they look in? Perhaps, and perhaps not, it mattered little, for the bed had been arranged against this contingency and no one but a detective bent upon ferreting out crime would have found it empty)—she asked herself how she could strengthen the situation and cause the theory advanced by Mrs. Ocumpaugh to be received, notwithstanding the evidence of seeming eye-witnesses. The result was the throwing of a second shoe into the water as soon as it was dark enough for her to do this unseen. As she had to approach the river by her own grounds, and as she was obliged to choose a place sufficiently remote from the lights about the dock not to incur the risk of being detected in her hazardous attempt, the shoe fell at a spot farther down stream than the searchers had yet reached, and the intense excitement I had myself seen in Mrs. Ocumpaugh's face the day I made my first visit to Homewood, sprang from the agony of suspense with which she watched, after twenty-four hours of alternating expectation and disappointment, the finding of this second shoe which, with fanatic confidence, she hoped would bring all the confirmation to be desired of her oft-repeated declaration that the child would yet be found in the river.

Meanwhile, to the infinite dismay of both, the matter had been placed in the hands of the police and word sent to Mr. Ocumpaugh, not that the child was dead, but missing. This meant world-wide publicity and the constant coming and going about Homewood of the very men whose insight and surveillance were most to be dreaded. Mrs. Ocumpaugh sank under the terrors thus accumulating upon her; but Mrs. Carew, of different temperament and history, rose to meet them with a courage which bade fair to carry everything before it.

As midnight approached (the hour agreed upon in their compact) she prepared to go for Gwendolen. Mrs. Ocumpaugh, who had not forgotten what was expected of her at that hour, roused as the clock struck twelve, and uttering a loud cry, rushed from her place in the window down to the lawn, calling out that she had heard the men shout aloud from the boats. Her plan was to draw every one who challenged to be about, down to the river bank, in order to give Mrs. Carew full opportunity to go and come unseen on her dangerous errand. And she apparently succeeded in this, for by the time she had crept back in seeming disappointment to the house, a light could be seen burning behind a pink shade in one of Mrs. Carew's upper windows—the signal agreed upon between them of the presence of Gwendolen in her new home.

But small was the relief as yet. The shoe had not been found, and at any moment some intruder might force his way into Mrs. Carew's house and, in spite of all her precautions, succeed in obtaining a view of the little Harry and recognize in him the missing child.

Of these same precautions some mention must be made. The artful widow had begun by dismissing all her help, giving as an excuse her speedy departure for Europe, and the colored girl she had brought up from New York saw no difference in the child running about the house in its little velvet suit from the one who, with bound-up face and a heavy shade over his eyes, came up in the cars with her in Mrs. Carew's lap. Her duties being limited to a far-off watch on the child to see that it came to no harm, she was the best witness possible in case of police intrusion or neighborhood gossip. As for Gwendolen herself, the novelty of the experience and the prospect held out by a speedy departure to "papa's country" kept her amused and even hilarious. She laughed when her hair was cut short, darkened and parted. She missed but one thing, and that was her pet plaything which she used to carry to bed with
her at night. The lack of this caused some tears—a grief which was divined by Mrs. Ocumpaugh, who took pains to assuage it in the manner we all know.

But this was after the finding of the second shoe; the event so long anticipated and so little productive. Somehow, neither Mrs. Carew nor Mrs. Ocumpaugh had taken into consideration the fact of the child's shoes being rights and lefts, and when this attempt to second the first deception was decided on, it was thought a matter of congratulation that Gwendolen had been supplied with two pairs of the same make and that one pair yet remained in her closet. The mate of that shown by Mrs. Ocumpaugh was still on the child's foot in the bungalow, but there being no difference in any of them, what was simpler than to take one of these and fling it where it would be found. Alas! the one seized upon by Mrs. Carew was for the same foot as that already shown and commented on, and thus this second attempt failed even more completely than the first, and people began to cry, "A conspiracy!"

And a conspiracy it was, but one which might yet have succeeded if Doctor Pool's suspicion of Mrs. Ocumpaugh's intentions, and my own secret knowledge of Mrs. Ocumpaugh's real position toward this child, could have been eliminated from the situation. But with those two factors against them, detection had crept upon them in unknown ways, and neither Mrs. Ocumpaugh's frantic clinging to the theory she had so recklessly advanced, nor Mrs. Carew's determined effort to meet suspicion with the brave front calculated to disarm it, was of any avail. The truth would have its way and their secret stood revealed.

This was the story told me by Mrs. Ocumpaugh; not in the continuous and detailed manner I have here set down, but in disjointed sentences and wild bursts of disordered speech. When it was finished she turned upon me eyes full of haggard inquiry.

"Our fate is in your hands," she falteringly declared. "What will you do with it?"

It was the hardest question which had ever been put me. For minutes I contemplated her in a silence which must have been one prolonged agony to her. I did not see my way; I did not see my duty. Then the fifty thousand dollars!

At last, I replied as follows:

"Mrs. Ocumpaugh, if you will let me advise you, as a man intensely interested in the happiness of yourself and husband, I would suggest your meeting him at quarantine and telling him the whole truth."

"I would rather die," said she.

"Yet only by doing what I suggest can you find any peace in life. The consciousness that others know your secret will come between you and any satisfaction you can ever get out of your husband's continued confidence. A wrong has been done; you are the only one to right it."

"I can not. I can die, but I can not do that."

And for a minute I thought she would die then and there.

"Doctor Pool is a fanatic; he will pursue you until he is assured that the child is in good hands."

"You can assure him of that now."

"Next month his exactions may take another direction. You can never trust a man who thinks he has a mission. Pardon my presumption. No mercenary motive prompts what I am saying now."

"So you intend to publish my story, if I do not?"

I hesitated again. Such questions can not be decided in a moment. Then, with a certain consciousness of doing right, I answered earnestly:

"To no one but to Mr. Ocumpaugh do I feel called upon to disclose what really concerns no one but yourself and him."

Her hands rose toward me in a gesture which may have been an expression of gratitude or only one of simple appeal.

"He is not due until Saturday," I added gently.

No answer from the cold lips. I do not think she could have spoken if she had tried.

XXII

ON THE SECOND TERRACE

My first step on leaving Homewood was to seek a public telephone. Calling up Doctor Pool in Yonkers, I assured him that he might rest easy as to the young patient to whose doubtful condition he had called my attention. That she was in good hands and was doing well. That I had seen her and would give him all necessary particulars when I came to interview him later in the day. To his uneasy questions I vouchsafed little reply. I was by no means sure of the advisability of taking him into my full confidence. It was enough for him to know that his demands had been complied with without injury to the child.

Before hanging up the receiver, I put him a question on my own behalf. How was the boy in his charge? The growl he returned me was very non-committal, and afforded me some food for thought as I turned back to Mrs. Carew's cottage, where I now proposed to make a final visit.

I entered from the road. The heavily wooded grounds looked desolate. The copper beeches which are the glory
of the place seemed to have lost color since I last saw them above the intervening hedges. Even the house, as it
gradually emerged to view through the close shrubbery, wore a different aspect from usual. In another moment I saw
why. Every shutter was closed and not a vestige of life was visible above or below. Startled, for I had not expected
quite so hasty a departure on her part, I ran about to the side door where I had previously entered and rang fit to
wake the dead. Only solitary echoes came from within and I was about to curse the time I had lost in telephoning to
Doctor Pool, when I heard a slight sound in the direction of the private path, and, leaping hastily to the opening,
cought the glimpse of something or somebody disappearing down the first flight of steps.

Did I run? You may believe I did, at least till I had descended the first terrace; then my steps grew gradually
wary and finally ceased; for I could hear voices ahead of me on the second terrace to which I had now come, and
these voices came from persons standing still. If I rushed on I should encounter these persons, and this was
undesirable. I accordingly paused just short of the top, and so heard what raised the moment into one of tragic
importance.

One of the speakers was Mrs. Carew--there was no doubting this--the other was Mr. Rathbone. From no other
lips than his could I hope to hear words uttered with such intensity, though he was guarded in his speech, or thought
he was, which is not always the same thing.

He was pleading with her, and my heart stood still with the sense of threatening catastrophe as I realized the
attitude of the pair. He, as every word showed, was still ignorant of Gwendolen's fate, consequently of the identity of
the child who I had every reason to believe was at that very moment fluttering a few steps below in the care of the
colored maid, whose voice I could faintly hear; she, with his passion to meet and quell, had this secret to maintain;
hearing his wild entreaties with one ear and listening for the possible outbursts of the not-to-be-restrained child with
the other; mad to go--to catch her train before discovery overwhelmed her, yet not daring to hasten him, for his
mood was a man's mood and not to be denied. I felt sorry for her, and cast about in my mind what aid to give the
situation, when the passion of his words seized me, and I forgot her position in the interest I began to feel in his.

"Valerie, Valerie," he was saying, "this is cruelty. You go with no good cause that I can see--put the sea between
us, and yet say no word to make the parting endurable. You understand what I suffer--my hateful thoughts, my
dread, which is not so much dread as--Oh, that I should say it! Oh, that I should feel it!--hope; guilty, unpardonable
hope. Yet you refuse me the little word, the kindly look, which would alleviate the oppression of my feelings and
give me the thought of you to counteract this eternal brooding upon Gwendolen and her possible fate. I want a
promise--conditional, O God! but yet a promise; and you simply bid me to have patience; to wait--as if a man could
wait who sees his love, his life, his future trembling in the balance against the fate of a little child. If you loved me--
"

"Hush!" The feeling in that word was not for him. I felt it at once; it was for her secret, threatened every instant
she lingered there by some move, by some word which might escape a thoughtless child. "You do not understand
me, Justin. You talk with no comprehension of myself or of the event. Six months from now, if all goes well, you
will see that I have been kind, not cruel. I can not say any more; I should not have said so much. Go back, dear
friend, and let me take the train with Harry. The sea is not impassable. We shall meet again, and then--" Did she
pause to look behind her down those steps--to make some gesture of caution to the uneasy child?--"you will forgive
me for what seems cruelty to you now. I can not do differently. With all the world weeping over the doubtful fate of
this little child, you can not expect me to--to make any promise conditional upon her _death_."

"Auntie, make Dinah move away; I want to see the man you are talking to."

Gwendolen had spoken.

XXIII
A CORAL BEAD

"What's that?"

It was Mr. Rathbone who first found voice.

"To what a state have I come when in every woman's face, even in hers who is dearest, I see expressions I no
longer understand, and in every child's voice catch the sound of Gwendolen's?"

"Harry's voice is not like Gwendolen's," came in desperate protest from the ready widow. A daring assertion for
her to make to him who had often held this child in his arms for hours together. "You are not yourself, Justin. I am sorry. I--I--" Almost she gave her promise, almost she risked her future, possibly his, by saying, under the stress of her fears, what her heart did not prompt her to, when--

A quick move on her part, a low cry on his, and he came rushing up the steps.

I had advanced at her hesitating words and shown myself.

When Mr. Rathbone was well up the terrace (he hardly honored me with a look as he went by), I slowly began my descent to where she stood with her back toward me and her arms thrown round the child she had evidently called to her in her anxiety to conceal the little beaming face from this new intruder.

That she had not looked as high as my face I felt assured; that she would not show me hers unless I forced her to seemed equally certain. Every step I took downward was consequently of moment to me. I wondered how I should come out of this; what she would do; what I myself should say. The bold course commended itself to me. No more circumlocution; no more doubtful playing of the game with this woman. I would take the bull by the horns and--

I had reached the step on which she crouched. I could catch sight of the child's eyes over her shoulder, a shoulder that quivered--was it with the storm of the last interview, or with her fear of this? I would see.

Pausing, I said to her with every appearance of respect, but in my most matter-of-fact tones:

"Mrs. Carew, may I request you to send Gwendolen down to the girl I see below there? I have something to say to you before you leave."

_Gwendolen!_

With a start which showed how completely she was taken by surprise, Mrs. Carew rose. She may have recognized my voice and she may not; it is hard to decide in such an actress. Whether she did or not, she turned with a frown, which gave way to a ravishing smile as her eyes met my face.

"You?" she said, and without any betrayal in voice or gesture that she recognized that her hopes, and those of the friend to whose safety she had already sacrificed so much, had just received their death-blow, she gave a quick order to the girl who, taking the child by the hand, sat down on the steps Mrs. Carew now quitted and laid herself out to be amusing.

Gravely Mrs. Carew confronted me on the terrace below.

"Explain," said she.

"I have just come from Mrs. Ocumpaugh," I replied.

The veiled head dropped a trifle.

"She could not sustain herself! So all is lost?"

"That depends. But I must request you not to leave the country till Mr. Ocumpaugh returns."

The flash of her eye startled me. "Who can detain me," she cried, "if I wish to go?"

I did not answer in kind. I had no wish to rouse this woman's opposition.

"I do not think you will want to go when you remember Mrs. Ocumpaugh's condition. Would you leave her to bear the full burden of this deception alone? She is a broken woman. Her full story is known to me. I have the profoundest sympathy for her. She has only three days in which to decide upon her course. I have advised her to tell the whole truth to her husband."

"You!"

The word was but a breath, but I heard it. Yet I felt no resentment against this woman. No one could, under the spell of so much spirit and grace.

"Did I not advise her right?"

"Perhaps, but you must not detain _me_. You must do nothing to separate me from this child. I will not bear it. I have experienced for days now what motherhood might be, and nothing on earth shall rob me of my present rights in this child." Then as she met my unmoved countenance: "If you know Mrs. Ocumpaugh's whole history, you know that neither she nor her husband has any real claim on the child."

"In that you are mistaken," I quickly protested. "Six years of care and affection such as they have bestowed on Gwendolen, to say nothing of the substantial form which these have taken from the first, constitute a claim which all the world must recognize, if you do not. Think of Mr. Ocumpaugh's belief in her relation to him! Think of the shock which awaits him, when he learns that she is not of his blood and lineage!"

"I know, I know." Her fingers worked nervously; the woman was showing through the actress. "But I will not give up the child. Ask anything but that."

"Madam, I have had the honor so far to make but one requirement--that you do not carry the child out of the country--yet."

As I uttered this ultimatum, some influence, acting equally upon both, caused us to turn in the direction of the river; possibly an apprehension lest some word of this conversation might be overheard by the child or the nurse. A surprise awaited us which effectually prevented Mrs. Carew's reply. In the corner of the Ocumpaugh grounds stood a
man staring with all his eyes at the so-called little Harry. An expression of doubt was on his face. I knew the minute
to be critical and was determined to make the most of it.

"Do you know that man?" I whispered to Mrs. Carew.
The answer was brief but suggestive of alarm.
"Yes, one of the gardeners over there--one of whom Gwendolen is especially fond."
"She's the one to fear, then. Engage his attention while I divert hers."
All this in a whisper while the man was summoning up courage to speak.
"A pretty child," he stammered, as Mrs. Carew advanced toward him smiling. "Is that your little nephew I've
heard them tell about? Seems to me he looks like our own little lost one; only darker and sturdier."

"Much sturdier," I heard her say as I made haste to accost the child.
"Harry," I cried, recalling my old address when I was in training for a gentleman; "your aunt is in a hurry. The
cars are coming; don't you hear the whistle? Will you trust yourself to me? Let me carry you--I mean, pick-a-back,
while we run for the train."

The sweet eyes looked up--it was fortunate for Mrs. Carew that no one but myself had ever got near enough to
see those eyes or she could hardly have kept her secret--and at first slowly, then with instinctive trust, the little arms
rose and I caught her to my breast, taking care as I did so to turn her quite away from the man whom Mrs. Carew
was about leaving.

"Come!" I shouted back, "we shall be late!"--and made a dash for the gate.
Mrs. Carew joined me, and none of us said anything till we reached the station platform. Then as I set the child
down, I gave her one look. She was beaming with gratitude.

"That saved us, together with the few words I could edge in between his loud regrets at my going and his
exclamations of grief over Gwendolen's loss. On the train I shall fear nothing. If you will lift him up I will wrap him
in this shawl as if he were ill. Once in New York--are you not going to permit me?"

"To go to New York, yes; but not to the steamer."
She showed anger, but also an admirable self-control. Far off we could catch the sounding thrill of the
approaching train.

"I yield," she announced suddenly. And opening the bag at her side, she fumbled in it for a card which she
presently put in my hand. "I was going there for lunch," she explained. "Now I will take a room and remain until I
hear from you."

"Yes, yes," I stammered, as I looked at the card and saw her name over that of an inconspicuous hotel in the
down-town portion of New York City. "I merely--"

The nearing of the train gave me the opportunity of cutting short the sentence I should have found it difficult to
finish.

"Here is the child," I exclaimed, lifting the little one, whom she immediately enveloped in the light but ample
wrap she had chosen as a disguise.

"Good-by--Harry."

"Good-by! I like you. Your arms are strong and you don't shake me when you run."

Mrs. Carew smiled. There was deep emotion in her face. "_Au revoir!_" she murmured in a tone implying
promise. Happily I understood the French phrase.

I bowed and drew back. Was I wrong in letting her slip from my surveillance? The agitation I probably showed
must have caused her some thought. But she would have been more than a diviner of mysteries to have understood
its cause. Her bag, when she had opened it before my eyes, had revealed among its contents a string of remarkable
corals. A bead similar in shape, color and marking rested at that very moment over my own heart. Was that necklace
one bead short? With a start of conviction I began to believe so and that I was the man who could complete it. If that
was so--why, then--then--

It isn't often that a detective's brain reels--but mine did then.
The train began to move--
This discovery, the greatest of all, if I were right, would--
I had no more time to think.
Instinctively, with a quick jump, I made my place good on the rear car.
XXIV
"SHALL I GIVE HIM MY WORD, HARRY?"
I did not go all the way to New York on the train which Mrs. Carew and the child had taken. I went only as far
as Yonkers.

When I reached Doctor Pool's house, I thought it entirely empty. Even the office seemed closed. But
appearances here could not always be trusted, and I rang the bell with a vigor which must have wakened echoes in
the uninhabited upper stories. I know that it brought the doctor to the door, and in a state of doubtful amiability. But when he saw who awaited him, his appearance changed and he welcomed me in with a smile or what was as nearly like one as his austere nature would permit.

"How now! Want your money? Seems to me you have earned it with unexpected ease."

"Not such great ease," I replied, as he carefully closed the door and locked it "I know that I feel as tired as I ever did in my life. The child is in New York under the guardianship of a woman who is really fond of her. You can dismiss all care concerning her."

"I see--and who is the woman? Name her."

"You do not trust me, I see."

"I trust no one in business matters."

"This is not a business matter--yet."

"What do you mean?"

"I have not asked for money. I am not going to till I can perfectly satisfy you that all deception is at an end so far as Mr. Ocumpaugh at least is concerned."

"Oh, you would play fair, I see."

I was too interested in noting how each of his hands involuntarily closed on itself, in his relief at not being called upon to part with some of his hoardings, to answer with aught but a nod.

"You have your reasons for keeping close, of course," he growled as he led the way toward the basement stairs. "You're not out of the woods, is that it? Or has the great lady bargained with you?--Um? Um?"

He threw the latter ejaculations back over his shoulder as he descended to the office. They displeased me, and I made no attempt to reply. In fact, I had no reply ready. Had I bargained with Mrs. Ocumpaugh? Hardly. Yet--

"She is handsome enough," the old man broke in sharply, cutting in two my self-communings. "You're a fellow of some stamina, if you have got at her secret without making her a promise. So the child is well! That's good! There's one long black mark eliminated from my account. But I have not closed the book, and I am not going to, till my conscience has nothing more to regret. It is not enough that the child is handed over to a different life; the fortunes that have been bequeathed her must be given to him who would have inherited them had this child not been taken for a veritable Ocumpaugh."

"That raises a nice point," I said.

"But one that will drag all false things to light."

"Your action in the matter along with the rest," I suggested.

"True! but do you think I shall stop because of that?"

He did not look as if he would stop because of anything.

"Do you not think Mrs. Ocumpaugh worthy some pity? Her future is a ghastly one, whichever way you look at it."

"She sinned," was his uncompromising reply. "The wages of sin is death."

"But such death!" I protested; "death of the heart, which is the worst death of all."

He shrugged his shoulders, leading the way into the office.

"Let her beware!" he went on surlily. "Last month I saw my duty no further than the exaction of this child's dismissal from the home whose benefits she enjoyed under a false name. To-day I am led further by the inexorable guide which prompts the anxious soul. All that was wrong must be made good. Mr. Ocumpaugh must know on whom his affections have been lavished. I will not yield. The woman has done wrong; and she shall suffer for it till she rises, a redeemed soul, into a state of mind that prefers humiliation to a continuance in a life of deception. You may tell her what I say--that is, if you enjoy the right of conversation with her."

The look he shot me at this was keen as hate and spite could make it. I was glad that we were by this time in the office, and that I could avoid his eye by a quick look about the well-remembered place. This proof of the vindictive pursuit he had marked out for himself was no surprise to me. I expected no less, yet it opened up difficulties which made my way, as well as hers, look dreary in the prospect. He perceived my despondency and smiled; then suddenly changed his tone.

"You do not ask after the little patient I have here. Come, Harry, come; here is some one I will let you see."

The door of my old room swung open and I do not know which surprised me most, the kindness in the rugged old voice I had never before heard lifted in tenderness, or the look of confidence and joy on the face of the little boy who now came running in. So inexorable to a remorseful and suffering woman, and so full of consideration for a stranger's child!

"Almost well," pronounced the doctor, and lifted him on his knee. "Do you know this child's parentage and condition?" he sharply inquired, with a quick look toward me.

I saw no reason for not telling the truth.
"He is an orphan, and was destined for an institution."
"You know this?"
"Positively."
"Then I shall keep the child. Harry, will you stay with me?"

To my amazement the little arms crept round his neck. A smile grim enough, in my estimation, but not at all frightful to the child, responded to this appeal.

"I did not like the old man and woman," he said.

Doctor Pool's whole manner showed triumph. "I shall treat him better than I did you," he remarked. "I am a regenerate man now."

I bowed; I was very uneasy; there was a question I wanted to ask and could not in the presence of this child.

"He is hardly of an age to take my place," I observed, still under the spell of my surprise, for the child was handling the old man's long beard, and seeming almost as happy as Gwendolen did in Mrs. Carew's arms.

"He will have one of his own," was the doctor's unexpected reply.

I rose. I saw that he did not intend to dismiss the child.

"I should like your word, in return for the relief I have undoubtedly brought you, that you will not molest certain parties till the three days are up which I have mentioned as the limit of my own silence."

"Shall I give him my word, Harry?"

The child, startled by the abrupt address, drew his fingers from the long beard he was playfully stroking and, eyeing me with elfish gravity, seemed to ponder the question as if some comprehension of its importance had found entrance into his small brain. Annoyed at the doctor's whim, yet trusting to the child's intuition, I waited with inner anxiety for what those small lips would say, and felt an infinite relief, even if I did not show it, when he finally uttered a faint "Yes," and hid his face again on the doctor's breast.

My last remembrance of them both was the picture they made as the doctor closed the door upon me, with the sweet, confiding child still clasped in his arms.

XXV
ued the work of an instant
I did not take the car at the corner. I was sure that Jupp was somewhere around, and I had a new mission for him of more importance than any he could find here now. I was just looking about for him when I heard cries and screams at my back, and, turning, saw several persons all running one way. As that way was the one by which I had just come, I commenced running too, and in another moment was one of a crowd collected before the doctor's door.

I mean the great front door which, to my astonishment, I had already seen was wide open. The sight which there met my eyes almost paralyzed me.

Stretched on the pavement, spotted with blood, lay the two figures I had seen within the last five minutes beaming with life and energy. The old man was dead, the child dying, one little hand outstretched as if in search of the sympathetic touch which had made the last few hours perhaps the sweetest of his life. How had it happened? Was it suicide on the doctor's part or just pure accident? Either way it was horrible, but--I looked about me; there was a man ready to give explanations. He had seen it all. The doctor had been racing with the child in the long hall. He had opened the door, probably for air. A sudden dash of the child had brought him to the verge, the doctor had plunged to save him, and losing his balance toppled headlong to the street, carrying the child with him.

It was all the work of an instant.

One moment two vigorous figures--the next, a mass of crushed humanity!

A sight to stagger a man's soul! But the thought which came with it staggered me still more.

The force which had been driving Mrs. Ocumpaugh to her fate was removed. Henceforth her secret was safe if--if I chose to have it so.

XXVI
"HE WILL NEVER FORGIVE"

I was walking away when a man touched me. Some one had seen me come from the doctor's office a few minutes before. Of course this meant detention till the coroner should arrive. I quarreled with the circumstances but felt forced to submit. Happily Jupp now came to the front and I was able to send him to New York to keep that watch over Mrs. Carew, without which I could not have rested quiet an hour. One great element of danger was removed most remarkably, if not providentially, from the path I had marked out for myself; but there still remained that of this woman's possible impulses under her great determination to keep Gwendolen in her own care. But with Jupp to watch the dock, and a man in plain clothes at the door of the small hotel she was at present bound for, I thought I might remain in Yonkers contentedly the whole day.

It was not, however, till late the next afternoon that I found myself again in Homewood. I had heard from Jupp. The steamer had sailed, but without two passengers who had been booked for the voyage. Mrs. Carew and the child
were still at the address she had given me. All looked well in that direction; but what was the aspect of affairs in
Homewood? I trembled in some anticipation of what these many hours of bitter thought might have effected in Mrs.
Ocumpaugh. Evidently nothing to lessen the gloom into which the whole household had now fallen. Miss Porter,
who came in haste to greet me, wore the careworn look of a long and unrelieved vigil. I was not astonished when
she told me that she had not slept a wink.

"How could I," she asked, "when Mrs. Ocumpaugh did not close her eyes? She did not even lie down, but sat all
night in an arm-chair which she had wheeled into Gwendolen's room, staring like one who sees nothing out into the
night through the window which overlooks the river. This morning we can not make her speak. Her eyes are dry
with fever; only now and then she utters a little moan. The doctor says she will not live to see her husband, unless
something comes to rouse her. But the papers give no news, and all the attempts of the police end in nothing. You
saw what a dismal failure their last attempt was. The child on which they counted proved to be both red-haired and
pock-marked. Gwendolen appears to be lost, lost."

In spite of the despair thus expressed my way seemed to open a little.

"I think I can break Mrs. Ocumpaugh's dangerous apathy if you will let me see her again. Will you let me try?"

"The nurse--we have a nurse now--will not consent, I fear."

"Then telephone to the doctor. Tell him I am the only man who can do anything for Mrs. Ocumpaugh. This will
not be an exaggeration."

"Wait! I will get his order. I do not know why I have so much confidence in you."

In another fifteen minutes she came to lead me to Mrs. Ocumpaugh.

I entered without knocking; they told me to. She was seated, as they said, in a large chair, but with no ease to
herself; for she was not even leaning against its back, but sat with body strained forward and eyes fixed on the ripple
of the great river where, from what she had intimated to me in our last interview, she probably saw her grave. There
was a miniature in her hand, but I saw at first glance that it was not the face of Gwendolen over which her fingers
closed so spasmodically. It was her husband's portrait which she held, and it was his face, aroused and full of
denunciation, which she evidently saw in her fancy as I drew nearer her in my efforts to attract her attention; for a
shiver suddenly contracted her lovely features and she threw her arms out as if to ward from herself something
which she had no power to meet. In doing this her head turned slightly and she saw me.

Instantly the spell under which she sat frozen yielded to a recognition of something besides her own terrible
brooding. She let her arms drop, and the lips which had not spoken that morning moved slightly. I waited
respectfully. I saw that in another moment she would speak.

"You have come," she panted out at last, "to hear my decision. It is too soon. The steamer has twenty-four hours
yet before it can make port. I have not finished weighing my life against the good opinion of him I live for." Then
faintly--"Mrs. Carew has gone."

"To New York," I finished.

"No farther than that?" she asked anxiously. "She has not sailed?"

"I did not see how it was compatible with my duty to let her."

Mrs. Ocumpaugh's whole form collapsed; the dangerous apathy was creeping over her again. "You are deciding
for me,"--she spoke very faintly--"you and Doctor Pool."

Should I tell her that Doctor Pool was dead? No, not yet. I wanted her to choose the noble course for Mr.
Ocumpaugh's sake--yes, and for her own.

"No," I ventured to rejoin. "You are the only one who can settle your own fate. The word must come from you. I
am only trying to make it possible for you to meet your husband without any additional wrong to blunt his possible
forgiveness."

"Oh, he will never forgive--and I have lost all."

And the set look returned in its full force.

I made my final attempt.

"Mrs. Ocumpaugh, we may never have another moment together in confidence. There is one thing I have never
told you, something which I think you ought to know, as it may affect your whole future course. It concerns
Gwendolen's real mother. You say you do not know her."

"No, no; do not bring up that. I do not want to know her. My darling is happy with Mrs. Carew--too happy. O
God! Give me no opportunity for disturbing that contentment. Don't you see that I am consumed with jealousy? That
I might--"

She was roused enough now, cheek and lip and brow were red; even her eyes looked blood-shot. Alarmed, I put
out my hand in a soothing gesture, and when her voice stopped and her words trailed off into an inarticulate murmur
I made haste to say:

"Listen to my little story. It will not add to your pain, rather alleviate it. When I hid behind the curtain on that
day we all regret, I did not slip from my post at your departure. I knew that another patient awaited the doctor's convenience in my own small room, where he had hastily seated her when your carriage drove up. I also knew that this patient had overheard what you said as well as I, for impervious as the door looked I had often heard the doctor's mutterings when he thought I was safe beyond ear-shot, if not asleep. And I wanted to see how she would act when she rejoined the doctor; for I had heard a little of what she had said before, and was quite aware that she could help you out of your difficulty if she wished. She was a married woman, or rather had been, but she had no use for a child, being very poor and anxious to earn her own living. Would she embrace this opportunity to part with it when it came? You may imagine my interest, boy though I was."

"And did she? Was she--"

"Yes. She was ready to make her compact with the doctor just as you had done. Before she left everything was arranged for. It was her child you took--reared--loved--and have now lost."

At another time she might have resented these words, especially the last; but I had roused her curiosity, her panting eager curiosity, and she let them pass altogether unchallenged.

"Did you see this woman? Was she of common blood, common manners? It does not seem possible--Gwendolen is by nature so dainty in all her ways."

"The woman was a lady. I did not see her face, it was heavily veiled, but I heard her voice; it was a lady's voice and--""

"What?"

"She wore beautiful jewels."

"Jewels? You said she was poor."

"So she declared herself, but she had on her neck under her coat a string of beads which were both valuable and of exquisite workmanship. I know, because it broke just as she was leaving, and the beads fell all over the floor, and one rolled my way and I picked it up, scamp that I was, when both their backs were turned in their search for the others."

"A bead--a costly bead--and you were not found out?"

"No, Mrs. Ocumpaugh, she never seemed to miss it. She was too excited over what she had just done to count correctly. She thought she had them all. But this has been in my pocket for six years. Perhaps you have seen its like; I never have, in jeweler's shop or elsewhere, till yesterday."

"Yesterday?" Her great eyes, haggard with suffering, rose to mine, then they fell on the bead which I had taken from my pocket. The cry she gave was not loud, but it effectually settled all my doubts.

"What did you know of Mrs. Carew before she came to ----?" I asked impressively.

For minutes she did not answer; she was trembling like a leaf.

"Her mother!" she exclaimed at last. "Her mother! her own mother! And she never hinted it to me by word or look. Oh, Valerie, Valerie, what tortures we have both suffered! and now you are happy while I--"

Grief seemed to engulf her. Feeling my position keenly, I walked to the window, but soon turned and came back in response to her cry: "I must see Mrs. Carew instantly. Give my orders. I will start at once to New York. They will think I have gone to be on hand to meet Mr. Ocumpaugh, and will say that I have not the strength. Override their objections. I put my whole cause in your hands. You will go with me?"

"With pleasure, madam."

And thus was that terrifying apathy broken up, to be succeeded by a spell of equally terrifying energy.

XXVII

THE FINAL STRUGGLE

She, however, did not get off that night. I dared not push the matter to the point of awakening suspicion, and when the doctor said that the ship was not due for twenty hours and that it would be madness for her to start without a night's rest and two or three good meals, I succumbed and she also to the few hours' delay. More than that, she consented to retire, and when I joined her in her carriage the following morning, it was to find her physically stronger, even if the mind was still a prey to deepest anguish and a torturing indecision. Her nurse accompanied us and the maid called Celia, so conversation was impossible--a fact I did not know whether to be thankful for or not. On the cars she was shielded as much as possible from every one's gaze, and when we reached New York we were driven at once to the Plaza. As I noticed the respect and intense sympathy with which her presence was met by those who saw nothing in her broken aspect but a mother's immeasurable grief, I wondered at the secrets which lie deep down in the hearts of humanity, and what the effect would be if I should suddenly shout aloud:

"She is more wretched than you think. Her suspense is one that the child's return would not appease. Dig deeper into mortal fear and woe if you would know what has changed this beautiful woman into a shadow in five days."

And I myself did not know her mind. I could neither foresee what she contemplated nor what the effect of seeing the child again would have upon her. I only knew that she must never for a moment be out of sight of some one who
loved her. I myself never left the hall upon which her room opened, a precaution for which I felt grateful when, late in the evening, she opened the door and, seeing me, stepped out fully dressed for the street.

"Come and tell Sister Angelina that I may be trusted with you," she said. Sister Angelina was the nurse.

Of course I did as she bade me, and after some few more difficulties I succeeded in getting her into a carriage without attracting any special attention. Once there she breathed more easily, and so did I.

"Now take me to _her_," she said. Whether she meant Mrs. Carew or Gwendolen, I never knew.

I now saw that the hour had come for telling her that she no longer need have any fear of Doctor Pool. Whatever she contemplated must be done with a true knowledge of where she stood and to just what extent her secret remained endangered. I do not know if she felt grateful. I almost think that for the first few minutes she felt rather frightened than relieved to find herself free to act as her wishes and the preservation of her place in her husband's heart and the world's regard impelled her. For she never for a moment seemed to doubt, that now the doctor was gone I would yield to her misery and prove myself the friend she had begged me to be from the first. She turned herself toward me and sought to read my face, but it was rather to find out what I expected of her than what she had yet to fear from me. I noted this and muttered some words of confidence; but her mood had already changed, and they fell on deaf ears.

I was not present at the meeting of the two women. That is, I remained in what they would call a private parlor, while Mrs. Ocumpaugh passed into the inner room, where she knew she would find Mrs. Carew and the child. Nor did I hear much. Some words came through the partition. I caught most of Mrs. Carew's explanation of how she came to give up her new-born child. She was an actress at the time with a London success to her credit, but with no hold as yet in this country. She was booked for a tour the coming season; the husband who might have seen to the child was dead; she had no friends, no relatives here save a brother poorer than herself, and the mother instinct had not awakened. She bartered her child away as she would have parted with any other encumbrance likely to interfere with her career. But--here her voice rose and I heard distinctly: "A fortune was suddenly left me. An old admirer dying abroad bequeathed me two million dollars, and I found myself rich, admired and independent, with no one on earth to care for or to share the happiness of what seemed to me, after the brilliant life I had hitherto led, a dreary inaction. Love had no interest for me. I had had a husband, and that part of my nature had been satisfied. What I wanted now--and the wish presently grew into a passion--was my child. From passion it grew to mania. Knowing the name of her to whom I had yielded it (I had overheard it in the doctor's office), I hunted up your residence and came one day to Homewood.

"Perhaps some old servant can be found there to-day who could tell you of the strange, deeply veiled lady who was found one evening at sunset, clinging to the gate with both hands and sobbing as she looked in at the triumphant little heiress racing up and down the walks with the great mastiff, Don. They will say that it was some poor crazy woman, or some mother who had buried her own little darling; but it was I, Marion, it was I, looking upon the child I had sold for a half-year's independence; I who was broken-hearted now for her smiles and touches and saw them all given to strangers, who had made her a princess, but who could never give her such love as I felt for her then in my madness. I went away that time, but I came again soon with the titles of the adjoining property in my pocket. I could not keep away from the sight of her, and felt that the torture would be less to see her in your arms than not to see her at all."

The answer was not audible, but I could well imagine what it was. As every one knew, the false mother had not long held out against the attractions of the true one. Instinct had drawn the little one to the heart that beat responsive to its own.

What followed I could best judge from the frightened cry which the child suddenly gave. She had evidently waked to find both women at her bedside. Mrs. Carew's "Hush! hush!" did not answer this time; the child was in a frenzy, and evidently turned from one to the other, sobbing out alternately, "I will not be a girl again. I like my horse and going to papa and sailing on the big ocean, in trousers and a little cap," and the softer phrases she evidently felt better suited to Mrs. Ocumpaugh's deep distress: "Don't feel bad, mamma, you shall come see me some time. Papa will send for you. I am going to him." Then silence, then such a struggle of woman-heart with woman-heart as I hoped never to be witness to again. Mrs. Ocumpaugh was pleading with Mrs. Carew, not for the child, but for her life. Mr. Ocumpaugh would be in port the next morning; if she could show him the child all would be well. Mr. Trevitt would manage the details; take the credit of having found Gwendolen somewhere in this great city, and that would insure him the reward and them his silence. (I heard this.) There was no one else to fear. Doctor Pool, the cause of all this misery, was dead; and in the future, her heart being set to rest about her secret, she would be happier and make the child happier, and they could enjoy her between them, and she would be unselfish and let Gwendolen spend an hour or more every day with Mrs. Carew, on some such plea as lessons in vocal-training and music.

Thus pleaded Mrs. Ocumpaugh.

But the mother hardly listened. She had eaten with the child, slept with the child and almost breathed with the
child for three days now, and the ecstasy of the experience had blinded her to any other claim than her own. She pitied Mrs. Ocumpaugh, pitied most of all her deceived husband, but no grief of theirs could equal that of Rachel crying for her child. Let Mrs. Ocumpaugh remember that when the evil days come. She had separated child from mother! child from mother! Oh, how the wail swept through those two rooms!

I dared not prophesy to myself at this point how this would end. I simply waited.

Their voices had sunk after each passionate outbreak, and I was only able to catch now and then a word which told me that the struggle was yet going on.

But finally there came a lull, and while I wondered, the door flew suddenly open and I saw Mrs. Ocumpaugh standing on the threshold, pallid and stricken, looking back at the picture made by the other two as Mrs. Carew, fallen on her knees by the bedside, held to her breast the panting child.

"I can not go against nature," said she. "Keep Gwendolen, and may God have pity upon me and Philo."

I stepped forward. Meeting my eye, she faltered this last word:

"Your advice was good. To-morrow when I meet my husband I will tell him who found the child and why that child is not at my side to greet him."

* * * * *

That night I had a vision. I saw a door--shut, ominous. Before that door stood a woman, tall, pale, beautiful. She was there to enter, but to what no mortal living could say. She saw nothing but loss and the hollowness of a living death behind that closed door.

But who knows? Angels spring up unknown on the darkest road, and perhaps--

Here the vision broke; the day and its possibilities lay before me.

Go to Start
THE MILL MYSTERY

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

I.
The Alarm.

Life, struck sharp on death, makes awful lightning. -- Mrs. Browning.

I had just come in from the street. I had a letter in my hand. It was for my fellow-lodger, a young girl who taught in the High School, and whom I had persuaded to share my room because of her pretty face and quiet ways. She was not at home, and I flung the letter down on the table, where it fell, address downwards. I thought no more of it; my mind was too full, my heart too heavy with my own trouble.

Going to the window, I leaned my cheek against the pane. Oh, the deep sadness of a solitary woman's life! The sense of helplessness that comes upon her when every effort made, every possibility sounded, she realizes that the world has no place for her, and that she must either stoop to ask the assistance of friends or starve! I have no words for the misery I felt, for I am a proud woman, and--But no lifting of the curtain that shrouds my past. It has fallen for ever, and for you and me and the world I am simply Constance Sterling, a young woman of twenty-five, without home, relatives, or means of support, having in her pocket seventy-five cents of change, and in her breast a heart like lead, so utterly had every hope vanished in the day's rush of disappointments.

How long I stood with my face to the window I cannot say. With eyes dully fixed upon the blank walls of the cottages opposite, I stood oblivious to all about me till the fading sunlight—or was it some stir in the room behind me?—recalled me to myself, and I turned to find my pretty room-mate staring at me with a troubled look that for a moment made me forget my own sorrows and anxieties.

"What is it?" I asked, going towards her with an irresistible impulse of sympathy.

"I don't know," she murmured; "a sudden pain here," laying her hand on her heart.

I advanced still nearer, but her face, which had been quite pale, turned suddenly rosy; and, with a more natural expression, she took me by the hand, and said:

"But you look more than ill, you look unhappy. Would you mind telling me what worries you?"

The gentle tone, the earnest glance of modest yet sincere interest, went to my heart. Clutching her hand convulsively, I burst into tears.

"It is nothing," said I; "only my last resource has failed, and I don't know where to get a meal for to-morrow. Not that this is any thing in itself," I hastened to add, my natural pride reasserting itself; "but the future! the future!—what am I to do with my future?"

She did not answer at first. A gleam—I can scarcely call it a glow—passed over her face, and her eyes took a far-away look that made them very sweet. Then a little flush stole into her cheek, and, pressing my hand, she said:

"Will you trust it to me for a while?"

I must have looked my astonishment, for she hastened to add:

"Your future I have little concern for. With such capabilities as yours, you must find work. Why, look at your face!" and she drew me playfully before the glass. "See the forehead, the mouth, and tell me you read failure there! But your present is what is doubtful, and that I can certainly take care of."

"But—" I protested, with a sensation of warmth in my cheeks.

The loveliest smile stopped me before I could utter a word more.

"As you would take care of mine," she completed, "if our positions were reversed." Then, without waiting for a further demur on my part, she kissed me, and as if the sweet embrace had made us sisters at once, drew me to a chair and sat down at my feet. "You know," she naively murmured, "I am almost rich; I have five hundred dollars laid up in the bank, and—"

The loveliest smile stopped me before I could utter a word more.

"But that is nothing, nothing," I said. "You have a future to provide for, too, and you are not as strong as I am, if you have been more successful."

She laughed, then blushed, then laughed again, and impulsively cried:

"It is, however, more than I need to buy a wedding-dress with, don't you think?" And as I looked up surprised, she flashed out: "Oh, it's my secret; but I am going to be married in a month, and—and then I won't need to count my pennies any more; and, so I say, if you will stay here with me without a care until that day comes, you will make me
very happy, and put me at the same time under a real obligation; for I shall want a great many things done, as you can readily conceive."

What did I say--what could I say, with her sweet blue eyes looking so truthfully into mine, but--"Oh, you darling girl!" while my heart filled with tears, which only escaped from overflowing my eyes, because I would not lessen her innocent joy by a hint of my own secret trouble.

"And who is the happy man?" I asked, at last, rising to pull down the curtain across a too inquisitive ray of afternoon sunshine.

"Ah, the noblest, best man in town!" she breathed, with a burst of gentle pride. "Mr. B----"

She went no further, or if she did, I did not hear her, for just then a hubbub arose in the street, and lifting the window, I looked out.

"What is it?" she cried, coming hastily towards me.

"I don't know," I returned. "The people are all rushing in one direction, but I cannot see what attracts them."

"Come away then!" she murmured; and I saw her hand go to her heart, in the way it did when she first entered the room a half-hour before. But just then a sudden voice exclaimed below: "The clergyman! It is the clergyman!"

And giving a smothered shriek, she grasped me by the arm, crying: "What do they say? '_The clergyman_'? Do they say 'The clergyman'?"

"Yes," I answered, turning upon her with alarm. But she was already at the door. "Can it be?" I asked myself, as I hurriedly followed, "that it is Mr. Barrows she is going to marry?"

For in the small town of S---- Mr. Barrows was the only man who could properly be meant by "The clergyman"; for though Mr. Kingston, of the Baptist Church, was a worthy man in his way, and the Congregational minister had an influence with his flock that was not to be despised, Mr. Barrows, alone of all his fraternity, had so won upon the affections and confidence of the people as to merit the appellation of "The clergyman."

"If I am right," thought I, "God grant that no harm has come to him!" and I dashed down the stairs just in time to see the frail form of my room-mate flying out of the front door.

I overtook her at last; but where? Far out of town on that dark and dismal road, where the gaunt chimneys of the deserted mill rise from a growth of pine-trees. But I knew before I reached her what she would find; knew that her short dream of love was over, and that stretched amongst the weeds which choked the entrance to the old mill lay the dead form of the revered young minister, who, by his precept and example, had won not only the heart of this young maiden, but that of the whole community in which he lived and labored.

II.

A FEARFUL QUESTION.

Nay, yet there's more in this: I pray thee, speak to me as to thy thinkings, As thou dost ruminate; and give thy worst of thoughts The worst of words. --OTHELLO.

My room-mate was, as I have intimated, exceedingly frail and unobtrusive in appearance; yet when we came upon this scene, the group of men about the inanimate form of her lover parted involuntarily as if a spirit had come upon them; though I do not think one of them, until that moment, had any suspicion of the relations between her and their young pastor. Being close behind her, I pressed forward too, and so it happened that I stood by her side when her gaze first fell upon her dead lover. Never shall I forget the cry she uttered, or the solemn silence that fell over all, as her hand, rigid and white as that of a ghost's, slowly rose and pointed with awful question at the pallid brow upturned before her. It seemed as if a spell had fallen, enchaining the roughest there from answering, for the truth was terrible, and we knew it; else why those dripping locks and heavily soaked garments oozing, not with the limpid waters of the stream we could faintly hear gurgling in the distance, but with some fearful substance that dyed the forehead blue and left upon the grass a dark stain that floods of rain would scarcely wash away?

"What is it? Oh, what does it mean?" she faintly gasped, shuddering backward with wondering dread as one of those tiny streams of strange blue moisture found its way to her feet.

Still that ominous silence.

"Oh, I must know!" she whispered. "I was his betrothed"; and her eyes wandered for a moment with a wild appeal upon those about her.

Whereupon a kindly voice spoke up, "He has been drowned, miss. The blue----" and there he hesitated.

"The blue is from the remains of some old dye that must have been in the bottom of the vat out of which we drew him," another voice went on.

"The vat!" she repeated. "The vat! Was he found----"

"In the vat? Yes, miss." And there the silence fell again.

It was no wonder. For a man like him, alert, busy, with no time nor inclination for foolish explorations, to have been found drowned in the disused vat of a half-tumbled-down old mill on a lonesome and neglected road meant---- But what did it mean? What could it mean? The lowered eyes of those around seemed to decline to express even a
conjecture.

My poor friend, so delicate, so tender, reeled in my arms. "In the vat!" she reiterated again and again, as if her mind refused to take in a fact so astounding and unaccountable.

"Yes, miss, and he might never have been discovered," volunteered a voice at last, over my shoulder, "if a parcel of school-children hadn’t strayed into the mill this afternoon. It is a dreadful lonesome spot, you see, and----"

"Hush!" I whispered; "hush!" and I pointed to her face, which at these words had changed as if the breath of death had blown across it; and winding my arms still closer about her, I endeavored to lead her away.

But I did not know my room-mate. Pushing me gently aside, she turned to a stalwart man near by, whose face seemed to invite confidence, and said:

"Take me in and show me the vat."

He looked at her amazed; so did we.

"I must see it," she said, simply; and she herself took the first step towards the mill.

There was no alternative but to follow. This we did in terror and pity, for the look with which she led the way was not the look of any common determination, and the power which seemed to force her feeble body on upon its fearful errand was of that strained and unnatural order which might at any moment desert her, and lay her a weak and helpless burden at our feet.

"It must be dark by this time down there," objected the man she had appealed to, as he stepped doubtfully forward.

But she did not seem to heed. Her eyes were fixed upon the ruined walls before her, rising drear and blank against the pale-green evening sky.

"He could have had no errand here," I heard her murmur. "How then be drowned here?--how? how?"

Alas! that was the mystery, dear heart, with which every mind was busy!

The door of the mill had fallen down and rotted away years before, so we had no difficulty in entering. But upon crossing the threshold and making for the steps that led below, we found that the growing twilight was any thing but favorable to a speedy or even safe advance. For the flooring was badly broken in places, and the stairs down which we had to go were not only uneven, but strangely rickety and tottering.

But the sprite that led us paused for nothing, and long before I had passed the first step she had reached the bottom one, and was groping her way towards the single gleam of light that infused itself through the otherwise pitchy darkness.

"Be careful, miss; you may fall into the vat yourself!" exclaimed more than one voice behind her.

But she hurried on, her slight form showing like a spectre against the dim gleam towards which she bent her way, till suddenly she paused and we saw her standing with clasped hands, and bent head, looking down into what?

We could readily conjecture.

"She will throw herself in," whispered a voice; but as, profoundly startled, I was about to hasten forward, she hurriedly turned and came towards us.

"I have seen it," she quietly said, and glided by us, and up the stairs, and out of the mill to where that still form lay in its ghostly quietude upon the sodden grass.

For a moment she merely looked at it, then she knelt, and, oblivious to the eyes bent pityingly upon her, kissed the brow and then the cheeks, saying something which I could not hear, but which lent a look of strange peace to her features, that were almost as pallid and set now as his. Then she arose, and holding out her hand to me, was turning away, when a word uttered by some one, I could not tell whom, stopped her, and froze her, as it were, to the spot.

That word was _suicide!_

I think I see her yet, the pale-green twilight on her forehead, her lips parted, and her eyes fixed in an incredulous stare.

"Do you mean," she cried, "that _he_ deserves any such name as that? That his death here was not one of chance or accident, mysterious, if you will, but still one that leaves no stigma on his name as a man and a clergyman?"

"Indeed, miss," came in reply, "we would not like to say."

"Then, _I_ say, that unless Mr. Barrows was insane, he never premeditated a crime of this nature. He was too much of a Christian. And if that does not strike you as good reasoning, he was too-- happy."

The last word was uttered so low that if it had not been for the faint flush that flitted into her cheek, it would scarcely have been understood. As it was, the furtive looks of the men about showed that they comprehended all that she would say; and, satisfied with the impression made, she laid her hand on my arm, and for the second time turned towards home.

III.

ADA.

For, in my sense, 't is happiness to die. --OTHELLO.
There was death in her face; I saw it the moment we reached the refuge of our room. But I was scarcely prepared for the words which she said to me.

"Mr. Barrows and I will be buried in one grave. The waters which drowned him have gone over my head also. But before the moment comes which proves my words true, there is one thing I wish to impress upon you, and that is: That no matter what people may say, or what conjectures they may indulge in, Mr. Barrows never came to his end by any premeditation of his own. And that you may believe me, and uphold his cause in the face of whatever may arise, I will tell you something of his life and mine. Will you listen?"

Would I listen? I could not speak, but I drew up the lounge, and sitting down by her side, pressed my cheek close to hers. She smiled faintly, all unhappiness gone from her look, and in sweet, soft tones, began:

"We are both orphans. As far as I know, neither of us have any nearer relatives than distant cousins; a similarity of condition that has acted as a bond between us since we first knew and loved each other. When I came to S---- he was just settled here, a young man full of zeal and courage. Whatever the experience of his college days had been--and he has often told me that at that time ambition was the mainspring of his existence,--the respect and appreciation which he found here, and the field which daily opened before him for work, had wakened a spirit of earnest trust that ere long developed that latent sweetness in his disposition which more than his mental qualities, perhaps, won him universal confidence and love.

"You have heard him preach; and you know he was not lacking in genius; but you have not heard him speak, eye to eye and hand to hand. It was there his power came in, and there, too, perhaps, his greatest temptation. For he was one for women to love, and it is not always easy to modify a naturally magnetic look and tone because the hand that touches yours is shy and white, and the glance which steals up to meet your own has within it the hint of unconscious worship. Yet what he could do he did; for, unknown, perhaps, to any one here, he was engaged to be married, as so many young ministers are, to a girl he had met while at college.

"I do not mean to go into too many particulars, Constance. He did not love this girl, but he meant to be true to her. He was even contented with the prospect of marrying her, till----Oh, Constance, I almost forget that he is gone, and that my own life is at an end, when I think of that day, six months ago--the day when we first met, and, without knowing it, first loved. And then the weeks which followed when each look was an event, and a passing word the making or the marring of a day. I did not know what it all meant; but he realized only too soon the precipice upon which we stood, and I began to see him less, and find him more reserved when, by any chance, we were thrown together. His cheek grew paler, too, and his health wavered. A struggle was going on in his breast--a struggle of whose depth and force I had little conception then, for I dared not believe he loved me, though I knew by this time he was bound to another who would never be a suitable companion for him.

"At last he became so ill, he was obliged to quit his work, and for a month I did not see him, though only a short square separated us. He was slowly yielding to an insidious disease, some said; and I had to bear the pain of this uncertainty, as well as the secret agony of my own crushed and broken heart.

"But one morning--shall I ever forget it?--the door opened, and he, _he_, came in where I was, and without saying a word, knelt down by my side, and drew my head forward and laid it on his breast. I thought at first it was a farewell, and trembled with a secret anguish that was yet strangely blissful, for did not the passionate constraint of his arms mean love? But when, after a moment that seemed a lifetime, I drew back and looked into his face, I saw it was not a farewell, but a greeting, he had brought me, and that we had not only got our pastor back to life, but that this pastor was a lover as well, who would marry the woman he loved.

"And I was right. In ten minutes I knew, that a sudden freak on the part of the girl he was engaged to had released him, without fault of his own, and that with this release new life had entered his veins, for the conflict was over and love and duty were now in harmony.

"Constance, I would not have you think he was an absolutely perfect man. He was too sensitively organized for that. A touch, a look that was not in harmony with his thoughts, would make him turn pale at times, and I have seen him put to such suffering by petty physical causes, that I have sometimes wondered where his great soul got its strength to carry him through the exigencies of his somewhat trying calling. But whatever his weaknesses--and they were very few,--he was conscientious in the extreme, and suffered agony where other men would be affected but slightly. You can imagine his joy, then, over this unexpected end to his long pain; and remembering that it is only a month previous to the day set apart by us for our marriage, ask yourself whether he would be likely to seek any means of death, let alone such a horrible and lonesome one as that which has robbed us of him to-day?"

"No!" I burst out, for she waited for my reply. "A thousand times, no, no, no!"

"He has not been so well lately, and I have not seen as much of him as usual; but that is because he had some literary work he wished to finish before the wedding-day. Ah, it will never be finished now! and our wedding-day is to-day! and the bride is almost ready. But!" she suddenly exclaimed, "I must not go yet--not till you have said again that he was no suicide. Tell me," she vehemently continued-- "tell me from your soul that you believe he is not
answerable for his death!"

"I do!" I rejoined, alarmed and touched at once by the fire in her cheek and eye.

"And that," she went, "you will hold to this opinion in the face of all opposition! That, whatever attack men may make upon his memory, you will uphold his honor and declare his innocence! Say you will be my deputy in this, and I will love you even in my cold grave, and bless you as perhaps only those who see the face of the Father can bless!"

"Ada!" I murmured, "Ada!"

"You will do this, will you not?" she persisted. "I can die knowing I can trust you as I would myself.

I took her cold hand in mine and promised, though I felt how feeble would be any power of mine to stop the tide of public opinion if once it set in any definite direction.

"He had no enemies," she whispered; "but I would sooner believe he had, than that he sought this fearful spot of his own accord."

And seemingly satisfied to have dropped this seed in my breast, she tremblingly arose, and going for her writing-desk, brought it back and laid it on the lounge by her side. "Go for Mrs. Gannon," she said.

Mrs. Gannon was our neighbor in the next room, a widow who earned her livelihood by nursing the sick; and I was only too glad to have her with me at this time, for my poor Ada's face was growing more and more deathly, and I began to fear she had but prophesied the truth when she said this was her wedding-day.

I was detained only a few minutes, but when I came back with Mrs. Gannon, I found my room-mate writing.

"Come!" said she, in a voice so calm, my companion started and hastily looked at her face for confirmation of the fears I had expressed; "I want you both to witness my signature."

With one last effort of strength she wrote her name, and then handed the pen to Mrs. Gannon, who took it without a word.

"It is my will," she faintly smiled, watching me as I added my name at the bottom. "We have had to do without lawyers, but I don't think there will be any one to dispute my last wishes." And taking the paper in her hand, she glanced hastily at it, then folded it, and handed it back to me with a look that made my heart leap with uncontrollable emotion. "I can trust you," she said, and fell softly back upon the pillow.

"You had better go for Dr. Farnham," whispered Mrs. Gannon in my ear, with an ominous shake of her head.

I was detained only a few minutes, but when I came back with Mrs. Gannon, I found my room-mate writing.

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"You had better go for Dr. Farnham," whispered Mrs. Gannon in my ear, with an ominous shake of her head.

But the Farnham was out, attending to a very urgent case, I was told; and so, to my growing astonishment and dismay, were Dr. Spaulding and Dr. Perry. I was therefore obliged to come back alone, which I did with what speed I could; for I begrudged every moment spent away from the side of one I had so lately learned to love, and must so soon lose.

Mrs. Gannon met me at the door, and with a strange look, drew me in and pointed towards the bed. There lay Ada, white as the driven snow, with closed eyes, whose faintly trembling lids alone betokened that she was not yet fled to the land of quiet shadows. At her side was a picture of the man she loved, and on her breast lay a bunch of withered roses I could easily believe had been his last gift. It was a vision of perfect peace, and I could not but contrast it with what my imagination told me must have been the frenzied anguish of that other death.

My approach, though light, disturbed her. Opening her eyes, she gave me one long, long look. Then, as if satisfied, she softly closed them again, breathed a little sigh, and in another moment was no more.

IV.
THE POLLARDS.

There's something in his soul, O'er which his melancholy sits on brood. --HAMLET.

Fearful as the experiences of this day had been, they were not yet at an end for me. Indeed, the most remarkable were to come. As I sat in this room of death--it was not far from midnight--I suddenly heard voices at the door, and Mrs. Gannon came in with Dr. Farnham.

"It is very extraordinary," I heard him mutter as he crossed the threshold. "One dying and another dead, and both struck down by the same cause."

I could not imagine what he meant, so I looked at him with some amazement. But he did not seem to heed me. Going straight to the bed, he gazed silently at Ada's pure features, with what I could not but consider a troubled glance. Then turning quickly to Mrs. Gannon, he said, in his somewhat brusque way:

"All is over here; you can therefore leave. I have a patient who demands your instant care."

"But----" she began.

"I have come on purpose for you," he put in, authoritatively. "It is an urgent case; do not keep me waiting."

"But, sir," she persisted, "it is impossible. I am expected early in the morning at Scott's Corners, and was just going to bed when you came in, in order to get a little sleep before taking the train."

"Dr. Perry's case?"

"Yes."
He frowned, and I am not sure but what he uttered a mild oath. At all events, he seemed very much put out.
I immediately drew near.
"Oh, sir," I cried, "if you would have confidence in me. I am not unused to the work, and----"
His stare frightened me, it was so searching and so keen.
"Who are you?" he asked.
I told him, and Mrs. Gannon put in a word for me. I was reliable, she said, and if too much experience was not wanted, would do better than such and such a one--naming certain persons, probably neighbors.
But the doctor's steady look told me he relied more on his own judgment than on anything she or I could say.
"Can you hold your tongue?" he asked.
I started. Who would not have done so?
"I see that you can," he muttered, and glanced down at my dress. "When can you be ready?" he inquired. "You may be wanted for days, and it may be only for hours."
"Will ten minutes be soon enough?" I asked.
A smile difficult to fathom crossed his firm lip.
"I will give you fifteen," he said, and turned towards the door. But on the threshold he paused and looked back.
"You have not asked who or what your patient is," he grimly suggested.
"No," I answered shortly.
"Well," said he, "it is Mrs. Pollard, and she is going to die."
Mrs. Pollard! Mrs. Gannon and I involuntarily turned and looked at each other.
"Mrs. Pollard!" repeated the good nurse, wonderingly. "I did not know she was sick"
"She wasn't this noon. It is a sudden attack. Apoplexy we call it. She fell at the news of Mr. Barrows' death."
And with this parting shot, he went out and closed the door behind him.
I sank, just a little bit weakened, on the lounge, then rose with renewed vigor. "The work has fallen into the right hands," thought I. "Ada would wish me to leave her for such a task as this."
And yet I was troubled. For though this sudden prostration of Mrs. Pollard, on the hearing of her young pastor's sorrowful death, seemed to betoken a nature of more than ordinary sensibility, I had always heard that she was a hard woman, with an eye of steel and a heart that could only be reached through selfish interests. But then she was the magnate of the place, the beginning and end of the aristocracy of S----; and when is not such a one open to calumny? I was determined to reserve my judgment.
In the fifteen minutes allotted me, I was ready. Suitable arrangements had already been made for the removal of my poor Ada's body to the house that held her lover. For the pathos of the situation had touched all hearts, and her wish to be laid in the same grave with him met with no opposition. I could therefore leave with a clear conscience; Mrs. Gannon promising to do all that was necessary, even if she were obliged to take a later train than she had expected to.
Dr. Farnham was in the parlor waiting for me, and uttered a grunt of satisfaction as he saw me enter, fully equipped.
"Come; this is business," he said, and led the way at once to his carriage.
We did not speak for the first block. He seemed meditating, and I was summoning up courage for the ordeal before me. For, now that we were started, I began to feel a certain inward trembling not to be entirely accounted for by the fact that I was going into a strange house to nurse a woman of whom report did not speak any too kindly. Nor did the lateness of the hour, and the desolate aspect of the unlighted streets, tend greatly to reassure me.
Indeed, something of the weird and uncanny seemed to mingle with the whole situation, and I found myself dreading our approach to the house, which from its old-time air and secluded position had always worn for me an aspect of gloomy reserve, that made it even in the daylight, a spot of somewhat fearful interest.
Dr. Farnham, who may have suspected my agitation, though he gave no token of doing so, suddenly spoke up.
"It is only right to tell you," he said, "that I should never have accepted the service of an inexperienced girl like you, if any thing was necessary but watchfulness and discretion. Mrs. Pollard lies unconscious, and all you will have to do is to sit at her side and wait for the first dawning of returning reason. It may come at any moment, and it may never come at all. She is a very sick woman."
"I understand," I murmured, plucking up heart at what did not seem so very difficult a task.
"Her sons will be within call; so will I. By daybreak we hope to have her daughter from Newport with her. You do not know Mrs. Harrington?"
I shook my head. Who was I, that I should know these grand folks? And yet----But I promised I would say nothing about days now so completely obliterated.
"She will not be much of an assistance," he muttered. "But it is right she should come--quite right."
I remembered that I had heard that Mrs. Pollard's daughter was a beauty, and that she had made a fine match;
which, said of Mrs. Pollard's daughter, must have meant a great deal. I, however, said nothing, only listened in a
guess hope of hearing more, for my curiosity was aroused in a strange way about these people, and nothing which
the good doctor could have said about them would have come amiss at this time.

But our drive had been too rapid, and we were too near the house for him to think of any thing but turning into
the gateway with the necessary caution. For the night was unusually dark, and it was difficult to tell just where the
gate-posts were. We, however, entered without accident, and in another moment a gleam of light greeted us from the
distant porch.

"They are expecting us," he said, and touched up his horse. We flew up the gravelled road, and before I could
still the sudden heart-beat that attacked me at sight of the grim row of cedars which surrounded the house, we were
hurrying up between the two huge lions rampant that flanked the steps, to where a servant stood holding open the
door. A sense of gloom and chill at once overwhelmed me. From the interior, which I faintly saw stretching before
me, there breathed even in that first moment of hurried entrance a cold and haughty grandeur that, however rich and
awe-inspiring, was anything but attractive to a nature like mine.

Drawing back, I let Dr. Farnham take the lead, which he did in his own brusque way. And then I saw what the
dim light had not revealed before, a young man's form standing by the newel-post of the wide staircase that rose at
our left. He at once came forward, and as the light from the lamp above us fell fully upon him, I saw his face, and
started.

Why? I could not tell. Not because his handsome features struck me pleasantly, for they did not. There was
something in their expression which I did not like, and yet as I looked at them a sudden sensation swept over me that
made my apprehensions of a moment back seem like child's play, and I became conscious that if a sudden call of life
or death were behind me urging me on the instant to quit the house, I could not do it while that face was before me
to be fathomed, and, if possible, understood.

"Ah, I see you have brought the nurse," were the words with which he greeted Dr. Farnham. And the voice was
as thrilling in its tone as the face was in its expression. "But," he suddenly exclaimed, as his eyes met mine, "this is
not Mrs. Gannon." And he hurriedly drew the doctor down the hall. "Why have you brought this young girl?" he
asked, in tones which, however lowered, I could easily distinguish. "Didn't you know there were reasons why we
especially wanted an elderly person?"

"No," I heard the doctor say, and then, his back being towards me, I lost the rest of his speech till the words,
"She is no gossip," came to salute me and make me ask myself if there was a secret skeleton in this house, that they
feared so much the eyes of a stranger.

"But," the young man went hurriedly on, "she is not at all the kind of person to have over my mother. How could we----" and there his voice fell so as to become unintelligible.

But the doctor's sudden exclamation helped me out.

"What!" he wonderingly cried, "do you intend to sit up too?"

"I or my brother," was the calm response, "Would you expect us to leave her alone with a stranger?"

The doctor made no answer, and the young man, taking a step sidewise, threw me a glance full of anxiety and
trouble.

"I don't like it," he murmured; "but there must be a woman of some kind in the room, and a stranger----"

He did not finish his words, but it seemed as if he were going to say: "And a stranger may, after all, be preferable
to a neighbor." But I cannot be sure of this, for he was not a man easy to sound. But what I do know is that he
stepped forward, to me with an easy grace, and giving me a welcome as courteous as if I had been the one of all
others he desired to see, led me up the stairs to a room which he announced to be mine, saying, as he left me at the
door:

"Come out in five minutes, and my brother will introduce you to your duties."

So far I had seen no woman in the house, and I was beginning to wonder if Mrs. Pollard had preferred to
surround herself with males, when the door was suddenly opened and a rosy-cheeked girl stepped in.

"Ah, excuse me," she said, with a stare; "I thought it was the nurse as was here."

"And it is the nurse," I returned, smiling in spite of myself at her look of indignant surprise. "Do you want any
thing of me?" I hastened to ask, for her eyes were like saucers and her head was tossing airily.

"No," she said, almost with spite. "I came to see if you wanted anything?"

I shook my head with what good nature I could, for I did not wish to make an enemy in this house, even of a
chambermaid.

"And you are really the nurse?" she asked, coming nearer and looking at me in the full glare of the gas.

"Yes," I assured her, "really and truly the nurse."

"Well, I don't understand it!" she cried. "I was always Mrs. Pollard's favorite maid, and I was with her when she
was took, and would be with her now, but they won't let me set a foot inside the door. And when I asked why they
keep me out, who was always attentive and good to her, they say I am too young. And here you be younger than I,
and a stranger too. I don't like it," she cried, tossing her head again and again. "I haven't deserved it, and I think it is
mighty mean."

I saw the girl was really hurt, so I hastened to explain that I was not the nurse they expected, and was
succeeding, I think, in mollifying her, when a step was heard in the hall, and she gave a frightened start, and hurried
towards the door.

"So you are sure you don't want anything?" she cried, and was out of my sight before I could answer.

There was nothing to detain me, and I hastened to follow. As I crossed the sill I almost started too, at sight of the
tall, slim, truly sinister figure that awaited me, leaning against the opposite wall. He was younger than his brother,
and had similar features, but there was no charm here to make you forget that the eye was darkly glittering, and the
lip formidable in its subtlety and power. He advanced with much of the easy nonchalance that had so characterized
the other.

"Miss Sterling, I believe," said he; and with no further word, turned and led me down the hall to the sick-room. I
noticed even then that he paused and listened before he pushed open the door, and that with our first step inside he
cast a look of inquiry at the bed that had something beside a son's loving anxiety in it. And I hated the man as I
would a serpent, though he bowed as he set me a chair, and was careful to move a light he thought shone a little too
directly in my eyes.

The other brother was not present, and I could give my undivided attention to my charge. I found her what report
had proclaimed her to be, a handsome woman of the sternly imposing type. Even with her age against her and the
shadow of death lying on her brow and cheek, there was something strangely attractive in the features and the stately
contour of her form. But it was attraction that was confined to the eye, and could by no means allure the heart, for
the same seal of mysterious reserve was upon her that characterized her sons, and in her, as in the younger one of
these, it inspired a distrust which I could imagine no smile as dissipating. She lay in a state of coma, and her heavy
breathing was the only sound that broke the silence of the great room. "God help me!" thought I; but had no wish to
leave. Instead of that, I felt a fearful pleasure in the prospect before me--such effect had a single look had upon me
from eyes I trembled to meet again or read.

I do not know how long I sat there gazing in the one direction for that faint sign of life for which the doctor had
bid me watch. That he who inspired me with dread was behind me, I knew; but I would not turn my head towards
him. I was determined to resist the power of this man, even if I must succumb a trifle to that of the other.

I was, therefore, surprised when a hand was thrust over my shoulder, and a fan dropped into my lap.

"It is warm here," was the comment which accompanied the action.

I thanked him, but felt that his sole object had been to cover his change of position. For, when he sat down again,
it was where he could see my face. I therefore felt justified in plying the fan he had offered me, in such a way as to
shut off his somewhat basilisk gaze. And so a dreary hour went by.

It was now well on towards morning, and I was beginning to suffer from the languor natural after so many
harrowing excitments, when the door opened behind me, and the electric thrill shooting through all my members,
testified as to whose step it was that entered. At the same moment the young man at my side arose, and with what I
felt to be a last sharp look in my direction, hastened to where his brother stood, and entered into a whispered
conversation with him. Then I heard the door close again, and almost at the same instant Mr. Pollard the elder
advanced, and without seeking an excuse for his action, sat down close by my side. The fan at once dropped; I had
no wish to avoid this man's scrutiny.

And yet when with a secret bracing of my nerves I looked up and met his eyes fixed with that baffling
expression upon mine, I own that I felt an inward alarm, as if something vaguely dangerous had reared itself in my
path, which by its very charm instinctively bade me beware. I, however, subdued my apprehensions, thinking, with a
certain haughty pride which I fear will never be eliminated from my nature, of the dangers I had already met with
and overcome in my brief but troubled life; and meeting his look with a smile which I knew to contain a spice of
audacity, I calmly waited for the words I felt to be hovering upon his lips. They were scarcely the ones I expected.

"Miss Sterling," said he, "you have seen Anice, my mother's waiting- maid?"

I bowed. I was too much disconcerted to speak.

"And she has told you her story of my mother's illness?" he went on, pitilessly holding me with his glance. "You
need not answer," he again proceeded, as I opened my lips. "I know Anice; she has not the gift of keeping her
thoughts to herself."

"An unfortunate thing in this house," I inwardly commented, and made a determination on the spot that whatever
emotions I might experience from the mysteries surrounding me, this master of reserve should find there was one
who could keep her thoughts to herself, even, perhaps, to his own secret disappointment and chagrin.

"She told you my mother was stricken at the sudden news of Mr. Barrows' death?"
"That was told me," I answered; for this was a direct question, put, too, with an effort I could not help but feel, notwithstanding the evident wish on his part to preserve an appearance of calmness.

"Then some explanation is needed," he remarked, his eyes flashing from his mother's face to mine with equal force and intentness. "My mother"--his words were low, but it was impossible not to hear them--"has not been well since my father died, two months ago. It needed but the slightest shock to produce the result you unhappily see before you. That shock this very girl supplied by the inconsiderate relation of Mr. Barrows' fearful fate. We have taken a prejudice against the girl, in consequence. Do you blame us? This is our mother."

What could I feel or say but No? What could any one, under the circumstances? Why then did a sudden vision of Ada's face, as she gave me that last look, rise up before me, bidding me remember the cause to which I was pledged, and not put too much faith in this man and his plausible explanations.

"I only hope death will not follow the frightful occurrence," he concluded; and do what he would, his features became drawn, and his face white, as his looks wandered back to his mother.

A sudden impulse seized me.

"Another death, you mean," said I; "one already has marked the event, though it happened only a few short hours ago."

His eyes flashed to mine, and a very vivid and real horror blanched his already pallid cheek till it looked blue in the dim light.

"What do you mean?" he gasped; and I saw the doctor had refrained from telling him of Ada's pitiful doom.

"I mean," said I, with a secret compunction I strove in vain to subdue, "that Mr. Barrows' betrothed could not survive his terrible fate--that she died a few hours since, and will be buried in the same grave as her lover."

"His betrothed?" Young Mr. Pollard had risen to his feet, and was actually staggering under the shock of his emotions. "I did not know he had any betrothed. I thought she had jilted him----"

"It is another woman," I broke in, jealous for my poor dead Ada's fame. "The woman he was formerly engaged to never loved him; but this one----" I could not finish the sentence. My own agitation was beginning to master me.

He looked at me, horrified, and I could have sworn the hair rose on his forehead.

"What was her name?" he asked. "Is it--is it any one I know?" Then, as if suddenly conscious that he was betraying too keen an emotion for the occasion, pitiful as it was, he forced his lips into a steadier curve, and quietly said: "After what has happened here, I am naturally overcome by a circumstance so coincident with our own trouble."

"Naturally," I assented with a bow, and again felt that secret distrust warring with a new feeling that was not unlike compassion.

"Her name is Ada Reynolds," I continued, remembering his last question. "She lived----"

"I know," he interrupted; and without another word walked away, and for a long time stood silent at the other end of the room. Then he came back and sat down, and when I summoned up courage to glance at his face, I saw that a change had passed over it, that in all probability was a change for life.

And my heart sank--sank till I almost envied that unconscious form before which we sat, and from which alone now came the one sound which disturbed the ghostly silence of that dread chamber.

V.

DOUBTS AND QUERIES.

And that well might Advise him to a caution, to hold what distance His wisdom can provide. --MACBETH.

At daybreak the doctor came in. Taking advantage of the occasion, I slipped away for a few minutes to my own room, anxious for any change that would relieve me from the gloom and oppression caused by this prolonged and silent _tete-a-tete_ with a being that at once so interested and repelled me. Observing that my windows looked towards the east, I hastened to throw wide the blinds and lean out into the open air. A burst of rosy sunlight greeted me. "Ah!" thought I, "if I have been indulging in visions, this will dispel them"; and I quaffed deeply and long of the fresh and glowing atmosphere before allowing my thoughts to return for an instant to the strange and harrowing experiences I had just been through. A sense of rising courage and renewed power rewarded me; and blessing the Providence that had granted us a morning of sunshine after a night of so much horror, I sat down and drew from my breast the little folded paper which represented my poor Ada's will. Opening it with all the reverent love which I felt for her memory, I set myself to decipher the few trembling lines which she had written, in the hope they would steady my thoughts and suggest, if not reveal, the way I should take in the more than difficult path I saw stretching before me.

My agitation may be conceived when I read the following:

"It is my last wish that all my personal effects, together with the sum of five hundred dollars, now credited to my name in the First National Bank of S----, should be given to my friend, Constance Sterling, who I hope will not forget the promise I exacted from her."
Five hundred dollars! and yesterday I had nothing. Ah, yes, I had _a friend!_

The thoughts awakened by this touching memorial from the innocent dead distracted me for a few moments from further consideration of present difficulties, but soon the very nature of the bequest recalled them to my mind, by that allusion to a promise which more than any thing else lay at the bottom of the dilemma in which I found myself. For, humiliating as it is to confess, the persistency with which certain impressions remained in my mind, in spite of the glowing daylight that now surrounded me, warned me that it would be for my peace to leave this house before my presentiments became fearful realities; while on the other hand my promise to Ada seemed to constrain me to remain in it till I had at least solved some of those mysteries of emotion which connected one and all of this family so intimately with the cause to which I had pledged myself.

"If the general verdict in regard to Mr. Barrows' death should be one of suicide," thought I, "how could I reconcile myself to the fact that I fled at the first approaching intimation that all was not as simple in his relations as was supposed, and that somewhere, somehow, in the breast of certain parishioners of his, a secret lay hidden, which, if known, would explain the act which otherwise must imprint an ineffaceable stain upon his memory?"

My heart and brain were still busy with this question when the sound of Mr. Pollard's footsteps passing my door recalled me to a sense of my present duty. Rising, I hurried across the hall to the sick-chamber, and was just upon the point of entering, when the doctor appeared before me, and seeing me, motioned me back, saying:

"Mrs. Harrington has just arrived. As she will doubtless wish to see her mother at once, you had better wait a few moments till the first agitation is over."

Glad of any respite, and particularly glad to escape an introduction to Mrs. Harrington at this time, I slipped hastily away, but had not succeeded in reaching my room before the two brothers and their sister appeared at the top of the stairs. I had thus a full opportunity of observing them, and being naturally quick to gather impressions, took in with a glance the one member of the Pollard family who was likely to have no mystery about her.

I found her pretty; prettier, perhaps, than any woman it had ever been my lot to meet before, but with a doll's prettiness that bespoke but little dignity or force of mind. Dressed with faultless taste and with an attention to detail that at a moment like the present struck one with a sense of painful incongruity, she advanced, a breathing image of fashion and perhaps folly; her rustling robes, and fresh, if troubled face, offering a most striking contrast to the gloom and reserve of the two sombre figures that walked at her side.

Knowing as by instinct that nothing but humiliation would follow any obtrusion of myself upon this petted darling of fortune, I withdrew as much as possible into the shadow, receiving for my reward a short look from both the brothers; the one politely deprecating in its saturnine courtesy, the other full of a bitter demand for what I in my selfish egotism was fain to consider sympathy. The last look did not tend to calm my already disturbed thoughts, and, anxious to efface its impression, I impulsively descended the stairs and strolled out on the lawn, asking myself what was meant by the difference in manner which I had discerned in these two brothers towards their sister. For while the whole bearing of the younger had expressed interest in this pretty, careless butterfly of a woman thus brought suddenly face to face with a grave trouble, the elder had only averted looks to offer, and an arm that seemed to shrink at her touch as if the weight of her light hand on his was almost more than he could bear. Could it be that affection and generosity were on the side of the younger after all, and that in this respect, at least, he was the truer man and more considerate brother?

I could find no more satisfactory answer for this question than for the many others that had suggested themselves since I had been in this house; and being determined not to allow myself to fall into a reverie which at this moment might be dangerous, I gave up consideration of all kinds, and yielded myself wholly to the pleasure of my ramble.

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The grounds were not large, though, situated as they were in the midst of a thickly populated district, they appeared so. It did not, therefore, take me long to exhaust their attractions, and I was about to return upon my course, when I espied a little summer-house before me, thickly shrouded in vines. Thinking what a charming retreat it offered, I stepped forward to observe it more closely, when to my great surprise I saw it was already occupied, and by a person whose attitude and appearance were such as to at once arouse my strongest curiosity. This person was a boy, slight of build, and fantastic in his dress, with a face like sculptured marble, and an eye which, if a little contracted, had a strange glitter in it that made you look and look again. He was kneeling on the floor of the summer-house, and his face, seen by me in profile, was turned with the fixedness of an extreme absorption towards a small opening in the vines, through which he was intently peering. What he saw or wished to see I could not
imagine, for nothing but the blank end of the house lay before him, and there could be very little which was interesting in that, for not one of its windows were open, unless you except the solitary one in my room. His expression, however, showed that he was engaged in watching something, and by the corrugation in his white brow and the peculiar compression of his fresh red lip, that something showed itself to be of great importance to him; a fact striking enough in itself if you consider the earliness of the hour and the apparent immaturity of his age, which did not appear to be more than fourteen.

Resolved to solve this simple mystery, I gave an admonitory cough, and stepped into the summer-house. He at once started to his feet, and faced me with a look I am pondering upon yet, there was so much in it that was wrathful, curious, dismayed, and defiant. The next moment a veil seemed to fall over his vision, the rich red lip relaxed from its expressive curve, and from being one of the most startling visions I ever saw, he became—what? It would be hard to tell, only not a fully responsible being, I am sure, however near he had just strayed to the border-land of judgment and good sense. Relieved, I scarcely knew why, and remembering almost at the same instant some passing gossip I had once heard about the pretty imbecile boy that ran the streets of S----, I gave him a cheerful smile, and was about to bestow some encouraging word upon him, when he suddenly broke into a laugh, and looking at me with a meaningless stare, asked:

"Who are you?"

I was willing enough to answer, so I returned: "I am Constance Sterling"; and almost immediately added: "And who are you?"

"I am the cat that mews in the well." Then suddenly, "Do you live here?"

"No," I replied, "I am only staying here. Mrs. Pollard is sick—"

"Do they like you?"

The interruption was quick, like all his speech, and caused me a curious sensation. But I conquered it with a laugh, and cheerily replied:

"As I only came last night, it would be hard to say"—and was going to add more, when the curious being broke out:

"She only came last night!" and, repeating the phrase again and again, suddenly darted from my side on to the lawn, where he stood for an instant, murmuring and laughing to himself before speeding away through the shrubbery that led to the gate.

This incident, trivial as it seemed, made a vivid impression upon me, and it was with a mind really calmed from its past agitation that I re-entered the house and took up my watch in the sick-room. I found every thing as I had left it an hour or so before, with the exception of my companion; the younger Mr. Pollard having taken the place of his brother. Mrs. Harrington was nowhere to be seen, but as breakfast had been announced I did not wonder at this, nor at the absence of the elder son, who was doubtless engaged in doing the honors of the house.

My own call to breakfast came sooner than I anticipated; soon enough, indeed, for me to expect to find Mr. Pollard and his sister still at the table. It therefore took some courage for me to respond to the summons, especially as I had to go alone, my companion, of course, refusing to leave his mother. But a glance in the hall-mirror, as I went by, encouraged me, for it was no weak woman's face I encountered, and if Mrs. Harrington was as beautiful as she was haughty, and as haughty as she was beautiful, Constance Sterling at least asked no favors and showed no embarrassment. Indeed, I had never felt more myself than when I lifted the _portiere_ from before the dining-room door and stepped in under the gaze of these two contradictory beings, either of which exerted an influence calculated to overawe a person in my position. The past—But what have I promised myself and you? Not the past, then, but my present will and determination made the ordeal easy.

Mr. Pollard, who is certainly a man to attract any woman's eye, rose gravely as I approached, and presented me with what struck me as a somewhat emphasized respect, to his sister. Her greeting was nothing more nor less than what I expected—that is, indifferently civil,—though I thought I detected a little glimmer of curiosity in the corner of her eye, as if some words had passed in regard to me that made her anxious to know what sort of a woman I was.

But my faculty for observation was very wide-awake that morning, and I may have imagined this, especially as she did not look at me again till she had finished her breakfast and rose to quit the room. Then, indeed, she threw me a hurried glance, half searching, half doubtful in its character, as if she hesitated whether she ought to leave us alone together. Instantly a wild thrill passed through me, and I came perilously near blushing. But the momentary emotion, if emotion it could be called, was soon lost in the deeper feeling which ensued when Mrs. Harrington, pausing at the door, observed, with a forced lightness:

"By-the-way, where is Mr. Barrows? I thought he was always on hand in time of trouble."

I looked at her; somehow, I dared not look at her brother; and, while making to myself such trivial observations as, "She has not been told the truth," and, "They took good care she should overhear no gossip at the station," I was inwardly agitating myself with the new thought, "Can _she_ have had any thing to do with Mr. Barrows? Can she be..."
the woman he was engaged to before he fell in love with Ada?"

The expression of her face, turned though

It was full upon us, told nothing, and my attention, though not my glances, passed to Mr. Pollard, who, motionless in his place, hesitated what reply to give to this simple question.

"Guy has not told you, then," said he, "what caused the shock that has prostrated our mother?"

"No," she returned, coming quickly back.

"It was the news of Mr. Barrows' death, Agnes; the servants say so, and the servants ought to know."

"Mr. Barrows' death! Is Mr. Barrows dead, then?" she asked, in a tone of simple wonder, which convinced me that my surmise of a moment ago was without any foundation. "I did not know he was sick," she went on. "Was his death sudden, that it should affect mother so?"

A short nod was all her brother seemed to be able to give to this question. At sight of it I felt the cold chills run through my veins, and wished that fate had not obliged me to be present at this conversation.

"How did Mr. Barrows die?" queried Mrs. Harrington, after waiting in manifest surprise and impatience for her brother to speak.

"He was drowned."

"Drowned?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"Yesterday."

"Where?"

This time the answer was not forthcoming. Was it because he knew the place too well? I dared not lift my eyes to see.

"Was it in the mill-stream?" she asked.

This time he uttered a hollow "No." Then, as if he felt himself too weak to submit to this cross-questioning, he pushed back his chair, and, hurriedly rising, said:

"It is a very shocking affair, Agnes. Mr. Barrows was found in a vat in the cellar of the old mill. He drowned himself. No one knows his motive."

"Drowned himself?" Did she speak or I? I saw her lips move, and I heard the words uttered as I thought in her voice; but it was to me he directed his look, and to me he seemed to reply:

"Yes; how else account for the circumstances? Is he a man to have enemies?--or is that a place a man would be likely to seek for pleasure?"

"But--" the trembling little woman at my side began.

"I say it is a suicide," he broke in, imperiously, giving his sister one look, and then settling his eyes back again upon my face. "No other explanation fits the case, and no other explanation will ever be given. Why he should have committed such a deed," he went on, in a changed voice, and after a momentary pause, "it would be impossible for me, and perhaps for any other man, to say; but that he did do it is evident, and that is all I mean to assert. The rest I leave for wiser heads than mine." And turning from me with an indescribable look that to my reason, if not to my head, seemed to belie his words, he offered his arm to his bewildered sister and quietly led her towards the door.

The breath of relief I gave as the _portiere_ closed behind them was, however, premature, for scarcely had he seen her on her way upstairs than he came back, and taking his stand directly before me, said:

"You and I do not agree on this question; I see it in your eyes. Now what explanation do you give of Mr. Barrows' death?"

The suddenness of the attack brought the blood to my cheeks, while the necessity of answering drove it as quickly away. He saw I was agitated, and a slight tremble--it could not be called a smile--disturbed the set contour of his lips. The sight of it gave me courage. I let my own curl as I replied:

"You do me too much honor to ask my opinion. But since you wish to know what I think, I consider it only justice to say that it would be easier for an unprejudiced mind to believe that Mr. Barrows had a secret enemy, or that his death was owing to some peculiar and perhaps unexplainable accident, than that he should seek it himself, having, as he did, every reason for living."

"He was very happy, then?" murmured my companion, looking for an instant away, as if he could not bear the intensity of my gaze.

"He loved deeply a noble woman; they were to have been married in a month; does that look like happiness?" I asked.

The roving eye came back, fixed itself upon me, and turned dangerously dark and deep.

"It _looks_ like it," he emphasized, and a strange smile passed over his lips, the utter melancholy of which was all that was plain to me.
"And it _was_!" I persisted, determined not to yield an iota of my convictions to the persuasiveness of this man. "The woman who knew him best declared it to be so as she was dying; and I am forced to trust in her judgment, whatever the opinion of others may be."

"But happy men----" he began.

"Sometimes meet with accidents," I completed.

"And your credulity is sufficient to allow you to consider Mr. Barrows' death as the result of accident?"

Lightly as the question was put, I felt that nothing but a deep anxiety had prompted it, else why that earnest gaze from which my own could not falter, or that white line showing about the lip he essayed in vain to steady? Recoiling inwardly, though I scarcely knew why, I forced myself to answer with the calmness of an inquisitor:

"My credulity is not sufficient for me to commit myself to that belief. If investigation should show that Mr. Barrows had an enemy----"

"Mr. Barrows had no enemy!" flashed from Mr. Pollard's lips. "I mean," he explained, with instant composure, "that he was not a man to awaken jealousy or antagonism; that, according to all accounts, he had the blessing, and not the cursing, of each man in the community."

"Yes," I essayed.

"He never came to his death through the instrumentality of another person," broke in Mr. Pollard, with a stern insistence. "He fell into the vat intentionally or unintentionally, but no man put him there. Do you believe me, Miss Sterling?"

Did I believe him? Was he upon trial, then, and was he willing I should see he understood it? No, no, that could not be; yet why asseverate so emphatically a fact of which no man could be sure unless he had been present at the scene of death, or at least known more of the circumstances attending it than was compatible with the perfect ignorance which all men professed to have of them. Did he not see that such words were calculated to awaken suspicion, and that it would be harder, after such a question, to believe he spoke from simple conviction, than from a desire to lead captive the will of a woman whose intuitions, his troubled conscience told him, were to be feared? Rising, as an intimation that the conversation was fast becoming insupportable to me, I confronted him with my proudest look.

"You must excuse me," said I, "if I do not linger to discuss a matter whose consequences just now are more important to us than the fact itself. While your mother lies insensible I cannot rest comfortable away from her side. You will therefore allow me to return to her."

"In a moment," he replied. "There are one or two questions it would please me to have you answer first." And his manner took on a charm that robbed his words of all peremptoriness, and made it difficult, if not impossible, for me to move. "You have spoken of Miss Reynolds," he resumed; "have told me that she declared upon her dying bed that the relations between Mr. Barrows and herself were very happy. Were you with her then? Did you know her well?"

"She was my room-mate," I returned.

It was a blow; I saw it, though not a muscle of his face quivered. He had not expected to hear that I was upon terms of intimacy with her.

"I loved her," I went on, with a sense of cruel pleasure that must have sprung from the inward necessity I felt to struggle with this strong nature. "The proof that she loved me lies in the fact that she has made me heir to all her little savings. We were friends," I added, seeing he was not yet under sufficient control to speak.

"I see," he now said, moving involuntarily between me and the door. "And by friends you mean confidantes, I presume?"

"Perhaps," I answered, coolly, dropping my eyes. His voice took a deeper tone; it was steel meeting steel, he saw.

"And she told you Mr. Barrows was happy?"

"That has been already discussed," said I.

"Miss Sterling"--I think I never heard such music in a human voice-- "you think me inquisitive, presuming, ungentlemanly, persistent, perhaps. But I have a great wish to know the truth about this matter, if only to secure myself from forming false impressions and wrongfully influencing others by them. Bear with me, then, strangers though we are, and if you feel you can trust me"--here he forced me to look at him,--"let me hear, I pray, what reasons you have for declaring so emphatically that Mr. Barrows did not commit suicide?"

"My reasons, Mr. Pollard? Have I not already given them to you? Is it necessary for me to repeat them?"

"No," he earnestly rejoined, charming me, whether I would or not, by the subtle homage he infused into his look, "if you will assure me that you have no others--that the ones you have given form the sole foundation for your conclusions. Will you?" he entreated; and while his eyes demanded the truth, his lip took a curve which it would have been better for me not to have seen if I wished to preserve unmoved my position as grand inquisitor.

I was compelled, or so it seemed to me, to answer without reserve. I therefore returned a quiet affirmative,
adding only in qualification of the avowal, "What other reasons were necessary?"

"None, none," was the quick reply, "for _you_ to believe as you do. A woman but proves her claim to our respect when she attaches such significance to the master-passion as to make it the argument of a perfect happiness."

I do not think he spoke in sarcasm, though to most minds it might appear so. I think he spoke in relief, a joyous relief, that was less acceptable to me at that moment than the sarcasm would have been. I therefore did not blush, but rather grew pale, as with a bow I acknowledged his words, and took my first step towards the doorway.

"I have wounded you," he murmured, softly, following me.

"You do not know me well enough," I answered, turning with a sense of victory in the midst of my partial defeat.

"It is a misfortune that can be remedied," he smiled.

"Your brother waits for us," I suggested, and, lifting the _portiere_ out of his hand, I passed through, steady as a dart, but quaking, oh, how fearfully quaking within! for this interview had not only confirmed me in my belief that something dark and unknown connected the life of this household with that which had suddenly gone out in the vat at the old mill, but deepened rather than effaced the fatal charm which, contrary to every instinct of my nature, held me in a bondage that more than all things else must make any investigation into this mystery a danger and a pain from which any woman might well recoil, even though she bore in her heart memories of a past like mine.

VI.

MRS. POLLARD.

My mind she has mated, and amazed my sight; I think but dare not speak. --MACBETH.

That day was a marked one in my life. It was not only the longest I have ever known, but it was by far the dreariest, and, if I may use the word in this connection, the most unearthly. Indeed, I cannot think of it to this day without a shudder; its effect being much the same upon my memory as that of a vigil in some underground tomb, where each moment was emphasized with horror lest the dead lying before me might stir beneath their cerements and wake. The continual presence of one or both of the brothers at my side did not tend to alleviate the dread which the silence, the constant suspense, the cold gloom of the ever dimly-lighted chamber were calculated to arouse; for the atmosphere of unreality and gloom was upon them too, and, saving the quick, short sigh that escaped from their lips now and then, neither of them spoke nor relaxed for an instant from that strain of painful attention which had for its focus their mother's stony face. Mrs. Harrington, who, in her youthful freshness and dimpled beauty, might have relieved the universal sombreness of the scene, was not in the room all day; but whether this was on account of her inability to confront sickness and trouble, or whether it was the result of the wishes of her brothers, I have never been able to decide; probably the latter, for, though she was a woman of frivolous mind, she had a due sense of the proprieties, and was never known to violate them except under the stress of another will more powerful than her own.

At last, as the day waned, and what light there was gradually vanished from the shadowy chamber, Guy made a movement of discouragement, and, rising from his place, approached his brother, dropped a word in his ear, and quietly left the room. The relief I felt was instantaneous. It was like having one coil of an oppressive nightmare released from my breast. Dwight, on the contrary, who had sat like a statue ever since the room began to darken, showed no evidence of being influenced by this change, and, convinced that any movement towards a more cheerful order of things must come from me, I rose, and, without consulting his wishes, dropped the curtains and lighted the lamp. The instant I had done so I saw why he was so silent and immovable. Overcome by fatigue, and possibly by a long strain of suppressed emotion, he had fallen asleep, and, ignorant of the fact that Guy had left the room, slumbered as peacefully as if no break had occurred in the mysterious watch they had hitherto so uninterruptedly maintained over their mother and me.

The peacefulness of his sleeping face made a deep impression upon me. Though I knew that with his waking the old look would come back, it was an indescribable pleasure to me to see him, if but for an instant, free from that shadowy something which dropped a vail of mistrust between us. It seemed to show me that evil was not innate in this man, and explained, if it did not justify, the weakness which had made me more lenient to what was doubtful in his appearance and character than I had been to that of his equally courteous but less attractive brother.

The glances I allowed myself to cast in his direction were fleeting enough, however. Even if womanly delicacy had not forbidden me to look too often and too long that way, the sense of the unfair advantage I was possibly taking of his weakness made the possibility of encountering his waking eye a matter of some apprehension. I knew that honor demanded I should rouse him, that he would not thank me for letting him sleep after his brother had left the room; and yet, whether from too much heart--he was in such sore need of rest--or from too little conscience--I was in such sore need of knowledge--I let him slumber on, and never made so much as a move after my first startled discovery of his condition.

And so five minutes, ten minutes, went by, and, imperceptibly to myself, the softening influence which his sleeping countenance exerted upon me deepened and strengthened till I began to ask if I had not given too much
scope to my, imagination since I had been in this house, and foolishly attributed a meaning to expressions and events
that in my calmer moments would show themselves to possess no special significance.

The probability was that I had, and once allowing myself to admit this idea, it is astonishing how rapidly it
gained possession of my judgment, altering the whole tenor of my thoughts, and if not exactly transforming the
situation into one of cheerfulness and ease, at least robbing it of much of that sepulchral character which had
hitherto made it so nearly unbearable to me. The surroundings, too, seemed to partake of the new spirit of life which
had seized me. The room looked less shadowy, and lost some of that element of mystery which had made its dimly
seen corners the possible abode of supernatural visitants. Even the clock ticked less lugubriously, and that
expressionless face on the pillow--

Great God! it is looking at me! With two wide open, stony eyes it is staring into my very soul like a spirit from
the tomb, awakening there a horror infinitely deeper than any I had felt before, though I knew it was but the signal
of returning life to the sufferer, and that I ought to rouse myself and welcome it with suitable ministrations, instead
of sitting there like a statue of fear in the presence of an impending fate. But do what I would, say to myself what I
would, I could not stir. A nightmare of terror was upon me, and not till I saw the stony lips move and the face take a
look of life in the effort made to speak, did I burst the spell that held me and start to my feet. Even then I dared not
look around nor raise my voice to warn the sleeper behind me that the moment so long waited for had come. A
power behind myself seemed to hold me silent, waiting, watching for those words that struggled to life so painfully
before me. At last they came, filling the room with echoes hollow as they were awful!

"Dwight! Guy! If you do not want me to haunt you, swear you will never divulge what took place between you
and Mr. Barrows at the mill."

"Mother!" rang in horror through the room. And before I could turn my head, Dwight Pollard leaped by me,
and hiding the face of the dying woman on his breast, turned on me a gaze that was half wild, half commanding, and
said:

"Go for my brother! He is in the northwest room. Tell him our mother raves." Then, as I took a hurried, though
by no means steady, step towards the door, he added: "I need not ask you to speak to no one else?"

"No," my cold lips essayed to utter, but an unmeaning murmur was all that left them. The reaction from hope
and trust to a now really tangible fear had been too sudden and overwhelming.

But by the time I had reached the room to which I had been directed, I had regained in a measure my self-
control. Guy Pollard at least should not see that I could be affected by any thing which could happen in this house.
Yet when, in answer to my summons, he joined me in the hall, I found it difficult to preserve the air of respectful
sympathy I had assumed, so searching was his look, and so direct the question with which he met his brother's
message.

"My mother raves, you say; will you be kind enough to tell me what her words were?"

"Yes," returned I, scorning to prevaricate in a struggle I at least meant should be an honest one. "She called upon
her sons, and said that she would haunt them if ever they divulged what took place between them and Mr. Barrows
at the mill."

"Ah!" he coldly laughed; "she does indeed rave." And while I admired his self-control, I could not prevent
myself from experiencing an increased dread of this nature that was so ready for all emergencies and so panoplied
against all shock.

I might have felt a more vivid apprehension still, had I known what was passing in his mind as we traversed the
hall back to the sick- chamber. But the instinct which had warned me of so much, did not warn me of that, and it was
with no other feeling than one of surprise that I noted the extreme deference with which he opened his mother's door
for me, and waited even in that moment of natural agitation and suspense for me to pass over the threshold before he
presumed to enter himself.

Dwight Pollard, however, did not seem to be so blind, for a change passed over his face as he saw us, and he half
rose from the crouching position he still held over his mother's form. He subsided back, however, as I drew to one
side and let Guy pass unheeded to the bed, and it was in quite a natural tone he bade me seat myself in the alcove
towards which he pointed, till his mother's condition required my services.

That there was really nothing to be done for her, I saw myself in the one glimpse I caught of her face as he
started up. She was on the verge of death, and her last moments were certainly due to her children. So I passed into
the alcove, which was really a small room opening out of the large one, and flinging myself on the lounge I saw
there, asked myself whether I ought to shut the door between us, or whether my devotion to Ada's cause bade me
listen to whatever came directly in my way to hear? The fact that I was in a measure prisoner there, there being no
other outlet to the room than the one by which I had entered, determined me to ignore for once the natural instincts
of my ladyhood; and pale and trembling to a degree I would not have wished seen by either of these two mysterious
men, I sat in a dream of suspense, hearing and not hearing the low hum of their voices as they reasoned with or
consoled the mother, now fast drifting away into an endless night.

Suddenly--shall I ever forget the thrill it gave me?--her voice rose again in those tones whose force and commanding power I have found it impossible to describe.

"The oath! the oath! Dwight, Guy, by my dying head---"

"Yes, mother," I heard one voice interpose; and by the solemn murmur that followed, I gathered that Guy had thought it best to humor her wishes.

The long-drawn sigh which issued from her lips testified to the relief he had given her, and the "Now Dwight!" which followed was uttered in tones more gentle and assured.

But to this appeal no solemn murmur ensued, for at that instant a scream arose from the bed, and to the sound of an opening door rang out the words: "Keep her away! What do you let her come in here for, to confound me and make me curse the day she was born! Away! I say, away!"

Horrified, and unable to restrain the impulse that moved me, I sprang to my feet and rushed upon the scene. The picture that met my eyes glares at me now from the black background of the past. On the bed, that roused figure, awful with the shadows of death, raised, in spite of the constraining hands of her two sons, into an attitude expressive of the most intense repulsion, terror, and dread; and at the door, the fainting form of the pretty, dimpled, care-shunning daughter, who, struck to the heart by this poisoned dart from the hand that should have been lifted in blessing, stood swaying in dismay, her wide blue eyes fixed on the terrible face before her, and her hands outstretched and clutching in vague fear after some support that would sustain her, and prevent her falling crushed to the floor.

To bound to her side, and lift her gently out of her mother's sight, was the work of a moment. But in that moment my eyes had time to see such a flash of infinite longing take the place of the fierce passions upon that mother's face, that my heart stood still, and I scarcely knew whether to bear my burden from the room, or to rush with it to that bedside and lay it, in all its childlike beauty, on that maddened mother's dying breast. A low, deep groan from the bed decided me. With that look of love on her face, otherwise distorted by every evil passion, Mrs. Pollard had fallen back into the arms of her two sons, and quietly breathed her last.

VII.
ADVANCES.

For they are actions that a man might play; But I have that within which passeth show. --HAMLET.

"Miss Sterling?"

I was sitting by the side of Mrs. Harrington in her own room. By a feverish exertion of strength I had borne her thither from her mother's chamber, and was now watching the returning hues of life color her pale cheek. At the sound of my name, uttered behind me, I arose. I had expected a speedy visit from one of the brothers, but I had been in hopes that it would be Dwight, and not Guy, who would make it.

"I must speak to you at once; will you follow me?" asked that gentleman, bowing respectfully as I turned.

I glanced at Mrs. Harrington, but he impatiently shook his head.

"Anice is at the door," he remarked. "She is accustomed to Mrs. Harrington, and will see that she is properly looked after." And, leading the way, he ushered me out, pausing only to cast one hurried glance back at his sister, as if to assure himself she was not yet sufficiently recovered to note his action.

In the hall he offered me his arm.

"The gas has not yet been lighted," he explained, "and I wish you to go with me to the parlor."

This sounded formidable, but I did not hesitate. I felt able to confront this man.

"I am at your service," I declared, with a comfortable sensation that my tone conveyed something of the uncompromising spirit I felt.

The room to which he conducted me was on the first floor, and was darkness itself when we entered. It was musty, too, and chill, as with the memory of a past funeral and the premonition of a new one.

Even the light which he soon made did not seem to be at home in the spot, but waivered and flickered with faint gasps, as if it longed to efface itself and leave the grand and solitary apartment to its wonted atmosphere of cold reserve. By its feeble flame I noted but two details: one was the portrait of Mrs. Pollard in her youth, and the other was my own reflection in some distant mirror. The first filled me with strange thoughts, the face was so wickedly powerful, if I may so speak; handsome, but with that will beneath its beauty which, when allied to selfishness, has produced the Lucretia Borgias and Catherine de Medicis of the world.

The reflection of which I speak, dimly seen as it was, had, on the contrary, a calming effect upon my mind. Weary as I undoubtedly was, and pale if not haggard with the emotions I had experienced, there was still something natural and alive in my image that recalled happier scenes to my eyes, and gave me the necessary strength to confront the possibilities of the present interview..

Mr. Pollard, who in his taciturn gloom seemed like the natural genius of the spot, appeared to be struck by this
same sensation also, for his eyes wandered more than once to the mirror, before he summoned up courage, or, perhaps, I should say, before he took the determination to look me in the face and open the conversation. When he did, it was curious to note the strife of expression between his eye and lip: the one hard, cold, and unyielding; the other depreciating in its half-smile and falsely gentle, as if the mind that controlled it was even then divided between its wish to subdue and the necessity it felt to win.

"Miss Sterling," so he began, "it would be only folly for me to speak as if nothing had occurred but an ordinary and natural death. It would be doing your good sense and womanly judgment but little honor, and putting myself, or, rather, ourselves—for we children are but one in this matter—in a position which would make any after-explanations exceedingly difficult. For explanations can be given, and in a word; for what has doubtless struck you as strange and terrible in my mother's last hours,—explanations which I am sure you will be glad to accept, as it is not natural for one so blooming in her womanliness to wish to hamper her youth with dark thoughts, or to nurse suspicions contrary to her own candid and noble nature."

He paused, but meeting with no response beyond a rather cool bow, the strife between his eye and lip became more marked. He went on, however, as if perfectly satisfied, his voice retaining its confident tone, whatever the disturbance communicated to his inward nature.

"The explanation to which I allude is this," said he. "My mother for the past three months has been the victim of many unwholesome delusions. The sickness of my father, which was somewhat prolonged, made great inroads upon her strength; and his death, followed by the necessity of parting with Mrs. Harrington—whom you perhaps know was for family reasons married immediately upon my father's decease,—sowed the seed of a mental weakness which culminated on her deathbed into a positive delirium. She had a notion, and has had it for weeks, unknown to every one but my brother and myself, that Mrs. Harrington had been the occasion of some great misfortune to us; whereas the innocent girl had done nothing but follow out her mother's wishes, both in her marriage and in her settlement in a distant town. But the love my mother had felt for her was always the ruling passion of her life, and when she came to find herself robbed of a presence that was actually necessary to her well-being, her mind, by some strange subtlety of disease I do not profess to understand, confounded the source of her grief with its cause, attributing to this well-beloved daughter's will the suffering, which only sprang out of the circumstances of the case. As to her wild remarks in regard to Mr. Barrows," he added, with studied indifference, "and the oath she wished us to take, that was but an outgrowth of the shock she had received in hearing of the clergyman's death. For, of course, I need not assure you, Miss Sterling, that for all our readiness to take the oath she demanded, neither my brother nor myself ever were at the mill, or knew any more of the manner or cause of Mr. Barrows' death than you do."

This distinct denial, made in quiet but emphatic tones, caused me to look up at him with what was perhaps something of an expressive glance. For at its utterance the longing cry had risen in my heart, "Oh, that it were Dwight who had said that!" And the realization which it immediately brought of the glad credence which it would have received from me had it only fallen from _his_ lips caused an inward tremble of self-consciousness which doubtless communicated itself to my glance. For Guy Pollard, without waiting for any words I might have to say, leaned towards me with a gratified air, and with what I would like to call a smile, exclaimed:

"You have been in the house scarce twenty-four hours, but I feel as if I could already give you the title of friend. Will you accept it from me, Miss Sterling, and with it my most cordial appreciation and esteem?"

"Ah, this is mere bait!" I thought, and was tempted to indignantly repel the hand he held out; but something restrained me which I am proud to call fear, and which in reality I do not think was fear, so much as it was wonder and a desire to understand the full motive of a condescension I could not but feel was unprecedented in this arrogant nature. I therefore gave him my hand, but in a steady, mechanical way that I flattered myself committed me to nothing; though the slight but unmistakable pressure he returned seemed to show that he took it for a sign of amity, if not of absolute surrender.

"You relieve me of a great weight," he acknowledged. "Had you been of the commonplace type of woman, you might have made it very uncomfortable for us." "And what have I said and done," I could not help remarking, "though neither so bitterly nor with so much irony as I might have done had that desire of which I have spoken been less keen than it was, "to lead you to think I shall not yet do so?"

"Your glance is your surety," was the response he made. "That and your honest hand, which does not lightly fall in that of a stranger." And with a real smile now, though it was by no means the reassuring and perhaps attractive one he doubtless meant it to be, he fixed me with his subtle glance, in which I began to read a meaning, if not a purpose, that made the blood leap indignantly to my heart, and caused me to feel as if I had somehow stumbled into a snare from which it would take more than ordinary skill and patience to escape.

A look down the shadowy room restored my equanimity, however. It was all so unreal, so ghostly, I could not help acknowledging to myself that I was moving in a dream which exaggerated every impression I received, even that which might be given by the bold gaze of an unscrupulous man. So I determined not to believe in it, or in any
thing else I should see that night, unless it were in the stern soul of the woman who had just died; a qualification which my mind could not help making to itself as my eyes fell again upon her portrait, with its cruel, unrelenting expression.

"You do not feel at home!" exclaimed Guy, interpreting according to his needs my silence and the look I had thrown about me. "I do not wonder," he pursued. "Dreariness like this has little to do with youth and beauty. But I hope"—here he took a step nearer, while that meaning look—oh, my God! was I deceiving myself?—deepened in his eyes—"I hope the day will come when you will see the sunshine stream through the gloom of these dim recesses, and in the new cheer infused into the life of this old mansion forget the scenes of horror that encompassed the beginning of our friendship." And with a bow that seemed to intimate that necessity, and not his wishes, forced him to terminate this interview, he was stepping back, when the door opened quickly behind him, and the face of Dwight Pollard showed itself on the threshold.

The look he cast first at his brother and then at me caused a fresh tumult to take place in my breast. Was it displeasure he showed? I was pleased to think so. I could not be sure of his feeling, however, for almost on the instant his brow cleared, and advancing with an excuse for his interruption, he spoke a few low words to Guy. The latter gravely bowed, and with just a slight glance in my direction, immediately left the room. I was once more alone with Dwight Pollard.

He seemed to feel the situation as much as I did, for it was several moments before he spoke, and when he did, his voice had a subdued tremble in it which I had not noticed before.

"Miss Sterling," he remarked, "my brother has been talking to you, trying, I presume, to explain to you the distressing scene to which you have just been witness."

I bowed, for I seemed to have no words to say, though he evidently longed to hear me speak.

"My brother is not always considerate in his manner of address," he went on, after a moment's intent scrutiny of my face. "I hope he has not made you feel other than satisfied of our good-will towards you?"

"No," I faintly smiled, wishing I knew what feeling prompted this subtle attempt to learn the nature of the interview which had just passed. "Mr. Guy Pollard has never been any thing but polite to me."

He looked at me again as if he would read my very soul, but I gave him no help to its understanding, and he presently dropped his eyes.

"Did he tell you," he at last resumed, with some effort, "that it is our wish for you to remain in this house till our mother is buried?"

"No," I returned, "he said nothing about it."

"But you will do so?" he queried, in that rich and deep tone which thrilled so dangerously to my heart.

"I—J must have time to think," I faltered, taken by surprise, and not seeing my way as clearly as I could wish. "It is my desire to attend the funeral of Mr. Barrows and Miss Reynolds, and—Mr. Pollard!" I suddenly exclaimed, taking perhaps the most courageous resolution of my life, "I must be honest with you. It is useless for me to deny that the manner and circumstances of your mother's death have made a great impression upon me; that I cannot, in spite of all explanations, but connect some special significance to the oath you were requested to take; and that, weakened as your mother may have been, something more terrible than the mere shock of hearing of her pastor's sudden decease must have occasioned emotions so intense as to end in death and delirium. If, therefore, you are willing to assure me, as your brother has done, that it was entirely a fancy of hers that you ever held any communication with Mr. Barrows at the mill, I will gladly promise to disabuse my mind of all unfavorable impressions, and even promise to stay here, if such be your desire, till the days of your trouble are over, and the body of your mother is laid in her grave."

"And has my brother given you such an assurance as you speak of?"

"He has," I returned.

"Then why do you ask one from me?"

Was it possible for me to tell him?

"If it was not enough coming from his lips, how could it be coming from mine?" he continued.

Shame and confusion kept me silent.

"Would it be?" he persisted, this time with feeling and something like a hint of eagerness in his voice.

I dared not say "Yes," and yet I must have the assurance I demanded, if ever I was to know peace again.

"You no not answer; but I think, I feel confident you would believe my word, Miss Sterling."

"I have asked for it," I returned.

He turned frightfully pale; it seemed as if he would speak, but the words did not come. I felt, my heart growing sick, and as for him, he started violently away from my side, and took a turn or two up and down the room.

"I cannot deny what looks like an accusation," he declared at last, coming and standing before me with a sombre but determined air. "My pride alone is sufficient to deter me. Will you accept from me any thing less. I am not such
a man as my brother."

"I will accept your assurance that as the true friend to Ada Reynolds I may remain in this house without stain to her memory or love."

"Then you think--"

"No," said I, with a burst I could not control, "I do not think; I do not want to think; do not make me, I entreat."

He smiled, a sad and fearful smile, and took another turn up and down the seemingly darkening room. When he came back I was cold as marble, and almost as insensible.

"Miss Sterling," were his words, "do you remember a conversation we had this morning?"

I bowed, with a sudden rush of hope that almost melted me again.

"In that conversation I made a solemn assertion; do you recollect what it was?"

"Yes," I looked, if I did not audibly reply.

"I make that assertion again--is it sufficient?" he asked.

At that moment it seemed to me that it was. I looked and felt as if a great weight had been lifted from my heart, and though he flushed deeply, as any man of spirit, let alone one of such a proud and aristocratic nature as his, would be apt to under the circumstances, I saw that he experienced a relief also, and giving way to an impulse I do not yet know whether to regret or not, I held out my hand, saying calmly:

"I will remain, Mr. Pollard."

VIII.

A FLOWER FROM THE POLLARD CONSERVATORY.

You may wear your rue with a difference. --HAMLET.

Mrs. Harrington did not immediately recover from the shock she had received. I therefore found myself fully employed the next day. Towards evening, however, a respite came, and I took the opportunity for a stroll up-street, as much for the sake of hearing the gossip of the town as to escape from the atmosphere of sorrow and perplexity by which I was surrounded.

My walk down to the gate was full of a certain uneasy apprehension. I had made no secret of my intentions at the supper-table, and for the reason that neither of the brothers had ventured upon any reply to my remark, I expected one, if not both, of them to join me on the way. But I reached the last turn of the path without meeting any one, and I was congratulating myself upon the prospect of having an hour of perfect freedom, when I detected, leaning on the gate before me, the firm, well-knit figure of a man.

As the two Pollards were more or less alike in form, I could not distinguish at first glance which of the brothers it was. I therefore faltered back a step, and was indeed debating whether I should not give up my project and return to the house, when I saw the gentleman's head turn, and realized that it was too late to retreat. I therefore advanced with as much calmness as I could assume, determined not to vary my conduct, no matter which of the brothers it should turn out to be. But, to my great surprise, the gentleman before me gave me no opportunity to test my resolution. No sooner did he perceive me than he made a hurried gesture that I did not at that moment understand; and, just lifting his hat in courteous farewell, vanished from my sight in the thick bushes which at that place encumbered the grounds.

"It was Dwight; it was Guy," I alternately explained to myself, and knew not whether it would give me most relief to find myself shunned by the one or the other. My final conclusion, that I wished to have nothing further to do with either of them, received, notwithstanding, a rude shock when I arrived at the gate-post. For there, on its broad top, lay a magnificent blossom, the choicest fruit of the hot-house, and it was to beg my acceptance of this that the gentleman had made the peculiar gesture I had noticed--an act which, if it came from Dwight, certainly possessed a significance which I was not yet ready to ignore; while, if it proceeded from his cold and crafty brother--But I would not allow myself to dwell upon that possibility. The flower must be mine, and if afterwards I found that it was to Guy I owed its possession, it would be time enough then for me to determine what to do. So I took the gorgeous blossom off the post and was speeding away down the street, when I was suddenly stopped by the thought that only Guy would have the egotism to bestow a gift upon me in this way; that Dwight, if he had wished to present it at all, would have done so with his own hand, and not left it lying on a gate-post with the assurance it would be gathered up by the fortunate recipient of his favor.

Disgusted with myself, and instantly alive to the possible consequences of my act, I opened my fingers with the laudable intention of dropping the flower to the ground, when I saw standing in the road directly in front of me the beautiful idiot boy whose peculiarities of appearance and conduct had so attracted my attention in the summer-house the day before. He was looking at me with a strange gaze of mingled curiosity and imbecile good-nature, and his hands, white as milk, trembled in the air before him, as if he could scarcely restrain himself from snatching out of my grasp the superb flower I seemed so willing to throw away.

A happy impulse seized me.
"Here," said I, proffering him the blossom. "This will give you more pleasure than it will me."

But, to my great astonishment, he turned on his heel with a loud laugh, and then, shaking his head, and rolling it curiously from side to side, exclaimed, with his usual repetition:

"No, no, it is a lover's gift, a lover's gift; you will wear it in your hair." And he danced about me with grotesque gayety for a moment, then flitted away to a position from which he could still see me without being within reach of my hand.

Under these circumstances I was too proud to fling the flower away; so I dropped it into a basket I held, and walked swiftly down the street. The idiot boy followed me; now skipping a pace or two in advance, and now falling back till I had passed far beyond him. As he flashed back and forth, I saw that his eyes were always on my face, and once, as I confronted him with mine, he broke out into a series of chuckles, and cried: "Do they like you now? do they like you now?" and laughed and danced, and laughed again, till I began to find the situation somewhat embarrassing, and was glad enough when at the corner of a street he disappeared from my view, with the final cry of: "One day, two days; wait till you have been there ten; wait till you have been there twenty!"

Hot and trembling with apprehension lest his foolish speeches had been heard by some passer-by, I hurried on my way to the house where I lived. I reached it in a few minutes, and being so fortunate as to find my landlady in, succeeded before another half-hour had passed in learning all that was generally known about the serious occurrences in which I was just then so profoundly interested.

I heard first that the vat in the old mill had been examined for the purpose of ascertaining how it came to be full enough of water to drown a man; and it was found that, owing to a heavy storm which had lately devastated the country, a portion of the wall above the vat had been broken in by a falling tree, allowing the rain to enter in floods from a jutting portion of the roof. Next, that although an inquest had been held over Mr. Barrows' remains, and a verdict been given of accidental death, the common judgment of the community ascribed his end to suicide. This was mainly owing to the fact that the woman in whose house he had lived had testified to having observed a great change in his appearance during the last few weeks; a change which many were now ready to allow they had themselves perceived; though, from the fact of its having escaped the attention of Ada, I cannot but think they were greatly helped to this conclusion by their own imagination.

The last thing I made sure of was that the two deaths which had followed his so tragically had awakened on all sides the deepest interest and pity, but nothing more. That although the general features of Mrs. Pollard's end were well enough known, no whisper of suspicion had been breathed against her or hers, that showed in the faintest way that any doubt mingled with the general feeling of commiseration. And yet it was too evident she was no favorite with the world at large, and that the respect with which she was universally mentioned was rather the result of the pride felt in her commanding manners and position, than from any personal liking for the woman herself.

As for the sons, they were fine young men in their way, and had the sympathy of everybody in their bereavement; but gossip, if it busied itself with their names at all, was much more interested in wondering what disposition they would make of the property now coming to them, than in inquiring whether or not they could have had any secret relations with the man now dead, which were calculated to explain in any way his mysterious end.

Finally I learned that Ada and Mr. Barrows were to be buried the next day.

Satisfied with the information obtained, I started immediately for the Pollard mansion. It was my wish to re-enter it before dark. But the twilight fell fast, and by the time I reached the gate I could barely discern that a masculine figure was again leaning there, waiting, as it appeared, for my return. The discovery caused me a sensation of relief.

Now I should at least learn which of the two brothers showed this interest in my movements, for this time the figure was again leaning there, waiting, as it appeared, for my return. The discovery caused me a sensation of relief.

"I knew you wished to go alone, Miss Sterling, or I should have offered you my protection in your dismal walk. I am glad to see you return before it is quite dark."

"Thank you," I responded, with almost a degree of joyousness in my tone, I was so glad to be rid of the perplexity that had weighed down my spirits for the last half-hour. "It is not pleasant to walk the streets at dusk, but I am glad to see you return before it is quite dark."

"You utter that in a proud tone," he declared, reaching out and taking the basket that hung on my arm.

"I have reason to," I replied, glad it was so dark he could not see the blush which his action had caused. "It was no slight struggle for me to overcome certain prejudices in which I have been reared. That I have been able to do so gives me wholesome satisfaction. I am no longer ashamed to own that I stand by myself, and work for every benefit I obtain."

"Nor need you be," he murmured. "In this age and in this country a woman like you forfeits nothing by maintaining her own independence. On the contrary, she gains something, and that is the respect of every true-hearted man that knows her." And his step lagged more and more in spite of my conscientious efforts to maintain the
brisk pace in which I had indulged before I had encountered him at the gate.

"This is a grand old place," I remarked, vaguely anxious to change the drift of the conversation.

"Yes," he answered, moodily; "but it is shadowed." And with a sudden relapse into his most sombre self, he walked at my side in silence, till the sight of the high porch showing itself through the trees warned him that if he had any thing further to say to me, it must be said soon. He therefore paused, forcing me by the action to pause too, and earnestly observed: "I know, however you may address me, Miss Sterling, you cherish a doubt of me in your heart. I cannot resent this, much as my natural pride might prompt me to do so. During the short time in which I have known you, you have won so deeply upon my esteem, that the utmost which I feel able to ask of you under the circumstances is, that, in the two or three days you will yet remain with us, you will allow yourself but one thought concerning me, and that is, that I aspire to be an honest man, and to do not only what the world thinks right, but even what such a conscientious soul as yours must consider so. Are you willing to regard me in this light, and will my mere word be sufficient to cause you to do so?"

It was a searching question after his proffer, and my acceptance of the flower I held concealed, and I hesitated a moment before replying to it. I am so intensely proud; and then I could not but acknowledge to myself that, whatever my excuse, I was certainly running a risk of no ordinary nature in listening to the addresses of a man who could inspire me, or ever had inspired me, with the faintest element of distrust.

He noted my silence and drew back, uttering a sigh that was half impatient and half sorrowful. I felt this sigh, nondescript as it was, re-echo painfully in my heart, and hung my head in remorse; but not before I had caught a glimpse of his face, and been struck by its expression of deep melancholy.

"You have no favor to show me, then?" he asked.

Instantly and without premeditation I seized upon the basket he held in his hand, and impetuously opened the lid.

"Have I not shown you one?" I inquired.

A sound--it never came from him or from me--made us both start. With a fierce expression he turned towards the bushes at our right, but not before I had seen, by the look of astonishment he had cast upon the flower, that, notwithstanding the coincidence of finding him at the gate, he had had nothing to do with its culling or presentation.

"Some one is presuming to play the spy upon us," said he, and drawing my hand through his arm, he led me swiftly towards the porch. "You need not tremble so," he whispered, as we halted an instant between the cedars before mounting the steep steps. "No one in this house wishes to annoy you--or if there should be any one who does," he corrected in a quick tone, while he cast a glance of quick suspicion at the basket in my hand, "that person and I will soon come to an understanding."

"I was only startled," was my quick rejoinder, glad to explain my tremulousness in this way. "Let us go in," I added, feeling that I must escape to some place of solitude, if only to hide my shame and chagrin from every eye.

He acquiesced in my wishes at once, and we were proceeding slowly up the steps, when suddenly a shrill, strange laugh broke from amid the bushes, and the weird voice of the idiot boy, whom I thought had been left behind me in the town, rose once more to my ear, uttering those same words which had so annoyed me earlier in the evening.

"Oh, do you think they like you now? Say, say, do you think they like you now?" But the tone with which he addressed me this time had a ring of menace in it, and I was not surprised to see Dwight Pollard start, though I was somewhat affected by the deep agitation he showed as I tried to explain:

"Oh, it is only the little idiot boy whom you must have seen running about the streets. He seems to have taken a fancy to me, for he followed me nearly all the while I was gone, with something of the same senseless remarks as now."

"The idiot boy!" repeated Mr. Pollard. "Well, we will leave the idiot boy outside." And he held the door open till I had hurried in, when he vehemently closed it, looking at the same time as if he had shut the door on a threatening evil, or, at the most, on a bitter and haunting memory.

That night I did an unworthy thing; I listened to conversation which was not intended for my ears. It happened in this wise: I had been down-stairs on an errand for Mrs. Harrington, and was coming back through the dimly lighted hall, when I saw Dwight Pollard step out of a room in front of me and accost a man that was locking and bolting the front door.

"Simon," I heard him say, "you remember that beautiful flower I noticed yesterday in the conservatory?"

"Yes, sir," the man replied, with some embarrassment in his voice.

"Well, I want it picked to-morrow for my mother's funeral. You will bring it to my room."

"Oh, sir," I heard the man hurriedly interpose, "I'm sure I'm very sorry, sir; but it has already been picked, and there won't be another out before next week."

I knew I ought not to stay there and listen, especially as I could easily have gone on my way without attracting attention; but having heard thus much, I found it impossible to go on till I had at least learned if Mr. Pollard had the
motive I suspected in these inquiries of his. His next words satisfied me on this point.

"And who was the fortunate one to obtain this flower?" he asked, in an accent indifferent enough to deceive a merely casual listener.

"Mr. Guy, sir."

"Ah, so he noticed it too!" was the remark with which Mr. Pollard dropped the subject, and hurried away from the gardener's side.

The next instant I perceived him pass into Guy's room, and I saw that an explanation of some kind was about to take place between the brothers.

IX.
AN UNEXPECTED DISCOVERY.

Hold, hold my heart! And you, my sinews, grow not instant old. But bear me stiffly up!

Whether intentionally or unintentionally, I was saved the embarrassment of meeting Guy Pollard at the breakfast-table the next morning. I was, therefore, left in ignorance as to the result of the conversation between the brothers, though from the softened manner of Dwight, and the quiet assurance with which he surrounded me with the delicate atmosphere of his homage, I could not but argue that he had come out master of the situation.

It was, therefore, with mingled feelings of pleasure and apprehension that I left the house at the hour appointed for the double funeral; feelings that would have been yet more alive had I realized that I should not re-enter those gates again, or see the interior of that fatal house, till I had passed through many bitter experiences.

The ceremonies, in spite of the latent suspicion of the community that Mr. Barrows' death had been one of his own seeking, were of the most touching and impressive description. I was overcome by them, and left the churchyard before the final prayer was said, feeling as if the life of the last three days had been a dream, and that here in the memory of my lovely Ada and her griefs lay my true existence and the beginning and ending of my most sacred duty.

Pursuant to this thought I did not turn immediately back to the gloomy mansion which claimed me for the present as its own, but wandered away in an opposite direction, soothing my conscience by the thought that it was many hours yet before the services would be held for Mrs. Pollard, and that neither the brothers nor Mrs. Harrington could have any use for me till that time.

The road I had taken was a sequestered one, and strange as it may seem to some, did not awaken special memories in my mind till I came to a point where an opening in the trees gave to my view the vision of two tall chimneys; when like a flash it came across me that I was on the mill road, and within a few short rods of the scene of Mr. Barrows' death.

The sensation that seized me at this discovery was of the strangest kind. I felt that I had been led there; and without a thought of what I was doing, pressed on with ever-increasing rapidity till I came to the open doorway with its dismantled entrance.

To pass over the now much-trodden grass and take my stand by the dismal walls was the work of an instant; but when I had done this and experienced in a rush the loneliness and ghostly influence of the place, I was fain to turn back and leave it to the dream of its own fearful memories. But the sight of a small piece of paper pinned or pasted on the board that had been nailed in futile precaution across the open doorway deterred me. It was doubtless nothing more important than a notice from the town authorities, or possibly from the proprietors of the place, but my curiosity was excited, and I desired to see it. So I hastened over to where it was, and with little apprehension of the shock that was destined to overwhelm me, read these words:

"Those who say Mr. Barrows committed suicide lie. He was murdered, and by parties whose position places them above suspicion, as their wealth and seeming prosperity rob them of even the appearance of motive for such a terrible deed."

No names mentioned; but O God! And that word _murdered_. It swam before my eyes; it burned itself into every thing upon which I looked, as their wealth and seeming prosperity rob them of even the appearance of motive for such a terrible deed.

No names mentioned; but O God! And that word _murdered_. It swam before my eyes; it burned itself into every thing upon which I looked, as their wealth and seeming prosperity rob them of even the appearance of motive for such a terrible deed.
natural desire to understand one so seemingly impenetrable, but love, real, true, yearning, and despotic love, which if well founded might have made my bliss for a lifetime, and which now—I thrust the paper between my lips to keep down the cry that rose there, and hiding my face deep down in the turf, mourned the weakness that made me so ready a victim, while at the same time I prepared to sustain the struggle which I knew must there and then be waged and decided if I was ever to face the world again with the strength and calmness which my nature demanded, and the extraordinary circumstances of my position imposed.

The result was an hour of misery, with a sensation of triumph at the end; though I do not pretend to say that in this one effort I overcame the admiration and interest which attached my thoughts to this man. The accusation was as yet too vague, and its source too doubtful, to blot his image with ineffaceable stains; but I did succeed in gaining sufficient mastery over myself to make it possible to review the situation and give what I meant should be an unbiased judgment as to the duty it imposed upon me.

The result was a determination to hold myself neutral till I had at least discovered the author of the lines I held in my hand. If they came from a credible person—but how could they do so and be written and posted up in the manner they were? An honest man does not seek any such roundabout way to strike his blow. Only a coward or a villain would take this method to arouse public curiosity, and perhaps create public suspicion.

And yet who could say that a coward and a villain might not be speaking the truth even in an accusation of this nature? The very fact that it met and gave form and substance to my own dim and unrecognized fears, proved that something as yet unknown and unsounded connected the mysterious death of Mr. Barrows with the family towards which this accusation evidently pointed. While my own heart beat with dread, how could I ignore the possibility of these words being the work of an accomplice disgusted with his crime, or of a tool anxious to save himself, and at the same time to avenge some fancied slight? I could not. If peace and hope were lost in the effort, I must learn the truth and satisfy myself, once and for all, as to whose hatred and fear the Pollards were indebted for insinuations at once so tremendous and so veiled.

That I was the only person who had probably seen and read these fatal words, lent purpose to my resolution. If, as I madly hoped, they were but the expression of suspicion, rather than of knowledge, what a satisfaction it would be for me to discover the fact, and possibly unmask the cowardly author, before the public mind had been infected by his doubts.

But how could I, a woman and a stranger, with no other talisman than my will and patience, accomplish a purpose which would be, perhaps, no easy one for a trained detective to carry out to a successful issue? The characters in which the fatal insinuations had been conveyed offered no clue. They were printed, and in so rough and commonplace a manner that the keenest mind would have found itself baffled if it had attempted to trace its way to the writer through the mere medium of the lines he had transcribed. I must, therefore, choose some other means of attaining my end; but what one?

I had never, in spite of the many trials and embarrassments of my life, been what is called an intriguing woman. Nor had I ever amused myself with forming plots or devising plans for extricating imaginary characters out of fancied difficulties by the mere exercise of their wits. _Finesse_ was almost an unknown word to me, and yet, as I sat there with this fatal bit of paper in my hand, I felt that a power hitherto unguessed was awakening within me, and that if I could but restrain the emotions which threatened to dissipate my thoughts, I should yet hit upon a plan by which my design could be attained with satisfaction to myself and safety to others.

For—and this was my first idea—the paper had not been on the wall long. It was too fresh to have hung there overnight, and had, moreover, been too poorly secured to have withstood even for an hour the assaults of a wind as keen as that which had been blowing all the morning. It had, therefore, been put up a few moments before I came, or, in other words, while the funeral services were being held; a fact which, to my mind, argued a deep calculation on the part of the writer, for the hour was one to attract all wanderers to the other end of the town, while the following one would, on the contrary, see this quarter overflow with human beings, anxious to complete the impression made by the funeral services, by a visit to the scene of the tragedy.

That the sky had clouded over very much in the last half-hour, and that the first drops of a heavy thunder-shower were even now sifting through the branches over my head, was doubtless the reason why no one besides myself had yet arrived upon the scene; and, should the storm continue, this evil might yet be averted, and the one person I was most anxious to see, have an opportunity to show himself at the place, without being confounded with a mass of disinterested people. For I felt he would return, and soon, to note the result of his daring action. In the crowd, if a crowd assembled, or alone, if it so chanced that no one came to the spot, he would draw near the mill, and, if he found the notice gone, would betray, must betray, an interest or an alarm that would reveal him to my watchful eye. For I intended to take up my stand within the doorway, using, if necessary, the storm as my excuse for desiring its shelter; while as a precaution against suspicions that might be dangerous to me, as well as a preventive against any one else ever reading these accusatory lines, I determined to dip the paper in the stream, and then drop it near the
place where it had been tacked, that it might seem as if it had been beaten off by the rain, now happily falling faster and faster.

All this I did, not without some apprehension of being observed by a watchful eye. For what surety had I that the writer of these words was not even now in hiding, or had not been looking at me from some secret retreat at the very moment I tore the paper off the wall and fled with it into the bushes?

But this fear, if fear it was, was gradually dispelled as the moments sped by, and nothing beyond the wind and the fast driving rain penetrated to where I stood. Nor did it look as if any break in what seemed likely to become a somewhat dread monotony would ever occur. The fierce dash of the storm was like a barrier, shutting me off from the rest of the world, and had my purpose been less serious, my will less nerved, I might have succumbed to the dreariness of the outlook and taken myself away while yet the gruesome influences that lay crouched in the darkness at my back remained in abeyance, and neither ghost's step nor man's step had come to shake the foundations of my courage and make of my silent watch a struggle and a fear.

But an intent like mine was not to be relinquished at the first call of impatience or dread. Honor, love, and duty were at stake, and I held to my resolution, though each passing moment made it more difficult to maintain my hope as well as to sustain my composure.

At last--oh, why did that hollow of darkness behind me reverberate so continually in my fancy?--there seemed, there was, a movement in the bushes by the road, and a form crept gradually into sight that, when half seen, made the blood cease coursing through my veins; and, when fully in view, sent it in torrents to heart and brain; so deep, so vivid, so peculiar was the relief I felt. For--realize the effect upon me if you can--the figure that now stole towards me through the dank grass, looking and peering for the notice I had torn from the wall, was no other than my friend--or was it my enemy?--the idiot boy.

He was soaked with the rain, but he seemed oblivious of the fact. For him the wind had evidently no fierceness, the wet no chill. All his energies--and he seemed, as in that first moment when I saw him in the summer-house, to be alive with them--were concentrated in the gaze of his large eyes, as, coming nearer and nearer, he searched the wall, then the ground, and finally, with a leap, picked up the soaked and useless paper which I had dropped there.

His expression as he raised himself and looked fiercely about almost made me reveal myself. This an idiot, this trembling, wrathful, denunciatory figure, with its rings of hair clinging to a forehead pale with passion and corrugated with thought! Were these gestures, sudden, determined, and full of subdued threatening, the offspring of an erratic brain or the expression of a fool's hatred? I could not believe it, and stood as if fascinated before this vision, that not only upset every past theory which my restless mind had been able to form of the character and motives of the secret denunciator of the Pollards, but awakened new thoughts and new inquiries of a nature which I vaguely felt to be as mysterious as any which had hitherto engaged my attention.

Meantime the boy had crushed the useless paper in his hand, and, flinging it aside, turned softly about as if to go. I had no wish to detain him. I wished to make inquiries first, and learn if possible all that was known of his history and circumstances before I committed myself to an interview. If he were an idiot--well, that would simplify matters much; but, if he were not, or, being one, had moments of reason, then a mystery appeared that would require all the ingenuity and tact of a Machiavelli to elucidate. The laugh which had risen from the shrubbery the night before, and the look which Dwight Pollard had given when he heard it, proved that a mystery did exist, and gave me strength to let the boy vanish from my sight with his secret unsolved and his purposes unguessed.

X.

RHODA COLWELL.

I spare you common curses. --MRS. BROWNING.

It was not long after this that the storm began to abate. Sunshine took the place of clouds, and I was enabled to make my way back to the town at the risk of nothing worse than wet feet. I went at once to my boarding-house. Though I was expected back at the Pollards', though my presence seemed almost necessary there, I felt that it would be impossible for me to enter their door till something of the shadow that now enveloped their name had fallen away. I therefore sent them word that unlooked-for circumstances compelled me to remain at home for the present; and having thus dismissed one anxiety from my mind, set myself to the task of gleaning what knowledge I could of the idiot boy.

The result was startling. He was, it seemed, a real idiot--or so had always been regarded by those who had known him from his birth. Not one of the ugly, mischievous sort, but a gentle, chuckling vacant-brained boy, who loved to run the streets and mingle his harmless laughter with the shouts of playing children and the noise of mills and manufactories.

He was an orphan, but was neither poor nor dependent, for--and here was where the fact came in that astonished me--he had for protector a twin sister whose wits were as acute as his were dull; a sister who through years of orphanage had cherished and supported him, working sometimes for that purpose in the factories, and sometimes
simply with her needle at home. They lived in a nest of a cottage on the edge of the town, and had the sympathy of all, though not perhaps the full liking of any. For Rhoda, the sister, was a being of an unique order, who, while arousing the interest of a few, baffled the comprehension of the many. She was a problem; a creature out of keeping with her belongings and the circumstances in which she was placed. An airy, lissom, subtle specimen of woman, whose very beauty was of an unknown order, causing as much inquiry as admiration. A perfect blonde like her brother, she had none of the sweetness and fragility that usually accompanies this complexion. On the contrary, there was something bizarre in her whole appearance, and especially in the peculiar expression of her eye, that awakened the strangest feelings and produced even in the minds of those who saw her engaged in the most ordinary occupations of life an impression of remoteness that almost amounted to the uncanny. The fact that she affected brilliant colors and clothed both herself and brother in garments of a wellnigh fantastic make, added to this impression, and gave perhaps some excuse to those persons who regarded her as being as abnormally constituted as her brother, finding it impossible, I suppose, to reconcile waywardness with industry, and a taste for the rich and beautiful with a poverty so respectable, it scarcely made itself known for the reality it was. A blonde gypsy some called her, a dangerous woman some others; and the latter would undoubtedly have been correct had the girl possessed less pride of independence or been unhampered, as she was untrammelled, by the sense of responsibility towards her imbecile brother. As it was, more than one mother had had reason to ask why her son wore such a moody brow after returning from a certain quarter of the town, and at one time gossip had not hesitated to declare that Dwight Pollard—the haughty Dwight Pollard—had not been ashamed to be seen entering her door, though every one knew that no one stepped under its wreath of vines except their intentions were as honorable as the beauty, if not the poverty, of its owner demanded.

When I heard this, and heard also that he visited her no more, I seemed to have gained some enlightenment as to the odd and contradictory actions of my famous idiot boy. He loved his sister, and was in some way imbued with a sense that she had been wronged. He was, therefore, jealous of any one who had, or seemed to have, gained the attention of the man who had possibly forsaken her. Yet even with this explanation of his conduct, there was much for which I could not account, making my intended interview with the sister a matter to be more or less apprehended.

It was therefore with a composure altogether outward and superficial that I started for the quaint and tiny cottage which had been pointed out to me as the abode of these remarkable twins. I reached it just as the clock struck three, and was immediately impressed, as my informants evidently expected me to be, by the air of poetry and refinement that characterized even its humble exterior. But it was not till I had knocked at the door and been ushered into the house by the idiot brother, that my real astonishment began. For though the room in which I found myself did not, as I was afterwards assured, contain a single rich article, it certainly had the effect of luxuriousness upon the eye; and had it not been for my inward agitation and suspense, would have produced a sense of languid pleasure, scarcely to be looked for in the abode of a simple working-girl. As it was, I was dimly conscious of a slight relief in the keen tension of my feelings, and turned with almost a sensation of hope to the boy who was smiling and grimacing beside me. But here another shock awaited me, for this boy was not the one I had seen at the mill barely two hours ago, or, rather, if it were the same—and the identity of his features, figure, and dress with those I knew so well, seemed to proclaim him to be—he was in such a different mood now as to appear like another being. Laughing, merry, and inane, he bore on his brow no sign nor suggestion of the fierce passion I had seen there, nor did his countenance proclaim him to be—she was in such a different mood now as to appear like another being. Laughing, merry, and inane, he bore on his brow no sign nor suggestion of the fierce passion I had seen there, nor did his countenance proclaim him to be—

"It is not the boy I have known," I suddenly decided in my mind; and I cannot say in what wild surmises I might have indulged, if at that moment the door at my back had not opened and a figure stepped in which at the first glance attracted my whole attention and absorbed all my thought.

Imagine a woman, lithe, blonde, beautiful, intense; with features regular as the carver's hand could make them, but informed with a spirit so venomous, passionate, and perverse, that you lost sight of her beauty in your wonder at the formidable nature of the character she betrayed. Then see her dressed as no other woman ever dressed before, in a robe of scarlet of a cut and make quite its own, and conceive, if you can, the agitation I felt as I realized that in her countenance and expression of the boy I had met, went for nothing. The beauty and malice of a seeming imbecile, attracted my whole attention and absorbed all my thought.

That her face, even the hatred that visibly contrived it as her eyes met mine, were familiar to me in the countenance and expression of the boy I had met, went for nothing. The beauty and malice of a seeming imbecile, and the same characteristics in a woman subtle and decided as this, awaken very different emotions in the mind. Though I had seen that same brow corrugated before, it was like a revelation to behold it now, and watch how the rosy lips took a straight line and the half-shut, mysterious eyes burned like a thread of light, as she stretched out one white hand and asked half imperiously, half threateningly:

"Who are you, and for what do you come to _me?_"
"I am Constance Sterling," I retorted, satisfied that nothing short of the heroic treatment would avail with this woman; "and if I do not mistake, I think you know very well why I come here."

"Indeed!" came in something like a hiss from between her set lips. And in one short instant all that was best in her and all that was worst became suddenly visible, as turning to her softly chuckling brother, she motioned him gently out of the room, and then turning to me, advanced a step and said: "Will you explain yourself, Miss-- or is it Mrs. Constance Sterling?"

"I will explain myself," I returned, wondering, as I saw her cheeks pale and her eyes emit strange and fitful sparks, if I exerted any such influence over her as she did over me. "I said I thought you knew why I came here. I said this, because this is not the first time we have met, nor am I the first one who has presumed to address the other in a tone that to a sensitive ear sounded like menace. The idiot boy----"

"We will leave my brother out of the discussion," she broke in, in a voice so distinct I scarcely noticed that it was nothing but a whisper.

"I am not alluding to your brother," I declared, meeting her eyes with a look steady as her own, and I hope more open.

"Oh, I see," she murmured; and she took another step, while the flash of her glance cut like a knife. "You accuse me then----"

"Of assuming a disguise to spy upon Dwight Pollard."

It was a well-sped shaft, and quivered alive and burning in her heart of hearts. She gave a spring like the panther she seemed at that minute, but instantly recovered herself, and launching, upon me the strangest smile, mockingly exclaimed:

"You are a brave woman." Then as I did not quail before her passion, drew up her slight figure to its height and said: "We are worthy of each other, you and I. Tell me what you want."

Then I felt my own cheek turn pale, and I was fain to sit upon the pile of cushions that were arranged in one corner for a seat.

"What I want?" I repeated. "I want to know how you dared put in language the insinuations which you hung up on the door of the old mill this morning?"

Her eyes, narrowed, as I have said, in her seemingly habitual desire to keep their secrets to herself, flashed wide open at this, while a low and mirthless laugh escaped her lips. "So my labor was not entirely wasted!" she cried. "You accuse me then----"

"Of assuming a disguise to spy upon Dwight Pollard."

"Both the lines and the writer," I completed, relentlessly preserving the advantage I felt myself to have gained--"the lines before they were defaced by the storm, the writer as she picked up the useless paper and went away."

"So!" she commented, with another echo of that joyless laughter; "there are two spies instead of one in this game!"

"There are two women instead of one who know your enmity and purpose," I retorted.

"How came you at the mill?" she suddenly asked, after a moment of silent communion with her own repressed soul.

"By accident," was all my reply. "Were you alone?"

"I was."

"Then no one but yourself saw the paper?"

"No one but myself."

She gave me a look I made no sign of understanding.

"Have you told any one of what you saw and read?" she inquired at last, as she perceived I meant to volunteer nothing.

"That I am not called upon to state," I returned. "Oh, you would play the lawyer!" was her icy and quiet remark. "I would _play_ nothing," was the answer that came from my lips.

She drew back, and a change passed over her.

Slowly as a fire is kindled, the passion grew and grew on her face. When it was at its height she leaned her two hands on a table that stood between us, and, bending forward, whispered:

"Do you love him? Are you going to fight to keep his name free from stain and his position unassailed before the world?"

Believe me if you can, but I could not answer; possibly because I had as yet no answer to the question in my soul.

She took advantage of my hesitation.

"Perhaps you think it is not worth while to fight me; that I have no real weapons at my command?" and her eyes
shot forth a flame that devoured my rising hopes and seared my heart as with a fiery steel.

"I think you are a cruel woman," I declared, "anxious to destroy what no longer gives you pleasure."

"You know my story then?" she whispered. "He has talked about me, and to you?"

"No," I replied, in quiet disdain. "I know nothing save what your own eyes and your conduct tell me."

"Then you shall," she murmured, after a moment's scrutiny of my face. "You shall hear how I have been loved, and how I have been forsaken. Perhaps it will help you to appreciate the man who is likely to wreck both our lives."

I must have lifted my head at this, for she paused and gave me a curious look.

"You don't love him?" she cried.

"I shall not let him wreck my life," I responded.

Her lip curled and her two hands closed violently at her sides.

"You have not known him long," she declared. "You have not seen him at your feet, or heard his voice, as day by day he pleaded more and more passionately for a word or smile? You have not known his touch!"

"No," I impetuously cried, fascinated by her glance and tone.

I thought she looked relieved, and realized that her words might have been as much an inquiry as an assertion.

"Then do not boast," she said.

The blood that was in my cheeks went out of them. I felt my eyes close spasmodically, and hurriedly turned away my head. She watched me curiously.

"Do you think I succumbed without a struggle?" she vehemently asked, after a moment or two of this silent torture. "Look at me. Am I a woman to listen to the passionate avowals of the first man that happens to glance my way and imagine he would like to have me for his wife? Is a handsome face and honeyed tongue sufficient to gain my good graces, even when it is backed by the wealth, I love and the position to which I feel myself equal? I tell you you do not know Rhoda Colwell, if you think she could be won easily. Days and days he haunted this room before I let his words creep much beyond my ears. I had a brother who needed all my care and all my affection, and I did not mean to marry, much less to love. But slowly and by degrees he got a hold upon my heart, and then, like the wretch who trusts himself to the maelstrom, I was swept round and round into the whirlpool of passion till not earth nor heaven could save me or make me again the free and light-hearted girl I was. This was two years ago, and today--"

She stopped, choked. I had never seen greater passion, as I had never seen a more fiery nature.

"It is his persistency I complain of," she murmured at last. "He forced me to love him. Had he left me when I first said 'No,' I could have looked down on his face to-day with contempt. But, no, he had a fancy that I was his destiny, and that he must possess me or die. Die? He would not even let _me_ die when I found that my long-sought 'Yes' turned his worship into indifferance, and his passion into constraint. But--" she suddenly cried, with a repetition of that laugh which now sounded so fearful in my ears-- "all this does not answer your question as to how I dared publish the insinuations I tacked up on the mill-door this morning."

"No," I shudderingly cried.

"Ah! I have waited long," she passionately asserted. "Wrongs like mine are very patient, and are very still, but the time comes at last when even a woman weak and frail as I am can lift her hand in power; and when she does lift it--""

"Hush!" I exclaimed, bounding from my seat and seizing her upraised arm; for her vivid figure seemed to emit a flame like death. "Hush! we want no tirades, you nor I; only let me hear what Dwight Pollard has done, and whether you knew what you were saying when you called him and his family--"

"Murderers!" she completed.

I shook, but bowed my head. She loosed her arm from my grasp and stood for one moment contemplating me.

"You are a powerful rival," she murmured. "He will love you just six months longer than he did me."

I summoned up at once my pride and my composure.

"And that would be just six months too long," I averred, "if he is what you declare him to be."

"What?" came from between her set teeth, and she gave a spring that brought her close to my side. "You would hate him, if I proved to you that he and his brother and his mother were the planners, if not the executors, of Mr. Barrows' death."

"Hate him?" I repeated, recoiling, all my womanhood up in arms before the fearful joy expressed in her voice and attitude. "I should try and forget such a man ever existed. But I shall not be easily convinced," I continued, as I saw her lips open with a sort of eager hope terrible to witness. "You are too anxious to kill my love."

"Oh, you will be convinced," she asserted. "Ask Dwight Pollard what sort of garments those are which lie under the boards of the old mill, and see if he can answer you without trembling."

"Garments?" I repeated, in astonishment; "garments?"

"Yes," said she. "If he can hear you ask that question and not turn pale, stop me in my mad assertions, and fear his doom no more. But if he flinches--"
A frightful smile closed up the gap, and she seemed by a look to motion me towards the door.

"But is that all you are going to tell me?" I queried, dismayed at the prospect of our interview terminating thus.

"Is it not enough?" she asked. "When you have seen _him_, I will see _you_ again. Can you not wait for that hour?"

I might have answered No. I was tempted to do so, as I had been tempted more than once to exert the full force of my spirit and crush her. But I had an indomitable pride of my own, and did not wish to risk even the semblance of defeat. So I controlled myself and merely replied:

"I do not desire to see Dwight Pollard again. I am not intending to return to his house."

"And yet you will see him," she averred. "I can easily be patient till then." And she cast another look of dismissal towards the door.

"You are a demon!" I felt tempted to respond, but my own dignity restrained me as well as her beauty, which was something absolutely dazzling in its intensity and fire. "I will have the truth from you yet," was what I did say, as I moved, heart-sick and desponding, from her side.

And her slow "No doubt," seemed to fill up the silence like a knell, and give to my homeward journey a terror and a pang which proved that however I had deceived myself, hope had not quite given up its secret hold upon my heart.

And I dreamed of her that night, and in my dream her evil beauty shone so triumphantly that my greatest wonder was not that Dwight Pollard had succumbed to her fascinations, but that having once seen the glint of that subtle soul shine from between those half-shut lids, he could ever have found strength to turn aside and let the fire he had roused burn itself away.

XI.
UNDER THE MILL FLOOR.

I know, this act shows terrible and grim. --OTHELLO.

I had never considered myself a courageous person. I was therefore surprised at my own temerity when, with the morning light, came an impulse to revisit the old mill, and by an examination of its flooring, satisfy myself to whether it held in hiding any such articles as had been alluded to by Rhoda Colwell in the remarkable interview just cited. Not that I intended to put any such question to Dwight Pollard as she had suggested, or, indeed, had any intentions at all beyond the present. The outlook was too vague, my own mind too troubled, for me to concoct plans or to make any elaborate determinations. I could only perform the duty of the moment, and this visit seemed to me to be a duty, though not one of the pleasantest or even of the most promising character.

I had therefore risen and was preparing myself in an abstracted way for breakfast, when I was violently interrupted by a resounding knock at the door. Alarmed, I scarcely knew why, I hastened to open it, and fell back in very visible astonishment when I beheld standing before me no less a person than Anice, the late Mrs. Pollard's maid.

"I wanted to see you, miss," she said, coming in without an invitation, and carefully closing the door behind her. "So, as I had leave to attend early mass this morning, I just slipped over here, which, if it is a liberty, I hope you will pardon, seeing it is for your own good."

Not much encouraged by this preamble, I motioned her to take a seat, and then, turning my back to her, went on arranging my hair.

"I cannot imagine what errand you have with me, Anice," said I; "but if it is any thing important, let me hear it at once, as I have an engagement this morning, and am in haste."

A smile, which I could plainly see in the mirror before which I stood, passed slyly over her face. She took up her parasol from her lap, then laid it down again, and altogether showed considerable embarrassment. But it did not last long, and in another moment she was saying, in quite a bold way:

"You took my place beside the mistress I loved, but _I_ don't bear you no grudge, miss. On the contrary, I would do you a good turn; for what are we here for, miss, if it's not to help one another?"

As I had no answer for this worthy sentiment, she lapsed again into her former embarrassed state and as speedily recovered from it. Simpering in a manner that unconsciously put me on my guard, she remarked:

"You left us very suddenly yesterday, miss. Of course that is your own business, and I have nothing to say against it. But I thought if you knew what might be gained by staying--" She paused and gave me a look that was almost like an appeal.

But I would not help her out.

"Why," she went on desperately, with a backward toss of her head, "you might think as how we was not such very bad folks after all. I am sure you would make a very nice mistress to work for, Miss Sterling," she simpered; "and if you would just let me help you with your hair as I did old Mrs. Pollard--"

Angry, mortified, and ashamed of myself that I had listened to her so far, I turned on her with a look that seemed
to make some impression even upon her.

"How dare you--" I began, then paused, shocked at my own imprudence in thus betraying the depth of the feelings she had aroused. "I beg your pardon," I immediately added, recovering my composure by a determined effort; "you doubtless did not consider that you are not in a position to speak such words to me. Even if your insinuations meant anything serious, which I will not believe, our acquaintance--"--I am afraid I threw some sarcasm into that word--"has scarcely been long enough to warrant you in approaching me on any subject of a personal nature, least of all one that involves the names of those you live with and have served so long. If you have nothing better to say--"

She rose with a jerk that seemed to my eyes as much an expression of disappointment as anger, and took a reluctant step or two towards the door.

"I am sure I meant no offence, miss," she stammered, and took another step still more reluctantly than before.

I trembled. Outrageous as it may seem, I wished at this moment that honor and dignity would allow me to call her back and question her as to the motive and meaning of her extraordinary conduct. For the thought had suddenly struck me that she might be a messenger--a most unworthy and humiliating one it is true--and yet in some sort of a way a messenger, and my curiosity rose just in proportion as my pride rebelled.

Anice, who was not lacking in wit, evidently felt, if she could not see, the struggle she had awakened in my mind, for she turned and gave me a look I no longer had the courage to resent.

"It is only something I overheard Mr. Guy say to his brother," she faltered, opening and shutting her parasol with a nervous hand; then, as I let my hair suddenly fall from my grasp, in the rush of relief I felt, blurted out: "You have beautiful hair, miss; I don't wonder Mr. Guy should say, 'One of us two must marry that girl,'" and was gone like a flash from the room, leaving me in a state that bordered on stupefaction.

This incident, so suggestive, and, alas! so degrading to my self-esteem, produced a deep and painful effect on my mind. For hours I could not rid my ears of that final sentence: "One of us two must marry that girl." Nor could the events that speedily followed quite remove from my mind and heart the sting which this knowledge of the Pollards' base calculation and diplomacy had implanted. It had one favorable consequence, however. It nerved me to carry out the expedition I had planned, and gave to my somewhat failing purpose a heart of steel.

The old mill to which I have twice carried you, and to which I must carry you again, was, as I have already said, a dilapidated and much-dismantled structure. Though its walls were intact, many of its staircases were rotten, while its flooring was, as I knew, heavily broken away in spots, making it a dangerous task to walk about its passages, or even to enter the large and solitary rooms which once shook to the whirr and hum of machinery.

But it was not from such dangers as these I recoiled. If Heaven would but protect me from discovery and the possible intrusion of unwelcome visitants, I would willingly face the peril of a fall even in a place so lonesome and remote. Indeed, my one source of gratitude as I sped through the streets that morning lay in the fact, I was so little known in S----, I could pass and re-pass without awakening too much comment, especially when I wore a close veil, to prevent suspicion of possible intrusion of unwelcome visitants, I would willingly face the peril of a fall even in a place so lonesome and remote. Indeed, my one source of gratitude as I sped through the streets that morning lay in the fact, I was so little known in S----, I could pass and re-pass without awakening too much comment, especially when I wore a close veil, as I did on this occasion.

Rhoda Colwell's house lay in my way. I took especial pains not to go by it, great as the relief would have been to know she was at home and not wandering the streets in the garb and character of the idiot boy. Though I felt I could not be deceived as to her identity, the mere thought of meeting her, with that mock smile of imbecility upon her lip, filled me with a dismay that made my walk any thing but agreeable. It was consequently a positive relief when the entrance to the mill broke upon my view, and I found myself at my journey's end unwatched and unfollowed; nor could the unpromising nature of my task quite dash the spirit with which I began my search.

My first efforts were in a room which had undoubtedly been used as an office. But upon inspecting the floor I found it firm, and, convinced I should have to go farther for what I was seeking, I hastily passed into the next room. This was of much larger dimensions, and here I paused longer, for more than one board tilted as I passed over it, and not a few of them were loose and could be shifted aside by a little extra exertion of strength. But, though I investigated every board that rocked under my step, I discovered nothing beneath them but the dust and debris of years, and so was forced to leave this room as I had the other, without gaining any thing beyond a sense of hopelessness and the prospect of a weary back. And so on and on I went for an hour, and was beginning to realize the giant nature of my undertaking, when a sudden low sound of running water broke upon my ears, and going to one of the many windows that opened before me, I looked out and found I was at the very back of the mill, and in full sight of the dark and sullen stream that in times of yore used to feed the great wheel and run the machinery. Consequently I was in the last room upon the ground-floor, and, what struck me still more forcibly, near, if not directly over, that huge vat in the cellar which had served so fatal a purpose only a few short days before.

The sight of a flight of stairs descending at my right into the hollow darkness beneath intensified my emotion. I seemed to be in direct communication with that scene of death; and the thought struck me there, if anywhere in the whole building, must be found the mysterious hiding-place for which I was in search.
It was therefore with extra care that I directed my glances along the uneven flooring, and I was scarcely surprised when, after a short examination of the various loose boards that rattled beneath me, I discovered one that could be shifted without difficulty. But scarcely had I stooped to raise it when an emotion of fear seized me, and I started back alert and listening, though I was unconscious of having heard any thing more than the ordinary swash of the water beneath the windows and the beating of my own overtaxed heart. An instant's hearkening gave me the reassurance I needed, and convinced that I had alarmed myself unnecessarily, I bent again over the board, and this time succeeded in moving it aside. A long, black garment, smoothly spread out to its full extent, instantly met my eye. The words of Rhoda Colwell were true; the mill did contain certain articles of clothing concealed within it.

I do not know what I expected when, a few minutes later, I pulled the garment out of the hole in which it lay buried, and spread it out before me. Not what I discovered, I am sure; for when I had given it a glance, and found it was nothing more nor less than a domino, such as is worn by masqueraders, I experienced a shock that the mask, which fell out of its folds, scarcely served to allay. It was like the introduction of farce into a terrible tragedy; and as I stood in a maze and surveyed the garment before me till its black outline swam before my eyes, I remember thinking of the effect which had been produced, at a certain trial I had heard of, by the prisoner suddenly bursting into a laugh when the sentence of death was pronounced. But presently this feeling of incongruity gave way to one of hideous dread. If Dwight Pollard could explain the presence of a domino and mask in this spot, then what sort of a man was Dwight Pollard, and what sort of a crime could it have been that needed for its perpetration such adjuncts as these? The highwaymen of olden time, with their "Stand and deliver!" seemed out of place in this quiet New England town; nor was the character of any of the parties involved, of a nature to make the association of this masquerade gear with the tragedy gone by seem either possible or even probable. And yet, there they lay; and not all my wonder, nor all the speculations which their presence evoked, would serve to blot them from the floor or explain the mystery of which they were the sign and seal.

So impressed was I at last by this thought that I broke the spell which bound me, and began to restore the articles to their place. I was just engaged in throwing the mask into the hole, when the low but unmistakable sound of an approaching foot-fall broke upon my ears, startling me more than a thunder-clap would have done, and filling me with a fear that almost paralyzed my movements. I controlled myself, however, and hastily pulled the board back to its place, after which I frantically looked about me for some means of concealment or escape. I found but one. The staircase which ran down to the cellar was but a few feet off, and if I could summon courage to make use of it, would lead to a place of comparative safety. But the darkness of that spot seemed worse than the light of this, and I stood hesitating on the brink of the staircase till the footsteps drew so near I dared not linger longer, and plunged below with such desperate haste, I wonder I did not trip and fall headlong to the cellar-floor. I did not, however, nor do I seem to have made any special noise, for the footsteps above did not hasten. I had, therefore, the satisfaction of feeling myself saved from what might have been a very special danger, and was moving slowly away, when the fascination which all horrible objects exert upon the human soul seized me with a power I could not resist, and I turned slowly but irresistibly towards the corner where I knew the fatal vat to be.

One glimpse and I would have fled; but just at the instant I turned I heard a sound overhead that sent the current of my thoughts in a fresh direction, and lent to my failing courage a renewed strength which made flight at that moment seem nothing more nor less than an impulse of cowardice. This was nothing more nor less than a faint creaking, such as had followed my own lifting of the board which hid the domino and mask; a noise that was speedily followed by one yet more distinct and of a nature to convince me beyond a doubt that my own action was being repeated by some unknown hand. Whose? Curiosity, love, honor, every impulse of my being impelled me to find out. I moved like a spirit towards the stairs. I placed my foot on one step, and then on another, mounting in silence and without a fear, so intent was I upon the discovery which now absorbed me. But just as I reached the top, just when another movement would lift my head above the level of the floor, I paused, realizing as in a flash what the consequences might be if the intruder should prove to be another than Rhoda Colwell, and should have not his back but his face turned towards the place where I stood. The sounds I heard, feeble as they were, did not seem to indicate the presence of a woman, and in another instant a low exclamation, smothered in the throat almost before it was uttered, assured me that it was a man who stood not six feet from me, handling the objects which I had been told were in some way connected with a murder which I was by every instinct of honor bound to discover, if not avenge.

A man! and ah, he was so quiet, so careful! I could not even guess what he was doing, much less determine his identity, by listening. I had a conviction that he was taking the articles out of their place of concealment, but I could not be sure; and in a matter like this, certainty was indispensable. I resolved to risk all, and took another step, clinging dizzyly to the first support that offered. It was well I had the presence of mind to do this, or I might have had a serious fall. For no sooner had I raised my head above the level of the floor than my eyes fell upon the well-known form of him I desired least of all men to see in this place—my lover, if you may call him so—Dwight Pollard.

XII.
DWIGHT POLLARD.

Oh, 'tis too true! how smart A lash that speech doth give my conscience! --HAMLET.

He was standing with his back to me, and to all appearance was unconscious that he was under the surveillance of any eye. I had thus a moment in which to collect my energies and subdue my emotions; and I availed myself of it to such good purpose that by the time he had put the board back into its place I was ready to face him. He did not turn round, however; so, after a moment of silent suspense, I mounted the last stair, and thinking of nothing, hoping for nothing, wishing for nothing, stood waiting, with my eyes fixed on the domino he was now rapidly folding into smaller compass.

And thus I stood, like a pallid automaton, when the instant came for him to change his position, and he saw me. The cry that rose to his lips but did not escape them, the reel which his figure gave before it stiffened into marble, testified to the shock he had received, and also to the sense of unreality with which my appearance in this wise must have impressed him. His look, his attitude were those of a man gazing upon a spectre, and as I met his glance with mine, I was conscious of a feeling of unreality myself, as if the whole occurrence were a dream, and he and I but shadows which another moment would dissolve.

But alas! this was no more a dream than were the other strange and tragic events which had gone before; and in an instant we both knew it, and were standing face to face with wretched inquiry in the looks we fixed upon each other across the domino which had fallen from his hands. He was the first to speak.

"Miss Sterling!" he exclaimed, in a light tone, cruelly belied by the trembling lips from which it issued, "by what fortunate chance do I see you again, and in a place I should have thought to be the last you would be likely to visit?"

"By the same chance," I rejoined, "which appears to have brought you here. The desire to make sure if what I heard about the mill having been used as a secreting place for certain mysterious articles, was true." And I pointed to the mask and domino lying at my feet.

His eye, which had followed the direction of my finger, grew dark and troubled.

"Which disturbed these garments before you? Yes. And I shall make no apology for the action," I continued, "since it was done in the hope of proving false certain insinuations which had been made to me in your regard."

"Insinuations?" he repeated.

"Yes," I declared, in an agony between my longing to hear him vindicate himself and the desire to be true to the obligations I was under to Ada Reynolds. "Insinuations of the worst, the most terrible, character." Then, as I saw him fall back, stricken in something more than his pride, I hastened to inquire: "Have you an enemy in town, Mr. Pollard?"

He composed himself with a start, looked at me fixedly, and replied in what struck me as a strange tone even for such an occasion as this:

"Perhaps."

"One who out of revenge," I proceeded, "might be induced to attach your name to suspicions calculated to rob you of honor, if not life?"

"Perhaps," he reiterated; but this time with a fierceness that almost made me recoil, though I knew it was directed against some one besides myself.

"Then it may be," I said, "that you have but to speak to relieve my mind of the heaviest weight which has ever fallen upon it. These articles," I pursued, "have they, or have they not, any connection with the tragedy which makes the place in which we stand memorable?"

"I cannot answer you, Miss Sterling."

"Cannot answer me?"

"Cannot answer you," he reiterated, turning haggard about the eyes and lips.

"Then," I brokenly rejoined, "I had better leave this place; I do not see what more I have to do or say here."

"O God!" he cried, detaining me with a gesture full of agony and doubt. "Do not leave me so; let me think. Let me weigh the situation and see where I stand, in your eyes at least. Tell me what my enemy has said!" he demanded, his face, his very form, flashing with a terrible rage that seemed to have as much indignation as fear in it.

"Your enemy," I replied, in the steady voice of despair, "accuses you in so many words--of murder."

I expected to see him recoil, burst forth into cursing or frenzied declamation, by which men betray their inward consternation and remorse; but he did none of these things. Instead of that he laughed; a hideous laugh that seemed to shake the rafters above us and echoed in and out of the caverned recesses beneath.

"Accuses me?" he muttered; and it is not in language to express the scorn he infused into the words.

Stunned, and scarcely knowing what to think, I gazed at him helplessly. He seemed to feel my glance, for, after a moment's contemplation of my face, his manner suddenly changed, and bowing with a grim politeness full of sarcasm, he asked:
"And when did you see my enemy and hold this precious conversation in which _I_ was accused of murder?"

"Yesterday afternoon," I answered. "During the time of your mother's funeral," I subjoined, startled by the look of stupefaction which crossed his face at my words.

"I don't understand you," he murmured, sweeping his hand in a dazed way over his brow. "You saw him then? Spoke to him? Impossible!"

"It is not a man to whom I allude," I returned, almost as much agitated as himself. "It is a woman who is your accuser, a woman who seems to feel she has a right to make you suffer, possibly because she has suffered so much herself."

"A woman!" was all he said; "a woman!" turning pale enough now, God knows.

"Have you no enemies among the women?" I asked, wearied to the soul with the position in which my cruel fate had forced me.

"I begin to think I have," he answered, giving me a look that somehow broke down the barriers of ice between us and made my next words come in a faltering tone:

"And could you stop to bestow a thought upon a man while a woman held your secret? Did you think our sex was so long-suffering, or this special woman so generous----"

I did not go on, for he had leaped the gap which separated us and had me gently but firmly by the arm.

"Of whom are you speaking?" he demanded. "What woman has my secret-- if secret I have? Let me hear her name, now, at once."

"Is it possible," I murmured, "that you do not know?"

"The name! the name!" he reiterated, his eyes ablaze, his hand shaking where it grasped my arm.

"Rhoda Colwell," I returned, looking him steadily in the eye.

"Impossible!" his lips seemed to breathe, and his clasp slowly unloosed from my arm like a ring of ice which melts away. "Rhoda Colwell! Good God!" he exclaimed, and staggered back with ever-growing wonder and alarm till half the room lay between us.

"I am not surprised at your emotion," I said; "she is a dangerous woman."

He looked at me with dull eyes; he did not seem to hear what I said.

"How can it be?" he muttered; and his glance took a furtive aspect as it travelled slowly round the room and finally settled upon the mask and domino at my feet. "Was it she who told you where to look for those?" he suddenly queried in an almost violent tone.

I bowed; I had no wish to speak.

"She is an imp, a witch, an emissary of the Evil One," he vehemently declared; and turned away, murmuring, as it seemed to me, those sacred words of Scripture, "Be sure your sin find you out."

I felt the sobs rise in my throat. I could bear but little more. To recover myself, I looked away from him, even passed to a window and gazed out. Any thing but the sight of this humiliation in one who could easily have been my idol. I was therefore standing with my back to him when he finally approached, and touching me with the tip of his finger, calmly remarked;

"I did not know you were acquainted with Miss Colwell."

"Nor was I till yesterday," I rejoined. "Fate made us know each other at one interview, if could be said to ever know such a woman as she is."

"Fate is to blame for much; is it also to blame for the fact that you sought her? Or did she seek you?"

"I sought her," I said; and, not seeing any better road to a proper explanation of my conduct than the truth, I told him in a few words of the notice I had seen posted upon the mill, and of how I had afterwards surprised Rhoda Colwell there, and what the conclusions were which I had thereby drawn; though, from some motive of delicacy I do not yet understand, I refrained from saying any thing about her disguise, and left him to infer that it was in her own proper person I had seen her.

He seemed to be both wonder-stricken and moved by the recital, and did not rest till he had won from me the double fact that Rhoda Colwell evidently knew much more than she revealed, while I, on the contrary, knew much less. The latter discovery seemed to greatly gratify him, and while his brow lost none of the look of heavy anxiety which had settled upon it with the introduction of this woman's name into our colloquy, I noticed that his voice was lighter, and that he surveyed me with less distrust and possibly with less fear. His next words showed the direction his thoughts were taking.

"You have shown an interest in my fate, Miss Sterling, in spite of the many reasons you had for thinking it a degraded one, and for this I thank you with all my heart. Will you prove your womanliness still further by clinging to the belief which I have endeavored to force upon you, that notwithstanding all you have heard and seen, I stand in no wise amenable to the law, neither have I uttered, in your hearing at least, aught but the truth in regard to this whole matter?"
"And you can swear this to me?" I uttered, joyfully.
"By my father's grave, if you desire it," he returned.

A flood of hope rushed through my heart. I was but a weak woman, and his voice and look at that moment would have affected the coldest nature.

"I am bound to believe you," I said; "though there is much I do not understand--much which you ought to explain if you wish to disabuse my mind of all doubt in your regard. I would be laying claim to a cynicism I do not possess, if I did not trust your words just so far as you will allow me. But----" And I must have assumed an air of severity, for I saw his head droop lower and lower as I gazed at him and forbore to finish my sentence.

"But you believe I am a villain," he stammered.

"I would fain believe you to be the best and noblest of men," I answered, pointedly.

He lifted his head, and the flush of a new emotion swept over his face.

"Why did I not meet you two years ago?" he cried.

The tone was so bitter, the regret expressed so unutterable, I could not help my heart sinking again with the weight of fresh doubt which it brought.

"Would it have been better for me if you had?" I inquired. "Is the integrity which is dependent upon one's happiness, or the sympathy of friends, one that a woman can trust to under all circumstances of temptation or trial?"

"I do not know," he muttered. "I think it would stand firm with you for its safeguard and shield." Then, as he saw me draw back with an assumption of coldness I was far from feeling, added gently: "But it was not you, but Rhoda Colwell, I met two years ago, and I know you too well, appreciate you too well, to lay aught but my sincerest homage at your feet, in the hope that, whatever I may have been in the past, the future shall prove me to be not unworthy of your sympathy, and possibly of your regard."

And, as if he felt the stress of the interview becoming almost too great for even his strength, he turned away from me and began gathering up the toggery that lay upon the floor.

"These must not remain here," he observed, bitterly.

But I, drawn this way and that by the most contradictory emotions, felt that all had not been said which should be in this important and possibly final interview. Accordingly, smothering personal feeling and steeling myself to look only at my duty, I advanced to his side, and, indicating with a gesture the garments he was now rolling up into a compact mass, remarked:

"This may or may not involve you in some unpleasantness. Rhoda Colwell, who evidently attaches much importance to her discoveries, is not the woman to keep silent in their regard. If she speaks and forces me to speak, I must own the truth, Mr. Pollard. Neither sympathy nor regard could hold me back; for my honor is pledged to the cause of Mr. Barrows, and not even the wreck of my own happiness could deter me from revealing any thing that would explain his death or exonerate his memory. I wish you to understand this. God grant I may never be called upon to speak!"

It was a threat, a warning, or a danger for which he was wholly unprepared. He stared at me for a moment from his lowly position on the floor, then slowly rose and mechanically put his hand to his throat, as if he felt himself choking.

"I thank you for your frankness," he murmured, in almost inaudible tones. "It is no more than I ought to have expected; and yet----" He turned abruptly away. "I am evidently in a worse situation than I imagined," he continued, after a momentary pacing of the floor. "I thought only my position in your eyes was assailed; I see now that I may have to defend myself before the world." And, with a sudden change that was almost alarming, he asked if Rhoda Colwell had intimated in any way the source of whatever information she professed to have.

I told him no, and felt my heart grow cold with new and undefined fears as he turned his face toward the front of the building, and cried, in a suppressed tone, full of ire and menace:

"I thank you for your frankness," he murmured, in almost inaudible tones. "It is no more than I ought to have expected; and yet----" He turned abruptly away. "I am evidently in a worse situation than I imagined," he continued, after a momentary pacing of the floor. "I thought only my position in your eyes was assailed; I see now that I may have to defend myself before the world." And, with a sudden change that was almost alarming, he asked if Rhoda Colwell had intimated in any way the source of whatever information she professed to have.

I told him no, and felt my heart grow cold with new and undefined fears as he turned his face toward the front of the building, and cried, in a suppressed tone, full of ire and menace:

"It could have come but in one way; I am to be made a victim if----" He turned upon me with a wild look in which there was something personal. "Are you worth the penalty which my good name must suffer?" he violently cried. "For I swear that to you and you only I owe the position in which I now stand!"

"God help me then!" I murmured, dazed and confounded by this unexpected reproach.

"Had you been less beautiful, less alluring in your dignity and grace, my brother----" He paused and bit his lip. "Enough!" he cried. "I had wellnigh forgotten that generosity and forbearance are to actuate my movements in the future. I beg your pardon—and his!" he added, with deep and bitter sarcasm, under his breath.

This allusion to Guy, unpleasant and shocking as it was, gave me a peculiar sensation that was not unlike that of relief, while at the same moment the glimpse of something, which I was fain to call a revelation, visited my mind and led me impetuously to say:

"I hope you are not thinking of sacrificing yourself for another less noble and less generous than yourself. If such is the clew to actions which certainly have looked dubious till now, I pray that you will reconsider your duty and not
play the Don Quixote too far."

But Dwight Pollard, instead of accepting this explanation of his conduct with the eagerness of a great relief, only shook his head and declared:

"My brother--for I know who you mean, Miss Sterling--is no more amenable to the law than myself. Neither of us were guilty of the action that terminated Mr. Barrows' life."

"And yet," came in the strange and unexpected tones of a third person, "can you say, in the presence of her you profess to respect and of me whom you once professed to love, that either you or your brother are guiltless of his death?" and turning simultaneously toward the doorway, we saw gleaming in its heavy frame the vivid form and glittering eyes of his most redoubtable enemy and mine--Rhoda Colwell.

He fell back before this apparition and appeared to lose his power of speech. She advanced like an avenging Nemesis between us.

"Speak!" she vehemently exclaimed. "Are you--I say nothing of your brother, who is nothing to me or to her--are you guiltless, in the sense in which she would regard guilt, of David Barrows' death?" And her fierce eyes, shining through her half-closed lashes like lurid fires partly veiled, burned upon his face, which, turning paler and paler, drooped before her gaze till his chin settled upon his breast and we could barely hear the words that fell from his lips:

"God knows I would not dare to say I am."

XIII.

GUY POLLARD.

I will tell you why. --HAMLET.

There was a silence, then Dwight Pollard spoke again. "I have made a confession which I never expected to hear pass my lips. She who has forced it from me doubtless knows how much and how little it means. Let her explain herself, then. I have no further business in this place." And, without lifting his head or meeting the eye of either of us, he strode past us towards the door.

But there he paused, for Rhoda Colwell's voice had risen in words that must be answered.

"And where, then, have you business if not here? Do you not know I hold your good name, if not your life, in my hands?"

"My good name," he slowly rejoined, without turning his head, "is already lost in the eyes I most valued. As for my life, it stands in no jeopardy. Would I could say the same for his!" was his fierce addition.

"His?" came from Rhoda Colwell's lips, in surprise. "His?" and with a quick and subtle movement she glided to his side and seized him imperatively by the arm. "Whom do you mean?" she asked.

He turned on her with a dark look.

"Whom do I mean?" he retorted. "Whom should I mean but the base and unnatural wretch who, for purposes of his own, has made you the arbitrator of my destiny and the avenger of my sin--my brother, my vile, wicked brother, whom may Heaven----"

"Stop! Your brother has had nothing to do with this. Do you suppose I would stoop to take information from him? What I know I have seen it, Dwight Pollard! And now, what do you think of the clutch I hold upon your life?" and she held out those two milk-white hands of hers with a smile such as I hope never to see on mortal face again.

He looked at them, then at her, and drew back speechless. She burst into a low but ringing laugh of immeasurable triumph.

"And you thought such a blow as this could come _from a man_! Dullard and fool you must be, Dwight Pollard, or else you have never known _me_. Why should he risk his honor and his safety in an action as dangerous to him as ungrateful to you? Because he admires _her_? Guy Pollard is not so loving. But I--I whom you taught to be a woman, only to fling aside like a weed--Ah, that is another thing! Reason for waiting and watching here; reason for denouncing, when the time came, the man who could take advantage of another man's fears! Ah, you see I know what I am talking about."

"Speak!" he gasped. "How do you know? You say you saw. How could you see? Where were you, demon and witch in one?"

She smiled, not as before, but yet with a sense of power that only the evil glitter of her sidelong eye kept from making her wholly adorable.

"Will you come into the cellar below?" said she. "Or stay; that may be asking too much. A glance from one of these windows will do." And moving rapidly across the room, she threw up one of the broken sashes before her, and pointed to a stunted tree that grew up close against the wall. "Do you see that limb?" she inquired, indicating one that branched put towards a window we could faintly see defined beneath. "A demon or a witch might sit there for a half-hour and see, without so much as craning her neck, all that went on in the cellar below. That the leaves are
thick, and, to those within, apparently hang like a curtain between them and the outer world, would make no
difference to a demon's eyes, you know. Such folk can see where black walls intervene; how much more when only
a fluttering screen like that shuts off the view." And, drawing back, she looked into his dazed face, and then into
mine, as though she would ask: "Have I convinced you that I am a woman to be feared?"

His white cheek seemed to answer Yes, but his eyes, when he raised them, did not quail before her mocking
glance, though I thought they drooped a little when, in another moment, they flashed in my direction.
"Miss Sterling," he inquired, "do you understand what Miss Colwell has been saying?"

I shook my head and faltered back. I had only one wish, and that was to be effaced from this spot of misery.
He turned again to her.
"Do you intend to explain yourself further?" he demanded.
She did not answer; her look and her attention were fixed upon me.
"You are not quite convinced he is all that I have declared him to be?" she said, moving towards me. "You want
to know what I saw and whether there is not some loophole by which you can escape from utterly condemning him.
Well, you shall have my story. I ask nothing more of you than that." And with a quiet ignoring of his presence that
was full of contempt, she drew up to my side and calmly began: "You have seen me in the streets in the garb of my
brother?"

"Your brother?" cried a startled voice.

It was Dwight Pollard who spoke. He had sprung to her side and grasped her fiercely by the wrist. It was a
picture; all the more that neither of them said anything further, but stood so, surveying each other, till he thought fit
to drop her arm and draw back, when she quietly went on as though no interruption had occurred.

"It was a convenient disguise, enabling me to do and learn many things. It also made it possible for me to be out
in the evening alone, and allowed me to visit certain places where otherwise I should have been any but
welcome. It also satisfied a spirit of adventure which I possess, and led to the experience which I am now about to
relate. Miss Sterling, my brother has one peculiarity. He can be intrusted to carry a message, and forget it ten
minutes after it is delivered. This being generally known in town, I was not at all surprised when one evening, as I
was traversing a very dark street, I was met and accosted by a muffled figure, who asked me if I would run to Mr.
Barrows' house for him. I was about to say No, when something in his general air and manner deterred me, and I
changed it into the half-laughing, half-eager assent which my brother uses on such occasions. The man immediately
stooped to my ear and whispered:

"Tell Mr. Barrows to come with all speed to the old mill. A man has been thrown from his carriage and is dying
there. He wants Mr. Barrows' prayers and consolation. Can you remember?"

"I nodded my head and ran off. I was fearful, if I stayed, I would betray myself; for the voice, with all its
attempted disguise, was that of Guy Pollard, and the man injured might for all I knew be his brother. Before I
reached Mr. Barrows' door, however, I began to have my doubts. Something in the man's manner betrayed mystery,
and as Guy Pollard had never been a favorite of mine, I naturally gave to this any thing but a favorable
interpretation. I did not stop, though, because I doubted. On the contrary, I pushed forward, for if there was a secret,
I must know it; and how could I learn it so readily or so well as by following Mr. Barrows on his errand of mercy?

"The person who came to the door in answer to my summons was fortunately Mr. Barrows himself; fortunately
for me, that is; I cannot say it was altogether fortunately for him. He had a little book in his hand, and seemed
disturbed when I gave him my message. He did not hesitate, however. Being of an unsuspicious nature, he never
dreamed that all was not as he said, especially as he knew my brother well, and was thoroughly acquainted with the
exactness with which he always executed an errand. But he did not want to go; that I saw clearly, and laid it all to
the little book; for he was the kindest man who ever lived, and never was known to shirk a duty because it was
unpleasant or hard.

"I have said he knew my brother well. Remembering this when he came down stairs again ready to accompany
me, I assumed the wildest manner in which my brother ever indulged, that I might have some excuse for not
remaining at his side while still accompanying him in his walk. The consequence was that not a dozen words passed
between us, and I had the satisfaction of seeing him draw near the old mill in almost complete forgetfulness of my
proximity. This was what I wanted, for in the few minutes I had to think, many curious surmises had risen in my
mind, and I wished to perform my little part in this adventure without hindrance from his watchfulness or care.

"It was a very dark night, as you remember, Dwight Pollard, and it is no wonder that neither he nor the man who
came out of the doorway to meet him saw the slight figure that crouched against the wall close by the door they had
to enter. And if they had seen it, what would they have thought? That the idiot boy was only more freakish than
usual, or was waiting about for the dime which was the usual pay for his services. Neither the clouds, nor the trees,
nor the surrounding darkness would have whispered that an eager woman's heart beat under that boy's jacket, and
that they had better trust the wind in its sweep, the water in its rush, or the fire in its ravaging, than the will that lay
coiled behind the feebly moving lip and wandering, restless eye of the seeming idiot who knelt there.

"So I was safe and for the moment could hear and see. And this was what I saw: A tall and gentlemanly form, carrying a lantern which he took pains should shine on Mr. Barrows' face and not on his own. The expression of the former was, therefore, plain to me, and in it I read something more than reluctance, something which I dimly felt to be fear. His anxiety, however, did not seem to spring from his companion, but from the building he was about to enter, for it was when he looked up at its frowning walls and shadowy portal that I saw him shudder and turn pale. They went in, however. Not without a question or two from Mr. Barrows as to whom his guide was and where the sick man lay, to all of which the other responded shortly or failed to respond at all, facts which went far to convince me that a deception of some kind was being practised upon the confiding clergyman.

"I was consequently in a fever of impatience to follow them in, and had at last made up my mind to do so, when I heard a deep sigh, and glancing up towards the doorway, saw that it was again occupied by the dark figure which I had so lately seen pass in with Mr. Barrows. He had no lantern now, and I could not even discern the full outlines of his form, but his sigh being repeated, I knew who he was as certainly as if I had seen him, for it was one which had often been breathed in my ears, and was as well known to me as the beatings of my own heart. This discovery, as you may believe, Miss Sterling, did not tend to allay either my curiosity or my impatience, and when in a few minutes the watcher drew back, I stole from my hiding-place, and creeping up to the open doorway, listened. A sound of pacing steps came to my ears. The entrance was guarded.

"For a moment I stood baffled, then remembering the lantern which had been carried into the building, I withdrew quietly from the door, and began a tour of inspection round about the mill in the hope of spying some glimmer of light from one or more of the many windows, and in this way learn the exact spot to which Mr. Barrows had been taken. It was a task of no mean difficulty, Miss Sterling, for the bushes cluster thick about those walls, and I had no light to warn me of their whereabouts or of the many loose stones that lay in heaps here and there along the way. But I would not have stopped if firebrands had been under my feet, nor did I cease my exertions or lose my hope till I reached the back of the mill and found it as dark as the side and front. Then indeed I did begin to despair, for the place was so solitary and remote from observation, I could not conceive of any better being found for purposes that required secrecy or concealment. Yet the sombre walls rose before me, dark and unrelieved against the sky; and nothing remained for me but to press on to the broad west end and see if that presented as unpromising an aspect as the rest.

"I accordingly recommenced my toilsome journey, rendered positively dangerous now by the vicinity of the water and the steepness of the banks that led down to it. But I did not go far, for as, in my avoidance of the stream, I drew nearer and nearer the walls, I caught glimpses of what I at first thought to be the flash of a fire-fly in the bushes, but in another moment discovered to be the fitful glimmer of a light through a window heavily masked with leaves. You can imagine what followed from what I told you. How I climbed the tree, and seated myself on the limb that ran along by the window, and pushing aside the leaves, looked in upon the scene believed by those engaged in it to be as absolutely unwitnessed as if it had taken place in the bowels of the earth.

"And what did I see there, Miss Sterling? At first little. The light within was so dim and the window itself so high from the floor, that nothing save a moving shadow or two met my eye. But presently becoming accustomed to the position, I discovered first that I was looking in on a portion of the cellar, and next that three figures stood before me, two of which I immediately recognized as those of Mr. Barrows and Guy Pollard. But the third stood in shadow, and I did not know then, nor do I know now, who it was, though I have my suspicions, incredible as they may seem even to myself. Mr. Barrows, whose face was a study of perplexity, if not horror, seemed to be talking. He was looking Guy Pollard straight in the face when I first saw him, but presently I perceived him turn and fix his eyes on that mysterious third figure which he seemed to study for some signs of relenting. But evidently without success, for I saw his eyes droop and his hands fall helplessly to his side as if he felt that he had exhausted every argument, and that nothing was left to him but silence.

"All this, considering the circumstances and the scene, was certainly startling enough even to one of my nature and history, but when in a few minutes later I saw Guy Pollard step forward, and seizing Mr. Barrows by the hand, draw him forward to what seemed to be the verge of a pit, I own that I felt as if I were seized by some deadly nightmare, and had to turn myself away and look at the skies and trees for a moment to make sure I was not the victim of a hallucination. When I looked back they were still standing there, but a change had come over Mr. Barrows' face. From being pale it had become ghastly, and his eyes, fixed and fascinated, were gazing into those horrid depths, as if he saw there the horrible fate which afterwards befell him. Suddenly he drew back, covering his face with his hands, and I saw a look pass from Guy Pollard to that watchful third figure, which, if it had not been on the face of a gentleman, I should certainly call demoniacal. The next instant the third figure stepped forward, and before I could move or utter the scream that rose to my lips, Mr. Barrows had disappeared from view in the horrid recesses of that black hole, and only Guy Pollard and that other mysterious one, who I now saw wore a heavy black
domino and mask, remained standing on its dark verge.

"A cry, so smothered that it scarcely came to my ears, rose for an instant from the pit, then I saw Guy Pollard stoop forward and put what seemed to be a question to the victim below. From the nature of the smile that crossed his lip as he drew back, I judged it had not been answered satisfactorily; and was made yet more sure of this when the third person, stooping, took up the light, and beckoning to Guy Pollard, began to walk away. Yes, Miss Sterling, I am telling no goblin tale, as you can see if you will cast your eyes on our companion over there. They walked away, and the light grew dimmer and dimmer and the sense of horror deeper and deeper, till a sudden cry, rising shrill enough now from that deadly hole, drew the two conspirators slowly back to stand again upon its fatal brink, and, as it seemed to me, propound again that question, for answer to which they appeared ready to barter their honor, if not their souls.

"And this time they got it. The decisive gesture of the masked figure, and the speed with which Guy Pollard disappeared from the spot, testified that the knowledge they wanted was theirs, and that only some sort of action remained to be performed. What that action was I could not imagine, for, though Mr. Pollard carried away the lantern, the masked figure had remained.

"Meantime darkness was ours; a terrible darkness, as you may imagine, Miss Sterling, in which it was impossible not to wait for a repetition of that smothered cry from the depths of this unknown horror. But it did not come; and amid a silence as awful as the grave, the minutes went by till at last, to my great relief, the light appeared once more in the far recesses of the cellar, and came twinkling on till it reached the masked figure, which, to all appearance, had not moved hand or foot since it went away.

"Miss Sterling, you have doubtless consoled yourself during this narration with the thought that the evil which I had seen done had been the work of Guy and a person who need not necessarily have been our friend here. But I must shatter whatever satisfaction you may have derived from the possible absence of Dwight Pollard from this scene, by saying that when the lantern paused and I had the opportunity to see who carried it, I found that it was no longer in the hand of the younger brother, but had been transferred to that of Dwight, and that he, not Guy, now stood in the cellar before me.

"As I realize that we are not alone, I will not dilate upon his appearance, much as it struck me at the time. I will merely say he offered a contrast to Guy, who, if I may speak so plainly in this presence, had seemed much at home in the task he had set himself, uncongenial as one might consider it to the usual instincts and habits of a gentleman. But Dwight--you see I can be just, Miss Sterling--looked anxious and out of place; and, instead of seeming to be prepared for the situation, turned and peered anxiously about him, as if in search of the clergyman he expected to find standing somewhere on this spot. His surprise and horror when the masked figure pointed to the pit were evident, Miss Sterling; but it was a surprise and a horror that immediately settled into resignation, if not apathy; and after his first glance and shuddering start in that direction he did not stir again, but stood quite like a statue while the masked figure spoke, and when he did move it was to return the way he had come, without a look or a gesture toward the sombre hole where so much that was manly and kind lay sunk in a darkness that must have seemed to that sensitive nature the prototype of his grave."

"And is that all, Miss Colwell?" came with a strange intonation from Dwight Pollard's lips, as she paused, with a triumphant look in my direction.

"It is all I have to tell," was the reply; and it struck me that her tone was as peculiar as his. "Minutes, seconds even, spent under such circumstances, seem like hours; and after a spell of what appeared an interminable waiting, I allowed myself to be overcome by the disquiet and terror of my situation, and dropping from my perch, crept home."

"You should have stayed another hour," he dryly observed. "I wonder at an impatience you had never manifested till then."

"Do you?"

The meaning with which she said this, the gesture with which she gave it weight, struck us both aback.

"Woman!" he thundered, coming near to her with the mingled daring and repugnance with which one advances to crush a snake, "do you mean to say that you are going to publish this much of your story and publish no more? That you will tell the world this and not tell----"

"What I did not see?" she interpolated, looking him straight in the eye as might the serpent to which I have compared her.

"Good God!" was his horrified exclamation; "and yet you know-----"

"Pardon me," her voice broke in again. "You have heard what I know," and she bowed with such an inimitable and mocking grace, and yet with such an air of sinister resolve, that he stood like one fascinated, and let her move away towards the door without seeking by word or look to stop her. "I hold you tight, you see," were her parting words to him as she paused just upon the threshold to give us a last and scornful look. "So tight," she added, shaking her close-shut hand, "that I doubt if even your life could escape should I choose to remember in court what I have
remembered before you two here to-day."

"And forget----" he began.

"And forget," she repeated, "what might defeat the ends of that justice which demands a life for the one so wantonly sacrificed in the vat whose hideous depths now open almost under your feet." And, having said these words, she turned to go, when, looking up, she found her passage barred by the dark form of Guy Pollard, who, standing in the doorway with his hands upon either lintel, surveyed her with his saturnine smile, in which for this once I saw something that did not make me recoil, certain as I now was of his innate villainy and absolute connection with Mr. Barrows' death.

She herself seemed to feel that she had met her master; for, with a hurried look in his face, she drew slowly back, and, folding her arms, waited for him to move with a patience too nonchalant not to be forced.

But he did not seem inclined to move, and I beheld a faint blush as of anger break out on her cheek, though her attitude retained its air of superb indifference, and her lips, where they closed upon each other, did not so much as break their lines for an instant.

"You are not going, Miss Colwell," were the words with which he at last broke the almost intolerable suspense of the moment; "at least, not till you have given us the date of this remarkable experience of yours."

"The date?" she repeated, icily. "What day was it that Mr. Barrows was found in the vat?" she inquired, turning to me with an indifferent look.

His hand fell like iron on her arm.

"You need not appeal to Miss Sterling," he remarked. "_I_ am asking you this question, and I am not a man to be balked nor frightened by you when my life itself is at stake. What night was it on which you saw me place Mr. Barrows in the vat? I command you to tell me, or----"

His hands closed on her arm, and--she did not scream, but I did; for the look of the inquisitor was in his face, and I saw that she must succumb, or be broken like a reed before our eyes.

She chose to succumb. Deadly pale and shaking with the terror with which he evidently inspired her, she turned like a wild creature caught in the toils, and gasped out:

"It was a night in August--the seventeenth, I think. I wish you and your brother much joy of the acknowledgment."

He did not answer, only dropped her arm, and, looking at me, remarked:

"I think that puts a different face upon the matter."

It did indeed. For Mr. Barrows had only been dead four days, and to-day was the twenty-eight of September.

* * * * *

I do not know how long it was before I allowed the wonder and perplexity which this extraordinary disclosure aroused in me to express itself in words. The shock which had been communicated to me was so great, I had neither thought nor feeling left, and it was not till I perceived every eye fixed upon me that I found the power to say:

"Then Mr. Barrows' death was not the result of that night's work. The hand that plunged him into the vat drew him out again. But--but----" Here my tongue failed me. I could only look the question with which my mind was full.

Dwight Pollard immediately stepped forward.

"But whose were the hands that thrust him back four days ago? That is what you would ask, is it not, Miss Sterling?" he inquired, with a force and firmness he had not before displayed.

"Yes," I endeavored to say, though I doubt if a sound passed my lips.

His face took a more earnest cast, his voice a still deeper tone.

"Miss Sterling," he began, meeting my eye with what might have been the bravado of despair, but which I was fain to believe the courage of truth, "after what you have just heard, it would be strange, perhaps, if you should place much belief in anything we may say upon this subject. And yet it is my business to declare, and that with all the force and assurance of which I am capable, that we know no more than you, how Mr. Barrows came to find himself again in that place; that we had nothing to do with it, and that his death, occurring in the manner and at the spot it did, was a surprise to us which cost my mother her life, and me----well, almost my reason," he added, in a lower tone, turning away his face.

"Can this be true?" I asked myself, unconsciously taking on an air of determination, as I remembered I was prejudiced in his favor, and wished to believe him innocent of this crime.

This movement on my part, slight as it was, was evidently seen and misinterpreted by them all. For a look of disappointment came into Dwight Pollard's face, while from his brother's eye flashed a dangerous gleam that almost made me oblivious to the fact that Rhoda Colwell was speaking words full of meaning and venom.

"A specious declaration!" she exclaimed. "A jury would believe such assertions, of course; so would the world at large, It is so easy to credit that this simple and ordinary method of disposing of a valuable life should enter the mind of another person!"
"It is as easy to credit that," answered Dwight Pollard, with an emphasis which showed that he, if not I, felt the force of this sarcasm, "as it would be to believe that Mr. Barrows would return to a spot so fraught with hideous memories, except under the influence of a purpose which made him blind to all but its accomplishment. The fact that he died there, proves to my mind that no other will than his own plunged him anew into that dreadful vat."

"Ah! and so you are going to ascribe his death to suicide?" she inquired, with a curl of her lip that was full of disdain.

"Yes," he sternly responded with no signs of wavering now, though her looks might well have stung the stoutest soul into some show of weakness.

"It is a wise stroke," she laughed, with indescribable emphasis. "It has so much in Mr. Barrows' life and character to back it. And may I ask," she went on, with a look that included Guy Pollard's silent and contemptuous figure in its scope, "whether you have anything but words wherewith to impress your belief upon the public? I have heard that judge and jury like facts, or, at the least, circumstantial proof that a man's denial is a true one."

"And proofs we have!"

It was Guy Pollard who spoke this time, and with an icy self-possession that made her shiver in spite of herself.

"Proofs?" she repeated.

"That we were not near the mill the night before Mr. Barrows was found. We were both out of town, and did not return till about the time the accident was discovered."

"Ah!" was her single sarcastic rejoinder; but I saw--we all saw--that the blow had told, bravely as she tried to hide it.

"You, can make nothing by accusing us of this crime," he continued; "and if I might play the part of a friend to you, I would advise you not to attempt it." And his cold eye rested for a moment on hers before he turned and walked away to the other end of the room.

The look, the action, was full of contempt, but she did not seem to feel it. Following him with her gaze for a minute, she murmured quietly: "We will see"; then turning her look upon Dwight and myself, added slowly: "I think you are effectually separated at all events," and was gone almost without our realizing how or where.

I did not linger long behind. What I said or what they said I cannot remember. I only know that in a few minutes I too was flying along the highway, eager for the refuge which my solitary home offered me. Events had rushed upon me too thickly and too fast. I felt ill as I passed the threshold of my room, and was barely conscious when a few hours later the landlady came in to see why I had not made my appearance at the supper-table.

XIV.

CORRESPONDENCE.

Letters, my Lord. --HAMLET.

My illness, though severe, was not of long continuance. In a week I was able to be about my room; and in a fortnight I was allowed to read the letters that had come to me. There were two, either of them calculated to awaken dangerous emotions; and, taken together, making a draft on my powers which my newly gained health found it hard to sustain. The one was signed Rhoda Colwell, and the other Dwight Pollard. I read Rhoda Colwell's first.

It opened without preamble:

I sought revenge and I have found it. Not in the way I anticipated, perhaps, but still in a way good enough to satisfy both myself and the spirit of justice. You will never trust Dwight Pollard again. You will never come any nearer to him than you have to-day. You have an upright soul, and whether you believe his declarations or not, can be safely relied upon to hold yourself aloof from a man who could lend his countenance to such a cowardly deed as I saw perpetrated in the old cellar a month or so ago. Honor does not wed with dishonor, nor truth with treachery. Constance Sterling may marry whom she may; it will never be Dwight Pollard.

Convinced of this, I have decided to push my vengeance no further. Not that I believe Mr. Barrows committed suicide, any more than I believe that Dwight and Guy Pollard could be saved by any mere alibi, if I chose to speak. Men like them can find ready tools to do their work, and if they had been an hundred miles away instead of some six, I should still think that the will which plunged Mr. Barrows into his dreadful grave was the same which once before had made him taste the horrors of his threatened doom. But public disgrace and execration are not what I seek for my recreant lover. The inner anguish which no eye can see is what I have been forced to endure and what he shall be made to suffer. Guilty or not he can never escape that now; and it is a future which I gloat upon and from which I would not have him escape, no, not at the cost of his life, if that life were mine, and I could shorten it at a stroke.

And yet since human nature is human nature, and good hearts as well as bad yield sometimes to a fatal weakness, I would add that the facts which I suppress are always facts, and that if I see in you or him any forgetfulness of the gulf that separates you, I shall not think it too late to speak, though months have been added to months, and years to years, and I am no longer any thing but old.
RHODA COLWELL.

Close upon these words I read these others:

MISS STERLING:--Pardon me that I presume to address you. Pardon the folly, the weakness of a man who, having known you for less than a week, finds the loss of your esteem the hardest of the many miseries he is called upon to bear.

I know that I can never recover this esteem--if, indeed, I ever possessed it. The revelation of the secret which disgraced our family has been fatal; the secret which our mother commanded us on her death-bed to preserve, foreseeing that, if it should become known that we had been guilty of the occurrence of the seventeenth of August, nothing could save us from the suspicion that we were guilty of the real catastrophe of the twenty-fourth of September. Alas! my mother was a keen woman, but she did not reckon upon Rhoda Colwell; she did not reckon upon you. She thought if we kept silence, hell and heaven would find no tongue. But hell and heaven have both spoken, and we stand suspected of crime, if not absolutely accused of it.

Hard as this is to bear--and it is harder than you might think for one in whom the base and cowardly action into which he was betrayed a month ago has not entirely obliterated the sense of honor--I neither dare to complain of it nor of the possible consequences which may follow if Rhoda Colwell slights my brother's warning and carries out her revenge to the full. Deeds of treachery and shame must bear their natural fruit, and we are but reaping what we sowed on that dreadful night when we allowed David Barrows to taste the horrors of his future grave. But though I do not complain, I would fain say a final word to one whose truth and candor have stood in such conspicuous relief to my own secrecy and repression. Not in way of hope, not in way of explanation even. What we have done we have done, and it would little become me to assign motives and reasons for what in your eyes--and, I must now allow, in my own--no motive or reason can justify or even excuse. I can only place myself before you as one who abhors his own past; regarding it, indeed, with such remorse and detestation that I would esteem myself blessed if it had been my body, instead of that of Mr. Barrows, which had been drawn from the fatal pit. Not that any repentance can rid me of the stain which has fallen upon my manhood, or make meworthy of the honor of your faintest glance; but it may make me a less debased object in your eyes, and I would secure that much grace for myself even at the expense of what many might consider an unnecessary humiliation. For you have made upon my mind in the short time I have known you a deep, and, as I earnestly believe, a most lasting and salutary impression. Truth, candor, integrity, and a genuine loyalty to all that is noblest and best in human nature no longer seem to me like mere names since I have met you. The selfishness that makes dark deeds possible has revealed itself to me in all its hideous deformity since the light of your pure ideal fell upon it; and while naught on earth can restore me to happiness, or even to that equanimity of mind which my careless boyhood enjoyed, it would still afford me something like relief to know that you recognize the beginning of a new life in me, which, if not all you could desire, still has that gleam of light upon it which redeems it from being what it was before I knew you. I will, therefore, ask not a word from you, but a look. If, when I pass your house to-morrow afternoon at six o'clock, I see you standing in the window, I shall know you grant me the encouragement of your sympathy, a sympathy which will help me to endure the worst of all my thoughts, that indirectly, if not directly, Guy and myself may be guilty of Mr. Barrows' death; that our action may have given him an impetus to destroy himself, or at least have shown him the way to end his life in a seemingly secret manner; though why a man so respected and manifestly happy as he should wish to close his career so suddenly, is as great a mystery to me as it can possibly be to you.

One other word and I am done. If, in the mercy of your gentle and upright nature, you accord me this favor, do not fear that I shall take advantage of it, even in my thoughts. Nor need you think that by so doing you may hamper yourself in the performance of a future duty; since it would be as impossible for me to ask, as for you to grant, the least suppression of the truth on your part; your candor being the charm of all others which has most attracted my admiration and secured my regard.

DWIGHT POLLARD.

Of the emotions produced in me by these, two letters I will say nothing; I will only mention some of my thoughts. The first naturally was, that owing to my illness I had not received the latter letter till a week after it was written; consequently Dwight Pollard had failed to obtain the slight token of encouragement which he had requested. This was a source of deep regret to me, all the more that I did not know how to rectify the evil without running the risk of rousing suspicion in the breast of Rhoda Colwell. For, unreasonable as it may seem, her words had roused in me a dread similar to that which one might feel of a scorpion in the dark. I did not know how near she might be to me, or when she might strike. The least stir, the least turn of my head towards the forbidden object, might reveal her to be close at my side. I neither dared trust the silence nor the fact that all seemed well with me at present. A woman who could disguise herself as she could, and whom no difficulty deterred from gaining her purpose, was not one to brave with impunity, however clear might seem the outlook. I felt as if my very thoughts were in danger from her intuition, and scarcely dared breathe my intentions to the walls, lest the treacherous breeze should carry them to her
ears and awaken that formidable antagonism which in her case was barbed with a power which might easily make
the most daring quail. And yet she must be braved; for not to save his life could I let such an appeal as he had made
me go unanswered; no, though I knew the possibility remained of its being simply the offspring of a keen and
calculating mind driven to its last resource. It was enough that I felt him to be true, however much my reason might
recognize the possibility of his falsehood. Rather than slight a noble spirit struggling with a great distress, I would
incur any penalty which a possible lapse of judgment might bring; my temperament being such that I found less
shame in the thought that I might be deceived, than that, out of a spirit of too great caution and self-love, I should
fail an unhappy soul at the moment when my sympathy might be of inestimable benefit to its welfare.

The venomous threats and extreme show of power displayed in Rhoda Colwell’s letter had overreached
themselves. They roused my pride. They made me question whether it was necessary for us to live under such a
dominion of suspense as she had prepared for us. If Dwight Pollard’s asseverations were true, it would be a cruel
waste of peace and happiness for him or me to rest under such a subjection, when by a little bravery at the outset her
hold upon us might be annihilated and her potency destroyed.

The emotions which I have agreed to ignore came in to give weight to this thought. To save myself it was
necessary to prove Dwight Pollard true. Not only my sense of justice, but the very life and soul of my being,
demanded the settling of all suspicion and the establishment of my trust upon a sure foundation. While a single
doubt remained in my mind I was liable to shame before my best self, and shame and Constance Sterling did not
mix easily or well, especially with that leaven of self-interest added, to which I have alluded only a few paragraphs
back.

But how, with my lack of resources and the apparent dearth of all means for attaining the end I had in view, I
was to prove Rhoda Colwell’s insinuations false, and Dwight Pollard’s assertion true, was a question to which an
answer did not come with very satisfactory readiness. Even the simple query as to how I was to explain my late
neglect to Dwight Pollard occasioned me an hour of anxious thought; and it was not till I remembered that the
simplest course was always the best, and that with a snake in the grass like Rhoda Colwell, the most fearless foot
trud with the greatest safety, that I felt my difficulties on that score melt away. I would write to Dwight Pollard, and
I would tell Rhoda Colwell I had done so, thus proving to her that I meditated nothing underhanded, and could be
trusted to say what I would do, and do what I should say.

This decision taken, I sat down immediately and penned the following two notes:

MISS RHODA COLWELL:--Owing to illness, your letter has just been read by me. To it I will simply reply that
you are right in believing my regard could never be given to a guilty man. As long as the faintest doubt of Mr.
Pollard remains in my mind we are indeed separated by a gulf. But let that doubt in any way be removed, and I say
to you frankly that nothing you could threaten or the world perform, would prevent my yielding to him the fullest
sympathy and the most hearty encouragement.

I send him to-day, in the same mail which carries this, a few lines, a copy of which I inclose for your perusal.

Yours, CONSTANCE STERLING.

MR. DWIGHT POLLARD:--For two weeks I have been too ill to cross my room, which must account both for
this note and the tardiness I have displayed in writing it.

You assert that you know nothing of the causes or manner of a certain catastrophe. I believe you, and hope some
day to have more than a belief, viz., a surety of its truth founded on absolute evidence.

Till that time comes we go our several ways, secure in the thought that to the steadfast mind calumny itself loses
its sting when met by an earnest purpose to be and do only what is honest and upright.

CONSTANCE STERLING.

If you have any further communication to make to me, let me request that it be allowed to pass through the
hands of Miss Colwell. My reasons for this are well founded.

XV.

A GOSSIP.

This something settled matter in his heart, Whereon his brains still beating, puts him thus From fashion of
himself. --HAMLET.

I had not taken this tone with both my correspondents without a secret hope of being able to do something
myself towards the establishment of Mr. Pollard’s innocence. How, I could not very plainly perceive that day or the
next, but as time elapsed and my brain cleared and my judgment returned, I at last saw the way to an effort which
might not be without consequences of a satisfactory nature. What that effort was you may perhaps conjecture from
the fact that the first walk that I took was in the direction of the cottage where Mr. Barrows had formerly lived. The
rooms which he had occupied were for rent, and my ostensible errand was to hire them. The real motive of my visit,
however, was to learn something more of the deceased clergyman’s life and ways than I then knew; if happily out of
some hitherto unnoticed event in his late history I might receive a hint which should ultimately lead me to the
solution of the mystery which was involving my happiness.

I was not as unsuccessful in this attempt as one might anticipate. The lady of the house was a gossip, and the subject of Mr. Barrows' death was an inexhaustible topic of interest to her. I had but to mention his name, and straightway a tide of words flowed from her lips, which, if mostly words, contained here and there intimations of certain facts which I felt it was well enough for me to know, even if they did not amount to anything like an explanation of the tragedy. Among these was one which only my fear of showing myself too much interested in her theme prevented me from probing to the bottom. This was, that for a month at least before his death Mr. Barrows had seemed to her like a changed man. A month--that was about the interval which had elapsed between his first visit to the mill and his last; and the evidence that he showed an alteration of demeanor in that time might have its value and might not. I resolved to cultivate Mrs. Simpson's acquaintance, and sometime put her a question or two that would satisfy me upon this point.

This determination was all the easier to make in that I found the rooms I had come to see sufficiently to my liking to warrant me in taking them. Not that I should have hesitated to do this had they been as unattractive as they were pleasant. It was not their agreeableness that won me, but the fact that Mr. Barrows personal belongings had not yet been moved, and that for a short time at least I should find myself in possession of his library, and face to face with the same articles of taste and study which had surrounded him in his lifetime, and helped to mould, if not to make, the man. I should thus obtain a knowledge of his character, and some day, who knows, might flash upon his secret. For that he possessed one, and was by no means the plain and simple character I had been led to believe was apparent to me from the first glimpse I had of these rooms; there being in every little object that marked his taste a certain individuality and purpose that betrayed a stern and mystic soul; one that could hide itself, perhaps, beneath a practical exterior, but which, in ways like this, must speak, and speak loudly too, of its own inward promptings and tendency.

The evening when I first brought these objects under a close and conscientious scrutiny, was a memorable one to me. I had moved in early that day, and with a woman's unreasoning caprice had forborne to cast more than the most cursory glance around, being content to see that all was as I left it at my first visit, and that neither desk nor library had been disturbed. But when supper was over, and I could set myself with a free mind to a contemplation of my new surroundings, I found that my curiosity could no longer delay the careful tour of inspection to which I felt myself invited by the freshness and beauty of the pictures, and one or two of the statuettes that adorned the walls about me. One painting in especial attracted me, and made me choose for my first contemplation that side of the room on which it hung. It was a copy of some French painting, and represented the temptation of a certain saint. A curious choice of subject, you may think, to adorn a Protestant clergyman's wall, but if you could have seen it, and marked the extreme expression of mortal struggle on the face of the tempted one, who, with eyes shut, and hands clutching till it bent the cross of twigs stuck in the crevices of the rocks beneath which he writhed, waited for the victory over self that was just beginning to cast its light upon his brow, you would have felt that it was good to hang before the eyes of any one in whom conflict of any kind was waging. Upon me the effect was instantaneous, and so real that I have never been able to think of that moment without a sense of awe and rending of the heart. Human passion assumed a new significance in my mind, and the will and faith of a strong man suffering from its power, yet withstanding it to the very last gasp by the help of his trust in God, rose to such an exalted position in my mind, that passion assumed a new significance in my mind, and the will and faith of a strong man suffering from its power, yet widthstanding it to the very last gasp by the help of his trust in God, rose to such an exalted position in my mind, that it felt then, as I feel now whenever I remember this picture, that my whole moral nature had received, from its contemplation, an impetus towards religion and self-denial. While I was still absorbed in gazing at it, my landlady entered the room, and seeing me posed before the picture, quite sympathizingly exclaimed:

"Isn't that a dreadful painting, Miss Sterling, to have in any one's room? I don't wonder Mr. Barrows wanted to cover it up."

"Cover it up?" I repeated, turning hastily in my surprise.

"Yes," she replied, going to a drawer in his desk and taking out a small engraving, which she brought me. "For nearly a month before his death he had this picture stuck up over the other with pins. You can see the pin-holes now, if you look; they went right through the canvas. I thought it a very sensible thing to do, myself; but when I spoke of it to him one day, remarking that I had always thought the picture unfit for any one to see, he gave me such a look that I thought then he must be crazy. But no one else saw any thing amiss in him, and, as I did not want to lose a good lodger, I let him stay on, though my mind did sometimes misgave me."

The engraving she had handed me was almost as suggestive as the painting it had been used to conceal; but at this remarkable statement from Mrs. Simpson's lips I laid it quickly down.

"You think he was crazy?" I asked.

"I think he committed suicide," she affirmed.

I turned to the engraving again, and took it up. What a change had come over me that a statement against which I had once so honestly rebelled for Ada's sake should now arouse something like a sensation of joy in my breast!
Mrs. Simpson, too much interested in her theme to notice me, went confidently on.

"You see, folks that live in the same house with a person, learn to know them as other folks can't. Not that Mr. Barrows ever talked to me; he was a deal too much absorbed in his studies for that; but he ate at my table, and went in and out of my front door, and if a woman cannot learn something about a man under those circumstances, then she is no good, that is all I have got to say about her."

I was amused and slightly smiled, but she needed no encouragement to proceed.

"The way he would drop into a brown study over his meat and potatoes was a caution to my mind. A minister that don't eat is--an anomaly," she burst out. "I have boarded them before, and I know they like the good things of life as well as anybody. But Mr. Barrows, latterly at least, never seemed to see what was on the table before him, but ate because his plate of food was there, and had to be disposed of in some way. One day, I remember in particular, I had baked dumplings, for he used to be very fond of them, and would eat two without any urging; but this day he either did not put enough sauce on them, or else his whole appetite had changed; for he suddenly looked down at his plate and shuddered, almost as if he were in a chill, and, getting up, was going away, when I summoned up courage to ask if the dumplings were not as good as usual. He turned at the door--I can see him now,--and mechanically shaking his head, seemed to be trying to utter some apology. But he presently stopped in that attempt, and, pointing quickly at the table, said, in his accustomed tones: 'You need not make me any more desserts, Mrs. Simpson, I shall not indulge in them in the future'; and went out, without saying whether he was sick or what. And that was the end of the dumplings, and of many a good thing besides."

"And is that all--" I began; but she broke in before the words were half out of my mouth.

"But the strangest thing I ever see in him was this: I have not said much about it, for the people that went to his church are a high and mighty lot, and wouldn't bear a word said against his sanity, even by one as had more opportunities than they of knowing him. But you are a stranger in town, and can't have no such foolish touchiness about a person that is nothing to you, so I will just tell you all about it. You see, when he had visitors--and off and on a good many came--I used to seat them in the parlor below, till I was sure he was ready to receive them. This had happened one evening, and I had gone up to his door to notify him that a stranger was down-stairs, when I heard such a peculiar noise issuing from his room, that I just stood stock-still on the door-mat to listen. It was a swishing sound, followed by a--Miss Sterling," she suddenly broke in, in a half awe-struck, half-frightened tone, "did you ever _hear_ any one whipped? If you have, you will know why I stood shuddering at that door full two minutes before I dared lift my hand and knock. Not that I could believe Mr. Barrows was whipping any body, but the sound was so like it, and I was so certain besides that I had heard something like a smothered cry follow it, that nothing short of the most imperative necessity would have given me the courage to call him; my imagination filling the room with all sorts of frightful images; images that did not fade away in a hurry," she went on, with a look of shrinking terror about her which I am not sure was not reflected in my own face, "when, after the longest waiting I ever had at his door, he slowly came across the room and opened it, showing me a face as white as a sheet, and a hand that trembled so that he dropped the card I gave him and had to pick it up. Had there been a child there----"

"But there wasn't!" I interrupted, shocked and forced to defend him in spite of myself.

"No, nor anybody else. For when he went down-stairs, I looked in and there was no one there, and nothing uncommon about the room, except that I thought his bookcase looked as if it had been moved. And it had; for next day when I swept this room--it did not need sweeping, but one can't wait for ever to satisfy their curiosity--I just stood stock-still on the door-mat to listen. It was a swishing sound, followed by a--Miss Sterling," she suddenly broke in, in a half awe-struck, half-frightened tone, "did you ever _hear_ any one whipped? If you have, you will know why I stood shuddering at that door full two minutes before I dared lift my hand and knock. Not that I could believe Mr. Barrows was whipping any body, but the sound was so like it, and I was so certain besides that I had heard something like a smothered cry follow it, that nothing short of the most imperative necessity would have given me the courage to call him; my imagination filling the room with all sorts of frightful images; images that did not fade away in a hurry," she went on, with a look of shrinking terror about her which I am not sure was not reflected in my own face, "when, after the longest waiting I ever had at his door, he slowly came across the room and opened it, showing me a face as white as a sheet, and a hand that trembled so that he dropped the card I gave him and had to pick it up. Had there been a child there----"

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"Good God!" I interrupted; "you do not think he had been using it when you went to the door?"

"I do," she said. "I think he had a fit of something like insanity upon him, and had been swinging that strap----" Well, I will not say against what, for I do not know, but might it not have been against the fiends and goblins with which crazy people sometimes imagine they are surrounded?"

"Possibly," I acquiesced, though my tone could not have been one of any strong conviction.

"Insane persons sometimes do strange things," she continued; "and that he did not show himself violent before folks is no sign he did not let himself out sometimes when he was alone. The very fact that he restrained himself when he went into the pulpit and visited among his friends, may have made him wilder when he got all by himself. I am sure I remember having heard of a case where a man lived for ten years in a town without a single neighbor suspecting him of insanity; yet his wife suffered constantly from his freaks, and finally fell a victim to his violence."

"But Mr. Barrows was such a brilliant man," I objected. "His sermons up to the last were models of eloquence."

"Oh, he could preach," she asserted.

Seeing that she was not to be moved in her convictions, I ventured upon a few questions.

"Have you ever thought," I asked, "what it was that created such a change in him? You say you noticed it for a month before his death; could anything have happened to disturb him at that time?"

"Not that I know of," she answered, with great readiness. "I was away for a week in August, and it was when I
first came back that I observed how different he was from what he had been before. I thought at first it was the hot weather, but heat don't make one restless and unfit to sit quiet in one's chair. Nor does it drive a man to work as if the very evil one was in him, keeping the light burning sometimes till two in the morning, while he wrote and walked, and walked and wrote, till I thought my head would burst with sympathy for him."

"He was finishing a book, was he not? I think I have heard he left a completed manuscript behind him?"

"Yes; and don't you think it very singular that the last word should have been written, and the whole parcel done up and sent away to his publisher, two days before his death, if he did not know what was going to happen to him?"

"And was it?" I inquired.

"Yes, it was; for I was in the room when he signed his name to it, and heard his sigh of relief, and saw him, too, when, a little while afterwards, he took the bundle out to the post-office. I remember thinking, 'Well, now for some rest nights! little imagining what rest was in store for him, poor soul!'"

"Did you know that Mr. Barrows was engaged?" I suddenly asked, unable to restrain my impatience any longer.

"No, I did not," she rather sharply replied, as if her lack of knowledge on that subject had been rather a sore point with her. "I may have suspected there was some one he was interested in, but I am sure nobody ever imagined her as being the one. Poor girl, she must have thought a heap of him to die in that way."

She looked at me as she said this, anticipating, perhaps, a return of the confidences she had made me. But I could not talk of Ada to her, and after a moment of silent waiting she went eagerly on.

"Perhaps a lover's quarrel lay at the bottom of the whole matter," she suggested. "Miss Reynolds was a sweet girl and loved him very devotedly, of course; but they might have had a tiff for all that, and in a nature as sensitive as his, the least thing will sometimes unringe the mind."

But I could only shake my head at this; the supposition was at once too painful and absurd.

"Well, well," the garrulous woman went on, in no wise abashed, "there are some things that come easy and some things that come hard. Why Mr. Barrows went the way he did is one of the hard things to understand, but that he did go, and that of his own frenzied will, I am as sure as that two and two make four, and four from four leaves nothing."

I thought of all the others who secretly or openly expressed the same opinion, and felt my heart grow lighter. Then I thought of Rhoda Colwell, and then----

"Just what time was it," I asked, "when you were away in August? Was it before the seventeenth, or after? I inquire, because---"

But evidently she did not care why I inquired.

"It was during that week," she broke in. "I remember because it was on the sixteenth that Mr. Pollard died, and I was not here to attend the funeral. I came back----"

But it was no matter to me now when she came back. She had not been at home the night when Mr. Barrows was beguiled into his first visit to the mill, and she had mentioned a name I had long been eager to have introduced into the conversation.

"You knew Mr. Pollard?" I therefore interposed without ceremony. "He was a very rich man, was he not?"

"Yes," she assented. "I suppose the children will have the whole property, now that the old lady is gone. I hope Mr. Harrington will be satisfied. He just married that girl for her money. That, I am sure, you will hear everybody say."

"Yet she is exceedingly pretty," I suggested.

"Oh, yes, too pretty; she makes one think of a wax doll. But these English lords don't care for beauty without there is a deal of hard cash to back it, and if Agnes Pollard had been as poor as--what other beauty have we in town?"

"There is a girl called Rhoda Colwell," I ventured.

"Rhoda Colwell! Do you call her a beauty? I know some folks think she is--well, then, let us say as Rhoda Colwell, he would have made her any proposal sooner than that of his hand."

"And is Mr. Harrington a lord?" I asked, feeling that I was lighting upon some very strange truths.

"He is the next heir to one. A nephew I believe, or else a cousin. I cannot keep track of all those fine distinctions in people I never saw."

"They were married privately and right after Mr. Pollard's death, I have heard."

"Yes, and for no other earthly reason that one ever heard of than to have it settled and done; for Mr. Harrington did not take away his wife from the country; nor does he intend to as far as I can learn. Everybody thought it a very strange proceeding, and none too respectful to Mr. Pollard's memory either."

I thought of all I had heard and seen in that house, and wondered.

"Mr. Pollard was such a nice man, too," she pursued, in a musing tone. "Not a commanding person, like his wife, but so good and kind and attentive to poor folks like me. I never liked a man more than I did Mr. Pollard, and I have
always thought that if he had had a different kind of mother for his children--but what is the use of criticising the poor woman now. She is dead and so is he, and the children will do very well now with all that money to back them in any caprice they may have."

"You seem to know them well," I remarked, fearful she would observe the emotion I could not quite keep out of my face.

"No," she returned, with an assumption of grimness, which was evidently meant for sarcasm, "not well. Every one knows the Pollards, but I never heard any one say they knew them well."

"Didn't Mr. Barrows?" I tremulously inquired, anxious for her reply, yet fearful of connecting those two names.

"Not that I ever saw," she returned, showing no special interest in the question, or in the fact that it was seemingly of some importance to me.

"Didn't they use to come here to see him?" I proceeded, emboldened by her evident lack of perspicuity. "None of them?" I added, seeing her about to shake her head.

"Oh, Dwight or Guy would come here if they had any business with him," she allowed. "But that isn't intimacy; the Pollards are intimate with nobody."

She seemed to be rather proud of it, and as I did not see my way just then to acquire any further information, I sank with a weary air into a chair, turning the conversation as I did so upon other and totally irrelevant topics. But no topic was of much interest to her, that did not in some way involve Mr. Barrows; and after a few minutes of desultory chat, she pleaded the excuse of business and hurriedly left the room.

XVI.

THE GREEN ENVELOPE.

Sir, you shall understand what hath befall'n, Which, as I think, you know not. Here is a letter. --OTHELLO.

Her departure was a relief to me. First, because I had heard so much, I wanted an opportunity of digesting it; and, secondly, because of my interest in the engraving she had shown me, and the impatience I felt to study it more closely. I took it up the moment she closed the door.

It was the picture of a martyr, and had evidently been cut from some good-sized book. It represented a man clothed in a long white garment, standing with his back to the stake, and his hand held out to the flames, which were slowly consuming it. As a work of art, it was ordinary; as the illustration of some mighty fact, it was full of suggestion. I gazed at it for a long time, and then turned to the bookcase. Was the book from which it had been taken there? I eagerly hoped so. For, ignorant as I may seem to you, I did not know the picture or the incident it represented; and I was anxious to know both. For Mr. Barrows was not the man to disfigure a work of art by covering it with a coarse print like this unless he had a motive; and how could even a suspicion of that motive be mine, without a full knowledge of just what this picture implied?

But though I looked from end to end of the various shelves before me, I did not succeed in finding the volume from which this engraving had been taken. Large books were there in plenty, but none of the exact size of the print I held in my hand. I own I was disappointed, and turned away from the bookcase at last with a feeling of having been baffled on the verge of some very interesting discovery.

The theory advanced with so much assurance by Mrs. Simpson had not met with much credence on my part. I believed her facts, but not the conclusions she drew from them. Nothing she had related to me convinced me that Mr. Barrows was in any way insane; nor could I imagine for a moment that he could be so without the knowledge of Ada, if not of his associates and friends.

At the same time I was becoming more and more assured in my own mind that his death was the result of his own act, and, had it not been for the difficulty of imagining a reason for it, could have retired to rest that night with a feeling of real security in the justness of a conclusion that so exonerated the man I loved. As it was, that secret doubt still remained like a cloud over my hopes, a doubt which I had promised myself should be entirely removed before I allowed my partiality for Mr. Pollard to take upon itself the character of partisanship. I therefore continued my explorations through the room.

Mr. Barrows' desk presented to me the greatest attraction of any thing there; one that was entirely of the imagination, of course, since nothing could have induced me to open it, notwithstanding every key stood in its lock, and one of the drawers was pulled a little way out. Only the law had a right to violate his papers; and hard as it was to deny myself a search into what was possibly the truest exponent of his character, I resolutely did so, consoling myself with the thought that if any open explanation of his secret had been in these drawers, it would have been produced at the inquest.

As for his books, I felt no such scruples. But then, what could his books tell me? Nothing, save that he was a wide student and loved the delicate and imaginative in literature. Besides, I had glanced at many of the volumes, in my search after the one which had held the engraving. Yet I did pause a minute and run my eye along the shelves, vaguely conscious, perhaps, that often in the most out-of- the-way corners lurks the secret object for which we are so
carefully seeking. But I saw nothing to detain me, and after one brief glance at a strong and spirited statuette that adorned the top shelf, I hurried on to a small table upon which I thought I saw a photographic album.

I was not mistaken; and it was with considerable interest I took it up and began to run over its pages in search for that picture of Ada which I felt ought to be there. And which was there; but which I scarcely looked at twice, so much was my attention attracted by an envelope that fell out from between the leaves as I turned them eagerly over. That envelope, with its simple direction, "Miss Ada Reynolds, Monroe Street, S----," made an era in my history. For I no sooner perceived it than I felt confident of having seen it or its like before; and presently, with almost the force of an electric shock, I recollected the letter which I had brought Ada the afternoon of the day she died, and which, as my startled conscience now told me, had not only never been given her, but had not been so much as seen by me since, though all her belongings had passed into my hands, and the table where I had flung it had been emptied of its contents more than once. That letter and this empty envelope were, in style, handwriting, and direction, _facsimiles_. It had, therefore, come from Mr. Barrows; a most significant fact, and one which I had no sooner realized than I was seized by the most intense excitement, and might have done some wild and foolish thing, had not the lateness of the hour restrained me, and kept my passionate hopes and fears within their proper bounds. As it was, I found myself obliged to take several turns up and down the room, and even to open the window for a breath of fresh air, before I could face the subject with any calmness, or ask myself what had become of this letter, with any hope of receiving a rational reply.

That in the startling and tragic events of that day it had been overlooked and forgotten, I did not wonder. But that it should have escaped my notice afterwards, or if mine, that of the landlady who took charge of the room in my absence, was what I could not understand. As far as I could remember, I left the letter lying in plain view on the table. Why, then, had not some one seen and produced it? Could it be that some one more interested than I knew had stolen it? Or was the landlady of my former home alone to blame for its being lost or mislaid?

Had it been daylight I should have at once gone down to my former boarding-place to inquire; but as it was ten o'clock at night, I could only satisfy my impatience by going carefully over the incidents of that memorable day, in the hope of rousing some memory which would lead to an elucidation of this new mystery. First, then, I distinctly recollected receiving the letter from the postman. I had met him at the foot of the steps as I came home from my unsuccessful search for employment, and he had handed me the letter, simply saying: "For Miss Reynolds." I scarcely looked at it, certainly gave it no thought, for we had been together but a week, and I had as yet taken no interest in her concerns. So mechanical, indeed, had been my whole action in the matter, that I doubt if the sight of Mr. Barrows' writing alone, even though it had been used in transcribing her name, would have served to recall the incident to my mind. But the shade of the envelope--it was of a peculiar greenish tint--gave that unconscious spur to the memory which was needed to bring back the very look of the writing which had been on the letter I had so carelessly handled; and I found, as others have found before me, that there is no real forgetfulness in this world; that the most superficial glance may serve to imprint images upon the mind, which only await time and occasion to appear before us with startling distinctness.

My entrance into my own room, my finding it empty, and the consequent flinging of the letter down on the table, all came back to me with the utmost clearness; even the fact that the letter fell face downwards and that I did not stop to turn it over. But beyond that all was blank to me up to the moment when I found myself confronting Ada standing with her hand on her heart in that sudden spasm of pain which had been the too sure precursor of her rapidly approaching doom.

But wait! Where was I standing when I first became conscious of her presence in the room? Why, in the window, of course. I remembered now just how hot the afternoon sun looked to me as I stared at the white walls of the cottage over the way. And she--where was she?--between me and the table? Yes! She had, therefore, passed by the letter, and might have picked it up, might even have opened it, and read it before the spell of my reverie was broken, and I turned to find her standing there before my eyes. Her pallor, the evident distress under which she was laboring, even the sudden pain which had attacked her heart, might thus be accounted for, and what I had always supposed to be a purely physical attack prove to be the result of a mental and moral shock. But, no. Had she opened and read the letter it would have been found there; or if not there, at least upon her person after death. Besides, her whole conduct between the moment I faced her and that of the alarm in the street below precluded the idea that any thing of importance to her and her love had occurred to break her faith in the future and the man to whose care she was pledged. Could I not remember the happy smile which accompanied her offer of assistance and home to me? And was there any thing but hope and trust in the tone with which she had designated her lover as being the best and noblest man in town? No; if she had read his communication and afterwards disposed of it in some way I did not observe, then it was not of the nature I suspected; but an ordinary letter, similar in character to others she had received, foretelling nothing, and only valuable in the elucidation of the mystery before me from the fact of its offering proof presumptive that he did not anticipate death, or at all events did not meditate it.
An important enough fact to establish, certainly; but it was not the fact in which I had come to believe, and so I found it difficult to give it a place in my mind, or even to entertain the possibility of Ada's having seen the letter at all. I preferred rather to indulge in all sorts of wild conjectures, having the landlady, the servant, even Dr. Farnham, at their base; and it was not till I was visited by some mad thought of Rhoda Colwell's possible connivance in the disappearance of this important bit of evidence, that I realized the enormity of my selfish folly, and endeavored to put an end to its further indulgence by preparing stoically for bed.

But sleep, which would have been so welcome, did not come; and after a long and weary night, I arose in any thing but a refreshed state, to meet the exigencies of what might possibly prove to be a most important day.

The first thing to be done was undoubtedly to visit my old home and interview its landlady. If nothing came of that, to hunt up the nurse, Mrs. Gannon, whom, as you will remember, I had left in charge of my poor Ada's remains when sudden duty in the shape of Dr. Farnham carried me away to the bedside of Mrs. Pollard; and if this also came to naught, to burst the bonds of secrecy which I had maintained, and by taking this same Dr. Farnham into my confidence obtain at least an adviser who would relieve me, if only partially, from the weight of responsibility, which I now felt to be pressing rather too heavily upon my strength.

But though I carried out this programme as far as seeking for and procuring an interview with Mrs. Gannon at her place of nursing, I did not succeed in obtaining the least clew to the fate of this mysteriously lost letter. Neither of the women mentioned had seen it, nor was it really believed by them to have been on the table when they arranged the room after my Ada's peaceful death. Yet even to this they could not swear, nor would the landlady admit but that it might still have been lying there when they came to carry Ada away, though she would say that it could not have been anywhere in view the next day, for she had thoroughly cleaned and tidied up the room herself, and as in doing this she had been obliged to shift every article off the table on to the bed and back again, she must not only have seen, but handled the letter twice; and this she was morally certain she did not do.

I was therefore in as great perplexity as ever, and was seriously meditating a visit to Dr. Farnham, when I bethought me of making one final experiment before resorting to this last and not altogether welcome alternative.

This was to examine every thing which had been on the table, in the hope of discovering in some out-of-the-way receptacle the missing letter for which I had such need. To be sure it was an effort that promised little, there having been but few articles on the table capable of concealing even such a small object as this I was in search of; but when one is at their wits' ends, they do not stop to discuss probabilities, or even to weigh in too nice a scale the prospect of success.

Recalling, therefore, just what had been on the table, I went to the trunk in which these articles were packed, and laid them out one by one on the floor. They were as follows: A work-basket of Ada's; a box of writing-paper; a copy of _Harper's Magazine_; an atlas; and two volumes of poetry, one belonging to Ada and one to me.

A single glance into the work-basket was sufficient, also into the box of stationery. But the atlas was well shaken, and the magazine carefully looked through, before I decided it was not in them. As for the two books of poetry, I disdained them so completely, I was about to toss them back unopened, when there came upon me a shake, and the magazine carefully looked through, before I decided it was not in them. As for the two books of poetry, I disdained them so completely, I was about to toss them back unopened, when there came upon me a disposition to be thorough, and I looked at them both, only to find snugly ensconced in my own little copy of Mrs. Browning the long-sought and despaired-of letter, with its tell-tale green envelope unbroken, and its contents, in so far as I could see, unviolated and undisturbed.

XVII.

DAVID BARROWS.

"I have lived long enough." --MACBETH.

Before I proceeded to open this letter, I reasoned some time with myself. The will by which I had come into possession of Ada's effects was, as I knew, informal and possibly illegal. But it was the expression of her wishes, and there had been no one to dispute them or question my right to the inheritance she had so innocently bequeathed me. At the same time I felt a hesitation about opening this letter, as I had about using her money; and it was not till I remembered the trust she had reposed in me, and the promise I had given her to support Mr. Barrows' good name which I now felt to be pressing rather too heavily upon my strength.

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_September_ 23d.--_Evening_.

My Beloved Ada:--Could I by any means mitigate the blow which I am forced to deal you, believe me it should be done. But no words can prepare you for the terrible fact I am about to reveal, and I think from what I know of you, and of your delicate but strong soul, that in a matter of life and death like this the most direct language is what you would choose me to employ.

Know then, dearest of all women, that a duty I dare not fly from condemns me to death; that the love we have cherished, the hopes in which we have indulged, can have no fulfilment in this world, but must be yielded as a sacrifice to the inescapable claim of conscience and that ideal of right which has been mine since I took upon myself
the lofty vocation of a Christian minister.

You, my people, my own self even, have thought me an honest man. God knows I meant to be, even to the point of requiring nothing from others I was not willing to give myself. But our best friends do not know us; we do not know ourselves. When the hour of trial came, and a sudden call was made upon my faith and honor, I failed to sustain myself, failed ignominiously, showing myself to be no stronger than the weakest of my flock--ay, than the child that flies before a shadow because it is black, and he does not or will not see that it is his father's form that casts it.

Such lapses on the part of men professing to lead others demand heavy penalties. I feared to lose my life, therefore my life must go. Nothing short of this would reinstate me in my own eyes, or give to my repentance that stern and absolute quality which the nature of my sin imperatively demands.

That I must involve you in my sorrow and destruction is the bitterest drop in my cup. But dainty and flower-like as you are, you have a great nature, and would not hold me back from an act necessary to the welfare and honor of my eternal soul. I see you rather urging me on, giving me your last kiss, and smiling upon me with your own inspiring smile. So sure am I of this, that I can bear not to see you again; bear to walk for the last time by your house, leaving only my blessing in the air. For it is a part of my doom that I may not see you; since, were I to find myself in your presence, I could scarcely forbear telling you whither I was going, and that no man must know till all has been accomplished.

I go, then, without other farewell than these poor words can give you. Be strong, and bear my loss as many a noble woman before you has borne the wreck of all her hopes. When I am found--as some day I shall be--tell my people I died in the Christian faith, and for the simple reason that my honor as a man and a minister demanded it. If they love me they will take my word for it; but if questions should arise, and a fuller knowledge of my fate and the reasons which led me to such an act should in your judgment seem to be required, then go to my desk, and, in a secret drawer let into the back, you will find a detailed confession which will answer every inquiry and set straight any false or unworthy suspicions that may arise.

But heed these words and mark them well: Till such a need should arise, the manuscript is to be kept inviolate even from you; and no matter what the seeming need, or by what love or anxiety you may be driven, touch not that desk nor drawer till ten days have elapsed, or I shall think you love my body more than me, and the enjoyment of temporal comfort to the eternal weight of glory which is laid up for those who hold out steadfast to the end.

And now, my dear, my dear, with all the affection of my poor, weak, erring heart, I hold out arms of love towards you. Farewell for a short space. When we meet again may it be on equal terms once more, the heavy sin blotted out, the grievous wrong expiated.

Till then, God bless you.

DAVID.

Do not wonder at my revealing nothing of this in our late interviews. You were so happy, I dared not drop a shadow one day sooner than was necessary into your young life. Besides, my struggle was dark and secret, and could brook no eye upon it save that of the eternal God.

XVIII.
A LAST REQUEST.

"T is she That tempers him to this extremity. --Richard III.

The night had fallen. I was in a strange and awe-struck mood. The manuscript, which after some difficulty I had succeeded in finding, lay before me, unopened. A feeling as of an invisible presence was in the air. I hesitated to turn the page, written, as I already felt, with the life-blood of the man in whose mysterious doom the happiness of my own life had become entangled.

Waiting for courage, I glanced mechanically about the room. How strangely I had been led in this affair! How from the first I seemed to have been picked out and appointed for the solving of this mystery, till now I sat in the very room, at the very desk, in front of the very words, of its victim. I thought of Dwight Pollard struggling with his fate, and unconscious that in a few minutes the secret of Mr. Barrows' death would be known; of Rhoda Colwell, confident of her revenge and blind to the fact that I held in my hand what might possibly blunt her sharpest weapon, and make her most vindictive effort useless. Then each and every consideration of a purely personal nature vanished, and I thought only of the grand and tortured soul of him upon whose solemn and awesome history I was about to enter. Was it, as his letter seemed to imply, a martyr's story? I looked at the engraving of Cranmer, which had been a puzzle to me a few days before, and understanding it now, gathered fortitude by what it seemed to suggest, and hastily unrolled the manuscript.

This is what I read:

"_He that would save his life shall lose it._"

In order that the following tale of sin and its expiation may be understood, I must give a few words to the
I am a believer in the sacred character of my profession, and the absolute and unqualified devotion of those embracing it to the aims and purposes of the Christian religion. Though converted, as it is called, in my sixteenth year, I cannot remember the time my pulse did not beat with appreciation for those noble souls who had sacrificed every joy and comfort of this temporal life for the sake of their faith and the glory of God. I delighted in Fox's "Book of Martyrs," and while I shuddered over its pages in a horror I did not wholly understand, I read them again and again, till there was not a saint whose life I did not know by heart, with just the death he died and the pangs he experienced. Such a mania did this become with me at one time, that I grew visibly ill, and had to have the book taken away from me and more cheerful reading substituted in its stead.

Feeling thus strongly in childhood, when half, if not all, my interest sprang from the fascination which horrors have upon the impressionable mind, what were my emotions and longings when the real meaning of the Christian life was revealed to me, and I saw in this steadfastness of the spirit unto death the triumph of the immortal soul over the weaknesses of the flesh and the terrors of a purely transitory suffering!

That the days for such display of firmness in the fiery furnace were over was almost a matter of regret to me in the first flush of my enthusiasm for the cause I had espoused. I wished so profoundly to show my love, and found all modern ways so tame in comparison to those which demanded the yielding up of one's very blood and life. Poor fool! did I never think that those who are the bravest in imagination fail often the most lamentably when brought face to face with the doom they have invoked.

I have never been a robust man, and consequently have never entered much into those sports and exercises incident to youth and early manhood that show a man of what stuff he is made. I have lived in my books till I came to S----, since which I have tried to live in the joys and sorrows of my fellow-beings.

The great rule of Christian living has seemed to me imperative. Love your neighbor as yourself, or, as I have always interpreted it, more than yourself. For a man, then, to sacrifice that neighbor to save himself from physical or mental distress, has always seemed to me not only the height of cowardice, but a direct denial of those truths upon which are founded the Christian's ultimate hope. As a man myself, I despise with my whole heart such weaklings; as a Christian minister I denounce them. Nothing can excuse a soul for wavering in its duty because that duty is hard. It is the hard things we should take delight in facing; otherwise we are babes and not men, and our faith a matter of expediency, and not that stern and immovable belief in God and His purposes which can alone please Deity and bring us into that immediate communion with His spirit which it should be the end and aim of every human soul to enjoy.

Such are my principles. Let us see how I have illustrated them in the events of the last six weeks.

On the sixteenth of August, five weeks ago to-day, I was called to the bedside of Samuel Pollard. He had been long sinking with an incurable disease, and now the end was at hand and my Christian offices required. I was in the full tide of sermon-writing when the summons came, and I hesitated at first whether to follow the messenger at once or wait till the daylight had quite disappeared, and with it my desire to place on paper the thoughts that were inspiring me with more than ordinary fervor.

But a question to my own heart decided me. Not my sermon, but the secret disinclination I always felt to enter this special family, was what in reality held me back; and this was a reason which, as you will have seen from the words I have already written, I could not countenance. I accordingly signified to the messenger that I would be with Mr. Pollard in a few moments, and putting away my papers, prepared to leave the room.

There, is a saying in the Bible to the effect that no man liveth to himself, nor dieth to himself. If in the course of this narrative I seem to show little consideration for the secrets of others, let this be at once my explanation and excuse: That only in the cause of truth do I speak at all; and that in holding up before you the follies and wrong-doings of persons you know, I subject them to no heavier penalty than that which I have incurred through my own sin. I shall therefore neither gloss over nor suppress any fact bearing upon a full explanation of my fate; and when I say I hesitated to go to Mr. Pollard because of my inherent dislike to enter his house, I will proceed to give as my reason for this dislike, my unconquerable distrust of his wife, who, if a fine-looking and capable woman, is certainly one to be feared by every candid and truth-loving nature.

But, as I said before, I did not yield to the impulse I had within me to stay; and, merely stopping to cast a parting glance about my room--why, I do not know, for I could have had no premonition of the fact that I was bidding goodbye to the old life of hope and peace forever--I hastened after the messenger whom I had sent on before me to Mr. Pollard's home.

Small occurrences sometimes make great impressions on the mind. As I was turning the corner at Halsey Street, the idiot boy Colwell came rushing by, and almost fell into my arms. I started back, shuddering, as if some calamity had befallen me. An invincible repugnance to any thing deformed or half-witted has always been one of my weaknesses, and for him to have touched me--I hate myself as I write it, but I cannot think of it now without a chill
in my veins and an almost unbearable feeling of physical contamination. Yet as I would be as just to myself as I hope to be to others, I did not let this incident pass, without a struggle to conquer my lower nature. Standing still, I called the boy back, and deliberately, and with a reverential thought of the Christ, I laid my hand on his arm, and, stooping, kissed him. It cost me much, but I could never have passed that corner without doing it; nor were I to live years on this earth, instead of a few short days, should I ever let another week go by without forcing my body into some such contact with what nature has afflicted and man contemned.

The pallor which I therefore undoubtedly showed upon entering Mr. Pollard's room was owing to the memory of this incident rather than to any effect which the sight of the dying man had upon me. But before I had been many minutes in the room, I found my pulse thrilling with new excitement and my manhood roused to repel a fresh influence more dangerous, if less repulsive, than the last.

Let me see if I can make it plain to you. Mr. Pollard, whom we have all known as an excellent but somewhat weak man, lay with his face turned towards the room, and his gaze fixed with what I felt to be more than the common anxiety of the dying upon mine. At his side sat his wife, cold, formidable, alert, her hand on his hand, her eye on his eye, and all her icy and implacable will set, as I could plainly see, between him and any comfort or encouragement I might endeavor to impart. She even allowed her large and commanding figure to usurp the place usually accorded me on such occasions, and when, after a futile effort or so on my part to break down the barrier of restraint that such a presence necessarily imposed, I arose from my seat at the foot of the bed, and, approaching closer, would have leaned over her husband, she put out her other hand and imperatively waved me aside, remarking:

"The doctor says he must have air."

There are some persons whose looks and words are strangely controlling. Mrs. Pollard is one of these, and I naturally drew back. But a glance at Mr. Pollard's face made me question if I was doing right in this. Such disappointment, such despair even, I had seldom seen expressed in a look; and convinced that he had something of real purport to say to me, I turned towards his wife, and resolutely remarked:

"The dying frequently have communications to make to which only their pastor's ear is welcome. Will you excuse me, then, if I request a moment's solitude with Mr. Pollard, that I may find out if his soul is at rest before I raise my prayers in its behalf?"

But, before I had finished, I saw that any such appeal would be unavailing. If her immovable expression had not given me this assurance, the hopeless closing of his weak and fading eyes would have sufficiently betrayed the fact.

"I cannot leave Mr. Pollard," were the words with which she tempered her refusal. "If he has any communication to make, let him make it in my presence. I am his wife." And her hand pressed more firmly upon his, and her eyes, which had not stirred from his face even when I addressed her, assumed a dark, if not threatening look, which gradually forced his to open and meet them.

I felt that something must be done.

"Mr. Pollard," said I, "is there any thing you wish to impart to me before you die? If so, speak up freely and with confidence, for I am here to do a friend and a pastor's duty by you, even to the point of fulfilling any request you may have to make, so it be only actuated by right feeling and judgment." And determinedly ignoring her quick move of astonishment, I pressed forward and bent above him, striving with what I felt to be a purely righteous motive, to attract his glance from hers, which was slowly withering him away as if it were a basilisk's.

And I succeeded. After an effort that brought the sweat out on his brow, he turned his look on mine, and, gathering strength from my expression, probably, gave me one eager and appealing glance, and thrust his left hand under his pillow.

His wife, who saw every thing, leaned forward with an uneasy gesture.

"What have you there?" she asked.

But he had already drawn forth a little book and placed it in my hand.

"Only my old prayer-book," he faltered. "I felt as if I should like Mr. Barrows to have it."

She gave him an incredulous stare, and allowed her glance to follow the book. I immediately put it in my pocket.

"I shall take a great deal of pleasure in possessing it," I remarked.

"Read it," he murmured; "read it carefully." And a tone of relief was in his voice that seemed to alarm her greatly; for she half rose to her feet and made a gesture to some one I did not see, after which she bent again towards the dying man and whispered in his ear.

But, though her manner had all its wonted force, and her words, whatever they were, were lacking in neither earnestness nor purpose, he did not seem to be affected by them. For the first time in his life, perhaps, he rose superior to that insidious influence, and, nerved by the near approach of death, kept his gaze fixed on mine, and finally stammered:

"Will you do some thing else for me?"
"I will," I began, and might have said more, but he turned from me and with sudden energy addressed his wife.

"Margaret," said he, "bring me my desk."

Had a thunderbolt fallen at her feet, she could not have looked more astonished. I myself was somewhat surprised; I had never heard that tone from him before.

"My desk!" he cried again; "I want it here."

At this repetition of his request, uttered this time with all the vehemence of despair. Mrs. Pollard moved, though she did not rise. At the same moment a quick, soft step was heard, and through the gloom of the now rapidly darkening chamber I saw their younger son draw near and take his stand at the foot of the bed.

"I have but a few minutes," murmured the sick man. "Will you refuse to make them comfortable, Margaret?"

"No, no," she answered hastily, guided as I could not but see by an almost imperceptible movement of her son's hand; and rising with a great show of compliance, she proceeded to the other end of the room. I at once took her place by the side of his pillow.

"Is there no word of comfort I can give you?" said I, anxious for the soul thus tortured by earthly anxieties on the very brink of the grave.

But his mind, filled with one thought, refused to entertain any other.

"Pray God that my strength hold out," he whispered. "I have an act of reparation to make." Then, as his son made a move as if to advance, he caught my hand in his, and drew my ear down to his mouth. "The book," he gasped; "keep it safely--they may try to take it away--don't--"

But here his son intervened with some word of warning; and Mrs. Pollard, hurriedly approaching, laid the desk on the bed in such a way that I was compelled to draw back.

But this did not seem to awaken in him any special distress. From the instant his eyes fell upon the desk, a feverish strength seemed to seize him, and looking up at me with something of his old brightness of look and manner, he asked to have it opened and its contents taken out.

Naturally embarrassed at such a request, I turned to Mrs. Pollard.

"It seems a strange thing for me to do," I began; but a lightning glance had already passed between her and her son, and with the cold and haughty dignity for which she is remarkable, she calmly stopped me with a quiet wave of her hand.

"The whims of the dying must be respected," she remarked, and reseated herself in her old place at his side.

I at once proceeded to empty the desk. It contained mainly letters, and one legal-looking document, which I took to be his will. As I lifted this out, I saw mother and son both cast him a quick glance, as if they expected some move on his part. But though his hands trembled somewhat, he made no special sign of wishing to see or touch it, and at once I detected on their faces a look of surprise that soon took on the character of dismay, as with the lifting of the last paper from the desk he violently exclaimed:

"Now break in the bottom and take out the paper you will find there. It is my last will and testament, and by every sacred right you hold in this world, I charge you to carry it to Mr. Nicholls, and see that no man nor woman touches it till you give it into his hands."

"His will!" echoed Mrs. Pollard, astonished.

"He don't know what he says. This is his will," she was probably going to assert, for her hand was pointing to the legal-looking document I have before mentioned; but a gesture from her son made her stop before the last word was uttered. "He must be wandering in his mind," she declared. "We know of no will hidden away in his desk. Ah!"

The last exclamation was called forth by the sudden slipping into view of a folded paper from between the crevices of the desk. I had found the secret spring. The next instant the bottom fell out, and the paper slipped to the floor. I was quick to recover it. Had I not been, Mrs. Pollard would have had it in her grasp. As it was, our hands met, not without a shock, I fear, on either side. A gasp of intense suspense came from the bed.

"Keep it," the dying eyes seemed to say; and if mine spoke as plainly as his did, they answered with full as much meaning and force:

"I will."

Guy Pollard and his mother looked at each other, then at the pocket into which I had already thrust the paper. The dying man followed their glances, and with a final exertion of strength, raised himself on his elbow.

"My curse on him or her who seeks to step between me and the late reparation I have sought to make. Weaker than most men, I have submitted to your will, Margaret, up to this hour, but your reign is over at last, and--and--"

The passionate words died away, the feverish energy succumbed, and with one last look into my face, Samuel Pollard fell back upon his pillow, dead.

XIX.

A FATAL DELAY.

Would'st thou have that Which thou esteem'st the ornament of life, And live a coward in thine own esteem,
Letting "I dare not," wait upon "I would," Like the poor cat i' the adage? --MACBETH.

He was to all appearance immediately forgotten. As with mutual consent we all turned and faced each other, Mrs. Pollard with a stern, inexorable look in her dark eye, which, while it held me enchained, caused me to involuntarily lay my hand upon the document which I had hidden in my breast. She noticed the movement, and smiled darkly with a sidelong look at her son. The smile and the look affected me strangely. In them I seemed to detect something deeper than hatred and baffled rage, and when in a moment later her son responded to her glance by quietly withdrawing from the room, I felt such revolt against their secrecy that for a moment I was tempted to abandon an undertaking that promised to bring me in conflict with passions of so deep and unrelenting a nature.

But the impression which the pain and despair of my dead friend had made upon me was as yet too recent for me to yield to my first momentary apprehensions; and summoning up what resolution I possessed, I took my leave of Mrs. Pollard, and was hastening towards the door, when her voice, rising cold and clear, arrested me.

"You think, then, that it is your duty to carry this paper from the house, Mr. Barrows?"

"Yes, madam, I do," was my short reply.

"In spite of my protest and that of my son?"

"Yes, madam."

"Then upon your head be the consequences!" she exclaimed, and turned her back upon me with a look which went with me as I closed the door between us; lending a gloom to the unlighted halls and sombre staircases that affected me almost with an impulse of fear.

I dreaded crossing to where the stairs descended; I dreaded going down them into the darkness which I saw below. Not that I anticipated actual harm, but that I felt I was in the house of those who longed to see me the victim of it; and my imagination being more than usually alert, I even found myself fancying the secret triumph with which Guy Pollard would hail an incautious slip on my part, that would precipitate me from the top to the bottom of this treacherous staircase. That he was somewhere between me and the front door, I felt certain. The deadly quiet behind and before me seemed to assure me of this; and, ashamed as I was of the impulse that moved me, I could not prevent myself from stepping cautiously as I prepared to descend, saying as some sort of excuse to myself: "He is capable of seeing me trip without assistance," and as my imagination continued its work: "He is even capable of putting out his foot to help forward such a catastrophe."

And, indeed, I now think that if this simple plan had presented itself to his subtle mind, of stunning, if not disabling me, and thus making it possible for them to obtain his father's will without an open assault, he would not have hesitated to embrace it. But he evidently did not calculate, as I did, the chances of such an act, or perhaps he felt that I was likely to be too much upon my guard to fall a victim to this expedient, for I met no one as I advanced, and was well down the stairs and on my way to the front door, before I perceived any signs of life in the sombre house. Then a sudden glare of light across my path betrayed the fact that a door had been swung wide in a certain short passage that opened ahead of me; and while I involuntarily stopped, a shadow creeping along the further wall of that passage warned me that some one--I could not doubt it to be Guy Pollard--had come out to meet me.

The profound stillness, and the sudden pause which the shadow made as I inconsiderately stumbled in my hesitation, assured me that I was right in attributing a sinister motive to this encounter. Naturally, therefore, I drew back, keeping my eyes upon the shadow. It did not move. Convinced now that danger of some kind lay ahead of me, I looked behind and about me for some means of escaping from the house without passing by my half-seen enemy. But none presented themselves. Either I must slink away into the kitchen region--a proceeding from which my whole manhood revolted,--or I must advance and face whatever evil awaited me. Desperation drove me to the latter course. Making one bound, I stood before that lighted passage. A slim, firm figure confronted me; but it was not that of Guy, but of his older brother, Dwight.

The surprise of the shock, together with a certain revelation which came to me at the same moment, and of which I will speak hereafter, greatly unnerved me. I had not been thinking of Dwight Pollard. Strange as it may seem, I had not even missed him from the bedside of his father. To see him, then, here and now, caused many thoughts to spring into my mind, foremost among which was the important one as to whether he was of a nature to lend himself to any scheme of violence. The quickness with which I decided to the contrary proved to me in what thoughts to spring into my mind, foremost among which was the important one as to whether he was of a nature to lend himself to any scheme of violence. The quickness with which I decided to the contrary proved to me in what
prison, I certainly had left behind me influences of darkness and sinister suggestion, which, in the light of the calm moonbeams that I found flooding the world without, had the effect upon me of a vanished horror. Only I was still haunted by that last phrase which I had heard uttered, "Don't go by the way of Orchard Street," an injunction which simply meant, "Don't go with that document to the lawyer's to-night."

Now was this order, given as it was by Dwight Pollard, one of warning or of simple threat? My good-will toward this especial member of the Pollard family inclined me to think it the former.

There was danger, then, lurking for me somewhere on the road to Mr. Nicholls' house. Was it my duty to encounter this danger? It appeared to me not, especially as it was not necessary for me to acquit myself so instantly of the commission with which I had been intrusted. I accordingly proceeded directly home.

But once again in my familiar study, I became conscious of a strong dissatisfaction with myself. Indeed, I may speak more forcibly and say I was conscious of a loss of trust in my own manhood, which was at once so new and startling that it was as if a line had been drawn between my past and present. This was due to the discovery I had made at the moment I had confronted Dwight Pollard—a discovery so humiliating in its character that it had shaken me, body and soul. I had found in the light of that critical instant that I, David Barrows, was _a coward!_ Yes, gloss it over as I would, the knowledge was deep in my mind that I lacked manhood's most virile attribute; that peril, real or imaginary, could awaken in me fear; and that the paling cheek and trembling limbs of which I had been so bitterly conscious at that instant were but the outward signs of a weakness that extended deep down into my soul.

It was a revelation calculated to stagger any man, how much more, then, one who had so relied upon his moral powers as to take upon himself the sacred name of minister. But this was not all. I had not only found myself to be a coward, but I had shown myself such to another's eyes. By the searching look which Dwight Pollard had given me before he spoke, and the quiet, half-disdainful curve which his lips took at the close of his scrutiny, I was convinced that he saw the defect in my nature, and despised me for it, even while he condescended to offer me the protection which my fears seemed to demand. Or—the thought could come now that I was at home, and had escaped the dangers lying in wait for me on the road to my duty—he had made use of my weakness to gain his own ends. The carrying of that document to Mr. Nicholls meant loss of property to them all perhaps, and he had but taken means, consistent with his character, to insure the delay which his brother had possibly planned to gain in some more reprehensible manner. And I had yielded to my fears and let his will have its way. I hated myself as I considered my own weakness. I could find no excuse either for my pusillanimity or for that procrastination of my duty into which it had betrayed me. I found I could not face my own scorn; and, rising from my study-chair, I took my hat and went out. I had determined to make amends for my fault by going at once to Orchard Street.

And I did; but alas! for the result! The half-hour I had lost was fatal. To be sure I met with no adventure on my way, but I found Mr. Nicholls out. He had been summoned by a telegram to Boston, and had been absent from the house only fifteen minutes. I meditated following him to the station, but the whistle sounded just as I turned away from his door, and I knew I should be too late. Humiliated still further in my own estimation, I went home to wait with what patience I could for the two or three days which must elapse before his return.

Before I went to bed that night I opened the book which Mr. Pollard had given me, in the expectation of finding a letter in it, or, at least, some writing on the title-page or the blank pages of the book. But I was disappointed in both regards. With the exception of some minute pencil-marks scattered here and there along the text—indications, doubtless, of favorite passages—I perceived nothing in the volume to account for the extreme earnestness with which he had presented it.

XX.

THE OLD MILL.

Whither wilt thou lead me? speak; I'll go no farther. --Hamilet.

I did not sleep well that night, but this did not prevent me from beginning work early in the morning. The sermon I had been interrupted in the afternoon before, had to be completed that day; and I was hard at work upon it when there came a knock at my study-door. I arose with any thing but alacrity and opened it. Dwight Pollard stood before me.

It was a surprise that called up a flush to my cheeks; but daylight was shining upon this interview, and I knew none of those sensations which had unnerved me the night before. I was simply on my guard, and saw him seat himself in my own chair, without any other feeling than that of curiosity as to the nature of his errand. He likewise was extremely self-possessed, and looked at me calmly for some instants before speaking.

"Last night," he began, "you refused a request which my mother made of you."

I bowed.

"It was a mistake," he continued. "The paper which my father gave you cannot be one which he in his right senses would wish seen by the public. You should have trusted my mother, who knew my father much better than you did."
"It was not a matter of trust," I protest. "A document had been given me by a dying man, with an injunction to put it into certain hands. I had no choice but to fulfil his wishes in this regard. Your mother herself would have despised me if I had yielded to her importunities and left it behind me."

"My mother," he commenced.

"Your mother is your mother," I put in. "Let us have respect for her widowhood, and leave her out of this conversation."

He looked at me closely, and I understood his glance.

"I cannot return you your father's will," I declared, firmly.

He held my glance with his.

"Have you it still?" he asked.

"I cannot return it to you," I repeated.

He arose and approached me courteously. "You are doing what you consider to be your duty," said he. "In other words than my mother used, I simply add, on _our_ heads must be the consequences." And his grave look, at once half-sad and half-determined, impressed me for the first time with a certain sort of sympathy for this unhappy family. "And this leads me to the purpose of my call," he proceeded, deferentially. "I am here at my mother's wish, and I bring you her apologies. Though you have done and are doing wrong by your persistence in carrying out my poor father's wishes to the detriment of his memory, my mother regrets that she spoke to you in the manner she did, and hopes you will not allow it to stand in the way of your conducting the funeral services."

"Mr. Pollard," I replied, "your father was my friend, and to no other man could I delegate the privilege of uttering prayers over his remains. But I would not be frank to you nor true to myself if I did not add that it will take more than an apology from your mother to convince me that she wishes me well, or is, indeed, any thing but the enemy her looks proclaimed her to be last night."

"I am sorry----" he began, but meeting my eye, stopped. "You possess a moral courage which I envy you," he declared. And waiving the subject of his mother, he proceeded to inform me concerning the funeral and the arrangements which had been made.

I listened calmly. In the presence of this man I felt strong. Though he knew the secret of my weakness, and possibly despised me for it, he also knew what indeed he had just acknowledged, that in some respects I was on a par with him.

The arrangements were soon made, and he took his leave without any further allusion to personal matters. But I noticed that at the door he stopped and cast a look of inquiry around the room. It disconcerted me somewhat; and while I found it difficult to express to myself the nature of the apprehensions which it caused, I inwardly resolved to rid myself as soon as possible of the responsibility of holding Mr. Pollard's will. If Mr. Nicholls did not return by the day of the funeral, I would go myself to Boston and find him.

No occurrence worth mentioning followed this interview with Dwight Pollard. I conducted the services as I had promised, but found nothing to relate concerning them, save the fact that Mrs. Pollard was not present. She had been very much prostrated by her husband's death, and was not able to leave her room, or so it was said. I mistrusted the truth of this, however, but must acknowledge I was glad to be relieved of a presence not only so obnoxious to myself, but so out of tune with the occasion. I could ignore Guy, subtle and secret as he was, but this woman could not be ignored. Where she was, there brooded something dark, mysterious, and threatening; and whether she smiled or frowned, the influence of her spirit was felt by a vague oppression at once impossible to analyze or escape from.

From the cemetery I went immediately to my house. The day was a dreary one, and I felt, chilled. The gray of the sky was in my spirit, and every thing seemed unreal and dark and strange. I was in a mood, I suppose, and, unlike myself on other similar occasions, did not feel that drawing towards the one dear heart which hitherto had afforded me solace and support. I had not got used to my new self as yet, and till I did, the smile of her I loved was more of a reproach to me than consolation.

I was stopped at the gate by Mrs. Banks. She is my next-door neighbor, and in the absence of my landlady who had gone to visit some friends, took charge of any message which might be left for me while I was out. She looked flurried and mysterious.

"You have had a visitor," she announced.

As she paused and looked as if she expected to be questioned, I naturally asked who it was.

"She said she was your sister," she declared. "A tall woman with a thick veil over her face. She went right up to your study, but I think she must have got tired of waiting, for she went away again a few moments ago."

My sister! I had no sister. I looked at Mrs. Banks in amazement

"Describe her more particularly," said I.

"That I cannot do," she returned. "Her veil hid her features too completely for me to see them. I could not even tell her age, but I should say, from the way she walked that she was older than you."
A chill, which did not come entirely from the east wind then blowing, ran sharply through my veins.

"I thank you," said I, somewhat incoherently, and ran hastily upstairs. I had a presentiment as to the identity of this woman.

At the door of my study I paused and looked hurriedly around. No signs of any disturbance met my eye. Crossing over to my desk, I surveyed the papers which I had left scattered somewhat loosely over it. They had been moved. I knew it by the position of the blotter, which I had left under a certain sheet of paper, and which now lay on top. Hot and cold at once, I went immediately to the spot where I had concealed Mr. Pollard's will. It was in my desk, but underneath a drawer instead of in it, and by this simple precaution, perhaps, I had saved it from destruction; for I found it lying in its place undisturbed, though the hand which had crept so near its hiding-place was, as I felt certain, no other than that of Mrs. Pollard, searching for this very document.

It gave me a shuddering sense of disquiet to think that the veiled figure of this portentous woman had glided over my floors, reflected itself in my mirrors, and hung, dark and mysterious in its veiling drapery, over my desk and the papers which I had handled myself so lately.

I was struck, too, by the immovable determination to compass her own ends at any and every risk, which was manifested by this incident; and, wondering more and more as to what had been the nature of the offence for which Mr. Pollard sought to make reparation in his will, I only waited for a moment of leisure in order to make another effort at enlightenment by a second study of the prayer-book which my dying friend had placed so earnestly in my hands.

It came, as I supposed, about eight o'clock that evening. The special duties of the day were done, and I knew of nothing else that demanded my attention. I therefore took the book from my pocket, where I had fortunately kept it, and was on the point of opening its pages, when there came a ring at the door-bell below.

As I have said before, my landlady was away. I consequently went to the door myself, where I was met by an unexpected visitor in the shape of the idiot boy, Colwell. Somewhat disconcerted at the sight of a face so repugnant to me, I was still more thrown off my balance when I heard his errand. He had been sent, he said, by a man who had been thrown from his wagon on the north road, and was now lying in a dying condition inside the old mill, before which he was picked up. Would I come and see him? He had but an hour or so to live, and wished very much for a clergyman's consolation.

It was a call anything but agreeable to me. I was tired; I was interested in the attempt which I was about to make to solve a mystery that was not altogether disconnected with my own personal welfare, and--let me acknowledge it, since events have proved I had reason to fear this spot--I did not like the old mill. But I was far from conceiving what a wretched experience lay before me, and was on the point of opening its pages, when there came a ring at the door-bell below.

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I had, then, nothing but my own disinclinations to contend with, and these, strong as they were, could not, at that time, and in the mood which my late experience had induced, long stand in the way of a duty so apparent.

I consequently testified my willingness to go to the mill, and in a few minutes later set out for that spot with a mind comparatively free from disagreeable forebodings. But as we approached the mill, and I caught a glimpse of its frowning walls glooming so darkly from out the cluster of trees that environed them, I own that a sensation akin to that which had been awakened in me by Mrs. Pollard's threats, and the portentous darkness of her sombre mansion, once again swept with its chilling effect over my nerves.

Shocked, disgusted with myself at the recurrence of a weakness for which I had so little sympathy, I crushed down the feelings I experienced, and advanced at once to the door. A tall and slim figure met me, clothed in some dark enveloping garment, and carrying a lantern.

"The injured man is within," said he.

Something in the voice made me look up. His face was entirely in shadow.

"Who are you?" I asked.

He did not reply.

"Let us go in," he said.

A week before I would have refused to do this without knowing more of my man. But the shame from which I had suffered for the last few days had made me so distrustful of myself that I was ready to impute to cowardice even the most ordinary instinct of self-preservation.

I accordingly followed the man, though with each step that I took I felt my apprehensions increase. To pierce in this manner a depth of sombre darkness, with only the dim outline of an unknown man moving silently before me, was any thing but encouraging in itself. Then the way was too long, and the spot we sought too far from the door. A really injured man would not be carried beyond the first room, I thought, and we had already taken steps enough to
be half-way through the building. At last I felt that even cowardice was excusable under these circumstances, and, putting out my hand, I touched the man before me on the shoulder.

"Where are we going?" I demanded.

He continued to move on without reply.

"I shall follow you no longer if you do not speak," I cried again. "This midnight journey through an old building ready to fall into ruins seems to me not only unpleasant but hazardous."

Still no answer.

"I warned you," I said, and stopped, but the next moment I gave an almost frantic bound forward. A form had come up against me from behind, and I found that a man was following as closely upon my steps as I had been following those of the person who stalked before me.

The thrill of this discovery will never be forgotten by me. For a moment I could not speak, and when I did, the sound of my voice only added to my terrors.

"You have me in a trap," said I; "who are you, and what are your intentions with me?"

"We have you where we can reason with you," exclaimed the voice of him who pressed against my back; and at the sound of those gentlemanly tones with their underlying note of sarcasm, I understood that my hour had come. It was the voice and intonation of Guy Pollard.

XXI.

THE VAT.

_Des_._.--Talk you of killing? _Oth._.--Ay, I do. _Des._.--Then, heaven Have mercy on me! --OTHELLO.

I quivered with shame, for I felt my heart sink. But there was no pause in the smooth, sarcastic tones behind me.

"When a man persists in judging of his duty contrary to the dictates of reason, he must expect restraint from those who understand his position better than he does himself."

"Then," quoth I, with suddenly acquired strength, "I am to understand that the respectable family of Pollard finds itself willing to resort to the means and methods of highwaymen in order to compass its ends and teach me my duty."

"You are," a determined voice returned.

At that word, uttered as it was in a tone inexorable as fate, my last ray of hope went out. The voice was that of a woman.

I however, made a strong effort for the preservation of my dignity and person.

"And will Samuel Pollard's oldest and best-beloved son, the kind-hearted and honest Dwight, lend himself to a scheme of common fraud and violence?" I asked.

The reply came in his brother's most sarcastic tones. "Dwight has left us," he declared. "We have no need of honesty or kind-heartedness here. What we want for this business is an immovable determination."

Startled, I looked up. The lantern which had hitherto swung from the hand of my guide stood on the floor. By its light three things were visible. First, that we stood at the head of a staircase descending into a depth of darkness which the eye could not pierce; secondly, that in all the area about me but two persons stood; and third, that of these two persons one of them was masked and clad in a long black garment, such as is worn at masquerade balls under the name of a domino. Struck with an icy chill, I looked down again. Why had I allowed myself to be caught in such a trap? Why had I not followed Mr. Nicholls immediately to Boston when I heard that he was no longer in town? Or, better still, why had I not manufactured for myself a safeguard in the form of a letter to that gentleman, informing him of the important document which I held, and the danger in which it possibly stood from the family into whose toils I had now fallen? I could have cursed myself for my dereliction.

"David Barrows," came in imperative tones from the masked figure, "will you tell us where this will is?"

"No," I returned.

"Is it not on your person?" the inquisitorial voice pursued.

"It is not," I answered, firmly, thankful that I spoke the truth in this.

"It is in your rooms, then; in your desk, perhaps?"

I remained silent.

"Is it in your rooms?" the indomitable woman proceeded.

"You who have been there should know," I replied, feeling my courage rise, as I considered that they could not assail my honor, while my life without my secret would benefit them so little that it might be said to stand in no danger.

"I do not understand you," the icy voice declared; while Guy, stepping forward, planted his hand firmly on my shoulder and said:

"Wherever it is, it shall be delivered to our keeping to-night. We are in no mood for dallying. Either you will give us your solemn promise to obtain this will, and hand it over to us without delay and without scandal, or the free
light of heaven is shut out from you forever. You shall never leave this mill."

"But," I faltered, striving in vain to throw off the incubus of horror which his words invoked, "what good would my death do you? Could it put Mr. Pollard's will in your hands?"

"Yes," was the brief and decided reply, "if it is anywhere in your rooms."

It was a word that struck home. The will was in my rooms, and I already saw it, in my imagination, torn from its hiding-place by the unscrupulous hand that held me.

Mastering my emotion with what spirit I could, I looked quickly about me. Was there no means of escape? I saw none. In the remote and solitary place which they had chosen for this desperate attempt, a cry would be but waste breath, even if we were in that part of the mill which looked toward the road. But we were not; on the contrary, I could see by the aid of the faint glimmer which the lantern sent forth, that the room in which we had halted was as far as possible from the front of the building, for its windows were obscured by the brush-wood which only grew against the back of the mill. To call out, then, would be folly, while to seek by any force or strategy to break away from the two relentless beings that controlled me could only end in failure, unless darkness would come to my aid and hide my road of escape. But darkness could only come by the extinguishing of the lantern, and that it was impossible for me to effect; for I was not strong enough to struggle in its direction with Guy Pollard, nor could I reach it by any stretch of foot or hand. The light must burn and I must stay there, unless--the thought came suddenly--I could take advantage of the flight of steps at the head of which I stood, and by a sudden leap, gain the cellar, where I would stand a good chance of losing myself amid intricacies as little known to them as to myself. But to do this I must be free to move, and there was no shaking myself loose from the iron clutch that held me.

"You see you are in our power," hissed the voice of the woman from between the motionless lips of her black mask.

"I see I am," I acknowledged, "but I also see that you are in that of God." And I looked severely towards her, only to drop my eyes again with an irrepressible shudder.

For, lay it to my weakness or to the baleful influence which emanated from the whole ghostly place, there was something absolutely appalling in this draped and masked figure with its gleaming eyes and cold, thin voice.

"Shall we have what we want before your death or after?" proceeded Guy Pollard, with a calm but cold ignoring of my words that was more threatening than any rudeness.

I did not answer at first, and his grip upon me tightened; but next moment, from what motive I cannot say, it somewhat relaxed; and, startled, with the hope of freedom, I exclaimed with a vehemence for which my former speech must have little prepared them:

"You shall not have it at all. I cannot break my word with your father, and I will not stay here to be threatened and killed;" and making a sudden movement, I slipped from his grasp, and plunged down the steps into the darkness below.

But, scarcely had my feet touched the cellar floor, before I heard the warning cry shrill out from above:

"Take care! There is an open vat before you. If you fall into that, we shall be free of your interference without lifting a hand."

An open vat! I had heard of the vats in the old mill's cellar. Instinctively recoiling, I stood still, not knowing whether to advance or retreat. At the same moment I heard the sound of steps descending the stairs.

"So you think this a better place for decision than the floor above?" exclaimed Guy Pollard, drawing up by my side. "Well, I not sure but you are right," he added; and I saw by the light of the lantern which his companion now brought down the stairs, the cold glimmer of a smile cross his thin lips and shine for a moment from his implacable eyes. Not knowing what he meant, I glanced anxiously about, and shrank with dismay as I discerned the black hole of the vat he had mentioned, yawning within three feet of my side. Was it a dream, my presence in this fearful spot? I looked at the long stretch of arches before me glooming away into the darkness beyond us, and felt the chill of a nameless horror settle upon my spirit.

Was it because I knew those circles of blackness held many another such pit of doom as that into which I had so nearly stumbled? Or was it that the grisly aspect of the scene woke within me that slumbering demon of the imagination which is the bane of natures like mine.

Whatever it was, I felt the full force of my position, and scarcely cared whether my voice trembled or not as I replied:

"You surely have me in your hands; but that does not mean that it is I who must make a decision. If I understand the situation, it is for you to say whether you will be murderers or not."

"Then you do not intend to put us in possession of my father's will?"

"No," I murmured, and bowed my head for the blow I expected from him.

But he dealt me no blow. Instead of that he eyed me with a look which grew more and more sinister as I met his glance with one which I meant should convey my indomitable resolution. At last he spoke again:
"I think you will reconsider your determination," said he, with a meaning I did not even then fathom, and exchanging a quick glance with the silent figure at his right, he leaned towards me and--what happened? For a moment I could not tell, but soon, only too soon, I recognized by my stunned and bleeding body, by the closeness of the air I suddenly breathed, and by the circle of darkness that shut about me, and the still more distinct circle of light that glimmered above, that I had been pushed into the pit whose yawning mouth had but a few short moments before awakened me in me such dismay.

Aghast, almost mad with the horror of a fate so much more terrible than any I had anticipated, I strove to utter a cry; but my tongue refused its office, and nothing but an inarticulate murmur rose from my lips. It was not piercing enough to clear the edge of the vat, and my soul sunk with despair as I heard its fruitless gurgle and realized by the sound of departing steps, and the faint and fainter glimmer of the circle of light which at my first glance had shone quite brightly above my hideous prison-house, that my persecutors had done their worst and were now leaving me alone in my trap to perish.

God! what an instant it was! To speak, to shriek, to call, nay plead for aid, was but the natural outcome of the overwhelming anguish I felt, but the sound of steps had died out into an awful stillness, and the glimmering circle upon which my staring eyes were fixed had faded into a darkness so utter and complete, that had the earth been piled above my head, I could not have been more wholly hidden from the light.

I had fallen on my knees, and desperate as I was, had made no attempt to rise. Not that I thought of prayer, unless my whole dazed and horrified being was a prayer. The consolations which I had offered to others did not seem to meet this case. Here was no death in the presence of friends and under the free light of heaven. This was a horror. The hand of God which could reach every other mortal, whatever their danger or doom, seemed to stop short at this gate of hell. I could not even imagine my soul escaping thence. I was buried; body and soul, I was buried and yet I was alive and knew that I must remain alive for days if not for weeks.

I do not suppose that I remained in this frightful condition of absolute hopelessness for more than five minutes, but it seemed to me an eternity. If a drowning man can review his life in an instant, what was there not left for me to think and suffer in the lapse of those five horrible minutes? I was young when the unscrupulous hand of this daring murderer pushed me into this pit; I was old when with a thrill of joy such as passes over the body but once in a lifetime, I heard a voice issue from the darkness, saying severely, "David Barrows, are you prepared for a decision now?" and realized that like the light which now sprang into full brilliance above my head, hope had come again into my life, and that I had to speak but a dozen words to have sunshine and liberty restored to me.

The rush of emotion which this startling change brought was almost too much for my reason. Looking up into the sardonic face, I could now discern peering over the edge of the vat, I asked with a frantic impulse that left me no time for thought, if an immediate restoration to freedom would follow my compliance with his wishes, and when he answered: "Yes," I beheld such a vision of sunshiny fields and a happy, love-lighted home, that my voice almost choked as I responded, that I did not think his father would have wished me to sacrifice my life or force a son of his into the crime of murder, for the sake of any reparation which money could offer. And as I saw the face above me grow impatient, I told in desperate haste where I had concealed the will and how it could be obtained without arousing the suspicions of my neighbors.

He seemed satisfied and hastily withdrew his face; but soon returned and asked for the key of my house. I had it in my pocket and hurriedly pitched it up to him, when he again disappeared.

"When shall I be released?" I anxiously called out after him.

But no answer came back, and presently the light began to fade as before, and the sound of steps grow fainter and fainter till silence and darkness again settled upon my dreadful prison-house.

But this time I had hope to brighten me, and shutting my eyes, I waited patiently. But at last, as no change came and the silence and darkness remained unbroken, I became violently alarmed and cried to myself: "Am I the victim of their treachery? Have they obtained what they want and now am I to be left here to perish?"

The thought made my hair stand on end, and had I not been a God-fearing man I should certainly have raised my voice in curses upon my credulity and lack of courage. But before my passion could reach its height, hope shone again in the shape of returning light. Some one had entered the cellar and drawn near the edge of the vat; but though I strained my gaze upward, no face met my view, and presently I heard a voice which was not that of Guy Pollard utter in tones of surprise and apprehension:

"Where is the clergyman? Guy said I should find him here in good condition?"

The masked figure, who was doubtless the one addressed, must have answered with a gesture towards the hole in which I lay, for I heard him give vent to a horrified exclamation and then say in accents of regret and shame: "Was it necessary?" and afterwards: "Are you sure he is not injured?"

The answer, which I did not hear, seemed to satisfy him, for he said no more, and soon, too soon, walked away again, carrying the light and leaving me, as I now knew, with that ominous black figure for my watch and guardian,
-a horror that lent a double darkness to the situation which was only relieved now by the thought that Dwight Pollard's humanity was to be relied on, and that he would never wantonly leave me there to perish after the will had been discovered and destroyed.

It was well that I had this confidence, for the time I now had to wait was long. But I lived it through and at last had the joy of hearing footsteps and the voice of Guy saying in a dry and satisfied tone: "It is all right," after which the face of Dwight looked over the edge of the vat and he gave me the help which was needed to lift me out.

I was a free man again. I had slipped from the gates of hell, and the world with all its joys and duties lay before me bright and beautiful as love and hope could make it. Yet whether it was the gloom of the cellar in which we still lingered, or the baleful influence that emanated, from the three persons in whose presence I once more stood, I felt a strange sinking at my heart and found myself looking back at the pit from which I had just escaped, with a sensation of remorse, as if in its horrid depths I had left or lost something which must create a void within me forever.

My meditations in this regard were interrupted by the voice of Guy.

"David Barrows," said he, "we hold the paper which was given you by my father."

I bowed with a slight intimation of impatience.

"We have looked at it and it is as he said, his will. But it is not such a one as we feared, and to-morrow, or as soon as we can restore the seal, we shall return it to you for such disposition as your judgment suggests."

I stared at him in an amazement that made me forget my shame.

"You will give it back?" I repeated.

"To-morrow," he laconically replied.

XXII

THE CYPHER.

Ah, my false heart, what hast thou done?

This is a story of fact; it is also a story of mental struggle. I shall not, therefore, be considered too diffuse if I say that this unlooked for ending to my unhappy adventure threw me into a strange turmoil of feeling, from which I had no rest until the next day came. That they should promise to restore the will, to obtain which they had resorted to measures almost criminal in their severity, awoke in me the greatest astonishment. What could it mean? I waited to see the will before replying.

It came, as Guy Pollard had promised, at noon of the following day. It was in a new envelope, and was sealed just as it had been before it left my possession. Had I not known into what unscrupulous hands it had fallen, I should have doubted if it had ever been opened. As it was, I was not only confident that it had been read from end to end, but fearful that it had been tampered with, and perhaps altered. To get it out of my hands, and if possible, my mind also, I carried it at once to Mr. Nicholls, who, I had ascertained that morning, had returned to town the day before.

He received me with affability, but looked a little surprised when he learned my errand.

"I was just going to call on the family," said he; "I drew up Mr. Pollard's will myself, and---"

"You drew up Mr. Pollard's will?" I hastily interrupted. "You know, then, its contents, and can tell me---"

"Pardon me," he as hastily put in, "the family have the first right to a knowledge of what Mr. Pollard has done for them."

I felt myself at a loss. To explain my rights and the great desire which I experienced to ascertain whether the tenor of the paper he now held coincided with that which he had submitted to Mr. Pollard for his signature, necessitated a full relation of facts which I was not yet certain ought to be made public. For if the will had not been meddled with, and Mr. Pollard's wishes stood in no danger of being slighted or ignored, what else but a most unhappy scandal could accrue from the revelation which I should be forced to make? Then, my own part in the miserable affair. If not productive of actual evil, it was still something to blush for, and I had not yet reached that stage of repentance or humility which made it easy to show the world a weakness for which I had no pity nor sympathy myself. Yet to guard the interests with which I had been entrusted, it was absolutely necessary that the question which so much disturbed me should be answered. For, if any change had been made in this important paper by which the disposition of Mr. Pollard's property should be turned aside from the channel in which he had ordered it, I felt that no consideration for the public welfare or my own good fame should hinder me from challenging its validity.

My embarrassment evidently showed itself, for the acute lawyer, after a momentary scrutiny of my face, remarked:

"You say Mr. Pollard gave you this will to hand to me. Do you know the cause of this rather extraordinary proceeding, or have you any suspicion why, in the event of his desiring me to have in charge a paper which ought to be safe enough in his own house, he choose his pastor for his messenger instead of one of his own sons?"

"Mr. Nicholls," I returned, with inward satisfaction for the opportunity thus given me for reply, "the secrets which are confided to a clergyman are as sacred as those which are entrusted to a lawyer. I could not tell you my
suspicions if I had any; I can only state the facts. One thing, however, I will add. That owing to circumstances which I cannot explain, but greatly regret, this paper has been out of my hands for a short time, and in speaking as I did, I wished merely to state that it would be a satisfaction to me to know that no harm has befallen it, and that this is the very will in spirit and detail which you drew up and saw signed by Mr. Pollard."

"Oh," exclaimed the lawyer, "if that is all, I can soon satisfy you." And tearing open the envelope, he ran his eye over the document and quietly nodded.

"It is the same," he declared. "There has been no meddling here."

And feeling myself greatly relieved, I rose without further conversation and hastily took my leave.

But when I came to think of it all again in my own room, I found my equanimity was not yet fully restored. A doubt of some kind remained, and though, in consideration of the manifold duties that pressed upon me, I relentlessly put it aside, I could not help its lingering in my mind, darkening my pleasures, and throwing a cloud over my work and the operations of my mind. The sight which I now and then caught of the Pollards did not tend to allay my anxieties. There was satisfaction in their countenances, and in that of Guy, at least, a certain triumphant disdain which could only be partly explained by the victory which he had won over me through my fears. I awaited the proving of the will with anxiety. If there were no seeming reparation made in it, I should certainly doubt its being the expression of Mr. Pollard's wishes.

What was my surprise, then, when the will having been proved, I obtained permission to read it and found that it not only contained mention of reparation, but that this reparation was to be made to Margaret his wife.

"For sums loaned by her to me and lost, I desire to make reparation by an added bequest--" so it read; and I found myself nonplussed and thrown entirely out in all my calculations and conjectures. The anxiety he had shown lest the will should fall into this very woman's hands, did not tally with this expression of justice and generosity, nor did the large sums which he had left to his three children show any of that distrust which his countenance had betrayed towards the one who was present with him at the time of his death. Could it be that he had given me the wrong paper or was he, as Mrs. Pollard had intimated, not responsible for his actions and language at that time. I began to think the latter conjecture might be true, and was only hindered in the enjoyment of my old tranquility by the remembrance of the fearful ordeal I had been subjected to in the mill, and the consideration which it brought of the fears and suspicions which must have existed to make the perpetration of such an outrage possible.

But time, which dulls all things, soon began to affect my memory of that hideous nightmare, and with it my anxiety lest in my unfaithfulness to my trust, I had committed a wrong upon some unknown innocent. Life with its duties and love with its speedy prospect of marriage gradually pushed all unpleasant thoughts from my mind, and I was beginning to enjoy the full savor of my happy and honorable position again, when my serenity was again, and this time forever, destroyed by a certain revelation that was accidentally made to me.

The story of it was this. I had taken by mistake with me to a funeral the prayer-book with which Mr. Pollard had presented me. I was listening to the anthem which was being sung, and being in a nervous frame of mind, was restlessly fingering the leaves of the book which I held in my hand, when my eye, running over the page that happened to open before me, caught sight of some of the marks with which the text was plentifully bestowed. Mechanically I noticed the words under which they stood, and mechanically I began reading them, when, to my great astonishment and subsequent dismay, I perceived they made sense, in short had a connection which, when carried on from page to page of the book, revealed sentences which promised to extend themselves into a complete communication. This is the page I happened upon, with its lines and dots. Note the result which accrues from reading the marked words alone.

[Illustration:

THE EPIPHANY.

with haste, and found Mary and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known _abroad_ the saying which told them concerning this child. And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things, and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told unto them. And when eight days were accomplished for the circumcising of the child, his name was called JESUS, which was so named of the angel before he was conceived in the womb.

_The same Collect, Epistle, and Gospel shall serve for every day after, unto the Epiphany._

_The Epiphany._

_Or the Manifestation of Christ to the Gentiles._

THE COLLECT.

O God, who by the leading of _a_ star didst manifest thy only-begotten Son to the Gentiles, Mercifully grant that we, who know thee now by faith, may after this life have the fruition of thy glorious Godhead through Jesus Christ our Lord. _Amen._
THE EPISTLE. Eph iii. I.

For this cause, I Paul the _prisoner_ of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles, if ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God, which is given me to you. How that by _revelation_ he _made_ _known_ unto me the mystery (as I wrote afore _in_ _few_ _words_ , _whereby_ , _when_ _ye_ _read_ , _ye_ _may_ _understand_ my knowledge in _the_ _mystery_ of Christ) _which_ in other ages _was_ _not_ _made_ _known_ _unto_ _the_ _sons_ _of_ men, as it is now revealed unto his holy Apostles and Prophets by the Spirit, that the Gentiles should be _fellow-heirs_ , and _of_ the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ, by the Gospel whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the _grace_ of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

It was but one of many, and you can imagine how difficult I found it to continue with the service and put the subject from my mind till the funeral was over and I could return to solitude and my third and final examination into the meaning of this mysterious gift.

You can also imagine my wonder when by following out the plan I have indicated, the subjoined sentences appeared, which, if somewhat incoherent at times—as could only be expected from the limited means at his command—certainly convey a decided meaning, especially after receiving the punctuation and capital letters, which, after long study and some after-knowledge of affairs, I have ventured upon giving them:

"My sin is ever before me."
"Correct, lest thou bring me to nothing."
"Do those things which are requisite and necessary for a pure and humble one, Grace by name, begotten by son, he born of first wife and not obedient to the law abroad, a prisoner."
"Revelation made known in few words whereby when ye read ye may understand the mystery which was made known unto the sons, fellow-heirs of Grace."
"Go and search diligently for the young child."
"The higher powers resist and are a terror to good works."
"Do that which is good and thou shalt have praise, minister of God."
"Wherefore ye must needs be subject for wrath, for they are attending continually upon this thing."
"Render therefore to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute; honor to whom honor."
"Two possessed of devils, exceeding fierce of the household, hope Grace may evermore be cast away."
"They murmur against the good man of the house, and do not agree to mercifully defend against perils in the city an honest and good heart."
"My will leave(s) heritage to Grace."
"The devil is against me."
"Behold a woman grievously vexed with lost sheep of the house."
"Then came she, saying: 'It is not mete to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs. Be unto, us an offering named as becometh saints. For this ye know, that no unclean person hath any inheritance because of disobedience and fellowship with works of darkness. For it is a shame to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.'"
"Beelzebub, the chief of devils, and sons cast out man; taketh from him all wherein he trusteth and divideth the spoils against me."
"To purge conscience, the new testament means redemption of the transgressions under first testament."
"Said a devil: 'Father, ye do dishonor me. Say ye know him not, thy son, and suffer that a notable prisoner, his wife and child, were not called by thy name.' 'I will,' said I. But I deny all here. My soul is sorrowful unto death, as I bear false witness against them."
"The hand that betrayeth me is with me."
"I appoint you to sift as wheat."
"This must be accomplished, for the things concerning me have an end."
"Words sent unto me out of prison, said: 'Daughter weep(s). Beseech thee graciously to fetch home to thee my child in tribulation. For lo, the ungodly bend their bow and make ready their arrows within the quiver, that they may privily shoot at them which are true of heart. Show I thy marvellous loving-kindness unto an undefined soul forsaken on every side of mother and friendly neighbors. Make haste to deliver and save. I am clean forgotten, as a dead man out of mind. I am become as a broken vessel.'"
"Whilst I held my tongue, my bones consumed away daily."
"I will inform thee and teach thee ill the way wherein thou shalt go."
"Blessed are folk chosen to inheritance; the children of them that dwell under the king.
"Poor Grac(e) come over the see (sea), unaware that I were sick.
"Deliver my darling from the lions, so will I give thee thanks.
"O let not them that are mine enemies triumph that hate me.
"They imagine deceitful words against them that are quiet in the land.
"Child is in thy land.
"Look after daughter among honorable women. House in City of the East Wind.
"Child I have looked upon not.
"I promised with my lips and spake with my mouth, but God turned his mercy upon me, and upon health hath sent forth his voice, yea, and that a mighty voice.
"I sink, and the deep waters drown me.
"Mine adversaries hath broken my heart.
"Let the things that should have been for them be for the poor prisoner's posterity.
"Break down the carved work and search out my will.
"Walk to table under southwest borders of room, take the wood that hath in it operations of the law, and cleave.
"For my days are gone like a shadow, and I am withered as grass."

XXIII.
TOO LATE.

What fear is this, which startles in our ears? --ROMEO AND JULIET.

The conclusion which I drew from these sentences after a close and repeated perusal of them was to this effect:

That Mr. Pollard instead of possessing only two sons, as was generally supposed, had in reality been the father of three. That the eldest, born in all probability before Mr. Pollard's removal to this country (he was an Englishman by birth), had, by some act of violence or fraud, incurred the penalty of the law, and was even now serving out a term of imprisonment in his native land. That this son had a daughter innocent and virtuous, whom he desired to commit to the care of her grandfather; that he had even sent her over here for that purpose, but that Mr. Pollard, taken down with the illness which afterwards ended in death, had not only failed to be on hand to receive her, but that, surrounded and watched by his wife and sons, who, in their selfish pride, were determined to ignore all claims of kinship on the part of one they despised, he had not even had the chance to take such measures for her safety and happiness as his love and regard for her lonely and desolate position seemed to demand. That the will, whose concealment in his desk he had managed to describe, had been made in recompense for this neglect, and that by it she would receive that competence and acknowledgment of her rights which the hatred of her unscrupulous relatives would otherwise deny her.

And this was the will I had weakly given up, and it was upon the head of this innocent child that the results of my weakness must fall.

When I first recognized this fact I felt stupefied. That I, David Barrows, should be the cause of misery and loss to a guileless and pure soul! I could not realize it, nor believe that consequences so serious and irremediable could follow upon an act into which I had been betrayed by mere cowardice. But soon, too soon, the matter became plain to me. I saw what I had done and was overwhelmed, for I could no longer doubt that the real will had been destroyed and that the one which had been returned to me was a substituted one, perhaps the very same which I had seen among the papers of Mr. Pollard's desk.

The result of my remorse was an immediate determination on my part to search out the young girl, left in this remarkable manner to my care, and by my efforts in her behalf do what I could to remedy the great evil which, through my instrumentality, had befallen her.

The purpose was no sooner taken than I prepared to carry it out. S---- could hold no duty for me now paramount to this. I was a father and my child lingered solitary and uncared-for in a strange place. I took the first train the next morning for the "city of the east- wind."

The hour at which I arrived at number -- Charles Street, was one of deep agitation to me, I had thought so continually upon my journey of the young waif I was seeking. Would she be the embodiment of ingenuousness which her grandfather had evidently believed her to be? Should I find her forgiving and tractable; or were the expectations I had formed false in their character and founded rather upon Mr. Pollard's wishes than any knowledge he had of her disposition and acquirements?

The house was, as far as I could judge from the exterior, of a most respectable character, and the lady who answered my somewhat impatient summons was one of those neat and intelligent-looking persons who inspire confidence at first glance. To my inquiries as to whether there was living in her house a young English lady by the name of Grace--I did not like to venture upon that of Pollard, there being some phrases in the communication I have shown you which led me to think that Mr. Pollard had changed his name on coming to this country.--she gave me a
look of such trouble and anxiety that I was instantly struck with dismay.

"Miss Merriam?" she exclaimed; then, as I bowed with seeming acquiescence, continued in a tone that conveyed still more disquiet than her face, "She _was_ here; but she is gone, sir; a woman took her away."

A woman! I must have grown pale, for she swung wide the door and asked me to come in.

"We can talk better in the hall," she remarked, and pointed to a chair into which I half fell.

"I have a great interest in this young lady," I observed; "in short, I am her guardian. Can you tell me the name of the person with whom she went away, or where she can be found now?"

"No sir," she answered, with the same expression of trouble. "The woman gave us no name nor address, and the young lady seemed too much frightened to speak. We have felt anxious ever since she went, sir; for the letter she showed us from the captain of the ship which brought her over, told us to take great care of her. We did not know she had a guardian or we should not have let her go. The woman seemed very pleasant, and paid all the bills, but----"

"But what?" I cried, too anxious to bear a moment's delay.

"She did not lift her veil, and this seemed to me a suspicious circumstance."

Torn with apprehension and doubt, I staggered to my feet.

"Tell me all about this woman," I demanded. "Give me every detail you can remember. I have a dreadful fear that it is some one who should never have seen this child."

"Well, sir, she came at about eleven in the morning----"

"What day?" I interrupted her to ask.

"Thursday," she replied, "a week ago yesterday."

The very day after the will was returned to me. If she were the woman I feared, she had evidently lost no time.

"She asked for Miss Merriam," the lady before me pursued, evidently greatly pitying my distress, "and as we knew no reason why our young boarder should not receive visitors, we immediately proceeded to call her down. But the woman, with a muttered excuse, said she would not trouble us; that she knew the child well, and would go right up to her room if we would only tell her where it was. This we did and should have thought no more of the matter, if in a little while she had not reappeared in the hall, and, inquiring the way to my room, told me that Miss Merriam had decided to leave my house; that she had offered her a home with her, and that they were to go immediately."

"I was somewhat taken aback by this, and inquired if I could not see Miss Merriam. She answered 'What for?' and when I hinted that money was owing me for her board, she drew out her pocket-book and paid me on the spot. I could say nothing after this, 'But are you a relative, ma'am?' to which her quick and angry negative, hidden, however, next moment, by a suave acknowledgment of friendship, gave me my first feeling of alarm. But I did not dare to ask her any further questions, much as I desired to know who she was and where she was going to take the young girl. There was something in her manner that overawed me, at the same time it filled me with dread. But if I could not speak to her I meant to have some words with Miss Merriam before she left the house. This the woman seemed to wish to prevent, for she stood close by me when the young girl came down, and when I stepped forward to say good-by, pushed me somewhat rudely aside and took Miss Merriam by the arm. 'Come, my dear,' she cried, and would have hurried her out without a word. But I would not have that. The sorrow and perplexity in Miss Merriam's face were too marked for me to let her depart in silence. So I persisted in speaking, and after saying how sorry I was to have her go, asked her if she would not leave her new address with me in case any letters should come for her. Her answer was a frightened look at her companion who immediately spoke for her. 'I have told you,' said she, 'that Miss Merriam goes home with me. It is not likely she will have any letters, but if she should, you can send them to the place mentioned on this card,' and she pulled a visiting card from her bag and gave it to me, after which she immediately went away, dragging Miss Merriam after her."

"And you have that card?" I cried. "Why did you not show it to me at once?"

"O, sir," she responded with a sorrowful shake of her head, "it was a fraud, a deception. The card was not hers but another person's, and its owner don't even know Miss Merriam."

"How do you know this?" I asked. "Have you seen this other person?"

"Yes, sir, I had occasion to, for a letter did come for Miss Merriam only a short time after she left. So thinking it a good opportunity to see where she had gone, I carried it to the address which was on the card given me, and found as I have told you that it was not the same lady at all who lived there, and that there was not only no Miss Merriam in the house but that her name was not even known there."

"And you saw the lady herself?"

"Yes, sir."

"And are you sure it was not the same as the one who was here?"

"Oh yes; she was short and stout and had a frank way of speaking, totally unlike that of the veiled woman."

"And the latter? How was she shaped? You have not told me."

I asked this in trembling tones. Though I was sure what the answer would be, I dreaded to have my fears
confirmed.
"Well, sir, she was tall and had a full commanding figure, very handsome to look at. She was dressed all in gray and had a way of holding her head that made an ordinary sized woman like myself feel very small and insignificant. Yet she was not agreeable in her appearance; and I am sure that if I could have seen her face I should have disliked her still more, though I do not doubt it was in keeping with her figure, and very handsome."

I could have no doubts as to whom this described, yet I made one final effort to prove my suspicions false.
"You have given me the description of a person of some pretensions to gentility," I remarked, "yet from the first you have forborne to speak of her as a lady."

"An involuntary expression of my distrust and dislike I suppose. Then her dress was very plain, and the veil she wore quite common."

I thought of the dress and veil which my self-designated "sister" had worn in the visit she paid to my rooms and wondered if they would not answer to the description of these.

"What was the color of her veil?" I inquired.
"Dark blue."

That was the color of the one which had been worn by my mysterious visitor, as I had found from subsequent questions put to my neighbor, and I could no longer have the least uncertainty as to who the woman was who had carried off Mr. Pollard's grandchild. Sick at heart and fearing I scarcely knew what, I asked for the letter which had been left for Miss Merriam, and receiving it from the hand of this amiable woman in whom I appeared to have inspired as much confidence as her former visitor had alarm, I tore it open, and in my capacity of guardian read what it contained. Here it is:

MY DEAR MISS MERRIAM:
The gentleman, in the hope of whose protection you came to this country, is dead. I am his son and naturally feel it incumbent upon me to look after your interests. I am therefore, coming shortly to see you; but till I do so, remember that you are not to receive any one who may call, no matter what their name, sex, or apparent business. If you disobey me in this regard you may do yourself a permanent injury. Wait till my card is brought you, and then judge for yourself whether I am a person in whom you can trust. Hoping to find you in good health, and as happy as your bereaved condition will admit of, I remain sincerely yours,

Dwight Gaylord Pollard.

"Ah, he wrote a day too late!" I involuntarily exclaimed; then perceiving the look of curiosity which this unguarded expression had awakened on the face of my companion, folded the letter up and put it quietly in my pocket. "It is an unhappy piece of business," I now observed, "but I shall hope to find Miss Merriam very soon, and place her where she will be both safe and happy."

And feeling that I ought to know something of the appearance and disposition of one I so fully intended to befriend, I inquired whether she was a pretty girl.

The reply I received was almost enthusiastic.
"I do not know as you would call her pretty, sir, she is so pale and fragile; but if her features are not regular nor her color good, she has something unusually attractive in her face, and I have heard more than one gentleman here say, 'Miss Merriam is lovely.'"

"And her manners?"
"Very modest, sir, and timid. She seems to have a secret sorrow, for I have often seen her eyes fill when she thought no one was looking at her."

"Do you know her history or connections?"
"No, sir."
"Then she never talked to you about herself?"
"No, sir; though so young, she was strangely like a woman in many things. An uncommonly sweet child, sir, an uncommonly sweet child."

I felt the sting of a great reproach in my heart, and, anxious to hide the depth of my emotion, rose to leave. But the good woman, detaining me, Inquired what she should do with Miss Merriam's trunk.

"What," I exclaimed, "is that still here?" "Yes, sir; she took, as I noticed, a bag of some size with her, but she left her trunk. In the flurry of their departure I forgot to speak about it. I have expected an expressman after it every day, but none has come. That is another reason why I have felt anxious."

"I do not wonder," I exclaimed. "Sometimes," she observed, "I have thought it was my duty to speak to the police about the matter; it would be such a dreadful thing if any harm had come to her."

"I will speak to the police if necessary," said I. And determined as I had never been before in my life, I left the house and proceeded directly to the depot, where I took the first train for S----.

XXIV.
CONFRONTED.
Stop up the access and passage to remorse; That no compunctious visitings of nature Shake my fell purpose, nor keep peace between The effect and it! --MACBETH.

Being in the confessional, I have not forborne to tell the worst of myself; I will not, therefore, hesitate to tell the best. When on that very afternoon I entered Mrs. Pollard's grounds, it was with a resolve to make her speak out, that had no element of weakness in it. Not her severest frown, nor that diabolical look from Guy's eye, which had hitherto made me quail, should serve to turn me aside from my purpose, or thwart those interests of right and justice which I felt were so deeply at stake. If my own attempt, backed by the disclosures which had come to me through the prayer-book I had received from Mr. Pollard, should fail, then the law should take hold of the matter and wrench the truth from this seemingly respectable family, even at the risk of my own happiness and the consideration which I had always enjoyed in this town.

The house, when I approached it, struck me with an odd sense of change. I did not stop at the time to inquire why this was, but I have since concluded, in thinking over the subject, that the parlor curtains must have been drawn up, something which I do not remember ever having seen there before or since. The front door also was ajar, and when I rang the bell it was so speedily answered that I had hardly time to summon up the expression of determination which I felt would alone gain me admittance to the house. But my presence instead of seeming unwelcome, seemed to be almost expected by the servant who opened to me. He bowed, smiled, and that, too, in almost a holiday fashion; and when I would have asked for Mrs. Pollard, interrupted me by a request to lay off my overcoat in a side room, which he courteously pointed out to me.

There was something in this and in the whole aspect of the place which astonished me greatly. If this sombre dwelling with its rich but dimly dark halls and mysterious recesses could be said to ever wear an air of cheer, the attempt certainly had been made to effect this to-day. From the hand of the bronze figure that capped the newel-post hung wreaths of smilax and a basket full of the most exquisite flowers; while from a half-open door at my right came a streak of positive light, and the sound of several voices animated with some sentiment that was strangely out of accord with the solemn scene to which this very room had so lately been a witness. Can they be having a reception? I asked myself; and almost ashamed of the supposition, ever in the house of one so little respected, I, nevertheless, turned to the civil servant before me and remarked:

"There is something going on here of which I was ignorant. Is Mrs. Pollard entertaining guests to-day?"

"Did you not know, sir?" he inquired. "I thought you had been invited, perhaps; Miss Pollard is going to be married this afternoon."

Miss Pollard going to be married! Could anything have been worse? Shocked, I drew back; Miss Pollard was a beautiful girl and totally innocent, in as far as I knew, of any of the wrong which had certainly been perpetrated by some members of her family. It would never do to mortify her or to mar the pleasure of her wedding-day by any such scene as my errand probably involved. She must be saved sorrow even if her mother--But at that instant the vague but pathetic form of another young girl flitted in imagination before my eyes, and I asked myself if I had not already done enough injury to the helpless and the weak, without putting off for another hour even that attempt at rescue, which the possibly perilous position of Mr. Pollard's grandchild so imperatively demanded. As I thought this and remembered that the gentleman to whom Miss Pollard was engaged was an Englishman of lordly connections and great wealth, I felt my spirit harden and my purpose take definite form. Turning, therefore to the servant before me I inquired if Mrs. Pollard was above or below; and learning that she had not yet come down-stairs, I tore a leaf out of my note-book and wrote on it the following lines:

I know your daughter is on the point of descending to her marriage. I know also that you do not want to see me. But the interests of Miss Merriam demand that you should do so, and that immediately. If you do not come, I shall instantly enter the parlor and tell a story to the assembled guests which will somewhat shake your equanimity when you come to appear before them. My moral courage is not to be judged by my physical, madam, and I shall surely do this thing.

David Barrows

The servant, who still lingered before me, took this note.

"Give it to Mrs. Pollard," I requested. "Tell her it is upon a matter of pressing importance, but do not mention my name, if you please; she will find it in the note." And seeing by the man's face that my wishes would be complied with, I took up my stand in a certain half-curtained recess and waited with loudly beating heart for the issue.

She came. I saw her when she first put foot on the stairs, and notwithstanding my strong antipathy, I could not repress a certain feeling of admiration from mixing with the dread the least sight of her always occasioned me. Her form, which was of the finest, was clad in heavy black velvet, without a vestige of ornament to mar its sombre richness, and her hair, now verging towards gray, was piled up in masses on the top of her haughty head, adding inches to a height that in itself was almost queenly. But her face! and her cruel eye and the smile of her terrible lip. I
grew cold as I saw her approach, but I did not move from my place or meditate the least change in the plan I had laid for her subjection.

She stopped just two feet from where I stood, and without the least bend of her head or any gesture of greeting, looked at me. I bore it with quietude, and even answered glance with glance, until I saw her turn pale with the first hint of dismay which she had possibly ever betrayed; then I bowed and waited for her to speak. She did so with a hiss like a serpent.

"What does this mean?" she cried. "What do you hope to gain from me, that you presume to write me such a letter on an occasion like this?"

"Madam," I rejoined, "you are in haste, and so am I; so, without expressing any opinion of the actions which have driven me to this step, I will merely say that I want but one thing of you, but that I want immediately, without hesitation and without delay. I allude to Miss Merriam's address, which you have, and which you must give me on the spot."

She shrank. This cold, confident, imperious woman shrank, and this expression of emotion, while it showed she was not entirely without sensation, awoke within me a strange fear, since how dark must be her secret, if she could tremble at the thought of its discovery. She must have seen that I was affected, for her confidence immediately returned.

"I do not know,--" she began to say.

But I mercilessly interrupted her.

"But _I_ know," said I, with an emphasis on the pronoun, "and know so much that I am sure the company within would be glad to hear what I could tell them. Mr. Harrington, for instance, who I hear is of a very honorable family in England, would be pleased to learn--"

"Hush!" she whispered, seizing my wrist with a hand of steel. "If I must tell you I will, but no more words from you, do you hear, no more words."

I took out my note-book and thrust it into her hand.

"Write," I commanded; "her full address, mind you, that I may find her before the day is over."

She gave me a strange glance but took the book and pencil without a word.

"There!" she cried, hurriedly writing a line and passing the book back to me. "And now go; our time for further conversation will come later."

But I did not stir. I read aloud the line she had given me and then said:

"Madam, this address is either a true or a false one. Which, I shall soon know. For upon leaving here, I shall proceed immediately to the telegraph-office, from which I shall telegraph to the police station nearest to this address, for the information I desire. I shall receive an answer within the hour; and if I find you have deceived me I shall not hesitate to return here, and so suitably accompanied that you will not only open to me, but rectify whatever mistake you may have made. Your guests will not be gone in an hour," I ruthlessly added.

Her face, which had been pale, turned ghastly. Glancing up at a clock which stood a few feet from the recess in which we stood, she gave an involuntary shudder and looked about for Guy.

"Your son, fertile as he is in resources, cannot help you," I remarked. "There is no pit of darkness here; besides I have learned a lesson, madam; and not death itself would deter me now from doing my duty by this innocent child. So if you wish to change this address--"

I stopped; a strain of music had risen from the parlor. It was Mendelssohn's Wedding March. Mrs. Pollard started, cast a hurried look above and tore the note-book out of my hands.

"You are a fiend," she hissed, and hurriedly scratching out the words she had written, she wrote another number and name. "You will find she is there," she cried, "and since I have complied with your desire, you will have no need to return here till you bring the young girl _home_."

The emphasis she placed on the last word startled me. I looked at her and wondered if Medea wore such a countenance when she stabbed her children to the heart. But it flashed and was gone, and the next moment she had moved away from my side and I had stepped to the door. As I opened it to pass out I caught one glimpse of the bride as she came down the stairs. She looked exquisite in her simple white dress, and her face was wreathed in smiles.

XXV.

THE FINAL BLOW.

It was a deadly blow! A blow like that Which swooping unawares from out the night, Dashes a man from some high starlit peak Into a void of cold and hurrying waves.

The distrust which I felt for Mrs. Pollard was so great that I was still uncertain as to whether she had given me the right address. I therefore proceeded to carry out my original design and went at once to the telegraph-office. The message I sent was peremptory and in the course of half an hour this answer was returned.

Person described, found. Condition critical. Come at once.
There was a train that left in fifteen minutes. Though I had just come from Boston, I did not hesitate to return at once. By six o'clock of that day I stood before the house to which I had been directed. My first sight of it struck me like death. God, what was I about to encounter! What sort of a spot was this, and what was the doom that had befallen the child committed to my care. Numb with horror, I rang the door-bell with difficulty, and when I was admitted by a man in the guise of an officer, I felt something like an instantaneous relief, though I saw by his countenance that he had any thing but good news to give me.

"Are you the gentleman who telegraphed from S----?" he asked.
I bowed, not feeling able to speak.
"Relative or friend?" he went on.
"Friend," I managed to reply.
"Do you guess what has happened?" he inquired.
"I dare not," I answered, with a fearful look about me on walls that more than confirmed my suspicions.
"Miss Merriam is dead," he answered.
I drew a deep breath. It was almost a relief.
"Come in," he said, and opened the door of a room at our right. When we were seated and I had by careful observation made sure we were alone, I motioned for him to go on. He immediately complied. "When we received your telegram, we sent a man here at once. He had some difficulty in entering and still more in finding the young lady, who was hidden in the most remote part of the house. But by perseverance and some force he at last obtained entrance to her room where he found--pardon my abruptness, it will be a mercy to you for me to cut the story short--that he had been ordered here too late; the young lady had taken poison and was on the point of death."

The horror in my face reflected itself faintly in his.
"I do not know how she came to this house," he proceeded; "but she must have been a person of great purity and courage; for though she died almost immediately upon his entrance, she had time to say that she had preferred death to the fate that threatened her, and that no one would mourn her for she had no friends in this country, and her father would never hear how she died."
I sprang wildly to my feet.
"Did she mention no names?" I asked.
"Did she not say who brought her to this hell of hells, or murmur even with her dying breath, one word that would guide us in fixing this crime upon the head of her who is guilty of it?"
"No," answered the officer, "no; but you are right in thinking it was a woman, but what woman, the creature below evidently does not know."

Feeling that the situation demanded thought, I composed myself to the best of my ability.
"I am the Rev. David Barrows of S----," said I, "and my interest in this young girl is purely that of a humanitarian. I have never seen her. I do not even know how long she has been in this country. But I learned that a girl by the name of Grace Merriam had been beguiled from her boarding-place here in this city, and fearing that some terrible evil had befallen her, I telegraphed to the police to look her up."

The officer bowed.
"The number of her boarding-place?" asked he.
I told him, and not waiting for any further questions, demanded if I might not see the body of the young girl.
He led me at once to the room in which it lay, and stood respectfully at the door while I went in alone. The sight I saw has never left me. Go where I will, I see ever before me that pure young face, with its weary look hushed in the repose of death. It haunts me, it accuses me. It asks me where is the noble womanhood that might have blossomed from this sweet bud, had it not been for my pusillanimity and love of life? But when I try to answer, I am stopped by that image of death, with its sealed lips and closed eyes never to open again--never, never, whatever my longing, my anguish, or my despair.

But the worst shock was to come yet. As I left the room and went stumbling down the stairs, I was met by the officer and led again into the apartment I had first entered on the ground floor.
"There is some one here," he began, "whom you may like to question."
Thinking it to be the woman of the house, I advanced, though somewhat reluctantly, when a sight met my eyes that made me fall back in astonishment and dread. It was the figure of a woman dressed all in gray, with a dark-blue veil drawn tightly over her features.
"Good God!" I murmured, "who is this?"
"The woman who brought her here," observed the officer. "Farrell, there, has just found her."

And then I perceived darkly looming in the now heavy dusk the form of another man, whose unconscious and business-like air proclaimed him to be a member of the force.
"Her name is Sophie Preston," the officer continued, motioning to the woman to throw up her veil. "She is a hard
character, and some day will have to answer for her many crimes."

Meanwhile, I stood rooted to the ground; the name, the face were strange, and neither that of her whom I had inwardly accused of this wrong.

"I should like to ask the woman--" I commenced, but here my eyes fell upon her form. It was tall and it was full, but it was not by any means handsome. A fearful possibility crossed my mind. Approaching the woman closely, I modified my question.

"Are you the person who took this young lady from her boarding place?" I asked.

"Yes, sir," was the reply, uttered in smooth but by no means cultivated tones.

"And by what arts did you prevail upon this young and confiding creature to leave her comfortable home and go out into the streets with you?"

She did not speak, she smiled. O heaven! what depths of depravity opened before me in that smile!

"Answer!" the officer cried.

"Well, sir, I told her," she now replied, "that I was such and such a relative, grandmother, I think I said; and being a dutiful child--"

But I was now up close to her side, and, leaning to her very ear I interrupted her.

"Tell me on which side of the hall was the parlor into which you went."

"The right," she answered, without the least show of hesitation.

"Wrong," I returned; "you have never been there."

She looked frightened.

"O, sir," she whispered, "hush! hush! If you know--" And there she stopped; and instantly cried aloud, in a voice that warned me I should make nothing by pressing my suspicions at this time and in this place, "I lured the young lady from her home and I brought her here. If it is a criminal act I shall have to answer for it. We all run such risks now and then."

To me, with my superior knowledge of all the mysteries which lay behind this pitiful tragedy, her meaning was evident. Whether she had received payment sufficient for the punishment possibly awaiting her, or whether she had been frightened into assuming the responsibility of another, she was evidently resolved to sustain her role of abductress to the end.

The look she gave me at the completion of her words intensified this conviction, and not feeling sufficiently sure of my duty to dispute her at the present time and in this place, I professed myself satisfied with the result, and hastily withdrew.

XXVI.

A FELINE TOUCH.

Thou hast not half the power to do me harm, as I have to be hurt. --OTHELLO.

The tumult in my mind and heart were great, but my task was not yet completed, and till it was I could neither stop to analyze my emotions nor measure the depths of darkness into which I had been plunged by an occurrence as threatening to my peace as it was pitiful to my heart. Mrs. Pollard was to be again, interviewed, and to that formidable duty every thing bowed, even my need of rest and the demand which my whole body made for refreshment.

It was eight o'clock when I stood for the second time that day at her door; and, contrary to my expectations, I found as little difficulty in entering as I had before. Indeed, the servant was even more affable and obliging than he had been in the afternoon, and persisted in showing me into a small room off the parlor, now empty of guests, and going at once for Mrs. Pollard.

"She will see you, sir, I am sure," was his last remark as he went out of the door, "for, though she is so very tired, she told me if you called to ask you to wait."

I looked around on the somewhat desolate scene that presented itself, and doubtfully shook my head. This seeming submission on the part of a woman so indomitable as she, meant something. Either she was thoroughly frightened or else she meditated some treachery. In either case I needed all my self-command. Happily, the scene I had just quitted was yet vividly impressed upon my mind, and while it remained so, I felt as strong and unassailable as I had once felt weak and at the mercy of my fears.

I did not have to wait long. Almost immediately upon the servant's call, Mrs. Pollard entered the room and stood before me. Her first glance told me all. She was frightened.

"Well?" she said, in a hard whisper, and with a covert look around as if she feared the very walls might hear us.

"You have found the girl and you have come to ask for money. It is a reasonable request, and if you do not ask too
much you shall have it. I think it will heal all wounds."

My indignation flared up through all my horror and dismay.

"Money?" I cried, "money? what good will money do the dead; you have killed her, madam."

"Killed her?" No wonder she grew pale, no wonder she half gasped. "Killed her?" she repeated.

"Yes," I returned, not giving her time to think, much less speak. "Lured by you to a den of evil, she chose to die rather than live on in disgrace. The woman who lent you her clothes has been found, and--I see I have reached you at last," I broke in. "I thought God's justice would work."

"I--I--" She had to moisten her lips before she could speak. "I don't understand what you mean. You say I lured her, that is a lie. I never took her to this den of evil as you call it."

"But you knew the street and number of the house, and you gave her into the hand of the woman who did take her there."

"I knew the number of the house but I did not know it was a den of evil. I thought it was a respectable place, cheaper than the one she was in. I am sorry--"

"Madam," I interrupted, "you will find it difficult to make the world believe _you_ so destitute of good sense as not to know the character of the house to which such a woman as you entrusted her with would be likely to lead her. Besides, how will you account for the fact that, you wore a dress precisely like that of this creature when you enticed Miss Merriam away from her home. Is there any jury who will believe it to be a coincidence, especially when they learn that you kept your veil down in the presence of every one there?"

"But what proof have you that it was I who went for Miss Merriam? The word of this woman whom you yourself call a _creature? _"

"The word of the landlady, who described Miss Merriam's visitor as tall and of a handsome figure, and my own eyesight, which assured me that the woman who came with her to her place of death was not especially tall nor of a handsome figure. Besides, I talked to the latter, and found she could tell me nothing of the interior of the house where Miss Merriam boarded. She did not even know if the parlors were on the right or the left side of the hall."

"Indeed!" came in Mrs. Pollard's harshest and most cutting tones. But the attempted sarcasm failed. She was shaken to the core, and there was no use in her trying to hide it. I did not, therefore, seek to break the silence which followed the utterance of this bitter exclamation; for the sooner she understood the seriousness of her position the sooner I should see what my own duty was. Suddenly she spoke, but not in her former tones. The wily woman had sounded the depths of the gulf upon the brink of which she had inadvertently stumbled, and her voice, which had been harsh? and biting, now took on all the softness which hypocrisy could give it.

But her words were sarcastic as ever.

"I asked you a moment ago," said she, "what money you wanted. I do not ask that now, as the girl is dead and a clergyman is not supposed to take much interest in filthy lucre. But you want something, or you would not be here. Is it revenge? It is a sentiment worthy of your cloth, and I can easily understand the desire you may have to indulge in it."

"Madam," I cried, "can you think of no other motive than a desire for vengeance or gain? Have you never heard of such a thing as justice?"

"And do you intend--" she whispered.

"There will be an inquest held," I continued. "I shall be called as a witness, and so doubtless will you. Are you prepared to answer all and every question that will be put you?"

"An inquest?" Her face was quite ghastly now. "And have you taken pains to publish abroad my connection with this girl?"

"Not yet."

"She is known, however, to be a grandchild of Mr. Pollard?"

"No," said I.

"What is known?" she inquired.

"That she was Mr. Pollard's protege."

"And you, you alone, hold the key to her real history?"

"Yes," I assented, "I."

She advanced upon me with all the venom of her evil nature sparkling in her eye. I met the glance unmoved. For a reason I will hereafter divulge, I no longer felt any fear of what either she or hers might do.

"I alone know her history and what she owes to you," I repeated. She instantly fell back. Whether she understood me or not, she saw that her hold upon me was gone, that the cowardice she had been witness to was dead, and that she, not I, must plead for mercy.

"Mr. Barrows," said she; "what is this girl to you that you should sacrifice the living to her memory?"

"Mrs. Pollard," I returned with equal intensity, "shall I tell you? She is the victim of my pusillanimity. That is
what she is to me, and that is what makes her memory more to me than the peace or good name of her seemingly respectable murderers."

Was it the word I used or did some notion of the effect which a true remorse can have upon a conscientious soul, pierce her cold heart at last? I cannot tell; I only know that she crouched for an instant as if a blow had fallen upon her haughty head, then rising erect again—she was a proud woman still and would be to her death, whatever her fate or fortune—she gave me an indescribable look, and in smothered tones remarked:

"Your sympathies are with the innocent. That is well; now come with me, I have another innocence to show you, and after you have seen it tell me whether innocence living or innocence dead has the most claim upon your pity and regard." And before I realized what she was doing, she had led me across the room to a window, from which she hastily pulled aside the curtain that hung across it.

The sight that met my eyes was like a dream of fairyland let into the gloom and terror of a nightmare. The window overlooked the conservatory, and the latter being lighted, a vision of tropical verdure and burning blossoms flashed before us. But it was not upon this wealth of light and color that the gaze rested in the fullest astonishment and delight. It was upon two figures seated in the midst of these palm-trees and cacti, whose faces, turned the one towards the other, made a picture of love and joy that the coldest heart must feel, and the most stolid view with delight. It was the bridegroom and his bride, Mr. Harrington and the beautiful Agnes Pollard.

I felt the hand that lay upon my arm tremble.

"Have you the heart to dash such happiness as that?" murmured a voice in my ear.

Was it Mrs. Pollard speaking? I had never heard such a tone as that from her before. Turning, I looked at her. Her face was as changed as her voice; there was not only softness in it but appeal. It was no longer Mrs. Pollard who stood beside me, but _the mother_.

"_She_ has never made a mistake," continued this terrible being, all the more terrible to me now that I saw capabilities of feeling in her. "She is young and has her whole life before her. If you pursue the claims of justice as you call them, her future will be wrecked. It is no fool she has married but a proud man, the proudest of his race. If he had known she had for a brother one whom his own country had sentenced to perpetual imprisonment, he would not have married her had his love been ten times what it is. It was because her family was honored and could bestow a small fortune upon her in dowry that he braved his English prejudices at all. What then do you think would be the result if he knew that not only was her brother a convict, but her mother——" She did not finish, but broke in upon herself with a violence that partook of frenzy. "He would first ignore her, then hate her. I know these Englishmen well."

It was true. The happiness or misery of this young creature hung upon my decision. A glance at her husband's face made this evident. He would love her while he could be proud of her; he would hate her the moment her presence suggested shame or opprobrium.

My wily antagonist evidently saw I was impressed, for her face grew still softer and her tone more insinuating.

"She was her father's darling," she whispered. "He could never bear to see a frown upon her face or a tear in her eye. Could he know now what threatened her do you think he would wish you to drag disgrace upon her head for the sake of justice to a being who is dead?"

I did not reply. The truth was I felt staggered.

"See what an exquisite creature she is," the mother now murmured in my ear. "Look at her well--she can bear it--and tell me where in the world you will find beauty more entrancing or a nature lovelier and more enticing?"

"Madam," said I, turning upon her with a severity the moment seemed to deserve, "In a den of contamination, amid surroundings such as it will not upon this world you will find beauty more entrancing or a nature lovelier and more enticing?"

"Madam," said I, turning upon her with a severity the moment seemed to deserve, "In a den of contamination, amid surroundings such as it will not do for me to mention even before her who could make use of them to destroy the innocence that trusted in her, there lies the dead body of one as pure, as lovely, and as attractive as this; indeed her beauty is more winning for it has not the stamp of worldliness upon it."

The mother before me grew livid. Her brows contracted and she advanced upon me with a menacing gesture almost as if she would strike me. In all my experience of the world and of her I had never seen such rage; it was all but appalling. Involuntarily I raised my hand, in defence.

But she had already remembered her position and by a violent change now stood before me calm and collected as of old.

"You have been injured by me and have acquired the right to insult me," cried she. Then as I made no move, said: "It is not of the dead we were speaking. It was of her, Samuel Pollard's _child_. Do you intend to ruin her happiness or do you not? Speak, for it is a question I naturally desire to have settled."

"Madam," I now returned, edging away from that window with its seductive picture of youthful joy, "before I can settle it I must know certain facts. Not till I understand how you succeeded in enticing her from her home, and by what means you transferred her into the care of the vile woman who took your place, will I undertake to consider the possibility of withholding the denunciation which it is in my power to make."
"And you expect me to tell--" she began.
"Every thing," I finished, firmly.
She smiled with a drawing in of her lips that was feline. Then she glared; then she looked about her and approached nearer to me by another step.
"I wish I could kill you," her look said. "I wish by the lifting of my finger you would fall dead." But her lips made use of no such language. She was caught in the toils, and lioness as she was, found herself forced to obey the will that ensnared her.
"You want facts; well, you shall have them. You want to know how I managed to induce Miss Merriam to leave the house where my husband had put her. It is a simple question. Was I not her grandfather's wife, and could I not be supposed to know what his desires were concerning her?"
"And the second fact?"
She looked at me darkly.
"You are very curious," said she.
"I am," said I.
Her baleful smile repeated itself.
"You think that by these confessions I will place myself in a position which will make it impossible for me, to press my request. You do not understand me, sir. Had I committed ten times the evil I have done, that would not justify you in wantonly destroying the happiness of the innocent."
"I wish to know the facts," I said.
"She went with me to a respectable eating house," Mrs. Pollard at once explained. "Leave her to eat her lunch, I went to a place near by, where the woman you saw, met me by appointment, and putting on the clothes I had worn, went back for the girl in my stead. As I had taken pains not to raise my veil except just at the moment when I wanted to convince her I was her natural guardian, the woman had only to hold her tongue to make the deception successful. That she did this is evident from the result. Is there any thing more you would like to know?"
"Yes," I replied, inwardly quaking before this revelation of an inconceivable wickedness, yet steadily resolved to probe it to the very depths. "What did you hope to gain by this deliberate plan of destruction? The girl's death, or simply her degradation?"
"I hoped to lose her; to blot her out of my path--and hers," she more gently added, pointing with a finger that trembled with more than one fierce emotion, at the daughter for whom she had sacrificed so much. "I did not think the girl would die; I am no murderess whatever intimation you may make to that effect. I am simply a mother."
A mother! O horrible! I looked at her and recoiled. That such a one as this should have the right to lay claim to so holy a title and asperse it thus!
She viewed my emotion but made no sign of understanding it. Her words poured forth like a stream of burning liquid.
"Do you realize what this girl's living meant? It meant recognition, and consequently disgrace and a division of our property, the loss of my daughter's dowry, and of all the hopes she had built on it. Was I, who had given to Samuel Pollard the very money by means of which he had made his wealth, to stand this? Not if a hundred daughters of convicts must perish."
"And your sons?"
"What of them?"
"Had they no claim upon your consideration. When you plunged them into this abyss of greed and deceit did no phantom of their lost manhood rise and confront you with an unanswerable reproach?"
But she remained unmoved.
"My sons are men; they can take care of themselves."
"But Dwight--"
Her self-possession vanished.
"Hush!" she whispered with a quick look around her. "Do not mention him. I have sent him away an hour ago but he may have come back. I do not trust him."
This last clause she uttered beneath her breath and with a spasmodic clutch of her hand which showed she spoke involuntarily. I was moved at this. I began to hope that Dwight at least, was not all that his mother would have him.
"And yet I must speak of him," said I, taking out the letter he had written to Miss Merriam. "This letter addressed to one you have so successfully destroyed seems to show that he returns your mistrust."
She almost tore it out of my hands.
"When was this letter received?" she asked, reading it with burning eyes and writhing lips.
"The day after Miss Grace left her home."
"Then she never saw it?"
"No."
"Who has seen it?"
"Myself and you."
"No one else?"
"No one but the writer."
She laughed.
"We will destroy it," she said; and deliberately tore it up.
I stooped and picked up the fragments.
"You forget," said I, "this letter may be called for by the coroner. It is known that I took it in charge."
"I might better have burnt it," she hissed.
"Not so, I should then have had to explain its loss."
Her old fear came back into her eyes.
"Now I have merely to give it up and leave it to Mr. Dwight Pollard to explain. He doubtless can."
"My son will never betray his mother."
"Yet he could write this letter."
She frowned.
"Dwight has his weakness," said she.
"It is a pity his weakness did not lead him to send this letter a few hours sooner."
"That is where his very weakness fails. He struggles because he knows his mother partly, and fails because he does not know her wholly."
"And Guy?"
"He knows me better."

The smile with which this was said was the culminating point in a display of depravity such as I had never beheld, even in hovels of acknowledged vice. Feeling that I could not endure much more, I hastened to finish the interview.

"Madam," said I, "by your own acknowledgment you deserve neither consideration nor mercy. What leniency I then show will be for your daughter alone, who, in so far as I can see, is innocent and undeserving of the great retribution which I could so easily bring upon this family. But do not think because I promise to suppress your name from the account I may be called upon to give the coroner, that your sin will be forgotten by Heaven, or this young girl's death go unavenged. As sure as you are the vilest woman I ever met, will suffering and despair overtake you. I do not know when, and I do not know by what means, but it will be bitter when it comes, and the hand of man will not be able to save you."
But it was as if I had not spoken. All she seemed to hear, all, at least, that she paid the least attention to, was the promise I had made.
"You are decided, then, upon secrecy?" she asked.
"I am decided upon saying nothing that will bring your name into public notice."
Her proud manner immediately returned. You would have thought she had never suffered a humiliation.
"But how will you account for your interest in this young person?"
"By telling a portion of the truth. I shall say that my attention was called to her by a letter from Mr. Pollard requesting me to hunt her up and take care of her after he was dead. I shall not say he called her his grandchild unless I am positively forced to do so, nor will I mention the treatment I have received at your hands."
"And the woman you saw?"
"Is your business. I have nothing to do with her."
The shadow which till this moment rested upon her haughty brow, cleared away. With a quick gesture, from which she could not entirely exclude a betrayal of triumph, she dropped the curtain across that charming picture of bridal felicity by which she had won so much, and turning upon me with all the condescension of a conqueror, she exclaimed:
"I once did you an injustice, Mr. Barrows, and called you a name that was but little complimentary to your cloth. Allow me to make such amends as I can and call you what you most surely are--the most generous and least vindictive of men."
This was intolerable. I made haste to leave the room.
"Mrs. Pollard," said I, "no amenities can take place between us. From this hour on we are strangers, till the time conies when we shall appear before the judgment-seat of God. In that day, neither you nor I can hold back one iota of the truth. Think of this, and repent your part in this awful tragedy of sin, if you can."
And I turned away toward the door.
But just as I was about to open it, it swung slowly aside, and in the frame-work made by the lintels, I saw Guy Pollard standing with a quiet look of inquiry on his face.

"Mother," said he, in the calmest and most courteous of tones, "shall I let this gentleman pass?"

The reply came in accents equally calm and courteous:

"Certainly, my son."

And Guy Pollard made me a deep bow, and drew softly aside from my path.

I had been within an inch of my death, but it scarcely ruffled me.

XXVII.

REPARATION.

If hearts are weak, souls should at least be strong. I will be brief, for my short date of breath Is not so long as is a tedious tale. --ROMEO AND JULIET.

Let me hasten to the end.

When I told Mrs. Pollard that I would suppress that portion of the truth which connected her name with this fatal affair, I did not of course mean that I would resort to any falsehood or even prevarication. I merely relied upon the improbability of my being questioned close enough to necessitate my being obliged to reveal the astounding facts which made this matter a destructive one for the Pollards. And I was right in my calculations. Neither socially, nor at the formal inquiry before the coroner, was any question raised of relationship between the dead girl and the family in S----; and this fact, taken with the discreet explanations accorded by Dwight Pollard of his father's, and afterwards of his own interest in her, as shown in the letter which he had sent to her address, is the reason why this affair passed without scandal to the parties concerned.

But not without results for deep down in the heart of one person an influence was at work, destined ere long to eventuate in the tragedy to which these lines are the clue. Remorse deep as my nature and immovable as my sin, has gotten hold upon me, and nothing short of death, and death in the very shape from which I fled in such a cowardly manner, will ever satisfy my soul or allay that burning sense of shame and regret which makes me fear the eye of man and quake at the thought of eternal justice.

For in a final interview with Dwight Pollard I have become convinced that, however unprincipled his brother might be, it was with no intention of carrying out his threats that he plunged me into the vat on that fatal night; that, recognizing the weakness in me, he had resorted to intimidation to ensure his ends; and that all the consequences which followed might have been averted, if I had but remained true to my trust.

Being a Christian minister, and bound by my creed and faith to resist the devil and face the wrath of men, my dereliction in this regard acquires an importance not to be measured by the ordinary standard of law or social usage. For, when I failed to support my principles under trial, Christian faith was betrayed and the avowed power of God put to mockery and shame. I go, therefore, to the death I then shunned, deliberately, conscientiously, determinedly. For the sake of God, for the sake of honor, for the sake of those higher principles which it should be the glory of men to sustain at all risk and in every furnace of affliction, I lay down youth, love, and life, confident that if in so doing I rob one sweet soul of its happiness, I sow anew in other hearts the seed of that stern belief in God and the requirements of our faith which my cowardly act must have gone so far to destroy.

May God accept the sacrifice in the spirit in which I perform it, and in His gracious mercy make light, not the horrors of the pit into which I am about to descend, but the heart of him who must endure them. Whether long or short, they will be such as He sends me, and the end must be peace.

XXVIII.

TWO OR ONE.

How all the other passions fleet to air, As doubtful thoughts and rash embrac'd despair, And shuddering fear, and green-ey'd jealousy. O love, be moderate; allay thy ecstasy. --MER. OF VENICE.

I had finished it; the last line had been read, and I sat in a maze of astonishment and awe. What my thoughts were, what my judgment upon this astounding act of self-destruction for conscience sake, it will not interest you to know. In a matter so complicated with questions of right and wrong, each man must feel for himself, and out of his own nature adjudge praise, or express censure; I, Constance Sterling, shall do neither; I can only wonder and be still.

One point, however, in this lengthy confession I will allude to, as it involves a fact. Mr. Barrows says that he goes to his death, the same death from which he fled when he yielded to the threats of Guy Pollard and gave up the will. He expected, therefore, to find the vat dry, and looked forward to hours, if not days, of long-drawn suffering in a spot devoid of warmth, light, water, and food. His injunction to Ada in that last letter of his--not to make any move to find him for ten days--favors this idea, and proves what his expectations were.

But, by the mercy of God, the vat had been half filled with water in the interim which had elapsed between his first and last visit to the mill, and the prison thus becoming a cistern, he must have come to his end in a few moments after his fatal plunge. It was the one relief which a contemplation of this tragedy brought to my
overwrought mind.

But with the next day came a reaction; and with a heart full of rejoicing, I prepared to communicate to Dwight Pollard the fact of his release from the dominion of Rhoda Colwell. For whether this record of the past showed him to be a man worthy of full honor or not, it certainly sufficed to exonerate him from all suspicion of being the direct cause of David Barrow's death, and I knew her well enough, or thought I did, to feel certain that no revenge, unless the greatest, would ever satisfy her, and that in losing her hold upon his life and love, she would make no attempt that would merely darken his name before the world. It was therefore with a fearless heart I penned the following lines.

MISS COLWELL:

Your suspicions were unfounded. I have Mr. Barrows' own words to the effect that he meditated death by imprisonment in the vat. I go to acquaint Dwight Pollard with the fact that any accusation on your part must fail before the minute and circumstantial confession which Mr. Barrows has left behind him.

Signing this letter, I despatched it at once to its destination; then taking the important manuscript in my hand, I set out for the Pollard mansion.

It was a day full of sunshine and promise. As I sped through the streets and approached that end of the town which hitherto it had taken all my courage to face, I was astonished at the lightness of my own heart and the beneficent aspect which every object about me seemed to have acquired. Even the place I had come to visit looked less dreary than usual, and I found myself in the grounds and half way up the stoop, before I realized the least falling of that shadow which seemed inseparable from this particular spot. And even now it only came with the thought of Guy, whose possible presence at the door would be any thing but desirable. But my errand being one of peace I was enabled to contemplate even this contingency with equanimity, and was about to ring the bell with a trembling but determined hand, when the door suddenly opened and Dwight Pollard stood before me.

The look of surprise and delight which he gave me brought the color to my cheeks.

"Ah, what a pleasure!" he murmured. Then with a quick look in my face, added earnestly, "You bring good news."

"The best," I answered cheerily, and following him in, I took my stand once more in that dismal parlor where weeks ago I had received my first intimation of the feeling which his every look and gesture now conveyed.

"Mr. Pollard," I now managed to say with a certain dignity, "you see me here because Providence has lately put into my hands a document which completely exonerates you from the charges which Rhoda Colwell has threatened to make against you. Read it, and when you understand the tragedy we so much deplore, we will see how much or how little can be done with the lives it has so deeply affected." And placing the thickly written sheets in his hands I withdrew to the first window I saw and mechanically threw aside the curtains that hid it.

The sight that met my gaze made me for an instant forget the importance of what I had just done. The window I had chosen was the one which looked into the conservatory, and the picture which Mr. Barrows describes as having seen from this spot was then and there before my eyes. The tropical growth, the gorgeous blossoms, even the beautiful woman and the sturdy man. Mr. and Mrs. Harrington were lovers, then, still. The mother's death and that of the devoted clergyman had not served to reveal the secret which secured the happiness of this bright, attractive, if somewhat worldly, pair. I own I was glad of this, little as I felt myself in sympathy with the radiant but superficial Agnes. Youth, love, and joy are so precious that it lightens the heart to behold their sunshine even on the faces of those whose characters we do not envy.

Nevertheless, the thoughts suggested by this unexpected scene did not long serve to distract me from the more serious matter in hand. Dropping the curtains, I cast one look, toward Mr. Pollard. He was sitting with his face bent over the manuscript, a deep corrugation marked his brow, and a settled look of pain his mouth. I turned away again; I could not bear that look; all my strength was needed for the effort which it might possibly be my duty to make. I sat down in a remote corner and diligently set my soul to patience.

It was well, for my suspense was long, so long that hope and courage began to fail and an inward trembling to take the place of the joyous emotions with which I had placed this confession in his hands. Nevertheless, it came to an end at last, and, with an agitation easy to conceive, I heard him roll the manuscript up, rise, and approach to where I sat. I did not look up, I could not; but I felt his gaze burning through my half-closed lids, and terrified lest I should reveal my weakness and my hopes, I set my lips together, and stilled the beatings of my heart, till I must have struck his sense with the chill and immobility of a totally insensible woman. The despair which the sight caused him, showed itself in his tone when he spoke.

"You share my own opinion of myself," said he. "You consider me the destroyer of Mr. Barrows."

I looked up. What grief, what shame, what love I beheld in the face above me. Slowly I shook my head.

"Mr. Barrows does not accuse you," said I. Then, determined to be truthful to the core at all risks and at all hazards, I added earnestly, "But you were to blame; greatly to blame; I shall never hide that fact from you or from
dishonorable scheme they meditated. To take Mr. Barrows at a disadvantage, to argue with him, threaten him, and that is, they told me partly; and I, with that worse dread in my soul, was fain to be satisfied with the merely base and my steps home again, I confronted my mother and my brother and asked them what they meant to do; they told me, But I soon saw that in spite of the weakness I detected in him there was small prospect of his doing this; and turning but my mother and my brother and asked them what they meant to do; they told me, 

...makes it impossible for one to understand him or measure the depths of turpitude to which he would descend. When, matters of open enmity; but in ways of secrecy and deep dealing, he is master, and all the more to be dreaded that he...speak of him with calmness—is a man to be feared, Miss Sterling. Not that I would not be a match for him in all understand when I say that it led me to give Mr. Barrows the warning of which he has spoken. My brother—I cannot...disappointment, great as it was, had little time to exert its force on me, for with my brother's recital of what had taken place at my father's death-bed there came a new dread which I find it difficult to name but which you will...to all my mother's judgments and desires,—she was not only a powerful woman, Constance, but possessed of a strange fascination for those she loved and sought to govern—I lent myself sufficiently to her schemes to stand neutral in the struggle between my father's wishes and her determination, though that father would often turn upon me with a gaze of entreaty that went to my heart. That he had taken advantage of his last journey to Boston to have a new will drawn, and that his only desire now was for an opportunity to get this same safely transferred into the hands of his lawyer, I never suspected any more than did my mother or brother. We thought that as far as the past was concerned...or rather I admitted his position (I would be bitterly true at this hour) and wished to see the union effected. But there was a secret in our family, which if known, would make such a marriage impossible. A crime perpetrated before my birth had attached disgrace to our name and race, and Mr. Harrington is a man to fly disgrace quicker than he would death. Miss Sterling, it would be useless for me to try to make myself out better than I am. When I heard that my father, whom I am just beginning to revere but of whom in those days I had rather a careless opinion, was determined to acknowledge his convict son through the daughter which had been sent over here, I revolted. Not that I begrudged this young girl the money he wished to leave her,—though from a somewhat morbid idea of reparation which my father possessed, he desired to give her an amount that would materially affect our fortunes—but that I loved my sister, and above all loved the proud and isolated position we had obtained in society, and could not endure the results which the revelation of such a stain in, our family must produce. Not my mother, whose whole life since her marriage had been one haughty protest against this secret shame, nor Guy, with all his cynicism and pride, felt stronger on this point than I. To my warped judgment any action within the bounds of reason seemed justifiable that would prevent my dying father from bringing this disgrace upon his children; and being accustomed to defer to my mother's wishes and desires,—she was not only a powerful woman, Constance, but possessed of a strange fascination for those she loved and sought to govern—I lent myself sufficiently to her schemes to stand neutral in the struggle between my father's wishes and her determination, though that father would often turn upon me with a gaze of entreaty that went to my heart. That he had taken advantage of his last journey to Boston to have a new will drawn, and that his only desire now was for an opportunity to get this same safely transferred into the hands of his lawyer, I never suspected any more than did my mother or brother. We thought that as far as the past was concerned...to all my mother's judgments and desires,—she was not only a powerful woman, Constance, but possessed of a strange fascination for those she loved and sought to govern—I lent myself sufficiently to her schemes to stand neutral in the struggle between my father's wishes and her determination, though that father would often turn upon me with a gaze of entreaty that went to my heart. That he had taken advantage of his last journey to Boston to have a new will drawn, and that his only desire now was for an opportunity to get this same safely transferred into the hands of his lawyer, I never suspected any more than did my mother or brother. We thought that as far as the past was concerned...to all my mother's judgments and desires,—she was not only a powerful woman, Constance, but possessed of a strange fascination for those she loved and sought to govern—I lent myself sufficiently to her schemes to stand neutral in the struggle between my father's wishes and her determination, though that father would often turn upon me with a gaze of entreaty that went to my heart. That he had taken advantage of his last journey to Boston to have a new will drawn, and that his only desire now was for an opportunity to get this same safely transferred into the hands of his lawyer, I never suspected any more than did my mother or brother. We thought that as far as the past was concerned...
very vat into which my brother had forced him a month or so before. What did it mean? It was impossible for me to
whatever vague distress I felt into an active remorse and positive fear. Mr. Barrows was found dead, drowned in the
gradually becoming morbid from a continual brooding on this subject, when the great blow fell which changed
a feeling of deep separation such as is only made by some dark and secret crime. I was alone, or so I felt, and was
distrust so great that from that day to the worser ones which followed, I never looked at those nearest to me without
overwhelmed by the news of her death, and though I never knew the whole truth till now, I was conscious of a
impossible for me ever to behold her in this world, I had yet too much filial regard to imagine. I was consequently
letter I wrote to her shows, but that such evil would come upon her as did, or that my delay to see her would make it
older brother's child, but to part with the bulk of my fortune to her. That she would need my friendship I felt, as the
and my own; stilling my conscience when it spoke too loud, by an inward promise to be not only a friend to my
could only say what would ruin us without benefiting the direct object of those wishes. I therefore kept their counsel
you see, and though it would have been a man's part to have broken through every constraint and proclaimed myself
embitter my whole after existence. The return of my brother with the will caused me fresh emotions. As soon as I
little realizing that in thus allying myself with his persecutors, I had laid the foundations of a remorse that would
manhood against so unworthy an exercise of power, was that still dominating instinct of dread which any
would have felt, they were not what I would feel now. Mingled with my shame and the indignant protest of my
manhood against so unworthy an exercise of power, was that still dominating instinct of dread which any
interference with my father's plans or wishes had always inspired; and so when I learned that the worst was over
and that Mr. Barrows would be released on Guy's return, I subdued my natural desire to rescue him and went away,
little realizing that in thus allying myself with his persecutors, I had laid the foundations of a remorse that would
embitter my whole after existence. The return of my brother with the will caused me fresh emotions. As soon as I
saw him I knew there was a struggle before me; and in handing him back the lantern, I took occasion to ask if he had
opened the document. He looked at me a moment before replying and his lip took a sinister curl. 'I have,' he said.
'And what does it contain?' 'What we wish,' he answered, with a strange emphasis. I was too much astonished to
speak. I could not believe this to be true, and when, Mr. Barrows having been released, we had all returned home, I
asked to see the will and judge for myself. But Guy refused to show it. 'We are going to return it,' he said, and said
no more. Nor would my mother give me any further information. Either I had betrayed myself in the look I gave
Guy on his return to the mill, or else some underlying regard for my feelings had constrained her to spare me actual
participance in a fraud. At all events, I did not know the truth till the real will had been destroyed and the substituted
one placed in Mr. Nicholls' hands, and then it was told to me in a way to confound my sense of right and make me
think it would be better to let matters proceed to this false issue, than by a public acknowledgment of the facts, bring
down upon me and mine the very disgrace from which I had been so desirous of escaping. I was caught in the toils
you see, and though it would have been a man's part to have broken through every constraint and proclaimed myself
once and for all on the side of right, I had nothing whereby to show what the last wishes of my father had been, and
could only say what would ruin us without benefiting the direct object of those wishes. I therefore kept their counsel
and my own; stilling my conscience when it spoke too loud, by an inward promise to be not only a friend to my
older brother's child, but to part with the bulk of my fortune to her. That she would need my friendship I felt, as the
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gradually becoming morbid from a continual brooding on this subject, when the great blow fell which changed
whatever vague distress I felt into an active remorse and positive fear. Mr. Barrows was found dead, drowned in the
very vat into which my brother had forced him a month or so before. What did it mean? It was impossible for me to
guess the truth, but I could not but recognize the fact that we were more or less responsible for his death; that the frenzy which had doubtless led to this tragedy was the outcome of the strain which had been put upon his nerves, and though personally I had had nothing to do with placing him in the vat, I was certainly responsible for allowing him to remain there a moment after I knew where he was. It was, therefore, with the deepest horror and confusion that I rushed home with this news, only to find that it had outrun me, and that my mother, foreseeing the dangers which this death might bring upon us, had succumbed to the shock, and lay, as you know, in a most alarming condition herself. The perilous position into which we were thrown by these two fatal occurrences necessitated a certain confidence between my brother and myself. To watch our mother, and stifle any unguarded expressions into which she might be betrayed, to watch you, and when we saw it was too late to prevent your sharing our secret, to make our hold upon you such that you would feel it to your own advantage to keep it with us, was perhaps only pardonable in persons situated as we were. But, Constance, while with Guy the feeling that made this last task easy was one of selfish passion only, mine from the first possessed a depth and fervency which made the very thought of wooing you seem a desecration and a wrong. For already had your fine qualities produced their effect, and in the light of your high and lofty nature, my own past looked deformed and dark. And when the worst came, and Rhoda Colwell's threats put a seemingly immovable barrier between us, this love which had sprung up in a very nightmare of trouble, only seemed to take deeper and more lasting root, and I vowed that whether doomed to lifelong regret or not, I would live worthy of you, and be in misery what I could so easily be in joy, the man you could honor, if not love. That this hour would ever come I dared not dream, but now that it has, can you, will you give me so much as you have, and not give me more? I know I have no right to ask any thing from you; that the secrets of our family are a burden which any woman might well shrink from sharing, but if you do not turn from me, will you turn from them? Love is such a help to the burdened, and I love you so fondly, so reverently.”

He was on his knees; his forehead was pressed against my arm. The emotion which shook his whole body communicated itself to me. I felt that whatever his past weaknesses had been, he possessed a character capable of the noblest development, and, yielding to the longing with which my whole being was animated, I was about to lay my hand upon his head, when he lifted his face and, gazing earnestly at me, said:

“One moment; there is yet a cloud which ought to be blown away from between us--Rhoda Colwell. I loved her; I sought her love; but once gained, my eyes opened. I saw her imperfections; I felt the evil in her nature. I knew if I married her, I should ruin my life. I left her. I seemed to have no choice, for my love died with my esteem, and she was not a woman to marry without love. Could I have done differently, Constance?”

I answered as my whole heart inclined me to. I could not refuse this love coming into my desolate life. It seemed to be mine. Whatever trials, fear, or disquietude it might bring, the joy of it was great enough to make these very trials desirable, if only to prove to him and me that the links which bound us were forged from truest metal, without any base alloy to mar their purity and undermine their strength.

And so that spot of gloom, which had been the scene of so much that was dark and direful, became the witness of a happiness which seemed to lift it out of the veil of reserve in which it had been shrouded for so long, and make of the afternoon sun, which at that moment streamed in through the western windows, a signal of peace, whose brightness as yet has never suffered change or eclipse.

THE END.
"Do not by any show of curiosity endanger her recovery. I would not have her body or mind sacrificed on any account."

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BOOK I
A PROBLEM OF THE FIRST ORDER
I
"LET SOME ONE SPEAK!"

The hour of noon had just struck, and the few visitors still lingering among the curiosities of the great museum were suddenly startled by the sight of one of the attendants running down the broad, central staircase, loudly shouting:

"Close the doors! Let no one out! An accident has occurred, and nobody's to leave the building."

There was but one person near either of the doors, and as he chanced to be a man closely connected with the museum,—being, in fact, one of its most active directors,—he immediately turned about and in obedience to a gesture made by the attendant, ran up the marble steps, followed by some dozen others.

At the top they all turned, as by common consent, toward the left-hand gallery, where in the section marked II, a tableau greeted them which few of them will ever forget.

I say "tableau" because the few persons concerned in it stood as in a picture, absolutely motionless and silent as the dead. Sense, if not feeling, was benumbed in them all, as in another moment it was benumbed in the breasts of these new arrivals. Tragedy was there in its most terrible, its most pathetic, aspect. The pathos was given by the victim,—a young and pretty girl lying face upward on the tessellated floor with an arrow in her breast and death stamped unmistakably on every feature,—the terror by the look and attitude of the woman they saw kneeling over her—a remarkable woman, no longer young, but of a presence to hold the attention, even if the circumstances had been of a far less tragic nature. Her hand was on the arrow but she had made no movement to withdraw it, and her eyes, fixed upon space, showed depths of horror hardly to be explained even by the suddenness and startling character of the untoward fatality of which she had just been made the unhappy witness.

The director, whose name was Roberts, thought as he paused on the edge of the crowd that he had never seen a countenance upon which woe had stamped so deep a mark; and greatly moved by it, he was about to seek some explanation of a scene to which appearances gave so little clue, when the tall but stooping figure of the Curator entered, and he found himself relieved from a task whose seriousness he had no difficulty in measuring.

To those who knew William Jewett well, it was evident that he had been called from some task which still occupied his thoughts and for the moment somewhat bewildered his understanding. But as he was a conscientious man and quite capable of taking the lead when once roused to the exigencies of an occasion, Mr. Roberts felt a
certain interest in watching the slow awakening of this self-absorbed man to the awful circumstances which in one instant had clouded the museum in an atmosphere of mysterious horror.

When the full realization came,--which was not till a way had been made for him to the side of the stricken woman crouching over the dead child,--the energy which transformed his countenance and gave character to his usually bent and inconspicuous figure was all if not more than the anxious director expected.

Finding that his attempts to meet the older woman's eye only prolonged the suspense, the Curator addressed her quietly, and in sympathetic tones inquired whose child this was and how so dreadful a thing had happened.

She did not answer. She did not even look his way. With a rapid glance into the faces about him, ending in one of deep compassion directed toward herself, he repeated his question.

Still no response--still that heavy silence, that absolute immobility of face and limb. If her faculty of hearing was dulled, possibly she would yield to that of touch. Stooping, he laid his hand on her arm.

This roused her. Slowly her eyes lost their fixed stare and took on a more human light. A shudder shook her frame, and gazing down into the countenance of the young girl lying at her feet, she broke into moans of such fathomless despair as wrung the hearts of all about her.

It was a scene to test the nerve of any man. To one of the Curator's sympathetic temperament it was well-nigh unendurable. Turning to those nearest, he begged for an explanation of what they saw before them:

"Some one here must be able to tell me. Let that some one speak."

At this the quietest and least conspicuous person present, a young man heavily spectacled and of student-like appearance, advanced a step and said:

"I was the first person to come in here after this poor young lady fell. I was looking at coins just beyond the partition there, when I heard a gasping cry. I had not heard her fall--I fear I was very much preoccupied in my search for an especial coin I had been told I should find here--but I did hear the cry she gave, and startled by the sound, left the section where I was and entered this one, only to see just what you are seeing now."

The Curator pointed at the two women.

"This? The one woman kneeling over the other with her hand on the arrow?"

"Yes, sir."

A change took place in the Curator's expression. Involuntarily his eyes rose to the walls hung closely with Indian relics, among which was a quiver in which all could see arrows similar to the one now in the breast of the young girl lying dead before them.

"This woman must be made to speak," he said in answer to the low murmur which followed this discovery. "If there is a doctor present--"

Waiting, but receiving no response, he withdrew his hand from the woman's arm and laid it on the arrow.

This roused her completely. Loosing her own grasp upon the shaft, she cried, with sudden realization of the people pressing about her:

"I could not draw it. That causes death, they say. Wait! she may still be alive. She may have a word to speak."

She was bending to listen. It was hardly a favorable moment for further questioning, but the Curator in his anxiety could not refrain from saying:

"Who is she? What is her name and what is yours?"

"Her name?" repeated the woman, rising to face him again. "How should I know? I was passing through this gallery and had just stopped to take a look into the court when this young girl bounded by me from behind and flinging up her arms, fell with a deep sigh to the floor. I saw an arrow in her breast, and--"

Emotion choked her, and when some one asked if the girl was a stranger to her, she simply bowed her head; then, letting her gaze pass from face to face till it had completed the circle of those about her, she said in her former mechanical way:

"My name is Ermentrude Taylor. I came to look at the bronzes. I should like to go now."

But the crowd which had formed about her was too compact to allow her to pass. Besides, the director, Mr. Roberts, had something to say first. Working his way forward, he waited till he had attracted her attention and then remarked in his most considerate manner:

"You will pardon these importunities, Mrs. Taylor. I am a director of this museum, and if Mr. Jewett will excuse me,"--here he bowed to the Curator,--"I should like to inquire from what direction the arrow came which ended this young girl's life?"

For a moment she stood aghast, fixing him with her eye as though to ask whither this inquiry tended. Then with an air of intention which was not without some strange element of fear, she allowed her glance to travel across the court till it rested upon the row of connected arches facing them from the opposite gallery.

"Ah," said he, putting her look into words, "you think the arrow came from the other side of the building. Did you see anyone over there,--in the gallery, I mean,--at or before the instant of this young girl's fall?"
She shook her head.
"Did any of _you_?" he urged, with his eyes on the crowd. "Some one must have been looking that way."
But no answer came, and the silence was fast becoming oppressive when these words, whispered by one woman
to another, roused them anew and sent every glance again to the walls—even hers for whose benefit this remark had
possibly been made:
"But there are no arrows over there. All the arrows are here."
She was right. They were here, quiver after quiver of them; nor were they all beyond reach. As the woman thus
significantly assailed noted this and saw with what suspicion others noted it also, a decided change took place in her
aspect.
"I should like to sit down," she murmured. Possibly she was afraid she might fall.
As some one brought a chair, she spoke, but very tremulously, to the director:
"Are there no arrows in the rooms over there?"
"I am quite sure not."
"And no bows?"
"None."
"If—if anyone had been seen in the gallery----"
"No one was."  
"You are sure of that?" 
"You heard the question asked. It brought no answer."
"But—but these galleries are visible from below. Some one may have been looking up from the court and----"
"If there was any such person in the building, he would have been here by this time. People don't hold back such
information."
"Then—then—" she stammered, her eyes taking on a hunted look, "you conclude—these people conclude
_what_?"
"Madam,"--the word came coldly, stinging her into drawing herself to her full height,—"it is not for me to
conclude in a case like this. That is the business of the police."
At this word, with its suggestion of crime, her air of conscious power vanished in sudden collapse. Possibly she
had seen the significant gesture with which the Curator pointed out a quiver from which one of the arrows was
missing. That this was so, was shown by her next question:
"But where is the bow? Look about on the floor. You will find none. How can an arrow be shot without a bow?"
"It cannot be," came from some one at her back. "But it can be driven home like a dagger if the hand wielding it
is sufficiently powerful."
A cry left her lips; she seemed to listen as for some echo; then in a wild abandonment which ignored person and
place she flung herself again at the dead girl's side, and before the astonished people surrounding her could
intervene, she had caught up the body in her arms, and bending over it, whispered word after word into the poor
child's closed ear.
II
IN ROOM B
Five minutes later the Curator was at the 'phone calling up Police Headquarters. A death had occurred at the
museum. Would they send over a capable detective?
"What kind of death?" was the harsh reply. "We don't send detectives in cases of heart-failure or simple accident.
Is it an accident?"
"No--no--hardly. It looks more like an insane woman's attack upon a harmless stranger. It's the oddest sort of an
affair, and we feel very helpless. No common officer will do. We have one of that kind in the building. What we
want is a man of brains; he will need them."
A muffled sound at the other end--then a different voice asking some half-dozen comprehensive questions--
which, having been answered to the best of the Curator's ability, were followed by the welcome assurance that a man
on whose experience he could rely would be at the museum doors within five minutes.
With an air of relief Mr. Jewett stepped again into the court, and repelling with hasty gestures the importunities
of the small group of men and women who had lacked the courage to follow the more adventurous ones upstairs,
crossed to where the door-man stood on guard over the main entrance.
"Locked?" he asked.
"Yes, sir. Such were the orders. Didn't you give them?"
"No, but I should have done so, had I known. No one's to go out, and no one's to come in but the detective whom
I am expecting any moment."
They had not long to wait. Before their suspense had reached fever-point, a tap was heard on the great door. It
was opened, and a young man stepped in.

"Coast clear?" he sang out with a humorous twist of his jaw as he noted the Curator's evident chagrin at his meager and unsatisfactory appearance. "Oh, I'm not your man," he added as his eye ran over the whole place with a look which seemed to take in every detail in an instant. "Mr. Gryce is in the automobile. Wait till I help him up."

He was gone before the Curator could utter a word, only to reappear in a few minutes with a man in his wake whom the former at first blush thought to be as much past the age where experience makes for efficiency as the other seemed to be short of it.

But this impression, if impression it were, was of short duration. No sooner had this physically weak but extremely wise old man entered upon the scene than his mental power became evident to every person there. Timorous hearts regained their composure, and the Curator—who in his ten years of service had never felt the burden of his position so acutely as in the last ten minutes—showed his relief by a volubility quite unnatural to him under ordinary conditions. As he conducted the detectives across the court, he talked not of the victim, as might reasonably be expected, but of the woman who had been found leaning over her with her hand on the arrow.

"We think her some escaped lunatic," he remarked. "Only a demented woman would act as she does. First she denied all knowledge of the girl. Then when she was made to see that the arrow sticking in the girl's breast had been taken from a quiver hanging within arm's reach on the wall and used as lances are used, she fell a-moaning and crying, and began to whisper in the poor child's senseless ear."

"A common woman? One of a low-down type?"

"Not at all. A lady, and an impressive one, at that. You seldom see her equal. That's what has upset us so. The crime and the criminal do not seem to fit."

The detective blinked. Then suddenly he seemed to grow an inch taller.

"Where is she now?" he asked.

"In Room B, away from the crowd. She is not alone. A young lady detained with the rest of the people here is keeping her company, to say nothing of an officer we have put on guard."

"And the victim?"

"Lies where she fell, in Section II on the upper floor. There was no call to move her. She was dead when we came upon the scene. She does not look to be more than sixteen years old."

"Let's go up. But wait--can we see that section from here?"

They were standing at the foot of the great staircase connecting the two floors. Above them, stretching away on either side, ran the two famous, highly ornamented galleries, with their row of long, low arches indicating the five compartments into which they were severally divided. Pointing to the second one on the southern side, the Curator replied:

"That's it--the one where you see the Apache relics hanging high on the rear wall. We shall have to shift those to some other place just as soon as we can recover from this horror. I don't want the finest spot in the whole museum made a Mecca for the morbid and the curious."

The remark fell upon unheeding ears. Detective Gryce was looking, not in the direction named, but in the one directly opposite to it.

"I see," he quietly observed, "that there is a clear view across. Was there no one in the right-hand gallery to see what went on in the left?"

"Not that I have heard of. It's the dullest hour of the day, and not only this gallery but many of the rooms were entirely empty."

"I see. And now, what about the persons who were here? How many of them have you let go?"

"Not one; the doors have been opened twice only—once to admit the officer you will find on guard, and the other to let in yourself."

"Good! And how many have you here, all told?"

"I have not had time to count them, but I should say less than thirty. This includes myself, as well as two attendants."

With a thoughtful air Mr. Gryce turned in the direction of the few persons he could see huddled together around one of the central statues.

"Where are the others?" he asked.

"Upstairs—in and about the place where the poor child lies."

"They must be got out of there. Sweetwater!"

The young man who had entered with him was at his side in an instant.

"Clear the galleries. Then take down the name and address of every person in the building."

"Yes, sir."

Before the last word had left his lips, the busy fellow was halfway up the marble steps. "Lightning," some of his
pals called him, perhaps because he was as noiseless as he was quick. Meanwhile the senior detective had drawn the
Curator to one side.

"We'll take a look at these people as they come down. I have been said to be able to spot a witness with my eyes
shut. Let's see what I can do with my eyes open."

"Young and old, rich and poor," murmured the Curator as some dozen persons appeared at the top of the
staircase.

"Yes," sighed the detective, noting each one carefully as he or she filed down, "we shan't make much out of this
experiment. Not one of them avoids our looks. Emotion enough, but not of the right sort. Well, we'll leave them to
Sweetwater. Our business is above."

The Curator offered his arm. The old man made a move to take it--then drew himself up with an air of quiet
confidence.

"Many thanks," said he, "but I can go alone. Rheumatism is my trouble, but these mild days loosen its grip upon
my poor old muscles." He did not say that the prospect of an interesting inquiry had much the same effect, but the
Curator suspected it, possibly because he was feeling just a little bit spry himself.

Steeled as such experienced officers necessarily are to death in all its phases, it was with no common emotion
that the aged detective entered the presence of the dead girl and took his first look at this latest victim of mental or
moral aberration. So young! so innocent! so fair! A schoolgirl, or little more, of a class certainly above the average,
whether judged from the contour of her features or the niceties of her dress. With no evidences of great wealth about
her, there was yet something in the cut of her garments and the careful attention to each detail which bespoke not
only natural but cultivated taste. On her breast just above the spot where the cruel dart had entered, a fresh and
blooming nosegay still exhaled its perfume--a tragic detail accentuating the pathos of a death so sudden that the joy
with which she had pinned on this simple adornment seemed to linger about her yet.

The detective, with no words for this touching spectacle, stretched out his hand and with a reverent and fatherly
touch pressed down the lids over the unseeing eyes. This office done to the innocent dead, he asked if anything had
been found to establish the young girl's identity.

"Surely," he observed, "she was not without a purse or handbag. All young ladies carry them."

For answer the officer on guard thrust his hand into one of his capacious pockets, and drawing out a neat little
bag of knitted beads, passed it over to the detective with the laconic remark:

"Nothing doing."

And so it proved. It held only a pocket handkerchief--embroidered but without a monogram--and a
memorandum-book without an entry.

"A blind alley, if ever there was one," muttered Mr. Gryce; and ordering the policeman to replace the bag as
nearly as possible on the spot from which it had been taken, he proceeded with the Curator to Room B.

Prepared to encounter a woman of disordered mind, the appearance presented by Mrs. Taylor at his entrance
greatly astonished Mr. Gryce. There was a calmness in her attitude which one would scarcely expect to see in a
woman whom mania had just driven into crime. Surely lunacy does not show such self-restraint; nor does lunacy
awaken any such feelings of awe as followed a prolonged scrutiny of her set but determined features. Only grief of
the most intense and sacred character could account for the aspect she presented, and as the man to whom the
tragedies of life were of daily occurrence took in this mystery with all its incongruities, he realized, not without a
sense of professional pleasure, no doubt, that he had before him an affair calling for the old-time judgment which,
for forty or more years, had made his record famous in the police annals of the metropolis.

She was seated with no one near her but a young lady whom sympathetic interest had drawn to her side. Mr.
Roberts stood in one of the windows, and not far from him a man in the museum uniform.

At the authoritative advance of the old detective, the woman, whose eye he had caught, attempted to struggle to
her feet, but desisted after a moment of hopeless effort, and sank back in her chair. There was no pretense in this.
Though gifted with a strong frame, emotion had so weakened her that she was simply unable to stand. Quite
convinced of this, and affected in spite of himself by her look of lofty patience, Mr. Gryce prefaced his questions
with an apology--quite an unusual proceeding for him.

Whether or no she heard it, he could not tell; but she was quite ready to answer when he asked her name and
then her place of residence--saying in response to the latter query:

"I live at the Calderon, a family hotel in Sixty-seventh Street. My name"--here she paused for a second to
moisten her lips--"is Taylor--Ermentrude Taylor.... Nothing else," she speedily added in a tone which drew every
eye her way. Then more evenly: "You will find the name on the hotel's books."

"Wife or widow?"

"Widow."

What a voice! how it reached every heart, waking strange sympathies there! As the word fell, not a person in the
room but stirred uneasily. Even she herself started at its sound; and moved, perhaps, by the depth of silence which followed, she added in suppressed tones:

"A widow within the hour. That's why you see me still in colors, but crushed as you behold--killed! killed!"

That settled it. There was no mistaking her condition after an expression of this kind. The Curator and Mr. Gryce exchanged glances, and Mr. Roberts, stepping from his corner, betrayed the effect which her words had produced on him, by whispering in the detective's ear:

"What you need is an alienist."

Had she heard? It would seem so from the quick way she roused and exclaimed with indignant emphasis:

"You do not understand me! I see that I must drink my bitter cup to the dregs. This is what I mean: My husband was living this morning--living up to the hour when the clock in this building struck twelve. I knew it from the joyous hopes with which my breast was filled. But with the stroke of noon the blow fell. I was bending above the poor child who had fallen so suddenly at my feet, when the vision came, and I saw him gazing at me from a distance so remote--across a desert so immeasurable--that nothing but death could create such a removal or make of him the ghastly silhouette I saw. He is dead. At that moment I felt his soul pass; and so I say that I am a widow."

Ravings? No, the calm certainty of her tone, the grief, touching depths so profound it had no need of words, showed the confidence she felt in the warning she believed herself to have received. Though probably not a single person present put any faith in occultism in any of its forms, there was a general movement of sympathy which led Mr. Gryce to pass the matter by without any attempt at controversy, and return to the question in hand. With a decided modification of manner, he therefore asked her to relate how she came to be kneeling over the injured girl with her hand upon the arrow.

"Let me have a moment in which to recover myself," she prayed, covering her eyes with her hand. Then, while all waited, she gave a low cry, "I suffer; I suffer!" and leaped to her feet, only to sink back again inert and powerless. But only for an instant: with that one burst of extreme feeling she recovered her self-control, answering with apparent calmness the detective's question:

"I was passing through the gallery as any other visitor might, when a young lady rushed by me--stopped short--threw up her arms and fell backward to the floor, pierced to the heart by an arrow. In a moment I was on my knees at her side with hand outstretched to withdraw this dreadful arrow. But I was afraid--I had heard that this sometimes causes death, and while I was hesitating, that vision came, engulfing everything. I could think of nothing else."

She was near collapsing again; but being a woman of great nerve, she fought her weakness and waited patiently for the next question. It was different, without doubt, from any she had expected.

"Then you positively deny any active connection with the strange death of this young girl?"

A pause, as if to take in what he meant. Then slowly, impressively, came the answer:

"I do."

"Did you see the person who shot the arrow?"

"No."

"From what direction would it have had to come to strike her as it did?"

"From the opposite balcony."

"Did you see anyone there?"

"No."

"But you heard the arrow?"

"Heard?"

"An arrow shot from a bow makes a whizzing sound as it flies. Didn't you hear that?"

"I don't know." She looked troubled and uncertain. "I don't remember. I was expecting no such thing--I was not prepared. The sight of an arrow--a killing arrow--in that innocent breast overcame me with inexpressible grief and horror. If the vision of my husband had not followed, I might remember more. As it is, I have told all I can. Won't you excuse me? I should like to go. I am not fit to remain. I want to return home--to hear from my husband--to learn by letter or telegram whether he is indeed dead."

Mr. Gryce had let her finish. An inquiry so unofficial might easily await the moods of such a witness. Not till the last word had been followed by what some there afterward called a hungry silence, did he make use of his prerogative to say:

"I shall be pleased to release you and will do so just as soon as I can. But I must put one or two more questions. Were you interested in the Indian relics you had come among? Did you handle any of them in passing?"

"No. I had no interest. I like glass, bronzes, china--I hate weapons. I shall hate them eternally after this." And she began to shudder.

The detective, with a quick bend of his head, approached her ear with the whispered remark:

"I am told that when your attention was drawn to these weapons, you fell on your knees and murmured
something into the dead girl's ears. How do you explain that?"

"I was giving her messages to my husband. I felt--strange as it may seem to you--that they had fled the earth
together--and I wanted him to know that I would be constant, and other foolish things you will not wish me to repeat
here. Is that all you wish to know?"

Mr. Gryce bowed, and cast a quizzical glance in the direction of the Curator. Certainly for oddity this case
transcended any he had had in years. With this woman eliminated from the situation, what explanation was there of
the curious death he was there to investigate? As he was meditating how he could best convey to her the necessity of
detaining her further, he heard a muttered exclamation from the young woman standing near her, and following the
direction of her pointing finger, saw that the strange silence which had fallen upon the room had a cause. Mrs.
Taylor had fainted away in her chair.

III

"I HAVE SOMETHING TO SHOW YOU"

Mr. Gryce took advantage of the momentary disturbance to slip from the room. He was followed by the Curator,
who seemed more than ever anxious to talk.

"You see! Mad as a March hare!" was his hurried exclamation as the door closed behind them. "I declare I do
not know which I pity more, her victim or herself. The one is freed from all her troubles; the other--Do you think we
ought to have a doctor to look after her? Shall I telephone?"

"Not yet. We have much to learn before taking any decided steps." Then as he caught the look of amazement
with which this unexpected suggestion of difficulties was met, he paused on his way to the stair-head to ask in a
tentative way peculiarly his own: "Then you still think the girl died from a thrust given by this woman?"

"Of course. What else is there to think? You saw where the arrow came from. You saw that the only bow the
place contained was hanging high and unstrung upon the wall, and you are witness to this woman's irresponsible
condition of mind. The sight of those arrows well within her reach evidently aroused the homicidal mania often
latent in one of her highly emotional nature; and when this fresh young girl came by, the natural result followed. I
only hope I shall not be called upon to face the poor child's parents. What can I say to them? What can anybody say?
Yet I do not see how we can be held responsible for so unprecedented an attack as this, do you?"

Mr. Gryce made no answer. He had turned his back toward the stair-head and was wondering if this easy
explanation of a tragedy so peculiar as to have no prototype in all of the hundreds of cases he had been called upon
to investigate in a long life of detective activity would satisfy all the other persons then in the building. It was his
present business to find out—to search and probe among the dozen or two people he saw collected below, for the
witness who had seen or had heard some slight thing as yet unrevealed which would throw a different light upon this
matter. For his mind—or shall we say the almost unerring instinct of this ancient delver into human hearts?—would
not accept without question this theory of sudden madness in one of Mrs. Taylor's appearance, strange and
inexplicable as her conduct seemed. Though it was quite among the possibilities that she had struck the fatal blow
and in the manner mentioned, it was equally clear to his mind that she had not done it in an access of frenzy. He
knew a mad eye and he knew a despairing one. Fantastic as her story certainly was, he found himself more ready to
believe it than to accept any explanation of this crime which ascribed its peculiar features to the irresponsibilities of
lunacy.

However, he kept his impressions to himself and in his anxiety to pursue his inquiries among the people below,
was on the point of descending thither, when he found his attention arrested, and that of the Curator's as well, by the
sight of a young man hastening toward them through the northern gallery. (The tragedy, as you will remember, had
occurred in the southern one.) He was dressed in the uniform of the museum, and moved so quickly and in such an
evident flurry of spirits that the detective instinctively asked:

"Who's that? One of your own men?"

"Yes, that's Correy, our best-informed and most-trusted attendant. Looks as if he had something to tell us. Well,
Correy, what is it?" he queried as the man emerged upon the landing where they stood. "Anything new? If there is,
speak out plainly. Mr. Gryce is anxious for all the evidence he can get."

With an ingenuousness rather pleasing than otherwise to the man thus presented to his notice, the young fellow
stopped short and subjected the famous detective to a keen and close scrutiny before venturing to give the required
information.

Was it because of the importance of what he had to communicate? It would seem so, from the suppressed
excitement of his tone, as after his brief but exceedingly satisfactory survey, he jerked his finger over his shoulder in
the direction from which he had come, with the short remark:

"I have something to show you."

Something! Mr. Gryce had been asking for this something only a moment before. We can imagine, then, the
celerity with which he followed this new guide into the one spot of all others which possessed for him the greatest
interest. For if by any chance the arrow which had done such deadly work had been sped from a bow instead of
having been used as a dart, then it was from this gallery and from no other quarter of the building that it had been so
sped. Any proof of this could have but the one effect of exonerating from all blame the woman who had so
impressed him. He had traversed the first section and had entered the second, when the Curator joined him; together
they passed into the third.

For those who have not visited this museum, a more detailed description of these galleries may be welcome.
Acting as a means of communication between the row of front rooms and those at the back, they also serve to
exhibit certain choice articles which call for little space, and are of a nature more or less ornamental. For this
purpose they are each divided into five sections connected by arches narrower but not less decorative than those
which open in a direct row upon the court. Of these sections the middle one on either side is much larger than the
rest; otherwise they do not differ.

It was in the midst of this larger section that Correy now stood, awaiting their approach. There had been show-
cases filled with rare exhibits in the two through which they had just passed, but in this one there was nothing to be
seen but a gorgeous hanging, covering very nearly the whole wall, flanked at either end by a pedestal upholding a
vase of inestimable value and corresponding ugliness. A highly decorative arrangement, it is true, but in what lay its
interest for the criminal investigator?

Correy was soon to show them. With a significant gesture toward the tapestry, he eagerly exclaimed:
"You see that? I've run by it several times since the accident sent me flying all over the building at everybody's
call. But only just now, when I had a moment to myself, did I remember the door hid behind it. It's a door we no
longer use, and I'd no reason for thinking it had anything to do with the killing of the young lady in the opposite
gallery. But for all that I felt it would do no harm to give it a look, and running from the front, where I happened to
be, I pulled out the tapestry and saw--but supposing I wait and let you see for yourselves. That will be better."

Leaving them where they stood face to face with the great hanging, he made a dive for the pedestal towering
aloft at the farther end, and edging himself in behind it, drew out the tapestry from the wall, calling on them as he
did so to come and look behind it. The Curator did not hesitate. He was there almost as soon as the young man
himself.

But the detective was not so hasty. With a thousand things in mind, he stopped to peer along the gallery and
down into the court before giving himself away to any prying eye. Satisfied that he might make the desired move
with impunity, Mr. Gryce was about to turn in the desired direction when, struck by a new fact, he again stopped
short.

He had noticed how the heavy tapestry shivered under Correy's clutch. Had this been observed by anyone
besides himself? If by chance some person wandering about the court had been looking up--but no, the few people
gathered there stood too far forward to see what was going on in this part of the gallery; and relieved from all further
anxiety on this score, he joined Correy at the pedestal and at a word from him succeeded in squeezing himself
around it into the small space they had left for him between the pushed-out hanging and the wall. An exclamation
from the Curator, who had only waited for his coming to take his first look, added zest to his own scrutiny. It would
take something more than the sight of a well-known door to give it such a tone of astonished discovery. What? Even
he, with the accumulated surprises of years to give wings to his imagination, did not succeed in guessing. But when
his eyes, once accustomed to the semi-darkness of the narrow space which Correy had thus opened out before him,
saw not the door but what lay within its recess, he acknowledged to himself that he should have guessed--and that a
dozen years before, he certainly would have done so.

It was a _bow_--not like the one hanging high in the Apache exhibit, but yet a bow strong of make and strung for
use.

* * * * *

Here was a discovery as important as it was unexpected, eliminating Mrs. Taylor at once from the case and
raising it into a mystery of the first order. By dint of long custom, Mr. Gryce succeeded in hiding his extreme
satisfaction, but not the perplexity into which he was thrown by this complete change of base. The Curator appeared
to be impressed in much the same way, and shook his head in a doubtful fashion when Correy asked him if he
recognized the bow as belonging to the museum.

"I should have to see it nearer to answer that question with any sort of confidence," he demurred. "From such
glimpses as I can get of it from here I should say that it has not been taken from any of our exhibits."

"I am sure it has not," muttered Correy. Then with a side glance at Mr. Gryce, he added: "Shall I slip in behind
and get it?"

The detective, thus appealed to, hesitated a moment; then with an irrelevance perhaps natural to the occasion, he
inquired where this door so conveniently hidden from the general view led to. It was the Curator who answered.
"To a twisting, breakneck staircase opening directly into my office. But this door has not been used in years.
See! Here is the key to it on my own ring. There is no other. I lost the mate to it myself not long after my installation here."

The detective, working his way back around the pedestal, cast another glance up and down the gallery and over into the court. Still no spying eye, save that of the officer opposite.

"We will leave that bow where it is for the present," he decided, "a secret between us three." And motioning for Correy to let the tapestry fall, he stood watching it settle into place, till it hung quite straight again, with its one edge close to the wall and the other sweeping the floor. Had its weight been great enough to push the bow back again into its former place close against the door? Yes. No eye, however trained, would, from any bulge in the heavy tapestry, detect its presence there. He could leave the spot without fear; their secret would remain theirs until such time as they chose to disclose it.

As the three walked back the way they had come, the Curator glanced earnestly at the detective, who seemed to have fallen into a kind of anxious dream. Would it do to interrupt him with questions? Would he obtain a straight answer if he did? The old man moved heavily but the now fully alert Curator could not fail to see that it was with the heaviness of absorbed thought. Dare he disturb that thought? They had both reached the broad corridor separating the two galleries at the western end before he ventured to remark:

"This discovery alters matters, does it not? May I ask what you propose to do now? Anything in which we can help you?"

The detective may have heard him and he may not; at all events he made no reply though he continued to advance with a mechanical step until he stood again at the top of the marble steps leading down into the court. Here some of the uncertainty pervading his mind seemed to leave him, though he still looked very old and very troubled, or so the Curator thought, as pausing there, he allowed his glance to wander from the marble recesses below to the galleries on either side of him, and from these on to the seemingly empty spaces back of the high, carved railing guarding the great well. Would a younger man have served them better? It began to look so; then without warning and in a flash, as it were, the whole appearance of the octogenarian detective changed, and turning with a smile to the two men so anxiously watching him, he exclaimed with an air of quiet triumph:

"I have it. Follow and see how my plan works."

Amazed, for he looked and moved like another man,--a man in whom the almost extinguished spark of early genius had suddenly flared again into full blaze,--they hastily joined him in anticipation of they knew not what. But their enthusiasm received a check when at the moment of descent Mr. Gryce again turned back with the remark:

"I had forgotten. I have something to do first. If you will kindly see that the people down there are kept from growing too impatient, I will soon join you with Mrs. Taylor, who must not be left on this floor after we have gone below."

And with no further explanation of his purpose, he turned and proceeded without delay to Room B.

IV

A STRATEGIC MOVE

He found the unhappy woman quite recovered from her fainting spell, but still greatly depressed and not a little incoherent. He set himself to work to soothe her, for he had a request to make which called for an intelligent answer. Relieved from all suspicion of her having been an active agent in the deplorable deed he was here to investigate, he was lavish in his promises of speedy release, and seeing how much this steadied her, he turned to Mr. Roberts, who was still in the room, and then to the young lady who had been giving her a woman's care, and signified that their attentions were no longer required and that he would be glad to have them join the people below.

When the door had closed and Mr. Gryce found himself for the first time alone with Mrs. Taylor, he drew up a chair to her side and remarked in his old benevolent way:

"I feel guilty of cruelty, madam, in repeating a question you have already answered. But the conditions are such that I must, and do it now. When this young lady fell so unexpectedly at your feet, was your first look at her or at the opposite gallery?"

For an instant her eyes held his--something which did not often happen to him.

"At her," she vehemently declared. "I never thought of looking anywhere else. I saw her at my feet, and fell on my knees at her side. Who wouldn't have done so! Who would have seen anything but that arrow--_that arrow_! Oh, it was terrible! Do not make me recall it. I have sorrows enough----"

"Mrs. Taylor, you have my utmost sympathy. But you must realize how important it is for me to make sure that you saw nothing in the place from which that arrow was sent which would help us to locate the author of this accident. The flitting of an escaping figure up or down the opposite gallery, even a stir in the great tapestry confronting you from that far-away wall, might give us a clue."

"I saw nothing," she replied coldly but with extreme firmness, "nothing but that lifeless child and the picture of desolation which rose in my own mind. Do not, I pray, make me speak again of that. It would sound like delirium,
and it is my wish to impress you with my sanity, so that you will allow me to go home."

"You shall go, after the Coroner has had an opportunity to see you. We expect him any moment. Meanwhile, you will facilitate your release and greatly help us in what we have to do, if you will carry your fortitude to the point of showing me in your own person just where you were standing when this young girl dash'd by you to her death."

"Do you mean for me to go back to that--that---"

"Yes, Mrs. Taylor. Surely you can do so if you will. When you have time to think, you will be as anxious as ourselves to know through whose carelessness (to call it nothing worse) this child came to her death. Though it may prove to be quite immaterial whether you stood in one place or another at that fatal moment, it is a question which will be sure to come up at the inquest. That you may be able to answer correctly I urge you to return with me to the exact spot, before your recollection of the same has had time to fade. After that we will go below and I will see that you are taken to some quiet place where you can remain undisturbed till the Coroner comes."

Had she been a weak woman she would have succumbed again at this. But she was a strong one, and after the first moment of recoil she rose tremulously to her feet and signified her willingness to follow him to the scene of death.

"Is--is she there alone?" was her sole question as they crossed the corridor separating the room they had been in from the galleries.

"No--you will find an officer there. We could not leave the place quite unguarded."

If she shuddered he did not observe it. Having summoned up all her forces to meet this ordeal, she followed him without further word, and re-entering the spot she had so lately left in great agony of mind, stopped for one look and for one look only at the sweet face of the dead girl smiling up at her from the cold floor, then she showed Mr. Gryce as nearly as she could just where she had paused in shock and horror when the poor child smitten by the fatal arrow fell back almost into her arms.

The detective, with a glance at the opposite gallery, turned and spoke to the officer who had stepped aside into the neighboring section.

"Take the place just occupied by this lady," he said, "and hold it till you hear from me again." Then offering his arm to Mrs. Taylor, he led her out.

"I see that you were approaching the railing overlooking the court when you were stopped in this fearful manner," he remarked when well down the gallery toward its lower exit. "What did you have in mind? A nearer glimpse of the tapestry over there and the two great vases?"

"No, no." She was wrought up by now to a tension almost unendurable. "It was the court--what I might see in the court. Oh!" she impulsively cried: "the child! the child! that innocent, beautiful child!" And breaking away from his arm, she threw herself against the wall in a burst of uncontrollable weeping.

He allowed her a moment of unrestrained grief, then he took her on his arm again and led her down into the court where he gave her into the charge of Correy. He had gone as far as he dared in her present hysterical condition. Besides, he could no longer defer the great experiment by means of which he hoped to reach the heart of this mystery.

Taking the slip of paper handed him by Sweetwater, he crossed the court to where the various visitors, detained, some against their will and some quite in accordance with it, stood about in groups or sat side by side on the long benches placed along the front for their comfort. As he confronted them, his face beamed with that benevolent smile which had done so much for him in days gone by. Raising his hand he called attention to himself; then, when he was quite sure of being heard by them all, he addressed them with a quiet emphasis which could not fail to gain and hold their attention:

"I am Detective Gryce, sent here from Police Headquarters to look into this very serious matter. Till the Coroner arrives, I am in authority here, and being so, will have to ask your indulgence for any discomfort you may experience in helping me with my investigation. A young girl, full of life an hour ago, lies dead in the gallery above. We do not know her name; we do not know who killed her. But there is some one here who does. The man or woman who, wittingly or unwittingly, launched that fatal shaft, is present with us in this building. This person has not spoken. If he will do so now, he will save us and himself, too, no end of trouble. Let him speak, then, when he was quite sure of being heard by them all, he addressed them with a quiet emphasis which could not fail to gain and hold their attention:

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Silence. Heads moving, eyes peering, excitement visible in every face, but not a word from anybody. Mr. Gryce turned and pointed up at the clock. All looked--but still no word from man or woman.

One minute gone!
Two minutes!
Three!

The silence had become portentous. The movement, involuntary and simultaneous, which had run through the
crowd at first had stopped. They were waiting--each and all--waiting with eyes on the minute-hand creeping forward
over the dial toward which the detective's glance was still turned.

The fourth minute passed--then the fifth--and no one had spoken.

With a sigh Mr. Gryce wheeled himself back and faced the crowd again.

"You see," he quietly announced, "the case is serious. Twenty-two of you, and not one to speak the half-dozen
words which would release the rest from their present embarrassing position! What remains for us to do under
circumstances like these? My experience suggests but one course: to narrow down this inquiry to those--you will not
find them many--who from their nearness to the place of tragedy or from some other cause equally pertinent may be
looked upon as possible witnesses for the Coroner's jury. That this may be done speedily and surely, I am going to
ask you, every one of you, to retake the exact place in the building which you were occupying when you heard the
first alarm. I will begin with the Curator himself. Mr. Jewett, will you be so good as to return to the room, and if
possible to the precise spot, you were occupying when you first learned what had occurred here?"

The Curator, who stood at his elbow, made a quick bow and turned in the direction of the marble steps, which he
hastily remounted. A murmur from the crowd followed this action and continued till he disappeared in the recesses
of the right-hand gallery. Then, at a gesture from Mr. Gryce, it suddenly ceased, and with a breathless interest easy
to comprehend, they one and all waited for his next word. It was a simple one.

"We are all obliged to Mr. Jewett for his speedy compliance with so unusual a request. He has made my task a
comparatively easy one."

Then, glancing at the list of names and addresses which had been compiled for him by Sweetwater, he added:

"I will read off your names as recorded here. If each person, on hearing his own, will move quickly to his place
and remain there till my young man can make a note of the same, we shall get through this matter in short order.
And let me add"--as he perceived here and there a shoulder shrugged, or an eye turned askance--"that once the name
is called, no excuse of non-recollection will be accepted. You must know, every one of you, just where you were
standing when the cry of death rang out, and any attempt to mislead me or others in this matter will only subject the
person making it to a suspicion he must wish to avoid. Remember that there are enough persons here for no one to
be sure that his whereabouts at so exciting a moment escaped notice. Listen, then, and when your own name is
spoken, step quickly into place, whether that place be on this floor or in the rooms or galleries above.--Mrs. Alice
Lee!"
You can imagine the flurry, the excitement and the blank looks of the average men and women he addressed. But not one hesitated to obey. Mrs. Lee was on the farther side of one of the statues before her name had more than left his lips. Her example set the pace for those who followed. Like soldiers at roll-call, each one responded to the summons, going now in one direction and now in another until on reaching the proper spot he or she stopped.

Only six persons followed the Curator upstairs—an old woman who shook her head violently as she plodded slowly up the marble steps; Correy; a man with a packet of books under his arm (the same who had been studying coins in Section II); a young couple whose movements showed such a marked reluctance that more than one eye followed them as they went hesitatingly up, clinging together with interlocking hands and stopping now on one step and now on another to stare at each other in visible consternation; and a boy of fourteen who grinned from ear to ear as he bounded gayly up three steps at a time and took his position on the threshold of one of the upper doors with all the precision of a soldier called to sentry-duty—a boy scout if ever there was one.

There were twenty-two names on the list, and with the calling out of the twenty-second, Mr. Gryce perceived the space before him entirely cleared of its odd assortment of people. As he turned to take a look at the result, a gleam of satisfaction crossed his time-worn face. By this scheme, which he may be pardoned for looking upon as a stroke of genius worthy of his brilliant prime, he had set back time a full hour, restoring as by a magician's wand the conditions of that fatal moment of initial alarm. Surely, with the knowledge of that hidden bow in his mind, he should be able now to place his hand upon the person who had made use of it to launch the fatal arrow. No one, however sly of foot and quick of action, could have gone far from the gallery where that bow lay in the few minutes which were all that could have elapsed between the shooting of the arrow and the gasping cry which had brought all within hearing to the Apache section. The man or woman whom he should find nearest to that concealed door in the northern gallery would have to give a very good account of himself. Not even the Curator would escape suspicion under those circumstances.

However, it is only fair to add that Mr. Gryce had no fear of any such embarrassing end to his inquisition as that. He had noticed the young couple who had betrayed their alarm so ingenuously to every eye, and had already decided within himself that the man was just such a fool as might in a moment of vacuity pick up a bow and arrow to test his skill at a given mark. Such things had been and such results had followed. The man was a gawk and the woman a ninny; a few questions and their guiltiness would appear—that is, if they should be found near enough the tapestry to warrant his suspicion. If not—the alternative held an interest all its own, and sent him in haste toward the stairway.

To reach it Mr. Gryce had to pass several persons standing where fate had fixed them among the statuary grouped about the court, and had his attention been less engrossed by what he expected to discover above, he would have been deeply interested in noting how these persons, or most of them at least, had so thoroughly accepted the situation that they had taken the exact position and the exact attitude of the moment preceding the alarm. Those who were admiring the great torsos or carved chariots of the ancients, made a show of admiring them still. The man or woman who had been going in an easterly direction, faced east; and those who had been on the point of entering certain rooms, stood halting in the doorways with their backs to the court.

Unfortunately, he did not take note of all this, or give the poor pawns thus parading for his purpose more than a cursory glance. When he did think, which was when he was halfway up the staircase, it was to look back upon a changed scene. For with his going, interest had flagged and the tableau lost its pointedness. No one had ventured as yet to leave his place, but all had turned their faces his way, and on many of these faces could be seen signs of fatigue if not of absolute impatience. He had ordered them to stand and they had stood, but to be left there while he went above was certainly trying. The one spot which held the interest was in the southern gallery. If they could only follow him there---

All this was to be seen in their faces, and possibly the cunning old man read it there; but if he did, it was to ask himself if their conclusions were quite correct. The locale of interest had shifted in the last half hour; and while most of these people believed him to be searching for the witness who could tell him what had occurred in the death gallery, he really was hunting for one who could add to his knowledge of what had happened in the opposite one. And this witness might not be found in the gallery, or even on the upper floor. It was well among the probabilities that there might be among the various persons he saw posing in the court below some who by an upward look might take in a part of if not the whole broad sweep of that huge square of tapestry upon which his thoughts were centered. It was for him to make a note of these persons. A diagram of the court as it looked to him at that moment is shown for your enlightenment.
Sixteen persons! Ten in view from the steps and six not. Of the sixteen, only the following seemed to afford any excuse for future interrogation: Numbers Two, Six, Ten, Seven, Eight and Thirteen. Making a mental note of these, during which operation the poor unfortunates who had just been considering themselves as quite out of the game revived in a startling manner under his eye, he proceeded on his way.

As the action has now shifted to the upper floor, a diagram of this second story is now in order.
As you will see, a straight glimpse is given down either gallery from the arches opening into the broad corridor into which Mr. Gryce had stepped on leaving the central staircase. He had therefore only to choose which of the two would better repay his immediate investigation.

He decided upon the northern one, which you will remember was the one holding the tapestry; since, to find anybody there, no matter whom, would certainly settle the identity of the person responsible for that flying arrow. For, as all conceded, too little time had elapsed between its delivery and the discovery of the victim for the quickest possible attempt at escape to have carried the concealer of the bow very far from the spot where he had thrown it. It was possible--just possible--that he might have got as far as one of the four large rooms opening into the corridor stretching across the front, but that he was not in the gallery itself Mr. Gryce soon convinced himself by a rapid walk through its entire length.

That he did not follow up this move by an immediate searching of the rooms I have mentioned was owing to a wish he had to satisfy himself on another point first.

What was this point?

In passing along the rear on his way to this gallery, he had noticed the narrow staircase opening not a dozen feet away to his left. This undoubtedly led down to the side-entrance. If by any chance the user of the bow had fled to the rear instead of to the front, he would be found somewhere on this staircase, for he never could have got to the bottom before the cry of "Close the doors! Let no man out!" rendered this chance of immediate exit unavailable. So Mr. Gryce retraced his steps, and barely stopping to note the boy eying him with eager glances from the doorway of Room A, he approached the iron balustrade guarding the small staircase, and cautiously looked over.

A man was there! A man going down--no, coming up; and this man, as he soon saw from his face and uniform, was Correy the attendant.

"So that is where _you_ were," he called down as he beckoned the man up.

"As near as I can remember. I was on my way in search of Mr. Jewett, for whom I had a message, and had got as far as you saw me, when I heard a cry of pain from somewhere in the gallery. This naturally quickened my steps and I was up and on this floor in a jiffy."

"Did you notice, as you stepped from the landing, whether the boy staring at us from the doorway over there was facing just as we see him now?"

"He was. I remember his attitude perfectly."

"Coming out of the door--not going in?"

"Sure. He was on the run. He had heard the cry too."

"And followed you into the gallery?"

"Preceded me. He was on the scene almost as soon as the man who stepped in from the adjoining section."

"I see. And this man?"

"Was well within my view from the minute I entered the first arch. He seemed more bewildered than frightened
till he had passed the communicating arch and nearly stumbled over the body of the girl shot down almost at his elbow."

"And yourself?"

"I knew by his look that something dreadful had happened, and when I saw what it was, I didn't think of anything better to do than to order the doors shut."

"On your own initiative? Where was the Curator?"

"Not far, it seems. But he gets awfully absorbed in whatever he is doing, and there was no time to lose. Some one had shot that arrow, some one who might escape."

Mr. Gryce never allowed himself--or very rarely--to look at anyone full and square in the face; yet he always seemed to form an instant opinion of whomever he talked with. Perhaps he had already gauged this man and not unfavorably, for he showed not the slightest distrust as he remarked quite frankly:

"You must have had some suspicion of foul play even then, to act in so expeditious a manner."

"I don't know what my suspicions were. I simply followed my first impulse. I don't think it was a bad one. Do you, sir?"

"Far from it. But enough of that. Do you think"--here he drew Correy into the gallery out of earshot of the boy, who was watching them with all the curiosity of his fourteen years--"that this lad could have stolen from where we are standing now to the door where you first saw him, during the time you were making your rush up the stairs? Boys of his age are mighty quick, and----"

"I know it, sir; and I see what you mean. But even if he had been able to do this,--which I very much doubt,--no boy of his age could have strung that bow, or had he found it strung, have shot an arrow from it with force enough to kill. Only a hand accustomed to its use could handle a bow like that with any success."

"You know the bow, then? Saw it nearer than you said--possibly handled it?"

"No, sir; but I know its kind and have handled many of them."

"In this building?"

"Yes, sir, and in other museums where I have been. I have arranged and rearranged Indian exhibits for years."

"Then you think that the bow we saw behind the tapestry is an Indian one?"

"Without question."

The detective nodded and left him. One word with the boy, and he would feel free to go elsewhere.

It proved to be an amusing one. The boy, for all his enthusiasm as a scout, proved to be so hungry that he was actually doleful. More than that, he had a ticket for that afternoon's ball game in his pocket and feared that he would not be let out in time to see it. He therefore was quick with his answers, which certainly were ingenuous enough. He had been looking at the model of a ship (which could be seen through an open door), when he heard a woman cry out as if hurt, from somewhere down the gallery. He was running to see what it meant when a man came along who seemed in as great a hurry as himself. But he got there first--and so on and on, corroborating Correy's story in every particular. He was so honest (Mr. Gryce had been at great pains to trip him up in one of his statements and had openly failed) and yet so anxious for the detective to notice the ticket to the ball game which he held in one hand, that the old man took pity on him and calling an officer, ordered him to let the boy out--a concession to youth and innocence he was almost ready to regret when a woman of uncertain years and irate mien attacked him from the doorway he had just left, with the loud remark:

"If you let him go, you can let me go too. I was in this room at the same time he was and know no more about what happened over there than the dead. I have an appointment downtown of great importance. I shall miss it if you don't let me go at once."

"Is it of greater importance than the right which this dead girl's friends have to know by whose careless hands the arrow killing her was shot?" And without waiting for a reply, which was not readily forthcoming, Mr. Gryce handed her over to Correy with an injunction to see that she was given a comfortable seat below and proceeded to finish up this portion of the building by a search through the three great rooms extending along the rear.

He found them all empty and without clue of any kind, and satisfied that his real work lay in front, he returned thither with as much expedition as old age and rheumatism would admit. Why, in doing so, he went for the third time through the gallery instead of through rooms J, H and I, he did not stop to inquire, though afterward he asked that question of himself more than once. Had he taken this latter course, he might not have missed--

But that will come later. What we have to do now is to accompany him to the front of the building, where matters of importance undoubtedly await him. He had noted, in his previous passage to and fro, that the young man who had been nearest to the tragedy was in his place before the case of coins in Section I. This time he noted something more. The young man was in the selfsame spot, but during this brief interval of waiting, the passion he evidently cherished for numismatics had reasserted itself, and he now stood with his eyes bent as eagerly upon the display of coins over which he hung, as if no shaft of death had crossed the space without and no young body lay in
piteous quiet beyond the separating partition.

It was an exhibition of one of the most curious traits of human nature, and Mr. Gryce would undoubtedly have
expended a few cynical thoughts upon it if, upon entering the broad front corridor which he had hitherto avoided, he
had not run upon Sweetwater pointing in a meaning way toward two huge cases which, stacked with medieval arms,
occupied one of the corners.

"Odd couple over there," he whispered as the older detective paused to listen. "Been watching them for the last
five minutes. They pretend to be looking at some old armor, but they are mighty uneasy and keep glancing up at the
window overhead as if they would like to jump out."

Mr. Gryce indulged in one of his characteristic exclamations. This was the couple whose queer actions he had
noticed on the staircase. "I'll have a talk with them presently. Anyone in the rooms opposite?"

"Yes, the Curator. He's in Room A, where there are a lot of engravings waiting to be hung. I guess he was pretty
well up to his neck in business when that fellow Correy set up his shout. And have you noticed that he's a bit deaf,
which is the reason, perhaps, why he was not sooner on the scene?"

"No, I hadn't noticed. Anyone else at this end?"

"Only the young couple I speak of."

Mr. Gryce gave them a second look. They were by many paces farther from the pedestal from behind which the
bow had been flung back of the tapestry than would quite fit in with the theory he had formed, and by means of
which he hoped to single out the person who had sent the deadly arrow. But then, under the stress of fear, people can
move very swiftly; and besides, what guarantee did he have that these poor, frightened creatures had located
themselves with all the honesty the occasion demanded? According to Sweetwater there was nobody sufficiently
near to notice where they had been at the critical instant, or where they were now. The student's back was toward
them, and the Curator quite out of sight behind a close-shut door.

With this doubt in his mind, Mr. Gryce started to approach the couple. As he did so, he observed another curious
fact concerning them. They were neither of them in the place natural to people interested in the contents of the great
cases which they had crossed the hall to examine. Instead of standing where a full view of these cases could be had,
they had withdrawn so far behind them that they presented the appearance of persons in hiding. Yet as he drew
nearer and noted their youth and countrified appearance, Mr. Gryce was careful to assume his most benign
department and so to modulate his voice as to call up the pink into the young woman's cheek and the deep red into
the man's. What Mr. Gryce said was this: "You are interested I see in this show of old armor? I don't wonder. It is
very curious. Is this your first visit to the museum?"

The man nodded; the woman lowered her head. Both were self-conscious to a point painful to see.

"It is a pity your first visit should be spoiled by anything so dreadful as the accidental death of this young girl. It
seems to have frightened you both very much."

"Yes, yes," muttered the man. "We never saw anybody hurt before."

"Did you know the young lady?"

"Oh, no; oh, no!" they both hastened to cry out in a confused jumble, after which the man added:

"We--we're from up the river. We don't know anybody in this big town."

As he spoke, he began to edge away from the wall, the girl following.

"Wait!" smiled the detective. "You are getting out of place. You were looking at the armor when you first heard
the hubbub over there?"

Both were silent.

"What were you looking at?"

"I was looking at her, and her was looking at me," stammered the man. "We were--were talking together here--
we didn't notice--"

"Just married, eh?"

"Yesterday noon, sir. How--how did you know?"

"I didn't know; I only guessed. And I think I can guess something else--what your reason was for stealing into
this dark corner."

It was the man who now looked down, and the woman who looked up. In a pinch of this kind, it is the woman
who is the more courageous.

"He was a-kissin' of me, sir," she whispered in a frank but shamefaced way. "There was no harm in that, was
there? We're so fond of one another, and how could we know that anyone was dying so near?"

"No, there was no harm," Mr. Gryce reluctantly admitted. Caught in an absurdity amusing enough in its way, he
would certainly under less strenuous circumstances have rather enjoyed his own humiliation. But the occasion was
too serious and his part in it too pronounced for him to take any pleasure in this misadventure. In the prosecution of
so daring a scheme for locating witnesses if not of discovering the actual user of the bow, it would not do to fail. He
of prints satisfied him that Sweetwater was right as to the impossibility of getting any information from this quarter. Nor could he hope, remembering what he had himself seen, that he would succeed any better with the last person now remaining on this floor—the young man busy with the coins in No. I.

That he was to be so fortunate as to lay an immediate hand on the person who had shot the fatal arrow was no longer regarded by him as among the possibilities. Whoever this person was, he had found a way of escape which rendered him for the time being safe from discovery. But there was another possible miscalculation which he felt it his duty to recognize before he proceeded further in his difficult task. The bow found back of the tapestry had every appearance of being the one used for the delivery of the arrow. But was it? Might it not, in some strange and unaccountable way, have been flung there previous to the present event and by some hand no longer in the building?

Such coincidences have been known, and while as a rule this old and experienced detective put little confidence in coincidences of any kind, he had but one thought in mind in approaching this final witness, which was to get from him some acknowledgment of having seen, on or about the time of the accident, a movement in the tapestry behind which this bow lay concealed. If once this fact could be established, there could be no further question as to the direct connection between the bow there found and the present crime.

But Mr. Gryce might have spared his pains, so far as this young man was concerned. He had been so engrossed in his search for a particularly rare coin, that he had had no eyes for anything beyond. Besides, he was abnormally nearsighted, not being able, even with his glasses, to distinguish faces at any distance, much less a movement in a piece of tapestry.

All of this was discouraging, even if anticipated; but there were still the people below, some one of whom might have seen what this man had not. He would go down to them now, but by a course which would incidentally enlighten him in regard to another matter about which he had some doubts.

In his goings to and fro through the hall, he had passed the open door of Room H and noted how easily a direct flight could be made through it and Rooms I and J to the small staircase running down at the rear. Whether or not this explained the absence of anyone on this floor who by the utmost stretch of imagination could be held responsible for the accident which had occurred there, he felt it incumbent upon him to see in how short a time the escape he still believed in could be made through these rooms.

Timing his steps from the pedestal nearest this end, he found that even at his slow pace it took but three minutes for him to reach the arcade leading into the court from the foot of the staircase. A man conscious of wrong and eager to escape would do it in less; and if, as possibly happened, he had to wait in the doorway of Room J till Correy and the boy had cleared the way for him by their joint run into the farther gallery, he would still have time to be well on his way to the lower floor before the cry went up which shut off all further egress. Relieved, if not contented with the prospect this gave of a new clue to his problem, he reentered the court and was preparing to renew his investigations when the arrival of the Coroner put a temporary end to his efforts as well as to the impatience of the so-called pawns, who were now allowed, one and all, to leave their posts.

V

THREE WHERE TWO SHOULD BE

It was a good half-hour before Mr. Gryce again found himself in a position to pursue the line of investigation thus summarily interrupted. The condition of Mrs. Taylor, which had not been improved by delay, demanded attention, and it was with a sense of great relief that Mr. Gryce finally saw her put into a taxi. Her hurried examination by Coroner Price had elicited nothing new, and of all who had noticed her distracted air on leaving the building, there was not one, if we except the detective, but felt convinced that if she had not been of unsound mind previous to this accident, she certainly had become so since. He still held to his theory that her story, fantastic and out of character as it seemed, was true in all its essentials, and that it was the warning she believed herself to have received of her husband's death, rather than what had taken place under her eyes, which had caused her such extreme suffering and temporarily laid her reason low.

With the full approbation of the Coroner, to whom he had explained his idea, Mr. Gryce began the sifting process by which he hoped to discover the one witness he wanted.

To subject to further durance such persons as from their position at the moment of tragedy could have no information to give bearing in any way upon their investigation was manifestly unfair. The old woman who had been found in Room A was of this class, and accordingly was allowed to go, together with such others as had been within twenty feet or more of the main entrance. These eliminated (it was curious to see how loath these few chosen ones were to depart, now that the opportunity was given them), Mr. Gryce settled down to business by asking Mrs. Lynch to come forward.

She, as you will see by consulting the chart, answered to the person marked "2." A little, dried-up, eager woman rose from the bench on which were collected the few people still remaining, and met his inquiring look with a
nervous smile. She, of all the persons moving about on the main floor at the moment of alarm, had been in the best position for seeing the flight of the arrow and the fall of the victim in Section II. Had she seen them? The continued jigging of the small, wiry curls hanging out from either side of her old-fashioned bonnet would seem to betray an inner perturbation indicative of some hitherto suppressed information. At all events Mr. Gryce allowed himself this hope and was most bland and encouraging in his manner as he showed her the place which had been assigned her on the chart drawn up by Sweetwater, and asked if the position given her was correct.

Perhaps a ready reply was too much to expect--women of her stamp not knowing, as a rule, very much about charts. But when he saw her hasten to the very spot assigned her by Sweetwater, he took heart and with a suggestive glance at the gallery intimated that he would be very glad to hear what she had seen there. Her surprise was evident, much too evident for his satisfaction. The little curls jigged about more than ever, and her cheeks grew quite pink as she answered hastily:

"I didn't see anything. I wasn't looking. Did you think I saw anything?"

"I hoped you had," he smiled. "If your eyes had chanced to be turned toward that end of the gallery----"

"But I was going the other way. My back was to it, not my face--like this." And wheeling herself about, she showed him that she had been walking toward the rear of the building rather than advancing toward the front.

His disappointment was great; but it would have been greater if he had not realized that under these conditions she was in the precise position to meet face to face any person emerging into the court from the foot of the small staircase. If she could tell him of having seen any such person, and closely enough to be able to give a description of this person's appearance, then she might prove to be his prime witness, after all. But she could not satisfy him on this point. She had been on her way out, and was too busy searching in her bag for her umbrella check to notice whether there were people about her or not. She had not found it when the great shout came.

"And then?"

Oh, then she was so frightened and so shocked that everything swam before her eyes and she nearly fell! Her heart was not a strong one and sometimes missed a beat or two, and she thought it must have done so then, for when her head steadied again, she found herself clinging to the balustrade of the great staircase.

"Then you have nothing whatever to add to what the others have told?"

Her "no," if a shaky one, was decisive, and seeing no reason for detaining her further, he gave her permission to depart.

Disturbed in his calculations, but not disheartened, Mr. Gryce next proceeded to interrogate the door-man at this end of the building. From his position, facing as he did the approach from the small staircase, he should be able to say, if the old lady could not, whether anyone had crossed the open strip of court toward which she had been advancing. But Mr. Gryce found him no more clear-headed on this point than she. He was the oldest man connected with the museum, and had been very much shaken up by what had occurred. Really, he could not say whether anyone had passed across his line of vision at that time or not. All he could be sure of was that no attempt had been made by anyone to reach the door after he had been bidden to close it.

So this clue ended like the rest in no thoroughfare. Would he have any better luck with the subject of his next inquiry? The young lady tabulated as No. 13 was where she could have seen the upper edge of the tapestry shake if she had been looking that way; but she was not. She also was going from instead of toward the point of interest—in other words, entering and not leaving the room on whose threshold she stood.

Only two men were left from whom he could hope to obtain the important testimony he was so anxiously seeking: Nos. 10 and 11. He had turned back toward the bench where they should be awaiting his attention and was debating whether he would gain more by attacking them singly or together, when he suddenly became aware of a fact which drove all these small considerations out of his mind.

According to every calculation and according to the chart, there should be only these two men on that bench. But he saw _three_. Who was this third man, and where had he come from?

VI

THE MAN IN THE GALLERY

Beckoning to Sweetwater, Mr. Gryce pointed out this extra man and asked him if he recognized him as one of the twenty-two he had tabulated.

The answer was a vigorous no. "It's a new face to me. He must have dropped from the roof or come up through the flooring. He certainly wasn't anywhere about when I made out my list. He looks a trifle hipped, eh?"

"Troubled—decidedly troubled."

"You might go a little further and say done up."

"Good-looking, though. Appears to be of foreign birth."

"English, I should say, and just over."

"English, without a doubt. I'll go speak to him; you wait here, but watch out for the Coroner, and send him my
way as soon as he's at leisure."

Then he reapproached the bench, and observing, with the keenness with which he observed everything without a
direct look, that with each step he took the stranger's confusion increased, he decided to wait till after he had
finished with the others, before he entered upon an inquiry which might prove not only lengthy but of the first
importance.

He was soon very glad that he had done this. He got nothing from Mr. Simpson; but the questions put to Mr.
Turnbull were more productive. Almost at the first word, this gentleman acknowledged that he had seen a movement
in the great square of tapestry to which Mr. Gryce drew his attention. He did not know when, or just where he stood
at the time, but he certainly had noticed it shake.

"Can you describe the movement?" asked the gratified detective.
"It swayed out----"
"As if blown by some wind?"
"No, more as if pushed forward by a steady hand."
"Good! And what then?"
"It settled back almost without a quiver."
"Instantly?"
"No, not instantly. A moment or two passed before it fell back into place."
"This was before the attendant Correy called out his alarm, of course?"

Yes, of course it was before; but how long before, he couldn't say. A minute--two minutes--five minutes--how
could he tell! He had no watch in hand.

Mr. Gryce thought possibly he might assist the man's memory on this point but forbore to do so at the time. It
was enough for his present purpose that the necessary link to the establishment of his theory had been found. No
more doubt now that the bow lying in the niche of the doorway overhead had been the one made use of in this
desperate tragedy; and the way thus cleared for him, he could confidently proceed in his search for the man who had
flung it there. He believed him to be within his reach at that very moment, but his countenance gave no index to his
thought as reapproaching the young man now sitting all alone on the bench, he halted before him and pleasantly
inquired:

"Do I see you for the first time? I thought we had listed the name of every person in the building. How is it that
we did not get yours?"

The tide of color which instantly flooded the young man's countenance astonished Mr. Gryce both by its warmth
and fullness. If he were as thin-skinned as this betokened, one should experience but little difficulty in reaching the
heart of his trouble.

With an air of quiet interest Mr. Gryce sat down by the young man's side. Would this display of friendliness
have the effect of restoring some of his self-possession and giving him the confidence he evidently lacked? No, the
red fled from his cheek, and a ghastly white took its place; but he showed no other change.

Meantime the detective studied his countenance. It was a good one, but just now so distorted by suffering that
only such as were familiar with his every look could read his character from his present expression. Would a more
direct question rouse him? Possibly. At all events, Mr. Gryce decided to make the experiment.

"Will you give me your name?" he asked, "--your name and residence?"

The man he addressed gave a quick start, pulled himself together and made an attempt to reply.

"My name is Travis. I am an Englishman just off the steamer from Southampton. My home is in the county of
Hertfordshire. I have no residence here."

"Your hotel, then?"

Another flush--then quickly: "I have not yet chosen one."

This was too surprising for belief. A stranger in town without rooms or hotel accommodations, making use of
the morning hours to visit a museum!

"You must be very much interested in art!" observed his inquisitor a little dryly.

Again that flush and again the quick-recurring pallor.

"I--I am interested in all things beautiful," he replied at last in broken tones.

"I see. May I ask where you were when that arrow flew which killed a young lady visitor? Not in this part of the
court, I take it?"

Mr. Travis gave a quick shudder and that was all. The detective waited, but no other answer came.

"I am told that as she fell she uttered one cry. Did you hear it, Mr. Travis?"

"It wasn't a cry," was his quick reply. "It was something quite different, but dreadful, dreadful!"

Mr. Gryce's manner changed.

"Then you did hear it. You were near enough to distinguish between a scream and a gasp. Where were you, and
why weren't you seen by my man when he went through the building?"

"I--I was kneeling out of sight--too shocked to move. But I grew tired of that and wanted to go; but on reaching
the court, I found the doors closed. So I came here."

"Kneeling! Where were you kneeling?"

He made a quick gesture in the direction of the galleries.

The detective frowned, perhaps to hide his secret satisfaction.

"Won't you be a little more definite?" he asked; then as the man continued to hesitate he added, but as yet
without any appreciable loss of kindliness: "Every other person here has been good enough to show us the exact
place he was occupying at that serious moment. I must ask you to do the same; it is only just."

Was the look this called up one of fear or of simple repugnance? It might be either; but the detective was
disposed to consider it fear.

"Will you lead the way?" he pursued. "I shall be glad to follow."

A glance of extreme reproach; then these words, uttered with painful intensity:

"You want me to go back there--where I saw--where I can see again--I cannot. I'm not well. I suffer. You will
excuse me. You will allow me to say what I have to say, _here_."

"I'm sorry, but I cannot do that. The others have gone without question to their places; why should not you?"

"Because--" The word came brokenly and was followed by silence. Then, seeing the hopelessness of
contending with police authority, he cast another glance of strong repulsion in the direction of the gallery and started
to his feet. Mr. Gryce did the same, and together they crossed the court. But they got no further at this time than the
foot of the staircase. Coroner Price, by an extra effort which seemed to be called for by the circumstances, had
succeeded in picking up a jury from the people collected on the street, and entering at this moment, created a
diversion which effectively postponed the detective's examination of his new witness.

When the opportunity came for resuming it, so much time had elapsed that Mr. Gryce looked for some decided
change in the manner or bearing of the man who, unfortunately for his purposes, had thus been given a quiet hour in
which to think. Better, much better, for the cause of justice, if he could have pushed him to the point at once, harried
him, as it were, in hot blood. Now he might find him more difficult.

But when, in company with the Coroner, who now found himself free to assist him in his hunt for witnesses, he
reapproached the Englishman sitting as before alone on his bench, it was to find him in the same mind in which he had left him. He wore the same look and followed with the same reluctance when he was made to
understand that the time had now come for him to show just where he was standing when that arrow was sped on its
death-course. And greatly impressed by this fact, which in a way contradicted all his expectations, Mr. Gryce trod
slowly after, watching with the keenest interest to see whether, on reaching the top of the steps, this man upon
whose testimony so much depended would turn toward the southern gallery where the girl had fallen, or toward the
northern one, where Correy had found the bow.

It looked as if he were going to the left, for his head turned that way as he cleared the final step. But his body
soon swayed aside in the other direction, and by the time the old detective had himself reached the landing, Travis,
closely accompanied by the Coroner, had passed through the first of the three arches leading to that especial section
of the gallery where the concealing tapestry hung.

"The man is honest," was Mr. Gryce's first thought. "He is going to show us the bow and confess to what was
undoubtedly an accident." But Mr. Gryce felt more or less ready to modify this impromptu conclusion when, on
passing through the arch himself he came upon the young man still standing in Section VI, with his eyes on the
opposite gallery and his whole frame trembling with emotion.

"Is she--the young lady who was shot--still lying on those cold stones alone, forsaken and----"

Mr. Gryce knew misery when he saw it. This man had not overstated the case when he had said "I suffer." But
the cause! To what could this excess of sensibility be attributed? To remorse or to an exaggerated personal
repulsion? It looked like remorse, but that there might be no doubt as to this, Mr. Gryce hastened to assure the
Englishman that on the departure of the jury the body had been removed to one of the inner rooms. The relief which
this gave to Mr. Travis was evident. He showed no further reluctance to proceed and was indeed the first of the three
to enter where the great drapery hung, flanked by the two immense vases. Would he pause before it or hurry by into
the broad corridor in front? If he hurried by, what would become of their now secretly accepted theory?

But he did not hurry by; that is, he did not pass beyond the upper end, but stopped when he got there and looked
back with an air of extreme depreciation at the two officials.

"Have we arrived?" asked Mr. Gryce, his suspicions all returning, for the man had stepped aside from the
drapery and was standing in a spot conspicuously open to view even from the lower court.

The Englishman nodded; whereupon Mr. Gryce, approaching to his side, exclaimed in evident doubt:

"You were standing _here_? When? Not at the moment the young girl fell, or you would have been seen by
some one, if not by everyone, in the building. I want you to take the exact place you occupied when you first learned that something had gone wrong in the opposite gallery."

The stranger's distress grew. With a show of indecision scarcely calculated to inspire confidence in either of the two men watching him, he moved now here and now there till he finally came to a standstill close by the pedestal--so close, indeed, to its inner corner that he was almost in a line with its rear.

"It was here," he declared with a gulp of real feeling. "I am sure I am right now. I had just stepped out----"

"From behind the tapestry?"

"No." His blank astonishment at the quickness with which he had been caught up left him staring for a moment at the speaker, before he added:

"From behind the pedestal. The--the vase, as you see, is a very curious one. I wanted to look at it from all sides."

Without a word the Coroner slipped past him and entering the narrow space behind the pedestal took a look up at the vase from his present cramped position.

As he did this, two things happened: first Sweetwater, who had stolen upon the scene, possibly at some intimation from Mr. Gryce, took a step toward them which brought him in alignment with the Englishman, of whose height in comparison with his own he seemed to take careful note; and secondly, the sensitive skin of the foreigner flushed red again as he noticed the Coroner's sarcastic smile, and heard his dry remark:

"One gets a better view here of the opposite gallery than of the vase perched so high overhead. Had you wished to look at those ladies, without being seen by them, you could hardly have found a better loophole than the one made by the curving in of this great vase toward its base." Then quickly: "You surely took one look their way; that would be only natural."

The answer Mr. Travis gave was certainly unexpected.

"It was after I came out that I saw them," he stammered. "There were two ladies, one tall and one very young and slight. The older lady was stepping toward the front, the other entering from behind. As I looked, the younger made a dash and ran by the first lady. Then----"

"Proceed, Mr. Travis. Your emotion is very natural; but it is imperative that we hear all you have to tell us. She ran by the older lady, and then?"

Still silence. The Englishman appeared to be looking at Coroner Price, who in speaking emerged from behind the pedestal; but it is doubtful if he saw him. A tear was in his eye--a tear!

Seeing it, Mr. Gryce felt a movement of compassion, and thinking to help him, said kindly enough:

"Was it so very dreadful?"

The answer came with great simplicity:

"Yes. One minute she was all life and gaiety; the next she was lying outstretched on the hard floor."

"And you?"

Again that look of ingenuous surprise.

"I don't remember about myself," he said. "I was thinking too much about her. I never saw anyone killed before."

"Killed? Why do you say killed? You say you saw her fall, but how did you know she was killed?"

"I saw the arrow in her breast. As she fell backward, I saw the arrow."

As he uttered these words, the three men watching him perceived the sweat start out on his forehead, and his eyes take on a glassy stare. It was as if he were again in gaze upon that image of youthful loveliness falling to the ground with the arrow of death in her heart. The effect was strangely moving. To see this event reflected as it were in horror from this man's consciousness made it appear more real and much more impressive than when contemplated directly. Why? Had remorse given it its poignancy? Had it been his own hand which had directed this arrow from behind the pedestal? If not, why this ghastly display of an emotion so far beyond what might be expected from the most sentimental of onlookers?

In an endeavor to clear the situation, the Coroner intervened with the following question:

"Have you ever seen a shot made by a bow and arrow before, Mr. Travis? Archery-practice, I mean. Or--well, the shooting of wild animals in India, Africa or elsewhere?"

"Oh, yes. I come from a country where the bow and arrow are used. But I never shoot. I can only speak of what I have seen others do."

"That is sufficient. You ought to be able to tell, then, from what direction this arrow came."

"It--it must have come from this side of the gallery. Not from this section, as you call it, but from some one of the other open places along here."

"Why not from this one?"

"Because there was nobody here but me," was the simple and seemingly ingenuous answer.

It gave them an unexpected surprise. Innocence would speak in this fashion. But then the bow--the bow which was lying not a dozen feet from where they stood! Nothing could eliminate that bow.
After a short consultation between themselves, which the Englishman seemed not to notice, the Coroner addressed him with the soothing remark:

"Mr. Travis, you must not misunderstand me. The accident which has occurred (we will not yet say crime) is of so serious a nature that it is imperative for us to get at the exact facts. Only yourself and one other person whom we know can supply them. I allude to the lady you saw, first in front of and then behind the girl who was shot. Her story has been told. Yours will doubtless coincide with it. May I ask you, then, to satisfy us on a point you were in a better position than herself to take note of. It is this: When the young girl gave that bound forward of which you both speak, did she make straight for the railing in front, or did she approach it in a diagonal direction?"

"I do not know. You distress me very much. I was not thinking of anything like that. Why should I think of anything so immaterial. She came--I saw her smiling, beaming with joy, a picture of lovely youth--then her arms went suddenly up and she fell--backward--the arrow showing in her breast. If I told the story a hundred times, I could not tell it differently."

"We do not wish you to, Mr. Travis. Only there must be somewhere in your mind a recollection of the angle which her body presented to the railing as she came forward."

The unhappy man shook his head, at which token of helplessness Mr. Gryce beckoned to Sweetwater and whispered a few words in his ear. The man nodded and withdrew, going the length of the gallery, where he disappeared among the arches, to reappear shortly after in the gallery opposite. When he reached Section II, Mr. Gryce again addressed the witness, who, to his surprise and to that of the Coroner as well, had become reabsorbed in his own thoughts to the entire disregard of what this movement might portend. It took a sharp word to rouse him.

"I am going to ask you to watch the young man who has just shown himself on the other side, and tell us to what extent his movements agree with those made by the young lady prior to her collapse and fall to the floor."

For an instant indignation robbed the stranger of all utterance. Then he burst forth:

"You would make a farce of what is so sad and dreadful, and she scarcely cold! It is dishonoring to the young lady. I cannot look at that young man--that hideous young man--and think of her and of how she looked and walked the instant before her death."

The two officials smiled; they could not help it. Sweetwater was certainly no beauty, and to associate him in any kind of physical comparison with the dead girl was certainly incongruous. Yet they both felt that the point just advanced by them should be settled and settled now while the requisite remembrance was fresh in the mind of this invaluable witness. But in order to get at what they wanted, some show of consideration for his feelings was evidently necessary. Police persistence often defeats its own ends. If he was to be made to do what they wished, it would have to be through the persuasion of some one outside the Force. To whom should they appeal? The question answered itself. Mr. Roberts was approaching from the front, and to him they turned. Would he use his influence with this stranger?

"He may listen to you," urged the Coroner in the whispered conference which now followed, "if you explain to him how much patience you and all the rest of the people in the building have had to exercise in this unhappy crisis. He seems a good enough fellow, but not in line with our ideas."

Mr. Roberts, who saw the man for the first time, surveyed him in astonishment.

"Where was he standing?" he asked.

"Just where you see him now--or so he says."

"He couldn't have been. Some one would have observed him--the woman who was in the compartment with the stricken girl, or the man studying coins in the one next to it."

"So it would seem," admitted the Coroner. "But if he were behind the pedestal----"

"Behind the pedestal!"

"That's where we think he was. But no matter about that now!--we can explain that to you later. At present all we want is for you to reassure him."

Not altogether pleased with his task, but seeing no good reason for declining it, the affable director approached the Englishman, who, recognizing one of his own social status, seemed to take heart and turn a willing ear to Mr. Roberts' persuasions. The result was satisfactory.

When the Coroner again called Mr. Travis' attention to Sweetwater awaiting orders in the opposite gallery he did not refuse to look, though his whole manner showed how much he was affected by this forced acquiescence in their plans.

"You will watch the movements of the young man we have placed over there," the Coroner had said; "and when he strikes a position corresponding to that taken by the young lady at the moment she was shot, lift up your hand, thus. I will not ask you to speak."

"But you forget that there is blood on that floor. That man will step in it. I cannot lend myself to such sacrilege. It is wrong. Let the lady be buried first."
The outburst was so natural, the horror so unfeigned, that not only the men he addressed but all within hearing showed the astonishment it caused.

"One would think you knew the victim of this random shot!" the Coroner intimated with a fresh and close scrutiny of this very reluctant witness. "Did you? Was she a friend of yours?"

"No, no!" came in quick disavowal. "No friend. I have never exchanged a word with her--never."

"Then we will proceed. One cannot consider sensibilities in a case like this." And he made a signal to Sweetwater, who turned his body this way and that.

The distressed Englishman watched these movements with slowly dilating eyes.

"It's the angle we want--the angle at which she presented her body to the gallery front," explained the relentless official.

A shudder, then the rigidity of fixed attention, broken in another moment, however, by an impulsive movement and the unexpected question:

"Is it to find the man who did it that you are enacting this horrible farce?"

Somewhat startled, the Coroner retorted:

"If you object on that account----"

But Mr. Travis as vehemently exclaimed:

"But I don't! I want the man caught. One should not shoot arrows about in a place where there are beautiful young women. I want him caught and punished."

As they were all digesting this unexpected avowal, they saw his hand go up. The Coroner gave a low whistle, and the detective in obedience to it stood for one instant stock-still--then bent quickly to the floor.

"What is he doing?" cried Mr. Travis.

"Yes, what is he doing?" echoed Mr. Roberts.

"Running a mark about his shoes to fix their exact location," was the grim response.

VII

"YOU THINK THAT OF ME!"

"We're certainly up against it this time," were the words with which Dr. Price led the detective down the gallery.

"What sort of an opinion can a man form of a fellow like that? Is he fool or knave?"

Mr. Gryce showed no great alacrity in answering. When he did speak it was to say:

"We shall have to go into the matter a little more deeply before we can trust our judgment as to his complete sincerity. But if you want to know whether I believe him to have loosed the arrow which killed that innocent child, I am ready from present appearances to say yes. Who else was there to do it? He and he only was on the spot. But it was a chance action, without intention or wish to murder. No man, even if he were a fool, would choose such a place or such a means for murder."

"That's true; but how does it help to call it accident? Accident calls for a bow in hand, an arrow within reach, an impulse to try one's skill at a fancied target. Now the arrow--whatever may be said of the bow--was not within the reach of anyone standing in this gallery. The arrow came from the wall at the base of which this young woman died. It had to be brought from there here. That does not look like accident, but crime."

Yet as the Coroner uttered this acknowledgment, he realized as plainly as Mr. Gryce how many incongruous elements lay in the way of any such solution of the mystery. If they accepted the foreigner's account of himself,--which for some reason neither seemed ready to dispute,--into what a maze of improbabilities it at once led them! A stranger just off ship! The victim a mere schoolgirl! The weapon such an unusual one as to be _outre_ beyond belief. Only a madman--But there! Travis had less the appearance of a lunatic than Mrs. Taylor. It must have been an accident as Gryce said; and yet--

If there is much virtue in an _if_, there is certainly a modicum of the same in a _yet_, and the Coroner, in full recognition of this stumbling-block, remarked with unusual dryness:

"I agree with you that some half-dozen questions are necessary before we wade deeper into this quagmire. Where shall we go to have it out?"

"The Curator will allow us to use his office. I will see that Mr. Travis joins us there."

"See that he comes before he has a chance to fall into one of his reveries."

But quickly as Mr. Gryce worked, he was not speedy enough to prevent the result mentioned. The man upon whose testimony so much hinged did not even lift his eyes when brought again into their presence.

The Coroner, in his determination to be satisfied on this point, made short work of rousing him from his abstraction. With a few leading questions he secured his attention and then without preamble or apology asked him with what purpose he had come to America and why he had been so anxious to visit the museum that he hastened directly to it from the steamer without making an effort to locate himself in some hotel.

The ease with which this apparently ingenuous stranger had managed to meet the opening queries of this rough-
and-ready official was suddenly broken. He stammered and turned red and made so many abortive attempts to reply that the latter grew impatient and finally remarked:

"If the truth will incriminate you, you are quite justified in holding it back!"

"Incriminate me!" With the repetition of this alarming word, a change of the most marked character took place in young Travis' manner. "What does that mean?" he asked. "I am not sure that I understand your use of that word incriminate."

Dr. Price explained himself, to the seeming horror of the startled Englishman.

"You think that of me!" he cried, "of me, who----"

But here indignation made him speechless, till some feeling stronger than the one subduing him to silence forced him again into speech, and he supplemented in broken tones: "I am only a stranger to you and consequently am willing to pardon your misconception of my character and the principles by which I regulate my life. I have a horror of crime and all violence; besides, the young lady--she awakened my deepest admiration and reverence. I,"--again he stopped; again he burst forth,--"I would sooner have died myself than seen such angel graces laid low. Let my emotion be proof of what I say. It was a man of the hardest heart who killed her."

"It would seem so."

It was the Coroner who spoke. He was nonplussed; and Mr. Gryce no less so. Never had either of them been confronted by a blinder or more bewildering case. An incomprehensible crime and a suspect it was impossible to associate with a deed of blood! There must be some other explanation of the mournful circumstance they were considering. There had been twenty or more people in the building, but--and here was the rub--if the chart which they had drawn up was correct and the calculations which they had drawn from it were to be depended upon, this man was the only person who had been in this gallery when the arrow was shot.

With a side glance at Mr. Gryce, who seemed content to remain silent in the background, Dr. Price turned again to Mr. Travis.

"Your admiration of the young lady must have been as sudden as it was strong. Or possibly you had seen her before you hid behind the pedestal. Had you, Mr. Travis? She was a charming child; perhaps you had been attracted by her beauty before you even entered the galleries."

Instantly the man was another being.

"You are right," he acquiesced with undue alacrity. "I had seen her crossing the court. Her beauty was heavenly. I am a gentleman, but I followed her. When she moved, I moved; and when she went upstairs, I followed her. But I would not offend. I kept behind,--far behind her,--and when she entered the gallery on one side, I took pains to enter it on the other. This is how I came to be looking in her direction when she was struck down. You see, I speak with candor; I open my whole heart."

Dr. Price, stroking his long beard, eyed the man with a thoughtful air which changed to one of renewed inquiry. Instead of being convinced by this outburst, he was conscious of a new and deepening distrust. The transition from a low state of feeling to one so feverishly eager had been too sudden. The avidity with which this man just off ship had made a grasp at the offered explanation had been too marked; it lacked sincerity and could impose on no one. Of this he seemed himself aware, for again the ready flush ran from forehead to neck, and with a deprecatory glance which included the silent detective he vehemently exclaimed:

"I am poor at a lie. I see that you will have the whole truth. It was on her account I crossed the ocean. It was by dogging her innocent steps that I came to the museum this morning. I am a man of means, and I can do as I please. When I said that I had never exchanged a word with her, I spoke the truth. I never have; yet my interest in her was profound. I have never seen any other girl or woman whom I was anxious to make my wife. I hoped to meet and woo her in this country. I had no opportunity for doing so in my own. I did not see her till a night or so before she sailed, and then it was at the theater, where she sat with some friends in an adjoining box. She talked, and I heard what she said. She was leaving England. She was going to America to live; and she mentioned the steamer on which she expected to sail. It may strike you as impetuous, unnatural in an Englishman, and all that, but next morning I secured my passage on that same ship. As I have just said, I am my own master and can do as I please, and I pleased to do that. But for all the opportunity which a voyage sometimes gives, I did not succeed in making her acquaintance on shipboard, much as I desired it. I was ill for the first three days and timorous the rest. I could only watch her moving about the decks and wait for the happy moment in which I might be able to do her some service. But that moment never came, and now it never will come."

The mournfulness with which this was uttered seemed genuine. The Coroner was silenced by it, and it was left to Mr. Gryce to take up the conversation. This he did with the same show of respect evinced by Dr. Price.

"We are obliged to you for your confidence," said he. "Of course you can tell us this young girl's name."

"Angeline--Angeline Willetts. I saw it in the list of passengers."

"What ship?"
"The _Castania_, from Southampton."

"We are greatly obliged to you for this information. It gives us the much-wanted clue to her identity. Angeline Willetts! Whom was she with?"

"A Madame Duclos, a French lady. I once spoke to _her_."

"You did? And what did you say?"

"I bade her good morning as we were passing on the main-deck stairs. But she did not answer, and I was not guilty of the impertinence again."

"I see. Such, then, was the situation up to this morning. But since? How did it happen that a young girl, six hours after landing in this country, should come to a place like this without a chaperon?"

"I don't know what brought her here; I can only tell you why I came. When she left the dock, I was standing near enough to hear the orders Madame Duclos gave on entering a cab. Naturally, mine were the same. I have been in New York before, and I knew the hotel. If you will consult the Universal's register for the day, you will find my name in it under hers. You will understand why I shrank from confessing to this fact before. I held her in such honor--I was and am so anxious that no shadow should fall upon her innocence from my poor story of secret and unrecognized devotion. She knew nothing of what led me to follow every step she took. I was a witness of her fate, but that is all the connection between us. I hope you believe me."

It would be difficult not to, in face of his direct gaze, from which all faltering had now vanished. Yet the matter not being completely thrashed out, Mr. Gryce felt himself obliged to say in answer to this last:

"We see no reason to doubt your word or your story, Mr. Travis. All that you have said is possible. But how about your following the young girl here? How did that come about?"

"That was occasioned by my anxiety for her--an anxiety which seems to have been only too well-founded."

"How? What?" Both of the officials showed a greatly increased interest. "Please explain yourself, Mr. Travis. What reason had you for any such feeling in regard to a person with whom you had held no conversation? Anything which you saw or heard at the hotel?"

"Yes. I was sitting in the foyer. I knew that the ladies were in the house, but I had not seen them. I was anxious to do so (see, I am telling all) and was watching the door of the lift from behind my journal, when they both stepped out. Miss Willetts was dressed for the street, but Madame Duclos was not, which seemed very strange to me. But I felt no concern till I caught some fragments of what Madame said in passing me. She spoke in French, a language I understand, and she was exclaiming over her misfortune at not being allowed to accompany her young charge to whatever place she was going. It was bad, bad, she cried, and she would not have a moment's peace till her dear Angeline got back. Anxiety of this kind was natural in a Frenchwoman not accustomed to see a young lady enter the streets alone; but the force with which she expressed it betrayed a real alarm--an alarm which communicated itself to me. Where could this unprotected girl be going, alone and in a hotel cab?"

"I could not imagine, and when I saw Madame stop in the middle of her talk to buy some fresh flowers and pin them to Miss Willetts' corsage, I got a queer feeling, and flinging my newspaper aside, I strolled to the door and so out in time to hear Madame's orders to the chauffeur. The young lady was to be taken to a museum. To a museum, at this early hour! and alone, alone! Such a proceeding is not at all in accord with French ideas, and I feared a plot. Though it was far from being my affair, I determined to make it so; and as soon as I dared, I followed her just as I had followed her from the dock. But fruitlessly! Not knowing the danger, how could I avert it? I was in one gallery, she in the other. It was my evil fate to see her fall, but by whose hand I am as ignorant as yourselves. _Now_ I have told it all. Will you let me go?"

"Not yet," interposed the Coroner. "There are one or two questions more which you will undoubtedly answer with the same frankness. Were you standing in front of the pedestal or behind it when you saw Miss Willetts fall?"

"I was standing just where I said, somewhere near it in the open gallery."

This seemed so open to question that the Coroner paused a moment to recall the exact situation and see if it were possible for a man as conspicuous in figure as Mr. Travis to have stood thus in full view of gallery and court, without attracting the attention of anyone in either place. He found, after a moment's consideration, that it was possible. Mr. Gryce, for all his efforts and systematic inquiry into the position which each person had held at or near this time, had been able to find but one who chanced to be looking in the direction of this gallery, and he with a limited view which took in only the upper part of the tapestry.

A probe in a fresh direction might reach a more vulnerable spot.

"But you had been behind the pedestal?" Dr. Price suggested.

"Yes"--the quick flush coming again. "My old timidity led me to conceal myself where I could watch undetected her bright young figure pass from arch to arch along the opposite gallery. Not till she had got past my line of view did I step out, and then--then it was to see what I have already told you--her rush toward the front--the start she gave--the fall--that cruel arrow! I own that I shrank back into my narrow hiding-place when I realized that all was at
an end--that she was dead."

"Why? You had been witness to a deed of blood--a deed which must have recalled to you the anxiety expressed by the woman whom you regarded as the young girl's guardian; and yet you shrank back--out of sight--away from those who had the right to make inquiries! How do you explain that, Mr. Travis?"

"I cannot, except that I was so dazed, so stricken, that I was hardly conscious of what I did. And, sirs, believe me or not, had it not been for the refuge afforded by that narrow space behind the pedestal, I think I should have fallen headlong to the floor. When I came again to myself, which was after some of the confusion had abated, I had only one thought in mind: to suppress myself and my story lest some shadow should fall across her sweet purity. Waiting till the attention of the man you had placed on guard over her body was attracted another way, I slid out and hastened to the front, where I managed to find a quiet room in which to sit down and brood again over my misfortune. Forewarned, as you have said, and on the spot, with every wish to protect her, I had failed to do so. I fear it will make me mad some day."

Had it made him insane already? Was his story to be trusted? It was full of incongruities; were they those of a disordered mind? Such had been the excuse made for Mrs. Taylor when she had been thought guilty of this attack; why should it not be applied to this man who certainly had given evidences of not being of the usual type of young Englishman? With a sidelong look at Mr. Gryce, which that individual perfectly understood, Dr. Price thanked Mr. Travis for his candor and asked if he could point out the room in which he had sat while their young man had gone through the building checking off the position of everybody in it.

To his surprise, the Englishman answered quite simply, "I will try," and rose when they rose.

The glances exchanged between the other two men were eloquent. Where was he about to take them? Sweetwater was no fool; how had this man of marked appearance and generous proportions managed to elude him?

As has happened before, it proved to be easily explainable when once the conditions were known. The room to which he led them was that on the upper story marked H on Chart Two. It was devoted, like one or two others near it, to a line of famous paintings at once the hope and despair of young girl copyists. The one most favored for this purpose hung just behind the door "X," which, half-open as they found it, made with the easel, the canvas upon it and an apron hanging carelessly over all, an impromptu screen behind which a man crouched in misery on the copyist's stool might easily remain unnoticed by anyone passing hurriedly by him.

And thus vanished one hindrance to a full belief in young Travis' story.

But a greater one remained. The bow! the bow found behind the tapestry at the edge of which he had stood in timorous hiding! In the hope that a shock might startle him into some admission which would give a different aspect to the case, they now led him back to this place of first concealment. He was showing strain by this time, and no delay was made to press their point. Giving the tapestry a pull, the Coroner bade him tell what he saw behind it.

The answer came with much emotion.

"The bow! The bow which sped the arrow which killed Miss Willetts. I do not want to see it. It hurts me--hurts me physically. Let me go, I entreat."

"Mr. Travis," urged the Coroner as they again emerged upon the open gallery, "you have said that there was no one with you in the section where you stood. If that was so, how came this bow to be where you have just seen it?"

A bewildered look, a slow shake of the head and nothing more.

"Did you know it was there? Did you see it thrown there?"

"No, I saw nothing. I am an honest man. You may believe me."

The Coroner scrutinized him closely but not unkindly.

"We shall know before night who handled that bow, Mr. Travis. It carries its own clue with it."

A gleam of unmistakable joy lighted up the Englishman's features.

"I am glad," he cried. "I am glad."

Coroner Price was a man of experience. He recognized the ring of truth in the Englishman's tones, and saying no more, led the way from the gallery.

A few minutes later he was on the lower floor. He had a short conversation with the two doormen; then he proceeded to the telephone and called up the Universal.

The result was startling.

Asked if the name of Rupert Henry Travis, Hertfordshire, England, was on their register, the answer was yes.

"The date of his arrival?"

"Early this morning."

"Any other arrivals to-day from the other side?"

"Yes, a Madame Duclos and a Miss Willetts."

The Coroner's tone altered. So much of the stranger's story was true, then.

"Will you connect me with Madame Duclos. I have important news to give her. Some woman had better be with
her when she receives it."

"I am sorry, but I cannot do this. Madame Duclos has left."

"Left? Gone out, you mean?"

"No, left the hotel. She's been gone about half an hour. The young lady who came with her has gone out too, but we expect her back."

"You do. And what took the older woman away? What excuse did she give, and where has she gone?"

"I cannot tell you where she has gone. She left after receiving a telephone message from some one in town. Came down to the desk looking extremely distressed, said that she had had bad news and must go at once. I made out her bill and, at her request, that of the young lady, whom she said would be called for by a friend on her return to the hotel. These bills she paid; after that she left the hotel on foot, carrying her own bag. The young lady has not returned----"

"Enough. The young lady is dead, killed by chance here at the museum. A plain-clothes man will be with you shortly from Headquarters. Meanwhile keep your eyes and ears open. If a message comes for either Madame Duclos or Miss Willetts, notify me here; and if anyone calls, detain the party at all hazards. That's all; no time to talk."

And now Gryce entered the room. He was accompanied by an inspector. This was a welcome addition to their force. Coroner Price greeted him with cordiality:

"You've come in good time, Inspector. The death of this young girl struck down by an arrow shot by an unknown hand from the opposite side of the building bids fair to make a greater call on your resources than on mine. The woman who appears to have acted as companion to Miss Willetts has fled the hotel where they both took rooms immediately upon leaving the steamer. Either she has heard of the accident which has occurred here--and if so, how?--or she's but carrying out some deep-laid plan which it is highly important for us to know. It looks now like a premeditated crime."

"With this Englishman involved?"

"I doubt that; I seriously doubt that--don't you, Gryce? A more subtle head than his planned this strange crime."

"Yes; there can be little doubt about that. Shall I set the boys to work, Inspector? This Frenchwoman must be found."

"At once--a general alarm. You can get a description of her from the clerk at the Universal. She must not be allowed to leave town."

Mr. Gryce sat down before the telephone. Coroner Price proceeded to acquaint the Inspector with such details of the affair as were now known. The Curator moved restlessly about. Gloom had settled upon the museum. On only one face was there a smile to be seen, but that was a heavenly one, irradiating the countenance of her who had passed from the lesser to the larger world with the joy of earth still warm in her innocent heart.

BOOK II
MR. X
VIII
ON THE SEARCH

It was late in the afternoon. The Inspector's office had hummed for hours with messages and reports, and the lull which had finally come seemed grateful to him. With relaxed brow and a fresh cigar, he sat in quiet contemplation of the facts brought out by the afternoon's inquiries. He was on the point of dismissing even these from his mind, when the door opened and Gryce came in.

Instantly his responsibilities returned upon him in full force. He did not wait for the expected report, but questioned the detective at once.

"You have been to the hotel," he said, pointing out a chair into which the old man dropped with a sigh as eloquent of anxiety as of fatigue. "What more did you learn there?"

"Very little. No message has come; no persons called. For them and for us these two women, Madame Duclos and Miss Willetts, are still an unknown quantity. Their baggage, which arrived while I was there, supplied the only information I was able to obtain."

"Their baggage! But that should tell us everything."

"It may if you think best to go through it. It is not heavy--a trunk for each, besides the one they brought with them from the steamer. From the pasters to be seen on them, they have come from the Continental Hotel, Paris, by way of the Ritz, London. At this latter place their stay was short. This is proved by the fact that only the steamer-trunk is pasted with the Ritz label. And this trunk was the one I found in their room at the Universal. From it Miss Willetts had taken the dress she wore to the museum. Her other clothes--I mean those she wore on arriving--lay in disorder on the bed and chairs. I should say that they had been tossed about by a careless if not hasty hand, while the trunk----"

"Well?"
"Stood open on the floor."
"Stood open?"
"Yes, I went through it, of course."
"And found nothing?"
"Nothing to help us to-day. No letters—no cards. Some clothing—some little trifles (bought in Paris, by the way) and one little book."
"A name in it?"
"Yes—_Angeline_; and one line of writing from some poem, I judge. I put it back where I found it. When we know more, it may help us to find her friends."
"And is that all?"
"Almost, but not quite. The young girl had a bag too. It stood on a table—"
"Well?"
"Empty. Everything had been tumbled out—turned upside down and the contents scattered. I looked them carefully over. Nothing, positively nothing, but what you would be likely to find in any young girl's traveling-bag. There's but one conclusion to be drawn."
"And what is that?"
"That all these things, such as they were, had been pushed hastily about after being emptied out on the table. That was not the young girl's work."
"Madame Duclos!"
"You've hit it. She was in search of some one thing she wanted, and she took the quickest way of finding it. And—---"
"Yes, Gryce?"
"She was in a desperate hurry, or she wouldn't have left the trunk open or all those dainty things lying about. Frenchwomen are methodical and very careful of their belongings. One other thing I noted. There was a loose nail in the lock of the trunk. Sticking to this nail was a raveling of brown wool. Here it is, sir. The woman—Madame Duclos—wore a dress of brown serge. If my calculations are not wrong and we succeed in getting a glimpse of that dress, we shall find a tear in the skirt—and what is more, one very near the hem."
"Made to-day?"
"Yes—another token of haste. She probably jerked at the skirt when she found herself caught. She could not have been herself to have done this—for which we may be glad."
"You mean that by this thoughtless action she has left a clue in our hands?"
"That and something more. That tear in her decent skirt will bother her. She will either make an immediate attempt to mend it, or else do the other obvious thing—buy a new one. In either case it gives us something by which to trace her. I have put Sweetwater on that job. He never tires, never wearies, never lets go. No report in yet from the terminals?"
"Not a word. But she will not get far. Sooner or later we shall find her if she does not come forward herself after reading the evening papers."
"She will never come forward."
"I am not so sure. Something not a little peculiar happened at the museum after you left. We had Reynolds up, and he made a most careful examination of that bow for finger-prints. He did not find any. But fortune favored us in another way almost as good."
"Now you interest _me_."
"We had brought the bow into the Curator's office, and it lay on the long table in the middle of the room. I had been looking it over (this was after Reynolds had gone, of course) and had already noted a certain defect in it, when on chance to look up, my eyes fell on a mirror hanging in a closet the door of which stood wide open. A face was visible in it—a very white face which altered under my scrutiny into a semblance more natural. It was that of Correy—you remember Correy, one of the assistants, and an honest fellow enough, but more troubled at this moment than I had ever seen him. What could have happened?"
"Wheeling quickly about, I caught him just as he started to go. He had openly declared that he did not know this bow; but it was evident that he did, and I did not hesitate to say so. Taken unawares, he could not hide his distress, which he proceeded to explain thus: He did remember the bow, now that he had the opportunity of seeing it closer. He pointed to the nick I had myself noticed and said that owing to this defect the bow had been cast aside, and the last time he had handled it—Here he caught his breath and stopped. Another memory had evidently returned to embarrass him."
"Did you succeed in getting him to acknowledge what it was?"
"Yes, after I had worked with him for some time. He didn't want to talk. In a moment you will see why. Going
back to the time he had seen it before, he said that he had found it in the cellar in an old box, the contents of which he had been pulling over in a search for something very different. Amazed to find it there, he had taken it out, examined it carefully, noted the nick I mentioned and tossed it back again into the box. This he told, but reluctantly.

"Why reluctantly, I was soon to find out. He was not alone in the cellar. The shadow of some person at his back had fallen across the lid of the box as he was closing it. He did not recognize the shadow and had not given it at the time a second thought, but the remembrance of it came back vividly when he saw the bow lying before him and realized the part it had played in the morning's tragedy. Was it because he knew that only a person actively connected with the museum would have access to that part of the cellar? I asked. I did not expect an answer, and I did not get it. We looked at each other for a moment, then I let him go."

A momentary silence, which the Inspector broke by saying:

"Later I called the Curator in, and he also recognized the bow as belonging to the museum. But he volunteered no explanations and in fact had little to say on the subject. He was evidently too much startled by the direct connection which had thus been made between the crime (or accident, if you will) and the personnel of the museum."

"That was natural. He should be the first to see that the bow which shot the arrow must of necessity have been brought into the building by some other door than those at which the doormen stood guard. I had a talk with those men, and they both declared that no sticks or umbrellas or anything of that nature ever went by them or would be allowed to go by them, no matter how concealed or wrapped up. But to revert to the matter in hand. So Correy made absolutely no attempt to explain how this weapon had been carried from cellar to gallery without his knowledge?"

"No. He for one will have a sleepless night."

"Not he alone. I must and will see a way through this maze. To-morrow may bring luck. Ah, I forgot to say that I spent an hour of the three you allowed me with the captain of the steamer which brought over these two women. As might be expected, he had no information of any significance to give me; nor could I obtain much from such members of the crew as I could get hold of. One steward remembered the Englishman, chiefly because he never showed himself unless the young lady was on deck. But he never saw them speak."

"Which bears out Travis' story to the last detail."

"Exactly. I think we can depend upon him; otherwise we should be at sea."

"Yet his story is a very strange one."

"The whole affair is strange--the strangest I ever knew. But that isn't against it. It's the commonplace case which baffles. We shall get the key to the whole mystery yet."

"I've no doubt. Is Mr. Travis to be detained?"

"Yes, as witness."

"Does he object?"

"Not at all. Having spoken--told his whole story, as he says--he is rather glad than otherwise to be relieved from the common curiosity of strangers. He's a rare bird, Gryce. If he stops to think, he must see that he stands in a more or less ticklish position. But he does not betray by look or action any doubt of our entire belief in the truth of all his statements. His only trouble seems to be that he has lost, by these inhuman means, the girl upon whom he had set his heart. To-morrow we will confront him with Mrs. Taylor. She should be able to say whether he did or did not stand out in the open gallery at the moment Miss Willetts fell."

But Mr. Gryce had no encouragement to give him on this head.

"Mrs. Taylor is ill--very ill, as I take it. I stopped at her hotel to inquire. I was anxious about her for more than one reason and the report I got of her condition was far from favorable. She is suffering cruelly from shock. How occasioned, whether by the peculiar and startling death to which she was a witness or by the strangely coincident fancy to which she herself attributes her deep emotion, will have to be decided by further developments. Nothing which I was able to learn from doctor or nurse settled this interesting question. Meanwhile, no one is allowed to see her--or will be till she is on the direct road to recovery. Let us hope that this may be soon, or the inquest may be delayed indefinitely."

"I don't know as that is to be deplored. I imagine we shall find enough to fill in our time.... Any communications made by her before she collapsed? Did she send out or receive messages of any kind since her return from the museum?"

"She received none; but it is impossible to say whether or not she sent any out. There is a letter-chute very near her door. She may have dropped a letter in that any time before a watch was put upon her. You are thinking, of course, of the anxiety she expressed about her husband, and whether she took any measures for ascertaining if her fears for him had any foundation in fact?"

"I was, yes; but I presume this fancy had passed, or else she is too ill to remember her own aberrations. Were you able to effect an understanding with her nurse?"
"Yes; that's fixed. I had a short talk, too, with the proprietor of the hotel. He thinks very highly of Mrs. Taylor. She has lived in the one apartment for years, and he cannot say enough of her discreet and uniform life. Though she made no secret of the fact that she does not live with her husband, her conduct has always been such as to insure universal respect. He did not even make mention of eccentricities. If she is crazy, it is a late development. She seemed to have been all right up to this morning. Whichever way you turn, you encounter mystery and a closed door."

"The papers may spring the lock of that door at any moment. Publication does much in a case of this kind. Tomorrow we may be in a much more favorable position. Meantime, let us recount the facts it is our business to clear up."

"On what hypothesis?"
"On all hypotheses. We are not sure enough of our premises, as yet, to confine ourselves to one."
"Very good, these are the ones which seem to me to be of the greatest importance:
"Whose hand carried the bow from cellar to gallery?
"Was it the same which carried the arrow from one gallery to the other?
"Is it possible for an arrow, shot through the loophole made by the curving-in of the vase, to reach the mark set for it by Mr. Travis' testimony?
"Which one of the men or women known to be in the museum when this arrow was released has enough knowledge of archery to string a bow? A mark can be reached by chance; but only an accustomed hand can string a bow as unyielding as this one.
"Who telephoned to Madame Duclos; and of what nature was the message which sent her from the hotel so precipitately that she not only left the most important part of her baggage behind but went away without making adequate provision for the young girl confided to her charge?
"Does this mean that she had been made acquainted with the fate of the young girl; and if so, by whom?"
"Business enough for us all," was the Inspector's comment as Gryce paused in this enumeration. "As you put it, I am more and more convinced that the key you spoke of a short time ago will be found in this missing woman's tightly shut hand."

"Which brings us round full-circle to our first conclusion: that Miss Willetts' death is not only a crime, but a premeditated one."
"Carried out, not by the one benefited, but by an agent selected for the purpose."
"An agent, moreover, who knew the ways and possibilities of the place."
"A logical conclusion; but still too incredible for belief. I find it hard to trust to appearances in this case."
"And I also. But as we have both said, time may clear away some of its incongruities. Meanwhile I have an experiment to propose." And leaning close to the Inspector, notwithstanding the fact that there was nobody within hearing and he knew it, he whispered a few words in his ear.

The Inspector stared.
"To-night?" he asked.
The detective nodded.

IX
WHILE THE CITY SLEPT

Night--the night of a great city with its myriad of garish lights and its many curious and incongruous activities. Who has not felt his imagination stirred by the contrasts thus offered--contrasts never more apparent than at these hours of supposed rest? Grim walls, with dimpled children sleeping behind them! Places of merrymaking athrob with music and dazzling with jets of incandescent light, with grief in the heart of the dancer and despair making raucous the enforced laugh!

But nowhere in the great city of which we write on this night of May 23, 1913, was there to be found a scene of greater contradictions than in the court and galleries of its famous museum.

Lighted as for a reception, the architectural beauties of its Moorish arcades and carven balustrades flashed in full splendor. Gems of antique art, casts in which genius had stored its soul and caused to live before us the story of the ancients, pillars from desert sands, friezes from the Parthenon and bas-reliefs from Nineveh and Heliopolis, filled every corner, commanding the eye to satisfy itself in forms of deathless grace or superhuman power. And no one to heed! Not an eye to note that the Venus in one corner seemed to smile in the soft light with more than its accustomed allurement, or that the armor in which kings had fought wore a menacing sparkle exceeding that of other times and quieter days. Ghosts of vanished ages might parade at will among the chattels of their time or drain the iridescent beaker to their unknown gods--no one would have noticed or turned aside to see. For there was something else within these walls to-night for the men assembled there to look upon, and a story to be read which shut the imagination upon the past by amply filling it with the present.
What is this something? Let us follow the gaze of the half-dozen persons grouped in front of the tapestry hanging in the northern gallery, and see.

But first, of whom is this small and mystic group composed? Who are these men who in the middle of the night, in the security of a completely shuttered building, busy themselves, not with the inestimable treasures surrounding them, but with an odd and seemingly mountebank adventure totally out of keeping with the place and their absorbed demeanor? We will name them:

Mr. Roberts and a second director seen here for the first time, Inspector Jackson, Mr. Gryce, two lesser detectives, and a strange young man of undoubted Indian extraction who kept much in the background and yet stood always at attention like one awaiting orders.

Are these all? Yes, in the one gallery; but in the other, shadowy figures are visible among the arches at one end, with whose identity we shall probably soon be made acquainted.

At what are these various persons, in the one gallery as in the other, looking so intently that all are turned one way—the way of greatest interest—the way the fatal arrow had flown some fourteen hours before, carrying death to the innocent girl smiling upon life in youthful exuberance? Is it at some image of herself they see restored to hope and joy? An image is there, but alas! it is but a dummy taken from one of the exhibits and so set up as to present the same angle to the gallery-front as her young body had done, according to Mr. Travis' reluctant declaration.

Why so placed, and why regarded with such concentrated interest by the men confronting it from the opposite gallery, will become apparent when, upon the Indian's being summoned from his place of modest retirement, it can be seen that the bow he carries in one hand is offset by the arrow he holds in the other. A test is to be made which will settle, or so they hope, the truth of Mr. Travis' story. If an arrow launched from before the pedestal or even from behind it through the loophole made by the curving-in of the vase toward its base can be made to reach its mark in the breast of this dummy, then they would feel some justification in doubting his statement that the arrow, whatever the appearances, was not shot from this gallery. If it could not, belief in his statements would be confirmed and their minds be cleared of a doubt which must hamper all their future movements.

The second director, whose name was Clayton, stood at the left of the Inspector and close against the tapestry. To him that official now turned with this explanation:

"The bow you see in Mr. La Fleche's hand is similar in length and weight to the one found lying strung for use in the doorway back of where you are now standing. The arrow is from the same quiver as the one which entered Miss Willetts' breast.... Did you speak?"

No, Mr. Clayton had not spoken; yet for some reason a thrill had passed through the small group surrounding him, which had heightened the consciousness of them all. Eyes and ears became alert; only the Indian showed stolidity.

"Mr. La Fleche, you will first stand here," continued the Inspector, pointing to the spot which Mr. Travis had finally settled upon as the one where he had been standing at the moment he saw Miss Willetts fall.

The Indian took the place, sighted the figure diagonally opposite and laid his finger on the string.

"An inch to the left of the bunch of flowers pinned on the dummy's breast," murmured Mr. Gryce almost in his ear.

It was a breathless moment; even the two detectives showed excitement.

But the Indian failed to shoot. Instead, he looked around at the Inspector and quietly remarked:

"I will shoot standing, since you so request, but I think you will find that the arrow which caused death was delivered by a man kneeling."

A flash of the eye between the two detectives, which only one man saw! All the others were watching the lightning flight of the arrow. It struck the dummy full and square. Everyone shuddered, even the Inspector; it brought the real tragedy so vividly to mind.

Meanwhile a movement had taken place in the small group of men watching from the other side. One of them stepped fully into view and approaching the figure thus attacked, drew out the arrow and made close examination of the hole it had made and shook his head. It was Coroner Price.

"Try again, and from behind the pedestal this time," he called out across the intervening space as he stepped back into his former place of observation.

The Inspector motioned his wishes to the Indian, who with a subtle twist of his body slipped behind the pedestal.

"That's better," was the Inspector's quick comment. "Can you handle the bow easily from where you now stand?"

"There is plenty of room."

"Very well. But wait! Before we proceed further, there is a matter to which I wish to call the attention of these gentlemen. It must have been apparent to you all that a person standing where Mr. La Fleche did a moment ago would be easily visible to anyone looking up from the court or across from the opposite gallery, or even from the broad corridors at either end of the building. But would the same hold true if instead of being in front he had been
behind the pedestal, as Mr. La Fleche is now? Run below, Barney; and, gentlemen, disperse yourselves in different directions and give me your opinion. Now!" he demanded after a few minutes' wait, during which there had been a scattering to right and left along the galleries, "what do you say?"

"If anyone chanced to be looking directly there, yes," was shouted up from below.

"What do you say, Coroner Price?"

"Ask the man to kneel."

The Inspector gave the word.

"Ah, that's different! The bulge of the vase hides the upper part of his head, and the pedestal itself the lower. He might shoot from his present position with impunity."

"Do you all agree?"

"Yes, yes!" came from different parts of the building.

"Then, Mr. La Fleche, here's another arrow from the same quiver. Take fresh aim and shoot."

Another breathless moment--more breathless than the other; then a second arrow flew across the court and hung quivering in the breast of the dummy.

From both ends of the gallery men came running, and leaning eagerly over the gallery-rail they watched the Coroner as he stepped again into view to make a second examination.

This time he kept them several minutes in suspense, and when he had drawn out the arrow, he looked long at the hole it had made. Then, instead of shouting his decision across the court, he could be seen leaving the gallery and coming around their way.

What had he to say? As they waited, a clock struck from some neighboring steeple--three sonorous peals! The two directors glanced at each other. Doubtless they felt the weirdness of the hour as well as of the occasion. It was a new experience for these amateurs in police procedure.

Arrived on their side, the Coroner advanced quickly. When close upon the reassembled group, he remarked quickly but with great decision:

"Mr. Travis seems to have been correct in denying that the arrow flew either from before or behind this pedestal. The first arrow sent by Mr. La Fleche entered the dummy almost at a right angle; the last departed but a little from this same line. But the real wound which I probed and located to a hair was a decidedly slanting one. It must have been sent from a place further off."

"From behind the other pedestal!" spoke up Mr. Gryce, all fire and interest at once. "Either the Englishman deceived us, or each pedestal had its man."

"We'll see! Another shot, and from behind the further pedestal, Mr. La Fleche!"

The Indian glided into view and started for the other end of the tapestry, followed by the Inspector, his detectives and the two directors. As they passed one by one across the face of the great hanging, they had the appearance not of living men but of a parade of specters, so silent their step and so somber their air. The dread of some development hitherto unacknowledged made their movements slow instead of hasty. The upper pedestal instead of the lower! Why should this possible fact make any difference in their feelings. Yet it did--perhaps because it meant deception on the part of one they had instinctively believed trustworthy, or--

But why pursue conjecture when actuality only is of moment? Let us proceed with our relation and await the result.

Arrived at the upper pedestal, Mr. La Fleche took his place, received the third arrow and presently delivered it. The Coroner, who had already started for the other side, hastily approached the dummy, made his examination and threw up his hand with the loud shout:

"The shot was made from there; the matter is settled!"

Question: Had Mr. Travis wilfully misled them, or had the presumption in his favor been strengthened by this proof that it had been shown possible for another hand than his to have shot the arrow from this same section of the gallery, without disturbing his belief that he was the only person in it at the time?

X

"AND HE STOOD _HERE_?"

The Inspector, finding himself very much disturbed by the doubt just mentioned, felt inclined to question whether any perceptible advancement had been made by this freak business of his canny subordinate. He was hardly ready to say yes, and was not a little surprised when on his way toward the head of the staircase he heard the exultant voice of Mr. Gryce whisper in his ear:

"That's all right. We've gained a point. We know now the exact place from which the arrow was shot."

"But not who shot it."

"No--except that it was not the man Travis."

"How can you be sure of that?"
"For two reasons. This is the first one: If it is difficult to understand how a man could slip from behind the eastern pedestal and make his way along the open gallery to Room H, without attracting the attention of the officer posted opposite, how next to impossible we should find it, if thirty feet were added to his course--which is the distance between the two pedestals!"

"What was that fellow doing, that he shouldn't have seen this effort at escape, whether it involved a short flight or a long one?"

"He says he was not given detective-duty--that he was placed there to keep watch over the body of the young girl;--that at a certain moment he imagined himself to hear a stealthy footstep approaching from the farther end of the gallery, and anxious to spot the man yielding to so doubtful a curiosity, he approached the arch separating his section from the adjoining one, and stopping just inside, stood for a moment or so, listening. As this involved the turning of his back upon the court and consequently upon the opposite gallery, it gave Travis just the opportunity he needed for an unobserved escape. But I see you are not very much impressed by the reason I have advanced for believing his story and placing him where he says he was placed, behind the eastern pedestal. You doubtless think that if the officer opposite had stood long enough with his back to the court, Travis might have taken those extra thirty steps as easily as the twenty he had confessed to. Listen, then, to my second reason, or rather, step this way."

Leading his superior toward Room B, the door of which stood wide open, he paused just outside the threshold to note the effect produced upon the Inspector by what he saw inside. Evidently it was as marked with surprise as the detective had calculated upon, for with an air of great astonishment the Inspector turned upon him with the whispered exclamation:

"Travis here! where he could listen--see-----"

"Yes. Take a good look at him, Inspector. It won't trouble him any. I doubt if he would notice us if we stepped into the room."

And such was the opinion of the Inspector himself, as he remarked the extreme excitement under which the Englishman was laboring. Absorbed in thoughts of his own, he was pacing the room with long strides, turning mechanically as he met some impediment, but otherwise oblivious to his surroundings, even to the point of not noting the presence of Sweetwater, who stood quietly watching him from one of the corners.

This display of feeling was certainly eloquent enough to attract anyone's attention, but what gave it impressiveness to the official mind was this: his excitement was that of triumph, not fear, of hope without any trace of confusion.

"It is not of himself he is thinking," muttered Gryce.  
"And he stood _here_?"

"No--we left him free to move about at will, and his will carried him into full view of the whole performance."

"And Sweetwater?"

"Was near enough to note his every move, but of course kept himself well out of sight."

Then as they both stepped back from the doorway: "Mr. Travis didn't know he was being watched. He thought himself alone; and having an expressive countenance,--very expressive for an Englishman,--it was easy enough for Sweetwater to read his thoughts."

"And those thoughts?"

"Relief to find an explanation of the phenomenon he had doubtless been puzzling over for hours. The moments he had spent in hiding behind one pedestal had evidently failed to suggest that another man might have been in hiding behind the other."

"I am not surprised. Coincidences of this astonishing kind are not often met with even by us," was the Inspector's dry retort.

During the interchange of these hurried sentences, they had withdrawn still farther out of sight and hearing of the man discussed. But at this point Inspector Jackson reapproached the doorway, and entering in a manner to intercept Mr. Travis in his nervous goings to and fro, remarked in an off-hand way:

"I see that you have met with a surprise, Mr. Travis. Like ourselves, you gave little thought to what that upper pedestal might conceal."

"You are right. I never even glanced that way. But if I had, I should have seen nothing. He was well hid, exceedingly well hid, whoever he was. But he cannot escape now; you'll get him, won't you, Inspector? He could not have left the building--all say that this was impossible. He was one, then, of the people I saw moving about when I went down into the court. Find him! Find this murderer of innocence! of the sweetest, purest child----"

He turned away; grief was taking the place of indignation and revenge. At this sight the two men left him. The Inspector was at last convinced, both of the man's probity and of one stern, disconcerting fact: that the real culprit--the man whose guilty fingers had launched the fatal arrow--had been, as Travis said, one of the twenty-two persons who had been moving about for hours not only under his eyes but under those of the famous detective posted there.
FOOTSTEPS

WANTED--A WOMAN CALLING HERSELF ANTOINETTE Duclos, just arrived from Europe on the steamer _Castania_, who after taking rooms at the Universal for herself and her steamer companion, Angeline Willetts, left the hotel in great haste late in the afternoon of May twenty-third and has not been heard of since.

In person she is of medium height, but stocky for a Frenchwoman. Dark hair, black eyes, with an affection of the lid which causes the left one to droop. Her dress consisted of skirt and jacket of a soft shade of brown. Hat indistinguishable. She carried, on leaving the hotel, a dark brown leather bag of medium size, long and narrow in shape. Her only peculiarity, saving the one drooping eyelid, is a hesitating walk. This is particularly obvious when she attempts to hasten.

It is to be hoped that this person on hearing of Miss Willetts' death, will communicate at once with the clerk of the hotel.

If in two days this does not occur, a reward of five hundred dollars will be given to the man or woman who can give definite news of this Frenchwoman's whereabouts.

Police Headquarters, Mulberry St.

This notice, appended to such particulars of the tragedy as appeared in all the morning papers, roused the city--I may even say the country--to even greater wonder and excitement than had followed the first details given in the journals of the evening before.

Would anything come of it?

Morning passed; no news of Antoinette Duclos.

Afternoon: messages of all kinds leading to much work, but bringing no result.

Five o'clock: a missive from the directors of the museum to the effect that under the peculiar circumstances and the seeming absence of any friends of the deceased, they would be glad to furnish the means necessary to the proper care and burial of the young woman killed in such an unhappy manner within their walls.

A half-hour later, Gryce, for whose appearance the Inspector had been anxiously waiting, came in with his report. A chair was pushed up for him, for he was an old man and had had a sleepless night, as we know, besides two days of continued work. But he did not drop into it, as the Inspector expected, or give any other signs of exceptional fatigue; yet when he had seated himself and they were left alone, he did not hasten to speak, though he evidently had much to say, but remained quiet, holding counsel, as it were, in his old way, with some small object he had picked up from the desk before him.

At last the Inspector spoke:

"You have been on the hunt; what did you find?"

"Not much, Inspector--and yet enough to disturb me in a way I was not looking for. Of course, in studying the situation carefully, you have asked yourself how the man who shot the arrow from behind the upper pedestal got away. He did not wait as Travis did till the first excitement had abated and the way was, in a manner, cleared for an escape into the court. For X, as we will call him, was certainly among those I saw lined up before me at the moment I bade them one and all to return and stand until released, in the exact spot occupied by them when the first alarm rang out. After the surprise Travis gave us we had the building searched from roof to cellar. Not another soul was found in it whose name was not registered on the chart. As I have already said, the guilty one had managed to escape immediately upon the flight of the arrow, though how, even then, he could have got below in the time he did is a mystery which trips me up every time I think of it. But letting that go for the present, he did get there and get there unnoticed. How? Now, there are three ways of escape from behind either of those pedestals. The way Travis took, that is, toward the front, and round through the suite of rooms headed by the one marked H, to the rear staircase; the more direct one of an immediate exit from the gallery through Sections VI and VII to this same staircase; and (the only one worth considering) a straight plunge for the door behind the tapestry and so down by the winding staircase beyond, into the Curator's office. The unknown never went Travis' way, and he couldn't have gone the other without running into the arms of Correy; so he must have made use of the hidden door. So convinced was I of this, after last night's discovery eliminated Travis as a suspect, that I made it my first duty this morning to examine this door and the mysterious little passageway back of it. When first notified of this door, we had been assured that it had not been opened in years, that the only key remaining to it was the one the Curator showed us hanging from the ring he drew from his own pocket; and acting upon these statements, which I would not allow myself to doubt for a moment, we decided to open the door in our own way, which we immediately did. The result was the instant discovery that some one had passed through this door and down these stairs very much later than years ago. We could see, without taking a step beyond the doorway, traces of a well-shod foot in the dust lying thickly on every tread. These traces were so many and so confused that I left them for Stevens' experienced eye and deft manipulation to separate and make plain to us. He is making an examination of them now, and will be able to report to you before night."
The Inspector was a man of little pretense. He felt startled and showed it.
"But this is a serious matter, Gryce."
"Very serious."
"No mere visitor to the museum would have presumed upon this venture."
"No." 
"Which means----" 
"That some one actively connected with it had a guilty hand in this deplorable affair."
"I am afraid so."
"Some one well acquainted with the existence of this door and who had means of opening it. The question is--who?"

In saying this, Mr. Gryce studiously avoided the Inspector's eye; while the Inspector in his turn looked up, then down--anywhere but in the detective's direction. It was a moment of mutual embarrassment, broken, when it was broken, by a remark which manifestly avoided the issue.

"Possibly those traces you speak of were not made at the time you specify. They may have been made since, or they may have been made before. Perhaps the Curator was curious and tried his hand at a little detective work on his own account."

"He hadn't the chance. Every portion of the building has been very thoroughly guarded since first we entered it. He may have gone up prior to the shooting. That is open to dispute; but if he had done so, why did he not inform us of the fact when he showed us the key? The Curator is the soul of honor. He would hardly deceive us in so important a matter."

The quick glance which this elicited from the Inspector awoke no corresponding flash in the eye of the imperturbable detective. He continued to shake his head over the small object he was twirling thoughtfully about between his thumb and finger, and only from his general seriousness could the Inspector gather that his mind was no more at rest than his fingers. Was this why his remark took the form of a question?

"Where was the Curator when you forced open that door behind the tapestry? Was he anywhere in the building?"
"No, sir; he has not been there to-day. He was ill last night, and he is ill to-day. He sent us his excuses. If he had been in the building, I doubt whether I would have given the order to burst open the door. I would simply have requested him to use his key. And he would have done so and kept his own counsel. I do not know as I can say as much for any of his subordinates. Happily, no spying eye was about at that time; and Stevens will be sure to see that he is not watched at his work if he has to lock the door upon the whole bunch of directors."

"This is to be a secret investigation, then?"
"I would so advise."
"With every reporter headed off, and anyone likely to report to a reporter headed off also?"
"Do not _you_ advise this?"
"I do. Anything more?"
"Not till we hear from Stevens."

They had not long to wait. Sooner than they expected the expert mentioned came in. He held a batch of papers in his hand, which at a gesture from the Inspector he spread out before them. Then he spoke:

"One man and one man only has passed down those stairs. But that man has passed down them twice--once with rubbers on and once without. There are signs equally plain of his having gone up them, but only once, and at the time he wore the rubbers. I took every pains possible to preserve and photograph the prints, but as you see, great confusion was caused by the second line of steps falling half on and half off the other. All I dare read there is this: A quick run up and a quick run down by a man in rubbers, and then a second run down by the same man in shoes. That's the whole story. These other scraps of paper," he went on as he saw the Inspector's eye travel to some small bits lying on the side, "are what I have to show as the result of my search on and about the western pedestal for finger-prints. A gloved hand drew that bow. See here: this is an impression I obtained from the inner edge of the pedestal in question."

He pulled forward a small square of paper; the sewing of a kid glove was plainly indicated there. 
When Stevens had gone, the Inspector exclaimed meaningly:
"Gryce! Name your man; we shall get on faster."

The aged detective rose.
"I dare not," he said. "Give me one--two days. I must have time to think--to collect my evidence. A name once mentioned leaves an echo. When my echo rings, it must carry no false sound. Remember, I did not sleep last night. When I present this case to you as I see it, I must be at my best. I am not at my best to-day."

This was doubtless true, but the Inspector had not discovered it.

XII
"SPARE NOBODY! I SAY, SPARE NOBODY!"

On his way home Mr. Gryce stopped at the Calderon to inquire how Mrs. Taylor was doing, and what his prospects were for a limited interview with her.

He was told that no such interview could be considered for days—that she still lay in a stupor, with brief flashes of acute consciousness, during which she would scream "No! no!"—that brain fever was feared and that increased excitement might be fatal.

Another bar to progress! He had hoped to help her memory into supplying him with a fact which would greatly simplify a task whose anomalies secretly alarmed him. She had been in a fair state of mind before her nerve was attacked by the event which robbed the little Angeline of life and herself of reason, and if carefully approached, might possibly recall some of the impressions made upon her previous to that moment. If, for instance, she could describe even in a general way the appearance of any person she may have seen advancing in the direction of the northern gallery at the moment she herself turned to enter the southern one, what a stability it would give to his theory, and what certainty to his future procedure!

But he must wait for this, as he must wait for Angeline's story from Madame Duclos. Meantime, a word with Sweetwater—after which, rest.

It was Mr. Gryce's custom, especially when engaged upon a case of marked importance, to receive this, his recognized factotum, in his own home. No prying ears, no watchful eyes, were to be feared there. He was the absolute master of everything, even of Sweetwater, he sometimes thought. For this young fellow loved him—had reason to; and when Sweetwater played the violin, as he sometimes did after one of their long talks, the aged detective came as near happiness as he ever did, now that his little grandchild was married and had gone with her husband to the other side of the world.

To-night he was not anticipating any such relaxation as this, yet to Sweetwater, arriving later than he wished, he had never looked more in need of it, as, sitting in his old and somewhat dingy library, he mused over some little object he held in his half-closed palm, with an intent, care-worn gaze which it distressed his young subordinate to see. Uncertainty incites the young and fires them to action; but it wearies the old and saps what little strength they have; and Sweetwater detected uncertainty in his patron's troubled brow and prolonged stare at the insignificant article absorbing his attention.

However, Gryce roused quickly at the young detective's cheery greeting, and looking up with an answering welcome, plunged at once into business.

"So you have seen Turnbull! What did the man say?"

"That it was the left-hand upper corner of the tapestry he saw shaking, and not the right-hand one as we had blindly supposed."

"Good! Then we can take it for granted that our new theory is well founded. Certain things have come to light in your absence. That tapestry was pulled aside not merely for the purpose of flinging in the bow, but to let the flinger pass through the door at its back down to the Curator's office and so out into the court."

"Whew! And who...."

"If this fact had been made known to me sooner, you would have had a different day's work; not getting it until late this afternoon, we have perhaps wasted some valuable hours. But we won't fret about that. Mrs. Taylor being no better, we are likely to have all the time we want for substantiating my idea. It cannot take long if we succeed either in tracing the Duclos woman or in drawing the net I am quietly manufacturing, so closely about—well, I've decided to call him X—that it will hold against all opposition. I have hopes of finding the woman, but great doubts as to the efficacy of the net I have mentioned; it will have to be so wide and deep, and so absolutely without a single weak strand."

Sweetwater sat astonished, and what was more, silent—he who had a word for everything. Accustomed as he was to the varying moods of his remarkable friend, he had never before been met with a reticence so absolute. It made him think; but for once in his life did not make him loquacious.

Mr. Gryce seemed to be gratified by this, though he made no remark to that effect and continued to preserve his abstracted look and quiet demeanor. So Sweetwater waited, and while waiting managed to steal a glimpse at the small object to which his professional friend still paid his undivided attention.

It looked like a narrow bit of dingy black cloth—just that and nothing more—a thing as trivial as the band which clips a closed umbrella. Was it such a band, and would he presently be asked to find the umbrella from which it had fallen or been twisted away? No. Umbrellas are not carried about museum buildings. Besides, this strip of cloth had no ring on the end of it. Consequently it could not have served the purpose he had just ascribed to it. It must have had some other use.

But when, after an impatient flinging aside of this nondescript article, Mr. Gryce spoke, it was to say:

"I had a long talk with Correy to-day. It seems that he goes through both galleries every morning before the
museum opens. Though he will not swear to it, he is of the opinion that the quiver holding the Apache arrows had its full complement when he passed it that morning. He has a way of running things over with his eye which has never yet failed to draw his attention to anything defective or in the least out of order."

"I see, sir," acquiesced Sweetwater in an odd tone, Mr. Gryce's attitude showing that he awaited some expression of interest on his part.

The elder detective either did not notice the curious note in the younger one's voice, or noticing it, chose to ignore it, for with no change of manner he proceeded to say:

"I wish you would exercise your wits, Sweetwater, on the following troublesome question: if the arrow which slew this young girl was in one gallery at ten o'clock, how did it get into the other at twelve? The bow"--here he purposely hesitated--"might have been brought up the iron staircase. But the arrow----"

His eyes were on Sweetwater (a direct glance was a rare thing with Mr. Gryce), and he waited--waited patiently for the word which did not come; then he remarked dryly:

"We are both dull; you are tired with your day's work and I with mine: we will let difficult questions rest until our brains are clearer. But"--here he reached for the strip of dingy cloth he had cast aside, and tossing it over to Sweetwater, added with some suggestion of humor,--"if you want a subject to dream upon to-night, there it is. If you have no desire to dream, and want work for to-morrow, make an effort to discover from whose clothing that fell and what was its use. It was picked up in Room B on the second floor, the one where Mrs. Taylor was detained before going downstairs."

"Ah, something tangible at last!"

"I don't know about that; I honestly don't know. But we cannot afford to let anything go by us. Little things like that have not infrequently opened up a fresh trail which otherwise might have been missed."

Sweetwater nodded, and laying the little strip along his palm, examined it closely. It was made of silk, doubled, and stitched together except at the ends. These were loose, but rough with bits of severed thread, as if the thing had been hastily cut from some article of clothing to which it had been attached by some half-dozen very clumsy stitches.

"I think I understand you, Mr. Gryce," observed Sweetwater, rising slowly to his feet. "But a dream may help me out; we will see."

"I shall not leave here till ten to-morrow morning."

"Very good, sir. If you don't mind, I'll take this with me."

"Take it, by all means."

As Sweetwater turned to go, he was induced by the silence of his patron to cast a backward glance. Mr. Gryce had risen to his feet and was leaning toward him with an evident desire to speak.

"My boy," said he, "if your dreams lead you to undertake the search I have mentioned, spare nobody; I say, spare nobody."

Then he sat down; and the memory which Sweetwater carried away with him of the old detective at the moment he uttered this final injunction was far from being a cheerful one.

XIII

"WRITE ME HIS NAME"

Refreshed by a good night's rest and quite ready to take up his task again, Mr. Gryce sat at the same table in the early morning, awaiting the expected message from Sweetwater. Meanwhile he studied, with a fuller attention than he had been able to give it the evening before, the memorandum which this young fellow had handed him of his day's work. A portion of this may be interesting to the reader. Against the list of people registered on his chart as present in the museum at the moment of tragedy, he had inscribed such details concerning them as he could gather in the short time allotted him.

* * * * *

I--Ephraim Short. A sturdy New Englander visiting New York for the first time. Has a big story to take back. Don't care much for broken marbles and pictures so dingy you cannot tell what you are looking at; but the sight of a lot of folks standing up like scarecrows in a field, here and there all over a great building, because something had happened to somebody, will make a story the children will listen to for years.

Address taken, and account of himself verified by telegraph.

II--Mrs. Lynch. Widow, with a small house in Jersey and money to support it. No children. Interested in church work. Honest and of reliable character. Only fault a physical one--extreme nervousness.

III--Mr. Carleton Roberts, director; active in his work, member of the Union League and an aspirant for the high office of U. S. Senator. Lives in bachelor apartment, 67 W. ---- Street. A universally respected man of unquestioned integrity and decided importance. Close friend of Curator Jewett.

IV--Eben Clarke, door-man. Been long in the employ of museum. Considered entirely trustworthy. Home in
decent quarter of West 80th Street. Wife and nine children, mostly grown. Never been abroad. Has no foreign correspondence.

V--Emma Sutton, an art enthusiast, gaining her living by copying old masters. Is at museum six days in the week. It was behind her easel Travis found a hiding-place in Room H.

VI--Mrs. Alice Lee, widowed sister of Edward Cronk Tailor, ---- Sixth Ave. Lives with brother. Kindly in disposition, much liked and truthful to a fault. No acquaintance abroad.

VII-VIII--John and Mary Draper, husband and wife, living in East Orange, N. J. Decent, respectable folk with no foreign connections.

IX--Hetty Armstrong, young girl, none too bright but honest to the core. Impossible to connect her with this affair.

X--Charles Simpson, resident of Minneapolis. In town on business, stopping at Hotel St. Denis. Eager to return home, but willing to remain if requested to do so. Hates foreigners; thinks the United States the greatest country on earth.

XI--John Turnbull, college professor; one of the new type, alert, observant and extremely precise. Not apt to make a misstatement.

XII--James Hunter, door-man, a little old for his work, but straight as a string and methodical to a fault. No wife, no child. Bank account more than sufficient for his small wants.

XIII--Miss Charlotte Hunsicker, one of last season's debutantes. Given to tennis and all outdoor sports generally. Offhand but stanch. It was she who gave a woman's care to Mrs. Taylor when the latter fainted in Room B.

XIV--Museum attendant coming up from basement.

XV--Eliza Blake a school-teacher, convalescing after a long illness.

XVI--Officer Rudd.

XVII--Tommy Evans, boy scout. Did not lose his game. Went to the field after lunching on pie at a bakery.

XVIII--Mrs. Nathaniel Lord, wealthy widow, living at the St. Regis.

XIX--Mrs. Ermentrude Taylor. (Nothing to add to what is already known.)

XX--Henry Abbott, Columbia student, good-hearted and reliable, but living in a world of his own to such an extent as to make him the butt of his fellow students.

XXI-XXII--Young couple from Haverstraw. Just married. He a drug-clerk, she a farmer's daughter. Both regarded in their home town as harmless.

XXIII--James Correy, attendant. Bachelor, living with widowed mother. Fair record on the whole. Reprimanded once, not for negligence, but for some foolish act unbecoming his position. Thorough acquaintance with the museum and its exhibits. A valuable man, well liked, notwithstanding the one lapse alluded to. At home and among his friends regarded as the best fellow going. A little free, perhaps, when unduly excited, but not given to drink and very fond of games. A member once of a club devoted to contests with foils and target-shooting. Always champion. Visits a certain young lady three times a week.

XXIV--Curator Jewett. A widower with two grandchildren—a daughter married to an Englishman and living in Ringold, Hants, and a son, owner of a large ranch in California. Lives, when in city, at Hotel Gorham. Known too well for any description of himself or character to be necessary here. If he has a fault, or rather a weakness, it is his extreme pride in the museum and his own conduct of its many affairs.

As on the evening before, Mr. Gryce lingered longest over one name. He was still brooding anxiously over it when the telephone rang at his elbow and he was called up from Headquarters. Cablegrams had been received from London and Paris in acknowledgment of those sent, and in both these cablegrams promises were made of a full examination into the antecedents of Madame Duclos and her companion, Miss Willetts.

That was all. No further news regarding them from any quarter. Mr. Gryce hung up the receiver with a sigh.

"It is likely to be a long road full of unexpected turns and perilously near the precipice's edge," he muttered in weary comment to himself. "Nothing to start from but----"

Here Sweetwater walked in.

Mr. Gryce showed surprise. He had not expected to see the young man himself. Perhaps he was not quite ready to, for he seemed to shrink, for one brief instant, as from an unwelcome presence.

But the cheer which always entered with Sweetwater was contagious, and the old detective smiled as the newcomer approached, saying significantly:

"I had those dreams you spoke of last night, Mr. Gryce, and found them too weighty for the telephone."

"I see, I see! Sit down, Sweetwater, and tell me how they ran. I haven't as much confidence in my own dreams as I hope to have in yours. Speak up! Mention names, if you want to. No echo follows confidences uttered in this room."

"I know that; but for the present perhaps it will be best for me to follow your lead, and when I have to speak of a
certain person, say X as you do. X, Mr. Gryce, is the man who for reasons we do not yet understand brought up the discarded bow from the cellar and stored it somewhere within reach on the floor above. X is also the man who for the same unknown reason robbed the quiver hanging in the southern gallery of one of its arrows and kept the same on hand or in hiding, till he could mate it with the bow. My dreams showed me this picture:

"A man with a predominating interest in sport, but otherwise active in business, correct in his dealings and respectable in private life, sees and frequently handles weapons of ancient and modern make which rouse his interest and awaken the longing, common to such men, to test his skill in their use. Sometimes it is a sword, which he twirls vigorously in sly corners. Again, it is a bow calling for a yeoman's strength to pull. He is a man of sense and for a long time goes no further than the play I have just indicated. Perhaps he has no temptation to go further until one unfortunate day he comes upon an idle bow, rotting away in the cellar."

Here Mr. Gryce looked sharply up--a proof of awakened interest which Sweetwater did not heed. Possibly he was not expected to. At all events he continued rapidly:

"It was a fine, strong bow, a typical one from the plains. He took it up--examined it closely--noted a slight defect in it somewhere--and put it back. But he did not forget it. Before many days had passed, he goes down cellar again and brings it up and stands it on end in--where do you think, sir?--in the closet of the Curator's office!"

"How did you learn that?"

"From the woman who comes every day to wipe up the floors. I happened to think she might have something worth while to tell us, so I hunted her up----"

"Go on, boy. Another long mark in your favor."

"Thank you, sir. I'm relating a dream, you know. He stands it on end then in this closet into which nobody is supposed to go but the Curator and the scrubwoman, and there he leaves it, possibly as yet with no definite intention. How long it stood there I cannot say. It was well hidden, it seems, by something or other hanging over it. Nor am I altogether sure that it might not be standing there yet if the impulse swaying X had not been strengthened by seeing daily over his head a quiver full of arrows admirably fitted for this bow. Time has no place in dreams, or I might be able to state the day and the hour when he stood looking at the ring of keys lying on the Curator's desk, and struck with what it might do for him, singled out one of the keys which he placed in the keyhole of a door opening upon a certain little iron staircase. He was alone, but he stopped to listen before turning that key. I can see him, can't you? His air is a guilty one; but it is the guilt of folly, not of premeditated crime. He wants a try at that bow and recognizes his weakness and laughs.

"But his longing holds, and running up the little staircase to a second door, he unlocks this also and after another moment of hesitation pulls it open. He has brought the bow with him, but he does not take it past the drapery hanging straight down before his eyes. He simply drops it in the doorway and leaves it there within easy reach from the gallery if ever his impulse should be strong enough to lead him to make an attempt at striking a feather from the Indian headdress on the other side of the court. You think him mad. So do I, but dreams are filled with that kind of madness; and when I see him shut the door upon this bow, and steal back without relocking it or the one below, I have no other excuse than this to give in answer to your criticisms."

"I do not criticise; I listen, Sweetwater."

"You will criticise now. As Bunyan says in his 'Pilgrim's Progress': 'I dreamed again!' This time I saw the museum proper. It was filled with visitors. The morning of May twenty-second was a busy one, I am told, and a whole lot of people, singly and in groups, were continually passing up and down the marble steps and along the two galleries. Partaking of the feelings of the one whose odd impulses I am endeavoring to describe, I was very uneasy and very restless until these crowds had thinned and most of the guests vanished from the building. The hands of the clock were stealing toward twelve--the hour of greatest quiet and fewest visitors. As it reached the quarter mark, I was not expecting to. At all events he continued rapidly:

"Next, I see a sweep of tapestry, and an eager, peering figure passing slowly across it. It is that of the love-lorn Travis watching his inamorata tripping up the marble staircase and turning at its top in the direction of the opposite gallery. His is a timid soul, and anxious as he is to watch her, he is not at all anxious to be detected in the act of doing so. So he slips behind the huge pedestal towering near him, thus causing the whole gallery to appear empty to
the eyes of X, now entering it at the other end. This latter has come there with but one idea in his head--to shoot an arrow across the court at the mark I have mentioned. It may have been on a dare--sometimes I think it was; but shoot it he means to, before a fresh crowd collects.

"He already has, as you will remember, the arrow hidden somewhere about his person, and it is only a few steps to the edge of the tapestry behind which he has secreted the bow. If he takes a look opposite, he would never have proceeded to slip behind his chosen pedestal, secure the bow, pause to string it, then crouch for his aim in such apparent confidence. For after he has left the open gallery and limited his outlook to what is visible beyond the loophole through which he intends to shoot, he can see--as we know from Mr. La Fleche--little more than the spot where the cap hangs and the one narrow line between. Unhappily, it was across this line the young girl leaped just as the arrow left the bow. Don't you see it, sir? I do; and I see what follows, too."

"The escape of X?"

"Yes. Inadvertently, as you see, he has committed a horrible crime; he can never recall it. Whatever his remorse or shame, nothing will ever restore the victim of his folly to life, while he himself has many days before him--days which would be ruined if his part in this tragedy were known. Shall he confess to it, then, or shall he fly (the way is so easy), and leave it to fate to play his game--fate, whose well-known kindness to fools would surely favor him? It does not take long for such thoughts to pass through a man's head, and before the dying cry of his innocent victim had ceased to echo through those galleries, he is behind the tapestry and on his way toward the court. Beyond that, my dream does not go. How about yours, sir?"

"My dream was of a crime, not of an accident. No man could be such a fool as you have made out this X of yours to be. Only an extraordinary purpose or some imperious necessity could drive a man to shoot an arrow across an open court where people were passing hither and yon, even if he didn't see anyone in the gallery."

"By which you mean----"

"That he had already marked the approach of his victim and was ready with his weapon."

"You are undoubtedly right, and I only wish to say this: that the purpose in my relation was merely to show the method and manner of this shooting, leaving _you_ to put on the emphasis of crime if you saw fit."

The gravity with which Mr. Gryce received this suggestion had the effect of slightly embarrassing Sweetwater. Yet he presently ventured to add after a moment of respectful waiting:

"Did you know that after I woke from my dream I had a moment's doubt as to its accuracy on one point? The bow was undoubtedly flung behind the curtain, but the man----"

He paused abruptly. A morsel of clean white paper had just been pushed across the table under his eyes, and a peremptory voice was saying:

"Write me his name. I will do the same for you."

XIV

A LOOP OF SILK

Sweetwater hesitated.

"I am very fond of the one of your own choosing," he smiled, "but if you insist----"

Mr. Gryce was already writing.

In another moment the two slips were passed in exchange across the table.

Instantly, a simultaneous exclamation left the lips of both.

Each read a name he was in no wise prepared to see. They had been following diverging lines instead of parallel ones; and it took some few minutes for them to adjust themselves to this new condition.

Then Mr. Gryce spoke:

"What led you into loading up Correy with an act which to accept as true would oblige us to deny every premise we have been at such pains to establish?"

"Because--and I hope you will pardon me, Mr. Gryce, since our conclusions are so different--I found it easier to attribute this deed of folly--or crime, if we can prove it such--to a man young in years than to one old enough to know better."

"Very good; that is undoubtedly an excellent reason."

As this was said with an accent we will for want of a better word call _dry_, Sweetwater, hardy as he was, flushed to his ears. But then any prick from Mr. Gryce went very deep with him.

"Perhaps," he ventured, "you will give even less indulgence to what I have to add in way of further excuse."

"I shall have to hear it first."

"Correy is a sport, an incorrigible one; it is his only weakness. He bets like an Englishman--not for the money, for the sums he risks are small, but for the love of it--the fun--the transient excitement It might be"--here
Sweetwater's words came slowly and with shamefaced pauses—"that the shooting of that arrow—I believe I said something like this before—was the result of a dare."

A halt took place in the quick tattoo which Mr. Gryce's fingers were drumming out on the table-top. It was infinitesimal in length, but it gave Sweetwater courage to add:

"Then, I hear that he wishes to marry a rich girl and shrinks from proposing to her on account of his small salary."

"What has that got to do with it?"

"Nothing so far as I can see. I am only elaborating the meager report lying there under your hand. But I recognize my folly. You ordered me to dream, and I did so. Cannot we forget my unworthy vaporings and enter upon the consideration of what may prove more profitable?"

Here he glanced down at the slip of paper he himself held—the slip which Mr. Gryce had handed him with a single word written on it, and that word a name.

"In a moment," was Mr. Gryce's answer. "First explain to me how, with the facts all in mind, and your chart before your eyes, you reconciled Correy's position on the side staircase two minutes after the shooting with your theory of a quick escape to the court by means of the door back of the tapestry? Haven't you hurried matters to get him so far in such a short space of time?"

"Mr. Gryce, I have heard you say yourself that this question of time has been, from the first, our greatest difficulty. Even with these three means of escape in our minds, it is difficult to see how it was possible for anyone to get from the gallery to the court in the minute or so elapsing between the cry of the dying girl and the appearance at her side of the man studying coins in the adjoining section."

"You are right. There was a delay somewhere, as we shall find later on. But granting this delay, a man would have to move fast to go the full length of the court from the Curator's room even in the time which this small delay might afford him. But perhaps you cut this inextricable knot by locating Correy somewhere else than where he placed himself at the making of the chart."

"No, I cut it in another way. You remember my starting to tell you just now how, in my dissatisfaction with a certain portion of my dream, I refused to believe in the escape of my Mr. X by the way of the Curator's office. The tapestry was lifted, the bow flung behind, but the man stepped back instead of forward. An open flight along the gallery commended itself more to him than the doubtful one previously arranged for. If you will accept that for fact, which of course you will not, it is easy to see how Correy might have been somewhere on that staircase when the inspiration came to turn the appearance of flight into a show of his own innocence, by a quick rush back into the further gallery and a consequent loud-mouthed alarm. But I see that I am but getting deeper and deeper in the quagmire of a bad theory badly stated. I am forgetting—"

"Many things, Sweetwater. I will only mention a very simple one. The man who shot the arrow wore gloves. You wouldn't attribute any such extraordinary precaution as that to a fellow shooting an arrow across the court on a dare?"

"You wouldn't expect it, sir. But in going about the museum that afternoon, I came upon Correy's coat hanging on its peg. In one of its pockets was a pair of kid gloves."

"You say the fellow is courting a rich girl," suggested Mr. Gryce. "Under those circumstances some show of vanity is excusable. Certainly he would not carry his folly so far as to put on gloves for the shooting match with which you credit him, unless there was criminal intent back of his folly—which, of course, would be as hard for you as for me to believe."

Sweetwater winced, but noting the kindly twinkle with which Mr. Gryce softened the bitterness of this lesson, he brightened again and listened with becoming patience as the old man went on to say:

"To discuss probabilities in connection with this other name seems futile this morning. The ease with which one can twist the appearances of things to fit a preconceived theory as exemplified by the effort you have just made warns us to be chary of pushing one's idea too far without the firmest of bases to support it. If you find a man's coat showing somewhere on its lining evidences that there had once been sewed to it a loop of the exact dimensions of the one I passed over to you last night, I should consider it a much more telling clue to the personality of X than a pair of gloves in the pocket of a man who in all probability intends to finish up the day with a call on the girl he admires."

"I understand." Sweetwater was quite himself again. "But do you know that this is no easy task you are giving me, Mr. Gryce. Where a man has but two coats, or three at best, it might not be so hard, perhaps, to get at them. But some men have a dozen, and if I don't mistake—"

"Sweetwater, I meant to give you a task of no little difficulty. It will keep you out of mischief."

XV

NEWS FROM FRANCE
For the next three days the impatience of the public met with nothing but disappointment. The police were reticent,—more reticent far than usual,—and the papers, powerless to add to the facts already published, had little but conjectures to offer.

The hunt for Madame Duclos continued, joined in now by the general public. But for all the efforts made, aided by a careful search through her entire baggage, there was as little known concerning her as on the morning of her disappearance.

Nor did any better success follow the exhibition at the morgue of the poor little victim's innocent body. The mystery covering the whole affair seemed to be impenetrable, and the rush made on the museum upon its first reopening to the public was such as to lead to its being closed again till some limit could be put upon the attendance.

And thus matters stood when one morning the country was startled, and the keenest interest again aroused in this remarkable case, by an announcement received from France to the effect that the young lady so unfortunately killed in one of the public buildings in New York City was, from the description sent, not the ward of the woman Antoinette Duclos, but her own child, Angeline Duclos. That the two were well known in St. Pierre sur Loire, where they had lived for many years in the relationship mentioned. At the convent where she was educated, she had been registered under the name of Duclos--also at the hotel where she and her mother had spent a few days before leaving for England. Though of pure French descent, the father being a Breton, they could not furnish her birth-certificate, as she had not been born in France. According to the records to be seen at the convent, the father, Achille Duclos, was a professor of languages, whom her mother had met in England and married in France before going to the States. So far as known, their story was a simple one, affording no reason, so far as could be learned, for any change of name on the part of the young woman, in her visit to America.

This was supplemented by a word from Scotland Yard, England, received a few hours after the other, to the effect that Madame Duclos and Miss Willetts arrived at the Ritz from Dover, on the morning of May 16th, and left the next morning for Southampton. They spent the evening at the theater with friends who called for them in a public automobile. These people had not been found, but they had been advertised for and might yet show up. Nothing more could be learned of either of them.

Now here was an astonishing discovery! That two women known and recognized as mother and daughter in France should pass for unrelated companions on leaving that country to enter ours. What were we Americans to think of this, especially in the light of the tragic event which so soon terminated this companionship.

That the French records, imperfect as they were, were to be relied upon as stating the truth as to the exact nature of the connection between these two, there could be no doubt. But granting this, what fresh complexities were thus brought into an affair already teeming with incongruities--nay, absolute contradictions.

Madame Duclos' conduct, as shown toward her young charge, had seemed sufficiently strange and inconsistent when looked upon as that of governess or guardian. But for a mother, and a French mother at that, to allow a young and inexperienced girl to go alone to a strange museum on the very day of their arrival, and then, with or without knowledge of what had happened to her there, to efface herself by flight without promise of return, was inconceivable to anyone acquainted with the most ordinary of French conventions.

Some sinister secret, despite the seeming harmlessness of their lives, must hide behind such unnatural conduct! Was it one connected with or entirely dissociated from the tragedy which had terminated the poor child's existence? This was the great question. This was what gave new zest to the search for the dark-skinned Frenchwoman, with her drooping eyelid and hesitating walk, and led Sweetwater to whisper into Gryce's ear, as they stepped out that same day from Headquarters:

"No more nonsense now. We must find that woman or her dead body before the next twenty-four hours have elapsed. With our fingers on that end of the string----"

"We will get hold of some family secret, but not of the immediate one which especially concerns us. Madame Duclos sent her daughter unattended to the museum, but she did not direct the shaft which killed her. That was the work of our friend X. Let us then make sure that we fit the right man to this algebraic symbol, and trust to her testimony to convict him."

By this time they had reached the taxi which was to convey Mr. Gryce home. But though Sweetwater lent his arm to help the old man in, he did it with such an air of hesitation that it caused the other to remark:

"You have not ended your argument. There is something more you want to say. What is it? Speak up."

"No, no. I am quite satisfied, so far as the Duclos matter is concerned. It is only--would you mind stepping aside for a moment till I tell you a bit of gossip which has just come to my ears? Thank you, sir. Forbes is all right" (Forbes was the chauffeur), "but confidences are sacred and this thing was told me in confidence."

The humorous twist of his features as he said this quite transformed his very plain countenance. Mr. Gryce, noting it, began to stare at the first isolated object handy, which in this case happened to be the crooked end of his umbrella—a sign, to those who knew him well, of awakened interest.
"Well? Let's hear," he said.

"It doesn't sound like much; but it will probably be news to you, as it certainly was to me. It's this, Mr. Gryce: A certain gentleman we know has been contemplating matrimony; but since this accident happened at the museum,—that is, within the last two days,—the engagement has been broken off."

"So! But I thought he had not got so far as an engagement. You mean young Correy----"

"No, Mr. Gryce, I do not. I mean-- the other _"*

"The other! Well, that's worth listening to. Engaged, eh, and now all of a sudden free again? At whose instance, Sweetwater, his or hers? Did you hear?"

"Not exactly, but--it's quite a story, sir. I had it from his chauffeur and will tell it to you later if you are in a hurry to go home."

"Home! Come back with me into Headquarters. I've got to sleep to-night."

Sweetwater laughed, and together they retraced their steps.

"You see, sir," the young detective began as they drew their chairs together in an unoccupied corner, "you gave me a task the other day which called for the help of a friend--one at court, I mean, a fellow who not only knows the gentleman but has access to his person _and_ his wardrobe. X does not keep a man-servant--men of his intellectual type seldom do--but does own a limousine and consequently employs a chauffeur. To meet and make this chauffeur mine took me just two days. I don't know how I did it. I never know how I do it," he added with a sheepish smile as Mr. Gryce gave utterance to his old-fashioned "Umph!" "I don't flatter and I don't bring out my pocketbook or offer drinks or even cigars, but I get 'em, as you know, and get 'em strong, perhaps because I don't make any great effort."

"After an evening spent in the garage with this man, he was ready to talk, and this is what slipped out, among a lot of nonsensical gossip. Mr. X, the real Mr. X this time, has, besides his apartment in New York, a place on Long Island. The latter has been recently bought, and though fine enough, is being added to and refitted as no man at his age would take the trouble of doing, if he hadn't a woman in mind. The chauffeur--Holmes is his name--is no fool, and has seen for some time that Mr. X, for all his goings to and fro and the many calls he is in the habit of making on a certain young lady, did not expect him—that is, Holmes—to notice anything beyond the limits of his work, or to recognize in any way his employer's secret intentions. But fortunately for us, this man Holmes is just one of those singularly meddlesome people whose curiosity grows with every attempt at repression; and when, coincident with that disastrous happening at the museum, all these loverlike attentions ceased and no calls were made and no presents sent, and gloom instead of cheer marked his employer's manner, he made up his mind to sacrifice a portion of his dignity rather than endure the fret of a mystery he did not understand. This meant not only keeping his eyes open,—this he had always done,—but his ears as well.

"The young lady, whose name he never mentioned, lives not in the city but in that same Long Island village where Mr. X's country-house is in the process of renovation. If he, Holmes, should ever be so fortunate as to be ordered to drive there again, he knew of a gravel walk running under the balcony where the two often sat. He would make the acquaintance of that gravel walk instead of sitting out the hour somewhere in the rear, as he had hitherto been accustomed to do. What's the use of having ears if you don't use them? Nobody would be any the worse, and his mind would be at rest.

"And do you know, sir, that he did actually carry this cowardly resolution through. There came a night--I think it was Tuesday,—when the order came, and they took the road to Belpport. Not a word did his employer utter the whole way. Solemn and still he sat, and when they arrived he descended without a word, rang the bell and entered the house. It was very warm, that night, Holmes said, and before long he heard the glass doors open onto the balcony, and knew that his wished-for chance had come. Leaving the limousine, he crept around to secure a place among the bushes, and what he heard while there seemed to compensate him for what he called his loss of dignity. The young girl was crying, and the man was talking to her kindly enough but in a way to end whatever hopes she may have had.

"Holmes heard him say: 'It cannot be, now. Circumstances have changed for me lately, and much as I regret it I must ask you to be so good as to forgive me for giving up our plans.' Then he offered her money,—an annuity, I believe they call it,—but she cried out at that, saying it was love she wanted, to be petted and cared for—money she could do without. When he showed himself again in front, he was stiffer and more solemn than ever, and said 'Home,' in a dreary way which made the chauffeur feel decidedly uncomfortable.

"Of course Holmes is quite blind to what this all means, but you may possibly see some connection between this sudden act of sacrifice on X's part and the work of the arrow. At all events, I thought you ought to know that Mr. X's closet holds a skeleton which he will doubtless take every pains to keep securely locked from general view. Holmes says that his last word to the disappointed girl was in the way of warning. No mention of this break in their plans was to be made without his sanction."

"Good work, Sweetwater! You have strengthened my hands wonderfully. Does this fellow Holmes know you for a police-detective?"
"Indeed not, sir. That would be fatal to our friendship, I am sure. I haven't even let him discover that what he was burning to tell had any especial interest for me. I let him ramble on with just a word here and there to show I wasn't bored. He hasn't an idea——"

"Very good. Now, what do you propose to do next?"
"To take up my residence in Belport."
"Why Belport?"
"Because X proposes to move there, bag and baggage, this very week."
"Before his house is done?"
"Yes. He hates the city. Wants to have an eye to the changes being made. Perhaps he thinks a little work of this kind may distract him."
"And you?"
"Was a master carpenter once, you know."
"I see."
"And have a friend on the spot who promises to recommend me."
"Are workmen wanted there?"
"A good one, very much."
"I'm sure you'll fill the bill."
"I shall try to, sir."
"But for the risk you run of being recognized, I should bet on you, Sweetwater."
"I know; people will not forget the unfortunate shape of my nose."
"You were up and down the museum for hours. He must know your face like a book."
"It can't be helped, I shall keep out of sight as much as possible whenever he is around. I am an expert workman in the line wanted. I understand my trade, and he will see that I do and doubt his eyes rather than stretch probabilities to the point of connecting me with the Force. Besides, I get quite another expression when my hands get in touch with the wood; and I can look a man in the eye, if I have to, without a quiver of self-consciousness. His will drop before mine will."
"Your name as carpenter?"
"Jacob Shott. It's the name by which Holmes already knows me."
"Well, well, the game may be worth the candle. You can soon tell. I will keep you posted."
The rest was business with which we need not concern ourselves.

BOOK III
STORM IN THE MOUNTAINS
XVI
FRIENDS

A shaded walk, with a glimpse of sea beyond, embowering trees, a stretch of lawn on one side, and on the other the dormer windows of a fine old house half hidden by scaffolding, from which there came now and then the quick strokes of a workman's hammer.

It was half-past four, if the sharp little note of a cuckoo-clock, snapping out one, told the time correctly.

Two men are pacing this leafy retreat, both of whom we have seen before, but under circumstances so distracting that we took little note of their appearance, fine as it undoubtedly was in either case. However, we are more at leisure now, and will pause for an instant to give you some idea of these two prominent men, with one of whom our story will henceforth have very much to do.

One of them--the Curator of our famous museum--lacks comeliness of figure, though at moments he can be very impressive. We can therefore recognize him at a distance by means of a certain ungainliness of stride sometimes seen in a man wholly given over to intellectual pursuits. But when he turns and you get a glimpse of his face, you experience at once the scope of mind and charm of spirit which make his countenance a marked one in the metropolis. A little gray about the temples, a tendency--growing upon him, alas!--to raise his hand to his ear when called upon to listen, show that he has already passed the meridian of life; but in his quick glance, and clear and rapid speech, youth still lingers, making of him a companion delightful to many and admirable to all.

The other--Carleton Roberts, his bosom friend, and the museum's chief director--is of a different type, but no less striking to the eye. For him, personality has done much toward raising him to his present status among the leading men of New York. While not tall, he is tall enough never to look short, owing to the trim elegance of his figure and the quiet dignity of his carriage. He does not need to turn his face to impress you with the idea that he is handsome; but when he does so, you find that your expectations are more than met by the reality. For though he may not have the strictly regular features we naturally associate with one of his poise and matchless outline, there is enough of that quality, and more than enough of that additional elusive something which is an attraction in itself, to
make for handsomeness in a marked degree. He, like his friend, has passed his fortieth year, but nowhere save in his abundant locks can one see any sign of approaching age. They are quite white—cut close, but quite white, so white they attracted the notice of his companion, who stole more than one look at them as he chatted on in what had become almost a monologue, so little did Roberts join in the conversation.

Finally the Curator paused, and stealing another look at that white head, remarked anxiously:

"Have you not grown gray very suddenly? I don't remember your being whiter than myself the day I dined with you just preceding the horrible occurrence at the museum."

"I have been growing gray for a year," rejoined the other. "My father was white at forty; I am just forty-three."

"It becomes you, and yet—Roberts, you have taken this matter too much to heart. We were not to blame in any way, unless it was in having such deadly weapons within reach. How could one suppose-----"

"Yes, how could one suppose!" echoed the director. "And the mystery of it! The police seem no nearer solving the problem now than on the night they practised archery in the galleries. It does wear on me, possibly because I live so much alone. I see-----"

Here he stopped abruptly. They had been strolling in the direction of the house, and at this moment were not many paces from it.

"See what?" urged the Curator with an accent one might almost call tender—would have been called tender, if used in addressing a woman.

"See _her_, that dead girl!—constantly—at night when my eyes are shut—in the daytime while I go about my affairs, here, there and everywhere. The young, young face! so white, so still, so strangely and so unaccountably familiar! Do you feel the same? Did she remind you of anyone we know? I grow old trying to place her. I can say this to you; but not to another soul could I speak of what has become to me a sort of blind obsession. She was a stranger. I know of no Madame Duclos and am sure that I never saw her young daughter before; and yet I have started up in my bed more than once during these past few nights, confident that in another moment memory would supply the clue which will rid my mind of the eternal question as to where I have seen a face like hers before? But memory fails to answer; and the struggle, momentarily interrupted, begins again, to the destruction of my peace and comfort."

"Odd! but you must rid yourself of what unnerves you so completely. It does no good and only adds to regrets which are poignant enough in themselves."

"That is true; but—stop a minute. I see it now—her face, I mean. It comes between me and the house there. Even your presence does not dispel it. It is—no, it's gone again. Let us go back once more and take another look at the sea. It is the one thing which draws me away from this pursuing vision."

They resumed their stroll, this time away from the house and toward the oval cut in the trees for a straight view out to the sea. Across this oval a ship was now sailing which attracted the eyes of both; not till it had passed, did the Curator say:

"You live too lonely a life. You should seek change—recreation—possibly something more absorbing than either.""

"You mean marriage?"

"Yes, Roberts, I do. Pardon me; I want to see your eye beam again with contentment. The loss of your late companion has left you desolate, more desolate than you have been willing to acknowledge. You cannot replace her—"

"I am wedded to politics."

"An untrustworthy jade. When did politics ever make a man happy?"

"Happy!" They were turned toward the house again. When near, Roberts capped his exclamation with the remark:

"You ask a great deal for me, more than you ask for yourself. You have not married again."

"But my mistress is not a jade. I find joy in my work. I have not had time to woo a woman as she should be wooed if she's to be a happy second wife. I should have so much to explain to her. When I get looking over prints, the dinner-bell might ring a dozen times without my hearing it. A letter from an agent telling of some wonderful find in Mesopotamia would make me forget whether my wife's hair were brown or black. I don't need diversion, Roberts."

"Yet you enjoy a couple of hours in the country, a whiff of fresh air-----"

"And a chat with a friend. Yes, I do; but if the museum were open-----"

Mr. Roberts smiled.

"I see that you are incorrigible." Then, with a gesture toward the house: "Come and see my new veranda. Its outlook will surprise you."

As you have already surmised, he was the owner of this place; and the man for whose better understanding
Sweetwater had again taken up the plane and the hammer.

XVII

THE CUCKOO-CLOCK

As they made their way through scattered timber and the litter of fresh carpentry-work, the man who was busy there and who certainly had outstayed his time took up his kit and disappeared around the corner of the house. Neither noted him. The cuckoo-clock was chirping out its five small notes from the cheerful interior, and the Curator was remarking upon it.

"That’s a merry sound both sweet and stimulating; and what is still better, I can hear it without effort. I believe I should like to have a clock of that kind."

"It goes where I go," muttered its strange owner with what seemed an involuntary emphasis. Then as the Curator turned upon him in some surprise, he added with studied indifference: "I brought it from Switzerland when I was younger than I am now—a silly memento, but I fancy it."

A commonplace explanation surely; why, then, did that same workman, who had stopped short after rounding the corner to pick up something which he as quickly threw down, turn a quick head and listen eagerly for what might be said next. Nothing came of it, for the veranda door was near and the two gentlemen had stepped in; but to one who knew Sweetwater, the smile with which he resumed his work had an element in it which, if seen, would have darkened still further the gloom in the troubled eye of the speaker.

Switzerland! He had said Switzerland.

It was not long after this that the Curator and his host left for New York.

The house was not quite ready for occupancy, but was in the process of being made so by the woman who had done duty as housekeeper for Mr. Roberts both before his marriage and since his wife's death. During the fifteen years which had intervened, she had been simply the cook.

This woman, Huldah Weston by name, did not accompany them. She was in Belport to stay, and as it behooves us to remain there for a while longer ourselves, we will join her in the quiet rest she is taking on the kitchen steps before shutting up the house for the night.

She is not alone. A young man is with her—one to whom she is giving temporary board and lodging in exchange for the protection of his presence and such slight help as he can afford her in the heavy task of distributing and arranging the furniture.

We know this man. It is the one we have just seen halting at the corner of the house, on quitting his work on the new veranda—Sweetwater.

He is a genial soul; she, though very old for the responsibilities she still insists upon carrying, enjoys a good laugh. Nor is she averse to the numberless little kindly attentions with which he shows his respect for her age if not a personal liking for herself. In short, they are almost friends, and she trusts him as she has never trusted any young man yet, save the boy she lost when she was still a comely widow.

Perhaps this is why, on this night when we find the two together, he ventures to turn the talk upon the man she had so devotedly served during the better part of her life.

He began with the cuckoo-clock. Where did it come from? How long had they had it? What a jolly little customer the wee bird was, darting out and darting in with his hurry-call to anyone who would listen! It made a fellow feel ashamed to dawdle at his work. It wouldn't do to let any mere bird get ahead of him—a wooden bird at that!

He got her talking. She had known Mr. Roberts' mother, and she had been in the house (a young girl then) when he went away to Europe. He had not wanted to go. He was in love, or thought he was, with a woman older than himself. But the mother did not approve of the match, though the lady had a mint of money and everything in her favor but those seven years. She afterward became his wife and for all his mother's fears they lived together very happily. Since her death which occurred about a year ago he's been a different man; very sad and much given to sitting alone. Anyone can see the effect it has had upon him if they look at him closely.

"She was a good woman, then?"

"Very good."

"Well, life must be lonesome for a widower, especially if he has no children. But perhaps he has some married or at school?"

"No, he has no children, and no relations, to speak of."

"And he brought that clock from Switzerland? Did he ever say from what part of Switzerland?"

"If he did, I don't remember; I've no memory for foreign names."

This sent Sweetwater off on another tack. He knew such a good story, which, having told, he seemed to have forgotten all about the clock, for he said nothing more about it, and not much more about Mr. Roberts.

But when, a little later, he followed her into that gentleman's room for the purpose of unlocking a trunk which
had been delivered that day, he took advantage of her momentary absence in search of the key to pull out that
cuckoo-clock from the wall where it hung and read the small slip of paper pasted across its back. As he hoped, it
gave both the name and address of the merchant from whom it had been bought. But that was not all. Running in
diagonal lines across this label, he saw some faded lines in fine handwriting, which proved to be a couplet signed
with five initials. The latter were not quite legible, but the couplet he could read without the least difficulty. It was
highly sentimental, and might mean much and might mean nothing. If the handwriting should prove to be Mr.
Roberts', the probabilities were in favor of the former supposition--or so he said to himself, as he swung the clock
back into place.

When Mrs. Weston returned, he was standing as patiently as possible in the middle of the room, saying over and
over to himself to insure remembrance till he could jot the lines down in his notebook: _Bossberg, Lucerne.... I love
but thee--and thee will I love to eternity._

His interest in this slight and doubtful clue, however, sank into insignificance when, having unlocked and
unstrapped the trunk which Mrs. Weston pointed out, he saw to his infinite satisfaction that it held Mr. Roberts'
clothing--the one thing in the world toward which at this exact moment his curiosity mainly pointed. If only he
might help her handle the heavy coats which lay so temptingly on top! Should he propose to do so? Looking at her
firm chin and steady eye, he felt that he did not dare. To rouse the faintest suspicion in this woman's intelligent mind
would be fatal to all further procedure, and so he stood indifferent, while she lifted garment after garment and laid
them carefully on the bed. He counted five coats and as many vests--and was racking his brains for some plausible
excuse for a nearer inspection, when she stopped in the midst of her work, with the cheery remark:

"That will do for to-night. To-morrow I will look them all over for moths before hanging them away in the
closet."

And he had to go, leaving them lying there within reach of his hand, when one glance at the lining of a certain
coat which had especially attracted his eye might have given him the one clue he most needed.

The room which had been allotted to him in this house was in the rear and at the top of a steep flight of stairs. As
he sought it that night, he cast a quick glance through the narrow passageway opening just beyond his own door.
Would it be possible for him to thread those devious ways and reach Mr. Roberts' room without rousing Mrs.
Weston, who in spite of her years had the alertness of a watchdog with eye and ear ever open? To be found strolling
through quarters where he had no business would be worse than being suspected of taking a personal interest in the
owner's garments. He was of an adventurous turn, and ever ready to risk something on the turn of a die, but not too
much. A false move might hazard all; besides, he remembered the airing these clothes were to get and the nearness
of the clothes-yard to the pump he so frequently patronized, and all the chances which this gave for an inspection
which would carry little danger to one of his ready wit.

So he gave up the midnight search he might have attempted under other circumstances, and shut his room from
the moon and his eyes to sleep, and dreamed. Was it of the great museum, with its hidden mystery enshrouding its
many wonders of high art, or of a far-off time and a far-off scene, where in the stress of some great emotion the
trembling hand of Carleton Roberts had written on the back of this foolish clock for which he still retained so great a
fancy the couplet which he himself had so faithfully memorized:

_I love but thee, And thee will I love to eternity._

At eight o'clock on the following morning the quick strokes of the workman's hammer reawakened the echoes at
the end of the building where the big enclosed veranda was going up.

As the clock struck nine Mrs. Weston could be seen hanging up her master's coats and trousers on a long line
stretched across the clothes-yard. They remained there two hours, viewed from afar by Sweetwater, but not
approached till he saw the old woman disappear from one of the gates with a basket on her arm. Then he developed
thirst and went rearward to the pump. While there, he took a look at the sea. A brisk wind was springing up. It gave
him an idea.

Making sure that his fellow workmen were all busy, he loosened one end of the line holding the fluttering
garments and then went back to his work. As the wind increased, the strain on the line became too great, and soon he
had the satisfaction of seeing the whole thing fall in one wild flap to the ground. With an exclamation calculated to
draw the attention of the men about him to what had happened, he rushed to the rescue, lifted the line and rearranged
the clothes. Then refastening--this time securely--the end of the line which had slipped loose, he returned to his post,
with just one quick and disappointed look thrown back at the now safe if wildly fluttering garments.

He had improved his opportunity to examine the inside of every coat and had found nothing to reward his
scrutiny. But it was not this which had given him his chief annoyance. It was the fact that the one coat from which
he had expected the anticipated clue--the coat which Mr. Roberts had certainly worn on that tragic day at the
museum--was not there. A summer overcoat had filled out the number, and his investigation was incomplete.

Why was that one coat lacking? He was sure he had seen it the night before lying on the bed with the others.
Was it still there, or had it been stowed away in drawer or closet, irrespective of its danger from moths, for a reason he would give his eyeteeth to know but dared not inquire into till he had clinched his friendship with this old woman so thoroughly that he could ask her anything—which certainly was not the case as yet.

The absence of the one coat he wanted most to see afflicted him sorely. He told Mrs. Weston, on her return, how the line had fallen and how he had replaced it, but for all his wits, he could not get any further. With the close of the day's work and the reappearance of Mr. Roberts, he slipped away to the village, to avoid an encounter of the results of which he felt very doubtful. His dinner would not be ready till after Mr. Roberts had been served, and the three hours which must necessarily elapse before that happy moment looked very long and very unproductive to him, especially as he had found no answer as yet to the question which so grievously perplexed him.

He had paced the main street twice and had turned into a narrow lane ending in the smallest of gardens and the most infinitesimal of houses, when the door of this same house opened and a man came out whose appearance held him speechless for a moment—then sent him forward with a quickly beating heart. It was not the man himself that produced this somewhat startling effect; it was his clothes. So far as his hat and nether garments went, they were, if not tattered, not very far from it; but the coat he wore was not only trim but made of the finest cloth and without the smallest sign of wear. It was so conspicuously fine, and looked so grotesquely out of place on the man wearing it, that he could pass no one without rousing curiosity, and he probably had all he wanted to do for the next few days in explaining how a fine gentleman's coat had fallen to his lot.

But to Sweetwater its interest lay in something more important than the amusing incongruity it offered to the eye. It looked exactly like the one belonging to Mr. Roberts which had escaped his scrutiny in so remarkable a way. Should it prove to be that same, how fortunate he was to have it brought thus easily within his reach and under circumstances so natural it was not necessary for him to think twice how best to take advantage of them.

Father Dobbins—so that is the name by which this old codger was known to the boys—was, as might be expected, very proud of his new acquisition and quite blind to the contrast it offered to his fringed-out trouser-legs. He had a smile on his face which broadened as he caught Sweetwater's sympathetic glance.

"Fine day," he mumbled. "Are ye wantin' somethin' of me that ye're comin' this way?"

"Perhaps and perhaps," answered Sweetwater, "--if that fine coat I see you wearing is the one given you by Mrs. Weston up the road."

"Deed, sir, and what's amiss? She gave it to me, yes. Came all the way into the village to find me and give it to me. Too small for her master, she said; and would I take it to oblige him. Does she want it back?"

"Oh, no--not she. She's not that kind. It's only that she has since remembered that one of the pockets has a hole in it--an inside one, I believe. She's afraid it might lose you a dime some day. Will you let me see if she is right? If so, I was to take you to the tailor's and have it fixed immediately. I am to pay for it."

The old man stared in slow comprehension; then with the deliberation which evidently marked all his movements, he slowly put down his basket.

"I warrant ye it's all right," he said. "But look, an ye will. I don't want to lose no dimes."

Sweetwater threw back one side of the coat, then the other, felt in the pockets and smiled. But Gryce, and not ignorant Father Dobbins, should have seen that smile. There was comedy in it, and there was the deepest tragedy also; for the marks of stitches forcibly cut were to be seen under one of the pockets—stitches which must have held something as narrow as an umbrella-band and no longer than the little strip at which Mr. Gryce had been looking one night in a melancholy little short of prophetic.

XVIII

MRS. DAVIS' STRANGE LODGER

"If you will look carefully at this chart, and note where the various persons then in the museum were standing at the moment Correy shouted his alarm, you will see that of all upon whom suspicion can with any probability be attached there is but one who could have fulfilled the conditions of escape as just explained to you."

Stretching forth an impressive finger, Mr. Gryce pointed to a certain number on the chart outspread between him and the Chief Inspector.

He looked—saw the number "3" and glanced anxiously down at the name it prefigured.

"Roberts— the director! Impossible! Not to be considered for a moment. I'm afraid you're getting old, Gryce."

And he looked about to be sure that the door was quite shut.

Mr. Gryce smiled, a little drearily perhaps, as he acknowledged this self-evident fact.

"You are right, Chief: I am getting old—but not so old as to venture upon so shocking an insinuation against a man of Mr. Roberts' repute and seeming honor, if I had not some very substantial proofs to offer in its support."

"No doubt, no doubt; but it won't do. I tell you, Gryce, it won't do. There cannot be any such far-fetched and ridiculous explanation to the crime you talk about. Why, he's next to being the Republican nominee for Senator. An attack upon him, especially of this monstrous character, would be looked upon as a clear case of political
persecution. And such it would be, and nothing less; and it would be all to no purpose, I am sure. I hope you are alone in these conclusions--that you have not seen fit to share your ideas on this subject with any of the boys?"

"Only with Sweetwater, who did some of the work for me."

"And Joyce? How about him?"

"He had the same opportunities as myself, but we have not reached the point of mentioning names. I thought it best to consult with you first."

"Good! Then we'll drop it."

It was decisively said, but Gryce gave no signs of yielding.

"I'm afraid that's impossible," said he. Then with the dignity of long experience, he added with quiet impressiveness:

"I have, as you know, faced crime these many years in all its aspects. I have tracked the ignorant, almost imbecile, murderer of the slums, and laid my hand in arrest on the shoulder of so-called gentlemen hiding their criminal instincts under a show of culture and sometimes of wide education. Human nature is not so very different in high and low; and what may lead an irresponsible dago into unsheathing his knife against his fellow may work a like effect upon his high-bred brother if circumstances lend their aid to make discovery appear impossible.

"Mr. Roberts is the friend of many a good man who would swear to his integrity with a clear conscience. I would have sworn to it myself, a month ago, had I heard it questioned in the slightest manner; and I may live to swear to it again, notwithstanding the doubts which have been raised in my mind by certain strange discoveries which link him to this unhappy affair by what we are pleased to call circumstantial evidence. For, as I am obliged to acknowledge, the one great thing we rely upon, in accusations of this kind, is so far lacking in his case: I mean, the motive.

"I know of none--can, in fact, conceive of none--which would cause a gentleman of even life and ambitious projects to turn a deadly weapon upon an innocent child with whom he is not, so far as we can discover, even acquainted. Dementia only can account for such a freak, and to dementia we must ascribe this crime, if it is necessary for us to find cause before proceeding to lay our evidence before the District Attorney. All I propose to do at present is to show you my reasons for thinking that the arrow which slew Angeline Willetts--or, as we have been assured by unimpeachable authority, Angeline Duclos masquerading under the name of Angeline Willetts--was set to bow and loosed across the court by the gentleman we have just mentioned."

Here Mr. Gryce stopped for a look of encouragement from the severely silent man he was endeavoring to impress. But he did not get it. With a full sense of his years weighing upon him as never before, he sighed, but continued with little change of tone:

"In the first day or two of keen surprise following an event of so many complicated mysteries, I drew up in my own mind a list of questions which I felt should be properly answered before I would consider it my duty to submit to you a report to the disadvantage of any one suspect. This was Question One:

"Whose was the hand to bring up into the museum gallery the bow recognized by Correy as the one which had been lying by for an indefinite length of time in the cellar?"

"Not till yesterday did I get any really definite answer to this. Correy would not talk; nor would the Curator; and I dared not press either of them beyond a certain point, for equally with yourself, I felt it most undesirable to allow anyone to suspect the nature of my theory or whom it especially involved.

"The Curator had nothing to hide on this or any other point connected with the tragedy. But it was different with Correy. He had some very strong ideas about that visit to the cellar--only he would not acknowledge them. So yesterday, after the satisfactory settlement of another puzzling question, I made up my mind to trap him--which I did after this manner. He has, as most men have, in fact, a great love for the Curator. In discussing with him the mysterious fetching up of the bow and its subsequent concealment in the Curator's office, I remarked, with a smile I did not mean to have him take as real, that only the Curator himself would do such a thing and then forget it; that it must have been his shadow he saw; and I begged him, in a way half jocose, half earnest, to say so and have done with it.

"It worked, sir. He flushed like a man who had been struck; then he grew white with indignation and blurted forth that it was no more his shadow than it was Mr. Roberts'--that indeed it was much more like Mr. Roberts' than the Curator's. At which I simply remarked: 'You think so, Correy?' To which he replied: 'I do not think anything. But I know that Curator Jewett never brought up that bow from the cellar, or he would have said so the minute he saw it. There's no better man in the world than he.' 'Nor than Mr. Roberts either,' I put in, and left him comforted if not quite reassured.

"So much for Question One--

"Number Two is of a similar nature. 'Was the transference of the arrow from one gallery to the other due to the same person who brought up the bow?' Now, in answer to that, I have a curious thing to show you." And lifting into view a bundle of goodly size, wrapped in heavy brown paper, he opened it up and disclosed a gentleman's coat.
Spreading this out between them lining side out, and pointing out two marks an inch or so apart showing the remains of stitches for which there seemed to have been no practical use, he took from his own vest-pocket what looked like a bit of narrow black tape. This he laid down on the upturned lining in the space bounded by the two lines of marks I have mentioned, and drawing the Chief's attention to it, observed in quiet explanation:

"The one fits the other--stitch for stitch. Look closely at them both, I beg, and tell me if in your judgment it is not evident that this strap or loop, or whatever we may call it, has been cut away from this coat to which it had been previously sewed--and by no woman either."

Anyone could see that this had been so. There could be but one reply:

"This coat I bought from an old man to whom it had been given by Mr. Roberts' housekeeper on their arrival at his new home on Long Island. The strip was picked up at the museum in the room where Mrs. Taylor spent an hour or so immediately upon leaving the scene of crime. With her at the time was the young lady who had kindly offered to look after her and two or three men directly associated with the museum, of whom Mr. Roberts was one. These and these only. Now, this strap or let us say loop, since we are beginning to see for what purpose it was used, was not on the floor previous to the entrance of these few persons into this room--or, indeed, for some little time afterward. Otherwise this young lady, who was the one to open my eyes to this clue, surely would have seen it in the half-hour she stood at Mrs. Taylor's side with no one to talk to and quite free to look about her. But it _was_ there after that lady had revived from her fainting-fit--dropped, as you see--cut from its owner's coat and dropped! Chief, let me ask why this should have been done in a time of such suspense if it had had nothing to do with the crime then occupying everybody's attention--a good coat too, almost new, as you will observe?"

The Chief, possibly with a shade less of irony in his manner, answered this direct question with one equally direct:

"And what connection have you succeeded in establishing between this abominable crime and the coat with or without a loop worn by the museum's leading director? One as straight and indisputable, no doubt, as that you have just attempted to make between this same gentleman and the museum bow," he added with biting incredulity.

"Yes," returned the other in calm disregard of the sarcasm, "straighter and more indisputable, if anything. We are asking, as you will remember, how an arrow could have been carried from the southern to the northern gallery without attracting anyone's attention. I will show you how."

With a rap on the table which brought Sweetwater into the room, he proceeded to pin again into its old place on the lining of Mr. Roberts' coat the so-called tag. Then, taking the arrow which Sweetwater proceeded to hand him, he slipped it into the loop thus made and showed how securely it could be held there by its feather end.

"A man of Mr. Roberts' upright carriage might, with his coat well buttoned up, walk the length of Broadway without disclosing the presence of this stick," remarked Mr. Gryce as, at his look, Sweetwater doffed his own coat and put on the one thus discreetly weighted.

The Chief stared, paling slightly as he noted the result. Mr. Gryce, who never overemphasised his effects, motioned Sweetwater to leave and proceeded to the next question.

"Number Three," he now observed, "should have come first, as it has already been answered. It asks if it is possible to hit the mark in Section II of the museum's gallery, from behind the pedestal in Section VIII. From the pedestal nearest the front, _no_; but from the one further back--upon which, by the way, Stevens found the print of a gloved finger--_yes_."

"Who wore gloves that day--kid gloves, mind you, for the mark of the stitching is exact, as you can see in this print of the same made by Stevens? All the ladies, except a young copyist who was leaving in a hurry and had not stopped to put hers on. But of the men, only one--Mr. Roberts, the careful dresser, who was never known to enter the street without this last touch to his toilet. How do I know this? Look at the chart, Chief--this one which shows the court and the persons in it at the precise minute of first alarm. You see how near the exit Mr. Roberts was, and who was closest to him. I had a little talk--the most guarded one imaginable--with this lady, who was the very one of whom I have just said that she had omitted to put on her gloves; and she gave me the fact I have just passed on to you. She noted Mr. Roberts' hands, because they shamed hers, and she was just stopping to pull her gloves from her coat-pocket when Correy's voice rang out and everything else was forgotten.

"Corroborative, only corroborative, sir? I am quite aware of that. But what I have now to add may give it weight. The stringing of a bow is no easy task for an amateur; nor is the discharge of an arrow, under such dangerous circumstances as marked the delivery of the one we are discussing, one which would be lightly attempted by a person altogether ignorant of archery. However strong the evidence might be against a man who was not an utter fool, I would never have presumed to lay it out before you if I had not verified the fact that the director, whatever his life now, was once greatly addicted to sports, and thoroughly acquainted with the management of a bow and arrow. It has taken time. Many cablegrams were necessary, but I have at last received this copy of a report made sixteen years ago by a club in Lucerne, Switzerland, in which mention is made of a prize given to one Carleton Roberts, an
American, for twelve piercings of the bull's-eye in as many shots, in an archery-contest which included all nationalities.

"Nor is that all. In a study of himself,--his home, his life, his secret interests,--we come upon things which call for closer inspection. For instance, not a day has passed since that poor child has been in the morgue that he has not been one on the line to see her. He dreams of her, he says; he cannot get her face out of his mind--you notice that he has been growing gray.

"But I will stop here. I do not wonder that you look upon all this as the ravings of a man on the verge of senility. If I were in your place, I should undoubtedly do the same. But ungracious as the task has proved, I owed it to myself to rid my mind of its secret burden. It is for you to say whether, all things considered, I am to drop the matter here or proceed blindly in search of the motive lying back of every premeditated crime. I can imagine none in this case, as I have frankly stated, save the very weak and improbable one already advanced by young Sweetwater in connection with another party upon whom he had fixed his eye--that of the irresistible desire of an expert to test his skill with a bow which comes unexpectedly into his hands."

"That wouldn't apply to Roberts--not in the least," affirmed the Chief with the emphasis of strong conviction.

"Even if we should allow ourselves to regard these stray bits of circumstantial evidence as in any way conclusive of the extraordinary theory you have advanced, he's much too able and cautious a man to yield to any such foolish temptation as that. But to let that matter pass for the present: why have you paid such close attention to one end of your string, and quite ignored the other? Madame Duclos' hasty flight and continued absence, in face of circumstances which would lead a natural mother to break through every obstacle put in the way of her return, offers a field of inquiry more promising, it appears to me, than the one upon which you have expended your best energies. You say nothing of her."

"I have nothing to say. I am glad to leave that particular line of investigation to you, and more than glad if it has proved or is likely to prove fruitful. Have you heard----"

"Read that."
He tossed a letter within the detective's grasp and leaned back while Gryce laboriously perused it.

It was ill written, but well worth the pains he gave to it--as witness:

_To the Chief of Police:_

Dear Sir:--I am told that there is a reward out for a certain woman by the name of Duclos. I do not know any such person, but there is a woman who has been lodging in my house for the last two weeks who has acted so strangely at odd times that I have become very suspicious of her, and think it right for you to know what she did here one night.

It's about a fortnight since she came to my house in search of lodgings. Had she been young, I would not have opened my doors to her, decent as she was in her dress and ways; for she was a foreign woman and I don't like foreigners. But being middle-aged and ready with her money in advance, I not only allowed her to come in but gave her my very best room. This is not saying much, because the elevated road runs by my door, darkening my whole front, besides making an awful clatter. But she did not seem to mind this, and I took little notice of her, till one of the other lodgers--a woman with a busy tongue--began to ask why this strange woman, who was so very dark and plain, went out only at night? Did she sew or write for a living? If not, what did she do with herself all day?

As the last was a question I could easily answer, I said that she spent most of her time in reading the newspapers; and this was true, because she always came in with her arms full of them. But there I stopped, as I never discuss my lodgers. Yet I must acknowledge that my curiosity had been roused by all this talk, and I began to watch the woman, who I soon saw was in what I would call a fluttered state of mind, and as unhappy as anyone could be who hadn't suffered some great bereavement. But still I wasn't really alarmed, being misled by the name she gave, which was Clery.

Night before last I went to bed early. I am a heavy sleeper, as I need to be with those cars pounding by the house every few minutes. But there are certain noises which wake me, and I found myself all of a sudden sitting up in bed and listening with all my ears. Everything was quiet, even on the elevated road; but when the next train came thundering along, I heard, piercing shrilly through the rumble and roar, that same sharp sound which had wakened me. What was it? It seemed to come from somewhere in the house. But how could that be! I was startled enough, however, to get up and slip on some of my clothes and stand with ears astretch for the next train.

It came and passed, and right in the middle of the noise it made I heard again that quick, sharp sound. This time I was sure it came from somewhere near, and opening my door, I slid out into the hall. All my lodgers were in but one, a young gentleman who has a night-key. And most of the rooms were dark, as I can very well tell from the fact that none of the doors fit as they ought to and there is sure to be a streak of light showing somewhere about them if the gas is burning inside. Everything looked so natural, and the house was so still, that I was going back again when another train swept by and that sound was repeated. This time I was sure it came from somewhere on the lower
floor, and mindful of Mrs. Clery's queer ways, I stole downstairs to her door. She was up—that was plainly enough to
be seen. But what was she doing? I was just a little frightened, or I would have knocked on the door and asked.

As I was waiting for the passing by of the next train, my last lodger came in and caught me standing there before
Mrs. Clery's door. I know him pretty well; so I put my finger to my lips and then beckoned him to join me. As the
train approached, I seized him by the arm and pointed toward Mrs. Clery's door. He didn't know what I meant, of
course, but he looked and listened, and when the train had gone by, I drew him down the hall and said, "You heard
it!" and then asked him what it was. He answered that it was a pistol-shot, and he wanted to go back to see if any
dreadful thing had happened. But I shook my head and told him it was one of five, each one taking place when the
roar of the trains going by was at the loudest. Then he said that this woman was practising at a mark, and bade me
look out or we should have a house full of anarchists. At that, I loudly declared she should go the first thing in the
morning and so got rid of him. But I did not keep my word, and for this reason: When I went to do her room-work as
I always do immediately after breakfast, I was all smiles and full of talk till I had taken a good look at the walls for
the bullet-holes I expected to see there. But I didn't find any, and was puzzled enough you may be sure, for those
bullets must have gone somewhere and I was quite certain that they had not been fired out of the window. I hardly
dared to look at the ceiling, for she was watching me and kept me chatting and wondering till all of a sudden I
noticed that one of the sofa-pillows was missing from its place. This set me thinking, and I was about to ask her
what she had done with it when my attention was drawn away by seeing among the scraps in the wastebasket I had
lifted to carry out the end and corner of what looked like a partly destroyed photograph.

This was something too strange not to rouse any woman's curiosity, but I was careful not to give it another
stance till I was well out of the room. Then, as you may believe, I drew it quickly out, to find that all the middle part
was gone--shot to pieces by those tearing bullets. Not a particle of the face was to be seen, and only enough of the
neck and shoulders to show that it had been the portrait of a man. I enclose it for you to see; and if you want to talk
to the woman, she is still here, though I only keep her in the hope of her being that Madame Duclos for whom
money is offered. I will tell you why I think this: Not because of a torn skirt,—you see I have been looking over the
advertisement printed in the papers,—but because she is foreign and dark and has a decidedly drooping eyelid. Then
too, she halts a little on one foot, as I noticed when I called her hurriedly to the window to see something. If you
want to have a look at her, come after five and before seven; we are both in then.

Yours respectfully,
Caroline Davis.

"No doubt that's the woman," commented Gryce. "We are fortunate in hitting her trail at this critical moment."
He had already glanced at the mutilated photograph lying before him, but now he took it up.

"Very little here," he remarked as he examined first the face of it and then the back. "But if you will let me take
it, I may find that its place is in our incompleted chain."

"Take it, and if you would like to have a talk with the woman herself----"

"Yes, Chief; I would like that above all things."

"Very good. I'm expecting her here any minute, but—Well, what now? What's up?"

An officer had entered hurriedly after one quick knock.

"Mrs. Davis' lodger is gone," said he. "Left without a word to anybody. When they went to her room they found
it empty, with a five-dollar bill pinned to the riddled cushion. As nobody saw her go, we are as much at sea as ever."

A smile, both curious and fine, crossed Mr. Gryce's lips as he listened to this, and turning earnestly to the Chief,
he begged for the job of looking her up.

"I think with the little start we now have that I can find her," said he. "At all events, I should like to try."

"And let the other matter rest quiescent meanwhile?"

"If it will."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I hardly know myself, Chief. All is hazy yet, but skies clear, and so do most of our problems. If the two ends of
my string should chance to come together-----"

But here a look from his Chief stopped him.

"Let us pray that they won't. But if they do, we shall not shirk our duty, Gryce."

XIX
MR. GRYCE AND THE TIMID CHILD

"Assurance does it, sir—a great deal of assurance. Not that I have much-----"

Here Mr. Gryce laughed, with the result that Sweetwater laughed also. A moment of fun was a welcome relief,
and they both made the most of it.

"Not that I lack it entirely," Sweetwater hastened to say. Then they laughed again—after which their talk
proceeded on serious lines.
"Sweetwater, what is that you once told me about a family named Duclos?"

"Why, this, sir: There is one such family in town, as Peters discovered in looking up the name in the directory a day or two after Madame's disappearance. But there's nothing to be learned from them. Mr. and Mrs. Edward Duclos are a most respectable couple and have but one answer to every question. They know no one of their name outside their own family. Though the man of the house is Breton born, he has lived many years in this country, and in all that time has never met another Duclos."

"And Peters let it go at that?"

"Had to. What else could he do? However, he did make this admission--that there was a child in the room who betrayed a nervousness under his questions which was not observable in her elders, a girl of twelve or so who put her hands behind her when she found she could not control their twitching. And I've an idea that if he could have got this child by herself, he might have heard something quite different from the plain denial he got from the mother. I've always thought so; but I've had too many other things to do to make an effort in this direction.

"Now, if you approve, I'll see what I can do with this girl, for it stands to reason there must be some place in town where this woman, just off ship, found an immediate refuge and a change of clothing and effects. Nor should I be much surprised if we should discover that she is an inmate of this very house. What do you think, Mr. Gryce? Is it worth looking into?"

"It is worth my looking into. I have other work for you. Where does this Duclos family live?"

Sweetwater told him. It was in one of the Eighties, not a quarter of a mile from the Hotel Universal.

This settled, Mr. Gryce took from his pocket the mutilated photograph which had served as a target to the woman in Fifty-third Street.

"You see this," said he. "The face is all gone; only a sweep of the hair on one side, and a bit of collar and the tip of a shoulder on the other, remain to act as a clue. Yet I expect you to find the negative from which this photograph was printed. It should not be so difficult,--that is, if in the course of time it has not been destroyed,--for look here." And turning over what remained of the mutilated photograph he displayed the following:

Cor. 9th Street w York)

"New York! The portrait was made here and--at Fredericks'. His studio was on the corner of Ninth Street up to a few years ago. It's a trail after my own mind. If that negative is in existence, I'll find it, if I have to ransack half the photograph-studios in town. About how old do you think this picture is?"

"Old enough to give you trouble. But that you're used to. What we want to know--what we must know--is this: The name of the man who has incurred Madame's enmity to such a degree that she spends the small hours of the night in knocking out his features from a fifteen-year-old photograph. If it should prove to be that of a public man, rich or otherwise, we might consistently lay it to social hatred; but if, on the contrary, it turns out to be that of a private individual--well, in that case, I shall have a task for you which may call for a little of that assurance of which we have just acknowledged you possess a limited share."

That evening, just at dusk, a taxicab which had been wandering up and down a well-kept block in Eighty-seventh Street stopped suddenly in front of a certain drug-store to let an old man out. He seemed very feeble and leaned heavily on his cane while crossing the sidewalk toward the store. But his face was kindly, and his whole aspect that of one who takes the ills of life without bitterness or complaint. When halfway to his goal,--for twenty steps are a journey to one who has to balance himself carefully with every one,--he slipped or stumbled, and his cane flew out of his hand. Happily--because he seemed unable to reach it himself--a young girl just emerging from the drug-store saw his plight and stooping for the stick, handed it to him. He received it with a smile, and while it was yet in both of their hands, said in the most matter-of-fact way in the world:

"Thank you, little Miss Duclos." Then suddenly: "Where's your aunt?"

She did not stop to think. She did not stop to ask herself what this question meant or whether this old gentleman who seemed to know so much about her and the family's secrets had a right to ask it, but blurted out in nervous haste as if she knew of nothing else to do, "She's gone," and then started to run away.

"Come back, little one." His tone was very imperative, but for all that of a nature to win upon a frightened child. "I know she's gone," he added soothingly as she looked back, hesitating. "And I'm sorry, for I have something for her. I recognized you the moment you stepped out of the store; but I see that you don't remember me. But why should you? Little girls don't remember old men."

Again that benevolent smile as he poked about in one of his pockets and finally drew out a little parcel which he held out toward her.

"This belongs to your aunt. See, it has her name on it, Madame Antoinette Duclos. It came to the lodging-house in Fifty-third Street just after she left, and I was asked to bring it to her. I was going to your house as soon as I had done my little errand at this store, but now that I have met you, I will ask you to see that she gets it."

The girl looked down at the parcel, then up at him, and reaching out her hand, took it.
His old heart, which had almost stopped, beat again naturally and with renewed strength. He was on the correct trail. When Mrs. Duclos and the rest of them had said that they knew of no one of their name in this country but themselves, it was because the Madame of the Hotel Universal was of their family--the widow of their brother, as this child's acknowledgment showed.

He was turning back to his taxi when the child, still trembling very much, took a step toward him and said:

"I don't know where to find my aunt. She didn't tell us where she was going; and--and I had rather not take this parcel back with me. Mother don't like us to speak of Aunt Nettie; and--and I don't believe Aunt Nettie would care to have this now. Won't--won't you forget about it, sir, if I promise to tell her some day that it was brought back and I wouldn't take it?"

Mr. Gryce felt a qualm of conscience. The child really was too simple to be made game of. Besides, he felt sure that she had spoken the truth, so far as she herself was concerned. She didn't know where her erratic aunt had gone; and any further questioning would only frighten her without winning him the knowledge he sought. He therefore took the parcel back, said some soothing words and made his way across the walk to his taxi. But the number he gave the chauffeur was that of the house where this little girl lived.

He arrived there first. To him, waiting in the parlor and very near the window, her shrinking little figure looked pathetic enough, as glancing in at the taxi, and finding it empty, she realized who might be awaiting her under her mother's eye. He remembered his grandchild, and made up his mind, as she slid nervously in, that no matter what happened he would keep this innocent child out of trouble.

The lady who presently came in to receive him was one who called him instinctively to his feet in respect and admiration. She was an American and of the best type, a woman who, if she told a lie, would not tell it for her own comfort or gain, but to help some one else to whom she owed fealty or love. But would she lie for anyone? As he studied her longer, taking in, in his own way, the candid expression of her eye and the sweet but firm set of her lips, he began to think she would not, and the interest with which he proceeded to address her was as much due to herself as to the knowledge he hoped to gain from her.

"Mrs. Duclos?" he asked.

"Yes, sir. And you?"

"I am a member of the New York police. My errand is one which you can probably guess. You have a sister-in-law, the widow of your husband's brother. As her testimony is of the utmost importance in the inquiry which is to be made into the cause and manner of her daughter's death, I should be very glad to have a few minutes' talk with her if, as we have every reason to believe, she is in this house at the present moment."

Mrs. Edward Duclos was a strong and upright woman, but this direct address, this open attack, was too much for her. However, before replying, she had a question of her own to put, and she proceeded to ask it firmly, quietly and apparently with every expectation of its being answered:

"How did you learn that Mr. Duclos had a brother and that this brother had left a widow?"

"Not from you, madam," he smiled. "Not from your husband. I very much wish we had. We have been waiting for such word ever since our advertisement appeared. It has not come."

She gave him a quick interrogating glance, folded her hands and answered without further hesitation:

"We had our reasons for silence, reasons which we thought quite justifiable. But they don't hold good if we are to be brought into conflict with the police. Mr. Duclos told me this morning that if we were driven to speak we must do so with complete honesty and without quibble. What do you want to know?"

"Everything. First, your sister-in-law's story, then her reasons for sending her child alone to the museum, as well as the cause of her flight before she could have heard of that poor child's fate. More hangs upon an understanding of these facts than I am at liberty to tell you. She herself would agree with me in this if I could have a few minutes' conversation with her."

"She is not in the house. She left us late last night without giving us the least hint as to where she was going. She is, as you can very well see, as little anxious to talk of her great trouble as you are to have her, and recognizing that attempts were being made to find her and make her speak, she fled before it was too late. I am sorry she did so, sorry for her and sorry for ourselves. We do not approve her course, whatever reasons she may have for it. At the same time, I feel bound to assure you that to her they are all-sufficient. She is a conscientious woman, with many fine qualities, and when she says as she did to us, 'It is my duty to flee,' and again as she bade us a final adieu, 'I will die rather than speak a word of what is on my mind,' I know that it is no small matter which sends her wandering about like this."

"I should think not. A mother to leave her daughter to be exposed at the morgue, and never intervene to protect her from this ignominy or to see that she has proper burial after that dread display is over!"

"I know--it was dreadful--and we! Do you not think we felt the horror of this also?"

"Your own flesh and blood--that is, your husband's. I wonder you could stand it."
"We had promised. She made us promise the first day she came that we would keep still and make no move, whatever happened."
"It was here she came then, directly from the hotel?"
"I am obliged to admit it."
"With her torn dress and her little bag?"
"Yes."
"And you procured her different clothes and the suit-case in which she now lugs about her effects?"
"You seem to know it all."
"Mrs. Duclos, I hope you will answer my next question as honestly as you have the previous ones. Had Madame Duclos heard of her daughter's death when she first presented herself to you?"
"Since you ask me this, I must answer. She was in great distress, but did not tell me why, till I asked her where Angeline was. Then she broke down utterly and flinging herself face down on the sofa, sobbed and wailed and finally confided to us that a terrible accident had happened to the child and that she was lying dead in one of the city's great museums."
"Did she say what accident?"
"No; she was almost delirious with grief, and we couldn't question her. After the papers came and we had read the dreadful news, we tried to get from her some explanation of what it all meant, but now she wouldn't answer; before, she couldn't."
"Did you ask her how she came to know that Angeline was dead, before the news was circulated outside the museum?"
"Yes; but she did not answer, only looked at us. It was the most despairing look I ever saw in my life. It made it easier for us to promise her all she wanted, though we regretted having done this when we came to think the matter over."
"So you positively do not know any more than this of what she has so religiously held secret?"
"No; and I have got to the point where I do not wish to."
"Did you know she was coming to this country?"
"Yes--but not her reasons for doing so. She has been a little mysterious of late."
"Did she say she was going to bring her daughter with her?"
"Yes, she mentioned Angeline. Also the name of the ship on which they expected to sail."
"Was this letter mailed from Paris or London?"
"It came from Paris."
"Did you understand that she was leaving France for good?"
"I got that idea, certainly."
"But not her reasons for it?"
"No. The letter was very short and not very explicit. I really have given you all the information I have on this subject."
"Mrs. Duclos, it is my duty to inform you that your sister-in-law had a deep and intense hatred for a man to us at present unknown. Can you name him? Is there anything in her early history or in what you know of her later life, here and abroad, to enlighten you as to his identity?"
With a steady look and a slow shake of her head, Mrs. Duclos denied any such knowledge, even showing a marked surprise at what was evidently a new development to her.
"Antoinette has had little to do with the men since our brother's death," she said. "I can hardly conceive of her being greatly interested either in favor of or against any of the opposite sex."
"Yet she is--even to the point of wishing him dead."
Mrs. Duclos rose quickly to her feet, but instantly sat again.
"How do you know?" she asked.
Should he tell her? At first he thought not; then he reconsidered his decision and spoke out plainly.
"Madam," said he, "some day you will hear what I had rather you heard now and from me. Madame Duclos left the lodging-house where she was so safe because she was detected, or was suspicious of having been detected, shooting the face from a photograph she had set up before her as a target in the small hours of the night."
"Impossible!" The woman thus exclaiming was quite sincere. "I cannot imagine Antoinette doing that."
"Yet she did. We have the remains of the photograph."
"And who was the man?"
"When we know that, we shall know all, or be in the way of knowing all."
"You alarm me!" She certainly looked alarmed.
"Why, madam? Do you not think it better for the truth to be known in such a case?"
"You forget what I told you. Antoinette will not survive the betrayal of her secret. She said she would not, and she is a woman who weighs her words. There is a firm edge to her resolves. It has always worked for good till now. I cannot bear to think of its working in any way for evil."

"Has she socialistic ideas? Can her hatred be for some of our plutocrats or supposed oppressors of the people?"

"Oh, no; she is of aristocratic descent and proud of her order. The Duclos are bourgeois, but Antoinette is a De Montfort."

Mr. Gryce suppressed all token of his instinctive amazement. This fine American woman was not without a sense of reflected glory given by this fact. Her sister-in-law was a De Montfort! Expressing his thanks for her candor, he rose to depart.

"For all that," said he, "she may be at heart a _revolutionnaire_." Then, as he noticed the negation in her look, he added softly: "The least clue as to her present refuge would make me greatly your debtor."

"I cannot give it; I do not know it."

And somehow he believed her as absolutely as even she could desire. If he should yet be fortunate enough to find this elusive Madame, it would have to be through some other agency than these relatives of hers by marriage.

As he passed out, he heard a frightened gasp from somewhere back in the hall. Turning, he asked in the most natural manner whether there were children in the house.

Mrs. Duclos answered with some dignity that she had three daughters.

"You are fortunate, madame," he remarked with his old-fashioned bow. "I live alone. My last grandchild left me a year ago for a man many years my junior."

This brought the little one into his view. She was smiling, and he went away in a state of relief marred by but one regret:

He was as ignorant as ever where to look for the mother of Angeline.

XX

MR. GRYCE AND THE UNWARY WOMAN

Nevertheless Mr. Gryce was proud of the gain he had made in his talk with Mrs. Duclos, and he smiled as he thought of his next interview with Sweetwater. Assurance will often accomplish much, it is true, but it sometimes needs age to make it effective. He could not imagine either Mrs. Duclos or her daughter yielding to the blandishments of one even as gifted in this special direction as Sweetwater. Authority was needed as well--the authority of long experience and an ineradicable sympathy with human nature.

Thus he gratified himself with a few complacent thoughts. But when he stopped to think what a great haystack New York was, and how elusive was the needle which had escaped them now these three times, his spirits sank a trifle, and by the time he had ridden a half-block on his way back to Headquarters, he was at that low ebb of disheartenment from which only some happy inspiration can effectually lift one. He was glad to be able to report that he had learned a few important facts in regard to Madame Duclos, but he equally hated to admit that for all his haste in following up the clue given him, he knew as little as ever of her present whereabouts; and hated even worse to have to give the cue which would lead to a surveillance, however secret, over a house which held a child of so sensitive and tremulous a nature as that of the little friend who had picked up his stick in front of the drug-store.

He was recalling to mind the pathetic spectacle presented by her agitated little figure, when his eyes chanced to fall upon a small shop he was then passing. It was devoted to ladies' furnishings, and as he took in the contents of the window and such articles as could be seen on the shelves beyond, a happy thought came to him.

Madame Duclos had left her hotel in a hurry, carrying but few of her belongings with her. A lady of cultivated taste, she must have missed many articles necessary to her comfort; and having money would naturally buy them. Prevented by her fears from going downtown, or even from going anywhere in the daytime, what was left for her to do but to patronize some such small shop as this. Its nearness to her late refuge, as well as its neat and attractive appearance, made this seem all the more likely. A question or two would suffice to settle his mind on this point and perhaps lead to results which might prove invaluable in his present emergency.

Signaling to the chauffeur to stop, he got out in front of this little shop, toward which he immediately proceeded, with an uncertainty of step not altogether assumed. He did have some rheumatic twinges that day.

Entering, Mr. Gryce first cast a comprehensive glance at the shelves and counters, to make sure that he would find here the line of dress-goods in which he had decided to invest; then, approaching the middle-aged woman who seemed to be in charge, he engaged her in a tedious display of the goods, which led on to talk and finally to a casual remark from him, quite in keeping with the anxiety he had been careful to show.

"I am buying this for a woman to whom you have probably sold many odd little things within the past few days. Perhaps you knew her taste, and can help me choose what will please her. She lives down the street and buys always in the evening--a dark, genteel appearing Frenchwoman, with a strange way of looking down even when other people would be likely to look up. Do you remember her?"
Yes, she remembered her and recognized her perfectly from this description. He saw this at once, but he kept right on talking as he handled first one piece of goods and then another, seeming to hesitate between the gray and the brown.

"She went out of town yesterday, and wanted this material sent after her. Do you think you could do that for me, or shall I have to see to expressing it myself? I'll do it if I must--only I've forgotten her exact address." This he muttered self-reproachfully, "I've a shocking bad memory, and it's growing worse every day. You don't happen to know where she's gone to, do you?"

The innocence of this appeal from one of his years and benevolent aspect did not appear to raise the woman's suspicion; yet she limited her reply to this short statement:

"I'll send the goods, if you will make your choice." And it was not till long after that he learned that Madame Duclos, being very anxious for her mail and such newspapers as she wanted, had made arrangements with this woman to forward them.

Disappointed, but still hoping for some acknowledgment that would give him what he wanted, he continued to putter with the goods, when she broke in with harsh decision:

"I think she would prefer the gray."

"Oh, do you?" said he, with just a hint of disapproval at the suggestion. "I like brown best, myself; but let it be the gray. Ten yards," he ordered. "She was particular to say that she wanted ten yards, and that I was to be sure and purchase the dress at the shop adjoining the drug-store. You see I have obeyed her," he added with a touch of senility in his quiet chuckle which threw the busy woman off her guard.

"I fear," said she, "that the dress I sold her before will not prove very becoming. But gray is always good. That's why I advised it."

"I see, I see," chattered away the old man, not without some slight compunction. "But in my opinion she's too dark for such somber dresses. I've told her so a score of times." Then as he watched the woman before him rolling up the goods he proceeded to ask with fussy importunity what she thought the express charges were likely to be, for he wanted to pay the whole bill and be done with it.

She was caught--caught fairly this time, though I doubt if she ever knew it.

"We don't often send up the river," said she. "But I should say that for a package of this size and weight the charges would be about forty cents. But that you can leave her to pay. She will be quite willing to do so, I am sure."

"Of course, of course--I didn't think of that. She'll pay for it, of course she'll pay for it." And he continued to fuss and chat, with that curious mixture of native shrewdness and senile interest in little things which he thought most likely to impress the woman attending him, and trap her into giving him the complete address.

But she was too wary, or too much preoccupied with her own affairs, to let the cat any farther out of the bag, and he had to be content with her promise, that the package should be given to the expressman as early as possible the next morning.

The feebleness he showed while leaving the shop was in marked contrast, however, to the vigor with which he took down the telephone-receiver in the booth of the neighboring drug-store. But she was not there to see; nor anyone else who had the least interest in his movements. He could, therefore, give all the emphasis he desired to the demand he made upon Headquarters for a close watch to be set on the adjoining dry-goods shop, for the purpose of intercepting and obtaining the address of a certain package, on the point of being expressed from there to some place up the river.

Then he went home; for by now he was fully as tired as his years demanded.

XXI

PERPLEXED

"Elvira Brown."

"Elvira Brown? That the name on the package?"

"Yes."

"And the address?"

The name of a small town in the Catskills was given him.

"Thank you. Very good work." And Mr. Gryce hung up the receiver. Then he stood thinking.

"Elvira Brown! A very fair alias--that is, the _Brown_ end. But what am I to think of _Elvira_? And what am I to think of the _Brown_--now that I remember that the woman who has chosen to hide her identity under another name is a Frenchwoman. Something queer! Let me see if I can call up the station-master at the place she's gone."

A long-distance connection proving practicable, he found himself after a little while in communication with the man he wanted.

"I'm Gryce, of the New York police. A woman in whom we're greatly interested has just entered your town under the name of Elvira Brown."
"Elvira Brown!"

Mr. Gryce was startled at the tone in which this was repeated, even making due allowance for the medium through which it came.

"Yes. What's there strange about that?"

"Only this: That's the name of a woman who has lived in these mountains for forty years, and who died here three days ago. To-day we're going to bury her."

This _was_ a blow to the detective's expectations. What awful mistake had he made? Or had it been made by the man detailed to steal the name from the package—or by the woman in the shop, or by all these combined? He could not stop to ask; but he caught at the first loose end which presented itself.

"Well, it isn't she we're after, that's certain. The one we want is middle-aged, and plain in looks and dress. If she came into your town, it was yesterday or possibly the night before. You wouldn't be apt to notice her, unless your attention was caught by her lameness. Do you remember any such person?"

"No, and I don't think anyone like that passed through my station. We're off the main road, and our travelers are few. I would have noticed the arrival of a woman like that."

Mr. Gryce, with an exclamation of chagrin, hung up the receiver. He felt completely balked.

But old as he was, he still had some of the tenacity of youth. He was not willing to accept defeat without one more effort. Going downtown as usual, he wandered again into the little dry-goods shop to see if the package had been sent.

Yes, it had gone, but the expressman had had some trouble with a drunken man who actually took the package out of his hands and didn't give it back without a squabble. Strange how men can drink till they can't see, and so early in the morning, at that!

Mr. Gryce's vigorous hunch dismissed summarily this expression of opinion as altogether feminine. But he had something to say about the package itself, which kept the good woman waiting, though a customer or two demanded her attention.

"You'll think me a fussy old man," said he, "but I've worried about that package all night. She needs a new dress so much, and I'm afraid you didn't have the right address. I remember it now--it was--was----"

"Barford on the Hudson," she finished promptly. Evidently she begrudged the time she was wasting on his imbecilities.

"That's it; that's it. 'Way up in the Catskills, isn't it?"

"I don't know. Those people are waiting, sir. I shall really----"

"One moment! I want to buy something more for her. But I'll send it myself this time; I won't bother you again. Another dress, something bright and prettier than anything she has. She'll forgive me. She'll be glad to have it."

"I don't know, sir." The woman was really very much embarrassed. She was honest to the core, and though she enjoyed seeing her goods disappear from the shelves, it wasn't in her heart to take advantage of a man so old as this.

"I'm afraid she wouldn't be pleased. You see, it isn't a fortnight since she bought and made up the one I sold her first, and she thought that a great extravagance. Now with the gray----"

"Are you speaking of the blue one?"

"No, it wasn't blue."

"What color was it? Haven't you a bit left to show me? I should know better what to do, then."

She pointed to a bolt of striped wool—a little gaudy for a woman whose taste they had both been speaking of as inclined to the plain and somber.

"That? But that's bright enough. I've never seen her in that."

"She didn't like it. But something made her take it. She wore it when she came in last."

"She did! Then I'm satisfied. Thankee all the same. Just give me a pair of gloves for her, and I'll be getting on."

She picked out a pair for him, and he trotted away, mumbling cheerily to himself as he passed between the counters. But once in his taxi again, he concentrated all his thought on that bolt of striped dress-goods. The colors were crimson and black, with a dot here and there of some lighter shade! He took pains to fix it in his mind, for this was undoubtedly the dress she fled in— an important clue to him, if this hunt should resolve itself into a chase with doubling and redoubling of the escaping quarry.

He spent the next two hours in acquainting himself with the location and some of the conditions of the town he now meant to visit. Though he could not understand Madame Duclos' reason for taking the name of a woman so well known as this Elvira Brown, there was something in this circumstance and the fact that the person so styled had been at that moment at the point of death, which called, as he felt, for personal investigation. He hardly felt fit for any such purely speculative expedition as this; especially as he must do without the companionship, to say nothing of the assistance, of Sweetwater, whom he hardly felt justified in withdrawing from the task he had given him. So he picked out a fellow named Perry; and together they took the West Shore into Greene County, where they stopped at
a station from which a branch road ran to the small town whither the package addressed to Elvira Brown had preceded them.

Accidents frequently determine our course, as well as turn us from the one we had mapped out for ourselves. By accident I mean, in this case, an actual one which had occurred on the branch road I have mentioned, by which the trains were held up and further progress in that direction made impossible. When this came to the knowledge of Mr. Gryce, he found it necessary to choose between trusting himself to an automobile for the rest of the journey, or of remaining all night in the town where the train had stopped. A glance at the hills towering up between him and his goal decided him to wait for the running of the trains next day; and after an inquiry or two, he left the station on foot for the hotel to which he had been recommended.

A philosopher, in many regards, Mr. Gryce quieted himself, under the irritation of this annoyance, with the thought that in this world we do not always know just what is best for us; and that the few hours of rest thus forced upon him by the seemingly unfortunate break in his plans might prove in the end to be the best thing that could happen to him. He accordingly took a good room, enjoyed a good dinner and then sat down in the lobby to have an equally good smoke. He chose a chair which gave him a prospect of the river, and for a long time, while vaguely listening to the talk about him, he feasted his eyes on the view and allowed some of its calm to enter his perturbed spirit. But gradually, as he looked and smoked, he found his attention caught, first by what a man was saying in his rear, and secondly by something he saw intervening between himself and the flow of shining river which had hitherto filled his eye.

The sentence which had roused him was one quite foreign to his thoughts and seemingly of little importance to him or to anyone about. It was in connection with a factory on the other side of the river, which was running overtime, and had not help enough to fill its orders.

"It's women we want," he heard shouted out. "Young women, middle-aged women, any sort of women who are anxious for steady work and good wages."

The emphasis with which this announcement was made perhaps gave it point; at all events this one brief sentence sank into Mr. Gryce's ear just as he began to notice a woman who sat with her back to him on the hotel piazza.

He was not thinking of Madame Duclos at that moment; nor was there the least thing about this woman to recall his secret quarry to mind. Yet once his eyes had fallen on her, they remained there for several minutes.

Why?
Perhaps because she sat so unnaturally still. In all the time he stared at her simple bonnet and decently clothed shoulders, the silhouette she made against the silver band of the river did not change by an iota. He had been agaze upon the landscape too, but he was sure that he had not sat as still as this, and when, after an interval during which he had turned to see what kind of man it was who had spoken so vigorously, he wheeled back into place and glanced out again through his window, she was there yet, hat, shoulders and all, immovable as an image and almost as rigid.

Well, and what of it? There was surely nothing very remarkable in so commonplace a fact; yet during the ensuing half-hour, during which he gave, or tried to give, the greater part of his attention to the political talk which followed the statements he had heard made in regard to the needs of a certain factory, his eye would turn riverward from time to time and always with a view to see if this woman had moved. And not once did he detect the least change in her attitude.

"She will sit there all night," he muttered to himself; and after a while his curiosity mounted to such a pitch that he got up and went out on the piazza for one of his short strolls.

XXII
HE REMEMBERS

Just an ordinary woman, lost in a dream of some kind while awaiting her departure on an out-going train!--or such was Detective Gryce's conclusion as he hobbled slowly past her.

Why should he give her a moment's thought? Yet he did. He noticed her dress and the way she held her hands, and the fact, not suspected before, that she was not looking out at the landscape outspread before her eyes, but down into her lap at her own hands clasped together in an unnaturally tight grip. Then he straightway forgot her in the thought of that other woman whose track he was following with such poor promise of success. Madame Duclos' image was in his mind as plainly as if she sat before him in place of this chance passenger. He knew the sort of hat she would wear (or thought he did). He also knew the color of her dress. Had he not been shown the piece of goods from which it had been taken? And had he not understood her choice, bizarre as it was, and for this very reason, that it was bizarre? Being a woman of subtle mind, she would reason that since the police were seeking one of plain exterior and simple dress, a gaudy frock would throw them off their guard and insure her immunity from any close inspection. Therefore this striped material rather than the plain black she so much preferred. Then her eyes! She would try to hide the defect which particularized them, by the use of glasses or, at least, by a very heavy veil. While
her walk—well! she might successfully conceal her halting step if she were not hurried. But he promised himself that he would be very careful to see that any woman rousing his suspicion should be given some reason for hurrying.

While thus musing, he had reached the farther end of the piazza. In wheeling about to come back, the woman whose profile he now faced attracted his eye again, in spite of himself, and he gave her another idle thought. How absorbing was the subject upon which she was brooding, and how deeply it affected her!

It struck him as he quietly repassed her that he had never seen a sadder face. Then that impression passed from his mind, for he saw Perry coming toward him with a pencil and telegram-blank in hand. He had decided to let Sweetwater know where he could be reached that night, and Perry had come for the message.

It must have been fully two hours later that Mr. Gryce, sitting down in his former chair, looked up and found his view unobstructed to the river. The woman had gone.

Just for the sake of saying something to Perry, who had drawn up beside him, he remarked upon the fact, adding in explanation of his interest in so small a matter:

"It's the thoughts and feelings of people which take hold of my curiosity now. Human nature is a big book, a great book. I have only begun to thumb it, and I'm an old man. Some people betray their emotions in one way, some in another. Some are loudest when most troubled, and some are so quiet one would think them dead. The woman I was watching there was one of the quiet ones; her trouble was deep; that was apparent from her outline—an outline which never varied."

"Yes, she's a queer duck. I saw her: I even did an errand for her--that was before you sat down here."

"You did an errand for her?"

"Yes; she wanted a newspaper. Of course I was glad to get it for her, as she said she was lame."

"Lame?"

"Yes; I suppose she spoke the truth. I didn't think of her being in any special trouble, but I did think her an odd one. She seemed to be wearing two dresses."

Mr. Gryce started and turned sharply toward him.

"What's that you say? What do you mean by that?"

"Why, this: when she stopped to get her money out of some hidden pocket, she pulled up the skirt of her dress, and I saw another one under it. Perhaps she thought that was the easiest way of carrying it. I noticed that her suitcase was a small one."

"Describe that under-frock to me." Mr. Gryce's air and tone were unaccountably earnest. "What was its color?"

"Why, reddish, I think. No, it had stripes in it and something like spots. Do you suppose it was her petticoat?"

Mr. Gryce brought his hand down on his lame knee and did not seem to feel it. "Find out where she's gone!" he cried. "No, I will do it myself." And before the other could recover from his astonishment, he had started for the piazza where he had just seen the proprietor of the hotel take his seat.

"This comes from an old man's folly in thinking he could manage an affair of this kind without help," he mumbled to himself as he went stumping along. "Had I told Perry whom we were after and how he was to recognize her, I should have spent my time talking with this woman instead of staring at her. Two dresses! with the bright one under! Well, she's even more subtle than I thought."

And by this time, having reached the man he sought, he put his question:

"Can you tell me anything about the woman who was sitting here? Who she is and where she has gone?"

"The woman who was sitting here? Why, I should say she was a factory hand and has gone to her work on the other side of the river."

"Her name? Do you know her name? I'm a detective from New York--one of the regular police force. I'm in search of a woman not unlike the one I saw here, though not, I am bound to state, a factory worker except on compulsion."

"You are! A police detective, eh, and at your age! It must be a healthy employment. But about this woman! I'm sorry, but I can't tell you anything except that she came on the same train you did and wanted a boat right away to take her across the river. You see, we've no ferry here, and I told her so, and the only way she could get across was to wait for Phil Jenkins, who was going over at five. She said she would wait, and sat down here, refusing dinner, or even to enter the house. Perhaps she wasn't hungry, and perhaps she didn't wish to register, eh?"

"Had her speech an accent? Did you take her for a foreign woman?"

"Yes, I did and I didn't. She spoke very well. She's not young, you know?"

"I'm not looking for a young woman."

"Well, she's gone and you can't reach her to-night. There they are now, see! about a quarter of the way across. That small boat just slipping across the wake of the big one."

Mr. Gryce looked and saw that she was in the way of escape for to-night.

"When can I get over?" he asked.
"Not till Phil crosses again to-morrow noon."
"Meanwhile, she may go anywhere. I shall certainly lose her."
"Hardly. She's bound for the factory; you can just see the roof of it above the trees a little to the right. She asked me all sorts of questions about the work over there, and whether there were decent places to live in within walking distance of the factory."
"Then she isn't lame? My woman is a trifle lame."
"So may this woman be, for all I know. I didn't see her on her feet, but she carried no crutch--only a bag and an umbrella."
"A brown bag, neat like herself in appearance?"
"No. It was light in color and old. She herself was neat enough."

Mr. Gryce's brows came together. He was in a quandary. He felt convinced, with a positiveness which surprised him, that in watching the withdrawal of this small boat farther and farther toward the opposite shore, he was watching the escape of Antoinette Duclos from his immediate interference.

Yet, circumstantial as were the proofs which had led him to this conclusion, he felt that he would gladly welcome some further corroboration of those proofs before risking the time and opportunity he might lose in following the person of two skirts to her destination on the other side of the Hudson. There were more reasons than one why he could not afford to lose one unnecessary minute. An extra twinge or two of rheumatism warned him that he was approaching the point of disablement.

Moreover, of Mr. Gryce's secret fears there was one which loomed larger than the others and held an impulsive, unconsidered movement in check. He must have proof of her identity--which nevertheless he did not question-- before hazarding himself and the success of his undertaking by a delay of so many additional hours. But what proof could he hope to obtain under the circumstances in which he found himself placed? Any appeal to Mrs. Edouard Duclos, by telephone or telegram, would certainly fail of its purpose. Even if the neat black dress in which her sister-in-law now traveled was one from her own wardrobe, he would find it impossible to establish the fact in time to make his own decision. The child--yes, he might worm that fact out of the child if he were where he could reach her; but he was miles away; and besides, something within him revolted from involving this child further in schemes honest enough from his standpoint, but certainly not helpful to her. No, he would have to trust his intuition, or--

He had thrown himself into a chair at the side of his host, but he rose quickly as his musings reached this point. The proof he had been looking for was his. In recalling the child to mind there had flashed upon his inner vision an instantaneous picture of her appearance as she stooped to pick up his stick in front of the drug-store. He saw again the bending figure, the flushed cheeks and the flaxen locks surmounted by a little hat. Ah! it was that little hat! The impression it had made upon him was greater than he thought. He found that he remembered not only its ribbons, but the bunches of curiously tinted flowers hanging down in front. And these bunches, or some precisely like them, had been the sole trimming of the hat he had been contemplating so long from the other side of the window. The woman was Madame Duclos. These flowers had been taken from the child's hat and pinned upon the aunt's; and it was their familiar look which had given him, without any recognition of the reason, his surety as to the latter's identity.

Calmed immensely by this assurance, he turned back to have another word with the proprietor, now busily engaged with his newspaper.

"Will you be obliging enough to see that I'm given an opportunity for a few words with this Phil Jenkins on his return?" he asked. "And if you will be so good, respect my confidence till I am sure I have made no mistake in thinking what I have of his passenger."

The proprietor nodded, and Mr. Gryce settled himself again inside to watch for the rowboat's return.

What he learned that night from this man Jenkins calmed him still further. The woman had acknowledged, on leaving him, that she was going to seek work at the factory. "A little old for the job," the man volunteered, "but spry. How she did clamber up that bank!"

It was enough; Mr. Gryce was satisfied, and engaged a seat in his small boat for the following day.

XXIII

GIRLS, GIRLS! NOTHING BUT GIRLS!

The superintendent was puzzled and showed it. He listened to Mr. Gryce with a shrug, saying that so many women had been taken on that day, that he really couldn't remember whether any one of them answered to the given description.
"There's the time-keeper's book. Look it over. All the names are there," he said.

Mr. Gryce did as he advised, but of course without finding there the name of Antoinette Duclos or of anyone else of whom he had ever heard.

The next thing was for him to go through the factory itself and see if he could pick her out from those already at
work. This he was greatly averse to doing; it would be too long and painful an effort for him, and he could not trust Perry with any such piece of nice discrimination. How he missed Sweetwater! How tempted he was to send for him! It was finally decided that when the hour came for the departure of the whole dayshift, he should take his stand where he could mark each employee as she filed out.

A sorry attempt followed by as sorry a failure! He did not see one among them who was over twenty-five years of age. But this did not mean the end of all hope. There was the nightshift. Might she not be put on that? A different man had charge at night. He would wait for this man's appearance, present his cause to him and see what could be done.

Not much, he found, when the night superintendent finally entered the office and he had the chance of introducing himself. Newer to authority than the superintendent of the dayshift, he was also of a more active temperament and much more self-assertive. He was not impressed by the detective's years or even by his errand. It was a busy night, a very busy night--new hands in every department. To take him through the building at present was quite out of the question. Perhaps later it might be done; but not now, not now.

With that the night superintendent bustled out. This was not very encouraging, but Mr. Gryce did not despair. He had seen with what ease he could look from the broad, rear window near which he stood, into the rooms where rows upon rows of girls were already at work. Only a narrow court divided him from these girls, and as the three stories of which the factory was composed were all brilliantly lighted, he should have little difficulty in picking out from among them the middle-aged woman who held in her closed and mysterious hand the key to that formidable affair threatening the honor of one of New York's most prominent men.

Before doing this, Mr. Gryce stopped to locate himself and recall if possible the entire plan of the building. He was in what was called the outer office. The inner one, used only by the president of the concern, opened on his left. There was no one in the latter room at present, the president seldom showing up at night. Another door led to the platform outside, and a third one, located in the middle of the right-hand partition, to a large vestibule or locker-room belonging exclusively to the girls, which in its turn communicated with the work-rooms of the factory running in unbroken continuity around a narrow central court.

He had been through this locker-room in the late afternoon. It was here he had stood to watch the girls file out at the close of their day's work. The exit for all employees was in one of the corners and out of this Antoinette Duclos would have to pass when it came her turn to leave the building—that is, if she were really in it, as he had every reason to believe.

However, certainty on this point would relieve him from much of his present impatience, and with this end in view he prepared to enter the room again in the hope of spying among the various hats with which the walls were hung the one with whose shape and trimming he was so well acquainted.

But promising as this attempt looked, it was destined to immediate failure. The room was not empty. He could hear girls whispering not a dozen steps away, and anxious as he always was not to attract any unnecessary attention to himself, he turned his back upon this door and returned to the window from the broad view of which he anticipated so much.

A brilliant scene awaited him. This building, built originally for other purposes, had been hastily reconstructed for its present use in a manner possibly open to criticism but which certainly gave those who worked in it an abundance of light and air. The narrow columns supporting its three stories were so inconspicuous at night when a blaze of electricity dominated the whole, that it presented the appearance of being made entirely of windows. One break and one only he observed in the double row of lights encircling the courtyard. This was in a spot diagonally opposite, where a space of several feet showed a dimness he failed to understand. But as no workers appeared to be there, he passed the matter over as one of no importance.

The task before him looked hopeless. In the first place there were the three floors, with no faces visible above the first one. Then of the long rectangle stretching out before him he could see but two sides, which fact was further complicated by there being as many of the workers' faces turned toward the outside of the building as toward the court. Yet having determined upon his course, he was bound to see it through.

His position near the corner of the huge rectangle precluded his seeing anyone working at his own end. He was obliged to pass them over. But of those opposite, especially those directly so, he could take easy count. They were all girls of fifteen or so, and could be passed over also without more than a cursory glance. Further on he saw a row of older women, and student as he was of human nature, there were faces among them at which he was tempted to look twice, though once answered his purpose. There was no Madame there.

Continuing his examination, he next encountered the space so unaccountably darkened, and having skipped this, came upon a stretch of benches displaying great activity. Only old hands seemed to be at work in this section. Their method and despatch showed a training which made it useless to look among them for one who had probably never worked before amid the hum of machinery.
In the corner beyond he saw nobody, but when he came to look along the end connecting the opposite rooms with those on his side, a different scene awaited him. There every bench seemed occupied both back and front, and mostly by newcomers, as was apparent from the anxious way the superintendent moved about among them, explaining the work and directing them with a zeal which not only attested his interest in the task but showed how completely he had forgotten the man he had left behind him in his office. Well, well, such is the way of the world! The old man saw that he would have to depend upon himself, and realizing this, bent all his energies to his present far-off inspection of these women, hoping against hope that he would be able at least to tell the young from the old.

Yes, he could do that, but the older women seemed to be in the majority; and this perplexed him. It was all too distant for him to see clearly, but he took heart of grace as he observed how the faces and figures he was studying so closely were resolving themselves into mere silhouettes under his gaze. For as I have already said, he had a quick eye for outline, and felt sure that he could sufficiently recall that of the woman whose head and shoulders had been so long under his eye that day, to recognize it even among fifty others. But not one of them—not one of them all—had the precise narrowness and rigidity of Madame Duclos'; and after many painful minutes of renewed effort followed by renewed disappointment he moved back from the window and sat down. There was one thing you could always count on in Mr. Gryce, and that was his patience.

But it was a patience not without its breaks. Once he rose to look out front to make sure he had not miscalculated the distance of this factory from the river. Then after another period of waiting, he got thinking how much he might discover if he could get one glimpse into that far corner contiguous to that end of the rectangle where he had seen so many raw workers receiving the assistance of the night superintendent. There was a way of doing this of which he had not thought before. He had but to step outside, walk the length of the platform where the loading of shipments was going on, and look in at one of the great windows at the further end. But when he came to make the attempt, he found himself plunged into such a turmoil and the way so blocked by the loading of boxes and the backing up and driving off of horses that he retreated precipitately. Rather than encounter all this, he would await events from the inside. So he took his old seat again and for another half-hour listened to the thump of machinery and the squeak of a rusty elevator-brake which almost robbed him of thought. He was even inclined to doze, when he suddenly became aware of some change either in himself or in what lay about him.

Had the machinery stopped? No, it was not that.

The place seemed darker, yet it was still very light.

With a restless move, he rose heavily and peered again into the court. Immediately it was evident what had occurred. The whole string of lights in the third story had been shut off, and now those of the middle story were following suit. Only the ground floor remained active with all its lights at the maximum, and every belt moving.

At this unexpected narrowing down of his field of operations he felt greatly relieved. He had dreaded those long walks through innumerable rooms. He could manage circling the building once, but three times would have been too much. In a mood of increased contentment, he started to return to his seat, but found himself stayed by something he saw in what had been but a dimly lighted space when he looked there last. It was now as bright as the rest and showed him the figure of the superintendent stooping over a woman, explaining to her some intricate manipulation of the work in hand which was evidently quite new to her. He could see him very plainly, but her figure was more or less hidden. Not for long though. The superintendent passed on and she came into full view. It was Antoinette Duclos. He was confident of this even before he noted her dress. When his eyes fell on that, he was sure; there was no mistaking the stripes and the dots. Antoinette Duclos! and she was where he could reach her in five minutes—in fact as soon as the superintendent returned. As he stood and watched her working quite assiduously but in something like isolation, he felt as though ten years had slipped from his age, and trifled with his pleasure as the rest of us do when we behold a despaired-of goal loom suddenly in sight. Was she the woman he had pictured in his mind's eye? Hardly. Yet there was an admirable directness in her movements. From the way she went about things, he could plainly see that she would master her duties in no time if Fate did not interpose to prevent. It certainly was hard to interrupt her in her work just when she was on the way to safety and competence. But there could be no question of his duty, or of the claims of Mr. Roberts to whatever help might accrue from an understanding of the relation of this woman to events threatening his reputation with such utter destruction. Her story might free him from all suspicion or it might actually determine his guilt. Therefore her story must be had, and at once—if possible, this very night.

But he must wait—wait for the coming of the superintendent. He felt safe to do this. Meanwhile he was determined not to let this woman out of his sight; so, drawing up a chair, he settled down within view of her active figure, from which all rigidity had vanished in the interest she was rapidly developing in her work. If he could have seen her countenance more clearly, he would have been glad. There seemed to be a veil between him and it, a hazy indistinctness which he found it difficult to understand; but remembering that he was looking through two windows and on a long diagonal, he accepted this slight drawback with equanimity and was about to indulge in the comfort of a cigar when he saw the scene he still held in view change, and change vividly, to the excitation of a fresh interest.
and a still more careful watch.

A girl had approached Madame Duclos from some place quite out of sight, and in passing her by, had slipped a note into her hand. The Frenchwoman had taken it, but in a way indicating shock. The ease which had given suppleness to her form and surety to all her movements was gone in an instant, and from the furtive way in which she sought to read the communication thus handed her Mr. Gryce saw that his own powers would soon be taxed to keep him even with a situation changing thus from moment to moment under his eye.

What did that note contain, and who could have taken advantage of the arrival of some late-comer to slip it into her hand? Mr. Gryce found this a very formidable question, and watched with ever-increasing anxiety to see what effect these unknown words would have upon their recipient when her opportunity came for reading them.

A startling one--of that he was presently a witness; for no sooner had she taken in their import than she cast a hurried look about her and left her place without fuss or flurry, but with an air of quiet determination which Mr. Gryce felt confident covered a resolution which nothing could balk.

She had not only left her bench but seemingly was in the act of leaving the building. This, of course, it was for him to prevent, and he rose to do so. It might be interesting to wait and watch her hurrying figure threading its way to the locker-room through the double row of girls on the opposite side of the court; but there were reasons why he wished to reach that last mentioned room before she did; reasons which seemed good enough to send him there without any further delay. If he could but discover her hat among the many he had seen hanging on pegs in one of the corners, how easy it would be for him to hold her back till he could make her listen to the few words which must be said before he could allow her to leave the building.

Quick of eye, if not of step, he had run in review the varying headgear depending from those isolated pegs, before he had half-circled the lockers. But hers he did not see. Could she have been given a locker on this her first night? He did not think so; and approaching closer, he looked again. The hat was there, but lying on the floor. Somebody had knocked it down; perhaps the late-comer who had given her the letter.

Greatly gratified by the advantage he now indisputably held over her, he picked up the hat and approached the door through which she must in another minute emerge.

She did not come.

He waited and waited, and still she did not come. At last, driven by impatience, he ventured to open the door he had previously hesitated to touch and took a quick look in. Girls, girls! nothing but girls! No Madame Duclos anywhere.

Something must have happened to interrupt her escape. Either she had been caught in the attempt by the superintendent or by some one else of equal authority. This, if bad for her, was also bad for him, as a quiet hold-up in the manner he had planned was certainly better than the public one which must now follow.

Sorry for her and sorry for himself, Mr. Gryce returned to the office just as the superintendent entered from the opposite door. He thought the latter looked a little queer, and in an instant he learned why.

"Was the woman you wanted a staid, elderly person, apparently a foreigner?"

"Yes--of French birth, I am told."

"Well, I guess you were all right in distrusting her. She's gone--took a notion that night work didn't agree with her and left without so much as a 'By your leave!' She must have smelt you out in some uncanny way. Too bad! She bade fair to be just the woman we wanted for a very nice part of the work."

"Do you mean she's really out of the building--that you didn't stop her----"

"I didn't know what she was up to, till she was gone. I----"

"But how did she get out? She didn't go by the employees' door for I stood there on the watch. I had seen her receive a note----"

"A note? How? Who gave it to her?"

"Some girl."

"And you saw this? How could you? Been through the work-rooms?"

"No. I saw her from this window, as I was looking diagonally across the court. She was in one of the opposite rooms over there----"

The superintendent broke into a hearty laugh.

"Fooled!" he cried. "You police detectives are a smart crowd, but our old factory with its string of useless windows has led you astray for once. You weren't looking into any one of the rooms over there. You were looking at a reflection in that useless old window behind which the elevator runs. That happens when the elevator running on that side is down. I've seen it often and laughed in my sleeve at the chance it gives me to observe on the sly how things are going on at certain benches. Many a girl has got her discharge--But no matter about that. Come here.

"The room you think you see over there--you will notice that nobody is at work in it now--is on this side of the building, and the woman you have in chase escaped by the south delivery-door. We are loading cars to-night from
this side of the building, and she took a flying advantage of it. Men give way to a woman. Though there's an order against any such use of that door, you can't get one of them to hold onto a woman when she once gets it into her head to skip the premises. But she can't have gone far. This is a place of few houses and no big buildings besides the factory. If you take pains to head her off at the station, you'll be safe for to-night, and in the morning you can easily find her. Now I must go; but first, what was her offense? Theft, eh?"

"No. This woman whom we have let slip through our fingers is Madame Duclos, the mother of the girl shot in a New York museum. There is a big reward out for her recovery and detention, and----"

The superintendent stood aghast.

"Why didn't you say so? Why didn't you say so at once? I'd have had the whole troop file out before you. I'd have had----"

The detective caught at his hat.

"I wasn't aware that I had reached an age when I couldn't tell the difference between a reflection and a reality," he growled, and hurried out.

The town was a small one; and Perry would see that she didn't escape from the station. Besides, she had fled without her hat. Surely, with all this in his favor, he would soon be able to lay his hand upon her, if not to-night, certainly before another day was at an end.

XXIV

FLIGHT

In leaving the building Mr. Gryce almost ran into the arms of Perry. In his anxiety to be within call, the young detective had seated himself on the steps outside and now stood ready for any emergency.

Mr. Gryce's spirits rose as he saw him there. The great door leading to the elevator opened not twenty feet to the left of him. Perhaps Perry had seen the woman and could tell which way she ran. Questions followed, rapid and to the purpose. Perry had seen a woman flash by. But she seemed to be in company with a man. He had not been able to see either clearly.

"Which way were they heading?" asked Mr. Gryce.

Perry told him.

It would look as though they were making for the station. Alarmed at the idea, Mr. Gryce stepped down into the road and endeavored to pierce the darkness in that direction. All he could see were the station lights. Everything else was in shadow. The night hung over all, and had it not been for the grinding of machinery in their rear, the silence would have been just as marked.

"Perry, is the way rough between here and the station--I mean, rough for me?"

"Not very, if you keep in the road."

"Run ahead, then, and learn how soon the next train is due--any train, going north or going south--I don't care which. If it is soon, look for a middle-aged woman in a striped dress, and if you can't prevent her getting on, without a fracas, follow her yourself and never quit her--telegraphing me at the first opportunity. Run."

Perry gave a leap and was soon swallowed up in the darkness which was intense as soon as he had passed beyond the glare from the factory. Mr. Gryce followed after, moving as quickly as he dared. It was not far to the station platform, but in his anxiety it seemed a mile; nor did he breathe with ease till he saw a flying shadow come between him and the station lights and knew that Perry had reached the platform.

It was just at the hour when the fewest trains pass, and Mr. Gryce was himself across the tracks and on the platform before a far-off whistle warned him that one was approaching. Looking hastily around, he saw Perry hurrying up behind him.

"No one," said he. "No such person around."

They waited. The train came in, stopped, took on two unimportant passengers and rushed away north.

"I'm afraid I shall have to ask you to stay here, Perry. It would be so easy for her to board one of these night trains and buy a ticket from the conductor."

But as he spoke he paused, and gripping Perry's arm, turned his ear to listen.

"A boat," said he. "A small boat leaving shore."

It was so. They could hear the dip of the oars distinctly in the quiet which had followed the departure of the train. No other sound but that was in the air, and it struck cold upon one old heart.

"It is she! I'm sure of it," muttered Gryce.

"The man across the river has warned her--sent a boat for her, perhaps. Run down to the point and see if there is anyone there who saw her go."

Perry slid into the night, and Mr. Gryce stood listening. The quiet dip of the oars was growing fainter every instant. The boat was rapidly withdrawing, carrying with it all hope of securing off-hand this desirable witness.

To be sure, there was nothing very serious in this. He had only to telephone across the river to have the woman
detained till he could reach her himself in the early morning. Yet he felt unaccountably disturbed and anxious. For all his many experiences and a record which should have made him immune from the ordinary disappointments of life, he had never, or so it seemed to him, felt more thoroughly depressed or weary of the work which had given him occupation for more years than he liked to number, than in the few minutes of solitary waiting, with his face toward the river and the sense of some impending doom settling slowly over his aged heart.

But he was still too much the successful detective to allow his disheartenment to be seen by his admiring subordinate. As the latter approached, the old man's countenance brightened, and nothing could have been more deceptive than the calmness he displayed when the fellow reported that he had just been talking to a man who had recognized the boat and the oarsman. It was the same boat and the same oarsman that had brought them over earlier in the day. He had made an extra trip at this most unusual hour, for the express purpose of taking this woman back.

"I suppose there is no possibility of your drumming up anyone to row us over in time to catch them?"

"None in the least. I have inquired."

"Then follow me into the station. I have a few messages to send."

Among these messages was a peremptory one to Sweetwater.

Morning! and an early crossing to the other side. Here a surprise awaited them. They found, on inquiry, that the man responsible for Madame's flitting was not, as they had supposed, the hotel proprietor, but Phil himself, the good-natured, easily-imposed-upon ferryman, on whose sympathies she had worked during their first short passage from one shore to the other. Perhaps a little money had helped to deepen this impression; one never knows.

But this was not all. The woman was gone. She had fled the town on foot before they were able to locate Phil, who had not made shore at his usual place but at some point up the river about which they knew nothing. When he finally showed up, it was almost daybreak.

"Where is he now?"

"At home, or ought to be."

"Show me the house."

In ten minutes the two were face to face.

The result was not altogether satisfactory to the detective. Though he used all his skill in his manipulation of this kind-hearted ferryman, he got very little from him but the plain fact that the woman insisted upon taking to the road when she heard that the train-service had stopped; that he could not persuade her to wait till daylight or to listen for a moment to what he had to say of the danger and terrors awaiting her in the darkness, and the awful loneliness of the hills. She didn't fear nature even at its worst, and she knew these hills better than many who had lived among them for years. She was bound to go, and she went.

This was six hours ago. Asked to explain the interest he had shown in her, it soon became evident that he was in complete ignorance of her identity. He had simply, on their first trip over, seen that she was middle-aged, suffering and much too good and kind to be followed up by enemies and wicked police officials. True, he had rowed them over in her pursuit in the early part of the day, but that was because he had not known their business. When on returning he had learned it, he made up his mind to help her out with a warning even if it kept him up all night. He had not expected to bring her back with him, but she had insisted upon his doing so, saying that she had friends in the mountains who would look after her. He saw that she was dreadfully in earnest, for she had not stopped to get her hat and would not have had so much as an extra stitch with her if she had not taken the precaution to hide a bag of things somewhere in the bushes near the factory, in anticipation of some such emergency. And he couldn't resist her. She made him think of a sister of his who had had a dreadful time of it in the world and was now well out of it, thank God!

When the ferryman heard that a reward of hundreds of dollars was waiting for the man who succeeded in bringing her before the police officials in New York, he betrayed some chagrin, but even this did not last. He was soon declaring with heartfelt earnestness that he didn't care anything about that. It was peace of mind he wanted, and not money.

When Mr. Gryce left him, it was with an even slower step than usual. Peace of mind! How about his own peace of mind? Was he trailing this poor unfortunate from pillar to post, for the reward it would bring him? No. With his advancing years money had lost much of its attraction. Nor, if he knew himself, was he particularly affected by the glory which attends success. Duty, and duty only, drove him on--to elucidate his problem and merit the confidence put in him by his superiors. If suffering followed, that was not his fault; his business was to go ahead.

It was in this frame of mind that he prepared himself for the automobile trip he saw before him.

There was no question in Mr. Gryce's mind now, as to this woman's destination or whither he should be obliged to go in order to find her. As he now saw into her mind, she had left New York with the intention of hiding herself in the remote village to which she had ordered her mail sent under the name of Elvira Brown, whom she evidently knew; but hearing, either on the car or in the hotel, where she was detained, the plea which was being made for
TERROR

A woman fleeing from publicity as one flies from death--a refined woman, too, whose life had hitherto been passed in the open!

When Antoinette Duclos, after a night and morning of unprecedented fatigue and extraordinary fears, with little to upbear her in the way of food, stepped from the train which brought a few local passengers into the quiet village of Rexam, she hardly would have been recognized by her best friend, such marks may a few hours leave upon one battling with untoward Fate in one supreme effort.

She seemed to realize this, for meeting more than one eye fixed inquiringly upon her she drew down the veil wound about a sort of cap she wore till it concealed not only her features but her throat which a restless pulse had tightened almost to the exclusion of her breath. Ready to drop, she yet made use of the little energy left her, to approach with faltering steps a lumbering old vehicle waiting in the dust and smoke for such passengers as might wish to be taken up Long Hill.

There was no driver in sight, but she did not hesitate to take her seat inside. There was extra business at the station, for this was the first train to come in for two days; and if anyone noticed her in the shadowy recesses of the cumbrous old coach, nobody approached her; nor was she in any way disturbed. When the driver did show himself, she was almost asleep, but she woke up quickly enough when his good-natured face peered in at her and she heard him ask where she wanted to go and whether she had any baggage.

"I want to go up Long Hill and be set down at the first cross-road," she said. "My baggage is here." And she pointed to the space at her feet. But that space was empty; she had no baggage. She had dropped both bag and umbrella at the side of the road after one of her long climbs under a fitful moon and had not so much as thought of them since.

Now she remembered and flushed as she met the eyes of the man looking in at her with his hand on his whiskers, smoothing them thoughtfully down but saying nothing, though his countenance and expression showed him to be one of the loquacious sort. If any smiles remained to her from the old days, now was the time for one; but before she could twist her dry lips into any such attempt, he had uttered a cheerful "All right" and turned away to clamber up into his seat.

The relief was great, and she settled back, rejoicing in the fact that they would soon be moving and that she was likely to be the sole passenger. But she soon came to rue this fact, for the driver wanted to talk and even made many abortive attempts that way. But she could not fall in with his mood, and seeing this, he soon withheld all remarks and bent his full energies to the task of urging his horses up the interminable incline.

Houses, at which she scarcely looked, disappeared gradually from view, and groups of spreading trees and patches of upland took their places, deepening into the forest as they advanced. When halfway up, the farther mountains, which had hitherto been hidden by nearer hills, burst into view. Behind them the sun was setting, and the scene was glorious. If she saw it at all, she gave no sign of pleasure or even of admiration. Her head, which she had held straight up for the first quarter of a mile, sank lower and lower as they clambered on; yet she gave no signs of drowsiness--only of a mortal weariness which seemed to attack the very springs of life. The pomp and pageantry of the heavens, burning with all the pigments of the rainbow, failed to appeal to a soul shut within dungeon bars. Rocks and mighty gorges darkling to the eye and stirring to the imagination held no story for her; she looked neither to the right nor to the left while the beauty lasted, much less when the last gleam had faded from the mountain tops and a troop of leaden clouds, coming up from the east, added their shadows to those of premature night.

The driver, who had been eying these clouds for some little time, felt that he ought to speak if she did not.
Pulling up his horses as though to give them a breathing spell, he remarked over his shoulder with a strain of anxiety in his voice:

"I hope your friends live near the top of the hill, missus. A storm is coming up, and it's getting very dark. Will you have to walk far?"

"No, no," she assured him with a quick glance up and around her. "A little way, a very little way!" Then she became quiet and absorbed again.

"I've got to go on," he broke in again as the top of the hill came in sight. "I've a passenger for the eight-fifty train waiting for me more than a mile along the road. I shall have to leave you after I set you down."

"That's right; I expect that. I can take care of myself--don't worry. Not but what you're very kind," she added after a moment, in her cultured voice, with just enough trace of accent to make it linger sweetly in the ear.

Then here we are," he called back a moment later, jerking his horses to a standstill and jumping down into the road. "Goin' east or goin' west?" he asked as he took another glance at her frail and poorly protected figure.

"This way," she answered, pointing east.

He stopped and stared at her.

"Nobody lives that way," he said, "--that is, nobody near enough for you to reach shelter before the storm bursts."

"You are mistaken," she said, cringing involuntarily as the first big clap of thunder rolled in endless echoes among the mountains. And turning about, she started hurriedly into the shadows of the narrow cross-road.

He gave one glance back at his horses, the twitching of whose ears showed nervousness, uttered some familiar word and launched out after the woman. "Pardon me, missus," he cried, "but is it Miss Brown's you mean?"

The widow stopped, glanced back at him over her shoulder, made a quick, protesting gesture and dashed on.

With a shake of his head and a muttered, "Well, women do beat the devil!" he retraced his steps; and she proceeded on alone.

As the last sound of his horses' hoof-beats died out on the road, a second clap of thunder seemed to bring heaven and earth together. She scarcely looked up. She was approaching a little weather-beaten house nestled among trees on the edge of a deep gorge. As her eyes fell on it, her footsteps quickened, and lifting a hasty hand, she pulled off her veil. A change quite indescribable, but real for all that, had taken place in her worn and waxen features. Not joy, but a soft expectancy relieved them from their extreme tension. If a friend awaited her, that friend would have no difficulty in recognizing her now. But alas!

A few steps more, and she stood before the door. It had a desolate look; the whole house had a desolate look, possibly because every shade was drawn. But she did not notice this; she was too sure of her welcome. Raising her hand to the knocker, she gave two sharp raps. Then she waited. No answer from within--no sound of hurrying steps--only another rumble in the sky and a quick rustling of the trees on either side of her as if the wind which made the horizon black had sent an _avant-courier_ over the hilltops.

"Elvira is out--gone to some church meeting or social gathering down in the village. She will be back. But I won't wait. I will try and get in in the old way. The storm may delay her indefinitely."

Leaving the door, which was raised only two steps above the road, she walked to the corner of the house and stooping down, felt behind a projecting stone for what she had certainly expected to find there--a key to the front door.

But her hand came away empty.

Surprised, for this was not her first visit to this house (she had once spent weeks there and knew the habits of its mistress well), she felt again in the place where the key should be, and where she had so often found it when her friend was out. But all to no avail. It was not there, and presently she was in the road again staring at the closed-up front.

As she did so, these words left her lips:

"And she knew I might come at any minute!"

Tottering from fatigue, she caught at the trunk of a great tree which held roof and wall in its embrace.

Why did it quiver? Why did the ground beneath her feet seem to rock and all nature darken as with the falling of a pall. The storm was upon her. It had rolled up with incredible swiftness and was about to break over her head. With a shock she realized her position. No shelter, and the storm of the season upon her! What should she do? There was no way of getting into the house at the rear, for the bushes were too thick. She must accept her fate, be drenched to the skin, perhaps smitten by the next thunderbolt. But Antoinette Duclos was no coward, so far as physical ills were concerned. She drew herself up straight against the trunk of the tree, thinking that this, bad as it was, was better than shelter with the enemy at the door. She would be calm, and she was fast growing so when she suddenly became aware of a man standing very near and hunting her out through the dusk.

She never knew why the scream which rose in her throat did not pass her lips. Her terror was unspeakable, for
she had heard no advance; indeed, there was too much noise about her for that. But it was the silent terror of despair, for she thought it was the man from whom she had made this great effort at escape. But he soon proved to her he was not. It was just the driver of the stagecoach, returned to see what had become of her. He had feared to find her stricken down in the road, and when he saw her clinging alone and in a maddened way to this tree, he made no bones of speaking to her with all necessary plainness.

"I asked you if it was Missus Brown you had come to see," he called to her through the din. "And you wouldn't answer."

"Why should I?" she shouted back. "Why do you speak like that? Has anything happened to her?"

"Don't you know?"

"No, no--she was well when I heard from her last, and expecting me, or so she wrote. Is she--she--"

"Dead, missus. We buried her last Tuesday. I'm sorry, but--"

Why finish? She was lying out before him, straight and stark in the road. A bolt of lightning which at that moment tore its way through the heavens brought into startling view her face, white with distraction, framed in a mass of iron-gray locks released by her fall.

"Good heaven!" burst from the lips of the frightened man as he stooped to lift her. "What am I going to do now?"

The thunder answered him, or rather it robbed him for the moment of all thought. Peal after peal rattled over the neighboring peaks, rocking the air on the uplands and filling his soul with dismay. But when quiet had come again, hope returned with it. She was not only standing upright but was crying in his ear:

"Can I get into the house? If I could stay there to-night, I could go back to-morrow."

"I'll see that you get in, if I have to break in a window," he answered. "But you're sure that you will not be afraid to stay out this terrible storm in a house with no neighbors within half a mile?"

"I know the house. I have been here before, and if Elvira Brown could face the storms of forty years from her solitary home, I can surely face a single one, without losing my courage."

He said no more, but approaching the house, began to test such windows as he could reach. He finally broke in a pane and released the latch; after that, entrance was easy.

Yet after he had opened the way for her and she had stepped into the dim interior, he felt loth to leave her. Duty called him away. The passenger awaiting him up the road was a man he could not afford to disappoint; yet he stood there longer than the occasion warranted, with the knob of the door in hand, watching her struggle with the lamp, which she at last succeeded in lighting. As the walls of the hall and her anxiously bending figure burst into view, he uttered a quick "Good-by!"

She turned, smiled and tried to thank him, but the words failed to leave her lips. A nearer and fiercer bolt had shot to earth at that instant, striking a tree so near that the noise of its fall mingled with the crash of the heavens. When it had ceased, he had gone. He could not face the look with which she met this new catastrophe.

That look never again left her. When she saw herself in a glass, as she presently did, on entering one of the rooms lamp in hand, she was startled and muttered:

"My own mother would pass me by if she saw me now. I could go anywhere I wished without fear or dread. Why did I leave New York?" And setting the lamp down, she covered her face and wept.

The storm abated; a few minutes of fiercely pouring rain, and all was over. She was left in ghastly quiet--a quiet which was almost worse than the turmoil which had preceded it--to face her memories and accustom herself to the thought that the solitary woman with whose life everything she looked upon was so intimately connected was gone, never to pass through these doors again or touch with deft and careful fingers the infinite number of little belongings with which the house was filled.

For as yet nothing had been changed, nothing had been moved. How fitting this was, Antoinette knew better than anybody else, perhaps, for she was the only person whom Elvira Brown had ever allowed to spend any length of time with her, and she could remember--alas! how vividly, in spite of the one great fear forever gnawing at her heart--that an article, no matter how small, when once given place in this house, held that place always till broken or in some other way robbed of its usefulness. She looked at her friend's pet chair standing just in the one spot where she had seen it eight years before, and her heart swelled, and a tear rose in her eye. But there was not time for another. A sense of the straits in which she found herself placed by the death of this dependable friend returned upon her in full force; the past retired into its old place, and the present, with its maddening problems, seized upon her nerve and quelled her once indomitable spirit.

The fate which had pursued her ever since she had left her happy home in France had not spared her at this crisis. The storm, of so little consequence to her, had roused the driver's sympathy. This had not only fixed her image in his mind but given away her destination. All hope of hiding herself among the mountains was therefore gone. She would have to move on; but where? If she were but able to leave now, she might before morning find
some covert from which help might be given her for further escape. But the condition of the roads, as well as her own weakness, forbade that. She needed food: she needed sleep. Of food she would find plenty, she was sure; but sleep! How could she sleep, with the promise of the morrow before her? Yet she must; everything depended upon her strength. How could she win that rest which alone would secure it.

Pausing in the midst of the hall whither her restless thought had driven her, she stared in a fruitless inquiry at the wall confronting her. Her mind, like her feet, was at a standstill. She could neither think nor act. In fact, she was at the point of a nervous collapse, when slowly from out the void there rose to her view and pierced its way into her mind the outline of the door upon which she had been steadily looking but without seeing it till now. Why did she start as it thus took on shape before her? There was nothing strange or mysterious about it. It led nowhere; it hid nothing, unless it was the yard upon which it directly opened.

But that yard! She remembered it well. It was unlike any other she had ever seen in this country or her own. It was small and semicircular; it was shut in by a high board fence except at the extreme end, where it was met by a swinging bridge topping a forty-foot chasm. That bridge led through a sparsely wooded forest to a road running in a quite different direction from the one by which the house was approached. As she strove to recall her memories of it, she became more and more assured that her one and only opportunity for a successful flight lay that way. Moved to joy at the thought, she bowed her head for one wild moment in heartfelt thankfulness and then quickly drew the bolts of the door which offered her this happy deliverance.

She did not mean to seek escape to-night, but an irresistible impulse, which quite robbed her of her judgment, drove her to take a look into the yard and make sure for herself that the bridge was still there and everything as she had last seen it.

But when with the help of the wind she pulled open the heavy door and stood, throbbing under the force of the gale, on the shallow step outside, she found herself confronted by a darkness so hollow and so absolute that she felt as though she had stumbled into a pit. But instead of retreating, if only to procure a lantern, she took the one step down to the narrow walk which led through grass and flowers to the edge of the plateau from which the bridge extended. Would she be satisfied now? No, she must see the bridge, or if she could not see it, must feel it with her foot or touch it with her hand. Once sure of its presence there, she would return, take off her clothing and seek refreshment.

But how was she to find her way in such absolute darkness? Alone with the dying tempest, now moaning in fitful gusts, now shrieking a last protest in her ear, she stood peering helplessly before her. Already her arms had gone out like those of a blind person loosed upon an unknown road. She was conscious of a great fear. All the solitude of her position had rushed upon her. She felt herself lost, forsaken; yet she had no idea of turning back. If she could but find some support--something upon which to lay her fingers. She thought of the fence, and her courage revived. If she could but reach and follow that!

There were obstacles in her way. She was sure of this, for she remembered some of them, and Elvira no more changed her garden than her house. But with care she succeeded in getting around these, and soon she knew by the lessened force of the wind that she was near, if not directly under, the high fence upon which she depended for guidance. A few bushes--another unexpected obstacle, followed by a bad stumble--separated her from the contact for which she had reached; then by a final effort her fingers found the boards and she went eagerly on, dragging herself through the wet without knowing it, and only stopping with a sense of shock, when her hand, sliding from the boards, fell groping about in midair with nothing to grasp at. She had come to the end of the fence and was within a foot of the bridge--if the bridge was still there.

But her fears on this score were few, and she felt about with hand and foot till the former struck the rail at her side, and the latter the narrow planking spanning the gorge.

She hesitated now. Who would not? But the impulse which had led her thus far continued to urge her on. She stepped upon the bridge and proceeded to cross it, clinging to the rail with a feverish clutch, and feeling every board with her foot before venturing to trust her full weight upon it. She found them seemingly firm, and when about halfway across she stopped to listen for the roar of the mountain stream which she knew to be rushing over its rocky bed some forty awesome feet below her.

She heard it, but the swish of the trees lining the gorge was in her straining ears and half drowned its sullen sound. With feelings impossible to describe, she tossed up her arms to the skies, where a single brilliant star was looking through the mass of quickly flying, quickly disintegrating clouds. Then she sought again the safety of the guiding rail, and clinging desperately to it, took one more step and stopped with a smothered shriek. The rail had snapped under her hand and had gone tumbling down into the abyss. She heard it as it struck, or thought she did, and for a moment stood breathless and fearing to move, the world and all it held vanishing in semi-unconsciousness from heart and mind. What was she but a trembling atom floating in an unknown void on the fathomless sea of eternity! Then, as her mind steadied, she began to feel once more the boards under her feet, and to hear the smiting
together of the great limbs wrestling in the depths of the forest. She even caught such a homely sound as the violent slamming of the door she had left unlatched behind her; and summoning up all her courage, which was not small when she was released from her first surprise, she stepped firmly backward till she felt the rail strong again under her clutch. Then she turned resolutely and retraced her steps along the bridge and so across the plateau to the house whose light had acted as a beacon to her whenever the door blew wide enough to let the one inner beam be seen.

When she was inside again, she lingered for a long time in the darkening hall, her slight form and whitened head leaning against the wall in a desolation such as few hearts know. Then something within the woman flared up in a rekindled flame, and she passed quickly into the room where she had left her lamp burning; and blowing it out, she threw herself down on a couch and tried to sleep.

An hour later the moon shone in upon her pale features and wild, staring eyes upturned to meet it. Then it vanished, and she and the whole house were given up again to darkness.

She had forgotten to eat, though the cupboards, in this well-stored house, were quite full.

XXVI

THE FACE IN THE WINDOW

"Is this the place?"

"According to our instructions, yes. The first house after the first turn to the right. We took the first turn, and this is the first house. Romantic situation, eh? But a bit lonesome for a city chap? Shall I help you down?"

While talking, Sweetwater, who was already in the road, held up his elbow to Mr. Gryce, who slowly descended. It was early morning, and the glory of sunshine was everywhere misleading the eye from the ravages of the night before; yet neither of these two men wore an air in keeping with the freshness of renewed life and the joyous aspect of exultant nature. There seemed to be an oppression upon them both--a hesitation not common to either, and to all appearance without cause.

To end what he probably considered a weakness, Sweetwater approached the door staring somewhat blankly from the flat front of the primitive old house whose privacy they were about to invade, and rapped on its weather-beaten panels, first gently and then with quick insistence.

There was no response from within; no sound of movement; no token that he had been so much as heard. Sweetwater turned and consulted his companion before making another attempt.

"It's early. Perhaps she's not up yet," rejoined the old detective as he painfully advanced. The storm of the preceding night had got into his bones.

"I don't know. There's something uncanny about this silence. She ought to be here; but I'm afraid she isn't." Sweetwater rapped again, this time with decided vehemence.

Suddenly in one of the uncurtained windows a face appeared. They saw it, and both drew a deep breath. The eyes were looking their way, but they were like ghost's eyes. Without sight or speculation in them, they simply looked; then the face slowly withdrew, growing ghastlier every minute, and the window stared on, but the woman was gone. Yet the door did not open.

"I hate to use force," objected Sweetwater.

Before answering, Mr. Gryce stepped to one side and cast a glance around the corner of the house in the direction of the gorge opening in the rear.

"There is something like a yard at the back," he announced, "but the fence which shut it in is so high and so protected by means of prickly underbrush that you would have difficulty in climbing it."

"Just so at this end," called out Sweetwater after a short run to the left. "If we get in at all," he remarked on coming back, "it will have to be by the window you see there with one pane knocked out."

"I don't like that; I don't like any of it. But we can't stay out here any longer. The looks of the woman herself forbid it. We sha'n't forget that hollow stare."

"They said the woman who lived here was dead."

"Yes. It's a bad business, Sweetwater. Rap once more, and then if she doesn't come, throw up the window and climb in."

Sweetwater did as he was bid, and meeting with no more response than before, thrust his hand through the hole made by the broken pane; and finding the window had been left unlocked, he pushed it up and entered. In another moment he appeared at the front door, where Mr. Gryce joined him, and together they took their first look at the small but surprisingly well-furnished interior.

The hall in which they stood was without staircase and had many of the appointments of a room. Doors opened here and there along its length, and in the rear they saw a closed one evidently leading into the yard. There was no one within sight. One would have said that with the death and carrying out of the owner of this little dwelling, all life had departed from it. Yet these two men knew that life was there; and raising his voice, Mr. Gryce called out in the least alarming way possible:
"Madame Duclos!" following this utterance of her name with an apology for the intrusion and a prayer for one minute's interview.

Silence was his answer--no stir anywhere.

Apprehensive of they knew not what, the two detectives started simultaneously, one for the door on their right, the other for that on the left. When they met again in the ill-lighted hall, Mr. Gryce was shaking his head, but Sweetwater had lifted a beckoning finger. Unconsciously moderating his step, Mr. Gryce followed him through one room to the door of another which he saw standing partly open.

Through the crack thus made between the hinges, they could get a very fair glimpse of what was going on inside. They saw a bed, and a woman kneeling beside this bed, her eyes upraised in prayer. The look which had awed them at the window was gone, and in its place was one so high and so full of religious faith that for an instant they were conscious of the reversal of all their ideas.

But only for an instant; for while they waited, hesitating to break in upon her evidently sincere devotions, she started to her feet and with a half-insane look about her, disappeared from their view in the direction of the hall.

Sweetwater was after her in a twinkling; but by the time he and Mr. Gryce, each going his separate way, had themselves reached the hall, it was to see the end door--the one giving upon the plateau--closing behind her.

"Madame!" called out Sweetwater, bounding briskly in her wake.

Mr. Gryce said nothing but approached with hastening steps the door which Sweetwater had left open behind him, and took a quick survey of the fenced-in plateau, the bridge and the towering trees beyond, toward which she seemed to be making.

"She cannot escape," was his ready conclusion; and he shouted to Sweetwater to go easy.

Sweetwater, who was in the act of setting foot upon the bridge down which she was running, slacked up at this command and presently stopped, for she had stopped herself and was looking back from a spot about halfway across, with the air of one willing, at last, to hear what they had to say.

"Who are you?" she cried. "And what do you want of me?"

"Are you not Madame Duclos?"

"Yes, I am Antoinette Duclos."

"Then you must know why you are wanted by the police authorities of New York. Your daughter--"

Her hand went up.

"I've nothing to say--nothing. Will you take that for your answer and let me go?"

"Alas, madam, we cannot!" spoke up Mr. Gryce in his calm, benevolent way. "Miss Duclos' death was of a nature demanding an inquest. Your testimony, hard as it may be for you to give it, is necessary for a righteous verdict. That is all we want--"

"It is too much!" she cried. And with a quick glance upward she took another step or two along the bridge till she had reached the broken rail; and before Sweetwater in his dismay could more than give a horrified bound in her direction, she had made the fatal leap and was gone from their sight into the gorge below.

BOOK IV
NEMESIS
XXVII
FROM LIPS LONG SILENT

"This finishes my usefulness as a detective. I have had my fill of horrors; all, in fact, that my old age can stand."

Thus, Mr. Gryce, as hours afterward he and Sweetwater turned their faces back toward New York.

"I appreciate your feelings," responded the latter, who had been strangely silent all day, speaking only when directly addressed. "I can assure you that in my way I'm as much cut up as you are. I wish now that I had made an attempt from the rear to head off this distracted woman, even if I had been obliged to scratch my hands to pieces tearing a board from the fence."

"It would have done no good. She was determined to die rather than give up her secret. I remember the look with which her sister-in-law warned me that she would never survive a capture. But I thought that mere exaggeration."

Then after a moment of conscious silence on the part of both, the weary old man added with bitter emphasis, "Her testimony might--I do not say would--have cleared away our suspicions of Director Roberts."

Sweetwater, who was acting as chauffeur, slowed down his machine till it came to a standstill at the side of the road. Then wheeling quietly about till he faced his surprised companion, he remarked very gravely:

"Mr. Gryce, I hadn't the heart to tell you this before, but the time has come for you to know that Mr. Roberts' cause is not so favorably affected, as you seem to think, by this suicidal death of one who without doubt would have proved to be a leading witness against him. I am sure you will agree with me in this when I inform you that in pursuing the task you set me, I came upon _this_."

Thrusting his hand into his pocket, he pulled out a large envelope from which he proceeded to draw forth first
the tattered square of what had once been a cabinet portrait, and then a freshly printed proof of the same. Holding them both up, he waited for the word that was sure to follow.

It came with all the emphasis he expected.

"Roberts! Director Roberts!"

"The same, sir"; and the eyes of the two detectives met in what was certainly one of the most solemn moments of their lives.

They had paused for this short conference at a point where the road running for a few yards on a level gave them a view of slope on slope of varying verdure, with glimpses of the Hudson between. Glancing up, with a gesture of manifest shrinking from the portrait which Sweetwater still held, Mr. Gryce allowed his glance to run over the wonderful landscape laid out to his view, and said with breaks and halts bespeaking his deep emotion:

"If my death here and now, following fast upon that of this unhappy Frenchwoman, would avail to wipe out the evidence I have so laboriously collected against this man, I should welcome it with gratitude. I shrink from ending my career with the shattering of so fine an image, in the public eye. What lies back of this crime--what past memories or present miseries have led to an act which would be called dastardly in the most uninstructed and basest of our sex, I lack the imagination to conceive. Would to God I had never tried to find out! But no man standing where Roberts does to-day among the leaders of a great party can fall into such a pit of shame without weakening the faith of the young and making a travesty of virtue and honor."

"Yet, if he is guilty----"

"It is our business to pursue him to the end. Only, I like the man, Sweetwater. I had a long talk with him yesterday on indifferent matters and I came away liking him."

This was certainly something Sweetwater had not expected to hear, and it threw him again into silence as he started up the machine and they pursued their course home.

Hard as the day had been for Mr. Gryce, its trials were not yet over. He had left it to Sweetwater to report the case to the New York authorities and had gone home to rest from the shock of the occurrence and to prepare for that interview with the Chief Inspector which he was satisfied would now lead to an even more exacting one with the District Attorney.

He was met by a messenger from downtown who handed him a letter. He opened it abstractedly and read the following:

"Mrs. Taylor is talking."

He had forgotten Mrs. Taylor. To have her thus brought forcibly collected against this man, I should welcome it with gratitude. I shrink from ending my career with the shattering of so fine an image, in the public eye. What lies back of this crime--what past memories or present miseries have led to an act which would be called dastardly in the most uninstructed and basest of our sex, I lack the imagination to conceive. Would to God I had never tried to find out! But no man standing where Roberts does to-day among the leaders of a great party can fall into such a pit of shame without weakening the faith of the young and making a travesty of virtue and honor."

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He was met by a messenger from downtown who handed him a letter. He opened it abstractedly and read the following:

"Mrs. Taylor is talking."

He had forgotten Mrs. Taylor. To have her thus brought forcibly back to mind was a shock heightened, rather than diminished, by a perusal of the few connected words which the careful nurse had transcribed as falling from her delirious patient's lips.

They were these:

I love but thee, And thee will I love to eternity.

The exact lines, no more, no less, which Sweetwater had found written on the back of the Swiss clock cherished by Mr. Roberts.

XXVIII

"ROMANTIC! TOO ROMANTIC!"

Next morning Mr. Gryce left his home an hour earlier than usual. He wished to have a talk with Mrs. Taylor's nurse before encountering the Inspector.

It was an inconvenient time for a nurse to leave the sick-bed; but the matter being so important, she was prevailed upon to give him a few moments, in the little reception room where he had seated himself. The result was meagre--that is, from her standpoint. All she had to add to what she had written him the day before was the fact that the two lines of verse quoted in the note she had sent him were Mrs. Taylor's first coherent utterance, and that they had been spoken not only once but many times, in every kind of tone, and with ever-varying emphasis. That and a dreamy request for "The papers! the papers!" which had followed some action of her own this very morning comprised all she had to give in fulfillment of the promise she had made him at the beginning of this illness.

Mr. Gryce believed her and rose reluctantly to his feet.

"Then she is still very ill?"

"Very ill, but mending daily; or so the doctor says."

"If she talks again, as she is liable to do at any moment, do not check her, but remember every word. The importance of this I cannot impress upon you too fully. But do not by any show of curiosity endanger her recovery. She seems to be one of the very best sort; I would not have her body or mind sacrificed on any account."

"You may trust me, sir."

He nodded, giving her his hand.

But as he was turning away, he looked back with the quiet remark: "I should like to ask a final question. You
have been in constant attendance on this lady for some time and must have seen many of her friends, as well as taken charge of her mail and of any messages which may have been left for her. Has there been anything in this experience to settle the doubt as to whether her talk of a vision in which she saw her absent husband stricken simultaneously with the poor child lying at that very moment dead at her feet simply delirium or a striking instance of telepathy recording an accomplished fact? In other words, do you believe her husband to be living or not living at the present time?"

"That is a subject upon which I have not been able to form any opinion. I have heard nothing, seen nothing to influence my mind either way. Some other people have asked me this same question. If her mail contains any news, it is still in the hands of the proprietor of the hotel. He has refrained from sending it up. She has lived here, as you know, for a long while."

"Has she no relative to share your watch or take such things in charge?"

"I have seen none. Friends she has in plenty, but no one who claims relationship with her, or who raises the least objection to anything I do."

He seemed about to ask another question, but refrained and allowed her to depart after some final injunction as to what she should do in case of certain emergencies. Then he had a talk with the proprietor, which added little or nothing to his present knowledge; and these duties off his mind, he went downtown.

As he expected, he found the Chief Inspector awaiting him. The death of Madame Duclos had added still another serious complication to the many with which this difficult affair was already encumbered, and he was anxious to talk over the matter with one who had been on the spot and upon whose impressions he consequently could rely.

But when he heard all that Mr. Gryce had to say on the subject, he grew as serious as the detective himself could wish, even going so far as to propose an immediate ride over to the District Attorney's office.

Fortunately, they found that gentleman in and ready to listen, though it was evident he expected little from the conference. But his temper changed as Mr. Gryce opened up his theory and began to substantiate it with facts. The looks which he exchanged with the Chief Inspector grew more and more earnest and inquiring, and when Mr. Gryce reached that portion of his report which connected Mr. Roberts so indisputably with the arrow, he called in his assistant and together they listened to what Mr. Gryce had further to say.

With this addition to his audience, the old man's manner changed and became a trifle more formal. He related the fact, not generally known, of Mr. Roberts' engagement to a young girl residing on Long Island, and how this was broken off immediately after the occurrence at the museum, seemingly from no other reason than the unhappy condition of mind in which he found himself, a condition added to if not explained by the pertinacity with which he had haunted the morgue and dwelt upon the image of the young girl who had perished under no random shot.

Here the old man paused, shrinking as much from what he had yet to say as they from the hearing of it. It was not till the Chief Inspector had made him an encouraging gesture that he found the requisite courage to proceed. He did so, in these words:

"I know that the evidence I have thus far advanced is of a purely circumstantial nature, capable, perhaps, of a more or less satisfactory explanation. But what I have to add cannot be so easily disposed of. Connections have developed between persons we thought strangers which have opened up a field of inquiry which brings the doubts and surmises of an old detective within the scope of this office. I do not know what to make of them; perhaps their full meaning can only be found out here. Of this only I am assured. The gentleman whom it seems presumptuous on my part to connect even in a casual way with crime has not gained but lost by what I have to tell of Madame Duclos'.

"But this is not all," he continued, as the remarks incident upon this proof of deadly hatred on the part of the mother of the victim for the man whom circumstances seemed to point out as her slayer subsided under the pressure of their interest in what he had further to impart. "As you will see after a moment's consideration, this token of animosity does not explain Madame Duclos' flight, and certainly not her death, which, as the unhappy witness of it, I am ready to declare was not the death of one driven to extremity from personal fear, but by some exalted feeling which we have yet to understand. All that I now wish to point out in its connection is the proof offered by this shattered photograph, that Mr. Roberts was in some manner and from some cause a party to this crime from which a superficial observation would completely dissociate him.

"Where is the connecting link? How can we hope to establish it? That is what it has now become my unfortunate duty to make plain to you. Carleton Roberts drawing a bow to shoot an innocent schoolgirl is incredible. In spite of
all I have said and shown you, I do not believe him guilty of so inhuman an act. He drew the bow, he shot the arrow,
but----Here allow me to pause a moment to present another aspect of the case as surprising as any you have yet
heard. You are aware--we all are aware--that the inquest we await has been held back for the purpose of giving Mrs.
Taylor an opportunity to recover from the illness into which she has been thrown by what she saw and suffered that
day. Gentlemen, this Mrs. Taylor whom we all--I will not even exclude myself from this category--regarded not
only as a casual visitor to the museum, but a stranger to all concerned, is, on the contrary, as I think you will soon
see, more closely allied to the seemingly dispassionate director than even Madame Duclos. The shock which laid her
low was not that usually ascribed to her, or even the one she so fantastically offered to our acceptance; but the
recognition of Carleton Roberts as the author of this tragedy,--Carleton Roberts whom she not only knew well but
had loved in days gone by, as sincerely as he had loved her. This I now propose to prove to you by what I cannot but
regard as incontestable evidence."

Taking from a small portfolio which he carried another photograph, unmounted this time and evidently the work
of an amateur, he laid it out before them. The silence with which his last statement had been received, the kind of
silence which covers emotions too deep for audible expression, remained unbroken save for an involuntary murmur
or so, as the District Attorney and his assistant bent over this crude presentation of something--they hardly knew
what--which this old but long trusted detective was offering them in substantiation of the well-nigh unbelievable
statement he had just made.

"This, gentlemen," he went on, as he pointed to the following, "is the copy of a label pasted on the back of a
certain Swiss clock to be seen at this very moment on the wall of Mr. Roberts' own bedroom in his home in Belport,
Long Island. He prizes this clock. He has been heard to say that it goes where he goes and stays where he stays, and
as it is far from a valuable one either from intrinsic worth or from any accuracy it displays in keeping time, the
reason for this partiality must lie in old associations and the memories they invoke. A love token. Can you not see
that it is such from the couplet scrawled across it? If not, just take a look at the initials appended to that couplet. May
I ask you to read them?"

The District Attorney stooped, adjusted his glasses and slowly read out:
"C. C. R."
"Carleton Clifton Roberts," explained Mr. Gryce. Then slowly, "The other two if you will be so good."
"E. T."
"Ermentrude Taylor," declared the inexorable voice. "And written by herself. Here is her signature which I have
obtained; and here is his. Compare them at your leisure with their initials inscribed according to the date there,
sixteen years or more ago. Now where were these two--this man and this woman--at the time just designated?
Alone, or together? Let us see if we can find out," pursued the detective with a quiet ignoring of the effect he had
produced, which revealed him as the master of a situation probably as difficult and disconcerting as the three
officials hanging in manifest anxiety upon his words had ever been called upon to face. "Mr. Roberts was in
Switzerland, as his housekeeper will be obliged to admit on oath, she being an honest woman and a domestic in his
mother's house at the time. And Ermentrude Taylor! I have a witness to prove where she was also! A witness I
should be glad to have you interrogate. Here is her name and address." And he slipped a small scrap of paper into
the District Attorney's hand. "What she will say is this, for I think I have very thoroughly sounded her: First, that she
is Mrs. Taylor's most intimate friend. This is conceded by all who know her. Secondly, that while her intimacy does
not extend back to their girlhood days--Mrs. Taylor being an Englishwoman by birth and remarkably reticent as to
her former life and experiences--she has one story to tell of that time which answers the question I have given you.
She got it from Mrs. Taylor herself, and in this manner. They were engaged in talking one day about our Western
mountains and the grandeur of scenery generally. When Mrs. Taylor let fall some word which frightened her she was
herself disturbed by what might very easily give offense, and being of a kindly, even loving disposition, took occasion when next they met to explain that it was as a
girl she had visited Switzerland, and that her experiences there had been so unfortunate that any allusion which
recalled those days distressed her. This is all that ever passed between these two on this subject, but is it not enough
when we read this couplet, and mark the combined initials, and recognize them as those of Carleton Roberts and
Ermentrude Taylor? But lest you should doubt even this evidence of an old-time friendship so intimate that it has
almost the look of a betrothal, I must add one more item of corroborative fact which came to me as late as last night.
In a moment of partial consciousness, while the nurse hung over her bed, Mrs. Taylor spoke her first coherent
sentence since she fell into a state demanding medical assistance. And what was that sentence? A repetition of this
couplet, gentlemen, spoken not once but over and over again, till even the nurse grew tired of listening to it.
"I love but thee, And thee will I love to eternity.""

As the last word fell from Mr. Gryce's lips, the District Attorney muttered a quick exclamation, and sat down
heavily in his chair.

"No coincidence that," he cried, with forced vivacity. "The couplet is too little known."

"Exactly," came from Mr. Gryce in dry confirmation. "Mrs. Taylor, as well as her friends can judge, is a woman
of thirty-five or thirty-eight. If she went to Switzerland as a girl, this would make her visit coincident, so far as we
can calculate from our present knowledge, with that of Carleton Roberts. For the surer advancement of our
argument, let us say that it was. What follows? Let the inscription of this label speak for us. They met; they loved--
as was natural when we remember the youth and good looks of both, and--_they parted_. This we must concede, or
how could the experience have been one she could not recall without a heart-break. They parted, and he returned
home, to marry within the year, while she--I do not think she married--though I have no doubt she looks upon
herself as a wife and forever bound to the man who deserted her. Women of her kind think in this way of such
matters, and act upon them too as is shown by the fact that, on following him here, she passed herself off as a
woman separated from her husband. Changing the Miss before her name to Mrs., she lived under this assumption for
twelve years at her present hotel. In all that time, so far as I can learn, she has never been visited by anyone of an
appearance answering to that of her former lover; nor have I any reason to think she ever intruded herself on him, or
made herself in any way obnoxious. He was married and settled, and contrary to the usual course of men who step
with one stride into affluence, was living a life of usefulness which was rapidly making him a marked man in public
esteem. Perhaps she had no right to meddle with what no longer concerned her. At all events, there is no evidence of
her having done so in all these fourteen years. Even after Mrs. Roberts' death, all went on as usual; _but_--" Here
Mr. Gryce became emphatic--"when he turned his attention to a second marriage and that with a very young girl--(I
can name her to you, gentlemen, if you wish) her patient soul may have been roused; she may have troubled him
with importunities; may have threatened him with a scandal which would have interfered greatly with his political
hopes if it had not ended them at once. I can conceive such an end to her long patience, can't you, gentlemen? And
what is more, if this were so, and the gentleman found the situation intolerable, it might account for the flight of that
arrow as nothing else ever will."

Both men had started to their feet.

"How! It was not _she_--""

"It was not she who was struck, _but_ it was she who was aimed at_. The young girl merely got in the way. But
before I enlarge upon this point," he continued in lower tones as the two officials slowly reseated themselves, "allow
me to admit that any proof of correspondence between these old-time lovers would have added much to my present
argument. But while I have no doubt that such an interchange of letters took place, and that in all probability some
one or more of them still exist, Mrs. Taylor's illness and Mr. Roberts' high position prevent any substantiation of the
same on our part. I must therefore ask you to assume that it was in obedience to some definite agreement between
them that she came to the museum on that fatal morning and made her appearance in that especial section of the
gallery marked II. If this strikes you as inconceivable and too presumptuous for belief, you must at least concede
that we have ample proof of his entire readiness for her coming. The bow brought up so many days before from the
cellar was within reach; the arrow under his coat; and his place of concealment so chosen as to make his escape
feasible the moment that arrow flew from the bow. Had she entered that section alone--had the arrow found
lodgment in her breast instead of in that of another--nay, I will go even further and say that had no cry followed his
act, an expectation he had every right to count upon from the lightning-like character of the attack,--he would have
reached the Curator's office and been out of the building before quick discovery of the deed made his completion of
this attempt impossible."

"But the girl did cry out," remarked the Assistant District Attorney. "How do you account for that, since, as you
say, it was not natural for one pierced at the heart without warning?"

"Ah, you see the big mistake we made,--Correy and all the rest of us. Had Miss Willetts, or I should say,
Mademoiselle Duclos, been the one to let out that dolorous cry, the man just behind the partition would have been
there almost in time to see her fall. Correy, who started up the stairs at the first sound, would have been at the
gallery entrance before the man of the arrow could have dropped the hanging over his retreating figure. But it was
not from her lips, poor girl, that this gasping shriek went up, but from those of the woman who saw the deed and knew from whom the arrow came and for whom it was meant. How do I know this? Because of the time which elapsed, the few precious minutes which allowed Mr. Roberts to get as far away as the court. For she did not voice her agony immediately. Even she, with her own unwounded heart keeping up its functions, stood benumbed before this horror. Not till the full meaning of it all had penetrated her reluctant brain did she move or cry out. How long this interval was; whether three minutes were consumed by it, or five, we have no means of telling. She, in her despair, would take no note of time, nor would Mr. Travis, reeling in the opposite gallery under the shock of seeing all that he loved taken from him in one awful minute."

Here the detective turned with great earnestness toward the two officials.

"This question of time has been, as I have repeatedly said, the greatest stumbling-block we have encountered in our consideration of this crime. How could the assassin, by any means possible, have got so far away from the pedestal, in the infinitesimal lapse of time between the cry that was heard and the quick alarm which followed. Now we know. Have you anything to say against this conclusion? Any other explanation to give which will account for every fact as this does?"

His answer came in a dubious gesture from the District Attorney and a half-hearted "No" from his Assistant. They were both either too awed by the circumstance or too fearful of mistake, to accept without a struggle an accusation of this grave and momentous character against one of Mr. Roberts' stamp and consequence.

This was no more than Mr. Gryce had expected, and while he realized that his reputation as a detective of extraordinary insight in cases of an unusually baffling nature trembled in the balance, he experienced a sudden distaste of his work which almost drove him into renouncing the whole affair. But the habits of a lifetime are not parted with so easily; and when the Chief Inspector observed--evidently with the idea of goading him on--"This seems to be mainly a matter of conjecture, Gryce," his old self reasserted itself, and he answered boldly:

"I acknowledge that; but conjecture is what in nine cases out of ten smoothes out many of our difficulties. I have here a short statement made by myself, after the most careful inquiries, of all that Mrs. Taylor and the untrapped director did and said in the few difficult moments when they met face to face over the body of his unfortunate victim. I will ask you to listen to a portion of it.

"She had not moved. After her one cry of horror which had brought a rush of witnesses upon the scene, she remained fixed on her knees in the absorbed introspection common to those brought suddenly face to face with a life and death crisis. He, finding that his own safety demanded action suitable to his position as a director, had entered with the crowd and now stood in her presence, in face of his own diabolical work, in an attitude of cold courage such as certain strong natures are able to assume under the pressure of great emergencies.

"So long as she was deaf to all appeal to rouse and explain the situation, he stood back, watchful and silent; but when she finally roused and showed a disposition to speak, his desperation drove him into questioning her in order to see how much she understood of an attack which had killed a harmless stranger and let herself go free.

"He asked her first if she could tell them from which direction came the arrow which ended this young girl's life.

"She made no reply in words; but glanced significantly at the opposite gallery.

"This called from him the direct inquiry, "Did you see anyone over there at the moment this young girl fell?"

"She shook her head. Afterward she explained the denial by saying that she had been looking down into the court.

"But he did not cease his inquiries. Turning to the people crowding about him, he put the like question to them; but receiving no answer, a silence followed, during which a woman suggested in tones loud enough for all to hear, that there were no arrows on the other side of the court, but that the gallery where they stood was full of them.

"This seemed to alarm Mrs. Taylor. Turning to the director, she asked whether he was sure that the opposite gallery held no arrows and no bows; and when he replied that nothing of the kind was to be found along its entire length, she proceeded to inquire whether any such deed could be committed in a place so open to view, without attracting the observation of some one wandering in court or gallery.

"This, undoubtedly, to ascertain the full extent of his danger, before bestowing a thought upon herself. But at his answer, given with the cold precision of a thoroughly selfish man, that if anyone in the whole building had seen so much as a movement in a spot so under suspicion, that person would have been heard from by this time, she faltered and was heard to ask what he had in mind and why the people about her looked at her so. He did not respond directly, but made some remark about the police, which increased her alarm to the point of an attempted justification. She said that it was true about the arrows, as anyone could see by looking up at the walls. But where was the bow? No one could shoot an arrow without a bow, and when some one shouted that if an arrow was used as a dagger, one wouldn't need a bow, a sort of frenzy seized her and she acted quite insane, falling at the young girl's side and whispering sentence after sentence in her ear.

"What more was needed to stamp her as a mad woman in the eyes of the ordinary observer? Nothing. But to you
and me, with the cue just given, it has another look. She had just seen the man whom she had herself spared from an accusation which would have been his ruin accept in the coldest fashion an explanation which left her own innocence in doubt. What wonder she succumbed to temporary aberration! As will be remembered, she soon became comparatively calm again, and so remained until in an interview I had with her a half hour or so later I urged her, possibly with too much insistence, for some explanation of the extreme agitation she had shown at the time, when she broke forth with the remarkable statement that it was not the child, but her husband, she was mourning, stricken to death, as she would have us believe, simultaneously with the young and innocent victim then lying dead at her feet.

"Of course, such a coincidence was much too startling not to be regarded by us all as the ravings of delirium; nor has anything occurred since in the way of communication from, or in regard to the absent one, to show that this so-called warning of death has been followed up by fact. But, if you test her action by the theory I have just advanced, viz., that the man she called husband was at that moment in the room with us and that these words were a plea to him—the last appeal of a broken-hearted woman for the support she felt to be her due—how the atmosphere of unreason and mystery clears itself. His suggestion that what was needed there was an alienist, and the pitiful efforts she made to exonerate herself without implicating him in the murderous event, fall naturally into place, as the action of a guilty man and the self-denying conduct of a devoted woman."

"Romantic! too romantic!" objected the District Attorney. "I should think we were listening to one of Dumas' tales."

"Dumas got his greatest effects from life, or so I have been told," remarked the Chief Inspector.

Mr. Gryce sat silent.

Suddenly, the District Attorney observed with the slightest tinge of irony edging his tone:

"I presume you would find a like explanation for the messages she professed to be sending to her husband, when engaged in babbling fool words into the death girl's ear."

"Certainly. He was there, mark you! He stood where he could both see and hear her. All she said and all she did was by way of appeal to him for some token of regret, some sign that he appreciated her reticence; and when she found that it was bringing her nothing, she fainted away."

"Ingenious, very ingenious, Gryce. Had you failed to give us proofs connecting this idol of the Republican party with the actual shooting, it would have been simply ingenious and a quite useless expenditure of talent. But we have these proofs, and while they are mainly circumstantial, they undoubtedly call upon us for some recognition, and so we will hear you out whatever action we may take afterward."

"But first I should like to ask Mr. Gryce one question," interposed his assistant. Then addressing the detective: "Two mysteries are involved in this matter. You have given us a clever explanation of one of them, but how about the other? Will you, before going further, tell us what connection you find between the theory just advanced and the flight and ultimate suicide of Madame Duclos under circumstances which point to a desire to suppress evidence even at the cost of her life? It was not from consideration for Mr. Roberts, whom you have shown she hated. What was it then? Have you an equally ingenious explanation for that too?"

"I have an explanation, but I cannot say that it is altogether satisfactory. She died but yesterday, and my opportunities have been small for any work since. What I have learned was from her sister-in-law, whom I saw this morning. Realizing that she will be obliged to give full testimony at the inevitable inquest, she is at last ready to acknowledge that she has been aware for a long time of a secret in Madame's life. That while she knew nothing of its nature, she had always thought that it was in some manner connected with her prolonged residence abroad. Whether it would also explain the meaning of her return at this time and the seemingly inexplicable change made in her daughter's name while _en route_, must be left to our judgment. Madame had told her nothing. She had simply made use of their home, coming and going, not once, but twice, without giving them the least excuse for her inexplicable conduct. A hundred questions could not elicit more. But to one who like myself has had the opportunity of observing this wretched woman at the moment of her supreme distress an insight is given into her character, which suggests the only plausible explanation of her action. Her sacrifice was one of devotion! She perished in an exaltation of feeling. Love drove her to this desperate act. Not the love of a woman for a man, but the love which women of her profound nature sometimes feel for one of their own sex. Mrs. Taylor was her friend—wait, I hope to prove it—and to save her from experiencing the extreme misery of seeing the man who was the joy as well as bane of her life suffer from the consequences of his own misdeeds, Antoinette Duclos felt willing to die and did. You smile, gentlemen. You think the old man is approaching senility. Perhaps I am, but if the contention is raised that no connection has been shown to exist between Mrs. Taylor and this foreign Madame, save such as was made by the death of Madame's child, I must retort by asking who warned Madame Duclos of the fatal occurrence at the museum in time for her to flee before even our telephone messages reached her hotel? Gentlemen, there is but one person who could have done this—our chief witness, Ermentrude Taylor. She alone had not only the incentive, but the necessary
opportunity. Coroner Price as well as myself made a great mistake when we allowed Mrs. Taylor to go home alone that day."

"Very likely." This from the Chief Inspector. "But if the information I have received on this point is correct, she seemed at that time to be so entirely dissociated with a deed whose origin had just been located in the opposite gallery, that you have no real cause to blame yourselves in this regard."

"True; our minds were diverted. But you are waiting for me to explain what I mean by opportunity. Since my attention has been drawn to Mrs. Taylor again, I have been making inquiries. The chauffeur who drove her to her hotel has been found, and he admits that she stopped once on her way home, to buy some coffee. He watched her as she went into the store and he watched her as she came out; and he smelled the coffee. Happily, the interest he took in her as a sick woman intrusted to his care was strong enough for him to remember the store. It was one with two entrances, front and back; and next door to it there is a public building with a long row of telephone booths on the ground floor. If I read the incident aright, she bought her coffee, ordered it ground, slipped out at the rear door and into the adjoining building, where, unnoticed and unheard, she called up the Universal and got into communication with Madame Duclos. When she returned it was by the same route. She did not forget her coffee nor give way under the great strain to which she had subjected herself till she reached her own apartment."

"Clever."

"And true, gentlemen; I will stake my reputation on it, unable as I am to explain every circumstance, and close up every gap. Have you any further questions to ask or shall I leave you to your deliberations?"

XXIX

A STRONG MAN

An hour later when the Chief Inspector rose to depart, it was with the understanding that until their way cleared and their duty in this matter had become inevitable, no word of this business should reach the press, or even pass beyond the three officials interested.

Strange to say, they were able to keep this compact, and days elapsed without any public recognition of the new factor which had entered into the consideration of this complicated crime.

Then a hint of what was seething in the official mind was allowed to carry its own shock to the person most interested. Mr. Roberts was summoned to an interview with Coroner Price. No reason was given for this act, but the time was set with an exactness which gave importance to a request which they all felt the director would not venture to disregard.

Nor did he. He came at the time appointed, and Coroner Price in welcoming him with becoming deference could not but notice the great change which had taken place in him since that night they stood together in the museum and saw the Indian make the trial with bow and arrow which located the point of delivery as that of the upper pedestal. In just what this change lay, the Coroner hardly knew, unless it was in the increased grayness of his hair. Mr. Roberts' face, handsome as it was, was not an expressive one. Slight emotions made no impression there; nor did he to-day present anything but a calm and dignified appearance. Yet he was changed; and anyone who had not seen him since that night must certainly observe it.

The Coroner, who was also a man of a somewhat stolid cut, proffered him a seat and at once opened fire.

"You will pardon me any inconvenience I may have put you to, Mr. Roberts, when I tell you that Coroner D---- of Greene County, is anxious to have a few words with you. He would have visited you at your home; but I induced him to see you here."

"Coroner D---- of Greene County!" Mr. Roberts was entirely surprised. "And what business can he have with me?"

"It is in regard to the suicide of Madame Antoinette Duclos, committed, as you know, a week since in the Catskills."

"Ah! an extraordinarily sad affair, and of considerable moment I should judge, from its seeming connection with the one previously occurring at our museum. The girls' mother, was she not? Grief evidently unseated her brain. But-" here he changed his position quietly but with evident effort:"-"in what manner am I supposed to be in a position to help the Coroner in his inquiry into this case? I was a witness, together with many others, of what happened after the accident which took place at the museum; but I know nothing of Madame Duclos or of her self-inflicted death, beyond what has appeared in the papers."

"The papers! An uncertain guide, Mr. Roberts. You may not believe it," Coroner Price remarked with a strange sort of smile, "but there are secrets known to this office, as well as to Police Headquarters, which never get into the most enterprising journals."

Was this meant to startle the director, and did it succeed in doing so?

It may have startled him, but if so, he made no betrayal of the fact. His manner continued to be perfectly natural and his voice under full control as he replied that it would be strange if in a case like this they should give out all the
extraneous facts and possible clues which might be gathered in by their detectives.

This was carrying the offense into the enemy's camp with a vengeance. But the Coroner was saved replying by Mr. Roberts remarking:

"But this is not an answer to my question. Why should the Coroner of Greene County want to see _me_?"

Coroner Price proffered him a cigar, during the lighting of which the former remarked:

"It's certainly very odd. You say that you didn't know Madame Duclos."

"No; how should I? She was a foreigner, was she not?"

"Yes; a Frenchwoman, both by birth and marriage. Her husband, a professor of languages, was located some sixteen years ago, in New Orleans."

"I never knew him. Indeed, I find it hard to understand why I should be expected to show any interest in him or his wife."

"Well, I will tell you. You may not have known the Madame; but it is very certain that she knew you."

"She?" This certainly unexpected blow seemed to make some impression. "Will you give me your reasons for such an assertion? Was the name Duclos a false one? Was her name like that of her daughter, Willetts? If so, allow me to assure you that I never heard of a Willetts any more than I have of a Duclos. That a woman of whatever name and nationality should desert her child fills me with horror. I cannot speak of her, dead though she be, with any equanimity. A mother and act as she did! She herself was to blame, and only she for what happened to that beautiful girl--so young--so sweet--so innocent. I have a weakness for youth. To me a girl of that type is sacred. Had I been blessed with such a child----But there, I am straying again from our point. What makes you say Madame Duclos knew me?"

Before replying, the Coroner rose, and taking a small package from his desk, opened it, and laid out before the astonished eyes of Mr. Roberts the freshly printed photograph of himself with which we are so well acquainted, and then the half-demolished one which for all its imperfections showed that it had been originally struck off from the same negative.

"Do you recognize this portrait of yourself as one taken by Fredericks some dozen years ago?"

"Certainly. But this other? This end and corner of what must have been my picture too, where was _it_ found?"

"Ah, that is what I have called you here to learn. This remnant of what you have just admitted to have been your photograph also was found in the very condition in which you see it now, in the wastebasket of the room where Madame Duclos lodged previous to her flight to the Catskills."

"This! with the face----"

"Just that! With the face riddled out of it by bullets! She shot six into it at intervals; waiting for the passing of an elevated train by her windows, in the hope that the bigger noise would drown the lesser."

"It is nothing," was Mr. Roberts' indignant comment, as he brushed the picture aside. "That was never my picture, or she wanted a target for her skill and didn't care what she took. That is all I have to say to you or to the Coroner of Greene County, on a matter in which I have no concern. I am sorry to disappoint both of you, but it is so."

He rose, and the Coroner did not seek to detain him. He merely observed, as the director turned to go:

"Have you heard the latest news about Mrs. Taylor?"

"No."

"She is improving rapidly. Soon she will be able to appear before the jury already chosen to inquire into the cause and manner of Miss Willetts' death."

"A fine woman!" came in a burst from the director's lips as he faced about for a good-bye nod. "I don't know when I have seen one I admired more."

And Coroner Price had nothing to say, he was stupefied.

But it was not so with Mr. Gryce, who entered immediately upon Mr. Roberts' departure.

"Not a jarring note," he remarked. Evidently he had heard the whole conversation. "I never for a moment imagined that he knew Madame Duclos. Any knowledge we gain of her will have to come from Mrs. Taylor."

"He's a strong man. We shall find it difficult to hold our own against him if we are brought to an actual struggle."

"Why did he run the forefinger of his right hand so continuously into his right-hand vest pocket?" was Mr. Gryce's sole comment.

By which it looks as if he had seen as well as heard.

"I didn't notice it. Is the District Attorney prepared to make the next move? Mine has failed."

"Not yet. The game is too hazardous. We should only make ourselves ridiculous in the eyes of the whole world if we should fail in an attack upon a man of such national importance. After the two inquests and a letter I hope to receive from Switzerland, we may be in a position to launch our first bomb. I don't anticipate the act with any
pleasure; the explosion will be something frightful."

"If half you think is true, the unexpected confronting of him with Mrs. Taylor should produce some result. That's what I reckon on now, if the business falls first to me."

"I reckon on nothing. Chance is going to take this thing out of our hands."

"Chance! I don't understand you."

"I don't understand myself; but this is a case which will never come into court."

"I differ with you. I almost saw confession in his face when he turned upon me at last with that extravagant expression of admiration for the woman you say he meant to kill."

"Why did his finger go so continuously to his vest pocket? When you answer that, I will give a name to what I just called _chance_."

XXX

THE CREEPING SHADOW

Mrs. Taylor suffered a relapse, and the inquest which had been held back in anticipation of her recovery was again delayed. This led to a like postponement of an inquiry into the death of Madame Duclos; and a consequent let-up in public interest which thus found itself, for the nonce, deprived of further food on which to batten.

Meanwhile, Mr. Gryce was not idle. Anxious to determine just how and where Madame Duclos' story fitted into the deeper and broader one of the museum crime, he made use of his fast waning strength to probe its mysteries and master such of its details as bore upon the serious investigation to which he was so unhappily committed. When he had done this,--when he had penetrated, as it were, into the very heart of the matter to the elimination of all doubt and the full establishment of his own theory, it was felt that the time had come for some sort of positive action on the part of those interested in the cause of justice.

This they decided should take the form of a personal interview between certain officials and Mr. Roberts himself. A lesser man would have been asked to meet the District Attorney in his office; but in a case of such moment where the honor of one so prominent in many ways was involved it was thought best for them to visit him in his own home. To do this without exciting his apprehension while still making sure of his presence required some management. Various plans were discussed with the result that a political exigency was brought into play. The District Attorney asked Mr. Roberts for an interview for the purpose of introducing to him a man whose influence could not fail to play an important part in his future candidacy.

He did not name this man; but we will name him. It was the Chief Inspector.

The appointment was made and the day set. It was the following Monday. On Tuesday, Coroner Price was to open his inquest.

Did Carleton Roberts see any connection between these two events?

Who can tell? The secrets of such a brain are not to be read lightly. If we possessed Sweetwater's interest, and were to follow in secret fashion every action of the director on the evening preceding this date, what conclusion should we draw in this regard? How would we characterize his anticipations, or measure in our own mind the possibilities of the future as felt by him?

He was very quiet. He ate his meal with seeming appetite. Then he took a look over his whole house. From the carefulness with which he noted everything, the changes which he had caused to be made in it were not without their interest for him. Not a young man's interest, but yet an interest as critical and acute as though he had expected it to be shared by one whose comfort he sought and in whose happiness he would fain take part.

This, to Sweetwater, had he our vision, would have been incomprehensible from any point of view; especially, had he seen what followed when the owner of all this luxury returned to his library.

There was a picture there; a small framed photograph which occupied the post of honor on his desk.

It showed a young and pretty face, untouched, as yet, by the cares or troubles of this world. He spent a minute or so in looking at it; then he slowly lifted it, and taking the picture from the frame, gave it another look, during which a smile almost derisive gathered slowly on his lips. Before this smile had altogether vanished, he had torn the picture in two and thrown the fragments into the fire he had kindled early in the evening with his own hands.

If he stopped to watch these fragments burn, it was from abstraction rather than from interest; for his step grew lighter as he left the fireplace. Whatever this young girl's face had meant to him in days gone by was now as completely dissipated as the little puff of smoke which had marked the end of her picture.

If he read the papers afterward it was mechanically. Night, and the one great planet sinking in the West, appeared to appeal to him much more strongly than his books or the more than usually stirring news of the day.

He must have stood an hour in his unlighted window, gazing out at the tumbling waves lapping the shore.

But of his thoughts, God wot, he gave no sign.

Later, he slept.

Slept! with his hand under his pillow! Slept, though there were others in the house awake!--or why this creeping
shadow of a man outlined upon the wall wherever the moon shone in, and disappearing from sight whenever the way led through darkness.

It came from above; no noise accompanied it. Where the great window opened upon the sea, lighting up the main staircase, it halted,—halted for several minutes; then passed stealthily down, a shadowy silhouette, descending now quickly, now slowly, as tread after tread is left behind and the great hall is reached.

Here there is no darkness. Open doors admit the light from many windows. A semi-obscurity is all, and through this the figure passes, but hesitatingly still, and with pause after pause, till a certain door is reached—a closed door—the only door which is closed in this part of the house.

Here it stands—stands with profile to the panels, one ear against the wood. One minute—two minutes—five minutes pass. Then a hand goes out and touches the knob. It yields; yields without a sound—and a small gap is seen between the door and its casing. This gap grows. Still no sound to disturb the tragic silence. Stop! What was that? A moan? Yes, from within. Another? Yes. Then all is quiet again. The dream has passed. Sleep has resumed its sway. The gap can safely be made wider. This is done, and the figure halting without, passes in.

XXXI

CONFRONTED

Late in the afternoon of the following day, the expected car entered Mr. Roberts' spacious grounds. It contained, besides the chauffeur, just two persons, the District Attorney and the Chief Inspector. But it was followed by another in which could be seen Mr. Gryce and a stenographer from the District Attorney's office.

The house was finished by this time, and to one approaching through the driveway presented a very attractive appearance. As the last turn was made, the sea burst upon the view—a somewhat tumultuous sea, for the wind was keen that day and whipped the waves into foam and froth from the horizon to the immediate shore-line. To add to the scene, a low black cloud with coppery edges hovered at the meeting of sea and sky, between which and themselves one taut sail could be seen trailing its boom in the water.

To one of them—to Mr. Gryce, in fact, upon whose age Fancy had begun to work, this battling craft presented an ominous appearance. It was doomed. The gale was too much for it. Did he see in this obvious fact a prophecy of what lay before the man upon whose privacy they were on the point of intruding?

The house was so arranged that to reach the main entrance it was necessary to pass a certain window. As they did so, the figure of Mr. Roberts could be seen in the room beyond moving about in an interested survey of its new furnishings and present comfortable arrangement. To these men bent on an errand as far as possible removed from interests of this kind, this evidence of Mr. Roberts' pleasure in the promise of future domesticity gave a painful shock, and raised in the minds of more than one of them a doubt—perhaps the first in days—whether a man so heavily weighted with a burden of unacknowledged guilt could show this pleasurable absorption in his new surroundings.

However, when they came to see him nearer, and marked the stiffening of his body and the slight toss-up of his head, as he noted the number and the exact character of his guests, their spirits fell again, for he was certainly a broken man, however much he might seek to disguise it. Yet there was something in this extraordinary man's personality—a force or a charm wholly dissociated it may be from worth or the sterling qualities which insure respect—which appealed to them in spite of their new-found prejudice, and prevented any dallying with his suspense or the use of any of the common methods usually employed in an encounter of this kind.

The Chief Inspector to whom the first say had been given faced the director squarely, as he saw how the hand which had just welcomed the District Attorney fell at his approach.

"You are surprised, Mr. Roberts, and rightly, to see me here not only in connection with the Prosecuting Attorney of the City of New York, but with a member of my own force. This, you will say, is no political delegation such as you have been led to expect. Nor is it, Mr. Roberts. But let us hope you will pardon this subterfuge when you learn that it was resorted to for the sole purpose of sparing you all unnecessary unpleasantness in an interview which can no longer be avoided or delayed."

"Let us sit."

It was his only answer.

When they had all complied, the District Attorney took the lead by saying:

"I am disposed to omit all preliminaries, Mr. Roberts. We have but one object in this visit and that is to clear up to your satisfaction, as well as to our own, certain difficulties of an unexpected nature which have met us in our investigation into the crime in which you, as a director of the museum in which it occurred, and ourselves as protectors of the public peace, are all vitally concerned."

"Granted," came in the most courteous manner from their involuntary host. "Yet I fail to understand why so many are needed for a purpose so laudable."

"Perhaps this will no longer surprise you, if you will allow me to draw your attention to this chart," was the
answer made to this by the District Attorney.

Here he took from a portfolio which he carried a square of paper which he proceeded to lay out on a table standing conveniently near.

Mr. Roberts threw a glance at it and straightened again.

"Explain yourself," said he. "I am quite at your service."

The District Attorney made, perhaps, one of the greatest efforts of his life.

"I see that you recognize this chart, Mr. Roberts. You know when it was made and why. But what you may not know is this: that in serving its original purpose, it has proved to be our guide in another of equal, if not greater, importance. For instance, it shows us quite plainly who of all the persons present at the time of first alarm were near enough to the Curator's office to be in the line of escape from the particularly secluded spot from which the arrow was delivered. Of these persons, only one fulfills all other necessary conditions with an exactness which excuses any special interest we may feel in him. It is he who is tabulated here as number 3."

It was said. Mr. Roberts was well acquainted with his own number. He did not have to follow with his eye the point of the District Attorney's finger to know upon whose name it had settled; and for a moment, surprise, shock,—the greatest which can befall a man,—struggled with countless other emotions in his usually impassive countenance. Then he regained his poise, and with a curiously sarcastic smile such as his lips had seldom shown, he coldly asked:

"And by what stretch of probability do you pick me out for this attack? There were other men and women in this court, some very near me if I remember rightly. In what are their characters superior, or their claims to respect greater, that you should thus single me out as the fool or knave who could not only commit so wild and despicable an act, but go so far in folly,—let alone knavery,—as to conceal it afterward?"

"No evidence has been found against the others you have named which could in any way connect them with this folly—or shall we say knavery, since you yourself have made use of the word. But hard as it is for me to say this, in a presence so highly esteemed, this is not true of you, Mr. Roberts, however high are our hopes that you will have such explanations ready as will relieve our minds from further doubts, and send us home rejoicing. Shall I be frank in stating the precise reasons which seem to justify our present presumption?"

The director bowed, the same curious smile giving an unnatural expression to his mouth.

"Let me begin then," the other continued, "by reading to you a list of questions made out at Headquarters, as a test by which suspicion might be conscientiously held or summarily dismissed. They are few in number," he added, as he unfolded a slip of paper taken from his vest pocket. "But they are very vital, Mr. Roberts. Here is the first:

"Whose hand carried the bow from cellar to gallery?"

The director remained silent; but the oppression of that silence was difficult for them all to endure.

"This the second:

"Was it the same that carried the arrow from one gallery to another?"

Still no word; but Mr. Gryce, who was watching Mr. Roberts' every move without apparently looking up from the knob of his own cane, turned resolutely aside; the strain was too great. How long could such superhuman composure endure? And which word of all that were to come would break it?

Meanwhile, the District Attorney was reading the third question.

"Is it possible for an arrow, shot through the loophole made by the curving in of the vase, to reach the mark set for it by Mr. Travis' testimony?"

"That question was answered when Mr. La Fleche made his experiments from behind the two pedestals. It could not have been done from the one behind which Mr. Travis crouched, but was entirely possible from the rear of the other."

With a wave of his hand, Mr. Roberts dismissed this, and the District Attorney proceeded.

"Which of the men and women known to be in the museum when this arrow was delivered has enough knowledge of archery to string a bow? A mark can be reached by chance, but only an accustomed hand can string a bow as unyielding as this one."

"I will pause there, Mr. Roberts. You may judge by our presence here to whose hand and to whose skill we have felt forced to ascribe this wanton shooting of a young and lovely girl. We wish to be undeceived, and stand ready to listen to anything you may have to say in contradiction of these conclusions. That is, if you wish to speak. You know that you will be well within your rights to remain silent. Likewise that if you decide to speak, it will be our painful duty to make record of your words for any use our duty may hereafter suggest."

"I will speak." The words came with difficulty,—but they came. "Ask what you will. Satisfy my curiosity, as well as your own."

"First then, the bow. It was brought up from the cellar a fortnight or more before it was used, and placed on end in the Curator's office, where it was seen more than once by the woman who wipes up the floors. The person who did this cast a shadow on the cellar wall,—that shadow was seen. Need I say more? A man's shadow is himself--
sometimes."

"I brought up the bow; but I do not see how that implicates me in the use which was afterward made of it. My reasons for bringing it up were innocent enough----"

He stopped--not even knowing that he stopped. His eyes had been drawn to a small article which the District Attorney had dropped from his hand onto the table. It looked like an end of black tape; but whether it was this or something quite different, it held the gaze of the man who was speaking, so completely that he forgot to go on.

The hush which followed paled the cheeks of more than one man there. To release the tension, the District Attorney resumed his argument, observing quietly, and as if no interruption had occurred:

"As to the arrow and its means of secret transfer from one side of the building to the other in the face of a large crowd, let me direct your attention to this little strip of folded silk. You have seen it before. Surely, I am quite justified in asking whether indeed you have not handled it both before and after the lamentable occurrence we are discussing?"

"I see it for the first time," came from lips so stiff that the words were with difficulty articulated. "What is its purpose?" he asked after a short pause.

"I hardly think it necessary to tell you," came in chilling response from the now thoroughly disenchanted official. "It looks like a loop, and notwithstanding your assertion that you see it now for the first time, we have ample evidence that it was once attached to the coat you wore on that fatal day and later carefully severed from it and dropped on the museum floor."

The District Attorney waited, they all waited with eyes on the subject of this attack, for some token of shame or indignation at this scarcely veiled insinuation. But beyond a certain stillness of expression, still further masking a countenance naturally cold and irresponsible, no hint was given that any effect had been produced upon him by these words. The coal before it falls apart into ash holds itself intact though its heart of flame has departed; so he--or such was Mr. Gryce's thought as he waited for the District Attorney's next move.

It was of a sort which recalls that soul-harrowing legend of the man hung up in an iron cage above a yawning precipice, from under whose madly shifting feet one plank after another is withdrawn from the cage's bottom, till no spot is left for him to stand on; and he falls.

"I hear that you are an expert with the bow and arrow, Mr. Roberts, or rather were at an earlier stage of your career. You have even taken a prize for the same from an Alpine Club."

Ah! that told. It was such an unexpected blow; and it showed so much knowledge. But the man who thus beheld his own youth brought up in accusation against him quickly recovered; and with an entire change of demeanor, faced them all and spoke up at last quickly and defiantly:

"Gentlemen, I have shown patience up till now, because I saw that you had something on your minds which it might be better for you and possibly for me to be rid of. This affair of Miss Willett's death is, as all must acknowledge, baffling enough to strain even to the point of folly any effort made to explain it. I had sympathy with your difficulties, and have still enough of that sympathy left, not to express too much indignation at what you are pleased to call your suspicions. I will merely halt for the moment your attempts in my direction, by asking, what have you or anybody else ever seen in me to think I would practise my old-time skill on a young and beautiful stranger enjoying herself in a place so dear to my heart as the museum of which I have been a director now these many years? Am I a madman, or a destroyer of youth? I love the young. This inhuman death of one so fair and innocent has whitened my locks and seared my very heart-strings. I shall never get over it; and whatever evidence you may have or think you have, of my having handled bow and arrow in that museum gallery, it must fall before the fact of my natural incapability to do the thing with which you have charged me. No act possible to man is more in contradiction to my instincts, than the wanton or even casual killing of a young girl."

"I believe you."

It was the Inspector who spoke, and the emphasis which he gave to his words lifted the director's head again into its old self-reliant poise. But the silence which followed was so weighted with possibilities of something yet to be said by this portentous holder of secrets, that it caused the nobly lifted head slowly to droop again and the lips which had opened impulsively to close.

Were the words coming--the words which might at a stroke pull down the whole fabric of his life, past, present and to come?

In his excited state of mind he seemed already to hear them. Doom was in their sound, and the world, once so bright, was growing dark about him--dark!

Yet how could these men know? And if they did why did they not speak? And they did not; they did not. There was silence in the air, not words; and life for him was taking on once more its ancient colors, when sharp and merry through the heavy quiet there rang out the five clear calls of a cuckoo clock from some near-by room. One, two, three, four, five! Jolly reminder of old days! But to the men who listened, the voice of doom spoke in its gladsome
peal, whether the ears which caught it were those of accuser or accused. Old days were not the days to be rejoiced in at a moment so perilous to the one and so painful to the others.

With the cessation of the last shrill cry, the Inspector repeated the phrase:

"I believe you, Mr. Roberts. But how about the woman who was troubling you with demands you had no wish to grant? Miss Willetts, as you choose to call her, though you must know that her name is Duclos, was not the only person in the line of the arrow shot on that day from one gallery to the other. Perhaps this weapon of destruction was meant for one it failed to reach. Perhaps--but I have gone far enough. I should not have gone so far if it had not been my wish to avoid any misunderstanding with one of such undoubted claims to consideration as yourself. If you have explanations to offer--if you can in any way relieve our minds from the responsibilities which are weighing upon us, pray believe in our honest desire to have you do so. There may be something back of appearances which has escaped our penetration; but it will have to be something startlingly clear, for we know facts in your life which are not open to the world at large, I may even say to your most intimate friends."

"As, for instance?"

"That Mrs. Taylor is no stranger to you, even if Mademoiselle Duclos was. We have evidence you will find it hard to dispute that you knew and--liked each other, fifteen years or so ago."

"Evidence?"

"Incontrovertible, Mr. Roberts."

"Attested to by her? I do not believe it. I never shall believe it, and I deny the charge. The ravings of a sick woman,--if it is such you have listened to--"

"I advise you to stop there, Mr. Roberts," interjected the District Attorney. "Mrs. Taylor has said nothing. Neither has Madame Duclos. What the former may say under oath I do not know. We shall both have an opportunity to hear to-morrow, when Coroner Price opens his inquest. She is in sufficiently good health now, I believe, to give her testimony. Pray, say nothing." Mr. Roberts had started to his feet. "Do nothing. You will be one of the witnesses called--"

There he stopped, meeting with steady gaze the wild eyes of the man who was staring at him, staring at them all in an effort to hold them back, while his finger crept stealthily and ever more stealthily toward his right-hand vest-pocket.

"You would dare," he shouted, then suddenly dropped his hand and broke into a low, inarticulate murmur, harrowing and dreadful to hear. To some it sounded like a presage to absolute confession, but presently this murmur took on a distinctness, and they heard him say:

"I should be glad to have five minutes' talk with Mrs. Taylor before that time. In your presence, gentlemen, or in anybody's presence, I do not care whose."

Did he know--had he felt whose step was in the hall, whose form was at the door? If he did, then the agitation which in another moment shook his self-possession into ashes was that of hope realized, not of fear surprised. Ermentrude Taylor entered the room and at the sight of her he rose and his arms went out; then he sank back weak and stricken into his chair, gazing as if he could never have his fill at her noble countenance luminous with a boundless pity if not with the tenderness of an unforgotten love.

When she was near enough to speak without effort and had thanked the gentlemen who had made way for her with every evidence of respect, she addressed him in quite a natural tone but with strange depths of feeling in her voice:

"What is it you want to say to me? As I stood at the door, I heard you tell these gentlemen that you would like to have a few minutes' talk with me. I was glad to hear that; and I am ready to listen to--anything--"

The pause she made before uttering the last word caused it to ring with double force when it fell. All heads drooped at the sound and the lines came out on Mr. Gryce's face till he looked his eighty-five years and more. But what Carleton Roberts had to say at this critical moment of his double life was not at all what they expected to hear.

Rising, for her eyes seemed to draw him to his feet, he cried in the indescribable tone of suppressed feeling:

"Shadows are falling upon me. My interview with these gentlemen may end in a way I cannot now foresee. In my uncertainty as to how and when we may meet again, I should like to make you such amends as opportunity allows me. Ermentrude, will you marry me--now--to-night, before leaving this house?"

A low cry escaped her. She was no more prepared for this astounding offer than were these others. "Carleton!" came in a groan from her lips. "Carleton! Carleton!" the word rising in intensity as thought followed thought and her spirits ran the full gamut of what this proposal on his part meant in past, present and future. Then she fell silent and they saw the great soul of the woman illumine a countenance always noble, with the light of a purpose altogether lofty. When she spoke it was to say:

"I recognize your kindness and the impulse which led to this offer. But I do not wish to add so much as a feather's weight to your difficulties. Let matters remain as they are till after--"
He took a quick step toward her.

"Not if my heart is full of regret?" he cried. "Not if I recognize in you now the one influence left in this world which can help me bear the burden of my own past and the threatening collapse of my whole future?"

"No," she replied, with an access of emotion of so elevated a type it added to rather than detracted from her dignity. "It is too much or it is not enough."

His head drooped and he fell back, throwing a glance to right and left at the two officials who had drawn up on either side of him. It was an expressive glance; it was as if he said, "You see! she knows as well as you for whom the arrow was intended--yet she is kind."

But in an instant later he was before her again, with an aspect so changed that they all marveled.

"I had hoped," he began, then stopped. Passion had supplanted duty in his disturbed mind; a passion so great it swept everything before it and he stood bare to the soul before the woman he had wronged and under the eyes of these men who knew it. "Life is over for us two," said he, "whether your presence here is a trap in which I have been caught and from which it is hopeless for me to extricate myself; or whether it is by chance or an act of Providence that we should meet again with eager ears listening and eager eyes watching for such tokens of guilt as will make their own course clear, true it is that they have got what they sought; and whatever the result, nothing of real comfort or honor is left for either you or me. Our lives have gone down in shipwreck; but before we yield utterly to our fate, will you not grant me my prayer if I precede it by an appeal for forgiveness not only for old wrongs but for my latest and gravest one? Ermentrude, I entreat."

Ah, then, they were witness to the fascination of the man, hidden heretofore, but now visible even to the schooled spectators of this tragedy of human souls. The tone permeated with pathos and charm, the look, the attitude from which all formality had fled and only the natural grace remained, all were of the sort which sways without virtue and rouses in both weak and strong an answering chord of sympathy.

The woman in whom it probably awakened a thousand memories trembled under it. She drew back, but her whole countenance had softened, revealing whatever of native charm she also possessed. Would she heed his prayer? If she did not, they could well be silent. If she did----

But the woman gave no sign of yielding.

"Cease, Carleton," came in stern reply--stern for all the approach to concession in her manner. "If your life and my life are both over, let us talk of other things than marriage. When one faces death, whether of body or spirit, one clings to higher hopes than those of earth or its remaining interests. If my forgiveness will help you to this end, you have it. I have had but one aim in life since we parted, and that was to see your higher self triumph over the material one. If that hour has come or is coming, my life needs no other consolation. In having that, I possess all."

The man who listened--the men who listened--stood for a moment in awe of the nobility with which she thus expressed herself. Then the only person present whom she seemed to see burst forth with a low cry, saying:

"You shall not be disappointed. I----"

But there she hushed him. "No," said she. And he seemed to understand and was silent.

What did this mean?

The District Attorney betrayed his doubt; the Chief his, each in a characteristic way. The former frowned, the latter tapped his breast absently with his forefinger while looking askance at Mr. Gryce, who in his turn took up some little object from the desk beside which he was standing and to it confided whatever surprise he felt at this proof of some uncommunicated secret shared by these two, of which he had not yet become possessed. Then he again looked up and the glances of the three men met. Should they attempt to sound this new mystery of mutual understanding to which as yet they had received no clue? No, the inquest would do that. Neither this man nor this woman could stand a close examination. He would weaken from despair, she from the candor of her soul. They would wait. But ah, the tragedy of it! Even these men hardened by years of contact with every species of human suffering and crime were openly moved. If they needed an excuse, surely they could find it in the superior abilities and attainment of the man upon whom justice was about to wreak its vengeance. And yet, what more despicable crime had they ever encountered in the long line of their duty. The youth and innocence of the real victim and the worth of the intended one only added to its wickedness and shame. It was this thought which again steeled their hearts.

Meantime the two upon whom they now redirected their attention had attempted no further speech and made no further move. She had said No to something he was willing to concede, and he had accepted that no as final. Had this brought him any relief? Possibly. And she? Had it had a like effect on her? Hardly. Though her aspect was one of calm resignation, her physical powers were perceptibly failing. This in itself was alarming, and determined them not to subject her any longer to an interview which might rob her of all strength for the morrow. Accordingly, the District Attorney, addressing Mr. Roberts, suggestively remarked:

"Mrs. Taylor is showing fatigue. Would it not be better for you to say at once while she is yet in a condition to
remain with us, whether you prefer to make a public statement of your case or leave it to unfold itself in the ordinary manner through the two impending inquests and the busy pen of the reporter?"

"First, am I under arrest? Am I to leave this house--?"

"Not to-night. An officer will remain here with you. To-morrow--after the inquest, perhaps."

"I will make a statement. I will make it now. I wish to be left in peace to-night, to think and to regret." Then turning to her, "Ermentrude, a woman who has served me and my family for twenty-five years is at this very moment in the rear of the house. Go to her and let her care for you. I have business here,--business of which I am sure you approve."

"Yes, Carleton. And remember that I shall be put upon my oath to-morrow. The questions I am asked I must answer--and truthfully," she added, with a look as full of anguish as inquiry.

"I shall be truthful myself," he assured her, and again their eyes met.

After a while she gave a stumble backward, which Mr. Gryce perceiving, held out his arm and assisted her from the room.

But once in the hall he felt the clinch of her fingers digging into his arm.

"Is there no hope?" she whispered. "Must I live----"

"Yes," he interrupted kindly, but with the authority given him by his relations to this case. "You have won his heart at last, and he speaks truly when he says that to you and to you alone can he look for comfort, wherever the action of the law may leave him."

She shivered; then glowed again with renewed fire.

"Thank you," she said; and they passed on.

XXXII

"WHY IS THAT HERE?"

They waited while he wrote. A sinister calm quite unlike that which the victim of his ambition had shown under the stress of equal suffering if not equal guilt had subdued his expression to one of unmoved gloom, never to be broken again.

As word after word flowed from the point of his pen upon the paper spread out before him, the two officials sitting aside in the shadow watched for the flicker of an eyelash, or a trembling of the fingers so busy over their task. But no such sign of weakening did they see. Once only did he pause to look away--was it into the past or into futurity?--with a steady, self-forgetful gaze which seemed to make a man of him again. Then he went on with his task with the grimness of one who takes his last step into ignominy.

We will follow his words as he writes, leaving them for the others to read on their completion.

"I, Carleton Roberts, in face of an inquiry which is about to be held on the death of her who called herself Angeline Willetts, but whose real name is as I have since been told Angeline Duclos, wish to make this statement in connection with the same.

"It was at my hand she died. I strung the bow and let fly the arrow which killed this unfortunate child. Not with the intention of finding my mark in her innocent bosom. She simply got in the way of the woman for whom it was intended--if I really was governed by intent, of which I here declare before God I am by no means sure.

"The child was a stranger to me, but the woman in whose stead she inadvertently perished I had known long and well. My wrongs to her had been great, but she had kept silence during my whole married life and in my blind confidence in the exemption this seemed to afford me, I put no curb upon my ambition which had already carried me far beyond my deserts. Those who read these lines may know how majestic were my hopes, how imminent the honor, to attain which I have employed my best energies for years. Life was bright, the future dazzling. Though I had neither wife nor child, the promise of activity on the lines which appeal to every man of political instinct gave me all I seemed to need in the way of compensation. I was happy, arrogantly so, perhaps, when without warning the woman I had not seen in years, who,--if I thought of her at all, I honestly believed to be dead--wrote me a letter recalling her claims and proposing a speedy interview, with a view to their immediate settlement. Though couched in courteous terms, the whole letter was instinct with a confidence which staggered me. She meant to reenter my life, and if I knew her, openly. Nothing short of bearing my name and being introduced to the world as my wife would satisfy her; and this not only threatened a scandal destructive of my hopes, but involved the breaking of a fresh matrimonial engagement into which I had lately entered with more ardor I fear than judgment. What was I to do? Let her have her way--this woman I had not seen in fifteen years,--who if at the age of twenty had seemed to my enthusiastic youth little short of a poet's dream, must be far short of any such perfection now? I rebelled at the very thought. Yet to deny her meant the possible facing of consequences such as the strongest may well shrink from. And the time for choice was short. She had limited her patience to a fortnight, and one day of that fortnight had already passed.

"I have in my arrogant manhood sometimes credited myself with the possession of a mind of more or less
superiority; but I have never deceived myself as to the meretricious quality of the goodness with which many have thoughtlessly endowed me. I have always known it was not even up to that of men whose standards fall far short of the highest integrity. But never, till that hour came, had I realized to what depths of evil my nature could sink under a disappointment threatening the fulfillment of my ambitious projects. Had there been any prospect of escape from the impending scandal by means usually employed by men in my position, I might have given my thoughts less rein and been saved at least from crime. But these were not available in my case. She was not a woman who could be bought. She was not even one I could cajole. Death only would rid me of her; kindly death which does not come at call. This is as far as my thoughts went at first. I was a gentleman and had some of a gentleman's feelings. But when my sleep began to be disturbed by dreams, and this was very soon, I could not hide from myself toward what fatal goal my thoughts were tending. To be freed from her! To be freed from her! dinned itself in my ears, sleeping or waking, at home or abroad. But I saw no plain road to this freedom, for our paths never crossed and my honor as well as safety demanded that the coveted result should be without any possible danger to myself. Cold, heartless villain! you say. Well, so I was; no colder nor more heartless villain lives to-day than I was between the inception of my purpose and its diabolical fulfillment in the manner publicly known.

"So true is this that, as time went on, my ideas cleared and the plan for which I was seeking unfolded itself before me from the day I came upon a discarded bow lying open to view in the museum cellar. The dreams of which I have spoken had prepared me for this sudden knowledge. The woman who blocked my way and against whom I meditated this crime was connected in my mind with Alpine scenery and Alpine events. It was at Lucerne I had first met her, young and fresh, but giving no promise of the woman she has since become; and in the visions which came and went before my eyes, it was not herself I saw so much as the surroundings of those days, and the feats of prowess by which I had hoped to win her approbation. Among these was the shooting at a small target with a bow and arrow. I became very proficient in this line. I shot as by instinct. I could never tell whether I really took aim or not, but the arrow infallibly hit the mark. In my dreams I always saw it flying, and when this bow came to hand a thought of what the two might accomplish came with it. Yet even then I had no real idea of putting into practice this fancy of a distempered brain. I brought the bow up from the cellar and hid it unstrung in the Curator's closet, more from idle impulse I fondly thought, than from any definite purpose. Another day I saw the Curator's keys lying on his desk and took them to open a passage to the upper floor. But for all that, I felt sure that I would never use the bow even after I had thrust it near to hand behind the tapestry masking the secret entrance to this passage. One dreams of such things but they do not perpetrate them. I might approach the deed, I might even make every preparation for its accomplishment, but that did not mean that the day would ever come when I should actually loose an arrow from this bow against a human breast. More than once I laughed at the mere idea.

"But the devil knew me better than I knew myself. Impelled by these same instincts, I answered the letter sent me with the assurance that I would surely see her, but I did not name any day, intuitively knowing that what I dreamed of doing but certainly should not do required a certain set of circumstances not easily to be met with. Instead, I bade her show herself in the second section of the southern gallery, every Tuesday and Friday at the exact hour of noon. If at the moment the two hands of the clock came together, she saw me on the lower step of the main staircase, she was to know that I was free to talk and would soon join her. If she did not see me there, she was to return home and come another day. She answered that she would come but once, and set the day. This was startling to my pride, but in a way it brought me a sense of relief. To wait till all was propitious might mean continual delays. The very fact of my uncertainty as to whether or not I should have the courage of my wishes at the critical moment made an indefinite prolongation of my present condition undesirable. Better one straight risk and be done with it.

"I was to wait two weeks. Why she exacted so long and seemingly unnecessary a delay, I do not know. Before I saw her, I thought it was from a sheer desire to make me suffer; now I know it was not for that. However, it did make me suffer, from the alternate weakening and strengthening of my resolve. When the day came, the most trivial of circumstances would have deterred me from what still had the nature of a dream to me. Unhappily, everything worked for its fulfillment. There had never been fewer persons in the building at the noon hour; nor had there been a time during the past two weeks when the Curator was more completely occupied in a spot quite remote from his office. As I tried the door leading up the little winding staircase to the one back of the tapestry where the bow lay, and found it, just as I had left it, unlocked, I had a sense for the first time that the courage concerning which I had had so many doubts would hold. At that moment I was a murderer in heart and purpose, whatever I was after or have been since. As I recognized this fact, I felt my face go pale and my limbs shake from sheer horror of myself. But this weakness was short-lived and I felt my blood flowing evenly again when having slipped into my place behind the upper pedestal I peered through my peep-hole in a search for her figure in the spot where I had hidden her await me.

"She was not there, but then it was not quite twelve, though the noon hour was so near she must be somewhere in the gallery and liable at any minute to cross my line of vision.

"It was fifteen years, as I have already said, since I had seen her; and I had no other picture of her in my mind
than the appearance she had made as a girl, coarsened by time and disappointment. Why I should have looked for just this sort of change in her, God knows, but I did expect it and probably would not have recognized her if I had passed her in the court. But I was not worrying about any mistake I might make of this kind. All I seemed to fear was that at the critical moment some one would pass between us on my side of the gallery. I never thought of anyone passing in front of her.

"I had picked out Section II as the place where she was to show herself, because it was in a direct line with the course an arrow would take from a sight behind the vase. I had bade her to look for me in the court, and that would bring her forward to the balustrade in front. A knot of scarlet ribbon at her breast was to distinguish her. But the spot I had thus chosen for her, and the spot I had chosen for myself had this disadvantage; that while I could see straight to my mark from the peep-hole I have mentioned, I could see nothing to right or left of that one line of vision. Why I did not realize the hazard involved in this fact I do not know. Enough that my whole thought was centered on the lookout I was keeping and it was with a shock of surprise I suddenly saw the whole scene blotted from my view by the passing by of some one on my own side of the gallery. This must have been the Englishman who found his vantage-point from behind the other pedestal. He went by quickly, and as the opening cleared once more, I beheld the woman for whom I was waiting appear in the spot selected. For an instant I was dazzled. I had not expected to see so noble a figure; and in that instant a cloud came before my eyes, my resolution failed,—I was almost saved—she was almost saved—when instinct got the better of my judgment, and the arrow flew just as that young creature bounded forward in her delight at seeing her steamer admirer watching her from my side of the court.

"The shock of thus beholding a perfect stranger fall under my hand benumbed me, but only for an instant. In the two weeks of intolerable waiting through which I had just passed, I had so forcibly impressed upon my consciousness the exact course I was to pursue from the instant the arrow left the bow that I went about the same automatically. Pulling out the edge of the tapestry, I slipped behind it, dropping my bow in the doorway left open for my passage. This caused me no thought and awakened no fears. But what took all the nerve I possessed, and gave me in one awful moment a foretaste of the terror and despair awaiting me in days to come, was the opening of the second door—the one leading into the Curator’s office.

"What might I not be forced to encounter when the knob to this was turned! Some strolling guest—Correy the attendant—even the guard who was never where he was needed and always where he was not! For anyone to be there of sufficient intelligence to note my face and the place from which I came meant the end of all things to me. It was not necessary for this imaginary person to be in the room. To be within sight of it was enough. But this fear—this horror of impending retribution—did not make me hesitate or delay my advance a single instant. Everything depended upon my being one of the crowd when the first alarm was raised. So with the daring of one who in escaping a present danger hurls himself knowingly into another equally perilous, I pushed open the door and entered the office.

"It was empty! Fortune had favored me thus far. Nor was there anyone in the court beyond, near enough or interested enough to note my presence or observe any effort I might make at immediate departure. With the hope riding high within my breast that I should yet reach the street before my crime was discovered, I made for the nearest exit. But I was not destined to reach it. When I was only some half a dozen paces from the great door, Correy’s cry rang loudly through the building, with the result that all egress was shut off, and I was left, with no other aid than my own assurance, to face my hideous deed with all its appalling consequences.

"How it served me, you have seen. Steeled by a sense of my own danger, I was able to confront the woman whom I had so deeply wronged,—whom I had even endeavored to kill,—and ply her with those questions upon whose answers depended not only my honor, but my very life.

"My cold-blooded absorption in my own security, and her almost superhuman devotedness, must have given the Powers cognizant of mortal lives a new lesson in human nature. Never has a greater contrast been shown between self-seeking man and self-forgetful woman. But deeply as I was impressed by the steadfastness and magnanimity of her spirit, nay by the woman herself, I have been less oppressed by the great debt I owed her than by the thought, growing more intolerable every day, that in my frenzied struggle against fate I had cut short the existence of a young and lovely girl whose right to live was beyond all comparison superior to my own.

"But now, as the shadows fall thickly about me and the last page of my dishonorable existence awaits to be turned, my mortal wound is this: that I must leave to loneliness and unspeakable grief the great-souled woman who has seen into the heart of my crime and yet has forgiven me. All else of anguish or dread is swallowed up in this one over-mastering sorrow. To her my heart’s thanks are here given; to her my last word is due. May she find in it all that her soul calls for in this hour of supreme disaster: repentance equal to my sin, and a recognition of her worth, which, late as it is for her comfort, may lead to her acceptance of the consolation yet to be meted out to her from eternal sources."

That was all. The pen dropped from his hand and he sat inert, almost pulseless, in the desolation of a despair
known only to those who, at a blow, have sunk from the height of public applause into the depths of irretrievable ignominy.

The District Attorney, who was a man of more feeling than was usually supposed, contemplated him in compassionate silence for a moment, then gently--very gently for him--leaned forward and drew from under the unresisting hands the scattered sheets which lay in disorder before him, and passed them on to his stenographer.

"Read," said he; but immediately changed his mind and took them back. "I will read them myself. Mr. Roberts, I must ask you to listen. It is right for you to know exactly what you have written before you affix your signature to it."

Mr. Roberts bowed mechanically, but he looked very weary.

The District Attorney began to read. It is a matter of doubt whether Mr. Roberts so much as heard him. Yet the reading went on, and when the last word was reached, the District Attorney, after a pause during which his eye had consulted that of the Chief Inspector, remarked in a kindly tone and yet with an emphasis impossible to disregard:

"I see that you have made no mention of Madame Duclos in this relation of the cause and manner of her young daughter's death. Is it possible that you are ignorant of the part she played in your affairs or the reasons she had for the suicide with which she terminated her life?"

"I know nothing of the woman but that she was the mother of the girl who----" he hesitated, then added with a gesture of despair, "fell under my hand."

The District Attorney said nothing in reply, he simply waited. But no denial or further admission came.

"She was a friend of Mrs. Taylor," suggested the Chief Inspector as the silence grew somewhat oppressive. "An old friend; a friend of her early days; do you not remember?"

"I do not."

His tormentors went no further. Why harass him for an item of knowledge which the morrow would certainly bring to light. Instead, they hurried through the remaining formalities, adding to the reading already made a capitulation of such answers as he had given to their questions, and witnessing, while he signed both papers.

This done, he was left for a moment in peace, while the two officials drew aside into the embrasure of the window for a momentary conference.

He seemed to notice the hush, for he roused from the torpor into which he was again about to sink, and glanced cautiously about him. The stenographer was busy with his papers, and the other two stood with their backs to him. If help was to come it must come now. This he realized, with a sudden graying of his face which took from it the last vestige of that youthfulness which had been its distinguishing feature; and the finger which had fumbled from time to time in his vest-pocket stole thither once more, bringing forth a little vial which in another moment he raised to his lips.

Was there no one to see? No one to stop him?

No, the stenographer was closing up his bag; and the two officials deep in conversation. He could drain the last drop unseen.

But the sound of the little vial crashing upon the hearthstone whither he had flung it broke the quiet and startled the District Attorney forward in a doubt bordering upon terror.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing to the fragments that had just missed the ash heap.

"It contained oblivion," was the answer given him in steady tones. "Do you wonder that I sought it? Nothing can save me. I have two minutes before me. I would dedicate them to _her_."

His head fell forward on his hands. The clock on the mantel struck. Could it be that when the second hand had circled its small disc twice--

This was the thought of the District Attorney, but not of the Chief Inspector. He had advanced to the desk where Mr. Roberts was still sitting, and remarked with a gravity exceeding any he had hitherto shown:

"Mr. Roberts, I have a great disappointment for you. This little vial of yours which held poison yesterday contained nothing but a few drops of harmless liquid to-day. The change was made in the night, by one suspicious of your intention. You will have to face the full consequences of your crime."

Carleton Roberts' arms collapsed and his face fell forward upon them, and they heard a groan. Then in the short silence which followed, another and a very different sound broke upon their ears. Seven clear calls from the cuckoo-clock rang out from the room beyond, followed by a woman's smothered cry.

It was the one ironic touch the situation had lacked. It pierced the heart of Carleton Roberts and started him in anguish to his feet.

"O God!" he cried, "that I should have let that thing of evil shriek out the wicked hours from day to day, only to torment her now with old remembrances! Why did I not crush it to atoms long ago? Why did I leave it hanging on my wall----"

With a dash he was in the hall. In another instant he was at the door of his bedroom, followed by the two
officials crowding closely up behind him.

Would they find her there? Yes; where else should she be, she whom this call from the past might almost draw from the grave! She was there, but not in the spot where they had expected to see her, nor in that state of collapse of which her former weakness had given promise. Apart from Mr. Gryce, with her form drawn up to its full height she stood, with her finger pointing not at the cuckoo-clock as would seem most natural, but at a small newspaper print of the dead girl's face pinned up on another wall.

"Why is that here?" she cried in a passionate inquiry which ignored every other presence than that of him who must heed and answer her. "Carleton, Carleton, why have you pinned that young girl's face up opposite your bed where you can see it on waking, where it can look at you and you at it--Or----" here checked by a sudden thought she broke off, and her tone changed to one of doubt, "perhaps you did not put it there yourself? Perhaps its presence on your wall is a trick of the police to startle you into betrayal. Was it? Was it?"

"No, Ermentrude." The words came slowly but firmly. "I put it there myself. I thought it would haunt me less than if left to my imagination."

Then in a low tone which perhaps reached no other ears than hers:

"I do not know what it does to me; or what I see in it. Something besides youth and beauty. Something-----"

"Hush!" She had him by the arm. "Forget it; these men are listening-----"

But with a convulsive movement, he broke from her hold, and in so doing his eyes fell on a mirror confronting him from the opposite side of the room. Two faces were visible in it, his own and that of his young victim pictured in the print hanging on the wall behind him. They seemed alive. Both of them seemed alive, and as he saw them thus in conjunction, the sweet, pure countenance of the child he had instinctively mourned, peering at him over his guilty shoulder--the sweat started on his forehead and he uttered a great cry. Then he stood still, swaying from side to side, the eyes starting from his head in a horror transcending all that had gone before.

"Take him away!" she cried. "Out of the room! Let him remain anywhere but here. I pray you; I entreat."

But he was not to be moved.

"Ermentrude," he whispered; "they say her name was Duclos. She gave her name as Willetts. What _was_ her name? You know the truth and can tell me."

XXXIII

AGAIN THE CUCKOO-CLOCK

Then to the wonder and admiration of all, this extraordinary woman showed her full strength and the inexhaustible power she possessed over her own emotions. With a smile piteous in its triumph over a suffering the depths of which they were just beginning to sound, she held his gaze in hers and quietly said:

"You have driven me to the wall, Carleton. If I answer, nothing remains to us of hope or honor; nothing upon which to stay our souls but a consciousness of truth. Shall we let all go and meet our fate as people should who stand on a desolate shore and see the whole world roll away from before them?"

"What was her name?"

At his look, at this repetition of his question, she straightened up, and addressed herself to Mr. Gryce.

"You were astonished and regarded me curiously when at the sound of that foolish little clock I entered this room. That little clock means everything to me, gentlemen." Here she surveyed them one after the other with her proud and candid eye. "It is the one witness I have--is it not, Carleton?" she asked, turning quickly upon him. "You have not failed me in this?"

He shook his head.

"A witness to what I am still ready to ignore, if such is your will, Carleton."

Terror! terror far beyond anything they had seen in him yet, paled his cheek and made his face almost unrecognizable; but he could still speak, and in the murmur he let fall she heard no word of protest.

"May I ask one of you to take down that clock?"

In a few minutes it lay on the table to which she had pointed. Mr. Gryce who had at that moment in his pocket a copy of the inscription pasted on its back, expected her to turn it over and show them the token of Mr. Roberts' and her united initials.

But it was not this she had in mind. Though she took up the clock, she did not turn it round, only looked at it steadily, her trembling lips and a tear--the first they had seen--testifying to the rush of old memories which this simple little object brought back to her long suffering heart. Then she laid it down again and seemed to hesitate.

"I want to get at the works inside," she appealed to them with a helpless accent. "Can you tear off the back? That would be the quickest way. But no, I know a quicker," and lifting the clock again she turned it upside down and shook it.

They heard--what did they hear? No one could say, but when she again reversed it, there fell out upon the table and rolled to the floor a small gold circlet. Lifting it, Mr. Gryce held it out to her. Taking it, she carried it over to the
District Attorney and placed it in his hand.

"Read the inscription inside."

He did so, and looking quickly up, said:

"This is a wedding ring! Yours! You believe yourself to have been married to him."

"I _was_ married to him in Switzerland. The marriage was legal; he knows it, he acknowledges it, or why should he keep this ring. I have endured seeing him put another woman in my place. I have kept silence for years; but when he asks the right name of the child shot down in the museum, and asks it in a way which compels answer, then I must make known my rightful claims. For that child was not only mine, but _his_: born after he left me, and reared without his knowledge, first in this country and then in France."

And breaking down now utterly, she fell on her knees sobbing out her soul at the feet of him from whose honor she had torn the last poor, pitiful shred.

As for him, he said nothing; even his lips refused the smallest cry. Only his hand which had hung at his side went to his heart; and thus he stood swaying--swaying, till he finally fell forward into the arms she suddenly threw out to receive him.

"Carleton! Carleton!" she wailed, searching for consciousness in his fast glazing eye. "It was to show you your child that I made the appointment at the museum. Not for myself. Oh, not for myself, but for your sake, that you might have----"

Useless; all useless.

He was dead.

* * * * *

Would she have had it otherwise? Would any of them? When they were quite sure of the fact, she placed the ring in his still warm hand; then she solemnly put it on her finger, and turning, faced them all.

"Do not blame me too much for this final blow I gave him. He had already seen the truth in that mirror over there. His face--look at it and then at this picture of her taken after death, and see the resemblance! It is showing plainer every minute. It was the something which had worried and eluded him. Nothing could have kept back the truth from him after that one glimpse he caught of himself and her in the mirror. I loved him. Mine is the grief; you will let me stay here with him to-night. To-morrow I will answer all questions."

XXXIV

THE BUD--THEN THE DEADLY FLOWER

You who have read thus far will care little for the legalities which followed the events just related, but you may wish to know to a fuller extent some of the facts in Ermentrude Taylor's life which led to this tragic end of all her hopes.

Her story is twofold, the portion connecting her with Carleton Roberts being entirely dissociated from that which made her the debtor of Antoinette Duclos. Let me tell the latter first, as it preceded the other, and tell it in episodes.

* * * * *

Two girls stood at one end of a long walk of immemorial yews. At the other could be seen the advancing figure of a man, young, alert, English-clad but unmistakably foreign. They were school girls and bosom friends; he their instructor in French; the walk one attached to a well-known seminary. When they had entered this walk, it had been empty. Now it held for one of them--and possibly for the other, too--a world of joy and promise;--the world of seventeen. Innocent and unthinking, neither of them had known her own heart, much less that of her fellow. But when in face of that approach, eye met eye with an askance look of eager question, revelation came, crimsoning the cheeks of both, and marking an epoch in either life.

Noble of heart and tender each toward the other, they were yet human. Arm fell from arm, and with an equally spontaneous movement, they turned to search each the other's countenance, not for betrayal,--for that had already been made--but for those physical charms or marks of mental superiority which might attract the eye or win the heart of a man of the ideality of this one.

Alas! these gifts, for gifts they are, were much too unequally distributed between these two to render the balance at all even.

Ermentrude was handsome; Antoinette was not.

Ermentrude had besides, what even without beauty would have made her conspicuous to the eye, the figure of a goddess and the air of a queen. But Antoinette was small and had to feel secure and in a happy mood to show the excellence of her mind and the airy quality of her wit.

Then, Ermentrude had money and could dress, while Antoinette, who was dependent upon an English uncle for everything she possessed, wore clothes so plain that but for their exquisite neatness, one would never dream that she came from French ancestry, and that ancestry noble.

Yes, she had that advantage; rank was hers, but not the graces which should accompany it. More than that, she
had nothing with which to support it. Better be of the yeoman class like Ermentrude, and smile like a duchess granting favors. Or so she thought, poor girl, as her meek regard passed from the friend whose attractions she had thus acknowledged to the man whose approbation would make a goddess of her too.

He was coming--not with his usual indifferent swing, but eagerly, joyously, as though this moment meant something to him too. She knew it did. Small memories rushing upon her, made no doubt of that. But why? Because of Ermentrude or because of herself? Alas! she could recall nothing which would answer that. They were much together; he had scarcely ever seen them separate. It might be either--Hardly alive from suspense, she watched him coming--coming. In a moment he would be upon them. On which would his eyes linger?

That would tell the tale.

In an anguish of ungovernable shyness, she slipped behind the ample figure of her friend till only her fluttering skirt betrayed her presence. Perhaps she was saved something by this move; perhaps not. She did not see the beam of joy sparkling in his eye as he greeted Ermentrude; but she could not but mark the heaviness of his step as he passed them by and wandered away into the shadows.

And that she understood. Ermentrude had not smiled upon him. To him, the moment had brought pain.

It was enough. Now she knew.

But why had not Ermentrude smiled?

* * * * *

A dormitory lighted only by the moon! Two beds close together; in one a form of noble proportions, and in the other the meagre figure of a girl almost buried from sight among pillows and huddled-up blankets. Both are quiet save for an occasional shudder which shakes the bed of the latter. Ermentrude lies like the dead, though the moonlight falls full upon her face blanching it to the aspect of marble. Even her lashes rest moveless on her cheek.

But she is not sleeping; she is listening--listening to the sobs, almost inaudible, which now and then escape from the beloved one at her side. As they grow fainter and fainter and gradually die away altogether till stillness reigns through the whole dormitory, she rouses and bending forward on her elbow, looks long and lovingly at the wet brow of her sleeping mate. She then sinks back again into rigidity, with a low moan, ending in the whispered words:

"He does not love,--not yet. A slight thing will turn him. Did I not see him glance back twice, and both times at her? The look with which she greeted him was so wonderful."

* * * * *

A village street in Brittany; a parish church in the distance; two women bidding each other farewell amid a group of wedding-guests, gay as the heavens are blue.

"_Au revoir!_" was the whisper breathed by the bride into the ear of the other. "_Au revoir_, my Ermentrude. May you have a happy year in Switzerland!"

"_Au revoir_! little Madame, _You_ will be happy I know in those United States to which you are going."

And the tears stood in the eyes of both.

"You will write?"

"I will write."

But the bride did not seem quite satisfied. Glancing about and finding her young husband busy with his adieux, she drew her friend apart and softly murmured:

"There is something I must say,--something I must know, before the sea divides us. You remember the day we all left school and you went home and I came to Brittany? Ermentrude, Achille tells me that on that day he sought the whole house over for you till he came upon you in one of the classrooms; and that you whom I had sometimes seen so sad were very gay and told him between laughing and crying that you were bidding a solemn farewell to all the nooks and corners of the old seminary, because your fiance awaited you at home, and there would be no coming back."

"I meant my music."

"He did not know that, Ermentrude," and here she laid her hands upon the other's shoulders, drawing back as she did so to look earnestly up into her face. "Was that done for me?"

They were too near for anything but the truth to pass from eye to eye. Ermentrude tried to laugh and utter a quick _No, no!_ but the little bride was not deceived. Again upon her face there appeared that wonderful look of hers, which made her face for the moment verily beautiful, and unclasping her hands, she threw them about the other's neck, whispering in awed tones:

"Yet you loved him! loved him too!"

Then after a moment of silence dear to both their hearts, she drew back to give her friend one other look, and quietly said:

"His heart is mine now, Ermentrude, wholly and truly mine. And so you would have it be, I am sure. Life looks fair to me and very sweet; but however fair, however sweet, that life is yours if ever you want it and when you want
it. The time may come--one never knows--when I can pay you back this debt. Till then, let there be perfect trust and perfect love between us. Give me your hand upon it--not just your lips--for I speak as men speak when they mean to keep their word."

Their eyes met, their hands clasped; then the bridegroom drew away his bride, and Ermentrude turned with bowed head and glistening eyes, to enter upon the new life awaiting her in ways she had yet to tread.

* * * * *

The second series of episodes opens with the meeting of a man and woman on a rustic bridge spanning a Swiss chasm. They are strangers to each other, yet both instinctively pause and a flush of intuitive feeling dyes the cheek of each.

The eternal, ever-recurring miracle has happened. He sees Woman for the first time, though he had thought himself in love before and had wandered thus far in an effort to forget. So, likewise, with her. She had had her fancies, or rather her one fancy; but when in strolling along this road ahead of her party she saw rising between her and the glorious landscape which had hitherto filled her eye the fine masculine head and perfect figure of Carleton Roberts, this fancy floated from her mind like the veriest thistledown, leaving it free to expand in fuller hopes and deeper joys than visit many women even when they think they love.

Alas! why in that instant of mutual revelation had not the further grace been given them of quick catastrophe shutting the door upon a future of which neither could then dream or sense the coming doom.

It was not to be.

He passed, she passed, and for the time the look they gave each other was all; but the world had been glorified for them both--and Destiny waited.

* * * * *

"Good looks? Yes; but nothing else; very ordinary connections, very. A little money, true. Her uncle, whom by the way I judge you have not seen, will leave her a few thousands; but meanwhile he is a fixture--will not leave her or let her leave him, which is a misfortune since in a social way he is simply impossible. No sort of match for you, Roberts. Cut and run while there is time; that's my advice to you, given in the most friendly spirit."

"Thank you. As I have but just met Miss Taylor, don't you think such advice is a little premature?"

"No, I don't. She is a woman who must be loved or left; that's all. You've heard me."

Did Carleton Roberts heed these words? No. What man in the thrall of his first romance ever did.

"You love me, Ermentrude?"

"I love you, Carleton."

"For a day, for a month or for a year?" he smiled.

"Forever," she answered.

"That's a long time," he murmured, with his eyes on a little clock hanging in the shop window before which they had stopped in one of their infrequent walks together. "A long time! That foolish little clock will beat out the hours of its short life and go the way of all things, before we shall hardly have entered upon the soul's 'forever.'"

"That clock will last our lifetime, Carleton. Afterward, love will not be counted by hours."

As she said this she turned her face his way and he saw it in its full flower with the light of heaven upon it. In later years he may have forgotten the emotions of that moment, but they were the purest, the freest from earthly stain that he was ever destined to know.

"I will love you _forever_," he whispered. "That little clock shall be my witness." And he drew her into the shop.

* * * * *

"Cuckoo!"

Ermentrude glanced up; the clock hung on her wall.

"Oh," she murmured, "each hour it will speak to me of him and his words," then softly, like one adream in Paradise:

"I love but thee, And thee will I love to eternity."

Such was the event to her. What was it to him? Let us see:

A hotel room--a view of Pilatus, but with its top lost in enveloping clouds.

Seated before it with pen in hand above a sheet of paper, Carleton Roberts eyes these clouds but does not see them; he is hunting in his brain for words and they do not come. Why? His mother's name is on the page and he has only to write that she has been quite correct in her judgment as to the unfitness of the marriage he had had in mind--that youth should mate with youth and that if she could see the glorious young girl whose acquaintance he had made here, she would be satisfied with his new choice which promised him the fullest happiness. Why then a sheet yet blank and a hesitating hand, when all it had to do was to write?

Who can tell? Man knows little of himself or of the conflicting passions which sway him this way or that, even when to the outward eye, and possibly to the inner one as well, action looks easy.
Did he feel, without its reaching the point of knowledge, that this mother of keenest expectation and highest hope would not be satisfied with what this charming but undeveloped girl of middle class parentage would bring him? Or was there, deep down in his own undeveloped nature, a secret nerve alive to ambitions yet unnamed, to hopes not yet formulated, which warned him to think well before he spoke the irrevocable word linking a chain which, though twined with roses, was nevertheless a chain which nothing on earth should have power to break.

He never sounded his soul for an answer to this question; but when he rose, the paper was still blank. The letter had not been written.

* * * * *

"I do not like secrecy."
"Only for a little while, Ermentrude. My mother is difficult. I would prepare her."
"And Uncle!"
"What of Uncle?"
"He made me take an oath to-day."
"An oath?"
"That I would not leave him while he lived."
"And you could do that?"
"I could do nothing else. He's a sick man, Carleton. The doctors shake their heads when they leave him. He will not live a year."
"A year? But that's an eternity! Can you wait, can I wait a year?"
"He loves me and I owe everything to him. Next week we go to Nice. These are days of parting for you and me, Carleton."

Parting! What word more cruel. She saw that it shook him, and held her breath for his promise that she should not be long alone. But it did not come. He was taking time to think. She hardly understood his doing this. Surely, his mother must be very difficult and he a most considerate son. She knew he loved her; perhaps never with a more controlling passion than at this moment of palpitating silence.

As she smiled, he caught her to his breast.
"We have yet a week," he cried, and left her hurriedly, precipitately.

* * * * *

It was their last ride and they had gone far--too far, Ermentrude thought, for a day so chilly and a sky so threatening. They had entered gorges; they had skirted mountain streams, had passed a village, left a ruined tower behind, and were still facing eastward, as if Lucerne had no further claims upon them and the world was all their own.

As the snows of the higher peaks burst upon their view, she made an attempt to stop this seeming flight.
"My uncle," she said. "He will be counting the hours. Let us go back."

Then Carleton Roberts spoke.
"Another mile," he whispered, not because he feared being overheard by their driver, but because Love's note is instinctively low. "You are cold; we shall find there a fire, and dinner--and--Listen, Ermentrude,--a minister ready to unite us. We are going back, man and wife."
"Carleton!"
"Yes, dear, it is quite understood. Letters are urging my return to New York. Your uncle is holding you here. I cannot face an uncertain separation. I must feel that you are mine beyond all peradventure--must be able to think of you as my wife, and that will hold us both and make it proper for you to come to me if I cannot come to you, the moment you are free to go where you will."

"But why this long ride, this far-away spot? Why couldn't a minister be found in Lucerne? Is our marriage to be as secret as our engagement? Is that what you wish, Carleton?"

"Yes, dear; for a little while, just for a little while, till I have seen my mother, and rid our way of every obstacle to complete happiness. It will be better. When one has promised to love _forever_ what are a few weeks or months. Make me happy, dear. You have it in your power to do so. Happy! When once I can whisper 'wife,' the world will not hold a happier man than I."

Did she yield because of her own great longing? No, it was by that phrase he caught her: _The world will not hold a happier man than I._

* * * * *

Mountains! Icy peaks, with sides heavy with snow! And so near! Almost they seemed to meet across the narrow valley. She gave them one quick glance, then her eyes and her heart became absorbed in what she could see of this Alpine village, holding up its head in the eternal snows like an edelweiss on the edge of a glacier.

It was to be the scene of her one great act in life; the spot she was entering as a maiden and would leave as a
wife. What other spot would ever be so interesting! To note its every detail of house and church would not take long--it was such a little village, and the streets were so few; and the people--why she could count them.

Afterward, she found that the exact number and the difference in color of the short line of timbered houses stretching between them and the church were imprinted on her brain; but she did not know it at the time for her attention was mainly fixed upon the people when once she had seen them, for there was a strangeness in their looks and actions she did not understand, all the more that it seemed to have nothing to do either with Carleton or herself.

It was not fear they showed, not exactly, though consternation was not lacking in their aspect, so strangely similar in all, whether they were men or women, or whether they stood in groups in the street or came out singly on the doorstep to glance about and listen, though there seemed to be nothing to listen to, for the air was preternaturally still.

"Carleton, Carleton," she asked as he came to lift her to the ground, "see those people how oddly they act. The whole town is in the street. What is the matter?"

"Nothing, except that if we do not hasten we shall have to return unmarried. The minister is waiting for us."

"What, in the church?"

"Yes, dear. We are a little late."

She took his arm, and though they were a fine couple and the event was almost an unprecedented one in that remote village, only a few followed them; the rest hung round their homes or gazed with indecision at the mountains or up and down along the empty roads.

* * * * *

"Wilt thou have this woman...."

The ceremony had proceeded thus far and all seemed well, when with a rush and a cry a dozen people burst into the building.

"The snows are moving!" rang up the aisles in accents of mad terror. "Save yourselves!"

Then came the silence of emptiness. Every soul had left the church save the three before the pulpit.

An avalanche! and the ceremony was as yet incomplete! Ermentrude never forgot Carleton Roberts' look. Doubtless he never forgot hers. Meanwhile the minister spoke.

"There is a chance for escape. Take it; the good God will pardon you."

But the bridegroom stood firm and the bride shook her head.

"Not till the words are said which make us man and wife," declared Carleton Roberts. "Unless"--and here his perfect courtesy manifested itself even in this crisis of life and death--"you feel it your duty to carry what assistance you can to the saving of your frightened flock."

"God must save my flock," said the minister with a solemn glance upward. "I am where my duty places me."

And calmly as though the pews were filled with guests and joy attended the ceremony instead of apprehended doom, he proceeded with the rite.

"Wilt thou have this man...."

The glad "I will" leaped bravely from Ermentrude's lips; but it was lost in loud calls and shrieks from without, mingled with that sound--terrible to all who hear--impossible to describe--of the might of the hills made audible in this down-rushing mass, now halting, now gathering fresh momentum, but coming--always coming, till its voice, but now a threat, swells into thunder in which all human cries are lost, and only from the movement of the minister's lips can this couple see that the words which make them one are being spoken.

Then comes the benediction, and with the falling of those holy hands, a headlong rush into the open air--a vision of flying forms here, there, and everywhere--men staggering under foolish burdens--women on their knees with arms lifted to heaven or flung around their babes--hope lost under the bowing mountain; and in the midst of it all, plain to the view of all, the stranger's horse and carriage which, standing there, stamped with undying honor these terrified villagers, who had seen and not touched them though Death had them by the hair.

* * * * *

"Quick! quick! You mother there with the child, get in, get in; there is room here for one more."

But another got the place. The driver, reeling as he ran, sprang for the empty seat and hung there between the wheels as the horses plunged and tore away to safety just as the great mass with its weight of gathered boulders and uprooted forests crashed in final doom upon that devoted village, burying it from sight as though it had never been.

To safety? Yes, for two of them; the other, struck by a flying stone, fell in the road and was covered in a trice. So close were they to destruction's edge at this moment of headlong flight.

* * * * *

Not till the painted towers encircling Lucerne had come again into sight did the newly wedded pair find words or make the least attempt to speak. Then Carleton kissed his bride and for a moment love was triumphant. Was it triumphant enough to lead him to acknowledge their marriage? She looked anxiously in his face to see and finally
she asked:
"How much of this are we to tell, Carleton?"
"All about the catastrophe; but nothing more," he answered.
And while her heart retained its homage, the light in her eyes was veiled.
Married but not acknowledged! Would it not have been better if the avalanche had overwhelmed them? She
almost thought so, till bending, he murmured in her ear:
"I shall follow you soon. Did you think I could go on living without you?"
* * * * *
"Why so thoughtful, Ermentrude? You are not quite yourself to-day?"
"Uncle is very ill. The doctors say that he may not live a month."
"And does that grieve you?"
A yes was on her lips, but she did not utter it. Instead, she drew a little ribbon from her breast, on which hung a
plain gold ring, and gazing earnestly at this token she remarked very quietly:
"Carleton, have you ever thought that but for this ring no proof remains in all this world of our ever having been
married?"
"But our hearts know it. Is that not enough?" he asked.
"For to-day, yes. But when uncle goes...."
His kisses finished the sentence for her, and love resumed its sway; but when alone and wakeful on her pillow,
she recalled his look, the sting of her first doubt darted through her uneasy heart, and feeling eagerly after the ring
she tore it from its ribbon and put it on her finger.
"It is my right," she whispered. "Henceforth I shall wear it. He loves me too well to quarrel with my decision.
Now am I really his wife."
* * * * *
Did she see a change in him? Did he come less frequently? Did he stay less long? Was there uneasiness in his
eye--coolness--languor? No, no. It was her exacting heart which thus interpreted his look--which counted the days--
forgot his many engagements--saw impatience in the quickness with which he corrected her faults in manner or
language instead of the old indulgence which met each error with a smile. Love cannot always keep at fever-heat.
He, the cynosure of the whole foreign element, had the world at his feet here as in Lucerne. It needed no jealous eye
to see this; while she--well, she had her attractions too, as had been often proved, and with God's help she would yet
be a fit mate for him. What she now lacked, she would acquire. She would watch these fine ladies who blushed with
pleasure at his approach, and when her time of mourning was over she would astonish him with her graces and her
appearance. For she knew how to dress, yes, with the best of them, and hold her head and walk like the queen she
would feel herself to be when once she bore his name. Patience then, till she had stored her mind and learned the
ways he was accustomed to in others. She had money enough now that her uncle was dead, and she could do
things....
Yes, but something had gone out of her face, and the ring hung loose on her finger.
* * * * *
And he? Had her fears read him aright? Had he grown indifferent or was he simply perplexed? Let us watch him
as he paces his hotel room one glorious afternoon, now stopping to re-read a letter he held in his hand, and now to
gaze out with unseeing eyes to where the blue of the sea melts into the blue of the sky on the far horizon.
Love had been sweet; but man has other passions, and he is in the grip of the one mightiest in men of his stamp--
the all-engrossing, all-demanding one of personal ambition.
Without solicitation, without expectation even, a hand had been held out to him whose least grasp meant success
in the one field most to his mind,--a political career under auspices which had never been known to fail. But there
were conditions attached--conditions which a year before would have filled him with joy, but which now stood like
a barrier between him and his goal, unless.... But he was not yet ready to disavow his wife, trample upon her heart,
nay on his own as well;--that is, without a struggle.
For the third time he read the letter which you will see was from his mother.
My Son:--I have an apology to make and a bit of news to give you. When I urged you to give up Lucie and to
seek distraction abroad, I felt that I was doing justice to your immaturity and saving you from ties which might very
easily jeopardize your future happiness.
But I have lately changed my mind. In seeing more of her I have not only learned her worth but the advantage
such a woman would be to one of your tastes and promise. And she loves you more devotedly, perhaps, than you
have loved her. How do I know this? Let me tell you of an interview I had with a certain relative of hers last night. I
allude to her brother, and for a recognized boss buried out of sight in politics, he has more heart in his breast than I
have ever given him credit for. Not having children of his own, he has centered his affections on this choice little
sister of his, and finding her far from happy, came to see me yesterday evening with this proposition: If I would consent to your union with Lucie, and withdraw my opposition to your immediate marriage, he would take your future in charge and put you in the way of political advancement only to be limited, as he says, by your talents, which he is good enough to rate very high.

After this, how can I do otherwise than bid you follow your impulses and marry Lucie in spite of the disparity of years to which I have hitherto taken exception. Were she as poor as she is accounted rich, I should say the same, now that I have sounded the depths of her lovely disposition and the rare culture of a mind which those seven years have enriched beyond what is usual even in women of intellect. Her money does not influence me in her favor, nor does it weigh with me in my present opinion of her complete fitness for the position you are so eager to give her. That this will make you happy I know. Let it hasten your return which cannot be too speedy.

This was the bombshell which had disturbed Carleton Roberts' complacency, bared his own soul to his horrified view, and revealed to him the weakness of his moral nature which he had hitherto considered strong. For his first impulse was one of recoil, not only from the secret marriage which shut him off from these new hopes, but from his youthful bride as well. He found himself weary of his flowery bonds and eager for a man's life in his native city. Oh, why had he urged this immature girl to take the ride which had led him into slavery to one who could not advance him in life, however queen-like she moved and talked and smiled upon the world from the heights of her physical perfections. It was brain that was needed—an understanding like Lucie's, tempered, like hers, by years, not months, of culture and refined association.

It was at this point he paused in his restless walk and looked for inspiration to the far-off waters of the bluest of all seas.

Suddenly he resumed his walk; then quickly stopping again sat down at his desk and with an air of desperate haste began a letter to his mother with the announcement:

It is too late. Unfortunately for your scheme, I am already....

He never got any further. A fresh impulse drove him into the street. He could not thus summarily settle his future fate. It meant too much to him. He must take time to think. His heart clamors loudly for its rights; he is only twenty-six—and in a rush of feeling which should have been his salvation, he turned toward that nest among the flowers where help was to be had if help was to come at all in this crisis of conflicting passions.

The hour was noon, one which he had never chosen before for a visit to Ermentrude. Would he find her in? Would she be in spirits to meet him? Would she look beautiful—worthy of his name, worthy of the greatest sacrifice a man can make for a woman? He half hoped that she would; that he would find his chains riveted and secure beyond the power of any force to break.

As his musings faltered, he turned the knob of the little side door and went in. As he did so a shower of rose-leaves fell upon him from the vines enveloping the balcony.

He shuddered slightly and passed down the hall. Everything was very still.

She was asleep. Lying on a couch in utter weariness or pain, she had drifted off into the land of dreams, and he felt that he had a moment of respite. He could look and weigh the question: Love or a quick success? A weakling's paradise or the goal of the strong man?

Meanwhile, she was not as beautiful as he thought. But she was more touching—less robust, less bounteous of aspect, more child-like, more appealing,—a woman who, if he were no more of a man than he appeared to be in this hurly-burly of pleasure and fashion, might in time do him credit and hold him back from follies.

But he was not just the man these casual friends and admirers considered him. There was much more to him than that. He knew this better than Lucie did or her powerful brother, or even his adoring mother. Great opportunities awaited him and a large space in the affairs of men if not of nations. Such confidence did he feel in himself at this fevered moment that he never doubted that eventually he would gain all this, even with the handicap of a good-looking but unsophisticated wife.

But not quickly;... step by step perhaps ... and he was longing to take it all at a bound.

Poor girl! and she lay there under his eyes all unmindful of his conflict or of the fact that her fate as well as his was trembling in the balance; unmindful, though her dreams were far from joyous—or why the tear welling from between her lashes as he gazed.

She was alone in the house; he knew it by the complete silence. He could look and look and study her every feature, without fear of interruption; wait for her waking and be ready to meet her first glance of tender astonishment which might restore him to his better self.

Drawing up a chair, he sat down; then started upright again with dilating eyes and a strange shadow on his brow. One of her arms lay uppermost and on the hand—almost as fine as Lucie's, but not quite,—he saw the ring—his ring, and it hung loosely. The poor child was growing thin, very thin. "If she were to hold her hand downward," he
muttered to himself, "I believe that ring would fall off." Did some stray glimpse of his own features, wearing a look never seen on them before, confront him from some near-by mirror that he started so guiltily as this heart murmur rose to his lips? Or was it at a thought, hideous but tempting, which held him, gained upon him and soon absolutely possessed him, till his own hand went out stealthily and with hesitations toward those helpless fingers of hers, now approaching, now withdrawing, and now approaching them again but not touching them, great as his impulse was to do so, for fear she should wake, while yet the devil gripped his arm and lit up baleful fires in his eyes.

He had remembered those words of hers: "Have you ever thought that with the exception of this ring no proof exists in all the world of our ever having been married?" Remember them? He had not remembered them; he had heard them, sounding and resounding in his ears till the whole room seemed to palpitate with them. Then the devil made his final move. Ermentrude shuddered, and her position changing, the hand which had been uppermost fell down at her side and the ring slipped--left her finger--paused on the edge of the couch--then came to rest in his palm held out to receive it.

He had not drawn it from her hand. Fate had restored it. As he forced himself to look at it lying in his grasp, a faintness as of death seized and held him for a moment; then this passed and he slowly rose and step by step with sidelong looks and hair starting upright on his forehead, like one who has walked in blood and sees the trail of guilt following him along the floor, he left her side--he left the room--he left the house--and the rose-leaves fell about him once more, maddening him with their color, maddening him with the memories inseparable from their sweetness--a sweetness which spoke of her, of love, and the attachment of a true heart destined to grieve for a little while at least, for he was never going back, never, never.

There was no eye to see, and no tongue to tell him that the seed, destined to flower into awful crime some dozen or more years later, put forth its first bud at this fatal hour.

* * * * *

He wrote her a letter. He had the grace to do that. Addressing her simply as Ermentrude, he told her that he had been called home to enter upon the serious business of life. That he was not likely to come back, and as she was not really his wife, however pleasing the fiction had been in which they had both indulged, it seemed to him wiser to end their happy romance thus suddenly and while much of its glamour remained, than to linger on and see it decay day by day before their eyes till nothing but bitterness remained. He loved her and felt the wrench more than she did, but duty and his obligations as a man, etc., etc., till it ended in his signature limited to initials like his love.

Despicable! the work of a man without conscience or heart! Yes, and he knew it, and for weeks his sleep was broken by visions and his waking hours rendered dreadful by fears. How had she taken this cool assumption that the ceremony performed in the path of the snow was voided by lack of proof? To whom had she ascribed the loss of her ring, and what must she think of him? He had left Nice almost immediately, but wherever he went, in whatever hotel he stayed, or through whatever street he passed, he was always expecting to see her figure rise up before him in the familiar ways and encircled the familiar walls. Had she been there----

But the windows were blank and the place desolate, and he fled the spot and the town, with his questions unasked and his fears unallayed. In two days he had sailed for home. With the ocean between them he might forget; and in time he did. As week followed week, and the silence he had half trusted, half feared, remained unbroken, his equanimity gradually returned, and he prepared to face the prospect of his new marriage much as a man who watches for a dreaded door to open moves with restored confidence about his affairs, when at last convinced that the door is padlocked and the key lost.

One precaution and one only he was wise enough to take. He told his story to Lucie’s brother, and left it to him to say whether or not he should marry his sister. And the answer was yes; that if trouble came he would see him through it. A marriage which could not be proved was no marriage, and as for anything else, Lucie’s happiness must not be sacrificed to a boy’s peccadillos. What were a few wild oats sown by a man of his promise?

And was this the end? Did Ermentrude accept her doom without a struggle?

Let us see.

* * * * *

One afternoon in June, there entered the parlor of the old-fashioned mansion of the Roberts family a lady who had asked to see Mrs. Roberts on business of an important nature. Though plainly clad, her appearance possessed an elegance which insured respect; but when alone and seated in the darkest corner of the great drawing room she put up a trembling hand to thrust back her veil, the countenance thus revealed betrayed an emotion hardly in keeping
with the quiet bearing with which she had advanced under the servant's eye.

His home! and these the surroundings amid which he had grown to manhood! Why should the sight of all this rouse emotions she believed eliminated by a treachery most cruel in face of promises most sacred? Why, as she looked about, and noted object after object which must have been there previous to his birth, did she see him as a child and boy and not as the man who had first won and then deserted her? She would not have had it so at this hour when strength was needed rather than tenderness. But she could not help her nature, or still the wild surging of her rebellious heart, as his portrait seen upon the wall challenged her constancy and whispered of the hour when his "forever" echoed her "forever" and the compact for eternity was sealed.

He had broken this compact--broken it soon--broken it before the honeymoon had passed. But she! Was she to show no firmer spirit whose love was of the soul and took no note of time? She was his wife, and acknowledged or unacknowledged, must yet prove to be his blessing though he--he----

But this would not do. The interview before her called for calmness. She would not add to the turbulence of her spirits by another glance at what brought back too much of the past to fortify her for the impending struggle. She had to do credit to his choice, to impress a difficult woman with her dignity as a wife. She must not shake nor weep.

Yet when she heard a step at the door, instinct told her to pull down her veil till the first greetings were over--a precaution for which she was deeply grateful when in another moment a young woman entered instead of her husband's mother for whom she had asked and whom she naturally expected to see.

In the humiliation of the moment, her disappointment took words and she muttered within herself:

"A companion or possibly a relative. I am to be put off with kindly excuses; begged to state my errand--rehearse my claims and my hopes to some gentle go-between! I have not strength for that. I must see the mother--the mother. God give me wisdom and keep me calm--calm."

Meanwhile the young woman she had instinctively called gentle advanced into the center of the room. Mechanically, Ermentrude rose to meet her, and thus stepped into a better light. Tragedy came with her. This it was impossible not to see--not to feel. But the warning which her aspect gave passed as she spoke and said in tones a little tremulous, perhaps, but with an air of perfect courtesy:

"I had hoped to see Mrs. Roberts herself."

The smile with which this was greeted, the flush of pride and the joy of possession which lit the other's pleasing features as she replied, "I am Mrs. Roberts," should have carried the truth to Ermentrude.

But they did not. She looked surprised--baffled, and after the briefest hesitation, observed:

"I am a stranger in this city and have doubtless made some mistake. The Mrs. Roberts I have called to see--and I was told she lived here--is the mother of a gentleman of the name of----"

She could not speak it.

But the other could.

"Carleton?" she asked; and at Ermentrude's agitated nod, added with friendly interest: "This is her home; but she has left it for a while to us. I am Mr. Carleton Roberts' wife."

* * * * *

There are blows which prostrate; there are others which sear but leave the body intact--feet still supporting it--eyes still gazing ahead unmoved--lips moving with mechanical exactness and sometimes still retaining their smile. Only the soul which gave life to all of this is dead. The image is there but the spirit is gone; and if sufficiently preoccupied, the one who struck the blow sees no change. So was it with Ermentrude and Lucie.

"We are looking for mother to return next week," added the latter as Ermentrude stood stark and silent before her. "Would you like to leave a message for her?"

At these words uttered with the sweetness of a rich and sympathetic nature, the soul returned to Ermentrude's body. With a long and earnest look which took in the full measure of the other's personality, radiant with happiness and the consciousness of an assured wifedom, she answered softly:

"No, I will leave no message," and turned as if to go.

"Nor any name?" queried Lucie, eying with admiration the noble lines of a figure with whose perfect proportions her own could never hope to compete.

"Nor any name," came back in indescribable accents from the doorway.

Lucie paused, and gazing in vague trouble after her rapidly disappearing visitor, murmured to herself, "Who is she?"

But the one who could have answered her was gone.

* * * * *

"Carleton, you seldom see such a woman. Younger than I, she had the poise of a woman of thirty. Who could she have been?"

"Describe her."
"I wish I could; I hardly saw her face; it was her figure, her voice, her way of moving and holding herself. I felt as small and quiet as a little mouse beside her. Only I was happy and she was not. That much I feel now that I recall her look in leaving."

"Was she American or--or foreign?" he asked, hiding his trouble, for a great fear had seized him.

"She had an English accent which added very much to her charm."

"Forget her." For a moment his accent was almost fierce, then he laughed the matter off, assuring this bride of a month that she made him cross with her self-deprecation, that there was no one of finer mien and manner than herself, the chosen of his heart upon whom he always looked with pride. Which subtle tribute to what was her greatest charm accomplished its end; she did forget the stranger.

But he did not; he knew what was before him and prepared himself for the inevitable meeting which would be followed by--what?

Not by what he had every right to expect and evidently did. Ermentrude had learned all she would both of this marriage and of the woman who had supplanted her, and had made her resolve. This he saw as they came together in the isolation of a quiet corner of the Park, and so was not greatly surprised, though a little moved, as after the first few words, and with an earnest look, she said:

"I am your wife, I, Ermentrude Roberts, married to you in the sight of God and man. I cannot prove it, but as you once said, our hearts know it and will continue to know it as long as either of us lives. But I am not going to obtrude my claims upon you, Carleton, or stand like a specter in your path. Had this woman you have deceived been weak or foolish or unloving, or indeed anything but what she is, I might have held to my rights and insisted upon a recognition which would have profited you in the end. But I cannot shame that woman--I can neither shame her nor bring her to grief. You have broken one heart, but you shall be saved the remorse of breaking two. I had rather suffer myself. I am alone in the world. I have means. I can ultimately be useful and face good men and women without fear. Why then should I drag down to the dust one as innocent as myself, or take from you what may make you the man I once thought you and hope to see you again. But that I may have strength for this and for all the sacrifices it involves, you must declare here, now, in this open park where we stand, with no one within sight much less within hearing, that I am your wife."

"You are my wife."

"It is enough. Now I can say what otherwise could never have left my lips. I love you, Carleton, love you to eternity as I promised; but I shall never seek you again, and you can go on your way unperturbed. I have consolations here," laying her hand on her breast. "It will no longer be my portion to watch your face for signs of a failing regard. What I have is mine, and that is the undying memory of two months of perfect happiness."

She would have said more, but she saw that he had been greatly shaken. She feared the renewal of a flame not yet altogether extinct in a heart which once beat for her alone, and so contenting herself with a low farewell, she was turning swiftly away, when one last thought made her pause and say:

"I cannot return you your ring. It is lost. I was careless with it and it fell unnoticed from my hand. But to-night I will send you back the little clock which unites our initials. Destroy it if you will, but if some sentiment bids you keep it, let it be this one and no other: 'I recall Ermentrude only that I may be faithful to Lucie.'"

With a low cry his head fell upon his breast in extreme self-abasement, then he slowly lifted his eyes and seeing in her face a full knowledge of his sin, murmured in overwhelming shame and contrition:

"You know me for the wretch I am. I have the ring; it fell from your hand into mine one day while you lay asleep. I do not ask for forgiveness, but this I promise you, Ermentrude:--if the little clock comes back, I will make a place in it for this ring, and neither clock nor ring shall leave me again while I live."

Instinctively her hands went out to him, then they fell back on her breast.

"God will hold you to that promise," she said; and melted away from his sight in the mist which had been gradually enveloping them without being seen by either.

Thus the struggle ended for him, which for her had simply begun.

Not till she found herself in the South with her girl friend, Antoinette Duclos, did she discover that the closest bond which can unite man and woman held her in spite of her late compact with Carleton Roberts. Should she reassert her rights and demand that the father should recognize his child? Her generous heart said No. The old arguments held good. She appealed to Antoinette for advice.

The result we know. When Antoinette's own child died at birth, she took Ermentrude's to her heart and brought it up as her own. There was little difficulty in this, as the Professor had already yielded to a Southern fever and lay at rest in a New Orleans cemetery.

And this brings us to another episode.
traveling and so was the babe. The dismantled rooms showed why. Young still, for the years of either's romance had been few, each face, as the other contemplated it, told the story of sorrow which Time, for all its kindliness, would never efface. But the charm of either remained--perceptible at this hour as perhaps it would never be again to the same extent. Antoinette basked in the light of Ermentrude's beauty ennobled by renunciation, and Ermentrude in that wonderful look in her friend's plain face which came at great crises and made her for the moment the equal of the best.

They had said little; and they said little now, as is the way of the strong amongst us when an act is to be performed which wrings the heart but satisfies the conscience.

The child was legitimate. It must not grow up under a shadow. To insure its welfare and raise no doubt in its own mind as it grew in knowledge and feeling, the two women must separate. No paltering with this duty, and no delay. A month of baby cries and baby touches might weaken the real mother. It should be now. It should be to-day.

But first, a final word--a parting question. It was uttered by Ermentrude.
"You will go back to France?"
"Yes. I can easily live there. And you, Ermentrude?"
"To New York. I shall never go far from him. But he and I will never meet. My world will not be his world. I shall make my own place."
"As Ermentrude Taylor?"
"As Mrs. Ermentrude Taylor. I am a wife. I shall never forget that fact."
"And the child? Will you never come to see it?"
Ermentrude's head fell and she stood a long time without answering. Then with a steady look she calmly said:
"I can think of but one contingency which might shake my resolution to leave her yours without the least interruption from me. If _he_--Antoinette, if he were left alone and childless, I might see my duty differently from now. You must be prepared for that."

"Ermentrude, when you send me this little shoe--See, I will leave one on and give you the other, I shall know that you are coming, or that you want the child. My life is yours as I once promised, and do you think I would hold back the child?"

And again their hands met as once before, in that strong clasp, which means:
"Trust me to the death and beyond it."

* * * *

With Antoinette it was to the death, as we have seen. Warned by Ermentrude of the appalling results of their plan to bring father and child together, and entreated to fly lest her story should imperil the secret upon the preservation of which his very life now hung, she answered to the call as she had promised, and thus acquitted her debt though she failed to save him.

Of her previous act in disfiguring his photograph in her temporary lodging-place, we shall never know the full story. The picture had been hers for years, given her by Ermentrude on their parting, so that the child should not be without some semblance of her father even if she should not know him as such, and it was to secure this clue to their now doubly dangerous secret that Madame Duclos ransacked her baggage previous to her flight from the New York hotel. But whether its destruction in the peculiar manner we know was the result of simple precaution, or of a feeling of antagonism so strong against this destroyer of her beloved's peace, that it had to be expended in some way before she felt strong enough for that supreme sacrifice in his favor toward which events seemed hurrying her, may be known in _Eternity_ but will never be told in _Time_.

* * * *

And Ermentrude? What of her? Alone, robbed of husband and child and friend--where shall we look for her in this world of extreme tribulation? Search the hospitals of France where they press closest to the trenches. There will you find the woman who losing all has found much. Blessing and blest! the angel of the battlefield whom the bullets spare since her work on earth is not yet accomplished!
A STRANGE DISAPPEARANCE

BY ANNA KATHARINE GREEN

CHAPTER I

A NOVEL CASE

"Talking of sudden disappearances the one you mention of Hannah in that Leavenworth case of ours, is not the only remarkable one which has come under my direct notice. Indeed, I know of another that in some respects, at least, surpasses that in points of interest, and if you will promise not to inquire into the real names of the parties concerned, as the affair is a secret, I will relate you my experience regarding it."

The speaker was Q, the rising young detective, universally acknowledged by us of the force as the most astute man for mysterious and unprecedented cases, then in the bureau, always and of course excepting Mr. Gryce; and such a statement from him could not but arouse our deepest curiosity. Drawing up, then, to the stove around which we were sitting in lazy enjoyment of one of those off-hours so dear to a detective's heart, we gave with alacrity the required promise; and settling himself back with the satisfied air of a man who has a good story to tell that does not entirely lack certain points redounding to his own credit, he began:

I was one Sunday morning loitering at the ----- Precinct Station, when the door opened and a respectable-looking middle-aged woman came in, whose agitated air at once attracted my attention. Going up to her, I asked her what she wanted.

"A detective," she replied, glancing cautiously about on the faces of the various men scattered through the room. "I don't wish anything said about it, but a girl disappeared from our house last night, and"--she stopped here, her emotion seeming to choke her--"and I want some one to look her up," she went on at last with the most intense emphasis.

"A girl? what kind of a girl; and what house do you mean when you say our house?"

She looked at me keenly before replying. "You are a young man," said she; "isn't there some one here more responsible than yourself that I can talk to?"

I shrugged my shoulders and beckoned to Mr. Gryce who was just then passing. She at once seemed to put confidence in him. Drawing him aside, she whispered a few low eager words which I could not hear. He listened nonchalantly for a moment but suddenly made a move which I knew indicated strong and surprised interest, though from his face--but you know what Gryce's face is. I was about to walk off, convinced he had got hold of something he would prefer to manage himself, when the Superintendent came in.

"Where is Gryce?" asked he; "tell him I want him."

Mr. Gryce heard him and hastened forward. As he passed me, he whispered, "Take a man and go with this woman; look into matters and send me word if you want me; I will be here for two hours."

I did not need a second permission. Beckoning to Harris, I reapproached the woman. "Where do you come from," said I, "I am to go back with you and investigate the affair it seems."

"Did he say so?" she asked, pointing to Mr. Gryce who now stood with his back to us busily talking with the Superintendent.

I nodded, and she at once moved towards the door. "I come from No. ---- Second Avenue: Mr. Blake's house," she whispered, uttering a name so well known, I at once understood Mr. Gryce's movement of sudden interest "A girl--one who sewed for us--disappeared last night in a way to alarm us very much. She was taken from her room--"

"Yes," she cried vehemently, seeing my look of sarcastic incredulity, "taken from her room; she never went of her own accord; and she must be found if I spend every dollar of the pittance I have laid up in the bank against my old age."

Her manner was so intense, her tone so marked and her words so vehement, I at once and naturally asked if the girl was a relative of hers that she felt her abduction so keenly.

"No," she replied, "not a relative, but," she went on, looking every way but in my face, "a very dear friend--a--a--protegee, I think they call it, of mine; I--I--She must be found," she again reiterated.

We were by this time in the street.

"Nothing must be said about it," she now whispered, catching me by the arm. "I told him so," nodding back to the building from which we had just issued, "and he promised secrecy. It can be done without folks knowing anything about it, can't it?"

"What?" I asked.
"Finding the girl."
"Well," said I, "we can tell you better about that when we know a few more of the facts. What is the girl's name
and what makes you think she didn't go out of the house-door of her own accord?"
"Why, why, everything. She wasn't the person to do it; then the looks of her room, and--They all got out of the
window," she cried suddenly, "and went away by the side gate into ------ Street."
"They? Who do you mean by they?"
"Why, whoever they were who carried her off."
I could not suppress the "bah!" that rose to my lips. Mr. Gryce might have been able to, but I am not Gryce.
"You don't believe," said she, "that she was carried off?"
"Well, no," said I, "not in the sense you mean."
She gave another nod back to the police station now a block or so distant. "He didn't seem to doubt it at all."
I laughed. "Did you tell him you thought she had been taken off in this way?"
"Yes, and he said, 'Very likely.' And well he might, for I heard the men talking in her room, and--"
"You heard men talking in her room--when?"
"O, it must have been as late as half-past twelve. I had been asleep and the noise they made whispering, woke
me."
"Wait," I said, "tell me where her room is, hers and yours."
"Hers is the third story back, mine the front one on the same floor."
"Who are you?" I now inquired. "What position do you occupy in Mr. Blake's house?"
"I am the housekeeper."
Mr. Blake was a bachelor.
"And you were wakened last night by hearing whispering which seemed to come from this girl's room."
"Yes, I at first thought it was the folks next door,--we often hear them when they are unusually noisy,--but soon I
became assured it came from her room; and more astonished than I could say,--She is a good girl," she broke in,
suddenly looking at me with hotly indignant eyes, "a--a--as good a girl as this whole city can show; don't you dare,
any of you, to hint at anything else o--"
"Come, come," I said soothingly, a little ashamed of my too communicative face, "I haven't said anything, we
will take it for granted she is as good as gold, go on."
The woman wiped her forehead with a hand that trembled like a leaf. "Where was I?" said she. "O, I heard
voices and was surprised and got up and went to her door. The noise I made unlocking my own must have startled
her, for all was perfectly quiet when I got there. I waited a moment, then I turned the knob and called her: she did
not reply and I called again. Then she came to the door, but did not unlock it. 'What is it?' she asked. 'O,' said I, "I
thought I heard talking here and I was frightened;' 'It must have been next door,' said she. I begged pardon and went
back to my room. There was no more noise, but when in the morning we broke into her room and found her gone,
the window open and signs of distress and struggle around, I knew I had not been mistaken; that there were men
with her when I went to her door, and that they had carried her off--"
"Indeed! she seems at least to have been a willing victim," I remarked.
The woman clutched my arm with a grip like iron. "Don't you believe it," gasped she, stopping me in the street
where we were. "I tell you if what I say is true, and these burglars or whatever they were, did carry her off, it was an
agony to her, an awful, awful thing that will kill her if it has not done so already. You don't know what you are
talking about, you never saw her--"
"Was she pretty," I asked, hurrying the woman along, for more than one passer-by had turned their heads to look
at us. The question seemed in some way to give her a shock.
"Ah, I don't know," she muttered; "some might not think so, I always did; it depended upon the way you looked
at her."

For the first time I felt a thrill of anticipation shoot through my veins. Why, I could not say. Her tone was
peculiar, and she spoke in a sort of brooding way as though she were weighing something in her own mind; but then
her manner had been peculiar throughout. Whatever it was that aroused my suspicion, I determined henceforth to
keep a very sharp eye upon her ladyship. Levelling a straight glance at her face, I asked her how it was that she came
to be the one to inform the authorities of the girl's disappearance.
"Doesn't Mr. Blake know anything about it?"
The faintest shadow of a change came into her manner. "Yes," said she, "I told him at breakfast time; but Mr.
Blake doesn't take much interest in his servants; he leaves all such matters to me."

"Then he does not know you have come for the police?"

"No, sir, and O, if you would be so good as to keep it from him. It is not necessary he should know. I shall let
you in the back way. Mr. Blake is a man who never meddles with anything, and--"

"What did Mr. Blake say this morning when you told him that this girl--By the way, what is her name?"

"Emily."

"That this girl, Emily, had disappeared during the night?"

"Not much of anything, sir. He was sitting at the breakfast table reading his paper, he merely looked up, frowned
a little in an absent-minded way, and told me I must manage the servants' affairs without troubling him."

"And you let it drop?"

"Yes sir; Mr. Blake is not a man to speak twice to."

I could easily believe that from what I had seen of him in public, for though by no means a harsh looking man,
he had a reserved air which if maintained in private must have made him very difficult of approach.

We were now within a half block or so of the old-fashioned mansion regarded by this scion of New York's
aristocracy as one of the most desirable residences in the city; so motioning to the man who had accompanied me to
take his stand in a doorway near by and watch for the signal I would give him in case I wanted Mr. Gryce, I turned
to the woman, who was now all in a flutter, and asked her how she proposed to get me into the house without the
knowledge of Mr. Blake.

"O sir, all you have got to do is to follow me right up the back stairs; he won't notice, or if he does will not ask
any questions."

And having by this time reached the basement door, she took out a key from her pocket and inserting it in the
lock, at once admitted us into the dwelling.

CHAPTER II

A FEW POINTS

Mrs. Daniels, for that was her name, took me at once up stairs to the third story back room. As we passed
through the halls, I could not but notice how rich, though sombre were the old fashioned walls and heavily frescoed
ceilings, so different in style and coloring from what we see now-a-days in our secret penetrations into Fifth Avenue
mansions. Many as are the wealthy houses I have been called upon to enter in the line of my profession, I had never
crossed the threshold of such an one as this before, and impervious as I am to any foolish sentimentalities, I felt a
certain degree of awe at the thought of invading with police investigation, this home of ancient Knicker-bocker
respectability. But once in the room of the missing girl, every consideration fled save that of professional pride and
curiosity. For almost at first blush, I saw that whether Mrs. Daniels was correct or not in her surmises as to the
manner of the girl's disappearance, the fact that she had disappeared was likely to prove an affair of some
importance. For, let me state the facts in the order in which I noticed them. The first thing that impressed me was,
that whatever Mrs. Daniels called her, this was no sewing girl's room into which I now stepped. Plain as was the
furniture in comparison with the elaborate richness of the walls and ceiling, there were still scattered through the
room, which was large even for a thirty foot house, articles of sufficient elegance to make the supposition that it was
the abode of an ordinary seamstress open to suspicion, if no more.

Mrs. Daniels, seeing my look of surprise, hastened to provide some explanation. "It is the room which has
always been devoted to sewing," said she; "and when Emily came, I thought it would be easier to put up a bed here
than to send her upstairs. She was a very nice girl and disarranged nothing."

I glanced around on the writing-case lying open on a small table in the centre of the room, on the vase half full
of partly withered roses, on the mantel-piece, the Shakespeare, and Macaulay's History lying on the stand at my
right, thought my own thoughts, but said nothing.

"You found the door locked this morning?" asked I, after a moment's scrutiny of the room in which three facts
had become manifest: first, that the girl had not occupied the bed the night before; second, that there had been some
sort of struggle or surprise,--one of the curtains being violently torn as if grasped by an agitated hand, to say nothing
of a chair lying upset on the floor with one of its legs broken; third, that the departure, strange as it may seem, had
been by the window.

"Yes," returned she; "but there is a passageway leading from my room to hers and it was by that means we
entered. There was a chair placed against the door on this side but we easily pushed it away."

I stepped to the window and looked out. Ah, it would not be so very difficult for a man to gain the street from
that spot in a dark night, for the roof of the newly-erected extension was almost on a level with the window.

"Well," said she anxiously, "couldn't she have been got out that way?"

"More difficult things have been done," said I; and was about to step out upon the roof when I bethought to
inquire of Mrs. Daniels if any of the girl's clothing was missing.
She immediately flew to the closets and thence to bureau drawers which she turned hastily over. "No, nothing is missing but a hat and cloak and--" She paused confusedly.

"And what?" I asked.

"Nothing," returned she, hurriedly closing the bureau drawer; "only some little nick-knacks."

"Knick-knacks!" quoth I. "If she stopped for nick-knacks, she couldn't have gone in any very unwilling frame of mind." And somewhat disgusted, I was about to throw up the whole affair and leave the room. But the indecision in Mrs. Daniels' own face deterred me.

"I don't understand it," murmured she, drawing her hand across her eyes. "I don't understand it. But," she went on with even an increase in her old tone of heart-felt conviction, "no matter whether we understand it or not, the case is serious; I tell you so, and she must be found."

I resolved to know the nature of that must, used as few women in her position would use it even under circumstances to all appearance more aggravated than these.

"Why, must?" said I. "If the girl went of her own accord as some things seem to show, why should you, no relative as you acknowledge, take the matter so to heart as to insist she shall be followed and brought back?"

She turned away, uneasily taking up and putting down some little matters on the table before her. "Is it not enough that I promise to pay for all expenses which a search will occasion, without my being forced to declare just why I should be willing to do so? Am I bound to tell you I love the girl? that I believe she has been taken away by foul means, and that to her great suffering and distress? that being fond of her and believing this, I am conscientious enough to put every means I possess at the command of those who will recover her?"

I was not satisfied with this but on that very account felt my enthusiasm revive.

"But Mr. Blake? Surely he is the one to take this interest if anybody."

"I have before said," returned she, paling however as she spoke, "that Mr. Blake takes very little interest in his servants."

I cast another glance about the room. "How long have you been in this house?" asked I.

"I was in the service of Mr. Blake's father and he died a year ago."

"Since when you have remained with Mr. Blake himself?"

"Yes sir."

"And this Emily, when did she come here?"

"Oh it must be eleven months or so ago."

"An Irish girl?"

"O no, American. She is not a common person, sir."

"What do you mean by that? That she was educated, lady-like, pretty, or what?"

"I don't know what to say. She was educated, yes, but not as you would call a lady educated. Yet she knew a great many things the rest of us didn't. She liked to read, you see, and--O sir, ask the girls about her, I never know what to say when I am questioned."

I scanned the gray-haired woman still more intently than I had yet done. Was she the weak common-place creature she seemed, or had she really some cause other than appeared for these her numerous breaks and hesitations.

"Where did you get this girl?" I inquired. "Where did she live before coming here?"

"I cannot say, I never asked her to talk about herself. She came to me for work and I liked her and took her without recommendation."

"And she has served you well?"

"Excellently."

"Been out much? Had any visitors?"

She shook her head. "Never went out and never had any visitors."

I own I was nonplussed. "Well," said I, "no more of this at present. I must first find out if she left this house alone or in company with others." And without further parley I stepped out upon the roof of the extension.

As I did so I debated with myself whether the case warranted me or not in sending for Mr. Gryce. As yet there was nothing to show that the girl had come to any harm. A mere elopement with or without a lover to help her, was not such a serious matter that the whole police force need be stirred up on the subject; and if the woman had money, as she said, ready to give the man who should discover the whereabouts of this girl, why need that money be divided up any more than was necessary. Yet Gryce was not one to be dallied with. He had said, send for him if the affair seemed to call for his judgment, and somehow the affair did promise to be a trifle complicated. I was yet undetermined when I reached the edge of the roof.

It was a dizzy descent, but once made, escape from the yard beneath would be easy. A man could take that road without difficulty; but a woman! Baffled at the idea I turned thoughtfully back, when I beheld something on the roof
before me that caused me to pause and ask myself if this was going to turn out to be a tragedy after all. It was a drop of congealed blood. Further on towards the window was another, and yes, further still, another and another. I even found one upon the very window ledge itself. Bounding into the room, I searched the carpet for further traces. It was the worst one in the world to find anything of the nature of which I was seeking, being a confused pattern of mingled drab and red, and in my difficulty I had to stoop very low.

"What are you looking for?" cried Mrs. Daniels.

I pointed to the drop on the window sill. "Do you see that?" I asked.

She uttered an exclamation and bent nearer. "Blood!" cried she, and stood staring, with rapidly paling cheeks and trembling form. "They have killed her and he will never--"

As she did not finish I looked up.

"Do you think it was her blood?" she whispered in a horrified tone.

"There is every reason to believe so," rejoined I, pointing to a spot where I had at last discovered not only one crimson drop but many, scattered over the scarcely redder roses under my feet.

"Ah, it is worse than I thought," murmured she. "What are you going to do? What can we do?"

"I am going to send for another detective," returned I; and stepping to the window I telegraphed at once to the man Harris to go for Mr. Gryce.

"The one we saw at the Station?"

I bowed assent.

Her face lost something of its drawn expression. "O I am glad; he will do something."

Subduing my indignation at this back thrust, I employed my time in taking note of such details as had escaped my previous attention. They were not many. The open writing-desk--in which, however I found no letters or written documents of any kind, only a few sheets of paper, with pen, ink, etc.; the brush and hairpins scattered on the bureau as though the girl had been interrupted while arranging her hair (if she had been interrupted); and the absence of any great pile of work such as one would expect to see in a room set apart for sewing, were all I could discover. Not much to help us, in case this was to prove an affair of importance as I began to suspect.

With Mr. Gryce's arrival, however, things soon assumed a better shape. He came to the basement door, was ushered in by your humble servant, had the whole matter as far as I had investigated it, at his finger-ends in a moment, and was up-stairs and in that room before I, who am called the quickest man in the force as you all know, could have time to determine just what difference his presence would make to me in a pecuniary way in event of Mrs. Daniels' promises amounting to anything. He did not remain there long, but when he came down I saw that his interest was in no wise lessened.

"What kind of a looking girl was this?" he asked, hurrying up to Mrs. Daniels who had withdrawn into a recess in the lower hall while all this was going on. "Describe her to me, hair, eyes, complexion, etc.; you know."

"I--I--don't know as I can," she stammered reluctantly, turning very red in the face. "I am a poor one for noticing. I will call one of the girls, I--" She was gone before we realized she had not finished her sentence.

"Humph!" broke from Mr. Gryce's lips as he thoughtfully took down a vase that stood on a bracket near by and looked into it.

I did not venture a word.

When Mrs. Daniels came back she had with her a trim-looking girl of prepossessing appearance.

"This is Fanny," said she; "she knows Emily well, being in the habit of waiting on her at table; she will tell you what you want to hear. I have explained to her," she went on, nodding towards Mr. Gryce with a composure such as she had not before displayed; "that you are looking for your niece who ran away from home some time ago to go into some sort of service."

"Certainly, ma'am," quoth that gentleman, bowing with mock admiration to the gas-fixture. Then carelessly shifting his glance to the cleaning-cloth which Fanny held rather conspicuously in her hand, he repeated the question he had already put to Mrs. Daniels.

The girl, tossing her head just a trifle, at once replied:

"O she was good-looking enough, if that is what you mean, for them as likes a girl with cheeks as white as this cloth was afore I rubbed the spoons with it. As for her eyes, they was blacker than her hair, which was the blackest I ever see. She had no flesh at all, and as for her figure--" Fanny glanced down on her own well developed person, and gave a shrug inexpressibly suggestive.

"Is this description true?" Mr. Gryce asked, seemingly of Mrs. Daniels, though his gaze rested with curious intenness on the girl's head which was covered with a little cap.

"Sufficiently so," returned Mrs. Daniels in a very low tone, however. Then with a sudden display of energy, "Emily's figure is not what you would call plump. I have seen her--" She broke off as if a little startled at herself and motioned Fanny to go.
"Wait a moment," interposed Mr. Gryce in his soft way. "You said the girl's hair and eyes were dark; were they
darker than yours?"
"O, yes sir;" replied the girl simpering, as she settled the ribbons on her cap.
"Let me see your hair."
She took off her cap with a smile.
"Ha, very pretty, very pretty. And the other girls? You have other girls I suppose?"
"Two, sir;" returned Mrs. Daniels.
"How about their complexions? Are they lighter too than Emily's?"
"Yes, sir; about like Fanny's."
Mr. Gryce spread his hand over his breast in a way that assured me of his satisfaction, and allowed the girl to go.
"We will now proceed to the yard," said he. But at that moment the door of the front room opened and a
gentleman stepped leisurely into the hall, whom at first glance I recognized as the master of the house. He was
dressed for the street and had his hat in his hand. At the sight we all stood silent, Mrs. Daniels flushing up to the
roots of her gray hair.
Mr. Blake is an elegant-looking man as you perhaps know; proud, reserved, and a trifle sombre. As he turned to
come towards us, the light shining through the windows at our right, fell full upon his face, revealing such a self-
assembled and melancholy expression, I involuntarily drew back as if I had unwittingly intruded upon a great man's
privacy. Mr. Gryce on the contrary stepped forward.
"Mr. Blake, I believe," said he, bowing in that deferential way he knows so well how to assume.
The gentleman, startled as it evidently seemed from a reverie, looked hastily up. Meeting Mr. Gryce's bland
smile, he returned the bow, but haughtily, and as it appeared in an abstracted way.
"Allow me to introduce myself," proceeded my superior. "I am Mr. Gryce from the detective bureau. We were
notified this morning that a girl in your employ had disappeared from your house last night in a somewhat strange
and unusual way, and I just stepped over with my man here, to see if the matter is of sufficient importance to inquire
into. With many apologies for the intrusion, I stand obedient to your orders."
With a frown expressive of annoyance, Mr. Blake glanced around and detecting Mrs. Daniels, said: "Did you
consider the affair so serious as that?"
She nodded, seeming to find it difficult to speak.
He remained looking at her with an expression of some doubt. "I can hardly think," said he, "such extreme
measures were necessary; the girl will doubtless come back, or if not--" His shoulders gave a slight shrug and he
took out his gloves.
"The difficulty seems to be," quoth Mr. Gryce eyeing those gloves with his most intent and concentrated look,
"that the girl did not go alone, but was helped away, or forced away, by parties who had previously broken into your
house."
"That is a strange circumstance," remarked Mr. Blake, but still without any appearance of interest, "and if you
are sure of what you say, demands, perhaps, some inquiry. I would not wish to put anything in the way of justice
succoring the injured. But--" again he gave that slight shrug of the shoulders, indicative of doubt, if not indifference.
Mrs. Daniels trembled, and took a step forward. I thought she was going to speak, but instead of that she drew
back again in her strange hesitating way.
Mr. Gryce did not seem to notice.
"Perhaps sir," said he, "if you will step upstairs with me to the room occupied by this girl, I may be able to show
you certain evidences which will convince you that our errand here is not one of presumption."
"I am ready to concede that without troubling myself with proof,;" observed the master of the house with the
faintest show of asperity. "Yet if there is anything to see of a startling nature, perhaps I had best yield to your
wishes. Whereabouts in the house is this girl's room, Mrs. Daniels?"
"It is--I gave her the third story back, Mr. Blake;" replied that woman, nervously eyeing his face. "It was large
and light for sewing, and she was so nice--"
He impatiently waved his hand on which he had by this time fitted his glove to a nicety, as if these details were
an unnecessary bore to him, and motioned her to show the way. Instantly a new feeling appeared to seize her, that of
alarm.
"I hardly think you need trouble Mr. Blake to go up-stairs," she murmured, turning towards Mr. Gryce. "I am
sure when you tell him the curtains were torn, and the chair upset, the window open and--"
But Mr. Gryce was already on the stairs with Mr. Blake, whom this small opposition seemed to have at once
determined.
"O my God!" she murmured to herself, "who could have foreseen this." And ignoring my presence with all the
egotism of extreme agitation, she hurried past me to the room above, where I speedily joined her.
CHAPTER III
THE CONTENTS OF A BUREAU DRAWER

Mr. Blake was standing in the centre of the room when I entered, carelessly following with his eyes the motion of Mr. Gryce's finger as that gentleman pointed with unwearying assiduity to the various little details that had struck us. His hat was still in his hand, and he presented a very formidable and imposing appearance, or so Mrs. Daniels appeared to think as she stood watching him from the corner, whither she had withdrawn herself.

"A forcible departure you see," exclaimed Mr. Gryce; "she had not even time to gather up her clothes;" and with a sudden movement he stooped and pulled out one of the bureau drawers before the eyes of his nonchalant listener.

Immediately a smothered exclamation struck our ears, and Mrs. Daniels started forward.

"I pray, gentlemen," she entreated, advancing in such a way as to place herself against the front of the bureau in a manner to preclude the opening of any more drawers, "that you will remember that a modest woman such as this girl was, would hardly like to have her clothing displayed before the eyes of strangers."

Mr. Gryce instantly closed the drawer.

"You are right," said he; "pardon the rough ways of a somewhat hardened officer of the law."

She drew up closer to the bureau, still protecting it with her meagre but energetic form while her eyes rested with almost a savage expression upon the master of the house as if he, and not the detective, had been the aggressor whose advances she feared.

Mr. Blake did not return the look.

"If that is all you can show me, I think I will proceed to my appointment," said he. "The matter does seem to be more serious than I thought, and if you judge it necessary to take any active measures, why, let no consideration of my great and inherent dislike to notoriety of any kind, interfere with what you consider your duty. As for the house, it is at your command, under Mrs. Daniels' direction. Good morning." And returning our bows with one singularly impressive for all its elegant carelessness, he at once withdrew.

Mrs. Daniels took one long deep breath and came from the bureau. Instantly Mr. Gryce stooped and pulled out the drawer she had so visibly protected. A white towel met our eyes, spread neatly out at its full length. Lifting it, we looked beneath. A carefully folded dress of dark blue silk, to all appearance elegantly made, confronted our rather eager eyes. Beside it, a collar of exquisite lace--I know enough of such matters to be a judge--pricked through by a gold breast-pin of a strange and unique pattern. A withered bunch of what appeared to have been a bouquet of red roses, surmounted the whole, giving to the otherwise commonplace collection the appearance of a relic from the tomb.

We both drew back in some amazement, involuntarily glancing up at Mrs. Daniels.

"I have no explanation to give," said that woman, with a calmness strangely in contrast to the agitation she had displayed while Mr. Blake had remained in the room. "That those things rich as they are, really belonged to the girl, I have no doubt. She brought them when she came, and they only confirm what I have before intimated: that she was no ordinary sewing girl, but a woman who had seen better days."

With a low "humph!" and another glance at the dark blue dress and delicate collar, Mr. Gryce carefully replaced the cloth he had taken from them, and softly closed the drawer without either of us having laid a finger upon a single article. Five minutes later he disappeared from the room.

I did not see him again till occasion took me below, when I beheld him softly issue from Mr. Blake's private apartment. Meeting me, he smiled, and I saw that whether he was conscious of betraying it or not, he had come upon some clue or at the least fashioned for himself some theory with which he was more or less satisfied.

"An elegant apartment, that," whispered he, nodding sideways toward the room he had just left, "pity you haven't time to examine it."

"Are you sure that I haven't?" returned I, drawing a step nearer to escape the eyes of Mrs. Daniels who had descended after me.

"Quite sure;" and we hastened down together into the yard.

But my curiosity once aroused in this way would not let me rest. Taking an opportunity when Mr. Gryce was engaged in banter with the girls below, and in this way learning more in a minute of what he wanted to know than some men would gather in an hour by that or any other method, I stole lightly back and entered this room.

I almost started in my surprise. Instead of the luxurious apartment I had prepared myself to behold, a plain, scantily-furnished room opened before me, of a nature between a library and a studio. There was not even a carpet on the polished floor, only a rug, which strange to say was not placed in the centre of the room or even before the fireplace, but on one side, and directly in front of a picture that almost at first blush had attracted my attention as being the only article in the room worth looking at. It was the portrait of a woman, handsome, haughty and alluring; a modern beauty, with eyes of fire burning beneath high piled locks of jetty blackness, that were only relieved from being too intense by the scarlet hood of an opera cloak, that was drawn over them. "A sister," I thought to myself, "it
is too modern for his mother," and I took a step nearer to see if I could trace any likeness in the chiselled features of 
this disdainful brunette, to the more characteristic ones of the careless gentleman who had stood but a few moments 
before in my presence. As I did so, I was struck with the distance with which the picture stood out from the wall, 
and thought to myself that the awkwardness of the framing came near marring the beauty of this otherwise lovely 
work of art. As for the likeness I was in search of, I found it or thought I did, in the expression of the eyes which 
were of the same color as Mr. Blake's but more full and passionate; and satisfied that I had exhausted all the picture 
could tell me, I turned to make what other observations I could, when I was startled by confronting the agitated 
countenance of Mrs. Daniels who had entered behind me.

"This is Mr. Blake's room," said she with dignity; "no one ever intrudes here but myself, not even the servants."

"I beg pardon," said I, glancing around in vain for the something which had awakened that look of satisfaction in 
Mr. Gryce's eyes. "I was attracted by the beauty of this picture visible through the half open door and stepped in to 
favor myself with a nearer view. It is very lovely. A sister of Mr. Blake?"

"No, his cousin;" and she closed the door after us with an emphasis that proclaimed she was anything but 
pleased.

It was my last effort to obtain information on my own account. In a few moments later Mr. Gryce appeared from 
below, and a conversation ensued with Mrs. Daniels that absorbed my whole attention.

"You are very anxious, my man here tells me, that this girl should be found?" remarked Mr. Gryce; "so much so 
that you are willing to defray all the expenses of a search?"

She bowed. "As far as I am able sir; I have a few hundreds in the bank, you are welcome to them. I would not 
keep a dollar back if I had thousands, but I am poor, and can only promise you what I myself possess; though--" and 
her cheeks grew flushed and hot with an unnatural agitation--"I believe that thousands would not be lacking if they 
were found necessary. I--I could almost swear you shall have anything in reason which you require; only the girl 
must be found and soon."

"Have you thought," proceeded Mr. Gryce, utterly ignoring the wildness of these statements, "that the girl may 
come back herself if let alone?"

"She will come back if she can," quoth Mrs. Daniels.

"Did she seem so well satisfied with her home as to warrant you in saying that?"

"She liked her home, but she loved me," returned the woman steadily. "She loved me so well she would never 
have gone as she did without being forced. Yes," said she, "though she made no outcry and stopped to put on her 
bonnet and shawl. She was not a girl to make a fuss. If they had killed her outright, she would never have uttered a 
cry."

"Why do you say they?"

"Because I am confident I heard more than one man's voice in her room."

"Humph! Would you know those voices if you heard them again?"

"No."

There was a surprise in this last negative which Mr. Gryce evidently noticed.

"I ask," said he, "because I have been told that Mr. Blake lately kept a body servant who has been seen to look at 
this girl more than once, when she has passed him on the stairs."

Mrs. Daniels' face turned scarlet with rage and she hastily rose from the chair. "I don't believe it," said she; 
"Henry was a man who knew his place, and--I won't hear such things," she suddenly exclaimed; "Emily was--was a 
lady, and--" 

"Well, well," interposed Mr. Gryce soothingly, "though the cat looks at the king, it is no sign the king looks at 
the cat. We have to think of everything you know."

"You must never think of anything like that."

Mr. Gryce softly ran his thumb around the brim of the hat he held in his hand. "Mrs. Daniels," observed he, "it 
would greatly facilitate matters if you would kindly tell us why you take such an interest in this girl. One glimpse at 
her real history would do more towards setting us on the right track than anything else you could offer."

Her face assumed an unmistakable frown. "Have I not told you," said she, "what is known of it? That she came 
to me about two years ago for work; that I liked her, and so hired her; that she has been with us ever since and--"

"Then you will not tell us?" exclaimed Mr. Gryce.

Her face fell and a look of hesitation crossed it.

"I doubt if we can do anything unless you do," continued he.

Her countenance settled again into a resolved expression.

"You are mistaken," said she; "if the girl had a secret--as nearly all girls have, brought low as she has evidently 
been--it had nothing to do with her disappearance, nor would a knowledge of it help you in any way. I am confident 
of this and so shall hold my peace."
She was not a woman to be frightened or cajoled into making revelations she did not think necessary, and seeing it, Mr. Gryce refrained from urging her further.

"However, you will at least tell me this," said he, "what were the knick-knacks she took away with her from her bureau drawer?"

"No," said she, "for they have nothing to do with her abduction. They were articles of positive value to her, though I assure you of little importance to any one else. All that is shown by their disappearance is the fact that she had a moment's time allowed her in which to collect what she most wanted."

Mr. Gryce arose. "Well," said he, "you have given us a hard sum to work out, but I am not the man to recoil from anything hard. If I can discover the whereabouts of this girl I will certainly do it, but you must help me."

"I, how?"

"By inserting a personal in the Herald. You say she loves you; and would come back if she could. Now whether you believe it or not this is open to doubt; therefore I would advise that you take some such means as that to inform her of the anxiety of her friends and their desire to communicate with her."

"Impossible," she cried vehemently. "I should be afraid--"

"Well?"

"I might put it that Mrs. D----, anxious about Emily, desires information of her whereabouts--"

"Put it any way you like."

"You had better add," said I, speaking for the first time, "that you would be willing to pay for information."

"Yes," said Mr. Gryce, "add that."

Mrs. Daniels frowned, but made no objection, and after getting as minute a description as possible of the clothing worn by the girl the night before, we left the house.

CHAPTER IV

THOMPSON'S STORY

"An affair of some mystery," remarked Mr. Gryce, as we halted at the corner to take a final look at the house and its environs. "Why a girl should choose such a method of descent as that,"--and he pointed to the ladder down which we believed her to have come--"to leave a house of which she had been an inmate for a year, baffles me, I can tell you. If it were not for those marks of blood which betray her track, I would be disinclined to believe any such hare-brained adventure was ever perpetrated by a woman. As it is, what wouldn't I give for her photograph. Black hair, black eyes, white face and thin figure! what a description whereby to find a girl in this great city of New York. Ah!" said he with sudden gratification, "here is Mr. Blake again; his appointment must have been a failure. Let us see if his description will be any more definite." And hurrying towards the advancing figure of that gentleman, he put some questions to him.

Instantly Mr. Blake stopped, looked at him blankly for a moment, then replied in a tone sufficiently loud for me to hear:

"I am sorry, sir, if my description could have done you any good, but I have not the remotest idea how the girl looked. I did not know till this morning even, that there was such a person in my house as a sewing-woman. I leave all such domestic concerns entirely with Mrs. Daniels."

Mr. Gryce again bowed low and ventured another question. The answer came as before, distinctly to my ears.

"O, I may have seen her, I can not say about that; I very often run across the servants in the hall; but whether she is tall or short, light or dark, pretty or ugly, I know no more than you do, sir." Then with a dignified nod calculated to abash a man in Mr. Gryce's position, inquired,

"Is that all?"

It did not seem to be, Mr. Gryce put another question.

Mr. Blake give him a surprised stare before replying, then courteously remarked,

"I do not concern myself with servants after they have left me. Henry was an excellent valet, but a trifle domineering, something which I never allow in any one who approaches me. I dismissed him and that was the end of it, I know nothing of what has become of him."

Mr. Gryce bowed and drew back, and Mr. Blake, with the haughty step peculiar to him, passed by him and reentered his house.

"I should not like to get into that man's clutches," said I, as my superior rejoined me; "he has a way of making one appear so small."

Mr. Gryce shot an askance look at his shadow gloomily following him along the pavement. "Yet it may happen that you will have to run the risk of that very experience."

I glanced towards him in amazement.

"If the girl does not turn up of her own accord, or if we do not succeed in getting some trace of her movements, I shall be tempted to place you where you can study into the ways of this gentleman's household. If the affair is a
mystery, it has its centre in that house."

I stared at Mr. Gryce good and roundly. "You have come across something which I have missed," observed I, "or you could not speak so positively."

"I have come across nothing that was not in plain sight of any body who had eyes to see it," he returned shortly.

I shook my head slightly mortified.

"You had it all before you," continued he, "and if you were not able to pick up sufficient facts on which to base a conclusion, you mustn't blame me for it."

More nettled than I would be willing to confess, I walked back with him to the station, saying nothing then, but inwardly determined to reestablish my reputation with Mr. Gryce before the affair was over. Accordingly hunting up the man who had patrolled the district the night before, I inquired if he had seen any one go in or out of the side gate of Mr. Blake's house on ----- street, between the hours of eleven and one.

"No," said he, "but I heard Thompson tell a curious story this morning about some one he had seen."

"What was it?"

"He said he was passing that way last night about twelve o'clock when he remarked standing under the lamp on the corner of Second Avenue, a group consisting of two men and a woman, who no sooner beheld him than they separated, the men drawing back into Second Avenue and the woman coming hastily towards him. Not understanding the move, he stood waiting her approach, when instead of advancing to where he was, she paused at the gate of Mr. Blake's house and lifted her hand as if to open it, when with a wild and terrified gesture she started back, covering her face with her hands, and before he knew it, had actually fled in the direction from which she had come. A little startled, Thompson advanced and looked through the gate before him to see if possible what had alarmed her, when to his great surprise, he beheld the pale face of the master of the house, Mr. Blake himself, looking through the bars from the other side of the gate. He in his turn started back and before he could recover himself, Mr. Blake had disappeared. He says he tried the gate after that, but found it locked."

"Thompson tells you this story, does he?"

"Yes."

"Well," said I, "it's a pretty wild kind of a tale, and all I have got to say is, that neither you nor Thompson had better go blabbing it around too much. Mum is the word where such men as Mr. Blake are concerned." And I departed to hunt up Thompson.

But he had nothing to add to his statement, except that the girl appeared to be tall and thin, and was closely wrapped about in a shawl. My next move was to make such inquiries as I could with safety into the private concerns of Mr. Blake and his family, and discovered--well, such facts as these:

That Mr. Blake was a man who if he paid but little attention to domestic affairs was yet rarely seen out of his own house, except upon occasions of great political importance, when he was always to be found on the platform at meetings of his constituents. Though to the ordinary observer a man eminently calculated, from his good looks, fine position, and solid wealth to enjoy society, he not only manifested a distaste for it, but even went so far as to refuse to participate in the social dinners of his most intimate friends; the only table to which he would sit down being that of some public caterer, where he was sure of finding none but his political associates assembled.

To all appearance he wished to avoid the ladies, a theory borne out by the fact that never, even in church, on the street, or at any place of amusement, was he observed with one at his side. This fact in a man, young--he was not far from thirty-five at that time--rich, and marriageable, would, however, have been more noteworthy than it was if he had not been known to belong to a family eminent for their eccentricities. Not a man of all his race but had possessed some marked peculiarity. His father, bibliomaniac though he was, would never treat a man or a woman with decency, who mentioned Shakspeare to him, nor would he acknowledge to his dying day any excellence in that divine poet beyond a happy way of putting words together. Mr. Blake's uncle hated all members of the legal profession, and as for his grandfather--but you have heard what a mania of dislike he had against that simple article of diet, fish; now his friends were obliged to omit it from their bills of fare whenever they expected him to dinner. If then Mr. Blake chose to have any pet antipathy--as for women for instance--he surely had precedent enough in his own family to back him. However, it was whispered in my ear by one gentleman, a former political colleague of his who had been with him in Washington, that he was known at one time to show considerable attention to Miss Evelyn Blake, that cousin of his who has since made such a brilliant thing of it by marrying, and straightway losing by death, a wealthy old scapegrace of a French noble, the Count De Mirac. But that was not a matter to be talked about, Madame the Countess being free at present and in New York, though to all appearance upon anything but pleasant terms with her quondam admirer.

Remembering the picture I had seen in Mr. Blake's private apartment, I asked if this lady was a brunette, and being told she was, and of the most pronounced type, felt for the moment I had stumbled upon something in the shape of a clue; but upon resorting to Mr. Gryce with my information, he shook his head with a short laugh and told
me I would have to dive deeper than that if I wanted to fish up the truth lying at the bottom of this well.

CHAPTER V
A NEW YORK BELLE

Meanwhile all our efforts to obtain information in regard to the fate or whereabouts of the missing girl, had so far proved utterly futile. Even the advertisements inserted by Mrs. Daniels had produced no effect; and frustrated in my scheme I began to despair, when the accounts of that same Mrs. Daniels' strange and unaccountable behavior during these days of suspense, which came to me through Fanny, (the pretty housemaid at Mr. Blake's, whose acquaintance I had lately taken to cultivating,) aroused once more my dormant energies and led me to ask myself if the affair was quite as hopeless as it seemed.

"If she was a ghost," was her final expression on the subject, "she couldn't go rambling around this house more than she does. It seems as if she couldn't keep still a minute. Upstairs and down, upstairs and down, till we're most wild. And so white as she is and so trembling! Why her hands shake so all the time she never dares lift a dish off the table. And then the way she hangs about Mr. Blake's door when he's at home! She never goes in, that's the oddest part of it, but walks up and down before it, wringing her hands and talking to herself just like a mad woman. Why, I have seen her last put her hand on the knob twice in an afternoon perhaps, then draw back as if she was afraid it would burn her; and if by any chance the door opened and Mr. Blake came out, you ought to have seen how she run. What it all means I don't know, but I have my imaginings, and if she is'nt crazy, why--" etc., etc.

In face of facts like these I felt it would be pure insanity to despair. Let there be but a mystery, though it involved a man of the position of Mr. Blake and I was safe. My only apprehension had been that the whole affair would dissolve itself into an ordinary elopement or some such common-place matter.

Where, therefore, a few minutes later, Fanny announced that Mr. Blake had ordered a carriage to take him to the Charity Ball that evening, I determined to follow him and learn if possible what change had taken place in himself or his circumstances, to lead him into such an innovation upon his usual habits. Though the hour was late I had but little difficulty in carrying out my plan, arriving at the Academy something less than an hour after the opening dance.

The crowd was great and I circulated the floor three times before I came upon him. When I did, I own I was slightly disappointed; for instead of finding him as I anticipated, the centre of an admiring circle of ladies and gentlemen, I espied him withdrawn into a corner with a bland old politician of the Fifteenth Ward, discussing, as I presently overheard, the merits and demerits of a certain Smith who at that time was making some disturbance in the party.

"If that is all he has come for," thought I, "I had better have stayed at home and made love to the pretty Fanny." And somewhat chagrined, I took up my stand near by, and began scrutinizing the ladies.

Suddenly I felt my heart stand still, the noise of voices ceasing the same instant behind me. A lady was passing on the arm of a foreign-looking gentleman, whom it did not require a second glance to identify with the subject of the portrait in Mr. Blake's house. Older by some few years than when her picture was painted, her beauty had assumed a certain defiant expression that sufficiently betrayed the fact that the years had not been so wholly happy as she had probably anticipated when she jilted handsome Holman Blake for the old French Count. At all events so I interpreted the look of latent scorn that burned in her dark eyes, as she slowly turned her richly bejeweled head towards the corner where that gentleman stood, and meeting his eyes no doubt, bowed with a sudden loss of self-possession that not all the haughty carriage of her noble form, held doubly erect for the next few moments, could quite conceal or make forgotten.

"She still loves him," I inwardly commented and turned to see if the surprise had awakened any expression on his uncommunicative countenance.

Evidently not, for the tough old politician of the Fifteenth Ward was laughing, at one of his own jokes probably, and looking up in the face of Mr. Blake, whose back was turned to me, in a way that entirely precluded all thought of any tragic expression in that quarter. Somewhat disgusted, I withdrew and followed the lady.

I could not get very near. By this time the presence of a live countess in the assembly had become known, and I found her surrounded by a swarm of half-fledged youths. But I cared little for this; all I wanted to know was whether Mr. Blake would approach her or not during the evening. Tediously the moments passed; but a detective on duty, or on fancied duty, succumbs to no weariness. I had a woman before me worth studying and the time could not be thrown away. I learned to know her beauty; the poise of her head, the flush of her cheek, the curl of her lip, the glance—yes, the glance of her eye, though that was more difficult to understand, for she had a way of drooping her lids at times that, while exceedingly effective upon the poor wretch toward whom she might be directing that half-veiled shaft of light, was anything but conducive to my purposes.

At length with a restless shrug of her haughty shoulders she turned away from her crowd of adorers, her breast heaving under its robing of garnet velvet, and her whole face flaring with a light that might mean resolve and might
mean simply love. I had no need to turn my head to see who was advancing towards her; her stately attitude as countess, her thrilling glance as woman, betrayed only too readily.

He was the more composed of the two. Bowing over her hand with a few words I could not hear, he drew back a step and began uttering the usual common-place sentiments of the occasion.

She did not respond. With a splendor of indifference not often seen even in the manner of our grandest ladies, she waited, opening and shutting her richly feathered fan, as one who would say, "I know all this has to be gone through with, therefore I will be patient." But as the moments passed, and his tone remained unchanged, I could detect a slight gleam of impatience flash in the depths of her dark eyes, and a change come into the conventional smile that had hitherto lighted, without illuminating her countenance. Drawing still further back from the crowd that was not to be awed from pressing upon her, she looked around as if seeking a refuge. Her glance fell upon a certain window, with a gleam of satisfaction. Seeing they would straightway withdraw there, I took advantage of the moment and made haste to conceal myself behind a curtain as near that vicinity as possible. In another instant I heard them approaching.

"You seem to be rather overwhelmed with attention to-night," were the first words I caught, uttered in Mr. Blake's calmest and most courteous tones.

"Do you think so?" was the slightly sarcastic reply. "I was just deciding to the contrary when you came up."

There was a pause. Taking out my knife, I ripped open a seam in the curtain hanging before me, and looked through. He was eyeing her intently, a firm look upon his face that made its reserve more marked than common. I saw him gaze at her handsome head piled with its midnight tresses amid which the jewels, doubtless of her dead lord, burned with a fierce and ominous glare, at her smooth olive brow, her partly veiled eyes where the fire passionately blazed, at her scarlet lips trembling with an emotion her rapidly flushing cheeks would not allow her to conceal. I saw his glances fall and embrace her whole elegant form with its casing of ruby velvet and ornamentation of lace and diamonds, and an expectant thrill passed through me almost as if I already beheld the mask of his reserve falling, and the true man flash out in response to the wooing beauty of this full-blown rose, evidently in waiting for him. But it died away and a deeper feeling seized me as I saw his glances return unkindled to her countenance, and heard him say in still more measured accents than before:

"Is it possible then that the Countess De Mirac can desire the adulation of us poor American plebeians? I had not thought it, madame."

Slowly her dark eyes turned towards him; she stood a statue.

"But I forget," he went on, a tinge of bitterness for a moment showing itself in his smile: "perhaps in returning to her own country, Evelyn Blake has so far forgotten the last two years as to find pleasure again in the toys and foibles of her youth. Such things have been, I hear." And he bowed almost to the ground in his half sarcastic homage.

"Evelyn Blake! It is long since I have heard that name," she murmured.

He could not restrain the quick flush from mounting to his brow. "Pardon me," said he, "if it brings you sadness or unwelcome memories. I promise you I will not so transgress again."

A wan smile crossed her lips grown suddenly pallid.

"You mistake," said she; "if my name brings up a past laden with bitter memories and shadowed by regret, it also recalls much that is pleasant and never to be forgotten. I do not object to hearing my girlhood's name uttered--by my nearest relative."

The answer was dignity itself. "Your name is Countess De Mirac, your relatives must be proud to utter it."

A gleam not unlike the lightning's quick flash shot from the eyes she drooped before him.

"Is it Holman Blake I am listening to," said she; "I do not recognize my old friend in the cool and sarcastic man of the world now before me."

"A wan smile crossed her lips grown suddenly pallid."

"What," she cried, "do you mean--would you say that--""""I would say nothing," interrupted he calmly, stooping for the fan she had dropped. "At an interview which is at once a meeting and a parting, I would give utterance to nothing which would seem like recrimination. I--"

"Wait," suddenly exclaimed she, reaching out her hand for her fan with a gesture lofty as it was resolute. "You have spoken a word which demands explanation; what have I ever done to you that you should speak the word recrimination to me?"

"What? You shook my faith in womankind; you showed me that a woman who had once told a man she loved him, could so far forget that love as to marry one she could never respect, for the sake of titles and jewels. You showed me--"

"Hold," said she again, this time without gesture or any movement, save that of her lips grown pallid as marble, "and what did you show me?"

He started, colored profoundly, and for a moment stood before her unmasked of his stern self-possession. "I beg
your pardon," said he, "I take back that word, recrimination."

It was now her turn to lift her head and survey him. With glance less cool than his, but fully as deliberate, she looked at his proud head bending before her; studying his face, line by line, from the stern brow to the closely compressed lips on which melancholy seemed to have set its everlasting seal, and a change passed over her countenance. "Holman," said she, with a sudden rush of tenderness, "if in the times gone by, we both behaved with too much worldly prudence for it now to be any great pleasure for either of us to look back, is that any reason why we should mar our whole future by dwelling too long upon what we are surely still young enough to bury if not forget? I acknowledge that I would have behaved in a more ideal fashion, if, after I had been forsaken by you, I had turned my face from society, and let the canker-worm of despair slowly destroy whatever life and bloom I had left. But I was young, and society had its charms, so did the prospect of wealth and position, however hollow they may have proved; you who are the master of both this day, because twelve months ago you forsook Evelyn Blake, should be the last to reproach me with them. I do not reproach you; I only say let the past be forgotten--"

"Impossible," exclaimed he, his whole face darkening with an expression I could not fathom. "What was done at that time cannot be undone. For you and me there is no future. Yes," he said turning towards her as she made a slight fluttering move of dissent, "no future; we can bury the past, but we cannot resurrect it. I doubt if you would wish to if we could; as we cannot, of course you will not desire even to converse upon the subject again. Evelyn I wanted to see you once, but I do not wish to see you again; will you pardon my plain speaking, and release me?"

"I will pardon your plain speaking, but--" Her look said she would not release him.

He seemed to understand it so, and smiled, but very bitterly. In another moment he had bowed and gone, and she had returned to her crowd of adoring sycophants.

CHAPTER VI
A BIT OF CALICO

It was about this time that I took up my residence in a sort of lodging-house that occupied the opposite corner to that of Mr. Blake. My room, as I took pains to have it, overlooked the avenue, and from its windows I could easily watch the goings and comings of the gentleman whose movements were daily becoming of more and more interest to me. For set it down to caprice--and men are often as capricious as women--or account for it as you will, his restlessness at this period was truly remarkable. Not a day that he did not spend his time in walking the streets, and that not in his usual aimless gentlemanly way, but eagerly and with an intent gaze that roamed here and there, like a bird seeking its prey. It would often be as late as five o'clock before he came in, and if, as now frequently happened, he did not have company to dinner, he was even known to start out again after seven o'clock and go over the same ground as in the morning, looking with strained gaze, that vainly endeavored to appear unconcerned, into the faces of the women that he passed. I not unfrequently followed him at these times as much for my own amusement as from any hope I had of coming upon anything that should aid me in the work before me. But when he suddenly changed his route of travel from a promenade in the fashionable thoroughfares of Broadway and Fourteenth Street to a walk through Chatham Square and the dark, narrow streets of the East side, I began to scent whom the prey might be that he was seeking, and putting every other consideration aside, regularly set myself to dog his steps, as only I, with my innumerable disguises, knew how to do. For three separate days I kept at his heels wherever he went, each day growing more and more astonished if not to say hopeful, as I found myself treading the same ground as in the morning, looking with strained gaze, that vainly endeavored to appear unconcerned, into the faces of the women that he passed. I not unfrequently followed him at these times as much for my own amusement as from any hope I had of coming upon anything that should aid me in the work before me. But when he suddenly changed his route of travel from a promenade in the fashionable thoroughfares of Broadway and Fourteenth Street to a walk through Chatham Square and the dark, narrow streets of the East side, I began to scent whom the prey might be that he was seeking, and putting every other consideration aside, regularly set myself to dog his steps, as only I, with my innumerable disguises, knew how to do. For three separate days I kept at his heels wherever he went, each day growing more and more astonished if not to say hopeful, as I found myself treading the narrowest and most disreputable streets of the city; halting at the shops of pawnbrokers; peering into the back-rooms of liquor shops; mixing with the crowds that infest the corner groceries at nightfall, and even slinking with hand on the trigger of the pistol I carried in my pocket, up dark alleys where every door that swung noiselessly to and fro as we passed, shut upon haunts of such villainy as only is known to us of the police, or to those good souls that for the sake of One whose example they follow, lay aside their fears and sensitiveness to carry light into the dim pits of this wretched world. At first I thought Mr. Blake might have some such reason for the peculiar course he took. But his indifference to all crowds where only men were collected, his silence where a word would have been well received, convinced me it was a woman he was seeking and that with an intentness which blinded him to the commonest needs of the hour. I even saw him once in his hurry and abstraction, step across the body of a child who had fallen face downward on the stones, and that with an expression showing he was utterly unconscious of anything but an obstacle in his path. The strangest part of it all was that he seemed to have no fear. To be sure he took pains to leave his watch at home; but with such a figure and carriage as he possessed, the absence of jewelry could never deceive the eye for a moment as to the fact of his being a man of wealth, and those he went among would do anything for money. Perhaps, like me, he carried a pistol. At all events he shunned no spot where either poverty lay hid or deviltry reigned, his proud stern head bending to enter the lowest doors without a tremble of the haughty lips that remained compressed as by an iron force; except when some poor forlorn creature with flaunting head-gear, and tremulous hands, attracted by his bearing would hastily brush against him, when he would turn and look, perhaps speak, though what he said I always failed to catch; after which he would hurry on as if possessed by seven devils.
The evenings of those three days were notable also. Two of them he spent in the manner I have described; the third he went to the Windsor House—where the Countess De Mirac had taken rooms—going up to the ladies' entrance and actually ringing the bell, only to start back and walk up and down on the opposite side of the way, with his hands behind his back, and his head bent, evidently deliberating as to whether he should or should not carry out his original intention of entering. The arrival of a carriage with the stately subject of his deliberations, who from her elaborate costume had seemingly been to some kettledrum or private reception, speedily put an end to his doubts. As the door opened to admit her, I saw him cast one look at her heavily draped person, with its snowy opera-cloak drawn tightly over the sweeping folds of her maize colored silk, and shrink back with what sounded like a sigh of anger or distrust, and without waiting for the closing of the door upon her, turn toward home with a step that hesitated no longer.

The fourth day to my infinite chagrin, I was sick and could not go with him. All I could do was to wrap myself in blankets and sit in my window from which I had the satisfaction of viewing him start as I supposed upon his usual course. The rest of the day was employed in a long, dull waiting for his return, only relieved by casual glimpses of Mrs. Daniels' troubled face as she appeared at one window or another of the old-fashioned mansion before me. She seemed, too, to be unusually restless, opening the windows and looking out with forlorn crannies of her neck as if she too were watching for her master. Indeed I have no doubt from what I afterwards learned, that she was in a state of constant suspense during these days. Her frequent appearance at the station house, where she in vain sought for some news of the girl in whose fate she was so absorbed, confirmed this. Only the day before I gave myself up to my unreserved espionage of Mr. Blake, she had had an interview with Mr. Gryce in which she had let fall her apprehensions that the girl was dead, and asked whether if that were the case, the police would be likely to come into a knowledge of the fact. Upon being assured that if she had not been privately made way with, there was every chance in their favor, she had grown a little calmer, but before going away had so far forgotten herself as to intimate that if some result was not reached before another fortnight had elapsed, she should take the matter into her own hands and—She did not say what she would do, but her looks were of a very menacing character. It was no wonder, then, that her countenance bore marks of the keenest anxiety as she trod the halls of that dim old mansion, with its dusky corners rich with brocades, and the glimmering shine of ancient brocades, of mark and wrong; or bent her wrinkled forehead to gaze from the windows for the coming of one whose footsteps were ever delayed. She happened to be looking out, when after a longer stroll than usual the master of the house returned. As he made his appearance at the corner, I saw her hurriedly withdraw her head and hide herself behind the curtain, from which position she watched him as with tired steps and somewhat dejected mien, he passed up the steps and entered the house. Not till the door closed upon him, did she venture to issue forth and with a hurried movement shut the blinds and disappear. This anxiety on her part redoubled mine, and thankful enough was I when on the next day I found myself well enough to renew my operations. To ferret out this mystery, if mystery it was,—I still found myself forced to admit the possibility of there being none—had now become the one ambition of my life; and all because it was not only an unusually blind one, but of a nature that involved danger to my position as detective, I entered upon it with a zest rare even to me who love my work and all it involves with an undivided passion.

To equip myself, then, in a fresh disguise and to join Mr. Blake shortly after he had left his own corner, was anything but a hardship to me that bright winter morning, though I knew from past experience, a long and wearisome walk was before me with nothing in all probability at the end but reiterated disappointment. But for once the fates had willed it otherwise. Whether Mr. Blake, discouraged at the failure of his own attempts, whatever they were, felt less heart to prosecute them than usual I cannot say, but we had scarcely entered upon the lower end of the Bowery, before he suddenly turned with a look of disgust, and gazing hurriedly about him, hailed a Madison Avenue car that was rapidly approaching. I was at that moment on the other side of the way, but I hurried forward too, and signaled the same car. But just as I was on the point of entering it I perceived Mr. Blake step hastily back and with his eyes upon a girl that was hurrying past him with a basket on her arm, regain the sidewalk with a swiftness that argued his desire to stop her. Of course I let the car pass me, though I did not dare approach him too closely after my forced to admit the possibility of there being none—had now become the one ambition of my life; and all because it was not only an unusually blind one, but of a nature that involved danger to my position as detective, I entered upon it with a zest rare even to me who love my work and all it involves with an undivided passion.

 Barely bestowing a glance upon him, then, as he passed, in a vain attempt to read the sombre expression of his
emotion over anything. The prospect of a long tedious evening spent in a country hotel seemed almost unendurable. He did not take it quite as calmly as I did, though he was of too reserved a nature to display much. 

Just as I was going down, I caught sight of the girl tearing away from a box of garbage on the curb-stone; and when order having been restored, by which lofty statement I mean to say when your humble servant had regained his equilibrium, I awoke to the fact that she had effectually disappeared, I hurried to that box and succeeded in finding hanging to it a bit of rag easily recognized as a piece of the old calico frock of nameless color which I had been following a moment before. Regarding it as the sole spoils of a very unsatisfactory day's work, I put it carefully away in my pocket book, where it lay till--But with all my zeal for compression, I must not anticipate.

When I came home that afternoon I found myself unexpectedly involved in a matter that for the remainder of the day at least, prevented me from further attending to the affair I had in hand. The next morning Mr. Blake did not start out as usual, and at noon I received intimation from Fanny that he was preparing to take a journey. Where, she could not inform me, nor when, though she thought it probable he would take an early train. Mrs. Daniels was feeling dreadfully, she informed me; and the house was like a grave. Greatly excited at this unexpected move on Mr. Blake's part, I went home and packed my valise with something of the spirit of her who once said, under somewhat different circumstances I allow, "Whither thou goest I will go."

The truth was, I had travelled so far and learned so little, that my professional pride was piqued. That expression of Mr. Gryce still rankled, and nothing could soothe my injured spirit now but success. Accordingly when Mr. Blake stepped up to the ticket office of the Hudson River Railroad next morning, to buy a ticket for Putney, a small town in the northern part of Vermont, he found beside him a spruce young drummer, or what certainly appeared such, who by some strange coincidence, wanted a ticket for the same place. The fact did not seem in the least to surprise him, nor did he cast me a look beyond the ordinary glance of one stranger at another. Indeed Mr. Blake had no appearance of being a suspicious man, nor do I think at this time, he had the remotest idea that he was either watched or followed; an ignorance of the truth which I took care to preserve by taking my seat in a different car.

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I did not wait to hear more but hurried down to the hotel he had pointed out, and hunting up the landlord inquired if for love or money he could get me any sort of a conveyance for Melville that afternoon. He assured me it would be impossible, the livery stable as well as his own being entirely empty.

"Such a thing don't happen here once in five years," said he to me. "But the old codger who is dead, though a queer dick was a noted personage in these parts, and not a man, woman or child, who could find a horse, mule or donkey, but what availed himself of the privilege. Even the doctor's spavined mare was pressed into service, though she halts on one leg and stops to get her breath half a dozen times in going up one short hill. You will have to wait for the stage, sir."

"But I am in a hurry," said I as I saw Mr. Blake enter. "I have business in Melville tonight, and I would pay anything in reason to get there."

But the landlord only shook his head; and drawing back with the air of an abused man, I took up my stand in the doorway where I could hear the same colloquy entered into with Mr. Blake, with the same unsatisfactory termination. He did not take it quite as calmly as I did, though he was of too reserved a nature to display much emotion over anything. The prospect of a long tedious evening spent in a country hotel seemed almost unendurable.
to him, but he finally succumbed to the force of circumstances, as indeed he seemed obliged to do, and partaking of
such refreshment as the rather poorly managed hotel afforded, retired without ceremony to his room, from which he
did not emerge again till next morning. In all this he had somehow managed not to give his name; and by means of
some inquiries I succeeded in making that evening, I found his person was unknown in the town.

By a little management I secured the next room to his, by which arrangement I succeeded in passing a sleepless
night, Mr. Blake spending most of the wee sma’ hours in pacing the floor of his room, with an unremitting regularity
that had anything but a soothing effect upon my nerves. Early the next morning we took the stage, he sitting on the
back seat, and I in front with the driver. There were other passengers, but I noticed he never spoke to any of them,
nor through all the long drive did he once look up from the corner where he had ensconced himself. It was twelve
o’clock when we reached the end of the route, a small town of somewhat less than the usual pretensions of mountain
villages; so insignificant indeed, that I found it more and more difficult to imagine what the wealthy ex-
Congressman could find in such a spot as this, to make amends for a journey of such length and discomfort; when to
my increasing wonder I heard him give orders for a horse to be saddled and brought round to the inn door directly
after dinner. This was a move I had not expected and it threw me a little aback, for although I had thus far managed
to hold myself so aloof from Mr. Blake, even while keeping him under my eye, that no suspicion of my interest in
his movements had as yet been awakened, how could I thus for the third time follow his order with one precisely
similar, without attracting an attention that would be fatal to my plans. Yet to let him ride off alone now, would be to
drop the trail at the very moment the scent became of importance.

The landlord, a bustling, wiry little man all nervousness and questions, unwittingly helped me at this crisis.
"Are you going on to Perry, sir?" inquired he of that gentleman, "I have been expecting a man along these three
days bound for Perry."

"I am that man," I broke in, stepping forward with some appearance of asperity, "and I hope you won't keep me
waiting. A horse as soon as dinner is over, do you hear? I am two days late now, and won't stand any nonsense."

And to escape the questions sure to follow, I strode into the dining-room with a half-fierce, half-
sullen countenance, that effectually precluded all advances. During the meal I saw Mr. Blake’s eye roam more than once
atoyrds my face; but I did not return his gaze, or notice him in any way; hurrying through my dinner, and mounting
the first horse brought around, as if time were my only consideration. But once on the road I took the first
opportunity to draw rein and wait, suddenly remembering that I had not heard Mr. Blake give any intimation of the
direction he intended taking. A few minutes revealed to me his elegant form well mounted and showing to
perfection in his closely buttoned coat, slowly approaching up the road. Taking advantage of a rise in the ground, I
lingered till he was almost upon me, when I cantered quickly on, fearing to arouse his apprehensions if I allowed
him to pass me on a road so solitary as that which now stretched out before us: a move provocative of much
embarrassment to me, as I dared not turn my head for the same reason, anxious as I was to keep him in sight.

The roads dividing before me, at length gave me my first opportunity to pause and look back. He was some fifty
paces behind. Waiting till he came up, I bowed with the surly courtesy I thought in keeping with the character I had
assumed, and asked if he knew which road led towards Perry, saying I had come off in such haste I had forgotten to
inquire my way. He returned my bow, pointed towards the left hand road and saying, “I know this does not,” calmly
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And thus we went on for an hour, over the most uneven country I ever traversed, he sitting on the
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And thus we went on for an hour, over the most uneven country I ever traversed, he always one hill ahead; when
suddenly, by what instinct I cannot determine, I felt myself approaching the end, and hastening to the top of the
ascent up which I was then laboring, looked down into the shallow valley spread out before me.

What a sight met my eyes if I had been intent on anything less practical than the movements of the solitary
horseman below! Hills on hills piled about a verdant basin in whose depths nestled a scanty collection of houses, in
number so small they could be told upon the fingers of the right hand, but which notwithstanding lent an
indescribable aspect of comfort to this remote region of hill and forest.

But the vision of Mr. Blake pausing half way down the slope before me, examining, yes examining a pistol
which he held in his hand, soon put an end to all ideas of romance. Somewhat alarmed I reined back; but his action
had evidently no connection with me, for he did not once glance behind him, but kept his eye on the road which I
Now observed took a short turn towards a house of so weird and ominous an appearance that I scarcely marvelled at
his preoccupation.

Situated on a level track of land at the crossing of three roads, its spacious front, rude and unpainted as it was,
presented every appearance of an inn, but from its moss-grown chimneys no smoke arose, nor could I detect any
sign of life in its shutterless windows and closed doors, across which shivered the dark shadow of the one gaunt and
aged pine, that stood like a guard beside its tumbled-down porch.

Mr. Blake seemed to have been struck by the same fact concerning its loneliness, for hurriedly replacing his
pistol in his breast pocket, he rode slowly forward. I instantly conceived the plan of striking across the belt of
underbrush that separated me from this old dwelling, and by taking my stand opposite its front, intercept a view of
Mr. Blake as he approached. Hastily dismounting, therefore, I led my horse into the bushes and tied her to a tree,
proceeding to carry out my plan on foot. I was so far successful as to arrive at the further edge of the wood, which
was thick enough to conceal my presence without being too dense to obstruct my vision, just as Mr. Blake passed on
his way to this solitary dwelling. He was looking very anxious, but determined. Turning my eyes from him, I took
another glance at the house, which by this movement I had brought directly before me. It was even more deserted-
looking than I had thought; its unpainted front with its double row of blank windows meeting your gaze without a
response, while the huge old pine with half its limbs dismantled of foliage, rattled its old bones against its sides and
moaned in its aged fashion like the solitary retainer of a dead race.

I own I felt the cold shivers creep down my back as that creaking sound struck my ears, though as the day was
chill with an east wind I dare say it was more the effect of my sudden cessation from exercise, than of any
superstitious awe I felt. Mr. Blake seemed to labor under no such impressions. Riding up to the front door he
knocked without dismounting, on its dismal panels with his riding whip. No response was heard. Knitting his brows
impatiently, he tried the latch: the door was locked. Hastily running his eye over the face of the building, he drew
rein and proceeded to ride around the house, which he could easily do owing to the absence of every obstruction in
the way of fence or shrubbery. Finding no means of entrance he returned again to the front door which he shook
with an impatient hand that however produced no impression upon the trusty lock, and recognizing, doubtless, the
futility of his endeavors, he drew back, and merely pausing to give one other look at its deserted front, turned his
horse's head, and to my great amazement, proceeded with sombre mien and clouded brow to retake the road to
Melville.

This old inn or decayed homestead was then the object of his lengthened and tedious journey; this ancient house
rotting away among the bleak hills of Vermont, the bourne towards which his steps had been tending for these past
two days. I could not understand it. Rapidly emerging from the spot where I had secreted myself, I in my turn made
a circuit of the house, if happily I should discover some loophole of entrance which had escaped his attention. But
every door and window was securely barred, and I was about to follow his example and leave the spot, when I saw
two or three children advancing towards me down the cross roads, gaily swinging their school books. I noticed they
hesitated and huddled together as they approached and saw me, but not heeding this, I accosted them with a pleasant
word or so, then pointing over my shoulder to the house behind, asked who lived there. Instantly their already pale
faces grew paler.

"Why," cried one, a boy, "don't you know? That is where the two wicked men lived who stole the money out of
the Rutland bank. They were put in prison, but they got away and--"

Here, the other, a little girl, plucked him by the sleeve with such affright, that he himself took alarm and just
giving me one quick stare out of his wide eyes, grasped his companion by the hand and took to his heels. As for
myself I stood rooted to the ground in my astonishment. This blank, sleepy old house the home of the notorious
Schoenmakers after whom half of the detectives of the country were searching? I could scarcely credit my own ears.
True I now remembered they had come from these parts, still--

Turning round I eyed the house once more. How altered it looked to me! What a murderous aspect it wore, and
how dismal and secret were the tight shut windows and closely fastened doors, on one of which a rude cross scrawled
in red chalk met the eye with a mysterious significance. Even the old pine had acquired the villainous air of the
uncanny repositor of secrets too dreadful to reveal, as it groaned and murmured to itself in the keen east wind. Dark
deeds and foul wrong seemed written all over the fearful place, from the long strings of black moss that clung to the
worm-eaten eaves, to the worn stone with its great blotch of something,--could it have been blood?--that served as a
threshold to the door. Suddenly with the quickness of lightning the thought flashed across me, what could Mr.
Blake, the aristocratic representative of New York's oldest family, have wanted in this nest of infamy? What errand
of hope, fear, despair, avarice or revenge, could have brought this superior gentleman with his refined tastes and
proudly reticent manners, so many miles from home, to the forsaken den of a brace of hardy villains whose name for
two years now, had stood as the type of all that was bold, bad and lawless, and for whom during the last six weeks
the prison had yawned, and the gallows hungered. Contemplation brought no reply, and shocked at my own
Something like a sensible dread of a very possible danger now seized hold of me. If I had stumbled upon these strangely subtle, yet devilishly bold creatures in their secret lair, the pistol I carried was not going to save me. Shut in like a fox in a hole, I had little to hope for, if they once made their appearance at the stairhead or came upon me...
from any of the dim halls of the crazy old dwelling, which I now began to find altogether too large for my comfort.

Stealing cautiously forth from the room in which I had found so much to disconcert me, I crept towards the front
staircase and listened. All was deathly quiet. The old pine tree moaned and twisted without, and from time to time
the wind came sweeping down the chimney with an unearthly shrieking sound that was weirdly in keeping with the
place. But within and below all was still as the tomb, and though in no ways reassured, I determined to descend and
have the suspense over at once. I did so, pistol in hand and ears stretched to their utmost to catch the slightest rustle,
but no sound came to disturb me, nor did I meet on this lower floor the sign of any other presence in the house but
my own. Passing hastily through what appeared to be a sort of rude parlor, I stepped into the kitchen and tried one of
the windows. Finding I could easily lift it from the inside, I drew my breath with ease for the first time since I had
alighted among the broken glass above, and turning back, deliberately opened the door of the kitchen stove, and
looked in. As I half expected, I found a pile of partly charred rags, showing where the wretches had burned their
prison clothing, and proceeding further, picked up from the ashes a ring which whether or not they were conscious
of having attempted to destroy in this way I cannot say, but which I thankfully put in my pocket against the day it
might be required as proof.

Discerning nothing more in that quarter inviting interest, I asked myself if I had nerve to descend into the cellar.
Finally concluding that that was more than could be expected from any man in my position, I gave one look of
farewell to the damp and desolate walls about me, then with a breath of relief jumped from the kitchen window
again into the light and air of day. As I did so I could swear I heard a door within that old house swing on its hinges
and softly close. With a thrill I recognized the fact that it came from the cellar.

* * * *

My thoughts on the road back to Melville were many and conflicting. Chief above them all, however, rose the
comfortable conclusion that in the pursuit of one mysterious affair, I had stumbled, as is often the case, upon the
clue to another of yet greater importance, and by so doing got a start that might yet redound greatly to my advantage.
For the reward offered for the recapture of the Schoenmakers was large, and the possibility of my being the one to
put the authorities upon their track, certainly appeared after this day's developements, open at least to a very
reasonable hope. At all events I determined not to let the grass grow under my feet till I had informed the
Superintendent of what I had seen and heard that day in the old haunt of these two escaped convicts.

Arrived at the public house in Melville, and learning that Mr. Blake had safely returned there an hour before, I
drew the landlord to one side and asked what he could tell me about that old house of the two noted robbers
Schoenmaker, I had passed on my way back among the hills.

"Wa'al now," replied he, "this is curious. Here I've just been answering the gentleman up stairs a heap of
questions concerning that self same old place, and now you come along with another batch of them; just as if that
rickety old den was the only spot of interest we had in these parts."

"Perhaps that may be the truth," I laughed. "Just now when the papers are full of these rogues, anything
concerning them must be of superior interest of course." And I pressed him again to give me a history of the house
and the two thieves who had inhabited it.

"Wa'al," drawled he "'taint much we know about them, yet after all it may be a trifle too much for their necks
some day. Time was when nobody thought especial ill of them beyond a suspicion or so of their being somewhat
mean about money. That was when they kept an inn there, but when the robbery of the Rutland bank was so clearly
traced to them, more than one man about here started up and said as how they had always suspected them
Shoenmakers of being villains, and even hinted at something worse than robbery. But nothing beyond that one
rascality has yet been proved against them, and for that they were sent to jail for twenty years as you know. Two
months ago they escaped, and that is the last known of them. A precious set, too, they are; the father being only so
much the greater rogue than the son as he is years older."

"And the inn? When was that closed?"

"Has'nt it been opened since?"

"Only once when a brace of detectives came up from Troy to investigate, as they called it."

"Who has the key?"

"Ah, that's more than I can tell you."

I dared not ask how my questions differed from those of Mr. Blake, nor indeed touch upon that point in any way.
I was chiefly anxious now to return to New York without delay; so paying my bill I thanked the landlord, and
without waiting for the stage, remounted my horse and proceeded at once to Putney where I was fortunate enough to
catch the evening train. By five o'clock next morning I was in New York where I proceeded to carry out my
programme by hastening at once to headquarters and reporting my suspicions regarding the whereabouts of the
Schoenmakers. The information was received with interest and I had the satisfaction of seeing two men despatched
north that very day with orders to procure the arrest of the two notable villains wherever found.

CHAPTER VIII
A WORD OVERHEARD

That evening I had a talk with Fanny over the area gate. She came out when she saw me approach, with her eyes staring and her whole form in a flutter.

"O," she cried, "such things as I have heard this day!"

"Well," said I, "what? let me hear too." She put her hand on her heart. "I never was so frightened," whispered she, "I thought I should have fainted right away. To hear that elegant lady use such a word as crime,--"

"What elegant lady?" interrupted I. "Don't begin in the middle of your story, that's a good girl; I want to hear it all."

"Well," said she, calming down a little, "Mrs. Daniels had a visitor to-day, a lady. She was dressed--"

"O, now," interrupted I for the second time, "you can leave that out. Tell me what her name was and let the fol-de-rols go."

"Her name?" exclaimed the girl with some sharpness, "how should I know her name; she didn't come to see me."

"How did she look then? You saw her I suppose?"

"And wasn't that what I was telling you, when you stopped me. She looked like a queen, that she did; as grand a lady as ever I see, in her velvet dress sweeping over the floor, and her diamonds as big as--"

"Was she a dark woman?" I asked.

"Her hair was black and so were her eyes, if that is what you mean."

"And was she very tall and proud looking?"

The girl nodded. "You know her?" whispered she.

"No," said I, "not exactly; but I think I can tell who she is. And so she called to-day on Mrs. Daniels, did she."

"Yes, but I guess she knew master would be home before she got away."

"Come," said I, "tell me all about it; I'm getting impatient."

"And ain't I telling you?" said she. "It was about three o'clock this afternoon, the time I go up stairs to dress, so I just hangs about in the hall a bit, near the parlor door, and I hear her gossiping with Mrs. Daniels almost as if she was an old friend, and Mrs. Daniels answering her mighty stiffly and as if she wasn't glad to see her at all. But the lady didn't seem to mind, but went on talking as sweet as honey, and when they came out, you would have thought she loved the old woman like a sister to see her look into her face and say something about knowing how busy she was, but that it would give her so much pleasure if she would come some day to see her and talk over old times. But Mrs. Daniels wasn't pleased a bit and showed plain enough she didn't like the lady, fine as she was in her ways. She was going to answer her too, but just then the front door opened and Mr. Blake with his satchel in his hand, came into the house. And how he did start, to be sure, when he saw them, though he tried to say something perlite which she didn't seem to take to at all, for after muttering something about not expecting to see him, she put her hand on the knob and was going right out. But he stopped her and they went into the parlor together while Mrs. Daniels stood staring after them like one mad, her hand held out with his bag and umbrella in it, stiff as a statter in the Central Park. She did'nt stand so long, though, but came running down the hall, as if she was bewitched. I was dreadful flustered, for though I was hid behind the wall that juts out there by the back stairs, I was afraid she would see me and shame me before Mr. Blake. But she passed right by and never looked up. 'There is something dreadful mysterious in this,' thought I, and I just made up my mind to stay where I was till Mr. Blake and the lady should come out again from the parlor. I didn't have to wait very long. In a few minutes the door opened and they stepped out, he ahead and she coming after. I thought this was queer, he is always so dreadful perlite in his ways, but I thought it was a deal queerer when I saw him go up the front stairs, she hurrying after, looking I cannot tell you how, but awful troubled and anxious, I should say.

"They went into that room of his he calls his studio and though I knew it might cost me my place if I was found out, I couldn't help following and listening at the keyhole."

"And what did you hear?" I asked, for she paused to take breath.

"Well, the first thing I heard was a cry of pleasure from her, and the words, 'You keep that always before you? You cannot dislike me, then, as much as you pretend.' I don't know what she meant nor what he did, but he stepped across the room and I heard her cry out this time as if she was hurt as well as awful surprised; and he talked and talked, and I couldn't catch a word, he spoke so low; and by and by she sobbed just a little, and I got scared and would have run away but she cried out with a kind of shriek, 'O, don't say any more; to think that crime should come into our family, the proudest in the land. How could you, Holman, how could you.' Yes," the girl went on, flushing in her excitement till she was as red as the cherry ribbons in her cap, "those were the very words she used: 'To think that crime should come into our family! the proudest one in the land!' And she called him by his first name, and asked him how he could do it."
"And what did Mr. Blake say?" returned I, a little taken back myself at this result of my efforts with Fanny.

"O, I didn't wait to hear. I didn't wait for anything. If folks was going to talk about such things as that, I thought I had better be anywhere than listening at the keyhole. I went right up stairs I can tell you."

"And whom have you told of what you heard in the half dozen hours that have gone by?"

"Nobody; how could you think so mean of me when I promised, and--"

It is not necessary to go any further into this portion of the interview.

The Countess De Mirac possessed to its fullest extent the present fine lady's taste for bric-a-brac. So much I had learned in my inquiries concerning her. Remembering this, I took the bold resolution of profiting by this weakness of hers to gain admission to her presence, she being the only one sharing Mr. Blake's mysterious secret. Borrowing a valuable antique from a friend of mine at that time in the business, I made my appearance the very next day at her apartments, and sending in an urgent request to see Madame, by the trim negress who answered my summons, waited in some doubt for her reply.

It came all too soon; Madame was ill and could see no one. I was not, however, to be baffled by one rebuff. Handing the basket I held to the girl, I urged her to take it in and show her mistress what it contained, saying it was a rare article which might never again come her way.

The girl complied, though with a doubtful shake of the head which was anything but encouraging. Her incredulity, however, must have been speedily rebuked, for she almost immediately returned without the basket, saying Madame would see me.

My first thoughts upon entering the grand lady's presence, was that the girl had been mistaken, for I found the Countess walking the floor in an abstracted way, drying a letter she had evidently but just completed, by shaking it to and fro with an unsteady hand; the plaque I had brought, lying neglected on the table.

But at sight of my respectful form standing with bent head in the doorway, she hurriedly thrust the letter into a book and took up the plaque. As she did so I marked her well and almost started at the change I observed in her since that evening at the Academy. It was not only that she was dressed in some sort of loose dishabille that was in eminent contrast to the sweeping silks and satins in which I had hitherto beheld her adorned; or that she was laboring under some physical disability that robbed her dark cheek of the bloom that was its chiefest charm. The change I observed went deeper than that; it was more as if a light had been extinguished in her countenance. It was the same woman I had beheld standing like a glowing column of will and strength before the melancholy form of Mr. Blake, but with the will and strength gone, and with them all the glow.

"She no longer hopes," thought I, and already felt repaid for my trouble.

"This is a very pretty article you have brought me," said she with something of the unrestrained love of art which she undoubtedly possessed, showing itself through all her languor. "Where did it come from, and what recommendations have you, to prove it is an honest sale you offer me?"

"None," returned I, ignoring with a reassuring smile the first question, "except that I should not be afraid if all the police in New York knew I was here with this fine plaque for sale."

She gave a shrug of her proud shoulder that bespoke the French Countess and softly ran her finger round the edge of the plaque.

"I don't need anything more of this kind," said she languidly; "besides," and she set it down with a fretful air, "I am in no mood to buy this afternoon." Then shortly, "What do you ask for it?"

I named a fabulous price.

She started and cast me a keen glance. "You had better take it to some one else; I have no money to throw away."

With a hesitating hand I lifted the plaque towards the basket. "I would very much like to sell it to you," said I. "Perhaps--"

Just then a lady's fluttering voice rose from the room beyond inquiring for the Countess, and hurriedly taking the plaque from my hand with an impulsive "O there's Amy," she passed into the adjoining apartment, leaving the door open behind her.

I saw a quick interchange of greetings between her and a fashionably dressed lady, then they withdrew to one side with the ornament I had brought, evidently consulting in regard to its merits. Now was my time. The book in which she had placed the letter she had been writing lay on the table right before me, not two inches from my hand. I had only to throw back the cover and my curiosity would be satisfied. Taking advantage of a moment when their backs were both turned, I pressed open the book with a careful hand, and with one eye on them and one on the sheet before me, managed to read these words:--

MY DEAREST CECILIA.

I have tried in vain to match the sample you sent me at Stewart's, Arnold's and McCreery's. If you still insist upon making up the dress in the way you propose, I will see what Madame Dudevant can do for us, though I cannot
but advise you to alter your plans and make the darker shade of velvet do. I went to the Cary reception last night and met Lulu Chittenden. She has actually grown old, but was as lively as ever. She created a great stir in Paris when she was there; but a husband who comes home two o'clock in the morning with bleared eyes and empty pockets, is not conducive to the preservation of a woman's beauty. How she manages to retain her spirits I cannot imagine. You ask me news of cousin Holman. I meet him occasionally and he looks well, but has grown into the most sombre man you ever saw. In regard to certain hopes of which you have sometimes made mention, let me assure you they are no longer practicable. He has done what--

Here the conversation ceased in the other room, the Countess made a movement of advance and I closed the book with an inward groan over my ill-luck.

"It is very pretty," said she with a weary air; "but as I remarked before, I am not in the buying mood. If you will take half you mention, I may consider the subject, but--"

"Pardon me, Madame," I interrupted, being in no wise anxious to leave the plaque behind me, "I have been considering the matter and I hold to my original price. Mr. Blake of Second Avenue may give it to me if you do not."

"Mr. Blake!" She eyed me suspiciously. "Do you sell to him?"

"I sell to anyone I can," replied I; "and as he has an artist's eye for such things--"

Her brows knitted and she turned away. "I do not want it;" said she, "sell it to whom you please."

I took up the plaque and left the room.

CHAPTER IX
A FEW GOLDEN HAIRS

When a few days from that I made my appearance before Mr. Gryce, it was to find him looking somewhat sober. "Those Schoenmakers," said he, "are making a deal of trouble. It seems they escaped the fellows up north and are now somewhere in this city, but where--"

An expressive gesture finished the sentence.

"Is that so?" exclaimed I. "Then we are sure to nab them. Given time and a pair of low, restless German thieves, I will wager anything, our hands will be upon them before the month is over. I only hope, when we do come across them, it will not be to find their betters too much mixed up with their devilish practices." And I related to him what Fanny had told me a few evenings before.

"The coil is tightening," said he. "What the end will be I don't know. Crime, said she? I wish I knew in what blind hole of the earth that girl we are after lies hidden."

As if in answer to this wish the door opened and one of our men came in with a letter in his hand. "Ha!" exclaimed Mr. Gryce, after he had perused it, "look at that."

I took the letter from his hand and read:

The dead body of a girl such as you describe was found in the East river off Fiftieth Street this morning. From appearance has been dead some time. Have telegraphed to Police Headquarters for orders. Should you wish to see the body before it is removed to the Morgue or otherwise disturbed, please hasten to Pier 48 E. R. GRAHAM.

"Come," said I, "let's go and see for ourselves. If it should be the one--"

"The dinner party proposed by Mr. Blake for to-night, may have its interruptions," he remarked.

I do not wish to make my story any longer than is necessary, but I must say that when in an hour or so later, I stood with Mr. Gryce before the unconscious form of that poor drowned girl I felt an unusual degree of awe stealing over me: there was so much mystery connected with this affair, and the parties implicated were of such standing and repute.

I almost dreaded to see the covering removed from her face lest I should behold, what? I could not have told if I had tried.

"A trim made body enough," cried the official in charge as Mr. Gryce lifted an end of the cloth that enveloped her and threw it back. "Pity the features are not better preserved."

"No need for us to see the features," exclaimed I, pointing to the locks of golden red hair that hung in tangled masses about her. "The hair is enough; she is not the one." And I turned aside, asking myself if it was relief I felt.

To my surprise Mr. Gryce did not follow.

"Tall, thin, white face, black eyes." I heard him whisper to himself. "It is a pity the features are not better preserved."

"But," said I, taking him by the arm, "Fanny spoke particularly of her hair being black, while this girl's--Good heavens!" I suddenly ejaculated as I looked again at the prostrate form before me. "Yellow hair or black, this is the girl I saw him speaking to that day in Broome Street. I remember her clothes if nothing more." And opening my pocketbook, I took out the morsel of cloth I had plucked that day from the ash barrel, lifted up the discolored rags that hung about the body and compared the two. The pattern, texture and color were the same.
"Well," said Mr. Gryce, pointing to certain contusions, like marks from the blow of some heavy instrument on the head and bared arms of the girl before us; "he will have to answer me one question anyhow, and that is, who this poor creature is who lies here the victim of treachery or despair." And turning to the official he asked if there were any other signs of violence on the body.

The answer came deliberately, "Yes, she has evidently been battered to death."

Mr. Gryce's lips closed with grim decision. "A most brutal murder," said he and lifting up the cloth with a hand that visibly trembled, he softly covered her face.

"Well," said I as we slowly paced back up the pier, "there is one thing certain, she is not the one who disappeared from Mr. Blake's house."

"I am not so sure of that."

"How!" said I. "You believed Fanny lied when she gave that description of the missing girl upon which we have gone till now?"

Mr. Gryce smiled, and turning back, beckoned to the official behind us. "Let me have that description," said he, "which I distributed among the Harbor Police some days ago for the identification of a certain corpse I was on the lookout for."

The man opened his coat and drew out a printed paper which at Mr. Gryce's word he put into my hand. It ran as follows:

Look out for the body of a young girl, tall, well shaped but thin, of fair complexion and golden hair of a peculiar bright and beautiful color, and when found, acquaint me at once. G.

"I don't understand," began I.

But Mr. Gryce tapping me on the arm said in his most deliberate tones, "Next time you examine a room in which anything of a mysterious nature has occurred, look under the bureau and if you find a comb there with several long golden hairs tangled in it, be very sure before you draw any definite conclusions, that your Fannys know what they are talking about when they declare the girl who used that comb had black hair on her head."

CHAPTER X

THE SECRET OF MR. BLAKE'S STUDIO

"Mr. Blake is at dinner, sir, with company, but I will call him if you say so."

"No," returned Mr. Gryce; "show us into some room where we can be comfortable and we will wait till he has finished."

The servant bowed, and stepping forward down the hall, opened the door of a small and cosy room heavily hung with crimson curtains. "I will let him know that you are here," said he, and vanished towards the dining-room.

"I doubt if Mr. Blake will enjoy the latter half of his bill of fare as much as the first," said I, drawing up one of the luxurious arm-chairs to the side of my principal. "I wonder if he will break away from his guests and come in here?"

"No; if I am not mistaken we shall find Mr. Blake a man of nerve. Not a muscle of his face will show that he is disturbed."

"Well," said I, "I dread it."

Mr. Gryce looked about on the gorgeous walls and the rich old fashioned furniture that surrounded him, and smiled one of his grimmest smiles.

"Well, you may," said he.

The next instant a servant stood in the doorway, bearing to our great astonishment, a tray well set with decanter and glasses.

"Mr. Blake's compliments, gentlemen," said he, setting it down on the table before us. "He hopes you will make yourselves at home and he will see you as soon as possible."

The humph! of Mr. Gryce when the servant had gone would have done your soul good, also the look he cast at the pretty Dresden Shepherdess on the mantel-piece, as I reached out my hand towards the decanter. Somehow it made me draw back.

"I think we had better leave his wine alone," said he.

And for half an hour we sat there, the wine untouched between us, listening alternately to the sound of speech-making and laughter that came from the dining-room, and the solemn ticking of the clock as it counted out the seconds on the mantel-piece. Then the guests came in from the table, filing before us past the open door on their way to the parlors. They were all gentlemen of course--Mr. Blake never invited ladies to his house--and gentlemen of well known repute. The dinner had been given in honor of a certain celebrated statesman, and the character of his guests was in keeping with that of the one thus complimented.

As they went by us gaily indulging in the jokes and light banter with which such men season a social dinner, I saw Mr. Gryce's face grow sober by many a shade; and when in the midst of it all, we heard the voice of Mr. Blake
rise in that courteous and measured tone for which it is distinguished, I saw him reach forward and grasp his cane with an uneasiness I had never seen displayed by him before. But when some time later, the guests having departed, the dignified host advanced with some apology to where we were, I never beheld a firmer look on Mr. Gryce's face than that with which he rose and confronted him. Mr. Blake's own had not more character in it.

"You have called at a rather inauspicious time, Mr. Gryce," said the latter, glancing at the card which he held in his hand. "What may your business be? Something to do with politics, I suppose."

I surveyed the man in amazement. Was this great politician stooping to act a part, or had he forgotten our physiognomies as completely as appeared?

"Our business is not politics," replied Mr. Gryce; "but fully as important. May I request the doors be closed?"

I thought Mr. Blake looked surprised, but he immediately stepped to the door and shut it. Then coming back, he looked at Mr. Gryce more closely and a change took place in his manner.

"I think I have seen you before," said he.

Mr. Gryce bowed with just the suspicion of a smile. "I have had the honor of consulting you before in this very house," observed he.

A look of full recognition passed over the dignified countenance of the man before us.

"I remember," said he, shrugging his shoulders in the old way. "You are interested in some servant girl or other who ran away from this house a week or so ago. Have you found her?" This with no apparent concern.

"We think we have," rejoined Mr. Gryce with some solemnity. "The river gives up its prey now and then, Mr. Blake."

Still only that look of natural surprise.

"Indeed! You do not mean to say she has drowned herself? I am sorry for that, a girl who had once lived in my house. What trouble could she have had to drive her to such an act?"

Mr. Gryce advanced a step nearer the gentleman.

"That is what we have come here to learn," said he with a deliberation that yet was not lacking in the respect due to a man so universally esteemed as Mr. Blake. "You who have seen her so lately ought to be able to throw some light upon the subject at least."

"Mr.---" he again glanced at the card, "Mr. Gryce,--excuse me--I believe I told you when you were here before that I had no remembrance of this girl at all. That if such a person was in my house I did not know it, and that all questions put to me on that subject would be so much labor thrown away."

Mr. Gryce bowed. "I remember," said he. "I was not alluding to any connection you may have had with the girl in this house, but to the interview you were seen to have with her on the corner of Broome Street some days ago. You had such an interview, did you not?"

A flush, deep as it was sudden, swept over Mr. Blake's usually unmoved cheek. "You are transgressing sir," said he and stopped. Though a man of intense personal pride, he had but little of that quality called temper, or perhaps if he had, thought it unwise to display it on this occasion. "I saw and spoke to a girl on the corner of that street some days ago," he went on more mildly, "but that she was the one who lived here, I neither knew at the time nor feel willing to believe now without positive proof." Then in a deep ringing tone the stateliness of which it would be impossible to describe, he inquired, "Have the city authorities presumed to put a spy on my movements, that the fact of my speaking to a poor forsaken creature on the corner of the street should be not only noted but remembered?"

"Mr. Blake," observed Mr. Gryce, and I declare I was proud of my superior at that moment, "no man who is a true citizen and a Christian should object to have his steps followed, when by his own thoughtlessness, perhaps, he has incurred a suspicion which demands it."

"And do you mean to say that I have been followed," inquired he, clenching his hand and looking steadily, but with a blanching cheek, first at Mr. Gryce then at me.

"It was indispensable," quoth that functionary gently. The outraged gentleman riveted his gaze upon me. "In town and out of town?" demanded he.

I let Mr. Gryce reply. "It is known that you have lately sought to visit the Schoenmakers," said he.

Mr. Blake drew a deep breath, cast his eyes about the handsome apartment in which we were, let them rest for a moment upon a portrait that graced one side of the wall, and which was I have since learned a picture of his father, and slowly drew forward a chair. "Let me hear what your suspicions are," said he.

I noticed Mr. Gryce colored at this; he had evidently been met in a different way from what he expected. "Excuse me," said he, "I do not say I have any suspicions; my errand is simply to notify you of the death of the girl you were seen to speak with, and to ask whether or not you can give us any information that can aid us in the matter before the coroner."

"You know I have not. If I have been as closely followed as you say, you must know why I spoke to that girl and others, why I went to the house of the Schoenmakers and--Do you know?" he suddenly inquired.
Mr. Gryce was not the man to answer such a question as that. He eyed the rich signet ring that adorned the hand of the gentleman before him and suavely smiled. "I am ready to listen to any explanations," said he.

Mr. Blake's haughty countenance became almost stern. "You consider you have a right to demand them; let me hear why."

"Well," said Mr. Gryce with a change of tone, "you shall. Unprofessional as it is, I will tell you why I, a member of the police force, dare enter the house of such a man as you are, and put him the questions I have concerning his domestic affairs. Mr. Blake, imagine yourself in a detective's office. A woman comes in, the housekeeper of a respected citizen, and informs us that a girl employed by her as seamstress has disappeared in a very unaccountable way from her master's house the night before; in fact been abducted as she thinks from certain evidences, through the window. Her manner is agitated, her appeal for assistance urgent, though she acknowledges no relationship to the girl or expresses any especial cause for her interest beyond that of common humanity. 'She must be found,' she declares, and hints that any sum necessary will be forthcoming, though from what source after her own pittance is expended she does not state. When asked if her master has no interest in the matter, she changes color and puts us off. He never noticed his servants, left all such concerns to her, etc.; but shows fear when a proposition is made to consult him. Next imagine yourself with the detectives in that gentleman's house. You enter the girl's room; what is the first thing you observe? Why that it is not only one of the best in the house, but that it is conspicuous for its comforts if not for its elegancies. More than that, that there are books of poetry and history lying around, showing that the woman who inhabited it was above her station; a fact which the housekeeper is presently brought to acknowledge. You notice also that the wild surmise of her abduction by means of the window, has some ground in appearance, though the fact that she went with entire unwillingness is not made so apparent. The housekeeper, however, insists in a way that must have had some special knowledge of the girl's character or circumstances to back it, that she never went without compulsion; a statement which the torn curtains and the track of blood over the roof of the extension, would seem to emphasize. A few other facts are made known. First, a pen-knife is picked up from the grass plot in the yard beneath, showing with what instrument the wound was inflicted, whose drippings made those marks of blood alluded to. It was a pearl-handled knife belonging to the writing desk found open on her table, and its frail and dainty character proved indisputably, that it was employed by the girl herself, and that against manifest enemies; no man being likely to snatch up any such puny weapon for the purpose either of offence or defence. That these enemies were two and were both men, was insisted upon by Mrs. Daniels who overheard their voices the night before.

"Mr. Blake, such facts as these arouse curiosity, especially when the master of the house being introduced upon the scene, he fails to manifest common human interest, while his housekeeper betrays in every involuntary gesture and expression she makes use of, her horror if not her fear of his presence, and her relief at his departure. Yes," he exclaimed, unheeding the sudden look here cast him by Mr. Blake, "and curiosity begets inquiry, and inquiry elucidated further facts such as these, that the mysterious master of the house was in his garden at the hour of the girl's departure, was even looking through the bars of his gate when she, having evidently escaped from her captors, came back with every apparent desire to reenter her home, but seeing him, betrayed an unreasonable amount of fear and fled back even into the very arms of the men she had endeavored to avoid. Did you speak sir?" asked Mr. Gryce suddenly stopping, with a sly look at his left boot tip.

Mr. Blake shook his head. "No," said he shortly, "go on." But that last remark of Mr. Gryce had evidently made its impression.

"Inquiry revealed, also, two or three other interesting facts. First, that this gentleman qualified though he was to shine in ladies' society, never obtruded himself there, but employed his leisure time instead, in walking the lower streets of the city, where he was seen more than once conversing with certain poor girls at street corners and in blind alleys. The last one he talked with, believed from her characteristics to be the same one that was abducted from his house—"

"Hold there," said Mr. Blake with some authority in his tone, "there you are mistaken; that is impossible."

"Ah, and why?"

"The girl you allude to had bright golden hair, something which the woman who lived in my house did not possess."

"Indeed. I thought you had never noticed the woman who sewed for you, sir,—did not know how she looked?"

"I should have noticed her if she had had such hair as the girl you speak of."

Mr. Gryce smiled and opened his pocketbook.

"There is a sample of her hair, sir," said he, taking out a thin strand of brilliant hair and showing it to the gentleman before him. "Bright you see, and golden as that of the unfortunate creature you talked with the other night."

Mr. Blake stooped forward and lifted it with a hand that visibly trembled. "Where did you get this?" asked he at
last, clenching it to his breast with sudden passion.

"From out of the comb which the girl had been using the night before."

The imperious man flung it hastily from him.

"We waste our time," said he, looking Mr. Gryce intently in the face. "All that you have said does not account for your presence here nor the tone you have used while addressing me. What are you keeping back? I am not a man to be trifled with."

Mr. Gryce rose to his feet. "You are right," said he, and he gave a short glance in my direction. "All that I have said would not perhaps justify me in this intrusion, if--" he looked again towards me. "Do you wish me to continue?" he asked.

Mr. Blake's intent look deepened. "I see no reason why you should not utter the whole," said he. "A good story loses nothing by being told to the end. You wish to say something about my journey to Schoenmaker's house, I suppose."

Mr. Gryce gravely shook his head.

"What, you can let such a mystery as that go without a word?"

"I am not here to discuss mysteries that have no connection with the sewing-girl in whose cause I am interested."

"Then," said Mr. Blake, turning for the first time upon my superior with all the dignified composure for which he was eminent, "it is no longer necessary for us to prolong this interview. I have allowed, nay encouraged you to state in the plainest terms what it was you had or imagined you had against me, knowing that my actions of late, seen by those who did not possess the key to them, must have seemed a little peculiar. But when you say you have no interest in any mystery disconnected with the girl who has lived the last few months in my house, I can with assurance say that it is time we quitted this unprofitable conversation, as nothing which I have lately done, said or thought here or elsewhere has in any way had even the remotest bearing upon that individual; she having been a stranger to me while in my house, and quite forgotten by me, after her unaccountable departure hence."

Mr. Gryce's hand which had been stretched out towards the hitherto untouched decanter before him, suddenly dropped. "You deny then," said he, "all connection between yourself and the woman, lady or sewing-girl, who occupied that room above our heads for eleven months previous to the Sunday morning I first had the honor to make your acquaintance."

"I am not in the habit of repeating my assertions," said Mr. Blake with some severity, "even when they relate to a less disagreeable matter than the one under discussion."

Mr. Gryce bowed, and slowly reached out for his hat; I had never seen him so disturbed. "I am sorry," he began and stopped, fingering his hat-brim nervously. Suddenly he laid his hat back, and drew up his form into as near a semblance of dignity as its portliness would allow.

"Mr. Blake," said he, "I have too much respect for the man I believed you to be when I entered this house tonight, to go with the thing unsaid which is lying at present like a dead weight upon my lips. I dare not leave you to the consequence of my silence; for duty will compel me to speak some day and in some presence where you may not have the opportunity which you can have here, to explain yourself with satisfaction. Mr. Blake I cannot believe you when you say the girl who lived in this house was a stranger to you."

Mr. Blake drew his proud form up in a disdain that was only held in check by the very evident honesty of the man before him. "You are courageous at least," said he. "I regret you are not equally discriminating." And raising Mr. Gryce's hat he placed it in his hand.

"Pardon me," said that gentleman, "I would like to justify myself before I go. Not with words," he proceeded as the other folded his arms with a sarcastic bow. "I am done with words; action accomplishes the rest. Mr. Blake I believe you consider me an honest officer and a reliable man. Will you accompany me to your private room for a moment? There is something there which may convince you I was neither playing the fool nor the bravado when I uttered the phrase I did an instant ago."

I expected to hear the haughty master of the house refuse a request so peculiar. But he only bowed, though in a surprised way that showed his curiosity if no more was aroused. "My room and company are at your disposal," said he, "but you will find nothing there to justify you in your assertions."

"Let me at least make the effort," entreated my superior.

Mr. Blake smiling bitterly immediately led the way to the door. "The man may come," he remarked carelessly as Mr. Gryce waved his hand in my direction. "Your justification if not mine may need witnesses."

Rejoiced at the permission, for my curiosity was by this time raised to fever pitch, I at once followed. Not without anxiety. The assured poise of Mr. Blake's head seemed to argue that the confidence betrayed by my superior might receive a shock; and I felt it would be a serious blow to his pride to fail now. But once within the room above, my doubts speedily fled. There was that in Mr. Gryce's face which anyone acquainted with him could not easily mistake. Whatever might be the mysterious something which the room contained, it was evidently sufficient in his
eyes to justify his whole conduct.

"Now sir," said Mr. Blake, turning upon my superior with his sternest expression, "the room and its contents are before you; what have you to say for yourself."

Mr. Gryce equally stern, if not equally composed, cast one of his inscrutable glances round the apartment and without a word stepped before the picture that was as I have said, the only ornamentation of the otherwise bare and unattractive room.

I thought Mr. Blake looked surprised, but his face was not one that lightly expressed emotion.

"A portrait of my cousin the Countess De Mirac," said he with a certain dryness of tone hard to interpret.

Mr. Gryce bowed and for a moment stood looking with a strange lack of interest at the proudly brilliant face of the painting before him, then to our great amazement stepped forward and with a quick gesture turned the picture rapidly to the wall, when--Gracious heavens! what a vision started out before us from the reverse side of that painted canvas! No luxurious brunette countenance now, steeped in pride and languor, but a face--Let me see if I can describe it. But no, it was one of those faces that are indescribable. You draw your breath as you view it; you feel as if you had had an electric shock; but as for knowing ten minutes later whether the eyes that so enthralled you were blue or black, or the locks that clustered halo-like about a forehead almost awful in its expression of weird, unfathomable power, were brown or red, you could not nor would you pretend to say. It was the character of the countenance itself that impressed you. You did not even know if this woman who might have been anything wonderful or grand you ever read of, were beautiful or not. You did not care; it was as if you had been gazing on a tranquil evening sky and a lightning flash had suddenly startled you. Is the lightning beautiful? Who asks! But I know from what presently transpired, that the face was ivory pale in complexion, the eyes deeply dark, and the hair,--strange and uncanny combination,--of a bright and peculiar golden hue.

"You dare!" came forth in strange broken tones from Mr. Blake's lips.

I instantly turned towards him. He was gazing with a look that was half indignant, half menacing at the silent detective who with eyes drooped and finger directed towards the picture, seemed to be waiting for him to finish.

"I do not understand an audacity that allows you to--to--" Was this the haughty gentleman we had known, this hesitating troubled man with bloodless lips and trembling hands?

"I declared my desire to justify myself," said my principal with a respectful bow. "This is my justification. Do you note the color of the woman's hair whose portrait hangs with its face turned to the wall in your room? Is it like or unlike that of the strand you held in your hand a few moments ago; a strand taken as I swear, hair by hair from the comb of the poor creature who occupied the room above. But that is not all," he continued as Mr. Blake fell a trifle aback; "just observe the dress in which this woman is painted; blue silk you see, dark and rich; a wide collar cunningly executed, you can almost trace the pattern; a brooch; then the roses in the hand, do you see? Now come with me upstairs."

Too much startled to speak, Mr. Blake, haughty aristocrat as he was, turned like a little child and followed the detective who with an assured step and unembarrassed mien led the way into the deserted room above.

"You accuse me of insulting you, when I express disbelief of your assertion that there was no connection between you and the girl Emily," said Mr. Gryce as he lit the gas and unlocked that famous bureau drawer. "Will you do so any longer in face of these?" And drawing off the towel that lay uppermost, he revealed the neatly folded dress, wide collar, brooch and faded roses that lay beneath. "Mrs. Daniels assures us these articles belonged to the sewing-woman Emily; were brought here by her. Dare you say they are not the ones reproduced in the portrait below?"

Mr. Blake uttering a cry sank on his knees before the drawer. "My God! My God!" was his only reply, "what are these?" Suddenly he rose, his whole form quivering, his eyes burning. "Where is Mrs. Daniels?" he cried, hastily advancing and pulling the bell. "I must see her at once. Send the house-keeper here," he ordered as Fanny smiling demurely made her appearance at the door.

"Mrs. Daniels is out," returned the girl, "went out as soon as ever you got up from dinner, sir."

"Gone out at this hour?"

"Yes sir; she goes out very often nowadays, sir."

Her master frowned. "Send her to me as soon as she returns," he commanded, and dismissed the girl.

"I don't know what to make of this," he now said in a strange tone, approaching again the touching contents of that open bureau drawer with a look in which longing and doubt seemed in some way to be strangely commingled. "I cannot explain the presence of these articles in this room; but if you will come below I will see what I can do to make other matters intelligible to you. Disagreeable as it is for me to take anyone into my confidence, affairs have gone too far for me to hope any longer to preserve secrecy as to my private concerns."

CHAPTER XI

LUTTRA
"Gentlemen," said he as he ushered us once more into his studio, "you have presumed, and not without reason I should say, to infer that the original of this portrait and the woman who has so long occupied the position of sewing-woman in my house, are one and the same. You will no longer retain that opinion when I inform you that this picture, strange as it may appear to you, is the likeness of my wife."

"Wife!" We both were astonished as I take it, but it was my voice which spoke. "We were ignorant you ever had a wife."

"No doubt," continued our host smiling bitterly, "that at least has evaded the knowledge even of the detectives."

Then with a return to his naturally courteous manner, "She was never acknowledged by me as my wife, nor have we ever lived together, but if priestly benediction can make a man and woman one, that woman as you see her there is my lawful wife."

Rising, he softly turned the lovely, potent face back to the wall, leaving us once more confronted by the dark and glowing countenance of his cousin.

"I am not called upon," said he, "to go any further with you than this. I have told you what no man till this hour has ever heard from my lips, and it should serve to exonerate me from any unjust suspicions you may have entertained. But to one of my temperament, secret scandal and the gossip it engenders is only less painful than open notoriety. If I leave the subject here, a thousand conjectures will at once seize upon you, and my name if not hers will become, before I know it, the football of gossip if not of worse and deeper suspicion than has yet assailed me. Gentleman I take you to be honest men; husbands, perhaps, and fathers; proud, too, in your way and jealous of your own reputation and that of those with whom you are connected. If I succeed in convincing you that my movements of late have been totally disconnected with the girl whose cause you profess solely to be interested in, may I count upon your silence as regards those actions and the real motive that led to them?"

"You may count upon my discretion as regards all matters that do not come under the scope of police duty," returned Mr. Gryce. "I haven't much time for gossip."

"And your man here?"

"O, he's safe where it profits him to be."

"Very well, then, I shall count upon you."

And with the knitted brows and clinched hands of a proudly reticent man who, perhaps for the first time in his life finds himself forced to reveal his inner nature to the world, he began his story in these words:

"Difficult as it is for me to introduce into a relation like this the name of my father, I shall be obliged to do so in order to make my conduct at a momentous crisis of my life intelligible to you. My father, then, was a man of strong will and a few but determined prejudices. Resolved that I should sustain the reputation of the family for wealth and respectability, he gave me to understand from my earliest years, that as long as I preserved my manhood from reproach, I had only to make my wishes known, to have them immediately gratified; while if I crossed his will either by indulging in dissipation or engaging in pursuits unworthy of my name, I no longer need expect the favor of his countenance or the assistance of his purse.

"When, therefore, at a certain period of my life, I found that the charms of my cousin Evelyn were making rather too strong an impression upon my fancy for a secured peace of mind, I first inquired how such a union would affect my father, and learning that it would be in direct opposition to his views, cast about in my mind what I should do to overcome my passion. Travel suggested itself, and I took a trip to Europe. But the sight of new faces only awakened in me comparisons anything but detrimental to the beauty of her who was at that time my standard of feminine loveliness. Nature and the sports connected with a wild life were my next resort. I went overland to California, roamed the orange groves of Florida, and probed the wildernesses of Canada and our Northern states. It was during these last excursions that an event occurred which has exercised the most material influence upon my fate, though at the time it seemed to me no more than the matter of a day.

"I had just returned from Canada and was resting in tolerable enjoyment of a very beautiful autumn at Lake George, when a letter reached me from a friend then loitering in the vicinity, urging me to join him in a certain small town in Vermont where trout streams abounded and what is not so often the case under the circumstances, fishers were few.

"Being in a somewhat reckless mood I at once wrote a consent, and before another day was over, started for the remote village whence his letter was postmarked. I found it by no means easy of access. Situated in the midst of hills some twenty miles or so distant from any railroad, I discovered that in order to reach it, a long ride in a stage-coach was necessary, followed by a somewhat shorter journey on horseback. Not being acquainted with the route, I timed my connections wrong, so that when evening came I found myself riding over a strange road in the darkest night I had ever known. As if this was not enough, my horse suddenly began to limp and presently became so lame I found it impossible to urge her beyond a slow walk. It was therefore with no ordinary satisfaction that I presently beheld a lighted building in the distance, which as I approached resolved itself into an inn. Stopping in front of the house,
which was closed against the chill night air, I called out lustily for someone to take my horse, whereupon the door opened and a man appeared on the threshold with a lantern in his hand. I at once made my wishes known, receiving in turn a somewhat gruff,

"Well it is a nasty night and it will be nastier before it's over;' an opinion instantly endorsed by a sudden swoop of wind that rushed by at that moment, slamming the door behind him and awakening over my head a lugubrious groaning as from the twisting boughs of some old tree, that was almost threatening in its character.

"You had better go in,' said he, 'the rain will come next.'

"I at once leaped from my horse and pushing open the door with main strength, entered the house. Another man met me on the threshold who merely pointed over his shoulder to a lighted room in his rear, passed out without a word, to help the somewhat younger man, who had first appeared, in putting up my horse. I at once accepted his silent invitation and stepped into the room before me. Instantly I found myself confronted by the rather startling vision of a young girl of a unique and haunting style of beauty, who rising at my approach now stood with her eyes on my face and her hands resting on the deal table before which she had been sitting, in an attitude expressive of mingled surprise and alarm. To see a woman in that place was not so strange; but such a woman! Even in the first casual glance I gave her, I at once acknowledged to myself her extraordinary power. Not the slightness of her form, the palor of her countenance, or the fairness of the locks of golden red hair that fell in two long braids over her bosom, could for a moment counteract the effect of her dark glance or the vivid almost unearthly force of her expression. It was as if you saw a flame upstarting before you, waving tremulously here and there, but burning and resistless in its white heat. I took off my hat with deference.

"A shudder passed over her, but she made no effort to return my acknowledgement. As we cast our eyes dilating with horror, down some horrible pit upon whose verge we suddenly find ourselves, she allowed her gaze for a moment to dwell upon my face, then with a sudden lifting of her hand, pointed towards the door as if to bid me depart--when it swung open with that shrill rushing of wind that involuntarily awakes a shudder within you, and the two men entered and came stamping up to my side. Instantly her hand sunk, not feebly as with fear, but calmly as if at the bidding of her will, and without waiting for them to speak, she turned away and quietly left the room. As the door closed upon her I noticed that she wore a calico frock and that her face did not own one perfect feature.

"Go after Luttra and tell her to make up the bed in the northwest room,' said the elder of the two in deep gutteral tones unmistakably German in their accent, to the other who stood shaking the wet off his coat into the leaping flames of a small wood fire that burned on the hearth before us.

"O, she'll do without my bothering,' was the sullen return. 'I'm wet through.'

"The elder man, a large powerfully framed fellow of some fifty years or so, frowned. It was an evil frown, and the younger one seemed to feel it. He immediately tossed his coat onto a chair and left the room.

"Boys are so obstropolous now-a-days,' remarked his companion to me with what he evidently intended for a conciliatory nod. 'In my time they were broke in, did what they were told and asked no questions.'

"I smiled to myself at his calling the broad shouldered six-footer who had just left us a boy, but merely remarking, 'He is your son is he not!' seated myself before the blaze which shot up a tongue of white flame at my approach, that irresistibly recalled to my fancy the appearance of the girl who had gone out a moment before.

"O, yes, he is my son, and that girl you saw here was my daughter; I keep this inn and they help me, but it is a slow way to live, I can tell you. Travel on these roads is slim.'

"I should think likely,' I returned, remembering the half dozen or so hills up which I had clambered since I took to my horse. 'How far are we from Pentonville?'

"O, two or three miles,' he replied, but in a hurried kind of a way. 'Not far in the daytime but a regular journey in a night like this?'

"Yes,' said I, as the house shook under a fresh gust; 'it is fortunate I have a place in which to put up.'

"He glanced down at my baggage which consisted of a small hand bag, an over-coat and a fishing pole, with something like a gleam of disappointment.

"'Going fishing?' he asked.

"'Yes,' I returned.

"'Good trout up those streams and plenty of them,' he went on. 'Going alone?'

"I did not half like his importunity, but considering I had nothing better to do, replied as affably as possible. 'No, I expect to meet a friend in Pentonville who will accompany me.'"

"His hand went to his beard in a thoughtful attitude and he cast me what, with my increased experience of the world, I should now consider a sinister glance. 'Then you are expected' said he.

"Not considering this worth reply, I stretched out my feet to the blaze and began to warm them, for I felt chilled through.

"'Been on the road long?' he now asked, glancing at the blue flannel suit I wore.
'All summer,' I returned, 'I again thought he looked disappointed. 'From Troy or New York?' he went on with a vague endeavor to appear good naturally off hand. 'New York.' 'A big place that,' he continued. 'I was there once, lots of money stored away in them big buildings down in Wall Street, eh?'

'I assented, and he drew a chair up to my side, a proceeding that was interrupted, however, by the reentrance of his son, who without any apology crowded into the other side of the fire-place in a way to sandwich me between them. Not fancying this arrangement which I, however, imputed to ignorance, I drew back and asked if my room was ready. It seemed it was not, and unpleasantly as it promised, I felt forced to reseat myself and join in, if not support, the conversation that followed.

A half hour passed away, during which the wind increased till it almost amounted to a gale. Spurts of rain dashed against the windows with a sharp cracking sound that suggested hail, while ever and anon a distant roll as of rousing thunder, rumbled away among the hills in a long and reverberating peal, that made me feel glad to be housed even under the roof of these rude and uncongenial creatures. Suddenly the conversation turned upon the time and time-pieces, when in a low even tone I heard murmured behind me, 'The gentleman's room is ready;' and turning, I saw standing in the doorway the slight figure of the young girl whose appearance had previously so impressed me.

'I immediately arose. 'Then I will proceed to it at once,' said I, taking up my traps and advancing towards her. 'Do not be alarmed if you hear creaks and cracklings all over the house,' observed the landlord as I departed. 'The windows are loose and the doors ill-fitting. In such a storm as this they make noise enough to keep an army awake. The house is safe enough though and if you don't mind noise--'

'O I don't mind noise,' rejoined I, feeling at that moment tired enough to fall into a doze on the staircase. 'I shall sleep, never fear,' and without further ado followed the girl upstairs into a large clumsily furnished room whose enormous bed draped with heavy curtains at once attracted my attention. 'O I cannot sleep under those things,' remarked I, with a gesture towards the dismal draperies which to me were another name for suffocation.

With a single arm-sweep she threw them back. 'Is there anything more I can do for you?' asked she, glancing hastily about the room.

'I thanked her and said 'no,' at which she at once departed with a look of still determination upon her countenance that I found it hard to explain.

Left alone in that large, bare and dimly lighted room, with the wind shrieking in the chimney and the powerful limbs of some huge tree beating against the walls without, with a heavy thud inexpressibly mournful, I found to my surprise and something like dismay, that the sleepiness which had hitherto oppressed me, had in some unaccountable way entirely fled. In vain I contemplated the bed, comfortable enough now in its appearance that the stifling curtains were withdrawn; no temptation to invade it came to arouse me from the chair into which I had thrown myself. It was as if I felt myself under the spell of some invisible influence that like the eye of a basilisk, held me enchained. I remember turning my head towards a certain quarter of the wall as if I half expected to encounter there the bewildering glance of a serpent. Yet far from being apprehensive of any danger, I only wondered over the weakness of mind that made such fancies possible.

An extra loud swirl of the foliage without, accompanied by a quick vibration of the house, aroused me at last. If I was to lose the sense of this furious storm careening over my head, I must court sleep at once. Rising, I drew off my coat, unloosened my vest and was about to throw it off, when I bethought me of a certain wallet it contained. Going to the door in some unconscious impulse of precaution I suppose, I locked myself in, and then drawing out my wallet, took from it a roll of bills which I put into a small side pocket, returning the wallet to its old place.

'Why I did this I can scarcely say. As I have before intimated, I was under no special apprehension. I was at that time anything but a suspicious man, and the manner and appearance of the men below struck me as unpleasantly disagreeable but nothing more. But I not only did what I have related, but allowed the lamp to remain lighted, lying down finally in my clothes; an almost unprecedented act on my part, warranted however as I said to myself, by the fury of the gale which at that time seemed as if it would tumble the roof over our heads.

How long I lay listening to the creakings and groanings of the rickety old house, I cannot say, nor how long I remained in the doze which finally seized me as I became accustomed to the sounds around and over me. Enough that before the storm had passed its height, I awoke as if at the touch of a hand, and leaping with a bound out of the bed, beheld to my incredible amazement, the alert, nervous form of Luttra standing before me. She had my coat in her hand, and it was her touch that had evidently awakened me.

'I want you to put this on,' said she in a low thrilling tone totally new in my experience, 'and come with me. The
house is unsafe for you to remain in. Hear how it cracks and trembles. Another blast like that and we shall be roofless.'

"She was moving toward the door, which to my amazement stood ajar, but my hesitation stopped her.

"Won't you come?" she whispered, turning her face towards me with a look of such potent determination, I followed in spite of myself 'I dare not let you stay here, your blood will be upon my head.'

"You exaggerate,' I replied, shrinking back with a longing look at the comfortable bed I had just left. 'These old houses are always strong. It will take many such a gust as that you hear, to overturn it, I assure you.'

"I exaggerate!' she returned with a look of scorn impossible to describe. 'Hark!' she said, 'hear that.'

"I did hear, and I must acknowledge that it seemed is if we were about to be swept from our foundations."

"Yes,' said I, 'but it is a fearful night to be out in.'

"I shall go with you,' said she.

"In that case--' I began with an ill-advised attempt at gallantry which she cut short with a gesture.

"Here is your hat,' remarked she, 'and here is your bag. The fishing-pole must remain, you cannot carry it.'

"But,--' I expostulated.

"Hush!' said she with her ear turned towards the depths of the staircase at the top of which we stood. 'My father and brother will think as you do that it is folly to leave the shelter of a roof for the uncertainties of the road on such a night as this, but you must not heed them. I tell you shelter this night is danger, and that the only safety to be found is on the stormy highway.'

'And without waiting for my reply, she passed rapidly down stairs, pushed open a door at the bottom, and stepped at once into the room we had left an hour or so before.

'What was there in that room that for the first time struck an ominous chill as of distinct peril through my veins? Nothing at first sight, everything at the second. The fire which had not been allowed to die out, still burned brightly on the ruddy hearthstone, but it was not that which awakened my apprehension. Nor was it the loud ticking clock on the mantel-piece with its hand pointing silently to the hour of eleven. Nor yet the heavy quiet of the scantily-furnished room with its one lamp burning on the deal table against the side of the wall. It was the sight of those two powerful men drawn up in grim silence, the one against the door leading to the front hall, the other against that opening into the kitchen.

'A glance at Luttra standing silent and undismayed at my side, however, instantly reassured me. With that will exercised in my favor, I could not but win through whatever it was that menaced me. Slinging my bag over my shoulder, I made a move towards the door and the silent figure of my host. But with a quick outreaching of her hand, she drew me back.

'Stand still!' said she. 'Karl,' she went on, turning her face towards the more sullen but less intent countenance of her brother, 'open the door and let this gentleman pass. He finds the house unsafe in such a gale and desires to leave it. At once!' she continued as her brother settled himself more determinedly against the lock: 'I don't often ask favors.'

"The man is a fool that wants to go out in a night like this,' quoth the fellow with a dogged move; 'and so are you to encourage it. I think too much of your health to allow it.'

'She did not seem to hear. 'Will you open the door?' she went on, not advancing a step from the fire, before which she had placed herself and me.'

"No, I won't,' was the brutal reply. 'Its been locked for the night and its not me nor one like me, that will open it.'

'With a sudden whitening of her already pale face, she turned towards her father. He was not even looking at her.

'Some one must open the house,' said she, glancing back at her brother. 'This gentleman purposes to leave and his whim must be humored. Will you unlock that door or shall I?'

'An angry snarl interrupted her. Her father had bounded from the door where he stood and was striding hastily towards her. In my apprehension I put up my arm for a shield, for he looked ready to murder her, but I let it drop again as I caught her glance which was like white flame undisturbed by the least breeze of personal terror.

"You will stop there,' said she, pointing to a spot a few feet from where she stood. 'Another step and I let that for which I have heard you declare you would peril your very soul, fall into the flames.' And drawing from her breast a roll of bills, she stretched them out above the fire before which she was standing.

"You -----' broke from the gray-bearded lips of the old man, but he stopped where he was, eyeing those bills as if fascinated.

'I am not a girl of many words, as you know,' continued she in a lofty tone inexpressibly commanding. 'You may strangle me, you may kill me, it matters little; but this gentleman leaves the house this night, or I destroy the money with a gesture.'

"You -----' again broke from those quivering lips, but the old man did not move.
"Not so the younger. With a rush he left his post and in another instant would have had his powerful arms about her slender form, only that I met him half way with a blow that laid him on the floor at her feet. She said nothing, but one of the bills immediately left her hand and fluttered into the fire where it instantly shrivelled into nothing.

"With the yell of a mad beast wounded in his most vulnerable spot, the old man before us stamped with his heel upon the floor.

"'Stop!' cried he; and going rapidly to the front door he opened it. 'There!' shrieked he, 'if you will be fools, go! and may the lightning blast you. But first give me the money.'

"'Come from the door,' said she, reaching out her left hand for the lantern hanging at the side of the fireplace, 'and let Karl light this and keep himself out of the way.'

"It was all done. In less time than I can tell it, the old man had stepped from the door, the younger one had lit the lantern and we were in readiness to depart.

"'Now do you proceed,' said she to me, 'I will follow.'

"'No,' said I, 'we will go together.'

"'But the money?' growled the heavy voice of my host over my shoulder.

"'I will give it to you on my return,' said the girl.

CHAPTER XII
A WOMAN'S LOVE

"Shall I ever forget the blast of driving rain that struck our faces and enveloped us in a cloud of wet, as the door swung on its hinges and let us forth into the night; or the electric thrill that shot through me as that slender girl grasped my hand and drew me away through the blinding darkness. It was not that I was so much affected by her beauty as influenced by her power and energy. The fury of the gale seemed to bend to her will, the wind lend wings to her feet. I began to realize what intellect was. Arrived at the roadside, she paused and looked back. The two burly forms of the men we had left behind us were standing in the door of the inn; in another moment they had plunged forth and towards us. With a low cry the young girl leaped towards a tree where to my unbounded astonishment I beheld my horse standing ready saddled. Dragging the mare from her fastenings, she hung the lantern, burning as it was, on the pommel of the saddle, struck the panting creature a smart blow upon the flank, and drew back with a leap to my side.

"The startled horse snorted, gave a plunge of dismay and started away from us down the road.

"'We will wait,' said Luttra.

"'The words were no sooner out of her mouth than her father and brother rushed by.

"'They will follow the light,' whispered she; and seizing me again by the hand, she hurried me away in the direction opposite to that which the horse had taken. 'If you will trust me, I will bring you to shelter,' she murmured, bending her slight form to the gusty wind but relaxing not a whit of her speed.

"'You are too kind,' I murmured in return. 'Why should you expose yourself to such an extent for a stranger?'

"Her hand tightened on mine, but she did not reply, and we hastened on as speedily as the wind and rain would allow. After a short but determined breasting of the storm, during which my breath had nearly failed me, she suddenly stopped.

"'Do you know,' she exclaimed in a low impressive tone, 'that we are on the verge of a steep and dreadful precipice? It runs along here for a quarter of a mile and it is not an uncommon thing for a horse and rider to be dashed over it in a night like this.'

"There was something in her manner that awakened a chill in my veins almost as if she had pointed out some dreadful doom which I had unwittingly escaped.

"'This is, then, a dangerous road,' I murmured.

"'Very,' was her hurried and almost incoherent reply.

"'How far we travelled through the mud and tangled grasses of that horrible road I do not know. It seemed a long distance; it was probably not more than three quarters of a mile. At last she paused with a short 'Here we are;' and looking up, I saw that we were in front of a small unlighted cottage.

"No refuge ever appeared more welcome to a pair of sinking wanderers I am sure. Wet to the skin, bedrabbled with mud, exhausted with breasting the gale, we stood for a moment under the porch to regain our breath, then with her characteristic energy she lifted the knocker and struck a smart blow on the door.

"'We will find shelter here,' said she.

"She was not mistaken. In a few moments we were standing once more before a comfortable fire hastily built by the worthy couple whose slumbers we had thus interrupted. As I began to realize the sweetness of conscious safety, all that this young, heroic creature had done for me swept warmly across my mind. Looking up from the fire that was beginning to infuse its heat through my grateful system, I surveyed her as she slowly undid her long braids and shook them dry over the blaze, and almost started to see how young she was. Not more than sixteen I should say,
and yet what an invincible will shone from her dark eyes and dignified her slender form; a will gentle as it was
strong, elevated as it was unbending. I bowed my head as I watched her, in grateful thankfulness which I presently
put into words.

"At once she drew herself erect. 'I did but my duty,' said she quietly. 'I am glad I was prospered in it.' Then
slowly. 'If you are grateful, sir, will you promise to say nothing of--of what took place at the inn?"

"Instantly I remembered a suspicion which had crossed my mind while there, and my hand went involuntarily to
my vest pocket. The roll of bills was gone.

"She did not falter. 'I would be relieved if you would,' continued she.

"'I drew out my empty hand, looked at it, but said nothing.

"'Have you lost anything?' asked she. 'Search in your overcoat pockets.'

"I plunged my hand into the one nearest her and drew it out with satisfaction; the roll of bills was there. 'I give
you my promise,' said I.

"'You will find a bill missing,' she murmured; 'for what amount I do not know; the sacrifice of something was
inevitable.'

"'I can only wonder over the ingenuity you displayed, as well as express my appreciation for your bravery,'
returned I with enthusiasm. 'You are a noble girl.'

"She put out her hand as if compliments hurt her. 'It is the first time they have ever attempted anything like that,'
cried she in a quick low tone full of shame and suffering. 'They have shown a disposition to--to take money
sometimes, but they never threatened life before. They were going to kill
you and then tumble you and your horse over the precipice below there. But I overheard them talking and when they
went out to saddle the horse, I hurried up to your room to wake you. I had to take possession of the bills; you were
not safe while you held them. I took them quietly because I hoped to save you without betraying them. But I failed
in that. You must remember they are my father and my brother.'

"'I will not betray them,' said I.

"She smiled. It was a wintry gleam but it ineffably softened her face. I became conscious of a movement of pity
towards her.

"'You have a hard lot,' remarked I. 'Your life must be a sad one.'

"'She flashed upon me one glance of her dark eye. 'I was born for hardship,' said she, 'but--' and a sudden wild
shudder seized her, 'but not for crime.'

"'The word fell like a drop of blood wrung from her heart.

"'Good heavens!' cried I, 'and must you--'

"'No,' rang from her lips in a clarion-like peal; 'some things cut the very bonds of nature. I am not called upon to
cleave to what will drag me into infamy.' Then calmly, as if speaking of the most ordinary matter in the world, 'I
shall never go back to that house we have left behind us, sir.'

"'But,' cried I, glancing at her scanty garments, 'where will you go? What will you do? You are young--'

"'And very strong,' she interrupted. 'Do not fear for me.' And her smile was like a burst of sudden sunshine.

"'I said no more that night.

"But when in the morning I stumbled upon her sitting in the kitchen reading a book not only above her position
but beyond her years, a sudden impulse seized me and I asked her if she would like to be educated. The
instantaneous illumining of her whole face was sufficient reply without her low emphatic words,

"'I would be content to study on my knees to know what some women do, whom I have seen.'

"It is not necessary for me to relate with what pleasure I caught at the idea that here was a chance to repay in
some slight measure the inestimable favor she had done me; nor by what arguments I finally won her to accept an
education at my hands as some sort of recompense for the life she had saved. The advantage which it would give her
in her struggle with the world she seemed duly to appreciate, but that so great a favor could be shown her without
causing me much trouble and an unwarrantable expense, she could not at once be brought to comprehend, and till
she could, she held out with that gentle but inflexible will of hers. The battle, however, was won at last and I left her
in that little cottage, with the understanding that as soon as the matter could be arranged, she was to enter a certain
boarding-school in Troy with the mistress of which I was acquainted. Meanwhile she was to go out to service at
Melville and earn enough money to provide herself with clothes.

"I was a careless fellow in those days but I kept my promise to that girl. I not only entered her into that school
for a course of three years, but acting through its mistress who had taken a great fancy to her, supplied her with the
necessities her position required. It was so easy; merely the signing of a check from time to time, and it was done. I
say this because I really think if it had involved any personal sacrifice on my part, even of an hour of my time, or the
labor of a thought, I should not have done it. For with my return to the city my interest in my cousin revived,
advantages yet I won her. I did not know my father. Sick as he was--he was at that time laboring under the disease which in a couple of months later bore him to the tomb--he kept an eye upon my movements and seemed to probe my inmost heart. At last he came to a definite decision and spoke.

His words opened a world of dismay before me. I was his only child, as he remarked, and it had been and was the desire of his heart to leave me as rich and independent a man as himself. But I seemed disposed to commit one of those acts against which he had the most determined prejudice; marriage between cousins being in his eyes an unsanctified and dangerous proceeding, liable to consequences the most unhappy. If I persisted, he must will his property elsewhere. The Blake estate should never descend with the seal of his approbation to a race of probable imbeciles.

Nor was this enough. He not only robbed me of the woman I loved, but with a clear insight into the future, I presume, insisted upon my marrying some one else of respectability and worth before he died. 'Anyone whose appearance will do you credit and whose virtue is beyond reproach,' said he. 'I don't ask her to be rich or even the offspring of one of our old families. Let her be good and pure and of no connection to us, and I will bless her and you with my dying breath.'

The idea had seized upon him with great force, and I soon saw he was not to be shaken out of it. To all my objections he returned but the one word,

'I don't restrict your choice and I give you a month in which to make it. If at the end of that time you cannot bring your bride to my bedside, I must look around for an heir who will not thwart my dying wishes.'"

A month! I surveyed the fashionable belles that nightly thronged the parlors of my friends and felt my heart sink within me. Take one of them for my wife, loving another woman? Impossible. Women like these demanded something in return for the honor they conferred upon a man by marrying him. Wealth? they had it. Position? that was theirs also. Consideration? ah, what consideration had I to give? I turned from them with distaste.

My cousin Evelyn gave me no help. She was a proud woman and loved my money and my expectations as much as she did me.

"If you must marry another woman to retain your wealth, marry, said she, "but do not marry one of my associates. I will have no rival in my own empire; your wife must be a plainer and a less aspiring woman than Evelyn Blake. Yet do not discard your name, --which is mine,' she would always add.

"Meanwhile the days flew by. If my own conscience had allowed me to forget the fact, my father's eagerly inquiring, but sternly unrelenting gaze as I came each evening to his bedside, would have kept it sufficiently in my mind. I began to feel like one in the power of some huge crushing machine whose slowly descending weight he in vain endeavors to escape.

"How or when the thought of Luttra first crossed my mind I cannot say. At first I recoiled at the suggestion and put it away from me in disdain; but it ever recurred and with it so many arguments in her favor that before long I found myself regarding it as a refuge. To be sure she was a waif and a stray, but that seemed to be the kind of wife demanded of me. She was allied to rogues if not villains, I knew; but then had she not cut all connection with them, dropped away from them, planted her feet on new ground which they would never invade? I commenced to cherish the idea. With this friendless, grateful, unassuming protegee of mine for a wife, I would be as little bound as might be. She would ask nothing, and I need give nothing, beyond a home and the common attentions required of a gentleman and a friend. Then she was not disagreeable, nor was her beauty of a type to suggest the charms of her I had lost. None of the graces of the haughty patrician lady whose lightest gesture was a command, would appear in her. I had no rival in my own empire; my father's eager inquiring, but sternly unrelenting gaze as I came each evening to his bedside, would have kept it sufficiently in my mind. I began to feel like one in the power of some huge crushing machine whose slowly descending weight he in vain endeavors to escape.

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"We were married, there, in Troy in the quietest and most unpretending manner. Why the fact has never transpired I cannot say. I certainly took no especial pains to conceal it at the time, though I acknowledge that after our separation I did resort to such measures as I thought necessary, to suppress what had become gall and wormwood to my pride.

"My first move after the ceremony was to bring her immediately to New York and to this house. With perhaps a pardonable bitterness of spirit, I had refrained from any notification of my intentions, and it was as strangers might enter an unprepared dwelling, that we stepped across the threshold of this house and passed immediately to my father's room.

"I can give you no wedding and no honeymoon,' I had told her. 'My father is dying and demands my care. From the altar to a death-bed may be sad for you, but it is an inevitable condition of your marriage with me.' And she had accepted her fate with a deep unspeakable smile it has taken me long months of loneliness and suffering to understand.

"Father, I bring you my bride,' were my first words to him as the door closed behind us shutting us in with the dread, invisible Presence that for so long a time had been relentlessly advancing upon our home.

"I shall never forget how he roused himself in his bed, nor with what eager eyes he read her young face and surveyed her slight form swaying towards him in her sudden emotion like a flame in a breeze. Nor while I live shall I lose sight of the spasm of uncontrollable joy with which he lifted his aged arms towards her, nor the look with which she sprang from my side and nestled, yes nestled, on the breast that never to my remembrance had opened itself to me even in the years of my earliest childhood. For my father was a stern man who believed in holding love at arm's length and measured affection by the depth of awe it inspired.

"'My daughter!' broke from his lips, and he never inquired who she was or what; no, not even when after a moment of silence she raised her head and with a sudden low cry of passionate longing looked in his face and murmured,

"'I never had a father.'

"Sirs, it is impossible for me to continue without revealing depths of pride and bitterness in my own nature, from which I now shrink with unspeakable pain. So far from being touched by this scene, I felt myself grow hard under it. If he had been disappointed in my choice, queried at it or even been simply pleased at my obedience, I might have accepted the wife I had won, and been tolerably grateful. But to love her, admire her, glory in her when Evelyn Blake had never succeeded in winning a glance from his eyes that was not a public disapprobation! I could not endure it; my whole being rebelled, and a movement like hate took possession of me.

"Bidding my wife to leave me with my father alone, I scarcely waited for the door to close upon the poor young thing before all that had been seething in my breast for a month, burst from me in the one cry,

"'I have brought you a daughter as you commanded me. Now give me the blessing you promised and let me go; for I cannot live with a woman I do not love.'

"Instantly, and before his lips could move, the door opened and the woman I thus repudiated in the first dawning hour of her young bliss, stood before us. My God! what a face! When I think of it now in the night season—when from dreams that gloomy as they are, are often elysian to the thoughts which beset me in my waking hours, I suddenly arouse to see starting upon me from the surrounding shadows that young fair brow with its halo of golden tresses, blotted, ay blotted by the agony that turned her that instant into stone, I wonder I did not take out the pistol that lay in the table near which I stood, and shoot her lifeless on the spot as some sort of a compensation for the misery I had caused her. I say I wonder now: then I only thought of braving it out.

"Straight as a dart, but with that look on her face, she came towards us. 'Did I hear aright?' were the words that came from her lips. 'Have you married me, a woman beneath your station as I now perceive, because you were commanded to do so? Have you not loved me? given me that which alone makes marriage a sacrament or even a possibility? and must you leave this house made sacred by the recumbent form of your dying father if I remain within it?'

"I saw my father's stiff and pallid lips move silently as though he would answer for me if he could, and summoning up what courage I possessed, I told her that I deeply regretted she had overheard my inconsiderate words. That I had never meant to wound her, whatever bitterness lay in my heart towards one who had thwarted me in my dearest and most cherished hopes. That I humbly begged her pardon and would so far acknowledge her claim upon me as to promise that I would not leave my home at this time, if it distressed her; my desire being not to injure her, only to protect myself.

"O the scorn that mounted to her brow at these weak words. Not scorn of me, thank God, worthy as I was of it that hour, but scorn of my slight opinion of her.

"Then I heard aright,' she murmured, and waited with a look that would not be gainsaid.

"I could only bow my head, cursing the day I was born.
"Holman! Holman!" came in agonized entreaty from the bed, 'you will not rob me of my daughter now?"

'Startled, I looked up. Luttra was half way to the door.

'What are you going to do?' cried I, bounding towards her.

'She stopped me with a look. 'The son must never forsake the father,' said she. 'If either of us must leave the house this day, let it be I.' Then in a softer tone, 'When you asked me to be your wife, I who had worshipped you from the moment you entered my father's house on the memorable night I left it, was so overcome at your condescension that I forgot you did not prefix it by the usual passionate, 'I love you,' which more than the marriage ring binds two hearts together. In the glamour and glow of my joy, I did not see that the smile that was in my heart, was missing from your face. I was to be your wife and that was enough, or so I thought then, for I loved you. Ah, and I do now, my husband, love you so that I leave you. Were it for your happiness I would do more than that, I would give you back your freedom, but from what I hear, it seems that you need a wife in name and I will be but fulfilling your desire in holding that place for you. I will never disgrace the position high as it is above my poor deserts. When the day comes--if the day comes--that you need or feel you need the sustainment of my presence or the devotion of my heart, no power on earth save that of death itself, shall keep me from your side. Till that day arrives I remain what you have made me, a bride who lays no claim to the name you this morning bestowed upon her.' And with a gesture that was like a benediction, she turned, and noiselessly, breathlessly as a dream that vanishes, left the room.

'Sirs, I believe I uttered a cry and stumbled towards her. Some one in that room uttered a cry, but it may be that it only rose in my heart and that the one I heard came from my father's lips. For when at the door I turned, startled at the deathly silence, I saw he had fainted on his pillow. I could not leave him so. Calling to Mrs. Daniels, who was never far from my father in those days, I bade her stop the lady--I believe I called her my wife--who was going down the stairs, and then rushed to his side. It took minutes to revive him. When he came to himself it was to ask for the creature who had flashed like a beacon of light upon his darkening path. I rose as if to fetch her but before I could advance I heard a voice say, 'She is not here,' and looking up I saw Mrs. Daniels glide into the room.

'Mrs. Blake has gone, sir, I could not keep her.'

CHAPTER XIII
A MAN'S HEART

'That was the last time my eyes ever I rested upon my wife. Whither she went or what refuge she gained, I never knew. My father who had received in this scene a great shock, began to fail so rapidly, he demanded my constant care; and though from time to time as I ministered to him and noted with what a yearning persistency he would eye the door and then turn and meet my gaze with a look I could not understand, I caught myself asking whether I had done a deed destined to hang forever about me like a pall; it was not till after his death that the despairing image of the bright young creature to whom I had given my name, returned with any startling distinctness to my mind, or that I allowed myself to ask whether the heavy gloom which I now felt settling upon me was owing to the sense of shame that overpowered me at the remembrance of the past, or to the possible loss I had sustained in the departure of my young unloved bride.

'The announcement at this time of the engagement between Evelyn Blake and the Count De Mirac may have had something to do with this. Though I had never in the most passionate hours of my love for her, lost sight of that side of her nature which demanded as her right the luxury of great wealth; and though in my tacit abandonment of her and secret marriage with another I had certainly lost the right to complain of her actions whatever they might be, this manifest surrendering of herself to the power of wealth and show at the price of all that women are believed to hold dear, was an undoubted blow to my pride and the confidence I had till now unconsciously reposed in her inherent womanliness and affection. That she had but made on a more conspicuous scale, the same sacrifice as myself to the god of Wealth and Position, was in my eyes at that time, no palliation of her conduct. I was a man none too good or exalted at the best; she, a woman, should have been superior to the temptations that overpowered me. That she was not, seemed to drag all womanhood a little nearer the dust; fashionable womanhood I ought to say, for somehow even at that early day her conduct did not seem to affect the vivid image of Luttra standing upon my threshold, shorn of her joy but burning with a devotion I did not comprehend, and saying,

'I loved you. Ah, and I do yet, my husband, love you so that I leave you. When the day comes--if the day comes--you need or feel you need the sustainment of my presence or the devotion of my heart, no power on earth save that of death itself, shall keep me from your side.'

'Yes, with the fading away of other faces and other forms, that face and that form now began to usurp the chief place in my thoughts. Not to my relief and pleasure. That could scarcely be, remembering all that had occurred; rather to my increasing distress and passionate resentment. I longed to forget I was held by a tie, that known to the world would cause me the bitterest shame. For by this time the true character of her father and brother had been revealed and I found myself bound to the daughter of a convicted criminal.
"But I could not forget her. The look with which she had left me was branded into my consciousness. Night and day it floated before me, till to escape it I resolved to fasten it upon canvas, if by that means I might succeed in eliminating it from my dreams.

"The painting you have seen this night is the result. Born with an artist's touch and insight that under other circumstances might, perhaps, have raised me into the cold dry atmosphere of fame, the execution of this piece of work, presented but few difficulties to my somewhat accustomed hand. Day by day her beauty grew beneath my brush, startling me often with its spiritual force and significance till my mind grew feverish over its work, and I could scarcely refrain from rising at night to give a touch here or there to the floating golden hair or the piercing, tender eyes turned, ah, ever turned upon the inmost citadel of my heart with that look that slew my father before his time and made me, yes me, old in spirit even in the ardent years of my first manhood.

"At last it was finished and she stood before me life-like and real in the very garments and with almost the very aspect of that never to be forgotten moment. Even the roses which in the secret uneasiness of my conscience I had put in her hand on our departure from Troy, as a sort of visible token that I regarded her as my bride, and which through all her interview with my father she had never dropped, blossomed before me on the canvas. Nothing that could give reality to the likeness, was lacking; the vision of my dreams stood embodied in my sight, and I looked for peace. Alas, that picture now became my dream.

"Inserting it behind that of Evelyn which for two years had held its place above my armchair, I turned its face to the wall when I rose in the morning. But at night it beamed ever upon me, becoming as the months passed, the one thing to hold to and muse over when the world grew a little noisy in my ears and the never ceasing conflict of the ages beat a trifle too loudly on heart and brain.

"Meanwhile no word of her, only of her villainous father and brother; no token that she had escaped evil or was removed from want. If I had loved her I could not have succored her, for I did not know where to find her. Her countenance illumined my wall, but her fair young self lay for all I knew sheltered within the darkness and silence of the tomb.

"At length my morbid broodings worked out their natural result. A dull melancholy settled upon me which nothing could break. Even the news that my cousin who had lost her husband a month after marriage, had returned to America with expectation to remain, scarcely caused a ripple in my apathy. Was I sinking into a hypochondriac? or was my passion for the beautiful brunette dead? I determined to solve the doubt.

"Seeking her where I knew she would be found, I gazed again upon her beauty. It was absolutely nothing to me. A fair young face with high thoughts in every glance floated like sunshine between us and I left the haughty Countess, with the knowledge burned deep into my brain, that the love I had considered slain was alive and demanding, but that the object of it past recall, was my lost young wife.

"Once assured of this, my apathy vanished like mist before a kindled torch. Henceforth the future held a hope, and life a purpose. I would seek my wife throughout the world and bring her back if I found her in prison between the men whose existence was a curse to my pride. But where should I turn my steps? What golden thread had she left in my hand by which to trace her through the labyrinth of this world? I could think of but one, and that was the love which would restrain her from going away from me too far. The Luttra of old would not leave the city where her husband lived. If she was not changed, I ought to be able to find her somewhere within this great Babylon of ours. Wisdom told me to set the police upon her track, but pride bade me try every other means first. So with the feverish energy of one leading a forlorn hope, I began to pace the streets if haply I might see her face shine upon me from the crowd of passers by; a foolish fancy, unproductive of result! I not only failed to see her, but anyone like her.

"You tell me that I did see a girl there, and that it was the one who had lived as sewing woman in my house; it may be so, but at the time I considered it a vision of my wife, and the remembrance of it, coming as it did after my repeated failures to encounter her in the street, worked a change in my plans. For regard it as weakness or not, the recollection that the vision I had seen wore the garments of a working-woman rather than a lady, acted upon me like a warning not to search for her any longer among the resorts of the welldressed, but in the regions of poverty and toil. I therefore took to wanderings such as I have no heart to describe. Nor do I need to, if, as you have informed...
me, I have been followed.

"The result was almost madness. Though deep in my heart I felt a steadfast trust in the purity of her intentions, the fear of what she might have been driven to by the awful poverty and despair I every day saw seething about me, was like hot steel in brain and heart. Then her father and her brother! To what might they not have forced her, innocent and loving soul though she was! Drinking the dregs of a cup such as I had never considered it possible for me to taste, I got so far as to believe that her eyes would yet flash upon me from beneath some of the tattered shawls I saw sullying the forms of the young girls upon which I hourly stumbled. Yes, and even made a move to see my cousin, if haply I could so win upon her compassion as to gain her consent to shelter the poor creature of my dreams in case the necessity came. But my heart failed me at the sight of her cold face above the splendor she had bought with her charms, and I was saved a humiliation I might never have risen above.

"At last, one day I saw a girl--no, it was not she, but her hair was similar to hers in hue, and the impulse to follow her was irresistible. I did more than that, I spoke to her. I asked her if she could tell me anything of one whose locks were golden red like hers--But I need not tell you what I said nor what she replied with a gentle delicacy that was almost a shock to me as showing from what heights to what depths a woman can fall. Enough that nothing passed between us beyond what I have intimated, and that in all she said she gave me no news of Luttra.

"Next day I started for the rambling old house in Vermont, if haply in the spot where I first saw her, I might come upon some clue to her present whereabouts. But the old inn was deserted, and whatever hope I may have had in that direction, perished with the rest.

"Concerning the contents of that bureau-drawer above, I can say nothing. If, as I scarcely dare to hope, they should prove to have been indeed brought here by the girl who has since disappeared so strangely, who knows but what in those folded garments a clue is given which will lead me at last to the knowledge for which I would now barter all I possess. My wife--But I can mention her name no more till the question that now assails us is set at rest. Mrs. Daniels must--"

But at that moment the door opened and Mrs. Daniels came in.

CHAPTER XIV

MRS. DANIELS

She still wore her bonnet and shawl and her face was like marble.

"You want me?" said she with a hurried look towards Mr. Blake that had as much fear as surprise in it.

"Yes," murmured that gentleman moving towards her with an effort we could very well appreciate. "Mrs. Daniels, who was the girl you harbored in that room above us for so long? Speak; what was her name and where did she come from?"

The housekeeper trembling in every limb, cast us one hurried appeal.

"Speak!" reechoed Mr. Gryce; "the time for secrecy has passed."

"O," cried she, sinking into a chair from sheer inability to stand, "it was your wife, Mr. Blake, the young creature you--"

"Ah!"

All the agony, the hopelessness, the love, the passion of those last few months flashed up in that word. She stopped as if she had been shot, but seeing the hand which he had hurriedly raised, fall slowly before him, went on with a burst,

"O sir, she made me swear on my knees I would never betray her, no matter what happened. When not two weeks after your father died she came to the house and asking for me, told me all her story and all her love; how she could not reconcile it with her idea of a wife's duty to live under any other roof than that of her husband, and lifting off the black wig which she wore, showed me how altered she had made herself by that simple change--in her case more marked by the fact that her eyes were in keeping with black hair, while with her own bright locks they always gave you a shock as of something strange and haunting--I gave up my will as if forced by a magnetic power, and not only opened the house to her but my heart as well; swearing to all she demanded and keeping my oath too, as I would preserve my soul from sin and my life from the knife of the destroyer."

"But, when she went," broke from the pallid lips of the man before her, "when she was taken away from the house, what then?"

"Ah," returned the agitated woman. "what then! Do you not think I suffered? To be held by my oath, an oath I was satisfied she would wish kept even at this crisis, yet knowing all the while she was drifting away into some evil that you, if you knew who she was, would give your life to avert from your honor if not from her innocent head! To see you cold, indifferent, absorbed in other things, while she, who would have perished any day for your happiness, was losing her life perhaps in the clutches of those horrible villains! Do not ask me to tell you what I have suffered since she went; I can never tell you,--innocent, tender, noble-hearted creature that she was."

"Was?" His hand clutched his heart as if it had been seized by a deathly spasm. "Why do you say was?"
"Because I have just come from the Morgue where she lies dead."

"No, no," came in a low shriek from his lips, "that is not she; that is another woman, like her perhaps, but not she."

"Would to God you were right; but the long golden braids! Such hair as hers I never saw on anyone before."

"Mr. Blake is right," I broke in, for I could not endure this scene any longer. "The woman taken out of the East river to-day has been both seen and spoken to by him and that not long since. He should know if it is his wife."

"And isn't it?"

"No, a thousand times no; the girl was a perfect stranger."

The assurance seemed to lift a leaden weight from her heart. "O thank God," she murmured dropping with an irresistible impulse on her knees. Then with a sudden return of her old tremble, "But I was only to reveal her secret in case of her death! What have I done, O what have I done! Her only hope lay in my faithfulness."

Mr. Blake leaning heavily on the table before him, looked in her face.

"Mrs. Daniels," said he, "I love my wife; her hope now lies in me."

She leaped to her feet with a joyous bound. "You love her? O thank God!" she again reiterated but this time in a low murmur to herself. "Thank God!" and weeping with unrestrained joy, she drew back into a corner.

Of course after that, all that remained for us to do was to lay our heads together and consult as to the best method of renewing our search after the unhappy girl, now rendered of double interest to us by the facts with which we had just been made acquainted. That she had been forced away from the roof that sheltered her by the power of her father and brother was of course no longer open to doubt. To discover them, therefore, meant to recover her. Do you wonder, then, that from the moment we left Mr. Blake's house, the capture of that brace of thieves became the leading purpose of our two lives?

CHAPTER XV

A CONFAB

Next morning Mr. Gryce and I met in serious consultation. How, and in what direction should we extend the inquiries necessary to a discovery of these Schoenmakers?

"I advise a thorough overhauling of the German quarter," said my superior. "Schmidt, and Rosenthal will help us and the result ought to be satisfactory."

But I shook my head at this. "I don't believe," said I, "that they will hide among their own people. You must remember they are not alone, but have with them a young woman of a somewhat distinguished appearance, whose presence in a crowded district, like that, would be sure to awaken gossip; something which above all else they must want to avoid."

"That is true; the Germans are a dreadful race for gossip."

"If they dared to ill-dress her or ill-treat her, it would be different. But she is a valuable piece of property to them you see, a choice lot of goods which it is for their interest to preserve in first-class condition till the day comes for its disposal. For I presume you have no doubt that it is for the purpose of extorting money from Mr. Blake that they have carried off his young wife."

"For that reason or one similar. He is a man of resources, they may have hoped he would help them to escape the country."

"If they don't hide in the German quarter they certainly won't in the Italian, French or Irish. What they want is too keep close and rouse no questions. I think they will be found to have gone up the river somewhere, or over to Jersey. Hoboken wouldn't be a bad place to send Schmidt to."

"You forget what it is they've got on their minds; besides no conspicuous party such as they could live in a rural district without attracting more attention than in the most crowded tenement house in the city."

"Where do you think, then, they would be liable to go?"

"Well my most matured thought on the subject," returned Mr. Gryce, after a moment's deliberation, "is this,--you say, and I agree, that they have hampered themselves with this woman at this time for the purpose of using her hereafter in a scheme of black-mail upon Mr. Blake. He, then, must be the object about which their thoughts revolve and toward which whatever operations or plans they may be engaged upon must tend. What follows? When a company of men have made up their minds to rob a bank, what is the first thing they do? They hire, if possible, a house next to the especial building they intend to enter, and for months work upon the secret passage through which they hope to reach the safe and its contents; or they make friends with the watchman that guards its treasures, and the janitor who opens and shuts the doors. In short they hang about their prey before they pounce upon it. And so will these Schoenmakers do in the somewhat different robbery which they plan sooner or later to effect. Whatever may keep them close at this moment, Mr. Blake and Mr. Blake's house is the point toward which their eyes are turned, and if we had time--"
"If we had time," Mr. Gryce persisted, "all it would be necessary to do would be to wait, they would come into our hands as easily and naturally as a hawk into the snare of the fowler. But as you say we have not, and therefore, I would recommend a little beating of the bush directly about Mr. Blake's house; for if all my experience is not at fault, those men are already within eye-shot of the prey they intend to run down."

"But," said I, "I have been living myself in that very neighborhood and know by this time the ways of every house in the vicinity. There is not a spot up and down the Avenue for ten blocks where they could hide away for two days much less two weeks. And as for the side streets,--why I could tell you the names of those who live in each house for a considerable distance. Yet if you say so I will go to work--"

"Do, and meanwhile Schmidt and Rosenthal shall rummage the German quarter and even go through Williamsburgh and Hoboken. The end justifies any amount of labor that can be spent upon this matter."

"And you," I asked.

"Will do my part when you have done yours."

CHAPTER XVI

THE MARK OF THE RED CROSS

And what success did I meet? The best in the world. And by what means did I attain it? By that of the simplest, prettiest clue I ever came upon. But let me explain.

When after a wearisome day spent in an ineffectual search through the neighborhood, I went home to my room, which as you remember was a front one in a lodging-house on the opposite corner from Mr. Blake, I was so absorbed in mind and perhaps I may say shaken in nerve, by the strain under which I had been laboring for some time now, that I stumbled up an extra flight of stairs, and without any suspicion of the fact, tried the door of the room directly over mine. It is a wonder to me now that I could have made the mistake, for the halls were totally dissimilar, the one above being much more cut up than the one below, besides being flanked by a greater number of doors. But the intoxication of the mind is not far removed from that of the body, and as I say it was not till I had tried the door and found it locked, that I became aware of the mistake I had made.

With the foolish sense of shame that always overcomes us at the committal of any such trivial error, I stumbled hastily back, when my foot trod upon something that broke under my weight. I never let even small things pass without some notice. Stooping, then, for what I had thus inadvertently crushed, I carried it to where a single gas jet turned down very low, made a partial light in the long hall, and examining it, found it to be a piece of red chalk.

What was there in that simple fact to make me start and hastily recall one or two half-forgotten incidents which, once brought to mind, awoke a train of thought that led to the discovery and capture of those two desperate thieves? I will tell you.

I don't remember now whether in my account of the visit I paid to the Schoenmakers' house in Vermont, I informed you of the red cross I noticed scrawled on the panel of one of the doors. It seemed a trivial thing at the time and made little or no impression upon me, the chances being that I should never have thought of it again, if I had not come upon the article just mentioned at a moment when my mind was full of those very Schoenmakers. But remembered now, together with another half-forgotten fact,--that some days previous I had been told by the woman who kept the house I was in, that the parties over my head (two men and a woman I believe she said) were giving her some trouble, but that they paid well and therefore she did not like to turn them out,--it aroused a vague suspicion in my mind, and led to my walking back to the door I had endeavored to open in my abstraction, and carefully looking at it.

It was plain and white, rather ruder of make than those below, but offering no inducements for prolonged scrutiny. But not so with the one that stood at right angles to it on the left. Full in the centre of that, I beheld distinctly scrawled, probably with the very piece of chalk I then held, a red cross precisely similar in outline to the one I had seen a few days before on the panel of the Schoenmakers' door at Granby.

The discovery sent a thrill over me that almost raised my hair on end. Was, then, this famous trio to be found in the very house in which I had been myself living for a week or more? over my head in fact? I could not withdraw my gaze from the mysterious looking object. I bent near, I listened, I heard what sounded like the suppressed snore of a powerful man, and almost had to lay hold of myself to prevent my hand from pushing open that closed door and my feet from entering. As it was I did finger the knob a little, but an extra loud snore from within reminded me by its suggestion of strength that I was but a small man and that in this case and at this hour, discretion was the better part of valor.

I therefore withdrew, but for the whole night lay awake listening to catch any sounds that might come from above, and going so far as to plan what I would do if it should be proved that I was indeed upon the trail of the men I was so anxious to encounter.

With the breaking of day I was upon my feet. A rude step had gone up the stairs a few minutes before and I was
all alert to follow. But I presently considered that my wisest course would be to sound the landlady and learn if
possible with what sort of characters I had to deal. Routing her out of the kitchen, where at that early hour she was
already engaged in domestic duties, I drew her into a retired corner and put my questions. She was not backward in
replying. She had conceived an innocent liking for me in the short time I had been with her—a display of weakness
for which I was myself, perhaps, as much to blame as she—and was only too ready to pour out her griefs into my
sympathizing ear. For those men were a grief to her, acceptable as was the money they were careful to provide her
with. They were not only not always in the house, that is one of them, smoking his old pipe and blackening up the walls,
but they looked so shabby, and kept the girl so close, and if they did go out, came in at such unheard of hours. It was
enough to drive her crazy; yet the money—

"Yes," said I, "I know; and the money ought to make you overlook all the small disagreeablenesses you mention.
What is a landlady without patience." And I urged her not to turn them out.

"But the girl," she went on, "so nice, so quiet, so sick-looking! I cannot stand it to see her cooped up in that small
room, always watched over by one or both of those burly wretches. The old man says she is his daughter and she
does not deny it, but I would as soon think of that little rosy child you see cooing in the window over the way,
belonging to the beggar going in at the gate, as of her with her lady-like ways having any connection with him and
his rough-acting son. You ought to see her—"

"That is just what I want to do," interrupted I. "Not because you have tempted my fancy by a recital of her
charms," I hastened to add, "but because she is, if I don't mistake, a woman for whose discovery and rescue, a large
sum of money has been offered."

And without further disguise I acquainted the startled woman before me with the fact that I was not, as she had
always considered, the clerk out of employment whose daily business it was to sally forth in quest of a situation, but
a member of the city police.

She was duly impressed and easily persuaded to second all my operations as far as her poor wits would allow,
giving me free range of her upper story, and above all, promising that secrecy without which all my finely laid plans
for capturing the rogues without raising a scandal, would fall headlong to the ground.

Behold me, then, by noon of that same day domiciled in an apartment next to the one whose door bore that
scarlet sign which had aroused within me such feverish hopes the night before. Clad in the seedy garments of a
broken down French artist whose acquaintance I had once made, with something of his air and general appearance
and with a few of his wretched daubs hung about on the whitewashed wall, I commenced with every prospect of
success as I thought, that quiet espionage of the hall and its inhabitants which I considered necessary to a proper
attainment of the end I had in view.

A racking cough was one of the peculiarities of my friend, and determined to assume the character in toto, I
allowed myself to startle the silence now and then with a series of gasps and chokings that whether agreeable or not,
certainly were of a character to show that I had no desire to conceal my presence from those I had come among.
Indeed it was my desire to acquaint them as fully and as soon as possible with the fact of their having a neighbor: a
weak-eyed half-alive innocent to be sure, but yet a neighbor who would keep his door open night and day—for the
warmth of the hall of course—and who with the fretful habit of an old man who had once been a gentleman and a
beau, went rambling about through the hall speaking to those he met and expecting a civil word in return. When he
was not rambling or coughing he made architectural monsters out of cardboard, wherewith to tempt the pennies out
of the pockets of unwary children, an employment that kept him chained to a small table in the centre of his room
directly opposite the open door.

As I expected I had scarcely given way to three separate fits of coughing, when the door next me opened with a
jerk and a rough voice called out,

"Who's that making all that to do about here? If you don't stop that infernal noise in a hurry—"

A soft voice interrupted him and he drew back. "I will go see," said those gentle tones, and Luttra Blake, for I
knew it was she before the skirt of her robe had advanced beyond the door, stepped out into the hall.

I was yet bent over my work when she paused before me. The fact is I did not dare look up, the moment was one
of such importance to me.

"You have a dreadful cough," said she with that low ring of sympathy in her voice that goes unconsciously to the
heart. "Is there no help for it?"

I pushed back my work, drew my hand over my eyes, (I did not need to make it tremble) and glanced up. "No,"
said I with a shake of my head, "but it is not always so bad. I beg your pardon, miss, if it disturbs you."

She threw back the shawl which she had held drawn tightly over her head, and advanced with an easy gliding
step close to my side. "You do not disturb me, but my father is—is, well a trifle cross sometimes, and if he should
speak up a little harsh now and then, you must not mind. I am sorry you are so ill."

What is there in some women's look, some women's touch that more than all beauty goes to the heart and
subdues it. As she stood there before me in her dark worsted dress and coarse shawl, with her locks simply braided and her whole person undignified by art and ungraced by ornament, she seemed just by the power of her expression and the witchery of her manner, the loveliest woman I had ever beheld.

"You are veree kind, veree good," I murmured, half ashamed of my disguise, though it was assumed for the purpose of rescuing her. "Your sympathy goes to my heart." Then as a deep growl of impatience rose from the room at my side, I motioned her to go and not irritate the man who seemed to have such control over her.

"In a minute," answered she, "first tell me what you are making."

So I told her and in the course of telling, let drop such other facts about my fancied life as I wished to have known to her and through her to her father. She looked sweetly interested and more than once turned upon me that dark eye, of which I had heard so much, full of tears that were as much for me, scamp that I was, as for her own secret trouble. But the growls becoming more and more impatient she speedily turned to go, repeating, however, as she did so,

"Now remember what I say, you are not to be troubled if they do speak cross to you. They make noise enough themselves sometimes, as you will doubtless be assured of to-night."

And the lips which seemed to have grown stiff and cold with her misery, actually softened into something like a smile.

The nod which I gave her in return had the solemnity of a vow in it.

My mind thus assured as to the correctness of my suspicions, and the way thus paved to the carrying out of my plans, I allowed some few days to elapse without further action on my part. My motive was to acquaint myself as fully as possible with the habits and ways of these two desperate men, before making the attempt to capture them upon which so many interests hung. For while I felt it would be highly creditable to my sagacity, as well as valuable to my reputation as a detective, to restore these escaped convicts in any way possible into the hands of justice, my chief ambition after all was to so manage the affair as to save the wife of Mr. Blake, not only from the consequences of their despair, but from the publicity and scandal attendant upon the open arrest of two heavily armed men. Strategy, therefore, rather than force was to be employed, and strategy to be successful must be founded upon the most thorough knowledge of the matter with which one has to deal. Three days, then, did I give to the acquiring of that knowledge, the result of which was the possession of the following facts.

1. That the landlady was right when she told me the girl was never left alone, one of the men, if not the father then the son, always remaining with her.

2. That while thus guarded, she was not so restricted but that she had the liberty of walking in the hall, though never for any length of time.

3. That the cross on the door seemed to possess some secret meaning connected with their presence in the house, it having been erased one evening when the whole three went out on some matter or other, only to be chalked on again when in an hour or so later, father and daughter returned alone.

4. That it was the father and not the son who made such purchases as were needed, while it was the son and not the father who carried on whatever operations they had on hand; nightfall being the favorite hour for the one and midnight for the other; though it not infrequently happened that the latter sauntered out for a short time also in the afternoon, probably for the drink he could not go long without.

5. That they were men of great strength but little alertness; the stray glimpses I had had of them, revealing a breadth of back that was truly formidable, if it had not been joined to a heaviness of motion that proclaimed a certain stolidity of mind that was eminently in our favor.

How best to use these facts in the building up of a matured plan of action, was, then, the problem. By noon of a certain day I believed it to have been solved, and reluctant as I was to leave the spot of my espionage even for the hour or two necessary to a visit to headquarters, I found myself compelled to do so. Packing up in a small basket I had for the purpose, the little articles I had been engaged during the last few days in making, I gave way to a final fit of coughing so hollow and sepulchral in its tone, that it awoke a curse from the next room deep as the growl of a wild beast, and still continuing, finally brought Luttra to the door with that look of compassion on her face that always called up a flush to my cheek whether I wished it or no.

"Ah, Monsieur, I am afraid your cough is very bad to-day. O I see; you have been getting ready to go out--"

"Come back here," broke in a heavy voice from the room she had left. "What do you mean by running off to palaver with that old rascal every time he opens his ----- battery of a cough?"

A smile that went through me like the cut of a knife, flashed for a moment on her face.

"My father is in one of his impatient moods," said she, "you had better go. I hope you will be successful," she murmured, glancing wistfully at my basket.

"What is that?" again came thundering on our ears. "Successful? What are you two up to?" And we heard the rough clatter of advancing steps.
"Go," said she; "you are weak and old; and when you come back, try and not cough." And she gave me a gentle push towards the door.

"When I come back," I began, but was forced to pause, the elder Schoenmaker having by this time reached the open doorway where he stood frowning in upon us in a way that made my heart stand still for her.

"What are you two talking about?" said he; "and what have you got in your basket there?" he continued with a stride forward that shook the floor.

"Only some little toys that he has been making, and is now going out to sell," was her low answer given with a quick deprecatory gesture such as I doubt if she ever used for herself.

"Nothing more?" asked he in German with a red glare in the eye he turned towards her.

"Nothing more," replied she in the same tongue. "You may believe me."

He gave a deep growl and turned away. "If there was," said he, "you know what would happen." And unheeding the wild keen shudder that seized her at the word, making her insensible for the moment to all and everything about her, he laid one heavy hand upon her slight shoulder and led her from the room.

I waited no longer than was necessary to carry my feeble and faltering steps appropriately down the stairs, to reach the floor below and gain the landlady's presence.

"Do you go up," said I, "and sit on those stairs till I come back. If you hear the least cry of pain or sound of struggle from that young girl's room, do you call at once for help. I will have a policeman standing on the corner below."

The good woman nodded and proceeded at once to take up her work-basket. "Lucky there's a window up there, so I can see," I heard her mutter. "I've no time to throw away even on deeds of charity."

Notwithstanding which precaution, I was in constant anxiety during my absence; an absence necessarily prolonged as I had to stop and explain matters to the Superintendent, as well as hunt up Mr. Gryce and get his consent to assist me in the matter of the impending arrest.

I found the latter in his own home and more than enthusiastic upon the subject.

"Well," said he after I had informed him of the discoveries I had made, "the fates seem to prosper you in this. I have not received an inkling of light upon the matter since I parted from you at Mr. Blake's house. By the way I saw that gentleman this morning and I tell you we will find him a grateful man if this affair can be resolved satisfactorily."

"That is good," said I," gratitude is what we want." Then shortly, "Perhaps it is no more than our duty to let him know that his wife is safe and under my eye; though I would by no means advocate his knowing just how near him she is, till the moment comes when he is wanted, or we shall have a lover's impetuosity to deal with as well as all the rest." Then with a hurried remembrance of a possible contingency, went on to say, "But, by the way, in case we should need the cooperation of Mrs. Blake in what we have before us, you had better get a line written in French from Mrs. Daniels, expressive of her belief in Mr. Blake's present affection for his wife. The latter will not otherwise trust us, or understand that we are to be obeyed in whatever we may demand. Let it be unsigned and without names in case of accident; and if the housekeeper don't understand French, tell her to get some one to help her that does, only be sure that the handwriting employed is her own."

Mr. Gryce seemed to perceive the wisdom of this precaution and promised to procure me such a note by a certain hour, after which I related to him the various other details of the capture such as I had planned it, meeting to my secret gratification an unqualified approval that went far towards alleviating that wound to my pride which I had received from him in the beginning of this affair.

"Let all things proceed as you have determined, and we shall accomplish something that it will be a life-long satisfaction to remember," said he; "but you must be prepared for some twist of the screw which you do not anticipate. I never knew anything to go off just as one prognosticates it must, except once," he added thoughtfully, "and then it was with a surprise attached to it that well nigh upset me notwithstanding all my preparations."

"You won a great success that day," remarked I. "I hope the fates will be as propitious to me to-morrow. Failure now would break my heart."

"But you won't fail," exclaimed he. "I myself am resolved to see you through this matter with credit."

And in this assurance I returned to my lodgings where I found the landlady sitting where I had left her, darning her twenty-third sock.

"I have to mend for a dozen men and three boys," said she, "and the boys are the worst by a heap sight. Look at that, will you," holding up a darn with a bit of stocking attached. "That hole was made playing shinny."

I uttered my condolences and asked if any sound or disturbance had reached her ears from above.

"O no, all is right up there; I've scarcely heard a whisper since you've been gone." I gave her a pat on the chin scarcely consistent with my aged and tottering mien and proceeded to shamble painfully to my room.
CHAPTER XVII
THE CAPTURE

Promptly next morning at the designated hour, came the little note promised me by Mr. Gryce. It was put in my hand with many sly winks by the landlady herself, who developed at this crisis quite an adaptation for, if not absolute love of intrigue and mystery. Glancing over it—it was unsealed—and finding it entirely unintelligible, I took it for granted it was all right and put it by till chance, or if that failed, strategy, should give me an opportunity to communicate with Mrs. Blake. An hour passed; the doors of their rooms remained unclosed. A half hour more dragged its slow minutes away, and no sound had come from their precincts save now and then a mumbled word of parley between the father and son, a short command to the daughter, or a not-to-be-restrained oath of annoyance from one or both of the heavy-limbed brutes as something was said or done to disturb them in their indolent repose. At last my impatience was to be no longer restrained. Rising, I took a bold resolution. If the mountain would not come to Mahomet, Mahomet would go to the mountain. Taking my letter in the hand, I deliberately proceeded to the door marked with the ominous red cross and knocked.

A surprised snarl from within, followed by a sudden shuffling of feet as the two men leaped upright from what I presume had been a recumbent position, warned me to be ready to face defiance if not the fury of despair; and curbing with a determined effort the slight sinking of heart natural to a man of my make on the threshold of a very doubtful adventure, I awaited with as much apparent unconcern as possible, the quick advance of that light foot which seemed to be ready to perform all the biddings of these hardened wretches, much as it shrunk from following in the ways of their infamy.

"Ah miss," said I, as the door opened revealing in the gap her white face clouded with some new and sudden apprehension, "I beg your pardon but I am an old man, and I got a letter to-day and my eyes are so weak with the work I've been doing that I cannot read it. It is from some one I love, and would you be so kind as to read off the words for me and so relieve an old man from his anxiety."

The murmur of suspicion behind her, warned her to throw wide open the door. "Certainly," said she, "if I can," taking the paper in her hand.

"Just let me get a squint at that first," said a sullen voice behind her; and the youngest of the two Schoenmakers stepped forward and tore the paper out of her grasp.

"You are too suspicious," murmured she, looking after him with the first assumption of that air of power and determination which I had heard so eloquently described by the man who loved her. "There is nothing in those lines which concerns us; let me have them back."

"You hold your tongue," was the brutal reply as the rough man opened the folded paper and read or tried to read what was written within. "Blast it! it's French," was his slow exclamation after a moment spent in this way. "See," and he thrust it towards his father who stood frowning heavily a few feet off.

"Of course, it's French," cried the girl. "Would you write a note in English to father there? The man's friends are French like himself, and must write in their own language."

"Here take it and read it out," commanded her father; "and mind you tell us what it means. I'll have nothing going on here that I don't understand."

"Read me the French words first, miss," said I. "It is my letter and I want to know what my friend has to say to me."

Nodding at me with a gentle look, she cast her eyes on the paper and began to read:

"Calmez vous, mon amie, il vous aime et il vous cherche. Dans quatre heures vous serez heureuse. Allons du courage, et surtout soyez maître de vous meme."

"Thanks!" I exclaimed in a calm matter-of-fact way as I perceived the sudden tremor that seized her as she recognized the handwriting and realized that the words were for her. "My friend says he will pay my week's rent and bids me be at home to receive him," said I, turning upon the two ferocious faces peering over her shoulder, with a look of meek unsuspiciousness in my eye, that in a theatre would have brought down the house.

"Is that what those words say, you?" asked the father, pointing over her shoulder to the paper she held.

"I will translate for you word by word what it says," replied she, nerving herself for the crisis till her face was like marble, though I could see she could not prevent the gleam of secret rapture that had visited her, from flashing fitfully across it. "Calmez vous, mon amie. Do not be afraid, my friend. Il vous aime et il vous cherche. He loves you and is hunting for you. Dans quatre heures vous serez heureuse. In four hours you will be happy. Allons du courage, et surtout soyez maître de vous meme. Then take courage and above all preserve your self-possession. It is the French way of expressing one's self," observed she. "I am glad your friend is disposed to help you," she continued, giving me back the letter with a smile. "I am afraid you needed it."

In a sort of maze I folded up the letter, bowed my very humble thanks to her and shuffled slowly back. The fact is I had no words; I was utterly dumbfounded. Half way through that letter, with whose contents you must remember
I was unacquainted, I would have given my whole chance of expected reward to have stopped her. Read out such words as those before these men! Was she crazy? But how naturally at the conclusion did she with a word make its language seem consistent with the meaning I had given it. With a fresh sense of my obligation to her, I hurried to my room, there to count out the minutes of another long hour in anxious expectation of her making that endeavor to communicate with me, which her new hopes and fears must force her to feel almost necessary to her existence. At length, my confidence in her was rewarded. Coming out into the hall, she hurried past my door, her finger on her lip. I immediately rose and stood on the threshold with another paper in my hand, which I had prepared against this opportunity. As she glided back, I put it in her hand, and warning her with a look not to speak, resumed my usual occupation. The words I had written were as follows:

At or as near the time as possible of your brother's going out, you are to come to this room wrapped in an extra skirt and with your shawl over your head. Leave the skirt and shawl behind you, and withdraw at once to the room at the head of the stairs. You are not to speak, and you are not to vary from the plan thus laid down. Your brother and father are to be arrested, whether or no; but if you will do as this commands, they will be arrested without bloodshed and without shame to one you know.

Her face while she read these lines, was a study, but I dared not soften toward it. Dropping the paper from her hand, she gave me one inquiring look. But I pointed determinedly to the words lying upward on the floor, and would listen to no appeal. My resolve had its effect. Bowing her head with a sorrowful gesture, she laid her hand on her heart, looked up and glided from the room. I took up that paper and tore it into bits.

And now for the first time since I had been in the house, I closed the door of my room. I had a part to perform that rendered the dropping of my disguise indispensable. The old French artist had finished his work, and henceforth must merge into Q. the detective. Shortly before two o'clock my assistants began to arrive. First, Mr. Gryce appeared on the scene and was stowed away in a large room on the other side of mine. Next, two of the most agile, as well as muscular men in the force who, thanks to having taken off their shoes in the lower hall, gained the same refuge without awakening the suspicions of those we were anxious to surprise. Lastly, the landlady who went into the closet to which I had bidden Mrs. Blake retire after leaving in my room the articles I had mentioned.

All was now ready and waiting for the departure of the youngest Schoenmaker. Would he disappoint us and remain at home that day? Had any suspicions been awakened in the stolid breasts of these men, that would serve to make them more watchful than usual against running unnecessary risks? No; at or near the time for the clock to strike two, their door opened and the tread of a lumbering foot was heard in the hall. On it came, passing my room with a rude stamping that gradually grew less distinct as the hardy rough went down the corridor, brushing the wall behind which Mr. Gryce and his men lay concealed with his thick cane, and even stopping to light his pipe in front of the small apartment where cowered our good landlady with her eternal basket of mending in her lap.

At length all was quiet, and throwing open my door, I withdrew into a small closet connected with my room, to wait with indescribable impatience, the appearance of Mrs. Blake. She came in a very few minutes, remained for an instant, and departed, leaving behind her as I had requested, the skirt and shawl in which she had left her father's presence. I at once endowed myself in these articles of apparel--taking care to draw the shawl well over my head--and with a pocket handkerchief to my face, (a proceeding made natural enough by the sneeze which at that very moment I took care should assail me) walked boldly back to the room from which she had just come.

The door was of course ajar, and as I swung it open with as near a simulation of her manner as possible, the vision of her powerful father lolling on a bench directly before me, offered anything but an encouraging spectacle to my eyes. But doubling myself almost together with as ladylike an atch-ee as my masculine nostrils would allow, I succeeded in closing the door and reaching a low stool by the window without calling from him anything worse than a fretful "I hope you are not going to bark too."

I did not reply to this of course, but sat with my face turned towards the street in an attitude which I hoped would awaken his attention sufficiently to cause him to get up and come over to my side. For as he sat face to the door it would be impossible to take him by surprise, and that, now that I saw what a huge and muscular creature he was, seemed to me to be the only safe method before us. But, whether from the sullenness of his disposition or the very evident laziness of the moment, he manifested no disposition to move, and hearing or thinking I did, the stealthy advance of Mr. Gryce and his companions down the hall, I allowed myself to give way to a suppressed exclamation, and leaning forward, pressed my forehead against the pane of glass before me as if something of absorbing interest had just taken place in the street beneath.

His fears at once took alarm. Bounding up with a curse, he strode towards me, muttering, "What's up now? What's that you are looking at?" reaching my side just as Mr. Gryce and his two men softly opened the door and with a quick leap threw their arms about him, closing upon him with a force he could not resist, desperate as he was and mighty in the huge strength of an unusually developed muscular organization.

"You, you girl there, are to blame for this!" came mingled with curses from his lips, as with one huge pant he
submitted to his captors. "Only let me get my hand well upon you once--Damn it!" he suddenly exclaimed, dragging
the whole three men forward in his effort to get his mouth down to my ear, "go and rub that sign out on the door or
I'll--you know what I'll do well enough. Do you hear?"
Rising, still with face averted, I proceeded to do what he asked. But in another moment seeing that he had been
effectually bound and gagged, I took out the piece of red chalk I had kept in my pocket, and deliberately chalked it
on again, after which operation I came back and took my seat as before on the low stool by the window.
The object now was to secure the second rascal in the same way we had the first; and for this purpose Mr. Gryce
ordered the now helpless giant to be dragged into the adjoining small room formerly occupied by Mrs. Blake, where
he and his men likewise took up their station leaving me to confront as best I might, the surprise and consternation
of the one whose return we now awaited.
I did not shrink. With that brave woman's garments drawn about me, something of her dauntless spirit seemed to
invade my soul, and though I expected--But let that come in its place, I am not here to interest you in myself or my
selfish thoughts.
A half hour passed; he had never lingered away so long before, or so it seemed, and I was beginning to wonder if
we should have to keep up this strain of nerve for hours, when the heavy tread was again heard in the hall, and with
a blow of the fist that argued anger or a brutal impatience, he flung open the door and came in, I did not turn my
head.
"Where's father?" he growled, stopping where he was a foot or so from the door.
I shook my head with a slight gesture and remained looking out.
He brought his cane down on the floor with a thump. "What do you mean by sitting there staring out of the
window like mad and not answering when I ask you a decent question?"
Still I made no reply.
Provoked beyond endurance, yet held in check by that vague sense of danger in the air,--which while not
amounting to apprehension is often sufficient to hold back from advance the most daring foot,--he stood glaring at
me in what I felt to be a very ferocious attitude, but made no offer to move. Instantly I rose and still looking out of
the window, made with my hand what appeared to be a signal to some one on the opposite side of the way. The ruse
was effective. With an oath that rings in my ears yet, he lifted his heavy cane and advanced upon me with a bound,
only to meet the same fate as his father at the hands of the watchful detectives. Not, however, before that heavy cane
came down upon my head in a way to lay me in a heap at his feet and to sow the seeds of that blinding head-ache,
which has afflicted me by spells ever since. But this termination of the affair was no more than I had feared from the
beginning; and indeed it was as much to protect Mrs. Blake from the wrath of these men, as from any requirements
of the situation I had assumed the disguise I then wore. I therefore did not allow this mishap to greatly trouble me,
unsatisfactory as it was at the time, but, as soon as ever I could do so, rose from the floor and throwing off my strange
habiliments, proceeded to finish up to my satisfaction, the work already so successfully begun.

CHAPTER XVIII
LOVE AND DUTY
Dismissing the men who had assisted us in the capture of these two hardy villains, we ranged our prisoners
before us.
"Now," said Mr. Gryce, "no fuss and no swearing; you are in for it, and you might as well take it quietly as any
other way."
"Give me a clutch on that girl, that's all," said her father, "Where is she? Let me see her; every father has a right
to see his own daughter,"
"You shall see her," returned my superior, "but not till her husband is here to protect her."
"Her husband? ah, you know about that do you?" growled the heavy voice of the son. "A rich man they say he is
and a proud one. Let him come and look at us lying here like dogs and say how he will enjoy having his wife's father
and brother grinding away their lives in prison."
"Mr. Blake is coming," quoth Mr. Gryce, who by some preconcerted signal from the window had drawn that
gentleman across the street. "He will tell you himself that he considers prison the best place for you. Blast you! but
he--"
"But he, what?" inquired I, as the door opened and Mr. Blake with a pale face and agitated mien entered the
room.
The wretch did not answer. Rousing from the cowering position in which they had both lain since their capture,
the father and son struggled up in some sort of measure to their feet, and with hot, anxious eyes surveyed the
countenance of the gentleman before them, as if they felt their fate hung upon the expression of his pallid face. The
son was the first to speak.
"How do you do, brother-in-law," were his sullen and insulting words.
Mr. Blake shuddered and cast a look around.
"My wife?" murmured he.
"She is well," was the assurance given by Mr. Gryce, "and in a room not far from this. I will send for her if you say so."
"No, not yet," came in a sort of gasp; "let me look at these wretches first, and understand if I can what my wife has to suffer from her connection with them."
"Your wife," broke in the father, "what's that to do with it; the question is how do you like it and what will you do to get us clear of this thing."
"I will do nothing," returned Mr. Blake. "You amply merit your doom and you shall suffer it to the end for all time."
"It will read well in the papers," exclaimed the son.
"The papers are to know nothing about it," I broke in. "All knowledge of your connection with Mr. or Mrs. Blake is to be buried in this spot before we or you leave it. Not a word of her or him is to cross the lips of either of you from this hour. I have set that down as a condition and it has got to be kept."
"You have, have you," thundered in chorus from father and son. "And who are you to make conditions, and what do you think we are that you expect us to keep them? Can you do anything more than put us back from where we came from?"
For reply I took from my pocket the ring I had fished out of the ashes of their kitchen stove on that memorable visit to their house, and holding it up before their faces, looked them steadily in the eye.
A sudden wild glare followed by a bluish palor that robbed their countenances of their usual semblance of daring ferocity, answered me beyond my fondest hopes.
"I got that out of the stove where you had burned your prison clothing," said I. "It is a cheap affair, but it will send you to the gallows if I choose to use it against you. The pedlar--"
"Hush," exclaimed the father in a low choked tone greatly in contrast to any he had yet used in all our dealings with him. "Throw that ring out of the window and I promise to hold my tongue about any matter you don't want spoke of. I'm not a fool--"
"Nor I," was my quick reply, as I restored the ring to my pocket. "While that remains in my possession together with certain facts concerning your habits in that old house of yours which have lately been made known to me, your life hangs by a thread I can any minute snap in two. Mr. Blake here, has spent some portion of a night in your house and knows how near it lies to a certain precipice, at foot of which--"
"Mein Gott, father, why don't you say something!" leaped in cowed accents from the son's white lips. "If they want us to keep quiet, let them say so and not go talking about things that--"
"Now look here," interposed Mr. Gryce stepping before them with a look that closed their mouths at once. "I will just tell you what we propose to do. You are to go back to prison and serve your time out, there is no help for that, but as long as you behave yourselves and continue absolutely silent regarding your relationship to the wife of this gentleman, you shall have paid into a certain bank that he will name, a monthly sum that upon your dismissal from jail shall be paid you with whatever interest it may have accumulated. You are ready to promise that, are you not?" he inquired turning to Mr. Blake.
That gentleman bowed and named the sum, which was liberal enough, and the bank.
"But," continued the detective, ignoring the sudden flash of eye that passed between the father and son, "let me or any of us hear of a word having been uttered by you, which in the remotest way shall suggest that you have in the world such a connection as Mrs. Blake, and the money not only stops going into the bank, but old scores shall be raked up against you with a zeal which if it does not stop your mouth in one way, will in another, and that with a suddenness you will not altogether relish."
The men with a dogged air from which the bravado had however fled, turned and looked from one to the other of us in a fearful, inquiring way that duly confessed to the force of the impression made by these words upon their slow but not unimaginative minds.
"Do you three promise to keep our secret if we keep yours?" muttered the father with an uneasy glance at my pocket.
"We certainly do," was our solemn return.
"Very well; call in the girl and let me just look at her, then, before we go. We won't say nothing," continued he, seeing Mr. Blake shrink, "only she is my daughter and if I cannot bid her good-bye--"
"Let him see his child," cried Mr. Blake turning with a shudder to the window. "I--I wish it," added he.
Straightway with hasty foot I left the room. Going to the little closet where I had ordered his wife to remain concealed, I knocked and entered. She was crouched in an attitude of prayer on the floor, her face buried in her hands, and her whole person breathing that agony of suspense that is a torture to the sensitive soul.
"Mrs. Blake," said I, dismissing the landlady who stood in helpless distress beside her, "the arrest has been satisfactorily made and your father calls for you to say good-bye before going away with us. Will you come?"

"But my--my--Mr. Blake?" exclaimed she leaping to her feet. "I am sure I heard his footstep in the hall?"

"He is with your father and brother. It was at his command I came for you."

A gleam hard to interpret flashed for an instant over her face. With her eye on the door she towered in her womanly dignity, while thoughts innumerable seemed to rush in wild succession through her mind.

"Will you not come?" I urged.

"I--", she paused. "I will go see my father," she murmured, "but--"

Suddenly she trembled and drew back; a step was in the hall, on the threshold, at her side; Mr. Blake had come to reclaim his bride.

"Mr. Blake!"

The word came from her in a low tone shaken with the concentrated anguish of many a month of longing and despair, but there was no invitation in its sound, and he who had held out his arms, stopped and surveying her with a certain deprecatory glance in his proud eye, said,

"You are right; I have first my acknowledgments to make and your forgiveness to ask before I can hope--"

"No, no," she broke in, "your coming here is enough, I request no more. If you felt unkindly toward me--"

"Unkindly?" A world of love thrilled in that word. "Luttra, I am your husband and rejoice that I am so; it is to lay the devotion of my heart and life at your feet that I seek your presence this hour. The year has taught me--ah, what has not the year taught me of the worth of her I so recklessly threw from me on my wedding day. Luttra,"--he held out his hand--"will you crown all your other acts of devotion with a pardon that will restore me to my manhood and that place in your esteem which I covet above every other earthly good?"

Her face which had been raised to his with that earnest look we knew so well, softened with an ineffable smile, but still she did not lay her hand in his.

"And you say this to me in the very hour of my father's and brother's arrest! With the remembrance in your mind of their bound and abject forms lying before you guarded by police; knowing too, that they deserve their ignominy and the long imprisonment that awaits them?"

"No, I say it on the day of the discovery and the restoration of that wife for whom I have long searched, and to whom when found I have no word to give but welcome, welcome, welcome."

With the same deep smile she bowed her head, "Now let come what will, I can never again be unhappy," were the words I caught, uttered in the lowest of undertones. But in another moment her head had regained its steady poise and a great change had passed over her manner.

"Mr. Blake," said she, "you are good; how good, I alone can know and duly appreciate who have lived in your house this last year and seen with eyes that missed nothing, just what your surroundings are and have been from the earliest years of your proud life. But goodness must not lead you into the committal of an act you must and will repent to your dying day; or if it does, I who have learned my duty in the school of adversity, must show the courage of two and forbid what every secret instinct of my soul declares to be only provocative of shame and sorrow. You would take me to your heart as your wife; do you realize what that means?"

"I think I do," was his earnest reply. "Relief from heart-ache, Luttra."

Her smooth brow wrinkled with a sudden spasm of pain but her firm lips did not quiver.

"It means," said she, drawing nearer but not with that approach which indicates yielding, "it means, shame to the proudest family that lives in the land. It means silence as regards a past blotted by suggestions of crime; and apprehension concerning a future across which the shadow of prison walls must for so many years lie. It means, the hushing of certain words upon beloved lips; the turning of cherished eyes from visions where fathers and daughters ay, brothers and sisters are seen joined together in tender companionship or loving embrace. It means,--God help me to speak out--a home without the sanctity of memories; a husband without the honors he has been accustomed to enjoy; a wife with a fear gnawing like a serpent into her breast; and children, yes, perhaps children from whose innocent lips the sacred word of grandfather can never fall without awaking a blush on the cheeks of their parents, which all their lovesome prattle will be helpless to chase away."

"Luttra, your father and your brother have given their consent to go their dark way alone and trouble you no more. The shadow you speak of may lie on your heart, dear wife, for these men are of your own blood, but it need never invade the hearthstone beside which I ask you to sit. The world will never know, whether you come with me or not, that Luttra Blake was ever Luttra Schoenmaker. Will you not then give me the happiness of striving to make such amends for the past, that you too, will forget you ever bore any other name than the one you now honor so truly?"

"O do not," she began but paused with a sudden control of her emotion that lifted her into an atmosphere almost holy in its significance. "Mr. Blake," said she, "I am a woman and therefore weak to the voice of love pleading in
my ear. But in one thing I am strong, and that is in my sense of what is due to the man I have sworn to honor. Eleven months ago I left you because your pleasure and my own dignity demanded it; to-day I put by all the joy and exaltation you offer, because your position as a gentleman, and your happiness as a man equally requires it."

"My happiness as a man!" he broke in. "Ah, Luttra if you love me as I do you--"

"I might perhaps yield," she allowed with a faint smile. "But I love you as a girl brought up amid surroundings from which her whole being recoiled, must love the one who first brought light into her darkness and opened up to her longing feet the way to a life of culture, purity and honor. I were the basest of women could I consent to repay such a boundless favor--"

"But Luttra," he again broke in, "you married me knowing what your father and brother were capable of committing."

"Yes, yes; I was blinded by passion, a girl's passion, Mr. Blake, born of glamour and gratitude; not the self-forgetting devotion of a woman who has tasted the bitterness of life and so learned its lesson of sacrifice. I may not have thought, certainly I did not realize, what I was doing. Besides, my father and brother were not convicted criminals at that time, however weak they had proved themselves under temptation. And then I believed I had left them behind me on the road of life; that we were sundered, irrevocably cut loose from all possible connection. But such ties are not to be snapped so easily. They found me, you see, and they will find me again--"

"Never!" exclaimed her husband. "They are as dead to you as if the grave had swallowed them. I have taken care of that."

"But the shame! you have not taken care of that. That exists and must, and while it does I remain where I can meet it alone. I love you; God's sun is not dearer to my eyes; but I will never cross your threshold as your wife till the opprobrium can be cut loose from my skirts, and the shadow uplifted from my brow. A queen with high thoughts in her eyes and brave hopes in her heart were not too good to enter that door with you. Shall a girl who has lived three weeks in an atmosphere of such crime and despair, that these rooms have often seemed to me the gateway to hell, carry there, even in secrecy, the effects of that atmosphere? I will cherish your goodness in my heart but do not ask me to bury that heart in any more exalted spot, than some humble country home, where my life may be spent in good deeds and my love in prayers for the man I hold dear, and because I hold dear, leave to his own high path among the straight and unshadowed courses of the world."

And with a gesture that inexorably shut him off while it expressed the most touching appeal, she glided by him and took her way to the room where her father and brother awaited her presence.

CHAPTER XIX
EXPLANATIONS

"I cannot endure this," came in one burst of feeling from the lips of Mr. Blake. "She don't know, she don't realize--Sir," cried he, suddenly becoming conscious of my presence in the room, "will you be good enough to see that this note," he hastily scribbled one, "is carried across the way to my house and given to Mrs. Daniels."

I bowed assent, routed up one of the men in the next room and despatched it at once.

"Perhaps she will listen to the voice of one of her own sex if not to me," said he; and began pacing the floor of the narrow room in which we were, with a wildness of impatience that showed to what depths had sunk the hope of gaining this lovely woman for his own.

Feeling myself no longer necessary in that spot, I followed where my wishes led and entered the room where Luttra was bidding good-bye to her father and brother awaited her presence.

"I shall never forget," I heard her say as I crossed the floor to where Mr. Gryce stood looking out of the window, "that your blood runs in my veins together with that of my gentle-hearted, never-to-be- forgotten mother. Whatever my fate may be or wherever I may hide the head you have bowed to the dust, be sure I shall always lift up my hands in prayer for your repentance and return to an honest life. God grant that my prayers may be heard and that I may yet receive at your hands, a father's kindly blessing."

The only answer to this was a heavily muttered growl that gave but little promise of any such peaceful termination to a deeply vicious life. Hearing it, Mr. Gryce hastened to procure his men and remove the hardened wretches from the spot. All through the preparations for their departure, she stood and watched their sullen faces with a wild yearning in her eye that could scarcely be denied, but when the door finally closed upon them, and she was left standing there with no one in the room but myself she steadied herself up as one who is conscious that all the storms of heaven are about to break upon her; and turning slowly to the door waited with arms crossed and a still determination upon her brow, the coming of the feet of him whose resolve she felt must have, as yet been only strengthened by her resistance.

She had not long to wait. Almost with the closing of the street door upon the detectives and their prisoners, Mr. Blake followed by Mrs. Daniels and another lady whose thick veil and long cloak but illy concealed the patrician features and stately form of the Countess De Mirac, entered the room.
The surprise had its effect; Luttra was evidently for the moment thrown off her guard.

"Mrs. Daniels!" she breathed, holding out her hands with a longing gesture.

"My dear mistress!" returned that good woman, taking those hands in hers but in a respectful way that proved the constraint imposed upon her by Mr. Blake's presence. "Do I see you again and safe?"

"You must have thought I cared little for the anxiety you would be sure to feel," said that fair young mistress, gazing with earnestness into the glad but tearful eyes of the housekeeper. "But indeed, I have been in no position to communicate with you, nor could I do so without risking that to protect which I so outraged my feelings as to leave the house at all. I mean the life and welfare of its master, Mrs. Daniels."

"Ha, what is that?" quoth Mr. Blake. "It was to save me, you consented to follow them?"

"Yes; what else would have led me to such an action? They might have killed me, I would not have cared, but when they began to utter threats against you--"

"Mrs. Blake," exclaimed Mrs. Daniels, catching hold of her mistress's uplifted hand, and pointing to a scar that slightly disfigured her white arm a little above the wrist, "Mrs. Blake, what's that?"

A pink flush, the first I had seen on her usually pale countenance, rose for an instant to her cheeks, and she seemed to hesitate.

"It was not there when I last saw you, Mrs. Blake."

"No," was the slow reply, "I found myself forced that night to inflict upon myself a little wound. It is nothing, let it go."

"No, Luttra I cannot let it go," said her husband, advancing towards her with something like gentle command. "I must hear not only about this but all the other occurrences of that night. How came they to find you in the refuge you had attained?"

"I think," said she in a low tone the underlying suffering of which it would be hard to describe, "that it was not to seek me they first invaded your house. They had heard you were a rich man, and the sight of that ladder running up the side of the new extension was too much for them. Indeed I know that it was for purposes of robbery they came, for they had hired this room opposite you some days previous to making the attempt. You see they were almost destitute of money and though they had some buried in the cellar of the old house in Vermont, they dared not leave the city to procure it. My brother was obliged to do so later, however. It was a surprise to them seeing me in your house. They had reached the roof of the extension and were just lifting up the corner of the shade I had dropped across the open window--I always open my window a few minutes before preparing to retire--when I rose from the chair in which I had been brooding, and turned up the gas. I was combing my hair at the time and so of course they recognized me. Instantly they gave a secret signal I, alas, remembered only too well, and crouching back, bade me put out the light that they might enter with safety. I was at first too much startled to realize the consequences of my action, and with some vague idea that they had discovered my retreat and come for purposes of advice or assistance, I did what they bid. Immediately they threw back the shade and came in, their huge figures looming frightfully in the faint light made by a distant gas lamp in the street below. 'What do you want?' were my first words uttered in a voice I scarcely recognized for my own; 'why do you steal on me like this in the night and through an open window fifty feet from the ground? Aren't you afraid you will be discovered and sent back to the prison from which you have escaped?' Their reply sent a chill through my blood and awoke me to a realization of what I had done in thus allowing two escaped convicts to enter a house not my own. 'We want money and we're not afraid of anything now you are here.' And without heeding my exclamation of horror, they coolly told me that they would wait where they were till the household was asleep, when they would expect me to show them the way to the silver closet or what was better, the safe or wherever it was Mr. Blake kept his money. I saw they took me for a servant, as indeed I was, and for some minutes I managed to preserve that position in their eyes. But when in a sudden burst of rage at my refusal to help them, they pushed me aside and hurried to the door with the manifest intention of going below, I forgot prudence in my fears and uttered some wild appeal to them not to do injury to any one in the house for it was my husband's. Of course that disclosure had its natural effect.

"They stopped, but only to beset me with questions till the whole truth came out. I could not have committed a worse folly than thus taking them into my confidence. Instantly the advantages to be gained by using my secret connection with so wealthy a man for the purpose of cowering me and blackmailing him, seemed to strike both their minds at once, slow as they usually are to receive impressions. The silver-closet and money-safe sank to a worse folly than thus taking them into my confidence. Instantly the advantages to be gained by using my secret connection with so wealthy a man for the purpose of cowering me and blackmailing him, seemed to strike both their minds at once, slow as they usually are to receive impressions. The silver-closet and money-safe sank to a
fondly believed they had stumbled upon unawares, promised too richly to be easily abandoned. 'You must go with us,' said they, 'if not peaceably then by force,' and they actually advanced upon me, upsetting a chair and tearing down one of the curtains to which I clung. It was then I committed that little act concerning which you questioned me. I wanted to show them I was not to be moved by threats of that character; that I did not even fear the shedding of my blood; and that they would only be wasting their time in trying to sway me by hints of personal violence. And they were a little impressed, sufficiently so at least to turn their threats in another direction, awakening fears at last which I could not conceal, much as I felt it would be policy to do so. Gathering up a few articles I most prized, my wedding ring, Mr. Blake, and a photograph of yourself that Mrs. Daniels had been kind enough to give me, I put on my bonnet and cloak and said I would go with them, since they persisted in requiring it. The fact is I no longer possessed motive or strength to resist. Even your unexpected appearance at the door, Mrs. Daniels, offered no prospect of hope. Arouse the house? what would that do? only reveal my cherished secret and perhaps jeopardize the life of my husband. Besides, they were my own near kin, remember, and so had some little claim upon my consideration, at least to the point of my not personally betraying them unless they menaced immediate and actual harm. The escape by the window which would have been a difficult task for most women to perform, was easy enough for me. I was brought up to wild ways you know, and the descent of a ladder forty feet long was a comparatively trivial thing for me to accomplish. It was the tearing away from a life of silent peace, the reentrance of my soul into an atmosphere of sin and deadly plotting, that was the hard thing, the difficult dreadful thing which hung weights to my feet, and made me well nigh mad. And it was this which at the sight of a policeman in the street led me to make an effort to escape. But it was not successful. Though I was fortunate enough to free myself from the grasp of my father and brother, I reached the gate on street only to encounter the eyes of him whose displeasure I most feared, looking sternly upon me from the other side. The shock was too much for me in my then weak and unnerved condition. Without considering anything but the fact that he never had known and never must, that I had been in the same house with him for so long, I rushed back to the corner and into the arms of the men who awaited me. How you came to be there, Mr. Blake, or why you did not open the gate and follow, I cannot say."

"The gate was locked," returned that gentleman. "You remember it closes with a spring, and can only be opened by means of a key which I did not have."

"My father had it," she murmured; "he spent a whole week in the endeavor to get hold of it, and finally succeeded on the evening of the very day he used it. It was left in the lock I believe."

"So much for servants," I whispered to myself.

"The next morning," continued she, "they put the case very plainly before me. I was at liberty to return at once to my home if I would promise to work in their interest by making certain demands upon you as your wife. All they wanted, said they, was a snug little sum and a lift out of the country. If I would secure them these, they would trouble me no more. But I could not concede to anything of that nature, of course, and the consequence was these long weeks of imprisonment and suspense; weeks that I do not now begrudge, seeing they have brought me the assurance of your esteem and the knowledge, that wherever I go, your thoughts will follow me with compassion if not with love."

And having told her story and thus answered his demands, she assumed once more the position of lofty reserve that seemed to shut him back from advance like a wall of invincible crystal.

CHAPTER XX

THE BOND THAT UNITES

But he was not to be discouraged. "And after all this, after all you have suffered for my sake and your own, do you think you have a right to deny me the one desire of my heart? How can you reconcile it with your ideas of devotion, Luttra?"

"My ideas of devotion look beyond the present, Mr. Blake. It is to save you from years of wearing anxiety that I consent to the infliction upon you of a passing pang."

He took a bold step forward. "Luttra, you do not know a man's heart. To lose you now would not merely inflict a passing pang, but sow the seeds of a grief that would go with me to the grave."

"Do you then"--she began, but paused blushing. Mrs. Daniels took the opportunity to approach her on the other side.

"My dear mistress," said she, "you are wrong to hold out in this matter." And her manner betrayed something of the peculiar agitation that had belonged to it in the former times of her secret embarassment. "I, who have honored the family which I have so long served, above every other in the land, tell you that you can do it no greater good than to join it now, or inflict upon it any greater harm than to wilfully withdraw yourself from the position in which God has placed you."

"And I," said another voice, that of the Countess de Mirac, who up to this time had held herself in the background, but who now came forward and took her place with the rest, "I, who have borne the name of Blake, and
who am still the proudest of them all at heart, I, the Countess de Mirac, cousin to your husband there, repeat what
this good woman has said, and in holding out my hand to you, ask you to make my cousin happy and his family
contented by assuming that position in his household which the law as well as his love accords you."

The girl looked at the daintily gloved hand held out to her, colored faintly, and put her own within it.

"I thank you for your goodness," said she, surveying with half-sad, half-admiring glances, the somewhat pale
face of the beautiful brunette.

"And you will yield to our united requests?" She cast her eye down at the spot where her father and brother had
cowered in their shackles, and shook her head. "I dare not," said she.

Immediately Mrs. Daniels, whose emotion had been increasing every moment since she last spoke, plunged her
hand into her bosom and drew out a folded paper.

"Mrs. Blake," said she, "if you could be convinced that what I have told you was true, and that you would be
irretrievably injuring your husband and his interests, by persisting in that desertion of him which your purpose,
would you not consent to reconsider your determination, settled as it appears to be?"

"If I could be made to see that, most certainly," returned she in a low voice whose broken accents betrayed at
what cost she remained true to her resolve. "But I cannot."

"Perhaps the sight of this paper will help you," said she. And turning to Mr. Blake she exclaimed, "Your pardon
for what I am called upon to do. A duty has been laid upon me which I cannot avoid, hard as it is for an old servant
to perform. This paper--but it is no more than that you, sir, should see and read it first." And with a hand that
quivered with fear or some equally strong emotion, she put it in his clasp.

The exclamation that rewarded the act made us all start forward. "My father's handwriting!" were his words.

"Executed under my eye," observed Mrs. Daniels.

His glance ran rapidly down the sheet and rested upon the final signature.

"Why has this been kept from me?" demanded he, turning upon Mrs. Daniels with sternness.

"Your father so willed it," was her reply. "For a year' was his command, 'you shall keep this my last will and
testament which I give into your care with my dying hands, a secret from the world. At the expiration of that time
mark if my son's wife sits at the head of his husband's table; if she does and is happy, suppress this by deliberately
giving it to the flames, but if from any reason other than death, she is not seen there, carry it at once to my son, and
bid him as he honors my memory, to see that my wishes as there expressed are at once carried out."

The paper in Mr. Blake's hand fluttered.

"You are aware what those wishes are?" said he.

"I steadied his hand while he wrote," was her sad and earnest reply.

Mr. Blake turned with a look of inexpressible deference to his wife.

"Madame," said he "when I urged you with such warmth to join your fate to mine and honor my house by
presiding over it, I thought I was inviting you to share the advantages of wealth as well as the love of a lonely man's
heart. This paper undeceives me. Luttra, the daughter-in-law of Abner Blake, not Holman, his son, is the one who by
the inheritance of his millions has the right to command in this presence."

With a cry she took from him the will whose purport was thus briefly made known. "O, how could he, how
could he?" exclaimed she, running her eye down the sheet, and then crushing it spasmodically to her breast. "Did he
not realize that he could do me no greater wrong?" Then in one yielding up of her whole womanhood to the mighty
burst of passion that had been flooding the defenses of her heart for so long, she exclaimed in a voice the mingled
rapture and determination of which rings in my ears even now, "And is it a thing like this with its suggestions of
mercenary interest that shall bridge the gulf that separates you and me? Shall the giving or the gaining of a fortune
make necessary the uniting of lives over which holier influences have beamed and loftier hopes shone? No, no; by the
smile with which your dying father took me to his breast, love alone, with the hope and confidence it gives, shall be
the bond to draw us together and make of the two separate planes on which we stand, a common ground where we
can meet and be happy."

And with one supreme gesture she tore into pieces the will which she held, and sank all aglow with woman's
divinest joy into the arms held out to receive her.

* * * * * *

I was present at the wedding-reception given them by the Countess De Mirac in her elegant apartments at the
Windsor. I never saw a happier bride, nor a husband in whose eyes burned a deeper contentment. To all questions as
to who this extraordinary woman could be, where she was found, and in what place and at what time she was
married, the Countess had apt replies whose art of hushing curiosity without absolutely satisfying it, was one of the
tokens she yet preserved, of her short sway as grand lady, in the gayest and most hollow city of the world.

As I prepared to leave a scene perhaps the most gratifying in many respects that I had ever witnessed, I felt a
slight touch on my arm. It came from Mrs. Blake who with her husband had crossed the room to bid me farewell.
"Will you allow me to thank you," said she, "for the risk you ran for me one day and of which I have just heard. It was an act that merits the gratitude of years, and as such shall be always remembered by me. If the old French artist with the racking cough ever desires a favor at my hands, let him feel free to ask it. The interest I experienced in him in the days of my trouble, will suffer no abatement in these of my joy and prosperity." And with a look that was more than words, she gave me a flower from the bouquet she held in her hand, and smilingly withdrew.
CHAPTER I

The Rome Express, the diretissimo, or most direct, was approaching Paris one morning in March, when it became known to the occupants of the sleeping-car that there was something amiss, very much amiss, in the car. The train was travelling the last stage, between Laroche and Paris, a run of a hundred miles without a stop. It had halted at Laroche for early breakfast, and many, if not all the passengers, had turned out. Of those in the sleeping-car, seven in number, six had been seen in the restaurant, or about the platform; the seventh, a lady, had not stirred. All had reentered their berths to sleep or doze when the train went on, but several were on the move as it neared Paris, taking their turn at the lavatory, calling for water, towels, making the usual stir of preparation as the end of a journey was at hand.

There were many calls for the porter, yet no porter appeared. At last the attendant was found—lazy villain!--asleep, snoring loudly, stertorously, in his little bunk at the end of the car. He was roused with difficulty, and set about his work in a dull, unwilling, lethargic way, which promised badly for his tips from those he was supposed to serve.

By degrees all the passengers got dressed, all but two,—the lady in 9 and 10, who had made no sign as yet; and the man who occupied alone a double berth next her, numbered 7 and 8.

As it was the porter's duty to call every one, and as he was anxious, like the rest of his class, to get rid of his travellers as soon as possible after arrival, he rapped at each of the two closed doors behind which people presumably still slept.

The lady cried "All right," but there was no answer from No. 7 and 8.

Again and again the porter knocked and called loudly. Still meeting with no response, he opened the door of the compartment and went in.

It was now broad daylight. No blind was down; indeed, the one narrow window was open, wide; and the whole of the interior of the compartment was plainly visible, all and everything in it.

The occupant lay on his bed motionless. Sound asleep? No, not merely asleep—the twisted unnatural lie of the limbs, the contorted legs, the one arm drooping listlessly but stiffly over the side of the berth, told of a deeper, more eternal sleep.

The man was dead. Dead—and not from natural causes.

One glance at the blood-stained bedclothes, one look at the gaping wound in the breast, at the battered, mangled face, told the terrible story.

It was murder! murder most foul! The victim had been stabbed to the heart.

With a wild, affrighted, cry the porter rushed out of the compartment, and to the eager questioning of all who crowded round him, he could only mutter in confused and trembling accents:

"There! there! in there!"
Thus the fact of the murder became known to every one by personal inspection, for every one (even the lady had appeared for just a moment) had looked in where the body lay. The compartment was filled for some ten minutes or more by an excited, gesticulating, polyglot mob of half a dozen, all talking at once in French, English, and Italian.

The first attempt to restore order was made by a tall man, middle-aged, but erect in his bearing, with bright eyes and alert manner, who took the porter aside, and said sharply in good French, but with a strong English accent:

"Here! it's your business to do something. No one has any right to be in that compartment now. There may be reasons—traces—things to remove; never mind what. But get them all out. Be sharp about it; and lock the door. Remember you will be held responsible to justice."

The porter shuddered, so did many of the passengers who had overheard the Englishman's last words.

Justice! It is not to be trifled with anywhere, least of all in France, where the uncomfortable superstition prevails that every one who can be reasonably suspected of a crime is held to be guilty of that crime until his innocence is clearly proved.

All those six passengers and the porter were now brought within the category of the accused. They were all open to suspicion; they, and they alone, for the murdered man had been seen alive at Laroche, and the fell deed must have been done since then, while the train was in transit, that is to say, going at express speed, when no one could leave it except at peril of his life.

"Deuced awkward for us!" said the tall English general, Sir Charles Collingham by name, to his brother the parson, when he had reëntered their compartment and shut the door.

"I can't see it. In what way?" asked the Reverend Silas Collingham, a typical English cleric, with a rubicund face and square-cut white whiskers, dressed in a suit of black serge, and wearing the professional white tie.

"Why, we shall be detained, of course; arrested, probably—certainly detained. Examined, cross-examined, bully-ragged—I know something of the French police and their ways."

"If they stop us, I shall write to the Times" cried his brother, by profession a man of peace, but with a choleric eye that told of an angry temperament.

"By all means, my dear Silas, when you get the chance. That won't be just yet, for I tell you we're in a tight place, and may expect a good deal of worry." With that he took out his cigarette-case, and his match-box, lighted his cigarette, and calmly watched the smoke rising with all the coolness of an old campaigner accustomed to encounter and face the ups and downs of life. "I only hope to goodness they'll run straight on to Paris," he added in a fervent tone, not unmixed with apprehension. "No! By jingo, we're slackening speed—."

"Why shouldn't we? It's right the conductor, or chief of the train, or whatever you call him, should know what has happened."

"Why, man, can't you see? While the train is travelling express, every one must stay on board it; if it slows, it is possible to leave it."

"Who would want to leave it?"

"Oh, I don't know," said the General, rather testily. "Any way, the thing's done now."

The train had pulled up in obedience to the signal of alarm given by some one in the sleeping-car, but by whom it was impossible to say. Not by the porter, for he seemed greatly surprised as the conductor came up to him.

"How did you know?" he asked.

"Know! Know what? You stopped me."

"I didn't."

"Who rang the bell, then?"

"I did not. But I'm glad you've come. There has been a crime—murder."

"Good Heavens!" cried the conductor, jumping up on to the car, and entering into the situation at once. His business was only to verify the fact, and take all necessary precautions. He was a burly, brusque, peremptory person, the despotic, self-important French official, who knew what to do—as he thought—and did it without hesitation or apology.

"No one must leave the car," he said in a tone not to be misunderstood. "Neither now, nor on arrival at the station."

There was a shout of protest and dismay, which he quickly cut short.

"You will have to arrange it with the authorities in Paris; they can alone decide. My duty is plain: to detain you, place you under surveillance till then. Afterwards, we will see. Enough, gentlemen and madame."

He bowed with the instinctive gallantry of his nation to the female figure which now appeared at the door of her compartment. She stood for a moment listening, seemingly greatly agitated, and then, without a word, disappeared, retreating hastily into her own private room, where she shut herself in.

Almost immediately, at a signal from the conductor, the train resumed its journey. The distance remaining to be traversed was short; half an hour more, and the Lyons station, at Paris, was reached, where the bulk of the
passengers—all, indeed, but the occupants of the sleeper—descended and passed through the barriers. The latter were again desired to keep their places, while a posse of officials came and mounted guard. Presently they were told to leave the car one by one, but to take nothing with them. All their hand-bags, rugs, and belongings were to remain in the berths, just as they lay. One by one they were marched under escort to a large and bare waiting-room, which had, no doubt, been prepared for their reception.

Here they took their seats on chairs placed at wide intervals apart, and were peremptorily forbidden to hold any communication with each other, by word or gesture. This order was enforced by a fierce-looking guard in blue and red uniform, who stood facing them with his arms folded, gnawing his moustache and frowning severely.

Last of all, the porter was brought in and treated like the passengers, but more distinctly as a prisoner. He had a guard all to himself; and it seemed as though he was the object of peculiar suspicion. It had no great effect upon him, for, while the rest of the party were very plainly sad, and a prey to lively apprehension, the porter sat dull and unmoved, with the stolid, sluggish, unconcerned aspect of a man just roused from sound sleep and relapsing into slumber, who takes little notice of what is passing around.

Meanwhile, the sleeping-car, with its contents, especially the corpse of the victim, was shunted into a siding, and sentries were placed on it at both ends. Seals had been affixed upon the entrance doors, so that the interior might be kept inviolate until it could be visited and examined by the Chef de la Surêté, or Chief of the Detective Service. Every one and everything awaited the arrival of this all-important functionary.

CHAPTER II

M. Floçon, the Chief, was an early man, and he paid a first visit to his office about 7 A.M.

He lived just round the corner in the Rue des Arcs, and had not far to go to the Prefecture. But even now, soon after daylight, he was correctly dressed, as became a responsible ministerial officer. He wore a tight frock coat and an immaculate white tie; under his arm he carried the regulation portfolio, or lawyer's bag, stuffed full of reports, dispositions, and documents dealing with cases in hand. He was altogether a very precise and natty little personage, quiet and unpretending in demeanour, with a mild, thoughtful face in which two small ferrety eyes blinked and twinkled behind gold-rimmed glasses. But when things went wrong, when he had to deal with fools, or when scent was keen, or the enemy near, he would become as fierce and eager as any terrier.

He had just taken his place at his table and begun to arrange his papers, which, being a man of method, he kept carefully sorted by lots each in an old copy of the Figaro, when he was called to the telephone. His services were greatly needed, as we know, at the Lyons station and the summons was to the following effect:

"Crime on train No. 45. A man murdered in the sleeper. All the passengers held. Please come at once. Most important."

A fiacre was called instantly, and M. Floçon, accompanied by Galipaud and Block, the two first inspectors for duty, was driven with all possible speed across Paris.

He was met outside the station, just under the wide verandah, by the officials, who gave him a brief outline of the facts, so far as they were known, and as they have already been put before the reader.

"The passengers have been detained?" asked M. Floçon at once.

"Those in the sleeping-car only—"

"Tut, tut! they should have been all kept—at least until you had taken their names and addresses. Who knows what they might not have been able to tell?"

It was suggested that as the crime was committed presumably while the train was in motion, only those in the one car could be implicated.

"We should never jump to conclusions," said the Chief snappishly. "Well, show me the train card—the list of the travellers in the sleeper."

"It cannot be found, sir."

"Impossible! Why, it is the porter's business to deliver it at the end of the journey to his superiors, and under the law—to us. Where is the porter? In custody?"

"Surely, sir, but there is something wrong with him."

"So I should think! Nothing of this kind could well occur without his knowledge. If he was doing his duty—unless, of course, he—but let us avoid hasty conjectures."

"He has also lost the passengers' tickets, which you know he retains till the end of the journey. After the catastrophe, however, he was unable to lay his hand upon his pocket-book. It contained all his papers."

"Worse and worse. There is something behind all this. Take me to him. Stay, can I have a private room close to the other—where the prisoners, those held on suspicion, are? It will be necessary to hold investigations, take their depositions. M. le Juge will be here directly."
M. Floçon was soon installed in a room actually communicating with the waiting-room, and as a preliminary of the first importance, taking precedence even of the examination of the sleeping-car, he ordered the porter to be brought in to answer certain questions.

The man, Ludwig Groote, as he presently gave his name, thirty-two years of age, born at Amsterdam, looked such a sluggish, slouching, blear-eyed creature that M. Floçon began by a sharp rebuke.

"Now. Sharp! Are you always like this?" cried the Chief.

The porter still stared straight before him with lack-lustre eyes, and made no immediate reply.

"Are you drunk? are you—Can it be possible?" he said, and in vague reply to a sudden strong suspicion, he went on:

"What were you doing between Laroche and Paris? Sleeping?"

The man roused himself a little. "I think I slept. I must have slept. I was very drowsy. I had been up two nights; but so it is always, and I am not like this generally. I do not understand."

"Hah!" The Chief thought he understood. "Did you feel this drowsiness before leaving Laroche?"

"No,monsieur, I did not. Certainly not. I was fresh till then—quite fresh."

"Hum; exactly; I see;" and the little Chief jumped to his feet and ran round to where the porter stood sheepishly, and sniffed and smelt at him.

"Yes, yes." Sniff, sniff, sniff, the little man danced round and round him, then took hold of the porter's head with one hand, and with the other turned down his lower eyelid so as to expose the eyeball, sniffed a little more, and then resumed his seat.

"Exactly. And now, where is your train card?"

"Pardon, monsieur, I cannot find it."

"That is absurd. Where do you keep it? Look again—search—I must have it."

The porter shook his head hopelessly.

"It is gone, monsieur, and my pocket-book."

"But your papers, the tickets—"

"Everything was in it, monsieur. I must have dropped it."

Strange, very strange. However—the fact was to be recorded, for the moment. He could of course return to it.

"You can give me the names of the passengers?"

"No, monsieur. Not exactly. I cannot remember, not enough to distinguish between them."

"Fichtre! But this is most devilishly irritating. To think that I have to do with a man so stupid—such an idiot, such an ass!"

"At least you know how the berths were occupied, how many in each, and which persons? Yes? You can tell me that? Well, go on. By and by we will have the passengers in, and you can fix their places, after I have ascertained their names. Now, please! For how many was the car?"

"Sixteen. There were two compartments of four berths each, and four of two berths each."

"Stay, let us make a plan. I will draw it. Here, now, is that right?" and the Chief held up the rough diagram, here shown—

[Diagram of railroad car.]

"Here we have the six compartments. Now take a, with berths 1, 2, 3, and 4. Were they all occupied?"

"No; only two, by Englishmen. I know that they talked English, which I understand a little. One was a soldier; the other, I think, a clergyman, or priest."

"Good! we can verify that directly. Now, b, with berths 5 and 6. Who was there?"

"One gentleman. I don't remember his name. But I shall know him by appearance."

"Go on. In c, two berths, 7 and 8?"

"Also one gentleman. It was he who—I mean, that is where the crime occurred."

"Ah, indeed, in 7 and 8? Very well. And the next, 9 and 10?"

"A lady. Our only lady. She came from Rome."

"One moment. Where did the rest come from? Did any embark on the road?"

"No, monsieur; all the passengers travelled through from Rome."

"The dead man included? Was he Roman?"

"That I cannot say, but he came on board at Rome."

"Very well. This lady—she was alone?"

"In the compartment, yes. But not altogether."

"I do not understand!"

"She had her servant with her."

"In the car?"
"No, not in the car. As a passenger by second class. But she came to her mistress sometimes, in the car."
"For her service, I presume?"
"Well, yes, monsieur, when I would permit it. But she came a little too often, and I was compelled to protest, to speak to Madame la Comtesse—"
"She was a countess, then?"
"The maid addressed her by that title. That is all I know. I heard her."
"When did you see the lady's maid last?"
"Last night. I think at Amberieux. about 8 p.m."
"Not this morning?"
"No, sir, I am quite sure of that."
"Not at Laroche? She did not come on board to stay, for the last stage, when her mistress would be getting up, dressing, and likely to require her?"
"No; I should not have permitted it."
"And where is the maid now, d'you suppose?"
The porter looked at him with an air of complete imbecility.
"She is surely somewhere near, in or about the station. She would hardly desert her mistress now," he said, stupidly, at last.
"At any rate we can soon settle that." The Chief turned to one of his assistants, both of whom had been standing behind him all the time, and said:
"Step out, Galipaud, and see. No, wait. I am nearly as stupid as this simpleton. Describe this maid."
"Tall and slight, dark-eyed, very black hair. Dressed all in black, plain black bonnet. I cannot remember more."
"Find her, Galipaud—keep your eye on her. We may want her—why, I cannot say, as she seems disconnected with the event, but still she ought to be at hand." Then, turning to the porter, he went on. "Finish, please. You said 9 and 10 was the lady's. Well, 11 and 12?"
"It was vacant all through the run."
"And the last compartment, for four?"
"There were two berths, occupied both by Frenchmen, at least so I judged them. They talked French to each other and to me."
"Then now we have them all. Stand aside, please, and I will make the passengers come in. We will then determine their places and affix their names from their own admissions. Call them in, Block, one by one."

CHAPTER III

The questions put by M. Floçon were much the same in every case, and were limited in this early stage of the inquiry to the one point of identity.

The first who entered was a Frenchman. He was a jovial, fat-faced, portly man, who answered to the name of Anatole Lafolay, and who described himself as a traveller in precious stones. The berth he had occupied was No. 13 in compartment f. His companion in the berth was a younger man, smaller, slighter, but of much the same stamp. His name was Jules Devaux, and he was a commission agent. His berth had been No. 15 in the same compartment, f. Both these Frenchmen gave their addresses with the names of many people to whom they were well known, and established at once a reputation for respectability which was greatly in their favour.

The third to appear was the tall, gray-headed Englishman, who had taken a certain lead at the first discovery of the crime. He called himself General Sir Charles Collingham, an officer of her Majesty's army; and the clergyman who shared the compartment was his brother, the Reverend Silas Collingham, rector of Theakstone-Lammas, in the county of Norfolk. Their berths were numbered 1 and 4 in a.

Before the English General was dismissed, he asked whether he was likely to be detained.
"For the present, yes," replied M. Floçon, briefly. He did not care to be asked questions. That, under the circumstances, was his business.
"Because I should like to communicate with the British Embassy."
"You are known there?" asked the detective, not choosing to believe the story at first. It might be a ruse of some sort.
"I know Lord Dufferin personally; I was with him in India. Also Colonel Papillon, the military attaché; we were in the same regiment. If I sent to the Embassy, the latter would, no doubt, come himself."
"How do you propose to send?"
"That is for you to decide. All I wish is that it should be known that my brother and I are detained under suspicion, and incriminated."
"Hardly that, Monsieur le General. But it shall be as you wish. We will telephone from here to the post nearest the Embassy to inform his Excellency—"
"Certainly, Lord Dufferin, and my friend, Colonel Papillon."
"Of what has occurred. And now, if you will permit me to proceed?"

So the single occupant of the compartment b, that adjoining the Englishmen, was called in. He was an Italian, by name Natale Ripaldi; a dark-skinned man, with very black hair and a bristling black moustache. He wore a long dark cloak of the Inverness order, and, with the slouch hat he carried in his hand, and his downcast, secretive look, he had the rather conventional aspect of a conspirator.

"If monsieur permits," he volunteered to say after the formal questioning was over, "I can throw some light on this catastrophe."
"And how so, pray? Did you assist? Were you present? If so, why wait to speak till now?" said the detective, receiving the advance rather coldly. It behooved him to be very much on his guard.
"I have had no opportunity till now of addressing any one in authority. You are in authority, I suppose?"
"I am the Chief of the Detective Service."
"Then, monsieur, remember, please, that I can give some useful information when called upon. Now, indeed, if you will receive it."

M. Floçon was so anxious to approach the inquiry without prejudice that he put up his hand.
"We will wait, if you please. When M. le Juge arrives, then, perhaps; at any rate, at a later stage. That will do now, thank you."

The Italian's lip curled with a slight indication of contempt at the French detective's methods, but he bowed without speaking, and went out.

Last of all the lady appeared, in a long sealskin travelling cloak, and closely veiled. She answered M. Floçon's questions in a low, tremulous voice, as though greatly perturbed.

She was the Contessa di Castagneto, she said, an Englishwoman by birth; but her husband had been an Italian, as the name implied, and they resided in Rome. He was dead—she had been a widow for two or three years, and was on her way now to London.
"That will do, madame, thank you," said the detective, politely, "for the present at least."
"Why, are we likely to be detained? I trust not." Her voice became appealing, almost piteous. Her hands, restlessly moving, showed how much she was distressed.
"Indeed, Madame la Comtesse, it must be so. I regret it infinitely; but until we have gone further into this, have elicited some facts, arrived at some conclusions—But there, madame, I need not, must not say more."
"Oh, monsieur, I was so anxious to continue my journey. Friends are awaiting me in London. I do hope—I most earnestly beg and entreat you to spare me. I am not very strong; my health is indifferent. Do, sir, be so good as to release me from—"

As she spoke, she raised her veil, and showed what no woman wishes to hide, least of all when seeking the good-will of one of the opposite sex. She had a handsome face—strikingly so. Not even the long journey, the fatigue, the worries and anxieties which had supervened, could rob her of her marvellous beauty.

She was a brilliant brunette, dark-skinned; but her complexion was of a clear, pale olive, and as soft, as lustrous as pure ivory. Her great eyes, of a deep velvety brown, were saddened by near tears. She had rich red lips, the only colour in her face, and these, habitually slightly apart, showed pearly-white glistening teeth.

It was difficult to look at this charming woman without being affected by her beauty. M. Floçon was a Frenchman, gallant and impressionable; yet he steeled his heart. A detective must beware of sentiment, and he seemed to see something insidious in this appeal, which he resented.
"Madame, it is useless," he answered gruffly. "I do not make the law; I have only to support it. Every good citizen is bound to that."
"I trust I am a good citizen," said the Countess, with a wan smile, but very wearily. "Still, I should wish to be let off now. I have suffered greatly, terribly, by this horrible catastrophe. My nerves are quite shattered. It is too cruel. However, I can say no more, except to ask that you will let my maid come to me."

M. Floçon, still obdurate, would not even consent to that.
"I fear, madame, that for the present at least you cannot be allowed to communicate with any one, not even with your maid."
"But she is not implicated; she was not in the car. I have not seen her since—"
"Since?" repeated M. Floçon, after a pause.
"Since last night, at Amberieux, about eight o'clock. She helped me to undress, and saw me to bed. I sent her away then, and said I should not need her till we reached Paris. But I want her now, indeed I do."
"She did not come to you at Laroche?"
"No. Have I not said so? The porter,"—here she pointed to the man, who stood staring at her from the other side of the table,—"he made difficulties about her being in the car, saying that she came too often, stayed too long, that I must pay for her berth, and so on. I did not see why I should do that; so she stayed away."

"Except from time to time?"

"Precisely."

"And the last time was at Amberieux?"

"As I have told you, and he will tell you the same."

"Thank you, madame, that will do." The Chief rose from his chair, plainly intimating that the interview was at an end.

CHAPTER IV

He had other work to do, and was eager to get at it. So he left Block to show the Countess back to the waiting-room, and, motioning to the porter that he might also go, the Chief hastened to the sleeping-car, the examination of which, too long delayed, claimed his urgent attention.

It is the first duty of a good detective to visit the actual theatre of a crime and overhaul it inch by inch,—seeking, searching, investigating, looking for any, even the most insignificant, traces of the murderer's hands.

The sleeping-car, as I have said, had been side-tracked, its doors were sealed, and it was under strict watch and ward. But everything, of course, gave way before the detective, and, breaking through the seals, he walked in, making straight for the little room or compartment where the body of the victim still lay untended and absolutely untouched.

It was a ghastly sight, although not new in M. Floçon's experience. There lay the corpse in the narrow berth, just as it had been stricken. It was partially undressed, wearing only shirt and drawers. The former lay open at the chest, and showed the gaping wound that had, no doubt, caused death, probably instantaneous death. But other blows had been struck; there must have been a struggle, fierce and embittered, as for dear life. The savage truculence of the murderer had triumphed, but not until he had battered in the face, destroying features and rendering recognition almost impossible.

A knife had given the mortal wound; that was at once apparent from the shape of the wound. It was the knife, too, which had gashed and stabbed the face, almost wantonly; for some of these wounds had not bled, and the plain inference was that they had been inflicted after life had sped. M. Floçon examined the body closely, but without disturbing it. The police medical officer would wish to see it as it was found. The exact position, as well as the nature of the wounds, might afford evidence as to the manner of death.

But the Chief looked long, and with absorbed, concentrated interest, at the murdered man, noting all he actually saw, and conjecturing a good deal more.

The features of the mutilated face were all but unrecognizable, but the hair, which was abundant, was long, black, and inclined to curl; the black moustache was thick and drooping. The shirt was of fine linen, the drawers silk. On one finger were two good rings, the hands were clean, the nails well kept, and there was every evidence that the man did not live by manual labour. He was of the easy, cultured class, as distinct from the workman or operative.

This conclusion was borne out by his light baggage, which still lay about the berth,—hat-box, rugs, umbrella, brown morocco hand-bag. All were the property of some one well to do, or at least possessed of decent belongings. One or two pieces bore a monogram, "F.Q.," the same as on the shirt and under-linen; but on the bag was a luggage label, with the name, "Francis Quadling, passenger to Paris," in full. Its owner had apparently no reason to conceal his name. More strangely, those who had done him to death had been at no pains to remove all traces of his identity.

M. Floçon opened the hand-bag, seeking for further evidence; but found nothing of importance,—only loose collars, cuffs, a sponge and slippers, two Italian newspapers of an earlier date. No money, valuables, or papers. All these had been removed probably, and presumably, by the perpetrator of the crime.

Having settled the first preliminary but essential points, he next surveyed the whole compartment critically.

Now, for the first time, he was struck with the fact that the window was open to its full height. Since when was this? It was a question to be put presently to the porter and any others who had entered the car, but the discovery drew him to examine the window more closely, and with good results.

At the ledge, caught on a projecting point on the far side, partly in, partly out of the car, was a morsel of white lace, a scrap of feminine apparel; although what part, or how it had come there, was not at once obvious to M. Floçon. A long and minute inspection of this bit of lace, which he was careful not to detach as yet from the place in which he found it, showed that it was ragged, and frayed, and fast caught where it hung. It could not have been blown there by any chance air; it must have been torn from the article to which it belonged, whatever that might be, —head-dress, nightcap, night-dress, or handkerchief. The lace was of a kind to serve any of these purposes.
Inspecting further, M. Floçon made a second discovery. On the small table under the window was a short length of black jet beading, part of the trimming or ornamentation of a lady's dress.

These two objects of feminine origin—one partly outside the car, the other near it, but quite inside—gave rise to many conjectures. It led, however, to the inevitable conclusion that a woman had been at some time or other in the berth. M. Floçon could not but connect these two finds with the fact of the open window. The latter might, of course, have been the work of the murdered man himself at an earlier hour. Yet it is unusual, as the detective imagined, for a passenger, and especially an Italian, to lie under an open window in a sleeping-berth when travelling by express train before daylight in March.

Who opened that window, then, and why? Perhaps some further facts might be found on the outside of the car. With this idea, M. Floçon left it, and passed on to the line or permanent way.

Here he found himself a good deal below the level of the car. These sleepers have no foot-boards like ordinary carriages; access to them is gained from a platform by the steps at each end. The Chief was short of stature, and he could only approach the window outside by calling one of the guards and ordering him to make the small ladder (faire la petite échelle). This meant stooping and giving a back, on which little M. Floçon climbed nimbly, and so was raised to the necessary height.

A close scrutiny revealed nothing unusual. The exterior of the car was encrusted with the mud and dust gathered in the journey, none of which appeared to have been disturbed.

M. Floçon reentered the carriage neither disappointed nor pleased; his mind was in an open state, ready to receive any impressions, and as yet only one that was at all clear and distinct was borne in on him.

This was the presence of the lace and the jet beads in the theatre of the crime. The inference was fair and simple. He came logically and surely to this:

1. That some woman had entered the compartment.
2. That whether or not she had come in before the crime, she was there after the window had been opened, which was not done by the murdered man.
3. That she had leaned out, or partly passed out, of the window at some time or other, as the scrap of lace testified.
4. Why had she leaned out? To seek some means of exit or escape, of course.
   But escape from whom? from what? The murderer? Then she must know him, and unless an accomplice (if so, why run from him?), she would give up her knowledge on compulsion, if not voluntarily, as seemed doubtful, seeing she (his suspicions were consolidating) had not done so already.
   But there might be another even stronger reason to attempt escape at such imminent risk as leaving an express train at full speed. To escape from her own act and the consequences it must entail—escape from horror first, from detection next, and then from arrest and punishment.
   All this would imperiously impel even a weak woman to face the worst peril, to look out, lean out, even try the terrible but impossible feat of climbing out of the car.

So M. Floçon, by fair process of reasoning, reached a point which incriminated one woman, the only woman possible, and that was the titled, high-bred lady who called herself the Contessa di Castagneto.

This conclusion gave a definite direction to further search. Consulting the rough plan which he had constructed to take the place of the missing train card, he entered the compartment which the Countess had occupied, and which was actually next door.

It was in the tumbled, untidy condition of a sleeping-place but just vacated. The sex and quality of its recent occupant were plainly apparent in the goods and chattels lying about, the property and possessions of a delicate, well-bred woman of the world, things still left as she had used them last—rugs still unrolled, a pair of easy-slippers on the floor, the sponge in its waterproof bag on the bed, brushes, bottles, button-hook, hand-glass, many things belonging to the dressing-bag, not yet returned to that receptacle. The maid was no doubt to have attended to all these, but as she had not come, they remained unpacked and strewn about in some disorder.

M. Floçon pounced down upon the contents of the berth, and commenced an immediate search for a lace scarf, or any wrap or cover with lace.

He found nothing, and was hardly disappointed. It told more against the Countess, who, if innocent, would have no reason to conceal or make away with a possibly incriminating possession, the need for which she could not of course understand.

Next, he handled the dressing-bag, and with deft fingers replaced everything.

Everything was forthcoming but one glass bottle, a small one, the absence of which he noted, but thought of little consequence, till, by and by, he came upon it under peculiar circumstances.

Before leaving the car, and after walking through the other compartments, M. Floçon made an especially strict search of the corner where the porter had his own small chair, his only resting-place, indeed, throughout the journey.
He had not forgotten the attendant's condition when first examined, and he had even then been nearly satisfied that the man had been hucussed, narcotized, drugged.

Any doubts were entirely removed by his picking up near the porter's seat a small silver-topped bottle and a handkerchief, both marked with coronet and monogram, the last of which, although the letters were much interlaced and involved, were decipherable as S.L.L.C.

It was that of the Countess, and corresponded with the marks on her other belongings. He put it to his nostril, and recognized at once by its smell that it had contained tincture of laudanum, or some preparation of that drug.

CHAPTER V

M. Floçon was an experienced detective, and he knew so well that he ought to be on his guard against the most plausible suggestions, that he did not like to make too much of these discoveries. Still, he was distinctly satisfied, if not exactly exultant, and he went back towards the station with a strong predisposition against the Contessa di Castagneto.

Just outside the waiting-room, however, his assistant, Galipaud, met him with news which rather dashed his hopes, and gave a new direction to his thoughts.

The lady's maid was not to be found.

"Impossible!" cried the Chief, and then at once suspicion followed surprise.

"I have looked, monsieur, inquired everywhere; the maid has not been seen. She certainly is not here."

"Did she go through the barrier with the other passengers?"

"No one knows; no one remembers her; not even the conductor. But she has gone. That is positive."

"Yet it was her duty to be here; to attend to her service. Her mistress would certainly want her—has asked for her! Why should she run away?"

This question presented itself as one of infinite importance, to be pondered over seriously before he went further into the inquiry.

Did the Countess know of this disappearance?

She had asked imploringly for her maid. True, but might that not be a blind? Women are born actresses, and at need can assume any part, convey any impression. Might not the Countess have wished to be dissociated from the maid, and therefore have affected complete ignorance of her flight?

"I will try her further," said M. Floçon to himself.

But then, supposing that the maid had taken herself off of her own accord? Why was it? Why had she done so? Because—because she was afraid of something. If so, of what? No direct accusation could be brought against her on the face of it. She had not been in the sleeping-car at the time of the murder, while the Countess as certainly was; and, according to strong presumption, in the very compartment where the deed was done. If the maid was afraid, why was she afraid?

Only on one possible hypothesis. That she was either in collusion with the Countess, or possessed of some guilty knowledge tending to incriminate the Countess and probably herself. She had run away to avoid any inconvenient questioning tending to get her mistress into trouble, which would react probably on herself.

"We must press the Countess on this point closely; I will put it plainly to M. le Juge," said the detective, as he entered the private room set apart for the police authorities, where he found M. Beaumont le Hardi, the instructing judge, and the Commissary of the Quartier (arrondissement).

A lengthy conference followed among the officials. M. Floçon told all he knew, all he had discovered, gave his views with all the force and fluency of a public prosecutor, and was congratulated warmly on the progress he had made.

"I agree with you, sir," said the instructing judge: "we must have in the Countess first, and pursue the line indicated as regards the missing maid."

"I will fetch her, then. Stay, what can be going on in there?" cried M. Floçon, rising from his seat and running into the outer waiting-room, which, to his surprise and indignation, he found in great confusion.

The guard who was on duty was struggling, in personal conflict almost, with the English General. There was a great hubbub of voices, and the Countess was lying back half-fainting in her chair.

"What's all this? How dare you, sir?"

This to the General, who now had the man by the throat with one hand and with the other was preventing him from drawing his sword. "Desist—forbear! You are opposing legal authority; desist, or I will call in assistance and will have you secured and removed."

The little Chief's blood was up; he spoke warmly, with all the force and dignity of an official who sees the law outraged.
“It is entirely the fault of this ruffian of yours; he has behaved most brutally,” replied Sir Charles, still holding him tight.

“Let him go, monsieur; your behaviour is inexcusable. What! you, a military officer of the highest rank, to assault a sentinel! For shame! This is unworthy of you!”

“He deserves to be scragged, the beast!” went on the General, as with one sharp turn of the wrist he threw the guard off, and sent him flying nearly across the room, where, being free at last, the Frenchman drew his sword and brandished it threateningly—from a distance.

But M. Floçon interposed with uplifted hand and insisted upon an explanation.

“It is just this,” replied Sir Charles, speaking fast and with much fierceness: “that lady there—poor thing, she is ill, you can see that for yourself, suffering, overwrought; she asked for a glass of water, and this brute, triple brute, as you say in French, refused to bring it.”

“I could not leave the room,” protested the guard. “My orders were precise.”

“So I was going to fetch the water,” went on the General angrily, eying the guard as though he would like to make another grab at him, “and this fellow interfered.”

“Very properly,” added M. Floçon.

“Then why didn’t he go himself, or call some one? Upon my word, monsieur, you are not to be complimented upon your people, nor your methods. I used to think that a Frenchman was gallant, courteous, especially to ladies.”

The Chief looked a little disconcerted, but remembering what he knew against this particular lady, he stiffened and said severely, “I am responsible for my conduct to my superiors, and not to you. Besides, you appear to forget your position. You are here, detained—all of you”—he spoke to the whole room—“under suspicion. A ghastly crime has been perpetrated—by some one among you—”

“Do not be too sure of that,” interposed the irrepressible General.

“Who else could be concerned? The train never stopped after leaving Laroche,” said the detective, allowing himself to be betrayed into argument.

“Yes, it did,” corrected Sir Charles, with a contemptuous laugh; “shows how much you know.”

Again the Chief looked unhappy. He was on dangerous ground, face to face with a new fact affecting all his theories,—if fact it was, not mere assertion, and that he must speedily verify. But nothing was to be gained—much, indeed, might be lost—by prolonging this discussion in the presence of the whole party. It was entirely opposed to the French practice of investigation, which works secretly, taking witnesses separately, one by one, and strictly preventing all intercommunication or collusion among them.

“What I know or do not know is my affair,” he said, with an indifference he did not feel. “I shall call upon you, M. le Général, for your statement in due course, and that of the others.” He bowed stiffly to the whole room. “Every one must be interrogated. M. le Juge is now here, and he proposes to begin, madame, with you.”

The Countess gave a little start, shivered, and turned very pale.

“But you see she is not equal to it?” cried the General, hotly. "She has not yet recovered. In the name of—I do not say chivalry, for that would be useless—but of common humanity, spare madame, at least for the present.”

“That is impossible, quite impossible. There are reasons why Madame la Comtesse should be examined first. I trust, therefore, she will make an effort.”

“I will try, if you wish it.” She rose from her chair and walked a few steps rather feebly, then stopped.

“No, no, Countess, do not go,” said Sir Charles, hastily, in English, as he moved across to where she stood and gave her his hand. “This is sheer cruelty, sir, and cannot be permitted.”

“Stand aside!” shouted M. Floçon; “I forbid you to approach that lady, to address her, or communicate with her. Guard, advance, do your duty.”

But the guard, although his sword was still out of its sheath, showed great reluctance to move. He had no desire to try conclusions again with this very masterful person, who was, moreover, a general; as he had seen service, he had a deep respect for generals, even of foreign growth.

Meanwhile the General held his ground and continued his conversation with the Countess, speaking still in English, thus exasperating M. Floçon, who did not understand the language, almost to madness.

“This is not to be borne!” he cried. “Here, Galipaud, Block;” and when his two trusty assistants came rushing in, he pointed furiously to the General. “Seize him, remove him by force if necessary. He shall go to the violon—to the nearest lock-up.”

The noise attracted also the Judge and the Commissary, and there were now six officials in all, including the guard, all surrounding the General, a sufficiently imposing force to overawe even the most recalcitrant fire-eater.

But now the General seemed to see only the comic side of the situation, and he burst out laughing.

“What, all of you? How many more? Why not bring up cavalry and artillery, horse, foot, and guns?” he asked, derisively. “All to prevent one old man from offering his services to one weak woman! Gentlemen, my regards!”
"Really, Charles, I fear you are going too far," said his brother the clergyman, who, however, had been manifestly enjoying the whole scene.

"Indeed, yes. It is not necessary, I assure you," added the Countess, with tears of gratitude in her big brown eyes. "I am most touched, most thankful. You are a true soldier, a true English gentleman, and I shall never forget your kindness." Then she put her hand in his with a pretty, winning gesture that was reward enough for any man.

Meanwhile, the Judge, the senior official present, had learned exactly what had happened, and he now addressed the General with a calm but stern rebuke.

"Monsieur will not, I trust, oblige us to put in force the full power of the law. I might, if I chose, and as I am fully entitled, commit you at once to Mazas, to keep you in solitary confinement. Your conduct has been deplorable, well calculated to traverse and impede justice. But I am willing to believe that you were led away, not unnaturally, as a gallant gentleman,—it is the characteristic of your nation, of your cloth,—and that on more mature consideration you will acknowledge and not repeat your error."

M. Beaumont le Hardi was a grave, florid, soft-voiced person, with a bald head and a comfortably-lined white waistcoat; one who sought his ends by persuasion, not force, but who had the instincts of a gentleman, and little sympathy with the peremptory methods of his more inflammable colleague.

"Oh, with all my heart, monsieur," said Sir Charles, cordially. "You saw, or at least know, how this has occurred. I did not begin it, nor was I the most to blame. But I was in the wrong, I admit. What do you wish me to do now?"

"Give me your promise to abide by our rules,—they may be irksome, but we think them necessary,—and hold no further converse with your companions."

"Certainly, certainly, monsieur,—at least after I have said one word more to Madame la Comtesse."

"No, no, I cannot permit even that—"

But Sir Charles, in spite of the warning finger held up by the Judge, insisted upon crying out to her, as she was being led into the other room:

"Courage, dear lady, courage. Don't let them bully you. You have nothing to fear."

Any further defiance of authority was now prevented by her almost forcible removal from the room.

CHAPTER VI

The stormy episode just ended had rather a disturbing effect on M. Floçon, who could scarcely give his full attention to all the points, old and new, that had now arisen in the investigation. But he would have time to go over them at his leisure, while the work of interrogation was undertaken by the Judge.

The latter had taken his seat at a small table, and just opposite was his greffier, or clerk, who was to write down question and answer, verbatim. A little to one side, with the light full on the face, the witness was seated, bearing the scrutiny of three pairs of eyes—the Judge first, and behind him, those of the Chief Detective and the Commissary of Police.

"I trust, madame, that you are equal to answering a few questions?" began M. le Hardi, blandly.

"Oh, yes, I hope so. Indeed, I have no choice," replied the Countess, bravely resigned.

"They will refer principally to your maid."

"Ah!" said the Countess, quickly and in a troubled voice, yet she bore the gaze of the three officials without flinching.

"I want to know a little more about her, if you please."

"Of course. Anything I know I will tell you." She spoke now with perfect self-possession. "But if I might ask—why this interest?"

"I will tell you frankly. You asked for her, we sent for her, and—"

"Yes?"

"She cannot be found. She is not in the station."

The Countess all but jumped from her chair in her surprise—surprise that seemed too spontaneous to be feigned.

"Impossible! it cannot be. She would not dare to leave me here like this, all alone."

"Parbleu! she has dared. Most certainly she is not here."

"But what can have become of her?"

"Ah, madame, what indeed? Can you form any idea? We hoped you might have been able to enlighten us."

"I cannot, monsieur, not in the least."

"Perchance you sent her on to your hotel to warn your friends that you were detained? To fetch them, perhaps, to you in your trouble?"

The trap was neatly contrived, but she was not deceived.

"How could I? I knew of no trouble when I saw her last."
"Oh, indeed? and when was that?"
"Last night, at Amberieux, as I have already told that gentleman." She pointed to M. Floçon, who was obliged to nod his head.
"Well, she has gone away somewhere. It does not much matter, still it is odd, and for your sake we should like to help you to find her, if you do wish to find her?"
Another little trap which failed.
"Indeed I hardly think she is worth keeping after this barefaced desertion."
"No, indeed. And she must be held to strict account for it, must justify it, give her reasons. So we must find her for you—"
"I am not at all anxious, really," the Countess said, quickly, and the remark told against her.
"Well, now, Madame la Comtesse, as to her description. Will you tell us what was her height, figure, colour of eyes, hair, general appearance?"
"She was tall, above the middle height, at least; slight, good figure, black hair and eyes."
"Pretty?"
"That depends upon what you mean by 'pretty.' Some people might think so, in her own class."
"How was she dressed?"
"In plain dark serge, bonnet of black straw and brown ribbons. I do not allow my maid to wear colours."
"Exactly. And her name, age, place of birth?"
"Hortense Petitpré, thirty-two, born, I believe, in Paris."
The Judge, when these particulars had been given, looked over his shoulder towards the detective, but said nothing. It was quite unnecessary, for M. Floçon, who had been writing in his note-book, now rose and left the room. He called Galipaud to him, saying sharply:
"Here is the more detailed description of the lady's maid, and in writing. Have it copied and circulate it at once. Give it to the station-master, and to the agents of police round about here. I have an idea—only an idea—that this woman has not gone far. It may be worth nothing, still there is the chance. People who are wanted often hang about the very place they would not stay in if they were wise. Anyhow, set a watch for her and come back here."
Meanwhile, the Judge had continued his questioning.
"And where, madame, did you obtain your maid?"
"In Rome. She was there, out of a place. I heard of her at an agency and registry office, when I was looking for a maid a month or two ago."
"Then she has not been long in your service?"
"No; as I tell you, she came to me in December last."
"Well recommended?"
"Strongly. She had lived with good families, French and English."
"And with you, what was her character?"
"Irreproachable."
"Well, so much for Hortense Petitpré. She is not far off, I dare say. When we want her we shall be able to lay hands on her, I do not doubt, madame may rest assured."
"Pray take no trouble in the matter. I certainly should not keep her."
"Very well, very well. And now, another small matter. I see," he referred to the rough plan of the sleeping-car prepared by M. Floçon,—"I see that you occupied the compartment d, with berths Nos. 9 and 10?"
"I think 9 was the number of my berth."
"It was. You may be certain of that. Now next door to your compartment—do you know who was next door? I mean in 7 and 8?"
The Countess's lip quivered, and she was a prey to sudden emotion as she answered in a low voice:
"It was where—where—"
"There, there, madame," said the Judge, reassuring her as he would a little child. "You need not say. It is no doubt very distressing to you. Yet, you know?"
She bent her head slowly, but uttered no word.
"Now this man, this poor man, had you noticed him at all? No—no—not afterwards, of course. It would not be likely. But during the journey. Did you speak to him, or he to you?"
"No, no—distinctly no."
"Nor see him?"
"Yes, I saw him, I believe, at Modane with the rest when we dined."
"Ah! exactly so. He dined at Modane. Was that the only occasion on which you saw him? You had never met him previously in Rome, where you resided?"
"Whom do you mean? The murdered man?"
"Who else?"
"No, not that I am aware of. At least I did not recognize him as a friend."
"I presume, if he was among your friends—"
"Pardon me, that he certainly was not," interrupted the Countess.
"Well, among your acquaintances—he would probably have made himself known to you?"
"I suppose so."
"And he did not do so? He never spoke to you, nor you to him?"
"I never saw him, the occupant of that compartment, except on that one occasion. I kept a good deal in my compartment during the journey."
"Alone? It must have been very dull for you," said the Judge, pleasantly.
"I was not always alone," said the Countess, hesitatingly, and with a slight flush. "I had friends in the car."
"Oh—oh"—the exclamation was long-drawn and rather significant.
"Who were they? You may as well tell us, madame, we should certainly find out."
"I have no wish to withhold the information," she replied, now turning pale, possibly at the imputation conveyed.
"Why should I?"
"And these friends were—?"
"Sir Charles Collingham and his brother. They came and sat with me occasionally; sometimes one, sometimes the other."
"During the day?"
"Of course, during the day." Her eyes flashed, as though the question was another offence.
"Have you known them long?"
"The General I met in Roman society last winter. It was he who introduced his brother."
"Very good, so far. The General knew you, took an interest in you. That explains his strange, unjustifiable conduct just now—"
"I do not think it was either strange or unjustifiable," interrupted the Countess, hotly. "He is a gentleman."
"Quite a preux cavalier, of course. But we will pass on. You are not a good sleeper, I believe, madame?"
"Indeed no, I sleep badly, as a rule."
"Then you would be easily disturbed. Now, last night, did you hear anything strange in the car, more particularly in the adjoining compartment?"
"Nothing."
"No sound of voices raised high, no noise of a conflict, a struggle?"
"No, monsieur."
"That is odd. I cannot understand it. We know, beyond all question, from the appearance of the body,—the corpse,—that there was a fight, an encounter. Yet you, a wretched sleeper, with only a thin plank of wood between you and the affray, hear nothing, absolutely nothing. It is most extraordinary."
"I was asleep. I must have been asleep."
"A light sleeper would certainly be awakened. How can you explain—how can you reconcile that?" The question was blandly put, but the Judge's incredulity verged upon actual insolence.
"Easily: I had taken a soporific. I always do, on a journey. I am obliged to keep something, sulphonal or chloral, by me, on purpose."
"Then this, madame, is yours?" And the Judge, with an air of undisguised triumph, produced the small glass vial which M. Floçon had picked up in the sleeping-car near the conductor's seat.
The Countess, with a quick gesture, put out her hand to take it.
"No, I cannot give it up. Look as near as you like, and say is it yours?"
"Of course it is mine. Where did you get it? Not in my berth?"
"No, madame, not in your berth."
"But where?"
"Pardon me, we shall not tell you—not just now."
"I missed it last night," went on the Countess, slightly confused.
"After you had taken your dose of chloral?"
"No, before."
"And why did you want this? It is laudanum."
"For my nerves. I have a toothache. I—I—really, sir, I need not tell you all my ailments."
"And the maid had removed it?"
"So I presume; she must have taken it out of the bag in the first instance."
"And then kept it?"
"That is what I can only suppose."
"Ah!"

CHAPTER VII

When the Judge had brought down the interrogation of the Countess to the production of the small glass bottle, he paused, and with a long-drawn "Ah!" of satisfaction, looked round at his colleagues.

Both M. Floçon and the Commissary nodded their heads approvingly, plainly sharing his triumph.

Then they all put their heads together in close, whispered conference.

"Admirable, M. le Juge!" said the detective. "You have been most adroit. It is a clear case."

"No doubt," said the Commissary, who was a blunt, rather coarse person, believing that to take anybody and everybody into custody is always the safest and simplest course. "It looks black against her. I think she ought to be arrested at once."

"We might, indeed we ought to have more evidence, more definite evidence, perhaps?" The Judge was musing over the facts as he knew them. "I should like, before going further, to look at the car," he said, suddenly coming to a conclusion.

M. Floçon readily agreed. "We will go together," he said, adding, "Madame will remain here, please, until we return. It may not be for long."

"And afterwards?" asked the Countess, whose nervousness had if anything increased during the whispered colloquy of the officials.

"Ah, afterwards! Who knows?" was the reply, with a shrug of the shoulders, all most enigmatic and unsatisfactory.

"What have we against her?" said the Judge, as soon as they had gained the absolute privacy of the sleeping-car.

"The bottle of laudanum and the porter's condition. He was undoubtedly drugged," answered the detective; and the discussion which followed took the form of a dialogue between them, for the Commissary took no part in it.

"Yes; but why by the Countess? How do we know that positively?"

"It is her bottle," said M. Floçon.

"Her story may be true—that she missed it, that the maid took it."

"We have nothing whatever against the maid. We know nothing about her."

"No. Except that she has disappeared. But that tells more against her mistress. It is all very vague. I do not see my way quite, as yet."

"But the fragment of lace, the broken beading? Surely, M. le Juge, they are a woman's, and only one woman was in the car—"

"So far as we know."

"But if these could be proved to be hers?"

"Ah! if you could prove that!"

"Easy enough. Have her searched, here at once, in the station. There is a female searcher attached to the detention-room."

"It is a strong measure. She is a lady."

"Ladies who commit crimes must not expect to be handled with kid gloves."

"She is an Englishwoman, or with English connections; titled, too. I hesitate, upon my word. Suppose we are wrong? It may lead to unpleasantness. M. le Prefet is anxious to avoid complications possibly international."

As he spoke, he bent over, and, taking a magnifier from his pocket, examined the lace, which still fluttered where it was caught.

"It is fine lace, I think. What say you, M. Floçon? You may be more experienced in such matters."

"The finest, or nearly so; I believe it is Valenciennes—the trimming of some underclothing, I should think. That surely is sufficient, M. le Juge?"

M. Beaumont le Hardi gave a reluctant consent, and the Chief went back himself to see that the searching was undertaken without loss of time.

The Countess protested, but vainly, against this new indignity. What could she do? A prisoner, practically friendless,—for the General was not within reach,—to resist was out of the question. Indeed, she was plainly told that force would be employed unless she submitted with a good grace. There was nothing for it but to obey.

Mother Tontaine, as the female searcher called herself, was an evil-visaged, corpulent old creature, with a sickly, soft, insinuating voice, and a greasy, familiar manner that was most offensive. They had given her the scrap of torn lace and the débris of the jet as a guide, with very particular directions to see if they corresponded with any part of
the lady's apparel.

She soon showed her quality.

"Aha! oho! What is this, my pretty princess? How comes so great a lady into the hands of Mother Tontaine? But I will not harm you, my beauty, my pretty, my little one. Oh, no, no, I will not trouble you, dearie. No, trust to me;" and she held out one skinny claw, and looked the other way. The Countess did not or would not understand.

"Madame has money?" went on the old hag in a half-threatening, half-coaxing whisper, as she came up quite close, and fastened on her victim like a bird of prey.

"If you mean that I am to bribe you—"

"Fie, the nasty word! But just a small present, a pretty gift, one or two yellow bits, twenty, thirty, forty francs—you'd better." She shook the soft arm she held roughly, and anything seemed preferable than to be touched by this horrible woman.

"Wait, wait!" cried the Countess, shivering all over, and, feeling hastily for her purse, she took out several napoleons.

"Aha! oho! One, two, three," said the searcher in a fat, wheedling voice. "Four, yes, four, five;" and she clinked the coins together in her palm, while a covetous light came into her faded eyes at the joyous sound. "Five—make it five at once, d'ye hear me?—or I'll call them in and tell them. That will go against you, my princess. What, try to bribe a poor old woman, Mother Tontaine, honest and incorruptible Tontaine? Five, then, five!"

With trembling haste the Countess emptied the whole contents of her purse in the old hag's hand.

"Bon aubaine. Nice pickings. It is a misery what they pay me here. I am, oh, so poor, and I have children, many babies. You will not tell them—the police—you dare not. No, no, no."

Thus muttering to herself, she shambled across the room to a corner, where she stowed the money safely away. Then she came back, showed the bit of lace, and pressed it into the Countess's hands.

"Do you know this, little one? Where it comes from, where there is much more? I was told to look for it, to search for it on you;" and with a quick gesture she lifted the edge of the Countess's skirt, dropping it next moment with a low, chuckling laugh.

"Oho! aha! You were right, my pretty, to pay me, my pretty—right. And some day, to-day, to-morrow, whenever I ask you, you will remember Mother Tontaine."

The Countess listened with dismay. What had she done? Put herself into the power of this greedy and unscrupulous old beldame?

"And this, my princess? What have we here, aha?"

Mère Tontaine held up next the broken bit of jet ornament for inspection, and as the Countess leaned forward to examine it more closely, gave it into her hand.

"You recognize it, of course. But be careful, my pretty! Beware! If any one were looking, it would ruin you. I could not save you then. Sh! say nothing, only look, and quick, give it me back. I must have it to show."

All this time the Countess was turning the jet over and over in her open palm, with a perplexed, disturbed, but hardly a terrified air.

Yes, she knew it, or thought she knew it. It had been—But how had it come here, into the possession of this base myrmidon of the French police?

"Give it me, quick!" There was a loud knock at the door. "They are coming. Remember!" Mother Tontaine put her long finger to her lip. "Not a word! I have found nothing, of course. Nothing, I can swear to that, and you will not forget Mother Tontaine?"

Now M. Floçon stood at the open door awaiting the searcher's report. He looked much disconcerted when the old woman took him on one side and briefly explained that the search had been altogether fruitless.

"What next, M. Floçon?" asked the Judge. "What shall we do with her?"

"Let her go," answered the detective, briefly.

"What! do you suggest this, sir," said the Judge, slyly. "After your strong and well-grounded suspicions?"

"They are as strong as ever, stronger: and I feel sure I shall yet justify them. But what I wish now is to let her go at large, under surveillance."

"Ah! you would shadow her?"

"Precisely. By a good agent. Galipaud, for instance. He speaks English, and he can, if necessary, follow her
anywhere, even to England."

"She can be extradited," said the Commissary, with his one prominent idea of arrest.

"Do you agree, M. le Juge? Then, if you will permit me, I will give the necessary orders, and perhaps you will inform the lady that she is free to leave the station?"

The Countess now had reason to change her opinion of the French officials. Great politeness now replaced the first severity that had been so cruel. She was told, with many bows and apologies, that her regretted but unavoidable detention was at an end. Not only was she freely allowed to depart, but she was escorted by both M. Floçon and the Commissary outside, to where an omnibus was in waiting, and all her baggage piled on top, even to the dressing-bag, which had been neatly repacked for her.

But the little silver-topped vial had not been restored to her, nor the handkerchief.

In her joy at her deliverance, either she had not given these a second thought, or she did not wish to appear anxious to recover them.

Nor did she notice that, as the bus passed through the gates at the bottom of the large slope that leads from the Lyons Station, it was followed at a discreet distance by a modest fiacre, which pulled up, eventually, outside the Hôtel Madagascar. Its occupant, M. Galipaud, kept the Countess in sight, and, entering the hotel at her heels, waited till she had left the office, when he held a long conference with the proprietor.

CHAPTER VIII

A first stage in the inquiry had now been reached, with results that seemed promising, and were yet contradictory.

No doubt the watch to be set on the Countess might lead to something yet—something to bring first plausible suspicion to a triumphant issue; but the examination of the other occupants of the car should not be allowed to slacken on that account. The Countess might have some confederate among them—this pestilent English General, perhaps, who had made himself so conspicuous in her defence; or some one of them might throw light upon her movements, upon her conduct during the journey.

Then, with a spasm of self-reproach, M. Floçon remembered that two distinct suggestions had been made to him by two of the travellers, and that, so far, he had neglected them. One was the significant hint from the Italian that he could materially help the inquiry. The other was the General’s sneering assertion that the train had not continued its journey uninterruptedly between Laroche and Paris.

Consulting the Judge, and laying these facts before him, it was agreed that the Italian’s offer seemed the most important, and he was accordingly called in next.

"Who and what are you?" asked the Judge, carelessly, but the answer roused him at once to intense interest, and he could not quite resist a glance of reproach at M. Floçon.

"My name I have given you—Natale Ripaldi. I am a detective officer belonging to the Roman police."

"What!" cried M. Floçon, colouring deeply. "This is unheard of. Why in the name of all the devils have you withheld this most astonishing statement until now?"

"Monsieur surely remembers. I told him half an hour ago I had something important to communicate—"

"Yes, yes, of course. But why were you so reticent. Good Heavens!"

"Monsieur was not so encouraging that I felt disposed to force on him what I knew he would have to hear in due course."

"It is monstrous—quite abominable, and shall not end here. Your superiors shall hear of your conduct," went on the Chief, hotly.

"They will also hear, and, I think, listen to my version of the story,—that I offered you fairly, and at the first opportunity, all the information I had, and that you refused to accept it."

"You should have persisted. It was your manifest duty. You are an officer of the law, or you say you are."

"Pray telegraph at once, if you think fit, to Rome, to the police authorities, and you will find that Natale Ripaldi—your humble servant—travelled by the through express with their knowledge and authority. And here are my credentials, my official card, some official letters—"

"And what, in a word, have you to tell us?"

"I can tell you who the murdered man was."

"We know that already."

"Possibly; but only his name, I apprehend. I know his profession, his business, his object in travelling, for I was appointed to watch and follow him. That is why I am here."

"Was he a suspicious character, then? A criminal?"

"At any rate he was absconding from Rome, with valuables."
"A thief, in fact?"

The Italian put out the palms of his hands with a gesture of doubt and deprecation.

"Thief is a hard, ugly word. That which he was removing was, or had been, his own property."

"Tut, tut! do be more explicit and get on," interrupted the little Chief, testily.

"I ask nothing better; but if questions are put to me—"

The Judge interposed.

"Give us your story. We can interrogate you afterwards."

"The murdered man is Francis A. Quadling, of the firm of Correse & Quadling, bankers, in the Via Condotti, Rome. It was an old house, once of good, of the highest repute, but of late years it has fallen into difficulties. Its financial soundness was doubted in certain circles, and the Government was warned that a great scandal was imminent. So the matter was handed over to the police, and I was directed to make inquiries, and to keep my eye on this Quadling”—he jerked his thumb towards the platform, where the body might be supposed to be.

"This Quadling was the only surviving partner. He was well known and liked in Rome, indeed, many who heard the adverse reports disbelieved them, I myself among the number. But my duty was plain—"

"Naturally," echoed the fiery little detective.

"I made it my business to place the banker under surveillance, to learn his habits, his ways of life, see who were his friends, the houses he visited. I soon knew much that I wanted to know, although not all. But one fact I discovered, and think it right to inform you of it at once. He was on intimate terms with La Castagneto—at least, he frequently called upon her."

"La Castagneto! Do you mean the Countess of that name, who was a passenger in the sleeper?"

"Beyond doubt! it is she I mean." The officials looked at each other eagerly, and M. Beaumont le Hardi quickly turned over the sheets on which the Countess's evidence was recorded.

She had denied acquaintance with this murdered man, Quadling, and here was positive evidence that they were on intimate terms!

"He was at her house on the very day we all left Rome—in the evening, towards dusk. The Countess had an apartment in the Via Margutta, and when he left her he returned to his own place in the Condotti, entered the bank, stayed half an hour, then came out with one hand-bag and rug, called a cab, and was driven straight to the railway station."

"And you followed?"

"Of course. When I saw him walk straight to the sleeping-car, and ask the conductor for 7 and 8, I knew that his plans had been laid, and that he was on the point of leaving Rome secretly. When, presently, La Castagneto also arrived, I concluded that she was in his confidence, and that possibly they were eloping together."

"Why did you not arrest him?"

"I had no authority, even if I had had the time. Although I was ordered to watch the Signor Quadling, I had no warrant for his arrest. But I decided on the spur of the moment what course I should take. It seemed to be the only one, and that was to embark in the same train and stick close to my man."

"You informed your superiors, I suppose?"

"Pardon me, monsieur," said the Italian blandly to the Chief, who asked the question, "but have you any right to inquire into my conduct towards my superiors? In all that affects the murder I am at your orders, but in this other matter it is between me and them."

"Ta, ta, ta! They will tell us if you will not. And you had better be careful, lest you obstruct justice. Speak out, sir, and beware. What did you intend to do?"

"To act according to circumstances. If my suspicions were confirmed—"

"What suspicions?"

"Why—that this banker was carrying off any large sum in cash, notes, securities, as in effect he was."

"Ah! You know that? How?"

"By my own eyes. I looked into his compartment once and saw him in the act of counting them over, a great quantity, in fact—"

Again the officials looked at each other significantly. They had got at last to a motive for the crime.

"And that, of course, would have justified his arrest?"

"Exactly. I proposed, directly we arrived in Paris, to claim the assistance of your police and take him into custody. But his fate interposed."

There was a pause, a long pause, for another important point had been reached in the inquiry: the motive for the murder had been made clear, and with it the presumption against the Countess gained terrible strength.

But there was more, perhaps, to be got out of this dark-visaged Italian detective, who had already proved so useful an ally.
"One or two words more," said the Judge to Ripaldi. "During the journey, now, did you have any conversation with this Quadling?"

"None. He kept very much to himself."

"You saw him, I suppose, at the restaurants?"

"Yes, at Modane and Laroche."

"But did not speak to him?"

"Not a word."

"Had he any suspicion, do you think, as to who you were?"

"Why should he? He did not know me. I had taken pains he should never see me."

"Did he speak to any other passenger?"

"Very little. To the Countess. Yes, once or twice, I think, to her maid."

"Ah! that maid. Did you notice her at all? She has not been seen. It is strange. She seems to have disappeared."

"To have run away, in fact?" suggested Ripaldi, with a queer smile.

"Well, at least she is not here with her mistress. Can you offer any explanation of that?"

"She was perhaps afraid. The Countess and she were very good friends, I think. On better, more familiar terms, than is usual between mistress and maid."

"The maid knew something?"

"Ah, monsieur, it is only an idea. But I give it you for what it is worth."

"Well, well, this maid—what was she like?"

"Tall, dark, good-looking, not too reserved. She made other friends—the porter and the English Colonel. I saw the last speaking to her. I spoke to her myself."

"What can have become of her?" said the Judge.

"Would M. le Juge like me to go in search of her? That is, if you have no more questions to ask, no wish to detain me further?"

"We will consider that, and let you know in a moment, if you will wait outside."

And then, when alone, the officials deliberated.

It was a good offer, the man knew her appearance, he was in possession of all the facts, he could be trusted—

"Ah, but can he, though?" queried the detective. "How do we know he has told us truth? What guarantee have we of his loyalty, his good faith? What if he is also concerned in the crime—has some guilty knowledge? What if he killed Quadling himself, or was an accomplice before or after the fact?"

"All these are possibilities, of course, but—pardon me, dear colleague—a little far-fetched, eh?" said the Judge.

"Why not utilize this man? If he betrays us—serves us ill—if we had reason to lay hands on him again, he could hardly escape us."

"Let him go, and send some one with him," said the Commissary, the first practical suggestion he had yet made.

"Excellent!" cried the Judge. "You have another man here, Chief; let him go with this Italian."

They called in Ripaldi and told him, "We will accept your services, monsieur, and you can begin your search at once. In what direction do you propose to begin?"

"Where has her mistress gone?"

"How do you know she has gone?"

"At least, she is no longer with us out there. Have you arrested her—or what?"

"No, she is still at large, but we have our eye upon her. She has gone to her hotel—the Madagascar, off the Grands Boulevards."

"Then it is there that I shall look for the maid. No doubt she preceded her mistress to the hotel, or she will join her there very shortly."

"You would not make yourself known, of course? They might give you the slip. You have no authority to detain them, not in France."

"I should take my precautions, and I can always appeal to the police."

"Exactly. That would be your proper course. But you might lose valuable time, a great opportunity, and we wish to guard against that, so we shall associate one of our own people with you in your proceedings."

"Oh! very well, if you wish. It will, no doubt, be best." The Italian readily assented, but a shrewd listener might have guessed from the tone of his voice that the proposal was not exactly pleasing to him.

"I will call in Block," said the Chief, and the second detective inspector appeared to take his instructions.

He was a stout, stumpy little man, with a barrel-like figure, greatly emphasized by the short frock coat he wore; he had smallish pig's eyes buried deep in a fat face, and his round, chubby cheeks hung low over his turned-down collar.

"This gentleman," went on the Chief, indicating Ripaldi, "is a member of the Roman police, and has been so
obliging as to offer us his services. You will accompany him, in the first instance, to the Hôtel Madagascar. Put yourself in communication with Galipaud, who is there on duty."

"Would it not be sufficient if I made myself known to M. Galipaud?" suggested the Italian. "I have seen him here, I should recognize him—"

"That is not so certain; he may have changed his appearance. Besides, he does not know the latest developments, and might not be very cordial."

"You might write me a few lines to take to him."

"I think not. We prefer to send Block," replied the Chief, briefly and decidedly. He did not like this pertinacity, and looked at his colleagues as though he sought their concurrence in altering the arrangements for the Italian's mission. It might be wiser to detain him still.

"It was only to save trouble that I made the suggestion," hastily put in Ripaldi. "Naturally I am in your hands. And if I do not meet with the maid at the hotel, I may have to look further, in which case Monsieur—Block? thank you—would no doubt render valuable assistance."

This speech restored confidence, and a few minutes later the two detectives, already excellent friends from the freemasonry of a common craft, left the station in a closed cab.

CHAPTER IX

"What next?" asked the Judge.

"That pestilent English officer, if you please, M. le Juge," said the detective. "That fire-eating, swashbuckling soldier, with his blustering barrack-room ways. I long to come to close quarters with him. He ridiculed me, taunted me, said I knew nothing—we will see, we will see."

"In fact, you wish to interrogate him yourself. Very well. Let us have him in."

When Sir Charles Collingham entered, he included the three officials in one cold, stiff bow, waited a moment, and then, finding he was not offered a chair, said with studied politeness:

"I presume I may sit down?"

"Pardon. Of course; pray be seated," said the Judge, hastily, and evidently a little ashamed of himself.

"Ah! thanks. Do you object?" went on the General, taking out a silver cigarette-case. "May I offer one?" He handed round the box affably.

"We do not smoke on duty," answered the Chief, rudely. "Nor is smoking permitted in a court of justice."

"Come, come, I wish to show no disrespect. But I cannot recognize this as a court of justice, and I think, if you will forgive me, that I shall take three whiffs. It may help me keep my temper."

He was evidently making game of them. There was no symptom remaining of the recent effervescence when he was acting as the Countess's champion, and he was perfectly—nay, insolently calm and self-possessed.

"You call yourself General Collingham?" went on the Chief.

"I do not call myself. I am General Sir Charles Collingham, of the British Army."

"Retired?"

"No, I am still on the active list."

"These points will have to be verified."

"With all my heart. You have already sent to the British Embassy?"

"Yes, but no one has come," answered the detective, contemptuously.

"If you disbelieve me, why do you question me?"

"It is our duty to question you, and yours to answer. If not, we have means to make you. You are suspected, inculpated in a terrible crime, and your whole attitude is—is—objectionable—unworthy—disgr—"

"Gently, gently, my dear colleague," interposed the Judge. "If you will permit me, I will take up this. And you, M. le Général, I am sure you cannot wish to impede or obstruct us; we represent the law of this country."

"Have I done so, M. le Juge?" answered the General, with the utmost courtesy, as he threw away his half-burned cigarette.

"No, no. I do not imply that in the least. I only entreat you, as a good and gallant gentleman, to meet us in a proper spirit and give us your best help."

"Indeed, I am quite ready. If there has been any unpleasantness, it has surely not been of my making, but rather of that little man there." The General pointed to M. Floçon rather contemptuously, and nearly started a fresh disturbance.

"Well, well, let us say no more of that, and proceed to business. I understand," said the Judge, after fingerling a few pages of the dispositions in front of him, "that you are a friend of the Contessa di Castagneto? Indeed, she has told us so herself."
"It was very good of her to call me her friend. I am proud to hear she so considers me."

"How long have you known her?"

"Four or five months. Since the beginning of the last winter season in Rome."

"Did you frequent her house?"

"If you mean, was I permitted to call on her on friendly terms, yes."

"Did you know all her friends?"

"How can I answer that? I know whom I met there from time to time."

"Exactly. Did you often meet among them a Signor—Quadling?"

"Quadling—Quadling? I cannot say that I have. The name is familiar somehow, but I cannot recall the man."

"Have you never heard of the Roman bankers, Correse & Quadling?"

"Ah, of course. Although I have had no dealing with them. Certainly I have never met Mr. Quadling."

"Not at the Countess's?"

"Never—of that I am quite sure."

"And yet we have had positive evidence that he was a constant visitor there."

"It is perfectly incomprehensible to me. Not only have I never met him, but I have never heard the Countess mention his name."

"It will surprise you, then, to be told that he called at her apartment in the Via Margutta on the very evening of her departure from Rome. Called, was admitted, was closeted with her for more than an hour."

"I am surprised, astounded. I called there myself about four in the afternoon to offer my services for the journey, and I too stayed till after five. I can hardly believe it."

"I have more surprises for you, General. What will you think when I tell you that this very Quadling—this friend, acquaintance, call him what you please, but at least intimate enough to pay her a visit on the eve of a long journey—was the man found murdered in the sleeping-car?"

"Can it be possible? Are you sure?" cried Sir Charles, almost starting from his chair. "And what do you deduce from all this? What do you imply? An accusation against that lady? Absurd!"

"I respect your chivalrous desire to stand up for a lady who calls you her friend, but we are officials first, and sentiment cannot be permitted to influence us. We have good reasons for suspecting that lady. I tell you that frankly, and trust to you as a soldier and man of honour not to abuse the confidence reposed in you."

"May I not know those reasons?"

"Because she was in the car—the only woman, you understand—between Laroche and Paris."

"Do you suspect a female hand, then?" asked the General, evidently much interested and impressed.

"That is so, although I am exceeding my duty in revealing this."

"And you are satisfied that this lady, a refined, delicate person in the best society, of the highest character,—believe me, I know that to be the case,—whom you yet suspect of an atrocious crime, was the only female in the car?"

"Obviously. Who else? What other woman could possibly have been in the car? No one got in at Laroche; the train never stopped till it reached Paris."

"On that last point at least you are quite mistaken, I assure you. Why not upon the other also?"

"The train stopped?" interjected the detective. "Why has no one told us that?"

"Possibly because you never asked. But it is nevertheless the fact. Verify it. Every one will tell you the same."

The detective himself hurried to the door and called in the porter. He was within his rights, of course, but the action showed distrust, at which the General only smiled, but he laughed outright when the still stupid and half-dazed porter, of course, corroborated the statement at once.

"At whose instance was the train pulled up?" asked the detective, and the Judge nodded his head approvingly.

To know that would fix fresh suspicion. But the porter could not answer the question.

Some one had rung the alarm-bell,—so at least the conductor had declared; otherwise they should not have stopped. Yet he, the porter, had not done so, nor did any passenger come forward to admit giving the signal. But there had been a halt. Yes, assuredly.

"This is a new light," the Judge confessed. "Do you draw any conclusion from it?" he went on to ask the General.

"That is surely your business. I have only elicited the fact to disprove your theory. But if you wish, I will tell you how it strikes me."

The Judge bowed assent.

"The bare fact that the train was halted would mean little. That would be the natural act of a timid or excitable person involved indirectly in such a catastrophe. But to disavow the act starts suspicion. The fair inference is that
there was some reason, an unavowable reason, for halting the train."
"And that reason would be—"
"You must see it without my assistance, surely! Why, what else but to afford some one an opportunity to leave
the car."
"But how could that be? You would have seen that person, some of you, especially at such a critical time. The
aisle would be full of people, both exits were thus practically overlooked."
"My idea is—it is only an idea, understand—that the person had already left the car—that is to say, the interior
of the car."
"Escaped how? Where? What do you mean?"
"Escaped through the open window of the compartment where you found the murdered man."
"You noticed the open window, then?" quickly asked the detective. "When was that?"
"Directly I entered the compartment at the first alarm. It occurred to me at once that some one might have gone
through it."
"But no woman could have done it. To climb out of an express train going at top speed would be an impossible
feat for a woman," said the detective, doggedly.
"Why, in God's name, do you still harp upon the woman? Why should it be a woman more than a man?"
"Because"—it was the Judge who spoke, but he paused a moment in deference to a gesture of protest from M.
Flocon. The little detective was much concerned at the utter want of reticence displayed by his colleague.
"Because," went on the Judge with decision—"because this was found in the compartment;" and he held out the
piece of lace and the scrap of beading for the General's inspection, adding quickly, "You have seen these, or one of
them, or something like them before. I am sure of it; I call upon you; I demand—no, I appeal to your sense of
honour, Sir Collingham. Tell me, please, exactly what you know."

CHAPTER X

The General sat for a time staring hard at the bit of torn lace and the broken beads. Then he spoke out firmly:
"It is my duty to withhold nothing. It is not the lace. That I could not swear to; for me—and probably for most
men—two pieces of lace are very much the same. But I think I have seen these beads, or something exactly like
them, before."
"Where? When?"
"They formed part of the trimming of a mantle worn by the Contessa di Castagneto."
"Ah!" it was the same interjection uttered simultaneously by the three Frenchmen, but each had a very different
note; in the Judge it was deep interest, in the detective triumph, in the Commissary indignation, as when he caught a
criminal red-handed.
"Did she wear it on the journey?" continued the Judge.
"As to that I cannot say."
"Come, come, General, you were with her constantly; you must be able to tell us. We insist on being told." This
fiercely, from the now jubilant M. Flocon.
"I repeat that I cannot say. To the best of my recollection, the Countess wore a long travelling cloak—an ulster,
as we call them. The jacket with those bead ornaments may have been underneath. But if I have seen them,—as I
believe I have,—it was not during this journey."
Here the Judge whispered to M. Flocon, "The searcher did not discover any second mantle."
"How do we know the woman examined thoroughly?" he replied. "Here, at least, is direct evidence as to the
beads. At last the net is drawing round this fine Countess."
"Well, at any rate," said the detective aloud, returning to the General, "these beads were found in the
compartment of the murdered man. I should like that explained, please."
"By me? How can I explain it? And the fact does not bear upon what we were considering, as to whether any one
had left the car."
"Why not?"
"The Countess, as we know, never left the car. As to her entering this particular compartment,—at any previous
time,—it is highly improbable. Indeed, it is rather insulting her to suggest it."
"She and this Quadling were close friends."
"So you say. On what evidence I do not know, but I dispute it."
"Then how could the beads get there? They were her property, worn by her."
"Once, I admit, but not necessarily on this journey. Suppose she had given the mantle away—to her maid, for
instance; I believe ladies often pass on their things to their maids."
"It is all pure presumption, a mere theory. This maid—she has not as yet been imported into the discussion."
"Then I would suggest that you do so without delay. She is to my mind a—well, rather a curious person."
"You know her—spoke to her?"
"I know her, in a way. I had seen her in the Via Margutta, and I nodded to her when she came first into the car."
"And on the journey—you spoke to her frequently?"
"If? Oh, dear, no, not at all. I noticed her, certainly; I could not help it, and perhaps I ought to tell her mistress. She seemed to make friends a little too readily with people."
"As for instance—?"
"With the porter to begin with. I saw them together at Laroche, in the buffet at the bar; and that Italian, the man who was in here before me; indeed, with the murdered man. She seemed to know them all."
"Do you imply that the maid might be of use in this inquiry?"
"Most assuredly I do. As I tell you, she was constantly in and out of the car, and more or less intimate with several of the passengers."
"Including her mistress, the Countess," put in M. Floçon.
The General laughed pleasantly.
"Most ladies are, I presume, on intimate terms with their maids. They say no man is a hero to his valet. It is the same, I suppose, with the other sex."
"So intimate," went on the little detective, with much malicious emphasis, "that now the maid has disappeared lest she might be asked inconvenient questions about her mistress."
"Disappeared? You are sure?"
"She cannot be found, that is all we know."
"It is as I thought, then. She it was who left the car!" cried Sir Charles, with so much vehemence that the officials were startled out of their dignified reserve, and shouted back almost in a breath: "Explain yourself. Quick, quick. What in God's name do you mean?"
"I had my suspicions from the first, and I will tell you why. At Laroche the car emptied, as you may have heard; every one except the Countess, at least, went over to the restaurant for early coffee; I with the rest. I was one of the first to finish, and I strolled back to the platform to get a few whiffs of a cigarette. At that moment I saw, or thought I saw, the end of a skirt disappearing into the sleeping-car. I concluded it was this maid, Hortense, who was taking her mistress a cup of coffee. Then my brother came up, we exchanged a few words, and entered the car together."
"By the same door as that through which you had seen the skirt pass?"
"No, by the other. My brother went back to his berth, but I paused in the corridor to finish my cigarette after the train had gone on. By this time every one but myself had returned to his berth, and I was on the point of lying down again for half an hour, when I distinctly heard the handle turned of the compartment I knew to be vacant all through the run."
"That was the one with berths 11 and 12?"
"Probably. It was next to the Countess. Not only was the handle turned, but the door partly opened—"
"It was not the porter?"
"Oh, no, he was in his seat,—you know it, at the end of the car,—sound asleep, snoring; I could hear him."
"Did any one come out of the vacant compartment?"
"No; but I was almost certain, I believe I could swear that I saw the same skirt, just the hem of it, a black skirt, sway forward beyond the door, just for a second. Then all at once the door was closed again fast."
"What did you conclude from this? Or did you think nothing of it?"
"I thought very little. I supposed it was that the maid wished to be near her mistress as we were approaching Paris, and I had heard from the Countess that the porter had made many difficulties. But you see, after what has happened, that there was a reason for stopping the train."
"Quite so," M. Floçon readily admitted, with a scarcely concealed sneer.
He had quite made up his mind now that it was the Countess who had rung the alarm-bell, in order to allow of the escape of the maid, her confederate and accomplice.
"And you still have an impression that some one—presumably this woman—got off the car, somehow, during the stoppage?" he asked.
"I suggest it, certainly. Whether it was or could be so, I must leave to your superior judgment."
"What! A woman climb out like that? Bah! Tell that to some one else!"
"You have, of course, examined the exterior of the car, dear colleague?" now said the Judge.
"Assuredly, once, but I will do it again. Still, the outside is quite smooth, there is no foot-board. Only an acrobat could succeed in thus escaping, and then only at the peril of his life. But a woman—oh, no! it is too absurd."
"With help she might, I think, get up on to the roof," quickly remarked Sir Charles. "I have looked out of the
window of my compartment. It would be nothing for a man, nor much for a woman if assisted."
"That we will see for ourselves," said the detective, ungraciously.
"The sooner the better," added the Judge, and the whole party rose from their chairs, intending to go straight to
the car, when the policeman on guard appeared at the door, followed close by an English military officer in uniform,
whom he was trying to keep back, but with no great success. It was Colonel Papillon of the Embassy.
"Halloa, Jack! you are a good chap," cried the General, quickly going forward to shake hands. "I was sure you
would come."
"Come, sir! Of course I came. I was just going to an official function, as you see, but his Excellency insisted, my
horse was at the door, and here I am."
All this was in English, but the attaché turned now to the officials, and, with many apologies for his intrusion,
suggested that they should allow his friend, the General, to return with him to the Embassy when they had done with
him.
"Of course we will answer for him. He shall remain at your disposal, and will appear whenever called upon." He
returned to Sir Charles, asking, "You will promise that, sir?"
"Oh, willingly. I had always meant to stay on a bit in Paris. And really I should like to see the end of this. But
my brother? He must get home for next Sunday’s duty. He has nothing to tell, but he would come back to Paris at
any time if his evidence was wanted."
The French Judge very obligingly agreed to all these proposals, and two more of the detained passengers,
making four in all, now left the station.
Then the officials proceeded to the car, which still remained as the Chief Detective had left it.
Here they soon found how just were the General’s previsions.

CHAPTER XI

The three officials went straight to where the still open window showed the particular spot to be examined. The
exterior of the car was a little smirched and stained with the dust of the journey, lying thick in parts, and in others
there were a few great splotches of mud plastered on.
The detective paused for a moment to get a general view, looking, in the light of the General’s suggestion, for
either hand or foot marks, anything like a trace of the passage of a feminine skirt, across the dusty surface.
But nothing was to be seen, nothing definite or conclusive at least. Only here and there a few lines and scratches
that might be encouraging, but proved little.
Then the Commissary, drawing nearer, called attention to some suspicious spots sprinkled about the window, but
above it towards the roof.
"What is it?" asked the detective, as his colleague with the point of his long fore-finger nail picked at the thin
crust on the top of one of these spots, disclosing a dark, viscous core.
"I could not swear to it, but I believe it is blood."
"Blood! Good Heavens!" cried the detective, as he dragged his powerful magnifying glass out of his pocket and
applied it to the spot. "Look, M. le Juge," he added, after a long and minute examination. "What say you?"
"It has that appearance. Only medical evidence can positively decide, but I believe it is blood."
"Now we are on the right track, I feel convinced. Some one fetch a ladder."
One of these curious French ladders, narrow at the top, splayed out at the base, was quickly leaned against the
car, and the detective ran up, using his magnifier as he climbed.
"There is more here, much more, and something like—yes, beyond question it is—the print of two hands upon
the roof. It was here she climbed."
"No doubt. I can see it now exactly. She would sit on the window ledge, the lower limbs inside the car here and
held there. Then with her hands she would draw herself up to the roof," said the Judge.
"But what nerve! what strength of arm!"
"It was life and death. Within the car was more terrible danger. Fear will do much in such a case. We all know
that. Well! what more?"
By this time the detective had stepped on to the roof of the car.
"More, more, much more! Footprints, as plain as a picture. A woman's feet. Wait, let me follow them to the end," said he, cautiously creeping forward to the end of the car.
A minute or two more, and he rejoined his colleagues on the ground level, and, rubbing his hands, declared
joyously that it was all perfectly clear.
"Dangerous or not, difficult or not, she did it. I have traced her; have seen where she must have lain crouching
ever so long, followed her all along the top of the car, to the end where she got down above the little platform exit.
Beyond doubt she left the car when it stopped, and by arrangement with her confederate."

"The Countess?"

"Who else?"

"And at a point near Paris. The English General said the halt was within twenty minutes' run of the station."

"Then it is from that point we must commence our search for her. The Italian has gone on the wrong scent."

"Not necessarily. The maid, we may be sure, will try to communicate with her mistress."

"Still, it would be well to secure her before she can do that," said the Judge. "With all we know now, a sharp interrogation might extract some very damaging admissions from her," went on the detective, eagerly. "Who is to go? I have sent away both my assistants. Of course I can telephone for another man, or I might go myself."

"No, no, dear colleague, we cannot spare you just yet. Telephone by all means. I presume you would wish to be present at the rest of the interrogatories?"

"Certainly, you are right. We may elicit more about this maid. Let us call in the porter now. He is said to have had relations with her. Something more may be got out of him."

The more did not amount to much. Groote, the porter, came in, cringing and wretched, in the abject state of a man who has lately been drugged and is now slowly recovering. Although sharply questioned, he had nothing to add to his first story.

"Speak out," said the Judge, harshly. "Tell us everything plainly and promptly, or I shall send you straight to gaol. The order is already made out;" and as he spoke, he waved a flimsy bit of paper before him.

"I know nothing," the porter protested, piteously.

"That is false. We are fully informed and no fools. We are certain that no such catastrophe could have occurred without your knowledge or connivance."

"Indeed, gentlemen, indeed—"

"You were drinking with this maid at the buffet at Laroche. You had more drink with her, or from her hands, afterwards in the car."

"No, gentlemen, that is not so. I could not—she was not in the car."

"We know better. You cannot deceive us. You were her accomplice, and the accomplice of her mistress, also, I have no doubt."

"I declare solemnly that I am quite innocent of all this. I hardly remember what happened at Laroche or after. I do not deny the drink at the buffet. It was very nasty, I thought, and could not tell why, nor why I could not hold my head up when I got back to the car."

"You went off to sleep at once? Is that what you pretend?"

"It must have been so. Yes. Then I know nothing more, not till I was aroused."

And beyond this, a tale to which he stuck with undeviating persistence, they could elicit nothing.

"He is either too clever for us or an absolute idiot and fool," said the Judge, wearily, at last, when Groote had gone out. "We had better commit him to Mazas and hold him there in solitary confinement under our hands. After a day or two of that he may be less difficult."

"It is quite clear he was drugged, that the maid put opium or laudanum into his drink at Laroche."

"And enough of it apparently, for he says he went off to sleep directly he returned to the car," the Judge remarked.

"He says so. But he must have had a second dose, or why was the vial found on the ground by his seat?" asked the Chief, thoughtfully, as much of himself as of the others.

"I cannot believe in a second dose. How was it administered—by whom? It was laudanum, and could only be given in a drink. He says he had no second drink. And by whom? The maid? He says he did not see the maid again."

"Pardon me, M. le Juge, but do you not give too much credibity to the porter? For me, his evidence is tainted, and I hardly believe a word of it. Did he not tell me at first he had not seen this maid after Amberieux at 8 P.M.? Now he admits that he was drinking with her at the buffet at Laroche. It is all a tissue of lies, his losing the pocket-book and his papers too. There is something to conceal. Even his sleepiness, his stupidity, are likely to have been assumed."

"I do not think he is acting; he has not the ability to deceive us like that."

"Well, then, what if the Countess took him the second drink?"

"Oh! oh! That is the purest conjecture. There is nothing whatever to suggest or support that."

"Then how explain the finding of the vial near the porter's seat?"

"May it not have been dropped there on purpose?" put in the Commissary, with another flash of intelligence.

"On purpose?" queried the detective, crossly, foreseeing an answer that would not please him.

"On purpose to bring suspicion on the lady?"

"I don't see it in that light. That would imply that she was not in the plot, and plot there certainly was; everything
points to it. The drugging, the open window, the maid's escape."

"A plot, no doubt, but organized by whom? These two women only? Could either of them have struck the fatal blow? Hardly. Women have the wit to conceive, but neither courage nor brute force to execute. There was a man in this, rest assured."

"Granted. But who? That fire-eating Sir Collingham?" quickly asked the detective, giving rein once more to his hatred.

"That is not a solution that commends itself to me, I must confess," declared the Judge. "The General's conduct has been blameworthy and injudicious, but he is not of the stuff that makes criminals."

"Who, then? The porter? No? The clergymen? No? The French gentlemen?—well, we have not examined them yet; but from what I saw at the first cursory glance, I am not disposed to suspect them."

"What of that Italian?" asked the Commissary.

"Are you sure of him? His looks did not please me greatly, and he was very eager to get away from here. What if he takes to his heels?"

"Block is with him," the Chief put in hastily, with the evident desire to stifle an unpleasant misgiving. "We have touch of him if we want him, as we may."

"How much they might want him they only realized when they got further in their inquiry!"

CHAPTER XII

Only the two Frenchmen remained for examination. They had been left to the last by pure accident. The exigencies of the inquiry had led to the preference of others, but these two well-broken and submissive gentlemen made no visible protest. However much they may have chafed inwardly at the delay, they knew better than to object; any outburst of discontent would, they knew, recoil on themselves. Not only were they perfectly patient now when summoned before the officers of justice, they were most eager to give every assistance to the law, to go beyond the mere letter, and, if needs be, volunteer information.

The first called in was the elder, M. Anatole Lafolay, a true Parisian _bourgeois_, fat and comfortable, unctuous in speech, and exceedingly deferential.

The story he told was in its main outlines that which we already know, but he was further questioned, by the light of the latest facts and ideas as now elicited.

The line adroitly taken by the Judge was to get some evidence of collusion and combination among the passengers, especially with reference to two of them, the two women of the party. On this important point M. Lafolay had something to say.

Asked if he had seen or noticed the lady's maid on the journey, he answered "yes" very decisively and with a smack of the lips, as though the sight of this pretty and attractive person had given him considerable satisfaction.

"Did you speak to her?"

"Oh, no. I had no opportunity. Besides, she had her own friends—great friends, I fancy. I caught her more than once whispering in the corner of the car with one of them."

"And that was?"

"I think the Italian gentleman; I am almost sure I recognized his clothes. I did not see his face, it was turned from me—towards hers, and very close, I may be permitted to say."

"And they were friendly?"

"More than friendly, I should say. Very intimate indeed. I should not have been surprised if—when I turned away as a matter of fact—if he did not touch, just touch, her red lips. It would have been excusable—forgive me, messieurs."

"Aha! They were so intimate as that? Indeed! And did she reserve her favours exclusively for him? Did no one else address her, pay her court on the quiet—you understand?"

"I saw her with the porter, I believe, at Laroche, but only then. No, the Italian was her chief companion."

"Did any one else notice the flirtation, do you think?"

"Possibly. There was no secrecy. It was very marked. We could all see."

"And her mistress too?"

"That I will not say. The lady I saw but little during the journey."

A few more questions, mainly personal, as to his address, business, probable presence in Paris for the next few weeks, and M. Lafolay was permitted to depart.

The examination of the younger Frenchman, a smart, alert young man, of pleasant, insinuating address, with a quick, inquisitive eye, followed the same lines, and was distinctly corroborative on all the points to which M. Lafolay spoke. But M. Jules Devaux had something startling to impart concerning the Countess.
When asked if he had seen her or spoken to her, he shook his head.

"No; she kept very much to herself," he said. "I saw her but little, hardly at all, except at Modane. She kept her own berth."

"Where she received her own friends?"

"Oh, beyond doubt. The Englishmen both visited her there, but not the Italian."

"The Italian? Are we to infer that she knew the Italian?"

"That is what I wish to convey. Not on the journey, though. Between Rome and Paris she did not seem to know him. It was afterwards; this morning, in fact, that I came to the conclusion that there was some secret understanding between them."

"Why do you say that, M. Devaux?" cried the detective, excitedly. "Let me urge you and implore you to speak out, and fully. This is of the utmost, of the very first, importance."

"Well, gentlemen, I will tell you. As you are well aware, on arrival at this station we were all ordered to leave the car, and marched to the waiting-room, out there. As a matter of course, the lady entered first, and she was seated when I went in. There was a strong light on her face."

"Was her veil down?"

"Not then. I saw her lower it later, and, as I think, for reasons I will presently put before you. Madame has a beautiful face, and I gazed at it with sympathy, grieving for her, in fact, in such a trying situation; when suddenly I saw a great and remarkable change come over it."

"Of what character?"

"It was a look of horror, disgust, surprise,--a little perhaps of all three; I could not quite say which, it faded so quickly and was followed by a cold, deathlike pallor. Then almost immediately she lowered her veil."

"Could you form any explanation for what you saw in her face? What caused it?"

"Something unexpected, I believe, some shock, or the sight of something shocking. That was how it struck me, and so forcibly that I turned to look over my shoulder, expecting to find the reason there. And it was."

"That reason--?"

"Was the entrance of the Italian, who came just behind me. I am certain of this; he almost told me so himself, not in words, but the unmistakable leer he gave her in reply. It was wicked, sardonic, devilish, and proved beyond doubt that there was some secret, some guilty secret perhaps, between them."

"And was that all?" cried both the Judge and M. Floçon in a breath, leaning forward in their eagerness to hear more.

"For the moment, yes. But I was made so interested, so suspicious by this, that I watched the Italian closely, awaiting, expecting further developments. They were long in coming; indeed, I am only at the end now."

"Explain, pray, as quickly as possible, and in your own words."

"It was like this, monsieur. When we were all seated, I looked round, and did not at first see our Italian. At last I discovered he had taken a back seat, through modesty perhaps, or to be out of observation--how was I to know? He sat in the shadow by a door, that, in fact, which leads into this room. He was thus in the background, rather out of the way, but I could see his eyes glittering in that far-off corner, and they were turned in our direction, always fixed upon the lady, you understand. She was next me, the whole time."

"Then, as you will remember, monsieur, you called us in one by one, and I, with M. Lafolay, was the first to appear before you. When I returned to the outer room, the Italian was still staring, but not so fixedly or continuously, at the lady. From time to time his eyes wandered towards a table near which he sat, and which was just in the gangway or passage by which people must pass into your presence."

"There was some reason for this, I felt sure, although I did not understand it immediately. "Presently I got at the hidden meaning. There was a small piece of paper, rolled up or crumpled up into a ball, lying upon this table, and the Italian wished, nay, was desperately anxious, to call the lady's attention to it. If I had had any doubt of this, it was quite removed after the man had gone into the inner room. As he left us, he turned his head over his shoulder significantly and nodded very slightly, but still perceptibly, at the ball of paper."

"Well, gentlemen, I was now satisfied in my own mind that this was some artful attempt of his to communicate with the lady, and had she fallen in with it, I should have immediately informed you, the proper authorities. But whether from stupidity, dread, disinclination, a direct, definite refusal to have any dealings with this man, the lady would not--at any rate did not--pick up the ball, as she might have done easily when she in her turn passed the table on her way to your presence."

"I have no doubt it was thrown there for her, and probably you will agree with me. But it takes two to make a game of this sort, and the lady would not join. Neither on leaving the room nor on returning would she take up the missive."

"And what became of it, then?" asked the detective in breathless excitement. "I have it here." M. Devaux opened
the palm of his hand and displayed the scrap of paper in the hollow rolled up into a small tight ball.  
"When and how did you become possessed of it?"

"I got it only just now, when I was called in here. Before that I could not move. I was tied to my chair, practically, and ordered strictly not to move."

"Perfectly. Monsieur's conduct has been admirable. And now tell us--what does it contain? Have you looked at it?"

"By no means. It is just as I picked it up. Will you gentlemen take it, and if you think fit, tell me what is there? Some writing--a message of some sort, or I am greatly mistaken."

"Yes, here are words written in pencil," said the detective, unrolling the paper, which he handed on to the Judge, who read the contents aloud--

"Be careful. Say nothing. If you betray me, you will be lost too."

A long silence followed, broken first by the Judge, who said at last solemnly to Devaux:

"Monsieur, in the name of justice I beg to thank you most warmly. You have acted with admirable tact and judgment, and have rendered us invaluable assistance. Have you anything further to tell us?"

"No, gentlemen. That is all. And you--you have no more questions to ask? Then I presume I may withdraw?"

Beyond doubt it had been reserved for the last witness to produce facts that constituted the very essence of the inquiry.

CHAPTER XIII

The examination was now over, and, the dispositions having been drawn up and signed, the investigating officials remained for some time in conference.

"It lies with those three, of course--the two women and the Italian. They are jointly, conjointly concerned, although the exact degrees of guilt cannot quite be apportioned," said the detective.

"And all three are at large!" added the Judge.

"If you will issue warrants for arrest, M. le Juge, we can take them--two of them at any rate--when we choose."

"That should be at once," remarked the Commissary, eager, as usual, for decisive action.

"Very well. Let us proceed in that way. Prepare the warrants," said the Judge, turning to his clerk. "And you," he went on, addressing M. Floçon, "dear colleague, will you see to their execution? Madame is at the Hôtel Madagascar; that will be easy. The Italian Ripaldi we shall hear of through your inspector Block. As for the maid, Hortense Petitpré, we must search for her. That too, sir, you will of course undertake?"

"I will charge myself with it, certainly. My man should be here by now, and I will instruct him at once. Ask for him," said M. Floçon to the guard whom he called in.

"The inspector is there," said the guard, pointing to the outer room. "He has just returned."

"Returned? You mean arrived."

"No, monsieur, returned. It is Block, who left an hour or more ago."

"Block? Then something has happened--he has some special information, some great news! Shall we see him, M. le Juge?"

When Block appeared, it was evident that something had gone wrong with him. His face wore a look of hot, flurried excitement, and his manner was one of abject, cringing self-abasement.

"What is it?" asked the little Chief, sharply. "You are alone. Where is your man?"

"Alas, monsieur! how shall I tell you? He has gone--disappeared! I have lost him!"

"Impossible! You cannot mean it! Gone, now, just when we most want him? Never!"

"It is so, unhappily."

"Idiot! _Triple_ idiot! You shall be dismissed, discharged from this hour. You are a disgrace to the force." M. Floçon raved furiously at his abashed subordinate, blaming him a little too harshly and unfairly, forgetting that until quite recently there had been no strong suspicion against the Italian. We are apt at times to expect others to be intuitively possessed of knowledge that has only come to us at a much later date.

"How was it? Explain. Of course you have been drinking. It is that, or your great gluttony. You were beguiled into some eating-house."

"Monsieur, you shall hear the exact truth. When we started more than an hour ago, our fiacre took the usual route, by the Quais and along the riverside. My gentleman made himself most pleasant"

"No doubt," growled the Chief.

"Offered me an excellent cigar, and talked--not about the affair, you understand--but of Paris, the theatres, the races, Longchamps, Auteuil, the grand restaurants. He knew everything, all Paris, like his pocket. I was much surprised, but he told me his business often brought him here. He had been employed to follow up several great
Italian criminals, and had made a number of important arrests in Paris."
"Get on, get on! come to the essential."
"Well, in the middle of the journey, when we were about the Pont Henri Quatre, he said, 'Figure to yourself, my
friend, that it is now near noon, that nothing has passed my lips since before daylight at Laroche. What say you?
Could you eat a mouthful, just a scrap on the thumb-nail? Could you?'"
"And you--greedy, gormandizing beast!--you agreed?"
"My faith, monsieur, I too was hungry. It was my regular hour. Well--at any rate, for my sins I accepted. We
entered the first restaurant, that of the 'Reunited Friends,' you know it, perhaps, monsieur? A good house, especially
noted for tripe _à la mode de Caen_." In spite of his anguish, Block smacked his fat lips at the thought of this most
succulent but very greasy dish.
"How often must I tell you to get on?"
"Forgive me, monsieur, but it is all part of my story. We had oysters, two dozen Marennes, and a glass or two of
Chablis; then a good portion of tripe, and with them a bottle, only one, monsieur, of Pontet Canet; after that a
beefsteak with potatoes and a little Burgundy, then a rum omelet."
"Great Heavens! you should be the fat man in a fair, not an agent of the Detective Bureau."
"It was all this that helped me to my destruction. He ate, this devilish Italian, like three, and I too, I was so
hungry,--forgive me, sir,—I did my share. But by the time we reached the cheese, a fine, ripe Camembert, had our
coffee, and one thimbleful of green Chartreuse, I was _plein jusqu'au bec_, gorged up to the beak."
"And what of your duty, your service, pray?"
"I did think of it, monsieur, but then, he, the Italian, was just the same as myself. He was a colleague. I had no
fear of him, not till the very last, when he played me this evil turn. I suspected nothing when he brought out his
pocketbook,—it was stuffed full, monsieur; I saw that and my confidence increased,—called for the reckoning, and
paid with an Italian bank-note. The waiter looked doubtful at the foreign money, and went out to consult the
manager. A minute after, my man got up, saying:
"'There may be some trouble about changing that bank-note. Excuse me one moment, pray.' He went out,
monsieur, and piff-paff, he was no more to be seen."
"Ah, _nigaud_ (ass), you are too foolish to live! Why did you not follow him? Why let him out of your sight?"
"But, monsieur, I was not to know, was I? I was to accompany him, not to watch him. I have done wrong, I
confess. But then, who was to tell he meant to run away?"
M. Floçon could not deny the justice of this defence. It was only now, at the eleventh hour, that the Italian had
become inculpated, and the question of his possible anxiety to escape had never been considered.
"He was so artful," went on Block in further extenuation of his offence. "He left everything behind. His
overcoat, stick, this book—his own private memorandum-book seemingly—"
"Book? Hand it me," said the Chief, and when it came into his hands he began to turn over the leaves hurriedly.
"I do not understand, not more than a word here and there. It is no doubt Italian. Do you know that language, M.
le Juge?"
"Not perfectly, but I can read it. Allow me."
He also turned over the pages, pausing to read a passage here and there, and nodding his head from time to time,
evidently struck with the importance of the matter recorded.
Meanwhile, M. Floçon continued an angry conversation with his offending subordinate.
"You will have to find him, Block, and that speedily, within twenty-four hours,—to-day, indeed,—or I will break
you like a stick, and send you into the gutter. Of course, such a consummate ass as you have proved yourself would
not think of searching the restaurant or the immediate neighbourhood, or of making inquiries as to whether he had
been seen, or as to which way he had gone?"
"Pardon me, monsieur is too hard on me. I have been unfortunate, a victim to circumstances, still I believe I
know my duty. Yes, I made inquiries, and, what is more, I heard of him."
"Where? how?" asked the Chief, gruffly, but obviously much interested.
"He never spoke to the manager, but walked out and let the change go. It was a note for a hundred _lire_, a
hundred francs, and the restaurant bill was no more than seventeen francs."
"Hah! that is greatly against him indeed."
"He was much pressed, in a great hurry. Directly he crossed the threshold he called the first cab and was driving
away, but he was stopped—"
"The devil! Why did they not keep him, then?"
"Stopped, but only for a moment, and accosted by a woman."
"A woman?"
"Yes, monsieur. They exchanged but three words. He wished to pass on, to leave her, she would not consent, then they both got into the cab and were driven away together."

The officials were now listening with all ears.

"Tell me," said the Chief, "quick, this woman--what was she like? Did you get her description?"

"Tall, slight, well formed, dressed all in black. Her face--it was a policeman who saw her, and he said she was good-looking, dark, brunette, black hair."

"It is the maid herself!" cried the little Chief, springing up and slapping his thigh in exuberant glee. "The maid! the missing maid!"

CHAPTER XIV

The joy of the Chief of Detectives at having thus come, as he supposed, upon the track of the missing maid, Hortense Petitpré, was somewhat dashed by the doubts freely expressed by the Judge as to the result of any search. Since Block's return, M. Beaumont le Hardi had developed strong symptoms of discontent and disapproval at his colleague's proceedings.

"But if it was this Hortense Petitpré how did she get there, by the bridge Henri Quatre, when we thought to find her somewhere down the line? It cannot be the same woman."

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," interposed Block. "May I say one word? I believe I can supply some interesting information about Hortense Petitpré. I understand that some one like her was seen here in the station not more than an hour ago."

"_Peste!_ Why were we not told this sooner?" cried the Chief, impetuously.

"Who saw her? Did he speak to her? Call him in; let us see how much he knows."

The man was summoned, one of the subordinate railway officials, who made a specific report.

Yes, he had seen a tall, slight, neat-looking woman, dressed entirely in black, who, according to her account, had arrived at 10.30 by the slow local train from Dijon.

"_Fichtre!_" said the Chief, angrily; "and this is the first we have heard of it."

"Monsieur was much occupied at the time, and, indeed, then we had not heard of your inquiry."

"I notified the station-master quite early, two or three hours since, about 9 A.M. This is most exasperating!"

"Instructions to look out for this woman have only just reached us, monsieur. There were certain formalities, I suppose."

For once the detective cursed in his heart the red-tape, roundabout ways of French officialism.

"Well, well! Tell me about her," he said, with a resignation he did not feel. "Who saw her?"

"I, monsieur. I spoke to her myself. She was on the outside of the station, alone, unprotected, in a state of agitation and alarm. I went up and offered my services. Then she told me she had come from Dijon, that friends who were to have met her had not appeared. I suggested that I should put her into a cab and send her to her destination. But she was afraid of losing her friends, and preferred to wait."

"A fine story! Did she appear to know what had happened? Had she heard of the murder?"

"Something, monsieur."

"Who could have told her? Did you?"

"No, not I. But she knew."

"Was not that in itself suspicious? The fact has not yet been made public."

"It was in the air, monsieur. There was a general impression that something had happened. That was to be seen on every face, in the whispered talk, the movement to and fro of the police and the guards."

"Did she speak of it, or refer to it?"

"Only to ask if the murderer was known; whether the passengers had been detained; whether there was any inquiry in progress; and then--""

"What then?"

"This gentleman," pointing to Block, "came out, accompanied by another. They passed pretty close to us, and I noticed that the lady slipped quickly on one side."

"She recognized her confederate, of course, but did not wish to be seen just then. Did he, the person with Block here, see her?"

"Hardly, I think; it was all so quick, and they were gone, in a minute, to the cab-stand."

"What did your woman do?"

"She seemed to have changed her mind all at once, and declared she would not wait for her friends. Now she was in quite a hurry to go."

"Of course! and left you like a fool planted there. I suppose she took a cab and followed the others, Block here
and his companion."

"I believe she did. I saw her cab close behind theirs."

"It is too late to lament this now," said the Chief, after a short pause, looking at his colleagues. "At least it confirms our ideas, and brings us to certain definite conclusions. We must lay hands on these two. Their guilt is all but established. Their own acts condemn them. They must be arrested without a moment's delay."

"If you can find them!" suggested the Judge, with a very perceptible sneer.

"That we shall certainly do. Trust to Block, who is very nearly concerned. His future depends on his success. You quite understand that, my man?"

Block made a gesture half-deprecating, half-confident.

"I do not despair, gentlemen; and if I might make so bold, sir, I will ask you to assist? If you would give orders direct from the Prefecture to make the round of the cab-stands, to ask of all the agents in charge the information we need? Before night we shall have heard from the cabman who drove them what became of this couple, and so get our birds themselves, or a point of fresh departure."

"And you, Block, where shall you go?"

"Where I left him, or rather where he left me," replied the inspector, with an attempt at wit, which fell quite flat, being extinguished by a frigid look from the Judge.

"Go," said M. Floçon, briefly and severely, to his subordinate; "and remember that you have now to justify your retention on the force."

Then, turning to M. Beaumont le Hardi, the Chief went on pleasantly:

"Well, M. le Juge, it promises, I think; it is all fairly satisfactory, eh?"

"I am sorry I cannot agree with you," replied the Judge, harshly. "On the contrary, I consider that we--or more exactly you, for neither I nor M. Garraud accept any share in it--you have so far failed, and miserably."

"Your pardon, M. le Juge, you are too severe," protested M. Floçon, quite humbly.

"Well! Look at it from all points of view. What have we got? What have we gained? Nothing, or, if anything, it is of the smallest, and it is already jeopardized, if not absolutely lost."

"We have at least gained the positive assurance of the guilt of certain individuals."

"Whom you have allowed to slip through your fingers."

"Ah, not so, M. le Juge! We have one under surveillance. My man Galipaud is there at the hotel watching the Countess."

"Do not talk to me of your men, M. Floçon," angrily interposed the Judge. "One of them has given us a touch of his quality. Why should not the other be equally foolish? I quite expect to hear that the Countess also has gone, that would be the climax!"

"It shall not happen. I will take the warrant and arrest her now, at once, myself," cried M. Floçon.

"Well, that will be something, yet not much. Yes, she is only one, and not to my mind the most criminal. We do not know as yet the exact responsibility of each, the exact measure of their guilt; but I do not myself believe that the Countess was a prime mover, or, indeed, more than an accessory. She was drawn into it, perhaps involved, how or why we cannot know, but possibly by fortuitous circumstances that put an unavoidable pressure upon her; a consenting party, but under protest. That is my view of the lady."

M. Floçon shook his head. Prepossessions with him were tenacious, and he had made up his mind about the Countess's guilt.

"When you again interrogate her, M. le Juge, by the light of your present knowledge, I believe you will think otherwise. She will confess,--you will make her, your skill is unrivalled,--and you will then admit, M. le Juge, that I was right in my suspicions."

"Ah, well, produce her! We shall see," said the Judge, somewhat mollified by M. Floçon's fulsome flattery.

"I will bring her to your chamber of instruction within an hour, M. le Juge," said the detective, very confidently.

But he was doomed to disappointment in this as he was in other respects.

CHAPTER XV

Let us go back a little in point of time, and follow the movements of Sir Charles Collingham.

It was barely 11 A.M. when he left the Lyons Station with his brother, the Reverend Silas, and the military attaché, Colonel Papillon. They paused for a moment outside the station while the baggage was being got together.

"See, Silas," said the General, pointing to the clock, "you will have plenty of time for the 11.50 train to Calais for London, but you must hurry up and drive straight across Paris to the Nord. I suppose he can go, Jack?"

"Certainly, as he has promised to return if called upon."

And Mr. Collingham promptly took advantage of the permission.
"But you, General, what are your plans?" went on the attaché.

"I shall go to the club first, get a room, dress, and all that. Then call at the Hôtel Madagascar. There is a lady there,—one of our party, in fact,—and I should like to ask after her. She may be glad of my services."

"English? Is there anything we can do for her?"

"Yes, she is an Englishwoman, but the widow of an Italian—the Contessa di Castagneto."

"Oh, but I know her!" said Papillon. "I remember her in Rome two or three years ago. A deuced pretty woman, very much admired, but she was in deep mourning then, and went out very little. I wished she had gone out more. There were lots of men ready to fall at her feet."

"You were in Rome, then, some time back? Did you ever come across a man there, Quadling, the banker?"

"Of course I did. Constantly. He was a good deal about—a rather free-living, self-indulgent sort of chap. And now you mention his name, I recollect they said he was much smitten by this particular lady, the Contessa di Castagneto."

"And did she encourage him?" "Lord! how can I tell? Who shall say how a woman's fancy falls? It might have suited her too. They said she was not in very good circumstances, and he was thought to be a rich man. Of course we know better than that now."

"Why _now?_"

"Haven't you heard? It was in the _Figaro_ yesterday, and in all the Paris papers. Quadling's bank has gone to smash; he has bolted with all the 'ready' he could lay hands upon."

"He didn't get far, then!" cried Sir Charles. "You look surprised, Jack. Didn't they tell you? This Quadling was the man murdered in the sleeping-car. It was no doubt for the money he carried with him."

"Was it Quadling? My word! what a terrible Nemesis. Well, _nil nisi bonum_, but I never thought much of the chap, and your friend the Countess has had an escape. But now, sir, I must be moving. My engagement is for twelve noon. If you want me, mind you send--207 Rue Miromesnil, or to the Embassy; but let us arrange to meet this evening, eh? Dinner and a theatre—what do you say?"

Then Colonel Papillon rode off, and the General was driven to the Boulevard des Capucines, having much to occupy his thoughts by the way.

It did not greatly please him to have this story of the Countess's relations with Quadling, as first hinted at by the police, endorsed now by his friend Papillon. Clearly she had kept up her acquaintance, her intimacy to the very last: why otherwise should she have received him, alone, been closeted with him for an hour or more on the very eve of his flight? It was a clandestine acquaintance too, or seemed so, for Sir Charles, although a frequent visitor at her house, had never met Quadling there.

What did it all mean? And yet, what, after all, did it matter to him?

A good deal really more than he chose to admit to himself, even now, when closely questioning his secret heart. The fact was, the Countess had made a very strong impression on him from the first. He had admired her greatly during the past winter at Rome, but then it was only a passing fancy, as he thought,—the pleasant platonic flirtation of a middle-aged man, who never expected to inspire or feel a great love. Only now, when he had shared a serious trouble with her, had passed through common difficulties and dangers, he was finding what accident may do—how it may fan a first liking into a stronger flame. It was absurd, of course. He was fifty-one, he had weathered many trifling affairs of the heart, and here he was, bowled over at last, and by a woman he was not certain was entitled to his respect.

The answer came at once and unhesitatingly, as it would to any other honest, chivalrous gentleman.

"By George, I'll stick to her through thick and thin! I'll trust her whatever happens or has happened, come what may. Such a woman as that is above suspicion. She _must_ be straight. I should be a beast and a blackguard double distilled to think anything else. I am sure she can put all right with a word, can explain everything when she chooses. I will wait till she does."

Thus fortified and decided, Sir Charles took his way to the Hôtel Madagascar about noon. At the desk he inquired for the Countess, and begged that his card might be sent up to her. The man looked at it, then at the visitor, as he stood there waiting rather impatiently, then again at the card. At last he walked out and across the inner courtyard of the hotel to the office. Presently the manager came back, bowing low, and, holding the card in his hand, began a desultory conversation.

"Yes, yes," cried the General, angrily cutting short all references to the weather and the number of English visitors in Paris. "But be so good as to let Madame la Comtesse know that I have called."

"Ah, to be sure! I came to tell Monsieur le Général that madame will hardly be able to see him. She is indisposed, I believe. At any rate, she does not receive to-day."

"As to that, we shall see. I will take no answer except direct from her. Take or send up my card without further
delay. I insist! Do you hear?” said the General, so fiercely that the manager turned tail and fled up-stairs.

Perhaps he yielded his ground the more readily that he saw over the General's shoulder the figure of Galipaud the detective looming in the archway. It had been arranged that, as it was not advisable to have the inspector hanging about the courtyard of the hotel, the clerk or the manager should keep watch over the Countess and detain any visitors who might call upon her. Galipaud had taken post at a wine-shop over the way, and was to be summoned whenever his presence was thought necessary.

There he was now, standing just behind the General, and for the present unseen by him.

But then a telegraph messenger came in and up to the desk. He held the usual blue envelope in his hand, and called out the name on the address:
"Castagneto. Contessa Castagneto."

At sound of which the General turned sharply, to find Galipaud advancing and stretching out his hand to take the message.

"Pardon me," cried Sir Charles, promptly interposing and understanding the situation at a glance. "I am just going up to see that lady. Give me the telegram."

Galipaud would have disputed the point, when the General, who had already recognized him, said quietly:
"No, no, Inspector, you have no earthly right to it. I guess why you are here, but you are not entitled to interfere with private correspondence. Stand back;" and seeing the detective hesitate, he added peremptorily:
"Enough of this. I order you to get out of the way. And be quick about it!"

The manager now returned, and admitted that Madame la Comtesse would receive her visitor. A few seconds more, and the General was admitted into her presence.

"How truly kind of you to call!” she said at once, coming up to him with both hands outstretched and frank gladness in her eyes.

Yes, she was very attractive in her plain, dark travelling dress draping her tall, graceful figure; her beautiful, pale face was enhanced by the rich tones of her dark brown, wavy hair, while just a narrow band of white muslin at her wrists and neck set off the dazzling clearness of her skin.

"Of course I came. I thought you might want me, or might like to know the latest news," he answered, as he held her hands in his for a few seconds longer than was perhaps absolutely necessary.

"Oh, do tell me! Is there anything fresh?” There was a flash of crimson colour in her cheek, which faded almost instantly.

"This much. They have found out who the man was."

"Really? Positively? Whom do they say now?"

"Perhaps I had better not tell you. It may surprise you, shock you to hear. I think you knew him—"

"Nothing can well shock me now. I have had too many shocks already. Who do they think it is?"

"A Mr. Quadling, a banker, who is supposed to have absconded from Rome."

She received the news so impassively, with such strange self-possession, that for a moment he was disappointed in her. But then, quick to excuse, he suggested:

"You may have already heard?"

"Yes; the police people at the railway station told me they thought it was Mr. Quadling."

"But you knew him?"

"Certainly. They were my bankers, much to my sorrow. I shall lose heavily by their failure."

"That also has reached you, then?” interrupted the General, hastily and somewhat uneasily.

"To be sure. The man told me of it himself. Indeed, he came to me the very day I was leaving Rome, and made me an offer—a most obliging offer."

"To share his fallen fortunes?"

"Sir Charles Collingham! How can you? That creature!" The contempt in her tone was immeasurable.

"I had heard—well, some one said that—"

"Speak out, General; I shall not be offended. I know what you mean. It is perfectly true that the man once presumed to pester me with his attentions. But I would as soon have looked at a courier or a cook. And now—"

There was a pause. The General felt on delicate ground. He could ask no questions—anything more must come from the Countess herself.

"But let me tell you what his offer was. I don't know why I listened to it. I ought to have at once informed the police. I wish I had."

"It might have saved him from his fate."

"Every villain gets his deserts in the long run," she said, with bitter sententiousness. "And this Mr. Quadling is--"

"But wait, you shall know him better. He came to me to propose—what do you think?—that he—his bank, I mean—should secretly repay me the amount of my deposit, all the money I had in it. To join me in his fraud, in fact—"
"The scoundrel! Upon my word, he has been well served. And that was the last you saw of him?"

"I saw him on the journey, at Turin, at Modane, at--Oh, Sir Charles, do not ask me any more about him!" she cried, with a sudden outburst, half-grief, half-dread. "I cannot tell you--I am obliged to--I--I--"

"Then do not say another word," he said, promptly.

"There are other things. But my lips are sealed--at least for the present. You do not--will not think any worse of me?"

She laid her hand gently on his arm, and his closed over it with such evident good-will that a blush crimsoned her cheek. It still hung there, and deepened when he said, warmly:

"As if anything could make me do that! Don't you know--you may not, but let me assure you, Countess--that nothing could happen to shake me in the high opinion I have of you. Come what may, I shall trust you, believe in you, think well of you--always."

"How sweet of you to say that! and now, of all times," she murmured quite softly, and looking up for the first time, shyly, to meet his eyes.

Her hand was still on his arm, covered by his, and she nestled so close to him that it was easy, natural, indeed, for him to slip his other arm around her waist and draw her to him.

"And now--of all times--may I say one word more?" he whispered in her ear. "Will you give me the right to shelter and protect you, to stand by you, share your troubles, or keep them from you--?"

"No, no, no, indeed, not now!" She looked up appealingly, the tears brimming up in her bright eyes. "I cannot, will not accept this sacrifice. You are only speaking out of your true-hearted chivalry. You must not join yourself to me, you must not involve yourself--"

He stopped her protests by the oldest and most effectual method known in such cases. That first sweet kiss sealed the compact so quickly entered into between them.

And after that she surrendered at discretion. There was no more hesitation or reluctance; she accepted his love as he had offered it, freely, with whole heart and soul, crept up under his sheltering wing like a storm-beaten dove reëntering the nest, and there, cooing softly, "My knight--my own true knight and lord," yielded herself willingly and unquestioningly to his tender caresses.

Such moments snatched from the heart of pressing anxieties are made doubly sweet by their sharp contrast with a background of trouble.

CHAPTER XVI

They sat there, these two, hand locked in hand, saying little, satisfied now to be with each other and their newfound love. The time flew by far too fast, till at last Sir Charles, with a half-laugh, suggested:

"Do you know, dearest Countess--"

She corrected him in a soft, low voice.

"My name is Sabine--Charles."

"Sabine, darling. It is very prosaic of me, perhaps, but do you know that I am nearly starved? I came on here at once. I have had no breakfast."

"Nor have I," she answered, smiling. "I was thinking of it when--when you appeared like a whirlwind, and since then, events have moved so fast."

"Are you sorry, Sabine? Would you rather go back to--to--before?" She made a pretty gesture of closing his traitor lips with her small hand.

"Not for worlds. But you soldiers--you are terrible men! Who can resist you?"

"Bah! It is you who are irresistible. But there, why not put on your jacket and let us go out to lunch somewhere--Durand's, Voisin's, the Café de le Paix? Which do you prefer?"

"I suppose they will not try to stop us?"

"Who should try?" he asked.

"The people of the hotel--the police--I cannot exactly say whom; but I dread something of the sort. I don't quite understand that manager. He has been up to see me several times, and he spoke rather oddly, rather rudely."

"Then he shall answer for it," snorted Sir Charles, hotly. "It is the fault of that brute of a detective, I suppose. Still they would hardly dare--"

"A detective? What? Here? Are you sure?"

"Perfectly sure. It is one of those from the Lyons Station. I knew him again directly, and he was inclined to be interfering. Why, I caught him trying--but that reminds me--I rescued this telegram from his clutches."

He took the little blue envelope from his breast pocket and handed it to her, kissing the tips of her fingers as she took it from him.
"Ah!"

A sudden ejaculation of dismay escaped her, when, after rather carelessly tearing the message open, she had glanced at it.

"What is the matter?" he asked in eager solicitude. "May I not know?"

She made no offer to give him the telegram, and said in a faltering voice, and with much hesitation of manner, "I do not know. I hardly think--of course I do not like to withhold anything, not now. And yet, this is a business which concerns me only, I am afraid. I ought not to drag you into it."

"What concerns you is very much my business, too. I do not wish to force your confidence, still--"

She gave him the telegram quite obediently, with a little sigh of relief, glad to realize now, for the first time after many years, that there was some one to give her orders and take the burden of trouble off her shoulders.

He read it, but did not understand it in the least. It ran: "I must see you immediately, and beg you will come. You will find Hortense here. She is giving trouble. You only can deal with her. Do not delay. Come at once, or we must go to you.--Ripaldi, Hôtel Ivoire, Rue Bellechasse."

"What does this mean? Who sends it? Who is Ripaldi?" asked Sir Charles, rather brusquely.

"He--he--oh, Charles, I shall have to go. Anything would be better than his coming here."

"Ripaldi? Haven't I heard the name? He was one of those in the sleeping-car, I think? The Chief of the Detective Police called it out once or twice. Am I not right? Please tell me--am I not right?"

"Yes, yes; this man was there with the rest of us. A dark man, who sat near the door--"

"Ah, to be sure. But what--what in Heaven's name has he to do with you? How does he dare to send you such an impudent message as this? Surely, Sabine, you will tell me? You will admit that I have a right to ask?"

"Yes, of course. I will tell you, Charles, everything; but not here--not now. It must be on the way. I have been very wrong, very foolish--but oh, come, come, do let us be going. I am so afraid he might--"

"Then I may go with you? You do not object to that?"

"I much prefer it--much. Do let us make haste!"

She snatched up her sealskin jacket, and held it to him prettily, that he might help her into it, which he did neatly and cleverly, smoothing her great puffed-out sleeves under each shoulder of the coat, still talking eagerly and taking no toll for his trouble as she stood patiently, passively before him.

"And this Hortense? It is your maid, is it not--the woman who had taken herself off? How comes it that she is with that Italian fellow? Upon my soul, I don't understand--not a little bit."

"I cannot explain that, either. It is most strange, most incomprehensible, but we shall soon know. Please, Charles, please do not get impatient."

They passed together down into the hotel courtyard and across it, under the archway which led past the clerk's desk into the street.

On seeing them, he came out hastily and placed himself in front, quite plainly barring their egress.

"Oh, madame, one moment," he said in a tone that was by no means conciliatory. "The manager wants to speak to you; he told me to tell you, and stop you if you went out."

"The manager can speak to madame when she returns," interposed the General angrily, answering for the Countess.

"I have had my orders, and I cannot allow her--"

"Stand aside, you scoundrel!" cried the General, blazing up; "or upon my soul I shall give you such a lesson you will be sorry you were ever born."

At this moment the manager himself appeared in reinforcement, and the clerk turned to him for protection and support.

"I was merely giving madame your message, M. Auguste, when this gentleman interposed, threatened me, maltreated me--"

"Oh, surely not; it is some mistake;" the manager spoke most suavely. "But certainly I did wish to speak to madame. I wished to ask her whether she was satisfied with her apartment. I find that the rooms she has generally occupied have fallen vacant, in the nick of time. Perhaps madame would like to look at them, and move?"

"Thank you, M. Auguste, you are very good; but at another time. I am very much pressed just now. When I return in an hour or two, not now."

The manager was profuse in his apologies, and made no further difficulty.

"Oh, as you please, madame. Perfectly. By and by, later, when you choose."

The fact was, the desired result had been obtained. For now, on the far side from where he had been watching, Galipaud appeared, no doubt in reply to some secret signal, and the detective with a short nod in acknowledgment had evidently removed his embargo.

A cab was called, and Sir Charles, having put the Countess in, was turning to give the driver his instructions,
when a fresh complication arose.

Some one coming round the corner had caught a glimpse of the lady disappearing into the fiacre, and cried out from afar.

"Stay! Stop! I want to speak to that lady; detain her." It was the sharp voice of little M. Floçon, whom most of those present, certainly the Countess and Sir Charles, immediately recognized.

"No, no, no--don't let them keep me--I cannot wait now," she whispered in earnest, urgent appeal. It was not lost on her loyal and devoted friend.

"Go on!" he shouted to the cabman, with all the peremptory insistence of one trained to give words of command. "Forward! As fast as you can drive. I'll pay you double fare. Tell him where to go, Sabine. I'll follow--in less than no time."

The fiacre rattled off at top speed, and the General turned to confront M. Floçon.

The little detective was white to the lips with rage and disappointment; but he also was a man of promptitude, and before falling foul of this pestilent Englishman, who had again marred his plans, he shouted to Galipaud--

"Quick! After them! Follow her wherever she goes. Take this,"--he thrust a paper into his subordinate's hand. "It is a warrant for her arrest. Seize her wherever you find her, and bring her to the Quai l'Horloge," the euphemistic title of the headquarters of the French police.

The pursuit was started at once, and then the Chief turned upon Sir Charles. "Now it is between us," he said, fiercely. "You must account to me for what you have done."

"Must I?" answered the General, mockingly and with a little laugh. "It is perfectly easy. Madame was in a hurry, so I helped her to get away. That was all."

"You have traversed and opposed the action of the law. You have impeded me, the Chief of the Detective Service, in the execution of my duty. It is not the first time, but now you must answer for it."

"Dear me!" said the General in the same flippant, irritating tone.

"You will have to accompany me now to the Prefecture."

"And if it does not suit me to go?"

"I will have you carried there, bound, tied hand and foot, by the police, like any common rascallion taken in the act who resists the authority of an officer."

"Oho, you talk very big, sir. Perhaps you will be so obliging as to tell me what I have done."

"You have connived at the escape of a criminal from justice--"

"That lady? Psha!"

"She is charged with a heinous crime--that in which you yourself were implicated--the murder of that man on the train."

"Bah! You must be a stupid goose, to hint at such a thing! A lady of birth, breeding, the highest respectability--impossible!"

"All that has not prevented her from allying herself with base, common wretches. I do not say she struck the blow, but I believe she inspired, concerted, approved it, leaving her confederates to do the actual deed."

"Confederates?"

"The man Ripaldi, your Italian fellow traveller; her maid, Hortense Petitpré, who was missing this morning."

The General was fairly staggered at this unexpected blow. Half an hour ago he would have scouted the very thought, indignantly repelled the spoken words that even hinted a suspicion of Sabine Castagneto. But that telegram, signed Ripaldi, the introduction of the maid's name, and the suggestion that she was troublesome, the threat that if the Countess did not go, they would come to her, and her marked uneasiness thereat--all this implied plainly the existence of collusion, of some secret relations, some secret understanding between her and the others.

He could not entirely conceal the trouble that now overcame him; it certainly did not escape so shrewd an observer as M. Floçon, who promptly tried to turn it to good account.

"Come, M. le Général," he said, with much assumed _bonhomie_. "I can see how it is with you, and you have my sincere sympathy. We are all of us liable to be carried away, and there is much excuse for you in this. But now--believe me, I am justified in saying it--now I tell you that our case is strong against her, that it is not mere speculation, but supported by facts. Now surely you will come over to our side?"

"In what way?"

"Tell us frankly all you know--where that lady has gone, help us to lay our hands on her."

"Your own people will do that. I heard you order that man to follow her."

"Probably; still I would rather have the information from you. It would satisfy me of your good-will. I need not then proceed to extremities--"

"I certainly shall not give it you," said the General, hotly. "Anything I know about or have heard from the Contessa Castagneto is sacred; besides, I still believe in her--thoroughly. Nothing you have said can shake me."
"Then I must ask you to accompany me to the Prefecture. You will come, I trust, on my invitation." The Chief spoke quietly, but with considerable dignity, and he laid a slight stress upon the last word.

"Meaning that if I do not, you will have resort to something stronger?"

"That will be quite unnecessary, I am sure,—at least I hope so. Still--"

"I will go where you like, only I will tell you nothing more, not a single word; and before I start, I must let my friends at the Embassy know where to find me."

"Oh, with all my heart," said the little detective, shrugging his shoulders. "We will call there on our way, and you can tell the porter. They will know where to find us."

CHAPTER XVII

Sir Charles Collingham and his escort, M. Floçon, entered a cab together and were driven first to the Faubourg St. Honoré. The General tried hard to maintain his nonchalance, but he was yet a little crestfallen at the turn things had taken, and M. Floçon, who, on the other hand, was elated and triumphant, saw it. But no words passed between them until they arrived at the portals of the British Embassy, and the General handed out his card to the magnificent porter who received them.

"Kindly let Colonel Papillon have that without delay." The General had written a few words: "I have got into fresh trouble. Come on to me at the Police Prefecture if you can spare the time."

"The Colonel is now in the Chancery: will not monsieur wait?" asked the porter, with superb civility.

But the detective would not suffer this, and interposed, answering abruptly for Sir Charles:

"No. It is impossible. We are going to the Quai l'Horloge. It is an urgent matter."

The porter knew what the Quai l'Horloge meant, and he guessed intuitively who was speaking. Every Frenchman can recognize a police officer, and has, as a rule, no great opinion of him.

"Very well!" now said the porter, curtly, as he banged the wicket-gate on the retreating cab, and he did not hurry himself in giving the card to Colonel Papillon.

"Does this mean that I am a prisoner?" asked Sir Charles, his gorge rising, as it did easily.

"It means, monsieur, that you are in the hands of justice until your recent conduct has been fully explained," said the detective, with the air of a despot.

"But I protest--"

"I wish to hear no further observations, monsieur. You may reserve them till you can give them to the right person."

The General's temper was sorely ruffled. He did not like it at all; yet what could he do? Prudence gained the day, and after a struggle he decided to submit, lest worse might befall him.

There was, in truth, worse to be encountered. It was very irksome to be in the power of this now domineering little man on his own ground, and eager to show his power. It was with a very bad grace that Sir Charles obeyed the curt orders he received, to leave the cab, to enter at a side door of the Prefecture, to follow this pompous conductor along the long vaulted passages of this rambling building, up many flights of stone stairs, to halt obediently at his command when at length they reached a closed door on an upper story.

"It is here!" said M. Floçon, as he turned the handle unceremoniously without knocking. "Enter."

A man was seated at a small desk in the centre of a big bare room, who rose at once at the sight of M. Floçon, and bowed deferentially without speaking.

"Baume," said the Chief, shortly, "I wish to leave this gentleman with you. Make him at home,"—the words were spoken in manifest irony,—"and when I call you, bring him at once to my cabinet. You, monsieur, you will oblige me by staying here."

Sir Charles nodded carelessly, took the first chair that offered, and sat down by the fire.

He was to all intents and purposes in custody, and he examined his gaoler at first wrathfully, then curiously, struck with his rather strange figure and appearance. Baume, as the Chief had called him, was a short, thick-set man with a great shock head sunk in low between a pair of enormous shoulders, betokening great physical strength; he stood on very thin but greatly twisted bow legs, and the quaintness of his figure was emphasized by the short black blouse or smock-frock he wore over his other clothes like a French artisan.

He was a man of few words, and those not the most polite in tone, for when the General began with a banal remark about the weather, M. Baume replied, shortly:

"I wish to have no talk;" and when Sir Charles pulled out his cigarette-case, as he did almost automatically from time to time when in any situation of annoyance or perplexity, Baume raised his hand warningly and grunted:

"Not allowed."

"Then I'll be hanged if I don't smoke in spite of every man jack of you!" cried the General, hotly, rising from his
seat and speaking unconsciously in English.

"What's that?" asked Baume, gruffly. He was one of the detective staff, and was only doing his duty according to his lights, and he said so with such an injured air that the General was pacified, laughed, and relapsed into silence without lighting his cigarette.

The time ran on, from minutes into nearly an hour, a very trying wait for Sir Charles. There is always something irritating in doing antechamber work, in kicking one's heels in the waiting-room of any functionary or official, high or low, and the General found it hard to possess himself in patience, when he thought he was being thus ignominiously treated by a man like M. Floçon. All the time, too, he was worrying himself about the Countess, wondering first how she had fared; next, where she was just then; last of all, and longest, whether it was possible for her to be mixed up in anything compromising or criminal.

Suddenly an electric bell struck in the room. There was a table telephone at Baume's elbow; he took up the handle, put the tube to his mouth and ear, got his message answered, and then, rising, said abruptly to Sir Charles:

"Come."

When the General was at last ushered into the presence of the Chief of the Detective Police, he found to his satisfaction that Colonel Papillon was also there, and at M. Floçon's side sat the instructing judge, M. Beaumont le Hardi, who, after waiting politely until the two Englishmen had exchanged greetings, was the first to speak, and in apology.

"You will, I trust, pardon us, M. le Général, for having detained you here and so long. But there were, as we thought, good and sufficient reasons. If those have now lost some of their cogency, we still stand by our action as having been justifiable in the execution of our duty. We are now willing to let you go free, because--because--"

"We have caught the person, the lady you helped to escape," blurted out the detective, unable to resist making the point.

"The Countess? Is she here, in custody? Never!"

"Undoubtedly she is in custody, and in very close custody too," went on M. Floçon, gleefully. "_Au secret_, if you know what that means--in a cell separate and apart, where no one is permitted to see or speak to her."

"Surely not that? Jack--Papillon--this must not be. I beg of you, implore, insist, that you will get his lordship to interpose."

"But, sir, how can I? You must not ask impossibilities. The Contessa Castagneto is really an Italian subject now."

"She is English by birth, and whether or no, she is a woman, a high-bred lady; and it is abominable, unheard-of, to subject her to such monstrous treatment," said the General.

"But these gentlemen declare that they are fully warranted, that she has put herself in the wrong--greatly, culpably in the wrong."

"I don't believe it!" cried the General, indignantly. "Not from these chaps, a pack of idiots, always on the wrong tack! I don't believe a word, not if they swear."

"But they have documentary evidence--papers of the most damaging kind against her."

"Where? How?"

"He--M. le Juge--has been showing me a note-book;" and the General's eyes, following Jack Papillon's, were directed to a small _carnet_, or memorandum-book, which the Judge, interpreting the glance, was tapping significantly with his finger.

Then the Judge said blandly, "It is easy to perceive that you protest, M. le Général, against that lady's arrest. Is it so? Well, we are not called upon to justify it to you, not in the very least. But we are dealing with a brave man, a gentleman, an officer of high rank and consideration, and you shall know things that we are not bound to tell, to you or to any one."

"First," he continued, holding up the note-book, "do you know what this is? Have you ever seen it before?"

"I am dimly conscious of the fact, and yet I cannot say when or where."

"It is the property of one of your fellow travellers--an Italian called Ripaldi.""Ripaldi?" said the General, remembering with some uneasiness that he had seen the name at the bottom of the Countess's telegram. "Ah! now I understand."

"You had heard of it, then? In what connection?" asked the Judge, a little carelessly, but it was a suddenly planned pitfall.

"I now understand," replied the General, perfectly on his guard, "why the note-book was familiar to me. I had seen it in that man's hands in the waiting-room. He was writing in it."

"Indeed? A favourite occupation evidently. He was fond of confiding in that note-book, and committed to it much that he never expected would see the light--his movements, intentions, ideas, even his inmost thoughts. The book--which he no doubt lost inadvertently is very incriminating to himself and his friends."
"What do you imply?" hastily inquired Sir Charles.

"Simply that it is on that which is written here that we base one part, perhaps the strongest, of our case against
the Countess. It is strangely but convincingly corroborative of our suspicions against her."

"May I look at it for myself?" went on the General in a tone of contemptuous disbelief.

"It is in Italian. Perhaps you can read that language? If not, I have translated the most important passages," said
the Judge, offering some other papers.

"Thank you; if you will permit me, I should prefer to look at the original;" and the General, without more ado,
stretched out his hand and took the note-book.

What he read there, as he quickly scanned its pages, shall be told in the next chapter. It will be seen that there
were things written that looked very damaging to his dear friend, Sabine Castagneto.

CHAPTER XVIII

Ripaldi's diary--its ownership plainly shown by the record of his name in full, Natale Ripaldi, inside the cover--
was a commonplace note-book bound in shabby drab cloth, its edges and corners strengthened with some sort of
white metal. The pages were of coarse paper, lined blue and red, and they were dog-eared and smirched as though
they had been constantly turned over and used.

The earlier entries were little more than a record of work to do or done.

"Jan. 11. To call at Café di Roma, 12.30. Beppo will meet me.

"Jan. 13. Traced M. L. Last employed as a model at S.'s studio, Palazzo B.

"Jan. 15. There is trouble brewing at the Circolo Bonafede; Louvain, Malatesta, and the Englishman Sprot, have
joined it. All are noted Anarchists.

"Jan. 20. Mem., pay Trattore. The Bestia will not wait. X. is also pressing, and Mariuccia. Situation tightens.

"Feb. 10, 11, 12. After Q. No grounds yet.

"Feb. 27. Q. keeps up good appearance. Any mistake? Shall I try him? Sorely pressed. X. threatens me with
Prefettura.

"March 1. Q. in difficulties. Out late every night. Is playing high; poor luck.

"March 3. Q. means mischief. Preparing for a start?

"March 10. Saw Q. about, here, there, everywhere."

Then followed a brief account of Quadling's movements on the day before his departure from Rome, very much
as they have been described in a previous chapter. These were made mostly in the form of reflections, conjectures,
hopes, and fears; hurry-scurry of pursuit had no doubt broken the immediate record of events, and these had been
entered next day in the train.

"March 17 (the day previous). He has not shown up. I thought to see him at the buffet at Genoa. The conductor
took him his coffee to the car. I hoped to have begun an acquaintance.

"12.30. Breakfasted at Turin. Q. did not come to table. Found him hanging about outside restaurant. Spoke; got
short reply. Wishes to avoid observation, I suppose.

"But he speaks to others. He has claimed acquaintance with madame's lady's maid, and he wants to speak to the
mistress. 'Tell her I must speak to her,' I heard him say, as I passed close to them. Then they separated hurriedly.

"At Modane he came to the Douane, and afterwards into the restaurant. He bowed across the table to the lady.
She hardly recognized him, which is odd. Of course she must know him; then why--? There is something between
them, and the maid is in it.

"What shall _I_ do? I could spoil any game of theirs if I stepped in. What are they after? His money, no doubt.

"So am I; I have the best right to it, for I can do most for him. He is absolutely in my power, and he'll see that--
he's no fool-- directly he knows who I am, and why I'm here. It will be worth his while to buy me off, if I'm ready to
sell myself, and my duty, and the Prefettura--and why shouldn't I? What better can I do? Shall I ever have such a
chance again? Twenty, thirty, forty thousand lire, more, even, at one stroke; why, it's a fortune! I could go to the
Republic, to America, North or South, send for Mariuccia-- no, _cos petto!_ I will continue free! I will spend the
money on myself, as I alone will have earned it, and at such risk.

"I have worked it out thus:

"I will go to him at the very last, just before we are reaching Paris. Tell him, threaten him with arrest, then give
him his chance of escape. No fear that he won't accept it; he _must_, whatever he may have settled with the others.

"Altro! I snap my fingers at them. He has most to fear from me."

The next entries were made after some interval, a long interval, --no doubt, after the terrible deed had been
done,--and the words were traced with trembling fingers, so that the writing was most irregular and scarcely legible.
"Ugh! I am still trembling with horror and fear. I cannot get it out of my mind; I never shall. Why, what tempted me? How could I bring myself to do it?

"But for these two women--they are fiends, furies--it would never have been necessary. Now one of them has escaped, and the other--she is here, so cold-blooded, so self-possessed and quiet--who would have thought it of her? That she, a lady of rank and high breeding, gentle, delicate, tender-hearted. Tender? the fiend! Oh, shall I ever forget her?

"And now she has me in her power! But have I not her also? We are in the same boat--we must sink or swim, together. We are equally bound, I to her, she to me. What are we to do? How shall we meet inquiry? _Santissima Donna!_ why did I not risk it, and climb out like the maid? It was terrible for the moment, but the worst would have been over, and now--"

There was yet more, scribbled in the same faltering, agitated handwriting, and from the context the entries had been made in the waiting-room of the railroad station.

"I must attract her attention. She will not look my way. I want her to understand that I have something special to say to her, and that, as we are forbidden to speak, I am writing it herein--that she must contrive to take the book from me and read unobserved.

"_Cos petto!_ she is stupid! Has fear dazed her entirely? No matter, I will set it all down."

Now followed what the police deemed such damaging evidence.

"Countess. Remember. Silence--absolute silence. Not a word as to who I am, or what is common knowledge to us both. That cannot be undone. Be brave, resolute; admit nothing. Stick to it that you know nothing, heard nothing. Deny that you knew _him_, or me. Swear you slept soundly the night through, make some excuse, say you were drugged, anything, only be on your guard, and say nothing about me. I warn you. Leave me alone. Or--but your interests are my interests; we must stand or fall together. Afterwards I will meet you--I _must_ meet you somewhere. If we miss at the station front, write to me Poste Restante, Grand Hôtel, and give me an address. This is imperative. Once more, silence and discretion."

This ended the writing in the note-book, and the whole perusal occupied Sir Charles from fifteen to twenty minutes, during which the French officials watched his face closely, and his friend Colonel Papillon anxiously.

But the General's mask was impenetrable, and at the end of his reading he turned back to read and re-read many pages, holding the book to the light, and seeming to examine the contents very curiously.

"Well?" said the Judge at last, when he met the General's eye.

"Do you lay great store by this evidence?" asked the General in a calm, dispassionate voice.

"Is it not natural that we should? Is it not strongly, conclusively incriminating?"

"It would be so, of course, if it were to be depended upon. But as to that I have my doubts, and grave doubts."

"Bah!" interposed the detective; "that is mere conjecture, mere assertion. Why should not the book be believed? It is perfectly genuine--"

"Wait, sir," said the General, raising his hand. "Have you not noticed--surely it cannot have escaped so astute a police functionary--that the entries are not all in the same handwriting?"

"What! Oh, that is too absurd!" cried both the officials in a breath.

They saw at once that if this discovery were admitted to be an absolute fact, the whole drift of their conclusions must be changed.

"Examine the book for yourselves. To my mind it is perfectly clear and beyond all question," insisted Sir Charles. "I am quite positive that the last pages were written by a different hand from the first."

CHAPTER XIX

For several minutes both the Judge and the detective pored over the note-book, examining page after page, shaking their heads, and declining to accept the evidence of their eyes.

"I cannot see it," said the Judge at last; adding reluctantly, "No doubt there is a difference, but it is to be explained."

"Quite so," put in M. Floçon. "When he wrote the early part, he was calm and collected; the last entries, so straggling, so ragged, and so badly written, were made when he was fresh from the crime, excited, upset, little master of himself. Naturally he would use a different hand."

"Or he would wish to disguise it. It was likely he would so wish," further remarked the Judge.

"You admit, then, that there is a difference?" argued the General, shrewdly. "But there is more than a disguise. The best disguise leaves certain unchangeable features. Some letters, capital G's, H's, and others, will betray themselves through the best disguise. I know what I am saying. I have studied the subject of handwriting; it interests me. These are the work of two different hands. Call in an expert; you will find I am right."
"Well, well," said the Judge, after a pause, "let us grant your position for the moment. What do you deduce? What do you infer therefrom?"

"Surely you can see what follows--what this leads us to?" said Sir Charles, rather disdainfully.

"I have formed an opinion--yes, but I should like to see if it coincides with yours. You think--"

"I know," corrected the General. "I know that, as two persons wrote in that book, either it is not Ripaldi's book, or the last of them was not Ripaldi. I saw the last writer at his work, saw him with my own eyes. Yet he did not write with Ripaldi's hand--this is incontestable, I am sure of it, I will swear it--ergo, he is not Ripaldi."

"But you should have known this at the time," interjected M. Floçon, fiercely. "Why did you not discover the change of identity? You should have seen that this was not Ripaldi."

"Pardon me. I did not know the man. I had not noticed him particularly on the journey. There was no reason why I should. I had no communication, no dealings, with any of my fellow passengers except my brother and the Countess."

"But some of the others would surely have remarked the change?" went on the Judge, greatly puzzled. "That alone seems enough to condemn your theory, M. le General."

"I take my stand on fact, not theory," stoutly maintained Sir Charles, "and I am satisfied I am right."

"But if that was not Ripaldi, who was it? Who would wish to masquerade in his dress and character, to make entries of that sort, as if under his hand?"

"Some one determined to divert suspicion from himself to others--"

"But stay--does he not plainly confess his own guilt?"

"What matter if he is not Ripaldi? Directly the inquiry was over, he could steal away and resume his own personality--that of a man supposed to be dead, and therefore safe from all interference and future pursuit."

"You mean--Upon my word, I compliment you, M. le Général. It is really ingenious! remarkable, indeed! superb!" cried the Judge, and only professional jealousy prevented M. Floçon from concurring in the same praise.

"But how--what--I do not understand," asked Colonel Papillon in amazement. His wits did not travel quite so fast as those of his companions.

"Simply this, my dear Jack," explained the General: "Ripaldi must have tried to blackmail Quadling, as he proposed, and Quadling turned the tables on him. They fought, no doubt, and Quadling killed him, possibly in self-defence. He would have said so, but in his peculiar position as an absconding defaulter he did not dare. That is how I read it, and I believe that now these gentlemen are disposed to agree with me."

"In theory, certainly," said the Judge, heartily. "But oh! for some more positive proof of this change of character! If we could only identify the corpse, prove clearly that it is not Quadling. And still more, if we had not let this so-called Ripaldi slip through our fingers! You will never find him, M. Floçon, never."

The detective hung his head in guilty admission of this reproach.

"We may help you in both these difficulties, gentlemen," said Sir Charles, pleasantly. "My friend here, Colonel Papillon, can speak as to the man Quadling. He knew him well in Rome, a year or two ago."

"Please wait one moment only," the detective touched a bell, and briefly ordered two fiacres to the door at once.

"That is right, M. Floçon," said the Judge. "We will all go to the Morgue. The body is there by now. You will not refuse your assistance, monsieur?"

"One moment. As to the other matter, M. le General?" went on M. Floçon. "Can you help us to find this miscreant, whoever he may be?"

"Yes. The man who calls himself Ripaldi is to be found--or, at least, you would have found him an hour or so ago--at the Hotel Ivoire, Rue Bellechasse. But time has been lost, I fear."

"Nevertheless, we will send there."

"The woman Hortense was also with him when last I heard of them."

"How do you know?" began the detective, suspiciously.

"Psha!" interrupted the Judge; "that will keep. This is the time for action, and we owe too much to the General to distrust him now."

"Thank you; I am pleased to hear you say that," went on Sir Charles. "But if I have been of some service to you, perhaps you owe me a little in return. That poor lady! Think what she is suffering. Surely, to oblige me, you will now set her free?"

"Indeed, monsieur, I fear--I do not see how, consistently with my duty"--protested the Judge.

"At least allow her to return to her hotel. She can remain there at your disposal. I will promise you that."

"How can you answer for her?"

"She will do what I ask, I think, if I may send her just two or three lines."

The Judge yielded, smiling at the General's urgency, and shrewdly guessing what it implied.

Then the three departures from the Prefecture took place within a short time of each other.
A posse of police went to arrest Ripaldi; the Countess returned to the Hotel Madagascar; and the Judge's party started for the Morgue,—only a short journey,—where they were presently received with every mark of respect and consideration.

The keeper, or officer in charge, was summoned, and came out bareheaded to the fiacre, bowing low before his distinguished visitors.

"Good morning, La Pêche," said M. Floçon in a sharp voice. "We have come for an identification. The body from the Lyons Station—he of the murder in the sleeping-car—is it yet arrived?"

"But surely, at your service, Chief," replied the old man, obsequiously. "If the gentlemen will give themselves the trouble to enter the office, I will lead them behind, direct into the mortuary chamber. There are many people in yonder."

It was the usual crowd of sightseers passing slowly before the plate glass of this, the most terrible shop-front in the world, where the goods exposed, the merchandise, are hideous corpses laid out in rows upon the marble slabs, the battered, tattered remnants of outraged humanity, insulted by the most terrible indignities in death.

Who make up this curious throng, and what strange morbid motives drag them there? Those fat, comfortable-looking women, with their baskets on their arms; the decent workmen in dusty blouses, idling between the hours of work; the riffraff of the streets, male or female, in various stages of wretchedness and degradation? A few, no doubt, are impelled by motives we cannot challenge—they are torn and tortured by suspense, trembling lest they may recognize missing dear ones among the exposed; others stare carelessly at the day's "take," wondering, perhaps, if they may come to the same fate; one or two are idle sightseers, not always French, for the Morgue is a favourite haunt with the irrepressible tourist doing Paris. Strangest of all, the murderer himself, the doer of the fell deed, comes here, to the very spot where his victim lies stark and reproachful, and stares at it spellbound, fascinated, filled more with remorse, perchance, than fear at the risk he runs. So common is this trait, that in mysterious murder cases the police of Paris keep a disguised officer among the crowd at the Morgue, and have thereby made many memorable arrests.

"This way, gentlemen, this way;" and the keeper of the Morgue led the party through one or two rooms into the inner and back recesses of the buildings. It was behind the scenes of the Morgue, and they were made free of its most gruesome secrets as they passed along.

The temperature had suddenly fallen far below freezing-point, and the icy cold chilled to the very marrow. Still worse was an all-pervading, acrid odour of artificially suspended animal decay. The cold-air process, that latest of scientific contrivances to arrest the waste of tissue, has now been applied at the Morgue to preserve and keep the bodies fresh, and allow them to be for a longer time exposed than when running water was the only aid. There are, moreover, many specially contrived refrigerating chests, in which those still unrecognized corpses are laid by for months, to be dragged out, if needs be, like carcasses of meat.

"What a loathsome place!" cried Sir Charles. "Hurry up, Jack! let us get out of this, in Heaven's name!"

"Where's my man?" quickly asked Colonel Papillon in response to this appeal.

"There, the third from the left," whispered M. Floçon. "We hoped you would recognize the corpse at once."

"That? Impossible! You do not expect it, surely? Why, the face is too much mangled for any one to say who it is."

"Are there no indications, no marks or signs, to say whether it is Quadling or not?" asked the Judge in a greatly disappointed tone.

"Absolutely nothing. And yet I am quite satisfied it is not him. For the simple reason that—"

"Yes, yes, go on."

"That Quadling in person is standing out there among the crowd."

CHAPTER XX

M. Floçon was the first to realize the full meaning of Colonel Papillon's surprising statement.

"Run, run, La Pêche! Have the outer doors closed; let no one leave the place."

"Draw back, gentlemen!" he went on, and he hustled his companions with frantic haste out at the back of the mortuary chamber. "Pray Heaven he has not seen us! He would know us, even if we do not him."

Then with no less haste he seized Colonel Papillon by the arm and hurried him by the back passages through the office into the outer, public chamber, where the astonished crowd stood, silent and perturbed, awaiting explanation of their detention.

"Quick, monsieur!" whispered the Chief; "point him out to me."

The request was not unnecessary, for when Colonel Papillon went forward, and, putting his hand on a man's shoulder, saying, "Mr. Quadling, I think," the police officer was scarcely able to restrain his surprise.
The person thus challenged was very unlike any one he had seen before that day, Ripaldi most of all. The moustache was gone, the clothes were entirely changed; a pair of dark green spectacles helped the disguise. It was strange indeed that Papillon had known him; but at the moment of recognition Quadling had removed his glasses, no doubt that he might the better examine the object of his visit to the Morgue, that gruesome record of his own fell handiwork.

Naturally he drew back with well-feigned indignation, muttering half-unintelligible words in French, denying stoutly both in voice and gesture all acquaintance with the person who thus abruptly addressed him.

"This is not to be borne," he cried. "Who are you that dares--"

"Ta! ta!" quietly put in M. Floçon; "we will discuss that fully, but not here. Come into the office; come, I say, or must we use force?"

There was no escaping now, and with a poor attempt at bravado the stranger was led away.

"Now, Colonel Papillon, look at him well. Do you know him? Are you satisfied it is--"

"Mr. Quadling, late banker, of Rome. I have not the slightest doubt of it. I recognize him beyond all question."

"That will do. Silence, sir!" This to Quadling. "No observations. I too can recognize you now as the person who called himself Ripaldi an hour or two ago. Denial is useless. Let him be searched; thoroughly, you understand, La Pêche? Call in your other men; he may resist."

They gave the wretched man but scant consideration, and in less than three minutes had visited every pocket, examined every secret receptacle, and practically turned him inside out.

After this there could no longer be any doubt of his identity, still less of his complicity in the crime.

First among the many damning evidences of his guilt was the missing pocketbook of the porter of the sleeping-car. Within was the train card and the passengers' tickets, all the papers which the man Groote had lost so unaccountably. They had, of course, been stolen from his person with the obvious intention of impeding the inquiry into the murder. Next, in another inner pocket was Quadling's own wallet, with his own visiting-cards, several letters addressed to him by name; above all, a thick sheaf of bank-notes of all nationalities—English, French, Italian, and amounting in total value to several thousands of pounds.

"Well, do you still deny? Bah! it is childish, useless, mere waste of breath. At last we have penetrated the mystery. You may as well confess. Whether or no, we have enough to convict you by independent testimony," said the Judge, severely. "Come, what have you to say?"

But Quadling, with pale, averted face, stood obstinately mute. He was in the toils, the net had closed round him, they should have no assistance from him.

"Come, speak out; it will be best. Remember, we have means to make you--"

"Will you interrogate him further, M. Beaumont le Hardi? Here, at once?"

"No, let him be removed to the Prefecture; it will be more convenient; to my private office."

Without more ado a fiacre was called, and the prisoner was taken off under escort, M. Floçon seated by his side, one policeman in front, another on the box, and lodged in a secret cell at the Quai l'Horloge.

"And you, gentlemen?" said the Judge to Sir Charles and Colonel Papillon. "I do not wish to detain you further, although there may be points you might help us to elucidate if I might venture to still trespass on your time?"

Sir Charles was eager to return to the Hôtel Madagascar, and yet he felt that he should best serve his dear Countess by seeing this to the end. So he readily assented to accompany the Judge, and Colonel Papillon, who was no less curious, agreed to go too.

"I sincerely trust," said the Judge on the way, "that our people have laid hands on that woman Petitpré. I believe that she holds the key to the situation, that when we hear her story we shall have a clear case against Quadling; and--who knows?--she may completely exonerate Madame la Comtesse."

During the events just recorded, which occupied a good hour, the police agents had time to go and come from the Rue Bellechasse. They did not return empty-handed, although at first it seemed as second-class place, a lodging-house, or hotel with furnished rooms let out by the week to lodgers with whom the proprietor had no very close acquaintance. His clerk did all the business, and this functionary produced the register, as he is bound by law, for the inspection of the police officers, but afforded little information as to the day's arrivals.

"Yes, a man calling himself Dufour had taken rooms about midday, one for himself, one for madame who was with him, also named Dufour—his sister, he said;" and he went on at the request of the police officers to describe them.

"Our birds," said the senior agent, briefly. "They are wanted. We belong to the detective police."

"All right." Such visits were not new to the clerk.

"But you will not find monsieur; he is out; there hangs his key. Madame? No, she is within. Yes, that is certain, for not long since she rang her bell. There, it goes again."

He looked up at the furiously oscillating bell, but made no move.
"Bah! they do not pay for service; let her come and say what she needs."

"Exactly; and we will bring her," said the officer, making for the stairs and the room indicated.

But on reaching the door, they found it locked. From within? Hardly, for as they stood there in doubt, a voice inside cried vehemently:

"Let me out! Help! Help! Send for the police. I have much to tell them. Quick! Let me out."

"We are here, my dear, just as you require us. But wait; step down, Gaston, and see if the clerk has a second key. If not, call in a locksmith—the nearest. A little patience only, my beauty. Do not fear."

The key was quickly produced, and an entrance effected.

A woman stood there in a defiant attitude, with arms akimbo; she, no doubt, of whom they were in search. A tall, rather masculine-looking creature, with a dark, handsome face, bold black eyes just now flashing fiercely, rage in every feature.

"Madame Dufour?" began the police officer.

"Dufour! Rot! My name is Hortense Petitpré; who are you? _La Rousse?" (Police.)

"At your service. Have you anything to say to us? We have come on purpose to take you to the Prefecture quietly, if you will let us; or—"

"I will go quietly. I ask nothing better. I have to lay information against a miscreant—a murderer—the vile assassin who would have made me his accomplice—the banker, Quadling, of Rome!"

In the fiacre Hortense Petitpré talked on with such incessant abuse, virulent and violent, of Quadling, that her charges were neither precise nor intelligible.

It was not until she appeared before M. Beaumont le Hardi, and was handled with great dexterity by that practised examiner, that her story took definite form.

What she had to say will be best told in the clear, formal language of the official disposition.

The witness inculpated stated:

"She was named Aglaé Hortense Petitpré, thirty-four years of age, a Frenchwoman, born in Paris, Rue de Vincennes No. 374. Was engaged by the Contessa Castagneto, November 19, 189--., in Rome, as lady's maid, and there, at her mistress's domicile, became acquainted with the Sieur Francis Quadling, a banker of the Via Condotti, Rome.

"Quadling had pretensions to the hand of the Countess, and sought, by bribes and entreaties, to interest witness in his suit. Witness often spoke of him in complimentary terms to her mistress, who was not very favourably disposed towards him.

"One afternoon (two days before the murder) Quadling paid a lengthened visit to the Countess. Witness did not hear what occurred, but Quadling came out much distressed, and again urged her to speak to the Countess. He had heard of the approaching departure of the lady from Rome, but said nothing of his own intentions.

"Witness was much surprised to find him in the sleeping-car, but had no talk to him till the following morning, when he asked her to obtain an interview for him with the Countess, and promised a large reward. In making this offer he produced a wallet and exhibited a very large number of notes.

"Witness was unable to persuade the Countess, although she returned to the subject frequently. Witness so informed Quadling, who then spoke to the lady, but was coldly received.

"During the journey witness thought much over the situation. Admitted that the sight of Quadling's money had greatly disturbed her, but, although pressed, would not say when the first idea of robbing him took possession of her. (Note by Judge--That she had resolved to do so is, however, perfectly clear, and the conclusion is borne out by her acts. It was she who secured the Countess's medicine bottle; she, beyond doubt, who drugged the porter at Laroche. In no other way can her presence in the sleeping-car between Laroche and Paris be accounted for—presence which she does not deny.)

"Witness at last reluctantly confessed that she entered the compartment where the murder was committed, and at a critical moment. An affray was actually in progress between the Italian Ripaldi and the incriminated man Quadling, but the witness arrived as the last fatal blow was struck by the latter.

"She saw it struck, and saw the victim fall lifeless on the floor.

"Witness declared she was so terrified she could at first utter no cry, nor call for help, and before she could recover herself the murderer threatened her with the ensanguined knife. She threw herself on her knees, imploring pity, but the man Quadling told her that she was an eye-witness, and could take him to the guillotine,—she also must die.

"Witness at last prevailed on him to spare her life, but only on condition that she would leave the car. He indicated the window as the only way of escape; but on this for a long time she refused to venture, declaring that it was only to exchange one form of death for another. Then, as Quadling again threatened to stab her, she was compelled to accept this last chance, never hoping to win out alive.
"With Quadling's assistance, however, she succeeded in climbing out through the window and in gaining the roof. He had told her to wait for the first occasion when the train slackened speed to leave it and shift for herself. With this intention he gave her a thousand francs, and bade her never show herself again.

Witness descended from the train not far from the small station of Villeneuve on the line, and there took the local train for Paris. Landed at the Lyons Station, she heard of the inquiry in progress, and then, waiting outside, saw Quadling disguised as the Italian leave in company with another man. She followed and marked Quadling down, meaning to denounce him on the first opportunity. Quadling, however, on issuing from the restaurant, had accosted her, and at once offered her a further sum of five thousand francs as the price of silence, and she had gone with him to the Hôtel Ivoire, where she was to receive the sum. Quadling had paid it, but on one condition, that she would remain at the Hotel Ivoire until the following day. Apparently he had distrusted her, for he had contrived to lock her into her compartment. As she did not choose to be so imprisoned, she summoned assistance, and was at length released by the police."

This was the substance of Hortense Petitpré's deposition, and it was corroborated in many small details.

When she appeared before the Judge, with whom Sir Charles Collingham and Colonel Papillon were seated, the former at once pointed out that she was wearing a dark mantle trimmed with the same sort of passementerie as that picked up in the sleeping-car.

L'Envoi

Quadling was in due course brought before the Court of Assize and tried for his life. There was no sort of doubt of his guilt, and the jury so found, but, having regard to certain extenuating circumstances, they recommended him to mercy. The chief of these was Quadling's positive assurance that he had been first attacked by Ripaldi; he declared that the Italian detective had in the first instance tried to come to terms with him, demanding 50,000 francs as his price for allowing him to go at large; that when Quadling distinctly refused to be black-mailed, Ripaldi struck at him with a knife, but that the blow failed to take effect.

Then Quadling closed with him and took the knife from him. It was a fierce encounter, and might have ended either way, but the unexpected entrance of the woman Petitpré took off Ripaldi's attention, and then he, Quadling, maddened and reckless, stabbed him to the heart.

It was not until after the deed was done that Quadling realized the full measure of his crime and its inevitable consequences. Then, in a daring effort to extricate himself, he intimidated the woman Petitpré, and forced her to escape through the sleeping-car window.

It was he who had rung the signal-bell to stop the train and give her a chance of leaving it. It was after the murder, too, that he conceived the idea of personating Ripaldi, and, having disfigured him beyond recognition, as he hoped, he had changed clothes and compartments.

On the strength of this confession Quadling escaped the guillotine, but he was transported to New Caledonia for life.

The money taken on him was forwarded to Rome, and was usefully employed in reducing his liabilities to the depositors in the bank.

The other word.

Some time in June the following announcement appeared in all the Paris papers:

"Yesterday, at the British Embassy, General Sir Charles Collingham, K. C. B., was married to Sabine, Contessa di Castagneto, widow of the Italian Count of that name."

THE END.
The Three Strangers

by Thomas Hardy

AMONG the few features of agricultural England which retain an appearance but little modified by the lapse of centuries, may be reckoned the high, grassy and furzy downs, coombs, or ewe-leases, as they are indifferently called, that fill a large area of certain counties in the south and south-west. If any mark of human occupation is met with hereon, it usually takes the form of the solitary cottage of some shepherd.

Fifty years ago such a lonely cottage stood on such a down, and may possibly be standing there now. In spite of its loneliness, however, the spot, by actual measurement, was not more than five miles from a county-town. Yet that affected it little. Five miles of irregular upland, during the long inimical seasons, with their sleets, snows, rains, and mists, afford withdrawing space enough to isolate a Timon or a Nebuchadnezzar; much less, in fair weather, to please that less repellent tribe, the poets, philosophers, artists, and others who 'conceive and meditate of pleasant things.'

Some old earthen camp or barrow, some clump of trees, at least some starved fragment of ancient hedge is usually taken advantage of in the erection of these forlorn dwellings. But, in the present case, such a kind of shelter had been disregarded. Higher Crowstairs, as the house was called, stood quite detached and undefended. The only reason for its precise situation seemed to be the crossing of two footpaths at right angles hard by, which may have crossed there and thus for a good five hundred years. Hence the house was exposed to the elements on all sides. But, though the wind up here blew unmistakably when it did blow, and the rain hit hard whenever it fell, the various weathers of the winter season were not quite so formidable on the coomb as they were imagined to be by dwellers on low ground. The raw rimes were not so pernicious as in the hollows, and the frosts were scarcely so severe. When the shepherd and his family who tenanted the house were pitied for their sufferings from the exposure, they said that upon the whole they were less inconvenienced by 'wuzzes and flames' (hoarses and phlegms) than when they had lived by the stream of a snug neighbouring valley.

The night of March 28, 182-, was precisely one of the nights that were wont to call forth these expressions of commiseration. The level rainstorm smote walls, slopes, and hedges like the clothyard shafts of Senlac and Crecy. Such sheep and outdoor animals as had no shelter stood with their buttocks to the winds; while the tails of little birds trying to roost on some scraggy thorn were blown inside-out like umbrellas. The gable-end of the cottage was stained with wet, and the eavesdroppings flapped against the wall. Yet never was commiseration for the shepherd more misplaced. For that cheerful rustic was entertaining a large party in glorification of the christening of his second girl.

The guests had arrived before the rain began to fall, and they were all now assembled in the chief or living room of the dwelling. A glance into the apartment at eight o'clock on this eventful evening would have resulted in the opinion that it was as cosy and comfortable a nook as could be wished for in boisterous weather. The calling of its inhabitant was proclaimed by a number of highly-polished sheep-crooks without stems that were hung ornamentally over the fireplace, the curl of each shining crook varying from the antiquated type engraved in the patriarchal pictures of old family Bibles to the most approved fashion of the last local sheep-fair. The room was lighted by half-a-dozen candles, having wicks only a trifle smaller than the grease which enveloped them, in candlesticks that were never used but at high-days, holy-days, and family feasts. The lights were scattered about the room, two of them standing on the chimney-piece. This position of candles was in itself significant. Candles on the chimney-piece always meant a party.

On the hearth, in front of a back-brand to give substance, blazed a fire of thorns, that crackled 'like the laughter of the fool.'

Nineteen persons were gathered here. Of these, five women, wearing gowns of various bright hues, sat in chairs along the wall; girls shy and not shy filled the window-bench; four men, including Charley Jake the hedge-carpenter, Elijah New the parish-clerk, and John Pitcher, a neighbouring dairyman, the shepherd's father-in-law, lolled in the settle; a young man and maid, who were blushing over tentative pourparlers on a life-companionship, sat beneath the corner-cupboard; and an elderly engaged man of fifty or upward moved restlessly about from spots where his betrothed was not to the spot where she was. Enjoyment was pretty general, and so much the more prevailed in being unhampered by conventional restrictions. Absolute confidence in each other's good opinion begat perfect ease, while the finishing stroke of manner, amounting to a truly princely serenity, was lent to the majority by the absence of any expression or trait denoting that they wished to get on in the world, enlarge their minds, or do any eclipsing thing whatever--which nowadays so generally nips the bloom and bonhomie of all except the two extremes of the social scale.
Shepherd Fennel had married well, his wife being a dairyman's daughter from a vale at a distance, who brought fifty guineas in her pocket--and kept them there, till they should be required for ministering to the needs of a coming family. This frugal woman had been somewhat exercised as to the character that should be given to the gathering. A sit-still party had its advantages; but an undisturbed position of ease in chairs and settles was apt to lead on the men to such an unconscionable deal of topping that they would sometimes fairly drink the house dry. A dancing-party was the alternative; but this, while avoiding the foregoing objection on the score of good drink, had a counterbalancing disadvantage in the matter of good victuals, the ravenous appetites engendered by the exercise causing immense havoc in the buttery. Shepherdess Fennel fell back upon the intermediate plan of mingling short dances with short periods of talk and singing, so as to hinder any ungovernable rage in either. But this scheme was entirely confined to her own gentle mind: the shepherd himself was in the mood to exhibit the most reckless phases of hospitality.

The fiddler was a boy of those parts, about twelve years of age, who had a wonderful dexterity in jigs and reels, though his fingers were so small and short as to necessitate a constant shifting for the high notes, from which he scrambled back to the first position with sounds not of unmixed purity of tone. At seven the shrill tweedle-dee of this youngster had begun, accompanied by a booming ground-bass from Elijah New, the parish-clerk, who had thoughtfully brought with him his favourite musical instrument, the serpent. Dancing was instantaneous, Mrs. Fennel privately enjoining the players on no account to let the dance exceed the length of a quarter of an hour.

But Elijah and the boy, in the excitement of their position, quite forgot the injunction. Moreover, Oliver Giles, a man of seventeen, one of the dancers, who was enamoured of his partner, a fair girl of thirty-three rolling years, had recklessly handed a new crown-piece to the musicians, as a bribe to keep going as long as they had muscle and wind. Mrs. Fennel, seeing the steam begin to generate on the countenances of her guests, crossed over and touched the fiddler's elbow and put her hand on the serpent's mouth. But they took no notice, and fearing she might lose her character of genial hostess if she were to interfere too markedly, she retired and sat down helpless. And so the dance whizzed on with cumulative fury, the performers moving in their planet-like courses, direct and retrograde, from apogee to perigee, till the hand of the well-kicked clock at the bottom of the room had travelled over the circumference of an hour.

While these cheerful events were in course of enactment within Fennel's pastoral dwelling, an incident having considerable bearing on the party had occurred in the gloomy night without. Mrs. Fennel's concern about the growing fierceness of the dance corresponded in point of time with the ascent of a human figure to the solitary hill of Higher Crowstairs from the direction of the distant town. This personage strode on through the rain without a pause, following the little-worn path which, further on in its course, skirted the shepherd's cottage.

It was nearly the time of full moon, and on this account, though the sky was lined with a uniform sheet of dripping cloud, ordinary objects out of doors were readily visible. The sad wan light revealed the lonely pedestrian to be a man of supple frame; his gait suggested that he had somewhat passed the period of perfect and instinctive agility, though not so far as to be otherwise than rapid of motion when occasion required. At a rough guess, he might have been about forty years of age. He appeared tall, but a recruiting sergeant, or other person accustomed to the judging of men's heights by the eye, would have discerned that this was chiefly owing to his gauntness, and that he was not more than five-feet-eight or nine.

Notwithstanding the regularity of his tread, there was caution in it, as in that of one who mentally feels his way; and despite the fact that it was not a black coat nor a dark garment of any sort that he wore, there was something about him which suggested that he naturally belonged to the black-coated tribes of men. His clothes were of fustian, and his boots hobnailed, yet in his progress he showed not the mud-accustomed bearing of hobnailed and fustianed peasantry.

By the time that he had arrived abreast of the shepherd's premises the rain came down, or rather came along, with yet more determined violence. The outskirts of the little settlement partially broke the force of wind and rain, and this induced him to stand still. The most salient of the shepherd's domestic erections was an empty sty at the forward corner of his hedgeless garden, for in these latitudes the principle of masking the homelier features of your establishment by a conventional frontage was unknown. The traveller's eye was attracted to this small building by the pallid shine of the wet slates that covered it. He turned aside, and, finding it empty, stood under the pent-roof for a pause, following the little-worn path which, further on in its course, skirted the shepherd's cottage.

While he stood, the boom of the serpent within the adjacent house, and the lesser strains of the fiddler, reached the spot as an accompaniment to the surging hiss of the flying rain on the sod, its louder beating on the cabbage-leaves of the garden, on the eight or ten beehives just discernible by the path, and its dripping from the eaves into a row of buckets and pans that had been placed under the walls of the cottage. For at Higher Crowstairs, as at all such elevated domiciles, the grand difficulty of housekeeping was an insufficiency of water; and a casual rainfall was utilized by turning out, as catchers, every utensil that the house contained. Some queer stories might be told of the contrivances for economy in suds and dish-waters that are absolutely necessitated in upland habitations during the
droughts of summer. But at this season there were no such exigencies; a mere acceptance of what the skies bestowed
was sufficient for an abundant store.

At last the notes of the serpent ceased and the house was silent. This cessation of activity aroused the solitary
pedestrian from the reverie into which he had lapsed, and, emerging from the shed, with an apparently new
intention, he walked up the path to the house-door. Arrived here, his first act was to kneel down on a large stone
beside the row of vessels, and to drink a copious draught from one of them. Having quenched his thirst he rose and
lifted his hand to knock, but paused with his eye upon the panel. Since the dark surface of the wood revealed
absolutely nothing, it was evident that he must be mentally looking through the door, as if he wished to measure
thereby all the possibilities that a house of this sort might include, and how they might bear upon the question of his
entry.

In his indecision he turned and surveyed the scene around. Not a soul was anywhere visible. The garden-path
stretched downward from his feet, gleaming like the track of a snail the roof of the little well (mostly dry), the well-
cover, the top rail of the garden-gate, were varnished with the same dull liquid glaze; while, far away in the vale, a
faunt whiteness of more than usual extent showed that the rivers were high in the meads. Beyond all this winked a
few blearred lamplights through the beating drops--lights that denoted the situation of the county-town from which
he had appeared to come. The absence of all notes of life in that direction seemed to clinch his intentions, and he
knocked at the door.

Within, a desultory chat had taken the place of movement and musical sound. The hedge-carpenter was
suggesting a song to the company, which nobody just then was inclined to undertake, so that the knock afforded a
not unwelcome diversion.

'Walk in!' said the shepherd promptly.

The latch clicked upward, and out of the night our pedestrian appeared upon the door-mat. The shepherd arose,
snuffed two of the nearest candles, and turned to look at him.

Their light disclosed that the stranger was dark in complexion and not unprepossessing as to feature. His hat,
which for a moment he did not remove, hung low over his eyes, without concealing that they were large, open, and
determined, moving with a flash rather than a glance round the room. He seemed pleased with his survey, and,
baring his shaggy head, said, in a rich deep voice, 'The rain is so heavy, friends, that I ask leave to come in and rest
awhile.'

'To be sure, stranger,' said the shepherd. 'And faith, you've been lucky in choosing your time, for we are having a
bit of a fling for a glad cause--though, to be sure, a man could hardly wish that glad cause to happen more than once
a year.'

'Nor less,' spoke up a woman. 'For 'tis best to get your family over and done with, as soon as you can, so as to be
all the earlier out of the fag o't.'

'And what may be this glad cause?' asked the stranger.

'A birth and christening,' said the shepherd.

The stranger hoped his host might not be made unhappy either by too many or too few of such episodes, and
being invited by a gesture to a seat at the mug, he readily acquiesced. His manner, which, before entering, had been
so dubious, was now altogether that of a careless and candid man.

'Late to be traipsing athwart this coomb--hey?' said the engaged man of fifty.

'Late it is, master, as you say.--I'll take a seat in the chimney-corner, if you have nothing to urge against it,
ma'am; for I am a little moist on the side that was next the rain.'

Mrs. Shepherd Fennel assented, and made room for the self-invited comer, who, having got completely inside
the chimney-corner, stretched out his legs and his arms with the expansiveness of a person quite at home.

'Yes, I am rather cracked in the vamp,' he said freely, seeing that the eyes of the shepherd's wife fell upon his
boots, 'and I am not well fitted either. I have had some rough times lately, and have been forced to pick up what I
can in the way of wearing, but I must find a suit better fit for working-days when I reach home.'

'One of hereabouts?' she inquired.

'Not quite that--further up the country.'

'I thought so. And so be I; and by your tongue you come from my neighbourhood.'

'But you would hardly have heard of me,' he said quickly. 'My time would be long before yours, ma'am, you see.'

This testimony to the youthfulness of his hostess had the effect of stopping her cross-examination.

'There is only one thing more wanted to make me happy,' continued the new-comer. 'And that is a little baccy,
which I am sorry to say I am out of.'

'I'll fill your pipe,' said the shepherd.

'I must ask you to lend me a pipe likewise.'

'A smoker, and no pipe about 'ee?'
'I have dropped it somewhere on the road.'

The shepherd filled and handed him a new clay pipe, saying, as he did so, 'Hand me your baccy-box--I'll fill that too, now I am about it.'

The man went through the movement of searching his pockets.

'Lost that too?' said his entertainer, with some surprise.

'I am afraid so,' said the man with some confusion. 'Give it to me in a screw of paper.' Lighting his pipe at the candle with a suction that drew the whole flame into the bowl, he resettled himself in the corner and bent his looks upon the faint steam from his damp legs, as if he wished to say no more.

Meanwhile the general body of guests had been taking little notice of this visitor by reason of an absorbing discussion in which they were engaged with the band about a tune for the next dance. The matter being settled, they were about to stand up when an interruption came in the shape of another knock at the door.

At sound of the same the man in the chimney-corner took up the poker and began stirring the brands as if doing it thoroughly were the one aim of his existence; and a second time the shepherd said, 'Walk in!' In a moment another man stood upon the straw-woven door-mat. He too was a stranger.

This individual was one of a type radically different from the first. There was more of the commonplace in his manner, and a certain jovial cosmopolitanism sat upon his features. He was several years older than the first arrival, his hair being slightly frosted, his eyebrows bristly, and his whiskers cut back from his cheeks. His face was rather full and flabby, and yet it was not altogether a face without power. A few grog-blossoms marked the neighbourhood of his nose. He flung back his long drab greatcoat, revealing that beneath it he wore a suit of cinder-gray shade throughout, large heavy seals, of some metal or other that would take a polish, dangling from his fob as his only personal ornament. Shaking the water-drops from his low-crowned glazed hat, he said, 'I must ask for a few minutes' shelter, comrades, or I shall be wetted to my skin before I get to Casterbridge.'

'Make yourself at home, master,' said the shepherd, perhaps a trifle less heartily than on the first occasion. Not that Fennel had the least tinge of niggardliness in his composition; but the room was far from large, spare chairs were not numerous, and damp companions were not altogether desirable at close quarters for the women and girls in their bright-coloured gowns.

However, the second comer, after taking off his greatcoat, and hanging his hat on a nail in one of the ceiling-beams as if he had been specially invited to put it there, advanced and sat down at the table. This had been pushed so closely into the chimney-corner, to give all available room to the dancers, that its inner edge grazed the elbow of the man who had ensconced himself by the fire; and thus the two strangers were brought into close companionship. They nodded to each other by way of breaking the ice of unacquaintance, and the first stranger handed his neighbour the family mug--a huge vessel of brown ware, having its upper edge worn away like a threshold by the rub of whole generations of thirsty lips that had gone the way of all flesh, and bearing the following inscription burnt upon its rotund side in yellow letters:-- THERE IS NO FUN UNTILL i CUM.

The other man, nothing loth, raised the mug to his lips, and drank on, and on, and on--till a curious blueness overspread the countenance of the shepherd's wife, who had regarded with no little surprise the first stranger's free offer to the second of what did not belong to him to dispense.

'I knew it!' said the toper to the shepherd with much satisfaction. 'When I walked up your garden before coming in, and saw the hives all of a row, I said to myself, 'Where there's bees there's honey, and where there's honey there's mead.' But mead of such a truly comfortable sort as this I really didn't expect to meet in my older days.' He took yet another pull at the mug, till it assumed an ominous elevation.

'Glad you enjoy it!' I said the shepherd warmly.

'It is goodish mead,' assented Mrs. Fennel, with an absence of enthusiasm which seemed to say that it was possible to buy praise for one's cellar at too heavy a price. 'It is trouble enough to make--and really I hardly think we shall make any more. For honey sells well, and we ourselves can make shift with a drop o' small mead and metheglin for common use from the comb-washings.'

'O, but you'll never have the heart!' reproachfully cried the stranger in cinder-gray, after taking up the mug a third time and setting it down empty. 'I love mead, when 'tis old like this, as I love to go to church o' Sundays, or to relieve the needy any day of the week.'

'Ha, ha, ha!' said the man in the chimney-corner, who, in spite of the taciturnity induced by the pipe of tobacco, could not or would not refrain from this slight testimony to his comrade's humour.

Now the old mead of those days, brewed of the purest first-year or maiden honey, four pounds to the gallon--with its due complement of white of eggs, cinnamon, ginger, cloves, mace, rosemary, yeast, and processes of working, bottling, and cellaring--tasted remarkably strong; but it did not taste so strong as it actually was. Hence, presently, the stranger in cinder-gray at the table, moved by its creeping influence, unbuttoned his waistcoat, threw himself back in his chair, spread his legs, and made his presence felt in various ways.
'Well, well, as I say,' he resumed, 'I am going to Casterbridge, and to Casterbridge I must go. I should have been almost there by this time; but the rain drove me into your dwelling, and I'm not sorry for it.'

'You don't live in Casterbridge?' said the shepherd.

'Not as yet; though I shortly mean to move there.'

'Going to set up in trade, perhaps?'

'No, no,' said the shepherd's wife. 'It is easy to see that the gentleman is rich, and don't want to work at anything.'

The cinder-gray stranger paused, as if to consider whether he would accept that definition of himself. He presently rejected it by answering, 'Rich is not quite the word for me, dame. I do work, and I must work. And even if I only get to Casterbridge by midnight I must begin work there at eight to-morrow morning. Yes, het or wet, blow or snow, famine or sword, my day's work to-morrow must be done.'

'Poor man! Then, in spite o' seeming, you be worse off than we?' replied the shepherd's wife.

'Tis the nature of my trade, men and maidens. 'Tis the nature of my trade more than my poverty. But really and truly I must up and off, or I shan't get a lodging in the town.' However, the speaker did not move, and directly added, 'There's time for one more draught of friendship before I go; and I'd perform it at once if the mug were not dry.'

'Here's a mug o' small,' said Mrs. Fennel. 'Small, we call it, though to be sure 'tis only the first wash o' the combs.'

'No,' said the stranger disdainfully. 'I won't spoil your first kindness by partaking o' your second.'

'Certainly not,' broke in Fennel. 'We don't increase and multiply every day, and I'll fill the mug again.' He went away to the dark place under the stairs where the barrel stood. The shepherdess followed him.

'Why should you do this?' she said reproachfully, as soon as they were alone. 'He's emptied it once, though it held enough for ten people; and now he's not contented wi' the small, but must needs call for more o' the strong! And a stranger unbeknown to any of us. For my part, I don't like the look o' the man at all.'

'But he's in the house, my honey; and 'tis a wet night, and a christening. Daze it, what's a cup of mead more or less? There'll be plenty more next bee-burning.'

'Very well--this time, then,' she answered, looking wistfully at the barrel. 'But what is the man's calling, and where is he one of, that he should come in and join us like this?'

'I don't know. I'll ask him again.'

The catastrophe of having the mug drained dry at one pull by the stranger in cinder-gray was effectually guarded against this time by Mrs. Fennel. She poured out his allowance in a small cup, keeping the large one at a discreet distance from him. When he had tossed off his portion the shepherd renewed his inquiry about the stranger's occupation.

The latter did not immediately reply, and the man in the chimney-corner, with sudden demonstrativeness, said, 'Anybody may know my trade--I'm a wheel-wright.'

'A very good trade for these parts,' said the shepherd.

'And anybody may know mine--if they've the sense to find it out,' said the stranger in cinder-gray.

'You may generally tell what a man is by his claws,' observed the hedge-carpenter, looking at his own hands.

'My fingers be as full of thorns as an old pin-cushion is of pins.'

The hands of the man in the chimney-corner instinctively sought the shade, and he gazed into the fire as he resumed his pipe. The man at the table took up the hedge-carpenter's remark, and added smartly, 'True; but the oddity of my trade is that, instead of setting a mark upon me, it sets a mark upon my customers.'

No observation being offered by anybody in elucidation of this enigma, the shepherd's wife once more called for a song. The same obstacles presented themselves as at the former time--one had no voice, another had forgotten the first verse. The stranger at the table, whose soul had now risen to a good working temperature, relieved the difficulty by exclaiming that, to start the company, he would sing himself. Thrusting one thumb into the arm-hole of his waistcoat, he waved the other hand in the air, and, with an extemporizing gaze at the shining sheep-crooks above the mantelpiece, began:--

'O my trade it is the rarest one, Simple shepherds all---My trade is a sight to see; For my customers I tie, and take them up on high, And waft 'em to a far countree!'
quietly said, 'Second verse, stranger,' and smoked on.

The singer thoroughly moistened himself from his lips inwards, and went on with the next stanza as requested:--

'My tools are but common ones, Simple shepherds all-- My tools are no sight to see: A little hempen string, and a
post whereon to swing Are implements enough for me!'

Shepherd Fennel glanced round. There was no longer any doubt that the stranger was answering his question
rhythmically. The guests one and all started back with suppressed exclamations. The young woman engaged to the
man of fifty fainted half-way, and would have proceeded, but finding him wanting in alacrity for catching her she sat
down trembling.

'O, he's the ----!' whispered the people in the background, mentioning the name of an ominous public officer.

'He's come to do it! 'Tis to be at Casterbridge jail to-morrow--the man for sheep-stealing--the poor clock-maker we
heard of, who used to live away at Shottsford and had no work to do--Timothy Summers, whose family were a-
starving, and so he went out of Shottsford by the high-road, and took a sheep in open daylight, defying the farmer
and the farmer's wife and the farmer's lad, and every man jack among 'em. He' (and they nodded towards the
stranger of the deadly trade) 'is come from up the country to do it because there's not enough to do in his own
county-town, and he's got the place here now our own county man's dead; he's going to live in the same cottage
under the prison wall.'

The stranger in cinder-gray took no notice of this whispered string of observations, but again wetted his lips.
Seeing that his friend in the chimney-corner was the only one who reciprocated his joviality in any way, he held out
his cup towards that appreciative comrade, who also held out his own. They clinked together, the eyes of the rest of
the room hanging upon the singer's actions. He parted his lips for the third verse; but at that moment another knock
was audible upon the door. This time the knock was faint and hesitating.

The company seemed scared; the shepherd looked with consternation towards the entrance, and it was with some
effort that he resisted his alarmed wife's deprecatory glance, and uttered for the third time the welcoming words,
'Walk in!'

The door was gently opened, and another man stood upon the mat. He, like those who had preceded him, was a
stranger. This time it was a short, small personage, of fair complexion, and dressed in a decent suit of dark clothes.

'Can you tell me the way to----?' he began: when, gazing round the room to observe the nature of the company
amongst whom he had fallen, his eyes lighted on the stranger in cinder-gray. It was just at the instant when the latter,
who had thrown his mind into his song with such a will that he scarcely heeded the interruption, silenced all
whispers and inquiries by bursting into his third verse:--

'To-morrow is my working day, Simple shepherds all-- To-morrow is a working day for me: For the farmer's
sheep is slain, and the lad who did it ta'en, And on his soul may God ha' merc-y!'

The stranger in the chimney-corner, waving cups with the singer so heartily that his mead splashed over on the
hearth, repeated in his bass voice as before:--

'And on his soul may God ha' merc-y!'

All this time the third stranger had been standing in the doorway. Finding now that he did not come forward or
go on speaking, the guests particularly regarded him. They noticed to their surprise that he stood before them the
picture of abject terror--his knees trembling, his hand shaking so violently that the door-latch by which he supported
himself rattled audibly: his white lips were parted, and his eyes fixed on the merry officer of justice in the middle of
the room. A moment more and he had turned, closed the door, and fled.

'What a man can it be?' said the shepherd.

The rest, between the awfulness of their late discovery and the odd conduct of this third visitor, looked as if they
knew not what to think, and said nothing. Instinctively they withdrew further and further from the grim gentleman in
their midst, whom some of them seemed to take for the Prince of Darkness himself, till they formed a remote circle,
an empty space of floor being left between them and him--

'.. circulus, cujus centrum diabolus.'

The room was so silent--though there were more than twenty people in it--that nothing could be heard but the
patter of the rain against the window-shutters, accompanied by the occasional hiss of a stray drop that fell down the
chimney into the fire, and the steady puffing of the man in the corner, who had now resumed his pipe of long clay.

The stillness was unexpectedly broken. The distant sound of a gun reverberated through the air--apparently from
the direction of the county-town.

'Be jiggered!' cried the stranger who had sung the song, jumping up.

'What does that mean?' asked several.

'A prisoner has escaped from the jail--that's what it means.'

All listened. The sound was repeated, and none of them spoke but the man in the chimney-corner, who said
quietly, 'I've often been told that in this county they fire a gun at such times; but I never heard it till now.'
'I wonder if it is my man?' murmured the personage in cinder-gray.
'Surely it is!' said the shepherd involuntarily. 'And surely we've seed him! That little man who looked in at the
door by now, and quivered like a leaf when he seed ye and heard your song!'
'His teeth chattered, and the breath went out of his body,' said the dairyman.
'And his heart seemed to sink within him like a stone,' said Oliver Giles.
'And he bolted as if he'd been shot at,' said the hedge-carpenter.
'True---his teeth chattered, and his heart seemed to sink; and he bolted as if he'd been shot at,' slowly summed up
the man in the chimney-corner.
'I didn't notice it,' remarked the hangman.
'We were all a-wondering what made him run off in such a fright,' faltered one of the women against the wall,
'and now 'tis explained!'
The firing of the alarm-gun went on at intervals, low and sullenly, and their suspicions became a certainty. The
sinister gentleman in cinder-gray roused himself. 'Is there a constable here?' he asked, in thick tones. 'If so, let him
step forward.'
The engaged man of fifty stept quavering out from the wall, his betrothed beginning to sob on the back of the
chair.
'You are a sworn constable?'
'I be, sir.'
'Then, pursue the criminal at once, with assistance, and bring him back here. He can't have gone far.'
'I will sir, I will--when I've got my staff. I'll go home and get it, and come sharp here, and start in a body.'
'Staff!--never mind your staff; the man'll be gone!'
'But I can't do nothing without my staff--can I, William, and John, and Charles Jake? No; for there's the king's
royal crown a painted on en in yaller and gold, and the lion and the unicorn, so as when I raise en up and hit my
prisoner, 'tis made a lawful blow thereby. I wouldn't 'tempt to take up a man without my staff--no, not I. If I hadn't
the law to gie me courage, why, instead o' my taking up him he might take up me!'
'Now, I'm a king's man myself, and can give you authority enough for this,' said the formidable officer in gray.
'Now then, all of ye, be ready. Have ye any lanterns?'
'Yes--have ye any lanterns?--I demand it!' said the constable.
'And the rest of you able-bodied----'
'Able-bodied men--yes--the rest of ye!' said the constable.
'Have you some good stout staves and pitch-forks----'
'Staves and pitchforks--in the name o' the law! And take 'em in yer hands and go in quest, and do as we in
authority tell ye!'
Thus aroused, the men prepared to give chase. The evidence was, indeed, though circumstantial, so convincing,
that but little argument was needed to show the shepherd's guests that after what they had seen it would look very
much like connivance if they did not instantly pursue the unhappy third stranger, who could not as yet have gone
more than a few hundred yards over such uneven country.
A shepherd is always well provided with lanterns; and, lighting these hastily, and with hurdle-staves in their
hands, they poured out of the door, taking a direction along the crest of the hill, away from the town, the rain having
fortunately a little abated.
Disturbed by the noise, or possibly by unpleasant dreams of her baptism, the child who had been christened
began to cry heart-brokenly in the room overhead. These notes of grief came down through the chinks of the floor to
the ears of the women below, who jumped up one by one, and seemed glad of the excuse to ascend and comfort the
baby, for the incidents of the last half-hour greatly oppressed them. Thus in the space of two or three minutes the
room on the ground-floor was deserted quite.
But it was not for long. Hardly had the sound of footsteps died away when a man returned round the corner of
the house from the direction the pursuers had taken. Peeping in at the door, and seeing nobody there, he entered
leisurely. It was the stranger of the chimney-corner, who had gone out with the rest. The motive of his return was
shown by his helping himself to a cut piece of skimmer-cake that lay on a ledge beside where he had sat, and which
he had apparently forgotten to take with him. He also poured out half a cup more mead from the quantity that
remained, ravenously eating and drinking these as he stood. He had not finished when another figure came in just as
quietly--his friend in cinder-gray.
'O--you here?' said the latter, smiling. 'I thought you had gone to help in the capture.' And this speaker also
revealed the object of his return by looking solicitously round for the fascinating mug of old mead.
'And I thought you had gone,' said the other, continuing his skimmer-cake with some effort.
'Well, on second thoughts, I felt there were enough without me,' said the first confidentially, 'and such a night as
it is, too. Besides, 'tis the business o' the Government to take care of its criminals--not mine.'

'True; so it is. And I felt as you did, that there were enough without me.'

'I don't want to break my limbs running over the humps and hollows of this wild country.'

'Nor I neither, between you and me.'

'These shepherd-people are used to it--simple-minded souls, you know, stirred up to anything in a moment. They'll have him ready for me before the morning, and no trouble to me at all.'

'They'll have him, and we shall have saved ourselves all labour in the matter.'

'True, true. Well, my way is to Casterbridge; and 'tis as much as my legs will do to take me that far. Going the same way?'

'No, I am sorry to say! I have to get home over there' (he nodded indefinitely to the right), 'and I feel as you do, that it is quite enough for my legs to do before bedtime.'

The other had by this time finished the mead in the mug, after which, shaking hands heartily at the door, and wishing each other well, they went their several ways.

In the meantime the company of pursuers had reached the end of the hog's-back elevation which dominated this part of the down. They had decided on no particular plan of action; and, finding that the man of the baleful trade was no longer in their company, they seemed quite unable to form any such plan now. They descended in all directions down the hill, and straightway several of the party fell into the snare set by Nature for all misguided midnight ramblers over this part of the cretaceous formation. The 'lanchets,' or flint slopes, which belted the escarpment at intervals of a dozen yards, took the less cautious ones unawares, and losing their footing on the rubbly steep they slid sharply downwards, the lanterns rolling from their hands to the bottom, and there lying on their sides till the horn was scorched through.

When they had again gathered themselves together, the shepherd, as the man who knew the country best, took the lead, and guided them round these treacherous inclines. The lanterns, which seemed rather to dazzle their eyes and warn the fugitive than to assist them in the exploration, were extinguished, due silence was observed; and in this more rational order they plunged into the vale. It was a grassy, briery, moist defile, affording some shelter to any person who had sought it; but the party perambulated it in vain, and ascended on the other side. Here they wandered apart, and after an interval closed together again to report progress. At the second time of closing in they found themselves near a lonely ash, the single tree on this part of the coomb, probably sown there by a passing bird some fifty years before. And here, standing a little to one side of the trunk, as motionless as the trunk itself, appeared the man they were in quest of, his outline being well defined against the sky beyond. The band noiselessly drew up and faced him.

'Your money or your life!' said the constable sternly to the still figure.

'No, no,' whispered John Pitcher. Tisn't our side ought to say that. That's the doctrine of vagabonds like him, and we be on the side of the law.'

'Well, well,' replied the constable impatiently; 'I must say something, mustn't I? and if you had all the weight o' this undertaking upon your mind, perhaps you'd say the wrong thing too!--Prisoner at the bar, surrender, in the name of the Father--the Crown, I mane!'

The man under the tree seemed now to notice them for the first time, and, giving them no opportunity whatever for exhibiting their courage, he strolled slowly towards them. He was, indeed, the little man, the third stranger; but his trepidation had in a great measure gone.

'Well, travellers,' he said, 'did I hear ye speak to me?'

'You did: you've got to come and be our prisoner at once!' said the constable. 'We arrest 'ee on the charge of not biding in Casterbridge jail in a decent proper manner to be hung to-morrow morning. Neighbours, do your duty, and seize the culprit!'

On hearing the charge, the man seemed enlightened, and, saying not another word, resigned himself with preternatural civility to the search-party, who, with their staves in their hands, surrounded him on all sides, and marched him back towards the shepherd's cottage.

It was eleven o'clock by the time they arrived. The light shining from the open door, a sound of men's voices within, proclaimed to them as they approached the house that some new events had arisen in their absence. On entering they discovered the shepherd's living room to be invaded by two officers from Casterbridge jail, and a well-known magistrate who lived at the nearest country-seat, intelligence of the escape having become generally circulated.

'Gentlemen,' said the constable, 'I have brought back your man--not without risk and danger; but every one must do his duty! He is inside this circle of able-bodied persons, who have lent me useful aid, considering their ignorance of Crown work. Men, bring forward your prisoner!' And the third stranger was led to the light.

'Who is this?' said one of the officials.
'The man,' said the constable.
'Certainly not,' said the turnkey; and the first corroborated his statement.
'But how can it be otherwise?' asked the constable. 'or why was he so terrified at sight o' the singing instrument of the law who sat there?' Here he related the strange behaviour of the third stranger on entering the house during the hangman's song.
'Can't understand it,' said the officer coolly. 'All I know is that it is not the condemned man. He's quite a different character from this one; a gauntish fellow, with dark hair and eyes; rather good-looking, and with a musical bass voice that if you heard it once you'd never mistake as long as you lived.'
'Why, souls--'twas the man in the chimney-corner!'
'Hey--what?' said the magistrate, coming forward after inquiring particulars from the shepherd in the background. 'Haven't you got the man after all?'
'Well, sir,' said the constable, 'he's the man we were in search of, that's true; and yet he's not the man we were in search of. For the man we were in search of was not the man we wanted, sir, if you understand my every-day way; for 'twas the man in the chimney-corner!'
'A pretty kettle of fish altogether!' said the magistrate. 'You had better start for the other man at once.'

The prisoner now spoke for the first time. The mention of the man in the chimney-corner seemed to have moved him as nothing else could do. 'Sir,' he said, stepping forward to the magistrate, 'take no more trouble about me. The time is come when I may as well speak. I have done nothing; my crime is that the condemned man is my brother. Early this afternoon I left home at Shottsford to tramp it all the way to Casterbridge jail to bid him farewell. I was benighted, and called here to rest and ask the way. When I opened the door I saw before me the very man, my brother, that I thought to see in the condemned cell at Casterbridge. He was in this chimney-corner; and jammed close to him, so that he could not have got out if he had tried, was the executioner who'd come to take his life, singing a song about it and not knowing that it was his victim who was close by, joining in to save appearances. My brother looked a glance of agony at me, and I knew he meant, 'Don't reveal what you see; my life depends on it.' I was so terror-struck that I could hardly stand, and, not knowing what I did, I turned and hurried away.'

The narrator's manner and tone had the stamp of truth, and his story made a great impression on all around. 'And do you know where your brother is at the present time?' asked the magistrate.
'I do not. I have never seen him since I closed this door.'
'I can testify to that, for we've been between ye ever since,' said the constable.
'Where does he think to fly to?--what is his occupation?'
'He's a watch-and-clock-maker, sir.'

'A said 'a was a wheelwright--a wicked rogue,' said the constable.
'The wheels of clocks and watches he meant, no doubt,' said Shepherd Fennel. 'I thought his hands were palish for's trade.'

'Well, it appears to me that nothing can be gained by retaining this poor man in custody,' said the magistrate; 'your business lies with the other, unquestionably.'

And so the little man was released off-hand; but he looked nothing the less sad on that account, it being beyond the power of magistrate or constable to raze out the written troubles in his brain, for they concerned another whom he regarded with more solicitude than himself. When this was done, and the man had gone his way, the night was found to be so far advanced that it was deemed useless to renew the search before the next morning.

Next day, accordingly, the quest for the clever sheep-stealer became general and keen, to all appearance at least. But the intended punishment was cruelly disproportioned to the transgression, and the sympathy of a great many country-folk in that district was strongly on the side of the fugitive. Moreover, his marvellous coolness and daring in hob-and-nobbing with the hangman, under the unprecedented circumstances of the shepherd's party, won their admiration. So that it may be questioned if all those who ostensibly made themselves so busy in exploring woods and fields and lanes were quite so thorough when it came to the private examination of their own lofts and outhouses. Stories were afloat of a mysterious figure being occasionally seen in some old overgrown trackway or other, remote from turnpike roads; but when a search was instituted in any of these suspected quarters nobody was found. Thus the days and weeks passed without tidings.

In brief, the bass-voiced man of the chimney-corner was never recaptured. Some said that he went across the sea, others that he did not, but buried himself in the depths of a populous city. At any rate, the gentleman in cinder-gray never did his morning's work at Casterbridge, nor met anywhere at all, for business purposes, the genial comrade with whom he had passed an hour of relaxation in the lonely house on the coomb.

The grass has long been green on the graves of Shepherd Fennel and his frugal wife; the guests who made up the christening party have mainly followed their entertainers to the tomb; the baby in whose honour they all had met is a matron in the sere and yellow leaf. But the arrival of the three strangers at the shepherd's that night, and the details
connected therewith, is a story as well known as ever in the country about Higher Crowstairs.
The Mystery of the Yellow Room

by Gaston Leroux

CHAPTER I
In Which We Begin Not to Understand

It is not without a certain emotion that I begin to recount here the extraordinary adventures of Joseph Rouletabille. Down to the present time he had so firmly opposed my doing it that I had come to despair of ever publishing the most curious of police stories of the past fifteen years. I had even imagined that the public would never know the whole truth of the prodigious case known as that of The Yellow Room, out of which grew so many mysterious, cruel, and sensational dramas, with which my friend was so closely mixed up, if, propos of a recent nomination of the illustrious Stangerson to the grade of grandcross of the Legion of Honour, an evening journal--in an article, miserable for its ignorance, or audacious for its perfidy--had not resuscitated a terrible adventure of which Joseph Rouletabille had told me he wished to be for ever forgotten.

The Yellow Room! Who now remembers this affair which caused so much ink to flow fifteen years ago? Events are so quickly forgotten in Paris. Has not the very name of the Nayves trial and the tragic history of the death of little Menaldo passed out of mind? And yet the public attention was so deeply interested in the details of the trial that the occurrence of a ministerial crisis was completely unnoticed at the time. Now The Yellow Room trial, which, preceded that of the Nayves by some years, made far more noise. The entire world hung for months over this obscure problem --the most obscure, it seems to me, that has ever challenged the perspicacity of our police or taxed the conscience of our judges. The solution of the problem baffled everybody who tried to find it. It was like a dramatic rebus with which old Europe and new America alike became fascinated. That is, in truth--I am permitted to say, because there cannot be any author's vanity in all this, since I do nothing more than transcribe facts on which an exceptional documentation enables me to throw a new light--that is because, in truth, I do not know that, in the domain of reality or imagination, one can discover or recall to mind anything comparable, in its mystery, with the natural mystery of The Yellow Room.

That which nobody could find out, Joseph Rouletabille, aged eighteen, then a reporter engaged on a leading journal, succeeded in discovering. But when, at the Assize Court, he brought in the key to the whole case, he did not tell the whole truth. He only allowed so much of it to appear as sufficed to ensure the acquittal of an innocent man. The reasons which he had for his reticence no longer exist. Better still, the time has come for my friend to speak out fully. You are going to know all; and, without further preamble, I am going to place before your eyes the problem of The Yellow Room as it was placed before the eyes of the entire world on the day following the enactment of the drama at the Chateau du Glandier.

On the 25th of October, 1892, the following note appeared in the latest edition of the "Temps":

"A frightful crime has been committed at the Glandier, on the border of the forest of Sainte-Genevieve, above Epinay-sur-Orge, at the house of Professor Stangerson. On that night, while the master was working in his laboratory, an attempt was made to assassinate Mademoiselle Stangerson, who was sleeping in a chamber adjoining this laboratory. The doctors do not answer for the life of Mdle. Stangerson."

The impression made on Paris by this news may be easily imagined. Already, at that time, the learned world was deeply interested in the labours of Professor Stangerson and his daughter. These labours --the first that were attempted in radiography--served to open the way for Monsieur and Madame Curie to the discovery of radium. It was expected the Professor would shortly read to the Academy of Sciences a sensational paper on his new theory,--the Dissociation of Matter,--a theory destined to overthrow from its base the whole of official science, which based itself on the principle of the Conservation of Energy. On the following day, the newspapers were full of the tragedy. The "Matin," among others, published the following article, entitled: "A Supernatural Crime":

"These are the only details," wrote the anonymous writer in the "Matin"--"we have been able to obtain concerning the crime of the Chateau du Glandier. The state of despair in which Professor Stangerson is plunged, and the impossibility of getting any information from the lips of the victim, have rendered our investigations and those of justice so difficult that, at present, we cannot form the least idea of what has passed in The Yellow Room in which Mdle. Stangerson, in her night-dress, was found lying on the floor in the agonies of death. We have, at least, been able to interview Daddy Jacques--as he is called in the country--a old servant in the Stangerson family. Daddy Jacques entered The Room at the same time as the Professor. This chamber adjoins the laboratory. Laboratory and Yellow Room are in a pavilion at the end of the park, about three hundred metres (a thousand feet) from the chateau.
“It was half-past twelve at night,” this honest old man told us, ‘and I was in the laboratory, where Monsieur Stangerson was still working, when the thing happened. I had been cleaning and putting instruments in order all the evening and was waiting for Monsieur Stangerson to go to bed. Mademoiselle Stangerson had worked with her father up to midnight; when the twelve strokes of midnight had sounded by the cuckoo-clock in the laboratory, she rose, kissed Monsieur Stangerson and bade him good-night. To me she said “bon soir, Daddy Jacques” as she passed into The Yellow Room. We heard her lock the door and shoot the bolt, so that I could not help laughing, and said to Monsieur: “There's Mademoiselle double-locking herself in,--she must be afraid of the 'Bete du bon Dieu!'” Monsieur did not even hear me, he was so deeply absorbed in what he was doing. Just then we heard the distant miaowing of a cat. “Is that going to keep us awake all night?” I said to myself; for I must tell you, Monsieur, that, to the end of October, I live in an attic of the pavilion over The Yellow Room, so that Mademoiselle should not be left alone through the night in the lonely park. It was the fancy of Mademoiselle to spend the fine weather in the pavilion; no doubt, she found it more cheerful than the chateau and, for the four years it had been built, she had never failed to take up her lodging there in the spring. With the return of winter, Mademoiselle returns to the chateau, for there is no fireplace in The Yellow Room.

“We were staying in the pavilion, then--Monsieur Stangerson and me. We made no noise. He was seated at his desk. As for me, I was sitting on a chair, having finished my work and, looking at him, I said to myself: "What a man!--what intelligence!--what knowledge!" I attach importance to the fact that we made no noise; for, because of that, the assassin certainly thought that we had left the place. And, suddenly, while the cuckoo was sounding the half after midnight, a desperate clamour broke out in The Yellow Room. It was the voice of Mademoiselle, crying "Murder!--murder! --help!" Immediately afterwards revolver shots rang out and there was a great noise of tables and furniture being thrown to the ground, as if in the course of a struggle, and again the voice of Mademoiselle calling, "Murder!--help!--Papa!--Papa!--"

“You may be sure that we quickly sprang up and that Monsieur Stangerson and I threw ourselves upon the door. But alas! it was locked, fast locked, on the inside, by the care of Mademoiselle, as I have told you, with key and bolt. We tried to force it open, but it remained firm. Monsieur Stangerson was like a madman, and truly, it was enough to make him one, for we heard Mademoiselle still calling "Help!--help!" Monsieur Stangerson showered terrible blows on the door, and wept with rage and sobbed with despair and helplessness.

“It was then that I had an inspiration. "The assassin must have entered by the window!" I cried;--"I will go to the window!" and I rushed from the pavilion and ran like one out of his mind.

"The inspiration was that the window of The Yellow Room looks out in such a way that the park wall, which abuts on the pavilion, prevented my at once reaching the window. To get up to it one has first to go out of the park. I ran towards the gate and, on my way, met Bernier and his wife, the gate-keepers, who had been attracted by the pistol reports and by our cries. In a few words I told them what had happened, and directed the concierge to join Monsieur Stangerson with all speed, while his wife came with me to open the park gate. Five minutes later she and I were before the window of The Yellow Room.

"The moon was shining brightly and I saw clearly that no one had touched the window. Not only were the bars that protect it intact, but the blinds inside of them were drawn, as I had myself drawn them early in the evening, as I did every day, though Mademoiselle, knowing that I was tired from the heavy work I had been doing, had begged me not to trouble myself, but leave her to do it; and they were just as I had left them, fastened with an iron catch on the inside. The assassin, therefore, could not have passed either in or out that way; but neither could I get in.

"It was unfortunate,--enough to turn one's brain! The door of the room locked on the inside and the blinds on the only window also fastened on the inside; and Mademoiselle still calling for help!--No! she had ceased to call. She was dead, perhaps. But I still heard her father, in the pavilion, trying to break down the door.

"With the concierge I hurried back to the pavilion. The door, in spite of the furious attempts of Monsieur Stangerson and Bernier to burst it open, was still holding firm; but at length, it gave way before our united efforts,--and then what a sight met our eyes! I should tell you that, behind us, the concierge held the laboratory lamp--a powerful lamp, that lit the whole chamber.

"I must also tell you, monsieur, that The Yellow Room is a very small room. Mademoiselle had furnished it with a fairly large iron bedstead, a small table, a night-commode; a dressing-table, and two chairs. By the light of the big lamp we saw all at a glance. Mademoiselle, in her night-dress, was lying on the floor in the midst of the greatest disorder. Tables and chairs had been overthrown, showing that there had been a violent struggle. Mademoiselle had certainly been dragged from her bed. She was covered with blood and had terrible marks of finger-nails on her throat,--the flesh of her neck having been almost torn by the nails. From a wound on the right temple a stream of blood had run down and made a little pool on the floor. When Monsieur Stangerson saw his daughter in that state, he threw himself on his knees beside her, uttering a cry of despair. He ascertained that she still breathed. As to us, we searched for the wretch who had tried to kill our mistress, and I swear to you, monsieur, that, if we had found him, it
would have gone hard with him!

"But how to explain that he was not there, that he had already escaped? It passes all imagination!--Nobody under the bed, nobody behind the furniture!--All that we discovered were traces, blood-stained marks of a man's large hand on the walls and on the door; a big handkerchief red with blood, without any initials, an old cap, and many fresh footmarks of a man on the floor,--footmarks of a man with large feet whose boot-soles had left a sort of sooty impression. How had this man got away? How had he vanished? Don't forget, monsieur, that there is no chimney in The Yellow Room. He could not have escaped by the door, which is narrow, and on the threshold of which the concierge stood with the lamp, while her husband and I searched for him in every corner of the little room, where it is impossible for anyone to hide himself. The door, which had been forced open against the wall, could not conceal anything behind it, as we assured ourselves. By the window, still in every way secured, no flight had been possible. What then?--I began to believe in the Devil.

"But we discovered my revolver on the floor!--Yes, my revolver! Oh! that brought me back to the reality! The Devil would not have needed to steal my revolver to kill Mademoiselle. The man who had been there had first gone up to my attic and taken my revolver from the drawer where I kept it. We then ascertained, by counting the cartridges, that the assassin had fired two shots. Ah! it was fortunate for me that Monsieur Stangerson was in the laboratory when the affair took place and had seen with his own eyes that I was there with him; for otherwise, with this business of my revolver, I don't know where we should have been,--I should now be under lock and bar. Justice wants no more to send a man to the scaffold!!"

The editor of the "Matin" added to this interview the following lines:

"We have, without interrupting him, allowed Daddy Jacques to recount to us roughly all he knows about the crime of The Yellow Room. We have reproduced it in his own words, only sparing the reader the continual lamentations with which he garnished his narrative. It is quite understood, Daddy Jacques, quite understood, that you are very fond of your masters; and you want them to know it, and never cease repeating it--especially since the discovery of your revolver. It is your right, and we see no harm in it. We should have liked to put some further questions to Daddy Jacques--Jacques--Louis Moustier--but the inquiry of the examining magistrate, which is being carried on at the chateau, makes it impossible for us to gain admission at the Glandier; and, as to the oak wood, it is guarded by a wide circle of policemen, who are jealously watching all traces that can lead to the pavilion, and that may perhaps lead to the discovery of the assassin. "We have also wished to question the concierges, but they are invisible. Finally, we have waited in a roadside inn, not far from the gate of the chateau, for the departure of Monsieur de Marquet, the magistrate of Corbeil. At half-past five we saw him and his clerk and, before he was able to enter his carriage, had an opportunity to ask him the following question:

""Can you, Monsieur de Marquet, give us any information as to this affair, without inconvenience to the course of your inquiry?"

"It is impossible for us to do it," replied Monsieur de Marquet. 'I can only say that it is the strangest affair I have ever known. The more we think we know something, the further we are from knowing anything!"

"We asked Monsieur de Marquet to be good enough to explain his last words; and this is what he said,--the importance of which no one will fail to recognise:

"If nothing is added to the material facts so far established, I fear that the mystery which surrounds the abominable crime of which Mademoiselle Stangerson has been the victim will never be brought to light; but it is to be hoped, for the sake of our human reason, that the examination of the walls, and of the ceiling of The Yellow Room --an examination which I shall to-morrow intrust to the builder who constructed the pavilion four years ago--will afford us the proof that may not discourage us. For the problem is this: we know by what way the assassin gained admission,--he entered by the door and hid himself under the bed, awaiting Mademoiselle Stangerson. But how did he leave? How did he escape? If no trap, no secret door, no hiding place, no opening of any sort is found; if the examination of the walls--even to the demolition of the pavilion--does not reveal any passage practicable--not only for a human being, but for any being whatsoever--if the ceiling shows no crack, if the floor hides no underground passage, one must really believe in the Devil, as Daddy Jacques says!!"

And the anonymous writer in the "Matin" added in this article --which I have selected as the most interesting of all those that were published on the subject of this affair--that the examining magistrate appeared to place a peculiar significance to the last sentence: "One must really believe in the Devil, as Jacques says.

The article concluded with these lines: "We wanted to know what Daddy Jacques meant by the cry of the Bete Du Bon Dieu." The landlord of the Donjon Inn explained to us that it is the particularly sinister cry which is uttered sometimes at night by the cat of an old woman,--Mother Angenoux, as she is called in the country. Mother Angenoux is a sort of saint, who lives in a hut in the heart of the forest, not far from the grotto of Sainte-Genevieve.

"The Yellow Room, the Bete Du Bon Dieu, Mother Angenoux, the Devil, Sainte-Genevieve, Daddy Jacques,--here is a well entangled crime which the stroke of a pickaxe in the wall may disentangle for us to-morrow. Let us at
least hope that, for the sake of our human reason, as the examining magistrate says. Meanwhile, it is expected that Mademoiselle Stangerson—who has not ceased to be delirious and only pronounces one word distinctly, 'Murderer! Murderer!'—will not live through the night."

In conclusion, and at a late hour, the same journal announced that the Chief of the Surete had telegraphed to the famous detective, Frederic Larsan, who had been sent to London for an affair of stolen securities, to return immediately to Paris.

CHAPTER II
In Which Joseph Rouletabille Appears for the First Time

I remember as well as if it had occurred yesterday, the entry of young Rouletabille into my bedroom that morning. It was about eight o'clock and I was still in bed reading the article in the "Matin" relative to the Glandier crime.

But, before going further, it is time that I present my friend to the reader.

I first knew Joseph Rouletabille when he was a young reporter. At that time I was a beginner at the Bar and often met him in the corridors of examining magistrates, when I had gone to get a "permit to communicate" for the prison of Mazas, or for Saint-Lazare. He had, as they say, "a good nut." He seemed to have taken his head—round as a bullet—out of a box of marbles, and it is from that, I think, that his comrades of the press—all determined billiard-players—had given him that nickname, which was to stick to him and be made illustrious by him. He was always as red as a tomato, now gay as a lark, now grave as a judge. How, while still so young—he was only sixteen and a half years old when I saw him for the first time—had he already won his way on the press? That was what everybody who came into contact with him might have asked, if they had not known his history. At the time of the affair of the woman cut in pieces in the Rue Oberskampf—another forgotten story—he had taken to one of the editors of the "Epoque,"—a paper then rivaling the "Matin" for information,—the left foot, which was missing from the basket in which the gruesome remains were discovered. For this left foot the police had been vainly searching for a week, and young Rouletabille had found it in a drain where nobody had thought of looking for it. To do that he had dressed himself as an extra sewer-man, one of a number engaged by the administration of the city of Paris, owing to an overflow of the Seine.

When the editor-in-chief was in possession of the precious foot and informed as to the train of intelligent deductions the boy had been led to make, he was divided between the admiration he felt for such detective cunning in a brain of a lad of sixteen years, and delight at being able to exhibit, in the "morgue window" of his paper, the left foot of the Rue Oberskampf.

"This foot," he cried, "will make a great headline."

Then, when he had confided the gruesome packet to the medical lawyer attached to the journal, he asked the lad, who was shortly to become famous as Rouletabille, what he would expect to earn as a general reporter on the "Epoque"?

"Two hundred francs a month," the youngster replied modestly, hardly able to breathe from surprise at the proposal.

"You shall have two hundred and fifty," said the editor-in-chief; "only you must tell everybody that you have been engaged on the paper for a month. Let it be quite understood that it was not you but the 'Epoque' that discovered the left foot of the Rue Oberskampf. Here, my young friend, the man is nothing, the paper everything."

Having said this, he begged the new reporter to retire, but before the youth had reached the door he called him back to ask his name. The other replied:

"Joseph Josephine."

"That's not a name," said the editor-in-chief, "but since you will not be required to sign what you write it is of no consequence."

The boy-faced reporter speedily made himself many friends, for he was serviceable and gifted with a good humour that enchanted the most severe-tempered and disarmed the most zealous of his companions. At the Bar cafe, where the reporters assembled before going to any of the courts, or to the Prefecture, in search of their news of crime, he began to win a reputation as an unraveller of intricate and obscure affairs which found its way to the office of the Chief of the Surete. When a case was worth the trouble and Rouletabille—he had already been given his nickname—had been started on the scent by his editor-in-chief, he often got the better of the most famous detective.

It was at the Bar cafe that I became intimately acquainted with him. Criminal lawyers and journalists are not enemies, the former need advertisement, the latter information. We chatted together, and I soon warmed towards him. His intelligence was so keen, and so original!—and he had a quality of thought such as I have never found in any other person.

Some time after this I was put in charge of the law news of the "Cri du Boulevard." My entry into journalism could not but strengthen the ties which united me to Rouletabille. After a while, my new friend being allowed to
carry out an idea of a judicial correspondence column, which he was allowed to sign "Business," in the "Epoque," I was often able to furnish him with the legal information of which he stood in need.

Nearly two years passed in this way, and the better I knew him, the more I learned to love him; for, in spite of his careless extravagance, I had discovered in him what was, considering his age, an extraordinary seriousness of mind. Accustomed as I was to seeing him gay and, indeed, often too gay, I would many times find him plunged in the deepest melancholy. I tried then to question him as to the cause of this change of humour, but each time he laughed and made me no answer. One day, having questioned him about his parents, of whom he never spoke, he left me, pretending not to have heard what I said.

While things were in this state between us, the famous case of The Yellow Room took place. It was this case which was to rank him as the leading newspaper reporter, and to obtain for him the reputation of being the greatest detective in the world. It should not surprise us to find in the one man the perfection of two such lines of activity if we remember that the daily press was already beginning to transform itself and to become what it is to-day--the gazette of crime.

Morose-minded people may complain of this; for myself I regard it a matter for congratulation. We can never have too many arms, public or private, against the criminal. To this some people may answer that, by continually publishing the details of crimes, the press ends by encouraging their commission. But then, with some people we can never do right. Rouletabille, as I have said, entered my room that morning of the 26th of October, 1892. He was looking redder than usual, and his eyes were bulging out of his head, as the phrase is, and altogether he appeared to be in a state of extreme excitement. He waved the "Matin" with a trembling hand, and cried:

"Well, my dear Sainclair,--have you read it?"
"The Glandier crime?"
"Yes; The Yellow Room!--What do you think of it?"
"I think that it must have been the Devil or the Bete du Bon Dieu that committed the crime."
"Be serious!"
"Well, I don't much believe in murderers* who make their escape through walls of solid brick. I think Daddy Jacques did wrong to leave behind him the weapon with which the crime was committed and, as he occupied the attic immediately above Mademoiselle Stangerson's room, the builder's job ordered by the examining magistrate will give us the key of the enigma and it will not be long before we learn by what natural trap, or by what secret door, the old fellow was able to slip in and out, and return immediately to the laboratory to Monsieur Stangerson, without his absence being noticed. That, of course, is only an hypothesis."

*Although the original English translation often uses the words "murder" and "murderer," the reader may substitute "attack" and "attacker" since no murder is actually committed.

Rouletabille sat down in an armchair, lit his pipe, which he was never without, smoked for a few minutes in silence--no doubt to calm the excitement which, visibly, dominated him--and then replied:

"Young man," he said, in a tone the sad irony of which I will not attempt to render, "young man, you are a lawyer and I doubt not your ability to save the guilty from conviction; but if you were a magistrate on the bench, how easy it would be for you to condemn innocent persons!--You are really gifted, young man!"

He continued to smoke energetically, and then went on:

"No trap will be found, and the mystery of The Yellow Room will become more and more mysterious. That's why it interests me. The examining magistrate is right; nothing stranger than this crime has ever been known."

"Have you any idea of the way by which the murderer escaped?" I asked.

"None," replied Rouletabille--"none, for the present. But I have an idea as to the revolver; the murderer did not use it."

"Good Heavens! By whom, then, was it used?"

"Why--by Mademoiselle Stangerson."

"I don't understand,--or rather, I have never understood," I said.

Rouletabille shrugged his shoulders.

"Is there nothing in this article in the 'Matin' by which you were particularly struck?"

"Nothing,--I have found the whole of the story it tells equally strange."

"Well, but--the locked door--with the key on the inside?"

"That's the only perfectly natural thing in the whole article."

"Really!--And the bolt?"

"The bolt?"

"Yes, the bolt--also inside the room--a still further protection against entry? Mademoiselle Stangerson took quite
extraordinary precautions! It is clear to me that she feared someone. That was why she took such precautions—even Daddy Jacques's revolver—without telling him of it. No doubt she didn't wish to alarm anybody, and least of all, her father. What she dreaded took place, and she defended herself. There was a struggle, and she used the revolver skilfully enough to wound the assassin in the hand—which explains the impression on the wall and on the door of the large, blood-stained hand of the man who was searching for a means of exit from the chamber. But she didn't fire soon enough to avoid the terrible blow on the right temple."

"Then the wound on the temple was not done with the revolver?"

"The paper doesn't say it was, and I don't think it was; because logically it appears to me that the revolver was used by Mademoiselle Stangerson against the assassin. Now, what weapon did the murderer use? The blow on the temple seems to show that the murderer wished to stun Mademoiselle Stangerson,—after he had unsuccessfully tried to strangle her. He must have known that the attic was inhabited by Daddy Jacques, and that was one of the reasons, I think, why he must have used a quiet weapon,—a life-preserver, or a hammer."

"All that doesn't explain how the murderer got out of The Yellow Room," I observed.

"Evidently," replied Rouletabille, rising, "and that is what has to be explained. I am going to the Chateau du Glandier, and have come to see whether you will go with me."

"If?—"

"Yes, my boy. I want you. The 'Epoque' has definitely entrusted this case to me, and I must clear it up as quickly as possible."

"But in what way can I be of any use to you?"

"Monsieur Robert Darzac is at the Chateau du Glandier."

"That's true. His despair must be boundless."

"I must have a talk with him."

Rouletabille said it in a tone that surprised me.

"Is it because—you think there is something to be got out of him?" I asked.

"Yes."

That was all he would say. He retired to my sitting-room, begging me to dress quickly.

I knew Monsieur Robert Darzac from having been of great service to him in a civil action, while I was acting as secretary to Maitre Barbet Delatour. Monsieur Robert Darzac, who was at that time about forty years of age, was a professor of physics at the Sorbonne. He was intimately acquainted with the Stangersons, and, after an assiduous seven years' courtship of the daughter, had been on the point of marrying her. In spite of the fact that she has become, as the phrase goes, "a person of a certain age," she was still remarkably good-looking. While I was dressing I called out to Rouletabille, who was impatiently moving about my sitting-room:

"Have you any idea as to the murderer's station in life?"

"Yes," he replied; "I think if he isn't a man in society, he is, at least, a man belonging to the upper class. But that, again, is only an impression."

"What has led you to form it?"

"Well,—the greasy cap, the common handkerchief, and the marks of the rough boots on the floor," he replied.

"I understand," I said; "murderers don't leave traces behind them which tell the truth."

"We shall make something out of you yet, my dear Sainclair," concluded Rouletabille.

CHAPTER III

"A Man Has Passed Like a Shadow Through the Blinds"

Half an hour later Rouletabille and I were on the platform of the Orleans station, awaiting the departure of the train which was to take us to Epinay-sur-Orge.

On the platform we found Monsieur de Marquet and his Registrar, who represented the Judicial Court of Corbeil. Monsieur Marquet had spent the night in Paris, attending the final rehearsal, at the Scala, of a little play of which he was the unknown author, signing himself simply "Castigat Ridendo."

Monsieur de Marquet was beginning to be a "noble old gentleman." Generally he was extremely polite and full of gay humour, and in all his life had had but one passion,—that of dramatic art. Throughout his magisterial career he was interested solely in cases capable of furnishing him with something in the nature of a drama. Though he might very well have aspired to the highest judicial positions, he had never really worked for anything but to win a success at the romantic Porte-Saint-Martin, or at the sombre Odeon.

Because of the mystery which shrouded it, the case of The Yellow Room was certain to fascinate so theatrical a mind. It interested him enormously, and he threw himself into it, less as a magistrate eager to know the truth, than as an amateur of dramatic embroglios, tending wholly to mystery and intrigue, who dreads nothing so much as the explanatory final act.

So that, at the moment of meeting him, I heard Monsieur de Marquet say to the Registrar with a sigh:
"I hope, my dear Monsieur Maleine, this builder with his pickaxe will not destroy so fine a mystery."

"Have no fear," replied Monsieur Maleine, "his pickaxe may demolish the pavilion, perhaps, but it will leave our case intact. I have sounded the walls and examined the ceiling and floor and I know all about it. I am not to be deceived."

Having thus reassured his chief, Monsieur Maleine, with a discreet movement of the head, drew Monsieur de Marquet's attention to us. The face of that gentleman clouded, and, as he saw Rouletabille approaching, hat in hand, he sprang into one of the empty carriages saying, half aloud to his Registrar, as he did so, "Above all, no journalists!"

Monsieur Maleine replied in the same tone, "I understand!" and then tried to prevent Rouletabille from entering the same compartment with the examining magistrate.

"Excuse me, gentlemen,—this compartment is reserved."

"I am a journalist, Monsieur, engaged on the 'Epoque,'" said my young friend with a great show of gesture and politeness, "and I have a word or two to say to Monsieur de Marquet."

"Monsieur is very much engaged with the inquiry he has in hand."

"Ah! his inquiry, pray believe me, is absolutely a matter of indifference to me. I am no scavenger of odds and ends," he went on, with infinite contempt in his lower lip, "I am a theatrical reporter; and this evening I shall have to give a little account of the play at the Scala."

"Get in, sir, please," said the Registrar.

Rouletabille was already in the compartment. I went in after him and seated myself by his side. The Registrar followed and closed the carriage door.

Monsieur de Marquet looked at him.

"Ah, sir," Rouletabille began, "You must not be angry with Monsieur de Maleine. It is not with Monsieur de Marquet that I desire to have the honour of speaking, but with Monsieur 'Castigat Ridendo.' Permit me to congratulate you,—personally, as well as the writer for the 'Epoque.'" And Rouletabille, having first introduced me, introduced himself.

Monsieur de Marquet, with a nervous gesture, caressed his beard into a point, and explained to Rouletabille, in a few words, that he was too modest an author to desire that the veil of his pseudonym should be publicly raised, and that he hoped the enthusiasm of the journalist for the dramatist's work would not lead him to tell the public that Monsieur "Castigat Ridendo" and the examining magistrate of Corbeil were one and the same person.

"The work of the dramatic author may interfere," he said, after a slight hesitation, "with that of the magistrate, especially in a province where one's labours are little more than routine."

"Oh, you may rely on my discretion!" cried Rouletabille.

The train was in motion.

"We have started!" said the examining magistrate, surprised at seeing us still in the carriage.

"Yes, Monsieur,—truth has started," said Rouletabille, smiling amiably,—"on its way to the Chateau du Glandier. A fine case, Monsieur de Marquet,—a fine case!"

"An obscure,—incredible, unfathomable, inexplicable affair,—and there is only one thing I fear, Monsieur Rouletabille,—that the journalists will be trying to explain it."

My friend felt this a rap on his knuckles.

"Yes," he said simply, "that is to be feared. They meddle in everything. As for my interest, monsieur, I only referred to it by mere chance,—the mere chance of finding myself in the same train with you, and in the same compartment of the same carriage."

"Where are you going, then?" asked Monsieur de Marquet.

"To the Chateau du Glandier," replied Rouletabille, without turning.

"You'll not get in, Monsieur Rouletabille!"

"Will you prevent me?" said my friend, already prepared to fight.

"Not I,—I like the press and journalists too well to be in any way disagreeable to them; but Monsieur Stangerson has given orders for his door to be closed against everybody, and it is well guarded. Not a journalist was able to pass through the gate of the Glandier yesterday."

Monsieur de Marquet compressed his lips and seemed ready to relapse into obstinate silence. He only relaxed a little when Rouletabille no longer left him in ignorance of the fact that we were going to the Glandier for the purpose of shaking hands with an "old and intimate friend," Monsieur Robert Darzac—a man whom Rouletabille had perhaps seen once in his life.

"Poor Robert!" continued the young reporter, "this dreadful affair may be his death,—he is so deeply in love with Mademoiselle Stangerson."

"His sufferings are truly painful to witness," escaped like a regret from the lips of Monsieur de Marquet.
"But it is to be hoped that Mademoiselle Stangerson's life will be saved."

"Let us hope so. Her father told me yesterday that, if she does not recover, it will not be long before he joins her in the grave. What an incalculable loss to science his death would be!"

"The wound on her temple is serious, is it not?"

"Evidently; but, by a wonderful chance, it has not proved mortal. The blow was given with great force."

"Then it was not with the revolver she was wounded," said Rouletabille, glancing at me in triumph.

Monsieur de Marquet appeared greatly embarrassed.

"I didn't say anything--I don't want to say anything--I will not say anything," he said. And he turned towards his Registrar as if he no longer knew us.

But Rouletabille was not to be so easily shaken off. He moved nearer to the examining magistrate and, drawing a copy of the 'Matin' from his pocket, he showed it to him and said:

"There is one thing, Monsieur, which I may enquire of you without committing an indiscretion. You have, of course, seen the account given in the 'Matin'? It is absurd, is it not?"

"Not in the slightest, Monsieur."

"What! The Yellow Room has but one barred window--the bars of which have not been moved--and only one door, which had to be broken open--and the assassin was not found!"

"That's so, monsieur,-that's so. That's how the matter stands."

Rouletabille said no more but plunged into thought. A quarter of an hour thus passed.

Coming back to himself again he said, addressing the magistrate:

"How did Mademoiselle Stangerson wear her hair on that evening?"

"I don't know," replied Monsieur de Marquet.

"That's a very important point," said Rouletabille. "Her hair was done up in bands, wasn't it? I feel sure that on that evening, the evening of the crime, she had her hair arranged in bands."

"Then you are mistaken, Monsieur Rouletabille," replied the magistrate; "Mademoiselle Stangerson that evening had her hair drawn up in a knot on the top of her head,—her usual way of arranging it --her forehead completely uncovered. I can assure you, for we have carefully examined the wound. There was no blood on the hair, and the arrangement of it has not been disturbed since the crime was committed."

"You are sure! You are sure that, on the night of the crime, she had not her hair in bands?"

"Quite sure," the magistrate continued, smiling, "because I remember the Doctor saying to me, while he was examining the wound, 'It is a great pity Mademoiselle Stangerson was in the habit of drawing her hair back from her forehead. If she had worn it in bands, the blow she received on the temple would have been weakened.' It seems strange to me that you should attach so much importance to this point."

"Oh! if she had not her hair in bands, I give it up," said Rouletabille, with a despairing gesture.

"And was the wound on her temple a bad one?" he asked presently.

"Terrible."

"With what weapon was it made?"

"That is a secret of the investigation."

"Have you found the weapon--whatever it was?"

The magistrate did not answer.

"And the wound in the throat?"

Here the examining magistrate readily confirmed the decision of the doctor that, if the murderer had pressed her throat a few seconds longer, Mademoiselle Stangerson would have died of strangulation.

"The affair as reported in the 'Matin,'" said Rouletabille eagerly, "seems to me more and more inexplicable. Can you tell me, Monsieur, how many openings there are in the pavilion? I mean doors and windows."

"There are five," replied Monsieur de Marquet, after having coughed once or twice, but no longer resisting the desire he felt to talk of the whole of the incredible mystery of the affair he was investigating. "There are five, of which the door of the vestibule is the only entrance to the pavilion,—a door always automatically closed, which cannot be opened, either from the outer or inside, except with the two special keys which are never out of the possession of either Daddy Jacques or Monsieur Stangerson. Mademoiselle Stangerson had no need for one, since Daddy Jacques lodged in the pavilion and because, during the daytime, she never left her father. When they, all four, rushed into the Yellow Room, after breaking open the door of the laboratory, the door in the vestibule remained closed as usual and, of the two keys for opening it, Daddy Jacques had one in his pocket, and Monsieur Stangerson the other. As to the windows of the pavilion, there are four; the one window of The Yellow Room and those of the laboratory looking out on to the country; the window in the vestibule looking into the park."

"It is by that window that he escaped from the pavilion!" cried Rouletabille.

"How do you know that?" demanded Monsieur de Marquet, fixing a strange look on my young friend.
"We'll see later how he got away from The Yellow Room," replied Rouletabille, "but he must have left the pavilion by the vestibule window."

"Once more,--how do you know that?"

"How? Oh, the thing is simple enough! As soon as he found he could not escape by the door of the pavilion his only way out was by the window in the vestibule, unless he could pass through a grated window. The window of The Yellow Room is secured by iron bars, because it looks out upon the open country; the two windows of the laboratory have to be protected in like manner for the same reason. As the murderer got away, I conceive that he found a window that was not barred,--that of the vestibule, which opens on to the park,--that is to say, into the interior of the estate. There's not much magic in all that."

"Yes," said Monsieur de Marquet, "but what you have not guessed is that this single window in the vestibule, though it has no iron bars, has solid iron blinds. Now these iron blinds have remained fastened by their iron latch; and yet we have proof that the murderer made his escape from the pavilion by that window! Traces of blood on the inside wall and on the blinds as well as on the floor, and footmarks, of which I have taken the measurements, attest the fact that the murderer made his escape that way. But then, how did he do it, seeing that the blinds remained fastened on the inside? He passed through them like a shadow. But what is more bewildering than all is that it is impossible to form any idea as to how the murderer got out of The Yellow Room, or how he got across the laboratory to reach the vestibule! Ah, yes, Monsieur Rouletabille, it is altogether as you said, a fine case, the key to which will not be discovered for a long time, I hope."

"You hope, Monsieur?"

Monsieur de Marquet corrected himself.

"I do not hope so,--I think so."

"Could that window have been closed and refastened after the flight of the assassin?" asked Rouletabille.

"That is what occurred to me for a moment; but it would imply an accomplice or accomplices,--and I don't see--"

After a short silence he added:

"Ah--if Mademoiselle Stangerson were only well enough to-day to be questioned!"

Rouletabille following up his thought, asked:

"And the attic?--There must be some opening to that?"

"Yes; there is a window, or rather skylight, in it, which, as it looks out towards the country, Monsieur Stangerson has had barred, like the rest of the windows. These bars, as in the other windows, have remained intact, and the blinds, which naturally open inwards, have not been unfastened. For the rest, we have not discovered anything to lead us to suspect that the murderer had passed through the attic."

"It seems clear to you, then, Monsieur, that the murderer escaped--nobody knows how--by the window in the vestibule?"

"Everything goes to prove it."

"I think so, too," confessed Rouletabille gravely.

After a brief silence, he continued:

"If you have not found any traces of the murderer in the attic, such as the dirty footmarks similar to those on the floor of The Yellow Room, you must come to the conclusion that it was not he who stole Daddy Jacques's revolver."

"There are no footmarks in the attic other than those of Daddy Jacques himself," said the magistrate with a significant turn of his head. Then, after an apparent decision, he added: "Daddy Jacques was with Monsieur Stangerson in the laboratory--and it was lucky for him he was."

"Then what part did his revolver play in the tragedy?--It seems very clear that this weapon did less harm to Mademoiselle Stangerson than it did to the murderer."

The magistrate made no reply to this question, which doubtless embarrassed him. "Monsieur Stangerson," he said, "tells us that the two bullets have been found in The Yellow Room, one embedded in the wall stained with the impression of a red hand--a man's large hand--and the other in the ceiling."

"Oh! oh! in the ceiling!" muttered Rouletabille. "In the ceiling! That's very curious!--In the ceiling!"

He puffed awhile in silence at his pipe, enveloping himself in the smoke. When we reached Savigny-sur-Orge, I had to tap him on the shoulder to arouse him from his dream and come out on to the platform of the station.

There, the magistrate and his Registrar bowed to us, and by rapidly getting into a cab that was awaiting them, made us understand that they had seen enough of us.

"How long will it take to walk to the Chateau du Glandier?" Rouletabille asked one of the railway porters.

"An hour and a half or an hour and three quarters--easy walking," the man replied.

Rouletabille looked up at the sky and, no doubt, finding its appearance satisfactory, took my arm and said:

"Come on!--I need a walk."

"Are things getting less entangled?" I asked.
"Not a bit of it!" he said, "more entangled than ever! It's true, I have an idea--"
"What's that?" I asked.
"I can't tell you what it is just at present--it's an idea involving the life or death of two persons at least."
"Do you think there were accomplices?"
"I don't think it--"
We fell into silence. Presently he went on:
"It was a bit of luck, our falling in with that examining magistrate and his Registrar, eh? What did I tell you about that revolver?" His head was bent down, he had his hands in his pockets, and he was whistling. After a while I heard him murmur:
"Poor woman!"
"Is it Mademoiselle Stangerson you are pitying?"
"Yes; she's a noble woman and worthy of being pitied!--a woman of a great, a very great character--I imagine--I imagine."
"You know her then?"
"Not at all. I have never seen her."
"Why, then, do you say that she is a woman of great character?"
"Because she bravely faced the murderer; because she courageously defended herself--and, above all, because of the bullet in the ceiling."
I looked at Rouletabille and inwardly wondered whether he was not mocking me, or whether he had not suddenly gone out of his senses. But I saw that he had never been less inclined to laugh, and the brightness of his keenly intelligent eyes assured me that he retained all his reason. Then, too, I was used to his broken way of talking, which only left me puzzled as to his meaning, till, with a very few clear, rapidly uttered words, he would make the drift of his ideas clear to me, and I saw that what he had previously said, and which had appeared to me void of meaning, was so thoroughly logical that I could not understand how it was I had not understood him sooner.

CHAPTER IV
"In the Bosom of Wild Nature"

The Chateau du Glandier is one of the oldest chateaux in the Ile de France, where so many building remains of the feudal period are still standing. Built originally in the heart of the forest, in the reign of Philip le Bel, it now could be seen a few hundred yards from the road leading from the village of Sainte-Genevieve to Monthery. A mass of inharmonious structures, it is dominated by a donjon. When the visitor has mounted the crumbling steps of this ancient donjon, he reaches a little plateau where, in the seventeenth century, Georges Philibert de Sequigny, Lord of the Glandier, Maisons-Neuves and other places, built the existing town in an abominably rococo style of architecture.

It was in this place, seemingly belonging entirely to the past, that Professor Stangerson and his daughter installed themselves to lay the foundations for the science of the future. Its solitude, in the depths of woods, was what, more than all, had pleased them. They would have none to witness their labours and intrude on their hopes, but the aged stones and grand old oaks. The Glandier --ancient Glandierum--was so called from the quantity of glands (acorns) which, in all times, had been gathered in that neighbourhood. This land, of present mournful interest, had fallen back, owing to the negligence or abandonment of its owners, into the wild character of primitive nature. The buildings alone, which were hidden there, had preserved traces of their strange metamorphoses. Every age had left on them its imprint; a bit of architecture with which was bound up the remembrance of some terrible event, some bloody adventure. Such was the chateau in which science had taken refuge--a place seemingly designed to be the theatre of mysteries, terror, and death.

Having explained so far, I cannot refrain from making one further reflection. If I have lingered a little over this description of the Glandier, it is not because I have reached the right moment for creating the necessary atmosphere for the unfolding of the tragedy before the eyes of the reader. Indeed, in all this matter, my first care will be to be as simple as is possible. I have no ambition to be an author. An author is always something of a romancer, and God knows, the mystery of The Yellow Room is quite full enough of real tragic horror to require no aid from literary effects. I am, and only desire to be, a faithful "reporter." My duty is to report the event; and I place the event in its frame --that is all. It is only natural that you should know where the things happened.

I return to Monsieur Stangerson. When he bought the estate, fifteen years before the tragedy with which we are engaged occurred, the Chateau du Glandier had for a long time been unoccupied. Another old chateau in the neighbourhood, built in the fourteenth century by Jean de Belmont, was also abandoned, so that that part of the country was very little inhabited. Some small houses on the side of the road leading to Corbeil, an inn, called the "Auberge du Donjon," which offered passing hospitality to waggoners; these were about all to represent civilisation in this out-of-the-way part of the country, but a few leagues from the capital.
But this deserted condition of the place had been the determining reason for the choice made by Monsieur Stangerson and his daughter. Monsieur Stangerson was already celebrated. He had returned from America, where his works had made a great stir. The book which he had published at Philadelphia, on the "Dissociation of Matter by Electric Action," had aroused opposition throughout the whole scientific world. Monsieur Stangerson was a Frenchman, but of American origin. Important matters relating to a legacy had kept him for several years in the United States, where he had continued the work begun by him in France, whither he had returned in possession of a large fortune. This fortune was a great boon to him; for, though he might have made millions of dollars by exploiting two or three of his chemical discoveries relative to new processes of dyeing, it was always repugnant to him to use for his own private gain the wonderful gift of invention he had received from nature. He considered he owed it to mankind, and all that his genius brought into the world went, by this philosophical view of his duty, into the public lap.

If he did not try to conceal his satisfaction at coming into possession of this fortune, which enabled him to give himself up to his passion for pure science, he had equally to rejoice, it seemed to him, for another cause. Mademoiselle Stangerson was, at the time when her father returned from America and bought the Glandier estate, twenty years of age. She was exceedingly pretty, having at once the Parisian grace of her mother, who had died in giving her birth, and all the splendour, all the riches of the young American blood of her parental grandfather, William Stangerson. A citizen of Philadelphia, William Stangerson had been obliged to become naturalised in obedience to family exigencies at the time of his marriage with a French lady, she who was to be the mother of the illustrious Stangerson. In that way the professor's French nationality is accounted for.

Twenty years of age, a charming blonde, with blue eyes, milk-white complexion, and radiant with divine health, Mathilde Stangerson was one of the most beautiful marriageable girls in either the old or the new world. It was her father's duty, in spite of the inevitable pain which a separation from her would cause him, to think of her marriage; and he was fully prepared for it. Nevertheless, he buried himself and his child at the Glandier at the moment when his friends were expecting him to bring her out into society. Some of them expressed their astonishment, and to their questions he answered: "It is my daughter's wish. I can refuse her nothing. She has chosen the Glandier."

Interrogated in her turn, the young girl replied calmly: "Where could we work better than in this solitude?" For Mademoiselle Stangerson had already begun to collaborate with her father in his work. It could not at the time be imagined that her passion for science would lead her so far as to refuse all the suitors who presented themselves to her for over fifteen years. So secluded was the life led by the two, father and daughter, that they showed themselves only at a few official receptions and, at certain times in the year, in two or three friendly drawing-rooms, where the fame of the professor and the beauty of Mathilde made a sensation. The young girl's extreme reserve did not at first discourage suitors; but at the end of a few years, they tired of their quest.

One alone persisted with tender tenacity and deserved the name of "eternal fiance," a name he accepted with melancholy resignation; that was Monsieur Robert Darzac. Mademoiselle Stangerson was now no longer young, and it seemed that, having found no reason for marrying at five-and-thirty, she would never find one. But such an argument evidently found no acceptance with Monsieur Robert Darzac. He continued to pay his court—if the delicate and tender attention with which he ceaselessly surrounded this woman of five-and-thirty could be called courtship—in face of her declared intention never to marry.

Suddenly, some weeks before the events with which we are occupied, a report—to which nobody attached any importance, so incredible did it sound—was spread about Paris, that Mademoiselle Stangerson had at last consented to "crown" the inextinguishable flame of Monsieur Robert Darzac! It needed that Monsieur Robert Darzac himself should not deny this matrimonial rumour to give it an appearance of truth, so unlikely did it seem to be well founded. One day, however, Monsieur Stangerson, as he was leaving the Academy of Science, announced that the marriage of his daughter and Monsieur Robert Darzac would be celebrated in the privacy of the Chateau du Glandier, as soon as he and his daughter had put the finishing touches to their report summing up their labours on the "Dissociation of Matter." The new household would install itself in the Glandier, and the son-in-law would lend his assistance in the work to which the father and daughter had dedicated their lives.

The scientific world had barely had time to recover from the effect of this news, when it learned of the attempted assassination of Mademoiselle under the extraordinary conditions which we have detailed and which our visit to the chateau was to enable us to ascertain with yet greater precision. I have not hesitated to furnish the reader with all these retrospective details, known to me through my business relations with Monsieur Robert Darzac. On crossing the threshold of The Yellow Room he was as well posted as I was.

CHAPTER V

In Which Joseph Rouletabille Makes a Remark to Monsieur Robert Darzac Which Produces Its Little Effect

Rouletabille and I had been walking for several minutes, by the side of a long wall bounding the vast property of Monsieur Stangerson and had already come within sight of the entrance gate, when our attention was drawn to an
individual who, half bent to the ground, seemed to be so completely absorbed in what he was doing as not to have seen us coming towards him. At one time he stooped so low as almost to touch the ground; at another he drew himself up and attentively examined the wall; then he looked into the palm of one of his hands, and walked away with rapid strides. Finally he set off running, still looking into the palm of his hand. Rouletabille had brought me to a standstill by a gesture.

"Hush! Frederic Larsan is at work! Don't let us disturb him!"

Rouletabille had a great admiration for the celebrated detective. I had never before seen him, but I knew him well by reputation. At that time, before Rouletabille had given proof of his unique talent, Larsan was reputed as the most skilful unraveller of the most mysterious and complicated crimes. His reputation was world-wide, and the police of London, and even of America, often called him in to their aid when their own national inspectors and detectives found themselves at the end of their wits and resources.

No one was astonished, then, that the head of the Surete had, at the outset of the mystery of The Yellow Room, telegraphed his precious subordinate to London, where he had been sent on a big case of stolen securities, to return with all haste. Frederic who, at the Surete, was called the "great Frederic," had made all speed, doubtless knowing by experience that, if he was interrupted in what he was doing, it was because his services were urgently needed in another direction; so, as Rouletabille said, he was that morning already "at work." We soon found out in what it consisted.

What he was continually looking at in the palm of his right hand was nothing but his watch, the minute hand of which he appeared to be noting intently. Then he turned back still running, stopping only when he reached the park gate, where he again consulted his watch and then put it away in his pocket, shrugging his shoulders with a gesture of discouragement. He pushed open the park gate, reclosed and locked it, raised his head and, through the bars, perceived us. Rouletabille rushed after him, and I followed. Frederic Larsan waited for us.

"Monsieur Fred," said Rouletabille, raising his hat and showing the profound respect, based on admiration, which the young reporter felt for the celebrated detective, "can you tell me whether Monsieur Robert Darzac is at the chateau at this moment? Here is one of his friends, of the Paris Bar, who desires to speak with him."

"I really don't know, Monsieur Rouletabille," replied Fred, shaking hands with my friend, whom he had several times met in the course of his difficult investigations. "I have not seen him."

"The concierges will be able to inform us no doubt?" said Rouletabille, pointing to the lodge the door and windows of which were close shut.

"The concierges will not be able to give you any information, Monsieur Rouletabille."

"Why not?"

"Because they were arrested half an hour ago."

"Arrested!" cried Rouletabille; "then they are the murderers!"

Frederic Larsan shrugged his shoulders.

"When you can't arrest the real murderer," he said with an air of supreme irony, "you can always indulge in the luxury of discovering accomplices."

"Did you have them arrested, Monsieur Fred?"

"Not I!--I haven't had them arrested. In the first place, I am pretty sure that they have not had anything to do with the affair, and then because--"

"Because of what?" asked Rouletabille eagerly.

"Because of nothing," said Larsan, shaking his head.

"Because there were no accomplices!" said Rouletabille.

"Aha!--you have an idea, then, about this matter?" said Larsan, looking at Rouletabille intently, "yet you have seen nothing, young man--you have not yet gained admission here!"

"I shall get admission."

"I doubt it. The orders are strict."

"I shall gain admission, if you let me see Monsieur Robert Darzac. Do that for me. You know we are old friends. I beg of you, Monsieur Fred. Do you remember the article I wrote about you on the gold bar case?"

The face of Rouletabille at the moment was really funny to look at. It showed such an irresistible desire to cross the threshold beyond which some prodigious mystery had occurred; it appealed with so much eloquence, not only of the mouth and eyes, but with all its features, that I could not refrain from bursting into laughter. Frederic Larsan, no more than myself, could retain his gravity. Meanwhile, standing on the other side of the gate, he calmly put the key in his pocket. I closely scrutinised him.

He might be about fifty years of age. He had a fine head, his hair turning grey; a colourless complexion, and a firm profile. His forehead was prominent, his chin and cheeks clean shaven. His upper lip, without moustache, was finely chiselled. His eyes were rather small and round, with a look in them that was at once searching and
disquieting. He was of middle height and well built, with a general bearing elegant and gentlemanly. There was nothing about him of the vulgar policeman. In his way, he was an artist, and one felt that he had a high opinion of himself. The sceptical tone of his conversation was that of a man who had been taught by experience. His strange profession had brought him into contact with so many crimes and villanies that it would have been remarkable if his nature had not been a little hardened.

Larsan turned his head at the sound of a vehicle which had come from the chateau and reached the gate behind him. We recognised the cab which had conveyed the examining magistrate and his Registrar from the station at Epinay.

"Ah!" said Frederic Larsan, "if you want to speak with Monsieur Robert Darzac, he is here."

The cab was already at the park gate and Robert Darzac was begging Frederic Larsan to open it for him, explaining that he was pressed for time to catch the next train leaving Epinay for Paris. Then he recognised me. While Larsan was unlocking the gate, Monsieur Darzac inquired what had brought me to the Glandier at such a tragic moment. I noticed that he was frightfully pale, and that his face was lined as if from the effects of some terrible suffering.

"Is Mademoiselle getting better?" I immediately asked.

"Yes," he said. "She will be saved perhaps. She must be saved!"

He did not add "or it will be my death"; but I felt that the phrase trembled on his pale lips.

Rouletabille intervened:
"You are in a hurry, Monsieur; but I must speak with you. I have something of the greatest importance to tell you."

Frederic Larsan interrupted:
"May I leave you?" he asked of Robert Darzac. "Have you a key, or do you wish me to give you this one."

"Thank you. I have a key and will lock the gate."

Larsan hurried off in the direction of the chateau, the imposing pile of which could be perceived a few hundred yards away.

Robert Darzac, with knitted brow, was beginning to show impatience. I presented Rouletabille as a good friend of mine, but, as soon as he learnt that the young man was a journalist, he looked at me very reproachfully, excused himself, under the necessity of having to reach Epinay in twenty minutes, bowed, and whipped up his horse. But Rouletabille had seized the bridle and, to my utter astonishment, stopped the carriage with a vigorous hand. Then he gave utterance to a sentence which was utterly meaningless to me.

"The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm, nor the garden its brightness."

The words had no sooner left the lips of Rouletabille than I saw Robert Darzac quail. Pale as he was, he became paler. His eyes were fixed on the young man in terror, and he immediately descended from the vehicle in an inexpressible state of agitation.

"Come!--come in!" he stammered.

Then, suddenly, and with a sort of fury, he repeated:
"Let us go, monsieur."

He turned up by the road he had come from the chateau, Rouletabille still retaining his hold on the horse's bridle. I addressed a few words to Monsieur Darzac, but he made no answer. My looks questioned Rouletabille, but his gaze was elsewhere.

CHAPTER VI
In the Heart of the Oak Grove

We reached the chateau, and, as we approached it, saw four gendarmes pacing in front of a little door in the ground floor of the donjon. We soon learned that in this ground floor, which had formerly served as a prison, Monsieur and Madame Bernier, the concierges, were confined. Monsieur Robert Darzac led us into the modern part of the chateau by a large door, protected by a projecting awning--a "marquise" as it is called. Rouletabille, who had resigned the horse and the cab to the care of a servant, never took his eyes off Monsieur Darzac. I followed his look and perceived that it was directed solely towards the gloved hands of the Sorbonne professor. When we were in a tiny sitting-room fitted with old furniture, Monsieur Darzac turned to Rouletabille and said sharply:

"What do you want?"

The reporter answered in an equally sharp tone:
"To shake you by the hand."

Darzac shrunk back.

"What does that mean?"

Evidently he understood, what I also understood, that my friend suspected him of the abominable attempt on the life of Mademoiselle Stangerson. The impression of the blood-stained hand on the walls of The Yellow Room was
in his mind. I looked at the man closely. His haughty face with its expression ordinarily so straightforward was at this moment strangely troubled. He held out his right hand and, referring to me, said:

"As you are a friend of Monsieur Sainclair who has rendered me invaluable services in a just cause, monsieur, I see no reason for refusing you my hand--"

Rouletabille did not take the extended hand. Lying with the utmost audacity, he said:

"Monsieur, I have lived several years in Russia, where I have acquired the habit of never taking any but an ungloved hand."

I thought that the Sorbonne professor would express his anger openly, but, on the contrary, by a visibly violent effort, he calmed himself, took off his gloves, and showed his hands; they were unmarked by any cicatrix.

"Are you satisfied?"

"No!" replied Rouletabille. "My dear friend," he said, turning to me, "I am obliged to ask you to leave us alone for a moment."

I bowed and retired; stupefied by what I had seen and heard. I could not understand why Monsieur Robert Darzac had not already shown the door to my impertinent, insulting, and stupid friend. I was angry myself with Rouletabille at that moment, for his suspicions, which had led to this scene of the gloves.

For some twenty minutes I walked about in front of the chateau, trying vainly to link together the different events of the day. What was in Rouletabille's mind? Was it possible that he thought Monsieur Robert Darzac to be the murderer? How could it be thought that this man, who was to have married Mademoiselle Stangerson in the course of a few days, had introduced himself into The Yellow Room to assassinate his fiancee? I could find no explanation as to how the murderer had been able to leave The Yellow Room; and so long as that mystery, which appeared to me so inexplicable, remained unexplained, I thought it was the duty of all of us to refrain from suspecting anybody. But, then, that seemingly senseless phrase--"The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm, nor the garden its brightness"--still rang in my ears. What did it mean? I was eager to rejoin Rouletabille and question him.

At that moment the young man came out of the chateau in the company of Monsieur Robert Darzac, and, extraordinary to relate, I saw, at a glance, that they were the best of friends. "We are going to The Yellow Room. Come with us," Rouletabille said to me. "You know, my dear boy, I am going to keep you with me all day. We'll breakfast together somewhere about here--"

"You'll breakfast with me, here, gentlemen--"

"No, thanks," replied the young man. "We shall breakfast at the Donjon Inn."

"You'll fare very badly there; you'll not find anything--"

"Do you think so? Well, I hope to find something there," replied Rouletabille. "After breakfast, we'll set to work again. I'll write my article and if you'll be so good as to take it to the office for me--"

"Won't you come back with me to Paris?"

"No; I shall remain here."

I turned towards Rouletabille. He spoke quite seriously, and Monsieur Robert Darzac did not appear to be in the least degree surprised.

We were passing by the donjon and heard wailing voices. Rouletabille asked:

"Why have these people been arrested?"

"It is a little my fault," said Monsieur Darzac. "I happened to remark to the examining magistrate yesterday that it was inexplicable that the concierges had had time to hear the revolver shots, to dress themselves, and to cover so great a distance as that which lies between their lodge and the pavilion, in the space of two minutes; for not more than that interval of time had elapsed after the firing of the shots when they were met by Daddy Jacques."

"That was suspicious evidently," acquiesced Rouletabille. "And were they dressed?"

"That is what is so incredible--they were dressed--completely --not one part of their costume wanting. The woman wore sabots, but the man had on laced boots. Now they assert that they went to bed at half-past nine. On arriving this morning, the examining magistrate brought with him from Paris a revolver of the same calibre as that found in the room (for he couldn't use the one held for evidence), and made his Registrar fire two shots in The Yellow Room while the doors and windows were closed. We were with him in the lodge of the concierges, and yet we heard nothing, not a sound. The concierges have lied, of that there can be no doubt. They must have been already waiting, not far from the pavilion, waiting for something! Certainly they are not to be accused of being the authors of the crime, but their complicity is not improbable. That was why Monsieur de Marquet had them arrested at once."

"If they had been accomplices," said Rouletabille, "they would not have been there at all. When people throw themselves into the arms of justice with the proofs of complicity on them, you can be sure they are not accomplices. I don't believe there are any accomplices in this affair."

"Then, why were they abroad at midnight? Why don't they say?"
"They have certainly some reason for their silence. What that reason is, has to be found out; for, even if they are not accomplices, it may be of importance. Everything that took place on such a night is important."

We had crossed an old bridge thrown over the Douve and were entering the part of the park called the Oak Grove. The oaks here were centuries old. Autumn had already shrivelled their tawny leaves, and their high branches, black and contorted, looked like horrid heads of hair, mingled with quaint reptiles such as the ancient sculptors have made on the head of Medusa. This place, which Mademoiselle found cheerful and in which she lived in the summer season, appeared to us as sad and funereal now. The soil was black and muddy from the recent rains and the rotting of the fallen leaves; the trunks of the trees were black and the sky above us was now, as if in mourning, charged with great, heavy clouds.

And it was in this sombre and desolate retreat that we saw the white walls of the pavilion as we approached. A queer-looking building without a window visible on the side by which we neared it. A little door alone marked the entrance to it. It might have passed for a tomb, a vast mausoleum in the midst of a thick forest. As we came nearer, we were able to make out its disposition. The building obtained all the light it needed from the south, that is to say, from the open country. The little door closed on the park. Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson must have found it an ideal seclusion for their work and their dreams.

Here is the ground plan of the pavilion. It had a ground-floor which was reached by a few steps, and above it was an attic, with which we need not concern ourselves. The plan of the ground-floor only, sketched roughly, is what I here submit to the reader.

1. The Yellow Room, with its one window and its one door opening into the laboratory.
2. Laboratory, with its two large, barred windows and its doors, one serving for the vestibule, the other for The Yellow Room.
3. Vestibule, with its unbarred window and door opening into the park.
4. Lavatory.
5. Stairs leading to the attic.
6. Large and the only chimney in the pavilion, serving for the experiments of the laboratory.

The plan was drawn by Rouletabille, and I assured myself that there was not a line in it that was wanting to help to the solution of the problem then set before the police. With the lines of this plan and the description of its parts before them, my readers will know as much as Rouletabille knew when he entered the pavilion for the first time. With him they may now ask: How did the murderer escape from The Yellow Room? Before mounting the three steps leading up to the door of the pavilion, Rouletabille stopped and asked Monsieur Darzac point blank:

"What was the motive for the crime?"

"Speaking for myself, Monsieur, there can be no doubt on the matter," said Mademoiselle Stangerson's fiancé, greatly distressed. "The nails of the fingers, the deep scratches on the chest and throat of Mademoiselle Stangerson show that the wretch who attacked her attempted to commit a frightful crime. The medical experts who examined these traces yesterday affirm that they were made by the same hand as that which left its red imprint on the wall; an enormous hand, Monsieur, much too large to go into my gloves," he added with an indefinable smile.

"Could not that blood-stained hand," I interrupted, "have been the hand of Mademoiselle Stangerson who, in the moment of falling, had pressed it against the wall, and, in slipping, enlarged the impression?"

"There was not a drop of blood on either of her hands when she was lifted up," replied Monsieur Darzac.

"We are now sure," said I, "that it was Mademoiselle Stangerson who was armed with Daddy Jacques's revolver, since she wounded the hand of the murderer. She was in fear, then, of somebody or something."

"Probably."

"Do you suspect anybody?"
"No," replied Monsieur Darzac, looking at Rouletabille. Rouletabille then said to me:

"You must know, my friend, that the inquiry is a little more advanced than Monsieur de Marquet has chosen to tell us. He not only knows that Mademoiselle Stangerson defended herself with the revolver, but he knows what the weapon was that was used to attack her. Monsieur Darzac tells me it was a mutton-bone. Why is Monsieur de Marquet surrounding this mutton-bone with so much mystery? No doubt for the purpose of facilitating the inquiries of the agents of the Surete? He imagines, perhaps, that the owner of this instrument of crime, the most terrible invented, is going to be found amongst those who are well-known in the slums of Paris who use it. But who can ever say what passes through the brain of an examining magistrate?" Rouletabille added with contemptuous irony.

"Has a mutton-bone been found in The Yellow Room?" I asked him.

"Yes, Monsieur," said Robert Darzac, "at the foot of the bed; but I beg of you not to say anything about it." (I made a gesture of assent.) "It was an enormous mutton-bone, the top of which, or rather the joint, was still red with the blood of the frightful wound. It was an old bone, which may, according to appearances, have served in other crimes. That's what Monsieur de Marquet thinks. He has had it sent to the municipal laboratory at Paris to be analysed. In fact, he thinks he has detected on it, not only the blood of the last victim, but other stains of dried blood, evidences of previous crimes."

"A mutton-bone in the hand of a skilled assassin is a frightful weapon," said Rouletabille, "a more certain weapon than a heavy hammer."

"The scoundrel has proved it to be so," said Monsieur Robert Darzac, sadly. "The joint of the bone found exactly fits the wound inflicted.

"My belief is that the wound would have been mortal, if the murderer's blow had not been arrested in the act by Mademoiselle Stangerson's revolver. Wounded in the hand, he dropped the mutton-bone and fled. Unfortunately, the blow had been already given, and Mademoiselle was stunned after having been nearly strangled. If she had succeeded in wounding the man with the first shot of the revolver, she would, doubtless, have escaped the blow with the bone. But she had certainly employed her revolver too late; the first shot deviated and lodged in the ceiling; it was the second only that took effect."

Having said this, Monsieur Darzac knocked at the door of the pavilion. I must confess to feeling a strong impatience to reach the spot where the crime had been committed. It was some time before the door was opened by a man whom I at once recognised as Daddy Jacques.

He appeared to be well over sixty years of age. He had a long white beard and white hair, on which he wore a flat Basque cap. He was dressed in a complete suit of chestnut-coloured velveteen, worn at the sides; sabots were on his feet. He had rather a waspish-looking face, the expression of which lightened, however, as soon as he saw Monsieur Darzac.

"Friends," said our guide. "Nobody in the pavilion, Daddy Jacques?"

"I ought not to allow anybody to enter, Monsieur Robert, but of course the order does not apply to you. These gentlemen of justice have seen everything there is to be seen, and made enough drawings, and drawn up enough reports--"

"Excuse me, Monsieur Jacques, one question before anything else," said Rouletabille.

"What is it, young man? If I can answer it--"

"Did your mistress wear her hair in bands, that evening? You know what I mean--over her forehead?"

"No, young man. My mistress never wore her hair in the way you suggest, neither on that day nor on any other. She had her hair drawn up, as usual, so that her beautiful forehead could be seen, pure as that of an unborn child!"

Rouletabille grunted and set to work examining the door, finding that it fastened itself automatically. He satisfied himself that it could never remain open and needed a key to open it. Then we entered the vestibule, a small, well-lit room paved with square red tiles.

"Ah! This is the window by which the murderer escaped!" said Rouletabille.

"So they keep on saying, monsieur, so they keep on saying! But if he had gone off that way, we should have been sure to have seen him. We are not blind, neither Monsieur Stangerson nor me, nor the concierges who are in prison. Why have they not put me in prison, too, on account of my revolver?"

Rouletabille had already opened the window and was examining the shutters.

"Were these closed at the time of the crime?"

"And fastened with the iron catch inside," said Daddy Jacques, "and I am quite sure that the murderer did not get out that way."

"Are there any blood stains?"

"Yes, on the stones outside; but blood of what?"

"Ah!" said Rouletabille, "there are footmarks visible on the path --the ground was very moist. I will look into that presently."
"Nonsense!" interrupted Daddy Jacques; "the murderer did not go that way."
"Which way did he go, then?"
"How do I know?"
Rouletabille looked at everything, smelled everything. He went down on his knees and rapidly examined every one of the paving tiles. Daddy Jacques went on:
"Ah!--you can't find anything, monsieur. Nothing has been found. And now it is all dirty; too many persons have tramped over it. They wouldn't let me wash it, but on the day of the crime I had washed the floor thoroughly, and if the murderer had crossed it with his hobnailed boots, I should not have failed to see where he had been; he has left marks enough in Mademoiselle's chamber."

Rouletabille rose.
"When was the last time you washed these tiles?" he asked, and he fixed on Daddy Jacques a most searching look.
"Why--as I told you--on the day of the crime, towards half-past five--while Mademoiselle and her father were taking a little walk before dinner, here in this room: they had dined in the laboratory. The next day, the examining magistrate came and saw all the marks there were on the floor as plainly as if they had been made with ink on white paper. Well, neither in the laboratory nor in the vestibule, which were both as clean as a new pin, were there any traces of a man's footmarks. Since they have been found near this window outside, he must have made his way through the ceiling of The Yellow Room into the attic, then cut his way through the roof and dropped to the ground outside the vestibule window. But --there's no hole, neither in the ceiling of The Yellow Room nor in the roof of my attic--that's absolutely certain! So you see we know nothing--nothing! And nothing will ever be known! It's a mystery of the Devil's own making."

Rouletabille went down upon his knees again almost in front of a small lavatory at the back of the vestibule. In that position he remained for about a minute.
"Well?" I asked him when he got up.
"Oh! nothing very important,--a drop of blood," he replied, turning towards Daddy Jacques as he spoke. "While you were washing the laboratory and this vestibule, was the vestibule window open?" he asked.
"No, Monsieur, it was closed; but after I had done washing the floor, I lit some charcoal for Monsieur in the laboratory furnace, and, as I lit it with old newspapers, it smoked, so I opened both the windows in the laboratory and this one, to make a current of air; then I shut those in the laboratory and left this one open when I went out. When I returned to the pavilion, this window had been closed and Monsieur and Mademoiselle were already at work in the laboratory."
"Monsieur or Mademoiselle Stangerson had, no doubt, shut it?"
"No doubt."
"You did not ask them?"
After a close scrutiny of the little lavatory and of the staircase leading up to the attic, Rouletabille--to whom we seemed no longer to exist--entered the laboratory. I followed him. It was, I confess, in a state of great excitement. Robert Darzac lost none of my friend's movements. As for me, my eyes were drawn at once to the door of The Yellow Room. It was closed and, as I immediately saw, partially shattered and out of commission.

My friend, who went about his work methodically, silently studied the room in which we were. It was large and well-lighted. Two big windows--almost bays--were protected by strong iron bars and looked out upon a wide extent of country. Through an opening in the forest, they commanded a wonderful view through the length of the valley and across the plain to the large town which could be clearly seen in fair weather. To-day, however, a mist hung over the ground--and blood in that room!

The whole of one side of the laboratory was taken up with a large chimney, crucibles, ovens, and such implements as are needed for chemical experiments; tables, loaded with phials, papers, reports, an electrical machine,—an apparatus, as Monsieur Darzac informed me, employed by Professor Stangerson to demonstrate the Dissociation of Matter under the action of solar light,—and other scientific implements.

Along the walls were cabinets, plain or glass-fronted, through which were visible microscopes, special photographic apparatus, and a large quantity of crystals.

Rouletabille, who was ferreting in the chimney, put his fingers into one of the crucibles. Suddenly he drew himself up, and held up a piece of half-consumed paper in his hand. He stepped up to where we were talking by one of the windows.
"Keep that for us, Monsieur Darzac," he said.
I bent over the piece of scorched paper which Monsieur Darzac took from the hand of Rouletabille, and read distinctly the only words that remained legible:
"Presbytery--lost nothing--charm, nor the gar--its brightness."
Twice since the morning these same meaningless words had struck me, and, for the second time, I saw that they produced on the Sorbonne professor the same paralysing effect. Monsieur Darzac's first anxiety showed itself when he turned his eyes in the direction of Daddy Jacques. But, occupied as he was at another window, he had seen nothing. Then tremblingly opening his pocket-book he put the piece of paper into it, sighing: "My God!"

During this time, Rouletabille had mounted into the opening of the fire-grate—that is to say, he had got upon the bricks of a furnace—and was attentively examining the chimney, which grew narrower towards the top, the outlet from it being closed with sheets of iron, fastened into the brickwork, through which passed three small chimneys.

"Impossible to get out that way," he said, jumping back into the laboratory. "Besides, even if he had tried to do it, he would have brought all that ironwork down to the ground. No, no; it is not on that side we have to search."

Rouletabille next examined the furniture and opened the doors of the cabinet. Then he came to the windows, through which he declared no one could possibly have passed. At the second window he found Daddy Jacques in contemplation.

"Well, Daddy Jacques," he said, "what are you looking at?"

"That policeman who is always going round and round the lake. Another of those fellows who think they can see better than anybody else!"

"You don't know Frederic Larsan, Daddy Jacques, or you wouldn't speak of him in that way," said Rouletabille in a melancholy tone. "If there is anyone who will find the murderer, it will be he." And Rouletabille heaved a deep sigh.

"Before they find him, they will have to learn how they lost him," said Daddy Jacques, stolidly.

At length we reached the door of The Yellow Room itself.

CHAPTER VII
In Which Rouletabille Sets Out on an Expedition Under the Bed

Rouletabille having pushed open the door of The Yellow Room paused on the threshold saying, with an emotion which I only later understood, "Ah, the perfume of the lady in black!"

The chamber was dark. Daddy Jacques was about to open the blinds when Rouletabille stopped him.

"Did not the tragedy take place in complete darkness?" he asked.

"No, young man, I don't think so. Mademoiselle always had a nightlight on her table, and I lit it every evening before she went to bed. I was a sort of chambermaid, you must understand, when the evening came. The real chambermaid did not come here much before the morning. Mademoiselle worked late--far into the night."

"Where did the table with the night-light stand,--far from the bed?"

"Some way from the bed."

"Can you light the burner now?"

"The lamp is broken and the oil that was in it was spilled when the table was upset. All the rest of the things in the room remain just as they were. I have only to open the blinds for you to see."

"Wait."

Rouletabille went back into the laboratory, closed the shutters of the two windows and the door of the vestibule. When we were in complete darkness, he lit a wax vesta, and asked Daddy Jacques to move to the middle of the chamber with it to the place where the night-light was burning that night.

Daddy Jacques who was in his stockings—he usually left his sabots in the vestibule—entered The Yellow Room with his bit of a vesta. We vaguely distinguished objects overthrown on the floor, a bed in one corner, and, in front of us, to the left, the gleam of a looking-glass hanging on the wall, near to the bed.

"That will do!--you may now open the blinds," said Rouletabille.

"Don't come any further," Daddy Jacques begged, "you may make marks with your boots, and nothing must be deranged; it's an idea of the magistrate's--though he has nothing more to do here."

And he pushed open the shutter. The pale daylight entered from without, throwing a sinister light on the saffron-coloured walls. The floor—for though the laboratory and the vestibule were tiled, The Yellow Room had a flooring of wood—was covered with a single yellow mat which was large enough to cover nearly the whole room, under the bed and under the dressing-table—the only piece of furniture that remained upright. The centre round table, the night-table and two chairs had been overturned. These did not prevent a large stain of blood being visible on the mat, made, as Daddy Jacques informed us, by the blood which had flowed from the wound on Mademoiselle Stangerson's forehead. Besides these stains, drops of blood had fallen in all directions, in line with the visible traces of the footsteps—large and black—of the murderer. Everything led to the presumption that these drops of blood had fallen from the wound of the man who had, for a moment, placed his red hand on the wall. There were other traces of the same hand on the wall, but much less distinct.
"See!--see this blood on the wall!" I could not help exclaiming. "The man who pressed his hand so heavily upon it in the darkness must certainly have thought that he was pushing at a door! That's why he pressed on it so hard, leaving on the yellow paper the terrible evidence. I don't think there are many hands in the world of that sort. It is big and strong and the fingers are nearly all one as long as the other! The thumb is wanting and we have only the mark of the palm; but if we follow the trace of the hand," I continued, "we see that, after leaving its imprint on the wall, the touch sought the door, found it, and then felt for the lock--"

"No doubt," interrupted Rouletabille, chuckling, "only there is no blood, either on the lock or on the bolt!"

"What does that prove?" I rejoined with a good sense of which I was proud; "he might have opened the lock with his left hand, which would have been quite natural, his right hand being wounded."

"He didn't open it at all!" Daddy Jacques again exclaimed. "We are not fools; and there were four of us when we burst open the door!"

"What a queer hand!--Look what a queer hand it is!" I said.

"It is a very natural hand," said Rouletabille, "of which the shape has been deformed by its having slipped on the wall. The man dried his hand on the wall. He must be a man about five feet eight in height."

"How do you come at that?"

"By the height of the marks on the wall."

My friend next occupied himself with the mark of the bullet in the wall. It was a round hole.

"This ball was fired straight, not from above, and consequently, not from below."

Rouletabille went back to the door and carefully examined the lock and the bolt, satisfying himself that the door had certainly been burst open from the outside, and, further, that the key had been found in the lock on the inside of the chamber. He finally satisfied himself that with the key in the lock, the door could not possibly be opened from without with another key. Having made sure of all these details, he let fall these words: "That's better!" --Then sitting down on the ground, he hastily took off his boots and, in his socks, went into the room.

The first thing he did was to examine minutely the overturned furniture. We watched him in silence.

"Young fellow, you are giving yourself a great deal of trouble," said Daddy Jacques ironically.

Rouletabille raised his head and said:

"You have spoken the simple truth, Daddy Jacques; your mistress did not have her hair in bands that evening. I was a donkey to have believed she did."

Then, with the suppleness of a serpent, he slipped under the bed. Presently we heard him ask:

"At what time, Monsieur Jacques, did Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson arrive at the laboratory?"

"At six o'clock."

The voice of Rouletabille continued:

"Yes,--he's been under here,--that's certain; in fact, there was no where else where he could have hidden himself. Here, too, are the marks of his hobnails. When you entered--all four of you--did you look under the bed?"

"At once,--we drew it right out of its place--"

"And between the mattresses?"

"There was only one on the bed, and on that Mademoiselle was placed; and Monsieur Stangerson and the concierge immediately carried it into the laboratory. Under the mattress there was nothing but the metal netting, which could not conceal anything or anybody. Remember, monsieur, that there were four of us and we couldn't fail to see everything--the chamber is so small and scantily furnished, and all was locked behind in the pavilion."

I ventured on a hypothesis:

"Perhaps he got away with the mattress--in the mattress!--Anything is possible, in the face of such a mystery! In their distress of mind Monsieur Stangerson and the concierge may not have noticed they were bearing a double weight; especially if the concierge were an accomplice! I throw out this hypothesis for what it is worth, but it explains many things,--and particularly the fact that neither the laboratory nor the vestibule bear any traces of the footmarks found in the room. If, in carrying Mademoiselle on the mattress from the laboratory of the chateau, they rested for a moment, there might have been an opportunity for the man in it to escape."

"And then?" asked Rouletabille, deliberately laughing under the bed.

I felt rather vexed and replied:

"I don't know,--but anything appears possible"--

"The examining magistrate had the same idea, monsieur," said Daddy Jacques, "and he carefully examined the mattress. He was obliged to laugh at the idea, monsieur, as your friend is doing now,--for whoever heard of a mattress having a double bottom?"

I was myself obliged to laugh, on seeing that what I had said was absurd; but in an affair like this one hardly knows where an absurdity begins or ends.

My friend alone seemed able to talk intelligently. He called out from under the bed.
"The mat here has been moved out of place,—who did it?"

"We did, monsieur," explained Daddy Jacques. "When we could not find the assassin, we asked ourselves whether there was not some hole in the floor—"

"There is not," replied Rouletabille. "Is there a cellar?"

"No, there's no cellar. But that has not stopped our searching, and has not prevented the examining magistrate and his Registrar from studying the floor plank by plank, as if there had been a cellar under it."

The reporter then reappeared. His eyes were sparkling and his nostrils quivered. He remained on his hands and knees. He could not be better likened than to an admirable sporting dog on the scent of some unusual game. And, indeed, he was scenting the steps of a man,—the man whom he has sworn to report to his master, the manager of the "Epoque." It must not be forgotten that Rouletabille was first and last a journalist.

Thus, on his hands and knees, he made his way to the four corners of the room, so to speak, sniffing and going round everything --everything that we could see, which was not much, and everything that we could not see, which must have been infinite.

The toilette table was a simple table standing on four legs; there was nothing about it by which it could possibly be changed into a temporary hiding-place. There was not a closet or cupboard. Mademoiselle Stangerson kept her wardrobe at the chateau.

Rouletabille literally passed his nose and hands along the walls, constructed of solid brickwork. When he had finished with the walls, and passed his agile fingers over every portion of the yellow paper covering them, he reached to the ceiling, which he was able to touch by mounting on a chair placed on the toilette table, and by moving this ingeniously constructed stage from place to place he examined every foot of it. When he had finished his scrutiny of the ceiling, where he carefully examined the hole made by the second bullet, he approached the window, and, once more, examined the iron bars and blinds, all of which were solid and intact. At last, he gave a grunt of satisfaction and declared "Now I am at ease!"

"Well,—do you believe that the poor dear young lady was shut up when she was being murdered--when she cried out for help?" wailed Daddy Jacques.

"Yes," said the young reporter, drying his forehead, "The Yellow Room was as tightly shut as an iron safe."

"That," I said, "is why this mystery is the most surprising I know. Edgar Allan Poe, in 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue,' invented nothing like it. The place of that crime was sufficiently closed to prevent the escape of a man; but there was that window through which the monkey, the perpetrator of the murder, could slip away! But here, there can be no question of an opening of any sort. The door was fastened, and through the window blinds, secure as they were, not even a fly could enter or get out."

"True, true," assented Rouletabille as he kept on drying his forehead, which seemed to be perspiring less from his recent bodily exertion than from his mental agitation. "Indeed, it's a great, a beautiful, and a very curious mystery."

"The Bete du bon Dieu," muttered Daddy Jacques, "the Bete du bon Dieu herself, if she had committed the crime, could not have escaped. Listen! Do you hear it? Hush!"

Daddy Jacques made us a sign to keep quiet and, stretching his arm towards the wall nearest the forest, listened to something which we could not hear.

"It's answering," he said at length. "I must kill it. It is too wicked, but it's the Bete du bon Dieu, and, every night, it goes to pray on the tomb of Sainte-Genevieve and nobody dares to touch her, for fear that Mother Angenoux should cast an evil spell on them."

"How big is the Bete du bon Dieu?"

"Nearly as big as a small retriever,—a monster, I tell you. Ah! --I have asked myself more than once whether it was not her that took our poor Mademoiselle by the throat with her claws. But the Bete du bon Dieu does not wear hobnailed boots, nor fire revolvers, nor has she a hand like that!" exclaimed Daddy Jacques, again pointing out to us the red mark on the wall. "Besides, we should have seen her as well as we would have seen a man--"

"Evidently," I said. "Before we had seen this Yellow Room, I had also asked myself whether the cat of Mother Angenoux--"

"You also!" cried Rouletabille.

"Didn't you?" I asked.

"Not for a moment. After reading the article in the 'Matin,' I knew that a cat had nothing to do with the matter. But I swear now that a frightful tragedy has been enacted here. You say nothing about the Basque cap, or the handkerchief, found here, Daddy Jacques?"

"Of course, the magistrate has taken them," the old man answered, hesitatingly.

"I haven't seen either the handkerchief or the cap, yet I can tell you how they are made," the reporter said to him gravely.
"Oh, you are very clever," said Daddy Jacques, coughing and embarrassed.

"The handkerchief is a large one, blue with red stripes and the cap is an old Basque cap, like the one you are wearing now."

"You are a wizard!" said Daddy Jacques, trying to laugh and not quite succeeding. "How do you know that the handkerchief is blue with red stripes?"

"Because, if it had not been blue with red stripes, it would not have been found at all."

Without giving any further attention to Daddy Jacques, my friend took a piece of paper from his pocket, and taking out a pair of scissors, bent over the footprints. Placing the paper over one of them he began to cut. In a short time he had made a perfect pattern which he handed to me, begging me not to lose it.

He then returned to the window and, pointing to the figure of Frederic Larsan, who had not quitted the side of the lake, asked Daddy Jacques whether the detective whether the detective had, like himself, been working in The Yellow Room?

"No," replied Robert Darzac, who, since Rouletabille had handed him the piece of scorched paper, had not uttered a word, "He pretends that he does not need to examine The Yellow Room. He says that the murderer made his escape from it in quite a natural way, and that he will, this evening, explain how he did it."

As he listened to what Monsieur Darzac had to say, Rouletabille turned pale.

"Has Frederic Larsan found out the truth, which I can only guess at?" he murmured. "He is very clever--very clever--and I admire him. But what we have to do to-day is something more than the work of a policeman, something quite different from the teachings of experience. We have to take hold of our reason by the right end."

The reporter rushed into the open air, agitated by the thought that the great and famous Fred might anticipate him in the solution of the problem of The Yellow Room.

I managed to reach him on the threshold of the pavilion. "Calm yourself, my dear fellow," I said. "Aren't you satisfied?"

"Yes," he confessed to me, with a deep sigh. "I am quite satisfied. I have discovered many things."

"Moral or material?"

"Several moral,--one material. This, for example."

And rapidly he drew from his waistcoat pocket a piece of paper in which he had placed a light-coloured hair from a woman's head.

CHAPTER VIII

The Examining Magistrate Questions Mademoiselle Stangerson

Two minutes later, as Rouletabille was bending over the footprints discovered in the park, under the window of the vestibule, a man, evidently a servant at the chateau, came towards us rapidly and called out to Monsieur Darzac then coming out of the pavilion:

"Monsieur Robert, the magistrate, you know, is questioning Mademoiselle."

Monsieur Darzac uttered a muttered excuse to us and set off running towards the chateau, the man running after him.

"If the corpse can speak," I said, "it would be interesting to be there."

"We must know," said my friend. "Let's go to the chateau." And he drew me with him. But, at the chateau, a gendarme placed in the vestibule denied us admission up the staircase of the first floor. We were obliged to wait down stairs.

This is what passed in the chamber of the victim while we were waiting below.

The family doctor, finding that Mademoiselle Stangerson was much better, but fearing a relapse which would no longer permit of her being questioned, had thought it his duty to inform the examining magistrate of this, who decided to proceed immediately with a brief examination. At this examination, the Registrar, Monsieur Stangerson, and the doctor were present. Later, I obtained the text of the report of the examination, and I give it here, in all its legal dryness:

"Question. Are you able, mademoiselle, without too much fatiguing yourself, to give some necessary details of the frightful attack of which you have been the victim?"

"Answer. I feel much better, monsieur, and I will tell you all I know. When I entered my chamber I did not notice anything unusual there.

"Q. Excuse me, mademoiselle,--if you will allow me, I will ask you some questions and you will answer them. That will fatigue you less than making a long recital."

"A. Do so, monsieur."

"Q. What did you do on that day?--I want you to be as minute and precise as possible. I wish to know all you did that day, if it is not asking too much of you."

"A. I rose late, at ten o'clock, for my father and I had returned home late on the night previously, having been to dinner at the reception given by the President of the Republic, in honour of the Academy of Science of Philadelphia.
When I left my chamber, at half-past ten, my father was already at work in the laboratory. We worked together till midday. We then took half-an-hour's walk in the park, as we were accustomed to do, before breakfasting at the chateau. After breakfast, we took another walk for half an hour, and then returned to the laboratory. There we found my chambermaid, who had come to set my room in order. I went into The Yellow Room to give her some slight orders and she directly afterwards left the pavilion, and I resumed my work with my father. At five o'clock, we again went for a walk in the park and afterward had tea.

"Q. Before leaving the pavilion at five o'clock, did you go into your chamber?
"A. No, monsieur, my father went into it, at my request to bring me my hat.
"Q. And he found nothing suspicious there?
"A. Evidently no, monsieur.
"Q. It is, then, almost certain that the murderer was not yet concealed under the bed. When you went out, was the door of the room locked?
"A. No, there was no reason for locking it.
"Q. You were absent from the pavilion some length of time, Monsieur Stangerson and you?
"A. About an hour.
"Q. It was during that hour, no doubt, that the murderer got into the pavilion. But how? Nobody knows. Footmarks have been found in the park, leading away from the window of the vestibule, but none has been found going towards it. Did you notice whether the vestibule window was open when you went out?
"A. I don't remember.
"Monsieur Stangerson. It was closed.
"Q. And when you returned?
"Mademoiselle Stangerson. I did not notice.
"M. Stangerson. It was still closed. I remember remarking aloud: 'Daddy Jacques must surely have opened it while we were away.'

"Q. Strange!—Do you recollect, Monsieur Stangerson, if during your absence, and before going out, he had opened it? You returned to the laboratory at six o'clock and resumed work?
"Mademoiselle Stangerson. Yes, monsieur.
"Q. And you did not leave the laboratory from that hour up to the moment when you entered your chamber?
"M. Stangerson. Neither my daughter nor I, monsieur. We were engaged on work that was pressing, and we lost not a moment, --neglecting everything else on that account.
"Q. Did you dine in the laboratory?
"A. For that reason.
"Q. Are you accustomed to dine in the laboratory?
"A. We rarely dine there.
"Q. Could the murderer have known that you would dine there that evening?
"M. Stangerson. Good Heavens!—I think not. It was only when we returned to the pavilion at six o'clock, that we decided, my daughter and I, to dine there. At that moment I was spoken to by my gamekeeper, who detained me a moment, to ask me to accompany him on an urgent tour of inspection in a part of the woods which I had decided to thin. I put this off until the next day, and begged him, as he was going by the chateau, to tell the steward that we should dine in the laboratory. He left me, to execute the errand and I rejoined my daughter, who was already at work.

"Q. At what hour, mademoiselle, did you go to your chamber while your father continued to work there?
"A. At midnight.
"Q. Did Daddy Jacques enter The Yellow Room in the course of the evening?
"A. To shut the blinds and light the night-light.
"Q. He saw nothing suspicious?
"A. He would have told us if he had seen. Daddy Jacques is an honest man and very attached to me.
"Q. You affirm, Monsieur Stangerson, that Daddy Jacques remained with you all the time you were in the laboratory?
"M. Stangerson. I am sure of it. I have no doubt of that.
"Q. When you entered your chamber, mademoiselle, you immediately shut the door and locked and bolted it? That was taking unusual precautions, knowing that your father and your servant were there? Were you in fear of something, then?
"A. My father would be returning to the chateau and Daddy Jacques would be going to his bed. And, in fact, I did fear something.
"Q. You were so much in fear of something that you borrowed Daddy Jacques's revolver without telling him you
"A. That is true. I did not wish to alarm anybody,—the more, because my fears might have proved to have been foolish.

"Q. What was it you feared?

"A. I hardly know how to tell you. For several nights, I seemed to hear, both in the park and out of the park, round the pavilion, unusual sounds, sometimes footsteps, at other times the cracking of branches. The night before the attack on me, when I did not get to bed before three o'clock in the morning, on our return from the Elysee, I stood for a moment before my window, and I felt sure I saw shadows.

"Q. How many?

"A. Two. They moved round the lake,—then the moon became clouded and I lost sight of them. At this time of the season, every year, I have generally returned to my apartment in the chateau for the winter; but this year I said to myself that I would not quit the pavilion before my father had finished the resume of his works on the 'Dissociation of Matter' for the Academy. I did not wish that that important work, which was to have been finished in the course of a few days, should be delayed by a change in our daily habit. You can well understand that I did not wish to speak of my childish fears to my father, nor did I say anything to Daddy Jacques who, I knew, would not have been able to hold his tongue. Knowing that he had a revolver in his room, I took advantage of his absence and borrowed it, placing it in the drawer of my night-table.

"Q. You know of no enemies you have?

"A. None.

"Q. You understand, mademoiselle, that these precautions are calculated to cause surprise?

"M. Stangerson. Evidently, my child, such precautions are very surprising.

"A. No;—because I have told you that I had been uneasy for two nights.

"M. Stangerson. You ought to have told me of that! This misfortune would have been avoided.

"Q. The door of The Yellow Room locked, did you go to bed?

"A. Yes, and, being very tired, I at once went to sleep.

"Q. The night-light was still burning?

"A. Yes, but it gave a very feeble light.

"Q. Then, mademoiselle, tell us what happened.

"A. I do not know whether I had been long asleep, but suddenly I awoke—and uttered a loud cry.

"M. Stangerson. Yes—a terrible cry—'Murder!'—It still rings in my ears.

"Q. You uttered a loud cry?

"A. A man was in my chamber. He sprang at me and tried to strangle me. I was nearly stifled when suddenly I was able to reach the drawer of my night-table and grasp the revolver which I had placed in it. At that moment the man had forced me to the foot of my bed and brandished in over my head a sort of mace. But I had fired. He immediately struck a terrible blow at my head. All that, monsieur, passed more rapidly than I can tell it, and I know nothing more.

"Q. Nothing?—Have you no idea as to how the assassin could escape from your chamber?

"A. None whatever,—I know nothing more. One does not know what is passing around one, when one is unconscious.

"Q. Was the man you saw tall or short, little or big?

"A. I only saw a shadow which appeared to me formidable.

"Q. You cannot give us any indication?

"A. I know nothing more, monsieur, than that a man threw himself upon me and that I fired at him. I know nothing more."

Here the interrogation of Mademoiselle Stangerson concluded.

Rouletabille waited patiently for Monsieur Robert Darzac, who soon appeared.

From a room near the chamber of Mademoiselle Stangerson, he had heard the interrogatory and now came to recount it to my friend with great exactitude, aided by an excellent memory. His docility still surprised me. Thanks to hasty pencil-notes, he was able to reproduce, almost textually, the questions and the answers given.

It looked as if Monsieur Darzac were being employed as the secretary of my young friend and acted as if he could refuse him nothing; nay, more, as if under a compulsion to do so.

The fact of the closed window struck the reporter as it had struck the magistrate. Rouletabille asked Darzac to repeat once more Mademoiselle Stangerson's account of how she and her father had spent their time on the day of the tragedy, as she had stated it to the magistrate. The circumstance of the dinner in the laboratory seemed to interest him in the highest degree; and he had it repeated to him three times. He also wanted to be sure that the forest-keeper knew that the professor and his daughter were going to dine in the laboratory, and how he had come to know it.
When Monsieur Darzac had finished, I said: "The examination has not advanced the problem much."
"It has put it back," said Monsieur Darzac.
"It has thrown light upon it," said Rouletabille, thoughtfully.

CHAPTER IX
Reporter and Detective

The three of us went back towards the pavilion. At some distance from the building the reporter made us stop and, pointing to a small clump of trees to the right of us, said:
"That's where the murderer came from to get into the pavilion."

As there were other patches of trees of the same sort between the great oaks, I asked why the murderer had chosen that one, rather than any of the others. Rouletabille answered me by pointing to the path which ran quite close to the thicket to the door of the pavilion.

"That path is as you see, topped with gravel," he said; "the man must have passed along it going to the pavilion, since no traces of his steps have been found on the soft ground. The man didn't have wings; he walked; but he walked on the gravel which left no impression of his tread. The gravel has, in fact, been trodden by many other feet, since the path is the most direct way between the pavilion and the chateau. As to the thicket, made of the sort of shrubs that don't flourish in the rough season--laurels and fuchsias--it offered the murderer a sufficient hiding-place until it was time for him to make his way to the pavilion. It was while hiding in that clump of trees that he saw Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson, and then Daddy Jacques, leave the pavilion. Gravel has been spread nearly, very nearly, up to the windows of the pavilion. The footprints of a man, parallel with the wall--marks which we will examine presently, and which I have already seen--prove that he only needed to make one stride to find himself in front of the vestibule window, left open by Daddy Jacques. The man drew himself up by his hands and entered the vestibule."

"After all it is very possible," I said.
"After all what? After all what?" cried Rouletabille.

I begged of him not to be angry; but he was too much irritated to listen to me and declared, ironically, that he admired the prudent doubt with which certain people approached the most simple problems, risking nothing by saying "that is so, or 'that is not so." Their intelligence would have produced about the same result if nature had forgotten to furnish their brain-pan with a little grey matter. As I appeared vexed, my young friend took me by the arm and admitted that he had not meant that for me; he thought more of me than that.

"If I did not reason as I do in regard to this gravel," he went on, "I should have to assume a balloon!--My dear fellow, the science of the aerostation of dirigible balloons is not yet developed enough for me to consider it and suppose that a murderer would drop from the clouds! So don't say a thing is possible, when it could not be otherwise. We know now how the man entered by the window, and we also know the moment at which he entered,--during the five o'clock walk of the professor and his daughter. The fact of the presence of the chambermaid--who had come to clean up The Yellow Room--in the laboratory, when Monsieur Stangerson and his daughter returned from their walk, at half-past one, permits us to affirm that at half-past one the murderer was not in the chamber under the bed, unless he was in collusion with the chambermaid. What do you say, Monsieur Darzac?"

Monsieur Darzac shook his head and said he was sure of the chambermaid's fidelity, and that she was a thoroughly honest and devoted servant.
"Besides," he added, "at five o'clock Monsieur Stangerson went into the room to fetch his daughter's hat"
"There is that also," said Rouletabille.

"That the man entered by the window at the time you say, I admit," I said; "but why did he shut the window? It was an act which would necessarily draw the attention of those who had left it open"

"It may be the window was not shut at once," replied the young reporter. "But if he did shut the window, it was because of the bend in the gravel path, a dozen yards from the pavilion, and on account of the three oaks that are growing at that spot."

"What do you mean by that?" asked Monsieur Darzac, who had followed us and listened with almost breathless attention to all that Rouletabille had said.

"I'll explain all to you later on, Monsieur, when I think the moment to be ripe for doing so; but I don't think I have anything of more importance to say on this affair, if my hypothesis is justified."
"And what is your hypothesis?"

"You will never know if it does not turn out to be the truth. It is of much too grave a nature to speak of it, so long as it continues to be only a hypothesis."

"Have you, at least, some idea as to who the murderer is?"
"No, monsieur, I don't know who the murderer is; but don't be afraid, Monsieur Robert Darzac--I shall know."

I could not but observe that Monsieur Darzac was deeply moved; and I suspected that Rouletabille's confident
assertion was not pleasing to him. Why, I asked myself, if he was really afraid that the murderer should be discovered, was he helping the reporter to find him? My young friend seemed to have received the same impression, for he said, bluntly:

"Monsieur Darzac, don't you want me to find out who the murderer was?"

"Oh!—I should like to kill him with my own hand!" cried Mademoiselle Stangerson's fiance, with a vehemence that amazed me.

"I believe you," said Rouletabille gravely; "but you have not answered my question."

We were passing by the thicket, of which the young reporter had spoken to us a minute before. I entered it and pointed out evident traces of a man who had been hidden there. Rouletabille, once more, was right.

"Yes, yes!" he said. "We have to do with a thing of flesh and blood, who uses the same means that we do. It'll all come out on those lines."

Having said this, he asked me for the paper pattern of the footprint which he had given me to take care of, and applied it to a very clear footmark behind the thicket. "Aha!" he said, rising.

I thought he was now going to trace back the track of the murderer's footmarks to the vestibule window; but he led us instead, far to the left, saying that it was useless ferreting in the mud, and that he was sure, now, of the road taken by the murderer.

"He went along the wall to the hedge and dry ditch, over which he jumped. See, just in front of the little path leading to the lake, that was his nearest way to get out."

"How do you know he went to the lake?"

"Because Frederic Larsan has not quitted the borders of it since this morning. There must be some important marks there."

A few minutes later we reached the lake.

It was a little sheet of marshy water, surrounded by reeds, on which floated some dead water-lily leaves. The great Fred may have seen us approaching, but we probably interested him very little, for he took hardly any notice of us and continued to be stirring with his cane something which we could not see.

"Look!" said Rouletabille, "here again are the footmarks of the escaping man; they skirt the lake here and finally disappear just before this path, which leads to the high road to Epinay. The man continued his flight to Paris."

"What makes you think that?" I asked, "since these footmarks are not continued on the path?"

"What makes me think that?—Why these footprints, which I expected to find!" he cried, pointing to the sharply outlined imprint of a neat boot. "See!"—and he called to Frederic Larsan.

"Monsieur Fred, these neat footprints seem to have been made since the discovery of the crime."

"Yes, young man, yes, they have been carefully made," replied Fred without raising his head. "You see, there are steps that come, and steps that go back."

"And the man had a bicycle!" cried the reporter.

Here, after looking at the marks of the bicycle, which followed, going and coming, the neat footprints, I thought I might intervene.

"The bicycle explains the disappearance of the murderer's big foot-prints," I said. "The murderer, with his rough boots, mounted a bicycle. His accomplice, the wearer of the neat boots, had come to wait for him on the edge of the lake with the bicycle. It might be supposed that the murderer was working for the other."

"No, no!" replied Rouletabille with a strange smile. "I have expected to find these footmarks from the very beginning. These are not the footmarks of the murderer!"

"Then there were two?"

"No--there was but one, and he had no accomplice."

"Very good!—Very good!" cried Frederic Larsan.

"Look!" continued the young reporter, showing us the ground where it had been disturbed by big and heavy heels; "the man seated himself there, and took off his hobnailed boots, which he had worn only for the purpose of misleading detection, and then no doubt, taking them away with him, he stood up in his own boots, and quietly and slowly regained the high road, holding his bicycle in his hand, for he could not venture to ride it on this rough path. That accounts for the lightness of the impression made by the wheels along it, in spite of the softness of the ground. If there had been a man on the bicycle, the wheels would have sunk deeply into the soil. No, no; there was but one man there, the murderer on foot."

"Bravo!—bravo!" cried Fred again, and coming suddenly towards us and, planting himself in front of Monsieur Robert Darzac, he said to him:

"If we had a bicycle here, we might demonstrate the correctness of the young man's reasoning, Monsieur Robert Darzac. Do you know whether there is one at the chateau?"

"No!" replied Monsieur Darzac. "There is not. I took mine, four days ago, to Paris, the last time I came to the
chateau before the crime."

"That's a pity!" replied Fred, very coldly. Then, turning to Rouletabille, he said: "If we go on at this rate, we'll both come to the same conclusion. Have you any idea, as to how the murderer got away from The Yellow Room?"

"Yes," said my young friend; "I have an idea."

"So have I," said Fred, "and it must be the same as yours. There are no two ways of reasoning in this affair. I am waiting for the arrival of my chief before offering any explanation to the examining magistrate."

"Ah! Is the Chief of the Surete coming?"

"Yes, this afternoon. He is going to summon, before the magistrate, in the laboratory, all those who have played any part in this tragedy. It will be very interesting. It is a pity you won't be able to be present."

"I shall be present," said Rouletabille confidently.

"Really--you are an extraordinary fellow--for your age!" replied the detective in a tone not wholly free from irony. "You'd make a wonderful detective--if you had a little more method--if you didn't follow your instincts and that bump on your forehead. As I have already several times observed, Monsieur Rouletabille, you reason too much; you do not allow yourself to be guided by what you have seen. What do you say to the handkerchief full of blood, and the red mark of the hand on the wall? You have seen the stain on the wall, but I have only seen the handkerchief."

"Bah!" cried Rouletabille, "the murderer was wounded in the hand by Mademoiselle Stangerson's revolver!"

"Ah!--a simply instinctive observation! Take care!--You are becoming too strictly logical, Monsieur Rouletabille; logic will upset you if you use it indiscriminately. You are right, when you say that Mademoiselle Stangerson fired her revolver, but you are wrong when you say that she wounded the murderer in the hand."

"I am sure of it," cried Rouletabille.

Fred, imperturbable, interrupted him:

"Defective observation--defective observation!--the examination of the handkerchief, the numberless little round scarlet stains, the impression of drops which I found in the tracks of the footprints, at the moment when they were made on the floor, prove to me that the murderer was not wounded at all. Monsieur Rouletabille, the murderer bled at the nose!"

The great Fred spoke quite seriously. However, I could not refrain from uttering an exclamation.

The reporter looked gravely at Fred, who looked gravely at him. And Fred immediately concluded:

"The man allowed the blood to flow into his hand and handkerchief, and dried his hand on the wall. The fact is highly important," he added, "because there is no need of his being wounded in the hand for him to be the murderer."

Rouletabille seemed to be thinking deeply. After a moment he said:

"There is something--a something, Monsieur Frederic Larsan, much graver than the misuse of logic the disposition of mind in some detectives which makes them, in perfect good faith, twist logic to the necessities of their preconceived ideas. You, already, have your idea about the murderer, Monsieur Fred. Don't deny it; and your theory demands that the murderer should not have been wounded in the hand, otherwise it comes to nothing. And you have searched, and have found something else. It's dangerous, very dangerous, Monsieur Fred, to go from a preconceived idea to find the proofs to fit it. That method may lead you far astray Beware of judicial error, Monsieur Fred, it will trip you up!"

And laughing a little, in a slightly bantering tone, his hands in his pockets, Rouletabille fixed his cunning eyes on the great Fred.

Frederic Larsan silently contemplated the young reporter who pretended to be as wise as himself. Shrugging his shoulders, he bowed to us and moved quickly away, hitting the stones on his path with his stout cane.

Rouletabille watched his retreat, and then turned toward us, his face joyous and triumphant.

"I shall beat him!" he cried. "I shall beat the great Fred, clever as he is; I shall beat them all!"

And he danced a double shuffle. Suddenly he stopped. My eyes followed his gaze; they were fixed on Monsieur Robert Darzac, who was looking anxiously at the impression left by his feet side by side with the elegant footmarks. There was not a particle of difference between them!

We thought he was about to faint. His eyes, bulging with terror, avoided us, while his right hand, with a spasmodic movement, twitched at the beard that covered his honest, gentle, and now despairing face. At length regaining his self-possession, he bowed to us, and remarking, in a changed voice, that he was obliged to return to the chateau, left us.

"The deuce!" exclaimed Rouletabille.

He, also, appeared to be deeply concerned. From his pocket-book he took a piece of white paper as I had seen him do before, and with his scissors, cut out the shape of the neat bootmarks that were on the ground. Then he fitted the new paper pattern with the one he had previously made--the two were exactly alike. Rising, Rouletabille
exclaimed again: "The deuce!" Presently he added: "Yet I believe Monsieur Robert Darzac to be an honest man." He then led me on the road to the Donjon Inn, which we could see on the highway, by the side of a small clump of trees.

CHAPTER X

"We Shall Have to Eat Red Meat--Now"

The Donjon Inn was of no imposing appearance; but I like these buildings with their rafters blackened with age and the smoke of their hearths--these inns of the coaching-days, crumbling erections that will soon exist in the memory only. They belong to the bygone days, they are linked with history. They make us think of the Road, of those days when highwaymen rode.

I saw at once that the Donjon Inn was at least two centuries old--perhaps older. Under its sign-board, over the threshold, a man with a crabbed-looking face was standing, seemingly plunged in unpleasant thought, if the wrinkles on his forehead and the knitting of his brows were any indication.

When we were close to him, he deigned to see us and asked us, in a tone anything but engaging, whether we wanted anything. He was, no doubt, the not very amiable landlord of this charming dwelling-place. As we expressed a hope that he would be good enough to furnish us with a breakfast, he assured us that he had no provisions, regarding us, as he said this, with a look that was unmistakably suspicious.

"You may take us in," Rouletabille said to him, "we are not policemen."

"I'm not afraid of the police--I'm not afraid of anyone!" replied the man.

I had made my friend understand by a sign that we should do better not to insist; but, being determined to enter the inn, he slipped by the man on the doorstep and was in the common room.

"Come on," he said, "it is very comfortable here."

A good fire was blazing in the chimney, and we held our hands to the warmth it sent out; it was a morning in which the approach of winter was unmistakable. The room was a tolerably large one, furnished with two heavy tables, some stools, a counter decorated with rows of bottles of syrup and alcohol. Three windows looked out on to the road. A coloured advertisement lauded the many merits of a new vermouth. On the mantelpiece was arrayed the innkeeper's collection of figured earthenware pots and stone jugs.

"That's a fine fire for roasting a chicken," said Rouletabille. "We have no chicken--not even a wretched rabbit," said the landlord.

"I know," said my friend slowly; "I know--We shall have to eat red meat--now."

I confess I did not in the least understand what Rouletabille meant by what he had said; but the landlord, as soon as he heard the words, uttered an oath, which he at once stifled, and placed himself at our orders as obediently as Monsieur Robert Darzac had done, when he heard Rouletabille's prophetic sentence--"The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm, nor the garden its brightness." Certainly my friend knew how to make people understand him by the use of wholly incomprehensible phrases. I observed as much to him, but he merely smiled. I should have proposed that he give me some explanation; but he put a finger to his lips, which evidently signified that he had not only determined not to speak, but also enjoined silence on my part.

Meantime the man had pushed open a little side door and called to somebody to bring him half a dozen eggs and a piece of beefsteak. The commission was quickly executed by a strongly-built young woman with beautiful blonde hair and large, handsome eyes, who regarded us with curiosity.

"Get out!--and if the Green Man comes, don't let me see him."

She disappeared. Rouletabille took the eggs, which had been brought to him in a bowl, and the meat which was on a dish, placed all carefully beside him in the chimney, unhooked a frying-pan and a gridiron, and began to beat up our omelette before proceeding to grill our beefsteak. He then ordered two bottles of cider, and seemed to take as little notice of our host as our host did of him. The landlord let us do our own cooking and set our table near one of the windows.

Suddenly I heard him mutter:

"Ah!--there he is."

His face had changed, expressing fierce hatred. He went and glued himself to one of the windows, watching the road. There was no need for me to draw Rouletabille's attention; he had already left our omelette and had joined the landlord at the window. I went with him.

A man dressed entirely in green velvet, his head covered with a huntsman's cap of the same colour, was advancing leisurely, lighting a pipe as he walked. He carried a fowling-piece slung at his back. His movements displayed an almost aristocratic ease. He wore eye-glasses and appeared to be about five and forty years of age. His hair as well as his moustache were salt grey. He was remarkably handsome. As he passed near the inn, he hesitated, as if asking himself whether or no he should enter it; gave a glance towards us, took a few whiffs at his pipe, and then resumed his walk at the same nonchalant pace.
Rouletabille and I looked at our host. His flashing eyes, his clenched hands, his trembling lips, told us of the tumultuous feelings by which he was being agitated.

"He has done well not to come in here to-day!" he hissed.

"Who is that man?" asked Rouletabille, returning to his omelette.

"The Green Man," growled the innkeeper. "Don't you know him? Then all the better for you. He is not an acquaintance to make.--Well, he is Monsieur Stangerson's forest-keeper."

"You don't appear to like him very much?" asked the reporter, pouring his omelette into the frying-pan.

"Nobody likes him, monsieur. He's an upstart who must once have had a fortune of his own; and he forgives nobody because, in order to live, he has been compelled to become a servant. A keeper is as much a servant as any other, isn't he? Upon my word, one would say that he is the master of the Glandier, and that all the land and woods belong to him. He'll not let a poor creature eat a morsel of bread on the grass his grass!"

"Does he often come here?"

"Too often. But I've made him understand that his face doesn't please me, and, for a month past, he hasn't been here. The Donjon Inn has never existed for him!--he hasn't had time!--been too much engaged in paying court to the landlady of the Three Lilies at Saint-Michel. A bad fellow!--There isn't an honest man who can bear him. Why, the concierges of the chateau would turn their eyes away from a picture of him!"

"The concierges of the chateau are honest people, then?"

"Yes, they are, as true as my name's Mathieu, monsieur. I believe them to be honest."

"Yet they've been arrested?"

"What does that prove?--But I don't want to mix myself up in other people's affairs."

"And what do you think of the murder?"

"Of the murder of poor Mademoiselle Stangerson?--A good girl much loved everywhere in the country. That's what I think of it--and many things besides; but that's nobody's business."

"Not even mine?" insisted Rouletabille.

The innkeeper looked at him sideways and said gruffly:

"Not even yours."

The omelette ready, we sat down at table and were silently eating, when the door was pushed open and an old woman, dressed in rags, leaning on a stick, her head doddering, her white hair hanging loosely over her wrinkled forehead, appeared on the threshold.

"Ah!--there you are, Mother Angenoux!--It's long since we saw you last," said our host.

"I have been very ill, very nearly dying," said the old woman. "If ever you should have any scraps for the Bete du Bon Dieu--?"

"A glass of cider, Daddy Mathieu," he said.

As the Green Man entered, Daddy Mathieu had started violently; but visibly mastering himself he said:

"I've no more cider; I served the last bottles to these gentlemen."

"Then give me a glass of white wine," said the Green Man, without showing the least surprise.

"I've no more white wine--no more anything," said Daddy Mathieu, surlily.

"How is Madame Mathieu?"

"Quite well, thank you."

So the young Woman with the large, tender eyes, whom we had just seen, was the wife of this repugnant and brutal rustic, whose jealousy seemed to emphasise his physical ugliness.

Slamming the door behind him, the innkeeper left the room. Mother Angenoux was still standing, leaning on her stick, the cat at her feet.

"You've been ill, Mother Angenoux?--Is that why we have not seen you for the last week?" asked the Green Man.

"Yes, Monsieur keeper. I have been able to get up but three times, to go to pray to Sainte-Genevieve, our good patroness, and the rest of the time I have been lying on my bed. There was no one to care for me but the Bete du bon Dieu!"

"Did she not leave you?"

"Neither by day nor by night."

"Are you sure of that?"

"As I am of Paradise."
"Then how was it, Madame Angenoux, that all through the night of the murder nothing but the cry of the Bete du bon Dieu was heard?"

Mother Angenoux planted herself in front of the forest-keeper and struck the floor with her stick.

"I don't know anything about it," she said. "But shall I tell you something? There are no two cats in the world that cry like that. Well, on the night of the murder I also heard the cry of the Bete du bon Dieu outside; and yet she was on my knees, and did not mew once, I swear. I crossed myself when I heard that, as if I had heard the devil."

I looked at the keeper when he put the last question, and I am much mistaken if I did not detect an evil smile on his lips. At that moment, the noise of loud quarrelling reached us. We even thought we heard a dull sound of blows, as if some one was being beaten. The Green Man quickly rose and hurried to the door by the side of the fireplace; but it was opened by the landlord who appeared, and said to the keeper:

"Don't alarm yourself, Monsieur--it is my wife; she has the toothache." And he laughed. "Here, Mother Angenoux, here are some scraps for your cat."

He held out a packet to the old woman, who took it eagerly and went out by the door, closely followed by her cat.

"Then you won't serve me?" asked the Green Man.

Daddy Mathieu's face was placid and no longer retained its expression of hatred.

"I've nothing for you--nothing for you. Take yourself off."

The Green Man quietly refilled his pipe, lit it, bowed to us, and went out. No sooner was he over the threshold than Daddy Mathieu slammed the door after him and, turning towards us, with eyes bloodshot, and frothing at the mouth, he hissed to us, shaking his clenched fist at the door he had just shut on the man he evidently hated:

"I don't know who you are who tell me 'We shall have to eat red meat--now'; but if it will interest you to know it--that man is the murderer!"

With which words Daddy Mathieu immediately left us. Rouletabille returned towards the fireplace and said:

"Now we'll grill our steak. How do you like the cider?--It's a little tart, but I like it."

We saw no more of Daddy Mathieu that day, and absolute silence reigned in the inn when we left it, after placing five francs on the table in payment for our feast.

Rouletabille at once set off on a three mile walk round Professor Stangerson's estate. He halted for some ten minutes at the corner of a narrow road black with soot, near to some charcoal-burners' huts in the forest of Sainte-Genevieve, which touches on the road from Epinay to Corbeil, to tell me that the murderer had certainly passed that way, before entering the grounds and concealing himself in the little clump of trees.

"You don't think, then, that the keeper knows anything of it?" I asked.

"We shall see that, later," he replied. "For the present I'm not interested in what the landlord said about the man. The landlord hates him. I didn't take you to breakfast at the Donjon Inn for the sake of the Green Man."

Then Rouletabille, with great precaution glided, followed by me, towards the little building which, standing near the park gate, served for the home of the concierges, who had been arrested that morning. With the skill of an acrobat, he got into the lodge by an upper window which had been left open, and returned ten minutes later. He said only, "Ah!"--a word which, in his mouth, signified many things.

We were about to take the road leading to the chateau, when a considerable stir at the park gate attracted our attention. A carriage had arrived and some people had come from the chateau to meet it. Rouletabille pointed out to me a gentleman who descended from it.

"That's the Chief of the Surete" he said. "Now we shall see what Frederic Larsan has up his sleeve, and whether he is so much cleverer than anybody else."  

The carriage of the Chief of the Surete was followed by three other vehicles containing reporters, who were also desirous of entering the park. But two gendarmes stationed at the gate had evidently received orders to refuse admission to anybody. The Chief of the Surete calmed their impatience by undertaking to furnish to the press, that evening, all the information he could give that would not interfere with the judicial inquiry.

CHAPTER XI

In Which Frederic Larsan Explains How the Murderer Was Able to Get Out of The Yellow Room

Among the mass of papers, legal documents, memoirs, and extracts from newspapers, which I have collected, relating to the mystery of The Yellow Room, there is one very interesting piece; it is a detail of the famous examination which took place that afternoon, in the laboratory of Professor Stangerson, before the Chief of the Surete. This narrative is from the pen of Monsieur Maleine, the Registrar, who, like the examining magistrate, had spent some of his leisure time in the pursuit of literature. The piece was to have made part of a book which, however, has never been published, and which was to have been entitled: "My Examinations." It was given to me by the Registrar himself, some time after the astonishing denouement to this case, and is unique in judicial chronicles.

Here it is. It is not a mere dry transcription of questions and answers, because the Registrar often intersperses his
story with his own personal comments.

THE REGISTRAR'S NARRATIVE

The examining magistrate and I (the writer relates) found ourselves in The Yellow Room in the company of the builder who had constructed the pavilion after Professor Stangerson's designs. He had a workman with him. Monsieur de Marquet had had the walls laid entirely bare; that is to say, he had had them stripped of the paper which had decorated them. Blows with a pick, here and there, satisfied us of the absence of any sort of opening. The floor and the ceiling were thoroughly sounded. We found nothing. There was nothing to be found. Monsieur de Marquet appeared to be delighted and never ceased repeating:

"What a case! What a case! We shall never know, you'll see, how the murderer was able to get out of this room!"

Then suddenly, with a radiant face, he called to the officer in charge of the gendarmes.

"Go to the chateau," he said, "and request Monsieur Stangerson and Monsieur Robert Darzac to come to me in the laboratory, also Daddy Jacques; and let your men bring here the two concierges."

Five minutes later all were assembled in the laboratory. The Chief of the Surete, who had arrived at the Glandier, joined us at that moment. I was seated at Monsieur Stangerson's desk ready for work, when Monsieur de Marquet made us the following little speech—as original as it was unexpected:

"With your permission, gentlemen—as examinations lead to nothing—we will, for once, abandon the old system of interrogation. I will not have you brought before me one by one, but we will all remain here as we are,—Monsieur Stangerson, Monsieur Robert Darzac, Daddy Jacques and the two concierges, the Chief of the Surete, the Registrar, and myself. We shall all be on the same footing. The concierges may, for the moment, forget that they have been arrested. We are going to confer together. We are on the spot where the crime was committed. We have nothing else to discuss but the crime. So let us discuss it freely—intelligently or otherwise, so long as we speak just what is in our minds. There need be no formality or method since this won't help us in any way."

Then, passing before me, he said in a low voice:

"What do you think of that, eh? What a scene! Could you have thought of that? I'll make a little piece out of it for the Vaudeville." And he rubbed his hands with glee.

I turned my eyes on Monsieur Stangerson. The hope he had received from the doctor's latest reports, which stated that Mademoiselle Stangerson might recover from her wounds, had not been able to efface from his noble features the marks of the great sorrow that was upon him. He had believed his daughter to be dead, and he was still broken by that belief. His clear, soft, blue eyes expressed infinite sorrow. I had had occasion, many times, to see Monsieur Stangerson at public ceremonies, and from the first had been struck by his countenance, which seemed as pure as that of a child—the dreamy gaze with the sublime and mystical expression of the inventor and thinker.

On those occasions his daughter was always to be seen either following him or by his side; for they never quitted each other, it was said, and had shared the same labours for many years. The young lady, who was then five and thirty, though she looked no more than thirty, had devoted herself entirely to science. She still won admiration for her imperial beauty which had remained intact, without a wrinkle, withstanding time and love. Who would have dreamed that I should one day be seated by her pillow with my papers, and that I should see her, on the point of death, painfully recounting to us the most monstrous and most mysterious crime I have heard of in my career? Who would have thought that I should be, that afternoon, listening to the despairing father vainly trying to explain how his daughter's assailant had been able to escape from him? Why bury ourselves with our work in obscure retreats in the depths of woods, if it may not protect us against those dangerous threats to life which meet us in the busy cities?

"Now, Monsieur Stangerson," said Monsieur de Marquet, with somewhat of an important air, "place yourself exactly where you were when Mademoiselle Stangerson left you to go to her chamber."

Monsieur Stangerson rose and, standing at a certain distance from the door of The Yellow Room, said, in an even voice and without the least trace of emphasis—a voice which I can only describe as a dead voice:

"I was here. About eleven o'clock, after I had made a brief chemical experiment at the furnaces of the laboratory, needing all the space behind me, I had my desk moved here by Daddy Jacques, who spent the evening in cleaning some of my apparatus. My daughter had been working at the same desk with me. When it was her time to leave she rose, kissed me, and bade Daddy Jacques goodnight. She had to pass behind my desk and the door to enter her chamber, and she could do this only with some difficulty. That is to say, I was very near the place where the crime occurred later."

"And the desk?" I asked, obeying, in thus mixing myself in the conversation, the express orders of my chief, "as soon as you heard the cry of 'murder' followed by the revolver shots, what became of the desk?"

Daddy Jacques answered.

"We pushed it back against the wall, here—close to where it is at the present moment—so as to be able to get at the door at once."

I followed up my reasoning, to which, however, I attached but little importance, regarding it as only a weak
hypothesis, with another question.

"Might not a man in the room, the desk being so near to the door, by stooping and slipping under the desk, have left it unobserved?"

"You are forgetting," interrupted Monsieur Stangerson wearily, "that my daughter had locked and bolted her door, that the door had remained fastened, that we vainly tried to force it open when we heard the noise, and that we were at the door while the struggle between the murderer and my poor child was going on--immediately after we heard her stifled cries as she was being held by the fingers that have left their red mark upon her throat. Rapid as the attack was, we were no less rapid in our endeavors to get into the room where the tragedy was taking place."

I rose from my seat and once more examined the door with the greatest care. Then I returned to my place with a despairing gesture.

"If the lower panel of the door," I said, "could be removed without the whole door being necessarily opened, the problem would be solved. But, unfortunately, that last hypothesis is untenable after an examination of the door--it's of oak, solid and massive. You can see that quite plainly, in spite of the injury done in the attempt to burst it open."

"Ah!" cried Daddy Jacques, "it is an old and solid door that was brought from the chateau--they don't make such doors now. We had to use this bar of iron to get it open, all four of us--for the concierge, brave woman she is, helped us. It pains me to find them both in prison now."

Daddy Jacques had no sooner uttered these words of pity and protestation than tears and lamentations broke out from the concierges. I never saw two accused people crying more bitterly. I was extremely disgusted. Even if they were innocent, I could not understand how they could behave like that in the face of misfortune. A dignified bearing at such times is better than tears and groans, which, most often, are feigned.

"Now then, enough of that sniveling," cried Monsieur de Marquet; "and, in your interest, tell us what you were doing under the windows of the pavilion at the time your mistress was being attacked; for you were close to the pavilion when Daddy Jacques met you."

"We were coming to help!" they whined.

"If we could only lay hands on the murderer, he'd never taste bread again!" the woman gurgled between her sobs.

As before we were unable to get two connecting thoughts out of them. They persisted in their denials and swore, by heaven and all the saints, that they were in bed when they heard the sound of the revolver shot.

"It was not one, but two shots that were fired!--You see, you are lying. If you had heard one, you would have heard the other."

"Mon Dieu! Monsieur--it was the second shot we heard. We were asleep when the first shot was fired."

"Two shots were fired," said Daddy Jacques. "I am certain that all the cartridges were in my revolver. We found afterward that two had been exploded, and we heard two shots behind the door. Was not that so, Monsieur Stangerson?"

"Yes," replied the Professor, "there were two shots, one dull, and the other sharp and ringing."

"Why do you persist in lying?" cried Monsieur de Marquet, turning to the concierges. "Do you think the police are the fools you are? Everything points to the fact that you were out of doors and near the pavilion at the time of the tragedy. What were you doing there? So far as I am concerned," he said, turning to Monsieur Stangerson, "I can only explain the escape of the murderer on the assumption of help from these two accomplices. As soon as the door was forced open, and while you, Monsieur Stangerson, were occupied with your unfortunate child, the concierge and his wife facilitated the flight of the murderer, who, screening himself behind them, reached the window in the vestibule, and sprang out of it into the park. The concierge closed the window after him and fastened the blinds, which certainly could not have closed and fastened of themselves. That is the conclusion I have arrived at. If anyone here has any other idea, let him state it."

Monsieur Stangerson intervened:

"What you say was impossible. I do not believe either in the guilt or in the connivance of my concierges, though I cannot understand what they were doing in the park at that late hour of the night. I say it was impossible, because Madame Bernier held the lamp and did not move from the threshold of the room; because I, as soon as the door was forced open, threw myself on my knees beside my daughter, and no one could have left or entered the room by the door, without passing over her body and forcing his way by me! Daddy Jacques and the concierge had but to cast a glance round the chamber and under the bed, as I had done on entering, to see that there was nobody in it but my daughter lying on the floor."

"What do you think, Monsieur Darzac?" asked the magistrate.

Monsieur Darzac replied that he had no opinion to express. Monsieur Dax, the Chief of the Surete who, so far, had been listening and examining the room, at length deigned to open his lips:

"While search is being made for the criminal, we had better try to find out the motive for the crime; that will
advance us a little," he said. Turning towards Monsieur Stangerson, he continued, in the even, intelligent tone indicative of a strong character, "I understand that Mademoiselle was shortly to have been married?"

The professor looked sadly at Monsieur Robert Darzac.

"To my friend here, whom I should have been happy to call my son --to Monsieur Robert Darzac."

"Mademoiselle Stangerson is much better and is rapidly recovering from her wounds. The marriage is simply delayed, is it not, Monsieur?" insisted the Chief of the Surete.

"I hope so.

"What! Is there any doubt about that?"

Monsieur Stangerson did not answer. Monsieur Robert Darzac seemed agitated. I saw that his hand trembled as it fingered his watchchain. Monsieur Dax coughed, as did Monsieur de Marquet. Both were evidently embarrassed.

"You understand, Monsieur Stangerson," he said, "that in an affair so perplexing as this, we cannot neglect anything; we must know all, even the smallest and seemingly most futile thing concerning the victim--information apparently the most insignificant. Why do you doubt that this marriage will take place? You expressed a hope; but the hope implies a doubt. Why do you doubt?"

Monsieur Stangerson made a visible effort to recover himself.

"Yes, Monsieur," he said at length, "you are right. It will be best that you should know something which, if I concealed it, might appear to be of importance; Monsieur Darzac agrees with me in this."

Monsieur Darzac, whose pallor at that moment seemed to me to be altogether abnormal, made a sign of assent. I gathered he was unable to speak.

"I want you to know then," continued Monsieur Stangerson, "that my daughter has sworn never to leave me, and adheres firmly to her oath, in spite of all my prayers and all that I have argued to induce her to marry. We have known Monsieur Robert Darzac many years. He loves my child; and I believed that she loved him; because she only recently consented to this marriage which I desire with all my heart. I am an old man, Monsieur, and it was a happy hour to me when I knew that, after I had gone, she would have at her side, one who loved her and who would help her in continuing our common labours. I love and esteem Monsieur Darzac both for his greatness of heart and for his devotion to science. But, two days before the tragedy, for I know not what reason, my daughter declared to me that she would never marry Monsieur Darzac."

A dead silence followed Monsieur Stangerson's words. It was a moment fraught with suspense.

"Did Mademoiselle give you any explanation,--did she tell you what her motive was?" asked Monsieur Dax.

"She told me she was too old to marry--that she had waited too long. She said she had given much thought to the matter and while she had a great esteem, even affection, for Monsieur Darzac, she felt it would be better if things remained as they were. She would be happy, she said, to see the relations between ourselves and Monsieur Darzac become closer, but only on the understanding that there would be no more talk of marriage."

"That is very strange!" muttered Monsieur Dax.

"Strange!" repeated Monsieur de Marquet.

"You'll certainly not find the motive there, Monsieur Dax," Monsieur Stangerson said with a cold smile.

"In any case, the motive was not theft!" said the Chief impatiently.

"Oh! we are quite convinced of that!" cried the examining magistrate.

At that moment the door of the laboratory opened and the officer in charge of the gendarmes entered and handed a card to the examining magistrate. Monsieur de Marquet read it and uttered a half angry exclamation:

"This is really too much!" he cried.

"What is it?" asked the Chief.

"It's the card of a young reporter engaged on the 'Epoque,' a Monsieur Joseph Rouletabille. It has these words written on it: 'One of the motives of the crime was robbery.'"

The Chief smiled.

"Ah,--young Rouletabille--I've heard of him he is considered rather clever. Let him come in."

Monsieur Joseph Rouletabille was allowed to enter. I had made his acquaintance in the train that morning on the way to Epinay-sur-Orge. He had introduced himself almost against my wish into our compartment. I had better say at once that his manners, and the arrogance with which he assumed to know what was incomprehensible even to us, impressed him unfavourably on my mind. I do not like journalists. They are a class of writers to be avoided as the pest. They think that everything is permissible and they respect nothing. Grant them the least favour, allow them even to approach you, and you never can tell what annoyance they may give you. This one appears to be scarcely twenty years old, and the effrontery with which he dared to question us and discuss the matter with us made him particularly obnoxious to me. Besides, he had a way of expressing himself that left us guessing as to whether he was mocking us or not. I know quite well that the 'Epoque' is an influential paper with which it is well to be on good terms, but the paper ought not to allow itself to be represented by sneaking reporters.
Monsieur Joseph Rouletabille entered the laboratory, bowed to us, and waited for Monsieur de Marquet to ask him to explain his presence.

"You pretend, Monsieur, that you know the motive for the crime, and that that motive—in the face of all the evidence that has been forthcoming—was robbery?"

"No, Monsieur, I do not pretend that. I do not say that robbery was the motive for the crime, and I don't believe it was."

"Then, what is the meaning of this card?"

"It means that robbery was one of the motives for the crime."

"What leads you to think that?"

"If you will be good enough to accompany me, I will show you."

The young man asked us to follow him into the vestibule, and we did. He led us towards the lavatory and begged Monsieur de Marquet to kneel beside him. This lavatory is lit by the glass door, and, when the door was open, the light which penetrated was sufficient to light it perfectly. Monsieur de Marquet and Monsieur Joseph Rouletabille knelt down on the threshold, and the young man pointed to a spot on the pavement.

"The stones of the lavatory have not been washed by Daddy Jacques for some time," he said; "that can be seen by the layer of dust that covers them. Now, notice here, the marks of two large footprints and the black ash they left where they have been. That ash is nothing else than the charcoal dust that covers the path along which you must pass through the forest, in order to get directly from Epinay to the Glandier. You know there is a little village of charcoal-burners at that place, who make large quantities of charcoal. What the murderer did was to come here at midday, when there was nobody at the pavilion, and attempt his robbery."

"But what robbery?—Where do you see any signs of robbery? What proves to you that a robbery has been committed?" we all cried at once. "What put me on the trace of it," continued the journalist...

"Was this?" interrupted Monsieur de Marquet, still on his knees.

"Evidently," said Rouletabille.

And Monsieur de Marquet explained that there were on the dust of the pavement marks of two footsteps, as well as the impression, freshly-made, of a heavy rectangular parcel, the marks of the cord with which it had been fastened being easily distinguished.

"You have been here, then, Monsieur Rouletabille? I thought I had given orders to Daddy Jacques, who was left in charge of the pavilion, not to allow anybody to enter."

"Don't scold Daddy Jacques, I came here with Monsieur Robert Darzac."

"Ah,—Indeed!" exclaimed Monsieur de Marquet, disagreeably, casting a side-glance at Monsieur Darzac, who remained perfectly silent.

"When I saw the mark of the parcel by the side of the footprints, I had no doubt as to the robbery," replied Monsieur Rouletabille. "The thief had not brought a parcel with him; he had made one here—a parcel with the stolen objects, no doubt; and he put it in this corner intending to take it away when the moment came for him to make his escape. He had also placed his heavy boots beside the parcel,—for, see—there are no marks of steps leading to the marks left by the boots, which were placed side by side. That accounts for the fact that the murderer left no trace of his steps when he fled from The Yellow Room, nor any in the laboratory, nor in the vestibule. After entering The Yellow Room in his boots, he took them off, finding them troublesome, or because he wished to make as little noise as possible. The marks made by him in going through the vestibule and the laboratory were subsequently washed out by Daddy Jacques. Having, for some reason or other, taken off his boots, the murderer carried them in his hand and placed them by the side of the parcel he had made,—by that time the robbery had been accomplished. The man then returned to The Yellow Room and slipped under the bed, where the mark of his body is perfectly visible on the floor and even on the mat, which has been slightly moved from its place and creased. Fragments of straw also, recently torn, bear witness to the murderer's movements under the bed."

"Yes, yes,—we know all about that," said Monsieur de Marquet.

"The robber had another motive for returning to hide under the bed," continued the astonishing boy-journalist. "You might think that he was trying to hide himself quickly on seeing, through the vestibule window, Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson about to enter the pavilion. It would have been much easier for him to have climbed up to the attic and hidden there, waiting for an opportunity to get away, if his purpose had been only flight.—No! No!—he had to be in The Yellow Room."

Here the Chief intervened.

"That's not at all bad, young man. I compliment you. If we do not know yet how the murderer succeeded in getting away, we can at any rate see how he came in and committed the robbery. But what did he steal?"

"Something very valuable," replied the young reporter.

At that moment we heard a cry from the laboratory. We rushed in and found Monsieur Stangerson, his eyes
haggard, his limbs trembling, pointing to a sort of bookcase which he had opened, and which, we saw, was empty. At the same instant he sank into the large armchair that was placed before the desk and groaned, the tears rolling down his cheeks, "I have been robbed again! For God's sake, do not say a word of this to my daughter. She would be more pained than I am." He heaved a deep sigh and added, in a tone I shall never forget: "After all, what does it matter,--so long as she lives!"

"She will live!" said Monsieur Darzac, in a voice strangely touching.
"And we will find the stolen articles," said Monsieur Dax. "But what was in the cabinet?"

"Twenty years of my life," replied the illustrious professor sadly, "or rather of our lives--the lives of myself and my daughter! Yes, our most precious documents, the records of our secret experiments and our labours of twenty years were in that cabinet. It is an irreparable loss to us and, I venture to say, to science. All the processes by which I had been able to arrive at the precious proof of the destructibility of matter were there--all. The man who came wished to take all from me,--my daughter and my work--my heart and my soul."

And the great scientist wept like a child.

We stood around him in silence, deeply affected by his great distress. Monsieur Darzac pressed closely to his side, and tried in vain to restrain his tears--a sight which, for the moment, almost made me like him, in spite of an instinctive repulsion which his strange demeanour and his inexplicable anxiety had inspired me.

Monsieur Rouletabille alone,--as if his precious time and mission on earth did not permit him to dwell in the contemplation on human suffering--very, very calmly, stepped up to the empty cabinet and, pointing at it, broke the almost solemn silence. He entered into explanations, for which there was no need, as to why he had been led to believe that a robbery had been committed, which included the simultaneous discovery he had made in the lavatory, and the empty precious cabinet in the laboratory. The first thing that had struck him, he said, was the unusual form of that piece of furniture. It was very strongly built of fire-proof iron, clearly showing that it was intended for the keeping of most valuable objects. Then he noticed that the key had been left in the lock. "One does not ordinarily have a safe and leave it open!" he had said to himself. This little key, with its brass head and complicated wards, had strongly attracted him,--its presence had suggested robbery.

Monsieur de Marquet appeared to be greatly perplexed, as if he did not know whether he ought to be glad of the new direction given to the inquiry by the young reporter, or sorry that it had not been done by himself. In our profession and for the general welfare, we have to put up with such mortifications and bury selfish feelings. That was why Monsieur de Marquet controlled himself and joined his compliments with those of Monsieur Dax. As for Monsieur Rouletabille, he simply shrugged his shoulders and said: "There's nothing at all in that!" I should have liked to box his ears, especially when he added: "You will do well, Monsieur, to ask Monsieur Stangerson who usually kept that key?"

"My daughter," replied Monsieur Stangerson, "she was never without it.

"Ah! then that changes the aspect of things which no longer corresponds with Monsieur Rouletabille's ideas!" cried Monsieur de Marquet. "If that key never left Mademoiselle Stangerson, the murderer must have waited for her in her room for the purpose of stealing it; and the robbery could not have been committed until after the attack had been made on her. But after the attack four persons were in the laboratory! I can't make it out!"

"The robbery," said the reporter, "could only have been committed before the attack upon Mademoiselle Stangerson in her room. When the murderer entered the pavilion he already possessed the brass-headed key."

"That is impossible," said Monsieur Stangerson in a low voice.

"It is quite possible, Monsieur, as this proves."

And the young rascal drew a copy of the "Epoque" from his pocket, dated the 21st of October (I recall the fact that the crime was committed on the night between the 24th and 25th), and showing us an advertisement, he read:

"Yesterday a black satin reticule was lost in the Grands Magasins de la Louvre. It contained, amongst other things, a small key with a brass head. A handsome reward will be given to the person who has found it. This person must write, poste restante, bureau 40, to this address: M. A. T. H. S. N.' Do not these letters suggest Mademoiselle Stangerson?' continued the reporter. "The 'key with a brass head'--is not this the key? I always read advertisements. In my business, as in yours, Monsieur, one should always read the personals. They are often the keys to intrigues, that are not always brass-headed, but which are none the less interesting. This advertisement interested me specially; the woman of the key surrounded it with a kind of mystery. Evidently she valued the key, since she promised a big reward for its restoration! And I thought on these six letters: M. A. T. H. S. N. The first four at once pointed to a Christian name; evidently I said Math is Mathilde. But I could make nothing of the two last letters. So I threw the journal aside and occupied myself with other matters. Four days later, when the evening paper appeared with enormous head-lines announcing the murder of Mademoiselle Stangerson, the letters in the advertisement mechanically recurred to me. I had forgotten the two last letters, S. N. When I saw them again I could not help exclaiming, 'Stangerson!' I jumped into a cab and rushed into the bureau No. 40, asking: 'Have you a letter addressed
"And then," continued Frederic Larsan, "the old Basque cap also found in The Yellow Room might at one time have been worn by Daddy Jacques himself. All this, gentlemen, proves, I think, that the murderer wished to disguise his real personality. He did it in a very clumsy way--or, at least, so it appears to us. Don't be alarmed, Daddy Jacques; we are quite sure that you were not the murderer; you never left the side of Monsieur Stangerson. But if Monsieur Stangerson had not been working that night and had gone back to the chateau after parting with his daughter, and Daddy Jacques had gone to sleep in his attic, no one would have doubted that he was the murderer. He owes his safety, therefore, to the tragedy having been enacted too soon,--the murderer, no doubt, from the silence in the laboratory, imagined that it was empty, and that the moment for action had come. The man who had been able to introduce himself here so mysteriously and to leave so many evidences against Daddy Jacques, was, there can be no doubt, familiar with the house. At what hour exactly he entered, whether in the afternoon or in the evening, I cannot say. One familiar with the proceedings and persons of this pavilion could choose his own time for entering The..."
Yellow Room."

"He could not have entered it if anybody had been in the laboratory," said Monsieur de Marquet.

"How do we know that?" replied Larsan. "There was the dinner in the laboratory, the coming and going of the servants in attendance. There was a chemical experiment being carried on between ten and eleven o'clock, with Monsieur Stangerson, his daughter, and Daddy Jacques engaged at the furnace in a corner of the high chimney. Who can say that the murderer--an intimate!--a friend!--did not take advantage of that moment to slip into The Yellow Room, after having taken off his boots in the lavatory?"

"It is very improbable," said Monsieur Stangerson.

"Doubtless--but it is not impossible. I assert nothing. As to the escape from the pavilion--that's another thing, the most natural thing in the world."

For a moment Frederic Larsan paused,--a moment that appeared to us a very long time. The eagerness with which we awaited what he was going to tell us may be imagined.

"I have not been in The Yellow Room," he continued, "but I take it for granted that you have satisfied yourselves that he could have left the room only by way of the door; it is by the door, then, that the murderer made his way out. At what time? At the moment when it was most easy for him to do so; at the moment when it became most explainable--so completely explainable that there can be no other explanation. Let us go over the moments which followed after the crime had been committed. There was the first moment, when Monsieur Stangerson and Daddy Jacques were close to the door, ready to bar the way. There was the second moment, during which Daddy Jacques was absent and Monsieur Stangerson was left alone before the door. There was a third moment, when Monsieur Stangerson was joined by the concierge. There was a fourth moment, during which Monsieur Stangerson, the concierge and his wife and Daddy Jacques were before the door. There was a fifth moment, during which the door was burst open and The Yellow Room entered. The moment at which the flight is explainable is the very moment when there was the least number of persons before the door. There was one moment when there was but one person,--Monsieur Stangerson. Unless a complicity of silence on the part of Daddy Jacques is admitted--in which I do not believe --the door was opened in the presence of Monsieur Stangerson alone and the man escaped.

"Here we must admit that Monsieur Stangerson had powerful reasons for not arresting, or not causing the arrest of the murderer, since he allowed him to reach the window in the vestibule and closed it after him!--That done, Mademoiselle Stangerson, though horribly wounded, had still strength enough, and no doubt in obedience to the entreaties of her father, to refasten the door of her chamber, with both the bolt and the lock, before sinking on the floor. We do not know who committed the crime; we do not know of what wretch Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson are the victims, but there is no doubt that they both know! The secret must be a terrible one, for the father had not hesitated to leave his daughter to die behind a door which she had shut upon herself,--terrible for him to have allowed the assassin to escape. For there is no other way in the world to explain the murderer's flight from The Yellow Room!"

The silence which followed this dramatic and lucid explanation was appalling. We all of us felt grieved for the illustrious professor, driven into a corner by the pitiless logic of Frederic Larsan, forced to confess the whole truth of his martyrdom or to keep silent, and thus make a yet more terrible admission. The man himself, a veritable statue of sorrow, raised his hand with a gesture so solemn that we bowed our heads to it as before something sacred. He then pronounced these words, in a voice so loud that it seemed to exhaust him:

"I swear by the head of my suffering child that I never for an instant left the door of her chamber after hearing her cries for help; that that door was not opened while I was alone in the laboratory; and that, finally, when we entered The Yellow Room, my three domestics and I, the murderer was no longer there! I swear I do not know the murderer!"

Must I say it,--in spite of the solemnity of Monsieur Stangerson's words, we did not believe in his denial. Frederic Larsan had shown us the truth and it was not so easily given up.

Monsieur de Marquet announced that the conversation was at an end, and as we were about to leave the laboratory, Joseph Rouletabille approached Monsieur Stangerson, took him by the hand with the greatest respect, and I heard him say:

"I believe you, Monsieur."

I here close the citation which I have thought it my duty to make from Monsieur Maleine's narrative. I need not tell the reader that all that passed in the laboratory was immediately and faithfully reported to me by Rouletabille.

CHAPTER XII

Frederic Larsan's Cane

It was not till six o'clock that I left the chateau, taking with me the article hastily written by my friend in the little sitting-room which Monsieur Robert Darzac had placed at our disposal. The reporter was to sleep at the chateau, taking advantage of the to me inexplicable hospitality offered him by Monsieur Robert Darzac, to whom Monsieur
Stangerson, in that sad time, left the care of all his domestic affairs. Nevertheless he insisted on accompanying me to
the station at Epinay. In crossing the park, he said to me:

"Frederic is really very clever and has not belied his reputation. Do you know how he came to find Daddy
Jacques's boots?--Near the spot where we noticed the traces of the neat boots and the disappearance of the rough
ones, there was a square hole, freshly made in the moist ground, where a stone had evidently been removed. Larsan
searched for that stone without finding it, and at once imagined that it had been used by the murderer with which to
sink the boots in the lake. Fred's calculation was an excellent one, as the success of his search proves. That escaped
me; but my mind was turned in another direction by the large number of false indications of his track which the
murderer left, and by the measure of the black foot-marks corresponding with that of Daddy Jacques's boots, which I
had established without his suspecting it, on the floor of The Yellow Room. All which was a proof, in my eyes, that
the murderer had sought to turn suspicion on to the old servant. Up to that point, Larsan and I are in accord; but no
further. It is going to be a terrible matter; for I tell you he is working on wrong lines, and I--I, must fight him with
nothing!"

I was surprised at the profoundly grave accent with which my young friend pronounced the last words.
He repeated:

"Yes terrible!--terrible! For it is fighting with nothing, when you have only an idea to fight with."

At that moment we passed by the back of the chateau. Night had come. A window on the first floor was partly
open. A feeble light came from it as well as some sounds which drew our attention. We approached until we had
reached the side of a door that was situated just under the window. Rouletabille, in a low tone, made me understand,
that this was the window of Mademoiselle Stangerson's chamber. The sounds which had attracted our attention
ceased, then were renewed for a moment, and then we heard stifled sobs. We were only able to catch these words,
which reached us distinctly: "My poor Robert!"--Rouletabille whispered in my ear:

"If we only knew what was being said in that chamber, my inquiry would soon be finished."

He looked about him. The darkness of the evening enveloped us; we could not see much beyond the narrow path
bordered by trees, which ran behind the chateau. The sobs had ceased.

"If we can't hear we may at least try to see," said Rouletabille.

And, making a sign to me to deaden the sound of my steps, he led me across the path to the trunk of a tall beech
tree, the white bole of which was visible in the darkness. This tree grew exactly in front of the window in which we
were so much interested, its lower branches being on a level with the first floor of the chateau. From the height of
those branches one might certainly see what was passing in Mademoiselle Stangerson's chamber. Evidently that was
what Rouletabille thought, for, enjoining me to remain hidden, he clasped the trunk with his vigorous arms
and climbed up. I soon lost sight of him amid the branches, and then followed a deep silence. In front of me, the open
window remained lighted, and I saw no shadow move across it. I listened, and presently from above me these words
reached my ears:

"After you!"

"After you, pray!"

Somebody was overhead, speaking,--exchanging courtesies. What was my astonishment to see on the slippery
column of the tree two human forms appear and quietly slip down to the ground. Rouletabille had mounted alone,
and had returned with another.

"Good evening, Monsieur Sainclair!"

It was Frederic Larsan. The detective had already occupied the post of observation when my young friend had
thought to reach it alone. Neither noticed my astonishment. I explained that to myself by the fact that they must have
been witnesses of some tender and despairing scene between Mademoiselle Stangerson, lying in her bed, and
Monsieur Darzac on his knees by her pillow. I guessed that each had drawn different conclusions from what they
had seen. It was easy to see that the scene had strongly impressed Rouletabille in favour of Monsieur Robert Darzac;
while, to Larsan, it showed nothing but consummate hypocrisy, acted with finished art by Mademoiselle
Stangerson's fiance.

As we reached the park gate, Larsan stopped us.

"My cane!" he cried. "I left it near the tree."

He left us, saying he would rejoin us presently.

"Have you noticed Frederic Larsan's cane?" asked the young reporter, as soon as we were alone. "It is quite a
new one, which I have never seen him use before. He seems to take great care of it--it never leaves him. One would
think he was afraid it might fall into the hands of strangers. I never saw it before to-day. Where did he find it? It isn't
natural that a man who had never before used a walking-stick should, the day after the Glandier crime, never move a
step without one. On the day of our arrival at the chateau, as soon as he saw us, he put his watch in his pocket and
picked up his cane from the ground--a proceeding to which I was perhaps wrong not to attach some importance."
We were now out of the park. Rouletabille had dropped into silence. His thoughts were certainly still occupied with Frederic Larsan's new cane. I had proof of that when, as we came near to Epinay, he said:

"Frederic Larsan arrived at the Glandier before me; he began his inquiry before me; he has had time to find out things about which I know nothing. Where did he find that cane?" Then he added: "It is probable that his suspicion--more than that, his reasoning--has led him to lay his hand on something tangible. Has this cane anything to do with it? Where the deuce could he have found it?"

As I had to wait twenty minutes for the train at Epinay, we entered a wine shop. Almost immediately the door opened and Frederic Larsan made his appearance, brandishing his famous cane.

"I found it!" he said laughingly.

The three of us seated ourselves at a table. Rouletabille never took his eyes off the cane; he was so absorbed that he did not notice a sign Larsan made to a railway employe, a young man with a chin decorated by a tiny blond and ill-kept beard. On the sign he rose, paid for his drink, bowed, and went out. I should not myself have attached any importance to the circumstance, if it had not been recalled to my mind, some months later, by the reappearance of the man with the beard at one of the most tragic moments of this case. Then I learned that the youth was one of Larsan's assistants and had been charged by him to watch the going and coming of travellers at the station of Epinay-sur-Orge. Larsan neglected nothing in any case on which he was engaged.

I turned my eyes again on Rouletabille.

"Ah,--Monsieur Fred!" he said, "when did you begin to use a walking-stick? I have always seen you walking with your hands in your pockets!"

"It is a present," replied the detective.

"Recent?" insisted Rouletabille.

"No, it was given to me in London."

"Ah, yes, I remember--you have just come from London. May I look at it?"

"Oh!--certainly!"

Fred passed the cane to Rouletabille. It was a large yellow bamboo with a crutch handle and ornamented with a gold ring. Rouletabille, after examining it minutely, returned it to Larsan, with a bantering expression on his face, saying:

"You were given a French cane in London!"

"Possibly," said Fred, imperturbably.

"Read the mark there, in tiny letters: Cassette, 6a, Opera."

"Cannot English people buy canes in Paris?"

When Rouletabille had seen me into the train, he said:

"You'll remember the address?"

"Yes,--Cassette, 6a, Opera. Rely on me; you shall have word tomorrow morning."

That evening, on reaching Paris, I saw Monsieur Cassette, dealer in walking-sticks and umbrellas, and wrote to my friend:

"A man unmistakably answering to the description of Monsieur Robert Darzac--same height, slightly stooping, putty-coloured overcoat, bowler hat--purchased a cane similar to the one in which we are interested, on the evening of the crime, about eight o'clock. Monsieur Cassette had not sold another such cane during the last two years. Fred's cane is new. It is quite clear that it's the same cane. Fred did not buy it, since he was in London. Like you, I think that he found it somewhere near Monsieur Robert Darzac. But if, as you suppose, the murderer was in The Yellow Room for five, or even six hours, and the crime was not committed until towards midnight, the purchase of this cane proves an incontestable alibi for Darzac."

CHAPTER XIII

"The Presbytery Has Lost Nothing of Its Charm, Nor the Garden Its Brightness"

A week after the occurrence of the events I have just recounted--on the 2nd of November, to be exact--I received at my home in Paris the following telegraphic message: "Come to the Glandier by the earliest train. Bring revolvers. Friendly greetings. Rouletabille."

I have already said, I think, that at that period, being a young barrister with but few briefs, I frequented the Palais de Justice rather for the purpose of familiarising myself with my professional duties than for the defence of the widow and orphan. I could, therefore, feel no surprise at Rouletabille disposing of my time. Moreover, he knew how keenly interested I was in his journalistic adventures in general and, above all, in the murder at the Glandier. I had not heard from him for a week, nor of the progress made with that mysterious case, except by the innumerable paragraphs in the newspapers and by the very brief notes of Rouletabille in the "Epoque." Those notes had divulged the fact that traces of human blood had been found on the mutton-bone, as well as fresh traces of the blood of Mademoiselle Stangerson--the old stains belonged to other crimes, probably dating years back.
It may be easily imagined that the crime engaged the attention of the press throughout the world. No crime known had more absorbed the minds of people. It appeared to me, however, that the judicial inquiry was making but very little progress; and I should have been very glad, if, on the receipt of my friend's invitation to rejoin him at the Glandier, the despatch had not contained the words, "Bring revolvers."

That puzzled me greatly. Rouletabille telegraphing for revolvers meant that there might be occasion to use them. Now, I confess it without shame, I am not a hero. But here was a friend, evidently in danger, calling on me to go to his aid. I did not hesitate long; and after assuring myself that the only revolver I possessed was properly loaded, I hurried towards the Orleans station. On the way I remembered that Rouletabille had asked for two revolvers; I therefore entered a gunsmith's shop and bought an excellent weapon for my friend.

I had hoped to find him at the station at Epinay; but he was not there. However, a cab was waiting for me and I was soon at the Glandier. Nobody was at the gate, and it was only on the threshold of the chateau that I met the young man. He saluted me with a friendly gesture and threw his arms about me, inquiring warmly as to the state of my health.

When we were in the little sitting-room of which I have spoken, Rouletabille made me sit down.
"It's going badly," he said.
"What's going badly?" I asked.
"Everything."

He came nearer to me and whispered:
"Frederic Larsan is working with might and main against Darzac."

This did not astonish me. I had seen the poor show Mademoiselle Stangerson's fiance had made at the time of the examination of the footprints. However, I immediately asked:
"What about that cane?"
"It is still in the hands of Frederic Larsan. He never lets go of it."
"But doesn't it prove the alibi for Monsieur Darzac?"

"Not at all. Gently questioned by me, Darzac denied having, on that evening, or on any other, purchased a cane at Cassette's. However," said Rouletabille, "I'll not swear to anything; Monsieur Darzac has such strange fits of silence that one does not know exactly what to think of what he says."

"To Frederic Larsan this cane must mean a piece of very damaging evidence. But in what way? The time when it was bought shows it could not have been in the murderer's possession."

"The time doesn't worry Larsan. He is not obliged to adopt my theory which assumes that the murderer got into The Yellow Room between five and six o'clock. But there's nothing to prevent him assuming that the murderer got in between ten and eleven o'clock at night. At that hour Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson, assisted by Daddy Jacques, were engaged in making an interesting chemical experiment in the part of the laboratory taken up by the furnaces. Larsan says, unlikely as that may seem, that the murderer may have slipped behind them. He has already got the examining magistrate to listen to him. When one looks closely into it, the reasoning is absurd, seeing that the 'intimate'--if there is one--must have known that the professor would shortly leave the pavilion, and that the 'friend' had only to put off operating till after the professor's departure. Why should he have risked crossing the laboratory while the professor was in it? And then, when he had got into The Yellow Room?

"There are many points to be cleared up before Larsan's theory can be admitted. I sha'n't waste my time over it, for my theory won't allow me to occupy myself with mere imagination. Only, as I am obliged for the moment to keep silent, and Larsan sometimes talks, he may finish by coming out openly against Monsieur Darzac,--if I'm not there," added the young reporter proudly. "For there are surface evidences against Darzac, much more convincing than that cane, which remains incomprehensible to me, all the more so as Larsan does not in the least hesitate to let Darzac see him with it!--I understand many things in Larsan's theory, but I can't make anything of that cane.

"Is he still at the chateau?"

"Yes; he hardly ever leaves it!--He sleeps there, as I do, at the request of Monsieur Stangerson, who has done for him what Monsieur Robert Darzac has done for me. In spite of the accusation made by Larsan that Monsieur Stangerson knows who the murderer is he yet affords him every facility for arriving at the truth,--just as Darzac is doing for me."

"But you are convinced of Darzac's innocence?"

"At one time I did believe in the possibility of his guilt. That was when we arrived here for the first time. The time has come for me to tell you what has passed between Monsieur Darzac and myself."

Here Rouletabille interrupted himself and asked me if I had brought the revolvers. I showed him them. Having examined both, he pronounced them excellent, and handed them back to me.

"Shall we have any use for them?" I asked.

"No doubt; this evening. We shall pass the night here--if that won't tire you?"
"On the contrary," I said with an expression that made Rouletabille laugh.

"No, no," he said, "this is no time for laughing. You remember the phrase which was the 'open sesame' of this chateau full of mystery?"

"Yes," I said, "perfectly.--The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm, nor the garden its brightness.' It was the phrase which you found on the half-burned piece of paper amongst the ashes in the laboratory."

"Yes; at the bottom of the paper, where the flame had not reached, was this date: 23rd of October. Remember this date, it is highly important. I am now going to tell you about that curious phrase. On the evening before the crime, that is to say, on the 23rd, Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson were at a reception at the Elysee. I know that, because I was there on duty, having to interview one of the savants of the Academy of Philadelphia, who was being feted there. I had never before seen either Monsieur or Mademoiselle Stangerson. I was seated in the room which precedes the Salon des Ambassadeurs, and, tired of being jostled by so many noble personages, I had fallen into a vague reverie, when I scented near me the perfume of the lady in black.

"Do you ask me what is the 'perfume of the lady in black'? It must suffice for you to know that it is a perfume of which I am very fond, because it was that of a lady who had been very kind to me in my childhood,--a lady whom I had always seen dressed in black. The lady who, that evening, was scented with the perfume of the lady in black, was dressed in white. She was wonderfully beautiful. I could not help rising and following her. An old man gave her his arm and, as they passed, I heard voices say: 'Professor Stangerson and his daughter.' It was in that way I learned who it was I was following."

"They met Monsieur Robert Darzac, whom I knew by sight. Professor Stangerson, accosted by Mr. Arthur William Rance, one of the American savants, seated himself in the great gallery, and Monsieur Robert Darzac led Mademoiselle Stangerson into the conservatory. I followed. The weather was very mild that evening; the garden doors were open. Mademoiselle Stangerson threw a fichu shawl over her shoulders and I plainly saw that it was she who was begging Monsieur Darzac to go with her into the garden. I continued to follow, interested by the agitation plainly exhibited by the bearing of Monsieur Darzac. They slowly passed along the wall abutting on the Avenue Marigny. I took the central alley, walking parallel with them, and then crossed over for the purpose of getting nearer to them. The night was dark, and the grass deadened the sound of my steps. They had stopped under the vacillating light of a gas jet and appeared to be both bending over a paper held by Mademoiselle Stangerson, reading something which deeply interested them. I stopped in the darkness and silence.

"Neither of them saw me, and I distinctly heard Mademoiselle Stangerson repeat, as she was refolding the paper: 'The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm, nor the garden its brightness!'--It was said in a tone at once mocking and despairing, and was followed by a burst of such nervous laughter that I think her words will never cease to sound in my ears. But another phrase was uttered by Monsieur Robert Darzac: 'Must I commit a crime, then, to win you?' He was in an extraordinarily agitated state. He took the hand of Mademoiselle Stangerson and held it for a long time to his lips, and I thought, from the movement of his shoulders, that he was crying. Then they went away.

"When I returned to the great gallery," continued Rouletabille, "I saw no more of Monsieur Robert Darzac, and I was not to see him again until after the tragedy at the Glandier. Mademoiselle was near Mr. Rance, who was talking with much animation, his eyes, during the conversation, glowing with a singular brightness. Mademoiselle Stangerson, I thought, was not even listening to what he was saying, her face expressing perfect indifference. His face was the red face of a drunkard. When Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson left, he went to the bar and remained there. I joined him, and rendered him some little service in the midst of the pressing crowd. He thanked me and told me he was returning to America three days later, that is to say, on the 26th (the day after the crime). I talked with him about Philadelphia; he told me he had lived there for five-and-twenty years, and that it was there he had met the illustrious Professor Stangerson and his daughter. He drank a great deal of champagne, and when I left him he was very nearly drunk.

"Such were my experiences on that evening, and I leave you to imagine what effect the news of the attempted murder of Mademoiselle Stangerson produced on me.--with what force those words pronounced by Monsieur Robert Darzac, 'Must I commit a crime, then, to win you?' recurred to me. It was not this phrase, however, that I repeated to him, when we met here at Glandier. The sentence of the presbytery and the bright garden sufficed to open the gate of the chateau. If you ask me if I believe now that Monsieur Darzac is the murderer, I must say I do not. I do not think I ever quite thought that. At the time I could not really think seriously of anything. I had so little evidence to go on.

"When we were alone together, I told him how I had chanced to overhear a part of his conversation with Mademoiselle Stangerson in the garden of the Elysee; and when I repeated to him the words, 'Must I commit a crime, then, to win you?' he was greatly troubled, though much less so than he had been by hearing me repeat the phrase about the presbytery. What threw him into a state of real consternation was to learn from me that the day on which he had gone to meet Mademoiselle Stangerson at the Elysee, was the very day on which she had gone to the
Post Office for the letter. It was that letter, perhaps, which ended with the words: 'The presbytery has lost nothing of
its charm, nor the garden its brightness.' My surmise was confirmed by my finding, if you remember, in the ashes of
the laboratory, the fragment of paper dated October the 23rd. The letter had been written and withdrawn from the
Post Office on the same day.

"There can be no doubt that, on returning from the Elysee that night, Mademoiselle Stangerson had tried to
destroy that compromising paper. It was in vain that Monsieur Darzac denied that letter had anything whatever
to do with the crime. I told him that in an affair so filled with mystery as this, he had no right to hide this letter; that I
was persuaded it was of considerable importance; that the desperate tone in which Mademoiselle Stangerson had
pronounced the prophetic phrase,--that his own tears, and the threat of a crime which he had professed after the letter
was read--all these facts tended to leave no room for me to doubt. Monsieur Darzac became more and more agitated,
and I determined to take advantage of the effect I had produced on him. 'You were on the point of being married,
Monsieur,' I said negligently and without looking at him, 'and suddenly your marriage becomes impossible because
of the writer of that letter; because as soon as his letter was read, you spoke of the necessity for a crime to win
Mademoiselle Stangerson. Therefore there is someone between you and her someone who has attempted to kill her,
so that she should not be able to marry!' And I concluded with these words: 'Now, monsieur, you have only to tell
me in confidence the name of the murderer!'--The words I had uttered must have struck him ominously, for when I
turned my eyes on him, I saw that his face was haggard, the perspiration standing on his forehead, and terror
showing in his eyes.

"'Monsieur,' he said to me, 'I am going to ask of you something which may appear insane, but in exchange for
which I place my life in your hands. You must not tell the magistrates of what you saw and heard in the garden of
the Elysee,--neither to them nor to anybody. I swear to you, that I am innocent, and I know, I feel, that you believe
me; but I would rather be taken for the guilty man than see justice go astray on that phrase, "The presbytery has lost
nothing of its charm, nor the garden its brightness." The judges must know nothing about that phrase. All this matter
is in your hands. Monsieur, I leave it there; but forget the evening at the Elysee. A hundred other roads are open to
you in your search for the criminal. I will open them for you myself. I will help you. Will you take up your quarters
here?--You may remain here to do as you please.--Eat--sleep here--watch my actions--the actions of all here. You
shall be master of the Glandier, Monsieur; but forget the evening at the Elysee.'"

Rouletabille here paused to take breath. I now understood what had appeared so unexplainable in the demeanour
of Monsieur Robert Darzac towards my friend, and the facility with which the young reporter had been able to
install himself on the scene of the crime. My curiosity could not fail to be excited by all I had heard. I asked
Rouletabille to satisfy it still further. What had happened at the Glandier during the past week?--Had he not told me
that there were surface indications against Monsieur Darzac much more terrible than that of the cane found by
Larsan?

"Everything seems to be pointing against him," replied my friend, "and the situation is becoming exceedingly
grave. Monsieur Darzac appears not to mind it much; but in that he is wrong. I was interested only in the health of
Mademoiselle Stangerson, which was daily improving, when something occurred that is even more mysterious than-
than the mystery of The Yellow Room!"

"Impossible!" I cried, "What could be more mysterious than that?"

"Let us first go back to Monsieur Robert Darzac," said Rouletabille, calming me. "I have said that everything
seems to be pointing against him. The marks of the neat boots found by Frederic Larsan appear to be really the
footprints of Mademoiselle Stangerson's fiance. The marks made by the bicycle may have been made by his bicycle.
He had usually left it at the chateau; why did he take it to Paris on that particular occasion? Was it because he was
going not to return again to the chateau? Was it because, owing to the breaking off of his marriage, his relations with
the Stangersons were to cease? All who are interested in the matter affirm that those relations were to continue
unchanged.

"Frederic Larsan, however, believes that all relations were at an end. From the day when Monsieur Darzac
accompanied Mademoiselle Stangerson to the Grands Magasins de la Louvre until the day after the crime, he had
not been at the Glandier. Remember that Mademoiselle Stangerson lost her reticule containing the key with the brass
head while she was in his company. From that day to the evening at the Elysee, the Sorbonne professor and
Mademoiselle Stangerson did not see one another; but they may have written to each other. Mademoiselle
Stangerson went to the Post Office to get a letter, which Larsan says was written by Robert Darzac; for knowing
nothing of what had passed at the Elysee, Larsan believes that it was Monsieur Darzac himself who stole the reticule
with the key, with the design of forcing her consent, by getting possession of the precious papers of her father--
papers which he would have restored to him on condition that the marriage engagement was to be fulfilled.

"All that would have been a very doubtful and almost absurd hypothesis, as Larsan admitted to me, but for
another and much graver circumstance. In the first place here is something which I have not been able to explain--
Monsieur Darzac had himself, on the 24th, gone to the Post Office to ask for the letter which Mademoiselle had called for and received on the previous evening. The description of the man who made application tallies in every respect with the appearance of Monsieur Darzac, who, in answer to the questions put to him by the examining magistrate, denies that he went to the Post Office. Now even admitting that the letter was written by him—which I do not believe—he knew that Mademoiselle Stangerson had received it, since he had seen it in her hands in the garden at the Elysée. It could not have been he, then, who had gone to the Post Office, the day after the 24th, to ask for a letter which he knew was no longer there.

"To me it appears clear that somebody, strongly resembling him, stole Mademoiselle Stangerson's reticule and in that letter, had demanded of her something which she had not sent him. He must have been surprised at the failure of his demand, hence his application at the Post Office, to learn whether his letter had been delivered to the person to whom it had been addressed. Finding that it had been claimed, he had become furious. What had he demanded? Nobody but Mademoiselle Stangerson knows. Then, on the day following, it is reported that she had been attacked during the night, and, the next day, I discovered that the Professor had, at the same time, been robbed by means of the key referred to in the poste restante letter. It would seem, then, that the man who went to the Post Office to inquire for the letter must have been the murderer. All these arguments Larsan applies as against Monsieur Darzac. You may be sure that the examining magistrate, Larsan, and myself, have done our best to get from the Post Office precise details relative to the singular personage who applied there on the 24th of October. But nothing has been learned. We don't know where he came from--or where he went. Beyond the description which makes him resemble Monsieur Darzac, we know nothing.

"I have announced in the leading journals that a handsome reward will be given to a driver of any public conveyance who drove a fare to No. 40, Post Office, about ten o'clock on the morning of the 24th of October. Information to be addressed to 'M. R.,' at the office of the 'Epoque'; but no answer has resulted. The man may have walked; but, as he was most likely in a hurry, there was a chance that he might have gone in a cab. Who, I keep asking myself night and day, is the man who so strongly resembles Monsieur Robert Darzac, and who is also known to have bought the cane which has fallen into Larsan's hands?

"The most serious fact is that Monsieur Darzac was, at the very same time that his double presented himself at the Post Office, scheduled for a lecture at the Sorbonne. He had not delivered that lecture, and one of his friends took his place. When I questioned him as to how he had employed the time, he told me that he had gone for a stroll in the Bois de Boulogne. What do you think of a professor who, instead of giving his lecture, obtains a substitute to go for a stroll in the Bois de Boulogne? When Frederic Larsan asked him for information on this point, he quietly replied that it was no business of his how he spent his time in Paris. On which Fred swore aloud that he would find out, without anybody's help.

"All this seems to fit in with Fred's hypothesis, namely, that Monsieur Stangerson allowed the murderer to escape in order to avoid a scandal. The hypothesis is further substantiated by the fact that Darzac was in The Yellow Room and was permitted to get away. That hypothesis I believe to be a false one.--Larsan is being misled by it, though that would not displease me, did it not affect an innocent person. Now does that hypothesis really mislead Frederic Larsan? That is the question--that is the question."

"Perhaps he is right," I cried, interrupting Rouletabille. "Are you sure that Monsieur Darzac is innocent?--It seems to me that these are extraordinary coincidences--"

"Coincidences," replied my friend, "are the worst enemies to truth."

"What does the examining magistrate think now of the matter?"

"Monsieur de Marquet hesitates to accuse Monsieur Darzac, in the absence of absolute proofs. Not only would he have public opinion wholly against him, to say nothing of the Sorbonne, but Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson. She adores Monsieur Robert Darzac. Indistinctly as she saw the murderer, it would be hard to make the public believe that she could not have recognised him, if Darzac had been the criminal. No doubt The Yellow Room was very dimly lit; but a night-light, however small, gives some light. Here, my boy, is how things stood when, three days, or rather three nights ago, an extraordinarily strange incident occurred."

CHAPTER XIV

"I Expect the Assassin This Evening"

"I must take you," said Rouletabille, "so as to enable you to understand, to the various scenes. I myself believe that I have discovered what everybody else is searching for, namely, how the murderer escaped from The Yellow Room, without any accomplice, and without Mademoiselle Stangerson having had anything to do with it. But so long as I am not sure of the real murderer, I cannot state the theory on which I am working. I can only say that I believe it to be correct and, in any case, a quite natural and simple one. As to what happened in this place three nights ago, I must say it kept me wondering for a whole day and a night. It passes all belief. The theory I have formed from the incident is so absurd that I would rather matters remained as yet unexplained."
Saying which the young reporter invited me to go and make the tour of the chateau with him. The only sound to
be heard was the crunching of the dead leaves beneath our feet. The silence was so intense that one might have
thought the chateau had been abandoned. The old stones, the stagnant water of the ditch surrounding the donjon, the
bleak ground strewn with the dead leaves, the dark, skeleton-like outlines of the trees, all contributed to give to the
desolate place, now filled with its awful mystery, a most funereal aspect. As we passed round the donjon, we met the
Green Man, the forest-keeper, who did not greet us, but walked by as if we had not existed. He was looking just as I
had formerly seen him through the window of the Donjon Inn. He had still his fowling-piece slung at his back, his
pipe was in his mouth, and his eye-glasses on his nose.

"An odd kind of fish!" Rouletabille said to me, in a low tone.

"Have you spoken to him?" I asked.

"Yes, but I could get nothing out of him. His only answers are grunts and shrugs of the shoulders. He generally
lives on the first floor of the donjon, a big room that once served for an oratory. He lives like a bear, never goes out
without his gun, and is only pleasant with the girls. The women, for twelve miles round, are all setting their caps for
him. For the present, he is paying attention to Madame Mathieu, whose husband is keeping a lynx eye upon her in
consequence."

After passing the donjon, which is situated at the extreme end of the left wing, we went to the back of the
chateau. Rouletabille, pointing to a window which I recognised as the only one belonging to Mademoiselle
Stangerson's apartment, said to me:

"If you had been here, two nights ago, you would have seen your humble servant at the top of a ladder, about to
enter the chateau by that window."

As I expressed some surprise at this piece of nocturnal gymnastics, he begged me to notice carefully the exterior
disposition of the chateau. We then went back into the building.

"I must now show you the first floor of the chateau, where I am living," said my friend.

To enable the reader the better to understand the disposition of these parts of the dwelling, I annex a plan of the
first floor of the right wing, drawn by Rouletabille the day after the extraordinary phenomenon occurred, the details
of which I am about to relate.

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Rouletabille motioned me to follow him up a magnificent flight of stairs ending in a landing on the first floor.
From this landing one could pass to the right or left wing of the chateau by a gallery opening from it. This gallery,
high and wide, extended along the whole length of the building and was lit from the front of the chateau facing the
north. The rooms, the windows of which looked to the south, opened out of the gallery. Professor Stangerson
inhabited the left wing of the building. Mademoiselle Stangerson had her apartment in the right wing.

We entered the gallery to the right. A narrow carpet, laid on the waxed oaken floor, which shone like glass,
deadened the sound of our footsteps. Rouletabille asked me, in a low tone, to walk carefully, as we were passing the
door of Mademoiselle Stangerson's apartment. This consisted of a bed-room, an ante-room, a small bath-room, a
boudoir, and a drawing-room. One could pass from one to another of these rooms without having to go by way of
the gallery. The gallery continued straight to the western end of the building, where it was lit by a high window
(window 2 on the plan). At about two-thirds of its length this gallery, at a right angle, joined another gallery.
following the course of the right wing.

The better to follow this narrative, we shall call the gallery leading from the stairs to the eastern window, the "right" gallery and the gallery quitting it at a right angle, the "off-turning" gallery (winding gallery in the plan). It was at the meeting point of the two galleries that Rouletabille had his chamber, adjoining that of Frederic Larsan, the door of each opening on to the "off-turning" gallery, while the doors of Mademoiselle Stangerson's apartment opened into the "right" gallery. (See the plan.)

Rouletabille opened the door of his room and after we had passed in, carefully drew the bolt. I had not had time to glance round the place in which he had been installed, when he uttered a cry of surprise and pointed to a pair of eye-glasses on a side-table.

"What are these doing here?" he asked.

I should have been puzzled to answer him.

"I wonder," he said, "I wonder if this is what I have been searching for. I wonder if these are the eye-glasses from the presbytery!"

He seized them eagerly, his fingers caressing the glass. Then looking at me, with an expression of terror on his face, he murmured, "Oh!--Oh!"

He repeated the exclamation again and again, as if his thoughts had suddenly turned his brain.

He rose and, putting his hand on my shoulder, laughed like one demented as he said:

"Those glasses will drive me silly! Mathematically speaking the thing is possible; but humanly speaking it is impossible--or afterwards--or afterwards--"

Two light knocks struck the door. Rouletabille opened it. A figure entered. I recognised the concierge, whom I had seen when she was being taken to the pavilion for examination. I was surprised, thinking she was still under lock and key. This woman said in a very low tone:

"In the grove of the parquet."

Rouletabille replied: "Thanks."--The woman then left. He again turned to me, his look haggard, after having carefully refastened the door, muttering some incomprehensible phrases.

"If the thing is mathematically possible, why should it not be humanly!--And if it is humanly possible, the matter is simply awful." I interrupted him in his soliloquy:

"Have they set the concierges at liberty, then?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied, "I had them liberated, I needed people I could trust. The woman is thoroughly devoted to me, and her husband would lay down his life for me."

"Oho!" I said, "when will he have occasion to do it?"

"This evening.--for this evening I expect the murderer."

"You expect the murderer this evening? Then you know him?"

"I shall know him; but I should be mad to affirm, categorically, at this moment that I do know him. The mathematical idea I have of the murderer gives results so frightful, so monstrous, that I hope it is still possible that I am mistaken. I hope so, with all my heart!"

"Five minutes ago, you did not know the murderer; how can you say that you expect him this evening?"

"Because I know that he must come."

Rouletabille very slowly filled his pipe and lit it. That meant an interesting story. At that moment we heard some one walking in the gallery and passing before our door. Rouletabille listened. The sound of the footstep died away in the distance.

"Is Frederic Larsan in his room?" I asked, pointing to the partition.

"No," my friend answered. "He went to Paris this morning.--still on the scent of Darzac, who also left for Paris. That matter will turn out badly. I expect that Monsieur Darzac will be arrested in the course of the next week. The worst of it is that set the concierges at liberty seems to be in league against him.--circumstances, things, people. Not an hour passes without bringing some new evidence against him. The examining magistrate is overwhelmed by it--and blind."

"Frederic Larsan, however, is not a novice," I said.

"I thought so," said Rouletabille, with a slightly contemptuous turn of his lips, "I fancied he was a much abler man. I had, indeed, a great admiration for him, before I got to know his method of working. It's deplorable. He owes his reputation solely to his ability; but he lacks reasoning power,--the mathematics of his ideas are very poor."

I looked closely at Rouletabille and could not help smiling, on hearing this boy of eighteen talking of a man who had proved to the world that he was the finest police sleuth in Europe.

"You smile," he said? "you are wrong! I swear I will outwit him --and in a striking way! But I must make haste about it, for he has an enormous start on me--given him by Monsieur Robert Darzac, who is this evening going to increase it still more. Think of it! --every time the murderer comes to the chateau, Monsieur Darzac, by a strange fatality, absents himself and refuses to give any account of how he employs his time."
"Every time the assassin comes to the chateau!" I cried. "Has he returned then--?"
"Yes, during that famous night when the strange phenomenon occurred."

I was now going to learn about the astonishing phenomenon to which Rouletabille had made allusion half an hour earlier without giving me any explanation of it. But I had learned never to press Rouletabille in his narratives. He spoke when the fancy took him and when he judged it to be right. He was less concerned about my curiosity than he was for making a complete summing up for himself of any important matter in which he was interested.

At last, in short rapid phrases, he acquainted me with things which plunged me into a state bordering on complete bewilderment. Indeed, the results of that still unknown science known as hypnotism, for example, were not more inexplicable than the disappearance of the "matter" of the murderer at the moment when four persons were within touch of him. I speak of hypnotism as I would of electricity, for of the nature of both we are ignorant and we know little of their laws. I cite these examples because, at the time, the case appeared to me to be only explicable by the inexplicable,—that is to say, by an event outside of known natural laws. And yet, if I had had Rouletabille's brain, I should, like him, have had a presentiment of the natural explanation; for the most curious thing about all the mysteries of the Glandier case was the natural manner in which he explained them.

I have among the papers that were sent me by the young man, after the affair was over, a note-book of his, in which a complete account is given of the phenomenon of the disappearance of the "matter" of the assassin, and the thoughts to which it gave rise in the mind of my young friend. It is preferable, I think, to give the reader this account, rather than continue to reproduce my conversation with Rouletabille; for I should be afraid, in a history of this nature, to add a word that was not in accordance with the strictest truth.

CHAPTER XV

The Trap

(EXTRACT FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF JOSEPH ROULETABILLE)

"Last night—the night between the 29th and 30th of October—" wrote Joseph Rouletabille, "I woke up towards one o'clock in the morning. Was it sleeplessness, or noise without?—The cry of the Bete du Bon Dieu rang out with sinister loudness from the end of the park. I rose and opened the window. Cold wind and rain; opaque darkness; silence. I reclosed my window. Again the sound of the cat's weird cry in the distance. I partly dressed in haste. The weather was too bad for even a cat to be turned out in it. What did it mean, then—that imitating of the mewing of Mother Angenoux' cat so near the chateau? I seized a good-sized stick, the only weapon I had, and, without making any noise, opened the door."

"The gallery into which I went was well lit by a lamp with a reflector. I felt a keen current of air and, on turning, found the window open, at the extreme end of the gallery, which I call the 'off-turning' gallery, to distinguish it from the 'right' gallery, on to which the apartment of Mademoiselle Stangerson opened. These two galleries cross each other at right angles. Who had left that window open? Or, who had come to open it? I went to the window and leaned out. Five feet below me there was a sort of terrace over the semi-circular projection of a room on the ground-floor. One could, if one wanted, jump from the window on to the terrace, and allow oneself to drop from it into the court of the chateau. Whoever had entered by this road had, evidently, not had a key to the vestibule door. But why should I be thinking of my previous night's attempt with the ladder?—Because of the open window—left open, perhaps, by the negligence of a servant? I reclosed it, smiling at the ease with which I built a drama on the mere suggestion of an open window."

"Again the cry of the Bete du Bon Dieu!—and then silence. The rain ceased to beat on the window. All in the chateau slept. I walked with infinite precaution on the carpet of the gallery. On reaching the corner of the 'right' gallery, I peered round it cautiously. There was another lamp there with a reflector which quite lit up the several objects in it,—three chairs and some pictures hanging on the wall. What was I doing there? Perfect silence reigned throughout. Everything was sunk in repose. What was the instinct that urged me towards Mademoiselle Stangerson's chamber? Why did a voice within me cry: 'Go on, to the chamber of Mademoiselle Stangerson!' I cast my eyes down upon the carpet on which I was treading and saw that my steps were being directed towards Mademoiselle Stangerson's door by the marks of steps that had already been made there. Yes, on the carpet were traces of footsteps stained with mud leading to the chamber of Mademoiselle Stangerson. Horror! Horror!—I recognised in those footprints the impression of the neat boots of the murderer! He had come, then, from without in this wretched night. If you could descend from the gallery by way of the window, by means of the terrace, then you could get into the chateau by the same means."

"The murderer was still in the chateau, for here were marks as of returning footsteps. He had entered by the open window at the extremity of the 'off-turning' gallery; he had passed Frederic Larsan's door and mine, had turned to the right, and had entered Mademoiselle Stangerson's room. I am before the door of her ante-room—it is open. I push it, without making the least noise. Under the door of the room itself I see a streak of light. I listen—no sound—not even of breathing! Ah!—if I only knew what was passing in the silence that is behind that door! I find the door locked and
the key turned on the inner side. And the murderer is there, perhaps. He must be there! Will he escape this time?--
All depends on me!--I must be calm, and above all, I must make no false steps. I must see into that room. I can enter
it by Mademoiselle Stangerson's drawing-room; but, to do that I should have to cross her boudoir; and while I am
there, the murderer may escape by the gallery door--the door in front of which I am now standing.

"I am sure that no other crime is being committed, on this night; for there is complete silence in the boudoir,
where two nurses are taking care of Mademoiselle Stangerson until she is restored to health.

"As I am almost sure that the murderer is there, why do I not at once give the alarm? The murderer may,
perhaps, escape; but, perhaps, I may be able to save Mademoiselle Stangerson's life. Suppose the murderer on this
occasion is not here to murder? The door has been opened to allow him to enter; by whom?--And it has been
refastened--by whom?--Mademoiselle Stangerson shuts herself up in her apartment with her nurses every night.
Who turned the key of that chamber to allow the murderer to enter?--The nurses, --two faithful domestics? The old
chambermaid, Sylvia? It is very improbable. Besides, they slept in the boudoir, and Mademoiselle Stangerson, very
nervous and careful, Monsieur Robert Darzac told me, sees to her own safety since she has been well enough to
move about in her room, which I have not yet seen her leave. This nervousness and sudden care on her part, which
had struck Monsieur Darzac, had given me, also, food for thought. At the time of the crime in The Yellow Room,
there can be no doubt that she expected the murderer. Was he expected this night?--Was it she herself who had
opened her door to him? Had she some reason for doing so? Was she obliged to do it?--Was it a meeting for
purposes of crime? --Certainly it was not a lover's meeting, for I believe Mademoiselle Stangerson adores Monsieur
Darzac.

"All these reflections ran through my brain like a flash of lightning. What would I not give to know!

"It is possible that there was some reason for the awful silence. My intervention might do more harm than good.
How could I tell? How could I know I might not any moment cause another crime? If I could only see and know,
without breaking that silence!

"I left the ante-room and descended the central stairs to the vestibule and, as silently as possible, made my way
to the little room on the ground-floor where Daddy Jacques had been sleeping since the attack made at the pavilion.

"I found him dressed, his eyes wide open, almost haggard. He did not seem surprised to see me. He told me that
he had got up because he had heard the cry of the Bete du bon Dieu, and because he had heard footsteps in the park,
close to his window, out of which he had looked and, just then, had seen a black shadow pass by. I asked him
whether he had a firearm of any kind. No, he no longer kept one, since the examining magistrate had taken his
revolver from him. We went out together, by a little back door, into the park, and stole along the chateau to the point
which is just below Mademoiselle Stangerson's window.

"I placed Daddy Jacques against the wall, ordering him not to stir from the spot, while I, taking advantage of a
moment when the moon was hidden by a cloud, moved to the front of the window, out of the patch of light which
came from it,--for the window was half-open! If I could only know what was passing in that silent chamber! I
returned to Daddy Jacques and whispered the word 'ladder' in his ear. I immediately saw that, from the way the window was half-opened, I should not be able to see from that point of view anything that was passing in the room; and I wanted, not only to see, but to
hear, and--to act.

"Greatly agitated, almost trembling, Daddy Jacques disappeared for a moment and returned without the ladder,
but making signs to me with his arms, as signals to me to come quickly to him. When I got near him he gasped:
'Come!'

"I went to the donjon in search of my ladder, and in the lower part of the donjon which serves me and the
gardener for a lumber room, I found the door open and the ladder gone. On coming out, that's what I caught sight of
by the light of the moon.

"And he pointed to the further end of the chateau, where a ladder stood resting against the stone brackets
supporting the terrace, under the window which I had found open. The projection of the terrace had prevented my
seeing it. Thanks to that ladder, it was quite easy to get into the 'off-turning' gallery of the first floor, and I had no
doctrine of it having been the road taken by the unknown.

"We ran to the ladder, but at the moment of reaching it, Daddy Jacques drew my attention to the half-open door
of the little semi-circular room, situated under the terrace, at the extremity of the right wing of the chateau, having
the terrace for its roof. Daddy Jacques pushed the door open a little further and looked in.

"'He's not there!' he whispered.

"Who is not there?'

"The forest--keeper."

With his lips once more to my ear, he added:

"Do you know that he has slept in the upper room of the donjon ever since it was restored?' And with the same
gesture he pointed to the half-open door, the ladder, the terrace, and the windows in the 'off-turning' gallery which, a little while before, I had re-closed.

"What were my thoughts then? I had no time to think. I felt more than I thought.

"Evidently, I felt, if the forest-keeper is up there in the chamber (I say, if, because at this moment, apart from the presence of the ladder and his vacant room, there are no evidences which permit me even to suspect him)—if he is there, he has been obliged to pass by the ladder, and the rooms which lie behind his, in his new lodging, are occupied by the family of the steward and by the cook, and by the kitchens, which bar the way by the vestibule to the interior of the chateau. And if he had been there during the evening on any pretext, it would have been easy for him to go into the gallery and see that the window could be simply pushed open from the outside. This question of the unfastened window easily narrowed the field of search for the murderer. He must belong to the house, unless he had an accomplice, which I do not believe he had; unless --unless Mademoiselle Stangerson herself had seen that that window was not fastened from the inside. But, then,—what could be the frightful secret which put her under the necessity of doing away with obstacles that separated her from the murderer?

"I seized hold of the ladder, and we returned to the back of the chateau to see if the window of the chamber was still half-open. The blind was drawn but did not join and allowed a bright stream of light to escape and fall upon the path at our feet. I planted the ladder under the window. I am almost sure that I made no noise; and while Daddy Jacques remained at the foot of the ladder, I mounted it, very quietly, my stout stick in my hand. I held my breath and lifted my feet with the greatest care. Suddenly a heavy cloud discharged itself at that moment in a fresh downpour of rain.

"At the same instant the sinister cry of the Bete du bon Dieu arrested me in my ascent. It seemed to me to have come from close by me—only a few yards away. Was the cry a signal?—Had some accomplice of the man seen me on the ladder!—Would the cry bring the man to the window?—Perhaps! Ah, there he was at the window! I felt his head above me. I heard the sound of his breath! I could not look up towards him; the least movement of my head, and—I might be lost. Would he see me?—Would he peer into the darkness? No; he went away. He had seen nothing. I felt, rather than heard, him moving on tip-toe in the room; and I mounted a few steps higher. My head reached to the level of the window-sill; my forehead rose above it; my eyes looked between the opening in the blinds—and I saw—A man seated at Mademoiselle Stangerson's little desk, writing. His back was turned toward me. A candle was lit before him, and he bent over the flame, the light from it projecting shapeless shadows. I saw nothing but a monstrous, stooping back.

"Mademoiselle Stangerson herself was not there!—Her bed had not been lain on! Where, then, was she sleeping that night? Doubtless in the side-room with her women. Perhaps this was but a guess. I must content myself with the joy of finding the man alone. I must be calm to prepare my trap.

"But who, then, is this man writing there before my eyes, seated at the desk, as if he were in his own home? If there had not been that ladder under the window; if there had not been those footprints on the carpet in the gallery; if there had not been that open window, I might have been led to think that this man had a right to be there, and that he was there as a matter of course and for reasons about which as yet I knew nothing. But there was no doubt that this mysterious unknown was the man of The Yellow Room,—the man to whose murderous assault Mademoiselle Stangerson—without denouncing him—had had to submit. If I could but see his face! Surprise and capture him!

"If I spring into the room at this moment, he will escape by the right-hand door opening into the boudoir,—or crossing the drawing-room, he will reach the gallery and I shall lose him. I have him now and in five minutes more he'll be safer than if I had him in a cage.—What is he doing there, alone in Mademoiselle Stangerson's room?—What is he writing? I descend and place the ladder on the ground. Daddy Jacques follows me. We re-enter the chateau. I send Daddy Jacques to wake Monsieur Stangerson, and instruct him to await my coming in Mademoiselle Stangerson's room and to say nothing definite to him before my arrival. I will go and awaken Frederic Larsan. It's a bore to have to do it, for I should have liked to work alone and to have carried off all the honors of this affair myself, right under the very nose of the sleeping detective. But Daddy Jacques and Monsieur Stangerson are old men, and I am not yet fully developed. I might not be strong enough. Larsan is used to wrestling and putting on the handcuffs. He opened his eyes swollen with sleep, ready to send me flying, without in the least believing in my reporter's fancies. I had to assure him that the man was there!

"That's strange!' he said; 'I thought I left him this afternoon in Paris.'

"He dressed himself in haste and armed himself with a revolver. We stole quietly into the gallery.

"Where is he?' Larsan asked.

"In Mademoiselle Stangerson's room.

"And—Mademoiselle Stangerson?"

"She is not in there.'

"Let's go in.'
"Don't go there! On the least alarm the man will escape. He has four ways by which to do it--the door, the window, the boudoir, or the room in which the women are sleeping.'

"I'll draw him from below.'

"And if you fail?--If you only succeed in wounding him--he'll escape again, without reckoning that he is certainly armed. No, let me direct the expedition, and I'll answer for everything.'

"As you like,' he replied, with fairly good grace.

"Then, after satisfying myself that all the windows of the two galleries were thoroughly secure, I placed Frederic Larsan at the end of the 'off-turning' gallery, before the window which I had found open and had reclosed.

"Under no consideration,' I said to him, 'must you stir from this post till I call you. The chances are even that the man, when he is pursued, will return to this window and try to save himself that way; for it is by that way he came in and made a way ready for his flight. You have a dangerous post.'

"What will be yours?' asked Fred.

"I shall spring into the room and knock him over for you.'

"Take my revolver,' said Fred, 'and I'll take your stick.'

"Thanks,' I said; 'You are a brave man.'

"I accepted his offer. I was going to be alone with the man in the room writing and was really thankful to have the weapon.

"I left Fred, having posted him at the window (No. 5 on the plan), and, with the greatest precaution, went towards Monsieur Stangerson's apartment in the left wing of the chateau. I found him with Daddy Jacques, who had faithfully obeyed my directions, confining himself to asking his master to dress as quickly as possible. In a few words I explained to Monsieur Stangerson what was passing. He armed himself with a revolver, followed me, and we were all three speedily in the gallery. Since I had seen the murderer seated at the desk ten minutes had elapsed. Monsieur Stangerson wished to spring upon the assassin at once and kill him. I made him understand that, above all, he must not, in his desire to kill him, miss him.

"When I had sworn to him that his daughter was not in the room, and in no danger, he conquered his impatience and left me to direct the operations. I told them that they must come to me the moment I called to them, or when I fired my revolver. I then sent Daddy Jacques to place himself before the window at the end of the 'right' gallery. (No. 2 on my plan.) I chose that position 'for Daddy Jacques because I believed that the murderer, tracked, on leaving the room, would run through the gallery towards the window which he had left open, and, instantly seeing that it was guarded by Larsan, would pursue his course along the 'right' gallery. There he would encounter Daddy Jacques, who would prevent his springing out of the window into the park. Under that window there was a sort of buttress, while all the other windows in the galleries were at such a height from the ground that it was almost impossible to jump from them without breaking one's neck. All the doors and windows, including those of the lumber-room at the end of the 'right' gallery --as I had rapidly assured myself--were strongly secured.

"Having indicated to Daddy Jacques the post he was to occupy, and having seen him take up his position, I placed Monsieur Stangerson on the landing at the head of the stairs not far from the door of his daughter's ante-room, rather than the boudoir, where the women were, and the door of which must have been locked by Mademoiselle Stangerson herself if, as I thought, she had taken refuge in the boudoir for the purpose of avoiding the murderer who was coming to see her. In any case, he must return to the gallery where my people were awaiting him at every possible exit.

"On coming there, he would see on his left, Monsieur Stangerson; he would turn to the right, towards the 'off-turning' gallery--the way he had pre-arranged for flight, where, at the intersection of the two galleries, he would see at once, as I have explained, on his left, Frederic Larsan at the end of the 'off-turning' gallery, and in front, Daddy Jacques, at the end of the 'right' gallery. Monsieur Stangerson and myself would arrive by way of the back of the chateau. --He is ours!--He can no longer escape us! I was sure of that.

"The plan I had formed seemed to me the best, the surest, and the most simple. It would, no doubt, have been simpler still, if we had been able to place some one directly behind the door of Mademoiselle's boudoir, which opened out of her bedchamber, and, in that way, had been in a position to besiege the two doors of the room in which the man was. But we could not penetrate the boudoir except by way of the drawing-room, the door of which had been locked on the inside by Mademoiselle Stangerson. But even if I had had the free disposition of the boudoir, I should have held to the plan I had formed; because any other plan of attack would have separated us at the moment of the struggle with the man, while my plan united us all for the attack, at a spot which I had selected with almost mathematical precision.--the intersection of the two galleries.

"Having so placed my people, I again left the chateau, hurried to my ladder, and, replacing it, climbed up, revolver in hand.

"If there be any inclined to smile at my taking so many precautionary measures, I refer them to the mystery of
The Yellow Room, and to all the proofs we have of the weird cunning of the murderer. Further, if there be some who think my observations needlessly minute at a moment when they ought to be completely held by rapidity of movement and decision of action, I reply that I have wished to report here, at length and completely, all the details of a plan of attack conceived so rapidly that it is only the slowness of my pen that gives an appearance of slowness to the execution. I have wished, by this slowness and precision, to be certain that nothing should be omitted from the conditions under which the strange phenomenon was produced, which, until some natural explanation of it is forthcoming, seems to me to prove, even better than the theories of Professor Stangerson, the Dissociation of Matter—I will even say, the instantaneous Dissociation of Matter."

Chapter XVI
Strange Phenomenon of the Dissociation of Matter
(EXTRACT FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF JOSEPH ROULETABILLE, continued)

"I am again at the window-sill," continues Rouletabille, "and once more I raise my head above it. Through an opening in the curtains, the arrangement of which has not been changed, I am ready to look, anxious to note the position in which I am going to find the murderer, --whether his back will still be turned towards me!--whether he is still seated at the desk writing! But perhaps--perhaps--he is no longer there!--Yet how could he have fled?--Was I not in possession of his ladder? I force myself to be cool. I raise my head yet higher. I look--he is still there. I see his monstrous back, deformed by the shadow thrown by the candle. He is no longer writing now, and the candle is on the parquet, over which he is bending--a position which serves my purpose.

"I hold my breath. I mount the ladder. I am on the uppermost rung of it, and with my left hand seize hold of the window-sill. In this moment of approaching success, I feel my heart beating wildly. I put my revolver between my teeth. A quick spring, and I shall be on the window-ledge. But--the ladder! I had been obliged to press on it heavily, and my foot had scarcely left it, when I felt it swaying beneath me. It grated on the wall and fell. But, already, my knees were touching the window-sill, and, by a movement quick as lightning, I got on to it.

"But the murderer had been even quicker than I had been. He had heard the grating of the ladder on the wall, and I saw the monstrous back of the man raise itself. I saw his head. Did I really see it? --The candle on the parquet lit up his legs only. Above the height of the table the chamber was in darkness. I saw a man with long hair, a full beard, wild-looking eyes, a pale face, framed in large whiskers,—as well as I could distinguish, and, as I think—red in colour. I did not know the face. That was, in brief, the chief sensation I received from that face in the dim half-light in which I saw it. I did not know it—or, at least, I did not recognise it.

"Now for quick action! It was indeed time for that, for as I was about to place my legs through the window, the man had seen me, had bounded to his feet, had sprung—as I foresaw he would— to the door of the ante-chamber, had time to open it, and fled. But I was already behind him, revolver in hand, shouting 'Help!'

"Like an arrow I crossed the room, but noticed a letter on the table as I rushed. I almost came up with the man in the ante-room, for he had lost time in opening the door to the gallery. I flew on wings, and in the gallery was but a few feet behind him. He had taken, as I supposed he would, the gallery on his right,—that is to say, the road he had prepared for his flight. 'Help, Jacques!—help, Larsan!' I cried. He could not escape us! I raised a shout of joy, of savage victory. The man reached the intersection of the two galleries hardly two seconds before me for the meeting which I had prepared—the fatal shock which must inevitably take place at that spot! We all rushed to the crossing-place—Monsieur Stangerson and I coming from one end of the right gallery, Daddy Jacques coming from the other end of the same gallery, and Frederic Larsan coming from the 'off-turning' gallery.

"The man was not there!

"We looked at each other stupidly and with eyes terrified. The man had vanished like a ghost. 'Where is he—where is he?' we all asked.

"'It is impossible he can have escaped!' I cried, my terror mastered by my anger.

"'I touched him!' exclaimed Frederic Larsan.

"'I felt his breath on my face!' cried Daddy Jacques.

"'Where is he?'—'where is he?' we all cried.

"We raced like madmen along the two galleries; we visited doors and windows—they were closed, hermetically closed. They had not been opened. Besides, the opening of a door or window by this man whom we were hunting, without our having perceived it, would have been more inexplicable than his disappearance.

"Where is he?—where is he?—He could not have got away by a door or a window, nor by any other way. He could not have passed through our bodies!

"I confess that, for the moment, I felt 'done for.' For the gallery was perfectly lighted, and there was neither trap, nor secret door in the walls, nor any sort of hiding-place. We moved the chairs and lifted the pictures. Nothing!—nothing! We would have looked into a flower-pot, if there had been one to look into!"

When this mystery, thanks to Rouletabille, was naturally explained, by the help alone of his masterful mind, we
were able to realise that the murderer had got away neither by a door, a window, nor the stairs—a fact which the judges would not admit.

CHAPTER XVII
The Inexplicable Gallery

"Mademoiselle Stangerson appeared at the door of her ante-room," continues Rouletabille's note-book. "We were near her door in the gallery where this incredible phenomenon had taken place. There are moments when one feels as if one's brain were about to burst. A bullet in the head, a fracture of the skull, the seat of reason shattered—with only these can I compare the sensation which exhausted and left me void of sense.

"Happily, Mademoiselle Stangerson appeared on the threshold of her ante-room. I saw her, and that helped to relieve my chaotic state of mind. I breathed her—I inhaled the perfume of the lady in black, whom I should never see again. I would have given ten years of my life—half my life—to see once more the lady in black! Alas! I no more meet her but from time to time,—and yet!—and yet! how the memory of that perfume—felt by me alone—carries me back to the days of my childhood.* It was this sharp reminder from my beloved perfume, of the lady in black, which made me go to her —dressed wholly in white and so pale—so pale and so beautiful! —on the threshold of the inexplicable gallery. Her beautiful golden hair, gathered into a knot on the back of her neck, left visible the red star on her temple which had so nearly been the cause of her death. When I first got on the right track of the mystery of this case I had imagined that, on the night of the tragedy in The Yellow Room, Mademoiselle Stangerson had worn her hair in bands. But then, how could I have imagined otherwise when I had not been in The Yellow Room!

*When I wrote these lines, Joseph Rouletabille was eighteen years of age,—and he spoke of his "youth." I have kept the text of my friend, but I inform the reader here that the episode of the mystery of The Yellow Room has no connection with that of the perfume of the lady in black. It is not my fault if, in the document which I have cited, Rouletabille thought fit to refer to his childhood.

"But now, since the occurrence of the inexplicable gallery, I did not reason at all. I stood there, stupid, before the apparition —so pale and so beautiful—of Mademoiselle Stangerson. She was clad in a dressing-gown of dreamy white. One might have taken her to be a ghost—a lovely phantom. Her father took her in his arms and kissed her passionately, as if he had recovered her after being long lost to him. I dared not question her. He drew her into the room and we followed them,—for we had to know!—The door of the boudoir was open. The terrified faces of the two nurses craned towards us. Mademoiselle Stangerson inquired the meaning of all the disturbance. That she was not in her own room was quite easily explained—quite easily. She had a fancy not to sleep that night in her chamber, but in the boudoir with her nurses, locking the door on them. Since the night of the crime she had experienced feelings of terror, and fears came over her that are easily to be comprehended.

"But who could imagine that on that particular night when he was to come, she would, by a mere chance, determine to shut herself in with her women? Who would think that she would act contrary to her father's wish to sleep in the drawing-room? Who could believe that the letter which had so recently been on the table in her room would no longer be there? He who could understand all this, would have to assume that Mademoiselle Stangerson knew that the murderer was coming —she could not prevent his coming again—unknown to her father, unknown to all but to Monsieur Robert Darzac. For he must know it now—perhaps he had known it before! Did he remember that phrase in the Elysee garden: 'Must I commit a crime, then, to win you?' Against whom the crime, if not against the obstacle, against the murderer? 'Ah, I would kill him with my own hand!' And I replied, 'You have not answered my question.' That was the very truth. In truth, in truth, Monsieur Darzac knew the murderer so well that —while wishing to kill him himself—he was afraid I should find him. There could be but two reasons why he had assisted me in my investigation. First, because I forced him to do it; and, second, because she would be the better protected.

"I am in the chamber—her room. I look at her, also at the place where the letter had just now been. She has possessed herself of it; it was evidently intended for her—evidently. How she trembles! —Trembles at the strange story her father is telling her, of the presence of the murderer in her chamber, and of the pursuit. But it is plainly to be seen that she is not wholly satisfied by the assurance given her until she had been told that the murderer, by some incomprehensible means, had been able to elude us.

"Then follows a silence. What a silence! We are all there—looking at her—her father, Larsan, Daddy Jacques and I. What were we all thinking of in the silence? After the events of that night, of the mystery of the inexplicable gallery, of the prodigious fact of the presence of the murderer in her room, it seemed to me that all our thoughts might have been translated into the words which were addressed to her. 'You who know of this mystery, explain it to us, and we shall perhaps be able to save you. How I longed to save her —for herself, and, from the other!—It brought the tears to my eyes.

"She is there, shedding about her the perfume of the lady in black. At last, I see her, in the silence of her chamber. Since the fatal hour of the mystery of The Yellow Room, we have hung about this invisible and silent
woman to learn what she knows. Our desires, our wish to know must be a torment to her. Who can tell that, should we learn the secret of her mystery, it would not precipitate a tragedy more terrible than that which had already been enacted here? Who can tell if it might not mean her death? Yet it had brought her close to death,—and we still knew nothing. Or, rather, there are some of us who know nothing. But I—if I knew who, I should know all. Who?—Who?—Not knowing who, I must remain silent, out of pity for her. For there is no doubt that she knows how he escaped from The Yellow Room, and yet she keeps the secret. When I know who, I will speak to him—to him!

"She looked at us now—with a far-away look in her eyes—as if we were not in the chamber. Monsieur Stangerson broke the silence. He declared that, henceforth, he would no more absent himself from his daughter's apartments. She tried to oppose him in vain. He adhered firmly to his purpose. He would install himself there this very night, he said. Solely concerned for the health of his daughter, he reproached her for having left her bed. Then he suddenly began talking to her as if she were a little child. He smiled at her and seemed not to know either what he said or what he did. The illustrious professor had lost his head. Mademoiselle Stangerson in a tone of tender distress said: 'Father!—father!' Daddy Jacques blows his nose, and Frederic Larsan himself is obliged to turn away to hide his emotion. For myself, I am able neither to think or feel. I felt an infinite contempt for myself.

"It was the first time that Frederic Larsan, like myself, found himself face to face with Mademoiselle Stangerson since the attack in The Yellow Room. Like me, he had insisted on being allowed to question the unhappy lady; but he had not, any more than had I, been permitted. To him, as to me, the same answer had always been given: Mademoiselle Stangerson was too weak to receive us. The questionings of the examining magistrate had over-fatigued her. It was evidently intended not to give us any assistance in our researches. I was not surprised; but Frederic Larsan had always resented this conduct. It is true that he and I had a totally different theory of the crime.

"I still catch myself repeating from the depths of my heart: 'Save her!--save her without his speaking!' Who is he—the murderer? Take him and shut his mouth. But Monsieur Darzac made it clear that in order to shut his mouth he must be killed. Have I the right to kill Mademoiselle Stangerson's murderer? No, I had not. But let him only give me the chance! Let me find out whether he is really a creature of flesh and blood!—Let me see his dead body, since it cannot be taken alive.

"If I could but make this woman, who does not even look at us, understand! She is absorbed by her fears and by her father's distress of mind. And I can do nothing to save her. Yes, I will go to work once more and accomplish wonders.

"I move towards her. I would speak to her. I would entreat her to have confidence in me. I would, in a word, make her understand --she alone--that I know how the murderer escaped from The Yellow Room—that I have guessed the motives for her secrecy—and that I pity her with all my heart. But by her gestures she begged us to leave her alone, expressing weariness and the need for immediate rest. Monsieur Stangerson asked us to go back to our rooms and thanked us. Frederic Larsan and I bowed to him and, followed by Daddy Jacques, we regained the gallery. I heard Larsan murmur: 'Strange! strange!' He made a sign to me to go with him into his room. On the threshold he turned towards Daddy Jacques.

"'Did you see him distinctly?' he asked.

"'Who?'

"'The man?'

"'Saw him!—why, he had a big red beard and red hair.'

"'That's how he appeared to me,' I said.

"'And to me,' said Larsan.

"The great Fred and I were alone in his chamber, now, to talk over this thing. We talked for an hour, turning the matter over and viewing it from every side. From the questions put by him, from the explanation which he gives me, it is clear to me that--in spite of all our senses--he is persuaded the man disappeared by some secret passage in the chateau known to him alone.

"'He knows the chateau,' he said to me; 'he knows it well.'

"'He is a rather tall man—well-built,' I suggested.

"'He is as tall as he wants to be,' murmured Fred.

"'I understand,' I said; 'but how do you account for his red hair and beard?'

"'Too much beard—too much hair—false,' says Fred.

"'That's easily said. You are always thinking of Robert Darzac. You can't get rid of that idea? I am certain that he is innocent.'

"So much the better. I hope so; but everything condemns him. Did you notice the marks on the carpet?—Come and look at them.'

"'I have seen them; they are the marks of the neat boots, the same as those we saw on the border of the lake.'

"'Can you deny that they belong to Robert Darzac?'}
“'Of course, one may be mistaken.'

"'Have you noticed that those footprints only go in one direction? --that there are no return marks? When the man came from the chamber, pursued by all of us, his footsteps left no traces behind them.'

"'He had, perhaps, been in the chamber for hours. The mud from his boots had dried, and he moved with such rapidity on the points of his toes--We saw him running, but we did not hear his steps.'

"I suddenly put an end to this idle chatter--void of any logic, and made a sign to Larsan to listen.

"'There--below; some one is shutting a door.'

"I rise; Larsan follows me; we descend to the ground-floor of the chateau. I lead him to the little semi-circular room under the terrace beneath the window of the 'off-turning' gallery. I point to the door, now closed, open a short time before, under which a shaft of light is visible.

"'The forest-keeper!' says Fred.

"'Come on!' I whisper.

"Prepared--I know not why--to believe that the keeper is the guilty man--I go to the door and rap smartly on it.

"Some might think that we were rather late in thinking of the keeper, since our first business, after having found that the murderer had escaped us in the gallery, ought to have been to search everywhere else, --around the chateau,--in the park--

"Had this criticism been made at the time, we could only have answered that the assassin had disappeared from the gallery in such a way that we thought he was no longer anywhere! He had eluded us when we all had our hands stretched out ready to seize him--when we were almost touching him. We had no longer any ground for hoping that we could clear up the mystery of that night.

"As soon as I rapped at the door it was opened, and the keeper asked us quietly what we wanted. He was undressed and preparing to go to bed. The bed had not yet been disturbed.

"'Not gone to bed yet?'

"'No,' he replied roughly. 'I have been making a round of the park and in the woods. I am only just back--and sleepy. Good-night!'

"Listen,' I said. 'An hour or so ago, there was a ladder close by your window.'

"'What ladder?--I did not see any ladder. Good-night!'

"And he simply put us out of the room. When we were outside I looked at Larsan. His face was impenetrable.

"'Well?' I said.

"'Well?' he repeated.

"'Does that open out any new view to you?'

"'There was no mistaking Larsan's bad temper. On re-entering the chateau, I heard him mutter:

"'It would be strange--very strange--if I had deceived myself on that point!'

"He seemed to be talking to me rather than to himself. He added: 'In any case, we shall soon know what to think. The morning will bring light with it.'"

CHAPTER XVIII
Rouletabille Has Drawn a Circle Between the Two Bumps on His Forehead

(EXTRACT FROM THE NOTE-BOOK OF JOSEPH ROULETABILLE, continued)

"We separated on the thresholds of our rooms, with a melancholy shake of the hands. I was glad to have aroused in him a suspicion of error. His was an original brain, very intelligent but--without method. I did not go to bed. I awaited the coming of daylight and then went down to the front of the chateau, and made a detour, examining every trace of footsteps coming towards it or going from it. These, however, were so mixed and confusing that I could make nothing of them. Here I may make a remark,--I am not accustomed to attach an exaggerated importance to exterior signs left in the track of a crime.

"The method which traces the criminal by means of the tracks of his footsteps is altogether primitive. So many footprints are identical. However, in the disturbed state of my mind, I did go into the deserted court and did look at all the footprints I could find there, seeking for some indication, as a basis for reasoning.

"If I could but find a right starting-point! In despair I seated myself on a stone. For over an hour I busied myself with the common, ordinary work of a policeman. Like the least intelligent of detectives I went on blindly over the traces of footprints which told me just no more than they could.

"I came to the conclusion that I was a fool, lower in the scale of intelligence than even the police of the modern romancer. Novelists build mountains of stupidity out of a footprint on the sand, or from an impression of a hand on the wall. That's the way innocent men are brought to prison. It might convince an examining magistrate or the head of a detective department, but it's not proof. You writers forget that what the senses furnish is not proof. If I am taking cognisance of what is offered me by my senses I do so but to bring the results within the circle of my reason.
That circle may be the most circumscribed, but if it is, it has this advantage—it holds nothing but the truth! Yes, I swear that I have never used the evidence of the senses but as servants to my reason. I have never permitted them to become my master. They have not made of me that monstrous thing,—worse than a blind man,—a man who sees falsely. And that is why I can triumph over your error and your merely animal intelligence, Frederic Larsan.

"Be of good courage, then, friend Rouletabille; it is impossible that the incident of the inexplicable gallery should be outside the circle of your reason. You know that! Then have faith and take thought with yourself and forget not that you took hold of the right end when you drew that circle in your brain within which to unravel this mysterious play of circumstance.

"To it, once again! Go—back to the gallery. Take your stand on your reason and rest there as Frederic Larsan rests on his cane. You will then soon prove that the great Fred is nothing but a fool.

--30th October. Noon. JOSEPH ROULETABILLE."

"I acted as I planned. With head on fire, I retraced my way to the gallery, and without having found anything more than I had seen on the previous night, the right hold I had taken of my reason drew me to something so important that I was obliged to cling to it to save myself from falling.

"Now for the strength and patience to find sensible traces to fit in with my thinking—and these must come within the circle I have drawn between the two bumps on my forehead!

--30th of October. Midnight." "JOSEPH ROULETABILLE."

CHAPTER XIX
Rouletabille Invites Me to Breakfast at the Donjon Inn

It was not until later that Rouletabille sent me the note-book in which he had written at length the story of the phenomenon of the inexplicable gallery. On the day I arrived at the Glandier and joined him in his room, he recounted to me, with the greatest detail, all that I have now related, telling me also how he had spent several hours in Paris where he had learned nothing that could be of any help to him.

The event of the inexplicable gallery had occurred on the night between the 29th and 30th of October, that is to say, three days before my return to the chateau. It was on the 2nd of November, then, that I went back to the Glandier, summoned there by my friend's telegram, and taking the revolvers with me.

I am now in Rouletabille's room and he has finished his recital.

While he had been telling me the story I noticed him continually rubbing the glass of the eyeglasses he had found on the side table. From the evident pleasure he was taking in handling them I felt they must be one of those sensible evidences destined to enter what he had called the circle of the right end of his reason. That strange and unique way of his, to express himself in terms wonderfully adequate for his thoughts, no longer surprised me. It was often necessary to know his thought to understand the terms he used; and it was not easy to penetrate into Rouletabille's thinking.

This lad's brain was one of the most curious things I have ever observed. Rouletabille went on the even tenor of his way without suspecting the astonishment and even bewilderment he roused in others. I am sure he was not himself in the least conscious of the originality of his genius. He was himself and at ease wherever he happened to be.

When he had finished his recital he asked me what I thought of it. I replied that I was much puzzled by his question. Then he begged me to try, in my turn, to take my reason in hand "by the right end."

"Very well," I said. "It seems to me that the point of departure of my reason would be this—there can be no doubt that the murderer you pursued was in the gallery." I paused.

"After making so good a start, you ought not to stop so soon," he exclaimed. "Come, make another effort."

"I'll try. Since he disappeared from the gallery without passing through any door or window, he must have escaped by some other opening."

Rouletabille looked at me pityingly, smiled carelessly, and remarked that I was reasoning like a postman, or—like Frederic Larsan.

Rouletabille had alternate fits of admiration and disdain for the great Fred. It all depended as to whether Larsan's discoveries tallied with Rouletabille's reasoning or not. When they did he would exclaim: "He is really great!" When they did not he would grunt and mutter, "What an ass!" It was a petty side of the noble character of this strange youth.

We had risen, and he led me into the park. When we reached the court and were making towards the gate, the sound of blinds thrown back against the wall made us turn our heads, and we saw, at a window on the first floor of the chateau, the ruddy and clean shaven face of a person I did not recognise.

"Hullo!" muttered Rouletabille. "Arthur Rance!"—He lowered his head, quickened his pace, and I heard him ask himself between his teeth: "Was he in the chateau that night? What is he doing here?"

We had gone some distance from the chateau when I asked him who this Arthur Rance was, and how he had
come to know him. He referred to his story of that morning and I remembered that Mr. Arthur W. Rance was the American from Philadelphia with whom he had had so many drinks at the Elysee reception.

"But was he not to have left France almost immediately?" I asked.

"No doubt; that's why I am surprised to find him here still, and not only in France, but above all, at the Glandier. He did not arrive this morning; and he did not get here last night. He must have got here before dinner, then. Why didn't the concierges tell me?"

I reminded my friend, apropos of the concierges, that he had not yet told me what had led him to get them set at liberty.

We were close to their lodge. Monsieur and Madame Bernier saw us coming. A frank smile lit up their happy faces. They seemed to harbour no ill-feeling because of their detention. My young friend asked them at what hour Mr. Arthur Rance had arrived. They answered that they did not know he was at the chateau. He must have come during the evening of the previous night, but they had not had to open the gate for him, because, being a great walker, and not wishing that a carriage should be sent to meet him, he was accustomed to get off at the little hamlet of Saint-Michel, from which he came to the chateau by way of the forest. He reached the park by the grotto of Sainte-Genevieve, over the little gate of which, giving on to the park, he climbed.

As the concierges spoke, I saw Rouletabille's face cloud over and exhibit disappointment—a disappointment, no doubt, with himself. Evidently he was a little vexed, after having worked so much on the spot, with so minute a study of the people and events at the Glandier, that he had to learn now that Arthur Rance was accustomed to visit the chateau.

"You say that Monsieur Arthur Rance is accustomed to come to the chateau. When did he come here last?"

"We can't tell you exactly," replied Madame Bernier—"that was the name of the concierge—"we couldn't know while they were keeping us in prison. Besides, as the gentleman comes to the chateau without passing through our gate he goes away by the way he comes."

"Do you know when he came the first time?"

"Oh yes, Monsieur!—nine years ago."

"He was in France nine years ago, then," said Rouletabille, "and, since that time, as far as you know, how many times has he been at the Glandier?"

"Three times."

"When did he come the last time, as far as you know?"

"A week before the attempt in The Yellow Room."

Rouletabille put another question—this time addressing himself particularly to the woman:

"In the grove of the parquet?"

"In the grove of the parquet," she replied.

"Thanks!" said Rouletabille. "Be ready for me this evening."

He spoke the last words with a finger on his lips as if to command silence and discretion.

We left the park and took the way to the Donjon Inn.

"Do you often eat here?"

"Sometimes."

"But you also take your meals at the chateau?"

"Yes, Larsan and I are sometimes served in one of our rooms."

"Hasn't Monsieur Stangerson ever invited you to his own table?"

"Never."

"Does your presence at the chateau displease him?"

"I don't know; but, in any case, he does not make us feel that we are in his way."

"Doesn't he question you?"

"Never. He is in the same state of mind as he was in at the door of The Yellow Room when his daughter was being murdered, and when he broke open the door and did not find the murderer. He is persuaded, since he could discover nothing, that there's no reason why we should be able to discover more than he did. But he has made it his duty, since Larsan expressed his theory, not to oppose us."

Rouletabille buried himself in thought again for some time. He aroused himself later to tell me of how he came to set the two concierges free.

"I went recently to see Monsieur Stangerson, and took with me a piece of paper on which was written: 'I promise, whatever others may say, to keep in my service my two faithful servants, Bernier and his wife.' I explained to him that, by signing that document, he would enable me to compel those two people to speak out; and I declared my own assurance of their innocence of any part in the crime. That was also his opinion. The examining magistrate, after it was signed, presented the document to the Berniers, who then did speak. They said, what I was certain they
would say, as soon as they were sure they would not lose their place.

"They confessed to poaching on Monsieur Stangerson's estates, and it was while they were poaching, on the night of the crime, that they were not far from the pavilion at the moment when the outrage was being committed. Some rabbits they caught in that way were sold by them to the landlord of the Donjon Inn, who served them to his customers, or sent them to Paris. That was the truth, as I had guessed from the first. Do you remember what I said, on entering the Donjon Inn?--'We shall have to eat red meat--now!' I had heard the words on the same morning when we arrived at the park gate. You heard them also, but you did not attach any importance to them. You recollect, when we reached the park gate, that we stopped to look at a man who was running by the side of the wall, looking every minute at his watch. That was Larsan. Well, behind us the landlord of the Donjon Inn, standing on his doorstep, said to someone inside: 'We shall have to eat red meat--now.'

'Why that 'now'? When you are, as I am, in search of some hidden secret, you can't afford to have anything escape you. You've got to know the meaning of everything. We had come into a rather out-of-the-way part of the country which had been turned topsy-turvey by a crime, and my reason led me to suspect every phrase that could bear upon the event of the day. 'Now,' I took to mean, 'since the outrage.' In the course of my inquiry, therefore, I sought to find a relation between that phrase and the tragedy. We went to the Donjon Inn for breakfast; I repeated the phrase and saw, by the surprise and trouble on Daddy Mathieu's face, that I had not exaggerated its importance, so far as he was concerned.

'I had just learned that the concierges had been arrested. Daddy Mathieu spoke of them as of dear friends--people for whom one is sorry. That was a reckless conjunction of ideas, I said to myself. 'Now,' that the concierges are arrested, 'we shall have to eat red meat.' No more concierges, no more game! The hatred expressed by Daddy Mathieu for Monsieur Stangerson's forest-keeper--a hatred he pretended was shared by the concierges led me easily to think of poaching. Now as all the evidence showed the concierges had not been in bed at the time of the tragedy, why were they abroad that night? As participants in the crime? I was not disposed to think so. I had already arrived at the conclusion, by steps of which I will tell you later--that the assassin had had no accomplice, and that the tragedy held a mystery between Mademoiselle Stangerson and the murderer, a mystery with which the concierges had nothing to do.

'With that theory in my mind, I searched for proof in their lodge, which, as you know, I entered. I found there under their bed, some springs and brass wire. 'Ah!' I thought, 'these things explain why they were out in the park at night!' I was not surprised at the dogged silence they maintained before the examining magistrate, even under the accusation so grave as that of being accomplices in the crime. Poaching would save them from the Assize Court, but it would lose them their places; and, as they were perfectly sure of their innocence of the crime they hoped it would soon be established, and then their poaching might go on as usual. They could always confess later. I, however, hastened their confession by means of the document Monsieur Stangerson signed. They gave all the necessary 'proofs,' were set at liberty, and have now a lively gratitude for me. Why did I not get them released sooner? Because I was not sure that nothing more than poaching was against them. I wanted to study the ground. As the days went by, my conviction became more and more certain. The day after the events of the inexplicable gallery I had need of help I could rely on, so I resolved to have them released at once."

That was how Joseph Rouletabille explained himself. Once more I could not but be astonished at the simplicity of the reasoning which had brought him to the truth of the matter. Certainly this was no big thing; but I think, myself, that the young man will, one of these days, explain with the same simplicity, the fearful tragedy in The Yellow Room as well as the phenomenon of the inexplicable gallery.

We reached the Donjon Inn and entered it.

This time we did not see the landlord, but were received with a pleasant smile by the hostess. I have already described the room in which we found ourselves, and I have given a glimpse of the charming blonde woman with the gentle eyes who now immediately began to prepare our breakfast.

"How's Daddy Mathieu?" asked Rouletabille.

"Not much better--not much better; he is still confined to his bed."

"His rheumatism still sticks to him, then?"

"Yes. Last night I was again obliged to give him morphine--the only drug that gives him any relief."

She spoke in a soft voice. Everything about her expressed gentleness. She was, indeed, a beautiful woman; somewhat with an air of indolence, with great eyes seemingly black and blue--amorous eyes. Was she happy with her cramped, rheumatic husband? The scene at which we had once been present did not lead us to believe that she was; yet there was something in her bearing that was not suggestive of despair. She disappeared into the kitchen to prepare our repast, leaving on the table a bottle of excellent cider. Rouletabille filled our earthenware mugs, loaded his pipe, and quietly explained to me his reason for asking me to come to the Glandier with revolvers.

"Yes," he said, contemplatively looking at the clouds of smoke he was puffing out, "yes, my dear boy, I expect
the assassin to-night." A brief silence followed, which I took care not to interrupt, and then he went on:

"Last night, just as I was going to bed, Monsieur Robert Darzac knocked at my room. When he came in he
confided to me that he was compelled to go to Paris the next day, that is, this morning. The reason which made this
journey necessary was at once peremptory and mysterious; it was not possible for him to explain its object to me. 'I
go, and yet,' he added, 'I would give my life not to leave Mademoiselle Stangerson at this moment.' He did not try to
hide that he believed her to be once more in danger. 'It will not greatly astonish me if something happens to-morrow
night,' he avowed, 'and yet I must be absent. I cannot be back at the Glandier before the morning of the day after to-
morrow.'

"I asked him to explain himself, and this is all he would tell me. His anticipation of coming danger had come to
him solely from the coincidence that Mademoiselle Stangerson had been twice attacked, and both times when he had
been absent. On the night of the incident of the inexplicable gallery he had been obliged to be away from the
Glandier. On the night of the tragedy in The Yellow Room he had also not been able to be at the Glandier, though
this was the first time he had declared himself on the matter. Now a man so moved who would still go away must be
acting under compulsion--must be obeying a will stronger than his own. That was how I reasoned, and I told him so.
He replied 'Perhaps.'--I asked him if Mademoiselle Stangerson was compelling him. He protested that she was not.
His determination to go to Paris had been taken without any conference with Mademoiselle Stangerson.

"To cut the story short, he repeated that his belief in the possibility of a fresh attack was founded entirely on the
extraordinary coincidence. 'If anything happens to Mademoiselle Stangerson,' he said, 'it would be terrible for both
of us. For her, because her life would be in danger; for me because I could neither defend her from the attack nor tell
of where I had been. I am perfectly aware of the suspicions cast on me. The examining magistrate and Monsieur
Larsan are both on the point of believing in my guilt. Larsan tracked me the last time I went to Paris, and I had all
the trouble in the world to get rid of him.'

"'Why do you not tell me the name of the murderer now, if you know it?' I cried.

"Monsieur Darzac appeared extremely troubled by my question, and replied to me in a hesitating tone:

"'I?--I know the name of the murderer? Why, how could I know his name?'

"I at once replied: 'From Mademoiselle Stangerson.'

"He grew so pale that I thought he was about to faint, and I saw that I had hit the nail right on the head.
Mademoiselle and he knew the name of the murderer! When he recovered himself, he said to me: 'I am going to
leave you. Since you have been here I have appreciated your exceptional intelligence and your unequalled ingenuity.
But I ask this service of you. Perhaps I am wrong to fear an attack during the coming night; but, as I must act with
foresight, I count on you to frustrate any attempt that may be made. Take every step needful to protect Mademoiselle
Stangerson. Keep a most careful watch of her room. Don't go to sleep, nor allow yourself one moment of repose.
The man we dread is remarkably cunning--with a cunning that has never been equalled. If you keep watch his very
cunning may save her; because it's impossible that he should not know that you are watching; and knowing it, he
may not venture.'

"'Have you spoken of all this to Monsieur Stangerson?'

"'No. I do not wish him to ask me, as you just now did, for the name of the murderer. I tell you all this, Monsieur
Rouletabille, because I have great, very great, confidence in you. I know that you do not suspect me.'

"The poor man spoke in jerks. He was evidently suffering. I pitied him, the more because I felt sure that he
would rather allow himself to be killed than tell me who the murderer was. As for Mademoiselle Stangerson, I felt
that she would rather allow herself to be murdered than denounce the man of The Yellow Room and of the
inexplicable gallery. The man must be dominating her, or both, by some inscrutable power. They were dreading
nothing so much as the chance of Monsieur Stangerson knowing that his daughter was 'held' by her assailant. I made
Monsieur Darzac understand that he had explained himself sufficiently, and that he might refrain from telling me
any more than he had already told me. I promised him to watch through the night. He insisted that I should establish
an absolutely impassable barrier around Mademoiselle Stangerson's chamber, around the boudoir where the nurses
were sleeping, and around the drawing-room where, since the affair of the inexplicable gallery, Monsieur
Stangerson had slept. In short, I was to put a cordon round the whole apartment.

"From his insistence I gathered that Monsieur Darzac intended not only to make it impossible for the expected
man to reach the chamber of Mademoiselle Stangerson, but to make that impossibility so visibly clear that, seeing
himself expected, he would at once go away. That was how I interpreted his final words when we parted: 'You may
mention your suspicions of the expected attack to Monsieur Stangerson, to Daddy Jacques, to Frederic Larsan, and
to anybody in the chateau.'

"The poor fellow left me hardly knowing what he was saying. My silence and my eyes told him that I had
guessed a large part of his secret. And, indeed, he must have been at his wits' end, to have come to me at such a
time, and to abandon Mademoiselle Stangerson in spite of his fixed idea as to the consequence.
"When he was gone, I began to think that I should have to use even a greater cunning than his so that if the man
should come that night, he might not for a moment suspect that his coming had been expected. Certainly! I would
allow him to get in far enough, so that, dead or alive, I might see his face clearly! He must be got rid of.
Mademoiselle Stangerson must be freed from this continual impending danger.
"Yes, my boy," said Rouletabille, after placing his pipe on the table, and emptying his mug of cider, "I must see
his face distinctly, so as to make sure to impress it on that part of my brain where I have drawn my circle of
reasoning."

The landlady re-appeared at that moment, bringing in the traditional bacon omelette. Rouletabille chaffed her a
little, and she took the chaff with the most charming good humour.
"She is much jollier when Daddy Mathieu is in bed with his rheumatism," Rouletabille said to me.

But I had eyes neither for Rouletabille nor for the landlady's smiles. I was entirely absorbed over the last words
of my young friend and in thinking over Monsieur Robert Darzac's strange behaviour.

When he had finished his omelette and we were again alone, Rouletabille continued the tale of his confidences.

"When I sent you my telegram this morning," he said, "I had only the word of Monsieur Darzac, that 'perhaps'
the assassin would come to-night. I can now say that he will certainly come. I expect him."

"What has made you feel this certainty?"

"I have been sure since half-past ten o'clock this morning that he would come. I knew that before we saw Arthur
Rance at the window in the court."

"Ah!" I said, "But, again--what made you so sure? And why since half-past ten this morning?"

"Because, at half-past ten, I had proof that Mademoiselle Stangerson was making as many efforts to permit of
the murderer's entrance as Monsieur Robert Darzac had taken precautions against it."

"Is that possible!" I cried. "Haven't you told me that Mademoiselle Stangerson loves Monsieur Robert Darzac?"

"I told you so because it is the truth."

"Then do you see nothing strange--"

"Everything in this business is strange, my friend; but take my word for it, the strangeness you now feel is
nothing to the strangeness that's to come!"

"It must be admitted, then," I said, "that Mademoiselle Stangerson and her murderer are in communication--at
any rate in writing?"

"Admit it, my friend, admit it! You don't risk anything! I told you about the letter left on her table, on the night
of the inexplicable gallery affair,--the letter that disappeared into the pocket of Mademoiselle Stangerson. Why
should it not have been a summons to a meeting? Might he not, as soon as he was sure of Darzac's absence, appoint
the meeting for 'the coming night?""

And my friend laughed silently. There are moments when I ask myself if he is not laughing at me.

The door of the inn opened. Rouletabille was on his feet so suddenly that one might have thought he had
received an electric shock.

"Mr. Arthur Rance!" he cried.

Mr. Arthur Rance stood before us calmly bowing.

CHAPTER XX
An Act of Mademoiselle Stangerson

"You remember me, Monsieur?" asked Rouletabille.

"Perfectly!" replied Arthur Rance. "I recognise you as the lad at the bar. [The face of Rouletabille crimsoned at
being called a "lad."] I want to shake hands with you. You are a bright little fellow."

The American extended his hand and Rouletabille, relaxing his frown, shook it and introduced Mr. Arthur Rance
to me. He invited him to share our meal.

"No thanks. I breakfasted with Monsieur Stangerson."

Arthur Rance spoke French perfectly,--almost without an accent.

"I did not expect to have the pleasure of seeing you again, Monsieur. I thought you were to have left France the
day after the reception at the Elysee."

Rouletabille and I, outwardly indifferent, listened most intently for every word the American would say.

The man's purplish red face, his heavy eyelids, the nervous twitches, all spoke of his addiction to drink. How
came it that so sorry a specimen of a man should be so intimate with Monsieur Stangerson?

Some days later, I learned from Frederic Larsan--who, like ourselves, was surprised and mystified by his
appearance and reception at the chateau--that Mr. Rance had been an inebriate for only about fifteen years; that is
to say, since the professor and his daughter left Philadelphia. During the time the Stangersons lived in America they
were very intimate with Arthur Rance, who was one of the most distinguished phrenologists of the new world.
Owing to new experiments, he had made enormous strides beyond the science of Gall and Lavater. The friendliness
with which he was received at the Glandier may be explained by the fact that he had once rendered Mademoiselle Stangerson a great service by stopping, at the peril of his own life, the runaway horses of her carriage. The immediate result of that could, however, have been no more than a mere friendly association with the Stangersons; certainly, not a love affair.

Frederic Larsan did not tell me where he had picked up this information; but he appeared to be quite sure of what he said.

Had we known these facts at the time Arthur Rance met us at the Donjon Inn, his presence at the chateau might not have puzzled us, but they could not have failed to increase our interest in the man himself. The American must have been at least forty-five years old. He spoke in a perfectly natural tone in reply to Rouletabille's question.

"I put off my return to America when I heard of the attack on Mademoiselle Stangerson. I wanted to be certain the lady had not been killed, and I shall not go away until she is perfectly recovered."

Arthur Rance then took the lead in talk, paying no heed to some of Rouletabille's questions. He gave us, without our inviting him, his personal views on the subject of the tragedy.--views which, as well as I could make out, were not far from those held by Frederic Larzan. The American also thought that Robert Darzac had something to do with the matter. He did not mention him by name, but there was no room to doubt whom he meant. He told us he was aware of the efforts young Rouletabille was making to unravel the tangled skein of The Yellow Room mystery. He explained that Monsieur Stangerson had related to him all that had taken place in the inexplicable gallery. He several times expressed his regret at Monsieur Darzac's absence from the chateau on all these occasions, and thought that Monsieur Darzac had done cleverly in allying himself with Monsieur Joseph Rouletabille, who could not fail, sooner or later, to discover the murderer. He spoke the last sentence with unconcealed irony. Then he rose, bowed to us, and left the inn.

Rouletabille watched him through the window.

"An odd fish, that!" he said.

"Do you think he'll pass the night at the Glandier?" I asked.

To my amazement the young reporter answered that it was a matter of entire indifference to him whether he did or not.

As to how we spent our time during the afternoon, all I need say is that Rouletabille led me to the grotto of Sainte-Genevieve, and, all the time, talked of every subject but the one in which we were most interested. Towards evening I was surprised to find Rouletabille making none of the preparations I had expected him to make. I spoke to him about it when night had come on, and we were once more in his room. He replied that all his arrangements had already been made, and this time the murderer would not get away from him.

I expressed some doubt on this, reminding him of his disappearance in the gallery, and suggested that the same phenomenon might occur again. He answered that he hoped it would. He desired nothing more. I did not insist, knowing by experience how useless that would have been. He told me that, with the help of the concierges, the chateau had since early dawn been watched in such a way that nobody could approach it without his knowing it, and that he had no concern for those who might have left it and remained without.

It was then six o'clock by his watch. Rising, he made a sign to me to follow him, and, without in the least tying to conceal his movements or the sound of his footsteps, he led me through the gallery. We reached the ‘right’ gallery and came to the landing-place which we crossed. We then continued our way in the gallery of the left wing, passing Professor Stangerson's apartment.

At the far end of the gallery, before coming to the donjon, is the room occupied by Arthur Rance. We knew that, because we had seen him at the window looking on to the court. The door of the room opens on to the end of the gallery, exactly facing the east window, at the extremity of the ‘right’ gallery, where Rouletabille had placed Daddy Jacques, and commands an uninterrupted view of the gallery from end to end of the chateau.

"That ‘off-turning’ gallery," said Rouletabille, "I reserve for myself; when I tell you you'll come and take your place here."

And he made me enter a little dark, triangular closet built in a bend of the wall, to the left of the door of Arthur Rance’s room. From this recess I could see all that occurred in the gallery as well as if I had been standing in front of Arthur Rance’s door, and I could watch that door, too. The door of the closet, which was to be my place of observation, was fitted with panels of transparent glass. In the gallery, where all the lamps had been lit, it was quite light. In the closet, however, it was quite dark. It was a splendid place from which to observe and remain unobserved.

I was soon to play the part of a spy—a common policeman. I wonder what my leader at the bar would have said had he known! I was not altogether pleased with my duties, but I could not refuse Rouletabille the assistance he had begged me to give him. I took care not to make him see that I in the least objected, and for several reasons. I wanted to oblige him; I did not wish him to think me a coward; I was filled with curiosity; and it was too late for me to draw
back, even had I determined to do so. That I had not had these scruples sooner was because my curiosity had quite
got the better of me. I might also urge that I was helping to save the life of a woman, and even a lawyer may do that
conscientiously.

We returned along the gallery. On reaching the door of Mademoiselle Stangerson's apartment, it opened from a
push given by the steward who was waiting at the dinner-table. (Monsieur Stangerson had, for the last three days,
dined with his daughter in the drawing-room on the first floor.) As the door remained open, we distinctly saw
Mademoiselle Stangerson, taking advantage of the steward's absence, and while her father was stooping to pick up
something he had let fall, pour the contents of a phial into Monsieur Stangerson's glass.

CHAPTER XXI
On the Watch

The act, which staggered me, did not appear to affect Rouletabille much. We returned to his room and, without
even referring to what we had seen, he gave me his final instructions for the night. First we were to go to dinner;
after dinner, I was to take my stand in the dark closet and wait there as long as it was necessary--to look out for what
might happen.

"If you see anything before I do," he explained, "you must let me know. If the man gets into the 'right' gallery by
any other way than the 'off-turning' gallery, you will see him before I shall, because you have a view along the
whole length of the 'right' gallery, while I can only command a view of the 'off-turning' gallery. All you need do to
let me know is to undo the cord holding the curtain of the 'right' gallery window, nearest to the dark closet. The
curtain will fall of itself and immediately leave a square of shadow where previously there had been a square of
light. To do this, you need but stretch your hand out of the closet, I shall understand your signal perfectly."

"And then?"

"Then you will see me coming round the corner of the 'off-turning' gallery."

"What am I to do then?"

"You will immediately come towards me, behind the man; but I shall already be upon him, and shall have seen
his face."

I attempted a feeble smile.

"Why do you smile? Well, you may smile while you have the chance, but I swear you'll have no time for that a
few hours from now.

"And if the man escapes?"

"So much the better," said Rouletabille, coolly, "I don't want to capture him. He may take himself off any way he
can. I will let him go--after I have seen his face. That's all I want. I shall know afterwards what to do so that as far as
Mademoiselle Stangerson is concerned he shall be dead to her even though he continues to live. If I took him alive,
Mademoiselle Stangerson and Robert Darzac would, perhaps, never forgive me! And I wish to retain their good-will
and respect.

"Seeing, as I have just now seen, Mademoiselle Stangerson pour a narcotic into her father's glass, so that he
might not be awake to interrupt the conversation she is going to have with her murderer, you can imagine she would
not be grateful to me if I brought the man of The Yellow Room and the inexplicable gallery, bound and gagged, to
her father. I realise now that if I am to save the unhappy lady, I must silence the man and not capture him. To kill a
human being is no small thing. Besides, that's not my business, unless the man himself makes it my business. On the
other hand, to render him forever silent without the lady's assent and confidence is to act on one's own initiative and
assumes a knowledge of everything with nothing for a basis. Fortunately, my friend, I have guessed, no, I have
reasoned it all out. All that I ask of the man who is coming to-night is to bring me his face, so that it may enter--"

"Into the circle?"

"Exactly! And his face won't surprise me!"

"But I thought you saw his face on the night when you sprang into the chamber?"

"Only imperfectly. The candle was on the floor; and, his beard--"

"Will he wear his beard this evening?"

"I think I can say for certain that he will. But the gallery is light and, now, I know--or--at least, my brain knows--
and my eyes will see."

"If we are here only to see him and let him escape, why are we armed?"

"Because, if the man of The Yellow Room and the inexplicable gallery knows that I know, he is capable of
doing anything! We should then have to defend ourselves."

"And you are sure he will come to-night?"

"As sure as that you are standing there! This morning, at half-past ten o'clock, Mademoiselle Stangerson, in the
cleverest way in the world, arranged to have no nurses to-night. She gave them leave of absence for twenty-four
hours, under some plausible pretexts, and did not desire anybody to be with her but her father, while they are away.
Her father, who is to sleep in the boudoir, has gladly consented to the arrangement. Darzac's departure and what he
told me, as well as the extraordinary precautions Mademoiselle Stangerson is taking to be alone to-night leaves me
no room for doubt. She has prepared the way for the coming of the man whom Darzac dreads."

"That's awful!"
"It is!"
"And what we saw her do was done to send her father to sleep?"
"Yes."
"Then there are but two of us for to-night's work?"
"Four; the concierge and his wife will watch at all hazards. I don't set much value on them before--but the
concierge may be useful after--if there's to be any killing!"
"Then you think there may be?"
"If he wishes it."
"Why haven't you brought in Daddy Jacques?--Have you made no use of him to-day?"
"No," replied Rouletabille sharply.
I kept silence for awhile, then, anxious to know his thoughts, I asked him point blank:
"Why not tell Arthur Rance?--He may be of great assistance to us?"
"Oh!" said Rouletabille crossly, "then you want to let everybody into Mademoiselle Stangerson's secrets?--
Come, let us go to dinner; it is time. This evening we dine in Frederic Larsan's room,--at least, if he is not on the
heels of Darzac. He sticks to him like a leech. But, anyhow, if he is not there now, I am quite sure he will be, to-
night! He's the one I am going to knock over!"
At this moment we heard a noise in the room near us.
"It must be he," said Rouletabille.
"I forgot to ask you," I said, "if we are to make any allusion to to-night's business when we are with this
policeman. I take it we are not. Is that so?"
"Evidently. We are going to operate alone, on our own personal account."
"So that all the glory will be ours?"
Rouletabille laughed.

We dined with Frederic Larsan in his room. He told us he had just come in and invited us to be seated at table.
We ate our dinner in the best of humours, and I had no difficulty in appreciating the feelings of certainty which both
Rouletabille and Larsan felt. Rouletabille told the great Fred that I had come on a chance visit, and that he had asked
me to stay and help him in the heavy batch of writing he had to get through for the "Epoque." I was going back to
Paris, he said, by the eleven o'clock train, taking his "copy," which took a story form, recounting the principal
episodes in the mysteries of the Glandier. Larsan smiled at the explanation like a man who was not fooled and
politey refrain from making the slightest remark on matters which did not concern him.

With infinite precautions as to the words they used, and even as to the tones of their voices, Larsan and
Rouletabille discussed, for a long time, Mr. Arthur Rance's appearance at the chateau, and his past in America, about
which they expressed a desire to know more, at any rate, so far as his relations with the Stangersons. At one time,
Larsan, who appeared to me to be unwell, said, with an effort:
"I think, Monsieur Rouletabille, that we've not much more to do at the Glandier, and that we sha'n't sleep here
many more nights."
"I think so, too, Monsieur Fred."
"Then you think the conclusion of the matter has been reached?"
"I think, indeed, that we have nothing more to find out," replied Rouletabille.
"Have you found your criminal?" asked Larsan.
"Have you?"
"Yes."
"So have I," said Rouletabille.
"Can it be the same man?"
"I don't know if you have swerved from your original idea," said the young reporter. Then he added, with
emphasis: "Monsieur Darzac is an honest man!"
"Are you sure of that?" asked Larsan. "Well, I am sure he is not. So it's a fight then?"
"Yes, it is a fight. But I shall beat you, Monsieur Frederic Larsan."
"Youth never doubts anything," said the great Fred laughingly, and held out his hand to me by way of
conclusion.
Rouletabille's answer came like an echo:
"Not anything!"
Suddenly Larsan, who had risen to wish us goodnight, pressed both his hands to his chest and staggered. He was obliged to lean on Rouletabille for support, and to save himself from falling.

"Oh! Oh!" he cried. "What is the matter with me?--Have I been poisoned?"

He looked at us with haggard eyes. We questioned him vainly; he did not answer us. He had sunk into an armchair and we could get not a word from him. We were extremely distressed, both on his account and on our own, for we had partaken of all the dishes he had eaten. He seemed to be out of pain; but his heavy head had fallen on his shoulder and his eyelids were tightly closed. Rouletabille bent over him, listening for the beatings of the heart.

My friend's face, however, when he stood up, was as calm as it had been a moment before agitated.

"He is asleep," he said.

He led me to his chamber, after closing Larsan's room.

"The drug?" I asked. "Does Mademoiselle Stangerson wish to put everybody to sleep, to-night?"

"Perhaps," replied Rouletabille; but I could see he was thinking of something else.

"But what about us?" I exclaimed. "How do we know that we have not been drugged?"

"Do you feel indisposed?" Rouletabille asked me coolly.

"Not in the least."

"Do you feel any inclination to go to sleep?"

"None whatever."

"Well, then, my friend, smoke this excellent cigar."

And he handed me a choice Havana, one Monsieur Darzac had given him, while he lit his briarwood--his eternal briarwood.

We remained in his room until about ten o'clock without a word passing between us. Buried in an armchair Rouletabille sat and smoked steadily, his brow in thought and a far-away look in his eyes. On the stroke of ten he took off his boots and signalled to me to do the same. As we stood in our socks he said, in so low a tone that I guessed, rather than heard, the word:

"Revolver."

I drew my revolver from my jacket pocket.

"Cock it!" he said.

I did as he directed.

Then moving towards the door of his room, he opened it with infinite precaution; it made no sound. We were in the "off-turning" gallery. Rouletabille made another sign to me which I understood to mean that I was to take up my post in the dark closet.

When I was some distance from him, he rejoined me and embraced me; and then I saw him, with the same precaution, return to his room. Astonished by his embrace, and somewhat disquieted by it, I arrived at the right gallery without difficulty, crossing the landing-place, and reaching the dark closet.

Before entering it I examined the curtain-cord of the window and found that I had only to release it from its fastening with my fingers for the curtain to fall by its own weight and hide the square of light from Rouletabille--the signal agreed upon. The sound of a footstep made me halt before Arthur Rance's door. He was not yet in bed, then! How was it that, being in the chateau, he had not dined with Monsieur Stangerson and his daughter? I had not seen him at table with them, at the moment when we looked in.

I retired into the dark closet. I found myself perfectly situated. I could see along the whole length of the gallery. Nothing, absolutely nothing could pass there without my seeing it. But what was going to pass there? Rouletabille's embrace came back to my mind. I argued that people don't part from each other in that way unless on an important or dangerous occasion. Was I then in danger?

My hand closed on the butt of my revolver and I waited. I am not a hero; but neither am I a coward.

I waited about an hour, and during all that time I saw nothing unusual. The rain, which had begun to come down strongly towards nine o'clock, had now ceased.

My friend had told me that, probably, nothing would occur before midnight or one o'clock in the morning. It was not more than half-past eleven, however, when I heard the door of Arthur Rance's room open very slowly. The door remained open for a minute, which seemed to me a long time. As it opened into the gallery, that is to say, outwards, I could not see what was passing in the room behind the door.

At that moment I noticed a strange sound, three times repeated, coming from the park. Ordinarily I should not have attached any more importance to it than I would to the noise of cats on the roof. But the third time, the mew was so sharp and penetrating that I remembered what I had heard about the cry of the Bete du bon Dieu. As the cry had accompanied all the events at the Glandier, I could not refrain from shuddering at the thought.

Directly afterwards I saw a man appear on the outside of the door, and close it after him. At first I could not recognise him, for his back was towards me and he was bending over a rather bulky package. When he had closed
the door and picked up the package, he turned towards the dark closet, and then I saw who he was. He was the forest-keeper, the Green Man. He was wearing the same costume that he had worn when I first saw him on the road in front of the Donjon Inn. There was no doubt about his being the keeper. As the cry of the Bete du Bon Dieu came for the third time, he put down the package and went to the second window, counting from the dark closet. I dared not risk making any movement, fearing I might betray my presence.

Arriving at the window, he peered out on to the park. The night was now light, the moon showing at intervals. The Green Man raised his arms twice, making signs which I did not understand; then, leaving the window, he again took up his package and moved along the gallery towards the landing-place.

Rouletabille had instructed me to undo the curtain-cord when I saw anything. Was Rouletabille expecting this? It was not my business to question. All I had to do was obey instructions. I unfastened the window-cord; my heart beating the while as if it would burst. The man reached the landing-place, but, to my utter surprise--I had expected to see him continue to pass along the gallery--I saw him descend the stairs leading to the vestibule.

What was I to do? I looked stupidly at the heavy curtain which had shut the light from the window. The signal had been given, and I did not see Rouletabille appear at the corner of the off-turning gallery. Nobody appeared. I was exceedingly perplexed. Half an hour passed, an age to me. What was I to do now, even if I saw something? The signal once given I could not give it a second time. To venture into the gallery might upset all Rouletabille's plans. After all, I had nothing to reproach myself for, and if something had happened that my friend had not expected he could only blame himself. Unable to be of any further assistance to him by means of a signal, I left the dark closet and, still in my socks, made my way to the "off-turning" gallery.

There was no one there. I went to the door of Rouletabille's room and listened. I could hear nothing. I knocked gently. There was no answer. I turned the door-handle and the door opened. I entered. Rouletabille lay extended at full length on the floor.

CHAPTER XXII
The Incredible Body

I bent in great anxiety over the body of the reporter and had the joy to find that he was deeply sleeping, the same unhealthy sleep that I had seen fall upon Frederic Larsan. He had succumbed to the influence of the same drug that had been mixed with our food. How was it then, that I, also, had not been overcome by it? I reflected that the drug must have been put into our wine; because that would explain my condition. I never drink when eating. Naturally inclined to obesity, I am restricted to a dry diet. I shook Rouletabille, but could not succeed in waking him. This, no doubt, was the work of Mademoiselle Stangerson.

She had certainly thought it necessary to guard herself against this young man as well as her father. I recalled that the steward, in serving us, had recommended an excellent Chablis which, no doubt, had come from the professor's table.

More-than a quarter of an hour passed. I resolved, under the pressing circumstances, to resort to extreme measures. I threw a pitcher of cold water over Rouletabille's head. He opened his eyes. I beat his face, and raised him up. I felt him stiffen in my arms and heard him murmur: "Go on, go on; but don't make any noise." I pinched him and shook him until he was able to stand up. We were saved!

"They sent me to sleep," he said. "Ah! I passed an awful quarter of an hour before giving way. But it is over now. Don't leave me."

He had no sooner uttered those words than we were thrilled by a frightful cry that rang through the chateau,—a veritable death cry.

"Malheur!" roared Rouletabille; "we shall be too late!"

He tried to rush to the door, but he was too dazed, and fell against the wall. I was already in the gallery, revolver in hand, rushing like a madman towards Mademoiselle Stangerson's room. The moment I arrived at the intersection of the "off-turning" gallery and the "right" gallery, I saw a figure leaving her apartment, which, in a few strides had reached the landing-place.

I was not master of myself. I fired. The report from the revolver made a deafening noise; but the man continued his flight down the stairs. I ran behind him, shouting: "Stop!—stop! or I will kill you!" As I rushed after him down the stairs, I came face to face with Arthur Rance coming from the left wing of the chateau, yelling: "What is it? What is it?" We arrived almost at the same time at the foot of the staircase. The window of the vestibule was open. We distinctly saw the form of a man running away. Instinctively we fired our revolvers in his direction. He was not more than ten paces in front of us; he staggered and we thought he was going to fall. We had sprung out of the window, but the man dashed off with renewed vigour. I was in my socks, and the American was barefooted. There being no hope of overtaking him, we fired our last cartridges at him. But he still kept on running, going along the right side of the court towards the end of the right wing of the chateau, which had no other outlet than the door of the little chamber occupied by the forest-keeper. The man, though he was evidently wounded by our bullets, was now
twenty yards ahead of us. Suddenly, behind us, and above our heads, a window in the gallery opened and we heard
the voice of Rouletabille crying out desperately:
"Fire, Bernier!--Fire!"

At that moment the clear moonlight night was further lit by a broad flash. By its light we saw Daddy Bernier
with his gun on the threshold of the donjon door.

He had taken good aim. The shadow fell. But as it had reached the end of the right wing of the chateau, it fell on
the other side of the angle of the building; that is to say, we saw it about to fall, but not the actual sinking to the
ground. Bernier, Arthur Rance and myself reached the other side twenty seconds later. The shadow was lying dead
at our feet.

Aroused from his lethargy by the cries and reports, Larsan opened the window of his chamber and called out to
us. Rouletabille, quite awake now, joined us at the same moment, and I cried out to him:
"He is dead!—is dead!"

"So much the better," he said. "Take him into the vestibule of the chateau." Then as if on second thought, he
said: "No!—no! Let us put him in his own room."

Rouletabille knocked at the door. Nobody answered. Naturally, this did not surprise me.

"He is evidently not there, otherwise he would have come out," said the reporter. "Let us carry him to the
vestibule then."

Since reaching the dead shadow, a thick cloud had covered the moon and darkened the night, so that we were
unable to make out the features. Daddy Jacques, who had now joined us, helped us to carry the body into the
vestibule, where we laid it down on the lower step of the stairs. On the way, I had felt my hands wet from the warm
blood flowing from the wounds.

Daddy Jacques flew to the kitchen and returned with a lantern. He held it close to the face of the dead shadow,
and we recognised the keeper, the man called by the landlord of the Donjon Inn the Green Man, whom, an hour
earlier, I had seen come out of Arthur Rance's chamber carrying a parcel. But what I had seen I could only tell
Rouletabille later, when we were alone.

Rouletabille and Frederic Larsan experienced a cruel disappointment at the result of the night's adventure. They
could only look in consternation and stupefaction at the body of the Green Man.

Daddy Jacques showed a stupidly sorrowful face and with silly lamentations kept repeating that we were
mistaken—the keeper could not be the assailant. We were obliged to compel him to be quiet. He could not have
shown greater grief had the body been that of his own son. I noticed, while all the rest of us were more or less
undressed and barefooted, that he was fully clothed.

Rouletabille had not left the body. Kneeling on the flagstones by the light of Daddy Jacques's lantern he removed
the clothes from the body and laid bare its breast. Then snatching the lantern from Daddy Jacques, he held it over the
corpse and saw a gaping wound. Rising suddenly he exclaimed in a voice filled with savage irony:
"The man you believe to have been shot was killed by the stab of a knife in his heart!"

I thought Rouletabille had gone mad; but, bending over the body, I quickly satisfied myself that Rouletabille was
right. Not a sign of a bullet anywhere—the wound, evidently made by a sharp blade, had penetrated the heart.

CHAPTER XXIII
The Double Scent

I had hardly recovered from the surprise into which this new discovery had plunged me, when Rouletabille
touched me on the shoulder and asked me to follow him into his room.

"What are we going to do there?"

"To think the matter over."

I confess I was in no condition for doing much thinking, nor could I understand how Rouletabille could so
control himself as to be able calmly to sit down for reflection when he must have known that Mademoiselle
Stangerson was at that moment almost on the point of death. But his self-control was more than I could explain.
Closing the door of his room, he motioned me to a chair and, seating himself before me, took out his pipe. We sat
there for some time in silence and then I fell asleep.

When I awoke it was daylight. It was eight o'clock by my watch. Rouletabille was no longer in the room. I rose
to go out when the door opened and my friend re-entered. He had evidently lost no time.

"How about Mademoiselle Stangerson?" I asked him.

"Her condition, though very alarming, is not desperate."

"When did you leave this room?"

"Towards dawn."

"I guess you have been hard at work?"

"Rather!"
"Have you found out anything?"
"Two sets of footprints!"
"Do they explain anything?"
"Yes."
"Have they anything to do with the mystery of the keeper's body?"
"Yes; the mystery is no longer a mystery. This morning, walking round the chateau, I found two distinct sets of
footprints, made at the same time, last night. They were made by two persons walking side by side. I followed them
from the court towards the oak grove. Larsan joined me. They were the same kind of footprints as were made at the
time of the assault in The Yellow Room--one set was from clumsy boots and the other was made by neat ones,
except that the big toe of one of the sets was of a different size from the one measured in The Yellow Room
incident. I compared the marks with the paper patterns I had previously made.

"Still following the tracks of the prints, Larsan and I passed out of the oak grove and reached the border of the
lake. There they turned off to a little path leading to the high road to Epinay where we lost the traces in the newly
macadamised highway.

"We went back to the chateau and parted at the courtyard. We met again, however, in Daddy Jacques's room to
which our separate trains of thinking had led us both. We found the old servant in bed. His clothes on the chair were
wet through and his boots very muddy. He certainly did not get into that state in helping us to carry the body of the
keeper. It was not raining then. Then his face showed extreme fatigue and he looked at us out of terror-stricken eyes.

"On our first questioning him he told us that he had gone to bed immediately after the doctor had arrived. On
pressing him, however, for it was evident to us he was not speaking the truth, he confessed that he had been away
from the chateau. He explained his absence by saying that he had a headache and went out into the fresh air, but had
gone no further than the oak grove. When we then described to him the whole route he had followed, he sat up in
bed trembling.

"And you were not alone! cried Larsan.
"Did you see it then?" gasped Daddy Jacques.
"What?" I asked.
"The phantom--the black phantom!"

"Then he told us that for several nights he had seen what he kept calling the black phantom. It came into the park
at the stroke of midnight and glided stealthily through the trees; it appeared to him to pass through the trunks of the
trees. Twice he had seen it from his window, by the light of the moon and had risen and followed the strange
apparition. The night before last he had almost overtaken it; but it had vanished at the corner of the donjon. Last
night, however, he had not left the chateau, his mind being disturbed by a presentiment that some new crime would
be attempted. Suddenly he saw the black phantom rush out from somewhere in the middle of the court. He followed
it to the lake and to the high road to Epinay, where the phantom suddenly disappeared.

"Did you see his face?" demanded Larsan.
"No!--I saw nothing but black veils.'
"Did you go out after what passed on the gallery?"
"I could not! I was terrified.'
"Daddy Jacques,' I said, in a threatening voice, 'you did not follow it; you and the phantom walked to Epinay
together--arm in arm!'

"No!' he cried, turning his eyes away, 'I did not. It came on to pour, and--I turned back. I don't know what
became of the black phantom.'

"We left him, and when we were outside I turned to Larsan, looking him full in the face, and put my question
suddenly to take him off his guard:
"An accomplice?"
"How can I tell?" he replied, shrugging his shoulders. 'You can't be sure of anything in a case like this. Twenty-
four hours ago I would have sworn that there was no accomplice!' He left me saying he was off to Epinay."

"Well, what do you make of it?" I asked Rouletabille, after he had ended his recital. "Personally I am utterly in
the dark. I can't make anything out of it. What do you gather?"

"Everything! Everything!" he exclaimed. "But," he said abruptly, "let's find out more about Mademoiselle
Stangerson."

CHAPTER XXIV
Rouletabille Knows the Two Halves of the Murderer

Mademoiselle Stangerson had been almost murdered for the second time. Unfortunately, she was in too weak a
state to bear the severer injuries of this second attack as well as she had those of the first. She had received three
wounds in the breast from the murderer's knife, and she lay long between life and death. Her strong physique,
however, saved her; but though she recovered physically it was found that her mind had been affected. The slightest allusion to the terrible incident sent her into delirium, and the arrest of Robert Darzac which followed on the day following the tragic death of the keeper seemed to sink her fine intelligence into complete melancholia.

Robert Darzac arrived at the chateau towards half-past nine. I saw him hurrying through the park, his hair and clothes in disorder and his face a deadly white. Rouletabille and I were looking out of a window in the gallery. He saw us, and gave a despairing cry: "I'm too late!"

Rouletabille answered: "She lives!"

A minute later Darzac had gone into Mademoiselle Stangerson's room and, through the door, we could hear his heart-rending sobs.

"There's a fate about this place!" groaned Rouletabille. "Some infernal gods must be watching over the misfortunes of this family! --If I had not been drugged, I should have saved Mademoiselle Stangerson. I should have silenced him forever. And the keeper would not have been killed!"

Monsieur Darzac came in to speak with us. His distress was terrible. Rouletabille told him everything: his preparations for Mademoiselle Stangerson's safety; his plans for either capturing or for disposing of the assailant for ever; and how he would have succeeded had it not been for the drugging.

"If only you had trusted me!" said the young man, in a low tone. "If you had but begged Mademoiselle Stangerson to confide in me! --But, then, everybody here distrusts everybody else, the daughter distrusts her father, and even her lover. While you ask me to protect her she is doing all she can to frustrate me. That was why I came on the scene too late!"

At Monsieur Robert Darzac's request Rouletabille described the whole scene. Leaning on the wall, to prevent himself from falling, he had made his way to Mademoiselle Stangerson's room, while we were running after the supposed murderer. The ante-room door was open and when he entered he found Mademoiselle Stangerson lying partly thrown over the desk. Her dressing-gown was dyed with the blood flowing from her bosom. Still under the influence of the drug, he felt he was walking in a horrible nightmare.

He went back to the gallery automatically, opened a window, shouted his order to fire, and then returned to the room. He crossed the deserted boudoir, entered the drawing-room, and tried to rouse Monsieur Stangerson who was lying on a sofa. Monsieur Stangerson rose stupidly and let himself be drawn by Rouletabille into the room where, on seeing his daughter's body, he uttered a heart-rending cry. Both united their feeble strength and carried her to her bed.

On his way to join us Rouletabille passed by the desk. On the floor, near it, he saw a large packet. He knelt down and, finding the wrapper loose, he examined it, and made out an enormous quantity of papers and photographs. On one of the papers he read: "New differential electroscopic condenser. Fundamental properties of substance intermediary between ponderable matter and imponderable ether." Strange irony of fate that the professor's precious papers should be restored to him at the very time when an attempt was being made to deprive him of his daughter's life! What are papers worth to him now?

The morning following that awful night saw Monsieur de Marquet once more at the chateau, with his Registrar and gendarmes. Of course we were all questioned. Rouletabille and I had already agreed on what to say. I kept back any information as to my being in the dark closet and said nothing about the drugging. We did not wish to suggest in any way that Mademoiselle Stangerson had been expecting her nocturnal visitor. The poor woman might, perhaps, never recover, and it was none of our business to lift the veil of a secret the preservation of which she had paid for so dearly.

Arthur Rance told everybody, in a manner so natural that it astonished me, that he had last seen the keeper towards eleven o'clock of that fatal night. He had come for his valise, he said, which he was to take for him early next morning to the Saint-Michel station, and had been kept out late running after poachers. Arthur Rance had, indeed, intended to leave the chateau and, according to his habit, to walk to the station.

Monsieur Stangerson confirmed what Rance had said, adding that he had not asked Rance to dine with him because his friend had taken his final leave of them both earlier in the evening. Monsieur Rance had had tea served him in his room, because he had complained of a slight indisposition.

Bernier testified, instructed by Rouletabille, that the keeper had ordered him to meet at a spot near the oak grove, for the purpose of looking out for poachers. Finding that the keeper did not keep his appointment, he, Bernier, had gone in search of him. He had almost arrived at the donjon, when he saw a figure running swiftly in a direction opposite to him, towards the right wing of the chateau. He heard revolver shots from behind the figure and saw Rouletabille at one of the gallery windows. He heard Rouletabille call out to him to fire, and he had fired. He believed he had killed the man until he learned, after Rouletabille had uncovered the body, that the man had died from a knife thrust. Who had given it he could not imagine. "Nobody could have been near the spot without my seeing him.” When the examining magistrate reminded him that the spot where the body was found was very dark
and that he himself had not been able to recognise the keeper before firing, Daddy Bernier replied that neither had they seen the other body; nor had they found it. In the narrow court where five people were standing it would have been strange if the other body, had it been there, could have escaped. The only door that opened into the court was that of the keeper's room, and that door was closed, and the key of it was found in the keeper's pocket.

However that might be, the examining magistrate did not pursue his inquiry further in this direction. He was evidently convinced that we had missed the man we were chasing and we had come upon the keeper's body in our chase. This matter of the keeper was another matter entirely. He wanted to satisfy himself about that without any further delay. Probably it fitted in with the conclusions he had already arrived at as to the keeper and his intrigues with the wife of Mathieu, the landlord of the Donjon Inn. This Mathieu, later in the afternoon, was arrested and taken to Corbeil in spite of his rheumatism. He had been heard to threaten the keeper, and though no evidence against him had been found at his inn, the evidence of carters who had heard the threats was enough to justify his retention.

The examination had proceeded thus far when, to our surprise, Frederic Larsan returned to the chateau. He was accompanied by one of the employes of the railway. At that moment Rance and I were in the vestibule discussing Mathieu's guilt or innocence, while Rouletabille stood apart buried, apparently, in thought. The examining magistrate and his Registrar were in the little green drawing-room, while Darzac was with the doctor and Stangerson in the lady's chamber. As Frederic Larsan entered the vestibule with the railway employed, Rouletabille and I at once recognised him by the small blond beard. We exchanged meaningful glances. Larsan had himself announced to the examining magistrate by the gendarme and entered with the railway servant as Daddy Jacques came out. Some ten minutes went by during which Rouletabille appeared extremely impatient. The door of the drawing-room was then opened and we heard the magistrate calling to the gendarme who entered. Presently he came out, mounted the stairs and, coming back shortly, went in to the magistrate and said:

"Monsieur,--Monsieur Robert Darzac will not come!"
"What! Not come!" cried Monsieur de Marquet.
"He says he cannot leave Mademoiselle Stangerson in her present state."
"Very well," said Monsieur de Marquet; "then we'll go to him."

Monsieur de Marquet and the gendarme mounted the stairs. He made a sign to Larsan and the railroad employe to follow. Rouletabille and I went along too.

On reaching the door of Mademoiselle Stangerson's chamber, Monsieur de Marquet knocked. A chambermaid appeared. It was Sylvia, with her hair all in disorder and consternation showing on her face.

"Is Monsieur Stangerson within?" asked the magistrate.
"Yes, Monsieur."
"Tell him that I wish to speak with him."
Stangerson came out. His appearance was wretched in the extreme.
"What do you want?" he demanded of the magistrate. "May I not be left in peace, Monsieur?"
"Monsieur," said the magistrate, "it is absolutely necessary that I should see Monsieur Darzac at once. If you cannot induce him to come, I shall be compelled to use the help of the law."

The professor made no reply. He looked at us all like a man being led to execution, and then went back into the room.

Almost immediately after Monsieur Robert Darzac came out. He was very pale. He looked at us and, his eyes falling on the railway servant, his features stiffened and he could hardly repress a groan.

We were all much moved by the appearance of the man. We felt that what was about to happen would decide the fate of Monsieur Robert Darzac. Frederic Larsan's face alone was radiant, showing a joy as of a dog that had at last got its prey.

Pointing to the railway servant, Monsieur de Marquet said to Monsieur Darzac:
"Do you recognise this man, Monsieur?"
"I do," said Monsieur Darzac, in a tone which he vainly tried to make firm. "He is an employe at the station at Epinay-sur-Orge."

"This young man," went on Monsieur de Marquet, "affirms that he saw you get off the train at Epinay-sur-Orge--"

"That night," said Monsieur Darzac, interrupting, "at half-past ten --it is quite true."

An interval of silence followed.
"Monsieur Darzac," the magistrate went on in a tone of deep emotion, "Monsieur Darzac, what were you doing that night, at Epinay-sur-Orge --at that time?"
Monsieur Darzac remained silent, simply closing his eyes.
"Monsieur Darzac," insisted Monsieur de Marquet, "can you tell me how you employed your time, that night?"
Monsieur Darzac opened his eyes. He seemed to have recovered his self-control.

"No, Monsieur."

"Think, Monsieur! For, if you persist in your strange refusal, I shall be under the painful necessity of keeping you at my disposition."

"I refuse."

"Monsieur Darzac!--in the name of the law, I arrest you!"

The magistrate had no sooner pronounced the words than I saw Rouletabille move quickly towards Monsieur Darzac. He would certainly have spoken to him, but Darzac, by a gesture, held him off. As the gendarme approached his prisoner, a despairing cry rang through the room:

"Robert!--Robert!"

We recognised the voice of Mademoiselle Stangerson. We all shuddered. Larsan himself turned pale. Monsieur Darzac, in response to the cry, had flown back into the room.

The magistrate, the gendarme, and Larsan followed closely after. Rouletabille and I remained on the threshold. It was a heart-breaking sight that met our eyes. Mademoiselle Stangerson, with a face of deathly pallor, had risen on her bed, in spite of the restraining efforts of two doctors and her father. She was holding out her trembling arms towards Robert Darzac, on whom Larsan and the gendarme had laid hands. Her distended eyes saw --she understood--her lips seemed to form a word, but nobody made it out; and she fell back insensible.

Monsieur Darzac was hurried out of the room and placed in the vestibule to wait for the vehicle Larsan had gone to fetch. We were all overcome by emotion and even Monsieur de Marquet had tears in his eyes. Rouletabille took advantage of the opportunity to say to Monsieur Darzac:

"Are you going to put in any defense?"

"No!" replied the prisoner.

"Very well, then I will, Monsieur."

"You cannot do it," said the unhappy man with a faint smile.

"I can--and I will."

Rouletabille's voice had in it a strange strength and confidence.

"I can do it, Monsieur Robert Darzac, because I know more than you do!"

"Come! Come!" murmured Darzac, almost angrily.

"Have no fear! I shall know only what will benefit you."

"You must know nothing, young man, if you want me to be grateful."

Rouletabille shook his head, going close up to Darzac.

"Listen to what I am about to say," he said in a low tone, "and let it give you confidence. You do not know the name of the murderer. Mademoiselle Stangerson knows it; but only half of it; but I know the whole man!"

Robert Darzac opened his eyes, with a look that showed he had not understood a word of what Rouletabille had said to him. At that moment the conveyance arrived, driven by Frederic Larsan. Darzac and the gendarme entered it, Larsan remaining on the driver's seat. The prisoner was taken to Corbeil.

CHAPTER XXV

Rouletabille Goes on a Journey

That same evening Rouletabille and I left the Glandier. We were very glad to get away and there was nothing more to keep us there. I declared my intention to give up the whole matter. It had been too much for me. Rouletabille, with a friendly tap on my shoulder, confessed that he had nothing more to learn at the Glandier; he had learned there all it had to tell him. We reached Paris about eight o'clock, dined, and then, tired out, we separated, agreeing to meet the next morning at my rooms.

Rouletabille arrived next day at the hour agreed on. He was dressed in a suit of English tweed, with an ulster on his arm, and a valise in his hand. Evidently he had prepared himself for a journey.

"How long shall you be away?" I asked.

"A month or two," he said. "It all depends."

I asked him no more questions.

"Do you know," he asked, "what the word was that Mademoiselle Stangerson tried to say before she fainted?"

"No--nobody heard it."

"I heard it!" replied Rouletabille. "She said 'Speak!'"

"Do you think Darzac will speak?"

"Never."

I was about to make some further observations, but he wrung my hand warmly and wished me good-bye. I had only time to ask him one question before he left.
"Are you not afraid that other attempts may be made while you're away?"

"No! Not now that Darzac is in prison," he answered.

With this strange remark he left. I was not to see him again until the day of Darzac's trial at the court when he appeared to explain the inexplicable.

CHAPTER XXVI
In Which Joseph Rouletabille Is Awaited with Impatience

On the 15th of January, that is to say, two months and a half after the tragic events I have narrated, the "Epoque" printed, as the first column of the front page, the following sensational article: "The Seine-et-Oise jury is summoned to-day to give its verdict on one of the most mysterious affairs in the annals of crime. There never has been a case with so many obscure, incomprehensible, and inexplicable points. And yet the prosecution has not hesitated to put into the prisoner's dock a man who is respected, esteemed, and loved by all who knew him--a young savant, the hope of French science, whose whole life has been devoted to knowledge and truth. When Paris heard of Monsieur Robert Darzac's arrest a unanimous cry of protest arose from all sides. The whole Sorbonne, disgraced by this act of the examining magistrate, asserted its belief in the innocence of Mademoiselle Stangerson's fiance. Monsieur Stangerson was loud in his denunciation of this miscarriage of justice. There is no doubt in the mind of anybody that could the victim speak she would claim from the jurors of Seine-et-Oise the man she wishes to make her husband and whom the prosecution would send to the scaffold. It is to be hoped that Mademoiselle Stangerson will shortly recover her reason, which has been temporarily unhinged by the horrible mystery at the Glandier. The question before the jury is the one we propose to deal with this very day.

"We have decided not to permit twelve worthy men to commit a disgraceful miscarriage of justice. We confess that the remarkable coincidences, the many convicting evidences, and the inexplicable silence on the part of the accused, as well as a total absence of any evidence for an alibi, were enough to warrant the bench of judges in assuming that in this man alone was centered the truth of the affair. The evidences are, in appearance, so overwhelming against Monsieur Robert Darzac that a detective so well informed, so intelligent, and generally so successful, as Monsieur Frederic Larsan, may be excused for having been misled by them. Up to now everything has gone against Monsieur Robert Darzac in the magisterial inquiry. To-day, however, we are going to defend him before the jury, and we are going to bring to the witness stand a light that will illumine the whole mystery of the Glandier. For we possess the truth.

"If we have not spoken sooner, it is because the interests of certain parties in the case demand that we should take that course. Our readers may remember the unsigned reports we published relating to the 'Left foot of the Rue Oberkampf,' at the time of the famous robbery of the Credit Universel, and the famous case of the 'Gold Ingots of the Mint.' In both those cases we were able to discover the truth long before even the excellent ingenuity of Frederic Larsan had been able to unravel it. These reports were written by our youngest reporter, Joseph Rouletabille, a youth of eighteen, whose fame to-morrow will be world-wide. When attention was first drawn to the Glandier case, our youthful reporter was on the spot and installed in the chateau, when every other representative of the press had been denied admission. He worked side by side with Frederic Larsan. He was amazed and terrified at the grave mistake the celebrated detective was about to make, and tried to divert him from the false scent he was following; but the great Fred refused to receive instructions from this young journalist. We know now where it brought Monsieur Robert Darzac.

"But now, France must know--the whole world must know, that, on the very evening on which Monsieur Darzac was arrested, young Rouletabille entered our editorial office and informed us that he was about to go away on a journey. 'How long I shall be away,' he said, 'I cannot say; perhaps a month--perhaps two--perhaps three perhaps I may never return. Here is a letter. If I am not back on the day on which Monsieur Darzac is to appear before the Assize Court, have this letter opened and read to the court, after all the witnesses have been heard. Arrange it with Monsieur Darzac's counsel. Monsieur Darzac is innocent. In this letter is written the name of the murderer; and--that is all I have to say. I am leaving to get my proofs--for the irrefutable evidence of the murderer's guilt.' Our reporter departed. For a long time we were without news from him; but, a week ago, a stranger called upon our manager and said: 'Act in accordance with the instructions of Joseph Rouletabille, if it becomes necessary to do so. The letter left by him holds the truth.' The gentleman who brought us this message would not give us his name.

"To-day, the 15th of January, is the day of the trial. Joseph Rouletabille has not returned. It may be we shall never see him again. The press also counts its heroes, its martyrs to duty. It may be he is no longer living. We shall know how to avenge him. Our manager will, this afternoon, be at the Court of Assize at Versailles, with the letter--the letter containing the name of the murderer!"

Those Parisians who flocked to the Assize Court at Versailles, to be present at the trial of what was known as the "Mystery of The Yellow Room," will certainly remember the terrible crush at the Saint-Lazare station. The ordinary trains were so full that special trains had to be made up. The article in the "Epoque" had so excited the populace that
discussion was rife everywhere even to the verge of blows. Partisans of Rouletabille fought with the supporters of Frederic Larsan. Curiously enough the excitement was due less to the fact that an innocent man was in danger of a wrongful conviction than to the interest taken in their own ideas as to the Mystery of The Yellow Room. Each had his explanation to which each held fast. Those who explained the crime on Frederic Larsan's theory would not admit that there could be any doubt as to the perspicacity of the popular detective. Others who had arrived at a different solution, naturally insisted that this was Rouletabille's explanation, though they did not as yet know what that was.

With the day's "Epoque" in their hands, the "Larsans" and the "Rouletabilles" fought and shoved each other on the steps of the Palais de Justice, right into the court itself. Those who could not get in remained in the neighbourhood until evening and were, with great difficulty, kept back by the soldiery and the police. They became hungry for news, welcoming the most absurd rumours. At one time the rumour spread that Monsieur Stangerson himself had been arrested in the court and had confessed to being the murderer. This goes to show to what a pitch of madness nervous excitement may carry people. Rouletabille was still expected. Some pretended to know him; and when a young man with a "pass" crossed the open space which separated the crowd from the Court House, a scuffle took place. Cries were raised of "Rouletabille!--there's Rouletabille!" The arrival of the manager of the paper was the signal for a great demonstration. Some applauded, others hissed.

The trial itself was presided over by Monsieur de Rocouz, a judge filled with the prejudice of his class, but a man honest at heart. The witnesses had been called. I was there, of course, as were all who had, in any way, been in touch with the mysteries of the Glandier. Monsieur Stangerson--looking many years older and almost unrecognisable--Larsan, Arthur Rance, with his face ruddy as ever, Daddy Jacques, Daddy Mathieu, who was brought into court handcuffed between two gendarmes, Madame Mathieu, in tears, the two Berniers, the two nurses, the steward, all the domestics of the chateau, the employe of the Paris Post Office, the railway employe from Epinay, some friends of Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson, and all Monsieur Darzac's witnesses. I was lucky enough to be called early in the trial, so that I was then able to watch and be present at almost the whole of the proceedings.

The court was so crowded that many lawyers were compelled to find seats on the steps. Behind the bench of justices were representatives from other benches. Monsieur Robert Darzac stood in the prisoner's dock between policemen, tall, handsome, and calm. A murmur of admiration rather than of compassion greeted his appearance. He leaned forward towards his counsel, Maitre Henri Robert, who, assisted by his chief secretary, Maitre Andre Hesse, was busily turning over the folios of his brief.

Many expected that Monsieur Stangerson, after giving his evidence, would have gone over to the prisoner and shaken hands with him; but he left the court without another word. It was remarked that the jurors appeared to be deeply interested in a rapid conversation which the manager of the "Epoque" was having with Maitre Henri Robert. The manager, later, sat down in the front row of the public seats. Some were surprised that he was not asked to remain with the other witnesses in the room reserved for them.

The reading of the indictment was got through, as it always is, without any incident. I shall not here report the long examination to which Monsieur Darzac was subjected. He answered all the questions quickly and easily. His silence as to the important matters of which we know was dead against him. It would seem as if this reticence would be fatal for him. He resented the President's reprimands. He was told that his silence might mean death.

"Very well," he said, "I will submit to it; but I am innocent."

With that splendid ability which has made his name, Maitre Robert took advantage of the incident, and tried to show that it brought out in noble relief his client's character; for only heroic natures could remain silent for moral reasons in face of such a danger. The eminent advocate however, only succeeded in assuring those who were already assured of Darzac's innocence. At the adjournment Rouletabille had not yet arrived. Every time a door opened, all eyes there turned towards it and back to the manager of the "Epoque," who sat impassive in his place. When he once was feeling in his pocket a loud murmur of expectation followed. The letter!

It is not, however, my intention to report in detail the course of the trial. My readers are sufficiently acquainted with the mysteries surrounding the Glandier case to enable me to go on to the really dramatic denouement of this ever-memorable day.

When the trial was resumed, Maitre Henri Robert questioned Daddy Mathieu as to his complicity in the death of the keeper. His wife was also brought in and was confronted by her husband. She burst into tears and confessed that she had been the keeper's mistress, and that her husband had suspected it. She again, however, affirmed that he had had nothing to do with the murder of her lover. Maitre Henri Robert thereupon asked the court to hear Frederic Larsan on this point.

"In a short conversation which I have had with Frederic Larsan, during the adjournment," declared the advocate, "he has made me understand that the death of the keeper may have been brought about otherwise than by the hand of Mathieu. It will be interesting to hear Frederic Larsan's theory."
Frederic Larsan was brought in. His explanation was quite clear.

"I see no necessity," he said, "for bringing Mathieu in this. I have told Monsieur de Marquet that the man's threats had biassed the examining magistrate against him. To me the attempt to murder Mademoiselle and the death of the keeper are the work of one and the same person. Mademoiselle Stangerson's murderer, flying through the court, was fired on; it was thought he was struck, perhaps killed. As a matter of fact, he only stumbled at the moment of his disappearance behind the corner of the right wing of the chateau. There he encountered the keeper who, no doubt, tried to seize him. The murderer had in his hand the knife with which he had stabbed Mademoiselle Stangerson and with this he killed the keeper."

This very simple explanation appeared at once plausible and satisfying. A murmur of approbation was heard.

"And the murderer? What became of him?" asked the President.

"He was evidently hidden in an obscure corner at the end of the court. After the people had left the court carrying with them the body of the keeper, the murderer quietly made his escape."

The words had scarcely left Larsan's mouth when from the back of the court came a youthful voice:

"I agree with Frederic Larsan as to the death of the keeper; but I do not agree with him as to the way the murderer escaped!"

Everybody turned round, astonished. The clerks of the court sprang towards the speaker, calling out silence, and the President angrily ordered the intruder to be immediately expelled. The same clear voice, however, was again heard:

"It is I, Monsieur President--Joseph Rouletabille!"

CHAPTER XXVII

In Which Joseph Rouletabille Appears in All His Glory

The excitement was extreme. Cries from fainting women were to be heard amid the extraordinary bustle and stir.

The "majesty of the law" was utterly forgotten. The President tried in vain to make himself heard. Rouletabille made his way forward with difficulty, but by dint of much elbowing reached his manager and greeted him cordially. The letter was passed to him and pocketing it he turned to the witness-box. He was dressed exactly as on the day he left me even to the ulster over his arm. Turning to the President, he said:

"I beg your pardon, Monsieur President, but I have only just arrived from America. The steamer was late. My name is Joseph Rouletabille!"

The silence which followed his stepping into the witness-box was broken by laughter when his words were heard. Everybody seemed relieved and glad to find him there, as if in the expectation of hearing the truth at last.

But the President was extremely incensed:

"So, you are Joseph Rouletabille," he replied; "well, young man, I'll teach you what comes of making a farce of justice. By virtue of my discretionary power, I hold you at the court's disposition."

"I ask nothing better, Monsieur President. I have come here for that purpose. I humbly beg the court's pardon for the disturbance of which I have been the innocent cause. I beg you to believe that nobody has a greater respect for the court than I have. I came in as I could." He smiled.

"Take him away!" ordered the President.

Maitre Henri Robert intervened. He began by apologising for the young man, who, he said, was moved only by the best intentions. He made the President understand that the evidence of a witness who had slept at the Glandier during the whole of that eventful week could not be omitted, and the present witness, moreover, had come to name the real murderer.

"Are you going to tell us who the murderer was?" asked the President, somewhat convinced though still sceptical.

"I have come for that purpose, Monsieur President!" replied Rouletabille.

An attempt at applause was silenced by the usher.

"Joseph Rouletabille," said Maitre Henri Robert, "has not been regularly subpoenaed as a witness, but I hope, Monsieur President, you will examine him in virtue of your discretionary powers."

"Very well!" said the President, "we will question him. But we must proceed in order."

The Advocate-General rose:

"It would, perhaps, be better," he said, "if the young man were to tell us now whom he suspects."

The President nodded ironically:

"If the Advocate-General attaches importance to the deposition of Monsieur Joseph Rouletabille, I see no reason why this witness should not give us the name of the murderer."

A pin drop could have been heard. Rouletabille stood silent looking sympathetically at Darzac, who, for the first time since the opening of the trial, showed himself agitated.

"Well," cried the President, "we wait for the name of the murderer." Rouletabille, feeling in his waistcoat pocket,
drew his watch and, looking at it, said:

"Monsieur President, I cannot name the murderer before half-past six o'clock!"

Loud murmurs of disappointment filled the room. Some of the lawyers were heard to say: "He's making fun of us!"

The President in a stern voice, said:

"This joke has gone far enough. You may retire, Monsieur, into the witnesses' room. I hold you at our disposition."

Rouletabille protested.

"I assure you, Monsieur President," he cried in his sharp, clear voice, "that when I do name the murderer you will understand why I could not speak before half-past six. I assert this on my honour. I can, however, give you now some explanation of the murder of the keeper. Monsieur Frederic Larsan, who has seen me at work at the Glandier, can tell you with what care I studied this case. I found myself compelled to differ with him in arresting Monsieur Robert Darzac, who is innocent. Monsieur Larsan knows of my good faith and knows that some importance may be attached to my discoveries, which have often corroborated his own."

Frederic Larsan said:

"Monsieur President, it will be interesting to hear Monsieur Joseph Rouletabille, especially as he differs from me."

A murmur of approbation greeted the detective's speech. He was a good sportsman and accepted the challenge. The struggle between the two promised to be exciting.

As the President remained silent, Frederic Larsan continued:

"We agree that the murderer of the keeper was the assailant of Mademoiselle Stangerson; but as we are not agreed as to how the murderer escaped, I am curious to hear Monsieur Rouletabille's explanation."

"I have no doubt you are," said my friend.

General laughter followed this remark. The President angrily declared that if it was repeated, he would have the court cleared.

"Now, young man," said the President, "you have heard Monsieur Frederic Larsan; how did the murderer get away from the court?"

Rouletabille looked at Madame Mathieu, who smiled back at him sadly.

"Since Madame Mathieu," he said, "has freely admitted her intimacy with the keeper--"

"Why, it's the boy!" exclaimed Daddy Mathieu.

"Remove that man!" ordered the President.

Mathieu was removed from the court. Rouletabille went on:

"Since she has made this confession, I am free to tell you that she often met the keeper at night on the first floor of the donjon, in the room which was once an oratory. These meetings became more frequent when her husband was laid up by his rheumatism. She gave him morphine to ease his pain and to give herself more time for the meetings. Madame Mathieu came to the chateau that night, enveloped in a large black shawl which served also as a disguise. This was the phantom that disturbed Daddy Jacques. She knew how to imitate the mewing of Mother Angenoux' cat and she would make the cries to advise the keeper of her presence. The recent repairs of the donjon did not interfere with their meetings in the keeper's old room, in the donjon, since the new room assigned to him at the end of the right wing was separated from the steward's room by a partition only.

"Previous to the tragedy in the courtyard Madame Mathieu and the keeper left the donjon together. I learnt these facts from my examination of the footmarks in the court the next morning. Bernier, the concierge, whom I had stationed behind the donjon--as he will explain himself--could not see what passed in the court. He did not reach the court until he heard the revolver shots, and then he fired. When the woman parted from the man she went towards the open gate of the court, while he returned to his room.

"He had almost reached the door when the revolvers rang out. He had just reached the corner when a shadow bounded by. Meanwhile, Madame Mathieu, surprised by the revolver shots and by the entrance of people into the court, crouched in the darkness. The court is a large one and, being near the gate, she might easily have passed out unseen. But she remained and saw the body being carried away. In great agony of mind she neared the vestibule and saw the dead body of her lover on the stairs lit up by Daddy Jacques' lantern. She then fled; and Daddy Jacques joined her.

"That same night, before the murder, Daddy Jacques had been awakened by the cat's cry, and, looking through his window, had seen the black phantom. Hastily dressing himself he went out and recognised her. He is an old friend of Madame Mathieu, and when she saw him she had to tell him of her relations with the keeper and begged his assistance. Daddy Jacques took pity on her and accompanied her through the oak grove out of the park, past the border of the lake to the road to Epinay. From there it was but a very short distance to her home."
"Daddy Jacques returned to the chateau, and, seeing how important it was for Madame Mathieu's presence at the chateau to remain unknown, he did all he could to hide it. I appeal to Monsieur Larsan, who saw me, next morning, examine the two sets of footprints."

Here Rouletabille turning towards Madame Mathieu, with a bow, said:
"The footprints of Madame bear a strange resemblance to the neat footprints of the murderer."
Madame Mathieu trembled and looked at him with wide eyes as if in wonder at what he would say next.
"Madame has a shapely foot, long and rather large for a woman. The imprint, with its pointed toe, is very like that of the murderer's."

A movement in the court was repressed by Rouletabille. He held their attention at once.
"I hasten to add," he went on, "that I attach no importance to this. Outward signs like these are often liable to lead us into error, if we do not reason rightly. Monsieur Robert Darzac's footprints are also like the murderer's, and yet he is not the murderer!"

The President turning to Madame Mathieu asked:
"Is that in accordance with what you know occurred?"
"Yes, Monsieur President," she replied, "it is as if Monsieur Rouletabille had been behind us."
"Did you see the murderer running towards the end of the right wing?"
"Yes, as clearly as I saw them afterwards carrying the keeper's body."
"What became of the murderer?--You were in the courtyard and could easily have seen.
"I saw nothing of him, Monsieur President. It became quite dark just then."
"Then Monsieur Rouletabille," said the President, "must explain how the murderer made his escape."

Rouletabille continued:
"It was impossible for the murderer to escape by the way he had entered the court without our seeing him; or if we couldn't see him we must certainly have felt him, since the court is a very narrow one enclosed in high iron railings."

"Then if the man was hemmed in that narrow square, how is it you did not find him?--I have been asking you that for the last half hour."

"Monsieur President," replied Rouletabille, "I cannot answer that question before half-past six!"

By this time the people in the court-room were beginning to believe in this new witness. They were amused by his melodramatic action in thus fixing the hour; but they seemed to have confidence in the outcome. As for the President, it looked as if he also had made up his mind to take the young man in the same way. He had certainly been impressed by Rouletabille's explanation of Madame Mathieu's part.

"Well, Monsieur Rouletabille," he said, "as you say; but don't let us see any more of you before half-past six."
Rouletabille bowed to the President, and made his way to the door of the witnesses' room.

I quietly made my way through the crowd and left the court almost at the same time as Rouletabille. He greeted me heartily, and looked happy.

"I'll not ask you, my dear fellow," I said, smiling, "what you've been doing in America; because I've no doubt you'll say you can't tell me until after half-past six."
"No, my dear Sainclair, I'll tell you right now why I went to America. I went in search of the name of the other half of the murderer!"

"The name of the other half?"
"Exactly. When we last left the Glandier I knew there were two halves to the murderer and the name of only one of them. I went to America for the name of the other half."

I was too puzzled to answer. Just then we entered the witnesses' room, and Rouletabille was immediately surrounded. He showed himself very friendly to all except Arthur Rance to whom he exhibited a marked coldness of manner. Frederic Larsan came in also. Rouletabille went up and shook him heartily by the hand. His manner toward the detective showed that he had got the better of the policeman. Larsan smiled and asked him what he had been doing in America, Rouletabille began by telling him some anecdotes of his voyage. They then turned aside together apparently with the object of speaking confidentially. I, therefore, discreetly left them and, being curious to hear the evidence, returned to my seat in the court-room where the public plainly showed its lack of interest in what was going on in their impatience for Rouletabille's return at the appointed time.

On the stroke of half-past six Joseph Rouletabille was again brought in. It is impossible for me to picture the tense excitement which appeared on every face, as he made his way to the bar. Darzac rose to his feet, frightfully pale.

The President, addressing Rouletabille, said gravely:
"I will not ask you to take the oath, because you have not been regularly summoned; but I trust there is no need to urge upon you the gravity of the statement you are about to make."
Rouletabille looked the President quite calmly and steadily in the face, and replied:

"Yes, Monsieur."

"At your last appearance here," said the President, "we had arrived at the point where you were to tell us how the murderer escaped, and also his name. Now, Monsieur Rouletabille, we await your explanation."

"Very well, Monsieur," began my friend amidst a profound silence. "I had explained how it was impossible for the murderer to get away without being seen. And yet he was there with us in the courtyard."

"And you did not see him? At least that is what the prosecution declares."

"No! We all of us saw him, Monsieur le President!" cried Rouletabille.

"Then why was he not arrested?"

"Because no one, besides myself, knew that he was the murderer. It would have spoiled my plans to have had him arrested, and I had then no proof other than my own reasoning. I was convinced we had the murderer before us and that we were actually looking at him. I have now brought what I consider the indisputable proof."

"Speak out, Monsieur! Tell us the murderer's name."

"You will find it on the list of names present in the court on the night of the tragedy," replied Rouletabille.

The people present in the court-room began showing impatience. Some of them even called for the name, and were silenced by the usher.

"The list includes Daddy Jacques, Bernier the concierge, and Mr. Arthur Rance," said the President. "Do you accuse any of these?"

"No, Monsieur!"

"Then I do not understand what you are driving at. There was no other person at the end of the court."

"Yes, Monsieur, there was, not at the end, but above the court, who was leaning out of the window."

"Do you mean Frederic Larsan?" exclaimed the President.

"Yes! Frederic Larsan!" replied Rouletabille in a ringing tone. "Frederic Larsan is the murderer!"

The court-room became immediately filled with loud and indignant protests. So astonished was he that the President did not attempt to quiet it. The quick silence which followed was broken by the distinctly whispered words from the lips of Robert Darzac:

"It's impossible! He's mad!"

"You dare to accuse Frederic Larsan, Monsieur?" asked the President. "If you are not mad, what are your proofs?"

"Proofs, Monsieur?--Do you want proofs? Well, here is one," cried Rouletabille shrilly. "Let Frederic Larsan be called!"

"Usher, call Frederic Larsan."

The usher hurried to the side door, opened it, and disappeared. The door remained open, while all eyes turned expectantly towards it. The clerk re-appeared and, stepping forward, said:

"Monsieur President, Frederic Larsan is not here. He left at about four o'clock and has not been seen since."

"That is my proof!" cried Rouletabille, triumphantly.

"Explain yourself?" demanded the President.

"My proof is Larsan's flight," said the young reporter. "He will not come back. You will see no more of Frederic Larsan."

"Unless you are playing with the court, Monsieur, why did you not accuse him when he was present? He would then have answered you."

"He could give no other answer than the one he has now given by his flight."

"We cannot believe that Larsan has fled. There was no reason for his doing so. Did he know you'd make this charge?"

"He did. I told him I would."

"Do you mean to say that knowing Larsan was the murderer you gave him the opportunity to escape?"

"Yes, Monsieur President, I did;" replied Rouletabille, proudly. "I am not a policeman, I am a journalist; and my business is not to arrest people. My business is in the service of truth, and is not that of an executioner. If you are just, Monsieur, you will see that I am right. You can now understand why I refrained until this hour to divulge the name. I gave Larsan time to catch the 4:17 train for Paris, where he would know where to hide himself, and leave no traces. You will not find Frederic Larsan," declared Rouletabille, fixing his eyes on Monsieur Robert Darzac. "He is too cunning. He is a man who has always escaped you and whom you have long searched for in vain. If he did not succeed in outwitting me, he can yet easily outwit any police. This man who, four years ago, introduced himself to the Surete, and became celebrated as Frederic Larsan, is notorious under another name--a name well known to crime. Frederic Larsan, Monsieur President, is Ballmeyer!"

"Ballmeyer!" cried the President.
"Ballmeyer!" exclaimed Robert Darzac, springing to his feet. "Ballmeyer!--It was true, then!"

"Ah! Monsieur Darzac; you don't think I am mad, now!" cried Rouletabille.

Ballmeyer! Ballmeyer! No other word could be heard in the courtroom. The President adjourned the hearing.

Those of my readers who may not have heard of Ballmeyer will wonder at the excitement the name caused. And yet the doings of this remarkable criminal form the subject-matter of the most dramatic narratives of the newspapers and criminal records of the past twenty years. It had been reported that he was dead, and thus had eluded the police as he had eluded them throughout the whole of his career.

Ballmeyer was the best specimen of the high-class "gentleman swindler." He was adept at sleight of hand tricks, and no bolder or more ruthless crook ever lived. He was received in the best society, and was a member of some of the most exclusive clubs. On many of his depredatory expeditions he had not hesitated to use the knife and the mutton-bone. No difficulty stopped him and no "operation" was too dangerous. He had been caught, but escaped on the very morning of his trial, by throwing pepper into the eyes of the guards who were conducting him to Court. It was known later that, in spite of the keen hunt after him by the most expert of detectives, he had sat that same evening at a first performance in the Théâtre Français, without the slightest disguise.

He left France, later, to "work" America. The police there succeeded in capturing him once, but the extraordinary man escaped the next day. It would need a volume to recount the adventures of this master-criminal. And yet this was the man Rouletabille had allowed to get away! Knowing all about him and who he was, he afforded the criminal an opportunity for another laugh at the society he had defied! I could not help admiring the bold stroke of the young journalist, because I felt certain his motive had been to protect both Mademoiselle Stangerson and rid Darzac of an enemy at the same time.

The crowd had barely recovered from the effect of the astonishing revelation when the hearing was resumed. The question in everybody's mind was: Admitting that Larsan was the murderer, how did he get out of The Yellow Room?

Rouletabille was immediately called to the bar and his examination continued.

"You have told us," said the President, "that it was impossible to escape from the end of the court. Since Larsan was leaning out of his window, he had left the court. How did he do that?"

"He escaped by a most unusual way. He climbed the wall, sprang onto the terrace, and, while we were engaged with the keeper's body, reached the gallery by the window. He then had little else to do than to open the window, get in and call out to us, as if he had just come from his own room. To a man of Ballmeyer's strength all that was mere child's play. And here, Monsieur, is the proof of what I say."

Rouletabille drew from his pocket a small packet, from which he produced a strong iron peg.

"This, Monsieur," he said, "is a spike which perfectly fits a hole still to be seen in the cornice supporting the terrace. Larsan, who thought and prepared for everything in case of any emergency, had fixed this spike into the cornice. He had to do to make his escape good was to plant one foot on a stone which is placed at the corner of the chateau, another on this support, one hand on the cornice of the keeper's door and the other on the terrace, and Larsan was clear of the ground. The rest was easy. His acting after dinner as if he had been drugged was make believe. He was not drugged; but he did drug me. Of course he had to make it appear as if he also had been drugged so that no suspicion should fall on him for my condition. Had I not been thus overpowered, Larsan would never have entered Mademoiselle Stangerson's chamber that night, and the attack on her would not have taken place."

A groan came from Darzac, who appeared to be unable to control his suffering.

"You can understand," added Rouletabille, "that Larsan would feel himself hampered from the fact that my room was so close to his, and from a suspicion that I would be on the watch that night. Naturally, he could not for a moment believe that I suspected him! But I might see him leaving his room when he was about to go to Mademoiselle Stangerson. He waited till I was asleep, and my friend Sainclair was busy trying to rouse me. Ten minutes after that Mademoiselle was calling out, "Murder!"

"How did you come to suspect Larsan?" asked the President.

"My pure reason pointed to him. That was why I watched him. But I did not foresee the drugging. He is very cunning. Yes, my pure reason pointed to him; but I required tangible proof so that my eyes could see him as my pure reason saw him."

"What do you mean by your pure reason?"

"That power of one's mind which admits of no disturbing elements to a conclusion. The day following the incident of 'the inexplicable gallery,' I felt myself losing control of it. I had allowed myself to be diverted by fallacious evidence; but I recovered and again took hold of the right end. I satisfied myself that the murderer could not have left the gallery, either naturally or supernaturally. I narrowed the field of consideration to that small circle, so to speak. The murderer could not be outside that circle. Now who was in it? There was, first, the murderer. Then there were Daddy Jacques, Monsieur Stangerson, Frederic Larsan, and myself. Five persons in all, counting in the
murderer. And yet, in the gallery, there were but four. Now since it had been demonstrated to me that the fifth could not have escaped, it was evident that one of the four present in the gallery must be a double --he must be himself and the murderer also. Why had I not seen this before? Simply because the phenomenon of the double personality had not occurred before in this inquiry.

"Now who of the four persons in the gallery was both that person and the assassin? I went over in my mind what I had seen. I had seen at one and the same time, Monsieur Stangerson and the murderer, Daddy Jacques and the murderer, myself and the murderer; so that the murderer, then, could not be either Monsieur Stangerson, Daddy Jacques, or myself. Had I seen Frederic Larsan and the murderer at the same time?--No!--Two seconds had passed, during which I lost sight of the murderer; for, as I have noted in my papers, he arrived two seconds before Monsieur Stangerson, Daddy Jacques, and myself at the meeting-point of the two galleries. That would have given Larsan time to go through the 'off-turning' gallery, snatch off his false beard, return, and hurry with us as if, like us, in pursuit of the murderer. I was sure now I had got hold of the right end in my reasoning. With Frederic Larsan was now always associated, in my mind, the personality of the unknown of whom I was in pursuit--the murderer, in other words.

"That revelation staggered me. I tried to regain my balance by going over the evidences previously traced, but which had diverted my mind and led me away from Frederic Larsan. What were these evidences?

"1st. I had seen the unknown in Mademoiselle Stangerson's chamber. On going to Frederic Larsan's room, I had found Larsan sound asleep.

"2nd. The ladder.

"3rd. I had placed Frederic Larsan at the end of the 'off-turning' gallery and had told him that I would rush into Mademoiselle Stangerson's room to try to capture the murderer. Then I returned to Mademoiselle Stangerson's chamber where I had seen the unknown.

"The first evidence did not disturb me much. It is likely that, when I descended from my ladder, after having seen the unknown in Mademoiselle Stangerson's chamber, Larsan had already finished what he was doing there. Then, while I was re-entering the chateau, Larsan went back to his own room and, undressing himself, went to sleep.

"Nor did the second evidence trouble me. If Larsan were the murderer, he could have no use for a ladder; but the ladder might have been placed there to give an appearance to the murderer's entrance from without the chateau; especially as Larsan had accused Darzac and Darzac was not in the chateau that night. Further, the ladder might have been placed there to facilitate Larsan's flight in case of absolute necessity.

"But the third evidence puzzled me altogether. Having placed Larsan at the end of the 'off-turning gallery,' I could not explain how he had taken advantage of the moment when I had gone to the left wing of the chateau to find Monsieur Stangerson and Daddy Jacques, to return to Mademoiselle Stangerson's room. It was a very dangerous thing to do. He risked being captured,--and he knew it. And he was very nearly captured. He had not had time to regain his post, as he had certainly hoped to do. He had then a very strong reason for returning to his room. As for myself, when I sent Daddy Jacques to the end of the 'right gallery,' I naturally thought that Larsan was still at his post. Daddy Jacques, in going to his post, had not looked, when he passed, to see whether Larsan was at his post or not.

"What, then, was the urgent reason which had compelled Larsan to go to the room a second time? I guessed it to be some evidence of his presence there. He had left something very important in that room. What was it? And had he recovered it? I begged Madame Bernier who was accustomed to clean the room to look, and she found a pair of eye-glasses--this pair, Monsieur President!"

And Rouletabille drew the eye-glasses, of which we know, from his pocket.

"When I saw these eye-glasses," he continued, "I was utterly nonplussed. I had never seen Larsan wear eye-glasses. What did they mean? Suddenly I exclaimed to myself: 'I wonder if he is long-sighted?' I had never seen Larsan write. He might, then, be long-sighted. They would certainly know at the Surete, and also know if the glasses were his. Such evidence would be damning. That explained Larsan's return. I know now that Larsan, or Ballmeyer, is long-sighted and that these glasses belonged to him.

"I now made one mistake. I was not satisfied with the evidence I had obtained. I wished to see the man's face. Had I refrained from this, the second terrible attack would not have occurred."

"But," asked the President, "why should Larsan go to Mademoiselle Stangerson's room, at all? Why should he twice attempt to murder her?"

"Because he loves her, Monsieur President."

"That is certainly a reason, but--"

"It is the only reason. He was madly in love, and because of that, and--other things, he was capable of committing any crime."

"Did Mademoiselle Stangerson know this?"
"Yes, Monsieur; but she was ignorant of the fact that the man who was pursuing her was Frederic Larsan, otherwise, of course, he would not have been allowed to be at the chateau. I noticed, when he was in her room after the incident in the gallery, that he kept himself in the shadow, and that he kept his head bent down. He was looking for the lost eye-glasses. Mademoiselle Stangerson knew Larsan under another name."

"Monsieur Darzac," asked the President, "did Mademoiselle Stangerson in any way confide in you on this matter? How is it that she has never spoken about it to anyone? If you are innocent, she would have wished to spare you the pain of being accused."

"Mademoiselle Stangerson told me nothing," replied Monsieur Darzac.

"Does what this young man says appear probable to you?" the President asked.

"Mademoiselle Stangerson has told me nothing," he replied stolidly.

"How do you explain that, on the night of the murder of the keeper," the President asked, turning to Rouletabille, "the murderer brought back the papers stolen from Monsieur Stangerson?--How do you explain how the murderer gained entrance into Mademoiselle Stangerson's locked room?"

"The last question is easily answered. A man like Larsan, or Ballmeyer, could have had made duplicate keys. As to the documents, I think Larsan had not intended to steal them, at first. Closely watching Mademoiselle with the purpose of preventing her marriage with Monsieur Robert Darzac, he one day followed her and Monsieur into the Grands Magasins de la Louvre. There he got possession of the reticule which she lost, or left behind. In that reticule was a key with a brass head. He did not know there was any value attached to the key till the advertisement in the newspapers revealed it. He then wrote to Mademoiselle, as the advertisement requested. No doubt he asked for a meeting, making known to her that he was also the person who had for some time pursued her with his love. He received no answer. He went to the Post Office and ascertained that his letter was no longer there. He had already taken complete stock of Monsieur Darzac, and, having decided to go to any lengths to gain Mademoiselle Stangerson, he had planned that, whatever might happen, Monsieur Darzac, his hated rival, should be the man to be suspected.

"I do not think that Larsan had as yet thought of murdering Mademoiselle Stangerson; but whatever he might do, he made sure that Monsieur Darzac should suffer for it. He was very nearly of the same height as Monsieur Darzac and had almost the same sized feet. It would not be difficult, to take an impression of Monsieur Darzac's footprints, and have similar boots made for himself. Such tricks were mere child's play for Larsan, or Ballmeyer.

"Receiving no reply to his letter, he determined, since Mademoiselle Stangerson would not come to him, that he would go to her. His plan had long been formed. He had made himself master of the plans of the chateau and the pavilion. So that, one afternoon, while Monsieur and Mademoiselle Stangerson were out for a walk, and while Daddy Jacques was away, he entered the latter by the vestibule window. He was alone, and, being in no hurry, he began examining the furniture. One of the pieces, resembling a safe, had a very small keyhole. That interested him! He had with him the little key with the brass head, and, associating one with the other, he tried the key in the lock. The door opened. He saw nothing but papers. They must be very valuable to have been put away in a safe, and the key to which to be of so much importance. Perhaps a thought of blackmail occurred to him as a useful possibility in helping him in his designs on Mademoiselle Stangerson. He quickly made a parcel of the papers and took it to the lavatory in the vestibule. Between the time of his first examination of the pavilion and the night of the murder of the keeper, Larsan had had time to find out what those papers contained. He could do nothing with them, and they were rather compromising. That night he took them back to the chateau. Perhaps he hoped that, by returning the papers he might obtain some gratitude from Mademoiselle Stangerson. But whatever may have been his reasons, he took the papers back and so rid himself of an encumbrance."

Rouletabille coughed. It was evident to me that he was embarrassed. He had arrived at a point where he had to keep back his knowledge of Larsan's true motive. The explanation he had given had evidently been unsatisfactory. Rouletabille was quick enough to note the bad impression he had made, for, turning to the President, he said: "And now we come to the explanation of the Mystery of The Yellow Room!"

A movement of chairs in the court with a rustling of dresses and an energetic whispering of "Hush!" showed the curiosity that had been aroused.

"It seems to me," said the President, "that the Mystery of The Yellow Room, Monsieur Rouletabille, is wholly explained by your hypothesis. Frederic Larsan is the explanation. We have merely to substitute him for Monsieur Robert Darzac. Evidently the door of The Yellow Room was open at the time Monsieur Stangerson was alone, and that he allowed the man who was coming out of his daughter's chamber to pass without arresting him—perhaps at her entreaty to avoid all scandal."

"No, Monsieur President," protested the young man. "You forget that, stunned by the attack made on her, Mademoiselle Stangerson was not in a condition to have made such an appeal. Nor could she have locked and bolted herself in her room. You must also remember that Monsieur Stangerson has sworn that the door was not open."
"That, however, is the only way in which it can be explained. The Yellow Room was as closely shut as an iron safe. To use your own expression, it was impossible for the murderer to make his escape either naturally or supernaturally. When the room was broken into he was not there! He must, therefore, have escaped."

"That does not follow."
"What do you mean?"
"There was no need for him to escape—if he was not there!"
"Not there!"
"Evidently, not. He could not have been there, if he were not found there."
"But, what about the evidences of his presence?" asked the President.

"That, Monsieur President, is where we have taken hold of the wrong end. From the time Mademoiselle Stangerson shut herself in the room to the time her door was burst open, it was impossible for the murderer to escape. He was not found because he was not there during that time."

"But the evidences?"

"They have led us astray. In reasoning on this mystery we must not take them to mean what they apparently mean. Why do we conclude the murderer was there?—Because he left his tracks in the room? Good! But may he not have been there before the room was locked. Nay, he must have been there before! Let us look into the matter of these traces and see if they do not point to my conclusion.

"After the publication of the article in the 'Matin' and my conversation with the examining magistrate on the journey from Paris to Epinaysur-Orge, I was certain that The Yellow Room had been hermetically sealed, so to speak, and that consequently the murderer had escaped before Mademoiselle Stangerson had gone into her chamber at midnight."

"At the time I was much puzzled. Mademoiselle Stangerson could not have been her own murderer, since the evidences pointed to some other person. The assassin, then, had come before. If that were so, how was it that Mademoiselle had been attacked after? or rather, that she appeared to have been attacked after? It was necessary for me to reconstruct the occurrence and make of it two phases—each separated from the other, in time, by the space of several hours. One phase in which Mademoiselle Stangerson had really been attacked—the other phase in which those who heard her cries thought she was being attacked. I had not then examined The Yellow Room. What were the marks on Mademoiselle Stangerson? There were marks of strangulation and the wound from a hard blow on the temple. The marks of strangulation did not interest me much; they might have been made before, and Mademoiselle Stangerson could have concealed them by a collarette, or any similar article of apparel. I had to suppose this the moment I was compelled to reconstruct the occurrence by two phases. Mademoiselle Stangerson had, no doubt, her own reasons for so doing, since she had told her father nothing of it, and had made it understood to the examining magistrate that the attack had taken place in the night, during the second phase. She was forced to say that, otherwise her father would have questioned her as to her reason for having said nothing about it.

"But I could not explain the blow on the temple. I understood it even less when I learned that the mutton-bone had been found in her room. She could not hide the fact that she had been struck on the head, and yet that wound appeared evidently to have been inflicted during the first phase, since it required the presence of the murderer! I thought Mademoiselle Stangerson had hidden the wound by arranging her hair in bands on her forehead.

"As to the mark of the hand on the wall, that had evidently been made during the first phase—when the murderer was really there. All the traces of his presence had naturally been left during the first phase; the mutton-bone, the black footprints, the Basque cap, the handkerchief, the blood on the wall, on the door, and on the floor. If those traces were still all there, they showed that Mademoiselle Stangerson—who desired that nothing should be known—had not yet had time to clear them away. This led me to the conclusion that the two phases had taken place one shortly after the other. She had not had the opportunity, after leaving her room and going back to the laboratory to her father, to get back to her room and put it in order. Her father was all the time with her, working. So that after the first phase she did not re-enter her chamber till midnight. Daddy Jacques was there at ten o'clock, as he was every night; but he went in merely to close the blinds and light the night-light. Owing to her disturbed state of mind she had forgotten that Daddy Jacques would go into her room and had begged him not to trouble himself. All this was set forth in the article in the 'Matin.' Daddy Jacques did go, however, and, in the dim light of the room, saw nothing.

"Mademoiselle Stangerson must have lived some anxious moments while Daddy Jacques was absent; but I think she was not aware that so many evidences had been left. After she had been attacked she had only time to hide the traces of the man’s fingers on her neck and to hurry to the laboratory. Had she known of the bone, the cap, and the handkerchief, she would have made away with them after she had gone back to her chamber at midnight. She did not see them, and undressed by the uncertain glimmer of the night light. She went to bed, worn-out by anxiety and fear—a fear that had made her remain in the laboratory as late as possible.
"My reasoning had thus brought me to the second phase of the tragedy, when Mademoiselle Stangerson was alone in the room. I had now to explain the revolver shots fired during the second phase. Cries of 'Help!--Murder!' had been heard. How to explain these? As to the cries, I was in no difficulty; since she was alone in her room these could result from nightmare only. My explanation of the struggle and noise that were heard is simply that in her nightmare she was haunted by the terrible experience she had passed through in the afternoon. In her dream she sees the murderer about to spring upon her and she cries, 'Help! Murder!' Her hand wildly seeks the revolver she had placed within her reach on the night-table by the side of her bed, but her hand, striking the table, overturns it, and the revolver, falling to the floor, discharges itself, the bullet lodging in the ceiling. I knew from the first that the bullet in the ceiling must have resulted from an accident. Its very position suggested an accident to my mind, and so fell in with my theory of a nightmare. I no longer doubted that the attack had taken place before Mademoiselle had retired for the night. After wakening from her frightful dream and crying aloud for help, she had fainted.

"My theory, based on the evidence of the shots that were heard at midnight, demanded two shots—one which wounded the murderer at the time of his attack, and one fired at the time of the nightmare. The evidence given by the Berniers before the examining magistrate was to the effect that only one shot had been heard. Monsieur Stangerson testified to hearing a dull sound first followed by a sharp ringing sound. The dull sound I explained by the falling of the marble-topped table; the ringing sound was the shot from the revolver. I was now convinced I was right. The shot that had wounded the hand of the murderer and had caused it to bleed so that he left the bloody imprint on the wall was fired by Mademoiselle in self-defence, before the second phase, when she had been really attacked. The shot in the ceiling which the Berniers heard was the accidental shot during the nightmare.

"I had now to explain the wound on the temple. It was not severe enough to have been made by means of the mutton-bone, and Mademoiselle had not attempted to hide it. It must have been made during the second phase. It was to find this out that I went to The Yellow Room, and I obtained my answer there."

Rouletabille drew a piece of white folded paper from his pocket, and drew out of it an almost invisible object which he held between his thumb and forefinger.

"This, Monsieur President," he said, "is a hair—a blond hair stained with blood;—it is a hair from the head of Mademoiselle Stangerson. I found it sticking to one of the corners of the overturned table. The corner of the table was itself stained with blood—a tiny stain—hardly visible; but it told me that, on rising from her bed, Mademoiselle Stangerson had fallen heavily and had struck her head on the corner of its marble top.

"I still had to learn, in addition to the name of the assassin, which I did later, the time of the original attack. I learned this from the examination of Mademoiselle Stangerson and her father, though the answers given by the former were well calculated to deceive the examining magistrate—Mademoiselle Stangerson had stated very minutely how she had spent the whole of her time that day. We established the fact that the murderer had introduced himself into the pavilion between five and six o'clock. At a quarter past six the professor and his daughter had resumed their work. At five the professor had been with his daughter, and since the attack took place in the professor's absence from his daughter, I had to find out just when he left her. The professor had stated that at the time when he and his daughter were about to re-enter the laboratory he was met by the keeper and held in conversation about the cutting of some wood and the poachers. Mademoiselle Stangerson was not with him then since the professor said: 'I left the keeper and rejoined my daughter who was at work in the laboratory.'

"It was during that short interval of time that the tragedy took place. That is certain. In my mind's eye I saw Mademoiselle Stangerson re-enter the pavilion, go to her room to take off her hat, and find herself faced by the murderer. He had been in the pavilion for some time waiting for her. He had arranged to pass the whole night there. He had taken off Daddy Jacques's boots; he had removed the papers from the cabinet; and had then slipped under the bed. Finding the time long, he had risen, gone again into the laboratory, then into the vestibule, looked into the garden, and had seen, coming towards the pavilion, Mademoiselle Stangerson --alone. He would never have dared to attack her at that hour, if he had not found her alone. His mind was made up. He would be more at ease alone with Mademoiselle Stangerson in the pavilion, than he would have been in the middle of the night, with Daddy Jacques sleeping in the attic. So he shut the vestibule window. That explains why neither Monsieur Stangerson, nor the keeper, who were at some distance from the pavilion, had heard the revolver shot.

"Then he went back to The Yellow Room. Mademoiselle Stangerson came in. What passed must have taken place very quickly. Mademoiselle tried to call for help; but the man had seized her by the throat. Her hand had sought and grasped the revolver which she had been keeping in the drawer of her night-table, since she had come to fear the threats of her pursuer. The murderer was about to strike her on the head with the mutton-bone—a terrible weapon in the hands of a Larsan or Ballmeyer; but she fired in time, and the shot wounded the hand that held the weapon. The bone fell to the floor covered with the blood of the murderer, who staggered, clutching at the wall for support—imprinting on it the red marks—and, fearing another bullet, fled.

"She saw him pass through the laboratory, and listened. He was long at the window. At length he jumped from
it. She flew to it and shut it. The danger past, all her thoughts were of her father. Had he either seen or heard? At any cost to herself she must keep this from him. Thus when Monsieur Stangerson returned, he found the door of The Yellow Room closed, and his daughter in the laboratory, bending over her desk, at work!"

Turning towards Monsieur Darzac, Rouletabille cried: "You know the truth! Tell us, then, if that is not how things happened."

"I don't know anything about it," replied Monsieur Darzac.

"I admire you for your silence," said Rouletabille, "but if Mademoiselle Stangerson knew of your danger, she would release you from your oath. She would beg of you to tell all she has confided to you. She would be here to defend you!"

Monsieur Darzac made no movement, nor uttered a word. He looked at Rouletabille sadly.

"However," said the young reporter, "since Mademoiselle is not here, I must do it myself. But, believe me, Monsieur Darzac, the only means to save Mademoiselle Stangerson and restore her to her reason, is to secure your acquittal."

"What is this secret motive that compels Mademoiselle Stangerson to hide her knowledge from her father?" asked the President.

"That, Monsieur, I do not know," said Rouletabille. "It is no business of mine."

The President, turning to Monsieur Darzac, endeavoured to induce him to tell what he knew.

"Do you still refuse, Monsieur, to tell us how you employed your time during the attempts on the life of Mademoiselle Stangerson?"

"I cannot tell you anything, Monsieur."

The President turned to Rouletabille as if appealing for an explanation.

"We must assume, Monsieur President, that Monsieur Robert Darzac's absences are closely connected with Mademoiselle Stangerson's secret, and that Monsieur Darzac feels himself in honour bound to remain silent. It may be that Larsan, who, since his three attempts, has had everything in training to cast suspicion on Monsieur Darzac, had fixed on just those occasions for a meeting with Monsieur Darzac at a spot most compromising. Larsan is cunning enough to have done that."

The President seemed partly convinced, but still curious, he asked:

"But what is this secret of Mademoiselle Stangerson?"

"That I cannot tell you," said Rouletabille. "I think, however, you know enough now to acquit Monsieur Robert Darzac! Unless Larsan should return, and I don't think he will," he added, with a laugh.

"One question more," said the President. "Admitting your explanation, we know that Larsan wished to turn suspicion on Monsieur Robert Darzac, but why should he throw suspicion on Daddy Jacques also?"

"There came in the professional detective, Monsieur, who proves himself an unraveller of mysteries, by annihilating the very proofs he had accumulated. He's a very cunning man, and a similar trick had often enabled him to turn suspicion from himself. He proved the innocence of one before accusing the other. You can easily believe, Monsieur, that so complicated a scheme as this must have been long and carefully thought out in advance by Larsan. I can tell you that he had long been engaged on its elaboration. If you care to learn how he had gathered information, you will find that he had, on one occasion, disguised himself as the commissioner between the 'Laboratory of the Surete' and Monsieur Stangerson, of whom 'experiments' were demanded. In this way he had been able before the crime, on two occasions to take stock of the pavilion. He had 'made up' so that Daddy Jacques had not recognised him. And yet Larsan had found the opportunity to rob the old man of a pair of old boots and a cast-off Basque cap, which the servant had tied up in a handkerchief, with the intention of carrying them to a friend, a charcoal-burner on the road to Epinay. When the crime was discovered, Daddy Jacques had immediately recognised these objects as his. They were extremely compromising, which explains his distress at the time when we spoke to him about them. Larsan confessed it all to me. He is an artist at the game. He did a similar thing in the affair of the 'Credit Universel,' and in that of the 'Gold Ingots of the Mint.' Both these cases should be revised. Since Ballmeyer or Larsan has been in the Surete a number of innocent persons have been sent to prison."

CHAPTER XXVIII
In Which It Is Proved That One Does Not Always Think of Everything

Great excitement prevailed when Rouletabille had finished. The court-room became agitated with the murmurings of suppressed applause. Maitre Henri Robert called for an adjournment of the trial and was supported in his motion by the public prosecutor himself. The case was adjourned. The next day Monsieur Robert Darzac was released on bail, while Daddy Jacques received the immediate benefit of a "no cause for action." Search was everywhere made for Frederic Larsan, but in vain. Monsieur Darzac finally escaped the awful calamity which, at one time, had threatened him. After a visit to Mademoiselle Stangerson, he was led to hope that she might, by careful nursing, one day recover her reason.
Rouletabille, naturally, became the "man of the hour." On leaving the Palais de Justice, the crowd bore him aloft in triumph. The press of the whole world published his exploits and his photograph. He, who had interviewed so many illustrious personages, had himself become illustrious and was interviewed in his turn. I am glad to say that the enormous success in no way turned his head.

We left Versailles together, after having dined at "The Dog That Smokes." In the train I put a number of questions to him which, during our meal, had been on the tip of my tongue, but which I had refrained from uttering, knowing he did not like to talk "shop" while eating.

"My friend," I said, "that Larsan case is wonderful. It is worthy of you."

He begged me to say no more, and humorously pretended an anxiety for me should I give way to silly praise of him because of a personal admiration for his ability.

"I'll come to the point, then," I said, not a little nettled. "I am still in the dark as to your reason for going to America. When you left the Glandier you had found out, if I rightly understand, all about Frederic Larsan; you had discovered the exact way he had attempted the murder?"

"Quite so. And you," he said, turning the conversation, "did you suspect nothing?"

"Nothing!"

"It's incredible!"

"I don't see how I could have suspected anything. You took great pains to conceal your thoughts from me. Had you already suspected Larsan when you sent for me to bring the revolvers?"

"Yes! I had come to that conclusion through the incident of the 'inexplicable gallery.' Larsan's return to Mademoiselle Stangerson's room, however, had not then been cleared up by the eye-glasses. My suspicions were the outcome of my reasoning only; and the idea of Larsan being the murderer seemed so extraordinary that I resolved to wait for actual evidence before venturing to act. Nevertheless, the suspicion worried me, and I sometimes spoke to the detective in a way that ought to have opened your eyes. I spoke disparagingly of his methods. But until I found the eye-glasses I could but look upon my suspicion of him in the light of an absurd hypothesis only. You can imagine my elation after I had explained Larsan's movements. I remember well rushing into my room like a madman and crying to you: 'I'll get the better of the great Fred. I'll get the better of him in a way that will make a sensation!'

"I was then thinking of Larsan, the murderer. It was that same evening that Darzac begged me to watch over Mademoiselle Stangerson. I made no efforts until after we had dined with Larsan, until ten o'clock. He was right there before me, and I could afford to wait. You ought to have suspected, because when we were talking of the murderer's arrival, I said to you: 'I am quite sure Larsan will be here to-night.'

"But one important point escaped us both. It was one which ought to have opened our eyes to Larsan. Do you remember the bamboo cane? I was surprised to find Larsan had made no use of that evidence against Robert Darzac. Had it not been purchased by a man whose description tallied exactly with that of Darzac? Well, just before I saw him off at the train, after the recess during the trial, I asked him why he hadn't used the cane evidence. He told me he had never had any intention of doing so; that our discovery of it in the little inn at Epinay had much embarrassed him. If you will remember, he told us then that the cane had been given him in London. Why did we not immediately say to ourselves: 'Fred is lying. He could not have had this cane in London. He was not in London. He bought it in Paris'? Then you found out, on inquiry at Cassette's, that the cane had been bought by a person dressed very like Robert Darzac, though, as we learned later, from Darzac himself, it was not he who had made the purchase. Couple this with the fact we already knew, from the letter at the poste restante, that there was actually a man in Paris who was passing as Robert Darzac, why did we not immediately fix on Fred himself?

"Of course, his position at the Surete was against us; but when we saw the evident eagerness on his part to find convicting evidence against Darzac, nay, even the passion he displayed in his pursuit of the man, the lie about the cane should have had a new meaning for us. If you ask why Larsan bought the cane, if he had no intention of manufacturing evidence against Darzac by means of it, the answer is quite simple. He had been wounded in the hand by Mademoiselle Stangerson, so that the cane was useful to enable him to close his hand in carrying it. You remember I noticed that he always carried it?

"All these details came back to my mind when I had once fixed on Larsan as the criminal. But they were too late then to be of any use to me. On the evening when he pretended to be drugged I looked at his hand and saw a thin silk bandage covering the signs of a slight healing wound. Had we taken a quicker initiative at the time Larsan told us that lie about the cane, I am certain he would have gone off, to avoid suspicion. All the same, we worried Larsan or Ballmeyer without our knowing it."

"But," I interrupted, "if Larsan had no intention of using the cane as evidence against Darzac, why had he made himself up to look like the man when he went in to buy it?"

"He had not specially 'made up' as Darzac to buy the cane; he had come straight to Cassette's immediately after
he had attacked Mademoiselle Stangerson. His wound was troubling him and, as he was passing along the Avenue de l'Opéra, the idea of the cane came to his mind and he acted on it. It was then eight o'clock. And I, who had hit upon the very hour of the occurrence of the tragedy, almost convinced that Darzac was not the criminal, and knowing of the cane, I still never suspected Larsan. There are times...

"There are times," I said, "when the greatest intellects--..." Rouletabille shut my mouth. I still continued to chide him, but, finding he did not reply, I saw he was no longer paying any attention to what I was saying. I found he was fast asleep.

CHAPTER XXIX
The Mystery of Mademoiselle Stangerson

During the days that followed I had several opportunities to question him as to his reason for his voyage to America, but I obtained no more precise answers than he had given me on the evening of the adjournment of the trial, when we were on the train for Paris. One day, however, on my still pressing him, he said:

"Can't you understand that I had to know Larsan's true personality?"

"No doubt," I said, "but why did you go to America to find that out?"

He sat smoking his pipe, and made no further reply. I began to see that I was touching on the secret that concerned Mademoiselle Stangerson. Rouletabille evidently had found it necessary to go to America to find out what the mysterious tie was that bound her to Larsan by so strange and terrible a bond. In America he had learned who Larsan was and had obtained information which closed his mouth. He had been to Philadelphia.

And now, what was this mystery which held Mademoiselle Stangerson and Monsieur Robert Darzac in so inexplicable a silence? After so many years and the publicity given the case by a curious and shameless press; now that Monsieur Stangerson knows all and has forgiven all, all may be told. In every phase of this remarkable story Mademoiselle Stangerson had always been the sufferer.

The beginning dates from the time when, as a young girl, she was living with her father in Philadelphia. A visitor at the house, a Frenchman, had succeeded by his wit, grace and persistent attention, in gaining her affections. He was said to be rich and had asked her of her father. Monsieur Stangerson, on making inquiries as to Monsieur Jean Roussel, found that the man was a swindler and an adventurer. Jean Roussel was but another of the many names under which the notorious Ballmeyer, a fugitive from France, tried to hide himself. Monsieur Stangerson did not know of his identity with Ballmeyer; he learned that the man was simply undesirable for his daughter. He not only refused to give his consent to the marriage but denied him admission into the house. Mathilde Stangerson, however, had fallen in love. To her Jean Roussel was everything that her love painted him. She was indignant at her father's attitude, and did not conceal her feelings. Her father sent her to stay with an aunt in Cincinnati. There she was joined by Jean Roussel and, in spite of the reverence she felt for her father, ran away with him to get married.

They went to Louisville and lived there for some time. One morning, however, a knock came at the door of the house in which they were and the police entered to arrest Jean Roussel. It was then that Mathilde Stangerson, or Roussel, learned that her husband was no other than the notorious Ballmeyer!

The young woman in her despair tried to commit suicide. She failed in this, and was forced to rejoin her aunt in Cincinnati. The old lady was overjoyed to see her again. She had been anxiously searching for her and had not dared to tell Monsieur Stangerson of her disappearance. Mathilde swore her to secrecy, so that her father should not know she had been away. A month later, Mademoiselle Stangerson returned to her father, repentant, her heart dead within her, hoping only one thing: that she would never again see her husband, the horrible Ballmeyer. A report was spread, a few weeks later, that he was dead, and she now determined to atone for her disobedience by a life of labour and devotion for her father. And she kept her word.

All this she had confessed to Robert Darzac, and, believing Ballmeyer dead, had given herself to the joy of a union with him. But fate had resuscitated Jean Roussel--the Ballmeyer of her youth. He had taken steps to let her know that he would never allow her to marry Darzac --that he still loved her.

Mademoiselle Stangerson never for one moment hesitated to confide in Monsieur Darzac. She showed him the letter in which Jean Roussel asked her to recall the first hours of their union in their beautiful and charming Louisville home. "The presbytery has lost nothing of its charm, nor the garden its brightness," he had written. The scoundrel pretended to be rich and claimed the right of taking her back to Louisville. She had told Darzac that if her father should know of her dishonour, she would kill herself. Monsieur Darzac had sworn to silence her persecutor, even if he had to kill him. He was outwitted and would have succumbed had it not been for the genius of Rouletabille.

Mademoiselle Stangerson was herself helpless in the hands of such a villain. She had tried to kill him when he had first threatened and then attacked her in The Yellow Room. She had, unfortunately, failed, and felt herself condemned to be for ever at the mercy of this unscrupulous wretch who was continually demanding her presence at clandestine interviews. When he sent her the letter through the Post Office, asking her to meet him, she had refused.
The result of her refusal was the tragedy of The Yellow Room. The second time he wrote asking for a meeting, the letter reaching her in her sick chamber, she had avoided him by sleeping with her servants. In that letter the scoundrel had warned her that, since she was too ill to come to him, he would come to her, and that he would be in her chamber at a particular hour on a particular night. Knowing that she had everything to fear from Ballmeyer, she had left her chamber on that night. It was then that the incident of the "inexplicable gallery" occurred.

The third time she had determined to keep the appointment. He asked for it in the letter he had written in her own room, on the night of the incident in the gallery, which he left on her desk. In that letter he threatened to burn her father's papers if she did not meet him. It was to rescue these papers that she made up her mind to see him. She did not for one moment doubt that the wretch would carry out his threat if she persisted in avoiding him, and in that case the labours of her father's lifetime would be for ever lost. Since the meeting was thus inevitable, she resolved to see her husband and appeal to his better nature. It was for this interview that she had prepared herself on the night the keeper was killed. They did meet, and what passed between them may be imagined. He insisted that she renounce Darzac. She, on her part, affirmed her love for him. He stabbed her in his anger, determined to convict Darzac of the crime. As Larsan he could do it, and had so managed things that Darzac could never explain how he had employed the time of his absence from the chateau. Ballmeyer's precautions were most cunningly taken.

Larsan had threatened Darzac as he had threatened Mathilde—with the same weapon, and the same threats. He wrote Darzac urgent letters, declaring himself ready to deliver up the letters that had passed between him and his wife, and to leave them for ever, if he would pay him his price. He asked Darzac to meet him for the purpose of arranging the matter, appointing the time when Larsan would be with Mademoiselle Stangerson. When Darzac went to Epinay, expecting to find Ballmeyer or Larsan there, he was met by an accomplice of Larsan's, and kept waiting until such time as the "coincidence" could be established.

It was all done with Machiavellian cunning; but Ballmeyer had reckoned without Joseph Rouletabille.

Now that the Mystery of The Yellow Room has been cleared up, this is not the time to tell of Rouletabille's adventures in America. Knowing the young reporter as we do, we can understand with what acumen he had traced, step by step, the story of Mathilde Stangerson and Jean Roussel. At Philadelphia he had quickly informed himself as to Arthur William Rance. There he learned of Rance's act of devotion and the reward he thought himself entitled to for it. A rumour of his marriage with Mademoiselle Stangerson had once found its way into the drawing-rooms of Philadelphia. He also learned of Rance's continued attentions to her and his importunities for her hand. He had taken to drink, he had said, to drown his grief at his unrequited love. It can now be understood why Rouletabille had shown so marked a coolness of demeanour towards Rance when they met in the witnesses' room, on the day of the trial.

The strange Roussel-Stangerson mystery had now been laid bare. Who was this Jean Roussel? Rouletabille had traced him from Philadelphia to Cincinnati. In Cincinnati he became acquainted with the old aunt, and had found means to open her mouth. The story of Ballmeyer's arrest threw the right light on the whole story. He visited the "presbytery"--a small and pretty dwelling in the old colonial style—which had, indeed, "lost nothing of its charm." Then, abandoning his pursuit of traces of Mademoiselle Stangerson, he took up those of Ballmeyer. He followed them from prison to prison, from crime to crime. Finally, as he was about leaving for Europe, he learned in New York that Ballmeyer had, five years before, embarked for France with some valuable papers belonging to a merchant of New Orleans whom he had murdered.

And yet the whole of this mystery has not been revealed. Mademoiselle Stangerson had a child, by her husband,—a son. The infant was born in the old aunt's house. No one knew of it, so well had the aunt managed to conceal the event.

What became of that son?—That is another story which, so far, I am not permitted to relate.

About two months after these events, I came upon Rouletabille sitting on a bench in the Palais de Justice, looking very depressed.

"What's the matter, old man?" I asked. "You are looking very down. cast. How are your friends getting on?"
"Apart from you," he said, "I have no friends."
"I hope that Monsieur Darzac—"
"No doubt."
"And Mademoiselle Stangerson—How is she?"
"Better—much better."
"Then you ought not to be sad."
"I am sad," he said, "because I am thinking of the perfume of the lady in black—"
"The perfume of the lady in black!—I have heard you often refer to it. Tell me why it troubles you."
"Perhaps—some day; some day," said Rouletabille.

And he heaved a profound sigh.
The Lodger

by Marie Belloc Lowndes

"Lover and friend hast thou put far from me, and mine acquaintance into darkness." PSALM lxxxviii. 18

CHAPTER I

Robert Bunting and Ellen his wife sat before their dully burning, carefully-banked-up fire.

The room, especially when it be known that it was part of a house standing in a grimy, if not exactly sordid, London thoroughfare, was exceptionally clean and well-cared-for. A casual stranger, more particularly one of a Superior class to their own, on suddenly opening the door of that sitting-room; would have thought that Mr. and Mrs. Bunting presented a very pleasant cozy picture of comfortable married life. Bunting, who was leaning back in a deep leather arm-chair, was clean-shaven and dapper, still in appearance what he had been for many years of his life--a self-respecting man-servant.

On his wife, now sitting up in an uncomfortable straight-backed chair, the marks of past servitude were less apparent; but they were there all the same--in her neat black stuff dress, and in her scrupulously clean, plain collar and cuffs. Mrs. Bunting, as a single woman, had been what is known as a useful maid.

But peculiarly true of average English life is the time-worn English proverb as to appearances being deceitful. Mr. and Mrs. Bunting were sitting in a very nice room and in their time--how long ago it now seemed!--both husband and wife had been proud of their carefully chosen belongings. Everything in the room was strong and substantial, and each article of furniture had been bought at a well-conducted auction held in a private house.

Thus the red damask curtains which now shut out the fog-laden, drizzling atmosphere of the Marylebone Road, had cost a mere song, and yet they might have been warranted to last another thirty years. A great bargain also had been the excellent Axminster carpet which covered the floor; as, again, the arm-chair in which Bunting now sat forward, staring into the dull, small fire. In fact, that arm-chair had been an extravagance of Mrs. Bunting. She had wanted her husband to be comfortable after the day's work was done, and she had paid thirty-seven shillings for the chair. Only yesterday Bunting had tried to find a purchaser for it, but the man who had come to look at it, guessing their cruel necessities, had only offered them twelve shillings and sixpence for it; so for the present they were keeping their arm-chair.

But man and woman want something more than mere material comfort, much as that is valued by the Bunktins of this world. So, on the walls of the sitting-room, hung neatly framed if now rather faded photographs--photographs of Mr. and Mrs. Bunting's various former employers, and of the pretty country houses in which they had separately lived during the long years they had spent in a not unhappy servitude.

But appearances were not only deceitful, they were more than usually deceitful with regard to these unfortunate people. In spite of their good furniture--that substantial outward sign of respectability which is the last thing which wise folk who fall into trouble try to dispose of--they were almost at the end of their tether. Already they had learnt to go hungry, and they were beginning to learn to go cold. Tobacco, the last thing the sober man foregoes among his comforts, had been given up some time ago by Bunting. And even Mrs. Bunting--prim, prudent, careful woman as she was in her way--had realised what this must mean to him. So well, indeed, had she understood that some days back she had crept out and bought him a packet of Virginia.

Bunting had been touched--touched as he had not been for years by any woman's thought and love for him. Painful tears had forced themselves into his eyes, and husband and wife had both felt in their odd, unemotional way, moved to the heart.

Fortunately he never guessed--how could he have guessed, with his slow, normal, rather dull mind?--that his poor Ellen had since more than once bitterly regretted that fourpence-ha'penny, for they were now very near the soundless depths which divide those who dwell on the safe tableland of security--those, that is, who are sure of making a respectable, if not a happy, living--and the submerged multitude who, through some lack in themselves, or owing to the conditions under which our strange civilisation has become organised, struggle rudderless till they die in workhouse, hospital, or prison.

Had the Bunktins been in a class lower than their own, had they belonged to the great company of human beings technically known to so many of us as the poor, there would have been friendly neighbours ready to help them, and the same would have been the case had they belonged to the class of smug, well-meaning, if unimaginative, folk whom they had spent so much of their lives in serving.

There was only one person in the world who might possibly be brought to help them. That was an aunt of
Bunting's first wife. With this woman, the widow of a man who had been well-to-do, lived Daisy, Bunting's only child by his first wife, and during the last long two days he had been trying to make up his mind to write to the old lady, and that though he suspected that she would almost certainly retort with a cruel, sharp rebuff.

As to their few acquaintances, former fellow-servants, and so on, they had gradually fallen out of touch with them. There was but one friend who often came to see them in their deep trouble. This was a young fellow named Chandler, under whose grandfather Bunting had been footman years and years ago. Joe Chandler had never gone into service; he was attached to the police; in fact not to put too fine a point upon it, young Chandler was a detective.

When they had first taken the house which had brought them, so they both thought, such bad luck, Bunting had encouraged the young chap to come often, for his tales were well worth listening to--quite exciting at times. But now poor Bunting didn't want to hear that sort of stories--stories of people being cleverly "nabbed," or stupidly allowed to escape the fate they always, from Chandler's point of view, richly deserved.

But Joe still came very faithfully once or twice a week, so timing his calls that neither host nor hostess need press food upon him--nay, more, he had done that which showed him to have a good and feeling heart. He had offered his father's old acquaintance a loan, and Bunting, at last, had taken 30s. Very little of that money now remained: Bunting still could jingle a few coppers in his pocket; and Mrs. Bunting had 2s. 9d.; that and the rent they would have to pay in five weeks, was all they had left. Everything of the light, portable sort that would fetch money had been sold. Mrs. Bunting had a fierce horror of the pawnshop. She had never put her feet in such a place, and she declared she never would--she would rather starve first.

But she had said nothing when there had occurred the gradual disappearance of various little possessions she knew that Bunting valued, notably of the old-fashioned gold watch-chain which had been given to him after the death of his first master, a master he had nursed faithfully and kindly through a long and terrible illness. There had also vanished a twisted gold tie-pin, and a large mourning ring, both gifts of former employers.

When people are living near that deep pit which divides the secure from the insecure--when they see themselves creeping closer and closer to its dread edge--they are apt, however loquacious by nature, to fall into long silences. Bunting had always been a talker, but now he talked no more. Neither did Mrs. Bunting, but then she had always been a silent woman, and that was perhaps one reason why Bunting had felt drawn to her from the very first moment he had seen her.

It had fallen out in this way. A lady had just engaged him as butler, and he had been shown, by the man whose place he was to take, into the dining-room. There, to use his own expression, he had discovered Ellen Green, carefully pouring out the glass of port wine which her then mistress always drank at 11.30 every morning. And as he, the new butler, had seen her engaged in this task, as he had watched her carefully stopper the decanter and put it back into the old wine-cooler, he had said to himself, "That is the woman for me!"

But now her stillness, her--her dumbness, had got on the unfortunate man's nerves. He no longer felt like going into the various little shops, close by, patronised by him in more prosperous days, and Mrs. Bunting also went afield to make the slender purchases which still had to be made every day or two, if they were to be saved from actually starving to death.

Suddenly, across the stillness of the dark November evening there came the muffled sounds of hurrying feet and of loud, shrill shouting outside--boys crying the late afternoon editions of the evening papers.

Bunting turned uneasily in his chair. The giving up of a daily paper had been, after his tobacco, his bitterest deprivation. And the paper was an older habit than the tobacco, for servants are great readers of newspapers.

As the shouts came through the closed windows and the thick damask curtains, Bunting felt a sudden sense of mind hunger fall upon him.

It was a shame--a damned shame--that he shouldn't know what was happening in the world outside! Only criminals are kept from hearing news of what is going on beyond their prison walls. And those shouts, those hoarse, sharp cries must portend that something really exciting had happened, something warranted to make a man forget for the moment his own intimate, gnawing troubles.

He got up, and going towards the nearest window strained his ears to listen. There fell on them, emerging now and again from the confused babel of hoarse shouts, the one clear word "Murder!"

Slowly Bunting's brain pieced the loud, indistinct cries into some sort of connected order. Yes, that was it--"Horrible Murder! Murder at St. Pancras!" Bunting remembered vaguely another murder which had been committed near St. Pancras--that of an old lady by her servant-maid. It had happened a great many years ago, but was still vividly remembered, as of special and natural interest, among the class to which he had belonged.

The newsboys--for there were more than one of them, a rather unusual thing in the Marylebone Road--were coming nearer and nearer; now they had adopted another cry, but he could not quite catch what they were crying. They were still shouting hoarsely, excitedly, but he could only hear a word or two now and then. Suddenly "The Avenger! The Avenger at his work again!" broke on his ear.
During the last fortnight four very curious and brutal murders had been committed in London and within a comparatively small area.

The first had aroused no special interest--even the second had only been awarded, in the paper Bunting was still then taking in, quite a small paragraph.

Then had come the third--and with that a wave of keen excitement, for pinned to the dress of the victim--a drunken woman--had been found a three-cornered piece of paper, on which was written, in red ink, and in printed characters, the words,

"THE AVENGER"

It was then realised, not only by those whose business it is to investigate such terrible happenings, but also by the vast world of men and women who take an intelligent interest in such sinister mysteries, that the same miscreant had committed all three crimes; and before that extraordinary fact had had time to soak well into the public mind there took place yet another murder, and again the murderer had been to special pains to make it clear that some obscure and terrible lust for vengeance possessed him.

Now everyone was talking of The Avenger and his crimes! Even the man who left their ha'porth of milk at the door each morning had spoken to Bunting about them that very day.

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Bunting came back to the fire and looked down at his wife with mild excitement. Then, seeing her pale, apathetic face, her look of weary, mournful absorption, a wave of irritation swept through him. He felt he could have shaken her!

Ellen had hardly taken the trouble to listen when he, Bunting, had come back to bed that morning, and told her what the milkman had said. In fact, she had been quite nasty about it, intimating that she didn't like hearing about such horrid things.

It was a curious fact that though Mrs. Bunting enjoyed tales of pathos and sentiment, and would listen with frigid amusement to the details of a breach of promise action, she shrank from stories of immorality or of physical violence. In the old, happy days, when they could afford to buy a paper, aye, and more than one paper daily, Bunting had often had to choke down his interest in some exciting "case" or "mystery" which was affording him pleasant mental relaxation, because any allusion to it sharply angered Ellen.

But now he was at once too dull and too miserable to care how she felt.

Walking away from the window he took a slow, uncertain step towards the door; when there he turned half round, and there came over his close-shaven, round face the rather sly, pleading look with which a child about to do something naughty glances at its parent.

But Mrs. Bunting remained quite still; her thin, narrow shoulders just showed above the back of the chair on which she was sitting, bolt upright, staring before her as if into vacancy.

Bunting turned round, opened the door, and quickly he went out into the dark hall--they had given up lighting the gas there some time ago--and opened the front door.

Walking down the small flagged path outside, he flung open the iron gate which gave on to the damp pavement. But there he hesitated. The coppers in his pocket seemed to have shrunk in number, and he remembered ruefully how far Ellen could make even four pennies go.

Then a boy ran up to him with a sheaf of evening papers, and Bunting, being sorely tempted--fell. "Give me a Sun," he said roughly, "Sun or Echo!"

But the boy, scarcely stopping to take breath, shook his head. "Only penny papers left," he gasped. "What'll yer 'ave, sir?"

With an eagerness which was mingled with shame, Bunting drew a penny out of his pocket and took a paper--it was the Evening Standard--from the boy's hand.

Then, very slowly, he shut the gate and walked back through the raw, cold air, up the flagged path, shivering yet full of eager, joyful anticipation.

Thanks to that penny he had just spent so recklessly he would pass a happy hour, taken, for once, out of his anxious, despondent, miserable self. It irritated him shrewdly to know that these moments of respite from carking care would not be shared with his poor wife, with careworn, troubled Ellen.

A hot wave of unease, almost of remorse, swept over Bunting. Ellen would never have spent that penny on herself--he knew that well enough--and if it hadn't been so cold, so foggy, so--so drizzly, he would have gone out again through the gate and stood under the street lamp to take his pleasure. He dreaded with a nervous dread the glance of Ellen's cold, reproving light-blue eye. That glance would tell him that he had had no business to waste a penny on a paper, and that well he knew it!

Suddenly the door in front of him opened, and he beard a familiar voice saying crossly, yet anxiously, "What on earth are you doing out there, Bunting? Come in--do! You'll catch your death of cold! I don't want to have you ill on
my hands as well as everything else!" Mrs. Bunting rarely uttered so many words at once nowadays.

He walked in through the front door of his cheerless house. "I went out to get a paper," he said sullenly.

After all, he was master. He had as much right to spend the money as she had; for the matter of that the money on which they were now both living had been lent, nay, pressed on him--not on Ellen--by that decent young chap, Joe Chandler. And he, Bunting, had done all he could; he had pawned everything he could pawn, while Ellen, so he resentfully noticed, still wore her wedding ring.

He stepped past her heavily, and though she said nothing, he knew she grudged him his coming joy. Then, full of rage with her and contempt for himself, and giving himself the luxury of a mild, a very mild, oath--Ellen had very early made it clear she would have no swearing in her presence--he lit the hall gas full-flare.

"How can we hope to get lodgers if they can't even see the card?" he shouted angrily.

And there was truth in what he said, for now that he had lit the gas, the oblong card, though not the word "Apartments" printed on it, could be plainly seen out-lined against the old-fashioned fanlight above the front door.

Bunting went into the sitting-room, silently followed by his wife, and then, sitting down in his nice arm-chair, he poked the little banked-up fire. It was the first time Bunting had poked the fire for many a long day, and this exertion of marital authority made him feel better. A man has to assert himself sometimes, and he, Bunting, had not asserted himself enough lately.

A little colour came into Mrs. Bunting's pale face. She was not used to be flouted in this way. For Bunting, when not thoroughly upset, was the mildest of men.

She began moving about the room, flicking off an imperceptible touch of dust here, straightening a piece of furniture there.

But her hands trembled--they trembled with excitement, with self-pity, with anger. A penny? It was dreadful--dreadful to have to worry about a penny! But they had come to the point when one has to worry about pennies. Strange that her husband didn't realise that.

Bunting looked round once or twice; he would have liked to ask Ellen to leave off fidgeting, but he was fond of peace, and perhaps, by now, a little bit ashamed of himself, so he refrained from remark, and she soon gave over what irritated him of her own accord.

But Mrs. Bunting did not come and sit down as her husband would have liked her to do. The sight of him, absorbed in his paper as he was, irritated her, and made her long to get away from him. Opening the door which separated the sitting-room from the bedroom behind, and--shutting out the aggravating vision of Bunting sitting comfortably by the now brightly burning fire, with the Evening Standard spread out before him--she sat down in the cold darkness, and pressed her hands against her temples.

Never, never had she felt so hopeless, so--so broken as now. Where was the good of having been an upright, conscientious, self-respecting woman all her life long, if it only led to this utter, degrading poverty and wretchedness? She and Bunting were just past the age which gentefolk think proper in a married couple seeking to enter service together, unless, that is, the wife happens to be a professed cook. A cook and a butler can always get a nice situation. But Mrs. Bunting was no cook. She could do all right the simple things any lodger she might get would require, but that was all.

Lodgers? How foolish she had been to think of taking lodgers! For it had been her doing. Bunting had been like butter in her hands.

Yet they had begun well, with a lodging-house in a seaside place. There they had prospered, not as they had hoped to do, but still pretty well; and then had come an epidemic of scarlet fever, and that had meant ruin for them, and for dozens, nay, hundreds, of other luckless people. Then had followed a business experiment which had proved even more disastrous, and which had left them in debt--in debt to an extent they could never hope to repay, to a good-natured former employer.

After that, instead of going back to service, as they might have done, perhaps, either together or separately, they had made up their minds to make one last effort, and they had taken over, with the trifle of money that remained to them, the lease of this house in the Marylebone Road.

In former days, when they had each been leading the sheltered, impersonal, and, above all, financially easy existence which is the compensation life offers to those men and women who deliberately take upon themselves the yoke of domestic service, they had both lived in houses overlooking Regent's Park. It had seemed a wise plan to settle in the same neighbourhood, the more so that Bunting, who had a good appearance, had retained the kind of connection which enables a man to get a job now and again as waiter at private parties.

But life moves quickly, jaggedly, for people like the Buntings. Two of his former masters had moved to another part of London, and a caterer in Baker Street whom he had known went bankrupt.

And now? Well, just now Bunting could not have taken a job had one been offered him, for he had pawned his dress clothes. He had not asked his wife's permission to do this, as so good a husband ought to have done. He had
just gone out and done it. And she had not had the heart to say anything; nay, it was with part of the money that he
had handed her silently the evening he did it that she had bought that last packet of tobacco.

And then, as Mrs. Bunting sat there thinking these painful thoughts, there suddenly came to the front door the
sound of a loud, tremulous, uncertain double knock.

CHAPTER II

Mr. Bunting jumped nervously to her feet. She stood for a moment listening in the darkness, a darkness made the
blacker by the line of light under the door behind which sat Bunting reading his paper.

And then it came again, that loud, tremulous, uncertain double knock; not a knock, so the listener told herself,
that boded any good. Would-be lodgers gave sharp, quick, bold, confident raps. No; this must be some kind of
beggar. The queerest people came at all hours, and asked--whining or threatening--for money.

Mrs. Bunting had had some sinister experiences with men and women --especially women--drawn from that
nameless, mysterious class made up of the human flotsam and jetsam which drifts about every great city. But since
she had taken to leaving the gas in the passage unlit at night she had been very little troubled with that kind of
visitors, those human bats which are attracted by any kind of light but leave alone those who live in darkness.

She opened the door of the sitting-room. It was Bunting's place to go to the front door, but she knew far better
than he did how to deal with difficult or obtrusive callers. Still, somehow, she would have liked him to go to-night.
But Bunting sat on, absorbed in his newspaper; all he did at the sound of the bedroom door opening was to look up
and say, " Didn't you hear a knock?"

Without answering his question she went out into the hall.

Slowly she opened the front door.

On the top of the three steps which led up to the door, there stood the long, lanky figure of a man, clad in an
Inverness cape and an old-fashioned top hat. He waited for a few seconds blinking at her, perhaps dazzled by the
light of the gas in the passage. Mrs. Bunting's trained perception told her at once that this man, odd as he looked,
was a gentleman, belonging by birth to the class with whom her former employment had brought her in contact.

"Is it not a fact that you let lodgings?" he asked, and there was something shrill, unbalanced, hesitating, in his
voice.

"Yes, sir," she said uncertainly--it was a long, long time since anyone had come after their lodgings, anyone, that
is, that they could think of taking into their respectable house.

Instinctively she stepped a little to one side, and the stranger walked past her, and so into the hall.

And then, for the first time, Mrs. Bunting noticed that he held a narrow bag in his left hand. It was quite a new
bag, made of strong brown leather.

"I am looking for some quiet rooms," he said; then he repeated the words, " quiet rooms," in a dreamy, absent
way, and as he uttered them he looked nervously round him.

Then his sallow face brightened, for the hall had been carefully furnished, and was very clean.

There was a neat hat-and-umbrella stand, and the stranger's weary feet fell soft on a good, serviceable dark-red
rug, which matched in colour the flock-paper on the walls.

A very superior lodging-house this, and evidently a superior lodging-house keeper.

"You'd find my rooms quite quiet, sir," she said gently. " And just now I have four to let. The house is empty,
save for my husband and me, sir."

Mrs. Bunting spoke in a civil, passionless voice. It seemed too good to be true, this sudden coming of a possible
lodger, and of a lodger who spoke in the pleasant, courteous way and voice which recalled to the poor woman her
happy, far-off days of youth and of security.

"That sounds very suitable," he said. " Four rooms? Well, perhaps I ought only to take two rooms, but, still, I
should like to see all four before I make my choice."

How fortunate, how very fortunate it was that Bunting had lit the gas! But for that circumstance this gentleman
would have passed them by.

She turned towards the staircase, quite forgetting in her agitation that the front door was still open; and it was the
stranger whom she already in her mind described as " the lodger," who turned and rather quickly walked down the
passage and shut it.

" Oh, thank you, sir!" she exclaimed. " I'm sorry you should have had the trouble."

For a moment their eyes met. " It's not safe to leave a front door open in London," he said, rather sharply. " I hope
you do not often do that. It would be so easy for anyone to slip in."

Mrs. Bunting felt rather upset. The stranger had still spoken courteously, but he was evidently very much put
out.

" I assure you, sir, I never leave my front door open," she answered hastily. " You needn't be at all afraid of that!"

And then, through the closed door of the sitting-room, came the sound of Bunting coughing--it was just a little,
hard cough, but Mrs. Bunting's future lodger started violently.

"Who's that?" he said, putting out a hand and clutching her arm. "Whatever was that?"

"Only my husband, sir. He went out to buy a paper a few minutes ago, and the cold just caught him, I suppose."

"Your husband--?" he looked at her intently, suspiciously. "What--what, may I ask, is your husband's occupation?"

Mrs. Bunting drew herself up. The question as to Bunting's occupation was no one's business but theirs. Still, it wouldn't do for her to show offence. "He goes out waiting," she said stiffly. "He was a gentleman's servant, sir. He could, of course, valet you should you require him to do so."

And then she turned and led the way up the steep, narrow staircase.

At the top of the first flight of stairs was what Mrs. Bunting, to herself, called the drawing-room floor. It consisted of a sitting-room in front, and a bedroom behind. She opened the door of the sitting-room and quickly lit the chandelier.

This front room was pleasant enough, though perhaps a little over-encumbered with furniture. Covering the floor was a green carpet simulating moss; four chairs were placed round the table which occupied the exact middle of the apartment, and in the corner, opposite the door giving on to the landing, was a roomy, old-fashioned chiffonier.

On the dark-green walls hung a series of eight engravings, portraits of early Victorian belles, clad in lace and tarletan ball dresses, clipped from an old Book of Beauty. Mrs. Bunting was very fond of these pictures; she thought they gave the drawing-room a note of elegance and refinement.

As she hurriedly turned up the gas she was glad, glad indeed, that she had summoned up sufficient energy, two days ago, to give the room a thorough turn-out.

It had remained for a long time in the state in which it had been left by its last dishonest, dirty occupants when they had been scared into going away by Bunting's rough threats of the police. But now it was in apple-pie order, with one paramount exception, of which Mrs. Bunting was painfully aware. There were no white curtains to the windows, but that omission could soon be remedied if this gentleman really took the lodgings.

But what was this--? The stranger was looking round him rather dubiously. "This is rather--rather too grand for me," he said at last "I should like to see your other rooms, Mrs. er--"

"Bunting," she said softly. "Bunting, sir."

And as she spoke the dark, heavy load of care again came down and settled on her sad, burdened heart. Perhaps she had been mistaken, after all--or rather, she had not been mistaken in one sense, but perhaps this gentleman was a poor gentleman--too poor, that is, to afford the rent of more than one room, say eight or ten shillings a week; eight or ten shillings a week would be very little use to her and Bunting, though better than nothing at all.

"Will you just look at the bedroom, sir?"

"No," he said, "no. I think I should like to see what you have farther up the house, Mrs. er--" and then, as if making a prodigious mental effort, he brought out her name, "Bunting," with a kind of gasp.

The two top rooms were, of course, immediately above the drawing-room floor. But they looked poor and mean, owing to the fact that they were bare of any kind of ornament. Very little trouble had been taken over their arrangement; in fact, they had been left in much the same condition as that in which the Buntings had found them.

For the matter of that, it is difficult to make a nice, genteel sitting-room out of an apartment of which the principal features are a sink and a big gas stove. The gas stove, of an obsolete pattern, was fed by a tiresome, shilling-in-the-slot arrangement. It had been the property of the people from whom the Buntings had taken over the lease of the house, who, knowing it to be of no monetary value, had thrown it in among the humble fittings they had left behind.

What furniture there was in the room was substantial and clean, as everything belonging to Mrs. Bunting was bound to be, but it was a bare, uncomfortable-looking place, and the landlady now felt sorry that she had done nothing to make it appear more attractive.

To her surprise, however, her companion's dark, sensitive, hatchet-shaped face became irradiated with satisfaction. "Capital! Capital!" he exclaimed, for the first time putting down the bag he held at his feet, and rubbing his long, thin hands together with a quick, nervous movement.

"This is just what I have been looking for." He walked with long, eager strides towards the gas stove. "First-rate--quite first-rate! Exactly what I wanted to find! You must understand, Mrs.--er--Bunting, that I am a man of science. I make, that is, all sorts of experiments, and I often require the--ah, well, the presence of great heat."

He shot out a hand, which she noticed shook a little, towards the stove. "This, too, will be useful--exceedingly useful, to me," and he touched the edge of the stone sink with a lingering, caressing touch.

He threw his head back and passed his hand over his high, bare forehead; then, moving towards a chair, he sat down--wearily. "I'm tired," he muttered in a low voice, "tired--tired! I've been walking about all day, Mrs. Bunting, and I could find nothing to sit down upon. They do not put benches for tired men in the London streets. They do so
on the Continent. In some ways they are far more humane on the Continent than they are in England, Mrs. Bunting."

"Indeed, sir," she said civilly; and then, after a nervous glance, she asked the question of which the answer would mean so much to her, "Then you mean to take my rooms, sir?"

"This room, certainly," he said, looking round. "This room is exactly what I have been looking for, and longing for, the last few days;" and then hastily he added, "I mean this kind of place is what I have always wanted to possess, Mrs. Bunting. You would be surprised if you knew how difficult it is to get anything of the sort. But now my weary search has ended, and that is a relief --a very, very great relief to me!"

He stood up and looked round him with a dreamy, abstracted air. And then, "Where's my bag?" he asked suddenly, and there came a note of sharp, angry fear in his voice. He glared at the quiet woman standing before him, and for a moment Mrs. Bunting felt a tremor of fright shoot through her. It seemed a pity that Bunting was so far away, right down the house.

But Mrs. Bunting was aware that eccentricity has always been a perquisite, as it were the special luxury, of the well-born and of the well-educated. Scholars, as she well knew, are never quite like other people, and her new lodger was undoubtedly a scholar. "Surely I had a bag when I came in?" he said in a scared, troubled voice.

"Here it is, sir," she said soothingly, and, stooping, picked it up and handed it to him. And as she did so she noticed that the bag was not at all heavy; it was evidently by no means full.

He took it eagerly from her. "I beg your pardon," he muttered. "But there is something in that bag which is very precious to me --something I procured with infinite difficulty, and which I could never get again without running into great danger, Mrs. Bunting. That must be the excuse for my late agitation."

"About terms, sir?" she said a little timidly, returning to the subject which meant so much, so very much to her.

"About terms?" he echoed. And then there came a pause. "My name is Sleuth," he said suddenly,--"S-l-e-u-t-h. Think of a hound, Mrs. Bunting, and you'll never forget my name. I could provide you with a reference--" (he gave her what she described to herself as a funny, sideways look), "but I should prefer you to dispense with that, if you don't mind. I am quite willing to pay you--well, shall we say a month in advance?"

A spot of red shot into Mrs. Bunting's cheeks. She felt sick with relief--nay, with a joy which was almost pain. She had not known till that moment how hungry she was--how eager for--a good meal. "That would be all right, sir," she murmured.

"And what are you going to charge me?" There had come a kindly, almost a friendly note into his voice. "With attendance, mind! I shall expect you to give me attendance, and I need hardly ask if you can cook, Mrs. Bunting?"

"Oh, yes, sir," she said. "I am a plain cook. What would you say to twenty-five shillings a week, sir?" She looked at him deprecatingly, and as he did not answer she went on falteringly, "You see, sir, it may seem a good deal, but you would have the best of attendance and careful cooking--and my husband, sir--he would be pleased to valet you."

"I shouldn't want anything of that sort done for me," said Mr. Sleuth hastily. "I prefer looking after my own clothes. I am used to waiting on myself. But, Mrs. Bunting, I have a great dislike to sharing lodgings--"

She interrupted eagerly, "I could let you have the use of the two floors for the same price--that is, until we get another lodger. I shouldn't like you to sleep in the back room up here, sir. It's such a poor little room. You could do as you say, sir--do your work and your experiments up here, and then have your meals in the drawing-room."

"Yes," he said hesitatingly, "that sounds a good plan. And if I offered you two pounds, or two guineas? Might I then rely on your not taking another lodger?"

"Yes," she said quietly. "I'd be very glad only to have you to wait on, sir."

"I suppose you have a key to the door of this room, Mrs. Bunting? I don't like to be disturbed while I'm working."

He waited a moment, and then said again, rather urgently, "I suppose you have a key to this door, Mrs. Bunting?"

"Oh, yes, sir, there's a key--a very nice little key. The people who lived here before had a new kind of lock put on to the door." She went over, and throwing the door open, showed him that a round disk had been fitted above the old keyhole.

He nodded his head, and then, after standing silent a little, as if absorbed in thought, "Forty-two shillings a week? Yes, that will suit me perfectly. And I'll begin now by paying my first month's rent in advance. Now, four times forty-two shillings is--"he jerked his head back and stared at his new landlady; for the first time he smiled, a queer, wry smile--"why, just eight pounds eight shillings, Mrs. Bunting!"

He thrust his hand through into an inner pocket of his long cape-like coat and took out a handful of sovereigns. Then he began putting these down in a row on the bare wooden table which stood in the centre of the room. "Here's five--six--seven--eight--nine --ten pounds. You'd better keep the odd change, Mrs. Bunting, for I shall want you to do some shopping for me to-morrow morning. I met with a misfortune to-day." But the new lodger did not speak as
if his misfortune, whatever it was, weighed on his spirits.

"Indeed, sir. I'm sorry to hear that." Mrs. Bunting's heart was going thump--thump--thump. She felt extraordinarily moved, dizzy with relief and joy.

"Yes, a very great misfortune! I lost my luggage, the few things I managed to bring away with me." His voice dropped suddenly. "I shouldn't have said that," he muttered. "I was a fool to say that!" Then, more loudly, "Someone said to me, 'You can't go into a lodging-house without any luggage. They wouldn't take you in.' But you have taken me in, Mrs. Bunting, and I'm grateful for--for the kind way you have met me--" He looked at her feelingly, appealingly, and Mrs. Bunting was touched. She was beginning to feel very kindly towards her new lodger.

"I hope I know a gentleman when I see one," she said, with a break in her staid voice.

"I shall have to see about getting some clothes to-morrow, Mrs. Bunting." Again he looked at her appealingly.

"I expect you'd like to wash your hands now, sir. And would you tell me what you'd like for supper? We haven't much in the house."

"Oh, anything'll do," he said hastily. "I don't want you to go out for me. It's a cold, foggy, wet night, Mrs. Bunting. If you have a little bread-and-butter and a cup of milk I shall be quite satisfied."

"I have a nice sausage," she said hesitatingly.

It was a very nice sausage, and she had bought it that same morning for Bunting's supper; as to herself, she had been going to content herself with a little bread and cheese. But now--wonderful, almost, intoxicating thought--she could send Bunting out to get anything they both liked. The ten sovereigns lay in her hand full of comfort and good cheer.

"A sausage? No, I fear that will hardly do. I never touch flesh meat," he said; "it is a long, long time since I tasted a sausage, Mrs. Bunting."

"Is it indeed, sir?" She hesitated a moment, then asked stiffly, "And will you be requiring any beer, or wine, sir?"

A strange, wild look of lowering wrath suddenly filled Mr. Sleuth's pale face.

"Certainly not. I thought I had made that quite clear, Mrs. Bunting. I had hoped to hear that you were an abstainer--""

"So I am, sir, lifelong. And so's Bunting been since we married." She might have said, had she been a woman given to make such confidences, that she had made Bunting abstain very early in their acquaintance. That he had given in about that had been the thing that first made her believe, that he was sincere in all the nonsense that he talked to her, in those far-away days of his courting. Glad she was now that he had taken the pledge as a younger man; but for that nothing would have kept him from the drink during the bad times they had gone through.

And then, going downstairs, she showed Mr. Sleuth the nice bedroom which opened out of the drawing-room. It was a replica of Mrs. Bunting's own room just underneath, excepting that everything up here had cost just a little more, and was therefore rather better in quality.

The new lodger looked round him with such a strange expression of content and peace stealing over his worn face. "A haven of rest," he muttered; and then, "'He bringeth them to their desired haven.' Beautiful words, Mrs. Bunting."

"Yes, sir."

Mrs. Bunting felt a little startled. It was the first time anyone had quoted the Bible to her for many a long day. But it seemed to set the seal, as it were, on Mr. Sleuth's respectability.

What a comfort it was, too, that she had to deal with only one lodger, and that a gentleman, instead of with a married couple! Very peculiar married couples had drifted in and out of Mr. and Mrs. Bunting's lodgings, not only here, in London, but at the seaside.

How unlucky they had been, to be sure! Since they had come to London not a single pair of lodgers had been even moderately respectable and kindly. The last lot had belonged to that horrible underworld of men and women who, having, as the phrase goes, seen better days, now only keep their heads above water with the help of petty fraud.

"I'll bring you up some hot water in a minute, sir, and some clean towels," she said, going to the door.

And then Mr. Sleuth turned quickly round. "Mrs. Bunting"--and as he spoke he stammered a little--"I--I don't want you to interpret the word attendance too liberally. You need not run yourself off your feet for me. I'm accustomed to look after myself."

And, queerly, uncomfortably, she felt herself dismissed--even a little snubbed. "All right, sir," she said. "I'll only just let you know when I've your supper ready."

CHAPTER III

But what was a little snub compared with the intense relief and joy of going down and telling Bunting of the great piece of good fortune which had fallen their way?

Staid Mrs. Bunting seemed to make but one leap down the steep stairs. In the hall, however, she pulled herself
together, and tried to still her agitation. She had always disliked and despised any show of emotion; she called such betrayal of feeling "making a fuss."

Opening the door of their sitting-room, she stood for a moment looking at her husband's bent back, and she realised, with a pang of pain, how the last few weeks had aged him.

Bunting suddenly looked round, and, seeing his wife, stood up. He put the paper he had been holding down on to the table: "Well," he said, "well, who was it, then?"

He felt rather ashamed of himself; it was he who ought to have answered the door and done all that parleying of which he had heard murmurs.

And then in a moment his wife's hand shot out, and the ten sovereigns fell in a little clinking heap on the table. "Look there!" she whispered, with an excited, tearful quiver in her voice. "Look there, Bunting!"

And Bunting did look there, but with a troubled, frowning gaze.

He was not quick-witted, but at once he jumped to the conclusion that his wife had just had in a furniture dealer, and that this ten pounds represented all their nice furniture upstairs. If that were so, then it was the beginning of the end. That furniture in the first-floor front had cost--Ellen had reminded him of the fact bitterly only yesterday--seventeen pounds nine shillings, and every single item had been a bargain. It was too bad that she had only got ten pounds for it.

Yet he hadn't the heart to reproach her.

He did not speak as he looked across at her, and meeting that troubled, rebuking glance, she guessed what it was that he thought had happened.

"We've a new lodger!" she cried. "And--and, Bunting? He's quite the gentleman! He actually offered to pay four weeks in advance, at two guineas a week."

"No, never!"

Bunting moved quickly round the table, and together they stood there, fascinated by the little heap of gold. "But there's ten sovereigns here," he said suddenly.

"Yes, the gentleman said I'd have to buy some things for him to-morrow. And, oh, Bunting, he's so well spoken, I really felt that--I really felt that--" and then Mrs. Bunting, taking a step or two sideways, sat down, and throwing her little black apron over her face burst into gasping sobs.

Bunting patted her back timidly. "Ellen?" he said, much moved by her agitation, "Ellen? Don't take on so, my dear--"

"I won't," she sobbed, "I--I won't! I'm a fool--I know I am! But, oh, I didn't think we was ever going to have any luck again!"

And then she told him--or rather tried to tell him--what the lodger was like. Mrs. Bunting was no hand at talking, but one thing she did impress on her husband's mind, namely, that Mr. Sleuth was eccentric, as so many clever people are eccentric--that is, in a harmless way--and that he must be humoured.

"He says he doesn't want to be waited on much," she said at last wiping her eyes, "but I can see he will want a good bit of looking after, all the same, poor gentleman."

And just as the words left her mouth there came the unfamiliar sound of a loud ring. It was that of the drawing-room bell being pulled again and again.

Bunting looked at his wife eagerly. "I think I'd better go up, eh, Ellen?" he said. He felt quite anxious to see their new lodger. For the matter of that, it would be a relief to be doing something again.

"Yes," she answered, "you go up! Don't keep him waiting! I wonder what it is he wants? I said I'd let him know when his supper was ready."

A moment later Bunting came down again. There was an odd smile on his face. "Whatever d'you think he wanted?" he whispered mysteriously. And as she said nothing, he went on, "He's asked me for the loan of a Bible!"

"Well, I don't see anything so out of the way in that," she said hastily, "specially if he don't feel well. I'll take it up to him."

And then going to a small table which stood between the two windows, Mrs. Bunting took off it a large Bible, which had been given to her as a wedding present by a married lady with whose mother she had lived for several years.

"He said it would do quite well when you take up his supper," said Bunting; and, then, "Ellen? He's a queer-looking cove--not like any gentleman I ever had to do with."

"He is a gentleman," said Mrs. Bunting rather fiercely.

"Oh, yes, that's all right." But still he looked at her doubtfully. "I asked him if he'd like me to just put away his clothes. But, Ellen, he said he hadn't got any clothes!"

"No more he hasn't;" she spoke quickly, defensively. "He had the misfortune to lose his luggage. He's one dishonest folk 'ud take advantage of."
"Yes, one can see that with half an eye," Bunting agreed.

And then there was silence for a few moments, while Mrs. Bunting put down on a little bit of paper the things she wanted her husband to go out and buy for her. She handed him the list, together with a sovereign. "Be as quick as you can," she said, "for I feel a bit hungry. I'll be going down now to see about Mr. Sleuth's supper. He only wants a glass of milk and two eggs. I'm glad I've never fallen to bad eggs!"

"Sleuth," echoed Bunting, staring at her. "What a queer name! How d'you spell it--S-l-u-t-h?"

"No," she shot out, "S-l-e--u--t--h."

"Oh," he said doubtfully.

"He said, 'Think of a hound and you'll never forget my name,'" and Mrs. Bunting smiled.

When he got to the door, Bunting turned round: "We'll now be able to pay young Chandler back some o' that thirty shillings. I am glad." She nodded; her heart, as the saying is, too full for words.

And then each went about his and her business--Bunting out into the drenching fog, his wife down to her cold kitchen.

The lodger's tray was soon ready; everything upon it nicely and daintily arranged. Mrs. Bunting knew how to wait upon a gentleman.

Just as the landlady was going up the kitchen stair, she suddenly remembered Mr. Sleuth's request for a Bible. Putting the tray down in the hall, she went into her sitting-room and took up the Book; but when back in the hall she hesitated a moment as to whether it was worth while to make two journeys. But, no, she thought she could manage; clasping the large, heavy volume under her arm, and taking up the tray, she walked slowly up the staircase.

But a great surprise awaited her; in fact, when Mr. Sleuth's landlady opened the door of the drawing-room she very nearly dropped the tray. She actually did drop the Bible, and it fell with a heavy thud to the ground.

The new lodger had turned all those nice framed engravings of the early Victorian beauties, of which Mrs. Bunting had been so proud, with their faces to the wall!

For a moment she was really too surprised to speak. Putting the tray down on the table, she stooped and picked up the Book. It troubled her that the Book should have fallen to the ground; but really she hadn't been able to help it--it was mercy that the tray hadn't fallen, too.

Mr. Sleuth got up. "I--I have taken the liberty to arrange the room as I should wish it to be," he said awkwardly.

"You see, Mrs.--er--Bunting, I felt as I sat here that these women's eyes followed me about. It was a most unpleasant sensation, and gave me quite an eerie feeling."

The landlady was now laying a small tablecloth over half of the table. She made no answer to her lodger's remark, for the good reason that she did not know what to say.

Her silence seemed to distress Mr. Sleuth. After what seemed a long pause, he spoke again.

"I prefer bare walls, Mrs. Bunting," he spoke with some agitation. "As a matter of fact, I have been used to seeing bare walls about me for a long time." And then, at last his landlady answered him, in a composed, soothing voice, which somehow did him good to hear. "I quite understand, sir. And when Bunting comes in he shall take the pictures all down. We have plenty of space in our own rooms for them."

"Thank you--thank you very much."

Mr. Sleuth appeared greatly relieved.

"And I have brought you up my Bible, sir. I understood you wanted the loan of it?"

Mr. Sleuth stared at her as if dazed for a moment; and then, rousing himself, he said, "Yes, yes, I do. There is no reading like the Book. There is something there which suits every state of mind, aye, and of body too--"

"Very true, sir." And then Mrs. Bunting, having laid out what really looked a very appetising little meal, turned round and quietly shut the door.

She went down straight into her sitting-room and waited there for Bunting, instead of going to the kitchen to clear up. And as she did so there came to her a comfortable recollection, an incident of her long-past youth, in the days when she, then Ellen Green, had maided a dear old lady.

The old lady had a favourite nephew--a bright, jolly young gentleman, who was learning to paint animals in Paris. And one morning Mr. Algernon--that was his rather peculiar Christian name--had had the impudence to turn to the wall six beautiful engravings of paintings done by the famous Mr. Landseer!

Mrs. Bunting remembered all the circumstances as if they had only occurred yesterday, and yet she had not thought of them for years.

It was quite early; she had come down--for in those days maids weren't thought so much of as they are now, and she slept with the upper housemaid, and it was the upper housemaid's duty to be down very early--and, there, in the dining-room, she had found Mr. Algernon engaged in turning each engraving to the wall! Now, his aunt thought all the world of those pictures, and Ellen had felt quite concerned, for it doesn't do for a young gentleman to put himself wrong with a kind aunt.
"Oh, sir," she had exclaimed in dismay, "whatever are you doing?" And even now she could almost hear his merry voice, as he had answered, "I am doing my duty, fair Helen"--he had always called her "fair Helen" when no one was listening. "How can I draw ordinary animals when I see these half-human monsters staring at me all the time I am having my breakfast, my lunch, and my dinner?" That was what Mr. Algernon had said in his own saucy way, and that was what he repeated in a more serious, respectful manner to his aunt, when that dear old lady had come downstairs. In fact he had declared, quite soberly, that the beautiful animals painted by Mr. Landseer put his eye out!

But his aunt had been very much annoyed--in fact, she had made him turn the pictures all back again; and as long as he stayed there he just had to put up with what he called "those half-human monsters." Mrs. Bunting, sitting there, thinking the matter of Mr. Sleuth's odd behaviour over, was glad to recall that funny incident of her long-gone youth. It seemed to prove that her new lodger was not so strange as he appeared to be. Still, when Bunting came in, she did not tell him the queer thing which had happened. She told herself that she would be quite able to manage the taking down of the pictures in the drawing-room herself.

But before getting ready their own supper, Mr. Sleuth's landlady went upstairs to clear away, and when on the staircase she heard the sound of--was it talking, in the drawing-room? Startled, she waited a moment on the landing outside the drawing-room door, then she realised that it was only the lodger reading aloud to himself. There was something very awful in the words which rose and fell on her listening ears:

"A strange woman is a narrow gate. She also lieth in wait as for a prey, and increaseth the transgressors among men."

She remained where she was, her hand on the handle of the door, and again there broke on her shrinking ears that curious, high, sing-song voice, "Her house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death."

It made the listener feel quite queer. But at last she summoned up courage, knocked, and walked in.

"I'd better clear away, sir, had I not?" she said. And Mr. Sleuth nodded.

Then he got up and closed the Book. "I think I'll go to bed now," he said. "I am very, very tired. I've had a long and a very weary day, Mrs. Bunting."

After he had disappeared into the back room, Mrs. Bunting climbed up on a chair and unhooked the pictures which had so offended Mr. Sleuth. Each left an unsightly mark on the wall--but that, after all, could not be helped. Treading softly, so that Bunting should not hear her, she carried them down, two by two, and stood them behind her bed.

CHAPTER IV

Mrs. Bunting woke up the next morning feeling happier than she had felt for a very, very long time.

For just one moment she could not think why she felt so different--and then she suddenly remembered.

How comfortable it was to know that upstairs, just over her head, lay, in the well-found bed she had bought with such satisfaction at an auction held in a Baker Street house, a lodger who was paying two guineas a week! Something seemed to tell her that Mr. Sleuth would be "a permanency." In any case, it wouldn't be her fault if he wasn't. As to his--his queerness, well, there's always something funny in everybody. But after she had got up, and as the morning wore itself away, Mrs. Bunting grew a little anxious, for there came no sound at all from the new lodger's rooms. At twelve, however, the drawing-room bell rang. Mrs. Bunting hurried upstairs. She was painfully anxious to please and satisfy Mr. Sleuth. His coming had only been in the nick of time to save them from terrible disaster.

She found her lodger up, and fully dressed. He was sitting at the round table which occupied the middle of the sitting-room, and his landlady's large Bible lay open before him.

As Mrs. Bunting came in, he looked up, and she was troubled to see how tired and worn he seemed.

"You did not happen," he asked, "to have a Concordance, Mrs. Bunting?"

She shook her head; she had no idea what a Concordance could be, but she was quite sure that she had nothing of the sort about.

And then her new lodger proceeded to tell her what it was he desired her to buy for him. She had supposed the bag he had brought with him to contain certain little necessaries of civilised life--such articles, for instance, as a comb and brush, a set of razors, a toothbrush, to say nothing of a couple of nightshirts--but no, that was evidently not so, for Mr. Sleuth required all these things to be bought now.

After having cooked him a nice breakfast Mrs. Bunting hurried out to purchase the things of which he was in urgent need.

How pleasant it was to feel that there was money in her purse again--not only someone else's money, but money she was now in the very act of earning so agreeably.

Mrs. Bunting first made her way to a little barber's shop close by. It was there she purchased the brush and comb and the razors. It was a funny, rather smelly little place, and she hurried as much as she could, the more so that the
foreigner who served her insisted on telling her some of the strange, peculiar details of this Avenger murder which had taken place forty-eight hours before, and in which Bunting took such a morbid interest.

The conversation upset Mrs. Bunting. She didn't want to think of anything painful or disagreeable on such a day as this.

Then she came back and showed the lodger her various purchases. Mr. Sleuth was pleased with everything, and thanked her most courteously. But when she suggested doing his bedroom he frowned, and looked quite put out.

"Please wait till this evening," he said hastily. "It is my custom to stay at home all day. I only care to walk about the streets when the lights are lit. You must bear with me, Mrs. Bunting, if I seem a little, just a little, unlike the lodgers you have been accustomed to. And I must ask you to understand that I must not be disturbed when thinking out my problems--" He broke off short, sighed, then added solemnly, "for mine are the great problems of life and death."

And Mrs. Bunting willingly fell in with his wishes. In spite of her prim manner and love of order, Mr. Sleuth's landlady was a true woman --she had, that is, an infinite patience with masculine vagaries and oddities.

When she was downstairs again, Mr. Sleuth's landlady met with a surprise; but it was quite a pleasant surprise. While she had been upstairs, talking to the lodger, Bunting's young friend, Joe Chandler, the detective, had come in, and as she walked into the sitting-room she saw that her husband was pushing half a sovereign across the table towards Joe.

Joe Chandler's fair, good-natured face was full of satisfaction: not at seeing his money again, mark you, but at the news Bunting had evidently been telling him--that news of the sudden wonderful change in their fortunes, the coming of an ideal lodger.

"Mr. Sleuth don't want me to do his bedroom till he's gone out!" she exclaimed. And then she sat down for a bit of a rest.

It was a comfort to know that the lodger was eating his good breakfast, and there was no need to think of him for the present. In a few minutes she would be going down to make her own and Bunting's dinner, and she told Joe Chandler that he might as well stop and have a bite with them.

Her heart warmed to the young man, for Mrs. Bunting was in a mood which seldom surprised her--a mood to be pleased with anything and everything. Nay, more. When Bunting began to ask Joe Chandler about the last of those awful Avenger murders, she even listened with a certain languid interest to all he had to say.

In the morning newspaper which Bunting had begun taking again that very day three columns were devoted to the extraordinary mystery which was now beginning to be the one topic of talk all over London, West and East, North and South. Bunting had read out little bits about it while they ate their breakfast, and in spite of herself Mrs. Bunting had felt thrilled and excited.

"They do say," observed Bunting cautiously, "They do say, Joe, that the police have a clue they won't say nothing about?" He looked expectantly at his visitor. To Bunting the fact that Chandler was attached to the detective section of the Metropolitan Police invested the young man with a kind of sinister glory--especially just now, when these awful and mysterious crimes were amazing and terrifying the town.

"Them who says that says wrong," answered Chandler slowly, and a look of unease, of resentment came over his fair, stolid face, "'Twould make a good bit of difference to me if the Yard had a clue."

And then Mrs. Bunting interposed. "Why that, Joe?" she said, smiling indulgently; the young man's keenness about his work pleased her. And in his slow, sure way Joe Chandler was very keen, and took his job very seriously. He put his whole heart and mind into it.

"Well, 'tis this way," he explained. "From to-day I'm on this business myself. You see, Mrs. Bunting, the Yard's nettled--that's what it is, and we're all on our mettle--that we are. I was right down sorry for the poor chap who was on point duty in the street where the last one happened--"

"No!" said Bunting incredulously. "You don't mean there was a policeman there, within a few yards?"

That fact hadn't been recorded in his newspaper.

Chandler nodded. "That's exactly what I do mean, Mr. Bunting! The man is near off his head, so I'm told. He did hear a yell, so he says, but he took no notice--there are a good few yells in that part o' London, as you can guess. People always quarrelling and rowing at one another in such low parts."

"Have you seen the bits of grey paper on which the monster writes his name?" inquired Bunting eagerly.

Public imagination had been much stirred by the account of those three-cornered pieces of grey paper, pinned to the victims' skirts, on which was roughly written in red ink and in printed characters the words "The Avenger."

His round, fat face was full of questioning eagerness. He put his elbows on the table, and stared across expectantly at the young man.

"Yes, I have," said Joe briefly.

"A funny kind of visiting card, eh?" Bunting laughed; the notion struck him as downright comic.
But Mrs. Bunting coloured. "It isn't a thing to make a joke about," she said reprovingly.

And Chandler backed her up. "No, indeed," he said feelingly. "I'll never forget what I've been made to see over this job. And as for that grey bit of paper, Mr. Bunting—or, rather, those grey bits of paper"—he corrected himself hastily—"you know they've three of them now at the Yard—well, they give me the horrors!"

And then he jumped up. "That reminds me that I oughtn't to be wasting my time in pleasant company—"

"Won't you stay and have a bit of dinner?" said Mrs. Bunting solicitously.

But the detective shook his head. "No," he said, "I had a bite before I came out. Our job's a queer kind of job, as you know. A lot's left to our discretion, so to speak, but it don't leave us much time for lazing about, I can tell you."

When he reached the door he turned round, and with elaborate carelessness he inquired, "Any chance of Miss Daisy coming to London again soon?"

Bunting shook his head, but his face brightened. He was very, very fond of his only child; the pity was he saw her so seldom. "No," he said, "I'm afraid not Joe. Old Aunt, as we calls the old lady, keeps Daisy pretty tightly tied to her apron-string. She was quite put about that week the child was up with us last June."

"Indeed? Well, so long!"

After his wife had let their friend out, Bunting said cheerfully, "Joe seems to like our Daisy, eh, Ellen?"

But Mrs. Bunting shook her head scornfully. She did not exactly dislike the girl, though she did not hold with the way Bunting's daughter was being managed by that old aunt of hers—an idle, good-for-nothing way, very different from the fashion in which she herself had been trained at the Foundling, for Mrs. Bunting as a little child had known no other home, no other family than those provided by good Captain Coram.

"Joe Chandler's too sensible a young chap to be thinking of girls yet awhile," she said tartly.

"No doubt you're right," Bunting agreed. "Times be changed. In my young days chaps always had time for that. 'Twas just a notion that came into my head, hearing him asking, anxious-like, after her."

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About five o'clock, after the street lamps were well alight, Mr. Sleuth went out, and that same evening there came two parcels addressed to his landlady. These parcels contained clothes. But it was quite clear to Mrs. Bunting's eyes that they were not new clothes. In fact, they had evidently been bought in some good second-hand clothes-shop. A funny thing for a real gentleman like Mr. Sleuth to do! It proved that he had given up all hope of getting back his lost luggage.

When the lodger had gone out he had not taken his bag with him, of that Mrs. Bunting was positive. And yet, though she searched high and low for it, she could not find the place where Mr. Sleuth kept it. And at last, had it not been that she was a very clear-headed woman, with a good memory, she would have been disposed to think that the bag had never existed, save in her imagination.

But no, she could not tell herself that! She remembered exactly how it had looked when Mr. Sleuth had first stood, a strange, queer-looking figure of a man, on her doorstep.

She further remembered how he had put the bag down on the floor of the top front room, and then, forgetting what he had done, how he had asked her eagerly, in a tone of angry fear, where the bag was—only to find it safely lodged at his feet!

As time went on Mrs. Bunting thought a great deal about that bag, for, strange and amazing fact, she never saw Mr. Sleuth's bag again. But, of course, she soon formed a theory as to its whereabouts. The brown leather bag which had formed Mr. Sleuth's only luggage the afternoon of his arrival was almost certainly locked up in the lower part of the drawing-room chiffonier. Mr. Sleuth evidently always carried the key of the little corner cupboard about his person; Mrs. Bunting had also had a good hunt for that key, but, as was the case with the bag, the key disappeared, and she never saw either the one or the other again.

CHAPTER V

How quietly, how uneventfully, how pleasantly, sped the next few days. Already life was settling down into a groove. Waiting on Mr. Sleuth was just what Mrs. Bunting could manage to do easily, and without tiring herself.

It had at once become clear that the lodger preferred to be waited on only by one person, and that person his landlady. He gave her every little trouble. Indeed, it did her good having to wait on the lodger; it even did her good that he was not like other gentlemen; for the fact occupied her mind, and in a way it amused her. The more so that whatever his oddities Mr. Sleuth had none of those tiresome, disagreeable ways with which landladies are only too familiar, and which seem peculiar only to those human beings who also happen to be lodgers. To take but one point: Mr. Sleuth did not ask to be called unduly early. Bunting and his Ellen had fallen into the way of lying rather late in the morning, and it was a great comfort not to have to turn out to make the lodger a cup of tea at seven, or even half-past seven. Mr. Sleuth seldom required anything before eleven.

But odd he certainly was.

The second evening he had been with them Mr. Sleuth had brought in a book of which the queer name was
Cruden's Concordance. That and the Bible--Mrs. Bunting had soon discovered that there was a relation between the two books--seemed to be the lodger's only reading. He spent hours each day, generally after he had eaten the breakfast which also served for luncheon, poring over the Old Testament and over that strange kind of index to the Book.

As for the delicate and yet the all-important question of money, Mr. Sleuth was everything--everything that the most exacting landlady could have wished. Never had there been a more confiding or trusting gentleman. On the very first day he had been with them he had allowed his money--the considerable sum of one hundred and eighty-four sovereigns--to lie about wrapped up in little pieces of rather dirty newspaper on his dressing-table. That had quite upset Mrs. Bunting. She had allowed herself respectfully to point out to him that what he was doing was foolish, indeed wrong. But as only answer he had laughed, and she had been startled when the loud, unusual and discordant sound had issued from his thin lips.

"I know those I can trust," he had answered, stuttering rather, as was his way when moved. "And--and I assure you, Mrs. Bunting, that I hardly have to speak to a human being--especially to a woman" (and he had drawn in his breath with a hissing sound) "before I know exactly what manner of person is before me."

It hadn't taken the landlady very long to find out that her lodger had a queer kind of fear and dislike of women. When she was doing the staircase and landings she would often hear Mr. Sleuth reading aloud to himself passages in the Bible that were very uncomplimentary to her sex. But Mrs. Bunting had no very great opinion of her sister woman, so that didn't put her out. Besides, where one's lodger is concerned, a dislike of women is better than--well, than the other thing.

In any case, where would have been the good of worrying about the lodger's funny ways? Of course, Mr. Sleuth was eccentric. If he hadn't been, as Bunting funnily styled it, "just a leetle touched upstairs," he wouldn't be here, living this strange, solitary life in lodgings. He would be living in quite a different sort of way with some of his relatives, or with a friend of his own class.

There came a time when Mrs. Bunting, looking back--as even the least imaginative of us are apt to look back to any part of our own past lives which becomes for any reason poignantly memorable--wondered how soon it was that she had discovered that her lodger was given to creeping out of the house at a time when almost all living things prefer to sleep.

She brought herself to believe--but I am inclined to doubt whether she was right in so believing--that the first time she became aware of this strange nocturnal habit of Mr. Sleuth's happened to be during the night which preceded the day on which she had observed a very curious circumstance. This very curious circumstance was the complete disappearance of one of Mr. Sleuth's three suits of clothes.

It always passes my comprehension how people can remember, over any length of time, not every moment of certain happenings, for that is natural enough, but the day, the hour, the minute when these happenings took place! Much as she thought about it afterwards, even Mrs. Bunting never quite made up her mind whether it was during the fifth or the sixth night of Mr. Sleuth's stay under her roof that she became aware that he had gone out at two in the morning and had only come in at five.

But that there did come such a night is certain--as certain as is the fact that her discovery coincided with various occurrences which were destined to remain retrospectively memorable.

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It was intensely dark, intensely quiet--the darkest quietest hour of the night, when suddenly Mrs. Bunting was awakened from a deep, dreamless sleep by sounds at once unexpected and familiar. She knew at once what those sounds were. They were those made by Mr. Sleuth, first coming down the stairs, and walking on tiptoe--she was sure it was on tiptoe--past her door, and finally softly shutting the front door behind him.

Try as she would, Mrs. Bunting found it quite impossible to go to sleep again. There she lay wide awake, afraid to move lest Bunting should waken up too, till she heard Mr. Sleuth, three hours later, creep back into the house and so up to bed.

Then, and not till then, she slept again. But in the morning she felt very tired, so tired indeed, that she had been very glad when Bunting good-naturedly suggested that he should go out and do their little bit of marketing.

The worthy couple had very soon discovered that in the matter of catering it was not altogether an easy matter to satisfy Mr. Sleuth, and that though he always tried to appear pleased. This perfect lodger had one serious fault from the point of view of those who keep lodgings. Strange to say, he was a vegetarian. He would not eat meat in any form. He sometimes, however, condescended to a chicken, and when he did so condescend he generously intimated that Mr. and Mrs. Bunting were welcome to a share in it.

Now to-day--this day of which the happenings were to linger in Mrs. Bunting's mind so very long, and to remain so very vivid, it had been arranged that Mr. Sleuth was to have some fish for his lunch, while what he left was to be "done up" to serve for his simple supper.
Knowing that Bunting would be out for at least an hour, for he was a gregarious soul, and liked to have a gossip in the shops he frequented, Mrs. Bunting rose and dressed in a leisurely manner; then she went and "did" her front sitting-room.

She felt languid and dull, as one is apt to feel after a broken night, and it was a comfort to her to know that Mr. Sleuth was not likely to ring before twelve.

But long before twelve a loud ring suddenly clanged through the quiet house. She knew it for the front door bell.

Mrs. Bunting frowned. No doubt the ring betokened one of those tiresome people who come round for old bottles and such-like fal-lals.

She went slowly, reluctantly to the door. And then her face cleared, for it was that good young chap, Joe Chandler, who stood waiting outside.

He was breathing a little hard, as if he had walked over-quickly through the moist, foggy air.

"Why, Joe?" said Mrs. Bunting wonderingly. "Come in--do! Bunting's out, but he won't be very long now. You've been quite a stranger these last few days."

"Well, you know why, Mrs. Bunting--"

She stared at him for a moment, wondering what he could mean. Then, suddenly she remembered. Why, of course, Joe was on a big job just now--the job of trying to catch The Avenger! Her husband had alluded to the fact again and again when reading out to her little bits from the halfpenny evening paper he was taking again.

She led the way to the sitting-room. It was a good thing Bunting had insisted on lighting the fire before he went out, for now the room was nice and warm--and it was just horrible outside. She had felt a chill go right through her as she had stood, even for that second, at the front door.

And she hadn't been alone to feel it, for, "I say, it is jolly to be in here, out of that awful cold!" exclaimed Chandler, sitting down heavily in Bunting's easy chair.

And then Mrs. Bunting bethought herself that the young man was tired, as well as cold. He was pale, almost pallid under his usual healthy, tanned complexion--the complexion of the man who lives much out of doors.

"Wouldn't you like me just to make you a cup of tea?" she said solicitously.

"Well, to tell truth, I should be right down thankful for one, Mrs. Bunting!" Then he looked round, and again he said her name, "Mrs. Bunting--?"

He spoke in so odd, so thick a tone that she turned quickly. "Yes, what is it, Joe?" she asked. And then, in sudden terror, "You've never come to tell me that anything's happened to Bunting? He's not had an accident?"

"Goodness, no! Whatever made you think that? But--but, Mrs. Bunting, there's been another of them!"

His voice dropped almost to a whisper. He was staring at her with unhappy, it seemed to her terror-filled, eyes.

"Another of them?" She looked at him, bewildered--at a loss. And then what he meant flashed across her--"another of them" meant another of these strange, mysterious, awful murders.

But her relief for the moment was so great--for she really had thought for a second that he had come to give her ill news of Bunting--that the feeling that she did experience on hearing this piece of news was actually pleasurable, though she would have been much shocked had that fact been brought to her notice.

Almost in spite of herself, Mrs. Bunting had become keenly interested in the amazing series of crimes which was occupying the imagination of the whole of London's nether-world. Even her refined mind had busied itself for the last two or three days with the strange problem so frequently presented to it by Bunting--for Bunting, now that they were no longer worried, took an open, unashamed, intense interest in "The Avenger" and his doings.

She took the kettle off the gas-ring. "It's a pity Bunting isn't here," she said, drawing in her breath. "He'd a-liked so much to hear you tell all about it, Joe."

As she spoke she was pouring boiling water into a little teapot.

But Chandler said nothing, and she turned and glanced at him. "Why, you do look bad!" she exclaimed.

And, indeed, the young fellow did look bad--very bad indeed.

"I can't help it," he said, with a kind of gasp. "It was your saying that about my telling you all about it that made me turn queer. You see, this time I was one of the first there, and it fairly turned me sick--that it did. Oh, it was too awful, Mrs. Bunting! Don't talk of it."

He began gulping down the hot tea before it was well made.

She looked at him with sympathetic interest. "Why, Joe," she said, "I never would have thought, with all the horrible sights you see, that anything could upset you like that."

"This isn't like anything there's ever been before," he said. "And then--then--oh, Mrs. Bunting, 'twas I that discovered the piece of paper this time."

"Then it is true," she cried eagerly. "It is The Avenger's bit of paper! Bunting always said it was. He never believed in that practical joker."

"I did," said Chandler reluctantly. "You see, there are some queer fellows even--even--" (he lowered his voice,
and looked round him as if the walls had ears)—"even in the Force, Mrs. Bunting, and these murders have fair got on our nerves."

"No, never!" she said. "D'you think that a Bobby might do a thing like that?"

He nodded impatiently, as if the question wasn't worth answering. Then, "It was all along of that bit of paper and my finding it while the poor soul was still warm,"--he shuddered--"that brought me out West this morning. One of our bosses lives close by, in Prince Albert Terrace, and I had to go and tell him all about it. They never offered me a bit or a sup—I think they might have done that, don't you, Mrs. Bunting?"

"Yes," she said absently. "Yes, I do think so."

"But, there, I don't know that I ought to say that," went on Chandler. "He had me up in his dressing-room, and was very considerate-like to me while I was telling him."

"Have a bit of something now?" she said suddenly.

"Oh, no, I couldn't eat anything," he said hastily. "I don't feel as if I could ever eat anything any more."

"That'll only make you ill." Mrs. Bunting spoke rather crossly, for she was a sensible woman. And to please her he took a bite out of the slice of bread-and-butter she had cut for him.

"I expect you're right," he said. "And I've a goodish heavy day in front of me. Been up since four, too--"

"Four?" she said. "Was it then they found--" she hesitated a moment, and then said, "it?"

He nodded. "It was just a chance I was near by. If I'd been half a minute sooner either I or the officer who found her must have knocked up against that—that monster. But two or three people do think they saw him slinking away."

"What was he like?" she asked curiously.

"Well, that's hard to answer. You see, there was such an awful fog. But there's one thing they all agree about. He was carrying a bag—"

"A bag?" repeated Mrs. Bunting, in a low voice. "Whatever sort of bag might it have been, Joe?"

There had come across her—just right in her middle, like—such a strange sensation, a curious kind of tremor, or fluttering.

She was at a loss to account for it.

"Just a hand-bag," said Joe Chandler vaguely. "A woman I spoke to --cross-examining her, like—who was positive she had seen him, said, 'Just a tall, thin shadow—that's what he was, a tall, thin shadow of a man—with a bag.'"

"With a bag?" repeated Mrs. Bunting absently. "How very strange and peculiar—"

"Why, no, not strange at all. He has to carry the thing he does the deed with in something, Mrs. Bunting. We've always wondered how he hid it. They generally throws the knife or fire-arms away, you know."

"Do they, indeed?" Mrs. Bunting still spoke in that absent, wondering way. She was thinking that she really must try and see what the lodger had done with his bag. It was possible—in fact, when one came to think of it, it was very probable—that he had just lost it, being so forgetful a gentleman, on one of the days he had gone out, as she knew he was fond of doing, into the Regent's Park.

"There'll be a description circulated in an hour or two," went on Chandler. "Perhaps that'll help catch him. There isn't a London man or woman, I don't suppose, who wouldn't give a good bit to lay that chap by the heels. Well, I suppose I must be going now."

"Won't you wait a bit longer for Bunting?" she said hesitatingly.

"No, I can't do that. But I'll come in, maybe, either this evening or to-morrow, and tell you any more that's happened. Thanks kindly for the tea. It's made a man of me, Mrs. Bunting."

"Well, you've had enough to unman you, Joe."

"Aye, that I have," he said heavily.

A few minutes later Bunting did come in, and he and his wife had quite a little tiff—the first tiff they had had since Mr. Sleuth became their lodger.

It fell out this way. When he heard who had been there, Bunting was angry that Mrs. Bunting hadn't got more details of the horrible occurrence which had taken place that morning, out of Chandler.

"You don't mean to say, Ellen, that you can't even tell me where it happened?" he said indignantly. "I suppose you put Chandler off --that's what you did! Why, whatever did he come here for, excepting to tell us all about it?"

"He came to have something to eat and drink," snapped out Mrs. Bunting. "That's what the poor lad came for, if you wants to know. He could hardly speak of it at all—he felt so bad. In fact, he didn't say a word about it until he'd come right into the room and sat down. He told me quite enough!"

"Didn't he tell you if the piece of paper on which the murderer had written his name was square or three-cornered?" demanded Bunting.

"No; he did not. And that isn't the sort of thing I should have cared to ask him."

"The more fool you!" And then he stopped abruptly. The newsboys were coming down the Marylebone Road,
shouting out the awful discovery which had been made that morning—that of The Avenger's fifth murder. Bunting went out to buy a paper, and his wife took the things he had brought in down to the kitchen.

The noise the newspaper-sellers made outside had evidently wakened Mr. Sleuth, for his landlady hadn't been in the kitchen ten minutes before his bell rang.

CHAPTER VI
Mr. Sleuth's bell rang again.

Mr. Sleuth's breakfast was quite ready, but for the first time since he had been her lodger Mrs. Bunting did not answer the summons at once. But when there came the second imperative tinkle—for electric bells had not been fitted into that old-fashioned house—she made up her mind to go upstairs.

As she emerged into the hall from the kitchen stairway, Bunting, sitting comfortably in their parlour, heard his wife stepping heavily under the load of the well-laden tray.

"Wait a minute!" he called out. "I'll help you, Ellen," and he came out and took the tray from her.

She said nothing, and together they proceeded up to the drawing-room floor landing.

There she stopped him. "Here," she whispered quickly, "you give me that, Bunting. The lodger won't like your going in to him." And then, as he obeyed her, and was about to turn downstairs again, she added in a rather acid tone, "You might open the door for me, at any rate! How can I manage to do it with this here heavy tray on my hands?"

She spoke in a queer, jerky way, and Bunting felt surprised—rather put out. Ellen wasn't exactly what you'd call a lively, jolly woman, but when things were going well—as now—she was generally equable enough. He supposed she was still resentful of the way he had spoken to her about young Chandler and the new Avenger murder.

However, he was always for peace, so he opened the drawing-room door, and as soon as he had started going downstairs Mrs. Bunting walked into the room.

And then at once there came over her the queerest feeling of relief, of lightness of heart.

As usual, the lodger was sitting at his old place, reading the Bible.

Somehow—she could not have told you why, she would not willingly have told herself—she had expected to see Mr. Sleuth looking different. But no, he appeared to be exactly the same—in fact, as he glanced up at her a pleasanter smile than usual lighted up his thin, pallid face.

"Well, Mrs. Bunting," he said genially, "I overslept myself this morning, but I feel all the better for the rest."

"I'm glad of that, sir," she answered, in a low voice. "One of the ladies I once lived with used to say, 'Rest is an old-fashioned remedy, but it's the best remedy of all.'"

Mr. Sleuth himself removed the Bible and Cruden's Concordance off the table out of her way, and then he stood watching his landlady laying the cloth.

Suddenly he spoke again. He was not often so talkative in the morning. "I think, Mrs. Bunting, that there was someone with you outside the door just now?"

"Yes, sir. Bunting helped me up with the tray."

"I'm afraid I give you a good deal of trouble," he said hesitatingly.

But she answered quickly, "Oh, no, sir! Not at all, sir! I was only saying yesterday that we've never had a lodger that gave us as little trouble as you do, sir."

"I'm glad of that. I am aware that my habits are somewhat peculiar."

He looked at her fixedly, as if expecting her to give some sort of denial to this observation. But Mrs. Bunting was an honest and truthful woman. It never occurred to her to question his statement. Mr. Sleuth's habits were somewhat peculiar. Take that going out at night, or rather in the early morning, for instance? So she remained silent.

After she had laid the lodger's breakfast on the table she prepared to leave the room. "I suppose I'm not to do your room till you goes out, sir?"

And Mr. Sleuth looked up sharply. "No, no!" he said. "I never want my room done when I am engaged in studying the Scriptures, Mrs. Bunting. But I am not going out to-day. I shall be carrying out a somewhat elaborate experiment—upstairs. If I go out at all he waited a moment, and again he looked at her fixedly "—I shall wait till night-time to do so." And then, coming back to the matter in hand, he added hastily, "Perhaps you could do my room when I go upstairs, about five o'clock—if that time is convenient to you, that is?"

"Oh, yes, sir! That'll do nicely!"

And Mr. Sleuth looked up sharply. "No, no!" he said. "I never want my room done when I am engaged in studying the Scriptures, Mrs. Bunting. But I am not going out to-day. I shall be carrying out a somewhat elaborate experiment—upstairs. If I go out at all he waited a moment, and again he looked at her fixedly "—I shall wait till night-time to do so." And then, coming back to the matter in hand, he added hastily, "Perhaps you could do my room when I go upstairs, about five o'clock—if that time is convenient to you, that is?"

"Oh, yes, sir! That'll do nicely!"

Mrs. Bunting went downstairs, and as she did so she took herself wordlessly, ruthlessly to task, but she did not face—even in her inmost heart—the strange tenors and tremors which had so shaken her. She only repeated to herself again and again, "I've got upset—that's what I've done," and then she spoke aloud, "I must get myself a dose at the chemist's next time I'm out. That's what I must do."

And just as she murmured the word "do," there came a loud double knock on the front door.

It was only the postman's knock, but the postman was an unfamiliar visitor in that house, and Mrs. Bunting
started violently. She was nervous, that's what was the matter with her,—so she told herself angrily. No doubt this was a letter for Mr. Sleuth; the lodger must have relations and acquaintances somewhere in the world. All gentlefolk have. But when she picked the small envelope off the hall floor, she saw it was a letter from Daisy, her husband's daughter.

"Bunting!" she called out sharply. "Here's a letter for you."

She opened the door of their sitting-room and looked in. Yes, there was her husband, sitting back comfortably in his easy chair, reading a paper. And as she saw his broad, rather rounded back, Mrs. Bunting felt a sudden thrill of sharp irritation. There he was, doing nothing—in fact, doing worse than nothing—wasting his time reading all about those horrid crimes.

She sighed—a long, unconscious sigh. Bunting was getting into idle ways, bad ways for a man of his years. But how could she prevent it? He had been such an active, conscientious sort of man when they had first made acquaintance. . .

She also could remember, even more clearly than Bunting did himself, that first meeting of theirs in the dining-room of No. 90 Cumberland Terrace. As she had stood there, pouring out her mistress's glass of port wine, she had not been too much absorbed in her task to have a good out-of-her-eye look at the spruce, nice, respectable-looking fellow who was standing over by the window. How superior he had appeared even then to the man she already hoped he would succeed as butler!

To-day, perhaps because she was not feeling quite herself, the past rose before her very vividly, and a lump came into her throat.

Putting the letter addressed to her husband on the table, she closed the door softly, and went down into the kitchen; there were various little things to put away and clean up, as well as their dinner to cook. And all the time she was down there she fixed her mind obstinately, determinedly on Bunting and on the problem of Bunting. She wondered what she'd better do to get him into good ways again.

Thanks to Mr. Sleuth, their outlook was now moderately bright. A week ago everything had seemed utterly hopeless. It seemed as if nothing could save them from disaster. But everything was now changed!

Perhaps it would be well for her to go and see the new proprietor of that registry office, in Baker Street, which had lately changed hands. It would be a good thing for Bunting to get even an occasional job—for the matter of that he could now take up a fairly regular thing in the way of waiting. Mrs. Bunting knew that it isn't easy to get a man out of idle ways once he has acquired those ways.

When, at last, she went upstairs again she felt a little ashamed of what she had been thinking, for Bunting had laid the cloth, and laid it very nicely, too, and brought up the two chairs to the table.

"Ellen?" he cried eagerly, "here's news! Daisy's coming to-morrow! There's scarlet fever in their house. Old Aunt thinks she'd better come away for a few days. So, you see, she'll be here for her birthday. Eighteen, that's what she be on the nineteenth! It do make me feel old—that it do!"

Mrs. Bunting put down the tray. "I can't have the girl here just now," she said shortly. "I've just as much to do as I can manage. The lodger gives me more trouble than you seem to think for."

"Rubbish!" he said sharply. "I'll help you with the lodger. It's your own fault you haven't had help with him before. Of course, Daisy must come here. Whatever other place could the girl go to?"

Bunting felt pugnacious—so cheerful as to be almost light-hearted. But as he looked across at his wife his feeling of satisfaction vanished. Ellen's face was pinched and drawn to-day; she looked ill—ill and horribly tired. It was very aggravating of her to go and behave like this—just when they were beginning to get on nicely again.

"For the matter of that," he said suddenly, "Daisy'll be able to help you with the work, Ellen, and she'll brisk us both up a bit."

Mrs. Bunting made no answer. She sat down heavily at the table. And then she said languidly, "You might as well show me the girl's letter."

He handed it across to her, and she read it slowly to herself.

"DEAR FATHER (it ran)—I hope this finds you as well at it leaves me. Mrs. Puddle's youngest has got scarlet fever, and Aunt thinks I had better come away at once, just to stay with you for a few days. Please tell Ellen I won't give her no trouble. I'll start at ten if I don't hear nothing.--Your loving daughter,

"Yes, I suppose Daisy will have to come here," Mrs. Bunting slowly. "It'll do her good to have a bit of work to do for once in her life."

And with that ungraciously worded permission Bunting had to content himself.

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Quietly the rest of that eventful day sped by. When dusk fell Mr. Sleuth's landlady heard him go upstairs to the top floor. She remembered that this was the signal for her to go and do his room.

He was a tidy man, was the lodger; he did not throw his things about as so many gentlemen do, leaving them all
over the place. No, he kept everything scrupulously tidy. His clothes, and the various articles Mrs. Bunting had bought for him during the first two days he had been there, were carefully arranged in the chest of drawers. He had lately purchased a pair of boots. Those he had arrived in were peculiar-looking footgear, buff leather shoes with rubber soles, and he had told his landlady on that very first day that he never wished them to go down to be cleaned.

A funny idea--a funny habit that, of going out for a walk after midnight in weather so cold and foggy that all other folk were glad to be at home, snug in bed. But then Mr. Sleuth himself admitted that he was a funny sort of gentleman.

After she had done his bedroom the landlady went into the sitting-room and gave it a good dusting. This room was not kept quite as nice as she would have liked it to be. Mrs. Bunting longed to give the drawing-room something of a good turn out; but Mr. Sleuth disliked her to be moving about in it when he himself was in his bedroom; and when up he sat there almost all the time. Delighted as he had seemed to be with the top room, he only used it when making his mysterious experiments, and never during the day-time.

And now, this afternoon, she looked at the rosewood chiffonnier with longing eyes--she even gave that pretty little piece of furniture a slight shake. If only the doors would fly open, as the locked doors of old cupboards sometimes do, even after they have been securely fastened, how pleased she would be, how much more comfortable somehow she would feel!

But the chiffonnier refused to give up its secret.

About eight o'clock on that same evening Joe Chandler came in, just for a few minutes' chat. He had recovered from his agitation of the morning, but he was full of eager excitement, and Mrs. Bunting listened in silence, intensely interested in spite of herself, while he and Bunting talked.

"Yes," he said, "I'm as right as a trivet now! I've had a good rest--laid down all this afternoon. You see, the Yard thinks there's going to be something on to-night. He's always done them in pairs."

"So he has," exclaimed Bunting wonderingly. "So he has! Now, I never thought o' that. Then you think, Joe, that the monster'll be on the job again to-night?"

Chandler nodded. "Yes. And I think there's a very good chance of his being caught too--"

"I suppose there'll be a lot on the watch to-night, eh?"

"I should think there will be! How many of our men d'you think there'll be on night duty to-night, Mr. Bunting?"

Bunting shook his head. "I don't know," he said helplessly.

"I mean extra," suggested Chandler, in an encouraging voice.

"A thousand?" ventured Bunting.

"Five thousand, Mr. Bunting."

"Never!" exclaimed Bunting, amazed.

And even Mrs. Bunting echoed "Never!" incredulously.

"Yes, that there will. You see, the Boss has got his monkey up!" Chandler drew a folded-up newspaper out of his coat pocket. "Just listen to this:

"The police have reluctantly to admit that they have no clue to the perpetrators of these horrible crimes, and we cannot feel any surprise at the information that a popular attack has been organised on the Chief Commissioner of the Metropolitan Police. There is even talk of an indignation mass meeting."

"What d'you think of that? That's not a pleasant thing for a gentleman as is doing his best to read, eh?"

"Well, it does seem queer that the police can't catch him, now doesn't it?" said Bunting argumentatively.

"I don't think it's queer at all," said young Chandler crossly. "Now you just listen again! Here's a bit of the truth for once-- in a newspaper. And slowly he read out:

"The detection of crime in London now resembles a game of blind man's buff, in which the detective has his hands tied and his eyes bandaged. Thus is he turned loose to hunt the murderer through the slums of a great city."

"Whatever does that mean?" said Bunting. "Your hands aren't tied, and your eyes aren't bandaged, Joe?"

"It's metaphorical-like that it's intended, Mr. Bunting. We haven't got the same facilities--no, not a quarter of them--that the French 'tecs have."

And then, for the first time, Mrs. Bunting spoke: "What was that word, Joe--'perpetrators'? I mean that first bit you read out."

"Yes," he said, turning to her eagerly.

"Then do they think there's more than one of them?" she said, and a look of relief came over her thin face.

"There's some of our chaps thinks it's a gang," said Chandler. "They say it can't be the work of one man."

"What do you think, Joe?"

"Well, Mrs. Bunting, I don't know what to think. I'm fair puzzled."

He got up. "Don't you come to the door. I'll shut it all right. So long! See you to-morrow, perhaps." As he had
done the other evening, Mr. and Mrs. Bunting's visitor stopped at the door. "Any news of Miss Daisy?" he asked casually.

"Yes; she's coming to-morrow," said her father. "They've got scarlet fever at her place. So Old Aunt thinks she'd better clear out."

The husband and wife went to bed early that night, but Mrs. Bunting found she could not sleep. She lay wide awake, hearing the hours, the half-hours, the quarters chime out from the belfry of the old church close by.

And then, just as she was dozing off--it must have been about one o'clock--she heard the sound she had half unconsciously been expecting to hear, that of the lodger's stealthy footsteps coming down the stairs just outside her room.

He crept along the passage and let himself out very, very quietly.

But though she tried to keep awake, Mrs. Bunting did not hear him come in again, for she soon fell into a heavy sleep.

Oddly enough, she was the first to wake the next morning; odder still, it was she, not Bunting, who jumped out of bed, and going out into the passage, picked up the newspaper which had just been pushed through the letter-box.

But having picked it up, Mrs. Bunting did not go back at once into her bedroom. Instead she lit the gas in the passage, and leaning up against the wall to steady herself, for she was trembling with cold and fatigue, she opened the paper.

Yes, there was the heading she sought:
"The AVENGER Murders"

But, oh, how glad she was to see the words that followed:
"Up to the time of going to press there is little new to report concerning the extraordinary series of crimes which are amazing, and, indeed, staggering not only London, but the whole civilised world, and which would seem to be the work of some woman-hating teetotal fanatic. Since yesterday morning, when the last of these dastardly murders was committed, no reliable clue to the perpetrator, or perpetrators, has been obtained, though several arrests were made in the course of the day. In every case, however, those arrested were able to prove a satisfactory alibi."

And then, a little lower down:
"The excitement grows and grows. It is not too much to say that even a stranger to London would know that something very unusual was in the air. As for the place where the murder was committed last night--"

"Last night!" thought Mrs. Bunting, startled; and then she realised that "last night," in this connection, meant the night before last.

She began the sentence again:
"As for the place where the murder was committed last night, all approaches to it were still blocked up to a late hour by hundreds of onlookers, though, of course, nothing now remains in the way of traces of the tragedy."

Slowly and carefully Mrs. Bunting folded the paper up again in its original creases, and then she stooped and put it back down on the mat where she had found it. She then turned out the gas, and going back into bed she lay down by her still sleeping husband.

"Anything the matter?" Bunting murmured, and stirred uneasily. "Anything the matter, Ellen?"

She answered in a whisper, a whisper thrilling with a strange gladness, "No, nothing, Bunting--nothing the matter! Go to sleep again, my dear."

They got up an hour later, both in a happy, cheerful mood. Bunting rejoiced at the thought of his daughter's coming, and even Daisy's stepmother told herself that it would be pleasant having the girl about the house to help her a bit.

About ten o'clock Bunting went out to do some shopping. He brought back with him a nice little bit of pork for Daisy's dinner, and three mince-pies. He even remembered to get some apples for the sauce.

CHAPTER VII

Just as twelve was striking a four-wheeler drew up to the gate.

It brought Daisy--pink-cheeked, excited, laughing-eyed Daisy--a sight to gladden any father's heart.

"Old Aunt said I was to have a cab if the weather was bad," she cried out joyously.

There was a bit of a wrangle over the fare. King's Cross, as all the world knows, is nothing like two miles from the Marylebone Road, but the man clamoured for one and sixpence, and hinted darkly that he had done the young lady a favour in bringing her at all.

While he and Bunting were having words, Daisy, leaving them to it, walked up the flagged path to the door where her stepmother was awaiting her.

As they were exchanging a rather frigid kiss, indeed, 'twas a mere peck on Mrs. Bunting's part, there fell, with startling suddenness, loud cries on the still, cold air. Long-drawn and wailing, they sounded strangely sad as they rose and fell across the distant roar of traffic in the Edgware Road.
"What's that?" exclaimed Bunting wonderingly. "Why, whatever's that?"

The cabman lowered his voice. "Them's 'a-crying out that 'orrible affair at King's Cross. He's done for two of 'em this time! That's what I meant when I said I might 'a got a better fare. I wouldn't say nothink before little missy there, but folk 'ave been coming from all over London the last five or six hours; plenty of toffs, too--but there, there's nothing to see now!"

"What? Another woman murdered last night?"

Bunting felt tremendously thrilled. What had the five thousand constables been about to let such a dreadful thing happen?

The cabman stared at him, surprised. "Two of 'em, I tell yer-- within a few yards of one another. He 'ave--got a nerve--But, of course, they was drunk. He are got a down on the drink!"

"Have they caught him?" asked Bunting perfunctorily.

"Lord, no! They'll never catch 'im! It must 'ave happened hours and hours ago--they was both stone cold. One each end of a little passage what ain't used no more. That's why they didn't find 'em before."

The hoarse cries were coming nearer and nearer--two news vendors trying to outshout each other.

"'Orrible discovery near King's Cross!" they yelled exultingly. "The Avenger again!"

And Bunting, with his daughter's large straw hold-all in his hand, ran forward into the roadway and recklessly gave a boy a penny for a halfpenny paper.

He felt very much moved and excited. Somehow his acquaintance with young Joe Chandler made these murders seem a personal affair. He hoped that Chandler would come in soon and tell them all about it, as he had done yesterday morning when he, Bunting, had unluckily been out.

As he walked back into the little hall, he heard Daisy's voice-- high, voluble, excited--giving her stepmother a long account of the scarlet fever case, and how at first Old Aunt's neighbours had thought it was not scarlet fever at all, but just nettle rash.

But as Bunting pushed open the door of the sitting-room, there came a note of sharp alarm in his daughter's voice, and he heard her cry, "Why, Ellen, whatever is the matter? You do look bad!" and his wife's muffled answer, "Open the window--do."

"'Orrible discovery near King's Cross--a clue at last!" yelled the newspaper-boys triumphantly.

And then, helplessly, Mrs. Bunting began to laugh. She laughed, and laughed, and laughed, rocking herself to and fro as if in an ecstasy of mirth.

"Why, father, whatever's the matter with her?"

Daisy looked quite scared.

"She's in 'sterics--that's what it is," he said shortly. "I'll just get the water-jug. Wait a minute!"

Bunting felt very put out. Ellen was ridiculous--that's what she was, to be so easily upset.

The lodger's bell suddenly pealed through the quiet house. Either that sound, or maybe the threat of the water-jug, had a magical effect on Mrs. Bunting. She rose to her feet, still shaking all over, but mentally composed.

"I'll go up," she said a little chokingly. "As for you, child, just run down into the kitchen. You'll find a piece of pork roasting in the oven. You might start paring the apples for the sauce."

As Mrs. Bunting went upstairs her legs felt as if they were made of cotton wool. She put out a trembling hand, and clutched at the banister for support. But soon, making a great effort over herself, she began to feel more steady; and after waiting for a few moments on the landing, she knocked at the door of the drawing-room.

Mr. Sleuth's voice answered her from the bedroom. "I'm not well," he called out querulously; "I think I've caught a chill. I should be obliged if you would kindly bring me up a cup of tea, and put it outside my door, Mrs. Bunting."

"Very well, sir."

Mrs. Bunting turned and went downstairs. She still felt queer and giddy, so instead of going into the kitchen, she made the lodger his cup of tea over her sitting-room gas-ring.

During their midday dinner the husband and wife had a little discussion as to where Daisy should sleep. It had been settled that a bed should be made up for her in the top back room, but Mrs. Bunting saw reason to change this plan. "I think 'twould be better if Daisy were to sleep with me, Bunting, and you was to sleep upstairs."

Bunting felt and looked rather surprised, but he acquiesced. Ellen was probably right; the girl would be rather lonely up there, and, after all, they didn't know much about the lodger, though he seemed a respectable gentleman enough.

Daisy was a good-natured girl; she liked London, and wanted to make herself useful to her stepmother. "I'll wash up; don't you bother to come downstairs," she said cheerfully.

Bunting began to walk up and down the room. His wife gave him a furtive glance; she wondered what he was thinking about.

"Didn't you get a paper?" she said at last.
"Yes, of course I did," he answered hastily. "But I've put it away. I thought you'd rather not look at it, as you're that nervous."

Again she glanced at him quickly, furtively, but he seemed just as usual--he evidently meant just what he said and no more.

"I thought they was shouting something in the street--I mean just before I was took bad."

It was now Bunting's turn to stare at his wife quickly and rather furtively. He had felt sure that her sudden attack of queerness, of hysterics--call it what you might--had been due to the shouting outside. She was not the only woman in London who had got the Avenger murders on her nerves. His morning paper said quite a lot of women were afraid to go out alone. Was it possible that the curious way she had been taken just now had had nothing to do with the shouts and excitement outside?

"Don't you know what it was they were calling out?" he asked slowly.

Mrs. Bunting looked across at him. She would have given a very great deal to be able to lie, to pretend that she did not know what those dreadful cries had portended. But when it came to the point she found she could not do so.

"Yes," she said dully. "I heard a word here and there. There's been another murder, hasn't there?"

"Two other murders," he said soberly.

"Two? That's worse news!" She turned so pale--a sallow greenish-white--that Bunting thought she was again going queer.

"Ellen?" he said warningly, "Ellen, now do have a care! I can't think what's come over you about these murders. Turn your mind away from them, do! We needn't talk about them--not so much, that is--"

"But I wants to talk about them," cried Mrs. Bunting hysterically.

The husband and wife were standing, one each side of the table, the man with his back to the fire, the woman with her back to the door.

Bunting, staring across at his wife, felt sadly perplexed and disturbed. She really did seem ill; even her slight, spare figure looked shrunk. For the first time, so he told himself ruefully, Ellen was beginning to look her full age. Her slender hands--she had kept the pretty, soft white hands of the woman who has never done rough work--grasped the edge of the table with a convulsive movement.

Bunting didn't at all like the look of her. "Oh, dear," he said to himself, "I do hope Ellen isn't going to be ill! That would be a to-do just now."

"Tell me about it," she commanded, in a low voice. "Can't you see I'm waiting to hear? Be quick now, Bunting!"

"There isn't very much to tell," he said reluctantly. "There's precious little in this paper, anyway. But the cabman what brought Daisy told me--"

"Well?"

"What I said just now. There's two of 'em this time, and they'd both been drinking heavily, poor creatures."

"Was it where the others was done?" she asked looking at her husband fearfully.

"No," he said awkwardly. "No, it wasn't, Ellen. It was a good bit farther West--in fact, not so very far from here. Near King's Cross --that's how the cabman knew about it, you see. They seems to have been done in a passage which isn't used no more." And then, as he thought his wife's eyes were beginning to look rather funny, he added hastily. "There, that's enough for the present! We shall soon be hearing a lot more about it from Joe Chandler. He's pretty sure to come in some time to-day."

"Then the five thousand constables weren't no use?" said Mrs. Bunting slowly. She had relaxed her grip of the table, and was standing more upright.

"No use at all," said Bunting briefly. "He is artful and no mistake about it. But wait a minute--" he turned and took up the paper which he had laid aside, on a chair. "Yes they says here that they has a clue."

"A clue, Bunting?" Mrs. Bunting spoke in a soft, weak, die-away voice, and again, stooping somewhat, she grasped the edge of the table.

But her husband was not noticing her now. He was holding the paper close up to his eyes, and he read from it, in a tone of considerable satisfaction:

"'It is gratifying to be able to state that the police at last believe they are in possession of a clue which will lead to the arrest of the--'" and then Bunting dropped the paper and rushed round the table.

His wife, with a curious sighing moan, had slipped down on to the floor, taking with her the tablecloth as she went. She lay there in what appeared to be a dead faint. And Bunting, scared out of his wits, opened the door and screamed out, "Daisy! Daisy! Come up, child. Ellen's took bad again."

And Daisy, hurrying in, showed an amount of sense and resource which even at this anxious moment roused her fond father's admiration.

"Get a wet sponge, Dad--quick!" she cried, "a sponge,--and, if you've got such a thing, a drop o' brandy. I'll see after her!" And then, after he had got the little medicine flask, "I can't think what's wrong with Ellen," said Daisy
“She seemed quite all right when I first came in. She was listening, interested-like, to what I was telling her, and then, suddenly--well, you saw how she was took, father? 'Tain't like Ellen this, is it now?"

"No," he whispered. "No, 'tain't. But you see, child, we've been going through a pretty bad time--worse nor I should ever have let you know of, my dear. Ellen's just feeling it now--that's what it is. She didn't say nothing, for Ellen's a good plucked one, but it's told on her--it's told on her!"

And then Mrs. Bunting, sitting up, slowly opened her eyes, and instinctively put her hand up to her head to see if her hair was all right.

She hadn't really been quite "off." It would have been better for her if she had. She had simply had an awful feeling that she couldn't stand up--more, that she must fall down. Bunting's words touched a most unwonted chord in the poor woman's heart, and the eyes which she opened were full of tears. She had not thought her husband knew how she had suffered during those weeks of starving and waiting.

But she had a morbid dislike of any betrayal of sentiment. To her such betrayal betokened "foolishness," and so all she said was, "There's no need to make a fuss! I only turned over a little queer. I never was right off, Daisy."

Pettishly she pushed away the glass in which Bunting had hurriedly poured a little brandy. "I wouldn't touch such stuff--no, not if I was dying!" she exclaimed.

Putting out a languid hand, she pulled herself up, with the help of the table, on to her feet. "Go down again to the kitchen, child"; but there was a sob, a kind of tremor in her voice.

"You haven't been eating properly, Ellen--that's what's the matter with you," said Bunting suddenly. "Now I come to think of it, you haven't eat half enough these last two days. I always did say--in old days many a time I told you--that a woman couldn't live on air. But there, you never believed me!"

Daisy stood looking from one to the other, a shadow over her bright, pretty face. "I'd no idea you'd had such a bad time, father," she said feelingly. "Why didn't you let me know about it? I might have got something out of Old Aunt."

"We didn't want anything of that sort," said her stepmother hastily. "But of course--well, I expect I'm still feeling the worry now. I don't seem able to forget it. Those days of waiting, of--of--" she restrained herself; another moment and the word "starving" would have left her lips.

"But everything's all right now," said Bunting eagerly, "all right, thanks to Mr. Sleuth, that is."

"Yes," repeated his wife, in a low, strange tone of voice. "Yes, we're all right now, and as you say, Bunting, it's all along of Mr. Sleuth."

She walked across to a chair and sat down on it. "I'm just a little tottery still," she muttered.

And Daisy, looking at her, turned to her father and said in a whisper, but not so low but that Mrs. Bunting heard her, "Don't you think Ellen ought to see a doctor, father? He might give her something that would pull her round."

"I won't see no doctor!" said Mrs. Bunting with sudden emphasis. "I saw enough of doctors in my last place. Thirty-eight doctors in ten months did my poor missis have. Just determined on having 'em she was! Did they save her? No! She died just the same! Maybe a bit sooner."

"She was a freak, was your last mistress, Ellen," began Bunting aggressively.

Ellen had insisted on staying on in that place till her poor mistress died. They might have been married some months before they were married but for that fact. Bunting had always resented it.

His wife smile wanly. "We won't have no words about that," she said, and again she spoke in a softer, kindlier tone than usual. "Daisy? If you won't go down to the kitchen again, then I must"--she turned to her stepdaughter, and the girl flew out of the room.

"I think the child grows prettier every minute," said Bunting fondly.

"Folks are too apt to forget that beauty is but skin deep," said his wife. She was beginning to feel better. "But still, I do agree, Bunting, that Daisy's well enough. And she seems more willing, too."

"I say, we mustn't forget the lodger's dinner," Bunting spoke uneasily. "It's a bit of fish to-day, isn't it? Hadn't I better just tell Daisy to see to it, and then I can take it up to him, as you're not feeling quite the thing, Ellen?"

"I'm quite well enough to take up Mr. Sleuth's luncheon," she said quickly. It irritated her to hear her husband speak of the lodger's dinner. They had dinner in the middle of the day, but Mr. Sleuth had luncheon. However odd he might be, Mrs. Bunting never forgot her lodger was a gentleman.

"After all, he likes me to wait on him, doesn't he? I can manage all right. Don't you worry," she added after a long pause.

CHAPTER VIII

Perhaps because his luncheon was served to him a good deal later than usual, Mr. Sleuth ate his nice piece of steamed sole upstairs with far heartier an appetite than his landlady had eaten her nice slice of roast pork downstairs.

"I hope you're feeling a little better, sir," Mrs. Bunting had forced herself to say when she first took in his tray.

And he had answered plaintively, querulously, "No, I can't say I feel well to-day, Mrs. Bunting. I am tired--very
tired. And as I lay in bed I seemed to hear so many sounds--so much crying and shouting. I trust the Marylebone
Road is not going to become a noisy thoroughfare, Mrs. Bunting?"

"Oh, no, sir, I don't think that. We're generally reckoned very quiet indeed, sir."

She waited a moment--try as she would, she could not allude to what those unwonted shouts and noises had
betokened. "I expect you've got a chill, sir," she said suddenly. "If I was you, I shouldn't go out this afternoon; I'd
just stay quietly indoors. There's a lot of rough people about--" Perhaps there was an undercurrent of warning, of
painful pleading, in her toneless voice which penetrated in some way to the brain of the lodger, for Mr. Sleuth
looked up, and an uneasy, watchful look came into his luminous grey eyes.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Mrs. Bunting. But I think I'll take your advice. That is, I will stay quietly at home, I am
never at a loss to know what to do with myself so long as I can study the Book of Books."

"Then you're not afraid about your eyes, sir?" said Mrs. Bunting curiously. Somehow she was beginning to feel
better. It comforted her to be up here, talking to Mr. Sleuth, instead of thinking about him downstairs. It seemed to
banish the terror which filled her soul--aye, and her body, too--at other times. When she was with him Mr. Sleuth
was so gentle, so reasonable, so--so grateful.

Poor kindly, solitary Mr. Sleuth! This kind of gentleman surely wouldn't hurt a fly, let alone a human being.
Eccentric--so much must be admitted. But Mrs. Bunting had seen a good deal of eccentric folk, eccentric women
rather than eccentric men, in her long career as useful maid.

Being at ordinary times an exceptionally sensible, well-balanced woman, she had never, in old days, allowed her
mind to dwell on certain things she had learnt as to the aberrations of which human nature is capable--even well-
born, well-nurtured, gentle human nature--as exemplified in some of the households where she had served. It would,
indeed, be unfortunate if she now became morbid or--or hysterical.

So it was in a sharp, cheerful voice, almost the voice in which she had talked during the first few days of Mr.
Sleuth's stay in her house, that she exclaimed, "Well, sir, I'll be up again to clear away in about half an hour. And if
you'll forgive me for saying so, I hope you will stay in and have a rest to-day. Nasty, muggy weather --that's what it
is! If there's any little thing you want, me or Bunting can go out and get it."

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It must have been about four o'clock when there came a ring at the front door.

The three were sitting chatting together, for Daisy had washed up --she really was saving her stepmother a good
bit of trouble--and the girl was now amusing her elders by a funny account of Old Aunt's pernickety ways.

"Whoever can that be?" said Bunting, looking up. "It's too early for Joe Chandler, surely."

"I'll go," said his wife, hurriedly jumping up from her chair. "I'll go! We don't want no strangers in here."

And as she stepped down the short bit of passage she said to herself, "A clue? What clue?"

But when she opened the front door a glad sigh of relief broke from her. "Why, Joe? We never thought 'twas
you! But you're very welcome, I'm sure. Come in."

And Chandler came in, a rather sheepish look on his good-looking, fair young face.

"I thought maybe that Mr. Bunting would like to know--" he began, in a loud, cheerful voice, and Mrs. Bunting
hurriedly checked him. She didn't want the lodger upstairs to hear what young Chandler might be going to say.
"Don't talk so loud," she said a little sharply. "The lodger is not very well to-day. He's had a cold," she added
hastily, "and during the last two or three days he hasn't been able to go out."

She wondered at her temerity, her--her hypocrisy, and that moment, those few words, marked an epoch in Ellen
Bunting's life. It was the first time she had told a bold and deliberate lie. She was one of those women--there are
many, many such--to whom there is a whole world of difference between the suppression of the truth and the
utterance of an untruth.

But Chandler paid no heed to her remarks. "Has Miss Daisy arrived?" he asked, in a lower voice.

She nodded. And then he went through into the room where the father and daughter were sitting.

"Well?" said Bunting, starting up. "Well, Joe? Now you can tell us all about that mysterious clue. I suppose it'd
be too good news to expect you to tell us they've caught him?"

"No fear of such good news as that yet awhile. If they'd caught him," said Joe ruefully, "well, I don't suppose I
should be here, Mr. Bunting. But the Yard are circulating a description at last. And--well, they've found his
weapon!"

"No?" cried Bunting excitedly. "You don't say so! Whatever sort of a thing is it? And are they sure 'tis his?"

"Well, 'tain't sure, but it seems to be likely."

Mrs. Bunting had slipped into the room and shut the door behind her. But she was still standing with her back
against the door, looking at the group in front of her. None of them were thinking of her --she thanked God for that!
She could hear everything that was said without joining in the talk and excitement.

"Listen to this!" cried Joe Chandler exultantly. "'Tain't given out yet--not for the public, that is--but we were all
given it by eight o'clock this morning. Quick work that, eh?" He read out:

"WANTED
A man, of age approximately 28, slight in figure, height approximately 5 ft. 8 in. Complexion dark. No beard or whiskers. Wearing a black diagonal coat, hard felt hat, high white collar, and tie. Carried a newspaper parcel. Very respectable appearance."

Mrs. Bunting walked forward. She gave a long, fluttering sigh of unutterable relief.

"There's the chap!" said Joe Chandler triumphantly. "And now, Miss Daisy"--he turned to her jokingly, but there was a funny little tremor in his frank, cheerful-sounding voice--"if you knows of any nice, likely young fellow that answers to that description--well, you've only got to walk in and earn your reward of five hundred pounds."

"Five hundred pounds!" cried Daisy and her father simultaneously.

"Yes. That's what the Lord Mayor offered yesterday. Some private bloke--nothing official about it. But we of the Yard is barred from taking that reward, worse luck. And it's too bad, for we has all the trouble, after all."

"Just hand that bit of paper over, will you?" said Bunting. "I'd like to con it over to myself."

Chandler threw over the bit of flimsy.

A moment later Bunting looked up and handed it back. "Well, it's clear enough, isn't it?"

"Yes. And there's hundreds--nay, thousands--of young fellows that might be a description of," said Chandler sarcastically. "As a pal of mine said this morning, 'There isn't a chap will like to carry a newspaper parcel after this.' And it won't do to have a respectable appearance--eh?"

Daisy's voice rang out in merry, pealing laughter. She greatly appreciated Mr. Chandler's witticism.

"Why on earth didn't the people who saw him try and catch him?" asked Bunting suddenly.

And Mrs. Bunting broke in, in a lower voice, "Yes, Joe--that seems odd, don't it?"

Joe Chandler coughed. "Well, it's this way," he said. "No one person did see all that. The man who's described here is just made up from the description of two different folk who think they saw him. You see, the murders must have taken place--well, now, let me see--perhaps at two o'clock this last time. Two o'clock-- that's the idea. Well, at such a time as that not many people are about, especially on a foggy night. Yes, one woman declares she saw a young chap walking away from the spot where 'twas done; and another one--but that was a good bit later--says The Avenger passed by her. It's mostly her they're following in this 'ere description. And then the boss who has charge of that sort of thing looked up what other people had said--I mean when the other crimes was committed. That's how he made up this 'Wanted.'"

"Then The Avenger may be quite a different sort of man?" said Bunting slowly, disappointedly.

"Well, of course he may be. But, no; I think that description fits him all right," said Chandler; but he also spoke in a hesitating voice.

"You was saying, Joe, that they found a weapon?" observed Bunting insinuatingly.

He was glad that Ellen allowed the discussion to go on--in fact, that she even seemed to take an intelligent interest in it. She had come up close to them, and now looked quite her old self again.

"Yes. They believe they've found the weapon what he does his awful deeds with," said Chandler. "At any rate, within a hundred yards of that little dark passage where they found the bodies--one at each end, that was--there was discovered this morning a very peculiar kind o' knife--'keen as a razor, pointed as a dagger'--that's the exact words the boss used when he was describing it to a lot of us. He seemed to think a lot more of that clue than of the other--I mean than of the description people gave of the chap who walked quickly by with a newspaper parcel. But now there's a pretty job in front of us. Every shop where they sell or might a' sold, such a thing as that knife, including every eating-house in the East End, has got to be called at!"

"Whatever for?" asked Daisy.

"Why, with an idea of finding out if anyone saw such a knife fooling about there any time, and, if so, in whose possession it was at the time. But, Mr. Bunting"--Chandler's voice changed; it became businesslike, official--"they're not going to say anything about that--not in newspapers--till to-morrow, so don't you go and tell anybody. You see, we don't want to frighten the fellow off. If he knew they'd got his knife--well, he might just make himself scarce, and they don't want that! If it's discovered that any knife of that kind was sold, say a month ago, to some customer whose ways are known, then--then--"

"What'll happen then?" said Mrs. Bunting, coming nearer.

"Well, then, nothing'll be put about it in the papers at all," said Chandler deliberately. "The only objec' of letting the public know about it would be if nothink was found--I mean if the search of the shops, and so on, was no good. Then, of course, we must try and find out someone--some private person-like, who's watched that knife in the criminal's possession. It's there the reward--the five hundred pounds will come in."

"Oh, I'd give anything to see that knife!" exclaimed Daisy, clasping her hands together.

"You cruel, bloodthirsty, girl!" cried her stepmother passionately.
They all looked round at her, surprised.
"Come, come, Ellen!" said Bunting reprovingly.
"Well, it is a horrible idea!" said his wife sullenly. "To go and sell a fellow-being for five hundred pounds."
But Daisy was offended. "Of course I'd like to see it!" she cried defiantly. "I never said nothing about the reward. That was Mr. Chandler said that! I only said I'd like to see the knife."
Chandler looked at her soothingly. "Well, the day may come when you will see it," he said slowly.
A great idea had come into his mind.
"No! What makes you think that?"
"If they catches him, and if you comes along with me to see our Black Museum at the Yard, you'll certainly see the knife, Miss Daisy. They keeps all them kind of things there. So if, as I say, this weapon should lead to the conviction of The Avenger--well, then, that knife 'ull be there, and you'll see it!"
"The Black Museum? Why, whatever do they have a museum in your place for?" asked Daisy wonderingly. "I thought there was only the British Museum--"
Had then even Mrs. Bunting, as well as Bunting and Chandler, laughed aloud.
"You are a goosey girl!" said her father fondly. "Why, there's a lot of museums in London; the town's thick with 'em. Ask Ellen there. She and me used to go to them kind of places when we was courting--if the weather was bad."
"But our museum's the one that would interest Miss Daisy," broke in Chandler eagerly. "It's a regular Chamber of 'Orrors!"
"Why, Joe, you never told us about that place before," said Bunting excitedly. "D'you really mean that there's a museum where they keeps all sorts of things connected with crimes? Things like knives murders have been committed with?"
"Knives?" cried Joe, pleased at having become the centre of attention, for Daisy had also fixed her blue eyes on him, and even Mrs. Bunting looked at him expectantly. "Much more than knives, Mr. Bunting! Why, they've got there, in little bottles, the real poison what people have been done away with."
"And can you go there whenever you like?" asked Daisy wonderingly. She had not realised before what extraordinary and agreeable privileges are attached to the position of a detective member of the London Police Force.
"Well, I suppose I could--" Joe smiled. "Anyway I can certainly get leave to take a friend there." He looked meaningly at Daisy, and Daisy looked eagerly at him.
But would Ellen ever let her go out by herself with Mr. Chandler? Ellen was so prim, so--so irritatingly proper. But what was this father was saying? "D'you really mean that, Joe?"
"Yes, of course I do!"
"Well, then, look here! If it isn't asking too much of a favour, I should like to go along there with you very much one day. I don't want to wait till The Avenger's caught--"Bunting smiled broadly. "I'd be quite content as it is with what there is in that museum o' yours. Ellen, there,"--he looked across at his wife--"don't agree with me about such things. Yet I don't think I'm a bloodthirsty man! But I'm just terribly interested in all that sort of thing--always have been. I used to positively envy the butler in that Balham Mystery!"
Again a look passed between Daisy and the young man--it was a look which contained and carried a great many things backwards and forwards, such as--"Now, isn't it funny that your father should want to go to such a place? But still, I can't help it if he does want to go, so we must put up with his company, though it would have been much nicer for us to go just by our two selves." And then Daisy's look answered quite as plainly, though perhaps Joe didn't read her glance quite as clearly as she had read his: "Yes, it is tiresome. But father means well; and 'twill be very pleasant going there, even if he does come too."
"Well, what d'you say to the day after to-morrow, Mr. Bunting? I'd call for you here about--shall we say half-past two?--and just take you and Miss Daisy down to the Yard. 'Twouldn't take very long; we could go all the way by bus, right down to Westminster Bridge." He looked round at his hostess: "Wouldn't you join us, Mrs. Bunting? 'Tis truly a wonderful interesting place."
But his hostess shook her head decidedly. "'Twould turn me sick," she exclaimed, "to see the bottle of poison what had done away with the life of some poor creature!"
"And as for knives--" a look of real horror, of startled fear, crept over her pale face.
"There, there!" said Bunting hastily. "Live and let live--that's what I always say. Ellen ain't on in this turn. She can just stay at home and mind the cat--I beg his pardon, I mean the lodger!"
"I won't have Mr. Sleuth laughed at," said Mrs. Bunting darkly. "But there! I'm sure it's very kind of you, Joe, to think of giving Bunting and Daisy such a rare treat"--she spoke sarcastically, but none of the three who heard her understood that.

CHAPTER IX
The moment she passed through the great arched door which admits the stranger to that portion of New Scotland Yard where throbs the heart of that great organism which fights the forces of civilised crime, Daisy Bunting felt that she had indeed become free of the Kingdom of Romance. Even the lift in which the three of them were whirled up to one of the upper floors of the huge building was to the girl a new and delightful experience. Daisy had always lived a simple, quiet life in the little country town where dwelt Old Aunt and this was the first time a lift had come her way.

With a touch of personal pride in the vast building, Joe Chandler marched his friends down a wide, airy corridor. Daisy clung to her father's arm, a little bewildered, a little oppressed by her good fortune. Her happy young voice was stilled by the awe she felt at the wonderful place where she found herself, and by the glimpses she caught of great rooms full of busy, silent men engaged in unravelling—or so she supposed—the mysteries of crime.

They were passing a half-open door when Chandler suddenly stopped short. "Look in there," he said, in a low voice, addressing the father rather than the daughter, "that's the Finger-Print Room. We've records here of over two hundred thousand men's and women's finger-tips! I expect you know, Mr. Bunting, as how, once we've got the print of a man's five finger-tips, well, he's done for—if he ever does anything else, that is. Once we've got that bit of him registered he can't never escape us—no, not if he tries ever so. But though there's nigh on a quarter of a million records in there, yet it don't take—well, not half an hour, for them to tell whether any particular man has ever been convicted before! Wonderful thought, ain't it?"

"Wonderful!" said Bunting, drawing a deep breath. And then a troubled look came over his stolid face. "Wonderful, but also a very fearful thought for the poor wretches as has got their finger-prints in, Joe."

Joe laughed. "Agreed!" he said. "And the cleverer ones knows that only too well. Why, not long ago, one man who knew his record was here safe, managed to slash about his fingers something awful, just so as to make a blurred impression—you takes my meaning? But there, at the end of six weeks the skin grew all right again, and in exactly the same little creases as before!"

"Poor devil!" said Bunting under his breath, and a cloud even came over Daisy's bright eager face.

They were now going along a narrower passage, and then again they came to a half-open door, leading into a room far smaller than that of the Finger-Print Identification Room.

"If you'll glance in there," said Joe briefly, "you'll see how we finds out all about any man whose finger-tips has given him away, so to speak. It's here we keeps an account of what he's done, his previous convictions, and so on. His finger-tips are where I told you, and his record in there—just connected by a number."

"Wonderful!" said Bunting, drawing in his breath. But Daisy was longing to get on—to get to the Black Museum. All this that Joe and her father were saying was quite unreal to her, and, for the matter of that not worth taking the trouble to understand. However, she had not long to wait.

A broad-shouldered, pleasant-looking young fellow, who seemed on very friendly terms with Joe Chandler, came forward suddenly, and, unlocking a common-place-looking door, ushered the little party of three through into the Black Museum.

For a moment there came across Daisy a feeling of keen disappointment and surprise. This big, light room simply reminded her of what they called the Science Room in the public library of the town where she lived with Old Aunt. Here, as there, the centre was taken up with plain glass cases fixed at a height from the floor which enabled their contents to be looked at closely.

She walked forward and peered into the case nearest the door. The exhibits shown there were mostly small, shabby-looking little things, the sort of things one might turn out of an old rubbish cupboard in an untidy house—old medicine bottles, a soiled neckerchief, what looked like a child's broken lantern, even a box of pills...

As for the walls, they were covered with the queerest-looking objects; bits of old iron, odd-looking things made of wood and leather, and so on.

It was really rather disappointing.

Then Daisy Bunting gradually became aware that standing on a shelf just below the first of the broad, spacious windows which made the great room look so light and shadowless, was a row of life-size white plaster heads, each head slightly inclined to the right. There were about a dozen of these, not more—and they had such odd, staring, helpless, real-looking faces.

"Whatever's those?" asked Bunting in a low voice.

Daisy clung a thought closer to her father's arm. Even she guessed that these strange, pathetic, staring faces were the death-masks of those men and women who had fulfilled the awful law which ordains that the murderer shall be, in his turn, done to death.

"All hanged!" said the guardian of the Black Museum briefly. "Casts taken after death."

Bunting smiled nervously. "They don't look dead somehow. They looks more as if they were listening," he said.

"That's the fault of Jack Ketch," said the man facetiously. "It's his idea—that of knotting his patient's necktie
under the left ear! That's what he does to each of the gentlemen to whom he has to act valet on just one occasion only. It makes them lean just a bit to one side. You look here--?"

Daisy and her father came a little closer, and the speaker pointed with his finger to a little dent imprinted on the left side of each neck; running from this indentation was a curious little furrow, well ridged above, showing how tightly Jack Ketch's necktie had been drawn when its wearer was hurried through the gates of eternity.

"They looks foolish-like, rather than terrified, or--or hurt," said Bunting wonderingly.

He was extraordinarily moved and fascinated by those dumb, staring faces.

But young Chandler exclaimed in a cheerful, matter-of-fact voice, "Well, a man would look foolish at such a time as that, with all his plans brought to naught--and knowing he's only got a second to live --now wouldn't he?"

"Yes, I suppose he would," said Bunting slowly.

Daisy had gone a little pale. The sinister, breathless atmosphere of the place was beginning to tell on her. She now began to understand that the shabby little objects lying there in the glass case close to her were each and all links in the chain of evidence which, in almost every case, had brought some guilty man or woman to the gallows.

"We had a yellow gentleman here the other day," observed the guardian suddenly; "one of those Brahmins--so they calls themselves. Well, you'd a been quite surprised to see how that heathen took on! He declared--what was the word he used?"--he turned to Chandler.

"He said that each of these things, with the exception of the casts, mind you--queer to say, he left them out--exuded evil, that was the word he used! Exuded--squeezed out it means. He said that being here made him feel very bad. And twasn't all nonsense either. He turned quite green under his yellow skin, and we had to shove him out quick. He didn't feel better till he'd got right to the other end of the passage!"

"There now! Who'd ever think of that?" said Bunting. "I should say that man 'ud got something on his conscience, wouldn't you?"

"Well, I needn't stay now," said Joe's good-natured friend. "You show your friends round, Chandler. You knows the place nearly as well as I do, don't you?"

He smiled at Joe's visitors, as if to say good-bye, but it seemed that he could not tear himself away after all.

"Look here," he said to Bunting. "In this here little case are the tools of Charles Peace. I expect you've heard of him."

"I should think I have!" cried Bunting eagerly.

"Many gents as comes here thinks this case the most interesting of all. Peace was such a wonderful man! A great inventor they say he would have been, had he been put in the way of it. Here's his ladder; you see it folds up quite compactly, and makes a nice little bundle--just like a bundle of old sticks any man might have been seen carrying about London in those days without attracting any attention. Why, it probably helped him to look like an honest working man time and time again, for on being arrested he declared most solemnly he'd always carried that ladder openly under his arm."

"The daring of that!" cried Bunting.

"Yes, and when the ladder was opened out it could reach from the ground to the second storey of any old house. And, oh! how clever he was! Just open one section, and you see the other sections open automatically; so Peace could stand on the ground and force the thing quietly up to any window he wished to reach. Then he'd go away again, having done his job, with a mere bundle of old wood under his arm! My word, he was artful! I wonder if you've heard the tale of how Peace once lost a finger. Well, he guessed the constables were instructed to look out for a man missing a finger; so what did he do?"

"Put on a false finger," suggested Bunting.

"No, indeed! Peace made up his mind just to do without a hand altogether. Here's his false stump: you see, it's made of wood --wood and black felt? Well, that just held his hand nicely. Why, we considers that one of the most ingenious contrivances in the whole museum."

Meanwhile, Daisy had let go her hold of her father. With Chandler in delighted attendance, she had moved away to the farther end of the great room, and now she was bending over yet another glass case. "Whatever are those little bottles for?" she asked wonderingly.

There were five small phials, filled with varying quantities of cloudy liquids.

"They're full of poison, Miss Daisy, that's what they are. There's enough arsenic in that little whack o' brandy to do for you and me --aye, and for your father as well, I should say."

"Then chemists shouldn't sell such stuff," said Daisy, smiling. Poison was so remote from herself, that the sight of these little bottles only brought a pleasant thrill.

"No more they don't. That was sneaked out of a flypaper, that was. Lady said she wanted a cosmetic for her complexion, but what she was really going for was flypapers for to do away with her husband. She'd got a bit tired of him, I suspect."
"Perhaps he was a horrid man, and deserved to be done away with," said Daisy. The idea struck them both as so very comic that they began to laugh aloud in unison.

"Did you ever hear what a certain Mrs. Pearce did?" asked Chandler, becoming suddenly serious.

"Oh, yes," said Daisy, and she shuddered a little. "That was the wicked, wicked woman what killed a pretty little baby and its mother. They've got her in Madame Tussaud's. But Ellen, she won't let me go to the Chamber of Horrors. She wouldn't let father take me there last time I was in London. Cruel of her, I called it. But somehow I don't feel as if I wanted to go there now, after having been here!"

"Well," said Chandler slowly, "we've a case full of relics of Mrs. Pearce. But the pram the bodies were found in, that's at Madame Tussaud's--at least so they claim, I can't say. Now here's something just as curious, and not near so dreadful. See that man's jacket there?"

"Yes," said Daisy falteringly. She was beginning to feel oppressed, frightened. She no longer wondered that the Indian gentleman had been taken queer.

"A burglar shot a man dead who'd disturbed him, and by mistake he went and left that jacket behind him. Our people noticed that one of the buttons was broken in two. Well, that don't seem much of a clue, does it, Miss Daisy? Will you believe me when I tells you that that other bit of button was discovered, and that it hanged the fellow? And 'twas the more wonderful because all three buttons was different!"

Daisy stared wonderingly, down at the little broken button which had hung a man. "And whatever's that?" she asked, pointing to a piece of dirty-looking stuff.

"Well," said Chandler reluctantly, "that's rather a horrible thing --that is. That's a bit o' shirt that was buried with a woman--buried in the ground, I mean--after her husband had cut her up and tried, to burn her. 'Twas that bit o' shirt that brought him to the gallows."

"I considers your museum's a very horrid place!" said Daisy pettishly, turning away.

She longed to be out in the passage again, away from this brightly lighted, cheerful-looking, sinister room. But her father was now absorbed in the case containing various types of infernal machines. "Beautiful little works of art some of them are," said his guide eagerly, and Bunting could not but agree.

"Come along--do, father!" said Daisy quickly. "I've seen about enough now. If I was to stay in here much longer it 'ud give me the horrors. I don't want to have no nightmares to-night. It's dreadful to think there are so many wicked people in the world. Why, we might knock up against some murderer any minute without knowing it, mightn't we?"

"Not you, Miss Daisy," said Chandler smirkingly. "I don't suppose you'll ever come across even a common swindler, let alone anyone who's committed a murder--not one in a million does that. Why, even I have never had anything to do with a proper murder case!"

But Bunting was in no hurry. He was thoroughly enjoying every moment of the time. Just now he was studying intently the various photographs which hung on the walls of the Black Museum; especially was he pleased to see those connected with a famous and still mysterious case which had taken place not long before in Scotland, and in which the servant of the man who died had played a considerable part--not in elucidating, but in obscuring, the mystery.

"I suppose a good many murderers get off?" he said musingly.

And Joe Chandler's friend nodded. "I should think they did!" he exclaimed. "There's no such thing as justice here in England. 'Tis odds on the murderer every time. 'Tisn't one in ten that come to the end he should do--to the gallows, that is."

"And what d'you think about what's going on now--I mean about those Avenger murders?"

Bunting lowered his voice, but Daisy and Chandler were already moving towards the door.

"I don't believe he'll ever be caught," said the other confidentially. "In some ways 'tis a lot more of a job to catch a madman than 'tis to run down just an ordinary criminal. And, of course--leastways to my thinking--The Avenger is a madman--one of the cunning, quiet sort. Have you heard about the letter?" his voice dropped lower.

"No," said Bunting, staring eagerly at him. "What letter d'you mean?"

"Well, there's a letter--it'll be in this museum some day--which came just before that last double event. 'Twas signed 'The Avenger,' in just the same printed characters as on that bit of paper he always leaves behind him. Mind you, it don't follow that it actually was The Avenger what sent that letter here, but it looks uncommonly like it, and I know that the Boss attaches quite a lot of importance to it."

"And where was it posted?" asked Bunting. "That might be a bit of a clue, you know."

"Oh, no," said the other. "They always goes a very long way to post anything--criminals do. It stands to reason they would. But this particular one was put in the Edgware Road Post Office."

"What? Close to us?" said Bunting. "Goodness! dreadful!"

"Any of us might knock up against him any minute. I don't suppose The Avenger's in any way peculiar-lookin--
in fact we know he ain't."
"Then you think that woman as says she saw him did see him?" asked Bunting hesitatingly.
"Our description was made up from what she said," answered the other cautiously. "But, there, you can't tell! In a case like that it's groping--groping in the dark all the time--and it's just a lucky accident if it comes out right in the end. Of course, it's upsetting us all very much here. You can't wonder at that!"
"No, indeed," said Bunting quickly. "I give you my word, I've hardly thought of anything else for the last month."

Daisy had disappeared, and when her father joined her in the passage she was listening, with downcast eyes, to what Joe Chandler was saying.

He was telling her about his real home, of the place where his mother lived, at Richmond--that it was a nice little house, close to the park. He was asking her whether she could manage to come out there one afternoon, explaining that his mother would give them tea, and how nice it would be.

"I don't see why Ellen shouldn't let me," the girl said rebelliously. "But she's that old-fashioned and pernickety is Ellen--a regular old maid! And, you see, Mr. Chandler, when I'm staying with them, father don't like for me to do anything that Ellen don't approve of. But she's got quite fond of you, so perhaps if you ask her--?" She looked at him, and he nodded sagely.

"Don't you be afraid," he said confidently. "I'll get round Mrs. Bunting. But, Miss Daisy"--he grew very red--"I'd just like to ask you a question--no offence meant--"
"Yes?" said Daisy a little breathlessly. "There's father close to us, Mr. Chandler. Tell me quick; what is it?"
"Well, I take it, by what you've just said, that you've never walked out with any young fellow?"

Daisy hesitated a moment; then a very pretty dimple came into her cheek. "No," she said sadly. "No, Mr. Chandler, that I have not." In a burst of candour she added, "You see, I never had the chance!"

And Joe Chandler smiled, well pleased.

CHAPTER X

By what she regarded as a fortunate chance, Mrs. Bunting found herself for close on an hour quite alone in the house during her husband's and Daisy's jaunt with young Chandler.

Mr. Sleuth did not often go out in the daytime, but on this particular afternoon, after he had finished his tea, when dusk was falling, he suddenly observed that he wanted a new suit of clothes, and his landlady eagerly acquiesced in his going out to purchase it.

As soon as he had left the house, she went quickly up to the drawing-room floor. Now had come her opportunity of giving the two rooms a good dusting; but Mrs. Bunting knew well, deep in her heart, that it was not so much the dusting of Mr. Sleuth's sitting-room she wanted to do--as to engage in a vague search for--she hardly knew for what.

During the years she had been in service Mrs. Bunting had always had a deep, wordless contempt for those of her fellow-servants who read their employers' private letters, and who furtively peeped into desks and cupboards in the hope, more vague than positive, of discovering family skeletons.

But now, with regard to Mr. Sleuth, she was ready, aye, eager, to do herself what she had once so scorned others for doing.

Beginning with the bedroom, she started on a methodical search. He was a very tidy gentleman was the lodger, and his few things, under-garments, and so on, were in apple-pie order. She had early undertaken, much to his satisfaction, to do the very little bit of washing he required done, with her own and Bunting's. Luckily he wore soft shirts.

At one time Mrs. Bunting had always had a woman in to help her with this tiresome weekly job, but lately she had grown quite clever at it herself. The only things she had to send out were Bunting's shirts. Everything else she managed to do herself.

From the chest of drawers she now turned her attention to the dressing-table.

Mr. Sleuth did not take his money with him when he went out, he generally left it in one of the drawers below the old-fashioned looking-glass. And now, in a perfunctory way, his landlady pulled out the little drawer, but she did not touch what was lying there; she only glanced at the heap of sovereigns and a few bits of silver. The lodger had taken just enough money with him to buy the clothes he required. He had consulted her as to how much they would cost, making no secret of why he was going out, and the fact had vaguely comforted Mrs. Bunting.

Now she lifted the toilet-cover, and even rolled up the carpet a little way, but no, there was nothing there, not so much as a scrap of paper. And at last, when more or less giving up the search, as she came and went between the two rooms, leaving the connecting door wide open, her mind became full of uneasy speculation and wonder as to the lodger's past life.

Odd Mr. Sleuth must surely always have been, but odd in a sensible sort of way, having on the whole the same moral ideals of conduct as have other people of his class. He was queer about the drink--one might say almost crazy
on the subject—but there, as to that, he wasn’t the only one! She, Ellen Bunting, had once lived with a lady who was just like that, who was quite crazed, that is, on the question of drink and drunkards—She looked round the neat drawing-room with vague dissatisfaction. There was only one place where anything could be kept concealed—that place was the substantial if small mahogany chiffonnier. And then an idea suddenly came to Mrs. Bunting, one she had never thought of before.

After listening intently for a moment, lest something should suddenly bring Mr. Sleuth home earlier than she expected, she went to the corner where the chiffonnier stood, and, exerting the whole of her not very great physical strength, she tipped forward the heavy piece of furniture.

As she did so, she heard a queer rumbling sound,—something rolling about on the second shelf, something which had not been there before Mr. Sleuth's arrival. Slowly, laboriously, she tipped the chiffonnier backwards and forwards—once, twice, thrice—satisfied, yet strangely troubled in her mind, for she now felt sure that the bag of which the disappearance had so surprised her was there, safely locked away by its owner.

Suddenly a very uncomfortable thought came to Mrs. Bunting's mind. She hoped Mr. Sleuth would not notice that his bag had shifted inside the cupboard. A moment later, with sharp dismay, Mr. Sleuth's landlady realised that the fact that she had moved the chiffonnier must become known to her lodger, for a thin trickle of some dark-coloured liquid was oozing out though the bottom of the little cupboard door.

She stooped down and touched the stuff. It showed red, bright red, on her finger.

Mrs. Bunting grew chalky white, then recovered herself quickly. In fact the colour rushed into her face, and she grew hot all over.

It was only a bottle of red ink she had upset—that was all! How could she have thought it was anything else?

It was the more silly of her—so she told herself in scornful condemnation—because she knew that the lodger used red ink. Certain pages of Cruden's Concordance were covered with notes written in Mr. Sleuth's peculiar upright handwriting. In fact in some places you couldn't see the margin, so closely covered was it with remarks and notes of interrogation.

Mr. Sleuth had foolishly placed his bottle of red ink in the chiffonnier—that was what her poor, foolish gentleman had done; and it was owing to her inquisitiveness, her restless wish to know things she would be none the better, none the happier, for knowing, that this accident had taken place.

She mopped up with her duster the few drops of ink which had fallen on the green carpet and then, still feeling, as she angrily told herself, foolishly upset she went once more into the back room.

It was curious that Mr. Sleuth possessed no notepaper. She would have expected him to have made that one of his first purchases—the more so that paper is so very cheap, especially that rather dirty-looking grey Silurian paper. Mrs. Bunting had once lived with a lady who always used two kinds of notepaper, white for her friends and equals, grey for those whom she called "common people." She, Ellen Green, as she then was, had always resented the fact. Strange she should remember it now, stranger in a way because that employer of her's had not been a real lady, and Mr. Sleuth, whatever his peculiarities, was, in every sense of the word, a real gentleman. Somehow Mrs. Bunting felt sure that if he had bought any notepaper it would have been white—white and probably cream-laid—not grey and cheap.

Again she opened the drawer of the old-fashioned wardrobe and lifted up the few pieces of underclothing Mr. Sleuth now possessed.

But there was nothing there—nothing, that is, hidden away. When one came to think of it there seemed something strange in the notion of leaving all one's money where anyone could take it, and in locking up such a valueless thing as a cheap sham leather bag, to say nothing of a bottle of ink.

Mrs. Bunting once more opened out each of the tiny drawers below the looking-glass, each delicately fashioned of fine old mahogany. Mr. Sleuth kept his money in the centre drawer.

The glass had only cost seven-and-sixpence, and, after the auction a dealer had come and offered her first fifteen shillings, and then a guinea for it. Not long ago, in Baker Street, she had seen a looking-glass which was the very spit of this one, labeled "Chippendale, Antique. L21 5s 0d."

There lay Mr. Sleuth's money—the sovereigns, as the landlady well knew, would each and all gradually pass into her's and Bunting's possession, honestly earned by them no doubt but unattainable—in act unearnable—excepting in connection with the present owner of those dully shining gold sovereigns.

At last she went downstairs to await Mr. Sleuth's return.

When she heard the key turn in the door, she came out into the passage.

"I'm sorry to say I've had an accident, sir," she said a little breathlessly. "Taking advantage of your being out I went up to dust the drawing-room, and while I was trying to get behind the chiffonnier it tilted. I'm afraid, sir, that a bottle of ink that was inside may have got broken, for just a few drops oozed out, sir. But I hope there's no harm done. I wiped it up as well as I could, seeing that the doors of the chiffonnier are locked."
Mr. Sleuth stared at her with a wild, almost a terrified glance. But Mrs. Bunting stood her ground. She felt far less afraid now than she had felt before he came in. Then she had been so frightened that she had nearly gone out of the house, on to the pavement, for company.

"Of course I had no idea, sir, that you kept any ink in there."

She spoke as if she were on the defensive, and the lodger's brow cleared.

"I was aware you used ink, sir," Mrs. Bunting went on, "for I have seen you marking that book of yours--I mean the book you read together with the Bible. Would you like me to go out and get you another bottle, sir?"

"No," said Mr. Sleuth. "No, I thank you. I will at once proceed upstairs and see what damage has been done. When I require you I shall ring."

He shuffled past her, and five minutes later the drawing-room bell did ring.

At once, from the door, Mrs. Bunting saw that the chiffonnier was wide open, and that the shelves were empty save for the bottle of red ink which had turned over and now lay in a red pool of its own making on the lower shelf.

"I'm afraid it will have stained the wood, Mrs. Bunting. Perhaps I was ill-advised to keep my ink in there."

"Oh, no, sir! That doesn't matter at all. Only a drop or two fell out on to the carpet, and they don't show, as you see, sir, for it's a dark corner. Shall I take the bottle away? I may as well."

Mr. Sleuth hesitated. "No," he said, after a long pause, "I think not, Mrs. Bunting. For the very little I require it the ink remaining in the bottle will do quite well, especially if I add a little water, or better still, a little tea, to what already remains in the bottle. I only require it to mark up passages which happen to be of peculiar interest in my Concordance--a work, Mrs. Bunting, which I should have taken great pleasure in compiling myself had not this--ah--this gentleman called Cruden, been before."

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Not only Bunting, but Daisy also, thought Ellen far pleasanter in her manner than usual that evening. She listened to all they had to say about their interesting visit to the Black Museum, and did not snub either of them--no, not even when Bunting told of the dreadful, haunting, silly-looking death-masks taken from the hanged.

But a few minutes after that, when her husband suddenly asked her a question, Mrs. Bunting answered at random. It was clear she had not heard the last few words he had been saying.

"A penny for your thoughts!" he said jocularly. But she shook her head.

Daisy slipped out of the room, and, five minutes later, came back dressed up in a blue-and-white check silk gown.

"My!" said her father. "You do look fine, Daisy. I've never seen you wearing that before."

"And a rare figure of fun she looks in it!" observed Mrs. Bunting sarcastically. And then, "I suppose this dressing up means that you're expecting someone. I should have thought both of you must have seen enough of young Chandler for one day. I wonder when that young chap does his work--that I do! He never seems too busy to come and waste an hour or two here."

But that was the only nasty thing Ellen said all that evening. And even Daisy noticed that her stepmother seemed dazed and unlike herself. She went about her cooking and the various little things she had to do even more silently than was her wont.

Yet under that still, almost sullen, manner, how fierce was the storm of dread, of sombre anguish, and, yes, of sick suspense, which shook her soul, and which so far affected her poor, ailing body that often she felt as if she could not force herself to accomplish her simple round of daily work.

After they had finished supper Bunting went out and bought a penny evening paper, but as he came in he announced, with a rather rueful smile, that he had read so much of that nasty little print this last week or two that his eyes hurt him.

"Let me read aloud a bit to you, father," said Daisy eagerly, and he handed her the paper.

Scarcey had Daisy opened her lips when a loud ring and a knock echoed through the house.

CHAPTER XI

It was only Joe. Somehow, even Bunting called him "Joe" now, and no longer "Chandler," as he had mostly used to do.

Mrs. Bunting had opened the front door only a very little way. She wasn't going to have any strangers pushing in past her.

To her sharpened, suffering senses her house had become a citadel which must be defended; aye, even if the besiegers were a mighty horde with right on their side. And she was always expecting that first single spy who would herald the battalion against whom her only weapon would be her woman's wit and cunning.

But when she saw who stood there smiling at her, the muscles of her face relaxed, and it lost the tense, anxious, almost agonised look it assumed the moment she turned her back on her husband and stepdaughter.

"Why, Joe," she whispered, for she had left the door open behind her, and Daisy had already begun to read
aloud, as her father had bidden her. "Come in, do! It's fairly cold to-night."

A glance at his face had shown her that there was no fresh news.

Joe Chandler walked in, past her, into the little hall. Cold? Well, he didn't feel cold, for he had walked quickly to be the sooner where he was now.

Nine days had gone by since that last terrible occurrence, the double murder which had been committed early in the morning of the day Daisy had arrived in London. And though the thousands of men belonging to the Metropolitan Police—to say nothing of the smaller, more alert body of detectives attached to the Force—were keenly on the alert, not one but had begun to feel that there was nothing to be alert about. Familiarity, even with horror, breeds contempt.

But with the public it was far otherwise. Each day something happened to revive and keep alive the mingled horror and interest this strange, enigmatic series of crimes had evoked. Even the more sober organs of the Press went on attacking, with gathering severity and indignation, the Commissioner of Police; and at the huge demonstration held in Victoria Park two days before violent speeches had also been made against the Home Secretary.

But just now Joe Chandler wanted to forget all that. The little house in the Marylebone Road had become to him an enchanted isle of dreams, to which his thoughts were ever turning when he had a moment to spare from what had grown to be a wearisome, because an unsatisfactory, job. He secretly agreed with one of his pals who had exclaimed, and that within twenty-four hours of the last double crime, "Why, 'twould be easier to find a needle in a rick o' hay than this--bloke!"

And if that had been true then, how much truer it was now—after nine long, empty days had gone by?

Quickly he divested himself of his great-coat, muffler, and low hat. Then he put his finger on his lip, and motioned smilingly to Mrs. Bunting to wait a moment. From where he stood in the hall the father and daughter made a pleasant little picture of contented domesticity. Joe Chandler's honest heart swelled at the sight.

Daisy, wearing the blue-and-white check silk dress about which her stepmother and she had had words, sat on a low stool on the left side of the fire, while Bunting, leaning back in his own comfortable arm-chair, was listening, his hand to his ear, in an attitude--as it was the first time she had caught him doing it, the fact brought a pang to Mrs. Bunting—which showed that age was beginning to creep over the listener.

One of Daisy's duties as companion to her great-aunt was that of reading the newspaper aloud, and she prided herself on her accomplishment.

Just as Joe had put his finger on his lip Daisy had been asking, "Shall I read this, father?" And Bunting had answered quickly, "Aye, do, my dear."

He was absorbed in what he was hearing, and, on seeing Joe at the door, he had only just nodded his head. The young man was becoming so frequent a visitor as to be almost one of themselves.

Daisy read out:

"The AVENGER: A--"

And then she stopped short, for the next word puzzled her greatly. Bravely, however, she went on. "A the-o-ry."

"'Go in--do!" whispered Mrs. Bunting to her visitor. "Why should we stay out here in the cold? It's ridiculous."

"I don't want to interrupt Miss Daisy," whispered Chandler back, rather hoarsely.

"Well, you'll hear it all the better in the room. Don't think she'll stop because of you, bless you! There's nothing shy about our Daisy!"

The young man resented the tart, short tone. "Poor little girl!" he said to himself tenderly. "That's what it is having a stepmother, instead of a proper mother." But he obeyed Mrs. Bunting, and then he was pleased he had done so, for Daisy looked up, and a bright blush came over her pretty face.

"Joe begs you won't stop yet awhile. Go on with your reading," commanded Mrs. Bunting quickly. "Now, Joe, you can go and sit over there, close to Daisy, and then you won't miss a word."

There was a sarcastic inflection in her voice, even Chandler noticed that, but he obeyed her with alacrity, and crossing the room he went and sat on a chair just behind Daisy. From there he could note with reverent delight the charming way her fair hair grew upwards from the nape of her slender neck.

"The AVENGER: A THE-O-RY"

began Daisy again, clearing her throat.

"DEAR Sir—I have a suggestion to put forward for which I think there is a great deal to be said. It seems to me very probable that The Avenger—to give him the name by which he apparently wishes to be known—comprises in his own person the peculiarities of Jekyll and Hyde, Mr. Louis Stevenson's now famous hero.

'The culprit, according to my point of view, is a quiet, pleasant-looking gentleman who lives somewhere in the West End of London. He has, however, a tragedy in his past life. He is the husband of a dipsomaniac wife. She is, of course, under care, and is never mentioned in the house where he lives, maybe with his widowed mother and perhaps a maiden sister. They notice that he has become gloomy and brooding of late, but he lives his usual life,
occupying himself each day with some harmless hobby. On foggy nights, once the quiet household is plunged in
sleep, he creeps out of the house, maybe between one and two o'clock, and swiftly makes his way straight to what
has become The Avenger's murder area. Picking out a likely victim, he approaches her with Judas-like gentleness,
and having committed his awful crime, goes quietly home again. After a good bath and breakfast, he turns up happy,
once more the quiet individual who is an excellent son, a kind brother, esteemed and even beloved by a large circle
of friends and acquaintances. Meantime, the police are searching about the scene of the tragedy for what they regard
as the usual type of criminal lunatic.

"I give this theory, Sir, for what it is worth, but I confess that I am amazed the police have so wholly confined
their inquiries to the part of London where these murders have been actually committed. I am quite sure from all that
has come out--and we must remember that full information is never given to the newspapers--The Avenger should
be sought for in the West and not in the East End of London--Believe me to remain, Sir, yours very truly--"

Again Daisy hesitated, and then with an effort she brought out the word "Gab-o-ri-you," said she.

"What a funny name!" said Bunting wonderingly.

And then Joe broke in: "That's the name of a French chap what wrote detective stories," he said. "Pretty good,
some of them are, too!"

"Then this Gaboriyou has come over to study these Avenger murders, I take it?" said Bunting.

"Oh, no," Joe spoke with confidence. "Whoever's written that silly letter just signed that name for fun."

"It is a silly letter," Mrs. Bunting had broken in resentfully. "I wonder a respectable paper prints such rubbish."

"Fancy if The Avenger did turn out to be a gentleman!" cried Daisy, in an awe-struck voice. "There'd be a how-to-do!"

"There may be something in the notion," said her father thoughtfully. "After all, the monster must be somewhere. This very minute he must be somewhere a-hiding of himself."

"Of course he's somewhere," said Mrs. Bunting scornfully.

She had just heard Mr. Sleuth moving overhead. Twould soon be time for the lodger's supper.

She hurried on: "But what I do say is that—that—he has nothing to do with the West End. Why, they say it's a
sailor from the Docks—that's a good bit more likely, I take it. But there, I'm fair sick of the whole subject! We talk
of nothing else in this house. The Avenger this—The Avenger that—"

"I expect Joe has something to tell us new to-night," said Bunting cheerfully. "Well, Joe, is there anything new?"

"I say, father, just listen to this!" Daisy broke in excitedly. She read out:

"BLOODHOUNDS TO BE SERIOUSLY CONSIDERED"

"Bloodhounds?" repeated Mrs. Bunting, and there was terror in her tone. "Why bloodhounds? That do seem to
me a most horrible idea!"

Bunting looked across at her, mildly astonished. "Why, 'twould be a very good idea, if 'twas possible to have
bloodhounds in a town. But, there, how can that be done in London, full of butchers' shops, to say nothing of
slaughter-yards and other places o' that sort?"

But Daisy went on, and to her stepmother's shrinking ear there seemed a horrible thrill of delight; of gloating
pleasure, in her fresh young voice.

"Hark to this," she said:

"A man who had committed a murder in a lonely wood near Blackburn was traced by the help of a bloodhound,
and thanks to the sagacious instincts of the animal, the miscreant was finally convicted and hanged."

"La, now! Who'd ever have thought of such a thing?" Bunting exclaimed, in admiration. "The newspapers do
have some useful hints in sometimes, Joe."

But young Chandler shook his head. "Bloodhounds ain't no use," he said; "no use at all! If the Yard was to listen
to all the suggestions that the last few days have brought in--well, all I can say is our work would be cut out for us--
ot but what it's cut out for us now, if it comes to that!" He sighed ruefully. He was beginning to feel very tired; if
only he could stay in this pleasant, cosy room listening to Daisy Bunting reading on and on for ever, instead of
having to go out, as he would presently have to do, into the cold and foggy night!

Joe Chandler was fast becoming very sick of his new job. There was a lot of unpleasantness attached to the
business, too. Why, even in the house where he lived, and in the little cook-shop where he habitually took his meals,
the people round him had taken to taunt him with the remissness of the police. More than that one of his pals, a man
he'd always looked up to, because the young fellow had the gift of the gab, had actually been among those who had
spoken at the big demonstration in Victoria Park, making a violent speech, not only against the Commissioner of the
Metropolitan Police, but also against the Home Secretary.

But Daisy, like most people who believe themselves blessed with the possession of an accomplishment, had no
mind to leave off reading just yet.

"Here's another notion!" she exclaimed. "Another letter, father!"

"PARDON TO ACCOMPLICES.

"DEAR Sir--During the last day or two several of the more Intelligent of my acquaintances have suggested that The Avenger, whoever he may be, must be known to a certain number of persons. It is impossible that the perpetrator of such deeds, however nomad he may be in his habits--"

"Now I wonder what 'nomad' can be?" Daisy interrupted herself, and looked round at her little audience.

"I've always declared the fellow had all his senses about him," observed Bunting confidently.

Daisy went on, quite satisfied:

"--however nomad he may be in his habit; must have some habitat where his ways are known to at least one person. Now the person who knows the terrible secret is evidently withholding information in expectation of a reward, or maybe because, being an accessory after the fact, he or she is now afraid of the consequences. My suggestion, Sir, is that the Home Secretary promise a free pardon. The more so that only thus can this miscreant be brought to justice. Unless he was caught red-handed in the act, it will be exceedingly difficult to trace the crime committed to any individual, for English law looks very askance at circumstantial evidence."

"There's something worth listening to in that letter," said Joe, leaning forward.

Now he was almost touching Daisy, and he smiled involuntarily as she turned her gay, pretty little face the better to hear what he was saying.

"Yes, Mr. Chandler?" she said interrogatively.

"Well, d'you remember that fellow what killed an old gentleman in a railway carriage? He took refuge with someone--a woman his mother had known, and she kept him hidden for quite a long time. But at last she gave him up, and she got a big reward, too!"

"I don't think I'd like to give anybody up for a reward," said Bunting, in his slow, dogmatic way.

"Oh, yes, you would, Mr. Bunting," said Chandler confidently. "You'd only be doing what it's the plain duty of everyone--everyone, that is, who's a good citizen. And you'd be getting something for doing it, which is more than most people gets as does their duty."

"A man as gives up someone for a reward is no better than a common informer," went on Bunting obstinately. "And no man 'ud care to be called that! It's different for you, Joe," he added hastily. "It's your job to catch those who've done anything wrong. And a man'd be a fool who'd take refuge--like with you. He'd be walking into the lion's mouth--" Bunting laughed.

And then Daisy broke in coquettishly: "If I'd done anything I wouldn't mind going for help to Mr. Chandler," she said.

And Joe, with eyes kindling, cried, "No. And if you did you needn't be afraid I'd give you up, Miss Daisy!"

And then, to their amazement, there suddenly broke from Mrs. Bunting, sitting with bowed head over the table, an exclamation of impatience and anger, and, it seemed to those listening, of pain.

"Why, Ellen, don't you feel well?" asked Bunting quickly.

"Just a spasm, a sharp stitch in my side, like," answered the poor woman heavily. "It's over now. Don't mind me."

"But I don't believe--no, that I don't--that there's anybody in the world who knows who The Avenger is," went on Chandler quickly. "It stands to reason that anybody'd give him up--in their own interest, if not in anyone else's. Who'd shelter such a creature? Why, 'twould be dangerous to have him in the house along with one!"

"Then it's your idea that he's not responsible for the wicked things he does?" Mrs. Bunting raised her head, and looked over at Chandler with eager, anxious eyes.

"I'd be sorry to think he wasn't responsible enough to hang!" said Chandler deliberately. "After all the trouble he's been giving us, too!"

"Hanging'd be too good for that chap," said Bunting.

"Not if he's not responsible," said his wife sharply. "I never heard of anything so cruel--that I never did! If the man's a madman, he ought to be in an asylum--that's where he ought to be."

"Hark to her now!" Bunting looked at his Ellen with amusement. "Contrary isn't the word for her! But there, I've noticed the last few days that she seemed to be taking that monster's part. That's what comes of being a born total abstainer."

Mrs. Bunting had got up from her chair. "What nonsense you do talk!" she said angrily. "Not but what it's a good thing if these murders have emptied the public-houses of women for a bit. England's drink is England's shame--I'll never depart from that! Now, Daisy, child, get up, do! Put down that paper. We've heard quite enough. You can be laying the cloth while I goes down the kitchen."

"Yes, you mustn't be forgetting the lodger's supper," called out Bunting. "Mr. Sleuth don't always ring--" he turned to Chandler. "For one thing, he's often out about this time."

"Not often--just now and again, when he wants to buy something," snapped out Mrs. Bunting. "But I hadn't
forgot his supper. He never do want it before eight o'clock."

"Let me take up the lodger's supper, Ellen," Daisy's eager voice broke in. She had got up in obedience to her stepmother, and was now laying the cloth.

"Certainly not! I told you he only wanted me to wait on him. You have your work cut out looking after things down here—that's where I wants you to help me."

Chandler also got up. Somehow he didn't like to be doing nothing while Daisy was so busy. "Yes," he said, looking across at Mrs. Bunting, "I'd forgotten about your lodger. Going on all right, eh?"

"Never knew so quiet and well-behaved a gentleman," said Bunting. "He turned our luck, did Mr. Sleuth."

His wife left the room, and after she had gone Daisy laughed. "You'll hardly believe it, Mr. Chandler, but I've never seen this wonderful lodger. Ellen keeps him to herself, that she does! If I was father I'd be jealous!"

Both men laughed. Ellen? No, the idea was too funny.

CHAPTER XII

"All I can say is, I think Daisy ought to go. One can't always do just what one wants to do--not in this world, at any rate!"

Mrs. Bunting did not seem to be addressing anyone in particular, though both her husband and her stepdaughter were in the room. She was standing by the table, staring straight before her, and as she spoke she avoided looking at either Bunting or Daisy. There was in her voice a tone of cross decision, of thin finality, with which they were both acquainted, and to which each listener knew the other would have to bow.

There was silence for a moment, then Daisy broke out passionately, "I don't see why I should go if I don't want to!" she cried. "You'll allow I've been useful to you, Ellen? 'Tisn't even as if you was quite well."

"I am quite well--perfectly well!" snapped out Mrs. Bunting, and she turned her pale, drawn face, and looked angrily at her stepdaughter.

"'Tain't often I has a chance of being with you and father." There were tears in Daisy's voice, and Bunting glanced deprecatingly at his wife.

An invitation had come to Daisy--an invitation from her own dead mother's sister, who was housekeeper in a big house in Belgrave Square. "The family" had gone away for the Christmas holidays, and Aunt Margaret--Daisy was her godchild--had begged that her niece might come and spend two or three days with her.

But the girl had already had more than one taste of what life was like in the great gloomy basement of 100 Belgrave Square. Aunt Margaret was one of those old-fashioned servants for whom the modern employer is always sighing. While "the family" were away it was her joy--she regarded it as a privilege--to wash sixty-seven pieces of very valuable china contained in two cabinets in the drawing-room; she also slept in every bed by turns, to keep them all well aired. These were the two duties with which she intended her young niece to assist her, and Daisy's soul sickened at the prospect.

But the matter had to be settled at once. The letter had come an hour ago, containing a stamped telegraph form, and Aunt Margaret was not one to be trifled with.

Since breakfast the three had talked of nothing else, and from the very first Mrs. Bunting had said that Daisy ought to go--that there was no doubt about it, that it did not admit of discussion. But discuss it they all did, and for once Bunting stood up to his wife. But that, as was natural, only made his Ellen harder and more set on her own view.

"What the child says is true," he observed. "It isn't as if you was quite well. You've been took bad twice in the last few days--you can't deny of it, Ellen. Why shouldn't I just take a bus and go over and see Margaret? I'd tell her just how it is. She'd understand, bless you!"

"I won't have you doing nothing of the sort!" cried Mrs. Bunting, speaking almost as passionately as her stepdaughter had done. "Haven't I a right to be ill, haven't I a right to be too bad, aye, and to feel all right again--same as other people?"

Daisy turned round and clasped her hands. "Oh, Ellen!" she cried; "do say that you can't spare me! I don't want to go across to that horrid old dungeon of a place."

"Do as you like," said Mrs. Bunting sullenly. "I'm fair tired of you both! There'll come a day, Daisy, when you'll know, like me, that money is the main thing that matters in this world; and when your Aunt Margaret's left her savings to somebody else just because you wouldn't spend a few days with her this Christmas, then you'll know what it's like to go without--you'll know what a fool you were, and that nothing can't alter it any more!"

And then, with victory actually in her grasp, poor Daisy saw it snatched from her.

"Ellen is right," Bunting said heavily. "Money does matter--a terrible deal--though I never thought to hear Ellen say 'twas the only thing that mattered. But 'twould be foolish--very, very foolish, my girl, to offend your Aunt Margaret. It'll only be two days after all--two days isn't a very long time."

But Daisy did not hear her father's last words. She had already rushed from the room, and gone down to the
kitchen to hide her childish tears of disappointment—the childish tears which came because she was beginning to be a woman, with a woman's natural instinct for building her own human nest.

Aunt Margaret was not one to tolerate the comings of any strange young man, and she had a peculiar dislike to the police.

"Who'd ever have thought she'd have minded as much as that!" Bunting looked across at Ellen deprecatingly; already his heart was misgiving him.

"It's plain enough why she's become so fond of us all of a sudden," said Mrs. Bunting sarcastically. And as her husband stared at her uncomprehendingly, she added, in a tantalising tone, "as plain as the nose on your face, my man."

"What d'you mean?" he said. "I daresay I'm a bit slow, Ellen, but I really don't know what you'd be at?"

"Don't you remember telling me before Daisy came here that Joe Chandler had become sweet on her last summer? I thought it only foolishness then, but I've come round to your view—that's all."

Bunting nodded his head slowly. Yes, Joe had got into the way of coming very often, and there had been the expedition to that gruesome Scotland Yard museum, but somehow he, Bunting, had been so interested in the Avenger murders that he hadn't thought of Joe in any other connection—not this time, at any rate.

"And do you think Daisy likes him?" There was an unwonted tone of excitement, of tenderness, in Bunting's voice.

His wife looked over at him; and a thin smile, not an unkindly smile by any means, lit up her pale face. "I've never been one to prophesy," she answered deliberately. "But this I don't mind telling you, Bunting—Daisy'll have plenty o' time to get tired of Joe Chandler before they two are dead. Mark my words!"

"Well, she might do worse," said Bunting ruminatingly. "He's as steady as God makes them, and he's already earning thirty-two shillings a week. But I wonder how Old Aunt'd like the notion? I don't see her parting with Daisy before she must."

"I wouldn't let no old aunt interfere with me about such a thing as that!" cried Mrs. Bunting. "No, not for millions of gold!" And Bunting looked at her in silent wonder. Ellen was singing a very different tune now to what she'd sung a few minutes ago, when she was so keen about the girl going to Belgrave Square.

"If she still seems upset while she's having her dinner," said his wife suddenly, "well, you just wait till I've gone out for something, and then you just say to her, 'Absence makes the heart grow fonder'—just that, and nothing more! She'll take it from you. And I shouldn't be surprised if it comforted her quite a lot."

"For the matter of that, there's no reason why Joe Chandler shouldn't go over and see her there," said Bunting hesitatingly.

"Oh, yes, there is," said Mrs. Bunting, smiling shrewdly. "Plenty of reason. Daisy'll be a very foolish girl if she allows her aunt to know any of her secrets. I've only seen that woman once, but I know exactly the sort Margaret is. She's just waiting for Old Aunt to drop off and then she'll want to have Daisy herself—to wait on her, like. She'd turn quite nasty if she thought there was a young fellow what stood in her way."

She glanced at the dock, the pretty little eight-day clock which had been a wedding present from a kind friend of her last mistress. It had mysteriously disappeared during their time of trouble, and had as mysteriously reappeared three or four days after Mr. Sleuth's arrival.

"I've time to go out with that telegram," she said briskly—somehow she felt better, different to what she had done the last few days—and then it'll be done. It's no good having more words about it, and I expect we should have plenty more words if I wait till the child comes upstairs again."

She did not speak unkindly, and Bunting looked at her rather wonderfully. Ellen very seldom spoke of Daisy as "the child"—in fact, he could only remember her having done so once before, and that was a long time ago. They had been talking over their future life together, and she had said, very solemnly, "Bunting, I promise I will do my duty—as much as lies in my power, that is—by the child."

But Ellen had not had much opportunity of doing her duty by Daisy. As not infrequently happens with the duties that we are willing to do, that particular duty had been taken over by someone else who had no mind to let it go.

"What shall I do if Mr. Sleuth rings?" asked Bunting, rather nervously. It was the first time since the lodger had come to them that Ellen had offered to go out in the morning.

She hesitated. In her anxiety to have the matter of Daisy settled, she had forgotten Mr. Sleuth. Strange that she should have done so—strange, and, to herself, very comfortable and pleasant.

"Oh, well, you can just go up and knock at the door and say I'll be back in a few minutes—that I had to go out with a message. He's quite a reasonable gentleman." She went into the back room to put on her bonnet and thick jacket for it was very cold—getting colder every minute.

As she stood, buttoning her gloves—she wouldn't have gone out untidy for the world—Bunting suddenly came across to her. "Give us a kiss, old girl," he said. And his wife turned up her face.
"One 'ud think it was catching!" she said, but there was a lilt in her voice.  
"So it is," Bunting briefly answered. "Didn't that old cook get married just after us? She'd never 'a thought of it if it hadn't been for you!"

But once she was out, walking along the damp, uneven pavement, Mr. Sleuth revenged himself for his landlady's temporary forgetfulness.

During the last two days the lodger had been queer, odder than usual, unlike himself, or, rather, very much as he had been some ten days ago, just before that double murder had taken place.

The night before, while Daisy was telling all about the dreadful place to which Joe Chandler had taken her and her father, Mrs. Bunting had heard Mr. Sleuth moving about overhead, restlessly walking up and down his sitting-room. And later, when she took up his supper, she had listened a moment outside the door, while he read aloud some of the texts his soul delighted in--terrible texts telling of the grim joys attendant on revenge.

Mrs. Bunting was so absorbed in her thoughts, so possessed with the curious personality of her lodger, that she did not look where she was going, and suddenly a young woman bumped up against her.

She started violently and looked round, dazed, as the young person muttered a word of apology;--then she again fell into deep thought.

It was a good thing Daisy was going away for a few days; it made the problem of Mr. Sleuth and his queer ways less disturbing. She, Ellen, was sorry she had spoken so sharp-like to the girl, but after all it wasn't wonderful that she had been snappy. This last night she had hardly slept at all. Instead, she had lain awake listening --and there is nothing so tiring as to lie awake listening for a sound that never comes.

The house had remained so still you could have heard a pin drop. Mr. Sleuth, lying snug in his nice warm bed upstairs, had not stirred. Had he stirred his landlady was bound to have heard him, for his bed was, as we know, just above hers. No, during those long hours of darkness Daisy's light, regular breathing was all that had fallen on Mrs. Bunting's ears.

And then her mind switched off Mr. Sleuth. She made a determined effort to expel him, to toss him, as it were, out of her thoughts.

It seemed strange that The Avenger had stayed his hand, for, as Joe had said only last evening, it was full time that he should again turn that awful, mysterious searchlight of his on himself. Mrs. Bunting always visioned The Avenger as a black shadow in the centre a bright blinding light--but the shadow had no form or definite substance. Sometimes he looked like one thing, sometimes like another . . .

Mrs. Bunting had now come to the corner which led up the street where there was a Post Office. But instead of turning sharp to the left she stopped short for a minute.

There had suddenly come over her a feeling of horrible self-rebuke and even self-loathing. It was dreadful that she, of all women, should have longed to hear that another murder had been committed last night!

Yet such was the shameful fact. She had listened all through breakfast hoping to hear the dread news being shouted outside; yes, and more or less during the long discussion which had followed on the receipt of Margaret's letter she had been hoping--hoping against hope--that those dreadful triumphant shouts of the newspaper-sellers still might come echoing down the Marylebone Road. And yet hypocrite that she was, she had reproved Bunting when he had expressed, not disappointment exactly--but, well, surprise, that nothing had happened last night.

Now her mind switched off to Joe Chandler. Strange to think how afraid she had been of that young man! She was no longer afraid of him, or hardly at all. He was dotty--that's what was the matter with him, dotty with love for rosy-cheeked, blue-eyed little Daisy. Anything might now go on, right under Joe Chandler's very nose--but, bless you, he'd never see it! Last summer, when this affair, this nonsense of young Chandler and Daisy had begun, she had had very little patience with it all. In fact, the memory of the way Joe had gone on then, the tiresome way he would be always dropping in, had been one reason (though not the most important reason of all) why she had felt so terribly put about at the idea of the girl coming again. But now? Well, now she had become quite tolerant, quite kindly--at any rate as far as Joe Chandler was concerned.

She wondered why.

Still, 'twouldn't do Joe a bit of harm not to see the girl for a couple of days. In fact 'twould be a very good thing, for then he'd think of Daisy--think of her to the exclusion of all else. Absence does make the heart grow fonder--at first, at any rate. Mrs. Bunting was well aware of that. During the long course of hers and Bunting's mild courting, they'd been separated for about three months, and it was that three months which had made up her mind for her. She had got so used to Bunting that she couldn't do without him, and she had felt--oddest fact of all--acutely jealous. But she hadn't let him know that--no fear!

Of course, Joe mustn't neglect his job--that would never do. But what a good thing it was, after all, that he wasn't like some of those detective chaps that are written about in stories--the sort of chaps that know everything, see everything, guess everything --even where there isn't anything to see, or know, or guess!
Why, to take only one little fact—Joe Chandler had never shown the slightest curiosity about their lodger. . . .

Mrs. Bunting pulled herself together with a start, and hurried quickly on. Bunting would begin to wonder what had happened to her.

She went into the Post Office and handed the form to the young woman without a word. Margaret, a sensible woman, who was accustomed to manage other people's affairs, had even written out the words: "Will be with you to tea.--DAISY."

It was a comfort to have the thing settled once for all. If anything horrible was going to happen in the next two or three days—it was just as well Daisy shouldn't be at home. Not that there was any real danger that anything would happen,--Mrs. Bunting felt sure of that.

By this time she was out in the street again, and she began mentally counting up the number of murders The Avenger had committed. Nine, or was it ten? Surely by now The Avenger must be avenged! Surely by now, if—as that writer in the newspaper had suggested—he was a quiet, blameless gentleman living in the West End, whatever vengeance he had to wreak, must be satisfied?

She began hurrying homewards; it wouldn't do for the lodger to ring before she had got back. Bunting would never know how to manage Mr. Sleuth, especially if Mr. Sleuth was in one of his queer moods.

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Mrs. Bunting put the key into the front door lock and passed into the house. Then her heart stood still with fear and terror. There came the sound of voices—of voices she thought she did not know—in the sitting-room.

She opened the door, and then drew a long breath. It was only Joe Chandler—Joe, Daisy, and Bunting, talking together. They stopped rather guiltily as she came in, but not before she had heard Chandler utter the words: "That don't mean nothing! I'll just run out and send another saying you won't come, Miss Daisy."

And then the strangest smile came over Mrs. Bunting's face. There had fallen on her ear the still distant, but unmistakable, shouts which betokened that something had happened last night—something which made it worth while for the newspaper-sellers to come crying down the Marylebone Road.

"Well?" she said a little breathlessly. "Well, Joe? I suppose you've brought us news? I suppose there's been another?"

He looked at her, surprised. "No, that there hasn't, Mrs. Bunting—not as far as I know, that is. Oh, you're thinking of those newspaper chaps? They've got to cry out something," he grinned. "You wouldn't 'a thought folk was so bloodthirsty. They're just shouting out that there's been an arrest; but we don't take no stock of that. It's a Scotchman what gave himself up last night at Dorking. He'd been drinking, and was a-pitying of himself. Why, since this business began, there's been about twenty arrests, but they've all come to nothing."

"Why, Ellen, you looks quite sad, quite disappointed," said Bunting jokingly. "Come to think of it, it's high time The Avenger was at work again." He laughed as he made his grim joke. Then turned to young Chandler: "Well, you'll be glad when it's all over, my lad."

"Glad in a way," said Chandler unwillingly. "But one 'ud have liked to have caught him. One doesn't like to know such a creature's at large, now, does one?"

Mrs. Bunting had taken off her bonnet and jacket. "I must just go and see about Mr. Sleuth's breakfast," she said in a weary, dispirited voice, and left them there.

She felt disappointed, and very, very depressed. As to the plot which had been hatching when she came in, that had no chance of success; Bunting would never dare let Daisy send out another telegram contradicting the first. Besides, Daisy's stepmother shrewdly suspected that by now the girl herself wouldn't care to do such a thing. Daisy had plenty of sense tucked away somewhere in her pretty little head. If it ever became her fate to live as a married woman in London, it would be best to stay on the right side of Aunt Margaret.

And when she came into her kitchen the stepmother's heart became very soft, for Daisy had got everything beautifully ready. In fact, there was nothing to do but to boil Mr. Sleuth's two eggs. Feeling suddenly more cheerful than she had felt of late, Mrs. Bunting took the tray upstairs.

"As it was rather late, I didn't wait for you to ring, sir," she said.

And the lodger looked up from the table where, as usual, he was studying with painful, almost agonising intentness, the Book. "Quite right, Mrs. Bunting—quite right! I have been pondering over the command, 'Work while it is yet light.'"

"Yes, sir?" she said, and a queer, cold feeling stole over her heart. "Yes, sir?"

"The spirit is willing, but the flesh—the flesh is weak," said Mr. Sleuth, with a heavy sigh.

"You studies too hard, and too long—'that's what's ailing you, sir," said Mr. Sleuth's landlady suddenly.

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When Mrs. Bunting went down again she found that a great deal had been settled in her absence; among other things, that Joe Chandler was going to escort Miss Daisy across to Belgrave Square. He could carry Daisy's modest
bag, and if they wanted to ride instead of walk, why, they could take the bus from Baker Street Station to Victoria—that would land them very near Belgrave Square.

But Daisy seemed quite willing to walk; she hadn't had a walk, she declared, for a long, long time—and then she blushed rosy red, and even her stepmother had to admit to herself that Daisy was very nice looking, not at all the sort of girl who ought to be allowed to go about the London streets by herself.

CHAPTER XIII

Daisy's father and stepmother stood side by side at the front door, watching the girl and young Chandler walk off into the darkness.

A yellow pall of fog had suddenly descended on London, and Joe had come a full half-hour before they expected him, explaining, rather lamely, that it was the fog which had brought him so soon.

"If we was to have waited much longer, perhaps, 'twouldn't have been possible to walk a yard," he explained, and they had accepted, silently, his explanation.

"I hope it's quite safe sending her off like that?" Bunting looked deprecatingly at his wife. She had already told him more than once that he was too fussy about Daisy, that about his daughter he was like an old hen with her last chicken.

"She's safer than she would be, with you or me. She couldn't have a smarter young fellow to look after her."

"It'll be awful thick at Hyde Park Corner," said Bunting. "It's always worse there than anywhere else. If I was Joe I'd a taken her by the Underground Railway to Victoria—that 'ud been the best way, considering the weather 'tis."

"They don't think anything of the weather, bless you!" said his wife. "They'll walk and walk as long as there's a glimmer left for 'em to steer by. Daisy's just been pining to have a walk with that young chap. I wonder you didn't notice how disappointed they both were when you was so set on going along with them to that horrid place."

"D'you really mean that, Ellen?" Bunting looked upset. "I understood Joe to say he liked my company."

"Oh, did you?" said Mrs. Bunting dryly. "I expect he liked it just about as much as we liked the company of that old cook who would go out with us when we was courting. It always was a wonder to me how the woman could force herself upon two people who didn't want her."

"But I'm Daisy's father; and an old friend of Chandler," said Bunting remonstratingly. "I'm quite different from that cook. She was nothing to us, and we was nothing to her."

"She'd have liked to be something to you, I make no doubt," observed his Ellen, shaking her head, and her husband smiled, a little foolishly.

By this time they were back in their nice, cosy sitting-room, and a feeling of not altogether unpleasant lassitude stole over Mrs. Bunting. It was a comfort to have Daisy out of her way for a bit. The girl, in some ways, was very wide awake and inquisitive, and she had early betrayed what her stepmother thought to be a very unseemly and silly curiosity concerning the lodger. "You might just let me have one peep at him, Ellen?" she had pleaded, only that morning. But Ellen had shaken her head. "No, that I won't! He's a very quiet gentleman; but he knows exactly what he likes, and he don't like anyone but me waiting on him. Why, even your father's hardly seen him."

But that, naturally, had only increased Daisy's desire to view Mr. Sleuth.

There was another reason why Mrs. Bunting was glad that her stepdaughter had gone away for two days. During her absence young Chandler was far less likely to haunt them in the way he had taken to doing lately, the more so that, in spite of what she had said to her husband, Mrs. Bunting felt sure that Daisy would ask Joe Chandler to call at Belgrave Square. 'Twouldn't be human nature --at any rate, not girlish human nature--not to do so, even if Joe's coming did anger Aunt Margaret.

Yes, it was pretty safe that with Daisy away they, the Buntings, would be rid of that young chap for a bit, and that would be a good thing.

When Daisy wasn't there to occupy the whole of his attention, Mrs. Bunting felt queerly afraid of Chandler. After all, he was a detective—it was his job to be always nosing about, trying to find out things. And, though she couldn't fairly say to herself that he had done much of that sort of thing in her house, he might start doing it any minute. And then—then—where would she, and --and Mr. Sleuth, be?

She thought of the bottle of red ink--of the leather bag which must be hidden somewhere--and her heart almost stopped beating. Those were the sort of things which, in the stories Bunting was so fond of reading, always led to the detection of famous criminals. . . .

Mr. Sleuth's bell for tea rang that afternoon far earlier than usual. The fog had probably misled him, and made him think it later than it was.

When she went up, "I would like a cup of tea now, and just one piece of bread-and-butter," the lodger said wearily. "I don't feel like having anything else this afternoon."

"It's a horrible day," Mrs. Bunting observed, in a cheerier voice than usual. "No wonder you don't feel hungry, sir. And then it isn't so very long since you had your dinner, is it?"
"No," he said absently. "No, it isn't, Mrs. Bunting."

She went down, made the tea, and brought it up again. And then, as she came into the room, she uttered an exclamation of sharp dismay.

Mr. Sleuth was dressed for going out. He was wearing his long Inverness cloak, and his queer old high hat lay on the table, ready for him to put on.

"You're never going out this afternoon, sir?" she asked falteringly. "Why, the fog's awful; you can't see a yard ahead of you!"

Unknown to herself, Mrs. Bunting's voice had risen almost to a scream. She moved back, still holding the tray, and stood between the door and her lodger, as if she meant to bar his way--to erect between Mr. Sleuth and the dark, foggy world outside a living barrier.

"The weather never affects me at all," he said sullenly; and he looked at her with so wild and pleading a look in his eyes that, slowly, reluctantly, she moved aside. As she did so she noticed for the first time that Mr. Sleuth held something in his right hand. It was the key of the chiffonnier cupboard. He had been on his way there when her coming in had disturbed him.

"It's very kind of you to be so concerned about me," he stammered, "but--but, Mrs. Bunting, you must excuse me if I say that I do not welcome such solicitude. I prefer to be left alone. I--I cannot stay in your house if I feel that my comings and goings are watched--spied upon."

She pulled herself together. "No one spies upon you, sir," she said, with considerable dignity. "I've done my best to satisfy you--"

"You have--you have!" he spoke in a distressed, apologetic tone. "But you spoke just now as if you were trying to prevent my doing what I wish to do--indeed, what I have to do. For years I have been misunderstood--persecuted"--he waited a moment, then in a hollow voice added the one word, "tortured! Do not tell me that you are going to add yourself to the number of my tormentors, Mrs. Bunting?"

She stared at him helplessly. "Don't you be afraid I'll ever be that, sir. I only spoke as I did because--well, sir, because I thought it really wasn't safe for a gentleman to go out this afternoon. Why, there's hardly anyone about, though we're so near Christmas."

He walked across to the window and looked out. "The fog is clearing somewhat; Mrs. Bunting," but there was no relief in his voice, rather was there disappointment and dread.

Plucking up courage, she followed him. Yes, Mr. Sleuth was right. The fog was lifting--rolling off in that sudden, mysterious way in which local fogs sometimes do lift in London.

He turned sharply from the window. "Our conversation has made me forget an important thing, Mrs. Bunting. I should be glad if you would just leave out a glass of milk and some bread-and-butter for me this evening. I shall not require supper when I come in, for after my walk I shall probably go straight upstairs to carry through a very difficult experiment."

"Very good, sir." And then Mrs. Bunting left the lodger.

But when she found herself downstairs in the fog-laden hall, for it had drifted in as she and her husband had stood at the door seeing Daisy off, instead of going in to Bunting she did a very odd thing --a thing she had never thought of doing in her life before. She pressed her hot forehead against the cool bit of looking-glass let into the hat-and-umbrella stand. "I don't know what to do!" she moaned to herself, and then, "I can't bear it! I can't bear it!"

But though she felt that her secret suspense and trouble was becoming intolerable, the one way in which she could have ended her misery never occurred to Mrs. Bunting.

In the long history of crime it has very, very seldom happened that a woman has betrayed one who has taken refuge with her. The timorous and cautious woman has not infrequently hunted a human being fleeing from his pursuer from her door, but she has not revealed the fact that he was ever there. In fact, it may almost be said that such betrayal has never taken place unless the betrayer has been actuated by love of gain, or by a longing for revenge. So far, perhaps because she is subject rather than citizen, her duty as a component part of civilised society weighs but lightly on woman's shoulders.

And then--and then, in a sort of way, Mrs. Bunting had become attached to Mr. Sleuth. A wan smile would sometimes light up his sad face when he saw her come in with one of his meals, and when this happened Mrs. Bunting felt pleased--pleased and vaguely touched. In between those--those dreadful events outside, which filled her with such suspicion, such anguish and such suspense, she never felt any fear, only pity, for Mr. Sleuth.

Often and often, when lying wide awake at night, she turned over the strange problem in her mind. After all, the lodger must have lived somewhere during his forty-odd years of life. She did not even know if Mr. Sleuth had any brothers or sisters; friends she knew he had none. But, however odd and eccentric he was, he had evidently, or so she supposed, led a quiet, undistinguished kind of life, till--till now.

What had made him alter all of a sudden--if, that is, he had altered? That was what Mrs. Bunting was always
debating fitfully with herself; and, what was more, and very terribly, to the point, having altered, why should he not in time go back to what he evidently had been—that is, a blameless, quiet gentleman?

If only he would! If only he would!

As she stood in the hall, cooling her hot forehead, all these thoughts, these hopes and fears, jostled at lightning speed through her brain.

She remembered what young Chandler had said the other day—that there had never been, in the history of the world, so strange a murderer as The Avenger had proved himself to be.

She and Bunting, aye, and little Daisy too, had hung, fascinated, on Joe's words, as he had told them of other famous series of murders which had taken place in the past, not only in England but abroad—especially abroad.

One woman, whom all the people round her believed to be a kind, respectable soul, had poisoned no fewer than fifteen people in order to get their insurance money. Then there had been the terrible tale of an apparently respectable, contented innkeeper and his wife, who, living at the entrance to a wood, killed all those humble travellers who took shelter under their roof, simply for their clothes, and any valuables they possessed. But in all those stories the murderer or murderers always had a very strong motive, the motive being, in almost every case, a wicked lust for gold.

At last, after having passed her handkerchief over her forehead, she went into the room where Bunting was sitting smoking his pipe.

"The fog's lifting a bit," she said in an ill-assured voice. "I hope that by this time Daisy and that Joe Chandler are right out of it."

But the other shook his head silently. "No such luck!" he said briefly. "You don't know what it's like in Hyde Park, Ellen. I expect 'twill soon be just as heavy here as 'twas half an hour ago!"

She wandered over to the window, and pulled the curtain back. "Quite a lot of people have come out, anyway," she observed.

"There's a fine Christmas show in the Edgware Road. I was thinking of asking if you wouldn't like to go along there with me."

"No," she said dully. "I'm quite content to stay at home."

She was listening—listening for the sounds which would betoken that the lodger was coming downstairs.

At last she heard the cautious, stuffless tread of his rubber-soled shoes shuffling along the hall. But Bunting only woke to the fact when the front door shut to.

"That's never Mr. Sleuth going out?" He turned on his wife, startled. "Why, the poor gentleman'll come to harm—that he will! One has to be wide awake on an evening like this. I hope he hasn't taken any of his money out with him."

"'Tisn't the first time Mr. Sleuth's been out in a fog," said Mrs. Bunting sombrely.

Somehow she couldn't help uttering these over-true words. And then she turned, eager and half frightened, to see how Bunting had taken what she said.

But he looked quite placid, as if he had hardly heard her. "We don't get the good old fogs we used to get—not what people used to call 'London particulars.' I expect the lodger feels like Mrs. Crowley—I've often told you about her, Ellen?"

Mrs. Bunting nodded.

Mrs. Crowley had been one of Bunting's ladies, one of those he had liked best—a cheerful, jolly lady, who used often to give her servants what she called a treat. It was seldom the kind of treat they would have chosen for themselves, but still they appreciated her kind thought.

"Mrs. Crowley used to say," went on Bunting, in his slow, dogmatic way, "that she never minded how bad the weather was in London, so long as it was London and not the country. Mr. Crowley, he liked the country best, but Mrs. Crowley always felt dull-like there. Fog never kept her from going out—no, that it didn't. She wasn't a bit afraid. But—" he turned round and looked at his wife—"I am a bit surprised at Mr. Sleuth. I should have thought him a timid kind of gentleman—"

He waited a moment, and she felt forced to answer him.

"I wouldn't exactly call him timid," she said, in a low voice, "but he is very quiet, certainly. That's why he dislikes going out when there are a lot of people bustling about the streets. I don't suppose he'll be out long."

She hoped with all her soul that Mr. Sleuth would be in very soon—that he would be daunted by the now increasing gloom.

Somehow she did not feel she could sit still for very long. She got up, and went over to the farthest window.

The fog had lifted, certainly. She could see the lamp-lights on the other side of the Marylebone Road, glimmering redly; and shadowy figures were hurrying past, mostly making their way towards the Edgware Road, to see the Christmas shops.
At last to his wife's relief, Bunting got up too. He went over to the cupboard where he kept his little store of books, and took one out.

"I think I'll read a bit," he said. "Seems a long time since I've looked at a book. The papers was so jolly interesting for a bit, but now there's nothing in 'em."

His wife remained silent. She knew what he meant. A good many days had gone by since the last two Avenger murders, and the papers had very little to say about them that they hadn't said in different language a dozen times before.

She went into her bedroom and came back with a bit of plain sewing.

Mrs. Bunting was fond of sewing, and Bunting liked to see her so engaged. Since Mr. Sleuth had come to be their lodger she had not had much time for that sort of work.

It was funny how quiet the house was without either Daisy, or--or the lodger, in it.

At last she let her needle remain idle, and the bit of cambric slipped down on her knee, while she listened, longingly, for Mr. Sleuth's return home.

And as the minutes sped by she fell to wondering with a painful wonder if she would ever see her lodger again, for, from what she knew of Mr. Sleuth, Mrs. Bunting felt sure that if he got into any kind of--well, trouble outside, he would never betray where he had lived during the last few weeks.

No, in such a case the lodger would disappear in as sudden a way as he had come. And Bunting would never suspect, would never know, until, perhaps--God, what a horrible thought--a picture published in some newspaper might bring a certain dreadful fact to Bunting's knowledge.

But if that happened--if that unthinkable awful thing came to pass, she made up her mind, here and now, never to say anything. She also would pretend to be amazed, shocked, unutterably horrified at the astounding revelation.

CHAPTER XIV

"There he is at last, and I'm glad of it, Ellen. 'Tain't a night you would wish a dog to be out in."

Bunting's voice was full of relief, but he did not turn round and look at his wife as he spoke; instead, he continued to read the evening paper he held in his hand.

He was still close to the fire, sitting back comfortably in his nice arm-chair. He looked very well--well and ruddy. Mrs. Bunting stared across at him with a touch of sharp envy, nay, more, of resentment. And this was very curious, for she was, in her own dry way, very fond of Bunting.

"You needn't feel so nervous about him; Mr. Sleuth can look out for himself all right."

Bunting laid the paper he had been reading down on his knee. "I can't think why he wanted to go out in such weather," he said impatiently.

"Well, it's none of your business, Bunting, now, is it?"

"No, that's true enough. Still, 'twould be a very bad thing for us if anything happened to him. This lodger's the first bit of luck we've had for a terrible long time, Ellen."

Mrs. Bunting moved a little impatiently in her high chair. She remained silent for a moment. What Bunting had said was too obvious to be worth answering. Also she was listening, following in imagination her lodger's quick, singularly quiet progress--"stealthy" she called it to herself--through the fog-filled, lamp-lit hall. Yes, now he was going up the staircase. What was that Bunting was saying?

"It isn't safe for decent folk to be out in such weather--no, that it ain't, not unless they have something to do that won't wait till to-morrow." The speaker was looking straight into his wife's narrow, colourless face. Bunting was an obstinate man, and liked to prove himself right. "I've a good mind to speak to him about it, that I have! He ought to be told that it isn't safe--not for the sort of man he is--to be wandering about the streets at night. I read you out the accidents in Lloyd's--shocking, they were, and all brought about by the fog! And then, that horrid monster 'ull soon be at his work again--"

"Monster?" repeated Mrs. Bunting absentely.

She was trying to hear the lodger's footsteps overhead. She was very curious to know whether he had gone into his nice sitting-room, or straight upstairs, to that cold experiment-room, as he now always called it.

But her husband went on as if he had not heard her, and she gave up trying to listen to what was going on above.

"It wouldn't be very pleasant to run up against such a party as that in the fog, eh, Ellen?" He spoke as if the notion had a certain pleasant thrill in it after all.

"What stuff you do talk!" said Mrs. Bunting sharply. And then she got up. Her husband's remarks had disturbed her. Why couldn't they talk of something pleasant when they did have a quiet bit of time together?

Bunting looked down again at his paper, and she moved quietly about the room. Very soon it would be time for supper, and to-night she was going to cook her husband a nice piece of toasted cheese. That fortunate man, as she was fond of telling him, with mingled contempt and envy, had the digestion of an ostrich, and yet he was rather fanciful, as gentleman's servants who have lived in good places often are.
Yes, Bunting was very lucky in the matter of his digestion. Mrs. Bunting prided herself on having a nice mind, and she would never have allowed an unrefined word—such a word as "stomach," for instance, to say nothing of an even plainer term—to pass her lips, except, of course, to a doctor in a sick-room.

Mr. Sleuth's landlady did not go down at once into her cold kitchen; instead, with a sudden furtive movement, she opened the door leading into her bedroom, and then, closing the door quietly, stepped back into the darkness, and stood motionless, listening.

At first she heard nothing, but gradually there stole on her listening ears the sound of someone moving softly about in the room just overhead, that is, in Mr. Sleuth's bedroom. But, try as she might, it was impossible for her to guess what the lodger was doing.

At last she heard him open the door leading out on the little landing. She could hear the stairs creaking. That meant, no doubt, that Mr. Sleuth would pass the rest of the evening in the cheerless room above. He hadn't spent any time up there for quite a long while—in fact, not for nearly ten days. 'Twas odd he chose to-night, when it was so foggy, to carry out an experiment.

She groped her way to a chair and sat down. She felt very tired—strangely tired, as if she had gone through some great physical exertion.

Yes, it was true that Mr. Sleuth had brought her and Bunting luck, and it was wrong, very wrong, of her ever to forget that.

As she sat there she also reminded herself, and not for the first time, what the lodger's departure would mean. It would almost certainly mean ruin; just as his staying meant all sorts of good things, of which physical comfort was the least. If Mr. Sleuth stayed on with them, as he showed every intention of doing, it meant respectability, and, above all, security.

Mrs. Bunting thought of Mr. Sleuth's money. He never received a letter, and yet he must have some kind of income—so much was clear. She supposed he went and drew his money, in sovereigns, out of a bank as he required it.

Her mind swung round, consciously, deliberately, away from Mr. Sleuth.

The Avenger? What a strange name! Again she assured herself that there would come a time when The Avenger, whoever he was, must feel satiated; when he would feel himself to be, so to speak, avenged.

To go back to Mr. Sleuth; it was lucky that the lodger seemed so pleased, not only with the rooms, but with his landlord and landlady—indeed, there was no real reason why Mr. Sleuth should ever wish to leave such nice lodgings.

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Mrs. Bunting suddenly stood up. She made a strong effort, and shook off her awful sense of apprehension and unease. Feeling for the handle of the door giving into the passage she turned it, and then, with light, firm steps, she went down into the kitchen.

When they had first taken the house, the basement had been made by her care, if not into a pleasant, then, at any rate, into a very clean place. She had had it whitewashed, and against the still white walls the gas stove loomed up, a great square of black iron and bright steel. It was a large gas-stove, the kind for which one pays four shillings a quarter rent to the gas company, and here, in the kitchen, there was no foolish shilling-in-the-slot arrangement. Mrs. Bunting was too shrewd a woman to have anything to do with that kind of business. There was a proper gas-meter, and she paid for what she consumed after she had consumed it.

Putting her candle down on the well-scrubbed wooden table, she turned up the gas-jet, and blew out the candle. Then, lighting one of the gas-rings, she put a frying-pan on the stove, and once more her mind reverted, as if in spite of herself, to Mr. Sleuth. Never had there been a more confiding or trusting gentleman than the lodger, and yet in some ways he was so secret, so—so peculiar.

She thought of the bag—that bag which had rumbled about so queerly in the chiffonnier. Something seemed to tell her that tonight the lodger had taken that bag out with him.

And then she thrust away the thought of the bag almost violently from her mind, and went back to the more agreeable thought of Mr. Sleuth's income, and of how little trouble he gave. Of course, the lodger was eccentric, otherwise he wouldn't be their lodger at all—he would be living in quite a different sort of way with some of his relations, or with a friend in his own class.

While these thoughts galloped disconnectedly through her mind, Mrs. Bunting went on with her cooking, preparing the cheese, cutting it up into little shreds, carefully measuring out the butter, doing everything, as was always her way, with a certain delicate and cleanly precision.

And then, while in the middle of toasting the bread on which was to be poured the melted cheese, she suddenly heard sounds which startled her, made her feel uncomfortable.

Shuffling, hesitating steps were creaking down the house.
She looked up and listened. Surely the lodger was not going out again into the cold and foggy night--going out, as he had done the other evening, for a second time? But no; the sounds she heard, the sounds of now familiar footsteps, did not continue down the passage leading to the front door.

Instead--Why, what was this she heard now? She began to listen so intently that the bread she was holding at the end of the toasting-fork grew quite black. With a start she became aware that this was so, and she frowned, vexed with herself. That came of not attending to one's work.

Mr. Sleuth was evidently about to do what he had never yet done. He was coming down into the kitchen.

Nearer and nearer came the thudding sounds, treading heavily on the kitchen stairs, and Mrs. Bunting's heart began to beat as if in response. She put out the flame of the gas-ring, unheedful of the fact that the cheese would stiffen and spoil in the cold air.

Then she turned and faced the door.

There came a fumbling at the handle, and a moment later the door opened, and revealed, as she had at once known and feared it would do, the lodger.

Mr. Sleuth looked even odder than usual. He was clad in a plaid dressing-gown, which she had never seen him wear before, though she knew that he had purchased it not long after his arrival. In his hand was a lighted candle.

When he saw the kitchen all lighted up, and the woman standing in it, the lodger looked inexplicably taken aback, almost aghast.

"Yes, sir? What can I do for you, sir? I hope you didn't ring, sir?"

Mrs. Bunting held her ground in front of the stove. Mr. Sleuth had no business to come like this into her kitchen, and she intended to let him know that such was her view.

"No, I--I didn't ring," he stammered awkwardly. "The truth is, I didn't know you were here, Mrs. Bunting. Please excuse my costume. My gas-stove has gone wrong, or, rather, that shilling-in-the-slot arrangement has done so. So I came down to see if you had a gas-stove. I am going to ask you to allow me to use it to-night for an important experiment I wish to make."

Mrs. Bunting's heart was beating quickly--quickly. She felt horribly troubled, unnaturally so. Why couldn't Mr. Sleuth's experiment wait till the morning? She stared at him dubiously, but there was that in his face that made her at once afraid and pitiful. It was a wild, eager, imploring look.

"Oh, certainly, sir; but you will find it very cold down here."

"It seems most pleasantly warm," he observed, his voice full of relief, "warm and cosy, after my cold room upstairs."

Warm and cosy? Mrs. Bunting stared at him in amazement. Nay, even that cheerless room at the top of the house must be far warmer and more cosy than this cold underground kitchen could possibly be.

"I'll make you a fire, sir. We never use the grate, but it's in perfect order, for the first thing I did after I came into the house was to have the chimney swept. It was terribly dirty. It might have set the house on fire." Mrs. Bunting's housewifely instincts were roused. "For the matter of that, you ought to have a fire in your bedroom this cold night."

"By no means--I would prefer not. I certainly do not want a fire there. I dislike an open fire, Mrs. Bunting. I thought I had told you as much."

Mr. Sleuth frowned. He stood there, a strange-looking figure, his candle still alight, just inside the kitchen door.

"I shan't be very long, sir. Just about a quarter of an hour. You could come down then. I'll have everything quite tidy for you. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"I do not require the use of your kitchen yet--thank you all the same, Mrs. Bunting. I shall come down later--altogether later--after you and your husband have gone to bed. But I should be much obliged if you would see that the gas people come to-morrow and put my stove in order. It might be done while I am out. That the shilling-in-the-slot machine should go wrong is very unpleasant. It has upset me greatly."

"Perhaps Bunting could put it right for you, sir. For the matter of that, I could ask him to go up now."

"No, no, I don't want anything of that sort done to-night. Besides, he couldn't put it right. I am something of an expert, Mrs. Bunting, and I have done all I could. The cause of the trouble is quite simple. The machine is choked up with shillings; a very foolish plan, so I always felt it to be."

Mr. Sleuth spoke pettishly, with far more heat than he was wont to speak, but Mrs. Bunting sympathised with him in this matter. She had always suspected that those slot machines were as dishonest as if they were human. It was dreadful, the way they swallowed up the shillings! She had had one once, so she knew.

And as if he were divining her thoughts, Mr. Sleuth walked forward and stared at the stove. "Then you haven't got a slot machine?" he said wonderingly. "I'm very glad of that, for I expect my experiment will take some time. But, of course, I shall pay you something for the use of the stove, Mrs. Bunting."

"Oh, no, sir, I wouldn't think of charging you anything for that. We don't use our stove very much, you know,
sir. I'm never in the kitchen a minute longer than I can help this cold weather."

Mrs. Bunting was beginning to feel better. When she was actually in Mr. Sleuth's presence her morbid fears would be lulled, perhaps because his manner almost invariably was gentle and very quiet. But still there came over her an eerie feeling, as, with him preceding her, they made a slow progress to the ground floor.

Once there, the lodger courteously bade his landlady good-night, and proceeded upstairs to his own apartments.

Mrs. Bunting returned to the kitchen. Again she lighted the stove; but she felt unnerved, afraid of she knew not what. As she was cooking the cheese, she tried to concentrate her mind on what she was doing, and on the whole she succeeded. But another part of her mind seemed to be working independently, asking her insistent questions.

The place seemed to her alive with alien presences, and once she caught herself listening—which was absurd, for, of course, she could not hope to hear what Mr. Sleuth was doing two, if not three, flights upstairs. She wondered in what the lodger's experiments consisted. It was odd that she had never been able to discover what it was he really did with that big gas-stove. All she knew was that he used a very high degree of heat.

CHAPTER XV

The Buntings went to bed early that night. But Mrs. Bunting made up her mind to keep awake. She was set upon knowing at what hour of the night the lodger would come down into her kitchen to carry through his experiment, and, above all, she was anxious to know how long he would stay there.

But she had had a long and a very anxious day, and presently she fell asleep.

The church clock hard by struck two, and, suddenly Mrs. Bunting awoke. She felt put out, sharply annoyed with herself. How could she have dropped off like that? Mr. Sleuth must have been down and up again hours ago!

Then, gradually, she became aware that there was a faint acrid odour in the room. Elusive, intangible, it yet seemed to encompass her and the snoring man by her side, almost as a vapour might have done.

Mrs. Bunting sat up in bed and sniffed; and then, in spite of the cold, she quietly crept out of her nice, warm bedclothes, and crawled along to the bottom of the bed. When there, Mr. Sleuth's landlady did a very curious thing; she leaned over the brass rail and put her face close to the hinge of the door giving into the hall. Yes, it was from here that this strange, horrible odor was coming; the smell must be very strong in the passage.

As, shivering, she crept back under the bedclothes, she longed to give her sleeping husband a good shake, and in fancy she heard herself saying, "Bunting, get up! There's something strange and dreadful going on downstairs which we ought to know about."

But as she lay there, by her husband's side, listening with painful intentness for the slightest sound, she knew very well that she would do nothing of the sort.

What if the lodger did make a certain amount of mess—a certain amount of smell—in her nice clean kitchen? Was he not—was he not an almost perfect lodger? If they did anything to upset him, where could they ever hope to get another like him?

Three o'clock struck before Mrs. Bunting heard slow, heavy steps creaking up the kitchen stairs. But Mr. Sleuth did not go straight up to his own quarters, as she had expected him to do. Instead, he went to the front door, and, opening it, put on the chain. Then he came past her door, and she thought—but could not be sure—that he sat down on the stairs.

At the end of ten minutes or so she heard him go down the passage again. Very softly he closed the front door.

By then she had divined why the lodger had behaved in this funny fashion. He wanted to get the strong, acrid smell of burning—was it of burning wool? —out of the house.

But Mrs. Bunting, lying there in the darkness, listening to the lodger creeping upstairs, felt as if she herself would never get rid of the horrible odour.

Mrs. Bunting felt herself to be all smell.

At last the unhappy woman fell into a deep, troubled sleep; and then she dreamed a most terrible and unnatural dream. Hoarse voices seemed to be shouting in her ear: "The Avenger close here! The Avenger close here!" "Orrible murder off the Edgware Road!" "The Avenger at his work again!"

And even in her dream Mrs. Bunting felt angered—angered and impatient. She knew so well why she was being disturbed by this horrid nightmare! It was because of Bunting—Bunting, who could think and talk of nothing else than those frightful murders, in which only morbid and vulgar-minded people took any interest.

Why, even now, in her dream, she could hear her husband speaking to her about it:

"Ellen"—so she heard Bunting murmur in her ear—"Ellen, my dear, I'm just going to get up to get a paper. It's after seven o'clock."

The shouting—nay, worse, the sound of tramping, hurrying feet smote on her shrinking ears. Pushing back her hair off her forehead with both hands, she sat up and listened.

It had been no nightmare, then, but something infinitely worse—reality.

Why couldn't Bunting have lain quiet abed for awhile longer, and let his poor wife go on dreaming? The most
awful dream would have been easier to bear than this awakening.

She heard her husband go to the front door, and, as he bought the paper, exchange a few excited words with the newspaper-seller. Then he came back. There was a pause, and she heard him lighting the gas-ring in the sitting-room.

Bunting always made his wife a cup of tea in the morning. He had promised to do this when they first married, and he had never yet broken his word. It was a very little thing and a very usual thing, no doubt, for a kind husband to do, but this morning the knowledge that he was doing it brought tears to Mrs. Bunting's pale blue eyes. This morning he seemed to be rather longer than usual over the job.

When, at last, he came in with the little tray, Bunting found his wife lying with her face to the wall.

"Here's your tea, Ellen," he said, and there was a thrill of eager, nay happy, excitement in his voice.

She turned herself round and sat up. "Well?" she asked. "Well? Why don't you tell me about it?"

"I thought you was asleep," he stammered out. "I thought, Ellen, you never heard nothing."

"How could I have slept through all that din? Of course I heard. Why don't you tell me?"

"I've hardly had time to glance at the paper myself," he said slowly.

"You was reading it just now," she said severely, "for I heard the rustling. You begun reading it before you lit the gas-ring. Don't tell me! What was that they was shouting about the Edgware Road?"

"Well," said Bunting, "as you do know, I may as well tell you. The Avenger's moving West--that's what he's doing. Last time 'twas King's Cross--now 'tis the Edgware Road. I said he'd come our way, and he has come our way!"

"You just go and get me that paper," she commanded. "I wants to see for myself."

Bunting went into the next room; then he came back and handed her silently the odd-looking, thin little sheet.

"Why, whatever's this?" she asked. "This ain't our paper!"

"Course not," he answered, a trifle crossly. "It's a special early edition of the Sun, just because of The Avenger. Here's the bit about it"--he showed her the exact spot. But she would have found it, even by the comparatively bad light of the gas-jet now flaring over the dressing-table, for the news was printed in large, clear characters:

"Once more the murder fiend who chooses to call himself The Avenger has escaped detection. While the whole attention of the police, and of the great army of amateur detectives who are taking an interest in this strange series of atrocious crimes, were concentrating their attention round the East End and King's Cross, he moved swiftly and silently Westward. And, choosing a time when the Edgware Road is at its busiest and most thronged, did another human being to death with lightning-like quickness and savagery.

"Within fifty yards of the deserted warehouse yard where he had lured his victim to destruction were passing up and down scores of happy, busy people, intent on their Christmas shopping. Into that cheerful throng he must have plunged within a moment of committing his atrocious crime. And it was only owing to the merest accident that the body was discovered as soon as it was--that is, just after midnight."

"Dr. Dowtray, who was called to the spot at once, is of opinion that the woman had been dead at least three hours, if not four. It was at first thought--we were going to say, hoped--that this murder had nothing to do with the series which is now puzzling and horrifying the whole of the civilised world. But no--pinned on the edge of the dead woman's dress was the usual now familiar triangular piece of grey paper--the grimmest visiting card ever designed by the wit of man! And this time The Avenger has surpassed himself as regards his audacity and daring--so cold in its maniacal fanaticism and abhorrent wickedness."

All the time that Mrs. Bunting was reading with slow, painful intentness, her husband was looking at her, longing, yet afraid, to burst out with a new idea which he was burning to confide even to his Ellen's unsympathetic ears.

At last, when she had quite finished, she looked up defiantly.

"Haven't you anything better to do than to stare at me like that?" she said irritably. "Murder or no murder, I've got to get up! Go away--do!"

And Bunting went off into the next room.

After he had gone, his wife lay back and closed her eyes. She tried to think of nothing. Nay, more--so strong, so determined was her will that for a few moments she actually did think of nothing. She felt terribly tired and weak, brain and body both quiescent, as does a person who is recovering from a long, wearing illness.

Presently detached, puerile thoughts drifted across the surface of her mind like little clouds across a summer sky. She wondered if those horrid newspaper men were allowed to shout in Belgrave Square; she wondered if, in that case, Margaret, who was so unlike her brother-in-law, would get up and buy a paper. But no. Margaret was not one to leave her nice warm bed for such a silly reason as that.

Was it to-morrow Daisy was coming back? Yes--to-morrow, not to-day. Well, that was a comfort, at any rate. What amusing things Daisy would be able to tell about her visit to Margaret! The girl had an excellent gift of
mimicry. And Margaret, with her precise, funny ways, her perpetual talk about "the family," lent herself to the cruel gift.

And then Mrs. Bunting's mind—her poor, weak, tired mind—wandered off to young Chandler. A funny thing love was, when you came to think of it—which she, Ellen Bunting, didn't often do. There was Joe, a likely young fellow, seeing a lot of young women, and pretty young women, too,—quite as pretty as Daisy, and ten times more artful—and yet there! He passed them all by, had done so ever since last summer, though you might be sure that they, artful minxes, by no manner of means passed him by,—without giving them a thought! As Daisy wasn't here, he would probably keep away to-day. There was comfort in that thought, too.

And then Mrs. Bunting sat up, and memory returned in a dreadful turgid flood. If Joe did come in, she must nerve herself to hear all that—that talk there'd be about The Avenger between him and Bunting.

Slowly she dragged herself out of bed, feeling exactly as if she had just recovered from an illness which had left her very weak, very, very tired in body and soul.

She stood for a moment listening—listening, and shivering, for it was very cold. Considering how early it still was, there seemed a lot of coming and going in the Marylebone Road. She could hear the unaccustomed sounds through her closed door and the tightly fastened windows of the sitting-room. There must be a regular crowd of men and women, on foot and in cabs, hurrying to the scene of The Avenger's last extraordinary crime.

She heard the sudden thud made by their usual morning paper falling from the letter-box on to the floor of the hall, and a moment later came the sound of Bunting quickly, quietly going out and getting it. She visualised him coming back, and sitting down with a sigh of satisfaction by the newly-lit fire.

Languidly she began dressing herself to the accompaniment of distant tramping and of noise of passing traffic, which increased in volume and in sound as the moments slipped by.

When Mrs. Bunting went down into her kitchen everything looked just as she had left it, and there was no trace of the acrid smell she had expected to find there. Instead, the cavernous, whitewashed room was full of fog, but she noticed that, though the shutters were bolted and barred as she had left them, the windows behind them had been widely opened to the air. She had left them shut.

Making a "spill" out of a twist of newspaper—she had been taught the art as a girl by one of her old mistresses—she stooped and flung open the oven-door of her gas-stove. Yes, it was as she had expected, a fierce heat had been generated there since she had last used the oven, and through to the stone floor below had fallen a mass of black, gluey soot.

Mrs. Bunting took the ham and eggs that she had bought the previous day for her own and Bunting's breakfast upstairs, and broiled them over the gas-ring in their sitting-room. Her husband watched her in surprised silence. She had never done such a thing before.

"I couldn't stay down there," she said; "it was so cold and foggy. I thought I'd make breakfast up here, just for to-day."

"Yes," he said kindly; "that's quite right, Ellen. I think you've done quite right, my dear."

But, when it came to the point, his wife could not eat any of the nice breakfast she had got ready; she only had another cup of tea.

"I'm afraid you're ill, Ellen?" Bunting asked solicitously.

"No," she said shortly; "I'm not ill at all. Don't be silly! The thought of that horrible thing happening so close by has upset me, and put me off my food. Just hark to them now!"

Through their closed windows penetrated the sound of scurrying feet and loud, ribald laughter. What a crowd; nay, what a mob, must be hastening busily to and from the spot where there was now nothing to be seen!

Mrs. Bunting made her husband lock the front gate. "I don't want any of those ghouls in here!" she exclaimed angrily. And then, "What a lot of idle people there are in the world!" she said.

CHAPTER XVI

Bunting began moving about the room restlessly. He would go to the window; stand there awhile staring out at the people hurrying past; then, coming back to the fireplace, sit down.

But he could not stay long quiet. After a glance at his paper, up he would rise from his chair, and go to the window again.

"I wish you'd stay still," his wife said at last. And then, a few minutes later, "Hadn't you better put your hat and coat on and go out?" she exclaimed.

And Bunting, with a rather shamed expression, did put on his hat and coat and go out.

As he did so he told himself that, after all, he was but human; it was natural that he should be thrilled and excited by the dreadful, extraordinary thing which had just happened close by. Ellen wasn't reasonable about such things. How queer and disagreeable she had been that very morning—angry with him because he had gone out to hear what
all the row was about, and even more angry when he had come back and said nothing, because he thought it would annoy her to hear about it!

Meanwhile, Mrs. Bunting forced herself to go down again into the kitchen, and as she went through into the low, whitewashed place, a tremor of fear, of quick terror, came over her. She turned and did what she had never in her life done before, and what she had never heard of anyone else doing in a kitchen. She bolted the door.

But, having done this, finding herself at last alone, shut off from everybody, she was still beset by a strange, uncanny dread. She felt as if she were locked in with an invisible presence, which mocked and jeered, reproached and threatened her, by turns.

Why had she allowed, nay encouraged, Daisy to go away for two days? Daisy, at any rate, was company—kind, young, unsuspecting company. With Daisy she could be her old sharp self. It was such a comfort to be with someone to whom she not only need, but ought to, say nothing. When with Bunting she was pursued by a sick feeling of guilt, of shame. She was the man's wedded wife—in his stolid way he was very kind to her, and yet she was keeping from him something he certainly had a right to know.

Not for worlds, however, would she have told Bunting of her dreadful suspicion—nay, of her almost certainty.

At last she went across to the door and unlocked it. Then she went upstairs and turned out her bedroom. That made her feel a little better.

She longed for Bunting to return, and yet in a way she was relieved by his absence. She would have liked to feel him near by, and yet she welcomed anything that took her husband out of the house.

And as Mrs. Bunting swept and dusted, trying to put her whole mind into what she was doing, she was asking herself all the time what was going on upstairs.

What a good rest the lodger was having! But there, that was only natural. Mr. Sleuth, as she well knew, had been up a long time last night, or rather this morning.

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Suddenly, the drawing-room bell rang. But Mr. Sleuth's landlady did not go up, as she generally did, before getting ready the simple meal which was the lodger's luncheon and breakfast combined. Instead, she went downstairs again and hurriedly prepared the lodger's food.

Then, very slowly, with her heart beating queerly, she walked up, and just outside the sitting-room—for she felt sure that Mr. Sleuth had got up, that he was there already, waiting for her—she rested the tray on the top of the banisters and listened. For a few moments she heard nothing; then through the door came the high, quavering voice with which she had become so familiar:

"'She saith to him, stolen waters are sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant. But he knoweth not that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of hell.'"

There was a long pause. Mrs. Bunting could hear the leaves of her Bible being turned over, eagerly, busily; and then again Mr. Sleuth broke out, this time in a softer voice:

"'She hath cast down many wounded from her; yea, many strong men have been slain by her.'" And in a softer, lower, plaintive tone came the words: "'I applied my heart to know, and to search, and to seek out wisdom and the reason of things; and to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.'"

And as she stood there listening, a feeling of keen distress, of spiritual oppression, came over Mrs. Bunting. For the first time in her life she visioned the infinite mystery, the sadness and strangeness, of human life.

Poor Mr. Sleuth—poor unhappy, distraught Mr. Sleuth! An overwhelming pity blotted out for a moment the fear, aye, and the loathing, she had been feeling for her lodger.

She knocked at the door, and then she took up her tray.

"Come in, Mrs. Bunting." Mr. Sleuth's voice sounded feebler, more toneless than usual.

She turned the handle of the door and walked in. The lodger was not sitting in his usual place; he had taken the little round table on which his candle generally rested when he read in bed, out of his bedroom, and placed it over by the drawing-room window. On it were placed, open, the Bible and the Concordance. But as his landlady came in, Mr. Sleuth hastily closed the Bible, and began staring dreamily out of the window, down at the sordid, hurrying crowd of men and women which now swept along the Marylebone Road.

"There seem a great many people out today," he observed, without looking round.

"Yes, sir, there do."

Mrs. Bunting began busying herself with laying the cloth and putting out the breakfast-lunch, and as she did so she was seized with a mortal, instinctive terror of the man sitting there.

At last Mr. Sleuth got up and turned round. She forced herself to look at him. How tired, how worn, he looked, and—how strange!

Walking towards the table on which lay his meal, he rubbed his hands together with a nervous gesture—it was a gesture he only made when something had pleased, nay, satisfied him. Mrs. Bunting, looking at him, remembered
that he had rubbed his hands together thus when he had first seen the room upstairs, and realised that it contained a
large gas-stove and a convenient sink.

What Mr. Sleuth was doing now also reminded her in an odd way of a play she had once seen--a play to which a
young man had taken her when she was a girl, unnumbered years ago, and which had thrilled and fascinated her.
"Out, out, damned spot!" that was what the tall, fierce, beautiful lady who had played the part of a queen had said,
twisting her hands together just as the lodger was doing now.

"It's a fine day," said Mr. Sleuth, sitting down and unfolding his napkin. "The fog has cleared. I do not know if
you will agree with me, Mrs. Bunting, but I always feel brighter when the sun is shining, as it is now, at any rate,
trying to shine." He looked at her inquiringly, but Mrs. Bunting could not speak. She only nodded. However, that
did not affect Mr. Sleuth adversely.

He had acquired a great liking and respect for this well-balanced, taciturn woman. She was the first woman for
whom he had experienced any such feeling for many years past.

He looked down at the still covered dish, and shook his head. "I don't feel as if I could eat very much to-day," he
said plaintively. And then he suddenly took a half-sovereign out of his waistcoat pocket.

Already Mrs. Bunting had noticed that it was not the same waistcoat Mr. Sleuth had been wearing the day
before.

"Mrs. Bunting, may I ask you to come here?"
And after a moment of hesitation his landlady obeyed him.

"Will you please accept this little gift for the use you kindly allowed me to make of your kitchen last night?" he
said quietly. "I tried to make as little mess as I could, Mrs. Bunting, but--well, the truth is I was carrying out a very
elaborate experiment."

Mrs. Bunting held out her hand, she hesitated, and then she took the coin. The fingers which for a moment
brushed lightly against her palm were icy cold--cold and clammy. Mr. Sleuth was evidently not well.

As she walked down the stairs, the winter sun, a scarlet ball hanging in the smoky sky, glinted in on Mr. Sleuth's
landlady, and threw blood-red gleams, or so it seemed to her, on to the piece of gold she was holding in her hand.

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The day went by, as other days had gone by in that quiet household, but, of course, there was far greater
animation outside the little house than was usually the case.

Perhaps because the sun was shining for the first time for some days, the whole of London seemed to be making
holiday in that part of the town.

When Bunting at last came back, his wife listened silently while he told her of the extraordinary excitement
reigning everywhere. And then, after he had been talking a long while, she suddenly shot a strange look at him.

"I suppose you went to see the place?" she said.
And guiltily he acknowledged that he had done so.

"Well?"

"Well, there wasn't anything much to see--not now. But, oh, Ellen, the daring of him! Why, Ellen, if the poor
soul had had time to cry out--which they don't believe she had--it's impossible someone wouldn't 'a heard her. They
say that if he goes on doing it like that--in the afternoon, like--he never will be caught. He must have just got mixed
up with all the other people within ten seconds of what he'd done!"

During the afternoon Bunting bought papers recklessly--in fact, he must have spent the best part of six-pence.
But in spite of all the supposed and suggested clues, there was nothing--nothing at all new to read, less, in fact than
ever before.

The police, it was clear, were quite at a loss, and Mrs. Bunting began to feel curiously better, less tired, less ill,
less--less terrified than she had felt through the morning.

And then something happened which broke with dramatic suddenness the quietude of the day.

They had had their tea, and Bunting was reading the last of the papers he had run out to buy, when suddenly
there came a loud, thundering, double knock at the door.

Mrs. Bunting looked up, startled. "Why, whoever can that be?" she said.
But as Bunting got up she added quickly, "You just sit down again. I'll go myself. Sounds like someone after
lodgings. I'll soon send them to the right-about!"

And then she left the room, but not before there had come another loud double knock.

Mrs. Bunting opened the front door. In a moment she saw that the person who stood there was a stranger to her.
He was a big, dark man, with fierce, black moustaches. And somehow--she could not have told you why--he
suggested a policeman to Mrs. Bunting's mind.

This notion of hers was confirmed by the very first words he uttered. For, "I'm here to execute a warrant!" he
exclaimed in a theatrical, hollow tone.
With a weak cry of protest Mrs. Bunting suddenly threw out her arms as if to bar the way; she turned deadly white--but then, in an instant the supposed stranger's laugh rang out, with loud, jovial, familiar sound!

"There now, Mrs. Bunting! I never thought I'd take you in as well as all that!"

It was Joe Chandler--Joe Chandler dressed up, as she knew he sometimes, not very often, did dress up in the course of his work.

Mrs. Bunting began laughing--laughing helplessly, hysterically, just as she had done on the morning of Daisy's arrival, when the newspaper-sellers had come shouting down the Marylebone Road.

"What's all this about?" Bunting came out

Young Chandler ruefully shut the front door. "I didn't mean to upset her like this," he said, looking foolish; "'twas just my silly nonsense, Mr. Bunting." And together they helped her into the sitting-room.

But, once there, poor Mrs. Bunting went on worse than ever; she threw her black apron over her face, and began to sob hysterically.

"I made sure she'd know who I was when I spoke," went on the young fellow apologetically. "But, there now, I have upset her. I am sorry!"

"It don't matter!" she exclaimed, throwing the apron off her face, but the tears were still streaming from her eyes as she sobbed and laughed by turns. "Don't matter one little bit, Joe! 'Twas stupid of me to be so taken aback. But, there, that murder that's happened close by, it's just upset me--upset me altogether to-day."

"Enough to upset anyone--that was," acknowledged the young man ruefully. "I've only come in for a minute, like. I haven't no right to come when I'm on duty like this--"

Joe Chandler was looking longingly at what remains of the meal were still on the table.

"You can take a minute just to have a bite and a sup," said Bunting hospitably; "and then you can tell us any news there is, Joe. We're right in the middle of everything now, ain't we?" He spoke with evident enjoyment, almost pride, in the gruesome fact.

Joe nodded. Already his mouth was full of bread-and-butter. He waited a moment, and then: "Well I have got one piece of news--not that I suppose it'll interest you very much."

They both looked at him--Mrs. Bunting suddenly calm, though her breast still heaved from time to time.

"Our Boss has resigned!" said Joe Chandler slowly, impressively.

"No! Not the Commissioner o' Police?" exclaimed Bunting.

"Yes, he has. He just can't bear what's said about us any longer --and I don't wonder! He done his best, and so's we all. The public have just gone daft--in the West End, that is, to-day. As for the papers, well, they're something cruel--that's what they are. And the ridiculous ideas they print! You'd never believe the things they asks us to do--and quite serious-like."

"What d'you mean?" questioned Mrs. Bunting. She really wanted to know.

"Well, the Courier declares that there ought to be a house-to-house investigation--all over London. Just think of it! Everybody to let the police go all over their house, from garret to kitchen, just to see if The Avenger isn't concealed there. Dotty, I calls it! Why, 'twould take us months and months just to do that one job in a town like London."

"I'd like to gag that ex-Lord Mayor!" concluded Joe Chandler wrathfully.

"It's all along of them blarsted papers that The Avenger went to work a different way this time," said Chandler slowly.

"I don't take your meaning, Joe."

"Well, you see, it's this way. The newspapers was always saying how extraordinary it was that The Avenger chose such a peculiar time to do his deeds--I mean, the time when no one's about the streets. Now, doesn't it stand to reason that the fellow, reading all that, and seeing the sense of it, said to himself, I'll go on another tack this time? Just listen to this!" He pulled a strip of paper, part of a column cut from a newspaper, out of his pocket:

"AN EX-LORD MAYOR OF LONDON ON THE AVENGER

"Will the murderer be caught? Yes,' replied Sir John, 'he will certainly be caught--probably when he commits his next crime. A whole army of bloodhounds, metaphorical and literal, will be on his track the moment he draws blood again. With the whole community against him, he cannot escape, especially when it be remembered that he chooses the quietest hour in the twenty-four to commit his crimes."

"Londoners are now in such a state of nerves--if I may use the expression, in such a state of funk--that every passer-by, however innocent, is looked at with suspicion by his neighbour if his avocation happens to take him abroad between the hours of one and three in the morning."

"I'd like to gag that ex-Lord Mayor!" concluded Joe Chandler wrathfully.

Just then the lodger's bell rang.
"Let me go up, my dear," said Bunting.
His wife still looked pale and shaken by the fright she had had.
"No, no," she said hastily. "You stop down here, and talk to Joe. I'll look after Mr. Sleuth. He may be wanting
his supper just a bit earlier than usual to-day."

Slowly, painfully, again feeling as if her legs were made of cotton wool, she dragged herself up to the first floor,
knocked at the door, and then went in.
"You did ring, sir?" she said, in her quiet, respectful way.

And Mr. Sleuth looked up.

She thought--but, as she reminded herself afterwards, it might have been just her idea, and nothing else--that for
the first time the lodger looked frightened--frightened and cowed.

"I heard a noise downstairs," he said fretfully, "and I wanted to know what it was all about. As I told you, Mrs.
Bunting, when I first took these rooms, quiet is essential to me."

"It was just a friend of ours, sir. I'm sorry you were disturbed. Would you like the knocker taken off to-morrow?
Bunting'll be pleased to do it if you don't like to hear the sound of the knocks."

"Oh, no, I wouldn't put you to such trouble as that." Mr. Sleuth looked quite relieved. "Just a friend of yours, was
it, Mrs. Bunting? He made a great deal of noise."

"Just a young fellow," she said apologetically. "The son of one of Bunting's old friends. He often comes here, sir;
but he never did give such a great big double knock as that before. I'll speak to him about it."

"Oh, no, Mrs. Bunting. I would really prefer you did nothing of the kind. It was just a passing annoyance--
nothing more!"

She waited a moment. How strange that Mr. Sleuth said nothing of the hoarse cries which had made of the road
outside a perfect Bedlam every hour or two throughout that day. But no, Mr. Sleuth made no allusion to what might
well have disturbed any quiet gentleman at his reading.

"I thought maybe you'd like to have supper a little earlier to-night, sir?"

"Just when you like, Mrs. Bunting--just when it's convenient. I do not wish to put you out in any way."

She felt herself dismissed, and going out quietly, closed the door.

As she did so, she heard the front door banging to. She sighed --Joe Chandler was really a very noisy young
fellow.

CHAPTER XVII

Mrs. Bunting slept well the night following that during which the lodger had been engaged in making his
mysterious experiments in her kitchen. She was so tired, so utterly exhausted, that sleep came to her the moment she
laid her head upon her pillow.

Perhaps that was why she rose so early the next morning. Hardly giving herself time to swallow the tea Bunting
had made and brought her, she got up and dressed.

She had suddenly come to the conclusion that the hall and staircase required a thorough "doing down," and she
did not even wait till they had eaten their breakfast before beginning her labours. It made Bunting feel quite
uncomfortable. As he sat by the fire reading his morning paper--the paper which was again of such absorbing
interest--he called out, "There's no need for so much hurry, Ellen. Daisy'll be back to-day. Why don't you wait till
she's come home to help you?"

But from the hall where she was busy dusting, sweeping, polishing, his wife's voice came back: "Girls ain't no
good at this sort of work. Don't you worry about me. I feel as if I'd enjoy doing an extra bit of cleaning to-day. I
don't like to feel as anyone could come in and see my place dirty."

"No fear of that!" Bunting chuckled. And then a new thought struck him. "Ain't you afraid of waking the
lodger?" he called out.

"Mr. Sleuth slept most of yesterday, and all last night," she answered quickly. "As it is, I study him over-much;
it's a long, long time since I've done this staircase down."

All the time she was engaged in doing the hall, Mrs. Bunting left the sitting-room door wide open.

That was a queer thing of her to do, but Bunting didn't like to get up and shut her out, as it were. Still, try as he
would, he couldn't read with any comfort while all that noise was going on. He had never known Ellen make such
a lot of noise before. Once or twice he looked up and frowned rather crossly.

There came a sudden silence, and he was startled to see that. Ellen was standing in the doorway, staring at him,
doing nothing.

"Come in," he said, "do! Ain't you finished yet?"

"I was only resting a minute," she said. "You don't tell me nothing. I'd like to know if there's anything--I mean
anything new--in the paper this morning."

She spoke in a muffled voice, almost as if she were ashamed of her unusual curiosity; and her look of fatigue, of
pallor, made Bunting suddenly uneasy. "Come in--do!" he repeated sharply. "You've done quite enough--and before breakfast, too. 'Tain't necessary. Come in and shut that door."

He spoke authoritatively, and his wife, for a wonder, obeyed him.

She came in, and did what she had never done before--brought the broom with her, and put it up against the wall in the corner.

Then she sat down.

"I think I'll make breakfast up here," she said. "I--I feel cold, Bunting." And her husband stared at her surprised, for drops of perspiration were glistening on her forehead.

He got up. "All right. I'll go down and bring the eggs up. Don't you worry. For the matter of that, I can cook them downstairs if you like."

"No," she said obstinately. "I'd rather do my own work. You just bring them up here--that'll be all right. Tomorrow morning we'll have Daisy to help see to things."

"Come over here and sit down comfortable in my chair," he suggested kindly. "You never do take any bit of rest, Ellen. I never see'd such a woman!"

And again she got up and meekly obeyed him, walking across the room with languid steps.

He watched her, anxiously, uncomfortably.

She took up the newspaper he had just laid down, and Bunting took two steps towards her.

"I'll show you the most interesting bit" he said eagerly. "It's the piece headed, 'Our Special Investigator.' You see, they've started a special investigator of their own, and he's got hold of a lot of little facts the police seem to have overlooked. The man who writes all that--I mean the Special Investigator--was a famous 'tec in his time, and he's just come back out of his retirement o' purpose to do this bit of work for the paper. You read what he says--I shouldn't be a bit surprised if he ends by getting that reward! One can see he just loves the work of tracking people down."

"There's nothing to be proud of in such a job," said his wife listlessly.

"He'll have something to be proud of if he catches The Avenger!" cried Bunting. He was too keen about this affair to be put off by Ellen's contradictory remarks. "You just notice that bit about the rubber soles. Now, no one's thought o' that. I'll just tell Chandler--he don't seem to me to be half awake, that young man don't."

"He's quite wide awake enough without you saying things to him! How about those eggs, Bunting? I feel quite ready for my breakfast even if you don't--"

Mrs. Bunting now spoke in what her husband sometimes secretly described to himself as "Ellen's snarling voice."

He turned away and left the room, feeling oddly troubled. There was something queer about her, and he couldn't make it out. He didn't mind it when she spoke sharply and nastily to him. He was used to that. But now she was so up and down; so different from what she used to be! In old days she had always been the same, but now a man never knew where to have her.

And as he went downstairs he pondered uneasily over his wife's changed ways and manner.

Take the question of his easy chair. A very small matter, no doubt, but he had never known Ellen sit in that chair--no, not even once, for a minute, since it had been purchased by her as a present for him.

They had been so happy, so happy, and so--so restful, during that first week after Mr. Sleuth had come to them. Perhaps it was the sudden, dramatic change from agonising anxiety to peace and security which had been too much for Ellen--yes, that was what was the matter with her, that and the universal excitement about these Avenger murders, which were shaking the nerves of all London. Even Bunting, unobservant as he was, had come to realise that his wife took a morbid interest in these terrible happenings. And it was the more queer of her to do so that at first she refused to discuss them, and said openly that she was utterly uninterested in murder or crime of any sort.

He, Bunting, had always had a mild pleasure in such things. In his time he had been a great reader of detective tales, and even now he thought there was no pleasanter reading. It was that which had first drawn him to Joe Chandler, and made him welcome the young chap as cordially as he had done when they first came to London.

But though Ellen had tolerated, she had never encouraged, that sort of talk between the two men. More than once she had exclaimed reproachfully: "To hear you two, one would think there was no nice, respectable, quiet people left in the world!"

But now all that was changed. She was as keen as anyone could be to hear the latest details of an Avenger crime. True, she took her own view of any theory suggested. But there! Ellen always had her own notions about everything under the sun. Ellen was a woman who thought for herself--a clever woman, not an everyday woman by any manner of means.

While these thoughts were going disconnectedly through his mind, Bunting was breaking four eggs into a basin. He was going to give Ellen a nice little surprise--to cook an omelette as a French chef had once taught him to do,
years and years ago. He didn't know how she would take his doing such a thing after what she had said; but never mind, she would enjoy the omelette when done. Ellen hadn't been eating her food properly of late.

And when he went up again, his wife, to his relief, and, it must be admitted, to his surprise, took it very well. She had not even noticed how long he had been downstairs, for she had been reading with intense, painful care the column that the great daily paper they took in had allotted to the one-time famous detective.

According to this Special Investigator's own account he had discovered all sorts of things that had escaped the eye of the police and of the official detectives. For instance, owing, he admitted, to a fortunate chance, he had been at the place where the two last murders had been committed very soon after the double crime had been discovered—in fact within half an hour, and he had found, or so he felt sure, on the slippery, wet pavement imprints of the murderer's right foot.

The paper reproduced the impression of a half-worn rubber sole. At the same time, he also admitted—for the Special Investigator was very honest, and he had a good bit of space to fill in the enterprising paper which had engaged him to probe the awful mystery—that there were thousands of rubber soles being worn in London. . . .

And when she came to that statement Mrs. Bunting looked up, and there came a wan smile over her thin, closely-shut lips. It was quite true—that about rubber soles; there were thousands of rubber soles being worn just now. She felt grateful to the Special Investigator for having stated the fact so clearly.

The column ended up with the words:

"And to-day will take place the inquest on the double crime of ten days ago. To my mind it would be well if a preliminary public inquiry could be held at once. Say, on the very day the discovery of a fresh murder is made. In that way alone would it be possible to weigh and sift the evidence offered by members of the general public. For when a week or more has elapsed, and these same people have been examined and cross-examined in private by the police, their impressions have had time to become blurred and hopelessly confused. On that last occasion but one there seems no doubt that several people, at any rate two women and one man, actually saw the murderer hurrying from the scene of his atrocious double crime—this being so, to-day's investigation may be of the highest value and importance. To-morrow I hope to give an account of the impression made on me by the inquest, and by any statements made during its course."

Even when her husband had come in with the tray Mrs. Bunting had gone on reading, only lifting up her eyes for a moment. At last he said rather crossly, "Put down that paper, Ellen, this minute! The omelette I've cooked for you will be just like leather if you don't eat it."

But once his wife had eaten her breakfast—and, to Bunting's mortification, she left more than half the nice omelette untouched—and Bunting's mortification, she left more than half the nice omelette untouched—as she took the paper up again. She turned over the big sheets, until she found, at the foot of one of the ten columns devoted to The Avenger and his crimes, the information she wanted, and then uttered an exclamation under her breath.

What Mrs. Bunting had been looking for—as what last she had found—was the time and place of the inquest which was to be held that day. The hour named was a rather odd time—two o'clock in the afternoon, but, from Mrs. Bunting's point of view, it was most convenient.

By two o'clock, nay, by half-past one, the lodger would have had his lunch; by hurrying matters a little she and Bunting would have had their dinner, and—daisy wasn't coming home till tea-time.

She got up out of her husband's chair. "I think you're right," she said, in a quick, hoarse tone. "I mean about going and see a doctor, Bunting. I think I will go and see a doctor this very afternoon."

"Wouldn't you like me to go with you?" he asked.

"No, that I wouldn't. In fact I wouldn't go at all you was to go with me."

"All right," he said vexedly. "Please yourself, my dear; you know best."

"I should think I did know best where my own health is concerned."

Even Bunting was incensed by this lack of gratitude. "Twas I said, long ago, you ought to go and see the doctor; 'twas you said you wouldn't!" he exclaimed pugnaciously.

"Well, I've never said you was never right, have I? At any rate, I'm going."

"Have you a pain anywhere?" He stared at her with a look of real solicitude on his fat, phlegmatic face.

Somewhere Ellen didn't look right, standing there opposite him. Her shoulders seemed to have shrunk; even her cheeks had fallen in a little. She had never looked so bad—not even when they had been half starving, and dreadfully, dreadfully worked.

"Yes," she said briefly, "I've a pain in my head, at the back of my neck. It doesn't often leave me; it gets worse when anything upsets me, like I was upset last night by Joe Chandler."

"He was a silly ass to come and do a thing like that!" said Bunting crossly. "I'd a good mind to tell him so, too. But I must say, Ellen, I wonder he took you in—he didn't me!"

"Well, you had no chance he should—you knew who it was," she said slowly.
And Bunting remained silent, for Ellen was right. Joe Chandler had already spoken when he, Bunting, came out into the hall, and saw their cleverly disguised visitor.

"Those big black moustaches," he went on complainingly, "and that black wig--why, 'twas too ridic'lous--that's what I call it!"

"Not to anyone who didn't know Joe," she said sharply.

"Well, I don't know. He didn't look like a real man--nowhow. If he's a wise lad, he won't let our Daisy ever see him looking like that!" and Bunting laughed, a comfortable laugh.

He had thought a good deal about Daisy and young Chandler the last two days, and, on the whole, he was well pleased. It was a dull, unnatural life the girl was leading with Old Aunt. And Joe was earning good money. They wouldn't have long to wait, these two young people, as a beau and his girl often have to wait, as he, Bunting, and Daisy's mother had had to do, for ever so long before they could be married. No, there was no reason why they shouldn't be spliced quite soon--if so the fancy took them. And Bunting had very little doubt that so the fancy would take Joe, at any rate.

But there was plenty of time. Daisy wouldn't be eighteen till the week after next. They might wait till she was twenty. By that time Old Aunt might be dead, and Daisy might have come into quite a tidy little bit of money.

"What are you smiling at?" said his wife sharply.

And he shook himself. "I--smiling? At nothing that I knows of." Then he waited a moment. "Well, if you will know, Ellen, I was just thinking of Daisy and that young chap Joe Chandler. He is gone on her, ain't he?"

"Gone?" And then Mrs. Bunting laughed, a queer, odd, not unkindly laugh. "Gone, Bunting?" she repeated.

"Why, he's out o' sight--right, out of sight!"

Then hesitatingly, and looking narrowly at her husband, she went on, twisting a bit of her black apron with her fingers as she spoke:-- "I suppose he'll be going over this afternoon to fetch her? Or--or d'you think he'll have to be at that inquest, Bunting?"

"Inquest? What inquest?" He looked at her puzzled.

"Why, the inquest on them bodies found in the passage near by King's Cross."

"Oh, no; he'd have no call to be at the inquest. For the matter o' that, I know he's going over to fetch Daisy. He said so last night--just when you went up to the lodger."

"That's just as well." Mrs. Bunting spoke with considerable satisfaction. "Otherwise I suppose you'd ha' had to go. I wouldn't like the house left--not with us out of it. Mr. Sleuth would be upset if there came a ring at the door."

"Oh, I won't leave the house, don't you be afraid, Ellen--not while you're out."

"Not even if I'm out a good while, Bunting."

"No fear. Of course, you'll be a long time if it's your idea to see that doctor at Ealing?"

He looked at her questioningly, and Mrs. Bunting nodded. Somehow nodding didn't seem as bad as speaking a lie.

CHAPTER XVIII

Any ordeal is far less terrifying, far easier to meet with courage, when it is repeated, than is even a milder experience which is entirely novel.

Mrs. Bunting had already attended an inquest, in the character of a witness, and it was one of the few happenings of her life which was sharply etched against the somewhat blurred screen of her memory.

In a country house where the then Ellen Green had been staying for a fortnight with her elderly mistress, there had occurred one of those sudden, pitiful tragedies which occasionally destroy the serenity, the apparent decorum, of a large, respectable household.

The under-housemaid, a pretty, happy-natured girl, had drowned herself for love of the footman, who had given his sweetheart cause for bitter jealousy. The girl had chosen to speak of her troubles to the strange lady's maid rather than to her own fellow-servants, and it was during the conversation the two women had had together that the girl had threatened to take her own life.

As Mrs. Bunting put on her outdoor clothes, preparatory to going out, she recalled very clearly all the details of that dreadful affair, and of the part she herself had unwillingly played in it.

She visualised the country inn where the inquest on that poor, unfortunate creature had been held.

The butler had escorted her from the Hall, for he also was to give evidence, and as they came up there had been a look of cheerful animation about the inn yard; people coming and going, many women as well as men, village folk, among whom the dead girl's fate had aroused a great deal of interest, and the kind of horror which those who live on a dull countryside welcome rather than avoid.

Everyone there had been particularly nice and polite to her, to Ellen Green; there had been a time of waiting in a room upstairs in the old inn, and the witnesses had been accommodated, not only with chairs, but with cake and wine.
She remembered how she had dreaded being a witness, how she had felt as if she would like to run away from her nice, easy place, rather than have to get up and tell the little that she knew of the sad business.

But it had not been so very dreadful after all. The coroner had been a kindly-spoken gentleman; in fact he had complimented her on the clear, sensible way she had given her evidence concerning the exact words the unhappy girl had used.

One thing Ellen Green had said, in answer to a question put by an inquisitive juryman, had raised a laugh in the crowded, low-ceilinged room. "Ought not Miss Ellen Green," so the man had asked, "to have told someone of the girl's threat? If she had done so, might not the girl have been prevented from throwing herself into the lake?" And she, the witness, had answered, with some asperity—for by that time the coroner's kind manner had put her at her ease—that she had not attached any importance to what the girl had threatened to do, never believing that any young woman could be so silly as to drown herself for love!

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Vaguely Mrs. Bunting supposed that the inquest at which she was going to be present this afternoon would be like that country inquest of long ago.

It had been no mere perfunctory inquiry; she remembered very well how little by little that pleasant-spoken gentleman, the coroner, had got the whole truth out—the story, that is, of how that horrid footman, whom she, Ellen Green, had disliked from the first minute she had set eyes on him, had taken up with another young woman. It had been supposed that this fact would not be elicited by the coroner; but it had been, quietly, remorselessly; more, the dead girl's letters had been read out—piteous, queerly expressed letters, full of wild love and bitter, threatening jealousy. And the jury had censured the young man most severely; she remembered the look on his face when the people, shrinking back, had made a passage for him to slink out of the crowded room.

Come to think of it now, it was strange she had never told Bunting that long-ago tale. It had occurred years before she knew him, and somehow nothing had ever happened to make her tell him about it.

She wondered whether Bunting had ever been to an inquest. She longed to ask him. But if she asked him now, this minute, he might guess where she was thinking of going.

And then, while still moving about her bedroom, she shook her head—no, no, Bunting would never guess such a thing; he would never, never suspect her of telling him a lie.

Stop—had she told a lie? She did mean to go to the doctor after the inquest was finished—if there was time, that is. She wondered uneasily how long such an inquiry was likely to last. In this case, as so very little had been discovered, the proceedings would surely be very formal—formal and therefore short.

She herself had one quite definite object—that of hearing the evidence of those who believed they had seen the murderer leaving the spot where his victims lay weltering in their still flowing blood. She was filled with a painful, secret, and, yes, eager curiosity to hear how those who were so positive about the matter would describe the appearance of The Avenger. After all, a lot of people must have seen him, for, as Bunting had said only the day before to young Chandler, The Avenger was not a ghost; he was a living man with some kind of hiding-place where he was known, and where he spent his time between his awful crimes.

As she came back to the sitting-room, her extreme pallor struck her husband.

"Why, Ellen," he said, "it is time you went to the doctor. You looks just as if you was going to a funeral. I'll come along with you as far as the station. You're going by train, ain't you? Not by bus, eh? It's a very long way to Ealing, you know."

"There you go! Breaking your solemn promise to me the very first minute!" But somehow she did not speak unkindly, only fretfully and sadly.

And Bunting hung his head. "Why, to be sure I'd gone and clean forgot the lodger! But will you be all right, Ellen? Why not wait till to-morrow, and take Daisy with you?"

"I like doing my own business in my own way, and not in someone else's way!" she snapped out; and then more gently, for Bunting really looked concerned, and she did feel very far from well, "I'll be all right, old man. Don't you worry about me!"

As she turned to go across to the door, she drew the black shawl she had put over her long jacket more closely round her.

She felt ashamed, deeply ashamed, of deceiving so kind a husband. And yet, what could she do? How could she share her dreadful burden with poor Bunting? Why, 'twould be enough to make a man go daft. Even she often felt as if she could stand it no longer—as if she would give the world to tell someone—anyone—what it was that she suspected, what deep in her heart she so feared to be the truth.

But, unknown to herself, the fresh outside air, fog-laden though it was, soon began to do her good. She had gone out far too little the last few days, for she had had a nervous terror of leaving the house unprotected, as also a great unwillingness to allow Bunting to come into contact with the lodger.
When she reached the Underground station she stopped short. There were two ways of getting to St. Pancras--
she could go by bus, or she could go by train. She decided on the latter. But before turning into the station her eyes
strayed over the bills of the early afternoon papers lying on the ground.

Two words,
THE AVENGER,
starred up at her in varying type.

Drawing her black shawl yet a little closer about her shoulders, Mrs. Bunting looked down at the placards. She
did not feel inclined to buy a paper, as many of the people round her were doing. Her eyes were smarting, even now,
from their unaccustomed following of the close print in the paper Bunting took in.

Slowly she turned, at last, into the Underground station.

And now a piece of extraordinary good fortune befell Mrs. Bunting.
The third-class carriage in which she took her place happened to be empty, save for the presence of a police
inspector. And once they were well away she summoned up courage, and asked him the question she knew she
would have to ask of someone within the next few minutes.

"Can you tell me," she said, in a low voice, "where death inquests are held"--she moistened her lips, waited a
moment, and then concluded--"in the neighbourhood of King's Cross?"

The man turned and, looked at her attentively. She did not look at all the sort of Londoner who goes to an
inquest--there are many such--just for the fun of the thing. Approvingly, for he was a widower, he noted her neat
black coat and skirt; and the plain Princess bonnet which framed her pale, refined face.

"I'm going to the Coroner's Court myself," he said good-naturedly. "So you can come along of me. You see
there's that big Avenger inquest going on to-day, so I think they'll have had to make other arrangements for--hum,
hum--ordinary cases." And as she looked at him dumbly, he went on, "There'll be a mighty crowd of people at The
Avenger inquest--a lot of ticket folk to be accommodated, to say nothing of the public."

"That's the inquest I'm going to," faltered Mrs. Bunting. She could scarcely get the words out. She realised with
acute discomfort, yes, and shame, how strange, how untoward, was that which she was going to do. Fancy a
respectable woman wanting to attend a murder inquest!

During the last few days all her perceptions had become sharpened by suspense and fear. She realised now, as
she looked into the stolid face of her unknown friend, how she herself would have regarded any woman who wanted
to attend such an inquiry from a simple, morbid feeling of curiosity. And yet--and yet that was just what she was
about to do herself.

"I've got a reason for wanting to go there," she murmured. It was a comfort to unburden herself this little way
even to a stranger.

"Ah!" he said reflectively. "A--a relative connected with one of the two victims' husbands, I presume?"

And Mrs. Bunting bent her head.

"Going to give evidence?" he asked casually, and then he turned and looked at Mrs. Bunting with far more
attention than he had yet done.

"Oh, no!" There was a world of horror, of fear in the speaker's voice.

And the inspector felt concerned and sorry. "Hadn't seen her for quite a long time, I suppose?"

"Never had, seen her. I'm from the country." Something impelled Mrs. Bunting to say these words. But she
hastily corrected herself, "At least, I was."

"Will he be there?"

She looked at him dumbly; not in the least knowing to whom he was alluding.

"I mean the husband," went on the inspector hastily. "I felt sorry for the last poor chap--I mean the husband of
the last one--he seemed so awfully miserable. You see, she'd been a good wife and a good mother till she took to the
drink."

"It always is so," breathed out Mrs. Bunting.

"Aye." He waited a moment. "D'you know anyone about the court?" he asked.

She shook her head.

"Well, don't you worry. I'll take you in along o' me. You'd never get in by yourself."

They got out; and oh, the comfort of being in some one's charge, of having a determined man in uniform to look
after one! And yet even now there was to Mrs. Bunting something dream-like, unsubstantial about the whole
business.

"If he knew--if he only knew what I know!" she kept saying over and over again to herself as she walked lightly
by the big, burly form of the police inspector.

"'Tisn't far--not three minutes," he said suddenly. "Am I walking too quick for you, ma'am?"

"No, not at all. I'm a quick walker."
And then suddenly they turned a corner and came on a mass of people, a densely packed crowd of men and women, staring at a mean-looking little door sunk into a high wall.

"Better take my arm," the inspector suggested. "Make way there! Make way!" he cried authoritatively; and he swept her through the serried ranks which parted at the sound of his voice, at the sight of his uniform.

"Lucky you met me," he said, smiling. "You'd never have got through alone. And 'tain't a nice crowd, not by any manner of means."

The small door opened just a little way, and they found themselves on a narrow stone-flagged path, leading into a square yard. A few men were out there, smoking.

Before preceding her into the building which rose at the back of the yard, Mrs. Bunting's kind new friend took out his watch. "There's another twenty minutes before they'll begin," he said. "There's the mortuary"--he pointed with his thumb to a low room built out to the right of the court. "Would you like to go in and see them?"

"Oh, no!" she cried, in a tone of extreme horror. And he looked down at her with sympathy, and with increased respect. She was a nice, respectable woman, she was. She had not come here imbued with any morbid, horrible curiosity, but because she thought it her duty to do so. He suspected her of being sister-in-law to one of The Avenger's victims.

They walked through into a big room or hall, now full of men talking in subdued yet eager, animated tones.

"I think you'd better sit down here," he said considerately, and, leading her to one of the benches that stood out from the whitewashed walls--"unless you'd rather be with the witnesses, that is."

But again she said, "Oh, no!" And then, with an effort, "Oughtn't I to go into the court now, if it's likely to be so full?"

"Don't you worry," he said kindly. "I'll see you get a proper place. I must leave you now for a minute, but I'll come back in good time and look after you."

She raised the thick veil she had pulled down over her face while they were going through that sinister, wolfish-looking crowd outside, and looked about her.

Many of the gentlemen--they mostly wore tall hats and good overcoats--standing round and about her looked vaguely familiar. She picked out one at once. He was a famous journalist, whose shrewd, animated face was familiar to her owing to the fact that it was widely advertised in connection with a preparation for the hair--the preparation which in happier, more prosperous days Bunting had had great faith in, and used, or so he always said, with great benefit to himself. This gentleman was the centre of an eager circle; half a dozen men were talking to him, listening deferentially when he spoke, and each of these men, so Mrs. Bunting realised, was a Somebody.

How strange, how amazing, to reflect that from all parts of London, from their doubtless important avocations, one unseen, mysterious beckoner had brought all these men here together, to this sordid place, on this bitterly cold, dreary day. Here they were, all thinking of, talking of, evoking one unknown, mysterious personality--that of the shadowy and yet terribly real human being who chose to call himself The Avenger. And somewhere, not so very far away from them all The Avenger was keeping these clever, astute, highly trained minds--aye, and bodies, too--at bay.

Even Mrs. Bunting, sitting here unnoticed, realised the irony of her presence among them.

CHAPTER XIX

It seemed to Mrs. Bunting that she had been sitting there a long time--it was really about a quarter of an hour--when her official friend came back.

"Better come along now," he whispered; "it'll begin soon."

She followed him out into a passage, up a row of steep stone steps, and so into the Coroner's Court.

The court was big, well-lighted room, in some ways not unlike a chapel, the more so that a kind of gallery ran half-way round, a gallery evidently set aside for the general public, for it was now crammed to its utmost capacity.

Mrs. Bunting glanced timidly towards the serried row of faces. Had it not been for her good fortune in meeting the man she was now following, it was there that she would have had to try and make her way. And she would have failed. Those people had rushed in the moment the doors were opened, pushing, fighting their way in a way she could never have pushed or fought.

There were just a few women among them, set, determined-looking women, belonging to every class, but made one by their love of sensation and their power of forcing their way in where they wanted to be. But the women were few; the great majority of those standing there were men--men who were also representative of every class of Londoner.

The centre of the court was like an arena; it was sunk two or three steps below the surrounding gallery. Just now it was comparatively clear of people, save for the benches on which sat the men who were to compose the jury. Some way from these men, huddled together in a kind of big pew, stood seven people--three women and four men.
"D'you see the witnesses?" whispered the inspector, pointing these out to her. He supposed her to know one of them with familiar knowledge, but, if that were so, she made no sign.

Between the windows, facing the whole room, was a kind of little platform, on which stood a desk and an armchair. Mrs. Bunting guessed rightly that it was there the coroner would sit. And to the left of the platform was the witness-stand, also raised considerably above the jury.

Amazingly different, and far, far more grim and awe-inspiring than the scene of the inquest which had taken place so long ago, on that bright April day, in the village inn. There the coroner had sat on the same level as the jury, and the witnesses had simply stepped forward one by one, and taken their place before him.

Looking round her fearfully, Mrs. Bunting thought she would surely die if ever she were exposed to the ordeal of standing in that curious box-like stand, and she stared across at the bench where sat the seven witnesses with a feeling of sincere pity in her heart.

But even she soon realised that her pity was wasted. Each woman witness looked eager, excited, and animated; well pleased to be the centre of attention and attraction to the general public. It was plain each was enjoying her part of important, if humble, actress in the thrilling drama which was now absorbing the attention of all London—it might almost be said of the whole world.

Looking at these women, Mrs. Bunting wondered vaguely which was which. Was it that rather draggle-tailed-looking young person who had certainly, or almost certainly, seen The Avenger within ten seconds of the double crime being committed? The woman who, aroused by one of his victims' cry of terror, had rushed to her window and seen the murderer's shadowy form pass swiftly by in the fog?

Yet another woman, so Mrs. Bunting now remembered, had given a most circumstantial account of what The Avenger looked like, for he, it was supposed, had actually brushed by her as he passed.

Those two women now before her had been interrogated and cross-examined again and again, not only by the police, but by representatives of every newspaper in London. It was from what they had both said—unluckily their accounts materially differed—that that official description of The Avenger had been worked up—that which described him as being a good-looking, respectable young fellow of twenty-eight, carrying a newspaper parcel.

As for the third woman, she was doubtless an acquaintance, a boon companion of the dead.

Mrs. Bunting looked away from the witnesses, and focused her gaze on another unfamiliar sight. Specially prominent, running indeed through the whole length of the shut-in space, that is, from the coroner's high dais right across to the opening in the wooden barrier, was an ink-splashed table at which, when she had first taken her place, there had been sitting three men busily sketching; but now every seat at the table was occupied by tired, intelligent-looking men, each with a notebook, or with some loose sheets of paper, before him.

"Them's the reporters," whispered her friend. "They don't like coming till the last minute, for they has to be the last to go. At an ordinary inquest there are only two—maybe three—attending, but now every paper in the kingdom has pretty well applied for a pass to that reporters' table."

He looked consideringly down into the well of the court. "Now let me see what I can do for you—"

Then he beckoned to the coroner's officer: "Perhaps you could put this lady just over there, in a corner by herself? Related to a relation of the deceased, but doesn't want to be—" He whispered a word or two, and the other nodded sympathetically, and looked at Mrs. Bunting with interest. "I'll put her just here," he muttered. "There's no one coming there to-day. You see, there are only seven witnesses—sometimes we have a lot more than that."

And he kindly put her on a now empty bench opposite to where the seven witnesses stood and sat with their eager, set faces, ready—a, more than ready—to play their part.

For a moment every eye in the court was focused on Mrs. Bunting, but soon those who had stared so hungrily, so intently, at her, realised that she had nothing to do with the case. She was evidently there as a spectator, and, more fortunate than most, she had a "friend at court," and so was able to sit comfortably, instead of having to stand in the crowd.

But she was not long left in isolation. Very soon some of the important-looking gentlemen she had seen downstairs came into the court, and were ushered over to her seat while two or three among them, including the famous writer whose face was so familiar that it almost seemed to Mrs. Bunting like that of a kindly acquaintance, were accommodated at the reporters' table.

"Gentlemen, the Coroner."

The jury stood up, shuffling their feet, and then sat down again; over the spectators there fell a sudden silence.

And then what immediately followed recalled to Mrs. Bunting, for the first time, that informal little country inquest of long ago.

First came the "Oyez! Oyez!" the old Norman-French summons to all whose business it is to attend a solemn inquiry into the death—sudden, unexplained, terrible—of a fellow-being.

The jury—there were fourteen of them—all stood up again. They raised their hands and solemnly chanted together
the curious words of their oath.

Then came a quick, informal exchange of sentences 'twixt the coroner and his officer.

Yes, everything was in order. The jury had viewed the bodies--he quickly corrected himself--the body, for, technically speaking, the inquest just about to be held only concerned one body.

And then, amid a silence so absolute that the slightest rustle could be heard through the court, the coroner--a clever-looking gentleman, though not so old as Mrs. Bunting thought he ought to have been to occupy so important a position on so important a day--gave a little history, as it were, of the terrible and mysterious Avenger crimes.

He spoke very clearly, warming to his work as he went on.

He told them that he had been present at the inquest held on one of The Avenger's former victims. "I only went through professional curiosity," he threw in by way of parenthesis, "little thinking, gentlemen, that the inquest on one of these unhappy creatures would ever be held in my court."

On and on, he went, though he had, in truth, but little to say, and though that little was known to every one of his listeners.

Mrs. Bunting heard one of the older gentlemen sitting near her whisper to another: "Drawing it out all he can; that's what he's doing. Having the time of his life, evidently!" And then the other whispered back, so low that she could only just catch the words, "Aye, aye. But he's a good chap--I knew his father; we were at school together. Takes his job very seriously, you know--he does to-day, at any rate."

She was listening intently, waiting for a word, a sentence, which would relieve her hidden terrors, or, on the other hand, confirm them. But the word, the sentence, was never uttered.

And yet, at the very end of his long peroration, the coroner did throw out a hint which might mean anything--or nothing.

"I am glad to say that we hope to obtain such evidence to-day as will in time lead to the apprehension of the miscreant who has committed, and is still committing, these terrible crimes."

Mrs. Bunting stared uneasily up into the coroner's firm, determined-looking face. What did he mean by that? Was there any new evidence--evidence of which Joe Chandler, for instance, was ignorant? And, as if in answer to the unspoken question, her heart gave a sudden leap, for a big, burly man had taken his place in the witness-box--a policeman who had not been sitting with the other witnesses.

But soon her uneasy terror became stilled. This witness was simply the constable who had found the first body. In quick, business-like tones he described exactly what had happened to him on that cold, foggy morning ten days ago. He was shown a plan, and he marked it slowly, carefully, with a thick finger. That was the exact place--no, he was making a mistake--that was the place where the other body had lain. He explained apologetically that he had got rather mixed up between the two bodies--that of Johanna Cobbett and Sophy Hurtle.

And then the coroner intervened authoritatively: "For the purpose of this inquiry," he said, "we must, I think, for a moment consider the two murders together."

After that, the witness went on far more comfortably; and as he proceeded, in a quick monotone, the full and deadly horror of The Avenger's acts came over Mrs. Bunting in a great seething flood of sick fear and--and, yes, remorse.

Up to now she had given very little thought--if, indeed, any thought--to the drink-sodden victims of The Avenger. It was he who had filled her thoughts,--he and those who were trying to track him down. But now? Now she felt sick and sorry she had come here to-day. She wondered if she would ever be able to get the vision the policeman's words had conjured up out of her mind--out of her memory.

And then there came an eager stir of excitement and of attention throughout the whole court, for the policeman had stepped down out of the witness-box, and one of the women witnesses was being conducted to his place.

Mrs. Bunting looked with interest and sympathy at the woman, remembering how she herself had trembled with fear, trembled as that poor, bedraggled, common-looking person was trembling now. The woman had looked so cheerful, so--so well pleased with herself till a minute ago, but now she had become very pale, and she looked round her as a hunted animal might have done.

But the coroner was very kind, very soothing and gentle in his manner, just as that other coroner had been when dealing with Ellen Green at the inquest on that poor drowned girl.

After the witness had repeated in a toneless voice the solemn words of the oath, she began to be taken, step by step, though her story. At once Mrs. Bunting realised that this was the woman who claimed to have seen The Avenger from her bedroom window. Gaining confidence, as she went on, the witness described how she had heard a long-drawn, stifled screech, and, aroused from deep sleep, had instinctively jumped out of bed and rushed to her window.

The coroner looked down at something lying on his desk. "Let me see! Here is the plan. Yes--I think I
understand that the house in which you are lodging exactly faces the alley where the two crimes were committed?"

And there arose a quick, futile discussion. The house did not face the alley, but the window of the witness's bedroom faced the alley.

"A distinction without a difference," said the coroner testily. "And now tell us as clearly and quickly as you can what you saw when you looked out."

There fell a dead silence on the crowded court. And then the woman broke out, speaking more volubly and firmly than she had yet done. "I saw 'im!" she cried. "I shall never forget it--no, not till my dying day!" And she looked round defiantly.

Mrs. Bunting suddenly remembered a chat one of the newspaper men had had with a person who slept under this woman's room. That person had unkindly said she felt sure that Lizzie Cole had not got up that night--that she had made up the whole story. She, the speaker, slept lightly, and that night had been tending a sick child. Accordingly, she would have heard if there had been either the scream described by Lizzie Cole, or the sound of Lizzie Cole jumping out of bed.

"We quite understand that you think you saw the"--the coroner hesitated--"the individual who had just perpetrated these terrible crimes. But what we want to have from you is a description of him. In spite of the foggy atmosphere about which all are agreed, you say you saw him distinctly, walking along for some yards below your window. Now, please, try and tell us what he was like."

The woman began twisting and untwisting the corner of a coloured handkerchief she held in her hand.

"Let us begin at the beginning," said the coroner patiently. "What sort of a hat was this man wearing when you saw him hurrying from the passage?"

"It was just a black 'at" said the witness at last, in a husky, rather anxious tone.

"Yes--just a black hat. And a coat--were you able to see what sort of a coat he was wearing?"

"'E 'adn't got no coat" she said decidedly. "No coat at all! I remembers that very perticulerly. I thought it queer, as it was so cold--everybody as can wears some sort o' coat this weather!"

A juryman who had been looking at a strip of newspaper, and apparently not attending at all to what the witness was saying, here jumped up and put out his hand.

"Yes?" the coroner turned to him.

"I just want to say that this 'ere witness--if her name is Lizzie Cole, began by saying The Avenger was wearing a coat--a big, heavy coat. I've got it here, in this bit of paper."

"I never said so!" cried the woman passionately. "I was made to say all those things by the young man what came to me from the Evening Sun. Just put in what 'e liked in 'is paper, 'e did--not what I said at all!"

At this there was some laughter, quickly suppressed.

"In future," said the coroner severely, addressing the juryman, who had now sat down again, "you must ask any question you wish to ask through your foreman, and please wait till I have concluded my examination of the witness."

But this interruption, this--this accusation, had utterly upset the witness. She began contradicting herself hopelessly. The man she had seen hurrying by in the semi-darkness below was tall--no, he was short. He was thin--no, he was a stoutish young man. And as to whether he was carrying anything, there was quite an acrimonious discussion.

Most positively, most confidently, the witness declared that she had seen a newspaper parcel under his arm; it had bulged out at the back --so she declared. But it was proved, very gently and firmly, that she had said nothing of the kind to the gentleman from Scotland Yard who had taken down her first account--in fact, to him she had declared confidently that the man had carried nothing--nothing at all; that she had seen his arms swinging up and down.

One fact--if fact it could be called--the coroner did elicit. Lizzie Cole suddenly volunteered the statement that as he had passed her window he had looked up at her. This was quite a new statement.

"He looked up at you?" repeated the coroner. "You said nothing of that in your examination."

"I said nothink because I was scared--nigh scared to death!"

"If you could really see his countenance, for we know the night was dark and foggy, will you please tell me what he was like?"

But the coroner was speaking casually, his hand straying over his desk; not a creature in that court now believed the woman's story.

"Dark!" she answered dramatically. "Dark, almost black! If you can take my meaning, with a sort of nigger look."

And then there was a titter. Even the jury smiled. And sharply the coroner bade Lizzie Cole stand down.

Far more credence was given to the evidence of the next witness.
This was an older, quieter-looking woman, decently dressed in black. Being the wife of a night watchman whose work lay in a big warehouse situated about a hundred yards from the alley or passage where the crimes had taken place, she had gone out to take her husband some food he always had at one in the morning. And a man had passed her, breathing hard and walking very quickly. Her attention had been drawn to him because she very seldom met anyone at that hour, and because he had such an odd, peculiar look and manner.

Mrs. Bunting, listening attentively, realised that it was very much from what this witness had said that the official description of The Avenger had been composed—that description which had brought such comfort to her, Ellen Bunting's, soul.

This witness spoke quietly, confidently, and her account of the newspaper parcel the man was carrying was perfectly clear and positive.

"It was a neat parcel," she said, "done up with string."

She had thought it an odd thing for a respectably dressed young man to carry such a parcel—that was what had made her notice it. But when pressed, she had to admit that it had been a very foggy night --so foggy that she herself had been afraid of losing her way, though every step was familiar.

When the third woman went into the box, and with sighs and tears told of her acquaintance with one of the deceased, with Johanna Cobbett, there was a stir of sympathetic attention. But she had nothing to say throwing any light on the investigation, save that she admitted reluctantly that "Anny" would have been such a nice, respectable young woman if it hadn't been for the drink.

Her examination was shortened as much as possible; and so was that of the next witness, the husband of Johanna Cobbett. He was a very respectable-looking man, a foreman in a big business house at Croydon. He seemed to feel his position most acutely. He hadn't seen his wife for two years; he hadn't had news of her for six months. Before she took to drink she had been an admirable wife, and--and yes, mother.

Yet another painful few minutes, to anyone who had a heart, or imagination to understand, was spent when the father of the murdered woman was in the box. He had had later news of his unfortunate daughter than her husband had had, but of course he could throw no light at all on her murder or murderer.

A barman, who had served both the women with drink just before the public-house closed for the night, was handled rather roughly. He had stepped with a jaunty air into the box, and came out of it looking cast down, uneasy.

And then there took place a very dramatic, because an utterly unexpected, incident. It was one of which the evening papers made the utmost much to Mrs. Bunting's indignation. But neither coroner nor jury--and they, after all, were the people who mattered--thought a great deal of it.

There had come a pause in the proceedings. All seven witnesses had been heard, and a gentleman near Mrs. Bunting whispered, "They are now going to call Dr. Gaunt. He's been in every big murder case for the last thirty years. He's sure to have something interesting to say. It was really to hear him I came."

But before Dr. Gaunt had time even to get up from the seat with which he had been accommodated close to the coroner, there came a stir among the general public, or, rather, among those spectators who stood near the low wooden door which separated the official part of the court from the gallery.

The coroner's officer, with an apologetic air, approached the coroner, and handed him up an envelope. And again in an instant, there fell absolute silence on the court.

Looking rather annoyed, the coroner opened the envelope. He glanced down the sheet of notepaper it contained. Then he looked up.

"Mr.--" then he glanced down again. "Mr.--ah--Mr.--is it Cannot?" he said doubtfully, "may come forward."

There ran a titter though the spectators, and the coroner frowned.

A neat, jaunty-looking old gentleman, in a nice fur-lined overcoat, with a fresh, red face and white side-whiskers, was conducted from the place where he had been standing among the general public, or, rather, among those spectators who stood near the low wooden door which separated the official part of the court from the gallery.

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This is somewhat out of order, Mr.--er--Cannot," said the coroner severely. "You should have sent me this note before the proceedings began. This gentleman," he said, addressing the jury, "informs me that he has something of the utmost importance to reveal in connection with our investigation."

"I have remained silent--I have locked what I knew within my own breast"--began Mr. Cannot in a quavering voice, "because I am so afraid of the Press! I knew if I said anything, even to the police, that my house would be besieged by reporters and newspaper men...I have a delicate wife, Mr. Coroner. Such a state of things--the state of things I imagine--might cause her death--indeed, I hope she will never read a report of these proceedings. Fortunately, she has an excellent trained nurse--"

"You will now take the oath," said the coroner sharply. He already regretted having allowed this absurd person to have his say.

Mr. Cannot took the oath with a gravity and decorum which had been lacking in most of those who had preceded him.
"I will address myself to the jury," he began.
"You will do nothing of the sort," broke in the coroner. "Now, please attend to me. You assert in your letter that you know who is the--the--"
"The Avenger," put in Mr. Cannot promptly.
"The perpetrator of these crimes. You further declare that you met him on the very night he committed the murder we are now investigating?"
"I do so declare," said Mr. Cannot confidently. "Though in the best of health myself,"--he beamed round the court, a now amused, attentive court--"it is my fate to be surrounded by sick people, to have only ailing friends. I have to trouble you with my private affairs, Mr. Coroner, in order to explain why I happened to be out at so undue an hour as one o'clock in the morning--"

Again a titter ran through the court. Even the jury broke into broad smiles.

"Yes," went on the witness solemnly, "I was with a sick friend--in fact, I may say a dying friend, for since then he has passed away. I will not reveal my exact dwelling-place; you, sir, have it on my notepaper. It is not necessary to reveal it, but you will understand me when I say that in order to come home I had to pass through a portion of the Regent's Park; and it was there--to be exact, about the middle of Prince's Terrace--when a very peculiar-looking individual stopped and accosted me."

Mrs. Bunting's hand shot up to her breast. A feeling of deadly fear took possession of her.

"I mustn't faint," she said to herself hurriedly. "I mustn't faint! Whatever's the matter with me?" She took out her bottle of smelling-salts, and gave it a good, long sniff.

"He was a grim, gaunt man, was this stranger, Mr. Coroner, with a very odd-looking face. I should say an educated man--in common parlance, a gentleman. What drew my special attention to him was that he was talking aloud to himself--in fact, he seemed to be repeating poetry. I give you my word, I had no thought of The Avenger, no thought at all. To tell you the truth, I thought this gentleman was a poor escaped lunatic, a man who'd got away from his keeper. The Regent's Park, sir, as I need hardly tell you, is a most quiet and soothing neighbourhood--"

And then a member of the general public gave a loud guffaw.

"I appeal to you; sir," the old gentleman suddenly cried out "to protect me from this unseemly levity! I have not come here with any other object than that of doing my duty as a citizen!"

"I must ask you to keep to what is strictly relevant," said the coroner stiffly. "Time is going on, and I have another important witness to call--a medical witness. Kindly tell me, as shortly as possible, what made you suppose that this stranger could possibly be--" with an effort he brought out for the first time since the proceedings began, the words, "The Avenger?"

"I am coming to that!" said Mr. Cannot hastily. "I am coming to that! Bear with me a little longer, Mr. Coroner. It was a foggy night, but not as foggy as it became later. And just when we were passing one another, I and this man, who was talking aloud to himself--he, instead of going on, stopped and turned towards me. That made me feel queer and uncomfortable, the more so that there was a very wild, mad look on his face. I said to him, as soothingly as possible, 'A very foggy night, sir.' And he said, 'Yes--yes, it is a foggy night, a night fit for the commission of dark and salutary deeds.' A very strange phrase, sir, that--dark and salutary deeds." He looked at the coroner expectantly--

"Well? Well, Mr. Cannot? Was that all? Did you see this person go off in the direction of--of King's Cross, for instance?"

"No." Mr. Cannot reluctantly shook his head. "No, I must honestly say I did not. He walked along a certain way by my side, and then he crossed the road and was lost in the fog."

"That will do," said the coroner. He spoke more kindly. "I thank you, Mr. Cannot, for coming here and giving us what you evidently consider important information."

Mr. Cannot bowed, a funny, little, old-fashioned bow, and again some of those present tittered rather foolishly.

As he was stepping down from the witness-box, he turned and looked up at the coroner, opening his lips as he did so. There was a murmur of talking going on, but Mrs. Bunting, at any rate, heard quite distinctly what it was that he said:

"One thing I have forgotten, sir, which may be of importance. The man carried a bag--a rather light-coloured leather bag, in his left hand. It was such a bag, sir, as might well contain a long-handled knife."

Mrs. Bunting looked at the reporters' table. She remembered suddenly that she had told Bunting about the disappearance of Mr. Sleuth's bag. And then a feeling of intense thankfulness came over her; not a single reporter at the long, ink-stained table had put down that last remark of Mr. Cannot. In fact, not one of them had heard it.

Again the last witness put up his hand to command attention. And then silence did fall on the court.

"One word more," he said in a quavering voice. "May I ask to be accommodated with a seat for the rest of the proceedings? I see there is some room left on the witnesses' bench." And, without waiting for permission, he nimbly
stepped across and sat down.

Mrs. Bunting looked up, startled. Her friend, the inspector, was bending over her.

"Perhaps you'd like to come along now," he said urgently--"I don't suppose you want to hear the medical
evidence. It's always painful for a female to hear that. And there'll be an awful rush when the inquest's over. I could
get you away quietly now."

She rose, and, pulling her veil down over her pale face, followed him obediently.

Down the stone staircase they went, and through the big, now empty, room downstairs.

"I'll let you out the back way," he said. "I expect you're tired, ma'am, and will like to get home to a cup o' tea."

"I don't know how to thank you!" There were tears in her eyes. She was trembling with excitement and emotion.

"You have been good to me."

"Oh, that's nothing," he said a little awkwardly. "I expect you went though a pretty bad time, didn't you?"

"Will they be having that old gentleman again?" she spoke in a whisper, and looked up at him with a pleading,
agonised look.

"Good Lord, no! Crazy old fool! We're troubled with a lot of those sort of people, you know, ma'am, and they
often do have funny names, too. You see, that sort is busy all their lives in the City, or what not; then they retires
when they gets about sixty, and they're fit to hang themselves with dulness. Why, there's hundreds of lunies of the
sort to be met in London. You can't go about at night and not meet 'em. Plenty of 'em!"

"Then you don't think there was anything in what he said?" she ventured.

"In what that old gent said? Goodness--no!" he laughed good-naturedly. "But I'll tell you what I do think. If it
wasn't for the time that had gone by, I should believe that the second witness had seen that crafty devil--" he lowered
his voice. "But, there, Dr. Gaunt declares most positively--so did two other medical gentlemen--that the poor
creatures had been dead hours when they was found. Medical gentlemen are always very positive about their
evidence. They have to be--otherwise who'd believe 'em? If we'd time I could tell you of a case in which--well, 'twas
all because of Dr. Gaunt that the murderer escaped. We all knew perfectly well the man we caught did it, but he was
able to prove an alibi as to the time Dr. Gaunt said the poor soul was killed."

CHAPTER XX

It was not late even now, for the inquest had begun very punctually, but Mrs. Bunting felt that no power on earth
should force her to go to Ealing. She felt quite tired out and as if she could think of nothing.

Pacing along very slowly, as if she were an old, old woman, she began listlessly turning her steps towards home.
Somehow she felt that it would do her more good to stay out in the air than take the train. Also she would thus put
off the moment--the moment to which she looked forward with dread and dislike--when she would have to invent a
circumstantial story as to what she had said to the doctor, and what the doctor had said to her.

Like most men and women of his class, Bunting took a great interest in other people's ailments, the more interest
that he was himself so remarkably healthy. He would feel quite injured if Ellen didn't tell him everything that had
happened; everything, that is, that the doctor had told her.

As she walked swiftly along, at every corner, or so it seemed to her, and outside every public-house, stood eager
boys selling the latest edition of the afternoon papers to equally eager buyers. "Avenger Inquest?" they shouted
exultantly. "All the latest evidence!" At one place, where there were a row of contents-bills pinned to the pavement
by stones, she stopped and looked down. "Opening of the Avenger Inquest. What is he really like? Full description."
On yet another ran the ironic query: "Avenger Inquest. Do you know him?"

And as that facetious question stared up at her in huge print, Mrs. Bunting turned sick--so sick and faint that she
did what she had never done before in her life--she pushed her way into a public-house, and, putting two pennies
down on the counter, asked for, and received, a glass of cold water.

As she walked along the now gas-lit streets, she found her mind dwelling persistently--not on the inquest at
which she had been present, not even on The Avenger, but on his victims.

Shudderingly, she visualised the two cold bodies lying in the mortuary. She seemed also to see that third body,
which, though cold, must yet be warmer than the other two, for at this time yesterday The Avenger's last victim had
been alive, poor soul-- alive and, according to a companion of hers whom the papers had already interviewed,
particularly merry and bright.

Hitherto Mrs. Bunting had been spared in any real sense a vision of The Avenger's victims. Now they haunted
her, and she wondered wearily if this fresh horror was to be added to the terrible fear which encompassed her night
and day.

As she came within sight of home, her spirit suddenly lightened. The narrow, drab-coloured little house, flanked
each side by others exactly like it in every single particular, save that their front yards were not so well kept, looked
as if it could, aye, and would, keep any secret closely hidden.

For a moment, at any rate, The Avenger's victims receded from her mind. She thought of them no more. All her
thoughts were concentrated on Bunting--Bunting and Mr. Sleuth. She wondered what had happened during her absence--whether the lodger had rung his bell, and, if so, how he had got on with Bunting, and Bunting with him?

She walked up the little flagged path wearily, and yet with a pleasant feeling of home-coming. And then she saw that Bunting must have been watching for her behind the now closely drawn curtains, for before she could either knock or ring he had opened the door.

"I was getting quite anxious about you," he exclaimed. "Come in, Ellen, quick! You must be fair perished a day like now--and you out so little as you are. Well? I hope you found the doctor all right?" He looked at her with affectionate anxiety.

And then there came a sudden, happy thought to Mrs. Bunting. "No," she said slowly, "Doctor Evans wasn't in. I waited, and waited, and waited, but he never came in at all. "Twas my own fault," she asked quickly. Even at such a moment as this she told herself that though she had, in a sort of way, a kind of right to lie to her husband, she had no sight to slander the doctor who had been so kind to her years ago. "I ought to have sent him a card yesterday night," she said. "Of course, I was a fool to go all that way, just on chance of finding a doctor in. It stands to reason they've got to go out to people at all times of day."

"I hope they gave you a cup of tea?" he said.

And again she hesitated, debating a point with herself: if the doctor had a decent sort of servant, of course, she, Ellen Bunting, would have been offered a cup of tea, especially if she explained she'd known him a long time.

She compromised. "I was offered some," she said, in a weak, tired voice. "But there, Bunting, I didn't feel as if I wanted it. I'd be very grateful for a cup now--if you'd just make it for me over the ring."

"Course I will," he said eagerly. "You just come in and sit down, my dear. Don't trouble to take your things off now--wait till you've had tea."

And she obeyed him. "Where's Daisy?" she asked suddenly. "I thought the girl would be back by the time I got home."

"She ain't coming home to-day"--there was an odd, sly, smiling look on Bunting's face.

"Did she send a telegram?" asked Mrs. Bunting.

"No. Young Chandler's just come in and told me. He's been over there and--would you believe it, Ellen?--he's managed to make friends with Margaret. Wonderful what love will do, ain't it? He went over there just to help Daisy carry her bag back, you know, and then Margaret told him that her lady had sent her some money to go to the play, and she actually asked Joe to go with them this evening--she and Daisy--to the pantomime. Did you ever hear o' such a thing?"

"Very nice for them, I'm sure," said Mrs. Bunting absently. But she was pleased--pleased to have her mind taken off herself. "Then when is that girl coming home?" she asked patiently.

"Well, it appears that Chandler's got to-morrow morning off too-- this evening and to-morrow morning. He'll be on duty all night, but he proposes to go over and bring Daisy back in time for early dinner. Will that suit you, Ellen?"

"Yes. That'll be all right," she said. "I don't grudge the girl her bit of pleasure. One's only young once. By the way, did the lodger ring while I was out?"

Bunting turned round from the gas-ring, which he was watching to see the kettle boil. "No," he said. "Come to think of it, it's rather a funny thing, but the truth is, Ellen, I never gave Mr. Sleuth a thought. You see, Chandler came in and was telling me all about Margaret, laughing-like, and then something else happened while you was out, Ellen."

"Something else happened?" she said in a startled voice. Getting up from her chair she came towards her husband: "What happened? Who came?"

"Just a message for me, asking if I could go to-night to wait at a young lady's birthday party. In Hanover Terrace it is. A waiter--one of them nasty Swiss fellows as works for nothing--fell out just at the last minute and so they had to send for me."

His honest face shone with triumph. The man who had taken over his old friend's business in Baker Street had hitherto behaved very badly to Bunting, and that though Bunting had been on the books for ever so long, and had always given every satisfaction. But this new man had never employed him--no, not once.

"I hope you didn't make yourself too cheap?" said his wife jealously.

"No, that I didn't! I hum'd and haw'd a lot; and I could see the fellow was quite worried--in fact, at the end he offered me half-a-crown more. So I graciously consented!"

Husband and wife laughed more merrily than they had done for a long time.

"You won't mind being alone, here? I don't count the lodger--he's no good--" Bunting looked at her anxiously. He was only prompted to ask the question because lately Ellen had been so queer, so unlike herself. Otherwise it never would have occurred to him that she could be afraid of being alone in the house. She had often been so in the
days when he got more jobs.

She stared at him, a little suspiciously. "I be afraid?" she echoed. "Certainly not. Why should I be? I've never been afraid before. What d'you exactly mean by that, Bunting?"

"Oh, nothing. I only thought you might feel funny-like, all alone on this ground floor. You was so upset yesterday when that young fool Chandler came, dressed up, to the door."

"I shouldn't have been frightened if he'd just been an ordinary stranger," she said shortly. "He said something silly to me--just in keeping with his character-like, and it upset me. Besides, I feel better now."

As she was sipping gratefully her cup of tea, there came a noise outside, the shouts of newspaper-sellers.

"I'll just run out," said Bunting apologetically, "and see what happened at that inquest to-day. Besides, they may have a clue about the horrible affair last night. Chandler was full of it-- when he wasn't talking about Daisy and Margaret, that is. He's on to-night, luckily not till twelve o'clock; plenty of time to escort the two of 'em back after the play. Besides, he said he'd put them into a cab and blow the expense, if the panto' goes on too long for him to take 'em home."

"On to-night?" repeated Mrs. Bunting. "Whatever for?"

"Well, you see, The Avenger's always done 'em in couples, so to speak. They've got an idea that he'll have a try again to-night. However, even so, Joe's only on from midnight till five o'clock. Then he'll go and turn in a bit before going off to fetch Daisy. Fine thing to be young, ain't it, Ellen?"

"I can't believe that he'd go out on such a night as this!"

"What do you mean?" said Bunting, staring at her. Ellen had spoken so oddly, as if to herself, and in so fierce and passionate a tone.

"What do I mean?" she repeated--and a great fear clutched at her heart. What had she said? She had been thinking aloud.

"Why, by saying he won't go out. Of course, he has to go out. Besides, he'll have been to the play as it is. 'Twould be a pretty thing if the police didn't go out, just because it was cold!"

"I--I was thinking of The Avenger," said Mrs. Bunting. She looked at her husband fixedly. Somehow she had felt impelled to utter those true words.

"He don't take no heed of heat nor cold," said Bunting sombrely. "I take it the man's dead to all human feeling--saving, of course, revenge."

"So that's your idea about him, is it?" She looked across at her husband. Somehow this dangerous, this perilous conversation between them attracted her strangely. She felt as if she must go on with it. "D'you think he was the man that woman said she saw? That young man what passed her with a newspaper parcel?"

"Let me see," he said slowly. "I thought that 'twas from the bedroom window a woman saw him?"

"No, no. I mean the other woman, what was taking her husband's breakfast to him in the warehouse. She was far the most respectable-looking woman of the two," said Mrs. Bunting impatiently.

And then, seeing her husband's look of utter, blank astonishment, she felt a thrill of unreasoning terror. She must have gone suddenly mad to have said what she did! Hurriedly she got up from her chair. "There, now," she said; "here I am gossiping all about nothing when I ought to be seeing about the lodger's supper. It was someone in the train talked to me about that person as thinks she saw The Avenger."

Without waiting for an answer, she went into her bedroom, lit the gas, and shut the door. A moment later she heard Bunting go out to buy the paper they had both forgotten during their dangerous discussion.

As she slowly, languidly took off her nice, warm coat and shawl, Mrs. Bunting found herself shivering. It was dreadfully cold, quite unnaturally cold even for the time of year.

She looked longingly towards the fireplace. It was now concealed by the washhand-stand, but how pleasant it would be to drag that stand aside and light a bit of fire, especially as Bunting was going to be out to-night. He would have to put on his dress clothes, and she didn't like his dressing in the sitting-room. It didn't suit her ideas that he should do so. How if she did light the fire here, in their bedroom? It would be nice for her to have bit of fire to cheer her up after he had gone.

Mrs. Bunting knew only too well that she would have very little sleep the coming night. She looked over, with shuddering distaste, at her nice, soft bed. There she would lie, on that couch of little ease, listening--listening. . . .

She went down to the kitchen. Everything was ready for Mr. Sleuth's supper, for she had made all her preparations before going out so as not to have to hurry back before it suited her to do so.

Leaning the tray for a moment on the top of the banisters, she listened. Even in that nice warm drawing-room, and with a good fire, how cold the lodger must feel sitting studying at the table! But unwonted sounds were coming through the door. Mr. Sleuth was moving restlessly about the room, not sitting reading, as was his wont at this time of the evening.

She knocked, and then waited a moment.
There came the sound of a sharp click, that of the key turning in the lock of the chiffonnier cupboard—or so Mr. Sleuth's landlady could have sworn.

There was a pause—she knocked again.

"Come in," said Mr. Sleuth loudly, and she opened the door and carried in the tray.

"You are a little earlier than usual, are you not Mrs. Bunting?" he said, with a touch of irritation in his voice.

"I don't think so, sir, but I've been out. Perhaps I lost count of the time. I thought you'd like your breakfast early, as you had dinner rather sooner than usual."

"Breakfast? Did you say breakfast, Mrs. Bunting?"

"I beg your pardon, sir, I'm sure! I meant supper." He looked at her fixedly. It seemed to Mrs. Bunting that there was a terrible questioning look in his dark, sunken eyes.

"Aren't you well?" he said slowly. "You don't look well, Mrs. Bunting."

"No, sir," she said. "I'm not well. I went over to see a doctor this afternoon, to Ealing, sir."

"I hope he did you good, Mrs. Bunting"—the lodger's voice had become softer, kinder in quality.

"It always does me good to see the doctor," said Mrs. Bunting evasively.

And then a very odd smile lit up Mr. Sleuth's face. "Doctors are a maligned body of men," he said. "I'm glad to hear you speak well of them. They do their best, Mrs. Bunting. Being human they are liable to err, but I assure you they do their best."

"That I'm sure they do, sir"—she spoke heartily, sincerely. Doctors had always treated her most kindly, and even generously.

And then, having laid the cloth, and put the lodger's one hot dish upon it, she went towards the door. "Wouldn't you like me to bring up another scuttleful of coals, sir? it's bitterly cold—getting colder every minute. A fearful night to have to go out in—" she looked at him deprecatingly.

And then Mr. Sleuth did something which startled her very much. Pushing his chair back, he jumped up and drew himself to his full height.

"What d'you mean?" he stammered. "Why did you say that, Mrs. Bunting?"

She stared at him, fascinated, affrighted. Again there came an awful questioning look over his face.

"I was thinking of Bunting, sir. He's got a job to-night. He's going to act as waiter at a young lady's birthday party. I was thinking it's a pity he has to turn out, and in his thin clothes, too"—she brought out her words jerkily.

Mr. Sleuth seemed somewhat reassured, and again he sat down. "Ah!" he said. "Dear me—I'm sorry to hear that! I hope your husband will not catch cold, Mrs. Bunting."

And then she shut the door, and went downstairs.

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Without telling Bunting what she meant to do, she dragged the heavy washhand-stand away from the chimneypiece, and lighted the fire.

Then in some triumph she called Bunting in.

"Time for you to dress," she cried out cheerfully, "and I've got a little bit of fire for you to dress by."

As he exclaimed at her extravagance, "Well, 'twill be pleasant for me, too; keep me company-like while you're out; and make the room nice and warm when you come in. You'll be far perished, even walking that short way," she said.

And then, while her husband was dressing, Mrs. Bunting went upstairs and cleared away Mr. Sleuth's supper.

The lodger said no word while she was so engaged—no word at all.

He was sitting away from the table, rather an unusual thing for him to do, and staring into the fire, his hands on his knees.

Mr. Sleuth looked lonely, very, very lonely and forlorn. Somehow, a great rush of pity, as well as of horror, came over Mrs. Bunting's heart. He was such a—she searched for a word in her mind, but could only find the word "gentle"—he was such a nice, gentle gentleman, was Mr. Sleuth. Lately he had again taken to leaving his money about, as he had done the first day or two, and with some concern his landlady had seen that the store had diminished a good deal. A very simple calculation had made her realise that almost the whole of that missing money had come her way, or, at any rate, had passed through her hands.

Mr. Sleuth never stinted himself as to food, or stinted them, his landlord and his landlady, as to what he had said he would pay. And Mrs. Bunting's conscience pricked her a little, for he hardly ever used that room upstairs—that room for which he had paid extra so generously. If Bunting got another job or two through that nasty man in Baker Street,—and now that the ice had been broken between them it was very probable that he would do so, for he was a very well-trained, experienced waiter—then she thought she would tell Mr. Sleuth that she no longer wanted him to pay as much as he was now doing.

She looked anxiously, deprecatingly, at his long, bent back.
"Good-night, sir," she said at last.
Mr. Sleuth turned round. His face looked sad and worn.
"I hope you'll sleep well, sir."
"Yes, I'm sure I shall sleep well. But perhaps I shall take a little turn first. Such is my way, Mrs. Bunting; after I have been studying all day I require a little exercise."
"Oh, I wouldn't go out to-night," she said deprecatingly. "'Tisn't fit for anyone to be out in the bitter cold."
"And yet--and yet"--he looked at her attentively--"there will probably be many people out in the streets to-night."
"A many more than usual, I fear, sir."
"Indeed?" said Mr. Sleuth quickly. "Is it not a strange thing, Mrs. Bunting, that people who have all day in which to amuse themselves should carry their revels far into the night?"
"Oh, I wasn't thinking of revellers, sir; I was thinking"--she hesitated, then, with a gasping effort Mrs. Bunting brought out the words, "of the police."
"The police?" He put up his right hand and stroked his chin two or three times with a nervous gesture. "But what is man--what is man's puny power or strength against that of God, or even of those over whose feet God has set a guard?"
Mr. Sleuth looked at his landlady with a kind of triumph lighting up his face, and Mrs. Bunting felt a shuddering sense of relief. Then she had not offended her lodger? She had not made him angry by that, that--was it a hint she had meant to convey to him?
"Very true, sir," she said respectfully. "But Providence means us to take care o' ourselves too." And then she closed the door behind her and went downstairs.
But Mr. Sleuth's landlady did not go on, down to the kitchen. She came into her sitting-room, and, careless of what Bunting would think the next morning, put the tray with the remains of the lodger's meal on her table. Having done that, and having turned out the gas in the passage and the sitting-room, she went into her bedroom and closed the door.
The fire was burning brightly and clearly. She told herself that she did not need any other light to undress by.
What was it made the flames of the fire shoot up, shoot down, in that queer way? But watching it for awhile, she did at last doze off a bit.
And then--and then Mrs. Bunting woke with a sudden thumping of her heart. Woke to see that the fire was almost out--woke to hear a quarter to twelve chime out--woke at last to the sound she had been listening for before she fell asleep--the sound of Mr. Sleuth, wearing his rubber-soled shoes, creeping downstairs, along the passage, and so out, very, very quietly by the front door.
But once she was in bed Mrs. Bunting turned restless. She tossed this way and that, full of discomfort and unease. Perhaps it was the unaccustomed firelight dancing on the walls, making queer shadows all round her, which kept her so wide awake.
She lay thinking and listening--listening and thinking. It even occurred to her to do the one thing that might have quieted her excited brain--to get a book, one of those detective stories of which Bunting had a slender store in the next room, and then, lighting the gas, to sit up and read.
No, Mrs. Bunting had always been told it was very wrong to read in bed, and she was not in a mood just now to begin doing anything that she had been told was wrong. . . .
CHAPTER XXI
It was a very cold night--so cold, so windy, so snow-laden was the atmosphere, that everyone who could do so stayed indoors.
Bunting, however, was now on his way home from what had proved a really pleasant job. A remarkable piece of luck had come his way this evening, all the more welcome because it was quite unexpected! The young lady at whose birthday party he had been present in capacity of waiter had come into a fortune that day, and she had had the gracious, the surprising thought of presenting each of the hired waiters with a sovereign!
This gift, which had been accompanied by a few kind words, had gone to Bunting's heart. It had confirmed him in his Conservative principles; only gentlefolk ever behaved in that way; quiet, old-fashioned, respectable, gentlefolk, the sort of people of whom those nasty Radicals know nothing and care less!
But the ex-butler was not as happy as he should have been. Slackening his footsteps, he began to think with puzzled concern of how queer his wife had seemed lately. Ellen had become so nervous, so "jumpy," that he didn't know what to make of her sometimes. She had never been really good-tempered--your capable, self-respecting woman seldom is--but she had never been like what she was now. And she didn't get better as the days went on; in fact she got worse. Of late she had been quite hysterical, and for no reason at all! Take that little practical joke of young Joe Chandler. Ellen knew quite well he often had to go about in some kind of disguise, and yet how she had gone on, quite foolish-like--not at all as one would have expected her to do.
There was another queer thing about her which disturbed him in more senses than one. During the last three
weeks or so Ellen had taken to talking in her sleep. "No, no, no!" she had cried out, only the night before. "It isn't
true—I won't have it said—it's a lie!" And there had been a wail of horrible fear and revolt in her usually quiet,
mincing voice.

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Whew! it was cold; and he had stupidly forgotten his gloves.

He put his hands in his pockets to keep them warm, and began walking more quickly.

As he tramped steadily along, the ex-butler suddenly caught sight of his lodger walking along the opposite side
of the solitary street --one of those short streets leading off the broad road which encircles Regent's Park.

Well! This was a funny time o' night to be taking a stroll for pleasure, like!

Glancing across, Bunting noticed that Mr. Sleuth's tall, thin figure was rather bowed, and that his head was bent
toward the ground. His left arm was thrust into his long Inverness cape, and so was quite hidden, but the other side
of the cape bulged out, as if the lodger were carrying a bag or parcel in the hand which hung down straight.

Mr. Sleuth was walking rather quickly, and as he walked he talked aloud, which, as Bunting knew, is not
unusual with gentlemen who live much alone. It was clear that he had not yet become aware of the proximity of his
landlord.

Bunting told himself that Ellen was right. Their lodger was certainly a most eccentric, peculiar person. Strange,
was it not, that that odd, luny-like gentleman should have made all the difference to his, Bunting's, and Mrs.
Bunting's happiness and comfort in life?

Again glancing across at Mr. Sleuth, he reminded himself, not for the first time, of this perfect lodger's one fault-
his odd dislike to meat, and to what Bunting vaguely called to himself, sensible food.

But there, you can't have everything! The more so that the lodger was not one of those crazy vegetarians who
won't eat eggs and cheese. No, he was reasonable in this, as in everything else connected with his dealings with the
Buntings.

As we know, Bunting saw far less of the lodger than did his wife. Indeed, he had been upstairs only three or four
times since Mr. Sleuth had been with them, and when his landlord had had occasion to wait on him the lodger had
remained silent. Indeed, their gentleman had made it very clear that he did not like either the husband or wife to
come up to his rooms without being definitely asked to do so.

Now, surely, would be a good opportunity for a little genial conversation? Bunting felt pleased to see his lodger;
it increased his general comfortable sense of satisfaction.

So it was that the butler, still an active man for his years, crossed over the road, and, stepping briskly forward,
began trying to overtake Mr. Sleuth. But the more he hurried along, the more the other hastened, and that without
ever turning round to see whose steps he could hear echoing behind him on the now freezing pavement.

Mr. Sleuth's own footsteps were quite inaudible--an odd circumstance, when you came to think of it--as Bunting
did think of it later, lying awake by Mrs. Bunting's side in the pitch darkness. What it meant of course, was that the
lodger had rubber soles on his shoes. Now Bunting had never had a pair of rubber-soled shoes sent down to him to
clean. He had always supposed the lodger had only one pair of outdoor boots.

The two men--the pursued and the pursuer--at last turned into the Marylebone Road; they were now within a few
hundred yards of home. Plucking up courage, Bunting called out, his voice echoing freshly on the still air:

"Mr. Sleuth, sir? Mr. Sleuth!"

The lodger stopped and turned round.

He had been walking so quickly, and he was in so poor a physical condition, that the sweat was pouring down
his face.

"Ah! So it's you, Mr. Bunting? I heard footsteps behind me, and I hurried on. I wish I'd known that it was you;
there are so many queer characters about at night in London."

"Not on a night like this, sir. Only honest folk who have business out of doors would be out such a night as this.
It is cold, sir!"

And then into Bunting's slow and honest mind there suddenly crept the query as to what on earth Mr. Sleuth's
own business out could be on this bitter night.

"Cold?" the lodger repeated; he was panting a little, and his words came out sharp and quick through his thin
lips. "I can't say that I find it cold, Mr. Bunting. When the snow falls, the air always becomes milder."

"Yes, sir; but to-night there's such a sharp east wind. Why, it freezes the very marrow in one's bones! Still,
there's nothing like walking in cold weather to make one warm, as you seem to have found, sir."

Bunting noticed that Mr. Sleuth kept his distance in a rather strange way; he walked at the edge of the pavement,
leaving the rest of it, on the wall side, to his landlord.

"I lost my way," he said abruptly. "I've been over Primrose Hill to see a friend of mine, a man with whom I
studied when I was a lad, and then, coming back, I lost my way."

Now they had come right up to the little gate which opened on the shabby, paved court in front of the house--that gate which now was never locked.

Mr. Sleuth, pushing suddenly forward, began walking up the flagged path, when, with a "By your leave, sir," the ex-butler, stepping aside, slipped in front of his lodger, in order to open the front door for him.

As he passed by Mr. Sleuth, the back of Bunting's bare left hand brushed lightly against the long Inverness cape the lodger was wearing, and, to Bunting's surprise, the stretch of cloth against which his hand lay for a moment was not only damp, damp maybe from stray flakes of snow which had settled upon it, but wet--wet and gluey.

Bunting thrust his left hand into his pocket; it was with the other that he placed the key in the lock of the door.

The two men passed into the hall together.

The house seemed blackly dark in comparison with the lighted-up road outside, and as he groped forward, closely followed by the lodger, there came over Bunting a sudden, reeling sensation of mortal terror, an instinctive, assailing knowledge of frightful immediate danger.

A stuffless voice--the voice of his first wife, the long-dead girl to whom his mind so seldom reverted nowadays--uttered into his ear the words, "Take care!"

And then the lodger spoke. His voice was harsh and grating, though not loud.
"I'm afraid, Mr. Bunting, that you must have felt something dirty, foul, on my coat? It's too long a story to tell you now, but I brushed up against a dead animal, a creature to whose misery some thoughtful soul had put an end, lying across a bench on Primrose Hill."

"No, sir, no. I didn't notice nothing. I scarcely touched you, sir."

It seemed as if a power outside himself compelled Bunting to utter these lying words. "And now, sir, I'll be saying good-night to you," he said.

Stepping back he pressed with all the strength that was in him against the wall, and let the other pass him. There was a pause, and then--"Good-night," returned Mr. Sleuth, in a hollow voice. Bunting waited until the lodger had gone upstairs, and then, lighting the gas, he sat down there, in the hall. Mr. Sleuth's landlord felt very queer--queer and sick.

He did not draw his left hand out of his pocket till he heard Mr. Sleuth shut the bedroom door upstairs. Then he held up his left hand and looked at it curiously; it was flecked, streaked with pale reddish blood.

Taking off his boots, he crept into the room where his wife lay asleep. Stealthily he walked across to the wash-hand-stand, and dipped a hand into the water-jug.

"Whatever are you doing? What on earth are you doing?" came a voice from the bed, and Bunting started guiltily.
"I'm just washing my hands."

"Indeed, you're doing nothing of the sort! I never heard of such a thing--putting your hand into the water in which I was going to wash my face to-morrow morning!"

"I'm very sorry, Ellen," he said meekly; "I meant to throw it away. You don't suppose I would have let you wash in dirty water, do you?"

She said no more, but, as he began undressing himself, Mrs. Bunting lay staring at him in a way that made her husband feel even more uncomfortable than he was already.

At last he got into bed. He wanted to break the oppressive silence by telling Ellen about the sovereign the young lady had given him, but that sovereign now seemed to Bunting of no more account than if it had been a farthing he had picked up in the road outside.

Once more his wife spoke, and he gave so great a start that it shook the bed.

"I suppose that you don't know that you've left the light burning in the hall, wasting our good money?" she observed tartly.

He got up painfully and opened the door into the passage. It was as she had said; the gas was flaring away, wasting their good money--or, rather, Mr. Sleuth's good money. Since he had come to be their lodger they had not had to touch their rent money.

Bunting turned out the light and groped his way back to the room, and so to bed. Without speaking again to each other, both husband and wife lay awake till dawn.

The next morning Mr. Sleuth's landlord awoke with a start; he felt curiously heavy about the limbs, and tired about the eyes.

Drawing his watch from under his pillow, he saw that it was seven o'clock. Without waking his wife, he got out of bed and pulled the blind a little to one side. It was snowing heavily, and, as is the way when it snows, even in London, everything was strangely, curiously still. After he had dressed he went out into the passage. As he had at once dreaded and hoped, their newspaper was already lying on the mat. It was probably the sound of its being
pushed through the letter-box which had waked him from his unrestful sleep.

He picked the paper up and went into the sitting-room then, shutting the door behind him carefully, he spread the newspaper wide open on the table, and bent over it.

As Bunting at last looked up and straightened himself, an expression of intense relief shone upon his stolid face.

The item of news he had felt certain would be printed in big type on the middle sheet was not there.

CHAPTER XXII

Feeling amazingly light-hearted, almost light-headed, Bunting lit the gas-ring to make his wife her morning cup of tea.

While he was doing it, he suddenly heard her call out:

"Bunting!" she cried weakly. "Bunting!" Quickly he hurried in response to her call. "Yes," he said. "What is it, my dear? I won't be a minute with your tea." And he smiled broadly, rather foolishly.

She sat up and looked at him, a dazed expression on her face.

"What are you grinning at?" she asked suspiciously.

"I've had a wonderful piece of luck," he explained. "But you was so cross last night that I simply didn't dare tell you about it."

"Well, tell me now," she said in a low voice.

"I had a sovereign given me by the young lady. You see, it was her birthday party, Ellen, and she'd come into a nice bit of money, and she gave each of us waiters a sovereign."

Mrs. Bunting made no comment. Instead, she lay back and closed her eyes.

"What time d'you expect Daisy?" she asked languidly. "You didn't say what time Joe was going to fetch her, when we was talking about it yesterday."

"Didn't I? Well, I expect they'll be in to dinner."

"I wonder, how long that old aunt of hers expects us to keep her?" said Mrs. Bunting thoughtfully. All the cheer died out of Bunting's round face. He became sullen and angry. It would be a pretty thing if he couldn't have his own daughter for a bit--especially now that they were doing so well!

"Daisy'll stay here just as long as she can," he said shortly. "It's too bad of you, Ellen, to talk like that! She helps you all she can; and she brisks us both up ever so much. Besides, 'twould be cruel--crue! to take the girl away just now, just as she and that young chap are making friends-like. One would suppose that even you would see the justice o' that!"

But Mrs. Bunting made no answer.

Bunting went off, back into the sitting-room. The water was boiling now, so he made the tea; and then, as he brought the little tray in, his heart softened. Ellen did look really ill--ill and wizened. He wondered if she had a pain about which she wasn't saying anything. She had never been one to grouse about herself.

"The lodger and me came in together last night," he observed genially. "He's certainly a funny kind of gentleman. It wasn't the sort of night one would have chosen to go out for a walk, now was it? And yet he must 'a been out a long time if what he said was true."

"I don't wonder a quiet gentleman like Mr. Sleuth hates the crowded streets," she said slowly. "They gets worse every day-- that they do! But go along now; I want to get up."

He went back into their sitting-room, and, having laid the fire and put a match to it, he sat down comfortably with his newspaper.

Deep down in his heart Bunting looked back to this last night with a feeling of shame and self-rebuke. Whatever had made such horrible thoughts and suspicions as had possessed him suddenly come into his head? And just because of a trifling thing like that blood. No doubt Mr. Sleuth's nose had bled--that was what had happened; though, come to think of it, he had mentioned brushing up against a dead animal.

Perhaps Ellen was right after all. It didn't do for one to be always thinking of dreadful subjects, of murders and such-like. It made one go dotty--that's what it did.

And just as he was telling himself that, there came to the door a loud knock, the peculiar rat-tat-tat of a telegraph boy. But before he had time to get across the room, let alone to the front door, Ellen had rushed through the room, clad only in a petticoat and shawl.

"I'll go," she cried breathlessly. "I'll go, Bunting; don't you trouble."

He stared at her, surprised, and followed her into the hall.

She put out a hand, and hiding herself behind the door, took the telegram from the invisible boy. "You needn't wait," she said. "If there's an answer we'll send it out ourselves." Then she tore the envelope open--"Oh!" she said with a gasp of relief. "It's only from Joe Chandler, to say he can't go over to fetch Daisy this morning. Then you'll have to go."

She walked back into their sitting-room. "There!" she said. "There it is, Bunting. You just read it."
"Am on duty this morning. Cannot fetch Miss Daisy as arranged.-- Chandler."

"I wonder why he's on duty?" said Bunting slowly, uncomfortably. "I thought Joe's hours was as regular as clockwork—that nothing could make any difference to them. However, there it is. I suppose it'll do all right if I start about eleven o'clock? It may have left off snowing by then. I don't feel like going out again just now. I'm pretty tired this morning."

"You start about twelve," said his wife quickly.

"That'll give plenty of time."

The morning went on quietly, uneventfully. Bunting received a letter from Old Aunt saying Daisy must come back next Monday, a little under a week from now. Mr. Sleuth slept soundly, or, at any rate, he made no sign of being awake; and though Mrs. Bunting often, stopped to listen, while she was doing her room, there came no sounds at all from overhead.

Scarcely aware that it was so, both Bunting and his wife felt more cheerful than they had done for a long time. They had quite a pleasant little chat when Mrs. Bunting came and sat down for a bit, before going down to prepare Mr. Sleuth's breakfast.

"Daisy will be surprised to see you--not to say disappointed!" she observed, and she could not help laughing a little to herself at the thought. And when, at eleven, Bunting got up to go, she made him stay on a little longer. "There's no such great hurry as that," she said good-temperedly. "It'll do quite well if you're there by half-past twelve. I'll get dinner ready myself. Daisy needn't help with that. I expect Margaret has worked her pretty hard."

But at last there came the moment when Bunting had to start, and his wife went with him to the front door. It was still snowing, less heavily, but still snowing. There were very few people coming and going, and only just a few cabs and carts dragging cautiously along through the slush.

Mrs. Bunting was still in the kitchen when there came a ring and a knock at the door—a now very familiar ring and knock. "Joe thinks Daisy's home again by now!" she said, smiling to herself.

Before the door was well open, she heard Chandler's voice. "Don't be scared this time, Mrs. Bunting!" But though not exactly scared, she did give a gasp of surprise. For there stood Joe, made up to represent a public-house loafer; and he looked the part to perfection, with his hair combed down raggedly over his forehead, his seedy-looking, ill-fitting, dirty clothes, and greenish-black pot hat.

"I haven't a minute," he said a little breathlessly. "But I thought I'd just run in to know if Miss Daisy was safe home again. You got my telegram all right? I couldn't send no other kind of message."

"She's not back yet. Her father hasn't been gone long after her." Then, struck by a look in his eyes, "Joe, what's the matter?" she asked quickly.

There came a thrill of suspense in her voice, her face grew drawn, while what little colour there was in it receded, leaving it very pale.

"Well," he said. "Well, Mrs. Bunting, I've no business to say anything about it—but I will tell you!"

He walked in and shut the door of the sitting-room carefully behind him. "There's been another of 'em!" he whispered. "But this time no one is to know anything about it—not for the present, I mean," he corrected himself hastily. "The Yard thinks we've got a clue—and a good clue, too, this time."

"But where—and how?" faltered Mrs. Bunting.

"Well, 'twas just a bit of luck being able to keep it dark for the present"—he still spoke in that stifled, hoarse whisper. "The poor soul was found dead on a bench on Primrose Hill. And just by chance 'twas one of our fellows saw the body first. He was on his way home, over Hampstead way. He knew where he'd be able to get an ambulance quick, and he made a very clever, secret job of it. I 'spect he'll get promotion for that!"

"What about the clue?" asked Mrs. Bunting, with dry lips. "You said there was a clue?"

"Well, I don't rightly understand about the clue myself. All I knows is it's got something to do with a public-house, 'The Hammer and Tongs,' which isn't far off there. They feels sure The Avenger was in the bar just on closing-time."

And then Mrs. Bunting sat down. She felt better now. It was natural the police should suspect a public-house loafer. "Then that's why you wasn't able to go and fetch Daisy, I suppose?"

He nodded. "Mum's the word, Mrs. Bunting! It'll all be in the last editions of the evening newspapers—it can't be kep' out. There'd be too much of a row if 'twas!"

"Are you going off to that public-house now?" she asked.

"Yes, I am. I've got a awk'ard job—to try and worm something out of the barmaid."

"Something out of the barmaid?" repeated Mrs. Bunting nervously. "Why, whatever for?"

He came and stood close to her. "They think 'twas a gentleman," he whispered.

"A gentleman?"

Mrs. Bunting stared at Chandler with a scared expression. "Whatever makes them think such a silly thing as
Well, just before closing-time a very peculiar-looking gent, with a leather bag in his hand, went into the bar and asked for a glass of milk. And what d'you think he did? Paid for it with a sovereign! He wouldn't take no change--just made the girl a present of it! That's why the young woman what served him seems quite unwilling to give him away. She won't tell now what he was like. She doesn't know what he's wanted for, and we don't want her to know just yet. That's one reason why nothing's being said public about it. But there! I really must be going now. My time'll be up at three o'clock. I thought of coming in on the way back, and asking you for a cup o' tea, Mrs. Bunting."

"Do," she said. "Do, Joe. You'll be welcome," but there was no welcome in her tired voice.

She let him go alone to the door, and then she went down to her kitchen, and began cooking Mr. Sleuth's breakfast.

The lodger would be sure to ring soon; and then any minute Bunting and Daisy might be home, and they'd want something, too. Margaret always had breakfast even when "the family" were away, unnaturally early.

As she bustled about Mrs. Bunting tried to empty her mind of all thought. But it is very difficult to do that when one is in a state of torturing uncertainty. She had not dared to ask Chandler what they supposed that man who had gone into the public-house was really like. It was fortunate, indeed, that the lodger and that inquisitive young chap had never met face to face.

At last Mr. Sleuth's bell rang--a quiet little tinkle. But when she went up with his breakfast the lodger was not in his sitting-room.

Supposing him to be still in his bedroom, Mrs. Bunting put the cloth on the table, and then she heard the sound of his footsteps coming down the stairs, and her quick ears detected the slight whirring sound which showed that the gas-stove was alight. Mr. Sleuth had already lit the stove; that meant that he would carry out some elaborate experiment this afternoon.

"Still snowing?" he said doubtfully. "How very, very quiet and still London is when under snow, Mrs. Bunting. I have never known it quite as quiet as this morning. Not a sound, outside or in. A very pleasant change from the shouting which sometimes goes on in the Marylebone Road."

"Yes," she said dully. "It's awful quiet to-day--too quiet to my thinking. 'Tain't natural-like."

The outside gate swung to, making a noisy clatter in the still air.

"Is that someone coming in here?" asked Mr. Sleuth, drawing a quick, hissing breath. "Perhaps you will oblige me by going to the window and telling me who it is, Mrs. Bunting?"

And his landlady obeyed him.

"It's only Bunting, sir--Bunting and his daughter."

"Oh! Is that all?"

Mr. Sleuth hurried after her, and she shrank back a little. She had never been quite so near to the lodger before, save on that first day when she had been showing him her rooms.

Side by side they stood, looking out of the window. And, as if aware that someone was standing there, Daisy turned her bright face up towards the window and smiled at her stepmother, and at the lodger, whose face she could only dimly discern.

"A very sweet-looking young girl," said Mr. Sleuth thoughtfully. And then he quoted a little bit of poetry, and this took Mrs. Bunting very much aback.

"Wordsworth," he murmured dreamily. "A poet too little read nowadays, Mrs. Bunting; but one with a beautiful feeling for nature, for youth, for innocence."

"Indeed, sir?" Mrs. Bunting stepped back a little. "Your breakfast will be getting cold, sir, if you don't have it now."

He went back to the table, obediently, and sat down as a child rebuked might have done.

And then his landlady left him.

"Well?" said Bunting cheerily. "Everything went off quite all right. And Daisy's a lucky girl--that she is! Her Aunt Margaret gave her five shillings."

But Daisy did not look as pleased as her father thought she ought to do.

"I hope nothing's happened to Mr. Chandler," she said a little disconsolately. "The very last words he said to me last night was that he'd be there at ten o'clock. I got quite fidgety as the time went on and he didn't come."

"He's been here," said Mrs. Bunting slowly.

"Been here?" cried her husband. "Then why on earth didn't he go and fetch Daisy, if he'd time to come here?"

"He was on the way to his job," his wife answered. "You run along, child, downstairs. Now that you are here you can make yourself useful."

And Daisy reluctantly obeyed. She wondered what it was her stepmother didn't want her to hear.

"I've something to tell you, Bunting."
"Yes?" He looked across uneasily. "Yes, Ellen?"

"There's been another o' those murders. But the police don't want anyone to know about it--not yet. That's why Joe couldn't go over and fetch Daisy. They're all on duty again."

Bunting put out his hand and clutched hold of the edge of the mantelpiece. He had gone very red, but his wife was far too much concerned with her own feelings and sensations to notice it.

There was a long silence between them. Then he spoke, making a great effort to appear unconcerned.

"And where did it happen?" he asked. "Close to the other one?"

She hesitated, then: "I don't know. He didn't say. But hush!" she added quickly. "Here's Daisy! Don't let's talk of that horror in front of her-like. Besides, I promised Chandler I'd be mum."

And he acquiesced.

"You can be laying the cloth, child, while I go up and clear away the lodger's breakfast." Without waiting for an answer, she hurried upstairs.

Mr. Sleuth had left the greater part of the nice lemon sole untouched. "I don't feel well to-day," he said fretfully. "And, Mrs. Bunting? I should be much obliged if your husband would lend me that paper I saw in his hand. I do not often care to look at the public prints, but I should like to do so now."

She flew downstairs. "Bunting," she said a little breathlessly, "the lodger would like you just to lend him the Sun."

Bunting handed it over to her. "I've read it through," he observed. "You can tell him that I don't want it back again."

On her way up she glanced down at the pink sheet. Occupying a third of the space was an irregular drawing, and under it was written, in rather large characters:

"We are glad to be able to present our readers with an authentic reproduction of the footprint of the half-worn rubber sole which was almost certainly worn by The Avenger when he committed his double murder ten days ago."

She went into the sitting-room. To her relief it was empty.

"Kindly put the paper down on the table," came Mr. Sleuth's muffled voice from the upper landing.

She did so. "Yes, sir. And Bunting don't want the paper back again, sir. He says he's read it." And then she hurried out of the room.

CHAPTER XXIII

All afternoon it went on snowing; and the three of them sat there, listening and waiting--Bunting and his wife hardly knew for what; Daisy for the knock which would herald Joe Chandler.

And about four there came the now familiar sound.

Mrs. Bunting hurried out into the passage, and as she opened the front door she whispered, "We haven't said anything to Daisy yet. Young girls can't keep secrets."

Chandler nodded comprehendingly. He now looked the low character he had assumed to the life, for he was blue with cold, disheartened, and tired out.

Daisy gave a little cry of shocked surprise, of amusement, of welcome, when she saw how cleverly he was disguised.

"I never!" she exclaimed. "What a difference it do make, to be sure! Why, you looks quite horrid, Mr. Chandler."

And, somehow, that little speech of hers amused her father so much that he quite cheered up. Bunting had been very dull and quiet all that afternoon.

"It won't take me ten minutes to make myself respectable again," said the young man rather ruefully.

His host and hostess, looking at him eagerly, furtively, both came to the conclusion that he had been unsuccessful--that he had failed, that is, in getting any information worth having. And though, in a sense, they all had a pleasant tea together, there was an air of constraint, even of discomfort, over the little party.

Bunting felt it hard that he couldn't ask the questions that were trembling on his lips; he would have felt it hard any time during the last month to refrain from knowing anything Joe could tell him, but now it seemed almost intolerable to be in this queer kind of half suspense. There was one important fact he longed to know, and at last came his opportunity of doing so, for Joe Chandler rose to leave, and this time it was Bunting who followed him out into the hall.

"Where did it happen?" he whispered. "Just tell me that, Joe?"

"Primrose Hill," said the other briefly. "You'll know all about it in a minute or two, for it'll be all in the last editions of the evening papers. That's what's been arranged."

"No arrest I suppose?"

Chandler shook his head despondently. "No," he said, "I'm inclined to think the Yard was on a wrong tack altogether this time. But one can only do one's best. I don't know if Mrs. Bunting told you I'd got to question a barmaid about a man who was in her place just before closing-time. Well, she's said all she knew, and it's as clear as
daylight to me that the eccentric old gent she talks about was only a harmless luny. He gave her a sovereign just because she told him she was a teetotaller!" He laughed ruefully.

Even Bunting was diverted at the notion. "Well, that's a queer thing for a barmaid to be!" he exclaimed. "She's niece to the people what keeps the public," explained Chandler; and then he went out of the front door with a cheerful "So long!"

When Bunting went back into the sitting-room Daisy had disappeared. She had gone downstairs with the tray. "Where's my girl?" he said irritably.

"She's just taken the tray downstairs."

He went out to the top of the kitchen stairs, and called out sharply, "Daisy! Daisy, child! Are you down there?"

"Yes, father," came her eager, happy voice.

"Better come up out of that cold kitchen."

He turned and came back to his wife. "Ellen, is the lodger in? I haven't heard him moving about. Now mind what I says, please! I don't want Daisy to be mixed up with him."

"Mr. Sleuth don't seem very well to-day," answered Mrs. Bunting quietly. "'Tain't likely I should let Daisy have anything to do with him. Why, she's never even seen him. 'Tain't likely I should allow her to begin waiting on him now."

But though she was surprised and a little irritated by the tone in which Bunting had spoken, no glimmer of the truth illumined her mind. So accustomed had she become to bearing alone the burden of her awful secret, that it would have required far more than a cross word or two, far more than the fact that Bunting looked ill and tired, for her to have come to suspect that her secret was now shared by another, and that other her husband.

Again and again the poor soul had agonised and trembled at the thought of her house being invaded by the police, but that was only because she had always credited the police with supernatural powers of detection. That they should come to know the awful fact she kept hidden in her breast would have seemed to her, on the whole, a natural thing, but that Bunting should even dimly suspect it appeared beyond the range of possibility.

And yet even Daisy noticed a change in her father. He sat cowering over the fire--saying nothing, doing nothing. "Why, father, ain't you well?" the girl asked more than once.

And, looking up, he would answer, "Yes, I'm well enough, my girl, but I feels cold. It's awful cold. I never did feel anything like the cold we've got just now."

At eight the now familiar shouts and cries began again outside.

"The Avenger again!" "Another horrible crime!" "Extra speshul edition!"--such were the shouts, the exultant yells, hurled through the clear, cold air. They fell, like bombs into the quiet room.

Both Bunting and his wife remained silent, but Daisy's cheeks grew pink with excitement, and her eye sparkled.

"Hark, father! Hark, Ellen! D'you hear that?" she exclaimed childishly, and even clapped her hands. "I do wish Mr. Chandler had been here. He would 'a been startled!"

"Don't, Daisy!" and Bunting frowned.

Then, getting up, he stretched himself. "It's fair getting on my mind," he said, "these horrible things happening. I'd like to get right away from London, just as far as I could--that I would!"

"Up to John-o'-Groat's?" said Daisy, laughing. And then, "Why, father, ain't you going out to get a paper?"

"Yes, I suppose I must."

Slowly he went out of the room, and, lingering a moment in the hall, he put on his greatcoat and hat. Then he opened the front door, and walked down the flagged path. Opening the iron gate, he stepped out on the pavement, then crossed the road to where the newspaper-boys now stood.

The boy nearest to him only had the Sun--a late edition of the paper he had already read. It annoyed Bunting to give a penny for a ha'penny rag of which he already knew the main contents. But there was nothing else to do.

Standing under a lamp-post, he opened out the newspaper. It was bitingly cold; that, perhaps, was why his hand shook as he looked down at the big headlines. For Bunting had been very unfair to the enterprise of the editor of his favourite evening paper. This special edition was full of new matter--new matter concerning The Avenger.

First, in huge type right across the page, was the brief statement that The Avenger had now committed his ninth crime, and that he had chosen quite a new locality, namely, the lonely stretch of rising ground known to Londoners as Primrose Hill.

"The police," so Bunting read, "are very reserved as to the circumstances which led to the finding of the body of The Avenger's latest victim. But we have reason to believe that they possess several really important clues, and that one of them is concerned with the half-worn rubber sole of which we are the first to reproduce an outline to-day. (See over page.)"

And Bunting, turning the sheet round about, saw the irregular outline he had already seen in the early edition of
the Sun, that purporting to be a facsimile of the imprint left by The Avenger's rubber sole.

He stared down at the rough outline which took up so much of the space which should have been devoted to reading matter with a queer, sinking feeling of terrified alarm. Again and again criminals had been tracked by the marks their boots or shoes had made at or near the scenes of their misdoings.

Practically the only job Bunting did in his own house of a menial kind was the cleaning of the boots and shoes. He had already visualised early this very afternoon the little row with which he dealt each morning--first came his wife's strong, serviceable boots, then his own two pairs, a good deal patched and mended, and next to his own Mr. Sleuth's strong, hardly worn, and expensive buttoned boots. Of late a dear little coquetish high-heeled pair of outdoor shoes with thin, paperlike soles, bought by Daisy for her trip to London, had ended the row. The girl had worn these thin shoes persistently, in defiance of Ellen's reproof and advice, and he, Bunting, had only once had to clean her more sensible country pair, and that only because the others had become wet though the day he and she had accompanied young Chandler to Scotland Yard.

Slowly he returned across the road. Somehow the thought of going in again, of hearing his wife's sarcastic comments, of parrying Daisy's eager questions, had become intolerable. So he walked slowly, trying to put off the evil moment when he would have to tell them what was in his paper.

The lamp under which he had stood reading was not exactly opposite the house. It was rather to the right of it. And when, having crossed over the roadway, he walked along the pavement towards his own gate, he heard odd, shuffling sounds coming from the inner side of the low wall which shut off his little courtyard from the pavement.

Now, under ordinary circumstances Bunting would have rushed forward to drive out whoever was there. He and his wife had often had trouble, before the cold weather began, with vagrants seeking shelter there. But to-night he stayed outside, listening intently, sick with suspense and fear.

Was it possible that their place was being watched--already? He thought it only too likely. Bunting, like Mrs. Bunting, credited the police with almost supernatural powers, especially since he had paid that visit to Scotland Yard.

But to Bunting's amazement, and, yes, relief, it was his lodger who suddenly loomed up in the dim light. Mr. Sleuth must have been stooping down, for his tall, lank form had been quite concealed till he stepped forward from behind the low wall on to the flagged path leading to the front door.

The lodger was carrying a brown paper parcel, and, as he walked along, the new boots he was wearing creaked, and the tap-tap of hard nail-studded heels rang out on the flat-stones of the narrow path.

Bunting, still standing outside the gate, suddenly knew what it was his lodger had been doing on the other side of the low wall. Mr. Sleuth had evidently been out to buy himself another pair of new boots, and then he had gone inside the gate and had put them on, placing his old footgear in the paper in which the new pair had been wrapped.

The ex-butler waited--waited quite a long time, not only until Mr. Sleuth had let himself into the house, but till the lodger had had time to get well away, upstairs.

Then he also walked up the flagged pathway, and put his latchkey in the door. He lingered as long over the job of hanging his hat and coat up in the hall as he dared, in fact till his wife called out to him. Then he went in, and throwing the paper down on the table, he said sullenly: "There it is! You can see it all for yourself--not that there's very much to see," and groped his way to the fire.

His wife looked at him in sharp alarm. "Whatever have you done to yourself?" she exclaimed. "You're ill--that's what it is, Bunting. You got a chill last night!"

"I told you I'd got a chill," he muttered. "'Twasn't last night, though; 'twas going out this morning, coming back in the bus. Margaret keeps that housekeeper's room o' hers like a hothouse--that's what she does. 'Twas going out from there into the biting wind, that's what did for me. It must be awful to stand about in such weather; 'tis a wonder to me how that young fellow, Joe Chandler, can stand the life--being out in all weathers like he is."

Bunting spoke at random, his one anxiety being to get away from what was in the paper, which now lay, neglected, on the table.

"Those that keep out o' doors all day never do come to no harm," said his wife testily. "But if you felt so bad, whatever was you out so long for, Bunting? I thought you'd gone away somewhere! D'you mean you only went to get the paper?"

"I just stopped for a second to look at it under the lamp," he muttered apologetically.

"That was a silly thing to do!"

"Perhaps it was," he admitted meekly.

Daisy had taken up the paper. "Well, they don't say much," she said disappointedly. "Hardly anything at all! But perhaps Mr. Chandler'll be in soon again. If so, he'll tell us more about it."

"A young girl like you oughtn't to want to know anything about murders," said her stepmother severely. "Joe won't think any the better of you for your inquisitiveness about such things. If I was you, Daisy, I shouldn't say
nothing about it if he does come in—which I fair tell you I hope he won't. I've seen enough of that young chap to-

day."

"He didn't come in for long—not to-day," said Daisy, her lip trembling.

"I can tell you one thing that'll surprise you, my dear"—Mrs. Bunting looked significantly at her stepdaughter.
She also wanted to get away from that dread news—which yet was no news.

"Yes?" said Daisy, rather defiantly. "What is it, Ellen?"

"Maybe you'll be surprised to hear that Joe did come in this morning. He knew all about that affair then, but he
particular asked that you shouldn't be told anything about it."

"Never!" cried Daisy, much mortified.

"Yes," went on her stepmother ruthlessly. "You just ask your father over there if it isn't true."

"Tain't a healthy thing to speak overmuch about such happenings," said Bunting heavily.

"If I was Joe," went on Mrs. Bunting, quickly pursuing her advantage, "I shouldn't want to talk about such horrid
things when I comes in to have a quiet chat with friends. But the minute he comes in that poor young chap is set
upon—mostly, I admit, by your father," she looked at her husband severely. "But you does your share, too, Daisy! You
asks him this, you asks him that—he's fair puzzled sometimes. It don't do to be so inquisitive."

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And perhaps because of this little sermon on Mrs. Bunting's part when young Chandler did come in again that
evening, very little was said of the new Avenger murder.

Bunting made no reference to it at all, and though Daisy said a word, it was but a word. And Joe Chandler
thought he had never spent a pleasanter evening in his life—for it was he and Daisy who talked all the time, their
elders remaining for the most part silent.

Daisy told of all that she had done with Aunt Margaret. She described the long, dull hours and the queer jobs her
aunt set her to do—the washing up of all the fine drawing-room china in a big basin lined with flannel, and how
terified she (Daisy) had been lest there should come even one teeny little chip to any of it. Then she went on to
relate some of the funny things Aunt Margaret had told her about "the family."

There came a really comic tale, which hugely interested and delighted Chandler. This was of how Aunt
Margaret's lady had been taken in by an impostor—an impostor who had come up, just as she was stepping out of her
carriage, and pretended to have a fit on the doorstep. Aunt Margaret's lady, being a soft one, had insisted on the man
coming into the hall, where he had been given all kinds of restoratives. When the man had at last gone off, it was
found that he had "wolfed" young master's best walking-stick, one with a fine tortoise-shell top to it. Thus had Aunt
Margaret proved to her lady that the man had been shamming, and her lady had been very angry—near had a fit
herself!

"There's a lot of that about," said Chandler, laughing. "Incorrigible rogues and vagabonds—that's what those sort
of people are!"

And then he, in his turn, told an elaborate tale of an exceptionally clever swindler whom he himself had brought
to book. He was very proud of that job, it had formed a white stone in his career as a detective. And even Mrs.
Bunting was quite interested to hear about it.

Chandler was still sitting there when Mr. Sleuth's bell rang. For awhile no one stirred; then Bunting looked
questioningly at his wife.

"Did you hear that?" he said. "I think, Ellen, that was the lodger's bell."

She got up, without alacrity, and went upstairs.

"I rang," said Mr. Sleuth weakly, "to tell you I don't require any supper to-night, Mrs. Bunting. Only a glass of
milk, with a lump of sugar in it. That is all I require—nothing more. I feel very very far from well"—and he had a
hunted, plaintive expression on his face. "And then I thought your husband would like his paper back again, Mrs.
Bunting."

Mrs. Bunting, looking at him fixedly, with a sad intensity of gaze of which she was quite unconscious, answered,
"Oh, no, sir! Bunting don't require that paper now. He read it all through." Something impelled her to add,
ruthlessly, "He's got another paper by now, sir. You may have heard them come shouting outside. Would you like
me to bring you up that other paper, sir?"

And Mr. Sleuth shook his head. "No," he said querulously. "I much regret now having asked for the one paper I
did read, for it disturbed me, Mrs. Bunting. There was nothing of any value in it—there never is in any public print. I
gave up reading newspapers years ago, and I much regret that I broke though my rule to-day."

As if to indicate to her that he did not wish for any more conversation, the lodger then did what he had never
done before in his landlady's presence. He went over to the fireplace and deliberately turned his back on her.
She went down and brought up the glass of milk and the lump of sugar he had asked for.

Now he was in his usual place, sitting at the table, studying the Book.
When Mrs. Bunting went back to the others they were chatting merrily. She did not notice that the merriment was confined to the two young people.

"Well?" said Daisy pertly. "How about the lodger, Ellen? Is he all right?"
"Yes," she said stiffly. "Of course he is!"
"He must feel pretty dull sitting up there all by himself--awful lonely-like, I call it," said the girl.
But her stepmother remained silent.
"Whatever does he do with himself all day?" persisted Daisy.
"Just now he's reading the Bible," Mrs. Bunting answered, shortly and dryly.
"Well, I never! That's a funny thing for a gentleman to do!"
And Joe, alone of her three listeners, laughed--a long hearty peal of amusement.
"There's nothing to laugh at," said Mrs. Bunting sharply. "I should feel ashamed of being caught laughing at anything connected with the Bible."
And poor Joe became suddenly quite serious. This was the first time that Mrs. Bunting had ever spoken really nastily to him, and he answered very humbly, "I beg pardon. I know I oughtn't to have laughed at anything to do with the Bible, but you see, Miss Daisy said it so funny-like, and, by all accounts, your lodger must be a queer card, Mrs. Bunting."
"He's no queerer than many people I could mention," she said quickly; and with these enigmatic words she got up, and left the room.

CHAPTER XXIV

Each hour of the days that followed held for Bunting its full meed of aching fear and suspense.

The unhappy man was ever debating within himself what course he should pursue, and, according to his mood and to the state of his mind at any particular moment, he would waver between various widely-differing lines of action.

He told himself again and again, and with fretful unease, that the most awful thing about it all was that he wasn't sure. If only he could have been sure, he might have made up his mind exactly what it was he ought to do.

But when telling himself this he was deceiving himself, and he was vaguely conscious of the fact; for, from Bunting's point of view, almost any alternative would have been preferable to that which to some, nay, perhaps to most, householders would have seemed the only thing to do, namely, to go to the police. But Londoners of Bunting's class have an uneasy fear of the law. To his mind it would be ruin for him and for his Ellen to be mixed up publicly in such a terrible affair. No one concerned in the business would give them and their future a thought, but it would track them to their dying day, and, above all, it would make it quite impossible for them ever to get again into a good joint situation. It was that for which Bunting, in his secret soul, now longed with all his heart.

No, some other way than going to the police must be found--and he racked his slow brain to find it.

The worst of it was that every hour that went by made his future course more difficult and more delicate, and increased the awful weight on his conscience.

If only he really knew! If only he could feel quite sure! And then he would tell himself that, after all, he had very little to go upon; only suspicion--suspicion, and a secret, horrible certainty that his suspicion was justified.

And so at last Bunting began to long for a solution which he knew to be indefensible from every point of view; he began to hope, that is, in the depths of his heart, that the lodger would again go out one evening on his horrible business and be caught--red-handed.

But far from going out on any business, horrible or other, Mr. Sleuth now never went out at all. He kept upstairs, and often spent quite a considerable part of his day in bed. He still felt, so he assured Mrs. Bunting, very far from well. He had never thrown off the chill he had caught on that bitter night he and his landlord had met on their several ways home.

Joe Chandler, too, had become a terrible complication to Daisy's father. The detective spent every waking hour that he was not on duty with the Buntings; and Bunting, who at one time had liked him so well and so cordially, now became mortally afraid of him.

But though the young man talked of little else than The Avenger, and though on one evening he described at immense length the eccentric-looking gent who had given the barmaid a sovereign, picturing Mr. Sleuth with such awful accuracy that both Bunting and Mrs. Bunting secretly and separately turned sick when they listened to him, he never showed the slightest interest in their lodger.

At last there came a morning when Bunting and Chandler held a strange conversation about The Avenger. The young fellow had come in earlier than usual, and just as he arrived Mrs. Bunting and Daisy were starting out to do some shopping. The girl would fain have stopped behind, but her stepmother had given her a very peculiar, disagreeable look, daring her, so to speak, to be so forward, and Daisy had gone on with a flushed, angry look on her pretty face.
And then, as young Chandler stepped through into the sitting-room, it suddenly struck Bunting that the young man looked unlike himself --indeed, to the ex-butler's apprehension there was something almost threatening in Chandler's attitude.

"I want a word with you, Mr. Bunting," he began abruptly, faltering. "And I'm glad to have the chance now that Mrs. Bunting and Miss Daisy are out."

Bunting braced himself to hear the awful words--the accusation of having sheltered a murderer, the monster whom all the world was seeking, under his roof. And then he remembered a phrase, a horrible legal phrase--"Accessory after the fact." Yes, he had been that, there wasn't any doubt about it!

"Yes?" he said. "What is it, Joe?" and then the unfortunateman sat down in his chair. "Yes?" he said again uncertainly; for young Chandler had now advanced to the table, he was looking at Bunting fixedly--the other thought threateningly. "Well, out with it, Joe! Don't keep me in suspense."

And then a slight smile broke over the young man's face. "I don't think what I've got to say can take you by surprise, Mr. Bunting."

And Bunting wagged his head in a way that might mean anything--yes or no, as the case might be.

The two men looked at one another for what seemed a very, very long time to the elder of them. And then, making a great effort, Joe Chandler brought out the words, "Well, I suppose you know what it is I want to talk about. I'm sure Mrs. Bunting would, from a look or two she's lately cast on me. It's your daughter--it's Miss Daisy."

And then Bunting gave a kind of cry, 'twixt a sob and a laugh. "My girl?" he cried. "Good Lord, Joe! Is that all you wants to talk about? Why, you fair frightened me--that you did!"

And, indeed, the relief was so great that the room swam round as he stared across it at his daughter's lover, that lover who was also the embodiment of that now awful thing to him, the law. He smiled, rather foolishly, at his visitor; and Chandler felt a sharp wave of irritation, of impatience sweep over his good-natured soul. Daisy's father was an old stupid--that's what he was.

And then Bunting grew serious. The room ceased to go round. "As far as I'm concerned," he said, with a good deal of solemnity, even a little dignity, 'you have my blessing, Joe. You're a very likely young chap, and I had a true respect for your father."

"Yes," said Chandler, "that's very kind of you, Mr. Bunting. But how about her--her herself?"

Bunting stared at him. It pleased him to think that Daisy hadn't given herself away, as Ellen was always hinting the girl was doing.

"I can't answer for Daisy," he said heavily. "You'll have to ask her yourself--that's not a job any other man can do for you, my lad."

"I never gets a chance. I never sees her, not by our two selves," said Chandler, with some heat. "You don't seem to understand, Mr. Bunting, that I never do see Miss Daisy alone," he repeated. "I hear now that she's going away Monday, and I've only once had the chance of a walk with her. Mrs. Bunting's very particular, not to say pernickety in her ideas, Mr. Bunting--"

"That's a fault on the right side, that is--with a young girl," said Bunting thoughtfully.

And Chandler nodded. He quite agreed that as regarded other young chaps Mrs. Bunting could not be too particular.

"She's been brought up like a lady, my Daisy has," went on Bunting, with some pride. "That Old Aunt of hers hardly lets her out of her sight."

"I was coming to the old aunt," said Chandler heavily. "Mrs. Bunting she talks as if your daughter was going to stay with that old woman the whole of her natural life--now is that right? That's what I wants to ask you, Mr. Bunting.--is that right?"

"I'll say a word to Ellen, don't you fear," said Bunting abstractedly.

His mind had wandered off, away from Daisy and this nice young chap, to his now constant anxious preoccupation. "You come along to-morrow," he said, "and I'll see you gets your walk with Daisy. It's only right you and she should have a chance of seeing one another without old folk being by; else how's the girl to tell whether she likes you or not! For the matter of that, you hardly knows her, Joe--" He looked at the young man consideringly.

Chandler shook his head impatiently. "I knows her quite as well as I wants to know her," he said. "I made up my mind the very first time I see'd her, Mr. Bunting."

"No! Did you really?" said Bunting. "Well, come to think of it, I did so with her mother; aye, and years after, with Ellen, too. But I hope you'll never want no second, Chandler."

"God forbid!" said the young man under his breath. And then he asked, rather longingly, "D'you think they'll be out long now, Mr. Bunting?"

And Bunting woke up to a due sense of hospitality. "Sit down, sit down; do!" he said hastily. "I don't believe they'll be very long. They've only got a little bit of shopping to do."
And then, in a changed, in a ringing, nervous tone, he asked, "And how about your job, Joe? Nothing new, I take it? I suppose you're all just waiting for the next time?"

"Aye--that's about the figure of it." Chandler's voice had also changed; it was now sombre, menacing. "We're fair tired of it--beginning to wonder when it'll end, that we are!"

"Do you ever try and make to yourself a picture of what the master's like?" asked Bunting. Somehow, he felt he must ask that.

"Yes," said Joe slowly. "I've a sort of notion--a savage, fierce-looking devil, the chap must be. It's that description that put us wrong. I don't believe it was the man that knocked up against that woman in the fog--no, not one bit I don't. But I wavers, I can't quite make up my mind. Sometimes I think it's a sailor--the foreigner they talks about, that goes away for eight or nine days in between, to Holland maybe, or to France. Then, again, I says to myself that it's a butcher, a man from the Central Market. Whoever it is, it's someone used to killing, that's flat."

"Then it don't seem to you possible--?" (Bunting got up and walked over to the window.) "You don't take any stock, I suppose, in that idea some of the papers put out, that the man is--" then he hesitated and brought out, with a gasp--"a gentleman?"

Chandler looked at him, surprised. "No," he said deliberately. "I've made up my mind that's quite a wrong tack, though I knows that some of our fellows--big pots, too--are quite sure that the fellow what gave the girl the sovereign is the man we're looking for. You see, Mr. Bunting, if that's the fact--well, it stands to reason the fellow's an escaped lunatic; and if he's an escaped lunatic he's got a keeper, and they'd be raising a hue and cry after him; now, wouldn't they?"

"You don't think," went on Bunting, lowering his voice, "that he could be just staying somewhere, lodging like?"

"D'you mean that The Avenger may be a toff, staying in some West-end hotel, Mr. Bunting? Well, things almost as funny as that 'ud be have come to pass." He smiled as if the notion was a funny one.

"Yes, something o' that sort," muttered Bunting.

"Well, if your idea's correct, Mr. Bunting--?"

"I never said 'twas my idea," said Bunting, all in a hurry.

"Well, if that idea's correct then, 'twill make our task more difficult than ever. Why, 'twould be looking for a needle in a field of hay, Mr. Bunting! But there! I don't think it's anything quite so unlikely as that--not myself I don't." He hesitated. "There's some of us"--he lowered his voice--"that hopes he'll betake himself off--The Avenger, I mean--to another big city, to Manchester or to Edinburgh. There'd be plenty of work for him to do there," and Chandler chuckled at his own grim joke.

And then, to both men's secret relief, for Bunting was now mortally afraid of this discussion concerning The Avenger and his doings, they heard Mrs. Bunting's key in the lock.

Daisy blushed rosy-red with pleasure when she saw that young Chandler was still there. She had feared that when they got home he would be gone, the more so that Ellen, just as if she was doing it on purpose, had lingered aggravatingly long over each small purchase.

"Here's Joe come to ask if he can take Daisy out for a walk," blurted out Bunting.

"My mother says as how she'd like you to come to tea, over at Richmond," said Chandler awkwardly, "I just come in to see whether we could fix it up, Miss Daisy." And Daisy looked imploringly at her stepmother.

"D'you mean now--this minute?" asked Mrs. Bunting tartly.

"No, o' course not!--Bunting broke in hastily. "How you do go on, Ellen!"

"What day did your mother mention would be convenient to her?" asked Mrs. Bunting, looking at the young man satirically.

Chandler hesitated. His mother had not mentioned any special day --in fact, his mother had shown a surprising lack of anxiety to see Daisy at all. But he had talked her round.

"How about Saturday?" suggested Bunting. "That's Daisy's birthday. 'Twould be a birthday treat for her to go to Richmond, and she's going back to Old Aunt on Monday."

"I can't go Saturday," said Chandler disconsolately. "I'm on duty Saturday."

"Well, then, let it be Sunday," said Bunting consolately. His wife looked at him surprised; he seldom asserted himself so much in her presence.

"What do you say, Miss Daisy?" said Chandler.

"Sunday would be very nice," said Daisy demurely. And then, as the young man took up his hat, and as her stepmother did not stir, Daisy ventured to go out into the hall with him for a minute.

Chandler shut the door behind them, and so was spared the hearing of Mrs. Bunting's whispered remark: "When I was a young woman folk didn't gallivant about on Sunday; those who was courting used to go to church together, decent-like--"
CHAPTER XXV

Daisy's eighteenth birthday dawned uneventfully. Her father gave her what he had always promised she should have on her eighteenth birthday—a watch. It was a pretty little silver watch, which Bunting had bought secondhand on the last day he had been happy—it seemed a long, long time ago now.

Mrs. Bunting thought a silver watch a very extravagant present but she was far too wretched, far too absorbed in her own thoughts, to trouble much about it. Besides, in such matters she had generally had the good sense not to interfere between her husband and his child.

In the middle of the birthday morning Bunting went out to buy himself some more tobacco. He had never smoked so much as in the last four days, excepting, perhaps, the week that had followed on his leaving service. Smoking a pipe had then held all the exquisite pleasure which we are told attaches itself to the eating of forbidden fruit.

His tobacco had now become his only relaxation; it acted on his nerves as an opiate, soothing his fears and helping him to think. But he had been overdoing it, and it was that which now made him feel so "jumpy," so he assured himself, when he found himself starting at any casual sound outside, or even when his wife spoke to him suddenly.

Just now Ellen and Daisy were down in the kitchen, and Bunting didn't quite like the sensation of knowing that there was only one pair of stairs between Mr. Sleuth and himself. So he quietly slipped out of the house without telling Ellen that he was going out.

In the last four days Bunting had avoided his usual haunts; above all, he had avoided even passing the time of day to his acquaintances and neighbours. He feared, with a great fear, that they would talk to him of a subject which, because it filled his mind to the exclusion of all else, might make him betray the knowledge—no, not knowledge, rather the— the suspicion—that dwelt within him.

But to-day the unfortunate man had a curious, instinctive longing for human companionship—companionship, that is, other than that of his wife and of his daughter.

This longing for a change of company finally led him into a small, populous thoroughfare hard by the Edgware Road. There were more people there than usual just now, for the housewives of the neighbourhood were doing their Saturday marketing for Sunday. The ex-butler turned into a small old-fashioned shop where he generally bought his tobacco.

Bunting passed the time of day with the tobacconist, and the two fell into desultory talk, but to his customer's relief and surprise the man made no allusion to the subject of which all the neighbourhood must still be talking.

And then, quite suddenly, while still standing by the counter, and before he had paid for the packet of tobacco he held in his hand, Bunting, through the open door, saw with horrified surprise that Ellen, his wife, was standing, alone, outside a greengrocer's shop just opposite.

Muttering a word of apology, he rushed out of the shop and across the road.

"Ellen!" he gasped hoarsely, "you've never gone and left my little girl alone in the house with the lodger?"

Mrs. Bunting's face went yellow with fear. "I thought you was indoors," she cried. "You was indoors! Whatever made you come out for, without first making sure I'd stay in?"

Bunting made no answer; but, as they stared at each other in exasperated silence, each now knew that the other knew.

They turned and scurried down the crowded street. "Don't run," he said suddenly; "we shall get there just as quickly if we walk fast. People are noticing you, Ellen. Don't run."

He spoke breathlessly, but it was breathlessness induced by fear and by excitement, not by the quick pace at which they were walking.

At last they reached their own gate, and Bunting pushed past in front of his wife.

After all, Daisy was his child; Ellen couldn't know how he was feeling.

He seemed to take the path in one leap, then fumbled for a moment with his latchkey.

Opening wide the door, "Daisy!" he called out, in a wailing voice, "Daisy, my dear! where are you?"

"Here I am, father. What is it?"

"She's all right." Bunting turned a grey face to his wife. "She's all right, Ellen."

He waited a moment, leaning against the wall of the passage. "It did give me a turn," he said, and then, warningly, "Don't frighten the girl, Ellen."

Daisy was standing before the fire in their sitting room, admiring herself in the glass.

"Oh, father," she exclaimed, without turning round, "I've seen the lodger! He's quite a nice gentleman, though, to be sure, he does look a cure. He rang his bell, but I didn't like to go up; and so he came down to ask Ellen for something. We had quite a nice little chat—that we had. I told him it was my birthday, and he asked me and Ellen to go to Madame Tussaud's with him this afternoon." She laughed, a little self-consciously. "Of course, I could see he
was 'centric, and then at first he spoke so funnily. 'And who be you?' he says, threatening-like. And I says to him, I'm Mr. Bunting's daughter, sir.' Then you're a very fortunate girl!--that's what he says, Ellen--to 'ave such a nice stepmother as you've got. That's why,' he says, 'you look such a good, innocent girl.' And then he quoted a bit of the Prayer Book. 'Keep innocency,' he says, wagging his head at me. Lor! It made me feel as if I was with Old Aunt again."

"I won't have you going out with the lodger--that's flat."

Bunting spoke in a muffled, angry tone. He was wiping his forehead with one hand, while with the other he mechanically squeezed the little packet of tobacco, for which, as he now remembered, he had forgotten to pay.

Daisy pouted. "Oh, father, I think you might let me have a treat on my birthday! I told him that Saturday wasn't a very good day-- at least, so I'd heard--for Madame Tussaud's. Then he said we could go early, while the fine folk are still having their dinners." She turned to her stepmother, then giggled happily. "He particularly said you was to come, too. The lodger has a wonderful fancy for you, Ellen; if I was father, I'd feel quite jealous!"

Her last words were cut across by a tap-tap on the door.

Bunting and his wife looked at each other apprehensively. Was it possible that, in their agitation, they had left the front door open, and that someone, some merciless myrmidon of the law, had crept in behind them?

Both felt a curious thrill of satisfaction when they saw that it was only Mr. Sleuth--Mr. Sleuth dressed for going out; the tall hat he had worn when he had first come to them was in his hand, but he was wearing a coat instead of his Inverness cape.

"I heard you come in"--he addressed Mrs. Bunting in his high, whistling, hesitating voice--"and so I've come down to ask you if you and Miss Bunting will come to Madame Tussaud's now. I have never seen those famous waxworks, though I've heard of the place all my life."

As Bunting forced himself to look fixedly at his lodger, a sudden doubt bringing with it a sense of immeasurable relief, came to Mr. Sleuth's landlord.

Surely it was inconceivable that this gentle, mild-mannered gentleman could be the monster of cruelty and cunning that Bunting had now for the terrible space of four days believed him to be!

He tried to catch his wife's eye, but Mrs. Bunting was looking away, staring into vacancy. She still, of course, wore the bonnet and cloak in which she had just been out to do her marketing. Daisy was already putting on her hat and coat.

"Well?" said Mr. Sleuth. Then Mrs. Bunting turned, and it seemed to his landlady that he was looking at her threateningly. "Well?"

"Yes, sir. We'll come in a minute," she said dully.

CHAPTER XXVI

Madame Tussaud's had hitherto held pleasant memories for Mrs. Bunting. In the days when she and Bunting were courting they often spent there part of their afternoon-out.

The butler had an acquaintance, a man named Hopkins, who was one of the waxworks staff, and this man had sometimes given him passes for "self and lady." But this was the first time Mrs. Bunting had been inside the place since she had come to live almost next door, as it were, to the big building.

They walked in silence to the familiar entrance, and then, after the ill-assorted trio had gone up the great staircase and into the first gallery, Mr. Sleuth suddenly stopped short. The presence of those curious, still, waxen figures which suggest so strangely death in life, seemed to surprise and affright him.

Daisy took quick advantage of the lodger's hesitation and unease.

"Oh, Ellen," she cried, "do let us begin by going into the Chamber of Horrors! I've never been in there. Old Aunt made father promise he wouldn't take me the only time I've ever been here. But now that I'm eighteen I can do just as I like; besides, Old Aunt will never know."

Mr. Sleuth looked down at her, and a smile passed for a moment over his worn, gaunt face.

"Yes," he said, "let us go into the Chamber of Horrors; that's a good idea, Miss Bunting. I've always wanted to see the Chamber of Horrors."

They turned into the great room in which the Napoleonic relics were then kept, and which led into the curious, vault-like chamber where waxen effigies of dead criminals stand grouped in wooden docks.

Mrs. Bunting was at once disturbed and relieved to see her husband's old acquaintance, Mr. Hopkins, in charge of the turnstile admitting the public to the Chamber of Horrors.

"Well, you are a stranger," the man observed genially. "I do believe that this is the very first time I've seen you in here, Mrs. Bunting, since you was married!"

"Yes," she said, "that is so. And this is my husband's daughter, Daisy; I expect you've heard of her, Mr. Hopkins. And this"--she hesitated a moment--"is our lodger, Mr. Sleuth."

But Mr. Sleuth frowned and shuffled away. Daisy, leaving her stepmother's side, joined him.
Two, as all the world knows, is company, three is none. Mrs. Bunting put down three sixpences.

"Wait a minute," said Hopkins; "you can't go into the Chamber of Horrors just yet. But you won't have to wait more than four or five minutes, Mrs. Bunting. It's this way, you see; our boss is in there, showing a party round." He lowered his voice. "It's Sir John Burney--I suppose you know who Sir John Burney is?"

"No," she answered indifferently, "I don't know that I ever heard of him."

She felt slightly--oh, very slightly--uneasy about Daisy. She would have liked her stepdaughter to keep well within sight and sound, but Mr. Sleuth was now taking the girl down to the other end of the room.

"Well, I hope you never will know him--not in any personal sense, Mrs. Bunting." The man chuckled. "He's the Commissioner of Police--the new one—that's what Sir John Burney is. One of the gentlemen he's showing round our place is the Paris Police boss--whose job is on all fours, so to speak, with Sir John's. The Frenchy has brought his daughter with him, and there are several other ladies. Ladies always likes horrors, Mrs. Bunting; that's our experience here. 'Oh, take me to the Chamber of Horrors'—that's what they say the minute they gets into this here building!"

Mrs. Bunting looked at him thoughtfully. It occurred to Mr. Hopkins that she was very wan and tired; she used to look better in the old days, when she was still in service, before Bunting married her.

"Yes," she said; "that's just what my stepdaughter said just now. 'Oh, take me to the Chamber of Horrors'—that's exactly what she did say when we got upstairs."

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A group of people, all talking and laughing together; were advancing, from within the wooden barrier, toward the turnstile.

Mrs. Bunting stared at them nervously. She wondered which of them was the gentleman with whom Mr. Hopkins had hoped she would never be brought into personal contact; she thought she could pick him out among the others. He was a tall, powerful, handsome gentleman, with a military appearance.

Just now he was smiling down into the face of a young lady. "Monsieur Barberoux is quite right," he was saying in a loud, cheerful voice, "our English law is too kind to the criminal, especially to the murderer. If we conducted our trials in the French fashion, the place we have just left would be very much fuller than it is to-day. A man of whose guilt we are absolutely assured is oftener than not acquitted, and then the public taunt us with 'another undiscovered crime!'"

"D'you mean, Sir John, that murderers sometimes escape scot-free? Take the man who has been committing all these awful murders this last month? I suppose there's no doubt he'll be hanged—if he's ever caught, that is!"

Her girlish voice rang out, and Mrs. Bunting could hear every word that was said.

The whole party gathered round, listening eagerly. "Well, no." He spoke very deliberately. "I doubt if that particular murderer ever will be hanged."

"You mean that you'll never catch him?" the girl spoke with a touch of airy impertinence in her clear voice.

"I think we shall end by catching him—because"—he waited a moment, then added in a lower voice—"now don't give me away to a newspaper fellow, Miss Rose—because now I think we do know who the murderer in question is—"

Several of those standing near by uttered expressions of surprise and incredulity.

"Then why don't you catch him?" cried the girl indignantly.

"I didn't say we knew where he was; I only said we knew who he was, or, rather, perhaps I ought to say that I personally have a very strong suspicion of his identity."—

Sir John's French colleague looked up quickly. "De Leipsic and Liverpool man?" he said interrogatively.

The other nodded. "Yes, I suppose you've had the case turned up?"

Then, speaking very quickly, as if he wished to dismiss the subject from his own mind, and from that of his auditors, he went on:

"Four murders of the kind were committed eight years ago--two in Leipsic, the others, just afterwards, in Liverpool,—and there were certain peculiarities connected with the crimes which made it clear they were committed by the same hand. The perpetrator was caught, fortunately for us, red-handed, just as he was leaving the house of his last victim, for in Liverpool the murder was committed in a house. I myself saw the unhappy man—I say unhappy, for there is no doubt at all that he was mad"—he hesitated, and added in a lower tone—"suffering from an acute form of religious mania. I myself saw him, as I say, at some length. But now comes the really interesting point. I have just been informed that a month ago this criminal lunatic, as we must of course regard him, made his escape from the asylum where he was confined. He arranged the whole thing with extraordinary cunning and intelligence, and we should probably have caught him long ago, were it not that he managed, when on his way out of the place, to annex a considerable sum of money in gold, with which the wages of the asylum staff were about to be paid. It is owing to that fact that his escape was, very wrongly, concealed—"
He stopped abruptly, as if sorry he had said so much, and a moment later the party were walking in Indian file through the turnstile, Sir John Burney leading the way.

Mrs. Bunting looked straight before her. She felt—as she expressed it to her husband later—as if she had been turned to stone.

Even had she wished to do so, she had neither the time nor the power to warn her lodger of his danger, for Daisy and her companion were now coming down the room, bearing straight for the Commissioner of Police. In another moment Mrs. Bunting's lodger and Sir John Burney were face to face.

Mr. Sleuth swerved to one side; there came a terrible change over his pale, narrow face; it became discomposed, livid with rage and terror.

But, to Mrs. Bunting's relief—yes, to her inexpressible relief—Sir John Burney and his friends swept on. They passed Mr. Sleuth and the girl by his side, unaware, or so it seemed to her, that there was anyone else in the room but themselves.

"Hurry up, Mrs. Bunting," said the turnstile-keeper; "you and your friends will have the place all to yourselves for a bit." From an official he had become a man, and it was the man in Mr. Hopkins that gallantly addressed pretty Daisy Bunting: "It seems strange that a young lady like you should want to go in and see all those 'orrible frights," he said jestingly.

"Mrs. Bunting, may I trouble you to come over here for a moment?"

The words were hissed rather than spoken by Mr. Sleuth's lips.

His landlady took a doubtful step towards him.

"A last word with you, Mrs. Bunting." The lodger's face was still distorted with fear and passion. "Do not think to escape the consequences of your hideous treachery. I trusted you, Mrs. Bunting, and you betrayed me! Put I am protected by a higher power, for I still have much to do." Then, his voice sinking to a whisper, he hissed out "Your end will be bitter as wormwood and sharp as a two-edged sword. Your feet shall go down to death, and your steps take hold on hell."

Even while Mr. Sleuth was muttering these strange, dreadful words, he was looking round, glancing this way and that, seeking a way of escape.

At last his eyes became fixed on a small placard placed above a curtain. "Emergency Exit" was written there. Mrs. Bunting thought he was going to make a dash for the place; but Mr. Sleuth did something very different. Leaving his landlady's side, he walked over to the turnstile, he fumbled in his pocket for a moment, and then touched the man on the arm. "I feel ill," he said, speaking very rapidly; "very ill indeed! It is the atmosphere of this place. I want you to let me out by the quickest way. It would be a pity for me to faint here--especially with ladies about."

His left hand shot out and placed what he had been fumbling for in his pocket on the other's bare palm. "I see there's an emergency exit over there. Would it be possible for me to get out that way?"

"Well, yes, sir; I think so."

The man hesitated; he felt a slight, a very sight, feeling of misgiving. He looked at Daisy, flushed and smiling, happy and unconcerned, and then at Mrs. Bunting. She was very pale; but surely her lodger's sudden seizure was enough to make her feel worried. Hopkins felt the half-sovereign pleasantly tickling his palm. The Paris Prefect of Police had given him only half-a-crown—mean, shabby foreigner!

"Yes, sir; I can let you out that way," he said at last, "and 'praps when you're standing out in the air, on the iron balcony, you'll feel better. But then, you know, sir, you'll have to come round to the front if you wants to come in again, for those emergency doors only open outward."

"Yes, yes," said Mr. Sleuth hurriedly. "I quite understand! If I feel better I'll come in by the front way, and pay another shilling--that's only fair."

"You needn't do that if you just explain what happened here."

The man went and pulled the curtain aside, and put his shoulder against the door. It burst open, and the light, for a moment, blinded Mr. Sleuth.

He passed his hand over his eyes. "Thank you," he muttered, "thank you. I shall get all right out there."

An iron stairway led down into a small stable yard, of which the door opened into a side street.

Mr. Sleuth looked round once more; he really did feel very ill—ill and dazed. How pleasant it would be to take a flying leap over the balcony railing and find rest, eternal rest, below.

But no—he thrust the thought, the temptation, from him. Again a convulsive look of rage came over his face. He had remembered his landlady. How could the woman whom he had treated so generously have betrayed him to his arch-enemy?—to the official, that is, who had entered into a conspiracy years ago to have him confined—him, an absolutely sane man with a great avenging work to do in the world—in a lunatic asylum.

He stepped out into the open air, and the curtain, falling-to behind him, blotted out the tall, thin figure from the little group of people who had watched him disappear.
Even Daisy felt a little scared. "He did look bad, didn't he, now?" she turned appealingly to Mr. Hopkins.
"Yes, that he did, poor gentleman--your lodger, too?" he looked sympathetically at Mrs. Bunting.
She moistened her lips with her tongue. "Yes," she repeated dully, "my lodger."

**CHAPTER XXVII**

In vain Mr. Hopkins invited Mrs. Bunting and her pretty stepdaughter to step through into the Chamber of Horrors. "I think we ought to go straight home," said Mr. Sleuth's landlady decidedly. And Daisy meekly assented.

Somehow the girl felt confused, a little scared by the lodger's sudden disappearance. Perhaps this unwonted feeling of hers was induced by the look of stunned surprise and, yes, pain, on her stepmother's face.

Slowly they made their way out of the building, and when they got home it was Daisy who described the strange way Mr. Sleuth had been taken.
"I don't suppose he'll be long before he comes home," said Bunting heavily, and he cast an anxious, furtive look at his wife. She looked as if stricken in a vital part; he saw from her face that there was something wrong--very wrong indeed.

The hours dragged on. All three felt moody and ill at ease. Daisy knew there was no chance that young Chandler would come in to-day.

About six o'clock Mrs. Bunting went upstairs. She lit the gas in Mr. Sleuth's sitting-room and looked about her with a fearful glance. Somehow everything seemed to speak to her of the lodger, there lay her Bible and his Concordance, side by side on the table, exactly as he had left them, when he had come downstairs and suggested that ill-starred expedition to his landlord's daughter. She took a few steps forward, listening the while anxiously for the familiar sound of the click in the door which would tell her that the lodger had come back, and then she went over to the window and looked out.

What a cold night for a man to be wandering about, homeless, friendless, and, as she suspected with a pang, with but very little money on him!

Turning abruptly, she went into the lodger's bedroom and opened the drawer of the looking-glass.
Yes, there lay the much-diminished heap of sovereigns. If only he had taken his money out with him! She wondered painfully whether he had enough on his person to secure a good night's lodging, and then suddenly she remembered that which brought relief to her mind. The lodger had given something to that Hopkins fellow--either a sovereign or half a sovereign, she wasn't sure which.

The memory of Mr. Sleuth's cruel words to her, of his threat, did not disturb her overmuch. It had been a mistake--all a mistake. Far from betraying Mr. Sleuth, she had sheltered him--kept his awful secret as she could not have kept it had she known, or even dimly suspected, the horrible fact with which Sir John Burney's words had made her acquainted; namely, that Mr. Sleuth was victim of no temporary aberration, but that he was, and had been for years, a madman, a homicidal maniac.

In her ears there still rang the Frenchman's half careless yet confident question, "De Leipsic and Liverpool man?"

Following a sudden impulse, she went back into the sitting-room, and taking a black-headed pin out of her bodice stuck it amid the leaves of the Bible. Then she opened the Book, and looked at the page the pin had marked:-

"My tabernacle is spoiled and all my cords are broken... There is none to stretch forth my tent any more and to set up my curtains."

At last leaving the Bible open, Mrs. Bunting went downstairs, and as she opened the door of her sitting-room Daisy came towards her stepmother.
"I'll go down and start getting the lodger's supper ready for you," said the girl good-naturedly. "He's certain to come in when he gets hungry. But he did look upset, didn't he, Ellen? Right down bad-- that he did!"

Mrs. Bunting made no answer; she simply stepped aside to allow Daisy to go down.
"Mr. Sleuth won't never come back no more," she said sombrely, and then she felt both glad and angry at the extraordinary change which came over her husband's face. Yet, perversely, that look of relief, of right-down joy, chiefly angered her, and tempted her to add, "That's to say, I don't suppose he will."

And Bunting's face altered again; the old, anxious, depressed look, the look it had worn the last few days, returned.
"What makes you think he mayn't come back?" he muttered.
"Too long to tell you now," she said. "Wait till the child's gone to bed."
And Bunting had to restrain his curiosity.

And then, when at last Daisy had gone off to the back room where she now slept with her stepmother, Mrs. Bunting beckoned to her husband to follow her upstairs.

Before doing so he went down the passage and put the chain on the door. And about this they had a few sharp
whispered words.
"You're never going to shut him out?" she expostulated angrily, beneath her breath.
"I'm not going to leave Daisy down here with that man perhaps walking in any minute."
"Mr. Sleuth won't hurt Daisy, bless you! Much more likely to hurt me," and she gave a half sob.
Bunting stared at her. "What do you mean?" he said roughly. "Come upstairs and tell me what you mean."
And then, in what had been the lodger's sitting-room, Mrs. Bunting told her husband exactly what it was that had happened.
He listened in heavy silence.
"So you see," she said at last, "you see, Bunting, that 'twas me that was right after all. The lodger was never responsible for his actions. I never thought he was, for my part."
And Bunting stared at her ruminatingly. "Depends on what you call responsible--" he began argumentatively.
But she would have none of that. "I heard the gentleman say myself that he was a lunatic," she said fiercely. And then, dropping her voice, "A religious maniac--that's what he called him."
"Well, he never seemed so to me," said Bunting stoutly. "He simply seemed to me 'centric--that's all he did. Not a bit madder than many I could tell you of." He was walking round the room restlessly, but he stopped short at last.
"And what d'you think we ought to do now?"
Mrs. Bunting shook her head impatiently. "I don't think we ought to do nothing," she said. "Why should we?"
And then again he began walking round the room in an aimless fashion that irritated her.
"If only I could put out a bit of supper for him somewhere where he would get it! And his money, too? I hate to feel it's in there."
"Don't you make any mistake--he'll come back for that," said Bunting, with decision.
But Mrs. Bunting shook her head. She knew better. "Now," she said, "you go off up to bed. It's no use us sitting up any longer."
And Bunting acquiesced.
She ran down and got him a bedroom candle--there was no gas in the little back bedroom upstairs. And then she watched him go slowly up.
Suddenly he turned and came down again. "Ellen," he said, in an urgent whisper, "if I was you I'd take the chain off the door, and I'd lock myself in--that's what I'm going to do. Then he can sneak in and take his dirty money away."
Mrs. Bunting neither nodded nor shook her head. Slowly she went downstairs, and there she carried out half of Bunting's advice. She took, that is, the chain off the front door. But she did not go to bed, neither did she lock herself in. She sat up all night, waiting. At half-past seven she made herself a cup of tea, and then she went into her bedroom.
Daisy opened her eyes.
"Why, Ellen," she said, "I suppose I was that tired, and slept so sound, that I never heard you come to bed or get up--funny, wasn't it?"
"Young people don't sleep as light as do old folks," Mrs. Bunting said sententiously.
"Did the lodger come in after all? I suppose he's upstairs now?"
Mrs. Bunting shook her head. "It looks as if 'twould be a fine day for you down at Richmond," she observed in a kindly tone.
And Daisy smiled, a very happy, confident little smile.
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That evening Mrs. Bunting forced herself to tell young Chandler that their lodger had, so to speak, disappeared. She and Bunting had thought carefully over what they would say, and so well did they carry out their programme, or, what is more likely, so full was young Chandler of the long happy day he and Daisy had spent together, that he took their news very calmly.
"Gone away, has he?" he observed casually. "Well, I hope he paid up all right?"
"Oh, yes, yes," said Mrs. Bunting hastily. "No trouble of that sort."
And Bunting said shamefacedly, "Aye, aye, the lodger was quite an honest gentleman, Joe. But I feel worried, about him. He was such a poor, gentle chap--not the sort o' man one likes to think of as wandering about by himself."
"You always said he was 'centric," said Joe thoughtfully.
"Yes, he was that," said Bunting slowly. "Regular right-down queer. Leetle touched, you know, under the thatch," and, as he tapped his head significantly, both young people burst out laughing.
"Would you like a description of him circulated?" asked Joe good-naturedly.
Mr. and Mrs. Bunting looked at one another.
"No, I don't think so. Not yet awhile at any rate. 'Twould upset him awfully, you see."

And Joe acquiesced. "You'd be surprised at the number o' people who disappears and are never heard of again," he said cheerfully. And then he got up, very reluctantly.

Daisy, making no bones about it this time, followed him out into the passage, and shut the sitting-room door behind her.

When she came back she walked over to where her father was sitting in his easy chair, and standing behind him she put her arms round his neck.

Then she bent down her head. "Father," she said, "I've a bit of news for you!"

"Yes, my dear?"

"Father, I'm engaged! Aren't you surprised?"

"Well, what do you think?" said Bunting fondly. Then he turned round and, catching hold of her head, gave her a good, hearty kiss.

"What'll Old Aunt say, I wonder?" he whispered.

"Don't you worry about Old Aunt," exclaimed his wife suddenly. "I'll manage Old Aunt! I'll go down and see her. She and I have always got on pretty comfortable together, as you knows well, Daisy."

"Yes," said Daisy a little wonderingly. "I know you have, Ellen."

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Mr. Sleuth never came back, and at last after many days and many nights had gone by, Mrs. Bunting left off listening for the click of the lock which she at once hoped and feared would herald her lodger's return.

As suddenly and as mysteriously as they had begun the "Avenger" murders stopped, but there came a morning in the early spring when a gardener, working in the Regent's Park, found a newspaper in which was wrapped, together with a half-worn pair of rubber-soled shoes, a long, peculiarly shaped knife. The fact, though of considerable interest to the police, was not chronicled in any newspaper, but about the same time a picturesque little paragraph went the round of the press concerning a small boxful of sovereigns which had been anonymously forwarded to the Governors of the Foundling Hospital.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bunting had been as good as her word about "Old Aunt," and that lady had received the wonderful news concerning Daisy in a more philosophical spirit than her great-niece had expected her to do. She only observed that it was odd to reflect that if gentlefolks leave a house in charge of the police a burglary is pretty sure to follow—a remark which Daisy resented much more than did her Joe.

Mr. Bunting and his Ellen are now in the service of an old lady, by whom they are feared as well as respected, and whom they make very comfortable.
TO JOHN VINE MILNE MY DEAR FATHER,

Like all really nice people, you have a weakness for detective stories, and feel that there are not enough of them. So, after all that you have done for me, the least that I can do for you is to write you one. Here it is: with more gratitude and affection than I can well put down here.

A.A.M.

CHAPTER I

Mrs. Stevens is Frightened

In the drowsy heat of the summer afternoon the Red House was taking its siesta. There was a lazy murmur of bees in the flower-borders, a gentle cooing of pigeons in the tops of the elms. From distant lawns came the whir of a mowing-machine, that most restful of all country sounds; making ease the sweeter in that it is taken while others are working.

It was the hour when even those whose business it is to attend to the wants of others have a moment or two for themselves. In the housekeeper's room Audrey Stevens, the pretty parlour-maid, re-trimmed her best hat, and talked idly to her aunt, the cook-housekeeper of Mr. Mark Ablett's bachelor home.

"For Joe?" said Mrs. Stevens placidly, her eye on the hat. Audrey nodded. She took a pin from her mouth, found a place in the hat for it, and said, "He likes a bit of pink."

"I don't say I mind a bit of pink myself," said her aunt. "Joe Turner isn't the only one."

"It isn't everybody's colour," said Audrey, holding the hat out at arm's length, and regarding it thoughtfully. "Stylish, isn't it?"

"Oh, it'll suit you all right, and it would have suited me at your age. A bit too dressy for me now, though wearing better than some other people, I daresay. I was never the one to pretend to be what I wasn't. If I'm fifty-five, I'm fifty-five --that's what I say."

"Fifty-eight, isn't it, auntie?"

"I was just giving that as an example," said Mrs. Stevens with great dignity.

Audrey threaded a needle, held her hand out and looked at her nails critically for a moment, and then began to sew.

"Funny thing that about Mr. Mark's brother. Fancy not seeing your brother for fifteen years." She gave a self-conscious laugh and went on, "Wonder what I should do if I didn't see Joe for fifteen years."

"As I told you all this morning," said her aunt, "I've been here five years, and never heard of a brother. I could say that before everybody if I was going to die to-morrow. There's been no brother here while I've been here."

"You could have knocked me down with a feather when he spoke about him at breakfast this morning. I didn't hear what went before, naturally, but they was all talking about the brother when I went in--now what was it I went in for--hot milk, was it, or toast?--well, they was all talking, and Mr. Mark turns to me, and says--you know his way--"Stevens," he says, 'my brother is coming to see me this afternoon; I'm expecting him about three,' he says. 'Show him into the office,' he says, just like that. He likes a bit of pink myself," said her aunt. "Joe Turner isn't the only one." "I'm not saying anything about fifteen years, Audrey. I'm not saying anything about fifteen years. If you don't say that before everybody if I was going to die to-morrow. There's been no brother here while I've been here." "You could have knocked me down with a feather when he spoke about him at breakfast this morning. I didn't hear what went before, naturally, but they was all talking about the brother when I went in--now what was it I went in for--hot milk, was it, or toast?--well, they was all talking, and Mr. Mark turns to me, and says--you know his way--"Stevens," he says, 'my brother is coming to see me this afternoon; I'm expecting him about three,' he says. 'Show him into the office,' he says, just like that. 'Yes, sir,' I says quite quietly, but I was never so surprised in my life, not knowing he had a brother. 'My brother from Australia,' he says--there, I'd forgotten that. From Australia."

"Well, he may have been in Australia," said Mrs. Stevens, judicially; "I can't say for that, not knowing the country; but what I do say is he's never been here. Not while I've been here, and that's five years."

"Well, but, auntie, he hasn't been here for fifteen years. I heard Mr. Mark telling Mr. Cayley. 'Fifteen years,' he says. Mr. Cayley having arst him when his brother was last in England. Mr. Cayley knew of him, I heard him telling Mr. Beverley, but didn't know when he was last in England--see? So that's why he arst Mr. Mark."

"I'm not saying anything about fifteen years, Audrey. I can only speak for what I know, and that's five years Whitsuntide. I can take my oath he's not set foot in the house since five years Whitsuntide. And if he's been in Australia, as you say, well, I daresay he's had his reasons."

"What reasons?" said Audrey lightly.

"Never mind what reasons. Being in the place of a mother to you, since your poor mother died, I say this, Audrey--when a gentleman goes to Australia, he has his reasons. And when he stays in Australia fifteen years, as Mr. Mark says, and as I know for myself for five years, he has his reasons. And a respectably brought-up girl doesn't ask what reasons."
"Got into trouble, I suppose," said Audrey carelessly. "They were saying at breakfast he'd been a wild one. Debts. I'm glad Joe isn't like that. He's got fifteen pounds in the post-office savings' bank. Did I tell you?"

But there was not to be any more talk of Joe Turner that afternoon. The ringing of a bell brought Audrey to her feet—no longer Audrey, but now Stevens. She arranged her cap in front of the glass.

"There, that's the front door," she said. "That's him. 'Show him into the office,' said Mr. Mark. I suppose he doesn't want the other ladies and gentlemen to see him. Well, they're all out at their golf, anyhow—Wonder if he's going to stay—'P'raps he's brought back a lot of gold from Australia—I might hear something about Australia, because if anybody can get gold there, then I don't say but what Joe and I—"

"Now, now, get on, Audrey."

"Just going, darling." She went out.

To anyone who had just walked down the drive in the August sun, the open door of the Red House revealed a delightfully inviting hall, of which even the mere sight was cooling. It was a big low-roofed, oak-beamed place, with cream-washed walls and diamond-paned windows, blue-curtained. On the right and left were doors leading into other living-rooms, but on the side which faced you as you came in were windows again, looking on to a small grass court, and from open windows to open windows such air as there was played gently. The staircase went up in broad, low steps along the right-hand wall, and, turning to the left, led you along a gallery, which ran across the width of the hall, to your bedroom. That is, if you were going to stay the night. Mr. Robert Ablett's intentions in this matter were as yet unknown.

As Audrey came across the hall she gave a little start as she saw Mr. Cayley suddenly, sitting unobtrusively in a seat beneath one of the front windows, reading. No reason why he shouldn't be there; certainly a much cooler place than the golf-links on such a day; but somehow there was a deserted air about the house that afternoon, as if all the guests were outside, or—perhaps the wisest place of all—up in their bedrooms, sleeping. Mr. Cayley, the master's cousin, was a surprise; and, having given a little exclamation as she came suddenly upon him, she blushed, and said, "Oh, I beg your pardon, sir, I didn't see you at first," and he looked up from his book and smiled at her. An attractive smile it was on that big ugly face. "Such a gentleman, Mr. Cayley," she thought to herself as she went on, and wondered what the master would do without him. If this brother, for instance, had to be bundled back to Australia, it was Mr. Cayley who would do most of the bundling.

"So this is Mr. Robert," said Audrey to herself, as she came in sight of the visitor.

She told her aunt afterwards that she would have known him anywhere for Mr. Mark's brother, but she would have said that in any event. Actually she was surprised. Dapper little Mark, with his neat pointed beard and his carefully curled moustache; with his quick-darting eyes, always moving from one to the other of any company he was in, to register one more smile to his credit when he had said a good thing, one more expectant look when he was only waiting his turn to say it; he was a very different man from this rough-looking, ill-dressed colonial, staring at her so loweringly.

"I want to see Mr. Mark Ablett," he growled. It sounded almost like a threat.

Audrey recovered herself and smiled reassuringly at him. She had a smile for everybody.

"Yes, sir. He is expecting you, if you will come this way."

"Oh! So you know who I am, eh?"

"Mr. Robert Ablett?"

"Ay, that's right. So he's expecting me, eh? He'll be glad to see me, eh?"

"If you will come this way, sir," said Audrey primly.

She went to the second door on the left, and opened it.

"Mr. Robert Ab—" she began, and then broke off. The room was empty. She turned to the man behind her. "If you will sit down, sir, I will find the master. I know he's in, because he told me that you were coming this afternoon."

"Oh!" He looked round the room. "What d'you call this place, eh?"

"The office, sir."

"The office?"

"The room where the master works, sir."

"Works, eh? That's new. Didn't know he'd ever done a stroke of work in his life."

"Where he writes, sir," said Audrey, with dignity. The fact that Mr. Mark "wrote," though nobody knew what, was a matter of pride in the housekeeper's room.

"Not well-dressed enough for the drawing-room, eh?"

"I will tell the master you are here, sir," said Audrey decisively.

She closed the door and left him there.

Well! Here was something to tell auntie! Her mind was busy at once, going over all the things which he had said
to her and she had said to him--quiet-like. "Directly I saw him I said to myself--" Why, you could have knocked her over with a feather. Feathers, indeed, were a perpetual menace to Audrey.

However, the immediate business was to find the master. She walked across the hall to the library, glanced in, came back a little uncertainly, and stood in front of Cayley.

"If you please, sir," she said in a low, respectful voice, "can you tell me where the master is? It's Mr. Robert called."

"What?" said Cayley, looking up from his book. "Who?"

Audrey repeated her question.

"I don't know. Isn't he in the office? He went up to the Temple after lunch. I don't think I've seen him since."

"Thank you, sir. I will go up to the Temple."

Cayley returned to his book.

The "Temple" was a brick summer-house, in the gardens at the back of the house, about three hundred yards away. Here Mark meditated sometimes before retiring to the "office" to put his thoughts upon paper. The thoughts were not of any great value; moreover, they were given off at the dinner-table more often than they got on to paper, and got on to paper more often than they got into print. But that did not prevent the master of The Red House from being a little pained when a visitor treated the Temple carelessly, as if it had been erected for the ordinary purposes of flirtation and cigarette-smoking. There had been an occasion when two of his guests had been found playing fives in it. Mark had said nothing at the time, save to ask with a little less than his usual point--whether they couldn't find anywhere else for their game, but the offenders were never asked to The Red House again.

Audrey walked slowly up to the Temple, looked in and walked slowly back. All that walk for nothing. Perhaps the master was upstairs in his room. "Not well-dressed enough for the drawing-room." Well, now, Auntie, would you like anyone in your drawing-room with a red handkerchief round his neck and great big dusty boots, and--listen! One of the men shooting rabbits. Auntie was partial to a nice rabbit, and onion sauce. How hot it was; she wouldn't say no to a cup of tea. Well, one thing, Mr. Robert wasn't staying the night; he hadn't any luggage. Of course Mr. Mark could lend him things; he had clothes enough for six. She would have known him anywhere for Mr. Mark's brother.

She came into the house. As she passed the housekeeper's room on her way to the hall, the door opened suddenly, and a rather frightened face looked out.

"Hallo, Aud," said Elsie. "It's Audrey," she said, turning into the room.

"Come in, Audrey," called Mrs. Stevens.

"What's up?" said Audrey, looking in at the door.

"Oh, my dear, you gave me such a turn. Where have you been?"

"Up to the Temple."

"Did you hear anything?"

"Hear what?"

"Bangs and explosions and terrible things."

"Oh!" said Audrey, rather relieved. "One of the men shooting rabbits. Why, I said to myself as I came along, 'Auntie's partial to a nice rabbit,' I said, and I shouldn't be surprised if--"

"Rabbits!" said her aunt scornfully. "It was inside the house, my girl."

"Straight it was," said Elsie. She was one of the housemaids. "I said to Mrs. Stevens--didn't I, Mrs. Stevens?--'That was in the house,' I said."

Audrey looked at her aunt and then at Elsie.

"Do you think he had a revolver with him?" she said in a hushed voice.

"Who?" said Elsie excitedly.

"That brother of his. From Australia. I said as soon as I set eyes on him, 'You're a bad lot, my man!' That's what I said, Elsie. Even before he spoke to me. Rude!" She turned to her aunt. "Well, I give you my word."

"If you remember, Audrey, I always said there was no saying with anyone from Australia." Mrs. Stevens lay back in her chair, breathing rather rapidly. "I wouldn't go out of this room now, not if you paid me a hundred thousand pounds."

"Oh, Mrs. Stevens!" said Elsie, who badly wanted five shillings for a new pair of shoes, "I wouldn't go as far as that, not myself, but--"

"There!" cried Mrs. Stevens, sitting up with a start. They listened anxiously, the two girls instinctively coming closer to the older woman's chair.

A door was being shaken, kicked, rattled.

"Listen!"

Audrey and Elsie looked at each other with frightened eyes.
They heard a man's voice, loud, angry.
"Open the door!" it was shouting. "Open the door! I say, open the door!"
"Don't open the door!" cried Mrs. Stevens in a panic, as if it was her door which was threatened. "Audrey! Elsie! Don't let him in!"
"Damn it, open the door!" came the voice again.
"We're all going to be murdered in our beds," she quavered. Terrified, the two girls huddled closer, and with an arm round each, Mrs. Stevens sat there, waiting.

CHAPTER II
Mr. Gillingham Gets Out at the Wrong Station

Whether Mark Ablett was a bore or not depended on the point of view, but it may be said at once that he never bored his company on the subject of his early life. However, stories get about. There is always somebody who knows. It was understood—and this, anyhow, on Mark's own authority—that his father had been a country clergyman. It was said that, as a boy, Mark had attracted the notice, and patronage, of some rich old spinster of the neighbourhood, who had paid for his education, both at school and university. At about the time when he was coming down from Cambridge, his father had died; leaving behind him a few debts, as a warning to his family, and a reputation for short sermons, as an example to his successor. Neither warning nor example seems to have been effective. Mark went to London, with an allowance from his patron, and (it is generally agreed) made acquaintance with the money-lenders. He was supposed, by his patron and any others who inquired, to be "writing"; but what he wrote, other than letters asking for more time to pay, has never been discovered. However, he attended the theatres and music halls very regularly—no doubt with a view to some serious articles in the "Spectator" on the decadence of the English stage.

Fortunately (from Mark's point of view) his patron died during his third year in London, and left him all the money he wanted. From that moment his life loses its legendary character, and becomes more a matter of history. He settled accounts with the money-lenders, abandoned his crop of wild oats to the harvesting of others, and became in his turn a patron. He patronized the Arts. It was not only usurers who discovered that Mark Ablett no longer wrote for money; editors were now offered free contributions as well as free lunches; publishers were given agreements for an occasional slender volume, in which the author paid all expenses and waived all royalties; promising young painters and poets dined with him; and he even took a theatrical company on tour, playing host and "lead" with equal lavishness.

He was not what most people call a snob. A snob has been defined carelessly as a man who loves a lord; and, more carefully, as a mean lover of mean things—which would be a little unkind to thepeerage if the first definition were true. Mark had his vanities undoubtedly, but he would sooner have met an actor-manager than an earl; he would have spoken of his friendship with Dante—had that been possible—more glibly than of his friendship with the Duke. Call him a snob if you like, but not the worst kind of snob; a hanger-on, but to the skirts of Art, not Society; a climber, but in the neighbourhood of Parnassus, not Hay Hill.

His patronage did not stop at the Arts. It also included Matthew Cayley, a small cousin of thirteen, whose circumstances were as limited as had been Mark's own before his patron had rescued him. He sent the Cayley cousin to school and Cambridge. His motives, no doubt, were unworlly enough at first; a mere repaying to his account in the Recording Angel's book of the generosity which had been lavished on himself; a laying-up of treasure in heaven. But it is probable that, as the boy grew up, Mark's designs for his future were based on his own interests as much as those of his cousin, and that a suitably educated Matthew Cayley of twenty-three was felt by him to be a useful property for a man in his position; a man, that is to say, whose vanities left him so little time for his affairs.

Cayley, then, at twenty-three, looked after his cousin's affairs. By this time Mark had bought the Red House and the considerable amount of land which went with it. Cayley superintended the necessary staff. His duties, indeed, were many. He was not quite secretary, not quite land-agent, not quite business-adviser, not quite companion, but something of all four. Mark leant upon him and called him "Cay," objecting quite rightly in the circumstances to the name of Matthew. Cay, he felt was, above all, dependable; a big, heavy-jawed, solid fellow, who didn't bother you with unnecessary talk—a boon to a man who liked to do most of the talking himself.

Cayley was now twenty-eight, but had all the appearance of forty, which was his patron's age. Spasmodically they entertained a good deal at the Red House, and Mark's preference—call it kindliness or vanity, as you please—was for guests who were not in a position to repay his hospitality. Let us have a look at them as they came down to that breakfast, of which Stevens, the parlour-maid, has already given us a glimpse.

The first to appear was Major Rumbold, a tall, grey-haired, grey-moustached, silent man, wearing a Norfolk coat and grey flannel trousers, who lived on his retired pay and wrote natural history articles for the papers. He inspected the dishes on the side-table, decided carefully on kedgeree, and got to work on it. He had passed on to a sausage by the time of the next arrival. This was Bill Beverly, a cheerful young man in white flannel trousers and a blazer.
"Hallo, Major," he said as he came in, "how's the gout?"
"It isn't gout," said the Major gruffly.
"Well, whatever it is."
The Major grunted.
"I make a point of being polite at breakfast," said Bill, helping himself largely to porridge. "Most people are so rude. That's why I asked you. But don't tell me if it's a secret. Coffee?" he added, as he poured himself out a cup.
"No, thanks. I never drink till I've finished eating."
"Quite right, Major; it's only manners." He sat down opposite to the other. "Well, we've got a good day for our game. It's going to be dashed hot, but that's where Betty and I score. On the fifth green, your old wound, the one you got in that frontier skirmish in '43, will begin to trouble you; on the eighth, your liver, undermined by years of curry, will drop to pieces; on the twelfth--"
"Oh, shut up, you ass!"
"Well, I'm only warning you. Hallo; good morning, Miss Norris. I was just telling the Major what was going to happen to you and him this morning. Do you want any assistance, or do you prefer choosing your own breakfast?"
"Please don't get up," said Miss Norris. "I'll help myself. Good morning, Major." She smiled pleasantly at him.
The Major nodded.
"Good morning. Going to be hot."
"As I was telling him," began Bill, "that's where--Hallo, here's Betty. Morning, Cayley."
Betty Calladine and Cayley had come in together. Betty was the eighteen-year-old daughter of Mrs. John Calladine, widow of the painter, who was acting hostess on this occasion for Mark. Ruth Norris took herself seriously as an actress and, on her holidays, seriously as a golfer. She was quite competent as either. Neither the Stage Society nor Sandwich had any terrors for her.
"By the way, the car will be round at 10.30," said Cayley, looking up from his letters. "You're lunching there, and driving back directly afterwards. Isn't that right?"
"I don't see why we shouldn't have--two rounds," said Bill hopefully.
"Much too hot in the afternoon," said the Major. "Get back comfortably for tea."
Mark came in. He was generally the last. He greeted them and sat down to toast and tea. Breakfast was not his meal. The others chattered gently while he read his letters.
"Good God!" said Mark suddenly.
There was an instinctive turning of heads towards him. "I beg your pardon, Miss Norris. Sorry, Betty."
Miss Norris smiled her forgiveness. She often wanted to say it herself, particularly at rehearsals.
"I say, Cay!" He was frowning to himself--annoyed, puzzled. He held up a letter and shook it. "Who do you think this is from?"
Cayley, at the other end of the table, shrugged his shoulders. How could he possibly guess?
"Robert," said Mark.
"Robert?" It was difficult to surprise Cayley. "Well?"
"It's all very well to say 'well?' like that," said Mark peevishly. "He's coming here this afternoon."
"I thought he was in Australia, or somewhere."
"Of course. So did I." He looked across at Rumbold. "Got any brothers, Major?"
"No."
"Well, take my advice, and don't have any."
"Not likely to now," said the Major.
Bill laughed. Miss Norris said politely: "But you haven't any brothers, Mr. Ablett?"
"One," said Mark grimly. "If you're back in time you'll see him this afternoon. He'll probably ask you to lend him five pounds. Don't."
Everybody felt a little uncomfortable.
"I've got a brother," said Bill helpfully, "but I always borrow from him."
"Like Robert," said Mark.
"When was he in England last?" asked Cayley.
"About fifteen years ago, wasn't it? You'd have been a boy, of course."
"Yes, I remember seeing him once about then, but I didn't know if he had been back since."
"No. Not to my knowledge." Mark, still obviously upset, returned to his letter.
"Personally," said Bill, "I think relations are a great mistake."
"All the same," said Betty a little daringly, "it must be rather fun having a skeleton in the cupboard."
Mark looked up, frowning.
"If you think it's fun, I'll hand him over to you, Betty. If he's anything like he used to be, and like his few letters
have been—well, Cay knows."

Cayley grunted.

"All I knew was that one didn't ask questions about him."

It may have been meant as a hint to any too curious guest not to ask more questions, or a reminder to his host not to talk too freely in front of strangers, although he gave it the sound of a mere statement of fact. But the subject dropped, to be succeeded by the more fascinating one of the coming foursome. Mrs. Calladine was driving over with the players in order to lunch with an old friend who lived near the links, and Mark and Cayley were remaining at home—on affairs. Apparently "affairs" were now to include a prodigal brother. But that need not make the foursome less enjoyable.

At about the time when the Major (for whatever reasons) was fluffing his tee-shot at the sixteenth, and Mark and his cousin were at their business at the Red House, an attractive gentleman of the name of Antony Gillingham was handing up his ticket at Woodham station and asking the way to the village. Having received directions, he left his bag with the station-master and walked off leisurely. He is an important person to this story, so that it is as well we should know something about him before letting him loose in it. Let us stop him at the top of the hill on some excuse, and have a good look at him.

The first thing we realize is that he is doing more of the looking than we are. Above a clean-cut, clean-shaven face, of the type usually associated with the Navy, he carries a pair of grey eyes which seem to be absorbing every detail of our person. To strangers this look is almost alarming at first, until they discover that his mind is very often elsewhere; that he has, so to speak, left his eyes on guard, while he himself follows a train of thought in another direction. Many people do this, of course; when, for instance, they are talking to one person and trying to listen to another; but their eyes betray them. Antony's never did.

He had seen a good deal of the world with those eyes, though never as a sailor. When at the age of twenty-one he came into his mother's money, 400 pounds a year, old Gillingham looked up from the "Stockbreeders' Gazette" to ask what he was going to do.

"See the world," said Antony.

"Well, send me a line from America, or wherever you get to."

"Right," said Antony.

Old Gillingham returned to his paper. Antony was a younger son, and, on the whole, not so interesting to his father as the cadets of certain other families; Champion Birket's, for instance. But, then, Champion Birket was the best Hereford bull he had ever bred.

Antony, however, had no intention of going further away than London. His idea of seeing the world was to see, not countries, but people; and to see them from as many angles as possible. There are all sorts in London if you know how to look at them. So Antony looked at them—from various strange corners; from the view-point of the valet, the newspaper-reporter, the waiter, the shop-assistant. With the independence of 400 pounds a year behind him, he enjoyed it immensely. He never stayed long in one job, and generally closed his connection with it by telling his employer (contrary to all etiquette as understood between master and servant) exactly what he thought of him. He had no difficulty in finding a new profession. Instead of experience and testimonials he offered his personality and a sporting bet. He would take no wages the first month, and—if he satisfied his employer—double wages the second. He always got his double wages.

He was now thirty. He had come to Waldheim for a holiday, because he liked the look of the station. His ticket entitled him to travel further, but he had always intended to please himself in the matter. Waldheim attracted him, and he had a suit-case in the carriage with him and money in his pocket. Why not get out?

The landlady of 'The George' was only too glad to put him up, and promised that her husband would drive over that afternoon for his luggage.

"And you would like some lunch, I expect, sir."

"Yes, but don't give yourself any trouble about it. Cold anything-you've-got."

"What about beef, sir?" she asked, as if she had a hundred varieties of meat to select from, and was offering him her best.

"That will do splendidly. And a pint of beer."

While he was finishing his lunch, the landlord came in to ask about the luggage. Antony ordered another pint, and soon had him talking.

"It must be rather fun to keep a country inn," he said, thinking that it was about time he started another profession.

"I don't know about fun, sir. It gives us a living, and a bit over."

"You ought to take a holiday," said Antony, looking at him thoughtfully.

"Funny thing your saying that," said the landlord, with a smile. "Another gentleman, over from the Red House,
was saying that only yesterday. Offered to take my place 'n all." He laughed rumblingly.

"The Red House? Not the Red House, Stanton?"

"That's right, sir. Stanton's the next station to Waldheim. The Red House is about a mile from here--Mr. Ablett's."

Antony took a letter from his pocket. It was addressed from "The Red House, Stanton," and signed "Bill."

"Good old Bill," he murmured to himself. "He's getting on."

Antony had met Bill Beverley two years before in a tobacconist's shop. Gillingham was on one side of the counter and Mr. Beverley on the other. Something about Bill, his youth and freshness, perhaps, attracted Antony; and when cigarettes had been ordered, and an address given to which they were to be sent, he remembered that he had come across an aunt of Beverley's once at a country-house. Beverley and he met again a little later at a restaurant. Both of them were in evening-dress, but they did different things with their napkins, and Antony was the more polite of the two. However, he still liked Bill. So on one of his holidays, when he was unemployed, he arranged an introduction through a mutual friend. Beverley was a little inclined to be shocked when he was reminded of their previous meetings, but his uncomfortable feeling soon wore off, and he and Antony quickly became intimate. But Bill generally addressed him as "Dear Madman" when he happened to write.

Antony decided to stroll over to the Red House after lunch and call upon his friend. Having inspected his bedroom which was not quite the lavender-smelling country-inn bedroom of fiction, but sufficiently clean and comfortable, he set out over the fields.

As he came down the drive and approached the old red-brick front of the house, there was a lazy murmur of bees in the flower-borders, a gentle cooing of pigeons in the tops of the elms, and from distant lawns the whir of a mowing-machine, that most restful of all country sounds ....

And in the hall a man was banging at a locked door, and shouting, "Open the door, I say; open the door!"

"Hallo!" said Antony in amazement.

CHAPTER III

Two Men and a Body

Cayley looked round suddenly at the voice.

"Can I help?" said Antony politely.

"Something's happened," said Cayley. He was breathing quickly. "I heard a shot--it sounded like a shot--I was in the library. A loud bang--I didn't know what it was. And the door's locked." He rattled the handle again, and shook it. "Open the door!" he cried. "I say, Mark, what is it? Open the door!"

"But he must have locked the door on purpose," said Antony. "So why should he open it just because you ask him to?"

Cayley looked at him in a bewildered way. Then he turned to the door again. "We must break it in," he said, putting his shoulder to it. "Help me."

"Isn't there a window?"

Cayley turned to him stupidly.

"Window? Window?"

"So much easier to break in a window," said Antony with a smile. He looked very cool and collected, as he stood just inside the hall, leaning on his stick, and thinking, no doubt, that a great deal of fuss was being made about nothing. But then, he had not heard the shot.

"Window--of course! What an idiot I am."

He pushed past Antony, and began running out into the drive. Antony followed him. They ran along the front of the house, down a path to the left, and then to the left again over the grass, Cayley in front, the other close behind him. Suddenly Cayley looked over his shoulder and pulled up short.

"Here," he said.

They had come to the windows of the locked room, French windows which opened on to the lawns at the back of the house. But now they were closed. Antony couldn't help feeling a thrill of excitement as he followed Cayley's example, and put his face close up to the glass. For the first time he wondered if there really had been a revolver shot in this mysterious room. It had all seemed so absurd and melodramatic from the other side of the door. But if there had been one shot, why should there not be two more?--at the careless fools who were pressing their noses against the panes, and asking for it.

"My God, can you see it?" said Cayley in a shaking voice. "Down there. Look!"

The next moment Antony saw it. A man was lying on the floor at the far end of the room, his back towards them. A man? Or the body of a man?

"Who is it?" said Antony.

"I don't know," the other whispered.
"Well, we'd better go and see." He considered the windows for a moment. "I should think, if you put your weight into it, just where they join, they'll give all right. Otherwise, we can kick the glass in."

Without saying anything, Cayley put his weight into it. The window gave, and they went into the room. Cayley walked quickly to the body, and dropped on his knees by it. For the moment he seemed to hesitate; then with an effort he put a hand on to its shoulder and pulled it over.

"Thank God!" he murmured, and let the body go again.

"Who is it?" said Antony.

"Robert Ablett."

"Oh!" said Antony. "I thought his name was Mark," he added, more to himself than to the other.

"Yes, Mark Ablett lives here. Robert is his brother." He shuddered, and said, "I was afraid it was Mark."

"Was Mark in the room too?"

"Yes," said Cayley absently. Then, as if resenting suddenly these questions from a stranger, "Who are you?"

But Antony had gone to the locked door, and was turning the handle. "I suppose he put the key in his pocket," he said, as he came back to the body again.

"Who?"

Antony shrugged his shoulders.

"Whoever did this," he said, pointing to the man on the floor. "Is he dead?"

"Help me," said Cayley simply.

They turned the body on to its back, nerving themselves to look at it. Robert Ablett had been shot between the eyes. It was not a pleasant sight, and with his horror Antony felt a sudden pity for the man beside him, and a sudden remorse for the careless, easy way in which he had treated the affair. But then one always went about imagining that these things didn't happen--except to other people. It was difficult to believe in them just at first, when they happened to yourself.

"Did you know him well?" said Antony quietly. He meant, "Were you fond of him?"

"Hardly at all. Mark is my cousin. I mean, Mark is the brother I know best."

"Your cousin?"

"Yes." He hesitated, and then said, "Is he dead? I suppose he is. Will you--do you know anything about--about that sort of thing? Perhaps I'd better get some water."

There was another door opposite to the locked one, which led, as Antony was to discover for himself directly, into a passage from which opened two more rooms. Cayley stepped into the passage, and opened the door on the right. The door from the office, through which he had gone, remained open. The door, at the end of the short passage was shut. Antony, kneeling by the body, followed Cayley with his eyes, and, after he had disappeared, kept his eyes on the blank wall of the passage, but he was not conscious of that at which he was looking, for his mind was with the other man, sympathizing with him.

"Not that water is any use to a dead body," he said to himself, "but the feeling that you're doing something, when there's obviously nothing to be done, is a great comfort."

Cayley came into the room again. He had a sponge in one hand, a handkerchief in the other. He looked at Antony. Antony nodded. Cayley murmured something, and knelt down to bathe the dead man's face. Then he placed the handkerchief over it. A little sigh escaped Antony, a sigh of relief.

They stood up and looked at each other.

"If I can be of any help to you," said Antony, "please let me."

"That's very kind of you. There will be things to do. Police, doctors--I don't know. But you mustn't let me trespass on your kindness. Indeed, I should apologise for having trespassed so much already."

"I came to see Beverley. He is an old friend of mine."

"He's out playing golf. He will be back directly," Then, as if he had only just realized it, "They will all be back directly."

"I will stay if I can be of any help."

"Please do. You see, there are women. It will be rather painful. If you would--" He hesitated, and gave Antony a timid little smile, pathetic in so big and self-reliant a man. "Just your moral support, you know. It would be something."

"Of course." Antony smiled back at him, and said cheerfully, "Well, then, I'll begin by suggesting that you should ring up the police."

"The police? Y-yes." He looked doubtfully at the other. "I suppose--"

Antony spoke frankly.

"Now, look here, Mr.--er--"

"Cayley. I'm Mark Ablett's cousin. I live with him."
"My name's Gillingham. I'm sorry, I ought to have told you before. Well now, Mr. Cayley, we shan't do any good by pretending. Here's a man been shot--well, somebody shot him."

"He might have shot himself," mumbled Cayley.

"Yes, he might have, but he didn't. Or if he did, somebody was in the room at the time, and that somebody isn't here now. And that somebody took a revolver away with him. Well, the police will want to say a word about that, won't they?"

Cayley was silent, looking on the ground.

"Oh, I know what you're thinking, and believe me I do sympathize with you, but we can't be children about it. If your cousin Mark Ablett was in the room with this"--he indicated the body--"this man, then--"

"Who said he was?" said Cayley, jerking his head up suddenly at Antony.

"You did."

"I was in the library. Mark went in--he may have come out again --I know nothing. Somebody else may have gone in--"

"Yes, yes," said Antony patiently, as if to a little child. "You know your cousin; I don't. Let's agree that he had nothing to do with it. But somebody was in the room when this man was shot, and--well, the police will have to know. Don't you think--" He looked at the telephone. "Or would you rather I did it?"

Cayley shrugged his shoulders and went to the telephone.

"May I--er--look round a bit?" Antony nodded towards the open door.

"Oh, do. Yes." He sat down and drew the telephone towards him. "You must make allowances for me, Mr. Gillingham. You see, I've known Mark for a very long time. But, of course, you're quite right, and I'm merely being stupid." He took off the receiver.

Let us suppose, for the purpose of making a first acquaintance with this "office," we are coming into it from the hall, through the door which is now locked, but which, for our special convenience, has been magically unlocked for us. As we stand just inside the door, the length of the room runs right and left; or, more accurately, to the right only, for the left-hand wall is almost within our reach. Immediately opposite to us, across the breadth of the room (some fifteen feet), is that other door, by which Cayley went out and returned a few minutes ago. In the right-hand wall, thirty feet away from us, are the French windows. Crossing the room and going out by the opposite door, we come into a passage, from which two rooms lead. The one on the right, into which Cayley went, is less than half the length of the office, a small, square room, which has evidently been used some time or other as a bedroom. The bed is no longer there, but there is a basin, with hot and cold taps, in a corner; chairs; a cupboard or two, and a chest of drawers. The window faces the same way as the French windows in the next room; but anybody looking out of the bedroom window has his view on the immediate right shut off by the outer wall of the office, which projects, by reason of its greater length, fifteen feet further into the lawn.

The room on the other side of the bedroom is a bathroom. The three rooms together, in fact, form a sort of private suite; used, perhaps, during the occupation of the previous owner, by some invalid, who could not manage the stairs, but allowed by Mark to fall into disuse, save for the living-room. At any rate, he never slept downstairs.

Antony glanced at the bathroom, and then wandered into the bedroom, the room into which Cayley had been. The window was open, and he looked out at the well-kept grass beneath him, and the peaceful stretch of park beyond; and he felt very sorry for the owner of it all, who was now mixed up in so grim a business.

"Cayley thinks he did it," said Antony to himself. "That's obvious. It explains why he wasted so much time banging on the door. Why should he try to break a lock when it's so much easier to break a window? Of course he might just have lost his head; on the other hand, he might--well, he might have wanted to give his cousin a chance of getting away. The same about the police, and--oh, lots of things. Why, for instance, did we run all the way round the house in order to get to the windows? Surely there's a back way out through the hall. I must have a look later on."

Antony, it will be observed, had by no means lost his head.

There was a step in the passage outside, and he turned round, to see Cayley in the doorway. He remained looking at him for a moment, asking himself a question. It was rather a curious question. He was asking himself why the door was open.

Well, not exactly why the door was open; that could be explained easily enough. But why had he expected the door to be shut? He did not remember shutting it, but somehow he was surprised to see it open now, to see Cayley through the doorway, just coming into the room. Something working sub-consciously in his brain had told him that it was surprising. Why?

He tucked the matter away in a corner of his mind for the moment; the answer would come to him later on. He had a wonderfully retentive mind. Everything which he saw or heard seemed to make its corresponding impression somewhere in his brain; often without his being conscious of it; and these photographic impressions were always there ready for him when he wished to develop them.
Cayley joined him at the window. "I've telephoned," he said. "They're sending an inspector or some one from Middleton, and the local police and doctor from Stanton." He shrugged his shoulders. "We're in for it now."

"How far away is Middleton?" It was the town for which Antony had taken a ticket that morning--only six hours ago. How absurd it seemed.

"About twenty miles. These people will be coming back soon."

"Beverley, and the others?"

"Yes. I expect they'll want to go away at once."

"Much better that they should."

"Yes." Cayley was silent for a little. Then he said, "You're staying near here?"

"I'm at 'The George,' at Waldheim."

"If you're by yourself, I wish you'd put up here. You see," he went on awkwardly, "you'll have to be here--for the--the inquest and--and so on. If I may offer you my cousin's hospitality in his--I mean if he doesn't--if he really has--"

Antony broke in hastily with his thanks and acceptance.

"That's good. Perhaps Beverley will stay on, if he's a friend of yours. He's a good fellow."

Antony felt quite sure, from what Cayley had said and had hesitated to say, that Mark had been the last to see his brother alive. It didn't follow that Mark Ablett was a murderer. Revolvers go off accidentally; and when they have gone off, people lose their heads and run away, fearing that their story will not be believed. Nevertheless, when people run away, whether innocently or guiltily, one can't help wondering which way they went.

"I suppose this way," said Antony aloud, looking out of the window.

"Who?" said Cayley stubbornly.

"Well, whoever it was," said Antony, smiling to himself. "The murderer. Or, let us say, the man who locked the door after Robert Ablett was killed."

"I wonder."

"Well, how else could he have got away? He didn't go by the windows in the next room, because they were shut."

"Isn't that rather odd?"

"Well, I thought so at first, but--" He pointed to the wall jutting out on the right. "You see, you're protected from the rest of the house if you get out here, and you're quite close to the shrubbery. If you go out at the French windows, I imagine you're much more visible. All that part of the house--" he waved his right hand--"the west, well, north-west almost, where the kitchen parts are--you see, you're hidden from them here. Oh, yes! he knew the house, whoever it was, and he was quite right to come out of this window. He'd be into the shrubbery at once."

Cayley looked at him thoughtfully.

"It seems to me, Mr. Gillingham, that you know the house pretty well, considering that this is the first time you've been to it."

Antony laughed. "Oh, well, I notice things, you know. I was born noticing. But I'm right, aren't I, about why he went out this way?"

"Yes, I think you are." Cayley looked away--towards the shrubbery. "Do you want to go noticing in there now?"

He nodded at it.

"I think we might leave that to the police," said Antony gently. "It's--well, there's no hurry."

Cayley gave a little sigh, as if he had been holding his breath for the answer, and could now breathe again.

"Thank you, Mr. Gillingham," he said.

CHAPTER IV

The Brother from Australia

Guests at the Red House were allowed to do what they liked within reason--the reasonableness or otherwise of it being decided by Mark. But when once they (or Mark) had made up their minds as to what they wanted to do, the plan had to be kept. Mrs. Calladine, who knew this little weakness of their host's, resisted, therefore, the suggestion of Bill that they should have a second round in the afternoon, and drive home comfortably after tea. The other golfers were willing enough, but Mrs. Calladine, without actually saying that Mr. Ablett wouldn't like it, was firm on the point that, having arranged to be back by four, they should be back by four.

"I really don't think Mark wants us, you know," said the Major. Having played badly in the morning, he wanted to prove to himself in the afternoon that he was really better than that. "With this brother of his coming, he'll be only too glad to have us out of the way."

"Of course he will, Major." This from Bill. "You'd like to play, wouldn't you, Miss Norris?"
Miss Norris looked doubtfully at the hostess.

"Of course, if you want to get back, dear, we mustn't keep you here. Besides, it's so dull for you, not playing."

"Just nine holes, mother," pleaded Betty.

"The car could take you back, and you could tell them that we were having another round, and then it could come back for us," said Bill brilliantly.

"It's certainly much cooler here than I expected," put in the Major.

Mrs. Calladine fell. It was very pleasantly cool outside the golf-house, and of course Mark would be rather glad to have them out of the way. So she consented to nine holes; and the match having ended all-square, and everybody having played much better than in the morning, they drove back to the Red House, very well pleased with themselves.

"Halo," said Bill to himself, as they approached the house, "isn't that old Tony?"

Antony was standing in front of the house, waiting for them. Bill waved, and he waved back. Then as the car drew up, Bill, who was in front with the chauffeur, jumped down and greeted him eagerly.

"Hallo, you madman, have you come to stay, or what?" He had a sudden idea. "Don't say you're Mark Ablett's long-lost brother from Australia, though I could quite believe it of you." He laughed boyishly.

"Hallo, Bill," said Antony quietly. "Will you introduce me? I'm afraid I've got some bad news."

Bill, rather sobered by this, introduced him. The Major and Mrs. Calladine were on the near side of the car, and Antony spoke to them in a low voice.

"I'm afraid I'm going to give you rather a shock," he said. "Robert Ablett, Mr. Mark Ablett's brother, has been killed." He jerked a thumb over his shoulder. "In the house."

"Good God!" said the Major.

"Do you mean that he has killed himself?" asked Mrs. Calladine. "Just now?"

"It was about two hours ago. I happened to come here,"--he half-turned to Beverley and explained--"I was coming to see you, Bill, and I arrived just after the--the death. Mr. Cayley and I found the body. Mr. Cayley being busy just now--there are police and doctors and so on in the house--he asked me to tell you. He says that no doubt you would prefer, the house-party having been broken up in this tragic way, to leave as soon as possible. He gave a pleasant apologetic little smile and went on, "I am putting it badly, but what he means, of course, is that you must consult your own feelings in the matter entirely, and please make your own arrangements about ordering the car for whatever train you wish to catch. There is one this evening, I understand, which you could go by if you wished it."

Bill gazed with open mouth at Antony. He had no words in his vocabulary to express what he wanted to say, other than those the Major had already used. Betty was leaning across to Miss Norris and saying, "Who's killed?" in an awe-struck voice, and Miss Norris, who was instinctively looking as tragic as she looked on the stage when a messenger announced the death of one of the cast, stopped for a moment in order to explain. Mrs. Calladine was quietly mistress of herself.

"We shall be in the way, yes, I quite understand," she said; "but we can't just shake the dust of the place off our shoes because something terrible has happened there. I must see Mark, and we can arrange later what to do. He must know how very deeply we feel for him. Perhaps we--" she hesitated.

"The Major and I might be useful anyway," said Bill. "Isn't that what you mean, Mrs. Calladine?"

"Where is Mark?" said the Major suddenly, looking hard at Antony.

Antony looked back unwaveringly--and said nothing.

"I think," said the Major gently, leaning over to Mrs. Calladine, "that it would be better if you took Betty back to London to-night."

"Very well," she agreed quietly. "You will come with us, Ruth?"

"I'll see you safely there," said Bill in a meek voice. He didn't quite know what was happening, and, having expected to stay at the Red House for another week, he had nowhere to go to in London, but London seemed to be the place that everyone was going to, and when he could get Tony alone for a moment, Tony no doubt would explain.

"Cayley wants you to stay, Bill. You have to go anyhow, to-morrow, Major Rumbold?"

"Yes. I'll come with you, Mrs. Calladine."

"Mr. Cayley would wish me to say again that you will please not hesitate to give your own orders, both as regard the car and as regard any telephoning or telegraphing that you want done." He smiled again and added, "Please forgive me if I seem to have taken a good deal upon myself, but I just happened to be handy as a mouthpiece for Cayley." He bowed to them and went into the house.

"Well!" said Miss Norris dramatically.

As Antony re-entered the hall, the Inspector from Middleton was just crossing into the library with Cayley. The latter stopped and nodded to Antony.
"Wait a moment, Inspector. Here's Mr. Gillingham. He'd better come with us." And then to Antony, "This is Inspector Birch."

Birch looked inquiringly from one to the other.
"Mr. Gillingham and I found the body together," explained Cayley.
"Oh! Well, come along, and let's get the facts sorted out a bit. I like to know where I am, Mr. Gillingham."
"We all do."
"Oh!" He looked at Antony with interest. "D'you know where you are in this case?"
"I know where I'm going to be."
"Where's that?"
"Put through it by Inspector Birch," said Antony with a smile.

The inspector laughed genially.
"Well, I'll spare you as much as I can. Come along."

They went into the library. The inspector seated himself at a writing-table, and Cayley sat in a chair by the side of it. Antony made himself comfortable in an armchair and prepared to be interested.

"We'll start with the dead man," said the Inspector. "Robert Ablett, didn't you say?" He took out his notebook.
"Yes. Brother of Mark Ablett, who lives here."
"Ah!" He began to sharpen a pencil. "Staying in the house?"
"Oh, no!"

Antony listened attentively while Cayley explained all that he knew about Robert. This was news to him. "I see. Sent out of the country in disgrace. What had he done?"
"I hardly know. I was only about twelve at the time. The sort of age when you're told not to ask questions."
"Inconvenient questions?"
"Exactly."
"So you don't really know whether he had been merely wild or--or wicked?"
"No. Old Mr. Ablett was a clergyman," added Cayley. "Perhaps what might seem wicked to a clergyman might seem only wild to a man of the world."
"I daresay, Mr. Cayley," smiled the Inspector. "Anyhow, it was more convenient to have him in Australia?"
"Yes."
"Mark Ablett never talked about him?"
"Hardly ever. He was very much ashamed of him, and--well, very glad he was in Australia."
"Did he write Mark sometimes?"
"Occasionally. Perhaps three or four times in the last five years."
"Asking for money?"
"Something of the sort. I don't think Mark always answered them. As far as I know, he never sent any money."
"Now your own private opinion, Mr. Cayley. Do you think that Mark was unfair to his brother? Unduly hard on him?"

"They'd never liked each other as boys. There was never any affection between them. I don't know whose fault it was in the first place--if anybody's."
"Still, Mark might have given him a hand?"
"I understand," said Cayley, "that Robert spent his whole life asking for hands."

The inspector nodded.
"I know that sort. Well, now, we'll go on to this morning. This letter that Mark got--did you see it?"
"Not at the time. He showed it to me afterwards."
"Any address?"
"No. A half-sheet of rather dirty paper."
"Where is it now?"
"I don't know. In Mark's pocket, I expect."
"Ah!" He pulled at his beard. "Well, we'll come to that. Can you remember what it said?"

"As far as I remember, something like this: 'Mark, your loving brother is coming to see you to-morrow, all the way from Australia. I give you warning so that you will be able to conceal your surprise, but not I hope, your pleasure. Expect him at three, or thereabouts.'"
"Ah!" The inspector copied it down carefully. "Did you notice the postmark?"
"London."
"And what was Mark's attitude?"
"Annoyance, disgust--" Cayley hesitated.
"Apprehension?"
“N-no, not exactly. Or, rather, apprehension of an unpleasant interview, not of any unpleasant outcome for himself.”

"You mean that he wasn't afraid of violence, or blackmail, or anything of that sort?"

"He didn't appear to be."

"Right . . . . Now then, he arrived, you say, about three o'clock?"

"Yes, about that."

"Who was in the house then?"

"Mark and myself, and some of the servants. I don't know which. Of course, you will ask them directly, no doubt."

"With your permission. No guests?"

"They were out all day playing golf," explained Cayley. "Oh, by the way," he put in, "if I may interrupt a moment, will you want to see them at all? It isn't very pleasant for them now, naturally, and I suggested--" he turned to Antony, who nodded back to him. "I understand that they want to go back to London this evening. There's no objection to that, I suppose?"

"You will let me have their names and addresses in case I want to communicate with them?"

"Of course. One of them is staying on, if you would like to see him later, but they only came back from their golf as we crossed the hall."

"That's all right, Mr. Cayley. Well, now then, let's go back to three o'clock. Where were you when Robert arrived?"

Cayley explained how he had been sitting in the hall, how Audrey had asked him where the master was, and how he had said that he had last seen him going up to the Temple.

"She went away, and I went on with my book. There was a step on the stairs, and I looked up to see Mark coming down. He went into the office, and I went on with my book again. I went into the library for a moment, to refer to another book, and when I was in there I heard a shot. At least, it was a loud bang, I wasn't sure if it was a shot. I stood and listened. Then I came slowly to the door and looked out. Then I went back again, hesitated a bit, you know, and finally decided to go across to the office, and make sure that it was all right. I turned the handle of the door and found it was locked. Then I got frightened, and I banged at the door, and shouted, and--well, that was when Mr. Gillingham arrived." He went on to explain how they had found the body.

The inspector looked at him with a smile.

"Yes, well, we shall have to go over some of that again, Mr. Cayley. Mr. Mark, now. You thought he was in the Temple. Could he have come in, and gone up to his room, without your seeing him?"

"There are back stairs. He wouldn't have used them in the ordinary way, of course. But I wasn't in the hall all the afternoon. He might easily have gone upstairs without my knowing anything about it."

"So that you weren't surprised when you saw him coming down?"

"Oh, not a bit."

"Well, did he say anything?"

"He said, 'Robert's here?' or something of the sort. I suppose he'd heard the bell, or the voices in the hall."

"Which way does his bedroom face? Could he have seen him coming down the drive?"

"He might have, yes."

"Well?"

"Well, then, I said 'Yes,' and he gave a sort of shrug, and said, 'Don't go too far away, I might want you'; and then went in."

"What did you think he meant by that?"

"Well, he consults me a good deal, you know. I'm his sort of unofficial solicitor in a kind of way."

"This is a business meeting rather than a brotherly one?"

"Oh, yes. That's how he regarded it, I'm sure."

"Yes. How long was it before you heard the shot?"

"Very soon. Two minutes, perhaps."

The inspector finished his writing, and then regarded Cayley thoughtfully. Suddenly he said:

"What is your theory of Robert's death?"

Cayley shrugged his shoulders.

"You've probably seen more than I've seen," he answered. "It's your job. I can only speak as a layman--and Mark's friend."

"Well?"

"Then I should say that Robert came here meaning trouble, and bringing a revolver with him. He produced it almost at once, Mark tried to get it from him, there was a little struggle perhaps, and it went off. Mark lost his head,
finding himself there with a revolver in his hand and a dead man at his feet. His one idea was to escape. He locked the door almost instinctively, and then, when he heard me hammering at it, went out of the window."

"Y-yes. Well, that sounds reasonable enough. What do you say, Mr. Gillingham?"

"I should hardly call it 'reasonable' to lose your head," said Antony, getting up from his chair and coming towards them.

"Well, you know what I mean. It explains things."

"Oh, yes. Any other explanation would make them much more complicated."

"Have you any other explanation?"

"Not I."

"Are there any points on which you would like to correct Mr. Cayley?--anything that he left out after you arrived here?"

"No, thanks. He described it all very accurately."

"Ah! Well now, about yourself. You're not staying in the house, I gather?"

Antony explained his previous movements.

"Yes. Did you hear the shot?"

Antony put his head on one side, as if listening. "Yes. Just as I came in sight of the house. It didn't make any impression at the time, but I remember it now."

"Where were you then?"

"Coming up the drive. I was just in sight of the house."

"Nobody left the house by the front door after the shot?"

Antony closed his eyes and considered.

"Nobody," he said. "No."

"You're certain of that?"

"Absolutely," said Antony, as though rather surprised that he could be suspected of a mistake.

"Thank you. You're at 'The George,' if I want you?"

"Mr. Gillingham is staying here until after the inquest," explained Cayley.

"Good. Well now, about these servants?"

CHAPTER V

Mr. Gillingham Chooses a New Profession

As Cayley went over to the bell, Antony got up and moved to the door.

"Well, you won't want me, I suppose, inspector," he said.

"No, thank you, Mr. Gillingham. You'll be about, of course?"

"Oh, yes."

The inspector hesitated.

"I think, Mr. Cayley, it would be better if I saw the servants alone. You know what they are; the more people about, the more they get alarmed. I expect I can get at the truth better by myself."

"Oh, quite so. In fact, I was going to ask you to excuse me. I feel rather responsible towards these guests of ours. Although Mr. Gillingham very kindly--" He smiled at Antony, who was waiting at the door, and left his sentence unfinished.

"Ah, that reminds me," said the Inspector. "Didn't you say that one of your guests--Mr. Beverley was it?--a friend of Mr. Gillingham's, was staying on?"

"Yes; would you like to see him?"

"Afterwards, if I may."

"I'll warn him. I shall be up in my room, if you want me. I have a room upstairs where I work--any of the servants will show you. Ah, Stevens, Inspector Birch would like to ask you a few questions."

"Yes, sir," said Audrey primly, but inwardly fluttering. The housekeeper's room had heard something of the news by this time, and Audrey had had a busy time explaining to other members of the staff exactly what he had said, and what she had said. The details were not quite established yet, but this much at least was certain: that Mr. Mark's brother had shot himself and spirited Mr. Mark away, and that Audrey had seen at once that he was that sort of man when she opened the door to him. She had passed the remark to Mrs. Stevens. And Mrs. Stevens--if you remember, Audrey--had always said that people didn't go away to Australia except for very good reasons. Elsie agreed with both of them, but she had a contribution of her own to make. She had actually heard Mr. Mark in the office, threatening his brother.

"You mean Mr. Robert," said the second parlour-maid. She had been having a little nap in her room, but she had heard the bang. In fact, it had woken her up--just like something going off, it was.

"It was Mr. Mark's voice," said Elsie firmly.
"Pleading for mercy," said an eager-eyed kitchen-maid hopefully from the door, and was hurried out again by the others, wishing that she had not given her presence away. But it was hard to listen in silence when she knew so well from her novelettes just what happened on these occasions.

"I shall have to give that girl a piece of my mind," said Mrs. Stevens. "Well, Elsie?"

"He said, I heard him say it with my own ears, 'It's my turn now,' he said, triumphant-like."

"Well, if you think that's a threat, dear, you're very particular, I must say."

But Audrey remembered Elsie's words when she was in front of Inspector Birch. She gave her own evidence with the readiness of one who had already repeated it several times, and was examined and cross-examined by the Inspector with considerable skill. The temptation to say, "Never mind about what you said to him," was strong, but he resisted it, knowing that in this way he would discover best what he said to her. By this time both his words and the looks he gave her were getting their full value from Audrey, but the general meaning of them seemed to be well-established.

"Then you didn't see Mr. Mark at all."

"No, sir; he must have come in before and gone up to his room. Or come in by the front door, likely enough, while I was going out by the back."

"Yes. Well, I think that's all that I want to know, thank you very much. Now what about the other servants?"

"Elsie heard the master and Mr. Robert talking together," said Audrey eagerly. "He was saying--Mr. Mark, I mean--"

"Ah! Well, I think Elsie had better tell me that herself. Who is Elsie, by the way?"

"One of the housemaids. Shall I send her to you, sir?"

"Please."

Elsie was not sorry to get the message. It interrupted a few remarks from Mrs. Stevens about Elsie's conduct that afternoon which were (Elsie thought) much better interrupted. In Mrs. Stevens' opinion any crime committed that afternoon in the office was as nothing to the double crime committed by the unhappy Elsie.

For Elsie realized too late that she would have done better to have said nothing about her presence in the hall that afternoon. She was bad at concealing the truth and Mrs. Stevens was good at discovering it. Elsie knew perfectly well that she had no business to come down the front stairs, and it was no excuse to say that she happened to come out of Miss Norris' room just at the head of the stairs, and didn't think it would matter, as there was nobody in the hall, and what was she doing anyhow in Miss Norris' room at that time? Returning a magazine? Lent by Miss Norris, might she ask? Well, not exactly lent. Really, Elsie!--and this in a respectable house! In vain for poor Elsie to plead that a story by her favourite author was advertised on the cover, with a picture of the villain falling over the cliff.

"That's where you'll go to, my girl, if you aren't careful," said Mrs. Stevens firmly.

But, of course, there was no need to confess all these crimes to Inspector Birch. All that interested him was that she was passing through the hall, and heard voices in the office.

"And stopped to listen?"

"Certainly not," said Elsie with dignity, feeling that nobody really understood her. "I was just passing through the hall, just as you might have been yourself, and not supposing they was talking secrets, didn't think to stop my ears, as no doubt I ought to have done." And she sniffed slightly.

"Come, come," said the Inspector soothingly, "I didn't mean to suggest--"

"Everyone is very unkind to me," said Elsie between sniffs, "and there's that poor man lying dead there, and sorry they'd have been, if it had been me, to have spoken to me as they have done this day."

"Nonsense, we're going to be very proud of you. I shouldn't be surprised if your evidence were of very great importance. Now then, what was it you heard? Try to remember the exact words."

Something about working in a passage, thought Elsie.

"Yes, but who said it?"

"Mr. Robert."

"How do you know it was Mr. Robert? Had you heard his voice before?"

"I don't take it upon myself to say that I had had any acquaintance with Mr. Robert, but seeing that it wasn't Mr. Mark, nor yet Mr. Cayley, nor any other of the gentlemen, and Miss Stevens had shown Mr. Robert into the office not five minutes before--"

"Quite so," said the Inspector hurriedly. "Mr. Robert, undoubtedly. Working in a passage?"

"That was what it sounded like, sir."

"H'm. Working a passage over--could that have been it?"

"That's right, sir," said Elsie eagerly. "He'd worked his passage over."

"Well?"

"And then Mr. Mark said loudly--sort of triumphant-like--'It's my turn now. You wait.'"
"Triumphantly?"
"As much as to say his chance had come."
"And that's all you heard?"
"That's all, sir--not standing there listening, but just passing through the hall, as it might be any time."
"Yes. Well, that's really very important, Elsie. Thank you."

Elsie gave him a smile, and returned eagerly to the kitchen. She was ready for Mrs. Stevens or anybody now.

Meanwhile Antony had been exploring a little on his own. There was a point which was puzzling him. He went through the hall to the front of the house and stood at the open door, looking out on to the drive. He and Cayley had run round the house to the left. Surely it would have been quicker to have run round to the right? The front door was not in the middle of the house, it was to the end. Undoubtedly they went the longest way round. But perhaps there was something in the way, if one went to the right--a wall, say. He strolled off in that direction, followed a path round the house and came in sight of the office windows. Quite simple, and about half the distance of the other way. He went on a little farther, and came to a door, just beyond the broken-in windows. It opened easily, and he found himself in a passage. At the end of the passage was another door. He opened it and found himself in the hall again.

"And, of course, that's the quickest way of the three," he said to himself. "Through the hall, and out at the back; turn to the left and there you are. Instead of which, we ran the longest way round the house. Why? Was it to give Mark more time in which to escape? Only, in that case--why run? Also, how did Cayley know then that it was Mark who was trying to escape? If he had guessed--well, not guessed, but been afraid--that one had shot the other, it was much more likely that Robert had shot Mark. Indeed, he had admitted that this was what he thought. The first thing he had said when he turned the body over was, 'Thank God! I was afraid it was Mark.' But why should he want to give Robert time in which to get away? And again--why run, if he did want to give him time?"

Antony went out of the house again to the lawns at the back, and sat down on a bench in view of the office windows.

"Now then," he said, "let's go through Cayley's mind carefully, and see what we get."

Cayley had been in the hall when Robert was shown into the office. The servant goes off to look for Mark, and Cayley goes on with his book. Mark comes down the stairs, warns Cayley to stand by in case he is wanted, and goes to meet his brother. What does Cayley expect? Possibly that he won't be wanted at all; possibly that his advice may be wanted in the matter, say, of paying Robert's debts, or getting him a passage back to Australia; possibly that his physical assistance may be wanted to get an obstreperous Robert out of the house. Well, he sits there for a moment, and then goes into the library. Why not? He is still within reach, if wanted. Suddenly he hears a pistol-shot. A pistol-shot is the last noise you expect to hear in a country-house; very natural, then, that for the moment he would hardly realize what it was. He listens--and hears nothing more. Perhaps it wasn't a pistol-shot after all. After a moment or two he goes to the library door again. The profound silence makes him uneasy now. Was it a pistol-shot? Absurd! Still--no harm in going into the office on some excuse, just to reassure himself. So he tries the door--and finds it locked!

What are his emotions now? Alarm, uncertainty. Something is happening. Incredible though it seems, it must have been a pistol-shot. He is banging at the door and calling out to Mark, and there is no answer. Alarm--yes. But alarm for whose safety? Mark's, obviously. Robert is a stranger; Mark is an intimate friend. Robert has written a letter that morning, the letter of a man in a dangerous temper. Robert is the tough customer; Mark the highly civilized gentleman. If there has been a quarrel, it is Robert who has shot Mark. He bangs at the door again.

Of course, to Antony, coming suddenly upon this scene, Cayley's conduct had seemed rather absurd, but then, just for the moment, Cayley had lost his head. Anybody else might have done the same. But, as soon as Antony suggested trying the windows, Cayley saw that that was the obvious thing to do. So he leads the way to the windows--the longest way.

Why? To give the murderer time to escape? If he had thought then that Mark was the murderer, perhaps, yes. But he thinks that Robert is the murderer. If he is not hiding anything, he must think so. Indeed he says so, when he sees the body; "I was afraid it was Mark," he says, when he finds that it is Robert who is killed. No reason, then, for wishing to gain time. On the contrary, every instinct would urge him to get into the room as quickly as possible, and seize the wicked Robert. Yet he goes the longest way round. Why? And then, why run?

"That's the question," said Antony to himself, as he filled his pipe, "and bless me if I know the answer. It may be, of course, that Cayley is just a coward. He was in no hurry to get close to Robert's revolver, and yet wanted me to think that he was bursting with eagerness. That would explain it, but then that makes Cayley out a coward. Is he? At any rate he pushed his face up against the window bravely enough. No, I want a better answer than that."

He sat there with his unlit pipe in his hand, thinking. There were one or two other things in the back of his brain, waiting to be taken out and looked at. For the moment he left them undisturbed. They would come back to him later when he wanted them.
He laughed suddenly, and lit his pipe.

"I was wanting a new profession," he thought, "and now I've found it. Antony Gillingham, our own private sleuthhound. I shall begin to-day."

Whatever Antony Gillingham's other qualifications for his new profession, he had at any rate a brain which worked clearly and quickly. And this clear brain of his had already told him that he was the only person in the house at that moment who was unhindered in the search for truth. The inspector had arrived in it to find a man dead and a man missing. It was extremely probable, no doubt, that the missing man had shot the dead man. But it was more than extremely probable, it was almost certain that the Inspector would start with the idea that this extremely probable solution was the one true solution, and that, in consequence, he would be less disposed to consider without prejudice any other solution. As regards all the rest of them --Cayley, the guests, the servants--they also were prejudiced; in favour of Mark (or possibly, for all he knew, against Mark); in favour of, or against, each other; they had formed some previous opinion, from what had been said that morning, of the sort of man Robert was. No one of them could consider the matter with an unbiased mind.

But Antony could. He knew nothing about Mark; he knew nothing about Robert. He had seen the dead man before he was told who the dead man was. He knew that a tragedy had happened before he knew that anybody was missing. Those first impressions, which are so vitally important, had been received solely on the merits of the case; they were founded on the evidence of his senses, not on the evidence of his emotions or of other people's senses. He was in a much better position for getting at the truth than was the Inspector.

It is possible that, in thinking this, Antony was doing Inspector Birch a slight injustice. Birch was certainly prepared to believe that Mark had shot his brother. Robert had been shown into the office (witness Audrey); Mark had gone in to Robert (witness Cayley); Mark and Robert had been heard talking (witness Elsie); there was a shot (witness everybody); the room had been entered and Robert's body had been found (witness Cayley and Gillingham). And Mark was missing. Obviously, then, Mark had killed his brother: accidentally, as Cayley believed, or deliberately, as Elsie's evidence seemed to suggest. There was no point in looking for a difficult solution to a problem, when the easy solution had no flaw in it. But at the same time Birch would have preferred the difficult solution, simply because there was more credit attached to it. A "sensational" arrest of somebody in the house would have given him more pleasure than a commonplace pursuit of Mark Ablett across country. Mark must be found, guilty or not guilty. But there were other possibilities. It would have interested Antony to know that, just at the time when he was feeling rather superior to the prejudiced inspector, the Inspector himself was letting his mind dwell lovingly upon the possibilities in connection with Mr. Gillingham. Was it only a coincidence that Mr. Gillingham had turned up just when he did? And Mr. Beverley's curious answers when asked for some account of his friend. An assistant in a tobacconist's, a waiter! An odd man, Mr. Gillingham, evidently. It might be as well to keep an eye on him.

CHAPTER VI
Outside Or Inside?

The guests had said good-bye to Cayley, according to their different manner. The Major, gruff and simple: "If you want me, command me. Anything I can do--Good-bye"; Betty, silently sympathetic, with everything in her large eyes which she was too much overawed to tell; Mrs. Calladine, protesting that she did not know what to say, but apparently finding plenty; and Miss Norris, crowding so much into one despairing gesture that Cayley's unvarying "Thank you very much" might have been taken this time as gratitude for an artistic entertainment.

Bill had seen them into the car, had taken his own farewells (with a special squeeze of the hand for Betty), and had wandered out to join Antony on his garden seat.

"Well, this is a rum show," said Bill as he sat down.

"Very rum, William."

"And you actually walked right into it?"

"Right into it," said Antony.

"Then you're the man I want. There are all sorts of rumours and mysteries about, and that inspector fellow simply wouldn't keep to the point when I wanted to ask him about the murder, or whatever it is, but kept asking me questions about where I'd met you first, and all sorts of dull things like that. Now, what really happened?"

Antony told him as concisely as he could all that he had already told the Inspector, Bill interrupting him here and there with appropriate "Good Lords" and whistles.

"I say, it's a bit of a business, isn't it? Where do I come in, exactly?"

"How do you mean?"

"Well, everybody else is bundled off except me, and I get put through it by that inspector as if I knew all about it--what's the idea?"

Antony smiled at him.
"Well, there's nothing to worry about, you know. Naturally Birch wanted to see one of you so as to know what you'd all been doing all day. And Cayley was nice enough to think that you'd be company for me, as I knew you already. And well, that's all."

"You're staying here, in the house?" said Bill eagerly. "Good man. That's splendid."

"It reconciles you to the departure of some of the others?"

Bill blushed.

"Oh, well, I shall see her again next week, anyway," he murmured.

"I congratulate you. I liked her looks. And that grey dress. A nice comfortable sort of woman."

"You fool, that's her mother."

"Oh, I beg your pardon. But anyhow, Bill, I want you more than she does just now. So try and put up with me."

"I say, do you really?" said Bill, rather flattered. He had a great admiration for Antony, and was very proud to be liked by him.

"Yes. You see, things are going to happen here soon."

"Inquests and that sort of thing?"

"Well, perhaps something before that. Hallo, here comes Cayley."

Cayley was walking across the lawn towards them, a big, heavy-shouldered man, with one of those strong, clean-shaven, ugly faces which can never quite be called plain. "Bad luck on Cayley," said Bill. "I say, ought I to tell him how sorry I am and all that sort of thing? It seems so dashed inadequate."

"I shouldn't bother," said Antony.

Cayley nodded as he came to them, and stood there for a moment.

"We can make room for you," said Bill, getting up.

"Oh, don't bother, thanks. I just came to say," he went on to Antony, "that naturally they've rather lost their heads in the kitchen, and dinner won't be till half-past eight. Do just as you like about dressing, of course. And what about your luggage?"

"I thought Bill and I would walk over to the inn directly, and see about it."

"The car can go and fetch it as soon as it comes back from the station."

"It's very good of you, but I shall have to go over myself, anyhow, to pack up and pay my bill. Besides, it's a good evening for a walk. If you wouldn't mind it, Bill?"

"I should love it."

"Well, then, if you leave the bag there, I'll send the car round for it later."

"Thanks very much."

Having said what he wanted to say, Cayley remained there a little awkwardly, as if not sure whether to go or to stay. Antony wondered whether he wanted to talk about the afternoon's happenings, or whether it was the one subject he wished to avoid. To break the silence he asked carelessly if the Inspector had gone.

Cayley nodded. Then he said abruptly, "He's getting a warrant for Mark's arrest."

Bill made a suitably sympathetic noise, and Antony said with a shrug of the shoulders, "Well, he was bound to do that, wasn't he? It doesn't follow that--well, it doesn't mean anything. They naturally want to get hold of your cousin, innocent or guilty."

"Which do you think he is, Mr. Gillingham?" said Cayley, looking at him steadily.


"Bill's loyal, you see, Mr. Cayley."

"And you owe no loyalty to anyone concerned?"

"Exactly. So perhaps I might be too frank."

Bill had dropped down on the grass, and Cayley took his place on the seat, and sat there heavily, his elbows on his knees, his chin on his hands, gazing at the ground.

"I want you to be quite frank," he said at last. "Naturally I am prejudiced where Mark is concerned. So I want to know how my suggestion strikes you who have no prejudices either way."

"Your suggestion?"

"My theory that, if Mark killed his brother, it was purely accidental as I told the Inspector."

Bill looked up with interest.

"You mean that Robert did the hold-up business," he said, "and there was a bit of a struggle, and the revolver went off, and then Mark lost his head and bolted? That sort of idea?"

"Exactly."

"Well, that seems all right." He turned to Antony. "There's nothing wrong with that, is there? It's the most natural explanation to anyone who knows Mark."

Antony pulled at his pipe.
"I suppose it is," he said slowly. "But there's one thing that worries me rather."
"What's that?" Bill and Cayley asked the question simultaneously.
"The key."
"The key?" said Bill.
Cayley lifted his head and looked at Antony. "What about the key?" he asked.
"Well, there may be nothing in it; I just wondered. Suppose Robert was killed as you say, and suppose Mark lost his head and thought of nothing but getting away before anyone could see him. Well, very likely he'd lock the door and put the key in his pocket. He'd do it without thinking, just to gain a moment's time."
"Yes, that's what I suggest."
"It seems sound enough," said Bill. "Sort of thing you'd do without thinking. Besides, if you are going to run away, it gives you more of a chance."
"Yes, that's all right if the key is there. But suppose it isn't there?"
The suggestion, made as if it were already an established fact, startled them both. They looked at him wonderingly.
"What do you mean?" said Cayley.
"Well, it's just a question of where people happen to keep their keys. You go up to your bedroom, and perhaps you like to lock your door in case anybody comes wandering in when you've only got one sock and a pair of braces on. Well, that's natural enough. And if you look round the bedrooms of almost any house, you'll find the keys all ready, so that you can lock yourself in at a moment's notice. But downstairs people don't lock themselves in. It's really never done at all. Bill, for instance, has never locked himself into the dining-room in order to be alone with the sherry. On the other hand, all women, and particularly servants, have a horror of burglars. And if a burglar gets in by the window, they like to limit his activities to that particular room. So they keep the keys on the outside of the doors, and lock the doors when they go to bed." He knocked the ashes out of his pipe, and added, "At least, my mother always used to."
"You mean," said Bill excitedly, "that the key was on the outside of the door when Mark went into the room?"
"Well, I was just wondering."
"Have you noticed the other rooms the billiard-room, and library, and so on?" said Cayley.
"I've only just thought about it while I've been sitting out here. You live here haven't you ever noticed them?"
Cayley sat considering, with his head on one side.
"It seems rather absurd, you know, but I can't say that I have." He turned to Bill. "Have you?"
"Good Lord, no. I should never worry about a thing like that."
"I'm sure you wouldn't," laughed Antony. "Well, we can have a look when we go in. If the other keys are outside, then this one was probably outside too, and in that case well, it makes it more interesting."
Cayley said nothing. Bill chewed a piece of grass, and then said, "Does it make much difference?"
"It makes it more hard to understand what happened in there. Take your accidental theory and see where you get to. No instinctive turning of the key now, is there? He's got to open the door to get it, and opening the door means showing his head to anybody in the hall--his cousin, for instance, whom he left there two minutes ago. Is a man in Mark's state of mind, frightened to death lest he should be found with the body, going to do anything so foolhardy as that?"
"He needn't have been afraid of me," said Cayley.
"Then why didn't he call for you? He knew you were about. You could have advised him; Heaven knows he wanted advice. But the whole theory of Mark's escape is that he was afraid of you and of everybody else, and that he had no other idea but to get out of the room himself, and prevent you or the servants from coming into it. If the key had been on the inside, he would probably have locked the door. If it were on the outside, he almost certainly wouldn't."
"Yes, I expect you're right," said Bill thoughtfully. "Unless he took the key in with him, and locked the door at once."
"Exactly. But in that case you have to build up a new theory entirely."
"You mean that it makes it seem more deliberate?"
"Yes; that, certainly. But it also seems to make Mark out an absolute idiot. Just suppose for a moment that, for urgent reasons which neither of you know anything about, he had wished to get rid of his brother. Would he have done it like that? Just killed him and then run away? Why, that's practically suicide--suicide whilst of unsound mind. No. If you really wanted to remove an undesirable brother, you would do it a little bit more cleverly than that. You'd begin by treating him as a friend, so as to avoid suspicion, and when you did kill him at last, you would try to make it look like an accident, or suicide, or the work of some other man. Wouldn't you?"
"You mean you'd give yourself a bit of a run for your money?"
"Yes, that's what I mean. If you were going to do it deliberately, that is to say and lock yourself in before you began."

Cayley had been silent, apparently thinking over this new idea. With his eyes still on the ground, he said now: "I hold to my opinion that it was purely accidental, and that Mark lost his head and ran away."

"But what about the key?" asked Bill.

"We don't know yet that the keys were outside. I don't at all agree with Mr. Gillingham that the keys of the down-stairs rooms are always outside the doors. Sometimes they are, no doubt; but I think we shall probably find that these are inside."

"Oh, well, of course, if they are inside, then your original theory is probably the correct one. Having often seen them outside, I just wondered that's all. You asked me to be quite frank, you know, and tell you what I thought. But no doubt you're right, and we shall find them inside, as you say.

"Even if the key was outside," went on Cayley stubbornly, "I still think it might have been accidental. He might have taken it in with him, knowing that the interview would be an unpleasant one, and not wishing to be interrupted."

"But he had just told you to stand by in case he wanted you; so why should he lock you out? Besides, I should think that if a man were going to have an unpleasant interview with a threatening relation, the last thing he would do would be to barricade himself in with him. He would want to open all the doors and say, 'Get out of it!'

Cayley was silent, but his mouth looked obstinate. Antony gave a little apologetic laugh and stood up.

"Well, come on, Bill," he said; "we ought to be stepping." He held out a hand and pulled his friend up. Then, turning to Cayley, he went on, "You must forgive me if I have let my thoughts run on rather. Of course, I was considering the matter purely as an outsider; just as a problem, I mean, which didn't concern the happiness of any of my friends."

"That's all right, Mr. Gillingham," said Cayley, standing up too. "It is for you to make allowances for me. I'm sure you will. You say that you're going up to the inn now about your bag?"

"Yes." He looked up at the sun and then round the parkland stretching about the house. "Let me see; it's over in that direction, isn't it?" He pointed southwards. "Can we get to the village that way, or must we go by the road?"

"I'll show you, my boy," said Bill.

"Bill will show you. The park reaches almost as far as the village. Then I'll send the car round in about half an hour."

"Thanks very much."

Cayley nodded and turned to go into the house. Antony took hold of Bill's arm and walked off with him in the opposite direction.

CHAPTER VII

Portrait of a Gentleman

They walked in silence for a little, until they had left the house and gardens well behind them. In front of them and to the right the park dipped and then rose slowly, shutting out the rest of the world. A thick belt of trees on the left divided them from the main road.

"Ever been here before?" said Antony suddenly.

"Oh, rather. Dozens of times."

"I meant just here where we are now. Or do you stay indoors and play billiards all the time?"

"Oh Lord, no!"

"Well, tennis and things. So many people with beautiful parks never by any chance use them, and all the poor devils passing by on the dusty road think how lucky the owners are to have them, and imagine them doing all sorts of jolly things inside." He pointed to the right. "Ever been over there?"

Bill laughed, as if a little ashamed.

"Well, not very much. I've often been along here, of course, because it's the short way to the village."

"Yes .... All right; now tell me something about Mark."

"What sort of things?"

"Well, never mind about his being your host, or about your being a perfect gentleman, or anything like that. Cut out the Manners for Men, and tell me what you think of Mark, and how you like staying with him, and how many rows your little house-party has had this week, and how you get on with Cayley, and all the rest of it."

Bill looked at him eagerly.

"I say, are you being the complete detective?"

"Well, I wanted a new profession," smiled the other.

"What fun! I mean," he corrected himself apologetically, "one oughtn't to say that, when there's a man dead in the house, and one's host--" He broke off a little uncertainly, and then rounded off his period by saying again, "By
Jove, what a rum show it is. Good Lord!"
"Well?" said Antony. "Carry on, Mark"
"What do I think of him?"
"Yes."
Bill was silent, wondering how to put into words thoughts which had never formed themselves very definitely in his own mind. What did he think of Mark? Seeing his hesitation, Antony said:
"I ought to have warned you that nothing that you say will be taken down by the reporters, so you needn't bother about a split infinitive or two. Talk about anything you like, how you like. Well, I'll give you a start. Which do you enjoy more a week-end here or at the Barrington's, say?"
"Well; of course, that would depend--"
"Take it that she was there in both cases."
"Ass," said Bill, putting an elbow into Antony's ribs. "It's a little difficult to say," he went on. "Of course they do you awfully well here."
"Yes."
"I don't think I know any house where things are so comfortable. One's room--the food--drinks--cigars--the way everything's arranged: All that sort of thing. They look after you awfully well."
"Yes?"
"Yes." He repeated it slowly to himself, as if it had given him a new idea: "They look after you awfully well. Well, that's just what it is about Mark. That's one of his little ways. Weaknesses. Looking after you."
"Arranging things for you?"
"Yes. Of course, it's a delightful house, and there's plenty to do, and opportunities for every game or sport that's ever been invented, and, as I say, one gets awfully well done; but with it all, Tony, there's a faint sort of feeling that well, that one is on parade, as it were. You've got to do as you're told."
"How do you mean?"
"Well, Mark fancies himself rather at arranging things. He arranges things, and it's understood that the guests fall in with the arrangement. For instance, Betty--Miss Calladine--and I were going to play a single just before tea, the other day. Tennis. She's frightfully hot stuff at tennis, and backed herself to take me on level. I'm rather erratic, you know. Mark saw us going out with our rackets and asked us what we were going to do. Well, he'd got up a little tournament for us after tea--handicaps all arranged by him, and everything ruled out neatly in red and black ink--prizes and all--quite decent ones, you know. He'd had the lawn specially cut and marked for it. Well, of course Betty and I wouldn't have spoilt the court, and we'd have been quite ready to play again after tea--I had to give her half-fifteen according to his handicap--but somehow--" Bill stopped and shrugged his shoulders.
"It didn't quite fit in?"
"No. It spoilt the effect of his tournament. Took the edge off it just a little, I suppose he felt. So we didn't play." He laughed, and added, "It would have been as much as our place was worth to have played."
"Do you mean you wouldn't have been asked here again?"
"Probably. Well, I don't know. Not for some time, anyway."
"Really, Bill?"
"Oh, rather! He's a devil for taking offence. That Miss Norris, did you see her? She's done for herself. I don't mind betting what you like that she never comes here again."
"Why?"
Bill laughed to himself.
"We were all in it, really--at least, Betty and I were. There's supposed to be a ghost attached to the house. Lady Anne Patten. Ever heard of her?"
"Never."
"Mark told us about her at dinner one night. He rather liked the idea of there being a ghost in his house, you know; except that he doesn't believe in ghosts. I think he wanted all of us to believe in her, and yet he was annoyed with Betty and Mrs. Calladine for believing in ghosts at all. Rum chap. Well, anyhow, Miss Norris--she's an actress, some actress too--dressed up as the ghost and played the fool a bit. And poor Mark was frightened out of his life. Just for a moment, you know."
"What about the others?"
"Well, Betty and I knew; in fact, I'd told her--Miss Norris I mean--not to be a silly ass. Knowing Mark. Mrs. Calladine wasn't there--Betty wouldn't let her be. As for the Major, I don't believe anything would frighten him."
"Where did the ghost appear?"
"Down by the bowling-green. That's supposed to be its haunt, you know. We were all down there in the moonlight, pretending to wait for it. Do you know the bowling-green?"
"No."
"I'll show it to you after dinner."
"I wish you would .... Was Mark very angry afterwards?"
"Oh, Lord, yes. Sulked for a whole day. Well, he's just like that."
"Was he angry with all of you?"
"Oh, yes sulky, you know."
"This morning?"
"Oh, no. He got over it he generally does. He's just like a child. That's really it, Tony; he's like a child in some ways. As a matter of fact, he was unusually bucked with himself this morning. And yesterday."
"Yesterday?"
"Rather. We all said we'd never seen him in such form."
"Is he generally in form?"
"He's quite good company, you know, if you take him the right way. He's rather vain and childish well, like I've been telling you and self-important; but quite amusing in his way, and--" Bill broke off suddenly. "I say, you know, it really is the limit, talking about your host like this." 
"Don't think of him as your host. Think of him as a suspected murderer with a warrant out against him."
"Oh! but that's all rot, you know."
"It's the fact, Bill."
"Yes, but I mean, he didn't do it. He wouldn't murder anybody. It's a funny thing to say, but well, he's not big enough for it. He's got his faults, like all of us, but they aren't on that scale."
"One can kill anybody in a childish fit of temper." Bill grunted assent, but without prejudice to Mark. "All the same," he said, "I can't believe it. That he would do it deliberately, I mean."
"Suppose it was an accident, as Cayley says, would he lose his head and run away?"
Bill considered for a moment. 
"Yes, I really think he might, you know. He nearly ran away when he saw the ghost. Of course, that's different, rather."
"Oh, I don't know. In each case it's a question of obeying your instinct instead of your reason."
They had left the open land and were following a path through the bordering trees. Two abreast was uncomfortable, so Antony dropped behind, and further conversation was postponed until they were outside the boundary fence and in the high road. The road sloped gently down to the village of Waldheim a few red-roofed cottages, and the grey tower of a church showing above the green.
"Well, now," said Antony, as they stepped out more quickly, "what about Cayley?"
"How do you mean, what about him?"
"I want to see him. I can see Mark perfectly, thanks to you, Bill. You were wonderful. Now let's have Cayley's character. Cayley from within."
Bill laughed in pleased embarrassment, and protested that he was not a blooming novelist. 
"Besides," he added, "Mark's easy. Cayley's one of these heavy, quiet people, who might be thinking about anything. Mark gives himself away .... Ugly, black-jawed devil, isn't he?"
"Some women like that type of ugliness."
"Yes, that's true. Between ourselves, I think there's one here who does. Rather a pretty girl at Jallands" he waved his left hand "down that way."
"What's Jallands?"
"Well, I suppose it used to be a farm, belonging to a bloke called Jalland, but now it's a country cottage belonging to a widow called Norbury. Mark and Cayley used to go there a good deal together. Miss Norbury--the girl--has been here once or twice for tennis; seemed to prefer Cayley to the rest of us. But of course he hadn't much time for that sort of thing."
"What sort of thing?"
"Walking about with a pretty girl and asking her if she's been to any theatres lately. He nearly always had something to do."
"Mark kept him busy?"
"Yes. Mark never seemed quite happy unless he had Cayley doing something for him. He was quite lost and helpless without him. And, funnily enough, Cayley seemed lost without Mark."
"He was fond of him?"
"Yes, I should say so. In a protective kind of way. He'd sized Mark up, of course his vanity, his self-importance, his amateurishness and all the rest of it but he liked looking after him. And he knew how to manage him."
"Yes .... What sort of terms was he on with the guests--you and Miss Norris and all of them?"

"Just polite and rather silent, you know. Keeping himself to himself. We didn't see so very much of him, except at meals. We were here to enjoy ourselves, and well, he wasn't."

"He wasn't there when the ghost walked?"

"No. I heard Mark calling for him when he went back to the house. I expect Cayley stroked down his feathers a bit, and told him that girls will be girls ....--Hallo, here we are."

They went into the inn, and while Bill made himself pleasant to the landlady, Antony went upstairs to his room.

It appeared that he had not very much packing to do, after all. He returned his brushes to his bag, glanced sound to see that nothing else had been taken out, and went down again to settle his bill. He had decided to keep on his room for a few days; partly to save the landlord and his wife the disappointment of losing a guest so suddenly, partly in case he found it undesirable later on to remain at the Red House. For he was taking himself seriously as a detective; indeed, he took himself seriously (while getting all the fun out of it which was possible) at every new profession he adopted; and he felt that there might come a time after the inquest, say when he could not decently remain at the Red House as a guest, a friend of Bill's, enjoying the hospitality of Mark or Cayley, whichever was to be regarded as his host, without forfeiting his independent attitude towards the events of that afternoon. At present he was staying in the house merely as a necessary witness, and, since he was there, Cayley could not object to him using his eyes; but if, after the inquest, it appeared that there was still work for a pair of independent and very keen eyes to do, then he must investigate, either with his host's approval or from beneath the roof of some other host; the landlord of 'The George,' for instance, who had no feelings in the matter.

For of one thing Antony was certain. Cayley knew more than he professed to know. That is to say, he knew more than he wanted other people to know he knew. Antony was one of the "other people"; if, therefore, he was for trying to find out what it was that Cayley knew, he could hardly expect Cayley's approval of his labours. It would be 'The George,' then, for Antony after the inquest.

What was the truth? Not necessarily discreditable to Cayley, even though he were hiding something. All that could be said against him at the moment was that he had gone the longest way round to get into the locked office and that this did not fit in with what he had told the Inspector. But it did fit in with the theory that he had been an accessory after the event, and that he wanted (while appearing to be in a hurry) to give his cousin as much time as possible in which to escape. That might not be the true solution, but it was at least a workable one. The theory which he had suggested to the Inspector was not.

However, there would be a day or two before the inquest, in which Antony could consider all these matters from within The Red House. The car was at the door. He got in with Bill, the landlord put his bag on the front seat next to the chauffeur, and they drove back.

CHAPTER VIII
"Do You Follow Me, Watson?"

Anthony's bedroom looked over the park at the back of the house. The blinds were not yet drawn while he was changing his clothes for dinner, and at various stages of undress he would pause and gaze out of the window, sometimes smiling to himself, sometimes frowning, as he turned over in his mind all the strange things that he had seen that day. He was sitting on his bed, in shirt and trousers, absently smoothing down his thick black hair with his brushes, when Bill shouted an "Hallo!" through the door, and came in.

"I say, buck up, old boy, I'm hungry," he said.

Antony stopped smoothing himself and looked up at him thoughtfully.

"Where's Mark?" he said.

"Mark? You mean Cayley."

Antony corrected himself with a little laugh. "Yes, I mean Cayley. Is he down? I say, I shan't be a moment, Bill." He got up from the bed and went on briskly with his dressing. "Oh, by the way," said Bill, taking his place on the bed, "your idea about the keys is a wash-out."

"Why, how do you mean?"

"I went down just now and had a look at them. We were asses not to have thought of it when we came in. The library key is outside, but all the others are inside."

"Yes, I know."

"You devil, I suppose you did think of it, then?"

"I did, Bill," said Antony apologetically.

"Bother! I hoped you'd forgotten. Well, that knocks your theory on the head, doesn't it?"

"I never had a theory. I only said that if they were outside, it would probably mean that the office key was outside, and that in that case Cayley's theory was knocked on the head."

"Well, now, it isn't, and we don't know anything. Some were outside and some inside, and there you are. It
makes it much less exciting. When you were talking about it on the lawn, I really got quite keen on the idea of the key being outside and Mark taking it in with him."

"It's going to be exciting enough," said Antony mildly, as he transferred his pipe and tobacco into the pocket of his black coat. "Well, let's come down; I'm ready now."

Cayley was waiting for them in the hall. He made some polite inquiry as to the guest's comfort, and the three of them fell into a casual conversation about houses in general and The Red House in particular.

"You were quite right about the keys," said Bill, during a pause. He was less able than the other two, perhaps because he was younger than they, to keep away from the subject which was uppermost in the minds of them all.

"Keys?" said Cayley blankly.

"We were wondering whether they were outside or inside."

"Oh! oh, yes!" He looked slowly round the hall, at the different doors, and then smiled in a friendly way at Antony. "We both seem to have been right, Mr. Gillingham. So we don't get much farther."

"No. He gave a shrug, "I just wondered, you know. I thought it was worth mentioning."

"Oh, quite. Not that you would have convinced me, you know. Just as Elsie's evidence doesn't convince me."

"Elsie?" said Bill excitedly. Antony looked inquiringly at him, wondering who Elsie was.

"One of the housemaids," explained Cayley. "You didn't hear what she told the Inspector? Of course, as I told Birch, girls of that class make things up, but he seemed to think she was genuine."

"What was it?" said Bill.

Cayley told them of what Elsie had heard through the office door that afternoon.

"You were in the library then, of course," said Antony, rather to himself than to the other. "She might have gone through the hall without your hearing."

"Oh, I've no doubt she was there, and heard voices. Perhaps heard those very words. But--" He broke off, and then added impatiently, "It was accidental. I know it was accidental. What's the good of talking as if Mark was a murderer?" Dinner was announced at that moment, and as they went in, he added, "What's the good of talking about it at all, if it comes to that?"

"What, indeed?" said Antony, and to Bill's great disappointment they talked of books and politics during the meal.

Cayley made an excuse for leaving them as soon as their cigars were alight. He had business to attend to, as was natural. Bill would look after his friend. Bill was only too willing. He offered to beat Antony at billiards, to play him at piquet, to show him the garden by moonlight, or indeed to do anything else with him that he required.

"Thank the Lord you're here," he said piously. "I couldn't have stood it alone."

"Let's go outside," suggested Antony. "It's quite warm. Somewhere where we can sit down, right away from the house. I want to talk to you."

"Good man. What about the bowling-green?"

"Oh, you were going to show me that, anyhow, weren't you? Is it somewhere where we can talk without being overheard?"

"Rather. The ideal place. You'll see."

They came out of the front door and followed the drive to the left. Coming from Waldheim, Antony had approached the house that afternoon from the other side. The way they were going now would take them out at the opposite end of the park, on the high road to Stanton, a country town some three miles away. They passed by a gate and a gardener's lodge, which marked the limit of what auctioneers like to call "the ornamental grounds of the estate," and then the open park was before them.

"Sure we haven't missed it?" said Antony. The park lay quietly in the moonlight on either side of the drive, wearing a little way ahead of them a deceptive air of smoothness which retreated always as they advanced.

"Rum, isn't it?" said Bill. "An absurd place for a bowling green, but I suppose it was always here."

"Yes, but always where? It's short enough for golf, perhaps, but--Hallo!"

They had come to the place. The road bent round to the right, but they kept straight on over a broad grass path for twenty yards, and there in front of them was the green. A dry ditch, ten feet wide and six feet deep, surrounded it, except in the one place where the path went forward. Two or three grass steps led down to the green, on which there was a long wooden beach for the benefit of spectators.

"Yes, it hides itself very nicely," said Antony. "Where do you keep the bowls?"

"In a sort of summer house place. Round here."

They walked along the edge of the green until they came to it a low wooden bunk which had been built into one wall of the ditch.

"H'm. Jolly view."

Bill laughed.
"Nobody sits there. It's just for keeping things out of the rain."
They finished their circuit of the green "Just in case anybody's in the ditch," said Antony and then sat down on the bench.
"Now then," said Bill, "We are alone. Fire ahead."
Antony smoked thoughtfully for a little. Then he took his pipe out of his mouth and turned to his friend.
"Are you prepared to be the complete Watson?" he asked.
"Watson?"
"Do-you-follow-me-Watson; that one. Are you prepared to have quite obvious things explained to you, to ask futile questions, to give me chances of scoring off you, to make brilliant discoveries of your own two or three days after I have made them myself all that kind of thing? Because it all helps."
"My dear Tony," said Bill delightedly, "need you ask?" Antony said nothing, and Bill went on happily to himself, "I perceive from the strawberry-mark on your shirt-front that you had strawberries for dessert. Holmes, you astonish me. Tut, tut, you know my methods. Where is the tobacco? The tobacco is in the Persian slipper. Can I leave my practice for a week? I can."
Antony smiled and went on smoking. After waiting hopefully for a minute or two, Bill said in a firm voice:
"Well then, Holmes, I feel bound to ask you if you have deduced anything. Also whom do you suspect?"
Antony began to talk.
"Do you remember," he said, "one of Holmes's little scores over Watson about the number of steps up to the Baker Street lodging? Poor old Watson had been up and down them a thousand times, but he had never thought of counting them, whereas Holmes had counted them as a matter of course, and knew that there were seventeen. And that was supposed to be the difference between observation and non-observation. Watson was crushed again, and Holmes appeared to him more amazing than ever. Now, it always seemed to me that in that matter Holmes was the ass, and Watson the sensible person. What on earth is the point of keeping in your head an unnecessary fact like that? If you really want to know at any time the number of steps to your lodging, you can ring up your landlady and ask her. I've been up and down the steps of the club a thousand times, but if you asked me to tell you at this moment how many steps there are I couldn't do it. Could you?"
"I certainly couldn't," said Bill.
"But if you really wanted to know," said Antony casually, with a sudden change of voice, "I could find out for you without even bothering to ring up the hall-porter."
Bill was puzzled as to why they were talking about the club steps, but he felt it his duty to say that he did want to know how many they were.
"Right," said Antony. "I'll find out."
He closed his eyes.
"I'm walking up St James' Street," he said slowly. "Now I've come to the club and I'm going past the smoking-room--windows-one-two three four. Now I'm at the steps. I turn in and begin going up them. One-two-three-four-five-six, then a broad step; six-seven-eight-nine, another broad step; nine-ten-eleven. Eleven I'm inside. Good morning, Rogers. Fine day again." With a little start he opened his eyes and came back again to his present surroundings. He turned to Bill with a smile. "Eleven," he said. "Count them the next time you're there. Eleven and now I hope I shall forget it again."
Bill was distinctly interested.
"That's rather hot," he said. "Expound."
"Well, I can't explain it, whether it's something in the actual eye, or something in the brain, or what, but I have got rather an uncanny habit of recording things unconsciously. You know that game where you look at a tray full of small objects for three minutes, and then turn away and try to make a list of them. It means a devil of a lot of concentration for the ordinary person, if he wants to get his list complete, but in some odd way I manage to do it without concentration at all. I mean that my eyes seem to do it without the brain consciously taking any part. I could look at the tray, for instance, and talk to you about golf at the same time, and still get my list right."
"I should think that's rather a useful gift for an amateur detective. You ought to have gone into the profession before."
"Well, it is rather useful. It's rather surprising, you know, to a stranger. Let's surprise Cayley with it, shall we?"
"How?"
"Well, let's ask him--" Antony stopped and looked at Bill comically, "let's ask him what he's going to do with the key of the office."
For a moment Bill did not understand.
"Key of the office?" he said vaguely. "You don't mean--Tony! What do you mean? Good God! do you mean that Cayley--But what about Mark?"
"I don't know where Mark is--that's another thing I want to know --but I'm quite certain that he hasn't got the key of the office with him. Because Cayley's got it."
"Are you sure?"
"Quite."
Bill looked at him wonderingly.
"I say," he said, almost pleadingly, "don't tell me that you can see into people's pockets and all that sort of thing as well."
Antony laughed and denied it cheerfully.
"Then how do you know?"
"You're the perfect Watson, Bill. You take to it quite naturally. Properly speaking, I oughtn't to explain till the last chapter, but I always think that that's so unfair. So here goes. Of course, I don't really know that he's got it, but I do know that he had it. I know that when I came on him this afternoon, he had just locked the door and put the key in his pocket."
"You mean you saw him at the time, but that you've only just remembered it--reconstructed it in the way you were explaining just now?"
"No. I didn't see him. But I did see something. I saw the key of the billiard-room."
"Where?"
"Outside the billiard-room door."
"Outside? But it was inside when we looked just now."
"Exactly."
"Who put it there?"
"Obviously Cayley."
"But--"
"Let's go back to this afternoon. I don't remember noticing the billiard-room key at the time; I must have done so without knowing. Probably when I saw Cayley banging at the door I may have wondered subconsciously whether the key of the room next to it would fit. Something like that, I daresay. Well, when I was sitting out by myself on that seat just before you came along, I went over the whole scene in my mind, and I suddenly saw the billiard-room key there outside. And I began to wonder if the office-key had been outside too. When Cayley came up, I told you my idea and you were both interested. But Cayley was just a shade too interested. I daresay you didn't notice it, but he was."
"By Jove!"
"Well, of course that proved nothing; and the key business didn't really prove anything, because whatever side of the door the other keys were, Mark might have locked his own private room from the inside sometimes. But I piled it on, and pretended that it was enormously important, and quite altered the case altogether, and having got Cayley thoroughly anxious about it, I told him that we should be well out of the way for the next hour or so, and that he would be alone in the house to do what he liked about it. And, as I expected, he couldn't resist it. He altered the keys and gave himself away entirely."
"But the library key was still outside. Why didn't he alter that?"
"Because he's a clever devil. For one thing, the Inspector had been in the library, and might possibly have noticed it already. And for another--" Antony hesitated.
"What?" said Bill, after waiting for him to go on.
"It's only guesswork. But I fancy that Cayley was thoroughly upset about the key business. He suddenly realized that he had been careless, and he hadn't got time to think it all over. So he didn't want to commit himself definitely to the statement that the key was either outside or inside. He wanted to leave it vague. It was safest that way."
"I see," said Bill slowly.
But his mind was elsewhere. He was wondering suddenly about Cayley. Cayley was just an ordinary man--like himself. Bill had had little jokes with him sometimes; not that Cayley was much of a hand at joking. Bill had helped him to sausages, played tennis with him, borrowed his tobacco, lent him a putter .... and here was Antony saying that he was what? Well, not an ordinary man, anyway. A man with a secret. Perhaps a murderer. No, not a murderer; not Cayley. That was rot, anyway. Why, they had played tennis together.
"Now then, Watson," said Antony suddenly. "It's time you said something."
"I say, Tony, do you really mean it?"
"Mean what?"
"About Cayley."
"I mean what I said, Bill. No more."
"Well, what does it amount to?"
"Simply that Robert Ablett died in the office this afternoon, and that Cayley knows exactly how he died. That's all. It doesn't follow that Cayley killed him."

"No. No, of course it doesn't." Bill gave a sigh of relief. "He's just shielding Mark, what?"

"I wonder."

"Well, isn't that the simplest explanation?"

"It's the simplest if you're a friend of Cayley and want to let him down lightly. But then I'm not, you see."

"Why isn't it simple, anyhow?"

"Well, let's have the explanation then, and I'll undertake to give you a simpler one afterwards. Go on. Only remember the key is on the outside of the door to start with."

"Yes; well, I don't mind that. Mark goes in to see his brother, and they quarrel and all the rest of it, just as Cayley was saying. Cayley hears the shot, and in order to give Mark time to get away, locks the door, puts the key in his pocket and pretends that Mark has locked the door, and that he can't get in. How's that?"

"Hopeless, Watson, hopeless."

"Why?"

"How does Cayley know that it is Mark who has shot Robert, and not the other way round?"

"Oh!" said Bill, rather upset. "Yes." He thought for a moment, "All right. Say that Cayley has gone into the room first, and seen Robert on the ground."

"Well?"

"Well, you are."

"And what does he say to Mark? That it's a fine afternoon; and could he lend him a pocket-handkerchief? Or does he ask him what's happened?"

"Well, of course, I suppose he asks what happened," said Bill reluctantly.

"And what does Mark say?"

"Explains that the revolver went off accidentally during a struggle."

"Whereupon Cayley shields him by doing what, Bill? Encouraging him to do the damn silliest thing that any man could possibly do confess his guilt by running away!"

"No, that's rather hopeless, isn't it?" Bill thought again. "Well," he said reluctantly, "suppose Mark confessed that he'd murdered his brother?"

"That's better, Bill. Don't be afraid of getting away from the accident idea. Well then, your new theory is this. Mark confesses to Cayley that he shot Robert on purpose, and Cayley decides, even at the risk of committing perjury, and getting into trouble himself, to help Mark to escape. Is that right?"

Bill nodded.

"Well then, I want to ask you two questions. First, is it possible, as I said before dinner, that any man would commit such an idiotic murder--a murder that puts the rope so very tightly round his neck? Secondly, if Cayley is prepared to perjure himself for Mark (as he has to, anyway, now), wouldn't it be simpler for him to say that he was in the office all the time, and that Robert's death was accidental?"

Bill considered this carefully, and then nodded slowly again.

"Yes, my simple explanation is a wash-out," he said. "Now let's have yours."

Antony did not answer him. He had begun to think about something quite different.

CHAPTER IX
Possibilities of a Croquet Set

"What's the matter?" said Bill sharply.

Antony looked round at him with raised eyebrows.

"You've thought of something suddenly," said Bill. "What is it?"

Antony laughed.

"My dear Watson," he said, "you aren't supposed to be as clever as this."

"Oh, you can't take me in!"

"No.... Well, I was wondering about this ghost of yours, Bill. It seems to me--"

"Oh, that!" Bill was profoundly disappointed. "What on earth has the ghost got to do with it?"

"I don't know," said Antony apologetically. "I don't know what anything has got to do with it. I was just wondering. You shouldn't have brought me here if you hadn't wanted me to think about the ghost. This is where she appeared, isn't it?"

"Yes." Bill was distinctly short about it.

"How?"

"What?"

"I said, 'How?'"
"Over four or five hundred yards of open park?"
"Well, but she had to appear here, because this is where the original one--Lady Anne, you know--was supposed to walk."
"Oh, never mind Lady Anne! A real ghost can do anything. But how did Miss Norris appear suddenly over five hundred yards of bare park?"

Bill looked at Antony with open mouth.
"I--I don't know," he stammered. "We never thought of that."
"You would have seen her long before, wouldn't you, if she had come the way we came?"
"Of course we should."
"And that would have spoiled it rather. You would have had time to recognize her walk."

Bill was interested now.
"That's rather funny, you know, Tony. We none of us thought of that."
"You're sure she didn't come across the park when none of you were looking?"
"Quite. Because, you see, Betty and I were expecting her, and we kept looking round in case we saw her, so that we should all be playing with our backs to her."
"You and Miss Calladine were playing together?"
"I say, however do you know that?"
"Brilliant deductive reasoning. Well, then you suddenly saw her?"
"Yes, she walked across that side of the lawn." He indicated the opposite side, nearer to the house.
"She couldn't have been hiding in the ditch? Do you call it the moat, by the way?"
"Mark does. We don't among ourselves. No, she couldn't. Betty and I were here before the others, and walked round a bit. We should have seen her."
"Then she must have been hiding in the shed. Or do you call it the summer-house?"
"We had to go there for the bowls, of course. She couldn't have been there."
"Oh!"
"It's dashed funny," said Bill, after an interval for thought. "But it doesn't matter, does it? It has nothing to do with Robert."
"Hasn't it?"
"I say, has it?" said Bill, getting excited again.
"I don't know. We don't know what has, or what hasn't. But it has got something to do with Miss Norris. And Miss Norris--" He broke off suddenly.
"What about her?"
"Well, you're all in it in a kind of way. And if something unaccountable happens to one of you a day or two before something unaccountable happens to the whole house, one is well, interested." It was a good enough reason, but it wasn't the reason he had been on the point of giving.
"I see. Well?"
Antony knocked out his pipe and got up slowly.
"Well then, let's find the way from the house by which Miss Norris came."
Bill jumped up eagerly.
"By Jove! Do you mean there's a secret passage?"
"A secluded passage, anyway. There must be."
"I say, what fun! I love secret passages. Good Lord, and this afternoon I was playing golf just like an ordinary merchant! What a life! Secret passages!"

They made their way down into the ditch. If an opening was to be found which led to the house, it would probably be on the house side of the green, and on the outside of the ditch. The most obvious place at which to begin the search was the shed where the bowls were kept. It was a tidy place as anything in Mark's establishment would be. There were two boxes of croquet things, one of them with the lid open, as if the balls and mallets and hoops (neatly enough put away, though) had been recently used; a box of bowls, a small lawn-mower, a roller and so forth. A seat ran along the back of it, whereon the bowls-players could sit when it rained.

Antony tapped the wall at the back.
"This is where the passage ought to begin. It doesn't sound very hollow, does it?"
"It needn't begin here at all, need it?" said Bill, walking round with bent head, and tapping the other walls. He was just too tall to stand upright in the shed.
"There's only one reason why it should, and that is that it would save us the trouble of looking anywhere else for it. Surely Mark didn't let you play croquet on his bowling-green?" He pointed to the croquet things.
“He didn’t encourage it at one time, but this year he got rather keen about it. There’s really nowhere else to play. Personally I hate the game. He wasn’t very keen on bowls, you know, but he liked calling it the bowling-green, and surprising his visitors with it.”

Antony laughed.

“I love you on Mark,” he said. “You’re priceless.”

He began to feel in his pockets for his pipe and tobacco, and then suddenly stopped and stiffened to attention. For a moment he stood listening, with his head on one side, holding up a finger to bid Bill listen too.

“What is it?” whispered Bill.

Antony waved him to silence, and remained listening. Very quietly he went down on his knees, and listened again. Then he put his ear to the floor. He got up and dusted himself quickly, walked across to Bill and whispered in his ear:

“Footsteps. Somebody coming. When I begin to talk, back me up.”

Bill nodded. Antony gave him an encouraging pat on the back, and stepped firmly across to the box of bowls, whistling loudly to himself. He took the bowls out, dropped one with a loud bang on the floor, said, "Oh, Lord!" and went on:

"I say, Bill, I don't think I want to play bowls, after all."
"Well, why did you say you did?" grumbled Bill.
Antony flashed a smile of appreciation at him.
"Well, I wanted to when I said I did, and now I don't want to."
"Then what do you want to do?"
"Talk."
"Oh, right-o!" said Bill eagerly.
"There's a seat on the lawn I saw it. Let's bring these things along in case we want to play, after all."
"Right-o!" said Bill again. He felt safe with that, not wishing to commit himself until he knew what he was wanted to say.

As they went across the lawn, Antony dropped the bowls and took out his pipe.
"Got a match?" he said loudly.
As he bent his head over the match, he whispered, "There'll be somebody listening to us. You take the Cayley view," and then went on in his ordinary voice, "I don't think much of your matches, Bill," and struck another. They walked over to the seat and sat down.

"What a heavenly night!" said Antony.
"Ripping."
"I wonder where that poor devil Mark is now."
"It's a rum business."
"You agree with Cayley that it was an accident?"
"Yes. You see, I know Mark."

"H'm." Antony produced a pencil and a piece of paper and began to write on his knee, but while he wrote, he talked. He said that he thought Mark had shot his brother in a fit of anger, and that Cayley knew, or anyhow guessed, this and had tried to give his cousin a chance of getting away.

"Mind you, I think he's right. I think it's what any of us would do. I shan't give it away, of course, but somehow there are one or two little things which make me think that Mark really did shoot his brother I mean other than accidentally."

"Murdered him?"
"Well, manslaughtered him, anyway. I may be wrong. Anyway, it's not my business."
"But why do you think so? Because of the keys?"
"Oh, the keys are a wash-out. Still, it was a brilliant idea of mine, Wasn't it? And it would have been rather a score for me if they had all been outside."

He had finished his writing, and now passed the paper over to Bill. In the clear moonlight the carefully printed letters could easily be read:

"GO ON TALKING AS IF I WERE HERE. AFTER A MINUTE OR TWO, TURN ROUND AS IF I WERE SITTING ON THE GRASS BEHIND YOU, BUT GO ON TALKING."

"I know you don't agree with me," Antony went on as Bill read, "but you'll see that I'm right."
Bill looked up and nodded eagerly. He had forgotten golf and Betty and all the other things which had made up his world lately. This was the real thing. This was life. "Well," he began deliberately, "the whole point is that I know Mark. Now, Mark--"

But Antony was off the seat and letting himself gently down into the ditch. His intention was to crawl round it
until the shed came in sight. The footsteps which he had heard seemed to be underneath the shed; probably there was
a trap-door of some kind in the floor. Whoever it was would have heard their voices, and would probably think it
worth while to listen to what they were saying. He might do this merely by opening the door a little without showing
himself, in which case Antony would have found the entrance to the passage without any trouble to himself. But
when Bill turned his head and talked over the back of the seat, it was probable that the listener would find it
necessary to put his head outside in order to hear, and then Antony would be able to discover who it was. Moreover,
if he should venture out of his hiding-place altogether and peep at them over the top of the bank, the fact that Bill
was talking over the back of the seat would mislead the watcher into thinking that Antony was still there, sitting on
the grass, no doubt, behind the seat, swinging his legs over the side of the ditch.

He walked quickly but very silently along the half-length of the bowling-green to the first corner, passed
cautiously round, and then went even more carefully along the width of it to the second corner. He could hear Bill
hard at it, arguing from his knowledge of Mark's character that this, that and the other must have happened, and he
smiled appreciatively to himself. Bill was a great conspirator worth a hundred Watsons. As he approached the
second corner he slowed down, and did the last few yards on hands and knees. Then, lying at full length, inch by
inch his head went round the corner.

The shed was two or three yards to his left, on the opposite side of the ditch. From where he lay he could see
almost entirely inside it. Everything seemed to be as they left it. The bowls-box, the lawn-mower, the roller, the
open croquet-box, the--

"By Jove!" said Antony to himself, "that's neat."

The lid of the other croquet-box was open, too. Bill was turning round now; his voice became more difficult to
hear. "You see what I mean," he was saying. "If Cayley--"

And out of the second croquet-box came Cayley's black head.

Antony wanted to shout his applause. It was neat, devilish neat. For a moment he gazed, fascinated, at that
wonderful new kind of croquet-ball which had appeared so dramatically out of the box, and then reluctantly
wriggled himself back. There was nothing to be gained by staying there, and a good deal to be lost, for Bill showed
signs of running down. As quickly as he could Antony hurried round the ditch and took up his place at the back of
the seat. Then he stood up with a yawn, stretched himself and said carelessly, "Well, don't worry yourself about it,
Bill, old man. I daresay you're right. You know Mark, and I don't; and that's the difference. Shall we have a game or
shall we go to bed?"

Bill looked at him for inspiration, and, receiving it, said, "Oh, just let's have one game, shall we?"

"Right you are," said Antony.

But Bill was much too excited to take the game which followed very seriously. Antony, on the other hand,
seemed to be thinking of nothing but bowls. He played with great deliberation for ten minutes, and then announced
that he was going to bed. Bill looked at him anxiously.

"It's all right," laughed Antony. "You can talk if you want to. Just let's put 'em away first, though."

They made their way down to the shed, and while Bill was putting the bowls away, Antony tried the lid of the
closed croquet-box. As he expected, it was locked.

"Now then," said Bill, as they were walking back to the house again, "I'm simply bursting to know. Who was it?"

"Cayley."

"Good Lord! Where?"

"Inside one of the croquet-boxes."

"Don't be an ass."

"It's quite true, Bill. He told the other what he had seen.

"But aren't we going to have a look at it?" asked Bill, in great disappointment. "I'm longing to explore. Aren't
you?"

"To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow. We shall see Cayley coming along this way directly. Besides, I
want to get in from the other end, if I can. I doubt very much if we can do it this end without giving ourselves away.
Look, there's Cayley."

They could see him coming along the drive towards them. When they were a little closer, they waved to him and
he waved back.

"I wondered where you were," he said, as he got up to them. "I rather thought you might be along this way. What
about bed?"

"Bed it is," said Antony.

"We've been playing bowls," added Bill, "and talking, and--and playing bowls. Ripping night, isn't it?"

But he left the rest of the conversation, as they wandered back to the house, to Antony. He wanted to think.
There seemed to be no doubt now that Cayley was a villain. Bill had never been familiar with a villain before. It
didn't seem quite fair of Cayley, somehow; he was taking rather a mean advantage of his friends. Lot of funny people there were in the world funny people with secrets. Look at Tony, that first time he had met him in a tobacconist's shop. Anybody would have thought he was a tobacconist's assistant. And Cayley. Anybody would have thought that Cayley was an ordinary decent sort of person. And Mark. Dash it! one could never be sure of anybody. Now, Robert was different. Everybody had always said that Robert was a shady fellow.

But what on earth had Miss Norris got to do with it? What had Miss Norris got to do with it? This was a question which Antony had already asked himself that afternoon, and it seemed to him now that he had found the answer. As he lay in bed that night he reassembled his ideas, and looked at them in the new light which the events of the evening threw upon the dark corners in his brain.

Of course it was natural that Cayley should want to get rid of his guests as soon as the tragedy was discovered. He would want this for their own sake as well as for his. But he had been a little too quick about suggesting it, and about seeing the suggestion carried out. They had been hustled off as soon as they could be packed. The suggestion that they were in his hands, to go or stay as he wished, could have been left safely to them. As it was, they had been given no alternative, and Miss Norris, who had proposed to catch an after-dinner train at the junction, in the obvious hope that she might have in this way a dramatic cross-examination at the hands of some keen-eyed detective, was encouraged tactfully, but quite firmly, to travel by the earlier train with the others. Antony had felt that Cayley, in the tragedy which had suddenly befallen the house, ought to have been equally indifferent to her presence or absence. But he was not; and Antony assumed from this that Cayley was very much alive to the necessity for her absence.

Why? Well, that question was not to be answered off-hand. But the fact that it was so had made Antony interested in her; and it was for this reason that he had followed up so alertly Bill's casual mention of her in connection with the dressing-up business. He felt that he wanted to know a little more about Miss Norris and the part she had played in the Red House circle. By sheer luck, as it seemed to him, he had stumbled on the answer to his question.

Miss Norris was hurried away because she knew about the secret passage. The passage, then, had something to do with the mystery of Robert's death. Miss Norris had used it in order to bring off her dramatic appearance as the ghost. Possibly she had discovered it for herself; possibly Mark had revealed it to her secretly one day, never guessing that she would make so unkind a use of it later on; possibly Cayley, having been let into the joke of the dressing-up, had shown her how she could make her appearance on the bowling-green even more mysterious and supernatural. One way or another, she knew about the secret passage. So she must be hurried away.

Why? Because if she stayed and talked, she might make some innocent mention of it. And Cayley did not want any mention of it.

"I wonder if Mark's hiding there," thought Antony; and he went to sleep.

CHAPTER X

Mr. Gillingham Talks Nonsense

Antony came down in a very good humour to breakfast next morning, and found that his host was before him. Cayley looked up from his letters and nodded.

"Any word of Mr. Ablett--of Mark?" said Antony, as he poured out his coffee.

"No. The inspector wants to drag the lake this afternoon."

"Oh! Is there a lake?"

There was just the flicker of a smile on Cayley's face, but it disappeared as quickly as it came.

"Well, it's really a pond," he said, "but it was called 'the lake.'"

"By Mark," thought Antony. Aloud he said, "What do they expect to find?"

"They think that Mark--" He broke off and shrugged his shoulders.

"May have drowned himself, knowing that he couldn't get away? And knowing that he had compromised himself by trying to get away at all?"

"Yes; I suppose so," said Cayley slowly.

"I should have thought he would have given himself more of a run for his money. After all, he had a revolver. If he was determined not to be taken alive, he could always have prevented that. Couldn't he have caught a train to London before the police knew anything about it?"

"He might just have managed it. There was a train. They would have noticed him at Waldheim, of course, but he might have managed it at Stanton. He's not so well-known there, naturally. The inspector has been inquiring. Nobody seems to have seen him."

"There are sure to be people who will say they did, later on. There was never a missing man yet but a dozen
people come forward who swear to have seen him at a dozen different places at the same time."

Cayley smiled.

"Yes. That's true. Anyhow, he wants to drag the pond first." He added dryly, "From what I've read of detective stories, inspectors always do want to drag the pond first."

"Is it deep?"

"Quite deep enough," said Cayley as he got up. On his way to the door he stopped, and looked at Antony. "I'm so sorry that we're keeping you here like this, but it will only be until to-morrow. The inquest is to-morrow afternoon. Do amuse yourself how you like till then. Beverley will look after you."

"Thanks very much. I shall really be quite all right."

Antony went on with his breakfast. Perhaps it was true that inspectors liked dragging ponds, but the question was, Did Cayleys like having them dragged? Was Cayley anxious about it, or quite indifferent? He certainly did not seem to be anxious, but he could hide his feelings very easily beneath that heavy, solid face, and it was not often that the real Cayley peeped out. Just a little too eager once or twice, perhaps, but there was nothing to be learnt from it this morning. Perhaps he knew that the pond had no secrets to give up. After all, inspectors were always dragging ponds.

Bill came in noisily.

Bill's face was an open book. Excitement was written all over it.

"Well," he said eagerly, as he sat down to the business of the meal, "what are we going to do this morning?"

"Not talk so loudly, for one thing," said Antony. Bill looked about him apprehensively. Was Cayley under the table, for example? After last night one never knew.

"Is er--" He raised his eyebrows.

"No. But one doesn't want to shout. One should modulate the voice, my dear William, while breathing gently from the hips. Thus one avoids those chest-notes which have betrayed many a secret. In other words, pass the toast."

"You seem bright this morning."

"I am. Very bright. Cayley noticed it. Cayley said, 'Were it not that I have other business, I would come gathering nuts and may with thee. Fain would I gyrate round the mulberry-bush and hop upon the little hills. But the waters of Jordan encompass me and Inspector Birch tarries outside with his shrimping-net. My friend William Beverley will attend thee anon. Farewell, a long farewell to all--thy grape-nuts.' He then left up-centre. Enter W. Beverley, R."

"Are you often like this at breakfast?"

"Almost invariably. Said he with his mouth full. 'Exit W. Beverley, L.'"

"It's a touch of the sun, I suppose," said Bill, shaking his head sadly.

"It's the sun and the moon and the stars, all acting together on an empty stomach. Do you know anything about the stars, Mr. Beverley? Do you know anything about Orion's Belt, for instance? And why isn't there a star called Beverley's Belt? Or a novel? Said he masticating. Re-enter W. Beverley through trap-door."

"Talking about trap-doors--"

"Don't," said Antony, getting up. "Some talk of Alexander and some of Hercules, but nobody talks about--what's the Latin for trap-door?--Mensa a table; you might get it from that. Well, Mr. Beverley,"--and he slapped him heartily on the back as he went past him--"I shall see you later. Cayley says that you will amuse me, but so far you have not made me laugh once. You must try and be more amusing when you have finished your breakfast. But don't hurry. Let the upper mandibles have time to do the work." With those words Mr. Gillingham then left the spacious apartment.

Bill continued his breakfast with a slightly bewildered air. He did not know that Cayley was smoking a cigarette outside the windows behind him; not listening, perhaps; possibly not even overhearing; but within sight of Antony, who was not going to take any risks. So he went on with his breakfast, reflecting that Antony was a rum fellow, and wondering if he had dreamed only of the amazing things which had happened the day before.

Antony went up to his bedroom to fetch his pipe. It was occupied by a housemaid, and he made a polite apology for disturbing her. Then he remembered.

"Is it Elsie?" he asked, giving her a friendly smile.

"Yes, sir," she said, shy but proud. She had no doubts as to why it was that she had achieved such notoriety.

"It was you who heard Mr. Mark yesterday, wasn't it? I hope the inspector was nice to you?"

"Yes, thank you, sir."

"'Tis my turn now. You wait," murmured Antony to himself.

"Yes, sir. Nasty-like. Meaning to say his chance had come."

"I wonder."

"Well, that's what I heard, sir. Truly."
Antony looked at her thoughtfully and nodded. "Yes. I wonder. I wonder why."
"Why what, sir?"
"Oh, lots of things, Elsie .... It was quite an accident your being outside just then?"
Elsie blushed. She had not forgotten what Mrs. Stevens had said about it.
"Quite, sir. In the general way I use the other stairs."
"Of course."
He had found his pipe and was about to go downstairs again when she stopped him.
"I beg your pardon, sir, but will there be an inquest?"
"Oh, yes. To-morrow, I think."
"Shall I have to give my evidence, sir?"
"Of course. There's nothing to be frightened of."
"I did hear it, sir. Truly."
"Why, of course you did. Who says you didn't?"
"Some of the others, sir, Mrs. Stevens and all."
"Oh, that's just because they're jealous," said Antony with a smile.
He was glad to have spoken to her, because he had recognized at once the immense importance of her evidence.
To the Inspector no doubt it had seemed only of importance in that it had shown Mark to have adopted something of a threatening attitude towards his brother. To Antony it had much more significance. It was the only trustworthy evidence that Mark had been in the office at all that afternoon.
For who saw Mark go into the office? Only Cayley. And if Cayley had been hiding the truth about the keys, why should he not be hiding the truth about Mark's entry into the office? Obviously all Cayley's evidence went for nothing. Some of it no doubt was true; but he was giving it, both truth and falsehood, with a purpose. What the purpose was Antony did not know as yet; to shield Mark, to shield himself, even to betray Mark it might be any of these. But since his evidence was given for his own ends, it was impossible that it could be treated as the evidence of an impartial and trustworthy onlooker. Such, for instance, as Elsie appeared to be.
Elsie's evidence, however, seemed to settle the point. Mark had gone into the office to see his brother; Elsie had heard them both talking; and then Antony and Cayley had found the body of Robert .... and the Inspector was going to drag the pond.
But certainly Elsie's evidence did not prove anything more than the mere presence of Mark in the room. "It's my turn now; you wait." That was not an immediate threat;--it was a threat for the future. If Mark had shot his brother immediately afterwards it must have been an accident, the result of a struggle, say, provoked by that "nasty-like" tone of voice. Nobody would say "You wait" to a man who was just going to be shot. "You wait" meant "You wait, and see what's going to happen to you later on." The owner of the Red House had had enough of his brother's sponging, his brother's blackmail; now it was Mark's turn to get a bit of his own back. Let Robert just wait a bit, and he would see. The conversation which Elsie had overheard might have meant something like this. It couldn't have meant murder. Anyway not murder of Robert by Mark.
"It's a funny business," thought Antony. "The one obvious solution is so easy and yet so wrong. And I've got a hundred things in my head, and I can't fit them together. And this afternoon will make a hundred and one. I mustn't forget this afternoon."
He found Bill in the hall and proposed a stroll. Bill was only too ready. "Where do you want to go?" he asked.
"I don't mind much. Show me the park."
"Righto."
They walked out together.
"Watson, old man," said Antony, as soon as they were away from the house, "you really mustn't talk so loudly indoors. There was a gentleman outside, just behind you, all the time."
"Oh, I say," said Bill, going pink. "I'm awfully sorry. So that's why you were talking such rot."
"Partly, yes. And partly because I do feel rather bright this morning. We're going to have a busy day."
"Are we really? What are we going to do?"
"They're going to drag the pond--beg its pardon, the lake. Where is the lake?"
"We're on the way to it now, if you'd like to see it."
"We may as well look at it. Do you haunt the lake much in the ordinary way?"
"Oh, no, rather not. There's nothing to do there."
"You can't bathe?"
"Well, I shouldn't care to. Too dirty."
"I see .... This is the way we came yesterday, isn't it? The way to the village?"
"Yes. We go off a bit to the right directly. What are they dragging it for?"
"Mark."
"Oh, rot," said Bill uneasily. He was silent for a little, and then, forgetting his uncomfortable thoughts in his sudden remembrance of the exciting times they were having, said eagerly, "I say, when are we going to look for that passage?"
"We can't do very much while Cayley's in the house."
"What about this afternoon when they're dragging the pond? He's sure to be there."
Antony shook his head.
"There's something I must do this afternoon," he said. "Of course we might have time for both."
"Has Cayley got to be out of the house for the other thing too?"
"Well, I think he ought to be."
"I say, is it anything rather exciting?"
"I don't know. It might be rather interesting. I daresay I could do it at some other time, but I rather fancy it at three o'clock, somehow. I've been specially keeping it back for then."
"I say, what fun! You do want me, don't you?"
"Of course I do. Only, Bill don't talk about things inside the house, unless I begin. There's a good Watson."
"I won't. I swear I won't."
They had come to the pond--Mark's lake--and they walked silently round it. When they had made the circle, Antony sat down on the grass, and relit his pipe. Bill followed his example.
"Well, Mark isn't there," said Antony.
"No," said Bill. "At least, I don't quite see why you know he isn't."
"It isn't 'knowing,' it's 'guessing,'" said Antony rapidly. "It's much easier to shoot yourself than to drown yourself, and if Mark had wanted to shoot himself in the water, with some idea of not letting the body be found, he'd have put big stones in his pockets, and the only big stones are near the water's edge, and they haven't, and therefore he didn't, and oh, bother the pond; that can wait till this afternoon. Bill, where does the secret passage begin?"
"Well, that's what we've got to find out, isn't it?"
"Yes. You see, my idea is this."
He explained his reasons for thinking that the secret of the passage was concerned in some way with the secret of Robert's death, and went on:
"My theory is that Mark discovered the passage about a year ago the time when he began to get keen on croquet. The passage came out into the floor of the shed, and probably it was Cayley's idea to put a croquet-box over the trap-door, so as to hide it more completely. You know, when once you've discovered a secret yourself, it always seems as if it must be so obvious to everybody else. I can imagine that Mark loved having this little secret all to himself and to Cayley, of course, but Cayley wouldn't count and they must have had great fun fixing it up, and making it more difficult for other people to find out. Well then, when Miss Norris was going to dress-up, Cayley gave it away. Probably he told her that she could never get down to the bowling-green without being discovered, and then perhaps showed that he knew there was one way in which she could do it, and she wormed the secret out of him somehow."
"But this was two or three days before Robert turned up."
"Exactly. I am not suggesting that there was anything sinister about the passage in the first place. It was just a little private bit of romance and adventure for Mark, three days ago. He didn't even know that Robert was coming. But somehow the passage has been used since, in connection with Robert. Perhaps Mark escaped that way; perhaps he's hiding there now. And if so, then the only person who could give him away was Miss Norris. And she of course would only do it innocently not knowing that the passage had anything to do with it."
"So it was safer to have her out of the way?"
"Yes."
"But, look here, Tony, why do you want to bother about this end of it? We can always get in at the bowling-green end."
"I know, but if we do that we shall have to do it openly. It will mean breaking open the box, and letting Cayley know that we've done it. You see, Bill, if we don't find anything out for ourselves in the next day or two, we've got to tell the police what we have found out, and then they can explore the passage for themselves. But I don't want to do that yet."
"Rather not."
"So we've got to carry on secretly for a bit. It's the only way." He smiled and added, "And it's much more fun."
"Rather!" Bill chuckled to himself.
"Very well. Where does the secret passage begin?"
CHAPTER XI
The Reverend Theodore Ussher
"There's one thing, which we have got to realize at once," said Antony, "and that is that if we don't find it easily, we shan't find it at all."
"You mean that we shan't have time?"
"Neither time nor opportunity. Which is rather a consoling thought to a lazy person like me."
"But it makes it much harder, if we can't really look properly."
"Harder to find, yes, but so much easier to look. For instance, the passage might begin in Cayley's bedroom.
Well, now we know that it doesn't."
"We don't know anything of the sort," protested Bill.
"We--know for the purposes of our search. Obviously we can't go tailing into Cayley's bedroom and tapping his wardrobes; and obviously, therefore, if we are going to look for it at all, we must assume that it doesn't begin there."
"Oh, I see." Bill chewed a piece of grass thoughtfully. "Anyhow, it wouldn't begin on an upstairs floor, would it?"
"Probably not. Well, we're getting on."
"You can wash out the kitchen and all that part of the house," said Bill, after more thought. "We can't go there."
"Right. And the cellars, if there are any."
"Well, that doesn't leave us much."
"No. Of course it's only a hundred-to-one chance that we find it, but what we want to consider is which is the most likely place of the few places in which we can look safely."
"All it amounts to," said Bill, "is the living-rooms downstairs dining-room, library, hall, billiard-room and the office rooms."
"Yes, that's all."
"Well, the office is the most likely, isn't it?"
"Yes. Except for one thing."
"What's that?"
"Well, it's on the wrong side of the house. One would expect the passage to start from the nearest place to which it is going. Why make it longer by going under the house first?"
"Yes, that's true. Well, then, you think the dining-room or the library?"
"Yes. And the library for choice. I mean for our choice. There are always servants going into dining-rooms. We shouldn't have much of a chance of exploring properly in there. Besides, there's another thing to remember. Mark has kept this a secret for a year. Could he have kept it a secret in the dining-room? Could Miss Norris have got into the dining-room and used the secret door just after dinner without being seen? It would have been much too risky."
Bill got up eagerly.
"Come along," he said, "let's try the library. If Cayley comes in, we can always pretend we're choosing a book."
Antony got up slowly, took his arm and walked back to the house with him.
The library was worth going into, passages or no passages. Antony could never resist another person's bookshelves. As soon as he went into the room, he found himself wandering round it to see what books the owner read, or (more likely) did not read, but kept for the air which they lent to the house. Mark had prided himself on his library. It was a mixed collection of books. Books which he had inherited both from his father and from his patron; books which he had bought because he was interested in them or, if not in them, in the authors to whom he wished to lend his patronage; books which he had ordered in beautifully bound editions, partly because they looked well on his shelves, lending a noble colour to his rooms, partly because no man of culture should ever be without them; old editions, new editions, expensive books, cheap books, a library in which everybody, whatever his taste, could be sure of finding something to suit him.
"And which is your particular fancy, Bill?" said Antony, looking from one shelf to another. "Or are you always playing billiards?"
"I have a look at 'Badminton' sometimes," said Bill.
"It's over in that corner there." He waved a hand.
"Over here?" said Antony, going to it.
"Yes." He corrected himself suddenly. --"Oh, no, it's not. It's over there on the right now. Mark had a grand re-arrangement of his library about a year ago. It took him more than a week, he told us. He's got such a frightful lot, hasn't he?"
"Now that's very interesting," said Antony, and he sat down and filled his pipe again.
There was indeed a "frightful lot" of books. The four walls of the library were plastered with them from floor to ceiling, save only where the door and the two windows insisted on living their own life, even though an illiterate
one. To Bill it seemed the most hopeless room of any in which to look for a secret opening.  
"We shall have to take every blessed book down," he said, "before we can be certain that we haven't missed it."  
"Anyway," said Antony, "if we take them down one at a time, nobody can suspect us of sinister designs. After all, what does one go into a library for, except to take books down?"
"But there's such a frightful lot."
Antony's pipe was now going satisfactorily, and he got up and walked leisurely to the end of the wall opposite the door.
"Well, let's have a look," he said, "and see if they are so very frightful. Hallo, here's your 'Badminton.' You often read that, you say?"
"If I read anything."
"Yes." He looked down and up the shelf. "Sport and Travel chiefly. I like books of travel, don't you?"
"They're pretty dull as a rule."
"Well, anyhow, some people like them very much," said Antony, reproachfully. He moved on to the next row of shelves. "The Drama. The Restoration dramatists. You can have most of them. Still, as you well remark, many people seem to love them. Shaw, Wilde, Robertson—I like reading plays, Bill. There are not many people who do, but those who do are usually very keen. Let us pass on."
"I say, we haven't too much time," said Bill restlessly.
"We haven't. That's why we aren't wasting any. Poetry. Who reads poetry nowadays? Bill, when did you last read 'Paradise Lost'?"
"Never."
"I thought not. And when did Miss Calladine last read 'The Excursion' aloud to you?"
"As a matter of fact, Betty--Miss Calladine--happens to be jolly keen on what's the beggar's name?"
"Never mind his name. You have said quite enough. We pass on."
He moved on to the next shelf.
"Biography. Oh, lots of it. I love biographies. Are you a member of the Johnson Club? I bet Mark is. 'Memories of Many Courts' I'm sure Mrs. Calladine reads that. Anyway, biographies are just as interesting as most novels, so why linger? We pass on." He went to the next shelf, and then gave a sudden whistle. "Hallo, hallo!"
"What's the matter?"
"William, I am inspired. Stand by." He took down the Reverend Theodore Ussher's classic work, looked at it with a happy smile for a moment, and then gave it to Bill.
"Here, hold Ussher for a bit." Bill took the book obediently.
"No, give it me back. Just go out into the hall, and see if you can hear Cayley anywhere. Say 'Hallo' loudly, if you do."
Bill went out quickly, listened, and came back.
"It's all right."
"Good." He took the book out of its shelf again. "Now then, you can hold Ussher. Hold him in the left hand so. With the right or dexter hand, grasp this shelf firmly so. Now, when I say 'Pull,' pull gradually. Got that?"
Bill nodded, his face alight with excitement.
"Good." Antony put his hand into the space left by the stout Ussher, and fingered the hack of the shelf. "Pull," he said.
Bill pulled.
"Now just go on pulling like that. I shall get it directly. Not hard, you know, but just keeping up the strain."
His fingers went at it again busily.
And then suddenly the whole row of shelves, from top to bottom, swung gently open towards them.
"Good Lord!" said Bill, letting go of the shelf in his amazement.
Antony pushed the shelves back, extracted Ussher from Bill's fingers, replaced him, and then, taking Bill by the arm, led him to the sofa and deposited him in it. Standing in front of him, he bowed gravely.
"Child's play, Watson," he said; "child's play."
"How on earth--"

Antony laughed happily and sat down on the sofa beside him.

"You don't really want it explained," he said, smacking him on the knee; "you're just being Watsonish. It's very nice of you, of course, and I appreciate it."

"No, but really, Tony."

"Oh, my dear Bill!" He smoked silently for a little, and then went on, "It's what I was saying just now a secret is a secret until you have discovered it, and as soon as you have discovered it, you wonder why everybody else isn't discovering it, and how it could ever have been a secret at all. This passage has been here for years, with an opening at one end into the library, and at the other end into the shed. Then Mark discovered it, and immediately he felt that everybody else must discover it. So he made the shed end more difficult by putting the croquet-box there, and this end more difficult by--" he stopped and looked at the other "by what, Bill?"

But Bill was being Watsonish.

"What?"

"Obviously by re-arranging his books. He happened to take out 'The Life of Nelson' or 'Three Men in a Boat,' or whatever it was, and by the merest chance discovered the secret. Naturally he felt that everybody else would be taking down 'The Life of Nelson' or 'Three Men in a Boat.' Naturally he felt that the secret would be safer if nobody ever interfered with that shelf at all. When you said that the books had been re-arranged a year ago just about the time the croquet-box came into existence; of course, I guessed why. So I looked about for the dullest books I could find, the books nobody ever read. Obviously the collection of sermon-books of a mid-Victorian clergyman was the shelf we wanted."

"Yes, I see. But why were you so certain of the particular place?"

"Well, he had to mark the particular place by some book. I thought that the joke of putting 'The Narrow Way' just over the entrance to the passage might appeal to him. Apparently it did."

Bill nodded to himself thoughtfully several times. "Yes, that's very neat," he said. "You're a clever devil, Tony." Tony laughed.

"You encourage me to think so, which is bad for me, but very delightful."

"Well, come on, then," said Bill, and he got up, and held out a hand.

"Come on where?"

"To explore the passage, of course."

Antony shook his head.

"Why ever not?"

"Well, what do you expect to find there?"

"I don't know. But you seemed to think that we might find something that would help."

"Suppose we find Mark?" said Antony quietly.

"I say, do you really think he's there?"

"Suppose he is?"

"Well, then, there we are."

Antony walked over to the fireplace, knocked out the ashes of his pipe, and turned back to Bill. He looked at him gravely without speaking.

"What are you going to say to him?" he said at last.

"How do you mean?"

"Are you going to arrest him, or help him to escape?"

"I--I--well, of course, I--" began Bill, stammering, and then ended lamely, "Well, I don't know."

"Exactly. We've got to make up our minds, haven't we?"

Bill didn't answer. Very much disturbed in his mind, he walked restlessly about the room, frowning to himself, stopping now and then at the newly discovered door and looking at it as if he were trying to learn what lay behind it. Which side was he on, if it came to choosing sides--Mark's or the Law's?

"You know, you can't just say, 'Orr er hallo!' to him," said Antony, breaking rather appropriately into his thoughts.

"Nor," went on Antony, "can you say, 'This is my friend Mr. Gillingham, who is staying with you. We were just going to have a game of bowls.'"

"Yes, it's dashed difficult. I don't know what to say. I've been rather forgetting about Mark." He wandered over to the window and looked out on to the lawns. There was a gardener clipping the grass edges. No reason why the lawn should be untidy just because the master of the house had disappeared. It was going to be a hot day again. Dash it, of course he had forgotten Mark. How could he think of him as an escaped murderer, a fugitive from justice,
when everything was going on just as it did yesterday, and the sun was shining just as it did when they all drove off to their golf, only twenty-four hours ago? How could he help feeling that this was not real tragedy, but merely a jolly kind of detective game that he and Antony were playing?

He turned back to his friend.
"All the same," he said, "you wanted to find the passage, and now you've found it. Aren't you going into it at all?"

Antony took his arm.
"Let's go outside again," he said. "We can't go into it now, anyhow. It's too risky, with Cayley about. Bill, I feel like you--just a little bit frightened. But what I'm frightened of I don't quite know. Anyway, you want to go on with it, don't you?"
"Yes," said Bill firmly. "We must."
"Then we'll explore the passage this afternoon, if we get the chance. And if we don't get the chance, then we'll try it to-night."

They walked across the hall and out into the sunlight again.
"Do you really think we might find Mark hiding there?" asked Bill.
"It's possible," said Antony. "Either Mark or--" He pulled himself up quickly. "No," he murmured to himself, "I won't let myself think that not yet, anyway. It's too horrible."

CHAPTER XII

In the twenty hours or so at his disposal Inspector Birch had been busy. He had telegraphed to London a complete description of Mark in the brown flannel suit which he had last been seen wearing; he had made inquiries at Stanton as to whether anybody answering to this description had been seen leaving by the 4.20; and though the evidence which had been volunteered to him had been inconclusive, it made it possible that Mark had indeed caught that train, and had arrived in London before the police at the other end had been ready to receive him. But the fact that it was market-day at Stanton, and that the little town would be more full than usual of visitors, made it less likely that either the departure of Mark by the 4.20, or the arrival of Robert by the 2.10 earlier in the afternoon, would have been particularly noticed. As Antony had said to Cayley, there would always be somebody ready to hand the police a circumstantial story of the movements of any man in whom the police were interested.

That Robert had come by the 2.10 seemed fairly certain. To find out more about him in time for the inquest would be difficult. All that was known about him in the village where he and Mark had lived as boys bore out the evidence of Cayley. He was an unsatisfactory son, and he had been hurried off to Australia; nor had he been seen since in the village. Whether there were any more substantial grounds of quarrel between the two brothers than that the younger one was at home and well-to-do, while the elder was poor and an exile, was not known, nor, as far as the inspector could see, was it likely to be known until Mark was captured.

The discovery of Mark was all that mattered immediately. Dragging the pond might not help towards this, but it would certainly give the impression in court-morrow that Inspector Birch was handling the case with zeal. And if only the revolver with which the deed was done was brought to the surface, his trouble would be well repaid. "Inspector Birch produces the weapon" would make an excellent headline in the local paper.

He was feeling well-satisfied with himself, therefore, as he walked to the pond, where his men were waiting for him, and quite in the mood for a little pleasant talk with Mr. Gillingham and his friend, Mr. Beverley. He gave them a cheerful "Good afternoon," and added with a smile, "Coming to help us?"

"You don't really want us," said Antony, smiling back at him.
"You can come if you like."

Antony gave a little shudder.
"You can tell me afterwards what you find," he said. "By the way," he added, "I hope the landlord at 'the George' gave me a good character?"

The Inspector looked at him quickly.
"Now how on earth do you know anything about that?"

Antony bowed to him gravely.
"Because I guessed that you were a very efficient member of the Force."

The inspector laughed.
"Well, you came out all right, Mr. Gillingham. You got a clean bill. But I had to make certain about you.
"Of course you did. Well, I wish you luck. But I don't think you'll find much at the pond. It's rather out of the way, isn't it, for anybody running away?"

"That's just what I told Mr. Cayley, when he called my attention to the pond. However, we shan't do any harm by looking. It's the unexpected that's the most likely in this sort of case."
"You're quite right, Inspector. Well, we mustn't keep you. Good afternoon," and Antony smiled pleasantly at him.

"Good afternoon, sir."

"Good afternoon," said Bill.

Antony stood looking after the Inspector as he strode off, silent for so long that Bill shook him by the arm at last, and asked him rather crossly what was the matter.

Antony shook his head slowly from side to side.

"I don't know; really I don't know. It's too devilish what I keep thinking. He can't be as cold-blooded as that."

"Who?"

Without answering, Antony led the way back to the garden-seat on which they had been sitting. He sat there with his head in his hands.

"Oh, I hope they find something," he murmured. "Oh, I hope they do."

"In the pond?"

"Yes."

"But what?"

"Anything, Bill; anything."

Bill was annoyed. "I say, Tony, this won't do. You really mustn't be so damn mysterious. What's happened to you suddenly?"

Antony looked up at him in surprise.

"Didn't you hear what he said?"

"What, particularly?"

"That it was Cayley's idea to drag the pond."

"Oh! Oh, I say!" Bill was rather excited again. "You mean that he's hidden something there? Some false clue which he wants the police to find?"

"I hope so," said Antony earnestly, "but I'm afraid--" He stopped short.

"Afraid of what?"

"Afraid that he hasn't hidden anything there. Afraid that--"

"Well?"

"What's the safest place in which to hide anything very important?"

"Somewhere where nobody will look."

"There's a better place than that."

"What?"

"Somewhere where everybody has already looked."

"By Jove! You mean that as soon as the pond has been dragged, Cayley will hide something there?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"But why afraid?"

"Because I think that it must be something very important, something which couldn't easily be hidden anywhere else."

"What?" asked Bill eagerly.

Antony shook his head.

"No, I'm not going to talk about it yet. We can wait and see what the Inspector finds. He may find something--I don't know what--something that Cayley has put there for him to find. But if he doesn't, then it will be because Cayley is going to hide something there to-night."

"What?" asked Bill again.

"You will see what, Bill," said Antony; "because we shall be there."

"Are we going to watch him?"

"Yes, if the Inspector finds nothing."

"That's good," said Bill.

If it were a question of Cayley or the Law, he was quite decided as to which side he was taking. Previous to the tragedy of yesterday he had got on well enough with both of the cousins, without being in the least intimate with either. Indeed, of the two he preferred, perhaps, the silent, solid Cayley to the more volatile Mark. Cayley's qualities, as they appeared to Bill, may have been chiefly negative; but even if this merit lay in the fact that he never exposed whatever weaknesses he may have had, this is an excellent quality in a fellow-guest (or, if you like, fellow-host) in a house where one is continually visiting. Mark's weaknesses, on the other hand, were very plain to the eye, and Bill had seen a good deal of them.

Yet, though he had hesitated to define his position that morning in regard to Mark, he did not hesitate to place
himself on the side of the Law against Cayley. Mark, after all, had done him no harm, but Cayley had committed an unforgivable offence. Cayley had listened secretly to a private conversation between himself and Tony. Let Cayley hang, if the Law demanded it.

Antony looked at his watch and stood up.
"Come along," he said. "It's time for that job I spoke about."
"The passage?" said Bill eagerly.
"No; the thing which I said that I had to do this afternoon."
"Oh, of course. What is it?"

Without saying anything, Antony led the way indoors to the office.

It was three o'clock, and at three o'clock yesterday Antony and Cayley had found the body. At a few minutes after three, he had been looking out of the window of the adjoining room, and had been surprised suddenly to find the door open and Cayley behind him. He had vaguely wondered at the time why he had expected the door to be shut, but he had had no time then to worry the thing out, and he had promised himself to look into it at his leisure afterwards. Possibly it meant nothing; possibly, if it meant anything, he could have found out its meaning by a visit to the office that morning. But he had felt that he would be more likely to recapture the impressions of yesterday if he chose as far as possible the same conditions for his experiment. So he had decided that three o'clock that afternoon should find him once more in the office.

As he went into the room, followed by Bill, he felt it almost as a shock that there was now no body of Robert lying there between the two doors. But there was a dark stain which showed where the dead man's head had been, and Antony knelt down over it, as he had knelt twenty-four hours before.

"I want to go through it again," he said. "You must be Cayley. Cayley said he would get some water. I remember thinking that water wasn't much good to a dead man, and that probably he was only too glad to do anything rather than nothing. He came back with a wet sponge and a handkerchief. I suppose he got the handkerchief from the chest of drawers. Wait a bit."

He got up and went into the adjoining room; looked round it, pulled open a drawer or two, and, after shutting all the doors, came back to the office.

"The sponge is there, and there are handkerchiefs in the top right-hand drawer. Now then, Bill, just pretend you're Cayley. You've just said something about water, and you get up."

Feeling that it was all a little uncanny, Bill, who had been kneeling beside his friend, got up and walked out. Antony, as he had done on the previous day, looked up after him as he went. Bill turned into the room on the right, opened the drawer and got the handkerchief, damped the sponge and came back.

"Well?" he said wonderingly.

Antony shook his head.
"It's all different," he said. "For one thing, you made a devil of a noise and Cayley didn't."
"Perhaps you weren't listening when Cayley went in?"
"I wasn't. But I should have heard him if I could have heard him, and I should have remembered afterwards."
"Perhaps Cayley shut the door after him."
"Wait!"

He pressed his hand over his eyes and thought. It wasn't anything which he had heard, but something which he had seen. He tried desperately hard to see it again .... He saw Cayley getting up, opening the door from the office, leaving it open and walking into the passage, turning to the door on the right, opening it, going in, and then--What did his eyes see after that? If they would only tell him again!

Suddenly he jumped up, his face alight. "Bill, I've got it!" he cried.
"What?"
"The shadow on the wall! I was looking at the shadow on the wall. Oh, ass, and ten times ass!"
Bill looked uncomprehendingly at him. Antony took his arm and pointed to the wall of the passage.
"Look at the sunlight on it," he said. "That's because you've left the door of that room open. The sun comes straight in through the windows. Now, I'm going to shut the door. Look! D'you see how the shadow moves across? That's what I saw the shadow moving across as the door shut behind him. Bill, go in and shut the door behind you quite naturally. Quick!"

Bill went out and Antony knelt, watching eagerly.
"I thought so!" he cried. "I knew it couldn't have been that."
"What happened?" said Bill, coming back.
"Just what you would expect. The sunlight came, and the shadow moved back again all in one movement."
"And what happened yesterday?"
"The sunlight stayed there; and then the shadow came very slowly back, and there was no noise of the door
being shut."

Bill looked at him with startled eyes.

"By Jove! You mean that Cayley closed the door afterwards as an afterthought and very quietly, so that you couldn't hear?"

Antony nodded.

"Yes. That explains why I was surprised afterwards when I went into the room to find the door open behind me. You know how those doors with springs on them close?"

"The sort which old gentlemen have to keep out draughts?"

"Yes. Just at first they hardly move at all, and then very, very slowly they swing to well, that was the way the shadow moved, and subconsciously I must have associated it with the movement of that sort of door. By Jove!" He got up, and dusted his knees. "Now, Bill, just to make sure, go in and close the door like that. As an afterthought, you know; and very quietly, so that I don't hear the click of it."

Bill did as he was told, and then put his head out eagerly to hear what had happened.

"That was it," said Antony, with absolute conviction. "That was just what I saw yesterday." He came out of the office, and joined Bill in the little room.

"And now," he said, "let's try and find out what it was that Mr. Cayley was doing in here, and why he had to be so very careful that his friend Mr. Gillingham didn't overhear him."

CHAPTER XIII

The Open Window

Anthony's first thought was that Cayley had hidden something; something, perhaps, which he had found by the body, and but that was absurd. In the time at his disposal, he could have done no more than put it away in a drawer, where it would be much more open to discovery by Antony than if he had kept it in his pocket. In any case he would have removed it by this time, and hidden it in some more secret place. Besides, why in this case bother about shutting the door?

Bill pulled open a drawer in the chest, and looked inside.

"Is it any good going through these, do you think?" he asked.

Antony looked over his shoulder.

"Why did he keep clothes here at all?" he asked. "Did he ever change down here?"

"My dear Tony, he had more clothes than anybody in the world. He just kept them here in case they might be useful, I expect. When you and I go from London to the country we carry our clothes about with us. Mark never did. In his flat in London he had everything all over again which he has here. It was a hobby with him, collecting clothes. If he'd had half a dozen houses, they would all have been full of a complete gentleman's town and country outfit."

"I see."

"Of course, it might be useful sometimes, when he was busy in the next room, not to have to go upstairs for a handkerchief or a more comfortable coat."

"I see. Yes." He was walking round the room as he answered, and he lifted the top of the linen basket which stood near the wash basin and glanced in. "He seems to have come in here for a collar lately."

Bill peered in. There was one collar at the bottom of the basket.

"Yes. I daresay he would," he agreed. "If he suddenly found that the one he was wearing was uncomfortable or a little bit dirty, or something. He was very finicking."

Antony leant over and picked it out.

"It must have been uncomfortable this time," he said, after examining it carefully. "It couldn't very well be cleaner. He dropped it back again. "Anyway, he did come in here sometimes?"

"Oh, yes, rather."

"Yes, but what did Cayley come in for so secretly?"

"What did he want to shut the door for?" said Bill. "That's what I don't understand. You couldn't have seen him, anyhow."

"No. So it follows that I might have heard him. He was going to do something which he didn't want me to hear."

"By Jove, that's it!" said Bill eagerly.

"Yes; but what?"

Bill frowned hopefully to himself, but no inspiration came.

"Well, let's have some air, anyway," he said at last, exhausted by the effort, and he went to the window, opened it, and looked out. Then, struck by an idea, he turned back to Antony and said, "Do you think I had better go up to the pond to make sure that they're still at it? Because--"

He broke off suddenly at the sight of Antony's face.

"Oh, idiot, idiot!" Antony cried. "Oh, most super-excellent of Watsons! Oh, you lamb, you blessing! Oh,
"Gillingham, you incomparable ass!"

"What on earth--"

"The window, the window!" cried Antony, pointing to it.

Bill turned back to the window, expecting it to say something. As it said nothing, he looked at Antony again.

"He was opening the window!" cried Antony.

"Who?"

"Cayley, of course." Very gravely and slowly he expounded. "He came in here in order to open the window. He shut the door so that I shouldn't hear him open the window. He opened the window. I came in here and found the window open. I said, 'This window is open. My amazing powers of analysis tell me that the murderer must have escaped by this window.' 'Oh,' said Cayley, raising his eyebrows. 'Well,' said he, 'I suppose you must be right.' Said I proudly, 'I am. For the window is open,' I said. Oh, you incomparable ass!"

He understood now. It explained so much that had been puzzling him.

He tried to put himself in Cayley's place--Cayley, when Antony had first discovered him, hammering at the door and crying, "Let me in!" Whatever had happened inside the office, whoever had killed Robert, Cayley knew all about it, and knew that Mark was not inside, and had not escaped by the window. But it was necessary to Cayley's plans--to Mark's plans if they were acting in concert--that he should be thought so to have escaped. At some time, then, while he was hammering (the key in his pocket) at the locked door, he must suddenly have remembered--with what a shock!--that a mistake had been made. A window had not been left open!

Probably it would just have been a horrible doubt at first. Was the office window open? Surely it was open! Was it? ... Would he have time now to unlock the door, slip in, open the French windows and slip out again? No. At any moment the servants might come. It was too risky. Fatal, if he were discovered. But servants were stupid. He could get the windows safely open while they were crowding round the body. They wouldn't notice. He could do it somehow.

And then Antony's sudden appearance! Here was a complication. And Antony suggesting that they should try the window! Why, the window was just what he wanted to avoid. No wonder he had seemed dazed at first.

Ah, and here at last was the explanation why they had gone the longest way round and yet run. It was Cayley's only chance of getting a start on Antony, of getting to the windows first, of working them open somehow before Antony caught him up. Even if that were impossible, he must get there first, just to make sure. Perhaps they were open. He must get away from Antony and see. And if they were shut, hopelessly shut, then he must have a moment to himself, a moment in which to think of some other plan, and avoid the ruin which seemed so suddenly to be threatening.

So he had run. But Antony had kept up with him. They had broken in the window together, and gone into the office. But Cayley was not done yet. There was the dressing-room window! But quietly, quietly. Antony mustn't hear.

And Antony didn't hear. Indeed, he had played up to Cayley splendidly. Not only had he called attention to the open window, but he had carefully explained to Cayley why Mark had chosen this particular window in preference to the office window. And Cayley had agreed that probably that was the reason. How he must have chuckled to himself! But he was still a little afraid. Afraid that Antony would examine the shrubbery. Why? Obviously because there was no trace of anyone having broken through the shrubbery. No doubt Cayley had provided the necessary traces since, and had helped the Inspector to find them. Had he even gone as far as footmarks in Mark's shoes? But the ground was very hard. Perhaps footmarks were not necessary. Antony smiled as he thought of the big Cayley trying to squeeze into the dapper little Mark's shoes. Cayley must have been glad that footmarks were not necessary.

No, the open window was enough; the open window and a broken twig or two. But quietly, quietly. Antony mustn't hear. And Antony had not heard .... But he had seen a shadow on the wall.

They were outside on the lawn again now, Bill and Antony, and Bill was listening open-mouthed to his friend's theory of yesterday's happenings. It fitted in, it explained things, but it did not get them any further. It only gave them another mystery to solve.

"What's that?" said Antony.

"Mark. Where's Mark? If he never went into the office at all, then where is he now?"

"I don't say that he never went into the office. In fact, he must have gone. Elsie heard him." He stopped and repeated slowly, "She heard him, at least she says she did. But if he was there, he came out again by the door."

"Well, but where does that lead you?"

"Where it led Mark. The passage."

"Do you mean that he's been hiding there all the time?" Antony was silent until Bill had repeated his question, and then with an effort he came out of his thoughts and answered him.

"I don't know. But look here. Here is a possible explanation. I don't know if it is the right one I don't know, Bill;
I'm rather frightened. Frightened of what may have happened, of what may be going to happen. However, here is an explanation. See if you can find any fault with it.

With his legs stretched out and his hands deep in his pockets, he lay back on the garden-seat, looking up to the blue summer sky above him, and just as if he saw up there the events of yesterday being enacted over again, he described them slowly to Bill as they happened.

"We'll begin at the moment when Mark shoots Robert. Call it an accident; probably it was. Mark would say it was, anyhow. He is in a panic, naturally. But he doesn't lock the door and run away. For one thing, the key is on the outside of the door; for another, he is not, quite such a fool as that. But he is in a horrible position. He is known to be on bad terms with his brother; he has just uttered some foolish threat to him, which may possibly have been overheard. What is he to do? He does the natural thing, the thing which Mark would always do in such circumstances. He consults Cayley, the invaluable, inevitable Cayley.

"Cayley is just outside, Cayley must have heard the shot, Cayley will tell him what to do. He opens the door just as Cayley is coming to see what is the matter. He explains rapidly. 'What's to be done, Cay? what's to be done? It was an accident. I swear it was an accident. He threatened me. He would have shot me if I hadn't. Think of something, quick!'

"Cayley has thought of something. 'Leave it to me,' he says. 'You clear out altogether. I shot him, if you like. I'll do all the explaining. Get away. Hide. Nobody saw you go in. Into the passage, quick. I'll come to you there as soon as I can.'

"Good Cayley. Faithful Cayley! Mark's courage comes back. Cayley will explain all right. Cayley will tell the servants that it was an accident. He will ring up the police. Nobody will suspect Cayley--Cayley has no quarrel with Robert. And then Cayley will come into the passage and tell him that it is all right, and Mark will go out by the other end, and saunter slowly back to the house. He will be told the news by one of the servants. Robert accidentally shot? Good Heavens!

"So, greatly reassured, Mark goes into the library. And Cayley goes to the door of the office .... and locks it. And then he bangs on the door and shouts, 'Let me in!'

Antony was silent. Bill looked at him and shook his head.

"Yes, Tony, but that doesn't make sense. What's the point of Cayley behaving like that?"

Antony shrugged his shoulders without answering.

"And what has happened to Mark since?"

Antony shrugged his shoulders again.

"Well, the sooner we go into that passage, the better," said Bill.

"You're ready to go?"

"Quite," said Bill, surprised.

"You're quite ready for what we may find?"

"You're being dashed mysterious, old boy."

"I know I am." He gave a little laugh, and went on, "Perhaps I'm being an ass, just a melodramatic ass. Well, I hope I am." He looked at his watch.

"It's safe, is it? They're still busy at the pond?"

"We'd better make certain. Could you be a sleuthhound, Bill--one of those that travel on their stomachs very noiselessly? I mean, could you get near enough to the pond to make sure that Cayley is still there, without letting him see you?"

"Rather!" He got up eagerly. "You wait."

Antony's head shot up suddenly. "Why, that was what Mark said," he cried.

"Mark?"

"Yes. What Elsie heard him say."

"Oh, that."

"Yes I suppose she couldn't have made a mistake, Bill? She did hear him?"

"She couldn't have mistaken his voice, if that's what you mean."

"Oh?"

"Mark had an extraordinary characteristic voice."

"Oh!"

"Rather high-pitched, you know, and well, one can't explain, but--"

"Yes?"

"Well, rather like this, you know, or even more so if anything." He rattled these words off in Mark's rather monotonous, high-pitched voice, and then laughed, and added in his natural voice, "I say, that was really rather good."
Antony nodded quickly. "That was like it?" he said.
"Exactly."
"Yes." He got up and squeezed Bill’s arm. "Well just go and see about Cayley, and then we'll get moving. I shall be in the library."
"Right."
Bill nodded and walked off in the direction of the pond. This was glorious fun; this was life. The immediate programme could hardly be bettered. First of all he was going to stalk Cayley. There was a little copse above the level of the pond, and about a hundred yards away from it. He would come into this from the back, creep cautiously through it, taking care that no twigs cracked, and then, drawing himself on his stomach to the edge, peer down upon the scene below him. People were always doing that sort of thing in books, and he had been filled with a hopeless envy of them; well, now he was actually going to do it himself. What fun!

And then, when he had got back unobserved to the house and reported to Antony, they were going to explore the secret passage! Again, what fun! Unfortunately there seemed to be no chance of buried treasure, but there might be buried clues. Even if you found nothing, you couldn't get away from the fact that a secret passage was a secret passage, and anything might happen in it. But even that wasn't the end of this exciting day. They were going to watch the pond that night; they were going to watch Cayley under the moonlight, watch him as he threw into the silence of the pond what? The revolver? Well, anyhow, they were going to watch him. What fun!

To Antony, who was older and who realized into what deep waters they were getting, it did not seem fun. But it was amazingly interesting. He saw so much, and yet somehow it was all out of focus. It was like looking at an opal, and discovering with every movement of it some new colour, some new gleam of light reflected, and yet never really seeing the opal as a whole. He was too near it, or too far away; he strained his eyes and he relaxed his eyes; it was no good. His brain could not get hold of it.

But there were moments when he almost had it .... and then turned away from it. He had seen more of life than Bill, but he had never seen murder before, and this which was in his mind now, and to which he was afraid to listen, was not just the hot-blooded killing which any man may come to if he lose control. It was something much more horrible. Too horrible to be true. Then let him look again for the truth. He looked again but it was all out of focus.

"I will not look again," he said aloud, as he began to walk towards the house. "Not yet, anyway." He would go on collecting facts and impressions. Perhaps the one fact would come along, by itself which would make everything clear.

CHAPTER XIV
Mr. Beverley Qualifies for the Stage

Bill had come back, and had reported, rather breathless, that Cayley was still at the pond.
"But I don't think they're getting up much except mud," he said. "I ran most of the way back so as to give us as much time as possible."

Antony nodded.
"Well, come along, then," he said. "The sooner, the quicker."

They stood in front of the row of sermons. Antony took down the Reverend Theodore Ussher's famous volume, and felt for the spring. Bill pulled. The shelves swung open towards them.
"By Jove!" said Bill, "it is a narrow way."

There was an opening about a yard square in front of them, which had something the look of a brick fireplace, a fireplace raised about two feet from the ground. But, save for one row of bricks in front, the floor of it was emptiness. Antony took a torch from his pocket and flashed it down into the blackness.

"Look," he whispered to the eager Bill. "The steps begin down there. Six feet down."

He flashed his torch up again. There was a handhold of iron, a sort of large iron staple, in the bricks in front of them.

"You swing off from there," said Bill. "At least, I suppose you do. I wonder how Ruth Norris liked doing it."
"Cayley helped her, I should think .... It's funny."
"Shall I go first?" asked Bill, obviously longing to do so. Antony shook his head with a smile.
"I think I will, if you don't mind very much, Bill. Just in case."
"In case of what?"
"Well in case."

Bill, had to be content with that, but he was too much excited to wonder what Antony meant.
"Righto," he said. "Go on."
"Well, we'll just make sure we can get back again, first. It really wouldn't be fair on the Inspector if we got stuck down here for the rest of our lives. He's got enough to do trying to find Mark, but if he has to find you and me as well--"
"We can always get out at the other end."
"Well, we're not certain yet. I think I'd better just go down and back. I promise faithfully not to explore."
"Right you are."

Antony sat down on the ledge of bricks, swung his feet over, and sat there for a moment, his legs dangling. He flashed his torch into the darkness again, so as to make sure where the steps began; then returned it to his pocket, seized the staple in front of him and swung himself down. His feet touched the steps beneath him, and he let go.
"Is it all right?" said Bill anxiously.
"All right. I'll just go down to the bottom of the steps and back. Stay there."

The light shone down by his feet. His head began to disappear. For a little while Bill, craning down the opening, could still see faint splashes of light, and could hear slow uncertain footsteps; for a little longer he could fancy that he saw and heard them; then he was alone ....

Well, not quite alone. There was a sudden voice in the hall outside.
"Good Lord!" said Bill, turning round with a start, "Cayley!"

If he was not so quick in thought as Antony, he was quick enough in action. Thought was not demanded now. To close the secret door safely but noiselessly, to make sure that the books were in the right places, to move away to another row of shelves so as to be discovered deep in "Badminton" or "Baedeker" or whomever the kind gods should send to his aid the difficulty was not to decide what to do, but to do all this in five seconds rather than in six.
"Ah, there you are," said Cayley from the doorway.
"Hallo!" said Bill, in surprise, looking up from the fourth volume of "The Life and Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge." "Have they finished?"
"Finished what?"
"The pond," said Bill, wondering why he was reading Coleridge on such a fine afternoon. Desperately he tried to think of a good reason .... verifying a quotation--an argument with Antony--that would do. But what quotation?
"Oh, no. They're still at it. Where's Gillingham?"

"'The Ancient Mariner'--water, water, everywhere--or was that something else? And where was Gillingham? Water, water everywhere . . .
"Tony? Oh, he's about somewhere. We're just going down to the village. They aren't finding anything at the pond, are they?"

"No. But they like doing it. Something off their minds when they can say they've done it."
Bill, deep in his book, looked up and said "Yes," and went back to it again. He was just getting to the place.
"What's the book?" said Cayley, coming up to him. Out of the corner of his eye he glanced at the shelf of sermons as he came. Bill saw that glance and wondered. Was there anything there to give away the secret?
"I was just looking up a quotation," he drawled. "Tony and I had a bet about it. You know that thing about--er--water, water everywhere, and--er--not a drop to drink." (But what on earth, he wondered to himself, were they betting about?)

"'Nor any drop to drink,' to be accurate."
Bill looked at him in surprise. Then a happy smile came on his face.
"Quite sure?" he said.
"Of course."
"Then you've saved me a lot of trouble. That's, what the bet was about." He closed the book with a slam, put it back in its shelf, and began to feel for his pipe and tobacco. "I was a fool to bet with Tony," he added. "He always knows that sort of thing."

So far, so good. But here was Cayley still in the library, and there was Antony, all unsuspecting, in the passage. When Antony came back he would not be surprised to find the door closed, because the whole object of his going had been to see if he could open it easily from the inside. At any moment, then, the bookshelf might swing back and show Antony's head in the gap. A nice surprise for Cayley!
"Come with us?" he said casually, as he struck a match. He pulled vigorously at the flame as he waited for the answer, hoping to hide his anxiety, for if Cayley assented, he was done.
"I've got to go into Stanton."
Bill blew out a great cloud of smoke with an expiration which covered also a heartfelt sigh of relief.
"Oh, a pity. You're driving, I suppose?"
"Yes. The car will be here directly. There's a letter I must write first." He sat down at a writing table, and took out a sheet of notepaper.

He was facing the secret door; if it opened he would see it. At any moment now it might open.

Bill dropped into a chair and thought. Antony must be warned. Obviously. But how? How did one signal to anybody? By code. Morse code. Did Antony know it? Did Bill know it himself, if it came to that? He had picked up
a bit in the Army not enough to send a message, of course. But a message was impossible, anyhow; Cayley would hear him tapping it out. It wouldn't do to send more than a single letter. What letters did he know? And what letter would convey anything to Antony? ... He pulled at his pipe, his eyes wandering from Cayley at his desk to the Reverend Theodore Ussher in his shelf. What letter?

C for Cayley. Would Antony understand? Probably not, but it was just worth trying. What was C? Long, short, long, short. Umpty-iddy-umpty-iddy. Was that right? C yes, that was C. He was sure of that. C. Umpty-iddy-umpty-iddy.

Hands in pockets, he got up and wandered across the room, humming vaguely to himself, the picture of a man waiting for another man (as it might be his friend Gillingham) to come in and take him away for a walk or something. He wandered across to the books at the back of Cayley, and began to tap absent-mindedly on the shelves, as he looked at the titles. Umpty-iddy-umpty-iddy. Not that it was much like that at first; he couldn't get the rhythm of it .... Umpt-y-iddy-umpt-y-iddy. That was better. He was back at Samuel Taylor Coleridge now. Antony would begin to hear him soon. Umpt-y-iddy-umpt-y-iddy; just the aimless tapping of a man who is wondering what book he will take out with him to read on the lawn. Would Antony hear? One always heard the man in the next flat knocking out his pipe. Would Antony understand? Umpt-y-iddy-umpt-y-iddy. C. for Cayley, Antony. Cayley's here. For God's sake, wait.

"Good Lord! Sermons!" said Bill, with a loud laugh. (Umpt-y-iddy-umpt-y-iddy) "Ever read 'em, Cayley?"
"What?" Cayley looked up suddenly. Bill's back moved slowly along, his fingers beating a tattoo on the shelves as he walked.
"Er no," said Cayley, with a little laugh. An awkward, uncomfortable little laugh, it seemed to Bill.
"Nor do I." He was past the sermons now past the secret door but still tapping in the same aimless way.
"Oh, for God's sake sit down," burst out Cayley. "Or go outside if you want to walk about."
Bill turned round in astonishment.
"Hallo, what's the matter?"
Cayley was slightly ashamed of his outburst.
"Sorry, Bill," he apologized. "My nerves are on edge. Your constant tapping and fidgeting about--"
"Tapping?" said Bill with an air of complete surprise.
"Tapping on the shelves, and humming. Sorry. It got on my nerves."
"My dear old chap, I'm awfully sorry. I'll go out in the hall."
"It's all right," said Cayley, and went on with his letter. Bill sat down in his chair again. Had Antony understood? Well, anyhow, there was nothing to do now but wait for Cayley to go. "And if you ask me," said Bill to himself, much pleased, "I ought to be on the stage. That's where I ought to be. The complete actor."
A minute, two minutes, three minutes .... five minutes. It was safe now. Antony had guessed.
"Is the car there?" asked Cayley, as he sealed up his letter. Bill strolled into the hall, called back "Yes," and went out to talk to the chauffeur. Cayley joined him, and they stood there for a moment.
"Hallo," said a pleasant voice behind them. They turned round and saw Antony.
"Sorry to keep you waiting, Bill."
With a tremendous effort Bill restrained his feelings, and said casually enough that it was all right.
"Well, I must be off," said Cayley. "You're going down to the village?"
"That's the idea."
"I wonder if you'd take this letter to Jallands for me?"
"Of course."
"Thanks very much. Well, I shall see you later."
He nodded and got into the car.
As soon as they were alone Bill turned eagerly to his friend.
"Well?" he said excitedly.
"Come into the library."
They went in, and Tony sank down into a chair.
"You must give me a moment," he panted. "I've been running."
"Running?"
"Well, of course. How do you think I got back here?"
"You don't mean you went out at the other end?"
Antony nodded.
"I say, did you hear me tapping?"
"I did, indeed. Bill, you're a genius."
Bill blushed.  
"I knew you'd understand," he said. "You guessed that I meant Cayley?"

"I did. It was the least I could do after you had been so brilliant. You must have had rather an exciting time."

"Exciting? Good Lord, I should think it was."

"Tell me about it."

As modestly as possible, Mr. Beverley explained his qualifications for a life on the stage.

"Good man," said Antony at the end of it. "You are the most perfect Watson that ever lived. Bill, my lad," he went on dramatically, rising and taking Bill's hand in both of his, "There is nothing that you and I could not accomplish together, if we gave our minds to it."

"Silly old ass."

"That's what you always say when I'm being serious. Well, anyway, thanks awfully. You really saved us this time."

"Were you coming back?"

"Yes. At least I think I was. I was just wondering when I heard you tapping. The fact of the door being shut was rather surprising. Of course the whole idea was to see if it could be opened easily from the other side, but I felt somehow that you wouldn't shut it until the last possible moment--until you saw me coming back. Well, then I heard the taps, and I knew it must mean something, so I sat tight. Then when C began to come along I said, 'Cayley, b'Jove'--bright, aren't I?--and I simply hared to the other end of the passage for all I was worth. And hared back again. Because I thought you might be getting rather involved in explanations--about where I was, and so on."

"You didn't see Mark, then?"

"No. Nor his--No, I didn't see anything."

"Nor what?"

Antony was silent for a moment.

"I didn't see anything, Bill. Or rather, I did see something; I saw a door in the wall, a cupboard. And it's locked. So if there's anything we want to find, that's where it is."

"Could Mark be hiding there?"

"I called through the keyhole in a whisper 'Mark, are you there?' he would have thought it was Cayley. There was no answer."

"Well, let's go down and try again. We might be able to get the door open."

Antony shook his head.

"Aren't I going at all?" said Bill in great disappointment.

When Antony spoke, it was to ask another question:

"Can Cayley drive a car?"

"Yes, of course. Why?"

"Then he might easily drop the chauffeur at his lodge and go off to Stanton, or wherever he wanted to, on his own?"

"I suppose so if he wanted to."

"Yes." Antony got up. "Well, look here, as we said we were going into the village, and as we promised to leave that letter, I almost think we'd better do it."

"Oh! .... Oh, very well."

"Jallands. What were you telling me about that? Oh, yes; the Widow Norbury."

"That's right. Cayley used to be rather keen on the daughter. The letter's for her."

"Yes; well, let's take it. Just to be on the safe side."

"Am I going to be done out of that secret passage altogether?" asked Bill fretfully.

"There's nothing to see, really, I promise you."

"You're very mysterious. What's upset you? You did see something down there, I'm certain of it."

"I did and I've told you about it."

"No, you haven't. You only told me about the door in the wall."

"That's it, Bill. And it's locked. And I'm frightened of what's behind it."

"But then we shall never know what's there if we aren't going to look."

"We shall know to-night," said Antony, taking Bill's arm and leading him to the hall, "when we watch our dear friend Cayley dropping it into the pond."

CHAPTER XV
Mrs. Norbury Confides in Dear Mr. Gillingham

They left the road, and took the path across the fields which sloped gently downwards towards Jallands. Antony was silent, and since it is difficult to keep up a conversation with a silent man for any length of time, Bill had
dropped into silence too. Or rather, he hummed to himself, hit at thistles in the grass with his stick and made
uncomfortable noises with his pipe. But he noticed that his companion kept looking back over his shoulder, almost
as if he wanted to remember for a future occasion the way by which they were coming. Yet there was no difficulty
about it, for they remained all the time in view of the road, and the belt of trees above the long park wall which
bordered its further side stood out clearly against the sky.
Antony, who had just looked round again, turned back with a smile.
"What's the joke?" said Bill, glad of the more social atmosphere.
"Cayley. Didn't you see?"
"See what?"
"The car. Going past on the road there."
"So that's what you were looking for. You've got jolly good eyes, my boy, if you recognize the car at this
distance after only seeing it twice."
"Well, I have got jolly good eyes."
"I thought he was going to Stanton."
"He hoped you'd think so obviously."
"Then where is he going?"
"The library, probably. To consult our friend Ussher. After making quite sure that his friends Beverley and
Gillingham really were going to Jallands, as they said."
Bill stopped suddenly in the middle of the path.
"I say, do you think so?"
Antony shrugged his shoulders.
"I shouldn't be surprised. We must be devilishly inconvenient for him, hanging about the house. Any moment he
can get, when we're definitely somewhere else, must be very useful to him."
"Useful for what?"
"Well, useful for his nerves, if for nothing else. We know he's mixed up in this business; we know he's hiding a
secret or two. Even if he doesn't suspect that we're on his tracks, he must feel that at any moment we might stumble
on something."
Bill gave a grunt of assent, and they went slowly on again.
"What about to-night?" he said, after a lengthy blow at his pipe.
"Try a piece of grass," said Antony, offering it to him. Bill pushed it through the mouthpiece, blew again, said,
"That's better," and returned the pipe to his pocket.
"How are we going to get out without Cayley knowing?"
"Well, that wants thinking over. It's going to be difficult. I wish we were sleeping at the inn .... Is this Miss
Norbury, by any chance?"
Bill looked up quickly. They were close to Jallands now, an old thatched farmhouse which, after centuries of
sleep, had woken up to a new world, and had forthwith sprouted wings; wings, however, of so discreet a growth that
they had not brought with them any obvious change of character, and Jallands even with a bathroom was still
Jallands. To the outward view, at any rate. Inside, it was more clearly Mrs. Norbury's.
"Yes Angela Norbury," murmured Bill. "Not bad-looking, is she?"
The girl who stood by the little white gate of Jallands was something more than "not bad-looking," but in this
matter Bill was keeping his superlatives for another. In Bill's eyes she must be judged, and condemned, by all that
distinguished her from Betty Calladine. To Antony, unhampered by these standards of comparison, she seemed,
quite simply, beautiful.
"Cayley asked us to bring a letter along," explained Bill, when the necessary handshakings and introductions
were over. "Here you are."
"You will tell him, won't you, how dreadfully sorry I am about what has happened? It seems so hopeless to say
anything; so hopeless even to believe it. If it is true what we've heard."
Bill repeated the outline of events of yesterday.
"Yes .... And Mr. Ablett hasn't been found yet?" She shook her head in distress. "It still seems to have happened
to somebody else; somebody we didn't know at all." Then, with a sudden grave smile which included both of them,
"But you must come and have some tea."
"It's awfully decent of you," said Bill awkwardly, "but we--er--"
"You will, won't you?" she said to Antony.
"Thank you very much."
Mrs. Norbury was delighted to see them, as she always was to see any man in her house who came up to the
necessary standard of eligibility. When her life-work was completed, and summed up in those beautiful words: "A
marriage has been arranged, and will shortly take place, between Angela, daughter of the late John Norbury ...." then she would utter a grateful Nunc dimittis and depart in peace to a better world, if Heaven insisted, but preferentially to her new son-in-law's more dignified establishment. For there was no doubt that eligibility meant not only eligibility as a husband.

But it was not as "eligibles" that the visitors from the Red House were received with such eagerness to-day, and even if her special smile for "possibles" was there, it was instinctive rather than reasoned. All that she wanted at this moment was news—news of Mark. For she was bringing it off at last; and, if the engagement columns of the "Morning Post" were preceded, as in the case of its obituary columns, by a premonitory bulletin, the announcement of yesterday would have cried triumphantly to the world, or to such part of the world as mattered: "A marriage has very nearly been arranged (by Mrs. Norbury), and will certainly take place, between Angela, only daughter of the late John Norbury, and--Mark Ablett of the Red House." And, coming across it on his way to the sporting page, Bill would have been surprised. For he had thought that, if anybody, it was Cayley.

To the girl it was neither. She was often amused by her mother's ways; sometimes ashamed of them; sometimes distressed by them. The Mark Ablett affair had seemed to her particularly distressing, for Mark was so obviously in league with her mother against her. Other suitors, upon whom her mother had smiled, had been embarrassed by that championship; Mark appeared to depend on it as much as on his own attractions; great though he thought these to be. They went a-wooing together. It was a pleasure to turn to Cayley, that hopeless ineligible.

But alas! Cayley had misunderstood her. She could not imagine Cayley in love until she saw it, and tried, too late, to stop it. That was four days ago. She had not seen him since, and now here was this letter. She dreaded opening it. It was a relief to feel that at least she had an excuse for not doing so while her guests were in the house.

Mrs. Norbury recognized at once that Antony was likely to be the more sympathetic listener; and when tea was over, and Bill and Angela had been dispatched to the garden with the promptness and efficiency of the expert, dear Mr. Gillingham found himself on the sofa beside her, listening to many things which were of even greater interest to him than she could possibly have hoped.

"It is terrible, terrible," she said. "And to suggest that dear Mr. Ablett--"
Antony made suitable noises.
"You've seen Mr. Ablett for yourself. A kinder, more warmhearted man--"
Antony explained that he had not seen Mr. Ablett.
"Of course, yes, I was forgetting. But, believe me, Mr. Gillingham, you can trust a woman's intuition in these matters."
Antony said that he was sure of this.
"Think of my feelings as a mother."
Antony was thinking of Miss Norbury's feelings as a daughter, and wondering if she guessed that her affairs were now being discussed with a stranger. Yet what could he do? What, indeed, did he want to do except listen, in the hope of learning? Mark engaged, or about to be engaged! Had that any bearing on the events of yesterday? What, for instance, would Mrs. Norbury have thought of brother Robert, that family skeleton? Was this another reason for wanting brother Robert out of the way?

"I never liked him, never!"
"Never liked?" said Antony, bewildered.
"That cousin of his Mr. Cayley."
"Oh!"
"I ask you, Mr. Gillingham, am I the sort of woman to trust my little girl to a man who would go about shooting his only brother?"
"I'm sure you wouldn't, Mrs. Norbury."
"If there has been any shooting done, it has been done by somebody else."
Antony looked at her inquiringly.
"I never liked him," said Mrs. Norbury firmly. "Never." However, thought Antony to himself, that didn't quite prove that Cayley was a murderer.
"How did Miss Norbury get on with him?" he asked cautiously.
"There was nothing in that at all," said Miss Norbury's mother emphatically. "Nothing. I would say so to anybody."
"Oh, I beg your pardon. I never meant--"
"Nothing. I can say that for dear Angela with perfect confidence. Whether he made advances--" She broke off with a shrug of her plump shoulders.
Antony waited eagerly.
"Naturally they met. Possibly he might have--I don't know. But my duty as a mother was clear, Mr. Gillingham."
Mr. Gillingham made an encouraging noise.
"I told him quite frankly that--how shall I put it?--that he was trespassing. Tactfully, of course. But frankly."
"You mean," said Antony, trying to speak calmly, "that you told him that--er--Mr. Ablett and your daughter--?"
Mrs. Norbury nodded several times.
"Exactly, Mr. Gillingham. I had my duty as a mother."
"I am sure, Mrs. Norbury, that nothing would keep you from doing your duty. But it must have been disagreeable. Particularly if you weren't quite sure--"

"He was attracted, Mr. Gillingham. Obviously attracted."
"Who would not be?" said Antony, with a charming smile. "It must have been something of a shock to him to--"

"It was just that which made me so glad that I had spoken. I saw at once that I had not spoken a moment too soon."

"There must have been a certain awkwardness about the next meeting," suggested Antony.
"Naturally, he has not been here since. No doubt they would have been bound to meet up at the Red House sooner or later."
"Oh,--this was only quite lately?"
"Last week, Mr. Gillingham. I spoke just in time."

"Ah!" said Antony, under his breath. He had been waiting for it.

He would have liked now to have gone away, so that he might have thought over the new situation by himself; or, perhaps preferably, to have changed partners for a little while with Bill. Miss Norbury would hardly be ready to confide in a stranger with the readiness of a mother, but he might have learnt something by listening to her. For which of them had she the greater feeling, Cayley or Mark? Was she really prepared to marry Mark? Did she love him or the other--or neither? Mrs. Norbury was only a trustworthy witness in regard to her own actions and thoughts; he had learnt all that was necessary of those, and only the daughter now had anything left to tell him. But Mrs. Norbury was still talking.

"Girls are so foolish, Mr. Gillingham," she was saying. "It is fortunate that they have mothers to guide them. It was so obvious to me from the beginning that dear Mr. Ablett was just the husband for my little girl. You never knew him?"

Antony said again that he had not seen Mr. Ablett.

"Such a gentleman. So nice-looking, in his artistic way. A regular Velasquez--I should say Van Dyck. Angela would have it that she could never marry a man with a beard. As if that mattered, when--" She broke off, and Antony finished her sentence for her.

"The Red House is certainly charming," he said.
"Charming. Quite charming. And it is not as if Mr. Ablett's appearance were in any way undistinguished. Quite the contrary. I'm sure you agree with me?"

Antony said that he had never had the pleasure of seeing Mr. Ablett.

"Yes. And quite the centre of the literary and artistic world. So desirable in every way."

She gave a deep sigh, and communed with herself for a little. Antony was, about to snatch the opportunity of leaving, when Mrs. Norbury began again.

"And then there's this scapegrace brother of his. He was perfectly frank with me, Mr. Gillingham. He would be. He told me of this brother, and I told him that I was quite certain it would make no difference to my daughter's feelings for him.... After all, the brother was in Australia."

"When was this? Yesterday?" Antony felt that, if Mark had only mentioned it after his brother's announcement of a personal call at the Red House, this perfect frankness had a good deal of wisdom behind it.

"It couldn't have been yesterday, Mr. Gillingham. Yesterday--" she shuddered, and shook her head.

"I thought perhaps he had been down here in the morning."

"Oh, no! There is such a thing, Mr. Gillingham, as being too devoted a lover. Not in the morning, no. We both agreed that dear Angela--Oh, no. No; the day before yesterday, when he happened to drop in about tea-time."

It occurred to Antony that Mrs. Norbury had come a long way from her opening statement that Mark and Miss Norbury were practically engaged. She was now admitting that dear Angela was not to be rushed, that dear Angela had, indeed, no heart for the match at all.

"The day before yesterday. As it happened, dear Angela was out. Not that it mattered. He was driving to Middleton. He hardly had time for a cup of tea, so that even if she had been in--"

Antony nodded absenty. This was something new. Why did Mark go to Middleton the day before yesterday? But, after all, why shouldn't he? A hundred reasons unconnected with the death of Robert might have taken him there.

He got up to go. He wanted to be alone--alone, at least, with Bill. Mrs. Norbury had given him many things to
think over, but the great outstanding fact which had emerged was this: that Cayley had reason to hate Mark,—Mrs. Norbury had given him that reason. To hate? Well, to be jealous, anyhow. But that was enough.

"You see," he said to Bill, as they walked back, "we know that Cayley is perjuring himself and risking himself over this business, and that must be for one of two reasons. Either to save Mark or to endanger him. That is to say, he is either whole-heartedly for him or whole-heartedly against him. Well, now we know that he is against him, definitely against him."

"But, I say, you know," protested Bill, "one doesn't necessarily try to ruin one's rival in love."

"Doesn't one?" said Antony, turning to him with a smile.

Bill blushed.

"Well, of course, one never knows, but I mean--"

"You mightn't try to ruin him, Bill, but you wouldn't perjure yourself in order to get him out of a trouble of his own making."

"Lord! no."

"So that of the two alternatives the other is the more likely."

They had come to the gate into the last field which divided them from the road, and having gone through it, they turned round and leant against it, resting for a moment, and looking down at the house which they had left.

"Jolly little place, isn't it?" said Bill.

"Very. But rather mysterious."

"In what way?"

"Well, where's the front door?"

"The front door? Why, you've just come out of it."

"But isn't there a drive, or a road or anything?"

Bill laughed.

"No; that's the beauty of it to some people. And that's why it's so cheap, and why the Norburys can afford it, I expect. They're not too well off."

"But what about luggage and tradesmen and that kind of thing?"

"Oh, there's a cart-track, but motor-cars can't come any nearer than the road" he turned round and pointed "up there. So the week-end millionaire people don't take it. At least, they'd have to build a road and a garage and all the rest of it, if they did."

"I see," said Antony carelessly, and they turned round and continued their walk up to the road. But later on he remembered this casual conversation at the gate, and saw the importance of it.

CHAPTER XVI
Getting Ready for the Night

What was it which Cayley was going to hide in that pond that night? Antony thought that he knew now. It was Mark's body.

From the beginning he had seen this answer coming and had drawn back from it. For, if Mark had been killed, it seemed such a cold-blooded killing. Was Cayley equal to it? Bill would have said "No," but that was because he had had breakfast with Cayley, and lunch with him, and dinner with him; had ragged him and played games with him. Bill would have said "No," because Bill wouldn't have killed anybody in cold blood himself, and because he took it for granted that other people behaved pretty much as he did. But Antony had no such illusions. Murders were done; murder had actually been done here, for there was Robert's dead body. Why not another murder?

Had Mark been in the office at all that afternoon? The only evidence (other than Cayley's, which obviously did not count) was Elsie's. Elsie was quite certain that she had heard his voice. But then Bill had said that it was a very characteristic voice—an easy voice, therefore, to imitate. If Bill could imitate it so successfully, why not Cayley?

But perhaps it had not been such a cold-blooded killing, after all. Suppose Cayley had had a quarrel with his cousin that afternoon over the girl whom they were both wooing. Suppose Cayley had killed Mark, either purposely, in sudden passion, or accidentally, meaning only to knock him down. Suppose that this had happened in the passage, say about two o'clock, either because Cayley had deliberately led him there, or because Mark had casually suggested a visit to it. (One could imagine Mark continually gloating over that secret passage.) Suppose Cayley there, with the body at his feet, feeling already the rope round his neck; his mind darting this way and that in frantic search for a way of escape; and suppose that suddenly and irrelevantly he remembers that Robert is coming to the house at three o'clock that afternoon—automatically he looks at his watch—in half an hour's time .... In half an hour's time. He must think of something quickly, quickly. Shall he bury the body in the passage and let it be thought that Mark ran away, frightened at the mere thought of his brother's arrival? But there was the evidence of the breakfast table. Mark had seemed annoyed at this resurrection of the black sheep, but certainly not frightened. No; that was much too thin a story. But suppose Mark had actually seen his brother and had a quarrel with him; suppose it could be made to look
as if Robert had killed Mark--

Antony pictured to himself Cayley in the passage, standing over the dead body of his cousin, and working it out. How could Robert be made to seem the murderer, if Robert were alive to deny it? But suppose Robert were dead, too?

He looks at his watch again. (Only twenty-five minutes now.) Suppose Robert were dead, too? Robert dead in the office, and Mark dead in the passage how does that help? Madness! But if the bodies were brought together somehow and Robert's death looked like suicide? .... Was it possible?

Madness again. Too difficult. (Only twenty minutes now.) Too difficult to arrange in twenty minutes. Can't arrange a suicide. Too difficult .... Only nineteen minutes ....

And then the sudden inspiration! Robert dead in the office, Mark's body hidden in the passage--impossible to make Robert seem the murderer, but how easy to make Mark! Robert dead and Mark missing; why, it jumped to the eye at once. Mark had killed Robert--accidentally; yes, that would be more likely--and then had run away. Sudden panic .... (He looks at his watch again. Fifteen minutes, but plenty of time now. The thing arranges itself.)

Was that the solution, Antony wondered. It seemed to fit in with the facts as they knew them; but then, so did that other theory which he had suggested to Bill in the morning.

"Which one?" said Bill.

They had come back from Jallands through the park and were sitting in the copse above the pond, from which the Inspector and his fishermen had now withdrawn. Bill had listened with open mouth to Antony's theory, and save for an occasional "By Jove!" had listened in silence. "Smart man, Cayley," had been his only comment at the end.

"Which other theory?"

"That Mark had killed Robert accidentally and had gone to Cayley for help, and that Cayley, having hidden him in the passage, locked the office door from the outside and hammered on it."

"Yes, but you were so dash'd mysterious about that. I asked you what the point of it was, and you wouldn't say anything." He thought for a little, and then went on, "I suppose you meant that Cayley deliberately betrayed Mark, and tried to make him look like a murderer?"

"I wanted to warn you that we should probably find Mark in the passage, alive or dead."

"And now you don't think so?"

"Now I think that his dead body is there."

"Meaning that Cayley went down and killed him afterwards after you had come, after the police had come?"

"Well, that's what I shrink from, Bill. It's so horribly cold-blooded. Cayley may be capable of it, but I hate to think of it."

"But, dash it all, your other way is cold-blooded enough. According to you, he goes up to the office and deliberately shoots a man with whom he has no quarrel, whom he hasn't seen for fifteen years!"

"Yes, but to save his own neck. That makes a difference. My theory is that he quarrelled violently with Mark over the girl, and killed him in sudden passion. Anything that happened after that would be self-defense. I don't mean that I excuse it, but that I understand it. And I think that Mark's dead body is in the passage now, and has been there since, say, half-past two yesterday afternoon. And to-night Cayley is going to hide it in the pond."

Bill pulled at the moss on the ground beside him, threw away a handful or two, and said slowly, "You may be right, but it's all guess-work, you know."

Antony laughed.

"Good Lord, of course it is," he said. "And to-night we shall know if it's a good guess or a bad one."

Bill brightened up suddenly.

"To-night," he said. "I say, to-night's going to be rather fun. How do we work it?"

Antony was silent for a little.

"Of course," he said at last, "we ought to inform the police, so that they can come here and watch the pond to-night."

"Of course," grinned Bill.

"But I think that perhaps it is a little early to put our theories before them."

"I think perhaps it is," said Bill solemnly.

Antony looked up at him with a sudden smile.

"Bill, you old bounder."

"Well, dash it, it's our show. I don't see why we shouldn't get our little bit of fun out of it."

"Neither do I. All right, then, we'll do without the police to-night."

"We shall miss them," said Bill sadly, "but 'tis better so."

There were two problems in front of them: first, the problem of getting out of the house without being discovered by Cayley, and secondly, the problem of recovering whatever it was which Cayley dropped into the pond.
that night.

"Let's look at it from Cayley's point of view," said Antony. "He may not know that we're on his track, but he can't help being suspicious of us. He's bound to be suspicious of everybody in the house, and more particularly of us, because we're presumably more intelligent than the others."

He stopped for a moment to light his pipe, and Bill took the opportunity of looking more intelligent than Mrs. Stevens.

"Now, he has got something to hide to-night, and he's going to take good care that we aren't watching him. Well, what will he do?"

"See that we are asleep first, before he starts out."

"Yes. Come and tuck us up, and see that we're nice and comfortable."

"Yes, that's awkward," said Bill. "But we could lock our doors, and then he wouldn't know that we weren't there."

"Have you ever locked your door?"

"Never."

"No. And you can bet that Cayley knows that. Anyway, he'd bang on it, and you wouldn't answer, and then what would he think?"

Bill was silent; crushed.

"Then I don't see how we're going to do it," he said, after deep thought. "He'll obviously come to us just before he starts out, and that doesn't give us time to get to the pond in front of him."

"Let's put ourselves in his place," said Antony, puffing slowly at his pipe. "He's got the body, or whatever it is, in the passage. He won't come up the stairs, carrying it in his arms, and look in at our doors to see if we're awake. He'll have to make sure about us first, and then go down for the body afterwards. So that gives us a little time."

"Y-yes," said Bill doubtfully. "We might just do it, but it'll be a bit of a rush."

"But wait. When he's gone down to the passage and got the body, what will he do next?"

"Come out again," said Bill helpfully.

"Yes; but which end?"

Bill sat up with a start.

"By Jove, you mean that he will go out at the far end by the bowling-green?"

"Don't you think so? Just imagine him walking across the lawn in full view of the house, at midnight, with a body in his arms. Think of the awful feeling he would have in the back of the neck, wondering if anybody, any restless sleeper, had chosen just that moment to wander to the window and look out into the night. There's still plenty of moonlight, Bill. Is he going to walk across the park in the moonlight, with all those windows staring at him? Not if he can help it. But he can get out by the bowling green, and then come to the pond without ever being in sight of the house, at all."

"You're right. And that will just about give us time. Good. Now, what's the next thing?"

"The next thing is to mark the exact place in the pond where he drops whatever he drops."

"So that we can fish it out again."

"If we can see what it is, we shan't want to. The police can have a go at it to-morrow. But if it's something we can't identify from a distance, then we must try and get it out. To see whether it's worth telling the police about."

"Y-yes," said Bill, wrinkling his forehead. "Of course, the trouble with water is that one bit of it looks pretty much like the next bit. I don't know if that had occurred to you."

"It had," smiled Antony. "Let's come and have a look at it."

They walked to the edge of the copse, and lay down there in silence, looking at the pond beneath them.

"See anything?" said Antony at last.

"What?"

"The fence on the other side."

"What about it?"

"Well, it's rather useful, that's all."

"Said Sherlock Holmes enigmatically," added Bill. "A moment later, his friend Watson had hurled him into the pond."

Antony laughed.

"I love being Sherloky," he said. "It's very unfair of you not to play up to me."

"Why is that fence useful, my dear Holmes?" said Bill obediently.

"Because you can take a bearing on it. You see---"

"Yes, you needn't stop to explain to me what a bearing is."

"I wasn't going to. But you're lying here," he looked up "underneath this pine-tree. Cayley comes out in the old
boat and drops his parcel in. You take a line from here on to the boat, and mark it off on the fence there. Say it's the fifth post from the end. Well, then I take a line from my tree we'll find one for me directly and it comes on to the twentieth post, say. And where the two lines meet, there shall the eagles be gathered together. Q.E.D. And there, I almost forgot to remark, will the taller eagle, Beverley by name, do his famous diving act. As performed nightly at the Hippodrome."

Bill looked at him uneasily.
"I say, really? It's beastly dirty water, you know."
"I'm afraid so, Bill. So it is written in the book of Jasher."
"Of course I knew that one of us would have to, but I hoped, well, it's a warm night."
"Just the night for a bathe," agreed Antony, getting up. "Well now, let's have a look for my tree."

They walked down to the margin of the pond and then looked back. Bill's tree stood up and took the evening, tall and unmistakable, fifty feet nearer to heaven than its neighbours. But it had its fellow at the other end of the copse, not quite so tall, perhaps, but equally conspicuous.

"That's where I shall be," said Antony, pointing to it. "Now, for the Lord's sake, count your posts accurately."
"Thanks very much, but I shall do it for my own sake," said Bill with feeling. "I don't want to spend the whole night diving."

"Fix on the post in a straight line with you and the splash, and then count backwards to the beginning of the fence."
"Right, old boy. Leave it to me. I can do this on my head."
"Well, that's how you will have to do the last part of it," said Antony with a smile.

He looked at his watch. It was nearly time to change for dinner. They started to walk back to the house together.

"There's one thing which worries me rather," said Antony. "Where does Cayley sleep?"

"Next door to me. Why?"
"Well, it's just possible that he might have another look at you after he's come back from the pond. I don't think he'd bother about it in the ordinary way, but if he is actually passing your door, I think he might glance in."

"I shan't be there. I shall be at the bottom of the pond, sucking up mud."
"Yes .... Do you think you could leave something in your bed that looked vaguely like you in the dark? A bolster with a pyjama-coat round it, and one arm outside the blanket, and a pair of socks or something for the head. You know the kind of thing. I think it would please him to feel that you were still sleeping peacefully."

Bill chuckled to himself.
"Rather. I'm awfully good at that. I'll make him up something really good. But what about you?"
"I'm at the other end of the house; he's hardly likely to bother about me a second time. And I shall be so very fast asleep at his first visit. Still, I may as well to be on the safe side."

They went into the house. Cayley was in the hall as they came in. He nodded, and took out his watch.

"Time to change?" he said.
"Just about," said Bill.
"You didn't forget my letter?"
"I did not. In fact, we had tea there."
"Ah!" He looked away and said carelessly, "How were they all?"
"They sent all sorts of sympathetic messages to you, and--and all that sort of thing."
"Oh, yes."

Bill waited for him to say something more, and then, as nothing was coming, he turned round, said, "Come on, Tony," and led the way upstairs.

"Got all you want?" he said at the top of the stairs.
"I think so. Come and see me before you go down."
"Righto."

Antony shut his bedroom door behind him and walked over to the window. He pushed open a casement and looked out. His bedroom was just over the door at the back of the house. The side wall of the office, which projected out into the lawn beyond the rest of the house, was on his left. He could step out on to the top of the door, and from there drop easily to the ground. Getting back would be little more difficult. There was a convenient water-pipe which would help.

He had just finished his dressing when Bill came in. "Final instructions?" he asked, sitting down on the bed. "By the way, how are we amusing ourselves after dinner? I mean immediately after dinner."

"Billiards?"
"Righto. Anything you like."
"Don't talk too loud," said Antony in a lower voice. "We're more or less over the hall, and Cayley may be there."
He led the way to the window. "We'll go out this way to-night. Going downstairs is too risky. It's easy enough; better put on tennis-shoes."

"Right. I say, in case I don't get another chance alone with you what do I do when Cayley comes to tuck me up?"

"It's difficult to say. Be as natural as you can. I mean, if he just knocks lightly and looks in, be asleep. Don't overdo the snoring. But if he makes a hell of a noise, you'll have to wake up and rub your eyes, and wonder what on earth he's doing in your room at all. You know the sort of thing."

"Right. And about the dummy figure. I'll make it up directly we come upstairs, and hide it under the bed."

"Yes .... I think we'd better go completely to bed ourselves. We shan't take a moment dressing again, and it will give him time to get safely into the passage. Then come into my room."

"Right .... Are you ready?"

"Yes."

They went downstairs together.

CHAPTER XVII
Mr. Beverley Takes the Water

Cayley seemed very fond of them that night. After dinner was over, he suggested a stroll outside. They walked up and down the gravel in front of the house, saying very little to each other, until Bill could stand it no longer. For the last twenty turns he had been slowing down hopefully each time they came to the door, but the hint had always been lost on his companions, and each time another turn had been taken. But in the end he had been firm.

"What about a little billiards?" he said, shaking himself free from the others.

"Will you play?" said Antony to Cayley.

"I'll watch you," he said, and he had watched them resolutely until the game, and then another game after that; had been played.

They went into the hall and attacked the drinks.

"Well, thank heaven for bed," said Bill; putting down his glass. "Are you coming?"

"Yes," said Antony, and finished his drink. He looked at Cayley.

"I've just got one or two little things to do," said Cayley. "I shan't be long following you."

"Well, good night, then."

"Good night."

"Good night," called Bill from half-way up the stairs. "Good night, Tony."

"Good night."

Bill looked at his watch. Half-past eleven. Not much chance of anything happening for another hour. He pulled open a drawer and wondered what to wear on their expedition. Grey flannel trousers, flannel shirt, and a dark coat; perhaps a sweater, as they might be lying out in the copse for some time. And good idea a towel. He would want it later on, and meanwhile he could wear it round his waist.

Tennis-shoes .... There Everything was ready. Now then for the dummy figure.

He looked at his watch again before getting into bed. Twelve-fifteen. How long to wait before Cayley came up? He turned out the light, and then, standing by the door in his pyjamas, waited for his eyes to become accustomed to the new darkness .... He could only just make out the bed in the corner of the room. Cayley would want more light than that if he were to satisfy himself from the door that the bed was occupied. He pulled the curtains a little way back. That was about right. He could have another look later on, when he had the dummy figure in the bed.

How long would it be before Cayley came up? It wasn't that he wanted his friends, Beverley and Gillingham, to be asleep before he started on his business at the pond; all that he wanted was to be sure that they were safely in their bedrooms. Cayley's business would make no noise, give no sign, to attract the most wakeful member of the household, so long as the household was really inside the house. But if he wished to reassure himself about his guests, he would have to wait until they were far enough on their way to sleep not to be disturbed by him as he came up to reassure himself. So it amounted to the same thing, really. He would wait until they were asleep .... until they were asleep .... asleep ....

With a great effort Bill regained the mastery over his wandering thoughts and came awake again. This would never do. It would be fatal if he went to sleep .... if he went to sleep .... to sleep .... And then, in an instant, he was intensely awake. Suppose Cayley never came at all!

Suppose Cayley was so unsuspicious that, as soon as they had gone upstairs, he had dived down into the passage and set about his business. Suppose, even now, he was at the pond, dropping into it that secret of his. Good heavens, what fools they had been! How could Antony have taken such a risk? Put yourself in Cayley's place, he had said. But how was it possible? They weren't Cayley. Cayley was at the pond now. They would never know what he had dropped into it.

Listen! .... Somebody at the door. He was asleep. Quite naturally now. Breathe a little more loudly, perhaps. He
was asleep .... The door was opening. He could feel it opening behind him .... Good Lord, suppose Cayley really was a murderer! Why, even now he might be--no, he mustn't think of that. If he thought of that, he would have to turn round. He mustn't turn round. He was asleep; just peacefully asleep. But why didn't the door shut? Where was Cayley now? Just behind him? And in his hand no, he mustn't think of that. He was asleep. But why didn't the door shut?

The door was shutting. There was a sigh from the sleeper in the bed, a sigh of relief which escaped him involuntarily. But it had a very natural sound a deep breath from a heavy sleeper. He added another one to it to make it seem more natural. The door was shut.

Bill counted a hundred slowly and then got up. As quickly and as noiselessly as possible he dressed himself in the dark. He put the dummy figure in the bed, arranged the clothes so that just enough but not too much of it was showing, and stood by the door looking at it. For a casual glance the room was just about light enough. Then very quietly, very slowly he opened the door. All was still. There was no light from beneath the door of Cayley's room. Very quietly, very carefully he crept along the passage to Antony's room. He opened the door and went in.

Antony was still in bed. Bill walked across to wake him up, and then stopped rigid, and his heart thumped against his ribs. There was somebody else in the room.

"All right, Bill," said a whispering voice, and Antony stepped out from the curtains.

Bill gazed at him without saying anything.

"Rather good, isn't it?" said Antony, coming closer and pointing to the bed. "Come on; the sooner we get out now, the better."

He led the way out of the window, the silent Bill following him. They reached the ground safely and noiselessly, went quickly across the lawn and so, over the fence, into the park. It was not until they were out of sight of the house that Bill felt it safe to speak.

"I quite thought it was you in bed," he said.

"I hoped you would. I shall be rather disappointed now if Cayley doesn't call again. It's a pity to waste it."

"He came all right just now?"

"Oh, rather. What about you?"

Bill explained his feelings picturesquely.

"There wouldn't have been much point in his killing you," said Antony prosaically. "Besides being too risky."

"Oh!" said Bill. And then, "I had rather hoped that it was his love for me which restrained him."

Antony laughed.

"I doubt it .... You didn't turn up your light when you dressed?"

"Good Lord, no. Did you want me to?"

Antony laughed again and took him by the arm.

"You're a splendid conspirator, Bill. You and I could take on anything together."

The pond was waiting for them, more solemn in the moonlight. The trees which crowned the sloping bank on the far side of it were mysteriously silent. It seemed that they had the world very much to themselves.

Almost unconsciously Antony spoke in a whisper.

"There's your tree, there's mine. As long as you don't move, there's no chance of his seeing you. After he's gone, don't come out till I do. He won't be here for a quarter of an hour or so, so don't be impatient."

"Righto," whispered Bill.

Antony gave him a nod and a smile, and they walked off to their posts.

The minutes went by slowly. To Antony, lying hidden in the undergrowth at the foot of his tree, a new problem was presenting itself. Suppose Cayley had to make more than one journey that night? He might come back to find them in the boat; one of them, indeed, in the water. And if they decided to wait in hiding, on the chance of Cayley coming back again, what was the least time they could safely allow? Perhaps it would be better to go round to the front of the house and watch for his return there, the light in his bedroom, before conducting their experiments at the pond. But then they might miss his second visit in this way, if he made a second visit. It was difficult.

His eyes were fixed on the boat as he considered these things, and suddenly, as if materialized from nowhere, Cayley was standing by the boat. In his hand was a small brown bag.

Cayley put the bag in the bottom of the boat, stepped in, and using an oar as a punt-pole, pushed slowly off. Then, very silently, he rowed towards the middle of the pond.

He had stopped. The oars rested on the water. He picked up the bag from between his feet, leant over the nose of the boat, and rested it lightly on the water for a moment. Then he let go. It sank slowly. He waited there, watching; afraid, perhaps, that it might rise again. Antony began to count ....

And now Cayley was back at his starting-place. He tied up the boat, looked carefully round to see that he had left no traces behind him, and then turned to the water again. For a long time, as it seemed to the watchers, he stood
there, very big, very silent, in the moonlight. At last he seemed satisfied. Whatever his secret was, he had hidden it; and so with a gentle sigh, as unmistakable to Antony as if he had heard it, Cayley turned away and vanished again as quietly as he had come.

Antony gave him three minutes, and stepped out from the trees. He waited there for Bill to join him.

"Six," whispered Bill.

Antony nodded.

"I'm going round to the front of the house. You get back to your tree and watch, in case Cayley comes again. Your bedroom is the left-hand end one, and Cayley's the end but one? Is that right?"

Bill nodded.

"Right. Wait in hiding till I come back. I don't know how long I shall be, but don't be impatient. It will seem longer than it is." He patted Bill on the shoulder, and with a smile and a nod of the head he left him there.

What was in the bag? What could Cayley want to hide other than a key or a revolver? Keys and revolvers sink of themselves; no need to put them in a bag first. What was in the bag? Something which wouldn't sink of itself; something which needed to be helped with stones before it would hide itself safely in the mud.

Well, they would find that out. There was no object in worrying about it now. Bill had a dirty night's work in front of him. But where was the body which Antony had expected so confidently or, if there were no body, where was Mark?

More immediately, however, where was Cayley? As quickly as he could Antony had got to the front of the house and was now lying in the shrubbery which bordered the lawn, waiting for the light to go up in Cayley's window. If it went up in Bill's window, then they were discovered. It would mean that Cayley had glanced into Bill's room, had been suspicious of the dummy figure in the bed, and had turned up the light to make sure. After that, it was war between them. But if it went up in Cayley's room--

There was a light. Antony felt a sudden thrill of excitement. It was in Bill's room. War!

The light stayed there, shining vividly, for a wind had come up, blowing the moon behind a cloud, and casting a shadow over the rest of the house. Bill had left his curtains undrawn. It was careless of him; the first stupid thing he had done, but--

The moon slipped out again ... and Antony laughed to himself in the bushes. There was another window beyond Cayley's, and there was no light in it. The declaration of war was postponed.

Antony lay there, watching Cayley into bed. After all it was only polite to return Cayley's own solicitude earlier in the night. Politeness demanded that one should not disport oneself on the pond until one's friends were comfortably tucked up.

Meanwhile Bill was getting tired of waiting. His chief fear was that he might spoil everything by forgetting the number "six." It was the sixth post. Six. He broke off a twig and divided it into six pieces. These he arranged on the ground in front of him. Six. He looked at the pond, counted up to the sixth post, and murmured "six" to himself again. Then he looked down at his twigs. One-two-three-four-five-six-seven. Seven! Was it seven? Or was that seventh bit of a twig an accidental bit which had been on the ground anyhow? Surely it was six! Had he said "six" to Antony? If so, Antony would remember, and it was all right. Six. He threw away the seventh twig and collected the other six together. Perhaps they would be safer in his pocket. Six. The height of a tall man--well, his own height. Six feet. Yes, that was the way to remember it. Feeling a little safer on the point, he began to wonder about the bag, and what Antony would say to it, and the possible depth of the water and of the mud at the bottom; and was still so wondering, and saying, "Good Lord, what a life!" to himself, when Antony reappeared.

Bill got up and came down the slope to meet him.

"Six," he said firmly. "Sixth post from the end."

"Good," smiled Antony. "Mine was the eighteenth--a little way past it."

"What did you go off for?"

"To see Cayley into bed."

"Is it all right?"

"Yes. Better hang your coat over the sixth post, and then we shall see it more easily. I'll put mine on the eighteenth. Are you going to undress here or in the boat?"

"Some here, and some in the boat. You're quite sure that you wouldn't like to do the diving yourself?"

"Quite, thanks."

They had walked round to the other side of the pond. Coming to the sixth post of the fence, Bill took off his coat and put it in position, and then finished his undressing, while Antony went off to mark the eighteenth post. When they were ready, they got into the boat, Antony taking the oars.

"Now, Bill, tell me as soon as I'm in a line with your two marks."

He rowed slowly towards the middle of the pond.
"You're about there now," said Bill at last.
Antony stopped rowing and looked about him.
"Yes, that's pretty well right." He turned the boat's nose round until it was pointing to the pine-tree under which
Bill had lain. "You see my tree and the other coat?"
"Yes," said Bill.
"Right. Now then, I'm going to row gently along this line until we're dead in between the two. Get it as exact as
you can—for your own sake."
"Steady!" said Bill warningly. "Back a little .... a little more .... a little more forward again .... Right." Antony left
the oars on the water and looked around. As far as he could tell, they were in an exact line with each pair of
landmarks.
"Now then, Bill, in you go."
Bill pulled off his shirt and trousers, and stood up.
"You mustn't dive from the boat, old boy," said Antony hastily. "You'll shift its position. Slide in gently."
Bill slid in from the stern and swam slowly round to Antony.
"What's it like?" said Antony.
"Cold. Well, here's luck to it."
He gave a sudden kick, flashed for a moment in the water, and was gone. Antony steadied the boat, and took
another look at his landmarks.
Bill came up behind him with a loud explosion. "It's pretty muddy," he protested.
"Weeds?"
"No, thank the Lord."
"Well, try again."
Bill gave another kick and disappeared. Again Antony coaxed the boat back into position, and again Bill popped
up, this time in front of him.
"I feel that if I threw you a sardine," said Antony, with a smile, "you'd catch it in your mouth quite prettily."
"It's awfully easy to be funny from where you are. How much longer have I got to go on doing this?"
Antony looked at his watch.
"About three hours. We must get back before daylight. But be quicker if you can, because it's rather cold for me
sitting here."
Bill flicked a handful of water at him and disappeared again. He was under for almost a minute this time, and
there was a grin on his face when it was visible again.
"I've got it, but it's devilish hard to get up. I'm not sure that it isn't too heavy for me."
"That's all right," said Antony. He brought out a ball of thick string from his pocket. "Get this through the handle
if you can, and then we can both pull."
"Good man." He paddled to the side, took one end of the string and paddled back again. "Now then."
Two minutes later the bag was safely in the boat. Bill clambered in after it, and Antony rowed back. "Well done,
Watson," he said quietly, as they landed. He fetched their two coats, and then waited, the bag in his hand, while Bill
dried and dressed himself. As soon as the latter was ready, he took his arm and led him into the copse. He put the
bag down and felt in his pockets.
"I shall light a pipe before I open it," he said. "What about you?"
"Yes."
With great care they filled and lit their pipes. Bill's hand was a little unsteady. Antony noticed it and gave him a
reassuring smile.
"Ready?"
"Yes."
They sat down, and taking the bag between his knees, Antony pressed the catch and opened it.
"Clothes!" said Bill.
Antony pulled out the top garment and shook it out. It was a wet brown flannel coat.
"Do you recognize it?" he asked.
"Mark's brown flannel suit."
"The one he is advertised as having run away in?"
"Yes. It looks like it. Of course he had a dashed lot of clothes."
Antony put his hand in the breast-pocket and took out some letters. He considered them doubtfully for a
moment.
"I suppose I'd better read them," he said. "I mean, just to see --" He looked inquiringly at Bill, who nodded.
Antony turned on his torch and glanced at them. Bill waited anxiously.
"Yes. Mark .... Hallo!"
"What is it?"
"The letter that Cayley was telling the Inspector about. From Robert. 'Mark, your loving brother is coming to see you.--' Yes, I suppose I had better keep this. Well, that's his coat. Let's have out the rest of it." He took the remaining clothes from the bag and spread them out.
"They're all here," said Bill. "Shirt, tie, socks, underclothes, shoes--yes, all of them."
"All that he was wearing yesterday?"
"Yes."
"What do you make of it?"
Bill shook his head, and asked another question.
"Is it what you expected?"
Antony laughed suddenly.
"It's too absurd," he said. "I expected--well, you know what I expected. A body. A body in a suit of clothes. Well, perhaps it would be safer to hide them separately. The body here, and the clothes in the passage, where they would never betray themselves. And now he takes a great deal of trouble to hide the clothes here, and doesn't bother about the body at all." He shook his head. "I'm a bit lost for the moment, Bill, and that's the fact."
"Anything else there?"
Antony felt in the bag.
"Stones and--yes, there's something else." He took it out and held it up. "There we are, Bill."
It was the office key.
"By Jove, you were right."
Antony felt in the bag again, and then turned it gently upside down on the grass. A dozen large stones fell out--and something else. He flashed down his torch.
"Another key," he said.
He put the two keys in his pocket, and sat there for a long time in silence, thinking. Bill was silent, too, not liking to interrupt his thoughts, but at last he said:
"Shall I put these things back?"
Antony looked up with a start.
"What? Oh, yes. No, I'll put them back. You give me a light, will you?"
Very slowly and carefully he put the clothes back in the bag, pausing as he took up each garment, in the certainty, as it seemed to Bill, that it had something to tell him if only he could read it. When the last of them was inside, he still waited there on his knees, thinking.
"That's the lot," said Bill.
Antony nodded at him.
"Yes, that's the lot," he said; "and that's the funny thing about it. You're sure it is the lot?"
"What do you mean?"
"Give me the torch a moment." He took it and flashed it over the ground between them. "Yes, that's the lot. It's funny." He stood up, the bag in his hands. "Now let's find a hiding-place for these, and then--" He said no more, but stepped off through the trees, Bill following him meekly.
As soon as they had got the bag off their hands and were clear of the copse, Antony became more communicative. He took the two keys out of his pocket.
"One of them is the office key, I suppose, and the other is the key of the passage cupboard. So I thought that perhaps we might have a look at the cupboard."
"I say, do you really think it is?"
"Well, I don't see what else it can be."
"But why should he want to throw it away?"
"Because it has now done its work, whatever it was, and he wants to wash his hands of the passage. He'd throw the passage away if he could. I don't think it matters much one way or another, and I don't suppose there's anything to find in the cupboard, but I feel that we must look."
"Do you still think Mark's body might be there?"
"No. And yet where else can it be? Unless I'm hopelessly wrong, and Cayley never killed him at all."
Bill hesitated, wondering if he dare advance his theory.
"I know you'll think me an ass--"
"My dear Bill, I'm such an obvious ass myself that I should be delighted to think you are too."
"Well, then, suppose Mark did kill Robert, and Cayley helped him to escape, just as we thought at first. I know you proved afterwards that it was impossible, but suppose it happened in a way we don't know about and for reasons
we don't know about. I mean, there are such a lot of funny things about the whole show that—well, almost anything might have happened."

"You're quite right. Well?"

"Well, then, this clothes business. Doesn't that seem rather to bear out the escaping theory? Mark's brown suit was known to the police. Couldn't Cayley have brought him another one in the passage, to escape in, and then have had the brown one on his hands? And thought it safest to hide it in the pond?"

"Yes," said Anthony thoughtfully. Then: "Go on."

Bill went on eagerly:

"It all seems to fit in, you know. I mean even with your first theory—that Mark killed him accidentally and then came to Cayley for help. Of course, if Cayley had played fair, he'd have told Mark that he had nothing to be afraid of. But he isn't playing fair; he wants to get Mark out of the way because of the girl. Well, this is his chance. He makes Mark as frightened as possible, and tells him that his only hope is to run away. Well, naturally, he does all he can to get him well away, because if Mark is caught, the whole story of Cayley's treachery comes out."

"Yes. But isn't it overdoing it rather to make him change his underclothes and everything? It wastes a good deal of time, you know."

Bill was pulled up short, and said, "Oh!" in great disappointment.

"No, it's not as bad as that, Bill," said Antony with a smile. "I daresay the underclothes could be explained. But here's the difficulty. Why did Mark need to change from brown to blue, or whatever it was, when Cayley was the only person who saw him in brown?"

"The police description of him says that he is in a brown suit."

"Yes, because Cayley told the police. You see, even if Mark had had lunch in his brown suit, and the servants had noticed it, Cayley could always have pretended that he had changed into blue after lunch, because only Cayley saw him afterwards. So if Cayley had told the Inspector that he was wearing blue, Mark could have escaped quite comfortably in his brown, without needing to change at all."

"But that's just what he did do," cried Bill triumphantly. "What fools we are!"

Antony looked at him in surprise, and then shook his head.

"Yes, yes!" insisted Bill. "Of course! Don't you see? Mark did change after lunch, and, to give him more of a chance of getting away, Cayley lied and said that he was wearing the brown suit in which the servants had seen him. Well, then he was afraid that the police might examine Mark's clothes and find the brown suit still there, so he hid it, and then dropped it in the pond afterwards."

He turned eagerly to his friend, but Antony said nothing. Bill began to speak again, and was promptly waved into silence.

"Don't say anything more, old boy; you've given me quite enough to think about. Don't let's bother about it tonight. We'll just have a look at this cupboard and then get to bed."

But the cupboard had not much to tell them that night. It was empty save for a few old bottles.

"Well, that's that," said Bill.

But Antony, on his knees with the torch in his hand, continued to search for something.

"What are you looking for?" asked Bill at last.

"Something that isn't there," said Antony, getting up and dusting his trousers. And he locked the door again.

CHAPTER XVIII

Guess-work

The inquest was at three o'clock; thereafter Antony could have no claim on the hospitality of the Red House. By ten o'clock his bag was packed, and waiting to be taken to 'the George.' To Bill, coming upstairs after a more prolonged breakfast, this early morning bustle was a little surprising.

"What's the hurry?" he asked.

"None. But we don't want to come back here after the inquest. Get your packing over now and then we can have the morning to ourselves."

"Righto." He turned to go to his room, and then came back again. "I say, are we going to tell Cayley that we're staying at 'the George'?"

"You're not staying at 'the George,' Bill. Not officially. You're going back to London."

"Oh!"

"Yes. Ask Cayley to have your luggage sent in to Stanton, ready for you when you catch a train there after the inquest. You can tell him that you've got to see the Bishop of London at once. The fact that you are hurrying back to London to be confirmed will make it seem more natural that I should resume my interrupted solitude at 'the George' as soon as you have gone."

"Then where do I sleep to-night?"
"Officially, I suppose, in Fulham Place; unofficially, I suspect, in my bed, unless they've got another spare room at 'the George.' I've put your confirmation robe--I mean your pyjamas and brushes and things--in my bag, ready for you. Is there anything else you want to know? No? Then go and pack. And meet me at ten-thirty beneath the blasted oak or in the hall or somewhere. I want to talk and talk and talk, and I must have my Watson."

"Good," said Bill, and went off to his room.
An hour later, having communicated their official plans to Cayley, they wandered out together into the park.
"Well?" said Bill, as they sat down underneath a convenient tree. "Talk away."
"I had many bright thoughts in my bath this morning," began Antony. "The brightest one of all was that we were being damn fools, and working at this thing from the wrong end altogether."
"Well, that's helpful."
"Of course it's very hampering being a detective, when you don't know anything about detecting, and when nobody knows that you're doing detection, and you can't have people up to cross-examine them, and you have neither the energy nor the means to make proper inquiries; and, in short, when you're doing the whole thing in a thoroughly amateur, haphazard way."
"For amateurs I don't think we're doing at all badly," protested Bill.
"No; not for amateurs. But if we had been professionals, I believe we should have gone at it from the other end. The Robert end. We've been wondering about Mark and Cayley all the time. Now let's wonder about Robert for a bit."
"We know so little about him."
"Well, let's see what we do know. First of all, then, we know vaguely that he was a bad lot--the sort of brother who is hushed up in front of other people."
"Yes."
"We know that he announced his approaching arrival to Mark in a rather unpleasant letter, which I have in my pocket."
"Yes."
"And then we know rather a curious thing. We know that Mark told you all that this black sheep was coming. Now, why did he tell you?"
Bill was thoughtful for a moment.
"I suppose," he said slowly, "that he knew we were bound to see him, and thought that the best way was to be quite frank about him."
"But were you bound to see him? You were all away playing golf."
"We were bound to see him if he stayed in the house that night."
"Very well, then. That's one thing we've discovered. Mark knew that Robert was staying in the house that night. Or shall we put it this way--he knew that there was no chance of getting Robert out of the house at once."
Bill looked at his friend eagerly.
"Go on," he said. "This is getting interesting."
"He also knew something else," went on Antony. "He knew that Robert was bound to betray his real character to you as soon as you met him. He couldn't pass him off on you as just a travelled brother from the Dominions, with perhaps a bit of an accent; he had to tell you at once, because you were bound to find out, that Robert was a wastrel."
"Yes. That's sound enough."
"Well, now, doesn't it strike you that Mark made up his mind about all that rather quickly?"
"How do you mean?"
"He got this letter at breakfast. He read it; and directly he had read it he began to confide in you all. That is to say, in about one second he thought out the whole business and came to a decision--to two decisions. He considered the possibility of getting Robert out of the way before you came back, and decided that it was impossible. He considered the possibility of Robert's behaving like an ordinary decent person in public, and decided that it was very unlikely. He came to those two decisions instantaneously, as he was reading the letter. Isn't that rather quick work?"
"Well, what's the explanation?"
Antony waited until he had refilled and lighted his pipe before answering.
"What's the explanation? Well, let's leave it for a moment and take another look at the two brothers. In conjunction, this time, with Mrs. Norbury."
"Mrs. Norbury?" said Bill, surprised.
"Yes. Mark hoped to marry Miss Norbury. Now, if Robert really was a blot upon the family honour, Mark would want to do one of two things. Either keep it from the Norburys altogether, or else, if it had to come out, tell them himself before the news came to them indirectly. Well, he told them. But the funny thing is that he told them the day before Robert's letter came. Robert came, and was killed, the day before yesterday--Tuesday. Mark told Mrs.
Norbury about him on Monday. What do you make of that?"

"Coincidence," said Bill, after careful thought. "He'd always meant to tell her; his suit was prospering, and just
before it was finally settled, he told her. That happened to be Monday. On Tuesday he got Robert's letter, and felt
jolly glad that he'd told her in time."

"Well, it might be that, but it's rather a curious coincidence. And here is something which makes it very curious
indeed. It only occurred to me in the bath this morning. Inspiring place, a bathroom. Well, it's this--he told her on
Monday morning, on his way to Middleton in the car."

"Well?"

"Well."

"Sorry, Tony; I'm dense this morning."

"In the car, Bill. And how near can the car get to Jallands?"

"About six hundred yards."

"Yes. And on his way to Middleton, on some business or other, Mark stops the car, walks six hundred yards
down the hill to Jallands, says, 'Oh, by the way, Mrs. Norbury, I don't think I ever told you that I have a shady
brother called Robert,' walks six hundred yards up the hill again, gets into the car, and goes off to Middleton. Is that
likely?"

Bill frowned heavily.

"Yes, but I don't see what you're getting at. Likely or not likely, we know he did do it."

"Of course he did. All I mean is that he must have had some strong reason for telling Mrs. Norbury at once. And
the reason I suggest is that he knew on that morning--Monday morning, not Tuesday--that Robert was coming to see
him, and had to be in first with the news."

"But--but--"

"And that would explain the other point--his instantaneous decision at breakfast to tell you all about his brother.
It wasn't instantaneous. He knew on Monday that Robert was coming, and decided then that you would all have to
know."

"Then how do you explain the letter?"

"Well, let's have a look at it."

Antony took the letter from his pocket and spread it out on the grass between them.

"Mark, your loving brother is coming to see you to-morrow, all the way from Australia. I give you warning, so
that you will be able to conceal your surprise but not I hope your pleasure. Expect him at three or thereabouts."

"No date mentioned, you see," said Antony. "Just to-morrow."

"But he got this on Tuesday."

"Did he?"

"Well, he read it out to us on Tuesday."

"Oh, yes! he read it out to you."

Bill read the letter again, and then turned it over and looked at the back of it. The back of it had nothing to say to
him.

"What about the postmark?" he asked.

"We haven't got the envelope, unfortunately."

"And you think that he got this letter on Monday."

"I'm inclined to think so, Bill. Anyhow, I think--I feel almost certain--that he knew on Monday that his brother
was coming."

"Is that going to help us much?"

"No. It makes it more difficult. There's something rather uncanny about it all. I don't understand it." He was
silent for a little, and then added, "I wonder if the inquest is going to help us."

"What about last night? I'm longing to hear what you make of that. Have you been thinking it out at all?"

"Last night," said Antony thoughtfully to himself. "Yes, last night wants some explaining."

Bill waited hopefully for him to explain. What, for instance, had Antony been looking for in the cupboard?

"I think," began Antony slowly, "that after last night we must give up the idea that Mark has been killed; killed, I
mean, by Cayley. I don't believe anybody would go to so much trouble to hide a suit of clothes when he had a body
on his hands. The body would seem so much more important. I think we may take it now that the clothes are all that
Cayley had to hide."

"But why not have kept them in the passage?"

"He was frightened of the passage. Miss Norris knew about it."

"Well, then, in his own bedroom, or even, in Mark's. For all you or I or anybody knew, Mark might have had
two brown suits. He probably had, I should think."
"Probably. But I doubt if that would reassure Cayley. The brown suit hid a secret, and therefore the brown suit had to be hidden. We all know that in theory the safest hiding-place is the most obvious, but in practice very few people have the nerve to risk it."

Bill looked rather disappointed.

"Then we just come back to where we were," he complained. "Mark killed his brother, and Cayley helped him to escape through the passage; either in order to compromise him, or because there was no other way out of it. And he helped him by telling a lie about his brown suit."

Antony smiled at him in genuine amusement.

"Bad luck, Bill," he said sympathetically. "There's only one murder, after all. I'm awfully sorry about it. It was my fault for--"

"Shut up, you ass. You know I didn't mean that."

"Well, you seemed awfully disappointed."

Bill said nothing for a little, and then with a sudden laugh confessed.

"It was so exciting yesterday," he said apologetically, "and we seemed to be just getting there, and discovering the most wonderful things, and now--"

"And now?"

"Well, it's so much more ordinary."

Antony gave a shout of laughter.

"Ordinary!" he cried. "Ordinary! Well, I'm dashed! Ordinary! If only one thing would happen in an ordinary way, we might do something, but everything is ridiculous." Bill brightened up again.

"Ridiculous? How?"

"Every way. Take those ridiculous clothes we found last night. You can explain the brown suit, but why the under clothes. You can explain the underclothes in some absurd way, if you like--you can say that Mark always changed his underclothes whenever he interviewed anybody from Australia--but why, in that case, my dear Watson, why didn't he change his collar?"

"His collar?" said Bill in amazement.

"His collar, Watson."

"I don't understand."

"And it's all so ordinary," scoffed Antony.

"Sorry, Tony, I didn't mean that. Tell me about the collar."

"Well, that's all. There was no collar in the bag last night. Shirt, socks, tie--everything except a collar. Why?"

"Was that what you were looking for in the cupboard?" said Bill eagerly.

"Of course. Why no collar? I, said. For some reason Cayley considered it necessary to hide all Mark's clothes; not just the suit, but everything which he was wearing, or supposed to be wearing, at the time of the murder. But he hadn't hidden the collar. Why? Had he left it out by mistake? So I looked in the cupboard. It wasn't there. Had he left it out on purpose? If so, why?--and where was it? Naturally I began to say to myself, 'Where have I seen a collar lately? A collar all by itself? And I remembered--what, Bill?'"

Bill frowned heavily to himself, and shook his head.

"Don't ask me, Tony. I can't--By Jove!" He threw up his head, "In the basket in the office bedroom!"

"Exactly."

"But is that the one?"

"The one that goes with the rest of the clothes? I don't know. Where else can it be? But if so, why send the collar quite casually to the wash in the ordinary way, and take immense trouble to hide everything else? Why, why, why?"

Bill bit hard at his pipe, but could think of nothing to say.

"Anyhow," said Antony, getting up restless, "I'm certain of one thing. Mark knew on the Monday that Robert was coming here."

CHAPTER XIX

The Inquest

The Coroner, having made a few commonplace remarks as to the terrible nature of the tragedy which they had come to investigate that afternoon, proceeded to outline the case to the jury. Witnesses would be called to identify the deceased as Robert Ablett, the brother of the owner of the Red House, Mark Ablett. It would be shown that he was something of a ne'er-do-well, who had spent most of his life in Australia, and that he had announced, in what might almost be called a threatening letter, his intention of visiting his brother that afternoon. There would be evidence of his arrival, of his being shown into the scene of the tragedy--a room in the Red House, commonly called "the office"--and of his brother's entrance into that room. The jury would have to form their own opinion as to what happened there. But whatever happened, happened almost instantaneously. Within two minutes of Mark Ablett's
entrance, as would be shown in the evidence, a shot was heard, and when--perhaps five minutes later--the room was forced open, the dead body of Robert Ablett was found stretched upon the floor. As regards Mark Ablett, nobody had seen him from the moment of his going into the room, but evidence would be called to show that he had enough money on him at the time to take him to any other part of the country, and that a man answering to his description had been observed on the platform of Stanton station, apparently waiting to catch the 3.55 up train to London. As the jury would realize, such evidence of identity was not always reliable. Missing men had a way of being seen in a dozen different places at once. In any case, there was no doubt that for the moment Mark Ablett had disappeared.

"Seems a sound man," whispered Antony to Bill. "Doesn't talk too much."

Antony did not expect to learn much from the evidence--he knew the facts of the case so well by now--but he wondered if Inspector Birch had developed any new theories. If so, they would appear in the Coroner's examination, for the Coroner would certainly have been coached by the police as to the important facts to be extracted from each witness. Bill was the first to be put through it.

"Now, about this letter, Mr. Beverley?" he was asked when his chief evidence was over. "Did you see it at all?"
"I didn't see the actual writing. I saw the back of it. Mark was holding it up when he told us about his brother."
"You don't know what was in it, then?"

Bill had a sudden shock. He had read the letter only that morning. He knew quite well what was in it. But it wouldn't do to admit this. And then, just as he was about to perjure himself, he remembered: Antony had heard Cayley telling the Inspector.

"I knew afterwards. I was told. But Mark didn't read it out at breakfast."
"You gathered, however, that it was an unwelcome letter?"
"Oh, yes!"
"Would you say that Mark was frightened by it?"
"Not frightened. Sort of bitter--and resigned. Sort of 'Oh, Lord, here we are again!'"

There was a titter here and there. The Coroner smiled, and tried to pretend that he hadn't.

"Thank you, Mr. Beverley."

The next witness was summoned by the name of Andrew Amos, and Antony looked up with interest, wondering who he was.

"He lives at the inner lodge," whispered Bill to him.

All that Amos had to say was that a stranger had passed by his lodge at a little before three that afternoon, and had spoken to him. He had seen the body and recognized it as the man.

"What did he say?"
"Is this right for the Red House? or something like that, sir."
"What did you say?"
"I said, 'This is the Red House. Who do you want to see?' He was a bit rough-looking, you know, sir, and I didn't care about the way he said it. So I got in front of him like, and said, 'What do you want, eh?' and he gave a sort of chuckle and said, 'I want to see my dear brother Mark.' Well, then I took a closer look at him, and I see that p'raps he might be his brother, so I said, 'If you'll follow the drive, sir, you'll come to the house. Of course I can't say if Mr. Ablett's at home.' And he gave a sort of nasty laugh again, and said, 'Fine place Mister Mark Ablett's got here. Plenty of money to spend, eh?' Well, then I had another look at him, sir, because gentlemen don't talk like that, and if he was Mr. Ablett's brother--but before I could make up my mind, he laughed and went on. That's all I can tell you, sir."

Andrew Amos stepped down and moved away to the back of the room, nor did Antony take his eyes off him until he was assured that Amos intended to remain there until the inquest was over.

"Who's Amos talking to now?" he whispered to Bill.
"Parsons. One of the gardeners. He's at the outside lodge on the Stanton road. They're all here to-day. Sort of holiday for 'em.

"I wonder if he's giving evidence too," thought Antony. He was. He followed Amos. He had been at work on the lawn in front of the house, and had seen Robert Ablett arrive. He hadn't hear the shot--not to notice. He was a little hard of hearing. He had seen a gentleman arrive about five minutes after Mr. Robert.
"Can you see him in court now?" asked the Coroner. Parsons looked round slowly. Antony caught his eye and smiled.
"That's him," said Parsons, pointing.

Everybody looked at Antony.
"That was about five minutes afterwards?"
"About that, sir."
"Did anybody come out of the house before this gentleman's arrival?"
"No, sir. That is to say I didn't see 'em."

Stevens followed. She gave her evidence much as she had given it to the Inspector. Nothing new was brought out by her examination. Then came Elsie. As the reporters scribbled down what she had overheard, they added in brackets "Sensation" for the first time that afternoon.

"How soon after you had heard this did the shot come?" asked the Coroner.
"Almost at once, sir."
"A minute?"
"I couldn't really say, sir. It was so quick."
"Were you still in the hall?"
"Oh, no, sir. I was just outside Mrs. Stevens' room. The housekeeper, sir."
"You didn't think of going back to the hall to see what had happened?"
"Oh, no, sir. I just went in to Mrs. Stevens, and she said, 'Oh, what was that?' frightened-like. And I said, 'That was in the house, Mrs. Stevens, that was.' Just like something going off, it was."
"Thank you," said the Coroner.

There was another emotional disturbance in the room as Cayley went into the witness-box; not "Sensation" this time, but an eager and, as it seemed to Antony, sympathetic interest. Now they were getting to grips with the drama.

He gave his evidence carefully, unemotionally—the lies with the same slow deliberation as the truth. Antony watched him intently, wondering what it was about him which had this odd sort of attractiveness. For Antony, who knew that he was lying, and lying (as he believed) not for Mark's sake but his own, yet could not help sharing some of that general sympathy with him.

"Was Mark ever in possession of a revolver?" asked the Coroner.
"Not to my knowledge. I think I should have known if he had been."
"You were alone with him all that morning. Did he talk about this visit of Robert's at all?"
"I didn't see very much of him in the morning. I was at work in my room, and outside, and so on. We lunched together and he talked of it then a little."
"In what terms?"
"Well--" he hesitated, and then went on. "I can't think of a better word than 'peeviously.' Occasionally he said, 'What do you think he wants?' or 'Why couldn't he have stayed where he was?' or 'I don't like the tone of his letter. Do you think he means trouble?' He talked rather in that kind of way."
"Did he express his surprise that his brother should be in England?"
"I think he was always afraid that he would turn up one day."
"Yes .... You didn't hear any conversation between the brothers when they were in the office together?"
"No. I happened to go into the library just after Mark had gone in, and I was there all the time."
"Was the library door open?"
"Oh, yes."
"Did you see or hear the last witness at all?"
"No."
"If anybody had come out of the office while you were in the library, would you have heard it?"
"I think so. Unless they had come out very quietly on purpose."
"Would you call Mark a hasty-tempered man?"
Cayley considered this carefully before answering. "Hasty-tempered, yes," he said. "But not violent-tempered."
"Was he fairly athletic? Active and quick?"
"Active and quick, yes. Not particularly strong."
"Yes .... One question more. Was Mark in the habit of carrying any considerable sum of money about with him?"
"Yes. He always had one 100 pound note on him, and perhaps ten or twenty pounds as well."
"Thank you, Mr. Cayley."
Cayley went back heavily to his seat. "Damn it," said Antony to himself, "why do I like the fellow?"
"Antony Gillingham!"
Again the eager interest of the room could be felt. Who was this stranger who had got mixed up in the business so mysteriously?

Antony smiled at Bill and stepped up to give his evidence. He explained how he came to be staying at 'the George' at Waldheim, how he had heard that the Red House was
in the neighbourhood, how he had walked over to see his friend Beverley, and had arrived just after the tragedy. Thinking it over afterwards he was fairly certain that he had heard the shot, but it had not made any impression on him at the time. He had come to the house from the Waldheim end and consequently had seen nothing of Robert Ablett, who had been a few minutes in front of him. From this point his evidence coincided with Cayley's.

"You and the last witness reached the French windows together and found them shut?"
"Yes."
"You pushed them in and came to the body. Of course you had no idea whose body it was?"
"No."
"Did Mr. Cayley say anything?"
"He turned the body over, just so as to see the face, and when he saw it, he said, 'Thank God.'"
Again the reporters wrote "Sensation."
"Did you understand what he meant by that?"
"I asked him who it was, and he said that it was Robert Ablett. Then he explained that he was afraid at first it was the cousin with whom he lived--Mark."
"Yes. Did he seem upset?"
"Very much so at first. Less when he found that it wasn't Mark."
There was a sudden snigger from a nervous gentleman in the crowd at the back of the room, and the Coroner put on his glasses and stared sternly in the direction from which it came. The nervous gentleman hastily decided that the time had come to do up his bootlace. The Coroner put down his glasses and continued.

"Did anybody come out of the house while you were coming up the drive?"
"No."
"Thank you, Mr. Gillingham."
He was followed by Inspector Birch. The Inspector, realizing that this was his afternoon, and that the eyes of the world were upon him, produced a plan of the house and explained the situation of the different rooms. The plan was then handed to the jury.

Inspector Birch, so he told the world, had arrived at the Red House at 4.42 p.m. on the afternoon in question. He had been received by Mr. Matthew Cayley, who had made a short statement to him, and he had then proceeded to examine the scene of the crime. The French windows had been forced from outside. The door leading into the hall was locked; he had searched the room thoroughly and had found no trace of a key. In the bedroom leading out of the office he had found an open window. There were no marks on the window, but it was a low one, and, as he found from experiment, quite easy to step out of without touching it with the boots. A few yards outside the window a shrubbery began. There were no recent footmarks outside the window, but the ground was in a very hard condition owing to the absence of rain. In the shrubbery, however, he found several twigs on the ground, recently broken off, together with other evidence that some body had been forcing its way through. He had questioned everybody connected with the estate, and none of them had been into the shrubbery recently. By forcing a way through the shrubbery it was possible for a person to make a detour of the house and get to the Stanton end of the park without ever being in sight of the house itself.

He had made inquiries about the deceased. Deceased had left for Australia some fifteen years ago, owing to some financial trouble at home. Deceased was not well spoken of in the village from which he and his brother had come. Deceased and his brother had never been on good terms, and the fact that Mark Ablett had come into money had been a cause of great bitterness between them. It was shortly after this that Robert had left for Australia.

He had made inquiries at Stanton station. It had been market-day at Stanton and the station had been more full of arrivals than usual. Nobody had particularly noticed the arrival of Robert Ablett; there had been a good many passengers by the 2.10 train that afternoon, the train by which Robert had undoubtedly come from London. A witness, however, would state that he noticed a man resembling Mark Ablett at the station at 3.53 p.m. that afternoon, and this man caught the 3.55 up train to town.

There was a pond in the grounds of the Red House. He had dragged this, but without result ....

Antony listened to him carelessly, thinking his own thoughts all the time. Medical evidence followed, but there was nothing to be got from that. He felt so close to the truth; at any moment something might give his brain the one little hint which it wanted. Inspector Birch was just pursuing the ordinary. Whatever else this case was, it was not ordinary. There was something uncanny about it.

John Borden was giving evidence. He was on the up platform seeing a friend off by the 3.55 on Tuesday afternoon. He had noticed a man on the platform with coat collar turned up and a scarf round his chin. He had wondered why the man should do this on such a hot day. The man seemed to be trying to escape observation. Directly the train came in, he hurried into a carriage. And so on.

"There's always a John Borden at every murder case," said Antony to himself.
"Have you ever seen Mark Ablett?"
"Once or twice, sir."
"Was it he?"

"I never really got a good look at him, sir, what with his collar turned up and the scarf and all. But directly I
heard of the sad affair, and that Mr. Ablett was missing, I said to Mrs. Borden, 'Now I wonder if that was Mr. Ablett
I saw at the station?' So then we talked it over and decided that I ought to come and tell Inspector Birch. It was just
Mr. Ablett's height, sir."

Antony went on with his thoughts ....

The Coroner was summing up. The jury, he said, had now heard all the evidence and would have to decide what
had happened in that room between the two brothers. How had the deceased met his death? The medical evidence
would probably satisfy them that Robert Ablett had died from the effects of a bullet-wound in the head. Who had
fired that bullet? If Robert Ablett had fired it himself, no doubt they would bring in a verdict of suicide, but if this
had been so, where was the revolver which had fired it, and what had become of Mark Ablett? If they disbelieved in
this possibility of suicide, what remained? Accidental death, justifiable homicide, and murder. Could the deceased
have been killed accidentally? It was possible, but then would Mark Ablett have run away? The evidence that he had
run away from the scene of the crime was strong. His cousin had seen him go into the room, the servant Elsie Wood
had heard him quarrelling with his brother in the room, the door had been locked from the inside, and there were
signs that outside the open window some one had pushed his way very recently through the shrubbery. Who, if not
Mark? They would have then to consider whether he would have run away if he had been guiltless of his brother's
death. No doubt innocent people lost their heads sometimes. It was possible that if it were proved afterwards that
Mark Ablett had shot his brother, it might also be proved that he was justified in so doing, and that when he ran
away from his brother's corpse he had really nothing to fear at the hands of the Law. In this connection he need
hardly remind the jury that they were not the final tribunal, and that if they found Mark Ablett guilty of murder it
would not prejudice his trial in any way if and when he was apprehended .... The jury could consider their verdict.

They considered it. They announced that the deceased had died as the result of a bullet-wound, and that the
bullet had been fired by his brother Mark Ablett.

Bill turned round to Antony at his side. But Antony was gone. Across the room he saw Andrew Amos and
Parsons going out of the door together, and Antony was between them.

CHAPTER XX

Mr. Beverley is Tactful

The inquest had been held at the "Lamb" at Stanton; at Stanton Robert Ablett was to be buried next day. Bill
waited about outside for his friend, wondering where he had gone. Then, realizing that Cayley would be coming out
to his car directly, and that a farewell talk with Cayley would be a little embarrassing, he wandered round to the yard
at the back of the inn, lit a cigarette, and stood surveying a torn and weather-beaten poster on the stable wall.
"GRAND THEATRICAL ENTER" it announced, to take place on "Wednesday, Decem." Bill smiled to himself as
he looked at it, for the part of Joe, a loquacious postman, had been played by "William B. Beverl," as the remnants
of the poster still maintained, and he had been much less loquacious than the author had intended, having forgotten
his words completely, but it had all been great fun. And then he stopped smiling, for there would be no more fun
now at the Red House.

"Sorry to keep you waiting," said the voice of Antony behind him. "My old friends Amos and Parsons insisted
on giving me a drink."

He slipped his hand into the crook of Bill's arm, and smiled happily at him.
"Why were you so keen about them?" asked Bill a little resentfully. "I couldn't think where on earth you had got
to."

Antony didn't say anything. He was staring at the poster.
"When did this happen?" he asked.
"What?"

Antony waved to the poster.
"Oh, that? Last Christmas. It was rather fun."

Antony began to laugh to himself.
"Were you good?"
"Rotten. I don't profess to be an actor."
"Mark good?"
"Oh, rather. He loves it."
"Rev. Henry Stutters--Mr. Matthew Cay," read Antony.
"Was that our friend Cayley?"
"Yes."
"Any good?"
"Well, much better than I expected. He wasn't keen, but Mark made him."
"Miss Norris wasn't playing, I see."
"My dear Tony, she's a professional. Of course she wasn't."
Antony laughed again.
"A great success, was it?"
"Oh, rather!"
"I'm a fool, and a damned fool," Antony announced solemnly. "And a damned fool," he said again under his breath, as he led Bill away from the poster, and out of the yard into the road. "And a damned fool. Even now--" He broke off and then asked suddenly, "Did Mark ever have much trouble with his teeth?"
"He went to his dentist a good deal. But what on earth--"
Antony laughed a third time.
"What luck!" he chuckled. "But how do you know?"
"We go to the same man; Mark recommended him to me. Cartwright, in Wimpole Street."
"Cartwright in Wimpole Street," repeated Antony thoughtfully. "Yes, I can remember that. Cartwright in Wimpole Street. Did Cayley go to him too, by any chance?"
"I expect so. Oh, yes, I know he did. But what on earth--"
Antony laughed a third time.
"One last question," he said. "Was Mark fond of swimming?"
"No, he hated it. I don't believe he could swim. Tony, are you mad, or am I? Or is this a new game?"
Antony squeezed his arm.
"Dear old Bill," he said. "It's a game. What a game! And the answer is Cartwright in Wimpole Street."
They walked in silence for half a mile or so along the road to Waldheim. Bill tried two or three times to get his friend to talk, but Antony had only grunted in reply. He was just going to make another attempt, when Antony came to a sudden stop and turned to him anxiously.
"I wonder if you'd do something for me," he said, looking at him with some doubt.
"What sort of thing?"
"Well, it's really dashed important. It's just the one thing I want now."
Bill was suddenly enthusiastic again.
"I say, have you really found it all out?"
Antony nodded.
"At least, I'm very nearly there, Bill. There's just this one thing I want now. It means your going back to Stanton. Well, we haven't come far; it won't take you long. Do you mind?"
"My dear Holmes, I am at your service."
Antony gave him a smile and was silent for a little, thinking.
"Is there another inn at Stanton--fairly close to the station?"
"The 'Plough and Horses'--just at the corner where the road goes up to the station--is that the one you mean?"
"That would be the one. I suppose you could do with a drink, couldn't you?"
"Rather!" said Bill, with a grin.
"Good. Then have one at the 'Plough and Horses.' Have two, if you like, and talk to the landlord, or landlady, or whoever serves you. I want you to find out if anybody stayed there on Monday night."
"Robert?" said Bill eagerly.
"I didn't say Robert," said Antony, smiling. "I just want you to find out if they had a visitor who slept there on Monday night. A stranger. If so, then any particulars you can get of him, without letting the landlord know that you are interested--"
"Leave it to me," broke in Bill. "I know just what you want."
"Don't assume that it was Robert--or anybody else. Let them describe the man to you. Don't influence them unconsciously by suggesting that he was short or tall, or anything of that sort. Just get them talking. If it's the landlord, you'd better stand him a drink or two."
"Right you are," said Bill confidently. "Where do I meet you again?"
"Probably at 'the George.' If you get there before me, you can order dinner for eight o'clock. Anyhow we'll meet at eight, if not before."
"Good." He nodded to Antony and strode off back to Stanton again.

Antony stood watching him with a little smile at his enthusiasm. Then he looked round slowly, as if in search of something. Suddenly he saw what he wanted. Twenty yards farther on a lane wandered off to the left, and there was a gate a little way up on the right-hand side of it. Antony walked to the gate, filling his pipe as he went. Then he lit his pipe, sat on the gate, and took his head in his hands.

"Now then," he said to himself, "let's begin at the beginning."

It was nearly eight o'clock when William Beverley, the famous sleuth-hound, arrived, tired and dusty, at 'the George,' to find Antony, cool and clean, standing bare-headed at the door, waiting for him.

"Is dinner ready?" were Bill's first words.

"Yes."

"Then I'll just have a wash. Lord, I'm tired."

"I never ought to have asked you," said Antony penitently.

"That's all right. I shan't be a moment." Half-way up the stairs he turned round and asked, "Am I in your room?"

"Yes. Do you know the way?"

"Yes. Start carving, will you? And order lots of beer." He disappeared round the top of the staircase. Antony went slowly in.

When the first edge of his appetite had worn off, and he was able to spare a little time between the mouthfuls, Bill gave an account of his adventures. The landlord of the "Plough and Horses" had been sticky, decidedly sticky--Bill had been unable at first to get anything out of him. But Bill had been tactful; lorblessyou, how tactful he had been.

"He kept on about the inquest, and what a queer affair it had been, and so on, and how there'd been an inquest in his wife's family once, which he seemed rather proud about, and I kept saying, 'Pretty busy, I suppose, just now, what?' and then he'd say, 'Middlin',; and go on again about Susan--that was the one that had the inquest--he talked about it as if it were a disease --and then I'd try again, and say, 'Slack times, I expect, just now, eh?' and he'd say 'Middlin' again, and then it was time to offer him another drink, and I didn't seem to be getting much nearer. But I got him at last. I asked him if he knew John Borden--he was the man who said he'd seen Mark at the station. Well, he knew all about Borden, and after he'd told me all about Borden's wife's family, and how one of them had been burnt to death--after you with the beer; thanks--well, then I said carelessly that it must be very hard to remember anybody whom you had just seen once, so as to identify him afterwards, and he agreed that it would be 'middlin' hard,' and then--""

"Give me three guesses," interrupted Antony. "You asked him if he remembered everybody who came to his inn?"

"That's it. Bright, wasn't it?"

"Brilliant. And what was the result?"

"The result was a woman."

"A woman?" said Antony eagerly.

"A woman," said Bill impressively. "Of course I thought it was going to be Robert--so did you, didn't you?--but it wasn't. It was a woman. Came quite late on Monday night in a car--driving herself--went off early next morning."

"Did he describe her?"

"Yes. She was middlin'. Middlin' tall, middlin' age, middlin' colour, and so on. Doesn't help much, does it? But still--a woman. Does that upset your theory?"

Antony shook his head.

"No, Bill, not at all," he said.

"You knew all the time? At least, you guessed?"

"Wait till to-morrow. I'll tell you everything to-morrow."

"To-morrow!" said Bill in great disappointment.

"Well, I'll tell you one thing to-night, if you'll promise not to ask any more questions. But you probably know it already."

"What is it?"

"Only that Mark Ablett did not kill his brother."

"And Cayley did?"

"That's another question, Bill. However, the answer is that Cayley didn't, either."

"Then who on earth--"

"Have some more beer," said Antony with a smile. And Bill had to be content with that.

They were early to bed that evening, for both of them were tired. Bill slept loudly and defiantly, but Antony lay awake, wondering. What was happening at the Red House now? Perhaps he would hear in the morning; perhaps he
would get a letter. He went over the whole story again from the beginning--was there any possibility of a mistake? What would the police do? Would they ever find out? Ought he to have told them? Well, let them find out; it was their job. Surely he couldn't have made a mistake this time. No good wondering now; he would know definitely in the morning.

In the morning there was a letter for him.

CHAPTER XXI
Cayley's Apology

"My Dear Mr. Gillingham,

"I gather from your letter that you have made certain discoveries which you may feel it your duty to communicate to the police, and that in this case my arrest on a charge of murder would inevitably follow. Why, in these circumstances, you should give me such ample warning of your intentions I do not understand, unless it is that you are not wholly out of sympathy with me. But whether or not you sympathize, at any rate you will want to know—and I want you to know—the exact manner in which Ablett met his death and the reasons which made that death necessary. If the police have to be told anything, I would rather that they too knew the whole story. They, and even you, may call it murder, but by that time I shall be out of the way. Let them call it what they like.

"I must begin by taking you back to a summer day fifteen years ago, when I was a boy of thirteen and Mark a young man of twenty-five. His whole life was make-believe, and just now he was pretending to be a philanthropist. He sat in our little drawing-room, flicking his gloves against the back of his left hand, and my mother, good soul, thought what a noble young gentleman he was, and Philip and I, hastily washed and crammed into collars, stood in front of him, nudging each other and kicking the backs of our heels and cursing him in our hearts for having interrupted our game. He had decided to adopt one of us, kind Cousin Mark. Heaven knows why he chose me. Philip was eleven; two years longer to wait. Perhaps that was why.

"Well, Mark educated me. I went to a public school and to Cambridge, and I became his secretary. Well, much more than his secretary as your friend Beverley perhaps has told you: his land agent, his financial adviser, his courier, his—but this most of all—his audience. Mark could never live alone. There must always be somebody to listen to him. I think in his heart he hoped I should be his Boswell. He told me one day that he had made me his literary executor—poor devil. And he used to write me the absurdest long letters when I was away from him, letters which I read once and then tore up. The futility of the man!

"It was three years ago that Philip got into trouble. He had been hurried through a cheap grammar school and into a London office, and discovered there that there was not much fun to be got in this world on two pounds a week. I had a frantic letter from him one day, saying that he must have a hundred at once, or he would be ruined, and I went to Mark for the money. Only to borrow it, you understand; he gave me a good salary and I could have paid it back in three months. But no. He saw nothing for himself in it, I suppose; no applause, no admiration. Philip's gratitude would be to me, not to him. I begged, I threatened, we argued; and while we were arguing, Philip was arrested. It killed my mother—he was always her favourite—but Mark, as usual, got his satisfaction out of it. He preened himself on his judgment of character in having chosen me and not Philip twelve years before!

"Later on I apologized to Mark for the reckless things I had said to him, and he played the part of a magnanimous gentleman with his accustomed skill, but, though outwardly we were as before to each other, from that day forward, though his vanity would never let him see it, I was his bitterest enemy. If that had been all, I wonder if I should have killed him? To live on terms of intimate friendship with a man whom you hate is dangerous work for your friend. Because of his belief in me as his admiring and grateful protege and his belief in himself as my benefactor, he was now utterly in my power. I could take my time and choose my opportunity. Perhaps I should not have killed him, but I had sworn to have my revenge—and there he was, poor vain fool, at my mercy. I was in no hurry.

"Two years later I had to reconsider my position, for my revenge was being taken out of my hands. Mark began to drink. Could I have stopped him? I don't think so, but to my immense surprise I found myself trying to. Instinct, perhaps, getting the better of reason; or did I reason it out and tell myself that, if he drank himself to death, I should lose my revenge? Upon my word, I cannot tell you; but, for whatever motive, I did genuinely want to stop it. Drinking is such a beastly thing, anyhow.

"I could not stop him, but I kept him within certain bounds, so that nobody but myself knew his secret. Yes, I kept him outwardly decent; and perhaps now I was becoming like the cannibal who keeps his victim in good condition for his own ends. I used to gloat over Mark, thinking how utterly he was mine to ruin as I pleased, financially, morally, whatever way would give me most satisfaction. I had but to take my hand away from him and he sank. But again I was in no hurry.

"Then he killed himself. That futile little drunkard, eaten up with his own selfishness and vanity, offered his beastliness to the truest and purest woman on this earth. You have seen her, Mr. Gillingham, but you never knew
Mark Ablett. Even if he had not been a drunkard, there was no chance for her of happiness with him. I had known him for many years, but never once had I seen him moved by any generous emotion. To have lived with that shrivelled little soul would have been hell for her; and a thousand times worse hell when he began to drink.

"So he had to be killed. I was the only one left to protect her, for her mother was in league with Mark to bring about her ruin. I would have shot him openly for her sake, and with what gladness, but I had no mind to sacrifice myself needlessly. He was in my power; I could persuade him to almost anything by flattery; surely it would not be difficult to give his death the appearance of an accident.

"I need not take up your time by telling you of the many plans I made and rejected. For some days I inclined towards an unfortunate boating accident in the pond--Mark, a very indifferent swimmer, myself almost exhausted in a gallant attempt to hold him up. And then he himself gave me the idea, he and Miss Norris between them, and so put himself in my hands; without risk of discovery, I should have said, had you not discovered me.

"We were talking about ghosts. Mark had been even more vain, pompous and absurd than usual, and I could see that Miss Norris was irritated by it. After dinner she suggested dressing up as a ghost and frightening him. I thought it my duty to warn her that Mark took any joke against himself badly, but she was determined to do it. I gave way reluctantly. Reluctantly, also, I told her the secret of the passage. (There is an underground passage from the library to the bowling-green. You should exercise your ingenuity, Mr. Gillingham, in trying to discover it. Mark came upon it by accident a year ago. It was a godsend to him; he could drink there in greater secrecy. But he had to tell me about it. He wanted an audience, even for his vices.)

"I told Miss Norris, then, because it was necessary for my plan that Mark should be thoroughly frightened. Without the passage she could never have got close enough to the bowling-green to alarm him properly, but as I arranged it with her she made the most effective appearance, and Mark was in just the state of rage and vindictiveness which I required. Miss Norris, you understand, is a professional actress. I need not say that to her I appeared to be animated by no other feeling than a boyish desire to bring off a good joke--a joke directed as much against the others as against Mark.

"He came to me that night, as I expected, still quivering with indignation. Miss Norris must never be asked to the house again; I was to make a special note of it; never again. It was outrageous. Had he not a reputation as a host to keep up, he would pack her off next morning. As it was, she could stay; hospitality demanded it; but never again would she come to the Red House--he was absolutely determined about that. I was to make a special note of it.

"I comforted him, I smoothed down his ruffled feathers. She had behaved very badly, but he was quite right; he must try not to show how much he disapproved of her. And of course she would never come again--that was obvious. And then suddenly I began to laugh. He looked up at me indignantly.

"'Is there a joke?' he said coldly.

"'I laughed gently again.

"'I was just thinking,' I said, 'that it would be rather amusing if you--well, had your revenge.'

"'My revenge? How do you mean?'

"'Well, paid her back in her own coin.'

"'Do you mean try and frighten her?'

"'No, no; but dressed up and pulled her leg a bit. Made her look a fool in front of the others.' I laughed to myself again. 'Serve her jolly well right.'

"'He jumped up excitedly.

"'By Jove, Cay!' he cried. 'If I could! How? You must think of a way.

"'I don't know if Beverley has told you about Mark's acting. He was an amateur of all the arts, and vain of his little talents, but as an actor he seemed to himself most wonderful. Certainly he had some ability for the stage, so long as he had the stage to himself and was playing to an admiring audience. As a professional actor in a small part he would have been hopeless; as an amateur playing the leading part, he deserved all that the local papers had ever said about him. And so the idea of giving us a private performance, directed against a professional actress who had made fun of him, appealed equally to his vanity and his desire for retaliation. If he, Mark Ablett, by his wonderful acting could make Ruth Norris look a fool in front of the others, could take her in, and then join in the laugh at her afterwards, he would indeed have had a worthy revenge!

"It strikes you as childish, Mr. Gillingham? Ah, you never knew Mark Ablett.

"'How, Cay, how?' he said eagerly.

"'Well, I haven't really thought it out,' I protested. 'It was just an idea.'

"He began to think it out for himself.

"'I might pretend to be a manager, come down to see her--but I suppose she knows them all. What about an interviewer?'

"'It's going to be difficult,' I said thoughtfully. 'You've got rather a characteristic face, you know. And your
"I'd shave it off,' he snapped.
"My dear Mark!
'He looked away, and mumbled, 'I've been thinking of taking it off, anyhow. And besides, if I'm going to do the thing, I'm going to do it properly.'
"Yes, you always were an artist,' I said, looking at him admiringly.
'He purred. To be called an artist was what he longed for most. Now I knew that I had him.
"All the same,' I went on, 'even without your beard and moustache you might be recognizable. Unless, of course--' I broke off.
"'Unless what?
"'You pretend to be Robert.' I began to laugh to myself again. 'By Jove!' I said, 'that's not a bad idea. Pretend to be Robert, the wastrel brother, and make yourself objectionable to Miss Norris. Borrow money from her, and that sort of thing.'

"He looked at me, with his bright little eyes, nodding eagerly.
"'Robert,' he said. 'Yes. How shall we work it?'

'There was really a Robert, Mr. Gillingham, as I have no doubt you and the Inspector both discovered. And he was a wastrel and he went to Australia. But he never came to the Red House on Tuesday afternoon. He couldn't have, because he died (un lamented) three years ago. But there was nobody who knew this, save Mark and myself, for Mark was the only one of the family left, his sister having died last year. Though I doubt, anyhow, if she knew whether Robert was alive or dead. He was not talked about.

'For the next two days Mark and I worked out our plans. You understand by now that our aims were not identical. Mark's endeavour was that his deception should last for, say, a couple of hours; mine that it should go to the grave with him. He had only to deceive Miss Norris and the other guests; I had to deceive the world. When he was dressed up as Robert, I was going to kill him. Robert would then be dead, Mark (of course) missing. What could anybody think but that Mark had killed Robert? But you see how important it was for Mark to enter fully into his latest (and last) impersonation. Half-measures would be fatal.

'You will say that it was impossible so do the thing thoroughly enough. I answer again that you never knew Mark. He was being what he wished most to be--an artist. No Othello ever blacked himself all over with such enthusiasm as did Mark. His beard was going anyhow--possible a chance remark of Miss Norbury's helped here. She did not like beards. But it was important for me that the dead man's hands should not be the hands of a manicured gentleman. Five minutes playing upon the vanity of the artist settled his hands. He let the nails grow and then cut them raggedly. 'Miss Norris would notice your hands at once,' I had said. 'Besides, as an artist--'

'So with his underclothes. It was hardly necessary to warn him that his pants might show above the edge of his socks; as an artist he had already decided upon Robertian pants. I bought them, and other things, in London for him. Even if I had not cut out all trace of the maker's name, he would instinctively have done it. As an Australian and an artist, he could not have an East London address on his underclothes. Yes, we were doing the thing thoroughly, both of us; he as an artist, I as a--well, you may say murderer, if you like. I shall not mind now.

'Our plans were settled. I went to London on the Monday and wrote him a letter from Robert. (The artistic touch again.) I also bought a revolver. On the Tuesday morning he announced the arrival of Robert at the breakfast-table. Robert was now alive--we had six witnesses to prove it; six witnesses who knew that he was coming that afternoon. Our private plan was that Robert should present himself at three o'clock, in readiness for the return of the golfing-party shortly afterwards. The maid would go to look for Mark, and having failed to find him, come back to the office to find me entertaining Robert in Mark's absence. I would explain that Mark must have gone out somewhere, and would myself introduce the wastrel brother to the tea-table. Mark's absence would not excite any comment, for it would be generally felt--indeed Robert would suggest it--that he had been afraid of meeting his brother. Then Robert would make himself amusingly offensive to the guests, particularly, of course, Miss Norris, until he thought that the joke had gone far enough.

'That was our private plan. Perhaps I should say that it was Mark's private plan. My own was different.

'The announcement at breakfast went well. After the golfing-party had gone off, we had the morning in which to complete our arrangements. What I was chiefly concerned about was to establish as completely as possible the identity of Robert. For this reason I suggested to Mark that, when dressed, he should go out by the secret passage to the bowling-green, and come back by the drive, taking care to enter into conversation with the lodge-keeper. In this way I would have two more witnesses of Robert's arrival--first the lodge-keeper, and secondly one of the gardeners whom I would have working on the front lawn. Mark, of course, was willing enough. He could practise his Australian accent on the lodge-keeper. It was really amusing to see how readily he fell into every suggestion which I made. Never was a killing more carefully planned by its victim.
"He changed into Robert's clothes in the office bedroom. This was the safest way—for both of us. When he was ready, he called me in, and I inspected him. It was extraordinary how well he looked the part. I suppose that the signs of his dissipation had already marked themselves on, his face, but had been concealed hitherto by his moustache and beard; for now that he was clean-shaven they lay open to the world from which we had so carefully hidden them, and he was indeed the wastrel which he was pretending to be.

"By Jove, you're wonderful,' I said.

"He smirked, and called my attention to the various artistic touches which I might have missed.

"'Wonderful,' I said to myself again. 'Nobody could possibly guess.'

"I peered into the hall. It was empty. We hurried across to the library; he got into the passage and made off. I went back to the bedroom, collected all his discarded clothes, did them up in a bundle and returned with them to the passage. Then I sat down in the hall and waited.

"You heard the evidence of Stevens, the maid. As soon as she was on her way to the Temple in search of Mark, I stepped into the office. My hand was in my side-pocket, and in my hand was the revolver.

"He began at once in his character of Robert—some rigmarole about working his passage over from Australia; a little private performance for my edification. Then in his natural voice, gloating over his well-planned retaliation on Miss Norris, he burst out, 'It's my turn now. You wait.' It was this which Elsie heard. She had no business to be there and she might have ruined everything, but as it turned out it was the luckiest thing which could have happened. For it was the one piece of evidence which I wanted; evidence, other than my own, that Mark and Robert were in the room together.

"I said nothing. I was not going to take the risk of being heard to speak in that room. I just smiled at the poor little fool, and took out my revolver, and shot him. Then I went back into the library and waited—just as I said in my evidence.

"Can you imagine, Mr. Gillingham, the shock which your sudden appearance gave me? Can you imagine the feelings of a 'murderer' who has (as he thinks) planned for every possibility, and is then confronted suddenly with an utterly new problem? What difference would your coming make? I didn't know. Perhaps none; perhaps all. And I had forgotten to open the window!

"I don't know whether you will think my plan for killing Mark a clever one. Perhaps not. But if I do deserve any praise in the matter, I think I deserve it for the way I pulled myself together in the face of the unexpected catastrophe of your arrival. Yes, I got a window open, Mr. Gillingham, under your very nose; the right window too, you were kind enough to say. And the keys —yes, that was clever of you, but I think I was cleverer. I deceived you over the keys, Mr. Gillingham, as I learnt when I took the liberty of listening to a conversation on the bowling-green between you and your friend Beverley. Where was I? Ah, you must have a look for that secret passage, Mr. Gillingham.

"But what am I saying? Did I deceive you at all? You have found out the secret—Robert was Mark—and that is all that matters. How have you found out? I shall never know now. Where did I go wrong? Perhaps you have been deceiving me all the time. Perhaps you knew about the keys, about the window, even about the secret passage. You are a clever man, Mr. Gillingham.

"I had Mark's clothes on my hands. I might have left them in the passage, but the secret of the passage was now out. Miss Norris knew it. That was the weak point of my plan, perhaps, that Miss Norris had to know it. So I hid them in the pond, the Inspector having obligingly dragged it for me first. A couple of keys joined them, but I kept the revolver. Fortunate, wasn't it, Mr. Gillingham?

"I don't think that there is any more to tell you. This is a long letter, but then it is the last which I shall write. There was a time when I hoped that there might be a happy future for me, not at the Red House, not alone. Perhaps it was never more than an idle dream, for I am no more worthy of her than Mark was. But I could have made her happy, Mr. Gillingham. God, how I would have worked to make her happy! But now that is impossible. To offer her the hand of a murderer would be as bad as to offer her the hand of a drunkard. And Mark died for that. I saw her this morning. She was very sweet. It is a difficult world to understand.

"Well, well, we are all gone now—the Abletts and the Cayleys. I wonder what old Grandfather Cayley thinks of it all. Perhaps it is as well that we have died out. Not that there was anything wrong with Sarah—except her temper. And she had the Ablett nose—you can't do much with that. I'm glad she left no children.

"Good-bye, Mr. Gillingham. I'm sorry that your stay with us was not of a pleasanter nature, but you understand the difficulties in which I was placed. Don't let Bill think too badly of me. He is a good fellow; look after him. He will be surprised. The young are always surprised. And thank you for letting me end my own way. I expect you did sympathize a little, you know. We might have been friends in another world—you and I, and I and she. Tell her what you like. Everything or nothing. You will know what is best. Good-bye, Mr. Gillingham.

"MATTHEW CAYLEY.

"I am lonely to-night without Mark. That's funny, isn't it?"
CHAPTER XXII
Mr. Beverley Moves On

"Good Lord!" said Bill, as he put down the letter.
"I thought you'd say that," murmured Antony.
"Tony, do you mean to say that you knew all this?"
"I guessed some of it. I didn't quite know all of it, of course."
"Good Lord!" said Bill again, and returned to the letter. In a moment he was looking up again. "What did you write to him? Was that last night? After I'd gone into Stanton?"
"Yes."
"What did you say? That you'd discovered that Mark was Robert?"
"Yes. At least I said that this morning I should probably telegraph to Mr. Cartwright of Wimpole Street, and ask him to--" Bill burst in eagerly on the top of the sentence. "Yes, now what was all that about? You were so damn Sherlocky yesterday all of a sudden. We'd been doing the thing together all the time, and you'd been telling me everything, and then suddenly you become very mysterious and private and talk enigmatically--is that the word?--about dentists and swimming and the 'Plough and Horses,' and--well, what was it all about? You simply vanished out of sight; I didn't know what on earth we were talking about."
Antony laughed and apologized.
"Sorry, Bill. I felt like that suddenly. Just for the last half-hour; just to end up with. I'll tell you everything now. Not that there's anything to tell, really. It seems so easy when you know it--so obvious. About Mr. Cartwright of Wimpole Street. Of course he was just to identify the body."
"But whatever made you think of a dentist for that?"
"Who could do it better? Could you have done it? You'd never gone bathing with Mark; you'd never seen him stripped. He didn't swim. Could his doctor do it? Not unless he'd had some particular operation, and perhaps not then. But his dentists could--at any time, always--if he had been to his dentist fairly often. Hence Mr. Cartwright of Wimpole Street."
Bill nodded thoughtfully and went back again to the letter.
"I see. And you told Cayley that you were telegraphing to Cartwright to identify the body?"
"Yes. And then of course it was all up for him. Once we knew that Robert was Mark we knew everything."
"How did you know?"
Antony got up from the breakfast table and began to fill his pipe.
"I'm not sure that I can say, Bill. You know those problems in Algebra where you say, 'Let x be the answer,' and then you work it out and find what x is. Well, that's one way; and another way, which they never give you any marks for at school, is to guess the answer. Pretend the answer is 4--well, will that satisfy the conditions of the problem? No. Then try 6; and if 6 doesn't either, then what about 5?--and so on. Well, the Inspector and the Coroner and all that lot had guessed their answer, and it seemed to fit, but you and I knew it didn't really fit; there were several conditions in the problem which it didn't fit at all. So we knew that their answer was wrong, and we had to think of another--an answer which explained all the things which were puzzling us. Well, I happened to guess the right one. Got a match?"
Bill handed him a box, and he lit his pipe.
"Yes, but that doesn't quite do, old boy. Something must have put you on to it suddenly. By the way, I'll have my matches back, if you don't mind."
Antony laughed and took them out of his pocket.
"Sorry .... Well then, let's see if I can go through my own mind again, and tell you how I guessed it. First of all, the clothes."
"Yes?"
"To Cayley the clothes seemed an enormously important clue. I didn't quite see why, but I did realize that to a man in Cayley's position the smallest clue would have an entirely disproportionate value. For some reason, then, Cayley attached this exaggerated importance to the clothes which Mark was wearing on that Tuesday morning; all the clothes, the inside ones as well as the outside ones. I didn't know why, but I did feel certain that, in that case, the absence of the collar was unintentional. In collecting the clothes he had overlooked the collar. Why?"
"It was the one in the linen-basket?"
"Yes. It seemed probable. Why had Cayley put it there? The obvious answer was that he hadn't. Mark had put it there. I remembered what you told me about Mark being finicky, and having lots of clothes and so on, and I felt that he was just the sort of man who would never wear the same collar twice." He paused, and then asked, "Is that right, do you think?"
"Absolutely," said Bill with conviction.

"Well, I guessed it was. So then I began to see an x which would fit just this part of the problem--the clothes part. I saw Mark changing his clothes; I saw him instinctively dropping the collar in the linen-basket, just as he had always dropped every collar he had ever taken off, but leaving the rest of the clothes on a chair in the ordinary way; and I saw Cayley collecting all the clothes afterwards--all the visible clothes--and not realizing that the collar wasn't there."

"Go on," said Bill eagerly.

"Well, I felt pretty sure about that, and I wanted an explanation of it. Why had Mark changed down there instead of in his bedroom? The only answer was that the fact of his changing had to be kept secret. When did he change? The only possible time was between lunch (when he would be seen by the servants) and the moment of Robert's arrival. And when did Cayley collect the clothes in a bundle? Again, the only answer was 'Before Robert's arrival.' So another x was wanted--to fit those three conditions."

"And the answer was that a murder was intended, even before Robert arrived?"

"Yes. Well now, it couldn't be intended on the strength of that letter, unless there was very much more behind the letter than we knew. Nor was it possible a murder could be intended without any more preparation than the changing into a different suit in which to escape. The thing was too childish. Also, if Robert was to be murdered, why go out of the way to announce his existence to you all--even, at the cost of some trouble, to Mrs. Norbury? What did it all mean? I didn't know. But I began to feel now that Robert was an incident only; that the plot was a plot of Cayley's against Mark--either to get him to kill his brother, or to get his brother to kill him--and that for some inexplicable reason Mark seemed to be lending himself to the plot." He was silent for a little, and then said, almost to himself, "I had seen the empty brandy bottles in that cupboard."

"You never said anything about them" complained Bill.

"I only saw them afterwards. I was looking for the collar, you remember. They came back to me afterwards; I knew how Cayley would feel about it .... Poor devil!"

"Go on," said Bill.

"Well, then, we had the inquest, and of course I noticed, and I suppose you did too, the curious fact that Robert had asked his way at the second lodge and not at the first. So I talked to Amos and Parsons. That made it more curious. Amos told me that Robert had gone out of his way to speak to him; had called to him, in fact. Parsons told me that his wife was out in their little garden at the first lodge all the afternoon, and was certain that Robert had never come past it. He also told me that Cayley had put him on to a job on the front lawn that afternoon. So I had another guess. Robert had used the secret passage--the passage which comes out into the park between the first and second lodges. Robert, then, had been in the house; it was a put-up job between Robert and Cayley. But how could Robert be there without Mark knowing? Obviously, Mark knew too. What did it all mean?"

"When was this?" interrupted Bill. "Just after the inquest--after you'd seen Amos and Parsons, of course?"

"Yes. I got up and left them, and came to look for you. I'd got back to the clothes then. Why did Mark change his clothes so secretly? Disguise? But then what about his face? That was much more important than clothes. His face, his beard--he'd have to shave off his beard--and then--oh, idiot! I saw you looking at that poster. Mark acting, Mark made-up, Mark disguised. Oh, priceless idiot! Mark was Robert .... Matches, please."

Bill passed over the matches again, waited till Antony had relit his pipe, and then held out his hand for them, just as they were going into the other's pocket.

"Yes," said Bill thoughtfully. "Yes .... But wait a moment. What about the 'Plough and Horses'?" Antony looked comically at him.

"You'll never forgive me, Bill," he said. "You'll never come clue-hunting with me again."

"What do you mean?"

Antony sighed.

"It was a fake, Watson. I wanted you out of the way. I wanted to be alone. I'd guessed at my x, and I wanted to test it--to test it every way, by everything we'd discovered. I simply had to be alone just then. So--" he smiled and added, "Well, I knew you wanted a drink."

"You are a devil," said Bill, staring at him. "And your interest when I told you that a woman had been staying there--"

"Well, it was only polite to be interested when you'd taken so much trouble."

"You brute! You--you Sherlock! And then you keep trying to steal my matches. Well, go on."

"That's all. My x fitted."

"Did you guess Miss Norris and all that?"

"Well, not quite. I didn't realize that Cayley had worked for it from the beginning--had put Miss Norris up to frightening Mark. I thought he'd just seized the opportunity."
Bill was silent for a long time. Then, puffing at his pipe, he said slowly, "Has Cayley shot himself?"
Antony shrugged his shoulders.
"Poor devil," said Bill. "It was decent of you to give him a chance. I'm glad you did."
"I couldn't help liking Cayley in a kind of way, you know."
"He's a clever devil. If you hadn't turned up just when you did, he would never have been found out."
"I wonder. It was ingenious, but it's often the ingenious thing which gets found out. The awkward thing from Cayley's point of view was that, though Mark was missing, neither he nor his body could ever be found. Well, that doesn't often happen with a missing man. He generally gets discovered in the end; a professional criminal; perhaps not--but an amateur like Mark! He might have kept the secret of how he killed Mark, but I think it would have become obvious sooner or later that he had killed him."
"Yes, there's something in that .... Oh, just tell me one thing. Why did Mark tell Miss Norbury about his imaginary brother?"
"That's puzzled me rather, too, Bill. It may be that he was just doing the Othello business--painting himself black all over. I mean he may have been so full of his appearance as Robert that he had almost got to believe in Robert, and had to tell everybody. More likely, though, he felt that, having told all of you at the house, he had better tell Miss Norbury, in case she met one of you; in which case, if you mentioned the approaching arrival of Robert, she might say, 'Oh, I'm certain he has no brother; he would have told me if he had,' and so spoil his joke. Possibly, too, Cayley put him on to it; Cayley obviously wanted as many people as possible to know about Robert."
"Are you going to tell the police?"
"Yes, I suppose they'll have to know. Cayley may have left another confession. I hope he won't give me away; you see, I've been a sort of accessory since yesterday evening. And I must go and see Miss Norbury."
"I asked," explained Bill, "because I was wondering what I should say to--to Betty. Miss Calladine. You see, she's bound to ask."
"Perhaps you won't see her again for a long, long time," said Antony sadly.
"As a matter of fact, I happen to know that she will be at the Barringtons. And I go up there to-morrow."
"Well, you had better tell her. You're obviously longing to. Only don't let her say anything for a day or two. I'll write to you."
"Righto!"
Antony knocked the ashes out of his pipe and got up.
"The Barringtons," he said. "Large party?"
"Fairly, I think."
Antony smiled at his friend.
"Yes. Well, if any of 'em should happen to be murdered, you might send for me. I'm just getting into the swing of it."
The Purloined Letter

by Edgar Allan Poe

Nil sapientiae odiosius acumine nimio.

Seneca.

At Paris, just after dark one gusty evening in the autumn of 18-., I was enjoying the twofold luxury of meditation and a meerschaum, in company with my friend C. Auguste Dupin, in his little back library, or book-closet, au troisième, No. 33, Rue Dunôt, Faubourg St. Germain. For one hour at least we had maintained a profound silence; while each, to any casual observer, might have seemed intently and exclusively occupied with the curling eddies of smoke that oppressed the atmosphere of the chamber. For myself, however, I was mentally discussing certain topics which had formed matter for conversation between us at an earlier period of the evening; I mean the affair of the Rue Morgue, and the mystery attending the murder of Marie Rogêt. I looked upon it, therefore, as something of a coincidence, when the door of our apartment was thrown open and admitted our old acquaintance, Monsieur G--, the Prefect of the Parisian police.

We gave him a heartly welcome; for there was nearly half as much of the entertaining as of the contemptible about the man, and we had not seen him for several years. We had been sitting in the dark, and Dupin now arose for the purpose of lighting a lamp, but sat down again, without doing so, upon G.'s saying that he had called to consult us, or rather to ask the opinion of my friend, about some official business which had occasioned a great deal of trouble.

"If it is any point requiring reflection," observed Dupin, as he forebore to enkindle the wick, "we shall examine it to better purpose in the dark."

"That is another of your odd notions," said the Prefect, who had a fashion of calling every thing "odd" that was beyond his comprehension, and thus lived amid an absolute legion of "oddities."

"Very true," said Dupin, as he supplied his visiter with a pipe, and rolled towards him a comfortable chair.

"And what is the difficulty now?" I asked. "Nothing more in the assassination way, I hope?"

"Oh no; nothing of that nature. The fact is, the business is very simple indeed, and I make no doubt that we can manage it sufficiently well ourselves; but then I thought Dupin would like to hear the details of it, because it is so excessively odd."

"Simple and odd," said Dupin.

"Why, yes; and not exactly that, either. The fact is, we have all been a good deal puzzled because the affair is so simple, and yet baffles us altogether."

"Perhaps it is the very simplicity of the thing which puts you at fault," said my friend.

"What nonsense you do talk!" replied the Prefect, laughing heartily.

"Perhaps the mystery is a little too plain," said Dupin.

"Oh, good heavens! who ever heard of such an idea?"

"A little too self-evident."

"Ha! ha! ha - ha! ha! - ho! ho! ho!" roared our visiter, profoundly amused, "oh, Dupin, you will be the death of me yet!"

"And what, after all, is the matter on hand?" I asked.

"Why, I will tell you," replied the Prefect, as he gave a long, steady and contemplative puff, and settled himself in his chair. "I will tell you in a few words; but, before I begin, let me caution you that this is an affair demanding the greatest secrecy, and that I should most probably lose the position I now hold, were it known that I confided it to any one."

"Proceed," said I.

"Or not," said Dupin.

"Well, then; I have received personal information, from a very high quarter, that a certain document of the last importance, has been purloined from the royal apartments. The individual who purloined it is known; this beyond a doubt; he was seen to take it. It is known, also, that it still remains in his possession."

"How is this known?" asked Dupin.

"It is clearly inferred," replied the Prefect, "from the nature of the document, and from the non-appearance of certain results which would at once arise from its passing out of the robber's possession; that is to say, from his employing it as he must design in the end to employ it."

"Be a little more explicit," I said.

"Well, I may venture so far as to say that the paper gives its holder a certain power in a certain quarter where
such power is immensely valuable." The Prefect was fond of the cant of diplomacy.

"Still I do not quite understand," said Dupin.

"No? Well; the disclosure of the document to a third person, who shall be nameless, would bring in question the honor of a personage of most exalted station; and this fact gives the holder of the document an ascendancy over the illustrious personage whose honor and peace are so jeopardized."

"But this ascendancy," I interposed, "would depend upon the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber. Who would dare -"

"The thief," said G., "is the Minister D--, who dares all things, those unbecoming as well as those becoming a man. The method of the theft was not less ingenious than bold. The document in question - a letter, to be frank - had been received by the personage robbed while alone in the royal boudoir. During its perusal she was suddenly interrupted by the entrance of the other exalted personage from whom especially it was her wish to conceal it. After a hurried and vain endeavor to thrust it in a drawer, she was forced to place it, open as it was, upon a table. The address, however, was uppermost, and, the contents thus unexposed, the letter escaped notice. At this juncture enters the Minister D--. His lynx eye immediately perceives the paper, recognises the handwriting of the address, observes the confusion of the personage addressed, and fathoms her secret. After some business transactions, hurried through in his ordinary manner, he produces a letter somewhat similar to the one in question, opens it, pretends to read it, and then places it in close juxtaposition to the other. Again he converses, for some fifteen minutes, upon the public affairs. At length, in taking leave, he takes also from the table the letter to which he had no claim. Its rightful owner saw, but, of course, dared not call attention to the act, in the presence of the third personage who stood at her elbow. The minister decamped; leaving his own letter - one of no importance - upon the table."

"Here, then," said Dupin to me, "you have precisely what you demand to make the ascendancy complete - the robber's knowledge of the loser's knowledge of the robber."

"Yes," replied the Prefect; "and the power thus attained has, for some months past, been wielded, for political purposes, to a very dangerous extent. The personage robbed is more thoroughly convinced, every day, of the necessity of reclaiming her letter. But this, of course, cannot be done openly. In fine, driven to despair, she has committed the matter to me."

"Than whom," said Dupin, amid a perfect whirlwind of smoke, "no more sagacious agent could, I suppose, be desired, or even imagined."

"You flatter me," replied the Prefect; "but it is possible that some such opinion may have been entertained."

"It is clear," said I, "as you observe, that the letter is still in possession of the minister; since it is this possession, and not any employment of the letter, which bestows the power. With the employment the power departs."

"True," said G.; "and upon this conviction I proceeded. My first care was to make thorough search of the minister's hotel; and here my chief embarrassment lay in the necessity of searching without his knowledge. Beyond all things, I have been warned of the danger which would result from giving him reason to suspect our design."

"But," said I, "you are quite au fait in these investigations. The Parisian police have done this thing often before."

"O yes; and for this reason I did not despair. The habits of the minister gave me, too, a great advantage. He is frequently absent from home all night. His servants are by no means numerous. They sleep at a distance from their master's apartment, and, being chiefly Neapolitans, are readily made drunk. I have keys, as you know, with which I can open any chamber or cabinet in Paris. For three months a night has not passed, during the greater part of which I have not been engaged, personally, in ransacking the D--Hotel. My honor is interested, and, to mention a great secret, the reward is enormous. So I did not abandon the search until I had become fully satisfied that the thief is a more astute man than myself. I fancy that I have investigated every nook and corner of the premises in which it is possible that the paper can be concealed."

"But is it not possible," I suggested, "that although the letter may be in possession of the minister, as it unquestionably is, he may have concealed it elsewhere than upon his own premises?"

"This is barely possible," said Dupin. "The present peculiar condition of affairs at court, and especially of those intrigues in which D-- is known to be involved, would render the instant availability of the document - its susceptibility of being produced at a moment's notice - a point of nearly equal importance with its possession."

"Its susceptibility of being produced?" said I.

"That is to say, of being destroyed," said Dupin.

"True," I observed; "the paper is clearly then upon the premises. As for its being upon the person of the minister, we may consider that as out of the question."

"Entirely," said the Prefect. "He has been twice waylaid, as if by footpads, and his person rigorously searched under my own inspection."

"You might have spared yourself this trouble," said Dupin. "D--, I presume, is not altogether a fool, and, if not, must have anticipated these waylayings, as a matter of course."
"Not altogether a fool," said G., "but then he's a poet, which I take to be only one remove from a fool."
"True," said Dupin, after a long and thoughtful whiff from his meerschaum, "although I have been guilty of certain doggrel myself."
"Suppose you detail," said I, "the particulars of your search."
"Why the fact is, we took our time, and we searched everywhere. I have had long experience in these affairs. I took the entire building, room by room; devoting the nights of a whole week to each. We examined, first, the furniture of each apartment. We opened every possible drawer; and I presume you know that, to a properly trained police agent, such a thing as a secret drawer is impossible. Any man is a dolt who permits a 'secret' drawer to escape him in a search of this kind. The thing is so plain. There is a certain amount of bulk - of space - to be accounted for in every cabinet. Then we have accurate rules. The fiftieth part of a line could not escape us. After the cabinets we took the chairs. The cushions we probed with the fine long needles you have seen me employ. From the tables we removed the tops."
"Why so?"
"Sometimes the top of a table, or other similarly arranged piece of furniture, is removed by the person wishing to conceal an article; then the leg is excavated, the article deposited within the cavity, and the top replaced. The bottoms and tops of bedposts are employed in the same way."
"But could not the cavity be detected by sounding?" I asked.
"By no means, if, when the article is deposited, a sufficient wadding of cotton be placed around it. Besides, in our case, we were obliged to proceed without noise."
"But you could not have removed - you could not have taken to pieces all articles of furniture in which it would have been possible to make a deposit in the manner you mention. A letter may be compressed into a thin spiral roll, not differing much in shape or bulk from a large knitting-needle, and in this form it might be inserted into the rung of a chair, for example. You did not take to pieces all the chairs?"
"Certainly not; but we did better - we examined the rungs of every chair in the hotel, and, indeed the jointings of every description of furniture, by the aid of a most powerful microscope. Had there been any traces of recent disturbance we should not have failed to detect it instantly. A single grain of gimlet-dust, for example, would have been as obvious as an apple. Any disorder in the glueing - any unusual gaping in the joints - would have sufficed to insure detection."
"I presume you looked to the mirrors, between the boards and the plates, and you probed the beds and the bed-clothes, as well as the curtains and carpets."
"That of course; and when we had absolutely completed every particle of the furniture in this way, then we examined the house itself. We divided its entire surface into compartments, which we numbered, so that none might be missed; then we scrutinized each individual square inch throughout the premises, including the two houses immediately adjoining, with the microscope, as before."
"The two houses adjoining!" I exclaimed: "you must have had a great deal of trouble."
"We had; but the reward offered is prodigious!"
"You include the grounds about the houses?"
"All the grounds are paved with brick. They gave us comparatively little trouble. We examined the moss between the bricks, and found it undisturbed."
"You looked among D--'s papers, of course, and into the books of the library?"
"Certainly; we opened every package and parcel; we not only opened every book, but we turned over every leaf in each volume, not contenting ourselves with a mere shake, according to the fashion of some of our police officers. We also measured the thickness of every book-cover, with the most accurate admeasurement, and applied to each the most jealous scrutiny of the microscope. Had any of the bindings been recently meddled with, it would have been utterly impossible that the fact should have escaped observation. Some five or six volumes, just from the hands of the binder, we carefully probed, longitudinally, with the needles."
"You explored the floors beneath the carpets?"
"Beyond doubt. We removed every carpet, and examined the boards with the microscope."
"And the paper on the walls?"
"Yes."
"You looked into the cellars?"
"We did."
"Then," I said, "you have been making a miscalculation, and the letter is not upon the premises, as you suppose."
"I fear you are right there," said the Prefect. "And now, Dupin, what would you advise me to do?"
"To make a thorough re-search of the premises."
"That is absolutely needless," replied G-. "I am not more sure that I breathe than I am that the letter is not at the
"I have no better advice to give you," said Dupin. "You have, of course, an accurate description of the letter?"

"Oh yes!" - And here the Prefect, producing a memorandum-book proceeded to read aloud a minute account of the internal, and especially of the external appearance of the missing document. Soon after finishing the perusal of this description, he took his departure, more entirely depressed in spirits than I had ever known the good gentleman before. In about a month afterwards he paid us another visit, and found us occupied very nearly as before. He took a pipe and a chair and entered into some ordinary conversation. At length I said, -

"Well, but G--, what of the purloined letter? I presume you have at last made up your mind that there is no such thing as overreaching the Minister?"

"Confound him, say I - yes; I made the re-examination, however, as Dupin suggested - but it was all labor lost, as I knew it would be."

"How much was the reward offered, did you say?" asked Dupin.

"Why, a very great deal - a very liberal reward - I don't like to say how much, precisely; but one thing I will say, that I wouldn't mind giving my individual check for fifty thousand francs to any one who could obtain me that letter. The fact is, it is becoming of more and more importance every day; and the reward has been lately doubled. If it were trebled, however, I could do no more than I have done."

"Why, yes," said Dupin, drawlingly, between the whiffs of his meerschaum, "I really - think, G--, you have not exerted yourself - to the utmost in this matter. You might - do a little more, I think, eh?"

"How? - in what way?"

"Why - puff, puff - you might - puff, puff - employ counsel in the matter, eh? - puff, puff, puff. Do you remember the story they tell of Abernethy?"

"No; hang Abernethy!"

"To be sure! hang him and welcome. But, once upon a time, a certain rich miser conceived the design of spunging upon this Abernethy for a medical opinion. Getting up, for this purpose, an ordinary conversation in a private company, he insinuated his case to the physician, as that of an imaginary individual.

" 'We will suppose,' said the miser, 'that his symptoms are such and such; now, doctor, what would you have directed him to take?'

" 'Take!' said Abernethy, 'why, take advice, to be sure.' "

"But," said the Prefect, a little discomposed, "I am perfectly willing to take advice, and to pay for it. I would really give fifty thousand francs to any one who would aid me in the matter."

"In that case," replied Dupin, opening a drawer, and producing a check-book, "you may as well fill me up a check for the amount mentioned. When you have signed it, I will hand you the letter."

I was astounded. The Prefect appeared absolutely thunder-stricken. For some minutes he remained speechless and motionless, looking incredulously at my friend with open mouth, and eyes that seemed starting from their sockets; then, apparently recovering himself in some measure, he seized a pen, and after several pauses and vacant stares, finally filled up and signed a check for fifty thousand francs, and handed it across the table to Dupin. The latter examined it carefully and deposited it in his pocket-book; then, unlocking an escritoire, took thence a letter and gave it to the Prefect. This functionary grasped it in a perfect agony of joy, opened it with a trembling hand, cast a rapid glance at its contents, and then, scrambling and struggling to the door, rushed at length unceremoniously from the room and from the house, without having uttered a syllable since Dupin had requested him to fill up the check.

When he had gone, my friend entered into some explanations.

"The Parisian police," he said, "are exceedingly able in their way. They are persevering, ingenious, cunning, and thoroughly versed in the knowledge which their duties seem chiefly to demand. Thus, when G-- detailed to us his made of searching the premises at the Hotel D--, I felt entire confidence in his having made a satisfactory investigation - so far as his labors extended."

"So far as his labors extended?" said I.

"Yes," said Dupin. "The measures adopted were not only the best of their kind, but carried out to absolute perfection. Had the letter been deposited within the range of their search, these fellows would, beyond a question, have found it."

I merely laughed - but he seemed quite serious in all that he said.

"The measures, then," he continued, "were good in their kind, and well executed; their defect lay in their being inapplicable to the case, and to the man. A certain set of highly ingenious resources are, with the Prefect, a sort of Procrustean bed, to which he forcibly adapts his designs. But he perpetually errs by being too deep or too shallow, for the matter in hand; and many a schoolboy is a better reasoner than he. I knew one about eight years of age, whose success at guessing in the game of 'even and odd' attracted universal admiration. This game is simple, and is played with marbles. One player holds in his hand a number of these toys, and demands of another whether that
"You surprise me," I said, "by these opinions, which have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as the reason par excellence."

The Minister I believe has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician, and no poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect feels; and he is merely guilty however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister of-the-way hole or corner suggested by the same tenor of thought which would urge a man to secrete a letter in a gimlet-hole bored in a chair-leg? And do you not see also, that such recherchés nooks for concealment are adapted only for ordinary occasions, and would be adopted only by ordinary intellects; for, in all cases of concealment, a disposal of the article concealed - a disposal of it in this recherché manner, - is, in the very first instance, presumable; and thus its discovery depends, not at all upon the acumen, but altogether upon the mere care, patience, and determination of the seekers; and where the case is of importance - or, what amounts to the same thing in the policial eyes, when the reward is of magnitude, - the qualities in question have never been known to fail. You have no variation of principle in their investigations; at best, when urged by some unusual emergency - by some extraordinary reward - they extend or exaggerate their old modes of practice, without touching their principles. What, for example, in this case of D--, has been done to vary the principle of this functionary, - in other words, had the principle of its concealment been comprehended within the principles of the Prefect - its discovery would have been a matter altogether beyond question. This functionary, however, has been thoroughly mystified; and the remote source of his defeat lies in the supposition that the Minister is a fool, because he has acquired renown as a poet. All fools are poets; this the Prefect feels; and he is merely guilty of a non distributio medi in thence inferring that all poets are fools.

"But is this really the poet?" I asked. "There are two brothers, I know; and both have attained reputation in letters. The Minister I believe has written learnedly on the Differential Calculus. He is a mathematician, and no poet."

"You are mistaken; I know him well; he is both. As poet and mathematician, he would reason well; as mere mathematician, he could not have reasoned at all, and thus would have been at the mercy of the Prefect."

"You surprise me," I said, "by these opinions, which have been contradicted by the voice of the world. You do not mean to set at naught the well-digested idea of centuries. The mathematical reason has long been regarded as the reason par excellence."
"Il y a à parièr," replied Dupin, quoting from Chamfort, "que toute idée publique, toute convention reçue est une sottise, car elle a convenu au plus grand nombre.' The mathematicians, I grant you, have done their best to promulgate the popular error to which you allude, and which is none the less an error for its promulgation as truth. With an art worthy a better cause, for example, they have insinuated the term 'analysis' into application to algebra. The French are the originators of this particular deception; but if a term is of any importance - if words derive any value from applicability - then 'analysis' conveys 'algebra' about as much as, in Latin, 'ambitus' implies 'ambition,' 'religio' 'religion,' or 'homines honesti,' a set of honorablemen.'

"You have a quarrel on hand, I see," said I, "with some of the algebraists of Paris; but proceed."

"I dispute the availability, and thus the value, of that reason which is cultivated in any especial form other than the abstractly logical. I dispute, in particular, the reason educed by mathematical study. The mathematics are the science of form and quantity; mathematical reasoning is merely logic applied to observation upon form and quantity. The great error lies in supposing that even the truths of what is called pure algebra, are abstract or general truths. And this error is so egregious that I am confounded at the universality with which it has been received. Mathematical axioms are not axioms of general truth. What is true of relation - of form and quantity - is often grossly false in regard to morals, for example. In this latter science it is very usually untrue that the aggregated parts are equal to the whole. In chemistry also the axiom fails. In the consideration of motive it fails; for two motives, each of a given value, have not, necessarily, a value when united, equal to the sum of their values apart. There are numerous other mathematical truths which are only truths within the limits of relation. But the mathematician argues, from his finite truths, through habit, as if they were of an absolutely general applicability - as the world indeed imagines them to be. Bryant, in his very learned 'Mythology,' mentions an analogous source of error, when he says that 'although the Pagan fables are not believed, yet we forget ourselves continually, and make inferences from them as existing realities.' With the algebraists, however, who are Pagans themselves, the 'Pagan fables' are believed, and the inferences are made, not so much through lapse of memory, as through an unaccountable addling of the brains. In short, I never yet encountered the mere mathematician who could be trusted out of equal roots, or one who did not clandestinely hold it as a point of his faith that $x^2+px$ was absolutely and unconditionally equal to $q$. Say to one of these gentlemen, by way of experiment, if you please, that you believe occasions may occur where $x^2+px$ is not altogether equal to $q$, and, having made him understand what you mean, get out of his reach as speedily as convenient, for, beyond doubt, he will endeavor to knock you down.

"I mean to say," continued Dupin, while I merely laughed at his last observations, "that if the Minister had been no more than a mathematician, the Prefect would have been under no necessity of giving me this check. I know him, however, as both mathematician and poet, and my measures were adapted to his capacity, with reference to the circumstances by which he was surrounded. I knew him as a courtier, too, and as a bold intrigant. Such a man, I considered, could not fail to be aware of the ordinary policial modes of action. He could not have failed to anticipate - and events have proved that he did not fail to anticipate - the waylayings to which he was subjected. He must have foreseen, I reflected, the secret investigations of his premises. His frequent absences from home at night, which were hailed by the Prefect as certain aids to his success, I regarded only as ruses, to afford opportunity for thorough search to the police, and thus the sooner to impress them with the conviction to which G--., in fact, did finally arrive - the conviction that the letter was not upon the premises. I felt, also, that the whole train of thought, which I was at some pains in detailing to you just now, concerning the invariable principle of policial action in searches for articles concealed - I felt that this whole train of thought would necessarily pass through the mind of the Minister. It would imperatively lead him to despise all the ordinary nooks of concealment. He could not, I reflected, be so weak as not to see that the most intricate and remote recess of his hotel would be as open as his commonest closets to the eyes, to the probes, to the gimlets, and to the microscopes of the Prefect. I saw, in fine, that he would be driven, as a matter of course, to simplicity, if not deliberately induced to it as a matter of choice. You will remember, perhaps, how desperately the Prefect laughed when I suggested, upon our first interview, that it was just possible this mystery troubled him so much on account of its being so very self-evident."

"Yes," said I, "I remember his merriment well. I really thought he would have fallen into convulsions."

"The material world," continued Dupin, "abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument, as well as to embellish a description. The principle of the vis inertiæ, for example, seems to be identical in physics and metaphysics. It is not more true in the former, that a large body is with more difficulty set in motion than a smaller one, and that its subsequent momentum is commensurate with this difficulty, than it is, in the latter, that intellects of the vaster capacity, while more forcible, more constant, and more eventful in their movements than those of inferior grade, are yet the less readily moved, and more embarrassed and full of hesitation in the first few steps of their progress. Again: have you ever noticed which of the street signs, over the shop-doors, are the most attractive of attention?"
"I have never given the matter a thought," I said.

"There is a game of puzzles," he resumed, "which is played upon a map. One party playing requires another to find a given word - the name of town, river, state or empire - any word, in short, upon the motley and perplexed surface of the chart. A novice in the game generally seeks to embarrass his opponents by giving them the most minutely lettered names; but the adept selects such words as stretch, in large characters, from one end of the chart to the other. These, like the over-largely lettered signs and placards of the street, escape observation by dint of being excessively obvious; and here the physical oversight is precisely analogous with the moral inapprehension by which the intellect suffers to pass unnoticed those considerations which are too obtrusively and too palpably self-evident. But this is a point, it appears, somewhat above or beneath the understanding of the Prefect. He never once thought it probable, or possible, that the Minister had deposited the letter immediately beneath the nose of the whole world, by way of best preventing any portion of that world from perceiving it.

"But the more I reflected upon the daring, dashing, and discriminating ingenuity of D--; upon the fact that the document must always have been at hand, if he intended to use it to good purpose; and upon the decisive evidence, obtained by the Prefect, that it was not hidden within the limits of that dignitary's ordinary search - the more satisfied I became that, to conceal this letter, the Minister had resorted to the comprehensive and sagacious expedient of not attempting to conceal it at all.

"Full of these ideas, I prepared myself with a pair of green spectacles, and called one fine morning, quite by accident, at the Ministerial hotel. I found D-- at home, yawning, lounging, and dawdling, as usual, and pretending to be in the last extremity of ennui. He is, perhaps, the most really energetic human being now alive - but that is only when nobody sees him.

"To be even with him, I complained of my weak eyes, and lamented the necessity of the spectacles, under cover of which I cautiously and thoroughly surveyed the whole apartment, while seemingly intent only upon the conversation of my host.

"I paid especial attention to a large writing-table near which he sat, and upon which lay confusedly, some miscellaneous letters and other papers, with one or two musical instruments and a few books. Here, however, after a long and very deliberate scrutiny, I saw nothing to excite particular suspicion.

"At length my eyes, in going the circuit of the room, fell upon a trumpery fillagree card-rack of pasteboard, that hung dangling by a dirty blue ribbon, from a little brass knob just beneath the middle of the mantel-piece. In this rack, which had three or four compartments, were five or six visiting cards and a solitary letter. This last was much soiled and crumpled. It was torn nearly in two, across the middle - as if a design, in the first instance, to tear it entirely up as worthless, had been altered, or stayed, in the second. It had a large black seal, bearing the D-- cipher very conspicuously, and was addressed, in a diminutive female hand, to D--, the minister, himself. It was thrust carelessly, and even, as it seemed, contemptuously, into one of the uppermost divisions of the rack.

"No sooner had I glanced at this letter, than I concluded it to be that of which I was in search. To be sure, it was, to all appearance, radically different from the one of which the Prefect had read us so minute a description. Here the seal was large and black, with the D-- cipher; there it was small and red, with the ducal arms of the S-- family. Here, the address, to the Minister, diminutive and feminine; there the superscription, to a certain royal personage, was markedly bold and decided; the size alone formed a point of correspondence. But, then, the radicalness of these differences, which was excessive; the dirt; the soiled and torn condition of the paper, so inconsistent with the true methodical habits of D--, and so suggestive of a design to delude the beholder into an idea of the worthlessness of the document; these things, together with the hyper-obtrusive situation of this document, full in the view of every visitor, and thus exactly in accordance with the conclusions to which I had previously arrived; these things, I say, were strongly corroborative of suspicion, in one who came with the intention to suspect.

"I protracted my visit as long as possible, and, while I maintained a most animated discussion with the Minister upon a topic which I knew well had never failed to interest and excite him, I kept my attention really riveted upon the letter. In this examination, I committed to memory its external appearance and arrangement in the rack; and also fell, at length, upon a discovery which set at rest whatever trivial doubt I might have entertained. In scrutinizing the edges of the paper, I observed them to be more chafed than seemed necessary. They presented the broken appearance which is manifested when a stiff paper, having been once folded and pressed with a folder, is refolded in a reversed direction, in the same creases or edges which had formed the original fold. This discovery was sufficient.

"The next morning I called for the snuff-box, when we resumed, quite eagerly, the conversation of the preceding day. While thus engaged, however, a loud report, as if of a pistol, was heard immediately beneath the windows of the hotel, and was succeeded by a series of fearful screams, and the shoutings of a terrified mob. D-- rushed to a casement, threw it open, and looked out. In the meantime, I stepped to the card-rack took the letter, put it in my
pocket, and replaced it by a fac-simile, (so far as regards externals,) which I had carefully prepared at my lodgings -
imitating the D-- cipher, very readily, by means of a seal formed of bread.

"The disturbance in the street had been occasioned by the frantic behavior of a man with a musket. He had fired
it among a crowd of women and children. It proved, however, to have been without ball, and the fellow was suffered
to go his way as a lunatic or a drunkard. When he had gone, D-- came from the window, whither I had followed him
immediately upon securing the object in view. Soon afterwards I bade him farewell. The pretended lunatic was a
man in my own pay."

"But what purpose had you," I asked, "in replacing the letter by a fac-simile? Would it not have been better, at
the first visit, to have seized it openly, and departed?"

"D--," replied Dupin, "is a desperate man, and a man of nerve. His hotel, too, is not without attendants devoted
to his interests. Had I made the wild attempt you suggest, I might never have left the Ministerial presence alive. The
good people of Paris might have heard of me no more. But I had an object apart from these considerations. You
know my political prepossessions. In this matter, I act as a partisan of the lady concerned. For eighteen months the
Minister has had her in his power. She has now him in hers - since, being unaware that the letter is not in his
possession, he will proceed with his exactions as if it was. Thus will he inevitably commit himself, at once, to his
political destruction. His downfall, too, will not be more precipitate than awkward. It is all very well to talk about
the facilis descensus Averni; but in all kinds of climbing, as Catalani said of singing, it is far more easy to get up
than to come down. In the present instance I have no sympathy - at least no pity - for him who descends. He is that
monstrum horrendum, an unprincipled man of genius. I confess, however, that I should like very well to know the
precise character of his thoughts, when, being defied by her whom the Prefect terms 'a certain personage' he is
reduced to opening the letter which I left for him in the card-rack."

"How? did you put any thing particular in it?"

"Why - it did not seem altogether right to leave the interior blank - that would have been insulting. D--, at
Vienna once, did me an evil turn, which I told him, quite good-humoredly, that I should remember. So, as I knew he
would feel some curiosity in regard to the identity of the person who had outwitted him, I thought it a pity not to
give him a clue. He is well acquainted with my MS., and I just copied into the middle of the blank sheet the words -
"'-- -- Un dessein si funeste, S'il n'est digne d'Atrée, est digne de Thyeste.
They are to be found in Crebillon's 'Atrée.' "

Go to Start
The Murders in the Rue Morgue

by Edgar Allan Poe

Illustration by Aubrey Beardsley

What song the Syrens sang, or what name Achilles assumed when he hid himself among women, although puzzling questions, are not beyond all conjecture.

--Sir Thomas Browne.

The mental features discoursed of as the analytical, are, in themselves, but little susceptible of analysis. We appreciate them only in their effects. We know of them, among other things, that they are always to their possessor, when inordinately possessed, a source of the liveliest enjoyment. As the strong man exults in his physical ability, delighting in such exercises as call his muscles into action, so glories the analyst in that moral activity which disentangles. He derives pleasure from even the most trivial occupations bringing his talent into play. He is fond of enigmas, of conundrums, of hieroglyphics; exhibiting in his solutions of each a degree of acumen which appears to the ordinary apprehension præternatural. His results, brought about by the very soul and essence of method, have, in truth, the whole air of intuition.

The faculty of re-solution is possibly much invigorated by mathematical study, and especially by that highest branch of it which, unjustly, and merely on account of its retrograde operations, has been called, as if par excellence, analysis. Yet to calculate is not in itself to analyse. A chess-player, for example, does the one without effort at the other. It follows that the game of chess, in its effects upon mental character, is greatly misunderstood. I am not now writing a treatise, but simply prefacing a somewhat peculiar narrative by observations very much at random; I will, therefore, take occasion to assert that the higher powers of the reflective intellect are more decidedly and more usefully tasked by the unostentatious game of draughts than by a the elaborate frivolity of chess. In this latter, where the pieces have different and bizarre motions, with various and variable values, what is only complex is mistaken (a not unusual error) for what is profound. The attention is here called powerfully into play. If it flag for an instant, an oversight is committed resulting in injury or defeat. The possible moves being not only manifold but involute, the chances of such oversights are multiplied; and in nine cases out of ten it is the more concentrative rather than the more acute player who conquers. In draughts, on the contrary, where the moves are unique and have but little variation, the probabilities of inadvertence are diminished, and the mere attention being left comparatively unemployed, what advantages are obtained by either party are obtained by superior acumen. To be less abstract - Let us suppose a game of draughts where the pieces are reduced to four kings, and where, of course, no oversight is to be expected. It is obvious that here the victory can be decided (the players being at all equal) only by some recherché movement, the result of some strong exertion of the intellect. Deprived of ordinary resources, the analyst throws himself into the spirit of his opponent, identifies himself therewith, and not unfrequently sees thus, at a glance, the sole methods (sometime indeed absurdly simple ones) by which he may seduce into error or hurry into miscalculation.

Whist has long been noted for its influence upon what is termed the calculating power; and men of the highest
order of intellect have been known to take an apparently unaccountable delight in it, while eschewing chess as
frivolous. Beyond doubt there is nothing of a similar nature so greatly tasking the faculty of analysis. The best chess-
player in Christendom may be little more than the best player of chess; but proficiency in whist implies capacity for
success in all those more important undertakings where mind struggles with mind. When I say proficiency, I mean
that perfection in the game which includes a comprehension of all the sources whence legitimate advantage may be
derived. These are not only manifold but multiform, and lie frequently among recesses of thought altogether
inaccessible to the ordinary understanding. To observe attentively is to remember distinctly; and, so far, the
concentrative chess-player will do very well at whist; while the rules of Hoyle (themselves based upon the mere
mechanism of the game) are sufficiently and generally comprehensible. Thus to have a retentive memory, and to
proceed by "the book," are points commonly regarded as the sum total of good playing. But it is in matters beyond
the limits of mere rule that the skill of the analyst is evinced. He makes, in silence, a host of observations and
inferences. So, perhaps, do his companions; and the difference in the extent of the information obtained, lies not so
much in the validity of the inference as in the quality of the observation. The necessary knowledge is that of what to
observe. Our player confines himself not at all; nor, because the game is the object, does he reject deductions from
things external to the game. He examines the countenance of his partner, comparing it carefully with that of each of
his opponents. He considers the mode of assorting the cards in each hand; often counting trump by trump, and honor
by honor, through the glances bestowed by their holders upon each. He notes every variation of face as the play
progresses, gathering a fund of thought from the differences in the expression of certainty, of surprise, of triumph,
or of chagrin. From the manner of gathering up a trick he judges whether the person taking it can make another in the
suit. He recognises what is played through feint, by the air with which it is thrown upon the table. A casual or
inadvertent word; the accidental dropping or turning of a card, with the accompanying anxiety or carelessness in
regard to its concealment; the counting of the tricks, with the order of their arrangement; embarrassment, hesitation,
ejagerness or trepidation - all afford, to his apparently intuitive perception, indications of the true state of affairs.
The first two or three rounds having been played, he is in full possession of the contents of each hand, and thenceforward
puts down his cards with as absolute a precision of purpose as if the rest of the party had turned outward the faces of
their own.

The analytical power should not be confounded with ample ingenuity; for while the analyst is necessarily
ingenious, the ingenious man is often remarkably incapable of analysis. The constructive or combining power, by
which ingenuity is usually manifested, and to which the phrenologists (I believe erroneously) have assigned a
separate organ, supposing it a primitive faculty, has been so frequently seen in those whose intellect bordered
otherwise upon idiocy, as to have attracted general observation among writers on morals. Between ingenuity and the
analytic ability there exists a difference far greater, indeed, than that between the fancy and the imagination, but of a
character very strictly analogous. It will be found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the truly
imaginative never otherwise than analytic.

The narrative which follows will appear to the reader somewhat in the light of a commentary upon the
propositions just advanced.

Residing in Paris during the spring and part of the summer of 18--., I there became acquainted with a Monsieur
C. Auguste Dupin. This young gentleman was of an excellent - indeed of an illustrious family, but, by a variety of
untoward events, had been reduced to such poverty that the energy of his character succumbed beneath it, and he
cessated to bestir himself in the world, or to care for the retrieval of his fortunes. By courtesy of his creditors, there
still remained in his possession a small remnant of his patrimony; and, upon the income arising from this, he
managed, by means of a rigorous economy, to procure the necessaries of life, without troubling himself about its
superfluities. Books, indeed, were his sole luxuries, and in Paris these are easily obtained.

Our first meeting was at an obscure library in the Rue Montmartre, where the accident of our both being in
search of the same very rare and very remarkable volume, brought us into closer communion. We saw each other
again and again. I was deeply interested in the little family history which he detailed to me with all that candor
which a Frenchman indulges whenever mere self is his theme. I was astonished, too, at the vast extent of his reading;
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which a Frenchman indulges whenever mere self is his theme. I was astonished, too, at the vast extent of his reading;
locality of our retirement had been carefully kept a secret from my own former associates; and it had been many years since Dupin had ceased to know or be known in Paris. We existed within ourselves alone.

It was a freak of fancy in my friend (for what else shall I call it?) to be enamored of the Night for her own sake; and into this bizarrerie, as into all his others, I quietly fell; giving myself up to his wild whims with a perfect abandon. The sable divinity would not herself dwell with us always; but we could counterfeit her presence. At the first dawn of the morning we closed all the messy shutters of our old building; lighting a couple of tapers which, strongly perfumed, threw out only the ghastliest and feeblest of rays. By the aid of these we then busied our souls in dreams - reading, writing, or conversing, until warned by the clock of the advent of the true Darkness. Then we sallied forth into the streets arm in arm, continuing the topics of the day, or roaming far and wide until a late hour, seeking, amid the wild lights and shadows of the populous city, that infinity of mental excitement which quiet observation can afford.

At such times I could not help remarking and admiring (although from his rich ideality I had been prepared to expect it) a peculiar analytic ability in Dupin. He seemed, too, to take an eager delight in its exercise - if not exactly in its display - and did not hesitate to confess the pleasure thus derived. He boasted to me, with a low chuckling laugh, that most men, in respect to himself, wore windows in their bosoms, and was wont to follow up such assertions by direct and very startling proofs of his intimate knowledge of my own. His manner at these moments was frigid and abstract; his eyes were vacant in expression; while his voice, usually a rich tenor, rose into a treble which would have sounded petulantly but for the deliberateness and entire distinctness of the enunciation. Observing him in these moods, I often dwelt meditatively upon the old philosophy of the Bi-Part Soul, and amused myself with the fancy of a double Dupin - the creative and the resolvent.

Let it not be supposed, from what I have just said, that I am detailing any mystery, or penning any romance. What I have described in the Frenchman, was merely the result of an excited, or perhaps of a diseased intelligence. But of the character of his remarks at the periods in question an example will best convey the idea.

We were strolling one night down a long dirty street in the vicinity of the Palais Royal. Being both, apparently, occupied with thought, neither of us had spoken a syllable for fifteen minutes at least. All at once Dupin broke forth with these words:

"He is a very little fellow, that's true, and would do better for the Théâtre des Variétés."

"There can be no doubt of that," I replied unwittingly, and not at first observing (so much had I been absorbed in reflection) the extraordinary manner in which the speaker had chimed in with my meditations. In an instant afterward I recollected myself, and my astonishment was profound.

"Dupin," said I, gravely, "this is beyond my comprehension. I do not hesitate to say that I am amazed, and can scarcely credit my senses. How was it possible you should know I was thinking of ------ ?" Here I paused, to ascertain beyond a doubt whether he really knew of whom I thought.

-- "of Chantilly," said he, "why do you pause? You were remarking to yourself that his diminutive figure unfitted him for tragedy."

This was precisely what had formed the subject of my reflections. Chantilly was a quondam cobbler of the Rue St. Denis, who, becoming stage-mad, had attempted the rôle of Xerxes, in Crébillon's tragedy so called, and been notoriously Pasquinaded for his pains.

"Tell me, for Heaven's sake," I exclaimed, "the method - if method there is - by which you have been enabled to fathom my soul in this matter." In fact I was even more startled than I would have been willing to express.

"It was the fruiterer," replied my friend, "who brought you to the conclusion that the mender of soles was not of sufficient height for Xerxes et id genus omne."

"The fruiterer! - you astonish me - I know no fruiterer whomsoever."

"The man who ran up against you as we entered the street - it may have been fifteen minutes ago."

I now remembered that, in fact, a fruiterer, carrying upon his head a large basket of apples, had nearly thrown me down, by accident, as we passed from the Rue C ---- into the thoroughfare where we stood; but what this had to do with Chantilly I could not possibly understand.

There was not a particle of charâtanerie about Dupin. "I will explain," he said, "and that you may comprehend all clearly, we will first retrace the course of your meditations, from the moment in which I spoke to you until that of the rencontre with the fruiterer in question. The larger links of the chain run thus - Chantilly, Orion, Dr. Nichols, Epicurus, Stereotomy, the street stones, the fruiterer."

There are few persons who have not, at some period of their lives, amused themselves in retracing the steps by which particular conclusions of their own minds have been attained. The occupation is often full of interest and he who attempts it for the first time is astonished by the apparently illimitable distance and incoherence between the starting-point and the goal. What, then, must have been my amazement when I heard the Frenchman speak what he had just spoken, and when I could not help acknowledging that he had spoken the truth. He continued:
"We had been talking of horses, if I remember aright, just before leaving the Rue C ---- . This was the last subject we discussed. As we crossed into this street, a fruiterer, with a large basket upon his head, brushing quickly past us, thrust you upon a pile of paving stones collected at a spot where the causeway is undergoing repair. You stepped upon one of the loose fragments, slipped, slightly strained your ankle, appeared vexed or sulky, muttered a few words, turned to look at the pile, and then proceeded in silence. I was not particularly attentive to what you did; but observation has become with me, of late, a species of necessity.

"You kept your eyes upon the ground - glancing, with a petulant expression, at the holes and ruts in the pavement, (so that I saw you were still thinking of the stones,) until we reached the little alley called Lamartine, which has been paved, by way of experiment, with the overlapping and riveted blocks. Here your countenance brightened up, and, perceiving your lips move, I could not doubt that you murmured the word 'stereotomy,' a term very affectedly applied to this species of pavement. I knew that you could not say to yourself 'stereotomy' without being brought to think of atomies, and thus of the theories of Epicurus; and since, when we discussed this subject not very long ago, I mentioned to you how singularly, yet with how little notice, the vague guesses of that noble Greek had met with confirmation in the late nebular cosmogony, I felt that you could not avoid casting your eyes upward to the great nebula in Orion, and I certainly expected that you would do so. You did look up; and I was now assured that I had correctly followed your steps. But in that bitter tirade upon Chantilly, which appeared in yesterday's 'Musée,' the satirist, making some disgraceful allusions to the cobbler's change of name upon assuming the buskin, quoted a Latin line about which we have often conversed. I mean the line

Perdidit antiquum litera sonum.

I had told you that this was in reference to Orion, formerly written Urion; and, from certain pungencies connected with this explanation, I was aware that you could not have forgotten it. It was clear, therefore, that you would not fail to combine the two ideas of Orion and Chantilly. That you did combine them I saw by the character of the smile which passed over your lips. You thought of the poor cobbler's immolation. So far, you had been stooping in your gait; but now I saw you draw yourself up to your full height. I was then sure that you reflected upon the diminutive figure of Chantilly. At this point I interrupted your meditations to remark that as, in fact, he was a very little fellow - that Chantilly - he would do better at the Théâtre des Variétés."

Not long after this, we were looking over an evening edition of the "Gazette des Tribunaux," when the following paragraphs arrested our attention.

"EXTRAORDINARY MURDERS. - This morning, about three o'clock, the inhabitants of the Quartier St. Roch were aroused from sleep by a succession of terrific shrieks, issuing, apparently, from the fourth story of a house in the Rue Morgue, known to be in the sole occupancy of one Madame L'Espanaye, and her daughter Mademoiselle Camille L'Espanaye. After some delay, occasioned by a fruitless attempt to procure admission in the usual manner, the gateway was broken in with a crowbar, and eight or ten of the neighbors entered accompanied by two gendarmes. By this time the cries had ceased; but, as the party rushed up the first flight of stairs, two or more rough voices in angry contention were distinguished and seemed to proceed from the upper part of the house. As the second landing was reached, these sounds, also, had ceased and everything remained perfectly quiet. The party spread themselves and hurried from room to room. Upon arriving at a large back chamber in the fourth story, (the door of which, being found locked, with the key inside, was forced open,) a spectacle presented itself which struck every one present not less with horror than with astonishment.

"The apartment was in the wildest disorder - the furniture broken and thrown about in all directions. There was only one bedstead; and from this the bed had been removed, and thrown into the middle of the floor. On a chair lay a razor, besmeared with blood. On the hearth were two or three long and thick tresses of grey human hair, also dabbled in blood, and seeming to have been pulled out by the roots. Upon the floor were found four Napoleons, an ear-ring of topaz, three large silver spoons, three smaller of métal d'Alger, and two bags, containing nearly four thousand francs in gold. The drawers of a bureau, which stood in one corner were open, and had been, apparently, rifled, although many articles still remained in them. A small iron safe was discovered under the bed (not under the bedstead). It was open, with the key still in the door. It had no contents beyond a few old letters, and other papers of little consequence.

"Of Madame L'Espanaye no traces were here seen; but an unusual quantity of soot being observed in the fireplace, a search was made in the chimney, and (horrible to relate!) the corpse of the daughter, head downward, was dragged therefrom; it having been thus forced up the narrow aperture for a considerable distance. The body was quite warm. Upon examining it, many excoriations were perceived, no doubt occasioned by the violence with which it had been thrust up and disengaged. Upon the face were many severe scratches, and, upon the throat, dark bruises, and deep indentations of finger nails, as if the deceased had been throttled to death.

"After a thorough investigation of every portion of the house, without farther discovery, the party made its way into a small paved yard in the rear of the building, where lay the corpse of the old lady, with her throat so entirely
cut that, upon an attempt to raise her, the head fell off. The body, as well as the head, was fearfully mutilated - the
former so much so as scarcely to retain any semblance of humanity.

"To this horrible mystery there is not as yet, we believe, the slightest clue."

The next day's paper had these additional particulars.

"The Tragedy in the Rue Morgue. Many individuals have been examined in relation to this most extraordinary
and frightful affair. [The word 'affaire' has not yet, in France, that levity of import which it conveys with us,] "but
nothing whatever has transpired to throw light upon it. We give below all the material testimony elicited.

"Pauline Dubourg, laundress, deposes that she has known both the deceased for three years, having washed for
them during that period. The old lady and her daughter seemed on good terms - very affectionate towards each other.
They were excellent pay. Could not speak in regard to their mode or means of living. Believed that Madame L. told
fortunes for a living. Was reputed to have money put by. Never met any persons in the house when she called for the
clothes or took them home. Was sure that they had no servant in employ. There appeared to be no furniture in any
part of the building except in the fourth story.

"Pierre Moreau, tobacconist, deposes that he has been in the habit of selling small quantities of tobacco and snuff
to Madame L'Espanaye for nearly four years. Was born in the neighborhood, and has always resided there. The
deceased and her daughter had occupied the house in which the corpses were found, for more than six years. It was
formerly occupied by a jeweller, who under-let the upper rooms to various persons. The house was the property of
Madame L. She became dissatisfied with the abuse of the premises by her tenant, and moved into them herself,
refusing to let any portion. The old lady was childish. Witness had seen the daughter some five or six times during
the six years. The two lived an exceedingly retired life - were reputed to have money. Had heard it said among the
neighbors that Madame L. told fortunes - did not believe it. Had never seen any person enter the door except the old
lady and her daughter, a porter once or twice, and a physician some eight or ten times.

"Many other persons, neighbors, gave evidence to the same effect. No one was spoken of as frequenting the
house. It was not known whether there were any living connexions of Madame L. and her daughter. The shutters of
the front windows were seldom opened. Those in the rear were always closed, with the exception of the large back
room, fourth story. The house was a good house - not very old.

"Isidore Muset, gendarme, deposes that he was called to the house about three o'clock in the morning, and found
some twenty or thirty persons at the gateway, endeavoring to gain admittance. Forced it open, at length, with a
bayonet - not with a crowbar. Had but little difficulty in getting it open, on account of its being a double or folding
gate, and bolted neither at bottom nor top. The shrieks were continued until the gate was forced - and then suddenly
ceased. They seemed to be screams of some person (or persons) in great agony - were loud and drawn out, not short
and quick. Witness led the way up stairs. Upon reaching the first landing, heard two voices in loud and angry
contention - the one a gruff voice, the other much shriller - a very strange voice. Could distinguish some words of
the former, which was that of a Frenchman. Was positive that it was not a woman's voice. Could distinguish the
words 'sacré' and 'diable.' The shrill voice was that of a foreigner. Could not be sure whether it was the voice of a
man or of a woman. Could not make out what was said, but believed the language to be Spanish. The state of the
room and of the bodies was described by this witness as we described them yesterday.

"Henri Duval, a neighbor, and by trade a silver-smith, deposes that he was one of the party who first entered the
house. Corroborates the testimony of Musèt in general. As soon as they forced an entrance, they reclosed the door,
to keep out the crowd, which collected very fast, notwithstanding the lateness of the hour. The shrill voice, this
witness thinks, was that of an Italian. Was certain it was not French. Could not be sure that it was a man's voice. It
might have been a woman's. Was not acquainted with the Italian language. Could not distinguish the words, but was
convinced by the intonation that the speaker was an Italian. Knew Madame L. and her daughter. Had conversed with
both frequently. Was sure that the shrill voice was not that of either of the deceased.

"-- Odenheimer, restaurateur. This witness volunteered his testimony. Not speaking French, was examined
through an interpreter. Is a native of Amsterdam. Was passing the house at the time of the shrieks. They lasted for
several minutes - probably ten. They were long and loud - very awful and distressing. Was one of those who entered
the building. Corroborated the previous evidence in every respect but one. Was sure that the shrill voice was that of
a man - of a Frenchman. Could not distinguish the words uttered. They were loud and quick - unequal - spoken
apparently in fear as well as in anger. The voice was harsh - not so much shrill as harsh. Could not call it a shrill
voice. The gruff voice said repeatedly 'sacré,' 'diable,' and once 'mon Dieu.'

"Jules Mignaud, banker, of the firm of Mignaud et Fils, Rue Deloraine. Is the elder Mignaud. Madame
L'Espanaye had some property. Had opened an account with his banking house in the spring of the year - (eight
years previously). Made frequent deposits in small sums. Had checked for nothing until the third day before her
death, when she took out in person the sum of 4000 francs. This sum was paid in gold, and a clerk went home with the
money.
"Adolphe Le Bon, clerk to Mignaud et Fils, deposes that on the day in question, about noon, he accompanied Madame L'Espanaye to her residence with the 4000 francs, put up in two bags. Upon the door being opened, Mademoiselle L. appeared and took from his hands one of the bags, while the old lady relieved him of the other. He then bowed and departed. Did not see any person in the street at the time. It is a bye-street - very lonely.

"William Bird, tailor deposes that he was one of the party who entered the house. Is an Englishman. Has lived in Paris two years. Was one of the first to ascend the stairs. Heard the voices in contention. The gruff voice was that of a Frenchman. Could make out several words, but cannot now remember all. Heard distinctly 'sacré' and 'mon Dieu.' There was a sound at the moment as if of several persons struggling - a scraping and scuffling sound. The shrill voice was very loud - louder than the gruff one. Is sure that it was not the voice of an Englishman. Appeared to be that of a German. Might have been a woman's voice. Does not understand German.

"Four of the above-named witnesses, being recalled, deposed that the door of the chamber in which was found the body of Mademoiselle L. was locked on the inside when the party reached it. Every thing was perfectly silent - no groans or noises of any kind. Upon forcing the door no person was seen. The windows, both of the back and front room, were down and firmly fastened from within. A door between the two rooms was closed, but not locked. The door leading from the front room into the passage was locked, with the key on the inside. A small room in the front of the house, on the fourth story, at the head of the passage was open, the door being ajar. This room was crowded with old beds, boxes, and so forth. These were carefully removed and searched. There was not an inch of any portion of the house which was not carefully searched. Sweeps were sent up and down the chimneys. The house was a four story one, with garrets (mansardes.) A trap-door on the roof was nailed down very securely - did not appear to have been opened for years. The time elapsing between the hearing of the voices in contention and the breaking open of the room door, was variously stated by the witnesses. Some made it as short as three minutes - some as long as five. The door was opened with difficulty.

"Alphonzo Garcia, undertaker, deposes that he resides in the Rue Morgue. Is a native of Spain. Was one of the party who entered the house. Did not proceed up stairs. Is nervous, and was apprehensive of the consequences of agitation. Heard the voices in contention. The gruff voice was that of a Frenchman. Could not distinguish what was said. The shrill voice was that of an Englishman - is sure of this. Does not understand the English language, but judges by the intonation.

"Alberto Montani, confectioner, deposes that he was among the first to ascend the stairs. Heard the voices in question. The gruff voice was that of a Frenchman. Distinguished several words. The speaker appeared to be expostulating. Could not make out the words of the shrill voice. Spoke quick and unevenly. Thinks it the voice of a Russian. Corroborates the general testimony. Is an Italian. Never conversed with a native of Russia.

"Several witnesses, recalled, here testified that the chimneys of all the rooms on the fourth story were too narrow to admit the passage of a human being. By 'sweeps' were meant cylindrical sweeping brushes, such as are employed by those who clean chimneys. These brushes were passed up and down every flue in the house. There is no back passage by which any one could have descended while the party proceeded up stairs. The body of Mademoiselle L'Espanaye was so firmly wedged in the chimney that it could not be got down until four or five of the party united their strength.

"Paul Dumas, physician, deposes that he was called to view the bodies about day-break. They were both then lying on the sacking of the bedstead in the chamber where Mademoiselle L. was found. The corpse of the young lady was much bruised and excoriated. The fact that it had been thrust up the chimney would sufficiently account for these appearances. The throat was greatly chafed. There were several deep scratches just below the chin, together with a series of livid spots which were evidently the impression of fingers. The face was fearfully discolored, and the eye-balls protruded. The tongue had been partially bitten through. A large bruise was discovered upon the pit of the stomach, produced, apparently, by the pressure of a knee. In the opinion of M. Dumas, Mademoiselle L'Espanaye had been throttled to death by some person or persons unknown. The corpse of the mother was horribly mutilated. All the bones of the right leg and arm were more or less shattered. The left tibia much splintered, as well as all the ribs of the left side. Whole body dreadfully bruised and discolored. It was not possible to say how the injuries had been inflicted. A heavy club of wood, or a broad bar of iron - a chair - any large, heavy, and obtuse weapon would have produced such results, if wielded by the hands of a very powerful man. No woman could have inflicted the blows with any weapon. The head of the deceased, when seen by witness, was entirely separated from the body, and was also greatly shattered. The throat had evidently been cut with some very sharp instrument - probably with a razor.

"Alexandre Etienne, surgeon, was called with M. Dumas to view the bodies. Corroborated the testimony, and the opinions of M. Dumas.

"Nothing farther of importance was elicited, although several other persons were examined. A murder so mysterious, and so perplexing in all its particulars, was never before committed in Paris - if indeed a murder has
known why. The next day. He then asked me, suddenly, if I had observed anything peculiar at the scene of the atrocity.

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home my companion stepped in for a moment at the office of one of the daily papers.

accompanying us throughout. The examination occupied us until dark, when we took our departure. On our way

excepting the bodies of the victims. We then went into the other rooms, and into the yard; a gendarme

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admitted by the agents in charge. We went up stairs - into the chamber where the body of Mademoiselle L'Espanaye

neighborhood, as well as the house, with a minuteness of attention for which I could see no possible object.

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the way. It was an ordinary Parisian house, with a gateway, on one side of which was a glazed watch-box, with a

there were still many persons gazing up at the closed shutters, with an objectless curiosity, from the opposite side of

we reached it; as this quarter is at a great distance from that in which we resided. The house was readily found; for

thoroughfares which intervene between the Rue Richelieu and the Rue St. Roch. It was late in the afternoon when

permission."

I could merely agree with all Paris in considering them an insoluble mystery. I saw no means by which it would be possible to trace the murderer.

"We must not judge of the means," said Dupin, "by this shell of an examination. The Parisian police, so much extolled for acumen, are cunning, but no more. There is no method in their proceedings, beyond the method of the moment. They make a vast parade of measures; but, not unfrequently, these are so ill adapted to the objects proposed, as to put us in mind of Monsieur Jourdain's calling for his robe-de-chambre - pour mieux entendre la musique. The results attained by them are not unfrequently surprising, but, for the most part, are brought about by simple diligence and activity. When these qualities are unavailing, their schemes fail. Vidocq, for example, was a good guesser and a persevering man. But, without educated thought, he erred continually by the very intensity of his investigations. He impaired his vision by holding the object too close. He might see, perhaps, one or two points with unusual clearness, but in so doing he, necessarily, lost sight of the matter as a whole. Thus there is such a thing as being too profound. Truth is not always in a well. In fact, as regards the more important knowledge, I do believe that she is invariably superficial. The depth lies in the valleys where we seek her, and not upon the mountain-tops where she is found. The modes and sources of this kind of error are well typified in the contemplation of the heavenly bodies. To look at a star by glances - to view it in a side-long way, by turning toward it the exterior portions of the retina (more susceptible of feeble impressions of light than the interior), is to behold the star distantly - is to have the best appreciation of its lustre - a lustre which grows dim just in proportion as we turn our vision fully upon it. A greater number of rays actually fall upon the eye in the latter case, but, in the former, there is the more refined capacity for comprehension. By undue profundity we perplex and enfeeble thought; and it is possible to make even Venus herself vanish from the firmament by a scrutiny too sustained, too concentrated, or too direct.

"As for these murders, let us enter into some examinations for ourselves, before we make up an opinion respecting them. An inquiry will afford us amusement," [I thought this an odd term, so applied, but said nothing] "and, besides, Le Bon once rendered me a service for which I am not ungrateful. We will go and see the premises with our own eyes. I know G----, the Prefect of Police, and shall have no difficulty in obtaining the necessary permission."

The permission was obtained, and we proceeded at once to the Rue Morgue. This is one of those miserable thoroughfares which intervene between the Rue Richelieu and the Rue St. Roch. It was late in the afternoon when we reached it; as this quarter is at a great distance from that in which we resided. The house was readily found; for there were still many persons gazing up at the closed shutters, with an objectless curiosity, from the opposite side of the way. It was an ordinary Parisian house, with a gateway, on one side of which was a glazed watch-box, with a sliding panel in the window, indicating a loge de concierge. Before going in we walked up the street, turned down an alley, and then, again turning, passed in the rear of the building - Dupin, meanwhile examining the whole neighborhood, as well as the house, with a minuteness of attention for which I could see no possible object.

Retracing our steps, we came again to the front of the dwelling, rang, and, having shown our credentials, were admitted by the agents in charge. We went up stairs - into the chamber where the body of Mademoiselle L'Espanaye had been found, and where both the deceased still lay. The disorders of the room had, as usual, been suffered to exist. I saw nothing beyond what had been stated in the "Gazette des Tribunaux." Dupin scrutinized everything - not excepting the bodies of the victims. We then went into the other rooms, and into the yard; a gendarme accompanying us throughout. The examination occupied us until dark, when we took our departure. On our way home my companion stepped in for a moment at the office of one of the daily papers.

I have said that the whims of my friend were manifold, and that Je les ménagais: - for this phrase there is no English equivalent. It was his humor, now, to decline all conversation on the subject of the murder, until about noon the next day. He then asked me, suddenly, if I had observed anything peculiar at the scene of the atrocity.

There was something in his manner of emphasizing the word "peculiar," which caused me to shudder, without knowing why.

"No, nothing peculiar," I said; "nothing more, at least, than we both saw stated in the paper."

"The 'Gazette,' " he replied, "has not entered, I fear, into the unusual horror of the thing. But dismiss the idle
opinions of this print. It appears to me that this mystery is considered insoluble, for the very reason which should cause it to be regarded as easy of solution - I mean for the outré character of its features. The police are confounded by the seeming absence of motive - not for the murder itself - but for the atrocity of the murder. They are puzzled, too, by the seeming impossibility of reconciling the voices heard in contention, with the facts that no one was discovered up stairs but the assassinated Mademoiselle L'Espanaye, and that there were no means of egress without the notice of the party ascending. The wild disorder of the room; the corpse thrust, with the head downward, up the chimney; the frightful mutilation of the body of the old lady; these considerations, with those just mentioned, and others which I need not mention, have sufficed to paralyze the powers, by putting completely at fault the boasted acumen, of the government agents. They have fallen into the gross but common error of confounding the unusual with the abstruse. But it is by these deviations from the plane of the ordinary, that reason feels its way, if at all, in its search for the true. In investigations such as we are now pursuing, it should not be so much asked 'what has occurred,' as 'what has occurred that has never occurred before.' In fact, the facility with which I shall arrive, or have arrived, at the solution of this mystery, is in the direct ratio of its apparent insolubility in the eyes of the police."

I stared at the speaker in mute astonishment.

"I am now awaiting," continued he, looking toward the door of our apartment - "I am now awaiting a person who, although perhaps not the perpetrator of these butcheries, must have been in some measure implicated in their perpetration. Of the worst portion of the crimes committed, it is probable that he is innocent. I hope that I am right in this supposition; for upon it I build my expectation of reading the entire riddle. I look for the man here - in this room - every moment. It is true that he may not arrive; but the probability is that he will. Should he come, it will be necessary to detain him. Here are pistols; and we both know how to use them when occasion demands their use."

I took the pistols, scarcely knowing what I did, or believing what I heard, while Dupin went on, very much as if in a soliloquy. I have already spoken of his abstract manner at such times. His discourse was addressed to myself; but his voice, although by no means loud, had that intonation which is commonly employed in speaking to some one at a great distance. His eyes, vacant in expression, regarded only the wall.

"That the voices heard in contention," he said, "by the party upon the stairs, were not the voices of the women themselves, was fully proved by the evidence. This relieves us of all doubt upon the question whether the old lady could have first destroyed the daughter and afterward have committed suicide. I speak of this point chiefly for the sake of method; for the strength of Madame L'Espanaye would have been utterly unequal to the task of thrusting her daughter's corpse up the chimney as it was found; and the nature of the wounds upon her own person entirely preclude the idea of self-destruction. Murder, then, has been committed by some third party; and the voices of this third party were those heard in contention. Let me now advert - not to the whole testimony respecting these voices - but to what was peculiar in that testimony. Did you observe any thing peculiar about it?"

I remarked that, while all the witnesses agreed in supposing the gruff voice to be that of a Frenchman, there was much disagreement in regard to the shrill, or, as one individual termed it, the harsh voice.

"That was the evidence itself," said Dupin, "but it was not the peculiarity of the evidence. You have observed nothing distinctive. Yet there was something to be observed. The witnesses, as you remark, agreed about the gruff voice; they were here unanimous. But in regard to the shrill voice, the peculiarity is - not that they disagreed - but that, while an Italian, an Englishman, a Spaniard, a Hollander, and a Frenchman attempted to describe it, each one spoke of it as that of a foreigner. Each is sure that it was not the voice of one of his own countrymen. Each likens it - not to the voice of an individual of any nation with whose language he is conversant - but the converse. The Frenchman supposes it the voice of a Spaniard, and 'might have distinguished some words had he been acquainted with the Spanish.' The Dutchman maintains it to have been that of a Frenchman; but we find it stated that 'not understanding French this witness was examined through an interpreter.' The Englishman thinks it the voice of a German, and 'does not understand German.' The Spaniard 'is sure' that it was that of an Englishman, but 'judges by the intonation' altogether, 'as he has no knowledge of the English.' The Italian believes it the voice of a Russian, but 'has never conversed with a native of Russia.' A second Frenchman differs, moreover, with the first, and is positive that the voice was that of an Italian; but, not being cognizant of that tongue, is, like the Spaniard, 'convinced by the intonation.' Now, how strangely unusual must that voice have really been, about which such testimony as this could have been elicited! - in whose tones, even, denizens of the five great divisions of Europe could recognise nothing familiar! You will say that it might have been the voice of an Asiatic - of an African. Neither Asiatics nor Africans abound in Paris; but, without denying the inference, I will now merely call your attention to three points. The voice is termed by one witness 'harsh rather than shrill.' It is represented by two others to have been 'quick and unequal.' No words - no sounds resembling words - were by any witness mentioned as distinguishable.

"I know not," continued Dupin, "what impression I may have made, so far, upon your own understanding; but I do not hesitate to say that legitimate deductions even from this portion of the testimony - the portion respecting the gruff and shrill voices - are in themselves sufficient to engender a suspicion which should give direction to all
farther progress in the investigation of the mystery. I said 'legitimate deductions;' but my meaning is not thus fully expressed. I designed to imply that the deductions are the sole proper ones, and that the suspicion arises inevitably from them as the single result. What the suspicion is, however, I will not say just yet. I merely wish you to bear in mind that, with myself, it was sufficiently forcible to give a definite form - a certain tendency - to my inquiries in the chamber.

"Let us now transport ourselves, in fancy, to this chamber. What shall we first seek here? The means of egress employed by the murderers. It is not too much to say that neither of us believe in præternatural events. Madame and Mademoiselle L’Espanaye were not destroyed by spirits. The doers of the deed were material, and escaped materially. Then how? Fortunately, there is but one mode of reasoning upon the point, and that mode must lead us to a definite decision. - Let us examine, each by each, the possible means of egress. It is clear that the assassins were in the room where Mademoiselle L’Espanaye was found, or at least in the room adjoining, when the party ascended the stairs. It is then only from these two apartments that we have to seek issues. The police have laid bare the floors, the ceilings, and the masonry of the walls, in every direction. No secret issues could have escaped their vigilance. But, not trusting to their eyes, I examined with my own. There were, then, no secret issues. Both doors leading from the rooms into the passage were securely locked, with the keys inside. Let us turn to the chimneys. These, although of ordinary width for some eight or ten feet above the hearths, will not admit, throughout their extent, the body of a large cat. The impossibility of egress, by means already stated, being thus absolute, we are reduced to the windows. Through those of the front room no one could have escaped without notice from the crowd in the street. The murderers must have passed, then, through those of the back room. Now, brought to this conclusion in so unequivocal a manner as we are, it is not our part, as reasoners, to reject it on account of apparent impossibilities. It is only left for us to prove that these apparent 'impossibilities' are, in reality, not such.

"There are two windows in the chamber. One of them is unobstructed by furniture, and is wholly visible. The lower portion of the other is hidden from view by the head of the unwieldy bedstead which is thrust close up against it. The former was found securely fastened from within. It resisted the utmost force of those who endeavored to raise it. A large gimlet-hole had been pierced in its frame to the left, and a very stout nail was found fitted therein, nearly to the head. Upon examining the other window, a similar nail was seen similarly fitted in it; and a vigorous attempt to raise this sash, failed also. The police were now entirely satisfied that egress had not been in these directions. And, therefore, it was thought a matter of supererogation to withdraw the nails and open the windows.

"My own examination was somewhat more particular, and was so for the reason I have just given - because here it was, I knew, that all apparent impossibilities must be proved to be not such in reality.

"I proceeded to think thus - à posteriori. The murderers did escape from one of these windows. This being so, they could not have refastened the sashes from the inside, as they were found fastened; - the consideration which put a stop, through its obviousness, to the scrutiny of the police in this quarter. Yet the sashes were fastened. They must, then, have the power of fastening themselves. There was no escape from this conclusion. I stepped to the unobstructed casement, withdrew the nail with some difficulty and attempted to raise the sash. It resisted all my efforts, as I had anticipated. A concealed spring must, I now know, exist; and this corroboratio of my idea convinced me that my premises at least, were correct, however mysterious still appeared the circumstances attending the nails. A careful search soon brought to light the hidden spring. I pressed it, and, satisfied with the discovery, forbore to upraise the sash.

"I now replaced the nail and regarded it attentively. A person passing out through this window might have reclosed it, and the spring would have caught - but the nail could not have been replaced. The conclusion was plain, and again narrowed in the field of my investigations. The assassins must have escaped through the other window. Supposing, then, the springs upon each sash to be the same, as was probable, there must be found a difference between the nails, or at least between the modes of their fixture. Getting upon the sacking of the bedstead, I looked over the head-board minutely at the second casement. Passing my hand down behind the board, I readily discovered and pressed the spring, which was, as I had supposed, identical in character with its neighbor. I now looked at the nail. It was as stout as the other, and apparently fitted in the same manner - driven in nearly up to the head.

"You will say that I was puzzled; but, if you think so, you must have misunderstood the nature of the inductions. To use a sporting phrase, I had not been once 'at fault.' The scent had never for an instant been lost. There was no flaw in any link of the chain. I had traced the secret to its ultimate result, - and that result was the nail. It had, I say, in every respect, the appearance of its fellow in the other window; but this fact was an absolute nullity (conclusive us it might seem to be) when compared with the consideration that here, at this point, terminated the clew. 'There must be something wrong,' I said, 'about the nail.' I touched it; and the head, with about a quarter of an inch of the shank, came off in my fingers. The rest of the shank was in the gimlet-hole where it had been broken off. The fracture was an old one (for its edges were incrusted with rust), and had apparently been accomplished by the blow of a hammer, which had partially imbedded, in the top of the bottom sash, the head portion of the nail. I now
carefully replaced this head portion in the indentation whence I had taken it, and the resemblance to a perfect nail was complete - the fissure was invisible. Pressing the spring, I gently raised the sash for a few inches; the head went up with it, remaining firm in its bed. I closed the window, and the semblance of the whole nail was again perfect.

"The riddle, so far, was no riddle. The assassin had escaped through the window which looked upon the bed. Dropping of its own accord upon his exit (or perhaps purposely closed), it had become fastened by the spring; and it was the retention of this spring which had been mistaken by the police for that of the nail, - farther inquiry being thus considered unnecessary.

"The next question is that of the mode of descent. Upon this point I had been satisfied in my walk with you around the building. About five feet and a half from the casement in question there runs a lightning-rod. From this rod it would have been impossible for any one to reach the window itself, to say nothing of entering it. I observed, however, that the shutters of the fourth story were of the peculiar kind called by Parisian carpenters ferrades - a kind rarely employed at the present day, but frequently seen upon very old mansions at Lyons and Bourdeaux. They are in the form of an ordinary door, (a single, not a folding door) except that the lower half is latticed or worked in open trellis - thus affording an excellent hold for the hands. In the present instance these shutters are fully three feet and a half broad. When we saw them from the rear of the house, they were both about half open - that is to say, they stood off at right angles from the wall. It is probable that the police, as well as myself, examined the back of the tenement; but, if so, in looking at these ferrades in the line of their breadth (as they must have done), they did not perceive this great breadth itself, or, at all events, failed to take it into due consideration. In fact, having once satisfied themselves that no egress could have been made in this quarter, they would naturally bestow here a very cursory examination. It was clear to me, however, that the shutter belonging to the window at the head of the bed, would, if swung fully back to the wall, reach to within two feet of the lightning-rod. It was also evident that, by exertion of a very unusual degree of activity and courage, an entrance into the window, from the rod, might have been thus effected. - By reaching to the distance of two feet and a half (we now suppose the shutter open to its whole extent) a robber might have taken a firm grasp upon the trellis-work. Letting go, then, his hold upon the rod, placing his feet securely against the wall, and springing boldly from it, he might have swung the shutter so as to close it, and, if we imagine the window open at the time, might even have swung himself into the room.

"I wish you to bear especially in mind that I have spoken of a very unusual degree of activity as requisite to success in so hazardous and so difficult a feat. It is my design to show you, first, that the thing might possibly have been accomplished: - but, secondly and chiefly, I wish to impress upon your understanding the very extraordinary - the almost præternatural character of that agility which could have accomplished it.

"You will say, no doubt, using the language of the law, that 'to make out my case,' I should rather undervalue, than insist upon a full estimation of the activity required in this matter. This may be the practice in law, but it is not the usage of reason. My ultimate object is only the truth. My immediate purpose is to lead you to place in juxta-position, that very unusual activity of which I have just spoken with that very peculiar shrill (or harsh) and unequal voice, about whose nationality no two persons could be found to agree, and in whose utterance no syllabification could be detected."

At these words a vague and half-formed conception of the meaning of Dupin flitted over my mind. I seemed to be upon the verge of comprehension without power to comprehend - men, at times, find themselves upon the brink of remembrance without being able, in the end, to remember. My friend went on with his discourse.

"You will see," he said, "that I have shifted the question from the mode of egress to that of ingress. It was my design to convey the idea that both were effected in the same manner, at the same point. Let us now revert to the interior of the room. Let us survey the appearances here. The drawers of the bureau, it is said, had been rifled, although many articles of apparel still remained within them. The conclusion here is absurd. It is a mere guess - a very silly one - and no more. How are we to know that the articles found in the drawers were not all these drawers had originally contained? Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter lived an exceedingly retired life - saw no company - seldom went out - had little use for numerous changes of habiliment. Those found were at least of as good quality as any likely to be possessed by these ladies. If a thief had taken any, why did he not take the best - why did he not take all? In a word, why did he abandon four thousand francs in gold to encumber himself with a bundle of linen? The gold was abandoned. Nearly the whole sum mentioned by Monsieur Mignaud, the banker, was discovered, in bags, upon the floor. I wish you, therefore, to discard from your thoughts the blundering idea of motive, engendered in the brains of the police by that portion of the evidence which speaks of money delivered at the door of the house. Coincidences ten times as remarkable as this (the delivery of the money, and murder committed within three days upon the party receiving it), happen to all of us every hour of our lives, without attracting even momentary notice. Coincidences, in general, are great stumbling-blocks in the way of that class of thinkers who have been educated to know nothing of the theory of probabilities - that theory to which the most glorious objects of human research are indebted for the most glorious of illustration. In the present instance, had the gold been gone, the fact of its delivery
three days before would have formed something more than a coincidence. It would have been corroborative of this idea of motive. But, under the real circumstances of the case, if we are to suppose gold the motive of this outrage, we must also imagine the perpetrator so vacillating an idiot as to have abandoned his gold and his motive together.

"Keeping now steadily in mind the points to which I have drawn your attention - that peculiar voice, that unusual agility, and that startling absence of motive in a murder so singularly atrocious as this - let us glance at the butchery itself. Here is a woman strangled to death by manual strength, and thrust up a chimney, head downward. Ordinary assassins employ no such modes of murder as this. Least of all, do they thus dispose of the murdered. In the manner of thrusting the corpse up the chimney, you will admit that there was something excessively outré - something altogether irreconcilable with our common notions of human action, even when we suppose the actors the most depraved of men. Think, too, how great must have been that strength which could have thrust the body up such an aperture so forcibly that the united vigor of several persons was found barely sufficient to drag it down!

"Turn, now, to other indications of the employment of a vigor most marvellous. On the hearth were thick tresses - very thick tresses - of grey human hair. These had been torn out by the roots. You are aware of the great force necessary in tearing thus from the head even twenty or thirty hairs together. You saw the locks in question as well as myself. Their roots (a hideous sight!) were clotted with fragments of the flesh of the scalp - sure token of the prodigious power which had been exerted in uprooting perhaps half a million of hairs at a time. The throat of the old lady was not merely cut, but the head absolutely severed from the body: the instrument was a mere razor. I wish you also to look at the brutal ferocity of these deeds. Of the bruises upon the body of Madame L’Espanaye I do not speak. Monsieur Dumas, and his worthy coadjutor Monsieur Etienne, have pronounced that they were inflicted by some obtuse instrument; and so far these gentlemen are very correct. The obtuse instrument was clearly the stone pavement in the yard, upon which the victim had fallen from the window which looked in upon the bed. This idea, however simple it may now seem, escaped the police for the same reason that the breadth of the shutters escaped them - because, by the affair of the nails, their perceptions had been hermetically sealed against the possibility of the windows having ever been opened at all.

"If now, in addition to all these things, you have properly reflected upon the odd disorder of the chamber, we have gone so far as to combine the ideas of an agility astounding, a strength superhuman, a ferocity brutal, a butchery without motive, a grotesquerie in horror absolutely alien from humanity, and a voice foreign in tone to the ears of men of many nations, and devoid of all distinct or intelligible syllabification. What result, then, has ensued? What impression have I made upon your fancy?"

I felt a creeping of the flesh as Dupin asked me the question. "A madman," I said, "has done this deed - some raving maniac, escaped from a neighboring Maison de Santé."

"In some respects," he replied, "your idea is not irrelevant. But the voices of madmen, even in their wildest paroxysms, are never found to tally with that peculiar voice heard upon the stairs. Madmen are of some nation, and their language, however incoherent in its words, has always the coherence of syllabification. Besides, the hair of a madman is not such as I now hold in my hand. I disentangled this little tuft from the rigidly clutched fingers of Madame L’Espanaye. Tell me what you can make of it."

"Dupin!" I said, completely unnerved; "this hair is most unusual - this is no human hair."

"I have not asserted that it is," said he; "but, before we decide this point, I wish you to glance at the little sketch I have here traced upon this paper. It is a fac-simile drawing of what has been described in one portion of the testimony as 'dark bruises, and deep indentations of finger nails,' upon the throat of Mademoiselle L’Espanaye, and in another, (by Messrs. Dumas and Etienne,) as a 'series of livid spots, evidently the impression of fingers.'

"You will perceive," continued my friend, spreading out the paper upon the table before us, "that this drawing gives the idea of a firm and fixed hold. There is no slipping apparent. Each finger has retained - possibly until the death of the victim - the fearful grasp by which it originally imbedded itself. Attempt, now, to place all your fingers, at the same time, in the respective impressions as you see them."

I made the attempt in vain.

"We are possibly not giving this matter a fair trial," he said. "The paper is spread out upon a plane surface; but the human throat is cylindrical. Here is a billet of wood, the circumference of which is about that of the throat. Wrap the drawing around it, and try the experiment again."

I did so; but the difficulty was even more obvious than before. "This," I said, "is the mark of no human hand."

"Read now," replied Dupin, "this passage from Cuvier."

It was a minute anatomical and generally descriptive account of the large fulvous Ourang-Outang of the East Indian Islands. The gigantic stature, the prodigious strength and activity, the wild ferocity, and the imitative propensities of these mammalia are sufficiently well known to all. I understood the full horrors of the murder at once.

"The description of the digits," said I, as I made an end of reading, "is in exact accordance with this drawing. I
see that no animal but an Oorang-Outang, of the species here mentioned, could have impressed the indentations as you have traced them. This tuft of tawny hair, too, is identical in character with that of the beast of Cuvier. But I cannot possibly comprehend the particulars of this frightful mystery. Besides, there were two voices heard in contention, and one of them was unquestionably the voice of a Frenchman."

"True; and you will remember an expression attributed almost unanimously, by the evidence, to this voice, - the expression, 'mon Dieu!' This, under the circumstances, has been justly characterized by one of the witnesses (Montani, the confectioner,) as an expression of remonstrance or expostulation. Upon these two words, therefore, I have mainly built my hopes of a full solution of the riddle. A Frenchman was cognizant of the murder. It is possible - indeed it is far more than probable - that he was innocent of all participation in the bloody transactions which took place. The Oorang-Outang may have escaped from him. He may have traced it to the chamber; but, under the agitating circumstances which ensued, he could never have re-captured it. It is still at large. I will not pursue these guesses - for I have no right to call them more - since the shades of reflection upon which they are based are scarcely of sufficient depth to be appreciable by my own intellect, and since I could not pretend to make them intelligible to the understanding of another. We will call them guesses then, and speak of them as such. If the Frenchman in question is indeed, as I suppose, innocent of this atrocity, this advertisement which I left last night, upon our return home, at the office of 'Le Monde,' (a paper devoted to the shipping interest, and much sought by sailors,) will bring him to our residence."

He handed me a paper, and I read thus:

CAUGHT - In the Bois de Boulogne, early in the morning of the - inst., (the morning of the murder,) a very large, tawny Oorang-Outang of the Bornese species. The owner, (who is ascertained to be a sailor, belonging to a Maltese vessel,) may have the animal again, upon identifying it satisfactorily, and paying a few charges arising from its capture and keeping. Call at No. ----, Rue ----, Faubourg St. Germain - au troisième.

"How was it possible," I asked, "that you should know the man to be a sailor, and belonging to a Maltese vessel?"

"I do not know it," said Dupin. "I am not sure of it. Here, however, is a small piece of ribbon, which from its form, and from its greasy appearance, has evidently been used in tying the hair in one of those long queues of which sailors are so fond. Moreover, this knot is one which few besides sailors can tie, and is peculiar to the Maltese. I picked the ribbon up at the foot of the lightning-rod. It could not have belonged to either of the deceased. Now if, after all, I am wrong in my induction from this ribbon, that the Frenchman was a sailor belonging to a Maltese vessel, still I can have done no harm in saying what I did in the advertisement. If I am in error, he will merely suppose that I have been misled by some circumstance into which he will not take the trouble to inquire. But if I am right, a great point is gained. Cognizant although innocent of the murder, the Frenchman will naturally hesitate about replying to the advertisement - about demanding the Oorang-Outang. He will reason thus: - 'I am innocent; I am poor; my Oorang-Outang is of great value - to one in my circumstances a fortune of itself - why should I lose it through idle apprehensions of danger? Here it is, within my grasp. It was found in the Bois de Boulogne - at a vast distance from the scene of that butchery. How can it ever be suspected that a brute beast should have done the deed? The police are at fault - they have failed to procure the slightest clew. Should they even trace the animal, it would be impossible to prove me cognizant of the murder, or to implicate me in guilt on account of that cognizance. Above all, I am known. The advertiser designates me as the possessor of the beast. I am not sure to what limit his knowledge may extend. Should I avoid claiming a property of so great value, which it is known that I possess, I will render the animal at least, liable to suspicion. It is not my policy to attract attention either to myself or to the beast. I will answer the advertisement, get the Oorang-Outang, and keep it close until this matter has blown over."

At this moment we heard a step upon the stairs.

"Be ready," said Dupin, "with your pistols, but neither use them nor show them until at a signal from myself."

The front door of the house had been left open, and the visiter had entered, without ringing, and advanced several steps upon the staircase. Now, however, he seemed to hesitate. Presently we heard him descending. Dupin was moving quickly to the door, when we again heard him coming up. He did not turn back a second time, but stepped up with decision, and rapped at the door of our chamber.

"Come in," said Dupin, in a cheerful and hearty tone.

A man entered. He was a sailor, evidently, - a tall, stout, and muscular-looking person, with a certain dare-devil expression of countenance, not altogether unprepossessing. His face, greatly sunburnt, was more than half hidden by whisker and mustachio. He had with him a huge oaken cudgel, but appeared to be otherwise unarmed. He bowed awkwardly, and bade us "good evening," in French accents, which, although somewhat Neufchatelish, were still sufficiently indicative of a Parisian origin.

"Sit down, my freind," said Dupin. "I suppose you have called about the Oorang-Outang. Upon my word, I almost envy you the possession of him; a remarkably fine, and no doubt a very valuable animal. How old do you
suppose him to be?"

The sailor drew a long breath, with the air of a man relieved of some intolerable burden, and then replied, in an assured tone:

"I have no way of telling - but he can't be more than four or five years old. Have you got him here?"

"Oh no, we had no conveniences for keeping him here. He is at a livery stable in the Rue Dubourg, just by. You can get him in the morning. Of course you are prepared to identify the property?"

"To be sure I am, sir."

"I shall be sorry to part with him," said Dupin.

"I don't mean that you should be at all this trouble for nothing, sir," said the man. "Couldn't expect it. Am very willing to pay a reward for the finding of the animal - that is to say, any thing in reason."

"Well," replied my friend, "that is all very fair, to be sure. Let me think! - what should I have? Oh! I will tell you. My reward shall be this. You shall give me all the information in your power about these murders in the Rue Morgue."

Dupin said the last words in a very low tone, and very quietly. Just as quietly, too, he walked toward the door, locked it and put the key in his pocket. He then drew a pistol from his bosom and placed it, without the least flurry, upon the table.

The sailor's face flushed up as if he were struggling with suffocation. He started to his feet and grasped his cudgel, but the next moment he fell back into his seat, trembling violently, and with the countenance of death itself. He spoke not a word. I pitied him from the bottom of my heart.

"My friend," said Dupin, in a kind tone, "you are alarming yourself unnecessarily - you are indeed. We mean you no harm whatever. I pledge you the honor of a gentleman, and of a Frenchman, that we intend you no injury. I perfectly well know that you are innocent of the atrocities in the Rue Morgue. It will not do, however, to deny that you are in some measure implicated in them. From what I have already said, you must know that I have had means of information about this matter - means of which you could never have dreamed. Now the thing stands thus. You have done nothing which you could have avoided - nothing, certainly, which renders you culpable. You were not even guilty of robbery, when you might have robbed with impunity. You have nothing to conceal. You have no reason for concealment. On the other hand, you are bound by every principle of honor to confess all you know. An innocent man is now imprisoned, charged with that crime of which you can point out the perpetrator."

The sailor had recovered his presence of mind, in a great measure, while Dupin uttered these words; but his original boldness of bearing was all gone.

"So help me God," said he, after a brief pause, "I will tell you all I know about this affair; - but I do not expect you to believe one half I say - I would be a fool indeed if I did. Still, I am innocent, and I will make a clean breast if I die for it."

What he stated was, in substance, this. He had lately made a voyage to the Indian Archipelago. A party, of which he formed one, landed at Borneo, and passed into the interior on an excursion of pleasure. Himself and a companion had captured the Ourang- Outang. This companion dying, the animal fell into his own exclusive possession. After great trouble, occasioned by the intractable ferocity of his captive during the home voyage, he at length succeeded in lodging it safely at his own residence in Paris, where, not to attract toward himself the unpleasant curiosity of his neighbors, he kept it carefully secluded, until such time as it should recover from a wound in the foot, received from a splinter on board ship. His ultimate design was to sell it.

Returning home from some sailors' frolic the night, or rather in the morning of the murder, he found the beast occupying his own bed-room, into which it had broken from a closet adjoining, where it had been, as was thought, securely confined. Razor in hand, and fully lathered, it was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet. Terrified at the sight of so dangerous a weapon in the possession of an animal so ferocious, and so well able to use it, the man, for some moments, was at a loss what to do. He had been accustomed, however, to quiet the creature, even in its fiercest moods, by the use of a whip, and to this he now resorted. Upon sight of it, the Ourang-Outang sprang at once through the door of the chamber, down the stairs, and thence, through a window, unfortunately open, into the street.

The Frenchman followed in despair; the ape, razor still in hand, occasionally stopping to look back and gesticulate at its pursuer, until the latter had nearly come up with it. It then again made off. In this manner the chase continued for a long time. The streets were profoundly quiet, as it was nearly three o'clock in the morning. In passing down an alley in the rear of the Rue Morgue, the fugitive's attention was arrested by a light gleaming from the open window of Madame L'Espanaye's chamber, in the fourth story of her house. Rushing to the building, it perceived the lightning rod, clambered up with inconceivable agility, grasped the shutter, which was thrown fully back against the wall, and, by its means, swung itself directly upon the headboard of the bed. The whole feat did not
occupy a minute. The shutter was kicked open again by the Ourang-Outang as it entered the room.

The sailor, in the meantime, was both rejoiced and perplexed. He had strong hopes of now recapturing the brute, as it could scarcely escape from the trap into which it had ventured, except by the rod, where it might be intercepted as it came down. On the other hand, there was much cause for anxiety as to what it might do in the house. This latter reflection urged the man still to follow the fugitive. A lightning rod is ascended without difficulty, especially by a sailor; but, when he had arrived as high as the window, which lay far to his left, his career was stopped; the most that he could accomplish was to reach over so as to obtain a glimpse of the interior of the room. At this glimpse he nearly fell from his hold through excess of horror. Now it was that those hideous shrieks arose upon the night, which had startled from slumber the inmates of the Rue Morgue. Madame L’Espanaye and her daughter, habited in their night clothes, had apparently been occupied in arranging some papers in the iron chest already mentioned, which had been wheeled into the middle of the room. It was open, and its contents lay beside it on the floor. The victims must have been sitting with their backs toward the window; and, from the time elapsing between the ingress of the beast and the screams, it seems probable that it was not immediately perceived. The flapping-to of the shutter would naturally have been attributed to the wind.

As the sailor looked in, the gigantic animal had seized Madame L’Espanaye by the hair, (which was loose, as she had been combing it,) and was flourishing the razor about her face, in imitation of the motions of a barber. The daughter lay prostrate and motionless; she had swooned. The screams and struggles of the old lady (during which the hair was torn from her head) had the effect of changing the probably pacific purposes of the Ourang-Outang into those of wrath. With one determined sweep of its muscular arm it nearly severed her head from her body. The sight of blood inflamed its anger into phrenzy. Gnashing its teeth, and flashing fire from its eyes, it flew upon the body of the girl, and imbedded its fearful talons in her throat, retaining its grasp until she expired. Its wandering and wild glances fell at this moment upon the head of the bed, over which the face of its master, rigid with horror, was just discernible. The fury of the beast, who no doubt bore still in mind the dreaded whip, was instantly converted into fear. Conscious of having deserved punishment, it seemed desirous of concealing its bloody deeds, and skipped about the chamber in an agony of nervous agitation; throwing down and breaking the furniture as it moved, and dragging the bed from the bedstead. In conclusion, it seized first the corpse of the daughter, and thrust it up the chimney, as it was found; then that of the old lady, which it immediately hurled through the window headlong.

As the ape approached the casement with its mutilated burden, the sailor shrank aghast to the rod, and, rather gliding than clambering down it, hurried at once home - dreading the consequences of the butchery, and gladly abandoning, in his terror, all solicitude about the fate of the Ourang-Outang. The words heard by the party upon the staircase were the Frenchman's exclamations of horror and affright, commingled with the fiendish jabberings of the brute.

I have scarcely anything to add. The Ourang-Outang must have escaped from the chamber, by the rod, just before the break of the door. It must have closed the window as it passed through it. It was subsequently caught by the owner himself, who obtained for it a very large sum at the Jardin des Plantes. Le Don was instantly released, upon our narration of the circumstances (with some comments from Dupin) at the bureau of the Prefect of Police. This functionary, however well disposed to my friend, could not altogether conceal his chagrin at the turn which affairs had taken, and was fain to indulge in a sarcasm or two, about the propriety of every person minding his own business.

"Let him talk," said Dupin, who had not thought it necessary to reply. "Let him discourse; it will ease his conscience, I am satisfied with having defeated him in his own castle. Nevertheless, that he failed in the solution of this mystery, is by no means that matter for wonder which he supposes it; for, in truth, our friend the Prefect is somewhat too cunning to be profound. In his wisdom is no stamen. It is all head and no body, like the pictures of the Goddess Laterna, -- or, at best, all head and shoulders, like a codfish. But he is a good creature after all. I like him especially for one master stroke of cant, by which he has attained his reputation for ingenuity. I mean the way he has 'de nier ce qui est, et d'expliquer ce qui n'est pas.' " *

* Rousseau - Nouvelle Heloise.

Go to Start
The Mystery of Marie Rogêt

by Edgar Allan Poe

Footnotes

Es gibt eine Reihe idealischer Begebenheiten, die der Wirklichkeit parallel laufen. Selten fallen sie zusammen. Menschen und zufälle modifizieren gewohulich die idealische Begebenheit, so dass sie unvollkommen erscheint, und ihre Folgen gleichfalls unvollkommen sind. So bei der Reformation; statt des Protestantismus kam das Lutherthum hervor.

There are ideal series of events which run parallel with the real ones. They rarely coincide. Men and circumstances generally modify the ideal train of events, so that it seems imperfect, and its consequences are equally imperfect. Thus with the Reformation; instead of Protestantism came Lutheranism. {*1}

- Novalis. {*2} Moral Ansichten

THERE are few persons, even among the calmest thinkers, who have not occasionally been startled into a vague yet thrilling half-credence in the supernatural, by coincidences of so seemingly marvellous a character that, as mere coincidences, the intellect has been unable to receive them. Such sentiments - for the half-credences of which I speak have never the full force of thought - such sentiments are seldom thoroughly stifled unless by reference to the doctrine of chance, or, as it is technically termed, the Calculus of Probabilities. Now this Calculus is, in its essence, purely mathematical; and thus we have the anomaly of the most rigidly exact in science applied to the shadow and spirituality of the most intangible in speculation.

The extraordinary details which I am now called upon to make public, will be found to form, as regards sequence of time, the primary branch of a series of scarcely intelligible coincidences, whose secondary or concluding branch will be recognized by all readers in the late murder of Mary Cecilia Rogers, at New York.

When, in an article entitled "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," I endeavored, about a year ago, to depict some very remarkable features in the mental character of my friend, the Chevalier C. Auguste Dupin, it did not occur to me that I should ever resume the subject. This depicting of character constituted my design; and this design was thoroughly fulfilled in the wild train of circumstances brought to instance Dupin's idiosyncrasy. I might have adduced other examples, but I should have proven no more. Late events, however, in their surprising development, have startled me into some farther details, which will carry with them the air of extorted confession. Hearing what I have lately heard, it would be indeed strange should I remain silent in regard to what I both heard and saw so long ago.

Upon the winding up of the tragedy involved in the deaths of Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter, the Chevalier dismissed the affair at once from his attention, and relapsed into his old habits of moody reverie. Prone, at all times, to abstraction, I readily fell in with his humor; and, continuing to occupy our chambers in the Faubourg Saint Germain, we gave the Future to the winds, and slumbered tranquilly in the Present, weaving the dull world around us into dreams.

But these dreams were not altogether uninterrupted. It may readily be supposed that the part played by my friend, in the drama at the Rue Morgue, had not failed of its impression upon the fancies of the Parisian police. With its emissaries, the name of Dupin had grown into a household word. The simple character of those inductions by which he had disentangled the mystery never having been explained even to the Prefect, or to any other individual than myself, of course it is not surprising that the affair was regarded as little less than miraculous, or that the Chevalier's analytical abilities acquired for him the credit of intuition. His frankness would have led him to disabuse every inquirer of such prejudice; but his indolent humor forbade all farther agitation of a topic whose interest to himself had long ceased. It thus happened that he found himself the cynosure of the policial eyes; and the cases were not few in which attempt was made to engage his services at the Prefecture. One of the most remarkable instances was that of the murder of a young girl named Marie Rogêt.

This event occurred about two years after the atrocity in the Rue Morgue. Marie, whose Christian and family name will at once arrest attention from their resemblance to those of the unfortunate "cigar girl," was the only daughter of the widow Estelle Rogêt. The father had died during the child's infancy, and from the period of his death, until within eighteen months before the assassination which forms the subject of our narrative, the mother and daughter had dwelt together in the Rue Pavée Saint Andrée; {*3} Madame there keeping a pension, assisted by Marie. Affairs went on thus until the latter had attained her twenty-second year, when her great beauty attracted the notice of a perfumer, who occupied one of the shops in the basement of the Palais Royal, and whose custom lay chiefly among the desperate adventurers infesting that neighborhood. Monsieur Le Blanc {*4} was not unaware of the advantages to be derived from the attendance of the fair Marie in his perfumery; and his liberal proposals were
night wore drowsily away. Dupin, sitting steadily in his accustomed arm-chair, was the embodiment of respectful among his own views, interspersing them with long comments upon the evidence; of which latter we were not yet in a position to disclose, but which has no bearing upon the proper subject of my narrative.

He concluded a somewhat droll speech with a compliment upon what he was pleased to term the tact of Dupin, and made him a direct, and certainly a liberal proposition, the precise nature of which I do not feel myself able to detail. But I will say this, that the public were upon him; and there was really no sacrifice which he would not be willing to make for the development of his reputation - so he said with a peculiarly Parisian air - was at stake. Even his honor was concerned. The eyes of the public were turned towards him until late in the night. He had been piqued by the failure of all his endeavors to ferret out the assassins. His friends, we understand, had lost no time in bringing him the news; and he had gone to us by G ----, in person. He called upon us early in the afternoon of the thirteenth of July, 18--, and remained at liberty to disclose to us, in confidence, all his reflections upon the inimitable character, soon to be the subject of my narrative.

The first intelligence of the murder was brought us by G ----, in person. He called upon us early in the afternoon of the thirteenth of July, 18--, and remained at liberty to disclose to us, in confidence, all his reflections upon the inimitable character, soon to be the subject of my narrative.

In the meantime, the investigation proceeded with vigor, if not always with judgment, and numerous individuals were examined to no purpose; while, owing to the continual absence of all clue to the mystery, the popular excitement greatly increased. At the end of the tenth day it was thought advisable to double the sum originally proposed; and, at length, the second week having elapsed without leading to any discoveries, and the prejudice which always exists in Paris against the Police having given vent to itself in several serious émeutes, the Prefect took it upon himself to offer the sum of twenty thousand francs "for the conviction of the assassin," or, if more than one should prove to have been implicated, "for the conviction of any one of the assassins." In the proclamation setting forth this reward, a full pardon was promised to any accomplice who should come forward in evidence against his fellow; and to the whole was appended, wherever it appeared, the private placard of a committee of citizens, offering ten thousand francs, in addition to the amount proposed by the Prefecture. The entire reward thus stood at no less than thirty thousand francs, which will be regarded as an extraordinary sum when we consider the humble condition of the girl, and the great frequency, in large cities, of such atrocities as the one described.

No one doubted now that the mystery of this murder would be immediately brought to light. But although, in one or two instances, arrests were made which promised elucidation, yet nothing was elicited which could implicate the parties suspected; and they were discharged forthwith. Strange as it may appear, the third week from the discovery of the body had passed, and passed without any light being thrown upon the subject, before even a rumor of the events which had so agitated the public mind, reached the ears of Dupin and myself. Engaged in researches which absorbed our whole attention, it had been nearly a month since either of us had gone abroad, or received a visitor, or more than glanced at the leading political articles in one of the daily papers. The first intelligence of the murder was brought us by G ----, in person. He called upon us early in the afternoon of the thirteenth of July, 18--, and remained with us until late in the night. He had been piqued by the failure of all his endeavors to ferret out the assassins. His reputation - so he said with a peculiarly Parisian air - was at stake. Even his honor was concerned. The eyes of the public were upon him; and there was really no sacrifice which he would not be willing to make for the development of the mystery. He concluded a somewhat droll speech with a compliment upon what he was pleased to term the tact of Dupin, and made him a direct, and certainly a liberal proposition, the precise nature of which I do not feel myself at liberty to disclose, but which has no bearing upon the proper subject of my narrative.

The compliment my friend rebutted as best he could, but the proposition he accepted at once, although its advantages were altogether provisional. This point being settled, the Prefect broke forth at once into explanations of his own views, interspersing them with long comments upon the evidence; of which latter we were not yet in possession. He discoursed much, and beyond doubt, learnedly; while I hazard an occasional suggestion as the night wore drowsily away. Dupin, sitting steadily in his accustomed arm-chair, was the embodiment of respectful...
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now submitted to the mother and friends of the deceased, and fully identified as those worn by the girl upon leaving examination instituted; but nothing was elicited beyond what has been already noted. The clothes, however, were resulted. A weekly paper, {*9} however, at length took up the theme; the corpse was disinterred, and a re-

matter was industriously hushed up, as far as possible; and several days had elapsed before any public emotion but hastily interred not far front the spot at which it was brought ashore. Through the exertions of Beauvais, the

appended. The knot by which the strings of the bonnet were fastened, was not a lady's, fitting loosely, and secured with a hard knot. Over this muslin slip and the slip of lace, the strings of a bonnet were

eighteen inches wide had been torn entirely out - torn very evenly and with great care. It was found around her neck,

upward from the bottom hem to the waist, but not torn off. It was wound three times around the waist, and secured

found, that there could have been no difficulty in its recognition by friends.

character of the deceased. She had been subjected, it said, to brutal violence. The corpse was in such condition when

ear. This alone would have sufficed to produce death. The medical testimony spoke confidently of the virtuous

to be hidden from sight; it was completely buried in the flesh, and was fasted by a knot which lay just under the left

partially open. On the left wrist were two circular excoriations, apparently the effect of ropes, or of a rope in more than one volition. A part of the right wrist, also, was much chafed, as well as the back throughout its extent, but more especially at the shoulder-blades. In bringing the body to the shore the fishermen had attached to it a rope; but none of the excoriations had been effected by this. The flesh of the neck was much swollen. There were no cuts apparent, or bruises which appeared the effect of blows. A piece of lace was found tied so tightly around the neck as to be hidden from sight; it was completely buried in the flesh, and was fasted by a knot which lay just under the left ear. This alone would have sufficed to produce death. The medical testimony spoke confidently of the virtuous character of the deceased. She had been subjected, it said, to brutal violence. The corpse was in such condition when found, that there could have been no difficulty in its recognition by friends.

The dress was much torn and otherwise disordered. In the outer garment, a slip, about a foot wide, had been torn upward from the bottom hem to the waist, but not torn off. It was wound three times around the waist, and secured by a sort of hitch in the back. The dress immediately beneath the frock was of fine muslin; and from this a slip

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After the recognition of the corpse, it was not, as usual, taken to the Morgue, (this formality being superfluous,) but hastily interred not far front the spot at which it was brought ashore. Through the exertions of Beauvais, the matter was industriously hushed up, as far as possible; and several days had elapsed before any public emotion resulted. A weekly paper, {*9} however, at length took up the theme; the corpse was disinterred, and a re-examination instituted; but nothing was elicited beyond what has been already noted. The clothes, however, were now submitted to the mother and friends of the deceased, and fully identified as those worn by the girl upon leaving home.

Meantime, the excitement increased hourly. Several individuals were arrested and discharged. St. Eustache fell especially under suspicion; and he failed, at first, to give an intelligible account of his whereabouts during the Sunday on which Marie left home. Subsequently, however, he submitted to Monsieur G----, affidavits, accounting satisfactorily for every hour of the day in question. As time passed and no discovery ensued, a thousand contradictory rumors were circulated, and journalists busied themselves in suggestions. Among these, the one which
attracted the most notice, was the idea that Marie Rogêt still lived - that the corpse found in the Seine was that of some other unfortunate. It will be proper that I submit to the reader some passages which embody the suggestion alluded to. These passages are literal translations from L'Etoile, (*10) a paper conducted, in general, with much ability.

"Mademoiselle Rogêt left her mother's house on Sunday morning, June the twenty-second, 18--., with the ostensible purpose of going to see her aunt, or some other connexion, in the Rue des Drômes. From that hour, nobody is proved to have seen her. There is no trace or tidings of her at all. . . . There has no person, however, come forward, so far, who saw her at all, on that day, after she left her mother's door. . . . Now, though we have no evidence that Marie Rogêt was in the land of the living after nine o'clock on Sunday, June the twenty-second, we have proof that, up to that hour, she was alive. On Wednesday noon, at twelve, a female body was discovered afloat on the shore of the Barrière de Roule. This was, even if we presume that Marie Rogêt was thrown into the river within three hours after she left her mother's house, only three days from the time she left her home - three days to an hour. But it is folly to suppose that the murder, if murder was committed on her body, could have been consummated soon enough to have enabled her murderers to throw the body into the river before midnight. Those who are guilty of such horrid crimes, choose darkness rather than the light . . . . Thus we see that if the body found in the river was that of Marie Rogêt, it could only have been in the water two and a half days, or three at the outside. All experience has shown that drowned bodies, or bodies thrown into the water immediately after death by violence, require from six to ten days for decomposition to take place to bring them to the top of the water. Even where a cannon is fired over a corpse, and it rises before at least five or six days' immersion, it sinks again, if let alone. Now, we ask, what was there in this cave to cause a departure from the ordinary course of nature? . . . If the body had been kept in its mangled state on shore until Tuesday night, some trace would be found on shore of the murderers. It is a doubtful point, also, whether the body would be so soon afloat, even were it thrown in after having been dead two days. And, furthermore, it is exceedingly improbable that any villains who had committed such a murder as is here supposed, would have throw the body in without weight to sink it, when such a precaution could have so easily been taken."

The editor here proceeds to argue that the body must have been in the water "not three days merely, but, at least, five times three days," because it was so far decomposed that Beauvais had great difficulty in recognizing it. This latter point, however, was fully disproved. I continue the translation:

"What, then, are the facts on which M. Beauvais says that he has no doubt the body was that of Marie Rogêt? He ripped up the gown sleeve, and says he found marks which satisfied him of the identity. The public generally supposed those marks to have consisted of some description of scars. He rubbed the arm and found hair upon it - something as indefinite, we think, as can readily be imagined - as little conclusive as finding an arm in the sleeve. M. Beauvais did not return that night, but sent word to Madame Rogêt, at seven o'clock, on Wednesday evening, that an investigation was still in progress respecting her daughter. If we allow that Madame Rogêt, from her age and grief, could not go over, (which is allowing a great deal,) there certainly must have been some one who would have thought it worth while to go over and attend the investigation, if they thought the body was that of Marie. Nobody went over. There was nothing said or heard about the matter in the Rue Pavée St. Andrée, that reached even the occupants of the same building. M. St. Eustache, the lover and intended husband of Marie, who boarded in her mother's house, deposes that he did not hear of the discovery of the body of his intended until the next morning, when M. Beauvais came into his chamber and told him of it. For an item of news like this, it strikes us it was very coolly received."

In this way the journal endeavored to create the impression of an apathy on the part of the relatives of Marie, inconsistent with the supposition that these relatives believed the corpse to be hers. Its insinuations amount to this: - that Marie, with the connivance of her friends, had absented herself from the city for reasons involving a charge against her chastity; and that these friends, upon the discovery of a corpse in the Seine, somewhat resembling that of the girl, had availed themselves of the opportunity to impress the public with the belief of her death. But L'Etoile was again over-hasty. It was distinctly proved that no apathy, such as was imagined, existed; that the old lady was exceedingly feeble, and so agitated as to be unable to attend to any duty, that St. Eustache, so far from receiving the news coolly, was distracted with grief, and bore himself so frantically, that M. Beauvais prevailed upon a friend and relative to take charge of him, and prevent his attending the examination at the disinterment. Moreover, although it was stated by L'Etoile, that the corpse was re-interred at the public expense - that an advantageous offer of private sculpture was absolutely declined by the family - and that no member of the family attended the ceremonial: - although, I say, all this was asserted by L'Etoile in furtherance of the impression it designed to convey - yet all this was satisfactorily disproved. In a subsequent number of the paper, an attempt was made to throw suspicion upon Beauvais himself. The editor says:

"Now, then, a change comes over the matter. We are told that on one occasion, while a Madame B---- was at
of a female in the vicinity of the inn. The screams were violent but brief. Madame D. recognized not only the scarf worn by a deceased relative. A scarf was particularly noticed. Soon after the departure of the couple, a gang of miscreants made their appearance, behaved boisterously, ate and drank without making payment, followed in the way, according to their representations, in a very singular manner. He seems to have been very much averse to permitting the relatives to see the body."

By the following fact, some color was given to the suspicion thus thrown upon Beauvais. A visitor at his office, a few days prior to the girl's disappearance, and during the absence of its occupant, had observed a rose in the key-hole of the door, and the name "Marie" inscribed upon a slate which hung near at hand.

The general impression, so far as we were enabled to glean it from the newspapers, seemed to be, that Marie had been the victim of a gang of desperadoes - that by these she had been borne across the river, maltreated and murdered. Le Commerciel, (*11) however, a print of extensive influence, was earnest in combating this popular idea. I quote a passage or two from its columns:

"We are persuaded that pursuit has hitherto been on a false scent, so far as it has been directed to the Barrière du Roule. It is impossible that a person so well known to thousands as this young woman was, should have passed three blocks without some one having seen her; and any one who saw her would have remembered it, for she interested all who knew her. It was when the streets were full of people, when she went out. . . . It is impossible that she could have gone to the Barrière du Roule, or to the Rue des Drômes, without being recognized by a dozen persons; yet no one has come forward who saw her outside of her mother's door, and there is no evidence, except the testimony concerning her expressed intentions, that she did go out at all. Her gown was torn, bound round her, and tied; and by that the body was carried as a bundle. If the murder had been committed at the Barrière du Roule, there would have been no necessity for any such arrangement. The fact that the body was found floating near the Barrière, is no proof as to where it was thrown into the water. . . . A piece of one of the unfortunate girl's petticoats, two feet long and one foot wide, was torn out and tied under her chin around the back of her head, probably to prevent screams. This was done by fellows who had no pocket-handkerchief."

A day or two before the Prefect called upon us, however, some important information reached the police, which seemed to overthrow, at least, the chief portion of Le Commerciel's argument. Two small boys, sons of a Madame Deluc, while roaming among the woods near the Barrière du Roule, chanced to penetrate a close thicket, within which were three or four large stones, forming a kind of seat, with a back and footstool. On the upper stone lay a white petticoat; on the second a silk scarf. A parasol, gloves, and a pocket-handkerchief were also here found. The handkerchief bore the name "Marie Rogêt." Fragments of dress were discovered on the brambles around. The earth was trampled, the bushes were broken, and there was every evidence of a struggle. Between the thicket and the river, the fences were found taken down, and the ground bore evidence of some heavy burthen having been dragged along it.

A weekly paper, Le Soleil,(*12) had the following comments upon this discovery -- comments which merely echoed the sentiment of the whole Parisian press:

"The things had all evidently been there at least three or four weeks; they were all mildewed down hard with the action of the rain and stuck together from mildew. The grass had grown around and over some of them. The silk on the parasol was strong, but the threads of it were run together within. The upper part, where it had been doubled and folded, was all mildewed and rotten, and tore on its being opened. . . . The pieces of her frock torn out by the bushes were about three inches wide and six inches long. One part was the hem of the frock, and it had been mended; the other piece was part of the skirt, not the hem. They looked like strips torn off, and were on the thorn bush, about a foot from the ground. . . . There can be no doubt, therefore, that the spot of this appalling outrage has been discovered."

Consequent upon this discovery, new evidence appeared. Madame Deluc testified that she keeps a roadside inn not far from the bank of the river, opposite the Barrière du Roule. The neighborhood is secluded -- particularly so. It is the usual Sunday resort of blackguards from the city, who cross the river in boats. About three o'clock, in the afternoon of the Sunday in question, a young girl arrived at the inn, accompanied by a young man of dark complexion. The two remained here for some time. On their departure, they took the road to some thick woods in the vicinity. Madame Deluc's attention was called to the dress worn by the girl, on account of its resemblance to one worn by a deceased relative. A scarf was particularly noticed. Soon after the departure of the couple, a gang of miscreants made their appearance, behaved boisterously, ate and drank without making payment, followed in the route of the young man and girl, returned to the inn about dusk, and re-crossed the river as if in great haste.

It was soon after dark, upon this same evening, that Madame Deluc, as well as her eldest son, heard the screams of a female in the vicinity of the inn. The screams were violent but brief. Madame D. recognized not only the scarf
which was found in the thicket, but the dress which was discovered upon the corpse. An omnibus driver, Valence, {*13} now also testified that he saw Marie Rogêt cross a ferry on the Seine, on the Sunday in question, in company with a young man of dark complexion. He, Valence, knew Marie, and could not be mistaken in her identity. The articles found in the thicket were fully identified by the relatives of Marie.

The items of evidence and information thus collected by myself, from the newspapers, at the suggestion of Dupin, embraced only one more point -- but this was a point of seemingly vast consequence. It appears that, immediately after the discovery of the clothes as above described, the lifeless, or nearly lifeless body of St. Eustache, Marie's betrothed, was found in the vicinity of what all now supposed the scene of the outrage. A phial labelled "laudanum," and emptied, was found near him. His breath gave evidence of the poison. He died without speaking. Upon his person was found a letter, briefly stating his love for Marie, with his design of self-destruction.

"I need scarcely tell you," said Dupin, as he finished the perusal of my notes, "that this is a far more intricate case than that of the Rue Morgue; from which it differs in one important respect. This is an ordinary, although an atrocious instance of crime. There is nothing peculiarly outré about it. You will observe that, for this reason, the mystery has been considered easy, when, for this reason, it should have been considered difficult, of solution. Thus; at first, it was thought unnecessary to offer a reward. The myrmidons of G---- were able at once to comprehend how and why such an atrocity might have been committed. They could picture to their imaginations a mode - many modes - and a motive - many motives; and because it was not impossible that either of these numerous modes and motives could have been the actual one, they have taken it for granted that one of them must. But the case with which these variable fancies were entertained, and the very plausibility which each assumed, should have been understood as indicative rather of the difficulties than of the facilities which must attend elucidation. I have before observed that it is by prominences above the plane of the ordinary, that reason feels her way, if at all, in her search for the true, and that the proper question in cases such as this, is not so much 'what has occurred?' as 'what has occurred that has never occurred before?' In the investigations at the house of Madame L'Espanaye, {*14} the agents of G---- were discouraged and confounded by that very unusualness which, to a properly regulated intellect, would have afforded the surest omen of success; while this same intellect might have been plunged in despair at the ordinary character of all that met the eye in the case of the perfumery-girl, and yet told of nothing but easy triumph to the functionaries of the Prefecture.

"In the case of Madame L'Espanaye and her daughter there was, even at the beginning of our investigation, no doubt that murder had been committed. The idea of suicide was excluded at once. Here, too, we are freed, at the commencement, from all supposition of self-murder. The body found at the Barrière du Roule, was found under such circumstances as to leave us no room for embarrassment upon this important point. But it has been suggested that the corpse discovered, is not that of the Marie Rogêt for the conviction of whose assassin, or assassins, the reward is offered, and respecting whom, solely, our agreement has been arranged with the Prefect. We both know this gentleman well. It will not do to trust him too far. If, dating our inquiries from the body found, and thence tracing a murderer, we yet discover this body to be that of some other individual than Marie; or, if starting from the living Marie, we find her, yet find her unassassinated -- in either case we lose our labor; since it is Monsieur G---- with whom we have to deal. For our own purpose, therefore, if not for the purpose of justice, it is indispensable that our first step should be the determination of the identity of the corpse with the Marie Rogêt who is missing.

With the public the arguments of L'Etoile have had weight; and that the journal itself is convinced of their importance would appear from the manner in which it commences one of its essays upon the subject - 'Several of the morning papers of the day,' it says, 'speak of the _conclusive_ article in Monday's Etoile.' To me, this article appears conclusive of little beyond the zeal of its inditer. We should bear in mind that, in general, it is the object of our morning papers of the day,' it says, 'speak of the _conclusive_ article in Monday's Etoile.' To me, this article appears conclusive of little beyond the zeal of its inditer. We should bear in mind that, in general, it is the object of our morning papers rather to create a sensation -- to make a point - than to further the cause of truth. The latter end is only pursued when it seems coincident with the former. The print which merely falls in with ordinary opinion (however well founded this opinion may be) earns for itself no credit with the mob. The mass of the people regard as profound the ordinary character of all that met the eye in the case of the perfumery-girl, and yet told of nothing but easy triumph to the functionaries of the Prefecture.

"What I mean to say is, that it is the mingled epigram and melodrame of the idea, that Marie Rogêt still lives, rather than any true plausibility in this idea, which have suggested it to L'Etoile, and secured it a favorable reception with the public. Let us examine the heads of this journal's argument; endeavoring to avoid the incoherence with which it is originally set forth. The first aim of the writer is to show, from the brevity of the interval between Marie's disappearance and the finding of the floating corpse, that this corpse cannot be that of Marie. The reduction of this interval to its smallest possible dimension, becomes thus, at once, an object with the reasoner. In the rash pursuit of this object, he rushes into mere assumption at the outset. 'It is folly to suppose,' he says, 'that the murder, if murder was committed on her
Thus circumstanced, we shall find that we float without difficulty and without exertion. It is evident, however, that land, with the head thrown fully back, and immersed; the mouth and nostrils alone remaining above the surface.

As little exception as possible. The proper position for one who cannot swim, is the upright position of the walker on the surface in less than three days; and this probability will be in favor of L'Etoile's position until the instances so cited some five or six instances in which the bodies of individuals known to be drowned were found floating after the lapse of less time than is insisted upon by L'Etoile. But there is something excessively unphilosophical in the attempt on the part of Le Moniteur, to rebut the general assertion of L'Etoile, by a citation of particular instances militating against that assertion. Had it been possible to adduce fifty instead of five examples of bodies found floating at the end of two or three days, these fifty examples could still have been properly regarded only as exceptions to L'Etoile's rule, until such time as the rule itself should be confuted. Admitting the rule, (and this Le Moniteur does not deny, insisting merely upon its exceptions,) the argument of L'Etoile is suffered to remain in full force; for this argument does not pretend to involve more than a question of the probability of the body having risen to the surface in less than three days; and this probability will be in favor of L'Etoile's position until the instances so childishly adduced shall be sufficient in number to establish an antagonistical rule.

"Were it my purpose," continued Dupin, "merely to make out a case against this passage of L'Etoile's argument, I might safely leave it where it is. It is not, however, with L'Etoile that we have to do, but with the truth. The sentence in question has but one meaning, as it stands; and this meaning I have fairly stated: but it is material that we go behind the mere words, for an idea which these words have obviously intended, and failed to convey. It was the design of the journalist to say that, at whatever period of the day or night of Sunday this murder was committed, it was improbable that the assassins would have ventured to bear the corpse to the river before midnight. And herein lies, really, the assumption of which I complain. It is assumed that the murder was committed at such a position, and under such circumstances, that the bearing it to the river became necessary. Now, the assassination might have taken place upon the river's brink, or on the river itself; and, thus, the throwing the corpse in the water might have been resorted to, at any period of the day or night, as the most obvious and most immediate mode of disposal. You will understand that I suggest nothing here as probable, or as coincident with my own opinion. My design, so far, has no reference to the facts of the case. I wish merely to caution you against the whole tone of L'Etoile's suggestion, by calling your attention to its ex parte character at the outset.

"Having prescribed thus a limit to suit its own preconceived notions; having assumed that, if this were the body of Marie, it could have been in the water but a very brief time; the journal goes on to say:

'All experience has shown that drowned bodies, or bodies thrown into the water immediately after death by violence, require from six to ten days for sufficient decomposition to take place to bring them to the top of the water. Even when a cannon is fired over a corpse, and it rises before at least five or six days' immersion, it sinks again if let alone.'

"These assertions have been tacitly received by every paper in Paris, with the exception of Le Moniteur. {*15} This latter print endeavors to combat that portion of the paragraph which has reference to 'drowned bodies' only, by citing some five or six instances in which the bodies of individuals known to be drowned were found floating after the lapse of less time than is insisted upon by L'Etoile. But there is something excessively unphilosophical in the attempt on the part of Le Moniteur, to rebut the general assertion of L'Etoile, by a citation of particular instances militating against that assertion. Had it been possible to adduce fifty instead of five examples of bodies found floating at the end of two or three days, these fifty examples could still have been properly regarded only as exceptions to L'Etoile's rule, until such time as the rule itself should be confuted. Admitting the rule, (and this Le Moniteur does not deny, insisting merely upon its exceptions,) the argument of L'Etoile is suffered to remain in full force; for this argument does not pretend to involve more than a question of the probability of the body having risen to the surface in less than three days; and this probability will be in favor of L'Etoile's position until the instances so childishly adduced shall be sufficient in number to establish an antagonistical rule.

"You will see at once that all argument upon this head should be urged, if at all, against the rule itself; and for this end we must examine the rationale of the rule. Now the human body, in general, is neither much lighter nor much heavier than the water of the Seine; that is to say, the specific gravity of the human body, in its natural condition, is about equal to the bulk of fresh water which it displaces. The bodies of fat and fleshy persons, with small bones, and of women generally, are lighter than those of the lean and large-boned, and of men; and the specific gravity of the water of a river is somewhat influenced by the presence of the tide from sea. But, leaving this tide out of question, it may be said that very few human bodies will sink at all, even in fresh water, of their own accord. Almost any one, falling into a river, will be enabled to float, if he suffer the specific gravity of the water fairly to be adduced in comparison with his own - that is to say, if he suffer his whole person to be immersed, with as little exception as possible. The proper position for one who cannot swim, is the upright position of the walker on land, with the head thrown fully back, and immersed; the mouth and nostrils alone remaining above the surface. Thus circumstanced, we shall find that we float without difficulty and without exertion. It is evident, however, that
the gravities of the body, and of the bulk of water displaced, are very nicely balanced, and that a trifle will cause
either to preponderate. An arm, for instance, uplifted from the water, and thus deprived of its support, is an
additional weight sufficient to immerse the whole head, while the accidental aid of the smallest piece of timber will
enable us to elevate the head so as to look about. Now, in the struggles of one unused to swimming, the arms are
invariably thrown upwards, while an attempt is made to keep the head in its usual perpendicular position. The result
is the immersion of the mouth and nostrils, and the inception, during efforts to breathe while beneath the surface, of
water into the lungs. Much is also received into the stomach, and the whole body becomes heavier by the difference
between the weight of the air originally distending these cavities, and that of the fluid which now fills them. This
difference is sufficient to cause the body to sink, as a general rule; but is insufficient in the cases of individuals with
small bones and an abnormal quantity of flaccid or fatty matter. Such individuals float even after drowning.

'The corpse, being supposed at the bottom of the river, will there remain until, by some means, its specific
gravity again becomes less than that of the bulk of water which it displaces. This effect is brought about by
decomposition, or otherwise. The result of decomposition is the generation of gas, distending the cellular tissues and
all the cavities, and giving the puffed appearance which is so horrible. When this distension has so far progressed
that the bulk of the corpse is materially increased without a corresponding increase of mass or weight, its specific
gravity becomes less than that of the water displaced, and it forthwith makes its appearance at the surface. But
decomposition is modified by innumerable circumstances - is hastened or retarded by innumerable agencies; for
example, by the heat or cold of the season, by the mineral impregnation or purity of the water, by its depth or
shallowness, by its currency or stagnation, by the temperament of the body, by its infection or freedom from disease
before death. Thus it is evident that we can assign no period, with any thing like accuracy, at which the corpse shall
rise through decomposition. Under certain conditions this result would be brought about within an hour; under
others, it might not take place at all. There are chemical infusions by which the animal frame can be preserved
forever from corruption; the Bi-chloride of Mercury is one. But, apart from decomposition, there may be, and very
usually is, a generation of gas within the stomach, from the acetous fermentation of vegetable matter (or within other
cavities from other causes) sufficient to induce a distension which will bring the body to the surface. The effect
produced by the firing of a cannon is that of simple vibration. This may either loosen the corpse from the soft mud
or ooze in which it is imbedded, thus permitting it to rise when other agencies have already prepared it for so doing;
or it may overcome the tenacity of some putrescent portions of the cellular tissue; allowing the cavities to distend
under the influence of the gas.

'Having thus before us the whole philosophy of this subject, we can easily test by it the assertions of L'Etoile.
'All experience shows,' says this paper, 'that drowned bodies, or bodies thrown into the water immediately after
death by violence, require from six to ten days for sufficient decomposition to take place to bring them to the top of
the water. Even when a cannon is fired over a corpse, and it rises before at least five or six days' immersion, it sinks
again if let alone.'

"The whole of this paragraph must now appear a tissue of inconsequence and incoherence. All experience does
not show that 'drowned bodies' require from six to ten days for sufficient decomposition to take place to bring them
to the surface. Both science and experience show that the period of their rising is, and necessarily must be,
determinate. If, moreover, a body has risen to the surface through firing of cannon, it will not 'sink again if let
alone,' until decomposition has so far progressed as to permit the escape of the generated gas. But I wish to call your
attention to the distinction which is made between 'drowned bodies,' and 'bodies thrown into the water immediately
after death by violence.' Although the writer admits the distinction, he yet includes them all in the same category. I
have shown how it is that the body of a drowning man becomes specifically heavier than its bulk of water, and that
he would not sink at all, except for the struggles by which he elevates his arms above the surface, and his gasps for
breath while beneath the surface - gasps which supply by water the place of the original air in the lungs. But these
struggles and these gasps would not occur in the body 'thrown into the water immediately after death by violence.'
Thus, in the latter instance, the body, as a general rule, would not sink at all - a fact of which L'Etoile is evidently
ignorant. When decomposition had proceeded to a very great extent - when the flesh had in a great measure left the
bones - then, indeed, but not till then, should we lose sight of the corpse.

'And now what are we to make of the argument, that the body found could not be that of Marie Rogêt, because,
three days only having elapsed, this body was found floating? If drowned, being a woman, she might never have
sunk; or having sunk, might have reappeared in twenty-four hours, or less. But no one supposes her to have been
drowned; and, dying before being thrown into the river, she might have been found floating at any period afterwards
whatever.

'But,' says L'Etoile, 'if the body had been kept in its mangled state on shore until Tuesday night, some trace
would be found on shore of the murderers.' Here it is at first difficult to perceive the intention of the reasoner. He
means to anticipate what he imagines would be an objection to his theory - viz: that the body was kept on shore two
days, suffering rapid decomposition - morerapid than if immersed in water. He supposes that, had this been the case, it might have appeared at the surface on the Wednesday, and thinks that only under such circumstances it could so have appeared. He is accordingly in haste to show that it was not kept on shore; for, if so, 'some trace would be found on shore of the murderers.' I presume you smile at the sequitur. You cannot be made to see how the mere duration of the corpse on the shore could operate to multiply traces of the assassins. Nor can I.

" 'And furthermore it is exceedingly improbable,' continues our journal, 'that any villains who had committed such a murder as is here supposed, would have thrown the body in without weight to sink it, when such a precaution could have so easily been taken.' Observe, here, the laughable confusion of thought! No one - not even L'Etoile - disputes the murder committed _on_ the body found_. The marks of violence are too obvious. It is our reasoner's object merely to show that this body is not Marie's. He wishes to prove that Marie is not assassinated - not that the corpse was not. Yet his observation proves only the latter point. Here is a corpse without weight attached. Murderers, casting it in, would not have failed to attach a weight. Therefore it was not thrown in by murderers. This is all which is proved, if any thing is. The question of identity is not even approached, and L'Etoile has been at great pains merely to gainsay now what it has admitted only a moment before. 'We are perfectly convinced,' it says, 'that the body found was that of a murdered female.'

"Nor is this the sole instance, even in this division of his subject, where our reasoner unwittingly reasons against himself. His evident object, I have already said, is to reduce, us much as possible, the interval between Marie's disappearance and the finding of the corpse. Yet we find him urging the point that no person saw the girl from the moment of her leaving her mother's house. 'We have no evidence,' he says, 'that Marie Rogêt was in the land of the living after nine o'clock on Sunday, June the twenty-second.' As his argument is obviously an ex parte one, he should, at least, have left this matter out of sight; for had any one been known to see Marie, say on Monday, or on Tuesday, the interval in question would have been much reduced, and, by his own ratiocination, the probability much diminished of the corpse being that of the grisette. It is, nevertheless, amusing to observe that L'Etoile insists upon its point in the full belief of its furthering its general argument.

'Reperuse now that portion of this argument which has reference to the identification of the corpse by Beauvais. In regard to the hair upon the arm, L'Etoile has been obviously disingenuous. M. Beauvais, not being an idiot, could never have urged, in identification of the corpse, simply hair upon its arm. No arm is without hair. The generality of the expression of L'Etoile is a mere perversion of the witness' phraseology. He must have spoken of some peculiarity in this hair. It must have been a peculiarity of color, of quantity, of length, or of situation.

" 'Her foot,' says the journal, 'was small - so are thousands of feet. Her garter is no proof whatever - nor is her shoe - for shoes and garters are sold in packages. The same may be said of the flowers in her hat. One thing upon which M. Beauvais strongly insists is, that the clasp on the garter found, had been set back to take it in. This amounts to nothing; for most women find it proper to take a pair of garters home and fit them to the size of the limbs they are to encircle, rather than to try them in the store where they purchase.' Here it is difficult to suppose the reasoner in earnest. Had M. Beauvais, in his search for the body of Marie, discovered a corpse corresponding in general size and appearance to the missing girl, he would have been warranted (without reference to the question of habiliment at all) in forming an opinion that his search had been successful. If, in addition to the point of general size and contour, he had found upon the arm a peculiar hairy appearance which he had observed upon the living Marie, his opinion might have been justly strengthened; and the increase of positiveness might well have been in the ratio of the peculiarity, or unusualness, of the hairy mark. If, the feet of Marie being small, those of the corpse were also small, the increase of probability that the body was that of Marie would not be an increase in a ratio merely arithmetical, but in one highly geometrical, or accumulative. Add to all this shoes such as she had been known to wear upon the day of her disappearance, and, although these shoes may be 'sold in packages,' you so far augment the probability as to verge upon the certain. What, of itself, would be no evidence of identity, becomes through its corroborative position, proof most sure. Give us, then, flowers in the hat corresponding to those worn by the missing girl, and we seek for nothing farther. If only one flower, we seek for nothing farther - what then if two or three, or more? Each successive one is multiple evidence - proof not _added_ to proof, but multiplied by hundreds or thousands. Let us now discover, upon the deceased, garters such as the living used, and it is almost folly to proceed. But these garters are found to be tightened, by the setting back of a clasp, in just such a manner as her own had been tightenened by Marie, shortly previous to her leaving home. It is now madness or hypocrisy to doubt. What L'Etoile says in respect to this abbreviation of the garter's being an usual occurrence, shows nothing beyond its own pertinacity in error. The elastic nature of the clasp-garter is self-demonstration of the unusualness of the abbreviation. What is made to adjust itself, must of necessity require foreign adjustment but rarely. It must have been by an accident, in its strictest sense, that these garters of Marie needed the tightening described. They alone would have amply established her identity. But it is not that the corpse was found to have the garters of the missing girl, or found to have her shoes, or her bonnet, or the flowers of her bonnet, or her feet, or a peculiar mark upon the
and proper light, we must hold steadily in mind the great disproportion between the personal acquaintances of even
without meeting a single individual whom she knew, or by whom she was known. In viewing this question in its full
have proceeded, at any given period, by any one of the many routes between her own residence and that of her aunt,
made. For my own part, I should hold it not only as possible, but as very far more than probable, that Marie might
acquaintances to be equal, the chances would be also equal that an equal number of personal rencounters would be
instance, it will be understood as most probable, that she proceeded upon a route of more than average diversity
abounding in individuals who are led to observation of his person through interest in the kindred nature of his
species of limited region as are his own. He passes to and fro, at regular intervals, within a confined periphery,
This could only be the case were her walks of the same unvarying, methodical character, and within the same
vicinity of the public offices. He is aware that he seldom passes so far as a dozen blocks from his own bureau,
and reaches at once the conclusion that she, in her walks, would be equally liable to recognition with himself in his.
It seems to me unquestionable that Beauvais was a suitor of Marie’s; that she coquetted with him; and that he was ambitious of
interpretation, we shall find no difficulty in comprehending the rose in the key-hole; the ‘Marie’ upon the slate; the
romantic busy-bodyism, than with the reasoner’s suggestion of guilt. Once adopting the more charitable
impressions of individual identity. Each man recognizes his neighbor, yet there are few instances in which any one
is prepared to give a reason for his recognition. The editor of L’Etoile had no right to be offended at M. Beauvais
unreasoning belief.

"In respect to the insinuations levelled at Beauvais, you will be willing to dismiss them in a breath. You have
already fathomed the true character of this good gentleman. He is a busy-body, with much of romance and little of
wit. Any one so constituted will readily so conduct himself, upon occasion of real excitement, as to render himself
liable to suspicion on the part of the over acute, or the ill-disposed. M. Beauvais (as it appears from your notes) had
some personal interviews with the editor of L’Etoile, and offended him by venturing an opinion that the corpse,
notwithstanding the theory of the editor, was, in sober fact, that of Marie. ‘He persists,’ says the paper, ‘in asserting
the corpse to be that of Marie, but cannot give a circumstance, in addition to those which we have commented upon,
to make others believe.’ Now, without re-adverting to the fact that stronger evidence ‘to make others believe,’ could
never have been adduced, it may be remarked that a man may very well be understood to believe, in a case of this
kind, without the ability to advance a single reason for the belief of a second party. Nothing is more vague than
impressions of individual identity. Each man recognizes his neighbor, yet there are few instances in which any one
is prepared to give a reason for his recognition. The editor of L’Etoile had no right to be offended at M. Beauvais'
unreasoning belief.

"The suspicious circumstances which invest him, will be found to tally much better with my hypothesis of
romantic busy-bodyism, than with the reasoner’s suggestion of guilt. Once adopting the more charitable
interpretation, we shall find no difficulty in comprehending the rose in the key-hole; the ‘Marie’ upon the slate; the
‘elbowing the male relatives out of the way;’ the ‘aversion to permitting them to see the body;’ the caution given to
Madame B----, that she must hold no conversation with the gendarme until his return (Beauvais); and, lastly, his
apparent determination ‘that nobody should have anything to do with the proceedings except himself.’ It seems to me
unquestionable that Beauvais was a suitor of Marie’s; that she coquetted with him; and that he was ambitious of
being thought to enjoy her fullest intimacy and confidence. I shall say nothing more upon this point; and, as the
evidence fully rebuts the assertion of L’Etoile, touching the matter of apathy on the part of the mother and other
relatives - an apathy inconsistent with the supposition of their believing the corpse to be that of the perfumery-girl -
we shall now proceed as if the question of identity were settled to our perfect satisfaction."

"And what," I here demanded, "do you think of the opinions of Le Commerciel?"

"That, in spirit, they are far more worthy of attention than any which have been promulgated upon the subject.
The deductions from the premises are philosophical and acute; but the premises, in two instances, at least, are
found in imperfect observation. Le Commerciel wishes to intimate that Marie was seized by some gang of low
ruffians not far from her mother’s door. ‘It is impossible,’ it urges, ‘that a person so well known to thousands as this
young woman was, should have passed three blocks without some one having seen her.’ This is the idea of a man
long resident in Paris - a public man - and one whose walks to and fro in the city, have been mostly limited to the
vicinity of the public offices. He is aware that he seldom passes so far as a dozen blocks from his own bureau,
without being recognized and accosted. And, knowing the extent of his personal acquaintance with others, and of
others with him, he compares his notoriety with that of the perfumery-girl, finds no great difference between them,
and reaches at once the conclusion that she, in her walks, would be equally liable to recognition with himself in his.
This could only be the case were her walks of the same unvarying, methodical character, and within the same
species of limited region as are his own. He passes to and fro, at regular intervals, within a confined periphery,
abounding in individuals who are led to observation of his person through interest in the kindred nature of his
occupation with their own. But the walks of Marie may, in general, be supposed discursive. In this particular
instance, it will be understood as most probable, that she proceeded upon a route of more than average diversity
from her accustomed ones. The parallel which we imagine to have existed in the mind of Le Commerciel would
only be sustained in the event of the two individuals’ traversing the whole city. In this case, granting the personal
acquaintances to be equal, the chances would be also equal that an equal number of personal rencounters would be
made. For my own part, I should hold it not only as possible, but as very far more than probable, that Marie might
have proceeded, at any given period, by any one of the many routes between her own residence and that of her aunt,
without meeting a single individual whom she knew, or by whom she was known. In viewing this question in its full
and proper light, we must hold steadily in mind the great disproportion between the personal acquaintances of even
the most noted individual in Paris, and the entire population of Paris itself.

"But whatever force there may still appear to be in the suggestion of Le Commerciel, will be much diminished when we take into consideration the hour at which the girl went abroad. 'It was when the streets were full of people,' says Le Commerciel, 'that she went out.' But not so. It was at nine o'clock in the morning. Now at nine o'clock of every morning in the week, _with the exception of Sunday_, the streets of the city are, it is true, thronged with people. At nine on Sunday, the populace are chiefly within doors _preparing for church_. No observing person can have failed to notice the peculiarly deserted air of the town, from about eight until ten on the morning of every Sabbath. Between ten and eleven the streets are thronged, but not at so early a period as that designated.

"There is another point at which there seems a deficiency of observation on the part of Le Commerciel. 'A piece,' it says, 'of one of the unfortunate girl's petticoats, two feet long, and one foot wide, was torn out and tied under her chin, and around the back of her head, probably to prevent screams. This was done, by fellows who had no pocket-handkerchiefs.' Whether this idea is, or is not well founded, we will endeavor to see hereafter; but by fellows who have no pocket-handkerchiefs the editor intends the lowest class of ruffians. These, however, are the very description of people who will always be found to have handkerchiefs even when destitute of shirts. You must have had occasion to observe how absolutely indispensable, of late years, to the thorough blackguard, has become the pocket-handkerchief."

"And what are we to think," I asked, "of the article in Le Soleil?"

"That it is a vast pity its inditer was not born a parrot - in which case he would have been the most illustrious parrot of his race. He has merely repeated the individual items of the already published opinion; collecting them, with a laudable industry, from this paper and from that. 'The things had all evidently been there,' he says,'at least, three or four weeks, and there can be _no doubt_ that the spot of this appalling outrage has been discovered.' The facts here re-stated by Le Soleil, are very far indeed from removing my own doubts upon this subject, and we will examine them more particularly hereafter in connexion with another division of the theme.

"At present we must occupy ourselves with other investigations. You cannot fail to have remarked the extreme laxity of the examination of the corpse. To be sure, the question of identity was readily determined, or should have been; but there were other points to be ascertained. Had the body been in any respect despoiled? Had the deceased any articles of jewelry about her person upon leaving home? if so, had she any when found? These are important questions utterly untouched by the evidence; and there are others of equal moment, which have met with no attention. We must endeavor to satisfy ourselves by personal inquiry. The case of St. Eustache must be re-examined. I have no suspicion of this person; but let us proceed methodically. We will ascertain beyond a doubt the validity of the affidavits in regard to his whereabouts on the Sunday. Affidavits of this character are readily made matter of doubt, or at least, suspicion. 'The things had all evidently been there,' says Le Commerciel, 'at least, three or four weeks, and there can be _no doubt_ that the spot of this appalling outrage has been discovered.' The facts here re-stated by Le Soleil, are very far indeed from removing my own doubts upon this subject, and we will examine them more particularly hereafter in connexion with another division of the theme.

"In that which I now propose, we will discard the interior points of this tragedy, and concentrate our attention upon its outskirts. Not the least usual error, in investigations such as this, is the limiting of inquiry to the immediate, with total disregard of the collateral or circumstantial events. It is the mal-practice of the courts to confine evidence and discussion to the bounds of apparent relevancy. Yet experience has shown, and a true philosophy will always show, that a vast, perhaps the larger portion of truth, arises from the seemingly irrelevant. It is through the spirit of this principle, if not precisely through its letter, that modern science has resolved to calculate upon the unforeseen. It is the mal-practice of the courts to confine evidence and discussion to the bounds of apparent relevancy. Yet experience has shown, and a true philosophy will always show, that a vast, perhaps the larger portion of truth, arises from the seemingly irrelevant. It is through the spirit of this principle, if not precisely through its letter, that modern science has resolved to calculate upon the unforeseen. But perhaps you do not comprehend me. The history of human knowledge has so uninterruptedly shown that to accord, or incidental, or accidental events we are indebted for the most numerous and most valuable discoveries, that it has at length become necessary, in any prospective view of improvement, to make not only large, but the largest allowances for inventions that shall arise by chance, and quite out of the range of ordinary expectation. It is no longer philosophical to base, upon what has been, a vision of what is to be. Accident is admitted as a portion of the substructure. We make chance a matter of absolute calculation. We subject the unlooked for and unimagined, to the mathematical _formulae_ of the schools.

"I repeat that it is no more than fact, that the larger portion of all truth has sprung from the collateral; and it is but in accordance with the spirit of the principle involved in this fact, that I would divert inquiry, in the present case, from the trodden and hitherto unfruitful ground of the event itself, to the contemporary circumstances which surround it. While you ascertain the validity of the affidavits, I will examine the newspapers more generally than you have as yet done. So far, we have only reconnoitred the field of investigation; but it will be strange indeed if a comprehensive survey, such as I propose, of the public prints, will not afford us some minute points which shall establish a direction for inquiry."

In pursuance of Dupin's suggestion, I made scrupulous examination of the affair of the affidavits. The result was
a firm conviction of their validity, and of the consequent innocence of St. Eustache. In the mean time my friend occupied himself, with what seemed to me a minuteness altogether objectless, in a scrutiny of the various newspaper files. At the end of a week he placed before me the following extracts:

"About three years and a half ago, a disturbance very similar to the present, was caused by the disappearance of this same Marie Rogêt, from the parfumerie of Monsieur Le Blanc, in the Palais Royal. At the end of a week, however, she re-appeared at her customary comptoir, as well as ever, with the exception of a slight paleness not altogether usual. It was given out by Monsieur Le Blanc and her mother, that she had merely been on a visit to some friend in the country; and the affair was speedily hushed up. We presume that the present absence is a freak of the same nature, and that, at the expiration of a week, or perhaps of a month, we shall have her among us again." - Evening Paper - Monday June 23. {*17}

"An evening journal of yesterday, refers to a former mysterious disappearance of Mademoiselle Rogêt. It is well known that, during the week of her absence from Le Blanc's parfumerie, she was in the company of a young naval officer, much noted for his debaucheries. A quarrel, it is supposed, providentially led to her return home. We have the name of the Lothario in question, who is, at present, stationed in Paris, but, for obvious reasons, forbear to make it public." - Le Mercurie - Tuesday Morning, June 24. {*18}

"An outrage of the most atrocious character was perpetrated near this city the day before yesterday. A gentleman, with his wife and daughter, engaged, about dusk, the services of six young men, who were idly rowing a boat to and fro near the banks of the Seine, to convey him across the river. Upon reaching the opposite shore, the three passengers stepped out, and had proceeded so far as to be beyond the view of the boat, when the daughter discovered that she had left in it her parasol. She returned for it, was seized by the gang, carried out into the stream, gagged, brutally treated, and finally taken to the shore at a point not far from that at which she had originally entered the boat with her parents. The villains have escaped for the time, but the police are upon their trail, and some of them will soon be taken." - Morning Paper - June 25. {*19}

"We have received one or two communications, the object of which is to fasten the crime of the late atrocity upon Mennais; {*20} but as this gentleman has been fully exonerated by a loyal inquiry, and as the arguments of our several correspondents appear to be more zealous than profound, we do not think it advisable to make them public." - Morning Paper - June 28. {*21}

"We have received several forcibly written communications, apparently from various sources, and which go far to render it a matter of certainty that the unfortunate Marie Rogêt has become a victim of one of the numerous bands of blackguards which infest the vicinity of the city upon Sunday. Our own opinion is decidedly in favor of this supposition. We shall endeavor to make room for some of these arguments hereafter." - Evening Paper - Tuesday, June 31. {*22}

"On Monday, one of the bargemen connected with the revenue service, saw a empty boat floating down the Seine. Sails were lying in the bottom of the boat. The bargeman towed it under the barge office. The next morning it was taken from thence, without the knowledge of any of the officers. The rudder is now at the barge office." - Le Diligence - Thursday, June 26. &sect;

Upon reading these various extracts, they not only seemed to me irrelevant, but I could perceive no mode in which any one of them could be brought to bear upon the matter in hand. I waited for some explanation from Dupin.

"It is not my present design," he said, "to dwell upon the first and second of those extracts. I have copied them chiefly to show you the extreme remissness of the police, who, as far as I can understand from the Prefect, have not troubled themselves, in any respect, with an examination of the naval officer alluded to. Yet it is mere folly to say that between the first and second disappearance of Marie, there is no supposable connection. Let us admit the first elopement to have resulted in a quarrel between the lovers, and the return home of the betrayed. We are now prepared to view a second elopement (if we know that an elopement has again taken place) as indicating a renewal of the betrayer's advances, rather than as the result of new proposals by a second individual - we are prepared to regard it as a 'making up' of the old amour, rather than as the commencement of a new one. The chances are ten to one, that he who had once eloped with Marie, would again propose an elopement, rather than that she to whom proposals of elopement had been made by one individual, should have them made to her by another. And here let me call your attention to the fact, that the time elapsing between the first ascertained, and the second supposed elopement, is a few months more than the general period of the cruises of our men-of-war. Had the lover been interrupted in his first villainy by the necessity of departure to sea, and had he seized the first moment of his return to renew the base designs not yet altogether accomplished - or not yet altogether accomplished by _him_? Of all these things we know nothing.

"You will say, however, that, in the second instance, there was no elopement as imagined. Certainly not - but are we prepared to say that there was not the frustrated design? Beyond St. Eustache, and perhaps Beauvais, we find no recognized, no open, no honorable suitors of Marie. Of none other is there any thing said. Who, then, is the secret
lover, of whom the relatives (at least most of them) know nothing, but whom Marie meets upon the morning of Sunday, and who is so deeply in her confidence, that she hesitates not to remain with him until the shades of the evening descend, amid the solitary groves of the Barrière du Roule? Who is that secret lover, I ask, of whom, at least, most of the relatives know nothing? And what means the singular prophecy of Madame Rogêt on the morning of Marie's departure? -- 'I fear that I shall never see Marie again.'

"But if we cannot imagine Madame Rogêt privy to the design of elopement, may we not at least suppose this design entertained by the girl? Upon quitting home, she gave it to be understood that she was about to visit her aunt in the Rue des Drômes and St. Eustache was requested to call for her at dark. Now, at first glance, this fact strongly militates against my suggestion; but let us reflect. That she did meet some companion, and proceed with him across the river, reaching the Barrière du Roule at so late an hour as three o'clock in the afternoon, is known. But in consenting so to accompany this individual, (for whatever purpose -- to her mother known or unknown,) she must have thought of her expressed intention when leaving home, and of the surprise and suspicion aroused in the bosom of her affianced suitor, St. Eustache, when, calling for her, at the hour appointed, in the Rue des Drômes, he should find that she had not been there, and when, moreover, upon returning to the pension with this alarming intelligence, he should become aware of her continued absence from home. She must have thought of these things, I say. She must have foreseen the chagrin of St. Eustache, the suspicion of all. She could not have thought of returning to brave this suspicion; but the suspicion becomes a point of trivial importance to her, if we suppose her not intending to return.

"We may imagine her thinking thus - 'I am to meet a certain person for the purpose of elopement, or for certain other purposes known only to myself. It is necessary that there be no chance of interruption - there must be sufficient time given us to elude pursuit - I will give it to be understood that I shall visit and spend the day with my aunt at the Rue des Drômes - I well tell St. Eustache not to call for me until dark - in this way, my absence from home for the longest possible period, without causing suspicion or anxiety, will be accounted for, and I shall gain more time than in any other manner. If I bid St. Eustache call for me at dark, he will be sure not to call before; but, if I wholly neglect to bid him call, my time for escape will be diminished, since it will be expected that I return the earlier, and my absence will the sooner excite anxiety. Now, if it were my design to return at all - if I had in contemplation merely a stroll with the individual in question - it would not be my policy to bid St. Eustache call; for, calling, he will be sure to ascertain that I have played him false - a fact of which I might keep him for ever in ignorance, by leaving home without notifying him of my intention, by returning before dark, and by then stating that I had been to visit my aunt in the Rue des Drômes. But, as it is my design never to return - or not for some weeks - or not until certain concealments are effected - the gaining of time is the only point about which I need give myself any concern.'

"You have observed, in your notes, that the most general opinion in relation to this sad affair is, and was from the first, that the girl had been the victim of a gang of blackguards. Now, the popular opinion, under certain conditions, is not to be disregarded. When arising of itself -- when manifesting itself in a strictly spontaneous manner -- we should look upon it as analogous with that _intuition_ which is the idiosyncrasy of the individual man of genius. In ninety-nine cases from the hundred I would abide by its decision. But it is important that we find no palpable traces of _suggestion_. The opinion must be rigorously _the public's own_; and the distinction is often exceedingly difficult to perceive and to maintain. In the present instance, it appears to me that this 'public opinion' in respect to a gang, has been superinduced by the collateral event which is detailed in the third of my extracts. All Paris is excited by the discovered corpse of Marie, a girl young, beautiful and notorious. This corpse is found, bearing marks of violence, and floating in the river. But it is now made known that, at the very period, or about the very period, in which it is supposed that the girl was assassinated, an outrage similar in nature to that endured by the deceased, although less in extent, was perpetuated, by a gang of young ruffians, upon the person of a second young female. Is it wonderful that the one known atrocity should influence the popular judgment in regard to the other unknown? This judgment awaited direction, and the known outrage seemed so opportunely to afford it! Marie, too, was found in the river; and upon this very river was this known outrage committed. The connexion of the two events had about it so much of the palpable, that the true wonder would have been a failure of the populace to appreciate and to seize it. But, in fact, the one atrocity, known to be so committed, is, if any thing, evidence that the other, committed at a time nearly coincident, was not so committed. It would have been a miracle indeed, if, while a gang of ruffians were perpetrating, at a given locality, a most unheard-of wrong, there should have been another similar gang, in a similar locality, in the same city, under the same circumstances, with the same means and appliances, engaged in a wrong of precisely the same aspect, at precisely the same period of time! Yet in what, if not in this marvellous train of coincidence, does the accidentally suggested opinion of the populace call upon us to believe?

"Before proceeding farther, let us consider the supposed scene of the assassination, in the thicket at the Barrière du Roule. This thicket, although dense, was in the close vicinity of a public road. Within were three or four large
Notwithstanding the acclamation with which the discovery of this thicket was received by the press, and the unanimity with which it was supposed to indicate the precise scene of the outrage, it must be admitted that there was some very good reason for doubt. That it was the scene, I may or I may not believe - but there was excellent reason for doubt. Had the true scene been, as Le Commerciel suggested, in the neighborhood of the Rue Pavée St. Andréé, the perpetrators of the crime, supposing them still resident in Paris, would naturally have been stricken with terror at the public attention thus acutely directed into the proper channel; and, in certain classes of minds, there would have arisen, at once, a sense of the necessity of some exertion to redivert this attention. And thus, the thicket of the Barrière du Roule having been already suspected, the idea of placing the articles where they were found, might have been naturally entertained. There is no real evidence, although Le Soleil so supposes, that the articles discovered had been more than a very few days in the thicket; while there is much circumstantial proof that they could not have remained there, without attracting attention, during the twenty days elapsing between the fatal Sunday and the afternoon upon which they were found by the boys. 'They were all _mildewed_ down hard,' says Le Soleil, adopting the opinions of its predecessors, 'with the action of the rain, and stuck together from _mildew_. The grass had grown around and over some of them. The silk of the parasol was strong, but the threads of it were run together within. The upper part, where it had been doubled and folded, was all _mildewed_ and rotten, and tore on being opened.' In respect to the grass having '.grown around and over some of them,' it is obvious that the fact could only have been ascertained from the words, and thus from the recollections, of two small boys; for these boys removed the articles and took them home before they had been seen by a third party. But grass will grow, especially in warm and damp weather, (such as was that of the period of the murder,) as much as two or three inches in a single day. A parasol lying upon a newly turfed ground, might, in a single week, be entirely concealed from sight by the upspringing grass. And touching that mildew upon which the editor of Le Soleil so pertinaciously insists, that he employs the word no less than three times in the brief paragraph just quoted, is he really unaware of the nature of this mildew? Is he to be told that it is one of the many classes of fungus, of which the most ordinary feature is its upspringing and decadence within twenty-four hours?—

Thus we see, at a glance, that what has been most triumphantly adduced in support of the idea that the articles bad been 'for at least three or four weeks' in the thicket, is most absurdly null as regards any evidence of that fact. On the other hand, it is exceedingly difficult to believe that these articles could have remained in the thicket specified, for a longer period than a single week - for a longer period than from one Sunday to the next. Those who know any thing of the vicinity of Paris, know the extreme difficulty of finding seclusion unless at a great distance from its suburbs. Such a thing as an unexplored, or even an unfrequently visited recess, amid its woods or groves, is not for a moment to be imagined. Let any one who, being at heart a lover of nature, is yet chained by duty to the dust and heat of this great metropolis - let any such one attempt, even during the weekdays, to slake his thirst for solitude amid the scenes of natural loveliness which immediately surround us. At every second step, he will find the growing charm dispelled by the voice and personal intrusion of some ruffian or party of carousing blackguards. He will seek privacy amid the densest foliage, all in vain. Here are the very nooks where the unwashed most abound - here are the temples most desecrate. With sickness of the heart the wanderer will flee back to the polluted Paris as to a less odious because less incongruous sink of pollution. But if the vicinity of the city is so beset during the working days of the week, how much more so on the Sabbath! It is now especially that, released from the claims of labor, or deprived of the customary opportunities of crime, the town blackguard seeks the precincts of the town, not through love of the rural, which in his heart he despises, but by way of escape from the restraints and conventionalities of society. He desires less the fresh air and the green trees, than the utter license of the country. Here, at the road-side inn, or beneath the foliage of the woods, he indulges, unchecked by any eye except those of his boon companions, in all the mad excess of a counterfeit hilarity - the joint offspring of liberty and of rum. I say nothing more than what must be obvious to every dispassionate observer, when I repeat that the circumstance of the articles in question having remained undiscovered, for a longer period - than from one Sunday to another, in any thicket in the immediate neighborhood of Paris, is to be looked upon as little less than miraculous.

But there are not wanting other grounds for the suspicion that the articles were placed in the thicket with the view of diverting attention from the real scene of the outrage. And, first, let me direct your notice to the date of the discovery of the articles. Collate this with the date of the fifth extract made by myself from the newspapers. You will find that the discovery followed, almost immediately, the urgent communications sent to the evening paper. These communications, although various and apparently from various sources, tended all to the same point - viz., the directing of attention to a gang as the perpetrators of the outrage, and to the neighborhood of the Barrière du Roule
as its scene. Now here, of course, the suspicion is not that, in consequence of these communications, or of the public
attention by them directed, the articles were found by the boys; but the suspicion might and may well have been, that
the articles were not before found by the boys, for the reason that the articles had not before been in the thicket;
having been deposited there only at so late a period as at the date, or shortly prior to the date of the communications
by the guilty authors of these communications themselves.

"This thicket was a singular - an exceedingly singular one. It was unusually dense. Within its naturally walled
enclosure were three extraordinary stones, forming a seat with a back and footstool. And this thicket, so full of a
natural art, was in the immediate vicinity, within a few rods, of the dwelling of Madame Deluc, whose boys were in
the habit of closely examining the shrubberies about them in search of the bark of the sassafras. Would it be a rash
wager - a wager of one thousand to one -- that a day never passed over the heads of these boys without finding at
least one of them ensconced in the umbrageous hall, and enthroned upon its natural throne? Those who would
hesitate at such a wager, have either never been boys themselves, or have forgotten the boyish nature. I repeat -- it is
exceedingly hard to comprehend how the articles could have remained in this thicket undiscovered, for a longer
period than one or two days; and that thus there is good ground for suspicion, in spite of the dogmatic ignorance of
Le Soleil, that they were, at a comparatively late date, deposited where found.

"But there are still other and stronger reasons for believing them so deposited, than any which I have as yet
urged. And, now, let me beg your notice to the highly artificial arrangement of the articles. On the upper stone lay a
white petticoat; on the second a silk scarf; scattered around, were a parasol, gloves, and a pocket-handkerchief
bearing the name, 'Marie Rogêt.' Here is just such an arrangement as would naturally be made by a not over-acute
person wishing to dispose the articles naturally. But it is by no means a really natural arrangement. I should rather
have looked to see the things all lying on the ground and trampled under foot. In the narrow limits of that bower, it
would have been scarcely possible that the petticoat and scarf should have retained a position upon the stones, when
subjected to the brushing to and fro of many struggling persons. 'There was evidence,' it is said, 'of a struggle; and
the earth was trampled, the bushes were broken,' - but the petticoat and the scarf are found deposited as if upon
shelves. 'The pieces of the frock torn out by the bushes were about three inches wide and six inches long. One part
was the hem of the frock and it had been mended. They looked like strips torn off.' Here, inadvertently, Le Soleil has
employed an exceedingly suspicious phrase. The pieces, as described, do indeed 'look like strips torn off;' but
purposely and by hand. It is one of the rarest of accidents that a piece is 'torn off,' from any garment such as is now
in question, by the agency of a thorn. From the very nature of such fabrics, a thorn or nail becoming entangled in
them, tears them rectangularly - divides them into two longitudinal rents, at right angles with each other, and
meeting at an apex where the thorn enters - but it is scarcely possible to conceive the piece 'torn off.' I never so knew
it, nor did you. To tear a piece off from such fabric, two distinct forces, in different directions, will be, in almost
every case, required. If there be two edges to the fabric - if, for example, it be a pocket- handkerchief, and it is
desired to tear from it a slip, then, and then only, will the one force serve the purpose. But in the present case the
question is of a dress, presenting but one edge. To tear a piece from the interior, where no edge is presented, could
only be effected by a miracle through the agency of thorns, and no one thorn could accomplish it. But, even where
an edge is presented, two thorns will be necessary, operating, the one in two distinct directions, and the other in one.
And this in the supposition that the edge is unhemmed. If hemmed, the matter is nearly out of the question. We thus
see the numerous and great obstacles in the way of pieces being 'torn off' through the simple agency of 'thorns;' yet
we are required to believe not only that one piece but that many have been so torn. 'And one part,' too, 'was the hem
of the frock!' Another piece was 'part of the skirt, not the hem,' - that is to say, was torn completely out through the
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question is of a dress, presenting but one edge. To tear a piece from the interior, where no edge is presented, could
only be effected by a miracle through the agency of thorns, and no one thorn could accomplish it. But, even where
an edge is presented, two thorns will be necessary, operating, the one in two distinct directions, and the other in one.
And this in the supposition that the edge is unhemmed. If hemmed, the matter is nearly out of the question. We thus
see the numerous and great obstacles in the way of pieces being 'torn off' through the simple agency of 'thorns;' yet
we are required to believe not only that one piece but that many have been so torn. 'And one part,' too, 'was the hem
of the frock!' Another piece was 'part of the skirt, not the hem,' - that is to say, was torn completely out through the
agency of thorns, from the uncaged interior of the dress! These, I say, are things which one may well be pardoned
for disbelieving; yet, taken collectedly, they form, perhaps, less of reasonable ground for suspicion, than the one
startling circumstance of the articles' having been left in this thicket at all, by any murderers who had enough
precaution to think of removing the corpse. You will not have apprehended me rightly, however, if you suppose it
my design to deny this thicket as the scene of the outrage. There might have been a wrong here, or, more possibly,
an accident at Madame Deluc's. But, in fact, this is a point of minor importance. We are not engaged in an attempt to
discover the scene, but to produce the perpetrators of the murder. What I have adduced, notwithstanding the
minuteness with which I have adduced it, has been with the view, first, to show the folly of the positive and
headlong assertions of Le Soleil, but secondly and chiefly, to bring you, by the most natural route, to a further
contemplation of the doubt whether this assassination has, or has not been, the work of a gang.

"We will resume this question by mere allusion to the revolting details of the surgeon examined at the inquest. It
is only necessary to say that is published inferences, in regard to the number of ruffians, have been properly
ridiculed as unjust and totally baseless, by all the reputable anatomists of Paris. Not that the matter might not have
been as inferred, but that there was no ground for the inference: - was there not much for another?

"Let us reflect now upon 'the traces of a struggle;' and let me ask what these traces have been supposed to
inference is this. The solitary murderer, having borne the corpse, for some distance, (whether from the thicket or
would form a strong band when folded or rumpled longitudinally. And thus rumpled it was discovered. My
materially from those of Le Commerciel. The slip was eighteen inches wide, and therefore, although of muslin,'
'found around the neck, fitting loosely, and secured with a hard knot.' These words are sufficiently vague, but differ
would so much better have answered the purpose. But the language of the evidence speaks of the strip in question as
the object was not 'to prevent screams' appears, also, from the bandage having been employed in preference to what
Commerciel, that this bandage was employed, is rendered apparent by the handkerchief left in the thicket; and that
fact that I now especially advert. That it was not through want of a handkerchief for the purpose imagined by Le
'tied under her chin, and around the back of her head, probably to prevent screams. This was done by fellows who
a hitch in the back.' This was done with the obvious design of affording a handle by which to carry the body. But
have put themselves to the superfluous trouble of taking down a fence, for the purpose of dragging through it a
corpse which they might have lifted over any fence in an instant? Would a number of men have so dragged a corpse
the ground bore evident traces of some heavy burden having been dragged along it!' But would a number of men
this brings us to the fact that 'between the thicket and the river, the rails of the fences were found taken down, and
would have afforded not only a sufficient, but the best possible hold. The device is that of a single individual; and
would any number of men have dreamed of resorting to such an expedient? To three or four, the limbs of the corpse
hitch in the back.' This was done with the obvious design of affording a handle by which to carry the body. But
be remedied by a fourth. They would have left nothing behind them; for their number would have enabled
wanting in the breast of the arrant blackguard; and of arrant blackguards alone are the supposed gangs ever
constituted. Their number, I say, would have prevented the bewildering and unreasoning terror which I have
imagined to paralyze the single man. Could we suppose an oversight in one, or two, or three, this oversight would
have been remedied by a fourth. They would have left nothing behind them; for their number would have enabled
them to carry all at once. There would have been no need of return.

Consider now the circumstance that in the outer garment of the corpse when found, 'a slip, about a foot wide
had been torn upward from the bottom hem to the waist wound three times round the waist, and secured by a sort of
hitch in the back.' This was done with the obvious design of affording a handle by which to carry the body. But
would any number of men have dreamed of resorting to such an expedient? To three or four, the limbs of the corpse
would have afforded not only a sufficient, but the best possible hold. The device is that of a single individual; and
this brings us to the fact that 'between the thicket and the river, the rails of the fences were found taken down, and
the ground bore evident traces of some heavy burden having been dragged along it!' But would a number of men
have put themselves to the superfluous trouble of taking down a fence, for the purpose of dragging through it a
corpse which they might have lifted over any fence in an instant? Would a number of men have so dragged a corpse
at all as to have left evident traces of the dragging?

'And here we must refer to an observation of Le Commerciel; an observation upon which I have already, in
some measure, commented. 'A piece,' says this journal, 'of one of the unfortunate girl's petticoats was torn out and
tied under her chin, and around the back of her head, probably to prevent screams. This was done by fellows who
had no pocket-handkerchiefs.'

'I have before suggested that a genuine blackguard is never without a pocket-handkerchief. But it is not to this
fact that I now especially advert. That it was not through want of a handkerchief for the purpose imagined by Le
Commerciel, that this bandage was employed, is rendered apparent by the handkerchief left in the thicket; and that
the object was not 'to prevent screams' appears, also, from the bandage having been employed in preference to what
would so much better have answered the purpose. But the language of the evidence speaks of the strip in question as
'found around the neck, fitting loosely, and secured with a hard knot.' These words are sufficiently vague, but differ
materially from those of Le Commerciel. The slip was eighteen inches wide, and therefore, although of muslin,
would form a strong band when folded or rumpled longitudinally. And thus rumpled it was discovered. My
inference is this. The solitary murderer, having borne the corpse, for some distance, (whether from the thicket or
disposed of both in the same way. But it may be said that this man lives, and is deterred from making himself
outrages will naturally be supposed identical. And where is his corpse? The assassins would most probably have
Was he murdered by the gang? If so, why are there only traces of the assassinated girl? The scene of the two
constituted the sole point of remembrance, both as regards Valence and Madame Deluc. But why is this man absent?
pause to observe that the complexion of this man is dark and swarthy; it was no common swarthiness which
seaman with that of the 'naval officer' who is first known to have led the unfortunate into crime.
corroboration. The circumstance of the first elopement, as mentioned by Le Mercurie, tends to blend the idea of this
common sailor. Here the well written and urgent communications to the journals are much in the way of
complexion, the 'hitch' in the bandage, and the 'sailor's knot,' with which the bonnet-ribbon is tied, point to a seaman.
lover, or at least by an intimate and secret associate of the deceased. This associate is of swarthy complexion. This
accident under the roof of Madame Deluc, or of a murder perpetrated, in the thicket at the Barrière du Roule, by a
only to one, or two, living human beings, and to God.
has not been divulged, is the very best of proof that it is, in fact, a secret. The horrors of this dark deed are known
for escape, as fearful of betrayal. He betrays eagerly and early that he may not himself be betrayed. That the secret
long ago have betrayed his accomplices. Each one of a gang so placed, is not so much greedy of reward, or anxious
altogether irresistible. Under the circumstances of large reward offered, and full pardon to any King's evidence, it is
haste? It is no cause for wonder, surely, that even a gang of blackguards should make haste to get home, when a
wide river is to be crossed in small boats, when storm impends, and when night approaches.
'I say approaches; for the night had not yet arrived. It was only about dusk that the indecent haste of these
'miscreants' offended the sober eyes of Madame Deluc, since she dwelt lingeringly and lamentingly upon her violated cakes and ale - cakes and ale for which she might still have entertained a faint hope of compensation. Why, otherwise, since it was about dusk, should she make a point of the haste? It is no cause for wonder, surely, that even a gang of blackguards should make haste to get home, when a
Now this 'great haste' very possibly seemed greater haste in the eyes of Madame Deluc, since she dwelt
lingeringly and lamentingly upon her violated cakes and ale - for which she might still have entertained a faint hope of compensation. Why, otherwise, since it was about dusk, should she make a point of the haste? It is no cause for wonder, surely, that even a gang of blackguards should make haste to get home, when a
wide river is to be crossed in small boats, when storm impends, and when night approaches.
I say approaches; for the night had not yet arrived. It was only about dusk that the indecent haste of these
'miscreants' offended the sober eyes of Madame Deluc. But we are told that it was upon this very evening that
Madame Deluc, as well as her eldest son, 'heard the screams of a female in the vicinity of the inn.' And in what
words does Madame Deluc designate the period of the evening at which these screams were heard? 'It was soon after
dark,' she says. But 'soon after dark,' is, at least, dark; and 'about dusk' is as certainly daylight. Thus it is abundantly
clear that the gang quitted the Barrière du Roule prior to the screams overheard (?) by Madame Deluc. And
although, in all the many reports of the evidence, the relative expressions in question are distinctly and invariably
employed just as I have employed them in this conversation with yourself, no notice whatever of the gross
discrepancy has, as yet, been taken by any of the public journals, or by any of the Myrmidons of police.
'I shall add but one to the arguments against a gang; but this one has, to my own understanding at least, a weight
altogether irresistible. Under the circumstances of large reward offered, and full pardon to any King's evidence, it is
not to be imagined, for a moment, that some member of a gang of low ruffians, or of any body of men, would not
long ago have betrayed his accomplices. Each one of a gang so placed, is not so much greedy of reward, or anxious
for escape, as fearful of betrayal. He betrays eagerly and early that he may not himself be betrayed. That the secret
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only to one, or two, living human beings, and to God.
Let us sum up now the meagre yet certain fruits of our long analysis. We have attained the idea either of a fatal
accident under the roof of Madame Deluc, or of a murder perpetrated, in the thicket at the Barrière du Roule, by a
lover, or at least by an intimate and secret associate of the deceased. This associate is of swarthy complexion. This
complexion, the 'hitch' in the bandage, and the 'sailor's knot,' with which the bonnet-ribbon is tied, point to a seaman.
His companionship with the deceased, a gay, but not an abject young girl, designates him as above the grade of the
common sailor. Here the well written and urgent communications to the journals are much in the way of
corroboramation. The circumstance of the first elopement, as mentioned by Le Mercurie, tends to blend the idea of this
seaman with that of the 'naval officer' who is first known to have led the unfortunate into crime.
And here, most fitly, comes the consideration of the continued absence of him of the dark complexion. Let me
pause to observe that the complexion of this man is dark and swarthy; it was no common swarthiness which
constituted the sole point of remembrance, both as regards Valence and Madame Deluc. But why is this man absent?
Was he murdered by the gang? If so, why are there only traces of the assassinated girl? The scene of the two
outrages will naturally be supposed identical. And where is his corpse? The assassins would most probably have
disposed of both in the same way. But it may be said that this man lives, and is deterred from making himself
known, through dread of being charged with the murder. This consideration might be supposed to operate upon him now - at this late period - since it has been given in evidence that he was seen with Marie - but it would have had no force at the period of the deed. The first impulse of an innocent man would have been to announce the outrage, and to aid in identifying the ruffians. This policy would have suggested. He had been seen with the girl. He had crossed the river with her in an open ferry-boat. The denouncing of the assassins would have appeared, even to an idiot, the surest and sole means of relieving himself from suspicion. We cannot suppose him, on the night of the fatal Sunday, both innocent himself and incognizant of an outrage committed. Yet only under such circumstances is it possible to imagine that he would have failed, if alive, in the denouncement of the assassins.

"And what means are ours, of attaining the truth? We shall find these means multiplying and gathering distinctness as we proceed. Let us sift to the bottom this affair of the first elopement. Let us know the full history of 'the officer,' with his present circumstances, and his whereabouts at the precise period of the murder. Let us carefully compare with each other the various communications sent to the evening paper, in which the object was to inculcate a gang. This done, let us compare these communications, both as regards style and MS., with those sent to the morning paper, at a previous period, and insisting so vehemently upon the guilt of Mennais. And, all this done, let us again compare these various communications with the known MSS. of the officer. Let us endeavor to ascertain, by repeated questioning of Madame Deluc and her boys, as well as of the omnibus driver, Valence, something more of the personal appearance and bearing of the 'man of dark complexion.' Queries, skilfully directed, will not fail to elicit, from some of these parties, information on this particular point (or upon others) - information which the parties themselves may not even be aware of possessing. And let us now trace the boat picked up by the bargeman on the morning of Monday the twenty-third of June, and which was removed from the barge-office, without the cognizance of the officer in attendance, and without the rudder, at some period prior to the discovery of the corpse. With a proper caution and perseverance we shall infallibly trace this boat; for not only can the bargeman who picked it up identify it, but the rudder is at hand. The rudder of a sail-boat would not have been abandoned, without inquiry, by one altogether at ease in heart. And here let me pause to insinuate a question. There was no advertisement of the picking up of this boat. It was silently taken to the barge-office, and as silently removed. But its owner or employer - how happened he, at so early a period as Tuesday morning, to be informed, without the agency of advertisement, of the locality of the boat taken up on Monday, unless we imagine some connexion with the navy - some personal permanent connexion leading to cognizance of its minute in interests - its petty local news?

"In speaking of the lonely assassin dragging his burden to the shore, I have already suggested the probability of his availing himself of a boat. Now we are to understand that Marie Rogêt was precipitated from a boat. This would naturally have been the case. The corpse could not have been trusted to the shallow waters of the shore. The peculiar marks on the back and shoulders of the victim tell of the bottom ribs of a boat. That the body was found without weight is also corroborative of the idea. If thrown from the shore a weight would have been attached. We can only account for its absence by supposing the murderer to have neglected the precaution of supplying himself with it before pushing off. In the act of consigning the corpse to the water, he would unquestionably have noticed his oversight; but then no remedy would have been at hand. Any risk would have been preferred to a return to that accursed shore. Having rid himself of his ghastly charge, the murderer would have hastened to the city. There, at some obscure wharf, he would have leaped on land. But the boat - would he have secured it? He would have been in too great haste for such things as securing a boat. Moreover, in fastening it to the wharf, he would have felt as if securing evidence against himself. His natural thought would have been to cast from him, as far as possible, all that had held connection with his crime. He would not only have fled from the wharf, but he would not have permitted the boat to remain. Assuredly he would have cast it adrift. Let us pursue our fancies. - In the morning, the wretch is stricken with unutterable horror at finding that the boat has been picked up and detained at a locality which he is in the daily habit of frequenting - at a locality, perhaps, which his duty compels him to frequent. The next night, without daring to ask for the rudder, he removes it. Now where is that rudderless boat? Let it be one of our first purposes to discover. With the first glimpse we obtain of it, the dawn of our success shall begin. This boat shall guide us, with a rapidity which will surprise even ourselves, to him who employed it in the midnight of the fatal Sabbath. Corroboration will rise upon corroboration, and the murderer will be traced."

[For reasons which we shall not specify, but which to many readers will appear obvious, we have taken the liberty of here omitting, from the MSS. placed in our hands, such portion as details the following up of the apparently slight clew obtained by Dupin. We feel it advisable only to state, in brief, that the result desired was brought to pass; and that the Prefect fulfilled punctually, although with reluctance, the terms of his compact with the Chevalier. Mr. Poe's article concludes with the following words. - Eds. (*23)]

It will be understood that I speak of coincidences and no more. What I have said above upon this topic must suffice. In my own heart there dwells no faith in præter-nature. That Nature and its God are two, no man who thinks, will deny. That the latter, creating the former, can, at will, control or modify it, is also unquestionable. I say "at
will;" for the question is of will, and not, as the insanity of logic has assumed, of power. It is not that the Deity cannot modify his laws, but that we insult him in imagining a possible necessity for modification. In their origin these laws were fashioned to embrace all contingencies which could lie in the Future. With God all is Now.

I repeat, then, that I speak of these things only as of coincidences. And farther: in what I relate it will be seen that between the fate of the unhappy Mary Cecilia Rogers, so far as that fate is known, and the fate of one Marie Rogêt up to a certain epoch in her history, there has existed a parallel in the contemplation of whose wonderful exactitude the reason becomes embarrassed. I say all this will be seen. But let it not for a moment be supposed that, in proceeding with the sad narrative of Marie from the epoch just mentioned, and in tracing to its dénouement the mystery which enshrouded her, it is my covert design to hint at an extension of the parallel, or even to suggest that the measures adopted in Paris for the discovery of the assassin of a grisette, or measures founded in any similar ratiocination, would produce any similar result.

For, in respect to the latter branch of the supposition, it should be considered that the most trifling variation in the facts of the two cases might give rise to the most important miscalculations, by diverting thoroughly the two courses of events; very much as, in arithmetic, an error which, in its own individuality, may be inappreciable, produces, at length, by dint of multiplication at all points of the process, a result enormously at variance with truth. And, in regard to the former branch, we must not fail to hold in view that the very Calculus of Probabilities to which I have referred, forbids all idea of the extension of the parallel: - forbids it with a positiveness strong and decided just in proportion as this parallel has already been long-drawn and exact. This is one of those anomalous propositions which, seemingly appealing to thought altogether apart from the mathematical, is yet one which only the mathematician can fully entertain. Nothing, for example, is more difficult than to convince the merely general reader that the fact of sixes having been thrown twice in succession by a player at dice, is sufficient cause for betting the largest odds that sixes will not be thrown in the third attempt. A suggestion to this effect is usually rejected by the intellect at once. It does not appear that the two throws which have been completed, and which lie now absolutely in the Past, can have influence upon the throw which exists only in the Future. The chance for throwing sixes seems to be precisely as it was at any ordinary time - that is to say, subject only to the influence of the various other throws which may be made by the dice. And this is a reflection which appears so exceedingly obvious that attempts to controvert it are received more frequently with a derisive smile than with anything like respectful attention. The error here involved - a gross error redolent of mischief - I cannot pretend to expose within the limits assigned me at present; and with the philosophical it needs no exposure. It may be sufficient here to say that it forms one of an infinite series of mistakes which arise in the path or Reason through her propensity for seeking truth in detail.

~~~ End of Text ~~~

FOOTNOTES--Marie Rogêt

{*1} Upon the original publication of "Marie Roget," the foot-notes now appended were considered unnecessary; but the lapse of several years since the tragedy upon which the tale is based, renders it expedient to give them, and also to say a few words in explanation of the general design. A young girl, Mary Cecilia Rogers, was murdered in the vicinity of New York; and, although her death occasioned an intense and long-enduring excitement, the mystery attending it had remained unsolved at the period when the present paper was written and published (November, 1842). Herein, under pretence of relating the fate of a Parisian grisette, the author has followed in minute detail, the essential, while merely paralleling the inessential facts of the real murder of Mary Rogers. Thus all argument founded upon the fiction is applicable to the truth: and the investigation of the truth was the object. The "Mystery of Marie Roget" was composed at a distance from the scene of the atrocity, and with no other means of investigation than the newspapers afforded. Thus much escaped the writer of which he could have availed himself had he been upon the spot, and visited the localities. It may not be improper to record, nevertheless, that the confessions of two persons, (one of them the Madame Deluc of the narrative) made, at different periods, long subsequent to the publication, confirmed, in full, not only the general conclusion, but absolutely all the chief hypothetical details by which that conclusion was attained.

{*2} The nom de plume of Von Hardenburg.

{*3} Nassau Street.

{*4} Anderson.

{*5} The Hudson.

{*6} Weehawken.

{*7} Payne.

{*8} Crommelin.

{*9} The New York "Mercury."

A theory based on the qualities of an object, will prevent its being unfolded according to its objects; and he who arranges topics in reference to their causes, will cease to value them according to their results. Thus the jurisprudence of every nation will show that, when law becomes a science and a system, it ceases to be justice. The errors into which a blind devotion to principles of classification has led the common law, will be seen by observing how often the legislature has been obliged to come forward to restore the equity its scheme had lost." - Landor.
CHAPTER I

THE LONE PASSENGER

That evening the down train from London deposited at the little country station of Ramsdon but a single
passenger, a man of middle height, shabbily dressed, with broad shoulders and long arms and a most unusual
breadth and depth of chest.

Of his face one could see little, for it was covered by a thick growth of dark curly hair, beard, moustache and
whiskers, all overgrown and ill-tended, and as he came with a somewhat slow and ungainly walk along the platform,
the lad stationed at the gate to collect tickets grinned amusedly and called to one of the porters near:

"Look at this, Bill; here's the monkey-man escaped and come back along of us."

It was a reference to a travelling circus that had lately visited the place and exhibited a young chimpanzee
advertised as "the monkey-man," and Bill guffawed appreciatively.

The stranger was quite close and heard plainly, for indeed the youth at the gate had made no special attempt to
speak softly.

The boy was still laughing as he held out his hand for the ticket, and the stranger gave it to him with one hand
and at the same time shot out a long arm, caught the boy—a well-grown lad of sixteen --by the middle and, with as
little apparent effort as though lifting a baby, swung him into the air to the top of the gate-post, where he left him
clinging with arms and legs six feet from the ground.

"Hi, what are you a-doing of?" shouted the porter, running up, as the amazed and frightened youth, clinging to
his gate-post, emitted a dismal howl.

"Teaching a cheeky boy manners," retorted the stranger with an angry look and in a very gruff and harsh voice.

"Do you want to go on top of the other post to make a pair?"

The porter drew back hurriedly.

"You be off," he ordered as he retreated. "We don't want none of your sort about here."

"I certainly have no intention of staying," retorted the other as gruffly as before. "But I think you'll remember
Bobbie Dunn next time I come this way."

"Let me down; please let me down," wailed the boy, clinging desperately to the gate-post on whose top he had
been so unceremoniously deposited, and Dunn laughed and walked away, leaving the porter to rescue his youthful
colleague and to cuff his ears soundly as soon as he had done so, by way of a relief to his feelings.

"That will learn you to be a bit civil to folk, I hope," said the porter severely. "But that there chap must have an
amazing strong arm," he added thoughtfully. "Lifting you up there all the same as you was a bunch of radishes."

For some distance after leaving the station, Dunn walked on slowly.

He seemed to know the way well or else to be careless of the direction he took, for he walked along deep in
thought with his eyes fixed on the ground and not looking in the least where he was going.

Abruptly, a small child appeared out of the darkness and spoke to him, and he started violently and in a very
nervous manner.

"What was that? What did you say, kiddy?" he asked, recovering himself instantly and speaking this time not in
the gruff and harsh tones he had used before but in a singularly winning and pleasant voice, cultivated and gentle,
that was in odd contrast with his rough and battered appearance. "The time, was that what you wanted to know?"

"Yes, sir; please, sir," answered the child, who had shrunk back in alarm at the violent start Dunn had given, but
now seemed reassured by his gentle and pleasant voice. "The right time," the little one added almost instantly and
with much emphasis on the "right."

Dunn gravely gave the required information with the assurance that to the best of his belief it was "right," and
the child thanked him and scampered off.

Resuming his way, Dunn shook his head with an air of grave dissatisfaction.

"Nerves all to pieces," he muttered. "That won't do. Hang it all, the job's no worse than following a wounded
tiger into the jungle, and I've done that before now. Only then, of course, one knew what to expect, whereas now--
And I was a silly ass to lose my temper with that boy at the station. You aren't making a very brilliant start, Bobby,
my boy."
By this time he had left the little town behind him and he was walking along a very lonely and dark road.

On one side was a plantation of young trees, on the other there was the open ground, covered with furze bush, of the village common.

Where the plantation ended stood a low, two-storied house of medium size, with a veranda stretching its full length in front. It stood back from the road some distance and appeared to be surrounded by a large garden.

At the gate Dunn halted and struck a match as if to light a pipe, and by the flickering flame of this match the name "Bittermeads," painted on the gate became visible.

"Here it is, then," he muttered. "I wonder--"

Without completing the sentence he slipped through the gate, which was not quite closed, and entered the garden, where he crouched down in the shadow of some bushes that grew by the side of the gravel path leading to the house, and seemed to compose himself for a long vigil.

An hour passed, and another. Nothing had happened--he had seen nothing, heard nothing, save for the passing of an occasional vehicle or pedestrian on the road, and he himself had never stirred or moved, so that he seemed one with the night and one with the shadows where he crouched, and a pair of field-mice that had come from the common opposite went to and fro about their busy occupations at his feet without paying him the least attention.

Another hour passed, and at last there began to be signs of life about the house.

A light shone in one window and in another, and vanished, and soon the door opened and there appeared two people on the threshold, clearly visible in the light of a strong incandescent gas-burner just within the hall.

The watcher in the garden moved a little to get a clearer view.

In the paroxysm of terror at this sudden coming to life of what they had believed to be a part of the bushes, the two little field-mice scampered away, and Dunn bit his lip with annoyance, for he knew well that some of those he had had traffic with in the past would have been very sure, on hearing that scurrying-off of the frightened mice, that some one was lurking near at hand.

But the two in the lighted doorway opening on the veranda heard and suspected nothing.

One was a man, one a woman, both were young, both were extraordinarily good-looking, and as they stood in the blaze of the gas they made a strikingly handsome and attractive picture on which, however, Dunn seemed to look from his hiding-place with hostility and watchful suspicion.

"How dark it is, there's not a star showing," the girl was saying. "Shall you be able to find your way, even with the lantern? You'll keep to the road, won't you?"

Her voice was low and pleasant and so clear Dunn heard every word distinctly. She seemed quite young, not more than twenty or twenty-one, and she was slim and graceful in build and tall for a woman. Her face, on which the light shone directly, was oval in shape with a broad, low forehead on which clustered the small, unruly curls of her dark brown hair, and she had clear and very bright brown eyes. The mouth and chin were perhaps a little large to be in absolute harmony with the rest of her features, and she was of a dark complexion, with a soft and delicate bloom that would by itself have given her a right to claim her possession of a full share of good looks. She was dressed quite simply in a white frock with a touch of colour at the waist and she had a very flimsy lace shawl thrown over her shoulders, presumably intended as a protection against the night air.

Her companion was a very tall and big man, well over six feet in height, with handsome, strongly-marked features that often bore an expression a little too haughty, but that showed now a very tender and gentle look, so that it was not difficult to guess the state of his feelings towards the girl at his side. His shoulders were broad, his chest deep, and his whole build powerful in the extreme, and Dunn, looking him up and down with the quick glance of one accustomed to judge men, thought that he had seldom seen one more capable of holding his own.

Answering his companion's remark, he said lightly:

"Oh, no, I shall cut across the wood, it's ever so much shorter, you know."

"But it's so dark and lonely," the girl protested. "And then, after last week--"

He interrupted her with a laugh, and he lifted his head with a certain not unpleasing swagger.

"I don't think they'll trouble me for all their threats," he said. "For that matter, I rather hope they will try something of the sort on. They need a lesson."

"Oh, I do hope you'll be careful," the girl exclaimed.

He laughed again and made another lightly-confident, almost-boastful remark, to the effect that he did not think any one was likely to interfere with him.

For a minute or two longer they lingered, chatting together as they stood in the gas-light on the veranda and from his hiding-place Dunn watched them intently. It seemed that it was the girl in whom he was chiefly interested, for his eyes hardly moved from her and in them there showed a very grim and hard expression.

"Pretty enough," he mused. "More than pretty. No wonder poor Charles raved about her, if it's the same girl--if it is, she ought to know what's become of him. But then, where does this big chap come in?"
The "big chap" seemed really going now, though reluctantly, and it was not difficult to see that he would have been very willing to stay longer had she given him the least encouragement.

But that he did not get, and indeed it seemed as if she were a little bored and a little anxious for him to say good night and go.

At last he did so, and she retired within the house, while he came swinging down the garden path, passing close to where Dunn lay hidden, but without any suspicion of his presence, and out into the high road.

CHAPTER II
THE FIGHT IN THE WOOD

From his hiding-place in the bushes Dunn slipped out, as the big man vanished into the darkness down the road, and for the fraction of a second he seemed to hesitate.

The lights in the house were coming and going after a fashion that suggested that the inmates were preparing for bed, and almost at once Dunn turned his back to the building and hurried very quickly and softly down the road in the direction the big man had just taken.

"After all," he thought, "the house can't run away, that will be still there when I come back, and I ought to find out who this big chap is and where he comes from."

In spite of the apparent clumsiness of his build and the ungainliness of his movements it was extraordinary how swiftly and how quietly he moved, a shadow could scarcely have made less sound than this man did as he melted through the darkness and a swift runner would have difficulty in keeping pace with him.

An old labourer going home late bade the big man a friendly good night and passed on without seeing or hearing Dunn following close behind, and a solitary woman, watching at her cottage door, saw plainly the big man's tall form and heard his firm and heavy steps and would have been ready to swear no other passed that way at that time, though Dunn was not five yards behind, slipping silently and swiftly by in the shelter of the trees lining the road.

A little further beyond this cottage a path, reached by climbing a stile, led from the high road first across an open field and then through the heart of a wood that seemed to be of considerable extent.

The man Dunn was following crossed this stile and when he had gone a yard or two along the path he halted abruptly, as though all at once grown uneasy, and looked behind.

From where he stood any one following him across the stile must have shown plainly visible against the sky line, but though he lingered for a moment or two, and even, when he walked on, still looked back very frequently, he saw nothing.

Yet Dunn, when his quarry paused and looked back like this, was only a little distance behind, and when the other moved on Dunn was still very near.

But he had not crossed the stile, for when he came to it he realised that in climbing it his form would be plainly visible in outline for some distance, and so instead, he had found and crawled through a gap in the hedge not far away.

They came, Dunn so close and so noiseless behind his quarry he might well have seemed the other's shadow, to the outskirts of the wood, and as they entered it Dunn made his first fault, his first failure in an exhibition of woodcraft that a North American Indian or an Australian "black-fellow" might have equalled, but could not have surpassed.

For he trod heavily on a dry twig that snapped with a very loud, sharp retort, clearly audible for some distance in the quiet night, and, as dry twigs only snap like that under the pressure of considerable weight, the presence of some living creature in the wood other than the small things that run to and fro beneath the trees, stood revealed to all ears that could hear.

Dunn stood instantly perfectly still, rigid as a statue, listening intently, and he noted with satisfaction and keen relief that the regular heavy tread of the man in front did not alter or change.

"Good," he thought to himself. "What luck, he hasn't heard it."

He moved on again, as silently as before, perhaps a little inclined to be contemptuous of any one who could fail to notice so plain a warning, and he supposed that the man he was following must be some townsman who knew nothing at all of the life of the country and was, like so many of the dwellers in cities, blind and deaf outside the range of the noises of the streets and the clamour of passing traffic.

This thought was still in his mind when all at once the steady sound of footsteps he had been following ceased suddenly and abruptly, cut off on the instant as you turn off water from a tap.

Dunn paused, too, supposing that for some reason the other had stopped for a moment and would soon walk on again.

But a minute passed and then another and there was still no sound of the footsteps beginning again. A little puzzled, Dunn moved cautiously forward.

He saw nothing, he found nothing, there was no sign at all of the man he had been following.
It was as though he had vanished bodily from the face of the earth, and yet how this had happened, or why, or what had become of him, Dunn could not imagine, for this spot was, it seemed, in the very heart of the wood, there was no shelter of any sort or kind anywhere near, and though there were trees all round just the ground was fairly open.

"Well, that's jolly queer," he muttered, for indeed it had a strange and daunting effect, this sudden disappearance in the midst of the wood of the man he had followed so far, and the silence around seemed all the more intense now that those regular and heavy footsteps had ceased.

"Jolly queer, as queer a thing as ever I came across," he muttered again.

He listened and heard a faint sound from his right. He listened again and thought he heard a rustling on his left, but was not sure and all at once a great figure loomed up gigantic before him and the light of lantern gleamed in his face.

"Now, my man," a voice said, "you've been following me ever since I left Bittermeads, and I'm going to give you a lesson you won't forget in a hurry."

Dunn stood quite still. At the moment his chief feeling was one of intense discomfiture at the way in which he had been outwitted, and he experienced, too, a very keen and genuine admiration for the woodcraft the other had shown.

Evidently, all the time he had known, or at any rate, suspected, that he was being followed, and choosing this as a favourable spot he had quietly doubled on his tracks, come up behind his pursuer, and taken him unawares.

Dunn had not supposed there was a man in England who could have played such a trick on him, but his admiration was roughly disturbed before he could express it, for the grasp upon his collar tightened and upon his shoulders there alighted a tremendous, stinging blow, as with all his very considerable strength, the big man brought down his walking-stick with a resounding thwack.

The sheer surprise of it, the sudden sharp pain, jerked a quick cry from Dunn, who had not been in the least prepared for such an attack, and in the darkness had not seen the stick rise, and the other laughed grimly.

"Yes, you scoundrel," he said. "I know very well who you are and what you want, and I'm going to thrash you within an inch of your life."

Again the stick rose in the air, but did not fall, for round about his body Dunn laid such a grip as he had never felt before and as would for certain have crushed in the ribs of a weaker man. The lantern crashed to the ground, they were in darkness.

"Ha! Would you?" the man exclaimed, taken by surprise in his turn, and, giant as he was, he felt himself plucked up from the ground as you pluck a weed from a lawn and held for a moment in mid-air and then dashed down again.

Perhaps not another man alive could have kept his footing under such treatment, but, somehow, he managed to, though it needed all his great strength to resist the shock.

He flung away his walking-stick, for he realized very clearly now that this was not going to be, as he had anticipated, a mere case of the administration of a deserved punishment, but rather the starkest, fiercest fight that ever he had known.

He grappled with his enemy, trying to make the most of his superior height and weight, but the long arms twined about him, seemed to press the very breath from his body and for all the huge efforts he put forth with every ounce of his tremendous strength behind them, he could not break loose from the no less tremendous grip wherein he was taken.

Breast to breast they fought, straining, swaying a little this way or that, but neither yielding an inch. Their muscles stood out like bars of steel, their breath came heavily, neither man was conscious any more of anything save his need to conquer and win and overthrow his enemy.

The quick passion of hot rage that had come upon Dunn when he felt the other's unexpected blow still burned and flamed intensely, so that he no longer remembered even the strange and high purpose which had brought him here.

His adversary, too, had lost all consciousness of all other things in the lust of this fierce physical battle, and when he gave presently a loud, half-strangled shout, it was not fear that he uttered or a cry for aid, but solely for joy in such wild struggle and efforts as he had never known before.

And Dunn spake no word and uttered no sound, but strove all the more with all the strength of every nerve and muscle he possessed once again to pluck the other up that he might dash him down a second time.

In quick and heavy gasps came their breaths as they still swayed and struggled together, and though each exerted to the utmost a strength few could have withstood, each found that in the other he seemed to have met his match.

In vain Dunn tried again to lift his adversary up so that he might hurl him to the ground. It was an effort, a grip that seemed as though it might have torn up an oak by the roots, but the other neither budged nor flinched beneath it.

And in vain, in his turn, did he try to bend Dunn backwards to crush him to the earth, it was an effort before
which one might have thought that iron and stone must have given away, but Dunn still sustained it.

Thus dreadfully they fought, there in the darkness, there in the silence of the night.

Dreadfully they wrestled, implacable, fierce, determined, every primeval passion awake and strong again, and slowly, very slowly, that awful grip laid upon the big man's body began to tell.

His breathing grew more difficult, his efforts seemed aimed more to release himself than to overcome his adversary, he gave way an inch or two, no more, but still an inch or two of ground.

There was a sharp sound, like a thin, dry twig snapping beneath a careless foot.

It was one of his ribs breaking beneath the dreadful and intolerable pressure of Dunn's enormous grip. But neither of the combatants heard or knew, and with one last effort the big man put forth all his vast strength in a final attempt to bear his enemy down.

Dunn resisted still, resisted, though the veins stood out like cords on his brow, though a little trickle of blood crept from the corner of his mouth and though his heart swelled almost to bursting.

There was a sound of many waters in his ears, the darkness all around grew shot with little flames, he could hear some one breathing very noisily and he was not sure whether this were himself or his adversary till he realized that it was both of them. With one sudden, almost superhuman effort, he heaved out his great adversary up, but had not strength enough left to do more than let him slip from his grasp to fall on the ground, and with the effort he himself dropped forward on his hands and knees, just as a lantern shone at a distance and a voice cried:

"This way, Tom. Master John, Master John, where are you?"

CHAPTER III

A COINCIDENCE

Another voice answered from near by and Dunn scrambled hurriedly to his feet.

He had but a moment in which to decide what to do, for these new arrivals were coming at a run and would be upon him almost instantly if he stayed where he was.

That they were friends of the man he had just overthrown and whose huge bulk lay motionless in the darkness at his feet, seemed plain, and it also seemed plain to him that the moment was not an opportune one for offering explanations.

Swiftly he decided to slip away into the darkness. What had happened might be cleared up later when he knew more and was more sure of his ground; at present he must think first, he told himself, of the success of his mission.

Physically, he was greatly exhausted and his gait was not so steady nor his progress so silent and skillful as it had been before, as now he hurried away from the scene of the combat.

But the two new-comers made no attempt to pursue him and indeed did not seem to give his possible presence in the vicinity even a thought, as with many muttered exclamations of dismay and anger, they stooped over the body of his prostrate enemy.

It was evident they recognized him at once, and that he was the "Mr. John" whose name they had called, for so they spoke of him to each other as they busied themselves about him.

"I expect I've been a fool again," Dunn thought to himself ruefully, as from a little distance, well-sheltered in the darkness, he crouched upon the ground and listened and watched. "I may have ruined everything. Any one but a fool would have asked him what he meant when he hit out like that instead of flying into a rage and hitting back the way I did. Most likely it was some mistake when he said he knew who I was and what I wanted--at least if it wasn't--I hope I haven't killed him, anyhow."

Secure in the protection the dark night afforded him, he remained sufficiently near at hand to be able to assure himself soon that his overthrown adversary was certainly not killed, for now he began to express himself somewhat emphatically concerning the manner in which the two new-comers were ministering to him.

Presently he got to his feet and, with one of them supporting him on each side, began to limp away, and Dunn followed them, though cautiously and at a distance, for he was still greatly exhausted and in neither the mood nor the condition for running unnecessary risks.

The big man, Mr. John, as the others called him, seemed little inclined for speech, but the others talked a good deal, subsiding sometimes when he told them gruffly to be quiet but invariably soon beginning again their expressions of sympathy and vows of vengeance against his unknown assailant.

"How many of them do you think there were, Mr. John, sir?" one asked presently. "I'll lay you marked a fair sight of the villains."

"There was only one man," Mr. John answered briefly.

"Only one?" the other repeated in great surprise. "For the Lord's sake, Mr. John--only one? Why, there ain't any one man between here and Lunnon town could stand up to you, sir, in a fair tussle."

"Well, he did," Mr. John answered. "He had the advantage, he took me by surprise, but I never felt such a grip in my life."
"Lor', now, think of that," said the other in tones in which surprise seemed mingled with a certain incredulity. "It don't seem possible, but for sure, then, he don't come from these here parts, that I'll stand to."

"I knew that much before," retorted Mr. John. "I said all the time they were outsiders, a London gang very likely. You'll have to get Dr. Rawson, Bates. I don't know what's up, but I've a beast of a pain in my side. I can hardly breathe."

Bates murmured respectful sympathy as they came out of the shelter of the trees, and crossing some open ground, reached a road along the further side of which ran a high brick wall.

In this, nearly opposite the spot where they emerged on the road, was a small door which one of the men opened and through which they passed and locked it behind them, leaving Dunn without.

He hesitated for a moment, half-minded to scale the wall and continue on the other side of it to follow them. Calculating the direction in which the village of Ramsdon must lie, he turned that way and had gone only a short distance when he was overtaken by a pedestrian with whom he began conversation by asking for a light for his pipe.

The man seemed inclined to be conversational, and after a few casual remarks, Dunn made an observation on the length of the wall they were passing and to the end of which they had just come.

"Must be a goodish-sized place in there," he said. "Whose is it?"

"Oh, that there's Ramsdon Place," the other answered. "Mr. John Clive lives there now his father's dead."

Dunn stood still in the middle of the road.

"Who? What?" he stammered. "Who--who did you say?"

"Mr. John Clive," the other repeated. "Why--what's wrong about that?"

"Nothing, nothing," Dunn answered, but his voice shook a little with what seemed almost fear, and behind the darkness of the friendly night his face had become very pale. "Clive--John Clive, you say? Oh, that's impossible."

"Needn't believe it if you don't want to," grumbled the other. "Only what do you want asking questions for if you thinks folks tells lies when they answers them?"

"I didn't mean that, of course not," exclaimed Dunn hurriedly, by no means anxious to offend the other. "I'm very sorry, I only meant it was impossible it should be the same Mr. John Clive I knew once, though I think he came from about here somewhere. A little, middle-aged man, I mean, quite bald and wears glasses?"

"Oh, that ain't this 'un," answered the other, his good humour quite restored. "This is a young man and tremendous big. I ain't so small myself, but he tops me by a head and shoulders and so he does most hereabouts. Strong, too, with it, there ain't so many would care to stand up against him, I can tell you. Why, they do say he caught two poachers in the wood there last month and brought 'em out one under each arm like a pair of squealing babes."

"Did he, though?" said Dunn. "Take some doing, that, and I daresay the rest of the gang will try to get even with him for it."

"Well, they do say as there's been threats," the other agreed. "But what I says is as Mr. John can look after hisself all right. There was a tale as a man had been dodging after him at night, but all he said when they told him, was as if he caught any one after him he would thrash them within an inch of their lives."

"Serve them right, too," exclaimed Dunn warmly.

Evidently this explained, in part at least, what had recently happened. Mr. Clive, finding himself being followed, had supposed it was one of his poaching enemies and had at once attempted to carry out his threat he had made. Dunn told himself, at any rate, the error would have the result of turning all suspicion away from him, and yet he still seemed very disturbed and ill at ease.

"Has Mr. Clive been here long?" he asked.

"It must be four or five years since his father bought the place," answered his new acquaintance. "Then, when the old man was killed a year ago, Mr. John inherited everything."

"Old Mr. Clive was killed, was he?" asked Dunn, and his voice sounded very strange in the darkness. "How was that?"

"Accident to his motor-car," the other replied. "I don't hold with them things myself--give me a good horse, I say. People didn't like the old man much, and some say Mr. John's too fond of taking the high hand. But don't cross him and he won't cross you, that's his motto and there's worse."

Dunn agreed and asked one or two more questions about the details of the accident to old Mr. Clive, in which he seemed very interested.

But he did not get much more information about that concerning which his new friend evidently knew very little. However, he gave Dunn a few more facts concerning Mr. John Clive, as that he was unmarried, was said to be very wealthy, and had the reputation of being something of a ladies' man.

A little further on they parted, and Dunn took a side road which he calculated should lead him back to Bittermeads.
"It may be pure coincidence," he mused as he walked slowly in a very troubled and doubtful mood. "But if so, it's a very queer one, and if it isn't, it seems to me Mr. John Clive might as well put his head in a lion's jaws as pay visits at Bittermeads. But of course he can't have the least suspicion of the truth--if it is the truth. If I hadn't lost my temper like a fool when he whacked out at me like that I might have been able to warn him, or find out something useful perhaps. And his father killed recently in an accident--is that a coincidence, too, I wonder?"

He passed his hand across his forehead on which a light sweat stood, though he was not a man easily affected, for he had seen and endured many things.

His mind was very full of strange and troubled thoughts as at last he came back to Bittermeads, where, leaning with his elbows on the garden gate, he stood for a long time, watching the dark and silent house and thinking of that scene of which he had been a spectator when John Clive and the girl had stood together on the veranda in the light of the gas from the hall and had bidden each other good night.

"It seems," he mused, "as though the last that was seen of poor Charley must have been just like that. It was just such a dark night as this when Simpson saw him. He was standing on that veranda when Simpson recognized him by the light of the gas behind, and a girl was bidding him good night--a very pretty girl, too, Simpson said."

Silent and immobile he stood there a long time, not so much now as one who watched, but rather as if deep in thought, for his head was bent and supported on his hands and his eyes were fixed on the ground.

"As for this John Clive," he muttered presently, rousing himself. "I suppose that must be a coincidence, but it's queer, and queer the father should have died--like that."

He broke off, shuddering slightly, as though at thoughts too awful to be endured, and pushing open the gate, he walked slowly up the gravel path towards the house, round which he began to walk, going very slowly and cautiously and often pausing as if he wished to make as close examination of the place as the darkness would permit.

More by habit than because he thought there was any need of it, he moved always with that extreme and wonderful dexterity of quietness he could assume at will, and as he turned the corner of the building and came behind it, his quick ear, trained by many an emergency to pick out the least unusual sound, caught a faint, continued scratching noise, so faint and low it might well have passed unnoticed.

All at once he understood and realized that some one quite close at hand was stealthily cutting out the glass from one of the panes of a ground-floor window.

CHAPTER IV
A WOMAN WEEPST

Cautiously he glided nearer, moving as noiselessly as any shadow, seeming indeed but one shadow the more in the heavy surrounding darkness.

The persistent scratching noise continued, and Dunn was now so close he could have put out his hand and touched the shoulder of the man who was causing it and who still, intent and busy, had not the least idea of the other's proximity.

A faint smile touched Dunn's lips. The situation seemed not to be without a grim humour, for if one-half of what he suspected were true, one might as sensibly and safely attempt to break into the condemned cell at Pentonville Gaol as into this quiet house.

But then, was it perhaps possible that this fellow, working away so unconcernedly, within arm's-length of him, was in reality one of them, seeking to obtain admittance in this way for some reason of his own, some private treachery, it might be, or some dispute? To Dunn that did not seem likely. More probably the fellow was merely an ordinary burglar--some local practitioner of the housebreaking art, perhaps--whose ill-fortune it was to have hit upon this house to rob without his having the least idea of the nature of the place he was trying to enter.

"He might prove a useful recruit for them, though," Dunn thought, and a sudden idea flashed into his mind, vivid and startling.

For one moment he thought intently, weighing in his mind this idea that had come to him so suddenly. He was not blind to the risks it involved, but his eager temperament always inclined him to the most direct and often to the most dangerous course. His mind was made up, his plan of action decided.

The scratching of the burglar's tool upon the glass ceased. Already he had smeared treacle over the square of glass he intended to remove and had covered it with paper so as to be able to take it out easily and in one piece without the risk of falling fragments betraying him.

Through the gap thus made he thrust his arm and made sure there were no alarms fitted and no obstacles in the way of his easy entrance.

Cautiously he unfastened the window and cautiously and silently lifted the sash, and when he had done so he paused and listened for a space to make sure no one was stirring and that no alarm had been caused within the house.

Still very cautiously and with the utmost precaution to avoid making even the least noise, he put one knee upon the window-sill, preparatory to climbing in, and as he did so Dunn touched him lightly on the shoulder.
"Well, my man, what are you up to?" he said softly. And without a word, without giving the least warning, the burglar, a man evidently of determination and resource, swung round and aimed at Dunn's head a tremendous blow with the heavy iron jemmy he held in his right hand.

But Dunn was not unprepared for an attack and those bright, keen eyes of his seemed able to see as well in the dark as in the light. He threw up his left hand and caught the other's wrist before that deadly blow he aimed could descend and at the same instant he dashed his own clenched fist full into the burglar's face.

As it happened, more by good luck than intended aim, the blow took him on the point of the chin. He dropped instantly, collapsing in on himself as falls a pole-axed bullock, and lay, unconscious, in a crumpled heap on the ground.

For a little Dunn waited, crouching above him and listening for the least sound to show that their brief scuffle had been heard.

But it had all passed nearly as silently as quickly. Within the house everything remained silent, there was no sound audible, no gleam of light to show that any of the inmates had been disturbed.

Taking from his pocket a small electric flash-lamp Dunn turned its light on his victim.

He seemed a man of middle age with a brutal, heavy-jawed face and a low, receding forehead. His lips, a little apart, showed yellow, irregular teeth, of which two at the front of the lower jaw had been broken, and the scar of an old wound, running from the corner of his left eye down to the centre of his cheek, added to the sinister and forbidding aspect he bore.

His build was heavy and powerful and near by, where he had dropped it when he fell, lay the jemmy with which he had struck at Dunn. It was a heavy, ugly-looking thing, about two feet in length and with one end nearly as sharp as that of a chisel.

Dunn picked it up and felt it thoughtfully.

"Just as well I got my blow in first," he mused. "If he had landed that fairly on my skull I don't think anything else in this world would ever have interested me any more."

Stooping over the unconscious man, he felt in his pockets and found an ugly-looking revolver, fully loaded, a handful of cartridges, a coil of thin rope, an electric torch, a tiny dark lantern no bigger than a match-box, and a bunch of curiously-shaped wires Dunn rightly guessed to be skeleton keys used for opening locks quietly, together with some tobacco, a pipe, a little money, and a few other personal belongings of no special interest or significance.

These Dunn replaced where he had found them, but the revolver, the rope, the torch, the dark lantern, and the bunch of wires he took possession of.

He noticed also that the man was wearing rubber-soled boots and rubber gloves, and these last he also kept. Stooping, he lifted the unconscious man on to his shoulder and carried him with perfect ease and at a quick pace out of the garden and across the road to the common opposite, where, in a convenient spot, behind some furze bushes, he laid him down.

"When he comes round," Dunn muttered. "He won't know where he is or what's happened, and probably his one idea will be to clear off as quickly as possible. I don't suppose he'll interfere with me at all."

Then a new idea seemed to strike him, and he hurriedly removed his own coat and trousers and boots and exchanged them for those the burglar was wearing.

They were not a good fit, but he could get them on and the idea in his mind was that if the police of the district began searching, as very likely they would, for Mr. John Clive's assailant, and if they had discovered any clues in the shape of footprints or torn bits of clothing or buttons--and Dunn knew his attire had suffered considerably during the struggle--then it would be as well that such clues should lead not to him, but to this other man, who, if he were innocent on that score, had at any rate been guilty of attempting to carry out a much worse offence.

"I'm afraid your luck's out, old chap," Dunn muttered, apostrophizing the unconscious man. "But you did your best to brain me, and that gives me a sort of right to make you useful. Besides, if the police do run you in, it won't mean anything worse than a few questions it'll be your own fault if you can't answer. Anyhow, I can't afford to run the risk of some blundering fool of a policeman trying to arrest me for assaulting the local magnate."

Much relieved in mind, for he had been greatly worried by a fear that this encounter with John Clive might lead to highly inconvenient legal proceedings, he left the unlucky burglar lying in the shelter of the furze bushes and returned to the house.

All was as he had left it, the open window gaped widely, almost inviting entrance, and he climbed silently within. The apartment in which he found himself was apparently the drawing-room and he felt his way cautiously and slowly across it, moving with infinite care so as to avoid making even the least noise.

Reaching the door, he opened it and went out into the hall. All was dark and silent. He permitted himself here to flash on his electric torch for a moment, and he saw that the hall was spacious and used as a lounge, for there were
several chairs clustered in its centre, opposite the fireplace. There were two or three doors opening from it, and almost opposite where he stood were the stairs, a broad flight leading to a wide landing above.

Still with the same extreme silence and care, he began to ascend these stairs and when he was about half-way up he became aware of a faint and strange sound that came trembling through the silence and stillness of the night.

What it was he could not imagine. He listened for a time and then resumed his silent progress with even more care than previously, and only when he reached the landing did he understand that this faint and low sound he heard was caused by a woman weeping very softly in one of the rooms near by.

Silently he crossed the landing in the direction whence the sound seemed to come. Now, too, he saw a thread of light showing beneath a door at a little distance, and when he crept up to it and listened he could hear for certain that it was from within this room that there came the sound of muffled, passionate weeping.

The door was closed, but he turned the handle so carefully that he made not the least sound and very cautiously he began to push the door back, the tiniest fraction of an inch at a time, so that even one watching closely could never have said that it moved.

When, after a long time, during which the muffled weeping never ceased, he had it open an inch or two, he leaned forward and peeped within.

It was a bed-chamber, and, crouching on the floor near the fireplace, in front of a low arm-chair, her head hidden on her arms and resting on the seat of the chair, was the figure of a girl. She had made no preparations for retiring, and by the frock she wore Dunn recognized her as the girl he had seen on the veranda bidding good-bye to John Clive.

The sound of her weeping was very pitiful, her attitude was full of an utter and poignant despair, there was something touching in the extreme in the utter abandonment to grief shown by this young and lovely creature who seemed framed only for joy and laughter.

The stern features and hard eyes of the unseen watcher softened, then all at once they grew like tempered steel again.

For on the mantelpiece, just above where the weeping girl crouched, stood a photograph--the photograph of a young and good-looking, gaily-smiling man. Across it, in a boyish and somewhat unformed hand, was written

"Devotedly yours, Charley Wright."

It was this photograph that had caught Dunn’s eyes. Both it and the writing and the signature he recognized, and his look was very stern, his eyes as cold as death itself, as slowly, slowly he pushed back the door of the room another inch or so.

CHAPTER V
A WOMAN AND A MAN

The girl stirred. It was as though some knowledge of the slow opening of the door had penetrated to her consciousness before as yet she actually saw or heard anything.

She rose to her feet, drying her eyes with her handkerchief, and as she was moving to a drawer near to get a clean one her glance fell on the partially-open door.

"I thought I shut it,” she said aloud in a puzzled manner.

She crossed the floor to the door and closed it with a push from her hand and in the passage outside Dunn stood still, not certain what to do next.

But for that photograph he might have gone quietly away, giving up the reckless plan that had formed itself so suddenly in his mind while he watched the burglar at work.

That photograph, however, with its suggestion that he stood indeed on the brink of the solution of the mystery, seemed a summons to him to go on. It was as though a voice from the dead called him to continue on his task to punish and to save, and slowly, very slowly, with an infinite caution, he turned again the handle of the door and still very slowly, still with the same infinite caution, he pushed back the door the merest fraction of an inch at a time so that not even one watching could have said that it moved.

When he had it once more so far open that he could see within, he bent forward to look. The girl was beginning her preparations for the night now. She had assumed a long, comfortable-looking dressing-gown and, standing in front of the mirror, she had just finished brushing her hair and was beginning to fasten it up in a long plait. He could see her face in the mirror; her deep, sad eyes, swollen with crying, her cheeks still tear-stained, her mouth yet quivering with barely-repressed emotion.

He was still watching her when, as if growing uneasy, she turned her head and glanced over her shoulder, and though he moved back so quickly that she did not catch sight of him, she saw that the door was open once more.

"What can be the matter with the door?” she exclaimed aloud, and she crossed the room towards it with a quick and somewhat impatient movement.

But this time, instead of closing it, she pulled it open and found herself face to face with Dunn.
He did not speak or move, and she stood staring at him blankly. Slowly her mouth opened as though to utter a cry that, however, could not rise above her fluttering throat. Her face had taken on the pallor of death, her great eyes showed the awful fear she felt.

Still without speaking, Dunn stepped forward into the room and, closing the door, stood with his back to it. She shrank away and put her hand upon a chair, but for the support of which she must certainly have fallen, for her limbs were trembling so violently they gave her little support.

"Don't hurt me," she panted.

In truth he presented a strange and terrifying appearance. The unkempt hair that covered his face and through which his keen eyes glowed like fire, gave him an unusual and formidable aspect. In one hand he held the ugly-looking jemmy he had taken from the burglar, and the new clothes he had donned, ill-fitting and soiled, served to accentuate the ungainliness of his form.

The frightened girl was not even sure that he was human, and she shrank yet further away from him till she sank down upon the bed, dizzy with fear and almost swooning.

As yet he had not spoken, for his eyes had gone to the mantlepiece on which he saw that the photograph signed with the name "Charley Wright," did not now stand upright, but had fallen forward on its face so that one could no longer see what it represented.

It must have fallen just as he entered the room and this seemed to him an omen, though whether of good or ill, he did not know.

"Who are you?" the girl stammered. "What do you want?"

He looked at her moodily and still without answering, though in his bright and keen eyes a strange light burned.

She was lovely, he thought, of that there could be no question. But her beauty made to him small appeal, for he was wondering what kind of soul lay behind those perfect features, that smooth and delicate skin, those luminous eyes. Yet his eyes were still hard and it was in his roughest, gruffest tones that he said:

"You needn't be afraid, I won't hurt you."

"I'll give you everything I have," she panted, "if only you'll go away."

"Not so fast as all that," he answered, coolly, for indeed he had not taken so mad a risk in order to go away again if he could help it. "Who is there in the house besides you?"

"Only mother," she answered, looking up at him very pleadingly as if in hopes that he must relent when he saw her in distress. "Please, won't you take what you want and go away? Please don't disturb mother, it would nearly kill her."

"I'm not going to hurt either you or your mother if you'll be sensible," he said irritably, for, unreasonably enough, the extreme fear she showed and her pleading tones annoyed him. He had a feeling that he would like to shake her, it was so absurd of her to look at him as though she expected him to gobble her up in a mouthful.

She seemed a little reassured.

"Mother will be so dreadfully frightened," she repeated, "I'll give you everything there is in the house if only you'll go at once."

"I can take everything I want without your giving it me," he retorted. "How do I know you're telling the truth when you say there's no one else in the house? How many servants have you?"

"None," she answered. "There's a woman comes every day, but she doesn't sleep here."

"Do you live all alone here with your mother?" he asked, watching her keenly.

"There's my stepfather," she answered. "But he's not here tonight."

"Oh, is he away?" Dunn asked, his expression almost one of disappointment.

The girl, whose first extreme fear had passed and who was watching him as keenly as he watched her, noticed this manner of disappointment, and could not help wondering what sort of burglar it was who was not pleased to hear that the man of the house was away, and that he had only two women to deal with.

And it appeared to her that he seemed not only disappointed, but rather at a loss what to do next.

As in truth he was, for that the stepfather should be away, and this girl and her mother all alone, was, perhaps, the one possibility that he had never considered.

She noticed, too, that he did not pay any attention to her jewellery, which was lying close to his hand on the toilet-table, and though in point of actual fact this jewellery was not of any great value, it was exceedingly precious in her eyes, and she did not understand a burglar who showed no eagerness to seize on it.

"Did you want to see Mr. Dawson?" she asked, her voice more confident now and even with a questioning note in it.

"Mr. Dawson! Who's he?" Dunn asked, disconcerted by the question, but not wishing to seem so.

"My stepfather, Mr. Deede Dawson," she answered. "I think you knew that. If you want him, he went to London early today, but I think it's quite likely he may come back tonight."
"What should I want him for?" growled Dunn, more and more, disconcerted, as he saw that he was not playing his part too well.

"I don't know," she answered. "I suppose you do."

"You suppose a lot," he retorted roughly. "Now you listen to me. I don't want to hurt you, but I don't mean to be interfered with. I'm going over the house to see what I can find that's worth taking. Understand?"

"Oh, perfectly," she said.

She was watching him closely, and she noticed that he still made no attempt to take possession of her jewellery, though it lay at his hand, and that puzzled her very much, indeed, for she supposed the very first thing a burglar did was always to seize such treasures as these of hers. But this man paid them no attention whatever, and did not even notice them.

He was feeling in his pockets now and he took out the revolver and the coil of thin rope he had secured from the burglar.

"Now, do you know what I'm going to do?" he asked, with an air of roughness and brutality that was a little overdone. He put the revolver and the rope down on the bed, the revolver quite close to her.

"I'm going," he continued, "to tie you up to one of those chairs. I can't risk your playing any tricks or giving an alarm, perhaps, while I'm searching the house. I shall take what's worth having, and then I shall clear off, and if your stepfather's coming home tonight you won't have to wait long till he releases you, and if he don't come I can't help it."

He turned his back to her as he spoke and took hold of one of the chairs in the room, and then of another and looked at them as though carefully considering which would be the best to use for the carrying out of his threat.

He appeared to find it difficult to decide, for he kept his back turned to her for two or three minutes, during all of which time the revolver lay on the bed quite close to her hand.

He listened intently for he fully expected her to snatch it up, and he wished to be ready to turn before she could actually fire. But, indeed, nothing was further from her thoughts, for she did not know in the least how to use the weapon or even how to fire it off, and the very thought of employing it to kill any one would have terrified her far more even than had done her experiences of this night.

So the pistol lay untouched by her side, while, very pale and trembling a little, she waited what he would do, and on his side he felt as much puzzled by her failure to use the opportunity he had put in her way as she was puzzled by his neglect to seize her jewellery lying ready to his hand.

He was still hesitating, still appearing unable to decide which chair to employ in carrying out his proclaimed purpose of fastening her up when she asked a question that made him swing round upon her very quickly and with a very startled look.

"Are you a real burglar?" she said.

CHAPTER VI
A DISCOVERY

"What do you mean?" Dunn asked quickly. The matted growth of hair on his face served well to hide any change of expression, but his eyes betrayed him with their look of surprise and discomfiture, and in her own clear and steady glance appeared now a kind of puzzled mockery as if she understood well that all he did was done for some purpose, though what that purpose was still perplexed her.

"I mean," she said slowly, "well--what do I mean? I am only asking a question. Are you a burglar--or have you come here for some other reason?"

"I don't know what you're getting at," he grumbled. "Think I'm here for fun? Not me. Come and sit on this chair and put your hands behind you and don't make a noise, or scream, or anything, not if you value your life."

"I don't know that I do very much," she answered with a manner of extreme bitterness, but more as if speaking to herself than to him.

She did as he ordered, and he proceeded to tie her wrists together and to fasten them to the back of the chair on which she had seated herself. He was careful not to draw the cords too tight, but at the same time he made the fastening secure.

"You won't disturb mother, will you?" she asked quietly when he had finished. "Her room's the one at the end of the passage."

"I don't want to disturb any one," he answered. "I only want to get off quietly. I won't gag you, but don't you try to make any noise, if you do I'll come back. Understand?"

"Oh, perfectly," she answered. "May I ask one question? Do you feel very proud of yourself just now?"

He did not answer, but went out of the room quickly, and he had an impression that she smiled as she watched him go, and that her smile was bitter and a little contemptuous.

"What a girl," he muttered. "She scored every time. I didn't find out a thing, she didn't do anything I expected or
wanted her to. She seemed as if she spotted me right off--I wonder if she did? I wonder if she could be trusted?"

But then he thought of that photograph on the mantelpiece and his look grew stern and hard again. He was careful to avoid the room the girl had indicated as occupied by her mother, but of all the others on that floor he made a hasty search without discovering anything to interest him or anything of the least importance or at all unusual.

From the wide landing in the centre of the house a narrow stairway, hidden away behind an angle of the wall so that one did not notice it at first, led above to three large attics with steeply-sloping roofs and evidently designed more for storage purposes than for habitation.

The doors of two of these were open and within was merely a collection of such lumber as soon accumulates in any house.

The door of the third attic was locked, but by aid of the jemmy he still carried, he forced it open without difficulty.

Within was nothing but a square packing-case, standing in the middle of the floor. Otherwise the light of the electric torch he flashed around showed only the bare boarding of the floor and the bare plastered walls.

Near the packing-case a hammer and some nails lay on the floor and the lid was in position but was not fastened, as though some interruption had occurred before the task of nailing it down could be completed.

Dunn noted that one nail had been driven home, and he was on the point of leaving the attic, for he knew he had not much time and hoped that downstairs he would be able to make some discoveries of importance, when it occurred to him that it might be wise to see what was in this case, the nailing down the lid of which had not been completed.

He crossed the room to it, and without drawing the one nail, pushed back the lid which pivoted on it quite easily.

Within appeared a covering of coarse sacking. He pulled this away with a careless hand, and beneath the beam of his electric torch showed the pale and dreadful features of a dead man--of a man, the center of whose forehead showed the small round hole where a bullet had entered in; of a man whose still-recognizable features were those of the photograph on the mantel-piece of the room downstairs, the photograph that was signed:

"Devotedly yours, Charley Wright."

For a long time Robert Dunn stood, looking down in silence at that dead face which was hardly more still, more rigid than his own.

He shivered, for he felt very cold. It was as though the coldness of the death in whose presence he stood had laid its chilly hand on him also.

At last he stirred and looked about him with a bewildered air, then carefully and with a reverent hand, he put back the sackcloth covering.

"So I've found you, Charley," he whispered. "Found you at last."

He replaced the lid, leaving everything as it had been when he entered the attic, and stood for a time, trying to collect his thoughts which the shock of this dreadful discovery had so disordered, and to decide what to do next.

"But, then, that's simple," he thought. "I must go straight to the police and bring them here. They said they wanted proof; they said I had nothing to go on but bare suspicion. But that's evidence enough to hang Deede Dawson--the girl, too, perhaps."

Then he wondered whether it could be that she knew nothing and was innocent of all part or share in this dreadful deed. But how could that be possible? How could it be that such a crime committed in the house in which she lived could remain unknown to her?

On the other hand, when he thought of her clear, candid eyes; when he remembered her gentle beauty, it did not seem conceivable that behind them could lie hidden the tigerish soul of a murderess.

"That's only sentiment, though," he muttered. "Nothing more. Beautiful women have been rotten bad through and through before today. There's nothing for me to do but to go and inform the police, and get them here as soon as possible. If she's innocent, I suppose she'll be able to prove it."

He hesitated a moment, as he thought of how he had left her, bound and a prisoner.

It seemed brutal to leave her like that, while he was away, for he would probably be some time absent. But with a hard look, he told himself that whatever pain she suffered she must endure it.

His first and sole thought must be to bring to justice the murderers of his unfortunate friend; and to secure, too, thereby, the success almost certainly of his own mission.

To release her and leave her at liberty might endanger the attainment of both those ends, and so she must remain a prisoner.

"Only," he muttered, "if she knew the attic almost over her head held such a secret, why, didn't she take the chance I gave her of getting hold of my revolver? That she didn't, looks as if she knew nothing."

But then he thought again of the photograph in her room and remembered that agony of grief to which she had been surrendering herself when he first saw her. Now those passionate tears of hers seemed to him like remorse.
"I'll leave her where she is," he decided again. "I can't help it; I mustn't run any risks. My first duty is to get the police here and have Deede Dawson arrested."

He went down the stairs still deep in thought, and when he reached the landing below he would not even go to make sure that his captive was still secure. An obscure feeling that he did not wish to see her, and still more that he did not wish her to see him, prevented him.

He descended the second flight of steps to the hall, taking fewer precautions to avoid making a noise and still very deep in thought.

For some time he had had but little hope that young Charley Wright still lived. Nevertheless, the dreadful discovery he had made in the attic above had affected him profoundly, and left his mind in a chaos of emotions so that he was for the time much less acutely watchful than usual.

They had spent their boyhood together, and he remembered a thousand incidents of their childhood. They had been at school and college together. And how brilliantly Charley had always done at work and play, surmounting every difficulty with a laugh, as if it were merely some new and specially amusing jest!

Every one had thought well of him, every one had believed that his future career would be brilliant. Now it had ended in this obscure and dreadful fashion, as ends the life of a trapped rat.

Dunn found himself hardly able to realize that it was really so, and through all the confused medley of his thoughts there danced and flickered his memory of a young and lovely face, now tear-stained, now smiling, now pale with terror, now calmly disdainful.

"Can she have known?" he muttered. "She must have known--she can't have known--it's not possible either way."

He shuddered and as he put his foot on the lowest stair he raised his hands to cover his face as though to shut out the visions that passed before him.

Another step forward he took in the darkness, and all at once there flashed upon him the light of a strong electric torch, suddenly switched on.

"Put up your hands," said a voice sharply. "Or you're a dead man."

He looked bewilderedly, taken altogether by surprise, and saw he was faced by a fat little man with a smooth, chubby, smiling face and eyes that were cold and grey and deadly, and who held in one hand a revolver levelled at his heart.

"Put up your hands," this newcomer said again, his voice level and calm, his eyes intent and deadly. "Put up your hands or I fire."

CHAPTER VII
QUESTION AND ANSWER
Dunn obeyed promptly.

There was that about this little fat, smiling man and his unsmiling eyes which proclaimed very plainly that he was quite ready to put his threat into execution.

For a moment or two they stood thus, each regarding the other very intently. Dunn, his hands in the air, the steady barrel of the other's pistol levelled at his heart, knew that never in all his adventurous life had he been in such deadly peril as now, and the grotesque thought came into his mind to wonder if there were room for two in that packing-case in the attic.

Or perhaps no attempt would be made to hide his death since, after all, it is always permissible to shoot an armed burglar.

The clock on the stairs began to strike the hour, and he wondered if he would still be alive when the last stroke sounded.

He did not much think so for he thought he could read a very deadly purpose in the other's cold grey eyes, nor did he suppose that a man with such a secret as that of the attic upstairs to hide was likely to stand on any scruple. And he thought that if he still lived when the clock finished striking he would take it for an omen of good hope.

The last stroke sounded and died away into the silence of the night.

The revolver was still levelled at his heart, the grim purpose in the other's eyes had not changed, and yet Dunn drew a breath of deep relief as though the worst of the danger was past.

Through his mind, that had been a little dulled by the sudden consciousness of so extreme a peril, thought began again to race with more than normal rapidity and clearness.

It occurred to him, with a sense of the irony of the position, that when he entered this house it had been with the deliberate intention of getting himself discovered by the inmates, believing that to show himself to them in the character of a burglar might gain him their confidence.

It had seemed to him that so he might come to be accepted as one of them and perhaps learn in time the secret of
The danger that they might adopt the other course of handing him over to the police had not seemed to him very great, for he had his reasons for believing that there would be no great desire to draw the attention of the authorities to Bittermeads for any reason whatever.

But the discovery he had made in the attic changed all that. It changed his plans, for now he could go to the police immediately. And it changed also his conception of how these people were likely to act.

Before, it had not entered his mind to suppose that he ran any special risk of being shot at sight, but now he understood that the only thing standing between him and instant death was the faint doubt in his captor's mind as to how much he knew.

It seemed to him his only hope was to carry out his original plan and try to pass himself off as the sort of person who might be likely to be useful to the master of Bittermeads.

"Don't shoot, sir," he said, in a kind of high whine. "I ain't done no harm, and it's a fair cop--and me not a month out of Dartmoor Gaol. I shall get a hot 'un for this, I know."

The little fat man did not answer; his eyes were as deadly, the muzzle of his pistol as steady as before.

Dunn wondered if it were from that pistol had issued the bullet that had drilled so neat and round a hole in his friend's forehead. He supposed so.

He said again
"Don't shoot, Mr. Deede Dawson, sir; I ain't done no harm."

"Oh, you know my name, do you, you scoundrel?" Deede Dawson said, a little surprised.

"Yes, sir," Dunn answered. "We always find out as much as we can about a crib before we get to work."

"I see," said Mr. Dawson. "Very praiseworthy. Attention to business and all that. Pray, what did you find out about me?"

"Only as you was to be away tonight, sir," answered Dunn. "And that there didn't seem to be any other man in the house, and, of course, how the house lay and the garden, and so. But I didn't know as you was coming home so soon."

"No, I don't suppose you did," said Deede Dawson.

"I ain't done no harm," Dunn urged, making his voice as whining and pleading as he could. "I've only just been looking round the two top floors--I ain't touched a thing. Give a cove a chance, sir."

"You've been looking round, have you?" said Deede Dawson slowly. "Did you find anything to interest you?"

"I've only been in the bedrooms and the attics," answered Dunn, changing not a muscle of his countenance and thinking boldness his safest course, for he knew well the slightest sign or hint of knowledge that he gave would mean his death. "I'd only just come downstairs when you copped me, sir; I ain't touched a thing in one of these rooms down here."

"Haven't you?" said Deede Dawson slowly, and his face was paler, his eyes more deadly, the muzzle of his pistol yet more inflexibly steady than before.

More clearly still did Dunn realize that the faintest breath of suspicion stirring in the other's mind that he knew of what was hidden in the attic would mean certain death and just such another neat little hole bored through heart or brain as that he had seen showing in the forehead of his dead friend.

"Haven't you, though?" Deede Dawson repeated. "The bedrooms--the attics--that's all?"

"Yes, sir, that's all, take my oath that's all," Dunn repeated earnestly, as if he wished very much to impress on his captor that he had searched bedrooms and attics thoroughly, but not these downstairs rooms.

Deede Dawson was plainly puzzled, and for the first time a little doubt seemed to show in his hard grey eyes.

Dunn perceived that a need was on him to know for certain whether his dreadful secret had been discovered or not.

Until he had assured himself on that point Dunn felt comparatively safe, but he still knew also that to allow the faintest suspicion to dawn in Deede Dawson's mind would mean for him instant death.

He saw, too, watching very warily and ready to take advantage of any momentary slip or forgetfulness, how steady was Deede Dawson's hand, how firm and watchful his eyes.

With many men, with most men indeed, Dunn would have seized or made some opportunity to dash in and attack, taking the chance of being shot down first, since there are few indeed really skilled in the use of a revolver, the most tricky if the most deadly of weapons.

But he realized he had small hope of taking unawares this fat little smiling man with the unsmiling eyes and steady hand, and he was well convinced that the first doubtful movement he made would bring a bullet crashing through his brain.

His only hope was in delay and in diverting suspicion, and Deede Dawson's voice was very soft and deadly as he said:
"So you've been looking in the bedrooms, have you? What did you find there?"

"Nothing, sir, not a thing," protested Dunn. "I didn't touch a thing, I only wanted to look round before coming down here to see about the silver."

"And the attics?" asked Deede Dawson. "What did you find there?"

"There wasn't no one in them," Dunn answered. "I only wanted to make sure the young lady was telling the truth about there being no servants in the house to sleep."

"Did you look in all the attics, then?" asked Deede Dawson. "Yes," answered Dunn. "There was one as was locked, but I tooked the liberty of forcing it just to make sure. I ain't done no harm to speak of."

"You found one locked, eh?" said Deede Dawson, and his smile grew still more pleasant and more friendly. "That must have surprised you a good deal, didn't it?"

"I thought as perhaps there was some one waiting already to give the alarm," answered Dunn. "I didn't mind the old lady, but I couldn't risk there being some one hiding there, so I had to look, but I ain't done no damage to speak of, I could put it right for you myself in half-an-hour, sir, if you'll let me."

"Could you, indeed?" said Deede Dawson. "Well, and did you find any one sleeping there?"

But for that hairy disguise upon his cheeks and chin, Dunn would almost certainly have betrayed himself, so dreadful did the question seem to him, so poignant the double meaning that it bore, so clear his memory of his friend he had found there, sleeping indeed.

But there was nothing to show his inner agitation, as he said, shaking his head

"There wasn't no one there, any more than in the other attics, nothing but an old packing-case."

"And what?" said Deede Dawson, his voice so soft it was like a caress, his smile so sweet it was a veritable benediction. "What was in that packing-case?"

"Didn't look," answered Dunn, and then, with a sudden change of manner, as though all at once understanding what previously had puzzled him. "Lum-me," he cried, "is that where you keep the silver? Lor', and to think I never even troubled to look."

"You never looked?" repeated Deede Dawson.

Dunn shook his head with an air of baffled regret. "Never thought of it," he said. "I thought it was just lumber like in the other attics, and I might have got clear away with it as easy as not."

His chagrin was so apparent, his whole manner so innocent, that Deede Dawson began to believe he really did know nothing.

"Didn't you wonder why the door was locked?" he asked.

"Lor," answered Dunn, "if you stopped to wonder about everything you find rummy in a crib you're cracking, when would you ever get your business done?"

"So you didn't look--in that packing-case?" Deede Dawson repeated.

"If I had," answered Dunn ruefully, "I shouldn't be here, capped like this. I should have shoved with the stuff and not waited for nothing more. But I never had no luck."

"I'm not so sure of that," said Deede Dawson grimly, and as he spoke a soft voice called down from upstairs.

"Is there any one there?" it said. "Oh, please, is any one there?"

"Is that you, Ella?" Deede Dawson called back. "Come down here."

"I can't," she answered. "I'm fastened to a chair."

"I didn't hurt the young lady," Dunn interposed quickly. "I only tied her up as gentle as I could to a chair so as to stop her from interfering."

"Oh, that's it, is it?" said Deede Dawson, and seemed a little amused, as though the thought of his stepdaughter's plight pleased him rather than not. "Well, if she can't come down here, we'll go up there. Turn round, my man, and go up the stairs and keep your hands over your head all the time. I shan't hesitate to shoot if you don't, and I never miss."

Dunn was not inclined to value his life at a very high price as he turned and went awkwardly up the stairs, still holding his hands above his head.

But he meant to save it if he could, for many things depended on it, among them due punishment to be exacted for the crime he had discovered this night; and also, perhaps, for the humiliation he was now enduring.

CHAPTER VIII
CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE

Up the stairs, across the landing, and down the passage opposite Dunn went in silence, shepherded by the little man behind whose pistol was still levelled and still steady.

His hands held high in the air, he pushed open with his knee the door of the girl's room and entered, and she looked up as he did so with an expression of pure astonishment at his attitude of upheld hands that changed to one of
comprehension and of faint amusement as Deede Dawson followed, revolver in hand.

"Oh," she murmured. "Captivity captive, it seems."

At the fireplace Dunn turned and found her looking at him very intently, while from the doorway Deede Dawson surveyed them both, for once his eyes appearing to share in the smile that played about his lips as though he found much satisfaction in what he saw.

"Well, Ella," he said. "You've been having adventures, it seems, but you don't look too comfortable like that."

"Nor do I feel it," she retorted. "So please set me free."

"Yes, so I will," he answered, but he still hesitated, and Dunn had the idea that he was pleased to see the girl like this, and would leave her so if he could, and that he was wondering now if he could turn her predicament to his own advantage in any way.

"Yes, I will," he said again. "Your mother--?"

"She hasn't wakened," Ella answered. "I don't think she has heard anything. I don't suppose she will, for she took two of those pills last night that Dr. Rawson gave her for when she couldn't sleep."

"It's just as well she did," said Deede Dawson. "Yes, but please undo my hands," she asked him. "The cords are cutting my wrists dreadfully."

As she spoke she glanced at Dunn, standing by the fireplace and listening gravely to what they said, and Deede Dawson exclaimed with an air of great indignation:--

"The fellow deserves to be well thrashed for treating you like that. I've a good mind to do it, too, before handing him over to the police."

"But you haven't released me yet," she remarked. "Oh, yes, yes," he said, starting as if this were quite a new idea. "I'll release you at once--but I must watch this scoundrel. He must have frightened you dreadfully."

"Indeed he did not," she answered quickly, again looking at Dunn. "No, he didn't," she said again with a touch of defiance in her manner and a certain slightly lifting her small, round chin. "At least not much after just at first," she added.

"I'll loose you," Deede Dawson said once more, and coming up to her, he began to fumble in a feeble, ineffectual way at the cords that secured her wrists. "Jove, he's tied you up pretty tight, Ella!" he said.

"He believes in doing his work thoroughly, I suppose," she remarked, lifting her eyes to Dunn's with a look in them that was partly questioning and partly puzzled and wholly elusive. "I daresay he always likes to do everything thoroughly."

"Seems so," said Deede Dawson, giving up his fumbling and ineffectual efforts to release her. He stepped back and stood behind her chair, looking from her to Dunn and back again, and once more Dunn was conscious of an impression that he wished to make use for his own purposes of the girl's position, but that he did not know how to do so.

"You are a nice scoundrel," said Deede Dawson suddenly, with an indignation that seemed to Dunn largely assumed. "Treating a girl like this, Ella, what would you like done to him? He deserves shooting. Shall I put a bullet through him for you?"

"He might have treated me worse, I suppose," said Ella quietly. "And if you would be less indignant with him, you might be more help to me. There are scissors on the table somewhere."

"I'll get them," Deede Dawson said. "I'll get them," he repeated, as though now at last finally making up his mind. He took the scissors from the toilet-table where they lay before the looking-glass and cut the cords by which Ella was secured.

With a sigh of relief she straightened herself from the confined position in which she had been held and began to rub her wrists, which were slightly inflamed where the cords had bruised her soft skin. "Like to tie him up that way now?" asked Deede Dawson. "You shall if you like."

She turned and looked full at Dunn and he looked back at her with eyes as steady and as calm as her own. Again she showed that faint doubt and wonder which had flickered through her level gaze before as though she felt that there was more in all this than was apparent, and did not wish to condemn him utterly without a hearing.

But it was plain also that she did not wish to say too much before her stepfather and she answered carelessly "I don't think I could tie him tight enough, besides, he looks ridiculous enough like that with his hands up in the air."

It was her revenge for what he had made her suffer. He felt himself flush and he knew that she knew that her little barbed shaft had struck home. "Well, go and look through his pockets," Deede Dawson said. "And see if he's got a revolver. Don't be
frightened; if he lowers his hands he'll be a dead man before he knows it."
"He has a pistol," she said. "He showed it me, it's in his coat pocket."
"Better get it then," Deede Dawson told her. She obeyed and brought him the weapon, and he nodded with
satisfaction as he put it in his own pocket.
"I think we might let you put your hands down now," he remarked, and Dunn gladly availed himself of the
permission, for every muscle in his arms was aching badly.
He remained standing by the wall while Deede Dawson, seating himself on the chair to which Ella had been
bound, rested his chin on his left hand and, with the pistol still ready in his right, regarded Dunn with a steady
questioning gaze.
Ella was standing near the bed. She had poured a few drops of eau-de-Cologne on her wrists and was rubbing
them softly, and for ever after the poignant pleasant odour of the scent has remained associated in Robert Dunn's
mind with the strange events of that night so that always even the merest whiff of it conjures up before his mind a
picture of that room with himself silent by the fireplace and Ella silent by the bed and Deede Dawson, pistol in hand,
seated between them, as silent also as they, and very watchful.
Ella appeared fully taken up with her occupation and might almost have forgotten the presence of the two men.
She did not look at either of them, but continued to rub and chafe her wrists softly.
Deede Dawson had forgotten for once to smile, his brow was slightly wrinkled, his cold grey eyes intent and
watchful, and Dunn felt very sure that he was thinking out some plan or scheme.
The hope came to him that Deede Dawson was thinking he might prove of use, and that was the thought which,
above all others, he wished the other to have. It was, indeed, that thought which all his recent actions had been
aimed to implant in Deede Dawson's mind till his dreadful discovery in the attic had seemed to make at last direct
action possible. How, in his present plight that thought, if Deede Dawson should come to entertain it, might yet
prove his salvation. Now and again Deede Dawson gave him quick, searching glances, but when at last he spoke it
was Ella he addressed.
"Wristed hurt you much?" he asked.
"Not so much now," she answered. "They were beginning to hurt a great deal, though."
"Were they, thou?" said Deede Dawson. "And to think you might have been like that for hours if I hadn't
chanced to come home. Too bad, what a brute this fellow is."
"Men mostly are, I think," she observed indifferently.
"And women mostly like to get their own back again," he remarked with a chuckle, and then turned sharply to
Dunn. "Well, my man," he asked, "what have you got to say for yourself?"
"Nothing," Dunn answered. "It was a fair cop."
"You've had a taste of penal servitude before, I suppose?" Deede Dawson asked.
"Maybe," Dunn answered, as if not wishing to betray himself. "Maybe not."
"Well, I think I remember you said something about not being long out of Dartmoor," remarked Deede Dawson.
"How do you relish the prospect of going back there?"
"I wonder," interposed Ella thoughtfully. "I wonder what it is in you that makes you so love to be cruel, father?"
"Eh what?" he exclaimed, quite surprised. "Who's being cruel?"
"You," she answered. "You enjoy keeping him wondering what you are going to do with him, just as you
enjoyed seeing me tied to that chair and would have liked to leave me there."
"My dear Ella!" he protested. "My dear child!"
"Oh, I know," she said wearily. "Why don't you hand the man over to the police if you're going to, or let him go
at once if you mean to do that?"
"Let him go, indeed!" exclaimed Deede Dawson. "What an idea! What should I do that for?"
"If you'll give me another chance," said Dunn quickly, "I'll do anything--I should get it pretty stiff for this lot,
and that wouldn't be any use to you, sir, would it? I can do almost anything--garden, drive a motor, do what I'm
told, It's only because I've never had a chance I've had to take to this line."
"If you could do what you're told you certainly might be useful," said Deede Dawson slowly. "And I don't know
that it would do me any good to send you off to prison--you deserve it, of course. Still--you talk sometimes like an
educated man?"
"I had a bit of education," Dunn answered.
"I see," said Deede Dawson. "Well, I won't ask you any more questions, you'd probably only lie. What's your
name?"
With that sudden recklessness which was a part of his impulsive and passionate nature, Dunn answered:
"Charley Wright."
The effect was instantaneous and apparent on both his auditors.
Ella gave a little cry and started so violently that she dropped the bottle of eau-de-Cologne she had in her hands.

Deede Dawson jumped to his feet with a fearful oath. His face went livid, his fat cheeks seemed suddenly to sag, of his perpetual smile every trace vanished.

He swung his revolver up, and Dunn saw the crooked forefinger quiver as though in the very act of pressing the trigger.

The pressure of a hair decided, indeed, whether the weapon was to fire or not, as in a high-pitched, stammering voice, Deede Dawson gasped:

"What--what do you mean? What do you mean by that?"

"I only told you my name," Dunn answered. "What's wrong with it?"

Doubtful and afraid, Deede Dawson stood hesitant. His forehead had become very damp, and he wiped it with a nervous gesture.

"Is that your name--your real name?" he muttered.

"Never had another that I know of," Dunn answered.

Deede Dawson sat down again on the chair. He was still plainly very disturbed and shaken, and Ella seemed scarcely less agitated, though Dunn, watching them both very keenly, noticed that she was now looking at Deede Dawson with a somewhat strange expression and with an air as though his extreme excitement puzzled her and made her--afraid.

"Nothing wrong with the name, is there?" Dunn muttered again.

"No, no," Deede Dawson answered. "No. It's merely a coincidence, that's all. A coincidence, I suppose, Ella?"

Ella did not answer. Her expression was very troubled and full of doubt as she stood looking from her stepfather to Dunn and back again.

"It's only that your name happens to be the same as that of a friend of ours--a great friend of my daughter's," Deede Dawson said as though he felt obliged to offer some explanation. "That's all--a coincidence. It startled me for the moment." He laughed. "That's all. Well, my man, it happens there is something I can make you useful in. If you do prove useful and do what I tell you, perhaps you may get let off. I might even keep you on in a job. I won't say I will, but I might. You look a likely sort of fellow for work, and I daresay you aren't any more dishonest than most people. Funny how things happen--quite a coincidence, your name. Well, come on; it's that packing-case you saw in the attic upstairs. I want you to help me downstairs with that--Charley Wright."

CHAPTER IX

THE ATTIC OF MYSTERY

Robert Dunn was by no means sure that he was not going to his death as he went out of Ella's room on his way to the attics above, for he had perceived a certain doubt and suspicion in Deede Dawson's manner, and he thought it very likely that a fatal intention lay behind.

But he obeyed with a brisk promptitude of manner, like one who saw a prospect of escape opening before him, and as he went he saw that Ella had relapsed into her former indifference and was once more giving all her attention to bathing her wrists with eau-de-Cologne; and he saw, too, that Deede Dawson, following close behind, kept always his revolver ready.

"Perhaps he only wants to get me out of her way before he shoots," he reflected. "Perhaps there is room in that packing-case for two. It will be strange to die. Shall I try to rush him? But he would shoot at once, and I shouldn't have a chance. One thing, if anything happens to me, no one will ever know what's become of poor Charley."

And this seemed to him a great pity, so that he began to form confused and foolish plans for securing that his friend's fate should become known.

With a sudden start, for he had not known he was there, he found himself standing on the threshold of that attic of death. It was quite dark up here, and from behind Deede Dawson's voice told him impatiently to enter.

He obeyed, wondering if ever again he would cross that threshold alive, and Deede Dawson followed him into the dark attic so that Dunn was appalled by the man's rashness, for how could he tell that his victim would not take this opportunity to rise up from the place where he had been thrust and take his revenge?

"Perhaps he only wants to get me out of her way before he shoots," he reflected. "Perhaps there is room in that packing-case for two. It will be strange to die. Shall I try to rush him? But he would shoot at once, and I shouldn't have a chance. One thing, if anything happens to me, no one will ever know what's become of poor Charley."

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"What an idea," he thought to himself. "I must be going dotty, it's the strain of expecting a bullet in my back all the time, I suppose. I was never like this before."

Deede Dawson struck a match and put it to a gas-jet that lighted up the whole room. Between him and Dunn lay the packing-case, and Dunn was surprised to see that it was still there and that nothing had changed or moved; and then again he said to himself that this was a foolish thought only worthy of some excitable, hysterical girl.

"It's being too much for me," he thought resignedly. "I've heard of people being driven mad by horror. I suppose that's what's happening to me."

"You look--queer," Deede Dawson's voice interrupted the confused medley of his thoughts. "Why do you look like that--Charley Wright?"
Dunn looked moodily across the case in which the body of the murdered man was hidden to where the murderer stood.

After a pause, and speaking with an effort, he said:
"You'd look queer if some one with a pistol was watching you all the time the way you watch me."
"You do what I tell you and you'll be all right," Deede Dawson answered. "You see that packing-case?"
Dunn nodded.
"It's big enough," he said.
"Would you like to know?" asked Deede Dawson slowly with his slow, perpetual smile. "Would you like to know what's in it--Charley Wright?"

And again Dunn was certain that a faint suspicion hung about those last two words, and that his life and death hung very evenly in the balance.

"Silver, you said," he muttered. "Didn't you?"
"Ah, yes--yes--to be sure," answered Deede Dawson. "Yes, so I did. Silver. I want the lid nailed down. There's a hammer and nails there. Get to work and look sharp."

Dunn stepped forward and began to set about a task that was so terrible and strange, and that yet he had, at peril of his life--at peril of more than that, indeed--to treat as of small importance.

Standing a little distance from the lighted gas-jet, Deede Dawson watched him narrowly, and as Dunn worked he was very sure that to betray the least sign of his knowledge would be to bring instantly a bullet crashing through his brain.

It seemed curious to him that he had so carefully replaced everything after making his discovery, and that without any forethought or special intention he had put back everything so exactly as he had found it when the slightest neglect or failure in that respect would most certainly have cost him his life.

And he felt that as yet he could not afford to die.

One by one he drove in the nails, and as he worked at his gruesome task he heard the faintest rustle on the landing without--the faintest sound of a soft breath cautiously drawn in, of a light foot very carefully set down.

Deede Dawson plainly heard nothing; indeed, no ear less acute and less well-trained than Dunn's could have caught sounds that were so slight and low, but he, listening between each stroke of his hammer, was sure that it was Ella who had followed them, and that she crouched upon the landing without, watching and listening.

Did that mean, he wondered, that she, too, knew? Or was it merely natural curiosity; hostile in part, perhaps, since evidently the relations between her and her stepfather were not too friendly--a desire to know what task there could be in the attics so late at night for which Deede Dawson had such need of his captive's help?

Or was it by any chance because she wished to know how things went with him, and what was to be his fate?

In any case, Dunn was sure that Ella had followed them, and that she crouched upon the landing without, watching and listening.

He drove home the last nail and stood up. "That's done," he said.
"And well done," said Deede Dawson. "Well done--Charley Wright."

He spoke the name softly and lingeringly, and then all at once he began to laugh, a low and somewhat dreadful laughter that had in it no mirth at all, and that sounded horrible and strange in the chill emptiness of the attic.

Leaning one hand on the packing-case that served as the coffin of his dead friend, Dunn swore a silent oath to exact full retribution, and henceforth to put that purpose on a level with the mission on which originally he had come.

Aloud, and in a grumbling tone he said:
"What's the matter with my name? It's a name like any other. What's wrong with it?"
"What should there be?" flashed Deede Dawson in reply.
"I don't know," Dunn answered. "You keep repeating it so, that's all."
"It's a very good name," Deede Dawson said. "An excellent name. But it's not suitable. Not here." He began to laugh again and then stopped abruptly.
"Do you know, I think you had better choose another?" he said.
"It's all one to me," declared Dunn. "If Charley Wright don't suit, how will Robert Dunn do? I knew a man of that name once."

"It's a better name than Charley Wright," said Deede Dawson. "We'll call you Robert Dunn--Charley Wright. Do you know why I can't have you call yourself Charley Wight?"

Dunn shook his head.
"Because I don't like it," said Deede Dawson. "Why, that's a name that would drive me mad," he muttered, half to himself.

Dunn did not speak, but he thought this was a strange thing for the other to say and showed that even he, cold and remorseless and without any natural feeling, as he had seemed to be, yet had about him still some touch of
humanity.

And as he mused on this, which seemed to him so strange, though really it was not strange at all, his attentive ears caught the sound of a soft step without, beginning to descend the stairs.

Had that name, then, been more than she also could bear?

If so, she must know.

"I don't see why, I don't see what's wrong with it," he said aloud. "But Robert Dunn will suit me just as well."

"All a matter of taste," said Deede Dawson, his manner more composed and natural again.

"It's a funny thing now--suppose my name was Charley Wright, then there would be two Charley Wrights in this attic, eh? A coincidence, that would be?"

"I suppose so," answered Dunn. "I knew another man named Charley Wright once."

"Did you? Where's he?"

"Oh, he's dead," answered Dunn.

Deede Dawson could not repress the start he gave and for a moment Dunn thought that his suspicions were really roused. He came a little nearer, his pistol still ready in his hand.

"Dead, is he?" he said. "That's a pity. He's not here, then; but it would be funny wouldn't it, if there were two Charley Wrights in one room?"

"I don't know what you mean," Dunn answered. "I think there are lots of funnier things than that would be."

"That's where you're wrong," retorted Deede Dawson, and he laughed again, shrilly and dreadfully, a laughter that had in it anything but mirth.

"Can you carry that packing-case downstairs if I help you get it on your shoulder?" he asked abruptly.

"It's heavy, but I might," Dunn answered.

He supposed that now it was about to be hidden somewhere and he felt that he must know where, since that knowledge would mean everything and enable him to set the authorities to work at once immediately he could communicate with them.

The weight of the thing taxed even his great strength to the utmost, but he managed it somehow, and bending beneath his burden, he descended the stairs to the hall and then, following the orders Deede Dawson gave him from behind, out into the open air.

He was nearly exhausted when at last his task-master told him he could put it down as he stood still for a minute or two to recover his breath and strength.

The night was not very dark, for a young moon was shining in a clear sky, and it appeared to Dunn, as he felt his strength returning, that now at last he might find an opportunity of making an attack upon his captor with some chance of success.

Hitherto, in the house, in the bright glare of the gas lights, he had known that the first suspicious movement he made would have ensured his being instantly and remorselessly shot down, his mission unfulfilled.

But here in the open air, in the night that the moon illumined but faintly, it was different, and as he watched for his opportunity he felt that sooner or later it was sure to come.

But Deede Dawson was alert and wary, his pistol never left his hand, he kept so well on his guard he gave Dunn no opening to take him unawares, and Dunn did not wish to run too desperate a chance, since he was sure that sooner or later one giving fair chance of success would present itself.

"Do you want it carried any further?" he asked. "It's very heavy."

"I suppose you mean you're wondering what's in it?" said Deede Dawson sharply.

"It's nothing to me what's in it--silver or anything else," retorted Dunn. "Do you want me to carry it further, that's all I asked?"

"No," answered Deede Dawson. "No, I don't. Do you know, if you knew what was really in it, you'd be surprised?"

"Very likely," answered Dunn. "Why not?"

"Yes, you would be surprised," Deede Dawson repeated, and suddenly shouted into the darkness: "Are you ready? Are you ready there?"

Dunn was very startled, for somehow, he had supposed all along that Deede Dawson was quite alone.

There was no answer to his call, but after a minute or two there was the sound of a motor-car engine starting and then a big car came gliding forward and stopped in front of them, driven by a form so muffled in coats and coverings as to be indistinguishable in that faint light.

"Put the case inside," Deede Dawson said. "I'll help you."

With some trouble they succeeded in getting the case in and Deede Dawson covered it carefully with a big rug. When he had done so he stepped back.

"Ready, Ella?" he said.
"Yes," answered the girl's soft and low voice that already Dunn could have sworn to amidst a thousand others.

CHAPTER X
THE NEW GARDENER

"Go ahead, then," said Deede Dawson, and the great car with its terrible burden shot away into the night.

For a moment or two Deede Dawson stood looking after it, and then he turned and walked slowly towards the house, and mechanically Dunn followed, the sole thought in his mind, the one idea of which he was conscious, that of Ella driving away into the darkness with the dead body of his murdered friend in the car behind her.

Did she--know? he asked himself. Or was she ignorant of what it was she had with her?

It seemed to him that that question, hammering itself so awfully upon his mind and clamouring for an answer, must soon send him mad.

And still before him floated perpetually a picture of long, dark, lonely roads, of a rushing motor-car driven by a lovely girl, of the awful thing hidden in the car behind her.

Duly he recognized that the opportunity for which he had watched and waited so patiently had come and gone a dozen times, for Deede Dawson had now quite relaxed his former wary care.

It was as though he supposed all danger over, as though in the reaction after an enormous strain he could think of nothing but the immediate relief. He hardly gave a single glance at Dunn, whose faintest movement before had never escaped him. He had even put his pistol back in his pocket, and at almost any moment Dunn, with his unusual strength and agility, could have seized and mastered him.

But for such an enterprise Dunn had no longer any spirit, for all his mind was taken up by that one picture so clear in his thoughts of Ella in her great car driving the dead man through the night. "She must know," he said to himself. "She must, or she would never have gone off like that at that time--she can't know, it's impossible, or she would never have dared."

And again it seemed to him that this doubt was driving him mad.

Deede Dawson entered the house and got a bottle of whisky and a syphon of soda-water and mixed himself a drink. For the first time since Ella's departure he seemed to remember Dunn's presence.

"Oh, there you are," he said.

Dunn did not answer. He stood moodily on the threshold, wondering why he did not rush upon the other, and with his knee upon his chest, his hands about his throat, force him to answer the question that was still whispering, shouting, screaming itself into his ears:

"Does she know what it is she drives with her on that big car through the black and lonely night?"

"Like a drink?" asked Deede Dawson.

Dunn shook his head, and it came to him that he did not attack Deede Dawson and force the truth from him because he dared not, because he was afraid, because he feared what the answer might be.

"There's a tool-shed at the bottom of the garden," Deede Dawson said to him. "You can sleep there, tonight. You'll find some sacks you can make a bed of."

Without a word in reply Dunn turned and stumbled away. He felt very tired--physically exhausted--and the idea of a bed, even of sacks in an outhouse, became all at once extraordinarily attractive.

He found the place without difficulty, and, making a pile of the sacks, flung himself down on them and was asleep almost at once. But almost as promptly he awoke again, for he had dreamed of Ella driving her car through the night towards some strange peril from which in his dream he was trying frantically and ineffectively to save her when he awoke.

So it was all through the night.

His utter and complete exhaustion compelled him to sleep, and every time some fresh, fantastic dream in which Ella and the huge motor-car and the dreadful burden she had with her always figured, awoke him with a fresh start.

But towards morning he fell into a heavy sleep from which presently he awoke to find it broad daylight and Deede Dawson standing on the threshold of the shed with his perpetually smiling lips and his cold, unsmiling eyes.

"Well, my man; had a good sleep?" he said.

"I was tired," Dunn answered.

"Yes, we had a busy night," agreed Deede Dawson. "I slept well, too. I've been wondering what to do with you. Of course, I ought to hand you over to the police, and it's rather a risk taking on a man of your character, but I've decided to give you a chance. Probably you'll misuse it. But I'll give you an opportunity as gardener and chauffeur here. You can drive a car, you say?"

Dunn nodded.

"That's all right," said Deede Dawson.

"You shall have your board and lodging, and I'll get you some decent clothes instead of those rags; and if you prove satisfactory and make yourself useful you'll find I can pay well. There will be plenty of chances for you to
make a little money--if you know how to take them."

"When it's money," growled Dunn, "you give me the chance, and see."

"I think," added Deede Dawson, "I think it might improve your looks if you shaved."

Dunn passed his hand over the tangle of hair that hid his features so effectually.

"What for?" he asked.

"Oh, well: please yourself," answered Deede Dawson; "I don't know that it matters, and perhaps you have
reasons of your own for preferring a beard. Come on up to the house now and I'll tell Mrs. Dawson to give you some
breakfast. And you might as well have a wash, too, perhaps--unless you object to that as well as to shaving."

Dunn rose without answering, made his toilet by shaking off some of the dust that clung to him, and followed his
new employer out of the tool-house into the open air.

It was a fresh and lovely morning, and coming towards them down one of the garden paths was Ella, looking as
fresh and lovely as the morning in a dainty cotton frock with lace at her throat and wrists.

That she could possibly have spent the night tearing across country in a powerful car conveying a dead man to
an unknown destination, appeared to Dunn a clean impossibility, and for a moment he almost supposed he had been
mistaken in thinking he recognized her voice.

But he knew he had not, that he had made no mistake, that it had indeed been Ella he had seen dash away into
the darkness on her strange and terrible errand.

"Oh, my daughter," said Deede Dawson carelessly, noticing Dunn's surprise. "Oh, yes, she's back--you didn't
expect to see her this morning. Well, Ella, Dunn's surprised to see you back so soon, aren't you, Dunn?"

Dunn did not answer, for a kind of vertigo of horror had come upon him, and for a moment all things revolved
about him in a whirling circle wherein the one fixed point was Ella's gentle lovely face that sometimes, he thought,
had a small round hole with blue edges in the very centre of the forehead, above the nose.

It was her voice, clear and a little loud, that called him back to himself.

"He's not well," she was saying. "He's going to faint."

"I'm all right," he muttered. "It was nothing, nothing, it's only that I've had nothing to eat for so long."

"Oh, poor man!" exclaimed Ella.

"Come up to the house," Deede Dawson said.

"Breakfast's ready," Ella said. "Mother told me to find you."

"Has the woman come yet?" Deede Dawson asked. "If she has, you might tell her to give Dunn some breakfast. I've
just been telling him I'm willing to give him another chance and to take him on as gardener and chauffeur, so
you can keep an eye on him and see if he works well."

Ella was silent for a moment, but her expression was grave and a little puzzled as though she did not quite
understand this and wondered what it meant, and when she looked up at her stepfather, Dunn was certain there was
both distrust and suspicion in her manner.

"I suppose," she said then, "last night seemed to you a good recommendation?" As she spoke she glanced at her
wrists where the bruises still showed, and Deede Dawson's smile broadened.

"One should always be ready to give another chance to a poor fellow who's down," he said. "He may run straight
now he's got an opportunity. I told him he had better shave, but he seems to think a beard suits him best. What do
you say?"

"Breakfast's waiting," Ella answered, turning away without taking any notice of the question.

"I'll go in then," said Deede Dawson. "You might show Dunn the way to the kitchen--his name's Robert Dunn,
by the way--and tell Mrs. Barker to give him something to eat."

"I should think he could find his way there himself," Ella remarked.

But though she made this protest, she obeyed at once, for though she used a considerable liberty of speech to her
stepfather, it was none the less evident that she was very much afraid of him and would not be very likely to disobey
him or oppose him directly.

"This way," she said to Dunn, and walked on along a path that led to the back of the house. Once she stopped
and looked back. She smiled slightly and disdainfully as she did so, and Dunn saw that she was looking at a clump
of small bushes near where they had been standing.

He guessed at once that she believed Deede Dawson to be behind those bushes watching them, and when she
glanced at him he understood that she wished him to know it also.

He said nothing, though a faint movement visible in the bushes convinced him that her suspicions, if, indeed, she
had them, were well-founded, and they walked on in silence, Ella a little ahead, and Dunn a step or two behind.

The garden was a large one, and had at one time been well cultivated, but now it was neglected and overgrown.
It struck Dunn that if he was to be the gardener here he would certainly not find himself short of work, and Ella,
without looking round, said to him over her shoulder:
"Do you know anything about gardening?"

"A little, miss," he answered.

"You needn't call me 'miss,'" she observed. "When a man has tied a girl to a chair I think he may regard himself as on terms of some familiarity with her."

"What must I call you?" he asked, and his words bore to himself a double meaning, for, indeed, what name was it by which he ought to call her?

But she seemed to notice nothing as she answered "My name is Cayley --Ella Cayley. You can call me Miss Cayley. Do you know anything of motoring?"

"Yes," he answered. "Though I never cared much for motoring at night."

She gave him a quick glance, but said no more, and they came almost immediately to the back door.

Ella opened it and entered, nodding to him to follow, and crossing a narrow, stone-floored passage, she entered the kitchen where a tall gaunt elderly woman in a black bonnet and, a course apron was at work.

"This is Dunn, Mrs. Barker," she called, raising her voice. "He is the new gardener. Will you give him some breakfast, please?" She added to Dunn:

"When you've finished, you can go to the garage and wash the car, and when you speak to Mrs. Barker you must shout. She is quite deaf, that is why my stepfather engaged her, because he was sorry for her and wanted to give her a chance, you know . . ."

CHAPTER XI

THE PROBLEM

When he had finished his breakfast, and after he had had the wash of which he certainly stood in considerable need, Dunn made his way to the garage and there occupied himself cleaning the car. He noticed that the mud with which it was liberally covered was of a light sandy sort, and he discovered on one of the tyres a small shell.

Apparently, therefore, last night's wild journey had been to the coast, and it was a natural inference that the sea had provided a secure hiding-place for the packing-case and its dreadful contents.

But then that meant that there was no evidence left on which he could take action.

To his quick and hasty nature the swiftest action was always the most congenial, and had he followed his instinct, he would have lost no time in denouncing Deede Dawson. But his cooler thoughts told him that he dared not do that, since it would be to involve risks, not for himself, but for others, that he simply dared not contemplate.

He felt that the police, even if they credited his story, which he also felt that very likely they would not do, could not act on his sole evidence.

And even if they did act and did arrest Deede Dawson, it was certain no jury would convict on so strange a story, so entirely uncorroborated.

The only result would be to strengthen Deede Dawson's position by the warning, to show him his danger, and to give him the opportunity, if he chose to use it, of disappearing and beginning again his plots and plans after some fresh and perhaps more deadly fashion.

"Whereas at present," he mused, "at any rate, I'm here and he doesn't seem to suspect me, and I can watch and wait for a time, till I see my way more clearly."

And this decision he came to was a great relief to him, for he desired very greatly to know more before he acted and in especial to find out for certain what was Ella's position in all this.

It was Deede Dawson's voice that broke in upon his meditations.

"Ah, you're busy," he said. "That's right, I like to see a man working hard. I've got some new things for you I think may fit fairly well, and Mrs. Dawson is going to get one of the attics ready for you to sleep in."

"Very good, sir," said Dunn.

He wondered which attic was to be assigned to him and if it would be that one in which he had found his friend's body. He suspected, too, that he was to be lodged in the house so that Deede Dawson might watch him, and this pleased him, since it meant that he, in his turn, would be able to watch Deede Dawson.

Not that there appeared much to watch, for the days passed on and it seemed a very harmless and quiet life that Deede Dawson lived with his wife and stepdaughter.

But for the memory, burned into Dunn's mind, of what he had seen that night of his arrival, he would have been inclined to say that no more harmless, gentle soul existed than Deede Dawson.

But as it was, the man's very gentleness and smiling urbanity filled him with a loathing that it was at times all he could do to control.

The attic assigned to him to sleep in was that where he had made his dreadful discovery, and he believed this had been done as a further test of his ignorance, for he was sure Deede Dawson watched him closely to see if the idea of
being there was in any way repugnant to him.

Indeed at another time he might have shrunk from the idea of sleeping each night in the very room where his friend had been foully done to death, but now he derived a certain grim satisfaction and a strengthening of his nerves for the task that lay before him.

Only a very few visitors came to Bittermeads, especially now that Mr. John Clive, who had come often, was laid up. But one or two of the people from the village came occasionally, and the vicar appeared two or three times every week, ostensibly to play chess with Deede Dawson, but in reality, Dunn thought, drawn there by Ella, who, however, seemed quite unaware of the attraction she exercised over the good man.

Dunn did not find that he was expected to do very much work, and in fact, he was left a good deal to himself.

Once or twice the car was taken out, and occasionally Deede Dawson would come into the garden and chat with him idly for a few minutes on indifferent subjects. When it was fine he would often bring out a little travelling set of chessmen and board and proceed to amuse himself, working out or composing problems.

One day he called Dunn up to admire a problem he had just composed.

"Pretty clever, eh?" he said, admiring his own work with much complacence. "Quite an original idea of mine and I think the key move will take some finding. What do you say? I suppose you do play chess?"

"Only a very little," answered Dunn.

"Try a game with me," said Deede Dawson, and won it easily, for in fact, Dunn was by no means a strong player.

His swift victory appeared to delight Deede Dawson immensely.

"A very pretty mate I brought off there against you," he declared. "I've not often seen a prettier. Now you try to solve that problem of mine, it's easy enough once you hit on the key move."

Dunn thought to himself that there were other and more important problems which would soon be solved if only the key move could be discovered.

He said aloud that he would try what he could do, and Deede Dawson promised him half a sovereign if he solved it within a week.

"I mayn't manage it within a week," said Dunn. "I don't say I will. But sooner or later I shall find it out."

During all this time he had seen little of Ella, who appeared to come very little into the garden and who, when she did so, avoided him in a somewhat marked manner.

Her mother, Mrs. Dawson, was a little faded woman, with timid eyes and a frightened manner. Her health did not seem to be good, and Ella looked after her very assiduously. That she went in deadly fear of her husband was fairly evident, though he seemed to treat her always with great consideration and kindness and even with a show of affection, to which at times she responded and from which at other times she appeared to shrink with inexplicable terror.

"She doesn't know," Dunn said to himself. "But she suspects --something."

Ella, he still watched with the same care and secrecy, and sometimes he seemed to see her walking amidst the flowers as an angel of sweetness and laughing innocence; and sometimes he saw her, as it were, with the shadow of death around her beauty, and behind her gentle eyes and winning ways a great and horrible abyss.

Of one thing he was certain--her mind was troubled and she was not at ease; and it was plain, also, that she feared her smiling soft-spoken stepfather.

As the days passed, too, Dunn grew convinced that she was watching him all the time, even when she seemed most indifferent, as closely and as intently as he watched her.

"All watching together," Dunn thought grimly. "It would be simple enough, I suppose, if one could hit on the key move, but that I suppose no one knows but Deede Dawson himself. One thing, he can't very well be up to any fresh mischief while he's lounging about here like this. I suppose he is simply waiting his time."

As for the chess problem, that baffled him entirely. He said as much to Deede Dawson, who was very pleased, but would not tell him what the solution was.

"No, no, find it out for yourself," he said, chuckling with a merriment in which, for once his cold eyes seemed to take full share.

"I'll go on trying," said Dunn, and it grew to be quite a custom between them for Deede Dawson to ask him how he was getting on with the problem; and for Dunn to reply that he was still searching for the key move.

Several times little errands took Dunn into the village, where, discreetly listening to the current gossip, he learned that Mr. John Clive of Ramsdon Place had been injured in an attack made upon him by a gang of ferocious poachers--at least a dozen in number--but was making good progress towards recovery.

Also, he found that Mr. John Clive's visits to Bittermeads had not gone unremarked, or wholly uncriticized, since there was a vague feeling that a Mr. Clive of Ramsdon Place ought to make a better match.

"But a pretty face is all a young man thinks of," said the more experienced; and on the whole, it seemed to be felt
that the open attention Clive paid to Ella was at least easily to be understood. Almost the first visit Clive paid, when he was allowed to venture out, was to Bittermeads; and Dunn, returning one afternoon from an errand, found him established on the lawn in the company of Ella, and looking little the worse for his adventure.

He and Ella seemed to be talking very animatedly, and Dunn took the opportunity to busy himself with some gardening work not far away, so that he could watch their behaviour. He told himself it was necessary he should know in what relation they stood to each other, and as he heard them chatting and laughing together with great apparent friendliness and enjoyment, he remembered with considerable satisfaction how he had already broken one rib of Clive's, and he wished very much for an opportunity to break another.

For, without knowing why, he was beginning to conceive an intense dislike for Clive; and, also, it did not seem to him quite good taste for Ella to sit and chat and laugh with him so readily. "But we were told," he caught a stray remark of Ella's, "that it was a gang of at least a dozen that attacked you." "No," answered Clive reluctantly. "No, I think there was only one. But he had a grip like a bear." "He must have been very strong," remarked Ella thoughtfully. "I would give fifty pounds to meet him again, and have it out in the light, when one could see what one was doing," declared Clive with great vigour. "Oh, you would, would you?" muttered Dunn to himself. "Well, one of these days I may claim that fifty." He looked round at Clive as he thought this, and Clive noticed him, and said: "Is that a new man you've got there Miss Cayley? Doesn't he rather want a shave? Where on earth did Mr. Dawson pick him up?"

"Oh, he came here with the very best testimonials, and father engaged him on the spot," answered Ella, touching her wrists thoughtfully. "He certainly is not very handsome, but then that doesn't matter, does it?"

She spoke more loudly than usual, and Dunn was certain she did so in order that he might hear what she said. So he had no scruple in lingering on pretence of being busy with a rose bush, and heard Clive say: "Well, if he were one of my chaps, I should tell him to put the lawn-mower over his own face." Ella laughed amusedly. "Oh, what an idea, Mr. Clive," she cried, and Dunn thought to himself: "Yes, one day I shall very certainly claim that fifty pounds."

CHAPTER XII
AN AVOWAL

When Clive had gone that afternoon, Ella, who had accompanied him as far as the gate, and had from thence waved him a farewell, came back to the spot where Dunn was working. She stood still, watching him, and he looked up at her and then went on with his work without speaking, for now, as always, the appalling thought was perpetually in his mind: "Must she not have known what it was she had with her in the car when she went driving that night?"

After a little, she turned away, as if disappointed that he took no notice of her presence. At once he raised himself from the task he had been bending over, and stood moodily watching the slim, graceful figure, about which hung such clouds of doubt and dread, and she, turning around suddenly, as if she actually felt the impact of his gaze, saw him, and saw the strange expression in his eyes. "Why do you look at me like that?" she asked quickly, her soft and gentle tones a little shrill, as though swift fear had come upon her. "Like what?" he mumbled. "Oh, you know," she cried passionately. "Am I to be the next?" she asked.

He started, and looked at her wonderingly, asking himself if these words of hers bore the grim meaning that his mind instantly gave them. Was it possible that if she did know something of what was going on in this quiet country house, during these peaceful autumn days, she knew it not as willing accomplice, but as a helpless, destined victim who saw no way of escape.

As if she feared she had said too much, she turned and began to walk away. At once he followed. "Stop one moment," he exclaimed. "Miss Cayley." She obeyed, turning quickly to face him. They were both very pale, and both were under the influence of strong excitement. But between them there hung a thick cloud of doubt and dread that neither could penetrate.

All at once Dunn, unable to control himself longer, burst out with that question which for so long had hovered on his lips.
"Do you know," he said, "do you know what you took away with you in the car that night I came here?"
"The packing-case, you meant" she asked. "Of course I do; I helped to get it ready--what's the matter?"
"Nothing," he muttered, though indeed he had staggered as beneath some sudden and violent blow. "Oh--did you?" he said, with an effort.
"Certainly," she answered. "Now I've answered your question, will you answer me one? Why did you tell us your name was Charley Wright?"
"I knew a man of that name once," he answered. "He's dead now."
"I thought perhaps," she said slowly and quite calmly, "that it was because you had seen the name written on a photograph in my room."

"No, it wasn't that," he answered gravely, and his doubts that for a moment had seemed so terribly confirmed, now came back again, for though she had said that she knew of the contents of the packing-case, yet, if that were really so, how was it conceivable that she should speak of such a thing so calmly?

And yet again, if she could do it, perhaps also she could talk of it without emotion. Once more there was fear in his eyes as he watched her, and her own were troubled and doubtful.

"Why do you have all that hair on your face?" she asked.
"Well, why shouldn't I?" he retorted. "It saves trouble."
"Does it?" she said. "Do you know what it looks like--like a disguise?"
"A disguise?" he repeated. "Why should I want a disguise?"
"Do you think I'm quite a fool because I'm a woman?" she asked impatiently. "Do you suppose I couldn't see very well when you came that night that you were not an ordinary burglar? You had some reason of your own for breaking into this house. What was it?"

"I'll tell you," he answered, "if you'll tell me truly what was in that packing-case?"

"Oh, now I understand," she cried excitedly. "It was to find that out you came--and then Mr. Dawson made you help us get it away. That was splendid."

He did not speak, for once more a kind of horror held him dumb, as it seemed to him that she really knew. She saw the mingled horror and bewilderment in his eyes, and she laughed lightly as though that amused her.

"Do you know," she said, "I believe I guessed as much from the first, but I'm afraid Mr. Dawson was too clever for you--as he is for most people. Only then," she added, wrinkling her brows as though a new point puzzled her, "why are you staying here like this?"

"Can't you guess that too?" he asked hoarsely.

"No," she said, shaking her head with a frankly puzzled air. "No, I can't. That's puzzled me all the time. Do you know--I think you ought to shave?"

"Why?"
"A beard makes a good disguise," she answered, "so good it's hardly fair for you to have it when I can't."
"Perhaps you need it less," he answered bitterly, "or perhaps no disguise could be so effective as the one you have already."

"What's that?" she asked.
"Bright eyes, a pretty face, a clear complexion," he answered.

He spoke with an extreme energy and bitterness that she did not in the least understand, and that quite took away from the words any suspicion of intentional rudeness.

"If I have all that, I suppose it's natural and not a disguise," she remarked.
"My beard is natural too," he retorted.
"All the same, I wish you would cut it off," she answered. "I should like to see what you look like."

She turned and walked away, and the more Dunn thought over this conversation, the less he felt he understood, and that quite took away from the words any suspicion of intentional rudeness.

"If I have all that, I suppose it's natural and not a disguise," she remarked.
"My beard is natural too," he retorted.

"All the same, I wish you would cut it off," she answered. "I should like to see what you look like."

She turned and walked away, and the more Dunn thought over this conversation, the less he felt he understood it.

What had she meant by that strange start and look she had given him when she had asked if she were to be the next? And when she asserted so confidently that she knew what was in the packing-case, was that true, or was she speaking under some mistaken impression, or had she wished to deceive him?

The more he thought, the more disturbed he felt, and every hour that passed he seemed to feel more and more strongly the influence of her gracious beauty, the horror of his suspicions of her.

The next day Clive came again, and again Ella seemed very pleased to see him, and again Dunn, hanging about in their vicinity, watched gloomily their friendly intercourse.

That Clive was in love with Ella seemed fairly certain; at any rate, he showed himself strongly attracted by her, and very eager for her company.

How she felt was more doubtful, though she made no concealment of the fact that she liked to see him, and found pleasure in having him there. Dunn, moving about near at hand, was aware of an odd impression that she knew he was watching them, and that she wished him to do so for several times he saw her glance in his direction.
He could always move with a most extraordinary lightness of foot, so that, big and clumsy as he seemed in build, he could easily go unheard and even unseen, and John Clive seemed to have little idea that he remained so persistently near at hand.

This gift or power of Dunn's he had acquired in far-off lands, where life may easily depend on the snapping of a twig or the right interpretation of a trampled grass-blade, and he was using it now, almost unconsciously, so as to make his presence near Ella and Clive as unobtrusive as possible, when his keen eye caught sight of a bush, of which leaves and branches were moving against the wind.

For that he knew there could be but one explanation, and when he walked round, so as to get behind this bush, he was not surprised to see Deede Dawson crouching there, his eyes very intent and eager, his unsmiling lips drawn back to show his white teeth in a threatening grin or snarl.

Near by him was his little chess-board and men, and as Dunn came up behind he looked round quickly and saw him.

For a moment his eyes were deadly and his hand dropped to his hip-pocket, where Dunn had reason to believe he carried a formidable little automatic pistol.

But almost at once his expression changed, and with a gesture he invited Dunn to crouch down at his side. For a little they remained like this, and then Deede Dawson moved cautiously away, signing to Dunn to follow him.

When they were at a safe distance he turned to Dunn and said

"Is he serious, do you think, or is he playing with her? I'll make him pay for it if he is."

"How should I know?" answered Dunn, quite certain it was no such anxiety as this that had set Deede Dawson watching them so carefully.

Deede Dawson seemed to feel that the explanation he had offered was a little crude, and he made no attempt to enlarge on it.

With a complete change of manner, with his old smile on his lips and his eyes as dark and unsmiling as ever, he said

"Pretty girl, Ella--isn't she?"

"She is more than pretty, she is beautiful," Dunn answered with an emphasis that made Deede Dawson look at him sharply.

"Think so?" he said, and gave his peculiar laugh that had so little mirth in it. "Well, you're right, she is. He'll be a lucky man that gets her--and she's to be had, you know. But I'll tell you one thing, it won't be John Clive."

"I thought it rather looked," observed Dunn, "as if Miss Cayley might mean--"

Deede Dawson interrupted with a quick jerk of his head.

"Never mind what she means, it'll be what I mean," he declared. "I am boss; and what's more, she knows it. I believe in a man being master in his own family. Don't you?"

"If he can be," retorted Dunn. "But still, a girl naturally--"

"Naturally nothing," Deede Dawson interrupted again. "I tell you what I want for her, a man I can-trust-trust--that's the great thing. Some one I can trust."

He nodded at Dunn as he said this and then walked off, and Dunn felt very puzzled as he, too, turned away.

"Was he offering her to me?" he asked himself. "It almost sounded like it. If so, it must mean there's something he wants from me pretty bad. She's beautiful enough to turn any man's head--but did she know about poor Charlie's murder? --help in it, perhaps? --as she said she did with the packing-case."

He paused, and all his body was shaken by strong and fierce emotion.

"God help me," he groaned. "I believe I would marry her tomorrow if I could, innocent or guilty."

CHAPTER XIII

INVISIBLE WRITING

It was the next day that there arrived by the morning post a letter for Dunn.

Deede Dawson raised his eyebrows slightly when he saw it; and he did not hand it on until he had made himself master of its contents, though that did not prove to be very enlightening or interesting. The note, in fact, merely expressed gratification at the news that Dunn had secured steady work, a somewhat weak hope that he would keep it, and a still fainter hope that now perhaps he would be able to return the ten shillings borrowed, apparently from the writer, at some time in the past.

Mr. Deede Dawson, in spite of the jejune nature of the communication, read it very carefully and indeed even went so far as to examine the letter through a powerful magnifying-glass.

But he made no discovery by the aid of that instrument, and he neglected, for no man thinks of everything, to expose the letter to a gentle heat, which was what Dunn did when, presently, he received it, apparently unopened and with not the least sign to show that it had been tampered with in any way whatever.

Gradually, however, as Dunn held it to the fire, there appeared between the lines fresh writing, which he read
very eagerly, and which ran:

"Jane Dunsmore, born 1830, married, against family wishes, John Clive and had one son, John, killed early this year in a motor-car accident, leaving one son, John, now of Ramsdon Place and third in line of succession to the Wreste Abbey property."

When he had read the message thus strangely and with such precaution conveyed to him, Dunn burnt the letter and went that day about his work in a very grave and thoughtful mood.

"I knew it couldn't be a mere coincidence," he mused. "It wasn't possible. I must manage to warn him, somehow; but, ten to one, he won't believe a word, and I don't know that I blame him--I shouldn't in his place. And he might go straight to Deede Dawson and ruin everything. I don't know that it wouldn't be wiser and safer to say nothing for the present, till I'm more sure of my ground--and then it may be too late."

"Just possibly," he thought, "the job Deede Dawson clearly thinks he can make me useful in may have something to do with Clive. If so, I may be able to see my way more clearly."

As it happened, Clive was away for a few days on some business he had to attend to, so that for the present Dunn thought he could afford to wait.

But during the week-end Clive returned, and on the Monday he came again to Bittermeads.

It was never very agreeable to Dunn to have to stand aloof while Clive was laughing and chatting and drinking his tea with Ella and her mother, and of those feelings of annoyance and vexation he made this time a somewhat ostentatious show.

That his manner of sulky anger and resentment did not go unnoticed by Deede Dawson he was very sure, but nothing was said at the time.

Next morning Deede Dawson called him while he was busy in the garage and insisted on his trying to solve another chess problem.

"I haven't managed the other yet," Dunn protested. "It's not too easy to hit on these key-moves."

"Never mind try this one," Deede Dawson said; and Ella, going out for a morning stroll with her mother, saw them thus, poring together over the travelling chess-board.

"They seem busy, don't they?" she remarked. "Father is making quite a friend of that man."

"I don't like him," declared Mrs. Dawson, quite vigorously for her. "I'm sure a man with such a lot of hair on his face can't be really nice, and I thought he was inclined to be rude yesterday."

"Yes," agreed Ella. "Yes, he was. I think Mr. Clive was a little vexed, though he took no notice, I suppose he couldn't very well."

"I don't like the man at all," Mrs. Dawson repeated. "All that hair, too. Do you like him?"

"I don't know," Ella answered, and after she and her mother had returned from their walk she took occasion to find Dunn in the garden and ask him some trifling question or another.

"You are interested in chess?" she remarked, when he had answered her.

"All problems are interesting till one finds the answer to them," he replied.

"There's one I know of," she retorted. "I wish you would solve for me."

"Tell me what it is," he said quickly. "Will you?"

She shook her head slightly, but she was watching him very intently from her clear, candid eyes, and now, as always, her nearness to him, the infinite appeal he found in her every look and movement, the very fragrance of her hair, bore him away beyond all purpose and intention.

"Tell me what it is," he said again. "Won't you? Miss Cayley, if you and I were to trust each other--it's not difficult to see there's something troubling you."

"Most people have some trouble or another," she answered evasively.

He came a little nearer to her, and instead of the gruff, harsh tones he habitually used, his voice was singularly pleasant and low as he said:

"People who are in trouble need help, Miss Cayley. Will you let me help you?"

"You can't," she answered, shaking her head. "No one could."

"How can you tell that?" he asked eagerly. "Perhaps I know more already than you think."

"I daresay you do," she said slowly. "I have thought that a long time. Will you tell me one thing? --Are you his friend or not?"

There was no need for Dunn to ask to whom the pronoun she used referred.

"I am so much not his friend," he answered as quietly and deliberately as she had spoken. "That it's either his life or mine."

At that she drew back in a startled way as though his words had gone beyond her expectations.

"How do I know I can trust you?" she said presently, half to herself, half to him.

"You can," he said, and it was as though he flung the whole of his enigmatic and vivid personality into those two
"You can," he said again. "Absolutely."

"I must think," she muttered, pressing her hands to her head. "So much depends--how can I trust you? Why should I--why?"

"Because I'll trust you first," he answered with a touch of exultation in his manner. "Listen to me and I'll tell you everything. And that means I put my life in your hands. Well, that's nothing; I would do that any time; but other people's lives will be in your power, too--yes, and everything I'm here for, everything. Now listen."

"Not now," she interrupted sharply. "He may be watching, listening--he generally is." Again there was no need between them to specify to whom the pronoun referred. "Will you meet me tonight near the sweet-pea border--about nine?"

She glided away as she spoke without waiting for him to answer, and as soon as he was free from the magic of her presence, reaction came and he was torn by a thousand doubts and fears and worse.

"Why, I'm mad, mad," he groaned. "I've no right to tell what I said I would, no right at all."

And again there returned to him his vivid, dreadful memory of how she had started on that midnight drive with her car so awfully laden.

"Did she not know?"

And though he would willingly have left his life in her hands, he knew he had no right to put that of others there, and yet it seemed to him he must keep the appointment and the promise he had made.

About nine that evening, then, he made his way to the sweet-pea border, though, as he went, he resolved that he would not tell her what he had said he would.

Because he trusted his own strength so little when he was with her, he confirmed this resolution by an oath he swore to himself: and even that he was not certain would be a sure protection against the witchery she wielded.

So it was with a mind doubtful and troubled more than it had ever been since the beginning of these things that he came to the border where the sweet-peas grew, and saw a dark shadow already close by them.

But when he came a little nearer he saw that it was not Ella who was there but Deede Dawson and his first thought was that she had betrayed him.

"That you, Dunn?" Deede Dawson hailed him in his usual pleasant, friendly manner.

"Yes," Dunn answered warily, keeping himself ready for any eventuality.

Deede Dawson took a cigar from his pocket and lighted it and offered one to Dunn, who refused it abruptly.

Deede Dawson laughed at that in his peculiar, mirthless way.

"Am I being the third that's proverbially no company?" he asked. "Were you expecting to find some one else here? I thought I saw a white frock vanish just as I came up."

"That's why I waited. You are being just a little bit rapid in this affair, aren't you?"

"I don't know why. You said something, didn't you?" muttered Dunn, beginning to think that, after all, Deede Dawson's presence here was due to accident--or rather to his unceasing and unfailing watchfulness, and not to any treachery of Ella's.

"Yes, I did, didn't I?" he agreed pleasantly. "But you are a working gardener taken on out of charity to give you a chance and keep you out of gaol, and you are looking a little high when you think of your master's ward and daughter, aren't you?"

"There was a time when I shouldn't have thought so," answered Dunn.

"We're talking of the present, my good man," Deede Dawson said impatiently. "If you want the girl you must win her. It can be done, but it won't be easy."

"Tell me how," said Dunn.

"Oh, that's going too fast and too far," answered the other with his mirthless laugh. "Now, there's Mr. John Clive--what about him?"

"I'll answer for him," replied Dunn slowly and thickly. "I've put better men than John Clive out of my way before today."

"That's the way to talk," cried Deede Dawson. "Dunn, dare you play a big game for big stakes?"

"Try me," said Dunn.

"If I showed you," Deede Dawson's voice sank to a whisper, "if I showed you a pretty girl for a wife--a fortune to win--what would you say?"

"Try me," said Dunn again, and then, making his voice as low and hoarse as was Dunn's, he asked:

"Is it Clive?"

"Later--perhaps," answered Deede Dawson. "There's some one else--first. Are you ready?"
"Try me," said Dunn for the third time, and as he spoke his quick ear caught the faint sound of a retreating footstep, and he told himself that Ella must have lingered near and had perhaps heard all they said.

"Try me," he said once more, speaking more loudly and clearly this time.

CHAPTER XIV

LOVE-MAKING AT NIGHT

Dunn went to his room that night with the feeling that a crisis was approaching. And he wished very greatly that he knew how much Ella had overheard of his talk with her stepfather, and what interpretation she had put upon it.

He determined that in the morning he would take the very first opportunity he could find of speaking to her.

But in the morning it appeared that Mrs. Dawson had had a bad night, and was very unwell, and Ella hardly stirred from her side all day.

Even when Clive called in the afternoon she would not come down, but sent instead a message begging to be excused because of her mother's indisposition, and Dunn, from a secure spot in the garden, watched the young man retire, looking very disconsolate.

This day, too, Dunn saw nothing of Deede Dawson, for that gentleman immediately after breakfast disappeared without saying anything to anybody, and by night had still not returned.

Dunn therefore was left entirely to himself, and to him the day seemed one of the longest he had ever spent.

That Ella remained so persistently with her mother troubled him a good deal, for he did not think such close seclusion on her part could be really necessary.

He was inclined to fear that Ella had overheard enough of what had passed between him and Deede Dawson to rouse her mistrust, and that she was therefore deliberately keeping out of his way.

Then too, he was troubled in another fashion by Deede Dawson's absence, for he was afraid it might mean that plans were being prepared, or possibly action being taken, that might mature disastrously before he himself was ready to act.

All day this feeling of unrest and apprehension continued, and at night when he went upstairs to bed it was stronger than ever. He felt convinced now that Ella was deliberately avoiding him. But then, if she distrusted him, that must be because she feared he was on her stepfather's side, and if it seemed to her that who was on his side was of necessity an object of suspicion to herself, then there could be no such bond of dread and guilt between them as any guilty knowledge on her part of Wright's death would involve.

The substantial proof this exercise in logic appeared to afford of Ella's innocence brought him much comfort, but did not lighten his sense of apprehension and unrest, for he thought that in this situation in which he found himself his doubts of Ella had merely been turned into doubts on Ella's part of himself, and that the one was just as likely as the other to end disastrously.

"Though I don't know what I can do," he muttered as he stood in his attic, "if I gain Deede Dawson's confidence I lose Ella's, and if I win Ella's, Deede Dawson will at once suspect me."

He went over to the window and looked out, supporting himself on his elbows, and gazing moodily into the darkness.

As he stood there a faint sound came softly to his ear through the stillness of the quiet night in which nothing stirred.

He listened, and heard it again. Beyond doubt some one was stirring in the garden below, moving about there very cautiously and carefully, and at once Dunn glided from the room and down the stairs with all that extraordinary lightness of tread and agility of movement of which his heavy body and clumsy-looking build gave so small promise.

He had not been living so many days in the house without having taken certain precautions, of which one had been to secure for himself a swift and silent egress whenever necessity might arise.

Keys to both the front and back doors were in his possession, and the passage window on the ground floor he could at need lift bodily from its frame, leaving ample room for passage either in or out. This was the method of departure he chose now since he did not know but that the doors might be watched.

Lifting the window down, he swung himself outside, replacing behind him the window so that it appeared to be as firmly in position as ever, but could be removed again almost instantly should need arise.

Once outside he listened again, and though at first everything was quiet, presently he heard again a cautious step going to and fro at a little distance.

Crouching in the shadow of the house, he listened intently, and soon was able to assure himself that there was but one footstep and that he would have only one individual to deal with.

"It won't be Deede Dawson's," he thought to himself, "but it may very likely be some one waiting for him to return. I must find out who--and why."

Slipping through the darkness of the night, with whose shadows he seemed to melt and mingle, as though he
were but another one of them, he moved quickly in the direction of these cautious footsteps he had listened to.

They had ceased now, and the silence was profound, for those faint multitudinous noises of the night that murmur without ceasing in the woods and fields are less noticeable near the habitations of men.

A little puzzled, Dunn paused to listen again and once more crept forward a careful yard or two, and then lay still, feeling it would not be safe to venture further till he was more sure of his direction, and till some fresh sound to guide him reached his ears.

He had not long to wait, for very soon, from quite close by, he heard something that surprised and perplexed him equally—a deep, long-drawn sigh.

Again he heard it, and in utter wonder asked himself who this could be who came into another person's garden late at night to stand and sigh, and what such a proceeding could mean.

Once more he heard the sigh, deeper even than before, and then after it a low murmur in which at first he could distinguish nothing, but then caught the name of Ella being whispered over and over again.

He bent forward, more and more puzzled, trying in vain to make out something in the darkness, and then from under a tree, whose shadow had hitherto been a complete concealment, there moved forward a form so tall and bulky there could be little doubt whom it belonged to.

"John Clive--what on earth--!") Dunn muttered, his bewilderment increasing, and the next moment he understood and had some difficulty in preventing himself from bursting out laughing as there reached him the unmistakable sound of a kiss lightly blown through the air.

Clive was sending a kiss through the night towards Ella's room and his nocturnal visit was nothing more than the whim of a love-sick youth.

With Dunn, his first amusement gave way almost at once to an extreme annoyance.

For, in the first place, these proceedings seemed to him exceedingly impertinent, for what possible right did Clive imagine he had to come playing the fool like this, sighing in the dark and blowing kisses like a baby to its mammy?

And secondly, unless he were greatly mistaken, John Clive might just as sensibly and safely have dropped overboard from a ship in mid-Atlantic for a swim as come to indulge his sentimentalities in the Bittermeads garden at night.

"You silly ass!" he said in a voice that was very low, but very distinct and very full of an extreme disgust and anger.

Clive fairly leaped in the air with his surprise, and turned and made a sudden dash at the spot whence Dunn's voice had come, but where Dunn no longer was.

"What the blazes--!?" he began, spluttering in ineffectual rage. "You--you--!"

"You silly ass!" Dunn repeated, no less emphatically than before.

Clive made another rush that a somewhat prickly bush very effectually stopped.

"You--who are you--where--what--how dare you?" he gasped as he picked himself up and tried to disentangle himself from the prickles.

"Don't make such a row," said Dunn from a new direction. "Do you want to raise the whole neighbourhood? Haven't you played the fool enough? If you want to commit suicide, why can't you cut your throat quietly and decently at home, instead of coming alone to the garden at Bittermeads at night?"

There was a note of sombre and intense conviction in his voice that penetrated even the excited mind of the raging Clive.

"What do you mean?" he asked, and then:

"Who are you?"

"Never mind who I am," answered Dunn. "And I mean just what I say. You might as well commit suicide out of hand as come fooling about here alone at night."

"You're crazy, you're talking rubbish!" Clive exclaimed.

"I'm neither crazy nor talking rubbish," answered Dunn. "But if you persist in making such a row I shall take myself off and leave you to see the thing through by yourself and get yourself knocked on the head any way you like best."

"Oh, I'm beginning to understand," said Clive. "I suppose you're one of my poaching friends--are you? Look here, if you know who it was who attacked me the other night you can earn fifty pounds any time you like."

"Your poaching friends, as you call them," answered Dunn, "are most likely only anxious to keep out of your way. This has nothing to do with them."

"Well, come nearer and let me see you," Clive said. "You needn't be afraid. You can't expect me to take any notice of some one I can't see, talking rubbish in the dark."

"I don't much care whether you take any notice or not," answered Dunn. "You can go your own silly way if you
like, it's nothing to me. I've warned you, and if you care to listen I'll make my warning a little clearer. And one thing I will tell you--one man already has left this house hidden in a packing-case with a bullet through his brain, and I will ask you a question: 'How did your father die?'"

"He was killed in a motor-car accident," answered Clive hesitatingly, as though not certain whether to continue this strange and puzzling conversation or break it off.

"There are many accidents," said Dunn. "And that may have been one, for all I know, or it may not. Well, I've warned you. I had to do that. You'll probably go on acting like a fool and believing that nowadays murders don't happen, but if you're wise, you'll go home to bed and run no more silly risks."

"Of course I'm not going to pay the least attention," began Clive, when Dunn interrupted him sharply.

"Hush! hush!" he said sharply. "Crouch down: don't make a sound, don't stir or move. Hush!"

For Dunn's sharp ear had caught the sound of approaching footsteps that were drawing quickly nearer, and almost instantly he guessed who it would be, for there were few pedestrians who came along that lonely road so late at night.

There were two of them apparently, and at the gate of Bittermeads they halted.

"Well, good night," said then a voice both Dunn and Clive knew at once for Deede Dawson's. "That was a pretty check by the knight I showed you, wasn't it?"

A thin, high, somewhat peculiar voice cursed Deede Dawson, chess, and the pretty mate by the knight very comprehensively.

"It's young Clive that worries me," said the voice when it had finished these expressions of disapproval. "No need," answered Deede Dawson's voice with that strange mirthless laugh of his. "No need at all; before the week's out he'll trouble no one any more."

When he heard this, Clive would have betrayed himself by some startled movement or angry exclamation had not Dunn's heavy hand upon his shoulder held him down with a grave and steady pressure there was no disregarding.

Deede Dawson and his unknown companion went on towards the house, and admitted themselves, and as the door closed behind them Clive swung round sharply in the darkness towards Dunn.

"What's it mean?" he muttered in the bewildered and slightly-pathetic voice of a child at once frightened and puzzled. "What for? Why should any one--?"

"It's a long story," began Dunn, and paused.

He saw that the unexpected confirmation of his warning Clive had thus received from Deede Dawson's own lips had rendered his task of convincing Clive immensely more easy.

What he had wished to say had now at least a certainty of being listened to, a probability of being believed, and there was at any rate, he supposed, no longer the danger he had before dreaded of Clive's going straight with the whole story to Deede Dawson in arrogant disbelief of a word of it.

But he still distrusted Clive's discretion, and feared some rash and hasty action that might ruin all his plans, and allow Deede Dawson time to escape.

Besides he felt that the immediate task before him was to find out who Deede Dawson's new companion was, and, if possible, overhear anything they might have to say to each other.

That, and the discovery of the new-comer's identity, might prove to be of the utmost importance.

"I can't explain now," he said hurriedly. "I'll see you tomorrow sometime. Don't do anything till you hear from me. Your life may depend on it--and other people's lives that matter more."

"Tell me who you are first," Clive said quickly, incautiously raising his voice. "I can manage to take care of myself all right, I think, but I want to know who you are."

"H-ssh!" muttered Dunn. "Not so loud."

"There was a fellow made an attack on me one night a little while ago," Clive went on unheedingly. "You remind me of him somehow. I don't think I trust you, my man. I think you had better come along to the police with me."

But Dunn's sharp ears had caught the sound of the house door opening cautiously, and he guessed that Deede Dawson had taken the alarm and was creeping out to see who invaded so late at night the privacy of his garden.

"Clear out quick! Quiet! If you want to go on living. I'll stop them from following if I can. If you make the least noise you're done for."

Most likely the man they had seen in his company would be with him, and both of them would be armed. Neither Clive nor Dunn had a weapon, and Dunn saw the danger of the position and took the only course available.

"Go," he whispered fiercely into Clive's ear.

CHAPTER XV
THE SOUND OF A SHOT
He melted away into the darkness as he spoke, and through the night he slipped, one shadow more amongst many, from tree to bush, from bush to tree. Across a patch of open grass he crawled on his hands and knees; and once lay flat on his face when against the skyline he saw a figure he was sure was Deede Dawson's creep by a yard or two on his right hand.

On his left another shadow showed, distinguishable in the night only because it moved.

In a moment both shadows were gone, secret and deadly in the dark, and Dunn was very sure that Clive's life and his own both hung upon a slender chance, for if either of them was discovered the leaping bullet would do the rest.

It would be safe and easy--suspected burglars in a garden at midnight--nothing could be said. He lay very still with his face to the dewy sod, and all the night seemed full to him of searching footsteps and of a swift and murderous going to and fro.

He heard distinctly from the road a sudden, muffled sound as Clive in the darkness blunderingly missed his footing and fell upon one knee.

"That's finished him," Dunn thought grimly, his ears straining for the sharp pistol report that would tell Clive's tale was done, and then he was aware of a cat, a favourite of Ella's and often petted by himself, that was crouching near by under a tree, most likely much puzzled and alarmed by this sudden irruption of hurrying men into its domain. Instantly Dunn saw his chance, and seizing the animal, lifted it and threw it in the direction where he guessed Deede Dawson to be.

His guess was good and fortune served him well, for the tabby flying caterwauling through the air alighted almost exactly in front of Deede Dawson on top of a small bush. For a moment it hung there, quite unhurt, but very frightened, and emitted a yell, then fled.

In the quietness the tumult of its scrambling flight sounded astonishingly loud, so that it sounded as through a miniature avalanche had been let loose in the garden.

"Only cats," Deede Dawson exclaimed disgustedly, and from behind, nearer the house, Dunn called:

"Who's there? What is it? What's the matter? Is it Mr. Dawson? Is anything wrong?"

"I think there is," said Deede Dawson softly. "I think, perhaps, there is. What are you doing out here at this time of night, Charley Wright?"

"I heard a noise and came down to see what it was," answered Dunn. "There was a light in the breakfast-room, but I didn't see any one, and the front door was open so I came out here. Is anything wrong?"

"That's what I want to know," said Deede Dawson. "Come back to the house with me. If any one is about, he can just take himself off."

He spoke the last sentence loudly, and Dunn took it as a veiled instruction to his companion to depart.

He realized that if he had saved Clive he had done so at the cost of missing the best opportunity that had yet come his way of obtaining very important, and, perhaps, decisive information.

To have discovered the identity of this stranger who had come visiting Deede Dawson might have meant much, and he told himself angrily that Clive's safety had certainly not been worth purchasing at the cost of such a lost chance, though he supposed that was a point on which Clive himself might possibly entertain a different opinion.

But now there was nothing for it but to go quietly back to the house, for clearly Deede Dawson's suspicions were aroused and he had his revolver ready in his hand.

"I suppose it was only cats all the time," he observed, with apparent unconcern. "But at first I made sure there were no burglars in the house."

"And I suppose," suggested Deede Dawson. "You think one burglar's enough in a household."

"I don't mean to have any one else mucking around," growled Dunn in answer.

"Very admirable sentiments," said Deede Dawson and asked several more questions that showed he still entertained some suspicion of Dunn, and was not altogether satisfied that his appearance in the garden was quite innocent, or that the noise heard there was due solely to cats.

Dunn answered as best he could, and Deede Dawson listened and smiled, and smiled again, and watched him from eyes that did not smile at all.

"Oh, well," Deede Dawson said at last, with a yawn. "Anyhow, it's all right now. You had better get along back to bed, and I'll lock up." He accompanied Dunn into the hall and watched him ascend the stairs, and as Dunn went slowly up them he felt by no means sure that soon a bullet would not come questing after him, searching for heart or brain.

For he was sure that Deede Dawson still suspected him, and he knew Deede Dawson to be very sudden and swift in action. But nothing happened, he reached the broad, first landing in safety, and he was about to go on up to his attic when he heard a door at the end of the passage open and saw Ella appear in her dressing-gown.

"What is the matter?" she asked, in a low voice.

"It's all right," he answered. "There was a noise in the garden, and I came down to see what it was, but it's only
"Oh, is that all?" she said distrustfully.
"Yes," he answered, in a lower voice still, he said:
"Will you tell me something? Do you know any one who talks in a very peculiar shrill high voice?"
She did not answer, and, after a moment's hesitation, went back into her room and closed the door behind her.
He went on up to his attic with the feeling that she could have answered if she had wished to, and lay down in a troubled and dispirited mood.

For he was sure now that Ella mistrusted him and would give him no assistance, and that weighed upon him greatly, as did also his conviction that what it behoved him above all else to know--the identity of the man who, in this affair, stood behind Deede Dawson and made use of his fierce and fatal energies--he had had it in his power to discover and had failed to make use of the opportunity.

"I would rather know that," he said to himself, "than save a dozen Clives ten times over." Though again it occurred to him that on this point Clive might hold another opinion. "If he hadn't made such a blundering row I might have got to know who Deede Dawson's visitor was. I must try to get a word with Clive tomorrow by hook or crook, though I daresay Deede Dawson will be very much on the lookout."

However, next morning Deede Dawson not only made no reference to the events of the night, but had out the car and went off immediately after breakfast without saying when he would be back.

As soon after his departure as possible, Dunn also set out and took his way through the woods towards Ramsdon Place on the look-out for an opportunity to speak to Clive unobserved.

He thought it most likely that Clive would be drawn towards the vicinity of Bittermeads by the double fascination of curiosity and fear, and he supposed that if he waited and watched in the woods he would be sure presently to see him.

But though he remained for long hidden at a spot whence he could command the road to Bittermeads from Ramsdon Place, he saw nothing at all of Clive, and the sunny lazy morning was well advanced when he was startled by the sound of a gun shot some distance away.

"A keeper shooting rabbits, I suppose," he thought, looking round just in time to see Ella running through the wood from the direction whence the sound of the shot had seemed to come, and then vanish again with a quick look behind her into the heart of a close-growing spinney.

CHAPTER XVI
IN THE WOOD

There had been an air of haste, almost of furtiveness, about this swift appearance and more swift vanishing of Ella, that made Dunn ask himself uneasily what errand she could have been on.

He hesitated for a moment, half expecting to see her return again, or that there would be some other development, but he heard and saw nothing.

He caught no further glimpse of Ella, whom the green depths of the spinney hid well; and he heard no more shots.

After a little, he left the spot where he had been waiting and went across to where he had seen her.

The exact spot where she had entered the spinney was marked, for she had broken the branch of a young tree in brushing quickly by it, and a bramble she had trodden on had not yet lifted itself from the earth to which she had pressed it.

By other signs like these, plain enough and easy to read--for she had hurried on in great haste and without care, almost, indeed, as one who fled from some great danger or from some dreadful sight, and who had no thought to spare save for flight alone--he followed the way she had gone till it took him to a beaten public path that almost at once led over a stile to the high road which passed in front of Bittermeads. Along this beaten path, trodden by many, Ella's light foot had left no perceptible mark, and Dunn made no attempt to track her further, since it seemed certain that she had been simply hurried back home.

"She was badly frightened over something or another," he said to himself. "She never stopped once, she went as straight and quick as she could. I wonder what upset her like that?"

He went back the way he had come, and at the spot where he had seen her enter the spinney he set to work to pick up her trail in the direction whence she had appeared, for he thought that if he followed it he might find out what had been the cause of her evident alarm.

The ground was much more open here, and the trail correspondingly more difficult to follow, for often there was little but a trodden blade of grass to show where she had passed; and sometimes, where the ground was bare and hard, there was no visible sign left at all.

Once or twice at such places he was totally at fault, but by casting round in a wide circle like a dog scenting his prey he was able to pick up her tracks again.
They seemed to lead right into the depths of the wood, through lonely spots that only the keepers knew, and where others seldom came.

But that he was on the right trail he presently had proof, for on the bank of a lovely and hidden dell he picked up a tiny embroidered handkerchief with the initials "E. C." worked in one corner.

It had evidently been lying there only a very short time, for it was perfectly clean and fresh, and he picked it up and held it for a moment in his hands, smiling to himself with pleasure at its daintiness and smallness, and yet still uneasily wondering why she had come here, and why she had fled away again so quickly.

The morning was very fine and calm, though in the west heavy clouds were gathering and seemed to promise rain soon. But overhead the sun shone brightly, the air was calm and warm, and the little dell on whose verge he stood a very pretty and pleasant place.

A small stream wandered through it, the grass that carpeted it was green and soft, near by a great oak stood alone and spread its majestic branches far out on every side to give cool shelter from the summer heat.

The thought occurred to Dunn that this was just such a pretty and secluded spot as two lovers might choose to exchange their vows in, and the thought stung him intolerably as he wondered whether it was for such a reason that Ella had come here.

But if so, why had she fled away again in such strange haste?

He walked on slowly for a yard or two, not now attempting to follow Ella's trail, for he had the impression that this was her destination, and that she had gone no further than here.

All at once he caught sight of the form of a man lying hidden in the long grass that nearly covered him from view just where the far-spreading branches of the great oak ceased to give their shade.

At first Dunn thought he was sleeping, and he was just about to call out to him when something in the rigidity of the man's position and his utter stillness struck him unpleasantly.

He went quickly to the man's side, and the face of dead John Clive, supine and still, stared up at him from unseeing eyes.

He had been killed by a charge of small shot fired at such close quarters that his breast was shot nearly in two and his clothing and flesh charred by the burning powder.

But Dunn, standing staring down at the dead man, saw not him, but Ella. Ella fleeing away silently and furtively through the trees as from some sight or scene of guilt and terror.

He stooped closer over the dead man. Death had been instantaneous. Of course there could be no doubt. From one hand a piece of folded paper had fallen.

Dunn picked it up, and saw that there was writing on it, and he read it over slowly.

"Dear Mr. Clive,—Can you meet me as before by the oak tomorrow at eleven? There is something I very much want to say to you.—Yours sincerely, "ELLA CAYLEY."

Was that, then, the lure which had brought John Clive to meet his death? Was this the bait that had made him disregard the warnings he had received, and come alone to so quiet and solitary a spot?

Dunn had a moment of quick envy of him; he lay so quiet and still in the warm sunshine, with nothing to trouble or distress him any more for ever.

Then, stumblingly and heavily, Dunn turned an went away, and his eyes were very hard, his bearded face set like iron.

Like a man in a dream, or one obsessed by some purpose before which all other things faded into nothingness, he went his way, the way Ella had taken in her flight—through the wood, through the spinney to the public foot-path, and then out on the road that led to Bittermeads.

When he entered the garden there, he saw Ella sitting quietly on a deck-chair close to her mother, quietly busy with some fancy work.

She rose and came towards him, her needlework still in her hands.
"What is the matter?" she said in a voice of some concern. "Are you ill?"
"No," he answered. "No. I've been looking for Mr. Clive."
"Have you?" she said, a little surprised apparently, but in no way flustered or disturbed. "Did you find him?"
Dunn did not answer, for indeed he could not, and she said again:
"Did you find him?"
Still he made no answer, for it seemed to him those four words were the most awful that any one had ever uttered since the beginning of the world.
"What is the matter?" she said again. "Is anything the matter?"
"Oh, no, no," he said, and he gave himself a little shake like a man wakening from deep sleep and trying to remember where he was.
"Well, then," she said.
"I found Mr. Clive," he said hardly and abruptly. And he repeated again: "Yes, I found him."
They remained standing close together and facing each other, and he saw her as through a veil of red, and it was as though a red mist enveloped her, and where her shadow lay the earth was red, he thought, and where she put her foot it seemed to him red tracks remained, and never before had he understood how utterly he loved her and must love her, now and for evermore.
But he uttered no sound and made no movement, only stood very still, thinking to himself how dreadful it was that he loved her so greatly.
She was not paying him any attention now. A rose bush was near by, and she picked one of the flowers, and arranged it carefully at her waist.
She said, still looking at him:
"Do you know--I wish you would shave yourself?"
"Why?" he mumbled.
"I should like to see you," she answered. "I think I have a curiosity to see you."
"I should think you could do that well enough," he said in the same low, mumbled tones.
"No," she answered. "I can only see some very untidy hair and a pair of eyes--not very nice eyes, rather frightening eyes. I should like to see the rest of your face some day so as to know what it's like."
"Perhaps you shall--some day," he said.
"Is that a threat?" she asked. "It sounded like one."
"Perhaps," he answered.
She laughed lightly and turned away.
"You make me very curious," she said. "But then, you've always done that."
She went back to her seat by her mother, and he walked on moodily to the house.
Mrs. Dawson said to Ella:
"How can you talk to that man, my dear? I think he looks perfectly dreadful--hardly like a human being."
"I was just telling him he ought to shave himself," said Ella. "I told him I should like to know what he was really like."
"I shall ask father," said Mrs. Dawson sternly, "to make it a condition of his employment here."

CHAPTER XVII
A DECLARATION
Dunn knew very well that he ought to give immediate information to the authorities of what had happened. But he did not. He told himself that nothing could help poor John Clive, and that any precipitate action on his part might still fatally compromise his plans, which were now so near completion.
But his real reason was that he knew that if he came forward he would be very closely questioned, and sooner or later forced to tell the things he knew so terribly involving Ella.
And he knew that to surrender her to the police and proclaim her to the world as guilty of such things were tasks beyond his strength; though, to himself, with a touch of wildness in his thoughts, he said that no proved and certain guilt should go unpunished even though his own hand--It was a train of ideas he did not pursue.
"Charley Wright first and now John Clive," he said to himself. "But the end is not yet."
Again he would not let his thoughts go on but checked them abruptly.
In this dark and troubled mood he went out to busy himself with the garden, and all the time he worked he watched with a sort of vertigo of horror where Ella sat in the sunshine by her mother's side, her white hands moving nimbly to and fro upon her needlework.
It was not long, however, before the tragedy of the wood was discovered, for Clive had been seen to go in that direction, and when he did not return a search was made that was soon successful.
The news was brought to Bittermeads towards evening by a tradesman's boy, who came up from the village to
"Have you heard?" he said to Dunn excitedly. "Mr. Clive's been shot dead by poachers."
"Oh--by poachers?" repeated Dunn.
"Yes, poachers," the boy answered, and went on excitedly to tell his tale with many, and generally very inaccurate, details.

But that the crime had been discovered and instantly set down to poachers was at least certain, and Dunn realized at once that the adoption of this simple and apparently plausible theory would put an end to all really careful investigation of the circumstances and make the discovery of the truth highly improbable.

For the idea that the murder was the work of poachers would, when once adopted, fill the minds of the police and of every one else, and no suspicion would be directed elsewhere.

By the tremendous relief he felt, Dunn understood how heavy had been the burden of fear and apprehension that till now had oppressed him.

If he had not found that handkerchief—if he had not secured that letter—why, by now the police would be at Bittermeads.

"All the same," he thought. "No one who is guilty shall escape through me."

But what this phrase meant, and what he intended to do, he would not permit himself to think out clearly or try to understand.

The boy, having told his story, hurried off to spread the news elsewhere to more appreciative ears, for, he thought disgustedly, it might have been just nothing at all for all the interest the gardener at Bittermeads had shown.

As soon as he was gone, Dunn went across to the house, and going up to the window of the drawing-room where Ella and her mother were having tea, he tapped on the pane.

Ella looked up and saw him, and came at once to open the window, while from behind Mrs. Dawson frowned in severe disapproval of what she considered a great liberty.

"Mr. Clive has been shot," Dunn said abruptly. "They say poachers did it. He was killed instantly."

Ella did not seem at first to understand. She looked puzzled and bewildered, and did not seem to grasp the full import of his words.

"What--what do you say?" she asked. "Mr. Clive--Who's killed?"

Dunn thought to himself that her acting was the most wonderful thing he had ever seen.

It was extraordinary that she should be able to make that grey pallor come over her cheeks as though the meaning of what he said were only now entering her mind; wonderful that she should be able so well to give the idea of a great horror and a great doubt coming slowly into her startled eyes.

"Mr. Clive?" she said again.

"Yes, he's been killed," Dunn said. "By poachers, apparently."

"What is that? What is that man saying?" shrilled Mrs. Dawson from behind. "Mr. Clive--John--why, he was here yesterday."

Dunn turned his back and walked away. He heard Ella call after him, but he would not look back because he feared what he might do if he obeyed her call.

With an odd buzzing in his ears, with the blood throbbing through his brain as though something must soon break there, he walked blindly on, and as he came to the gate of Bittermeads he saw a motor-car coming up the road.

It was Deede Dawson's car, and he was driving it, and by his side sat a sulkily-smiling stranger, his air that of one not sure of his welcome, but determined to enforce it, in whom, with a quick start, Dunn recognized his burglar, the man whose attempt to break into Bittermeads he had frustrated, and whose place he had taken.

He put up his hand instinctively for them to stop, and Deede Dawson at once obeyed the gesture.

Dunn noticed that the smile upon his lips was more gentle and winning than ever, the look in his eyes more dark and menacing.

"Well, Dunn, what is it?" he said as pleasantly as he always spoke. "Mr. Allen," he added to his companion, "this is my man, Dunn, I told you about, my gardener and chauffeur, and a very industrious steady fellow—and quite trustworthy."

He seemed to lay a certain emphasis on the last two words, and Allen put his head on one side and looked at Dunn with an odd, mixture of familiarity, suspicion, hesitation, and an uncertain assumption of superiority, but with no hint of recognition showing.

"Glad to hear it," he said. "You always want to know whom you can trust."

"Mr. Clive has been murdered," Dunn said abruptly. "Poachers, it is said. Did you know?"

"We heard about it as we came through the village," answered Deede Dawson. "Very sad, very dreadful. It will be a great shock to poor Ella, I fear. Take the car on to the garage, will you?" he added.

He drove on up the drive, and at the front door they alighted and entered the house together. Dunn followed, and
getting into the car, drove it to the garage, where he busied himself cleaning it. As he worked he wondered very much what was the meaning of this sudden appearance on terms of friendship with Deede Dawson of this man Allen, whom he had last seen trying to break into the house at night.

Was Allen an accomplice of Deede Dawson, or a dupe, or, more probably, a new recruit?

At any rate, to Dunn it seemed that the crisis he had expected and prepared for was now fast approaching, and he told himself that if he had failed in Clive's case, those others he was working for he must not fail to save.

"Looks as if Dawson's plans were nearly ready," he said to himself. "Well, so are mine."

He finished his work and shutting the garage door, he was turning away when he saw Ella coming towards him.

She was extremely pale, and her eyes seemed larger than ever, and very bright against the deathly whiteness of her cheeks.

She was wearing a blouse that was cut a little low, and he noticed with a kind of terror how soft and round was her throat, like a column of pale and perfect ivory.

He hoped she would not speak to him, for he thought perhaps he could not bear it if she did, but she halted near by, and said:

"This is very dreadful about poor Mr. Clive."

"Very," he answered moodily.

"Why should poachers kill him?" she asked. "Why should they want to?"

"I don't know," he answered, watching not her but her soft throat, where he could see a pulse fluttering. "Perhaps it wasn't poachers," he added.

She started violently, and gave a quick look that seemed to make yet more certain the certainty he already entertained.

"Who else could it be?" she asked in a low voice.

He did not answer.

After what seemed a long time she said:

"You asked me a question once--do you remember?"

He shook his head.

"Why don't you speak? Why can't you speak?" she cried angrily. "Why can't you say something instead of just shaking your head?"

"You see, I've asked you so many questions," he said slowly. "Perhaps I shall ask you some more some day--which question do you mean?"

"I mean when you asked me if I had ever met any one who spoke in a very shrill, high whistling sort of voice? Do you remember?"

"Yes," he said. "You wouldn't tell me."

"Well, I will now," she said. "I did meet a man once with a voice like that. Do you remember the night you came here that I drove away in the car with a packing-case you carried downstairs?"

"Do I--remember?" he gasped, for that memory, and the thought of how she had driven away into the night with, that grisly thing behind her on the car had never since left his mind by night or by day.

"Yes," she exclaimed impatiently. "Why do you keep staring so? Are you as stupid as you choose to look? Do you remember?"

"I remember," he answered heavily. "I remember very well."

"Well, then, the man I took that packing-case to had a voice just like that--high and shrill, whistling almost."

"I thought as much," said Dunn. "May I ask you another question?"

She nodded.

"May I smoke?"

She nodded again with a touch of impatience.

He took a cigarette from his pocket and put it in his mouth and lighted a match, but the match, when he had lighted it, he used to put light to a scrap of folded paper with writing on it, like a note.

This piece of paper he used to light his cigarette with and when he had done so he watched the paper burn to an ash, not dropping it to the ground till the little flame stung his fingers.

The ash that had fallen he ground into the path where they stood with the heel of his boot.

"What have you burned there?" she asked, as if she suspected it was something of importance he had destroyed.

In fact it was the note that had fallen from dead John Clive's hand wherein Ella had asked him to meet her at the oak where he had met his death.

That bit of paper would have been enough, Dunn thought, to place a harsh hempen noose about the soft white throat he watched where the little pulse still fluttered up and down. But now it was burnt and utterly destroyed, and no one would ever see it.
At the thought he laughed and she drew back, very startled.
"Oh, what is the matter?" she exclaimed.
"Nothing," he answered. "Nothing in all the world except that I love you."

CHAPTER XVIII
ROBERT DUNN'S ENEMY

When he had said this he went a step or two aside and sat down on the stump of a tree. He was very agitated and disturbed for he had not in the very least meant to say such a thing, he had not even known that he really felt like that.

It was, indeed, a rush and power of quite unexpected passion that had swept him away and made him for the moment lose all control of himself. Ella showed much more composure. She had become extraordinarily pale, but otherwise she did not appear in any way agitated.

She remained silent, her eyes bent on the ground, her only movement a gesture by which she rubbed softly and in turn each of her wrists as though they hurt her.

"Well, can't you say something?" he asked roughly, annoyed by her persistent silence.
"I don't see that there's anything for me to say," she answered.
"Oh, well now then," he muttered; quite disconcerted.

She raised her eyes from the ground, and for the first time looked full at him, in her expression both curiosity and resentment.

"It is perfectly intolerable," she said with a heaving breast. "Will you tell me who you are?"
"I've told you one thing," he answered sullenly, his eyes on fire. "I should have thought that was enough. I'll tell you nothing more."

"I think you are the most horrid man I ever met," she cried. "And the very, very ugliest--all that hair on your face so that no one can see anything else. What are you like when you cut it off?"

"Does that matter?" he asked, in the same gruff and surly manner.

"I should think it matters a good deal when I ask you," she exclaimed. "Do you expect any one to care for a man she has never seen--nothing but hair. You hurt my wrists awfully that night," she added resentfully. "And you've never even hinted you're sorry."

His reply was unexpected and it disconcerted her greatly and for the first time, for he caught both her wrists in his hands and kissed them passionately where the cords had been.

"You mustn't do that, please don't do that," she said quickly, trying to release herself.

Her strength was nothing to his and he stood up and put his arm around her and strained her to him in an embrace so passionate and powerful she could not have resisted it though she had wished to.

But no thought of resistance came to her, since for the moment she had lost all consciousness of everything save the strange thrill of his bright, clear eyes looking so closely into hers, of his strong arms holding her so firmly.

He released her, or rather she at last freed herself by an effort he did not oppose, and she fled away down the path.

She had an impression that her hair would come down and that that would make her look a fright, and she put up her hands hurriedly to secure it. She never looked back to where he stood, breathing heavily and looking after her and thinking not of him, but of two dead men whom he had seen of late.

"Shall I make the third?" he wondered. "I do not care if I do, not I."

The path Ella had fled by led into another along which when she reached it she saw Deede Dawson coming.

She stopped at once and began to busy herself with a flower-bed overrun with weeds, but she could not entirely conceal her agitation from her stepfather's cold grey eyes.

"Oh, there you are, Ella," he said, with all that false geniality of his that filled the girl with such loathing and distrust. "Have you seen Dunn? Oh, there he is, isn't he? I wanted to ask you, Ella, what do you think of Dunn?"

She glanced over her shoulder towards where Dunn stood, and she managed to answer with a passable air of indifference.

"Well, I suppose," she said, "that he is quite the ugliest man I ever saw. Of course, if he cut all of that hair off--"

Deede Dawson laughed though his eyes remained as hard and cold as ever.

"I shall have to give him orders to shave," he said. "Your mother was telling me I ought to the other day, she said it didn't look respectable to have a man about with all that hair on his face. Though I don't see myself why hair isn't respectable, do you?"

"It looks odd," answered Ella carelessly.

Deede Dawson laughed again, and walked on to where Dunn was standing waiting for him. With his perpetual smile that his cold and evil eyes so strangely contradicted, he said to him:

"Well, what have you and Ella been talking about?"
"Why do you ask?" growled Dunn.

"Because she looks upset," answered Deede Dawson. "Oh, don't be shy about it. Shall I give you a little good advice?"

"What?"

"Never shave."

"Why not?"

"Because that thick growth of hair hiding your face gives you an air of mystery and romance no woman could possibly resist. You're a perpetual puzzle, and to pique a woman's curiosity is the surest way to interest her. Why, there are plenty of women who would marry you simply to find out what is under all that hair. So never you shave."

"I don't mean to."

"Unless, of course, you have to--for purposes of disguise, for example."

"I thought you were hinting that the beard itself was a disguise," retorted Dunn.

"Removing it might become a better one," answered Deede Dawson. "You told me once you knew this part fairly well. Do you know Wreste Abbey?"

Dunn gave his questioner a scowling look that seemed full of anger and suspicion.

"What about it if I do?" he asked.

"I am asking if you do know it," said Deede Dawson.

"Yes, I do. Well?"

"It belongs to Lord Chobham, doesn't it?"

Dunn nodded.

"Old man, isn't he?"

"I'm not a book of reference about Lord Chobham," answered Dunn. "If you want to know his age, you can easily find out, I suppose. What's the sense of asking me a lot of questions like that?"

"He has no family, and his heir is his younger brother, General Dunsmore, who has one son, Rupert, I believe. Do you know if that's so?"

"Look here," said Dunn, speaking with a great appearance of anger. "Don't you go too far, or maybe something you won't like will happen. If you've anything to say, say it straight out. Or there'll be trouble."

Deede Dawson seemed a little surprised at the vehemence of the other's tone.

"What's the matter?" he asked. "Don't you like the family, or what's upsetting you?"

Dunn seemed almost choking with fury. He half-lifted one hand and let it fall again.

"If ever I get hold of that young Rupert Dunsmore," he said with a little gasp for breath. "If ever I come face to face with him--man to man--"

"Dear me!" smiled Deede Dawson, lifting his eyebrows. "I'm treading on sore toes, it seems. What's the trouble between you?"

"Never you mind," replied Dunn roughly. "That's my business. But no man ever had a worse enemy than he's been to me."

"Has he, though?" said Deede Dawson, who seemed very interested and even a little excited. "What did he do?"

"Never you mind," Dunn repeated. "That's my affair, but I swore I'd get even with him some day and I will, too."

"Suppose," said Deede Dawson. "Suppose I showed you a way?"

Dunn did not answer at first, and for some moments the two men stood watching each other and staring into each other's eyes as though each was trying to read the depths of the other's soul.

"Suppose," said Deede Dawson very softly. "Suppose you were to meet Rupert Dunsmore--alone--quite alone?"

Still Dunn did not answer, but somehow it appeared that his silence was full of a very deadly significance.

"Suppose you did--what would you do?" murmured Deede Dawson again, and his voice sank lower with each word he uttered till the last was a scarce-audible whisper.

Dunn stopped and picked up a hoe that was lying near by. He placed the tough ash handle across his knee, and with a movement of his powerful hands, he broke the hoe across.

The two smashed pieces he dropped on the ground, and looking at Deede Dawson, he said:

"Like that--if ever Rupert Dunsmore and I meet alone, only one of us will go away alive." And he confirmed it with an oath.

Deede Dawson clapped him on the shoulder, and laughed.

"Good!" he cried. "Why, you're the man I've been looking for for a long time. The fact is, Rupert Dunsmore played me a nasty trick once, and I want to clear accounts with him. Now, suppose I show him to you--?"

"You do that," said Dunn, and he repeated the oath he had sworn before. "You show him to me, and I'll take care he never troubles any one again."

"That's the way I like to hear a man talk," cried Deede Dawson. "Dunsmore has been away for a time on
business I can make a guess at, but he is coming back soon. Should you know him if you saw him?"

"Should I know him?" repeated Dunn contemptuously. "Should I know myself?"

"That's good," said Deede Dawson again. "By the way, perhaps you can tell me, hasn't Lord Chobham a rather
distant cousin, Walter Dunsmore, living with him as secretary or something of the sort --quite a distant relative, I
believe, though in the direct line of succession?"

"Very likely," said Dunn indifferently. "I think so, but I don't care anything about the rest of them. It's only
Rupert Dunsmore I have anything against."

CHAPTER XIX
THE VISIT TO WRESTE ABBEY

It was a little later when Deede Dawson returned to the subject of Wreste Abbey.

"Lord Chobham has a very valuable collection of plate and jewellery and so on, hasn't he?" he asked.

"Oh, there's plenty of the stuff there," Dunn answered. "Why?"

"Oh, I was thinking a visit might be made fairly profitable," Deede Dawson said carelessly, for the first time
definitely throwing off his mask of law-abiding citizen under which he lived at Bittermeads.

"It would be a risky job," answered Dunn, showing no surprise at the suggestion. "The stuff's well guarded, and
then, that's not what I'm thinking about--it's meeting Rupert Dunsmore, man to man, and no one to come between us.
If that ever happens--"

Deede Dawson nodded reassuringly.

"That'll be all right," he said. "So you shall, I promise you that. But we might as well kill two birds with one
stone and clear a bit of profit, too. I've got to live, like any one else, and I haven't five thousand a year of my own, so
I get my living out of those who have, and I don't see who has any right to blame me. Mind, if there was any money
in chess, I should be a millionaire, but there isn't, and if a man can make a fortune on the Stock Exchange, which
takes no more thought or skill than auction-bridge, why shouldn't I make a bit when I can? There's the 'D. D.' gambit
I've invented, people will be studying and playing for centuries, but it'll never bring me a penny for all the brain-
work I put into it, and so I've got to protect myself, haven't I?"

"It's what I do with less talk about it," answered Dunn contemptuously. "Why, I've guessed all that from the first
when you weren't so all-fired keen on seeing me in gaol, as most of your honest, hard-working lot, who only do their
swindling in business-hours, would have been. And I've kept my eyes open, of course. It wasn't hard to twig you did
a bit on the cross yourself. Well, that's your affair, but one thing I do want to know--how much does Miss Cayley
know?"

For all his efforts he could not keep his anxiety entirely out of his voice as he said this, and recognizing that
thereby he had perhaps risked rousing some suspicion in the other's mind, he added:

"And her mother--the young lady and her mother, how much do they know?"

"Oh," answered Deede Dawson, with his false laugh and cold-watchful eyes. "My wife knows nothing at all, but
Ella's the best helper I've ever had. She looks so innocent, she can take in any one, and she never gives the show
away, she acts all the time. A wonderful girl and useful--you'd hardly believe how useful."

Dunn did not answer. It was only by a supreme effort that he kept his hands from Deede Dawson's throat. He did
not believe a word of what the other said, for he knew well the utter falseness of the man. None the less, the
accusation troubled him and chilled him to the heart, as though with the touch of the finger of death.

"You remember that packing-case," Deede Dawson added. "The one you helped me to get away from here the
night you came. Well, she knew what was in it, though you would never have thought so, to look at her, would
you?"

His cold eyes were very intent and keen as he said this, and Dunn thought to himself that it had been said more
to test any possible knowledge or suspicion of his own than for any other reason. With a manner of only slight
interest, he answered carelessly:

"Did she? Why? Wasn't it your stuff? Had it been pinched? But she was safe enough, the police would never
stop a smart young lady in a motor-car, except on very strong evidence."

"Perhaps not," agreed Deede Dawson. "That's one reason why Ella's so useful. But I've been thinking things out,
and trying to make them work in together, and I think the first thing to do is for you to drive Allen and Ella over to
Wreste Abbey this afternoon, so that they may have a good look around."

"Oh, Miss Cayley and Allen," Dunn muttered.

The new-comer, Allen, had been making himself very much at home at Bittermeads since his arrival, though he
had not so far troubled to any great extent either Ella in the house or Dunn outside. His idea of comfort seemed to be
to stay in bed very late, and spend his time when he did get up in the breakfast-room in the company of a box of
cigars and a bottle of whisky.

The suggestion that he and Ella should pay a visit together to Wreste Abbey was one that greatly surprised
"All right," he said. "This afternoon? I'll get the car ready."

"This is the afternoon the Abbey is thrown open to visitors, isn't it?" asked Deede Dawson. "Allen and Ella can get in as tourists, and have a good look round, and you can look round outside and get to know the lie of the land. There won't be long to wait, for Rupert Dunsmore will be back from his little excursion before long, I expect."

He laughed in his mirthless way, and walked off, and Dunn, as he got the car ready, seemed a good deal preoccupied and a little worried.

"How can he know that Rupert Dunsmore is coming back?" he said to himself. "Can he have any way of finding out things I don't know about? And if he did, how could he know--that? Most likely it's only a guess to soothe me down, and he doesn't really know anything at all about it."

After lunch, Allen and Ella appeared together, ready for their expedition. Ella looked her best in a big motoring coat and a close-fitting hat, with a long blue veil. Allen was, for almost the first time since his arrival, shaved, washed and tidy.

He looked indeed as respectable as his sinister and forbidding countenance would permit, and though Deede Dawson had made him as smart as possible, he had permitted him to gratify his own florid taste in adornment, so that his air of prosperity and wealth had the appearance of being that of some recently-enriched vulgarian whose association with a motor-car and a well-dressed girl of Ella's type was probably due to the fact that he had recently purchased them both out of newly-acquired wealth.

Dunn wore a neat chauffeur's costume, with which, however, his bearded face did not go too well. He felt indeed that their whole turn-out was far too conspicuous considering the real nature of their errand, and far too likely to attract attention, and he wondered if Deede Dawson's subtle and calculating mind had not for some private reason desired that to be so.

"He is keeping well in the background himself," Dunn mused. "He may reckon that if things go wrong--in case of any pursuit--it's a good move perhaps in a way, but he may find an unexpected check to his king opened on him."

The drive was a long one, and Ella noticed that though Dunn consulted his map frequently, he never appeared in any doubt concerning the way.

A little before three they drove into the village that lay round the park gates of Wreste Abbey.

Motors were not allowed in the park, so Dunn put theirs in the garage of the little hotel, that was already almost full, for visiting day at Wreste Abbey generally drew a goodly number of tourists, while Ella and Allen, in odd companionship, walked up to the Abbey by the famous approach through the chestnut avenue.

Allen was quiet and surly, and much on his guard, and very uncomfortable in Ella's company, and Ella herself, though for different reasons was equally silent.

But the beauty of the walk through the chestnut avenue, and of the vista with the great house at the end, drew from her a quick exclamation of delight.

"How beautiful a place this is," she said aloud. "And how peaceful and how quiet."

"Don't like these quiet places myself," grumbled Allen. "Don't like 'em, don't trust 'em. Give me lots of traffic; when everything's so awful quiet you've only got to kick your foot against a stone or drop a tool, and likely as not you'll wake the whole blessed place."

"Wake," repeated Ella, noticing the word, and she repeated it with emphasis. "Why do you say 'wake'?"

CHAPTER XX
ELLA'S WARNING

Ella did not say anything more, and in their character of tourists visiting the place, they were admitted to the Abbey and passed on though its magnificent rooms, where was stored a collection rich and rare even for one of the stateliest homes of England.

"What a wonderful place!" Ella sighed wistfully. Yet she could not enjoy the spectacle of all these treasures as she would have done at another time, for she was always watching Allen, who hung about a good deal, and seemed to look more at the locks of the cases that held some of the more valuable of the objects shown than at the things themselves, and generally spent fully half the time in each room at the window, admiring, the view, he said; but for quite another reason, Ella suspected.

"I shall speak when I get back," she said to herself, pale and resolute. "I don't care what happens; I don't care if I have to tell mother--perhaps she knows already. Anyhow, I shall speak."

Having come to this determination, she grew cheerful and more interested apparently in what they were seeing, as well as less watchful of her companion. When, presently, they left the house to go into the gardens, it happened that they noticed an old gentleman walking at a little distance behind a gate marked "Private," and leaning on the arm of a tall, thin, clean-shaven man of middle-age.

"Lord Chobham, the old gentleman," whispered a tourist, who was standing near. "I saw him once in the House
of Lords. That's his secretary with him, Mr. Dunsmore, one of the family; he manages everything now the old
gentleman is getting so feeble."

Ella walked on frowning and a little worried, for she thought she had seen the secretary before and yet could not
remember where. Soon she noticed Dunn, who had apparently been obeying Deede Dawson's orders to look round
outside and get to know the lie of the land.

He seemed at present to be a good deal interested in Lord Chobham and his companion, for he went and leaned
on the gate and stared at them so rudely that one or two of the other tourists noticed it and frowned at him. But he
took no notice, and presently, as if not seeing that the gate was marked "Private," he pushed it open and walked
through.

Noticing the impertinent intrusion almost at once, Mr. Dunsmore turned round and called "This is private."

Dunn did not seem to hear, and Mr. Dunsmore walked across to him with a very impatient air, while the little
group of tourists watched, with much interest and indignation and a very comforting sense of superiority.

"He ought to be sent right out of the grounds," they told each other. "That's the sort of rude behaviour other
people have to suffer for."

"Now, my man," said Mr. Dunsmore sharply, "this is private, you've no business here."

"Sorry, sir; beg pardon, I'm sure," said Dunn, touching his hat, and as he did so he said in a sharp, penetrating
whisper: "Look out-- trouble's brewing--don't know what, but look out, all the time."

He had spoken so quickly and quietly, in the very act of turning away, that none of the onlookers could have told
that a word had passed, but for the very violent start that Walter Dunsmore made and his quick movement forward
as if to follow the other. Immediately Dunn turned back towards him with a swift warning gesture of his hand.

"Careful, you fool, they're looking," he said in a quick whisper, and in a loud voice: "Very sorry, sir; beg pardon-
-I'm sure I didn't mean anything."

Walter Dunsmore swung round upon his heel and went quickly back to where Lord Chobham waited; and his
face was like that of one who has gazed into the very eyes of death.

"Lord in Heaven," he muttered, "it's all over, I'm done." And his hand felt for a little metal box he carried in his
waistcoat pocket and that held half a dozen small round tablets, each of them a strong man's death.

But he took his hand away again as he rejoined his cousin, patron, and employer, old Lord Chobham.

"What's the matter, Walter?" Lord Chobham asked. "You look pale."

"The fellow was a bit impudent; he made me angry," said Walter carelessly. He fingered the little box in his
waistcoat pocket and thought how one tablet on his tongue would always end it all. "By the way, oughtn't Rupert to
be back soon?" he asked.

"Yes, he ought," said Lord Chobham severely. "It's time he married and settled down--I shall speak to his father
about it. The boy is always rushing off somewhere or another when he ought to be getting to know the estate and the
 Tenants."

Walter Dunsmore laughed.

"I think he knows them both fairly well already," he said. "Not a tenant on the place but swears by Rupert. He's a
fine fellow, uncle."

"Oh, you always stick up for him; you and he were always friends," answered Lord Chobham in a grumbling
tone, but really very pleased. "I know I'm never allowed to say a word about Rupert."

"Well, he's a fine fellow and a good friend," said Walter, and the two disappeared into the house by a small side-
door as Dunn pushed his way through the group of tourists who looked at him with marked and severe disapproval.

"Disgraceful," one of them said quite loudly, and another added: "I believe he said something impudent to that
gentleman. I saw him go quite white, and look as if he were in two minds about ordering the fellow right out of the
grounds." And a third expressed the general opinion that the culprit looked a real ruffian with all that hair on his
face. "Might be a gorilla," said the third tourist. "And look what a clumsy sort of walk he has; perhaps he's been
drinking."

But Dunn was quite indifferent to, and indeed unaware of this popular condemnation as he made his way back to
the hotel garage where he had left their car. He seemed rather well pleased than otherwise as he walked on.

"Quite a stroke of luck for once," he mused, and he smiled to himself, and stroked the thick growth of his untidy
beard. "It's been worth while, for he didn't recognize me in the least, and had quite a shock, but, all the same, I shan't
be sorry to shave and see my own face again."

He had the car out and ready when Ella and Allen came back. Allen at once made an excuse to leave them, and
went into the hotel bar to get a drink of whisky, and when they were alone, Ella, who was looking very troubled and
thoughtful, said to Dunn

"We saw Lord Chobham in the garden with a gentleman some one told us was a relative of his, a Mr. Walter
Dunsmore. Did you see them?"
"Yes," answered Dunn, a little surprised, and giving her a quick and searching look from his bright, keen eyes. "I saw them. Why--"

"I think I've seen the one they said was Mr. Walter Dunsmore before, and I can't think where," she answered, puckering her brows. "I can't think--do you know anything about him?"

"I know he is Mr. Walter Dunsmore," answered Dunn slowly, "and I know he is one of the family, and a great friend of Rupert Dunsmore's. Rupert Dunsmore is Lord Chobham's nephew, you know, and heir, after his father, to the title and estates. His father, General Dunsmore, brought him and Walter up together like brothers, but recently Walter has lived at the Abbey as Lord Chobham's secretary and companion. The general likes to live abroad a good deal, and his son Rupert is always away on some sporting or exploring expedition or another."

"It's very strange," Ella said again. "I'm sure I've seen Walter Dunsmore before but I can't think where."

Allen came from the bar, having quenched his thirst for the time being, and they started off, arriving back at Bittermeads fairly early in the evening, for Dunn had brought them along at a good rate, and apparently remembered the road so well from the afternoon that he never once had occasion to refer to the map.

He took the car round to the garage, and Allen and Ella went into the house, where Allen made his way at once to the breakfast-room, searching for more whisky and cigars, while Ella, after a quick word with her mother to assure her of their safe return, went to find Deede Dawson.

"Ah, dear child, you are back then," he greeted her. "Well, how have you enjoyed yourself? Had a pleasant time?"

"It was not for pleasure we went there, I think," she said listlessly.

He looked up quickly, and though his perpetual smile still played as usual about his lips, his eyes were hard and daunting as they fixed themselves on hers. Before that sinister stare her own eyes sank, and sought the little travelling set of chessmen and board that were before him.

"See," he said, "I've just brought off a mate. Neat isn't it? Checkmate."

She looked up at him, and her eyes were steadier now.

"I've only one thing to say to you," she said. "I came here to say it. If anything happens at Wreste Abbey I shall go straight to the police."

"Indeed," he said, "indeed." He fingered the chessmen as though all his attention were engaged by them. "May I ask why?" he murmured. "For what purpose?"

"To tell them," she answered quietly, "what I--know."

"And what do you know?" he asked indifferently. "What do you know that is likely to interest the police?"

"I ought to have said, perhaps," she answered after a pause, "what I suspect."

"Ah, that's so different, isn't it?" he murmured gently. "So very different. You see we all of us suspect so many things."

She did not answer, for she had said all she had to say and she was afraid that her strength would not carry her further. She began to walk away, but he called her back.

"Oh, how do you think your mother is today?" he asked. "Do you know, her condition seems to me quite serious at times. I wonder if you are overanxious?"

"She is better--much better!" Ella answered, and added with a sudden burst of fiercest, white-hot passion: "But I think it would be better if we had both died before we met you."

She hurried away, for she was afraid of breaking down, and Deede Dawson smiled the more as he again turned his attention to his chessmen, taking them up and putting them down in turn.

"She's turning nasty," he mused. "I don't think she'll dare--but she might. She's only a pawn, but a pawn can cause a lot of trouble at times--a pawn may become a queen and give the mate. When a pawn threatens trouble it's best to--remove it."

He went out and came back a little late and busied himself with a four-move chess problem which absorbed all his attention, and which he did not solve to his satisfaction till past midnight. Then he went upstairs to bed, but at the door of his room he paused and went on very softly up the narrow stairs that led to the attics above.

Outside the one in which Dunn slept, he waited a little till the unbroken sound of regular breathing from within assured him that the occupant slept. Cautiously and carefully he crept on, and entered the one adjoining, where he turned the light of the electric flashlight he carried on a large, empty packing-case that stood in one corner.

With a two-foot rule he took from his pocket he measured it carefully and nodded with great satisfaction.

"A little smaller than the other," he said to himself. "But, then, it hasn't got to hold so much." He laughed in his silent, mirthless way, as at something that amused him. "A good deal less," he thought. "And Dunn shall drive."

He laughed again, and for a moment or two stood there in the darkness, laughing silently to himself, and then, speaking aloud, he called out:
"You can come in, Dunn."

Dunn, whom a creaking board had betrayed, came forward unconcernedly in his sleeping attire.

"I saw it was you," he remarked. "At first I thought something was wrong."

"Nothing, nothing," answered Deede Dawson. "I was only looking at this packing-case. I may have to send one away again soon, and I wanted to be sure this was big enough. If I do, I shall want you to drive."

"Not Miss Cayley?" asked Dunn.

"No, no," answered Deede Dawson. "She might be with you perhaps, but she wouldn't drive. Night driving is always dangerous, I think, don't you?"

"There's things more dangerous," Dunn remarked.

"Oh, quite true," answered Deede Dawson. "Well, did you enjoy your visit to Wreste Abbey?"

"No," answered Dunn roughly. "I didn't see Rupert Dunsmore, and it wouldn't have been any good if I had with all those people about."

"You're too impatient," Deede Dawson smiled. "I'm getting everything ready; you can't properly expect to win a game in a dozen moves. You must develop your pieces properly and have all ready before you start your attack. As soon as I'm ready--why, I'll act--and you'll have to do the rest."

"I see," said Dunn thoughtfully.

CHAPTER XXI
Doubts and Fears

In point of fact Dunn had not been asleep when Deede Dawson came listening at his door. Of late he had slept little and that little had been much disturbed by evil, haunting dreams in which perpetually he saw his dead friend, Charley Wright, and dead John Clive always together, while behind them floated the pale and lovely face of Ella, at whom the two dead men looked and whispered to each other.

In the day such thoughts troubled him less, for when he was under the influence of Ella's gentle presence, and when he could watch her clear and candid eyes, he found all doubt and suspicion melting away like snow beneath warm sunshine.

But in the silence of the night they returned, returned very dreadfully, so dreadfully that often as he lay awake in the darkness beads of sweat stood upon his forehead and he would drive his great hands one against the other in his passionate effort to still the thoughts that tormented him. Then, in the morning again, the sound of Ella's voice, the merest glimpse of her grave and gracious personality, would bring back once more his instinctive belief in her.

The morning after Deede Dawson had paid his visit to the attic there was news, however, that disturbed him greatly, for Mrs. Barker, the charwoman who came each morning to Bittermeads, told them that two men in the village--notorious poachers--had been arrested by the police on a charge of being concerned in Mr. Clive's death.

The news was a great shock to Dunn, for, knowing as he thought he did, that the police were working on an entirely wrong idea, he had not supposed they would ever find themselves able to make any arrest. As a matter of fact, these arrests they had made were the result of desperation on the part of the police, who unable to discover anything and entirely absorbed by their preconceived idea that the crime was the work of poachers, had arrested men they knew were poachers in the vague hope of somehow discovering something or of somehow getting hold of some useful clue.

But that Dunn did not know, and feared unlucky chance or undesigned coincidence must have appeared to suggest the guilt of the men and that they were really in actual danger of trial and conviction. As a matter of fact, these arrests they had made were the result of desperation on the part of the police, who unable to discover anything and entirely absorbed by their preconceived idea that the crime was the work of poachers, had arrested men they knew were poachers in the vague hope of somehow discovering something or of somehow getting hold of some useful clue.

But that Dunn did not know, and feared unlucky chance or undesigned coincidence must have appeared to suggest the guilt of the men and that they were really in actual danger of trial and conviction. He had, too, received that morning, through the secret means of communication he kept open with an agent in London, conclusive proof that at the moment of Clive's death Deede Dawson was in town on business that seemed obscure enough, but none the less in town, and therefore undoubtedly innocent of the actual perpetration of the murder.

Who, then, was left who could have fired the fatal shot?

It was a question Dunn dared not even ask himself but he saw very plainly that if the proceedings against the two arrested men were to be pressed, he would be forced to come forward before his preparations were ready and tell all he knew, no matter at what cost.

All the morning he waited and watched for his opportunity to speak to Ella, who was in a brighter and gayer mood than he had ever seen her in before.

At breakfast Deede Dawson had assured her that he could not conceive what were the suspicions she had referred to the night previously, and while he would certainly have no objection to her mentioning them at any time, in any quarter she thought fit if anything happened at Wreste Abbey--and would indeed be the first to urge her to do so --he, for his part, considered it most unlikely that anything of the sort she seemed to dread would in fact occur.

"Not at all likely," he said with his happy, beaming smile that never reached those cold eyes of his. "I should say myself that nothing ever did happen at Wreste Abbey, not since the Flood, anyhow. It strikes me as the most peaceful, secluded spot in all England."
"I'm very glad you think so," said Ella, tremendously relieved and glad to hear him say so, and supposing, though his smooth words and smiles and protestations deceived her very little, that, at any rate, what she had said had forced him to abandon whatever plans he had been forming in that direction.

Her victory, as it seemed to her, won so easily and containing good promise of further success in the future, cheered her immensely, and it was in almost a happy mood that she went unto the garden after lunch and met Dunn in a quiet, well-hidden corner, where he had been waiting and watching for long.

His appearance startled her--his eyes were so wild, his whole manner so strained and restless, and she gave a little dismayed exclamation as she saw him.

"Oh, what's the matter?" she asked. "Aren't you well? You look--"

She paused for she did not know exactly how it was he did look; and he said in his harshest, most abrupt manner

"Do you remember Charley Wright?"

"Why do you ask?" she said, puzzled. "Is anything wrong?"

"Do you remember John Clive?" he asked, disregarding this. "Have you heard two men have been arrested for his murder?"

"Mrs. Barker told me so," she answered gravely. He came a little nearer, almost threateningly nearer.

"What do you think of that?" he asked.

She lifted one hand and put it gently on his arm. The touch of it thrilled him through and through, and he felt a little dazed as he watched it resting on his coat sleeve. She had become very pale also and her voice was low and strained as she said

"Have you had suspicions too?"

He looked at her as if fascinated for a moment, and then nodded twice and very slowly.

"So have I," she sighed in tones so low he could scarcely hear them.

"Oh, you, you also," he muttered, almost suffocating.

"Yes," she said. "Yes--perhaps the same as yours. My stepfather," she breathed, "Mr. Deede Dawson."

He watched her closely and moodily, but he did not speak.

"I was afraid--at first," she whispered. "But I was wrong--quite wrong. It is as certain as it can be that he was in London at the time."

From his pocket Dunn took out the handkerchief of hers that he had found near the body of the dead man.

"Is this yours?" he asked.

"Yes," she answered. "Yes, where did you get it?"

He did not answer, but he lifted his hands one after the other, and put them on her shoulder, with the fingers outspread to encircle her throat. It seemed to him that when she acknowledged the ownership of the handkerchief she acknowledged also the perpetration of the deed, and he became a little mad, and he had it in his mind that the slightest, the very slightest, pressure of his fingers on that soft, round throat would put it for ever out of her power to do such things again. Then for himself death would be easy and welcome, and there would be an end to all these doubts and fears that racked him with anguish beyond bearing.

"What are you going to do?" she asked, making no attempt to resist or escape.

Ever so slightly the pressure of his hands upon her throat strengthened and increased. A very little more and the lovely thing of life he watched would be broken and cold for ever. Her eyes were steady, she showed no sign of fear, she stood perfectly still, her hands loosely clasped together before her. He groaned, and his arms fell to his side, helpless. Without the slightest change of expression, she said:

"What were you going to do?"

"I don't know," he answered. "Do you ever go mad? I do, I think. Perhaps you do too, and that explains it. Do you know where Charley Wright is?"

"Yes," she answered directly. "Why? Did you know him, then?"

"You know where he is now?" Dunn repeated.

She nodded quietly.

"I heard from him only last week," she said.

"I am certainly mad or you are," he muttered, staring at her with eyes in which such wonder and horror showed that it seemed there really was a touch of madness there.

"What is the matter?" she asked.

"You heard from him last week," he said again, and again she answered:

"Yes--last week. Why not?"

He leaned forward, and before she knew what he intended to do he kissed her pale, cool cheek.

Once more she stood still and immobile, her hands loosely clasped before her. It might have been that he had kissed a statue, and her perfect stillness made him afraid.
"Ella," he said. "Ella."

"Why did you do that?" she said, a little wildly now in her turn. "It was not that you were going to do to me before."

"I love you," he muttered excusingly.

She shook her head.

"You know too little of me; you have too many doubt and fears," she said. "You do not love me, you do not even trust me."

"I love you all the same," he asserted positively and roughly. "I loved you--it was when I tied your hands to the chair that night and you looked at me with such contempt, and asked me if I felt proud. That stung, that stung. I loved you then."

"You see," she said sadly, "you do not even pretend to trust me. I don't know why you should. Why are you here? Why are you disguised with all that growth of hair? There is something you are preparing, planning. I know it. I feel it. What is it?"

"I told you once before," he answered, "that the end of this will be Deede Dawson's death or mine. That's what I'm preparing."

"He is very cunning, very clever," she said. "Do you think he suspects you?"

"He suspects every one always," answered Dunn. "I've been trying to get proof to act on. I haven't succeeded. Not yet. Nothing definite. If I can't, I shall act without. That's all."

"If I told him even half of what you just said," she said, looking at him. "What would happen?"

"You see, I trust you," he answered bitterly.

She shook her head, but her eyes were soft and tender as she said:

"It wasn't trust in me made you say all that, it was because you didn't care what happened after."

"No," he said. "But when I see you, I forget everything. Do you love me?"

"Why, I've never even seen you yet," she exclaimed with something like a smile. "I only know you as two eyes over a tangle of hair that I don't believe you ever either brush or comb. Do you know, sometimes I am curious."

He took her hand and drew her to sit beside him on the bench under a tree near by. All his doubts and fears and suspicions he set far from him, and remembered nothing save that she was the woman for whom yearned all the depths of his soul as by pre-ordained decree. And she, too, forgot all else save that she had met her man--her man, to her strange, aloof, mysterious, but dominating all her life as though by primal necessity.

When they parted, it was with an agreement to meet again that evening, and in the twilight they spent a halcyon hour together, saying little, feeling much.

It was only when at last she had left him that he remembered all that had passed, that had happened, that he knew, suspected, dreaded, all that he planned and intended and would be soon called upon to put into action.

"She's made me mad," he said to himself, and for a long time he sat there in the darkness, in the stillness of the evening, motionless as the tree in whose shade he sat, plunged in the most profound and strange reverie, from which presently his quick ear, alert and keen even when his mind was deep in thought, caught the light and careful sound of an approaching footstep.

In a moment he was up and gliding through the darkness to meet who was coming, and almost at once a voice hailed him cautiously.

"There you are, Dunn," Deede Dawson said. "I've been looking for you everywhere. Tomorrow or next day we shall be able to strike; everything is ready at last, and I'll tell you now exactly what we are going to do."

"That's good news," said Dunn softly.

"Come this way," Deede Dawson said, and led Dunn through the darkness to the gate that admitted to the Bittermeads grounds from the high road.

Here he paused, and stood for a long time in silence, leaning on the gate and looking out across the road to the common beyond. Close beside him stood Dunn, controlling his impatience as best he could, and wondering if at last the secret springs of all these happenings was to be laid bare to him.

But Deede Dawson seemed in no hurry to begin. For a long time he remained in the same attitude, silent and sombre in the darkness, and when at last he spoke it was to utter a remark that quite took Dunn by surprise.

"What a lovely night," he said in low and pensive tones, very unlike those he generally used. "I remember when I was a boy--that's a long time ago."

Dunn was too surprised by this sudden and very unexpected lapse into sentiment to answer. Deede Dawson went on as if thinking to himself:

"A long time--I've done a lot--seen a lot since then--too much, perhaps--I remember mother told me once--poor soul, I believe she used to be rather proud of me--"

"Your mother?" Dunn said wondering greatly to think this man should still have such memories.
But Deede Dawson seemed either to resent his tone or else to be angry with himself for giving way to such weakness. In a voice more like his usual one, he said harshly and sneeringly:

"Oh, yes, I had a mother once, just like everybody else. Why not? Most people have their mothers, though it's not an arrangement I should care to defend. Now then, Ella was with you tonight; you and she were alone together a long time."

"Well," growled Dunn, "what of it?"

"Fine girl, isn't she?" asked Deede Dawson, and laughed.

Dunn did not speak. It filled him with such loathing to hear this man so much as utter Ella's name, it was all he could do to keep his hands motionless by his side and not make use of them about the other's throat.

"She's been useful, very useful," Deede Dawson went on meditatively. "Her mother had some money when I married her. I don't mind telling you it's all spent now, but Ella's a little fortune in herself."

"I didn't know we came to talk about her," said Dunn slowly. "I thought you had something else to say to me."

"So I have," Deede Dawson answered. "That's why I brought you here. We are safe from eavesdroppers here, in a house you can never tell who is behind a curtain or a door. But then, Ella is a part of my plans, a very important part. Do you remember I told you I might want you to take a second packing-case away from here in the car one night?"

"Yes, I remember," said Dunn slowly. "I remember. What would be in it? The same sort of thing that was in--that other?"

"Yes," answered Deede Dawson. "Much the same."

"I shall want to see for myself," said Dunn. "I'm a trustful sort of person, but I don't go driving about the country with packing-cases late at night unless I've seen for myself what's inside."

CHAPTER XXII
PLOTS AND PLAYS

"Very wise of you," yawned Deede Dawson. "That's just what Ella said--what's that?"

For instinctively Dunn had raised his hand, but he lowered it again at once.

"Oh, cut the cackle," he said impatiently. "Tell me what you want me to do, and make it plain, very plain, for I can tell you there's a good deal about all this I don't understand, and I'm not inclined to trust you far. For one thing, what are you after yourself? Where do you want me to go? Where do you come in? What are you going to get? And there's another thing I want to say. If you are thinking of playing any tricks on me don't do it, unless you are ready to take big risks. There's only one man alive who ever made a fool of me, and his name is Rupert Dunsmore, and I don't think he's today what insurance companies call a good risk. Not by any manner of means." He paused to laugh harshly. "Let's get to business," he said. "Look here, how do I know you mean all you say about Rupert Dunsmore? What's he to you?"

"Nothing," answered Deede Dawson promptly. "Nothing. But there's some one I'm acting for to whom he is a good deal."

"Who is that?" Dunn asked sharply.

"Do you think I'm going to tell you?" retorted the other, and laughed in his cold, mirthless manner. "Perhaps you aren't the only one who owes him a grudge."

"That's likely enough, but I want to know where I'm standing," said Dunn. "Is this unknown person you say you are acting for anxious to bring about Rupert Dunsmore's death?"

"I'm not answering any questions, so you needn't ask them," replied Deede Dawson.

"But I will tell you that there's something big going on. Or I shouldn't be in it, I don't use my brains on small things, you know. If it comes off all right, Er--" He paused, and for once a thrill of genuine emotion sounded in his voice. "Thousands," he said abruptly. "Yes, and more--more. But there's an obstacle--Rupert Dunsmore. It's your place to remove him. That'll suit you, and it'll mean good pay, as much as you like to ask for in reason. And Ella, if you want her. The girl won't be any use to me when this is over, and you can have her if you like. I don't think she'll object from what I can see--not that it would matter if she did. So there you are. Put Rupert Dunsmore out of the way and it'll be the best day's work you've ever done, and you shall have Ella into the bargain--if you claim her. Makeweight."

He began to laugh again and Dunn laughed, too, for while he was not sure what it was that amused Deede Dawson, there were certain aspects of all this that bore for him a very curious and ironic humour.

"All right," he said. "You bring me face to face with Rupert Dunsmore and you won't have to grumble about the result, for I swear only one of us will go away alive. But how are you going to do it?"

"I've my plan, and it's simple enough," answered Deede Dawson. "Though I can tell you it took some working out. But the simplest problem is always the best, whether in life or in chess." Again he indulged in a low and guarded outburst of his thin, mirthless laughter before he continued: "I suppose you know Rupert Dunsmore is one of those restless people who are never content except when wandering about in some out of the way place or
another, as often as not no one having the least idea of his whereabouts. Then he turns up unexpectedly, only to disappear again when the whim takes him. Lately he has been away on one of these trips, but I happen to know he is coming back almost at once--what's the matter?"

"I was only wondering how you knew that," answered Dunn, who had given a sudden start.

"Oh, I know, never mind how," Deede Dawson said. "I know that tomorrow afternoon at four o'clock he will be waiting by the side of Brook Bourne Spring in Ottom's Wood, near General Dunsmore's place. Which is as out of the way and quiet and lonely a spot as you could wish for."

"And you have information that he will be there?" Dunn said incredulously. "How can you possibly be sure of that?"

"Never mind how," answered Deede Dawson. "I am sure. That's enough. My information is certain."

"Oh, it is, is it?" Dunn muttered. "You are a wonderful man, Mr. Dawson. You know everything--or nearly everything. You are sure of everything--or nearly everything--but suppose he changes his mind at the last moment and doesn't come after all?"

"He won't," answered Deede Dawson. "You be there and you'll find him there all right."

"Well, perhaps," said Dunn slowly. "But what I want to know is why you are so sure? There's a good deal hangs on your being right, you know."

"I only wish I was as certain of everything else," Deede Dawson said.

"Oh, all right," exclaimed Dunn. "I suppose you know and you may be right."

"I am," Deede Dawson assured him. "Listen carefully now, there mustn't be any blunders. You are to make an early start tomorrow. I don't want you to take the car for fear of its being seen and identified. You must take the train to London and then another train back immediately to Delsby. From Delsby you'll have an eighteen-mile walk through lonely country where you aren't likely to meet any one, and must try not to. The less you are seen the better. You know that for yourself, and for your own sake you'll be careful. You'll have no time to spare, but you will be able to get to the place I told you of by four all right--no earlier, no later. You must arrange to be there at four exactly. You may spoil all if you are too early. Almost as soon as you get there, Rupert Dunsmore will arrive. You must do the rest for yourself, and then you must strike straight across country for here. You can look up your routes on the map. There will be less risk of attracting attention if you come and go by different ways. You ought to be here again some time in the small hours. I'll let you in, and you'll have cleared your own score with Rupert Dunsmore and earned more money than you ever had in all your life before. Now, can I depend on you?"

"Yes--yes," answered Dunn, over whom there had come a new and strange sense of unreality as he stood and listened to cold-blooded murder being thus calmly, coolly planned, as though it were some afternoon's pleasure trip that was being arranged, so that he hardly knew whether he did, in fact, hear this smooth, low, unceasing voice that from the darkness at his side laid down such a bloody road for his feet to travel.

"Oh, yes, you can depend on me," he said. "But can I depend on you, when you say Rupert Dunsmore will be there at that time and that place?"

It was a moment or two before Deede Dawson answered, and then his voice was very low and soft and confident as he said:

"Yes--yes," answered Dunn, over whom there had come a new and strange sense of unreality as he stood and listened to cold-blooded murder being thus calmly, coolly planned, as though it were some afternoon's pleasure trip that was being arranged, so that he hardly knew whether he did, in fact, hear this smooth, low, unceasing voice that from the darkness at his side laid down such a bloody road for his feet to travel.

"Oh, yes, you can depend on me," he said. "But can I depend on you, when you say Rupert Dunsmore will be there at that time and that place?"

It was a moment or two before Deede Dawson answered, and then his voice was very low and soft and confident as he said:

"Yes, you can--absolutely. You see, I know his plans."

"Oh, do you?" Dunn said as though satisfied. "Oh, well then, it's no wonder you're so sure."

"No wonder at all," agreed Deede Dawson. "There's just one other thing I can tell you. Some one else will be there, too, at Brook Bourne Spring in Ottam's Wood."

"Who's that?" asked Dunn sharply.

"The man," said Deede Dawson, "who is behind all this--the man you and I are working for--the man who's going to pay us, even better than he thinks."

"He--he will be there?" repeated Dunn, drawing a deep, breath.

"Yes, but you won't see him, and it wouldn't help you if you did," Deede Dawson told him. "Most likely he'll be disguised--a mask, perhaps; I don't know. Anyhow, he'll be there. Watching. I'm not suggesting you would do such a thing as never go near the place, loaf around a bit, then come back and report Rupert Dunsmore out of the way for good, draw your pay and vanish, and leave us to find out he was as lively and troublesome as ever. I don't think you would do that, because you sounded as if you meant what you said when you told me he was your worst enemy. But it's just as well to be sure, and so we mean to have a witness; and as it's what you might call a delicate matter, that witness will most likely be our employer himself. So you had better do the job thoroughly if you want your pay."

"I see you take your precautions," remarked Dunn. "Well, that's all right, I don't mind."

"You understand exactly what you've got to do?" Deede Dawson asked.

Dunn nodded.

"What about Allen?" he asked. "Does he take any part in this show?"
"He and I are planning a little visit to Wreste Abbey rather early the same night, during the dinner-hour most likely," answered Deede Dawson carelessly. "We can get in at one of the long gallery windows quite easily, Allen says. He kept his eyes open that day you all went there. It may be helpful to give the police two problems to work on at once; and besides, big as this thing is, there's a shortage of ready money at present. But our little affair at Wreste Abbey will have nothing to do with you. You mind what you've got to do, and don't trouble about anything else. See?"

"I see," answered Dunn slowly. "And if you can arrange for Rupert Dunsmore to be there at that time all right, I'll answer for the rest."

"You needn't be uneasy about that," Deede Dawson said, and laughed. "You see, I know his plans," he repeated, and laughed again; and still laughing that chill, mirthless way of his, he turned and walked back towards the house.

Dunn watched him go through the darkness, and to himself he muttered:

"Yes, but I wonder if you do."

CHAPTER XXIII
COUNTER-PLANS

The hour was late by now, but Dunn felt no inclination for sleep, and there was no need for him to return indoors as yet, since Deede Dawson, who always locked up the house himself, never did so till past midnight. Till the small hours, very often he was accustomed to sit up absorbed in those chess problems, the composing and solving of which were his great passion, so that, indeed, it is probable that under other circumstances he might have passed a perfectly harmless and peaceful existence, known to wide circles as an extraordinarily clever problemist and utterly unknown elsewhere.

But the Fate that is, after all, but man's own character writ large, had decreed otherwise. And the little, fat, smiling man bending over his travelling chess board on which he moved delicately to and fro the tiny red and white men of carved ivory, now and again removing a piece and laying it aside, had done as much with as little concern to his fellow creatures from the very beginning of his terrible career.

Outside, leaning on the gate where Deede Dawson had left him, Dunn was deep in thought that was not always very comforting, for there was very much in all this laid out for him to accomplish that he did not understand and that disturbed him a great deal.

A careful, cautious "Hist!" broke in upon his thoughts, and in an instant he stiffened to close attention, every nerve on the alert.

The sound was repeated, a faint and wary footstep sounded, and in the darkness a form appeared and stole slowly nearer.

Dunn poised for a moment, ready for attack or retreat, and then all at once his tense attitude relaxed.

"You, Walter," he exclaimed. "That's good! But how did you get here? And how did you know where I was?"

The new-comer drew a little nearer and showed the tall, thin form of Walter Dunsmore to whom Dunn had spoken at Wreste Abbey.

"I had to come," he murmured. "I couldn't rest without seeing you. You upset me the other day, saying what you did. Isn't it very dangerous your being here? Suppose Deede Dawson--"

"Oh, if he suspected, there would soon be an end of me," answered Dunn grimly. "But I think I'm going to win--at least, I did till tonight."

"What's happened?" the other asked sharply and anxiously.

"He has been telling me his plans," answered Dunn. "He has told me everything--he has put himself entirely in my power--he has done what I have been waiting and hoping for ever since I came here. He has given me his full confidence at last, and I never felt more uneasy or less certain of success than I do at this moment."

"He has told you--everything?" Walter Dunsmore asked. "Everything, except who is behind it all," answered Dunn. "I asked him who he was acting for, and he refused to say. But we shall know that tomorrow, for he told me something almost as good--he told me where this employer would be at four o'clock tomorrow afternoon. So then we shall have him, unless Deede Dawson was lying."

"Of course, it all depends on finding that out," remarked Walter thoughtfully. "Finding out his identity."

"Yes, that's the key move to the problem," Dunn said. "And tomorrow we shall know it, if Deede Dawson was speaking the truth just now."

"I should think he was," said Walter slowly. "I should think it is certain he was. You may depend on that, I think."

"I think so, too," agreed Dunn. "But how did you find out where I was?"

"You know that day you came to Wreste Abbey? There was some fellow you had with you who told the landlord of the Chobham Arms, so I easily found out from him," answered Walter.

"Anyhow, I'm glad you're here," Dunn said. "I was wondering how to get in touch with you. Well, this is Deede
Dawson's plan in brief. Tomorrow, at four in the afternoon, Rupert Dunsmore is to be killed—and I've undertaken to do the deed."

"What do you mean?" exclaimed Walter, starting.

"I've promised that if Deede Dawson will bring me face to face with Rupert Dunsmore, I'll murder him," answered Dunn, laughing softly.

"A fairly safe offer on your part, isn't it?" observed Walter. "At least, unless there's any saving clause about mirrors."

"Oh, none," answered Dunn. "I told Deede Dawson Rupert Dunsmore was my worst enemy, and that's true enough, for I think every man's worst enemy is himself."

"I wish I had none worse," muttered Walter.

"I think you haven't, old chap," Dunn said smilingly. "But come across the road. It'll be safer on the common. Deede Dawson is so cunning one is never safe from him. One can never be sure he isn't creeping up behind."

"Well, I daresay it's wise to take every precaution," observed Walter. "But I can't imagine either him or any one else getting near you without your knowledge."

Robert Dunn,—or rather, Rupert Dunsmore, as was his name by right of birth—laughed again to himself, very softly in the darkness.

"Perhaps not," he said. "But I take no chances I can avoid with Deede Dawson. Come along."

They crossed the road together and sat down on the common at an open spot, where none could well approach them unheard or unseen. Dunn laid his hand affectionately on Walter's shoulder as they settled themselves.

"Old chap," he said. "It was good of you to come here. You've run some risk. It's none too safe near Bittermeads. But I'm glad to see you, Walter. It's a tremendous relief after all this strain of doubt and watching and suspicion to be with some one I know—some one I can trust—some one like you, Walter."

In the darkness, Walter put out his hand and took Dunn's and held it for a moment.

"I have been anxious about you," he said. Dunn returned the pressure warmly.

"I know," he said. "Jove, old chap, it's good to see you again. You don't know what it's like after all this long time, feeling that every step was a step in the dark, to be at last with a real friend again."

"I think I can guess," Walter said softly.

Dunn shook his head.

"No one could," he said. "I tell you I've doubted, distrusted, suspected till I wasn't sure of my own shadow. Well, that's all over now. Tomorrow we can act."

"Tell me what I'm to do," Walter Dunsmore said.

"There's a whole lot I don't understand yet," Dunn continued slowly. "I suppose it was that that was making me feel so jolly down before you came. I don't feel sure somehow—not sure. Deede Dawson is such a cunning brute. He seems to have laid his whole hand bare, and yet there may be cards up his sleeve still. Besides, his plan he told me about seems so bold. And I don't understand why he should think he is so sure of what I—I mean, of what Rupert—it's a bit confusing to have a double identity—is going to do. He says he is sure Rupert Dunsmore is to be at the Brook Bourne Spring tomorrow at four. He says his information is certain, and that he has full knowledge of what Rupert Dunsmore is going to do, which is more than I have. But what can it be that's making him so sure?"

"That's probably simple enough," said Walter. "You said you suspected there was a leakage from Burns & Swift's office, and you told Burns to make misleading statements about your movements occasionally when he was dictating his letters. Well, I expect this is one."

"That may be; only Deede Dawson seems so very sure," answered Dunn. "But what's specially important is his saying that his employer, whoever it is, who is behind all this, will be there too."

"A meeting? Is that it?" exclaimed Walter.

"No, that's not the idea," answered Dunn. "You see, the idea is that Rupert Dunsmore will be there at four, and that I'm to be there in ambush to murder myself. Whoever is behind all this will be there too—to see I carry out my work properly. And that gives us our chance."

"Oh, that's good," exclaimed Walter. "We shall have him for certain."

"That's what I want you to see to," said Dunn. "I want you to have men you can trust well hidden all round, ready to collar him. And I want you to have all the roads leading to Ottam's Wood well watched and every one going along them noted. You understand?"

"That's quite easy," declared Walter. "I can promise not a soul will get into Ottam's Wood without being seen, and I'll make very sure indeed of getting hold of any one hiding anywhere near Brook Bourne Spring. And once we've done that—once we know who it is—"

"Yes," agreed Dunn. "We shall be all right then. That is the one thing necessary to know—the key move to the problem—the identity of who it is pulling the strings. He must be a clever beggar; anyhow, I mean to see him hang
"I daresay he's clever," agreed Walter. "He is playing for big stakes. Anyhow, we'll have him tomorrow all right; that seems certain--at last."

"At last," agreed Dunn, with a long-drawn sigh. "Ugh! it's all been such a nightmare. It's been pretty awful, knowing there was some one--not able to guess who. Ever since you discovered that first attempt, ever since we became certain there was a plot going on to clear out every one in succession to the Chobham estates--and that was jolly plain, though the fools of police did babble about no evidence, as if pistol bullets come from nowhere and poisoned cups of tea--"

"Ah, I was to blame there, that was my fault," said Walter. "You see, we had no proof about the shooting, and when I had spilt that tea, no proof of poison either. I shall always regret that."

"A bit of bad luck," Dunn agreed. "But accidents will happen. Anyhow, it was clear enough some one was trying to make a jolly clear sweep. It may be a madman; it may be some one with a grudge against us; it may be, as poor Charley thought, some one in the line of succession, who is just clearing the way to inherit the title and estates himself. I wish I knew what made Charley suspicious of Deede Dawson in the first place."

"You don't know that?" Walter asked.

"No, he never told me," answered Dunn. "Poor Charley, it cost him his life. That's another thing we must find out--where they've hidden his body."

"He was sure from the first," remarked Walter, "that it was a conspiracy on the part of some one in the line of succession?"

"Yes," agreed Dunn. "It's likely enough, too. You see, ever since that big family row and dispersion eighty years ago, a whole branch of the family has been entirely lost sight of. There may be half a dozen possible heirs we know nothing about. Like poor John Clive. I daresay if we had known of his existence we should have begun by suspecting him."

"There's one thing pretty sure," remarked Walter. "If these pleasant little arrangements did succeed, it would be a fairly safe guess that the inheritor of the title and estates was the guilty person. It might be brought home to him, too."

"Perhaps," agreed Dunn dryly. "But just a trifle too late to interest me for one. And I don't mean to let the dad or uncle be sacrificed if I can help it. I failed with Clive, poor fellow, but I don't mean to again, and I don't see how we can. Deede Dawson has exposed his hand. Now we can play ours."

"But what are you going to do?" Walter asked. "Are you going to follow out his instructions?"

"To the letter," Dunn answered. "We are dealing with very wary, suspicious people, and the least thing might make them take alarm. The important point, of course, is the promise that Deede Dawson's employer will be at Brook Bourne Spring tomorrow afternoon. That's our trump card. Everything hangs on that. And to make sure there's no hitch, I shall do exactly what I've been told to do. I expect I shall be watched. I shall be there at four o'clock, and ten minutes after I hope we shall have laid hands on--whoever it is."

Walter nodded.

"I don't see how we can fail," he said.  

CHAPTER XXIV  
AN APHORISM  

"No," Dunn agreed after a long pause. "No, I don't see myself how failure is possible; I don't see what there is to go wrong. All the same, I shan't be sorry when it's all over; I suppose I'm nervous, that's the truth of it. But Deede Dawson's hardly the sort of man I should have expected to lay all his cards on the table so openly."

"Oh, I think that's natural enough," answered Walter. "Quite natural--he thinks you are in with him and he tells you what he wants you to do. But I don't quite see the object of your visit to the Abbey the other day. You gave me the shock of my life, I think. I hadn't the least idea who you were--that beard makes a wonderful difference."

Dunn laughed quietly.

"It's a good disguise," he admitted. "I didn't quite know myself first time I looked in a mirror. We went to the Abbey to prepare for a burglary there."

"Oh, is that on the cards, too?" exclaimed Walter. "I didn't expect that."

"Yes," answered Dunn. "My own idea is that Deede Dawson sees an opportunity for making a bit on his own. After all of us are disposed of and his friend has got the title and estates, he won't dare to prosecute of course, and so Deede Dawson thinks it a good opportunity to visit the Abbey and pick up any pictures or heirlooms or so-so he can that it would be almost impossible to dispose of in the ordinary way, but that he expects he will be able to sell back at a good price to the new owner of the property. I think he calculates that that gentleman will be ready to pay as much as he is asked. I don't know, but I think that's his idea from something he said the other day about the uselessness of even good stuff from a big house unless you knew of a sure market, or could sell it back again to the
"Jolly clever idea if it works all right," said Walter slowly. "I can see Mr. Deede Dawson is a man who needs watching. And I suppose we had better be on the look-out at the Abbey tomorrow night?"

"Evening," corrected Dunn. "It's planned for the dinner-hour."

"Right," said Walter. "We shall see some crowded hours tomorrow, I expect. Well, it's like this, as I understand it--we had better be sure everything is quite clear. Their idea is that you will meet and murder Rupert Dunsmore, who they have no notion is really your own self, at Brook Bourne Spring at four tomorrow afternoon, and the unknown somebody who is behind all this business will be in hiding there to make sure you do your work properly. Our idea is to watch all the roads leading to Ottam's Wood and to have men in ambush near the spring to seize any one hiding there at that time. Then we shall know who is at the bottom of all these plots and shall be able to smash the whole conspiracy. In addition, Deede Dawson and this other man you speak of, Allen, are going to break into the Abbey tomorrow evening and we are to be ready for them and catch them in the act?"

"Yes," said Dunn, "that's the idea; you can manage all right?"

"Oh, yes," answered Walter. "It's all simple enough--you've planned it out so jolly well there's nothing much left for me to do. And I don't see what you're nervous about; there's nothing that can go wrong very well--your plans are perfect, I think."

"It's easy enough to make plans when you know just what the other side are going to do," observed Dunn. "There's one point more. Miss Cayley--I mentioned her in one of the notes I sent you through Burns."

"Yes, I remember--Deede Dawson's step-daughter," said Walter. "I suppose she is in it?"

"She is not; she knows nothing," declared Dunn vehemently.

"But it was she who took away poor Charley's body, wasn't it?" asked Walter. "But for that you would have had evidence enough to act on at once, wouldn't you?"

"She did not know what she was doing," Dunn replied. "And now she is in danger herself. I am convinced Deede Dawson is growing afraid of her, he dropped hints; I'm sure he is planning something, perhaps he means to murder her as well. So besides these other arrangements I want to see that there's a trustworthy man watching here. I don't anticipate that there's any immediate danger--it's almost certain that if he means anything he will wait till he sees how this other business is turning out. But I want some one trustworthy to be at hand in case of need. You will see to that?"

"Oh, yes, I can spare Simmonds; I'll send him," answered Walter. "Though, I must say, my dear chap, I don't think I should trouble much about that young lady. But it can be easily managed, in fact everything you want me to do is easy enough; I only wish some of it was a bit difficult or dangerous."

"You're a good chap, Walter," said Dunn, putting his hand on the other's shoulder again. "Well, I think it's all settled now. I tell you I'm looking forward a good deal to four o'clock tomorrow afternoon. I feel as if I would give all I possess to know who it is."

"Don't make that offer," Walter said with a smile, "or the fates may accept it."

"I feel as though there's only one thing in the world I want one half so much," Dunn said. "As to know who this--devil is."

"Devil?" repeated Walter. "Well, yes, devil's a word like any other."

"I think it's justified in this case," said Dunn sternly. "Poor Charley Wright dead! One thing I can't understand about that is how they got him back here when you saw him in London when you did. But they're a cunning lot. They must have worked it somehow. Then Clive. I feel to blame for Clive's death--as if I ought to have managed better and saved him. Now there's this other devilry they are planning. I tell you, Walter, I feel the whole world will be a sweeter place after four o'clock tomorrow afternoon."

"At any rate," said Walter, "I think we may be sure of one thing--after four o'clock tomorrow afternoon you will know all--all." He paused and repeated, slightly varying the phrase: "Yes, after four o'clock tomorrow afternoon you will know everything--everything." He added in a brisker tone: "There's nothing else to arrange?"

"No," said Dunn, "I don't think so, and I had better go now or Deede Dawson will be suspecting something. He'll want to know what I've been stopping out so late for. Good-bye, old chap, and good luck."

They shook hands.

"Good-bye and good luck, Rupert, old man," Walter said. "You may depend on me--you know that."

"Yes, I do know that," Dunn answered.

They shook hands again, and Dunn said: "You've hurt your hand. It's tied up. Is it anything much?"

"No, no," answered Walter with a little laugh. "A mere scratch. I scratched it on a bit of wood, a lid that didn't fit properly."

"Well, good-bye and good luck," Dunn said again, and they parted, Walter disappearing into the darkness and Dunn returning to the house.
Deede Dawson heard him enter, and he came to the door of the room in which he had been sitting. "Oh, there you are," he said. "Been enjoying the night air or what? You've been a long time."

"I've been thinking," Dunn muttered in the heavy, sulky manner he always assumed at Bittermeads.

"Not weakening, eh?" asked Deede Dawson.

"No," answered Dunn. "I'm not."

"Good," Deede Dawson exclaimed. "There's a lot to win, and no fear of failure. I don't see that failure's possible. Do you?"

"No," answered Dunn. "I suppose not."

"The mate's sure this time," Deede Dawson declared. "It's our turn to move, and whatever reply the other side makes, we're sure of our mate next move. By the way, did you ever solve that problem I showed you the other day?"

"Yes, I think so," answered Dunn. "It was a long time before I could hit on the right move, but I managed it at last, I think."

"Come and show me, then," said Deede Dawson, bustling back into his room and beginning to set up the pieces on his travelling chess-board. "This was the position, wasn't it? Now, what's your move?"

Dunn showed him, and Deede Dawson burst into a laugh that had in it for once a touch of honest enjoyment.

"Yes, that would do it, but for one thing you haven't noticed," he said. "Black can push the pawn at KB7 and make it, not a queen, but a knight, giving check to your king and no mate for you next move."

"Yes, that's so," agreed Dunn. "I hadn't thought of that."

"Unexpected, eh? Making the pawn a knight?" smiled Deede Dawson. "But in chess, and in life, it's the unexpected you have to look out for."

"That's quite an aphorism," said Dunn. "It's true, too."

He went up to bed, but did not sleep well, and when at last he fell into a troubled slumber, it seemed to him that Charley Wright and John Clive were there, one on each side of him, and that they had come, not because they sought for vengeance, but because they wished to warn him of a doom like their own that they could see approaching but he could not.

Toward's morning he got an hour's sound rest, and he was down stairs in good time. He did not see Ella, but he heard her moving about, so knew that she was safe as yet; and Deede Dawson gave him some elaborate parting instructions, a little money, and a loaded revolver.

"I don't know that I want that," said Dunn. "My hands will be all I need once I'm face to face with Rupert Dunsmore."

"That's the right spirit," said Deede Dawson approvingly. "But the pistol may be useful too. You needn't use it if you can manage without, but you may as well have it. Good-bye, and the best of luck. Take care of yourself, and don't lose your head or do anything foolish."

"Oh, you can trust me," said Dunn.

"I think I can," smiled Deede Dawson. "I think I can. Good-bye. Be careful, avoid noise and fuss, don't be seen any more than you can help, and if you shoot, aim low."

"There's a vade mecum for the intending assassin," Dunn thought grimly to himself, but he said nothing, gave the other a sullen nod, and started off on his strange and weird mission of murdering himself. He found himself wondering if any one else had ever been in such a situation. He did not suppose so.

CHAPTER XXV
THE UNEXPECTED

To the very letter Dunn followed the careful and precise instructions given him by Deede Dawson, for he did not wish to arouse in any way the slightest suspicion or run the least risk of frightening off that unknown instigator of these plots who was, it had been promised him, to be present near Brook Bourne Spring at four that afternoon.

Even the thought of Ella was perhaps less clear and vivid to his mind just now than was his intense and passionate desire to discover the identity of the strange and sinister personality against whom he had matched himself.

"Very likely it's some madman," he thought to himself. "How in the name of common sense can he expect to inherit the title and estates quietly after such a series of crimes as he seems to contemplate? Does he think no one will have any suspicion of him when he comes forward? Even if he is successful in getting rid of all of us in this way, how does he expect to be able to reap his reward? Of course he may think that there will be no direct evidence if he manages cleverly enough, and that mere suspicion he will be able to disregard and live down in time, but surely it will be plain enough that 'who benefits is guilty'? The whole thing is mad, fantastic. Why, the mere fact of any one making a claim to the title and estates would be almost enough to justify a jury in returning a verdict of guilty."

But though his thoughts ran in this wise all the time he was journeying to London, and though he repeated them to himself over and over again, none the less there remained an uneasy consciousness in his mind that perhaps these
people had plans more subtle than he knew, and that even this difficulty of making their claim without bringing instant suspicion on themselves they had provided for.

It was late in the year now, but the day was warm and very calm and fine. At the London terminus where he alighted he had a strong feeling that he was watched, and when he took the train back to Delsby he still had the idea that he was being kept under observation.

He felt he had been wise in deciding to carry out Deede Dawson's instructions so closely, for he was sure that if he had failed to do so in any respect alarm would have been taken at once, and warning telegrams gone flying on the instant to all concerned. Then that self-baited trap at Brook Bourne Spring, wherein he hoped to see his enemy taken, would remain unapproached, and all his work and risk would have gone for nothing.

When he alighted at his destination he was a little before time, and so he got himself something to eat at a small public-house near the station before starting on his fifteen-mile walk across country. Though he was not sure, he did not think any one was observing him now. Most likely his movements up to the present had appeared satisfactory, and it had not been thought necessary to watch him longer.

But he was careful to do nothing to rouse suspicion if he were still being spied upon, and after he had eaten and had a smoke he started off on his long tramp.

Even yet he was careful, and so long as he was near the village he made a show of avoiding observation as much as possible. Later on, when he had made certain he was not being followed, he did not trouble so much, though he still kept it in mind that any one he met or passed might well be in fact one of Deede Dawson's agents.

He walked on sharply through the crisp autumn air, and in other circumstances would have found the walk agreeable enough. It was a little curious that as he proceeded on his way his chief preoccupation seemed to shift from his immediate errand and intense eagerness to discover the identity of his unknown foe, with whom he hoped to stand face to face so soon, to a troubled and pressing anxiety about Ella.

Up till now he had not thought it likely that she was in the least real danger. He knew Simmonds, the man Walter had promised to put on watch at Bittermeads, and knew him to be capable and trustworthy. None the less, his uneasiness grew and strengthened with every mile he traversed, till presently her situation seemed to him the one weak link in his careful plans.

That the trap the unknown had so carefully laid for himself to be taken in, would assuredly and securely close upon him, Dunn felt certain enough. Walter would see to that. Sure was it, too, that the enterprise Deede Dawson had planned for himself and Allen at the Abbey must result in their discomfiture and capture. Walter would see to that also. But concerning Ella's position doubt would insist on intruding, till at last he decided that the very moment the Brook Bourne Spring business was satisfactorily finished with he would hurry at his best speed to Bittermeads and make sure of her safety.

Absorbed in these uneasy thoughts, he had insensibly slackened speed, and looking at his watch he saw that it was two o'clock, and that he was still, by the milestone at the roadside, eight miles from his destination.

He wished to be there a little before the time arranged for him by Deede Dawson, and he increased his pace till he came to a spot where the path he had to take branched off from the road he had been following. At this spot a heavy country lad was sitting on a gate by the wayside, and as Dunn approached he clambered heavily down and slouched forward to meet him.

"Be you called Robert Dunn, mister?" he asked.

Dunn gave him a quick and suspicious look, much startled by this sudden recognition in so lonely a spot.

"Yes, I am," he said, after a moment's hesitation. "Why?"

"If you are, there's this as I'm to give you," the lad answered, drawing a note from his pocket.

"Oh, who gave you that?" Dunn asked, fully persuaded the note contained some final instructions from Deede Dawson and wondering if this lad were one of his agents in disguise, or merely some inhabitant of the district hired for the one purpose of delivering the letter.

But the lad's drawled reply disconcerted him greatly.

"A lady," he said. "A real lady in a big car, she told me to wait here and give you this. All alone she was, and drove just like a man."

He handed the letter over as he spoke, and Dunn saw that it was addressed to him in his name of Robert Dunn in Ella's writing. He blinked at it in very great surprise, for there was nothing he expected less, and he did not understand how she knew so well where he would be or how she had managed to get away from Bittermeads uninterfered with by Deede Dawson.

His first impulse was to suspect some new trap, some new and cunning trap that, perhaps, the unconscious Ella was being used to bait. Taking the letter from the boy, he said:

"How did you know it was for me?"

"Lady told me," answered the boy grinning. "She said as I was to look out for a chap answering to the name of
Robert Dunn, with his face so covered with hair you couldn't see nothing of it no more'n you can see a sheep's back for wool. 'As soon as I set eye on 'ee,' says I, 'That's him,' I says, and so 'twas."

He grinned again and slouched away and Dunn stood still, holding the letter in his hand and not opening it at first. It was almost as though he feared to do so, and when at last he tore the envelope open it was with a hand that trembled a little in spite of all that he could do. For there was something about this strange communication and the means adopted to deliver it to him that struck him as ominous in the extreme. Some sudden crisis must have arisen, he thought, and it appeared to him that Ella's knowledge of where to find him implied a knowledge of Deede Dawson's plans that meant she was either his willing and active agent and accomplice, or else she had somehow acquired a knowledge of her stepfather's proceedings that must make her position a thousand times more critical and dangerous than before.

He flung the envelope aside and began to read the contents. It opened abruptly, without any form of address, and it was written in a hand that showed plain signs of great distress and agitation: "You are in great danger. I don't know what. I heard them talking. They spoke as though something threatened you, something you could not escape. Be careful, very careful. You asked me once if I had ever heard a man with a high, squeaky voice, and I did not answer. It was to a man with a voice like that I gave the packing-case I took away from here the night you came. Do you remember? He was here all last night, I think. He is Mr. Walter Dunsmore. I saw him that day at Wreste Abbey, and I knew I had seen him before. This morning I recognized him. I am sure because he hurt his hand on the packing-case lid, and I saw the mark there still. He and my stepfather were talking all night, I think I couldn't hear everything. There is a General Dunsmore. Something is to happen to him at three o'clock and then to you later, and they both laughed a great deal because they think you will be blamed for whatever happens to General Dunsmore. He is to be enticed somewhere to meet you, but you are not to be there till four, too late. I am afraid, more afraid than ever I have been. What shall I do? I think they are making plans to do something awful. I don't know what to do. I think my stepfather suspects I know something, he keeps looking, looking, smiling all the time. Please come back and take mother and me away, for I think he means to kill us both."

There was no signature, but written like an afterthought across one corner of the note were the scribbled words: "You told me something once, I don't know if you meant it." And then, underneath, was the addition--"He never stops smiling."

Twice over Dunn read this strange, disturbing message, and then a third time, and he made a little gesture of annoyance for it did not seem to him that the words he read made sense, or else it was that his brain no longer worked normally, and could not interpret them.

"Oh, but that's absurd," he said aloud.

He looked all around him, surprised to see that the face of the country-side had not changed in any way, but was all just as it had been before this letter had been put into his hands.

He began to read a third, but stopped half-way through the first sentence.

"Then it's Walter all the time," he muttered. "Walter--Walter!"

CHAPTER XXVI

A RACE AGAINST TIME

Even when he had said this aloud it was still as though he could not grasp its full meaning.

"Walter," he repeated vaguely. "Walter."

His thoughts, that had seemed as frozen by the sudden shock of the tremendous revelation so unconsciously made to him by Ella, began to stir and move again, and almost at once, with an extraordinary and abnormal rapidity.

As a drowning man is said to see flash before his eyes the whole history and record of his life, so now Dunn saw the whole story of his life-long friendship with Walter pictured before him.

For when he was very small, Walter had been to him like an elder brother, and when he was older, it was Walter who had taught him to ride and to shoot, to hunt and to fish, and when he was at school it was Walter to whom he looked up as the dashing young man of the world, who knew all life's secrets, and when he was at college it was Walter who had helped him out of the inevitable foolish scrapes into which it is the custom of the undergraduate to fall.

Then, when he had come to man's estate, Walter had still been his confidential friend and adviser. In Walter's hand he had been accustomed to leave everything during his absences on his hunting and exploring trips; and at what time during this long and kindly association of good-fellowship had such black hate and poison of envy bred in Walter's heart?

"Walter!" he said aloud once more, and he uttered the name as though it were a cry of anguish.

Yet, too, even in his utter bewilderment and surprise, it seemed strange to him that he had never once suspected, never dreamed, never once had the shadow of a suspicion.

Little things, trifling things, a word, an accent, a phrase that had passed at the time for a lest, a thousand such
memories came back to him now with a new and terrible significance.

For, after all, Walter was in the direct line. Only just a few lives stood between him and a great inheritance, a
great position. Perhaps long brooding on what might so easily be had made him mad.

Dunn remembered now, too, that it was Walter who had discovered that first murderous attempt which had first
put them on their guard, but perhaps he had discovered it only because he knew of it, and when it failed, saw his
safest plan was to be foremost in tracking it out.

And it was Walter who had last seen poor Charley Wright alone, and far from Bittermeads. But perhaps that was
a lie to confuse the search for the missing man, and a reason why that search had failed so utterly up to the moment
of Dunn's own grim discovery in the attic.

With yet a fresh shock so that he reeled as he stood with the impact of the thought, Dunn realized that all this
implied that every one of his precautions had been rendered futile that of all his elaborate plans not one would take
effect since all had been entrusted to the care of the very man against whom they were aimed.

It was Walter for whom the net had been laid in Ottam's Wood; and Walter to whom had been entrusted the task
drawing that net tight at the right moment.

It was Walter's friends and agents who were to break into Wreste Abbey, and Walter to whom had been
entrusted the task of defeating and capturing them. It was Walter from whom Ella stood in most danger if her action
that morning had been observed, and it was Walter to whom he had given the task of protecting her.

At this thought, he turned and began to run as fast as he could in the direction of Bittermeads.

At all costs she must be saved, she who had exposed the whole awful plot. For a hundred yards or so he fled,
swift as the wind, till on a sudden he stopped dead with the realization of the fact that every yard he took that way
took him further and further from Ottam's Wood.

For there was danger there, too--grim and imminent--and sentences in Ella's hasty letter that bore now to his new
knowledge a deep significance she had not dreamed of.

As when a flash of lightning lights all the landscape up and shows the traveller dreadful dangers that beset his
path, so a wave of intuition told Dunn clearly the whole conspiracy; so that he saw it all, and saw how every detail
was to be fitted in together. His father, General Dunsmore, was to be murdered first at the Brook Bourne Spring, to
which he was being lured; and afterwards, when Dunn arrived, he was to be murdered, too. And on him, dead and
unable to defend himself, the blame of his father's death would be laid. It would not be difficult to manage. Walter
would arrange it all as neatly as he had been accustomed to arrange the Dunsmore business affairs placed in his
hands for settlement.

A forged letter or two, Dunn's own revolver used to shoot the old man with and then placed in Dunn's dead hand
when his own turn had come, convincing detail like that would be easy to arrange. Why, the very fact of his
disguise, the tangled beard that he had grown to hide his features with, would appear conclusive. Any coroner's jury
would return a verdict of wilful murder against his memory on that one fact alone.

Walter would see to that all right. A little false evidence apparently reluctantly given would be added, and all
would be kneaded together into the one substance till the whole guilt of all that happened would appear to lie solely
on his shoulders.

As for motive, it would simply be put forward that he had been in a hurry to succeed his uncle. And very likely
some tale of a quarrel with his father or something of that sort would be invented, and would go uncontradicted
since there would be no one to contradict it.

And most probably what was contemplated at Wreste Abbey was no ordinary burglary, but the assassination of
old Lord Chobham, of which the guilt would also be set down to him.

Very clearly now he realized that this tremendous plot was aimed, not only at life, but at honour--that not only
was his life required, but also that he should be thought a murderer.

With the realization of the danger that threatened at Wreste Abbey he turned and began to run back in the
direction where it lay, that he might take timely warning there, but he did not run a dozen strides when he
remembered Ella again, and paused.

Surely he must think of her first, alone and unprotected. For she was the woman he loved; and besides, she had
summoned him to her help, and at least, the others were men.

All this flood of thoughts, this intuitive grasping of a situation terrible beyond conception, almost unparalleled in
bloody and dreadful horror, passed through his mind with extreme rapidity.

Once more he turned and began to run--to run as he had never run before, for now he saw that all depended on
the speed with which he could cover the eight miles that lay between him and Ottam's Wood, whether he could still
save his father or not.

The district was lonely in the extreme, there was no human habitation near, no place where he could obtain any
help or any swift means of conveyance. His one hope must be in his speed, his feet must be swift to save, not only
his own life and his father’s, but his honour, too, and Ella and his old uncle as well; and all--all hung upon the speed
with which he could cover the eight long miles that lay between him and Brook Bourne Spring in Ottam’s Wood.
Even as he ran, as he thought of Ella, he came abruptly to a pause, wrung with sudden anguish. For each fleet stride
he was making towards Brook Bourne Spring was taking him further and further away from Bittermeads just as
before each step to Bittermeads had been taking him further from Ottam’s Wood.
He began to run again, even faster than before, and it was towards Ottam’s Wood that he ran, each step taking
him further from Bittermeads and further from the woman he loved in her bitter need and peril, who looked to him
for the help he could not give. With pain and anguish he ran on, ran as men have seldom run--as seldom so much
was hung upon their running.
On and on he sped, fleet as the wind, fleet as the light breeze that blew lightly by. A solitary villager trudging on
some errand in this lonely place, tells to this day the tale of the bearded, wild-eyed man who raced so madly by him,
raced on and down the long, straight road till his figure dwindled and vanished in the distance.
A shepherd boy went home with a tale of a strange thing he had seen of a man running so fast it seemed he was
scarcely in sight before he was gone again.
And except for those two and one other none saw him at all and he ran his race alone beneath the skies, across
the bare country side.
It was at a spot where the path ran between two high hedges that he came upon a little herd of cows a lad was
driving home.
It seemed impossible to pass through that tangle of horns and tails and plunging hoofs, and so indeed it was, but
Dunn took another way, and with one leap, cleared the first beast clean and alighted on the back of the second.
Before the startled beast could plunge away he leaped again from the vantage of its back and landed on the open
ground beyond and so on, darting full speed past the staring driver, whose tale that he told when he got home caused
him to go branded for years as a liar.
On and on Dunn fled, without stay or pause, at the utmost of his speed every second of time, every yard of
distance. For he knew he had need of every ounce of power he possessed or could call to his aid, since he knew well
that all, all, might hang upon a second less or more, and now four miles lay behind him and four in front.
Still on he raced with labouring lungs and heart near to bursting--onward still, swift, swift and sure, and now
there were six miles behind and only two in front, and he was beginning to come to a part of the country that he
knew.
Whether he was soon or late he had no idea or how long it was that he had raced like this along the lonely
country road at the full extremity and limit of his strength.
He dared not take time to glance at his watch, for he knew the fraction of a second he would thus lose might
mean the difference between in time and too late. On he ran still and presently he left the path and took the fields.
But he had forgotten that though the distance might be shorter the going would be harder, and on the rough grass
he stumbled, and across the bare ground damp earth clung to his boots and hindered him as though each foot had
become laden with lead.
His speed was slower, his effort greater if possible, and when he came to a hedge he made no effort to leap, but
crashed through it as best he could and broke or clambered or tumbled a path for himself.
Now Ottam’s Wood was very near, and reeling and staggering like a man wounded to the death but driven by
inexorable fate, he plunged on still, and there was a little froth gathering at the corners of his mouth and from one of
his nostrils came a thin trickle of blood.
Yet still he held on, though in truth he hardly knew any longer why he ran or what his need for haste, and as he
came to the wood round a spur where a cluster of young beeches grew, he saw a tall, upright, elderly man walking
there, well-dressed and of a neat, soldier-like appearance.
“Hallo--there you are--father--” he gasped and fell down, prone unconscious.
CHAPTER XXVII
FLIGHT AND PURSUIT
When he came to himself he was lying on his back, and bending over him was his father’s familiar face, wearing
an expression of great surprise and wonder, and still greater annoyance.
“What is the matter?” General Dunsmore asked as soon as he saw that his son’s senses were returning to him.
“Have you all gone mad together? You send me a mysterious note to meet you here at three, you turn up racing and
running like an escaped lunatic, and with a disgusting growth of hair all over your face, so that I didn’t know you till
you spoke, and then there’s Walter dodging about in the wood here like a poacher hiding from the keepers. Are you
both quite mad, Rupert?”
“Walter,” Rupert repeated, lifting himself on one hand, “Walter--have you seen him?”
“Over there,” said the general, nodding towards the right. “He was dodging and creeping about for all the world
like some poaching rascal. I waved, but he didn't see me, and when I tried to overtake him I lost sight of him somehow in the trees, and found I had come right out of my way for Brook Bourne Spring."

"Thank God for that," said Rupert fervently as a picture presented itself to him of his unsuspecting father trying in that lonely wood to find and overtake the man whose murderous purpose was aimed at his life.

"What do you mean?" snapped the general. "And why have you made such a spectacle of yourself with all that beard? Why, I didn't know you till you spoke--there's Walter there. What makes him look like that?"

For Walter had just come out of the wood about fifty yards to their right, and when he saw them talking together he understood at once that in some way or another all his plans had failed.

He was looking at them through a gap in some undergrowth that hid most of his body, but showed his head and shoulders plainly, and as he stood there watching them his face was like a fiend's.

"Walter," the general shouted, and to his son Rupert he said: "The boy's ill."

Walter moved forward from among the trees. He had a gun in his hand, and he flung it forward as though preparing to fire, and at the same moment Rupert Dunsmore drew from his pocket the pistol Deede Dawson had given him and fired himself.

But at the very moment that he pulled the trigger the general struck up his arm so that the bullet flew high and harmless through the tops of the trees.

Walter stepped back again into the wood, and Rupert said:
"You don't know what you have done, father."
"You are mad, mad," the general gasped.

His face was very pale, and he trembled a little, for though he had heard many bullets whistle by his ears, that had happened in action against an enemy, and was altogether different from this. He put out his hand in an attempt to take the pistol that Rupert easily evaded.

"Give it to me," he said. "I saved his life; you might have killed him."

"Yes, you saved him, father," Rupert muttered, thinking to himself that the saving of Walter's life might well mean the loss of Ella's, since very likely the failure of their plots would be at once attributed by the conspirators to her. "Father, I never wrote that letter you say you had. Walter forged it to get you here, where he meant to kill us both. That's why he looked like that, that's why he had his gun."

General Dunsmore only stared blankly at him for a moment.

"Kill me? Kill you? What for?" he gasped.

"So that he might become Lord Chobham of Wreste Abbey instead of Lord Chobham's poor relation," answered Rupert. "The poison attempt on uncle which Walter discovered was first of all his own doing; it was through him Charley Wright lost his life. He has committed at least one other murder. Today he meant to kill both of us. Then he would have been heir to the title and estates, and when uncle died he would have been Lord Chobham."

"Nonsense, absurd, impossible. You're mad, quite mad," the general stammered. "Why, he would have been hanged at once."

"Not if he could have fixed the blame elsewhere," Rupert answered. "That was to have been my part; it was carefully arranged to make it seem I was responsible for it all. I haven't time to explain now. I don't think he is coming back. I expect he is only loaded with small shot, and he doesn't dare try a long range shot or come near now he knows I'm ready for him."

"But it's--it's impossible--Walter," stammered the general. "Impossible."

"The impossible so often happens," answered Rupert, and handed his pistol to him. "You must trust me, father, and do what I tell you. Take this pistol in case you are attacked on the way home. You may be, but I don't think it's likely. Get the motor out and go straight to Wreste Abbey. An attempt on uncle's life will be made tonight, if they still carry out their plans, about dinner-time tonight. See that every possible precaution is taken. See to that first. Then send help as soon as you can to Bittermeads, a house on the outskirts of Ramsdon; any one there will tell you where it is."

"But what are you going to do?" General Dunsmore asked.

"I'm going to find Walter, if he's still hiding in the wood here, as he may be," Rupert answered. "I should like a little chat with him. For a moment he nearly lost his self-control, and for a single moment there showed those fiery and tempestuous passions he was keeping now in such stern repression. "Yes a little talk with him, just us two," he said. "And if he's cleared out, or I can't find him I'm going straight on to Bittermeads. There's some one there who may be in danger, so the sooner I am there the better."

"But wait a moment," the general cried. "Are you armed?"

"Yes, with my hands, I shall want no more when Walter and I meet again," Rupert answered, and, without another word, plunged into the wood at the spot where Walter had vanished.

At first the track of Walter's flying footsteps was plain enough for he had fled full speed, panic having overtaken
him when he saw Rupert and his father together and understood that in some way his deep conspiracy had failed and his treachery become known.

For a little distance, therefore, he had crashed through bracken and undergrowth, heedless of all but the one need that was upon him to flee away and escape while there was yet time. But, after a while, his first panic subsiding, he had gone more carefully, and, as the weather had been very dry of late, when he came to open ground his footmarks were scarcely visible.

In such spots Rupert could make but slow progress, and he was handicapped, too, by the fact, that all the time he had to be on his guard lest from some unsuspected quarter his enemy should come upon him unawares.

For, indeed, this enterprise he had undertaken in the flood tide of his passion and fierce anger was dangerous enough since he, quite weaponless, was following up a very desperate armed man who would know that for him there could be henceforth no question of mercy.

But there was that burning in Rupert's heart that made him heedless of all danger, and indeed, he who for mere love of sport and adventure, had followed a wounded tiger into the jungle and tracked a buffalo through thick reeds, was not likely to draw back now.

Once he thought he had succeeded, for he saw a bush move and he rushed at once upon it. But when he reached it there was nothing there, and the ground about was hard and bare, showing no marks to prove any one had lately been near. And once he saw a movement in the midst of some bracken and caught a glimpse of what seemed like Walter's coat, so that he was sure he had him at last, and he shouted and ran forward.

But again no one was there, though the bracken was all trampled and beaten down. The tracks Walter had made in going were plain, too, but Rupert lost them almost at once and could not find them again, and when he came a little later to the further edge of the wood, he decided to waste no more time, but to make his way direct to Bittermeads so as at least to make sure of Ella's safety.

He told himself that he had failed badly in woodcraft and, indeed, he had been too fierce and hot in his pursuit to show his wonted skill.

The plan that had been in his mind from the moment when he left his father was to take advantage of the fact that on this edge of the wood was situated a farm belonging to Lord Chobham, where horses were bred and where he was well known.

Some of these horses were sure to be out in the fields, and it would be easy for him, wasting no time in explanation, to catch one of them, mount bare-backed and ride through the New Plantation--the New Plantation was a hundred years old, but still kept that name--over the brow of the hill beyond, swim the canal in the valley, and so straight across-country to Ramsdon.

Riding thus direct he would save time and distance, and arrive more quickly than by going the necessary distance to secure a motor-car which would have also to take a much more circuitous route.

He jumped the hedge, therefore, that lay at the wood's edge and slid down the steep bank into the sunken road beyond where he found himself standing in front of Walter, who held in his hands a gun levelled straight at Rupert's heart.

"I could have shot you time after time in there you know," he said quietly. "From behind that bush and from out of the bracken, too. I don't know why I didn't. I suppose it wasn't worth while, now I shall never be Lord Chobham."

He flung down his gun as he spoke and sprang on a bicycle that he had held leaning against his legs.

Quickly he sped away, leaving Rupert standing staring after him, realizing that his life had hung upon the bending of Walter's finger, and that Walter, with at least two cold-blooded murders to his account, or little more to hope for in this world or the next, had now inexplicably spared him for whose destruction, of life and honour alike, he had a little before been laying such elaborate, hellish plans.

With a gesture of his hands that proved he failed to understand, Rupert ran on and crossed a field to where he saw some horses grazing.

One he knew immediately for one of his father's mares, and he knew her also for an animal of speed and endurance.

The mare knew him, too, and suffered him to mount her without difficulty, and without a soul on the farm being aware of what was happening and without having to waste any precious time on explanations or declaring his identity, Rupert rode away, sitting the mare bare-backed, through the New Plantation towards Bittermeads, where he hoped, arriving unexpectedly, to be able to save Ella before the danger he was sure threatened her came to a head.

Of one thing he was certain. Deede Dawson would never do what his companion in villainy had just done, he would spare no one; fierce, malignant and evil to the last, his one thought if he knew they had and vengeance approached would be to do what harm he could before the end.

CHAPTER XXVIII
BACK AT BITTERMEADS
When, riding fast, Rupert Dunsmore came in sight of Bittermeads he experienced a feeling of extreme relief. Though what he had feared he did not quite know, for he did not see that any alarm could have reached here yet or any hint come to Deede Dawson of the failure of all his plotting.

Even if Walter had had the idea of returning to give his accomplice warning, he could not have come by the road on his bicycle as quickly as Rupert had ridden across country. And that Walter would spend either time or thought on Deede Dawson did not appear in any way probable.

To Rupert, therefore, it seemed certain that Deede Dawson could know nothing as yet. But all the same it was an immense relief to see the house again and to know that in a few moments he would be there.

He tied up the mare to a convenient tree, and with eyes that were quick and alert and every nerve and muscle ready for all emergencies, he drew near the house.

All was still and quiet, no smoke came from the chimneys, there was no sign of life or movement anywhere. For a moment he hesitated and then made his way round to the back, hoping to find Mrs. Barker there and perhaps obtain from her information as to the whereabouts of Deede Dawson and of Ella and her mother.

For it seemed to him it would be his best plan to get the two women quietly out of the way if he could possibly do so before making any attempt to deal with Deede Dawson or letting him know of his return.

For the mere fact that he was back again so soon would show at once that something had gone seriously wrong, and once Deede Dawson knew that, he would be, Rupert well realized, in a very desperate and reckless mood and ripe for committing any mischief that he could.

Cautiously Rupert opened the back door and found himself in the stone-paved passage that ran between the kitchen and the scullery and pantry. Everything seemed very quiet and still, and there was no sign of Mrs. Barker nor any appearance that she had been that morning busy about her usual tasks. The kitchen fire was not lighted, a pile of unwashed crockery stood on the table, there had apparently been no attempt to prepare any meals.

Frowning uneasily, for all this did not seem to him of good omen, Rupert went quickly on to the living rooms. They were unoccupied and did not seem to have been much used that day; and in the small breakfast-room Deede Dawson had been accustomed to consider his special apartment, his favourite little travelling chessboard stood on the table with pieces in position on it.

There was a letter, too, he had begun but not finished, to the editor of a chess-column in some paper, apparently to the effect that a certain problem "cooked," and that by such and such a move "the mate for the first player that appeared certain was unexpectedly and instantly transferred in this dramatic manner into a mate for his opponent."

The words seemed somehow oddly appropriate to Rupert, and he smiled grimly as he read them and then all at once his expression changed and his whole attitude became one of intense watchfulness and readiness.

For his quick eye had noted that the ink on the nib of the pen that this letter had been written with, was not yet dry.

Then Deede Dawson must have been here a moment or two ago and must have gone in a hurry. That could only mean he was aware of Rupert's return and was warned and suspicious. It is perhaps characteristic of Rupert's passionate and eager temperament that only now did it occur to him that he was quite unarmed and that without a weapon of any kind he was matching himself against as reckless and as formidable a criminal as had ever lived.

For want of anything better he picked up the heavy glass inkpot standing on the table, emptied the contents in a puddle on the floor, and held the inkpot itself ready in his hand.

He listened intently, but heard no sound—no sound at all in the whole house, and this increased his apprehensions, for he knew well that Deede Dawson was a man always the most dangerous when most silent.

It was possible of course that he had fled, but not likely. He would not go, Rupert thought, till he had made his preparations and not without a last effort to take revenge on those who had defeated him and in this dramatic way turned the mate he had expected to secure into a win for his opponent.

Still Rupert listened intently, straining his ears to catch the least sound to hint to him where his enemy was, for he knew that if he failed to discover him his first intimation of his proximity might well come in the shape of the white-hot sting of a bullet, rending flesh and bone.

Then, too, where was Ella, and where was her mother?

There was something inexpressibly sinister in the utter quietness of the house, a quietness not at all of peace and rest but of a brooding, angry threat.

Still he could hear nothing, and he left the room, very quickly and noiselessly, and he made sure there was no one anywhere in any of these rooms on the ground floor.

He locked the front door and the back to make sure no one should enter or leave too easily, and returned on tiptoe, moving to and fro like a shadow cast by a changing light, so swift and noiseless were his movements.

For a little he remained crouching against the side of the stairway, listening for any sound that might float down to him from above.
But none came--and on a sudden, in one movement, as it were, he ran up the stairs and crouched down on the topmost one so that any bullet aimed at him as he appeared might perhaps fly overhead.

But none was fired; there was still no sound at all, no sign that the house held any living creature beside himself. He began to think that Deede Dawson must have sent the two women away and now have gone himself.

But there was the pen downstairs with ink still wet upon the nib to prove that he had been here recently, and again very suddenly Rupert leaped to his feet and ran noiselessly down the corridor and entered quickly into Ella's room.

He had not been in it since the night of his arrival at Bittermeads, but it appeared to him extraordinarily familiar and every little object in it of ornament or use seemed to speak to him softly of Ella's gracious presence.

Of Ella herself there was no sign, but he noticed that the tassel at the end of the window blind cord was moving as if recently disturbed.

The movement was very slight, almost imperceptible, indeed, but it existed; and it proved that some one must very shortly before have been standing at the window. He moved to it and looked out.

The view commanded the road by which he had approached Bittermeads, and he wondered if Ella had been standing there and had seen his approach, and then had concealed herself for some reason.

But, if so, why and where was she hiding? And where was Deede Dawson? And why was everything so silent and so still?

He turned from the window, and as he did so he caught a faint sound in the passage without. Instantly he crouched behind the bed, the heavy glass inkpot that was his one weapon poised in his hand.

The sound did not come again, but as he waited, he saw the door begin to open very slowly, very quietly.

Lower still he crouched, the inkpot ready to throw, every nerve taut and tense for the leap at his foe's throat with which he meant to follow it up. The door opened a little more, very slowly, very carefully. It was wide enough now to admit of entry, and through the opening there sidled, pale and red-eyed, Ella's mother, looking so frail and feeble and so ruffled and disturbed she reminded Rupert irresistibly of a frightened hen.

She edged her way in as though she dared not open the door too widely, and Rupert hesitated in great perplexity and vexation, for he saw that he must show himself, and he feared that she would announce his presence by flight or screams.

But he could not possibly get away without her knowledge; and besides, she might be able to give him useful information.

He stood up quickly, with his finger to his lips. "Hush!" he said. "Not a sound--not a sound." The warning seemed unnecessary, for Mrs. Dawson appeared too paralysed with fear to utter even the faintest cry as she dropped tremblingly on the nearest chair.

"Hush! Hush!" he said. "Where is Ella?"

"I--I don't know," quavered Mrs. Dawson.

"When did you see her last?"

"A little while ago," Mrs. Dawson faltered. "She went upstairs. She didn't come down, so I thought I would try to find her."

"Where's Deede Dawson?" Rupert asked.

"I--I don't know," she quavered again.

"When did you see him last?"

"I--I--a little while ago," she faltered. "He went upstairs--he didn't come down again. I thought I would try to find her--him--I was so frightened when they didn't either of them come down again."

It was evident she was far too confused and upset to give any useful information of any nature, even if she knew anything.

"Deede's been so strange," she said. "And Ella too. I think it's very hard on me--dreams, too. He said he wanted her to help him get a packing-case ready he had to send away somewhere. I don't know where. I don't think Ella wanted to--"

"A packing-case?" Rupert muttered. "What for?"

"It's what they came upstairs to do," Mrs. Dawson said. "And--and --" She began to cry feebly. "It's my nerves," she said. "He's looked so strange at us all day--and neither of them has come down again."

CHAPTER XXIX

THE ATTIC

It was evident that more had occurred to make Mrs. Dawson afraid that she would, or perhaps could, say.

"Wait here," Rupert said to her. "Don't stir." The command seemed superfluous, for she had not at that moment the appearance of still possessing the power to move. Without speaking again, Rupert left the room and went quickly to the foot of the narrow stairs that led to the attics above.
He listened, crouching there, and heard nothing, and a cold fear came to him that perhaps Deede Dawson had done up above what he wished to do and then effected his escape while he himself had been lingering in Ella's room.

Adopting his plan of a rapid rush to disconcert the aim of any one who might be about to fire at him, he made a swift dash up the stairs and on the topmost one crouched down again and waited.

But still nothing happened, all was very quiet, and the door of one attic, the one which had been assigned to him as a bed-chamber, was wide open so that he could see into it and see that it was unoccupied.

But the doors of both the others were closed, and as he looked he made out in the gloom, for this landing by the attic was very badly-lighted by a small and awkwardly-placed skylight, a scattered dozen or so of hairpins, and a tortoiseshell comb such as he had seen sometimes in Ella's hair, lying on the floor near the door of the larger of the two attics, the one in which he remembered well he had found Deede Dawson on a certain night busy measuring and empty packing-case.

With one quick rush he crossed the landing and flung himself at the door.

It opened at once, for it was not locked, and within he saw Deede Dawson, screw-driver in his hand, standing behind a large packing-case, the lid of which he had apparently that minute finished fastening down.

He looked up as Rupert entered thus precipitately, and he showed no sign of surprise or alarm.

"You're back early," he said. "Something gone wrong?"

"What are you doing? What's in there?" Rupert asked, looking at the packing-case, his mouth and lips so suddenly dry he found it difficult to speak at all.

Deede Dawson began to laugh, a low and dreadful laughter that had in it no trace of merriment at all, but only of mockery and malice.

It was such laughter as a devil from the nethermost pit might give vent to when he saw at last a good man yield to long temptation.

"What's in there?" Rupert said again, pointing to the packing-case, and it was as though his soul swooned within him for fear of what the answer might be.

"What do the children say?" Deede Dawson returned with his terrible smile. "I'll give you three guesses, isn't it? See if you can guess in three tries."

"What's in there?" Rupert asked the third time, and Deede Dawson laid down the screw-driver with which he had just driven home the last screw.

"Oh, see for yourself, if you want to," he said. "But you ought to know. You know what was in the other case I sent away from here, the one I got Ella to take in the car for me? I want you to take this one away now, the sooner it's away the better."

"That's it, is it?" Rupert muttered.

He no longer doubted, and for a moment all things swam together before him and he felt dizzy and a little sick, and so weak he staggered and nearly fell, but recovered himself in time.

The sensation passed and he saw Deede Dawson as it were a long way off, and between them the packing-case, huge, monstrous, and evil, like a thing of dread from some other world. Violent shudderings swept though him one after the other, and he was aware that Deede Dawson was speaking again.

"What did you say?" he asked vacantly, when the other paused.

"You look ill," Deede Dawson answered. "Anything wrong? Why have you come back so soon? Have you failed?"

Rupert passed his hand before his eyes to clear away the mist that hung there and that hampered his sight.

He perceived that Deede Dawson held his right hand in the pocket of his coat, grasping something that bulged out curiously.

He divined that it was a pistol, and that Deede Dawson was ready to shoot at any moment, but that he wished very greatly to know first of all what had happened and why Rupert had returned so soon and whether there was immediate necessity for flight or not.

That he was uneasy was certain, for his cold eyes showed a hesitation and a doubt such as Rupert had never seen in them before.

"I'll tell you what's happened," Rupert heard himself saying hoarsely. "If you'll tell me what's in there."

"A bargain, eh?" Deede Dawson said. "It's easy enough. You can look for yourself if you unscrew the lid, but then, after all, why should we take all that trouble?"

As he spoke his pistol showed in his hand, and at once the heavy glass inkpot Rupert had held all this time flew straight and true, and with tremendous force, at Deede Dawson's head.

He avoided it only by the extreme rapidity with which he dropped behind the packing-case, and it flew over his head and crashed against the centre panel of a big wardrobe that stood in one corner of the room, splitting the panel it struck from top to bottom.
Following it, Rupert hurled himself forward with one great spring, but agile as a cat that leaps away from the mastiff's teeth, Deede Dawson slipped from his grasp to the other side of the room. In doing so he knocked his arm against the corner of the packing-case, so that his revolver fell to the ground.

With a shout Rupert stooped and seized it, and straightened himself to see that Deede Dawson had already another revolver in his hand—a second one that he had drawn from an inner pocket.

They remained very still, watching each other intently, neither eager to fire, since both wished first to make the other speak. For Rupert desired very greatly that Deede Dawson should tell him where Ella was, and Deede Dawson needed that Rupert should explain what had gone wrong, and how imminent and great was the danger that therefore most likely threatened him.

Each knew, too, that the slightest movement he made would set the other shooting, and each realized that in that close and narrow space any exchange of shots must almost of necessity mean the death of both, since both were cool and deadly marksmen, well accustomed to the use of the revolver.

Deede Dawson was the first to speak.

"Well, what next?" he said. "If that inkpot of yours had hit me it would pretty well have knocked my brains out, and if I hadn't hit my elbow against the corner of the packing-case I would have had you shot through with holes like a sieve by now. So far the score's even. Let's chat a bit, and see if we can't come to some arrangement. Look, I'll show I trust you."

As he spoke he laid down, much to Rupert's surprise, and to his equal suspicion, his revolver on the top of a moth-eaten roll of old carpet that leaned against the wall near where he was standing.

"You see, I trust you," he said once more.

"Take your pistol up again," answered Rupert grimly. "I do not trust you."

"Ah, that's a pity." Deede Dawson smiled, making no effort to do as the other said. "You see, we are both good shots, and if we start blazing away at each other up here we shall both be leaking pretty badly before long. That's a prospect that has no attraction for me; I don't know if it has for you. But there are things I can tell you that might be interesting, and things you can tell me I want to know. Why not exchange a little information, and then separate calmly, rather than indulge in pistol practice that can only mean the death of us both? For if your first bullet goes though my brain I swear my first will be in your heart."

"Likely enough," agreed Rupert, "but worth while perhaps."

"Oh, that's fanaticism," Deede Dawson answered. "Flattering perhaps to me, but not quite reasonable, eh?"

"There's only one thing I want to know from you," Rupert said slowly.

"Then why not ask it, why not agree to the little arrangement I suggest, eh? Eh, Rupert Dunsmore?"

"You know me, then?"

"Oh, long enough."

"Where is Ella?"

Deede Dawson laughed again.

"That's a thing I know and you don't," he said. "Well, she's safe away in London by this time."

"That's a lie, for her mother's here still," answered Rupert, even though his heart leapt merely to hear the words.

"Unbelieving Thomas," smiled the other. "Well, then, she is where she is, and that you can find out for yourself. But I'll make another suggestion. We are both good shots, and if we start to fire we shall kill each other. I am certain of killing you, but I shan't escape myself. Well, then, why not toss for it? Equal chances for both, and certain safety for one. Will you toss me, the one who loses to give up his pistol to the other?"

"It seems to me a good idea," Deede Dawson argued. "Here we are watching each other like cats, and knowing that the least movement of either will start the other off, and both of us pulling trigger as hard as we can. My idea would mean a chance for one. Well, let's try another way; the best shot to win. You don't trust me, but I will you."

Leaving his pistol lying where he had put it down, he crossed the attic, and with a pencil he took from his pocket drew a circle on the panel of the wardrobe door that Rupert had split with the inkpot he had thrown. In the centre of the circle he marked a dot, and turned smilingly to the frowning and suspicious Rupert.

"There you are," he said, "and made another circle near the first one. "Now you put a bullet into the middle of this circle and I'll put one afterwards through the second circle, and the one who is nearest to the dots I've marked, wins. What have you to say to that? Seems to me better than our killing each other. Isn't it?"

"I think you're playing the fool for some reason of your own," answered Rupert. "There's only one thing I want to know from you. Where is Ella?"

"Let me know how you can shoot," answered Deede Dawson, "and I'll tell you, by all that's holy, I will."

Rupert hesitated. He did not understand all this, he could not imagine what motive was in Deede Dawson's mind, though it was certainly true enough that once they began shooting at each other neither man was at all likely to survive, for Rupert knew he would not miss and he did not think Deede Dawson would either.
Above all, there was the one thing he wished to know, the one consideration that weighed with him above all others—what had become of Ella? And this time there had been in Deede Dawson's voice an accent of twisted and malign sincerity that seemed to say he really would be willing to tell the truth about her if Rupert would gratify his whim about this sort of shooting-match that he was suggesting.

The purpose of it Rupert could not understand, but it did not seem to him there would be any risk of harm in agreeing, for Deede Dawson was standing so far away from his own weapon he could not well be contemplating any immediate mischief or treachery.

It did occur to him that the pistol he held might be loaded in one chamber only and that Deede Dawson might be scheming to induce him to throw away his solitary cartridge.

But a glance reassured him on that point.

"Let me see how you can shoot," Deede Dawson repeated, leaning carelessly with folded arms against the wall a little distance away. "And I promise you I'll tell you where Ella is."

Rupert lifted his pistol and was indeed on the very point of firing when he caught a glimpse of such evil triumph and delight in Deede Dawson's cold eyes that he hesitated and lowered the weapon, and at the same time, looking more closely, searching more intently for some indication of Deede Dawson's hidden purpose, he noticed, caught in the crack of the wardrobe door, a tiny shred of some blue material only just visible.

He remembered that sometimes of an afternoon Ella had been accustomed to wear a frock made of a material exactly like that of which so tiny a fragment showed now in the crack of the wardrobe door.

CHAPTER XXX

SOME EXPLANATIONS

He turned quickly towards Deede Dawson. Their eyes met, and in that mutual glance Rupert Dunsmore read that his suspicions were correct and Deede Dawson that his dreadful trap was discovered.

Neither spoke. For a brief moment they remained impassive, immobile, their eyes meeting like blows, and then Deede Dawson made one spring to seize again the revolver he had laid down in the hope of enticing Rupert into the awful snare prepared for him.

But quick as he was, Rupert was quicker still, and as Deede Dawson leaped he lifted his pistol and fired, though his aim was not at the man, but at the revolver lying on the top of the roll of carpet where Deede Dawson had placed it.

The bullet, for Rupert was a man who seldom missed, struck the weapon fair and whirled it, shattered and useless, to the floor. Deede Dawson, whose hand had been already outstretched to seize it, drew back with a snarl that was more like the cry of a trapped wolf than any sound produced from human lips.

Still, Rupert did not speak. With the smoking pistol in his hand he watched silently and steadily his helpless enemy who, for his part, was silent, too, and very still, for he felt that doom was close upon him.

Yet he showed not the least sign of fear, but only a fierce and sullen defiance.

"Shoot away, why don't you shoot?" he sneered. "Mind you don't miss. I trusted you when I put my revolver down and I was a fool, but I thought you would play fair."

Without a word Rupert tossed his pistol through the attic window.

They heard the tinkling fall of the glass, they heard more faintly the sound of the revolver striking the outhouse roof twenty feet below and rebounding thence to the paved kitchen yard beneath, and then all was quiet again.

"I only need my hands for you," said Rupert softly, as softly as a mother coos to her drowsy babe. "My hands for you."

For the first time Deede Dawson seemed to fear, for, indeed, there was that in Rupert Dunsmore's eyes to rouse fear in any man. With a sudden swift spring, Rupert leaped forward and Deede Dawson, not daring to abide that onslaught, turned and ran, screaming shrilly.

During the space of one brief moment, a dreadful and appalling moment, there was a wild strange hunting up and down the narrow space of that upper attic, cumbered with lumber and old, disused furniture.

Round and round Deede Dawson fled, screaming still in a high shrill way, like some wild thing in pain, and hard upon him followed Rupert, nor had they gone a second time about that room before Rupert had Deede Dawson in a fast embrace, his arms about the other's middle.

One last great cry Deede Dawson gave when Rupert seized him, and then was silent as Rupert lifted him and swung him high at arm's length.

As a child in play sports with its doll, so Rupert swung Deede Dawson twice about his head, round and round and then loosed him so that he went hurling through the air with awful force, like a stone shot from a catapult, clean through the window through which Rupert had the moment before tossed his pistol with but little more apparent effort.

Right through the window, bearing panes and sash with him, Deede Dawson flew with the impetus of that great
throw and out beyond and down, turning over and over the while, down through the empty air to fall and be shattered like a piece of worthless crockery on the stone threshold of the outhouse door.

Surprised to find himself alone, Rupert put his hand to his forehead and looked vacantly around.

"My God, what have I done?" he thought.

He was trembling violently, and the fury of the passion that had possessed him and had given his mighty muscles a force more than human, was still upon him.

Going to the window, he looked out, for he did not quite know what had happened and from it he looked back at the wardrobe door.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Yes."

He ran to it and tore open the door and from within very tenderly and gently he lifted down the half-swooning Ella who, securely gagged and tightly bound, had been thrust into its interior to conceal her from him.

Hurriedly he freed her from her bonds and from the handkerchief that was tied over her mouth and holding her in his arms like a child, pressing her close to his heart, he carried her lightly out of that dreadful room.

Only once did she stir, only once did she speak, when lifting her pale, strained face to him she murmured very faintly something in which he just caught the words:

"Deede Dawson."

"He'll trouble us no more nor any one else, I think," answered Rupert, and she said no more but snuggled down in his arms as though with a feeling of perfect security and safety.

He took her to her own room and left her with her mother, and then went down to the hall and took a chair and sat at the front door.

All at once he felt very tired and one of his shoulders hurt him, for he had strained a muscle there rather badly. His one desire was to rest, and he did not even trouble to go round to the back of the house to see what had happened to Deede Dawson, though indeed that was not a point on which he entertained much doubt.

For a long time he sat there quietly, till at last his father arrived in a motor-car from Wreste Abbey, together with a police-inspector from the county town whom he had picked up on the way.

Rupert took them into the room where Deede Dawson's chessmen and the board were still standing and told them as briefly as he could what had happened since the first day when he had left his home to try to trace out and defeat the plot hatched by Walter Dunsmore and Deede Dawson.

"You people wouldn't act," he said to the inspector. "You said there was no evidence, no proof, and I daresay you were right enough from the legal point of view. But it was plain enough to me that there was some sort of conspiracy against my uncle's life, I thought against my father's as well, but I was not sure of that at first. It was through poor Charley Wright I became so certain. He found out things and told me about them; but for him the first attempt to poison my uncle would have succeeded. Even then we had still no evidence to prove the reality of our suspicions, for Walter destroyed it, by accident, I thought at the time, purposely, as I know now. It was something Walter said that gave Charley the idea of coming here. Then he vanished. He must have roused their suspicions somehow, and they killed him. But again Walter put us all off the scent by his story of having seen Charley in London, so that it was there the search for him was made, and no one ever thought of Bittermeads. I never suspected Walter, such an idea never entered my head; but luckily I didn't tell him of my idea of coming to Bittermeads myself to try to find out what was really going on here. He knew nothing of where I was till I told him that day at Wreste Abbey, then of course he came over here at once. I thought it was anxiety for my safety, but I expect really it was to warn his friends. When I saw him here that night I told him every single thing, I trusted the carrying-out of everything I had arranged to him. If it hadn't been for a note Miss Cayley wrote me to warn me, I should have walked right into the trap and so would my father too."

The police-inspector asked a few questions and then made a search of the room which resulted in the discovery of quite sufficient proof of the guilt of Deede Dawson and of Walter Dunsmore.

Among these proofs was also a hastily-scribbled note from Walter that solved the mystery of John Clive's death. It was not signed, but both General Dunsmore and Rupert knew his writing and were prepared to swear to it. Beginning abruptly and scribbled on a torn scrap of paper, it ran:

"I found Clive where you said, lucky you got hold of the note and read it before she sent it, for no doubt she meant to warn him. Take care she gets no chance of the sort again. I did Clive's business all right. She saw me and I think recognized me from that time she saw me over the packing-case business, before I took it out to sink it at sea. At any rate, she ran off in a great hurry. If you aren't careful, she'll make trouble yet."

"Apparently," remarked the inspector when he had read this aloud, "the young lady was very luckily not watched closely enough and did make trouble for them. Could I see her, do you think?"

"I don't know, I'll go and ask," Rupert said.

Ella was still very shaken, but she consented to see the inspector, and they all went together to her room where
she was lying on her bed with her mother fussing nervously about her.

She told them in as few words as possible the story of how she had always disliked and mistrusted the man whom so unfortunately her mother had married, and how gradually her suspicions strengthened till she became certain that he was involved in many unlawful deeds.

But always her inner certainty had fallen short of absolute proof, so careful had he been in all he did.

"I knew I knew," she said. "But there was nothing I really knew. And he made me do all sorts of things for him. I wouldn't have cared for myself, but if I tried to refuse he made mother suffer. She was very, very frightened of him, but she would never leave him. She didn't dare. There was one night he made me go very late with a packing-case full of silver things he had, and he wouldn't tell me where he had had them. I believe he stole them all, but I helped him pack them, and I took them away the night Mr. Dunsmore came and gave them to a man wearing a mask. My stepfather said it was just a secret family matter he was helping some friends in, and later on I saw the same man in the woods near here one day--the day Mr. Clive was killed by the poachers--and when he came another time to the house I thought I must try to find out what he wanted. I listened while they talked and they said such strange things I made up my mind to try to warn Mr. Dunsmore, for I was sure there was something they were plotting."

"There was indeed," said Rupert grimly. "And but for that warning you sent me they would have succeeded."

"Somehow they found out what I had done," Ella continued. "As soon as I got back he kept looking at me so strangely. I was afraid--I had been afraid a long time, for that matter--but I tried not to show it. In the afternoon he told me to go up to the attic. He said he wanted me to help him pack some silver. It was the same silver I had packed before; for some reason he had got it back again. This time I had to pack it in the little boxes, and after I had finished I waited up there till suddenly he ran in very quickly and looking very excited. He said I had betrayed them, and should suffer for it, and he took some rope and he tied me as tightly as he could, and tied a great handkerchief over my mouth, and pushed me inside the wardrobe and locked it. I think he would have killed me then only he was afraid of Mr. Dunsmore, and very anxious to know what had happened, and why Mr. Dunsmore had come home, and if there was any danger. And I was a long time there, and I heard a great noise, and then Mr. Dunsmore opened the door and took me out."

CHAPTER XXXI
CONCLUSION

Three months had passed, and in a quiet little cottage on the outskirts of a small country town, situated in one of the most beautiful and peaceful vales of the south-west country, Ella was slowly recovering from the shock of the dreadful experiences through which she had passed.

She had been ill for some weeks, but her mother, fussily incompetent at most times, was always at her best when sickness came, and she had nursed her daughter devotedly and successfully.

As soon as possible they had come to this quiet little place where people, busy with their own affairs and the important progress of the town, had scarcely heard of what the newspapers of the day called "The Great Chobham Sensation."

But, in fact, very much to Rupert's relief, comparatively little had been made known publicly, and the whole affair had attracted wonderfully little attention.

The one public proceeding had been the inquest of Deede Dawson, and that the coroner, at the request of the police eagerly searching for Walter Dunsmore, had made as brief and formal as possible. Under his direction the jury had returned a verdict of "justifiable homicide," and Ella's illness had had at least one good result of making it impossible for her to attend to give her evidence in person.

At a trial, of course, everything would have had to be told in full, but both Allen, Deede Dawson's accomplice, and Walter Dunsmore, his instigator and employer, had vanished utterly.

For Walter the search was very hot, but so far entirely without result. Now could Allen be found. He was identified with a fair degree of certainty as an old criminal well known to the authorities, and it was thought almost certain that he had had previous dealings with Deede Dawson, and knew enough about him to be able to force himself into Bittermeads.

Of the actual plot in operation there he most likely knew little or nothing, but probably Deede Dawson thought he might be useful, and the store of silver found in the attic that Ella had been employed in packing ready for removal was identified as part of the plunder from a recent burglary in a northern town.

It was thought, therefore, that both Allen and Deede Dawson might have been concerned in that affair, that Deede Dawson had managed to secure the greater share of the booty, and that Allen, on the night when Rupert found him breaking into Bittermeads, was endeavouring to get hold of the silver for himself.

But the actual facts are not likely now ever to be known, for from that day to this nothing has been heard of Allen. His old haunts know him no more, and to his record, carefully preserved at Scotland Yard, there have been no recent additions.
One theory is that Deede Dawson, finding him troublesome, took effectual steps to dispose of him. Another is that Deede Dawson got him away by either bribes or threats, and that, not knowing of Deede Dawson's death, he does not venture to return.

In any case, he was a commonplace criminal, and his fate is of little interest to any one but himself.

It was Walter for whom the police hunted with diligence and effort, but with a total lack of success, so that they began to think at the end of three months that he must somehow have succeeded in making his way out of the country.

During the first portion of this time Rupert had been very busy with a great many things that needed his attention. And then Lord Chobham, his health affected by the crimes and treachery of a kinsman whom he had known and trusted as he had known and trusted Walter, was attacked by acute bronchitis which affected his heart and carried him off within the week. The title and estates passed, therefore, to General Dunsmore, and Rupert became the Honourable Rupert Dunsmore and the direct heir. All this meant for him a great deal more to see to and arrange, for the health of the new Lord Chobham had also been affected and he left practically everything in his son's hands, so that, except for the letters which came regularly but had been often written in great haste, Ella knew and heard little of Rupert.

But today he was to come, for everything was finally in order, and, though this she did not know till later, Walter Dunsmore had at last been discovered, dead from poison self-administered, in a wretched lodging in an East End slum. Rupert had been called to identify the body and he had been able to arrange it so that very little was said at the inquest, where the customary verdict of "Suicide during temporary insanity" was duly returned by a quite uninterested jury.

That the last had been heard of the tragedy that had so nearly overwhelmed his life, Rupert was able now to feel fairly well assured, and it was therefore in a mood more cheerful than he had known of late that he started on his journey to Ella's new residence.

He had sent a wire to confirm his letter, and it was in a mood that was more than a little nervous that she busied herself with her preparations.

She chose her very simplest gown, and when there was absolutely nothing more to do she went into their little sitting-room to wait alone by the fire she had built up there, for it was winter now and today was cold and inclined to be stormy.

Rupert had not said exactly when she was to expect him, and she sat for a long time by the fire, starting at every sound and imagining at every moment that she heard the front-door bell ring.

"I shall not let him feel himself bound," she said to herself with great decision. "I shall tell him I hope we shall always be friends but that's all; and if he wants anything more, I shall say No. But most likely he won't say a word about all that nonsense, it would be silly to take seriously what he said--there."

To Ella, now, Bittermeads was always "there," and though she told herself several times that probably Rupert had not the least idea of repeating what he had said to her--there--and that most likely he was coming today merely to make a friendly call, and that it would never do for either of them to think again of what they had said when they were both so excited and overwrought, yet in her heart she knew a great deal better than all that.

But she said to herself very often:

"Anyhow, I shall certainly refuse him."

And on this point her mind was irrevocably made up since, after all, whether Rupert would accept refusal or not would still remain entirely for him to decide.

At half-past three she heard the garden-gate creak, and when she ran to the window to peep, she saw with a kind of chill surprise that there was a stranger coming through.

"Some one he's sent," she said to herself. "He doesn't want to come himself and so he has sent some one else instead. I am glad."

Having said this and repeated again the last three words, and having gulped down a sob--presumably of joy--that unexpectedly fluttered into her throat, she went quickly to open the door.

The newly-arrived stranger smiled at her as she showed herself but did not speak. He was a man of middle height, quite young, and wrapped in a big, loose overcoat that very completely hid his figure. His face, clean-shaven, showed clear, strongly-marked well-shaped features with a firm mouth round which at this moment played a very gentle and winning smile, a square-cut chin, and extremely bright, clear kindly eyes that were just now smiling too.

When he took off his hat she saw that his hair was cut rather closely, and very neatly brushed and combed, and she found his smile so compelling and so winning that in spite of her disappointment she found herself returning it.

It occurred to her that she had some time or another seen some one like this stranger, but when or where she could not imagine.

Still he did not speak, but his eyes were very tender and kind as they rested on her so that she wondered a little.
"Yes?" she said inquiringly. "Yes?"
"Don't you know me, Ella?" he said then, very softly, and in a voice that she recognized instantly.
"Is it you--you?" she breathed.
Instinctively she lifted her hands to greet him, and at once she found herself caught up and held, pressed passionately to his strongly-beating heart.

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An hour later, by the fire in the sitting-room, Ella suddenly remembered tea.
"Good gracious! You must be starving," she cried, smitten with remorse. "And there's poor mother waiting upstairs all this time. Oh, Rupert, are you very hungry?"
"Starving," he asserted, but held her to him as closely as ever.
"I must get the tea," she protested. She put one cheek against his and sighed contentedly.
"It's nice to see the real you," she murmured. "But oh, Rupert, I do miss your dear bristly beard.

Go to Start
The Bat

by Mary Roberts Rinehart and Avery Hopwood

Chapters: ONE | TWO | THREE | FOUR | FIVE | SIX | SEVEN | EIGHT | NINE | TEN | ELEVEN | TWELVE |
            | THIRTEEN | FOURTEEN | FIFTEEN | SIXTEEN | SEVENTEEN | EIGHTEEN | NINETEEN | TWENTY | TWENTY-ONE

THE BAT
CHAPTER ONE
THE SHADOW OF THE BAT

"You've got to get him, boys--get him or bust!" said a tired police chief, pounding a heavy fist on a table. The detectives he bellowed the words at looked at the floor. They had done their best and failed. Failure meant "resignation" for the police chief, return to the hated work of pounding the pavements for them--they knew it, and, knowing it, could summon no gesture of bravado to answer their chief's. Gunmen, thugs, hi-jackers, loft-robbers, murderers, they could get them all in time--but they could not get the man he wanted.

"Get him--to hell with expense--I'll give you carte blanche--but get him!" said a haggard millionaire in the sedate inner offices of the best private detective firm in the country. The man on the other side of the desk, man hunter extraordinary, old servant of Government and State, sleuthhound without a peer, threw up his hands in a gesture of odd hopelessness. "It isn't the money, Mr. De Courcy --I'd give every cent I've made to get the man you want--but I can't promise you results--for the first time in my life." The conversation was ended.

"Get him? Huh! I'll get him, watch my smoke!" It was young ambition speaking in a certain set of rooms in Washington. Three days later young ambition lay in a New York gutter with a bullet in his heart and a look of such horror and surprise on his dead face that even the ambulance-Doctor who found him felt shaken. "We've lost the most promising man I've had in ten years," said his chief when the news came in. He swore helplessly, "Damn the luck!"

"Get him--get him--get him--get him--get him!" From a thousand sources now the clamor arose--press, police, and public alike crying out for the capture of the master criminal of a century--lost voices hounding a specter down the alleyways of the wind. And still the meshes broke and the quarry slipped away before the hounds were well on the scent--leaving behind a trail of shattered safes and rifled jewel cases--while ever the clamor rose higher to "Get him--get him--get--"

Get whom, in God's name--get what? Beast, man, or devil? A specter--a flying shadow--the shadow of a Bat.

From thieves' hangout to thieves' hangout the word passed along stirring the underworld like the passage of an electric spark. "There's a bigger guy than Pete Flynn shooting the works, a guy that could have Jim Gunderson for breakfast and not notice he'd et." The underworld heard and waited to be shown; after a little while the underworld began to whisper to itself in tones of awed respect. There were bright stars and flashing comets in the sky of the world of crime--but this new planet rose with the portent of an evil moon.

The Bat--they called him the Bat. Like a bat he chose the night hours for his work of rapine; like a bat he struck and vanished, pouncingly, noiselessly; like a bat he never showed himself to the face of the day. He'd never been in stir, the bulls had never mugged him, he didn't run with a mob, he played a lone hand, and fenced his stuff so that even the fence couldn't swear he knew his face. Most lone wolves had a moll at any rate--women were their ruin--but if the Bat had a moll, not even the grapevine telegraph could locate her.

Rat-faced gunmen in the dingy back rooms of saloons muttered over his exploits with bated breath. In tawdrily gorgeous apartments, where gathered the larger figures, the procursors of the world of crime, cold, conscienceless brains dissected the work of a colder and swifter brain than theirs, with suave and bitter envy. Evil's Four Hundred chattered, discussed, debated--sent out a thousand invisible tentacles to clutch at a shadow--to turn this shadow and its distorted genius to their own ends. The tentacles recoiled, baffled--the Bat worked alone--not even Evil's Four Hundred could bend him into a willing instrument to execute another's plan.

The men higher up waited. They had dealt with lone wolves before and broken them. Some day the Bat would slip and falter; then they would have him. But the weeks passed into months and still the Bat flew free, solitary, untamed, and deadly. At last even his own kind turned upon him; the underworld is like the upper in its fear and distrust of genius that flies alone. But when they turned against him, they turned against a spook--a shadow. A cold and bodiless laughter from a pit of darkness answered and mocked at their bungling gestures of hate--and went on, flouting Law and Lawless alike.

Where official trailer and private sleuth had failed, the newspapers might succeed--or so thought the disillusioned young men of the Fourth Estate--the tireless foxes, nose-down on the trail of news --the trackers, who
never gave up until that news was run to earth. Star reporter, leg-man, cub, veteran gray in the trade--one and all they tried to pin the Bat like a caught butterfly to the front page of their respective journals--soon or late each gave up, beaten. He was news--bigger news each week--a thousand ticking typewriters clicked his adventures--the brief, staccato recital of his career in the morgues of the great dailies grew longer and more incredible each day. But the big news--the scoop of the century --the yearned-for headline, "Bat Nabbed Red-Handed", "Bat Slain in Gun Duel with Police"--still eluded the ravenous maw of the Linotypes. And meanwhile, the red-scored list of his felonies lengthened and the rewards offered from various sources for any clue which might lead to his apprehension mounted and mounted till they totaled a small fortune.

Columnists took him up, played with the name and the terror, used the name and the terror as a starting point from which to exhibit their own particular opinions on everything and anything. Ministers mentioned him in sermons; cranks wrote fanatic letters denouncing him as one of the even-headed beasts of the Apocalypse and a forerunner of the end of the world; a popular revue put on a special Bat number wherein eighteen beautiful chorus girls appeared masked and black-winged in costumes of Brazilian bat fur; there were Bat club sandwiches, Bat cigarettes, and a new shade of hosiery called simply and succinctly Bat. He became a fad--a catchword--a national figure. And yet--he was walking Death--cold-- remorseless. But Death itself had become a toy of publicity in these days of limelight and jazz.

A city editor, at lunch with a colleague, pulled at his cigarette and talked. "See that Sunday story we had on the Bat?" he asked. "Pretty tidy-- huh--and yet we didn't have to play it up. It's an amazing list--the Marshall jewels--the Allison murder--the mail truck thing--two hundred thousand he got out of that, all negotiable, and two men dead. I wonder how many people he's really killed. We made it six murders and nearly a million in loot--didn't even have room for the small stuff--but there must be more--"

His companion whistled.

"And when is the Universe's Finest Newspaper going to burst forth with 'Bat Captured by BLADE Reporter?'" he queried sardonically.

"Oh, for--lay off it, will you?" said the city editor peevishly. "The Old Man's been hopping around about it for two months till everybody's plumb cuckoo. Even offered a bonus--a big one--and that shows how crazy he is--he doesn't love a nickel any better than his right eye--for any sort of exclusive story. Bonus--huh!" and he crushed out his cigarette. "It won't be a Blade reporter that gets that bonus--or any reporter. It'll be Sherlock Holmes from the spirit world!"

"Well--can't you dig up a Sherlock?"

The editor spread out his hands. "Now, look here," he said. "We've got the best staff of any paper in the country, if I do say it. We've got boys that could get a personal signed story from Delilah on how she barbered Samson--and find out who struck Billy Patterson and who was the Man in the Iron Mask. But the Bat's something else again. Oh, of course, we've panned the police for not getting him; that's always the game. But, personally, I won't pan them; they've done their damnest. They're up against something new. Scotland Yard wouldn't do any better--or any other bunch of cops that I know about."

"But look here, Bill, you don't mean to tell me he'll keep on getting away with it indefinitely?"

The editor frowned. "Confidentially--I don't know," he said with a chuckle: "The situation's this: for the first time the super-crook --the super-crook of fiction--the kind that never makes a mistake --has come to life--real life. And it'll take a cleverer man than any Central Office dick I've ever met to catch him!"

"Then you don't think he's just an ordinary crook with a lot of luck?"

"I do not." The editor was emphatic. "He's much brainier. Got a ghastly sense of humor, too. Look at the way he leaves his calling card after every job--a black paper bat inside the Marshall safe --a bat drawn on the wall with a burnt match where he'd jimmed the Cedarburg Bank--a real bat, dead, tacked to the mantelpiece over poor old Allison's body. Oh, he's in a class by himself--and I very much doubt if he was a crook at all for most of his life."

"You mean?"

"I mean this. The police have been combing the underworld for him; I don't think he comes from there. I think they've got to look higher, up in our world, for a brilliant man with a kink in the brain. He may be a Doctor, a lawyer, a merchant, honored in his community by day--good line that, I'll use it some time--and at night, a bloodthirsty assassin. Deacon Brodie--ever hear of him --the Scotch deacon that burgled his parishioners' houses on the quiet? Well--that's our man."

"But my Lord, Bill--"

"I know. I've been going around the last month, looking at everybody I knew and thinking--are you the Bat? Try it for a while. You'll want to sleep with a light in your room after a few days of it. Look around the University Club--that white-haired man over there--dignified--respectable--is he the Bat? Your own lawyer--your own Doctor--your own best friend. Can happen you know--look at those Chicago boys--the thrill-killers. Just brilliant students--"
likeable boys--to the people that taught them--and cold-bloodied murderers all the same."

"Bill! You're giving me the shivers!"

"Am I?" The editor laughed grimly. "Think it over. No, it isn't so pleasant.--But that's my theory--and I swear I think I'm right." He rose.

His companion laughed uncertainly.

"How about you, Bill--are you the Bat?"

The editor smiled. "See," he said, "it's got you already. No, I can prove an alibi. The Bat's been laying off the city recently-- taking a fling at some of the swell suburbs. Besides I haven't the brains--I'm free to admit it." He struggled into his coat. "Well, let's talk about something else. I'm sick of the Bat and his murders."

His companion rose as well, but it was evident that the editor's theory had taken firm hold on his mind. As they went out the door together he recurred to the subject.

"Honestly, though, Bill--were you serious, really serious--when you said you didn't know of a single detective with brains enough to trap this devil?"

The editor paused in the doorway. "Serious enough," he said. "And yet there's one man--I don't know him myself but from what I've heard of him, he might be able--but what's the use of speculating?"

"I'd like to know all the same," insisted the other, and laughed nervously. "We're moving out to the country next week ourselves--right in the Bat's new territory."

"We-el," said the editor, "you won't let it go any further? Of course it's just an idea of mine, but if the Bat ever came prowling around our place, the detective I'd try to get in touch with would be--" He put his lips close to his companion's ear and whispered a name.

The man whose name he whispered, oddly enough, was at that moment standing before his official superior in a quiet room not very far away. Tall, reticently good-looking and well, if inconspicuously, clothed and groomed, he by no means seemed the typical detective that the editor had spoken of so scornfully. He looked something like a college athlete who had kept up his training, something like a pillar of one of the more sedate financial houses. He could assume and discard a dozen manners in as many minutes, but, to the casual observer, the one thing certain about him would probably seem his utter lack of connection with the seamiest side of existence. The key to his real secret of life, however, lay in his eyes. When in repose, as now, they were veiled and without unusual quality-- but they were the eyes of a man who can wait and a man who can strike.

He stood perfectly easy before his chief for several moments before the latter looked up from his papers.

"Well, Anderson," he said at last, looking up, "I got your report on the Wilhenry burglary this morning. I'll tell you this about it--if you do a neater and quicker job in the next ten years, you can take this desk away from me. I'll give it to you. As it is, your name's gone up for promotion today; you deserved it long ago."

"Thank you, sir," replied the tall man quietly, "but I had luck with that case."

"Of course you had luck," said the chief. "Sit down, won't you, and have a cigar--if you can stand my brand. Of course you had luck, Anderson, but that isn't the point. It takes a man with brains to use a piece of luck as you used it. I've waited a long time here for a man with your sort of brains and, by Judas, for a while I thought they were all as dead as Pinkerton. But now I know there's one of them alive at any rate--and it's a hell of a relief."

"Thank you, sir," said the tall man, smiling and sitting down. He took a cigar and lit it. "That makes it easier, sir--your telling me that. Because--I've come to ask a favor."

"All right," responded the chief promptly. "Whatever it is, it's granted."

Anderson smiled again. "You'd better hear what it is first, sir. I don't want to put anything over on you."

"Try it!" said the chief. "What is it--vacation? Take as long as you like--within reason--you've earned it--I'll put it through today."

Anderson shook his head, "No sir--I don't want a vacation."

"Well," said the chief impatiently. "Promotion? I've told you about that. Expense money for anything--fill out a voucher and I'll O.K. it--be best man at your wedding--by Judas, I'll even do that!"

Anderson laughed. "No, sir--I'm not getting married and--I'm pleased about the promotion, of course--but it's not that. I want to be assigned to a certain case--that's all."

The chief's look grew searching. "H'm," he said. "Well, as I say, anything within reason. What case do you want to be assigned to?"

The muscles of Anderson's left hand tensed on the arm of his chair. He looked squarely at the chief. "I want a chance at the Bat!" he replied slowly.

The chief's face became expressionless. "I said--anything within reason," he responded softly, regarding Anderson keenly.

"I want a chance at the Bat!" repeated Anderson stubbornly. "If I've done good work so far--I want a chance at the Bat!"
The chief drummed on the desk. Annoyance and surprise were in his voice when he spoke.

"But look here, Anderson," he burst out finally. "Anything else and I'll--but what's the use? I said a minute ago, you had brains --but now, by Judas, I doubt it! If anyone else wanted a chance at the Bat, I'd give it to them and gladly--I'm hard-boiled. But you're too valuable a man to be thrown away!"

"I'm no more valuable than Wentworth would have been."

"Maybe not--and look what happened to him! A bullet hole in his heart--and thirty years of work that he might have done thrown away! No, Anderson, I've found two first-class men since I've been at this desk--Wentworth and you. He asked for his chance; I gave it to him--turned him over to the Government--and lost him. Good detectives aren't so plentiful that I can afford to lose you both."

"Wentworth was a friend of mine," said Anderson softly. His knuckles were white dints in the hand that gripped the chair. "Ever since the Bat got him I've wanted my chance. Now my other work's cleaned up--and I still want it."

"But I tell you--" began the chief in tones of high exasperation. Then he stopped and looked at his protege. There was a silence for a time.

"Oh, well--" said the chief finally in a hopeless voice. "Go ahead --commit suicide--I'll send you a 'Gates Ajar' and a card, 'Here lies a damn fool who would have been a great detective if he hadn't been so pig-headed.' Go ahead!"

Anderson rose. "Thank you, sir," he said in a deep voice. His eyes had light in them now. "I can't thank you enough, sir."

"Don't try," grumbled the chief. "If I weren't as much of a damn fool as you are I wouldn't let you do it. And if I weren't so damn old, I'd go after the slippery devil myself and let you sit here and watch me get brought in with an infernal paper bat pinned where my shield ought to be. The Bat's supernatural, Anderson. You haven't a chance in the world but it does me good all the same to shake hands with a man with brains and nerve," and he solemnly wrung Anderson's hand in an iron grip.

Anderson smiled. "The cagiest bat flies once too often," he said. "I'm not promising anything, chief, but--"

"Maybe," said the chief. "Now wait a minute, keep your shirt on, you're not going out bat hunting this minute, you know--"

"Sir? I thought I--"

"Well, you're not," said the chief decidedly. "I've still some little respect for my own intelligence and it tells me to get all the work out of you I can, before you start wild-goose chasing after this--this bat out of hell. The first time he's heard of again --and it shouldn't be long from the fast way he works--you're assigned to the case. That's understood. Till then, you do what I tell you--and it'll be work, believe me!"

"All right, sir," Anderson laughed and turned to the door. "And-- thank you again."

He went out. The door closed. The chief remained for some minutes looking at the door and shaking his head. "The best man I've had in years--except Wentworth," he murmured to himself. "And throwing himself away--to be killed by a cold-blooded devil that nothing human can catch--you're getting old, John Grogan--but, by Judas, you can't blame him, can you? If you were a man in the prime like him, by Judas, you'd be doing it yourself. And yet it'll go hard --losing him--"

He turned back to his desk and his papers. But for some minutes he could not pay attention to the papers. There was a shadow on them --a shadow that blurred the typed letters--the shadow of bat's wings.

CHAPTER TWO

THE INDOMITABLE MISS VAN GORDER

Miss Cornelis Van Gorder, indomitable spinster, last bearer of a name which had been great in New York when New York was a red-roofed Nieuw Amsterdam and Peter Stuyvesant a parvenu, sat propped up in bed in the green room of her newly rented country house reading the morning newspaper. Thus seen, with an old soft Paisley shawl tucked in about her thin shoulders and without the stately gray transformation that adorned her on less intimate occasions,--she looked much less formidable and more innocently placid than those could ever have imagined who had only felt the bite of her tart wit at such functions as the state Van Gorder dinners. Patrician to her finger tips, independent to the roots of her hair, she preserved, at sixty-five, a humorous and quenchless curiosity in regard to every side of life, which even the full and crowded years that already lay behind her had not entirely satisfied. She was an Age and an Attitude, but she was more than that; she had grown old without growing dull or losing touch with youth--her face had the delicate strength of a fine cameo and her mild and youthful heart preserved an innocent zest for adventure.

Wide travel, social leadership, the world of art and books, a dozen charities, an existence rich with diverse experience--all these she had enjoyed energetically and to the full--but she felt, with ingenious vanity, that there were still sides to her character which even these had not brought to light. As a little girl she had hesitated between wishing to be a locomotive engineer or a famous bandit--and when she had found, at seven, that the accident of sex
would probably debar her from either occupation, she had resolved fiercely that some time before she died she would show the world in general and the Van Gorder clan in particular that a woman was quite as capable of dangerous exploits as a man. So far her life, while exciting enough at moments, had never actually been dangerous and time was slipping away without giving her an opportunity to prove her hardiness of heart. Whenever she thought of this the fact annoyed her extremely—and she thought of it now.

She threw down the morning paper disgustedly. Here she was at 65 --rich, safe, settled for the summer in a delightful country place with a good cook, excellent servants, beautiful gardens and grounds --everything as respectable and comfortable as--as a limousine! And out in the world people were murdering and robbing each other, floating over Niagara Falls in barrels, rescuing children from burning houses, taming tigers, going to Africa to hunt gorillas, doing all sorts of exciting things! She could not float over Niagara Falls in a barrel; Lizzie Allen, her faithful old maid, would never let her! She could not go to Africa to hunt gorillas; Sally Ogden, her sister, would never let her hear the last of it. She could not even, as she certainly would if the were a man, try and track down this terrible creature, the Bat!

She sniffed disgruntledly. Things came to her much too easily. Take this very house she was living in. Ten days ago she had decided on the spur of the moment--a decision suddenly crystallized by a weariness of charitable committees and the noise and heat of New York--to take a place in the country for the summer. It was late in the renting season--even the ordinary difficulties of finding a suitable spot would have added some spice to the quest--but this ideal place had practically fallen into her lap, with no trouble or search at all. Courtleigh Fleming, president of the Union Bank, who had built the house on a scale of comfortable magnificence--Courtleigh Fleming had died suddenly in the West when Miss Van Gorder was beginning her house hunting. The day after his death her agent had called her up. Richard Fleming, Courtleigh Fleming's nephew and heir, was anxious to rent the Fleming house at once. If she made a quick decision it was hers for the summer, at a bargain. Miss Van Gorder had decided at once; she took an innocent pleasure in bargains. The next day the keys were hers--the servants engaged to stay on--within a week she had moved. All very pleasant and easy no doubt--adventure--pooh!

And yet she could not really say that her move to the country had brought her no adventures at all. There had been--things. Last night the lights had gone off unexpectedly and Billy, the Japanese butler and handy man, had said that he had seen a face at one of the kitchen windows--a face that vanished when he went to the window. Servants' nonsense, probably, but the servants seemed unusually nervous for people who were used to the country. And Lizzie, of course, had sworn that she had seen a man trying to get up the stairs but Lizzie could grow hysterical over a creaking door. Still --it was queer! And what had that affable Doctor Wells said to her --"I respect your courage, Miss Van Gorder--moving out into the Bat's home country, you know!" She picked up the paper again. There was a map of the scene of the Bat's most recent exploits and, yes, three of his recent crimes had been within a twenty-mile radius of this very spot. She thought it over and gave a little shudder of pleasurable fear. Then she dismissed the thought with a shrug. No chance! She might live in a lonely house, two miles from the railroad station, all summer long--and the Bat would never disturb her. Nothing ever did.

She had skimmed through the paper hurriedly; now a headline caught her eye. Failure of Union Bank--wasn't that the bank of which Courtleigh Fleming had been president? She settled down to read the article but it was disappointingly brief. The Union Bank had closed its doors; the cashier, a young man named Bailey, was apparently under suspicion; the article mentioned Courtleigh Fleming's recent and tragic death in the best vein of newspaperese. She laid down the paper and thought--Bailey--Bailey--she seemed to have a vague recollection of hearing about a young man named Bailey who worked in a bank--but she could not remember where or by whom his name had been mentioned.

Well--it didn't matter. She had other things to think about. She must ring for Lizzie--get up and dress. The bright morning sun, streaming in through the long window, made lying in bed an old woman's luxury and she refused to be an old woman.

"Though the worst old woman I ever knew was a man!" she thought with a satiric twinkle. She was glad Sally's daughter--young Dale Ogden--was here in the house with her. The companionship of Dale's bright youth would keep her from getting old-womanish if anything could.

She smiled, thinking of Dale. Dale was a nice child--her favorite niece. Sally didn't understand her, of course--but Sally wouldn't. Sally read magazine articles on the younger generation and its wild ways. "Sally doesn't remember when she was a younger generation herself," thought Miss Cornelia. "But I do--and if we didn't have automobiles, we had buggies--and youth doesn't change its ways just because it has cut its hair. Before Mr. and Mrs. Ogden left for Europe, Sally had talked to her sister Cornelia ... long and weightily, on the problem of Dale."

"Problem of Dale, indeed!" thought Miss Cornelia scornfully. "Dale's the nicest thing I've seen in some time. She'd be ten times happier if Sally wasn't always trying to marry her off to some young snip with more of what fools call 'eligibility' than brains! But there, Cornelia Van Gorder--Sally's given you your innings by rampaging off to Europe
and leaving Dale with you all summer and you've a lot less sense than I flatter myself you have, if you can't give your favorite niece a happy vacation from all her immediate family-- and maybe find her someone who'll make her happy for good and all in the bargain." Miss Cornelia was an incorrigible matchmaker.

Nevertheless, she was more concerned with "the problem of Dale" than she would have admitted. Dale, at her age, with her charm and beauty--why, she ought to behave as if she were walking on air, thought her aunt worriedly. "And instead she acts more as if she were walking on pins and needles. She seems to like being here--I know she likes me--I'm pretty sure she's just as pleased to get a little holiday from Sally and Harry--she amuses herself-- she falls in with any plan I want to make, and yet--" And yet Dale was not happy--Miss Cornelia felt sure of it. "It isn't natural for a girl to seem so lackluster and--and quiet--at her age and she's nervous, too--as if something were preying on her mind--particularly these last few days. If she were in love with somebody--somebody Sally didn't approve of particularly-- well, that would account for it, of course--but Sally didn't say anything that would make me think that--or Dale either--though I don't suppose Dale would, yet, even to me. I haven't seen so much of her in these last two years--"

Then Miss Cornelia's mind seized upon a sentence in a hurried flow of her sister's last instructions--a sentence that had passed almost unnoticed at the time--something about Dale and "an unfortunate attachment--but of course, Cornelia, dear, she's so young--and I'm sure it will come to nothing now her father and I have made our attitude plain!"
"Pshaw--I bet that's it," thought Miss Cornelia shrewdly. "Dale's fallen in love, or thinks she has, with some decent young man without a penny or an 'eligibility' to his name--and now she's unhappy because her parents don't approve--or because she's trying to give him up and finds she can't. Well--" and Miss Cornelia's tight little gray curls trembled with the vehemence of her decision, "if the young thing ever comes to me for advice I'll give her a piece of my mind that will surprise her and scandalize Sally Van Gorder Ogden out of her seven senses. Sally thinks nobody's worth looking at if they didn't come over to America when our family did--she hasn't gumption enough to realize that if some people hadn't come over later, we'd all still be living on crullers and Dutch punch!"

She was just stretching out her hand to ring for Lizzie when a knock came at the door. She gathered her Paisley shawl more tightly about her shoulders. "Who is it--oh, it's only you, Lizzie," as a pleasant Irish face, crowned by an old-fashioned pompadour of graying hair, peeped in at the door. "Good morning, Lizzie--I was just going to ring for you. Has Miss Dale had breakfast--I know it's shamefully late."

"Good morning, Miss Neily," said Lizzie, "and a lovely morning it is, too--if that was all of it," she added somewhat tartly as she came into the room with a little silver tray whereupon the morning mail reposed.

We have not yet described Lizzie Allen--and she deserves description. A fixture in the Van Gorder household since her sixteenth year, she had long ere now attained the dignity of a Tradition. The slip of a colleen fresh from Kerry had grown old with her mistress, until the casual bond between mistress and servant had changed into something deeper; more in keeping with a better-mannered age than ours. One could not imagine Miss Cornelia without a Lizzie to grumble at and cherish--or Lizzie without a Miss Cornelia to baby and scold with the privileged frankness of such old family servitors. The two were at once a contrast and a complement. Fifty years of American ways had not shaken Lizzie's firm belief in banshees and leprechauns or tamed her wild Irish tongue; fifty years of Lizzie had not altered Miss Cornelia's attitude of fond exasperation with some of Lizzie's more startling eccentricities. Together they may have been, as one of the younger Van Gorder cousins had, irreverently put it, "a scream," but apart each would have felt lost without the other.

"Now what do you mean--if that were all of it, Lizzie?" queried Miss Cornelia sharply as she took her letters from the tray.

Lizzie's face assumed an expression of doleful reticence.

"It's not my place to speak," she said with a grim shake of her head, "but I saw my grandmother last night, God rest her--plain as life she was, the way she looked when they waked her--and if it was my doing we'd be leaving this house this hour!"

"Cheese-pudding for supper--of course you saw your grandmother!" said Miss Cornelia crisply, slitting open the first of her letters with a paper knife. "Nonsense, Lizzie, I'm not going to be scared away from an ideal country place because you happen to have felt lost without the other.

"Was it a bad dream I saw on the stairs last night when the lights went out and I was looking for the candles?" said Lizzie heatedly. "Was it a bad dream that ran away from me and out the back door, as fast as Paddy's pig? No, Miss Neily, it was a man--Seven feet tall he was, and eyes that shone in the dark and--"

"Lizzie Allen!"

"Well, it's true for all that," insisted Lizzie stubbornly. "And why did the lights go out--tell me that, Miss Neily? They never go out in the city."

"Well, this isn't the city," said Miss Cornelia decisively. "It's the country, and very nice it is, and we're staying
here all summer. I suppose I may be thankful," she went on ironically, "that it was only your grandmother you saw last night. It might have been the Bat--and then where would you be this morning?"

"I'd be stiff and stark with candles at me head and feet," said Lizzie gloomily. "Oh, Miss Neily, don't talk of that terrible creature, the Bat!" She came nearer to her mistress. "There's bats in this house, too--real bats," she whispered impressively. "I saw one yesterday in the trunk room--the creature! It flew in the window and nearly had the switch off me before I could get away!"

Miss Cornelia chuckled. "Of course there are bats," she said. "There are always bats in the country. They're perfectly harmless,--except to switches."

"And the Bat ye were talking of just then--he's harmless too, I suppose?" said Lizzie with mournful satire. "Oh, Miss Neily, Miss Neily--do let's go back to the city before he flies away with u all!"

"Nonsense, Lizzie," said Miss Cornelia again, but this time less firmly. Her face grew serious. "If I thought for an instant that there was any real possibility of our being in danger here--" she said slowly. "But--oh, look at the map, Lizzie! The Bat has been flying in this district--that's true enough--but he hasn't come within ten miles of us yet!"

"What's ten miles to the Bat?" the obdurate Lizzie sighed. "And what of the letter ye had when ye first moved in here? 'The Fleming house is unhealthy for strangers,' it said. Leave it while ye can."

"Some silly boy or some crank." Miss Cornelia's voice was firm. "I never pay any attention to anonymous letters."

"And there's a funny-lookin' letter this mornin', down at the bottom of the pile--" persisted Lizzie. "It looked like the other one. I'd half a mind to throw it away before you saw it!"

"Now, Lizzie, that's quite enough!" Miss Cornelia had the Van Gorder manner on now. "I don't care to discuss your ridiculous fears any further. Where is Miss Dale?"

Lizzie assumed an attitude of prim rebuff, "Miss Dale's gone into the city, ma'am."

"Gone into the city?"

"Yes, ma'am. She got a telephone call this morning, early--long distance it was. I don't know who it was called her."

"Lizzie! You didn't listen?"

"Of course not, Miss Neily." Lizzie's face was a study in injured virtue. "Miss Dale took the call in her own room and shut the door."

"And you were outside the door?"

"Where else would I be dustin' that time in the mornin'?" said Lizzie fiercely. "But it's yourself knows well enough the doors in this house is thick and not a sound goes past them."

"I should hope not," said Miss Cornelia rebukingly. "But--tell me, Lizzie, did Miss Dale seem--well--this morning?"

"That she did not," said Lizzie promptly. "When she came down to breakfast, after the call, she looked like a ghost. I made her the eggs she likes, too--but she wouldn't eat 'em."

"H'm," Miss Cornelia pondered. "I'm sorry if--well, Lizzie, we mustn't meddle in Miss Dale's affairs."

"No, ma'am."

"But--did she say when she would be back?"

"Yes, Miss Neily. On the two o'clock train. Oh, and I was almost forgettin'--she told me to tell you, particular--she said while he was in the city she'd be after engagin' the gardener you spoke of."

"The gardener? Oh, yes--I spoke to her about that the other night. The place is beginning to look run down--so many flowers to attend to. Well--that's very kind of Miss Dale."

"Yes, Miss Neily." Lizzie hesitated, obviously with some weighty news on her mind which she wished to impart. Finally she took the plunge. "I might have told Miss Dale she could have been lookin' for a cook as well--and a housemaid--" she muttered at last, "but they hadn't spoken to me then."

Miss Cornelia sat bolt upright in bed. "A cook--and a housemaid? But we have a cook and a housemaid, Lizzie! You don't mean to tell me--"

Lizzie nodded her head. "Yes'm. They're leaving. Both of 'em. Today."

"But good heav-- Lizzie, why on earth didn't you tell me before?"

Lizzie spoke soothingly, all the blarney of Kerry in her voice. "Now, Miss Neily, as if I'd wake you first thing in the morning with bad news like that! And thinks I, well, maybe 'tis all for the best after all--for when Miss Neily hears they're leavin'-- and her so particular--maybe she'll go back to the city for just a little and leave this house to its haunts and its bats and--""

"Go back to the city? I shall do nothing of the sort. I rented this house to live in and live in it I will, with servants or without them. You should have told me at once, Lizzie. I'm really very much annoyed with you because you
It had come at last--the adventure --and she was not afraid!

envelope--at the postmark--while her heart thudded uncomfortably for a moment and then resumed its normal beat.

unsigned sheet.

Lizzie's fears. The address was badly typed, on cheap paper--she tore the envelope open and drew out a single

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Cornelia. "I wish he could cook--but I don't suppose gardeners can--and Billy's a treasure. Still, its inconvenient--

would have to bear the brunt of the service. Oh, yes--and then there's Dale's gardener, if she gets one, thought Miss,

promised for the end of the week--but for the next three days the Japanese butler, Billy, and Lizzie between them

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housemaid had come and gone--civil enough, but so obviously determined upon leaving the house at once that Miss

Miss Neily," her voice grew solemn, "it's my belief they're scared--both of them--by the haunts and the banshees

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she'll have to do the best she can for twins and appendycitis is acts of God and not to be put aside for even the best

'Oh,' says I, 'and what about Miss Van Gorder?' 'I'm sorry for Miss Van Gorder,' says she--the falseness of her!--'But

the housemaid's leaving, too.' 'Has her sister got twins as well?' says I and looked at her. 'No,' says she as bold as

brass, 'but Annie's got a pain in her side and she's feared it's appendycitis--so she's leaving to go back to her family.

'Oh,' says I, 'and what about Miss Van Gorder?' 'I'm sorry for Miss Van Gorder,' says she--the falseness of her!--'But

She comes into the kitchen with her hat on and her bag in her hand. 'Good morning,' says I, pleasant enough, 'you've

got your hat on,' says I. 'I'm leaving,' says she. 'Leaving, are you?' says I. 'Leaving,' says she. 'My sister has twins,'

says she. 'I just got word--I must go to her right away.' 'What?' says I, all struck in a heap. 'Twins,' says she, 'you've

heard of such things as twins.' 'That I have,' says I, 'and I know a lie on a face when I see it, too.'

"Lizzie!"

"Well, it made me sick at heart, Miss Neily. Her with her hat and her bag and her talk about twins--and no

consideration for you. Well, I'll go on. 'You're a clever woman, aren't you?' says she --the impudence! 'I can see through

a millstone as far as most,' says I--I wouldn't put up with her sauce. 'Well!' says she, 'you can see that Annie

the housemaid's leaving, too.' 'Has her sister got twins as well?' says I and looked at her. 'No,' says she as bold as

brass, 'but Annie's got a pain in her side and she's feared it's appendycitis--so she's leaving to go back to her family.

'Oh,' says I, 'and what about Miss Van Gorder?' 'I'm sorry for Miss Van Gorder,' says she--the falseness of her!--'But

she'll have to do the best she can for twins and appendycitis is acts of God and not to be put aside for even the best

of wages.' 'Is that so?' says I and with that I left her, for I knew if I listened to her a minute longer I'd be giving her

bonnet a shake and that wouldn't be respectable. So there you are, Miss Neily, and that's the gist of the matter."

Miss Cornelia laughed. "Lizzie--you're unique," she said. "But I'm glad you didn't give her bonnet a shake--

though I've no doubt you could."

"Humph!" said Lizzie snorting, the fire of battle in her eye. "And is it any Black Irish from Ulster would play

impudence to a Kerrywoman without getting the flat of a hand in--but that's neither here nor there. The truth of it is,

Miss Neily," her voice grew solemn, "it's my belief they're scared--both of them--by the haunts and the banshees

here--and that's all."

"If they are they're very silly," said Miss Cornelia practically. "No, they may have heard of a better place, though

it would seem as if when one pays the present extortionate wages and asks as little as we do here--but it doesn't

matter. If they want to go, they may. Am I ready, Lizzie?"

"You look like an angel, ma'am," said Lizzie, clapping her hands.

"Well, I feel very little like one," said Miss Cornelia, rising. "As cook and housemaid may discover before I'm

through with them. Send them into the livingroom, Lizzie, when I've gone down. I'll talk to them there."

An hour or so later, Miss Cornelia sat in a deep chintz chair in the comfortable living-room of the Fleming house

going through the pile of letters which Lizzie's news of domestic revolt had prevented her reading earlier. Cook and

housemaid had come and gone--civil enough, but so obviously determined upon leaving the house at once that Miss

Cornelia had sighed and let them go, though not without caustic comment. Since then, she had devoted herself to

calling up various employment agencies without entirely satisfactory results. A new cook and housemaid were

promised for the end of the week--but for the next three days the Japanese butler, Billy, and Lizzie between them

would have to bear the brunt of the service. Oh, yes--and then there's Dale's gardener, if she gets one, thought Miss,

Cornelia. "I wish he could cook--but I don't suppose gardeners can--and Billy's a treasure. Still, its inconvenient--

now, stop--Cornelia Van Gorder--you were asking for an adventure only this morning and the moment the littlest

sort of one comes along, you want to crawl out of it."

She had reached the bottom of her pile of letters--these to be thrown away, these to be answered--ah, here was

one she had overlooked somehow. She took it up. It must be the one Lizzie had wanted to throw away--she smiled at

Lizzie's fears. The address was badly typed, on cheap paper--she tore the envelope open and drew out a single

unsigned sheet.

If you stay in this house any longer--DEATH. Go back to the city at once and save your life.

Her fingers trembled a little as she turned the missive over but her face remained calm. She looked at the

envelope--at the postmark--while her heart thudded uncomfortably for a moment and then resumed its normal beat.

It had come at last--the adventure --and she was not afraid!

CHAPTER THREE
She knew who it was, of course. The Bat! No doubt of it. And yet—did the Bat ever threaten before he struck? She could not remember. But it didn't matter. The Bat was unprecedented—unique. At any rate, Bat or no Bat, she must think out a course of action. The defection of cook and housemaid left her alone in the house with Lizzie and Billy—and Dale, of course, if Dale returned. Two old women, a young girl, and a Japanese butler to face the most dangerous criminal in America, she thought grimly. And yet—one couldn't be sure. The threatening letter might be only a joke—a letter from a crank—after all. Still, she must take precautions; look for aid somewhere. But where could she look for aid?

She ran over in her mind the new acquaintances she had made since she moved to the country. There was Doctor Wells, the local physician, who had joked with her about moving into the Bat's home territory—He seemed an intelligent man—but she knew him only slightly—she couldn't call a busy Doctor away from his patients to investigate something which might only prove to be a mare's-nest. The boys Dale had met at the country club—"Humph!" she sniffed, "I'd rather trust my gumption than any of theirs."

For a moment she felt very helpless, very much alone. Then her courage returned. "Psahw, Cornelia, if you have got to get help—get the help you want and hang the consequences!" she adjured herself. "You've always hankered to see a first-class detective do his detecting—well, get one—or decide to do the job yourself. I'll bet you could at that."

She tiptoed to the main door of the living-room and closed it cautiously, smiling as she did so. Lizzie might be about and Lizzie would promptly go into hystericis if she got an inking of her mistress's present intentions. Then she went to the city telephone and asked for long distance.

She tiptoed to the main door of the living-room and closed it cautiously, smiling as she did so. Lizzie might be about and Lizzie would promptly go into hystericis if she got an inking of her mistress's present intentions. Then she went to the city telephone and asked for long distance.

When she had finished her telephoning, she looked at once relieved and a little naughty—like a demure child who has carried out some piece of innocent mischief unobserved. "My stars!" she muttered to herself. "You never can tell what you can do till you try." Then she sat down again and tried to think of other measures of defense.

Now if I were the Bat, or any criminal, she mused, how would I get into this house? Well, that's it—I might get in 'most any way— it's so big and rambling. All the grounds you want to lurk in, to; it'd take a company of police to shut them off. Then there's the house itself. Let's see—third floor—trunk room, servants' rooms—couldn't get in there very well except with a pretty long ladder—that's all right. Second floor—well, I suppose a man could get into my bedroom from the porch if he were an acrobat, but he'd need to be a very good acrobat and there's no use borrowing trouble. Downstairs is the problem, Cornelia, downstairs is the problem.

"Take this room now." She rose and examined it carefully. "There's the door over there on the right that leads into the billiard room. There's this door over here that leads into the hall. Then there's that other door by the alcove, and all those French windows—whew!" She shook her head.

It was true. The room in which she stood, while comfortable and charming, seemed unusually accessible to the night prowler. A row of French windows at the rear gave upon a little terrace; below the terrace, the drive curved about and beneath the billiard-room windows in a hairpin loop, drawing up again at the main entrance on the other side of the house. At the left of the French windows (if one faced the terrace as Miss Cornelia was doing) was the alcove door of which she spoke. When open, it disclosed a little alcove, almost entirely devoted to the foot of a flight of stairs that gave direct access to the upper regions of the house. The alcove itself opened on one side upon the terrace and upon the other into a large butler's pantry. The arrangement was obviously designed so that, if necessary, one could pass directly from the terrace to the downstairs service quarters or the second floor of the house without going through the living-room, and so that trays could be carried up from the pantry by the side stairs without using the main staircase.

The middle pair of French windows were open, forming a double door. Miss Cornelia went over to them—shut them—tried the locks. Humph! Flimsy enough! she thought. Then she turned toward the billiard room.

The billiard room, as has been said, was the last room to the right in the main wing of the house. A single door led to it from the living-room. Miss Cornelia passed through this door, glanced about the billiard room, noting that most of its windows were too high from the ground to greatly encourage a marauder. She locked the only one that seemed to her particularly tempting—the billiard-room window on the terrace side of the house. Then she returned to
the living-room and again considered her defenses.

Three points of access from the terrace to the house—the door that led into the alcove, the French windows of the living room—the billiard-room window. On the other side of the house there was the main entrance, the porch, the library and dining-room windows. The main entrance led into a hall-living-room, and the main door of the living-room was on the right as one entered, the dining-room and library on the left, main staircase in front. "My mind is starting to go round like a pinwheel, thinking of all those windows and doors," she murmured to herself. She sat down once more, and taking a pencil and a piece of paper drew a plan of the lower floor of the house.

And now I've studied it, she thought after a while, I'm no further than if I hadn't. As far as I can figure out, there are so many ways for a clever man to get into this house that I'd have to be a couple of Siamese twins to watch it properly. The next house I rent in the country, she decided, just isn't going to have any windows and doors—or I'll know the reason why.

But of course she was not entirely shut off from the world, even if the worst developed. She considered the telephone instruments on a table near the wall, one the general phone, the other connecting a house line which also connected with the garage and the greenhouses. The garage would not be helpful, since Slocum, her chauffeur for many years, had gone back to England for a visit. Dale had been driving the car. But with an able-bodied man in the gardener's house—

She pulled herself together with a jerk.

"Cornelia Van Gorder, you're going to go crazy before nightfall if you don't take hold of yourself. What you need is lunch and a nap in the afternoon if you can make yourself take it. You'd better look up that revolver of yours, too, that you bought when you thought you were going to take a trip to China. You've never fired it off yet, but you've got to sometime today—there's no other way of telling if it will work. You can shut your eyes when you do it—no, you can't either—that's silly.

"Call you a spirited old lady, do they? Well, you never had a better time to show your spirit than now!"

And Miss Van Gorder, sighing, left the living-room to reach the kitchen just in time to calm a heated argument between Lizzie and Billy on the relative merits of Japanese and Irish-American cooking.

Dale Ogden, taxiing up from the two o'clock train some time later, to her surprise discovered the front door locked and rang for some time before she could get an answer. At last, Billy appeared, white-coated, with an inscrutable expression on his face.

"Will you take my bag, Billy--thanks. Where is Miss Van Gorder --taking a nap?"

"No," said Billy succinctly. "She take no nap. She out in srubbery shotting."

Dale stared at him incredulously. "Shooting, Billy?"

"Yes, ma'am. At least--she not shoot yet but she say she going to soon."

"But, good heavens, Billy--shooting what?"

"Shotting pistol," said Billy, his yellow mask of a face preserving its impish repose. He waved his hand. "You go srubbery. You see."

The scene that met Dale's eyes when she finally found the "srubbery" was indeed a singular one. Miss Van Gorder, her back firmly planted against the trunk of a large elm tree and an expression of ineffable distaste on her features, was holding out a blunt, deadly looking revolver at arm's length. Its muzzle wavered, now pointing at the ground, now at the sky. Behind the tree Lizzie sat in a heap, moaning quietly to herself, and now and then appealing to the saints to avert a visioned calamity.

As Dale approached, unseen, the climax came. The revolver steadied, pointed ferociously at an inoffensive grass-blade some 10 yards from Miss Van Gorder and went off. Lizzie promptly gave vent to a shrill Irish scream. Miss Van Gorder dropped the revolver like a hot potato and opened her mouth to tell Lizzie not to be such a fool. Then she saw Dale--her mouth went into a round O of horror and her hand clutched weakly at her heart.

"Good heavens, child!" she gasped. "Didn't Billy tell you what I was doing? I might have shot you like a rabbit!"

and, overcome with emotion, she sat down on the ground and started to fan herself mechanically with a cartridge.

Dale couldn't help laughing--and the longer she looked at her aunt the more she laughed--until that dignified lady joined in the mirth herself.

"Aunt Cornelia--Aunt Cornelia!" said Dale when she could get her breath. "That I've lived to see the day--and they call US the wild generation! Why on earth were you having pistol practice, darling-- has Billy turned into a Japanese spy or what?"

Miss Van Gorder rose from the ground with as much stateliness as she could muster under the circumstances.

"No, my dear--but there's no fool like an old fool—that's all," she stated. "I've wanted to fire that infernal revolver off ever since I bought it two years ago, and now I have and I'm satisfied. Still," she went on thoughtfully, picking up the weapon, "it seems a very good revolver--and shooting people must be much easier than I supposed. All you have to do is to point the--the front of it--like this and--"
"Oh, Miss Dale, dear Miss Dale!" came in woebegone accents from the other side of the tree. "For the love of heaven, Miss Dale, say no more but take it away from her--she'll have herself all riddled through with bullets like a kitchen sieve--and me too--if she's let to have it again."

"Lizzie, I'm ashamed of you!" said Lizzie's mistress. "Come out from behind that tree and stop wailing like a siren. This weapon is perfectly safe in competent hands and--" She seemed on the verge of another demonstration of its powers.

"MISS DALE, FOR THE DEAR LOVE O' GOD WILL YOU MAKE HER PUT IT AWAY?"

Dale laughed again. "I really think you'd better, Aunt Cornelia. Or both of us will have to put Lizzie to bed with a case of acute hysteria."

"Well," said Miss Van Gorder, "perhaps you're right, dear." Her eyes gleamed. "I should have liked to try it just once more though," she confided. "I feel certain that I could hit that tree over there if my eye wouldn't wink so when the thing goes off."

"Now, it's winking eyes," said Lizzie on a note of tragic chant, "but next time it'll be bleeding corpses and--"

Dale added her own protestations to Lizzie's. "Please, darling, if you really want to practice, Billy can fix up some sort of target range--but I don't want my favorite aunt assassinated by a ricocheted bullet before my eyes!"

"Well, perhaps it would be best to try again another time," admitted Miss Van Gorder. But there was a wistful look in her eyes as she gave the revolver to Dale and the three started back to the house.

"I should never have allowed Lizzie to know what I was doing," she confided in a whisper, on the way. "A woman is perfectly capable of managing firearms--but Lizzie is really too nervous to live, sometimes."

"I know just how you feel, darling," Dale agreed, suppressed mirth shaking her as the little procession reached the terrace. "But--oh," she could keep it no longer, "oh--you did look funny, darling-- sitting under that tree, with Lizzie on the other side of it making banshee noises and--"

Miss Van Gorder laughed too, a little shamefacedly.

"I must have," she said. "But--oh, you needn't shake your head, Lizzie Allen--I am going to practice with it. There's no reason I shouldn't and you never can tell when things like that might be useful," she ended rather vaguely. She did not wish to alarm Dale with her suspicions yet.

"There, Dale--yes, put it in the drawer of the table--that will reassure Lizzie. Lizzie, you might make us some lemonade, I think --Miss Dale must be thirsty after her long, hot ride."

"Yes, Miss Cornelia," said Lizzie, recovering her normal calm as the revolver was shut away in the drawer of the large table in the living-room. But she could not resist one parting shot. "And thank God it's lemonade I'll be making--and not bandages for bullet wounds!" she muttered darkly as she went toward the service quarters.

Miss Van Gorder glared after her departing back. "Lizzie is really impossible sometimes!" she said with stately ire. Then her voice softened. "Though of course I couldn't do without her," she added.

Dale stretched out on the settee opposite her aunt's chair. "I know you couldn't, darling. Thanks for thinking of the lemonade." She passed her hand over her forehead in a gesture of fatigue. "I AM hot--and tired."

Miss Van Gorder looked at her keenly. The young face seemed curiously worn and haggard in the clear afternoon light.

"You--you don't really feel very well, do you, Dale?"

"Oh--it's nothing. I feel all right--really."

"I could send for Doctor Wells if--"

"Oh, heavens, no, Aunt Cornelia." She managed a wan smile. "It isn't as bad as all that. I'm just tired and the city was terribly hot and noisy and--" She stole a glance at her aunt from between lowered lids. "I got your gardener, by the way," she said casually.

"Did you, dear? That's splendid, though--but I'll tell you about that later. Where did you get him?"

"That good agency, I can't remember its name." Dale's hand moved restlessly over her eyes, as if remembering details were too great an effort. "But I'm sure he'll be satisfactory. He'll be out here this evening--he--he couldn't get away before, I believe. What have you been doing all day, darling?"

Miss Cornelia hesitated. Now that Dale had returned she suddenly wanted very much to talk over the various odd happenings of the day with her--get the support of her youth and her common sense. Then that independence which was so firmly rooted a characteristic of hers restrained her. No use worrying the child unnecessarily; they all might have to worry enough before tomorrow morning.

She compromised. "We have had a domestic upheaval," she said. "The cook and the housemaid have left--if you'd only waited till the next train you could have had the pleasure of their company into town."

"Aunt Cornelia--how exciting! I'm so sorry! Why did they leave?"

"Why do servants ever leave a good place?" asked Miss Cornelia grimly. "Because if they had sense enough to know when they were well off, they wouldn't be servants. Anyhow, they've gone--we'll have to depend on Lizzie
and Billy the rest of this week. I telephoned—but they couldn't promise me any others before Monday."

"And I was in town and could have seen people for you—if I'd only known!" said Dale remorsefully. "Only," she hesitated, "I mightn't have had time—at least I mean there were some other things I had to do, besides getting the gardener and—" She rose. "I think I will go and lie down for a little if you don't mind, darling."

Miss Van Gorder was concerned. "Of course I don't mind but—won't you even have your lemonade?"

"Oh, I'll get some from Lizzie in the pantry before I go up," Dale managed to laugh. "I think I must have a headache after all," she said. "Maybe I'll take an aspirin. Don't worry, darling."

"I shan't. I only wish there were something I could do for you, my dear."

Dale stopped in the alcove doorway. "There's nothing anybody can do for me, really," she said soberly. "At least—oh, I don't know what I'm saying! But don't worry. I'm quite all right. I may go over to the country club after dinner—and dance. Won't you come with me, Aunt Cornelia?"

"Depends on your escort," said Miss Cornelia tartly. "If our landlord, Mr. Richard Fleming, is taking you I certainly shall—I don't like his looks and never did!"

Dale laughed. "Oh, he's all right," she said. "Drinks a good deal and wastes a lot of money, but harmless enough. No, this is a very sedate party; I'll be home early."

"Well, in that case," said her aunt, "I shall stay here with my Lizzie and my ouija-board. Lizzie deserves some punishment for the very cowardly way she behaved this afternoon—and the ouija-board will furnish it. She's scared to death to touch the thing. I think she believes it's alive."

"Well, maybe I'll send you a message on it from the country club," said Dale lightly. She had paused, half-way up the flight of side stairs in the alcove, and her aunt noticed how her shoulders drooped, belying the lightness of her voice. "Oh," she went on, "by the way—have the afternoon papers come yet? I didn't have time to get one when I was rushing for the train."

"I don't think so, dear, but I'll ask Lizzie." Miss Cornelia moved toward a bell push.

"Oh, don't bother; it doesn't matter. Only if they have, would you ask Lizzie to bring me one when she brings up the lemonade? I want to read about—about the Bat—he fascinates me."

"There was something else in the paper this morning," said Miss Cornelia idly. "Oh, yes—the Union Bank—the bank Mr. Fleming, Senior, was president of has failed. They seem to think the cashier robbed it. Did you see that, Dale?"

The shoulders of the girl on the staircase straightened suddenly. Then they drooped again. "Yes—I saw it," she said in a queerly colorless voice. "Too bad. It must be terrible to—to have everyone suspect you—and hunt you—as I suppose they're hunting that poor cashier."

"Well," said Miss Cornelia, "a man who wrecks a bank deserves very little sympathy to my way of thinking. But then I'm old-fashioned. Well, dear, I won't keep you. Run along—and if you want an aspirin, there's a box in my top bureau-drawer."

"Thanks, darling. Maybe I'll take one and maybe I won't—all I really need is to lie down for a while."

She moved on up the staircase and disappeared from the range of Miss Cornelia's vision, leaving Miss Cornelia to ponder many things. Her trip to the city had done Dale no good, of a certainty. If not actually ill, she was obviously under some considerable mental strain. And why this sudden interest, first in the Bat, then in the failure of the Union Bank? Was it possible that Dale, too, had been receiving threatening letters?

"I'll be glad when that gardener comes, she thought to herself. He'll make a MAN in the house at any rate."

When Lizzie at last came in with the lemonade she found her mistress shaking her head.

"Cornelia, Cornelia," she was murmuring to herself, "you should have taken to pistol practice when you were younger; it just shows how children waste their opportunities."

CHAPTER FOUR
THE STORM GATHERS

The long summer afternoon wore away, sunset came, red and angry, a sunset presaging storm. A chill crept into the air with the twilight. When night fell, it was not a night of silver patterns enskied, but a dark and cloudy cloak where a few stars glittered fitfully. Miss Cornelia, at dinner, saw a bat swoop past the window of the dining room in its scurrying flight, and narrowly escaped oversetting her glass of water with a nervous start. The tension of waiting—waiting—for some vague menace which might not materialize after all—had begun to prey on her nerves. She saw Dale off to the country club with relief—the girl looked a little better after her nap but she was still not her normal self. When Dale was gone, she wandered restlessly for some time between living-room and library, now giving an unnecessary dusting to a piece of bric-a-brac with her handkerchief, now taking a book from one of the shelves in the library only to throw it down before she read a page.

This house was queer. She would not have admitted it to Lizzie, for her soul's salvation—but, for the first time in her sensible life, she listened for creakings of woodwork, rustling of leaves, stealthy steps outside, beyond the safe,
bright squares of the windows—for anything that was actual, tangible, not merely formless fear.

"There's too much ROOM in the country for things to happen to you!" she confided to herself with a shiver. "Even the night--whenever I look out, it seems to me as if the night were ten times bigger and blacker than it ever is in New York!"

To comfort herself she mentally rehearsed her telephone conversation of the morning, the conversation she had not mentioned to her household. At the time it had seemed to her most reassuring—the plans she had based upon it adequate and sensible in the normal light of day. But now the light of day had been blotted out and with it her security. Her plans seemed weapons of paper against the sinister might of the darkness beyond her windows. A little wind wailed somewhere in that darkness like a beaten child—beyond the hills thunder rumbled, drawing near, and with it lightning and the storm.

She made herself sit down in the chair beside her favorite lamp on the center table and take up her knitting with stiff fingers. Knit two--purl two--Her hands fell into the accustomed rhythm mechanically—a spy, peering in through the French windows, would have deemed her the picture of calm. But she had never felt less calm in all the long years of her life.

She wouldn't ring for Lizzie to come and sit with her, she simply wouldn't. But she was very glad, nevertheless, when Lizzie appeared at the door.

"Miss Neily."
"Yes, Lizzie?" Miss Cornelia's voice was composed but her heart felt a throb of relief.
"Can I--can I sit in here with you, Miss Neily, just a minute?" Lizzie's voice was plaintive. "I've been sitting out in the kitchen watching that Jap read his funny newspaper the wrong way and listening for ghosts till I'm nearly crazy!"

"Why, certainly, Lizzie," said Miss Cornelia primly. "Though," she added doubtfully, "I really shouldn't pamper your absurd fears, I suppose, but--"

"Oh, please, Miss Neily!"
"Very well," said Miss Cornelia brightly. "You can sit here, Lizzie—and help me work the ouija-board. That will take your mind off listening for things!"

Lizzie groaned. "You know I'd rather be shot than touch that uncanny ouijie!" she said dolefully. "It gives me the creeps every time I put my hands on it!"

"Well, of course, if you'd rather sit in the kitchen, Lizzie--"

"Oh, give me the ouijie!" said Lizzie in tones of heartbreak. "I'd rather be shot and stabbed than stay in the kitchen any more."

"Very well," said Miss Cornelia, "it's your own decision, Lizzie—remember that." Her needles clicked on. "I'll just finish this row before we start," she said. "You might call up the light company in the meantime, Lizzie—there seems to be a storm coming up and I want to find out if they intend to turn out the lights tonight as they did last night. Tell them I find it most inconvenient to be left without light that way."

"It's worse than inconvenient," muttered Lizzie, "it's criminal-- that's what it is--turning off all the lights in a haunted house, like this one. As if spooks wasn't bad enough with the lights on--"

"Lizzie!"
"Yes, Miss Neily—I wasn't going to say another word." She went to the telephone. Miss Cornelia knitted on--knit two--purl two-- In spite of her experiments with the ouija-board she didn't believe in ghosts—and yet—there were things one couldn't explain by logic. Was there something like that in this house—a shadow walking the corridors—a vague shape of evil, drifting like mist from room to room, till its cold breath whispered on one's back and—there! She had ruined her knitting, the last two rows would have to be ripped out. That came of mooning about ghosts like a ninny.

She put down the knitting with an exasperated little gesture. Lizzie had just finished her telephoning and was hanging up the receiver.

"Well, Lizzie?"
"Yes'm," said the latter, glaring at the phone. "That's what he says—they turned off the lights last night because there was a storm threatening. He says it burns out their fuses if they leave 'em on in a storm."

A louder roll of thunder punctuated her words.

"There!" said Lizzie. "They'll be going off again to-night." She took an uncertain step toward the French windows.

"Humph!" said Miss Cornelia, "I hope it will be a dry summer." Her hands tightened on each other. Darkness—darkness inside this house of whispers to match with the darkness outside! She forced herself to speak in a normal voice.

"Ask Billy to bring some candles, Lizzie—and have them ready."
Lizzie had been staring fixedly at the French windows. At Miss Cornelia's command she gave a little jump of terror and moved closer to her mistress.

"You're not going to ask me to go out in that hall alone?" she said in a hurt voice.

It was too much. Miss Cornelia found vent for her feelings in crisp exasperation.

"What's the matter with you anyhow, Lizzie Allen?"

The nervousness in her own tones infected Lizzie's. She shivered frankly.

"Oh, Miss Neily--Miss Neily!" she pleaded. "I don't like it! I want to go back to the city!"

Miss Cornelia braced herself. "I have rented this house for four months and I am going to stay," she said firmly. Her eyes sought Lizzie's, striving to pour some of her own inflexible courage into the latter's quaking form. But Lizzie would not look at her. Suddenly she started and gave a low scream;

"There's somebody on the terrace!" she breathed in a ghastly whisper, clutching at Miss Cornelia's arm.

For a second Miss Cornelia sat frozen. Then, "Don't do that!" she said sharply. "What nonsense!" but she, looked over her shoulder as she said it and Lizzie saw the look. Both waited, in pulsing stillness--one second--two.

"I guess it was the wind," said Lizzie at last, relieved, her grip on Miss Cornelia relaxing. She began to look a trifle ashamed of herself and Miss Cornelia seized the opportunity.

"You were born on a brick pavement," she said crushingly. "You get nervous out here at night whenever a cricket begins to sing--or scrape his legs--or whatever it is they do!"

Lizzie bowed before the blast of her mistress's scorn and began to move gingerly toward the alcove door. But obviously she was not entirely convinced.

"Oh, it's more than that, Miss Neily," she mumbled. "I--"

Miss Cornelia turned to her fiercely. If Lizzie was going to behave like this, they might as well have it out now between them--before Dale came home.

"What did you really see last night?" she said in a minatory voice.

The instant relief on Lizzie's face was ludicrous; she so obviously preferred discussing any subject at any length to braving the dangers of the other part of the house unaccompanied.

"I was standing right there at the top of that there staircase," she began, gesticulating toward the alcove stairs in the manner of one who embarks upon the narration of an epic. "Standing there with your switch in my hand, Miss Neily--and then I looked down and," her voice dropped, "I saw a gleaming eye! It looked at me and winked! I tell you this house is haunted!"

"A flirtatious ghost?" queried Miss Cornelia skeptically. She snorted. "Humph! Why didn't you yell?"

"I was too scared to yell! And I'm not the only one." She started to back away from the alcove, her eyes still fixed upon its haunted stairs. "Why do you think the servants left so sudden this morning?" she went on. "Do you really believe the housemaid had appendicitis? Or the cook's sister had twins?"

She turned and gestured at her mistress with a long, pointed forefinger. Her voice had a note of doom.

"I bet a cent the cook never had any sister--and the sister never had any twins," she said impressively. "No, Miss Neily, they couldn't put it over on me like that! They were scared away. They saw--It!"

She concluded her epic and stood nodding her head, an Irish Cassandra who had prophesied the evil to come.

"Fiddlesticks!" said Miss Cornelia briskly, more shaken by the recital than she would have admitted. She tried to think of another topic of conversation.

"What time is it?" she asked.

Lizzie glanced at the mantel clock. "Half-past ten, Miss Neily."

Miss Cornelia yawned, a little dismally. She felt as if the last two hours had not been hours but years.

"Miss Dale won't be home for half an hour," she said reflectively. And if I have to spend another thirty minutes listening to Lizzie shiver, she thought, Dale will find me a nervous wreck when she does come home. She rolled up her knitting and put it back in her knitting-bag; it was no use going on, doing work that would have to be ripped out again and yet she must do something to occupy her thoughts. She raised her head and discovered Lizzie returning toward the alcove stairs with the stealthy tread of a panther. The sight exasperated her.

"Now, Lizzie Allen!" she said sharply, "you forget all that superstitious nonsense and stop looking for ghosts! There's nothing in that sort of thing." She smiled--she would punish Lizzie for her obdurate timorousness. "Where's that ouija-board?"

"It's up there--with a prayer book on it to keep it quiet!" she groaned, jerking her thumb in the direction of the farther bookcase.

"Bring it here!" said Miss Cornelia implacably; then as Lizzie still hesitated, "Lizzie!"

Shivering, every movement of her body a conscious protest, Lizzie slowly went over to the bookcase, lifted off the prayer book, and took down the ouija-board. Even then she would not carry it normally but bore it over to Miss Cornelia at arms'-length, as if any closer contact would blast her with lightning, her face a comic mask of loathing.
and repulsion.

She placed the lettered board in Miss Cornelia's lap with a sigh of relief. "You can do it yourself! I'll have none of it!" she said firmly.

"It takes two people and you know it, Lizzie Allen!" Miss Cornelia's voice was stern but--it was also amused.

Lizzie groaned, but she knew her mistress. She obeyed. She carefully chose the farthest chair in the room and took a long time bringing it over to where her mistress sat waiting.

"I've been working for you for twenty years," she muttered. "I've been your goat for twenty years and I've got a right to speak my mind--"

Miss Cornelia cut her off. "You haven't got a mind. Sit down," she commanded.

Lizzie sat--her hands at her sides. With a sigh of tried patience, Miss Cornelia put her unwilling fingers on the little moving table that is used to point to the letters on the board itself. Then she placed her own hands on it, too, the tips of the fingers just touching Lizzie's.

"Now make your mind a blank!" she commanded her factotum.

"You just said I haven't got any mind," complained the latter.

"Well;" said Miss Cornelia magnificently, "make what you haven't got a blank."

The repartee silenced Lizzie for the moment, but only for the moment. As soon as Miss Cornelia had settled herself comfortably and tried to make her mind a suitable receiving station for ouija messages, Lizzie began to mumble the sorrows of her heart.

"I've stood by you through thick and thin," she mourned in a low voice. "I stood by you when you were a vegetarian--I stood by you when you were a theosophist--and I seen you through socialism, Fletcherism and rheumatism--but when it comes to carrying on with ghosts--"

"Be still!" ordered Miss Cornelia. "Nothing will come if you keep chattering!"

"That's why I'm chattering!" said Lizzie, driven to the wall. "My teeth are, too," she added. "I can hardly keep my upper set in," and a desolate clicking of artificial molars attested the truth of the remark. Then, to Miss Cornelia's relief, she was silent for nearly two minutes, only to start so violently at the end of the time that she nearly upset the ouija-board on her mistress's toes.

"I've got a queer feeling in my fingers--all the way up my arms," she whispered in awed accents, wriggling the arms she spoke of violently.

"Hush!" said Miss Cornelia indignantly. Lizzie always exaggerated, of course--yet now her own fingers felt prickly, uncanny. There was a little pause while both sat tense, staring at the board.

"Now, Ouija," said Miss Cornelia defiantly, "is Lizzie Allen right about this house or is it all stuff and nonsense?"

For one second--two--the ouija remained anchored to its resting place in the center of the board, Then--

"My Gawd! It's moving!" said Lizzie in tones of pure horror as the little pointer began to wander among the letters.

"You shoved it!"

"I did not--cross my heart, Miss Neily--I--" Lizzie's eyes were round, her fingers glued rigidly and awkwardly to the ouija. As the movements of the pointer grew more rapid her mouth dropped open--wider and wider--prepared for an ear-piercing scream.

"Keep quiet!" said Miss Cornelia tensely. There was a pause of a few seconds while the pointer darted from one letter to another wildly.

"B--M--C--X--P--R--S--K--Z--" murmured Miss Cornelia trying to follow the spelled letters.

"It's Russian!" gasped Lizzie breathlessly and Miss Cornelia nearly disgraced herself in the eyes of any spirits that might be present by inappropriate laughter. The ouija continued to move--more letters--what was it spelling?--it couldn't be--good heavens-- "B--A--T--Bat!" said Miss Cornelia with a tiny catch in her voice.

The pointer stopped moving: She took her hands from the board.

"That's queer," she said with a forced laugh. She glanced at Lizzie to see how Lizzie was taking it. But the latter seemed too relieved to have her hands off the ouija-board to make the mental connection that her mistress had feared.

All she said was, "Bats indeed! That shows it's spirits. There's been a bat flying around this house all evening."

She got up from her chair tentatively, obviously hoping that the seance was over.

"Oh, Miss Neily," she burst out. "Please let me sleep in your room tonight! It's only when my jaw drops that I snore--I can tie it up with a handkerchief!"

"I wish you'd tie it up with a handkerchief now," said her mistress absent-mindedly, still pondering the message that the pointer had spelled. "B--A--T--Bat!" she murmured. Thought-transference-- warning--accident? Whatever it was, it was--nerve-shaking. She put the ouija-board aside. Accident or not, she was done with it for the evening. But
she could not so easily dispose of the Bat. Sending a protesting Lizzie off for her reading glasses, Miss Cornelia got the evening paper and settled down to what by now had become her obsession. She had not far to search for a long black streamer ran across the front page--"Bat Baffles Police Again."

She skimmed through the article with eerie fascination, reading bits of it aloud for Lizzie's benefit.

"Unique criminal--long baffled the police--record of his crimes shows him to be endowed with an almost diabolical ingenuity--so far there is no clue to his identity--" Pleasant reading for an old woman who's just received a threatening letter, she thought ironically--ah, here was something new in a black-bordered box on the front page--a statement by the paper.

She read it aloud. "We must cease combing the criminal world for the Bat and look higher. He may be a merchant--a lawyer--a Doctor --honored in his community by day and at night a bloodthirsty assassin--" The print blurred before her eyes, she could read no more for the moment. She thought of the revolver in the drawer of the table close at hand and felt glad that it was there, loaded.

"I'm going to take the butcher knife to bed with me!" Lizzie was saying.

Miss Cornelia touched the ouija-board. "That thing certainly spelled Bat," she remarked. "I wish I were a man. I'd like to see any lawyer, Doctor, or merchant of my acquaintance leading a double life without my suspecting it."

"Every man leads a double life and some more than that," Lizzie observed. "I guess it rests them, like it does me to take off my corset."

Miss Cornelia opened her mouth to rebuke her but just at that moment there, was a clink of ice from the hall, and Billy, the Japanese, entered carrying a tray with a pitcher of water and some glasses on it. Miss Cornelia watched his impassive progress, wondering if the Oriental races ever felt terror--she could not imagine all Lizzie's banshees and kelpies producing a single shiver from Billy. He set down the tray and was about to go as silently as he had come when Miss Cornelia spoke to him on impulse.

"Billy, what's all this about the cook's sister not having twins?" she said in an offhand voice. She had not really discussed the departure of the other servants with Billy before. "Did you happen to know that this interesting event was anticipated?"

Billy drew in his breath with a polite hiss. "Maybe she have twins," he admitted. "It happen sometime. Mostly not expected."

"Do you think there was any other reason for her leaving?"
"Maybe," said Billy blandly.
"Well, what was the reason?"
"All say the same thing--house haunted." Billy's reply was prompt as it was calm.
Miss Cornelia gave a slight laugh. "You know better than that, though, don't you?"
Billy's Oriental placidity remained unruffled. He neither admitted nor denied. He shrugged his shoulders. "Funny house," he said laconically. "Find window open--nobody there. Door slam--nobody there!"

On the heels of his words came a single, startling bang from the kitchen quarters--the bang of a slammed door!

CHAPTER FIVE
ALOPECIA AND RUBEOLA
Miss Cornelia dropped her newspaper. Lizzie, frankly frightened, gave a little squeal and moved closer to her mistress. Only Billy remained impassive but even he looked sharply in the direction whence the sound had come.

Miss Cornelia was the first of the others to recover her poise.

"Stop that! It was the wind!" she said, a little irritably--the "Stop that!" addressed to Lizzie who seemed on the point of squealing again.

"I think not wind," said Billy. His very lack of perturbation added weight to the statement. It made Miss Cornelia uneasy. She took out her knitting again.

"How long have you lived in this house, Billy?"
"Since Mr. Fleming built."
"H'm." Miss Cornelia pondered. "And this is the first time you have been disturbed?"
"Last two days only," Billy would have made an ideal witness in a courtroom. He restricted himself so precisely to answering what was asked of him in as few words as possible.

Miss Cornelia ripped out a row in her knitting. She took a deep breath.

"What about that face Lizzie said you saw last night at the window?" she asked in a steady voice. Billy grinned, as if slightly embarrassed. "Just face--that's all."

"A--man's face?"
He shrugged again.
"Don't know--maybe. It there! It gone!"
Miss Cornelia did not want to believe him--but she did. "Did you go out after it?" she persisted.
Billy's yellow grin grew wider. "No thanks," he said cheerfully with ideal succinctness.

Lizzie, meanwhile, had stood first on one foot and then on the other during the interrogation, terror and morbid interest fighting in her for mastery. Now she could hold herself in no longer.

"Oh, Miss Neily!" she exploded in a graveyard moan, "last night when the lights went out I had a token! My oil lamp was full of oil but, do what I would, it kept going out, too--the minute I shut my eyes out that lamp would go. There ain't a surer token of death! The Bible says, 'Let your light shine'--and when a hand you can't see puts your lights out--good night!"

She ended in a hushed whisper and even Billy looked a trifle uncomfortable after her climax.

"Well, now that you've cheered us up," began Miss Cornelia undauntedly, but a long, ominous roll of thunder that rattled the panes in the French windows drowned out the end of her sentence. Nevertheless she welcomed the thunder as a diversion. At least its menace was a physical one--to be guarded against by physical means.

She rose and went over to the French windows. That flimsy bolt! She parted the curtains and looked out--a flicker of lightning stabbed the night--the storm must be almost upon them.

"Bring some candles, Billy," she said. "The lights may be going out any moment--and Billy," as he started to leave, "there's a gentleman arriving on the last train. After he comes you may go to bed. I'll wait up for Miss Dale--oh, and Billy," arresting him at the door, "see that all the outer doors on this floor are locked and bring the keys here."

Billy nodded and departed. Miss Cornelia took a long breath. Now that the moment for waiting had passed--the moment for action come--she felt suddenly indomitable, prepared to face a dozen Bats!

Her feelings were not shared by her maid. "I know what all this means," moaned Lizzie. "I tell you there's going to be a death, sure!"

"There certainly will be if you don't keep quiet," said her mistress acidly. "Lock the billiard-room windows and go to bed."

But this was the last straw for Lizzie. A picture of the two long, dark flights of stairs up which she had to pass to reach her bedchamber rose before her--and she spoke her mind.

"I am not going to bed!" she said wildly. "I'm going to pack up tomorrow and leave this house." That such a threat would never be carried out while she lived made little difference to her--she was beyond the need of Truth's consolations. "I asked you on my bended knees not to take this place two miles from a railroad," she went on heatedly. "For mercy's sake, Miss Neily, let's go back to the city before it's too late!"

Miss Cornelia was inflexible.

"I'm not going. You can make up your mind to that. I'm going to find out what's wrong with this place if it takes all summer. I came out to the country for a rest and I'm going to get it."

"You'll get your heavenly rest!" mourned Lizzie, giving it up. She looked pitifully at her mistress's face for a sign that the latter might be weakening--but no such sign came. Instead, Miss Cornelia seemed to grow more determined.

"Besides," she said, suddenly deciding to share the secret she had hugged to herself all day, "I might as well tell you, Lizzie. I'm having a detective sent down tonight from police headquarters in the city."

"A detective?" Lizzie's face was horrified. "Miss Neily, you're keeping something from me! You know something I don't know."

"I hope so. I daresay he will be stupid enough. Most of them are. But at least we can have one proper night's sleep."

"Not I. I trust no man," said Lizzie. But Miss Cornelia had picked up the paper again.

"The Bat's last crime was a particularly atrocious one," she read. "'The body of the murdered man...'

But Lizzie could bear no more.

"Why don't you read the funny page once in a while?" she wailed and hurried to close the windows in the billiard room. The door leading into the billiard room shut behind her.

Miss Cornelia remained reading for a moment. Then--was that a sound from the alcove? She dropped the paper, went into the alcove and stood for a moment at the foot of the stairs, listening. No-- it must have been imagination. But, while she was here, she might as well put on the spring lock that bolted the door from the alcove to the terrace. She did so, returned to the living-room and switched off the lights for a moment to look out at the coming storm. It was closer now--the lightning flashes more continuous. She turned on the lights again as Billy re-entered with three candles and a box of matches.

He put them down on a side table.

"New gardener come," he said briefly to Miss Cornelia's back.

Miss Cornelia turned. "Nice hour for him to get here. What's his name?"

"Say his name Brook," said Billy, a little doubtful. English names still bothered him--he was never quite sure of
them at first.

Miss Cornelia thought. "Ask him to come in," she said. "And Billy --where are the keys?"

Billy silently took two keys from his pocket and laid them on the table. Then he pointed to the terrace door
which Miss Cornelia had just bolted.

"Door up there--spring lock," he said.

"Yes." She nodded. "And the new bolt you put on today makes it fairly secure. One thing is fairly sure, Billy. If
anyone tries to get in tonight, he will have to break a window and make a certain amount of noise."

But he only smiled his curious enigmatic smile and went out. And no sooner had Miss Cornelia seated herself
when the door of the billiard room slammed open suddenly and Lizzie burst into the room as if she had been shot
from a gun--her hair wild--her face stricken with fear.

"I heard somebody yell out in the grounds--away down by the gate!" she informed her mistress in a loud stage
whisper which had a curious note of pride in it, as if she were not too displeased at seeing her doleful predictions so
swiftly coming to pass.

Miss Cornelia took her by the shoulder--half-startled, half-dubious.

"What did they yell?"

"Just yelled a yell!"

"Lizzie!"

"I heard them!"

But she had cried "Wolf!" too often.

"You take a liver pill," said her mistress disgustedly, "and go to bed."

Lizzie was about to protest both the verdict on her story and the judgment on herself when the door in the hall
was opened by Billy to admit the new gardener. A handsome young fellow, in his late twenties, he came two steps
into the room and then stood there respectfully with his cap in his hand, waiting for Miss Cornelia to speak to him.

After a swift glance of observation that gave her food for thought she did so.

"You are Brooks, the new gardener?"

The young man inclined his head.

"Yes, madam. The butler said you wanted to speak to me."

Miss Cornelia regarded him anew. His hands look soft--for a gardener's, she thought. And his manners seem
much too good for one --Still--

"Come in," she said briskly. The young man advanced another two steps. "You're the man my niece engaged in
the city this afternoon?"

"Yes, madam."

"I could not verify your references as the Brays are in Canada--" she proceeded.

The young man took an eager step forward. "I am sure if Mrs. Bray were here--" he began, then flushed and
stopped, twisting his cap.

"Were here?" said Miss Cornelia in a curious voice. "Are you a professional gardener?"

"Yes." The young man's manner had grown a trifle defiant but Miss Cornelia's next question followed
remorselessly.

"Know anything about hardy perennials?" she said in a soothing voice, while Lizzie regarded the interview with
wondering eyes.

"Oh, yes," but the young man seemed curiously lacking in confidence. "They--they're the ones that keep their
leaves during the winter, aren't they?"

"Come over here--closer--" said Miss Cornelia imperiously. Once more she scrutinized him and this time there
was no doubt of his discomfort under her stare.

"Have you had any experience with rubeola?" she queried finally.

"Oh, yes--yes, indeed," the gardener stammered. "Yes."

"And--alopecia?" pursued Miss Cornelia.

The young man seemed to fumble in his mind for the characteristics of such a flower or shrub.

"The dry weather is very hard on alopecia," he asserted finally, and was evidently relieved to see Miss Cornelia
receive the statement with a pleasant smile.

"What do you think is the best treatment for urticaria?" she propounded with a highly professional manner.

It appeared to be a catch-question. The young man knotted his brows. Finally a gleam of light seemed to come to
him.

"Urticaria frequently needs--er--thinning," he announced decisively.

"Needs scratching you mean!" Miss Cornelia rose with a snort of disdain and faced him. "Young man, urticaria
is hives, rubeola is measles, and alopecia is baldness!" she thundered. She waited a moment for his defense. None
"Why did you tell me you were a professional gardener?" she went on accusingly. "Why have you come here at this hour of night pretending to be something you're not?"

By all standards of drama the young man should have wilted before her wrath. Instead he suddenly smiled at her, boyishly, and threw up his hands in a gesture of defeat.

"I know I shouldn't have done it!" he confessed with appealing frankness. "You'd have found me out anyhow! I don't know anything about gardening. The truth is," his tone grew somber, "I was desperate! I HAD to have work!"

The candor of his smile would have disarmed a stonier-hearted person than Miss Cornelia. But her suspicions were still awake.

"That's all, is it?"

"That's enough when you're down and out." His words had an unmistakable accent of finality. She couldn't help wanting to believe him, and yet, he wasn't what he had pretended to be--and this night of all nights was no time to take people on trust!

"How do I know you won't steal the spoons?" she queried, her voice still gruff.

"Are they nice spoons?" he asked with absurd seriousness.

She couldn't help smiling at his tone. "Beautiful spoons."

Again that engaging, boyish manner of his touched something in her heart.

"Spoons are a great temptation to me, Miss Van Gorder--but if you'll take me, I'll promise to leave them alone."

"That's extremely kind of you," she answered with grim humor, knowing herself beaten. She went over to ring for Billy.

Lizzie took the opportunity to gain her ear.

"I don't trust him, Miss Neily! He's too smooth!" she whispered warningly.

Miss Cornelia stiffened. "I haven't asked for your opinion, Lizzie," she said.

But Lizzie was not to be put off by the Van Gorder manner.

"Oh," she whispered, "you're just as bad as all the rest of 'em. A good-looking man comes in the door and your brains fly out the window!"

Miss Cornelia quelled her with a gesture and turned back to the young man. He was standing just where she had left him, his cap in his hands--but, while her back had been turned, his eyes had made a stealthy survey of the living-room--a survey that would have made it plain to Miss Cornelia, if she had seen him, that his interest in the Fleming establishment was not merely the casual interest of a servant in his new place of abode. But she had not seen and she could have told nothing from his present expression.

"Have you had anything to eat lately?" she asked in a kindly voice.

He looked down at his cap. "Not since this morning," he admitted as Billy answered the bell.

Miss Cornelia quelled her with a gesture and turned back to the young man. He was standing just where she had left him, his cap in his hands--but, while her back had been turned, his eyes had made a stealthy survey of the living-room--a survey that would have made it plain to Miss Cornelia, if she had seen him, that his interest in the Fleming establishment was not merely the casual interest of a servant in his new place of abode. But she had not seen and she could have told nothing from his present expression.

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Miss Cornelia turned to the impassive Japanese. "Billy, give this man something to eat and then show him where he is to sleep."

She hesitated. The gardener's house was some distance from the main building, and with the night and the approaching storm she felt her own courage weakening. Into the bargain, whether this stranger had lied about his gardening or not, she was curiously attracted to him.

"I think," she said slowly, "that I'll have you sleep in the house here, at least for tonight. Tomorrow we can--the housemaid's room, Billy," she told the butler. And before their departure she held out a candle and a box of matches.

"Better take these with you, Brooks," she said. "The local light company crawls under its bed every time there is a thunderstorm. Good night, Brooks."

"Good night, ma'am," said the young man smiling. Following Billy to the door, he paused. "You're being mighty good to me," he said diffidently, smiled again, and disappeared after Billy.

As the door closed behind them, Miss Cornelia found herself smiling too. "That's a pleasant young fellow--no matter what he is," she said to herself decidedly, and not even Lizzie's feverish "Haven't you any sense taking strange men into the house? How do you know he isn't the Bat?" could draw a reply from her.

Again the thunder rolled as she straightened the papers and magazines on the table and Lizzie gingerly took up the ouija-board to replace it on the bookcase with the prayer book firmly on top of it. And this time, with the roll of the thunder, the lights in the living-room blinked uncertainly for an instant before they recovered their normal brilliance.

"There go the lights!" grumbled Lizzie, her fingers still touching the prayer book, as if for protection. Miss Cornelia did not answer her directly.

"We'll put the detective in the blue room when he comes," she said. "You'd better go up and see if it's all ready."

Lizzie started to obey, going toward the alcove to ascend to the second floor by the alcove stairs. But Miss Cornelia stopped her.
"Lizzie—you know that stair rail's just been varnished. Miss Dale got a stain on her sleeve there this afternoon—and Lizzie—"

"Yes'm?"

"No one is to know that he is a detective. Not even Billy." Miss Cornelia was very firm.

"Well, what'll I say he is?"

"It's nobody's business."

"A detective," moaned Lizzie, opening the hall door to go by the main staircase. "Tiptoeing around with his eye to all the keyholes. A body won't be safe in the bathtub." She shut the door with a little slap and disappeared. Miss Cornelia sat down—she had many things to think over—"if I ever get time really to think of anything again," she thought, because with gardeners coming who aren't gardeners—and Lizzie hearing yells in the grounds and— She started slightly. The front door bell was ringing—a long trill, uncannily loud in the quiet house. She sat rigid in her chair, waiting. Billy came in.

"Front door key, please?" he asked urbanely. She gave him the key.

"Find out who it is before you unlock the door," she said. He nodded. She heard him at the door, then a murmur of voices—Dale's voice and another's—"Won't you come in for a few minutes? Oh, thank you." She relaxed.

The door opened; it was Dale. "How lovely she looks in that evening wrap!" thought Miss Cornelia. But how tired, too. I wish I knew what was worrying her.

She smiled. "Aren't you back early, Dale?"

Dale threw off her wrap and stood for a moment patting back into its smooth, smart bob, hair ruffled by the wind.

"I was tired," she said, sinking into a chair.

"Not worried about anything?" Miss Cornelia's eyes were sharp.

"No," said Dale without conviction, "but I've come here to be company for you and I don't want to run away all the time." She picked up the evening paper and looked at it without apparently seeing it. Miss Cornelia heard voices in the hall—a man's voice—affable—"How have you been, Billy?"—Billy's voice in answer, "Very well, sir."

"Who's out there, Dale?" she queried.

Dale looked up from the paper. "Doctor Wells, darling," she said in a listless voice. "He brought me over from the club; I asked him to come in for a few minutes. Billy's just taking his coat." She rose, threw the paper aside, came over and kissed Miss Cornelia suddenly and passionately—then before Miss Cornelia, a little startled, could return the kiss, went over and sat on the settee by the fireplace near the door of the billiard room.

Miss Cornelia turned to her with a thousand questions on her tongue, but before she could ask any of them, Billy was ushering in Doctor Wells.

As she shook hands with the Doctor, Miss Cornelia observed him with casual interest—wondering why such a good-looking man, in his early forties, apparently built for success, should be content with the comparative rustication of his local practice. That shrewd, rather aquiline face, with its keen gray eyes, would have found itself more at home in a wider sphere of action, she thought—there was just that touch of ruthlessness about it which makes or mars a captain in the world's affairs. She found herself murmuring the usual conventionalities of greeting.

"Oh, I'm very well, Doctor, thank you. Well, many people at the country club?"

"Not very many," he said, with a shake of his head. "This failure of the Union Bank has knocked a good many of the club members sky high."

"Just how did it happen?" Miss Cornelia was making conversation.

"Oh, the usual thing." The Doctor took out his cigarette case. "The cashier, a young chap named Bailey, looted the bank to the tune of over a million."

Dale turned sharply toward them from her seat by the fireplace.

"How do you know the cashier did it?" she said in a low voice.

The Doctor laughed. "Well—he's run away, for one thing. The bank examiners found the deficit. Bailey, the cashier, went out on an errand—and didn't come back. The method was simple enough—worthless bonds substituted for good ones—with a good bond on the top and bottom of each package, so the packages would pass a casual inspection. Probably been going on for some time."

The fingers of Dale's right hand drummed restlessly on the edge of her settee.

"Couldn't somebody else have done it?" she queried tensely.

The Doctor smiled, a trifle patronizingly.

"Of course the president of the bank had access to the vaults," he said. "But, as you know, Mr. Courtleigh Fleming, the late president, was buried last Monday."

Miss Cornelia had seen her niece's face light up oddly at the beginning of the Doctor's statement—to relapse into lassitude again at its conclusion. Bailey—Bailey—she was sure she remembered that name—on Dale's lips.
"Dale, dear, did you know this young Bailey?" she asked point-blank.

The girl had started to light a cigarette. The flame wavered in her fingers, the match went out.

"Yes--slightly," she said. She bent to strike another match, averting her face. Miss Cornelia did not press her.

"What with bank robberies and communism and the income tax," she said, turning the subject, "the only way to keep your money these days is to spend it."

"Or not to have any--like myself!" the Doctor agreed.

"It seems strange," Miss Cornelia went on, "living in Courtleigh Fleming's house. A month ago I'd never even heard of Mr. Fleming --though I suppose I should have--and now--why, I'm as interested in the failure of his bank as if I were a depositor!"

The Doctor regarded the end of his cigarette.

"As a matter of fact," he said pleasantly, "Dick Fleming had no right to rent you the property before the estate was settled. He must have done it the moment he received my telegram announcing his uncle's death."

"Were you with him when he died?"

"Yes--in Colorado. He had angina pectoris and took me with him for that reason. But with care he might have lived a considerable time. The trouble was that he wouldn't use ordinary care. He ate and drank more than he should, and so--"

"I suppose," pursued Miss Cornelia, watching Dale out of the corner of her eye, "that there is no suspicion that Courtleigh Fleming robbed his own bank?"

"Well, if he did," said the Doctor amicably, "I can testify that he didn't have the loot with him." His tone grew more serious. "No! He had his faults--but not that."

Miss Cornelia made up her mind. She had resolved before not to summon the Doctor for aid in her difficulties, but now that chance had brought him here the opportunity seemed too good a one to let slip.

"Doctor," she said, "I think I ought to tell you something. Last night and the night before, attempts were made to enter this house. Once an intruder actually got in and was frightened away by Lizzie at the top of that staircase." She indicated the alcove stairs. "And twice I have received anonymous communications threatening my life if I did not leave the house and go back to the city."

Dale rose from her settee, startled.

"I didn't know that, Auntie! How dreadful!" she gasped.

Instantly Miss Cornelia regretted her impulse of confidence. She tried to pass the matter off with tart humor.

"Don't tell Lizzie," she said. "She'd yell like a siren. It's the only thing she does like a siren, but she does it superbly!"

For a moment it seemed as if Miss Cornelia had succeeded. The Doctor smiled; Dale sat down again, her expression altering from one of anxiety to one of amusement. Miss Cornelia opened her lips to dilate further upon Lizzie's eccentricities.

But just then there was a splintering crash of glass from one of the French windows behind her!

CHAPTER SIX

DETECTIVE ANDERSON TAKES CHARGE

"What's that?"

"Somebody smashed a windowpane!"

"And threw in a stone!"

"Wait a minute, I'll--" The Doctor, all alert at once, ran into the alcove and jerked at the terrace door.

"It's bolted at the top, too," called Miss Cornelia. He nodded, without wasting words on a reply, unbolted the door and dashed out into the darkness of the terrace. Miss Cornelia saw him run past the French windows and disappear into blackness. Meanwhile Dale, her listlessness vanished before the shock of the strange occurrence, had gone to the broken window and picked up the stone. It was wrapped in paper; there seemed to be writing on the paper. She closed the terrace door and brought the stone to her aunt.

Miss Cornelia unwrapped the paper and smoothed out the sheet.

Two lines of coarse, round handwriting sprawled across it:

Take warning! Leave this house at once! It is threatened with disaster which will involve you if you remain!

There was no signature.

"Who do you think wrote it?" asked Dale breathlessly.

Miss Cornelia straightened up like a ramrod--indomitable.

"A fool--that's who! If anything was calculated to make me stay here forever, this sort of thing would do it!"

She twitched the sheet of paper angrily.

"But--something may happen, darling!"

"I hope so! That's the reason I--"
She stopped. The doorbell was ringing again--thrilling, insistent. Her niece started at the sound.

"Oh, don't let anybody in!" she besought Miss Cornelia as Billy came in from the hall with his usual air of walking on velvet.

"Key, front door please--bell ring," he explained tersely, taking the key from the table.

Miss Cornelia issued instructions.

"See that the chain is on the door, Billy. Don't open it all the way. And get the visitor's name before you let him in."

She lowered her voice.

"If he says he is Mr. Anderson, let him in and take him to the library."

Billy nodded and disappeared. Dale turned to her aunt, the color out of her cheeks.

"Anderson? Who is Mr.--"

Miss Cornelia did not answer. She thought for a moment. Then she put her hand on Dale's shoulder in a gesture of protective affection.

"Dale, dear--you know how I love having you here--but it might be better if you went back to the city."

"Tonight, darling?" Dale managed a wan smile. But Miss Cornelia seemed serious.

"There's something behind all this disturbance--something I don't understand. But I mean to."

She glanced about to see if the Doctor was returning. She lowered her voice. She drew Dale closer to her.

"The man in the library is a detective from police headquarters," she said.

She had expected Dale to show surprise--excitement--but the white mask of horror which the girl turned toward her appalled her. The young body trembled under her hand for a moment like a leaf in the storm.

"Not--the police!" breathed Dale in tones of utter consternation. Miss Cornelia could not understand why the news had stirred her niece so deeply. But there was no time to puzzle it out, she heard crunching steps on the terrace, the Doctor was returning.

"Ssh!" she whispered. "It isn't necessary to tell the Doctor. I think he's a sort of perambulating bedside gossip--and once it's known the police are here we'll NEVER catch the criminals!"

When the Doctor entered from the terrace, brushing drops of rain from his no longer immaculate evening clothes, Dale was back on her favorite settee and Miss Cornelia was poring over the mysterious missive that had been wrapped about the stone.

"He got away in the shrubbery," said the Doctor disgustedly, taking out a handkerchief to fleck the spots of mud from his shoes.

Miss Cornelia gave him the letter of warning. "Read this," she said.

The Doctor adjusted a pair of pince-nez--read the two crude sentences over--once--twice. Then he looked shrewdly at Miss Cornelia.

"Were the others like this?" he queried.

She nodded. "Practically."

He hesitated for a moment like a man with an unpleasant social duty to face.

"Miss Van Gorder, may I speak frankly?"

"Generally speaking, I detest frankness," said that lady grimly. "But--go on!"

The Doctor tapped the letter. His face was wholly serious.

"I think you ought to leave this house," he said bluntly.

"Because of that letter? Humph!" His very seriousness, perversely enough, made her suddenly wish to treat the whole matter as lightly as possible.

The Doctor repressed the obvious annoyance of a man who sees a warning, given in all sobriety, unexpectedly taken as a quip.

"There is some devilry afoot," he persisted. "You are not safe here, Miss Van Gorder."

But if he was persistent in his attitude, so was she in hers.

"I've been safe in all kinds of houses for sixty-odd years," she said lightly. "It's time I had a bit of a change. Besides," she gestured toward her defenses, "this house is as nearly impregnable as I can make it. The window locks are sound enough, the doors are locked, and the keys are there," she pointed to the keys lying on the table. "As for the terrace door you just used," she went on, "I had Billy put an extra bolt on it today. By the way, did you bolt that door again?" She moved toward the alcove.

"Yes, I did," said the Doctor quickly, still seeming unconvinced of the wisdom of her attitude.

"Miss Van Gorder, I confess--I'm very anxious for you," he continued. "This letter is--ominous. Have you any enemies?"

"Don't insult me! Of course I have. Enemies are an indication of character."

The Doctor's smile held both masculine pity and equally masculine exasperation. He went on more gently.
"Why not accept my hospitality in the village to-night?" he proposed reasonably. "It's a little house but I'll make you comfortable. Or," he threw out his hands in the gesture of one who reasons with a willful child, "if you won't come to me, let me stay here!"

Miss Cornelia hesitated for an instant. The proposition seemed logical enough--more than that--sensible, safe. And yet, some indefinable feeling--hardly strong enough to be called a premonition --kept her from accepting it. Besides, she knew what the Doctor did not, that help was waiting across the hall in the library.

"Thank you, no, Doctor," she said briskly, before she had time to change her mind. "I'm not easily frightened. And tomorrow I intend to equip this entire house with burglar alarms on doors and windows!" she went on defiantly. The incident, as far as she was concerned, was closed. She moved on into the alcove. The Doctor stared at her, shaking his head.

She tried the terrace door. "There, I knew it!" she said triumphantly. "Doctor--you didn't fasten that bolt!"

The Doctor seemed a little taken aback. "Oh--I'm sorry--" he said.

"You only pushed it part of the way," she explained. She completed the task and stepped back into the living-room. "The only thing that worries me now is that broken French window," she said thoughtfully. "Anyone can reach a hand through it and open the latch." She came down toward the settee where Dale was sitting. "Please, Doctor!"

"Oh--what are you going to do?" said the Doctor, coming out of a brown study.

"I'm going to barricade that window!" said Miss Cornelia firmly, already struggling to lift one end of the settee.

But now Dale came to her rescue.

"Oh, darling, you'll hurt yourself. Let me--" and between them, the Doctor and Dale moved the heavy settee along until it stood in front of the window in question.

The Doctor stood up when the dusty task was finished, wiping his hands.

"It would take a furniture mover to get in there now!" he said airily.

Miss Cornelia smiled.

"Well, Doctor--I'll say good night now--and thank you very much," she said, extending her hand to the Doctor, who bowed over it silently. "Don't keep this young lady up too late; she looks tired." She flashed a look at Dale who stood staring out at the night.

"I'll only smoke a cigarette," promised the Doctor. Once again his voice had a note of plea in it. "You won't change your mind?" he asked anew.

Miss Van Gorder's smile was obdurate. "I have a great deal of mind," she said. "It takes a long time to change it."

Then, having exercised her feminine privilege of the last word, she sailed out of the room, still smiling, and closed the door behind her.

The Doctor seemed a little nettled by her abrupt departure.

"It may be mind," he said, turning back toward Dale, "but forgive me if I say I think it seems more like foolhardy stubbornness!"

Dale turned away from the window. "Then you think there is really danger?"

The Doctor's eyes were grave.

"Well--those letters--" he dropped the letter on the table. '"They mean something. Here you are--isolated the village two miles away--and enough shrubbery round the place to hide a dozen assassins--""

If his manner had been in the slightest degree melodramatic, Dale would have found the ominous sentences more easy to discount. But this calm, intent statement of fact was a chill touch at her heart. And yet--

"But what enemies can Aunt Cornelia have?" she asked helplessly.

"Any man will tell you what I do," said the Doctor with increasing seriousness. He took a cigarette from his case and tapped it on the case to emphasize his words. "This is no place for two women, practically alone."

Dale moved away from him restlessly, to warm her hands at the fire. The Doctor gave a quick glance around the room. Then, unseen by her, he stepped noiselessly over to the table, took the matchbox there off its holder and slipped it into his pocket. It seemed a curiously useless and meaningless gesture, but his next words evinced that the action had been deliberate.

"I don't seem to be able to find any matches--" he said with assumed carelessness, fiddling with the matchbox holder.

Dale turned away from the fire. "Oh, aren't there any? I'll get you some," she said with automatic politeness, and departed to search for them.

The Doctor watched her go--saw the door close behind her. Instantly his face set into tense and wary lines. He glanced about--then ran lightly into the alcove and noiselessly unfastened the bolt on the terrace door which he had pretended to fasten after his search of the shrubbery. When Dale returned with the matches, he was back where he
had been when she had left him, glancing at a magazine on the table. He thanked her urbanely as she offered him the box. "So sorry to trouble you--but tobacco is the one drug every Doctor forbids his patients and prescribes for himself."

Dale smiled at the little joke. He lit his cigarette and drew in the fragrant smoke with apparent gusto. But a moment later he had crushed out the glowing end in an ash tray.

"By the way, has Miss Van Gorder a revolver?" he queried casually, glancing at his wrist watch. "Yes--she fired it off this afternoon to see if it would work." Dale smiled at the memory.

The Doctor, too, seemed amused. "If she tries to shoot anything-- for goodness' sake stand behind her!" he advised. He glanced at the wrist watch again. "Well--I must be going--"

"If anything happens," said Dale slowly, "I shall telephone you at once."

Her words seemed to disturb the Doctor slightly--but only for a second. He grew even more urbane. "I'll be home shortly after midnight," he said. "I'm stopping at the Johnsons' on my way--one of their children is ill--or supposed to be." He took a step toward the door, then he turned toward Dale again.

"Take a parting word of advice," he said. "The thing to do with a midnight prowler is--let him alone. Lock your bedroom doors and don't let anything bring you out till morning." He glanced at Dale to see how she took the advice, his hand on the knob of the door.

"Thank you," said Dale seriously. "Good night, Doctor--Billy will let you out, he has the key."

"By Jove!" laughed the Doctor, "you are careful, aren't you! The place is like a fortress! Well--good night, Miss Dale--"

"Good night." The door closed behind him--Dale was left alone. Suddenly her composure left her, the fixed smile died. She stood gazing ahead at nothing, her face a mask of terror and apprehension. But it was like a curtain that had lifted for a moment on some secret tragedy and then fallen again. When Billy returned with the front door key she was as impassive as he was.

"Has the new gardener come yet?"

"He here," said Billy stolidly. "Name Brook."

She was entirely herself once more when Billy, departing, held the door open wide--to admit Miss Cornelia Van Gorder and a tall, strong-featured man, quietly dressed, with reticent, piercing eyes --the detective!

Dale's first conscious emotion was one of complete surprise. She had expected a heavy-set, blue-jowled vulgarian with a black cigar, a battered derby, and stubby policeman's shoes. "Why this man's a gentleman!" she thought. "At least he looks like one--and yet-- you can tell from his face he'd have as little mercy as a steel trap for anyone he had to--catch--" She shuddered uncontrollably.

"Dale, dear," said Miss Cornelia with triumph in her voice. "This is Mr. Anderson."

The newcomer bowed politely, glancing at her casually and then looking away. Miss Cornelia, however, was obviously in fine feather and relishing to the utmost the presence of a real detective in the house.

"This is the room I spoke of," she said briskly. "All the disturbances have taken place around that terrace door."

The detective took three swift steps into the alcove, glanced about it searchingly. He indicated the stairs.

"That is not the main staircase?"

"No, the main staircase is out there," Miss Cornelia waved her hand in the direction of the hall. The detective came out of the alcove and paused by the French windows.

"I think there must be a conspiracy between the Architects' Association and the Housebreakers' Union these days," he said grimly. "Look at all that glass. All a burglar needs is a piece of putty and a diamond-cutter to break in."

"But the curious thing is," continued Miss Cornelia, "that whoever got into the house evidently had a key to that door. Again she indicated the terrace door, but Anderson did not seem to be listening to her.

"Hello--what's this?" he said sharply, his eye lighting on the broken glass below the shattered French window. He picked up a piece of glass and examined it.

Dale cleared her throat. "It was broken from the outside a few minutes ago," she said.

"The outside?" Instantly the detective had pulled aside a blind and was staring out into the darkness.

"Yes. And then that letter was thrown in." She pointed to the threatening missive on the center table.

Anderson picked it up, glanced through it, laid it down. All his movements were quick and sure--each executed with the minimum expense of effort.

"H'm," he said in a calm voice that held a glint of humor. "Curious, the anonymous letter complex! Apparently someone considers you an undesirable tenant!"

Miss Cornelia took up the tale.

"There are some things I haven't told you yet," she said. "This house belonged to the late Courtleigh Fleming."

He glanced at her sharply.
"The Union Bank?"
"Yes. I rented it for the summer and moved in last Monday. We have not had a really quiet night since I came. The very first night I saw a man with an electric flashlight making his way through the shrubbery!"
"You poor dear!" from Dale sympathetically. "And you were here alone!"
"Well, I had Lizzie. And," said Miss Cornelia with enormous importance, opening the drawer of the center table, "I had my revolver. I know so little about these things, Mr. Anderson, that if I didn't hit a burglar, I knew I'd hit somebody or something!" and she gazed with innocent awe directly down the muzzle of her beloved weapon, then waved it with an airy gesture beneath the detective's nose.
Anderson gave an involuntary start, then his eyes lit up with grim mirth.
"Would you mind putting that away?" he said suavely. "I like to get in the papers as much as anybody, but I don't want to have them say--omit flowers."
Miss Cornelia gave him a glare of offended pride, but he endured it with such quiet equanimity that she merely replaced the revolver in the drawer, with a hurt expression, and waited for him to open the next topic of conversation.

He finished his preliminary survey of the room and returned to her.
"Now you say you don't think anybody has got upstairs yet?" he queried.
Miss Cornelia regarded the alcove stairs.
"I think not. I'm a very light sleeper, especially since the papers have been so full of the exploits of this criminal they call the Bat. He's in them again tonight." She nodded toward the evening paper.

The detective smiled faintly.
"Yes, he's contrived to surround himself with such an air of mystery that it verges on the supernatural--or seems that way to newspapermen."
"I confess," admitted Miss Cornelia, "I've thought of him in this connection." She looked at Anderson to see how he would take the suggestion but the latter merely smiled again, this time more broadly.
"That's going rather a long way for a theory," he said. "And the Bat is not in the habit of giving warnings."
"Nevertheless," she insisted, "somebody has been trying to get into this house, night after night."
Anderson seemed to be revolving a theory in his mind.
"Any liquor stored here?" he asked.
Miss Cornelia nodded. "Yes."
"What?"
Miss Cornelia beamed at him maliciously. "Eleven bottles of home-made elderberry wine."
"You're safe." The detective smiled ruefully. He picked up the evening paper, glanced at it, shook his head. "I'd forget the Bat in all this. You can always tell when the Bat has had anything to do with a crime. When he's through, he signs his name to it."
Miss Cornelia sat bolt upright. "His name? I thought nobody knew his name?"
The detective made a little gesture of apology. "That was a figure of speech. The newspapers named him the Bat because he moved with incredible rapidity, always at night, and by signing his name I mean he leaves the symbol of his identity--the Bat, which can see in the dark."
"I wish I could," said Miss Cornelia, striving to seem unimpressed. "These country lights are always going out."
Anderson's face grew stern. "Sometimes he draws the outline of a bat at the scene of the crime. Once, in some way, he got hold of a real bat, and nailed it to the wall."
Dale, listening, could not repress a shudder at the gruesome picture --and Miss Cornelia's hands gave an involuntary twitch as her knitting needles clicked together. Anderson seemed by no means unconscious of the effect he had created.
"How many people in this house, Miss Van Gorder?"
"My niece and myself," Miss Cornelia indicated Dale, who had picked up her wrap and was starting to leave the room. "Lizzie Allen--who has been my personal maid ever since I was a child--the Japanese butler, and the gardener. The cook and the housemaid left this morning--frightened away."
She smiled as she finished her description. Dale reached the door and passed slowly out into the hall. The detective gave her a single, sharp glance as she made her exit. He seemed to think over the factors Miss Cornelia had mentioned.
"Well," he said, after a slight pause, "you can have a good night's sleep tonight. I'll stay right here in the dark and watch."
"Would you like some coffee to keep you awake?"
Anderson nodded. "Thank you." His voice sank lower. "Do the servants know who I am?"
"Only Lizzie, my maid."
His eyes fixed hers. "I wouldn't tell anyone I'm remaining up all night," he said.
A formless fear rose in Miss Cornelia's mind. "You don't suspect my household?" she said in a low voice.
He spoke with emphasis—all the more pronounced because of the quietude of his tone.
"I'm not taking any chances," he said determinedly.

CHAPTER SEVEN
CROSS-QUESTIONS AND CROOKED ANSWERS

All unconscious of the slur just cast upon her forty years of single-minded devotion to the Van Gorder family, Lizzie chose that particular moment to open the door and make a little bob at her mistress and the detective.
"The gentleman's room is ready," she said meekly. In her mind she was already beseeching her patron saint that she would not have to show the gentleman to his room. Her ideas of detectives were entirely drawn from sensational magazines and her private opinion was that Anderson might have anything in his pocket from a set of terrifying false whiskers to a bomb!

Miss Cornelia, obedient to the detective's instructions, promptly told the whitest of fibs for Lizzie's benefit.
"The maid will show you to your room now and you can make yourself comfortable for the night." There—that would mislead Lizzie, without being quite a lie.
"My toilet is made for an occasion like this when I've got my gun loaded," answered Anderson carelessly. The allusion to the gun made Lizzie start nervously, unhappily for her, for it drew his attention to her and he now transfixed her with a stare.
"This is the maid you referred to?" he inquired. Miss Cornelia assented. He drew nearer to the unhappy Lizzie.
"What's your name?" he asked, turning to her.
"E-Elizabeth Allen," stammered Lizzie, feeling like a small and distrustful sparrow in the toils of an officious python.
Anderson seemed to run through a mental rogues gallery of other criminals named Elizabeth Allen that he had known.
"How old are you?" he proceeded.
Lizzie looked at her mistress despairingly. "Have I got to answer that?" she wailed. Miss Cornelia nodded—inexorably.
Lizzie braced herself. "Thirty-two," she said, with an arch toss of her head.
The detective looked surprised and slightly amused.
"She's fifty if she's a day," said Miss Cornelia treacherously in spite of a look from Lizzie that would have melted a stone.
The trace of a smile appeared and vanished on the detective's face.
"Now, Lizzie," he said sternly, "do you ever walk in your sleep?"
"I do not," said Lizzie indignantly.
"Don't care for the country, I suppose?"
"I do not!"
"Or detectives?" Anderson deigned to be facetious.
"I DO NOT!" There could be no doubt as to the sincerity of Lizzie's answer.
"All right, Lizzie. Be calm. I can stand it," said the detective with treacherous suavity. But he favored her with a long and careful scrutiny before he moved to the table and picked up the note that had been thrown through the window. Quietly he extended it beneath Lizzie's nose.
"Ever see this before?" he said crisply, watching her face.
Lizzie read the note with bulging eyes, her face horror-stricken. When she had finished, she made a gesture of wild disclaimer that nearly removed a portion of Anderson's left ear.
"Mercy on us!" she moaned, mentally invoking not only her patron saint but all the rosary of heaven to protect herself and her mistress.
But the detective still kept his eye on her.
"Didn't write it yourself, did you?" he queried curtly.
"I did not!" said Lizzie angrily. "I did not!"
"And—you're sure you don't walk in your sleep?" The bare idea strained Lizzie's nerves to the breaking point.
"When I get into bed in this house I wouldn't put my feet out for a million dollars!" she said with heartfelt candor. Even Anderson was compelled to grin at this.
"Then I won't ask you to," he said, relaxing considerably; "That's more money than I'm worth, Lizzie."
"Well, I'll say it is!" quoth Lizzie, now thoroughly aroused, and flounced out of the room in high dudgeon, her pompadour bristling, before he had time to interrogate her further.
He replaced the note on the table and turned back to Miss Cornelia. If he had found any clue to the mystery in
Lizzie's demeanor, she could not read it in his manner.

"Now, what about the butler?" he said.

"Nothing about him--except that he was Courtleigh Fleming's servant."

Anderson paused. "Do you consider that significant?"

A shadow appeared behind him deep in the alcove—a vague, listening figure—Dale—on tiptoe, conspiratorial, taking pains not to draw the attention of the others to her presence. But both Miss Cornelia and Anderson were too engrossed in their conversation to notice her.

Miss Cornelia hesitated.

"Isn't it possible that there is a connection between the colossal theft at the Union Bank and these disturbances?" she said.

Anderson seemed to think over the question.

"What do you mean?" he asked as Dale slowly moved into the room from the alcove, silently closing the alcove doors behind her, and still unobserved.

"Suppose," said Miss Cornelia slowly, "that Courtleigh Fleming took that money from his own bank and concealed it in this house?" The eavesdropper grew rigid.

"That's the theory you gave headquarters, isn't it?" said Anderson. "But I'll tell you how headquarters figures it out. In the first place, the cashier is missing. In the second place, if Courtleigh Fleming did it and got as far as Colorado, he had it with him when he died, and the facts apparently don't bear that out. In the third place, suppose he had hidden the money in or around this house. Why did he rent it to you?"

"But he didn't," said Miss Cornelia obstinately, "I leased this house from his nephew, his heir."

The detective smiled tolerantly.

"Well, I wouldn't struggle like that for a theory," he said, the professional note coming back to his voice. "The cashier's missing—that's the answer."

Miss Cornelia resented his offhand demolition of the mental card-castle she had erected with such pride.

"I have read a great deal on the detection of crime," she said hotly, "and—"

"Well, we all have our little hobbies," he said tolerantly. "A good many people rather fancy themselves as detectives and run around looking for clues under the impression that a clue is a big and vital factor that sticks up like—well, like a sore thumb. The fact is that the criminal takes care of the big and important factors. It's only the little ones he may overlook. To go back to your friend the Bat, it's because of his skill in little things that he's still at large."

"Then you don't think there's a chance that the money from the Union Bank is in this house?" persisted Miss Cornelia.

"I think it very unlikely."

Miss Cornelia put her knitting away and rose. She still clung tenaciously to her own theories but her belief in them had been badly shaken.

"If you'll come with me, I'll show you to your room," she said a little stiffly. The detective stepped back to let her pass.

"Sorry to spoil your little theory," he said, and followed her to the door. If either had noticed the unobtrusive listener to their conversation, neither made a sign.

The moment the door had closed on them Dale sprang into action. She seemed a different girl from the one who had left the room so inconspicuously such a short time before. There were two bright spots of color in her cheeks and she was obviously laboring under great excitement. She went quickly to the alcove doors—they opened softly—disclosing the young man who had said that he was Brooks the new gardener—and yet not the same young man—for his assumed air of servitude had dropped from him like a cloak, revealing him as a young fellow at least of the same general social class as Dale's if not a fellow-inhabitant of the select circle where Van Gorders revolved about Van Gorders, and a man's great-grandfather was more important than the man himself.

Dale cautioned him with a warning finger as he advanced into the room.

"Sh! Sh!" she whispered. "Be careful! That man's a detective!"

Brooks gave a hunted glance at the door into the hall.

"Then they've traced me here," he said in a dejected voice.

"I don't think so."

He made a gesture of helplessness.

"I couldn't get back to my rooms," he said in a whisper. "If they've searched them, they'll find your letters to me."

"No, I told her I'd engaged a gardener—and that's all there was about it."

He came nearer to her. "Dale!" he murmured in a tense voice. "You know I didn't take that money!" he said with
boyish simplicity.

"Of course! I believe in you absolutely!" she said. He caught her in his arms and kissed her--gratefully, passionately. Then the galling memory of the predicament in which he stood, the hunt already on his trail, came back to him. He released her gently, still holding one of her hands.

"But--the police here!" he stammered, turning away. "What does that mean?"

Dale swiftly informed him of the situation.

"Aunt Cornelia says people have been trying to break into this house for days--at night."

Brooks ran his hand through his hair in a gesture of bewilderment. Then he seemed to catch at a hope.

"What sort of people?" he queried sharply.

Dale was puzzled. "She doesn't know."

The excitement in her lover's manner came to a head. "That proves exactly what I've contended right along," he said, thudding one fist softly in the palm of the other. "Through some underneath channel old Fleming has been selling those securities for months, turning them into cash. And somebody knows about it, and knows that that money is hidden here. Don't you see? Your Aunt Cornelia has crabbed the game by coming here."

"Why didn't you tell the police that? Now they think, because you ran away--"

"Ran away! The only chance I had was a few hours to myself to try to prove what actually happened." "Why don't you tell the detective what you think?" said Dale at her wits' end. "That Courtleigh Fleming took the money and that it is still here?"

Her lover's face grew somber.

"He'd take me into custody at once and I'd have no chance to search."

He was searching now--his eyes roved about the living-room--walls--ceiling--hopefully--desperately--looking for a clue--the tiniest clue to support his theory.

"Why are you so sure it is here?" queried Dale.

Brooks explained. "You must remember Fleming was no ordinary defaulter and he had no intention of being exiled to a foreign country. He wanted to come back here and take his place in the community while I was in the pen."

"But even then--"

He interrupted her. "Listen, dear--" He crossed to the billiard-room door, closed it firmly, returned.

"The architect that built this house was an old friend of mine," he said in hushed accents. "We were together in France and you know the way fellows get to talking when they're far away and cut off--" He paused, seeing the cruel gleam of the flame throwers--two figures huddled in a foxhole, whiling away the terrible hours of waiting by muttered talk.

"Just an hour or two before--a shell got this friend of mine," he resumed, "he told me he had built a hidden room in this house."

"Where?" gasped Dale.

Brooks shook his head. "I don't know. We never got to finish that conversation. But I remember what he said. He said, 'You watch old Fleming. If I get mine over here it won't break his heart. He didn't want any living being to know about that room.'"

Now Dale was as excited as he.

"Then you think the money is in this hidden room?"

"I do," said Brooks decided. "I don't think Fleming took it away with him. He was too shrewd for that. No, he meant to come back all right, the minute he got the word the bank had been looted. And he'd fixed things so I'd be railroaded to prison--you wouldn't understand, but it was pretty neat. And then the fool nephew rents this house the minute he's dead, and whoever knows about the money--"

"Jack! Why isn't it the nephew who is trying to break in?"

"He wouldn't have to break in. He could make an excuse and come in any time."

He clenched his hands despairingly.

"If I could only get hold of a blue-print of this place!" he muttered.

Dale's face fell. It was sickening to be so close to the secret--and yet not find it. "Oh, Jack, I'm so confused and worried!" she confessed, with a little sob.

Brooks put his hands on her shoulders in an effort to cheer her spirits.

"Now listen, dear," he said firmly, "this isn't as hard as it sounds. I've got a clear night to work in--and as true as I'm standing here, that money's in this house. Listen, honey--it's like this." He pantomimed the old nursery rhyme of The House that Jack Built, "Here's the house that Courtleigh Fleming built--here, somewhere, is the Hidden Room in the house that Courtleigh Fleming built--and here--somewhere--pray Heaven--is the money--in the Hidden Room--"
in the house that Courtleigh Fleming built. When you're low in your mind, just say that over!"

She managed a faint smile. "I've forgotten it already," she said, drooping.

He still strove for an offhand gaiety that he did not feel.

"Why, look here!" and she followed the play of his hands obediently, like a tired child, "it's a sort of game, dearest. 'Money, money-- who's got the money? You know!' For the dozenth time he stared at the unrevealing walls of the room. "For that matter," he added, "the Hidden Room may be behind these very walls."

He looked about for a tool, a poker, anything that would sound the walls and test them for hollow spaces. Ah, he had it—that driver in the bag of golf clubs over in the corner. He got the driver and stood wondering where he had best begin. That blank wall above the fireplace looked as promising as any. He tapped it gently with the golf club—afraid to make too much noise and yet anxious to test the wall as thoroughly as possible. A dull, heavy reverberation answered his stroke—nothing hollow there apparently.

As he tried another spot, again thunder beat the long roll on its iron drum outside, in the night. The lights blinked—wavered—recovered.

"The lights are going out again," said Dale dully, her excitement sunk into a stupefied calm.

"Let them go! The less light the better for me. The only thing to do is to go over this house room by room." He pointed to the billiard room door. "What's in there?"

"The billiard room." She was thinking hard. "Jack! Perhaps Courtleigh Fleming's nephew would know where the blue-prints are!"

He looked dubious. "It's a chance, but not a very good one," he said. "Well--" He led the way into the billiard room and began to rap at random upon its walls while Dale listened intently for any echo that might betray the presence of a hidden chamber or sliding panel.

Thus it happened that Lizzie received the first real thrill of what was to prove to her—and to others—a sensational and hideous night. For, coming into the living-room to lay a cloth for Mr. Anderson's night suppers not only did the lights blink threateningly and the thunder roll, but a series of spirit raps was certainly to be heard coming from the region of the billiard room.

"Oh, my God!" she wailed, and the next instant the lights went out, leaving her in inky darkness. With a loud shriek she bolted out of the room.

Thunder—lightning—dashing of rain on the streaming glass of the windows—the storm hallooing its hounds. Dale huddled close to her lover as they groped their way back to the living-room, cautiously, doing their best to keep from stumbling against some heavy piece of furniture whose fall would arouse the house.

"There's a candle on the table, Jack, if I can find the table." Her outstretched hands touched a familiar object. "Here it is." She fumbled for a moment. "Have you any matches?"

"Yes." He struck one—another—lit the candle—set it down on the table. In the weak glow of the little taper, whose tiny flame illuminated but a portion of the living-room, his face looked tense and strained.

"It's pretty nearly hopeless," he said, "if all the walls are paneled like that."

As if in mockery of his words and his quest, a muffled knocking that seemed to come from the ceiling of the very room he stood in answered his despair.

"What's that?" gasped Dale.

They listened. The knocking was repeated—knock—knock—knock—knock.

"Someone else is looking for the Hidden Room!" muttered Brooks, gazing up at the ceiling intently, as if he could tear from it the secret of this new mystery by sheer strength of will.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE GLEAMING EYE

"It's upstairs!" Dale took a step toward the alcove stairs. Brooks halted her.

"Who's in this house besides ourselves?" he queried.

"Only the detective, Aunt Cornelia, Lizzie, and Billy."

"Billy's the Jap?"

"Yes."

Brooks paused an instant. "Does he belong to your aunt?"

"No. He was Courtleigh Fleming's butler."

Knock—knock—knock—knock the dull, methodical rapping on the ceiling of the living-room began again.

"Courtleigh Fleming's butler, eh?" muttered Brooks. He put down his candle and stole noiselessly into the alcove. "It may be the Jap!" he whispered.

Knock—knock—knock—knock! This time the mysterious rapping seemed to come from the upper hall.

"If it is the Jap, I'll get him!" Brooks's voice was tense with resolution. He hesitated—made for the hall door—tiptoed out into the darkness around the main staircase, leaving Dale alone in the living-room beset by shadowy
terrors.
Utter silence succeeded his noiseless departure. Even the storm lulled for a moment. Dale stood thinking, wondering, searching desperately for some way to help her lover.

At last a resolution formed in her mind. She went to the city telephone.

"Hello," she said in a low voice, glancing over her shoulder now and then to make sure she was not overheard.

"1-2-4--please--yes, that's right. Hello--is that the country club? Is Mr. Richard Fleming there? Yes, I'll hold the wire."

She looked about nervously. Had something moved in that corner of blackness where her candle did not pierce? No! How silly of her!

Buzz-buzz on the telephone. She picked up the receiver again.

"Hello--is this Mr. Fleming? This is Miss Ogden--Dale Ogden. I know it must seem odd my calling you this late, but--I wonder if you could come over here for a few minutes. Yes--tonight." Her voice grew stronger. "I wouldn't trouble you but--it's awfully important. Hold the wire a moment." She put down the phone and made another swift survey of the room, listened furtively at the door--all clear! She returned to the phone.

"Hello--Mr. Fleming--I'll wait outside the house on the drive. It--it's a confidential matter. Thank you so much."

She hung up the phone, relieved--not an instant too soon, for, as she crossed toward the fireplace to add a new log to the dying glow of the fire, the hall door opened and Anderson, the detective, came softly in with an unlighted candle in his hand.

Her composure almost deserted her. How much had he heard? What deduction would he draw if he had heard? An assignation, perhaps! Well, she could stand that; she could stand anything to secure the next few hours of liberty for Jack. For that length of time she and the law were at war; she and this man were at war.

But his first words relieved her fears.

"Spooky sort of place in the dark, isn't it?" he said casually.

"Yes--rather." If he would only go away before Brooks came back or Richard Fleming arrived! But he seemed in a distressingly chatty frame of mind.

"Left me upstairs without a match," continued Anderson. "I found my way down by walking part of the way and falling the rest. Don't suppose I'll ever find the room I left my toothbrush in!" He laughed, lighting the candle in his hand from the candle on the table.

"You're not going to stay up all night, are you?" said Dale nervously, hoping he would take the hint. But he seemed entirely oblivious of such minor considerations as sleep. He took out a cigar.

"Oh, I may doze a bit," he said. He eyed her with a certain approval. She was a darned pretty girl and she looked intelligent. "I suppose you have a theory of your own about these intrusions you've been having here? Or apparently having."

"I knew nothing about them until tonight."

"Still," he persisted conversationally, "you know about them now." But when she remained silent, "Is Miss Van Gorder usually--of a nervous temperament? Imagines she sees things, and all that?"

"I don't think so." Dale's voice was strained. Where was Brooks? What had happened to him?

Anderson puffed on his cigar, pondering. "Know the Flemings?" he asked.

"I've met Mr. Richard Fleming once or twice." Something in her tone caused him to glance at her. "Nice fellow?"

"I don't know him at all well."

"Know the cashier of the Union Bank?" he shot at her suddenly.

"No!" She strove desperately to make the denial convincing but she could not hide the little tremor in her voice. The detective mused.

"Fellow of good family, I understand," he said, eyeing her. "Very popular. That's what's behind most of these bank embezzlements--men getting into society and spending more than they make."

Dale hailed the tinkle of the city telephone with an inward sigh of relief. The detective moved to answer the house phone on the wall by the alcove, mistaking the direction of the ring. Dale corrected him quickly.

"No, the other one. That's the house phone." Anderson looked the apparatus over.

"No connection with the outside, eh?"

"No," said Dale absent-mindedly. "Just from room to room in the house."

He accepted her explanation and answered the other telephone.

"Hello--hello--what the--" He moved the receiver hook up and down, without result, and gave it up. "This line sounds dead," he said.

"It was all right a few minutes ago," said Dale without thinking.

"You were using it a few minutes ago?"
She hesitated--what use to deny what she had already admitted, for all practical purposes.

"Yes."

The city telephone rang again. The detective pounced upon it.

"Hello--yes--yes--this is Anderson--go ahead." He paused, while the tiny voice in the receiver buzzed for some seconds. Then he interrupted it impatiently.

"You're sure of that, are you? I see. All right. 'By."

He hung up the receiver and turned swiftly on Dale. "Did I understand you to say that you were not acquainted with the cashier of the Union Bank?" he said to her with a new note in his voice.

Dale stared ahead of her blankly. It had come! She did not reply.

Anderson went on ruthlessly.

"That was headquarters, Miss Ogden. They have found some letters in Bailey's room which seem to indicate that you were not telling the entire truth just now."

He paused, waiting for her answer. "What letters?" she said wearily.

"From you to Jack Bailey--showing that you had recently become engaged to him."

Dale decided to make a clean breast of it, or as clean a one as she dared.

"Very well," she said in an even voice, "that's true."

"Why didn't you say so before?" There was menace beneath his suavity.

She thought swiftly. Apparent frankness seemed to be the only resource left her. She gave him a candid smile.

"It's been a secret. I haven't even told my aunt yet." Now she let indignation color her tones. "How can the police be so stupid as to accuse Jack Bailey, a young man and about to be married? Do you think he would wreck his future like that?"

"Some people wouldn't call it wrecking a future to lay away a million dollars," said Anderson ominously. He came closer to Dale, fixing her with his eyes. "Do you know where Bailey is now?" He spoke slowly and menacingly.

She did not flinch.

"No."

The detective paused.

"Miss Ogden," he said, still with that hidden threat in his voice, "in the last minute or so the Union Bank case and certain things in this house have begun to tie up pretty close together. Bailey disappeared this morning. Have you heard from him since?"

Her eyes met his without weakening, her voice was cool and composed.

"No."

The detective did not comment on her answer. She could not tell from his face whether he thought she had told the truth or lied. He turned away from her brusquely.

"I'll ask you to bring Miss Van Gorder here," he said in his professional voice.

"Why do you want her?" Dale blazed at him rebelliously.

He was quiet. "Because this case is taking on a new phase."

"You don't think I know anything about that money?" she said, a little wildly, hoping that a display of sham anger might throw him off the trail he seemed to be following.

He seemed to accept her words, cynically, at their face value.

"No," he said, "but you know somebody who does." Dale hesitated, sought for a biting retort, found none. It did not matter; any respite, no matter how momentary, from these probing questions, would be a relief. She silently took one of the lighted candles and left the living-room to search for her aunt.

Left alone, the detective reflected for a moment, then picking up the one lighted candle that remained, commenced a systematic examination of the living-room. His methods were thorough, but if, when he came to the end of his quest, he had made any new discoveries, the reticent composure of his face did not betray the fact. When he had finished he turned patiently toward the billiard room--the little flame of his candle was swallowed up in its dark recesses--he closed the door of the living-room behind him. The storm was dying away now, but a few flashes of lightning still flickered, lighting up the darkness of the deserted living-room now and then with a harsh, brief glare.

A lightning flash--a shadow cast abruptly on the shade of one of the French windows, to disappear as abruptly as the flash was blotted out--the shadow of a man--a prowler--feeling his way through the lightning-slashed darkness to the terrace door. The detective? Brooks? The Bat? The lightning flash was too brief for any observer to have recognized the stealing shape--if any observer had been there.

But the lack of an observer was promptly remedied. Just as the shadowy shape reached the terrace door and its shadow-fingers closed over the knob, Lizzie entered the deserted living-room on stumbling feet. She was carrying a
tray of dishes and food--some cold meat on a platter, a cup and saucer, a roll, a butter pat-- and she walked slowly, with terror only one leap behind her and blank darkness ahead.

She had only reached the table and was preparing to deposit her tray and beat a shameful retreat, when a sound behind her made her turn. The key in the door from the terrace to the alcove had clicked. Paralyzed with fright she stared and waited, and the next moment a formless thing, a blacker shadow in a world of shadows, passed swiftly in and up the small staircase.

But not only a shadow. To Lizzie's terrified eyes it bore an eye, a single gleaming eye, just above the level of the stair rail, and this eye was turned on her.

It was too much. She dropped the tray on the table with a crash and gave vent to a piercing shriek that would have shamed the siren of a fire engine.

Miss Cornelia and Anderson, rushing in from the hall and the billiard room respectively, each with a lighted candle, found her gasping and clutching at the table for support.

"For the love of heaven, what's wrong?" cried Miss Cornelia irritatedly. The coffeepot she was carrying in her other hand spilled a portion of its boiling contents on Lizzie's shoe and Lizzie screamed anew and began to dance up and down on the uninjured foot.

"Oh, my foot--my foot!" she squealed hysterically. "My foot!"

Miss Cornelia tried to shake her back to her senses.

"My patience! Did you yell like that because you stubbed your toe?"

"You scaled it!" cried Lizzie wildly. "It went up the staircase!"

"Your toe went up the staircase?"

"No, no! An eye--an eye as big as a saucer! It ran right up that staircase--" She indicated the alcove with a trembling forefinger. Miss Cornelia put her coffeepot and her candle down on the table and opened her mouth to express her frank opinion of her factotum's sanity. But here the detective took charge.

"Now see here," he said with some sternness to the quaking Lizzie, "stop this racket and tell me what you saw!"

"A ghost!" persisted Lizzie, still hopping around on one leg. "It came right through that door and ran up the stairs--oh--" and she seemed prepared to scream again as Dale, white-faced, came in from the hall, followed by Billy and Brooks, the latter holding still another candle.

"Who screamed?" said Dale tensely.

"I did!" Lizzie wailed, "I saw a ghost!" She turned to Miss Cornelia. "I begged you not to come here," she vociferated. "I begged you on my bended knees. There's a graveyard not a quarter of a mile away."

"Yes, and one more scare like that, Lizzie Allen, and you'll have me lying in it," said her mistress unsympathetically. She moved up to examine the scene of Lizzie's ghostly misadventure, while Anderson began to interrogate its heroine.

"Now, Lizzie," he said, forcing himself to urbanity, "what did you really see?"

"I told you what I saw."

His manner grew somewhat threatening.

"You're not trying to frighten Miss Van Gorder into leaving this house and going back to the city?"

"Well, if I am," said Lizzie with grim, unconscious humor, "I'm giving myself an awful good scare, too, ain't I?"

The two glared at each other as Miss Cornelia returned from her survey of the alcove.

"Somebody who had a key could have got in here, Mr. Anderson," she said annoyedly. "That terrace door's been unbolted from the inside."

Lizzie groaned. "I told you so," she wailed. "I knew something was going to happen tonight. I heard rappings all over the house today, and the ouija-board spelled Bat!"

The detective recovered his poise. "I think I see the answer to your puzzle, Miss Van Gorder," he said, with a scornful glance at Lizzie. "A hysterical and not very reliable woman, anxious to go back to the city and terrified over and over by the shutting off of the electric lights."

If looks could slay, his characterization of Lizzie would have laid him dead at her feet at that instant. Miss Van Gorder considered his theory.

"I wonder," she said.

The detective rubbed his hands together more cheerfully.

"A good night's sleep and--" he began, but the irrepressible Lizzie interrupted him.

"My God, we're not going to bed, are we?" she said, with her eyes as big as saucers.

He gave her a kindly pat on the shoulder, which she obviously resented.

"You'll feel better in the morning," he said. "Lock your door and say your prayers, and leave the rest to me."

Lizzie muttered something inaudible and rebellious, but now Miss Cornelia added her protestations to his.

"That's very good advice," she said decisively. "You take her, Dale."
Reluctantly, with a dragging of feet and scared glances cast back over her shoulder, Lizzie allowed herself to be
drawn toward the door and the main staircase by Dale. But she did not depart without one Parthian shot.
"I'm not going to bed!" she wailed as Dale's strong young arm helped her out into the hall. "Do you think I want
to wake up in the morning with my throat cut?" Then the creaking of the stairs, and Dale's soothing voice reassuring
her as she painfully clambered toward the third floor, announced that Lizzie, for some time at least, had been
removed as an active factor from the puzzling equation of Cedarcrest.
Anderson confronted Miss Cornelia with certain relief.
"There are certain things I want to discuss with you, Miss Van Gorder," he said. "But they can wait until
tomorrow morning."
Miss Cornelia glanced about the room. His manner was reassuring.
"Do you think all this--pure imagination?" she said.
"Don't you?"
She hesitated. "I'm not sure."
He laughed. "I'll tell you what I'll do. You go upstairs and go to bed comfortably. I'll make a careful search of the
house before I settle down, and if I find anything at all suspicious, I'll promise to let you know."
She agreed to that, and after sending the Jap out for more coffee prepared to go upstairs.
Never had the thought of her own comfortable bed appealed to her so much. But, in spite of her weariness, she
could not quite resign herself to take Lizzie's story as lightly as the detective seemed to.
"If what Lizzie says is true," she said, taking her candle, "the upper floors of the house are even less safe than
this one."
"I imagine Lizzie's account just now is about as reliable as her previous one as to her age," Anderson assured
her. "I'm certain you need not worry. Just go on up and get your beauty sleep; I'm sure you need it."
On which ambiguous remark Miss Van Gorder took her leave, rather grimly smiling.
It was after she had gone that Anderson's glance fell on Brooks, standing warily in the doorway.
"What are you? The gardener?"
But Brooks was prepared for him.
"Ordinarily I drive a car," he said. "Just now I'm working on the place here."
Anderson was observing him closely, with the eyes of a man ransacking his memory for a name--a picture. "I've
seen you somewhere--" he went on slowly. "And I'll--place you before long." There was a little threat in his shrewd
scrutiny. He took a step toward Brooks.
"Not in the portrait gallery at headquarters, are you?"
"Not yet." Brooks's voice was resentful. Then he remembered his pose and his back grew supple, his whole
attitude that of the respectful servant.
"Well, we slip up now and then," said the detective slowly. Then, apparently, he gave up his search for the
name--the pictured face. But his manner was still suspicious.
"All right, Brooks," he said tersely, "if you're needed in the night, you'll be called!"
Brooks bowed. "Very well, sir." He closed the door softly behind him, glad to have escaped as well as he had.
But that he had not entirely lulled the detective's watchfulness to rest was evident as soon as he had gone.
Anderson waited a few seconds, then moved noiselessly over to the half door--listened-- opened it suddenly--closed
it again. Then he proceeded to examine the alcove--the stairs, where the gleaming eye had wavered like a corpse-
candle before Lizzie's affrighted vision. He tested the terrace door and bolted it. How much truth had there been in
her story? He could not decide, but he drew out his revolver nevertheless and gave it a quick inspection to see if it
was in working order. A smile crept over his face--the smile of a man who has dangerous work to do and does not
shrink from the prospect. He put the revolver back in his pocket and, taking the one lighted candle remaining, went
out by the hall door, as the storm burst forth in fresh fury and the window-panes of the living-room rattled before a
new reverberation of thunder.
For a moment, in the living-room, except for the thunder, all was silence. Then the creak of surreptitious
footsteps broke the stillness--light footsteps descending the alcove stairs where the gleaming eye had passed.
It was Dale slipping out of the house to keep her appointment with Richard Fleming. She carried a raincoat over
her arm and a pair of rubbers in one hand. Her other hand held a candle. By the terrace door she paused, unbolted it,
glanced out into the streaming night with a shiver. Then she came into the living-room and sat down to put on her
rubbers.
Hardly had she begun to do so when she started up again. A muffled knocking sounded at the terrace door. It
was ominous and determined, and in a panic of terror she rose to her feet. If it was the law, come after Jack, what
should she do? Or again, suppose it was the Unknown who had threatened them with death? Not coherent thoughts
these, but chaotic, bringing panic with them. Almost unconscious of what she was doing, she reached into the
drawer beside her, secured the revolver there and leveled it at the door.

CHAPTER NINE
A SHOT IN THE Dark
A key clicked in the terrace door--a voice swore muffledly at the rain. Dale lowered her revolver slowly. It was Richard Fleming--come to meet her here, instead of down by the drive.
She had telephoned him on an impulse. But now, as she looked at him in the light of her single candle, she wondered if this rather dissipated, rather foppish young man about town, in his early thirties, could possibly understand and appreciate the motives that had driven her to seek his aid. Still, it was for Jack! She clenched her teeth and resolved to go through with the plan mapped out in her mind. It might be a desperate expedient but she had nowhere else to turn!

Fleming shut the terrace door behind him and moved down from the alcove, trying to shake the rain from his coat.

"Did I frighten you?"

"Oh, Mr. Fleming--yes!" Dale laid her aunt's revolver down on the table. Fleming perceived her nervousness and made a gesture of apology.

"I'm sorry," he said, "I rapped but nobody seemed to hear me, so I used my key."

"You're wet through--I'm sorry," said Dale with mechanical politeness.

He smiled. "Oh, no." He stripped off his cap and raincoat and placed them on a chair, brushing himself off as he did so with finicky little movements of his hands.

"Reggie Beresford brought me over in his car," he said. "He's waiting down the drive."

Dale decided not to waste words in the usual commonplaces of social greeting.

"Mr. Fleming, I'm in dreadful trouble!" she said, facing him squarely, with a courageous appeal in her eyes.

He made a polite movement. "Oh, I say! That's too bad."

She plunged on. "You know the Union Bank closed today."

He laughed lightly.

"Yes, I know it! I didn't have anything in it--or any other bank for that matter," he admitted ruefully, "but I hate to see the old thing go to smash."

Dale wondered which angle was best from which to present her appeal.

"Well, even if you haven't lost anything in this bank failure, a lot of your friends have--surely?" she went on.

"I'll say so!" said Fleming, debonairly. "Beresford is sitting down the road in his Packard now writhing with pain!"

Dale hesitated; Fleming's lightness seemed so incorrigible that, for a moment, she was on the verge of giving her project up entirely. Then, "Waster or not--he's the only man who can help us!" she told herself and continued.

"Lots of awfully poor people are going to suffer, too," she said wistfully.

Fleming chuckled, dismissing the poor with a wave of his hand.

"Oh, well, the poor are always in trouble," he said with airy heartlessness. "They specialize in suffering."

He extracted a monogrammed cigarette from a thin gold case.

"But look here," he went on, moving closer to Dale, "you didn't send for me to discuss this hypothetical poor depositor, did you? Mind if I smoke?"

"No." He lit his cigarette and puffed at it with enjoyment while Dale paused, summoning up her courage. Finally the words came in a rush.

"Mr. Fleming, I'm going to say something rather brutal. Please don't mind. I'm merely--desperate! You see, I happen to be engaged to the cashier, Jack Bailey--"

Fleming whistled. "I see! And he's beat it!"

Dale blazed with indignation.

"He has not! I'm going to tell you something. He's here, now, in this house--" she continued fiercely, all her defenses thrown aside. "My aunt thinks he's a new gardener. He is here, Mr. Fleming, because he knows he didn't take the money, and the only person who could have done it was--your uncle!"

Dick Fleming dropped his cigarette in a convenient ash tray and crushed it out there, absently, not seeming to notice whether it scorched his fingers or not. He rose and took a turn about the room. Then he came back to Dale.

"That's a pretty strong indictment to bring against a dead man," he said slowly, seriously.

"It's true!" Dale insisted stubbornly, giving him glance for glance.

Fleming nodded. "All right."

He smiled--a smile that Dale didn't like.

"Suppose it's true--where do I come in?" he said. "You don't think I know where the money is?"

"No," admitted Dale, "but I think you might help to find it."
She went swiftly over to the hall door and listened tensely for an instant. Then she came back to Fleming.

"If anybody comes in--you've just come to get something of yours," she said in a low voice. He nodded understandingly. She dropped her voice still lower.

"Do you know anything about a Hidden Room in this house?" she asked.

Dick Fleming stared at her for a moment. Then he burst into laughter.

"A Hidden Room--that's rich!" he said, still laughing. "Never heard of it! Now, let me get this straight. The idea is--a Hidden Room--and the money is in it--is that it?"

Dale nodded a "Yes."

"The architect who built this house told Jack Bailey that he had built a Hidden Room in it," she persisted.

For a moment Dick Fleming stared at her as if he could not believe his ears. Then, slowly, his expression changed. Beneath the well-fed, debonair mask of the clubman about town, other lines appeared--lines of avarice and calculation--wolf-marks, betokening the craft and petty ruthlessness of the small soul within the gentlemanly shell. His eyes took on a shifty, uncertain stare--they no longer looked at Dale--their gaze seemed turned inward, beholding a visioned treasure, a glittering pile of gold. And yet, the change in his look was not so pronounced as to give Dale pause--she felt a vague uneasiness steal over her, true--but it would have taken a shrewd and long-experienced woman of the world to read the secret behind Fleming's eyes at first glance--and Dale, for all her courage and common sense, was a young and headstrong girl.

She watched him, puzzled, wondering why he made no comment on her last statement.

"Do you know where there are any blue-prints of the house?" she asked at last.

An odd light glittered in Fleming's eyes for a moment. Then it vanished--he held himself in check--the casual idler again.

"Blue-prints?" He seemed to think it over. "Why--there may be some. Have you looked in the old secretary in the library? My uncle used to keep all sorts of papers there," he said with apparent helpfulness.

"Why, don't you remember--you locked it when we took the house."

"So I did." Fleming took out his key ring, selected a key. "Suppose you go and look," he said. "Don't you think I'd better stay here?"

"Oh, yes--" said Dale, blinded to everything else by the rising hope in her heart. "Oh, I can hardly thank you enough!" and before he could even reply, she had taken the key and was hurrying toward the hall door.

He watched her leave the room, a bleak smile on his face. As soon as she had closed the door behind her, his languor dropped from him. He became a hound--a ferret--questing for its prey. He ran lightly over to the bookcase by the hall door--a moment's inspection--he shook his head. Perhaps the other bookcase near the French windows--no--it wasn't there. Ah, the bookcase over the fireplace! He remembered now! He made for it, hastily swept the books from the top shelf, reached groping fingers into the space behind the second row of books. There! A dusty roll of three blue-prints! He unrolled them hurriedly and tried to make out the white tracings by the light of the fire--no--better take them over to the candle on the table.

He peered at them hungrily in the little spot of light thrown by the candle. The first one--no--nor the second--but the third--the bottom one--good heavens! He took in the significance of the blurred white lines with greedy eyes, his lips opening in a silent exclamation of triumph. Then he pondered for an instant, the blue-print itself--was an awkward size--bulky--good, he had it! He carefully tore a small portion from the third blue-print and was about to stuff it in the inside pocket of his dinner jacket when Dale, returning, caught him before he had time to conceal his find. She took in the situation at once.

"Oh, you found it!" she said in tones of rejoicing, giving him back the key to the secretary. Then, as he still made no move to transfer the scrap of blue paper to her, "Please let me have it, Mr. Fleming. I know that's it."

Dick Fleming's lips set in a thin line. "Just a moment," he said, putting the table between them with a swift movement. Once more he stole a glance at the scrap of paper in his hand by the flickering light of the candle. Then he faced Dale boldly.

"Do you suppose, if that money is actually here, that I can simply turn this over to you and let you give it to Bailey?" he said. "Every man has his price. How do I know that Bailey's isn't a million dollars?"

Dale felt as if he had dashed cold water in her face. "What do you mean to do with it then?" she said.

Dick Fleming turned the blue-print over in his hand.

"I don't know," he said. "What is it you want me to do?"

But by now Dale's vague distrust in him had grown very definite.

"Aren't you going to give it to me?"

He put her off. "I'll have to think about that." He looked at the blue-print again. "So the missing cashier is in this house posing as a gardener?" he said with a sneer in his tones.

Dale's temper was rising.
"If you won't give it to me--there's a detective in this house," she said, with a stamp of her foot. She made a movement as if to call Anderson--then, remembering Jack, turned back to Fleming.

"Give it to the detective and let him search," she pleaded.

"A detective?" said Fleming startled. "What's a detective doing here?"

"People have been trying to break in."

"What people?"

"I don't know."

Fleming stared out beyond Dale, into the night.

"Then it is here," he muttered to himself.

Behind his back--was it a gust of air that moved them?--the double doors of the alcove swung open just a crack.

Was a listener crouched behind those doors--or was it only a trick of carpentry--a gesture of chance?

The mask of the clubman dropped from Fleming completely. His lips drew back from his teeth in the snarl of a predatory animal that clings to its prey at the cost of life or death.

Before Dale could stop him, he picked up the discarded blue-prints and threw them on the fire, retaining only the precious scrap in his hand. The roll blackened and burst into flame. He watched it, smiling.

"I'm not going to give this to any detective," he said quietly, tapping the piece of paper in his hand.

Dale's heart pounded sickeningly but she kept her courage up.

"What do you mean?" she said fiercely. "What are you going to do?"

He faced her across the fireplace, his airy manner coming back to him just enough to add an additional touch of the sinister to the cold self-revelation of his words.

"Let us suppose a few things, Miss Ogden," he said. "Suppose my price is a million dollars. Suppose I need money very badly and my uncle has left me a house containing that amount in cash. Suppose I choose to consider that that money is mine--then it wouldn't be hard to suppose, would it, that I'd make a pretty sincere attempt to get away with it?"

Dale summoned all her fortitude.

"If you go out of this room with that paper I'll scream for help!" she said defiantly.

Fleming made a little mock-bow of courtesy. He smiled.

"To carry on our little game of supposing," he said easily, "suppose there is a detective in this house--and that, if I were cornered, I should tell him where to lay his hands on Jack Bailey. Do you suppose you would scream?"

Dale's hands dropped, powerless, at her sides. If only she hadn't told him--too late!--she was helpless. She could not call the detective without ruining Jack--and yet, if Fleming escaped with the money--how could Jack ever prove his innocence?

Fleming watched her for an instant, smiling. Then, seeing she made no move, he darted hastily toward the double doors of the alcove, flung them open, seemed about to dash up the alcove stairs. The sight of him escaping with the only existing clue to the hidden room galvanized Dale into action. She followed him, hurriedly snatching up Miss Cornelia's revolver from the table as she did so, in a last gesture of desperation.

"No! No! Give it to me! Give it to me!" and she sprang after him, clutching the revolver. He waited for her on the bottom step of the stairs, the slight smile still on his face.

Panting breaths in the darkness of the alcove--a short, furious scuffle--he had wrested the revolver away from her, but in doing so he had unguarded the precious blue-print--she snatched at it desperately, tearing most of it away, leaving only a corner in his hand. He swore--tried to get it back--she jerked away.

Then suddenly a bright shaft of light split the darkness of the alcove stairs like a sword, a spot of brilliance centered on Fleming's face like the glare of a flashlight focused from above by an invisible hand. For an instant it revealed him--his features distorted with fury--about to rush down the stairs again and attack the trembling girl at their foot.

A single shot rang out. For a second, the fury on Fleming's face seemed to change to a strange look of bewilderment and surprise.

Then the shaft of light was extinguished as suddenly as the snuffing of a candle, and he crumpled forward to the foot of the stairs--struck--lay on his face in the darkness, just inside the double doors.

Dale gave a little whimpering cry of horror.

"Oh, no, no, no," she whispered from a dry throat, automatically stuffing her portion of the precious scrap of blue-print into the bosom of her dress. She stood frozen, not daring to move, not daring even to reach down with her hand and touch the body of Fleming to see if he was dead or alive.

A murmur of excited voices sounded from the hall. The door flew open, feet stumbled through the darkness--"The noise came from this room!" that was Anderson's voice--"Holy Virgin!" that must be Lizzie--

Even as Dale turned to face the assembled household, the house lights, extinguished since the storm, came on in
full brilliance --revealing her to them, standing beside Fleming's body with Miss Cornelia's revolver between them.

She shuddered, seeing Fleming's arm flung out awkwardly by his side. No living man could lie in such a posture.

"I didn't do it! I didn't do it!" she stammered, after a tense silence that followed the sudden reillumining of the lights. Her eyes wandered from figure to figure idly, noting unimportant details. Billy was still in his white coat and his face, impassive as ever, showed not the slightest surprise. Brooks and Anderson were likewise completely dressed--but Miss Cornelia had evidently begun to retire for the night when she had heard the shot--her transformation was askew and she wore a dressing-gown. As for Lizzie, that worthy shivered in a gaudy wrapper adorned with incredible orange flowers, with her hair done up in curlers. Dale saw it all and was never after to forget one single detail of it.

The detective was beside her now, examining Fleming's body with professional thoroughness. At last he rose.

"He's dead," he said quietly. A shiver ran through the watching group. Dale felt a stifling hand constrict about her heart.

There was a pause. Anderson picked up the revolver beside Fleming's body and examined it swiftly, careful not to confuse his own fingerprints with any that might already be on the polished steel. Then he looked at Dale. "Who is he?" he said bluntly.

Dale fought hysteria for some seconds before she could speak.

"Richard Fleming--somebody shot him!" she managed to whisper at last.

Anderson took a step toward her.

"What do you mean by somebody?" he said.

The world to Dale turned into a crowd of threatening, accusing eyes --a multitude of shadowy voices, shouting, Guilty! Guilty! Prove that you're innocent--you can't!"

"I don't know," she said wildly. "Somebody on the staircase."

"Did you see anybody?" Anderson's voice was as passionless and cold as a bar of steel.

"No--but there was a light from somewhere--like a pocket-flash--" She could not go on. She saw Fleming's face before her--furious at first--then changing to that strange look of bewildered surprise-- she put her hands over her eyes to shut the vision out.

Lizzie made a welcome interruption.

"I told you I saw a man go up that staircase!" she wailed, jabbing her forefinger in the direction of the alcove stairs.

Miss Cornelia, now recovered from the first shock of the discovery, supported her gallantly.

"That's the only explanation, Mr. Anderson," she said decidedly.

The detective looked at the stairs--at the terrace door. His eyes made a circuit of the room and came back to Fleming's body. "I've been all over the house," he said. "There's nobody there."

A pause followed. Dale found herself helplessly looking toward her lover for comfort--comfort he could not give without revealing his own secret.

Eerily, through the tense silence, a sudden tinkling sounded--the sharp, persistent ringing of a telephone bell.

Miss Cornelia rose to answer it automatically. "The house phone!" she said. Then she stopped. "But we're all here."

They looked attach other aghast. It was true. And yet--somehow --somewhere--one of the other phones on the circuit was calling the living-room.

Miss Cornelia summoned every ounce of inherited Van Gorder pride she possessed and went to the phone. She took off the receiver. The ringing stopped.

"Hello--hello--" she said, while the others stood rigid, listening. Then she gasped. An expression of wondering horror came over her face.

CHAPTER TEN

THE PHONE CALL FROM NOWHERE

"Somebody groaning!" gasped Miss Cornelia. "It's horrible!"

The detective stepped up and took the receiver from her. He listened anxiously for a moment.

"I don't hear anything," he said.

"I heard it! I couldn't imagine such a dreadful sound! I tell you--somebody in this house is in terrible distress."

"Where does this phone connect?" queried Anderson practically.

Miss Cornelia made a hopeless little gesture. "Practically every room in this house!"

The detective put the receiver to his ear again.

"Just what did you hear?" he said stolidly.

Miss Cornelia's voice shook.

"Dreadful groans--and what seemed to be an inarticulate effort to speak!"
Lizzie drew her gaudy wrapper closer about her shuddering form. "I'd go somewhere," she wailed in the voice of a lost soul, "if I only had somewhere to go!"

Miss Cornelia quelled her with a glare and turned back to the detective. "Won't you send these men to investigate--or go yourself?" she said, indicating Brooks and Billy. The detective thought swiftly.

"My place is here," he said. "You two men," Brooks and Billy moved forward to take his orders, "take another look through the house-- don't leave the building--I'll want you pretty soon."

Brooks--or Jack Bailey, as we may as well call him through the remainder of this narrative--started to obey. Then his eye fell on Miss Cornelia's revolver which Anderson had taken from beside Fleming's body and still held clasped in his hand.

"If you'll give me that revolver--" he began in an offhand tone, hoping Anderson would not see through his little ruse. Once wiped clean of fingerprints, the revolver would not be such telling evidence against Dale Ogden.

But Anderson was not to be caught napping. "That revolver will stay where it is," he said with a grim smile. Jack Bailey knew better than to try and argue the point, he followed Billy reluctantly out of the door, giving Dale a surreptitious glance of encouragement and faith as he did so. The Japanese and he mounted to the second floor as stealthily as possible, prying into dark corners and searching unused rooms for any clue that might betray the source of the startling phone call from nowhere. But Bailey's heart was not in the search. His mind kept going back to the figure of Dale--nervous, shaken, undergoing the terrors of the third degree at Anderson's hands. She couldn't have shot Fleming of course, and yet, unless he and Billy found something to substantiate her story of how the killing had happened, it was her own, unsupported word against a damning mass of circumstantial evidence. He plunged with renewed vigor into his quest.

Back in the living-room, as he had feared, Anderson was subjecting Dale to a merciless interrogation. "Now I want the real story!" he began with calculated brutality. "You lied before!"

"That's no tone to use! You'll only terrify her," cried Miss Cornelia indignantly. The detective paid no attention, his face had hardened, he seemed every inch the remorseless sleuthhound of the law. He turned on Miss Cornelia for a moment.

"Where were you when this happened?" he said.
"Upstairs in my room." Miss Cornelia's tones were icy.
"And you?" badgeringly, to Lizzie.
"In my room," said the latter pertly, "brushing Miss Cornelia's hair."

Anderson broke open the revolver and gave a swift glance at the bullet chambers.
"One shot has been fired from this revolver!"

Miss Cornelia sprang to her niece's defense.
"I fired it myself this afternoon," she said.

The detective regarded her with grudging admiration.
"You're a quick thinker," he said with obvious unbelieving in his voice. He put the revolver down on the table. Miss Cornelia followed up her advantage.
"I demand that you get the coroner here," she said.
"Doctor Wells is the coroner," offered Lizzie eagerly. Anderson brushed their suggestions aside.
"I'm going to ask you some questions!" he said menacingly to Dale.

But Miss Cornelia stuck to her guns. Dale was not going to be bullied into any sort of confession, true or false, if she could help it--and from the way that the girl's eyes returned with fascinated horror to the ghastly heap on the floor that had been Fleming, she knew that Dale was on the edge of violent hysteria.

"Do you mind covering that body first?" she asked crisply. The detective eyed her for a moment in a rather ugly fashion--then grunted ungraciously and, taking Fleming's raincoat from the chair, threw it over the body. Dale's eyes telegraphed her aunt a silent message of gratitude.

"Now--shall I telephone for the coroner?" persisted Miss Cornelia. The detective obviously resented her interference with his methods but he could not well refuse such a customary request.

"I'll do it," he said with a snort, going over to the city telephone. "What's his number?"

"He's not at his office; he's at the Johnsons'," murmured Dale.

Miss Cornelia took the telephone from Anderson's hands.
"I'll get the Johnsons', Mr. Anderson," she said firmly. The detective seemed about to rebuke her. Then his manner recovered some of its former suavity. He relinquished the telephone and turned back toward his prey.

"Now, what was Fleming doing here?" he asked Dale in a gentler voice.

Should she tell him the truth? No--Jack Bailey's safety was too inextricably bound up with the whole sinister business. She must lie, and lie again, while there was any chance of a lie's being believed.
"I don't know," she said weakly, trying to avoid the detective's eyes.

Anderson took thought.

"Well, I'll ask that question another way," he said. "How did he get into the house?"

Dale brightened--no need for a lie here.

"He had a key."

"Key to what door?"

"That door over there." Dale indicated the terrace door of the alcove.

The detective was about to ask another question--then he paused. Miss Cornelia was talking on the phone.

"Hello--is that Mr. Johnson's residence? Is Doctor Wells there? No?" Her expression was puzzled. "Oh--all right--thank you-- good night--"

Meanwhile Anderson had been listening--but thinking as well. Dale saw his sharp glance travel over to the fireplace--rest for a moment, with an air of discovery, on the fragments of the roll of blueprints that remained unburned among ashes--return. She shut her eyes for a moment, trying tensely to summon every atom of shrewdness she possessed to aid her.

He was hammering at her with questions again. "When did you take that revolver out of the table drawer?"

"When I heard him outside on the terrace," said Dale promptly and truthfully. "I was frightened."

Lizzie tiptoed over to Miss Cornelia.

"You wanted a detective!" she said in an ironic whisper. "I hope you're happy now you've got one!"

Miss Cornelia gave her a look that sent her scuttling back to her former post by the door. But nevertheless, internally, she felt thoroughly in accord with Lizzie.

Again Anderson's questions pounded at the rigid Dale, striving to pierce her armor of mingled truth and falsehood.

"When Fleming came in, what did he say to you?"

"Just--something about the weather," said Dale weakly. The whole scene was, still too horribly vivid before her eyes for her to furnish a more convincing alibi.

"You didn't have any quarrel with him?"

Dale hesitated.

"No."

"He just came in that door--said something about the weather--and was shot from that staircase. Is that it?" said the detective in tones of utter incredulity.

Dale hesitated again. Thus baldly put, her story seemed too flimsy for words; she could not even blame Anderson for disbelieving it. And yet--what other story could she tell that would not bring ruin on Jack?

Her face whitened. She put her hand on the back of a chair for support.

"Yes--that's it," she said at last, and swayed where she stood.

Again Miss Cornelia tried to come to the rescue. "Are all these questions necessary?" she queried sharply. "You can't for a moment believe that Miss Ogden shot that man!" But by now, though she did not show it, she too began to realize the strength of the appalling net of circumstances that drew with each minute tighter around the unhappy girl. Dale gratefully seized the momentary respite and sank into a chair. The detective looked at her.

"I think she knows more than she's telling. She's concealing something!" he said with deadly intentness. "Behind every crime there is a motive. When we've found the motive for this crime, we'll have found the criminal."

He stopped. His right hand moved idly over the edge of the table--halted beside an ash tray--closed upon something.

Miss Cornelia rose.

"Is that true, Dale?" she said sorrowfully.

Dale nodded. "Yes." She could not trust herself to explain at greater length.

Then Miss Cornelia made one of the most magnificent gestures of her life.

"Well, even if it is--what has that got to do with it?" she said, turning upon Anderson fiercely, all her protective instinct for those whom she loved aroused.

Anderson seemed somewhat impressed by the fierceness of her query. When he went on it was with less harshness in his manner.

"I'm not accusing this girl," he said more gently. "But behind every crime there is a motive. When we've found the motive for this crime, we'll have found the criminal."

Unobserved, Dale's hand instinctively went to her bosom. There it lay--the motive--the precious fragment of
blue-print which she had torn from Fleming's grasp but an instant before he was shot down. Once Anderson found it in her possession the case was closed, the evidence against her overwhelming. She could not destroy it—it was the only clue to the Hidden Room and the truth that might clear Jack Bailey. But, somehow, she must hide it—get it out of her hands—before Anderson's third-degree methods broke her down or he insisted on a search of her person. Her eyes roved wildly about the room, looking for a hiding place.

The rain of Anderson's questions began anew.
"What papers did Fleming burn in that grate?" he asked abruptly, turning back to Dale.
"Papers!" she faltered.
"Papers! The ashes are still there."
Miss Cornelia made an unavailing interruption.
"Miss Ogden has said he didn't come into this room."
The detective smiled.
"I hold in my hand proof that he was in this room for some time," he said coldly, displaying the half-burned cigarette he had taken from the ash tray a moment before.
"His cigarette—with his monogram on it." He put the fragment of tobacco and paper carefully away in an envelope and marched over to the fireplace. There he rummaged among the ashes for a moment, like a dog uncovering a bone. He returned to the center of the room with a fragment of blackened blue paper fluttering between his fingers.
"A fragment of what is technically known as a blue-print," he announced. "What were you and Richard Fleming doing with a blue-print?" His eyes bored into Dale's.
Dale hesitated—shut her lips.
"Now think it over!" he warned. "The truth will come out, sooner or later! Better be frank NOW!"
If he only knew how I wanted to be—he wouldn't be so cruel, thought Dale wearily. But I can't—I can't! Then her heart gave a throb of relief. Jack had come back into the room—Jack and Billy—Jack would protect her! But even as she thought of this her heart sank again. Protect her, indeed! Poor Jack! He would find it hard enough to protect himself if once this terrible man with the cold smile and steely eyes started questioning him. She looked up anxiously.

Bailey made his report breathlessly.
"Nothing in the house, sir."
Billy's impassive lips confirmed him.
"We go all over house—nobody!"

Nobody—nobody in the house! And yet—the mysterious ringing of the phone—the groans Miss Cornelia had heard! Were old wives' tales and witches' fables true after all? Did a power—merciless—evil—exists outside the barriers of the flesh—blasting that trembling flesh with a cold breath from beyond the portals of the grave? There seemed to be no other explanation.

"You men stay here!" said the detective. "I want to ask you some questions." He doggedly returned to his third-degreeing of Dale.
"Now what about this blue-print?" he queried sharply.
Dale stiffened in her chair. Her lies had failed. Now she would tell a portion of the truth, as much of it as she could without menacing Jack.
"I'll tell you just what happened," she began. "I sent for Richard Fleming—and when he came, I asked him if he knew where there were any blue-prints of the house."
The detective pounced eagerly upon her admission.
"Why did you want blue-prints?" he thundered.
"Because," Dale took a long breath, "I believe old Mr. Fleming took the money himself from the Union Bank and hid it here."
"Where did you get that idea?"
Dale's jaw set. "I won't tell you."
"What had the blue-prints to do with it?"
She could think of no plausible explanation but the true one.
"Because I'd heard there was a Hidden Room in this house."
The detective leaned forward intently. "Did you locate that room?"
Dale hesitated. "No."
"Then why did you burn the blue-prints?"
Dale's nerve was crumbling—breaking—under the repeated, monotonous impact of his questions.
"He burned them!" she cried wildly. "I don't know why!"
The detective paused an instant, then returned to a previous query.
"Then you didn't locate this Hidden Room?"
Dale's lips formed a pale "No."
"Did he?" went on Anderson inexorably.
Dale stared at him, dully—the breaking point had come. Another question--another--and she would no longer be able to control herself. She would sob out the truth hysterically—that Brooks, the gardener, was Jack Bailey, the missing cashier—that the scrap of blue-print hidden in the bosom of her dress might unravel the secret of the Hidden Room—that--
But just as she felt herself, sucked of strength, beginning to slide toward a black, tingling pit of merciful oblivion, Miss Cornelia provided a diversion.
"What's that?" she said in a startled voice.
The detective turned away from his quarry for an instant.
"What's what?"
"I heard something," averred Miss Cornelia, staring toward the French windows.
All eyes followed the direction of her stare. There was an instant of silence.
Then, suddenly, traveling swiftly from right to left across the shades of the French windows, there appeared a glowing circle of brilliant white light. Inside the circle was a black, distorted shadow—a shadow like the shadow of a gigantic black Bat! It was there—then a second later, it was gone!
"Oh, my God!" wailed Lizzie from her corner. "It's the Bat—that's his sign!"
Jack Bailey made a dash for the terrace door. But Miss Cornelia halted him peremptorily.
"Wait, Brooks!" She turned to the detective. "Mr. Anderson, you are familiar with the sign of the Bat. Did that look like it?"
The detective seemed both puzzled and disturbed. "Well, it looked like the shadow of a bat. I'll say that for it," he said finally.
On the heels of his words the front door bell began to ring. All turned in the direction of the hall.
"I'll answer that!" said Jack Bailey eagerly.
Miss Cornelia gave him the key to the front door.
"Don't admit anyone till you know who it is," she said, Bailey nodded and disappeared into the hall. The others waited tensely. Miss Cornelia's hand crept toward the revolver lying on the table where Anderson had put it down.
There was the click of an opening door, the noise of a little scuffle—then men's voices raised in an angry dispute.
"What do I know about a flashlight?" cried an irritated voice. "I haven't got a pocket-flash—take your hands off me!"
Bailey's voice answered the other voice, grim, threatening. The scuffle resumed.
Then Doctor Wells burst suddenly into the room, closely followed by Bailey. The Doctor's tie was askew—he looked ruffled and enraged. Bailey followed him vigilantly, seeming not quite sure whether to allow him to enter or not.
"My dear Miss Van Gorder," began the Doctor in tones of high dudgeon, "won't you instruct your servants that even if I do make a late call, I am not to be received with violence?"
"I asked you if you had a pocket-flash about you!" answered Bailey indignantly. "If you call a question like that violence--" He seemed about to restrain the Doctor by physical force.
Miss Cornelia quelled the teapot-tempest.
"It's all right, Brooks," she said, taking the front door key from his hand and putting it back on the table. She turned to Doctor Wells.
"You see, Doctor Wells," she explained, "just a moment before you rang the doorbell a circle of white light was thrown on those window shades."
The Doctor laughed with a certain relief.
"Why, that was probably the searchlight from my car!" he said. "I noticed as I drove up that it fell directly on that window."
His explanation seemed to satisfy all present but Lizzie. She regarded him with a deep suspicion. "He may be a lawyer, a merchant, a Doctor..." she chanted ominously to herself.
Miss Cornelia, too, was not entirely at ease.
"In the center of this ring of light," she proceeded, her eyes on the Doctor's calm countenance, "was an almost perfect silhouette of a bat."
"A bat!" The Doctor seemed at sea. "Ah, I see—the symbol of the criminal of that name." He laughed again.
"I think I can explain what you saw. Quite often my headlights collect insects at night and a large moth, spread on the glass, would give precisely the effect you speak of. Just to satisfy you, I'll go out and take a look."
He turned to do so. Then he caught sight of the raincoat-covered huddle on the floor.
"Why--" he said in a voice that mingled astonishment with horror. He paused. His glance slowly traversed the circle of silent faces.

**CHAPTER ELEVEN**

**BILLY PRACTICES JIU-JITSU**

"We have had a very sad occurrence here, Doctor," said Miss Cornelia gently.

The Doctor braced himself.

"Who?"

"Richard Fleming."

"Richard Fleming?" gasped the Doctor in tones of incredulous horror.

"Shot and killed from that staircase," said Miss Cornelia tonelessly.

The detective demurred.

"Shot and killed, anyhow," he said in accents of significant omission.

The Doctor knelt beside the huddle on the floor. He removed the fold of the raincoat that covered the face of the corpse and stared at the dead, blank mask. Till a moment ago, even at the height of his irritation with Bailey, he had been blithe and offhand--a man who seemed comparatively young for his years. Now Age seemed to fall upon him, suddenly, like a gray, clinging dust--he looked stricken and feeble under the impact of this unexpected shock.

"Shot and killed from that stairway," he repeated dully. He rose from his knees and glanced at the fatal stairs.

"What was Richard Fleming doing in this house at this hour?" he said.

He spoke to Miss Cornelia but Anderson answered the question.

"That's what I'm trying to find out," he said with a saturnine smile.

The Doctor gave him a look of astonished inquiry. Miss Cornelia remembered her manners.

"Doctor, this is Mr. Anderson."

"Headquarters," said Anderson tersely, shaking hands.

It was Lizzie's turn to play her part in the tangled game of mutual suspicion that by now made each member of the party at Cedarcrest watch every other member with nervous distrust. She crossed to her mistress on tiptoe.

"Don't you let him fool you with any of that moth business!" she said in a thrilling whisper, jerking her thumb in the direction of the Doctor. "He's the Bat."

Ordinarily Miss Cornelia would have dismissed her words with a smile. But by now her brain felt as if it had begun to revolve like a pinwheel in her efforts to fathom the uncanny mystery of the various events of the night.

She addressed Doctor Wells.

"I didn't tell you, Doctor--I sent for a detective this afternoon." Then, with mounting suspicion, "You happened in very opportunely!"

"After I left the Johnsons' I felt very uneasy," he explained. "I determined to make one more effort to get you away from this house. As this shows--my fears were justified!"

He shook his head sadly. Miss Cornelia sat down. His last words had given her food for thought. She wanted to mull them over for a moment.

The Doctor removed muffler and topcoat--stuffed the former in his topcoat pocket and threw the latter on the settee. He took out his handkerchief and began to mop his face, as if to wipe away some strain of mental excitement under which he was laboring. His breath came quickly--the muscles of his jaw stood out.

"Died instantly, I suppose?" he said, looking over at the body. "Didn't have time to say anything?"

"Ask the young lady," said Anderson, with a jerk of his head. "She was here when it happened."

The Doctor gave Dale a feverish glance of inquiry.

"He just fell over," said the latter pitifully. Her answer seemed to relieve the Doctor of some unseen weight on his mind. He drew a long breath and turned back toward Fleming's body with comparative calm.

"Poor Dick has proved my case for me better than I expected," he said, regarding the still, unbreathing heap beneath the raincoat. He swerved toward the detective.

"Mr. Anderson," he said with dignified pleading, "I ask you to use your influence, to see that these two ladies find some safer spot than this for the night."

Lizzie bounced up from her chair, instanter.

"Two?" she wailed. "If you know any safe spot, lead me to it!"

The Doctor overlooked her sudden eruption into the scene. He took out his handkerchief and began to mop his face, as if to wipe away some strain of mental excitement under which he was laboring. His breath came quickly--the muscles of his jaw stood out.

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hand a nervous little slap.

During the little interlude of comedy, Billy, the Japanese, unwatched by the others, had stolen to the French windows, pulled aside a blind, looked out. When he turned back to the room his face had lost a portion of its Oriental calm—there was suspicion in his eyes. Softly, under cover of pretending to arrange the tray of food that lay untouched on the table, he possessed himself of the key to the front door, unperceived by the rest, and slipped out of the room like a ghost.

Meanwhile the detective confronted Doctor Wells.

"You say, Doctor, that you came back to take these women away from the house. Why?"

The Doctor gave him a dignified stare.

"Miss Van Gorder has already explained."

Miss Cornelia elucidated. "Mr. Anderson has already formed a theory of the crime," she said with a trace of sarcasm in her tones.

The detective turned on her quickly. "I haven't said that." He started.

It had come again—tinkling—persistent.—the phone call from nowhere— the ringing of the bell of the house telephone!

"The house telephone—again!" breathed Dale. Miss Cornelia made a movement to answer the tinkling, inexplicable bell. But Anderson was before her.

"I'll answer that!" he barked. He sprang to the phone.

"Hello—hello—"

All eyes were bent on him nervously—the Doctor's face, in particular, seemed a very study in fear and amazement. He clutched the back of a chair to support himself, his hand was the trembling hand of a sick, old man.

"Hello—hello—" Anderson swore impatiently. He hung up the phone.

"There's nobody there!"

Again, a chill breath from another world than ours seemed to brush across the faces of the little group in the living-room. Dale, sensitive, impressionable, felt a cold, uncanny prickling at the roots of her hair.

A light came into Anderson's eyes. "Where's that Jap?" he almost shouted.

"He just went out," said Miss Cornelia. The cold fear, the fear of the unearthly, subsided from around Dale's heart, leaving her shaken but more at peace.

The detective turned swiftly to the Doctor, as if to put his case before the eyes of an unprejudiced witness.

"That Jap rang the phone," he said decisively. "Miss Van Gorder believes that this murder is the culmination of the series of mysterious happenings that caused her to send for me. I do not."

"Then what is the significance of the anonymous letters?" broke in Miss Cornelia heatedly. "Of the man Lizzie saw going up the stairs, of the attempt to break into this house—of the ringing of that telephone bell?"

Anderson replied with one deliberate word.

"Terrorization," he said.

The Doctor moistened his dry lips in an effort to speak.

"By whom?" he asked.

Anderson's voice was an icicle.

"I imagine by Miss Van Gorder's servants. By that woman there—" he pointed at Lizzie, who rose indignantly to deny the charge. But he gave her no time for denial. He rushed on, "--who probably writes the letters," he continued.

"By the gardener—" his pointing finger found Bailey "--who may have been the man Lizzie saw slipping up the stairs. By the Jap, who goes out and rings the telephone," he concluded triumphantly.

Miss Cornelia seemed unimpressed by his fervor.

"With what object?" she queried smoothly.

"Terrorization," he repeated.

Miss Cornelia sniffed. "Absurd! The butler was in this room when the telephone rang for the first time."

The thrust pierced Anderson's armor. For once he seemed at a loss. Here was something he had omitted from his calculations. But he did not give up. He was about to retort when—crash! thud!—the noise of a violent struggle in the hall outside drew all eyes to the hall door.

An instant later the door slammed open and a disheveled young man in evening clothes was catapulted into the living-room as if slung there by a giant's arm. He tripped and fell to the floor in the center of the room. Billy stood in the doorway behind him, inscrutable, arms folded, on his face an expression of mild satisfaction as if he were demurely pleased with a neat piece of housework, neatly carried out.

The young man picked himself up, brushed off his clothes, sought for his hat, which had rolled under the table. Then he turned on Billy furiously.

"Damn you—what do you mean by this?"

"With searchlight?" barked Anderson.

The young man turned to face this new enemy.

"Well, why shouldn't I be on the terrace with a searchlight?" he demanded.

The detective moved toward him menacingly.

"Who are you?"

"Who are you?" said the young man with cool impertinence, giving him stare for stare.

Anderson did not deign to reply, in so many words. Instead he displayed the police badge which glittered on the inside of the right lapel of his coat. The young man examined it coolly.

"H'm," he said. "Very pretty--nice neat design--very chaste!" He took out a cigarette case and opened it, seemingly entirely unimpressed by both the badge and Anderson. The detective chafed.

"If you've finished admiring my badge," he said with heavy sarcasm, "I'd like to know what you were doing on the terrace."

The young man hesitated--shot an odd, swift glance at Dale who ever since his abrupt entrance into the room, had been sitting rigid in her chair with her hands clenched tightly together.

"I've had some trouble with my car down the road," he said finally. He glanced at Dale again. "I came to ask if I might telephone."

"Did it require a flashlight to find the house?" Miss Cornelia asked suspiciously.

"Look here," the young man blustered, "why are you asking me all these questions?" He tapped his cigarette case with an irritated air.

Miss Cornelia stepped closer to him.

"Do you mind letting me see that flashlight?" she said.

The young man gave it to her with a little, mocking bow. She turned it over, examined it, passed it to Anderson, who examined it also, seeming to devote particular attention to the lens. The young man stood puffing his cigarette a little nervously while the examination was in progress. He did not look at Dale again.

Anderson handed back the flashlight to its owner.

"Now--what's your name?" he said sternly.

"Beresford--Reginald Beresford," said the young man sulkily. "If you doubt it I've probably got a card somewhere--" He began to search through his pockets.

"What's your business?" went on the detective.

"What's my business here?" queried the young man, obviously fencing with his interrogator.

"No--how do you earn your living?" said Anderson sharply.

"I don't," said the young man flippantly. "I may have to begin now, if that is of any interest to you. As a matter of fact, I've studied law but--"

The one word was enough to start Lizzie off on another trail of distrust. "He may be a LAWYER--" she quoted to herself sepulchrally from the evening newspaper article that had dealt with the mysterious identity of the Bat.

"And you came here to telephone about your car?" persisted the detective.

Dale rose from her chair with a hopeless little sigh. "Oh, don't you see--he's trying to protect me," she said wearily. She turned to the young man. "It's no use, Mr. Beresford."

Beresford's air of flippancy vanished.

"I see," he said. He turned to the other, frankly. "Well, the plain truth is--I didn't know the situation and I thought I'd play safe for Miss Ogden's sake."

Miss Cornelia moved over to her niece protectingly. She put a hand on Dale's shoulder to reassure her. But Dale was quite composed now--she had gone through so many shocks already that one more or less seemed to make very little difference to her overworn nerves. She turned to Anderson calmly.

"He doesn't know anything about--this," she said, indicating Beresford. "He brought Mr. Fleming here in his car--that's all."

Anderson looked to Beresford for confirmation.

"Is that true?"

"Yes," said Beresford. He started to explain. "I got tired of waiting and so I--"

The detective broke in curtly.

"All right."

He took a step toward the alcove.

"Now, Doctor." He nodded at the huddle beneath the raincoat. Beresford followed his glance--and saw the ominous heap for the first time.
"What's that?" he said tensely. No one answered him. The Doctor was already on his knees beside the body, drawing the raincoat gently aside. Beresford stared at the shape thus revealed with frightened eyes. The color left his face.

"That's not--Dick Fleming--is it?" he said thickly. Anderson slowly nodded his head. Beresford seemed unable to believe his eyes.

"If you've looked over the ground," said the Doctor in a low voice to Anderson, "I'll move the body where we can have a better light." His right hand fluttered swiftly over Fleming's still, clenched fist --extracted from it a torn corner of paper...

Still Beresford did not seem to be able to take in what had happened. He took another step toward the body.

"Do you mean to say that Dick Fleming--" he began. Anderson silenced him with an uplifted hand.

"What have you got there, Doctor?" he said in a still voice.

The Doctor, still on his knees beside the corpse, lifted his head.

"What do you mean?"

"You took something, just then, out of Fleming's hand," said the detective.

"I took nothing out of his hand," said the Doctor firmly.

Anderson's manner grew peremptory.

"I warn you not to obstruct the course of justice!" he said forcibly. "Give it here!"

The Doctor rose slowly, dusting off his knees. His eyes tried to meet Anderson's and failed. He produced a torn corner of blue-print.

"Why, it's only a scrap of paper, nothing at all," he said evasively.

Anderson looked at him meaningly.

"Scraps of paper are sometimes very important," said with a side glance at Dale.

Beresford approached the two angrily.

"Look here!" he burst out, "I've got a right to know about this thing. I brought Fleming over here--and I want to know what happened to him!"

"You don't have to be a mind reader to know that!" moaned Lizzie, overcome.

As usual, her comment went unanswered. Beresford persisted in his questions.

"Who killed him? That's what I want to know!" he continued, nervously puffing his cigarette.

"Well, you're not alone in that," said Anderson in his grimly humorous vein.

The Doctor motioned nervously to them both.

"As the coroner--if Mr. Anderson is satisfied--I suggest that the body be taken where I can make a thorough examination," he said haltingly.

Once more Anderson bent over the shell that had been Richard Fleming. He turned the body half-over--let it sink back on its face. For a moment he glanced at the corner of the blue-print in his hand, then at the Doctor. Then he stood aside.

"All right," he said laconically.

So Richard Fleming left the room where he had been struck down so suddenly and strangely--borne out by Beresford, the Doctor, and Jack Bailey. The little procession moved as swiftly and softly as circumstances would permit--Anderson followed its passage with watchful eyes. Billy went mechanically to pick up the stained rug which the detective had kicked aside and carried it off after the body. When the burden and its bearers, with Anderson in the rear, reached the doorway into the hall, Lizzie shrank before the sight, affrighted, and turned toward the alcove while Miss Cornelia stared unseeing out toward the front windows. So, for perhaps a dozen ticks of time Dale was left unwatched--and she made the most of her opportunity.

Her fingers fumbled at the bosom of her dress--she took out the precious, dangerous fragment of blue-print that Anderson must not find in her possession--but where to hide it, before her chance had passed? Her eyes fell on the bread roll that had fallen from the detective's supper tray to the floor when Lizzie had seen the gleaming eye on the stairs and had lain there unnoticed ever since. She bent over swiftly and secreted the tantalizing scrap of blue paper in the body of the roll, smoothing the crust back above it with trembling fingers. Then she replaced the roll where it had fallen originally and straightened up just as Billy and the detective returned.

Billy went immediately to the tray, picked it up, and started to go out again. Then he noticed the roll on the floor, stooped for it, and replaced it upon the tray. He looked at Miss Cornelia for instructions.

"Take that tray out to the dining-room," she said mechanically. But Anderson's attention had already been drawn to the tiny incident.

"Wait--I'll look at that tray," he said briskly. Dale, her heart in her mouth, watched him examine the knives, the plates, even shake out the napkin to see that nothing was hidden in its folds. At last he seemed satisfied.

"All right--take it away," he commanded. Billy nodded and vanished toward the dining-room with tray and roll.
Dale breathed again.
The sight of the tray had made Miss Cornelia's thoughts return to practical affairs.
"Lizzie," she commanded now, "go out in the kitchen and make some coffee. I'm sure we all need it," she sighed.
Lizzie bristled at once.
"Go out in that kitchen alone?"
"Billy's there," said Miss Cornelia wearily.
The thought of Billy seemed to bring little solace to Lizzie's heart.
"That Jap and his jooy-jitsu," she muttered viciously. "One twist and I'd be folded up like a pretzel."
But Miss Cornelia's manner was imperative, and Lizzie slowly dragged herself kitchenward, yawning and promising the saints repentance of every sin she had or had not committed if she were allowed to get there without something grabbing at her ankles in the dark corner of the hall.
When the door had shut behind her, Anderson turned to Dale, the corner of blue-print which he had taken from the Doctor in his hand.
"Now, Miss Ogden," he said tensely, "I have here a scrap of blue-print which was in Dick Fleming's hand when he was killed. I'll trouble you for the rest of it, if you please!"

CHAPTER TWELVE
"I DIDN'T KILL HIM."
"The rest of it?" queried Dale with a show of bewilderment, silently thanking her stars that, for the moment at least, the incriminating fragment had passed out of her possession.
Her reply seemed only to infuriate the detective.
"Don't tell me Fleming started to go out of this house with a blank scrap of paper in his hand," he threatened. "He didn't start to go out at all!"
Dale rose. Was Anderson trying a chance shot in the dark--or had he stumbled upon some fresh evidence against her? She could not tell from his manner.
"Why do you say that?" she feinted.
"His cap's there on that table," said the detective with crushing terseness. Dale started. She had not remembered the cap--why hadn't she burned it, concealed it--as she had concealed the blue-print? She passed a hand over her forehead wearily.
Miss Cornelia watched her niece.
"It you're keeping anything back, Dale--tell him," she said.
"She's keeping something back all right," he said. "She's told part of the truth, but not all." He hammered at Dale again. "You and Fleming located that room by means of a blue-print of the house. He started--not to go out--but, probably, to go up that staircase. And he had in his hand the rest of this!" Again he displayed the blank corner of blue paper.
Dale knew herself cornered at last. The detective's deductions were too shrewd; do what she would, she could keep him away from the truth no longer.
"He was going to take the money and go away with it!" she said rather pitifully, feeling a certain relief of despair steal over her, now that she no longer needed to go on lying--lying--involving herself in an inextricable web of falsehood.
"Dale!" gasped Miss Cornelia, alarmed. But Dale went on, reckless of consequences to herself, though still warily shielding Jack.
"He changed the minute he heard about it. He was all kindness before that--but afterward--" She shuddered, closing her eyes. Fleming's face rose before her again, furious, distorted with passion and greed --then, suddenly, quenched of life.
Anderson turned to Miss Cornelia triumphantly.
"She started to find the money--and save Bailey," he explained, building up his theory of the crime. "But to do it she had to take Fleming into her confidence--and he turned yellow. Rather than let him get away with it, she--" He made an expressive gesture toward his hip pocket.
Dale trembled, feeling herself already in the toils. She had not quite realized, until now, how damningly plausible such an explanation of Fleming's death could sound. It fitted the evidence perfectly--it took account of every factor but one--the factor left unaccounted for was one which even she herself could not explain.
"Isn't that true?" demanded Anderson. Dale already felt the cold clasp of handcuffs on her slim wrists. What use of denial when every tiny circumstance was so leagued against her? And yet she must deny.
"I didn't kill him," she repeated perplexedly, weakly.
"Why didn't you call for help? You--you knew I was here."
Dale hesitated. "I--I couldn't." The moment the words were out of her mouth she knew from his expression that
they had only cemented his growing certainty of her guilt.

"Dale! Be careful what you say!" warned Miss Cornelia agitatedly. Dale looked dumbly at her aunt. Her answers
must seem the height of reckless folly to Miss Cornelia--oh, if there were only someone who understood!

Anderson resumed his grilling.

"Now I mean to find out two things," he said, advancing upon Dale. "Why you did not call for help--and what
you have done with that blue-print."

"Suppose I could find that piece of blue-print for you?" said Dale desperately. "Would that establish Jack
Bailey's innocence?"

The detective stared at her keenly for a moment.

"If the money's there--yes."

Dale opened her lips to reveal the secret, reckless of what might follow. As long as Jack was cleared--what
matter what happened to herself? But Miss Cornelia nipped the heroic attempt at self-sacrifice in the bud.

She put herself between her niece and the detective, shielding Dale from his eager gaze.

"But her own guilt!" she said in tones of great dignity. "No, Mr. Anderson, granting that she knows where that
paper is--and she has not said that she does--I shall want more time and much legal advice before I allow her to turn
it over to you."

All the unconscious note of command that long-inherited wealth and the pride of a great name can give was in
her voice, and the detective, for the moment, bowed before it, defeated. Perhaps he thought of men who had been
broken from the Force for injudicious arrests, perhaps he merely bided his time. At any rate, he gave up his grilling
of Dale for the present and turned to question the Doctor and Beresford who had just returned, with Jack Bailey,
from their grim task of placing Fleming's body in a temporary resting place in the library.

"Well, Doctor?" he grunted.

The Doctor shook his head

"Poor fellow--straight through the heart."

"Were there any powder marks?" queried Miss Cornelia.

"No--and the clothing was not burned. He was apparently shot from some little distance--and I should say from
above."

The detective received this information without the change of a muscle in his face. He turned to Beresford--
resuming his attack on Dale from another angle.

"Beresford, did Fleming tell you why he came here tonight?"

Beresford considered the question.

"No. He seemed in a great hurry, said Miss Ogden had telephoned him, and asked me to drive him over."

"Why did you come up to the house?"

"We-el," said Beresford with seeming candor, "I thought it was putting rather a premium on friendship to keep
me sitting out in the rain all night, so I came up the drive--and, by the way!" He snapped his fingers irritatedly, as if
recalling some significant incident that had slipped his memory, and drew a battered object from his pocket. "I
picked this up, about a hundred feet from the house," he explained. "A man's watch. It was partly crushed into the
ground, and, as you see, it's stopped running."

The detective took the object and examined it carefully. A man's open-face gold watch, crushed and battered in
as if it had been trampled upon by a heavy heel.

"Yes," he said thoughtfully. "Stopped running at ten-thirty."

Beresford went on, with mounting excitement.

"I was using my pocket-flash to find my way and what first attracted my attention was the ground--torn up, you
know, all around it. Then I saw the watch itself. Anybody here recognize it?"

The detective silently held up the watch so that all present could examine it. He waited. But if anyone in the
party recognized the watch--no one moved forward to claim it.

"You didn't hear any evidence of a struggle, did you?" went on Beresford. "The ground looked as if a fight had
taken place. Of course it might have been a dozen other things."

Miss Cornelia started.

"Just about ten-thirty Lizzie heard somebody cry out, in the grounds," she said.

The detective looked Beresford over till the latter grew a little uncomfortable.

"I don't suppose it has any bearing on the case," admitted the latter uneasily. "But it's interesting."

The detective seemed to agree. At least he slipped the watch in his pocket.

"Do you always carry a flashlight, Mr. Beresford?" asked Miss Cornelia a trifle suspiciously.

"Always at night, in the car." His reply was prompt and certain.

"This is all you found?" queried the detective, a curious note in his voice.
"Yes." Beresford sat down, relieved. Miss Cornelia followed his example. Another clue had led into a blind alley, leaving the mystery of the night's affairs as impenetrable as ever.

"Some day I hope to meet the real estate agent who promised me that I would sleep here as I never slept before!" she murmured acridly. "He's right! I've slept with my clothes on every night since I came!"

As she ended, Billy darted in from the hall, his beady little black eyes gleaming with excitement, a long, wicked-looking butcher knife in his hand.

"Key, kitchen door, please!" he said, addressing his mistress.

"Key?" said Miss Cornelia, startled. "What for?"

For once Billy's polite little grin was absent from his countenance.

"Somebody outside trying to get in," he chattered. "I see knob turn, so," he illustrated with the butcher knife, "and so--three times."

The detective's hand went at once to his revolver.

"You're sure of that, are you?" he said roughly to Billy.

"Sure, I sure!"

"Where's that hysterical woman Lizzie?" queried Anderson. "She may get a bullet in her if she's not careful."

"She see too. She shut in closet--say prayers, maybe," said Billy, without a smile.

The picture was a ludicrous one but not one of the little group laughed.

"Doctor, have you a revolver?" Anderson seemed to be going over the possible means of defense against this new peril.

"No."

"How about you, Beresford?"

Beresford hesitated.

"Yes," he admitted finally. "Always carry one at night in the country." The statement seemed reasonable enough but Miss Cornelia gave him a sharp glance of mistrust, nevertheless.

The detective seemed to have more confidence in the young idler.

"Beresford, will you go with this Jap to the kitchen?" as Billy, grimly clutching his butcher knife, retraced his steps toward the hall. "If anyone's working at the knob--shoot through the door. I'm going round to take a look outside."

Beresford started to obey. Then he paused.

"I advise you not to turn the doorknob yourself, then," he said flippantly.

The detective nodded. "Much obliged," he said, with a grin. He ran lightly into the alcove and tiptoed out of the terrace door, closing the door behind him. Beresford and Billy departed to take up their posts in the kitchen. "I'll go with you, if you don't mind--" and Jack Bailey had followed them, leaving Miss Cornelia and Dale alone with the Doctor. Miss Cornelia, glad of the opportunity to get the Doctor's theories on the mystery without Anderson's interference, started to question him at once.

"Doctor."

"Yes." The Doctor turned, politely.

"Have you any theory about this occurrence to-night?" She watched him eagerly as she asked the question.

He made a gesture of bafflement.

"None whatever--it's beyond me," he confessed.

"And yet you warned me to leave this house," said Miss Cornelia cannily. "You didn't have any reason to believe that the situation was even as serious as it has proved to be?"

"I did the perfectly obvious thing when I warned you," said the Doctor easily. "Those letters made a distinct threat."

Miss Cornelia could not deny the truth in his words. And yet she felt decidedly unsatisfied with the way things were progressing.

"You said Fleming had probably been shot from above?" she queried, thinking hard.

The Doctor nodded. "Yes."

"Have you a pocket-flash, Doctor?" she asked him suddenly.

"Why--yes--" The Doctor did not seem to perceive the significance of the query. "A flashlight is more important to a country Doctor than--castor oil," he added, with a little smile.

Miss Cornelia decided upon an experiment. She turned to Dale.

"Dale, you said you saw a white light shining down from above?"

"Yes," said Dale in a minor voice.

Miss Cornelia rose.

"May I borrow your flashlight, Doctor? Now that fool detective is out of the way," she continued some what
acidly, "I want to do something."

The Doctor gave her his flashlight with a stare of bewilderment. She took it and moved into the alcove.

"Doctor, I shall ask you to stand at the foot of the small staircase, facing up."

"Now?" queried the Doctor with some reluctance.

"Now, please."

The Doctor slowly followed her into the alcove and took up the position she assigned him at the foot of the stairs.

"Now, Dale," said Miss Cornelia briskly, "when I give the word, you put out the lights here--and then tell me when I have reached the point on the staircase from which the flashlight seemed to come. All ready?"

Two silent nods gave assent. Miss Cornelia left the room to seek the second floor by the main staircase and then slowly return by the alcove stairs, her flashlight poised, in her reconstruction of the events of the crime. At the foot of the alcove stairs the Doctor waited uneasily for her arrival. He glanced up the stairs --were those her footsteps now? He peered more closely into the darkness.

An expression of surprise and apprehension came over his face.

He glanced swiftly at Dale--was she watching him? No--she sat in her chair, musing. He turned back toward the stairs and made a frantic, insistent gesture--"Go back, go back!" it said, plainer than words, to--Something--in the darkness by the head of the stairs. Then his face relaxed, he gave a noiseless sigh of relief.

Dale, rousing from her brown study, turned out the floor lamp by the table and went over to the main light switch, awaiting Miss Cornelia's signal to plunge the room in darkness. The Doctor stole, another glance at her--had his gestures been observed?--apparently not.

Unobserved by either, as both waited tensely for Miss Cornelia's signal, a Hand stole through the broken pane of the shattered French window behind their backs and fumbled for the knob which unlocked the window-door. It found the catch--unlocked it--the window-door swung open, noiselessly--just enough to admit a crouching figure that cramped itself uncomfortably behind the settee which Dale and the Doctor had placed to barricade those very doors. When it had settled itself, unperceived, in its lurking place--the Hand stole out again--closed the window-door, relocked it.

Hand or claw? Hand of man or woman or paw of beast? In the name of God--WHOSE HAND?

Miss Cornelia's voice from the head of the stairs broke the silence.

"Was it here?" Miss Cornelia's voice came muffledly from the head of the stairs.

Dale considered. "Come down a little," she said. The white spot of light wavered, settled on the Doctor's face.

"I hope you haven't a weapon," the Doctor called up the stairs with an unsuccessful attempt at jocularity.

Miss Cornelia descended another step.

"How's this?"

"That's about right," said Dale uncertainly. Miss Cornelia was satisfied.

"Lights, please." She went up the stairs again to see if she could puzzle out what course of escape the man who had shot Fleming had taken after his crime--if it had been a man.

Dale switched on the living-room lights with a sense of relief. The reconstruction of the crime had tried her sorely. She sat down to recover her poise.

"Doctor! I'm so frightened!" she confessed.

The Doctor at once assumed his best manner of professional reassurance.

"Why, my dear child?" he asked lightly. "Because you happened to be in the room when a crime was committed?"

"But he has a perfect case against me," sighed Dale.

"That's absurd!"

"No."

"YOU DON'T MEAN?" said the Doctor aghast.

Dale looked at him with horror in her face.

"I didn't kill him!" she insisted anew. "But, you know the piece of blue-print you found in his hand?"

"Yes," from the Doctor tensely.

Dale's nerves, too bitterly tested, gave way at last under the strain of keeping her secret. She felt that she must confide in someone or perish. The Doctor was kind and thoughtful--more than that, he was an experienced man of the world--if he could not advise her, who could? Besides, a Doctor was in many ways like a priest--both sworn to
keep inviolate the secrets of their respective confessionals.

"There was another piece of blue-print, a larger piece--" said Dale slowly, "I tore it from him just before--"

The Doctor seemed greatly excited by her words. But he controlled himself swiftly.

"Why did you do such a thing?"

"Oh, I'll explain that later," said Dale tiredly, only too glad to be talking the matter out at last, to pay attention to
the logic of her sentences. "It's not safe where it is," she went on, as if the Doctor already knew the whole story.
"Billy may throw it out or burn it without knowing--"

"Let me understand this," said the Doctor. "The butler has the paper now?"

"He doesn't know he has it. It was in one of the rolls that went out on the tray."

The Doctor's eyes gleamed. He gave Dale's shoulder a sympathetic pat.

"Now don't you worry about it--I'll get it," he said. Then, on the point of going toward the dining-room, he

turned.

"But--you oughtn't to have it in your possession," he said thoughtfully. "Why not let it be burned?"

Dale was on the defensive at once.

"Oh, no! It's important, it's vital!" she said decidedly.

The Doctor seemed to consider ways and means of getting the paper.

"The tray is in the dining-room?" he asked.

"Yes," said Dale.

He thought a moment, then left the room by the hall door. Dale sank back in her chair and felt a sense of

overpowering relief steal over her whole body, as if new life had been poured into her veins. The Doctor had been so

helpful--why had she not confided in him before? He would know what to do with the paper--she would have the

benefit of his counsel through the rest of this troubled time. For a moment she saw herself and Jack, exonerated,

their worries at an end, wandering hand in hand over the green lawns of Cedarcrest in the cheerful sunlight of

morning.

Behind her, mockingly, the head of the Unknown concealed behind the settee lifted cautiously until, if she had

turned, she would have just been able to perceive the top of its skull.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

THE BLACKENED BAG

As it chanced, she did not turn. The hall door opened--the head behind the settee sank down again. Jack Bailey

entered, carrying a couple of logs of firewood.

Dale moved toward him as soon as he had shut the door.

"Oh, things have gone awfully wrong, haven't they?" she said with a little break in her voice.

He put his finger to his lips.

"Be careful!" he whispered. He glanced about the room cautiously.

"I don't trust even the furniture in this house to-night!" he said. He took Dale hungrily in his arms and kissed her

once, swiftly, on the lips. Then they parted--his voice changed to the formal voice of a servant.

"Miss Van Gorder wishes the fire kept burning," he announced, with a whispered "Play up!" to Dale.

Dale caught his meaning at once.

"Put some logs on the fire, please," she said loudly, for the benefit of any listening ears. Then in an undertone to

Bailey, "Jack--I'm nearly distracted!"

Bailey threw his wood on the fire, which received it with appreciative crackles and sputterings. Then again, for a

moment, he clasped his sweetheart closely to him.

"Dale, pull yourself together!" he whispered warningly. "We've got a fight ahead of us!"

He released her and turned back toward the fire.

"These old-fashioned fireplaces eat up a lot of wood," he said in casual tones, pretending to arrange the logs with

the poker so the fire would draw more cleanly.

But Dale felt that she must settle one point between them before they took up their game of pretense again.

"You know why I sent for Richard Fleming, don't you?" she said, her eyes fixed beseechingly on her lover. The

rest of the world might interpret her action as it pleased--she couldn't bear to have Jack misunderstand.

But there was no danger of that. His faith in her was too complete.

"Yes--of course--" he said, with a look of gratitude. Then his mind reverted to the ever-present problem before

them. "But who in God's name killed him?" he muttered, kneeling before the fire.

"You don't think it was--Billy?" Dale saw Billy's face before her for a moment, calm, impassive. But he was an

Oriental--an alien--his face might be just as calm, just as impassive while his hands were still red with blood. She

shuddered at the thought.

Bailey considered the matter.
"More likely the man Lizzie saw going upstairs," he said finally. "But--I've been all over the upper floors."
"And--nothing?" breathed Dale.
"Nothing." Bailey's voice had an accent of dour finality. "Dale, do you think that--" he began.
Some instinct warned the girl that they were not to continue their conversation uninterrupted. "Be careful!" she breathed, as footsteps sounded in the hall. Bailey nodded and turned back to his pretense of mending the fire. Dale moved away from him slowly.

The door opened and Miss Cornelia entered, her black knitting-bag in her hand, on her face a demure little smile of triumph. She closed the door carefully behind her and began to speak at once.

"Well, Mr. Alopecia--Urticaria--Rubeola--otherwise BAILEY!" she said in tones of the greatest satisfaction, addressing herself to Bailey's rigid back. Bailey jumped to his feet mechanically at her mention of his name. He and Dale exchanged one swift and hopeless glance of utter defeat.

"I wish," proceeded Miss Cornelia, obviously enjoying the situation to the full, "I wish you young people would remember that even if hair and teeth have fallen out at sixty the mind still functions."

She pulled out a cabinet photograph from the depths of her knitting-bag.
"His photograph--sitting on your dresser!" she chided Dale. "Burn it and be quick about it!"

Dale took the photograph but continued to stare at her aunt with incredulous eyes.

"Then--you knew?" she stammered.

Miss Cornelia, the effective little tableau she had planned now accomplished to her most humorous satisfaction, relapsed into a chair.

"My dear child," said the indomitable lady, with a sharp glance at Bailey's bewildered face, "I have employed many gardeners in my time and never before had one who manicured his fingernails, wore silk socks, and regarded baldness as a plant instead of a calamity."

An unwilling smile began to break on the faces of both Dale and her lover. The former crossed to the fireplace and threw the damning photograph of Bailey on the flames. She watched it shrivel--curl up--be reduced to ash. She stirred the ashes with a poker till they were well scattered.

Bailey, recovering from the shock of finding that Miss Cornelia's sharp eyes had pierced his disguise without his even suspecting it, now threw himself on her mercy.

"Then you know why I'm here?" he stammered.

"I still have a certain amount of imagination! I may think you are a fool for taking the risk, but I can see what that idiot of a detective might not--that if you had looted the Union Bank you wouldn't be trying to discover if the money is in this house. You would at least presumably know where it is."

The knowledge that he had an ally in this brisk and indomitable spinster lady cheered him greatly. But she did not wait for any comment from him. She turned abruptly to Dale.

"Now I want to ask you something," she said more gravely. "Was there a blue-print, and did you get it from Richard Fleming?"

It was Dale's turn now to bow her head.

"Yes," she confessed.

Bailey felt a thrill of horror run through him. She hadn't told him this!
"Dale!" he said uncomprehendingly, "don't you see where this places you? If you had it, why didn't you give it to Anderson when he asked for it?"

"Because," said Miss Cornelia uncompromisingly, "she had sense enough to see that Mr. Anderson considered that piece of paper the final link in the evidence against her!"

"But she could have no motive!" stammered Bailey, distraught, still failing to grasp the significance of Dale's refusal.

"Couldn't she?" queried Miss Cornelia pityingly. "The detective thinks she could--to save you!"

Now the full light of revelation broke upon Bailey. He took a step back.
"Good God!" he said.

Miss Cornelia would have liked to comment tartly upon the singular lack of intelligence displayed by even the nicest young men in trying circumstances. But there was no time. They might be interrupted at any moment and before they were, there were things she must find out.

"Where is that paper, now?" she asked Dale sharply;
"Why--the Doctor is getting it for me." Dale seemed puzzled by the intensity of her aunt's manner.
"What?" almost shouted Miss Cornelia. Dale explained.
"It was on the tray Billy took out," she said, still wondering why so simple an answer should disturb Miss Cornelia so greatly.

"Then I'm afraid everything's over," Miss Cornelia said despairingly, and made her first gesture of defeat. She
turned away. Dale followed her, still unable to fathom her course of reasoning.

"I didn't know what else to do," she said rather plaintively, wondering if again, as with Fleming, she had misplaced her confidence at a moment critical for them all.

But Miss Cornelia seemed to have no great patience with her dejection.

"One of two things will happen now," she said, with acrid, logic. "Either the Doctor's an honest man--in which case, as coroner, he will hand that paper to the detective--" Dale gasped. "Or he is not an honest man," went on Miss Cornelia, "and he will keep it for himself. I don't think he's an honest man."

The frank expression of her distrust seemed to calm her a little. She resumed her interrogation of Dale more gently.

"Now, let's be clear about this. Had Richard Fleming ascertained that there was a concealed room in this house?"

"He was starting up to it!" said Dale in the voice of a ghost, remembering.

"Just what did you tell him?"

"That I believed there was a Hidden Room in the house--and that the money from the Union Bank might be in it."

Again, for the millionth time, indeed it seemed to her, she reviewed the circumstances of the crime.

"Could anyone have overheard?" asked Miss Cornelia.

The question had rung in Dale's ears ever since she had come to her senses after the firing of the shot and seen Fleming's body stark on the floor of the alcove.

"I don't know," she said. "We were very cautious."

"You don't know where this room is?"

"No, I never saw the print. Upstairs somewhere, for he--"

"Upstairs! Then the thing to do, if we can get that paper from the Doctor, is to locate the room at once."

Jack Bailey did not recognize the direction where her thoughts were tending. It seemed terrible to him that anyone should devote a thought to the money while Dale was still in danger.

"What does the money matter now?" he broke in somewhat irritably. "We've got to save her!" and his eyes went to Dale.

Miss Cornelia gave him an ineffable look of weary patience.

"The money matters a great deal," she said, sensibly. "Someone was in this house on the same errand as Richard Fleming. After all," she went on with a tinge of irony, "the course of reasoning that you followed, Mr. Bailey, is not necessarily unique."

She rose.

"Somebody else may have suspected that Courtleigh Fleming robbed his own bank," she said thoughtfully. Her eye fell on the Doctor's professional bag--she seemed to consider it as if it were a strange sort of animal.

"Find the man who followed your course of reasoning," she ended, with a stare at Bailey, "and you have found the murderer."

"With that reasoning you might suspect me!" said the latter a trifle touchily.

Miss Cornelia did not give an inch.

"I have," she said. Dale shot a swift, sympathetic glance at her lover, another less sympathetic and more indignant at her aunt. Miss Cornelia smiled.

"However, I now suspect somebody else," she said. They waited for her to reveal the name of the suspect but she kept her own counsel. By now she had entirely given up confidence if not in the probity at least in the intelligence of all persons, male or female, under the age of sixty-five.

She rang the bell for Billy. But Dale was still worrying over the possible effects of the confidence she had given Doctor Wells.

"Then you think the Doctor may give this paper to Mr. Anderson?" she asked.

"He may or he may not. It is entirely possible that he may elect to search for this room himself! He may even already have gone upstairs!"

She moved quickly to the door and glanced across toward the dining-room, but so far apparently all was safe. The Doctor was at the table making a pretense of drinking a cup of coffee and Billy was in close attendance. That the Doctor already had the paper she was certain; it was the use he intended to make of it that was her concern.

She signaled to the Jap and he came out into the hall. Beresford, she learned, was still in the kitchen with his revolver, waiting for another attempt on the door and the detective was still outside in his search. To Billy she gave her order in a low voice.

"If the Doctor attempts to go upstairs," she said, "let me know at once. Don't seem to be watching. You can be in the pantry. But let me know instantly."

Once back in the living-room the vague outlines of a plan--a test--formed slowly in Miss Cornelia's mind, grew
more definite.

"Dale, watch that door and warn me if anyone is coming!" she commanded, indicating the door into the hall. Dale obeyed, marveling silently at her aunt's extraordinary force of character. Most of Miss Cornelia's contemporaries would have called for a quiet ambulance to take them to a sanatorium some hours ere this--but Miss Cornelia was not merely, comparatively speaking, as fresh as a daisy; her manner bore every evidence of a firm intention to play Sherlock Holmes to the mysteries that surrounded her, in spite of Doctors, detectives, dubious noises, or even the Bat himself.

The last of the Van Gorder spinsters turned to Bailey now.

"Get some soot from that fireplace," she ordered. "Be quick. Scrape it off with a knife or a piece of paper. Anything."

Bailey wondered and obeyed. As he was engaged in his grimy task, Miss Cornelia got out a piece of writing paper from a drawer and placed it on the center table, with a lead pencil beside it.

Bailey emerged from the fireplace with a handful of sooty flakes.

"Is this all right?"

"Yes. Now rub it on the handle of that bag." She indicated the little black bag in which Doctor Wells carried the usual paraphernalia of a country Doctor.

A private suspicion grew in Bailey's mind as to whether Miss Cornelia's fine but eccentric brain had not suffered too sorely under the shocks of the night. But he did not dare disobey. He blackened the handle of the Doctor's bag with painstaking thoroughness and awaited further instructions.

"Somebody's coming!" Dale whispered, warning from her post by the door.

Bailey quickly went to the fireplace and resumed his pretended labors with the fire. Miss Cornelia moved away from the Doctor's bag and spoke for the benefit of whoever might be coming.

"We all need sleep," she began, as if ending a conversation with Dale, "and I think--"

The door opened, admitting Billy. "Doctor just go upstairs," he said, and went out again leaving the door open.

A flash passed across Miss Cornelia's face. She stepped to the door. She called.

"Doctor! Oh, Doctor!"

"Yes?" answered the Doctor's voice from the main staircase. His steps clattered down the stairs--he entered the room. Perhaps he read something in Miss Cornelia's manner that demanded an explanation of his action. At any rate, he forestalled her, just as she was about to question him.

"I was about to look around above," he said. "I don't like to leave if there is the possibility of some assassin still hidden in the house."

"That is very considerate of you. But we are well protected now. And besides, why should this person remain in the house? The murder is done, the police are here."

"True," he said. "I only thought--"

But a knocking at the terrace door interrupted him. While the attention of the others was turned in that direction Dale, less cynical than her aunt, made a small plea to him and realized before she had finished with it that the Doctor too had his price.

"Doctor--did you get it?" she repeated, drawing the Doctor aside.

The Doctor gave her a look of apparent bewilderment.

"My dear child," he said softly, "are you sure that you put it there?"

Dale felt as if she had received a blow in the face.

"Why, yes--I--" she began in tones of utter dismay. Then she stopped. The Doctor's seeming bewilderment was too pat--too plausible. Of course she was sure--and, though possible, it seemed extremely unlikely that anyone else could have discovered the hiding-place of the blue-print in the few moments that had elapsed between the time when Billy took the tray from the room and the time when the Doctor ostensibly went to find it. A cold wave of distrust swept over her--she turned away from the Doctor silently.

Meanwhile Anderson had entered, slamming the terrace-door behind him.

"I couldn't find anybody!" he said in an irritated voice. "I think that Jap's crazy."

The Doctor began to struggle into his topcoat, avoiding any look at Dale.

"Well," he said, "I believe I've fulfilled all the legal requirements --I think I must be going." He turned toward the door but the detective halted him.

"Doctor," he said, "did you ever hear Courtleigh Fleming mention a Hidden Room in this house?"

If the Doctor started, the movement passed apparently unnoted by Anderson. And his reply was coolly made.

"No--and I knew him rather well."

"You don't think then," persisted the detective, "that such a room and the money in it could be the motive for this
The Doctor’s voice grew a little curt.

"I don’t believe Courtleigh Fleming robbed his own bank, if that’s what you mean," he said with nicely calculated emphasis, real or feigned. He crossed over to get his bag and spoke to Miss Cornelia.

"Well, Miss Van Gorder," he said, picking up the bag by its blackened handle, "I can’t wish you a comfortable night but I can wish you a quiet one."

Miss Cornelia watched him silently. As he turned to go, she spoke.

"We’re all of us a little upset, naturally," she confessed. "Perhaps you could write a prescription—a sleeping-powder or a bromide of some sort."

"Why, certainly," agreed the Doctor at once. He turned back. Miss Cornelia seemed pleased.

"I hoped you would," she said with a little tremble in her voice such as might easily occur in the voice of a nervous old lady. "Oh, yes, here’s paper and a pencil," as the Doctor fumbled in a pocket.

The Doctor took the sheet of paper she proffered and, using the side of his bag as a pad, began to write out the prescription.

"I don’t generally advise these drugs," he said, looking up for a moment. "Still—"

He paused. "What time is it?"

Miss Cornelia glanced at the clock. "Half-past eleven."

"Then I’d better bring you the powders myself," decided the Doctor. "The pharmacy closes at eleven. I shall have to make them up myself."

"That seems a lot of trouble."

"Nothing is any trouble if I can be helpful," he assured her, smilingly. And Miss Cornelia also smiled, took the piece of paper from his hand, glanced at it once, as if out of idle curiosity about the unfinished prescription, and then laid it down on the table with a careless little gesture. Dale gave her aunt a glance of dumb entreaty. Miss Cornelia read her wish for another moment alone with the Doctor.

"Dale will let you out, Doctor," said she, giving the girl the key to the front door,

The Doctor approved her watchfulness.

"That’s right," he said smilingly. "Keep things locked up. Discretion is the better part of valor!"

But Miss Cornelia failed to agree with him.

"I’ve been discreet for sixty-five years," she said with a sniff, "and sometimes I think it was a mistake!"

The Doctor laughed easily and followed Dale out of the room, with a nod of farewell to the others in passing.

The detective, seeking for some object upon whom to vent the growing irritation which seemed to possess him, made Bailey the scapegoat of his wrath.

"I guess we can do without you for the present!" he said, with an angry frown at the latter. Bailey flushed, then remembered himself, and left the room submissively, with the air of a well-trained servant accepting an unmerited rebuke. The detective turned at once to Miss Cornelia.

"Now I want a few words with you!"

"Which means that you mean to do all the talking!" said Miss Cornelia acidly. "Very well! But first I want to show you something. Will you come here, please, Mr. Anderson?"

She started for the alcove.

"I’ve examined that staircase," said the detective.

"Not with me!" insisted Miss Cornelia. "I have something to show you."

He followed her unwillingly up the stairs, his whole manner seeming to betray a complete lack of confidence in the theories of all amateur sleuths in general and spinster detectives of sixty-five in particular. Their footsteps died away up the alcove stairs. The living-room was left vacant for an instant.

Vacant? Only in seeming. The moment that Miss Cornelia and the detective had passed up the stairs, the crouching, mysterious Unknown, behind the settee, began to move. The French window-door opened—a stealthy figure passed through it silently to be swallowed up in the darkness of the terrace.

And poor Lizzie, entering the room at that moment, saw a hand covered with blood reach back and gropingly, horribly, through the broken pane, refasten the lock.

She shrieked madly.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

HANDCUFFS

Dale had failed with the Doctor. When Lizzie’s screams once more had called the startled household to the living-room, she knew she had failed. She followed in mechanically, watched an irritated Anderson send the Pride of Kerry to bed and threaten to lock her up, and listened vaguely to the conversation between her aunt and the detective that followed it, without more than casual interest.
Nevertheless, that conversation was to have vital results later on.
"Your point about that thumbprint on the stair rail is very interesting," Anderson said with a certain respect. "But just what does it prove?"
"It points down," said Miss Cornelia, still glowing with the memory of the whistle of surprise the detective had given when she had shown him the strange thumbprint on the rail of the alcove stairs.
"It does," he admitted. "But what then?"
Miss Cornelia tried to put her case as clearly and tersely as possible.
"It shows that somebody stood there for some time, listening to my niece and Richard Fleming in this room below," she said. "All right--I'll grant that to save argument," retorted the detective. "But the moment that shot was fired the lights came on. If somebody on that staircase shot him, and then came down and took the blue-print, Miss Ogden would have seen him."
He turned upon Dale.
"Did you?"
She hesitated. Why hadn't she thought of such an explanation before? But now--it would sound too flimsy!
"No, nobody came down," she admitted candidly. The detective's face altered, grew menacing. Miss Cornelia once more had put herself between him and Dale.
"Now, Mr. Anderson--" she warned. The detective was obviously trying to keep his temper.
"I'm not hounding this girl!" he said doggedly. "I haven't said yet that she committed the murder--but she took that blue-print and I want it!"
"You want it to connect her with the murder," parried Miss Cornelia. The detective threw up his hands.
"It's rather reasonable to suppose that I might want to return the funds to the Union Bank, isn't it?" he queried in tones of heavy sarcasm. "Provided they're here," he added doubtfully.
Miss Cornelia resolved upon comparative frankness.
"I see," she said. "Well, I'll tell you this much, Mr. Anderson, and I'll ask you to believe me as a lady. Granting that at one time my niece knew something of that blue-print--at this moment we do not know where it is or who has it."
Her words had the unmistakable ring of truth. The very oath from the detective that succeeded them showed his recognition of the fact.
"Damnation," he muttered. "That's true, is it?"
"That's true," said Miss Cornelia firmly. A silence of troubled thoughts fell upon the three. Miss Cornelia took out her knitting.
"Did you ever try knitting when you wanted to think?" she queried sweetly, after a pause in which the detective tramped from one side of the room to the other, brows knotted, eyes bent on the floor.
"No," grunted the detective. He took out a cigar--bit off the end with a savage snap of teeth--lit it--resumed his pacing.
"You should, sometimes," continued Miss Cornelia, watching his troubled movements with a faint light of mockery in her eyes. "I find it very helpful."
"I don't need knitting to think straight," rasped Anderson indignantly. Miss Cornelia's eyes danced. "I wonder!" she said with caustic affability. "You seem to have so much evidence left over."
The detective paused and glared at her helplessly.
"Did you ever hear of the man who took a clock apart--and when he put it together again, he had enough left over to make another clock?" she twittered.
"What do you mean by saying that paper isn't where you put it?" he demanded in tones of extreme severity. Miss Cornelia replied for her niece.
"She hasn't said that."
The detective made an impatient movement of his hand and walked away--as if to get out of the reach of the indefatigable spinster's tongue. But Miss Cornelia had not finished with him yet, by any means.
"Do you believe in circumstantial evidence?" she asked him with seeming ingenuousness.
"It's my business," said the detective stolidly. Miss Cornelia smiled. "While you have been investigating," she announced, "I, too, have not been idle."
The detective gave a barking laugh. She let it pass. "To me," she continued, "it is perfectly obvious that one intelligence has been at work behind many of the things that have occurred in this house."
Now Anderson observed her with a new respect.

"Who?" he grunted tersely.

Her eyes flashed.

"I'll ask you that! Some one person who, knowing Courtleigh Fleming well, probably knows of the existence of a Hidden Room in this house and who, finding us in occupation of the house, has tried to get rid of me in two ways. First, by frightening me with anonymous threats --and, second, by urging me to leave. Someone, who very possibly entered this house tonight shortly before the murder and slipped up that staircase!"

The detective had listened to her outburst with unusual thoughtfulness. A certain wonder—perhaps at her shrewdness, perhaps at an unexpected confirmation of certain ideas of his own --grew upon his face. Now he jerked out two words.

"The Doctor?"

Miss Cornelia knitted on as if every movement of her needles added one more link to the strong chain of probabilities she was piecing together.

"When Doctor Wells said he was leaving here earlier in the evening for the Johnsons' he did not go there," she observed. "He was not expected to go there. I found that out when I telephoned."

"The Doctor!" repeated the detective, his eyes narrowing, his head beginning to sway from side to side like the head of some great cat just before a spring.

"As you know," Miss Cornelia went on, "I had a supplementary bolt placed on that terrace door today." She nodded toward the door that gave access into the alcove from the terrace. "Earlier this evening Doctor Wells said that he had bolted it, when he had left it open-- purposely, as I now realize, in order that he might return later. You may also recall that Doctor Wells took a scrap of paper from Richard Fleming's hand and tried to conceal it--why did he do that?"

She paused for a second. Then she changed her tone a little.

"May I ask you to look at this?"

She displayed the piece of paper on which Doctor Wells had started to write the prescription for her sleeping-powders—and now her strategy with the doctor's bag and the soot Jack Bailey had got from the fireplace stood revealed. A sharp, black imprint of a man's right thumb—the Doctor's—stood out on the paper below the broken line of writing. The Doctor had not noticed the staining of his hand by the blackened bag handle, or, noticing, had thought nothing of it—but the blackened bag handle had been a trap, and he had left an indelible piece of evidence behind him. It now remained to test the value of this evidence.

Miss Cornelia handed the paper to Anderson silently. But her eyes were bright with pardonable vanity at the success of her little piece of strategy.

"A thumb-print," muttered Anderson. "Whose is it?"

"Doctor Wells," said Miss Cornelia with what might have been a little crow of triumph in anyone not a Van Gorder.

Anderson looked thoughtful. Then he felt in his pocket for a magnifying glass, failed to find it, muttered, and took the reading glass Miss Cornelia offered him.

"Try this," she said. "My whole case hangs on my conviction that that print and the one out there on the stair rail are the same."

He put down the paper and smiled at her ironically. "Your case!" he said. "You don't really believe you need a detective at all, do you?"

"I will only say that so far your views and mine have failed to coincide. If I am right about that fingerprint, then you may be right about my private opinion."

And on that he went out, rather grimly, paper and reading glass in hand, to make his comparison. It was then that Beresford came in, a new and slightly rigid Beresford, and crossed to her at once.

"Miss Van Gorder," he said, all the flippancy gone from his voice, "may I ask you to make an excuse and call your gardener here?"

Dale started uncontrollably at the ominous words, but Miss Cornelia betrayed no emotion except in the increased rapidity of her knitting.

"The gardener? Certainly, if you'll touch that bell," she said pleasantly.

Beresford stalked to the bell and rang it. The three waited--Dale in an agony of suspense. The detective re-entered the room by the alcove stairs, his mien unfathomable by any of the anxious glances that sought him out at once.

"It's no good, Miss Van Gorder," he said quietly. "The prints are not the same."

"Not the same!" gasped Miss Cornelia, unwilling to believe her ears.

Anderson laid down the paper and the reading glass with a little gesture of dismissal.
"If you think I'm mistaken, I'll leave it to any unprejudiced person or your own eyesight. Thumbprints never lie,"
he said in a flat, convincing voice. Miss Cornelia stared at him--disappointment written large on her features. He
allowed himself a little ironic smile.

"Did you ever try a good cigar when you wanted to think?" he queried suavely, puffing upon his own.

But Miss Cornelia's spirit was too broken by the collapse of her dearly loved and adroitly managed scheme for
her to take up the gauge of battle he offered.

"I still believe it was the Doctor," she said stubbornly. But her tones were not the tones of utter conviction which
she had used before.

"And yet," said the detective, ruthlessly demolishing another link in her broken chain of evidence, "the Doctor
was in this room tonight, according to your own statement, when the anonymous letter came through the window."

Miss Cornelia gazed at him blankly, for the first time in her life at a loss for an appropriately sharp retort. It was
true--the Doctor had been here in the room beside her when the stone bearing the last anonymous warning had
crashed through the windowpane. And yet--

Billy's entrance in answer to Beresford's ring made her mind turn to other matters for the moment. Why had
Beresford's manner changed so, and what was he saying to Billy now?

"Tell the gardener Miss Van Gorder wants him and don't say we're all here," the young lawyer commanded the
butler sharply. Billy nodded and disappeared. Miss Cornelia's back began to stiffen--she didn't like other people
ordering her servants around like that.

The detective, apparently, had somewhat of the same feeling.

"I seem to have plenty of help in this case!" he said with obvious sarcasm, turning to Beresford.

The latter made no reply. Dale rose anxiously from her chair, her lips quivering.

"Why have you sent for the gardener?" she inquired haltingly.

Beresford deigned to answer at last.

"I'll tell you that in a moment," he said with a grim tightening of his lips.

There was a fateful pause, for an instant, while Dale roved nervously from one side of the room to the other.

Then Jack Bailey came into the room--alone.

He seemed to sense danger in the air. His hands clenched at his sides, but except for that tiny betrayal of
emotion, he still kept his servant's pose.

"You sent for me?" he queried of Miss Cornelia submissively, ignoring the glowering Beresford.

But Beresford would be ignored no longer. He came between them before Miss Cornelia had time to answer.

"How long has this man been in your employ?" he asked brusquely, manner tense.

Miss Cornelia made one final attempt at evasion. "Why should that interest you?" she parried, answering his
question with an icy question of her own.

It was too late. Already Bailey had read the truth in Beresford's eyes.

"I came this evening," he admitted, still hoping against hope that his cringing posture of the servitor might give
Beresford pause for the moment.

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Beresford pause for the moment.

But the promptness of his answer only crystallized Beresford's suspicions.

"Exactly," he said with terse finality. He turned to the detective.

"I've been trying to recall this man's face ever since I came in tonight--" he said with grim triumph. "Now, I
know who he is."

"Who is he?"

Bailey straightened up. He had lost his game with Chance--and the loss, coming when it did, seemed bitterer
than even he had thought it could be, but before they took him away he would speak his mind.

"It's all right, Beresford," he said with a fatigue so deep that it colored his voice like flakes of iron-rust. "I know
you think you're doing your duty--but I wish to God you could have restrained your sense of duty for about three
hours more!"

"To let you get away?" the young lawyer sneered, unconvinced.

"No," said Bailey with quiet defiance. "To let me finish what I came here to do."

"Don't you think you have done enough?" Beresford's voice flicked him with righteous scorn, no less telling
because of its youthfulness. He turned back to the detective soberly enough.

This man has imposed upon the credulity of these women, I am quite sure without their knowledge," he said
with a trace of his former gallantry. "He is Bailey of the Union Bank, the missing cashier."

The detective slowly put down his cigar on an ash tray.

"That's the truth, is it?" he demanded.

Dale's hand flew to her breast. If Jack would only deny it--even now! But even as she thought this, she realized
the uselessness of any such denial.
Bailey realized it, too.
"It's true, all right," he admitted hopelessly. He closed his eyes for a moment. Let them come with the handcuffs now and get it over. every moment the scene dragged out was a moment of unnecessary torture for Dale.

But Beresford had not finished with his indictment. "I accuse him not only of the thing he is wanted for, but of the murder of Richard Fleming!" he said fiercely, glaring at Bailey as if only a youthful horror of making a scene before Dale and Miss Cornelia held him back from striking the latter down where he stood.

Bailey's eyes snapped open. He took a threatening step toward his accuser. "You lie!" he said in a hoarse, violent voice.

Anderson crossed between them, just as conflict seemed inevitable.
"You knew this?" he queried sharply in Dale's direction.
Dale set her lips in a line. She did not answer.
He turned to Miss Cornelia.
"Did you?"
"Yes," admitted the latter quietly, her knitting needles at last at rest. "I knew he was Mr. Bailey if that is all you mean."

The quietness of her answer seemed to infuriate the detective.
"Quite a pretty little conspiracy," he said. "How in the name of God do you expect me to do anything with the entire household united against me? Tell me that."

"Exactly," said Miss Cornelia. "And if we are united against you, why should I have sent for you? You might tell me that, too."

He turned on Bailey savagely.
"What did you mean by that 'three hours more'?" he demanded.
"I could have cleared myself in three hours," said Bailey with calm despair.

Beresford laughed mockingly--a laugh that seemed to sear into Bailey's consciousness like the touch of a hot iron. Again he turned frenziedly upon the young lawyer--and Anderson was just preparing to hold them away from each other, by force if necessary, when the doorbell rang.

For an instant the ringing of the bell held the various figures of the little scene in the rigid postures of a waxworks tableau-- Bailey, one foot advanced toward Beresford, his hands balled up into fists--Beresford already in an attitude of defense--the detective about to step in between them--Miss Cornelia stiff in her chair--Dale over by the fireplace, her hand at her heart. Then they relaxed, but not, at least on the part of Bailey and Beresford, to resume their interrupted conflict. Too many nerve-shaking things had already happened that night for either of the young men not to drop their mutual squabble in the face of a common danger.

"Probably the Doctor," murmured Miss Cornelia uncertainly as the doorbell rang again. "He was to come back with some sleeping-powders."

Billy appeared for the key of the front door.
"If that's Doctor Wells," warned the detective, "admit him. If it's anybody else, call me."

Billy grinned acquiescently and departed. The detective moved nearer to Bailey.
"Have you got a gun on you?"
"No." Bailey bowed his head.
"Well, I'll just make sure of that." The detective's hands ran swiftly and expertly over Bailey's form, through his pockets, probing for concealed weapons. Then, slowly drawing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket, he prepared to put them on Bailey's wrists.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN
THE SIGN OF THE BAT

But Dale could bear it no longer. The sight of her lover, beaten, submissive, his head bowed, waiting obediently like a common criminal for the detective to lock his wrists in steel broke down her last defenses. She rushed into the center of the room, between Bailey and the detective, her eyes wild with terror, her words stumbling over each other in her eagerness to get them out.

"Oh, no! I can't stand it! I'll tell you everything!" she cried frenziedly. "He got to the foot of the stair-case--Richard Fleming, I mean," she was facing the detective now, "and he had the blue-print you've been talking about. I had told him Jack Bailey was here as the gardener and he said if I screamed he would tell that. I was desperate. I threatened him with the revolver but he took it from me. Then when I tore the blue-print from him--he was shot--from the stairs--!"

"By Bailey!" interjected Beresford angrily.

"I didn't even know he was in the house!" Bailey's answer was as instant as it was hot. Meanwhile, the Doctor had entered the room, hardly noticed, in the middle of Dale's confession, and now stood watching the scene intently.
"What did you do with the blue-print?" The detective's voice beat at Dale like a whip.

"I put it first in the neck of my dress--" she faltered. "Then, when I found you were watching me, I hid it somewhere else."

Her eyes fell on the Doctor. She saw his hand steal out toward the knob of the door. Was he going to run away on some pretext before she could finish her story? She gave a sigh of relief when Billy, re-entering with the key to the front door, blocked any such attempt at escape.

Mechanically she watched Billy cross to the table, lay the key upon it, and return to the hall without so much as a glance at the tense, suspicious circle of faces focused upon herself and her lover.

"I put it--somewhere else," she repeated, her eyes going back to the Doctor.

"Did you give it to Bailey?"

"No--I hid it--and then I told where it was--to the Doctor--" Dale swayed on her feet. All turned surprisingly toward the Doctor. Miss Cornelia rose from her chair.

The Doctor bore the battery of eyes unflinchingly. "That's rather inaccurate," he said, with a tight little smile. "You told me where you had placed it, but when I went to look for it, it was gone."

"Are you quite sure of that?" queried Miss Cornelia acidly.

"Absolutely," he said. He ignored the rest of the party, addressing himself directly to Anderson.

"She said she had hidden it inside one of the rolls that were on the tray on that table," he continued in tones of easy explanation, approaching the table as he did so, and tapping it with the box of sleeping-powders he had brought for Miss Cornelia.

"She was in such distress that I finally went to look for it. It wasn't there."

"Do you realize the significance of this paper?" Anderson boomed at once.

"Nothing, beyond the fact that Miss Ogden was afraid it linked her with the crime." The Doctor's voice was very clear and firm.

Anderson pondered an instant. Then--

"I'd like to have a few minutes with the Doctor alone," he said somberly.

The group about him dissolved at once. Miss Cornelia, her arm around her niece's waist, led the latter gently to the door. As the two lovers passed each other a glance flashed between them--a glance, pathetically brief, of longing and love. Dale's finger tips brushed Bailey's hand gently in passing.

"Beresford," commanded the detective, "take Bailey to the library and see that he stays there."

Beresford tapped his pocket with a significant gesture and motioned Bailey to the door. Then they, too, left the room. The door closed. The Doctor and the detective were alone.

The detective spoke at once--and surprisingly.

"Doctor, I'll have that blue-print!" he said sternly, his eyes the color of steel.

The Doctor gave him a wary little glance.

"But I've just made the statement that I didn't find the blue-print," he affirmed flatly.

"I heard you!" Anderson's voice was very dry. "Now this situation is between you and me, Doctor Wells." His forefinger sought the Doctor's chest. "It has nothing to do with that poor fool of a cashier. He hasn't got either those securities or the money from them and you know it. It's in this house and you know that, too!"

"In this house?" repeated the Doctor as if stalling for time.

"In this house! Tonight, when you claimed to be making a professional call, you were in this house--and I think you were on that staircase when Richard Fleming was killed!"

"No, Anderson, I'll swear I was not!" The Doctor might be acting, but if he was, it was incomparable acting. The terror in his voice seemed too real to be feigned.

But Anderson was remorseless.

"Before Courtleigh Fleming died--did he tell you anything about a Hidden Room in this house?" he queried cannily.

The Doctor's confident air of honesty lessened, a furtive look appeared in his eyes.

"No," he insisted, but not as convincingly as he had made his previous denial.
The detective hammered at the point again.
"You haven't been trying to frighten these women out of here with anonymous letters so you could get in?"
"No. Certainly not." But again the Doctor's air had that odd mixture of truth and falsehood in it.
The detective paused for an instant.
"Let me see your key ring!" he ordered. The Doctor passed it over silently. The detective glanced at the keys--then, suddenly, his revolver glittered in his other hand.
The Doctor watched him anxiously. A puff of wind rattled the panes of the French windows. The storm, quieted for a while, was gathering its strength for a fresh unleashing of its dogs of thunder.
The detective stepped to the terrace door, opened it, and then quietly proceeded to try the Doctor's keys in the lock. Thus located he was out of visual range, and Wells took advantage of it at once. He moved swiftly toward the fireplace, extracting the missing piece of blue-print from an inside pocket as he did so. The secret the blue-print guarded was already graven on his mind in indelible characters--now he would destroy all evidence that it had ever been in his possession and bluff through the rest of the situation as best he might.

He threw the paper toward the flames with a nervous gesture of relief. But for once his cunning failed--the throw was too hurried to be sure and the light scrap of paper wavered and settled to the floor just outside the fireplace. The Doctor swore noiselessly and stooped to pick it up and make sure of its destruction. But he was not quick enough. Through the window the detective had seen the incident, and the next moment the Doctor heard his voice bark behind him. He turned, and stared at the leveled muzzle of Anderson's revolver.

"Hands up and stand back!" he commanded.
As he did so Anderson picked up the paper and a sardonic smile crossed his face as his eyes took in the significance of the print. He laid his revolver down on the table where he could snatch it up again at a moment's notice.

"Behind a fireplace, eh?" he muttered. "What fireplace? In what room?"
"I won't tell you!" The Doctor's voice was sullen. He inched, gingerly, cautiously, toward the other side of the table.

"All right--I'll find it, you know." The detective's eyes turned swiftly back to the blue-print. Experience should have taught him never to underrate an adversary, even of the Doctor's caliber, but long familiarity with danger can make the shrewdest careless. For a moment, as he bent over the paper again, he was off guard.
The Doctor seized the moment with a savage promptitude and sprang. There followed a silent, furious struggle between the two. Under normal circumstances Anderson would have been the stronger and quicker, but the Doctor fought with an added strength of despair and his initial leap had pinioned the detective's arms behind him. Now the detective shook one hand free and snatched at the revolver --in vain--for the Doctor, with a groan of desperation, struck at his hand as its fingers were about to close on the smooth butt and the revolver skidded from the table to the floor. With a sudden terrible movement he pinioned both the detective's arms behind him again and reached for the telephone. Its heavy base descended on the back of the detective's head with stunning force. The next moment the battle was ended and the Doctor, panting with exhaustion, held the limp form of an unconscious man in his arms.

He lowered the detective to the floor and straightened up again, listening tensely. So brief and intense had been the struggle that even now he could hardly believe in its reality. It seemed impossible, too, that the struggle had not been heard. Then he realized dully, as a louder roll of thunder smote on his ears, that the elements themselves had played into his hand. The storm, with its wind and fury, had returned just in time to save him and drown out all sounds of conflict from the rest of the house with its giant clamor.

He bent swiftly over Anderson, listening to his heart. Good--the man still breathed; he had enough on his conscience without adding the murder of a detective to the black weight. Now he pocketed the revolver and the blue-print--gagged Anderson rapidly with a knotted handkerchief and proceeded to wrap his own muffler around the detective's head as an additional silencer. Anderson gave a faint sigh.
The Doctor thought rapidly. Soon or late the detective would return to consciousness--with his hands free he could easily tear out the gag. He looked wildly about the room for a rope, a curtain--ah, he had it--the detective's own handcuffs! He snapped the cuffs on Anderson's wrists, then realized that, in his hurry, he had bound the detective's hands in front of him instead of behind him. Well-- it would do for the moment--he did not need much time to carry out his plans. He dragged the limp body, its head lolling, into the billiard room where he deposited it on the floor in the corner farthest from the door.

So far, so good--now to lock the door of the billiard room. Fortunately, the key was there on the inside of the door. He quickly transferred it, locked the billiard room door from the outside, and pocketed the key. For a second he stood by the center table in the living-room, recovering his breath and trying to straighten his rumpled clothing. Then he crossed cautiously into the alcove and started to pad up the alcove stairs, his face white and strained with excitement and hope.
And it was then that there happened one of the most dramatic events of the night. One which was to remain, for
the next hour or so, as bewildering as the murder and which, had it come a few moments sooner or a few moments
later, would have entirely changed the course of events.

It was preceded by a desperate hammering on the door of the terrace. It halted the Doctor on his way upstairs,
drew Beresford on a run into the living-room, and even reached the bedrooms of the women up above.

"My God! What's that?" Beresford panted.

The Doctor indicated the door. It was too late now. Already he could hear Miss Cornelia's voice above; it was
only a question of a short time until Anderson in the billiard room revived and would try to make his plight known.
And in the brief moment of that resumée of his position the knocking came again. But feebler, as though the
suppliant outside had exhausted his strength.

As Beresford drew his revolver and moved to the door, Miss Cornelia came in, followed by Lizzie.

"It's the Bat," Lizzie announced mournfully. "Good-by, Miss Neily. Good-by, everybody. I saw his hand, all
covered with blood. He's had a good night for sure!"

But they ignored her. And Beresford flung open the door.

Just what they had expected, what figure of horror or of fear they waited for, no one can say. But there was no
horror and no fear; only unutterable amazement as an unknown man, in torn and muddied garments, with a streak of
dried blood seaming his forehead like a scar, fell through the open doorway into Beresford's arms,

"Good God!" muttered Beresford, dropping his revolver to catch the strange burden. For a moment the Unknown
lay in his arms like a corpse. Then he straightened dizzily, staggered into the room, took a few steps toward the
table, and fell prostrate upon his face—at the end of his strength.

"Doctor!" gasped Miss Cornelia dazedly and the Doctor, whatever guilt lay on his conscience, responded at once
to the call of his profession.

He bent over the Unknown Man—the physician once more—and made a brief examination.

"He's fainted!" he said, rising. "Struck on the head, too."

"But who is he?" faltered Miss Cornelia.

"I never saw him before," said the Doctor. It was obvious that he spoke the truth. "Does anyone recognize him?"

All crowded about the Unknown, trying to read the riddle of his identity. Miss Cornelia rapidly revised her first
impressions of the stranger. When he had first fallen through the doorway into Beresford's arms she had not known
what to think. Now, in the brighter light of the living-room she saw that the still face, beneath its mask of dirt and
dried blood, was strong and fairly youthful; if the man were a criminal, he belonged, like the Bat, to the upper
fringes of the world of crime. She noted mechanically that his hands and feet had been tied, ends of frayed rope still
dangled from his wrists and ankles. And that terrible injury on his head! She shuddered and closed her eyes.

"Does anyone recognize him?" repeated the Doctor but one by one the others shook their heads. Crook, casual
tramp, or honest laborer unexpectedly caught in the sinister toils of the Cedarcrest affair—his identity seemed a
mystery to one and all.

"Is he badly hurt?" asked Miss Cornelia, shuddering again.

"It's hard to say," answered the Doctor. "I think not." The Unknown stirred feebly—made an effort to sit up.
Beresford and the Doctor caught him under the arms and helped him to his feet. He stood there swaying, a blank
expression on his face.

"A chair!" said the Doctor quickly. "Ah--" He helped the strange figure to sit down and bent over him again.

"You're all right now, my friend," he said in his best tones of professional cheeriness. "Dizzy a bit, aren't you?"
The Unknown rubbed his wrists where his bonds had cut them. He made an effort to speak.

"Water!" he said in a low voice.
The Doctor gestured to Billy. "Get some water—or whisky—if there is any—that'd be better."

"There's a flask of whisky in my room, Billy," added Miss Cornelia helpfully.

"Now, my man," continued the Doctor to the Unknown. "You're in the hands of friends. Brace up and tell us
what happened!"

Beresford had been looking about for the detective, puzzled not to find him, as usual, in charge of affairs. Now,
"Where's Anderson? This is a police matter!" he said, making a movement as if to go in search of him.

The Doctor stopped him quickly.

"He was here a minute ago—he'll be back presently," he said, praying to whatever gods he served that Anderson,
bound and gagged in the billiard room, had not yet returned to consciousness.

Unobserved by all except Miss Cornelia, the mention of the detective's name had caused a strange reaction in the
Unknown. His eyes had opened—he had started—the haze in his mind had seemed to clear away for a moment. Then,
for some reason, his shoulders had slumped again and the look of apathy come back to his face. But, stunned or not,
it now seemed possible that he was not quite as dazed as he appeared.
The Doctor gave the slumped shoulders a little shake.
"Rouse yourself, man!" he said. "What has happened to you?"
"I'm dazed!" said the Unknown thickly and slowly. "I can't remember." He passed a hand weakly over his forehead.
"What a night!" sighed Miss Cornelia, sinking into a chair. "Richard Fleming murdered in this house--and now--this!"
The Unknown shot her a stealthy glance from beneath lowered eyelids. But when she looked at him, his face was blank again.
"Why doesn't somebody ask his name?" queried Dale, and, "Where the devil is that detective?" muttered Beresford, almost in the same instant.
Neither question was answered, and Beresford, increasingly uneasy at the continued absence of Anderson, turned toward the hall.
The Doctor took Dale's suggestion.
"What's your name?"
Silence from the Unknown--and that blank stare of stupefaction.
"Look at his papers." It was Miss Cornelia's voice. The Doctor and Bailey searched the torn trouser pockets, the pockets of the muddied shirt, while the Unknown submitted passively, not seeming to care what happened to him. But search him as they would--it was in vain.
"Not a paper on him," said Jack Bailey at last, straightening up.
A crash of breaking glass from the head of the alcove stairs put a period to his sentence. All turned toward the stairs--or all except the Unknown, who, for a moment, half-rose in his chair, his eyes gleaming, his face alert, the mask of bewildered apathy gone from his face.
As they watched, a rigid little figure of horror backed slowly down the alcove stairs and into the room--Billy, the Japanese, his Oriental placidity disturbed at last, incomprehensible terror written in every line of his face.
"Billy!"
"Billy--what is it?"
The diminutive butler made a pitiful attempt at his usual grin.
"It--nothing," he gasped. The Unknown relapsed in his chair--again the dazed stranger from nowhere.
Beresford took the Japanese by the shoulders.
"Now see here!" he said sharply. "You've seen something! What was it!"
Billy trembled like a leaf.
"Ghost! Ghost!" he muttered frantically, his face working.
"He's concealing something. Look at him!" Miss Cornelia stared at her servant.
"No, no!" insisted Billy in an ague of fright. "No, no!"
But Miss Cornelia was sure of it.
"Brooks, close that door!" she said, pointing at the terrace door in the alcove which still stood ajar after the entrance of the Unknown.
Bailey moved to obey. But just as he reached the alcove the terrace door slammed shut in his face. At the same moment every light in Cedarcrest blinked and went out again.
Bailey fumbled for the doorknob in the sudden darkness.
"The door's locked!" he said incredulously. "The key's gone too. Where's your revolver, Beresford?"
"I dropped it in the alcove when I caught that man," called Beresford, cursing himself for his carelessness.
The illuminated dial of Bailey's wrist watch flickered in the darkness as he searched for the revolver--as round, glowing spot of phosphorescence.
Lizzie screamed. "The eye! The gleaming eye I saw on the stairs!" she shrieked, pointing at it frenziedly.
"Quick--there's a candle on the table--light it somebody. Never mind the revolver, I have one!" called Miss Cornelia.
"Righto!" called Beresford cheerily in reply. He found the candle, lit it--
The party blinked at each other for a moment, still unable quite to co-ordinate their thoughts.
Bailey rattled the knob of the door into the hall.
"This door's locked, too!" he said with increasing puzzlement. A gasp went over the group. They were locked in the room while some devilment was going on in the rest of the house. That they knew. But what it might be, what form it might take, they had not the remotest idea. They were too distracted to notice the injured man, now alert in his chair, or the Doctor's odd attitude of listening, above the rattle and banging of the storm.
But it was not until Miss Cornelia took the candle and proceeded toward the hall door to examine it that the full horror of the situation burst upon them.
Neatly fastened to the white panel of the door, chest high and hardly more than just dead, was the body of a bat.

Of what happened thereafter no one afterward remembered the details. To be shut in there at the mercy of one who knew no mercy was intolerable. It was left for Miss Cornelia to remember her own revolver, lying unnoticed on the table since the crime earlier in the evening, and to suggest its use in shattering the lock. Just what they had expected when the door was finally opened they did not know. But the house was quiet and in order; no new horror faced them in the hall; their candle revealed no bloody figure, their ears heard no unearthly sound.

Slowly they began to breathe normally once more. After that they began to search the house. Since no room was apparently immune from danger, the men made no protest when the women insisted on accompanying them. And as time went on and chamber after chamber was discovered empty and undisturbed, gradually the courage of the party began to rise. Lizzie, still whimpering, stuck closely to Miss Cornelia's heels, but that spirited lady began to make small side excursions of her own.

Of the men, only Bailey, Beresford, and the Doctor could really be said to search at all. Billy had remained below, impassive of face but rolling of eye; the Unknown, after an attempt to depart with them, had sunk back weakly into his chair again, and the detective, Anderson, was still unaccountably missing.

While no one could be said to be grieving over this, still the belief that somehow, somewhere, he had met the Bat and suffered at his hands was strong in all of them except the Doctor. As each door was opened they expected to find him, probably foully murdered; as each door was closed again they breathed with relief.

And as time went on and the silence and peace remained unbroken, the conviction grew on them that the Bat had in this manner achieved his object and departed; had done his work, signed it after his usual fashion, and gone.

And thus were matters when Miss Cornelia, happening on the attic staircase with Lizzie at her heels, decided to look about her up there. And went up.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN
THE HIDDEN ROOM

A few moments later Jack Bailey, seeing a thin glow of candlelight from the attic above and hearing Lizzie's protesting voice, made his way up there. He found them in the trunk room, a dusty, dingy apartment lined with high closets along the walls—the floor littered with an incongruous assortment of attic objects—two battered trunks, a clothes hamper, an old sewing machine, a broken-backed kitchen chair, two dilapidated suitcases and a shabby satchel that might once have been a woman's dressing case—in one corner a grimy fireplace in which, obviously, no fire had been lighted for years.

But he also found Miss Cornelia holding her candle to the floor and staring at something there.

"Candle grease!" she said sharply, staring at a line of white spots by the window. She stooped and touched the spots with an exploratory finger.

"Fresh candle grease! Now who do you suppose did that? Do you remember how Mr. Gillette, in Sherlock Holmes, when he—"

Her voice trailed off. She stooped and followed the trail of the candle grease away from the window, ingeniously trying to copy the shrewd, piercing gaze of Mr. Gillette as she remembered him in his most famous role.

"It leads straight to the fireplace!" she murmured in tones of Sherlockian gravity. Bailey repressed an involuntary smile. But her next words gave him genuine food for thought.

She stared at the mantel of the fireplace accusingly. "It's been going through my mind for the last few minutes that no chimney flue runs up this side of the house!" she said.

Bailey stared. "Then why the fireplace?"

"That's what I'm going to find out!" said the spinster grimly. She started to rap the mantel, testing it for secret springs.

"Jack! Jack!" It was Dale's voice, low and cautious, coming from the landing of the stairs.

Bailey stepped to the door of the trunk room.

"Come in," he called in reply. "And shut the door behind you."

Dale entered, turning the key in the lock behind her.

"Where are the others?"

"They're still searching the house. There's no sign of anybody."

"They haven't found—Mr. Anderson?"

Dale shook her head. "Not yet."

She turned toward her aunt. Miss Cornelia had begun to enjoy herself once more.

Rapping on the mantelpiece, poking and pressing various corners and sections of the mantel itself, she remembered all the detective stories she had ever read and thought, with a sniff of scorn, that she could better them. There were always sliding panels and hidden drawers in detective stories and the detective discovered them by rapping just as she was doing, and listening for a hollow sound in answer. She rapped on the wall above the mantel--
"Hollow as Lizzie's head!" she said triumphantly. The fireplace was obviously not what it seemed, there must be a space behind it unaccounted for in the building plans. Now what was the next step detectives always took? Oh, yes--they looked for panels; panels that moved. And when one shoved them away there was a button or something. She pushed and pressed and finally something did move. It was the mantelpiece itself, false grate and all, which began to swing out into the room, revealing behind a dark, hollow cubbyhole, some six feet by six--the Hidden Room at last!

"Oh, Jack, be careful!" breathed Dale as her lover took Miss Cornelia's candle and moved toward the dark hiding-place. But her eyes had already caught the outlines of a tall iron safe in the gloom and in spite of her fears, her lips formed a wordless cry of victory.

But Jack Bailey said nothing at all. One glance had shown him that the safe was empty.

The tragic collapse of all their hopes was almost more than they could bear. Coming on top of the nerve-racking events of the night, it left them dazed and directionless. It was, of course, Miss Cornelia who recovered first.

"Even without the money," she said; "the mere presence of this safe here, hidden away, tells the story. The fact that someone else knew and got here first cannot alter that."

But she could not cheer them. It was Lizzie who created a diversion. Lizzie who had bolted into the hall at the first motion of the mantelpiece outward and who now, with equal precipitation, came bolting back. She rushed into the room, slamming the door behind her, and collapsed into a heap of moaning terror at her mistress's feet. At first she was completely inarticulate, but after a time she muttered that she had seen "him" and then fell to groaning again.

The same thought was in all their minds, that in some corner of the upper floor she had come across the body of Anderson. But when Miss Cornelia finally quieted her and asked this, she shook her head.

"It was the Bat I saw," was her astounding statement. "He dropped through the skylight out there and ran along the hall. I saw him I tell you. He went right by me!"

"Nonsense," said Miss Cornelia briskly. "How can you say such a thing?"

But Bailey pushed forward and took Lizzie by the shoulder.

"What did he look like?"

"He hadn't any face. He was all black where his face ought to be."

"Do you mean he wore a mask?"

"Maybe. I don't know."

She collapsed again but when Bailey, followed by Miss Cornelia, made a move toward the door she broke into frantic wailing.

"Don't go out there!" she shrieked. "He's there I tell you. I'm not crazy. If you open that door, he'll shoot."

But the door was already open and no shot came. With the departure of Bailey and Miss Cornelia, and the resulting darkness due to their taking the candle, Lizzie and Dale were left alone. The girl was faint with disappointment and strain; she sat huddled on a trunk, saying nothing, and after a moment or so Lizzie roused to her condition.

"Not feeling sick, are you?" she asked.

"I feel a little queer."

"Who wouldn't in the dark here with that monster loose somewhere near by?" But she stirred herself and got up. "I'd better get the smelling salts," she said heavily. "God knows I hate to move, but if there's one place safer in this house than another, I've yet to find it."

She went out, leaving Dale alone. The trunk room was dark, save that now and then as the candle appeared and reappeared the doorway was faintly outlined. On this outline she kept her eyes fixed, by way of comfort, and thus passed the next few moments. She felt weak and dizzy and entirely despairing.

Then--the outline was not so clear. She had heard nothing but there was something in the doorway. It stood there, formless, diabolical, and then she saw what was happening. It was closing the door. Afterward she was mercifully not to remember what came next; the figure was perhaps intent on what was going on outside, or her own movements may have been as silent as its own. That she got into the mantel-room and even partially closed it behind her is certain, and that her description of what followed is fairly accurate is borne out by the facts as known.

The Bat was working rapidly. She heard his quick, nervous movements; apparently he had come back for something and secured it, for now he moved again toward the door. But he was too late; they were returning that way. She heard him mutter something and quickly turn the key in the lock. Then he seemed to run toward the window, and for some reason to recoil from it.

The next instant she realized that he was coming toward the mantel-room, that he intended to hide in it. There was no doubt in her mind as to his identity. It was the Bat, and in a moment more he would be shut in there with her.
She tried to scream and could not, and the next instant, when the Bat leaped into concealment beside her, she was in a dead faint on the floor.

Bailey meanwhile had crawled out on the roof and was carefully searching it. But other things were happening also. A disinterested observer could have seen very soon why the Bat had abandoned the window as a means of egress.

Almost before the mantel had swung to behind the archcriminal, the top of a tall pruning ladder had appeared at the window and by its quivering showed that someone was climbing up, rung by rung. Unsuspiciously enough he came on, pausing at the top to flash a light into the room, and then cautiously swinging a leg over the sill. It was the Doctor. He gave a low whistle but there was no reply, save that, had he seen it, the mantel swung out an inch or two. Perhaps he was never so near death as at that moment but that instant of irresolution on his part saved him, for by coming into the room he had taken himself out of range.

Even then he was very close to destruction, for after a brief pause and a second rather puzzled survey of the room, he started toward the mantel itself. Only the rattle of the doorknob stopped him, and a call from outside.

"Dale!" called Bailey's voice from the corridor. "Dale!"
"Dale! Dale! The door's locked!" cried Miss Cornelia.

The Doctor hesitated. The call came again. "Dale! Dale!" and Bailey pounded on the door as if he meant to break it down.

The Doctor made up his mind.

"Wait a moment!" he called. He stepped to the door and unlocked it. Bailey hurled himself into the room, followed by Miss Cornelia with her candle. Lizzie stood in the doorway, timidly, ready to leap for safety at a moment's notice.

"Why did you lock that door?" said Bailey angrily, threatening the Doctor.

"But I didn't," said the latter, truthfully enough. Bailey made a movement of irritation. Then a glance about the room informed him of the amazing, the incredible fact. Dale was not there! She had disappeared!

"You--you," he stammered at the Doctor. "Where's Miss Ogden? What have you done with her?"

The Doctor was equally baffled.

"Done with her?" he said indigantly. "I don't know what you're talking about, I haven't seen her!"

"Then you didn't lock that door?" Bailey menaced him.

The Doctor's denial was firm.

"Absolutely not. I was coming through the window when I heard your voice at the door!"

Bailey's eyes leaped to the window--yes--a ladder was there--the Doctor might be speaking the truth after all. But if so, how and why had Dale disappeared?

The Doctor's admission of his manner of entrance did not make Lizzie any the happier.

"In at the window--just like a bat!" she muttered in shaking tones. She would not have stayed in the doorway if she had not been afraid to move anywhere else.

"I saw lights up here from outside," continued the Doctor easily. "And I thought--"

Miss Cornelia interrupted him. She had set down her candle and laid the revolver on the top of the clothes hamper and now stood gazing at the mantel-fireplace.

"The mantel's--closed!" she said.

The Doctor stared. So the secret of the Hidden Room was a secret no longer. He saw ruin gaping before him--a bottomless abyss. "Damnation!" he cursed impotently under his breath.

Bailey turned on him savagely.

"Did you shut that mantel?"

"No!"

"I'll see whether you shut it or not!" Bailey leaped toward the fireplace. "Dale! Dale!" he called desperately, leaning against the mantel. His fingers groped for the knob that worked the mechanism of the hidden entrance.

The Doctor picked up the single lighted candle from the hamper, as if to throw more light on Bailey's task. Bailey's fingers found the knob. He turned it. The mantel began to swing out into the room.

As it did so the Doctor deliberately snuffed out the light of the candle he held, leaving the room in abrupt and obliterating darkness.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

ANDERSON MAKES AN ARREST

"Doctor, why did you put out that candle?" Miss Cornelia's voice cut the blackness like a knife.

"I didn't--I--"

"You did--I saw you do it."

The brief exchange of accusation and denial took but an instant of time, as the mantel swung wide open. The
next instant there was a rush of feet across the floor, from the fireplace--the shock of a collision between two bodies-the sound of a heavy fall.

"What was that?" queried Bailey dazedly, with a feeling as if some great winged creature had brushed at him and passed.

Lizzie answered from the doorway.

"Oh, oh!" she groaned in stricken accents. "Somebody knocked me down and trampled on me!"

"Matches, quick!" commanded Miss Cornelia. "Where's the candle?"

The Doctor was still trying to explain his curious action of a moment before.

"Awfully sorry, I assure you--it dropped out of the holder--ah, here it is!"

He held it up triumphantly. Bailey struck a match and lighted it. The wavering little flame showed Lizzie prostrate but vocal, in the doorway--and Dale lying on the floor of the Hidden Room, her eyes shut, and her face as drained of color as the face of a marble statue. For one horrible instant Bailey thought she must be dead.

He rushed to her wildly and picked her up in his arms. No--still breathing--thank God! He carried her tenderly to the only chair in the room.

"Doctor!"

The Doctor, once more the physician, knelt at her side and felt for her pulse. And Lizzie, picking herself up from where the collision with some violent body had thrown her, retrieved the smelling salts from the floor. It was onto this picture, the candlelight shining on strained faces, the dramatic figure of Dale, now semi-conscious, the desperate rage of Bailey, that a new actor appeared on the scene.

Anderson, the detective, stood in the doorway, holding a candle--as grim and menacing a figure as a man just arisen from the dead.

"That's right!" said Lizzie, unappalled for once. "Come in when everything's over!"

The Doctor glanced up and met the detective's eyes, cold and menacing.

"You took my revolver from me downstairs," he said. "I'll trouble you for it."

The Doctor got heavily to his feet. The others, their suspicions confirmed at last, looked at him with startled eyes. The detective seemed to enjoy the universal confusion his words had brought.

Slowly, with sullen reluctance, the Doctor yielded up the stolen weapon. The detective examined it casually and replaced it in his hip pocket.

"I've something to settle with you pretty soon," he said through clenched teeth, addressing the Doctor. "And I'll settle it properly. Now--what's this?"

He indicated Dale--her face still and waxen--her breath coming so faintly she seemed hardly to breathe at all as Miss Cornelia and Bailey tried to revive her.

"She's coming to--" said Miss Cornelia triumphantly, as a first faint flush of color reappeared in the girl's cheeks.

"We found her shut in there, Mr. Anderson," the spinster added, pointing toward the gaping entrance of the Hidden Room.

A gleam crossed the detective's face. He went up to examine the secret chamber. As he did so, Doctor Wells, who had been inching surreptitiously toward the door, sought the opportunity of slipping out unobserved.

But Anderson was not to be caught napping again. "Wells!" he barked. The Doctor stopped and turned.

"Where were you when she was locked in this room?"

The Doctor's eyes sought the floor--the walls--wildly--for any possible loophole of escape.

"I didn't shut her in if that's what you mean!" he said defiantly. "There was someone shut in there with her!" He gestured at the Hidden Room. "Ask these people here."

Miss Cornelia caught him up at once.

"The fact remains, Doctor," she said, her voice cold with anger, "that we left her here alone. When we came back you were here. The corridor door was locked, and she was in that room-- unconscious!"

She moved forward to throw the light of her candle on the Hidden Room as the detective passed into it, gave it a swift professional glance, and stepped out again. But she had not finished her story by any means.

"As we opened that door," she continued to the detective, tapping the false mantel, "the Doctor deliberately extinguished our only candle!"

"Do you know who was in that room?" queried the detective fiercely, wheeling on the Doctor.

But the latter had evidently made up his mind to cling stubbornly to a policy of complete denial.

"No," he said sullenly. "I didn't put out the candle. It fell. And I didn't lock that door into the hall. I found it locked!"

A sigh of relief from Bailey now centered everyone's attention on himself and Dale. At last the girl was recovering from the shock of her terrible experience and regaining consciousness. Her eyelids fluttered, closed again, opened once more. She tried to sit up, weakly, clinging to Bailey's shoulder. The color returned to her cheeks,
the stupor left her eyes.

She gave the Hidden Room a hunted little glance and then shuddered violently. "Please close that awful door," she said in a tremulous voice. "I don't want to see it again."

The detective went silently to close the iron doors. "What happened to you? Can't you remember?" faltered Bailey, on his knees at her side.

The shadow of an old terror lay on the girl's face, "I was in here alone in the dark," she began slowly--"Then, as I looked at the doorway there, I saw there was somebody there. He came in and closed the door. I didn't know what to do, so I slipped in--there, and after a while I knew he was coming in too, for he couldn't get out. Then I must have fainted."

"There was nothing about the figure that you recognized?"

"No. Nothing."

"But we know it was the Bat," put in Miss Cornelia. The detective laughed sardonically. The old duel of opposing theories between the two seemed about to recommence.

"Still harping on the Bat!" he said, with a little sneer, Miss Cornelia stuck to her guns.

"I have every reason to believe that the Bat is in this house," she said.

The detective gave another jarring, mirthless laugh. "And that he took the Union Bank money out of the safe, I suppose?" he jeered. "No, Miss Van Gorder."

He wheeled on the Doctor now.

"Ask the Doctor who took the Union Bank money out of that safe!" he thundered. "Ask the Doctor who attacked me downstairs in the living-room, knocked me senseless, and locked me in the billiard room!"

There was an astounded silence. The detective added a parting shot to his indictment of the Doctor.

"The next time you put handcuffs on a man be sure to take the key out of his vest pocket," he said, biting off the words.

Rage and consternation mingled on the Doctor's countenance--on the faces of the others astonishment was followed by a growing certainty. Only Miss Cornelia clung stubbornly to her original theory.

"Perhaps I'm an obstinate old woman," she said in tones which obviously showed that if so she was rather proud of it, "but the Doctor and all the rest of us were locked in the living-room not ten minutes ago!"

"By the Bat, I suppose!" mocked Anderson.

"By the Bat!" insisted Miss Cornelia inflexibly. "Who else would have fastened a dead bat to the door downstairs? Who else would have the bravado to do that? Or what you call the imagination?"

In spite of himself Anderson seemed to be impressed.

"The Bat, eh?" he muttered, then, changing his tone, "You knew about this hidden room, Wells?" he shot at the Doctor.

"Yes." The Doctor bowed his head.

"And you knew the money was in the room?"

"Well, I was wrong, wasn't I?" parried the Doctor. "You can look for yourself. That safe is empty."

The detective brushed his evasive answer aside.

"You were up in this room earlier tonight," he said in tones of apparent certainty.

"No, I couldn't get up!" the Doctor still insisted, with strange violence for a man who had already admitted such damning knowledge.

The detective's face was a study in disbelief.

"You know where that money is, Wells, and I'm going to find it!"

This last taunt seemed to goad the Doctor beyond endurance.

"Good God!" he shouted recklessly. "Do you suppose if I knew where it is, I'd be here? I've had plenty of chances to get away! No, you can't pin anything on me, Anderson! It isn't criminal to have known that room is here."

He paused, trembling with anger and, curiously enough, with an anger that seemed at least half sincere.

"Oh, don't be so damned virtuous!" said the detective brutally. "Maybe you haven't been upstairs but--unless I miss my guess, you know who was!"

The Doctor's face changed a little.

"What about Richard Fleming?" persisted the detective scornfully.

The Doctor drew himself up.

"I never killed him!" he said so impressively that even Bailey's faith in his guilt was shaken. "I don't even own a revolver!"

The detective alone maintained his attitude unchanged.

"You come with me, Wells," he ordered, with a jerk of his thumb toward the door. "This time I'll do the locking up."
The Doctor, head bowed, prepared to obey. The detective took up a candle to light their path. Then he turned to
the others for a moment.
"Better get the young lady to bed," he said with a gruff kindliness of manner. "I think that I can promise you a
quiet night from now on."
"I'm glad you think so, Mr. Anderson!" Miss Cornelia insisted on the last word. The detective ignored the satiric
twist of her speech, motioned the Doctor out ahead of him, and followed. The faint glow of his candle flickered
a moment and vanished toward the stairs.

It was Bailey who broke the silence.
"I can believe a good bit about Wells," he said, "but not that he stood on that staircase and killed Dick Fleming."
Miss Cornelia roused from deep thought.
"Of course not," she said briskly. "Go down and fix Miss Dale's bed, Lizzie. And then bring up some wine."
"Down there, where the Bat is?" Lizzie demanded.
"The Bat has gone."
"Don't you believe it. He's just got his hand in!"

But at last Lizzie went, and, closing the door behind her, Miss Cornelia proceeded more or less to think, out
loud.
"Suppose," she said, "that the Bat, or whoever it was shut in there with you, killed Richard Fleming. Say that he
is the one Lizzie saw coming in by the terrace door. Then he knew where the money was for he went directly up the
stairs. But that is two hours ago or more. Why didn't he get the money, if it was here, and get away?"
"He may have had trouble with the combination."
"Perhaps. Anyhow, he was on the small staircase when Dick Fleming started up, and of course he shot him.
That's clear enough. Then he finally got the safe open, after locking us in below, and my coming up interrupted him.
How on earth did he get out on the roof?"

Bailey glanced out the window.
"It would be possible from here. Possible, but not easy."
"But, if he could do that," she persisted, "he could have got away, too. There are trellises and porches. Instead of
that he came back here to this room." She stared at the window. "Could a man have done that with one hand?"
"Never in the world."
Saying nothing, but deeply thoughtful, Miss Cornelia made a fresh progress around the room.
"I know very little about bank-currency," she said finally. "Could such a sum as was looted from the Union Bank
be carried away in a man's pocket?"

Bailey considered the question.
"Even in bills of large denomination it would make a pretty sizeable bundle," he said.

But that Miss Cornelia's deductions were correct, whatever they were, was in question when Lizzie returned with
the elderberry wine. Apparently Miss Cornelia was to be like the man who repaired the clock: she still had certain
things left over.

For Lizzie announced that the Unknown was ranging the second floor hall. From the time they had escaped from
the living-room this man had not been seen or thought of, but that he was a part of the mystery there could be no
doubt. It flashed over Miss Cornelia that, although he could not possibly have locked them in, in the darkness that
followed he could easily have fastened the bat to the door. For the first time it occurred to her that the archcriminal
might not be working alone, and that the entrance of the Unknown might have been a carefully devised ruse to draw
them all together and hold them there.

Nor was Beresford's arrival with the statement that the Unknown was moving through the house below
particularly comforting.
"He may be dazed, or he may not," he said. "Personally, this is not a time to trust anybody."
Beresford knew nothing of what had just occurred, and now seeing Bailey he favored him with an ugly glance.
"In the absence of Anderson, Bailey," he added, "I don't propose to trust you too far. I'm making it my business
from now on to see that you don't try to get away. Get that?"

But Bailey heard him without particular resentment.
"All right," he said. "But I'll tell you this. Anderson is here and has arrested the Doctor. Keep your eye on me, if
you think it's your duty, but don't talk to me as if I were a criminal. You don't know that yet."
"The Doctor!" Beresford gasped.
But Miss Cornelia's keen ears had heard a sound outside and her eyes were focused on the door.
"That doorknob is moving," she said in a hushed voice.
Beresford moved to the door and jerked it violently open.
The butler, Billy, almost pitched into the room.
CHAPTER EIGHTEEN
THE BAT STILL FLIES

He stepped back in the doorway, looked out, then turned to them again.
"I come in, please?" he said pathetically, his hands quivering. "I not like to stay in dark."
Miss Cornelia took pity on him.
"Come in, Billy, of course. What is it? Anything the matter?"
Billy glanced about nervously.
"Man with sore head."
"What about him?"
"Act very strange." Again Billy's slim hands trembled.
Beresford broke in. "The man who fell into the room downstairs?"
Billy nodded.
"Yes. On second floor, walking around."
Beresford smiled, a bit smugly.
"I told you!" he said to Miss Cornelia. "I didn't think he was as dazed as he pretended to be."
Miss Cornelia, too, had been pondering the problem of the Unknown. She reached a swift decision. If he were what he pretended to be--a dazed wanderer, he could do them no harm. If he were not--a little strategy properly employed might unravel the whole mystery.
"Bring him up here, Billy," she said, turning to the butler.
 Billy started to obey. But the darkness of the corridor seemed to appall him anew the moment he took a step toward it.
"You give candle, please?" he asked with a pleading expression. "Don't like dark."
Miss Cornelia handed him one of the two precious candles. Then his present terror reminded her of that one other occasion when she had seen him lose completely his stoic Oriental calm.
"Billy," she queried, "what did you see when you came running down the stairs before we were locked in, down below?"
The candle shook like a reed in Billy's grasp.
"Nothing!" he gasped with obvious untruth, though it did not seem so much as if he wished to conceal what he had seen as that he was trying to convince himself he had seen nothing.
"Nothing!" said Lizzie scornfully. "It was some nothing that would make him drop a bottle of whisky!"
But Billy only backed toward the door, smiling apologetically.
"Thought I saw ghost," he said, and went out and down the stairs, the candlelight flickering, growing fainter, and finally disappearing. Silence and eerie darkness enveloped them all as they waited. And suddenly out of the blackness came a sound.

"That's damned odd." muttered Beresford uneasily. "There is something moving around the room."
"It's up near the ceiling!" cried Bailey as the sound began again.
Lizzie began a slow wail of doom and disaster.
"Oh--h--h--h--" 
"Good God!" cried Beresford abruptly. "It hit me in the face!" He slapped his hands together in a vain attempt to capture the flying intruder.
Lizzie rose.
"I'm going!" she announced. "I don't know where, but I'm going!"
She took a wild step in the direction of the door. Then the flapping noise was all about her, her nose was bumped by an invisible object and she gave a horrified shriek.
"It's in my hair!" she screamed madly. "It's in my hair!"
The next instant Bailey gave a triumphant cry.
"I've got it! It's a bat!"
Lizzie sank to her knees, still moaning, and Bailey carried the cause of the trouble over to the window and threw it out.
But the result of the absurd incident was a further destruction of their morale. Even Beresford, so far calm with the quiet of the virtuous onlooker, was now pallid in the light of the matches they successively lighted. And onto this strained situation came at last Billy and the Unknown.

The Unknown still wore his air of dazed bewilderment, true or feigned, but at least he was now able to walk without support. They stared at him, at his tattered, muddy garments, at the threads of rope still clinging to his ankles--and wondered. He returned their stares vacantly.
"Come in," began Miss Cornelia. "Sit down." He obeyed both commands docilely enough.
"Are you better now?"
"Somewhat." His words still came very slowly.
"Billy--you can go."
"I stay, please!" said Billy wistfully, making no movement to leave. His gesture toward the darkness of the corridor spoke louder than words.

Bailey watched him, suspicion dawning in his eyes. He could not account for the butler's inexplicable terror of being left alone.

"Anderson intimated that the Doctor had an accomplice in this house," he said, crossing to Billy and taking him by the arm. "Why isn't this the man?" Billy cringed away. "Please, no," he begged pitifully.

Bailey turned him around so that he faced the Hidden Room.
"Did you know that room was there?" he questioned, his doubts still unquieted.

Billy shook his head.
"No."

"He couldn't have locked us in," said Miss Cornelia. "He was with us."

Bailey demurred, not to her remark itself, but to its implication of Billy's entire innocence.
"He may know who did it. Do you?"

Billy still shook his head.

Bailey remained unconvincing.

"Who did you see at the head of the small staircase?" he queried imperatively. "Now we're through with nonsense; I want the truth!"

Billy shivered.
"See face--that's all," he brought out at last.
"Whose face?"

Again it was evident that Billy knew or thought he knew more than he was willing to tell.
"Don't know," he said with obvious untruth, looking down at the floor.

"Never mind, Billy," cut in Miss Cornelia. To her mind questioning Billy was wasting time. She looked at the Unknown.

"Solve the mystery of this man and we may get at the facts," she said in accents of conviction.

As Bailey turned toward her questioningly, Billy attempted to steal silently out of the door, apparently preferring any fears that might lurk in the darkness of the corridor to a further grilling on the subject of whom or what he had seen on the alcove stairs. But Bailey caught the movement out of the tail of his eye.

"You stay here," he commanded. Billy stood frozen. Beresford raised the candle so that it cast its light full in the Unknown's face.

"This chap claims to have lost his memory," he said dubiously. "I suppose a blow on the head might do that, I don't know."

"I wish somebody would knock me on the head! I'd like to forget a few things!" moaned Lizzie, but the interruption went unregarded.

"Don't you even know your name?" queried Miss Cornelia of the Unknown.

The Unknown shook his head with a slow, laborious gesture.
"Not--yet."

"Or where you came from?"

Once more the battered head made its movement of negation.
"Do you remember how you got in this house?" The Unknown made an effort.
"Yes--I--remember--that--all--right" he said, apparently undergoing an enormous strain in order to make himself speak at all. He put his hand to his head.

"My--head--aches--to--beat--the--band," he continued slowly.

Miss Cornelia was at a loss. If this were acting, it was at least fine acting.

"How did you happen to come to this house?" she persisted, her voice unconsciously tuning itself to the slow, laborious speech of the Unknown.

"Saw--the--lights."

Bailey broke in with a question.
"Where were you when you saw the lights?"

The Unknown wet his lips with his tongue, painfully.

"I--broke--out--of--the--garage," he said at length. This was unexpected. A general movement of interest ran over the group.
"How did you get there?" Beresford took his turn as questioner.
The Unknown shook his head, so slowly and deliberately that Miss Cornelia's fingers itched to shake him in spite of his injuries.
"I--don't--know."
"Have you been robbed?" queried Bailey with keen suspicion.
The Unknown mumbled something unintelligible. Then he seemed to get command of his tongue again.
"Everything gone--out of--my pockets," he said.
"Including your watch?" pursued Bailey, remembering the watch that Beresford had found in the grounds.
The Unknown would neither affirm nor deny.
"If--I--had--a--watch--it's gone," he said with maddening deliberation. "All my--papers--are gone."
Miss Cornelia pounced upon this last statement like a cat upon a mouse.
"How do you know you had papers?" she asked sharply.
For the first time the faintest flicker of a smile seemed to appear for a moment on the Unknown's features. Then it vanished as abruptly as it had come.
"Most men--carry papers--don't they?" he asked, staring blindly in front of him. "I'm dazed--but--my mind's--all-right. If you--ask me--I--think--I'm--d-damned funny!"
He gave the ghost of a chuckle. Bailey and Beresford exchanged glances.
"Did you ring the house phone?" insisted Miss Cornelia.
The Unknown nodded.
"Yes."
Miss Cornelia and Bailey gave each other a look of wonderment.
"I--leaned against--the button--in the garage--" he went on. "Then--I think--maybe I--fainted. That's--not clear."
His eyelids drooped. He seemed about to faint again.
Dale rose, and came over to him, with a sympathetic movement of her hand.
"You don't remember how you were hurt?" she asked gently.
"The first thing I remember--I was in the garage--tied." He moved his lips. "I was--gagged--too--that's --what's the matter--with my tongue--now--Then--I got myself --free--and--got out--of a window--"
Miss Cornelia made a movement to question him further. Beresford stopped her with his hand uplifted.
"Just a moment, Miss Van Gorder. Anderson ought to know of this."
He started for the door without perceiving the flash of keen intelligence and alertness that had lit the Unknown's countenance for an instant, as once before, at the mention of the detective's name. But just as he reached the door the detective entered.

"How did he get into the house?"
"He came through the terrace door some time ago," answered Miss Cornelia. "Just before we were locked in."
He halted for a moment, staring at the strange figure of the Unknown.
"A new element in our mystery, Mr. Anderson," said Miss Cornelia, remembering that the detective might not have heard of the mysterious stranger before--as he had been locked in the billiard room when the latter had made his queer entrance.

"Look up here!" he commanded.
The Unknown stared at him for an instant with blank, vacuous eyes. Then his head dropped back upon his breast again.
"Look up, you--" muttered the detective, jerking his head again. "This losing your memory stuff doesn't go down with me!!" His eyes bored into the Unknown's.
"Doesn't remember anything, eh?" he said dryly. He crossed over to the mysterious stranger and put his hand under the Unknown's chin, jerking his head up roughly.
"Quite dazed, poor fellow," Miss Cornelia went on. Beresford added other words of explanation.
"He doesn't remember what happened to him. Curious, isn't it?"
The detective still seemed puzzled.
"How did he get into the house?"
"He came through the terrace door some time ago," answered Miss Cornelia. "Just before we were locked in."
Her answer seemed to solve the problem to Anderson's satisfaction.
"Don't remember anything, eh?" he said dryly. He crossed over to the mysterious stranger and put his hand under the Unknown's chin, jerking his head up roughly.
"Look up here!" he commanded.
The Unknown stared at him for an instant with blank, vacuous eyes. Then his head dropped back upon his breast again.
"Look up, you--" muttered the detective, jerking his head again. "This losing your memory stuff doesn't go down with me!!" His eyes bored into the Unknown's.
"It doesn't--go down--very well--with me--either," said the Unknown weakly, making no movement of protest against Anderson's rough handling.
"Did you ever see me before?" demanded the latter. Beresford held the candle closer so that he might watch the Unknown's face for any involuntary movement of betrayal.
But the Unknown made no such movement. He gazed at Anderson, apparently with the greatest bewilderment, then his eyes cleared, he seemed to be about to remember who the detective was.

"You're--the--Doctor--I--saw--downstairs--aren't you?" he said innocently. The detective set his jaw. He started off on a new tack.

"Does this belong to you?" he said suddenly, plucking from his pocket the battered gold watch that Beresford had found and waving it before the Unknown's blank face.

The Unknown stared at it a moment, as a child might stare at a new toy, with no gleam of recognition. Then--

"Maybe," he admitted. "I--don't--know." His voice trailed off. He fell back against Bailey's arm.

Miss Cornelia gave a little shiver. The third degree in reality was less pleasant to watch than it had been to read about in the pages of her favorite detective stories.

"He's evidently been attacked," she said, turning to Anderson. "He claims to have recovered consciousness in the garage, where he was tied hand and foot!"

"He does, eh?" said the detective heavily. He glared at the Unknown. "If you'll give me five minutes alone with him, I'll get the truth out of him!" he promised.

A look of swift alarm swept over the Unknown's face at the words, unperceived by any except Miss Cornelia. The others started obediently to yield to the detective's behest and leave him alone with his prisoner. Miss Cornelia was the first to move toward the door. On her way, she turned.

"Do you believe that money is irrevocably gone?" she asked of Anderson.

The detective smiled.

"There's no such word as 'irrevocable' in my vocabulary," he answered. "But I believe it's out of the house, if that's what you mean."

Miss Cornelia still hesitated, on the verge of departure.

"Suppose I tell you that there are certain facts that you have overlooked?" she said slowly.

"Still on the trail!" muttered the detective sardonically. He did not even glance at her. He seemed only anxious that the other members of the group would get out of his way for once and leave him a clear field for his work.

"I was right about the Doctor, wasn't I?" she insisted.

"Just fifty per cent right," said Anderson crushingly. "And the Doctor didn't turn that trick alone. Now--" he went on with weary patience, "if you'll all go out and close that door--"

Miss Cornelia, defeated, took a candle from Bailey and stepped into the corridor. Her figure stiffened. She gave an audible gasp of dismayed surprise.

"Quick!" she cried, turning back to the others and gesturing toward the corridor. "A man just went through that skylight and out onto the roof!"

CHAPTER NINETEEN
MURDER ON MURDER
"Out on the roof!"
"Come on, Beresford!"
"Hustle--you men! He may be armed!"
"Righto--coming!"

And following Miss Cornelia's lead, Jack Bailey, Anderson, Beresford, and Billy dashed out into the corridor, leaving Dale and the frightened Lizzie alone with the Unknown.

"And I'd run if my legs would!" Lizzie despaired.

"Hush!" said Dale, her ears strained for sounds of conflict. Lizzie, creeping closer to her for comfort, stumbled over one of the Unknown's feet and promptly set up a new wail.

"How do we know this fellow right here isn't the Bat?" she asked in a blood-chilling whisper, nearly stabbing the unfortunate Unknown in the eye with her thumb as she pointed at him. The Unknown was either too dazed or too crafty to make any answer. His silence confirmed Lizzie's worst suspicions. She fairly hugged the floor and began to pray in a whisper.

Miss Cornelia re-entered cautiously with her candle, closing the door gently behind her as she came.

"What did you see?" gasped Dale.

Miss Cornelia smiled broadly.

"I didn't see anything," she admitted with the greatest calm. "I had to get that dratted detective out of the room before I assassinated him."

"Nobody went through the skylight?" said Dale incredulously.

"They have now," answered Miss Cornelia with obvious satisfaction. "The whole outfit of them."

She stole a glance at the veiled eyes of the Unknown. He was lying limply back in his chair, as if the excitement had been too much for him--and yet she could have sworn she had seen him leap to his feet, like a man in full
possession of his faculties, when she had given her false cry of alarm.

"Then why did you--" began Dale dazedly, unable to fathom her aunt's reasons for her trick.

"Because," interrupted Miss Cornelia decidedly, "that money's in this room. If the man who took it out of the safe got away with it, why did he come back and hide there?"

Her forefinger jabbed at the hidden chamber wherein the masked intruder had terrified Dale with threats of instant death.

"He got it out of the safe--and that's as far as he did get with it," she persisted inexorably. "There's a HAT behind that safe, a man's felt hat!"

So this was the discovery she had hinted of to Anderson before he rebuffed her proffer of assistance!

"Oh, I wish he'd take his hat and go home!" groaned Lizzie inattentive to all but her own fears.

Miss Cornelia did not even bother to rebuke her. She crossed behind the wicker clothes hamper and picked up something from the floor.

"A half-burned candle," she mused. "Another thing the detective overlooked."

She stepped back to the center of the room, looking knowingly from the candle to the Hidden Room and back again.

"Oh, my God--another one!" shrieked Lizzie as the dark shape of a man appeared suddenly outside the window, as if materialized from the air.

Miss Cornelia snatched up her revolver from the top of the hamper.

"Don't shoot--it's Jack!" came a warning cry from Dale as she recognized the figure of her lover.

Miss Cornelia laid her revolver down on the hamper again. The vacant eyes of the Unknown caught the movement.

Bailey swung in through the window, panting a little from his exertions.

"The man Lizzie saw drop from the skylight undoubtedly got to the roof from this window," he said. "It's quite easy."

"But not with one hand," said Miss Cornelia, with her gaze now directed at the row of tall closets around the walls of the room. "When that detective comes back I may have a surprise party for him," she muttered, with a gleam of hope in her eye.

Dale explained the situation to Jack.

"Aunt Cornelia thinks the money's still here."

Miss Cornelia snorted.

"I know it's here." She started to open the closets, one after the other, beginning at the left. Bailey saw what she was doing and began to help her.

Not so Lizzie. She sat on the floor in a heap, her eyes riveted on the Unknown, who in his turn was gazing at Miss Cornelia's revolver on the hamper with the intent stare of a baby or an idiot fascinated by a glittering piece of glass.

Dale noticed the curious tableau.

"Lizzie--what are you looking at?" she said with a nervous shake in her voice.

"What's he looking at?" asked Lizzie sepulchrally, pointing at the Unknown. Her pointed forefinger drew his eyes away from the revolver; he sank back into his former apathy, listless, drooping.

Miss Cornelia rattled the knob of a high closet by the other wall.

"This one is locked--and the key's gone," she announced. A new flicker of interest grew in the eyes of the Unknown. Lizzie glanced away from him, terrified.

"If there's anything locked up in that closet," she whimpered, "you'd better let it stay! There's enough running loose in this house as it is!"

Unfortunately for her, her whimper drew Miss Cornelia's attention upon her.

"Lizzie, did you ever take that key?" the latter queried sternly.

"No'm," said Lizzie, too scared to dissimulate if she had wished. She wagged her head violently a dozen times, like a china figure on a mantelpiece.

Miss Cornelia pondered.

"It may be locked from the inside; I'll soon find out." She took a wire hairpin from her hair and pushed it through the keyhole. But there was no key on the other side; the hairpin went through without obstruction. Repeated efforts to jerk the door open failed. And finally Miss Cornelia bethought herself of a key from the other closet doors.

Dale and Lizzie on one side--Bailey on the other--collected the keys of the other closets from their locks while Miss Cornelia stared at the one whose doors were closed as if she would force its secret from it with her eyes. The Unknown had been so quiet during the last few minutes, that, unconsciously, the others had ceased to pay much attention to him, except the casual attention one devotes to a piece of furniture. Even Lizzie's eyes were now fixed
on the locked closet. And the Unknown himself was the first to notice this.

At once his expression altered to one of cunning--cautiously, with infinite patience, he began to inch his chair over toward the wicker clothes hamper. The noise of the others, moving about the room, drowned out what little he made in moving his chair.

At last he was within reach of the revolver. His hand shot out in one swift sinuous thrust--clutched the weapon--withdrew. He then concealed the revolver among his tattered garments as best he could and, cautiously as before, inched his chair back again to its original position. When the others noticed him again, the mask of lifelessness was back on his face and one could have sworn he had not changed his position by the breadth of an inch.

"There--that unlocked it!" cried Miss Cornelia triumphantly at last, as the key to one of the other closet doors slid smoothly into the lock and she heard the click that meant victory.

She was about to throw open the closet door. But Bailey motioned her back.

"I'd keep back a little," he cautioned. "You don't know what may be inside."

"Mercy sakes, who wants to know?" shivered Lizzie. Dale and Miss Cornelia, too, stepped aside involuntarily as Bailey took the candle and prepared, with a good deal of caution, to open the closet door.

The door swung open at last. He could look in. He did so--and stared appalled at what he saw, while goose flesh crawled on his spine and the hairs of his head stood up.

After a moment he closed the door of the closet and turned back, white-faced, to the others.

"What is it?" said Dale aghast. "What did you see?"

Bailey found himself unable to answer for a moment. Then he pulled himself together. He turned to Miss Van Gorder.

"Miss Cornelia, I think we have found the ghost the Jap butler saw," he said slowly. "How are your nerves?"

Miss Cornelia extended a hand that did not tremble.

"Give me the candle."

He did so. She went to the closet and opened the door.

Whatever faults Miss Cornelia may have had, lack of courage was not one of them--or the ability to withstand a stunning mental shock. Had it been otherwise she might well have crumpled to the floor, as if struck down by an invisible hammer, the moment the closet door swung open before her.

Huddled on the floor of the closet was the body of a man. So crudely had he been crammed into this hiding-place that he lay twisted and bent. And as if to add to the horror of the moment one arm, released from its confinement, now slipped and slid out into the floor of the room.

Miss Cornelia's voice sounded strange to her own ears when finally she spoke.

"But who is it?"

"It is--or was--Courtleigh Fleming," said Bailey dully.

"But how can it be? Mr. Fleming died two weeks ago. I--"

"He died in this house sometime tonight. The body is still warm."

"But who killed him? The Bat?"

"Isn't it likely that the Doctor did it? The man who has been his accomplice all along? Who probably bought a cadaver out West and buried it with honors here not long ago?"

He spoke without bitterness. Whatever resentment he might have felt died in that awful presence.

"He got into the house early tonight," he said, "probably with the Doctor's connivance. That wrist watch there is probably the luminous eye Lizzie thought she saw."

But Miss Cornelia's face was still thoughtful, and he went on:

"Isn't it clear, Miss Van Gorder?" he queried, with a smile. "The Doctor and old Mr. Fleming formed a conspiracy--both needed money-- lots of it. Fleming was to rob the bank and hide the money here. Wells's part was to issue a false death certificate in the West, and bury a substitute body, secured God knows how. It was easy; it kept the name of the president of the Union Bank free from suspicion--and it put the blame on me."

He paused, thinking it out.

"Only they slipped up in one place. Dick Fleming leased the house to you and they couldn't get it back."

"Then you are sure," said Miss Cornelia quickly, "that tonight Courtleigh Fleming broke in, with the Doctor's assistance--and that he killed Dick, his own nephew, from the staircase?"

"Aren't you?" asked Bailey surprised. The more he thought of it the less clearly could he visualize it any other way.

Miss Cornelia shook her head decidedly.

"No."

Bailey thought her merely obstinate--unwilling to give up, for pride's sake, her own pet theory of the activities of the Bat.
"Wells tried to get out of the house tonight with that blue-print. Why? Because he knew the moment we got it, we'd come up here--and Fleming was here."

"Perfectly true," nodded Miss Cornelia. "And then?"

"Old Fleming killed Dick and Wells killed Fleming," said Bailey succinctly. "You can't get away from it!"

But Miss Cornelia still shook her head. The explanation was too mechanical. It laid too little emphasis on the characters of those most concerned.

"No," she said. "No. The Doctor isn't a murderer. He's as puzzled as we are about some things. He and Courtleigh Fleming were working together--but remember this--Doctor Wells was locked in the living-room with us. He'd been trying to get up the stairs all evening and failed every time."

But Bailey was as convinced of the truth of his theory as she of hers.

"He was here ten minutes ago--locked in this room," he said with a glance at the ladder up which the doctor had ascended.

"I'll grant you that," said Miss Cornelia. "But--" She thought back swiftly. "But at the same time an Unknown Masked Man was locked in that mantel-room with Dale. The Doctor put out the candle when you opened that Hidden Room. Why? Because he thought Courtleigh Fleming was hiding there!" Now the missing pieces of her puzzle were falling into their places with a vengeance. "But at this moment," she continued, "the Doctor believes that Fleming has made his escape! No--we haven't solved the mystery yet. There's another element--an unknown element," her eyes rested for a moment upon the Unknown, "and that element is--the Bat!"

She paused, impressively. The others stared at her--no longer able to deny the sinister plausibility of her theory. But this new tangling of the mystery, just when the black threads seemed raveled out at last, was almost too much for Dale.

"Oh, call the detective!" she stammered, on the verge of hysterical tears. "Let's get through with this thing! I can't bear any more!"

But Miss Cornelia did not even hear her. Her mind, strung now to concert pitch, had harked back to the point it had reached some time ago, and which all the recent distractions had momentarily obliterated.

Had the money been taken out of the house or had it not? In that mad rush for escape had the man hidden with Dale in the recess back of the mantel carried his booty with him, or left it behind? It was not in the Hidden Room, that was certain.

Yet she was so hopeless by that time that her first search was purely perfunctory.

During her progress about the room the Unknown's eyes followed her, but so still had he sat, so amazing had been the discovery of the body, that no one any longer observed him. Now and then his head drooped forward as if actual weakness was almost overpowering him, but his eyes were keen and observant, and he was no longer taking the trouble to act--if he had been acting.

It was when Bailey finally opened the lid of a clothes hamper that they stumbled on their first clue.

"Nothing here but some clothes and books," he said, glancing inside.

"Books?" said Miss Cornelia dubiously. "I left no books in that hamper."

Bailey picked up one of the cheap paper novels and read its title aloud, with a wry smile.

"Little Rosebud's Lover, Or The Cruel Revenge," by Laura Jean--"

"That's mine!" said Lizzie promptly. "Oh, Miss Neily, I tell you this house is haunted. I left that book in my satchel along with 'Wedded But No Wife' and now--"

"Where's your satchel?" snapped Miss Cornelia, her eyes gleaming.

"Where's my satchel?" mumbled Lizzie, staring about as best she could. "I don't see it. If that wretch has stolen my satchel--!"

"Where did you leave it?"

"Up here. Right in this room. It was a new satchel too. I'll have the law on him, that's what I'll do."

"Isn't that your satchel, Lizzie?" asked Miss Cornelia, indicating a battered bag in a dark corner of shadows above the window.

"Yes'm," she admitted. But she did not dare approach very close to the recovered bag. It might bite her!

"Put it there on the hamper," ordered Miss Cornelia.

"I'm scared to touch it!" moaned Lizzie. "It may have a bomb in it!"

She took up the bag between finger and thumb and, holding it with the care she would have bestowed upon a bottle of nitroglycerin, carried it over to the hamper and set it down. Then she backed away from it, ready to leap for the door at a moment's warning.

Miss Cornelia started for the satchel. Then she remembered. She turned to Bailey.

"You open it," she said graciously. "If the money's there--you're the one who ought to find it;"

Bailey gave her a look of gratitude. Then, smiling at Dale encouragingly, he crossed over to the satchel, Dale at
his heels. Miss Cornelia watched him fumble at the catch of the bag--even Lizzie drew closer. For a moment even
the Unknown was forgotten.

Bailey gave a triumphant cry.
"The money's here!"
"Oh, thank God!" sobbed Dale.

It was an emotional moment. It seemed to have penetrated even through the haze enveloping the injured man in
his chair. Slowly he got up, like a man who has been waiting for his moment, and now that it had come was in no
hurry about it. With equal deliberation he drew the revolver and took a step forward. And at that instant a red glare
appeared outside the open window and overhead could be heard the feet of the searchers, running.
"Fire!" screamed Lizzie, pointing to the window, even as Beresford's voice from the roof rang out in a shout.
"The garage is burning!"

They turned toward the door to escape, but a strange and menacing figure blocked their way.

It was the Unknown--no longer the bewildered stranger who had stumbled in through the living-room door--but
a man with every faculty of mind and body alert and the light of a deadly purpose in his eyes. He covered the group
with Miss Cornelia's revolver.

"This door is locked and the key is in my pocket!" he said in a savage voice as the red light at the window grew
yet more vivid and muffled cries and tramplings from overhead betokened universal confusion and alarm.

CHAPTER TWENTY
"HE IS--THE BAT!"

Lizzie opened her mouth to scream. But for once she did not carry out her purpose.

"Not a sound out of you!" warned the Unknown brutally, almost jabbing the revolver into her ribs. He wheeled
on Bailey.

"Close that satchel," he commanded, "and put it back where you found it!"

Bailey's fist closed. He took a step toward his captor.

"You--" he began in a furious voice. But the steely glint in the eyes of the Unknown was enough to give any man
pause.


"Do what he tells you!" Miss Cornelia insisted, her voice shaking.

A brave man may be willing to fight with odds a hundred to one-- but only a fool will rush on certain death.

Reluctantly, dejectedly, Bailey obeyed--stuffed the money back in the satchel and replaced the latter in its corner of
shadows near the window.

"It's the Bat--it's the Bat!" whispered Lizzie eerily, and, for once her gloomy prophecies seemed to be in a fair
way of justification, for "Blow out that candle!" commanded the Unknown sternly, and, after a moment of hesitation
on Miss Cornelia's part, the room was again plunged in darkness except for the red glow at the window.

This finished Lizzie for the evening. She spoke from a dry throat.

"I'm going to scream!" she sobbed hysterically. "I can't keep it back!"

But at last she had encountered someone who had no patience with her vagaries.

"Put that woman in the mantel-room and shut her up!" ordered the Unknown, the muzzle of his revolver
emphasizing his words with a savage little movement.

Bailey took Lizzie under the arms and started to execute the order. But the sometime colleen from Kerry did not
depart without one Parthian arrow.

"Don't shove," she said in tones of the greatest dignity as she stumbled into the Hidden Room. "I'm damn glad to

The iron doors shut behind her. Bailey watched the Unknown intently. One moment of relaxed vigilance and--
But though the Unknown was unlocking the door with his left hand the revolver in his right hand was as steady
as a rock. He seemed to listen for a moment at the crack of the door.

"Not a sound if you value your lives!" he warned again, he shepherded them away from the direction of the
window with his revolver.

"In a moment or two," he said in a hushed, taut voice, "a man will come into this room, either through the door
or by that window--the man who started the fire to draw you out of this house."

Bailey threw aside all pride in his concern for Dale's safety.

"For God's sake, don't keep these women here!" he pleaded in low, tense tones.

The Unknown seemed to tower above him like a destroying angel.

"Keep them here where we can watch them!" he whispered with fierce impatience. "Don't you understand? There's a KILLER loose!"

And so for a moment they stood there, waiting for they knew not what. So swift had been the transition from joy
to deadly terror, and now to suspense, that only Miss Cornelia's agile brain seemed able to respond. And at first it
did even that very slowly.

"I begin to understand," she said in a low tone. "The man who struck you down and tied you in the garage--the
man who killed Dick Fleming and stabbed that poor wretch in the closet--the man who locked us in downstairs and
removed the money from that safe--the man who started that fire outside--is--"

"Sssh!" warned the Unknown imperatively as a sound from the direction of the window seemed to reach his ears.
He ran quickly back to the corridor door and locked it.

"Stand back out of that light! The ladder!"

Miss Cornelia and Dale shrank back against the mantel. Bailey took up a post beside the window, the Unknown
flattening himself against the wall beside him. There was a breathless pause.

The top of the extension ladder began to tremble. A black bulk stood clearly outlined against the diminishing red
glow--the Bat, masked and sinister, on his last foray!

There was no sound as the killer stepped into the room. He waited for a second that seemed a year--still no
sound. Then he turned cautiously toward the place where he had left the satchel--the beam of his flashlight picked it
out.

In an instant the Unknown and Bailey were upon him. There was a short, ferocious struggle in the darkness--a
gasp of laboring lungs--the thud of fighting bodies clenched in a death grapple.

"Get his gun!" muttered the Unknown hoarsely to Bailey as he tore the Bat's lean hands away from his throat.
"Got it?"

"Yes," gasped Bailey. He jabbed the muzzle against a straining back. The Bat ceased to struggle. Bailey stepped
a little away.

"I've still got you covered!" he said fiercely. The Bat made no sound.

"Hold out your hands, Bat, while I put on the bracelets," commanded the Unknown in tones of terse triumph. He
snapped the steel cuffs on the wrists of the murderous prowler. "Sometimes even the cleverest Bat comes through a
window at night and is caught. Double murder--burglary--and arson! That's a good night's work even for you, Bat!"

He switched his flashlight on the Bat's masked face. As he did so the house lights came on; the electric light
company had at last remembered its duties. All blinked for an instant in the sudden illumination.

"Take off that handkerchief!" barked the Unknown, motioning at the black silk handkerchief that still hid the
face of the Bat from recognition. Bailey stripped it from the haggard, desperate features with a quick movement--
and stood appalled.

A simultaneous gasp went up from Dale and Miss Cornelia.

It was Anderson, the detective! And he was--the Bat!

"It's Mr. Anderson!" stuttered Dale, aghast at the discovery.

The Unknown gloated over his captive.

"I'm Anderson," he said. "This man has been impersonating me. You're a good actor, Bat, for a fellow that's such
a bad actor!" he taunted. "How did you get the dope on this case? Did you tap the wires to headquarters?"

The Bat allowed himself a little sardonic smile.

"I'll tell you that when I--" he began, then, suddenly, made his last bid for freedom. With one swift, desperate
movement, in spite of his handcuffs, he jerked the real Anderson's revolver from him by the barrel, then wheeling
with lightning rapidity on Bailey, brought the butt of Anderson's revolver down on his wrist. Bailey's revolver fell to
the floor with a clatter. The Bat swung toward the door. Again the tables were turned!

"Hands up, everybody!" he ordered, menacing the group with the stolen pistol. "Hands up--you!" as Miss
Cornelia kept her hands at her sides.

It was the greatest moment of Miss Cornelia's life. She smiled sweetly and came toward the Bat as if the pistol
aimed at her heart were as innocuous as a toothbrush.

"Why?" she queried mildly. "I took the bullets out of that revolver two hours ago."

The Bat flung the revolver toward her with a curse. The real Anderson instantly snatched up the gun that Bailey
had dropped and covered the Bat.

"Don't move!" he warned, "or I'll fill you full of lead!" He smiled out of the corner of his mouth at Miss Cornelia
who was primly picking up the revolver that the Bat had flung at her--her own revolver.

"You see--you never know what a woman will do," he continued.

Miss Cornelia smiled. She broke open the revolver, five loaded shells fell from it to the floor. The Bat stared at
her--then stared incredulously at the bullets.

"You see," she said, "I, too, have a little imagination!"

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

QUITE A COLLECTION
An hour or so later in a living-room whose terrors had departed, Miss Cornelia, her niece, and Jack Bailey were gathered before a roaring fire. The local police had come and gone; the bodies of Courtleigh Fleming and his nephew had been removed to the mortuary; Beresford had returned to his home, though under summons as a material witness; the Bat, under heavy guard, had gone off under charge of the detective. As for Doctor Wells, he too was under arrest, and a broken man, though, considering the fact that Courtleigh Fleming had been throughout the prime mover in the conspiracy, he might escape with a comparatively light sentence. In a little while the newspapermen of all the great journals would be at the door—but for a moment the sorely tried group at Cedarcrest enjoyed a temporary respite and they made the best of it while they could.

The fire burned brightly and the lovers, hand in hand, sat before it. But Miss Cornelia, birdlike and brisk, sat upright on a chair near by and relived the greatest triumph of her life while she knitted with automatic precision.

"Knit two, purl two," she would say, and then would wander once more back to the subject in hand. Out behind the flower garden the ruins of the garage and her beloved car were still smoldering; a cool night wind came through the broken windowpane where not so long before the bloody hand of the injured detective had intruded itself. On the door to the hall, still fastened as the Bat had left it, was the pathetic little creature with which the Bat had signed a job—for once, before he had completed it.

But calmly and dispassionately Miss Cornelia worked out the crossword puzzle of the evening and announced her results.

"It is all clear," she said. "Of course the Doctor had the blue-print. And the Bat tried to get it from him. Then when the Doctor had stunned him and locked him in the billiard room, the Bat still had the key and unlocked his own handcuffs. After that he had only to get out of a window and shut us in here."

And again:

"He had probably trailed the real detective all the way from town and attacked him where Mr. Beresford found the watch."

Once, too, she harkened back to the anonymous letters—

"It must have been a blow to the Doctor and Courtleigh Fleming when they found me settled in the house!" She smiled grimly. "And when their letters failed to dislodge me."

But it was the Bat who held her interest; his daring assumption of the detective's identity, his searching of the house ostensibly for their safety but in reality for the treasure, and that one moment of irresolution when he did not shoot the Doctor at the top of the ladder. And thereafter lost his chance—

It somehow weakened her terrified admiration for him, but she had nothing but acclaim for the escape he had made from the Hidden Room itself.

"That took brains," she said. "Cold, hard brains. To dash out of that room and down the stairs, pull off his mask and pick up a candle, and then to come calmly back to the trunk room again and accuse the Doctor—that took real ability. But I dread to think what would have happened when he asked us all to go out and leave him alone with the real Anderson!"

It was after two o'clock when she finally sent the young people off to get some needed sleep but she herself was still bright-eyed and wide-awake.

When Lizzie came at last to coax and scold her into bed, she was sitting happily at the table surrounded by divers small articles which she was handling with an almost childlike zest. A clipping about the Bat from the evening newspaper; a piece of paper on which was a well-defined fingerprint; a revolver and a heap of five shells; a small very dead bat; the anonymous warnings, including the stone in which the last one had been wrapped; a battered and broken watch, somehow left behind; a dried and broken dinner roll; and the box of sedative powders brought by Doctor Wells.

Lizzie came over to the table and surveyed her grimly.

"You see, Lizzie, it's quite a collection. I'm going to take them and—"

But Lizzie bent over the table and picked up the box of powders.

"No, ma'am," she said with extreme finality. "You are not. You are going to take these and go to bed."

And Miss Cornelia did.
CHAPTER I

I TAKE A COUNTRY HOUSE:

This is the story of how a middle-aged spinster lost her mind, deserted her domestic gods in the city, took a furnished house for the summer out of town, and found herself involved in one of those mysterious crimes that keep our newspapers and detective agencies happy and prosperous. For twenty years I had been perfectly comfortable; for twenty years I had had the window-boxes filled in the spring, the carpets lifted, the awnings put up and the furniture covered with brown linen; for as many summers I had said good-by to my friends, and, after watching their perspiring hegira, had settled down to a delicious quiet in town, where the mail comes three times a day, and the water supply does not depend on a tank on the roof.

And then--the madness seized me. When I look back over the months I spent at Sunnyside, I wonder that I survived at all. As it is, I show the wear and tear of my harrowing experiences. I have turned very gray--Liddy reminded me of it, only yesterday, by saying that a little bluing in the rinse-water would make my hair silvery, instead of a yellowish white. I hate to be reminded of unpleasant things and I snapped her off.

"No," I said sharply, "I'm not going to use bluing at my time of life, or starch, either."

Liddy's nerves are gone, she says, since that awful summer, but she has enough left, goodness knows! And when she begins to go around with a lump in her throat, all I have to do is to threaten to return to Sunnyside, and she is frightened into a semblance of cheerfulness,--from which you may judge that the summer there was anything but a success.

The newspaper accounts have been so garbled and incomplete--one of them mentioned me but once, and then only as the tenant at the time the thing happened--that I feel it my due to tell what I know. Mr. Jamieson, the detective, said himself he could never have done without me, although he gave me little enough credit, in print.

I shall have to go back several years--thirteen, to be exact--to start my story. At that time my brother died, leaving me his two children. Halsey was eleven then, and Gertrude was seven. All the responsibilities of maternity were thrust upon me suddenly; to perfect the profession of motherhood requires precisely as many years as the child has lived, like the man who started to carry the calf and ended by walking along with the bull on his shoulders. However, I did the best I could. When Gertrude got past the hair-ribbon age, and Halsey asked for a scarf-pin and put on long trousers--and a wonderful help that was to the darning.--I sent them away to good schools. After that, my responsibility was chiefly postal, with three months every summer in which to replenish their wardrobes, look over their lists of acquaintances, and generally to take my foster-motherhood out of its nine months' retirement in camphor.

I missed the summers with them when, somewhat later, at boarding-school and college, the children spent much of their vacations with friends. Gradually I found that my name signed to a check was even more welcome than when signed to a letter, though I wrote them at stated intervals. But when Halsey had finished his electrical course and Gertrude her boarding-school, and both came home to stay, things were suddenly changed. The winter Gertrude came out was nothing but a succession of sitting up late at night to bring her home from things, taking her to the dressmakers between naps the next day, and discouraging ineligible youths with either more money than brains, or less personal supervision, and as they both got their mother's fortune that winter, my responsibility became purely moral. Halsey bought a car, of course, and I learned how to tie over my bonnet a gray baize veil, and, after a time, never to stop to look at the dogs one has run down. People are apt to be so unpleasant about their dogs.

The additions to my education made me a properly equipped maiden aunt, and by spring I was quite tractable. So when Halsey suggested camping in the Adirondacks and Gertrude wanted Bar Harbor, we compromised on a good country house with links near, within motor distance of town and telephone distance of the doctor. That was how we went to Sunnyside.

We went out to inspect the property, and it seemed to deserve its name. Its cheerful appearance gave no indication whatever of anything out of the ordinary. Only one thing seemed unusual to me: the housekeeper, who had been left in charge, had moved from the house to the gardener's lodge, a few days before. As the lodge was far
enough away from the house, it seemed to me that either fire or thieves could complete their work of destruction undisturbed. The property was an extensive one: the house on the top of a hill, which sloped away in great stretches of green lawn and clipped hedges, to the road; and across the valley, perhaps a couple of miles away, was the Greenwood Club House. Gertrude and Halsey were infatuated.

"Why, it's everything you want," Halsey said "View, air, good water and good roads. As for the house, it's big enough for a hospital, if it has a Queen Anne front and a Mary Anne back," which was ridiculous: it was pure Elizabethan.

Of course we took the place; it was not my idea of comfort, being much too large and sufficiently isolated to make the servant question serious. But I give myself credit for this: whatever has happened since, I never blamed Halsey and Gertrude for taking me there. And another thing: if the series of catastrophes there did nothing else, it taught me one thing—that somehow, somewhere, from perhaps a half-civilized ancestor who wore a sheepskin garment and trailed his food or his prey, I have in me the instinct of the chase. Were I a man I should be a trapper of criminals, trailing them as relentlessly as no doubt my sheepskin ancestor did his wild boar. But being an unmarried woman, with the handicap of my sex, my first acquaintance with crime will probably be my last. Indeed, it came near enough to being my last acquaintance with anything.

The property was owned by Paul Armstrong, the president of the Traders' Bank, who at the time we took the house was in the west with his wife and daughter, and a Doctor Walker, the Armstrong family physician. Halsey knew Louise Armstrong,—had been rather attentive to her the winter before, but as Halsey was always attentive to somebody, I had not thought of it seriously, although she was a charming girl. I knew of Mr. Armstrong only through his connection with the bank, where the children's money was largely invested, and through an ugly story about the son, Arnold Armstrong, who was reported to have forged his father's name, for a considerable amount, to some bank paper. However, the story had had no interest for me.

I cleared Halsey and Gertrude away to a house party, and moved out to Sunnyside the first of May. The roads were bad, but the trees were in leaf, and there were still tulips in the borders around the house. The arbutus was fragrant in the woods under the dead leaves, and on the way from the station, a short mile, while the car stuck in the mud, I found a bank showered with tiny forget-me-nots. The birds—don't ask me what kind; they all look alike to me, unless they have a hall mark of some bright color— the birds were chirping in the hedges, and everything breathed of peace. Liddy, who was born and bred on a brick pavement, got a little bit down-spirited when the country might be, under favorable circumstances. Never after that night did I put my head on my pillow with any assurance how long it would be there; or on my shoulders, for that matter.

On the following morning Liddy and Mrs. Ralston, my own housekeeper, had a difference of opinion, and Mrs. Ralston left on the eleven train. Just after luncheon, Burke, the butler, was taken unexpectedly with a pain in his right side, much worse when I was within hearing distance, and by afternoon he was started cityward. That night the cook's sister had a baby—the cook, seeing indecision in my face, made it twins on second thought— and, to be short, by noon the next day the household staff was down to Liddy and myself. And this in a house with twenty-two rooms and five baths!

Liddy wanted to go back to the city at once, but the milk-boy said that Thomas Johnson, the Armstoms' colored butler, was working as a waiter at the Greenwood Club, and might come back. I have the usual scruples about coercing people's servants away, but few of us have any conscience regarding institutions or corporations—witness the way we beat railroads and street-car companies when we can—so I called up the club, and about eight o'clock Thomas Johnson came to see me. Poor Thomas!

Well, it ended by my engaging Thomas on the spot, at outrageous wages, and with permission to sleep in the gardener's lodge, empty since the house was rented. The old man—he was white-haired and a little stooped, but with an immense idea of his personal dignity—gave me his reasons hesitatingly.

"I ain't sayin' nothin', Mis' Innes," he said, with his hand on the door-knob, "but there's been goin's-on here this las' few months as ain't natchal. 'Tain't one thing an' 'tain't another— it's jest a door squealin' here, an' a winder closin' there, but when doors an' winders gets to cuttin' up capers and there's nobody nigh 'em, it's time Thomas Johnson sleeps somewhar's else."

Liddy, who seemed to be never more than ten feet away from me that night, and was afraid of her shadow in that great barn of a place, screamed a little, and turned a yellow-green. But I am not easily alarmed.

It was entirely in vain; I represented to Thomas that we were alone, and that he would have to stay in the house that night. He was politely firm, but he would come over early the next morning, and if I gave him a key, he would come in time to get some sort of breakfast. I stood on the huge veranda and watched him shuffle along down the shadowy drive, with mingled feelings—irritation at his cowardice and thankfulness at getting him at all. I am not
ashamed to say that I double-locked the hall door when I went in.

"You can lock up the rest of the house and go to bed, Liddy," I said severely. "You give me the creeps standing there. A woman of your age ought to have better sense." It usually braces Liddy to mention her age: she owns to forty—which is absurd. Her mother cooked for my grandfather, and Liddy must be at least as old as I. But that night she refused to brace.

"You're not going to ask me to lock up, Miss Rachel!" she quavered. "Why, there's a dozen French windows in the drawing-room and the billiard-room wing, and every one opens on a porch. And Mary Anne said that last night there was a man standing by the stable when she locked the kitchen door."

"Mary Anne was a fool," I said sternly. "If there had been a man there, she would have had him in the kitchen and been feeding him what was left from dinner, inside of an hour, from force of habit. Now don't be ridiculous. Lock up the house and go to bed. I am going to read."

But Liddy set her lips tight and stood still.

"I'm not going to bed," she said. "I am going to pack up, and to-morrow I am going to leave."

"You'll do nothing of the sort," I snapped. Liddy and I often desire to part company, but never at the same time.

The house was a typical summer residence on an extensive scale. Wherever possible, on the first floor, the architect had done away with partitions, using arches and columns instead. The effect was cool and spacious, but scarcely cozy. As Liddy and I went from one window to another, our voices echoed back at us uncomfortably. There was plenty of light—the electric plant down in the village supplied us—but there were long vistas of polished floor, and mirrors which reflected us from unexpected corners, until I felt some of Liddy's foolishness communicate itself to me.

The house was very long, a rectangle in general form, with the main entrance in the center of the long side. The brick-paved entry opened into a short hall to the right of which, separated only by a row of pillars, was a huge living-room. Beyond that was the drawing-room, and in the end, the billiard-room. Off the billiard-room, in the extreme right wing, was a den, or card-room, with a small hall opening on the east veranda, and from there went up a narrow circular staircase. Halsey had pointed it out with delight.

"Just look, Aunt Rachel," he said with a flourish. "The architect that put up this joint was wise to a few things. Arnold Armstrong and his friends could sit here and play cards all night and stumble up to bed in the early morning, without having the family send in a police call."

Liddy and I got as far as the card-room and turned on all the lights. I tried the small entry door there, which opened on the veranda, and examined the windows. Everything was secure, and Liddy, a little less nervous now, had just pointed out to me the disgracefully dusty condition of the hard-wood floor, when suddenly the lights went out. We waited a moment; I think Liddy was stunned with fright, or she would have screamed. And then I clutched her by the arm and pointed to one of the windows opening on the porch. The sudden change threw the window into relief, an oblong of grayish light, and showed us a figure standing close, peering in. As I looked it darted across the veranda and out of sight in the darkness.

CHAPTER II
A LINK CUFF-BUTTON

Liddy's knees seemed to give away under her. Without a sound she sank down, leaving me staring at the window in petrified amazement. Liddy began to moan under her breath, and in my excitement I reached down and shook her.

"Stop it," I whispered. "It's only a woman--maybe a maid of the Armstrongs'. Get up and help me find the door."

She groaned again. "Very well," I said, "then I'll have to leave you here. I'm going."

She moved at that, and, holding to my sleeve, we felt our way, with numerous collisions, to the billiard-room, and from there to the drawing-room. The lights came on then, and, with the long French windows unshuttered, I had a creepy feeling that each one sheltered a peering face. In fact, in the light of what happened afterward, I am pretty certain we were under surveillance during the entire ghostly evening. We hurried over the rest of the locking-up and got upstairs as quickly as we could. I left the lights all on, and our footsteps echoed cavernously. Liddy had a stiff neck the next morning, from looking back over her shoulder, and she refused to go to bed.

"Let me stay in your dressing-room, Miss Rachel," she begged. "If you don't, I'll sit in the hall outside the door. I'm not going to be murdered with my eyes shut."

"If you're going to be murdered," I retorted, "it won't make any difference whether they are shut or open. But you may stay in the dressing-room, if you will lie on the couch: when you sleep in a chair you snore."

She was too far gone to be indignant, but after a while she came to the door and looked in to where I was composing myself for sleep with Drummond's Spiritual Life.

"That wasn't a woman, Miss Rachel," she said, with her shoes in her hand. "It was a man in a long coat."

"What woman was a man?" I discouraged her without looking up, and she went back to the couch.
It was eleven o'clock when I finally prepared for bed. In spite of my assumption of indifference, I locked the door into the hall, and finding the transom did not catch, I put a chair cautiously before the door—it was not necessary to rouse Liddy—and climbing up put on the ledge of the transom a small dressing-mirror, so that any movement of the frame would send it crashing down. Then, secure in my precautions, I went to bed.

I did not go to sleep at once. Liddy disturbed me just as I was growing drowsy, by coming in and peering under the bed. She was afraid to speak, however, because of her previous snubbing, and went back, stopping in the doorway to sigh dismally.

Somewhere down-stairs a clock with a chime sang away the hours—eleven-thirty, forty-five, twelve. And then the lights went out to stay. The Casanova Electric Company shuts up shop and goes home to bed at midnight: when one has a party, I believe it is customary to fee the company, which will drink hot coffee and keep awake a couple of hours longer. But the lights were gone for good that night. Liddy had gone to sleep, as I knew she would. She was a very unreliable person: always awake and ready to talk when she wasn't wanted and dozing off to sleep when she was. I called her once or twice, the only result being an explosive snore that threatened her very windpipe—then I got up and lighted a bedroom candle.

My bedroom and dressing room were above the big living-room on the first floor. On the second floor a long corridor ran the length of the house, with rooms opening from both sides. In the wings were small corridors crossing the main one—the plan was simplicity itself. And just as I got back into bed, I heard a sound from the east wing, apparently, that made me stop, frozen, with one bedroom slipper half off, and listen. It was a rattling metallic sound, and it reverberated along the empty halls like the crash of doom. It was for all the world as if something heavy, perhaps a piece of steel, had rolled clattering and jangling down the hard-wood stairs leading to the card-room.

In the silence that followed Liddy stirred and snored again. I was exasperated: first she kept me awake by silly alarms, then when she was needed she slept like Joe Jefferson, or Rip,—they are always the same to me. I went in and aroused her, and I give her credit for being wide awake the minute I spoke.

"Get up," I said, "if you don't want to be murdered in your bed."

"Where? How?" she yelled vociferously, and jumped up.

"There's somebody in the house," I said. "Get up. We'll have to get to the telephone."

"Not out in the hall!" she gasped; "Oh, Miss Rachel, not out in the hall!" trying to hold me back. But I am a large woman and Liddy is small. We got to the door, somehow, and Liddy held a brass andiron, which it was all she could do to lift, let alone brain anybody with. I listened, and, hearing nothing, opened the door a little and peered into the hall. It was a black void, full of terrible suggestion, and my candle only emphasized the gloom. Liddy squealed and drew me back again, and as the door slammed, the mirror I had put on the transom came down and hit her on the head. That completed our moralization. It was some time before I could persuade her she had not been attacked from behind by a burglar, and when she found the mirror smashed on the floor she wasn't much better.

"There's going to be a death!" she wailed. "Oh, Miss Rachel, there's going to be a death!"

"There will be," I said grimly, "if you don't keep quiet, Liddy Allen."

And so we sat there until morning, wondering if the candle would last until dawn, and arranging what trains we could take back to town. If we had only stuck to that decision and gone back before it was too late!

The sun came finally, and from my window I watched the trees along the drive take shadowy form, gradually lose their ghastly appearance, become gray and then green. The Greenwood Club showed itself a dab of white against the hill across the valley, and an early robin or two hopped around in the dew. Not until the milk-boy and the sun came, about the same time, did I dare to open the door into the hall and look around. Everything was as we had left it. Trunks were heaped here and there, ready for the trunk-room, and through an end window of stained glass came a streak of red and yellow daylight that was eminently cheerful. The milk-boy was pounding somewhere below, and the day had begun.

Thomas Johnson came ambling up the drive about half-past six, and we could hear him clattering around on the lower floor, opening shutters. I had to take Liddy to her room up-stairs, however,—she was quite sure she would find something uncanny. In fact, when she did not, having now the courage of daylight, she was actually disappointed.

Well, we did not go back to town that day.

The discovery of a small picture fallen from the wall of the drawing-room was quite sufficient to satisfy Liddy that the alarm had been a false one, but I was anything but convinced. Allowing for my nerves and the fact that small noises magnify themselves at night, there was still no possibility that the picture had made the series of sounds I heard. To prove it, however, I dropped it again. It fell with a single muffled crash of its wooden frame, and incidentally ruined itself beyond repair. I justified myself by reflecting that if the Armstrongs chose to leave pictures in unsafe positions, and to rent a house with a family ghost, the destruction of property was their responsibility, not mine.

I warned Liddy not to mention what had happened to anybody, and telephoned to town for servants. Then after a
breakfast which did more credit to Thomas' heart than his head, I went on a short tour of investigation. The sounds had come from the east wing, and not without some qualms I began there. At first I found nothing. Since then I have developed my powers of observation, but at that time I was a novice. The small card-room seemed undisturbed. I looked for footprints, which is, I believe, the conventional thing to do, although my experience has been that as clues both footprints and thumb-marks are more useful in fiction than in fact. But the stairs in that wing offered something.

At the top of the flight had been placed a tall wicker hamper, packed, with linen that had come from town. It stood at the edge of the top step, almost barring passage, and on the step below it was a long fresh scratch. For three steps the scratch was repeated, gradually diminishing, as if some object had fallen, striking each one. Then for four steps nothing. On the fifth step below was a round dent in the hard wood. That was all, and it seemed little enough, except that I was positive the marks had not been there the day before.

It bore out my theory of the sound, which had been for all the world like the bumping of a metallic object down a flight of steps. The four steps had been skipped. I reasoned that an iron bar, for instance, would do something of the sort,--strike two or three steps, end down, then turn over, jumping a few stairs, and landing with a thud.

Iron bars, however, do not fall down-stairs in the middle of the night alone. Coupled with the figure on the veranda the agency by which it climbed might be assumed. But--and here was the thing that puzzled me most--the doors were all fastened that morning, the windows unmolested, and the particular door from the card-room to the veranda had a combination lock of which I held the key, and which had not been tampered with.

I fixed on an attempt at burglary, as the most natural explanation--an attempt frustrated by the falling of the object, whatever it was, that had roused me. Two things I could not understand: how the intruder had escaped with everything locked, and why he had left the small silver, which, in the absence of a butler, had remained down-stairs over night.

Under pretext of learning more about the place, Thomas Johnson led me through the house and the cellars, without result. Everything was in good order and repair; money had been spent lavishly on construction and plumbing. The house was full of conveniences, and I had no reason to repent my bargain, save the fact that, in the nature of things, night must come again. And other nights must follow--and we were a long way from a police-station.

In the afternoon a hack came up from Casanova, with a fresh relay of servants. The driver took them with a flourish to the servants' entrance, and drove around to the front of the house, where I was awaiting him.

"Two dollars," he said in reply to my question. "I don't charge full rates, because, bringin' em up all summer as I do, it pays to make a special price. When they got off the train, I sez, sez I, 'There's another bunch for Sunnyside, cook, parlor maid and all.' Yes'm--six summers, and a new lot never less than once a month. They won't stand for the country and the lonesomeness, I reckon."

But with the presence of the "bunch" of servants my courage revived, and late in the afternoon came a message from Gertrude that she and Halsey would arrive that night at about eleven o'clock, coming in the car from Richfield. Things were looking up; and when Beulah, my cat, a most intelligent animal, found some early catnip on a bank near the house and rolled in it in a feline ecstasy, I decided that getting back to nature was the thing to do.

While I was dressing for dinner, Liddy rapped at the door. She was hardly herself yet, but privately I think she was worrying about the broken mirror and its augury, more than anything else. When she came in she was holding something in her hand, and she laid it on the dressing-table carefully.

"I found it in the linen hamper," she said. "It must be Mr. Halsey's, but it seems queer how it got there."

It was the half of a link cuff-button of unique design, and I looked at it carefully.

"Where was it? In the bottom of the hamper?" I asked.

"On the very top," she replied. "It's a mercy it didn't fall out on the way."

When Liddy had gone I examined the fragment attentively. I had never seen it before, and I was certain it was not Halsey's. It was of Italian workmanship, and consisted of a mother-of-pearl foundation, encrusted with tiny seed-pearls, strung on horsehair to hold them. In the center was a small ruby. The trinket was odd enough, but not intrinsically of great value. Its interest for me lay in this: Liddy had found it lying in the top of the hamper which had blocked the east-wing stairs.

That afternoon the Armstrons' housekeeper, a youngish good-looking woman, applied for Mrs. Ralston's place, and I was glad enough to take her. She looked as though she might be equal to a dozen of Liddy, with her snapping black eyes and heavy jaw. Her name was Anne Watson, and I dined that evening for the first time in three days.

CHAPTER III
MR. JOHN BAILEY APPEARS

I had dinner served in the breakfast-room. Somehow the huge dining-room depressed me, and Thomas, cheerful enough all day, allowed his spirits to go down with the sun. He had a habit of watching the corners of the room, left
shadowy by the candles on the table, and altogether it was not a festive meal.

Dinner over I went into the living-room. I had three hours before the children could possibly arrive, and I got out my knitting. I had brought along two dozen pairs of slipper soles in assorted sizes—I always send knitted slippers to the Old Ladies’ Home at Christmas—and now I sorted over the wools with a grim determination not to think about the night before. But my mind was not on my work: at the end of a half-hour I found I had put a row of blue scallops on Eliza Klinefelter’s lavender slippers, and I put them away.

I got out the cuff-link and went with it to the pantry. Thomas was wiping silver and the air was heavy with tobacco smoke. I sniffed and looked around, but there was no pipe to be seen.

"Thomas," I said, "you have been smoking."

"No, ma’m." He was injured innocence itself. "It's on my coat, ma'm. Over at the club the gentlemen—"

But Thomas did not finish. The pantry was suddenly filled with the odor of singeing cloth. Thomas gave a clutch at his coat, whirled to the sink, filled a tumbler with water and poured it into his right pocket with the celerity of practice.

"Thomas," I said, when he was sheepishly mopping the floor, "smoking is a filthy and injurious habit. If you must smoke, you must; but don't stick a lighted pipe in your pocket again. Your skin's your own: you can blister it if you like. But this house is not mine, and I don't want a conflagration. Did you ever see this cuff-link before?"

No, he never had, he said, but he looked at it oddly.

"I picked it up in the hall," I added indifferently. The old man's eyes were shrewd under his bushy eyebrows.

"There's strange goin's-on here, Mis' Innes," he said, shaking his head. "Somethin's goin' to happen, sure. You ain't took notice that the big clock in the hall is stopped, I reckon?"

"Nonsense," I said. "Clocks have to stop, don't they, if they're not wound?"

"It's wound up, all right, and it stopped at three o'clock last night," he answered solemnly. "More'n that, that there clock ain't stopped for fifteen years, not since Mr. Armstrong's first wife died. And that ain't all,—no MA'M. Last three nights I slep' in this place, after the electrics went out I had a token. My oil lamp was full of oil, but it kep' goin' out, do what I would. Minute I shut my eyes, out that lamp'd go. There ain't no surer token of death. The Bible sez, LET YER LIGHT SHINE! When a hand you can't see puts yer light out, it means death, sure."

The old man's voice was full of conviction. In spite of myself I had a chilly sensation in the small of my back, and I left him mumbling over his dishes. Later on I heard a crash from the pantry, and Liddy reported that Beulah, who is coal black, had darted in front of Thomas just as he picked up a tray of dishes; that the bad omen had been too much for him, and he had dropped the tray.

The chug of the automobile as it climbed the hill was the most welcome sound I had heard for a long time, and with Gertrude and Halsey actually before me, my troubles seemed over for good. Gertrude stood smiling in the hall, with her hat quite over one ear, and her hair in every direction under her pink veil. Gertrude is a very pretty girl, no matter how her hat is, and I was not surprised when Halsey presented a good-looking young man, who bowed at me and looked at Trude—that is the ridiculous nickname Gertrude brought from school.

"I have brought a guest, Aunt Ray," Halsey said. "I want you to adopt him into your affections and your Saturday-to-Monday list. Let me present John Bailey, only you must call him Jack. In twelve hours he'll be calling you 'Aunt': I know him."

We shook hands, and I got a chance to look at Mr. Bailey; he was a tall fellow, perhaps thirty, and he wore a small mustache. I remember wondering why: he seemed to have a good mouth and when he smiled his teeth were above the average. One never knows why certain men cling to a messy upper lip that must get into things, any more than one understands some women building up their hair on wire atrocities. Otherwise, he was very good to look at, stalwart and tanned, with the direct gaze that I like. I am particular about Mr. Bailey, because he was a prominent figure in what happened later.

Gertrude was tired with the trip and went up to bed very soon. I made up my mind to tell them nothing; until the next day, and then to make as light of our excitement as possible. After all, what had I to tell? An inquisitive face peering in at a window; a crash in the night; a scratch or two on the stairs, and half a cuff-button! As for Thomas and his forebodings, it was always my belief that a negro is one part thief, one part pigment, and the rest superstition.

It was Saturday night. The two men went to the billiard-room, and I could hear them talking as I went up-stairs. It seemed that Halsey had stopped at the Greenwood Club for gasolene and found Jack Bailey there, with the Sunday golf crowd. Mr. Bailey had not been hard to persuade—probably Gertrude knew why—and they had carried him off triumphantly. I roused Liddy to get them something to eat—Thomas was beyond reach in the lodge—and paid no attention to her evident terror of the kitchen regions. Then I went to bed. The men were still in the billiard-room when I finally dozed off, and the last thing I remember was the howl of a dog in front of the house. It wailed a crescendo of woe that trailed off hopefully, only to break out afresh from a new point of the compass.

At three o'clock in the morning I was roused by a revolver shot. The sound seemed to come from just outside my
O Aunt Ray! Aunt Ray!" she cried hysterically. "Some one has been killed, killed!"

"Thieves," I said shortly. "Thank goodness, there are some men in the house to-night." I was getting into my slippers and a bath-robe, and Gertrude with shaking hands was lighting a lamp. Then we opened the door into the hall, where, crowded on the upper landing of the stairs, the maids, white-faced and trembling, were peering down, headed by Liddy. I was greeted by a series of low screams and questions, and I tried to quiet them.

Gertrude had dropped on a chair and sat there limp and shivering.

I went at once across the hall to Halsey's room and knocked; then I pushed the door open. It was empty; the bed had not been occupied!

"He must be in Mr. Bailey's room," I said excitedly, and followed by Liddy, we went there. Like Halsey's, it had not been occupied! Gertrude was on her feet now, but she leaned against the door for support.

"They have been killed!" she gasped. Then she caught me by the arm and dragged me toward the stairs. "They may only be hurt, and we must find them," she said, her eyes dilated with excitement.

I don't remember how we got down the stairs: I do remember expecting every moment to be killed. The cook was at the telephone up-stairs, calling the Greenwood Club, and Liddy was behind me, afraid to come and not daring to stay behind. We found the living-room and the drawing-room undisturbed. Somehow I felt that whatever we found would be in the card-room or on the staircase, and nothing but the fear that Halsey was in danger drove me on; with every step my knees seemed to give way under me. Gertrude was ahead and in the card-room she stopped, holding her candle high. Then she pointed silently to the doorway into the hall beyond. Huddled there on the floor, face down, with his arms extended, was a man.

Gertrude ran forward with a gasping sob. "Jack," she cried, "oh, Jack!"

Liddy had run, screaming, and the two of us were there alone. It was Gertrude who turned him over, finally, until we could see his white face, and then she drew a deep breath and dropped limply to her knees. It was the body of a man, a gentleman, in a dinner coat and white waistcoat, stained now with blood—the body of a man I had never seen before.

CHAPTER IV
WHERE IS HALSEY?

Gertrude gazed at the face in a kind of fascination. Then she put out her hands blindly, and I thought she was going to faint.

"He has killed him!" she muttered almost inarticulately; and at that, because my nerves were going, I gave her a good shake.

"What do you mean?" I said frantically. There was a depth of grief and conviction in her tone that was worse than anything she could have said. The shake braced her, anyhow, and she seemed to pull herself together. But not another word would she say: she stood gazing down at that gruesome figure on the floor, while Liddy, ashamed of her flight and afraid to come back alone, drove before her three terrified women-servants into the drawing-room, which was as near as any of them would venture.

Once in the drawing-room, Gertrude collapsed and went from one fainting spell into another. I had all I could do to keep Liddy from drowning her with cold water, and the maids huddled in a corner, as much use as so many sheep. In a short time, although it seemed hours, a car came rushing up, and Anne Watson, who had waited to dress, opened the door. Three men from the Greenwood Club, in all kinds of costumes, hurried in. I recognized a Mr. Jarvis, but the others were strangers.

"What's wrong?" the Jarvis man asked—and we made a strange picture, no doubt. "Nobody hurt, is there?" He was looking at Gertrude.

"Worse than that, Mr. Jarvis," I said. "I think it is murder."

At the word there was a commotion. The cook began to cry, and Mrs. Watson knocked over a chair. The men were visibly impressed.

"Not any member of the family?" Mr. Jarvis asked, when he had got his breath.

"No," I said; and motioning Liddy to look after Gertrude, I led the way with a lamp to the card-room door. One of the men gave an exclamation, and they all hurried across the room. Mr. Jarvis took the lamp from me—I remember that—and then, feeling myself getting dizzy and light-headed, I closed my eyes. When I opened them their brief examination was over, and Mr. Jarvis was trying to put me in a chair.

"You must get up-stairs," he said firmly, "you and Miss Gertrude, too. This has been a terrible shock. In his own home, too."

I stared at him without comprehension. "Who is it?" I asked with difficulty. There was a band drawn tight around my throat.
"It is Arnold Armstrong," he said, looking at me oddly, "and he has been murdered in his father’s house."

After a minute I gathered myself together and Mr. Jarvis helped me into the living-room. Liddy had got Gertrude up-stairs, and the two strange men from the club stayed with the body. The reaction from the shock and strain was tremendous: I was collapsed--and then Mr. Jarvis asked me a question that brought back my wandering faculties.

"Where is Halsey?" he asked.

"Halsey!" Suddenly Gertrude’s stricken face rose before me the empty rooms up-stairs. Where was Halsey?

"He was here, wasn't he?" Mr. Jarvis persisted. "He stopped at the club on his way over."

"I--don't know where he is," I said feebly.

One of the men from the club came in, asked for the telephone, and I could hear him excitedly talking, saying something about coroners and detectives. Mr. Jarvis leaned over to me.

"Why don't you trust me, Miss Innes?" he said. "If I can do anything I will. But tell me the whole thing."

I did, finally, from the beginning, and when I told of Jack Bailey's being in the house that night, he gave a long whistle.

"I wish they were both here," he said when I finished. "Whatever mad prank took them away, it would look better if they were here. Especially--"

"Especially what?"

"Especially since Jack Bailey and Arnold Armstrong were notoriously bad friends. It was Bailey who got Arnold into trouble last spring--something about the bank. And then, too--"

"Go on," I said. "If there is anything more, I ought to know."

"There's nothing more," he said evasively. "There's just one thing we may bank on, Miss Innes. Any court in the country will acquit a man who kills an intruder in his house, at night. If Halsey--"

"Why, you don't think Halsey did it!" I exclaimed. There was a queer feeling of physical nausea coming over me.

"No, no, not at all," he said with forced cheerfulness. "Come, Miss Innes, you're a ghost of yourself and I am going to help you up-stairs and call your maid. This has been too much for you."

Liddy helped me back to bed, and under the impression that I was in danger of freezing to death, put a hot-water bottle over my heart and another at my feet. Then she left me. It was early dawn now, and from voices under my window I surmised that Mr. Jarvis and his companions were searching the grounds. As for me, I lay in bed, with every faculty awake. Where had Halsey gone? How had he gone, and when? Before the murder, no doubt, but who would believe that? If either he or Jack Bailey had heard an intruder in the house and shot him--as they might have been justified in doing--why had they run away? The whole thing was unheard of, outrageous, and--impossible to ignore.

About six o'clock Gertrude came in. She was fully dressed, and I sat up nervously.

"Poor Aunty!" she said. "What a shocking night you have had!" She came over and sat down on the bed, and I saw she looked very tired and worn.

"Is there anything new?" I asked anxiously.

"Nothing. The car is gone, but Warner"--he is the chauffeur-- "Warner is at the lodge and knows nothing about it."

"Well," I said, "if I ever get my hands on Halsey Innes, I shall not let go until I have told him a few things. When we get this cleared up, I am going back to the city to be quiet. One more night like the last two will end me. The peace of the country-- fiddle sticks!"

Whereupon I told Gertrude of the noises the night before, and the figure on the veranda in the east wing. As an afterthought I brought out the pearl cuff-link.

"I have no doubt now," I said, "that it was Arnold Armstrong the night before last, too. He had a key, no doubt, but why he should steal into his father's house I can not imagine. He could have come with my permission, easily enough. Anyhow, whoever it was that night, left this little souvenir."

Gertrude took one look at the cuff-link, and went as white as the pearls in it; she clutched at the foot of the bed, and stood staring. As for me, I was quite as astonished as she was.

"Where did--you--find it?" she asked finally, with a desperate effort at calm. And while I told her she stood looking out of the window with a look I could not fathom on her face. It was a relief when Mrs. Watson tapped at the door and brought me some tea and toast. The cook was in bed, completely demoralized, she reported, and Liddy, brave with the daylight, was looking for footprints around the house. Mrs. Watson herself was a wreck; she was blue-white around the lips, and she had one hand tied up.

She said she had fallen down-stairs in her excitement. It was natural, of course, that the thing would shock her, having been the Armstrongs' housekeeper for several years, and knowing Mr. Arnold well.

Gertrude had slipped out during my talk with Mrs. Watson, and I dressed and went down-stairs. The billiard and
card-rooms were locked until the coroner and the detectives got there, and the men from the club had gone back for
more conventional clothing.

I could hear Thomas in the pantry, alternately wailing for Mr. Arnold, as he called him, and citing the tokens that
had precursed the murder. The house seemed to choke me, and, slipping a shawl around me, I went out on the drive.
At the corner by the east wing I met Liddy. Her skirts were dragged with dew to her knees, and her hair was still in
crimps.

"Go right in and change your clothes," I said sharply. "You're a sight, and at your age!"

She had a golf-stick in her hand, and she said she had found it on the lawn. There was nothing unusual about it,
but it occurred to me that a golf-stick with a metal end might have been the object that had scratched the stairs near
the card-room. I took it from her, and sent her up for dry garments. Her daylight courage and self-importance, and
her shuddering delight in the mystery, irritated me beyond words. After I left her I made a circuit of the building.
Nothing seemed to be disturbed: the house looked as calm and peaceful in the morning sun as it had the day I had
been coerced into taking it. There was nothing to show that inside had been mystery and violence and sudden death.

In one of the tulip beds back of the house an early blackbird was pecking viciously at something that glittered in
the light. I picked my way gingerly over through the dew and stooped down: almost buried in the soft ground was a
revolver! I scraped the earth off it with the tip of my shoe, and, picking it up, slipped it into my pocket. Not until I
had got into my bedroom and double-locked the door did I venture to take it out and examine it. One look was all I
needed. It was Halsey's revolver. I had unpacked it the day before and put it on his shaving-stand, and there could be
no mistake. His name was on a small silver plate on the handle.

I seemed to see a network closing around my boy, innocent as I knew he was. The revolver--I am afraid of them,
but anxiety gave me courage to look through the barrel--the revolver had still two bullets in it. I could only breathe a
prayer of thankfulness that I had found the revolver before any sharp-eyed detective had come around.

I decided to keep what clues I had, the cuff-link, the golf-stick and the revolver, in a secure place until I could
see some reason for displaying them. The cuff-link had been dropped into a little filigree box on my toilet table. I
opened the box and felt around for it. The box was empty--the cuff-link had disappeared!

CHAPTER V
GERTRUDE'S ENGAGEMENT

At ten o'clock the Casanova hack brought up three men. They introduced themselves as the coroner of the county
and two detectives from the city. The coroner led the way at once to the locked wing, and with the aid of one of the
detectives examined the rooms and the body. The other detective, after a short scrutiny of the dead man, busied
himself with the outside of the house. It was only after they had got a fair idea of things as they were that they sent
for me.

I received them in the living-room, and I had made up my mind exactly what to tell. I had taken the house for the
summer, I said, while the Armstongs were in California. In spite of a rumor among the servants about strange
noises--I cited Thomas--nothing had occurred the first two nights. On the third night I believed that some one had
been in the house: I had heard a crashing sound, but being alone with one maid had not investigated. The house had
been locked in the morning and apparently undisturbed.

Then, as clearly as I could, I related how, the night before, a shot had roused us; that my niece and I had
investigated and found a body; that I did not know who the murdered man was until Mr. Jarvis from the club
informed me, and that I knew of no reason why Mr. Arnold Armstrong should steal into his father's house at night. I
should have been glad to allow him entree there at any time.

"Have you reason to believe, Miss Innes," the coroner asked, "that any member of your household, imagining
Mr. Armstrong was a burglar, shot him in self-defense?"

"I have no reason for thinking so," I said quietly.

"Your theory is that Mr. Armstrong was followed here by some enemy, and shot as he entered the house?"

"I don't think I have a theory," I said. "The thing that has puzzled me is why Mr. Armstrong should enter his
father's house two nights in succession, stealing in like a thief, when he needed only to ask entrance to be admitted."

The coroner was a very silent man: he took some notes after this, but I did not know who the murdered man was until Mr. Jarvis from the club
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The coroner was a very silent man: he took some notes after this, but he seemed anxious to make the next train
back to town. He set the inquest for the following Saturday, gave Mr. Jamieson, the younger of the two detectives,
and the more intelligent looking, a few instructions, and, after gravely shaking hands with me and regretting the
unfortunate affair, took his departure, accompanied by the other detective.

I was just beginning to breathe freely when Mr. Jamieson, who had been standing by the window, came over to me.

"The family consists of yourself alone, Miss Innes?"

"My niece is here," I said.

"There is no one but yourself and your niece?"
"My nephew." I had to moisten my lips.
"Oh, a nephew. I should like to see him, if he is here."
"He is not here just now," I said as quietly as I could. "I expect him--at any time."
"No--yes."
"Didn't he have a guest with him? Another man?"
"He brought a friend with him to stay over Sunday, Mr. Bailey."
"Mr. John Bailey, the cashier of the Traders' Bank I believe." And I knew that some one at the Greenwood Club had told. "When did they leave?"
"Very early--I don't know at just what time."
Mr. Jamieson turned suddenly and looked at me.
"Please try to be more explicit," he said. "You say your nephew and Mr. Bailey were in the house last night, and yet you and your niece, with some women-servants, found the body. Where was your nephew?"
I was entirely desperate by that time.
"I do not know," I cried, "but be sure of this: Halsey knows nothing of this thing, and no amount of circumstantial evidence can make an innocent man guilty."
"Sit down," he said, pushing forward a chair. "There are some things I have to tell you, and, in return, please tell me all you know. Believe me, things always come out. In the first place, Mr. Armstrong was shot from above. The bullet was fired at close range, entered below the shoulder and came out, after passing through the heart, well down the back. In other words, I believe the murderer stood on the stairs and fired down. In the second place, I found on the edge of the billiard-table a charred cigar which had burned itself partly out, and a cigarette which had consumed itself to the cork tip. Neither one had been more than lighted, then put down and forgotten. Have you any idea what it was that made your nephew and Mr. Bailey leave their cigars and their game, take out the automobile without calling the chauffeur, and all this at--let me see certainly before three o'clock in the morning?"
"I don't know," I said; "but depend on it, Mr. Jamieson, Halsey will be back himself to explain everything."
"I sincerely hope so," he said. "Miss Innes, has it occurred to you that Mr. Bailey might know something of this?"
Gertrude had come down-stairs and just as he spoke she came in. I saw her stop suddenly, as if she had been struck.
"He does not," she said in a tone that was not her own. "Mr. Bailey and my brother know nothing of this. The murder was committed at three. They left the house at a quarter before three."
"How do you know that?" Mr. Jamieson asked oddly. "Do you KNOW at what time they left?"
"I do," Gertrude answered firmly. "At a quarter before three my brother and Mr. Bailey left the house, by the main entrance. I--was--there."
"Gertrude," I said excitedly, "you are dreaming! Why, at a quarter to three--"
"Listen," she said. "At half-past two the downstairs telephone rang. I had not gone to sleep, and I heard it. Then I heard Halsey answer it, and in a few minutes he came up-stairs and knocked at my door. We--we talked for a minute, then I put on my dressing-gown and slippers, and went down-stairs with him. Mr. Bailey was in the billiard-room. We--we all talked together for perhaps ten minutes. Then it was decided that--that they should both go away--"
"Can't you be more explicit?" Mr. Jamieson asked. "WHY did they go away?"
"I am only telling you what happened, not why it happened," she said evenly. "Halsey went for the car, and instead of bringing it to the house and rousing people, he went by the lower road from the stable. Mr. Bailey was to meet him at the foot of the lawn. Mr. Bailey left--"
"Which way?" Mr. Jamieson asked sharply.
"By the main entrance. He left--it was a quarter to three. I know exactly."
"The clock in the hall is stopped, Miss Innes," said Jamieson. Nothing seemed to escape him.
"He looked at his watch," she replied, and I could see Mr. Jamieson's snap, as if he had made a discovery. As for myself, during the whole recital I had been plunged into the deepest amazement.
"Will you pardon me for a personal question?" The detective was a youngish man, and I thought he was somewhat embarrassed. "What are your--your relations with Mr. Bailey?"
Gertrude hesitated. Then she came over and put her hand lovingly in mine.
"I am engaged to marry him," she said simply.
I had grown so accustomed to surprises that I could only gasp again, and as for Gertrude, the hand that lay in mine was burning with fever.
"And--after that," Mr. Jamieson went on, "you went directly to bed?"
Gertrude hesitated.
"No," she said finally. "I--I am not nervous, and after I had extinguished the light, I remembered something I had left in the billiard-room, and I felt my way back there through the darkness."

"Will you tell me what it was you had forgotten?"
"I can not tell you," she said slowly. "I--I did not leave the billiard-room at once--"
"Why?" The detective's tone was imperative. "This is very important, Miss Innes."

"I was crying," Gertrude said in a low tone. "When the French clock in the drawing-room struck three, I got up, and then--I heard a step on the east porch, just outside the card-room. Some one with a key was working with the latch, and I thought, of course, of Halsey. When we took the house he called that his entrance, and he had carried a key for it ever since. The door opened and I was about to ask what he had forgotten, when there was a flash and a report. Some heavy body dropped, and, half crazed with terror and shock, I ran through the drawing-room and got up-stairs--I scarcely remember how."

She dropped into a chair, and I thought Mr. Jamieson must have finished. But he was not through.
"You certainly clear your brother and Mr. Bailey admirably," he said. "The testimony is invaluable, especially in view of the fact that your brother and Mr. Armstrong had, I believe, quarreled rather seriously some time ago."

"Nonsense," I broke in. "Things are bad enough, Mr. Jamieson, without inventing bad feeling where it doesn't exist. Gertrude, I don't think Halsey knew the--the murdered man, did he?"

But Mr. Jamieson was sure of his ground.
"The quarrel, I believe," he persisted, "was about Mr. Armstrong's conduct to you, Miss Gertrude. He had been paying you unwelcome attentions."

And I had never seen the man!

When she nodded a "yes" I saw the tremendous possibilities involved. If this detective could prove that Gertrude feared and disliked the murdered man, and that Mr. Armstrong had been annoying and possibly pursuing her with hateful attentions, all that, added to Gertrude's confession of her presence in the billiard-room at the time of the crime, looked strange, to say the least. The prominence of the family assured a strenuous effort to find the murderer, and if we had nothing worse to look forward to, we were sure of a distasteful publicity.

Mr. Jamieson shut his note-book with a snap, and thanked us.
"I have an idea," he said, apropos of nothing at all, "that at any rate the ghost is laid here. Whatever the rappings have been--and the colored man says they began when the family went west three months ago--they are likely to stop now."

Which shows how much he knew about it. The ghost was not laid: with the murder of Arnold Armstrong he, or it, only seemed to take on fresh vigor.

Mr. Jamieson left then, and when Gertrude had gone up-stairs, as she did at once, I sat and thought over what I had just heard. Her engagement, once so engrossing a matter, paled now beside the significance of her story. If Halsey and Jack Bailey had left before the crime, how came Halsey's revolver in the tulip bed? What was the mysterious cause of their sudden flight? What had Gertrude left in the billiard-room? What was the significance of the cuff-link, and where was it?

CHAPTER VI
IN THE EAST CORRIDOR

When the detective left he enjoined absolute secrecy on everybody in the household. The Greenwood Club promised the same thing, and as there are no Sunday afternoon papers, the murder was not publicly known until Monday. The coroner himself notified the Armstrong family lawyer, and early in the afternoon he came out. I had not seen Mr. Jamieson since morning, but I knew he had been interrogating the servants. Gertrude was locked in her room with a headache, and I had luncheon alone.

Mr. Harton, the lawyer, was a little, thin man, and he looked as if he did not relish his business that day.
"This is very unfortunate, Miss Innes," he said, after we had shaken hands. "Most unfortunate--and mysterious. With the father and mother in the west, I find everything devolves on me; and, as you can understand, it is an unpleasant duty."

"No doubt," I said absently. "Mr. Harton, I am going to ask you some questions, and I hope you will answer them. I feel that I am entitled to some knowledge, because I and my family are just now in a most ambiguous position."

I don't know whether he understood me or not: he took of his glasses and wiped them.
"I shall be very happy," he said with old-fashioned courtesy.
"Thank you. Mr. Harton, did Mr. Arnold Armstrong know that Sunnyside had been rented?"
"I think--yes, he did. In fact, I myself told him about it."
"And he knew who the tenants were?"
"Yes."

"He had not been living with the family for some years, I believe?"

"No. Unfortunately, there had been trouble between Arnold and his father. For two years he had lived in town."

"Then it would be unlikely that he came here last night to get possession of anything belonging to him?"

"I should think it hardly possible," he admitted.

"To be perfectly frank, Miss Innes, I can not think of any reason whatever for his coming here as he did. He had been staying at the club-house across the valley for the last week, Jarvis tells me, but that only explains how he came here, not why. It is a most unfortunate family."

He shook his head despondently, and I felt that this dried-up little man was the repository of much that he had not told me. I gave up trying to elicit any information from him, and we went together to view the body before it was taken to the city. It had been lifted on to the billiard-table and a sheet thrown over it; otherwise nothing had been touched. A soft hat lay beside it, and the collar of the dinner-coat was still turned up. The handsome, dissipated face of Arnold Armstrong, purged of its ugly lines, was now only pathetic. As we went in Mrs. Watson appeared at the card-room door.

"Come in, Mrs. Watson," the lawyer said. But she shook her head and withdrew: she was the only one in the house who seemed to regret the dead man, and even she seemed rather shocked than sorry.

I went to the door at the foot of the circular staircase and opened it. If I could only have seen Halsey coming at his usual hare-brained clip up the drive, if I could have heard the throb of the motor, I would have felt that my troubles were over.

But there was nothing to be seen. The countryside lay sunny and quiet in its peaceful Sunday afternoon calm, and far down the drive Mr. Jamieson was walking slowly, stooping now and then, as if to examine the road. When I went back, Mr. Harton was furtively wiping his eyes.

"The prodigal has come home, Miss Innes," he said. "How often the sins of the fathers are visited on the children!" Which left me pondering.

Before Mr. Harton left, he told me something of the Armstrong family. Paul Armstrong, the father, had been married twice. Arnold was a son by the first marriage. The second Mrs. Armstrong had been a widow, with a child, a little girl. This child, now perhaps twenty, was Louise Armstrong, having taken her stepfather's name, and was at present in California with the family.

"They will probably return at once," he concluded "sad part of my errand here to-day is to see if you will relinquish your lease here in their favor."

"We would better wait and see if they wish to come," I said. "It seems unlikely, and my town house is being remodeled." At that he let the matter drop, but it came up unpleasantly enough, later.

At six o'clock the body was taken away, and at seven-thirty, after an early dinner, Mr. Harton went. Gertrude had not come down, and there was no news of Halsey. Mr. Jamieson had taken a lodging in the village, and I had not seen him since mid afternoon. It was about nine o'clock, I think, when the bell rang and he was ushered into the living-room.

"Sit down," I said grimly. "Have you found a clue that will incriminate me, Mr. Jamieson?"

He had the grace to look uncomfortable. "No," he said. "If you had killed Mr. Armstrong, you would have left no clues. You would have had too much intelligence."

After that we got along better. He was fishing in his pocket, and after a minute he brought out two scraps of paper. "I have been to the club-house," he said, "and among Mr. Armstrong's effects, I found these. One is curious; the other is puzzling."

The first was a sheet of club note-paper, on which was written, over and over, the name "Halsey B. Innes." It was Halsey's flowing signature to a dot, but it lacked Halsey's ease. The ones toward the bottom of the sheet were much better than the top ones. Mr. Jamieson smiled at my face.

"His old tricks," he said. "That one is merely curious; this one, as I said before, is puzzling."

The second scrap, folded and refolded into a compass so tiny that the writing had been partly obliterated, was part of a letter--the lower half of a sheet, not typed, but written in a cramped hand.

"---by altering the plans for----rooms, may be possible. The best way, in my opinion, would be to----the plan for----in one of the----rooms----chimney."

That was all.

"Well?" I said, looking up. "There is nothing in that, is there? A man ought to be able to change the plan of his house without becoming an object of suspicion."

"There is little in the paper itself," he admitted; "but why should Arnold Armstrong carry that around, unless it meant something? He never built a house, you may be sure of that. If it is this house, it may mean anything, from a secret room--"
"To an extra bath-room," I said scornfully. "Haven't you a thumb-print, too?"

"I have," he said with a smile, "and the print of a foot in a tulip bed, and a number of other things. The oddest part is, Miss Innes, that the thumb-mark is probably yours and the footprint certainly."

His audacity was the only thing that saved me: his amused smile put me on my mettle, and I ripped out a perfectly good scallop before I answered.

"Why did I step into the tulip bed?" I asked with interest.

"You picked up something," he said good-humoredly, "which you are going to tell me about later."

"Am I, indeed?" I was politely curious. "With this remarkable insight of yours, I wish you would tell me where I shall find my four-thousand-dollar motor car."

"I was just coming to that," he said. "You will find it about thirty miles away, at Andrews Station, in a blacksmith shop, where it is being repaired."

I laid down my knitting then and looked at him.

"And Halsey?" I managed to say.

"We are going to exchange information," he said "I am going to tell you that, when you tell me what you picked up in the tulip bed."

We looked steadily at each other: it was not an unfriendly stare; we were only measuring weapons. Then he smiled a little and got up.

"With your permission," he said, "I am going to examine the card-room and the staircase again. You might think over my offer in the meantime."

He went on through the drawing-room, and I listened to his footsteps growing gradually fainter. I dropped my pretense at knitting and, leaning back, I thought over the last forty-eight hours. Here was I, Rachel Innes, spinster, a granddaughter of old John Innes of Revolutionary days, a D. A. R., a Colonial Dame, mixed up with a vulgar and revolting crime, and even attempting to hoodwink the law! Certainly I had left the straight and narrow way.

I was roused by hearing Mr. Jamieson coming rapidly back through the drawing-room. He stopped at the door.

"Miss Innes," he said quickly, "will you come with me and light the east corridor? I have fastened somebody in the small room at the head of the card-room stairs."

I jumped! up at once.

"You mean--the murderer?" I gasped.

"Possibly," he said quietly, as we hurried together up the stairs. "Some one was lurking on the staircase when I went back. I spoke; instead of an answer, whoever it was turned and ran up. I followed--it was dark--but as I turned the corner at the top a figure darted through this door and closed it. The bolt was on my side, and I pushed it forward. It is a closet, I think." We were in the upper hall now. "If you will show me the electric switch, Miss Innes, you would better wait in your own room."

Trembling as I was, I was determined to see that door opened. I hardly knew what I feared, but so many terrible and inexplicable things had happened that suspense was worse than certainty.

"I am perfectly cool," I said, "and I am going to remain here."

The lights flashed up along that end of the corridor, throwing the doors into relief. At the intersection of the small hallway with the larger, the circular staircase wound its way up, as if it had been an afterthought of the architect. And just around the corner, in the small corridor, was the door Mr. Jamieson had indicated. I was still unfamiliar with the house, and I did not remember the door. My heart was thumping wildly in my ears, but I nodded to him to go ahead. I was perhaps eight or ten feet away--and then he threw the bolt back.

"Come out," he said quietly. There was no response. "Come--out," he repeated. Then--I think he had a revolver, but I am not sure--he stepped aside and threw the door open.

From where I stood I could not see beyond the door, but I saw Mr. Jamieson's face change and heard him mutter something, then he bolted down the stairs, three at a time. When my knees had stopped shaking, I moved forward, slowly, nervously, until I had a partial view of what was beyond the door. It seemed at first to be a closet, empty. Then I went close and examined it, to stop with a shudder. Where the floor should have been was black void and darkness, from which came the indescribable, damp smell of the cellars.

Mr. Jamieson had locked somebody in the clothes chute. As I leaned over I fancied I heard a groan--or was it the wind?

CHAPTER VII
A SPRAINED ANKLE

I was panic-stricken. As I ran along the corridor I was confident that the mysterious intruder and probable murderer had been found, and that he lay dead or dying at the foot of the chute. I got down the staircase somehow, and through the kitchen to the basement stairs. Mr. Jamieson had been before me, and the door stood open. Liddy was standing in the middle of the kitchen, holding a frying-pan by the handle as a weapon.
"Don't go down there," she yelled, when she saw me moving toward the basement stairs. "Don't you do it, Miss Rachel. That Jamieson's down there now. There's only trouble comes of hunting ghosts; they lead you into bottomless pits and things like that. Oh, Miss Rachel, don't--" as I tried to get past her.

She was interrupted by Mr. Jamieson's reappearance. He ran up the stairs two at a time, and his face was flushed and furious.

"The whole place is locked," he said angrily. "Where's the laundry key kept?"

"It's kept in the door," Liddy snapped. "That whole end of the cellar is kept locked, so nobody can get at the clothes, and then the key's left in the door? so that unless a thief was as blind as--as some detectives, he could walk right in."

"Liddy," I said sharply, "come down with us and turn on all the lights."

She offered her resignation, as usual, on the spot, but I took her by the arm, and she came along finally. She switched on all the lights and pointed to a door just ahead.

"That's the door," she said sulkily. "The key's in it."

But the key was not in it. Mr. Jamieson shook it, but it was a heavy door, well locked. And then he stooped and began punching around the keyhole with the end of a lead-pencil. When he stood up his face was exultant.

"It's locked on the inside," he said in a low tone. "There is somebody in there."

"Lord have mercy!" gasped Liddy, and turned to run.

"Liddy," I called, "go through the house at once and see who is missing, or if any one is. We'll have to clear this thing at once. Mr. Jamieson, if you will watch here I will go to the lodge and find Warner. Thomas would be of no use. Together you may be able to force the door."

"A good idea," he assented. "But--there are windows, of course, and there is nothing to prevent whoever is in there from getting out that way."

"Then lock the door at the top of the basement stairs," I suggested, "and patrol the house from the outside."

We agreed to this, and I had a feeling that the mystery of Sunnyside was about to be solved. I ran down the steps and along the drive. Just at the corner I ran full tilt into somebody who seemed to be as much alarmed as I was. It was not until I had recoiled a step or two that I recognized Gertrude, and she me.

"Good gracious, Aunt Ray," she exclaimed, "what is the matter?"

"There's somebody locked in the laundry," I panted. "That is-- unless--you didn't see any one crossing the lawn or skulking around the house, did you?"

"I think we have mystery on the brain," Gertrude said wearily. "No, I haven't seen any one, except old Thomas, who looked for all the world as if he had been ransacking the pantry. What have you locked in the laundry?"

"I can't wait to explain," I replied. "I must get Warner from the lodge. If you came out for air, you'd better put on your overshoes." And then I noticed that Gertrude was limping--not much, but sufficiently to make her progress very slow, and seemingly painful.

"You have hurt yourself," I said sharply.

"I fell over the carriage block," she explained. "I thought perhaps I might see Halsey coming home. He--he ought to be here."

I hurried on down the drive. The lodge was some distance from the house, in a grove of trees where the drive met the county road. There were two white stone pillars to mark the entrance, but the iron gates, once closed and tended by the lodge-keeper, now stood permanently open. The day of the motor-car had come; no one had time for closed gates and lodge-keepers. The lodge at Sunnyside was merely a sort of supplementary servants' quarters: it was as convenient in its appointments as the big house and infinitely more cozy.

As I went down the drive, my thoughts were busy. Who would it be that Mr. Jamieson had trapped in the cellar? Would we find a body or some one badly injured? Scarcely either. Whoever had fallen had been able to lock the laundry door on the inside. If the fugitive had come from outside the house, how did he get in? If it was some member of the household, who could it have been? And then--a feeling of horror almost overwhelmed me. Gertrude! Gertrude and her injured ankle! Gertrude found limping slowly up the drive when I had thought she was in bed!

I tried to put the thought away, but it would not go. If Gertrude had been on the circular staircase that night, why had she fled from Mr. Jamieson? The idea, puzzling as it was, seemed borne out by this circumstance. Whoever had taken refuge at the head of the stairs could scarcely have been familiar with the house, or with the location of the chute. The mystery seemed to deepen constantly. What possible connection could there be between Halsey and Gertrude, and the murder of Arnold Armstrong? And yet, every way I turned I seemed to find something that pointed to such a connection.

At the foot of the drive the road described a long, sloping, horseshoe-shaped curve around the lodge. There were lights there, streaming cheerfully out on to the trees, and from an upper room came wavering shadows, as if some one with a lamp was moving around. I had come almost silently in my evening slippers, and I had my second
collision of the evening on the road just above the house. I ran full into a man in a long coat, who was standing in the shadow beside the drive, with his back to me, watching the lighted windows.

"What the hell!" he ejaculated furiously, and turned around. When he saw me, however, he did not wait for any retort on my part. He faded away--this is not slang; he did--he absolutely disappeared in the dusk without my getting more than a glimpse of his face. I had a vague impression of unfamiliar features and of a sort of cap with a visor. Then he was gone.

I went to the lodge and rapped. It required two or three poundings to bring Thomas to the door, and he opened it only an inch or so.

"Where is Warner?" I asked.

"I--I think he's in bed, ma'm."

"Get him up," I said, "and for goodness' sake open the door, Thomas. I'll wait for Warner."

"It's kind o' close in here, ma'm," he said, obeying gingerly, and disclosing a cool and comfortable looking interior. "Perhaps you'd keer to set on the porch an' rest yo' self."

It was so evident that Thomas did not want me inside that I went in.

"Tell Warner he is needed in a hurry," I repeated, and turned into the little sitting-room. I could hear Thomas going up the stairs, could hear him rouse Warner, and the steps of the chauffeur as he hurriedly dressed. But my attention was busy with the room below.

On the center-table, open, was a sealskin traveling bag. It was filled with gold-topped bottles and brushes, and it breathed opulence, luxury, femininity from every inch of surface. How did it get there? I was still asking myself the question when Warner came running down the stairs and into the room. He was completely but somewhat incongruously dressed, and his open, boyish face looked abashed. He was a country boy, absolutely frank and reliable, of fair education and intelligence--one of the small army of American youths who turn a natural aptitude for mechanics into the special field of the automobile, and earn good salaries in a congenial occupation.

"What is it, Miss Innes?" he asked anxiously.

"There is some one locked in the laundry," I replied. "Mr. Jamieson wants you to help him break the lock. Warner, whose bag is this?"

He was in the doorway by this time, and he pretended not to hear.

"Warner," I called, "come back here. Whose bag is this?"

He stopped then, but he did not turn around.

"It's--it belongs to Thomas," he said, and fled up the drive.

To Thomas! A London bag with mirrors and cosmetic jars of which Thomas could not even have guessed the use! However, I put the bag in the back of my mind, which was fast becoming stored with anomalous and apparently irreconcilable facts, and followed Warner to the house.

Liddy had come back to the kitchen: the door to the basement stairs was double-barred, and had a table pushed against it; and beside her on the table was most of the kitchen paraphernalia.

"Did you see if there was any one missing in the house?" I asked, ignoring the array of sauce-pans rolling-pins, and the poker of the range.

"Rosie is missing," Liddy said with unction. She had objected to Rosie, the parlor maid, from the start. "Mrs. Watson went into her room, and found she had gone without her hat. People that trust themselves a dozen miles from the city, in strange houses, with servants they don't know, needn't be surprised if they wake up some morning and find their throats cut."

After which carefully veiled sarcasm Liddy relapsed into gloom. Warner came in then with a handful of small tools, and Mr. Jamieson went with him to the basement. Oddly enough, I was not alarmed. With all my heart I wished for Halsey, but I was not frightened. At the door he was to force, Warner put down his tools and looked at it. Then he turned the handle. Without the slightest difficulty the door opened, revealing the blackness of the drying-room beyond!

Mr. Jamieson gave an exclamation of disgust.

"Gone!" he said. "Confound such careless work! I might have known."

It was true enough. We got the lights on finally and looked all through the three rooms that constituted this wing of the basement. Everything was quiet and empty. An explanation of how the fugitive had escaped injury was found in a heaped-up basket of clothes under the chute. The basket had been overturned, but that was all. Mr. Jamieson examined the windows: one was unlocked, and offered an easy escape. The window or the door? Which way had the fugitive escaped? The door seemed most probable, and I hoped it had been so. I could not have borne, just then, to think that it was my poor Gertrude we had been hounding through the darkness, and yet--I had met Gertrude not far from that very window.

I went up-stairs at last, tired and depressed. Mrs. Watson and Liddy were making tea in the kitchen. In certain
walks of life the tea-pot is the refuge in times of stress, trouble or sickness: they give tea to the dying and they put it in the baby's nursing bottle. Mrs. Watson was fixing a tray to be sent in to me, and when I asked her about Rosie she confirmed her absence.

"She's not here," she said; "but I would not think much of that, Miss Innes. Rosie is a pretty young girl, and perhaps she has a sweetheart. It will be a good thing if she has. The maids stay much better when they have something like that to hold them here."

Gertrude had gone back to her room, and while I was drinking my cup of hot tea, Mr. Jamieson came in.

"We might take up the conversation where we left off an hour and a half ago," he said. "But before we go on, I want to say this: The person who escaped from the laundry was a woman with a foot of moderate size and well arched. She wore nothing but a stocking on her right foot, and, in spite of the unlocked door, she escaped by the window."

And again I thought of Gertrude's sprained ankle. Was it the right or the left?

CHAPTER VIII
THE OTHER HALF OF THE LINE
"Miss Innes," the detective began, "what is your opinion of the figure you saw on the east veranda the night you and your maid were in the house alone?"

"It was a woman," I said positively.
"And yet your maid affirms with equal positiveness that it was a man."
"Nonsense," I broke in. "Liddy had her eyes shut--she always shuts them when she's frightened."
"And you never thought then that the intruder who came later that night might be a woman--the woman, in fact, whom you saw on the veranda?"

"I had reasons for thinking it was a man," I said remembering the pearl cuff-link.
"Now we are getting down to business. WHAT were your reasons for thinking that?"

I hesitated.
"If you have any reason for believing that your midnight guest was Mr. Armstrong, other than his visit here the next night, you ought to tell me, Miss Innes. We can take nothing for granted. If, for instance, the intruder who dropped the bar and scratched the staircase--you see, I know about that--if this visitor was a woman, why should not the same woman have come back the following night, met Mr. Armstrong on the circular staircase, and in alarm shot him?"

"It was a man," I reiterated. And then, because I could think of no other reason for my statement, I told him about the pearl cuff-link. He was intensely interested.

"Will you give me the link," he said, when I finished, "or, at least, let me see it? I consider it a most important clue."

"Won't the description do?"
"Not as well as the original."
"Well, I'm very sorry," I said, as calmly as I could, "I--the thing is lost. It--it must have fallen out of a box on my dressing-table."

Whatever he thought of my explanation, and I knew he doubted it, he made no sign. He asked me to describe the link accurately, and I did so, while he glanced at a list he took from his pocket.

"One set monogram cuff-links," he read, "one set plain pearl links, one set cuff-links, woman's head set with diamonds and emeralds. There is no mention of such a link as you describe, and yet, if your theory is right, Mr. Armstrong must have taken back in his cuffs one complete cuff-link, and a half, perhaps, of the other."

The idea was new to me. If it had not been the murdered man who had entered the house that night, who had it been?

"There are a number of strange things connected with this case," the detective went on. "Miss Gertrude Innes testified that she heard some one fumbling with the lock, that the door opened, and that almost immediately the shot was fired. Now, Miss Innes, here is the strange part of that. Mr. Armstrong had no key with him. There was no key in the lock, or on the floor. In other words, the evidence points absolutely to this: Mr. Armstrong was admitted to the house from within."

"It is impossible," I broke in. "Mr. Jamieson, do you know what your words imply? Do you know that you are practically accusing Gertrude Innes of admitting that man?"

"Not quite that," he said, with his friendly smile. "In fact, Miss Innes, I am quite certain she did not. But as long as I learn only parts of the truth, from both you and her, what can I do? I know you picked up something in the flower bed: you refuse to tell me what it was. I know Miss Gertrude went back to the billiard-room to get something, she refuses to say what. You suspect what happened to the cuff-link, but you won't tell me. So far, all I am sure of is this: I do not believe Arnold Armstrong was the midnight visitor who so alarmed you by dropping--shall we say, a
golf-stick? And I believe that when he did come he was admitted by some one in the house. Who knows—it may have been—Liddy!"

I stirred my tea angrily.

"I have always heard," I said dryly, "that undertakers' assistants are jovial young men. A man's sense of humor seems to be in inverse proportion to the gravity of his profession."

"A man's sense of humor is a barbarous and a cruel thing, Miss Innes," he admitted. "It is to the feminine as the hug of a bear is to the scratch of—well;—anything with claws. Is that you, Thomas? Come in."

Thomas Johnson stood in the doorway. He looked alarmed and apprehensive, and suddenly I remembered the sealskin dressing-bag in the lodge. Thomas came just inside the door and stood with his head drooping, his eyes, under their shaggy gray brows, fixed on Mr. Jamieson.

"Thomas," said the detective, not unkindly, "I sent for you to tell us what you told Sam Bohannon at the club, the day before Mr. Arnold was found here, dead. Let me see. You came here Friday night to see Miss Innes, didn't you? And came to work here Saturday morning?"

For some unexplained reason Thomas looked relieved.

"Yas, sah," he said. "You see it were like this: When Mistah Armstrong and the fam'ly went away, Mis' Watson an' me, we was lef' in charge till the place was rented. Mis' Watson, she've bin here a good while, an' she warn' skeery. So she slep' in the house. I'd bin havin' tokens—I tol' Mis' Innes some of 'em—an' I slep' in the lodge. Then one day Mis' Watson, she came to me an' she sez, sez she, 'Thomas, you'll hev to sleep up in the big house. I'm too nervous to do it any more.' But I jes' reckon to myself that ef it's too skeery fer her, it's too skeery fer me. We had it, then, sho' nuff, and it ended up with Mis' Watson stayin' in the lodge nights an' me lookin' fer work at de club."

"Did Mrs. Watson say that anything had happened to alarm her?"

"No, sah. She was jes' natchally skeered. Well, that was all, far's I know, until the night I come over to see Mis' Innes. I come across the valley, along the path from the club-house, and I goes home that way. Down in the creek bottom I almost run into a man. He wuz standin' with his back to me, an' he was workin' with one of these yere electric light things that fit in yer pocket. He was havin' trouble—one minute it'd flash out, an' the nex' it'd be gone. I hed a view of 'is white dress shirt an' tie, as I passed. I didn't see his face. But I know it warn't Mr. Arnold. It was a taller man than Mr. Arnold. Beside that, Mr. Arnold was playin' cards when I got to the club-house, same's he'd been doin' all day."

"And the next morning you came back along the path," pursued Mr. Jamieson relentlessly.

"The nex' mornin' I come back along the path an' down where I dun see the man night befoh, I picked up this here." The old man held out a tiny object and Mr. Jamieson took it. Then he held it on his extended palm for me to see. It was the other half of the pearl cuff-link!

But Mr. Jamieson was not quite through questioning him.

"And so you showed it to Sam, at the club, and asked him if he knew any one who owned such a link, and Sam said—what?"

"Wal, Sam, he 'lowed he'd seen such a pair of cuff-buttons in a shirt belongin' to Mr. Bailey—Mr. Jack Bailey, sah."

"I'll keep this link, Thomas, for a while," the detective said. "That's all I wanted to know. Good night."

As Thomas shuffled out, Mr. Jamieson watched me sharply.

"You see, Miss Innes," he said, "Mr. Bailey insists on mixing himself with this thing. If Mr. Bailey came here that Friday night expecting to meet Arnold Armstrong, and missed him—if, as I say, he had done this, might he not, seeing him enter the following night, have struck him down, as he had intended before?"

"But the motive?" I gasped.

"There could be motive proved, I think. Arnold Armstrong and John Bailey have been enemies since the latter, as cashier of the Traders' Bank, brought Arnold almost into the clutches of the law. Also, you forget that both men have been paying attention to Miss Gertrude. Bailey's flight looks bad, too."

"And you think Halsey helped him to escape?"

"Undoubtedly. Why, what could it be but flight? Miss Innes, let me reconstruct that evening, as I see it. Bailey and Armstrong had quarreled at the club. I learned this to-day. Your nephew brought Bailey over. Prompted by jealous, insane fury, Armstrong followed, coming across by the path. He entered the billiard-room wing—perhaps rapping, and being admitted by your nephew. Just inside he was shot, by some one on the circular staircase. The shot fired, your nephew and Bailey left the house at once, going toward the automobile house. They left by the lower road, which prevented them being heard, and when you and Miss Gertrude got down-stairs everything was quiet."

"But—Gertrude's story," I stammered.

"Miss Gertrude only brought forward her explanation the following morning. I do not believe it, Miss Innes. It is the story of a loving and ingenious woman."
"And--this thing to-night?"

"May upset my whole view of the case. We must give the benefit of every doubt, after all. We may, for instance, come back to the figure on the porch: if it was a woman you saw that night through the window, we might start with other premises. Or Mr. Innes' explanation may turn us in a new direction. It is possible that he shot Arnold Armstrong as a burglar and then fled, frightened at what he had done. In any case, however, I feel confident that the body was here when he left. Mr. Armstrong left the club ostensibly for a moonlight saunter, about half after eleven o'clock. It was three when the shot was fired."

I leaned back bewildered. It seemed to me that the evening had been full of significant happenings, had I only held the key. Had Gertrude been the fugitive in the clothes chute? Who was the man on the drive near the lodge, and whose gold-mounted dressing-bag had I seen in the lodge sitting-room?

It was late when Mr. Jamieson finally got up to go. I went with him to the door, and together we stood looking out over the valley. Below lay the village of Casanova, with its Old World houses, its blossoming trees and its peace. Above on the hill across the valley were the lights of the Greenwood Club. It was even possible to see the curving row of parallel lights that marked the carriage road. Rumors that I had heard about the club came back--of drinking, of high play, and once, a year ago, of a suicide under those very lights.

Mr. Jamieson left, taking a short cut to the village, and I still stood there. It must have been after eleven, and the monotonous tick of the big clock on the stairs behind me was the only sound.

Then I was conscious that some one was running up the drive. In a minute a woman darted into the area of light made by the open door, and caught me by the arm. It was Rosie--Rosie in a state of collapse from terror, and, not the least important, clutching one of my Coalport plates and a silver spoon.

She stood staring into the darkness behind, still holding the plate. I got her into the house and secured the plate; then I stood and looked down at her where she crouched tremblingly against the doorway.

"Well," I asked, "didn't your young man enjoy his meal?"

She couldn't speak. She looked at the spoon she still held--I wasn't so anxious about it: thank Heaven, it wouldn't chip--and then she stared at me.

"I appreciate your desire to have everything nice for him," I went on, "but the next time, you might take the Limoges china. It's more easily duplicated and less expensive."

"I haven't a young man--not here." She had got her breath now, as I had guessed she would. "I--I have been chased by a thief, Miss Innes."

"Did he chase you out of the house and back again?" I asked.

Then Rosie began to cry--not silently, but noisily, hysterically.

I stopped her by giving her a good shake.

"What in the world is the matter with you?" I snapped. "Has the day of good common sense gone by! Sit up and tell me the whole thing." Rosie sat up then, and sniffled.

"I was coming up the drive--" she began.

"You must start with when you went DOWN the drive, with my dishes and my silver," I interrupted, but, seeing more signs of hysteria, I gave in. "Very well. You were coming up the drive--"

"I had a basket of--of silver and dishes on my arm and I was carrying the plate, because--because I was afraid I'd break it. Part-way up the road a man stepped out of the bushes, and held his arm like this, spread out, so I couldn't get past. He said-- he said--'Not so fast, young lady; I want you to let me see what's in that basket.'"

She got up in her excitement and took hold of my arm.

"It was like this, Miss Innes," she said, "and say you was the man. When he said that, I screamed and ducked under his arm like this. He caught at the basket and I dropped it. I ran as fast as I could, and he came after as far as the trees. Then he stopped. Oh, Miss Innes, it must have been the man that killed that Mr. Armstrong!"

"Don't be foolish," I said. "Whoever killed Mr. Armstrong would put as much space between himself and this house as he could. Go up to bed now; and mind, if I hear of this story being repeated to the other maids, I shall deduct from your wages for every broken dish I find in the drive."

I listened to Rosie as she went up-stairs, running past the shadowy places and slamming her door. Then I sat down and looked at the Coalport plate and the silver spoon. I had brought my own china and silver, and, from all appearances, I would have little enough to take back. But though I might jeer at Rosie as much as I wished, the fact remained that some one had been on the drive that night who had no business there. Although neither had Rosie, for that matter.

I could fancy Liddy's face when she missed the extra pieces of china--she had opposed Rosie from the start. If Liddy once finds a prophecy fulfilled, especially an unpleasant one, she never allows me to forget it. It seemed to me that it was absurd to leave that china dotted along the road for her to spy the next morning; so with a sudden resolution, I opened the door again and stepped out into the darkness. As the door closed behind me I half regretted
my impulse; then I shut my teeth and went on.

I have never been a nervous woman, as I said before. Moreover, a minute or two in the darkness enabled me to see things fairly well. Beulah gave me rather a start by rubbing unexpectedly against my feet; then we two, side by side, went down the drive.

There were no fragments of china, but where the grove began I picked up a silver spoon. So far Rosie's story was borne out: I began to wonder if it were not indiscreet, to say the least, this midnight prowling in a neighborhood with such a deservedly bad reputation. Then I saw something gleaming, which proved to be the handle of a cup, and a step or two farther on I found a V-shaped bit of a plate. But the most surprising thing of all was to find the basket sitting comfortably beside the road, with the rest of the broken crockery piled neatly within, and a handful of small silver, spoon, forks, and the like, on top! I could only stand and stare. Then Rosie's story was true. But where had Rosie carried her basket? And why had the thief, if he were a thief, picked up the broken china out of the road and left it, with his booty?

It was with my nearest approach to a nervous collapse that I heard the familiar throbbing of an automobile engine. As it came closer I recognized the outline of the Dragon Fly, and knew that Halsey had come back.

Strange enough it must have seemed to Halsey, too, to come across me in the middle of the night, with the skirt of my gray silk gown over my shoulders to keep off the dew, holding a red and green basket under one arm and a black cat under the other. What with relief and joy, I began to cry, right there, and very nearly wiped my eyes on Beulah in the excitement.

CHAPTER IX
JUST LIKE A GIRL

"Aunt Ray!" Halsey said from the gloom behind the lamps. "What in the world are you doing here?"

"Taking a walk," I said, trying to be composed. I don't think the answer struck either of us as being ridiculous at the time. "Oh, Halsey, where have you been?"

"Let me take you up to the house." He was in the road, and had Beulah and the basket out of my arms in a moment. I could see the car plainly now, and Warner was at the wheel--Warner in an ulster and a pair of slippers, over Heaven knows what. Jack Bailey was not there. I got in, and we went slowly and painfully up to the house.

We did not talk. What we had to say was too important to commence there, and, besides, it took all kinds of coaxing from both men to get the Dragon Fly up the last grade. Only when we had closed the front door and stood facing each other in the hall, did Halsey say anything. He slipped his strong young arm around my shoulders and turned me so I faced the light.

"Poor Aunt Ray!" he said gently. And I nearly wept again. "I--I must see Gertrude, too; we will have a three-cornered talk."

And then Gertrude herself came down the stairs. She had not been to bed, evidently: she still wore the white negligee she had worn earlier in the evening, and she limped somewhat. During her slow progress down the stairs I had time to notice one thing: Mr. Jamieson had said the woman who escaped from the cellar had worn no shoe on her right foot. Gertrude's right ankle was the one she had sprained!

The meeting between brother and sister was tense, but without tears. Halsey kissed her tenderly, and I noticed evidences of strain and anxiety in both young faces.

"Is everything--right?" she asked.

"Right as can be," with forced cheerfulness.

I lighted the living-room and we went in there. Only a half-hour before I had sat with Mr. Jamieson in that very room, listening while he overtly accused both Gertrude and Halsey of at least a knowledge of the death of Arnold Armstrong. Now Halsey was here to speak for himself: I should learn everything that had puzzled me.

"I saw it in the paper to-night for the first time," he was saying. "When I think of this houseful of women, and a thing like that occurring!"

Gertrude's face was still set and white. "That isn't all, Halsey," she said. "You and--and Jack left almost at the time it happened. The detective here thinks that you--we--know something about it."

"The devil he does!" Halsey's eyes were fairly starting from his head. "I beg your pardon, Aunt Ray, but--the fellow's a lunatic."

"Tell me everything, won't you, Halsey?" I begged. "Tell me where you went that night, or rather morning, and why you went as you did. This has been a terrible forty-eight hours for all of us."

He stood staring at me, and I could see the horror of the situation dawning in his face.

"I can't tell you where I went, Aunt Ray," he said, after a moment. "As to why, you will learn that soon enough. But Gertrude knows that Jack and I left the house before this thing--this horrible murder--occurred."

"Mr. Jamieson does not believe me," Gertrude said drearily. "Halsey, if the worst comes, if they should arrest you, you must--tell."
"I shall tell nothing," he said with a new sternness in his voice. "Aunt Ray, it was necessary for Jack and me to leave that night. I can not tell you why--just yet. As to where we went, if I have to depend on that as an alibi, I shall not tell. The whole thing is an absurdity, a trumped-up charge that can not possibly be serious."

"Has Mr. Bailey gone back to the city," I demanded, "or to the club?"

"Neither," defiantly; "at the present moment I do not know where he is."

"Halsey," I asked gravely, leaning forward, "have you the slightest suspicion who killed Arnold Armstrong? The police think he was admitted from within, and that he was shot down from above, by someone on the circular staircase."

"I know nothing of it," he maintained; but I fancied I caught a sudden glance at Gertrude, a flash of something that died as it came.

As quietly, as calmly as I could, I went over the whole story, from the night Liddy and I had been alone up to the strange experience of Rosie and her pursuer. The basket still stood on the table, a mute witness to this last mystifying occurrence.

"There is something else," I said hesitatingly, at the last. "Halsey, I have never told this even to Gertrude, but the morning after the crime, I found, in a tulip bed, a revolver. It--it was yours, Halsey."

For an appreciable moment Halsey stared at me. Then he turned to Gertrude.

"My revolver, Trude!" he exclaimed. "Why, Jack took my revolver with him, didn't he?"

"Oh, for Heaven's sake don't say that," I implored. "The detective thinks possibly Jack Bailey came back, and--and the thing happened then."

"He didn't come back," Halsey said sternly. "Gertrude, when you brought down a revolver that night for Jack to take with him, what one did you bring? Mine?"

Gertrude was defiant now.

"No. Yours was loaded, and I was afraid of what Jack might do. I gave him one I have had for a year or two. It was empty."

Halsey threw up both hands despairingly.

"If that isn't like a girl!" he said. "Why didn't you do what I asked you to, Gertrude? You send Bailey off with an empty gun, and throw mine in a tulip bed, of all places on earth! Mine was a thirty-eight caliber. The inquest will show, of course, that the bullet that killed Armstrong was a thirty-eight. Then where shall I be?"

"You forget," I broke in, "that I have the revolver, and that no one knows about it."

But Gertrude had risen angrily.

"I can not stand it; it is always with me," she cried. "Halsey, I did not throw your revolver into the tulip bed. I--think--you--did it--yourself!"

They stared at each other across the big library table, with young eyes all at once hard, suspicious. And then Gertrude held out both hands to him appealingly.

"We must not," she said brokenly. "Just now, with so much at stake, it--is shameful. I know you are as ignorant as I am. Make me believe it, Halsey."

Halsey soothed her as best he could, and the breach seemed healed. But long after I went to bed he sat downstairs in the living-room alone, and I knew he was going over the case as he had learned it. Some things were clear to him that were dark to me. He knew, and Gertrude, too, why Jack Bailey and he had gone away that night, as they did. He knew where they had been for the last forty-eight hours, and why Jack Bailey had not returned with him. It seemed to me that without fuller confidence from both the children--they are always children to me--I should never be able to learn anything.

As I was finally getting ready for bed, Halsey came up-stairs and knocked at my door. When I had got into a negligee--I used to say wrapper before Gertrude came back from school--I let him in. He stood in the doorway a moment, and then he went into agonies of silent mirth. I sat down on the side of the bed and waited in severe silence for him to stop, but he only seemed to grow worse.

When he had recovered he took me by the elbow and pulled me in front of the mirror.

"How to be beautiful," he quoted. "Advice to maids and matrons, by Beatrice Fairfax!" And then I saw myself. I had neglected to remove my wrinkle eradicators, and I presume my appearance was odd. I believe that it is a woman's duty to care for her looks, but it is much like telling a necessary falsehood--one must not be found out.

By the time I got them off Halsey was serious again, and I listened to his story.

"Aunt Ray," he began, extinguishing his cigarette on the back of my ivory hair-brush, "I would give a lot to tell you the whole thing. But--I can't, for a day or so, anyhow. But one thing I might have told you a long time ago. If you had known it, you would not have suspected me for a moment of--of having anything to do with the attack on Arnold Armstrong. Goodness knows what I might do to a fellow like that, if there was enough provocation, and I had a gun in my hand--under ordinary circumstances. But--I care a great deal about Louise Armstrong, Aunt Ray. I
hope to marry her some day. Is it likely I would kill her brother?"
"Her stepbrother," I corrected. "No, of course, it isn't likely, or possible. Why didn't you tell me, Halsey?"
"Well, there were two reasons," he said slowly.
"One was that you had a girl already picked out for me--"
"Nonsense," I broke in, and felt myself growing red. I had, indeed, one of the--but no matter.
"And the second reason," he pursued, "was that the Armstongs would have none of me."
I sat bolt upright at that and gasped.
"The Armstongs!" I repeated. "With old Peter Armstrong driving a stage across the mountains while your grandfather was war governor--"
"Well, of course, the war governor's dead, and out of the matrimonial market," Halsey interrupted. "And the present Innes admits himself he isn't good enough for--for Louise."
"Exactly," I said despairingly, "and, of course, you are taken at your own valuation. The Inneses are not always so self-depreciatory."
"Not always, no," he said, looking at me with his boyish smile. "Fortunately, Louise doesn't agree with her family. She's willing to take me, war governor or no, provided her mother consents. She isn't overly-fond of her stepfather, but she adores her mother. And now, can't you see where this thing puts me? Down and out, with all of them."
"But the whole thing is absurd," I argued. "And besides, Gertrude's sworn statement that you left before Arnold Armstrong came would clear you at once."
Halsey got up and began to pace the room, and the air of cheerfulness dropped like a mask.
"She can't swear it," he said finally. "Gertrude's story was true as far as it went, but she didn't tell everything. Arnold Armstrong came here at two-thirty--came into the billiard-room and left in five minutes. He came to bring--something."
"Halsey," I cried, "you MUST tell me the whole truth. Every time I see a way for you to escape you block it yourself with this wall of mystery. What did he bring?"
"A telegram--for Bailey," he said. "It came by special messenger from town, and was--most important. Bailey had started for here, and the messenger had gone back to the city. The steward gave it to Arnold, who had been drinking all day and couldn't sleep, and was going for a stroll in the direction of Sunnyside."
"And he brought it?"
"Yes."
"What was in the telegram?"
"I can tell you--as soon as certain things are made public. It is only a matter of days now," gloomily.
"And Gertrude's story of a telephone message?"
"Poor Trude!" he half whispered. "Poor loyal little girl! Aunt Ray, there was no such message. No doubt your detective already knows that and discredits all Gertrude told him."
"And when she went back, it was to get--the telegram?"
"Probably," Halsey said slowly. "When you get to thinking about it, Aunt Ray, it looks bad for all three of us, doesn't it? And yet--I will take my oath none of us even inadvertently killed that poor devil."
I looked at the closed door into Gertrude's dressing-room, and lowered my voice.
"The same horrible thought keeps recurring to me," I whispered. "Halsey, Gertrude probably had your revolver: she must have examined it, anyhow, that night. After you--and Jack had gone, what if that ruffian came back, and she--and she--"
I couldn't finish. Halsey stood looking at me with shut lips.
"She might have heard him fumbling at the door he had no key, the police say--and thinking it was you, or Jack, she admitted him. When she saw her mistake she ran up the stairs, a step or two, and turning, like an animal at bay, she fired."
Halsey had his hand over my lips before I finished, and in that position we stared each at the other, our stricken glances crossing.
"The revolver--my revolver--thrown into the tulip bed!" he muttered to himself. "Thrown perhaps from an upper window: you say it was buried deep. Her prostration ever since, her--Aunt Ray, you don't think it was Gertrude who fell down the clothes chute?"
I could only nod my head in a hopeless affirmative.
CHAPTER X
THE TRADERS BANK
The morning after Halsey's return was Tuesday. Arnold Armstrong had been found dead at the foot of the circular staircase at three o'clock on Sunday morning. The funeral services were to be held on Tuesday, and the
interment of the body was to be deferred until the Armstrongs arrived from California. No one, I think, was very sorry that Arnold Armstrong was dead, but the manner of his death aroused some sympathy and an enormous amount of curiosity. Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh, a cousin, took charge of the arrangements, and everything, I believe, was as quiet as possible. I gave Thomas Johnson and Mrs. Watson permission to go into town to pay their last respects to the dead man, but for some reason they did not care to go.

Halsey spent part of the day with Mr. Jamieson, but he said nothing of what happened. He looked grave and anxious, and he had a long conversation with Gertrude late in the afternoon.

Tuesday evening found us quiet, with the quiet that precedes an explosion. Gertrude and Halsey were both gloomy and distraught, and as Liddy had already discovered that some of the china was broken--it is impossible to have any secrets from an old servant--I was not in a pleasant humor myself. Warner brought up the afternoon mail and the evening papers at seven--I was curious to know what the papers said of the murder. We had turned away at least a dozen reporters. But I read over the head-line that ran half-way across the top of the Gazette twice before I comprehended it. Halsey had opened the Chronicle and was staring at it fixedly.

"The Traders' Bank closes its doors!" was what I read, and then I put down the paper and looked across the table.

"Did you know of this?" I asked Halsey.

"I expected it. But not so soon," he replied.

"And you?" to Gertrude.

"Jack--told us--something," Gertrude said faintly. "Oh, Halsey, what can he do now?"

"Jack!" I said scornfully. "Your Jack's flight is easy enough to explain now. And you helped him, both of you, to get away! You get that from your mother; it isn't an Innes trait. Do you know that every dollar you have, both of you, is in that bank?"

Gertrude tried to speak, but Halsey stopped her.

"That isn't all, Gertrude," he said quietly; "Jack is--under arrest."

"Under arrest!" Gertrude screamed, and tore the paper out of his hand. She glanced at the heading, then she crumpled the newspaper into a ball and flung it to the floor. While Halsey, looking stricken and white, was trying to smooth it out and read it, Gertrude had dropped her head on the table and was sobbing stormily.

I have the clipping somewhere, but just now I can remember only the essentials.

On the afternoon before, Monday, while the Traders' Bank was in the rush of closing hour, between two and three, Mr. Jacob Trautman, President of the Pearl Brewing Company, came into the bank to lift a loan. As security for the loan he had deposited some three hundred International Steamship Company 5's, in total value three hundred thousand dollars. Mr. Trautman went to the loan clerk and, after certain formalities had been gone through, the loan clerk went to the vault. Mr. Trautman, who was a large and genial German, waited for a time, whistling under his breath. The loan clerk did not come back. After an interval, Mr. Trautman saw the loan clerk emerge from the vault and go to the assistant cashier: the two went hurriedly to the vault. A lapse of another ten minutes, and the assistant cashier came out and approached Mr. Trautman. He was noticeably white and trembling. Mr. Trautman was told that through an oversight the bonds had been misplaced, and was asked to return the following morning, when everything would be made all right.

Mr. Trautman, however, was a shrewd business man, and he did not like the appearance of things. He left the bank apparently satisfied, and within thirty minutes he had called up three different members of the Traders' Board of Directors. At three- thirty there was a hastily convened board meeting, with some stormy scenes, and late in the afternoon a national bank examiner was in possession of the books. The bank had not opened for business on Tuesday.

At twelve-thirty o'clock the Saturday before, as soon as the business of the day was closed, Mr. John Bailey, the cashier of the defunct bank, had taken his hat and departed. During the afternoon he had called up Mr. Aronson, a member of the board, and said he was ill, and might not be at the bank for a day or two. As Bailey was highly thought of, Mr. Aronson merely expressed a regret. From that time until Monday night, when Mr. Bailey had surrendered to the police, little was known of his movements. Some time after one on Saturday he had entered the Western Union office at Cherry and White Streets and had sent two telegrams. He was at the Greenwood Country Club on Saturday night, and appeared unlike himself. It was reported that he would be released under enormous bond, some time that day, Tuesday.

The article closed by saying that while the officers of the bank refused to talk until the examiner had finished his work, it was known that securities aggregating a million and a quarter were missing. Then there was a diatribe on the possibility of such an occurrence; on the folly of a one-man bank, and of a Board of Directors that met only to lunch together and to listen to a brief report from the cashier, and on the poor policy of a government that arranges a three or four-day examination twice a year. The mystery, it insinuated, had not been cleared by the arrest of the cashier. Before now minor officials had been used to cloak the misdeeds of men higher up. Inseparable as the words
"speculation" and "peculation" have grown to be, John Bailey was not known to be in the stock market. His only words, after his surrender, had been "Send for Mr. Armstrong at once." The telegraph message which had finally reached the President of the Traders' Bank, in an interior town in California, had been responded to by a telegram from Doctor Walker, the young physician who was traveling with the Armstrong family, saying that Paul Armstrong was very ill and unable to travel.

That was how things stood that Tuesday evening. The Traders' Bank had suspended payment, and John Bailey was under arrest, charged with wrecking it; Paul Armstrong lay very ill in California, and his only son had been murdered two days before. I sat dazed and bewildered. The children's money was gone: that was bad enough, though I had plenty, if they would let me share. But Gertrude's grief was beyond any power of mine to comfort; the man she had chosen stood accused of a colossal embezzlement—and even worse. For in the instant that I sat there I seemed to see the coils closing around John Bailey as the murderer of Arnold Armstrong.

Gertrude lifted her head at last and stared across the table at Halsey.

"Why did he do it?" she wailed. "Couldn't you stop him, Halsey? It was suicidal to go back!"

Halsey was looking steadily through the windows of the breakfast-room, but it was evident he saw nothing.

"It was the only thing he could do, Trude," he said at last. "Aunt Ray, when I found Jack at the Greenwood Club last Saturday night, he was frantic. I can not talk until Jack tells me I may, but—he is absolutely innocent of all this, believe me. I thought, Trude and I thought, we were helping him, but it was the wrong way. He came back. Isn't that the act of an innocent man?"

"Then why did he leave at all?" I asked, unconvinced. "What innocent man would run away from here at three o'clock in the morning? Doesn't it look rather as though he thought it impossible to escape?"

Gertrude rose angrily. "You are not even just!" she flamed. "You don't know anything about it, and you condemn him!"

"I know that we have all lost a great deal of money," I said. "I shall believe Mr. Bailey innocent the moment he is shown to be. You profess to know the truth, but you can not tell me! What am I to think?"

Halsey leaned over and patted my hand.

"You must take us on faith," he said. "Jack Bailey hasn't a penny that doesn't belong to him; the guilty man will be known in a day or so."

"I shall believe that when it is proved," I said grimly. "In the meantime, I take no one on faith. The Inneses never do."

Gertrude, who had been standing aloof at a window, turned suddenly. "But when the bonds are offered for sale, Halsey, won't the thief be detected at once?"

Halsey turned with a superior smile.

"It wouldn't be done that way," he said. "They would be taken out of the vault by some one who had access to it, and used as collateral for a loan in another bank. It would be possible to realize eighty per cent. of their face value."

"In cash?"

"In cash."

"But the man who did it—he would be known?"

"Yes. I tell you both, as sure as I stand here, I believe that Paul Armstrong looted his own bank. I believe he has a million at least, as the result, and that he will never come back. I'm worse than a pauper now. I can't ask Louise to share nothing a year with me and when I think of this disgrace for her, I'm crazy."

The most ordinary events of life seemed pregnant with possibilities that day, and when Halsey was called to the telephone, I ceased all pretense at eating. When he came back from the telephone his face showed that something had occurred. He waited, however, until Thomas left the dining-room: then he told us.

"Paul Armstrong is dead," he announced gravely. "He died this morning in California. Whatever he did, he is beyond the law now."

Gertrude turned pale.

"And the only man who could have cleared Jack can never do it!" she said despairingly.

"Also," I replied coldly, "Mr. Armstrong is for ever beyond the power of defending himself. When your Jack comes to me, with some two hundred thousand dollars in his hands, which is about what you have lost, I shall believe him innocent."

Halsey threw his cigarette away and turned on me.

"There you go!" he exclaimed. "If he was the thief, he could return the money, of course. If he is innocent, he probably hasn't a tenth of that amount in the world. In his hands! That's like a woman."

Gertrude, who had been pale and despairing during the early part of the conversation, had flushed an indignant red. She got up and drew herself to her slender height, looking down at me with the scorn of the young and positive.

"You are the only mother I ever had," she said tensely. "I have given you all I would have given my mother, had
she lived--my love, my trust. And now, when I need you most, you fail me. I tell you, John Bailey is a good man, an honest man. If you say he is not, you--you--"

"Gertrude," Halsey broke in sharply. She dropped beside the table and, burying her face in her arms broke into a storm of tears.

"I love him--love him," she sobbed, in a surrender that was totally unlike her. "Oh, I never thought it would be like this. I can't bear it. I can't."

Halsey and I stood helpless before the storm. I would have tried to comfort her, but she had put me away, and there was something aloof in her grief, something new and strange. At last, when her sorrow had subsided to the dry shaking sobs of a tired child, without raising her head she put out one groping hand.

"Aunt Ray!" she whispered. In a moment I was on my knees beside her, her arm around my neck, her cheek against my hair.

"Where am I in this?" Halsey said suddenly and tried to put his arms around us both. It was a welcome distraction, and Gertrude was soon herself again. The little storm had cleared the air. Nevertheless, my opinion remained unchanged. There was much to be cleared up before I would consent to any renewal of my acquaintance with John Bailey. And Halsey and Gertrude knew it, knowing me.

CHAPTER XI
HALSEY MAKES A CAPTURE

It was about half-past eight when we left the dining-room and still engrossed with one subject, the failure of the bank and its attendant evils Halsey and I went out into the grounds for a stroll Gertrude followed us shortly. "The light was thickening," to appropriate Shakespeare's description of twilight, and once again the tree-toads and the crickets were making night throb with their tiny life. It was almost oppressively lonely, in spite of its beauty, and I felt a sickening pang of homesickness for my city at night--for the clatter of horses' feet on cemented paving, for the lights, the voices, the sound of children playing. The country after dark oppresses me. The stars, quite eclipsed in the city by the electric lights, here become insistent, assertive. Whether I want to or not, I find myself looking for the few I know by name, and feeling ridiculously new and small by contrast--always an unpleasant sensation.

After Gertrude joined us, we avoided any further mention of the murder. To Halsey, as to me, there was ever present, I am sure, the thought of our conversation of the night before. As we strolled back and forth along the drive, Mr. Jamieson emerged from the shadow of the trees.

"Good evening," he said, managing to include Gertrude in his bow.

Gertrude had never been even ordinarily courteous to him, and she nodded coldly. Halsey, however, was more cordial, although we were all constrained enough. He and Gertrude went on together, leaving the detective to walk with me. As soon as they were out of earshot, he turned to me.

"Do you know, Miss Innes," he said, "the deeper I go into this thing, the more strange it seems to me. I am very sorry for Miss Gertrude. It looks as if Bailey, whom she has tried so hard to save, is worse than a rascal; and after her plucky fight for him, it seems hard."

I looked through the dusk to where Gertrude's light dinner dress gleamed among the trees. She HAD made a plucky fight, poor child. Whatever she might have been driven to do, I could find nothing but a deep sympathy for her. If she had only come to me with the whole truth then!

"Miss Innes," Mr. Jamieson was saying, "in the last three days, have you seen a--any suspicious figures around the grounds? Any--woman?"

"No," I replied. "I have a houseful of maids that will bear watching, one and all. But there has been no strange woman near the house or Liddy would have seen her, you may be sure. She has a telescopic eye."

Mr. Jamieson looked thoughtful.

"It may not amount to anything," he said slowly. "It is difficult to get any perspective on things around here, because every one down in the village is sure he saw the murderer, either before or since the crime. And half of them will stretch a point or two as to facts, to be obliging. But the man who drives the hack down there tells a story that may possibly prove to be important."

"I have heard it, I think. Was it the one the parlor maid brought up yesterday, about a ghost wringing its hands on the roof? Or perhaps it's the one the milk-boy heard: a tramp washing a dirty shirt, presumably bloody, in the creek below the bridge?"

I could see the gleam of Mr. Jamieson's teeth, as he smiled.

"Neither," he said. "But Matthew Geist, which is our friend's name, claims that on Saturday night, at nine-thirty, a veiled lady--"

"I knew it would be a veiled lady," I broke in.

"A veiled lady," he persisted, "who was apparently young and beautiful, engaged his hack and asked to be driven to Sunnyside. Near the gate, however, she made him stop, in spite of his remonstrances, saying she preferred to walk
to the house. She paid him, and he left her there. Now, Miss Innes, you had no such visitor, I believe?"

"None," I said decidedly.

"Geist thought it might be a maid, as you had got a supply that day. But he said her getting out near the gate puzzled him. Anyhow, we have now one veiled lady, who, with the ghostly intruder of Friday night, makes two assets that I hardly know what to do with."

"It is mystifying," I admitted, "although I can think of one possible explanation. The path from the Greenwood Club to the village enters the road near the lodge gate. A woman who wished to reach the Country Club, unperceived, might choose such a method. There are plenty of women there."

I think this gave him something to ponder, for in a short time he said good night and left. But I myself was far from satisfied. I was determined, however, on one thing. If my suspicions—for I had suspicions—were true, I would make my own investigations, and Mr. Jamieson should learn only what was good for him to know.

We went back to the house, and Gertrude, who was more like herself since her talk with Halsey, sat down at the mahogany desk in the living-room to write a letter. Halsey prowled up and down the entire east wing, now in the card-room, now in the billiard-room, and now and then blowing his clouds of tobacco smoke among the pink and gold hangings of the drawing-room. After a little I joined him in the billiard-room, and together we went over the details of the discovery of the body.

The card-room was quite dark. Where we sat, in the billiard-room, only one of the side brackets was lighted, and we spoke in subdued tones, as the hour and the subject seemed to demand. When I spoke of the figure Liddy and I had seen on the porch through the card-room window Friday night, Halsey sauntered into the darkened room, and together we stood there, much as Liddy and I had done that other night.

The window was the same grayish rectangle in the blackness as before. A few feet away in the hall was the spot where the body of Arnold Armstrong had been found. I was a bit nervous, and I put my hand on Halsey's sleeve. Suddenly, from the top of the staircase above us came the sound of a cautious footstep. At first I was not sure, but Halsey's attitude told me he had heard and was listening. The step, slow, measured, infinitely cautious, was nearer now. Halsey tried to loosen my fingers, but I was in a paralysis of fright.

The swish of a body against the curving rail, as if for guidance, was plain enough, and now whoever it was had reached the foot of the staircase and had caught a glimpse of our rigid silhouettes against the billiard-room doorway. Halsey threw me off then and strode forward.

"Who is it?" he called imperiously, and took a half dozen rapid strides toward the foot of the staircase. Then I heard him mutter something; there was the crash of a falling body, the slam of the outer door, and, for an instant, quiet. I screamed, I think. Then I remember turning on the lights and finding Halsey, white with fury, trying to untangle himself from something warm and fleecy. He had cut his forehead a little on the lowest step of the stairs, and he was rather a ghastly sight.

He flung the white object at me, and, jerking open the outer door, raced into the darkness.

Gertrude had come on hearing the noise, and now we stood, staring at each other over--of all things on earth--a white silk and wool blanket, exquisitely fine! It was the most unghostly thing in the world, with its lavender border and its faint scent. Gertrude was the first to speak.

"Somebody--had it?" she asked.

"Yes. Halsey tried to stop whoever it was and fell. Gertrude, that blanket is not mine. I have never seen before."

She held it up and looked at it: then she went to the door on to the veranda and threw it open. Perhaps a hundred feet from the house were two figures, that moved slowly toward us as we looked.

When they came within range of the light, I recognized Halsey, and with him Mrs. Watson, the housekeeper.

CHAPTER XII

ONE MYSTERY FOR ANOTHER

The most commonplace incident takes on a new appearance if the attendant circumstances are unusual. There was no reason on earth why Mrs. Watson should not have carried a blanket down the east wing staircase, if she so desired. But to take a blanket down at eleven o'clock at night, with every precaution as to noise, and, when discovered, to fling it at Halsey and bolt--Halsey's word, and a good one--into the grounds,--this made the incident more than significant.

They moved slowly across the lawn and up the steps. Halsey was talking quietly, and Mrs. Watson was looking down and listening. She was a woman of a certain amount of dignity, most efficient, so far as I could see, although Liddy would have found fault if she dared. But just now Mrs. Watson's face was an enigma. She was defiant, I think, under her mask of submission, and she still showed the effect of nervous shock.

"Mrs. Watson," I said severely, "will you be so good as to explain this rather unusual occurrence?"

"I don't think it so unusual, Miss Innes." Her voice was deep and very clear: just now it was somewhat tremulous. "I was taking a blanket down to Thomas, who is--not well to-night, and I used this staircase, as being
nearer the path to the lodge. When-- Mr. Innes called and then rushed at me, I--I was alarmed, and flung the blanket at him."

Halsey was examining the cut on his forehead in a small mirror on the wall. It was not much of an injury, but it had bled freely, and his appearance was rather terrifying.

"Thomas ill?" he said, over his shoulder. "Why, _I_ thought I saw Thomas out there as you made that cyclonic break out of the door and over the porch."

I could see that under pretense of examining his injury he was watching her through the mirror.

"Is this one of the servants' blankets, Mrs. Watson?" I asked, holding up its luxurious folds to the light.

"Everything else is locked away," she replied. Which was true enough, no doubt. I had rented the house without bed furnishings.

"If Thomas is ill," Halsey said, "some member of the family ought to go down to see him. You needn't bother, Mrs. Watson. I will take the blanket."

She drew herself up quickly, as if in protest, but she found nothing to say. She stood smoothing the folds of her dead black dress, her face as white as chalk above it. Then she seemed to make up her mind.

"Very well, Mr. Innes," she said. "Perhaps you would better go. I have done all I could."

And then she turned and went up the circular staircase, moving slowly and with a certain dignity. Below, the three of us stared at one another across the intervening white blanket.

"Upon my word," Halsey broke out, "this place is a walking nightmare. I have the feeling that we three outsiders who have paid our money for the privilege of staying in this spook-factory, are living on the very top of things. We're on the lid, so to speak. Now and then we get a sight of the things inside, but we are not a part of them."

"Do you suppose," Gertrude asked doubtfully, "that she really meant that blanket for Thomas?"

"Thomas was standing beside that magnolia tree," Halsey replied, "when I ran after Mrs. Watson. It's down to this, Aunt Ray. Rosie's basket and Mrs. Watson's blanket can only mean one thing: there is somebody hiding or being hidden in the lodge. It wouldn't surprise me if we hold the key to the whole situation now. Anyhow, I'm going to the lodge to investigate."

Gertrude wanted to go, too, but she looked so shaken that I insisted she should not. I sent for Liddy to help her to bed, and then Halsey and I started for the lodge. The grass was heavy with dew, and, man-like, Halsey chose the shortest way across the lawn. Half-way, however, he stopped.

"We'd better go by the drive," he said. "This isn't a lawn; it's a field. Where's the gardener these days?"

"There isn't any," I said meekly. "We have been thankful enough, so far, to have our meals prepared and served and the beds aired. The gardener who belongs here is working at the club."

"Remind me to-morrow to send out a man from town," he said. "I know the very fellow."

I record this scrap of conversation, just as I have tried to put down anything and everything that had a bearing on what followed, because the gardener Halsey sent the next day played an important part in the events of the next few weeks--events that culminated, as you know, by stirring the country profoundly. At that time, however, I was busy trying to keep my skirts dry, and paid little or no attention to what seemed then a most trivial remark.

Along the drive I showed Halsey where I had found Rosie's basket with the bits of broken china piled inside. He was rather skeptical.

"Warner probably," he said when I had finished. "Began it as a joke on Rosie, and ended by picking up the broken china out of the road, knowing it would play hob with the tires of the car." Which shows how near one can come to the truth, and yet miss it altogether.

At the lodge everything was quiet. There was a light in the sitting-room down-stairs, and a faint gleam, as if from a shaded lamp, in one of the upper rooms. Halsey stopped and examined the lodge with calculating eyes.

"I don't know, Aunt Ray," he said dubiously; "this is hardly a woman's affair. If there's a scrap of any kind, you hike for the timber." Which was Halsey's solicitous care for me, put into vernacular.

"I shall stay right here," I said, and, crossing the small veranda, now shaded and fragrant with honeysuckle, I hammered the knocker on the door.

Thomas opened the door himself--Thomas, fully dressed and in his customary health. I had the blanket over my arm.

"I brought the blanket, Thomas," I said; "I am sorry you are so ill."

The old man stood staring at me and then at the blanket. His confusion under other circumstances would have been ludicrous.

"What! Not ill?" Halsey said from the step. "Thomas, I'm afraid you've been malingering."

Thomas seemed to have been debating something with himself. Now he stepped out on the porch and closed the door gently behind him.

"I reckon you bettah come in, Mis' Innes," he said, speaking cautiously. "It's got so I dunno what to do, and it's
boun' to come out some time or ruther."

He threw the door open then, and I stepped inside, Halsey close behind. In the sitting-room the old negro turned with quiet dignity to Halsey.

"You bettah sit down, Sah," he said. "It's a place for a woman, Sah."

Things were not turning out the way Halsey expected. He sat down on the center-table, with his hands thrust in his pockets, and watched me as I followed Thomas up the narrow stairs. At the top a woman was standing, and a second glance showed me it was Rosie.

She shrank back a little, but I said nothing. And then Thomas motioned to a partly open door, and I went in.

The lodge boasted three bedrooms up-stairs, all comfortably furnished. In this one, the largest and airiest, a night lamp was burning, and by its light I could make out a plain white metal bed. A girl was asleep there—or in a half stupor, for she muttered something now and then. Rosie had taken her courage in her hands, and coming in had turned up the light. It was only then that I knew. Fever-flushed, ill as she was, I recognized Louise Armstrong.

I stood gazing down at her in a stupor of amazement. Louise here, hiding at the lodge, ill and alone! Rosie came up to the bed and smoothed the white counterpane.

"I am afraid she is worse to-night," she ventured at last. I put my hand on the sick girl's forehead. It was burning with fever, and I turned to where Thomas lingered in the hallway.

"Will you tell me what you mean, Thomas Johnson, by not telling me this before?" I demanded indignantly.

Thomas quailed.

"Mis' Louise wouldn' let me," he said earnestly. "I wanted to. She ought to 'a' had a doctor the night she came, but she wouldn' hear to it. Is she--is she very bad, Mis' Innes?"

"Bad enough," I said coldly. "Send Mr. Innes up."

Halsey came up the stairs slowly, looking rather interested and inclined to be amused. For a moment he could not see anything distinctly in the darkened room; he stopped, glanced at Rosie and at me, and then his eyes fell on the restless head on the pillow.

I think he felt who it was before he really saw her; he crossed the room in a couple of strides and bent over the bed.

"Louise!" he said softly; but she did not reply, and her eyes showed no recognition. Halsey was young, and illness was new to him. He straightened himself slowly, still watching her, and caught my arm.

"She's dying, Aunt Ray!" he said huskily. "Dying! Why, she doesn't know me!"

"Fudge!" I snapped, being apt to grow irritable when my sympathies are aroused. "She's doing nothing of the sort,--and don't pinch my arm. If you want something to do, go and choke Thomas."

But at that moment Louise roused from her stupor to cough, and at the end of the paroxysm, as Rosie laid her back, exhausted, she knew us. That was all Halsey wanted; to him consciousness was recovery. He dropped on his knees beside the bed, and tried to tell her she was all right, and we would bring her around in a hurry, and how beautiful she looked--only to break down utterly and have to stop. And at that I came to my senses, and put him out.

"This instant!" I ordered, as he hesitated. "And send Rosie here."

He did not go far. He sat on the top step of the stairs, only leaving to telephone for a doctor, and getting in everybody's way in his eagerness to fetch and carry. I got him away finally, by sending him to fix up the car as a sort of ambulance, in case the doctor would allow the sick girl to be moved. He sent Gertrude down to the lodge loaded with all manner of impossible things, including an armful of Turkish towels and a box of mustard plasters, and as the two girls had known each other somewhat before, Louise brightened perceptibly when she saw her.

When the doctor from Englewood--the Casanova doctor, Doctor Walker, being away--had started for Sunnyside, and I had got Thomas to stop trying to explain what he did not understand himself, I had a long talk with the old man, and this is what I learned.

On Saturday evening before, about ten o'clock, he had been reading in the sitting-room down-stairs, when some one rapped at the door. The old man was alone, Warner not having arrived, and at first he was uncertain about opening the door. He did so finally, and was amazed at being confronted by Louise Armstrong. Thomas was an old family servant, having been with the present Mrs. Armstrong since she was a child, and he was overwhelmed at seeing Louise. He saw that she was excited and tired, and he drew her into the sitting-room and made her sit down. After a while he went to the house and brought Mrs. Watson, and they talked until late. The old man said Louise was in trouble, and seemed frightened. Mrs. Watson made some tea and took it to the lodge, but Louise made them both promise to keep her presence a secret. She had not known that Sunnyside was rented, and whatever her trouble was, this complicated things. She seemed puzzled. Her stepfather and her mother were still in California--that was all she would say about them. Why she had run away no one could imagine. Mr. Arnold Armstrong was at the Greenwood Club, and at last Thomas, not knowing what else to do, went over there along the path. It was almost midnight. Part-way over he met Armstrong himself and brought him to the lodge. Mrs. Watson had gone to the house for some bed-
linen, it having been arranged that under the circumstances Louise would be better at the lodge until morning. Arnold Armstrong and Louise had a long conference, during which he was heard to storm and become very violent. When he left it was after two. He had gone up to the house--Thomas did not know why--and at three o'clock he was shot at the foot of the circular staircase.

The following morning Louise had been ill. She had asked for Arnold, and was told he had left town. Thomas had not the moral courage to tell her of the crime. She refused a doctor, and shrank morbidly from having her presence known. Mrs. Watson and Thomas had had their hands full, and at last Rosie had been enlisted to help them. She carried necessary provisions--little enough--to the lodge, and helped to keep the secret.

Thomas told me quite frankly that he had been anxious to keep Louise's presence hidden for this reason: they had all seen Arnold Armstrong that night, and he, himself, for one, was known to have had no very friendly feeling for the dead man. As to the reason for Louise's flight from California, or why she had not gone to the Fitzhughs', or to some of her people in town, he had no more information than I had. With the death of her stepfather and the prospect of the immediate return of the family, things had become more and more impossible. I gathered that Thomas was as relieved as I at the turn events had taken. No, she did not know of either of the deaths in the family.

Taken all around, I had only substituted one mystery for another.

If I knew now why Rosie had taken the basket of dishes, I did not know who had spoken to her and followed her along the drive. If I knew that Louise was in the lodge, I did not know why she was there. If I knew that Arnold Armstrong had spent some time in the lodge the night before he was murdered, I was no nearer the solution of the crime. Who was the midnight intruder who had so alarmed Liddy and myself? Who had fallen down the clothes chute? Was Gertrude's lover a villain or a victim? Time was to answer all these things.

CHAPTER XIII
LOUISE

The doctor from Englewood came very soon, and I went up to see the sick girl with him. Halsey had gone to supervise the fitting of the car with blankets and pillows, and Gertrude was opening and airing Louise's own rooms at the house. Her private sitting-room, bedroom and dressing-room were as they had been when we came. They occupied the end of the east wing, beyond the circular staircase, and we had not even opened them.

The girl herself was too ill to notice what was being done. When, with the help of the doctor, who was a fatherly man with a family of girls at home, and Gertrude was opening and airing Louise's own rooms at the house. Her private sitting-room, bedroom and dressing-room were as they had been when we came. They occupied the end of the east wing, beyond the circular staircase, and we had not even opened them.

The girl herself was too ill to notice what was being done. When, with the help of the doctor, who was a fatherly man with a family of girls at home, we got her to the house and up the stairs into bed, she dropped into a feverish sleep, which lasted until morning. Doctor Stewart--that was the Englewood doctor--stayed almost all night, giving the medicine himself, and watching her closely. Afterward he told me that she had had a narrow escape from pneumonia, and that the cerebral symptoms had been rather alarming. I said I was glad it wasn't an "itis" of some kind, anyhow, and he smiled solemnly.

He left after breakfast, saying that he thought the worst of the danger was over, and that she must be kept very quiet.

"The shock of two deaths, I suppose, has done this," he remarked, picking up his case. "It has been very deplorable."

I hastened to set him right.

"She does not know of either, Doctor," I said. "Please do not mention them to her."

He looked as surprised as a medical man ever does.

"I do not know the family," he said, preparing to get into his top buggy. "Young Walker, down in Casanova, has been attending them. I understand he is going to marry this young lady."

"You have been misinformed," I said stiffly. "Miss Armstrong is going to marry my nephew."

The doctor smiled as he picked up the reins.

"Young ladies are changeable these days," he said. "We thought the wedding was to occur soon. Well, I will stop in this afternoon to see how my patient is getting along."

He drove away then, and I stood looking after him. He was a doctor of the old school, of the class of family practitioner that is fast dying out; a loyal and honorable gentleman who was at once physician and confidential adviser to his patients. When I was a girl we called in the doctor alike when we had measles, or when mother's sister died in the far West. He cut out redundant tonsils and brought the babies with the same air of inspiring self-confidence. Nowadays it requires a different specialist for each of these occurrences. When the babies cried, old Doctor Wainwright gave them peppermint and dropped warm sweet oil in their ears with sublime faith that if it was not colic it was earache. When, at the end of a year, father met him driving in his high side-bar buggy with the white mare ambling along, and asked for a bill, the doctor used to go home, estimate what his services were worth for that period, divide it in half--I don't think he kept any books--and send father a statement, in a cramped hand, on a sheet of ruled white paper. He was an honored guest at all the weddings, christenings, and funerals--yes, funerals--for every one knew he had done his best, and there was no gainsaying the ways of Providence.
Ah, well, Doctor Wainwright is gone, and I am an elderly woman with an increasing tendency to live in the past. The contrast between my old doctor at home and the Casanova doctor, Frank Walker, always rouses me to wrath and digression.

Some time about noon of that day, Wednesday, Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh telephoned me. I have the barest acquaintance with her--she managed to be put on the governing board of the Old Ladies' Home and ruins their digestions by sending them ice-cream and cake on every holiday. Beyond that, and her reputation at bridge, which is insufferably bad--she is the worst player at the bridge club--I know little of her. It was she who had taken charge of Arnold Armstrong's funeral, however, and I went at once to the telephone.

"Yes," I said, "this is Miss Innes."

"Miss Innes," she said volubly, "I have just received a very strange telegram from my cousin, Mrs. Armstrong. Her husband died yesterday, in California and--wait, I will read you the message."

I knew what was coming, and I made up my mind at once. If Louise Armstrong had a good and sufficient reason for leaving her people and coming home, a reason, moreover, that kept her from going at once to Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh, and that brought her to the lodge at Sunnyside instead, it was not my intention to betray her. Louise herself must notify her people. I do not justify myself now, but remember, I was in a peculiar position toward the Armstrong family. I was connected most unpleasantly with a cold-blooded crime, and my niece and nephew were practically beggared, either directly or indirectly, through the head of the family.

Mrs. Fitzhugh had found the message.

"Paul died yesterday. Heart disease," she read. "Wire at once if Louise is with you. You see, Miss Innes, Louise must have started east, and Fanny is alarmed about her."

"Yes," I said.

"Louise is not here," Mrs. Fitzhugh went on, "and none of her friends--the few who are still in town--has seen her. I called you because Sunnyside was not rented when she went away, and Louise might have, gone there."

"I am sorry, Mrs. Fitzhugh, but I cannot help you," I said, and was immediately filled with compunction. Suppose Louise grew worse? Who was I to play Providence in this case? The anxious mother certainly had a right to know that her daughter was in good hands. So I broke in on Mrs. Fitzhugh's voluble excuses for disturbing me.

"Mrs. Fitzhugh," I said. "I was going to let you think I knew nothing about Louise Armstrong, but I have changed my mind. If Louise Armstrong had a good and sufficient reason to leave her people and come east alone! It was not a new idea, but why had she done it? It occurred to me that Doctor Walker might be concerned in it, might possibly have bothered her with unwelcome attentions; but it seemed to me that Louise was hardly a girl to take refuge in flight under such circumstances. She had always been high-spirited, with the well-poised head and buoyant step of the outdoors girl. It must have been much more in keeping with Louise's character, as I knew it, to resent vigorously any unwelcome attentions from Doctor Walker. It was the suitor whom I should have expected to see in headlong flight, not the lady in the case.

The puzzle was no clearer at the end of the half-hour. I picked up the morning papers, which were still full of the looting of the Traders' Bank, the interest at fever height again, on account of Paul Armstrong's death. The bank examiners were working on the books, and said nothing for publication: John Bailey had been released on bond. The body of Paul Armstrong would arrive Sunday and would be buried from the Armstrong town house. There were rumors that the dead man's estate had been a comparatively small one. The last paragraph was the important one.

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"Mrs. Fitzhugh," I said. "I was going to let you think I knew nothing about Louise Armstrong, but I have changed my mind. Louise is here, with me." There was a clatter of ejaculations at the other end of the wire. "She is ill, and not able to be moved. Moreover, she is unable to see any one. I wish you would wire her mother that she is with me, and tell her not to worry. No, I do not know why she came east."

"But my dear Miss Innes!" Mrs. Fitzhugh began. I cut in ruthlessly.

"I will send for you as soon as she can see you," I said. "No, she is not in a critical state now, but the doctor says she must have absolute quiet."

When I had hung up the receiver, I sat down to think. So Louise had fled from her people in California, and had come east alone! It was not a new idea, but why had she done it? It occurred to me that Doctor Walker might be concerned in it, might possibly have bothered her with unwelcome attentions; but it seemed to me that Louise was hardly a girl to take refuge in flight under such circumstances. She had always been high-spirited, with the well-poised head and buoyant step of the outdoors girl. It must have been much more in keeping with Louise's character, as I knew it, to resent vigorously any unwelcome attentions from Doctor Walker. It was the suitor whom I should have expected to see in headlong flight, not the lady in the case.

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Walter P. Broadhurst, of the Marine Bank, had produced two hundred American Traction bonds, which had been placed as security with the Marine Bank for a loan of one hundred and sixty thousand dollars, made to Paul Armstrong, just before his California trip. The bonds were a part of the missing traction bonds from the Traders' Bank! While this involved the late president of the wrecked bank, to my mind it by no means cleared its cashier.

The gardener mentioned by Halsey came out about two o'clock in the afternoon, and walked up from the station. I was favorably impressed by him. His references were good--he had been employed by the Brays' until they went to Europe, and he looked young and vigorous. He asked for one assistant, and I was glad enough to get off so easily. He was a pleasant-faced young fellow, with black hair and blue eyes, and his name was Alexander Graham. I have been particular about Alex, because, as I said before, he played an important part later.

That afternoon I had a new insight into the character of the dead banker. I had my first conversation with Louise. She sent for me, and against my better judgment I went. There were so many things she could not be told, in her
weakened condition, that I dreaded the interview. It was much easier than I expected, however, because she asked no questions.

Gertrude had gone to bed, having been up almost all night, and Halsey was absent on one of those mysterious absences of his that grew more and more frequent as time went on, until it culminated in the event of the night of June the tenth. Liddy was in attendance in the sick-room. There being little or nothing to do, she seemed to spend her time smoothing the wrinkles from the counterpane. Louise lay under a field of virgin white, folded back at an angle of geometrical exactness, and necessitating a readjustment every time the sick girl turned.

Liddy heard my approach and came out to meet me. She seemed to be in a perpetual state of goose-flesh, and she had got in the habit of looking past me when she talked, as if she saw things. It had the effect of making me look over my shoulder to see what she was staring at, and was intensely irritating.

"She's awake," Liddy said, looking uneasily down the circular staircase, which was beside me. "She was talkin' in her sleep something awful--about dead men and coffins."

"Liddy," I said sternly, "did you breathe a word about everything not being right here?"

Liddy's gaze had wandered to the door of the chute, now bolted securely.

"Not a word," she said, "beyond asking her a question or two, which there was no harm in. She says there never was a ghost known here."

I glared at her, speechless, and closing the door into Louise's boudoir, to Liddy's great disappointment, I went on to the bedroom beyond.

Whatever Paul Armstrong had been, he had been lavish with his stepdaughter. Gertrude's rooms at home were always beautiful apartments, but the three rooms in the east wing at Sunnyside, set apart for the daughter of the house, were much more splendid.

From the walls to the rugs on the floor, from the furniture to the appointments of the bath, with its pool sunk in the floor instead of the customary unlovely tub, everything was luxurious. In the bedroom Louise was watching me. It was easy to see that she was much improved; the flush was going, and the peculiar gasping breathing of the night before was now a comfortable and easy respiration.

She held out her hand and I took it between both of mine.

"What can I say to you, Miss Innes?" she said slowly. "To have come like this--"

I thought she was going to break down, but she did not.

"You are not to think of anything but of getting well," I said, patting her hand. "When you are better, I am going to scold you for not coming here at once. This is your home, my dear, and of all people in the world, Halsey's old aunt ought to make you welcome."

She smiled a little, sadly, I thought.

"I ought not to see Halsey," she said. "Miss Innes, there are a great many things you will never understand, I am afraid. I am an impostor on your sympathy, because I--I stay here and let you lavish care on me, and all the time I know you are going to despise me."

"Nonsense!" I said briskly. "Why, what would Halsey do to me if I even ventured such a thing? He is so big and masterful that if I dared to be anything but rapturous over you, he would throw me out of a window. Indeed, he would be quite capable of it."

She seemed scarcely to hear my facetious tone. She had eloquent brown eyes--the Inneses are fair, and are prone to a grayish-green optic that is better for use than appearance--and they seemed now to be clouded with trouble.

"Poor Halsey!" she said softly. "Miss Innes, I can not marry him, and I am afraid to tell him. I am a coward--a coward!"

I sat beside the bed and stared at her. She was too ill to argue with, and, besides, sick people take queer fancies.

"We will talk about that when you are stronger," I said gently.

"But there are some things I must tell you," she insisted. "You must wonder how I came here, and why I stayed hidden at the lodge. Dear old Thomas has been almost crazy, Miss Innes. I did not know that Sunnyside was rented. I knew my mother wished to rent it, without telling my--stepfather, but the news must have reached her after I left. When I started east, I had only one idea--to be alone with my thoughts for a time, to bury myself here. Then, I--must have taken a cold on the train."

"You came east in clothing suitable for California," I said, "and, like all young girls nowadays, I don't suppose you wear flannels." But she was not listening.

"Miss Innes," she said, "has my stepbrother Arnold gone away?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, startled. But Louise was literal.

"He didn't come back that night," she said, "and it was so important that I should see him."

"I believe he has gone away," I replied uncertainly. "Isn't it something that we could attend to instead?"

But she shook her head. "I must do it myself," she said dully. "My mother must have rented Sunnyside without
telling my stepfather, and--Miss Innes, did you ever hear of any one being wretchedly poor in the midst of luxury?

"Did you ever long, and long, for money--money to use without question, money that no one would take you to task about? My mother and I have been surrounded for years with every indulgence everything that would make a display. But we have never had any money, Miss Innes; that must have been why mother rented this house. My stepfather pays out bills. It's the most maddening, humiliating existence in the world. I would love honest poverty better."

"Never mind," I said; "when you and Halsey are married you can be as honest as you like, and you will certainly be poor."

Halsey came to the door at that moment and I could hear him coaxing Liddy for admission to the sick room.

"Shall I bring him in?" I asked Louise, uncertain what to do. The girl seemed to shrink back among her pillows at the sound of his voice. I was vaguely irritated with her; there are few young fellows like Halsey--straightforward, honest, and willing to sacrifice everything for the one woman. I knew one once, more than thirty years ago, who was like that: he died a long time ago. And sometimes I take out his picture, with its cane and its queer silk hat, and look at it. But of late years it has grown too painful: he is always a boy--and I am an old woman. I would not bring him back if I could.

Perhaps it was some such memory that made me call out sharply.

"Come in, Halsey." And then I took my sewing and went into the boudoir beyond, to play propriety. I did not try to hear what they said, but every word came through the open door with curious distinctness. Halsey had evidently gone over to the bed and I suppose he kissed her. There was silence for a moment, as if words were superfluous things.

"I have been almost wild, sweetheart,"--Halsey's voice. "Why didn't you trust me, and send for me before?"

"It was because I couldn't trust myself," she said in a low tone.

"I am too weak to struggle to-day; oh, Halsey, how I have wanted to see you!"

There was something I did not hear, then Halsey again.

"We could go away," he was saying. "What does it matter about any one in the world but just the two of us? To be always together, like this, hand in hand; Louise--don't tell me it isn't going to be. I won't believe you."

"You don't know; you don't know," Louise repeated dully. "Halsey, I care--you know that--but--not enough to marry you."

"That is not true, Louise," he said sternly. "You can not look at me with your honest eyes and say that."

"I can not marry you," she repeated miserably. "It's bad enough, isn't it? Don't make it worse. Some day, before long, you will be glad."

"Then it is because you have never loved me." There were depths of hurt pride in his voice. "You saw how much I loved you, and you let me think you cared--for a while. No--that isn't like you, Louise. There is something you haven't told me. Is it--because there is some one else?"

"Yes," almost inaudibly.

"Louise! Oh, I don't believe it."

"It is true," she said sadly. "Halsey, you must not try to see me again. As soon as I can, I am going away from here--where you are all so much kinder than I deserve. And whatever you hear about me, try to think as well of me as you can. I am going to marry--another man. How you must hate me--hate me!"

I could hear Halsey cross the room to the window. Then, after a pause, he went back to her again. I could hardly sit still; I wanted to go in and give her a good shaking.

"Then it's all over," he was saying with a long breath. "The plans we made together, the hopes, the--all of it--over! Well, I'll not be a baby, and I'll give you up the minute you say 'I don't love you and I do love--some one else!'

"I can not say that," she breathed, "but, very soon, I shall marry--the other man."

I could hear Halsey's low triumphant laugh.

"I defy him," he said. "Sweetheart, as long as you care for me, I am not afraid."

The wind slammed the door between the two rooms just then, and I could hear nothing more, although I moved my chair quite close. After a discreet interval, I went into the other room, and found Louise alone. She was staring with sad eyes at the cherub painted on the ceiling over the bed, and because she looked tired I did not disturb her.

CHAPTER XIV

AN EGG-NOG AND A TELEGRAM

We had discovered Louise at the lodge Tuesday night. It was Wednesday I had my interview with her. Thursday and Friday were uneventful, save as they marked improvement in our patient. Gertrude spent almost all the time with her, and the two had grown to be great friends. But certain things hung over me constantly; the coroner's inquest on the death of Arnold Armstrong, to be held Saturday, and the arrival of Mrs. Armstrong and young Doctor
Walker, bringing the body of the dead president of the Traders' Bank. We had not told Louise of either death.

Then, too, I was anxious about the children. With their mother's inheritance swept away in the wreck of the bank, and with their love affairs in a disastrous condition, things could scarcely be worse. Added to that, the cook and Liddy had a flare-up over the proper way to make beef-tea for Louise, and, of course, the cook left.

Mrs. Watson had been glad enough, I think, to turn Louise over to our care, and Thomas went upstairs night and morning to greet his young mistress from the doorway. Poor Thomas! He had the faculty—found still in some old negroes, who cling to the traditions of slavery days—of making his employer's interest his. It was always "we" with Thomas; I miss him sorely; pipe-smoking, obsequious, not over reliable, kindly old man!

On Thursday Mr. Harton, the Armstrongs' legal adviser, called up from town. He had been advised, he said, that Mrs. Armstrong was coming east with her husband's body and would arrive Monday. He came with some hesitation, he went on, to the fact that he had been further instructed to ask me to relinquish my lease on Sunnyside, as it was Mrs. Armstrong's desire to come directly there.

I was aghast.

"Here!" I said. "Surely you are mistaken, Mr. Harton. I should think, after—what happened here only a few days ago, she would never wish to come back."

"Nevertheless," he replied, "she is most anxious to come. This is what she says. 'Use every possible means to have Sunnyside vacated. Must go there at once.'"

"Mr. Harton," I said testily, "I am not going to do anything of the kind. I and mine have suffered enough at the hands of this family. I rented the house at an exorbitant figure and I have moved out here for the summer. My city home is dismantled and in the hands of decorators. I have been here one week, during which I have had not a single night of uninterrupted sleep, and I intend to stay until I have recuperated. Moreover, if Mr. Armstrong died insolvent, as I believe was the case, his widow ought to be glad to be rid of so expensive a piece of property."

The lawyer cleared his throat.

"I am very sorry you have made this decision," he said. "Miss Innes, Mrs. Fitzhugh tells me Louise Armstrong is with you."

"She is."

"Has she been informed of this—double bereavement?"

"Not yet," I said. "She has been very ill; perhaps to-night she can be told."

"It is very sad; very sad," he said. "I have a telegram for her, Mrs. Innes. Shall I send it out?"

"Better open it and read it to me," I suggested. "If it is important, that will save time."

There was a pause while Mr. Harton opened the telegram. Then he read it slowly, judicially.


"Hum!" I said. "'Watch for Nina Carrington. Home Monday.' Very well, Mr. Harton, I will tell her, but she is not in condition to watch for any one."

"Well, Miss Innes, if you decide to—er—relinquish the lease, let me know," the lawyer said.

"I shall not relinquish it," I replied, and I imagined his irritation from the way he hung up the receiver.

I wrote the telegram down word for word, afraid to trust my memory, and decided to ask Doctor Stewart how soon Louise might be told the truth. The closing of the Traders' Bank I considered unnecessary for her to know, but the death of her stepfather and stepbrother must be broken to her soon, or she might hear it in some unexpected and shocking manner.

Doctor Stewart came about four o'clock, bringing his leather satchel into the house with a great deal of care, and opening it at the foot of the stairs to show me a dozen big yellow eggs nesting among the bottles.

"Real eggs," he said proudly. "None of your anemic store eggs, but the real thing—some of them still warm. Feel them! Egg-nog for Miss Louise."

He was beaming with satisfaction, and before he left, he insisted on going back to the pantry and making an egg-nog with his own hands. Somehow, all the time he was doing it, I had a vision of Doctor Willoughby, my nerve specialist in the city, trying to make an egg-nog. I wondered if he ever prescribed anything so plebeian—and so delicious. And while Doctor Stewart whisked the eggs he talked.

"I said to Mrs. Stewart," he confided, a little red in the face from the exertion, "after I went home the other day, that you would think me an old gossip, for saying what I did about Walker and Miss Louise."

"Nothing of the sort," I protested.

"The fact is," he went on, evidently justifying him self, "I got that piece of information just as we get a lot of things, through the kitchen end of the house. Young Walker's chauffeur—Walker's more fashionable than I am, and he goes around the country in a Stanhope car—well, his chauffeur comes to see our servant girl, and he told her the whole thing. I thought it was probable, because Walker spent a lot of time up here last summer, when the family was here, and besides, Riggs, that's Walker's man, had a very pat little story about the doctor's building a house on this
property, just at the foot of the hill. The sugar, please."

The egg-nog was finished. Drop by drop the liquor had cooked the egg, and now, with a final whisk, a last toss in the shaker, it was ready, a symphony in gold and white. The doctor sniffed it.

"Real eggs, real milk, and a touch of real Kentucky whisky," he said.

He insisted on carrying it up himself, but at the foot of the stairs he paused.

"Riggs said the plans were drawn for the house," he said, harking back to the old subject. "Drawn by Huston in town. So I naturally believed him."

When the doctor came down, I was ready with a question.

"Doctor," I asked, "is there any one in the neighborhood named Carrington? Nina Carrington?"

"Carrington?" He wrinkled his forehead. "Carrington? No, I don't remember any such family. There used to be Covingtons down the creek."

"The name was Carrington," I said, and the subject lapsed.

Gertrude and Halsey went for a long walk that afternoon, and Louise slept. Time hung heavy on my hands, and I did as I had fallen into a habit of doing lately--I sat down and thought things over. One result of my meditations was that I got up suddenly and went to the telephone. I had taken the most intense dislike to this Doctor Walker, whom I had never seen, and who was being talked of in the countryside as the fiance of Louise Armstrong.

I knew Sam Huston well. There had been a time, when Sam was a good deal younger than he is now, before he had married Anne Endicott, when I knew him even better. So now I felt no hesitation in calling him over the telephone. But when his office boy had given way to his confidential clerk, and that functionary had condescended to connect his employer's desk telephone, I was somewhat at a loss as to how to begin.

"Why, how are you, Rachel?" Sam said sonorously. "Going to build that house at Rock View?" It was a twenty-year-old joke of his.

"Sometime, perhaps," I said. "Just now I want to ask you a question about something which is none of my business."

"I see you haven't changed an iota in a quarter of a century, Rachel." This was intended to be another jest. "Ask ahead: everything but my domestic affairs is at your service."

"Try to be serious," I said. "And tell me this: has your firm made any plans for a house recently, for a Doctor Walker, at Casanova?"

"Yes, we have."

"Where was it to be built? I have a reason for asking."

"It was to be, I believe, on the Armstrong place. Mr. Armstrong himself consulted me, and the inference was--in fact, I am quite certain--the house was to be occupied by Mr. Armstrong's daughter, who was engaged to marry Doctor Walker."

When the architect had inquired for the different members of my family, and had finally rung off, I was certain of one thing. Louise Armstrong was in love with Halsey, and the man she was going to marry was Doctor Walker. Moreover, this decision was not new; marriage had been contemplated for some time. There must certainly be some explanation--but what was it?

That day I repeated to Louise the telegram Mr. Warton had opened.

She seemed to understand, but an unhappier face I have never seen. She looked like a criminal whose reprieve is over, and the day of execution approaching.

CHAPTER XV
LIDDY GIVES THE ALARM

The next day, Friday, Gertrude broke the news of her stepfather's death to Louise. She did it as gently as she could, telling her first that he was very ill, and finally that he was dead. Louise received the news in the most unexpected manner, and when Gertrude came out to tell me how she had stood it, I think she was almost shocked.

"She just lay and stared at me, Aunt Ray," she said. "Do you know, I believe she is glad, glad! And she is too honest to pretend anything else. What sort of man was Mr. Paul Armstrong, anyhow?"

"He was a bully as well as a rascal, Gertrude," I said. "But I am convinced of one thing; Louise will send for Halsey now, and they will make it all up."

For Louise had steadily refused to see Halsey all that day, and the boy was frantic.

We had a quiet hour, Halsey and I, that evening, and I told him several things; about the request that we give up the lease to Sunnyside, about the telegram to Louise, about the rumors of an approaching marriage between the girl and Doctor Walker, and, last of all, my own interview with her the day before.

He sat back in a big chair, with his face in the shadow, and my heart fairly ached for him. He was so big and so boyish! When I had finished he drew a long breath.

"Whatever Louise does," he said, "nothing will convince me, Aunt Ray, that she doesn't care for me. And up to
two months ago, when she and her mother went west, I was the happiest fellow on earth. Then something made a
difference: she wrote me that her people were opposed to the marriage; that her feeling for me was what it had
always been, but that something had happened which had changed her ideas as to the future. I was not to write until
she wrote me, and whatever occurred, I was to think the best I could of her. It sounded like a puzzle. When I saw her
yesterday, it was the same thing, only, perhaps, worse."

"Halsey," I asked, "have you any idea of the nature of the interview between Louise Armstrong and Arnold the
night he was murdered?"

"It was stormy. Thomas says once or twice he almost broke into the room, he was so alarmed for Louise."

"Another thing, Halsey," I said, "have you ever heard Louise mention a woman named Carrington, Nina
Carrington?"

"Never," he said positively.

For try as we would, our thoughts always came back to that fatal Saturday night, and the murder. Every
conversational path led to it, and we all felt that Jamieson was tightening the threads of evidence around John
Bailey. The detective's absence was hardly reassuring; he must have had something to work on in town, or he would
have returned.

The papers reported that the cashier of the Traders' Bank was ill in his apartments at the Knickerbocker--a
condition not surprising, considering everything. The guilt of the defunct president was no longer in doubt; the
missing bonds had been advertised and some of them discovered. In every instance they had been used as collateral
for large loans, and the belief was current that not less than a million and a half dollars had been realized. Every one
connected with the bank had been placed under arrest, and released on heavy bond.

Was he alone in his guilt, or was the cashier his accomplice? Where was the money? The estate of the dead man
was comparatively small--a city house on a fashionable street, Sunnyside, a large estate largely mortgaged, an
insurance of fifty thousand dollars, and some personal property--this was all.

The rest lost in speculation probably, the papers said. There was one thing which looked uncomfortable for Jack
Bailey: he and Paul Armstrong together had promoted a railroad company in New Mexico, and it was rumored that
together they had sunk large sums of money there. The business alliance between the two men added to the belief
that Bailey knew something of the looting. His unexplained absence from the bank on Monday lent color to the
suspicion against him. The strange thing seemed to be his surrendering himself on the point of departure. To me, it
seemed the shrewd calculation of a clever rascal. I was not actively antagonistic to Gertrude's lover, but I meant to
be convinced, one way or the other. I took no one on faith.

That night the Sunnyside ghost began to walk again. Liddy had been sleeping in Louise's dressing-room on a
couch, and the approach of dusk was a signal for her to barricade the entire suite. Situated as its was, beyond the
circular staircase, nothing but an extremity of excitement would have made her pass it after dark. I confess myself
that the place seemed to me to have a sinister appearance, but we kept that wing well lighted, and until the lights
went out at midnight it was really cheerful, if one did not know its history.

On Friday night, then, I had gone to bed, resolved to go at once to sleep. Thoughts that insisted on obtruding
themselves I pushed resolutely to the back of my mind, and I systematically relaxed every muscle. I fell asleep soon,
and was dreaming that Doctor Walker was building his new house immediately in front of my windows: I could hear
the thump-thump of the hammers, and then I waked to a knowledge that somebody was pounding on my door.

I was up at once, and with the sound of my footstep on the floor the low knocking ceased, to be followed
immediately by sibilant whispering through the keyhole.

"Miss Rachel! Miss Rachel!" somebody was saying, over and over.

"Is that you, Liddy?" I asked, my hand on the knob.

"For the love of mercy, let me in!" she said in a low tone.

She was leaning against the door, for when I opened it, she fell in. She was greenish-white, and she had a red
and black barred flannel petticoat over her shoulders.

"Listen," she said, standing in the middle of the floor and holding on to me. "Oh, Miss Rachel, it's the ghost of
that dead man hammering to get in!"

Sure enough, there was a dull thud--thud--thud from some place near. It was muffled: one rather felt than heard
it, and it was impossible to locate. One moment it seemed to come, three taps and a pause, from the floor under us:
the next, thud--thud--thud--it came apparently from the wall.

"It's not a ghost," I said decidedly. "If it was a ghost it wouldn't rap: it would come through the keyhole." Liddy
looked at the keyhole. "But it sounds very much as though some one is trying to break into the house."

Liddy was shivering violently. I told her to get me my slippers and she brought me a pair of kid gloves, so I
found my things myself, and prepared to call Halsey. As before, the night alarm had found the electric lights gone:
the hall, save for its night lamp, was in darkness, as I went across to Halsey's room. I hardly know what I feared, but
it was a relief to find him there, very sound asleep, and with his door unlocked.

"Wake up, Halsey," I said, shaking him.

He stirred a little. Liddy was half in and half out of the door, afraid as usual to be left alone, and not quite daring to enter. Her scruples seemed to fade, however, all at once. She gave a suppressed yell, bolted into the room, and stood tightly clutching the foot-board of the bed. Halsey was gradually waking.

"I've seen it," Liddy wailed. "A woman in white down the hall!"

I paid no attention.

"Halsey," I persevered, "some one is breaking into the house. Get up, won't you?"

"It isn't our house," he said sleepily. And then he roused to the exigency of the occasion. "All right, Aunt Ray," he said, still yawning. "If you'll let me get into something--"

It was all I could do to get Liddy out of the room. The demands of the occasion had no influence on her: she had seen the ghost, she persisted, and she wasn't going into the hall. But I got her over to my room at last, more dead than alive, and made her lie down on the bed.

The tappings, which seemed to have ceased for a while, had commenced again, but they were fainter. Halsey came over in a few minutes, and stood listening and trying to locate the sound.

"Give me my revolver, Aunt Ray," he said; and I got it--the one I had found in the tulip bed--and gave it to him. He saw Liddy there and divined at once that Louise was alone.

"You let me attend to this fellow, whoever it is, Aunt Ray, and go to Louise, will you? She may be awake and alarmed."

So in spite of her protests, I left Liddy alone and went back to the east wing. Perhaps I went a little faster past the yawning blackness of the circular staircase; and I could hear Halsey creaking cautiously down the main staircase. The rapping, or pounding, had ceased, and the silence was almost painful. And then suddenly, from apparently under my very feet, there rose a woman's scream, a cry of terror that broke off as suddenly as it came. I stood frozen and still. Every drop of blood in my body seemed to leave the surface and gather around my heart. In the dead silence that followed it throbbed as if it would burst. More dead than alive, I stumbled into Louise's bedroom. She was not there!

CHAPTER XVII
IN THE EARLY MORNING

I stood looking at the empty bed. The coverings had been thrown back, and Louise's pink silk dressing-gown was gone from the foot, where it had lain. The night lamp burned dimly, revealing the emptiness of the place. I picked it up, but my hand shook so that I put it down again, and got somehow to the door.

There were voices in the hall and Gertrude came running toward me.

"What is it?" she cried. "What was that sound? Where is Louise?"

"She is not in her room," I said stupidly. "I think--it was she--who screamed."

Liddy had joined us now, carrying a light. We stood huddled together at the head of the circular staircase, looking down into its shadows. There was nothing to be seen, and it was absolutely quiet down there. Then we heard Halsey running up the main staircase. He came quickly down the hall to where we were standing.

"There's no one trying to get in. I thought I heard some one shriek. Who was it?"

Our stricken faces told him the truth.

"Some one screamed down there," I said. "And--and Louise is not in her room."

With a jerk Halsey took the light from Liddy and ran down the circular staircase. I followed him, more slowly. My nerves seemed to be in a state of paralysis: I could scarcely step. At the foot of the stairs Halsey gave an exclamation and put down the light.

"Aunt Ray," he called sharply.

At the foot of the staircase, huddled in a heap, her head on the lower stair, was Louise Armstrong. She lay limp and white, her dressing-gown dragging loose from one sleeve of her night-dress, and the heavy braid of her dark hair stretching its length a couple of steps above her head, as if she had slipped down.

She was not dead: Halsey put her down on the floor, and began to rub her cold hands, while Gertrude and Liddy ran for stimulants. As for me, I sat there at the foot of that ghastly staircase--sat, because my knees wouldn't hold me--and wondered where it would all end. Louise was still unconscious, but she was breathing better, and I suggested that we get her back to bed before she came to. There was something grisly and horrible to me, seeing her there in almost the same attitude and in the same place where we had found her brother's body. And to add to the similarity, just then the hall clock, far off, struck faintly three o'clock.

It was four before Louise was able to talk, and the first rays of dawn were coming through her windows, which faced the east, before she could tell us coherently what had occurred. I give it as she told it. She lay propped in bed, and Halsey sat beside her, unrebuffed, and held her hand while she talked.
"I was not sleeping well," she began, "partly, I think, because I had slept during the afternoon. Liddy brought me
some hot milk at ten o'clock and I slept until twelve. Then I wakened and--I got to thinking about things, and
worrying, so I could not go to sleep.

"I was wondering why I had not heard from Arnold since the- -since I saw him that night at the lodge. I was
afraid he was ill, because- -he was to have done something for me, and he had not come back. It must have been
three when I heard some one rapping. I sat up and listened, to be quite sure, and the rapping kept up. It was cautious,
and I was about to call Liddy.

"Then suddenly I thought I knew what it was. The east entrance and the circular staircase were always used by
Arnold when he was out late, and sometimes, when he forgot his key, he would rap and I would go down and let
him in. I thought he had come back to see me--I didn't think about the time, for his hours were always erratic. But I
was afraid I was too weak to get down the stairs.

"The knocking kept up, and just as I was about to call Liddy, she ran through the room and out into the hall. I got
up then, feeling weak and dizzy, and put on my dressing-gown. If it was Arnold, I knew I must see him.

"It was very dark everywhere, but, of course, I knew my way. I felt along for the stair-rail, and went down as
quickly as I could. The knocking had stopped, and I was afraid I was too late. I got to the foot of the staircase and
over to the door on to the east veranda. I had never thought of anything but that it was Arnold, until I reached the
door. It was unlocked and opened about an inch. Everything was black: it was perfectly dark outside. I felt very
queer and shaky. Then I thought perhaps Arnold had used his key; he did--strange things sometimes, and I turned
around. Just as I reached the foot of the staircase I thought I heard some one coming. My nerves were going
anyhow, there in the dark, and I could scarcely stand. I got up as far as the third or fourth step; then I felt that some
one was coming toward me on the staircase. The next instant a hand met mine on the stair-rail. Some one brushed
past me, and I screamed. Then I must have fainted."

That was Louise's story. There could be no doubt of its truth, and the thing that made it inexpressibly awful to
me was that the poor girl had crept down to answer the summons of a brother who would never need her kindly
offices again. Twice now, without apparent cause, some one had entered the house by means of the east entrance:
had apparently gone his way unhindered through the house, and gone out again as he had entered. Had this unknown
visitor been there a third time, the night Arnold Armstrong was murdered? Or a fourth, the time Mr. Jamieson had
locked some one in the clothes chute?

Sleep was impossible, I think, for any of us. We dispersed finally to bathe and dress, leaving Louise little the
worse for her experience. But I determined that before the day was over she must know the true state of affairs.
Another decision I made, and I put it into execution immediately after breakfast. I had one of the unused bedrooms
in the east wing, back along the small corridor, prepared for occupancy, and from that time on, Alex, the gardener,
slept there. One man in that barn of a house was an absurdity, with things happening all the time, and I must say that
Alex was as unobjectionable as any one could possibly have been.

The next morning, also, Halsey and I made an exhaustive examination of the circular staircase, the small entry at
its foot, and the card-room opening from it. There was no evidence of anything unusual the night before, and had we
not ourselves heard the rapping noises, I should have felt that Louise's imagination had run away with her. The outer
door was closed and locked, and the staircase curved above us, for all the world like any other staircase.

Halsey, who had never taken seriously my account of the night Liddy and I were there alone, was grave enough
now. He examined the paneling of the wainscoting above and below the stairs, evidently looking for a secret door,
and suddenly there flashed into my mind the recollection of a scrap of paper that Mr. Jamieson had found among
Arnold Armstrong's effects. As nearly as possible I repeated its contents to him, while Halsey took them down in a
note-book.

"I wish you had told me that before," he said, as he put the memorandum carefully away. We found nothing at
all in the house, and I expected little from any examination of the porch and grounds. But as we opened the outer
door something fell into the entry with a clatter. It was a cue from the billiard-room.

Halsey picked it up with an exclamation.

"That's careless enough," he said. "Some of the servants have been amusing themselves."

I was far from convinced. Not one of the servants would go into that wing at night unless driven by dire
necessity. And a billiard cue! As a weapon of either offense or defense it was an absurdity, unless one accepted
Liddy's hypothesis of a ghost, and even then, as Halsey pointed out, a billiard-playing ghost would be a very modern
evolution of an ancient institution.

That afternoon we, Gertrude, Halsey and I, attended the coroner's inquest in town. Doctor Stewart had been
summoned also, it transpiring that in that early Sunday morning, when Gertrude and I had gone to our rooms, he had
been called to view the body. We went, the four of us, in the machine, preferring the execrable roads to the matinee
train, with half of Casanova staring at us. And on the way we decided to say nothing of Louise and her interview.
with her stepbrother the night he died. The girl was in trouble enough as it was.

CHAPTER XVII
A HINT OF SCANDAL

In giving the gist of what happened at the inquest, I have only one excuse--to recall to the reader the events of the night of Arnold Armstrong's murder. Many things had occurred which were not brought out at the inquest and some things were told there that were new to me. Altogether, it was a gloomy affair, and the six men in the corner, who constituted the coroner's jury, were evidently the merest puppets in the hands of that all-powerful gentleman, the coroner.

Gertrude and I sat well back, with our veils down. There were a number of people I knew: Barbara Fitzhugh, in extravagant mourning--she always went into black on the slightest provocation, because it was becoming--and Mr. Jarvis, the man who had come over from the Greenwood Club the night of the murder. Mr. Harton was there, too, looking impatient as the inquest dragged, but alive to every particle of evidence. From a corner Mr. Jamieson was watching the proceedings intently.

Doctor Stewart was called first. His evidence was told briefly, and amounted to this: on the Sunday morning previous, at a quarter before five, he had been called to the telephone. The message was from Mr. Jarvis, who asked him to come at once to Sunnyside, as there had been an accident there, and Mr. Arnold Armstrong had been shot. He had dressed hastily, gathered up some instruments, and driven to Sunnyside.

He was met by Mr. Jarvis, who took him at once to the east wing. There, just as he had fallen, was the body of Arnold Armstrong. There was no need of the instruments: the man was dead. In answer to the coroner's question--no, the body had not been moved, save to turn it over. It lay at the foot of the circular staircase. Yes, he believed death had been instantaneous. The body was still somewhat warm and rigor mortis had not set in. It occurred late in cases of sudden death. No, he believed the probability of suicide might be eliminated; the wounds could have been self-inflicted, but with difficulty, and there had been no weapon found.

The doctor's examination was over, but he hesitated and cleared his throat.

"Mr. Coroner," he said, "at the risk of taking up valuable time, I would like to speak of an incident that may or may not throw some light on this matter."

The audience was alert at once.

"Kindly proceed, Doctor," the coroner said.

"My home is in Englewood, two miles from Casanova," the doctor began. "In the absence of Doctor Walker, a number of Casanova people have been consulting me. A month ago--five weeks, to be exact--a woman whom I had never seen came to my office. She was in deep mourning and kept her veil down, and she brought for examination a child, a boy of six. The little fellow was ill; it looked like typhoid, and the mother was frantic. She wanted a permit to admit the youngster to the Children's Hospital in town here, where I am a member of the staff, and I gave her one. The incident would have escaped me, but for a curious thing. Two days before Mr. Armstrong was shot, I was sent for to go to the Country Club: some one had been struck with a golf-ball that had gone wild. It was late when I left--I was on foot, and about a mile from the club, on the Claysburg road, I met two people. They were disputing violently, and I had no difficulty in recognizing Mr. Armstrong. The woman, beyond doubt, was the one who had consulted me about the child."

At this hint of scandal, Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh sat up very straight. Jamieson was looking slightly skeptical, and the coroner made a note.

"The Children's Hospital, you say, Doctor?" he asked.

"Yes. But the child, who was entered as Lucien Wallace, was taken away by his mother two weeks ago. I have tried to trace them and failed."

All at once I remembered the telegram sent to Louise by some one signed F. L. W.--presumably Doctor Walker. Could this veiled woman be the Nina Carrington of the message? But it was only idle speculation. I had no way of finding out, and the inquest was proceeding.

The report of the coroner's physician came next. The post-mortem examination showed that the bullet had entered the chest in the fourth left intercostal space and had taken an oblique course downward and backward, piercing both the heart and lungs. The left lung was collapsed, and the exit point of the ball had been found in the muscles of the back to the left of the spinal column. It was improbable that such a wound had been self-inflicted, and its oblique downward course pointed to the fact that the shot had been fired from above. In other words, as the murdered man had been found dead at the foot of a staircase, it was probable that the shot had been fired by some one higher up on the stairs. There were no marks of powder. The bullet, a thirty-eight caliber, had been found in the dead man's clothing, and was shown to the jury.

Mr. Jarvis was called next, but his testimony amounted to little.

He had been summoned by telephone to Sunnyside, had come over at once with the steward and Mr. Winthrop,
at present out of town. They had been admitted by the housekeeper, and had found the body lying at the foot of the staircase. He had made a search for a weapon, but there was none around. The outer entry door in the east wing had been unfastened and was open about an inch.

I had been growing more and more nervous. When the coroner called Mr. John Bailey, the room was filled with suppressed excitement. Mr. Jamieson went forward and spoke a few words to the coroner, who nodded. Then Halsey was called.

"Mr. Innes," the coroner said, "will you tell under what circumstances you saw Mr. Arnold Armstrong the night he died?"

"I saw him first at the Country Club," Halsey said quietly. He was rather pale, but very composed. "I stopped there with my automobile for gasoline. Mr. Armstrong had been playing cards. When I saw him there, he was coming out of the card-room, talking to Mr. John Bailey."

"The nature of the discussion--was it amicable?"

Halsey hesitated.

"They were having a dispute," he said. "I asked Mr. Bailey to leave the club with me and come to Sunnyside over Sunday."

"Isn't it a fact, Mr. Innes, that you took Mr. Bailey away from the club-house because you were afraid there would be blows?"

"The situation was unpleasant," Halsey said evasively.

"At that time had you any suspicion that the Traders' Bank had been wrecked?"

"No."

"What occurred next?"

"Mr. Bailey and I talked in the billiard-room until two-thirty."

"And Mr. Arnold Armstrong came there, while you were talking?"

"Yes. He came about half-past two. He rapped at the east door, and I admitted him."

The silence in the room was intense. Mr. Jamieson's eyes never left Halsey's face.

"Will you tell us the nature of his errand?"

"He brought a telegram that had come to the club for Mr. Bailey."

"He was sober?"

"Perfectly, at that time. Not earlier."

"Was not his apparent friendliness a change from his former attitude?"

"Yes. I did not understand it."

"How long did he stay?"

"About five minutes. Then he left, by the east entrance."

"What occurred then?"

"We talked for a few minutes, discussing a plan Mr. Bailey had in mind. Then I went to the stables, where I kept my car, and got it out."

"Leaving Mr. Bailey alone in the billiard-room?"

Halsey hesitated.

"My sister was there?"

Mrs. Ogden Fitzhugh had the courage to turn and eye Gertrude through her lorgnon.

"And then?"

"I took the car along the lower road, not to disturb the household. Mr. Bailey came down across the lawn, through the hedge, and got into the car on the road."

"Then you know nothing of Mr. Armstrong's movements after he left the house?"

"Nothing. I read of his death Monday evening for the first time."

"Mr. Bailey did not see him on his way across the lawn?"

"I think not. If he had seen him he would have spoken of it."

"Thank you. That is all. Miss Gertrude Innes."

Gertrude's replies were fully as concise as Halsey's. Mrs. Fitzhugh subjected her to a close inspection, commencing with her hat and ending with her shoes. I flatter myself she found nothing wrong with either her gown or her manner, but poor Gertrude's testimony was the reverse of comforting. She had been summoned, she said, by her brother, after Mr. Armstrong had gone.

She had waited in the billiard-room with Mr. Bailey, until the automobile had been ready. Then she had locked the door at the foot of the staircase, and, taking a lamp, had accompanied Mr. Bailey to the main entrance of the house, and had watched him cross the lawn. Instead of going at once to her room, she had gone back to the billiard-room for something which had been left there. The card-room and billiard-room were in darkness. She had groped
around, found the article she was looking for, and was on the point of returning to her room, when she had heard
some one fumbling at the lock at the east outer door. She had thought it was probably her brother, and had been
about to go to the door, when she heard it open. Almost immediately there was a shot, and she had run panic-
stricken through the drawing-room and had roused the house.

"You heard no other sound?" the coroner asked. "There was no one with Mr. Armstrong when he entered?"

"It was perfectly dark. There were no voices and I heard nothing. There was just the opening of the door, the
shot, and the sound of somebody falling."

"Then, while you went through the drawing-room and up-stairs to alarm the household, the criminal, whoever it
was, could have escaped by the east door?"

"Yes."

"Thank you. That will do."

I flatter myself that the coroner got little enough out of me. I saw Mr. Jamieson smiling to himself, and the
coroner gave me up, after a time. I admitted I had found the body, said I had not known who it was until Mr. Jarvis
told me, and ended by looking up at Barbara Fitzhugh and saying that in renting the house I had not expected to be
involved in any family scandal. At which she turned purple.

The verdict was that Arnold Armstrong had met his death at the hands of a person or persons unknown, and we
all prepared to leave. Barbara Fitzhugh flounced out without waiting to speak to me, but Mr. Harton came up, as I
knew he would.

"You have decided to give up the house, I hope, Miss Innes," he said. "Mrs. Armstrong has wired me again."

"I am not going to give it up," I maintained, "until I understand some things that are puzzling me. The day that
the murderer is discovered, I will leave."

"Then, judging by what I have heard, you will be back in the city very soon," he said. And I knew that he
suspected the discredited cashier of the Traders' Bank.

Mr. Jamieson came up to me as I was about to leave the coroner's office.

"How is your patient?" he asked with his odd little smile.

"I have no patient," I replied, startled.

"I will put it in a different way, then. How is Miss Armstrong?"

"She--she is doing very well," I stammered.

"Good," cheerfully. "And our ghost? Is it laid?"

"Mr. Jamieson," I said suddenly, "I wish you would do one thing: I wish you would come to Sunnyside and
spend one night at least watching the circular staircase. The murder of Arnold Armstrong was a beginning, not an end."

He looked serious.

"Perhaps I can do it," he said. "I have been doing something else, but--well, I will come out to-night."

We were very silent during the trip back to Sunnyside. I watched Gertrude closely and somewhat sadly. To me
there was one glaring flaw in her story, and it seemed to stand out for every one to see. Arnold Armstrong had had
no key, and yet she said she had locked the east door. He must have been admitted from within the house; over and
over I repeated it to myself.

That night, as gently as I could, I told Louise the story of her stepbrother's death. She sat in her big, pillow-filled
chair, and heard me through without interruption. It was clear that she was shocked beyond words: if I had hoped to
learn anything from her expression, I had failed. She was as much in the dark as we were.

CHAPTER XVIII
A HOLE IN THE WALL

My taking the detective out to Sunnyside raised an unexpected storm of protest from Gertrude and Halsey. I was
not prepared for it, and I scarcely knew how to account for it. To me Mr. Jamieson was far less formidable under my
eyes where I knew what he was doing, than he was of in the city, twisting circumstances and motives to suit himself
and learning what he wished to know, about events at Sunnyside, in some occult way. I was glad enough to have
him there, when excitements began to come thick and fast.

A new element was about to enter into affairs: Monday, or Tuesday at the latest, would find Doctor Walker back
in his green and white house in the village, and Louise's attitude to him in the immediate future would signify
Halsey's happiness or wretchedness, as it might turn out. Then, too, the return of her mother would mean, of course,
that she would have to leave us, and I had become greatly attached to her.

From the day Mr. Jamieson came to Sunnyside there was a subtle change in Gertrude's manner to me. It was
elusive, difficult to analyze, but it was there. She was no longer frank with me, although I think her affection never
wavered. At the time I laid the change to the fact that I had forbidden all communication with John Bailey, and had
refused to acknowledge any engagement between the two. Gertrude spent much of her time wandering through the
grounds, or taking long cross-country walks. Halsey played golf at the Country Club day after day, and after Louise left, as she did the following week, Mr. Jamieson and I were much together. He played a fair game of cribbage, but he cheated at solitaire.

The night the detective arrived, Saturday, I had a talk with him.

I told him of the experience Louise Armstrong had had the night before, on the circular staircase, and about the man who had so frightened Rosie on the drive. I saw that he thought the information was important, and to my suggestion that we put an additional lock on the east wing door he opposed a strong negative.

"I think it probable," he said, "that our visitor will be back again, and the thing to do is to leave things exactly as they are, to avoid rousing suspicion. Then I can watch for at least a part of each night and probably Mr. Innes will help us out. I would say as little to Thomas as possible. The old man knows more than he is willing to admit."

I suggested that Alex, the gardener, would probably be willing to help, and Mr. Jamieson undertook to make the arrangement. For one night, however, Mr. Jamieson preferred to watch alone. Apparently nothing occurred. The detective sat in absolute darkness on the lower step of the stairs, dozing, he said afterwards, now and then. Nothing could pass him in either direction, and the door in the morning remained as securely fastened as it had been the night before. And yet one of the most inexplicable occurrences of the whole affair took place that very night.

Liddy came to my room on Sunday morning with a face as long as the moral law. She laid out my things as usual, but I missed her customary garrulousness. I was not regaled with the new cook's extravagance as to eggs, and she even forbore to mention "that Jamieson," on whose arrival she had looked with silent disfavor.

"What's the matter, Liddy?" I asked at last. "Didn't you sleep last night?"

"No, ma'm," she said stiffly.

"Did you have two cups of coffee at your dinner?" I inquired.

"No, ma'm," indignantly.

I sat up and almost upset my hot water--I always take a cup of hot water with a pinch of salt, before I get up. It tones the stomach.

"Liddy Allen," I said, "stop combing that switch and tell me what is wrong with you."

Liddy heaved a sigh.

"Girl and woman," she said, "I've been with you twenty-five years, Miss Rachel, through good temper and bad--" the idea! and what I have taken from her in the way of sulks!--"but I guess I can't stand it any longer. My trunk's packed."

"Who packed it?" I asked, expecting from her tone to be told she had wakened to find it done by some ghostly hand.

"I did; Miss Rachel, you won't believe me when I tell you this house is haunted. Who was it fell down the clothes chute? Who was it scared Miss Louise almost into her grave?"

"I'm doing my best to find out," I said. "What in the world are you driving at?" She drew a long breath.

"There is a hole in the trunk-room wall, dug out since last night. It's big enough to put your head in, and the plaster's all over the place."

"Nonsense!" I said. "Plaster is always falling."

But Liddy clenched that.

"Just ask Alex," she said. "When he put the new cook's trunk there last night the wall was as smooth as this. This morning it's dug out, and there's plaster on the cook's trunk. Miss Rachel, you can get a dozen detectives and put one on every stair in the house, and you'll never catch anything. There's some things you can't handcuff."

Liddy was right. As soon as I could, I went up to the trunk-room, which was directly over my bedroom. The plan of the upper story of the house was like that of the second floor, in the main. One end, however, over the east wing, had been left only roughly finished, the intention having been to convert it into a ball-room at some future time. The maids' rooms, trunk-room, and various store-rooms, including a large airy linen-room, opened from a long corridor, like that on the second floor. And in the trunk-room, as Liddy had said, was a fresh break in the plaster.

Not only in the plaster, but through the lathing, the aperture extended. I reached into the opening, and three feet away, perhaps, I could touch the bricks of the partition wall. For some reason, the architect, in building the house, had left a space there that struck me, even in the surprise of the discovery, as an excellent place for a conflagration to gain headway.

"You are sure the hole was not here yesterday?" I asked Liddy, whose expression was a mixture of satisfaction and alarm. In answer she pointed to the new cook's trunk--that necessary adjunct of the migratory domestic. The top was covered with fine white plaster, as was the floor. But there were no large pieces of mortar lying around--no bits of lathing. When I mentioned this to Liddy she merely raised her eyebrows. Being quite confident that the gap was of unholy origin, she did not concern herself with such trifles as a bit of mortar and lath. No doubt they were even then heaped neatly on a gravestone in the Casanova churchyard!
I brought Mr. Jamieson up to see the hole in the wall, directly after breakfast. His expression was very odd when he looked at it, and the first thing he did was to try to discover what object, if any, such a hole could have. He got a piece of candle, and by enlarging the aperture a little was able to examine what lay beyond. The result was nil. The trunk-room, although heated by steam heat, like the rest of the house, boasted of a fireplace and mantel as well. The opening had been made between the flue and the outer wall of the house. There was revealed, however, on inspection, only the brick of the chimney on one side and the outer wall of the house on the other; in depth the space extended only to the flooring. The breach had been made about four feet from the floor, and inside were all the missing bits of plaster. It had been a methodical ghost.

It was very much of a disappointment. I had expected a secret room, at the very least, and I think even Mr. Jamieson had fancied he might at last have a clue to the mystery. There was evidently nothing more to be discovered: Liddy reported that everything was serene among the servants, and that none of them had been disturbed by the noise. The maddening thing, however, was that the nightly visitor had evidently more than one way of gaining access to the house, and we made arrangements to redouble our vigilance as to windows and doors that night.

Halsey was inclined to pooh-pooh the whole affair. He said a break in the plaster might have occurred months ago and gone unnoticed, and that the dust had probably been stirred up the day before. After all, we had to let it go at that, but we put in an uncomfortable Sunday. Gertrude went to church, and Halsey took a long walk in the morning. Louise was able to sit up, and she allowed Halsey and Liddy to assist her down-stairs late in the afternoon. The east veranda was shady, green with vines and palms, cheerful with cushions and lounging chairs. We put Louise in a steamer chair, and she sat there passively enough, her hands clasped in her lap.

We were very silent. Halsey sat on the rail with a pipe, openly watching Louise, as she looked broodingly across the valley to the hills. There was something baffling in the girl's eyes; and gradually Halsey's boyish features lost their glow at seeing her about again, and settled into grim lines. He was like his father just then.

We sat until late afternoon, Halsey growing more and more moody. Shortly before six, he got up and went into the house, and in a few minutes he came out and called me to the telephone. It was Anna Whitcomb, in town, and she kept me for twenty minutes, telling me the children had had the measles, and how Madame Sweeny had botched her new gown.

When I finished, Liddy was behind me, her mouth a thin line.

"I wish you would try to look cheerful, Liddy," I groaned, "your face would sour milk." But Liddy seldom replied to my gibes. She folded her lips a little tighter.

"He called her up," she said oracularly, "he called her up, and asked her to keep you at the telephone, so he could talk to Miss Louise. A THANKLESS CHILD IS SHARPER THAN A SERPENT'S TOOTH."

"Nonsense!" I said brusquely. "I might have known enough to leave them. It's a long time since you and I were in love, Liddy, and--we forget."

Liddy sniffed.

"No man ever made a fool of me," she replied virtuously.

"Well, something did," I retorted.

CHAPTER XIX

CONCERNING THOMAS

"Mr. Jamieson," I said, when we found ourselves alone after dinner that night, "the inquest yesterday seemed to me the merest recapitulation of things that were already known. It developed nothing new beyond the story of Doctor Stewart's, and that was volunteered."

"An inquest is only a necessary formality, Miss Innes," he replied. "Unless a crime is committed in the open, the inquest does nothing beyond getting evidence from witnesses while events are still in their minds. The police step in later. You and I both know how many important things never transpired. For instance: the dead man had no key, and yet Miss Gertrude testified to a fumbling at the lock, and then the opening of the door. The piece of evidence you mention, Doctor Stewart's story, is one of those things we have to take cautiously: the doctor has a patient who wears black and does not raise her veil. Why, it is the typical mysterious lady! Then the good doctor comes across Arnold Armstrong, who was a graceless scamp--de mortuis--what's the rest of it?--and he is quarreling with a lady in black. Behold, says the doctor, they are one and the same."

"Why was Mr. Bailey not present at the inquest?"

The detective's expression was peculiar.

"Because his physician testified that he is ill, and unable to leave his bed."

"Ill!" I exclaimed. "Why, neither Halsey nor Gertrude has told me that."

"There are more things than that, Miss Innes, that are puzzling. Bailey gives the impression that he knew nothing of the crash at the bank until he read it in the paper Monday night, and that he went back and surrendered himself
stood there, looking along the yellowish line of the road, while I waited on the tiny veranda. uneasy, for the first time. Gertrude, who was never nervous in the dark, went alone down the drive to the gate, and was no response. No Thomas came, bowing and showing his white teeth through the darkness. I began to be vaguely the house. The men exchanged significant glances, and Warner got a lantern.

excursions around the place that I knew my way perfectly. But Thomas was not on the veranda, nor was he inside Gertrude threw a shawl around my shoulders, and we all started down over the hill: I had made so many nocturnal

seen a ghost. The old man looks bad, too; he can scarcely speak."

admitting Warner. He was out of breath from running, and he looked half abashed.

pretending to read. Halsey kicked a taboret viciously.

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arrangements for the funeral. Halsey disappeared shortly after Louise left and came home about nine that night,
greeting between Louise and her mother, and that Doctor Walker was there, apparently in charge of the

it, if you possibly can. I am afraid--to have you stay."

That was all. Gertrude went into town with her husband's body, and the services were set for the next day. The house on Chestnut Street, in town, had been opened, and Tuesday morning Louise left us to go home. She sent for me before she went, and I saw she had been crying.

"How can I thank you, Miss Innes?" she said. "You have taken me on faith, and--you have not asked me any questions. Some time, perhaps, I can tell you; and when that time comes, you will all despise me,--Halsey, too."

I tried to tell her how glad I was to have had her but there was something else she wanted to say. She said it finally, when she had bade a constrained good-by to Halsey and the car was waiting at the door.

"Miss Innes," she said in a low tone, "if they--if there is any attempt made to--to have you give up the house, do it, if you possibly can. I am afraid--to have you stay."

That was all. Gertrude went into town with her and saw her safely home. She reported a decided coolness in the greeting between Louise and her mother, and that Doctor Walker was there, apparently in charge of the arrangements for the funeral. Halsey disappeared shortly after Louise left and came home about nine that night, muddy and tired. As for Thomas, he went around dejected and sad, and I saw the detective watching him closely at

dinner. Even now I wonder--what did Thomas know? What did he suspect?

At ten o'clock the household had settled down for the night. Liddy, who was taking Mrs. Watson's place, had finished examining the tea-towels and the corners of the shelves in the cooling- room, and had gone to bed. Alex, the gardener, had gone heavily up the circular staircase to his room, and Mr. Jamieson was examining the locks of the windows. Halsey dropped into a chair in the living-room, and stared moodily ahead. Once he roused.

"What sort of a looking chap is that Walker, Gertrude?" he asked!

"Rather tall, very dark, smooth-shaven. Not bad looking," Gertrude said, putting down the book she had been pretending to read. Halsey kicked a taboret viciously.

"Lovely place this village must be in the winter," he said irrelevantly. "A girl would be buried alive here."

It was then some one rapped at the knocker on the heavy front door. Halsey got up leisurely and opened it, admitting Warner. He was out of running from him, and he looked half abashed.

"I am sorry to disturb you," he said. "But I didn't know what else to do. It's about Thomas."

"What about Thomas?" I asked. Mr. Jamieson had come into the hall and we all stared at Warner.

"He's acting queer," Warner explained. "He's sitting down there on the edge of the porch, and he says he has seen a ghost. The old man looks bad, too; he can scarcely speak."

"He's as full of superstition as an egg is of meat," I said. "Halsey, bring some whisky and we will all go down."

No one moved to get the whisky, from which I judged there were three pocket flasks ready for emergency. Gertrude threw a shawl around my shoulders, and we all started down over the hill: I had made so many nocturnal excursions around the place that I knew my way perfectly. But Thomas was not on the veranda, nor was he inside the house. The men exchanged significant glances, and Warner got a lantern.

"He can't have gone far," he said. "He was trembling so that he couldn't stand, when I left."

Jamieson and Halsey together made the round of the lodge, occasionally calling the old man by name. But there was no response. No Thomas came, bowing and showing his white teeth through the darkness. I began to be vaguely uneasy, for the first time. Gertrude, who was never nervous in the dark, went alone down the drive to the gate, and stood there, looking along the yellowish line of the road, while I waited on the tiny veranda.
Warner was puzzled. He came around to the edge of the veranda and stood looking at it as if it ought to know and explain.

"He might have stumbled into the house," he said, "but he could not have climbed the stairs. Anyhow, he's not inside or outside, that I can see." The other members of the party had come back now, and no one had found any trace of the old man. His pipe, still warm, rested on the edge of the rail, and inside on the table his old gray hat showed that its owner had not gone far.

He was not far, after all. From the table my eyes traveled around the room, and stopped at the door of a closet. I hardly know what impulse moved me, but I went in and turned the knob. It burst open with the impetus of a weight behind it, and something fell partly forward in a heap on the floor. It was Thomas--Thomas without a mark of injury on him, and dead.

CHAPTER XX
DOCTOR WALKER'S WARNING
Warner was on his knees in a moment, fumbling at the old man's collar to loosen it, but Halsey caught his hand.

"Let him alone?" he said. "You can't help him; he is dead."

We stood there, each avoiding the other's eyes; we spoke low and reverently in the presence of death, and we tacitly avoided any mention of the suspicion that was in every mind. When Mr. Jamieson had finished his cursory examination, he got up and dusted the knees of his trousers.

"There is no sign of injury," he said, and I know I, for one, drew a long breath of relief. "From what Warner says and from his hiding in the closet, I should say he was scared to death. Fright and a weak heart, together."

"But what could have done it?" Gertrude asked. "He was all right this evening at dinner. Warner, what did he say when you found him on the porch?"

Warner looked shaken: his honest, boyish face was colorless.

"Just what I told you, Miss Innes. He'd been reading the paper down-stairs; I had put up the car, and, feeling sleepy, I came down to the lodge to go to bed. As I went up-stairs, Thomas put down the paper and, taking his pipe, went out on the porch. Then I heard an exclamation from him."

"What did he say?" demanded Jamieson.

"I couldn't hear, but his voice was strange; it sounded startled. I waited for him to call out again, but he did not, so I went down-stairs. He was sitting on the porch step, looking straight ahead, as if he saw something among the trees across the road. And he kept mumbling about having seen a ghost. He looked queer, and I tried to get him inside, but he wouldn't move. Then I thought I'd better go up to the house."

"Didn't he say anything else you could understand?" I asked.

"He said something about the grave giving up its dead."

Mr. Jamieson was going through the old man's pockets, and Gertrude was composing his arms, folding them across his white shirt-bosom, always so spotless.

Mr. Jamieson looked up at me.

"What was that you said to me, Miss Innes, about the murder at the house being a beginning and not an end? By jove, I believe you were right!"

In the course of his investigations the detective had come to the inner pocket of the dead butler's black coat. Here he found some things that interested him. One was a small flat key, with a red cord tied to it, and the other was a bit of white paper, on which was written something in Thomas' cramped hand. Mr. Jamieson read it: then he gave it to me. It was an address in fresh ink--

LUCIEN WALLACE, 14 Elm Street, Richfield.

As the card went around, I think both the detective and I watched for any possible effect it might have, but, beyond perplexity, there seemed to be none.

"Richfield!" Gertrude exclaimed. "Why, Elm Street is the main street; don't you remember, Halsey?"

"Lucien Wallace!" Halsey said. "That is the child Stewart spoke of at the inquest."

Warner, with his mechanic's instinct, had reached for the key. What he said was not a surprise.

"Yale lock," he said. "Probably a key to the east entry."

There was no reason why Thomas, an old and trusted servant, should not have had a key to that particular door, although the servants' entry was in the west wing. But I had not known of this key, and it opened up a new field of conjecture. Just now, however, there were many things to be attended to, and, leaving Warner with the body, we all went back to the house. Mr. Jamieson walked with me, while Halsey and Gertrude followed.

"I suppose I shall have to notify the Armstrongs," I said. "They will know if Thomas had any people and how to reach them. Of course, I expect to defray the expenses of the funeral, but his relatives must be found. What do you think frightened him, Mr. Jamieson?"

"It is hard to say," he replied slowly, "but I think we may be certain it was fright, and that he was hiding from
something. I am sorry in more than one way: I have always believed that Thomas knew something, or suspected something, that he would not tell. Do you know how much money there was in that worn-out wallet of his? Nearly a hundred dollars! Almost two months’ wages—and yet those darkies seldom have a penny. Well—what Thomas knew will be buried with him."

Halsey suggested that the grounds be searched, but Mr. Jamieson vetoed the suggestion.

"You would find nothing," he said. "A person clever enough to get into Sunnyside and tear a hole in the wall, while I watched down-stairs, is not to be found by going around the shrubbery with a lantern."

With the death of Thomas, I felt that a climax had come in affairs at Sunnyside. The night that followed was quiet enough. Halsey watched at the foot of the staircase, and a complicated system of bolts on the other doors seemed to be effectual.

Once in the night I wakened and thought I heard the tapping again. But all was quiet, and I had reached the stage where I refused to be disturbed for minor occurrences.

The Armstrongs were notified of Thomas’ death, and I had my first interview with Doctor Walker as a result. He came up early the next morning, just as we finished breakfast, in a professional looking car with a black hood. I found him striding up and down the living-room, and, in spite of my preconceived dislike, I had to admit that the man was presentable. A big fellow he was, tall and dark, as Gertrude had said, smooth-shaven and erect, with prominent features and a square jaw. He was painfully spruce in his appearance, and his manner was almost obtrusively polite.

"I must make a double excuse for this early visit, Miss Innes," he said as he sat down. The chair was lower than he expected, and his dignity required collecting before he went on. "My professional duties are urgent and long neglected, and"—a fall to the every-day manner—"something must be done about that body."

"Yes," I said, sitting on the edge of my chair. "I merely wished the address of Thomas’ people. You might have telephoned, if you were busy."

He smiled.

"I wished to see you about something else," he said. "As for Thomas, it is Mrs. Armstrong’s wish that you would allow her to attend to the expense. About his relatives, I have already notified his brother, in the village. It was heart disease, I think. Thomas always had a bad heart."

"Heart disease and fright," I said, still on the edge of my chair. But the doctor had no intention of leaving.

"I understand you have a ghost up here, and that you have the house filled with detectives to exorcise it," he said. For some reason I felt I was being "pumped," as Halsey says. "You have been misinformed," I replied.

"What, no ghost, no detectives!" he said, still with his smile. "What a disappointment to the village!"

I resented his attempt at playfulness. It had been anything but a joke to us.

"Doctor Walker," I said tartly, "I fail to see any humor in the situation. Since I came here, one man has been shot, and another one has died from shock. There have been intruders in the house, and strange noises. If that is funny, there is something wrong with my sense of humor."

"You miss the point," he said, still good-naturedly. "The thing that is funny, to me, is that you insist on remaining here, under the circumstances. I should think nothing would keep you."

"You are mistaken. Everything that occurs only confirms my resolution to stay until the mystery is cleared."

"I have a message for you, Miss Innes," he said, rising at last. "Mrs. Armstrong asked me to thank you for your kindness to Louise, whose whim, occurring at the time it did, put her to great inconvenience. Also—and this is a delicate matter—she asked me to appeal to your natural sympathy for her, at this time, and to ask you if you will not reconsider your decision about the house. Sunnyside is her home; she loves it dearly, and just now she wishes to retire here for quiet and peace."

"She must have had a change of heart," I said, ungraciously enough. "Louise told me her mother despised the place. Besides, this is no place for quiet and peace just now. Anyhow, doctor, while I don’t care to force an issue, I shall certainly remain here, for a time at least."

"For how long?" he asked.

"My lease is for six months. I shall stay until some explanation is found for certain things. My own family is implicated now, and I shall do everything to clear the mystery of Arnold Armstrong’s murder."

The doctor stood looking down, slapping his gloves thoughtfully against the palm of a well-looked-after hand.

"You say there have been intruders in the house?" he asked. "You are sure of that, Miss Innes?"

"Certain."

"In what part?"

"In the east wing."

"Can you tell me when these intrusions occurred, and what the purpose seemed to be? Was it robbery?"

"No," I said decidedly. "As to time, once on Friday night a week ago, again the following night, when Arnold
Armstrong was murdered, and again last Friday night."

The doctor looked serious. He seemed to be debating some question in his mind, and to reach a decision.

"Miss Innes," he said, "I am in a peculiar position; I understand your attitude, of course; but--do you think you are wise? Ever since you have come here there have been hostile demonstrations against you and your family. I'm not a croaker, but--take a warning. Leave before anything occurs that will cause you a lifelong regret."

"I am willing to take the responsibility," I said coldly. I think he gave me up then as a poor proposition. He asked to be shown where Arnold Armstrong's body had been found, and I took him there. He scrutinized the whole place carefully, examining the stairs and the lock. When he had taken a formal farewell I was confident of one thing. Doctor Walker would do anything he could to get me away from Sunnyside.

CHAPTER XXI

FOURTEEN ELM STREET

It was Monday evening when we found the body of poor old Thomas. Monday night had been uneventful; things were quiet at the house and the peculiar circumstances of the old man's death had been carefully kept from the servants. Rosie took charge of the dining-room and pantry, in the absence of a butler, and, except for the warning of the Casanova doctor, everything breathed of peace.

Affairs at the Traders' Bank were progressing slowly. The failure had hit small stock-holders very hard, the minister of the little Methodist chapel in Casanova among them. He had received as a legacy from an uncle a few shares of stock in the Traders' Bank, and now his joy was turned to bitterness: he had to sacrifice everything he had in the world, and his feeling against Paul Armstrong, dead, as he was, must have been bitter in the extreme. He was asked to officiate at the simple services when the dead banker's body was interred in Casanova churchyard, but the good man providentially took cold, and a substitute was called in.

A few days after the services he called to see me, a kind-faced little man, in a very bad frock-coat and laundered tie. I think he was uncertain as to my connection with the Armstrong family, and dubious whether I considered Mr. Armstrong's taking away a matter for condolence or congratulation. He was not long in doubt.

I liked the little man. He had known Thomas well, and had promised to officiate at the services in the rickety African Zion Church. He told me more of himself than he knew, and before he left, I astonished him--and myself, I admit--by promising a new carpet for his church. He was much affected, and I gathered that he had yearned over his ragged chapel as a mother over a half-clothed child.

"You are laying up treasure, Miss Innes," he said brokenly, "where neither moth nor rust corrupt, nor thieves break through and steal."

"It is certainly a safer place than Sunnyside," I admitted. And the thought of the carpet permitted him to smile. He stood just inside the doorway, looking from the luxury of the house to the beauty of the view.

"The rich ought to be good," he said wistfully. "They have so much that is beautiful, and beauty is ennobling. And yet--while I ought to say nothing but good of the dead--Mr. Armstrong saw nothing of this fair prospect. To him these trees and lawns were not the work of God. They were property, at so much an acre. He loved money, Miss Innes. He offered up everything to his golden calf. Not power, not ambition, was his fetish: it was money." Then he dropped his pulpit manner, and, turning to me with his engaging smile: "In spite of all this luxury," he said, "the country people here have a saying that Mr. Paul Armstrong could sit on a dollar and see all around it. Unlike the summer people, he gave neither to the poor nor to the church. He loved money for its own sake."

"And there are no pockets in shrouds!" I said cynically.

I sent him home in the car, with a bunch of hot-house roses for his wife, and he was quite overwhelmed. As for me, I had a generous glow that was cheap at the price of a church carpet. I received less gratification--and less gratitude--when I presented the new silver communion set to St. Barnabas.

I had a great many things to think about in those days. I made out a list of questions and possible answers, but I seemed only to be working around in a circle. I always ended where I began. The list was something like this:

Who had entered the house the night before the murder?

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Thomas claimed it was Mr. Bailey, whom he had seen on the foot-path, and who owned the pearl cuff-link. Why did Arnold Armstrong come back after he had left the house the night he was killed?

No answer. Was it on the mission Louise had mentioned?

Who admitted him?

Gertrude said she had locked the east entry. There was no key on the dead man or in the door. He must have been admitted from within.

Who had been locked in the clothes chute?

Some one unfamiliar with the house, evidently. Only two people missing from the household, Rosie and Gertrude. Rosie had been at the lodge. Therefore--but was it Gertrude? Might it not have been the mysterious
intruder again?

Who had accosted Rosie on the drive?

Again--perhaps the nightly visitor. It seemed more likely some one who suspected a secret at the lodge. Was Louise under surveillance?

Who had passed Louise on the circular staircase?

Could it have been Thomas? The key to the east entry made this a possibility. But why was he there, if it were indeed he?

Who had made the hole in the trunk-room wall?

It was not vandalism. It had been done quietly, and with deliberate purpose. If I had only known how to read the purpose of that gaping aperture what I might have saved in anxiety and mental strain!

Why had Louise left her people and come home to hide at the lodge?

There was no answer, as yet, to this, or to the next questions.

Why did both she and Doctor Walker warn us away from the house?

Who was Lucien Wallace?

What did Thomas see in the shadows the night he died?

What was the meaning of the subtle change in Gertrude?

What all-powerful reason made Louise determine to marry Doctor Walker?

The examiners were still working on the books of the Traders' Bank, and it was probable that several weeks would elapse before everything was cleared up. The firm of expert accountants who had examined the books some two months before testified that every bond, every piece of valuable paper, was there at that time. It had been shortly after their examination that the president, who had been in bad health, had gone to California. Mr. Bailey was still ill at the Knickerbocker, and in this, as in other ways, Gertrude's conduct puzzled me. She seemed indifferent, refused to discuss matters pertaining to the bank, and never, to my knowledge, either wrote to him or went to see him.

Gradually I came to the conclusion that Gertrude, with the rest of the world, believed her lover guilty, and--although I believed it myself, for that matter--I was irritated by her indifference. Girls in my day did not meekly accept the public's verdict as to the man they loved.

But presently something occurred that made me think that under Gertrude's surface calm there was a seething flood of emotions.

Tuesday morning the detective made a careful search of the grounds, but he found nothing. In the afternoon he disappeared, and it was late that night when he came home. He said he would have to go back to the city the following day, and arranged with Halsey and Alex to guard the house.

Liddy came to me on Wednesday morning with her black silk apron held up like a bag, and her eyes big with virtuous wrath. It was the day of Thomas' funeral in the village, and Alex and I were in the conservatory cutting flowers for the old man's casket. Liddy is never so happy as when she is making herself wretched, and now her mouth drooped while her eyes were triumphant.

"I always said there were plenty of things going on here, right under our noses, that we couldn't see," she said, holding out her apron.

"I don't see with my nose," I remarked. "What have you got there?"

Liddy pushed aside a half-dozen geranium pots, and in the space thus cleared she dumped the contents of her apron--a handful of tiny bits of paper. Alex had stepped back, but I saw him watching her curiously.

"Wait a moment, Liddy," I said. "You have been going through the library paper-basket again!"

Liddy was arranging her bits of paper with the skill of long practice and paid no attention.

"Did it ever occur to you," I went on, putting my hand over the scraps, "that when people tear up their correspondence, it is for the express purpose of keeping it from being read?"

"If they wasn't ashamed of it they wouldn't take so much trouble, Miss Rachel," Liddy said oracularly. "More than that, with things happening every day, I consider it my duty. If you don't read and act on this, I shall give it to that Jamieson, and I'll venture he'll not go back to the city to-day."

That decided me. If the scraps had anything to do with the mystery ordinary conventions had no value. So Liddy arranged the scraps, like working out one of the puzzle-pictures children play with, and she did it with much the same eagerness. When it was finished she stepped aside while I read it.

"Wednesday night, nine o'clock. Bridge," I read aloud. Then, aware of Alex's stare, I turned on Liddy.

"Some one is to play bridge to-night at nine o'clock," I said. "Is that your business, or mine?"

Liddy was aggrieved. She was about to reply when I scooped up the pieces and left the conservatory.

"Now then," I said, when we got outside, "will you tell me why you choose to take Alex into your confidence? He's no fool. Do you suppose he thinks any one in this house is going to play bridge to-night at nine o'clock, by
appointment! I suppose you have shown it in the kitchen, and instead of my being able to slip down to the bridge to-night quietly, and see who is there, the whole household will be going in a procession."

"Nobody knows it," Liddy said humbly. "I found it in the basket in Miss Gertrude's dressing-room. Look at the back of the sheet." I turned over some of the scraps, and, sure enough, it was a blank deposit slip from the Traders' Bank. So Gertrude was going to meet Jack Bailey that night by the bridge! And I had thought he was ill! It hardly seemed like the action of an innocent man--this avoidance of daylight, and of his fiancee's people. I decided to make certain, however, by going to the bridge that night.

After luncheon Mr. Jamieson suggested that I go with him to Richfield, and I consented.

"I am inclined to place more faith in Doctor Stewart's story," he said, "since I found that scrap in old Thomas' pocket. It bears out the statement that the woman with the child, and the woman who quarreled with Armstrong, are the same. It looks as if Thomas had stumbled on to some affair which was more or less discreditable to the dead man, and, with a certain loyalty to the family, had kept it to himself. Then, you see, your story about the woman at the card-room window begins to mean something. It is the nearest approach to anything tangible that we have had yet."

Warner took us to Richfield in the car. It was about twenty-five miles by railroad, but by taking a series of atrociously rough short cuts we got there very quickly. It was a pretty little town, on the river, and back on the hill I could see the Mortons' big country house, where Halsey and Gertrude had been staying until the night of the murder.

Elm Street was almost the only street, and number fourteen was easily found. It was a small white house, dilapidated without having gained anything picturesque, with a low window and a porch only a foot or so above the bit of a lawn. There was a baby-carriage in the path, and from a swing at the side came the sound of conflict. Three small children were disputing vociferously, and a faded young woman with a kindly face was trying to hush the clamor. When she saw us she untied her gingham apron and came around to the porch.

"Good afternoon," I said. Jamieson lifted his hat, without speaking. "I came to inquire about a child named Lucien Wallace."

"I am glad you have come," she said. "In spite of the other children, I think the little fellow is lonely. We thought perhaps his mother would be here to-day."

Mr. Jamieson stepped forward.

"You are Mrs. Tate?" I wondered how the detective knew.

"Yes, sir."

"Mrs. Tate, we want to make some inquiries. Perhaps in the house--"

"Come right in," she said hospitably. And soon we were in the little shabby parlor, exactly like a thousand of its prototypes. Mrs. Tate sat uneasily, her hands folded in her lap.

"How long has Lucien been here?" Mr. Jamieson asked.

"Since a week ago last Friday. His mother paid one week's board in advance; the other has not been paid."

"Was he ill when he came?"

"No, sir, not what you'd call sick. He was getting better of typhoid, she said, and he's picking up fine."

"Will you tell me his mother's name and address?"

"That's the trouble," the young woman said, knitting her brows. "She gave her name as Mrs. Wallace, and said she had no address. She was looking for a boarding-house in town. She said she worked in a department store, and couldn't take care of the child properly, and he needed fresh air and milk. I had three children of my own, and one more didn't make much difference in the work, but--I wish she would pay this week's board."

"Did she say what store it was?"

"No, sir, but all the boy's clothes came from King's. He has far too fine clothes for the country."

There was a chorus of shouts and shrill yells from the front door, followed by the loud stamping of children's feet and a throaty "whoa, whoa!" Into the room came a tandem team of two chubby youngsters, a boy and a girl, harnessed with a clothes-line, and driven by a laughing boy of about seven, in tan overalls and brass buttons. The small driver caught my attention at once: he was a beautiful child, and, although he showed traces of recent severe illness, his skin had now the clear transparency of health.

"Whoa, Flinders," he shouted. "You're goin' to smash the trap."

Mr. Jamieson coaxed him over by holding out a lead-pencil, striped blue and yellow.

"Now, then," he said, when the boy had taken the lead-pencil and was testing its usefulness on the detective's cuff, "now then, I'll bet you don't know what your name is!"

"I do," said the boy. "Lucien Wallace."

"Great! And what's your mother's name?"

"Mother, of course. What's your mother's name?" And he pointed to me! I am going to stop wearing black: it doubles a woman's age.
"And where did you live before you came here?" The detective was polite enough not to smile.
"Grossmutter," he said. And I saw Mr. Jamieson's eyebrows go up.
"German," he commented, "Well, young man, you don't seem to know much about yourself."
"I've tried it all week," Mrs. Tate broke in. "The boy knows a word or two of German, but he doesn't know where he lived, or anything about himself."
Mr. Jamieson wrote something on a card and gave it to her.
"Mrs. Tate," he said, "I want you to do something. Here is some money for the telephone call. The instant the boy's mother appears here, call up that number and ask for the person whose name is there. You can run across to the drug-store on an errand and do it quietly. Just say, 'The lady has come.'"
"'The lady has come,'" repeated Mrs. Tate. "Very well, sir, and I hope it will be soon. The milk-bill alone is almost double what it was."
"How much is the child's board?" I asked.
"Three dollars a week, including his washing."
"Very well," I said. "Now, Mrs. Tate, I am going to pay last week's board and a week in advance. If the mother comes, she is to know nothing of this visit--absolutely not a word, and, in return for your silence, you may use this money for--something for your own children."
Her tired, faded face lighted up, and I saw her glance at the little Tates' small feet. Shoes, I divined--the feet of the genteel poor being almost as expensive as their stomachs.
As we went back Mr. Jamieson made only one remark: I think he was laboring under the weight of a great disappointment.
"Is King's a children's outfitting place?" he asked.
"Not especially. It is a general department store."
He was silent after that, but he went to the telephone as soon as we got home, and called up King and Company, in the city.
After a time he got the general manager, and they talked for some time. When Mr. Jamieson hung up the receiver he turned to me.
"The plot thickens," he said with his ready smile. "There are four women named Wallace at King's none of them married, and none over twenty. I think I shall go up to the city to-night. I want to go to the Children's Hospital. But before I go, Miss Innes, I wish you would be more frank with me than you have been yet. I want you to show me the revolver you picked up in the tulip bed."
So he had known all along!
"It WAS a revolver, Mr. Jamieson," I admitted, cornered at last, "but I can not show it to you. It is not in my possession."

CHAPTER XXII
A LADDER OUT OF PLACE

At dinner Mr. Jamieson suggested sending a man out in his place for a couple of days, but Halsey was certain there would be nothing more, and felt that he and Alex could manage the situation. The detective went back to town early in the evening, and by nine o'clock Halsey, who had been playing golf--as a man does anything to take his mind away from trouble--was sleeping soundly on the big leather davenport in the living-room.

I sat and knitted, pretending not to notice when Gertrude got up and wandered out into the starlight. As soon as I was satisfied that she had gone, however, I went out cautiously. I had no intention of eavesdropping, but I wanted to be certain that it was Jack Bailey she was meeting. Too many things had occurred in which Gertrude was, or appeared to be, involved, to allow anything to be left in question.

I went slowly across the lawn, skirted the hedge to a break not far from the lodge, and found myself on the open road. Perhaps a hundred feet to the left the path led across the valley to the Country Club, and only a little way off was the foot-bridge over Casanova Creek. But just as I was about to turn down the path I heard steps coming toward me, and I shrank into the bushes. It was Gertrude, going back quickly toward the house.

I was surprised. I waited until she had had time to get almost to the house before I started. And then I stepped back again into the shadows. The reason why Gertrude had not kept her tryst was evident. Leaning on the parapet of the bridge in the moonlight, and smoking a pipe, was Alex, the gardener. I could have throttled Liddy for her carelessness in reading the torn note where he could hear. And I could cheerfully have choked Alex to death for his audacity.

But there was no help for it: I turned and followed Gertrude slowly back to the house.

The frequent invasions of the house had effectually prevented any relaxation after dusk. We had redoubled our vigilance as to bolts and window-locks but, as Mr. Jamieson had suggested, we allowed the door at the east entry to remain as before, locked by the Yale lock only. To provide only one possible entrance for the invader, and to keep a
constant guard in the dark at the foot of the circular staircase, seemed to be the only method.

In the absence of the detective, Alex and Halsey arranged to change off, Halsey to be on duty from ten to two, and Alex from two until six. Each man was armed, and, as an additional precaution, the one off duty slept in a room near the head of the circular staircase and kept his door open, to be ready for emergency.

These arrangements were carefully kept from the servants, who were only commencing to sleep at night, and who retired, one and all, with barred doors and lamps that burned full until morning.

The house was quiet again Wednesday night. It was almost a week since Louise had encountered some one on the stairs, and it was four days since the discovery of the hole in the trunk-room wall.

Arnold Armstrong and his father rested side by side in the Casanova churchyard, and at the Zion African Church, on the hill, a new mound marked the last resting-place of poor Thomas.

Louise was with her mother in town, and, beyond a polite note of thanks to me, we had heard nothing from her. Doctor Walker had taken up his practice again, and we saw him now and then flying past along the road, always at top speed. The murder of Arnold Armstrong was still unavenged, and I remained firm in the position I had taken--to stay at Sunnyside until the thing was at least partly cleared.

And yet, for all its quiet, it was on Wednesday night that perhaps the boldest attempt was made to enter the house. On Thursday afternoon the laundress sent word she would like to speak to me, and I saw her in my private sitting-room, a small room beyond the dressing-room.

Mary Anne was embarrassed. She had rolled down her sleeves and tied a white apron around her waist, and she stood making folds in it with fingers that were red and shiny from her soap-suds.

"Well, Mary," I said encouragingly, "what's the matter? Don't dare to tell me the soap is out."

"No, ma'm, Miss Innes." She had a nervous habit of looking first at my one eye and then at the other, her own optics shifting ceaselessly, right eye, left eye, right eye, until I found myself doing the same thing. "No, ma'm. I was askin' did you want the ladder left up the clothes chute?"

"The what?" I screeched, and was sorry the next minute. Seeing her suspicions were verified, Mary Anne had gone white, and stood with her eyes shifting more wildly than ever.

"There's a ladder up the clothes chute, Miss Innes," she said. "It's up that tight I can't move it, and I didn't like to ask for help until I spoke to you."

It was useless to dissemble; Mary Anne knew now as well as I did that the ladder had no business to be there. I did the best I could, however. I put her on the defensive at once.

"Then you didn't lock the laundry last night?"

"I locked it tight, and put the key in the kitchen on its nail."

"Very well, then you forgot a window."

Mary Anne hesitated.

"Yes'm," she said at last. "I thought I locked them all, but there was one open this morning."

I went out of the room and down the hall, followed by Mary Anne. The door into the clothes chute was securely bolted, and when I opened it I saw the evidence of the woman's story. A pruning-ladder had been brought from where it had lain against the stable and now stood upright in the clothes shaft, its end resting against the wall between the first and second floors.

I turned to Mary.

"This is due to your carelessness," I said. "If we had all been murdered in our beds it would have been your fault." She shivered. "Now, not a word of this through the house, and send Alex to me."

The effect on Alex was to make him apoplectic with rage, and with it all I fancied there was an element of satisfaction. As I look back, so many things are plain to me that I wonder I could not see at the time. It is all known now, and yet the whole thing was so remarkable that perhaps my stupidity was excusable.

Alex leaned down the chute and examined the ladder carefully.

"It is caught," he said with a grim smile. "The fools, to have left a warning like that! The only trouble is, Miss Innes, they won't be apt to come back for a while."

"I shouldn't regard that in the light of a calamity," I replied.

Until late that evening Halsey and Alex worked at the chute. They forced down the ladder at last, and put a new bolt on the door. As for myself, I sat and wondered if I had a deadly enemy, intent on my destruction.

I was growing more and more nervous. Liddy had given up all pretense at bravery, and slept regularly in my dressing-room on the couch, with a prayer-book and a game knife from the kitchen under her pillow, thus preparing for both the natural and the supernatural. That was the way things stood that Thursday night, when I myself took a hand in the struggle.

CHAPTER XXIII
WHILE THE STABLES BURNED
About nine o'clock that night Liddy came into the living-room and reported that one of the housemaids declared she had seen two men slip around the corner of the stable. Gertrude had been sitting staring in front of her, jumping at every sound. Now she turned on Liddy pettishly.

"I declare, Liddy," she said, "you are a bundle of nerves. What if Eliza did see some men around the stable? It may have been Warner and Alex."

"Warner is in the kitchen, miss," Liddy said with dignity. "And if you had come through what I have, you would be a bundle of nerves, too. Miss Rachel, I'd be thankful if you'd give me my month's wages to-morrow. I'll be going to my sister's."

"Very well," I said, to her evident amazement. "I will make out the check. Warner can take you down to the noon train."

Liddy's face was really funny.

"You'll have a nice time at your sister's," I went on. "Five children, hasn't she?"

"That's it," Liddy said, suddenly bursting into tears. "Send me away, after all these years, and your new shawl only half done, and nobody knowin' how to fix the water for your bath."

"It's time I learned to prepare my own bath." I was knitting complacently. But Gertrude got up and put her arms around Liddy's shaking shoulders.

"You are two big babies," she said soothingly. "Neither one of you could get along for an hour without the other. So stop quarreling and be good. Liddy, go right up and lay out Aunty's night things. She is going to bed early."

After Liddy had gone I began to think about the men at the stable, and I grew more and more anxious. Halsey was aimlessly knocking the billiard-balls around in the billiard-room, and I called to him.

"Halsey," I said when he sauntered in, "is there a policeman in Casanova?"

"Constable," he said laconically. "Veteran of the war, one arm; in office to conciliate the G. A. R. element. Why?"

"Because I am uneasy to-night." And I told him what Liddy had said. "Is there any one you can think of who could be relied on to watch the outside of the house to-night?"

"We might get Sam Bohannon from the club," he said thoughtfully. "It wouldn't be a bad scheme. He's a smart darky, and with his mouth shut and his shirt-front covered, you couldn't see him a yard off in the dark."

Halsey conferred with Alex, and the result, in an hour, was Sam. His instructions were simple. There had been numerous attempts to break into the house; it was the intention, not to drive intruders away, but to capture them. If Sam saw anything suspicious outside, he was to tap at the east entry, where Alex and Halsey were to alternate in keeping watch through the night.

It was with a comfortable feeling of security that I went to bed that night. The door between Gertrude's rooms and mine had been opened, and, with the doors into the hall bolted, we were safe enough. Although Liddy persisted in her belief that doors would prove no obstacles to our disturbers.

As before, Halsey watched the east entry from ten until two. He had an eye to comfort, and he kept vigil in a heavy oak chair, very large and deep. We went up-stairs rather early, and through the open door Gertrude and I kept up a running fire of conversation. Liddy was brushing my hair, and Gertrude was doing her own, with a long free sweep of her strong round arms.

"Did you know Mrs. Armstrong and Louise are in the village?" she called.

"No," I replied, startled. "How did you hear it?"

"I met the oldest Stewart girl to-day, the doctor's daughter, and she told me they had not gone back to town after the funeral. They went directly to that little yellow house next to Doctor Walker's, and are apparently settled there. They took the house furnished for the summer."

"Why, it's a bandbox," I said. "I can't imagine Fanny Armstrong in such a place."

"It's true, nevertheless. Ella Stewart says Mrs. Armstrong has aged terribly, and looks as if she is hardly able to walk."

I lay and thought over some of these things until midnight. The electric lights went out then, fading slowly until there was only a red-hot loop to be seen in the bulb, and then even that died away and we were embarked on the darkness of another night.

Apparently only a few minutes elapsed, during which my eyes were becoming accustomed to the darkness. Then I noticed that the windows were reflecting a faint pinkish light, Liddy noticed it at the same time, and I heard her jump up. At that moment Sam's deep voice boomed from somewhere just below.

"Fire!" he yelled. "The stable's on fire!"

I could see him in the glare dancing up and down on the drive, and a moment later Halsey joined him. Alex was awake and running down the stairs, and in five minutes from the time the fire was discovered, three of the maids were sitting on their trunks in the drive, although, excepting a few sparks, there was no fire nearer than a hundred
yards.

Gertrude seldom loses her presence of mind, and she ran to the telephone. But by the time the Casanova volunteer fire department came toiling up the hill the stable was a furnace, with the Dragon Fly safe but blistered, in the road. Some gasoline exploded just as the volunteer department got to work, which shook their nerves as well as the burning building. The stable, being on a hill, was a torch to attract the population from every direction. Rumor had it that Sunnyside was burning, and it was amazing how many people threw something over their night-clothes and flew to the conflagration.

I take it Casanova has few fires, and Sunnyside was furnishing the people, in one way and another, the greatest excitement they had had for years.

The stable was off the west wing. I hardly know how I came to think of the circular staircase and the unguarded door at its foot. Liddy was putting my clothes into sheets, preparatory to tossing them out the window, when I found her, and I could hardly persuade her to stop.

"I want you to come with me, Liddy," I said. "Bring a candle and a couple of blankets."

She lagged behind considerably when she saw me making for the east wing, and at the top of the staircase she balked.

"I am not going down there," she said firmly.

"There is no one guarding the door down there," I explained. "Who knows?--this may be a scheme to draw everybody away from this end of the house, and let some one in here."

The instant I had said it I was convinced I had hit on the explanation, and that perhaps it was already too late. It seemed to me as I listened that I heard stealthy footsteps on the east porch, but there was so much shouting outside that it was impossible to tell. Liddy was on the point of retreat.

"Very well," I said, "then I shall go down alone. Run back to Mr. Halsey's room and get his revolver. Don't shoot down the stairs if you hear a noise: remember--I shall be down there. And hurry."

I put the candle on the floor at the top of the staircase and took off my bedroom slippers. Then I crept down the stairs, going very slowly, and listening with all my ears. I was keyed to such a pitch that I felt no fear: like the condemned who sleep and eat the night before execution, I was no longer able to suffer apprehension. I was past that. Just at the foot of the stairs I stubbed my toe against Halsey's big chair, and had to stand on one foot in a soundless agony until the pain subsided to a dull ache. And then--I knew I was right. Some one had put a key into the lock, and was turning it. For some reason it refused to work, and the key was withdrawn. There was a muttering of voices outside: I had only a second. Another trial, and the door would open. The candle above made a faint gleam down the well-like staircase, and at that moment, with a second, no more, to spare, I thought of a plan.

The heavy oak chair almost filled the space between the newel post and the door. With a crash I had turned it on its side, wedging it against the door, its legs against the stairs. I could hear a faint scream from Liddy, at the crash, and then she came down the stairs on a run, with the revolver held straight out in front of her.

"Thank God," she said, in a shaking voice. "I thought it was you."

She went up the stairs at that, two at a time. Evidently she collided with the candle, for it went out, and I was left in darkness.

I was really astonishingly cool. I remember stepping over the chair and gluing my ear to the door, and I shall never forget feeling it give an inch or two there in the darkness, under a steady pressure from without. But the chair held, although I could hear an ominous cracking of one of the legs. And then, without the slightest warning, the card-room window broke with a crash. I had my finger on the trigger of the revolver, and as I jumped it went off, right through the door. Some one outside swore roundly, and for the first time I could hear what was said.

"Only a scratch... Men are at the other end of the house... Have the whole rat's nest on us." And a lot of profanity which I won't write down. The voices were at the broken window now, and although I was trembling violently, I was determined that I would hold them until help came. I moved up the stairs until I could see into the card-room, or rather through it, to the window. As I looked a small man put his leg over the sill and stepped into the room. The curtain confused him for a moment; then he turned, not toward me, but toward the billiard-room door. I fired again, and something that was glass or china crashed to the ground. Then I ran up the stairs and along the corridor to the main staircase. Gertrude was standing there, trying to locate the shots, and I must have been a peculiar figure, with my hair in crimps, my dressing-gown flying, no slippers, and a revolver clutched in my hands. I had no time to talk. There was the sound of footsteps in the lower hall, and some one bounded up the stairs.

I had gone Berserk, I think. I leaned over the stair-rail and fired again. Halsey, below, yelled at me.

"What are you doing up there?" he yelled. "You missed me by an inch."

And then I collapsed and fainted. When I came around Liddy was rubbing my temples with eau de quinine, and
the search was in full blast.

Well, the man was gone. The stable burned to the ground, while the crowd cheered at every falling rafter, and the volunteer fire department sprayed it with a garden hose. And in the house Alex and Halsey searched every corner of the lower floor, finding no one.

The truth of my story was shown by the broken window and the overturned chair. That the unknown had got upstairs was almost impossible. He had not used the main staircase, there was no way to the upper floor in the east wing, and Liddy had been at the window, in the west wing, where the servants' stair went up. But we did not go to bed at all. Sam Bohannon and Warner helped in the search, and not a closet escaped scrutiny. Even the cellars were given a thorough overhauling, without result. The door in the east entry had a hole through it where my bullet had gone.

The hole slanted downward, and the bullet was embedded in the porch. Some reddish stains showed it had done execution.

"Somebody will walk lame," Halsey said, when he had marked the course of the bullet. "It's too low to have hit anything but a leg or foot."

From that time on I watched every person I met for a limp, and to this day the man who halts in his walk is an object of suspicion to me. But Casanova had no lame men: the nearest approach to it was an old fellow who tended the safety gates at the railroad, and he, I learned on inquiry, had two artificial legs. Our man had gone, and the large and expensive stable at Sunnyside was a heap of smoking rafters and charred boards. Warner swore the fire was incendiary, and in view of the attempt to enter the house, there seemed to be no doubt of it.

CHAPTER XXIV
FLINDERS

If Halsey had only taken me fully into his confidence, through the whole affair, it would have been much simpler. If he had been altogether frank about Jack Bailey, and if the day after the fire he had told me what he suspected, there would have been no harrowing period for all of us, with the boy in danger. But young people refuse to profit by the experience of their elders, and sometimes the elders are the ones to suffer.

I was much used up the day after the fire, and Gertrude insisted on my going out. The machine was temporarily out of commission, and the carriage horses had been sent to a farm for the summer. Gertrude finally got a trap from the Casanova liveryman, and we went out. Just as we turned from the drive into the road we passed a woman. She had put down a small valise, and stood inspecting the house and grounds minutely. I should hardly have noticed her, had it not been for the fact that she had been horribly disfigured by smallpox.

"Ugh!" Gertrude said, when we had passed, "what a face! I shall dream of it to-night. Get up, Flinders."

"Flinders?" I asked. "Is that the horse's name?"

"It is." She flicked the horse's stubby mane with the whip. "He didn't look like a livery horse, and the liveryman said he had bought him from the Armstrungs when they purchased a couple of motors and cut down the stable. Nice Flinders--good old boy!"

Flinders was certainly not a common name for a horse, and yet the youngster at Richfield had named his prancing, curly-haired little horse Flinders! It set me to thinking.

At my request Halsey had already sent word of the fire to the agent from whom we had secured the house. Also, he had called Mr. Jamieson by telephone, and somewhat guardedly had told him of the previous night's events. Mr. Jamieson promised to come out that night, and to bring another man with him. I did not consider it necessary to notify Mrs. Armstrong, in the village. No doubt she knew of the fire, and in view of my refusal to give up the house, an interview would probably have been unpleasant enough. But as we passed Doctor Walker's white and green house I thought of something.

"Stop here, Gertrude," I said. "I am going to get out."

"To see Louise?" she asked.

"No, I want to ask this young Walker something."

She was curious, I knew, but I did not wait to explain. I went up the walk to the house, where a brass sign at the side announced the office, and went in. The reception-room was empty, but from the consulting-room beyond came the sound of two voices, not very amicable.

"It is an outrageous figure," some one was storming. Then the doctor's quiet tone, evidently not arguing, merely stating something. But I had not time to listen to some person probably disputing his bill, so I coughed. The voices ceased at once: a door closed somewhere, and the doctor entered from the hall of the house. He looked sufficiently surprised at seeing me.

"Good afternoon, Doctor," I said formally. "I shall not keep you from your patient. I wish merely to ask you a question."

"Won't you sit down?"
"It will not be necessary. Doctor, has any one come to you, either early this morning or to-day, to have you treat
a bullet wound?"

"Nothing so startling has happened to me," he said. "A bullet wound! Things must be lively at Sunnyside."

"I didn't say it was at Sunnyside. But as it happens, it was. If any such case comes to you, will it be too much
trouble for you to let me know?"

"I shall be only too happy," he said. "I understand you have had a fire up there, too. A fire and shooting in one
night is rather lively for a quiet place like that."

"It is as quiet as a boiler-shop," I replied, as I turned to go.

"And you are still going to stay?"

"Until I am burned out," I responded. And then on my way down the steps, I turned around suddenly.

"Doctor," I asked at a venture, "have you ever heard of a child named Lucien Wallace?"

Clever as he was, his face changed and stiffened. He was on his guard again in a moment.

"Lucien Wallace?" he repeated. "No, I think not. There are plenty of Wallaces around, but I don't know any
Lucien."

I was as certain as possible that he did. People do not lie readily to me, and this man lied beyond a doubt. But
there was nothing to be gained now; his defenses were up, and I left, half irritated and wholly baffled.

Our reception was entirely different at Doctor Stewart's. Taken into the bosom of the family at once, Flinders
tied outside and nibbling the grass at the roadside, Gertrude and I drank some home-made elderberry wine and told
briefly of the fire. Of the more serious part of the night's experience, of course, we said nothing. But when at last we
had left the family on the porch and the good doctor was untying our steed, I asked him the same question I had put
to Doctor Walker.

"Shot!" he said. "Bless my soul, no. Why, what have you been doing up at the big house, Miss Innes?"

"Some one tried to enter the house during the fire, and was shot and slightly injured," I said hastily. "Please don't
mention it; we wish to make as little of it as possible."

There was one other possibility, and we tried that. At Casanova station I saw the station master, and asked him if
any trains left Casanova between one o'clock and daylight. There was none until six A.M. The next question
required more diplomacy.

"Did you notice on the six-o'clock train any person--any man--who limped a little?" I asked. "Please try to
remember: we are trying to trace a man who was seen loitering around Sunnyside last night before the fire."

He was all attention in a moment.

"I was up there myself at the fire," he said volubly. "I'm a member of the volunteer company. First big fire we've
had since the summer house burned over to the club golf links. My wife was sayin' the other day, 'Dave, you might
as well 'a' saved the money in that there helmet and shirt.' And here last night they came in handy. Rang that bell so
hard I hadn't time scarcely to get 'em on."

"And--did you see a man who limped?" Gertrude put in, as he stopped for breath.

"Not at the train, ma'm," he said. "No such person got on here to-day. But I'll tell you where I did see a man that
limped. I didn't wait till the fire company left; there's a fast freight goes through at four forty-five, and I had to get
down to the station. I seen there wasn't much more to do anyhow at the fire--we'd got the flames under control"--
Gertrude looked at me and smiled--"so I started down the hill. There was folks here and there goin' home, and along
by the path to the Country Club I seen two men. One was a short fellow. He was sitting on a big rock, his back to
me, and he had something white in his hand, as if he was tying up his foot. After I'd gone on a piece I looked back,
and he was hobbling on and--excuse me, miss--he was swearing something sickening."

"Did they go toward the club?" Gertrude asked suddenly, leaning forward.

"No, miss. I think they came into the village. I didn't get a look at their faces, but I know every chick and child in
the place, and everybody knows me. When they didn't shout at me--in my uniform, you know--I took it they were
strangers."

So all we had for our afternoon's work was this: some one had been shot by the bullet that went through the
door; he had not left the village, and he had not called in a physician. Also, Doctor Walker knew who Lucien
Wallace was, and his very denial made me confident that, in that one direction at least, we were on the right track.

The thought that the detective would be there that night was the most cheering thing of all, and I think even
Gertrude was glad of it. Driving home that afternoon, I saw her in the clear sunlight for the first time in several
days, and I was startled to see how ill she looked. She was thin and colorless, and all her bright animation was gone.

"Gertrude," I said, "I have been a very selfish old woman. You are going to leave this miserable house to-night.
Annie Morton is going to Scotland next week, and you shall go right with her."

To my surprise, she flushed painfully.

"I don't want to go, Aunt Ray," she said. "Don't make me leave now."
"You are losing your health and your good looks," I said decidedly. "You should have a change."

"I shan't stir a foot." She was equally decided. Then, more lightly: "Why, you and Liddy need me to arbitrate between you every day in the week."

Perhaps I was growing suspicious of every one, but it seemed to me that Gertrude's gaiety was forced and artificial. I watched her covertly during the rest of the drive, and I did not like the two spots of crimson in her pale cheeks. But I said nothing more about sending her to Scotland: I knew she would not go.

CHAPTER XXV
A VISIT FROM LOUISE

That day was destined to be an eventful one, for when I entered the house and found Eliza ensconced in the upper hall on a chair, with Mary Anne doing her best to stifle her with household ammonia, and Liddy rubbing her wrists--whatever good that is supposed to do--I knew that the ghost had been walking again, and this time in daylight.

Eliza was in a frenzy of fear. She clutched at my sleeve when I went close to her, and refused to let go until she had told her story. Coming just after the fire, the household was demoralized, and it was no surprise to me to find Alex and the under-gardener struggling down-stairs with a heavy trunk between them.

"I didn't want to do it, Miss Innes," Alex said. "But she was so excited, I was afraid she would do as she said--drag it down herself, and scratch the staircase."

I was trying to get my bonnet off and to keep the maids quiet at the same time. "Now, Eliza, when you have washed your face and stopped bawling," I said, "come into my sitting-room and tell me what has happened."

Liddy put away my things without speaking. The very set of her shoulders expressed disapproval.

"Well," I said, when the silence became uncomfortable, "things seem to be warming up."

Silence from Liddy, and a long sigh.

"If Eliza goes, I don't know where to look for another cook." More silence.

"Rosie is probably a good cook." Sniff.

"Liddy," I said at last, "don't dare to deny that you are having the time of your life. You positively gloat in this excitement. You never looked better. It's my opinion all this running around, and getting jolted out of a rut, has stirred up that torpid liver of yours."

"It's not myself I'm thinking about," she said, goaded into speech. "Maybe my liver was torpid, and maybe it wasn't; but I know this: I've got some feelings left, and to see you standing at the foot of that staircase shootin' through the door--I'll never be the same woman again."

"Well, I'm glad of that--anything for a change," I said. And in came Eliza, flanked by Rosie and Mary Anne.

Her story, broken with sobs and corrections from the other two, was this: At two o'clock (two-fifteen, Rosie insisted) she had gone up-stairs to get a picture from her room to show Mary Anne. (A picture of a LADY, Mary Anne interposed.) She went up the servants' staircase and along the corridor to her room, which lay between the trunk-room and the unfinished ball-room. She heard a sound as she went down the corridor, like some one moving furniture, but she was not nervous. She thought it might be men examining the house after the fire the night before, but she looked in the trunk-room and saw nobody.

She went into her room quietly. The noise had ceased, and everything was quiet. Then she sat down on the side of her bed, and, feeling faint--she was subject to spells--("I told you that when I came, didn't I, Rosie?" "Yes'm, indeed she did!")--she put her head down on her pillow and--

"Took a nap. All right!" I said. "Go on."

"When I came to, Miss Innes, sure as I'm sittin' here, I thought I'd die. Somethin' hit me on the face, and I set up, sudden. And then I seen the plaster drop, droppin' from a little hole in the wall. And the first thing I knew, an iron bar that long" (fully two yards by her measure) "shot through that hole and tumbled on the bed. If I'd been still sleeping" ("Fainting," corrected Rosie) "I'd 'a' been hit on the head and killed!"

"I wisht you'd heard her scream," put in Mary Anne. "And her face as white as a pillow-slip when she tumbled down the stairs."

"No doubt there is some natural explanation for it, Eliza," I said. "You may have dreamed it, in your 'fainting' attack. But if it is true, the metal rod and the hole in the wall will show it."

Eliza looked a little bit sheepish.

"The hole's there all right, Miss Innes," she said. "But the bar was gone when Mary Anne and Rosie went up to pack my trunk."

"That wasn't all," Liddy's voice came funereally from a corner. "Eliza said that from the hole in the wall a burning eye looked down at her!"

"The wall must be at least six inches thick," I said with asperity. "Unless the person who drilled the hole carried his eyes on the ends of a stick, Eliza couldn't possibly have seen them."
But the fact remained, and a visit to Eliza's room proved it. I might jeer all I wished: some one had drilled a hole in the unfinished wall of the ball-room, passing between the bricks of the partition, and shooting through the unresisting plaster of Eliza's room with such force as to send the rod flying on to her bed. I had gone up-stairs alone, and I confess the thing puzzled me: in two or three places in the wall small apertures had been made, none of them of any depth. Not the least mysterious thing was the disappearance of the iron implement that had been used.

I remembered a story I read once about an impish dwarf that lived in the spaces between the double walls of an ancient castle. I wondered vaguely if my original idea of a secret entrance to a hidden chamber could be right, after all, and if we were housing some erratic guest, who played pranks on us in the dark, and destroyed the walls that he might listen, hidden safely away, to our amazed investigations.

Mary Anne and Eliza left that afternoon, but Rosie decided to stay. It was about five o'clock when the hack came from the station to get them, and, to my amazement, it had an occupant. Matthew Geist, the driver, asked for me, and explained his errand with pride.

"I've brought you a cook, Miss Innes," he said. "When the message came to come up for two girls and their trunks, I supposed there was something doing, and as this here woman had been looking for work in the village, I thought I'd bring her along."

Already I had acquired the true suburbanite ability to take servants on faith; I no longer demanded written and unimpeachable references. I, Rachel Innes, have learned not to mind if the cook sits down comfortably in my sitting-room when she is taking the orders for the day, and I am grateful if the silver is not cleaned with scouring soap. And so that day I merely told Liddy to send the new applicant in. When she came, however, I could hardly restrain a gasp of surprise. It was the woman with the pitted face.

She stood somewhat awkwardly just inside the door, and she had an air of self-confidence that was inspiring. Yes, she could cook; was not a fancy cook, but could make good soups and desserts if there was any one to take charge of the salads. And so, in the end, I took her. As Halsey said, when we told him, it didn't matter much about the cook's face, if it was clean.

I have spoken of Halsey's restlessness. On that day it seemed to be more than ever a resistless impulse that kept him out until after luncheon. I think he hoped constantly that he might meet Louise driving over the hills in her runabout: possibly he did meet her occasionally, but from his continued gloom I felt sure the situation between them was unchanged.

Part of the afternoon I believe he read--Gertrude and I were out, as I have said, and at dinner we both noticed that something had occurred to distract him. He was disagreeable, which is unlike him, nervous, looking at his watch every few minutes, and he ate almost nothing. He asked twice during the meal on what train Mr. Jamieson and the other detective were coming, and had long periods of abstraction during which he dug his fork into my damask cloth and did not hear when he was spoken to. He refused dessert, and left the table early, excusing himself on the ground that he wanted to see Alex.

Alex, however, was not to be found. It was after eight when Halsey ordered the car, and started down the hill at a pace that, even for him, was unusually reckless. Shortly after, Alex reported that he was ready to go over the house, preparatory to closing it for the night. Sam Bohannon came at a quarter before nine, and began his patrol of the grounds, and with the arrival of the two detectives to look forward to, I was not especially apprehensive.

At half-past nine I heard the sound of a horse driven furiously up the drive. It came to a stop in front of the house, and immediately after there were hurried steps on the veranda. Our nerves were not what they should have been, and Gertrude, always apprehensive lately, was at the door almost instantly. A moment later Louise had burst into the room and stood there bareheaded and breathing hard!

"Where is Halsey?" she demanded. Above her plain black gown her eyes looked big and somber, and the rapid drive had brought no color to her face. I got up and drew forward a chair.

"He has not come back," I said quietly. "Sit down, child; you are not strong enough for this kind of thing."

I don't think she even heard me.

"He has not come back?" she asked, looking from me to Gertrude. "Do you know where he went? Where can I find him?"

"For Heaven's sake, Louise," Gertrude burst out, "tell us what is wrong. Halsey is not here. He has gone to the station for Mr. Jamieson. What has happened?"

"To the station, Gertrude? You are sure?"

"Yes," I said. "Listen. There is the whistle of the train now."

She relaxed a little at our matter-of-fact tone, and allowed herself to sink into a chair.

"Perhaps I was wrong," she said heavily. "He--will be here in a few moments if--everything is right."

We sat there, the three of us, without attempt at conversation. Both Gertrude and I recognized the futility of asking Louise any questions: her reticence was a part of a role she had assumed. Our ears were strained for the first
throb of the motor as it turned into the drive and commenced the climb to the house. Ten minutes passed, fifteen, twenty. I saw Louise's hands grow rigid as they clutched the arms of her chair. I watched Gertrude's bright color slowly ebbing away, and around my own heart I seemed to feel the grasp of a giant hand.

Twenty-five minutes, and then a sound. But it was not the chug of the motor: it was the unmistakable rumble of the Casanova hack. Gertrude drew aside the curtain and peered into the darkness.

"It's the hack, I am sure," she said, evidently relieved. "Something has gone wrong with the car, and no wonder—the way Halsey went down the hill."

It seemed a long time before the creaking vehicle came to a stop at the door. Louise rose and stood watching, her hand to her throat. And then Gertrude opened the door, admitting Mr. Jamieson and a stocky, middle-aged man. Halsey was not with them. When the door had closed and Louise realized that Halsey had not come, her expression changed. From tense watchfulness to relief, and now again to absolute despair, her face was an open page.

"Halsey?" I asked unceremoniously, ignoring the stranger. "Did he not meet you?"

"No." Mr. Jamieson looked slightly surprised. "I rather expected the car, but we got up all right."

"You didn't see him at all?" Louise demanded breathlessly.

Mr. Jamieson knew her at once, although he had not seen her before. She had kept to her rooms until the morning she left.

"No, Miss Armstrong," he said. "I saw nothing of him. What is wrong?"

"Then we shall have to find him," she asserted. "Every instant is precious. Mr. Jamieson, I have reason for believing that he is in danger, but I don't know what it is. Only—he must be found."

The stocky man had said nothing. Now, however, he went quickly toward the door.

"I'll catch the hack down the road and hold it," he said. "Is the gentleman down in the town?"

"Mr. Jamieson," Louise said impulsively, "I can use the hack. Take my horse and trap outside and drive like mad. Try to find the Dragon Fly—it ought to be easy to trace. I can think of no other way. Only, don't lose a moment."

The new detective had gone, and a moment later Jamieson went rapidly down the drive, the cob's feet striking fire at every step. Louise stood looking after them. When she turned around she faced Gertrude, who stood indignant, almost tragic, in the hall.

"You KNOW what threatens Halsey, Louise," she said accusingly. "I believe you know this whole horrible thing, this mystery that we are struggling with. If anything happens to Halsey, I shall never forgive you."

Louise only raised her hands despairingly and dropped them again.

"He is as dear to me as he is to you," she said sadly. "I tried to warn him."

"Nonsense!" I said, as briskly as I could. "We are making a lot of trouble out of something perhaps very small. Halsey was probably late—he is always late. Any moment we may hear the car coming up the road."

But it did not come. After a half-hour of suspense, Louise went out quietly, and did not come back. I hardly knew she was gone until I heard the station hack moving off. At eleven o'clock the telephone rang. It was Mr. Jamieson.

"I have found the Dragon Fly, Miss Innes," he said. "It has collided with a freight car on the siding above the station. No, Mr. Innes was not there, but we shall probably find him. Send Warner for the car."

But they did not find him. At four o'clock the next morning we were still waiting for news, while Alex watched the house and Sam the grounds. At daylight I dropped into exhausted sleep. Halsey had not come back, and there was no word from the detective.

CHAPTER XXVI
HALSEY'S DISAPPEARANCE

Nothing that had gone before had been as bad as this. The murder and Thomas' sudden death we had been able to view in a detached sort of way. But with Halsey's disappearance everything was altered. Our little circle, intact until now, was broken. We were no longer onlookers who saw a battle passing around them. We were the center of action. Of course, there was no time then to voice such an idea. My mind seemed able to hold only one thought: that Halsey had been foully dealt with, and that every minute lost might be fatal.

Mr. Jamieson came back about eight o'clock the next morning: he was covered with mud, and his hat was gone. Altogether, we were a sad-looking trio that gathered around a breakfast that no one could eat. Over a cup of black coffee the detective told us what he had learned of Halsey's movements the night before. Up to a certain point the car had made it easy enough to follow him. And I gathered that Mr. Burns, the other detective, had followed a similar car for miles at dawn, only to find it was a touring car on an endurance run.

"He left here about ten minutes after eight," Mr. Jamieson said. "He went alone, and at eight twenty he stopped at Doctor Walker's. I went to the doctor's about midnight, but he had been called out on a case, and had not come back at four o'clock. From the doctor's it seems Mr. Innes walked across the lawn to the cottage Mrs. Armstrong and
her daughter have taken. Mrs. Armstrong had retired, and he said perhaps a dozen words to Miss Louise. She will
not say what they were, but the girl evidently suspects what has occurred. That is, she suspects foul play, but she
doesn't know of what nature. Then, apparently, he started directly for the station. He was going very fast--the
flagman at the Carol Street crossing says he saw the car pass. He knew the siren. Along somewhere in the dark
stretch between Carol Street and the depot he evidently swerved suddenly--perhaps some one in the road--and went
full into the side of a freight. We found it there last night."
"He might have been thrown under the train by the force of the shock," I said tremulously.
Gertrude shuddered.
"We examined every inch of track. There was--no sign."
"But surely--he can't be--gone!" I cried. "Aren't there traces in the mud--anything?"
"There is no mud--only dust. There has been no rain. And the footpath there is of cinders. Miss Innes, I am
inclined to think that he has met with bad treatment, in the light of what has gone before. I do not think he has been
murdered." I shrank from the word. "Burns is back in the country, on a clue we got from the night clerk at the drug-
store. There will be two more men here by noon, and the city office is on the lookout."
"The creek?" Gertrude asked.
"The creek is shallow now. If it were swollen with rain, it would be different. There is hardly any water in it.
Now, Miss Innes," he said, turning to me, "I must ask you some questions. Had Mr. Halsey any possible reason for
going away like this, without warning?"
"None whatever."
"He went away once before," he persisted. "And you were as sure then."
"He did not leave the Dragon Fly jammed into the side of a freight car before."
"No, but he left it for repairs in a blacksmith shop, a long distance from here. Do you know if he had any
enemies? Any one who might wish him out of the way?"
"Not that I know of, unless--no, I can not think of any."
"Was he in the habit of carrying money?"
"He never carried it far. No, he never had more than enough for current expenses."
Mr. Jamieson got up then and began to pace the room. It was an unwonted concession to the occasion.
"Then I think we get at it by elimination. The chances are against flight. If he was hurt, we find no trace of him.
It looks almost like an abduction. This young Doctor Walker--have you any idea why Mr. Innes should have gone
there last night?"
"I can not understand it," Gertrude said thoughtfully. "I don't think he knew Doctor Walker at all, and--their
relations could hardly have been cordial, under the circumstances."
Jamieson pricked up his ears, and little by little he drew from us the unfortunate story of Halsey's love affair, and
the fact that Louise was going to marry Doctor Walker.
Mr. Jamieson listened attentively.
"There are some interesting developments here," he said thoughtfully. "The woman who claims to be the mother
of Lucien Wallace has not come back. Your nephew has apparently been spirited away. There is an organized
attempt being made to enter this house; in fact, it has been entered. Witness the incident with the cook yesterday.
And I have a new piece of information."
He looked carefully away from Gertrude. "Mr. John Bailey is not at his Knickerbocker apartments, and I don't
know where he is. It's a hash, that's what it is. It's a Chinese puzzle. They won't fit together, unless--unless Mr.
Bailey and your nephew have again--"
And once again Gertrude surprised me. "They are not together," she said hotly. "I--know where Mr. Bailey is,
and my brother is not with him."
The detective turned and looked at her keenly.
"Miss Gertrude," he said, "if you and Miss Louise would only tell me everything you know and surmise about
this business, I should be able to do a great many things. I believe I could find your brother, and I might be able to--
well, to do some other things." But Gertrude's glance did not falter.
"Nothing that I know could help you to find Halsey," she said stubbornly. "I know absolutely as little of his
disappearance as you do, and I can only say this: I do not trust Doctor Walker. I think he hated Halsey, and he would
get rid of him if he could."
"Perhaps you are right. In fact, I had some such theory myself. But Doctor Walker went out late last night to a
serious case in Summitville, and is still there. Burns traced him there. We have made guarded inquiry at the
Greenwood Club, and through the village. There is absolutely nothing to go on but this. On the embankment above
the railroad, at the point where we found the machine, is a small house. An old woman and a daughter, who is very
lame, live there. They say that they distinctly heard the shock when the Dragon Fly hit the car, and they went to the
bottom of their garden and looked over. The automobile was there; they could see the lights, and they thought some- one had been injured. It was very dark, but they could make out two figures, standing together. The women were curious, and, leaving the fence, they went back and by a roundabout path down to the road. When they got there the car was still standing, the headlight broken and the bonnet crushed, but there was no one to be seen."

The detective went away immediately, and to Gertrude and me was left the woman's part, to watch and wait. By luncheon nothing had been found, and I was frantic. I went up-stairs to Halsey's room finally, from sheer inability to sit across from Gertrude any longer, and meet her terror-filled eyes.

Liddy was in my dressing-room, suspiciously red-eyed, and trying to put a right sleeve in a left armhole of a new waist for me. I was too much shaken to scold.

"What name did that woman in the kitchen give?" she demanded, viciously ripping out the offending sleeve.


"Bliss. M. B. Well, that's not what she has on he suitcase. It is marked N. F. C."

The new cook and her initials troubled me not at all. I put on my bonnet and sent for what the Casanova liveryman called a "stylish turnout." Having once made up my mind to a course of action, I am not one to turn back. Warner drove me; he was plainly disgusted, and he steered the livery horse as he would the Dragon Fly, feeling uneasily with his left foot for the clutch, and working his right elbow at an imaginary horn every time a dog got in the way.

Warner had something on his mind, and after we had turned into the road, he voiced it.

"Miss Innes," he said. "I overheard a part of a conversation yesterday that I didn't understand. It wasn't my business to understand it, for that matter. But I've been thinking all day that I'd better tell you. Yesterday afternoon, while you and Miss Gertrude were out driving, I had got the car in some sort of shape again after the fire, and I went to the library to call Mr. Innes to see it. I went into the living-room, where Miss Liddy said he was, and half-way across to the library I heard him talking to some one. He seemed to be walking up and down, and he was in a rage, I can tell you."

"What did he say?"

"The first thing I heard was--excuse me, Miss Innes, but it's what he said, 'The damned rascal,' he said, 'I'll see him in'-- well, in hell was what he said, 'in hell first.' Then somebody else spoke up; it was a woman. She said, 'I warned them, but they thought I would be afraid.'"

"A woman! Did you wait to see who it was?"

"I wasn't spying, Miss Innes," Warner said with dignity. "But the next thing caught my attention. She said, 'I knew there was something wrong from the start. A man isn't well one day, and dead the next, without some reason.' I thought she was speaking of Thomas."

"And you don't know who it was!" I exclaimed. "Warner, you had the key to this whole occurrence in your hands, and did not use it!"

However, there was nothing to be done. I resolved to make inquiry when I got home, and in the meantime, my present errand absorbed me. This was nothing less than to see Louise Armstrong, and to attempt to drag from her what she knew, or suspected, of Halsey's disappearance. But here, as in every direction I turned, I was baffled.

A neat maid answered the bell, but she stood squarely in the doorway, and it was impossible to preserve one's dignity and pass her.

"Miss Armstrong is very ill, and unable to see any one," she said. I did not believe her.

"And Mrs. Armstrong--is she also ill?"

"She is with Miss Louise and can not be disturbed."

"Tell her it is Miss Innes, and that it is a matter of the greatest importance."

"It would be of no use, Miss Innes. My orders are positive."

At that moment a heavy step sounded on the stairs. Past the maid's white-strapped shoulder I could see a familiar thatch of gray hair, and in a moment I was face to face with Doctor Stewart. He was very grave, and his customary geniality was tinged with restraint.

"You are the very woman I want to see," he said promptly. "Send away your trap, and let me drive you home. What is this about your nephew?"

"He has disappeared, doctor. Not only that, but there is every evidence that he has been either abducted, or--" I could not finish. The doctor helped me into his capacious buggy in silence. Until we had got a little distance he did not speak; then he turned and looked at me.

"Now tell me about it," he said. He heard me through without speaking.

"And you think Louise knows something?" he said when I had finished. "I don't--in fact, I am sure of it. The best evidence of it is this: she asked me if he had been heard from, or if anything had been learned. She won't allow Walker in the room, and she made me promise to see you and tell you this: don't give up the search for him. Find
him, and find him soon. He is living."

"Well," I said, "if she knows that, she knows more. She is a very cruel and ungrateful girl."

"She is a very sick girl," he said gravely. "Neither you nor I can judge her until we know everything. Both she
and her mother are ghosts of their former selves. Under all this, these two sudden deaths, this bank robbery, the
invasions at Sunnyside and Halsey's disappearance, there is some mystery that, mark my words, will come out some
day. And when it does, we shall find Louise Armstrong a victim."

I had not noticed where we were going, but now I saw we were beside the railroad, and from a knot of men
standing beside the track I divined that it was here the car had been found. The siding, however, was empty. Except
a few bits of splintered wood on the ground, there was no sign of the accident.

"Where is the freight car that was rammed?" the doctor asked a bystander.

"It was taken away at daylight, when the train was moved."

There was nothing to be gained. He pointed out the house on the embankment where the old lady and her
daughter had heard the crash and seen two figures beside the car. Then we drove slowly home. I had the doctor put
me down at the gate, and I walked to the house--past the lodge where we had found Louise, and, later, poor Thomas;
up the drive where I had seen a man watching the lodge and where, later, Rosie had been frightened; past the east
entrance, where so short a time before the most obstinate effort had been made to enter the house, and where, that
night two weeks ago, Liddy and I had seen the strange woman. Not far from the west wing lay the blackened ruins
of the stables. I felt like a ruin myself, as I paused on the broad veranda before I entered the house.

Two private detectives had arrived in my absence, and it was a relief to turn over to them the responsibility of
the house and grounds. Mr. Jamieson, they said, had arranged for more to assist in the search for the missing man,
and at that time the country was being scoured in all directions.

The household staff was again depleted that afternoon. Liddy was waiting to tell me that the new cook had gone,
bag and baggage, without waiting to be paid. No one had admitted the visitor whom Warner had heard in the library,
unless, possibly, the missing cook. Again I was working in a circle.

CHAPTER XXVII
WHO IS NINA CARRINGTON?

The four days, from Saturday to the following Tuesday, we lived, or existed, in a state of the most dreadful
suspense. We ate only when Liddy brought in a tray, and then very little. The papers, of course, had got hold of the
story, and we were besieged by newspaper men. From all over the country false clues came pouring in and raised
hopes that crumbled again to nothing. Every morgue within a hundred miles, every hospital, had been visited,
without result.

Mr. Jamieson, personally, took charge of the organized search, and every evening, no matter where he happened
to be, he called us by long distance telephone. It was the same formula. "Nothing to-day. A new clue to work on.
Better luck to-morrow."

And heartsick we would put up the receiver and sit down again to our vigil.

The inaction was deadly. Liddy cried all day, and, because she knew I objected to tears, sniffled audibly around
the corner.

"For Heaven's sake, smile!" I snapped at her. And her ghastly attempt at a grin, with her swollen nose and red
eyes, made me hysterical. I laughed and cried together, and pretty soon, like the two old fools we were, we were
sitting together weeping into the same handkerchief.

Things were happening, of course, all the time, but they made little or no impression. The Charity Hospital
called up Doctor Stewart and reported that Mrs. Watson was in a critical condition. I understood also that legal steps
were being taken to terminate my lease at Sunnyside. Louise was out of danger, but very ill, and a trained nurse
guarded her like a gorgon. There was a rumor in the village, brought up by Liddy from the butcher's, that a wedding
had already taken place between Louise and Doctor Walkers and this roused me for the first time to action.

On Tuesday, then, I sent for the car, and prepared to go out. As I waited at the porte-cochere I saw the under-
gardener, an inoffensive, grayish-haired man, trimming borders near the house.

The day detective was watching him, sitting on the carriage block. When he saw me, he got up.

"Miss Innes," he said, taking of his hat, "do you know where Alex, the gardener, is?"

"Why, no. Isn't he here?" I asked.

"He has been gone since yesterday afternoon. Have you employed him long?"

"Only a couple of weeks."

"Is he efficient? A capable man?"

"I hardly know," I said vaguely. "The place looks all right, and I know very little about such things. I know much
more about boxes of roses than bushes of them."

"This man," pointing to the assistant, "says Alex isn't a gardener. That he doesn't know anything about plants."
"That's very strange," I said, thinking hard. "Why, he came to me from the Brays, who are in Europe."

"Exactly." The detective smiled. "Every man who cuts grass isn't a gardener, Miss Innes, and just now it is our policy to believe every person around here a rascal until he proves to be the other thing."

Warner came up with the car then, and the conversation stopped. As he helped me in, however, the detective said something further.

"Not a word or sign to Alex, if he comes back," he said cautiously.

I went first to Doctor Walker's. I was tired of beating about the bush, and I felt that the key to Halsey's disappearance was here at Casanova, in spite of Mr. Jamieson's theories.

The doctor was in. He came at once to the door of his consulting-room, and there was no mask of cordiality in his manner.

"Please come in," he said curtly.

"I shall stay here, I think, doctor." I did not like his face or his manner; there was a subtle change in both. He had thrown off the air of friendliness, and I thought, too, that he looked anxious and haggard.

"Doctor Walker," I said, "I have come to you to ask some questions. I hope you will answer them. As you know, my nephew has not yet been found."

"So I understand," stiffly.

"I believe, if you would, you could help us, and that leads to one of my questions. Will you tell me what was the nature of the conversation you held with him the night he was attacked and carried off?"

"Attacked! Carried off!" he said, with pretended surprise. "Really, Miss Innes, don't you think you exaggerate? I understand it is not the first time Mr. Innes has--disappeared."

"You are quibbling, doctor. This is a matter of life and death. Will you answer my question?"

"Certainly. He said his nerves were bad, and I gave him a prescription for them. I am violating professional ethics when I tell you even as much as that."

I could not tell him he lied. I think I looked it. But I hazarded a random shot.

"I thought perhaps," I said, watching him narrowly, "that it might be about--Nina Carrington."

For a moment I thought he was going to strike me. He grew livid, and a small crooked blood-vessel in his temple swelled and throbbed curiously. Then he forced a short laugh.

"Who is Nina Carrington?" he asked.

"I am about to discover that," I replied, and he was quiet at once. It was not difficult to divine that he feared Nina Carrington a good deal more than he did the devil. Our leave-taking was brief; in fact, we merely stared at each other over the waiting-room table, with its litter of year-old magazines. Then I turned and went out.

"To Richfield," I told Warner, and on the way I thought, and thought hard.

"Nina Carrington, Nina Carrington," the roar and rush of the wheels seemed to sing the words. "Nina Carrington, N. C." And I then knew, knew as surely as if I had seen the whole thing. There had been an N. C. on the suit-case belonging to the woman with the pitted face. How simple it all seemed. Mattie Bliss had been Nina Carrington. It was she Warner had heard in the library. It was something she had told Halsey that had taken him frantically to Doctor Walker's office, and from there perhaps to his death. If we could find the woman, we might find what had become of Halsey.

We were almost at Richfield now, so I kept on. My mind was not on my errand there now. It was back with Halsey on that memorable night. What was it he had said to Louise, that had sent her up to Sunnyside, half wild with fear for him? I made up my mind, as the car drew up before the Tate cottage, that I would see Louise if I had to break into the house at night.

Almost exactly the same scene as before greeted my eyes at the cottage. Mrs. Tate, the baby-carriage in the path, the children at the swing--all were the same.

She came forward to meet me, and I noticed that some of the anxious lines had gone out of her face. She looked young, almost pretty.

"I am glad you have come back," she said. "I think I will have to be honest and give you back your money."

"Why?" I asked. "Has the mother come?"

"No, but some one came and paid the boy's board for a month. She talked to him for a long time, but when I asked him afterward he didn't know her name."

"A young woman?"

"Not very young. About forty, I suppose. She was small and fair-haired, just a little bit gray, and very sad. She was in deep mourning, and, I think, when she came, she expected to go at once. But the child, Lucien, interested her. She talked to him for a long time, and, indeed, she looked much happier when she left."

"You are sure this was not the real mother?"

"O mercy, no! Why, she didn't know which of the three was Lucien. I thought perhaps she was a friend of yours,
but, of course, I didn't ask."

"She was not--pock-marked?" I asked at a venture. "No, indeed. A skin like a baby's. But perhaps you will know
the initials. She gave Lucien a handkerchief and forgot it. It was very fine, black-bordered, and it had three hand-
worked letters in the corner--F. B. A."

"No," I said with truth enough, "she is not a friend of mine." F. B. A. was Fanny Armstrong, without a chance of
doubt!

With another warning to Mrs. Tate as to silence, we started back to Sunnyside. So Fanny Armstrong knew of
Lucien Wallace, and was sufficiently interested to visit him and pay for his support. Who was the child's mother and
where was she? Who was Nina Carrington? Did either of them know where Halsey was or what had happened to
him?

On the way home we passed the little cemetery where Thomas had been laid to rest. I wondered if Thomas could
have helped us to find Halsey, had he lived. Farther along was the more imposing burial-ground, where Arnold
Armstrong and his father lay in the shadow of a tall granite shaft. Of the three, I think Thomas was the only one
sincerely mourned.

CHAPTER XXVIII

A TRAMP AND THE TOOTHACHE

The bitterness toward the dead president of the Traders' Bank seemed to grow with time. Never popular, his
memory was execrated by people who had lost nothing, but who were filled with disgust by constantly hearing new
stories of the man's grasping avarice. The Traders' had been a favorite bank for small tradespeople, and in its savings
department it had solicited the smallest deposits. People who had thought to be self-supporting to the last found
themselves confronting the poorhouse, their two or three hundred dollar savings wiped away. All bank failures have
this element, however, and the directors were trying to promise twenty per cent. on deposits.

But, like everything else those days, the bank failure was almost forgotten by Gertrude and myself. We did not
mention Jack Bailey: I had found nothing to change my impression of his guilt, and Gertrude knew how I felt. As for
the murder of the bank president's son, I was of two minds. One day I thought Gertrude knew or at least suspected
that Jack had done it; the next I feared that it had been Gertrude herself, that night alone on the circular staircase.
And then the mother of Lucien Wallace would obtrude herself, and an almost equally good case might be made
against her. There were times, of course, when I was disposed to throw all those suspicions aside, and fix definitely
on the unknown, whoever that might be.

I had my greatest disappointment when it came to tracing Nina Carrington. The woman had gone without
leaving a trace. Marked as she was, it should have been easy to follow her, but she was not to be found. A
description to one of the detectives, on my arrival at home, had started the ball rolling. But by night she had not been
found. I told Gertrude, then, about the telegram to Louise when she had been ill before; about my visit to Doctor
Walker, and my suspicions that Mattie Bliss and Nina Carrington were the same. She thought, as I did, that there
was little doubt of it.

I said nothing to her, however, of the detective's suspicions about Alex. Little things that I had not noticed at the
time now came back to me. I had an uncomfortable feeling that perhaps Alex was a spy, and that by taking him into
the house I had played into the enemy's hand. But at eight o'clock that night Alex himself appeared, and with him a
strange and repulsive individual. They made a queer pair, for Alex was almost as disreputable as the tramp, and he
had a badly swollen eye.

Gertrude had been sitting listlessly waiting for the evening message from Mr. Jamieson, but when the singular
pair came in, as they did, without ceremony, she jumped up and stood staring. Winters, the detective who watched
the house at night, followed them, and kept his eyes sharply on Alex's prisoner. For that was the situation as it
developed.

He was a tall lanky individual, ragged and dirty, and just now he looked both terrified and embarrassed. Alex
was too much engrossed to be either, and to this day I don't think I ever asked him why he went off without
permission the day before.

"Miss Innes," Alex began abruptly, "this man can tell us something very important about the disappearance of
Mr. Innes. I found him trying to sell this watch."

He took a watch from his pocket and put it on the table. It was Halsey's watch. I had given it to him on his
twenty-first birthday: I was dumb with apprehension.

"He says he had a pair of cuff-links also, but he sold them--"

"Fer a dollar'n half," put in the disreputable individual hoarsely, with an eye on the detective.

"He is not--dead?" I implored. The tramp cleared his throat.

"No'm," he said huskily. "He was used up pretty bad, but he weren't dead. He was comin' to hisself when I"--he
stopped and looked at the detective. "I didn't steal it, Mr. Winters," he whined. "I found it in the road, honest to God,
I did.”

Mr. Winters paid no attention to him. He was watching Alex.

"I'd better tell what he told me," Alex broke in. "It will be quicker. When Jamieson—when Mr. Jamieson calls up we can start him right. Mr. Winters, I found this man trying to sell that watch on Fifth Street. He offered it to me for three dollars."

"How did you know the watch?" Winters snapped at him.

"I had seen it before, many times. I used it at night when I was watching at the foot of the staircase." The detective was satisfied. "When he offered the watch to me, I knew it, and I pretended I was going to buy it. We went into an alley and I got the watch." The tramp shivered. It was plain how Alex had secured the watch. "Then—I got the story from this fellow. He claims to have seen the whole affair. He says he was in an empty car—in the car the automobile struck."

The tramp broke in here, and told his story, with frequent interpretations by Alex and Mr. Winters. He used a strange medley, in which familiar words took unfamiliar meanings, but it was gradually made clear to us.

On the night in question the tramp had been "pounding his ear"—this stuck to me as being graphic—in an empty box-car along the siding at Casanova. The train was going west, and due to leave at dawn. The tramp and the "brakey" were friendly, and things going well. About ten o'clock, perhaps earlier, a terrific crash against the side of the car roused him. He tried to open the door, but could not move it. He got out of the other side, and just as he did so, he heard one groan.

The habits of a lifetime made him cautious. He slipped on to the bumper of a car and peered through. An automobile had struck the car, and stood there on two wheels. The tail lights were burning, but the headlights were out. Two men were stooping over some one who lay on the ground. Then the taller of the two started on a dog-trot along the train looking for an empty. He found one four cars away and ran back again. The two lifted the unconscious man into the empty box-car, and, getting in themselves, stayed for three or four minutes. When they came out, after closing the sliding door, they cut up over the railroad embankment toward the town. One, the short one, seemed to limp.

The tramp was wary. He waited for ten minutes or so. Some women came down a path to the road and inspected the automobile. When they had gone, he crawled into the box-car and closed the door again. Then he lighted a match. The figure of a man, unconscious, gagged, and with his hands tied, lay far at the end.

The tramp lost no time; he went through his pockets, found a little money and the cuff-links, and took them. Then he loosened the gag—it had been cruelly tight—and went his way, again closing the door of the box-car. Outside on the road he found the watch. He got on the fast freight east, some time after, and rode into the city. He had sold the cuff-links, but on offering the watch to Alex he had been "copped."

The story, with its cold recital of villainy, was done. I hardly knew if I were more anxious, or less. That it was Halsey, there could be no doubt. How badly he was hurt, how far he had been carried, were the questions that demanded immediate answer. But it was the first real information we had had; my boy had not been murdered outright. But instead of vague terrors there was now the real fear that he might be lying in some strange hospital receiving the casual attention commonly given to the charity cases. Even this, had we known it, would have been paradise to the terrible truth. I wake yet and feel myself cold and trembling with the horror of Halsey's situation for three days after his disappearance.

Mr. Winters and Alex disposed of the tramp with a warning. It was evident he had told us all he knew. We had occasion, within a day or two, to be doubly thankful that we had given him his freedom. When Mr. Jamieson telephoned that night we had news for him; he told me what I had not realized before—that it would not be possible to find Halsey at once, even with this clue. The cars by this time, three days, might be scattered over the Union.

But he said to keep on hoping, that it was the best news we had had. And in the meantime, consumed with anxiety as we were, things were happening at the house in rapid succession.

We had one peaceful day—then Liddy took sick in the night. I went in when I heard her groaning, and found her with a hot-water bottle to her face, and her right cheek swollen until it was glassy.

"Toothache?" I asked, not too gently. "You deserve it. A woman of your age, who would rather go around with an exposed nerve in her head than have the tooth pulled! It would be over in a moment."

"So would hanging," Liddy protested, from behind the hot-water bottle.

I was hunting around for cotton and laudanum.

"You have a tooth just like it yourself, Miss Rachel," she whimpered. "And I'm sure Doctor Boyle's been trying to take it out for years."

There was no laudanum, and Liddy made a terrible fuss when I proposed carbolic acid, just because I had put too much on the cotton once and burned her mouth. I'm sure it never did her any permanent harm; indeed, the doctor said afterward that living on liquid diet had been a splendid rest for her stomach. But she would have none of the
acid, and she kept me awake groaning, so at last I got up and went to Gertrude's door. To my surprise, it was locked.

I went around by the hall and into her bedroom that way. The bed was turned down, and her dressing-gown and night-dress lay ready in the little room next, but Gertrude was not there. She had not undressed.

I don't know what terrible thoughts came to me in the minute I stood there. Through the door I could hear Liddy grumbling, with a squeal now and then when the pain stabbed harder. Then, automatically, I got the laudanum and went back to her.

It was fully a half-hour before Liddy's groans subsided. At intervals I went to the door into the hall and looked out, but I saw and heard nothing suspicious. Finally, when Liddy had dropped into a doze, I even ventured as far as the head of the circular staircase, but there floated up to me only the even breathing of Winters, the night detective, sleeping just inside the entry. And then, far off, I heard the rapping noise that had lured Louise down the staircase that other night, two weeks before. It was over my head, and very faint--three or four short muffled taps, a pause, and then again, stealthily repeated.

The sound of Mr. Winters' breathing was comforting; with the thought that there was help within call, something kept me from waking him. I did not move for a moment; ridiculous things Liddy had said about a ghost--I am not at all superstitious, except, perhaps, in the middle of the night, with everything dark--things like that came back to me. Almost beside me was the clothes chute. I could feel it, but I could see nothing. As I stood, listening intently, I heard a sound near me. It was vague, indefinite. Then it ceased; there was an uneasy movement and a grunt from the foot of the circular staircase, and silence again.

I stood perfectly still, hardly daring to breathe.

Then I knew I had been right. Some one was stealthily-passing the head of the staircase and coming toward me in the dark. I leaned against the wall for support--my knees were giving way. The steps were close now, and suddenly I thought of Gertrude. Of course it was Gertrude. I put out one hand in front of me, but I touched nothing. My voice almost refused me, but I managed to gasp out, "Gertrude!"

"Good Lord!" a man's voice exclaimed, just beside me. And then I collapsed. I felt myself going, felt someone catch me, a horrible nausea--that was all I remembered.

When I came to it was dawn. I was lying on the bed in Louise's room, with the cherub on the ceiling staring down at me, and there was a blanket from my own bed thrown over me. I felt weak and dizzy, but I managed to get up and totter to the door. At the foot of the circular staircase Mr. Winters was still asleep. Hardly able to stand, I crept back to my room. The door into Gertrude's room was no longer locked: she was sleeping like a tired child. And in my dressing-room Liddy hugged a cold hot-water bottle, and mumbled in her sleep.

"There's some things you can't hold with hand cuffs," she was muttering thickly.

CHAPTER XXIX

A SCRAP OF PAPER

For the first time in twenty years, I kept my bed that day. Liddy was alarmed to the point of hysteria, and sent for Doctor Stewart just after breakfast. Gertrude spent the morning with me, reading something--I forget what. I was too busy with my thoughts to listen. I had said nothing to the two detectives. If Mr. Jamieson had been there, I should have told him everything, but I could not go to these strange men and tell them my niece had been missing in the middle of the night; that she had not gone to bed at all; that while I was searching for her through the house, I had met a stranger who, when I fainted, had carried me into a room and left me there, to get better or not, as it might happen.

The whole situation was terrible: the issues had been less vital, it would have been absurd. Here we were, guarded day and night by private detectives, with an extra man to watch the grounds, and yet we might as well have lived in a Japanese paper house, for all the protection we had.

And there was something else: the man I had met in the darkness had been even more startled than I, and about his voice, when he muttered his muffled exclamation, there was something vaguely familiar. All that morning, while Gertrude read aloud, and Liddy watched for the doctor, I was puzzling over that voice, without result.

And there were other things, too. I wondered what Gertrude's absence from her room had to do with it all, or if it had any connection. I tried to think that she had heard the rapping noises before I did and gone to investigate, but I'm afraid I was a moral coward that day. I could not ask her.

Perhaps the diversion was good for me. It took my mind from Halsey, and the story we had heard the night before. The day, however, was a long vigil, with every ring of the telephone full of possibilities. Doctor Walker came up, some time just after luncheon, and asked for me.

"Go down and see him," I instructed Gertrude. "Tell him I am out--for mercy's sake don't say I'm sick. Find out what he wants, and from this time on, instruct the servants that he is not to be admitted. I loathe that man."

Gertrude came back very soon, her face rather flushed.

"He came to ask us to get out," she said, picking up her book with a jerk. "He says Louise Armstrong wants to
come here, now that she is recovering."

"And what did you say?"

"I said we were very sorry we could not leave, but we would be delighted to have Louise come up here with us. He looked daggers at me. And he wanted to know if we would recommend Eliza as a cook. He has brought a patient, a man, out from town, and is increasing his establishment—that's the way he put it."

"I wish him joy of Eliza," I said tartly. "Did he ask for Halsey?"

"Yes, I told him that we were on the track last night, and that it was only a question of time. He said he was glad, although he didn't appear to be, but he said not to be too sanguine."

"Do you know what I believe?" I asked. "I believe, as firmly as I believe anything, that Doctor Walker knows something about Halsey, and that he could put his finger on him, if he wanted to."

There were several things that day that bewildered me. About three o'clock Mr. Jamieson telephoned from the Casanova station and Warner went down to meet him. I got up and dressed hastily, and the detective was shown up to my sitting-room.

"No news?" I asked, as he entered. He tried to look encouraging, without success. I noticed that he looked tired and dusty, and, although he was ordinarily impeccable in his appearance, it was clear that he was at least two days from a razor.

"It won't be long now, Miss Innes," he said. "I have come out here on a peculiar errand, which I will tell you about later. First, I want to ask some questions. Did any one come out here yesterday to repair the telephone, and examine the wires on the roof?"

"Yes," I said promptly; "but it was not the telephone. He said the wiring might have caused the fire at the stable. I went up with him myself, but he only looked around."

Mr. Jamieson smiled.

"Good for you!" he applauded. "Don't allow any one in the house that you don't trust, and don't trust anybody. All are not electricians who wear rubber gloves."

He refused to explain further, but he got a slip of paper out of his pocketbook and opened it carefully.

"Listen," he said. "You heard this before and scoffed. In the light of recent developments I want you to read it again. You are a clever woman, Miss Innes. Just as surely as I sit here, there is something in this house that is wanted very anxiously by a number of people. The lines are closing up, Miss Innes."

The paper was the one he had found among Arnold Armstrong's effects, and I read it again:

"----by altering the plans for----rooms, may be possible. The best way, in my opinion, would be to----the plan for----in one of the----rooms----chimney."

"I think I understand," I said slowly. "Some one is searching for the secret room, and the invaders--"

"And the holes in the plaster--"

"Have been in the progress of his--"

"Or her--investigations."

"Her?" I asked.

"Miss Innes," the detective said, getting up, "I believe that somewhere in the walls of this house is hidden some of the money, at least, from the Traders' Bank. I believe, just as surely, that young Walker brought home from California the knowledge of something of the sort and, failing in his effort to reinstall Mrs. Armstrong and her daughter here, he, or a confederate, has tried to break into the house. On two occasions I think he succeeded."

"On three, at least," I corrected. And then I told him about the night before. "I have been thinking hard," I concluded, "and I do not believe the man at the head of the circular staircase was Doctor Walker. I don't think he could have got in, and the voice was not his."

Mr. Jamieson got up and paced the floor, his hands behind him.

"There is something else that puzzles me," he said, stepping before me. "Who and what is the woman Nina Carrington? If it was she who came here as Mattie Bliss, what did she tell Halsey that sent him racing to Doctor Walker's, and then to Miss Armstrong? If we could find that woman we would have the whole thing."

"Mr. Jamieson, did you ever think that Paul Armstrong might not have died a natural death?"

"That is the thing we are going to try to find out," he replied. And then Gertrude came in, announcing a man below to see Mr. Jamieson.

"I want you present at this interview, Miss Innes," he said. "May Riggs come up? He has left Doctor Walker and he has something he wants to tell us."

Riggs came into the room diffidently, but Mr. Jamieson put him at his ease. He kept a careful eye on me, however, and slid into a chair by the door when he was asked to sit down.

"Now, Riggs," began Mr. Jamieson kindly. "You are to say what you have to say before this lady."

"You promised you'd keep it quiet, Mr. Jamieson." Riggs plainly did not trust me. There was nothing friendly in
the glance he turned on me.

"Yes, yes. You will be protected. But, first of all, did you bring what you promised?"

Riggs produced a roll of papers from under his coat, and handed them over. Mr. Jamieson examined them with lively satisfaction, and passed them to me. "The blue-prints of Sunnyside," he said. "What did I tell you? Now, Riggs, we are ready."

"I'd never have come to you, Mr. Jamieson," he began, "if it hadn't been for Miss Armstrong. When Mr. Innes was spirited away, like, and Miss Louise got sick because of it, I thought things had gone far enough. I'd done some things for the doctor before that wouldn't just bear looking into, but I turned a bit squeamish."

"Did you help with that?" I asked, leaning forward.

"No, ma'am. I didn't even know of it until the next day, when it came out in the Casanova Weekly Ledger. But I know who did it, all right. I'd better start at the beginning.

"When Doctor Walker went away to California with the Armstrong family, there was talk in the town that when he came back he would be married to Miss Armstrong, and we all expected it. First thing I knew, I got a letter from him, in the west. He seemed to be excited, and he said Miss Armstrong had taken a sudden notion to go home and he sent me some money. I was to watch for her, to see if she went to Sunnyside, and wherever she was, not to lose sight of her until he got home. I traced her to the lodge, and I guess I scared you on the drive one night, Miss Innes."

"And Rosie!" I ejaculated.

Riggs grinned sheepishly.

"I only wanted to make sure Miss Louise was there. Rosie started to run, and I tried to stop her and tell her some sort of a story to account for my being there. But she wouldn't wait."

"And the broken china--in the basket?"

"Well, broken china's death to rubber tires," he said. "I hadn't any complaint against you people here, and the Dragon Fly was a good car."

So Rosie's highwayman was explained.

"Well, I telegraphed the doctor where Miss Louise was and I kept an eye on her. Just a day or so before they came home with the body, I got another letter, telling me to watch for a woman who had been pitted with smallpox. Her name was Carrington, and the doctor made things pretty strong. If I found any such woman loafing around, I was not to lose sight of her for a minute until the doctor got back.

"Well, I would have had my hands full, but the other woman didn't show up for a good while, and when she did the doctor was home."

"Riggs," I asked suddenly, "did you get into this house a day or two after I took it, at night?"

"I did not, Miss Innes. I have never been in the house before. Well, the Carrington woman didn't show up until the night Mr. Halsey disappeared. She came to the office late, and the doctor was out. She waited around, walking the floor and working herself into a passion. When the doctor didn't come back, she was in an awful way. She wanted me to hunt him, and when he didn't appear, she called him names; said he couldn't fool her. There was murder being done, and she would see him swing for it.

"She struck me as being an ugly customer, and when she left, about eleven o'clock, and went across to the Armstrong place, I was not far behind her. She walked all around the house first, looking up at the windows. Then she rang the bell, and the minute the door was opened she was through it, and into the hall."

"How long did she stay?"

"That's the queer part of it," Riggs said eagerly. "She didn't come out that night at all. I went to bed at daylight, and that was the last I heard of her until the next day, when I saw her on a truck at the station, covered with a sheet. She'd been struck by the express and you would hardly have known her--dead, of course. I think she stayed all night in the Armstrong house, and the agent said she was crossing the track to take the up-train to town when the express struck her."

"Another circle!" I exclaimed. "Then we are just where we started."

"Not so bad as that, Miss Innes," Riggs said eagerly. "Nina Carrington came from the town in California where Mr. Armstrong died. Why was the doctor so afraid of her? The Carrington woman knew something. I lived with Doctor Walker seven years, and I know him well. There are few things he is afraid of. I think he killed Mr. Armstrong out in the west somewhere, that's what I think. What else he did I don't know--but he dismissed me and pretty nearly throttled me--for telling Mr. Jamieson here about Mr. Innes' having been at his office the night he disappeared, and about my hearing them quarreling."

"What was it Warner overheard the woman say to Mr. Innes, in the library?" the detective asked me.

"She said 'I knew there was something wrong from the start. A man isn't well one day and dead the next without some reason.'"

How perfectly it all seemed to fit!
CHAPTER XXX
WHEN CHURCHYARDS YAWN

It was on Wednesday Riggs told us the story of his connection with some incidents that had been previously unexplained. Halsey had been gone since the Friday night before, and with the passage of each day I felt that his chances were lessening. I knew well enough that he might be carried thousands of miles in the box-car, locked in, perhaps, without water or food. I had read of cases where bodies had been found locked in cars on isolated sidings in the west, and my spirits went down with every hour.

His recovery was destined to be almost as sudden as his disappearance, and was due directly to the tramp Alex had brought to Sunnyside. It seems the man was grateful for his release, and when he learned something of Halsey's whereabouts from another member of his fraternity--for it is a fraternity--he was prompt in letting us know.

On Wednesday evening Mr. Jamieson, who had been down at the Armstrong house trying to see Louise--and failing--was met near the gate at Sunnyside by an individual precisely as repulsive and unkempt as the one Alex had captured. The man knew the detective, and he gave him a piece of dirty paper, on which was scrawled the words--"He's at City Hospital, Johnsville." The tramp who brought the paper pretended to know nothing, except this: the paper had been passed along from a "hobo" in Johnsville, who seemed to know the information would be valuable to us.

Again the long distance telephone came into requisition. Mr. Jamieson called the hospital, while we crowded around him. And when there was no longer any doubt that it was Halsey, and that he would probably recover, we all laughed and cried together. I am sure I kissed Liddy, and I have had terrible moments since when I seem to remember kissing Mr. Jamieson, too, in the excitement.

It was not until Gertrude and Rosie had gone and Sunnyside had settled down for the night, with Winters at the foot of the staircase, that Mr. Jamieson broached a subject he had evidently planned before he came.

"Miss Innes," he said, stopping me as I was about to go to my room up-stairs, "how are your nerves tonight?"

"I have none," I said happily. "With Halsey found, my troubles have gone."

"I mean," he persisted, "do you feel as though you could go through with something rather unusual?"

"The most unusual thing I can think of would be a peaceful night. But if anything is going to occur, don't dare to let me miss it."

"Something is going to occur," he said. "And you're the only woman I can think of that I can take along." He looked at his watch. "Don't ask me any questions, Miss Innes. Put on heavy shoes, and some old dark clothes, and make up your mind not to be surprised at anything."

Liddy was sleeping the sleep of the just when I went up-stairs, and I hunted out my things cautiously. The detective was waiting in the hall, and I was astonished to see Doctor Stewart with him.

They were talking confidentially together, but when I came down they ceased. There were a few preparations to be made: the locks to be gone over, Winters to be instructed as to renewed vigilance, and then, after extinguishing the hall light, we crept, in the darkness, through the front door, and into the night.

I asked no questions. I felt that they were doing me honor in making me one of the party, and I would show them I could be as silent as they. We went across the fields, passing through the woods that reached almost to the ruins of the stable, going over stiles now and then, and sometimes stepping over low fences. Once only somebody spoke, and then it was an emphatic bit of profanity from Doctor Stewart when he ran into a wire fence.

We were joined at the end of five minutes by another man, who fell into step with the doctor silently. He carried something over his shoulder which I could not make out. In this way we walked for perhaps twenty minutes. I had lost all sense of direction: I merely stumbled along in silence, allowing Mr. Jamieson to guide me this way or that as the path demanded. I hardly know what I expected. Once, when through a miscalculation I jumped a little short over a ditch and landed above my shoe-tops in the water and ooze, I remember wondering if this were really I, and if I had ever tasted life until that summer. I walked along with the water sloshing in my boots, and I was actually cheerful. I remember whispering to Mr. Jamieson that I had never seen the stars so lovely, and that it was a mistake, when the Lord had made the night so beautiful, to sleep through it!

The doctor was puffing somewhat when we finally came to a halt. I confess that just at that minute even Sunnyside seemed a cheerful spot. We had paused at the edge of a level cleared place, bordered all around with
primly trimmed evergreen trees. Between them I caught a glimpse of starlight shining down on rows of white headstones and an occasional more imposing monument, or towering shaft. In spite of myself, I drew my breath in sharply. We were on the edge of the Casanova churchyard.

I saw now both the man who had joined the party and the implements he carried. It was Alex, armed with two long-handled spades. After the first shock of surprise, I flatter myself I was both cool and quiet. We went in single file between the rows of headstones, and although, when I found myself last, I had an instinctive desire to keep looking back over my shoulder, I found that, the first uneasiness past, a cemetery at night is much the same as any other country place, filled with vague shadows and unexpected noises. Once, indeed—-but Mr. Jamieson said it was an owl, and I tried to believe him.

In the shadow of the Armstrong granite shaft we stopped. I think the doctor wanted to send me back.
"It's no place for a woman," I heard him protesting angrily. But the detective said something about witnesses, and the doctor only came over and felt my pulse.

"Anyhow, I don't believe you're any worse off here than you would be in that nightmare of a house," he said finally, and put his coat on the steps of the shaft for me to sit on.

There is an air of finality about a grave: one watches the earth thrown in, with the feeling that this is the end. Whatever has gone before, whatever is to come in eternity, that particular temple of the soul has been given back to the elements from which it came. Thus, there is a sense of desecration, of a reversal of the everlasting fitness of things, in resurrecting a body from its mother clay. And yet that night, in the Casanova churchyard, I sat quietly by, and watched Alex and Mr. Jamieson steaming over their work, without a single qualm, except the fear of detection.

The doctor kept a keen lookout, but no one appeared. Once in a while he came over to me, and gave me a reassuring pat on the shoulder.

"I never expected to come to this," he said once. "There's one thing sure—-I'll not be suspected of complicity. A doctor is generally supposed to be handier at burying folks than at digging them up."

The uncanny moment came when Alex and Jamieson tossed the spades on the grass, and I confess I hid my face. There was a period of stress, I think, while the heavy coffin was being raised. I felt that my composure was going, and, for fear I would shriek, I tried to think of something else—-what time Gertrude would reach Halsey—anything but the grisly reality that lay just beyond me on the grass.

And then I heard a low exclamation from the detective and I felt the pressure of the doctor's fingers on my arm.

"Now, Miss Innes," he said gently. "If you will come over--"

I held on to him frantically, and somehow I got there and looked down. The lid of the casket had been raised and a silver plate on it proved we had made no mistake. But the face that showed in the light of the lantern was a face I had never seen before. The man who lay before us was not Paul Armstrong!

CHAPTER XXXI
BETWEEN TWO FIREPLACES

What with the excitement of the discovery, the walk home under the stars in wet shoes and draggled skirts, and getting up-stairs and undressed without rousing Liddy, I was completely used up. What to do with my boots was the greatest puzzle of all, there being no place in the house safe from Liddy, until I decided to slip upstairs the next morning and drop them into the hole the "ghost" had made in the trunk-room wall.

I went asleep as soon as I reached this decision, and in my dreams I lived over again the events of the night. Again I saw the group around the silent figure on the grass, and again, as had happened at the grave, I heard Alex's voice, tense and triumphant:

"Then we've got them," he said. Only, in my dreams, he said it over and over until he seemed to shriek it in my ears.

I wakened early, in spite of my fatigue, and lay there thinking. Who was Alex? I no longer believed that he was a gardener. Who was the man whose body we had resurrected? And where was Paul Armstrong? Probably living safely in some extraditionless country on the fortune he had stolen. Did Louise and her mother know of the shameful and wicked deception? What had Thomas known, and Mrs. Watson? Who was Nina Carrington?

This last question, it seemed to me, was answered. In some way the woman had learned of the substitution, and had tried to use her knowledge for blackmail. Nina Carrington's own story died with her, but, however it happened, it was clear that she had carried her knowledge to Halsey the afternoon Gertrude and I were looking for clues to the man I had shot on the east veranda. Halsey had been half crazed by what he heard; it was evident that Louise was marrying Doctor Walker to keep the shameful secret, for her mother's sake. Halsey, always reckless, had gone at once to Doctor Walker and denounced him. There had been a scene, and he left on his way to the station to meet and notify Mr. Jamieson of what he had learned. The doctor was active mentally and physically. Accompanied perhaps by Riggs, who had shown himself not overscrupulous until he quarreled with his employer, he had gone across to the railroad embankment, and, by jumping in front of the car, had caused Halsey to swerve. The rest of the story we
knew.

That was my reconstructed theory of that afternoon and evening: it was almost correct—not quite.

There was a telegram that morning from Gertrude.

"Halsey conscious and improving. Probably home in day or so. GERTRUDE."

With Halsey found and improving in health, and with at last something to work on, I began that day, Thursday, with fresh courage. As Mr. Jamieson had said, the lines were closing up. That I was to be caught and almost finished in the closing was happily unknown to us all.

It was late when I got up. I lay in my bed, looking around the four walls of the room, and trying to imagine behind what one of them a secret chamber might lie. Certainly, in daylight, Sunnyside deserved its name: never was a house more cheery and open, less sinister in general appearance. There was not a corner apparently that was not open and above-board, and yet, somewhere behind its handsome papered walls I believed firmly that there lay a hidden room, with all the possibilities it would involve.

I made a mental note to have the house measured during the day, to discover any discrepancy between the outer and inner walls, and I tried to recall again the exact wording of the paper Jamieson had found.

The slip had said "chimney." It was the only clue, and a house as large as Sunnyside was full of them. There was an open fireplace in my dressing-room, but none in the bedroom, and as I lay there, looking around, I thought of something that made me sit up suddenly. The trunk-room, just over my head, had an open fireplace and a brick chimney, and yet, there was nothing of the kind in my room. I got out of bed and examined the opposite wall closely. There was apparently no flue, and I knew there was none in the hall just beneath. The house was heated by steam, as I have said before. In the living-room was a huge open fireplace, but it was on the other side.

Why did the trunk-room have both a radiator and an open fireplace? Architects were not usually erratic! It was not fifteen minutes before I was up-stairs, armed with a tape-measure in lieu of a foot-rule, eager to justify Mr. Jamieson's opinion of my intelligence, and firmly resolved not to tell him of my suspicion until I had more than theory to go on. The hole in the trunk-room wall still yawned there, between the chimney and the outer wall. I examined it again, with no new result. The space between the brick wall and the plaster and lath one, however, had a new significance. The hole showed only one side of the chimney, and I determined to investigate what lay in the space on the other side of the mantel.

I worked feverishly. Liddy had gone to the village to market, it being her firm belief that the store people sent short measure unless she watched the scales, and that, since the failure of the Traders' Bank, we must watch the corners; and I knew that what I wanted to do must be done before she came back. I had no tools, but after rummaging around I found a pair of garden scissors and a hatchet, and thus armed, I set to work. The plaster came out easily: the lathing was more obstinate. It gave under the blows, only to spring back into place again, and the necessity for caution made it doubly hard.

I had a blister on my palm when at last the hatchet went through and fell with what sounded like the report of a gun to my overstrained nerves. I sat on a trunk, waiting to hear Liddy fly up the stairs, with the household behind her, like the tail of a comet. But nothing happened, and with a growing feeling of uncanniness I set to work enlarging the opening.

The result was absolutely nil. When I could hold a lighted candle in the opening, I saw precisely what I had seen on the other side of the chimney—a space between the true wall and the false one, possibly seven feet long and about three feet wide. It was in no sense of the word a secret chamber, and it was evident it had not been disturbed since the house was built. It was a supreme disappointment.

It was late when I got up. I lay in my bed, looking around the four walls of the room, and trying to imagine behind what one of them a secret chamber might lie. Certainly, in daylight, Sunnyside deserved its name: never was a house more cheery and open, less sinister in general appearance. There was not a corner apparently that was not open and above-board, and yet, somewhere behind its handsome papered walls I believed firmly that there lay a hidden room, with all the possibilities it would involve.

I hurried into the next room. Yes, sure enough, there was a similar mantel and fireplace there, similarly closed. In both rooms the chimney flue extended well out from the wall. I measured with the tape-line, my hands trembling so that I could scarcely hold it. They extended two feet and a half into each room, which, with the three feet of space between the two partitions, made eight feet to be accounted for. Eight feet in one direction and almost seven in the other—what a chimney it was!

But I had only located the hidden room. I was not in it, and no amount of pressing on the carving of the wooden mantels, no search of the floors for loose boards, none of the customary methods availed at all. That there was a means of entrance, and probably a simple one, I could be certain. But what? What would I find if I did get in? Was the detective right, and were the bonds and money from the Traders' Bank there? Or was our whole theory wrong? Would not Paul Armstrong have taken his booty with him? If he had not, and if Doctor Walker was in the secret, he
sometimes to see the boy, and there he had taken fever. The people were Germans, and he called the farmer's wife took the child from the home and hid him in a farmhouse near Casanova, on the Claysburg road. There she went the scale, the heavier his demands became. With the rupture between him and his family, things were worse. Anne years went on he forced money from Anne Watson instead until she was always penniless. The lower Arnold sank in away. Anne was frantic. The positions became reversed. Where Arnold had given money for Lucien's support, as the ruling passion in this lonely woman's life. He found out where the child was hidden, and threatened to take him threatened exposure if he did not provide for him. Indeed, for a time, he did so. Then he realized that Lucien was the Arnold Armstrong.

She drifted around, doing plain sewing and keeping a home somewhere always for the boy. Finally, however, she devoted to the child that she should be ambitious for him: he must have every opportunity. And so she came east. It was her story that I shall tell it in my own way. In an hour from the time I entered the Charity Hospital, I had heard a sad and pitiful narrative, and had seen a woman slip into the unconsciousness that is only a step from death.

The nurse gave her a stimulant, and in a little while she was able to talk. So broken and half-coherent, however, was her story that I shall tell it in my own way. In an hour from the time I entered the Charity Hospital, I had heard a sad and pitiful narrative, and had seen a woman slip into the unconsciousness that is only a step from death.

Briefly, then, the housekeeper's story was this:

She was almost forty years old, and had been the sister-mother of a large family of children. One by one they had died, and been buried beside their parents in a little town in the Middle West. There was only one sister left, the baby, Lucy. On her the older girl had lavished all the love of an impulsive and emotional nature. When Anne, the elder, was thirty-two and Lucy was nineteen, a young man had come to the town. He was going east, after spending the summer at a celebrated ranch in Wyoming--one of those places where wealthy men send worthless and dissipated sons, for a season of temperance, fresh air and hunting. The sisters, of course, knew nothing of this, and the young man's ardor rather carried them away. In a word, seven years before, Lucy Haswell had married a young man whose name was given as Aubrey Wallace.

Anne Haswell had married a carpenter in her native town, and was a widow. For three months everything went fairly well. Aubrey took his bride to Chicago, where they lived at a hotel. Perhaps the very unsophistication that had charmed him in Valley Mill jarred on him in the city. He had been far from a model husband, even for the three months, and when he disappeared Anne was almost thankful. It was different with the young wife, however. She drooped and fretted, and on the birth of her baby boy, she had died. Anne took the child, and named him Lucien. Anne had had no children of her own, and on Lucien she had lavished all her aborted maternal instinct. On one thing she was determined, however: that was that Aubrey Wallace should educate his boy. It was a part of her devotion to the child that she should be ambitious for him: he must have every opportunity. And so she came east. She drifted around, doing plain sewing and keeping a home somewhere always for the boy. Finally, however, she realized that her only training had been domestic, and she put the boy in an Episcopalian home, and secured the position of housekeeper to the Armstrongs. There she found Lucien's father, this time under his own name. It was Arnold Armstrong.

I gathered that there was no particular enmity at that time in Anne's mind. She told him of the boy, and threatened exposure if he did not provide for him. Indeed, for a time, he did so. Then he realized that Lucien was the ruling passion in this lonely woman's life. He found out where the child was hidden, and threatened to take him away. Anne was frantic. The positions became reversed. Where Arnold had given money for Lucien's support, as the years went on he forced money from Anne Watson instead until she was always penniless. The lower Arnold sank in the scale, the heavier his demands became. With the rupture between him and his family, things were worse. Anne took the child from the home and hid him in a farmhouse near Casanova, on the Claysburg road. There she went sometimes to see the boy, and there he had taken fever. The people were Germans, and he called the farmer's wife
Grossmutter. He had grown into a beautiful boy, and he was all Anne had to live for.

The Armstrongs left for California, and Arnold's persecutions began anew. He was furious over the child's disappearance and she was afraid he would do her some hurt. She left the big house and went down to the lodge. When I had rented Sunnyside, however, she had thought the persecutions would stop. She had applied for the position of housekeeper, and secured it.

That had been on Saturday. That night Louise arrived unexpectedly. Thomas sent for Mrs. Watson and then went for Arnold Armstrong at the Greenwood Club. Anne had been fond of Louise--she reminded her of Lucy. She did not know what the trouble was, but Louise had been in a state of terrible excitement. Mrs. Watson tried to hide from Arnold, but he was ugly. He left the lodge and went up to the house about two-thirty, was admitted at the east entrance and came out again very soon. Something had occurred, she didn't know what; but very soon Mr. Innes and another gentleman left, using the car.

Thomas and she had got Louise quiet, and a little before three, Mrs. Watson started up to the house. Thomas had a key to the east entry, and gave it to her.

On the way across the lawn she was confronted by Arnold, who for some reason was determined to get into the house. He had a golf-club in his hand, that he had picked up somewhere, and on her refusal he had struck her with it. One hand had been badly cut, and it was that, poisoning having set in, which was killing her. She broke away in a frenzy of rage and fear, and got into the house while Gertrude and Jack Bailey were at the front door. She went upstairs, hardly knowing what she was doing. Gertrude's door was open, and Halsey's revolver lay there on the bed. She picked it up and turning, ran part way down the circular staircase. She could hear Arnold fumbling at the lock outside. She slipped down quietly and opened the door: he was inside before she had got back to the stairs. It was quite dark, but she could see his white shirt-bosom. From the fourth step she fired. As he fell, somebody in the billiard-room screamed and ran. When the alarm was raised, she had had no time to get upstairs: she hid in the west wing until every one was down on the lower floor. Then she slipped upstairs, and threw the revolver out of an upper window, going down again in time to admit the men from the Greenwood Club.

If Thomas had suspected, he had never told. When she found the hand Arnold had injured was growing worse, she gave the address of Lucien at Richfield to the old man, and almost a hundred dollars. The money was for Lucien's board until she recovered. She had sent for me to ask me if I would try to interest the Armstrongs in the child. When she found herself growing worse, she had written to Mrs. Armstrong, telling her nothing but that Arnold's legitimate child was at Richfield, and imploring her to recognize him. She was dying: the boy was an Armstrong, and entitled to his father's share of the estate. The papers were in her trunk at Sunnyside, with letters from the dead man that would prove what she said. She was going; she would not be judged by earthly laws; and somewhere else perhaps Lucy would plead for her. It was she who had crept down the circular staircase, drawn by a magnet, that night Mr. Jamieson had heard some one there. Pursued, she had fled madly, anywhere--through the first door she came to. She had fallen down the clothes chute, and been saved by the basket beneath. I could have cried with relief; then it had not been Gertrude, after all!

That was the story. Sad and tragic though it was, the very telling of it seemed to relieve the dying woman. She did not know that Thomas was dead, and I did not tell her. I promised to look after little Lucien, and sat with her until the intervals of consciousness grew shorter and finally ceased altogether. She died that night.

CHAPTER XXXIII
AT THE FOOT OF THE STAIRS

As I drove rapidly up to the house from Casanova Station in the hack, I saw the detective Burns loitering across the street from the Walker place. So Jamieson was putting the screws on--lightly now, but ready to give them a twist or two, I felt certain, very soon.

The house was quiet. Two steps of the circular staircase had been pried off, without result, and beyond a second message from Gertrude, that Halsey insisted on coming home and they would arrive that night, there was nothing new. Mr. Jamieson, having failed to locate the secret room, had gone to the village. I learned afterwards that he called at Doctor Walker's, under pretense of an attack of acute indigestion, and before he left, had inquired about the evening trains to the city. He said he had wasted a lot of time on the case, and a good bit of the mystery was in my imagination! The doctor was under the impression that the house was guarded day and night. Well, give a place a reputation like that, and you don't need a guard at all,--thus Jamieson. And sure enough, late in the afternoon, the two private detectives, accompanied by Mr. Jamieson, walked down the main street of Casanova and took a city-bound train.

That they got off at the next station and walked back again to Sunnyside at dusk, was not known at the time. Personally, I knew nothing of either move; I had other things to absorb me at that time.

Liddy brought me some tea while I rested after my trip, and on the tray was a small book from the Casanova library. It was called The Unseen World and had a cheerful cover on which a half-dozen sheeted figures linked
hands around a headstone.

At this point in my story, Halsey always says: "Trust a woman to add two and two together, and make six." To which I retort that if two and two plus X make six, then to discover the unknown quantity is the simplest thing in the world. That a houseful of detectives missed it entirely was because they were busy trying to prove that two and two make four.

The depression due to my visit to the hospital left me at the prospect of seeing Halsey again that night. It was about five o'clock when Liddy left me for a nap before dinner, having put me into a gray silk dressing-gown and a pair of slippers. I listened to her retreating footsteps, and as soon as she was safely below stairs, I went up to the trunk-room. The place had not been disturbed, and I proceeded at once to try to discover the entrance to the hidden room. The openings on either side, as I have said, showed nothing but perhaps three feet of brick wall.

There was no sign of an entrance--no levers, no hinges, to give a hint. Either the mantel or the roof, I decided, and after a half-hour at the mantel, productive of absolutely no result, I decided to try the roof.

I am not fond of a height. The few occasions on which I have climbed a step-ladder have always left me dizzy and weak in the knees. The top of the Washington monument is as impossible to me as the elevation of the presidential chair. And yet--I climbed out on to the Sunnyside roof without a second's hesitation. Like a dog on a scent, like my bearskin progenitor, with his spear and his wild boar, to me now there was the lust of the chase, the frenzy of pursuit, the dust of battle. I got quite a little of the latter on me as I climbed from the unfinished ball-room out through a window to the roof of the east wing of the building, which was only two stories in height.

Once out there, access to the top of the main building was rendered easy--at least it looked easy--by a small vertical iron ladder, fastened to the wall outside of the ball-room, and perhaps twelve feet high. The twelve feet looked short from below, but they were difficult to climb. I gathered my silk gown around me, and succeeded finally in making the top of the ladder.

Once there, however, I was completely out of breath. I sat down, my feet on the top rung, and put my hair pins in more securely, while the wind bellowed my dressing-gown out like a sail. I had torn a great strip of the silk loose, and now I ruthlessly finished the destruction of my gown by jerking it free and tying it around my head.

From far below the smallest sounds came up with peculiar distinctness. I could hear the paper boy whistling down the drive, and I heard something else. I heard the thud of a stone, and a spit, followed by a long and startled meiou from Beulah. I forgot my fear of a height, and advanced boldly almost to the edge of the roof.

It was half-past six by that time, and growing dusk.

"You boy, down there!" I called.

The paper boy turned and looked around. Then, seeing nobody, he raised his eyes. It was a moment before he located me: when he did, he stood for one moment as if paralyzed, then he gave a horrible yell, and dropping his papers, bolted across the lawn to the road without stopping to look around. Once he fell, and his impetus was so great that he turned an involuntary somersault. He was up and off again without any perceptible pause, and he leaped the hedge--which I am sure under ordinary stress would have been a feat for a man.

I am glad in this way to settle the Gray Lady story, which is still a choice morsel in Casanova. I believe the moral deduced by the village was that it is always unlucky to throw a stone at a black cat.

With Johnny Sweeny a cloud of dust down the road, and the dinner-hour approaching, I hurried on with my investigations. Luckily, the roof was flat, and I was able to go over every inch of it. But the result was disappointing; no trap-door revealed itself, no glass window; nothing but a couple of pipes two inches across, and standing perhaps eighteen inches high and three feet apart, with a cap to prevent rain from entering and raised to permit the passage of air. I picked up a pebble from the roof and dropped it down, listening with my ear at one of the pipes. I could hear it strike on something with a sharp, metallic sound, but it was impossible for me to tell how far it had gone.

I gave up finally and went down the ladder again, getting in through the ball-room window without being observed. I went back at once to the trunk-room, and, sitting down on a box, I gave my mind, as consistently as I could, to the problem before me. If the pipes in the roof were ventilators to the secret room, and there was no trap-door above, the entrance was probably in one of the two rooms between which it lay--unless, indeed, the room had been built, and the opening then closed with a brick and mortar wall.

The mantel fascinated me. Made of wood and carved, the more I looked the more I wondered that I had not noticed before the absurdity of such a mantel in such a place. It was covered with scrolls and panels, and finally, by the merest accident, I pushed one of the panels to the side. It moved easily, revealing a small brass knob.

It is not necessary to detail the fluctuations of hope and despair, and not a little fear of what lay beyond, with which I twisted and turned the knob. It moved, but nothing seemed to happen, and then I discovered the trouble. I pushed the knob vigorously to one side, and the whole mantel swung loose from the wall almost a foot, revealing a cavernous space beyond.

I took a long breath, closed the door from the trunk-room into the hall--thank Heaven, I did not lock it--and
pulling the mantel-door wide open, I stepped into the chimney-room. I had time to get a hazy view of a small portable safe, a common wooden table and a chair--then the mantel door swung to, and clicked behind me. I stood quite still for a moment, in the darkness, unable to comprehend what had happened. Then I turned and beat furiously at the door with my fists. It was closed and locked again, and my fingers in the darkness slid over a smooth wooden surface without a sign of a knob.

I was furiously angry--at myself, at the mantel door, at everything. I did not fear suffocation; before the thought had come to me I had already seen a gleam of light from the two small ventilating pipes in the roof. They supplied air, but nothing else. The room itself was shrouded in blackness.

I sat down in the stiff-backed chair and tried to remember how many days one could live without food and water. When that grew monotonous and rather painful, I got up and, according to the time-honored rule for people shut in unknown and ink-black prisons, I felt my way around--it was small enough, goodness knows. I felt nothing but a splintery surface of boards, and in endeavoring to get back to the chair, something struck me full in the face, and fell with the noise of a thousand explosions to the ground. When I had gathered up my nerves again, I found it had been the bulb of a swinging electric light, and that had it not been for the accident, I might have starved to death in an illuminated sepulcher.

I must have dozed off. I am sure I did not faint. I was never more composed in my life. I remember planning, if I were not discovered, who would have my things. I knew Liddy would want my heliotrope poplin, and she's a fright in lavender. Once or twice I heard mice in the partitions, and so I sat on the table, with my feet on the chair. I imagined I could hear the search going on through the house, and once some one came into the trunk-room; I could distinctly hear footsteps.

"In the chimney! In the chimney!" I called with all my might, and was rewarded by a piercing shriek from Liddy and the slam of the trunk-room door.

I felt easier after that, although the room was oppressively hot and enervating. I had no doubt the search for me would now come in the right direction, and after a little, I dropped into a doze. How long I slept I do not know.

It must have been several hours, for I had been tired from a busy day, and I wakened stiff from my awkward position. I could not remember where I was for a few minutes, and my head felt heavy and congested. Gradually I roused to my surroundings, and to the fact that in spite of the ventilators, the air was bad and growing worse. I was breathing long, gasping respirations, and my face was damp and clammy. I must have been there a long time, and the searchers were probably hunting outside the house, dredging the creek, or beating the woodland. I knew that another hour or two would find me unconscious, and with my inability to cry out would go my only chance of rescue. It was the combination of bad air and heat, probably, for some inadequate ventilation was coming through the pipes. I tried to retain my consciousness by walking the length of the room and back, over and over, but I had not the strength to keep it up, so I sat down on the table again, my back against the wall.

The house was very still. Once my straining ears seemed to catch a footfall beneath me, possibly in my own room. I groped for the chair from the table, and pounded with it frantically on the floor. But nothing happened: I was too weak to lift it, and my heart was beating so furiously that I thought I should be strangled by it. It was the combination of bad air and heat, probably, for some inadequate ventilation was coming through the pipes. I tried to retain my consciousness by walking the length of the room and back, over and over, but I had not the strength to keep it up, so I sat down on the table again, my back against the wall.

The first warning I had was a stealthy fumbling at the lock of the mantel-door. With my mouth open to scream, I stopped. Perhaps the situation had rendered me acute, perhaps it was instinctive. Whatever it was, I sat without moving, and some one outside, in absolute stillness, ran his fingers over the carving of the mantel and--found the panel.

"Watch the end staircases!" Jamieson was shouting. "Damnation-- there's no light here!" And then a second later. "All together now. One--two--three--"
The door into the trunk-room had been locked from the inside. At the second that it gave, opening against the wall with a crash and evidently tumbling somebody into the room, the stealthy fingers beyond the mantel-door gave the knob the proper impetus, and--the door swung open, and closed again. Only--and Liddy always screams and puts her fingers in her ears at this point--only now I was not alone in the chimney room. There was some one else in the darkness, some one who breathed hard, and who was so close I could have touched him with my hand.

I was in a paralysis of terror. Outside there were excited voices and incredulous oaths. The trunks were being jerked around in a frantic search, the windows were thrown open, only to show a sheer drop of forty feet. And the man in the room with me leaned against the mantel-door and listened. His pursuers were plainly baffled: I heard him draw a long breath, and turn to grope his way through the blackness. Then--he touched my hand, cold, clammy, death-like.

A hand in an empty room! He drew in his breath, the sharp intaking of horror that fills lungs suddenly collapsed. Beyond jerking his hand away instantly, he made no movement. I think absolute terror had him by the throat. Then he stepped back, without turning, retrieving foot by foot from The Dread in the corner, and I do not think he breathed.

Then, with the relief of space between us, I screamed, ear-splittingly, madly, and they heard me outside.

"In the chimney!" I shrieked. "Behind the mantel! The mantel!"

With an oath the figure hurled itself across the room at me, and I screamed again. In his blind fury he had missed me; I heard him strike the wall. That one time I eluded him; I was across the room, and I had got the chair. He stood for a second, listening, then--he made another rush, and I struck out with my weapon. I think it stunned him, for I had a second's respite when I could hear him breathing, and some one shouted outside:

"We--Can't--get--in. How--does--it--open?"

But the man in the room had changed his tactics. I knew he was creeping on me, inch by inch, and I could not tell from where. And then--he caught me. He held his hand over my mouth, and I bit him. I was helpless, strangling,--and some one was trying to break in the mantel from outside. It began to yield somewhere, for a thin wedge of yellowish light was reflected on the opposite wall. When he saw that, my assailant dropped me with a curse; then--the opposite wall swung open noiselessly, closed again without a sound, and I was alone. The intruder was gone.

In the next room!" I called wildly. "The next room!" But the sound of blows on the mantel drowned my voice. By the time I had made them understand, a couple of minutes had elapsed. The pursuit was taken up then, by all except Alex, who was determined to liberate me. When I stepped out into the trunk-room, a free woman again, I could hear the chase far below.

I must say, for all Alex's anxiety to set me free, he paid little enough attention to my plight. He jumped through the opening into the secret room, and picked up the portable safe.

"I am going to put this in Mr. Halsey's room, Miss Innes," he said, "and I shall send one of the detectives to guard it."

I hardly heard him. I wanted to laugh and cry in the same breath--to crawl into bed and have a cup of tea, and scold Liddy, and do any of the thousand natural things that I had never expected to do again. And the air! The touch of the cool night air on my face!

As Alex and I reached the second floor, Mr. Jamieson met us. He was grave and quiet, and he nodded comprehendingly when he saw the safe.

"Will you come with me for a moment, Miss Innes?" he asked soberly, and on my assenting, he led the way to the east wing. There were lights moving around below, and some of the maids were standing gaping down. They screamed when they saw me, and drew back to let me pass. There was a sort of hush over the scene; Alex, behind me, muttered something I could not hear, and brushed past me without ceremony. Then I realized that a man was lying doubled up at the foot of the staircase, and that Alex was stooping over him.

As I came slowly down, Winters stepped back, and Alex straightened himself, looking at me across the body with impenetrable eyes. In his hand he held a shaggy gray wig, and before me on the floor lay the man whose headstone stood in Casanova churchyard--Paul Armstrong.

Winters told the story in a dozen words. In his headlong flight down the circular staircase, with Winters just behind, Paul Armstrong had pitched forward violently, struck his head against the door to the east veranda, and probably broken his neck. He had died as Winters reached him.

As the detective finished, I saw Halsey, pale and shaken, in the card-room doorway, and for the first time that night I lost my self-control. I put my arms around my boy, and for a moment he had to support me. A second later, over Halsey's shoulder, I saw something that turned my emotion into other channels, for, behind him, in the shadowy card-room, were Gertrude and Alex, the gardener, and--there is no use mincing matters--he was kissing her!

I was unable to speak. Twice I opened my mouth: then I turned Halsey around and pointed. They were quite
unconscious of us; her head was on his shoulder, his face against her hair. As it happened, it was Mr. Jamieson who broke up the tableau.

He stepped over to Alex and touched him on the arm.

"And now," he said quietly, "how long are you and I to play OUR little comedy, Mr. Bailey?"

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE ODDS AND ENDS

Of Doctor Walker's sensational escape that night to South America, of the recovery of over a million dollars in cash and securities in the safe from the chimney room—the papers have kept the public well informed. Of my share in discovering the secret chamber they have been singularly silent. The inner history has never been told. Mr. Jamieson got all kinds of credit, and some of it he deserved, but if Jack Bailey, as Alex, had not traced Halsey and insisted on the disinterring of Paul Armstrong's casket, if he had not suspected the truth from the start, where would the detective have been?

When Halsey learned the truth, he insisted on going the next morning, weak as he was, to Louise, and by night she was at Sunnyside, under Gertrude's particular care, while her mother had gone to Barbara Fitzhugh's.

What Halsey said to Mrs. Armstrong I never knew, but that he was considerate and chivalrous I feel confident. It was Halsey's way always with women.

He and Louise had no conversation together until that night. Gertrude and Alex--I mean Jack--had gone for a walk, although it was nine o'clock, and anybody but a pair of young geese would have known that dew was falling, and that it is next to impossible to get rid of a summer cold.

At half after nine, growing weary of my own company, I went down-stairs to find the young people. At the door of the living-room I paused. Gertrude and Jack had returned and were there, sitting together on a divan, with only one lamp lighted. They did not see or hear me, and I beat a hasty retreat to the library. But here again I was driven back. Louise was sitting in a deep chair, looking the happiest I had ever seen her, with Halsey on the arm of the chair, holding her close.

It was no place for an elderly spinster. I retired to my up-stairs sitting-room and got out Eliza Klinefelter's lavender slippers. Ah, well, the foster motherhood would soon have to be put away in camphor again.

The next day, by degrees, I got the whole story.

Paul Armstrong had a besetting evil--the love of money. Common enough, but he loved money, not for what it would buy, but for its own sake. An examination of the books showed no irregularities in the past year since John had been cashier, but before that, in the time of Anderson, the old cashier, who had died, much strange juggling had been done with the records. The railroad in New Mexico had apparently drained the banker's private fortune, and he determined to retrieve it by one stroke. This was nothing less than the looting of the bank's securities, turning them into money, and making his escape.

But the law has long arms. Paul Armstrong evidently studied the situation carefully. Just as the only good Indian is a dead Indian, so the only safe defaulter is a dead defaulter. He decided to die, to all appearances, and when the hue and cry subsided, he would be able to enjoy his money almost anywhere he wished.

The first necessity was an accomplice. The connivance of Doctor Walker was suggested by his love for Louise. The man was unscrupulous, and with the girl as a bait, Paul Armstrong soon had him fast. The plan was apparently the acme of simplicity: a small town in the west, an attack of heart disease, a body from a medical college dissecting-room shipped in a trunk to Doctor Walker by a colleague in San Francisco, and palmed off for the supposed dead banker. What was simpler?

The woman, Nina Carrington, was the cog that slipped. What she only suspected, what she really knew, we never learned. She was a chambermaid in the hotel at C--, and it was evidently her intention to blackmail Doctor Walker. His position at that time was uncomfortable: to pay the woman to keep quiet would be confession. He denied the whole thing, and she went to Halsey.

It was this that had taken Halsey to the doctor the night he disappeared. He accused the doctor of the deception, and, crossing the lawn, had said something cruel to Louise. Then, furious at her apparent connivance, he had started for the station. Doctor Walker and Paul Armstrong--the latter still lame where I had shot him--hurried across to the embankment, certain only of one thing. Halsey must not tell the detective what he suspected until the money had been removed from the chimney-room. They stepped into the road in front of the car to stop it, and fate played into their hands. The car struck the train, and they had only to dispose of the unconscious figure in the road. This they did as I have told. For three days Halsey lay in the box car, tied hand and foot, suffering tortures of thirst, delirious at times, and discovered by a tramp at Johnsville only in time to save his life.

To go back to Paul Armstrong. At the last moment his plans had been frustrated. Sunnyside, with its hoard in the chimney-room, had been rented without his knowledge! Attempts to dislodge me having failed, he was driven to breaking into his own house. The ladder in the chute, the burning of the stable and the entrance through the card-
room window—all were in the course of a desperate attempt to get into the chimney-room.

Louise and her mother had, from the first, been the great stumbling-blocks. The plan had been to send Louise away until it was too late for her to interfere, but she came back to the hotel at C— just at the wrong time. There was a terrible scene. The girl was told that something of the kind was necessary, that the bank was about to close and her stepfather would either avoid arrest and disgrace in this way, or kill himself. Fanny Armstrong was a weakling, but Louise was more difficult to manage. She had no love for her stepfather, but her devotion to her mother was entire, self-sacrificing. Forced into acquiescence by her mother's appeals, overwhelmed by the situation, the girl consented and fled.

From somewhere in Colorado she sent an anonymous telegram to Jack Bailey at the Traders' Bank. Trapped as she was, she did not want to see an innocent man arrested. The telegram, received on Thursday, had sent the cashier to the bank that night in a frenzy.

Louise arrived at Sunnyside and found the house rented. Not knowing what to do, she sent for Arnold at the Greenwood Club, and told him a little, not all. She told him that there was something wrong, and that the bank was about to close. That his father was responsible. Of the conspiracy she said nothing. To her surprise, Arnold already knew, through Bailey that night, that things were not right. Moreover, he suspected what Louise did not, that the money was hidden at Sunnyside. He had a scrap of paper that indicated a concealed room somewhere.

His inherited cupidity was aroused. Eager to get Halsey and Jack Bailey out of the house, he went up to the east entry, and in the billiard-room gave the cashier what he had refused earlier in the evening—the address of Paul Armstrong in California and a telegram which had been forwarded to the club for Bailey, from Doctor Walker. It was in response to one Bailey had sent, and it said that Paul Armstrong was very ill.

Bailey was almost desperate. He decided to go west and find Paul Armstrong, and to force him to disgorge. But the catastrophe at the bank occurred sooner than he had expected. On the moment of starting west, at Andrews Station, where Mr. Jamieson had located the car, he read that the bank had closed, and, going back, surrendered himself.

John Bailey had known Paul Armstrong intimately. He did not believe that the money was gone; in fact, it was hardly possible in the interval since the securities had been taken. Where was it? And from some chance remark let fall some months earlier by Arnold Armstrong at a dinner, Bailey felt sure there was a hidden room at Sunnyside. He tried to see the architect of the building, but, like the contractor, if he knew of the such a room he refused any information. It was Halsey's idea that John Bailey come to the house as a gardener, and pursue his investigations as he could. His smooth upper lip had been sufficient disguise, with his change of clothes, and a hair-cut by a country barber.

So it was Alex, Jack Bailey, who had been our ghost. Not only had he alarmed—Louise and himself, he admitted—on the circular staircase, but he had dug the hole in the trunk-room wall, and later sent Eliza into hysteria. The note Liddy had found in Gertrude's scrap-basket was from him, and it was he who had startled me into unconsciousness by the clothes chute, and, with Gertrude's help, had carried me to Louise's room. Gertrude, I learned, had watched all night beside me, in an extremity of anxiety about me.

That old Thomas had seen his master, and thought he had seen the Sunnyside ghost, there could be no doubt. Of that story of Thomas', about seeing Jack Bailey in the footpath between the club and Sunnyside, the night Liddy and I heard the noise on the circular staircase—that, too, was right. On the night before Arnold Armstrong was murdered, Jack Bailey had made his first attempt to search for the secret room. He secured Arnold's keys from his room at the club and got into the house, armed with a golf-stick for sounding the walls. He ran against the hamper at the head of the stairs, caught his cuff-link in it, and dropped the golf-stick with a crash. He was glad enough to get away without an alarm being raised, and he took the "owl" train to town.

The oddest thing to me was that Mr. Jamieson had known for some time that Alex was Jack Bailey. But the face of the pseudo-gardener was very queer indeed, when that night, in the card-room, the detective turned to him and said:

"How long are you and I going to play our little comedy, MR. BAILEY?"

Well, it is all over now. Paul Armstrong rests in Casanova churchyard, and this time there is no mistake. I went to the funeral, because I wanted to be sure he was really buried, and I looked at the step of the shaft where I had sat that night, and wondered if it was all real. Sunnyside is for sale—no, I shall not buy it. Little Lucien Armstrong is living with his step-grandmother, and she is recovering gradually from troubles that had extended over the entire period of her second marriage. Anne Watson lies not far from the man she killed, and who as surely caused her death. Thomas, the fourth victim of the conspiracy, is buried on the hill. With Nina Carrington, five lives were sacrificed in the course of this grim conspiracy.

There will be two weddings before long, and Liddy has asked for my heliotrope poplin to wear to the church. I knew she would. She has wanted it for three years, and she was quite ugly the time I spilled coffee on it. We are
very quiet, just the two of us. Liddy still clings to her ghost theory, and points to my wet and muddy boots in the
trunk-room as proof. I am gray, I admit, but I haven't felt as well in a dozen years. Sometimes, when I am bored, I
ring for Liddy, and we talk things over. When Warner married Rosie, Liddy sniffed and said what I took for
faithfulness in Rosie had been nothing but mawkishness. I have not yet outlived Liddy's contempt because I gave
them silver knives and forks as a wedding gift.

So we sit and talk, and sometimes Liddy threatens to leave, and often I discharge her, but we stay together
somehow. I am talking of renting a house next year, and Liddy says to be sure there is no ghost. To be perfectly
frank, I never really lived until that summer. Time has passed since I began this story. My neighbors are packing up
for another summer. Liddy is having the awnings put up, and the window boxes filled. Liddy or no Liddy, I shall
advertise to-morrow for a house in the country, and I don't care if it has a Circular Staircase.
I am not a susceptible woman. I am objective rather than subjective, and a fairly full experience of life has taught me that most of my impressions are from within out rather than the other way about. For instance, obsession at one time a few years ago of a shadowy figure on my right, just beyond the field of vision, was later exposed as the result of a defect in my glasses. In the same way Maggie, my old servant, was during one entire summer haunted by church-bells and considered it a personal summons to eternity until it was shown to be in her inner ear.

Yet the Benton house undeniably made me uncomfortable. Perhaps it was because it had remained unchanged for so long. The old horsehair chairs, with their shiny mahogany frames, showed by the slightly worn places in the carpet before them that they had not deviated an inch from their position for many years. The carpets --carpets that reached to the very baseboards and gave under one's feet with the yielding of heavy padding beneath--were bright under beds and wardrobes, while in the centers of the rooms they had faded into the softness of old tapestry.

Maggie, I remember, on our arrival moved a chair from the wall in the library, and immediately put it back again, with a glance to see if I had observed her.

"It's nice and clean, Miss Agnes," she said. "A--I kind of feel that a little dirt would make it more homelike."

"I'm sure I don't see why," I replied, rather sharply, "I've lived in a tolerably clean house most of my life."

Maggie, however, was digging a heel into the padded carpet. She had chosen a sunny place for the experiment, and a small cloud of dust rose like smoke.

"Germs!" she said. "Just what I expected. We'd better bring the vacuum cleaner out from the city, Miss Agnes. Them carpets haven't been lifted for years."

But I paid little attention to her. To Maggie any particle of matter not otherwise classified is a germ, and the prospect of finding dust in that immaculate house was sufficiently thrilling to tide over the strangeness of our first few hours in it.

Once a year I rent a house in the country. When my nephew and niece were children, I did it to take them out of the city during school vacations. Later, when they grew up, it was to be near the country club. But now, with the children married and new families coming along, we were more concerned with dairies than with clubs, and I inquired more carefully about the neighborhood cows than about the neighborhood golf-links. I had really selected the house at Benton Station because there was a most alluring pasture, with a brook running through it, and violets over the banks. It seemed to me that no cow with a conscience could live in those surroundings and give colicky milk.

Then, the house was cheap. Unbelievably cheap. I suspected sewerage at once, but it seemed to be in the best possible order. Indeed, new plumbing had been put in, and extra bathrooms installed. As old Miss Emily Benton lived there alone, with only an old couple to look after her, it looked odd to see three bathrooms, two of them new, on the second floor. Big tubs and showers, although little old Miss Emily could have bathed in the washbowl and have had room to spare.

I faced the agent downstairs in the parlor, after I had gone over the house. Miss Emily Benton had not appeared and I took it she was away.

"Why all those bathrooms?" I demanded. "Does she use them in rotation?"

He shrugged his shoulders.

"She wished to rent the house, Miss Blakiston. The old-fashioned plumbing--"

"But she is giving the house away," I exclaimed. "Those bathrooms have cost much more than she will get out of it. You and I know that the price is absurd."

He smiled at that. "If you wish to pay more, you may, of course. She is a fine woman, Miss Blakiston, but you can never measure a Benton with any yard-stick but their own. The truth is that she wants the house off her hands this summer. I don't know why. It's a good house, and she has lived here all her life. But my instructions, I'll tell you frankly, are to rent it, if I have to give it away."

With which absurd sentence we went out the front door, and I saw the pasture, which decided me.

In view of the fact that I had taken the house for my grandnieces and nephews, it was annoying to find, by the end of June, that I should have to live in it by myself. Willie's boy was having his teeth straightened, and must make daily visits to the dentist, and Jack went to California and took Gertrude and the boys with him.

The first curious thing happened then. I wrote to the agent, saying that I would not use the house, but enclosing a
check for its rental, as I had signed the lease. To my surprise, I received in reply a note from Miss Emily herself, very carefully written on thin note-paper.

Although it was years since I had seen her, the exquisite neatness of the letter, its careful paragraphing, its margins so accurate as to give the impression that she had drawn a faint margin line with a lead pencil and then erased it—all these were as indicative of Emily Benton as--well, as the letter was not.

As well as I can explain it, the letter was impulsive, almost urgent. Yet the little old lady I remembered was neither of these things. "My dear Miss Blakiston," she wrote. "But I do hope you will use the house. It was because I wanted to be certain that it would be occupied this summer that I asked so low a rent for it.

"You may call it a whim if you like, but there are reasons why I wish the house to have a summer tenant. It has, for one thing, never been empty since it was built. It was my father's pride, and his father's before him, that the doors were never locked, even at night. Of course I can not ask a tenant to continue this old custom, but I can ask you to reconsider your decision.

"Will you forgive me for saying that you are so exactly the person I should like to see in the house that I feel I can not give you up? So strongly do I feel this that I would, if I dared, enclose your check and beg you to use the house rent free. Faithfully yours, Emily Benton."

Gracefully worded and carefully written as the letter was, I seemed to feel behind it some stress of feeling, an excitement perhaps, totally out of proportion to its contents. Years before I had met Miss Emily, even then a frail little old lady, her small figure stiffly erect, her eyes cold, her whole bearing one of reserve. The Bentons, for all their open doors, were known in that part of the country as "proud." I can remember, too, how when I was a young girl my mother had regarded the rare invitations to have tea and tiny cakes in the Benton parlor as commands, no less, and had taken the long carriage-ride from the city with complacency. And now Miss Emily, last of the family, had begged me to take the house.

In the end, as has been shown, I agreed. The glamor of the past had perhaps something to do with it. But I have come to a time of life when, failing intimate interests of my own, my neighbors' interests are mine by adoption. To be frank, I came because I was curious. Why, aside from a money consideration, was the Benton house to be occupied by an alien household? It was opposed to every tradition of the family as I had heard of it.

I knew something of the family history: the Reverend Thaddeus Benton, rector of Saint Bartholomew, who had forsaken the frame rectory near the church to build himself the substantial home now being offered me; Miss Emily, his daughter, who must now, I computed, be nearly seventy; and a son whom I recalled faintly as hardly bearing out the Benton traditions of solidity and rectitude.

The Reverend Mr. Benton, I recalled, had taken the stand that his house was his own, and having moved his family into it, had thereafter, save on great occasions, received the congregation individually or en masse, in his study at the church. A patriarchal old man, benevolent yet austere, who once, according to a story I had heard in my girlhood, had horsewhipped one of his vestrymen for trifling with the affections of a young married woman in the village!

There was a gap of thirty years in my knowledge of the family. I had, indeed, forgotten its very existence, when by the chance of a newspaper advertisement I found myself involved vitally in its affairs, playing providence, indeed, and both fearing and hating my role. Looking back, there are a number of things that appear rather curious. Why, for instance, did Maggie, my old servant, develop such a dislike for the place? It had nothing to do with the house. She had not seen it when she first refused to go. But her reluctance was evident from the beginning.

"I've just got a feeling about it, Miss Agnes," she said. "I can't explain it, any more than I can explain a cold in the head. But it's there."

At first I was inclined to blame Maggie's "feeling" on her knowledge that the house was cheap. She knew it, as she has, I am sure, read all my letters for years. She has a distrust of a bargain. But later I came to believe that there was something more to Maggie's distrust --as though perhaps a wave of uneasiness, spreading from some unknown source, had engulfed her.

Indeed, looking back over the two months I spent in the Benton house, I am inclined to go even further. If thoughts carry, as I am sure they do, then emotions carry. Fear, hope, courage, despair--if the intention of writing a letter to an absent friend can spread itself half-way across the earth, so that as you write the friend writes also, and your letters cross, how much more should big emotions carry? I have had sweep over me such waves of gladness, such gusts of despair, as have shaken me. Yet with no cause for either. They are gone in a moment. Just for an instant, I have caught and made my own another's joy or grief.

The only inexplicable part of this narrative is that Maggie, neither a psychic nor a sensitive type, caught the terror, as I came to call it, before I did. Perhaps it may be explainable by the fact that her mental processes are comparatively simple, her mind an empty slate that shows every mark made on it.

In a way, this is a study in fear.
Maggie's resentment continued through my decision to use the house, through the packing, through the very moving itself. It took the form of a sort of watchful waiting, although at the time we neither of us realized it, and of dislike of the house and its surroundings. It extended itself to the very garden, where she gathered flowers for the table with a ruthlessness that was almost vicious. And, as July went on, and Miss Emily made her occasional visits, as tiny, as delicate as herself, I had a curious conclusion forced on me. Miss Emily returned her antagonism. I was slow to credit it. What secret and even unacknowledged opposition could there be between my downright Maggie and this little old aristocrat with her frail hands and the soft rustle of silk about her?

In Miss Emily, it took the form of--how strange a word to use in connection with her!--of furtive watchfulness. I felt that Maggie's entrance, with nothing more momentous than the tea-tray, set her upright in her chair, put an edge to her soft voice, and absorbed her. She was still attentive to what I said. She agreed or dissented. But back of it all, with her eyes on me, she was watching Maggie.

With Maggie the antagonism took no such subtle form. It showed itself in the second best instead of the best china, and a tendency to weak tea, when Miss Emily took hers very strong. And such was the effect of their mutual watchfulness and suspicion, such perhaps was the influence of the staid old house on me, after a time even that fact, of the strong tea, began to strike me as incongruous. Miss Emily was so consistent, so consistently frail and dainty and so--well, unspotted seems to be the word--and so gentle, yet as time went on I began to feel that she hated Maggie with a real hatred. And there was the strong tea!

Indeed, it was not quite normal, nor was I. For by that time--the middle of July it was before I figured out as much as I have set down in five minutes--by that time I was not certain about the house. It was difficult to say just what I felt about the house. Willie, who came down over a Sunday early in the summer, possibly voiced it when he came down to his breakfast there.

"How did you sleep?" I asked.

"Not very well." He picked up his coffee-cup, and smiled over it rather sheepishly. "To tell the truth, I got to thinking about things--the furniture and all that," he said vaguely. "How many people have sat in the chairs and seen themselves in the mirror and died in the bed, and so on."

Maggie, who was bringing in the toast, gave a sort of low moan, which she turned into a cough.

"There have been twenty-three deaths in it in the last forty years, Mr. Willie," she volunteered. "That's according to the gardener. And more than half died in that room of yours."

"Put down that toast before you drop it, Maggie," I said. "You're shaking all over. And go out and shut the door."

"Very well," she said, with a meekness behind which she was both indignant and frightened. "But there is one word I might mention before I go, and that is--cats!"

"Cats!" said Willie, as she slammed the door.

"I think it is only one cat," I observed mildly. "It belongs to Miss Emily, I fancy. It manages to be in a lot of places nearly simultaneously, and Maggie swears it is a dozen."

Willie is not subtle. He is a practical young man with a growing family, and a tendency the last year or two to flesh. But he ate his breakfast thoughtfully.

"Don't you think it's rather isolated?" he asked finally. "Just you three women here?" I had taken Delia, the cook, along.

"We have a telephone," I said, rather loftily. "Although--" I checked myself. Maggie, I felt sure, was listening in the pantry, and I intended to give her wild fancies no encouragement. To utter a thing is, to Maggie, to give it life. By the mere use of the spoken word it ceases to be supposition and becomes fact.

As a matter of fact, my uneasiness about the house resolved itself into an uneasiness about the telephone. It seems less absurd now than it did then. But I remember what Willie said about it that morning on our way to the church.

"It rings at night, Willie," I said. "And when I go there is no one there."

"So do all telephones," he replied briskly. "It's their greatest weakness."

"Once or twice we have found the thing on the floor in the morning. It couldn't blow over or knock itself down."

"Probably the cat," he said, with the patient air of a man arguing with an unreasonable woman. "Of course," he added--we were passing the churchyard then, dominated by what the village called the Benton "mosolem"--"there's a chance that those dead-and-gone Bentons resent anything as modern as a telephone. It might be interesting to see what they would do to a victrola."

"I'm going to tell you something, Willie," I said. "I am afraid of the telephone."

He was completely incredulous. I felt rather ridiculous, standing there in the sunlight of that summer Sabbath and making my confession. But I did it.

"I am afraid of it," I repeated. "I'm desperately sure you will never understand. Because I don't. I can hardly force myself to go to it. I hate the very back corner of the hall where it stands, I--"
I saw his expression then, and I stopped, furious with myself. Why had I said it? But more important still, why did I feel it? I had not put it into words before, I had not expected to say it then. But the moment I said it I knew it was true. I had developed an idee fixe.

"I have to go downstairs at night and answer it," I added, rather feebly. "It's on my nerves, I think."

"I should think it is," he said, with a note of wonder in his voice. "It doesn't sound like you. A telephone!" But just at the church door he stopped me, a hand on my arm.

"Look here," he said, "don't you suppose it's because you're so dependent on the telephone? You know that if anything goes wrong with it, you're cut off, in a way. And there's another point--you get all your news over it, good and bad." He had difficulty, I think, in finding the words he wanted. "It's--it's vital," he said. "So you attach too much importance to it, and it gets to be an obsession."

"Very likely," I assented. "The whole thing is idiotic, anyhow."

But--was it idiotic?

I am endeavoring to set things down as they seemed to me at the time, not in the light of subsequent events. For, if this narrative has any interest at all, it is a psychological one. I have said that it is a study in fear, but perhaps it would be more accurate to say that it is a study of the mental reaction of crime, of its effects on different minds, more or less remotely connected with it.

That my analysis of my impressions in the church that morning are not colored by subsequent events is proved by the fact that under cover of that date, July 16th, I made the following entry:

"Why do Maggie and Miss Benton distrust each other?"

I realized it even then, although I did not consider it serious, as is evidenced by the fact that I follow it with a recipe for fruit gelatin, copied from the newspaper.

It was a calm and sunny Sunday morning. The church windows were wide open, and a butterfly came in and set the choir boys to giggling. At the end of my pew a stained-glass window to Carlo Benton--the name came like an echo from the forgotten past--sent a shower of colored light over Willie, turned my blue silk to most unspinsterly hues, and threw a sort of summer radiance over Miss Emily herself, in the seat ahead.

She sat quite alone, impeccably neat, even to her profile. She was so orderly, so well balanced, one stitch of her hand-sewed organdy collar was so clearly identical with every other, her very seams, if you can understand it, ran so exactly where they should, that she set me to pulling myself straight. I am rather casual as to seams.

After a time I began to have a curious feeling about her. Her head was toward the rector, standing in a sort of white nimbus of sunlight, but I felt that Miss Emily's entire attention was on our pew, immediately behind her. I find I can not put it into words, unless it was that her back settled into more rigid lines. I glanced along the pew. Willie's face wore a calm and slightly somnolent expression. But Maggie, in her far end--she is very high church and always attends--Maggie's eyes were glued almost fiercely to Miss Emily's back. And just then Miss Emily herself stirred, glanced up at the window, and turning slightly, returned Maggie's glance with one almost as malevolent. I have hesitated over that word. It seems strong now, but at the time it was the one that came into my mind.

When it was over, it was hard to believe that it had happened. And even now, with everything else clear, I do not pretend to explain Maggie's attitude. She knew, in some strange way. But she did not know that she knew--which sounds like nonsense and is as near as I can come to getting it down in words.

Willie left that night, the 16th, and we settled down to quiet days, and, for a time, to undisturbed nights. But on the following Wednesday, by my journal, the telephone commenced to bother me again. Generally speaking, it rang rather early, between eleven o'clock and midnight. But on the following Saturday night I find I have recorded the hour as 2 a.m.

In every instance the experience was identical. The telephone never rang the second time. When I went downstairs to answer it--I did not always go--there was the buzzing of the wire, and there was nothing else. It was on the twenty-fourth that I had the telephone inspected and reported in normal condition, and it is possibly significant that for three days afterward my record shows not a single disturbance.

But I do not regard the strange calls over the telephone as so important as my attitude to them. The plain truth is that my fear of the calls extended itself in a few days to cover the instrument, and more than that, to the part of the house it stood in. Maggie never had this, nor did she recognize it in me. Her fear was a perfectly simple although uncomfortable one, centering around the bedrooms where, in each bed, she nightly saw dead and gone Bentons laid out in all the decorum of the best linen.

On more than one evening she came to the library door, with an expression of mentally looking over her shoulder, and some such dialogue would follow:

"D'you mind if I turn the bed down now, Miss Agnes?"

"It's very early."

"'S'almost eight." When she is nervous she cuts verbal corners.
"You know perfectly well that I dislike having the beds disturbed until nine o'clock, Maggie."
"I'm going out."
"You said that last night, but you didn't go."
Silence.

"Now, see here, Maggie, I want you to overcome this feeling of--" I hesitated--"of fear. When you have really seen or heard something, it will be time enough to be nervous."

"Humph!" said Maggie on one of these occasions, and edged into the room. It was growing dusk. "It will be too late then, Miss Agnes. And another thing. You're a brave woman. I don't know as I've seen a braver. But I notice you keep away from the telephone after dark."

The general outcome of these conversations was that, to avoid argument, I permitted the preparation of my room for the night at an earlier and yet earlier hour, until at last it was done the moment I was dressed for dinner.

It is clear to me now that two entirely different sorts of fear actuated us. For by that time I had to acknowledge that there was fear in the house. Even Delia, the cook, had absorbed some of Maggie's terror; possibly traceable to some early impressions of death which connected themselves with a four-post bedstead.

Of the two sorts of fear, Delia's and Maggie's symptoms were subjective. Mine, I still feel, were objective.

It was not long before the beginning of August, and during a lull in the telephone matter, that I began to suspect that the house was being visited at night.

There was nothing I could point to with any certainty as having been disturbed at first. It was a matter of a book misplaced on the table, of my sewing-basket open when I always leave it closed, of a burnt match on the floor, whereas it is one of my orderly habits never to leave burnt matches around. And at last the burnt match became a sort of clue, for I suspected that it had been used to light one of the candles that sat in holders of every sort, on the top of the library shelves.

I tried getting up at night and peering over the banisters, but without result. And I was never sure as to articles that they had been moved. I remained in that doubting and suspicious halfway ground that is worse than certainty. And there was the matter of motive. I could not get away from that. What possible purpose could an intruder have, for instance, in opening my sewing-basket or moving the dictionary two inches on the center table?

Yet the feeling persisted, and on the second of August I find this entry in my journal:

Right-hand brass, eight inches; left-hand brass, seven inches; carved-wood--Italian--five and three quarter inches each; old glass on mantelpiece--seven inches. And below this, dated the third: Last night, between midnight and daylight, the candle in the glass holder on the right side of the mantel was burned down one and one-half inches.

I should, no doubt, have set a watch on my nightly visitor after making this discovery--and one that was apparently connected with it--nothing less than Delia's report that there were candle-droppings over the border of the library carpet. But I have admitted that this is a study in fear, and a part of it is my own.

I was afraid. I was afraid of the night visitor, but, more than that, I was afraid of the fear. It had become a real thing by that time, something that lurked in the lower back hall waiting to catch me by the throat, to stop my breath, to paralyze me so I could not escape. I never went beyond that point.

Yet I am not a cowardly woman. I have lived alone too long for that. I have closed too many houses at night and gone upstairs in the dark to be afraid of darkness. And even now I can not, looking back, admit that I was afraid of the darkness there, although I resorted to the weak expedient of leaving a short length of candle to burn itself out in the hall when I went up to bed.

I have seen one of Willie's boys waken up at night screaming with a terror he could not describe. Well, it was much like that with me, except that I was awake and horribly ashamed of myself.

On the fourth of August I find in my journal the single word "flour." It recalls both my own cowardice at that time, and an experiment I made. The telephone had not bothered us for several nights, and I began to suspect a connection of this sort: when the telephone rang, there was no night visitor, and vice versa. I was not certain.

Delia was setting bread that night in the kitchen, and Maggie was reading a ghost story from the evening paper. There was a fine sifting of flour over the table, and it gave me my idea. When I went up to bed that night, I left a powdering of flour here and there on the lower floor, at the door into the library, a patch by the table, and--going back rather uneasily--one near the telephone.

I was up and downstairs before Maggie the next morning. The patches showed trampling. In the doorway they were almost obliterated, as by the trailing of a garment over them, but by the fireplace there were two prints quite distinct. I knew when I saw them that I had expected the marks of Miss Emily's tiny foot, although I had not admitted it before. But these were not Miss Emily's. They were large, flat, substantial, and one showed a curious marking around the edge that--It was my own! The marking was the knitted side of my bedroom slipper. I had, so far as I could tell, gone downstairs, in the night, investigated the candles, possibly in darkness, and gone back to bed again.
The effect of the discovery on me was--well undermining. In all the uneasiness of the past few weeks I had at least had full confidence in myself. And now that was gone. I began to wonder how much of the things that had troubled me were real, and how many I had made for myself.

To tell the truth, by that time the tension was almost unbearable. My nerves were going, and there was no reason for it. I kept telling myself that. In the mirror I looked white and anxious, and I had a sense of approaching trouble. I caught Maggie watching me, too, and on the seventh I find in my journal the words: "Insanity is often only a formless terror."

On the Sunday morning following that I found three burnt matches in the library fireplace, and one of the candles in the brass holders was almost gone. I sat most of the day in that room, wondering what would happen to me if I lost my mind. I knew that Maggie was watching me, and I made one of those absurd hypotheses to myself that we all do at times. If any of the family came, I would know that she had sent for them, and that I was really deranged! It had been a long day, with a steady summer rain that had not cooled the earth, but only set it steaming. The air was like hot vapor, and my hair clung to my moist forehead. At about four o'clock Maggie started chasing a fly with a folded newspaper. She followed it about the lower floor from room to room, making little harsh noises in her throat when she missed it. The sound of the soft thud of the paper on walls and furniture seemed suddenly more than I could bear.

"For heaven's sake!" I cried. "Stop that noise, Maggie." I felt as though my eyes were starting from my head.

"It's a fly," she said doggedly, and aimed another blow at it. "If I don't kill it, we'll have a million. There, it's on the mantel now. I never--"

I felt that if she raised the paper club once more I should scream. So I got up quickly and caught her wrist. She was so astonished that she let the paper drop, and there we stood, staring at each other. I can still see the way her mouth hung open.

"Don't!" I said. And my voice sounded thick even to my own ears. "Maggie--I can't stand it!"

"My God, Miss Agnes!"

Her tone brought me up sharply. I released her arm.

"I--I'm just nervous, Maggie," I said, and sat down. I was trembling violently.

I was sane. I knew it then as I know it now. But I was not rational. Perhaps to most of us come now and then times when they realize that some act, or some thought, is not balanced, as though, for a moment or an hour, the control was gone from the brain. Or --and I think this was the feeling I had--that some other control was in charge. Not the Agnes Blakiston I knew, but another Agnes Blakiston, perhaps, was exerting a temporary dominance, a hectic, craven, and hateful control.

That is the only outburst I recall. Possibly Maggie may have others stored away. She has a tenacious memory. Certainly it was my nearest approach to violence. But it had the effect of making me set a watch on myself.

Possibly it was coincidence. Probably, however, Maggie had communicated with Willie. But two days later young Martin Sprague, Freda Sprague's son, stopped his car in the drive and came in. He is a nerve specialist, and very good, although I can remember when he came down in his night drawers to one of his mother's dinner-parties.

"Thought I would just run in and see you," he said. "Mother told me you were here. By George, Miss Agnes, you look younger than ever."

"Who told you to come, Martie?" I asked.

"Told me? I don't have to be told to visit an old friend."

Well, he asked himself to lunch, and looked over the house, and decided to ask Miss Emily if she would sell an old Japanese cabinet inlaid with mother of pearl that I would not have had as a gift. And, in the end, I told him my trouble, of the fear that seemed to center around the telephone, and the sleep-walking.

He listened carefully.

"Ever get any bad news over the telephone?" he asked.

One way and another, I said I had had plenty of it. He went over me thoroughly, and was inclined to find my experience with the flour rather amusing than otherwise. "It's rather good, that," he said. "Setting a trap to catch yourself. You'd better have Maggie sleep in your room for a while. Well, it's all pretty plain, Miss Agnes. We bury some things as deep as possible, especially if we don't want to remember that they ever happened. But the mind's a queer thing. It holds on pretty hard, and burying is not destroying. Then we get tired or nervous--maybe just holding the thing down and pretending it is not there makes us nervous--and up it pops, like the ghost of a buried body, and raises hell. You don't mind that, do you?" he added anxiously. "It's exactly what those things do raise."

"But," I demanded irritably, "who rings the telephone at night? I daresay you don't contend that I go out at night and call the house, and then come back and answer the call, do you?"

He looked at me with a maddening smile.

"Are you sure it really rings?" he asked.
And so bad was my nervous condition by that time, so undermined was my self-confidence, that I was not certain! And this in face of the fact that it invariably roused Maggie as well as myself.

On the eleventh of August Miss Emily came to tea. The date does not matter, but by following the chronology of my journal I find I can keep my narrative in proper sequence.

I had felt better that day. So far as I could determine, I had not walked in my sleep again, and there was about Maggie an air of cheerfulness and relief which showed that my condition was more nearly normal than it had been for some time. The fear of the telephone and of the back hall was leaving me, too. Perhaps Martin Sprague's matter-of-fact explanation had helped me. But my own theory had always been the one I recorded at the beginning of this narrative—that I caught and—well, registered is a good word— that I registered an overwhelming fear from some unknown source.

I spied Miss Emily as she got out of the hack that day, a cool little figure clad in a thin black silk dress, with the sheerest possible white collars and cuffs. Her small bonnet with its crepe veil was faced with white, and her carefully crimped gray hair showed a wavy border beneath it. Mr. Staley, the station hackman, helped her out of the surrey, and handed her the knitting-bag without which she was seldom seen. It was two weeks since she had been there, and she came slowly up the walk, looking from side to side at the perennial borders, then in full August bloom.

She smiled when she saw me in the doorway, and said, with the little anxious pucker between her eyes that was so childish, "Don't you think peonies are better cut down at this time of year?" She took a folded handkerchief from her bag and dabbed at her face, where there was no sign of dust to mar its old freshness. "It gives the lilies a better chance, my dear."

I led her into the house, and she produced a gay bit of knitting, a baby afghan, by the signs. She smiled at me over it.

"I am always one baby behind," she explained and fell to work rapidly. She had lovely hands, and I suspected them of being her one vanity.

Maggie was serving tea with her usual grudging reluctance, and I noticed then that when she was in the room Miss Emily said little or nothing. I thought it probable that she did not approve of conversing before servants, and would have let it go at that, had I not, as I held out Miss Emily's cup, caught her looking at Maggie. I had a swift impression of antagonism again, of alertness and something more. When Maggie went out, Miss Emily turned to me.

"She is very capable, I fancy."

"Very. Entirely too capable."

"She looks sharp," said Miss Emily. It was a long time since I had heard the word so used, but it was very apt. Maggie was indeed sharp. But Miss Emily launched into a general dissertation on servants, and Maggie's sharpness was forgotten.

It was, I think, when she was about to go that I asked her about the telephone.

"Telephone?" she inquired. "Why, no. It has always done very well. Of course, after a heavy snow in the winter, sometimes--"

She had a fashion of leaving her sentences unfinished. They trailed off, without any abrupt break.

"It rings at night."

"Rings?"

"I am called frequently and when I get to the phone, there is no one there."

Some of my irritation doubtless got into my voice, for Miss Emily suddenly drew away and stared at me.

"But—that is very strange. I--"

She had gone pale. I saw that now. And quite suddenly she dropped her knitting-bag. When I restored it to her, she was very calm and poised, but her color had not come back.

"It has always been very satisfactory," she said. "I don't know that it ever—"

She considered, and began again. "Why not just ignore it? If some one is playing a malicious trick on you, the only thing is to ignore it."

Her hands were shaking, although her voice was quiet. I saw that when she tried to tie the ribbons of the bag.

And--I wondered at this, in so gentle a soul--there was a hint of anger in her tones. There was an edge to her voice.

That she could be angry was a surprise. And I found that she could also be obstinate. For we came to an impasse over the telephone in the next few minutes, and over something so absurd that I was non-plussed. It was over her unqualified refusal to allow me to install a branch wire to my bedroom.

"But," I expostulated, "when one thinks of the convenience, and--"

"I am sorry." Her voice had a note of finality. "I daresay I am old-fashioned, but--I do not like changes. I shall have to ask you not to interfere with the telephone."
I could hardly credit my senses. Her tone was one of reproof, plus decision. It convicted me of an indiscretion. If I had asked to take the roof off and replace it with silk umbrellas, it might have been justified. But to a request to move the telephone!

"Of course, if you feel that way about it," I said, "I shall not touch it."

I dropped the subject, a trifle ruffled, I confess, and went upstairs to fetch a box in which Miss Emily was to carry away some flowers from the garden.

It was when I was coming down the staircase that I saw Maggie. She had carried the hall candlesticks, newly polished, to their places on the table, and was standing, a hand on each one, staring into the old Washington mirror in front of her. From where she was she must have had a full view of Miss Emily in the library. And Maggie was bristling. It was the only word for it.

She was still there when Miss Emily had gone, blowing on the mirror and polishing it. And I took her to task for her unfriendly attitude to the little old lady.

"You practically threw her muffins at her," I said. "And I must speak again about the cups--"

"What does she come snooping around for, anyhow?" she broke in. "Aren't we paying for her house? Didn't she get down on her bended knees and beg us to take it?"

"Is that any reason why we should be uncivil?"

"What I want to know is this," Maggie said truculently. "What right has she to come back, and spy on us? For that's what she's doing, Miss Agnes. Do you know what she was at when I looked in at her? She was running a finger along the baseboard to see if it was clean! And what's more, I caught her at it once before, in the back hall, when she was pretending to telephone for the station hack."

It was that day, I think, that I put fresh candles in all the holders downstairs. I had made a resolution like this,--to renew the candles, and to lock myself in my room and throw the key over the transom to Maggie. If, in the mornings that followed, the candles had been used, it would prove that Martin Sprague was wrong, that even foot-prints could lie, and that some one was investigating the lower floor at night. For while my reason told me that I had been the intruder, my intuition continued to insist that my sleepwalking was a result, not a cause. In a word, I had gone downstairs, because I knew that there had been and might be again, a night visitor.

Yet, there was something of comedy in that night's precautions, after all.

At ten-thirty I was undressed, and Maggie had, with rebellion in every line of her, locked me in. I could hear her, afterwards running along the hall to her own room and slamming the door. Then, a moment later, the telephone rang. It was too early, I reasoned, for the night calls. It might be anything, a telegram at the station, Willie's boy run over by an automobile, Gertrude's children ill. A dozen possibilities ran through my mind.

And Maggie would not let me out!

"You're not going downstairs," she called, from a safe distance.

"Maggie!" I cried, sharply. And banged at the door. The telephone was ringing steadily. "Come here at once."

"Miss Agnes," she beseeched, "you go to bed and don't listen. There'll be nothing there, for all your trouble," she said, in a quavering voice. "It's nothing human that rings that bell."

Finally, however, she freed me, and I went down the stairs. I had carried down a lamp, and my nerves were vibrating to the rhythm of the bell's shrill summons. But, strangely enough, the fear had left me. I find, as always, that it is difficult to put into words. I did not relish the excursion to the lower floor. I resented the jarring sound of the bell. But the terror was gone.

I went back to the telephone. Something that was living and moving was there. I saw its eyes, lower than mine, reflecting the lamp like twin lights. I was frightened, but still it was not the fear. The twin lights leaped forward--and proved to be the eyes of Miss Emily's cat, which had been sleeping on the stand!

I answered the telephone. To my surprise it was Miss Emily herself, a quiet and very dignified voice which apologized for disturbing me at that hour, and went on:

"I feel that I was very abrupt this afternoon, Miss Blakiston. My excuse is that I have always feared change. I have lived in a rut too long, I'm afraid. But of course, if you feel you would like to move the telephone, or put in an upstairs instrument, you may do as you like."

She seemed, having got me there, unwilling to ring off. I got a curious effect of reluctance over the telephone, and there was one phrase that she repeated several times.

"I do not want to influence you. I want you to do just what you think best."

The fear was entirely gone by the time she rang off. I felt, instead, a sort of relaxation that was most comforting. The rear hall, a cul-de-sac of nervousness in the daytime and of horror at night, was suddenly transformed by the light of my lamp into a warm and cheerful refuge from the darkness of the lower floor. The purring of the cat, comfortably settled on the telephone-stand, was as cheering as the singing of a kettle on a stove. On the rack near me my garden hat and an old Paisley shawl made a grotesque human effigy.
I sat back in the low wicker chair and surveyed the hallway. Why not, I considered, do away now with the fear of it? If I could conquer it like this at midnight, I need never succumb again to it in the light.

The cat leaped to the stand beside me and stood there, waiting. He was an intelligent animal, and I am like a good many spinsters. I am not more fond of cats than other people, but I understand them better. And it seemed to me that he and I were going through some familiar program, of which a part had been neglected. The cat neither sat nor lay, but stood there, waiting.

So at last I fetched the shawl from the rack and made him a bed on the stand. It was what he had been waiting for. I saw that at once. He walked onto it, turned around once, lay down, and closed his eyes.

I took up my vigil. I had been the victim of a fear I was determined to conquer. The house was quiet. Maggie had retired shriveled to bed. The cat slept on the shawl.

And then—I felt the fear returning. It welled up through my tranquillity like a flood, and swept me with it. I wanted to shriek. I was afraid to shriek. I longed to escape. I dared not move. There had been no sound, no motion. Things were as they had been.

It may have been one minute or five that I sat there. I do not know. I only know that I sat with fixed eyes, not even blinking, for fear of even for a second shutting out the sane and visible world about me. A sense of deadness commenced in my hands and worked up my arms. My chest seemed flattened.

Then the telephone bell rang.

The cat leaped to his feet. Somehow I reached forward and took down the receiver.

"Who is it?" I cried, in a voice that was thin, I knew, and unnatural.

The telephone is not a perfect medium. It loses much that we wish to register but, also, it registers much that we may wish to lose. Therefore when I say that I distinctly heard a gasp, followed by heavy difficult breathing, over the telephone, I must beg for credence. It is true. Some one at the other end of the line was struggling for breath.

Then there was complete silence. I realized, after a moment, that the circuit had been stealthily cut, and that my conviction was verified by Central's demand, a moment later, of what number I wanted. I was, at first, unable to answer her. When I did speak, my voice was shaken.

"What number, please?" she repeated, in a bored tone. There is nothing in all the world so bored as the voice of a small town telephone-operator.

"You called," I said.

"Beg y'pardon. Must have been a mistake," she replied glibly, and cut me off.

II

It may be said, and with truth, that so far I have recorded little but subjective terror, possibly easily explained by my occupancy of an isolated house, plus a few unimportant incidents, capable of various interpretations. But the fear was, and is today as I look back, a real thing. As real—and as difficult to describe—as a chill, for instance. A severe mental chill it was, indeed.

I went upstairs finally to a restless night, and rose early, after only an hour or so of sleep. One thing I was determined on—to find out, if possible, the connection between the terror and the telephone. I breakfasted early, and was dressing to go to the village when I had a visitor, no other than Miss Emily herself. She looked fluttered and perturbed at the unceremonious hour of her visit—she was the soul of convention—and explained, between breaths as it were, that she had come to apologize for the day before. She had hardly slept. I must forgive her. She had been very nervous since her brother's death, and small things upset her.

How much of what I say of Miss Emily depends on my later knowledge, I wonder? Did I notice then that she was watching me furtively, or is it only on looking back that I recall it? I do recall it—the hall door open and a vista of smiling garden beyond, and silhouetted against the sunshine, Miss Emily's frail figure and searching, slightly uplifted face. There was something in her eyes that I had not seen before—a sort of exaltation. She was not, that morning, the Miss Emily who ran a finger along her baseboards to see if we dusted them.

She had walked out, and it had exhausted her. She breathed in little gasps.

"I think," she said at last, "that I must telephone for Mr. Staley, I am never very strong in hot weather."

"Please let me call him, for you, Miss Emily." I am not a young woman, and she was at least sixty-five. But, because she was so small and frail, I felt almost a motherly anxiety for her that morning.

"I think I should like to do it, if you don't mind. We are old friends. He always comes promptly when I call him."

She went back alone, and I waited in the doorway. When she came out, she was smiling, and there was more color in her face.

"He is coming at once. He is always very thoughtful for me."

Now, without any warning, something that had been seething since her breathless arrival took shape in my mind, and became—suspicion. What if it had been Miss Emily who had called me the second time to the telephone, and having established the connection, had waited, breathing hard for—what?
It was fantastic, incredible in the light of that brilliant summer day. I looked at her, dainty and exquisite as ever, her ruchings fresh and white, her very face indicative of decorum and order, her wistful old mouth still rather like a child's, her eyes, always slightly upturned because of her diminutive height, so that she had habitually a look of adoration.

"One of earth's saints," the rector had said to me on Sunday morning. "A good woman, Miss Blakiston, and a sacrifice to an unworthy family."

Suspicion is like the rain. It falls on the just and on the unjust. And that morning I began to suspect Miss Emily. I had no idea of what.

On my mentioning an errand in the village she promptly offered to take me with her in the Staley hack. She had completely altered in manner. The strain was gone. In her soft low voice, as we made our way to the road, she told me the stories of some of the garden flowers.

"The climbing rose over the arch, my dear," she said, "my mother brought from England on her wedding journey. People have taken cuttings from it again and again, but the cuttings never thrive. A bad winter, and they are gone. But this one has lived. Of course now and then it freezes down."

She chattered on, and my suspicions grew more and more shadowy. They would have gone, I think, had not Maggie called me back with a grocery list.

"A sack of flour," she said, "and some green vegetables, and--Miss Agnes, that woman was down on her knees beside the telephone!--and bluing for the laundry, and I guess that's all."

The telephone! It was always the telephone. We drove on down the lane, eyed somnolently by spotted cows and incurious sheep, and all the way Miss Emily talked. She was almost garrulous. She asked the hackman about his family and stopped the vehicle to pick up a peddler, overburdened with his pack. I watched her with amazement. Evidently this was Mr. Staley's Miss Emily. But it was not mine.

But I saw mine, too, that morning. It was when I asked the hackman to put me down at the little telephone building. I thought she put her hand to her throat, although the next moment she was only adjusting the ruching at her neck.

"You--you have decided to have the second telephone put in, then?"

I hesitated. She so obviously did not want it installed. And was I to submit meekly to the fear again, without another effort to vanquish it?

"I think not, dear Miss Emily," I said at last, smiling at her drawn face. "Why should I disturb your lovely old house and its established order?"

"But I want you to do just what you think best," she protested. She had put her hands together. It was almost a supplication.

As to the strange night calls, there was little to be learned. The night operator was in bed. The manager made a note of my complaint, and promised an investigation, which, having had experience with telephone investigations, I felt would lead nowhere. I left the building, with my grocery list in my hand.

The hack was gone, of course. But--I may have imagined it--I thought I saw Miss Emily peering at me from behind the bonnets and hats in the milliner's window.

I did not investigate. The thing was enough on my nerves as it was.

Maggie served me my luncheon in a sort of strained silence. She observed once, as she brought me my tea, that she was giving me notice and intended leaving on the afternoon train. She had, she stated, holding out the sugar-bowl to me at arm's length, stood a great deal in the way of irregular hours from me, seeing as I would read myself to sleep, and let the light burn all night, although very fussy about the gas-bills. But she had reached the end of her tether, and you could grate a lemon on her most anywhere, she was that covered with goose-flesh.

"Goose-flesh about what?" I demanded. "And either throw the sugar to me or come closer."

"I don't know about what," she said sullenly. "I'm just scared."

And for once Maggie and I were in complete harmony. I, too, was "just scared."

We were, however, both of us much nearer a solution of our troubles than we had any idea of. I say solution, although it but substituted one mystery for another. It gave tangibility to the intangible, indeed, but I can not see that our situation was any better. I, for one, found myself in the position of having a problem to solve, and no formula to solve it with.

The afternoon was quiet. Maggie and the cook were in the throes of jelly-making, and I had picked up a narrative history of the county, written most pedantically, although with here and there a touch of heavy lightness, by Miss Emily's father, the Reverend Samuel Thaddeus Benton.

On the fly-leaf she had inscribed, "Written by my dear father during the last year of his life, and published after his death by the parish to which he had given so much of his noble life."

The book left me cold, but the inscription warmed me. Whatever feeling I might have had about Miss Emily died.
of that inscription. A devoted and self-sacrificing daughter, a woman both loving and beloved, that was the Miss Emily of the dedication to "Fifty years in Bolivar County."

In the middle of the afternoon Maggie appeared, with a saucer and a teaspoon. In the saucer she had poured a little of the jelly to test it, and she was blowing on it when she entered. I put down my book.

"Well!" I said. "Don't tell me you're not dressed yet. You've just got about time for the afternoon train."

She gave me an imploring glance over the saucer.

"You might just take a look at this, Miss Agnes," she said. "It jells around the edges, but in the middle--"

"I'll send your trunk tomorrow," I said, "and you'd better let Delia make the jelly alone. You haven't much time, and she says she makes good jelly."

She raised anguished eyes to mine.

"Miss Agnes," she said, "that woman's never made a glass of jelly in her life before. She didn't even know about putting a silver spoon in the tumblers to keep 'em from breaking."

I picked up "Bolivar County" and opened it, but I could see that the hands holding the saucer were shaking.

"I'm not going, Miss Agnes," said Maggie. (I had, of course, known she would not. The surprising thing to me is that she never learns this fact, although she gives me notice quite regularly. She always thinks that she is really going, until the last.) "Of course you can let that woman make the jelly, if you want. It's your fruit and sugar. But I'm not going to desert you in your hour of need."

"What do I need?" I demanded. "Jelly?"

But she was past sarcasm. She placed the saucer on a table and rolled her stained hands in her apron.

"That woman," she said, "what was she doing under the telephone stand?"

She almost immediately burst into tears, and it was some time before I caught what she feared. For she was more concrete than I. And she knew now what she was afraid of. It was either a bomb or fire.

"Mark my words, Miss Agnes," she said, "she's going to destroy the place. What made her set out and rent it for almost nothing if she isn't? And I know who rings the telephone at night. It's her."

"What on earth for?" I demanded as ungrammatical and hardly less uneasy than Maggie.

"She wakes us up, so we can get out in time. She's a preacher's daughter. More than likely she draws the line at bloodshed. That's one reason. Maybe there's another. What if by pressing a button somewhere and ringing that bell, it sets off a bomb somewhere?"

"It never has," I observed dryly.

But however absurd Maggie's logic might be, she was firm in her major premise. Miss Emily had been on her hands and knees by the telephone-stand, and had, on seeing Maggie, observed that she had dropped the money for the hackman out of her glove.

"Which I don't believe. Her gloves were on the stand. If you'll come back, Miss Agnes, I'll show you how she was."

We made rather an absurd procession, Maggie leading with the saucer, I following, and the cat, appearing from nowhere as usual, bringing up the rear. Maggie placed the jelly on the stand, and dropped on her hands and knees, crawling under the stand, a confused huddle of gingham apron, jelly-stains, and suspicion.

"She had her head down like this," she said, in rather a smothered voice. "I'm her, and you're me. And I says: 'If it's rolled off somewhere I'll find it next time I sweep, and give it back to you.' Well, what d'you think of that! Here it is!"

My attention had by this time been caught by the jelly, now unmistakably solidifying in the center. I moved to the kitchen door to tell Delia to take it off the fire. When I returned, Maggie was digging under the telephone battery-box with a hair-pin and muttering to herself.

"Darnation!" she said, "it's gone under!"

"If you do get it," I reminded her, "it belongs to Miss Emily."

There is a curious strain of cupidity in Maggie. I have never been able to understand it. With her own money she is as free as air. But let her see a chance for illegitimate gain, of finding a penny on the street, of not paying her fare on the cars, of passing a bad quarter, and she is filled with an unholy joy. And so today. The jelly was forgotten. Terror was gone. All that existed for Maggie was a twenty-five cent piece under a battery-box.

Suddenly she wailed: "It's gone, Miss Agnes. It's clear under!"

"Good heavens, Maggie! What difference does it make?"

"W'you mind if I got the ice-pick and unscrewed the box?"

My menage is always notoriously short of tools.

I forbade it at once, and ordered her back to the kitchen, and after a final squint along the carpet, head flat, she dragged herself out and to her feet.

"I'll get the jelly off," she said, "and then maybe a hat pin'll reach it. I can see the edge of it."
A loud crack from the kitchen announced that cook had forgotten the silver spoon, and took Maggie off on a jump. I went back to the library and "Bolivar County," and, I must confess, to a nap in my chair.

I was roused by the feeling that some one was staring at me. My eyes focused first on the icepick, then, as I slowly raised them, on Maggie's face, set in hard and uncompromising lines.

"I'd thank you to come with me," she said stiffly.

"Come where?"

"To the telephone."

I groaned inwardly. But, because submission to Maggie's tyranny has become a firm habit with me, I rose. I saw then that she held a dingy quarter in one hand.

Without a word she turned and stalked ahead of me into the hall. It is curious, looking back and remembering that she had then no knowledge of the significance of things, to remember how hard and inexorable her back was. Viewed through the light of what followed, I have never been able to visualize Maggie moving down the hall. It has always been a menacing figure, rather shadowy than real. And the hall itself takes on grotesque proportions, becomes inordinately long, an infinity of hall, fading away into time and distance.

Yet it was only a moment, of course, until I stood by the telephone. Maggie had been at work. The wooden box which covered the battery-jars had been removed, and lay on its side. The battery-jars were uncovered, giving an effect of mystery unveiled, a sort of shamelessness, of destroyed illusion.

Maggie pointed. "There's a paper under one of the jars," she said. "I haven't touched it, but I know well enough what it is."

I have not questioned Maggie on this point, but I am convinced that she expected to find a sort of final summons, of death's visiting-card, for one or the other of us.

The paper was there, a small folded scrap, partially concealed under a jar.

"Them prints was there, too," Maggie said, non-committally.

The box had accumulated the flocculent floating particles of months, possibly years—lint from the hall carpet giving it a reddish tinge. And in this light and evanescent deposit, fluttered by a breath, fingers had moved, searched, I am tempted to say groped, although the word seems absurd for anything so small. The imprint of Maggie's coin and of her attempts at salvage were at the edge and quite distinct from the others.

I lifted the jar and picked up the paper. It was folded and refolded until it was not much larger than a thumb-nail, a rather stiff paper crossed with faint blue lines. I am not sure that I would have opened it—had not Maggie suddenly gasped and implored me not to look at it. I immediately determined to examine it.

Yet, after I had read it twice, it had hardly made an impression on my mind. There are some things so incredible that the brain automatically rejects them. I looked at the paper. I read it with my eyes. But I did not grasp it.

It was not note paper. It was apparently torn from a tablet of glazed and ruled paper—just such paper, for instance, as Maggie soaks in brandy and places on top of her jelly before tying it up. It had been raggedly torn. The scrap was the full width of the sheet, but only three inches or so deep. It was undated, and this is what it said:

"To Whom it may concern: On the 30th day of May, 1911, I killed a woman (here) in this house. I hope you will not find this until I am dead. (Signed) EMILY BENTON."

Maggie had read the confession over my shoulder, and I felt her body grow rigid. As for myself, my first sensation was one of acute discomfort—that we should have exposed the confession to the light of day. Neither of us, I am sure, had really grasped it. Maggie put a trembling hand on my arm.

"The brass of her," she said, in a thin, terrified voice. "Oh, my God, Miss Agnes, put it back!"

I whirled on her, in a fury that was only an outlet for my own shock.

"Once for all, Maggie," I said, "I'll ask you to wait until you are spoken to. And if I hear that you have so much as mentioned this --piece of paper, out you go and never come back."

But she was beyond apprehension. She was literal, too. She saw, not Miss Emily unbelievably associated with a crime, but the crime itself. "Who d'you suppose it was, Miss Agnes?"

"I don't believe it at all. Some one has placed it there to hurt Miss Emily."

"It's her writing," said Maggie doggedly.

After a time I got rid of her, and sat down to think in the library. Rather I sat down to reason with myself.

For every atom of my brain was clamoring that this thing was true, that my little Miss Emily, exquisite and fine as she was, had done the thing she claimed to have done. It was her own writing, thin, faintly shaded, as neat and as erect as herself. But even that I would not accept, until I had compared it with such bits of hers as I possessed, the note begging me to take the house, the inscription on the fly-leaf of "Fifty Years in Bolivar County."

And here was something I could not quite understand. The writing was all of the same order, but while the
confession and the inscription in the book were similar, letter for letter, in the note to me there were differences, a
change in the "i" in Benton, a fuller and blacker stroke, a variation in the terminals of the letters--it is hard to
particularize.

I spent the remainder of the day in the library, going out for dinner, of course, but returning to my refuge again
immediately after. Only in the library am I safe from Maggie. By virtue of her responsibility for my wardrobe, she
virtually shares my bedroom, but her respect for books she never reads makes her regard a library as at least semi-
holy ground. She dusts books with more caution than china, and her respect for a family Bible is greater than her
respect for me.

I spent the evening there, Miss Emily's cat on the divan, and the mysterious confession lying before me under the
lamp. At night the variation between it and her note to me concerning the house seemed more pronounced. The note
looked more like a clumsy imitation of Miss Emily's own hand. Or--perhaps this is nearer--as if, after writing in a
certain way for sixty years, she had tried to change her style.

All my logic ended in one conclusion. She must have known the confession was there. Therefore the chances
were that she had placed it there. But it was not so simple as that.

Both crime and confession indicated a degree of impulse that Miss Emily did not possess. I have entirely failed
with my picture of Miss Emily if the word violence can be associated with her in any way. Miss Emily was a
temple, clean swept, cold, and empty. She never acted on impulse. Every action, almost every word, seemed the
result of thought and deliberation.

Yet, if I could believe my eyes, five years before she had killed a woman in this very house. Possibly in the very
room in which I was then sitting.

I find, on looking back, that the terror must have left me that day. It had, for so many weeks, been so much a part
of my daily life that I would have missed it had it not been for this new and engrossing interest. I remember that the
long French windows of the library reflected the room like mirrors against the darkness outside, and that once I
thought I saw a shadowy movement in one of them, as though a figure moved behind me. But when I turned sharply
there was no one there, and Maggie proved to be, as usual after nine o'clock, shut away upstairs.

I was not terrified. And indeed the fear never returned. In all the course of my investigations, I was never again a
victim of the unreasoning fright of those earlier days.

My difficulty was that I was asked to believe the unbelievable. It was impossible to reconstruct in that quiet
house a scene of violence. It was equally impossible, in view, for instance, of that calm and filial inscription in the
history of Bolivar County, to connect Miss Emily with it. She had killed a woman, forsooth! Miss Emily, of the
baby afghans, of the weary peddler, of that quiet seat in the church.

Yet I knew now that Miss Emily knew of the confession; knew, at least, of something concealed in that corner of
the rear hall which housed the telephone. Had she by chance an enemy who would have done this thing? But to
suspect Miss Emily of an enemy was as absurd as to suspect her of a crime.

I was completely at a loss when I put out the lights and prepared to close the house. As I glanced back along the
hall, I could not help wondering if the telephone, having given up its secret, would continue its nocturnal alarms. As
I stood there, I heard the low growl of thunder and the patter of rain against the windows. Partly out of loneliness,
partly out of bravado, I went back to the telephone and tried to call Willie. But the line was out of order.

I slept badly. Shortly after I returned I heard a door slamming repeatedly, which I knew meant an open window
somewhere. I got up and went into the hall. There was a cold air coming from somewhere below. But as I stood
there it ceased. The door above stopped slamming, and silence reigned again.

Maggie roused me early. The morning sunlight was just creeping into the room, and the air was still cool with
the night and fresh-washed by the storm.

"Miss Agnes," she demanded, standing over me, "did you let the cat out last night?"
"I brought him in before I went to bed."
"Humph!" said Maggie. "And did I or did I not wash the doorstep yesterday?"
"You ought to know. You said you did."
"Miss Agnes," Maggie said, "that woman was in this house last night. You can see her footprints as plain as day
on the doorstep. And what's more, she stole the cat and let out your mother's Paisley shawl."

Which statements, corrected, proved to be true. My old Paisley shawl was gone from the hallrack, and
unquestionably the cat had been on the back doorstep that morning along with the milk bottles. Moreover, one of my
fresh candles had been lighted, but had burned for only a moment or two.

That day I had a second visit from young Martin Sprague. The telephone was in working order again, having
unaccountably recovered, and I was using it when he came. He watched me quizzically from a position by the
newelpost, as I rang off.

"I was calling Miss Emily Benton," I explained, "but she is ill."
“Still troubled with telephobia?”

“I have other things to worry me, Martin,” I said gravely, and let him into the library.

There I made a clean breast of everything I omitted nothing. The fear, the strange ringing of the telephone bell; the gasping breathing over it the night before; Miss Emily’s visit to it. And, at last, the discovery.

He took the paper when I offered it to him, and examined it carefully by a window. Then he stood looking out and whistling reflectively. At last he turned back to the room.

“It’s an unusual story,” he said. “But if you’ll give me a little time I’ll explain it to you. In the first place, let go of the material things for a moment, and let's deal with minds and emotions. You're a sensitive person, Miss Agnes. You catch a lot of impressions that pass most people by. And, first of all, you’ve been catching fright from two sources.”

“Two sources?”

“Two. Maggie is one. She hates the country. She is afraid of old houses. And she sees in this house only the ghosts of people who have died here.”

“I pay no attention to Maggie’s fears.”

“You only think that. But to go further--you have been receiving waves of apprehension from another source--from the little lady, Miss Emily.”

“Then you think--”

“Hold on,” he said smiling. “I think she wrote that confession. Yes. As a matter of fact, I’m quite sure she did. And she has established a system of espionage on you by means of the telephone. If you had discovered the confession, she knew that there would be a change in your voice, in your manner. If you answered very quickly, as though you had been near the instrument, perhaps in the very act of discovering the paper--don't you get it? And can't you see how her terror affected you even over the wire? Don't you think that, if thought can travel untold distances, fear can? Of course.”

“But, Martin!” I exclaimed. “Little Miss Emily a murderess.”

He threw up his hands.

“Certainly not,” he said. “You’re a shrewd woman, Miss Agnes. Do you know that a certain type of woman frequently confesses to a crime she never committed, or had any chance of committing? Look at the police records--confessions of women as to crimes they could only have heard of through the newspapers! I would like to wager that if we had the newspapers of that date that came into this house, we would find a particularly atrocious and mysterious murder being featured--the murder of a woman.”

“You do not know her,” I maintained doggedly. And drew, as best I could, a sketch of Miss Emily, while he listened attentively.

“A pure neurasthenic type,” was his comment. “Older than usual, but that is accountable by the sheltered life she has led. The little Miss Emily is still at heart a girl. And a hysterical girl.”

“She has had enough trouble to develop her.”

“Trouble! Has she ever had a genuine emotion? Look at this house. She nursed an old father in it, a bedridden mother, a paretic brother, when she should have been having children. Don't you see it, Miss Agnes? All her emotions have had to be mental. Failing them outside, she provided them for herself. This--” he tapped the paper in his hand--“this is one.”

I had heard of people confessing to crimes they had never committed, and at the time Martin Sprague at least partly convinced me. He was so sure of himself. And when, that afternoon, he telephoned me from the city to say that he was mailing out some old newspapers, I knew quite well what he had found.

“I've thought of something else, Miss Agnes,” he said. “If you'll look it up you will probably find that the little lady had had either a shock sometime before that, or a long pull of nursing. Something, anyhow, to set her nervous system to going in the wrong direction.”

Late that afternoon, as it happened, I was enabled to learn something of this from a visiting neighbor, and once again I was forced to acknowledge that he might be right.

The neighbors had not been over cordial. I had gathered, from the first, the impression that the members of the Reverend Samuel Thaddeus Benton's congregation did not fancy an interloper among the sacred relics of the historian of Bolivar County. And I had a corroboration of that impression from my visitor of that afternoon, a Mrs. Graves.

“I've been slow in coming, Miss Blakiston,” she said, seating herself primly. “I don't suppose you can understand, but this has always been the Benton place, and it seems strange to us to see new faces here.”

I replied, with some asperity, that I had not been anxious to take the house, but that Miss Emily had been so insistent that I had finally done so.

It seemed to me that she flashed a quick glance at me.
"She is quite the most loved person in the valley," she said. "And she loves the place. It is--I cannot imagine why she rented the house. She is far from comfortable where she is."

After a time I gathered that she suspected financial stringency as the cause, and I tried to set her mind at rest.

"It cannot be money," I said. "The rent is absurdly low. The agent wished her to ask more, but she refused."

She sat silent for a time, pulling at the fingers of her white silk gloves. And when she spoke again it was of the garden. But before she left she returned to Miss Emily.

"She has had a hard life, in a way," she said. "It is only five years since she buried her brother, and her father not long before that. She has broken a great deal since then. Not that the brother--"

"I understand he was a great care."

Mrs. Graves looked about the room, its shelves piled high with the ecclesiastical library of the late clergyman.

"It was not only that," she said. "When he was--all right, he was an atheist. Imagine, in this house! He had the most terrible books, Miss Blakiston. And, of course, when a man believes there is no hereafter, he is apt to lead a wicked life. There is nothing to hold him back."

Her mind was on Miss Emily and her problems. She moved abstractedly toward the door.

"In this very hall," she said, "I helped Miss Emily to pack all his books into a box, and we sent for Mr. Staley--the hackman at the station, you know--and he dumped the whole thing into the river. We went away with him, and how she cheered up when it was done!"

Martin Sprague's newspapers arrived the next morning. They bore a date of two days before the date of the confession, and contained, rather triumphantly outlined in blue pencil, full details of the murder of a young woman by some unknown assassin. It had been a grisly crime, and the paper was filled with details of a most sensational sort.

Had I been asked, I would have said that Miss Emily's clear, slightly upturned eyes had never glanced beyond the merest headlines of such journalistic reports. But in a letter Martin Sprague set forth a precisely opposite view.

"You will probably find," he wrote, "that the little lady is pretty well fed up on such stuff. The calmer and more placid the daily life, the more apt is the secret inner one, in such a circumscribed existence, to be a thriller! You might look over the books in the house. There is a historic case where a young girl swore she had tossed her little brother to a den of lions (although there were no lions near, and little brother was subsequently found asleep in the attic) after reading Fox's Book of Martyrs. Probably the old gentleman has this joke book in his library."

I put down his letter and glanced around the room. Was he right, after all? Did women, rational, truthful, devout women, ever act in this strange manner? And if it was true, was it not in its own way as mysterious as everything else?

I was, for a time that day, strongly influenced by Martin Sprague's conviction. It was, for one thing, easier to believe than that Emily Benton had committed a crime. And, as if to lend color to his assertion, the sunlight, falling onto the dreary bookshelves, picked out and illuminated dull gilt letters on the brown back of a volume. It was Fox's Book of Martyrs!

If I may analyze my sensations at that time, they divided themselves into three parts. The first was fear. That seems to have given away to curiosity, and that at a later period, to an intense anxiety. Of the three, I have no excuse for the second, save the one I gave myself at the time--that Miss Emily could not possibly have done the thing she claimed to have done, and that I must prove her innocence to myself.

With regard to Martin Sprague's theory, I was divided. I wanted him to be right. I wanted him to be wrong. No picture I could visualize of little old Miss Emily conceivably fitted the type he had drawn. On the other hand, nothing about her could possibly confirm the confession as an actual one.

The scrap of paper became, for the time, my universe. Did I close my eyes, I saw it side by side with the inscription in "Fifty years of my Bolivar County," and letter for letter, in the same hand. Did the sun shine, I had it in the light, examining it, reading it. To such a point did it obsess me that I refused to allow Maggie to use a tablet of glazed paper she had found in the kitchen table drawer to tie up the jelly-glasses. It seemed, somehow, horrible to me.

At that time I had no thought of going back five years and trying to trace the accuracy or falsehood of the confession. I should not have known how to go about it. Had such a crime been committed, how to discover it at this late day? Whom in all her sheltered life, could Miss Emily have murdered? In her small world, who could have fallen out and left no sign?

It was impossible, and I knew it. And yet--

Miss Emily was ill. The news came through the grocery boy, who came out every day on a bicycle, and teased the cat and carried away all the pears as fast as they ripened. Maggie brought me the information at luncheon.

"She's sick," she said.

There was only one person in both our minds those days.
"Do you mean really ill, or only--"

"The boy says she's breaking up. If you ask me, she caught cold the night she broke in here and took your Paisley shawl. And if you ask my advice, Miss Agnes, you'll get it back again before the heirs step in and claim it. They don't make them shawls nowadays, and she's as like as not to will it to somebody if you don't go after it."

"Maggie," I said quietly, "how do you know she has that shawl?"

"How did I know that paper was in the telephone-box?" she countered.

And, indeed, by that time Maggie had convinced herself that she had known all along there was something in the telephone battery-box.

"I've a sort of second sight, Miss Agnes," she added. And, with a shrewdness I found later was partially correct: "She was snooping around to see if you'd found that paper, and it came on to rain; so she took the shawl. I should say," said Maggie, lowering her voice, "that as like as not she's been in this house every night since we came."

Late that afternoon I cut some of the roses from the arch for Miss Emily, and wrapping them against the sun, carried them to the village. At the last I hesitated. It was so much like prying. I turned aside at the church intending to leave them there for the altar. But I could find no one in the parish house, and no vessel to hold them.

It was late afternoon. I opened a door and stepped into the old church. I knelt for a moment, and then sat back and surveyed the quiet building. It occurred to me that here one could obtain a real conception of the Benton family, and of Miss Emily. The church had been the realest thing in their lives. It had dominated them, obsessed them. When the Reverend Samuel Thaddeus died, they had built him, not a monument, but a parish house. When Carlo Benton died (however did such an ungodly name come to belong to a Benton?) Miss Emily according to the story, had done without fresh mourning and built him a window.

I looked at the window. It was extremely ugly, and very devout. And under it was the dead man's name and two dates, 1860 and 1911.

I cannot claim that the fact at the time had any significance for me, or that I saw in it anything more than another verification of Martin Sprague's solution. But it enabled me to reconstruct the Benton household at the date that had grown so significant. The 30th would have probably been the day after the funeral. Perhaps the nurse was still there. He had had a nurse for months, according to Mrs. Graves. And there would have been the airing that follows long illness and death, the opened windows, the packing up or giving away of clothing, the pauses and silences, the sense of strangeness and quiet, the lowered voices. And there would have been, too, that remorseless packing for destruction of the dead atheist's books.

And some time, during that day or the night that followed, little Miss Emily claimed to have committed her crime.

I went home thoughtfully. At the gate I turned and looked back. The Benton Mausoleum was warm in the sunset, and the rose sprays lay, like outstretched arms, across the tiny grave.

Maggie is incredibly efficient. I am efficient myself, I trust, but I modify it with intelligence. It is not to me a vital matter, for instance, if three dozen glasses of jelly sit on a kitchen table a day or two after they are prepared for retirement to the fruit cellar. I rather like to see them, marshaled in their neat rows, capped with sealing wax and paper, and armed with labels. But Maggie has neither sentiment nor imagination. Jelly to her is an institution, not an inspiration. It is subject to certain rules and rites, of which not the least is the formal interment in the fruit closet.

Therefore, after much protesting that night, I agreed to visit the fruit cellar, and select a spot for the temporary entombing of thirty-six jelly tumblers, which would have been thirty-seven had Delia known the efficacy of a silver spoon. I can recall vividly the mental shift from the confession to that domestic excursion, my own impatience, Maggie's grim determination, and the curious denouement of that visit.

I had the very slightest acquaintance with the basement of the Benton house. I knew it was dry and orderly, and
with that my interest in it ceased. It was not cemented, but its hard clay floor was almost as solid as macadam. In
one end was built a high potato-bin. In another corner two or three old pews from the church, evidently long
discarded and showing weather-stains, as though they had once served as garden benches, were up-ended against the
whitewashed wall. The fruit-closet, built in of lumber, occupied one entire end, and was virtually a room, with a
door and no windows.

Maggie had, she said, found it locked and had had an itinerant locksmith fit a key to it.
"It's all scrubbed and ready," she said. "I found that preserved melon-rind you had for lunch in a corner.
'Twouldn't of kept much longer, so I took it up and opened it. She's probably got all sorts of stuff spoiling in the
locked part. Some folks're like that."

Most of the shelves were open, but now, holding the lamp high, I saw that a closet with a door occupied one end.
The door was padlocked. At the time I was interested, but I was, as I remember, much more occupied with Maggie's
sense of meum and tuum, which I considered deficient, and of a small lecture on other people's melon rinds, which I
delivered as she sullenly put away the jelly.

But that night, after I had gone to bed, the memory of that padlock became strangely insistent. There was
nothing psychic about the feeling I had. It was perfectly obvious and simple. The house held, or had held, a secret.
Yet it was, above stairs, as open as the day. There was no corner into which I might not peer, except--Why was that
portion of the fruit-closet locked?

At two o'clock, finding myself unable to sleep, I got up and put on my dressing-gown and slippers. I had refused
to repeat the experiment of being locked in. Then, with a candle and a box of matches, I went downstairs. I had, as I
have said, no longer any terror of the lower floor. The cat lay as usual on the table in the back hall. I saw his eyes
watching me with their curious unblinking stare, as intelligent as two brass buttons. He rose as my light approached,
and I made a bed for him of a cushion from a chair, failing my Paisley shawl.

It was after that that I had the curious sense of being led. It was as though I knew that something awaited my
discovery, and that my sole volition was whether I should make that discovery or not. It was there, waiting.
I have no explanation for this. And it is quite possible that I might have had it, to find at the end nothing more
significant than root-beer, for instance, or bulbs for the winter garden.

And indeed, at first sight, what awaited me in the locked closet amounted to anti-climax. For when I had broken
the rusty padlock open with a hatchet, and had opened doors with nervous fingers, nothing more startling appeared
than a number of books. The shelves were piled high with them, a motley crew of all colors, but dark shades
predominating.

I went back to bed, sheepishly enough, and wrapped my chilled feet in an extra blanket. Maggie came to the
door about the time I was dozing off and said she had heard hammering downstairs in the cellar some time ago, but
she had refused to waken me until the burglars had gone.

"If it was burglars," she added, "you're that up-and-ready, Miss Agnes, that I knew if I waked you you'd be
downstairs after them. What's a bit of silver to a human life?"

I got her away at last, and she went, muttering something about digging up the cellar floor and finding an uneasy
spirit. Then I fell asleep.

I had taken cold that night, and the following morning I spent in bed. At noon Maggie came upstairs, holding at
arm's length a book. She kept her face averted, and gave me a slanting and outraged glance.
"This is a nice place we've come to," she said, acidly. "Murder in the telephone and anti-Christ in the fruit
cellar!"

"Why, Maggie," I expostulated.
"If these books stay, I go, and that's flat, Miss Agnes," was her ipse dixit. She dropped the book on the bed and
stalked out, pausing at the door only to throw back, "If this is a clergyman's house, I guess I'd be better out of the
church."

I took up the book. It was well-worn, and in the front, in a heavy masculine hand, the owner had written his
name--written it large, a bit defiantly, perhaps. It had taken both courage and conviction to bring such a book into
that devout household.

I am not quick, mentally, especially when it comes to logical thought. I daresay I am intuitive rather than logical.
It was not by any process of reasoning at all, I fancy, that it suddenly seemed strange that there should be books
locked away in the cellar. Yet it was strange. For that had been a bookish household. Books were its stock in trade,
one may say. Such as I had borrowed from the library had been carefully tended. Torn leaves were neatly repaired.
The reference books were alphabetically arranged. And, looking back on my visit to the cellar, I recalled now as
inconsistent the disorder of those basement shelves.

I did not reach the truth until, that afternoon, I made a second visit to the cellar. Mrs. Graves had been mistaken.
If not all Carlo Benton's proscribed books were hidden there, at least a large portion of his library was piled, in
something like confusion, on the shelves. Yet she maintained that they had searched the house, and she herself had been present when the books were packed and taken away to the river.

That afternoon I returned Mrs. Graves's visit. She was at home, and in a sort of flurried neatness that convinced me she had seen me from far up the road. That conviction was increased by the amazing promptness with which a tea-tray followed my entrance. I had given her tea the day she came to see me, and she was not to be outdone. Indeed, I somehow gained the impression that tray and teapot, and even little cakes, had been waiting, day by day, for my anticipated visit.

It was not hard to set her talking of Carlo Benton and his wickedness. She rose to the bait like a hungry fish. Yet I gathered that, beyond his religious views or lack of them, she knew nothing. But on the matter of the books she was firm.

"After the box was ready," she said, "we went to every room and searched it. Miss Emily was set on clearing out every trace. At the last minute I found one called 'The Fallacy of Christianity' slipped down behind the dresser in his room, and we put that in."

It was "The Fallacy of Christianity" that Maggie had brought me that morning.

"It is a most interesting story," I observed. "What delicious tea, Mrs. Graves! And then you fastened up the box and saw it thrown into the river. It was quite a ceremony."

"My dear," Mrs. Graves said solemnly, "it was not a ceremony. It was a rite--a significant rite."

How can I reconcile the thoughts I had that afternoon with my later visit to Miss Emily? The little upper room in the village, dominated and almost filled by an old-fashioned bed, and Miss Emily, frail and delicate and beautifully neat, propped with pillows and holding a fine handkerchief, as fresh as the flutings of her small cap, in her hand. On a small stand beside the bed were her Bible, her spectacles, and her quaint old-fashioned gold watch.

And Miss Emily herself? She was altered, shockingly altered. A certain tenseness had gone, a tenseness that had seemed to uphold her frail body and carry her about. Only her eyes seemed greatly alive, and before I left they, too, had ceased their searching of mine and looked weary and old.

And, at the end of my short visit, I had reluctantly reached this conclusion: either Miss Emily had done the thing she confessed to doing, incredible as it might appear, or she thought she had done it; and the thing was killing her.

She knew I had found the confession. I knew that. It was written large over her. What she had expected me to do God only knows. To stand up and denounce her? To summon the law? I do not know.

She said an extraordinary thing, when at last I rose to go. I believe now that it was to give me my chance to speak. Probably she found the suspense intolerable. But I could not do it. I was too surprised, too perplexed, too--well, afraid of hurting her. I had the feeling, I know, that I must protect her. And that feeling never left me until the end.

"I think you must know, my dear," she said, from her pillows, "that I have your Paisley shawl."

I was breathless. "I thought that, perhaps"--I stumbled.

"It was raining that night," she said in her soft, delicate voice. "I have had it dried and pressed. It is not hurt. I thought you would not mind," she concluded.

"It does not matter at all--not in the least," I said unhappily.

I am quite sure now that she meant me to speak then. I can recall the way she fixed her eyes on me, serene and expectant. She was waiting. But to save my life I could not. And she did not. Had she gone as far as she had the strength to go? Or was this again one of those curious pacts of hers--if I spoke or was silent, it was to be?

I do not know.

I do know that we were both silent and that at last, with a quick breath, she reached out and thumped on the floor with a cane that stood beside the bed until a girl came running up from below stairs.

"Get the shawl, Fanny, dear," said Miss Emily, "and wrap it up for Miss Blakiston."

I wanted desperately, while the girl left the room to obey, to say something helpful, something reassuring. But I could not. My voice failed me. And Miss Emily did not give me another opportunity. She thanked me rather formally for the flowers I had brought from her garden, and let me go at last with the parcel under my arm, without further reference to it. The situation was incredible.

Somehow I had the feeling that Miss Emily would never reopen the subject again. She had given me my chance, at who knows what cost, and I had not taken it. There had been something in her good-by--I can not find words for it, but it was perhaps a finality, an effect of a closed door--that I felt without being able to analyze.

I walked back to the house, refusing the offices of Mr. Staley, who met me on the road. I needed to think. But thinking took me nowhere. Only one conclusion stood out as a result of a mile and a half of mental struggle. Something must be done. Miss Emily ought to be helped. She was under a strain that was killing her.

But to help I should know the facts. Only, were there any facts to know? Suppose--just by way of argument, for I did not believe it--that the confession was true; how could I find out anything about it? Five years was a long time. I
could not go to the neighbors. They were none too friendly as it was. Besides, the secret, if there was one, was not mine, but was Miss Emily's.

I reached home at last, and smuggled the shawl into the house. I had no intention of explaining its return to Maggie. Yet, small as it was in its way, it offered a problem at once. For Maggie has a penetrating eye and an inquiring nature. I finally decided to take the bull by the horns and hang it in its accustomed place in the hall, where Maggie, finding it at nine o'clock that evening, set up such a series of shrieks and exclamations as surpassed even her own record.

I knitted that evening. It has been my custom for years to knit bedroom-slippers for an old ladies' home in which I am interested. Because I can work at them with my eyes shut, through long practise, I find the work soothing. So that evening I knitted at Eliza Klinordlinger's fifth annual right slipper, and tried to develop a course of action.

I began with a major premise--to regard the confession as a real one, until it was proved otherwise. Granted, then, that my little old Miss Emily had killed a woman.

1st--Who was the woman?
2nd--Where is the body?
3rd--What was the reason for the crime?

Question two I had a tentative answer for. However horrible and incredible it seemed, it was at least possible that Miss Emily had substituted the body for the books, and that what Mrs. Graves described as a rite had indeed been one. But that brought up a picture I could not face. And yet--

I called up the local physician, a Doctor Lingard, that night and asked him about Miss Emily's condition. He was quite frank with me.

"It's just a breaking up," he said. "It has come early, because she has had a trying life, and more responsibility than she should have had."

"I have been wondering if a change of scene would not be a good thing," I suggested. But he was almost scornful.

"Change!" he said. "I've been after her to get away for years. She won't leave. I don't believe she has been twelve miles away in thirty years."

"I suppose her brother was a great care," I observed.

It seemed to me that the doctor's hearty voice was a trifle less frank when he replied. But when I rang off I told myself that I, too, was becoming neurasthenic and suspicious. I had, however, learned what I wanted to know. Miss Emily had had no life outside Bolivar County. The place to look for her story was here, in the immediate vicinity.

That night I made a second visit to the basement. It seemed to me, with those chaotic shelves before me, that something of the haste and terror of a night five years before came back to me, a night when, confronted by the necessity for concealing a crime, the box upstairs had been hurriedly unpacked, its contents hidden here and locked away, and some other content, inert and heavy, had taken the place of the books.

Miss Emily in her high bed, her Bible and spectacles on the stand beside her, her starched pillows, her soft and highbred voice? Or another Miss Emily, panting and terror-stricken, carrying down her armfuls of forbidden books, her slight figure bent under their weight, her ears open for sounds from the silent house? Or that third Miss Emily, Martin Sprague's, a strange wild creature, neither sane nor insane, building a crime out of the fabric of a nightmare? Which was the real Emily Benton?

Or was there another contingency that I had not thought of? Had some secret enemy of Miss Emily's, some hysterical girl from the parish, suffering under a fancied slight, or some dismissed and revengeful servant, taken this strange method of retaliation, done it and then warned the little old lady that her house contained such a paper? I confess that this last thought took hold on me. It offered a way out that I clutched at.

I had an almost frantic feeling by that time that I must know the truth. Suspense was weighing on me. And Maggie, never slow to voice an unpleasant truth, said that night, as she brought the carafe of ice-water to the library, "You're going off the last few days, Miss Agnes." And when I made no reply: "You're sagging around the chin. There's nothing shows age like the chin. If you'd rub a little lemon-juice on at night you'd tighten up some."

I ignored her elaborately, but I knew she was right. Heat and sleepless nights and those early days of fear had told on me. And although I usually disregard Maggie's cosmetic suggestions, culled from the beauty columns of the evening paper, a look in the mirror decided me. I went downstairs for the lemon. At least, I thought it was for the lemon. I am not sure. I have come to be uncertain of my motives. It is distinctly possible that, sub-consciously, I was making for the cellar all the time. I only know that I landed there, with a lemon in my hand, at something after eleven o'clock.

The books were piled in disorder on the shelves. Their five years of burial had not hurt them beyond a slight dampness of the leaves. No hand, I believe, had touched them since they were taken from the box where Mrs.
Graves had helped to pack them. Then, if I were shrewd, I should perhaps gather something from their very disorder, but, as a matter of fact, I did not.

I would, quite certainly, have gone away as I came, clueless, had I not attempted to straighten a pile of books, dangerously sagging--like my chin!--and threatening a fall. My effort was rewarded by a veritable Niagara of books. They poured over the edge, a few first, then more, until I stood, it seemed, knee-deep in a raging sea of atheism.

Somewhat grimly I set to work to repair the damage, and one by one I picked them up and restored them. I put them in methodically this time, glancing at each title to place the volume upright. Suddenly, out of the darkness of unbelief, a title caught my eye and held it, "The Handwriting of God." I knew the book. It had fallen into bad company, but its theology was unimpeachable. It did not belong. It--

I opened it. The Reverend Samuel Thaddeus had written his own name in it, in the cramped hand I had grown to know. Evidently its presence there was accidental. I turned it over in my hands, and saw that it was closed down on something, on several things, indeed. They proved to be a small black note-book, a pair of spectacles, a woman's handkerchief.

I stood there looking at them. They might mean nothing but the accidental closing of a book, which was mistakenly placed in bad company, perhaps by Mrs. Graves. I was inclined to doubt her knowledge of religious literature. Or they might mean something more, something I had feared to find.

Armed with the volume, and the lemon forgotten--where the cook found it the next day and made much of the mystery--I went upstairs again.

Viewed in a strong light, the three articles took on real significance. The spectacles I fancied were Miss Emily's. They were, to all appearances, the duplicates of those on her tidy bedside stand. But the handkerchief was not hers. Even without the scent, which had left it, but clung obstinately to the pages of the book, I knew it was not hers. It was florid, embroidered, and cheap. And held close to the light, I made out a laundry-mark in ink on the border. The name was either Wright or Knight.

The note-book was an old one, and covered a period of almost twenty years. It contained dates and cash entries. The entries were nearly all in the Reverend Samuel Thaddeus's hand, but after the date of his death they had been continued in Miss Emily's writing. They varied little, save that the amounts gradually increased toward the end, and the dates were further apart. Thus, in 1898 there were six entries, aggregating five hundred dollars. In 1902-1903 there were no entries at all, but in 1904 there was a single memorandum of a thousand dollars. The entire amount must have been close to twenty-five thousand dollars. There was nothing to show whether it was money saved or money spent, money paid out or come in.

But across the years 1902 and 1903, the Reverend Thaddeus had written diagonally the word "Australia." There was a certain amount of enlightenment there. Carlo Benton had been in Australia during those years. In his "Fifty Years in Bolivar County," the father had rather naively quoted a letter from Carlo Benton in Melbourne. A record, then, in all probability, of sums paid by this harassed old man to a worthless son.

Only the handkerchief refused to be accounted for.

I did not sleep that night. More and more, as I lay wide-eyed through the night, it seemed to me that Miss Emily must be helped, that she was drifting miserably out of life for need of a helping hand.

Once, toward morning, I dozed off, to waken in a state of terror that I recognized as a return of the old fear. But it left me soon, although I lay awake until morning.

That day I made two resolves--to send for Willie and to make a determined effort to see the night telephone-operator. My letter to Willie off, I tried to fill the day until the hour when the night telephone-operator was up and about, late in the afternoon.

The delay was simplified by the arrival of Mrs. Graves, in white silk gloves and a black cotton umbrella as a sunshade. She had lost her air of being afraid I might patronize her, and explained pantingly that she had come on an errand, not to call.

"I'm at my Christmas presents now," she said, "and I've fixed on a bedroom set for Miss Emily. I suppose you won't care if I go right up and measure the dresser-top, will you?"

I took her up, and her sharp eyes roved over the stairs and the upper hall.

"That's where Carlo died," she said, "it's never been used since, unless you--" she had paused, staring into Miss Emily's deserted bedroom. "It's a good thing I came," she said. "The eye's no use to trust to, especially for bureaus."

She looked around the room. There was, at that moment, something tender about her. She even lowered her voice and softened it. It took on, almost comically, the refinements of Miss Emily's own speech.

"Whose photograph is that?" she asked suddenly. "I don't know that I ever saw it before. But it looks familiar, too."

She reflected before it. It was clear that she felt a sort of resentment at not recognizing the young and smiling
woman in the old walnut frame, but a moment later she was measuring the dresser-top, her mind set on Christmas benevolence.

However, before she went out, she paused near the photograph.

"It's queer," she said. "I've been in this room about a thousand times, and I've never noticed it before. I suppose you can get so accustomed to a thing that you don't notice it."

As she went out, she turned to me, and I gathered that not only the measurement for a gift had brought her that afternoon.

"About those books," she said. "I run on a lot when I get to talking. I suppose I shouldn't have mentioned them. But I'm sure you'll keep the story to yourself. I've never even told Mr. Graves."

"Of course I shall," I assured her. "But--didn't the hackman see you packing the books?"

"No, indeed. We packed them the afternoon after the funeral, and it was the next day that Staley took them off. He thought it was old bedding and so on, and he hinted to have it given to him. So Miss Emily and I went along to see it was done right."

So I discovered that the box had sat overnight in the Benton house. There remained, if I was to help Miss Emily, to discover what had occurred in those dark hours when the books were taken out and something else substituted.

The total result of my conversation that afternoon on the front porch of the small frame house on a side street with the night telephone-operator was additional mystery.

I was not prepared for it. I had anticipated resentment and possibly insolence. But I had not expected to find fright. Yet the girl was undeniably frightened. I had hardly told her the object of my visit before I realized that she was in a state of almost panic.

"You can understand how I feel," I said. "I have no desire to report the matter, of course. But some one has been calling the house repeatedly at night, listening until I reply, and then hanging up the receiver. It is not accidental. It has happened too often."

"I'm not supposed to give out information about calls."

"But--just think a moment," I went on. "Suppose some one is planning to rob the house, and using this method of finding out if we are there or not?"

"I don't remember anything about the calls you are talking about," she parried, without looking at me. "As busy as I am--"

"Nonsense," I put in, "you know perfectly well what I am talking about. How do I know but that it is the intention of some one to lure me downstairs to the telephone and then murder me?"

"I am sure it is not that," she said. For almost the first time she looked directly at me, and I caught a flash of something—not defiance. It was, indeed, rather like reassurance.

"You see, you know it is not that." I felt all at once that she did know who was calling me at night, and why. And, moreover, that she would not tell. If, as I suspected, it was Miss Emily, this girl must be to some extent in her confidence.

"But--suppose for a moment that I think I know who is calling me?" I hesitated. She was a pretty girl, with an amiable face, and more than a suggestion of good breeding and intelligence about her. I made a quick resolve to appeal to her. "My dear child," I said, "I want so very much, if I can, to help some one who is in trouble. But before I can help, I must know that I can help, and I must be sure it is necessary. I wonder if you know what I am talking about?"

"Why don't you go back to the city?" she said suddenly. "Go away and forget all about us here. That would help more than anything."

"But--would it?" I asked gently. "Would my going away help--her?"

To my absolute amazement she began to cry. We had been sitting on a cheap porch seat, side by side, and she turned her back to me and put her head against the arm of the bench.

"She's going to die!" she said weakly. "She's weaker every day. She is slipping away, and no one does anything."

But I got nothing more from her. She had understood me, it was clear, and when at last she stopped crying, she knew well enough that she had betrayed her understanding. But she would not talk. I felt that she was not unfriendly, and that she was uncertain rather than stubborn. In the end I got up, little better off than when I came.

"I'll give you time to think it over," I said. "Not so much about the telephone calls, because you've really answered that. But about Miss Emily. She needs help, and I want to help her. But you tie my hands."

She had a sort of gift for silence. As I grew later on to know Anne Bullard better, I realized that even more. So now she sat silent, and let me talk.

"What I want," I said, "is to have Miss Emily know that I am friendly--that I am willing to do anything to--to show my friendliness. Anything."

"You see," she said, with a kind of dogged patience, "it isn't really up to you, or to me either. It's something
else." She hesitated. "She's very obstinate," she added.

When I went away I was aware that her eyes followed me, anxious and thoughtful eyes, with something of Miss Emily's own wide-eyed gaze.

Willie came late the next evening. I had indeed gone up-stairs to retire when I heard his car in the drive. When I admitted him, he drew me into the library and gave me a good looking over.

"As I thought!" he said. "Nerves gone, looks gone. I told you Maggie would put a curse on you. What is it?"

So I told him. The telephone he already knew about. The confession he read over twice, and then observed, characteristically, that he would be eternally—I think the word is "hornswoggled."

When I brought out "The Handwriting of God," following Mrs. Graves's story of the books, he looked thoughtful. And indeed by the end of the recital he was very grave.

"Sprague is a lunatic," he said, with conviction. "There was a body, and it went into the river in the packing-case. It is distinctly possible that this Knight—or Wright--woman, who owned the handkerchief, was the victim. However, that's for later on. The plain truth is, that there was a murder, and that Miss Emily is shielding some one else."

And, after all, that was the only immediate result of Willie's visit—a new theory! So that now it stood: there was a crime. There was no crime. Miss Emily had committed it. Miss Emily had not committed it. Miss Emily had confessed it, but some one else had committed it.

For a few hours, however, our attention was distracted from Miss Emily and her concerns by the attempted robbery of the house that night. I knew nothing of it until I heard Willie shouting downstairs. I was deeply asleep, relaxed no doubt by the consciousness that at last there was a man in the house. And, indeed, Maggie slept for the same reason through the entire occurrence.

"Stop, or I'll fire!" Willie repeated, as I sat up in bed.

I knew quite well that he had no weapon. There was not one in the house. But the next moment there was a loud report, either a door slamming or a pistol-shot, and I ran to the head of the stairs.

There was no light below, but a current of cool night air came up the staircase. And suddenly I realized that there was complete silence in the house.

"Willie!" I cried out, in an agony of fright. But he did not reply. And then, suddenly, the telephone rang.

I did not answer it. I know now why it rang, that there was real anxiety behind its summons. But I hardly heard it then. I was convinced that Willie had been shot.

I must have gone noiselessly down the stairs, and at the foot I ran directly into Willie. He was standing there, only a deeper shadow in the blackness, and I had placed my hand over his, as it lay on the newel-post, before he knew I was on the staircase. He wheeled sharply, and I felt, to my surprise, that he held a revolver in his hand.

"Willie! What is it?" I said in a low tone.

"Sh," he whispered. "Don't move—or speak."

We listened, standing together. There were undoubtedly sounds outside, some one moving about, a hand on a window-catch, and finally not particularly cautious steps at the front door. It swung open. I could hear it creak as it moved slowly on its hinges.

I put a hand out to steady myself by the comfort of Willie's presence before me, between me and that softly-opening door. But Willie was moving forward, crouched down, I fancied, and the memory of that revolver terrified me.

"Don't shoot him, Willie!" I almost shrieked.

"Shoot whom?" said Willie's cool voice, just inside the door.

I knew then, and I went sick all over. Somewhere in the hall between us crouched the man I had taken for Willie, crouched with a revolver in his right hand. The door was still open, I knew, and I could hear Willie fumbling on the hall-stand for matches. I called out something incoherent about not striking a light; but Willie, whistling softly to show how cool he was, struck a match. It was followed instantly by a report, and I closed my eyes.

When I opened them, Willie was standing unhurt, staring over the burning match at the door, which was closed, and I knew that the report had been but the bang of the heavy door.

"What in blazes slammed that door?" he said.

"The burglar, or whatever he is," I said, my voice trembling in spite of me. "He was here, in front of me. I laid my hand on his. He had a revolver in it. When you opened the door, he slipped out past you."

Willie muttered something, and went toward the door. A moment later I was alone again, and the telephone was ringing. I felt my way back along the hall. I touched the cat, which had been sleeping on the telephone-stand. He merely turned over.

I have tried, in living that night over again, to record things as they impressed me. For, after all, this is a narrative of motive rather than of incidents, of emotions as against deeds. But at the time, the brief conversation over the telephone seemed to me both horrible and unnatural.
From a great distance a woman's voice said, "Is anything wrong there?"
That was the first question, and I felt quite sure that it was the Bullard girl's voice. That is, looking back from the safety of the next day, I so decided. At the time I had no thought whatever.
"There is nothing wrong," I replied. I do not know why I said it. Surely there was enough wrong, with Willie chasing an armed intruder through the garden.
I thought the connection had been cut, for there was a buzzing on the wire. But a second or so later there came an entirely different voice, one I had never heard before, a plaintive voice, full, I thought, of tears.
"Oh, please," said this voice, "go out and look in your garden, or along the road. Please—quickly!"
"You will have to explain," I said impatiently. "Of course we will go and look, but who is it, and why—"
I was cut off there, definitely, and I could not get "central's" attention again.
Willie's voice from the veranda boomed through the lower floor. "This is I," he called, "No boiling water, please. I am coming in."
He went into the library and lighted a lamp. He was smiling when I entered, a reassuring smile, but rather a sheepish one, too.
"To think of letting him get by like that!" he said. "The cheapest kind of a trick. He had slammed the door before to make me think he had gone out, and all the time he was inside. And you--why didn't you scream?"
"I thought it was you," I told him.
The library was in chaos. Letters were lying about, papers, books. The drawer of the large desk-table in the center of the room had been drawn out and searched. "The History of Bolivar County," for instance, was lying on the floor, face down, in a most ignoble position. In one place books had been taken from a recess by the fireplace, revealing a small wall cupboard behind. I had never known of the hiding-place, but a glance into it revealed only a bottle of red ink and the manuscript of a sermon on missions.
Standing in the disorder of the room, I told Willie about the telephone-message. He listened attentively, and at first skeptically.
"Probably a ruse to get us out of the house, but coming a trifle late to be useful," was his comment. But I had read distress in the second voice, and said so. At last he went to the telephone.
"I'll verify it," he explained. "If some one is really anxious, I'll get the car and take a scout around."
But he received no satisfaction from the Bullard girl, who, he reported, listened stoically and then said she was sorry, but she did not remember who had called. On his reminding her that she must have a record, she countered with the flat statement that there had been no call for us that night.
Willie looked thoughtful when he returned to the library. "There's a queer story back of all this," he said. "I think I'll get the car and scout around."
"He is armed, Willie," I protested.
"He doesn't want to shoot me, or he could have done it," was his answer. "I'll just take a look around, and come back to report."
It was half-past three by the time he was ready to go. He was, as he observed, rather sketchily clad, but the night was warm. I saw him off, and locked the door behind him. Then I went into the library to wait and to put things to rights while I waited.
The dawn is early in August, and although it was not more than half-past four when Willie came back, it was about daylight by that time. I went to the door and watched him bring the car to a standstill. He shook his head when he saw me.
"Absolutely nothing," he said. "It was a ruse to get me out of the house, of course. I've run the whole way between here and town twice."
"But that could not have taken an hour," I protested.
"No," he said. "I met the doctor--what's his name?--the local M.D. anyhow--footing it out of the village to a case, and I took him to his destination. He has a car, it seems, but it's out of order. Interesting old chap," he added, as I led the way into the house. "Didn't know me from Adam, but opened up when he found who I was."
I had prepared the coffee machine and carried the tray to the library. While I lighted the lamp, he stood, whistling softly, and thoughtfully. At last he said:
"Look here, Aunt Agnes, I think I'm a good bit of a fool, but--some time this morning I wish you would call up Thomas Jenkins, on the Elmburg road, and find out if any one is sick there."
But when I stared at him, he only laughed sheepishly. "You can see how your suspicious disposition has undermined and ruined my once trusting nature," he scoffed.
He took his coffee, and then, stripping off his ulster, departed for bed. I stopped to put away the coffee machine, and with Maggie in mind, to hang up his motor-coat. It was then that the flashlight fell out. I picked it up. It was shaped like a revolver.
I stopped in Willie's room on my way to my own, and held it out to him.  
"Where did you get that?" I asked.  
"Good heavens!" he said, raising himself on his elbow. "It belongs to the doctor. He gave it to me to examine the fan belt. I must have dropped it into my pocket."

And still I was nowhere. Suppose I had touched this flashlight at the foot of the stairs and mistaken it for a revolver. Suppose that the doctor, making his way toward the village and finding himself pursued, had faced about and pretended to be leaving it? Grant, in a word, that Doctor Lingard himself had been our night visitor--what then? Why had he done it? What of the telephone-call, urging me to search the road? Did some one realize what was happening, and take this method of warning us and sending us after the fugitive?

I knew the Thomas Jenkins farm on the Elmsburg road. I had, indeed, bought vegetables and eggs from Mr. Jenkins himself. That morning, as early as I dared, I called the Jenkins farm. Mr. Jenkins himself would bring me three dozen eggs that day. They were a little torn up out there, as Mrs. Jenkins had borne a small daughter at seven A.M.

When I told Willie, he was evidently relieved. "I'm glad of it," he said heartily. "The doctor's a fine old chap, and I'd hate to think he was mixed up in any shady business."

He was insistent, that day, that I give up the house. He said it was not safe, and I was inclined to agree with him. But although I did not tell him of it, I had even more strongly than ever the impression that something must be done to help Miss Emily, and that I was the one who must do it.

Yet, in the broad light of day, with the sunshine pouring into the rooms, I was compelled to confess that Willie's theory was more than upheld by the facts. First of all was the character of Miss Emily as I read it, sternly conscientious, proud, and yet gentle. Second, there was the connection of the Bullard girl with the case. And third, there was the invader of the night before, an unknown quantity where so much seemed known, where a situation involving Miss Emily alone seemed to call for no one else.

Willie put the matter flatly to me as he stood in the hall, drawing on his driving gloves.

"Do you want to follow it up?" he asked. "Isn't it better to let it go? After all, you have only rented the house. You haven't taken over its history, or any responsibility but the rent."

"I think Miss Emily needs to be helped," I said, rather feebly.

"Let her friends help her. She has plenty of them. Besides, isn't it rather a queer way to help her, to try to fasten a murder on her?"

I could not explain what I felt so strongly--that Miss Emily could only be helped by being hurt, that whatever she was concealing, the long concealment was killing her. That I felt in her--it is always difficult to put what I felt about Miss Emily into words--that she both hoped for and dreaded desperately the light of the truth.

But if I was hardly practical when it came to Miss Emily, I was rational enough in other things. It is with no small pride--but without exultation, for in the end it cost too much--that I point to the solution of one issue as my own.

With Willie gone, Maggie and I settled down to the quiet tenure of our days. She informed me, on the morning after that eventful night, that she had not closed an eye after one o'clock! She came into the library and asked me if I could order her some sleeping-powders.

"Fiddlesticks!" I said sharply. "You slept all night. I was up and around the house, and you never knew it."

"Honest to heaven, Miss Agnes, I never slept at all. I heard a horse galloping', like it was runnin' off, and it waked me for good."

And after a time I felt that, however mistaken Maggie had been about her night's sleep, she was possibly correct about the horse.

"He started to run about the stable somewhere," she said. "You can smile if you want. That's the heaven's truth. And he came down the drive on the jump and out onto the road."

"We can go and look for hoof-marks," I said, and rose. But Maggie only shook her head.

"It was no real horse, Miss Agnes," she said. "You'll find nothing. Anyhow, I've been and looked. There's not a mark."

But Maggie was wrong. I found hoof-prints in plenty in the turf beside the drive, and a track of them through the lettuce-bed in the garden. More than that, behind the stable I found where a horse had been tied and had broken away. A piece of worn strap still hung there. It was sufficiently clear, then, that whoever had broken into the house had come on horseback and left afoot. But many people in the neighborhood used horses. The clue, if clue it can be called, got me nowhere.

IV

For several days things remained in statu quo. Our lives went on evenly. The telephone was at our service, without any of its past vagaries. Maggie's eyes ceased to look as if they were being pushed out from behind, and I
ceased to waken at night and listen for untoward signs.

Willie telephoned daily. He was frankly uneasy about my remaining there. "You know something that somebody
resents your knowing," he said, a day or two after the night visitor. "It may become very uncomfortable for you."

And, after a day or two, I began to feel that it was being made uncomfortable for me. I am a social being; I like
people. In the city my neighborly instincts have died of a sort of brick wall apathy, but in the country it comes to life
again. The instinct of gregariousness is as old as the first hamlets, I daresay, when prehistoric man ceased to live in
trees, and banded together for protection from the wild beasts that walked the earth.

The village became unfriendly. It was almost a matter of a night. One day the postmistress leaned on the shelf at
her window and chatted with me. The next she passed out my letters with hardly a glance. Mrs. Graves did not see
me at early communion on Sunday morning. The hackman was busy when I called him. It was intangible, a matter
of omission, not commission. The doctor's wife, who had asked me to tea, called up and regretted that she must go to
the city that day.

I sat down then and took stock of things. Did the village believe that Miss Emily must be saved from me? Did
the village know the story I was trying to learn, and was it determined I should never find out the truth? And, if this
were so, was the village right or was I? They would save Miss Emily by concealment, while I felt that concealment
had failed, and that only the truth would do. Did the village know, or only suspect? Or was it not the village at all,
but one or two people who were determined to drive me away?

My theories were rudely disturbed shortly after that by a visit from Martin Sprague. I fancied that Willie had
sent him, but he evaded my question.

"I'd like another look at that slip of paper," he said. "Where do you keep it, by the way?"

"In a safe place," I replied non-committally, and he laughed. The truth was that I had taken out the removable
inner sole of a slipper and had placed it underneath, an excellent hiding-place, but one I did not care to confide to
him. When I had brought it downstairs, he read it over again carefully, and then sat back with it in his hand.

"Now tell me about everything," he said.

I did, while he listened attentively. Afterward we walked back to the barn, and I showed him the piece of broken
halter still tied there.

He surveyed it without comment, but on the way back to the house he said: "If the village is lined up as you say
it is, I suppose it is useless to interview the harness-maker. He has probably repaired that strap, or sold a new one, to
whomever-- It would be a nice clue to follow up."

"I am not doing detective work," I said shortly. "I am trying to help some one who is dying of anxiety and
terror."

He nodded. "I get you," he said. But his tone was not flippant. "The fact is, of course, that the early theory won't
hold. There has been a crime, and the little old lady did not commit it. But suppose you find out who did it. How is
that going to help her?"

"I don't know, Martin," I said, in a sort of desperation. "But I have the most curious feeling that she is depending
on me. The way she spoke the day I saw her, and her eyes and everything; I know you think it nonsense," I finished
lamely.

"I think you'd better give up the place and go back to town," he said. But I saw that he watched me carefully, and
when, at last he got up to go, he put a hand on my shoulder.

"I think you are right, after all," he said. "There are a good many things that can't be reasoned out with any logic
we have, but that are true, nevertheless. We call it intuition, but it's really subconscious intelligence. Stay, by all
means, if you feel you should."

In the doorway he said: "Remember this, Miss Agnes. Both a crime of violence and a confession like the one in
your hand are the products of impulse. They are not, either of them, premeditated. They are not the work, then, of a
calculating or cautious nature. Look for a big, emotional type."

It was a day or two after that that I made my visit to Miss Emily. I had stopped once before, to be told with an air
of finality that the invalid was asleep. On this occasion I took with me a basket of fruit. I had half expected a refusal,
but I was admitted.

The Bullard girl was with Miss Emily. She had, I think, been kneeling beside the bed, and her eyes were red and
swollen. But Miss Emily herself was as cool, as dainty and starched and fragile as ever. More so, I thought. She was
thinner, and although it was a warm August day, a white silk shawl was wrapped around her shoulders and fastened
with an amethyst brooch. In my clasp her thin hand felt hot and dry.

"I have been waiting for you," she said simply. She looked at Anne Bullard, and the message in her eyes was
plain enough. But the girl ignored it. She stood across the bed from me and eyed me steadily.

"My dear," said Miss Emily, in her high-bred voice, "if you have anything to do, Miss Blakiston will sit with me
for a little while."
"I have nothing to do," said the girl doggedly. Perhaps this is not the word. She had more the look of endurance and supreme patience. There was no sharpness about her, although there was vigilance.

Miss Emily sighed, and I saw her eyes seek the Bible beside her. But she only said gently: "Then sit down, dear. You can work at my knitting if you like. My hands get very tired."

She asked me questions about the house and the garden. The raspberries were usually quite good, and she was rather celebrated for her lettuces. If I had more than I needed, would I mind if Mr. Staley took a few in to the doctor, who was fond of them.

The mention of Doctor Lingard took me back to the night of the burglary. I wondered if to tell Miss Emily would unduly agitate her. I think she would not have told her, but I caught the girl's eye, across the bed, raised from her knitting and fixed on me with a peculiar intensity. Suddenly it seemed to me that Miss Emily was surrounded by a conspiracy of silence, and it roused my antagonism.

"There are plenty of lettuces," I said, "although a few were trampled by a runaway horse the other night. It is rather a curious story."

So I told her of our night visitor. I told it humorously, lightly, touching on my own horror at finding I had been standing with my hand on the burglar's shoulder. But I was sorry for my impulse immediately, for I saw Miss Emily's body grow rigid, and her hands twist together. She did not look at me. She stared fixedly at the girl. Their eyes met.

It was as if Miss Emily asked a question which the girl refused to answer. It was as certain as though it had been a matter of words instead of glances. It was over in a moment. Miss Bullard went back to her knitting, but Miss Emily lay still.

"I think I should not have told you," I apologized. "I thought it might interest you. Of course nothing whatever was taken, and no damage done--except to the lettuces."

"Anne," said Miss Emily, "will you bring me some fresh water?"

The girl rose reluctantly, but she did not go farther than the top of the staircase, just beyond the door. We heard her calling to some one below, in her clear young voice, to bring the water, and the next moment she was back in the room. But Miss Emily had had the opportunity for one sentence.

"I know now," she said quietly, "that you have found it."

Anne Bullard was watching from the doorway, and it seemed to me, having got so far, I could not retreat. I must go on.

"Miss Bullard," I said. "I would like to have just a short conversation with Miss Emily. It is about a private matter. I am sure you will not mind if I ask you--"

"I shall not go out."

"Anne!" said Miss Emily sharply.

The girl was dogged enough by that time. Both dogged and frightened, I felt. But she stood her ground.

"She is not to be worried about anything," she insisted. "And she's not supposed to have visitors. That's the doctor's orders."

I felt outraged and indignant, but against the stone wall of the girl's presence and her distrust I was helpless. I got up, with as much dignity as I could muster.

"I should have been told that downstairs."

"The woman's a fool," said Anne Bullard, with a sort of suppressed fierceness. She stood aside as, having said good-by to Miss Emily, I went out, and I felt that she hardly breathed until I had got safely to the street.

Looking back, I feel that Emily Benton died at the hands of her friends. For she died, indeed, died in the act of trying to tell me what they had determined she should never tell. Died of kindness and misunderstanding. Died repressed, as she had lived repressed. Yet, I think, died calmly and bravely.

I had made no further attempt to see her, and Maggie and I had taken up again the quiet course of our lives. The telephone did not ring of nights. The cat came and went, spending as I had learned, its days with Miss Emily and its nights with us. I have wondered since how many nights Miss Emily had spent in the low chair in that back hall, where the confession lay hidden, that the cat should feel it could sleep nowhere else.

The days went by, warm days and cooler ones, but rarely rainy ones. The dust from the road settled thick over flowers and shrubbery. The lettuces wilted, and those that stood up in the sun were strong and bitter. By the end of August we were gasping in a hot dryness that cracked the skin and made any but cold food impossible.

Miss Emily lay through it all in her hot upper room in the village, and my attempt, through Doctor Lingard, to coax her back to the house by offering to leave it brought only a negative. "It would be better for her, you understand," the doctor said, over the telephone. "But she is very determined, and she insists on remaining where she is."

And I believe this was the truth. They would surely have been glad to get rid of me, these friends of Miss
Emily's.

I have wondered since what they thought of me, Anne Bullard and the doctor, to have feared me as they did. I look in the mirror, and I see a middle-aged woman, with a determined nose, slightly inquisitive, and what I trust is a humorous mouth, for it has no other virtues. But they feared me. Perhaps long looking for a danger affects the mental vision. Anyhow, by the doctor's order, I was not allowed to call and see Miss Emily again.

Then, one night, the heat suddenly lifted. One moment I was sitting on the veranda, lifeless and inert, and the next a cool wind, with a hint of rain, had set the shutters to banging and the curtains to flowing, like flags of truce, from the windows. The air was life, energy. I felt revivified.

And something of the same sort must have happened to Miss Emily. She must have sat up among her pillows, her face fanned with the electric breeze, and made her determination to see me. Anne Bullard was at work, and she was free from observation.

It must have been nine o'clock when she left the house, a shaken little figure in black, not as neat as usual, but hooked and buttoned, for all that, with no one will ever know what agony of old hands.

She was two hours and a half getting to the house, and the rain came at ten o'clock. By half after eleven, when the doorbell rang, she was a sodden mass of wet garments, and her teeth were chattering when I led her into the library.

She could not talk. The thing she had come to say was totally beyond her. I put her to bed in her own room. And two days later she died.

I had made no protest when Anne Bullard presented herself at the door the morning after Miss Emily arrived, and, walking into the house, took sleepless charge of the sickroom. And I made no reference save once to the reason for the tragedy. That was the night Miss Emily died. Anne Bullard had called to me that she feared there was a change, and I went into the sickroom. There was a change, and I could only shake my head. She burst out at me then.

"If only you had never taken this house!" she said. "You people with money, you think there is nothing you can not have. You came, and now look!"

"Anne," I said with a bitterness I could not conceal, "Miss Emily is not young, and I think she is ready to go. But she has been killed by her friends. I wanted to help, but they would not allow me to."

Toward morning there was nothing more to be done, and we sat together, listening to the stertorous breathing from the bed. Maggie, who had been up all night, had given me notice at three in the morning, and was upstairs packing her trunk.

I went into my room, and brought back Miss Emily's confession.

"Isn't it time," I said, "to tell me about this? I ought to know, I think, before she goes. If it is not true, you owe it to her, I think." But she shook her head.

I looked at the confession, and from it to Miss Emily's pinched old face.

"To whom it may concern: On the 30th day of May, 1911, I killed a woman here in this house. I hope you will not find this until I am dead. (Signed) EMILY BENTON."

Anne was watching me. I went to the mantel and got a match, and then, standing near the bed, I lighted it and touched it to the paper. It burned slowly, a thin blue semicircle of fire that ate its way slowly across until there was but the corner I held. I dropped it into the fireplace and watched it turn to black ash.

I may have fancied it--I am always fancying things about Miss Emily--but I will always think that she knew. She drew a longer, quieter breath, and her eyes, fixed and staring, closed. I think she died in the first sleep she had had in twenty-four hours.

I had expected Anne Bullard to show emotion, for no one could doubt her attachment to Miss Emily. But she only stood stolidly by the bed for a moment and then, turning swiftly, went to the wall opposite and took down from the wall the walnut-framed photograph Mrs. Graves had commented on.

Anne Bullard stood with the picture in her hand, looking at it. And suddenly she broke into sobs. It was stormy weeping, and I got the impression that she wept, not for Miss Emily, but for many other things--as though the piled-up grief of years had broken out at last.

She took the photograph away, and I never saw it again.

Miss Emily was buried from her home. I obliterated myself, and her friends, who were, I felt, her murderers, came in and took charge. They paid me the tribute of much politeness, but no cordiality, and I think they felt toward me as I felt toward them. They blamed me with the whole affair.

She left her property all to Anne Bullard, to the astonished rage of the congregation, which had expected the return of its dimes and quarters, no doubt, in the shape of a new altar, or perhaps an organ.

"Not a cent to keep up the mausoleum or anything," Mrs. Graves confided to me. "And nothing to the church. All to that telephone-girl, who comes from no one knows where! It's enough to make her father turn over in his
grave. It has set people talking, I can tell you."

Maggie's mental state during the days preceding the funeral was curious. She coupled the most meticulous care as to the preparations for the ceremony, and a sort of loving gentleness when she decked Miss Emily's small old frame for its last rites, with suspicion and hatred of Miss Emily living. And this suspicion she held also against Anne Bullard.

Yet she did not want to leave the house. I do not know just what she expected to find. We were cleaning up preparatory to going back to the city, and I felt that at least a part of Maggie's enthusiasm for corners was due to a hope of locating more concealed papers. She was rather less than polite to the Bullard girl, who was staying on at my invitation—because the village was now flagrantly unfriendly and suspicious of her. And for some strange reason, the fact that Miss Emily's cat followed Anne everywhere convinced Maggie that her suspicions were justified.

"It's like this, Miss Agnes," she said one morning, leaning on the handle of a floor brush. "She had some power over the old lady, and that's how she got the property. And I am saying nothing, but she's no Christian, that girl. To see her and that cat going out night after night, both snooping along on their tiptoes—it ain't normal."

I had several visits from Martin Sprague since Miss Emily's death, and after a time I realized that he was interested in Anne. She was quite attractive in her mourning clothes, and there was something about her, not in feature, but in neatness and in the way her things had of, well, staying in place, that reminded me of Miss Emily herself. It was rather surprising, too, to see the way she fitted into her new surroundings and circumstances.

But I did not approve of Martin's attraction to her. She had volunteered no information about herself, she apparently had no people. She was a lady, I felt, although, with the exception of her new mourning, her clothing was shabby and her linen even coarse.

She held the key to the confession. I knew that. And I had no more hope of getting it from her than I had from the cat. So I prepared to go back to the city, with the mystery unsolved. It seemed a pity, when I had got so far with it. I had reconstructed a situation out of such bricks as I had, the books in the cellar, Mrs. Graves's story of the river, the confession, possibly the note-book and the handkerchief. I had even some material left over in the form of the night intruder, who may or may not have been the doctor. And then, having got so far, I had had to stop for lack of other bricks.

A day or two before I went back to the city, Maggie came to me with a folded handkerchief in her hand.

"Is that yours?" she asked.

I disclaimed it. It was not very fine, and looked rather yellow.

"S'got a name on it," Maggie volunteered. "Wright, I think it is. 'Tain't hers, unless she's picked it up somewhere. It's just come out of the wash."

Maggie's eyes were snapping with suspicion. "There ain't any Wrights around here, Miss Agnes," she said. "I sh'd say she's here under a false name. Wright's likely hers."

In tracing the mystery of the confession, I find that three apparently disconnected discoveries paved the way to its solution. Of these the handkerchief came first.

I was inclined to think that in some manner the handkerchief I had found in the book in the cellar had got into the wash. But it was where I had placed it for safety, in the wall-closet in the library. I brought it out and compared the two. They were unlike, save in the one regard. The name "Wright" was clear enough on the one Maggie had found. With it as a guide, the other name was easily seen to be the same. Moreover, both had been marked by the same hand.

Yet, on Anne Bullard being shown the one Maggie had found, she disclaimed it. "Don't you think some one dropped it at the funeral?" she asked.

But I thought, as I turned away, that she took a step toward me. When I stopped, however, and faced about, she was intent on something outside the window.

And so it went. I got nowhere. And now, by way of complication, I felt my sympathy for Anne's loneliness turning to genuine interest. She was so stoical, so repressed, and so lonely. And she was tremendously proud. Her pride was vaguely reminiscent of Miss Emily's. She bore her ostracism almost fiercely, yet there were times when I felt her eyes on me, singularly gentle and appealing. Yet she volunteered nothing about herself.

I intended to finish the history of Bolivar County before I left. I dislike not finishing a book. Besides, this one fascinated me—the smug complacency and almost loud virtue of the author, his satisfaction in Bolivar County, and his small hits at the world outside, his patronage to those not of it. And always, when I began to read, I turned to the inscription in Miss Emily's hand, the hand of the confession—and I wondered if she had really believed it all.

So on this day I found the name Bullard in the book. It had belonged to the Reverend Samuel Thaddeus's grandmother, and he distinctly stated that she was the last of her line. He inferred, indeed, that since the line was to end, it had chosen a fitting finish in his immediate progenitor.
That night, at dinner, I said, "Anne, are there any Bullards in this neighborhood now?"
"I have never heard of any. But I have not been here long."
"It is not a common name," I persisted.
But she received my statement in silence. She had, as I have said, rather a gift for silence.
That afternoon I was wandering about the garden snipping faded roses with Miss Emily's garden shears, when I saw Maggie coming swiftly toward me. When she caught my eye, she beckoned to me. "Walk quiet, Miss Agnes," she said, "and don't say I didn't warn you. She's in the library."
So, feeling hatefuly like a spy, I went quietly over the lawn toward the library windows. They were long ones, to the floor, and at first I made out nothing. Then I saw Anne. She was on her knees, following the border of the carpet with fingers that examined it, inch by inch.
She turned, as if she felt our eyes on her, and saw us. I shall never forget her face. She looked stricken. I turned away. There was something in her eyes that made me think of Miss Emily, lying among her pillows and waiting for me to say the thing she was dreading to hear.
I sent Maggie away with a gesture. There was something in her pursed lips that threatened danger. For I felt then as if I had always known it and only just realized I knew it, that somewhere in that room lay the answer to all questions; lay Miss Emily's secret. And I did not wish to learn it. It was better to go on wondering, to question and doubt and decide and decide again. I was, I think, in a state of nervous terror by that time, terror and apprehension.
While Miss Emily lived, I had hoped to help. But now it seemed too hatefuly like accusing when she could not defend herself. And there is another element that I am bound to acknowledge. There was an element of jealousy of Anne Bullard. Both of us had tried to help Miss Emily. She had foiled my attempt in her own endeavor, a mistaken endeavor, I felt. But there was now to be no blemish on my efforts. I would no longer pry or question or watch. It was too late.
In a curious fashion, each of us wished, I think, to prove the quality of her tenderness for the little old lady who was gone beyond all human tenderness.
So that evening, after dinner, I faced Anne in the library.
"Why not let things be as they are, Anne?" I asked. "It can do no good. Whatever it is, and I do not know, why not let things rest?"
"Some one may find it," she replied. "Some one who does not care, as I--as we care."
"Are you sure there is something?"
"She told me, near the last. I only don't know just where it is."
"And if you find it?"
"It is a letter. I shall burn it without reading. Although," she drew a long breath, "I know what it contains."
"If in any way it comes into my hands," I assured her, "I shall let you know. And I shall not read it."
She looked thoughtful rather than grateful.
"I hardly know," she said. "I think she would want you to read it if it came to you. It explains so much. And it was a part of her plan. You know, of course, that she had a plan. It was a sort of arrangement"--she hesitated--"it was a sort of pact she made with God, if you know what I mean."
That night Maggie found the letter.
I had gone upstairs, and Anne was, I think, already asleep. I heard what sounded like distant hammering, and I went to the door. Some one was in the library below. The light was shining out into the hall, and my discovery of that was followed almost immediately by the faint splintering of wood. Rather outraged than alarmed, I went back for my dressing-gown, and as I left the room, I confronted Maggie in the hallway. She had an envelope in one hand, and a hatchet in the other.
"I found it," she said briefly.
She held it out, and I took it. On the outside, in Miss Emily's writing, it said, "To whom it may concern." It was sealed.
I turned it over in my hand, while Maggie talked.
"When I saw that girl crawling around," she said, "seems to me I remembered all at once seeing Miss Emily, that day I found her, running her finger along the baseboard. Says I to myself, there's something more hidden, and she don't know where it is. But I do. So I lifted the baseboard, and this was behind it."
Anne heard her from her room, and she went out soon afterward. I heard her going down the stairs and called to her. But she did not answer. I closed the door on Maggie and stood in my room, staring at the envelope.
I have wondered since whether Miss Emily, had she lived, would have put the responsibility on Providence for the discovery of her pitiful story. So many of us blame the remorseless hand of destiny for what is so manifestly our own doing. It was her own anxiety, surely, that led to the discovery in each instance, yet I am certain that old Emily Benton died, convinced that a higher hand than any on earth had directed the discovery of the confession.
Miss Emily has been dead for more than a year now. To publish the letter can do her no harm. In a way, too, I feel, it may be the fulfilment of that strange pact she made. For just as discovery was the thing she most dreaded, so she felt that by paying her penalty here she would be saved something beyond--that sort of spiritual book-keeping which most of us call religion. Anne Sprague --she is married now to Martin has, I think, some of Miss Emily's feeling about it, although she denies it. But I am sure that in consenting to the recording of Miss Emily's story, she feels that she is doing what that gentle fatalist would call following the hand of Providence.

I read the letter that night in the library where the light was good. It was a narrative, not a letter, strictly speaking. It began abruptly.

"I must set down this thing as it happened. I shall write it fully, because I must get it off my mind. I find that I am always composing it, and that my lips move when I walk along the street or even when I am sitting in church. How terrible if I should some day speak it aloud. My great-grandmother was a Catholic. She was a Bullard. Perhaps it is from her that I have this overwhelming impulse to confession. And lately I have been terrified. I must tell it, or I shall shriek it out some day, in the church, during the Litany. 'From battle and murder, and from sudden death, Good Lord, deliver us.'"

(There was a space here. When the writing began again, time had elapsed. The ink was different, the writing more controlled.)

"What a terrible thing hate is. It is a poison. It penetrates the mind and the body and changes everything. I, who once thought I could hate no one, now find that hate is my daily life, my getting up and lying down, my sleep, my waking.

"'From hatred, envy, and malice, and all uncharitableness, Good Lord, deliver us.'"

"Must one suffer twice for the same thing? Is it not true that we pay but one penalty? Surely we pay either here or beyond, but not both. Oh, not both!

"Will this ever be found? Where shall I hide it? For I have the feeling that I must hide it, not destroy it--as the Catholic buries his sin with the priest. My father once said that it is the healthful humiliation of the confessional that is its reason for existing. If humiliation be a virtue--"

I have copied the confession to this point, but I find I can not go on. She was so merciless to herself, so hideously calm, so exact as to dates and hours. She had laid her life on the table and dissected it--for the Almighty!

I heard the story that night gently told, and somehow I feel that that is the version by which Miss Emily will be judged.

"If humiliation be a virtue--" I read and was about to turn the page, when I heard Anne in the hall. She was not alone. I recognized Doctor Lingard's voice.

Five minutes later I was sitting opposite him, almost knee to knee, and he was telling me how Miss Emily had come to commit her crime. Anne Bullard was there, standing on the hearth rug. She kept her eyes on me, and after a time I realized that these two simple people feared me, feared for Miss Emily's gentle memory, feared that I --good heaven!--would make the thing public.

"First of all, Miss Blakiston," said the doctor, "one must have known the family to realize the situation--its pride in its own uprightness. The virtue of the name, what it stood for in Bolivar County. She was raised on that. A Benton could do no wrong, because a Benton would do no wrong.

"But there is another side, also. I doubt if any girl was ever raised as Miss Emily was. She--well, she knew nothing. At fifty she was as childlike and innocent as she was at ten. She had practically never heard of vice. The ugly things, for her, did not exist.

"And, all the time, there was a deep and strong nature underneath. She should have married and had children, but there was no one here for her to marry. I," he smiled faintly, "I asked for her myself, and was forbidden the house for years as a result.

"You have heard of the brother? But of course you have. I know you have found the books. Such an existence as the family life here was bound to have its reactions. Carlo was a reaction. Twenty-five years ago he ran away with a girl from the village. He did not marry her. I believe he was willing at one time, but his father opposed it violently. It would have been to recognize a thing he refused to recognize." He turned suddenly to Anne. "Don't you think this is going to be painful?"

"Why? I know it all."

"Very well. This girl--the one Carlo ran away with--determined to make the family pay for that refusal. She made them actually pay, year by year. Emily knew about it. She had to pinch to make the payments. The father sat in a sort of detached position, in the center of Bolivar County, and let her bear the brunt of it. I shall never forget the day she learned there was a child. It --well, it sickened her. She had not known about those things. And I imagine, if we could know, that that was the beginning of things.

"And all the time there was the necessity for secrecy. She had never known deceit, and now she was obliged to
practice it constantly. She had no one to talk to. Her father, beyond making entries of the amounts paid to the woman in the case, had nothing to do with it. She bore it all, year after year. And it ate, like a cancer.

"Remember, I never knew. I, who would have done anything for her --she never told me. Carlo lived hard and came back to die. The father went. She nursed them both. I came every day, and I never suspected. Only, now and then, I wondered about her. She looked burned. I don't know any other word.

"Then, the night after Carlo had been buried, she telephoned for me. It was eleven o'clock, She met me, out there in the hall, and she said, 'John, I have killed somebody.'

"I thought she was out of her mind. But she opened the door, and--"

He turned and glanced at Anne.

"Please!" she said.

"It was Anne's mother. You have guessed it about Anne by now, of course. It seems that the funeral had taken the money for the payment that was due, and there had been a threat of exposure. And Emily had reached the breaking-point. I believe what she said --that she had no intention even of striking her. You can't take the act itself. You have to take twenty-five years into account. Anyhow, she picked up a chair and knocked the woman down. And it killed her." He ran his fingers through his heavy hair. "It should not have killed her," he reflected. "There must have been some other weakness, heart or something. I don't know. But it was a heavy chair. I don't see how Emily--"

His voice trailed off.

"There we were," he said, with a long breath. "Poor Emily, and the other poor soul, neither of them fundamentally at fault, both victims."

"I know about the books," I put in hastily. I could not have him going over that again.

"You knew that, too!" He gazed at me.

"Poor Emily," he said. "She tried to atone. She brought Anne here, and told her the whole story. It was a bad time--all round. But at last Anne saw the light. The only one who would not see the light was Emily. And at last she hit on this confession idea. I suspected it when she rented the house. When I accused her of it, she said: 'I have given it to Providence to decide. If the confession is found, I shall know I am to suffer. And I shall not lift a hand to save myself.'"

So it went through the hours. Her fear, which I still think was the terror that communicated itself to me; the various clues, which she, poor victim, had overlooked; the articles laid carelessly in the book she had been reading and accidentally hidden with her brother's forbidden literature; the books themselves, with all of five years to destroy them, and left untouched; her own anxiety about the confession in the telephone-box, which led to our finding it; her espionage of the house by means of the telephone; the doctor's night visit in search of the confession; the daily penance for five years of the dead woman's photograph in her room--all of these--and her occasional weakenings, poor soul, when she tried to change her handwriting against discovery, and refused to allow the second telephone to be installed.

How clear it was! How, in a way, inevitable! And, too, how really best for her it had turned out. For she had made a pact, and she died believing that discovery here had come, and would take the place of punishment beyond.

Martin Sprague came the next day. I was in the library alone, and he was with Anne in the garden, when Maggie came into the room with a saucer of crab-apple jelly.

"I wish you'd look at this," she said. "If it's cooked too much, it gets tough and--" She straightened suddenly and stood staring out through a window.

"I'd thank you to look out and see the goings-on in our garden," she said sharply. "In broad daylight, too. I--"

But I did not hear what else Maggie had to say. I glanced out, and Martin had raised the girl's face to his and was kissing her, gently and very tenderly.

And then--and again, as with fear, it is hard to put into words--I felt come over me such a wave of contentment and happiness as made me close my eyes with the sheer relief and joy of it. All was well. The past was past, and out of its mistakes had come a beautiful thing. And, like the fear, this joy was not mine. It came to me. I picked it up--a thought without words.

Sometimes I think about it, and I wonder--did little Miss Emily know?
Natalie Spencer was giving a dinner. She was not an easy hostess. Like most women of futile lives she lacked a sense of proportion, and the small and unimportant details of the service absorbed her. Such conversation as she threw at random, to right and left, was trivial and distracted.

Yet the dinner was an unimportant one. It had been given with an eye more to the menu than to the guest list, which was characteristic of Natalie's mental processes. It was also characteristic that when the final course had been served without mishap, and she gave a sigh of relief before the gesture of withdrawal which was a signal to the other women, that she had realized no lack in it. The food had been good, the service satisfactory. She stood up, slim and beautifully dressed, and gathered up the women with a smile.

The movement found Doctor Haverford, at her left, unprepared and with his coffee cup in his hand. He put it down hastily and rose, and the small cup overturned in its saucer, sending a smudge of brown into the cloth.

"Dreadfully awkward of me!" he said. The clergyman's smile of apology was boyish, but he was suddenly aware that his hostess was annoyed. He caught his wife's amiable eyes on him, too, and they said quite plainly that one might spill coffee at home - one quite frequently did, to confess a good man's weakness - but one did not do it at Natalie Spencer's table. The rector's smile died into a sheepish grin.

For the first time since dinner began Natalie Spencer had a clear view of her husband's face. Not that that had mattered particularly, but the flowers had been too high. For a small dinner, low flowers, always. She would speak to the florist. But, having glanced at Clayton, standing tall and handsome at the head of the table, she looked again. His eyes were fixed on her with a curious intentness. He seemed to be surveying her, from the top of her burnished hair to the very gown she wore. His gaze made her vaguely uncomfortable. It was unsmiling, appraising, almost - only that was incredible in Clay - almost hostile.

Through the open door the half dozen women trailed out, Natalie in white, softly rustling as she moved, Mrs. Haverford in black velvet, a trifle tight over her ample figure, Marion Hayden, in a very brief garment she would have called a frock, perennial debutante that she was, rather negligible Mrs. Terry Mackenzie, and trailing behind the others, frankly loath to leave the men, Audrey Valentine. Clayton Spencer's eyes rested on Audrey with a smile of amused toleration, on her outrageously low green gown, that was somehow casually elegant, on her long green ear-rings and jade chain, on the cigaret between her slim fingers.

Audrey's audacity always amused him. In the doorway she turned and nonchalantly surveyed the room.

"For heaven's sake, hurry!" she apostrophized the table. "We are going to knit - I feel it. And don't give Chris anything more to drink, Clay. He's had enough."

She went on, a slim green figure, moving slowly and reluctantly toward the drawing-room, her head held high, a little smile still on her lips. But, alone for a moment, away from curious eyes, her expression changed, her smile faded, her lovely, irregular face took on a curious intensity. What a devilish evening! Chris drinking too much, talking wildly, and always with furtive eyes on her. Chris! Oh, well, that was life, she supposed.

She stopped before a long mirror and gave a bit of careless attention to her hair. Then she turned and surveyed the room. A new portrait of Natalie was there, hanging on the wall under a shaded light, and she wandered in, still with her cigaret, and surveyed it. Natalie had everything. The portrait showed it. It was beautiful, smug, complacent.

Mrs. Valentine's eyes narrowed slightly. She stood there, thinking about Natalie. She had not everything, after all. There was something she lacked. Charm, perhaps. She was a cold woman. But, then, Clay was cold, too. He was even a bit hard. Men said that; hard and ambitious, although he was popular. Men liked strong men. It was only the weak they deplored and loved. Poor Chris!

She lounged into the drawing-room, smiling her slow, cool smile. In the big, uncarpeted alcove, where stood Natalie's great painted piano, Marion Hayden was playing softly, carefully posed for the entrance of the men. Natalie was sitting with her hands folded, in the exact center of a peacock-blue divan. The others were knitting.

"Very pretty effect, Toots!" Audrey called. And Miss Hayden gave her the unashamed smile of one woman of
the world to another.
Audrey had a malicious impulse. She sat down beside Natalie, and against the blue divan her green gown shrieked a discord. She was vastly amused when Natalie found an excuse and moved away, to dispose herself carefully in a tall, old-gold chair, which framed her like a picture.
"We were talking of men, my dear," said Mrs. Haverford, placidly knitting.
"Of course," said Audrey, flippantly.
"Of what it is that they want more than anything else in the world."
"Children-sons," put in Mrs. Mackenzie. She was a robust, big woman with kindly eyes, and she was childless.
"Women!" called Toots Hayden. She was still posed, but she had stopped playing. Mrs. Haverford's eyes rested on her a moment, disapprovingly.
"What do you say, Natalie?" Audrey asked.
"I hadn't thought about it. Money, probably."
"You are all wrong," said Audrey, and lighted a fresh cigarette. "They want different things at different ages. That's why marriage is such a rotten failure. First they want women; any woman will do, really. So they marry - any woman. Then they want money. After that they want power and place. And when they've got that they begin to want - love."
"Good gracious, Audrey, what a cynical speech!" said Mrs. Mackenzie. "If they've been married all that time -"
"Oh, tut!" said Audrey, rudely.
She had the impulse of the unhappy woman to hurt, but she was rather ashamed of herself, too. These women were her friends. Let them go on believing that life was a thing of lasting loves, that men were true to the end, and that the relationships of life were fixed and permanent things.
"I'm sorry," she said. "I was just being clever! Let's talk about the war. It's the only thing worth talking about, anyhow."
In the dining-room Clayton Spencer, standing tall and erect, had watched the women go out. How typical the party was of Natalie, of her meticulous care in small things and her indifference or real ignorance as to what counted. Was it indifference, really, or was it supreme craftiness, the stupidity of her dinners, the general unattractiveness of the women she gathered around her, the ill-assortment of people who had little in themselves and nothing whatever in common?
Of all the party, only Audrey and the rector had interested him even remotely. Audrey amused him. Audrey was a curious mixture of intelligence and frivolity. She was a good fellow. Sometimes he thought she was a nice woman posing as not quite nice. He didn't know. He was not particularly analytical, but at least she had been one bit of cheer during the endless succession of courses.
The rector was the other, and he was relieved to find Doctor Haverford moving up to the vacant place at his right.
"I've been wanting to see you, Clay," he said in an undertone. "It's rather stupid to ask you how you found things over there. But I'm going to do it."
"You mean the war?"
"There's nothing else in the world, is there?"
"One wouldn't have thought so from the conversation here to-night."
Clayton Spencer glanced about the table. Rodney Page, the architect, was telling a story clearly not for the ears of the clergy, and his own son, Graham, forced in at the last moment to fill a vacancy, was sitting alone, bored and rather sulky, and sipping his third cognac.
"If you want my opinion, things are bad."
"For the Allies? Or for us?"
"Good heavens, man, it's the same thing. It is only the Allies who are standing between us and trouble now. The French are just holding their own. The British are fighting hard, but they're fighting at home too. We can't sit by for long. We're bound to be involved."
The rector lighted an excellent cigar.
"Even if we are," he said, hopefully, "I understand our part of it will be purely naval. And I believe our navy will give an excellent account of itself."
"Probably," Clay retorted. "If it had anything to fight! But with the German fleet bottled up, and the inadvisability of attempting to bombard Berlin from the sea -"
The rector made no immediate reply, and Clayton seemed to expect none. He sat back, tapping the table with long, nervous fingers, and his eyes wandered from the table around the room. He surveyed it all with much the look he had given Natalie, a few moments before, searching, appraising, vaguely hostile. Yet it was a lovely room, simple and stately. Rodney Page, who was by way of being decorator for the few, as he was architect for the many, had
done the room, with its plainly paneled walls, the over-mantel with an old painting inset, its lion chairs, its two console tables with each its pair of porcelain jars. Clayton liked the dignity of the room, but there were times when he and Natalie sat at the great table alone, with only the candles for light and the rest of the room in a darkness from which the butler emerged at stated intervals and retreated again, when he felt the oppression of it. For a dinner party, with the brilliant colors of the women's gowns, it was ideal. For Natalie and himself alone, with the long silences between them that seemed to grow longer as the years went on, it was inexpressibly dreary.

He was frequently aware that both Natalie and himself were talking for the butler's benefit.

From the room his eyes traveled to Graham, sitting alone, uninterested, dull and somewhat flushed. And on Graham, too, he fixed that clear appraising gaze that had vaguely disconcerted Natalie. The boy had had too much to drink, and unlike the group across the table, it had made him sullen and quiet. He sat there, staring moodily at the cloth and turning his glass around in fingers that trembled somewhat.

Then he found himself involved in the conversation.

"London as dark as they say?" inquired Christopher Valentine. He was a thin young man, with a small, affectedly curled mustache. Clayton did not care for him, but Natalie found him amusing. "I haven't been over - " he really said 'ovah'- "for ages. Eight months or so."

"Very dark. Hard to get about."

"Most of the fellows I know over there are doing something. I'd like to run over, but what's the use? Nobody around, street's dark, no gayety, nothing."

"No. You'd better stay at home. They - don't particularly want visitors, anyhow."

"Unless they go for war contracts, eh?" said Valentine pleasantly, a way he had of taking the edge off the frequent impertinence of his speech. "No, I'm not going over. We're not popular over there, I understand. Keep on thinking we ought to take a hand in the dirty mess."

Graham spoke, unexpectedly.

"Well, don't you think we ought?"

"If you want my candid opinion, no. We've been waving a red flag called the Monroe Doctrine for some little time, as a signal that we won't stand for Europe coming over here and grabbing anything. If we're going to be consistent, we can't do any grabbing in Europe, can we?"

Clayton eyed him rather contemptuously.

"We might want to 'grab' as you term it, a share in putting the madmen of Europe into chains," he said. "I thought you were pro-British, Chris."

"Only as to clothes, women and filet of sole," Chris returned flippantly. Then, seeing Graham glowering at him across the table, he dropped his affectation of frivolity. "What's the use of our going in now?" he argued. "This Somme push is the biggest thing yet. They're going through the Germans like a hay cutter through a field. German losses half a million already."

"And what about the Allies? Have they lost nothing?" This was Clayton's attorney, an Irishman named Denis Nolan. There had been two n's in the Denis, originally, but although he had disposed of a part of his birthright, he was still belligerently Irish. "What about Rumania? What about the Russians at Lemberg? What about Saloniki?"

"You Irish!" said the rector, genially. "Always fighting the world and each other. Tell me, Nolan, why is it that you always have individual humor and collective ill-humor?"

He felt that that was rather neat. But Nolan was regarding him acrimoniously, and Clayton apparently had not heard at all.

The dispute went on, Chris Valentine alternately flippant and earnest, the rector conciliatory, Graham gloowering and silent. Nolan had started on the Irish question, and Rodney baited him with the prospect of conscription there. Nolan's voice, full and mellow and strangely sweet, dominated the room.

But Clayton was not listening. He had heard Nolan air his views before. He was a trifle acid, was Nolan. He needed mellowing, a woman in his life. But Nolan had loved once, and the girl had died. With the curious constancy of the Irish, he had remained determinedly celibate.

"Strange race," Clayton reflected idly, as Nolan's voice sang on. "Don't know what they want, but want it like the devil. One-woman men, too. Curious!"

It occurred to him then that his own reflection was as odd as the fidelity of the Irish. He had been faithful to his wife. He had never thought of being anything else.

He did not pursue that line of thought. He sat back and resumed his nervous tapping of the cloth, not listening, hardly thinking, but conscious of a discontent that was beyond analysis.

Clayton had been aware, since his return from the continent and England days before, of a change in himself. He had not recognized it until he reached home. And he was angry with himself for feeling it. He had gone abroad for certain Italian contracts and had obtained them. A year or two, if the war lasted so long, and he would be on his feet
at last, after years of struggle to keep his organization together through the hard times that preceded the war. He would be much more than on his feet. Given three more years of war, and he would be a very rich man.

And now that the goal was within sight, he was finding that it was not money he wanted. There were some things money could not buy. He had always spent money. His anxieties had not influenced his scale of living. Money, for instance, could not buy peace for the world; or peace for a man, either. It had only one value for a man; it gave him independence of other men, made him free.

"Three things," said the rector, apropos of something or other, and rather oratorically, "are required by the normal man. Work, play, and love. Assure the crippled soldier that he has lost none of these, and - "

Work and play and love. Well, God knows he had worked. Play? He would have to take up golf again more regularly. He ought to play three times a week. Perhaps he could take a motor-tour now and then, too. Natalie would like that.

Love? He had not thought about love very much. A married man of forty-five certainly had no business thinking about love. No, he certainly did not want love. He felt rather absurd, even thinking about it. And yet, in the same flash, came a thought of the violent passions of his early twenties. There had been a time when he had suffered horribly because Natalie had not wanted to marry him. He was glad all that was over. No, he certainly did not want love.

He drew a long breath and straightened up.

"How about those plans, Rodney?" he inquired genially. "Natalie says you have them ready to look over."

"I'll bring them round, any time you say."

"To-morrow, then. Better not lose any time. Building is going to be a slow matter, at the best."

"Slow and expensive," Page added. He smiled at his host, but Clayton Spencer remained grave.

"I've been away," he said, "and I don't know what Natalie and you have cooked up between you. But just remember this: I want a comfortable country house. I don't want a public library."

Page looked uncomfortable. The move into the drawing-room covered his uneasiness, but he found a moment later on to revert to the subject.

"I have tried to carry out Natalie's ideas, Clay," he said. "She wanted a sizeable place, you know. A wing for house-parties, and - that sort of thing."

Clayton's eyes roamed about the room, where portly Mrs. Haverford was still knitting placidly, where the Chris Valentines were quarreling under pretense of raillery, where Toots Hayden was smoking a cigaret in a corner and smiling up at Graham, and where Natalie, exquisite and precise, was supervising the laying out of a bridge table.

"She would, of course," he observed, rather curtly, and, moving through a French window, went out onto a small balcony into the night.

He was irritated with himself. What had come over him? He shook himself, and drew a long breath of the sweet night air. His tall, boyishly straight figure dominated the little place. In the half-light he looked, indeed, like an overgrown boy. He always looked like Graham's brother, anyhow; it was one of Natalie's complaints against him. But he put the thought of Natalie away, along with his new discontent. By George, it was something to feel that, if a man could not fight in this war, at least he could make shells to help end it. Oblivious to the laughter in the room behind him, the clink of glass as whiskey-and-soda was brought in, he planned there in the darkness, new organization, new expansions - and found in it a great content.

He was proud of his mills. They were his, of his making. The small iron foundry of his father's building had developed into the colossal furnaces that night after night lighted the down-town district like a great conflagration. He was proud of his mills and of his men. He liked to take men and see them work out his judgment of them. He was not often wrong. Take that room behind him: Rodney Page, dilettante, liked by women, who called him "Roddie," a trifle unscrupulous but not entirely a knave, the sort of man one trusted with everything but one's wife; Chris, too - only he let married women alone, and forgot to pay back the money he borrowed. There was only one man in the room about whom he was beginning to mistrust his judgment, and that was his own son.

Perhaps it was because he had so recently come from lands where millions of boys like Graham were pouring out their young lives like wine, that Clayton Spencer was seeing Graham with a new vision. He turned and glanced back into the drawing-room, where Graham, in the center of that misfit group and not quite himself, was stooping over Marion Hayden. They would have to face that, of course, the woman urge in the boy. Until now his escapades had been boyish ones, a few debts frankly revealed and as frankly regretted, some college mischiefs, a rather serious gambling fever, quickly curbed. But never women, thank God.

But now the boy was through with college, and already he noticed something new in their relationship. Natalie had always spoiled him, and now there were, with increasing frequency, small consultations in her room when he was shut out, and he was beginning to notice a restraint in his relations with the boy, as though mother and son had united against him.
He was confident that Natalie was augmenting Graham's allowance from her own. His salary, rather, for he had taken the boy into the business, not as a partner - that would come later - but as the manager of a department. He never spoke to Natalie of money. Her house bills were paid at the office without question. But only that day Miss Potter, his secretary, had reported that Mrs. Spencer's bank had called up and he had made good a considerable overdraft.

He laid the cause of his discontent to Graham, finally. The boy had good stuff in him. He was not going to allow Natalie to spoil him, or to withdraw him into that little realm of detachment in which she lived. Natalie did not need him, and had not, either as a lover or a husband, for years. But the boy did.

There was a little stir in the room behind. The Haverfords were leaving, and the Hayden girl, who was plainly finding the party dull. Graham was looking down at her, a tall, handsome boy, with Natalie's blonde hair but his father's height and almost insolent good looks.

"Come around to-morrow," she was saying. "About four. There's always a crowd about five, you know."

Clayton knew, and felt a misgiving. The Hayden house was a late afternoon loafing and meeting place for the idle sons and daughters of the rich. Not the conservative old families, who had developed a sense of the responsibility of wealth, but of the second generation of easily acquired money. As she went out, with Graham at her elbow, he heard Chris, at the bridge table.

"Terrible house, the Haydens. Just one step from the Saturday night carouse in Clay's mill district."

When Graham came back, Mrs. Haverford put her hand on his arm.

"I wish you would come to see us, Graham. Delight so often speaks of you."

Graham stiffened almost imperceptibly.

"Thanks, I will." But his tone was distant.

"You know she comes out this winter."

"Really?"

"And - you were great friends. I think she misses you a little."

"I wish I thought so!"

Gentle Mrs. Haverford glanced up at him quickly.

"You know she doesn't approve of me."

"Why, Graham!"

"Well, ask her," he said. And there was a real bitterness under the lightness of his tone. "I'll come, of course, Mrs. Haverford. Thank you for asking me. I haven't a lot of time. I'm a sort of clerk down at the mill, you know."

Natalie overheard, and her eyes met Clayton's, with a glance of malicious triumph. She had been deeply resentful that he had not made Graham a partner at once. He remembered a conversation they had had a few months before.

"Why should he have to start at the bottom?" she had protested. "You have never been quite fair to him, Clay." His boyish diminutive had stuck to him. "You expect him to know as much about the mill now as you do, after all these years."

"Not at all. I want him to learn. That's precisely the reason why I'm not taking him in at once."

"How much salary is he to have?"

"Three thousand a year."

"Three thousand! Why, it will take all of that to buy him a car."

"There are three cars here now; I should think he could manage."

"Every boy wants his own car."

"I pay my other managers three thousand," he had said, still patient. "He will live here. His car can be kept here, without expense. Personally, I think it too much money for the service he will be able to give for the first year or two."

And, although she had let it go at that, he had felt in her a keen resentment. Graham had got a car of his own, was using it hard, if the bills the chauffeur presented were an indication, and Natalie had overdrawn her account two thousand five hundred dollars.

The evening wore on. Two tables of bridge were going, with Denis Nolan sitting in at one. Money in large amounts was being written in on the bridge scores. The air of the room was heavy with smoke, and all the men and some of the women were drinking rather too much. There were splotches of color under the tan in Graham's cheeks, and even Natalie's laughter had taken on a higher note.

Chris's words rankled in Clayton Spencer's mind. A step from the Saturday night carouse. How much better was this sort of thing? A dull party, driven to cards and drink to get through the evening. And what sort of home life were he and Natalie giving the boy? Either this, or the dreary evenings when they were alone, with Natalie sitting with folded hands, or withdrawing to her boudoir upstairs, where invariably she summoned Graham to talk to him
behind closed doors.

He went into the library and shut the door. The room rested him, after the babble across. He lighted a cigar, and
stood for a moment before Natalie's portrait. It had been painted while he was abroad at, he suspected, Rodney's
instigation. It left him quite cold, as did Natalie herself.

He could look at it dispassionately, as he had never quite cared to regard Natalie. Between them, personally,
there was always the element she never allowed him to forget, that she had given him a son. This was Natalie
herself, Natalie at forty-one, girlish, beautiful, fretful - - - selfish. Natalie with whom he was to live the rest of his
life, who was to share his wealth and his future, and with whom he shared not a single thought in common.

He had a curious sense of disloyalty as he sat down at his desk and picked up a pad and pencil. But a moment
later he had forgotten her, as he had forgotten the party across the hall. He had work to do. Thank God for work.

CHAPTER II

Natalie was in bed when he went up-stairs. Through the door of his dressing-room he could see her lying,
surrounded by papers. Natalie's handsome bed was always covered with things, her handkerchief, a novel, her silk
dressing-gown flung over the footboard, sometimes bits of dress materials and lace. Natalie did most of her planning
in bed.

He went in and, clearing a space, sat down on the foot of the bed, facing her. Her hair was arranged in a loose
knot on top of her head, and there was a tiny space, perhaps a quarter of an inch, slightly darker than the rest. He
realized with a little start that she had had her hair touched up during his absence. Still, she looked very pretty, her
skin slightly glistening with its night's bath of cold cream, her slim arms lying out on the blue silk eiderdown
coverlet.

"I told Doctor Haverford to-night that we would like to give him a car, Natalie," he began directly. It was typical
of him, the "we."

"A car? What for?"

"To ride about in, my dear. It's rather a large parish, you know. And I don't feel exactly comfortable seeing him
tramping along when most people are awheel. He's not very young."

"He'll kill himself, that's all."

"Well, that's rather up to Providence, of course."

"You are throwing a sop to Providence, aren't you?" she asked shrewdly. "Throwing bread on the waters! I
daresay he angled for it. You're easy, Clay. Give you a good dinner - it was a nice dinner, wasn't it?"

"A very nice dinner," he assented. But at the tone she looked up.

"Well, what was wrong?" she demanded. "I saw when I went out that you were angry about something. Your
face was awful."

"Oh, come now, Natalie," he protested. "It wasn't anything of the sort. The dinner was all right. The guests were
- all right. I may have unconsciously resented your attitude about Doctor Haverford. Certainly he didn't angle for it,
and I had no idea of throwing a sop to Providence."

"That isn't what was wrong at dinner."

"Do you really want me to tell you?"

"Not if it's too disagreeable."

"Good heavens, Natalie. One would think I bullied you!"

"Oh, no, you don't bully. It's worse. It's the way you look. Your face sets. Well?"

"I didn't feel unpleasant. It's rather my misfortune that my face - "

"Didn't you like my gown?"

"Very much. It seemed a trifle low, but you know I always like your clothes." He was almost pathetically
anxious to make up to her for that moment's disloyalty in the library.

"There!" she said, brushing the papers aside. "Now we're getting at it. Was I anything like as low as Audrey
Valentine? Of course not! Her back - You just drive me to despair, Clay. Nothing I do pleases you. The very tone of
that secretary of yours to-day, when I told her about that over-draft - it was positively insulting!"

"I don't like overdrafts," he said, without any irritation. "When you want extra amounts you have only to let me
know."

"You are always finding fault with me," she complained. "It's either money, or my clothes, or Graham, or
something." Her eyes filled. She looked young and absurdly childish. But a talk he had had with the rector was still
in his mind. It was while they were still at the table, and Nolan had been attacking the British government.

"We get out of this world largely what we put into it," he had said. "You give largely, Clay, and you receive
largely. I rejoice in your prosperity, because you have earned it."

"You think, then," he had asked, "that we only receive as we give? I don't mean material things, of course."

The rector had fixed him with kindly, rather faded old eyes. "That has been my experience," he said. "Happiness
for instance only comes when we forget our eternal search for it, and try to make others happy. Even religion is changing. The old selfish idea of saving our own souls has given way largely to the saving of others, by giving them a chance to redeem themselves. Decent living conditions - "

He had gone on, but Clayton had not listened very intently. He had been wondering if happiness was not the thing he had somehow missed. It was then that he had decided to give the car. If, after all, that would make for the rector’s happiness -

"I don't want to find fault with you, Natalie," he said gravely. "I would like to see you happy. Sometimes I think you are not. I have my business, but you have nothing to do, and - I suppose you wouldn't be interested in war-work, would you? There are a lot of committees, and since I've been in England I realize what a vast amount is needed. Clothes, you know, and bandages, and - well, everything."

"Nothing to do," she looked up, her eyes wide and indignant. "But of course you would think that. This house runs itself, I suppose."

"Let's be honest, Natalie," he said, with a touch of impatience. "Actually how much time each day do you give this house? You have plenty of trained servants. An hour? Two hours?"

"I'll not discuss it with you." She took up a typewritten sheet and pretended to read it carefully. Clayton had a half-humorous, half-irritated conviction that if he was actually hunting happiness he had begun his search for it rather badly. He took the paper from her, gently.

"What's this?" he inquired. "Anything I should not see?"

"Decorator's estimates for the new house." Her voice was resentful. "You'll have to see them some time."

"Library curtains, gray Chippendale velvet, gold gimp, faced with colonial yellow," he read an item picked at random, "two thousand dollars! That's going some for curtains, isn't it?"

"It's not too much for that sort of thing."

"But, look here, Natalie," he expostulated. "This is to be a country house, isn't it? I thought you wanted chintzed and homely things. This looks like a city house in the country."

He glanced down at the total. The hangings alone, with a tapestry or two, were to be thirty-five thousand dollars. He whistled.

"Hangings alone! And - what sort of a house has Rodney planned, anyhow?"

"Italian, with a sunken garden. The landscape estimates are there, too."

He did not look at them.

"It seems to me you and Rodney have been pretty busy while I've been away," he remarked. "Well, I want you to be happy, my dear. Only - I don't want to tie up a fortune just now. We may get into this war, and if we do - " He rose, and yawned, his arms above his head. "I'm off to bed," he said. "Big day to-morrow. I'll want Graham at the office at 8:30."

She had sat up in bed, and was staring at him. Her face was pale.

"Do you mean that we are going to get into this war?"

"I think it very likely, my dear."

"But if we do, Graham -"

"We might as well face it. Graham will probably want to go."

"He'll do nothing of the sort," she said sharply. "He's all I have. All. Do you think I'm going to send him over there to be cannon-fodder? I won't let him go."

She was trembling violently.

"I won't want him to go, of course. But if the thing comes - he's of age, you know."

She eyed him with thinly veiled hostility.

"You're hard, Clay," she accused him. "You're hard all the way through. You're proud, too. Proud and hard. You'd want to be able to say your son was in the army. It's not because you care anything about the war, except to make money out of it. What is the war to you, anyhow? You don't like the English, and as for French - you don't even let me have a French butler."

He was not the less angry because he realized the essential truth of part of what she said. He felt no great impulse of sympathy with any of the combatants. He knew the gravity of the situation rather than its tragedy. He did not like war, any war. He saw no reason why men should kill. But this war was a fact. He had had no hand in its making, but it was made.

His first impulse was to leave her in dignified silence. But she was crying, and he disliked leaving her in tears. Dead as was his love for her, and that night, somehow, he knew that it was dead, she was still his wife. They had had some fairly happy years together, long ago. And he felt the need, too, of justification.

"Perhaps you are right, Natalie," he said, after a moment. "I haven't cared about this war as much as I should. Not the human side of it, anyhow. But you ought to understand that by making shells for the Allies, I am not only
making money for myself; they need the shells. And I'll give them the best. I don't intend only to profit by their misfortunes."

She had hardly listened.
"Then, if we get into it, as you say, you'll encourage Graham to go?"
"I shall allow him to go, if he feels it his duty."
"Oh, duty, duty! I'm sick of the word." She bent forward and suddenly caught one of his hands. "You won't make him go, Clay?" she begged. You - you'll let him make his own decision?"
"If you will."
"What do you mean?"
"If you'll keep your hands off, too. We're not in it, yet. God knows I hope we won't be. But if I promise not to influence him, you must do the same thing."
"I haven't any more influence over Graham than that," she said, and snapped her finger. But she did not look at him.

"Promise," he said, steadily.
"Oh, all right." Her voice and face were sulky. She looked much as Graham had that evening at the table.
"Is that a promise?"
"Good heavens, do you want me to swear to it?"
"I want you to play fair. That's all."
She leaned back again among her pillows and gathered her papers.
"All right," she said, indifferently. "Have you any preference as to color for your rooms in the new house?"

He was sorry for his anger, and after all, these things which seemed so unimportant to him were the things that made up her life. He smiled.

"You might match my eyes. I'm not sure what color they are. Perhaps you know."
But she had not forgiven him.
"I've never noticed," she replied. And, small bundle of samples in her hand, resumed her reading and her inspection of textiles.
"Good night, Natalie."
"Good night." She did not look up.

Outside his wife's door he hesitated. Then he crossed and without knocking entered Graham's bedroom. The boy was lounging in a long chair by an open fire. He was in his dressing gown and slippers, and an empty whiskey-and-soda glass stood beside him on a small stand. Graham was sound asleep. Clayton touched him on the shoulder, but he slept on, his head to one side, his breathing slow and heavy. It required some little effort to waken him.
"Graham!" said Clayton sharply.
"Yes." He stirred, but did not open his eyes.
"Graham! Wake up, boy."

Graham sat up suddenly and looked at him. The whites of his eyes were red, but he had slept off the dinner wine. He was quite himself.
"Better get to bed," his father suggested. "I'll want you early to-morrow."
"What time, sir?"
He leaned forward and pressed a button beside the mantel-piece.
"What are you doing that for?"
"Ice water. Awfully thirsty."
"The servants have gone to bed. Go down and get it yourself."
Graham looked up at the tone. At his father's eyes, he looked away.
"Sorry, sir," he said. "Must have had too much champagne. Wasn't much else to do, was there? Mother's parties - my God, what a dreary lot!"

Clayton inspected the ice water carafe on the stand and found it empty.
"I'll bring you some water from my room," he said. "And - I don't want to see you this way again, Graham. When a man cannot take a little wine at his own table without taking too much he fails to be entirely a gentleman."

He went out. When he came back, Graham was standing by the fire in his pajamas, looking young and rather ashamed. Clayton had a flash of those earlier days when he had come in to bid the boy good night, and there had always been that last request for water which was to postpone the final switching off of the light.
"I'm sorry, father."
Clayton put his hand on the boy's shoulder and patted him.
"We'll have to do better next time. That's all."
For a moment the veil of constraint of Natalie's weaving lifted between them.
"I'm a pretty bad egg, I guess. You'd better shove me off the dock and let me swim - or drown."
"I'd hardly like to do that, you know. You are all I have."
"I'm no good at the mill."
"You haven't had very much time. I've been a good many years learning the business."
"I'll never be any good. Not there. If there was something to build up it would be different, but it's all done. You've done it. I'm only a sort of sublimated clerk. I don't mean," he added hastily, "that I think I ought to have anything more. It's only that - well, the struggle's over, if you know what I mean."
"I'll talk to you about that to-morrow. Get to bed now. It's one o'clock."

He moved to the doorway. Graham, carafe in hand, stood staring ahead of him. He had the courage of the last whiskey-and-soda, and a sort of desperate contrition.

"Father."
"Yes, Graham."
"I wish you'd let me go to France and fly."
"Something like a cold hand seemed to close round Clayton's heart."
"Fly! Why?"
"Because I'm not doing any good here. And - because I'd like to see if I have any good stuff in me. All the fellows are going," he added, rather weakly.
"That's not a particularly worthy reason, is it?"
"It's about as worthy as making money out of shells, when we haven't any reason for selling them to the Allies more than the Germans, except that we can't ship to the Germans."

He looked rather frightened then. But Clayton was not angry. He saw Natalie's fine hand there, and the boy's impressionable nature.

"Think that over, Graham," he said gravely. "I don't believe you quite mean it. Good-night."

He went across to his own bedroom, where his silk pajamas, neatly folded, lay on his painted Louis XVI bed. Under his reading lamp there was a book. It was a part of Natalie's decorative scheme for the room; it's binding was mauve, to match the hangings. For the first time since the room had been done over during his absence he picked up the book.

"Rodney's idea, for a cent!" he reflected, looking rather grimly at the cover.

He undressed slowly, his mind full of Graham and the problem he presented. Then he thought of Natalie, and of the little things that made up her life and filled her days. He glanced about the room, beautiful, formal, exquisitely appointed. His father's portrait was gone from over the mantel, and an old French water-color hung there instead. That was too bad of Natalie. Or had it been Rodney? He would bring it back. And he gave a fleeting thought to Graham and his request to go abroad. He had not meant it. It was sheer reaction. But he would talk to Graham.

He lighted a cigaret, and getting into bed turned on his reading lamp. Queer how a man could build, and then find that after all he did not care for the achievement. It was the building alone that was worth while.

He picked up the book from the table, and opened it casually.

"When first I loved I gave my very soul Utterly unreserved to Love's control, But Love deceived me, wrenched my youth away, And made the gold of life forever gray. Long I lived lonely, yet I tried in vain With any other joy to stifle pain; There is no other joy, I learned to know, And so returned to love, as long ago, Yet I, this little while ere I go hence, Love very lightly now, in self defense."

"Twaddle," said Clayton Spencer, and put the book away. That was the sort of stuff men like Rodney lived on. In a mauve binding, too.

After he had put out the light he lay for a long time, staring into the darkness. It was not love he wanted: he was through with all that. Power was the thing, integrity and power. To yield to no man, to achieve independence for one's soul - not that he put it that way. He formulated it, drowsily: 'Not to give a damn for any one, so long as you're right.' Of course, it was not always possible to know if one was right. He yawned. His conscious mind was drowsing, and from the depths below, released of the sentry of his waking hours, came the call of his starved imagination.

CHAPTER III

There was no moral to be adduced from Graham's waking the next morning. He roused, reluctantly enough, but blithe and hungry. He sang as he splashed in his shower, chose his tie whistling, and went down the staircase two steps at a time to a ravenous breakfast.

Clayton was already at the table in the breakfast room, sitting back with the newspaper, his coffee at his elbow, the first cigarette of the morning half smoked. He looked rather older in the morning light. Small fine threads had begun to show themselves at the corners of his eyes. The lines of repression from the nostrils to the corners of the mouth seemed deeper. But his invincible look of boyishness persisted, at that.
There was no awkwardness in Graham's "Morning, dad." He had not forgotten the night before, but he had already forgiven himself. He ignored the newspaper at his plate, and dug into his grapefruit.

"Anything new?" he inquired casually.
"You might look and see," Clayton suggested, good-naturedly.
"I'll read going down in the car. Can't stand war news on an empty stomach. Mother all right this morning?"
"I think she is still sleeping."
"Well, I should say she needs it, after last night. How in the world we manage, with all the interesting people in the world, to get together such a dreary lot as that - Lord, it was awful."

Clayton rose and folded his paper.
"The car's waiting," he said. "I'll be ready in five minutes."

He went slowly up the stairs. In her pink bedroom Natalie had just wakened. Madeleine, her elderly French maid, had brought her breakfast, and she was lying back among the pillows, the litter of the early mail about her and a morning paper on her knee. He bent over and kissed her, perfunctorily, and he was quick to see that her resentment of the evening before had survived the night.

"Sleep well?" he inquired, looking down at her. She evaded his eyes.
"Not particularly."
"Any plans for to-day?"
"I'll just play around. I'm lunching out, and I may run out with Rodney to Linndale. The landscape men are there today."

She picked up the newspaper as though to end the discussion. He saw then that she was reading the society news, and he rather more than surmised that she had not even glanced at the black headings which on the first page announced the hideous casualties of the Somme.

"Then you've given the planting contract?"
"Some things have to go in in the fall, Clay. For heaven's sake, don't look like a thunder cloud."
"Have you given the landscape contract?"
"Yes. And please go out. You make my head ache."
"How much is it to be?"
"I don't know. Ask Rodney."
"I'll do nothing of the sort, my dear. This is not Rodney's investment."
"Nor mine, I suppose!"
"All I want you to do, Natalie, is to consult me. I want you to have a free hand, but some one with a sense of responsibility ought to check up these expenditures. But it isn't only that. I'd like to have a hand in the thing myself. I've rather looked forward to the time when we could have the sort of country place we wanted."
"You don't like any of the strings to get out of your fingers, do you?"
"I didn't come up to quarrel, Natalie. I wish you wouldn't force it on me."
"I force it on you," she cried, and laughed in a forced and high-pitched note. "Just because I won't be over-ridden without a protest! I'm through, that's all. I shan't go near the place again."

"You don't understand," he persisted patiently. "I happen to like gardens. I had an idea - I told you about it - of trying to duplicate the old garden at home. You remember it. When we went there on our honeymoon - "
"You don't call that a garden?"
"Of course I didn't want to copy it exactly. It was old and out of condition. But there were a lot of old-fashioned flowers - However, if you intend to build an Italian villa, naturally - "
"I don't intend to build anything, or to plant anything." Her voice was frozen. "You go ahead. Do it in your own way. And then you can live there, if you like. I won't."

Which was what he carried away with him that morning to the mill. He was not greatly disturbed by her threat to keep her hands off. He knew quite well, indeed, that the afternoon would find her, with Rodney Page, picking her way in her high-heeled shoes over the waste that was some day to bloom, not like the rose of his desire but according to the formal and rigid blueprint which Rodney would be carrying. But in five minutes he had put the incident out of his mind. After all, if it gave her happiness and occupation, certainly she needed both. And his powers of inhibition were strong. For many years he had walled up the small frictions of his married life and its disappointments, and outside that wall had built up an existence of his own, which was the mill.

When he went down-stairs he found that Graham had ordered his own car and was already in it, drawing on his gloves.
"Have to come back up-town early, dad," he called in explanation, and drove off, going at the reckless speed he affected.

Clayton rode down alone in the limousine. He had meant to outline his plans of expansion to Graham, but he had
had no intention of consulting him. In his own department the boy did neither better nor worse than any other of the
dozens of young men in the organization. If he had shown neither special aptitude for nor interest in the business, he
had at least not spectacularly failed to show either. Now, paper and pencil in hand, Clayton jotted down the various
details of the new system in their sequence; the building of a forging plant to make the rough casts for the new
Italian shells out of the steel from the furnaces, the construction of a new spur to the little railway which bound the
old plant together with its shining steel rails. There were questions of supplies and shipping and bank credits to face,
the vast and complex problems of the complete new munition works, to be built out of town and involving such
matters as the housing of enormous numbers of employees. He scrawled figures and added them. Even with the size
of the foreign contract their magnitude startled him. He leaned back, his mouth compressed, the lines from the
nostrils to the corners deeper than ever.

He had completely forgotten Natalie and the country house.

Outside the gates to the mill enclosure he heard an early extra being called, and bought it. The Austrian premier
had been assassinated. The successful French counter-attack against Verdun was corroborated, also. On the center of
the front page was the first photograph to reach America of a tank. He inspected it with interest. So the Allies had at
last shown same inventive genius of their own! Perhaps this was but the beginning. Even at that, enough of these
fighting mammoths, and the war might end quickly. With the tanks, and the Allied offensive and the evidence of
discontent in Austria, the thing might after all be over before America was involved.

He reflected, however, that an early peace would not be an unmixed blessing for him. He wanted the war to end:
he hated killing. He felt inarticulately that something horrible was happening to the world. But personally his plans
were premised on a war to last at least two years more, until the fall of 1918. That would let him out, cover the cost
of the new plant, bring renewals of his foreign contracts, justify those stupendous figures on the paper in his hand.

He wondered, rather uncomfortably, what he would do, under the circumstances, if it were in his power to
declare peace to-morrow.

In his office in the mill administration building, he found the general manager waiting. Through the door into the
conference room beyond he could see the superintendents of the various departments, with Graham rather aloof and
detached, and a sprinkling of the most important foremen. On his desk, neatly machined, was the first tentative
shell-case made in the mill machine-shop, an experiment rather than a realization.

Hutchinson, the general manager, was not alone. Opposite him, very neatly dressed in his best clothes, his hat in
his hand and a set expression on his face, was one of the boss rollers of the steel mill, Herman Klein. At Clayton's
entrance he made a motion to depart, but Hutchinson stopped him.

"Tell Mr. Spencer what you've been telling me, Klein," he said curtly.

Klein fingered his hat, but his face remained set.

"I've just been saying, Mr. Spencer," he said, in good English, but with the guttural accent which thirty years in
America had not eliminated, "that I'll be leaving you now."

"Leaving! Why?"

"Because of that!" He pointed, without intentional drama, at the shell-case. "I can't make those shells for you,
Mr. Spencer, and me a German."

"You're an American, aren't you?"

"I am, sir. It is not that. It iss that I - " His face worked. He had dropped back to the old idiom, after years of
painful struggle to abandon it. "It iss that I am a German, also. I have people there, in the war. To make shells to kill
them - no."

"He is determined, Mr. Spencer," said Hutchinson. "I have been arguing with him, but - you can't argue with a
German."

Clayton was uneasily aware of something like sympathy for the man.

"I understand how you feel, Klein," he observed. "But of course you know, whether you go or stay, the shells
will be made, anyhow."

"I know that."

"You are throwing up a good position."

"I'll try to get another."

The prospective loss of Klein was a rather serious one. Clayton, seated behind his great desk, eyed him keenly,
and then stooped to bribery. He mentioned a change in the wage scale, with bonuses to all foremen and rollers. He
knew Klein's pride in the mill, and he outlined briefly the growth that was about to be developed. But the boss roller
remained obdurate. He understood that such things were to be, but it was not necessary that he assist Germany's
enemies against her. Against the determination in his heavy square figure Clayton argued in vain. When, ten minutes
later, he went into the conference room, followed by a secretary with a sheaf of papers, the mill was minus a boss
roller, and there was rankling in his mind Klein's last words.
"I haf no objection, Mr. Spencer, to your making money out of this war, but I will not."

There had been no insolence in his tone. He had gone out, with his heavy German stolidity of mien unchanged, and had closed the door behind him with quiet finality.

CHAPTER IV

Graham left the conference that morning in a rather exalted mood. The old mill was coming into its own at last. He had a sense of boyish triumph in the new developments, a feeling of being a part of big activities that would bring rich rewards. And he felt a new pride in his father. He had sat, a little way from the long table, and had watched the faces of the men gathered about it as clearly and forcibly the outlines of the new departure were given out. Hitherto "Spencer's" had made steel only. Now, they were not only to make the steel, but they were to forge the ingots into rough casts; these casts were then to be carried to the new munition works, there to be machined, drilled, polished, provided with fuses, which "Spencer's" were also to make, and shipped abroad.

The question of speeding production had been faced and met. The various problems had been discussed and the bonus system tentatively taken up. Then the men had dispersed, each infected with the drive of his father's contagious force. "Pretty fine old boy," Graham had considered. And he wondered vaguely if, when his time came, he would be able to take hold. For a few minutes Natalie's closetings lost their effect. He saw his father, not as one from whom to hide extravagance and unpaid bills, but as the head of a great concern that was now to be a part of the war itself. He wandered into his father's office, and picked up the shell. Clayton was already at his letters, but looked up.

"Think we rather had them, eh, Graham?"

"Think you did, sir. Carried them off their feet. Pretty, isn't it?" He held up the shell-case. "If a fellow could only forget what the damned things are for!"

"They are to help to end the war," said Clayton, crisply. "Don't forget that, boy." And went back to his steady dictation.

Graham went out of the building into the mill yard. The noise always irritated him. He had none of Clayton's joy and understanding of it. To Clayton each sound had its corresponding activity. To Graham it was merely din, an annoyance to his ears, as the mill yard outraged his fastidiousness. But that morning he found it rather more bearable. He stooped where, in front of the store, the storekeeper had planted a tiny garden. Some small late-blossoming chrysanthemums were still there and he picked one and put it in his buttonhole.

His own office was across the yard. He dodged in front of a yard locomotive, picked his way about masses of lumber and the general litter of all mill yards, and opened the door of his own building. Just inside his office a girl was sitting on a straight chair, her hat a trifle crooked, and her eyes red from crying. He paused in amazement.

"Why, Miss Klein!" he said. "What's the matter?"

She was rather a pretty girl, even now. She stood up at his voice and made an effort to straighten her hat.

"Haven't you heard?" she asked.

"I haven't heard anything that ought to make Miss Anna Klein weep of a nice, frosty morning in October. Unless - " he sobered, for her grief was evident. "Tell me about it."

"Father has given up his job."

"No!"!

"I'm telling you, Mr. Spencer. He won't help to make those shells. He's been acting queer for three or four days and this morning he told your father."

Graham sat down.

"I didn't think you'd want me to stay on."

"Tell me that," he said, "he won't make shells for the Allies and so he's given up his position. All right. That's bad, but he's a good workman. He'll not have any trouble getting another job. Now, why are you crying?"

"I didn't think you'd want me to stay on."

Putting her fear into words brought back her long hours of terror. She collapsed into the chair again and fell to unquiet sobbing. Graham was disturbed.

"You're a queer girl," he said. "Why should that lose me my most valued assistant?"

When she made no reply he got up and going over to her put a hand on her shoulder. "Tell me that," he said. He looked down at her. The hair grew very soft and blonde at the nape of her neck, and he ran a finger lightly across it. "Tell me that."

"I was afraid it would."

"And, even if it had, which you are a goose for thinking, you're just as good in your line as your father is in his. I've been expecting any time to hear of your leaving me for a handsomer man!"
He had been what he would have termed jollying her back to normality again. But to his intense surprise she suddenly leaned back and looked up into his face. There was no doubting what he saw there. Just for a moment the situation threatened to get out of hand. Then he patted her shoulders and put the safety of his desk between them.

"Run away and bathe your eyes," he said, "and then come back here looking like the best secretary in the state, and not like a winter thaw. We have the deuce of a lot of work to do."

But after she had gone he sat for some little time idly rapping a pencil on the top of his desk. By Jove! Anna Klein! Of all girls in the world! It was rather a pity, too. She was a nice little thing, and in the last few months she had changed a lot. She had been timid at first, and hideously dressed. Lately she had been almost smart. Those earrings now - they changed her a lot. Queer - how things went on in a girl's mind, and a fellow didn't know until something happened. He settled his tie and smoothed back his heavy hair.

During the remainder of the day he began to wonder if he had not been a fatuous idiot. Anna did her work with the thoroughness of her German blood plus her American training. She came back minus her hat, and with her eyes carefully powdered, and not once during the morning was he able to meet her eyes fully. By the middle of the afternoon sex vanity and curiosity began to get the better of his judgment, and he made an excuse, when she stood beside him over some papers, her hand on the desk, to lay his fingers over hers. She drew her hand away quickly, and when he glanced up, boyishly smiling, her face was flushed.

"Please," she said. And he felt hurt and rebuffed. He had no sentiment for her whatever, but the devil of mischief of twenty-two was behind him, urging him on to the eternal experiment. He was very formal with her for the rest of the day, and had the satisfaction of leaving her, at four o'clock, white-faced and miserable over her machine in the little office next to his.

He forgot her immediately, in the attempt to leave the mill without encountering his father. Clayton, he knew, would be staying late, and would be exacting similar tribute to the emergency from the entire force. Also, he had been going about the yard with contractors most of the afternoon. But Graham made his escape safely. It was two hours later when his father, getting into the limousine, noticed the absence of the boy's red car, and asked the gateman how long it had been gone.

"Since about four o'clock, Mr. Spencer."

Suddenly Clayton felt a reaction from the activities of the day. He sank back in the deeply padded seat, and felt tired and - in some odd fashion - lonely. He would have liked to talk to Graham on the way up-town, if only to crystallize his own thoughts. He would have liked to be going home to review with Natalie the day's events, the fine spirit of his men, the small difficulties. But Natalie hated the mention of the mill.

He thought it probable, too, that they were dining out. Yes, he remembered. They were dining at the Chris Valentines. Well, that was better than it might have been. They were not dull, anyhow. His mind wandered to the Valentine house, small, not too well-ordered, frequently noisy, but always gay and extremely smart.

He thought of Audrey, and her curious friendship with Natalie. Audrey the careless, with her dark lazy charm, her deep and rather husky contralto, her astonishing little French songs, which she sang with nonchalant grace, and her crowds of boyish admirers whom she alternately petted and bullied - surely she and Natalie had little enough in common.

Yet, in the last year or so, he had been continually coming across them together - at the club, at luncheon in the women's dining room, at his own house, Natalie always perfectly and expensively dressed, Audrey in the casual garments which somehow her wearing made effective.

He smiled a little. Certain of Audrey's impertinences came to his mind. She was an amusing young woman. He had an idea that she was always in debt, and that the fact concerned her very little. He fancied that few things concerned her very deeply, including Chris. But she knew about food. Her dinners were as casual as her house, as to service, but they were worth eating. She claimed to pay for them out of her bridge winnings, and, indeed, her invitation for to-night had been frankness itself.

"I'm going to have a party, Clay," she had said. "I've made two killings at bridge, and somebody has shipped Chris some ducks. If you'll send me some cigarets like the last, I'll make it Tuesday."

He had sent the cigarets, and this was Tuesday.

The pleasant rolling of the car soothed him. The street flashed by, brilliant with lights that in far perspective seemed to meet. The shop windows gleamed with color. From curb to curb were other cars like the one in which he rode, carrying home other men like himself to whatever the evening held in store. He remembered London at this hour, already dark and quiet, its few motors making their cautious way in the dusk, its throngs of clerks, nearly all women now, hurrying home to whatever dread the night might hold. And it made him slightly more complacent. These things that he had taken for granted before had since his return assumed the quality of luxury.

"Pray God we won't get into it," he said to himself.

He reviewed his unrest of the night before, and smiled at it. Happiness. Happiness came from a sense of
achievement. Integrity and power, that was the combination. The respect of one's fellow men, the day's work well done. Romance was done, at his age, but there remained the adventure of success. A few years more, and he would leave the mill to Graham and play awhile. After that - he had always liked politics. They needed business men in politics. If men of training and leisure would only go in for it there would be some chance of cleaning up the situation. Yes, he might do that. He was an easy speaker, and -

The car drew up at the curb and the chauffeur got out. Natalie's car had drawn up just ahead, and the footman was already opening the door. Rodney Page got out, and assisted Natalie to alight. Clayton smiled. So she had changed her mind. He saw Rodney bend over her hand and kiss it after his usual ceremonious manner. Natalie seemed a trifle breathless when she turned and saw him.

"You're early, aren't you?" she said.
"I fancy it is you who are late."
Then he realized that the chauffeur was waiting to speak to him.
"Yes, Jackson?"
"I'm sorry, sir. I guess I'll be leaving at the end of my month, Mr. Spencer."
"Come into the library and I'll talk to you. What's wrong?"
"There's nothing wrong, sir. I have been very well suited. It's only - I used to be in the regular army, sir, and I guess I'm going to be needed again."
"You mean - we are going to be involved?"
"Yes, sir. I think we are."
"There's no answer to that, Jackson," he said. But a sense of irritation stirred him as he went up the steps to the house door. Jackson was a good man. Jackson and Klein, and who knew who would be next?
"Oh, damn the war," he reflected rather wearily.

CHAPTER V

The winter which preceded the entrance of the United States into the war was socially an extraordinary one. It was marked by an almost feverish gayety, as though, having apparently determined to pursue a policy dictated purely by self interest, the people wished to forget their anomalous position. Like a woman who covers her shame with a smile. The vast number of war orders from abroad had brought prosperity into homes where it had long been absent. Mills and factories took on new life. Labor was scarce and high.

It was a period of extravagance rather than pleasure. People played that they might not think. Washington, convinced that the nation would ultimately be involved, kept its secret well and continued to preach a neutrality it could not enforce. War was to most of the nation a great dramatic spectacle, presented to them at breakfast and in the afternoon editions. It furnished unlimited conversation at dinner-parties, led to endless wrangles, gave zest and point to the peace that made those dinner parties possible, furnished an excuse for retrenchment here and there, and brought into vogue great bazaars and balls for the Red Cross and kindred activities.

But although the war was in the nation's mind, it was not yet in its soul. Life went on much as before. An abiding faith in the Allies was the foundation stone of its complacency. The great six-months battle of the Somme, with its million casualties, was resulting favorably. On the east the Russians had made some gains. There were wagers that the Germans would be done in the Spring.

But again Washington knew that the British and French losses at the Somme had been frightful; that the amount of lost territory regained was negligible as against the territory still held; that the food problem in the British Islands was acute; that the submarine sinkings were colossal. Our peace was at a fearful cost.

And on the edge of this volcano America played.

When Graham Spencer left the mill that Tuesday afternoon, it was to visit Marion Hayden. He was rather bored now at the prospect. He would have preferred going to the Club to play billiards, which was his custom of a late afternoon. He drove rather more slowly than was his custom, and so missed Marion's invitation to get there before the crowd.

Three cars before the house showed that she already had callers, and indeed when the parlor-maid opened the door a burst of laughter greeted him. The Hayden house was a general rendezvous. There were usually, by seven o'clock, whiskey-and-soda glasses and tea-cups on most of the furniture, and half-smoked cigarettes on everything that would hold them, including the piano.

Marion herself met him in the hall, and led him past the drawing-room door.
"There are people in every room who want to be left alone," she volunteered. "I kept the library as long as I could. We can sit on the stairs, if you like."

Which they proceeded to do, quite amiably. From various open doors came subdued voices. The air was pungent with tobacco smoke permeated with a faint scent of late afternoon highballs.
"Tommy!" Marion called, when she had settled herself.
"Yes," from a distance.
"Did you leave your cigaret on the piano?"
"No, Toots dear. But I can, easily."
"Mother," Marion explained, "is getting awfully touchy about the piano. Well, do you remember half the pretty things you told me last night?"
"Not exactly. But I meant them."
He looked up at her admiringly. He was only a year from college, and he had been rather arbitrarily limited to the debutantes. He found, therefore, something rather flattering in the attention he was receiving from a girl who had been out five years, and who was easily the most popular young woman in the gayer set. It gave him a sense of maturity. Since the night before he had been rankling under a sense of youth.
"Was I pretty awful last night?" he asked.
"You were very interesting. And - I imagine - rather indiscreet."
"Fine! What did I say?"
"You boasted, my dear young friend."
"Great Scott! I must have been awful."
"About the new war contracts."
"Oh, business!"
"But I found it very interesting. You know, I like business. And I like big figures. Poor people always do. Has it really gone through? I mean, those things do slip up sometimes, don't they.
"It's gone through, all right. Signed, sealed, and delivered."
Encouraged by her interest, he elaborated on the new work. He even developed an enthusiasm for it, to his own surprise. And the girl listened intently, leaning forward so that her arm brushed his shoulder. Her eyes, slightly narrowed, watched him closely. She knew every move of the game she was determining to play.
Marion Hayden, at twenty-five, knew already what her little world had not yet realized, that such beauty as she had had was the beauty of youth only, and that that was going. Late hours, golf, perhaps a little more champagne than was necessary at dinners, and the mornings found her almost plain. And, too, she had the far vision of the calculating mind. She knew that if the country entered the war, every eligible man she knew would immediately volunteer.
At twenty-five she already noticed a change in the personnel of her followers. The unmarried men who had danced with her during her first two winters were now sending flowers to the debutantes, and cutting in on the younger men at balls. Her house was still a rendezvous, but it was for couples like the ones who had preempted the drawing-room, the library and the music room that afternoon. They met there, smoked her cigarettes, made love in a corner, occasionally became engaged. But she was of the game, no longer in it.
Men still came to see her, a growing percentage of them married. They brought or sent her tribute, flowers, candy, and cigarettes. She was enormously popular at dances. But more and more her dinner invitations were from the older crowd. Like Natalie Spencer's stupid party the night before.
So she watched Graham and listened. He was a nice boy and a handsome one. Also he promised to be sole heir to a great business. If the war only lasted long enough -
"Imagine your knowing all those things," she said admiringly. "You're a partner, aren't you?"
He flushed slightly.
"Not yet. But of course I shall be."
"When you really get going, I wonder if you will take me round and show me how shells are made. I'm the most ignorant person you ever knew."
"I'll be awfully glad to."
"Very well. For that promise you shall have a highball. You're an awful dear, you know."
She placed a slim hand on his shoulder and patted it. Then, leaning rather heavily on him for support, she got to her feet.
"We'll go in and stir up some of the lovers," she suggested. "And if Tommy Hale hasn't burned up the piano we can dance a bit. You dance divinely, you know."
It was after seven when he reached home. He felt every inch a man. He held himself very straight as he entered the house, and the boyish grin with which he customarily greeted the butler had given place to a dignified nod.
Natalie was in her dressing-room. At his knock she told the maid to admit him, and threw a dressing-gown over her bare shoulders. Then she sent the maid away and herself cautiously closed the door into Clayton's room.
"I've got the money for you, darling," she said. From her jewel case she took a roll of bills and held them out to him. "Five hundred."
"I hate to take it, mother."
"Never mind about taking it. Pay those bills before your father learns about them. That's all."
He was divided between gratitude and indignation. His new-found maturity seemed to be slipping from him. Somehow here at home they always managed to make him feel like a small boy.
"Honestly, mother, I'd rather go to father and tell him about it. He'd make a row, probably, but at least you'd be out of it."
She ignored his protest, as she always ignored protests against her own methods of handling matters.
"I'm accustomed to it," was her sole reply. But her resigned voice brought her, as it always had, the ready tribute of the boy's sympathy. "Sit down, Graham, I want to talk to you."
He sat down, still uneasily fingering the roll of bills. Just how far Natalie's methods threatened to undermine his character was revealed when, at a sound in Clayton's room, he stuck the money hastily into his pocket.
"Have you noticed a change in your father since he came back?"
Her tone was so ominous that he started.
"He's not sick, is he?"
"Not that. But - he's different. Graham, your father thinks we may be forced into the war."
"Good for us. It's time, that's sure."
"Graham!"
"Why, good heavens, mother," he began, "we should have been in it last May. We should - "
She was holding out both hands to him, piteously.
"You wouldn't go, would you?"
"I might have to go," he evaded.
"You wouldn't, Graham. You're all I have. All I have left to live for. You wouldn't need to go. It's ridiculous. You're needed here. Your father needs you."
"He needs me the hell of a lot," the boy muttered. But he went over and, stooping down, kissed her trembling face.
"Don't worry about me," he said lightly. "I don't think we've got spine enough to get into the mix-up, anyhow. And if we have - "
"You won't go. Promise me you won't go."
When he hesitated she resorted to her old methods with both Clayton and the boy. She was doing all she could to make them happy. She made no demands, none. But when she asked for something that meant more than life to her, it was refused, of course. She had gone through all sorts of humiliation to get him that money, and this was the gratitude she received.
Graham listened. She was a really pathetic figure, crouched in her low chair, and shaken with terror. She must have rather a bad time; there were so many things she dared not take to his father. She brought them to him instead, her small grievances, her elaborate extravagances, her disappointments. It did not occur to him that she transferred to his young shoulders many of her own burdens. He was only grateful for her confidence, and a trifle bewildered by it. And she had helped him out of a hole just now.
"All right. I promise," he said at last. "But you're worrying yourself for nothing, mother."
She was quite content then, cheered at once, consulted the jewelled watch on her dressing table and rang for the maid.
"Heavens, how late it is!" she exclaimed. "Run out now, dear. And, Graham, tell Buckham to do up a dozen dinner-napkins in paper. Audrey Valentine has telephoned that she has just got in, and finds she hasn't enough. If that isn't like her!"
CHAPTER VI
Months afterward, Clayton Spencer, looking back, realized that the night of the dinner at the Chris Valentines marked the beginning of a new epoch for him. Yet he never quite understood what it was that had caused the change. All that was clear was that in retrospect he always commenced with that evening, when he was trying to trace his own course through the months that followed, with their various changes, to the momentous ones of the following Summer.
Everything pertaining to the dinner, save the food, stood out with odd distinctness. Natalie's silence during the drive, broken only by his few questions and her brief replies. Had the place looked well? Very. And was the planting going on all right? She supposed so. He had hesitated, rather discouraged. Then:
"I don't want to spoil your pleasure in the place, Natalie - " he had said, rather awkwardly. "After all, you will be there more than I shall. You'd better have it the way you like it."
She had appeared mollified at that and had relaxed somewhat. He fancied that the silence that followed was no longer resentful, that she was busily planning. But when they had almost reached the house she turned to him.
"Please don't talk war all evening, Clay," she said. "I'm so ghastly sick of it."
"All right," he agreed amiably. "Of course I can't prevent the others doing it."
"It's generally you who lead up to it. Ever since you came back you've bored everybody to death with it."
"Sorry," he said, rather stiffly. "I'll be careful."

He had a wretched feeling that she was probably right. He had come back so full of new impressions that he had probably overflowed with them. It was a very formal, extremely tall and reticent Clayton Spencer who greeted Audrey that night.

Afterward he remembered that Audrey was not quite her usual frivolous self that evening. But perhaps that was only in retrospect, in view of what he learned later. She was very daringly dressed, as usual, wearing a very low gown and a long chain and ear-rings of black opals, and as usual all the men in the room were grouped around her.

"Thank heaven for one dignified man," she exclaimed, looking up at him. "Clayton, you do give tone to my parties."

It was not until they went in to dinner that he missed Chris. He heard Audrey giving his excuses.
"He's been called out of town," she said. "Clay, you're to have his place. And the flowers are low, so I can look across and admire you."

There were a dozen guests, and things moved rapidly. Audrey's dinners were always hilarious. And Audrey herself, Clayton perceived from his place of vantage, was flirting almost riotously with the man on her left. She had two high spots of color in her cheeks, and Clayton fancied - or was that in retrospect, too? - that her gayety was rather forced. Once he caught her eyes and it seemed to him that she was trying to convey something to him.

And then, of course, the talk turned to the war, and he caught a flash of irritation on Natalie's face.
"Ask the oracle," said Audrey's clear voice, "Ask Clay. He knows all there is to know."
"I didn't hear it, but I suppose it is when the war will end?"
"Amazing perspicacity," some one said.
"I can only give you my own opinion. Ten years if we don't go in. Possibly four if we do."

There were clamors of dissent.
"None of them can hold out so long."
"If we go in it will end in six months."
"Nonsense! The Allies are victorious now:"

"I only gave an opinion," he protested. "One man's guess is just as good as another's. All I contend is that it is going on to a finish. The French and English are not going to stop until they have made the Hun pay in blood for what he has cost them."

"I wish I were a man," Audrey said suddenly. "I don't see how any man with red blood in his veins can sit still, and not take a gun and try to stop it. Sometimes I think I'll cut off my hair, and go over anyhow. I've only got one accomplishment. I can shoot. I'd like to sit in a tree somewhere and pick them off. The butchers!"

There was a roar of laughter, not so much at the words as at the fierceness with which she delivered them. Clayton, however, felt that she was in earnest and liked her the better for it. He surmised, indeed, that under Audrey's affectations there might be something rather fine if one could get at it. She looked around the table, coolly appraising every man there.

"Look at us," she said. "Here we sit, over-fed, over-dressed. Only not over-wined because I can't afford it. And probably - yes, I think actually - every man at this table is more or less making money out of it all. There's Clay making a fortune. There's Roddie, making money out of Clay. Here am I, serving Clayton's cigarettes. I don't know why I pick on you, Clay. The rest are just as bad. You're the most conspicuous, that's all."

Natalie evidently felt that the situation required saving.
"I'm sure we all send money over," she protested. "To the Belgians and all that. And if they want things we have to sell - "

"Oh, yes, I know all that," Audrey broke in, rather warily. "I know. We're the saviors of the Belgians, and we've given a lot of money and shiploads of clothes. But we're not stopping the war. And it's got to be stopped!"

Clayton watched her. Somehow what she had just said seemed to crystallize much that he had been feeling. The damnable butchery ought to be stopped.

"Right, Audrey," he supported her. "I'd give up every prospect I have if the thing could be ended now."

He meant it then. He might not have meant it, entirely, to-morrow or the day after. But he meant it then. He glanced down the table, to find Natalie looking at him with cynical amusement.

The talk veered then, but still focused on the war. It became abstract as was so much of the war talk in America in 1916. Were we, after this war was over, to continue to use the inventions of science to destroy mankind, or for its welfare? Would we ever again, in wars to come, go back to the comparative humanity of the Hague convention? Were such wickednesses as the use of poison gas, the spreading of disease germs and the killing of non-combatants, all German precedents, to inaugurate a new era of cruelty in warfare.
Was this the last war? Would there ever be a last war? Would there not always be outlaw nations, as there are outlaw individuals? Would there ever be a league of nations to enforce peace?

From that to Christianity. It had failed. On the contrary, there was a great revival of religious faith. Creeds, no. Belief, yes. Too many men were dying to permit the growth of any skepticism as to a future life. We must have it or go mad.

In the midst of that discussion Audrey rose. Her color had faded, and her smile was gone.
"I won't listen any longer," she said. "I'm ready to talk about fighting, but not about dying."

Clayton was conscious that he had had, in spite of Audrey's speech about the wine, rather more to drink than he should have. He was not at all drunk, but a certain excitement had taken the curb off his tongue. After the departure of the women he found himself, rather to his own surprise, delivering a harangue on the Germans.
"Liars and cheats," he said. And was conscious of the undivided attention of the men. "They lied when they signed the Hague Convention; they lie when they claim that they wanted peace, not war; they lie when they claim the mis-use by the Allies of the Red Cross; they lie to the world and they lie to themselves. And their peace offers will be lies. Always lies."

Then, conscious that the table was eying him curiously, he subsided into silence.

"You're a dangerous person, Clay," somebody said. "You're the kind who develops a sort of general hate, and will force the President's hand if he can. You're too old to go yourself, but you're willing to send a million or two boys over there to fight a war that is still none of our business."

"I've got a son," Clayton said sharply. And suddenly remembered Natalie. He would want to boast, she had said, that he had a son in the army. Good God, was he doing it already? He subsided into the watchful silence of a man not entirely sure of himself.

He took no liquor, and with his coffee he was entirely himself again. But he was having a reaction. He felt a sort of contemptuous scorn for the talk at the table. The guard down, they were either mouthing flamboyant patriotism or attacking the Government. It had done too much. It had done too little. Voices raised, faces flushed, they wrangled, protested, accused.

And the nation, he reflected, was like that, divided apparently hopelessly. Was there anything that would unite it, as for instance France was united? Would even war do it? Our problem was much greater, more complicated. We were of every race. And the country was founded and had grown by men who had fled from the quarrels of Europe. They had come to find peace. Was there any humanitarian principle in the world strong enough to force them to relinquish that peace?

Clayton found Audrey in the hall as they moved at last toward the drawing-room. He was the last of the line of men, and as he paused before her she touched him lightly on the arm.

"I want to talk to you, Clay. Unless you're going to play."

"I'd rather not, unless you need me."

"I don't. I'm not playing either. And I must talk to some one."

There was something wrong with Audrey. Her usual insouciance was gone, and her hands nervously fingered the opal beads of her long necklace.

"What I really want to do," she added, "is to scream. But don't look like that. I shan't do it. Suppose we go up to Chris's study."

She was always a casual hostess. Having got her parties together, and having fed them well, she consistently declined further responsibility. She kept open house, her side board and her servants at the call of her friends, but she was quite capable of withdrawing herself, without explanation, once things were moving well, to be found later by some one who was leaving, writing letters, fussing with her endless bills, or sending a check she could not possibly afford to some one in want whom she happened to have heard about. Her popularity was founded on something more substantial than her dinners.

Clayton was liking Audrey better that night than he had ever liked her, though even now he did not entirely approve of her. And to the call of any woman in trouble he always responded. It occurred to him, following her up the stairs, that not only was something wrong with Audrey, but that it was the first time he had ever known her to show weakness.

Chris's study was dark. She groped her way in and turned on the lamp, and then turned and faced him.
"I'm in an awful mess, Clay," she said. "And the worst of it is, I don't know just what sort of a mess it is."
"Are you going to tell me about it?"
"Some of it. And if I don't start to yelling like a tom-cat."
"You're not going to do that. Let me get you something."

He was terrified by her eyes. "Some aromatic ammonia." That was Natalie's cure for everything.
"I'm not going to faint. I never do. Close the door and sit down. And then - give me a hundred dollars, if you
have it. Will you?"

"Is that enough?" he asked. And drew out his black silk evening wallet, with its monogram in seed pearls. He laid the money on her knee, for she made no move to take it. She sat back, her face colorless, and surveyed him intently.

"What a comfort you are, Clay," she said. "Not a word in question. Just like that! Yet you know I don't borrow money, usually."

"The only thing that is important is that I have the money with me. Are you sure it's enough?"

"Plenty. I'll send it back in a week or so. I'm selling this house. It's practically sold. I don't know why anybody wants it. It's a poky little place. But - well, it doesn't matter about the house. I called up some people to-day who have been wanting one in this neighborhood and I'm practically sure they'll take it."

"But - you and Chris -"

"We have separated, Clay. At least, Chris has gone. There's a long story behind it. I'm not up to telling it to-night. And this money will end part of it. That's all I'm going to tell about the money. It's a small sum, isn't it, to break up a family?"

"Why, it's absurd! It's - it's horrible, Audrey."

"Oh, it isn't the money. That's a trifle. I just had to have it quickly. And when I learned I needed it of course the banks were closed. Besides, I fancy Chris had to have all there was."

Clayton was puzzled and distressed. He had not liked Chris. He had hated his cynicism, his pose of indifference. His very fastidiousness had never seemed entirely genuine. And this going away and taking all Audrey's small reserve of money -

"Where is he?"

"I don't know. I believe on his way to Canada."

"Do you mean -"

"Oh, no, he didn't steal anything. He's going to enlist in the Canadian army. Or he said so when he left."

"Look here, Audrey, you can't tell me only part of the story. Do you mean to say that Chris has had a magnificent impulse and gone to fight? Or that he's running away from something?"

"Both," said Audrey. "I'll tell you this much, Clay. Chris has got himself into a scrape. I won't tell you about that, because after all that's his story. And I'm not asking for sympathy. If you dare to pity me I'll cry, and I'll never forgive you."

"Why didn't he stay and face it like a man? Not leave you to face it."

"Because the only person it greatly concerned was myself. He didn't want to face me. The thing that is driving me almost mad is that he may be killed over there. Not because I love him so much. I think you know how things have been. But because he went to - well, I think to reinstate himself in my esteem, to show me he's a man, after all."

"Good heavens, Audrey. And you went through dinner with all this to bear!"

"I've got to carry it right along, haven't I? You know how I've been about this war, Clay. I've talked and talked about wondering how our men could stay out of it. So when the smash came, he just said he was going. He would show me there was some good stuff in him still. You see, I've really driven him to it, and if he's killed -"

A surge of resentment against the absent man rose in Clayton Spencer's mind. How like the cynicism of Chris's whole attitude that he should thrust the responsibility for his going onto Audrey. He had made her unhappy while he was with her, and now his death, if it occurred, would be a horror to her.

"I don't know why I burden you with all this," she said, rather impatiently. "I daresay it is because I knew you'd have the money. No, I don't mean that. I'd rather go to you in trouble than to any one else; that's why."

"I hope you always will."

"Oh, I shall! Don't worry." But her attempt at gayety fell flat. She lighted a cigaret from the stand beside her and fell to studying his face.

"What's happened to you?" she asked. "There's a change in you, somehow. I've noticed it ever since you came home. You ought to be smug and contented, if any man should. But you're not, are you?"

"I'm working hard. That's all. I don't want to talk about myself," he added impatiently. "What about you? What are you going to do?"

"Sell my house, pay my debts and live on my own little bit of an income."

"But, good heavens, Audrey! Chris has no right to cut off like this, and leave you. I don't know the story, but at least he must support you. A man can't just run away and evade every obligation. I think I'll have to go after him and give him a talking to."

"No!" she said, bending forward. "Don't do that. He has had a bad scare. But he's had one decent impulse, too. Let him alone, Clay."

She placed the money on the stand, and rose. As she faced him, she impulsively placed her hands on his
shoulders.

"I wish I could tell you, Clay," she said, in her low, slightly husky voice, "how very, very much I admire you. You're pretty much of a man, you know. And - there aren't such a lot of them."

For an uneasy moment he thought she was going to kiss him. But she let her hands fall, and smiling faintly, led the way downstairs. Once down, however, she voiced the under lying thought in her mind.

"If he comes out, Clay, he'll never forgive me, probably. And if he is - if he doesn't, I'll never forgive myself. So I'm damned either way."

But ten minutes later, with a man on either side of her, she was sitting at the piano with a cigaret tucked behind her ear, looking distractingly pretty and very gay and singing a slightly indecorous but very witty little French song.

Clayton Spencer, cutting in on the second rubber, wondered which of the many he knew was the real Audrey. He wondered if Chris had not married, for instance, the girl at the piano, only to find she was the woman upstairs. And he wondered, too, if that were true, why he should have had to clear out. So many men married the sort Audrey had been, in Chris's little study, only to find that after all the thing they had thought they were getting was a pose, and it was the girl at the piano after all.

He missed her, somewhat later. She was gone a full half hour, and he fancied her absence had something to do with the money she had borrowed.

CHAPTER VII

Two things helped greatly to restore Clayton to a more normal state of mind during the next few days. One of them undoubtedly was the Valentine situation. Beside Audrey's predicament and Chris's wretched endeavor to get away and yet prove himself a man, his own position seemed, if not comfortable, at least tenable. He would have described it, had he been a man to put such a thing into words, as that "he and Natalie didn't exactly hit it off."

There were times, too, during those next few days, when he wondered if he had not exaggerated their incompatibility. Natalie was unusually pleasant. She spent some evening hours on the arm of his big chair, talking endlessly about the Linndale house, and he would lean back, smiling, and pretend to a mad interest in black and white tiles and loggias.

He made no further protest as to the expense.

"Tell me," he said once, "what does a fellow wear in this - er - Italian palace? If you have any intention of draping me in a toga and putting vine leaves in my hair, or whatever those wreaths were made of -!"

Natalie had no sense of humor, however. She saw that he meant to be amusing, and she gave the little fleeting smile one gives to a child who is being rather silly.

"Of course," he went on, "we'll have Roman baths, and be anointed with oil afterwards by lady Greek slaves. Perfumed oil."

"Don't be vulgar, Clay." And he saw she was really offended.

While there was actually no change in their relationship, which remained as it had been for a dozen years, their surface life was pleasanter. And even that small improvement cheered him greatly. He was thankful for such a peace, even when he knew that he had bought it at a heavy price.

The other was his work. The directorate for the new munition plant had been selected, and on Thursday of that week he gave a dinner at his club to the directors. It had been gratifying to him to find how easily his past reputation carried the matter of the vast credits needed, how absolutely his new board deferred to his judgment. The dinner became, in a way, an ovation. He was vastly pleased and a little humbled. He wanted terribly to make good, to justify their faith in him. They were the big financial men of his time, and they were agreeing to back his judgment to the fullest extent.

When the dinner was over, a few of the younger men were in no mood to go home. They had dined and wined, and the night was young. Denis Nolan, who had been present as the attorney for the new concern, leaned back in his chair and listened to them with a sort of tolerant cynicism.

"Oh, go home, you fellows," he said at last. "You make me sick. Enough's enough. Why the devil does every dinner like this have to end in a debauch?"

In the end, however, both he and Clayton went along. Clayton at least frankly anxious to keep an eye on one or two of them until they started home. He had the usual standards, of course, except for himself. A man's private life, so long as he was not a bounder, concerned him not at all. But this had been his dinner. He meant to see it through. Once or twice he had seen real tragedy come to men as a result of the recklessness of long dinners, many toasts and the instinct to go on and make a night of it.

Afterward they went to a midnight roof-garden, and at first it was rather dreary. Their youth was only comparative after all, and the eyes of the girls who danced and sang passed over them, to rest on boys in their twenties.

Nolan chuckled.
"Pathetic!" he said. "The saddest sight in the world! Every one of you here would at this moment give up everything he's got to be under thirty."

"Oh, shut up!" some one said, almost savagely.

"Of course, there are compensations," he drawled. "At twenty you want to take the entire bunch home and keep 'em. At thirty you know you can't, but you still want to. At forty and over you don't want them at all, but you think it's damned curious they don't want you."

Clayton had watched the scene with a rather weary interest. He was, indeed, trying to put himself in Graham's place, at Graham's age. He remembered once, at twenty, having slipped off to see "The Black Crook," then the epitome of wickedness, and the disillusionment of seeing women in tights with their accentuated curves and hideous lack of appeal to the imagination. The caterers of such wares had learned since then. Here were soft draperies instead, laces and chiffons. The suggestion was not to the eyes but to the mind. How devilishly clever it all was.

Perhaps there were some things he ought to discuss with Graham. He wondered how a man led up to such a thing.

Nolan bent toward him.

"I've been watching for a girl," he said, "but I don't see her. Last time I was here I came with Chris. She was his girl."

"Chris!"

"Yes. It stumped me, at first. She came and sat with us, not a bad little thing, but - Good Lord, Clay, ignorant and not even pretty! And Chris was fastidious, in a way. I don't understand it."

The ancient perplexity of a man over the sex selections of his friends puckered his forehead.

"Dammed if I understand it," he repeated.

A great wave of pity for Audrey Valentine surged in Clayton Spencer's heart. She had known it, of course; that was why Chris had gone away. How long had she known it? She was protecting Chris's name, even now. For all her frivolity, there was something rather big in Audrey. The way she had held up at her dinner, for instance - and he rather fancied that the idea of his going into the army had come from her, directly or indirectly. So Chris, from being a fugitive, was already by way of being a hero to his friends.

Poor Audrey!

He made a mental note to send her some flowers in the morning.

He ordered them on his way down-town, and for some curious reason she was in his mind most of the day. Chris had been a fool to throw away a thing so worth having. Not every man had behind him a woman of Audrey's sort.

CHAPTER VIII

That afternoon, accompanied by a rather boyishly excited elderly clergyman, he took two hours off from the mill and purchased a new car for Doctor Haverford.

The rector was divided between pleasure at the gift and apprehension at its cost, but Clayton, having determined to do a thing, always did it well.

"Nonsense," he said. "My dear man, the church has owed you this car for at least ten years. If you get half the pleasure out of using it that I'm having in presenting it to you, it will be well worth while. I only wish you'd let me endow the thing. It's likely to cost you a small fortune."

Doctor Haverford insisted that he could manage that. He stood off, surveying with pride not unmixed with fear its bright enamel, its leather linings, the complicated system of dials and bright levers which filled him with apprehension.

"Delight says I must not drive it," he said. "She is sure I would go too fast, and run into things. She is going to drive for me."

"How is Delight?"

"I wish you could see her, Clayton. She - well, all young girls are lovely, but sometimes I think Delight is lovelier than most. She is much older than I am, in many ways. She looks after me like a mother. But she has humor, too. She has been drawing the most outrageous pictures of me arrested for speeding, and she has warned me most gravely against visiting road houses!"

"But Delight will have to be taught, if she is to run the car."

"The salesman says they will send some one."

"They give one lesson, I believe. That's not enough. I think Graham could show her some things. He drives well."

Flying uptown a little later in Clayton's handsome car, the rector dreamed certain dreams. First his mind went to his parish visiting list, so endless, so never cleaned up, and now about to be made a pleasure instead of a penance. And into his mind, so strangely compounded of worldliness and spirituality, came a further dream - of Delight and Graham Spencer - of ease at last for the girl after the struggle to keep up appearances of a clergyman's family in a
wealthy parish.

Money had gradually assumed an undue importance in his mind. Every Sunday, every service, he dealt in money. He reminded his people of the church debt. He begged for various charities. He tried hard to believe that the money that came in was given to the Lord, but he knew perfectly well that it went to the janitor and the plumber and the organist. He watched the offertory after the sermon, and only too often as he stood waiting, before raising it before the altar, he wondered if the people felt that they had received their money's worth.

He had started life with a dream of service, but although his own sturdy faith persisted, he had learned the cost of religion in dollars and cents. So, going up town, he wondered if Clayton would increase his church subscription, now that things were well with him.

"After all," he reflected, "war is not an unmixed evil," and outlined a sermon, to be called the Gains of War, and subsequently reprinted in pamphlet form and sold for the benefit of the new altar fund. He instructed Jackson to drive to the parish house instead of to the rectory, so that he might jot down the headings while they were in his mind. They ran like this: Spiritual growth; the nobility of sacrifice; the pursuit of an ideal; the doctrine of thy brother's keeper.

He stopped to speak to Jackson from the pavement.

"I daresay we shall be in frequent difficulties with that new car of ours, Jackson," he said genially. "I may have to ask you to come round and explain some of its mysterious interior to me."

Jackson touched his cap.

"Thank you, sir, I'll be glad to come. But I am leaving Mr. Spencer soon."

"Leaving!"

"Going back to the army, sir."

In the back of his mind the rector had been depending on Jackson, and he felt vaguely irritated.

"I'm sorry to hear it. I'd been counting on you."

"Very sorry, sir. I'm not leaving immediately."

"I sometimes think," observed the rector, still ruffled, "that a man's duty is not always what it appears on the surface. To keep Mr. Spencer - er - comfortable, while he is doing his magnificent work for the Allies, may be less spectacular, but it is most important."

Jackson smiled, a restrained and slightly cynical smile.

"That's a matter for a man's conscience, isn't it, sir?" he asked. And touching his cap again, moved off. Doctor Haverford felt reproved. Worse than that, he felt justly reproved. He did not touch the Gains of War that afternoon.

In the gymnasium he found Delight, captaining a basket-ball team. In her knickers and middy blouse she looked like a little girl, and he stood watching her as, flushed and excited, she ran round the long room. At last she came over and dropped onto the steps at his feet.

"Well?" she inquired, looking up. "Did you get it?"

"I did, indeed. A beauty, Delight."

"A flivver?"

"Not at all. A very handsome car." He told her the make, and she flushed again with pleasure.

"Joy and rapture!" she said. "Did you warn him I am to drive it?"

"I did. He suggests that Graham give you some lessons."

"Graham!"

"Why not?"

"He'll be bored to insanity. That's all. You - you didn't suggest it, did you, daddy?"

With all her adoration of her father, Delight had long recognized under his real spirituality a certain quality of worldly calculation. That, where it concerned her, it was prompted only by love did not make her acceptance of it easier.

"Certainly not," said the rector, stiffly.

"Graham's changed, you know. He used to be a nice little kid. But he's - I don't know what it is. Spoiled, I suppose."

"He'll steady down, Delight."

She looked up at him with clear, slightly humorous eyes.

"Don't get any queer ideas about Graham Spencer and me, Daddy," she said. "In the first place, I intend to choose my own husband. He's to look as much as possible like you, but a trifle less nose. And in the second place, after I've backed the car into a telegraph pole; and turned it over in a ditch, Graham Spencer is just naturally going to know I am no woman to tie to."

She got up and smiled at him.

"Anyhow, I wouldn't trust him with the communion service," she added, and walking out onto the floor, blew
shrilly on her whistle. The rector watched her with growing indignation. These snap judgments of youth! The easy
damning of the young! They left no room for argument. They condemned and walked away, leaving careful plans in
ruin behind them.

And Delight, having gone so far, went further. She announced that evening at dinner that she would under no
circumstances be instructed by Graham Spencer. Her mother ventured good-humored remonstrance.

"The way to learn to drive a car," said Delight, "is to get into it and press a few things, and when it starts, keep
on going. You've got to work it out for yourself."

And when Clayton, calling up with his usual thoughtfulness that evening, offered Graham as instructor, she
refused gratefully but firmly.

"You're a dear to think of it," she said, "and you're a dear to have given Daddy the car. But I'm just naturally
going to fight it out in my own way if it takes all winter."

Natalie, gathering her refusal from Clayton's protest, had heaved a sigh of relief. Not that she objected to Delight
Haverford. She liked her as much as she liked and understood any young girl, which was very little. But she did not
want Graham to marry. To marry would be to lose him. And again, watching Clayton's handsome head above his
newspaper, she reflected that Graham was all she had.

Nevertheless, Delight received a lesson in driving from Graham, and that within two days.

On Saturday afternoon, finding the mill getting on his nerves, Clayton suggested to Graham what might be the
last golf of the autumn and Graham consented cheerfully enough. For one thing, the offices closed at noon, and
Anna Klein had gone. He was playing a little game with Anna - a light-hearted matter of a glance now and then
cought and held, a touched hand, very casually done, and an admiring comment now and then on her work. And
Anna was blossoming like a flower. She sat up late to make fresh white blouses for the office, and rose early to have
abundance of time to dress. She had taken to using a touch of rouge, too, although she put it on after she reached the
mill, and took it off before she started for home.

Her father, sullen and irritable these days, would have probably beaten her for using it.

But Anna had gone, and a telephone call to Marion Hayden had told him she was not at home. He thought it
possible she had gone to the country club, and accepted his father's suggestion of golf willingly.

From the moment he left the mill Anna had left his mind. He was at that period when always in the back of his
mind there was a girl. During the mill hours the girl was Anna, because she was there. In the afternoon it was
Marion, just then, but even at that there were entire evenings when, at the theater, a pretty girl in the chorus held and
absorbed his entire attention - or at a dance a debutante, cloudy and mysterious in white chiffon, bounded his
universe for a few hours.

On this foundation of girl he built the superstructure of his days. Not evil, but wholly irresponsible. The urge of
vital youth had caught him and held him. And Clayton, sitting that day beside him in the car, while Graham drove
and the golf clubs rattled in their bags at his feet, remembered again the impulses of his own adolescence, and
wondered. There had been a time when he would have gone to the boy frankly, with the anxieties he was beginning
to feel. There were so many things he wanted to tell the boy. So many warnings he should have.

But Natalie had stolen him. That was what it amounted to. She had stolen his confidence, as only a selfish
woman could. And against that cabal of mother and son he felt helpless. It was even more than that. As against
Natalie's indulgence he did not wish to pose as a mentor pointing out always the way of duty.

"How old are you, Graham?" he said suddenly.

"Twenty-two." Graham glanced at him curiously. His father knew his age, of course.

"I was married at your age."

"Tough luck," said Graham. And then: "I'm sorry, father, I didn't mean that. But it's pretty early, isn't it? No time
for a good time, or anything."

"I fancy Nature meant men to marry young, don't you? It saves a lot of - complications."

"The girl a fellow marries at that age isn't often the one he'd marry at thirty," said Graham. And feeling that he
had said the wrong thing, changed the subject quickly. Clayton did not try to turn it back into its former channel.
The boy was uncomfortable, unresponsive. There was a barrier between them, of self-consciousness on his part, of
evasion and discomfort on Graham's.

On the way over they had sighted Delight in the new car. She had tried to turn, had backed into a ditch and was
at that moment ruefully surveying a machine which had apparently sat down on its rear wheels with its engine
pointed pathetically skyward.

Delight's face fell when she recognized them.

"Of course it would have to be you," she said. "Of all the people who might have seen my shame - I'm going on
with you. I never want to see the old thing again."

"Anything smashed?" Graham inquired.
"It looks smashed. I can't tell."

It was not until the car was out of the ditch, and Clayton had driven off in Graham's car toward the club that Delight remembered her father's voice the day he had told her Graham would teach her to drive. She stiffened and he was quick to see the change in her manner. The total damage was one flat tire, and while the engine was inflating it, he looked at her. She had grown to be quite pretty. His eyes approved her.

"Better let me come round and give you a few lessons, Delight."
"I'd rather learn by myself, if you don't mind."
"You'll have a real smash unless you learn properly."

But she remained rather obstinately silent.

"What's the matter with me, Delight? You're not exactly crazy about me, are you?"
"That's silly. I don't know anything about you any more."

"That's your fault. You know I've been away for four years, and since I came back I haven't seen much of you. But, if you'll let me come round - "
"You can come if you like. You'll be bored, probably."
"You're being awfully nasty, you know. Here I come to pull you out of a ditch and generally rescue you, and - Come, now, Delight, what is it? There's something. We used to be pals."

"I don't know, Graham," she said truthfully. "I only know - well, I hear things, of course. Nothing very bad. Just little things. I wish you wouldn't insist. It's idiotic. What does it matter what I think?"

Graham flushed. He knew well enough one thing she had heard. Her father and mother had been at dinner the other night, and he had had too much to drink.

"Sorry."

He stopped the pump and put away the tools, all in silence. Good heavens, was all the world divided into two sorts of people: the knockers - and under that heading he placed his father, Delight, and all those who occasionally disapproved of him - and the decent sort who liked a fellow and understood him?

But his training had been too good to permit him to show his angry scorn. He made an effort and summoned a smile.

"All ready," he said. "And since you won't let me teach you, perhaps I'd better take you home."
"You were going to the club."
"Oh, that's all right. Father's probably found some one."

But she insisted that he drive them both to the club, and turn the car round there. Then, with a grinding of gear levers that made him groan, she was off toward home, leaving Graham staring after her.

"Well, can you beat it?" he inquired of the empty air. "Can you beat it?"

And wounded in all the pride of new manhood, he joined Marion and her rather riotous crowd around the fire inside the clubhouse. Clayton had given him up and was going around alone, followed by a small caddie. The links were empty, and the caddie lonely. He ventured small bits of conversation now and then, looking up with admiration at Clayton's tall figure. And, after a little, Clayton took the bag from him and used him only for retrieving balls. The boy played round, whistling.

"Kinda quiet to-day, ain't it?" he offered, trudging a foot or two behind.
"It is, rather, young man."

"Mostly on Saturdays I caddie for Mr. Valentine. But he's gone to the war."

"Oh, he has, has he?" Clayton built a small tee, and placed his ball on it. "Well, maybe we'll all be going some day."

He drove off and started after the ball. It was not until he was on the green that he was conscious of the boy beside him again.

"How old d'you have to be to get into the army, Mr. Spencer?" inquired the caddie, anxiously.

Clayton looked at him quizzically.

"Want to try for it, do you? Well, I'm afraid you'll have to wait a bit."

"I'm older than I look, Mr. Spencer."

"How old are you?"

"Sixteen."

"Afraid you'll have to wait a while," said Clayton and achieved a well-nigh perfect long putt.

"I'd just like to get a whack at them Germans," offered the boy, and getting no response, trudged along again at his heels.

Suddenly it struck Clayton as rather strange that, in all the time since his return from Europe, only four people had shown any but a sort of academic interest in the war, and that, ironically enough, a German had been the first to make a sacrifice for principle. Chris had gone, to get out of trouble. The little caddie wanted to go, to get a "whack"
at the madmen of Europe. And Jackson, the chauffeur, was going, giving up his excellent wages to accept the thirty-
odd dollars a month of a non-com, from a pure sense of responsibility.

But, among the men he knew best, in business and in the clubs, the war still remained a magnificent spectacle. A
daily newspaper drama.

Suddenly Clayton saw Audrey Valentine. She was swinging toward him, her bag with its clubs slung over her
shoulder, her hands in the pockets of an orange-colored sweater. In her black velvet tam and short skirt she had
looked like a little girl, and at first he did not recognize her. She had seen him, however, and swung toward him.

"Hello, Clay," she called, when they were within hailing distance. "Bully shot, that last."

"Where's your caddie?"

"I didn't want one. I had a feeling that, if I took one, and he lost a ball in these impecunious times of mine, I'd
murder him. Saw you at the fifth hole. I'd know your silhouette anywhere."

Under her rakish cap her eyes were rather defiant. She did not want pity; she almost dared him to pity her.

"Come round again with me, Audrey, won't you?"

"I'm off my game to-day. I'll wander along, if you don't mind. I'll probably sneeze or something when you're
driving, of course."

"Nothing," he said, gravely approaching his ball, "so adds distance to my drive as a good explosive sneeze just
behind it."

They talked very little. Audrey whistled as she walked along with the free swinging step that was characteristic
of her, and Clayton was satisfied merely to have her companionship. She was not like some women; a man didn't
have to be paying her compliments or making love to her. She even made no comments on his shots, and after a time
that rather annoyed him.

"Well?" he demanded, after an excellent putt. "Was that good or wasn't it?"

"Very good," she said gravely. "I am only surprised when you do a thing badly. Not when you do it well."

He thought that over.

"Have you anything in mind that I do badly? I mean, particularly in mind."

"Not very much." But after a moment: "Why don't you make Natalie play golf?"

"She hates it."

He rather wondered if she thought Natalie was one of the things he managed badly.

The sense of companionship warmed him. Although neither of them realized it, their mutual loneliness and
dissatisfaction had brought them together, and mentally at least they were clinging, each desperately to the other.

But their talk was disjointed:

"I'll return that hundred soon. I've sold the house."

"I wish you wouldn't worry about it. It's ridiculous, Audrey."

And, a hundred yards or so further on, "They wouldn't have Chris in Canada. His heart. He's going into the
French Ambulance service."

"Good for Chris."

But she came out very frankly, when they started back to the clubhouse.

"It's done me a lot of good, meeting you, Clay. There's something so big and solid and dependable about you. I
wonder - I suppose you don't mind my using you as a sort of anchor to windward?"

"Good heavens, Audrey! If I could only do something."

"You don't have to do a thing." She smiled up at him, and her old audacity was quite gone. "You've just got to
be. And - you don't have to send me flowers, you know. I mean, I understand that you're sorry for me, without that.
You're the only person in the world I'd allow to be sorry for me."

He was touched. There was no coquetry in her manner. She paid her little tribute quite sincerely and frankly.

"I've been taking stock to-day," she went on, "and I put you among my assets. One reliable gentleman, six feet
tall, weight about a hundred and seventy, in good condition. Heavens, what a lot of liabilities you had to off-set!"

He stopped and looked down at her.

"Audrey dear," he said, "what am I to say to all that? What can I do? How can I help?"

"You might tell me - No, that's silly."

"What is silly?"

But she did not answer. She called "Joey!" and gave him her clubs.

"Joey wants to be a soldier," she observed.

"So he says."

"I want to be a soldier, too, Clay. A good soldier."

He suspected that she was rather close to unusual tears.

As they approached the clubhouse they saw Graham and Marion Hayden standing outside. Graham was absentley
dropping balls and swinging at them. It was too late when Clayton saw the danger and shouted sharply.

A ball caught the caddie on the side of the head and he dropped like a shot.

All through that night Clayton and Audrey Valentine sat by the boy's white bed in the hospital. Clayton knew Graham was waiting outside, but he did not go out to speak to him. He was afraid of himself, afraid in his anger that he would widen the breach between them.

Early in the evening Natalie had come, in a great evening-coat that looked queerly out of place, but she had come, he knew, not through sympathy for the thin little figure on the bed, but as he had known she would come, to plead for Graham. And her cry of joy when the surgeons had said the boy would live was again for Graham.

She had been too engrossed to comment on Audrey's presence there, and Audrey had gone out immediately and left them together. Clayton was forced, that night, to an unwilling comparison of Natalie with another woman. On the surface of their lives, where only they met, Natalie had always borne comparison well. But here was a new standard to measure by, and another woman, a woman with hands to serve and watchful, intelligent eyes, outmeasured her.

Not that Clayton knew all this. He felt, in a vague way, that Natalie was out of place there, and he felt, even more strongly, that she had not the faintest interest in the still figure on its white bed - save as it touched Graham and herself.

He was resentful, too, that she felt it necessary to plead with him for his own boy. Good God, if she felt that way about him, no wonder Graham -

She had placed a hand on Clayton's arm, as he sat in that endless vigil, and bent down to whisper, although no sound would have penetrated that death-like stupor.

"It was an accident, Clay," she pled. "You know Graham's the kindest soul in the world. You know that, Clay."

"He had been drinking." His voice sounded cold and strained to his own ears.

"Not much. Almost nothing. Toots says positively."

"Then I'd rather he had been, Natalie. If he drove that ball out of wanton indifference - "

"He didn't see the boy."

"He should have looked."

In her anger she ceased her sibilant whispering, and stood erect.

"I told him you'd be hard," she said. "He's outside, half-sick with fright, because he is afraid. Afraid of you," she added, and went out, her silks rustling in the quiet corridor.

She had gone away soon after that, the nurse informed him. And toward dawn Clayton left Audrey in the sick room and found Graham. He was asleep in a chair in the waiting-room, and looked boyish and very tired. Clayton's heart contracted.

He went back to his vigil, and let Graham sleep on.

Some time later he roused from a doze in his chair. Graham was across the bed from him, looking down. Audrey was gone. And the injured boy stirred and opened his eyes.

"H-hello, Joey," said Graham, with a catch in his voice.

Joey lay still, his eyes taking in his new surroundings. Then he put out a hand and touched the bandage on his head.

"What I got on?" he demanded, faintly.

Graham caught his father's eyes across the bed, and smiled a shaky, tremulous smile.

"I guess he's all right, Father," he said. And suddenly crumpled up beside the bed, and fell into a paroxysm of silent sobbing. With his arm around the boy's shoulders, Clayton felt in that gray dawn the greatest thankfulness of his life. Joey would live. That cup was taken from his boy's lips. And he and Graham were together again, close together. The boy's grip on his hand was tight. Please God, they would always be together from now on.

CHAPTER IX

Clayton did not care to tell Natalie of Chris's flight. She would learn it soon enough, he knew, and he felt unwilling to discuss the affair as Natalie would want to discuss it. Not that he cared about Chris, but he had begun to feel a protective interest in Audrey Valentine, an interest that had in it a curious aversion to hearing her name in connection with Chris's sordid story.

He and Natalie met rarely in the next few days. He dined frequently at his club with men connected in various ways with the new enterprise, and transacted an enormous amount of business over the dinner or luncheon table. Natalie's door was always closed on those occasions when he returned, and he felt that with the stubbornness characteristic of her she was still harboring resentment against him for what he had said at the hospital.

He knew she was spending most of her days at Linndale, and he had a vague idea that she and Rodney together had been elaborating still further on the plans for the house. It was the furtiveness of it rather than the fact itself that troubled him. He was open and straightforward himself. Why couldn't Natalie be frank with him?
It was Mrs. Haverford, punctually paying her dinner-call in an age which exacts dinner-calls no longer - even from its bachelors - who brought Natalie the news of Chris's going. Natalie, who went down to see her with a mental protest, found her at a drawing-room window, making violent signals at somebody without, and was unable to conceal her amazement.

"It's Delight," explained Mrs. Haverford. "She's driving me round. She won't come in, and she's forgotten her fur coat. And it's simply bitter outside. Well, my dear, how are you?"

Natalie was well, and said so. She was conscious that Mrs. Haverford was listening with only half an ear, and indeed, a moment later she had risen again and hurried to the window.

"Natalie!" she cried. "Do come and watch. She's turning the car. We do think she drives wonderfully. Only a few days, too."

"Why won't she come in?"
"I'm sure I don't know. Unless she is afraid Graham may be here."
"What in the world has Graham got to do with it?" Natalie's voice was faintly scornful.
"I was going to ask you that, Natalie. Have they quarreled, or anything?"
"I don't think they meet at all, do they?"
"They met once since Clayton gave Doctor Haverford the car. Graham helped her when she had got into a ditch, I believe. And I thought perhaps they had quarreled about something."
"That would imply a degree of intimacy that hardly exists, does it?" Natalie said, sharply.
But Mrs. Haverford had not fought the verbal battles of the parish for twenty years in vain.
"It was the day of that unfortunate incident at the country club, Natalie."
Natalie colored.
"Accident, rather than incident."
"How is the poor child?"
"He is quite well again," Natalie said impatiently "I can not understand the amount of fuss every one makes over the boy. He ran in front of where Graham was driving and got what he probably deserved."
"I understand Clayton has given him a position."
"He has made him an office boy."
"How like dear Clayton!" breathed Mrs. Haverford, and counted the honors as hers. But she had not come to quarrel.
"Are you certain?"
"It's town talk, my dear. Doctor Haverford spoke to Clayton about it some days ago. He rather gathered Clayton already knew."

That, too, was like dear Clayton, Natalie reflected bitterly. He had told her nothing. In her heart she added secretiveness to the long list of Clayton's deficiencies toward her.

"Personally, I imagine they were heavily in debt," Mrs. Haverford went on. "They had been living beyond their means, of course. I like Mrs. Valentine, but I do think, to drive a man to his death, or what may be his death - "
"I don't believe it. I don't believe he went to fight, anyway. He was probably in some sort of a scrape."
"She has sold her house."
Natalie's impulse of sympathy toward Audrey was drowned in her rising indignation. That all this could happen and Audrey not let her know was incredible.

"I haven't seen her recently," she said coldly.
"Nobody has. I do think she might have seen her clergyman. There is a time when only the church can give us the comfort we need, my dear."
And whatever Mrs. Haverford's faults, she meant that quite simply.
"And you say Clay knew?"
"It's rather likely he would. They were golfing together, weren't they, when that caddie was hurt?"
Natalie was not a jealous woman. She had, for years, taken Clay's faithfulness for granted, and her own
complacency admitted no chance of such a possibility. But she was quick to realize that she had him at a
disadvantage.

"How long have you known it?" she asked him that night, when, after the long dinner was over, she sat with her
elbows on the table and faced him across the candles.

He was tired and depressed, and his fine face looked drawn. But he roused and smiled across at her. He had
begun to have a feeling that he must make up to Natalie for something - he hardly knew for what.

"Known what, dear?"

"About Chris and Audrey?"

He was fundamentally honest, so he answered her directly.

"Since the day Chris left."

"When was that?"

"The day we dined there."

"And Audrey told you?"

"She had to, in a way. I'm sure she'll tell you herself. She's been rather hiding away, I imagine."

"Why did she have to tell you?"

"If you want the exact truth, she borrowed a small sum from me, as the banks were closed, naturally. There was
some emergency - I don't know what."

"She borrowed from you!"

"A very small amount, my dear. Don't look like that, Natalie. She knew I generally carried money with me."

"Oh, I'm not jealous! Audrey probably thinks of you as a sort of grandfather, anyhow. It's not that. It is your
keeping the thing from me."

"It was not my secret."

But Natalie was jealous. She had that curious jealousy of her friends which some women are cursed with, of
being first in their regard and their confidence. A slow and smoldering anger against Audrey, which had nothing
whatever to do with Clayton, darkened her eyes.

"I'm through with Audrey. That's all," she said.

And the man across regarded her with a sort of puzzled wonder.

Her indignation against Clayton took the form of calculation; and she was quick to pursue her advantage. In the
library she produced the new and enlarged plans for the house.

"Roddie says he has tried to call you at the mill, but you are always out of your office. So he sent these around
to-day."

True to the resolution he had made that night in the hospital, he went over them carefully. And even their
magnitude, while it alarmed him, brought no protest from him. After all the mill and the new plant were his toys to
play with. He found there something to fill up the emptiness of his life. If a great house was Natalie's ambition, if it
gave her pleasure and something to live for, she ought to have it.

She had prepared herself for a protest, but he made none, even when the rather startling estimate was placed
before him.

"I just want you to be happy, my dear," he said. "But I hope you'll arrange not to run over the estimate. It is
being pretty expensive as it is. But after all, success doesn't mean anything, unless we are going to get something out
of it."

They were closer together that evening than they had been for months. And at last he fell to talking about the
mill. Natalie, curled up on the chaise longue in her boudoir, listened attentively, but with small comprehension as he
poured out his dream, for himself now, for Graham later. A few years more and he would retire. Graham could take
hold then. He might even go into politics. He would be fifty then, and a man of fifty should be in his prime. And to
retire and do nothing was impossible. A fellow went to seed.

Eyes on the wood fire, he talked on until at last, roused by Natalie's silence, he glanced up. She was sound
asleep.

Some time later, in his dressing-gown and slippers, he came and roused her. She smiled up at him like a drowsy
child.

"Awfully tired," she said. "Is Graham in?"

"Not yet."

She held up her hands, and he drew her to her feet.

"You've been awfully dear about the house," she said. And standing on tiptoe, she kissed him on the cheek. Still
holding both her hands, he looked down at her gravely.

"Do you really think that, Natalie?"

"Of course."
"Then - will you do something in return?"
Her eyes became shrewd, watchful.
"Anything in reason."
"Don't, don't, dear, make Graham afraid of me."
"As if I did! If he is afraid of you, it is your own fault."
"Perhaps it is. But I try - good God, Natalie, I do try. He needs a curb now and then. All boys do. But if we could only agree on it - don't you see how it is now?"

He asked, trying to reason gently with her. "All the discipline comes from me, all the indulgence from you. And - I don't want to lose my boy, my dear."

She freed her hands.

"So we couldn't even have one happy evening!" she said. "I won't quarrel with you, Clay. And I won't be tragic over Graham. If you'll just be human to him, he'll come out all right."

She went into her bedroom, the heavy lace of her negligee trailing behind her, and closed the door.

Clayton had a visitor the next morning at the mill, a man named Dunbar, who marked on his visitors' slip, under the heading of his business with the head of the concern, the words, "Private and confidential."

Clayton, looking up, saw a small man, in a suit too large for him, and with ears that projected wide on either side of a shrewd, rather humorous face.

"Mr. Spencer?"
"Yes. Sit down, please."

Even through the closed window the noise of the mill penetrated. The yard-engine whistled shrilly. The clatter of motor-trucks, the far away roar of the furnaces, the immediate vicinity of many typewriters, made a very bedlam of sound. Mr. Dunbar drew his chair closer, and laid a card on the desk.

"My credentials," he explained.

Clayton read the card.

"Very well, Mr. Dunbar. What can I do for you?"

Dunbar fixed him with shrewd, light eyes, and bent forward.

"Have you had any trouble in your mill, Mr. Spencer?"

"None whatever."

"Are you taking any measures to prevent trouble?"

"I had expected to. Not that I fear anything, but of course no one can tell. We have barely commenced to get lined up for our new work."

"May I ask the nature of the precautions?"

Clayton told him, with an uneasy feeling that Mr. Dunbar was finding them childish and inefficient.

"Exactly," said his visitor. "And well enough as far as they go. They don't go far enough. The trouble with you manufacturers is that you only recognize one sort of trouble, and that's a strike. I suppose you know that the Kaiser has said, if we enter the war, that he need not send an army here at all. That his army is here already, armed and equipped."

"Bravado," said Clayton.

"I wonder!

Mr. Dunbar reached into his breast pocket, and produced a long typed memorandum.

"You might just glance at that."

Clayton read it carefully. It was a list of fires, mostly in granaries and warehouses, and the total loss was appalling.

"All German work," said his visitor. "Arson, for the Fatherland. All supplies for the Allies, you see. I've got other similar lists, here, all German devilry. And they're only commencing. If we go into the war - "

The immediate result of the visit was that Clayton became a member of a protective league which undertook, with his cooperation, to police and guard the mill. But Mr. Dunbar's last words left him thinking profoundly.

"We're going to be in it, that's sure. And soon. And Germany's army is here. It's not only Germans either. It's the I.W.W., for one thing. We've got a list through the British post-office censor, of a lot of those fellows who are taking German money to-day. They're against everything. Not only work. They're against law and order. And they're likely to raise hell."

He rose to leave.

"How do your Germans like making shells for the Allies?" he asked.

"We haven't a great many. We've had no trouble. One man resigned - a boss roller. That's all."

"Watch him. He's got a grievance."

"He's been here a long time. I haven't an idea he'd do us any harm. It was a matter of principle with him."

"Oh, it's a matter of principle with all of them. They can justify themselves seven ways to the ace. Keep an eye
on him, or let us do it for you.”

Clayton sat for some time after Dunbar had gone. Was it possible that Klein, or men like Klein, old employees and faithful for years, could be reached by the insidious wickedness of Germany? It was incredible. But then the whole situation was incredible; that a peaceful and home-loving people, to all appearances, should suddenly shed the sheep skin of years of dissimulation, and appear as the wolves of the world.

One of his men had died on the Lusitania, a quiet little chap, with a family in the suburbs and a mania for raising dahlias. He had been in the habit of bringing in his best specimens, and putting them in water on Clayton's desk. His pressed glass vase was still there, empty.

Then his mind went back to Herman Klein. He had a daughter in the mill. She was earning the livelihood for the family now, temporarily. And the Germans were thrifty. If for no other reason he thought Klein would not imperil either his daughter's safety or her salary.

There was a good bit of talk about German hate, but surely there was no hate in Klein.

Something else Dunbar had said stuck in his mind.

"We've got to get wise, and soon. It's too big a job for the regular departments to handle. Every city in the country and every town ought to have a civilian organization to watch and to fight it if it has to. They're hiding among us everywhere, and every citizen has got to be a sleuth, if we're to counter their moves. Every man his own detective!"

He had smiled as he said it, but Clayton had surmised a great earnestness and considerable knowledge behind the smile.

CHAPTER X

Delight Haverford was to come out in December, but there were times when the Doctor wondered if she was really as keen about it as she pretended to be. He found her once or twice, her usually active hands idle in her lap, and a pensive droop to her humorous young mouth.

"Tired, honey?" he asked, on one of those occasions.

"No. Just talking to myself."

"Say a few nice things for me, while you're about it, then."

"Nice things! I don't deserve them."

"What awful crime have you been committing? Break it to me gently. You know my weak heart."

"Your tobacco heart!" she said, severely. "Well, I've been committing a mental murder, if you want to know the facts. Don't protest. It's done. She's quite dead already."

"Good gracious! And I have reared this young viper! Who is she?"

"I don't intend to make you an accessory, daddy."

But behind her smile he felt a real hurt. He would have given a great deal to have taken her in his arms and tried to coax out her trouble so he might comfort her. But that essential fineness in him which his worldliness only covered like a veneer told him not to force her confidence. Only, he wandered off rather disconsolately to hunt his pipe and to try to realize that Delight was now a woman grown, and liable to woman's heart-aches.

"What do you think it is?" he asked that night, when after her nightly custom Mrs. Haverford had reached over from the bed beside his and with a single competent gesture had taken away his book and switched off his reading lamp, and he had, with the courage of darkness, voiced a certain uneasiness.

"Who do you think it is, you mean."

"Very well, only the word is 'whom.'"

Mrs. Haverford ignored this.

"It's that Hayden girl," she said. "Toots. And Graham Spencer."

"Do you think that Delight - "

"She always has. For years."

Which was apparently quite clear to them both.

"If it had only been a nice girl," Mrs. Haverford protested, plaintively. "But Toots! She's fast, I'm sure of it."

"My dear!"

"And that boy needs a decent girl, if anybody ever did. A shallow mother, and a money-making father - all Toots Hayden wants is his money. She's ages older than he is. I hear he is there every day and all of Sundays."

The rector had precisely as much guile as a turtle dove, and long, after Mrs. Haverford gave unmistakable evidences of slumber, he lay with his arms above his head, and plotted. He had no conscience whatever about it. He threw his scruples to the wind, and if it is possible to follow the twists of a theological mind turned from the straight and narrow way into the maze of conspiracy, his thoughts ran something like this:

"She is Delight. Therefore to see her is to love her. To see her with any other girl is to see her infinite superiority and charm. Therefore - "
Therefore, on the following Sunday afternoon, the totally unsuspecting daughter of a good man gone wrong took a note from the rector to the Hayden house, about something or other of no importance, and was instructed to wait for an answer. And the rector, vastly uneasy and rather pleased with himself, took refuge in the parish house and waited ten eternities, or one hour by the clock.

Delight herself was totally unsuspicious. The rectory on a Sunday afternoon was very quiet, and she was glad to get away. She drove over, and being in no hurry she went by the Spencer house. She did that now and then, making various excuses to herself, such as liking the policeman at the corner or wanting to see the river from the end of the street. But all she saw that day was Rodney Page going in, in a top hat and very bright gloves.

"Precious!" said Delight to herself. Her bump of reverence was very small.

But she felt a little thrill, as she always did, when she passed the house. Since she could remember she had cared for Graham. She did not actually know that she loved him. She told herself bravely that she was awfully fond of him, and that it was silly, because he never would amount to anything. But she had a little argument of her own, for such occasions, which said that being really fond of any one meant knowing all about them and liking them anyhow.

She stopped the car at the Hayden house, and carried her note to the door. When she went in, however, she was instantly uncomfortable. The place reeked with smoke, and undeniably there was dancing going on somewhere. A phonograph was scraping noisily. Delight's small nose lifted a little. What a deadly place! Coming in from the fresh outdoors, the noise and smoke and bar-room reek stifled her.

Then a door opened, and Marion Hayden was drawing her into a room.

"How providential, Delight!" she said. "You'll take my hand, won't you? It's Graham's dummy, and we want to dance."

The two connecting rooms were full of people, and the air was heavy. Through the haze she saw Graham, and nodded to him, but with a little sinking of the heart. She was aware, however, that he was looking at her with a curious intentness and a certain expectancy. Maybe he only hoped she would let him dance with Toots.

"No, thanks," she said. "Sorry."

"Why not, Delight? Just a hand, anyhow."

"Three good reasons: I don't play cards on Sunday; I don't ever play for money; and I'm stifling for breath already in this air."

She was, indeed, a little breathless.

There was, had she only seen it, relief in Graham's face. She did not belong there, he felt. Delight was - well, she was different. He had not been thinking of her before she came in; he forgot her promptly the moment she went out. But she had given him, for an instant, a breath of the fresh out-doors, and quietness and - perhaps something clean and fine.

There was an insistent clamor that she stay, and Tommy Hale even got down on his knees and made a quite impassioned appeal. But Delight's chin was very high, although she smiled.

"You are all very nice," she said. "But I'm sure I'd bore you in a minute, and I'm certain you'd bore me. Besides, I think you're quite likely to be raided."

Which met with great applause.

But there was nothing of Delight of the high head when she got out of her car and crept up the rectory steps. How could she even have cared? How could she? That was his life, those were the people he chose to play with. She had a sense of loss, rather than injury.

The rector, tapping at her door a little later, received the answer to his note through a very narrow crack, and went away feeling that the way of the wicked is indeed hard.

Clayton had been watching with growing concern Graham's intimacy with the gay crowd that revolved around Marion Hayden. It was more thoughtless than vicious; more pleasure-seeking than wicked; but its influence was bad, and he knew it.

But he was very busy. At night he was too tired to confront the inevitable wrangle with Natalie that any protest about Graham always evoked, and he was anxious not to disturb the new rapprochement with the boy by direct criticism.

The middle of December, which found the construction work at the new plant well advanced, saw the social season definitely on, also, and he found himself night after night going to dinners and then on to balls. There were fewer private dances than in previous Winters, but society had taken up various war activities and made them fashionable. The result was great charity balls.

On these occasions he found himself watching for Audrey, always. She had, with a sort of diabolical cleverness, succeeded in losing herself. Her house was sold, he knew, and he had expected that she would let him know where to find her. She had said she counted on him, and he had derived an odd sort of comfort from the thought. It had warmed him to think that, out of all the people he knew, to one woman he meant something more than success.
But although he searched the gayest crowds with his eyes, those hilarious groups of which she had been so frequently the center, he did not find her. And there had been no letter save a brief one without an address, enclosing her check for the money she had borrowed. She had apparently gone, not only out of her old life, but out of his as well.

At one of the great charity balls he met Nolan, and they stood together watching the crowd.

"Pretty expensive, I take it," Nolan said, indicating the scene. "Orchestra, florist, supper - I wonder how much the Belgians will get."

"Personally, I'd rather send the money and get some sleep."

"Precisely. But would you send the money? We've got to have a quid pro quo, you know-most of us." He surveyed the crowd with cynical, dissatisfied eyes. "At the end of two years of the war," he observed, apropos of nothing, "five million men are dead, and eleven million have been wounded. A lot of them were doing this sort of thing two years ago."

"I would like to know where we will be two years from now."

"Some of us won't be here. Have you seen Lloyd George's speech on the German peace terms? That means going on to the end. A speedy peace might have left us out, but there will be no peace. Not yet, or soon."

"And still we don't prepare!"

"The English tradition persists," said the Irishman, bitterly. "We want to wait, and play to the last moment, and then upset our business and overthrow the whole country, trying to get ready in a hurry."

"I wonder what they will do, when the time comes, with men like you and myself?"

"Take our money," said Nolan viciously. "Tax our heads off. Thank God I haven't a son."

Clayton eyed him with the comprehension of long acquaintance.

"Exactly," he said. "But you'll go yourself, if you can,"

"And fight for England? I will not."

He pursued the subject further, going into an excited account of Ireland's grievances. He was flushed and loquacious. He quoted Lloyd George's "quagmire of distrust" in tones raised over the noise of the band. And Clayton was conscious of a growing uneasiness. How much of it was real, how much a pose? Was Nolan representative of the cultured Irishman in America? And if he was, what would be the effect of their anti-English mania? Would we find ourselves, like the British, split into factions? Or would the country be drawn together by trouble until it changed from a federation of states to a great nation, united and unbeatable?

Were we really the melting pot of the world, and was war the fiery furnace which was to fuse us together, or were there elements, like Nolan, like the German-Americans, that would never fuse?

He left Nolan still irritable and explosive, and danced once with Natalie, his only dance of the evening. Then, finding that Rodney Page would see her to her car later, he went home.

He had a vague sense of disappointment, a return of the critical mood of the early days of his return from France. He went to his room and tried to read, but he gave it up, and lay, cigarette in hand, thinking!

There ought to have come to a man, when he reached the middle span, certain compensations for the things that had gone with his youth, the call of adventure, the violent impulses of his early love life. There should come, to take their place, friends, a new zest in the romance of achievement, since other romance had gone, and - peace. But the peace of the middle span of life should be the peace of fulfillment, and of a home and a woman.

Natalie was not happy, but she seemed contented enough. Her life satisfied her. The new house in the day-time, bridge, the theater in the evening or the opera, dinners, dances, clothes - they seemed to be enough for her. But his life was not enough for him. What did he want anyhow? In God's name, what did he want?

One night, impatient with himself, he picked up the book of love lyrics in its mauve cover, from his bedside table. He read one, then another. He read them slowly, engrossingly. It was as though something starved in him was feeding eagerly on this poor food. Their passion stirred him as in his earlier years he had never been stirred. For just a little time, while Natalie danced that night, Clayton Spencer faced the tragedy of the man in his prime, still strong and lusty with life, with the deeper passions of the deepening years, who has outgrown and outloved the woman he married.

A man's house must be built on love. Without love it can not stand.

Natalie, coming in much later and seeing his light still on, found him sleeping, with one arm under his head, and a small black hole burned in the monogrammed linen sheet. The book of poems had slipped to the floor.

The next day she missed it from its place, and Clayton's man, interrogated, said he had asked to have it put away somewhere. He did not care for it. Natalie raised her eyebrows. She had thought the poems rather pretty.

One resolution Clayton made, as a result of that night. He would not see Audrey again if he could help it. He was not in love with her and he did not intend to be. He was determinedly honest with himself. Men in his discontented state were only too apt to build up a dream-woman, compounded of their own starved fancy, and translate her into
terms of the first attractive woman who happened to cross the path. He was not going to be a driveling idiot, like Chris and some of the other men he knew. Things were bad, but they could be much worse.

It happened then that when Audrey called him at the mill a day or so later it was a very formal voice that came back to her over the wire. She was quick to catch his tone.

"I suppose you hate being called in business hours, Clay!"

"Not at all."

"That means yes, you know. But I'm going even further. I'm coming down to see you."

"Why, is anything wrong?"

He could hear her laughter, a warm little chuckle.

"Don't be so urgent," she said gayly. "I want to consult you. That's all. May I come?"

There was a second's pause. Then,

"Don't you think I'd better come to see you?"

"I've only a little flat. I don't think you'll like it."

"That's nonsense. Where is it?"

She gave him the address.

"When shall I come?"

"Whenever it suits you. I have nothing to do. Say this afternoon about four."

That "nothing to do" was an odd change, in itself, for Audrey had been in the habit of doling out her time like sweetmeats.

"Where in the world have you been all this time?" he demanded, almost angrily. To his own surprise he was suddenly conscious of a sense of indignation and affront. She had said she depended on him, and then she had gone away and hidden herself. It was ridiculous.

"Just getting acquainted with myself," she replied, with something of her old airy manner. "Good-by."

His irritation passed as quickly as it came. He felt calm and very sure of himself, and rather light-hearted. Joey, who was by now installed as an office adjunct, and who commonly referred to the mill as "ours," heard him whistling blithely and cocked an ear in the direction of the inner room.

"Guess we've made another million dollars," he observed to the pencil-sharpenener.

Clayton was not in the habit of paying afternoon calls on women. The number of such calls that he had paid without Natalie during his married life could have been numbered on the fingers of his two hands. Most of the men he knew paid such visits, dropping in somewhere for tea or a highball on the way uptown. He had preferred his club, when he had a little time, the society of other men.

He wondered if he should call Natalie and tell her. But he decided against it. It was possible, for one thing, that Audrey still did not wish her presence in town known. If she did, she would tell Natalie herself. And it was possible, too, that she wanted to discuss Chris, and the reason for his going.

He felt a real sense of relief, when at last he saw her, to find her looking much the same as ever. He hardly knew what he had expected. Audrey, having warned him as to the apartment, did not mention its poverty again. It was a tiny little place, but it had an open fire in the living-room, and plain, pale-yellow walls, and she had given it that curious air of distinction with which she managed, in her casual way, to invest everything about her.

"I hope you observe how neat I am," she said, as she gave him her hand. "My rooms, of course."

"Frightfully so."

He towered in the low room. Audrey sat down and surveyed him as he stood by the fire.

"It is nice to have a man about again."

"Do you mean to say you have been living here, without even visitors, for two months?"

"You'll laugh. Clay, I'm studying!"

"Studying! What?"

"Stenography. Oh, it's not as bad as that. I don't have to earn my living. I've just got to do something for my soul's sake. I went all over the ground, and I saw I was just a cumberer of the earth, and then I thought - "

She hesitated.

"What did you think?"

"If, some time or other, I could release a man to go and fight, it would be the next best thing to giving myself. Not here, necessarily; I don't believe we will ever go in. But in England, anywhere."

"You've released Chris."

"He released himself. And he's not fighting. He's driving an ambulance."

He waited, hoping she would go on. He was not curious, but he thought it might be good for her to talk Chris and the trouble over with some one. But she sat silent, and suddenly asked him if he cared for tea. He refused.

"How's Natalie?"
"Very well."
"And the house?"
"Held up by cold weather now. It should be finished by the end of April."
"Clay," she said, after a moment, "are you going to employ women in the new munition works?"
"In certain departments, yes."
"I have a girl I want work for. She's not trained, of course."
"None of them are. We have to teach them. I can give you a card to the employment department if you want it."
"Thanks."

There was a short silence. She sat looking at the fire, and he had a chance to notice the change in her. She had visualized it herself. Her long ear-rings were gone, and with them some of the insolence they had seemed to accentuate. She was not rouged, and he had thought at first, for that reason, that she looked ill. She was even differently dressed, in something dark and girlish with a boyish white Eton collar.

"I wonder if you think I'm hiding, Clay," she said, finally.
"Well, what are you doing?" He smiled down at her from the hearth-rug.
"Paying my bills! That's not all the truth, either. I'll tell you, Clay. I just got sick of it all. When Chris left I had a chance to burn my bridges and I burned them. The same people, the same talk, the same food, the same days filled with the same silly things that took all my time and gave me nothing."
"How long had you been feeling like that?"
"I don't know. Ever since the war, I suppose. I just got to thinking - "
Her voice trailed off.
"I have some of Chris's Scotch, if you want a high-ball."
"Thanks, no. Audrey, do you hear from Chris?"
"Yes. He's in a dangerous place now, and sometimes at night - I suppose I did force him, in a way. He was doing no good here, and I thought he would find himself over there. But I didn't send him. He - Tell me about making shells."

He was a little bit disappointed. Evidently she did not depend on him enough to tell him Chris's story. But again, she was being loyal to Chris.

He told her about the mill, phrasing his explanation in the simplest language; the presses drilling on white-hot metal; the great anvils; the forge; the machine-shop, with its lathes, where the rough surfaces of the shells were first rough-turned and then machined to the most exact measurements. And finding her interested, he told her of England's women workers, in their khaki-colored overalls and caps, and of the convent-like silence and lack of movement in the filling-sheds, where one entered with rubber-shod feet, and the women, silent and intent, sat all day and all night, with queer veils over their faces, filling shells with the death load.

Audrey listened, her hands clasped behind her head.
"If other women can do that sort of thing, why can't I, Clay?"
"Nonsense."
"But why? I'm intelligent."
"It's not work for a lady."
"Lady! How old-fashioned you are! There are no ladies any more. Just women. And if we aren't measured by our usefulness instead of our general not-worth-a-damn-ness, well, we ought to be. Oh, I've had time to think, lately."

He was hardly listening. Seeing her, after all those weeks, had brought him a wonderful feeling of peace. The little room, with its fire, was cozy and inviting. But he was quite sure, looking down at her, that he was not in danger of falling in love with her. There was no riot in him, no faint stirring of the emotions of that hour with the mauve book.

There was no suspicion in him that the ways of love change with the years, that the passions of the forties, when they come, are to those of the early years as the deep sea to a shallow lake, less easily roused, infinitely more terrible.

"This girl you spoke about, that was the business you mentioned?"
"Yes." She hesitated. "I could have asked you that over the telephone, couldn't I? The plain truth is that I've had two bad months - never mind why, and Christmas was coming, and - I just wanted to see your perfectly sane and normal face again."
"I wish you'd let me know sooner where you were."
She evaded his eyes.
"I was getting settled, and studying, and learning to knit, and - oh, I'm the most wretched knitter, Clay! I just stick at it doggedly. I say to myself that hands that can play golf, and use a pen, and shoot, and drive a car, have got to learn to knit. But look here!"
She held up a forlorn looking sock to his amused gaze. "And I think I'm a clever woman."

"You're a very brave woman, Audrey," he said. "You'll let me come back, won't you?"

"Heavens, yes. Whenever you like. And I'm going to stop being a recluse. I just wanted to think over some things."

On the way home he stopped at his florist's, and ordered a mass of American beauties for her on Christmas morning. She had sent her love to Natalie, so that night he told Natalie he had seen her, and such details of her life as he knew.

"I'm glad she's coming to her senses," Natalie said. "Everything's been deadly dull without her. She always made things go - I don't know just how," she added, as if she had been turning her over in her mind. "What sort of business did she want to see you about?"

"She has a girl she wants to get into the mill."

"Good gracious, she must be changed," said Natalie. And proceeded - she was ready to go out to dinner - to one of her long and critical surveys of herself in the cheval mirror. Recently those surveys had been rather getting on Clayton's nerves. She customarily talked, not to him, but to his reflection over her shoulder, when, indeed, she took her eyes from herself.

"I wonder," she said, fussing with a shoulder-strap, "who Audrey will marry if anything happens to Chris?"

She saw his face and raised her eyebrows.

"You needn't scowl like that. He's quite as likely as not never to come back, isn't he? And Audrey didn't care a pin for him."

"We're talking rather lightly of a very terrible thing, aren't we?"

"Oh, you're not," she retorted. "You think just the same things as I do, but you're not so open about them. That's all."

CHAPTER XI

Graham was engaged. He hardly knew himself how it had come about. His affair with Marion had been, up to the very moment of his blurted - out "I want you," as light-hearted as that of any of the assorted young couples who flirted and kissed behind the closed doors of that popular house.

The crowd which frequented the Hayden home was gay, tolerant and occasionally nasty. It made ardent love semi-promiscuously, it drank rather more than it should, and its desire for a good time often brought it rather close to the danger line. It did not actually step over, but it hovered gayly on the brink.

And Toots remained high-priestess of her little cult. The men liked her. The girls imitated her. And Graham, young as he was, seeing her popularity, was vastly gratified to find himself standing high in her favor.

Marion was playing for the stake of the Spencer money. In her intimate circle every one knew it but Graham.

"How's every little millionnaire?" was Tommy Hale's usual greeting.

She knew only one way to handle men, and with the stake of the Spencer money she tried every lure of her experience on Graham. It was always Marion who on cold nights sat huddled against him in the back seat of the Hayden's rather shabby car, her warm ungloved hand in his. It was Marion who taught him to mix the newest of cocktails, and who later praised his skill. It was Marion who insisted on his having a third, too, when the second had already set his ears drumming.

The effect on the boy of her steady propinquity, of her constant caressing touches, of the general letting-down of the bars of restraint, was to rouse in him impulses of which he was only vaguely conscious, and his proposal of marriage, when it finally came, was by nature of a confession. He had kissed her, not for the first time, but this time she had let him hold her, and he had rained kisses on her face.

"I want you," he had said, huskily.

And even afterward, when the thing was done, and she had said she would marry him, she had to ask him if he loved her.

"I - of course I do," he had said. And had drawn her back into his arms.

He wanted to marry her at once. It was the strongest urge of his life, and put into his pleading an almost pathetic earnestness. But she was firm enough now.

"I don't think your family will be crazy about this, you know."

"What do we care for the family? They're not marrying you, are they?"

"They will have to help to support me, won't they?"

And he had felt a trifle chilled.

It was not a part of Marion's program to enter the Spencer family unwelcomed. She had a furtive fear of Clayton Spencer, the fear of the indirect for the direct, of the designing woman for the essentially simple and open male. It was not on her cards to marry Graham and to try to live on his salary.

So for a few weeks the engagement was concealed even from Mrs. Hayden, and Graham, who had received
some stock from his father on his twenty-first birthday, secretly sold a few shares and bought the engagement ring.

With that Marion breathed easier. It was absolute evidence.

Her methods were the methods of her kind and her time. To allure a man by every wile she knew, and having won him to keep him uncertain and uneasy, was her perfectly simple creed. So she reduced love to its cheapest terms, passion and jealousy, played on them both, and made Graham alternately happy and wretched.

Once he found Rodney Page there, lounging about with the manner of a habitue. It seemed to Graham that he was always stumbling over Rodney those days, either at home, with drawings and color sketches spread out before him, or at the Hayden house.

"What's he hanging around here for?" he demanded when Rodney, having bent over Marion's hand and kissed it, had gone away. "If he could see that bare spot on the top of his head he'd stop all that kow-towing."

"You're being rather vulgar, aren't you?" Marion had said. "He's a very old friend and a very dear one."

"Probably in love with you once, like all the rest?"

He had expected denial from her, but she had held her cigarette up in the air, and reflectively regarded its small gilt tip.

"I'm afraid he's rather unhappy. Poor Rod!"

"About me?"

"About me."

"Look here, Toots," he burst out. "I'm playing square with you. I never go anywhere but here. I - I'm perfectly straight with you. But every time here I find some of your old guard hanging round. It makes me wild."

"They've always come here, and as long as our engagement isn't known, I can't very well stop them."

"Then let me go to father."

"He'll turn you out, you know. I know men, dear old thing, and father is going to raise a merry little hell about us. He's the sort who wants to choose his son's wife for him. He'd like to play Providence." She watched him, smiling, but with slightly narrowed eyes. "I rather think he has somebody in mind for you now."

"I don't believe it."

"Of course you don't. But he has."

"Who?"

"Delight. She's exactly the sort he thinks you'll need. He still thinks you are a little boy, Graham, so he picks out a nice little girl for you. Such a nice little girl."

The amused contempt in her voice made him angry - for Delight rather than himself. He was extremely grown-up and dignified the rest of the afternoon; he stood very tall and straight, and spoke in his deepest voice.

It became rather an obsession in him to prove his manhood, and added to that was the effect of Marion's constant, insidious appeal to the surging blood of his youth. And, day after day, he was shut in his office with Anna Klein.

He thought he was madly in love with Marion. He knew that he was not at all in love with Anna Klein. But she helped to relieve the office tedium.

He was often aware, sitting at his desk, with Anna before him, notebook in hand, that while he read his letters her eyes were on him. More than once he met them, and there was something in them that healed his wounded vanity. He was a man to her. He was indeed almost a god, but that he did not know. In his present frame of mind, he would have accepted even that, however.

Then, one day he kissed her. She was standing very close, and the impulse was quick and irresistible. She made no effort to leave his arms, and he kissed her again.

"Like me a little, do you?" he had asked, smiling into her eyes.

"Oh, I do, I do!" she had replied, hoarsely.

It was almost an exact reversal of his relationship with Marion. There the huskiness was his, the triumphant smile was Marion's. And the feeling of being adored without stint or reservation warmed him.

He released her then, but their relationship had taken on a new phase. He would stand against the outer door, to prevent its sudden opening. And she would walk toward him, frightened and helpless until his arms closed about her. It was entirely a game to him. There were days, when Marion was trying, or the work of his department was nagging him, when he scarcely noticed her at all. But again the mischief in him, the idler, the newly awakened hunting male, took him to her with arms outstretched and the look of triumph in his eyes that she mistook for love.

On one such occasion Joey came near to surprising a situation, so near that his sophisticated young mind guessed rather more than the truth. He went out, whistling.

He waited until Graham had joined the office force in the mill lunchroom, and invented an errand back to Graham's office. Anna was there, powdering her nose with the aid of a mirror fastened inside her purse.

Joey had adopted Clayton with a sort of fierce passion, hidden behind a pose of patronage.
"He's all right," he would say to the boys gathered at noon in the mill yard. "He's kinda short-tempered sometimes, but me, I understand him. And there ain't many of these here money kings that would sit up in a hospital the way he did with me."

The mill yard had had quite enough of that night in the hospital. It would fall on him in one of those half-playful, half-vicious attacks that are the humor of the street, and sometimes it was rather a battered Joey who returned to Clayton's handsome office, to assist him in running the mill.

But it was a very cool and slightly scornful Joey who confronted Anna that noon hour. He lost no time in preliminaries.

"What do you think you're doing, anyhow?" he demanded.
"Powdering my nose, if you insist on knowing."

They spoke the same language. Anna knew what was coming, and was on guard instantly.

"You cut it out, that's all."
"You cut out of this office. And that's all."

Joey sat down on Graham's desk and folded his arms.

"What are you going to get out of it, anyhow?" he said with a shift from bullying to argument.

"Out of what?"
"You know, all right."

She whirled on him.

"Now see here, Joey," she said. "You run out and play. I'll not have any little boys meddling in my affairs."

Joey slid off the desk and surveyed her with an impish smile. "Your affairs!" he repeated. "What the hell do I care about your affairs? I'm thinking of the boss. It's up to him if he wants to keep German spies on the place. But it's up to some of us here to keep our eyes open, so that they don't do any harm."

Sheer outrage made Anna's face pale. She had known for some time that the other girls kept away from her, and she had accepted it with the stolidity of her blood. She had no German sympathies; her sympathies in the war lay nowhere.

But - she a spy!

"You get out of here," she said furiously, "or I'll go to Mr. Spencer and complain about you. I'm no more a spy than you are. Not as much! - the way you come sneaking around listening and watching! Now you get out."

And Joey had gone, slowly to show that the going was of his own free will, and whistling. He went out and closed the door. Then he opened it and stuck his head in.

"You be good," he volunteered, "and when the little old U.S. gets to mixing up with the swine over there, I'll bring you a nice fat Hun as a present."

CHAPTER XII

Two days before Christmas Delight came out. There was an afternoon reception at the rectory, and the plain old house blossomed with the debutante's bouquets and baskets of flowers.

For weeks before the house had been getting ready. The rector, looking about for his accustomed chair, had been told it was at the upholsterer's, or had found his beloved and ragged old books relegated to dark corners of the bookcases. There were always stepladders on the landings, and paper-hangers waiting until a man got out of bed in the morning. And once he put his ecclesiastical heel in a pail of varnish, and slid down an entire staircase, to the great imperilment of his kindly old soul.

But he had consented without demur to the coming-out party, and he had taken, during all the morning of the great day, a most mundane interest in the boxes of flowers that came in every few minutes. He stood inside a window, under pretense of having no place to sit down, and called out regularly,

"Six more coming, mother! And a boy with three ringing across the street. I think he's made a mistake. Yes, he has. He's coming over!"

When all the stands and tables were overflowing, the bouquets were hung to the curtains in the windows. And Delight, taking a last survey, from the doorway, expressed her satisfaction.

"It's heavenly," she said. "Imagine all those flowers for me. It looks" - she squinted up her eyes critically - "it looks precisely like a highly successful funeral."

But a part of her satisfaction was pure pose, for the benefit of that kindly pair who loved her so. Alone in her room, dressed to go down-stairs, Delight drew a long breath and picked up her flowers which Clayton Spencer had sent. It had been his kindly custom for years to send to each little debutante, as she made her bow, a great armful of white lilacs and trailing tiny white rosebuds.


Her resentment against Graham was dying. After all, he was only a child in Toots Hayden's hands. And she made one of those curious "He-loves-me-he-loves-me-not" arrangements in her own mind. If Graham came that
afternoon, she would take it as a sign that there was still some good in him, and she would try to save him from himself. She had been rather nasty to him. If he did not come -

A great many came, mostly women, with a sprinkling of men. The rector, who loved people, was in his element. He was proud of Delight, proud of his home; he had never ceased being proud of his wife. He knew who exactly had sent each basket of flowers, each hanging bunch. "Your exquisite orchids," he would say; or, "that perfectly charming basket. It is there, just beside Mrs. Haverford."

But when Natalie Spencer came in alone, splendid in Russian sables, he happened to be looking at Delight, and he saw the light die out of her eyes.

Natalie had tried to bring Graham with her. She had gone into his room that morning while he was dressing and asked him. To tell the truth, she was uneasy about Marion Hayden and his growing intimacy there.

"You will, won't you, Graham, dear?"
"Sorry, mother. I just can't. I'm taking a girl out."
"I suppose it's Marion."
Her tone caused him to turn and look at her.
"Yes, it's Marion. What's wrong with that?"
"It's so silly, Graham. She's older than you are. And she's not really nice, Graham. I don't mean anything horrid, but she's designing. She knows you are young and - well, she's just playing with you. I know girls, Graham. I - "
She stopped, before his angry gaze.
"She is nice enough for you to ask here," he said hastily.
"She wants your money. That's all."
He had laughed then, an ugly laugh.
"There's a lot of it for her to want."

And Natalie had gone away to shed tears of fury and resentment in her own room.

She was really frightened. Bills for flowers sent to Marion were coming in, to lie unpaid on Graham's writing table. She had over-drawn once again to pay them, and other bills, for theater tickets, checks signed at restaurants, over-due club accounts.

So she went to the Haverfords alone, and managed very effectually to snub Mrs. Hayden before the rector's very eyes.

Mrs. Hayden thereupon followed an impulse.

"If it were not for Natalie Spencer," she said, following that lady's sables with malevolent eyes, "I should be very happy in something I want to tell you. Can we find a corner somewhere?"

And Doctor Haverford had followed her uneasily, behind some palms. She was a thin little woman with a maddening habit of drawing her tight veil down even closer by a contortion of her lower jaw, so that the rector found himself watching her chin rather than her eyes.

"I want you to know right away, as Marion's clergyman, and ours," she had said, and had given her jaw a particularly vicious wag and twist. "Of course it is not announced - I don't believe even the Spencers know it yet. I am only telling you now because I know how dearly" - she did it again - "how dearly interested you are in all your spiritual children. Marion is engaged to Graham Spencer."

The rector had not been a shining light for years without learning how to control his expression. He had a second, too, while she contorted her face again, to recover himself.

"Thank you," he said gravely. "I much appreciate your telling me."

Mrs. Hayden had lowered her voice still more. The revelation took on the appearance of conspiracy.

"In the early spring, probably," she said, "we shall need your services, and your blessing."

So that was the end of one dream. He had dreamed so many - in his youth, of spiritualizing his worldly flock; in middle life, of a bishopric; he had dreamed of sons, to carry on the name he had meant to make famous. But the failures of those dreams had been at once his own failure and his own disappointment. This was different.

He was profoundly depressed. He wandered out of the crowd and, after colliding with a man from the caterer's in a dark rear hall, found his way up the servant's staircase to the small back room where he kept the lares and penates of his quiet life, his pipe, his fishing rods, a shabby old smoking coat, and back files of magazines which he intended some day to read, when he got round to it.

The little room was jammed with old furniture, stripped from the lower floor to make room for the crowd. He had to get down on his knees and crawl under a table to reach his pipe. But he achieved it finally, still with an air of abstraction, and lighted it. Then, as there was no place to sit down, he stood in the center of the little room and thought.

He did not go down again. He heard the noise of the arriving and departing motors subside, its replacement by the sound of clattering china, being washed below in the pantry. He went down finally, to be served with a meal
largely supplemented by the left-overs of the afternoon refreshments, ornate salads, fancy ices, and an
overwhelming table decoration that shut him off from his wife and Delight, and left him in magnificent solitude
behind a pyramid of flowers.

Bits of the afternoon's gossip reached him; the comments on Delight's dress and her flowers; the reasons certain
people had not come. But nothing of the subject nearest his heart. At the end of the meal Delight got up.

"I'm going to call up Mr. Spencer," she said. "He has about fifty dollars' worth of thanks coming to him."

"I didn't see Graham," said Mrs. Haverford. "Was he here?"

Delight stood poised for flight.

"He couldn't come because he had enough to do being two places at once. His mother said he was working, and
Mrs. Hayden said he had taken Marion to the Country Club. I don't know why they take the trouble to lie to me."

CHAPTER XIII

Christmas day of the year of our Lord, 1916, dawned on a world which seemed to have forgotten the Man of
Peace. In Asia Minor the Allies celebrated it by the capture of a strong Turkish position at Maghdadah. The
Germans spent it concentrating at Dead Man's Hill; the British were ejected from enemy positions near Arras. There
was no Christmas truce. The death-grip had come.

Germany, conscious of her superiority in men, and her hypocritical peace offers unanimously rejected, was
preparing to free herself from the last restraint of civilization and to begin unrestricted submarine warfare.

On Christmas morning Clayton received a letter from Chris. Evidently it had come by hand, for it was mailed in
America.

"Dear Clay: I am not at all sure that you will care to hear from me. In fact, I have tried two or three times to
write to you, and have given it up. But I am lonelier than Billy-be-damned, and if it were not for Audrey's letters I
wouldn't care which shell got me and my little cart.

"I don't know whether you know why I got out, or not. Perhaps you don't. I'd been a fool and a scoundrel, and
I've had time, between fusses, to know just how rotten I've been. But I'm not going to whine to you. What I am
trying to get over is that I'm through with the old stuff for good.

"God only knows why I am writing to you, anyhow - unless it is because I've always thought you were pretty
near right. And I'd like to feel that now and then you are seeing Audrey, and bucking her up a bit. I think she's rather
down.

"Do you know, Clay, I think this is a darned critical time. The press, hasn't got it yet, but both the British and the
French are hard up against it. They'll fight until there is no one left to fight, but these damned Germans seem to have
no breaking-point. They haven't any temperament, I daresay, or maybe it is soul they lack. But they'll fight to the last
man also, and the plain truth is that there are too many of them.

"It looks mighty bad, unless we come in. And I don't mind saying that there are a good many eyes over here
straining across the old Atlantic. Are we doing anything, I wonder? Getting ready? The officers here say we can't
expand an army to get enough men without a draft law. Can you see the administration endangering the next
election with a draft law? Not on your life.

"I'm on the wagon, Clay. Honestly, it's funny. I don't mind telling you I'm darned miserable sometimes. But then
I get busy, and I'm so blooming glad in a rush to get water that doesn't smell to heaven that I don't want anything
else.

"I suppose they'll give us a good hate on Christmas. Well, think of me sometimes when you sit down to dinner,
and you might drink to our coming in. If we have a principle to divide among us we shall have to."

Clayton read the letter twice.

He and Natalie lunched alone, Natalie in radiant good humor. His gift to her had been a high collar of small
diamonds magnificently set, and Natalie, whose throat commenced to worry her, had welcomed it rapturously. Also,
he had that morning notified Graham that his salary had been raised to five thousand dollars.

Graham had shown relief rather than pleasure.

"I daresay I won't earn it, Father," he had said. "But I'll at least try to keep out of debt on it."

"If you can't, better let me be your banker, Graham."

The boy had flushed. Then he had disappeared, as usual, and Clayton and Natalie sat across from each other,
in their high-armed lion chairs, and made a pretense of Christmas gayety. True to Natalie's sense of the fitness of
things, a small Nuremberg Christmas tree, hung with tiny toys and lighted with small candles, stood in the center of
the table.

"We are dining out," she explained. "So I thought we'd use it now."

"It's very pretty," Clayton acknowledged. And he wondered if Natalie felt at all as he did, the vast room and the
two men serving, with Graham no one knew where, and that travesty of Christmas joy between them. His mind
wandered to long ago Christmases.
"It's not so very long since we had a real tree," he observed. "Do you remember the one that fell and smashed all the things on it? And how Graham heard it and came down?"

"Horribly messy things," said Natalie, and watched the second man critically. He was new, and she decided he was awkward.

She chattered through the meal, however, with that light gayety of hers which was not gayety at all, and always of the country house.

"The dining-room floor is to be oak, with a marble border," she said. "You remember the ones we saw in Italy? And the ceiling is blue and gold. You'll love the ceiling, Clay."

There was claret with the luncheon, and Clayton, raising his glass, thought of Chris and the water that smelled to heaven.

Natalie's mind was on loggias by that time.

"An upstairs loggia, too," she said. "Bordered with red geraniums. I loathe geraniums, but the color is good. Rodney wants Japanese screens and things, but I'm not sure. What do you think?"

"I think you're a better judge than I am," he replied, smiling. He had had to come back a long way, but he made the effort.

"It's hardly worth while struggling to have things attractive for you," she observed petulantly. "You never notice, anyhow. Clay, do you know that you sit hours and hours, and never talk to me?"

"No! Do I? I'm sorry."

"You're a perfectly dreary person to have around."

"I'll talk to you, my dear. But I'm not much good at houses. Give me something I understand."

"The mill, I suppose! Or the war!"

"Do I really talk of the war?"

"When you talk at all. What in the world do you think about, Clay, when you sit with your eyes on nothing? It's a vicious habit."

"Oh, ships and sails and sealing wax and cabbages and kings," he said, lightly.

That afternoon Natalie slept, and the house took on the tomb-like quiet of an establishment where the first word in service is silence. Clayton wandered about, feeling an inexpressible loneliness of spirit. On those days which work did not fill he was always discontented. He thought of the club, but the vision of those disconsolate groups of homeless bachelors who gathered there on all festivals that centered about a family focus was unattractive.

All at once, he realized that, since he had wakened that morning, he had been wanting to see Audrey. He wanted to talk to her, real talk, not gossip. Not country houses. Not personalities. Not recrimination. Such talk as Audrey herself had always led at dinner parties: of men and affairs, of big issues, of the war.

He felt suddenly that he must talk about the war to some one.

Natalie was still sleeping when he went down-stairs. It had been raining, but a cold wind was covering the pavement with a glaze of ice. Here and there men in top hats, like himself, were making their way to Christmas calls. Children clinging to the arms of governesses, their feet in high arctics, slid laughing on the ice. A belated florist's wagon was still delivering Christmas plants tied with bright red bows. The street held more of festivity to Clayton than had his house. Even the shop windows, as he walked toward Audrey's un Fashionable new neighborhood, cried out their message of peace. Peace - when there was no peace.

Audrey was alone, but her little room was crowded with gifts and flowers.

"I was hoping you would come, Clay," she said. "I've had some visitors, but they're gone. I'll tell them down-stairs that I'm not at home, and we can really talk."

"That's what I came for."

And when she had telephoned; "I've had a letter from Chris, Audrey."

She read it slowly, and he was surprised, when she finally looked up, to find tears in her eyes.

"Poor old Chris!" she said. "I've never told you the story, have I, Clay? Of course I know perfectly well I haven't. There was another woman. I think I could have understood it, perhaps, if she had been a different sort of a woman. But - I suppose it hurt my pride. I didn't love him. She was such a vulgar little thing. Not even pretty. Just - woman."

He nodded.

"He was fastidious, too. I don't understand it. And he swears he never cared for her. I don't believe he did, either. I suppose there's no explanation for these things. They just happen. It's the life we live, I dare say. When I look back - She's the girl I sent into the mill."

He was distinctly shocked.

"But, Audrey," he protested, "you are not seeing her, are you?"

"Now and then. She has fastened herself on me, in a way. Don't scowl like that. She says she is straight now and that she only wants a chance to work. She's off the stage for good. She - danced. That money I got from you was for
her. She was waiting, up-stairs. Chris was behind with her rent, and she was going to lose her furniture."

"That you should have to do such a thing!" he protested. "It's - well, it's infamous."

But she only smiled.

"Well, I've never been particularly shielded. It hasn't hurt me. I don't even hate her. But I'm puzzled sometimes. Where there's love it might be understandable. Most of us would hate to have to stand the test of real love, I daresay. There's a time in every one's life, I suppose, when love seems to be the only thing that matters."

That was what the poet in that idiotic book had said: "There is no other joy."

"Even you, Clay," she reflected, smilingly. "You big, grave men go all to pieces, sometimes."

"I never have," he retorted.

She returned Chris's letter to him.

"There," she said. "I've had my little whimper, and I feel better. Now talk to me."

The little clock was striking six when at last he rose to go. The room was dark, with only the glow of the wood fire on Audrey's face. He found her very lovely, rather chastened and subdued, but much more appealing than in her old days of sparkle and high spirits.

"You are looking very sweet, Audrey."

"Am I? How nice of you!"

She got up and stood on the hearth-rug beside him, looking up at him. Then, "Don't be startled, Clay," she announced, smilingly. "I am going to kiss you - for Christmas."

And kiss him she did, putting both hands on his shoulders, and rising on her toes to do it. It was a very small kiss, and Clayton took it calmly, and as she intended him to take it. But it was, at that, rather a flushed Audrey who bade him good-night and God bless you.

Clayton took away with him from that visit a great peace and a great relief. He had talked out to her for more than an hour of the many things that puzzled and bewildered him. He had talked war, and the mill, and even Graham and his problems. And by talking of them some of them had clarified. A little of his unrest had gone. He felt encouraged, he reflected, what the friendship of a woman could mean to a man. He was quite convinced that it was only friendship.

He turned toward home reluctantly. Behind him was the glow of Audrey's fire, and the glow that had been in her eyes when he entered. If a man had such a woman behind him...

He went into his great, silent house, and the door closed behind him like a prison gate.

For a long time after he had gone, Audrey, doors closed to visitors, sat alone by her fire, with one of his roses held close to her cheek.

In her small upper room, in a white frame cottage on the hill overlooking the Spencer furnaces, Anna Klein, locked away from prying eyes, sat that same Christmas evening and closely inspected a tiny gold wrist-watch. And now and then, like Audrey, she pressed it to her face.

Not the gift, but the giver.

CHAPTER XIV

Having turned Dunbar and his protective league over to Hutchinson, the general manager, Clayton had put him out of his mind. But during the week after Christmas he reached the office early one morning to find that keen and rather shabby gentleman already there, waiting.

Not precisely waiting, for he was standing by one of the windows, well back from it, and inspecting the mill yard with sharp, darting glances.

"Hello, Dunbar," said Clayton, and proceeded to shed his fur-lined coat. Dunbar turned and surveyed him with the grudging admiration of the undersized man for the tall one.

"Cold morning," he said, coming forward. "Not that I suppose you know it." He glanced at the coat.

"I thought Hutchinson said that you'd gone away."

"Been to Washington. I brought something back that will interest you."

From inside his coat he produced a small leather case, and took from it a number of photographs.

"I rather gathered, Mr. Spencer," he said dryly, "when I was here last that you thought me an alarmist. I don't know that I blame you. We always think the other fellow may get it, but that we are safe. You might glance at those photographs."

He spread them out on the desk. Beyond the windows the mill roared on; men shouted, the locomotive whistled, a long file of laborers with wheelbarrows went by. And from a new building going up came the hammering of the riveting-machines, so like the rapid explosions of machine guns.

"Interesting, aren't they?" queried Dunbar. "This is a clock-bomb with a strap for carrying it under a coat. That's a lump of coal - only it isn't. It's got enough explosive inside to blow up a battleship. It's meant for that, primarily. That's fire-confetti - damnable stuff - understand it's what burned up most of Belgium. And that's a fountain-pen.
What do you think of that? Use one yourself, don't you? Don't leave it lying around. That's all"

"What on earth can they do with a fountain-pen?"

"One of their best little tricks," said Mr. Dunbar, with a note of grudging admiration in his voice. "Here's a cut of the mechanism. You sit down, dip your pen, and commence to write. There's the striking pin, or whatever they call it. It hits here, and - good night!"

"Do you mean to say they're using things like that here?"

"I mean to say they're planning to, if they haven't already. That coal now, you'd see that go into your furnaces, or under your boilers, or wherever you use it, and wouldn't worry, would you?"

"Are these actual photographs?"

"Made from articles taken from a German officer's trunk, in a neutral country. He was on his way somewhere, I imagine."

Clayton sat silent. Then he took out his fountain-pen and surveyed it with a smile.

"Rather off fountain-pens for a time, I take it!" observed Dunbar. "Well, I've something else for you. You've got one of the best little I.W.W. workers in the country right here in your mill. Some of them aren't so bad - hot air and nothing else. But this fellow's a fanatic. Which is the same as saying he's crazy."

"Who is he?"

"Name's Rudolph Klein. He's a sort of relation to the chap that got out. Old man's been sore on him, but I understand he's hanging around the Klein place again."

Clayton considered.

"I don't remember him. Of course, I can't keep track of the men. We'll get rid of him."

Mr. Dunbar eyed him.

"That's the best thing you can think of?"

"I don't want him round, do I?"

"Nine of you men out of ten say that. You'd turn him loose and so warn him. Not only that, but he'll be off on his devil's work somewhere. Perhaps here. Perhaps elsewhere. And we want him where we can find him. See here, Mr. Spencer, d'you ever hear of counter-espionage?"

Clayton never had, but the term explained itself.

"Set a spy to watch a spy," said Dunbar. "Let him think he's going on fine. Find his confederates. Let them get ready to spring something. And then - get them. Remember," he added with sarcasm, "we're still neutral. You can't lock a man up because he goes around yelling 'Down with capital!' The whole country is ready to yell it with him. And, even if you find him with a bomb under his coat, labeled 'made in Germany,' it's hard to link Germans up with the thing. He can say that he always buys his bombs in Germany. That they make the best bombs in the world. That he likes the way they pack 'em, and their polite trade methods."

Clayton listened, thinking hard.

"We have a daughter of Klein's here. She is my son's secretary."

Dunbar glanced at him quickly, but his eyes were on the window.

"I know that."

"Think I should get rid of her?"

Dunbar hesitated. He liked Clayton Spencer, and it was his business just then to know something about the Kleins. It would be a good thing for Clayton Spencer's boy if they got rid of the girl.

On the other hand, to keep her there and watch her was certainly a bigger thing. If she stayed there might be trouble, but it would concern the boy only. If she left, and if she was one link in the chain to snare Rudolph, there might be a disaster costing many lives. He made his decision quickly.

"Keep her, by all means," he said. "And don't tell Mr. Graham anything. He's young, and he'd be likely to show something. I suppose she gets considerable data where she is?"

"Only of the one department. But that's a fair indication of the rest."

Dunbar rose.

"I'm inclined to think there's nothing to that end of it," he said. "The old chap is sulky, but he's not dangerous. It's Rudolph I'm afraid of."

At the luncheon hour that day Clayton, having finished his mail, went to Graham's office. He seldom did that, but he was uneasy. He wanted to see the girl. He wanted to look her over with this new idea in his mind. She had been a quiet little thing, he remembered; thorough, but not brilliant. He had sent her to Graham from his own office. He disliked even the idea of suspecting her; his natural chivalry revolted from suspecting any woman.

Joey, who customarily ate his luncheon on Clayton's desk in his absence, followed by one of Clayton's cigarettes, watched him across the yard, and whistled as he saw him enter Graham's small building.

"Well, what do you think of that?" he reflected. "I hope he coughs before he goes in."
But Clayton did not happen to cough. Graham's office was empty, but there was a sound of voices from Anna Klein's small room beyond. He crossed to the door and opened it, to stand astonished, his hand on the door-knob.

Anna Klein was seated at her desk, with her luncheon spread before her on a newspaper, and seated on the desk, a sandwich in one hand, the other resting on Anna's shoulder, was Graham. He was laughing when Clayton opened the door, but the smile froze on his face. He slid off her desk.

"Want me, father?"

"Yes," said Clayton, curtly. And went out, leaving the door open. A sort of stricken silence followed his exit, then Graham put down the sandwich and went out, closing the door behind him. He stood just inside it in the outer room, rather pale, but looking his father in the eyes.

"Sorry, father," he said. "I didn't hear you. I - "

"What has that to do with it?"

The boy was silent. To Clayton he looked furtive, guilty. His very expression condemned him far more than the incident itself. And Clayton, along with his anger, was puzzled as to his best course. Dunbar had said to leave the girl where she was. But - was it feasible under these circumstances? He was rather irritated than angry. He considered a flirtation with one's stenographer rotten bad taste, at any time. The business world, to his mind, was divided into two kinds of men, those who did that sort of thing, and those who did not. It was a code, rather than a creed, that the boy had violated.

Besides, he had bad a surprise. The girl who sat laughing into Graham's face was not the Anna Klein he remembered, a shy, drab little thing, badly dressed, rather sallow and unsmiling. Here was a young woman undeniably attractive; slightly rouged, trim in her white blouse, and with an air of piquancy that was added, had he known it, by the large imitation pearl earrings she wore.

"Get your hat and go to lunch, Graham," he said. "And you might try to remember that a slightly different standard of conduct is expected from my son, here, than may be the standard of some of the other men."

"It doesn't mean anything, that sort of fooling."

"You and I may know that. The girl may not."

Then he went out, and Graham returned unhappily to the inner room. Anna was not crying; she was too frightened to cry. She had sat without moving, her hand still clutching her untouched sandwich. Graham looked at her and tried to smile.

"I'm gone, I suppose?"

"Don't you worry about that," he said, with boyish bravado. "Don't you worry about that, little girl."

"Father will kill me," she whispered. "He's queer these days, and if I go home and have to tell him - " She shuddered.

"I'll see you get something else, if the worst comes, you know."

She glanced up at him with that look of dog-like fidelity that always touched him.

"I'll find you something good," he promised.

"Something good," she repeated, with sudden bitterness. "And you'll get another girl here, and flirt with her, and make her crazy about you, and - "

"Honestly, do you like me like that?"

"I'm just mad about you," she said miserably.

Frightened though he was, her wretchedness appealed to him. The thought that she cared for him, too, was a salve to his outraged pride. A moment ago, in the other room, he had felt like a bad small boy. As with Marion, Anna made him feel every inch a man. But she gave him what Marion did not, the feeling of her complete surrender. Marion would take; this girl would give.

He bent down and put his arms around her.

"Poor little girl!" he said. "Poor little girl!"

CHAPTER XV

The gay and fashionable crowd of which Audrey had been the center played madly that winter. The short six weeks of the season were already close to an end. By mid-January the south and California would have claimed most of the women and some of the men. There were a few, of course, who saw the inevitable catastrophe: the Mackenzies had laid up their house-boat on the west coast of Florida. Denis Nolan had let his little place at Pinehurst. The advance wave of the war tide, the increased cost of living, had sobered and made thoughtful the middle class, but above in the great businesses, and below among the laboring people, money was plentiful and extravagance ran riot.

And Audrey Valentine's world missed her. It refused to accept her poverty as an excuse, and clamored for her. It wanted her to sit again at a piano, somewhere, anywhere, with a lighted cigaret on the music-rack, and sing her husky, naive little songs. It wanted her cool audacity. It wanted her for week-end parties and bridge, and to canter on
frosty mornings on its best horses and make slaves of the park policemen, so that she might jump forbidden fences. It wanted to see her oust its grinning chauffeurs, and drive its best cars at their best speed.

Audrey Valentine leading a cloistered life! Impossible! Selfish!

And Audrey was not cut out for solitude. She did not mind poverty. She found it rather a relief to acknowledge what had always been the fact. But she did mind loneliness. And her idea of making herself over into something useful was not working out particularly well. She spent two hours a day, at a down-town school, struggling with shorthand, and her writing-table was always littered with papers covered with queer hooks and curves, or with typed sheets beginning:

"Messrs Smith and Co.; Dear Sirs."

Clayton Spencer met her late in December, walking feverishly along with a book under her arm, and a half-desperate look in her eyes. He felt a little thrill when he saw her, which should have warned him but did not.

She did not even greet him. She stopped and held out her book to him.

"Take it!" she said. "I've thrown it away twice, and two wretched men have run after me and brought it back."

He took it and glanced at it.

"Spelling! Can't you spell?"

"Certainly I can spell," she said with dignity. "I'm a very good speller. Clay, there isn't an "i" in business, is there?"

"It is generally considered necessary to have two pretty good eyes in business." But he saw then that she was really rather despairing. "There is, one 'i,'" he said. "It seems foolish, doesn't it? Audrey dear, what are you trying to do? For heaven's sake, if it's money?"

"It isn't that. I have enough. Honestly, Clay, I just had some sort of an idea that I'd been playing long enough. But I'm only good for play. That man this morning said as much, when we fussied about my spelling. He said I'd better write a new dictionary."

Clayton threw back his head and laughed, and after a moment she laughed, too. But as he went on his face was grave. Somebody ought to be looking after her. It was not for some time that he realized he carried the absurd little spelling-book. He took it back to the office with him, and put it in the back of a drawer of his desk. Joey, coming in some time later, found him, with the drawer open, and something in his hands which he hastily put away. Later on, Joey investigated that drawer, and found the little book. He inspected it with a mixture of surprise and scorn.

"Spelling!" he muttered. "And a hundred dollar a month girl to spell for him!"

It was Rodney Page who forced Audrey out of her seclusion.

Rodney had had a prosperous year, and for some time his conscience had been bothering him. For a good many years he had blithely accepted the invitations of his friends - dinners, balls, week-end and yachting parties, paying his way with an occasional box of flowers. He decided, that last winter of peace, to turn host and, true to instinct, to do the unusual.

It was Natalie who gave him the suggestion.

"Why don't you turn your carriage-house into a studio, and give a studio warming, Roddie? It would be fun fixing it up. And you might make it fancy dress."

Before long, of course, he had accepted the idea as of his own originating, and was hard at work.

Rodney's house had been his father's. He still lived there, although the business district had encroached closely. And for some time he had used the large stable and carriage-house at the rear as a place in which to store the odd bits of furniture, old mirrors and odds and ends that he had picked up here and there. Now and then, as to Natalie, he sold some of them, but he was a collector, not a merchant. In his way, he was an artist.

In the upper floor he had built a skylight, and there, in odd hours, he worked out, in water-color, sketches of interiors, sometimes for houses he was building, sometimes purely for the pleasure of the thing.

The war had brought him enormous increase in his collection. Owners of French chateaus, driven to poverty, were sending to America treasures of all sorts of furniture, tapestries, carpets, old fountains, porcelains, even carved woodwork and ancient mantels, and Rodney, from the mixed motives of business and pride, decided to exhibit them.

The old brick floor of the stable he replaced with handmade tiles. The box-stalls were small display-rooms, hung with tapestries and lighted with candles in old French sconces. The great carriage-room became a refectory, with Jacobean and old monastery chairs, and the vast loft overhead, reached by a narrow staircase that clung to the wall, was railed on its exposed side, waxed as to floor, hung with lanterns, and became a ballroom.

Natalie worked with him, spending much time and a prodigious amount of energy. There was springing up between them one of those curious and dangerous intimacies, of idleness on the woman's part, of admiration on the man's, which sometimes develop into a wholly spurious passion. Probably Rodney realized it; certainly Natalie did not. She liked his admiration; she dressed, each day, for Rodney's unfailing comment on her clothes.

"Clay never notices what I wear," she said, once, plaintively.
So it was Rodney who brought Audrey Valentine out of her seclusion, and he did it by making her angry. He dropped in to see her between Christmas and New-years, and made a plea.

"A stable-warming!" she said. "How interesting! And fancy dress! Are you going to have them come as grooms, or jockeys? If I were going I'd go as a circus-rider. I used to be able to stand up on a running horse. Of course you're having horses. What's a stable without a horse?"

He saw she was laughing at him and was rather resentful.

"I told you I have made it into a studio."

But when he implored her to go, she was obdurate.

"Do go away and let me alone, Rodney," she said at last. "I loathe fancy-dress parties."

"It won't be a party without you."

"Then don't have it. I've told you, over and over, I'm not going out. It isn't decent this year, in my opinion. And, anyhow, I haven't any money, any clothes, anything. A bad evening at bridge, and I shouldn't be able to pay my rent."

"That's nonsense. Why do you let people say you are moping about Chris? You're not."

"Of course not."

She sat up.

"What else are they saying?"

"Well, there's some talk, naturally. You can't be as popular as you have been, and then just drop out, without some gossip. It's not bad."

"What sort of talk?"

He was very uncomfortable.

"Well, of course, you have been pretty strong on the war stuff?"

"Oh, they think I sent him!"

"If only you wouldn't hide, Audrey. That's what has made the talk. It's not Chris's going."

"I'm not hiding. That's idiotic. I was bored to death, if you want the truth. Look here, Rodney. You're not being honest. What do they say about Chris and myself?"

He was cornered.

"Is it - about another woman?"

"Well, of course now and then - there are always such stories. And of course Chris -"

"Yes, they knew Chris." Her voice was scornful. "So they think I'm moping and hiding because - How interesting!"

She sat back, with her old insolent smile.

"Poor Chris!" she said. "The only man in the lot except Clay Spencer who is doing his bit for the war, and they - when is your party, Roddie?"

"New-year's Eve."

"I'll come," she said. And smiling again, dangerously, "I'll come, with bells on."

CHAPTER XVI

There had been once, in Herman Klein the making of a good American. He had come to America, not at the call of freedom, but of peace and plenty. Nevertheless, he had possibilities.

Taken in time he might have become a good American. But nothing was done to stimulate in him a sentiment for his adopted land. He would, indeed, have been, for all his citizenship papers, a man without a country but for one thing.

The Fatherland had never let go. When he went to the Turnverein, it was to hear the old tongue, to sing the old songs. Visiting Germans from overseas were constantly lecturing, holding before him the vision of great Germany. He saw moving-pictures of Germany; he went to meetings which commenced with "Die Wacht am Rhine." One Christmas he received a handsome copy of a photograph of the Kaiser through the mail. He never knew who sent it, but he had it framed in a gilt frame, and it hung over the fireplace in the sitting-room.

He had been adopted by America, but he had not adopted America, save his own tiny bit of it. He took what the new country gave him with no faintest sense that he owed anything in return beyond his small yearly taxes. He was neither friendly nor inimical.

His creed through the years had been simple: to owe no man money, even for a day; to spend less than he earned; to own his own home; to rise early, work hard, and to live at peace with his neighbors. He had learned English and had sent Anna to the public school. He spoke English with her, always. And on Sunday he put on his best clothes, and sat in the German Lutheran church, dozing occasionally, but always rigidly erect.

With his first savings he had bought a home, a tiny two-roomed frame cottage on a bill above the Spencer mill, with a bit of waste land that he turned into a thrifty garden. Anna was born there, and her mother had died there ten
years later. But long enough before that he had added four rooms, and bought an adjoining lot. At that time the hill
had been green; the way to the little white house had been along and up a winding path, where in the spring the early
wild flowers came out on sunny banks, and the first buds of the neighborhood were on Klein's own lilac-bushes.

He had had a magnificent sense of independence those days, and of freedom.

He voted religiously, and now and then in the evenings he had been the moderate member of a mild socialist
group. Theoretically, he believed that no man should amass a fortune by the labor of others. Actually he felt himself
well paid, a respected member of society, and a property owner.

In the early morning, winter and summer, he emerged into the small side porch of his cottage and there threw
over himself a pail of cold water from the well outside. Then he rubbed down, dressed in the open air behind the old
awning hung there, took a dozen deep breaths and a cup of coffee, and was off for work. The addition of a
bathroom, with running hot water, had made no change in his daily habits.

He was very strict with Anna, and with the women who, one after another, kept house for him.

"I'll have no men lounging around," was his first instruction on engaging them. And to Anna his solicitude took
the form almost of espionage. The only young man he tolerated about the place was a distant relative. Rudolph
Klein.

On Sunday evenings Rudolph came in to supper. But even Rudolph found it hard to get a word with the girl
alone.

"What's eating him, anyhow," he demanded of Anna one Sunday evening, when by the accident of a neighbor
calling old Herman to the gate, he had the chance of a word.

"He knows a lot about you fellows," Anna had said. "And the more he knows the less he trusts you. I don't
wonder."

"He hasn't anything on me."

But Anna had come to the limit of her patience with her father at last.

"What's the matter with you?" she demanded angrily one night, when Herman had sat with his pipe in his mouth,
and had refused her permission to go to the moving-pictures with another girl. "Do you think I'm going on forever
like this, without a chance to play? I'm sick of it. That's all."

"You vill not run around with the girls on this hill." He had conquered all but the English "w." He still
pronounced it like a "v."

"What's the matter with the girls on this hill?" And when he smoked on in imperturbable silence, she had flamed
into a fury.

"This is free America," she reminded him. "It's not Germany. And I've stood about all I can. I work all day, and I
need a little fun. I'm going."

And she had gone, rather shaky as to the knees, but with her head held high, leaving him on the little veranda
with his dead pipe in his mouth and his German-American newspaper held before his face. She had returned, still
terrified, to find the house dark and the doors locked, and rather than confess to any one, she had spent the night in a
chair out of doors.

At dawn she had heard him at the side of the house, drawing water for his bath. He had gone through his
morning program as usual, by the sounds, and had started off for work without an inquiry about her. Only when she
heard the gate click had she hammered at the front door and been admitted by the untidy servant.

"Fine way to treat me!" she had stormed, and for a part of that day she was convinced that she would never go
back home again. But fear of her father was the strongest emotion she knew, and she went back that night, as usual.
It not being Herman's way to bother with greetings, she had passed him on the porch without a word, and that night,
winding a clock before closing the house, he spoke to her for the first time.

"There is a performance at the Turnverein Hall to-morrow night. Rudolph vill take you."

"I don't like Rudolph."

"Rudolph viii take you," he had repeated, stolidly. And she had gone.

He had no conception of any failure in himself as a parent. He had the German idea of women. They had a
distinct place in the world, but that place was not a high one. Their function was to bring children into the world.
They were breeding animals, and as such to be carefully watched and not particularly trusted. They had no place in
the affairs of men, outside the home.

Not that he put it that way. In his way he probably loved the girl. But never once did he think of her as an
intelligent and reasoning creature. He took her salary, gave her a small allowance for car-fare, and banked the rest of
it in his own name. It would all be hers some day, so what difference did it make?

But the direst want would not have made him touch a penny of it.

He disliked animals. But in a curious shame-faced fashion he liked flowers. Such portions of his garden as were
useless for vegetables he had planted out in flowers. But he never cut them and brought them into the house, and he
watched jealously that no one else should do so. He kept poisoned meat around for such dogs in the neighborhood as wandered in, and Anna had found him once callously watching the death agonies of one of them.

Such, at the time the Spencer mill began work on its new shell contract, was Herman Klein, sturdily honest, just according to his ideas of justice, callous rather than cruel, but the citizen of a world bounded by his memories of Germany, his life at the mill, and his home.

But, for all that, he was not a man the German organization in America put much faith in. Rudolph, feeling his way, had had one or two conversations with him early in the war that had made him report adversely.

"Let them stop all this fighting," Herman had said. "What matter now who commenced it? Let them all stop. It is the only way."

"Sure, let them stop!" said Rudolph, easily. "Let them stop trying to destroy Germany."

"That is nonsense," Herman affirmed, sturdily. "Do you think I know nothing? I, who was in the Prussian Guard for five years. Think you I know nothing of the plan?"

The report of the German atrocities, however, found him frankly incredulous, and one noon hour, in the mill, having read the Belgian King's statement that the German army in Belgium had protected its advance with women and children, Rudolph found him tearing the papers to shreds furiously.

"Such lies!" he cried. "It is not possible that they should be believed."

The sinking of the Lusitania, however, left him thoughtful and depressed. In vain Rudolph argued with him.

"They were warned," he said. "If they chose to take the change, is it Germany's fault? If you tell me not to put my hand on a certain piece in a machine and I do it anyhow, is it your fault if I lose a hand?"

Old Herman eyed him shrewdly.

"And if Anna had been on the ship, you think the same, eh?"

Rudolph had colored.

For some time now Rudolph had been in love with Anna. He had not had much encouragement. She went out with him, since he was her only means of escape, but she treated him rather cavalierly, criticized his clothes and speech, laughed openly at his occasional lapses into sentiment, and was, once in a long time, so kind that she set his heart leaping.

Until the return of Graham Spencer, all had gone fairly well. But with his installment in the mill, Rudolph's relations with Anna had changed. She had grown prettier - Rudolph was not observant enough to mark what made the change, but he knew that he was madder about her than ever. And she had assumed toward him an attitude of almost scornful indifference. The effect on his undisciplined young mind was bad. He had no suspicion of Graham. He only knew his own desperate unhappiness. In the meetings held twice weekly in a hall on Third Street he was reckless, advocating violence constantly. The conservative element watched him uneasily; the others kept an eye on him, for future use.

The closing week of the old year found the situation strained in the Klein house. Herman had had plenty of opportunities for situations, but all of them had to do directly or indirectly with the making of munitions for the Allies. Old firms in other lines were not taking on new men. It was the munition works that were increasing their personnel. And by that time the determination not to assist Germany's enemies had become a fixed one.

The day after Christmas, in pursuit of this idea, he commanded Anna to leave the mill. But she had defied him, for the second time in her life, her face pale to the lips.

"Not on your life," she had said. "You may want to starve. I don't."

"There is plenty of other work."

"Don't you kid yourself. And, anyhow, I'm not looking for it. I don't mind working so you can sit here and nurse a grouch, but I certainly don't intend to start hunting another job."

She had eyed him morosely. "If you ask me," she continued, "you're out of your mind. What's Germany to you? You forgot it as fast as you could, until this war came along. You and Rudolph! You're long distance patriots, you are."

"I will not help my country's enemies," he had said doggedly.

"Your country's enemies. My word! Isn't this your country? What's the old Kaiser to you?"

He had ordered her out of the house, then, but she had laughed at him. She could always better him in an argument.

"Suppose I do go?" she had inquired. "What are you going to live on? I'm not crazy in the head, if you are."

She rather thought he would strike her. He had done it before, with the idea of enforcing discipline. If he did, she would leave him. Let him shift for himself. He had taken her money for years, and he could live on that. But he had only glared at her.

"We would have done better to remain in Germany," he said. "America has no respect for parents. It has no discipline. It is a country without law."
She felt a weakening in him, and followed up her advantage. "And another thing, while we're at it," she flung at him. "Don't you go on trying to shove Rudolph down my throat. I'm off Rudolph for keeps."

She flung out her arm, and old Herman saw the gleam of something gold on her wrist. He caught her hand in his iron grip and shoved up her sleeve. There was a tiny gold wrist-watch there, on a flexible chain. His amazement and rage gave her a moment to think, although she was terrified.

"Where did you get that?"
"The mill gave them to the stenographers for Christmas."
"Why did you not tell me?"
"We're not talking much these days, are we?"

He let her go then, and that night, in the little room behind Gustav Shroeder's saloon, he put the question to Rudolph. Because he was excited and frightened he made slow work of his inquiry, and Rudolph had a moment to think.

"Sure," he replied. "All the girls in the executive offices got them."

But when the meeting was over, Rudolph did not go back to his boarding-house. He walked the streets and thought.

He had saved Anna from her father. But he was of no mind to save her from himself. She would have to account to him for that watch.

Anna herself lay awake until late. She saw already the difficulties before her. Herman was suspicious. He might inquire. There were other girls from the mill offices on the hill. And he might speak to Rudolph.

The next evening she found Rudolph waiting for her outside the mill gate. Together they started up what had been, when Herman bought the cottage, a green hill with a winding path. But the smoke and ore from the mill had long ago turned it to bareness, had killed the trees and shrubbery, and filled the little hollows where once the first arbutus had hidden with cinders and ore dust. The path had become a crooked street, lined with wooden houses, and paved with worn and broken bricks.

Where once Herman Klein had carried his pail and whistled bits of Shubert as he climbed along, a long line of blackened men made their evening way. Untidy children sat on the curb, dogs lay in the center of the road, and women in all stages of dishabille hung over the high railings of their porches and watched for their men.

Under protest of giving her a lift up the hill, Rudolph slipped his hand through Anna's left arm. Immediately she knew that the movement was a pretext. She could not free herself.

"Be good, now," he cautioned her. "I've got you. I want to see that watch."
"You let me alone."
"I'm going to see that watch."

With his free hand he felt under her sleeve and drew down the bracelet.
"So the mill gave it to you, eh? That's a lie, and you know it."
"I'll tell you, Rudolph," she temporized. "Only don't tell father. All the girls have watches, and I wanted one. So I bought it."
"That's a lie, too."
"On the installment plan," she insisted. "A dollar a week, that's straight. I've paid five on it already."

He was almost convinced, not quite. He unfastened it awkwardly and took it off her wrist. It was a plain little octagonal watch, and on the back was a monogram. The monogram made him suspicious again.

"It's only gold filled, Rudolph."
"Pretty classy monogram for a cheap watch." He held it close; on the dial was the jeweler's name, a famous one.

He said nothing more, put it back on Anna's arm and released her. At the next corner he left her, with a civil enough good-bye, but with rage in his heart.

CHAPTER XVII

The New-year, destined to be so crucial, came in cheerfully enough. There was, to be sure, a trifle less ostentation in the public celebrations, but the usual amount of champagne brought in the most vital year in the history of the nation. The customary number of men, warmed by that champagne, made reckless love to the women who happened to be near them and forgot it by morning. And the women themselves presented pictures of splendor of a peculiar gorgeousness.

The fact that almost coincident with the war there had come into prominence an entirely new school of color formed one of the curious contrasts of the period. Into a drab world there flamed strange and bizarre theatrical effects, in scenery and costume. Some of it was beautiful, most of it merely fantastic. But it was immediately reflected in the clothing of fashionable women. Europe, which had originated it, could use it but little; but great opulent America adopted it and made it her own.
So, while the rest of the world was gray, America flamed, and Natalie Spencer, spending her days between
dressmakers and decorators, flamed with the rest.

On New-year's Eve Clayton Spencer always preceded the annual ball of the City Club, of which he was
president, by a dinner to the board of governors and their wives. It was his dinner. He, and not Natalie, arranged the
seating, ordered the flowers, and planned the menu. He took considerable pride in it; he liked to think that it was
both beautiful and dignified. His father had been president before him, and he liked to think that he was carrying on
his father's custom with the punctilious dignity that had so characterized him.

He was dressed early. Natalie had been closeted with Madeleine, her maid, and a hair-dresser, for hours. As he
went down-stairs he could hear her voice raised in querulous protest about something.

"Well, another year almost gone, Buckham!" he said.
"Yes, Mr. Spencer."
"It would be interesting to know what the New-year holds."
"I hope it will bring you peace and happiness, sir."
"Thank you."

And after Buckham had gone he thought that rather a curious New-year's wish. Peace and happiness! Well, God
knows he wanted both. A vague comprehension of the understanding the upper servants of a household acquire as to
the inner life of the family stirred in him; how much they knew and concealed under their impassive service.

When Natalie came down the staircase a few minutes later she was swathed in her chinchilla evening wrap, and
she watched his face, after her custom when she expected to annoy him, with the furtive look that he had grown to
associate with some unpleasantness.

"I hate dressing for a ball at this hour," she said, rather breathlessly. "I don't feel half-dressed by midnight."
Madeleine, in street costume, was behind her with a great box.
"She has something for my hair," she explained. Her tone was nervous, but he was entirely unsuspicious.
"You don't mind if I don't go on to Page's, do you? I'm rather tired, and I ought to stay at the club as late as I
can."

"Of course not. I shall probably pick up some people, anyhow. Everybody is going on."
In the car she chattered feverishly and he listened, lapsing into one of the silences which her talkative spells
always enforced.
"What flowers are you having?" she asked, finally.
"White lilacs and pussy-willow. Did your orchids come?"
"Thanks, yes. But I'm not wearing them. My gown is flame color. They simply shrieked."
"Flame color?"
"A sort of orange," she explained. And, in a slightly defiant tone: "Rodney's is a costume dance, you know."
"Do you mean you are in fancy dress?"
"I am, indeed."

He was rather startled. The annual dinner of the board of governors of the City Club and their wives was a most
dignified function always. He was the youngest by far of the men; the women were all frankly dowagers. They
represented the conservative element of the city's social life, that element which frowned on smartness and did not
even recognize the bizarre. It was old-fashioned, secure in its position, influential, and slightly tedious.
"There will be plenty in fancy dress."
"Not at the dinner."
"Stodgy old frumps!" was Natalie's comment. "I believe you would rather break one of the ten commandments
than one of the conventions," she added.

It was when he saw her coming down the staircase in the still empty clubhouse that he realized the reason for her
defiant attitude when she acknowledged to fancy dress. For she wore a peacock costume of the most daring sort.
Over an orange foundation, eccentric in itself and very short, was a vivid tunic covered with peacock feathers on
gold tissue, with a sweeping tail behind, and on her head was the towering chest of a peacock on a gold bandeau.
She waved a great peacock fan, also, and half-way down the stairs she paused and looked down at him, with half-
frightened eyes.
"Do you like it?"
"It is very wonderful," he said, gravely.
He could not hurt her. Her pleasure in it was too naive. It dawned on him then that Natalie was really a child, a
spoiled and wilful child. And always afterward he tried to remember that, and to judge her accordingly.

She came down, the upturned wired points of the tunic trembling as she stepped. When she came closer he saw
that she was made up for the costume ball also, her face frankly rouged, fine lines under her eyes, her lashes
blackened. She looked very lovely and quite unfamiliar. But he had determined not to spoil her evening, and he
continued gravely smiling.
"You'd better like it, Clay," she said, and took a calculating advantage of what she considered a softened mood.
"It cost a thousand dollars."
She went on past him, toward the room where the florist was still putting the finishing touches to the flowers on
the table. When the first guests arrived, she came back and took her place near him, and he was uncomfortably
aware of the little start of surprise with which she burst upon each new arrival, in the old and rather staid
surroundings of the club she looked out of place - oriental, extravagant, absurd.

And Clayton Spencer suffered. To draw him as he stood in the club that last year of our peace, 1916, is to draw
him not only with his virtues but with his faults; his over emphasis on small things; his jealousy for his dignity; his
hatred of the conspicuous and the unusual.

When, after the informal manner of clubs, the party went in to dinner, he was having one of the bad hours of his
life to that time. And when, as was inevitable, the talk of the rather serious table turned to the war, it seemed to him
that Natalie, gorgeous and painted, represented the very worst of the country he loved, indifference, extravagance,
and ostentatious display.

But Natalie was not America. Thank God, Natalie was not America.

Already with the men she was having a triumph. The women, soberly clad, glanced at each other with raised
eye-brows and cynical smiles. Above the band, already playing in the ballroom, Clayton could hear old Terry
Mackenzie paying Natalie extravagant, flagrant compliments.
"You should be sitting in the sun, or on a balcony," he was saying, his eyes twinkling. "And pretty gentlemen
with long curls and their hats tucked under their arms should be feeding you nightingale tongues, or whatever it is
you eat."
"Bugs," said Natalie.
"But - tell me," Terry bent toward her, and Mrs. Terry kept fascinated eyes on him. "Tell me, lovely creature -
aren't peacocks unlucky?"
"Are they? What bad luck can happen to me because I dress like this?"
"Frightfully bad luck," said Terry, jovially. "Some one will undoubtedly carry you away, in the course of the
evening, and go madly through the world hunting a marble balustrade to set you on. I'll do it myself if you'll give me
any encouragement."

Perhaps, had Clayton Spencer been entirely honest with himself that night, he would have acknowledged that he
had had a vague hope of seeing Audrey at the club. Cars came up, discharged their muffled occupants under the
awning and drove away again. Delight and Mrs. Haverford arrived and he danced with Delight, to her great anxiety
lest she might not dance well. Graham came very late, in the wake of Marion Hayden.

But Audrey did not appear.

He waited until the New-year came in. The cotillion was on then, and the favors for the midnight figure were gilt
cornucopias filled with loose flowers. The lights went out for a moment on the hour, the twelve strokes were rung on
a triangle in the orchestra, and there was a moment's quiet. Then the light blazed again, flowers and confetti were
thrown, and club servants in livery carried round trays of champagne.

Clayton, standing glass in hand, surveyed the scene with a mixture of satisfaction and impatience. He found
Terry Mackenzie at his elbow.
"Great party, Clay," he said. "Well, here's to 1917, and may it bring luck."
"May it bring peace," said Clayton, and raised his glass.

Some time later going home in the car with Mrs. Mackenzie, quiet and slightly grim beside him, Terry spoke out
of a thoughtful silence.
"There's something wrong with Clay," he said. "If ever a fellow had a right to be happy - he has a queer look.
Have you noticed it?"
"Anybody married to Natalie Spencer would develop what you call a queer look," she replied, tartly.
"Don't you think he is in love with her?"
"If you ask me, I think he has reached the point where he can't bear the sight of her. But he doesn't know it."
"She's pretty."
"So is a lamp-shade," replied Mrs. Terry, acidly. "Or a kitten, or a fancy ice-cream. But you wouldn't care to be
married to them, would you?"

It was almost dawn when Natalie came in. Clayton had not been asleep. He had got to thinking rather feverishly
of the New-year. Without in any way making a resolution, he had determined to make it a better year than the last;
to be more gentle with Natalie, more understanding with Graham; to use his new prosperity wisely; to forget his
own lack of happiness in making others happy. He was very vague about that. The search of the ages the rector had
called happiness, and one found it by giving it.

To his surprise, Natalie came into his bedroom, looking like some queer oriental bird, vivid and strangely unlike herself.

"I saw your light. Heavens, what a party!"
"I'm glad you enjoyed it. I hope you didn't mind my not going on."
"I wish you had. Clay, you'll never guess what happened."
"Probably not. What?"
"Well, Audrey just made it, that's all. Funny! I wish you'd seen some of their faces. Of course she was disgraceful, but she took it off right away. But it was like her - no one else would have dared."

His mouth felt dry. Audrey - disgraceful!

"It was in the stable, you know, I told you. And just at midnight the doors opened and a big white horse leaped in with Audrey on his back. No saddle - nothing. She was dressed like a bare-back rider in the circus, short tulle skirts and tights. They nearly mobbed her with joy." She yawned. "Well, I'm off to bed."

He roused himself.

"A happy New-year, my dear."
"Thanks," she said, and wandered out, her absurd feathered tail trailing behind her.

He lay back and closed his eyes. So Audrey had done that, Audrey, who had been in his mind all those sleepless hours; for he knew now that back of all his resolutions to do better had been the thought of her.

He felt disappointed and bitter. The sad disillusion of the middle years, still heroically clinging to faiths that one after another destroyed themselves, was his.

CHAPTER XVIII

Audrey was frightened. She did not care a penny's worth what her little world thought. Indeed, she knew that she had given it a new thrill and so had won its enthusiastic approval. She was afraid of what Clayton would think.

She was absurdly quiet and virtuous all the next day, gathered out her stockings and mended them; began a personal expenditure account for the New-year, heading it carefully with "darning silk, 50 cents"; wrote a long letter to Chris, and - listened for the telephone. If only he would call her, so she could explain. Still, what could she explain? She had done it. It was water over the dam - and it is no fault of Audrey's that she would probably have spelled it "damn."

By noon she was fairly abject. She did not analyze her own anxiety, or why the recollection of her escapade, which would a short time before have filled her with a sort of unholy joy, now turned her sick and trembling.

Then, in the middle of the afternoon, Clay called her up. She gasped a little when she heard his voice.

"I wanted to tell you, Audrey," he said, "that we can probably use the girl you spoke about, rather soon."
"Very well. Thank you. Is - wasn't there something else, too?"
"Something else?"
"You are angry, aren't you?"

He hesitated.

"Surprised. Not angry. I haven't any possible right to be angry."
"Will you come up and let me tell you about it, Clay?"
"I don't see how that will help any."
"It will help me."

He laughed at that; her new humility was so unlike her.

"Why, of course I'll come, Audrey," he said, and as he rang off he was happier than he had been all day.

He was coming. Audrey moved around the little room, adjusting chairs, rearranging the flowers that had poured in on New-year's day, brushing the hearth. And as she worked she whistled. He would be getting into the car now. He would be so far on his way. He would be almost there. She ran into her bedroom and powdered her nose, with her lips puckered, still whistling, and her heart singing.

But he scolded her thoroughly at first.

"Why on earth did you do it," he finished. "I still can't understand. I see you one day, gravity itself, a serious young woman - as you are to-day. And then I hear - it isn't like you, Audrey."

"Oh yes, it is. It's exactly like me. Like one me. There are others, of course."

She told him then, making pitiful confession of her own pride and her anxiety to spare Chris's name.

"I couldn't bear to have them suspect he had gone to the war because of a girl. Whatever he ran away from, Clay, he's doing all right now."

He listened gravely, with, toward the end, a jealousy he would not have acknowledged even to himself. Was it possible that she still loved Chris? Might she not, after the fashion of women, be building a new and idealized Chris, now that he had gone to war, out of his very common clay?
"He has done splendidly," he agreed. 
Again the warmth and coziness of the little room enveloped him. Audrey's low huskily sweet voice, her quick smile, her new and unaccustomed humility, and the odd sense of her understanding, comforted him. She made her indefinite appeal to the best that was in him.

Nothing so ennobles a man as to have some woman believe in his nobility.
"Clay," she said suddenly, "you are worrying about something."
"Nothing that won't straighten out, in time."
"Would it help to talk about it?"
He realized that he had really come to her to talk about it. It had been in the back of his head all the time.
"I'm rather anxious about Graham."
"Toots Hayden?"
"Partly."
"I'm afraid she's got him, Clay. There isn't a trick in the game she doesn't know. He had about as much chance as I have of being twenty again. She wants to make a wealthy marriage, and she's picked on Graham. That's all."
"It isn't only Marion. I'm afraid there's another girl, a girl at the mill - his stenographer. I have no proof of anything. In fact, I don't think there is anything yet. She's in love with him, probably, or she thinks she is. I happened on them together, and she looked - Of course, if what you say about Marion is true, he can not care for her, even, well, in any way."
"Oh, nonsense, Clay. A man - especially a boy - can love a half-dozen girls. He can be crazy about any girl he is with. It may not be love, but it plays the same tricks with him that the real thing does."
"I can't believe that."
"No. You wouldn't."
She leaned back and watched him. How much of a boy he was himself, anyhow! And yet how little he understood the complicated problems of a boy like Graham, irresponsible but responsive, rich without labor, with time for the sort of dalliance Clay himself at the same age had had neither leisure nor inclination to indulge.

He was wandering about the room, his hands in his pockets, his head bent. When he stopped:
"What am I to do with the girl, Audrey?"
"Get rid of her. That's easy."
"Not so easy as it sounds."
He told her of Dunbar and the photographs, of Rudolph Klein, and the problem as he saw it.
"So there I am," he finished. "If I let her go, I lose one of the links in Dunbar's chain. If I keep her?"
"Can't Natalie talk to him? Sometimes a woman can get to the bottom of these things when a man can't. He might tell her all about it."
"Possibly. But I think it unlikely Natalie would tell me."
She leaned over and patted his hand impulsively.
"What devils we women are!" she said. "Now and then one of us gets what she deserves. That's me. And now and then one of us get's something she doesn't deserve. And that's Natalie. She's over-indulgent to Graham."
"He is all she has."
"She has you."
Something in her voice made him turn and look at her.
"That ought to be something, you know," she added. And laughed a little.
"Does Natalie pay his debts?"
"I rather think so."
But that was a subject he could not go on with.
"The fault is mine. I know my business better than I know how to handle my life, or my family. I don't know why I trouble you with it all, anyhow. You have enough." He hesitated. "That's not exactly true, either. I do know. I'm relying on your woman's wit to help me. I'm wrong somehow."
"About Graham?"
"I have a curious feeling that I am losing him. I can't ask for his confidence. I can't, apparently, even deserve it. I see him, day after day, with all the good stuff there is in him, working as little as he can, drinking more than he should, out half the night, running into debt - good heavens, Audrey, what can I do?"
She hesitated.
"Of course, you know one thing that would save him, Clay?"
"What?"
"Our getting into the war."
"I ought not to have to lose my boy in order to find him. But - we are going to be in it."
He had risen and was standing, an elbow on the mantel-piece, looking down at her.

"I suppose every man wonders, once in a while, how he'd conduct himself in a crisis. When the Lusitania went down I dare say a good many fellows wondered if they'd have been able to keep their coward bodies out of the boats. I know I did. And I wonder about myself now. What can I do if we go into the war? I couldn't do a forced march of more than five miles. I can't drill, or whatever they call it. I can shoot clay pigeons, but I don't believe I could hit a German coming at me with a bayonet at twenty feet. I'd be pretty much of a total loss. Yet I'll want to do something."

And when she sat, very silent, looking into the fire: "You see, you think it absurd yourself."

"Hardly absurd," she roused herself to look up at him. "If it is, it's the sort of splendid absurdity I am proud of. I was wondering what Natalie would say."

"I don't believe it lies between a man and his wife. It's between him and his God."

He was rather ashamed of that, however, and soon after he went away.

CHAPTER XIX

Natalie Spencer was finding life full of interest that winter. Now and then she read the headings in the newspapers, not because she was really interested, but that she might say, at the dinner-party which was to her the proper end of a perfect day:

"What do you think of Turkey declaring her independence?"

Or:

"I see we have taken the Etoile Wood."

Clayton had overheard her more than once, and had marveled at the dexterity with which, these leaders thrown out, she was able to avoid committing herself further.

The new house engrossed her. She was seeing a great deal of Rodney, too, and now and then she had fancied that there was a different tone in Rodney's voice when he addressed her. She never analyzed that tone, or what it suggested, but it gave her a new interest in life. She was always marceled, massaged, freshly manicured. And she had found a new facial treatment. Clayton, in his room at night, could hear the sharp slapping of flesh on flesh, as Madeleine gently pounded certain expensive creams into the skin of her face and neck.

She refused all forms of war activity, although now and then she put some appeal before Clayton and asked him if he cared to send a check. He never suggested that she answer any of these demands personally, after an experience early in the winter.

"Why don't you send it yourself?" he had asked. "Wouldn't you like it to go in your name?"

"It doesn't matter. I don't know any of the committee."

He had tried to explain what he meant.

"You might like to feel that you are doing something."

"I thought my allowance was only to dress on. If I'm to attend to charities, too, you'll have to increase it."

"But," he argued patiently, "if you only sent them twenty-five dollars, did without some little thing to do it, you'd feel rather more as though you were giving, wouldn't you?"

"Twenty-five dollars! And be laughed at!"

He had given in then.

"If I put an extra thousand dollars to your account to-morrow, will you check it out to this fund?"

"It's too much."

"Will you?"

"Yes, of course," she had agreed, indifferently. And he had notified her that the money was in the bank. But two months later the list of contributors was published, and neither his name nor Natalie's was among them.

Toward personal service she had no inclination whatever. She would promise anything, but the hour of fulfilling always found her with something else to do. Yet she had kindly impulses, at times, when something occurred to take her mind from herself. She gave liberally to street mendicants. She sent her car to be used by those of her friends who had none. She was lavish with flowers to the sick - although Clayton paid her florist bills.

She was lavish with money - but never with herself.

In the weeks after the opening of the new year Clayton found himself watching her. He wondered sometimes just what went on in her mind during the hours when she sat, her hands folded, gazing into space. He could not tell. He surmised her planning, always planning; the new house, a gown, a hat, a party.

But late in January he began to think that she was planning something else. Old Terry Mackenzie had been there one night, and he had asserted not only that war was coming, but that we would be driven to conscription to raise an army.

"They've all had to come to it," he insisted. "And we will, as sure as God made little fishes. You can't raise a million volunteers for a war that's three thousand miles away."
"You mean, conscription among the laboring class?" Natalie had asked naively, and there had been a roar of laughter.

"Not at all," Terry had said. And chuckled. "This war, if it comes, is every man's burden, rich and poor. Only the rich will give most, because they have most to give."

"I think that's ridiculous," Natalie had said.

It was after that that Clayton began to wonder what she was planning. He came home late one afternoon to find that they were spending the evening in, and to find a very serious Natalie waiting, when he came down-stairs dressed for dinner. She made an effort to be conversational, but it was a failure. He was uneasily aware that she was watching him, inspecting, calculating, choosing her moment. But it was not until they were having coffee that she spoke.

"I'm uneasy about Graham, Clay."

He looked up quickly.

"Yes?"

"I think he ought to go away somewhere."

"He ought to stay here, and make a man of himself," he came out, almost in spite of himself. He knew well enough that such a note always roused Natalie's antagonism, and he waited for the storm. But none came.

"He's not doing very well, is he?"

"He's not failing entirely. But he gives the best of himself outside the mill. That's all."

She puzzled him. Had she heard of Marion?

"Don't you think, if he was away from this silly crowd he plays with, as he calls it, that he would be better off?"

"Where, for instance?"

"You keep an agent in England. He could go there. Or to Russia, if the Russian contract goes through."

He was still puzzled.

"But why England or Russia?"

"Anywhere out of this country."

"He doesn't have to leave this country to get away from a designing woman."

From her astonished expression, he knew that he had been wrong. She was not trying to get him away from Marion. From what?

She bent forward, her face set hard.

"What woman?"

Well, it was out. She might as well know it. "Don't you think it possible, Natalie, that he may intend to marry Marion Hayden?"

There was a very unpleasant half-hour after that. Marion was a parasite of the rich. She had abused Natalie's hospitality. She was designing. She played bridge for her dress money. She had ensnared the boy.

And then:

"That settles it, I should think. He ought to leave America. If you have a single thought for his welfare you'll send him to England."

"Then you hadn't known about Marion when you proposed that before?"

"No. I knew he was not doing well. And I'm anxious. After all, he's my boy. He is - "

"I know," he supplemented gravely. "He is all you have. But I still don't understand why he must leave America."

It was not until she had gone up-stairs to her room, leaving him uneasily pacing the library floor, that he found the solution. Old Terry Mackenzie and his statement about conscription. Natalie wanted Graham sent out of the country, so he would be safe. She would purchase for him a shameful immunity, if war came. She would stultify the boy to keep him safe. In that hour of clear vision he saw how she had always stultified the boy, to keep him safe. He saw her life a series of small subterfuges, of petty indulgences, of little plots against himself, all directed toward securing Graham immunity - from trouble at school, from debt, from his own authority.

A wave of unreasoning anger surged over him, but with it there was pity, too; pity for the narrowness of her life and her mind, pity for her very selfishness. And for the first time in his life he felt a shamefaced pity for himself. He shook himself violently. When a man got sorry for himself -

CHAPTER XX

Rudolph Klein had not for a moment believed Anna's story about the watch, and on the day after he discovered it on her wrist he verified his suspicions. During his noon hour he went up-town and, with the confident swagger of a certain type of man who feels himself out of place, entered the jeweler's shop in question.

He had to wait for some little time, and he spent it in surveying contemptuously the contents of the show-cases. That even his wildest estimate fell far short of their value he did not suspect, but his lips curled. This was where the
money earned by honest workmen was spent, that women might gleam with such gewgaws. Wall Street bought them, Wall Street which was forcing this country into the war to protect its loans to the Allies. America was to pull England's chestnuts out of the fire that women, and yet more women, might wear those strings of pearls, those glittering diamond baubles.

Into his crooked mind there flashed a line from a speech at the Third Street hall the night before: "War is hell. Let those who want to, go to hell."

So - Wall Street bought pearls for its women, and the dissolute sons of the rich bought gold wrist-watches for girls they wanted to seduce. The expression on his face was so terrible that the clerk behind the counter, waiting to find what he wanted, was startled.

"I want to look at gold wrist-watches," he said. And eyed the clerk for a trace of patronage.

"Ladies?"

"Yes."

He finally found one that was a duplicate of Anna's, and examined it carefully. Yes, it was the same, the maker's name on the dial, the space for the monogram on the back, everything.

"How much is this one?"

"One hundred dollars."

He almost dropped it. A hundred dollars! Then he remembered Anna's story.

"Have you any gold-filled ones that look like this?"

"We do not handle gold-filled cases."

He put it down, and turned to go. Then he stopped.

"Don't sell on the installment plan, either, I suppose?" The sneer in his voice was clearer than his anxiety. In his mind, he already knew the answer.

"Sorry. No."

He went out. So he had been right. That young skunk had paid a hundred dollars for a watch for Anna. To Rudolph it meant but one thing.

That had been early in January. For some days he kept his own counsel, thinking, planning, watching. He was jealous of Graham, but with a calculating jealousy that set him wondering how to turn his knowledge to his own advantage. And Anna's lack of liberty comforted him somewhat. He couldn't meet her outside the mill, at least not without his knowing it.

He established a system of espionage over her that drove her almost to madness.

"What're you hanging round for?" she would demand when he stepped forward at the mill gate. "D'you suppose I never want to be by myself?"

Or:

"You just go away, Rudolph Klein. I'm going up with some of the girls."

But she never lost him. He was beside her or at her heels, his small crafty eyes on her. When he walked behind her there was a sensuous gleam in them.

After a few weeks she became terrified. There was a coldness of deviltry in him, she knew. And he had the whip-hand. She was certain he knew about the watch, and her impertinence masked an agony of fear. Suppose he went to her father? Why, if he knew, didn't he go to her father?

She suspected him, but she did not know of what. She knew he was an enemy of all government, save that of the mob, that he was an incendiary, a firebrand who set on fire the brutish passions of a certain type of malcontents. She knew, for all he pretended to be the voice of labor, he no more represented the honest labor of the country than he represented law and order.

She watched him sometimes, at the table, when on Sundays he ate the mid-day meal with them; his thin hatchet face, his prominent epiglottis. He wore a fresh cotton shirt then, with a flaming necktie, but he did not clean his fingernails. And his talk was always of tearing down, never of building up.

"Just give us time, and we'll show them," he often said. And "them" was always the men higher up.

He hated policemen. He and Herman had had many arguments about policemen. Herman was not like Rudolph. He believed in law and order. He even believed in those higher up. But he believed very strongly in the fraternity of labor. Until the first weeks of that New-year, Herman Klein, outside the tyranny of his home life, represented very fairly a certain type of workman, believing in the dignity and integrity of his order. But, with his failure to relocate himself, something went wrong in Herman. He developed, in his obstinate, stubborn, German head a suspicion of the land of his adoption. He had never troubled to understand it. He had taken it for granted, as he took for granted that Anna should work and turn over her money to him.

Now it began to ask things of him. Not much. A delegation of women came around one night and asked him for money for Belgian Relief. The delegation came, because no one woman would venture alone.
"I have no money for Belgians," he said. He would not let them come in. "Why should I help the Belgians? Liars and hypocrites!"

The story went about the neighborhood, and he knew it. He cared nothing for popularity, but he resented losing his standing in the community. And all along he was convinced that he was right; that the Belgians had lied. There had been, in the Germany he had left, no such will to wanton killing. These people were ignorant. Out of the depths of their ignorance they talked.

He read only German newspapers. In the little room back of Gustav Shroeder's he met only Germans. And always, at his elbow, there was Rudolph.

Until the middle of January Rudolph had not been able to get him to one of his incendiary meetings. Then one cold night while Anna sewed by the lamp inside the little house, Rudolph and Herman walked in the frozen garden, Herman with his pipe, Rudolph with the cheap cigarettes he used incessantly. Anna opened the door a crack and listened at first. She was watchful of Rudolph, always, those days. But the subject was not Anna.

"You think we get in, then?" Herman asked.
"Sure."
"But for what?"
"So 'Spencers' can make more money out of it," said Rudolph bitterly. "And others like them. But they and their kind don't do the dying. It's the workers that go and die. Look at Germany!"
"Yes. It is so in Germany."
"All this talk about democracy - that's bunk. Just plain bunk. Why should the workers in this country kill the workers in another? Why? To make money for capital - more money."
"Ja," Herman assented. "That is what war is. Always the same. I came here to get away from war."
"Well, you didn't get far enough. You left a king behind, but we've got a Czar here."

Herman was slowly, methodically, following an earlier train of thought.
"I am a workman," he said. "I would not fight against other workmen. Just as I, a German, will not fight against other Germans."
"But you would sit here, on the hill, and do nothing."
"What can I do? One man, and with no job."
"Come to the meeting to-night."
"You and your meetings!" the old German said impatiently. "You talk. That's all."

Rudolph lowered his voice.
"You think we only talk, eh? Well, you come and hear some things. Talk! You come," he coaxed, changing his tone. "And we'll have some beer and schnitzel at Gus's after. My treat. How about it?"

Old Herman assented. He was tired of the house, tired of the frozen garden, tired of scolding the slovenly girl who pottered around all day in a boudoir cap and slovenly wrapper. Tired of Anna's rebellious face and pert answers.

He went inside the house and put a sweater under his coat, and got his cap.
"I go out," he said, to the impassive figure under the lamp. "You will stay in."
"Oh, I don't know. I may take a walk."
"You will stay in," he repeated, and followed Rudolph outside. There he reached in, secured the key, and locked the door on the outside. Anna, listening and white with anger, heard his ponderous steps going around to the back door, and the click as he locked that one also.
"Beast!" she muttered. "German schwein."

It was after midnight when she heard him coming back. She prepared to leap out of her bed when he came upstairs, to confront him angrily and tell him she was through. She was leaving home. But long after she had miserably cried herself to sleep, Herman sat below, his long-stemmed pipe in his teeth, his stockinged feet spread to the dying fire.

In that small guarded hail that night he had learned many surprising things, there and at Gus's afterward. The Fatherland's war was already being fought in America, and not only by Germans. The workers of the world had banded themselves together, according to the night's speakers. And because they were workers they would not fight the German workers. It was all perfectly simple. With the cooperation of the workers of the world, which recognized no country but a vast brotherhood of labor, it was possible to end war, all war.

In the meantime, while all the workers all over the world were being organized, one prevented as much as possible any assistance going to capitalistic England. One did some simple thing: started a strike, or sawed lumber too short, or burned a wheat-field, or put nails in harvesting machinery, or missent perishable goods, or changed signal-lights on railroads, or drove copper nails into fruit-trees, so they died. This was a pity, the fruit-trees. But at least they did not furnish fruit for Germany's enemies.
So each one did but one thing, and that small, so small that it was difficult to discover. But there were two hundred thousand men to do them, according to Rudolph, and that meant a great deal.

Only one thing about the meeting Herman had not liked. There were packages of wicked photographs going about. Filthy things. When they came to him he had dropped them on the floor. What had they to do with Germany's enemies, or preventing America from going into the war?

Rudolph laughed when he dropped them. 
"They won't bite you!" he had said, and had stooped to pick them up. But Herman had kept his foot on them.

So - America would go into the war against the Fatherland, unless many hundreds of thousands did each their little bit. And if they did not, America would go in, and fight for England to control the seas, and the Spencer plant would make millions of shells that honest German workers, sweat-brothers of the world, might die.

He remembered word for word the peroration of the evening's speech.
"We would extend the hand of brotherhood to the so-called enemy, and strangle the cry for war in the fat white throats of the blood-bloated money-lenders of Wall Street, before it became articulate."

He was very tired. He stooped and picked up his shoes, and with them in his hand, drawn to his old-time military erectness, he stood for some time before the gilt-framed picture on the wall. Then he went slowly and ponderously up-stairs to bed.

CHAPTER XXI

From the moment, the day before Christmas, when Graham had taken the little watch from his pocket and fastened it on Anna's wrist, he was rather uneasily aware that she had become his creature. He had had no intention of buying Anna. He was certainly not in love with her. But he found her amusing and at times comforting.

He had, of course, expected to lose her after the unlucky day when Clayton had found them together, but Dunbar had advised that she be kept on for a time at least. Mentally Graham figured that the first of January would see her gone, and the thought of a Christmas present for her was partly compounded of remorse.

He had been buying a cigarette case for Marion when the thought came to him. He had not bought a Christmas present for a girl, except flowers, since the first year he was at college. He had sent Delight one that year, a half-dozen little leather-bound books of poetry. What a precious young prig he must have been! He knew now that girls only pretended to care for books. They wanted jewelry, and they got past the family with it by pretending it was not real, or that they had bought it out of their allowances. One of Toots' friends was taking a set of silver fox from a man, and she was as straight as a die. Oh, he knew girls, now.

The next day he asked Anna Klein: "What would you like for Christmas?"

Anna, however, had insisted that she did not want a Christmas present.

Later on, however, she had seen a watch one of the girls on the hill had bought for twelve dollars, and on his further insistence a day or so later she had said:

"Do you really want to know?"

"Of course I do."

"You oughtn't to spend money on me, you know."

"You let me attend to that. Now, out with it!"

So she told him rather nervously, for she felt that twelve dollars was a considerable sum. He had laughed, and agreed instantly, but when he went to buy it he found himself paying a price that rather startled him.

"Don't you lose it, young lady!" he admonished her when, the day before Christmas, he fastened it on her wrist. Then he had stooped down to kiss her, and the intensity of feeling in her face had startled him. "It's a good watch," he had said, rather uneasily; "no excuse for your being late now!"

All the rest of the day she was radiant.

He meant well enough even then. He had never pretended to love her. He accepted her adoration, petted and teased her in return, worked off his occasional ill humors on her, was indeed conscious sometimes that he was behaving extremely well in keeping things as they were.

But by the middle of January he began to grow uneasy. The atmosphere at Marion's was bad; there was a knowledge of life plus an easy toleration of certain human frailties that was as insidious as a slow fever. The motto of live and let live prevailed. And Marion refused to run away with him and marry him, or to let him go to his father.

In his office all day long there was Anna, so yielding, so surely his to take if he wished. Already he knew that things there must either end or go forward. Human emotions do not stand still; they either advance or go back, and every impulse of his virile young body was urging him on.

He made at last an almost frenzied appeal to Marion to marry him at once, but she refused flatly.

"I'm not going to ruin you," she said. "If you can't bring your people round, we'll just have to wait."

"They'd be all right, once it is done."

"Not if I know your father! Oh, he'd be all right - in ten years or so. But what about the next two or three? We'd
have to live, wouldn't we?"

He lay awake most of the night thinking things over. Did she really care for him, as Anna cared, for instance? She was always talking about their having to live. If they couldn't manage on his salary for a while, then it was because Marion did not care enough to try.

For the first time he began to question Marion's feeling for him. She had been rather patronizing him lately. He had overheard her, once, speaking of him as a nice kid, and it rankled. In sheer assertion of his manhood he met Anna Klein outside the mill at the noon hour, the next day, and took her for a little ride in his car. After that he repeatedly did the same thing, choosing infrequented streets and roads, dining with her sometimes at a quiet hotel out on the Freeland road.

"How do you get away with this to your father?" he asked her once.

"Tell him you're getting ready to move out to the new plant, and we're working. He's not round much in the evenings now. He's at meetings, or swilling beer at Gus's saloon. They're a bad lot, Graham, that crowd at Gus's."

"How do you mean, bad?"

"Well, they're Germans, for one thing, the sort that shouts about the Fatherland. They make me sick."

"Let's forget them, honey," said Graham, and reaching under the table-cloth, caught and held one of her hands.

He was beginning to look at things with the twisted vision of Marion's friends. He intended only to flirt a little with Anna Klein, but he considered that he was extremely virtuous and, perhaps, a bit of a fool for letting things go at that. Once, indeed, Tommy Hale happened on them in a road-house, sitting very quietly with a glass of beer before Graham and a lemonade in front of Anna, and had winked at him as though he had received him into the brotherhood of those who were seeing life.

Then, near the end of January, events took another step forward. Rudolph Klein was discharged from the mill. Clayton, coming down one morning, found the manager, Hutchinson, and Dunbar in his office. The two men had had a difference of opinion, and the matter was laid before him.

"He is a constant disturbing element," Hutchinson finished; "I understand Mr. Dunbar's position, but we can't afford to have the men thrown into a ferment, constantly."

"If you discharge him you rouse his suspicions and those of his gang," said Dunbar, sturdily.

"There is a gang, then?"

"A gang! My God!"

In the end, however, Clayton decided to let Rudolph go. Hutchinson was insistent. Production was falling down. One or two accidents to the machinery lately looked like sabotage. He had found a black cat crudely drawn on the cement pavement outside his office-door that very morning, the black cat being the symbol of those I.W.W.'s who advocated destruction.

"What about the girl?" Dunbar asked, when the manager had gone.

"I have kept her, against my better judgment, Mr. Dunbar."

For just a moment Dunbar hesitated. He knew certain things that Clayton Spencer did not, things that it was his business to know. The girl might be valuable one of these days. She was in love with young Spencer. The time might come when he, Dunbar, would need to capitalize that love and use it against Rudolph and the rest of the crowd that met in the little room behind Shroeder's saloon. It was too bad, in a way. He was sorry for this man with the strong, repressed face and kindly mouth, who sat across from him. But these were strange times. A man could not be too scrupulous.

"Better keep her on for a month or two, anyhow," he said. "They're up to something, and I miss my guess if it isn't directed against you."

"How about Herman Klein?"

"Nothing doing," stated Mr. Dunbar, flatly. "Our informer is tending bar at Gus's. Herman listens and drinks their beer, but he's got the German fear of authority in him. He's a beer socialist. That's all."

But in that Mr. Dunbar left out of account the innate savagery that lurked under Herman's phlegmatic surface.

"You don't think it would do if she was moved to another office?"

"The point is this," Dunbar moved his chair forward. "The time may come when we will need the girl as an informer. Rudolph Klein is infatuated with her. Now I understand that she has a certain feeling of - loyalty to Mr. Graham. In that case" - he glanced at Clayton - "the welfare of the many, Mr. Spencer, against the few."

For a long time after he was gone Clayton sat at his desk, thinking. Every instinct in him revolted against the situation thus forced on him. There was something wrong with Dunbar's reasoning. Then it flashed on him that Dunbar probably was right, and that their points of view were bitterly opposed. Dunbar would have no scruples, because he was not quite a gentleman. But war was a man's game. It was not the time for fine distinctions of ethics. And Dunbar was certainly a man.

If only he could talk it over with Natalie! But he knew Natalie too well to expect any rational judgment from her.
She would demand at once that the girl should go. Yet he needed a woman's mind on it. In any question of relationship between the sexes men were creatures of impulse, but women had plotted and planned through the ages. They might lose their standards, but never their heads. Not that he put such a thought into words. He merely knew that women were better at such things than men.

That afternoon, as a result of much uncertainty, he took his problem to Audrey. And Audrey gave him an answer.

"You've got to think of the mill, Clay," she said. "The Dunbar man is right. And all you or any other father of a boy can do is to pray in season, and to trust to Graham's early training."

And all the repressed bitterness in Clayton Spencer's heart was in his answer.

"He never had any early training, Audrey. Oh, he had certain things. His manners, for instance. But other things? I ought not to say that. It was my fault, too. I'm not blaming only Natalie. Only now, when it is all we have to count on - "

He was full of remorse when he started for home. He felt guilty of every disloyalty. And in masculine fashion he tried to make up to Natalie for the truth that had been wrung from him. He carried home a great bunch of roses for her. But he carried home, too, a feeling of comfort and vague happiness, as though the little room behind him still reached out and held him in its warm embrace.

CHAPTER XXII

In the evening of the thirty-first of January Clayton and Graham were waiting for Natalie to come down to dinner when the bell rang, and Dunbar was announced. Graham welcomed the interruption. He had been vaguely uneasy with his father since that day in his office when Clayton had found him on Anna Klein's desk. Clayton had tried to restore the old friendliness of their relation, but the boy had only half-heartedly met his advances. Now and then he himself made an overture, but it was the almost timid advance of a puppy that has been beaten. It left Clayton discouraged and alarmed, set him to going back over the past for any severity on his part to justify it. Now and then he wondered if, in Graham's frequent closetings with Natalie, she did not covertly undermine his influence with the boy, to increase her own.

But if she did, why? What was going on behind the impassive, lovely mask that was her face.

Dunbar was abrupt, as usual.

"I've brought you some news, Mr. Spencer," he said. He looked oddly vital and alive in the subdued and quiet room. "They've shown their hand at last. But maybe you've heard it."

"I've heard nothing new."

"Then listen," said Dunbar, bending forward over a table, much as it was his habit to bend over Clayton's desk.

"We're in it at last. Or as good as in it. Unrestricted submarine warfare! All merchant-ships bound to and from Allied ports to be sunk without warning! We're to be allowed - mark this, it's funny! - we're to be allowed to send one ship a week to England, nicely marked and carrying passengers only."

There was a little pause. Clayton drew a long breath.

"That means war," he said finally.

"Hell turned over and stirred up with a pitch-fork, if we have any backbone at all," agreed Dunbar. He turned to Graham. "You young fellows'll be crazy about this."

"You bet we will," said Graham.

Clayton slipped an arm about the boy's shoulders. He could not speak for a moment. All at once he saw what the news meant. He saw Graham going into the horror across the sea. He saw vast lines of marching men, boys like Graham, boys who had frolicked through their careless days, whistled and played and slept sound of nights, now laden like pack-animals and carrying the implements of death in their hands, going forward to something too terrible to contemplate.

And a certain sure percentage of them would never come back.

His arm tightened about the boy. When he withdrew it Graham straightened.

"If it's war, it's my war, father."

And Clayton replied, quietly:

"It is your war, old man."

Dunbar turned his back and inspected Natalie's portrait. When he faced about again Graham was lighting a cigarette, and Natalie herself was entering the room. In her rose-colored satin she looked exotic, beautiful, and Dunbar gave her a fleeting glance of admiration as he bowed. She looked too young to have a boy going to war. Behind her he suddenly saw other women, thousands of other women, living luxurious lives, sheltered and pampered, and suddenly called on to face sacrifice without any training for it.

"Didn't know you were going out," he said. "Sorry. I'll run along now."

"We are dining at home," said Natalie, coldly. She remained standing near the door, as a hint to the shabby
gentleman with the alert eyes who stood by the table. But Dunbar had forgotten her already.

"I came here right away," he explained, "because you may be having trouble now. In fact, I'm pretty sure you will. If we declare war to-morrow, as we may?"

"War!" said Natalie, and took a step forward.

Dunbar remembered her.

"We will probably declare war in a day or two. The Germans..."

But Natalie was looking at Clayton with a hostility in her eyes she took no trouble to conceal.

"I hope you'll be happy, now. You've been talking war, wanting war - and now you've got it."

She turned and went out of the room. The three men in the library below heard her go up the stairs and the slam of her door behind her. Later on she sent word that she did not care for any dinner, and Clayton asked Dunbar to remain. Practical questions as to the mill were discussed, Graham entering into them with a new interest. He was flushed and excited. But Clayton was rather white and very quiet.

Once Graham took advantage of Dunbar's preoccupation with his asparagus to say:

"You don't object to the aviation service, father?"

"Wherever you think you can be useful."

After coffee Graham rose.

"I'll go and speak to mother," he said. And Clayton felt in him a new manliness. It was as though his glance said, "She is a woman, you know. War is men's work, work for you and me. But it's hard on them."

Afterward Clayton was to remember with surprise how his friends gathered that night at the house. Nolan came in early, his twisted grin rather accentuated, his tall frame more than usually stooped. He stood in the doorway of the library, one hand in his pocket, a familiar attitude which made him look oddly boyish.

"Well!" he drawled, without greeting. "They've done it. The English have got us. We hadn't a chance. The little Welshman - "

"Come in," Clayton said, "and talk like an American and not an Irishman. I don't want to know what you think about Lloyd George. What are you going to do?"

"I was thinking," Nolan observed, advancing, "of blowing up Washington. We'd have a fresh start, you see. With Washington gone root and branch we would have some sort of chance, a clear sweep, with the capital here or in Boston. Or London."

Clayton laughed. Behind Nolan's cynicism he felt a real disturbance. But Dunbar eyed him uncertainly. He didn't know about some of these Irish. They'd fight like hell, of course, if only they'd forget England.

"Don't worry about Washington," Clayton said. "Let it work out its own problems. We will have our own. What do you suppose men like you and myself are going to do? We can't fight."

Nolan settled himself in a long chair.

"Why can't we fight?" he asked. "I heard something the other day. Roosevelt is going to take a division abroad - older men. I rather like the idea. Wherever he goes there'll be fighting. I'm no Rough Rider, God knows; but I haven't spent a half hour every noon in a gymnasium for the last ten years for nothing. And I can shoot."

"And you are free," Clayton observed, quietly.

Nolan looked up.

"It's going to be hard on the women," he said. "You're all right. They won't let you go. You're too useful where you are. But of course there's the boy."

When Clayton made no reply Nolan glanced at him again.

"I suppose he'll want to go," he suggested.

Clayton's face was set. For more than an hour now Graham had been closeted with his mother, and as the time went on, and no slam of a door up-stairs told of his customary method of leaving a room, he had been conscious of a growing uneasiness. The boy was soft; the fiber in him had not been hardened yet, not enough to be proof against tears. He wanted desperately to leave Nolan, to go up and learn what arguments, what coaxing and selfish whimperings Natalie was using with the boy. But he wanted, also desperately, to have the boy fight his own fight and win.

"He will want to go, I think. Of course, his mother will be shaken just now. It'll all new to her. She wouldn't believe it was coming."

"He'll go," Nolan said reflectively. "They'll all go, the best of them first. After all, we've been making a lot of noise about wanting to get into the thing. Now we're in, and that's the first price we pay - the boys."

A door slammed up-stairs, and Clayton heard Graham coming down. He passed the library door, however, and Clayton suddenly realized that he was going out.

"Graham!" he called.

Graham stopped, and came back slowly.
"Yes, father," he said, from the doorway.

"Aren't you coming in?"

"I thought I'd go out for a hit of a spin, if you don't mind. Evening, Mr. Nolan."

The boy was shaken. Clayton knew it from his tone. All the fine vigor of the early evening was gone. And an overwhelming rage filled him, against Natalie, against himself, even against the boy. Trouble, which should have united his house, had divided it. The first threat of trouble, indeed.

"You can go out later," he said rather sharply. "We ought to talk things over, Graham. This is a mighty serious time."

"What's the use of talking things over, father? We don't know anything but that we may declare war."

"That's enough, isn't it?"

But he was startled when he saw Graham's face. He was very pale and his eyes already looked furtive. They were terribly like Natalie's eyes sometimes. The frankness was gone out of them. He came into the room, and stood there, rigid.

"I promised mother to get her some sleeping-powders."

"Sleeping-powders!"

"She's nervous."

"Bad things, sleeping-powders," said Nolan. "Get her to take some setting-up exercises by an open window and she'll sleep like a top."

"Do you mind, if I go, father?"

Clayton saw that it was of no use to urge the boy. Graham wanted to avoid him, wanted to avoid an interview. The early glow of the evening faded. Once again the sense of having lost his son almost overwhelmed him.

"Very well," he said stiffly. And Graham went out.

However, he did not leave the house. At the door he met Doctor Haverford and Delight, and Clayton heard the clergyman's big bass booming through the hall.

"- like a lamb to the slaughter!" he was saying. "And I a man of peace!"

When he came into the library he was still holding forth with an affectation of rage.

"I ask you, Clayton," he said, "what refuge is there for a man of peace? My own child, leading me out into the night, and inquiring on the way over if I did not feel that the commandment not to kill was a serious error."

"Of course he's going," she said. "He has been making the most outrageous excuses, just to hear mother and me reply to them. And all the time nothing would hold him back."

"My dear," said the rector solemnly. "I shall have to tell you something. I shall have to lay bare the secrets of my heart. How are you, Nolan? Delight, they will not take me. I have three back teeth on a plate. I have never told you this before. I did not wish to ruin your belief that I am perfect. But -"

In the laugh that greeted this Graham returned. He was, Clayton saw, vaguely puzzled by the rector and rather incredulous as to Delight's attitude.

"Do you really want him to go?" he asked her.

"Of course. Aren't you going? Isn't everybody who is worth anything going? I'd go myself if I could. You don't know how lucky you are."

"But is your Mother willing?"

"Why, what sort of a mother do you think I have?"

Clayton overheard that, and he saw Graham wince. His own hands clenched. What a power in the world a brave woman was! And what evil could be wrought by a woman without moral courage, a selfish woman. He brought himself up short at that.

Others came in. Hutchinson, from the mill. Terry Mackenzie, Rodney Page, in evening clothes and on his way from the opera to something or other. In a corner Graham and Delight talked. The rector, in a high state of exaltation, was inclined to be oratorical and a trifle noisy. He dilated on the vast army that would rise overnight, at the call. He considered the raising of a company from his own church, and nominated Clayton as its captain. Nolan grinned sardonically.

"Precisely," he said dryly. "Clayton, because he looks like a Greek god, is ideally fitted to lead a lot of men who never saw a bayonet outside of a museum. Against trained fighting men. There's a difference you know, dominie, between a clay pigeon and a German with a bomb in one hand and a saw-toothed bayonet in the other."

"We did that in the Civil War."

"We did. And it took four years to fight a six-months war."

"We must have an army. I daresay you'll grant that."

"Well, you can bet on one thing; we're not going to have every ward boss who wants to make a record raising a regiment out of his henchmen and leading them to death."
"What would you suggest?" inquired the rector, rather crestfallen.
"I'd suggest training men as officers. And then - a draft."
"Never come to it in the world." Hutchinson spoke up. "I've heard men in the mill talking. They'll go, some of them, but they won't be driven. It would be civil war."
Clayton glanced at Graham as he replied. The boy was leaning forward, listening.
"There's this to be said for the draft," he said. "Under the volunteer system the best of our boys will go first. That's what happened in England. And they were wiped out. It's every man's war now. There is no reason why the few should be sacrificed for the many."
"And there's this, too," Graham broke in. He was flushed and nervous. "A fellow would have to go. He wouldn't be having to think whether his going would hurt anybody or not. He wouldn't have to decide. He'd - just go."
There was a little hush in the room. Then Nolan spoke.
"Right-o!" he said. "The only trouble about it is that it's likely to leave out some of us old chaps, who'd like to have a fist in it."
Hutchinson remained after the others had gone. He wanted to discuss the change in status of the plant.
"We'll be taken over by the government, probably," Clayton told him. "They have all the figures, capacity and so on. The Ordnance Department has that in hand."
Hutchinson nodded. He had himself made the report.
"We'll have to look out more than ever, I suppose," he said, as he rose to go. "The government is guarding all bridges and railways already. Met a lot of National Guard boys on the way."

Graham left when he did, offering to take him to his home, and Clayton sat for some time alone, smoking and thinking. So the thing had come at last. A year from now, and where would they all be? The men who had been there to-night, himself, Graham? Would they all be even living? Would Graham - ?
He looked back over the years. Graham a baby, splashing water in his bath and shrieking aloud with joy; Graham in his first little-boy clothes, riding a velocipede in the park and bringing in bruises of an amazing size and blackness; Graham going away to school, and manfully fixing his mind on his first long trousers, so he would not cry; Graham at college, coming in with the winning crew, and stumbling, half collapsed, into the arms of a waiting, cheering crowd. And the Graham who had followed his mother up the stairs that night, to come down baffled, thwarted, miserable.
He rose and threw away his cigar. He must have the thing out with Natalie. The boy's soul was more important than his body. He wanted him safe. God, how he wanted him safe! But he wanted him to be a man.
Natalie's room was dark when he went in. He hesitated. Then he heard her in bed, sobbing quietly. He was angry at himself for his impatience at the sound. He stood beside the bed, and forced a gentleness he did not feel.
"Can I get you anything?" he asked.
"No, thank you." And he moved toward the lamp. "Don't turn the light on. I look dreadful."
"Shall I ring for Madeleine?"
"No. Graham is bringing me a sleeping-powder."
"If you are not sleepy, may I talk to you about some things?"
"I'm sick, Clay. My head is bursting."
"Sometimes it helps to talk out our worries, dear." He was still determinedly gentle. He heard her turning her pillow, and settling herself more comfortably. "Not to you. You've made up your mind. What's the use?"
"Made up my mind to what?"
"To sending Graham to be killed."
"That's hardly worthy of you, Natalie," he said gravely. "He is my son, too. I love him at least as much as you do. I don't think this is really up to us, anyhow. It is up to him. If he wants to go?"
She sat up, suddenly, her voice thin and high. "How does he know what he wants?" she demanded. "He's too young. He doesn't know what war is; you say so yourself. You say he is too young to have a position worth while at the plant, but of course he's old enough to go to war and have a leg shot off, or to be blinded, or something." Her voice broke.
He sat down on the bed and felt around until he found her hand. But she jerked it from him. "You promised me once to let him make his own decision if the time came."
"When did I promise that?"
"In the fall, when I came home from England."
"I never made such a promise."
"Will you make it now?"
"No!"
He rose, more nearly despairing than he had ever been. He could not argue with a hysterical woman. He hated cowardice, but far deeper than that was his conviction that she had already exacted some sort of promise. And the boy was not like her in that respect. He regarded a promise as almost in the nature of an oath. He himself had taught him that in the creed of a gentleman a promise was a thing of his honor, to be kept at any cost.

"You are compelling me to do a strange and hateful thing," he said. "If you intend to use your influence to keep him out, I shall have to offset it by urging him to go. That is putting a very terrible responsibility on me."

He heard her draw her breath sharply.

"If you do that I shall leave you," she said, in a frozen voice.

Suddenly he felt sorry for her. She was so weak, so childish, so cowardly. And this was the nearest they had come to a complete break.

"You're tired and nervous," he said. "We have come a long way from what I started out to say. And a long way from the things used to be between us. If this thing, to-night, does not bring two people together -"

"Together!" she cried shrilly. "When have we been together? Not in years. You have been married to your business. I am only your housekeeper, and Graham's mother. And even Graham you are trying to take away from me. Oh, go away and let me alone."

Down-stairs, thoughts that were almost great had formulated themselves in his mind; that to die that others might live might be better than to live oneself; that he loved his country, although he had been shamefaced about it; that America was really the melting-pot of the world, and that, perhaps, only the white flame of war would fuse it into a great nation.

But Natalie made all these thoughts tawdry. She cheapened them. She found in him nothing fine; therefore there was probably nothing fine in him. He went away, to lie awake most of the night.

CHAPTER XXIII

But, with the breaking off of diplomatic relations, matters remained for a time at a standstill. Natalie dried her eyes and ordered some new clothes, and saw rather more of Rodney Page than was good for her.

With the beginning of February the country house was far enough under way for it to be promised for June, and Natalie, the fundamentals of its decoration arranged for, began to haunt old-furniture shops, accompanied always by Rodney.

"Not that your taste is not right, Natalie," he explained. "It is exquisite. But these fellows are liars and cheats, some of them. Besides, I like trailing along, if you don't mind."

Trailing along was a fairly accurate phrase. There was scarcely a day now when Natalie's shining car, with its two men in livery, did not draw up before Rodney's office building, or stand, as unostentatiously as a fire engine, not too near the entrance of his club. Clayton, going in, had seen it there once or twice, and had smiled rather grimly. He considered its presence there in questionable taste, but he felt no uneasiness. Determined as he was to give Natalie such happiness as was still in him to give, he never mentioned these instances.

But a day came, early in February, which was to mark a change in the relationship between Natalie and Rodney.

It started simply enough. They had lunched together at a down-town hotel, and then went to look at rugs. Rodney had found her rather obdurate as to old rugs. They were still arguing the matter in the limousine.

"I just don't like to think of all sorts of dirty Turks and Arabs having used them," she protested. "Slept on them, walked on them, spilled things on the - ? ugh!"

"But the colors, Natalie dear! The old faded 'copper-tones, the dull-blues, the dead-rose! There is a beauty about age, you know. Lovely as you are, you'll be even lovelier as an old woman."

"I'm getting there rather rapidly."

He turned and looked at her critically. No slightest aid that she had given her beauty missed his eyes, the delicate artificial lights in her hair, her eyebrows drawn to a hair's breadth and carefully arched, the touch of rouge under her eyes and on the lobes of her ears. But she was beautiful, no matter what art had augmented her real prettiness. She was a charming, finished product, from her veil and hat to her narrowly shod feet. He liked finished things, well done. He liked the glaze on a porcelain; he liked the perfect lacquering on the Chinese screen he had persuaded Natalie to buy; he preferred wood carved into the fine lines of Sheraton to the trees that grow in the Park, for instance, through which they were driving.

A Sheraton sideboard was art. Even certain forms of Colonial mahogany were art, although he was not fond of them. And Natalie was - art. Even if she represented the creative instincts of her dressmaker and her milliner, and not her own - he did not like a Louis XV sofa the less that it had not carved itself.

Possibly Natalie appealed then to his collective instinct, he had not analyzed it. He only knew that he liked being with her, and he was not annoyed, certainly, by the fact that he knew their constant proximity was arousing a certain amount of comment.

So:
"You are very beautiful," he said with his appraising glance full on her. "You are quite the loveliest woman I know."
"Still? With a grown son?"
"I am not a boy myself, you know."
"What has that to do with it?"
He hesitated, then laughed a little.
"I don't know," he said. "I didn't mean to say that, exactly. Of course, that fact is that I'm rather glad you are not a debutante. You would be giving me odds and ends of dances if you were, you know, and shifting me as fast as possible. As it is - "

The coquetry which is a shallow woman's substitute for passion stirred in her.
"Well? I'm awfully interested."
He turned and faced her.
"I wonder if you are!"
"Go on, Roddie. As it is??"
"As it is," he said, rather rapidly, "you give me a great deal of happiness. I can't say all I would like to, but just being with you - Natalie, I wonder if you know how much it means to me to see you every day."
"I like it, or I wouldn't do it."
"But - I wonder if it means anything to you?"
Curiously enough, with the mere putting it into words, his feeling for her seemed to grow. He was even somewhat excited. He bent toward her, his eyes on her face, and caught one of her gloved hands. He was no longer flirting with a pretty woman. He was in real earnest. But Natalie was still flirting.
"Do you want to know why I like to be with you? Because of course I do, or I shouldn't be."
"Does a famishing man want water?"
"Because you are sane and sensible. You believe, as I do, in going on as normally as possible. All these people who go around glooming because there is a war across the Atlantic! They are so tiresome. Good heavens, the hysterical attitude of some women! And Clay!"
He released her hand.
"So you like me because I'm sensible! Thanks."
"That's a good reason, isn't it?"
"Good God, Natalie, I'm only sensible because I have to be. Not about the war. I'm not talking about that. About you."
"What have I got to do with your being sensible and sane?"
"Just think about things, and you'll know."
She was greatly thrilled and quite untouched. It was a pleasant little game, and she held all the winning cards. So she said, very softly:
"We mustn't go on like this, you know. We mustn't spoil things."
And by her very "we" let him understand that the plight was not his but theirs. They were to suffer on, she implied, in a mutual, unacknowledged passion. He flushed deeply.
But although he was profoundly affected, his infatuation was as spurious as her pretense of one. He was a dilettante in love, as he was in art. His aesthetic sense, which would have died of an honest passion, fattened on the very hopelessness of his beginning an affair with Natalie. Confronted just then with the privilege of marrying her, he would have drawn back in dismay.
Since no such privilege was to be his, however, he found a deep satisfaction in considering himself hopelessly in love with her. He was profoundly sorry for himself. He saw himself a tragic figure, hopeless and wretched. He longed for the unattainable; he held up empty hands to the stars, and by so mimicking the gesture of youth, he regained youth.
"You won't cut me out of your life, Natalie?" he asked wistfully.
And Natalie, who would not have sacrificed this new thrill for anything real in the world, replied:
"It would be better, wouldn't it?"
There was real earnestness in his voice when he spoke. He had dramatized himself by that time.
"Don't take away the only thing that makes life worth living, dear!"
Which Natalie, after a proper hesitation, duly promised not to do.
There were other conversations after that. About marriage, for instance, which Rodney broadly characterized as the failure of the world; he liked treading on dangerous ground.
"When a man has married, and had children, he has fulfilled his duty to the State. That's all marriage is - duty to the State. After that he follows his normal instincts, of course."
"If you are defending unfaithfulness?"
"Not at all. I admire faithfulness. It's rare enough for admiration. No. I'm recognizing facts. Don't you suppose even dear old Clay likes a pretty woman? Of course he does. It's a total difference of view-point, Natalie. What is an incident to a man is a crime to a woman."

Or:
"All this economic freedom of women is going to lead to other freedoms, you know."
"What freedoms?"
"The right to live wherever they please. One liberty brings another, you know. Women used to marry for a home, for some one to keep them. Now they needn't, but - they have to live just the same."
"I wish you wouldn't, Rodney. It's so - cheap."

It was cheap. It was the old game of talking around conversational corners, of whispering behind mental doors. It was insidious, dangerous, and tantalizing. It made between them a bond of lowered voices, of being on the edge of things. Their danger was as spurious as their passion, but Natalie, without humor and without imagination, found the sense of insecurity vaguely attractive.

Fundamentally cold, she liked the idea of playing with fire;

CHAPTER XXIV

When war was not immediately declared the rector, who on the Sunday following that eventful Saturday of the President's speech to Congress had preached a rousing call to arms, began to feel a bit sheepish about it.

"War or no war, my dear," he said to Delight, "it made them think for as much as an hour. And I can change it somewhat, and use it again, if the time really comes."

"Second-hand stuff!" she scoffed. "You with your old sermons, and Mother with my old dresses! But it was a good sermon," she added. "I have hardly been civil to that German laundress since."

"Good gracious, Delight. Can't you remember that we must love our enemies?"

"Do you love them? You know perfectly well that the moment you get on the other side, if you do, you'll be jerking the cross off your collar and bullying some wretched soldier to give you his gun."

He had a guilty feeling that she was right.

It was February then, and they were sitting in the parish house. Delight had been filling out Sunday-school reports to parents, an innovation she detested. For a little while there was only the scratching of her pen to be heard and an occasional squeal from the church proper, where the organ was being repaired. The rector sat back in his chair, his fingertips together, and whistled noiselessly, a habit of his when he was disturbed. Now and then he glanced at Delight's bent head.

"My dear," he commented finally.
"Just a minute. That wretched little Simonton girl has been absent three Sundays out of four. And on the fourth one she said she had a toothache and sat outside on the steps. Well, daddy?"

"Do you see anything of Graham Spencer now?"

"Very little." She looked at him with frank eyes. "He has changed somehow, daddy. When we do meet he is queer. I sometimes think he avoids me."

He fell back on his noiseless whistling. And Delight, who knew his every mood, got up and perched herself on the arm of his chair.

"Don't you get to thinking things," she said. And slipped an arm around his neck.

"I did think, in the winter - "

"I'll tell you about that," she broke in, bravely. "I suppose, if he'd cared for me at all, I'd have been crazy about him. It isn't because he's good looking. I - well, I don't know why. I just know, as long as I can remember, I - however, that's not important. He thinks I'm a nice little thing and lets it go at that. It's a good bit worse, of course, than having him hate me."

"Sometimes I think you are not very happy."

"I'm happier than I would be trying to make him fall in love with me. Oh, you needn't be shocked. It can be done. Lots of girls do it. It isn't any moral sense that keeps me from it, either. It's just pride."

"My dear!"

"And there's another angle to it. I wouldn't marry a man who hasn't got a mind of his own. Even if I had the chance, which I haven't. That silly mother of his - she is silly, daddy, and selfish - Do you know what she is doing now?"

"We ought not to discuss her. She - "

"Fiddlesticks. You love gossip and you know it."

Her tone was light, but the rector felt that arm around his neck tighten. He surmised a depth of feeling that made him anxious.
"She is trying to marry him to Marion Hayden."

The rector sat up, almost guiltily.

"But - are you sure she is doing that?"

"Everybody says so. She thinks that if he is married, and there is a war, he won't want to go if he has a wife."

She was silent for a moment. "Marion will drive him straight to the devil, daddy."

The rector reached up and took her hand. She cared more than she would admit, he saw. She had thought the thing out, perhaps in the long night - when he slept placidly. Thought and suffered, he surmised. And again he remembered his worldly plans for her, and felt justly punished.

"I suppose it is hard for a father to understand how any one can know his little girl and not love her. Or be the better for it."

She kissed him and slid off the arm of his chair.

"Don't you worry," she said cheerfully. "I had to make an ideal for myself about somebody. Every girl does. Sometimes it's the plumber. It doesn't really matter who it is, so you can pin your dreams to him. The only thing that hurts is that Graham wasn't worth while."

She went back to her little cards, but some ten minutes later the rector, lost in thought, heard the scratching of her pen cease.

"Did you ever think, daddy," she said, "of the influence women have over men? Look at the Spencers. Mrs. Spencer spoil[ing] Graham, and making her husband desperately unhappy. And -"

"Unhappy? What makes you think that?"

"He looks unhappy."

The rector was startled. He had an instant vision of Clayton Spencer, tall, composed, handsome, impeccably clothed. He saw him in the setting that suited him best, the quiet elegance of his home. Clayton unhappy! Nonsense. But he was uneasy, too. That very gravity which he had noticed lately, that was certainly not the gravity of an entirely happy man. Clayton had changed, somehow. Was there trouble there? And if there were, why?

The rector, who reduced most wretchedness to terms of dollars and cents, of impending bills and small deprivations found himself at a loss.

"I am sure you are wrong," he objected, rather feebly.

Delight eyed him with the scorn of nineteen for fifty.

"I'll tell you what you'd do," she persisted. "You'd fall in love with somebody else, probably. Or else you'd just naturally dry up and be made a bishop."

He was extremely shocked at that, and a little hurt. It took her some time to establish cheerful relations again, and a very humble apology. But her words stuck in the rector's mind. He made a note for a sermon, with the text: "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."

He went quietly into the great stone building and sat down. The organist was practicing the Introit anthem, and half way up the church a woman was sitting quietly.

The rector leaned back, and listened to the music. He often did that when he had a sermon in his mind. It was peaceful and quiet. Hard to believe, in that peace of great arches and swelling music, that across the sea at that moment men were violating that fundamental law of the church, "Thou shalt not kill."

The woman turned her head, and he saw that it was Audrey Valentine. He watched her with kindly, speculative eyes. Self-reliant, frivolous Audrey, sitting alone in the church she had so casually attended - surely that was one of the gains of war. People all came to it ultimately. They held on with both hands as long as they could, and then they found their grasp growing feeble and futile, and they turned to the Great Strength.

The organist had ceased. Audrey was kneeling now. The rector, eyes on the gleaming cross above the altar, repeated softly:

"Save and deliver us, we humbly beseech Thee, from the hands of our enemies; that we, being armed with Thy defense, may be preserved evermore from all perils."

Audrey was coming down the aisle. She did not see him. She had, indeed, the fixed eyes of one who still looks inward. She was very pale, but there was a new look of strength in her face, as of one who has won a victory.

"To glorify Thee, who are the only giver of all victory, through the merits of thy Son, Jesus Christ our Lord," finished the rector.

CHAPTER XXV

On the last day of February Audrey came home from her shorthand class and stood wearily by the window, too discouraged even to remove her hat. The shorthand was a failure; the whole course was a failure. She had not the
instinct for plodding, for the meticulous attention to detail that those absurd, irrational lines and hooks and curves demanded.

She could not even spell! And an idiot of an instructor had found fault with the large square band she wrote, as being uncommercial. Uncommercial! Of course it was. So was she uncommercial. She had dreamed a dream of usefulness, but after all, why was she doing it? We would never fight. Here we were, saying to Germany that we had ceased to be friends and letting it go at that.

She might go to England. They needed women there. But not untrained women. Not, she thought contemptuously, women whose only ability lay in playing bridge, or singing French chansons with no particular voice.

After all, the only world that was open to her was her old world. It liked her. It even understood her. It stretched out a tolerant, pleasure-beckoning hand to her.

"I'm a fool," she reflected bitterly. "I'm not happy, and I'm not useful. I might as well play. It's all I can do."

But her real hunger was for news of Clayton. Quite suddenly he had stopped dropping in on his way up-town. He had made himself the most vital element in her life, and then taken himself out of it. At first she had thought he might be ill. It seemed too cruel otherwise. But she saw his name with increasing frequency in the newspapers. It seemed to her that every relief organization in the country was using his name and his services. So he was not ill.

He had tired of her, probably. She had nothing to give, had no right to give anything. And, of course, he could not know how much he had meant to her, of courage to carry on. How the memory of his big, solid, dependable figure had helped her through the bad hours when the thought of Chris's defection had left her crushed and abject.

She told herself that the reason she wanted to see Natalie was because she had neglected her shamefully. Perhaps that was what was wrong with Clay; perhaps he felt that, by avoiding Natalie, she was putting their friendship on a wrong basis. Actually, she had reached that point all loving women reach, when even to hear a beloved name, coming out of a long silence, was both torture and necessity.

She took unusual pains with her dress that afternoon, and it was a very smart, slightly rouged and rather swaggering Audrey who made her first call in weeks on Natalie that afternoon.

Natalie was a little stiff, still slightly affronted.

"I thought you must have left town," she said. "But you look as though you'd been having a rest cure."

"Rouge," said Audrey, coolly. "No, I haven't been entirely resting."

"There are all sorts of stories going about. That you're going into a hospital; that you're learning to fly; that you're in the secret service?"

"Just because I find it stupid going about without a man!" Natalie eyed her shrewdly, but there was no self-consciousness in Audrey's face. If the stories were true, and there had been another woman, she was carrying it off well.

"At least Chris is in France. I have to go, when I go, without Clay. And there is no excuse whatever."

"You mean - he is working?"

"Not at night. He is simply obstinate. He says he is tired. I don't really mind any more. He is so hatefully heavy these days."

"Heavy! Clay!"

"My dear!" Natalie drew her chair closer and lowered her voice. "What can one do with a man who simply lives war? He spends hours over the papers. He's up if the Allies make a gain, and impossible if they don't. I can tell by the very way he slams the door of his room when he comes home what the news is. It's dreadful."

Audrey flushed.

"I wish there were more like him."

But Natalie smiled tolerantly.

"You are not married to him. I suppose the war is important, but I don't want it twenty-four hours a day. I want to forget it if I can. It's hideous."

Audrey's mouth twitched. After all, what was the good of talking to Natalie. She would only be resentful.

"How is the house coming on?" she asked.

She had Natalie on happy ground there. For a half-hour she looked at blueprints and water-color sketches, heard Rodney's taste extolled, listened to plans for a house-party which she gathered was, rather belatedly, to include her. And through it all she was saying to herself,

"This is his wife. This is the woman he loves. He has had a child by her. He is building this house for her. He goes into her room as Chris came into mine. And she is not good enough. She is not good enough."

Now that she had seen Natalie, she knew why she had not seen her before. She was jealous of her. Jealous and contemptuous. Suddenly she hated Natalie. She hated her because she was Clayton Spencer's wife, with all that that implied. She hated her because she was unworthy of him. She hated her because she loved Clay, and hated her more
because she loved herself more than she loved him.

Audrey sat back in her chair and saw that she had traveled a long way along a tragic road. For the first time in her brave and reckless life she was frightened. She was even trembling. She lighted a cigarette from the stand at Natalie's elbow to steady herself.

Natalie chattered on, and Audrey gave her the occasional nod that was all she needed. She thought, "Does he know about her? Is he still fooled? She is almost beautiful. Rodney is falling in love with her, probably. Does he know that? Will he care terribly if he finds it out? She looks cold, but one can't tell, and some men - has she a drop of honest, unselfish passion in her?"

She got up suddenly. "Heavens, how late it is!" she said. "I must run on."

"Why not stay on to dinner? Graham is seldom home, and we can talk, if Clay doesn't."

The temptation to see Clay again was strong in Audrey. But suddenly she knew that she did not want to see them together, in the intimacy of their home. She did not want to sit between them at dinner, and then go away, leaving them there together. And something fundamentally honest in her told her that she had no right to sit at their table.

"I'll come another time, if you'll ask me. Not to-day," she said. And left rather precipitately. It hurt her, rather, to have Natalie, with an impulsive gesture, gather the flowers out of a great jar and insist on her carrying them home with her. It gave her a miserable sense of playing unfairly.

She walked home. The fresh air, after Natalie's flower-scented, overheated room, made her more rational. She knew where she stood, anyhow. She was in love with Clayton Spencer. She had, she reflected cynically, been in love before. A number of times before. She almost laughed aloud. She had called those things love, those sickly romances, those feeble emotions!

Then her eyes filled with unexpected tears. She had always wanted some one to make her happy. Now she wanted to make some one happy. She cared nothing for the cost. She would put herself out of it altogether. He was not happy. Any one could see that. He had everything, but he was not happy. If he belonged to her, she would live to make him happy. She would -

Suddenly she remembered Chris. Perhaps she did not know how to hold a man's love. She had not held him. He had protested that she was the only woman he had ever loved, but all the time there had been that other girl. How account for her, then?

"He did not think of me," she reflected defiantly, "I shall not think of him."

She was ashamed of that instantly. After all, Chris was doing a man's part now. She was no longer angry with him. She had written him that, over and over, in the long letters she had made a point of sending him. Only, she did not love him any more. She thought now that she never had loved him.

What about the time when he came back? What would she then? She shivered.

But Chris, after all, was not to come back. He would never come back again. The cable was there when she reached her apartment - a cold statement, irrefutable, final.

She had put the flowers on the table and had raised her hands to unpin her hat when she saw it. She read it with a glance first, then slowly, painfully, her heart contracted as if a hand had squeezed it. She stood very still, not so much stricken as horrified, and her first conscious thought was of remorse, terrible, gasping remorse. All that afternoon, while she had been hating Natalie and nursing her love for Clay, Chris had been lying dead somewhere.

Chris was dead.

She felt very tired, but not faint. It seemed dreadful, indeed, that she could be standing there, full of life, while Chris was dead. Such grief as she felt was for him, not for herself. He had loved life so, even when he cheapened it. He had wanted to live and now he was dead. She, who did not care greatly to live, lived on, and he was gone.

All at once she felt terribly alone. She wanted some one with her. She wanted to talk it all out to some one who understood. She wanted Clay. She said to herself that she did not want him because she loved him. All love was dead in her now. She wanted him because he was strong and understanding. She made this very clear to herself, because she had a morbid fancy that Chris might be watching her. There were people who believed that sort of thing. To her excited fancy it seemed as though Chris's cynical smile might flash out from any dusky corner.

She knew she was not being quite rational. Which was strange, because she felt so strong, and because the voice with which she called Clayton's number was so steady. She knew, too, that she was no longer in love with Clay, because his steady voice over the telephone left her quite calm and unmoved.

"I want you to come up, Clay," she said. "If you can, easily."

"I can come at once. Is anything wrong?"

"Chris has been killed," she replied, and hung up the receiver. Then she sat down to wait, and to watch for Chris's cynical smile to flash in some dusky corner.

Clayton found her there, collapsed in her chair, a slim, gray-faced girl with the rouge giving a grotesque vitality
to her bloodless cheeks. She got up very calmly and gave him the cablegram. Then she fainted in a crumpled heap at his feet.

CHAPTER XXVI

The new munition plant was nearing completion. Situated on the outskirts of the city, it spread over a vast area of what had once been waste land. Of the three long buildings, two were already in operation and the third was well under way.

To Clayton Spencer it was the realization of a dream. He never entered the great high-walled enclosure without a certain surprise at the ease with which it had all been accomplished, and a thrill of pride at the achievement. He found the work itself endlessly interesting. The casts, made of his own steel, lying in huge rusty heaps in the yard; the little cars which carried them into the plant; the various operations by which the great lathes turned them out, smooth and shining, only to lose their polish when, heated again, they were ready for the ponderous hammer to close their gaping jaws. The delicacy of the work appealed to him, the machining to a thousandth of an inch, the fastidious making of the fuses, tiny things almost microscopic, and requiring the delicate touch of girls, most of whom had been watchmakers and jewelry-workers.

And with each carload of the finished shells that left the plant he felt a fine glow of satisfaction. The output was creeping up. Soon they would be making ten thousand shells a day. And every shell was one more chance for victory against the Hun. It became an obsession with him to make more, ever more.

As the work advanced, he found an unexpected enthusiasm in Graham. Here was something to be done, a new thing. The steel mill had been long established. Its days went on monotonously. The boy found it noisy, dirty, without appeal to his imagination. But the shell plant was different. There were new problems to face, of labor, of supplies, of shipping and output.

He was, however, reluctantly coming to the conclusion that the break with Germany was the final step that the Government intended to take. That it would not declare war.

However, the break had done something. It had provided him with men from the local National Guard to police the plant, and he found the government taking a new interest, an official interest, in his safety. Agents from the Military Intelligence and the Department of Justice scanned his employment lists and sent agents into the plant. In the building where men and women were hired, each applicant passed a desk where they were quietly surveyed by two unobtrusive gentlemen in indifferent business suits who eyed them carefully. Around the fuse department, where all day girls and women handled guncotton and high-explosive powder, a special guard was posted, day and night.

Early in March Clayton put Graham in charge of the first of the long buildings to be running full, and was rewarded by a new look in the boy's face. He was almost startled at the way he took it.

"I'll do my very best, sir," he said, rather huskily. "If I can't fight, I can help put the swine out of business, anyhow."

He was by that time quite sure that Natalie had extracted a promise of some sort from the boy. On the rare occasions when Graham was at home he was quiet and suppressed.

He was almost always at Marion Hayden's in the evenings, and from things he let fall, Clayton gathered that the irresponsible group which centered about Marion was, in the boy's own vernacular, rather "shot to pieces." Tommy Hale had gone to England to join the Royal Flying Corps. One or two of them were in Canada, trying to enlist there, and one evening Graham brought home to dinner an inordinately tall and thin youngster in the kilts of a Scotch-Canadian regiment, with an astounding length of thin leg below his skirts, who had been one of Marion's most reckless satellites.

"Look like a fool, I know, sir," said the tall individual sheepishly. "Just had to get in it somehow. No camouflage about these skirts, is there?"

And Clayton had noticed, with a thrill of sympathy, how wistfully Graham eyed the debonnair young Scot by adoption, and how Buckham had hovered over him, filling his plate and his glass. Even Graham noticed Buckham.

"Old boy looks as though he'd like to kiss you, Sid," he said. "It's the petticoats. Probably thinks you're a woman."

"I look better with my legs under the table," said the tall boy, modestly.

Clayton was still determined that Graham should fight the thing out for himself. He wished, sometimes, that he knew Marion Hayden's attitude. Was she like Natalie? Would she, if the time came, use her undeniable influence for or against? And there again he resented the influence of women in the boy's life. Why couldn't he make his own decisions? Why couldn't they let him make his own decisions?

He remembered his father, and how his grandmother, in '61, had put a Bible into one pocket and a housewife into another, and had sent him off to war. Had the fiber of our women weakened since then? But he knew it had not. All day, in the new plant, women were working with high-explosives quite calmly. And there were Audrey and the
Haverford women, strong enough, in all conscience.

Every mental path, those days, somehow led eventually to Audrey. She was the lighted window at the end of the long trail.

Graham was, as a matter of fact, trying to work out his own salvation. He blundered, as youth always blunders, and after a violent scene with Marion Hayden he made an attempt to break off his growing intimacy with Anna Klein - to find, as many a man had before him, that the sheer brutality of casting off a loving woman was beyond him.

The scene with Marion came one Sunday in the Spencer house, with Natalie asleep up-stairs after luncheon, and Clayton walking off a sense of irritation in the park. He did not like the Hayden girl. He could not fathom Natalie's change of front with regard to Graham and the girl. He had gone out, leaving them together, and Marion had launched her attack fiercely.

"Now!" she cried.
"I couldn't come last night. That's all, Marion."
"It is certainly not all. Why couldn't you come?"
"I worked late."
"Where?"
"At the plant."
"That's a lie, Graham. I called the plant. I'll tell you where you were. You were out with a girl. You were seen, if you want to know it."
"Oh, if you are going to believe everything you hear about me?"
"Don't act like a child. Who was the girl?"
"It isn't like you to be jealous, Marion. I let you run around all the time with other fellows, but the minute I take a girl out for a little spin, you're jealous."
"Jealous!" She laughed nastily. But she knew she was losing her temper; and brought herself up short. Let him think she was jealous. What really ailed her was deadly fear lest her careful plan go astray. She was terrified. That was all. And she meant to learn who the girl was.
"I know who it was," she hazarded.
"I think you are bluffing."
"It was Delight Haverford."
"Delight!"

She knew then that she was wrong, but it was her chance to assail Delight and she took it.
"That child!" she continued contemptuously. "Don't you suppose I've seen how she looks at you? I'm not afraid of her. You are too much a man of the world to let her put anything over on you. At least, I thought you were. Of course, if you like milk and water?"

"It was not Delight," he said doggedly. "And I don't think we need to bring her into this at all. She's not in love with me. She wouldn't wipe her feet on me."

Which was unfortunate. Marion smiled slowly.
"Oh! But you are good enough for me to be engaged to! I wonder!"

He went to the window and stood for a moment looking out. Then he went slowly back to her.
"I'm not good enough for you to be engaged to, Marion," he said. "I - don't you want to call it a day?"

She was really terrified then. She went white and again, miserably, he mistook her agitation for something deeper.
"You want to break the engagement?"
"Not if you still want me. I only mean - I'm a pretty poor sort. You ought to have the best, and God help this country if I'm the best."

"Graham, you're in some sort of trouble?"

He drew himself up in boyish bravado. He could not tell her the truth. It opened up too hideous a vista. Even his consciousness of the fact that the affair with Anna was still innocent did not dull his full knowledge of whither it was trending. He was cold and wretched.
"It's nothing," he muttered.
"You can tell me. You can tell me anything. I know a lot, you see. I'm no silly kitten. If you're in a fix, I'll help you. I don't care what it is, I'll help you. I? I'm crazy about you, Graham."

Anna's words, too!
"Look here, Marion," he said, roughly, "you've got to do one of two things. Either marry me or let me go."
"Let you go! I like that. If that is how you feel?"
"Oh - don't." He threw up his arm. "I want you. You know that. Marry me - to-morrow."
"I will not. Do you think I'm going to come into this family and have you cut off? Don't you suppose I know that Clayton Spencer hates the very chair I sit on? He'll come and beg me to marry you, some day. Until then?"
"You won't do it?"
"To-morrow? Certainly not."
And again he felt desperately his powerlessness to loosen the coils that were closing round him, fetters forged of his own red blood, his own youth, the woman-urge.
She was watching him with her calculating glance.
"You must be in trouble," she said.
"If I am, it's you and mother who have driven me there."
He was alarmed then, and lapsed into dogged silence. His anxiety had forced into speech thoughts that had never before been articulate. He was astounded to hear himself uttering them, although with the very speaking he realized now that they were true.
"Sorry, Marion," he muttered. "I didn't mean all that. I'm excited. That's all."
When he sat down beside her again and tried to take her hand, she drew it away.
"You've been very cruel, Graham," she said. "I've been selfish. Every girl who is terribly in love is selfish. I am going to give you your ring, and leave you free to do whatever you want."
Her generosity overcame him. He was instantly ashamed, humbled.
"Don't!" he begged. "Don't let me go. I'll just go to the dogs. If you really care?"
"Care!" she said softly. And as he buried his head in her lap she stroked his hair softly. Her eyes, triumphant, surveyed the long room, with its satin-paneled walls, its French furniture, its long narrow gilt-framed mirrors softening the angles of the four corners.
Some day all this would be hers. For this she would exchange the untidy and imitation elegance of her present setting.
She stroked the boy's head absently.
Graham made an attempt to free himself the next day. He was about to move his office to the new plant, and he made a determination not to take Anna with him.
He broke it to her as gently as he could.
"Mr. Weaver is taking my place here," he said, avoiding her eyes.
"Yes, Graham."
"He'll - there ought to be some one here who knows the ropes."
"Do you mean me?"
"Well, you know them, don't you?" He had tried to smile at her.
"Do you mean that you are going to have another secretary at the plant?"
"Look here, Anna," he said impulsively. "You know things can't go on indefinitely, the way we are now. You know it, don't you."
She looked down and nodded.
"Don't!" he begged. "Don't let me go. I'll just go to the dogs. If you really care?"
"Care!" she said softly. And as he buried his head in her lap she stroked his hair softly. Her eyes, triumphant, surveyed the long room, with its satin-paneled walls, its French furniture, its long narrow gilt-framed mirrors softening the angles of the four corners.
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"Do you mean that you are going to have another secretary at the plant?"
"Look here, Anna," he said impulsively. "You know things can't go on indefinitely, the way we are now. You know it, don't you."
She looked down and nodded.
"Well, don't you think I'd better leave you here?"
She fumbled nervously with her wrist-watch.
"I won't stay here if you go," she said finally. "I hate Mr. Weaver. I'm afraid of him. I - oh, don't leave me, Graham. Don't. I haven't anybody but you. I haven't any home - not a real home. You ought to see him these days."
She always referred to her father as "him." "He's dreadful. I'm only happy when I'm here with you."
He was angry, out of sheer despair.
"I've told you," he said. "Things can't go on as they are. You know well enough what I mean. I'm older than you are, Anna. God knows I don't want any harm to come to you through me. But, if we continue to be together - "
"I'm not blaming you." She looked at him honestly. "I'd just rather have you care about me than marry anybody else."
He kissed her, with a curious mingling of exultation and despair. He left her there when he went away that afternoon, a rather downcast young figure, piling up records and card-indexes, and following him to the door with worshiping, anxious eyes. Later on in the afternoon Joey, wandering in from Clayton's office on one of his self-constituted observation tours, found her crying softly while she wiped her typewriter, preparatory to covering it for the night.
"Somebody been treatin' you rough?" he asked, more sympathetic than curious.
"What are you doing here, anyhow?" she demanded, angrily. "You're always hanging around, spying on me."
"Somebody's got to keep an eye on you."
"Well, you don't."
"Look here," he said, his young-old face twitching with anxiety. "You get out from under, kid. You take my
advice, and get out from under. Something's going to fall."

"Just mind your own business, and stop worrying about me. That's all."

He turned and started out.

"Oh, very well," he said sharply. "But you might take a word of warning, anyhow. That cousin of yours has got an eye on you, all right. And we don't want any scandal about the place."

"We? Who are 'we'?"

"Me and Mr. Clayton Spencer," said Joey, smartly, and went out, banging the door cheerfully.

Anna climbed the hill that night wearily, but with a sense of relief that Rudolph had not been waiting for her at the yard gate. She was in no mood to thrust and parry with him. She wondered, rather dully, what mischief Rudolph was up to. He was gaining a tremendous ascendency over her father, she knew. Herman was spending more and more of his evenings away from home, creaking up the stairs late at night, shoes in hand, to undress in the cold darkness across the hall.

"Out?" she asked Katie, sitting by the fire with the evening paper. Conversation in the cottage was almost always laconic.

"Ate early," Katie returned. "Rudolph was here, too. I'm going to quit if I've got to cook for that sneak any longer. You'd think he had a meal ticket here. Your supper's on the stove."

"I'm not hungry." She ate her supper, however, and undressed by the fire. Then she went up-stairs and sat by her window in the gathering night. She was suffering acutely. Graham was tired of her. He wanted to get rid of her. Probably he had a girl somewhere else, a lady. Her idea of the life of such a girl had been gathered from novels.

"The sort that has her breakfast in bed," she muttered, "and has her clothes put on her by somebody. Her underclothes, too!"

The immodesty of the idea made her face burn with anger.

Late that night Herman came back.

Herman had been a difficult proposition for Rudolph to handle. His innate caution, his respect for law and, under his bullying exterior, a certain physical cowardice, made him slow to move in the direction Rudolph was urging. He was controversial. He liked to argue over the beer and schnitzel Rudolph bought. And Rudolph was growing impatient.

Rudolph himself was all eagerness and zeal. It was his very zeal that was his danger, although it brought him slavish followers. He was contemptuous, ill-tempered, and impatient, but, of limited intelligence himself, he understood for that very reason the mental processes of those he would lead. There was a certain simplicity even in his cunning. With Herman he was a ferret driving out of their hiding-places every evil instinct that lay dormant. Under his goading, Herman was becoming savage, sullen, and potentially violent.

He was confused, too. Rudolph's arguments always confused him.

He was confused that night, heavy with fatigue and with Rudolph's steady talk in his ear. He was tired of pondering great questions, tired of hearing about the Spencers and the money they were making.

Anna's clothing was scattered about the room, and he frowned at it. She spent too much money on her clothes. Always sewing at something -

He stooped down to gather up his shoes, and his ear thus brought close to the table was conscious in the silence of a faint rhythmical sound. He stood up and looked about. Then he moved the newspaper on the table. Underneath it, forgotten in her anxiety and trouble, lay the little gold watch.

He picked it up, still following his train of thought. It fitted into the evening's inflammable proceedings. So, with such trinkets as this, capital would silence the cry of labor for its just share in the products of its skill and strength! It would bribe, and cheaply. Ten dollars, perhaps, that ticking insult. For ten dollars -

He held it close to his spectacles. Ah, but it was not so cheap. It came from the best shop in the city. He weighed it carefully in his hand, and in so doing saw the monogram. A doubt crept into his mind, a cold and chilling fear. Since when had the Spencer plant taken to giving watches for Christmas? The hill girls who worked as stenographers in the plant; they came in often enough and he did not remember any watches, or any mention of watches. His mind, working slowly, recalled that never before had he seen the watch near at hand. And he went into a slow and painful calculation. Fifty dollars at least it had cost. A hundred stenographers - that would be five thousand dollars for watches.

Suddenly he knew that Anna had lied to him. One of two things, then: either she had spent money for it, unknown to him, or some one had given it to her. There was, in his mind, not much difference in degree between the two alternatives. Both were crimes of the first magnitude.

He picked the watch up between his broad thumb and forefinger, and then, his face a cold and dreadful mask, he mounted the stairs.

CHAPTER XXVII
Clayton Spencer was facing with characteristic honesty a situation that he felt was both hopeless and shameful. He was hopelessly in love with Audrey. He knew now that he had known it for a long time. Here was no slender sentiment, no thin romance. With every fiber of him, heart and soul and body, he loved her and wanted her. There was no madness about it, save the fact itself, which was mad enough. It was not the single attraction of passion, although he recognized that element as fundamental in it. It was the craving of a strong man who had at last found his woman.

He knew that, as certainly as he knew anything. He did not even question that she cared for him. It was as though they both had passed through the doubting period without knowing it, and had arrived together at the same point, the crying need of each other.

He rather thought, looking back, that Audrey had known it sooner than he had. She had certainly known the night she learned of Chris's death. His terror when she fainted, the very way he had put her out of his arms when she opened her eyes - those had surely told her. Yet, had Chris's cynical spirit been watching, there had been nothing, even then.

There was, between them, nothing now. He had given way to the people who flocked to her with sympathy, had called her up now and then, had sent her a few books, some flowers. But the hopelessness of the situation held him away from her. Once or twice, at first, he had called her on the telephone and had waited, almost trembling, for her voice over the wire, only to ask her finally, in a voice chilled with repression, how she was feeling, or to offer a car for her to ride in the park. And her replies were equally perfunctory. She was well. She was still studying, but it was going badly. She was too stupid to learn all those pot-hooks.

Once she had said:

"Aren't you ever coming to see me, Clay?"

Her voice had been wistful, and it had been a moment before he had himself enough in hand to reply, formally:

"Thank you. I shall, very soon."

But he had not gone to the little flat again.

Through Natalie he heard of her now and then.

"I saw Audrey to-day," she said once. "She is not wearing mourning. It's bad taste, I should say. When one remembers that she really drove Chris to his death - "

He had interrupted her, angrily.

"That is a cruel misstatement, Natalie. She did nothing of the sort."

"You needn't bite me, you know. He went, and had about as much interest in this war as - as - "

"As you have," he finished. And had gone out, leaving Natalie staring after him.

He was more careful after that, but the situation galled him. He was no hypocrite, but there was no need of wounding Natalie unnecessarily. And that, after all, was the crux of the whole situation. Natalie. It was not Natalie's fault that he had found the woman of his heart too late. He had no thought of blame for her. In decency, there was only one thing to do. He could not play the lover to her, but then he had not done that for a very long time. He could see, however, that she was not hurt.

Perhaps, in all her futile life, Natalie had, for all her complaining, never been so content in her husband as in those early spring months when she had completely lost him. He made no demands whatever. In the small attentions, which he had never neglected, he was even more assiduous. He paid her ever-increasing bills without comment. He submitted, in those tense days when every day made the national situation more precarious, to hours of discussion as to the country house, to complaints as to his own lack of social instinct, and to that new phase of her attitude toward Marion Hayden that left him baffled and perplexed.

Then, on the Sunday when he left Graham and Marion together at the house, he met Audrey quite by accident in the park. He was almost incredulous at first. She came like the answer to prayer, a little tired around the eyes, showing the strain of the past weeks, but with that same easy walk and unconscious elegance that marked her, always.

She was not alone. There was a tall blonde girl beside her, hideously dressed, but with a pleasant, shallow face. Just before they met Audrey stopped and held out her hand.

"Then you'll let me know, Clare?"

"Thank you. I will, indeed, Mrs. Valentine."

With a curious glance at Clayton the girl went on. Audrey smiled at him.

"Please don't run!" she said. "There are people looking. It would be so conspicuous."

"Run!" he replied. He stood looking down at her, and at something in his eyes her smile died.

"It's too wonderful, Clay."

For a moment he could not speak. After all those weeks of hunger for her there was no power in him to dissemble. He felt a mad, boyish impulse to hold out his arms to her, Malacca stick, gloves, and all!
"It's a bit of luck I hadn't expected, Audrey," he said, at last, unsteadily.
She turned about quite simply, and faced in the direction he was going.
"I shall walk with you," she said, with a flash of her old impertinence. "You have not asked me to, but I shall, anyhow. Only don't call this luck. It isn't at all. I walk here every Sunday, and every Sunday I say to myself - he will think he needs exercise. Then he will walk, and the likeliest place for him to go is the park. Good reasoning, isn't it?"
She glanced up at him, but his face was set and unsmiling. "Don't pay any attention to me, Clay. I'm a little mad, probably. You see" - she hesitated - "I need my friends just now. And when the very best of them all hides away from me?"

"Don't say that. I stayed away, because - " He hesitated.
"I'm almost through. Don't worry! But I was walking along before I met Clare - I'll tell you about her presently - and I was saying to myself that I thought God owed me something. I didn't know just what. Happiness, maybe. I've been careless and all that, but I've never been wicked. And yet I can look back, and count the really happy days of my life on five fingers."
She held out one hand.
"Five fingers!" she repeated, "and I am twenty-eight. The percentage is pretty low, you know."
"Perhaps you and I ask too much?"
He was conscious of her quick, searching glance.
"Oh! You feel that way, too? I mean - as I do, that it's all hardly worth while? But you seem to have everything, Clay."
"You have one thing I lack. Youth."
"Youth! At twenty-eight!"
"You can still mold your life, Audrey dear. You have had a bad time, but - with all reverence to Chris's memory - his going out of it, under the circumstances, is a grief. But it doesn't spell shipwreck."
"Do you mean that I will marry again?" she asked, in a low tone.
"Don't you think you will, some time? Some nice young chap who will worship you all the days of his life? That well, that is what I expect for you. It's at least possible, you know."
"Is it what you want for me?"
"Good God!" he burst out, his restraint suddenly gone. "What do you want me to say? What can I say, except that I want you to be happy? Don't you think I've gone over it all, over and over again? I'd give my life for the right to tell you the things I think, but - I haven't that right. Even this little time together is wrong, the way things are. It is all wrong."
"I'm sorry, Clay. I know. I am just reckless to-day. You know I am reckless. It's my vice. But sometimes - we'd better talk about the mill."
But he could not talk about the mill just then. They walked along in silence, and after a little he felt her touch his arm.
"Wouldn't it be better just to have it out?" she asked, wistfully. "That wouldn't hurt anybody, would it?"
"I'm afraid, Audrey."
"I'm not," she said proudly. "I sometimes think - oh, I think such a lot these days - that if we talked these things over, I'd recover my - friend. I've lost him now, you see. And I'm so horribly lonely, Clay."
"Lost him!"
"Lost him," she repeated. "I've lost my friend, and I haven't gained anything. It didn't hurt anybody for us to meet now and then, Clay. You know that. I wish you would understand," she added impatiently. "I only want to go back to things as they were. I want you to come in now and then. We used to talk about all sorts of things, and I miss that. Plenty of people come, but that's different. It's only your occasional companionship I want. I don't want you to come and make love to me."
"You say you have missed the companionship," he said rather unsteadily. "I wonder if you think I haven't?"
"I know you have, my dear. And that is why I want you to come. To come without being afraid that I expect or want anything else. Surely we can manage that."
He smiled down at her, rather wryly, at her straight courageous figure, her brave eyes, meeting his so directly. How like her it all was, the straightforwardness of it, the absence of coquetry. And once again he knew, not only that he loved her with all the depths of him, of his strong body and his vigorous mind, but that she was his woman. The one woman in the world for him. It was as though all his life he had been searching for her, and he had found her, and it was too late. She knew it, too. It was in her very eyes.
"I have wanted to come, terribly," he said finally. And when she held out her hand to him, he bent down and kissed it.
"Then that's settled," she said, in a matter-of-fact tone. "And now I'll tell you about Clare. I'm rather proud of
"Clare?"

The tension had been so great that he had forgotten the blonde girl entirely.

"Do you remember the night I got a hundred dollars from you? And later on, that I asked you for work in your mill for the girl I got it for?"

"Do you mean?" He looked at her in surprise.

"That was the girl. You see, she rather holds onto me. It's awful in a way, too. It looks as though I am posing as magnanimous. I'm not, Clay. If I had cared awfully it would have been different. But then, if I had cared awfully, perhaps it would never have happened."

"You have nothing to blame yourself for, Audrey."

"Well, I do, rather. But that's not the point. Sometimes when I am alone I have wicked thoughts, you know, Clay. I'm reckless, and sometimes I think maybe there is only one life, and why not get happiness out of it. I realize that, but for some little kink in my brain, I might be in Clare's position. So I don't turn her out. She's a poor, cheap thing, but - well, she is fond of me. If I had children - it's funny, but I rather mother her! And she's straight now, straight as a string!"

She was sensitive to his every thought, and she knew by the very change in the angle of his head that he was thinking that over and not entirely approving. But he said finally:

"You're a big woman, Audrey."

"But you don't like it!"

"I don't like her troubling you."

"Troubling me! She doesn't borrow money, you know. Why, she makes more money from your plant than I have to live on! And she brings me presents of flowers and the most awful embroidery, that she does herself."

"You ought not to know that side of life."

She laughed a little bitterly.

"Not know it!" she said. "I've had to know it. I learned it pretty well, too. And don't make any mistake, Clay." She looked up at him with her clear, understanding gaze. "Being good, decent, with a lot of people is only the lack of temptation. Only, thank God, there are some who have the strength to withstand it when it comes."

And he read in her clear eyes her promise and her understanding; that they loved each other, that it was the one big thing in both their lives, but that between them there would be only the secret inner knowledge of that love. There would be no shipwreck. And for what she gave, she demanded his strength and his promise. It was to what he read in her face, not to her words, that he replied:

"I'll do my very best, Audrey dear."

He went back to her rooms with her, and she made him tea, while he built the fire in the open fireplace and nursed it tenderly to a healthy strength. Overnursed it, she insisted. They were rather gay, indeed, and the danger-point passed by safely. There was so much to discuss, she pretended. The President's unfortunate phrase of "peace without victory"; the deportation of the Belgians, the recent leak in Washington to certain stock-brokers, and more and more imminent, the possibility of a state of war being recognized by the government.

"If it comes," she said, gayly, "I shall go, of course. I shall go to France and sing them into battle. My shorthand looks like a music score, as it is. What will you do?"

"I can't let you outshine me," he said. "And I don't want to think of your going over there without me. My dear! My dear!"

She ignored that, and gave him his tea, gravely.

CHAPTER XXVIII

When Natalie roused from her nap that Sunday afternoon, it was to find Marion gone, and Graham waiting for her in her boudoir. Through the open door she could see him pacing back and forward and something in his face made her vaguely uneasy. She assumed the child-like smile which so often preserved her from the disagreeable.

"What a sleep I've had," she said, and yawned prettily. "I'll have one of your cigarets, darling, and then let's take a walk."

Graham knew Natalie's idea of a walk, which was three or four blocks along one of the fashionable avenues, with the car within hailing distance. At the end of the fourth block she always declared that her shoes pinched, and called the machine.

"You don't really want to walk, mother."

"Of course I do, with you. Ring for Madeleine, dear."

She was uncomfortable. Graham had been very queer lately. He would have long, quiet spells, and then break out in an uncontrollable irritation, generally at the servants. But Graham did not ring for Madeleine. He lighted a cigaret for Natalie, and standing off, surveyed her. She was very pretty. She was prettier than Toots. That pale blue
wrapper, or whatever it was, made her rather exquisite. And Natalie, curled up on her pale rose chaise longue, set to work as deliberately to make a conquest of her son as she had ever done to conquer Rodney Page, or the long list of Rodney's predecessors.

"You're growing very handsome, you know, boy," she said. "Almost too handsome. A man doesn't need good looks. They're almost a handicap. Look at your father."

"They haven't hurt him any, I should say."

"I don't know." She reflected, eyeing her cigaret. "He presumes on them, rather. And a good many men never think a handsome man has any brains."

"Well, he fools them there, too."

She raised her eyebrows slightly.

"Tell me about the new plant, Graham."

"I don't know anything about it yet," he said bluntly. "And you wouldn't be really interested if I did."

"That's rather disagreeable of you."

"No; I'm just trying to talk straight, for once. We - you and I - we always talk around things. I don't know why."

"You look terribly like your father just now. You are quite savage."

"That's exactly what I mean, mother. You don't say father is savage. God knows he isn't that. You just say I act like father, and that I am savage."

Natalie blew a tiny cloud of cigaret smoke, and watched it for a moment.

"You sound fearfully involved. But never mind about that. I daresay I've done something; I don't know what, but of course I am guilty."

"Why did you bring Marion here to-day, mother?"

"Well, if you want to know exactly, I met her coming out of church, and it occurred to me that we were having rather a nice luncheon, and that it would be a pity not to ask some one to come in. It was a nice luncheon, wasn't it?"

"That's why you asked her? For food?"

"Brutally put, but correct."

"You have been asking her here a lot lately. And yet the last time we discussed her you said she was fast. That she wanted to marry me for my money. That people would laugh if I fell for it."

"I hardly used those words, did I?"

"For heaven's sake, mother," he cried, exasperated. "Don't quibble. Let's get down to facts. Does your bringing her here mean that you've changed your mind?"

Natalie considered. She was afraid of too quick a surrender lest he grow suspicious. She decided to temporize, with the affectation of frankness that had once deceived Clayton, and that still, she knew, affected Graham.

"I'll tell you exactly," she said, slowly. "At first I thought it was just an infatuation. And - you really are young, Graham, although you look and act like such a man. But I feel, now that time has gone on and you still care about her, that after all, your happiness is all that matters."

"Mother!"

But she held up her hand.

"Remember, I am only speaking for myself. My dearest wish is to make you happy. You are all I have. But I cannot help you very much. Your father looks at those things differently. He doesn't quite realize that you are grown up, and have a right to decide some things for yourself."

"He has moved me up, raised my salary."

"That's different. You're valuable to him, naturally. I don't mean he doesn't love you," she added hastily, as Graham wheeled and stared at her. "Of course he does, in his own way. It's not my way, but then - I'm only a woman and a mother."

"You think he'll object?"

"I think he must be handled. If you rush at him, and demand the right to live your own life - "

"It is my life."

"Precisely. Only he may not see it that way."

He took a step toward her.

"Mother, do you really want me to marry Marion?"

"I think you ought to be married."

"To Marion?"

"To some one you love."

"Circles again," he muttered. "You've changed your mind, for some reason. What is it, mother?"

He had an uneasy thought that she might have learned of Anna. There was that day, for instance, when his father had walked into the back room.
Natalie was following a train of thought suggested by her own anxiety. "You might be married quietly," she suggested. "Once it was done, I am sure your father would come around. You are both of age, you know."

He eyed her then with open-eyed amazement.

"I'm darned if I understand you," he burst out. And then, in one of his quick remorses, "I'm sorry, mother. I'm just puzzled, that's all. But that plan's no good, anyhow. Marion won't do it. She will have to be welcome in the family, or she won't come."

"She ought to be glad to come any way she can," Natalie said sharply. And found Graham's eyes on her, studying her.

"You don't want her. That's plain. But you do want her. That's not so plain. What's the answer, mother?"

And Natalie, with an itirable feeling that she had bungled somehow, got up and flung away the cigaret.

"I am trying to give you what you want," she said pettishly. "That's clear enough, I should think."

"There's no other reason?"

"What other reason could there be?"

Dressing to dine at the Hayden's that night, Graham heard Clayton come in and go into his dressing-room. He had an impulse to go over, tie in hand as he was, and put the matter squarely before his father. The marriage-urge - surely a man would understand that. Even Anna, and his predicament there. Anything was better than this constant indirectness of gaining his father's views through his mother.

Had he done so, things would have been different later. But by continual suggestion a vision of his father as hard, detached, immovable, had been built up in his mind. He got as far as the door, hesitated, turned back.

It was Marion herself who solved the mystery of Natalie's changed attitude, when Graham told of it that night. She sat listening, her eyes slightly narrowed, restlessly turning her engagement ring.

"Well, at least that's something," she said, noncommittally. But in her heart she knew, as one designing woman may know another. She knew that Natalie had made Graham promise not to enlist at once, if war was declared, and now she knew that she was desperately preparing to carry her fear for Graham a step further, even at the cost of having her in the family.

She smiled wryly. But there was triumph in the smile, too. She had them now. The time would come when they would crawl to her to marry Graham, to keep him from going to war. Then she would make her own terms.

In the meantime the thing was to hold him by every art she knew.

There was another girl, somewhere. She had been more frightened about that than she cared to admit, even to herself. She must hold him close.

She used every art she knew. She deliberately inflamed him. And the vicious circle closed in about him, Natalie and Marion and Anna Klein. And to offset them, only Delight Haverford, at evening prayer in Saint Luke's, and voicing a tiny petition for him, that he might walk straight, that he might find peace, even if that peace should be war.

CHAPTER XXIX

Herman Klein, watch between forefinger and thumb, climbed heavily to Anna's room. She heard him pause outside the door, and her heart almost stopped beating. She had been asleep, and rousing at his step, she had felt under the pillow for her watch to see the time. It was not there.

She remembered then; she had left it below, on the table. And he was standing outside her door. She heard him scratching a match, striking it against the panel of her door. For so long as it would take the match to burn out, she heard him there, breathing heavily. Then the knob turned.

She leaped out of the bed in a panic of fear. The hall, like the room, was dark, and she felt his ponderous body in the doorway, rather than saw it.

"You will put on something and come down-stairs," he said harshly.

"I will not." She tried to keep her voice steady. "I've got to work, if you haven't. I've got to have my sleep." Her tone rose, hysterically. "If you think you can stay out half the night, and guzzle beer, and then come here to get me up, you can think again."

"You are already up," he said, in a voice slowed and thickened by rage. "You will come down-stairs."

He turned away and descended the creaking stairs again. She listened for the next move, but he made none. She knew then that he was waiting at the foot of the stairs.

She was half-maddened with terror by that time, and she ran to the window. But it was high. Even if she could have dropped out, and before she could put on enough clothing to escape in, he would be back again, his rage the greater for the delay. She slipped into a kimono, and her knees giving way under her she went down the stairs. Herman was waiting. He moved under the lamp, and she saw that he held the watch, dangling.

"Now!" he said. "Where you got this? Tell me."
"I've told you how I got it."
"That was a lie."
So - Rudolph had told him!
"I like that!" she blustered, trying to gain time. "I guess it's time they gave me something - I've worked hard enough. They gave them to all the girls."
"That is a lie also."
"I like that. Telling me I'm lying. You ask Mr. Graham Spencer. He'll tell you."
"If that is true, why do you shake so?"
"You scare me, father." She burst into frightened tears. "I don't know what's got into you. I do my best. I give you all I make. I've kept this house going, and" - she gained a little courage - "I've had darned little thanks for it."
"You think I believe the mill gave five thousand dollars in watches last Christmas? To-morrow I go, with this to Mr. Clayton Spencer, not to that degenerate son of his, and I ask him. Then I shall know."

He turned, as if about to leave her, but the alternative he offered her was too terrible.
"Father!" she said. "I'll tell you the truth. I bought it myself."
"With what money?"
"I had a raise. I didn't tell you. I had a raise of five dollars a week. I'm paying for it myself. Honest to heaven, that's right, father."
"So - you have had a raise, and you have not told me?"
"I give all the rest to you. What do I get out of all my hard work? Just a place to live. No clothes. No fun. No anything. All the other girls have a good time now and then, but I'm just like a prisoner. You take all I earn, and I get - the devil."

Her voice rose to a terrified squeal. Behind her she heard the slovenly servant creaking down the stairs. As Herman moved toward her she screamed.

"Katie!" she called. "Quick. Help!"

But Herman had caught her by the shoulder and was dragging her toward a corner, where there hung a leather strap.

Katie, peering round the door of the enclosed staircase, saw him raise the strap, and Anna's white face upraised piteously.

"For God's sake, father.

The strap descended. Even after Katie had rushed up the stairs and locked herself in the room, she could hear, above Anna's cries, the thud of the strap, relentless, terrible, lusty with cruelty.

Herman went to church the next morning. Lying in her bed, too sore and bruised to move, Anna heard him carefully polishing his boots on the side porch, heard him throw away the water after he had shaved, heard at last the slam of the gate as he started, upright in his Sunday clothes, for church.

Only when he had reached the end of the street, and Katie could see him picking his way down the blackened hill, did she venture up with a cup of coffee. Anna had to unlock her door to admit her, to remove a further barricade of chairs. When Katie saw her she almost dropped the cup.

"You poor little rat," she said compassionately. "Gee! He was crazy. I never saw such a face. Gee!"

Anna said nothing. She dropped on the side of the bed and took the coffee, drinking gingerly through a lip swollen and cut.

"I'm going to leave," Katie went on. "It'll be my time next. If he tries any tricks on me I'll have the law on him. He's a beast; that's what he is."

"Katie," Anna said, "if I leave can you get my clothes to me? I'll carry all I can."

"He'd take the strap to me."

"Well, if you're leaving anyhow, you can put some of my things in your trunk."

"Good and right you are to get out," Katie agreed. "Sure I'll do it. Where do you think you'll go?"

"I thought last night I'd jump in the river. I've changed my mind, though. I'll pay him back, and not the way he expects."

"Give it to him good," assented Katie. "I'd have liked to slip some of that Paris green of his in his coffee this morning. And now he's off for church, the old hypocrite!"

To Katie's curious inquiries as to the cause of the beating Anna was now too committal.

"I held out some money on him," was all she said.

Katie regarded her with a mixture of awe and admiration.

"You've got your nerve," she said. "I wonder he didn't kill you. What's yours is his and what's his is his own!"

But Anna could not leave that morning. She lay in her bed, cold compresses on her swollen face and shoulders, a bruised and broken thing, planning hideous reprisals. Herman made no inquiry for her. He went stolidly about the
day's work, carried in firewood and coal from the shed, inspected the garden with a view to early planting, and ate hugely of the mid-day dinner.

In the afternoon Rudolph came.
"Where's Anna?" he asked briskly.
"She is in her room. She is not well."

If Rudolph suspected anything, it was only that Anna was sulking. But later on he had reason to believe that there trouble. Out of a clear sky Herman said:
"She has had a raise." Anna was "she" to him.
"Since when?" Rudolph asked with interest.
"I know nothing. She has not given it to me. She has been buying herself a watch."
"So!" Rudolph's tone was wary.
"She will buy herself no more watches," said Herman, with an air of finality.

Rudolph hesitated. The organization wanted Herman; he had had great influence with the millworkers. Through him many things would be possible. The Spencers trusted him, too. At any time Rudolph knew they would be glad to reinstate him, and once inside the plant, there was no limit to the mischief he could do. But Herman was too valuable to risk. Suppose he was told now about Graham Spencer and Anna, and beat the girl and was jailed for it? Besides, ugly as Rudolph's suspicions were, they were as yet only suspicions. He decided to wait until he could bring Herman proof of Graham Spencer's relations with Anna. When that time came he knew Herman. He would be clay for the potter. He, Rudolph, intended to be the potter.

Katie had an afternoon off that Sunday. When she came back that night, Herman, weary from the late hours of Saturday, was already snoring in his bed. Anna met Katie at her door and drew her in.
"I've found a nice room," Katie whispered. "Here's the address written down. The street cars go past it. Three dollars a week. Are you ready?"

Anna was ready, even to her hat. Over it she placed a dark veil, for she was badly disfigured. Then, with Katie crying quietly, she left the house. In the flare from the Spencer furnaces Katie watched until the girl reappeared on the twisting street below which still followed the old path - that path where Herman, years ago, had climbed through the first spring wild flowers to the cottage on the hill.

Graham was uncomfortable the next morning on his way to the mill. Anna's face had haunted him. But out of all his confusion one thing stood out with distinctness. If he was to be allowed to marry Marion, he must have no other entanglement. He would go to her clean and clear.

So he went to the office, armed toward Anna with a hardness he was far from feeling.
"Poor little kid!" he reflected on the way down. "Rotten luck, all round."

He did not for a moment believe that it would be a lasting grief. He knew that sort of girl, he reflected, out of his vast experience of twenty-two. They were sentimental, but they loved and forgot easily. He hoped she would forget him; but even with that, there was a vague resentment that she should do so.

"She'll marry some mill-hand," he reflected, "and wear a boudoir cap, and have a lot of children who need their noses wiped."

But he was uncomfortable.

Anna was not in her office. Her coat and hat were not there. He was surprised, somewhat relieved. It was out of his hands, then; she had gone somewhere else to work. Well, she was a good stenographer. Somebody was having a piece of luck.

Clayton, finding him short-handed, sent Joey over to help him pack up his office belongings, the fittings of his desk, his personal papers, the Japanese prints and rugs Natalie had sent after her single visit to the boy's new working quarters. And, when Graham came back from luncheon, Joey had a message for him.
"Telephone call for you, Mr. Spencer."
"What was it?"
"Lady called up, from a pay phone. She left her number and said she'd wait." Joey lowered his voice confidentially. "Sounded like Miss Klein," he volunteered.

He was extremely resentful when Graham sent him away on an errand. And Graham himself frowned as he called the number on the pad. It was like a girl, this breaking off clean and then telephoning, instead of letting the thing go, once and for all. But his face changed as he heard Anna's brief story over the wire.
"Of course I'll come," he said. "I'm pretty busy, but I can steal a half-hour. Don't you worry. We'll fix it up some way."

He was more concerned than deeply anxious when he rang off. It was unfortunate, that was all. And the father was a German swine, and ought to be beaten himself. To think that his Christmas gift had brought her to such a pass! A leather strap! God!
He was vaguely uneasy, however. He had a sense of a situation being forced on him. He knew, too, that Clayton was waiting for him at the new plant. But Anna's trouble, absurd as its cause seemed to him, was his responsibility.

It ceased to be absurd, however, when he saw her discolored features. It would be some time before she could even look for another situation. Her face was a swollen mask, and since such attraction as she had had for him had been due to a sort of evanescent prettiness of youth, he felt a repulsion that he tried his best to conceal.

"You poor little thing!" he said. "He's a brute. I'd like - " He clenched his fists. "Well, I got you into it. I'm certainly going to see you through."

She had lowered her veil quickly, and he felt easier. The telephone booth was in the corner of a quiet hotel, and they were alone. He patted her shoulder.

"I'll see you through," he repeated. "Don't you worry about anything. Just lie low."

"See me through? How?"

"I can give you money; that's the least I can do. Until you are able to work again." And as she drew away, "We'll call it a loan, if that makes you feel better. You haven't anything, have you?"

"He has everything I've earned. I've never had a penny except carfare."

"Poor little girl!" he said again.

She was still weak, he saw, and he led her into the deserted cafe. He took a highball himself, not because he wanted it, but because she refused to drink, at first. He had never before had a drink in the morning, and he felt a warm and reckless glow to his very finger-tips. Bending toward her, while the waiter's back was turned, he kissed her marred and swollen cheek.

"To think I have brought you all this trouble!"

"You mustn't blame yourself."

"I do. But I'll make it up to you, Anna. You don't hate me for it, do you?"

"Hate you! You know better than that."

"I'll come round to take you out now and then, in the evenings. I don't want you to sit alone in that forsaken boarding-house and mope." He drew out a bill-fold, and extracted some notes. "Don't be silly," he protested, as she drew back. "It's the only way I can get back my self-respect. You owe it to me to let me do it."

She was not hard to persuade. Anything was better than going back to the cottage on the hill, and to that heavy brooding figure, and the strap on the wall. But the taking of the money marked a new epoch in the girl's infatuation. It bought her. She did not know it, nor did he. But hitherto she had been her own, earning her own livelihood. What she gave of love, of small caresses and intimacies, had been free gifts.

From that time she was his creature. In her creed, which was the creed of the girls on the hill, one did not receive without giving. She would pay him back, but all that she had to give was herself.

"You'll come to see me, too. Won't you?"

The tingling was very noticeable now. He felt warm, and young, and very, very strong."

"Of course I'll come to see you," he said, recklessly. "You take a little time off - you've worked hard - and we'll play round together."

She bent down, unexpectedly, and put her bruised cheek against his hand, as it lay on the table.

"I love you dreadfully," she whispered.

CHAPTER XXX

February and March were peaceful months, on the surface. Washington was taking stock quietly of national resources and watching for Germany's next move. The winter impasse in Europe gave way to the first fighting of spring, raids and sorties mostly, since the ground was still too heavy for the advancement of artillery. On the high seas the reign of terror was in full swing, and little tragic echoes of the world drama began again to come by cable across the Atlantic. Some of Graham's friends, like poor Chris, found the end of the path of glory. The tall young Canadian Highlander died before Peronne in March. Denis Nolan's nephew was killed in the Irish Fusileers.

One day Clayton came home to find a white-faced Buckham taking his overcoat in the hall, and to learn that he had lost a young brother.

Clayton was uncomfortable at dinner that night. He wondered what Buckham thought of them, sitting there around the opulent table, in that luxurious room. Did he resent it? After dinner he asked him if he cared to take a few days off, but the old butler shook his head.

"I'm glad to have my work to keep me busy, sir," he said. "And anyhow, in England, it's considered best to go on, quite as though nothing had happened. It's better for the troops, sir."

There was a new softness and tolerance in Clayton that early spring. He had mellowed, somehow, a mellowing that had nothing to do with his new prosperity. In past times he had wondered how he would stand financial success if it ever came. He had felt fairly sure he could stand the other thing. But success - Now he found that it only increased his sense of responsibility. He was, outside of the war situation, as nearly happy as he had been in years.
Natalie's petulant moods, when they came, no longer annoyed him. He was supported, had he only known it, by the strong inner life he was living, a life that centered about his weekly meetings with Audrey.

Audrey gave him courage to go on. He left their comradely hours together better and stronger. All the week centered about that one hour, out of seven days, when he stood on her hearth-rug, or lay back in a deep chair, listening or talking - such talk as Natalie might have heard without resentment.

Some times he felt that that one hour was all he wanted; it carried so far, helped so greatly. He was so boyishly content in it. And then she would make a gesture, or there would be, for a second, a deeper note in her voice, and the mad instinct to catch her to him was almost overwhelming.

Some times he wondered if she were not very lonely, not knowing that she, too, lived for days on that one hour. She was not going out, because of Chris's death, and he knew there were long hours when she sat alone, struggling determinedly with the socks she was knitting.

Only once did they tread on dangerous ground, and that was on her birthday. He stopped in a jeweler's on his way up-town and brought her a black pearl on a thin almost invisible chain, only to have her refuse to take it.

"I can't Clay!"
"Why not?"
"It's too valuable. I can't take valuable presents from men."
"It's value hasn't anything to do with it."
"I'm not wearing jewelry, anyhow."
"Audrey," he said gravely, "it isn't the pearl. It isn't its value. That's absurd. Don't you understand that I would like to think that you have something I have given you?"

When she sat still, thinking over what he had said, he slipped the chain around her neck and clasped it. Then he stooped down, very gravely, and kissed her.

"For my silent partner!" he said.

In all those weeks, that was the only time he had kissed her. He knew quite well the edge of the gulf they stood on, and he was determined not to put the burden of denial on her. He felt a real contempt for men who left the strength of refusal to a woman, who pleaded, knowing that the woman's strength would save them from themselves, and that if she weakened, the responsibility was hers.

So he fed on the husks of love, and was, if not happy, happier.

Graham, too, was getting on better. For one thing, Anna Klein had been ill. She lay in her boarding-house, frightened at every step on the stairs, and slowly recovered from a low fever. Graham had not seen her, but he sent her money for a doctor, for medicines, for her room rent, enclosed in brief letters, purely friendly and interested. But she kept them under her pillow and devoured them with feverish eyes.

But something had gone out of life for Graham. Not Anna. Natalie, watching him closely, wondered what it was. He had been strange and distant with her ever since that tall boy in kilts had been there. He was studiously polite and attentive to her, rose when she entered a room and remained standing until she was seated, brought her the book she had forgotten, lighted her occasional cigaret, kissed her morning and evening. But he no longer came into her dressing-room for that hour before dinner when Natalie, in dressing-gown and slippers, had closed the door to Clayton's room and had kept him for herself.

She was jealous of Clayton those days. Some times she found the boy's eyes fixed on his father, with admiration and something more. She was jealous of the things they had in common, of the days at the mill, of the bits of discussion after dinner, when Clayton sat back with his cigar, and Graham voiced, as new discoveries, things about the work that Clayton had realized for years.

He always listened gravely, with no hint of patronage. But Natalie would break in now and then, impatient of a conversation that excluded her.

"Your father knows all these things, Graham," she said once. "You talk as though you'd just discovered the mill, like Columbus discovering America."

"Not at all," Clayton said, hastily. "He has a new viewpoint. I am greatly interested. Go on, Graham."

But the boy's enthusiasm had died. He grew self-conscious, apologetic. And Clayton felt a resentment that was close to despair.

The second of April fell on a Saturday. Congress, having ended the session the fourth of March, had been hastily reconvened, and on the evening of that day, Saturday, at half past eight, the President went before the two Houses in joint session.

Much to Clayton's disgust, he found on returning home that they were dining out.

"Only at the Mackenzies. It's not a party," Natalie said. As usual, she was before the dressing-table, and she spoke to his reflection in the mirror. "I should think you could do that, without looking like a thunder-cloud. Goodness knows we've been quiet enough this Lent."
"You know Congress has been re-convened?"

"I don't know why that should interfere."

"It's rather a serious time." He tried very hard to speak pleasantly. Her engrossment in her own reflection irritated him, so he did not look at her. "But of course I'll go."

"Every time is a serious time with you lately," she flung after him. Her tone was not disagreeable. She was merely restating an old grievance. A few moments later he heard her calling through the open door.

"I got some wonderful old rugs to-day, Clay."

"Yes?"

"You'll scream when you pay for them."

"I've lost my voice screaming, my dear."

"You'll love these. They have the softest colors, dead rose, and faded blue, and old copper tones."

"I'm very glad you're pleased."

She was in high good humor when they started. Clayton, trying to meet her conversational demands found himself wondering if the significance of what was to happen in Washington that night had struck home to her. If it had, and she could still be cheerful, then it was because she had forced a promise from Graham.

He made his decision then; to force her to release the boy from any promise; to allow him his own choice. But he felt with increasing anxiety that some of Natalie's weakness of character had descended to Graham, that in him, as in Natalie, perhaps obstinacy was what he hoped was strength. He wondered listening to her, what it would be to have beside him that night some strong and quiet woman, to whom he could carry his problems, his perplexities. Some one to sit, hand in his, and set him right as such a woman could, on many things.

And for a moment, he pictured Audrey. Audrey, his wife, driving with him in their car, to whatever the evening might hold. And after it was all over, going back with her, away from all the chatter that meant so little, to the home that shut them in together.

He was very gentle to Natalie that night.

Natalie had been right. It was a small and informal group, gathered together hastily to discuss the emergency; only Denis Nolan, the Mackenzies, Clayton and Natalie, and Audrey.

"We brought her out of her shell," said Terry, genially, "because the country is going to make history to-night. The sort of history Audrey has been shouting for for months."

The little party was very grave. Yet, of them all, only the Spencers would be directly affected. The Mackenzies had no children.

"Button, my secretary," Terry announced, "is in Washington. He is to call me here when the message is finished."

"Isn't it possible," said Natalie, recalling a headline from the evening paper, "that the House may cause an indefinite delay?"

And, as usual, Clayton wondered at the adroitness with which, in the talk that followed, she escaped detection.

They sat long at the table, rather as though they clung together. And Nolan insisted on figuring the cost of war in money.

"Queer thing," he said. "In ancient times the cost of war fell almost entirely on the poor. But it's the rich who will pay for this war. All taxation is directed primarily against the rich."

"The poor pay in blood," said Audrey, rather sharply. "They give their lives, and that is all they have."

"Rich and poor are going to do that, now," old Terry broke in. "Fight against it all you like, you members of the privileged class, the draft is coming. This is every man's war."

But Clayton Spencer was watching Natalie. She had paled and was fingering her liqueur-glass absently. Behind her lowered eyelids he surmised that again she was planning. But what? Then it came to him, like a flash. Old Terry had said the draft would exempt married men. She meant to marry Graham to a girl she detested, to save him from danger.

Through it all, however, and in spite of his anger and apprehension, he was sorry for her. Sorry for her craven spirit. Sorry even with an understanding that came from his own fears. Sorry for her, that she had remained an essential child in a time that would tax the utmost maturity. She was a child. Even her selfishness was the selfishness of a spoiled child. She craved things, and the spirit, the essence of life, escaped her.

And beside him was Audrey, valiant-eyed, courageous, honest. Natalie and Audrey! Some time during the evening his thoughts took this form: that there were two sorts of people in the world: those who seized their own happiness, at any cost; and those who saw the promised land from a far hill, and having seen it, turned back.

CHAPTER XXXI

Graham was waiting in Clayton's dressing-room when he went up-stairs. Through the closed door they could hear Natalie's sleepy and rather fretful orders to her maid. Graham rose when he entered, and threw away his cigaret.
"I guess it has come, father."

"It looks like it."

A great wave of tenderness for the boy flooded over him. That tall, straight body, cast in his own mold, but young, only ready to live, that was to be cast into the crucible of war, to come out - God alone knew how. And not his boy only, but millions of other boys. Yet - better to break the body than ruin the soul.

"How is mother taking it?"

Natalie's voice came through the door. She was insisting that the house be kept quiet the next morning. She wanted to sleep late. Clayton caught the boy's eyes on him, and a half smile on his face.

"Does she know?"

"Yes."

"She isn't taking it very hard, is she?" Then his voice changed. "I wish you'd talk to her, father. She's - well, she's got me! You see, I promised her not to go in without her consent."

"When did you do that?"

"The night we broke with Germany in February. I was a fool, but she was crying, and I didn't know what else to do. And - there was a ring of desperation in his voice - "she's holding me to it. I've been to her over and over again."

"And you want to go?"

"Want to go! I've got to go."

He broke out then into a wild appeal. He wanted to get away. He was making a mess of all sorts of things. He wasn't any good. He would try to make good in the army. Maybe it was only the adventure he wanted - he didn't know. He hadn't gone into that. He hated the Germans. He wanted one chance at them, anyhow. They were beasts.

Clayton, listening, was amazed at the depth of feeling and anger in his voice.

"I'll talk to your mother," he agreed, when the boy's passion had spent itself. "I think she will release you." But he was less certain than he pretended to be. He remembered Natalie's drooping eyelids that night at dinner. She might absolve him from the promise, but there were other ways of holding him back than promises.

"Perhaps we would better go into the situation thoroughly," he suggested. "I have rather understood, lately, that you - what about Marion Hayden, Graham?"

"I'm engaged to her."

"Since when?"

"Last fall, sir."

"Does your mother know?"

"I told her, yes." He looked up quickly. "I didn't tell you. I knew you disliked her, and mother said?" He checked himself. "Marion wanted to wait. She wanted to be welcome when she came into the family."

"I don't so much dislike her as I - disapprove of her."

"That's rather worse, isn't it?"

Clayton was tired. His very spirit was tired. He sat down in his big chair by the fire.

"She is older than you are, you know."

"I don't see what that has to do with it, father."

In Clayton's defense was his own situation. He did not want the boy to repeat his mistakes, to marry the wrong woman, and then find, too late, the right one. During the impassioned appeal that followed he was doggedly determined to prevent that. Perhaps he lost the urgency in the boy's voice. Perhaps in his new conviction that the passions of the forties were the only real ones, he took too little count of the urge of youth.

He roused himself.

"You think you are really in love with her?"

"I want her. I know that."

"That's different. That's - you are too young to know what you want."

"I ought to be married. It would settle me. I'm sick of batting round."

"You want to marry before you enter the army?"

"Yes."

"Do you think for a moment that your wife will be willing to let you go?"

Graham straightened himself.

"She would have to let me go."

And in sheer despair, Clayton played his last card. Played it, and regretted it bitterly a moment later.

"We must get this straight, Graham. It's not a question of your entering the army or not doing it. It's a question of your happiness. Marriage is a matter of a life-time. It's got to be based on something more than - " he hesitated.
"And your mother?"
"Please go on."
"You have just said that your mother does not want you to go into the army. Has it occurred to you she would even see you married to a girl she detests, to keep you at home?"

Graham's face hardened.

"So," he said, heavily, "Marion wants me for the money she thinks I'm going to have, and mother wants me to marry to keep me safe! By God, it's a dirty world, isn't it?"

Suddenly he was gone, and Clayton, following uneasily to the doorway, heard a slam below. When, some hours later, Graham had not come back, he fell into the heavy sleep that follows anxiety and brings no rest. In the morning he found that Graham had gone back to the garage and taken his car, and that he had not returned.

Afterward Clayton was to look back and to remember with surprise how completely the war crisis had found him absorbed in his own small group. But perhaps in the back of every man's mind war was always, first of all, a thing of his own human contacts. It was only when those were cleared up that he saw the bigger problem. The smaller questions loomed so close as to obscure the larger vision.

He went out into the country the next day, a cold Sunday, going afoot, his head down against the wind, and walked for miles. He looked haggard and tired when he came back, but his quiet face held a new resolve. War had come at last. He would put behind him the selfish craving for happiness, forget himself. He would not make money out of the nation's necessity. He would put Audrey out of his mind, if not out of his heart. He would try to rebuild his house of life along new and better lines. Perhaps he could bring Natalie to see things as he saw them, as they were, not as she wanted them to be.

Some times it took great crises to bring out women. Child-bearing did it, often. Urgent need did it, too. But after all the real test was war. The big woman met it squarely, took her part of the burden; the small woman weakened, went down under it, found it a grievance rather than a grief.

He did not notice Graham's car when it passed him, outside the city limits, or see Anna Klein's startled eyes as it flashed by.

Graham did not come in until evening. At ten o'clock Clayton found the second man carrying up-stairs a tray containing whisky and soda, and before he slept he heard a tap at Graham's door across the hall, and surmised that he had rung for another. Later still he heard Natalie cross the hall, and rather loud and angry voices. He considered, ironically, that a day which had found a part of the nation on its knees found in his own house only dissension and bitterness.

In the morning, at the office, Joey announced a soldier to see him, and added, with his customary nonchalance:
"We'll be having a lot of them around now, I expect."
Clayton, glancing up from the visitor's slip in his hand, surprised something wistful in the boy's eyes.
"Want to go, do you?"
"Give my neck to go - sir." He always added the "sir," when he remembered it, with the air of throwing a sop to a convention he despised.

"You may yet, you know. This thing is going to last a while. Send him in, Joey."
He had grown attached to this lad of the streets. He found in his loyalty a thing he could not buy.

Jackson was his caller. Clayton, who had been rather more familiar with his back in its gray livery than with any other aspect of him, found him strange and impressive in khaki.
"I'm sorry I couldn't get here sooner, Mr. Spencer," he explained. "I've been down on the border. Yuma. I just got a short leave, and came back to see my family."

He stood very erect, a bronzed and military figure. Suddenly it seemed strange to Clayton Spencer that this man before him had only a few months before opened his automobile door for him, and stood waiting with a rug to spread over his knees. He got up and shook hands.
"You look like a different man, Jackson."
"Well, at least I feel like a man."
"Sit down," he said. And again it occurred to him that never before had he asked Jackson to sit down in his presence. It was wrong, somehow. The whole class system was absurd. Maybe war would change that, too. It was doing many queer things, already.

He had sent for Jackson, but he did not at once approach the reason. He sat back, while Jackson talked of the border and Joey slipped in and pretended to sharpen lead pencils.

Clayton's eyes wandered to the window. Outside in the yard were other men, now employees of his, who would soon be in khaki. Out of every group there in a short time some would be gone, and of those who would go a certain number would never come back. That was what war was; one day a group of men, laboring with their hands or their brains, that some little home might live; that they might go back at evening to that home, and there rest for the next
day's toil. And the next, gone. Every man out there in the yard was loved by some one. To a certain number of them
this day meant death, or wounding. It meant separation, and suffering, and struggle.

And all over the country there were such groups.

The roar of the plant came in through the open window. A freight car was being loaded with finished shells. As
fast as it was filled, another car was shunted along the spur to take its place. Over in Germany, in hundreds of
similar plants, similar shells were being hurried to the battle line, to be hurled against the new army that was soon to
cross the seas.

All those men, and back of every man, a woman.

Jackson had stopped. Joey was regarding him with stealthy admiration, and holding his breast bone very high.
Already in his mind Joey was a soldier.

"You did not say in your note why you wanted to see me, Mr. Spencer."

He roused himself with a visible effort.

"I sent for you, yes," he said. "I sent - I'll tell you why I sent for you, Jackson. I've been meaning to do it for
several weeks. Now that this has come I'm more than glad I did so. You can't keep your family on what you are
getting. That's certain."

"My wife is going to help me, sir. The boy will soon be weaned. Then she intends to get a position. She was a
milliner when we were married."

"But - Great Scott! She ought not to leave a child as young as that."

Jackson smiled.

"She's going to fix that, all right. She wants to do it. And we're all right so far I had saved a little."

Then there were women like that! Women who would not only let their men go to war, but who would leave
their homes and enter the struggle for bread, to help them do it.

"She says it's the right thing," volunteered Jackson, proudly. Women who felt that a man going into the service
was a right thing. Women who saw war as a duty to be done, not a wild adventure for the adventurous.

"You ought to be very proud of her," he said slowly. "There are not many like that."

"Well," Jackson said, apologetically, "they'll come round, sir. Some of them kind of hate the idea, just at first.
But I look to see a good many doing what my wife's doing."

Clayton wondered grimly what Jackson would think if he knew that at that moment he was passionately envious
of him, of his uniform, of the youth that permitted him to wear that uniform, of his bronzed skin, of his wife, of his
pride in that wife.

"You're a lucky chap, Jackson," he said. "I sent for you because I wanted to say that, as long as you are in the
national service, I shall feel that you are on a vacation" - he smiled at the word - "on pay. Under those
circumstances, I owe you quite a little money."

Jackson was too overwhelmed to reply at once.

"As a matter of fad," Clayton went on, "it's a national move, in a way. You don't owe any gratitude. We need our
babies, you see. More than we do hats! If this war goes on, we shall need a good many boy babies."

And his own words suddenly crystallized the terror that was in him. It was the boys who would go; boys who
whistled in the morning; boys who dreamed in the spring, long dreams of romance and of love.

Boys. Not men like himself, with their hopes and dreams behind them. Not men who had lived enough to know
that only their early dreams were real. Not men who, having lived, knew the vast disillusion of living and were
ready to die.

It was only after Jackson had gone that he saw the fallacy of his own reasoning. If to live were disappointment,
then to die, still dreaming the great dream, was not wholly evil. He found himself saying,

"To earn some honorable advancement for one's soul."

Deep down in him, overlaid with years of worldliness, there was a belief in a life after death. He looked out the
window at the little, changing group. In each man out there there was something that would live on, after he had
shed that sweating, often dirty, always weary, sometimes malformed shell that was the body. And then the thing that
would count would be not how he had lived, but what he had done.

This war was a big thing. It was the biggest thing in all the history of the world. There might be, perhaps, some
special heaven for those who had given themselves to it, some particular honorable advancement for their souls.
Already he saw Jackson as one apart, a man dedicated.

Then he knew that all his thinking was really centered about his boy. He wanted Graham to go. But in giving
him he was giving him to the chance of death. Then he must hold to his belief in eternity. He must feel that, or the
thing would be unbearable. For the first time in his life he gave conscious thought to Natalie's religious belief. She
believed in those things. She must. She sat devoutly through the long service; she slipped, with a little rustle of soft
silk, so easily to her knees. Perhaps, if he went to her with that?
CHAPTER XXXII

For a week after Anna's escape Herman Klein had sat alone and brooded. Entirely alone now, for following a stormy scene on his discovery of Anna's disappearance, Katie had gone too.

"I don't know where she is," she had said, angrily, "and if I did know I wouldn't tell you. If I was her I'd have the law on you. Don't you look at that strap. You lay a hand on me and I'll kill you. If you think I'm afraid of you, you can think again."

"She is my daughter, and not yet of age," Herman said heavily. "You tell her for me that she comes back, or I go and bring her."

"Yah!" Katie jeered. "You try it! She's got marks on her that'll jail you." And on his failure to reply her courage mounted. "This ain't Germany, you know. They know how to treat women over here. And you ask me" - her voice rose - "and I'll just say that there's queer comings and goings here with that Rudolph. I've heard him say some things that'll lock him up good and tight."

For all his rage, Teutonic caution warned him not to lay hands on the girl. But his anger against her almost strangled him. Indeed, when she came down stairs, dragging her heavy suitcase, he took a step or two toward her, with his fists clenched. She stopped, terrified.

"You old bully!" she said, between white lips. "You touch me, and I'll scream till I bring in every neighbor in the block. There's a good lamp-post outside that's just waiting for your sort of German."

He had refused to pay her for the last week, also. But that she knew well enough was because he was out of money. As fast as Anna's salary had come in, he had taken out of it the small allowance that was to cover the week's expenses, and had banked the remainder. But Anna had carried her last pay envelope away with her, and added to his anger at her going was his fear that he would have to draw on his savings.

With Katie gone, he set heavily about preparing his Sunday dinner. Long years of service done for him, however, had made him clumsy. He cooked a wretched meal, and then, leaving the dishes as they were, he sat by the fire and brooded. When Rudolph came in, later, he found him there, in his stocking-feet, a morose and untidy figure.

Rudolph's reception of the news roused him, however. He looked up, after the telling, to find the younger man standing over him and staring down at him with blood-shot eyes.

"You beat her!" he was saying. "What with?"

"What does that matter - She had bought herself a watch - "

"What did you beat her with?" Rudolph was licking his lips. Receiving no reply, he called "Katie!"

"Katie has gone."

"Maybe you beat her, too."

"She wasn't my daughter."

"No by God! You wouldn't dare to touch her. She didn't belong to you. You - "

"Get out," said Herman, somberly. He stood up menacingly. "You go, now." Rudolph hesitated. Then he laughed.

"All right, old top," he said, in a conciliatory tone. "No offense meant. I lost my temper."

He picked up the empty coal-scuffle, and went out into the shed where the coal was kept. He needed a minute to think. Besides, he always brought in coal when he was there. In the shed, however, he put down the scuttle and stood still.

"The old devil!" he muttered.

But his rage for Anna was followed by rage against her. Where was she to-night? Did Graham Spencer know where she was? And if he did, what then? Were they at that moment somewhere together? Hidden away, the two of them? The conviction that they were together grew on him, and with it a frenzy that was almost madness. He left the coal scuttle in the shed, and went out into the air. For a half hour he stood there, looking down toward the Spencer furnace, sending up, now red, now violet bursts of flame.

He was angry enough, jealous enough. But he was quick, too, to see that that particular lump of potters' clay which was Herman Klein was ready for the wheel. Even while he was cursing the girl his cunning mind was already plotting, revenge for the Spencers, self-aggrandizement among his fellows for himself. His inordinate conceit, wounded by Anna's defection, found comfort in the early prospect of putting over a big thing. He carried the coal in, to find Herman gloomily clearing his untidy table. For a moment they worked in silence, Rudolph at the stove, Herman at the sink.

Then Rudolph washed his hands under the faucet and faced the older man. "How do you know she bought herself that watch," he demanded.

Herman eyed him.

"Perhaps you gave it to her!" Something like suspicion of Rudolph crept into his eyes.

"Me? A hundred-dollar watch!"
"How do you know it cost a hundred dollars?"
"I saw it. She tried that story on me, too. But I was too smart for her. I went to the store and asked. A hundred
bucks!"

Herman's lips drew back over his teeth.
"You knew it, eh? And you did not tell me?"
"It wasn't my funeral," said Rudolph coolly. "If you wanted to believe she bought it herself?"
"If she bought it herself!" Rudolph's shoulder was caught in an iron grip. "You will tell me what you mean."
"Well, I ask you, do you think she'd spend that much on a watch? Anyhow, the installment story doesn't go. That
place doesn't sell on installments."
"Who is there would buy her such a watch?" Herman's voice was thick.
"How about Graham Spencer? She's been pretty thick with him."
"How you mean - thick?"
Rudolph shrugged his shoulders.
"I don't mean anything. But he's taken her out in his car. And the Spencers think there's nothing can't be bought
with money."

Herman put down the dish-cloth and commenced to draw down his shirt sleeves.
"Where you going?" Rudolph demanded uneasily.
"I go to the Spencers!"
"Listen!" Rudolph said, excitedly. "Don't you do it; not yet. You got to get him first. We don't know anything;
we don't even know he gave her that watch. We've got to find her, don't you see? And then, we've got to learn if he's
going there - wherever she is."
"I shall bring her back," Herman said, stubbornly. "I shall bring her back, and I shall kill her."
"And get strung up yourself! Now listen?" he argued. "You leave this to me. I'll find her. I've got a friend, a city
detective, and he'll help me, see? We'll get her back, all right. Only you've got to keep your hands off her. It's the
Spencers that have got to pay."

Herman went back to the sink, slowly.
"That is right. It is the Spencers," he muttered.
Rudolph went out. Late in the evening he came back, with the news that the search was on. And, knowing
Herman's pride, he assured him that the hill need never learn of Anna's flight, and if any inquiries came he advised
him to say the girl was sick.

In Rudolph's twisted mind it was not so much Anna's delinquency that enraged him. The hill had its own ideas of
morality. But he was fiercely jealous, with that class-jealousy which was the fundamental actuating motive of his
life. He never for a moment doubted that she had gone to Graham.

And, sitting by the fire in the little house, old Herman's untidy head shrunk on his shoulders, Rudolph almost
forgot Anna in plotting to use this new pawn across the hearth from him in his game of destruction.

By the end of the week, however, there was no news of Anna. She had not returned to the mill. Rudolph's friend
on the detective force had found no clew, and old Herman had advanced from brooding by the fire to long and
furious wanderings about the city streets.

He felt no remorse, only a growing and alarming fury. He returned at night, to his cold and unkempt house, to
cook himself a frugal and wretched meal. His money had run very low, and with true German stubbornness he
refused to draw any from the savings bank.

Rudolph was very busy. There were meetings always, and to the little inner circle that met behind Gus's barroom
one night later in March, he divulged the plan for the destruction of the new Spencer munition plant.
"But - will they take him back?" one of the men asked. He was of better class than the rest, with a military
bearing and a heavy German accent, for all his careful English.
"Will a dog snatch at a bone?" countered Rudolph. "Take him back! They'll be crazy about it."
"He has been there a long time. He may, at the last, weaken."
But Rudolph only laughed, and drank more whisky of the German agent's providing.
"He won't weaken," he said. "Give me a few days more to find the girl, and all hell won't hold him."

On the Sunday morning after the President had been before Congress, he found Herman dressed for church, but
sitting by the fire. All around him lay the Sunday paper, and he barely raised his head when Rudolph entered.
"Well, it's here!" said Rudolph.
"It has come. Yes."
"Wall Street will be opening champagne to-day."
Herman said nothing. But later on he opened up the fountain of rage in his heart. It was wrong, all wrong. We
had no quarrel with Germany. It was the capitalists and politicians who had done it. And above all, England.
He went far. He blamed America and Americans for his loss of work, for Anna's disappearance. He searched his mind for grievances and found them in the ore dust on the hill, which killed his garden; in the inefficiency of the police, who could not find Anna; in the very attitude of Clayton Spencer toward his resignation.

And on this smoldering fire Rudolph piled fuel. Not that he said a great deal. He worked around the cottage, washed dishes, threw pails of water on the dirty porches, swept the floor, carried in coal and wood. And gradually he began to play on the older man's vanity. He had had great influence with the millworkers. No one man had ever had so much.

Old Herman sat up, and listened sourly. But after a time he got up and pouring some water out of the kettle, proceeded to shave himself. And Rudolph talked on. If now he were to go back, and it were to the advantage of the Fatherland and of the workers of the world to hamper the industry, who so able to do it as Herman.

"Hamper? How?" Herman asked, suspiciously, holding his razor aloft. He had a great fear of the law. Rudolph re-assured him, cunning eyes averted.

"Well, a strike," he suggested. "The men'll listen to you. God knows they've got a right to strike."

"I shall not go back," said Herman stolidly, and finished his shaving.

But Rudolph was satisfied. He left Herman sitting again by the fire, but his eyes were no longer brooding. He was thinking, watching the smoke curl up from the china-bowed German pipe which he had brought from the Fatherland, and which he used only on special occasions.

CHAPTER XXXIII

The declaration of war found Graham desperately unhappy. Natalie held him rigidly to his promise, but it is doubtful if Natalie alone could have kept him out of the army. Marion was using her influence, too! She held him by alternating between almost agreeing to runaway marriage and threats of breaking the engagement if he went to war. She had tacitly agreed to play Natalie's game, and she was doing it.

Graham did not analyze his own misery. What he said to himself was that he was making a mess of things. Life, which had seemed to be a simple thing, compounded of work and play, had become involved, difficult and wretched.

Some times he watched Clayton almost with envy. He seemed so sure of himself; he was so poised, so calm, so strong. And he wondered if there had been a tumultuous youth behind the quiet of his maturity. He compared the even course of Clayton's days, his work, his club, the immaculate orderliness of his life, with his own disordered existence.

He was hedged about with women. Wherever he turned, they obtruded themselves. He made plans and women brushed them aside. He tried to live his life, and women stepped in and lived it for him. His mother, Marion, Anna Klein. Even Delight, with her friendship always overclouded with disapproval. Wherever he turned, a woman stood in the way. Yet he could not do without them. He needed them even while he resented them.

Then, gradually, into his self-engrossment there penetrated a conviction that all was not well between his father and his mother. He had always taken them for granted much as he did the house and the servants. In his brief vacations during his college days they had agreed or disagreed, amicably enough. He had considered, in those days, that life was a very simple thing. People married and lived together. Marriage, he considered, was rather the end of things.

But he was older now, and he knew that marriage was a beginning and not an end. It did not change people fundamentally. It only changed their habits.

His discovery that his father and mother differed about the war was the first of other discoveries; that they differed about him; that they differed about many matters; that, indeed, they had no common ground at all on which to meet; between them, although Graham did not put it that way, was a No-Man's Land strewn with dead happiness, lost desires, and the wreckage of years of dissension.

It was incredible to Graham that he should ever reach the forties, but he wondered some times if all of life was either looking forward or looking back. And it seemed to him rather tragic that for Clayton, who still looked like a boy, there should be nothing but his day at the mill, his silent evening at home, or some stodgy dinner-party where the women were all middle-aged, and the other men a trifle corpulent.

For the first time he was beginning to think of Clayton as a man, rather than a father.

Not that all of this was coherently thought out. It was a series of impressions, outgrowth of his own beginning development and of his own uneasiness.

He wondered, too, about Rodney Page. He seemed to be always around, underfoot, suave, fastidious, bowing Natalie out of the room and in again. He had deplored the war until he found his attitude unfashionable, and then he began, with great enthusiasm, to arrange pageants for Red Cross funds, and even to make little speeches, graceful and artificial, patterned on his best after-dinner manner.

Graham was certain that he supported his mother in trying to keep him at home, and he began to hate him with a
healthy young hate. However, late in April, he posed in one of the pageants, rather ungraciously, in a khaki uniform. It was not until the last minute that he knew that Delight Haverford was to be the nurse bending over his prostrate figure. He turned rather savage.

"Rotten nonsense," he said to her, "when they stood waiting to be posed.

"Oh, I don't know. They're rather pretty;"

"Pretty! Do you suppose I want it be pretty?"

"Well, I do," said Delight, calmly.

"It's fake. That's what I hate. If you were really a nurse, and was really in uniform -! But this parading in somebody else's clothes, or stuff hired for the occasion - it's sickening."

Delight regarded him with clear, appraising eyes.

"Why don't you get a uniform of your own, then?" she inquired. She smiled a little.

He never knew what the effort cost her. He was pale and angry, and his face in the tableau was so set that it brought a round of applause. With the ringing down of the curtain he confronted her, almost menacingly.

"What did you mean by that?" he demanded. "We've hardly got into this thing yet."

"We are in it, Graham."

"Just because I don't leap into the first recruiting office and beg them to take me - what right have you got to call me a slacker?"

"But I heard -"

"Go on!"

"It doesn't matter what I heard, if you are going."

"Of course I'm going," he said, truculently.

He meant it, too. He would get Anna settled somewhere - she had begun to mend - and then he would have it out with Marion and his mother. But there was no hurry. The war would last a long time. And so it was that Graham Spencer joined the long line of those others who had bought a piece of ground, or five yoke of oxen, or had married a wife.

It was the morning after the pageant that Clayton, going down-town with him in the car, voiced his expectation that the government would take over their foreign contracts, and his feeling that, in that case, it would be a mistake to profit by the nation's necessities.

"What do you mean, sir?"

"I mean we should take only a small profit. A banker's profit."

Graham had been fairly stunned, and had sat quiet while Clayton explained his attitude. There were times when big profits were allowable. There was always the risk to invested capital to consider. But he did not want to grow fat on the nation's misfortunes. Italy was one thing. This was different.

"But - we are just getting on our feet!"

"Think it over!" said Clayton. "This is going to be a long war, and an expensive one. We don't particularly want to profit by it, do we?"

Graham flushed. He felt rather small and cheap, but with that there was a growing admiration of his father. Suddenly he saw that this man beside him was a big man, one to be proud of. For already he knew the cost of the decision. He sat still, turning this new angle of war over in his mind.

"I'd like to see some of your directors when you put that up to them!"

Clayton nodded rather grimly. He did not anticipate a pleasant hour.

"How about mother?"

"I think we may take it for granted that she feels as we do."

Graham pondered that, too.

"What about the new place?"

"It's too soon to discuss that. We are obligated to do a certain amount. Of course it would be wise to cut where we can."

Graham smiled.

"She'll raise the deuce of a row," was his comment.

It had never occurred to him before to take sides between his father and his mother, but there was rising in him a new and ardent partisanship of his father, a feeling that they were, in a way, men together. He had, more than once, been tempted to go to him with the Anna Klein situation. He would have, probably, but a fellow felt an awful fool going to somebody and telling him that a girl was in love with him, and what the dickens was he to do about it?

He wondered, too, if anybody would believe that his relationship with Anna was straight, under the circumstances. For weeks now he had been sending her money, out of a sheer sense of responsibility for her beating and her illness. He took no credit for altruism. He knew quite well the possibilities of the situation. He made no
promises to himself. But such attraction as Anna had had for him had been of her prettiness, and their propinquity. Again she was girl, and that was all. And the attraction was very faint now. He was only sorry for her.

When she could get about she took to calling him up daily from a drug-store at a near-by corner, and once he met her after dark and they walked a few blocks together. She was still weak, but she was spiritualized, too. He liked her a great deal that night.

"Do you know you've loaned me over a hundred dollars, Graham?" she asked.
"That's not a loan. I owed you that."
"I'll pay it back. I'm going to start to-morrow to look for work, and it won't cost me much to live."
"If you send it back, I'll buy you another watch!"
And, tragic as the subject was, they both laughed.
"I'd have died if I hadn't had you to think about when I was sick, Graham. I wanted to die - except for you."
He had kissed her then, rather because he knew she expected him to. When they got back to the house she said:
"You wouldn't care to come up?"
"I don't think I had better, Anna."
"The landlady doesn't object. There isn't any parlor. All the girls have their callers in their rooms."
"I have to go out to-night," he said evasively. "I'll come some other time."
As he started away he glanced back at her. She was standing in the doorway, eying him wistfully, a lonely and depressed little figure. He was tempted to throw discretion to the wind and go back. But he did not.

On the day when Clayton had broached the subject of offering their output to the government at only a banker's profit, Anna called him up at his new office in the munition plant.

He was rather annoyed. His new secretary was sitting across the desk, and it was difficult to make his responses noncommittal.

"Graham!"
"Yes."
"Is anybody there? Can you talk?"
"Not very well."
"Then listen; I'll talk. I want to see you."
"I'm busy all day. Sorry."
"Listen, Graham, I must see you. I've something to tell you."
"All right, go ahead."
"It's about Rudolph. I was out looking for a position yesterday and I met him."
"Yes?"
He looked up. Miss Peterson was absently scribbling on the cover of her book, and listening intently.
"He was terrible, Graham. He accused me of all sorts of things, about you."
He almost groaned aloud over the predicament he was in. It began to look serious.
"Suppose I pick you up and we have dinner somewhere?"
"At the same corner?"
"Yes."
He was very irritable all morning. He felt as though a net was closing in around him, and his actual innocence made him the more miserable. Miss Peterson found him very difficult that day, and shed tears in her little room before she went to lunch.

Anna herself was difficult that evening. Her landlady's son had given up a good job and enlisted. Everybody was going. She supposed Graham would go next, and she'd be left alone.

"I don't know. I'd like to."
"Oh, you'll go, all right. And you'll forget I ever existed." She made an effort. "You're right, of course. I'm only looking ahead. If anything happens to you, I'll kill myself."

The idea interested her. She began to dramatize herself, a forlorn figure, driven from home, and deserted by her lover. She saw herself lying in the cottage, stately and mysterious, while the hill girls went in and out, and whispered.

"I'll kill myself," she repeated.
"Nothing will happen to me, Anna, dear."
"I don't know why I care so. I'm nothing to you."
"That's not so;"
"If you cared, you'd have come up the other night. You left me alone in that lonesome hole. It's hell, that place. All smells and whispering and dirt."
"Now listen to me, Anna. You're tired, or you wouldn't say that. You know I'm fond of you. But I've got you into
trouble enough. I'm not - for God's sake don't tempt me, Anna."

She looked at him half scornfully.
"Tempt you!" Then she gave a little scream. Graham following her eyes looked through the window near them.
"Rudolph!" she whimpered. And began to weep out of pure terror.

But Graham saw nobody. To soothe her, however, he went outside and looked about. There were half a dozen cars, a group of chauffeurs, but no Rudolph. He went hack to her, to find her sitting, pale and tense, her hands clenched together.

"They'll pay you out some way," she said. "I know them. They'll never believe the truth. That was Rudolph, all right. He'll think we're living together. He'd never believe anything else."

"Do you think he followed you the other day?"
"I gave him the shake, in the crowd."
"Then I don't see why you're worrying. We're just where we were before, aren't we?"
"You don't know them. I do. They'll be up to something."

She was excited and anxious, and with the cocktail he ordered for her she grew reckless.
"I'm just hung around your neck like a stone," she lamented. "You don't care a rap for me; I know it. You're just sorry for me."

Her eyes filled again, and Graham rose, with an impatient movement.
"Let's get out of this," he said roughly. "The whole place is staring at you."

But on the road the fact that she had been weeping for him made him relent. He put an arm around her and drew her to him.

"Don't cry, honey," he said. "It makes me unhappy to see you miserable."

He kissed her. And they clung together, finding a little comfort in the contact of warm young bodies.

He went up to her room that night. He was more anxious as to Rudolph than he cared to admit, but he went up, treading softly on stairs that creaked with every step. He had no coherent thoughts. He wanted companionship rather than love. He was hungry for what she gave him, the touch of her hands about his neck, the sense of his manhood that shone from her faithful eyes, the admiration and unstinting love she offered him.

But alone in the little room he had a reaction, not the less keen because it was his fastidious rather than his moral sense that revolted. The room was untidy, close, sordid. Even Anna's youth did not redeem it. Again he had the sense, when he had closed the door, of being caught in a trap, and this time a dirty trap. When she had taken off her hat, and held up her face to be kissed, he knew he would not stay.

"It's awful, isn't it?" she asked, following his eyes.
"It doesn't look like you. That's sure."
"I hurried out. It's not so bad when it's tidy."

He threw up the window, and stood there a moment. The spring air was cool and clean, and there was a sound of tramping feet below. He looked down. The railway station was near-by, and marching toward it, with the long swing of regulars, a company of soldiers was moving rapidly. The night, the absence of drums or music, the businesslike rapidity of their progress, held him there, looking down. He turned around. Anna had slipped off her coat, and had opened the collar of her blouse. Her neck gleamed white and young. She smiled at him.

"I guess I'll be going," he stammered.
"Going!"
"I only wanted to see how you are fixed." His eyes evaded hers. "I'll see you again in a day or two. I - "

He could not tell her the thoughts that were surging in him. The country was at war. Those fellows below there were already in it, of it. And here in this sordid room, he had meant to take her, not because he loved her, but because she offered herself. It was cheap. It was terrible. It was - dirty.

"Good night," he said, and tried to kiss her. But she turned her face away. She stood listening to his steps on the stairs as he went down, steps that mingled and were lost in the steady tramp of the soldiers' feet in the street below.

CHAPTER XXXIV

With his many new problems following the declaration of war, Clayton Spencer found a certain peace. It was good to work hard. It was good to fill every working hour, and to drop into sleep at night too weary for consecutive thought.

Yet had he been frank with himself he would have acknowledged that Audrey was never really out of his mind. Back of his every decision lay his desire for her approval. He did not make them with her consciously in his mind, but he wanted her to know and understand, In his determination, for instance, to offer his shells to the government at a nominal profit, there was no desire to win her approbation.

It was rather that he felt her behind him in the decision. He shrank from telling Natalie. Indeed, until he had returned from Washington he did not broach the subject. And then he was tired and rather discouraged, and as a
result almost brutally abrupt.

Coming on top of a hard fight with the new directorate, a fight which he had finally won, Washington was disheartening. Planning enormously for the future it seemed to have no vision for the things of the present. He was met vaguely, put off, questioned. He waited hours, as patiently as he could, to find that no man seemed to have power to act, or to know what powers he had.

He found something else, too - a suspicion of him, of his motives. Who offered something for nothing must be actuated by some deep and hidden motive. He found his plain proposition probed and searched for some ulterior purpose behind it.

"It's the old distrust, Mr. Spencer," said Hutchinson, who had gone with him to furnish figures and various data. "The Democrats are opposed to capital. They're afraid of it. And the army thinks all civilians are on the make - which is pretty nearly true."

He saw the Secretary of War, finally, and came away feeling better. He had found there an understanding that a man may - even should - make sacrifices for his country during war. But, although he carried away with him the conviction that his offer would ultimately be accepted, there was nothing actually accomplished. He sent Hutchinson back, and waited for a day or two, convinced that his very sincerity must bring a concrete result, and soon.

Then, lunching alone one day in the Shoreham, he saw Audrey Valentine at another table. He had not seen her for weeks, and he had an odd moment of breathlessness when his eyes fell on her. She was pale and thin, and her eyes looked very tired. His first impulse was to go to her. The second, on which he acted, was to watch her for a little, to fill his eyes for the long months of emptiness ahead.

She was with a man in uniform, a young man, gay and smiling. He was paying her evident court, in a debonair fashion, bending toward her across the table. Suddenly Clayton was jealous, fiercely jealous.

The jealousy of the young is sad enough, but it is an ephemeral thing. Life calls from many directions. There is always the future, and the things of the future. And behind it there is the buoyancy and easy forgetfulness of youth. But the jealousy of later years knows no such relief. It sees time flying and happiness evading it. It has not the easy self-confidence of the twenties. It has learned, too, that happiness is a rare elusive thing, to be held and nursed and clung to, and that even love must be won and held.

It has learned that love must be free, but its instinct is to hold it with chains.

He suffered acutely, and was ashamed of his suffering. After all, Audrey was still young. Life had not been kind to her, and she should be allowed to have such happiness as she could. He could offer her nothing.

He would give her up. He had already given her up. She knew it.

Then she saw him, and his determination died under the light that came in her eyes. Give her up! How could he give her up, when she was everything he had in the world? With a shock, he recognized in the thought Natalie's constant repetition as to Graham. So he had come to that!

He felt Audrey's eyes on him, but he did not go to her. He signed his check, and went out. He fully meant to go away without seeing her. But outside he hesitated. That would hurt her, and it was cowardly. When, a few moments later, she came out, followed by the officer, it was to find him there, obviously waiting.

"I wondered if you would dare to run away!" she said. "This is Captain Sloane, Clay, and he knows a lot about you."

Close inspection showed Sloane handsome, bronzed, and with a soft Southern voice, somewhat like Audrey's. And it developed that he came from her home, and was on his way to one of the early camps. He obviously intended to hold on to Audrey, and Clayton left them there with the feeling that Audrey's eyes were following him, wistful and full of trouble. He had not even asked her where she was stopping.

He took a long walk that afternoon, and re-made his noon-hour resolution. He would keep away from her. It might hurt her at first, but she was young. She would forget. And he must not stand in her way. Having done which, he returned to the Shoreham and spent an hour in a telephone booth, calling hotels systematically and inquiring for her.

When he finally located her his voice over the wire startled her.

"Good heavens, Clay," she said. "Are you angry about anything?"

"Of course not. I just wanted to - I am leaving to-night and I'm saying good-by. That's all."

"Oh!" She waited.

"Have you had a pleasant afternoon?"

"Aren't you going to see me before you go?"

"I don't think so."

"Don't you want to know what I am doing in Washington?"

"That's fairly clear, isn't it?"

"You are being rather cruel, Clay."
He hesitated. He was amazed at his own attitude. Then, "Will you dine with me to-night?"
"I kept this evening for you."
But when he saw her, his sense of discomfort only increased. Their dining together was natural enough. It was not even faintly clandestine. But the new restraint he put on himself made him reserved and unhappy. He could not act a part. And after a time Audrey left off acting, too, and he found her watching him. On the surface he talked, but underneath it he saw her unhappiness, and her understanding of his.
"I'm going back, too," she said. "I came down to see what I can do, but there is nothing for the untrained woman. She's a cumberer of the earth. I'll go home and knit. I daresay I ought to be able to learn to do that well, anyhow."
"Have you forgiven me for this afternoon?"
"I wasn't angry. I understood."
That was it, in a nutshell. Audrey understood. She was that sort. She never held small resentments. He rather thought she never felt them.
"Don't talk about me," she said. "Tell me about you and why you are here. It's the war, of course."
So, rather reluctantly, he told her. He shrank from seeming to want her approval, but at the same time he wanted it. His faith in himself had been shaken. He needed it restored. And some of the exaltation which had led him to make his proffer to the government came back when he saw how she flushed over it.
"It's very big," she said, softly. "It's like you, Clay. And that's the best thing I can say. I am very proud of you."
"I would rather have you proud of me than anything in the world," he said, unsteadily.
They drifted, somehow, to talking of happiness. And always, carefully veiled, it was their own happiness they discussed.
"I don't think," she said, glancing away from him, "that one finds it by looking for it. That is selfish, and the selfish are never happy. It comes - oh, in queer ways. When you're trying to give it to somebody else, mostly."
"There is happiness, of a sort, in work."
Their eyes met. That was what they had to face, she dedicated to service, he to labor.
"It's never found by making other people unhappy, Clay."
"No. And yet, if the other people are already unhappy?"
"Never!" she said. And the answer was to the unspoken question in both their hearts.
It was not until they were in the taxicab that Clayton forced the personal note, and then it came as a cry, out of the very depths of him. She had slipped her hand into his, and the comfort of even that small touch broke down the barriers he had so carefully erected.
"I need you so!" he said. And he held her hand to his face. She made no movement to withdraw it.
"I need you, too," she replied. "I never get over needing you. But we are going to play the game, Clay. We may have our weak hours - and this is one of them - but always, please God, we'll play the game."
The curious humility he felt with her was in his voice.
"I'll need your help, even in that."
And that touch of boyishness almost broke down her reserve of strength. She wanted to draw his head down on her shoulder, and comfort him. She wanted to smooth back his heavy hair, and put her arms around him and hold him. There was a great tenderness in her for him. There were times when she would have given the world to have gone into his arms and let him hold her there, protected and shielded. But that night she was the stronger, and she knew it.
"I love you, Audrey. I love you terribly," And that was the word for it. It was terrible. She knew it.
"To have gone through all the world," he said, brokenly, "and then to find the Woman, when it is too late. Forever too late." He turned toward her. "You know it, don't you? That you are my woman?"
"I know it," she answered, steadily. "But I know, too - "
"Let me say it just once. Then never again. I'll bury it, but you will know it is there. You are my woman. I would go through all of life alone to find you at the end. And if I could look forward, dear, to going through the rest of it with you beside me, so I could touch you, like this - "
"I know."
"If I could only protect you, and shield you - oh, how tenderly I could care for you, my dear, my dear!"
The strength passed to him, then. Audrey had a clear picture of what life with him might mean, of his protection, his tenderness. She had never known it. Suddenly every bit of her called out for his care, his quiet strength.
"Don't make me sorry for myself." There were tears in her eyes. "Will you kiss me, Clay? We might have that to remember."
But they were not to have even that, for the taxicab drew up before her hotel. It was one of the absurd anti-climaxes of life that they should part with a hand-clasp and her formal "Thank you for a lovely evening."
Audrey was the better actor of the two. She went in as casually as though she had not put the only happiness of her life away from her. But Clayton Spencer stood on the pavement, watching her in, and all the tragedy of the empty years ahead was in his eyes.

CHAPTER XXXV

Left alone in her untidy room after Graham's abrupt departure, Anna Klein was dazed. She stood where he left her, staring ahead. What had happened meant only one thing to her, that Graham no longer cared about her, and, if that was true, she did not care to live.

It never occurred to her that he had done rather a fine thing, or that he had protected her against herself. She felt no particular shame, save the shame of rejection. In her small world of the hill, if a man gave a girl valuable gifts or money there was generally a quid pro quo. If the girl was unwilling, she did not accept such gifts. If the man wanted nothing, he did not make them. And men who made love to girls either wanted to marry them or desired some other relationship with them.

She listened to his retreating footsteps, and then began, automatically to unbutton her thin white blouse. But with the sound of the engine of his car below she ran to the window. She leaned out, elbows on the sill, and watched him go, without a look up at her window.

So that was the end of that!

Then, all at once, she was fiercely angry. He had got her into this scrape, and now he had left her. He had pretended to love her, and all the time he had meant to do just this, to let her offer herself so he might reject her. He had been playing with her. She had lost her home because of him, had been beaten almost insensible, had been ill for weeks, and now he had driven away, without even looking back.

She jerked her blouse off, still standing by the window, and when the sleeve caught on her watch, she jerked that off, too. She stood for a moment with it in her hand, her face twisted with shame and anger. Then recklessly and furiously she flung it through the open window.

In the stillness of the street far below she heard it strike and rebound.

"That for him!" she muttered.

Almost immediately she wanted it again. He had given it to her. It was all she had left now, and in a curious way it had, through long wearing, come to mean Graham to her. She leaned out of the window. She thought she saw it gleaming in the gutter, and already, attracted by the crash, a man was crossing the street to where it lay.

"You let that alone," she called down desperately. The figure was already stooping over it. Entirely reckless now, she ran, bare-armed and bare-bosomed, down the stairs and out into the street. She had thought to see its finder escaping, but he was still standing where he had picked it up.

"It's mine," she began. "I dropped it out of the window. I - "

"You threw it out of the window. I saw you."

It was Rudolph.

"You - " He snarled, and stood with menacing eyes fixed on her bare neck.

"Rudolph!"

"Get into the house," he said roughly. "You're half-naked."

"Give me my watch."

"I'll give it to you, all right. What's left of it. When we get in."

He followed her into the hail, but when she turned there and held out her hand, he only snarled again.

"We'll talk up-stairs."

"I can't take you up. The landlady don't allow it."

"She don't, eh? You had that Spencer skunk up there."

"His face frightened her, and she lied vehemently.

"That's not so, and you know it, Rudolph Klein. He came inside, just like this, and we stood and talked. Then he went away. He wasn't inside ten minutes." Her voice rose hysterically, but Rudolph caught her by the arm, and pushing her ahead of him, forced her up the stairs.

"We're going to have this out," he muttered, viciously.

Half way up she stopped.

"You're hurting my arm."

"You be glad I'm not breaking it for you."

He climbed in a mounting fury. He almost threw her into her room, and closing the door, he turned the key in it. His face reminded her of her father's the night he had beaten her, and her instinct of self-preservation made her put the little table between them.

"You lay a hand on me," she panted, "and I'll yell out the window. The police would be glad enough to have something on you, Rudolph Klein, and you know it."
"They arrest women like you, too."
"Don't you dare say that." And as he took a step or two toward her she retreated to the window. "You stay there, or I'll jump out of the window."

She looked desperate enough to do it, and Rudolph hesitated.

"He was up here. I saw him at the window. I've been trailing you all evening. Keep off that window-sill, you little fool! I'm not going to kill you. But I'm going to get him, all right, and don't you forget it."

His milder tone and the threat frightened her more than ever. He would get Graham; he was like that. Get him in some cruel, helpless way; that was the German blood in him. She began to play for time, with instinctive cunning.

"Listen, Rudolph," she said. "I'll tell you all about it. He did come up, but he left right away. We quarreled. He threw me over, Rudolph. That's what he did."

Her own words reminded her of her humiliation, and tears came into her eyes.

"He threw me over! Honest he did. That's why I threw his watch out of the window. That's straight, Rudolph. That's straight goods. I'm not lying now."

"God!" said Rudolph. "The dirty pup. Then - then you're through with him, eh?"

"I'm through, all right."

Her tone carried conviction. Rudolph's face relaxed, and seeing that, she remembered her half-dressed condition.

"Throw me that waist," she said.

"Come around and get it."

"Aw, Rudolph, throw it. Please!"

"Getting modest, all at once," he jeered. But he picked it up and advanced to the table with it. As she held out her hand for it he caught her and drew her forward toward him, across the table.

"You little devil!" he said, and kissed her.

She submitted, because she must, but she shivered. If she was to save Graham she must play the game. And so far she was winning. She was feminine enough to know that already the thing he thought she had done was to be forgiven her. More than that, she saw a half-reluctant admiration in Rudolph's eyes, as though she had gained value, if she had lost virtue, by the fact that young Spencer had fancied her. And Rudolph's morals were the morals of many of his kind. He admired chastity in a girl, but he did not expect it.

But she was watchful for the next move he might make. That it was not what she expected did not make it the less terrifying.

"You get your hat and coat on."

"I'll not do anything of the kind."

"D'you think I'm going to leave you here, where he can come back whenever he wants to? You think again!"

"Where are you going to take me?"

"I'm going to take you home."

When pleading made no impression on him, and when he refused to move without her, she threw her small wardrobe into the suitcase, and put her hat and coat on. She was past thinking, quite hopeless. She would go back, and her father would kill her, which would be the best thing anyhow; she didn't care to live.

Rudolph had relapsed into moody silence. Down the stairs, and on the street he preceded her, contemptuously letting her trail behind. He carried her suitcase, however, and once, being insecurely fastened, it opened and bits of untidy apparel littered the pavement. He dropped the suitcase and stood by while she filled it again. The softness of that moment, when, lured by her bare arms he had kissed her, was gone.

The night car jolted and swayed. After a time he dozed, and Anna, watching him, made an attempt at flight. He caught her on the rear platform, however, with a clutch that sickened her. The conductor eyed them with the scant curiosity of two o'clock in the morning, when all the waking world is awry.

At last they were climbing the hill to the cottage, while behind and below them the Spencer furnaces sent out their orange and violet flames, and the roar of the blast sounded like the coming of a mighty wind.

The cottage was dark. Rudolph put down the suitcase, and called Herman softly through his hands. Above they could hear him moving, and his angry voice came through the open window.

"What you want?"

"Come down. It's Rudolph."

But when he turned Anna was lying in a dead faint on the garden path, a crumpled little heap of blissful forgetfulness. When Herman came down, it was to find Rudolph standing over her, the suitcase still in his hand, and an ugly scowl on his face.

"Well, I got her," he said. "She's scared, that's all." He prodded her with his foot, but she did not move, and Herman bent down with his candle.

He straightened.
"Bring her in," he said, and led the way into the house. When Rudolph staggered in, with Anna in his arms, he found Herman waiting and fingerling the leather strap.

CHAPTER XXXVI

Audrey had found something to do at last. It was Captain Sloane who had given her the idea.
"You would make a great hit, Audrey," he had said. "It's your voice, you know. There's something about it - well, you know the effect it always has on me. No? All right, I'll be good."

But she had carried the idea home with her, and had proceeded, with her customary decision, to act on it.

Then, one day in May, she was surprised by a visit from Delight Haverford. She had come home, tired and rather depressed, to find the Haverford car at the door, and Delight waiting for her in her sitting-room.

Audrey's acquaintance with Delight had been rather fragmentary, but it had covered a long stretch of time. So, if she was surprised, it was not greatly when Delight suddenly kissed her. She saw then that the girl had brought her some spring flowers, and the little tribute touched her.

"What a nice child you are!" she said, and standing before the mirror proceeded to take off her hat. Before her she could see the reflection of Delight's face, and her own tired, slightly haggard eyes.

"And how unutterably old you make me look!" she added, smiling.
"You are too lovely for words, Mrs. Valentine."
Audrey patted her hair into order, and continued her smiling inspection of the girl's face.
"And now we have exchanged compliments," she said, "we will have some tea, and then you shall tell me what you are so excited about."

"I am excited; I - "
"Let's have the tea first."

Audrey's housekeeping was still rather casual. Tidiness of Natalie's meticulous order would always be beyond her, but after certain frantic searches for what was needed, she made some delicious tea.

"Order was left out of me, somehow," she complained. "Or else things move about when I'm away. I'm sure it is that, because I certainly never put the sugar behind my best hat. Now - let's have it."

Delight was only playing with her tea. She flushed delicately, and put the cup down.
"I was in the crowd this morning," she said.
"In the crowd? Oh, my crowd!"
"Yes."

"I see," said Audrey, thoughtfully. "I make a dreadful speech, you know."

"I thought you were wonderful. And, when those men promised to enlist, I cried. I was horribly ashamed. But you were splendid." "I wonder!" said Audrey, growing grave. Delight was astonished to see that there were tears in her eyes. "I do it because it is all I can do, and of course they must go. But some times at night - you see, my dear, some of them are going to be killed. I am urging them to go, but the better the day I have had, the less I sleep at night."

There was a little pause. Delight was thinking desperately of something to say.
"But you didn't come to talk about me, did you?"

"Partly. And partly about myself. I want to do something, Mrs. Valentine. I can drive a car, but not very well. I don't know a thing about the engine. And I can nurse a little. I like nursing."

Audrey studied her face. It seemed to her sad beyond words that this young girl, who should have had only happiness, was facing the horrors of what would probably be a long war. It was the young who paid the price of war, in death, in empty years. Already the careless gayety of their lives was gone. For the dream futures they had planned they had now to substitute long waiting; for happiness, service.

"The Red Cross is going to send canteen workers to France. You might do that."

"If I only could! But I can't leave mother. Not entirely. Father is going. He wants to go and fight, but I'm afraid they won't take him. He'll go as a chaplain, anyhow. But he's perfectly helpless, you know. Mother says she is going to tie his overshoes around his neck."

"I'll see if I can think of something for you, Delight. There's one thing in my mind. There are to be little houses built in all the new training-camps for officers, and they are to be managed by women. They are to serve food - sandwiches and coffee, I think. They may be even more pretentious. I don't know, but I'll find out."

"I'll do anything," said Delight, and got up. It was then that Audrey realized that there was something more to the visit than had appeared, for Delight, ready to go, hesitated.

"There is something else, Mrs. Valentine," she said, rather slowly. "What would you do if a young man wanted to go into the service, and somebody held him back?"

"His own people?"

"His mother. And - a girl."
"I would think the army is well off without him."
Delight flushed painfully.
"Perhaps," she admitted. "But is it right just to let it go at that? If you like people, it seems wrong just to stand by and let others ruin their lives for them."
"Only very weak men let women ruin their lives."
But already she began to understand the situation.
"There's a weakness that is only a sort of habit. It may come from not wanting to hurt somebody." Delight was pulling nervously at her gloves. "And there is this to be said, too. If there is what you call weakness, wouldn't the army be good for it? It makes men, some times, doesn't it?"

For a sickening moment, Audrey thought of Chris. War had made Chris, but it had killed him, too.
"Have you thought of one thing?" she asked. "That in trying to make this young man, whoever it is, he may be hurt, or even worse?"
"He would have to take his chance, like the rest."
She went a little pale, however. Audrey impulsively put an arm around her.
"And this - woman is the little long-legged girl who used to give signals to her father when the sermon was too long! Now - what can I do about this youth who can't make up his own mind?"
"You can talk to his mother."
"If I know his mother - ? and I think I do - it won't do the slightest good."
"Then his father. You are great friends, aren't you?"
Even this indirect mention of Clayton made Audrey's hands tremble. She put them behind her.
"We are very good friends," she said. But Delight was too engrossed to notice the deeper note in her voice. "I'll see what I can do. But don't count on me too much. You spoke of a girl. I suppose I know who it is."
"Probably. It is Marion Hayden. He is engaged to her."
And again Audrey marveled at her poise, for Delight's little tragedy was clear by that time. Clear, and very sad.
"I can't imagine his really being in love with her."
"But he must be. They are engaged."
Audrey smiled at the simple philosophy of nineteen, smiled and was extremely touched. How brave the child was! Audrey's own courageous heart rather swelled in admiration.

But after Delight had gone, she felt depressed again, and very tired. How badly these things were handled! How strange it was that love so often brought suffering! Great loves were almost always great tragedies. Perhaps it was because love was never truly great until the element of sacrifice entered into it.

Her own high courage failed her somewhat. During these recent days when, struggling against very real stage fright, she made her husky, wholly earnest but rather nervous little appeals to the crowds before the enlisting stations, she got along bravely enough during the day. But the night found her sad, unutterably depressed.

At these times she was haunted by a fear that persisted against all her arguments. In Washington Clayton had not looked well. He had been very tired and white, and some of his natural buoyancy seemed to have deserted him. He needed caring for, she would reflect bitterly. There should be some one to look after him. He was tired and anxious, but it took the eyes of love to see it. Natalie would never notice, and would consider it a grievance if she did. The fiercely, maternal tenderness of the childless woman for the man she loves kept her awake at night staring into the darkness and visualizing terrible things. Clayton ill, and she unable to go to him. Ill, and wanting her, and unable to ask for her.

She was, she knew, not quite normal, but the fear gripped and held her. These big strong men, no one ever looked after them. They spent their lives caring for others, and were never cared for.

There were times when a sort of exaltation of sacrifice kept her head high, when the thing she was forced to give up seemed trifling compared with the men and boys who, some determinedly, some sheepishly, left the crowd around the borrowed car from which she spoke, and went into the recruiting station. There was sacrifice and sacrifice, and there was some comfort in the thought that both she and Clayton were putting the happiness of others above their own.

They had both, somehow, somewhere, missed the path. But they must never go back and try to find it.

Delight's visit left her thoughtful. There must be some way to save Graham. She wondered how much of Clayton's weariness was due to Graham. And she wondered, too, if he knew of the talk about Natalie and Rodney Page. There was a great deal of talk. Somehow such talk cheapened his sacrifice and hers.

Not that she believed it, or much of it. She knew how little such gossip actually meant. Practically every woman she knew, herself included, had at one time or another laid herself open to such invidious comment. They had all been idle, and they sought amusement in such spurious affairs as this, harmless in the main, but taking on the appearance of evil. That was part of the game, to appear worse than one really was. The older the woman, the more
eager she was often in her clutch at the vanishing romance of youth.

Only - it was part of the game, too, to avoid scandal. A fierce pride for Clayton's name sent the color to her face.

On the evening after Delight's visit, she had promised to speak at a recruiting station far down-town in a crowded tenement district, and tired as she was, she took a bus and went down at seven o'clock. She was uneasy and nervous. She had not spoken in the evening before, and in all her sheltered life she had never seen the milling of a night crowd in a slum district.

There was a wagon drawn up at the curb, and an earnest-eyed young clergyman was speaking. The crowd was attentive, mildly curious. The clergyman was emphatic without being convincing. Audrey watched the faces about her, standing in the crowd herself, and a sense of the futility of it all gripped her. All these men, and only a feeble cheer as a boy still in his teens agreed to volunteer. All this effort for such scant result, and over on the other side such dire need! But one thing cheered her. Beside her, in the crowd, a portly elderly Jew was standing with his hat in his hand, and when a man near him made some jeering comment, the Jew brought his hand down on his shoulder.

"Be still and listen," he said. "Or else go away and allow others to listen. This is our country which calls."

"It's amusing, isn't it?" Audrey heard a woman's voice near her, carefully inflected, slightly affected.

"It's rather stunning, in a way. It's decorative; the white faces, and that chap in the wagon, and the gasoline torch."

"I'd enjoy it more if I'd had my dinner."

The man laughed.

"You are a most brazen combination of the mundane and the spiritual, Natalie. You are all soul - after you are fed. Come on. It's near here."

Audrey's hands were very cold. By the movement of the crowd behind her, she knew that Natalie and Rodney were making their escape, toward food and a quiet talk in some obscure restaurant in the neighborhood. Fierce anger shook her. For this she and Clayton were giving up the only hope they had of happiness - that Natalie might carry on a cheap and stealthy flirtation.

She made a magnificent appeal that night, and a very successful one. The lethargic crowd waked up and pressed forward. There were occasional cheers, and now and then the greater tribute of convinced silence. And on a box in the wagon the young clergyman eyed her almost wistfully. What a woman she was! With such a woman a man could live up to the best in him. Then he remembered his salary in a mission church of twelve hundred a year, and sighed.

He gained courage, later on, and asked Audrey if she would have some coffee with him, or something to eat. She looked tired.

"Tired!" said Audrey. "I am only tired these days when I am not working."

"You must not use yourself up. You are too valuable to the country."

She was very grateful. After all, what else really mattered? In a little glow she accepted his invitation.

"Only coffee," she said. "I have had dinner. Is there any place near?"

He piloted her through the crowd, now rapidly dispersing. Here and there some man, often in halting English, thanked her for what she had said. A woman, slightly the worse for drink, but with friendly, rather humorous eyes, put a hand on her arm.

"You're all right, m'dear," she said. "You're the stuff. Give it to them. I wish to God I could talk. I'd tell 'em something."

The clergyman drew her on hastily.

In a small Italian restaurant, almost deserted, they found a table, and the clergyman ordered eggs and coffee. He was a trifle uneasy. In the wagon Audrey's plain dark clothes had deceived him. But the single pearl on her finger was very valuable. He fell to apologizing for the place.

"I often come here," he explained. "The food is good, if you like Italian cooking. And it is near my work. I - "

But Audrey was not listening. At a corner, far back, Natalie and Rodney were sitting, engrossed in each other. Natalie's back was carefully turned to the room, but there was no mistaking her. Audrey wanted madly to get away, but the coffee had come and the young clergyman was talking gentle platitudes in a rather sweet but monotonous voice. Then Rodney saw her, and bowed.

Almost immediately afterward she heard the soft rustle that was Natalie, and found them both beside her.

"Can we run you up-town?" Natalie asked. "That is, unless - "

She glanced at the clergyman.

"Thank you, no, Natalie. I'm going to have some supper first."

Natalie was uneasy. Audrey made no move to present the clergyman, whose name she did not know. Rodney was looking slightly bored.

"Odd little place, isn't it?" Natalie offered after a second's silence.
"Rather quaint, I think."
Natalie made a desperate effort to smooth over an awkward situation. She turned to the clergyman.
"We heard you speaking. It was quite thrilling."
He smiled a little.
"Not so thrilling as this lady. She carried the crowd, absolutely."
Natalie turned and stared at Audrey, who was flushed with annoyance.
"You!" she said. "Do you mean to say you have been talking from that wagon?"
"I haven't said it. But I have."
"For heaven's sake!" Then she laughed and glanced at Rodney. "Well, if you won't tell on me, I'll not tell on you."
And then seeing Audrey straighten, "I don't mean that, of course. Clay's at a meeting to-night, so I am having a holiday."
She moved on, always with the soft rustle, leaving behind her a delicate whiff of violets and a wide-eyed clergyman, who stared after her admiringly.
"What a beautiful woman!" he said. There was a faint regret in his voice that Audrey had not presented him, and he did not see that her coffee-cup trembled as she lifted it to her lips.
At ten o'clock the next morning Natalie called her on the 'phone. Natalie's morning voice was always languid, but there was a trace of pleading in it now.
"It's a lovely day," she said. "What are you doing?"
"I've been darning."
"You! Darning!"
"I rather like it."
"Heavens, how you've changed! I suppose you wouldn't do anything so frivolous as to go out with me to the new house."
Audrey hesitated. Evidently Natalie wanted to talk, to try to justify herself. But the feeling that she was the last woman in the world to be Natalie's father-confessor was strong in her. On the other hand, there was the question of Graham. On that, before long, she and Natalie would have, in one of her own occasional lapses into slang, to go to the mat.
"I'll come, of course, if that's an invitation."
"I'll be around in an hour, then."
Natalie was unusually prompt. She was nervous and excited, and was even more carefully dressed than usual.
Over her dark blue velvet dress she wore a loose motor-coat, with a great chinchilla collar, but above it Audrey, who would have given a great deal to be able to hate her, found her rather pathetic, a little droop to her mouth, dark circles which no veil could hide under her eyes.
The car was in its customary resplendent condition. There were orchids in the flower-holder, and the footman, light rug over his arm, stood rigidly waiting at the door.
"What a tone you and your outfit do give my little street," Audrey said, as they started. "We have more milk-wagons than limousines, you know."
"I don't see how you can bear it."
Audrey smiled. "It's really rather nice," she said. "For one thing, I haven't any bills. I never lived on a cash basis before. It's a sort of emancipation."
"Oh, bills!" said Natalie, and waved her hands despairingly. "If you could see my desk! And the way I watch the mail so Clay won't see them first. They really ought to send bills in blank envelopes."
"But you have to give them to him eventually, don't you?"
"I can choose my moment. And it is never in the morning. He's rather awful in the morning."
"Awful?"
"Oh, not ugly. Just quiet. I hate a man who doesn't talk in the mornings. But then, for months, he hasn't really talked at all. That's why" - she was rather breathless - "that's why I went out with Rodney last night."
"I don't think Clayton would mind, if you told him first. It's your own affair, of course, but it doesn't seem quite fair to him."
"Oh, of course you'd side with him. Women always side with the husband."
"I don't 'side' with any one," Audrey protested. "But I am sure, if he realized that you are lonely -"
Suddenly she realized that Natalie was crying. Not much, but enough to force her, to dab her eyes carefully through her veil.
"I'm awfully unhappy, Audrey," she said. "Everything's wrong, and I don't know why. What have I done? I try and try and things just get worse."
Audrey was very uncomfortable. She had a guilty feeling that the whole situation, with Natalie pouring out her
woes beside her, was indecent, unbearable.

"But if Clay - " she began.

"Clay! He's absolutely ungrateful. He takes me for granted, and the house for granted. Everything. And if he knows I want a thing, he disapproves at once. I think sometimes he takes a vicious pleasure in thwarting me."

But as she did not go on, Audrey said nothing. Natalie had raised her veil, and from a gold vanity-case was repairing the damages around her eyes.

"Why don't you find something to do, something to interest you?" Audrey suggested finally.

But Natalie poured out a list of duties that lasted for the last three miles of the trip, ending with the new house.

"Even that has ceased to be a satisfaction," she finished. "Clayton wants to stop work on it, and cut down all the estimates. It's too awful. First he told me to get anything I liked, and now he says to cut down to nothing. I could just shriek about it."

"Perhaps that's because we are in the war, now."

"War or no war, we have to live, don't we? And he thinks I ought to do without the extra man for the car, and the second man in the house, and heaven alone knows what. I'm at the end of my patience."

Audrey made a resolution. After all, what mattered was that things should be more tolerable for Clayton. She turned to Natalie.

"Why don't you try to do what he wants, Natalie? He must have a reason for asking you. And it would please him a lot."

"If I start making concession, I can just keep it up. He's like that."

"He's so awfully fine, Natalie. He's - well, he's rather big. And sometimes I think, if you just tried, he wouldn't be so hard to please. He probably wants peace and happiness?"

"Happiness!" Natalie's voice was high. "That sounds like Clay. Happiness! Don't you suppose I want to be happy?"

"Not enough to work for it," said Audrey, evenly.

Natalie turned and stared at her.

"I believe you're half in love with Clay yourself!"

"Perhaps I am."

But she smiled frankly into Natalie's eyes.

"I know if I were married to him, I'd try to do what he wanted."

"You'd try it for a year. Then you'd give it up. It's one thing to admire a man. It's quite different being married to him, and having to put up with all sorts of things?"

Her voice trailed off before the dark vision of her domestic, unhappiness. And again, as with Graham and his father, it was what she did not say that counted. Audrey came close to hating her just then.

So far the conversation had not touched on Graham, and now they were turning in the new drive. Already the lawns were showing green, and extensive plantings of shrubbery were putting out their pale new buds. Audrey, bending forward in the car, found it very lovely, and because it belonged to Clay, was to be his home, it thrilled her, just as the towering furnaces of his mill thrilled her, the lines of men leaving at nightfall. It was his, therefore it was significant.

The house amazed her. Even Natalie's enthusiasm had not promised anything so stately or so vast. Moving behind her through great empty rooms, to the sound of incessant hammering, over which Natalie's voice was raised shrilly, she was forced to confess that, between them, Natalie and Rodney had made a lovely thing. She felt no jealousy when she contrasted it with her own small apartment. She even felt that it was the sort of house Clayton should have.

For, although it had been designed as a setting for Natalie, although every color-scheme, almost every chair, had been bought with a view to forming a background for her, it was too big, too massive. It dwarfed her. Out-of-doors, Audrey lost that feeling. In the formal garden Natalie was charmingly framed. It was like her, beautifully exact, carefully planned, already with its spring borders faintly glowing.

Natalie cheered in her approval.

"You're so comforting," she said. "Clay thinks it isn't homelike. He says it's a show place - which it ought to be. It cost enough - and he hates show places. He really ought to have a cottage. Now let's see the swimming-pool."

But at the pool she lost her gayety. The cement basin, still empty, gleamed white in the sun, and Natalie, suddenly brooding, stood beside it staring absently into it.

"It was for Graham," she said at last. "We were going to have week-end parties, and all sorts of young people. But now!"

"What about now?"

Natalie raised tragic eyes to hers.
"He's probably going into the army. He'd have never thought of it, but Clayton shows in every possible way that he thinks he ought to go. What is the boy to do? His father driving him to what may be his death!"

"I don't think he'd do that, Natalie."

Natalie laughed, her little mirthless laugh.

"Much you know what his father would do! I'll tell you this, Audrey. If Graham goes, and anything - happens to him, I'll never forgive Clay. Never."

Audrey had not suspected such depths of feeling as Natalie's eyes showed under their penciled brows. They were desperate, vindictive eyes. Suddenly Natalie was pleading with her.

"You'll talk to Clay, won't you? He'll listen to you. He has a lot of respect for your opinion. I want you to go to him, Audrey. I brought you here to ask you. I'm almost out of my mind. Why do you suppose I play around with Rodney? I've got to forget, that's all. And I've tried everything I know, and failed. He'll go, and I'll lose him, and if I do it will kill me."

"It doesn't follow that because he goes he won't come back."

"He'll be in danger. I shall be worrying about him every moment." She threw out her hands in what was as unrestrained a gesture as she ever made. "Look at me!" she cried. "I'm getting old under it. I have lines about my eyes already. I hate to look at myself in the morning. And I'm not old. I ought to be at my best now."

Natalie's anxiety was for Graham, but her pity was for herself. Audrey's heart hardened.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I can't go to Clay. I feel as I think he does. If Graham wants to go, he should be free to do it. You're only hurting him, and your influence on him, by holding him back."

"You've never had a child."

"If I had, and he wanted to go, I should be terrified, but I should be proud."

"You and Clay! You even talk alike. It's all a pose, this exalted attitude. Even this war is a pose. It's a national attitude we've struck, a great nation going to rescue humanity, while the rest of the world looks on and applauds! It makes me ill."

She turned and went back to the house, leaving Audrey by the swimming-pool. She sat on the edge of one of the stone benches, feeling utterly dreary and sad. To make a sacrifice for a worthy object was one thing. To throw away a life's happiness for a spoiled, petulant woman was another. It was too high a price to pay. Mingled with her depression was pity for Clayton; for all the years that he had lived with this woman; and pride in him, that he had never betrayed his disillusion.

After a time she saw the car waiting, and she went slowly back to the house. Natalie was already inside, and she made no apologies whatever. The drive back was difficult. Natalie openly sulked, replied in monosyllables, made no effort herself until they were in the city again. Then she said, "I'm sorry I asked you to speak to Clay. Of course you needn't do it."

"Not if it is to do what you said. But I wish you wouldn't misunderstand me, Natalie. I'm awfully sorry. We just think differently."

"We certainly do," said Natalie briefly. And that was her good-by.

CHAPTER XXXVII

When Clayton had returned from Washington, one of the first problems put up to him had been Herman Klein's application to be taken on again. He found Hutchinson in favor of it.

"He doesn't say much," he said. "Never did. But I gather things are changed, now we are in the war ourselves."

"I suppose we need him."

"You bet we need him."

For the problem of skilled labor was already a grave one.

Clayton was doubtful. If he could have conferred with Dunbar he would have felt more comfortable, but Dunbar was away on some mysterious errand connected with the Military Intelligence Department. He sat considering, tapping on his desk with the handle of his pen. Of course things were different now. A good many Germans whose sympathies had, as between the Fatherland and the Allies, been with Germany, were now driven to a decision between the land they had left and the land they had adopted. And behind Herman there were thirty years of good record.

"Where is the daughter?"

"I don't know. She left some weeks ago. It's talk around the plant that he beat her up, and she got out. Those Germans don't know the first thing about how to treat women."

"Then she is not in Weaver's office?"

There was more talk in the offices than Hutchinson repeated. Graham's fondness for Anna, her slavish devotion to him, had been pretty well recognized. He wondered if Clayton knew anything about it, or the further gossip that Graham knew where Anna Klein had been hiding.
"What about Rudolph Klein? He was a nephew, wasn't he?"
"Fired," said Hutchinson laconically. "Got to spreading the brotherhood of the world idea - sweat brothers, he calls them. But he was mighty careful never to get in a perspiration himself."
"We might try Herman again. But I'd keep an eye on him."

So Herman was taken on at the new munition plant. He was a citizen, he owned property, he had a record of long service behind him. And, at first, he was minded to preserve that record intact. While he had by now added to his rage against the Fatherland's enemies a vast and sullen fury against invested capital, his German caution still remained.

He would sit through fiery denunciations of wealth, nodding his head slowly in agreement. He was perfectly aware that in Gus's little back room dark plots were hatched. Indeed, on a certain April night Rudolph had come up and called him onto the porch.

"In about fifteen minutes," he said, consulting his watch in the doorway, "I'm going to show you something pretty."

And in fifteen minutes to the dot the great railroad warehouses near the city wharf had burst into flames. Herman had watched without comment, while Rudolph talked incessantly, boasting of his share in the enterprise.

"About a million dollars' worth of fireworks there," he said, as the glare dyed their faces red. "All stuff for the Allies." And he boasted, "When the cat sits on the pickhandle, brass buttons must go."

By that time Herman knew that the "cat" meant sabotage. He had nodded slowly.

"But it is dangerous," was his later comment. "Sometimes they will learn, and then?"

His caution had exasperated Rudolph almost to frenzy. And as time went on, and one man after another of the organization was ferreted out at the new plant and dismissed, the sole remaining hope of the organization was Herman. With his reinstatement their hopes had risen again, but to every suggestion so far he had been deaf. He would listen approvingly, but at the end, when he found the talk veering his way, and a circle of intent faces watching him, he would say:

"It is too dangerous. And it is a young man's work. I am not young."

Then he would pay his score, but never by any chance Rudolph's or the others, and go home to his empty house. But recently the plant had gone on double turn, and Herman was soon to go on at night. Here was the gang's opportunity. Everything was ready but Herman himself. He continued interested, but impersonal. For the sake of the Fatherland he was willing to have the plant go, and to lose his work. He was not at all daunted by the thought of the deaths that would follow. That was war. Anything that killed and destroyed was fair in war. But he did not care to place himself in danger. Let those young hot-heads do the work.

Rudolph, watching him, bided his time. The ground was plowed and harrowed, ready for the seed, and Rudolph had only to find the seed.

The night he had carried Anna into the cottage on the hill, he had found it. Herman had not beaten Anna. Rudolph had carried her up to her bed, and Herman, following slowly, strap in hand, had been confronted by the younger man in the doorway of the room where Anna lay, conscious but unmoving, on the bed.

"You can use that thing later," Rudolph said. "She's sick now. Better let her alone."

"I will teach her to run away," Herman muttered thickly. "She left me, her father, and threw away a good job - I -"

"You come down-stairs. I've something to say to you."

And, after a time, Herman had followed him down, but he still clung doggedly to the strap.

Rudolph led the way outside, and here in the darkness he told Anna's story, twisted and distorted through his own warped mind, but convincing and partially true. Herman's silence began to alarm him, however, and when at last he rose and made for the door, Rudolph was before him.

"What are you going to do?"

Herman said nothing, but he raised the strap and held it menacingly.

"Get out of my way."

"Don't be a fool," Rudolph entreated. "You can beat her to death, and what do you get out of it? She'll run away again if you touch her. Put that strap down. I'm not afraid of you."

Their voices, raised and angry, penetrated through Anna's haze of fright and faintness. She sat up in the bed, ready to spring to the window if she heard steps on the stairs. When none came, but the voices, lowered now, went on endlessly below, she slipped out of her bed and crept to the doorway.

Sounds traveled clearly up the narrow enclosed stairway. She stood there, swaying slightly, until at last her legs would no longer support her. She crouched on the floor, a hand clutching her throat, lest she scream. And listened.

She did not sleep at all. The night had been too full of horrors. And she was too ill to attempt a second flight.
Besides, where could she go? Katie was not there. She could see her empty little room across, with its cot bed and tawdry dresser. Before, too, she had had Grahams protection to count on. Now she had nothing.

And the voices went on.

When she went back to bed it was almost dawn. She heard Herman come up, heard the heavy thump of his shoes on the floor, and the creak immediately following that showed he had lain down without undressing. By the absence of his resonant snoring she knew he was not sleeping, either. She pictured him lying there, his eyes on the door, in almost unwinking espionage.

At half past six she got up and went down-stairs. Almost immediately she heard his stockinged feet behind her. She turned and looked up at him.

"What are you going to do?"

"Going to make myself some coffee."

He came down, and sat down in the sitting-room. From where he sat he could survey the kitchen, and she knew his eyes were on her. His very quiet terrified her, but although the strap lay on the table he made no move toward it. She built a fire and put on the kettle, and after a time she brought him some coffee and some bread. He took it without a word. Sick as she was, she fell to cleaning up the dirty kitchen. She went outside for a pail, to find him behind her in the doorway. Then she knew what he intended to do. He was afraid, for some reason, to beat her again, but he was going to watch her lest again she make her escape. The silence, under his heavy gaze, was intolerable.

All day she worked, and only once did Herman lose sight of her. That was when he took a ladder, and outside the house nailed all the upper windows shut. He did it with German thoroughness, hammering deliberately, placing his nails carefully. After that he went to the corner grocery, but before he went he spoke the first words of the day.

"You will go to your room."

She went, and he locked her in. She knew then that she was a prisoner. When he was at the mill at night, while he slept during the day, she was to be locked up in her stuffy, airless room. When he was about she would do the housework, always under his silent, contemptuous gaze.

She made one appeal to him, and only one, and that was to his cupidity.

"I've been sick, but I'm able to work now, father."

He paid no attention to her.

"If you lock me up and don't let me work," she persisted, "you'll only be cutting off your nose to spite your face. I make good money, and you know it."

She thought he was going to speak then, but he did not. She put his food on the table and he ate glutonously, as he always did. She did not sit down. She drank a little coffee, standing at the stove, and watched the back of his head with hate in her eyes. He could eat like that, when he stood committed to a terrible thing!

It was not until late in the day that it began to dawn on her how she was responsible. She was getting stronger then and more able to think. She followed as best she could the events of the last months, and she saw that, as surely as though a malevolent power had arranged it, the thing was the result of her infatuation for Graham.

She was in despair, and she began to plan how to get word to Graham of what was impending. She scrawled a note to Graham, telling him where she was and to try to get in touch with her somehow. If he would come around four o'clock Herman was generally up and off to the groc'er's, or to Gus's saloon for his afternoon beer.

"I'll break a window and talk to you," she wrote. "I'm locked in when he's out. My window is on the north side. Don't lose any time. There's something terrible going to happen."

But several days went by and the postman did not appear. Herman had put a padlock on the outside of her bedroom door, and her hope of finding a second key to fit the door-lock died then.

It had become a silent, bitter contest between the two of them, with two advantages in favor of the girl. She was more intelligent than Herman, and she knew the thing he was planning to do. She made a careful survey of her room, and she saw that with a screw-driver she could unfasten the hinge of her bedroom door. Herman, however, always kept his tools locked up. She managed, apparently by accident, to break the point off a knife, and when she went up to her room one afternoon to be locked in while Herman went to Gus's saloon, she carried the knife in her stocking.

It was a sorry tool, however. Driven by her shaking hand, there was a time when she almost despaired. And time was flying. The postman, when he came, came at five, and she heard the kitchen clock strike five before the first screw fell out into her hand. She got them all out finally, and the door hung crazily, held only by the padlock. She ran to the window. The postman was coming along the street, and she hammered madly at the glass. When he saw her he turned in at the gate, and she got her letter and ran down the stairs.

She heard his step on the porch outside, and called to him.

"Is that you, Briggs?"

The postman was "Briggs" to the hill.
"Yes."

"If I slide a letter out under the door, will you take it to the post-office for me? It's important."

"All right. Slide."

She had put it partially under the door when a doubt crept into her mind. That was not Briggs's voice. She made a frantic effort to draw the letter back, but stronger fingers than hers had it beyond the door. She clutched, held tight. Then she heard a chuckle, and found herself with a corner of the envelope in her hand.

There were voices outside, Briggs's and Rudolph's.

"Guess that's for me."

"Like hell it is."

She ran madly up the stairs again, and tried with shaking fingers to screw the door-hinges into place again. She fully expected that they would kill her. She heard Briggs go out, and after a time she heard Rudolph trying to kick in the house door. Then, when the last screw was back in place, she heard Herman's heavy step outside, and Rudolph's voice, high, furious, and insistent.

Had Herman not been obsessed with the thing he was to do, he might have beaten her to death that night. But he did not. She remained in her room, without food or water. She had made up her mind to kill herself with the knife if they came up after her, but the only sounds she heard were of high voices, growing lower and more sinister.

After that, for days she was a prisoner. Herman moved his bed down-stairs and slept in the sitting-room, the five or six hours of day-light sleep which were all he required. And at night, while he was at the mill, Rudolph sat and dozed and kept watch below. Twice a day some meager provisions were left at the top of the stairs and her door was unlocked. She would creep out and get them, not because she was hungry, but because she meant to keep up her strength. Let their vigilance slip but once, and she meant to be ready.

She learned to interpret every sound below. There were times when the fumes from burning food came up the staircase and almost smothered her. And there were times, she fancied, when Herman weakened and Rudolph talked for hours, inciting and inflaming him again. She gathered, too, that Gus's place was under surveillance, and more than once in the middle of the night stealthy figures came in by the garden gate and conferred with Rudolph downstairs. Then, one evening, in the dusk of the May twilight, she saw three of them come, one rather tall and military of figure, and one of them carried, very carefully, a cheap suitcase.

She knew what was in that suitcase.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

One morning, in his mail, Clayton Spencer received a clipping. It had been cut from a so-called society journal, and it was clamped to the prospectus of a firm of private detectives who gave information for divorce cases as their specialty.

First curiously, then with mounting anger, Clayton read that the wife of a prominent munition manufacturer was being seen constantly in out of the way places with the young architect who was building a palace for her out of the profiteer's new wealth. "It is quite probable," ended the notice, "that the episode will end in an explosion louder than the best shell the husband in the case ever turned out."

Clayton did not believe the thing for a moment. He was infuriated, but mostly with the journal, and with the insulting inference of the prospectus. He had a momentary clear vision, however, of Natalie, of her idle days, of perhaps a futile last clutch at youth. He had no more doubt of her essential integrity than of his own. But he had a very distinct feeling that she had exposed his name to cheap scandal, and that for nothing.

Had there been anything real behind it, he might have understood, in his new humility, in his new knowledge of impulses stronger than any restraints of society, he would quite certainly have made every allowance. But for a whim, an indulgence of her incorrigible vanity! To get along, to save Natalie herself, he was stifling the best that was in him, while Natalie -

That was one view of it. The other was that Natalie was as starved as he was. If he got nothing from her, he gave her nothing. How was he to blame her? She was straying along dangerous paths, but he himself had stood at the edge of the precipice, and looked down.

Suddenly it occurred to him that perhaps, for once, Natalie was in earnest. Perhaps Rodney was, too. Perhaps each of them had at last found something that loomed larger than themselves. In that case? But everything he knew of Natalie contradicted that. She was not a woman to count anything well lost for love. She was playing with his honor, with Rodney, with her own vanity.

Going up-town that night he pondered the question of how to take up the matter with her. It would be absurd, under the circumstances, to take any virtuous attitude. He was still undecided when he reached the house.

He found Marion Hayden there for dinner, and Graham, and a spirited three-corner discussion going on which ceased when he stood in the doorway. Natalie looked irritated, Graham determined, and Marion was slightly insolent and unusually handsome.
"Hurry and change, Clay," Natalie said. "Dinner is waiting."

As he went away he had again the feeling of being shut out of something which concerned Graham.

Dinner was difficult. Natalie was obviously sulking, and Graham was rather taciturn. It was Marion who kept the conversation going, and he surmised in her a repressed excitement, a certain triumph.

At last Natalie roused herself. The meal was almost over, and the servants had withdrawn.

"I wish you would talk sense to Graham, Clay," she said, fretfully. "I think he has gone mad."

"I don't call it going mad to want to enlist, father."

"I do. With your father needing you, and with all the men there are who can go."

"I don't understand. If he wants to enter the army, that's up to him, isn't it?"

There was a brief silence. Clayton found Natalie's eyes on him, uneasy, resentful.

"That's just it. I've promised mother not to, unless she gives her consent. And she won't give it."

"I certainly will not."

Clayton saw her appealing glance at Marion, but that young lady was lighting a cigarette, her eyelids lowered. He felt as though he were watching a play, in which he was the audience.

"It's rather a family affair, isn't it?" he asked. "Suppose we wait until we are alone. After all, there is no hurry."

Marion looked at him, and he caught a resentment in her glance. The two glances struck fire.

"Say something, Marion," Natalie implored her.

"I don't think my opinion is of any particular importance. As Mr. Spencer says, it's really a family matter."

Her insolence was gone. Marion was easy. She knew Natalie's game; it was like her own. But this big square-jawed man at the head of the table frightened her. And he hated her. He hardly troubled to hide it, for all his civility. Even that civility was contemptuous.

In the drawing-room things were little better. Natalie had counted on Marion's cooperation, and she had failed her. She pleaded a headache and went up-stairs, leaving Clayton to play the host as best he could.

Marion wandered into the music-room, with its bare polished floor, its lovely painted piano, and played a little -gay, charming little things, clever and artful. Except when visitors came, the piano was never touched, but now and then Clayton had visualized Audrey there, singing in her husky sweet voice her little French songs.

Graham moved restlessly about the room, and Clayton felt that he had altered lately. He looked older, and not happy. He knew the boy wanted to talk about Natalie's opposition, but was hoping that he would broach the subject. And Clayton rather grimly refused to do it. Those next weeks would show how much of the man there was in Graham, but the struggle must be between his mother and himself.

He paused, finally. Marion was singing.

"Give me your love for a day; A night; an hour. If the wages of sin are Death I'm willing to pay."

She sang it in her clear passionless voice. Brave words, Clayton thought, but there were few who would pay such wages. This girl at the piano, what did she know of the thing she sang about? What did any of the young know?

They always construed love in terms of passion. But passion was ephemeral. Love lived on. Passion took, but love gave.

He roused himself.

"Have you told Marion about the new arrangement?"

"I didn't know whether you cared to have it told."

"Don't you think she ought to know? If she intends to enter the family, she has a right to know that she is not marrying into great wealth. I don't suggest," he added, as Graham colored hotly, "that it will make any difference. I merely feel she ought to know your circumstances."

He was called to the telephone, and when he came back he found them in earnest conversation. The girl turned toward him smiling.

"Graham has just told me. You are splendid, Mr. Spencer."

And afterward Clayton was forced to admit an element of sincerity in her voice. She had had a disappointment, but she was very game. Her admiration surprised him. He was nearer to liking her than he had ever been.

Even her succeeding words did not quite kill his admiration for her.

"And I have told Graham that he must not let you make all the sacrifices. Of course he is going to enlist."

She had turned her defeat into a triumph against Natalie. Clayton knew then that she would never marry Graham. As she went out he followed her with a faint smile of tribute.

The smile died as he turned to go up the stairs.

Natalie was in her dressing-room. She had not undressed, but was standing by a window. She made no sign that she heard him enter, and he hesitated. Why try to talk things out with her? Why hurt her? Why not let things drift along? There was no hope of bettering them. One of two things he must do, either tear open the situation between them, or ignore it.
"Can I get anything for your head, my dear?"
"I haven't any headache."
"Then I think I'll go to bed. I didn't sleep much last night."
He was going out when she spoke again.
"I came up-stairs because I saw how things were going."
"Do you really want to go into that, to-night?"
"Why not to-night? We'll have to go into it soon enough."
Yet when she turned to him he saw the real distress in her face, and his anger died.
"I didn't want to hurt you, Natalie. I honestly tried. But you know how I feel about that girl."
"Even the servants know it. It is quite evident."
"We parted quite amiably."
"I dare say! You were relieved that she was going. If you would only be ordinarily civil to her - oh, don't you see? She could keep Graham from going into this idiotic war. You can't. I can't. I've tried everything I know. And she knows she can. She's - hateful about it."
"And you would marry him to that sort of a girl?"
"I'd keep him from being blinded, or mutilated, or being killed."
"You can kill his soul."
"His soul!" She burst into hysterical laughter. "You to talk about souls! That's - that's funny."
"Natalie, dear." He was very grave, very gentle. "Has it occurred to you that we are hitting it off rather badly lately?"
She looked at him quickly.
"How? Because I don't think as you do? We got on well enough before this war came along."
"Do you think it is only that?"
"If it's the house, just remember you gave me carte blanche there."
He made a little gesture of despair.
"I just thought perhaps you are not as happy as you might be."
"Happiness again! Did you come up-stairs to-night, with this thing hanging over us, to talk about happiness? That's funny, too." But her eyes were suddenly suspicious. There was something strange in his voice.
"Let's forget that for a moment. Graham will make his own decision. But, before we leave that, let me tell you that I love him as much as you do. His going means exactly as much. It's only - "
"Another point we differ on," she finished for him. "Go on. You are suddenly concerned about my happiness. I'm touched, Clay. You have left me all winter to go out alone, or with anybody who might be sorry enough for me to pick me up, and now?" Suddenly her eyes sharpened, and she drew her breath quickly. "You've seen that scandalous thing in the paper!"
"It was sent to me."
"Who sent it?"
"A firm of private detectives."
She was frightened, and the terror in her face brought him to her quickly.
"Natalie! Don't look like that! I don't believe it, of course. It's stupid. I wasn't going to tell you. You don't think I believe it, do you?"
She let him put an arm around her and hold her, as he would a scared child. There was no love for her in it, but a great pity, and acute remorse that he could hold her so and care for her so little.
"Oh, Clay!" she gasped. "I've been perfectly sick about it!"
His conviction of his own failure to her made him very tender. He talked to her, as she stood with her face buried in the shoulder of his coat, of the absurdity of her fear, of his own understanding, and when she was calmer he made a futile effort to make his position clear.
"I am not angry," he said. "And I'm not fudging you in any way. But you know how things are between us. We have been drifting apart for rather a long time. It's not your fault. Perhaps it is mine. Probably it is. I know I don't make you happy. And sometimes I think things have either got to be better or worse."
"If I'm willing to go along as we are, I think you should be."
"Then let's try to get a little happiness out of it all, Natalie."
"Oh, happiness! You are always raving about happiness. There isn't any such thing."
"Peace, then. Let's have peace, Natalie."
She drew back, regarding him.
"What did you mean by things having to be better or worse?"
When he found no immediate answer, she was uneasy. The prospect of any change in their relationship
frightened her. Like all weak women, she was afraid of change. Her life suited her. Even her misery she loved and fed on. She had pitied herself always. Not love, but fear of change, lay behind her shallow, anxious eyes. Yet he could not hurt her. She had been foolish, but she had not been wicked. In his new humility he found her infinitely better than himself.

"I spoke without thinking."

"Then it must have been in your mind. Let me see the clipping, Clay. I've tried to forget what it said."

She took it, still pinned to the prospectus, and bent over them both. When she had examined them, she continued to stand with lowered eyelids, turning and crumpling them. Then she looked up.

"So that is what you meant! It was a - well, a sort of a threat."

"I had no intention of threatening you, my dear. You ought to know me better. That clipping was sent me attached to the slip. The only reason I let you see it was because I think you ought to know how the most innocent things are misconstrued."

"You couldn't divorce me if you wanted to." Then her defiance faded in a weak terror. She began to cry, shameless frightened tears that rolled down her cheeks. She reminded him that she was the mother of his child, that she had sacrificed her life to both of them, and that now they would both leave her and turn her adrift. She had served her purpose, now let her go.

Utter hopelessness kept him dumb. He knew of old that she would cry until she was ready to stop, or until she had gained her point. And he knew, too, that she expected him to put his arms around her again, in token of his complete surrender. The very fact hardened him. He did not want to put his arms around her. He wanted, indeed, to get out into the open air and walk off his exasperation. The scent in the room stifled him.

When he made no move toward her she gradually stopped crying, and gave way to the rage that was often behind her tears.

"Just try to divorce me, and see!"

"Good God, I haven't even mentioned divorce. I only said we must try to get along better. To agree."

"Which means, I dare say, that I am to agree with you!" But she had one weapon still. Suddenly she smiled a little wistfully, and made the apparently complete surrender that always disarmed him.

"I'll be good from now on, Clay. I'll be very, very good. Only - don't be always criticizing me."

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"I'll be good from now on, Clay. I'll be very, very good. Only - don't be always criticizing me."

She held up her lips, and after a second's hesitation he kissed her. He knew he was precisely where he had been when he started, and he had a hopeless sense of the futility of the effort he had made. Natalie had got by with a bad half-hour, and would proceed to forget it as quickly as she always forgot anything disagreeable. Still, she was in a more receptive mood than usual, and he wondered if that would not be as good a time as any to speak about his new plan as to the mill. He took an uneasy turn or two about the room, feeling her eyes on him.

"There is something else, Natalie."

She had relaxed like a kitten in her big chair, and was lighting one of the small, gilt-tipped cigarettes she affected.

"About Graham?"

"It affects Graham. It affects us all."

"Yes?"

He hesitated. To talk to Natalie about business meant reducing it to its most elemental form.

"Have you ever thought that this war of ours means more than merely raising armies?"

"I haven't thought about this war at all. It's too absurd. A lot of politicians?" She shrugged her shoulders.

"It means a great deal of money."

"Well, the country is rich, isn't it?"

"The country? That means the people."

"I knew we'd get to money sooner or later," she observed, resignedly. "All right. We'll be taxed, so we'll cut down on the country house - go on. I can say it before you do. But don't say we'll have to do without the greenhouses, because we can't."

"We may have to go without more than greenhouses."

His tone made her sit bolt upright. Then she laughed a little.

"Poor old Clay," she said, with the caressing tone she used when she meant to make no concession. "I do spend money, don't I? But I do make you comfortable, you know. And what is what I spend, compared with what you are making?"

"It's just that. I don't think I can consistently go on making a profit on this war, now that we are in it."

He explained then what he meant, and watched her face set into the hard lines he knew so well. But she listened to the end and when he had finished she said nothing.

"Well?" he said.

"I don't think you have the remotest idea of doing it. You like to play at the heroic. You can see yourself doing it,
and every one pointing to you as the man who threw away a fortune. But you are humbugging yourself. You'll never do it. I give you credit for too much sense."

He went rather white. She knew the weakness in his armor, his hatred of anything theatrical, and with unfailing accuracy she always pierced it.

"Suppose I tell you I have already offered the plant to the government, at a nominal profit."

Suddenly she got up, and every vestige of softness was gone.

"I don't think you would be such a fool."

"I have done it."

"Then you are insane. There is no other possible explanation."

She passed him, moving swiftly, and went into her bedroom. He heard her lock the door behind her.

CHAPTER XXXIX

Audrey had made a resolution, and with characteristic energy had proceeded to carry it out. She was no longer needed at the recruiting stations. After a month's debate the conscription law was about to be passed, made certain by the frank statement of the British Commission under Balfour as to the urgency of the need of a vast new army in France.

For the first time the Allies laid their cards face up on the table, and America realized to what she was committed. Almost overnight a potential army of hundreds of thousands was changing to one of millions. The situation was desperate. Germany had more men than the Allies, and had vast eastern resources to draw on for still more. To the Allies only the untapped resources of America remained.

In private conference with the President Mr. Balfour had urged haste, and yet more haste.

Audrey, reading her newspapers faithfully, felt with her exaltation a little stirring of regret. Her occupation, such as it was, was gone. For the thin stream of men flowing toward the recruiting stations there was now to be a vast movement of the young manhood of the nation. And she could have no place in it.

Almost immediately she set to work to find herself a new place. At first there seemed to be none. She went to a hospital, and offered her strong body and her two willing hands for training.

"I could learn quickly," she pleaded, "and surely there will not be enough nurses for such an army as we are to have."

"Our regular course is three years."

"But a special course. Surely I may have that. There are so many things one won't need in France."

The head of the training school smiled rather wistfully. They came to her so often now, these intelligent, untrained women, all eagerness to help, to forget and unlive, if they could, their wasted lives.

"You want to go to France, of course?"

"If I can. My husband was killed over there."

But she did not intend to make capital of Chris's death. "Of course, that has nothing to do with my going. I simply want to work."

"It's hard work. Not romantic."

"I am not looking for romance."

In the end, however, she had to give it up. In some hospitals they were already training nurses helpers, but they were to relieve trained women for France. She went home to think it over. To stay on, seeing him now and then, was torture for them both.

But there was something else. She had begun, that afternoon, to doubt whether she was fitted for nursing after all. The quiet of the hospital, the all-pervading odor of drugs, the subdued voice and quiet eyes of the head of the training school, as of one who had looked on life and found it infinitely sad, depressed her. She had walked home, impatient with herself, disappointed in her own failure. She thought dismally:

"I am of no earthly use. I've played all my life, and now I'm paying for it. I ought to." And she ran over her pitiful accomplishments: "golf, bridge, ride, shoot, swim, sing (a little), dance, tennis, some French - what a sickening list!"

She was glad that day to find Clare Gould waiting for her. As usual, the girl had brought her tribute, this time some early strawberries. Audrey found her in the pantry arranging their leaves in a shallow dish.

"Clare!" she said. "Aren't you working?"

"I've gone on night-turn now."

The girl's admiration salved her wounded pride in herself. Then she saw, on a table, an envelope with her name on it. Clare's eyes followed hers.

"That's the rest of the money, Mrs. Valentine."

She colored, but Audrey only smiled at her.

"Fine!" she said. "Are you sure you can spare it?"
"I couldn't rest until it was all paid up. And I'm getting along fine. I make a lot, really."
"Tell me about the night work."
"We've gone on double turn. I rather like it at night. It's - well, it's like something on the stage. The sparks fly from the lathes, and they look like fireworks. And when they hammer on hot metal it's lovely."
She talked on, incoherent but glowing. She liked her big turret lathe. It gave her a sense of power. She liked to see the rough metal growing smooth and shining like silver under her hands. She was naively pleased that she was doing a man's work, and doing it well.
Audrey leaned back in her chair and listened. All this that Clare was talking about was Clayton's doing. He at least had dreamed true. He was doing a man's part, too, in the war. Even this girl, whose hand Natalie Spencer would not have touched, this girl was dreaming true.
Clare was still talking. The draft would be hard on the plant. They were short-handed now. There was talk of taking in more girls to replace the men who would be called.
"Do you think I could operate a lathe, Clare?"
"You! Why, Mrs. Valentine, it's not work for a lady! Look at my hands."
But Audrey made an impatient gesture.
"I don't care about my hands. The question is, could I do it? I don't seem able to do anything else."
"Why, yes." Clare was reluctant. "I can, and you're a lot cleverer than I am. But it's hard. It's rough, and some of the talk - oh, I hope you don't mean it, Mrs. Valentine."

Audrey, however, was meaning it. It seemed to her, all at once, the way out. Here was work, needed work. Work that she could do. For the first time in months she blessed the golf and riding that had kept her fit.
"Mr. Spencer is a friend of yours. He'll never let you do it."
"He is not to know, Clare," Audrey said briskly. "You are quite right. He would probably be very - mannish about it. So we won't tell him. And now, how shall I go about getting in? Will they teach me, or shall I have to lust learn? And whatever shall I wear?"
Clare explained while, for she was determined not to lose a minute, Audrey changed into her plainest clothes. They would be in time, if they hurried, before the employment department closed. There were women in charge there. They card-indexed you, and then you were investigated by the secret service and if you were all right, well, that was all.
"Mercy! It's enough," said Audrey, impatiently. "Do you mean to say they'll come here?"
She glanced around her rooms, littered with photographs of people well known to the public through the society journals, with its high bright silver vases, its odd gifts of porcelain, its grand piano taking up more than its share of room.
"If they come here," she deliberated, "they won't take me, Clare. They'll be thinking I'm living on German money!"
So, in the end, she did not go to the munition works. She went room-hunting instead, with Clare beside her, very uncomfortable on the street for fear Audrey would be compromised by walking with her. And at six o'clock that evening a young woman with a softly inflected voice and an air of almost humorous enjoyment of something the landlady failed to grasp, was the tenant, for one month's rent in advance, of a room on South Perry Street.
Clare was almost in tears.
"I can't bear to think of your sleeping in that bed, Mrs. Valentine," she protested. "It dips down so."
"I shan't have much time to sleep, anyhow. And when I do so I shall be so tired! - What was the name I gave her, Clare?"
"Thompson. Mary Thompson."
"She surprised me, or I'd have thought of a prettier one." She was absurdly high-spirited, although the next day's ordeal rather worried her when she thought about it. She had, oddly enough, no trepidation about the work itself. It was passing the detectives in the employment department that worried her. As a matter of fact, however, there was no ordeal. Her card was carried to the desk in the corner, where the two men sat on whose decisions might so easily rest the safety of the entire plant, and they surveyed her carefully. Audrey looked ahead, and waited. They would come over and question her, and the whole fabric she had built would be destroyed. But nothing happened. She was told she would be notified in a day or two if she would be taken on, and with that she was forced to be content.
She had a bad moment, however, for Graham came through the office on his way out, and stopped for a moment directly in front of her. Her heart almost stopped beating, and she dropped her glove and stooped to pick it up. When she sat erect again he was moving on. But even her brief glance had showed her that the boy looked tired and depressed.
She went to her rented room at once, for she must be prepared for inquiries about her. During the interval she arranged for the closing of her apartment and the storing of her furniture. With their going would depart the last
reminders of the old life, and she felt a curious sense of relief. They had little happiness to remind her of, and much suffering. The world had changed since she had gathered them together, and she had changed with it. She was older and sadder. But she would not have gone back. Not for anything would she have gone back.

She had one thing to do, however, before she disappeared. She had promised to try to find something for Delight, and she did it with her usual thoroughness and dispatch. She sent for her that last day in the apartment, when in the morning she had found at the Perry Street room a card telling her to report the following night. When Delight came in she found the little apartment rather bare and rather dreary, but Audrey was cheerful, almost gay.

"Going away for a little while," she explained. "I've stored a lot of stuff. And now, my dear, do you really want to work?"

"I just must do something."

"All right. That's settled. I've got the thing I spoke about, in one of the officers' training-camps. But remember, Delight, this is not going to be a romantic adventure. It's to be work."

"I don't want a romantic adventure, Mrs. Valentine."

"Poor little thing," Audrey reflected to herself. And aloud: "Good! Of course I know you're sincere about working. I - I understand, awfully well."

Delight was pleased, but Audrey saw that she was not happy. Even when the details had been arranged she still sat in her straight chair and made no move to go. And Audrey felt that the next move was up to her.

"What's the news about Graham Spencer?" she inquired. "He'll be drafted, I suppose."

"Not if they claim exemption. He's making shells, you know."

She lifted rather heavy eyes to Audrey's.

"His mother is trying that now," she said. "Ever since his engagement was broken?"

"Oh, it was broken, was it?"

"Yes. I don't know why. But it's off. Anyhow Mrs. Spencer is telling everybody he can't be spared."

"And his father?"

"I don't know. He doesn't talk about it, I think."

"Perhaps he wants him to make his own decision."

Delight rose and drew down her veil with hands that Audrey saw were trembling a little.

"How can he make his own decision?" she asked. "He may think it's his own, but it's hers, Mrs. Spencer's. She's always talking, always. And she's plausible. She can make him think black is white, if she wants to."

"Why don't you talk to him?"

"I? He'd think I'd lost my mind! Besides, that isn't it. If you - like a man, you want him to do the right thing because he wants to, not because a girl asks him to."

"I wonder," Audrey said, slowly, "if he's worth it, Delight?"

"Worth what?" She was startled.

"Worth your - worth our worrying about him."

But she did not need Delight's hasty and flushed championship of Graham to tell her what she already knew.

After she had gone, Audrey sat alone in her empty rooms and faced a great temptation. She was taking herself out of Clayton's life. She knew that she would be as lost to him among the thousands of workers in the munition plant as she would have been in Russia. According to Clare, he rarely went into the shops themselves, and never at night.

Of course "out of his life" was a phrase. They would meet again. But not now, not until they had had time to become resigned to what they had already accepted. The war would not last forever. And then she thought of their love, which had been born and had grown, always with war at its background. They had gone along well enough until this winter, and then everything had changed. Chris, Natalie, Clayton, herself - none of them were quite what they had been. Was that one of the gains of war, that sham fell away, and people revealed either the best or the worst in them?

War destroyed, but it also revealed.

The temptation was to hear Clayton's voice again. She went to the telephone, and stood with the instrument in her hands, thinking. Would it comfort him? Or would it only bring her close for a moment, to emphasize her coming silence?

She put it down, and turned away. When, some time later, the taxicab came to take her to Perry Street, she was lying on her bed in the dusk, face-down and arms outstretched, a lonely and pathetic figure, all her courage dead for the moment, dead but for the desire to hear Clayton's voice again before the silence closed down.

She got up and pinned on her hat for the last time, before the mirror of the little inlaid dressing-table. And she smiled rather forlornly at her reflection in the glass.

"Well, I've got the present, anyhow," she considered. "I'm not going either to wallow in the past or peer into the
future. I'm going to work."

The prospect cheered her. After all, work was the great solution. It was the great healer, too. That was why men bore their griefs better than women. They could work.

She took a final glance around her stripped and cheerless rooms. How really little things mattered! All her life she had been burdened with things. Now at last she was free of them.

The shabby room on Perry Street called her. Work called, beckoned to her with calloused, useful hands. She closed and locked the door and went quietly down the stairs.

CHAPTER XL

One day late in May, Clayton, walking up-town in lieu of the golf he had been forced to abandon, met Doctor Haverford on the street, and found his way barred by that rather worried-looking gentleman.

"I was just going to see you, Clayton," he said. "About two things. I'll walk back a few blocks with you."

He was excited, rather exalted.

"I'm going in," he announced. "Regimental chaplain. I've got a year's leave of absence. I'm rather vague about what a chaplain does, but I rather fancy he can be useful."

"You'll get over, of course. You're lucky. And you'll find plenty to do."

"I've been rather anxious," Doctor Haverford confided. "I've been a clergyman so long that I don't know just how I'll measure up as a man. You know what I mean. I am making no reflection on the church. But I've been sheltered and - well, I've been looked after. I don't think I am physically brave. It would be a fine thing," he said wryly, "if the chaplain were to turn and run under fire!"

"I shouldn't worry about that."

"My salary is to go on. But I don't like that, either. If I hadn't a family I wouldn't accept it. Delight thinks I shouldn't, anyhow. As a matter of fact, there ought to be no half-way measures about our giving ourselves. If I had a son to give it would be different."

Clayton looked straight ahead. He knew that the rector had, for the moment, forgotten that he had a son to give and that he had not yet given.

"Why don't you accept a small allowance?" he inquired quietly. "Or, better still, why don't you let me know how much it will take and let me do it? I'd like to feel that I was represented in France - by you," he added.

And suddenly the rector remembered. He was most uncomfortable, and very flushed.

"Thanks. I can't let you do that, of course."

"Why not?"

"Because, hang it all, Clayton, I'm not a parasite. I took the car, because it enabled me to do my parish work better. But I'm not going to run off to war and let you keep my family."

Clayton glanced at him, at his fine erect old figure, his warmly flushed face. War did strange things. There was a new light in the rector's once worldly if kindly eyes. He had the strained look of a man who sees great things, as yet far away, and who would hasten toward them. Insensibly he quickened his pace.

"But I can't go myself, so why can't I send a proxy?"

Clayton asked, smiling. "I've an idea I'd be well represented."

"That's a fine way to look at it, but I can't do it. I've saved something, not much, but it will do for a year or two. I'm glad you made the offer, though. It was like you, and - it showed me the way. I can't let any man, or any group of men, finance my going."

And he stuck to it. Clayton, having in mind those careful canvasses of the congregation of Saint Luke's which had every few years resulted in raising the rector's salary, was surprised and touched. After all, war was like any other grief. It brought out the best or the worst in us. It roused or it crushed us.

The rector had been thinking.

"I'm a very fortunate man," he said, suddenly. "They're standing squarely behind me, at home. It's the women behind the army that will make it count, Clayton."

Clayton said nothing.

"Which reminds me," went on the rector, "that I find Mrs. Valentine has gone away. I called on her to-day, and she has given up her apartment. Do you happen to know where she is? She has left no address."

"Gone away?" Clayton repeated. "Why, no. I hadn't heard of it."

There in the busy street he felt a strange sense of loneliness. Always, although he did not see her, he felt her presence. She walked the same streets. For the calling, if his extremity became too great, he could hear her voice over the telephone. There was always the hope, too, of meeting her. Not by design. She had forbidden that. But some times perhaps God would be good to them both, if they earned it, and they could touch hands for a moment. But - gone!

"You are certain she left no address?"
"Quite certain. She has stored her furniture, I believe."

There was a sense of hurt, then, too. She had made this decision without telling him. It seemed incredible. A
dozen decisions a day he made, and when they were vital there was always in his mind the question as to whether
she would approve or not. He could not go to her with them, but mentally he was always consulting with her,
earning her approbation. And she had gone without a word.

"Do you think she has gone to France?" He knew his voice sounded stiff and constrained.

"I hope not. She was being so useful here. Of course, the draft law - amazing thing, the draft law! Never thought
we'd come to it. But it threw her out, in a way, of course."

"What has the draft law to do with Mrs. Valentine?"

"Why, you know what she was doing, don't you?"

"I haven't seen her recently."

The rector half-stopped.

"Well!" he said. "Let me tell you, Clayton, that that girl has been recruiting men, night after night and day after
day. She's done wonders. Standing in a wagon, mind you, in the slums, or anywhere; I heard her one night. By
George, I went home and tore up a sermon I had been working on for days."

Why hadn't he known? Why hadn't he realized that that was exactly the sort of thing she would do? There was
bitterness in his heart, too. He might easily have stood unseen in the crowd, and have watched and listened and been
proud of her. Then, these last weeks, when he had been working, or dining out, or sitting dreary and bored in a
theater, she had been out in the streets. Ah, she lived, did Audrey. Others worked and played, but she lived. Audrey!
Audrey!

" - in the rain," the rector was saying. "But she didn't mind it. I remember her saying to the crowd, 'It's raining
over here, and maybe it's raining on the fellows in the trenches. But I tell you, I'd rather be over there, up to my
waist in mud and water, than scurrying for a doorway here.' They had started to run out of the shower, but at that
they grinned and stopped. She was wonderful, Clayton."

In the rain! And after it was over she would go home, in some crowded bus or car, to her lonely rooms, while he
rolled about the city in a limousine! It was cruel of her not to have told him, not to have allowed him at least to see
that she was warm and dry.

"I've been very busy. I hadn't heard," he said, slowly. "Is it - was it generally known?"

Had Natalie known, and kept it from him?

"I think not. Delight saw her and spoke to her, I believe."

"And you have no idea where she is now."

"None whatever."

He learned that night that Natalie had known, and he surprised a little uneasiness in her face.

"I - heard about it," she said. "I can't imagine her making a speech. She's not a bit oratorical."

"We might have sent out one of the cars for her, if I'd known."

"Oh, she was looked after well enough."

"Looked after?"

Natalie had made an error, and knew it.

"I heard that a young clergyman was taking her round," she said, and changed the subject. But he knew that she
was either lying or keeping something from him. In those days of tension he found her half-truths more irritating
than her rather childish falsehoods. In spite of himself, however, the thought of the young clergyman rankled.

That night, stretched in the low chair in his dressing-room, under the reading light, he thought over things
carefully. If he loved her as he thought he did, he ought to want her to be happy. Things between them were
hopeless and wretched. If this clergyman, or Sloane, or any other man loved her, and he groaned as he thought how
lovable she was, then why not want for her such happiness as she could find?

He slept badly that night, and for some reason Audrey wove herself into his dreams of the new plant. The roar of
the machinery took on the soft huskiness of her voice, the deeper note he watched for and loved.

CHAPTER XLI

Anna Klein stood in her small room and covered her mouth with her hands, lest she shriek aloud. She knew quite
well that the bomb in the suit-case would not suffice to blow up the whole great plant. But she knew what the result
of its explosion would be.

The shells were not loaded at the Spencer plant. They were shipped away for that. But the fuses were loaded
there, and in the small brick house at the end of the fuse building there were stored masses of explosive, enough to
destroy a town. It was there, of course, that Herman was to place the bomb. She knew how he would do it, carefully,
methodically, and with what a lumbering awkward gait he would make his escape.

Her whole mind was bent on giving the alarm. On escaping, first, and then on arousing the plant. But when the
voices below continued, long after Herman had gone, she was entirely desperate. Herman had not carried out the suit-case. He had looked, indeed, much as usual as he walked out the garden path and closed the gate behind him. He had walked rather slowly, but then he always walked slowly. She seemed to see, however, a new caution in his gait, as of one who dreaded to stumble.

She dressed herself, with shaking fingers, and pinned on her hat. The voices still went on below, monotonous, endless; the rasping of Rudolph's throat, irritated by cheap cigarettes, the sound of glasses on the table, once a laugh, guttural and mirthless. It was ten o'clock when she knew, by the pushing back of their chairs, that they were preparing to depart. Ten o'clock!

She was about to commence again the feverish unscrewing of the door hinges, when she heard Rudolph's step on the stairs. She had only time to get to the back of her room, beside the bed, when she heard him try the knob.

"Anna?"

She let him call her again.

"Anna!"

"What is it?"

"You in bed?"

"Yes. Go away and let me alone. I've got a right to sleep, anyhow."

"I'm going out, but I'll be back in ten minutes. You try any tricks and I'll get you. See?"

"You make me sick," she retorted.

She heard him turn and run lightly down the stairs. Only when she heard the click of the gate did she dare to begin again at the door. She got down-stairs easily, but she was still a prisoner. However, she found the high little window into the coal-shed open, and crawled through it, to stand listening. The street was quiet.

Once outside the yard she started to run. They would let her telephone from the drug-store, even without money. She had no money. But the drug-store was closed and dark, and the threat of Rudolph's return terrified her. She must get off the hill, somehow.

There were still paths down the steep hill-side, dangerous things that hugged the edge of small, rocky precipices, or sloped steeply to sudden turns. But she had played over the hill all her young life. She plunged down, slipping and falling a dozen times, and muttering, sometimes an oath, sometimes a prayer,

"Oh, God, let me be in time. Oh, God, hold him up a while until I - " then a slip. "If I fall now - "

Only when she was down in the mill district did she try to make any plan. It was almost eleven then, and her ears were tense with listening for the sound she dreaded. She faced her situation, then. She could not telephone from a private house, either to the mill or to the Spencer house, what she feared, and the pay-booths of the telephone company demanded cash in advance. She was incapable of clear thought, or she would have found some way out, undoubtedly. What she did, in the end, was to board an up-town car and throw herself on the mercy of the conductor.

"I've got to get up-town," she panted. "I'll not go in. See? I'll stand here and you take me as far as you can. Look at me! I don't look as though I'm just bumming a ride, do I?"

The conductor hesitated. He had very little faith in human nature, but Anna's eyes were both truthful and desperate. He gave the signal to go on.

"What's up?" he said. "Police after you?"

"Yes," Anna replied briefly.

There is, in certain ranks, a tacit conspiracy against the police. The conductor hated them. They rode free on his car, and sometimes kept an eye on him in the rush hours. They had a way, too, of letting him settle his own disputes with inebriated gentlemen who refused to pay their fares.

"Looks as though they'd come pretty close to grabbing you," he opened, by way of conversation. "But ten of 'em aren't a match for one smart girl. They can't run. All got flat feet."

Anna nodded. She was faint and dizzy, and the car seemed to creep along. It was twenty minutes after eleven when she got out. The conductor leaned down after her, hanging to the handrail.

"Good luck to you!" he said. "And you'd better get a better face on you than that. It's enough to send you up, on suspicion!"

She hardly heard him. She began to run, and again she said over and over her little inarticulate prayer. She knew the Spencer house. More than once she had walked past it, on Sunday afternoons, for the sheer pleasure of seeing Graham's home. Well, all that was over now. Everything was over, unless -

The Spencer house was dark, save for a low light in the hall. A new terror seized her. Suppose Graham saw her. He might not believe her story. He might think it a ruse to see his father. But, as it happened, Clayton had sent the butler to bed, and himself answered the bell from the library.

He recognized her at once, and because he saw the distress on her face he brought her in at once. In the brief
moment that it required to turn on the lights he had jumped to a sickening conviction that Graham was at the bottom of her visit, and her appearance in full light confirmed this.

"Come into the library," he said. "We can talk in there." He led the way and drew up a chair for her. But she did not sit down. She steadied herself by its back, instead.

"You think it's about Graham," she began. "It isn't, not directly, that is. And my coming is terrible, because it's my own father. They're going to blow up the munition plant, Mr. Spencer!"

"When?"

"To-night, I think. I came as fast as I could. I was locked in.

"Locked in?" He was studying her face.

"Yes. Don't bother about that now. I'm not crazy or hysterical. I tell you I heard them. I've been a prisoner or I'd have come sooner. To-day they brought something - dynamite or a bomb - in a suit-case - and it's gone to-night. He took it - my father."

He was already at the telephone as she spoke. He called the mill first, and got the night superintendent. Then he called a number Anna supposed was the police station, and at the same time he was ringing the garage-signal steadily for his car. By the time he had explained the situation to the police, his car was rolling under the porte-cochere beside the house. He was starting out, forgetful of the girl, when she caught him by the arm.

"You mustn't go!" she cried. "You'll be killed, too. It will all go, all of it. You can't be spared, Mr. Spencer. You can build another mill, but - "

He shook her off, gently.

"Of course I'm going," he said. "We'll get it in time. Don't you worry. You sit down here and rest, and when it's all straightened out I'll come back. I suppose you can't go home, after this?"

"No," she said, dully.

He ran out, hatless, and a moment later she heard the car rush out into the night.

Five minutes passed. Ten. Anna Klein stood, staring ahead of her. When nothing happened she moved around and sat down in the chair. She was frightfully tired. She leaned her head back and tried to think of something to calm her shaking nerves, - that this was Graham's home, that he sometimes sat in that very chair. But she found that Graham meant nothing to her. Nothing mattered, except that her warning had been in time.

So intent was she on the thing that she was listening for that smaller, near-by sounds escaped her. But as the footsteps outside the door she stood up quickly and looked back over her shoulder.

Natalie stood framed in the doorway, staring at her.

"Well?" she said. And on receiving no answer from the frightened girl, "What are you doing here?"

The ugly suspicion in her voice left Anna speechless for a moment.

"Don't move, please," said Natalie's cold voice. "Stay just where you are." She reached behind the curtain at the doorway, and Anna heard the far-away ringing of a bell, insistent and prolonged. The girl roused herself with an effort.

"I came to see Mr. Spencer."

"That is a likely story! Who let you in?"

"Mr. Spencer."

"Mr. Spencer is not in."

"But he did. I'm telling you the truth. Indeed I am. I rang the bell, and he came to the door. I had something to tell him."

"What could you possibly have to tell my husband at this hour."

But Anna Klein did not answer. From far away there came a dull report followed almost immediately by a second one. The windows rattled, and the house seemed to rock rather gently on its foundation. Then silence.

Anna Klein picked up her empty pocket-book from the table and looked at it.

"I was too late," she said dully, and the next moment she was lying at Natalie's feet.

CHAPTER XLII

It was not until dawn that the full extent of the disaster was revealed. All night, by the flames from the sheds in the yard, which were of wood and still burning, rescue parties had worked frantically. Two of the long buildings, nearest to the fuse department, had collapsed entirely. Above the piles of fallen masonry might be seen, here and there, the black mass of some machine or lathe, and it was there the search parties were laboring. Luckily the fuse department had not gone double turn, and the night shift in the machine-shop was not a full one.

The fuse department was a roaring furnace, and repeated calls had brought in most of the fire companies of the city. Running back and forth in the light of the flames were the firemen and such volunteer rescuers as had been allowed through the police cordon. Outside that line of ropes and men were gathered a tragic crowd, begging,
imploring to be allowed through to search for some beloved body. Now and then a fresh explosion made the mob recoil, only to press close again, importuning, tragic, hopeless.

The casualty list ran high. All night long ambulances stood in a row along the street, backed up to the curb and waiting, and ever so often a silent group, in broken step, carried out some quiet covered thing that would never move again.

With the dawn Graham found his father. He had thrown off his coat and in his shirt-sleeves was, with other rescuers, digging in the ruins. Graham himself had been working. He was nauseated, weary, and unutterably wretched, for he had seen the night superintendent and had heard of his father's message.

"Klein!" he said. "You don't mean Herman Klein?"

"That was what he said. I was to find him and hold him until he got here. But I couldn't find him. He may have got out. There's no way of telling now."

Waves of fresh nausea swept over Graham. He sat down on a pile of bricks and wiped his forehead, clammy with sweat.

"I hope to God he was burned alive," muttered the other man, surveying the scene. His eyes were reddened with smoke from the fire, his clothing torn.

"I was knocked down myself," he said. "I was out in the yard looking for Klein, and I guess I lay there quite a while. If I hadn't gone out?" He shrugged his shoulders.

"How many women were on the night shift?"

"Not a lot. Twenty, perhaps. If I had my way I'd take every German in the country and boil 'em in oil. I didn't want Klein back, but he was a good workman. Well, he's done a good job now."

It was after that that Graham saw his father, a strange, wild-eyed Clayton who drove his pick with a sort of mad strength, and at the same time gave orders in an unfamiliar voice. Graham, himself a disordered figure, watched him for a moment. He was divided between fear and resolution. Some place in that debacle there lay his own responsibility. He was still bewildered, but the fact that Anna's father had done the thing was ominous.

The urge to confession was stronger than his fears. Somehow, during the night, he had become a man. But now he only felt, that somehow, during the night, he had become a murderer.

Clayton looked up, and he moved toward him.

"Yes?"

"I've had some coffee made at a house down the street. Won't you come and have it?"

Clayton straightened. He was very tired, and the yard was full of volunteers now, each provided at the gate with a pick or shovel. A look at the boy's face decided him.

"I'll come," he said, and turned his pick over to a man beside him. He joined Graham, and for a moment he looked into the boy's eyes. Then he put a hand on his shoulder, and together they walked out, past the line of ambulances, into a street where the scattered houses showed not a single unshattered window, and the pavements were littered with glass.

His father's touch comforted the boy, but it made even harder the thing he had to do. For he could not go through life with this thing on his soul. There had been a moment, after he learned of Herman's implication, when he felt the best thing would be to kill himself, but he had put that aside. It was too easy. If Herman Klein had done this thing because of Anna and himself, then he was a murderer. If he had done it because he was a German, then he - Graham - had no right to die. He would live to make as many Germans as possible pay for this night's work.

"I've got something to tell you, father," he said, as they paused before the house where the coffee was ready. Clayton nodded, and together they went inside. Even this house was partially destroyed. A piece of masonry had gone through the kitchen, and standing on fallen bricks and plaster, a cheerful old woman was cooking over a stove which had somehow escaped destruction.

"It's bad," she said to Graham, as she poured the coffee into cups, "but it might have been worse, Mr. Spencer. We're all alive. And I guess I'll understand what my boy's writing home about now. They've sure brought the war here this night."

Graham carried the coffee into the little parlor, where Clayton sat dropped on a low chair, his hands between his knees. He was a strange, disheveled figure, gray of face and weary, and the hand he held out for the cup was blistered and blackened. Graham did not touch his coffee. He put it on the mantel, and stood waiting while Clayton finished his.

"Shall I tell you now, sir?"

Clayton drew a long breath.

"It was Herman Klein who did it?"

"Probably. I had a warning last night, but it was too late. I should have known, of course, but somehow I didn't. He'd been with us a long time. I'd have sworn he was loyal."
For the first time in his life Graham saw his father weaken, the pitiful, ashamed weakness of a strong man. His voice broke, his face twitched. The boy drew himself up; they couldn't both go to pieces. He could not know that Clayton had worked all that night in that hell with the conviction that in some way his own son was responsible; that he knew already what Graham was about to tell him.

"If Herman Klein did it, father, it was because he was the tool of a gang. And the reason he was a tool was because he thought I was - living with Anna. I wasn't. I don't know why I wasn't. There was every chance. I suppose I meant to some time. Anyhow, he thought I was."

If he had expected any outbreak from Clayton, he met none. Clayton sat looking ahead, and listening. Inside of the broken windows the curtains were stirring in the fresh breeze of early morning, and in the kitchen the old woman was piling the fallen bricks noisily.

"I had been flirting with her a little - it wasn't much more than that, and I gave her a watch at Christmas. He found it out, and he beat her. Awfully. She ran away and sent for me, and I met her. She had to hide for days. Her face was all bruised. Then she got sick from it. She was sick for weeks."

"Did he know where she was?"

"I think not, or he'd have gone to get her. But Rudolph Klein knew something. I took her out to dinner, to a roadhouse, a few days ago, and she said she saw him there. I didn't. All that time, weeks, I'd never - I'd never gone to her room. That night I did. I don't know why. I - "

"Go on."

"Well, I went, but I didn't stay. I couldn't. I guess she thought I was crazy. I went away, that's all. And the next day I felt that she might be feeling as though I'd turned her down or something. And I felt responsible. Maybe you won't understand. I don't quite myself. Anyhow, I went back, to let her know I wasn't quite a brute, even if - But she was gone. I'm not trying to excuse myself. It's a rotten story, for I was engaged to Marion then."

Suddenly he sat down beside Clayton and buried his face in his hands. For some reason or other Clayton found himself back in the hospital, that night when Joey lay still and quiet, and Graham was sobbing like a child, prostrate on the white covering of the bed. With the incredible rapidity of thought in a mental crisis, he saw the last months, the boy's desire to go to France thwarted, his attempt to interest himself in the business, the tool Marion Hayden had made of him, Anna's doglike devotion, all leading inevitably to catastrophe. And through it all he saw Natalie, holding Graham back from war, providing him with extra money, excusing him, using his confidences for her own ends, insidiously sapping the boy's confidence in his father and himself.

"We'll have to stand up to this together, Graham."

The boy looked up.

"Then - you're not going to throw me over altogether - "

"No."

"But - all this - !"

"If Herman Klein had not done it, there were others who would, probably. It looks as though you had provided them with a tool, but I suppose we were vulnerable in a dozen ways."

He rose, and they stood, eyes level, father and son, in the early morning sunlight. And suddenly Graham's arms were around his shoulders, and something tight around Clayton's heart relaxed. Once again, and now for good, he had found his boy, the little boy who had not so long ago stood on a chair for this very embrace. Only now the boy was a man.

"I'm going to France, father," he said. "I'm going to pay them back for this. And out of every two shots I fire one will be for you."

Perhaps he had found his boy only to lose him, but that would have to be as God willed.

At ten o'clock he went up to the house, to change his wet and draggled clothing. The ruins were being guarded by soldiers, and the work of rescue was still going on, more slowly now, since there was little or no hope of finding any still living thing in that flame-swept wreckage. He found Natalie in bed, with Madeleine in attendance, and he learned that her physician had just gone.

He felt that he could not talk to her just then. She had a morbid interest in horrors, and with the sights of that night fresh in his mind he could not discuss them. He stopped, however, in her doorway.

"I'm glad you are resting," he said, "Better stay in bed to-day. It's been a shock."

"Resting! I've been frightfully ill."

"I'm sorry, my dear. I'll come in again on my way out."

"Clay!"

He turned in the doorway.

"Is it all gone? Everything?"

"Practically. Yes."
"But you were insured?"
"I'll tell you about that later. I haven't given it much thought yet. I don't know just how we stand."
"I shall never let Graham go back to it again. I warn you. I've been lying here for hours, thinking that it might have happened as easily as not while he was there."
He hardly listened. He had just remembered Anna.
"I left a girl here last night, Natalie," he said. "Do you happen to know what became of her?"
Natalie stirred on her pillows.
"I should think I do. She fainted, or pretended to faint. The servants looked after her."
"Has she gone?"
"I hope so. It is almost noon. Oh, by the way," she called, as he moved off, "there is a message for you. A woman named Gould, from the Central Hospital. She wants to see you at once. They have kept the telephone ringing all the morning."
Clare Gould! That was odd. He had seen her taken out, a bruised and moaning creature, her masses of fair hair over her shoulders, her eyes shut. The surgeons had said she was not badly hurt. She might be worse than they thought. The mention of her name brought Audrey before him. He hoped, wherever she was, she would know that he was all right.
As soon as he had changed he called the hospital. The message came back promptly and clearly.
"We have a woman named Gould here. She is not badly hurt, but she is hysterical. She wants to see you, but if you can't come at once I am to give you a message. Wait a moment. She has written it, but it's hardly legible."
Clayton waited.
"It's about somebody you know, who had gone on night turn recently at your plant. I can't read the name. It looks like Ballantine."
"It isn't Valentine, is it?"
"Perhaps it is. It's just a scrawl. But the first name is clear enough - Audrey."
Afterward he did not remember hanging up the receiver, or getting out of the house. He seemed to come to himself somewhat at the hospital, and at the door to Clare's ward his brain suddenly cleared. He did not need Clare's story. It seemed that he knew it all, had known it long ages before. Her very words sounded like infinite repetitions of something he had heard, over and over.
"She was right beside me, and I was showing her about the lathe. They'd told me I could teach her. She was picking it up fast, too. And she liked it. She liked it."
The fact that Audrey had liked it broke down his scanty reserve of restraint. Clayton found himself looking down at her from a great distance. She was very remote. Clare pulled herself together.
"When the first explosion came it didn't touch us. But I guess she knew it meant more. She said something about the telephone and getting help and there'd be more, and she started to run. I just stood there, watching her run, and waiting. And then the second one came, and -"
Suddenly Clare seemed to disappear altogether. He felt something catch his arm, and the nurse's voice, very calm and quiet:
"Sit down. I'll get you something."
Then he was swallowing a fluid that burned his throat, and Clare was crying with the sheet drawn to her mouth, and somewhere Audrey -
He got up, and the nurse followed him out.
"You might look for the person here," she suggested. "We have had several brought in."
He was still dazed, but he followed her docilely. Audrey was not there. He seemed to have known that, too. That there would be a long search, and hours of agony, and at the end - the one thing he did not know was what was to be at the end.
All that afternoon he searched, going from hospital to hospital. And at each one, as he stopped, that curious feeling of inner knowledge told him she was not there. But the same instinct told him she was not dead. He would have known it if she was dead. There was no reasoning in it. He could not reason. But he knew, somehow.
Then, late in the afternoon, he found her. He knew that he had found her. It was as though, at the entrance of the hospital, some sixth sense had told him this was right at last. He was quite steady, all at once. She was here, waiting for him to come. And now he had come, and it would be all right.
Yet, for a time, it seemed all wrong. She was not conscious, had not roused since she was brought it. There were white screens around her bed, and behind them she lay alone. They had braided her hair in two long dark braids, and there was a bandage on one of her arms. She looked very young and very tired, but quite peaceful.
His arrival had caused a small stir of excitement, his own prominence, the disaster with which the country was ringing. But for a few minutes, before the doctors arrived, he was alone with her behind the screen. It was like being
alone with his dead. Bent over her, his face pressed to one of her quiet hands, he whispered to her all the little
tendernesses, the aching want of her, that so long he had buried in his heart. Things he could not have told her,
waking, he told her then. It seemed, too, that she must rouse to them, that she must feel him there beside her, calling
her back. But she did not move.

It was then, for the first time, that he wondered what he would do if she should die.

The doctors, coming behind the screen, found him sitting erect and still, staring ahead of him, with a strange
expression on his face. He had just decided that he could not, under any circumstances, live if she died.

It was rather a good thing for Clayton's sanity that they gave him hope. He was completely unnerved, tired and
derperate. Indeed, when they came in he had been picturing Audrey and himself, wandering hand in hand, very
quietly and contentedly, in some strange world which was his rather hazy idea of the Beyond. It seemed to him quite
same and extraordinarily happy.

The effort of meeting the staff roused him, and, with hope came a return to normality. There was much to be
done, special nurses, a private room, and - rather reluctantly - friends and relatives to be notified. Only for a few
minutes, out of all of life, had she been his. He must give her up now. Life had become one long renunciation.

He did not go home at all that night. He divided his time between the plant and the hospital, going back and
forward. Each time he found the report good. She was still strong; no internal injuries had manifested themselves,
and the concussion would probably wear off before long. He wanted to be there when she first opened her eyes. He
was afraid she might be frightened, and there would be a bad minute when she remembered - if she did remember.

At midnight, going into the room, he found Mrs. Haverford beside Audrey's bed, knitting placidly. She seemed
to accept his being there as perfectly natural, and she had no sick-room affectations. She did not whisper, for one
thing.

"The nurse thinks she is coming round, Clayton," she said. "I waited, because I thought she ought to see a
familiar face when she does."

Mrs. Haverford was eminently good for him. Her cheerful matter-of-factness her competent sanity, restored his
belief in a world that had seemed only chaos and death. How much, he wondered later, had Mrs. Haverford
suspected? He had not been in any condition to act a part. But whatever she suspected he knew was locked in her
kindly breast.

Audrey moved slightly, and he went over to her. When he glanced up again Mrs. Haverford had gone out.

So it was that Audrey came back to him, and to him alone. She asked no questions. She only lay quite still on her
white pillows, and looked at him. Even when he knelt beside her and drew her toward him, she said nothing, but she
lifted her uninjured hand and softly caressed his bent head. Clayton never knew whether Mrs. Haverford had come
back and seen that or not. He did not care, for that matter. It seemed to him just then that all the world must know
what was so vitally important, so transcendently wonderful.

Not until Audrey's eyes closed again, and he saw that she was sleeping, did he loosen his arms from around her.

When at last he went out to the stiffly furnished hospital parlor, he found Mrs. Haverford sitting there alone, still
knitting. But he rather thought she had been crying. There was an undeniably moist handkerchief on her knee.

"She roused a little while ago," he said, trying to speak quietly, and as though Audrey's rousing were not the
wonder that it was. "She seemed very comfortable. And now she's sleeping."

"The dear child!" said Mrs. Haverford. "If she had died, after everything - " Her plump face quivered. "Things
have never been very happy for her, Clayton."

"I'm afraid not." He went to a window and stood looking out. The city was not quiet, but its mighty roar of the
day was lowered to a monotonous, drowsy hummimg. From the east, reflected against low-hanging clouds, was the
dull red of his own steel mills, looking like the reflection of a vast conflagration.

"Not very happy," he repeated.

"Some times," Mrs. Haverford was saying. "I wonder about things. People go along missing the best things in
life, and - I suppose there is a reason for it, but some times I wonder if He ever meant us to go on, crucifying our
own souls."

So she did know!

"What would you have us do?"

"I don't know. I suppose there isn't any answer."

Afterward, Clayton found that that bit of conversation with Mrs. Haverford took on the unreality of the rest of
that twenty-four hours. But one part of it stood out real and hopelessly true. There wasn't any answer!

CHAPTER XLIII

Anna Klein had gone home, at three o'clock that terrible morning, a trembling, white-faced girl. She had done
her best, and she had failed. Unlike Graham, she had no feeling of personal responsibility, but she felt she could
never again face her father, with the thing that she knew between them. There were other reasons, too. Herman
would be arrested, and she would be called to testify. She had known. She had warned Mr. Spencer. The gang, Rudolph's gang, would get her for that.

She knew where they were now. They would be at Gus's, in the back room, drinking to the success of their scheme, and Gus, who was a German too, would be with them, offering a round of drinks on the house now and then as his share of the night's rejoicing. Gus, who was already arranging to help draft-dodgers by sending them over the Mexican border.

She would have to go back, to get in and out again if she could, before Herman came back. She had no clothes, except what she stood up in, and those in her haste that night were, only her print house-dress with a long coat. She would have to find a new position, and she would have to have her clothing to get about in. She dragged along, singularly unmolested. Once or twice a man eyed her, but her white face and vacant eyes were unattractive, almost sodden.

She was barely able to climb the hill, and as she neared the house her trepidation increased. What if Herman had come back? If he suspected her he would kill her. He must have been half mad to have done the thing, anyhow. He would surely be half mad now. And because she was young and strong, and life was still a mystery to be solved, she did not want to die. Strangely enough, face to face with danger there was still, in the back of her head, an exultant thrill in her very determination to live. She would start over again, and she would work hard and make good.

"You bet I'll make good," she resolved. "Just give me a chance and I'll work my fool head off."

Which was by way of being a prayer.

It was the darkest hour before the dawn when she reached the cottage. It was black and very still, and outside the gate she stooped and slipped off her shoes. The window into the shed by which she had escaped was still open, and she crouched outside, listening. When the stillness remained unbroken she climbed in, tense for a movement or a blow.

Once inside, however, she drew a long breath. The doors were still locked, and the keys gone. So Herman had not returned. But as she stood there, hurried stealthy footsteps came along the street and turned in at the gate. In a panic she flew up the stairs and into her room, where the door still hung crazily on its hinges. She stood there, listening, her heart pounding in her ears, and below she distinctly heard a key in the kitchen door. She did the only thing she could think of. She lifted the door into place, and stood against it, bracing it with her body.

Whoever it was in the kitchen now, moving however more swiftly than Herman. She heard matches striking. Then:

"Hsst!"

She knew that it was Rudolph, and she braced herself mentally. Rudolph was keener than Herman. If he found her door in that condition, and she herself dressed?! Working silently and still holding the door in place, she flung off her coat. She even unpinned her hair and unfastened her dress.

When his signal remained unanswered a second time he called her by name, and she heard him coming up.

"Anna!" he repeated.

"Yes?"

He was startled to hear her voice so close to the door. In the dark she heard him fumbling for the knob. He happened on the padlock instead, and he laughed a little. By that she knew that he was not quite sober.

"Locked you in, has he?"

"What do you want?"

"Has Herman come home yet?"

"He doesn't get home until seven."

"Hasn't he been back at all, to-night?"

She hesitated.

"How do I know? I've been asleep!"

"Some sleep!" he said, and suddenly lurched against the door. In spite of her it yielded, and although she braced herself with all her strength, his weight against it caused it to give way. It was a suspicious, crafty Rudolph who picked himself up and made a clutch at her in the dark.

"You little liar," he said thickly. And struck a match. She cowered away from him.

"I was going to run away, Rudolph," she cried. "He hasn't any business locking me in, I won't stand for it."

"You've been out."

"No!"

"Out - after him!"

"Honest to God, Rudolph, no. I hate him. I don't ever want to see him again."

He put a hand out into the darkness, and finding her, tried to draw her to him. She struggled, and he released her. All at once she knew that he was weak with fright. The bravado had died out of him. The face she had touched was
covered with a clammy sweat.

"I wish to God Herman would come."

"What d' you want with him?"

"Have you got any whisky?"

"You've had enough of that stuff."

Some one was walking along the street outside. She felt that he was listening, crouched ready to run; but the steps went on.

"Look here, Anna," he said, when he had pulled himself together again. "I'm going to get out of this. I'm going away."

"All right. You can go for all of me."

"D'you mean to say you've been asleep all night? You didn't hear anything?"

"Hear what?"

He laughed.

"You'll know soon enough." Then he told her, hurriedly, that he was going away. He'd come back to get her to promise to follow him. He wasn't going to stay here and -

"And what?"

"And be drafted," he finished, rather lamely.

"Gus has a friend in a town on the Mexican border," he said. "He's got maps of the country to Mexico City, and the Germans there fix you up all right. I'll get rich down there and some day I'll send for you? What's that?"

He darted to the window, faintly outlined by a distant street-lamp. Three men were standing quietly outside the gate, and a fourth was already in the garden, silently moving toward the house. She felt Rudolph brush by her, and the trembling hand he laid on her arm.

"Now lie!" he whispered fiercely. "You haven't seen me. I haven't been here to-night."

Then he was gone. She ran to the window. The other three men were coming in, moving watchfully and slowly, and Rudolph was at Katie's window, cursing. If she was a prisoner, so was Rudolph. He realized that instantly, and she heard him breaking out the sash with a chair. At the sound the three figures broke into a run, and she heard the sash give way. Almost instantly there was firing. The first shot was close, and she knew it was Rudolph firing from the window. Some wild design of braining him from behind with a chair flashed into her desperate mind, but when she had felt her way into Katie's room he had gone. The garden below was quiet, but there was yelling and the crackling of underbrush from the hill-side. Then a scattering of shots again, and silence. The yard was empty.

The hill paid but moderate attention to shots. They were usually merely pyrotechnic, and indicated rejoicing rather than death. But here and there she heard a window raised, and then lowered again. The hill had gone back to bed. Anna went into her room and dressed. For the first time it had occurred to her that she might be held by the police, and the thought was unbearable. It was when she was making her escape that she found a prostrate figure in the yard, and knew that one of Rudolph's shots had gone home. She could not go away and leave that, not unless - A terrible hatred of Herman and Rudolph and all their kind suddenly swept over her. She would not run away. She would stay and tell all the terrible truth. It was her big moment, and she rose to it. She would see it through. What was her own safety to letting this band of murderers escape? And all that in the few seconds it took to reach the fallen figure. It was only when she was very close that she saw it was moving.

"Tell Dunbar he went to the left," a voice was saying. "The left! They'll lose him yet."

"Joey!"

"Hello," said Joey's voice. He considered that he was speaking very loud, but it was hardly more than a whisper.

"That wasn't your father, was it? The old boy couldn't jump and run like that."

"Are you hurt?"

He coughed a little, a gurgling cough that rather startled himself. But he was determined to be a man.

"No. I just lay down here for a nap. Who was it that jumped?"

"My cousin Rudolph. Do you think I can help you into the house?"

"I'll walk there myself in a minute. Unless your cousin Rudolph - " His head dropped back on her arm. "I feel sort of all in." His voice trailed off.

"Joey!"

"Lemme alone," he muttered. "I'm the first casualty in the American army! I - " He made a desperate effort to speak in a man's voice, but the higher boyish notes of sixteen conquered. "They certainly gave us hell to-night. But we're going to build again; me and - Clayton Spen - "

All at once he was very still. Anna spoke to him and, that failing, gave him a frantic little shake. But Joey had gone to another partnership beyond the stars.
The immediate outstanding result of the holocaust at the munitions works was the end of Natalie's dominion aver Graham. She never quite forgave him the violence with which he threw off her shackles.

"If I'd been half a man I'd have been over there long ago," he said, standing before her, tall and young and flushed. "I'd have learned my job by now, and I'd be worth something, now I'm needed."

"And broken my heart."

"Hearts don't break that way, mother."

"Well, you say you are going now. I should think you'd be satisfied. There's plenty of time for you to get the glory you want."

"Glory! I don't want any glory. And as for plenty of time - that's exactly what there isn't."

During the next few days she preserved an obstinate silence on the subject. She knew he had been admitted to one of the officers' training-camps, and that he was making rather helpless and puzzled purchases. Going into his room she would find a dressing-case of khaki leather, perhaps, or flannel shirts of the same indeterminate hue. She would shed futile tears over them, and order them put out of sight. But she never offered to assist him.

Graham was older, in many ways. He no longer ran up and down the stairs whistling, and he sought every opportunity to be with his father. They spent long hours together in the library, when, after a crowded day, filled with the thousand, problems of reconstructions, Clayton smoked a great deal, talked a little, rather shame-facedly after the manner of men, of personal responsibility in the war, and quietly watched the man who was Graham.

Out of those quiet hours, with Natalie at the theater or reading up-stairs in bed, Clayton got the greatest comfort of his life. He would neither look back nor peer anxiously ahead.

The past, with its tragedy, was gone. The future might hold even worse things. But just now he would live each day as it came, working to the utmost, and giving his evenings to his boy. The nights were the worst. He was not sleeping well, and in those long hours of quiet he tried to rebuild his life along stronger, sterner lines. Love could have no place in it, but there was work left. He was strong and he was still young. The country should have every ounce of energy in him. He would re-build the plant, on bigger lines than before, and when that was done, he would build again. The best he could do was not enough.

He scarcely noticed Natalie's withdrawal from Graham and himself. When she was around he was his old punctilious self, gravely kind, more than ever considerate. Beside his failure to her, her own failure to him faded into insignificance. She was as she was, and through no fault of hers. But he was what he had made himself.

Once or twice he had felt an overwhelming remorse toward her, and on one such occasion he had made a useless effort to break down the barrier of her long silence.

"Don't go up-stairs, Natalie," he had begged. "I am not very amusing, I know, but - I'll try my best. I'll promise not to touch on anything disagreeable." He had been standing in the hail, looking up at her on the stair-case, and he smiled. There was pleading behind the smile, an inarticulate feeling that between them there might at least be friendship.

"You are never disagreeable," she had said, looking down with hostile eyes. "You are quite perfect."

"Then won't you wait?"

"Perfection bores me to tears," she said, and went up on the stairs.

On the morning of Graham's departure, however, he found her prepared to go to the railway-station. She was red-eyed and pale, and he was very sorry for her.

"Do you think it is wise?" he asked.

"I shall see him off, of course. I may never see him again."

And his own tautened nerves almost gave way.

"Don't say that!" he cried. "Don't even think that. And for God's sake, Natalie, send him off with a smile. That's the least we can do."

"I can't take it as casually as you do."

He gave up then in despair. He saw that Graham watched her uneasily during the early breakfast, and he surmised that the boy's own grip on his self-control was weakened by the tears that dropped into her coffee-cup. He reflected bitterly that all over the country strong women, good women, were sending their boys away to war, giving them with prayer and exaltation. What was wrong with Natalie? What was wrong with his whole life?

When Graham was up-stairs, he turned to her.

"Why do you persist in going, Natalie?"

"I intend to go. That's enough."

"Don't you think you've made him unhappy enough?"

"He has made me unhappy enough."

"You. It is always yourself, Natalie. Why don't you ever think of him?" He went to the door. "Countermand the order for the limousine," he said to the butler, "and order the small car for Mr. Graham and myself."
"How dare you do that?"
"I am not going to let you ruin the biggest day in his life."
She saw that he meant it. She was incredulous, reckless, angry, and thwarted for the first time in her self-indulgent life.
"I hate you," she said slowly. "I hate you!"
She turned and went slowly up the stairs. Graham, knocking at her door a few minutes later, heard the sound of hysterical sobbing, within, but received no reply.
"Good-by, mother," he called. "Good-by. Don't worry. I'll be all right."
When he saw she did not mean to open the door or to reply, he went rather heavily down the stairs.
"I wish she wouldn't," he said. "It makes me darned unhappy."
But Clayton surmised a relief behind his regret, and in the train the boy's eyes were happier than they had been for months.
"I don't know how I'll come out, dad," he said. "But if I don't get through it won't be because I didn't try."
And he did try. The enormous interest of the thing gripped him from the start; There was romance in it, too. He wore his first uniform, too small for him as it was, with immense pride. He rolled out in the morning at reveille, with the feeling that he had just gone to bed, ate hugely at breakfast, learned to make his own cot-bed, and lined up on a vast dusty parade ground for endless evolutions in a boiling sun.
It was rather amusing to find himself being ordered about, in a stentorian voice, by Jackson. And when, in off moments, that capable ex-chauffeur condescended to a few moments of talk and relaxation, the boy was highly gratified.
"Do you think I've got anything in me?" he would inquire anxiously.
And Jackson always said heartily, "Sure you have."
There were times when Graham doubted himself, however. There was one dreadful hour when Graham, in the late afternoon, and under the eyes of his commanding officer and a group of ladies, conducting the highly formal and complicated ceremony of changing the guard, tied a lot of grinning men up in a knot which required the captain of the company and two sergeants to untangle.
"I'm no earthly good," he confided to Jackson that night, sitting on the steps of his barracks. "I know it like a-b-c, and then I get up and try it and all at once I'm just a plain damned fool."
"Don't give up like that, son," Jackson said. "I've seen 'em march a platoon right into the C.O's porch before now. And once I just saved a baby-buggy and a pair of twins."
Clayton wrote him daily, and now and then there came a letter from Natalie, cheerful on the surface, but its cheerfulness obviously forced. And once, to his great surprise, Marion Hayden wrote him.
"I just want you to know," she said, "that I am still interested in you, even if it isn't going to be anything else. And that I am ridiculously proud of you. Isn't it queer to look back on last Winter and think what a lot of careless idiots we were? I suppose war doesn't really change us, but it does make us wonder what we've got in us. I am surprised to find that I am a great deal better than I ever thought I was!"
There was comfort in the letter, but no thrill. He was far away from all that now, like one on the first stage of a long journey, with his eyes ahead.
Then one day he saw a familiar but yet strange figure striding along the country road. Graham was map-sketching that day, and the strange but familiar figure was almost on him when he looked up. It was extremely military, and looked like a general at least. Also it was very red in the face, and was clutching doggedly in its teeth an old briar pipe. But what had appeared from the front to be an ultra military figure on closer inspection turned out to be a procession. Pulling back hard on a rope behind was the company goat, Elinor.
The ultra-military figure paused by Graham's sketching-stool, and said, "Young man, do you know where this creature belongs? I found her trying to commit suicide on the rifle range - why, Graham!"
It was Doctor Haverford. He grew a trifle less military then, and borrowed some pipe tobacco. He looked oddly younger, Graham thought, and rather self-conscious of his uniform.
"Every inch a soldier, Graham," he chuckled. "Still have to use a hook and eye at the bottom of the coat-blouse," he corrected himself. "But I'm getting my waist-line again. How's the - whoa!" he called, as Elinor wrapped the rope around his carefully putted legs. "Infernal animal!" he grumbled. "I just paid a quarter to have these puttees shined. How's the family?"
"Mother has gone to Linndale. The house is finished. Have you been here long, sir?"
"Two weeks. Hang it all, Graham, I wish I'd let this creature commit suicide. She's - do you know Delight is here?"
"Here? Why, no."
"At the hostess house," said the chaplain, proudly. "Doing her bit, too. Mrs. Haverford wanted to come too, and
sew buttons on, or something. But I told her two out of three was a fair percentage. I hear that Washington has sent
for your father.
"I hadn't heard."
"He's a big man, Graham. We're going to hear from him. Only - I thought he looked tired when I saw him last.
Somebody ought to look after him a bit." He was patiently untangling himself from Elinor's rope. "You know there
are two kinds of people in the world: those who look after themselves and those who look after others. That's your
father - the last."

Graham's face clouded. How true that was! He knew now, as he had not known before. He was thinking clearly
those days. Hard work and nothing to drink had clarified his mind, and he saw things at home as they really were.
Clayton's infinite patience, his strength and his gentleness. But he only said:
"He has had a hard year." He raised his eyes and looked at the chaplain. "I didn't help him any, you know, sir."
"Well, well, that's all over now. We've just one thing to think of, and that's to beat those German devils back to
Berlin. And then burn Berlin," he added, militantly.

The last Graham saw of him, he was dragging Elinor down the road, and a faint throaty humming came back,
which sounded suspiciously like "Where do we go from here, boys? Where do we go from here?"

Candidate Spencer took great pains with his toilet that afternoon. He polished his shoes, and shaved, and he
spent a half hour on some ten sadly neglected finger-nails. At retreat he stood at attention in the long line, and
watched the flag moving slowly and majestically to the stirring bugle notes. Something swelled almost to bursting
in his throat. That was his flag. He was going to fight for it. And after that was done he was going to find some girl,
some nice girl - the sort, for instance, that would leave her home to work in a hostess house. And having found her,
he would marry her, and love and cherish her all his life. Unless, of course, she wouldn't have him. He was inclined
to think she wouldn't.

He ate very little supper that night, little being a comparative term, of course. And then he went to discover
Delight. It appeared, however, that she had been already discovered. She was entirely surrounded by uniforms, and
Graham furiously counted a colonel, two majors, and a captain.
"Pulling rank, of course!" he muttered, and retired to a corner, where he had at least the mild gratification of
seeing that even the colonel could not keep Delight from her work.
"Silly asses!" said Graham, again, and then she saw him. There was no question about her being pleased. She
was quite flushed with it, but a little uncomfortable, too, at Graham's attitude. He was oddly humble, and yet he had
a look of determination that was almost grim. She filled in a rather disquieting silence by trying to let him know,
without revealing that she had ever been anything else, how proud she was of him. Then she realized that he was not
listening, and that he was looking at her with an almost painful intensity.
"When can you get away, Delight?" he asked abruptly.
"From here?" She cast an appraising glance over the room. "Right away, I think. Why?"
"Because I want to talk to you, and I can't talk to you here."

She brought a bright colored sweater and he helped her into it, still with his mouth set and his eyes a trifle
sunken. All about there were laughing groups of men in uniform. Outside, the parade glowed faintly in the dusk, and
from the low barrack windows there came the glow of lights, the movement of young figures, voices, the thin
metallic notes of a mandolin.
"How strange it all is," Delight said. "Here we are, you and father and myself - and even Jackson. I saw him to-
day. All here, living different lives, doing different things, even thinking different thoughts. It's as though we had all
moved into a different world."

He walked on beside her, absorbed in his own thoughts, which were yet only of her.
"I didn't know you were here," he brought out finally.
"That's because you've been burying yourself. I knew you were here."
"Why didn't you send me some word?"
She stiffened somewhat in the darkness.
"I didn't think you would be greatly interested, Graham."

And again, struggling with his new humility, he was silent. It was not until they had crossed the parade ground
and were beyond the noises of the barracks that he spoke again.
"Do you mind if I talk to you, Delight? I mean, about myself? I - since you're here, we're likely to see each other
now and then, if you are willing. And I'd like to start straight."
"Do you really want to tell me?"
"No. But I've got to. That's all."

He told her. He made no case for himself. Indeed, some of it Delight understood far better than he did himself.
He said nothing against Marion; on the contrary, he blamed himself rather severely. And behind his honest, halting
sentences, Delight read his own lack of understanding. She felt infinitely older than this tall, honest-eyed boy in his
stained uniform - older and more sophisticated. But if she had understood the Marion Hayden situation, she was
totally at a loss as to Anna.

"But I don't understand!" she cried. "How could you make love to her if you didn't love her?"

"I don't know. Fellows do those things. It's just mischief - some sort of a devil in them, I suppose."

When he reached the beating and Anna's flight, however, she understood a little better.

"Of course you had to stand by her," she agreed.

"You haven't heard it all," he said quietly. "When I'm through, if you get up and leave me, I'll understand,
Delight, and I won't blame you."

He told her the rest of the story in a voice strained with anxiety. It was as though he had come to a tribunal for
judgment. He spared her nothing, the dinner at the road-house with Rudolph at the window, his visit to Anna's room,
and her subsequent disappearance.

"She told the Department of Justice people that Rudolph found her that night, and, took her home. She was a
prisoner then, poor little kid. But she overheard her father and Rudolph plotting to blow up the mill. That's where I
came in, Delight. He was crazy at me. He was a German, of course, and he might have done it anyhow. But Rudolph
told him a lot of lies about me, and - he did it. When I think about it all, and about Joey, I'm crazy."

She slipped her hand over his.

"Of course they would have done it anyhow," she said softly.

"You aren't going to get up and go away?"

"Why should I?" she asked. "I only feel, oh, Graham, how wretched you must have been."

Something in her voice made him sit up straighter. He knew now that it had always been Delight, always. Only
she had been too good for him. She had set a standard he had not hoped to reach. But now things were different. He
hadn't amounted to much in other things, but he was a soldier now. He meant to be a mighty good soldier. And when
he got his commission -

"You won't mind, then, if I come in to see you now and then?"

"Mind? Why, Graham!"

"And you don't think I'm quite hopeless, do you?"

There were tears in her eyes, but she answered bravely:

"I believe in you every minute. But then I think I always have."

"Like fun you have!" But although he laughed, it was a shaky laugh. Suddenly he stood up and shook himself.

He felt young and strong and extremely happy. There had been a bad time, but it was behind him now. Ahead there
lay high adventure, and here, beside him in the dusk, was the girl of his heart. She believed in him. Work to do and a
woman who believed in a fellow - that was life.

"Aren't you cold?" he asked, and drew the gaudy sweater tenderly around her shoulders.

CHAPTER XLV

The fact that Audrey Valentine, conspicuous member of a conspicuous social group that she was, had been
working in the machine-shop of the Spencer munitions works at the time of the explosion was in itself sufficient to
rouse the greatest interest. When a young reporter, gathering human-interest stories about the event from the pitiful
wreckage in the hospitals, happened on Clare Gould, he got a feature-story for the Sunday edition that made
Audrey's own world, reading it in bed or over its exquisite breakfast-tables, gasp with amazement.

For, following up Clare's story, he found that Audrey had done much more than run toward the telephone. She
had reached it, had found the operator gone, and had succeeded, before the roof fell in on her, in calling the fire
department and in sending in a general alarm to all the hospitals.

The reporter found the night operator who had received the message. He got a photograph of her, too, and, from
the society file, an old one of Audrey, very delicate and audacious, and not greatly resembling the young woman
who lay in her bed and read the article aloud, between dismay and laughter, to old Terry Mackenzie.

"Good heavens, Terry," she said. "Listen! I had heard the explosion, but did not of course know what it was.
And then I got a signal, and it was the Spencer plant. A sweet Southern voice said, very calmly, "Operator, this is
important. Listen carefully. There has been an explosion at the Spencer plant and the ruins are on fire. There will
probably be more explosions in a minute. Send in a general fire-alarm, and then get all the ambulances and doctors -"

Then there was another explosion, and their lines went out of commission. I am glad she is not dead. She certainly
had her nerve."

"Fame at last, Audrey!" said old Terry, very gently.

"It's shameless!" But she was a little pleased, nevertheless. Not at the publicity. That was familiar enough. But
that, when her big moment came, she had met it squarely.

Terry was striding about the room. His visits were always rather cyclonic. He moved from chair to chair, leaving
about each one an encircling ring of cigaret ashes, and carefully inspecting each new vase of flowers. He stopped in front of a basket of exquisite small orchids.

"Who sent this?" he demanded.
"Rodney Page. Doesn't it look like him?"
He turned and stared at her.
"What's come over Clayton Spencer? Is he blind?"
"Blind?"
"About Rodney. He's head over heels in love with Natalie Spencer, God alone knows why."
"I daresay it isn't serious. He is always in love with somebody."
"There's a good bit of talk. I don't give a hang for either of them, but I'm fond of Clayton. So are you. Natalie's out in the country now, and Rodney is there every week-end. It's a scandal, that's all. As for Natalie herself, she ought to be interned as a dangerous pacifist. She's a martyr, in her own eyes. Thank heaven there aren't many like her."

Audrey leaned back against her pillows.
"I wonder, Terry," she said, "if you haven't shown me what to do next. I might be able to reach some of the women like Natalie. There are some of them, and they've got to learn that if they don't stand behind the men, we're lost."
"Fine!" he agreed. "Get 'em to knit less and write more letters, cheerful letters. Tell 'em to remember that by the time their man gets the letter the baby's tooth will be through. There are a good many men in the army-camps to-day vicariously cutting teeth. Get after 'em, Audrey! A worried man is a poor soldier."

After he had gone, she had the nurse bring her paper and pencil, and she wrote, rather incoherently, it is true, her first appeal to the women of the country. It was effective, too. Audrey was an effective person. When Clayton came for his daily visit she had just finished it, and was reading it over with considerable complacency.

"I've become an author, Clay," she said, "I think myself I'm terribly good at it. May I read it to you?"
He listened gravely, but with a little flicker of amusement in his eyes. How like her it was, to refuse to allow herself even time to get entirely well! But when she finished he was thoughtful. She had called it "Slacker Women." That was what Natalie was; he had never put it into words before. Natalie was a slacker.

He had never discussed Natalie's attitude toward the war with Audrey. He rather thought she was entirely ignorant of it. But her little article, glowing with patriotism, frank, simple, and convincing, might have been written to Natalie herself.

"It is very fine," he said. "I rather think you have found yourself at last. There aren't a lot of such women and I daresay they will be fewer all the time. But they exist, of course."

She glowed under his approval.

There was, in all their meetings, a sub-current of sadness, that they must be so brief, that before long they must end altogether, that they could not put into words the things that were in their eyes and their hearts. After that first hour of her return to consciousness there had been no expressed tenderness between them. The nurse sat in the room, eternally knitting, and Clayton sat near Audrey, or read to her, or, like Terry, wandered about the room. But now and then Audrey, enthroned, like a princess on her pillows, would find his eyes on her, and such a hungry look in them that she would clench her hands. And after such times she always said: "Now, tell me about the mill." Or about Washington, where he was being summoned with increasing frequency. Or about Graham. Anything to take that look out of his eyes. He told her all his plans; he even brought the blue-prints of the new plant and spread them out on the bed. He was dreaming a great dream those days, and Audrey knew it. He was building again, this time not for himself, but for the nation.

After he had gone, looking boyish and reluctant, she would lie for a little while watching the door. Perhaps he had forgotten something, and would come back! One day he did, and was surprised to find her suddenly in tears.
"You came back!" she said half hysterically. "You came back."
That was the only time in all those weeks that he kissed her. The nurse had gone out, and suddenly he caught her in his arms and held her to him. He put her back very gently, and she saw that he was pale.
"I think I'd better go now, and not come back," he said.

And for two long and endless days he did not come. Then on the third he came, very stiff and formal, and with himself well in hand. Audrey, leaning back and watching him, felt what a boy he was after all, so determined to do the right thing, so obvious with his blue-prints, and so self-conscious.

In June she left the hospital and went to the country. She had already made a little market for her work, and she wanted to carry it on. By that time, too, she knew that the break must come between Clayton and herself if it came at all.

"No letters, no anything, Clay," she said, and he acquiesced quietly. But the night she left, the butler, coming
downstairs to investigate a suspicious sound, found him restlessly pacing the library floor.

In August he went abroad, and some time about the middle of the month while he was in London, he received a cable from Graham. He had been commissioned a first lieutenant in the infantry. Clayton had been seeing war at first hand then, and for a few moments he was fairly terrified. On that first of August the Germans had used liquid fire for the first time, thus adding a new horror. Men in the trenches swept by it had been practically annihilated. Attacks against it were practically suicide. Already the year had seen the last of Kitchener's army practically destroyed, and the British combing the country for new divisions.

In the deadly give and take of that summer, where gains and losses were measured by yards, the advantage was steadily on the German side, and it would be a year before the small force of American regulars could be augmented to any degree by the great new army. It was the darkest hour.

Following on the heels of Graham's cable came a hysterical one from Natalie.

"Graham probably ordered abroad. Implore you use influence with Washington."

He resorted to his old remedy when he was in trouble. He walked the streets. He tried to allow for Natalie's lack of exaltation by the nature of her life. If she could have seen what he had seen, surely she would have felt, as he did, that no sacrifice could be too great to end this cancer of the world. But deep in his heart he knew that Natalie was - Natalie. Nothing would change her.

As it happened, he passed Graham on the Atlantic. There was a letter for him at the office, a boyish, exultant letter:

"Dad dear, I'm married!" it began. "Married and off for France. It is Delight, of course. It always was Delight, altho I know that sounds queer. And now I'm off to kill a Hun or two. More than that, I hope. I want two Germans for every poor devil they got at the works. That's the minimum. The maximum - !

"You'll look after Delight, I know. She has been perfectly bully, but it's hard on her. We were married two days ago, and already I feel as though I've always been married. She's going on with the canteen work, and I shall try not to be jealous. She's popular! And if you'd seen the General when we were married you'd have thought he was losing a daughter.

"I wired Mother, but she was too cut up about my leaving to come. I wish she had, for it was a strange sort of wedding. The division was about to move, and at the last minute five girls turned up to be married to fellows who were leaving. They came from all over, and believe me there was some excitement. All day the General and Chaplain Haverford were fussing about licenses, and those girls sat around and waited, and looked droopy but sort of happy - you know what I mean.

"It was nine o'clock in the evening before everything was ready. Delight had trimmed up the little church which is in the camp and had a flag over the altar. Then we had a multiple wedding. Honestly! The organ played a squeaky wedding march, and we went in, six couples. The church was full of soldiers, and - I don't mind saying I was ready to shed tears.

"We lined up, and Doctor Haverford married us. Delight says she is sure we are only one-sixth married. Quiet! You never heard such quiet - except for the General blowing his nose. I think myself he was weeping, and there was a rumor about the camp to that effect. You know - the flag over the altar, and all that. I tell you it made a fellow think.

"Well, I'm going over now. Quick work, isn't it? And to think that a few months ago I was hanging around the club and generally making a mess of life. That's all over now, thank God. I'm going to make good. Try to buck mother up. It's pretty hard for her. It's hard for all women, just waiting. And while I know I'm coming back, safe and sound, I'd like to feel that you are going to keep an eye on Delight. She's the most important thing in the world to me now."

Then scrawled in a corner he had added,

"You've been mighty fine with me always, dad. I was a good bit of a pup last winter. If I make anything of myself at all, it will be because I want to be like you."

Clayton sat for a long time with the letter in his hand. The happiness and hope that fairly radiated from it cheered and warmed him. He was nearly happy. And it came to him then that, while every man had the right to happiness, only those achieved it who craved it for others, and having craved it for them, at last saw the realization of their longing.

CHAPTER XLVI

Natalie had had a dull Spring. With Graham's departure for camp she moved to the country house, carrying with her vast amounts of luggage, the innumerable thing, large and small, which were necessary for her comfort. The installing of herself in her new and luxurious rooms gave her occupation for several days. She liked her new environment. She liked herself in it. The rose-colored taffetas of her bedroom brought out the delicacy of her skin. The hangings of her bed, small and draped, reflected a faint color into her face, and the morning inspection with a
hand-mirror, which always followed her coffee, showed her at her best instead of her worst.

Of her dressing-room she was not so sure. It's ivory-paneled walls, behind whose sliding panels were hung her gowns, her silk and satín chiffon negligees, her wraps and summer furs - all the vast paraphernalia with which she armed herself, as a knight with armor - the walls seemed cold. She hated old-blue, but old-blue Rodney had insisted upon.

He had held a bit of the taffeta to her cheek.
"It is delicious, Natalie," he said. "It makes your eyes as blue as the sea."
"Always a decorator!" she had replied, smiling.

And, standing in her blue room, the first day of her arrival, and frowning at her reflection, she remembered his reply.
"Because I have no right, with you, to be anything else." He had stopped for a moment, and had absently folded and refolded the bit of blue silk. Suddenly he said, "What do you think I am going to do, now that our work together is done? Have you ever thought about that, Natalie?"
"You are coming often to enjoy your handiwork?"

He had made an impulsive gesture.
"I'm not coming. I've been seeing too much of you as it is. If you want the truth, I'm just wretchedly unhappy, Natalie. You know I'm in love with you, don't you?"
"I believe you think you are."
"Don't laugh." He almost snarled. "I may laugh at my idiocy, but you haven't any right to. I know I'm ridiculous. I've known it for months. But it's pretty serious for me."

He had meant it. There could be no doubt of that. It is the curious quality of very selfish women that they inspire a certain sort of love. They are likely to be loved often, even tho the devotion they inspire is neither deep nor lasting. Big and single-hearted women are loved by one man, and that forever.

Natalie had not laughed, but she had done what was almost as bad. She had patted him on the arm.
"Don't talk like that," she said, gently. "You are all I have now, Rodney, and I don't want to lose you. I'm suffering horribly these days. You're my greatest comfort."
"I've heard you say that of a chair."
"As for loving me, you must not talk like that. Under the circumstances, it's indelicate."
"Oh!" he had said, and looked at her quickly. "I can love you, but it's indelicate to tell you about it!"
"I am married, Rodney."
"Good God, do you think I ever forget it?"

There was a real change in their relationship, but neither of them understood it. The change was that Rodney was no longer playing. Little by little he had dropped his artistic posing for her benefit, his cynical cleverness, his adroit simulation of passion. He no longer dramatized himself, because rather often he forgot himself entirely. His passion had ceased to be spurious, and it was none the less real because he loved not a real woman, but one of his own artistic creation.

He saw in Natalie a misunderstood and suffering woman, bearing the burdens he knew of with dignity and a certain beauty. And behind her slightly theatrical silences he guessed at other griefs, nobly borne and only gently intimated. He developed, after a time, a certain suspicion of Clayton, not of his conduct but of his character. These big men were often hard. It was that quality which made them successful. They married tender, gentle girls, and then repressed and trampled on them.

Natalie became, in his mind, a crushed and broken thing, infinitely lonely and pathetic. And, without in the least understanding, Natalie instinctively knew it was when she was wistful and dependent that he found her most attractive, and became wistful and dependent to a point that imposed even on herself.

"I've been very selfish with you, Rodney, dear," she said, lifting sad eyes to his. "I am going to be better. You must come often this summer, and I'll have some nice girls for you to play with."
"Thank you," he said, stiffly.
"We'll have to be as gay as we can," she sighed. "I'm just a little dreary these days, you know."

It was rather absurd that they were in a shop, and that the clerk should return just then with curtain cords, and that the discussion of certain shades of yellow made an anti-climax to it all. But in the car, later, he turned to her, roughly.
"You needn't ask any girls for me," he said. "I only want one woman, and if I can't have her I don't want any one."

At first the very fact that he could not have her had been, unconsciously, the secret of her attraction. She was a perfect thing, and unattainable. He could sigh for her with longing and perfect safety. But as time went on, with that incapacity of any human emotion to stand still, but either to go on or to go back, his passion took on a more human
and less poetic aspect. She satisfied him less, and he wanted more.

For one thing, he dreamed that strange dream of mankind, of making ice burn, of turning snow to fire. The old chimera of turning the cold woman to warmth through his own passion began to obsess him. Sometimes he watched Natalie, and had strange fancies. He saw her lit from within by a fire, which was not the reflection of his, but was recklessly her own. How wonderful she would be, he thought. And at those times he had wild visions of going away with her into some beautiful wilderness and there teaching her what she had missed in life.

But altho now he always wanted her, he was not always thinking of a wilderness. It was in his own world that he wanted her, to fit beautifully into his house, to move, exquisitely dressed, through ball-rooms beside him. He wanted her, at those times, as the most perfect of all his treasures. He was still a collector!

The summer only served to increase his passion. During the long hot days, when Clayton was abroad or in Washington, or working late at night, as he frequently did how, they were much together. Natalie's plans for gayety had failed dismally. The city and the country houses near were entirely lacking in men. She found it a real grievance.

"I don't know what we are coming to," she complained. "The country club is like a girl's boarding-school. I wish to heaven the war was over, and things were sensible again."

So, during his week-end visits, they spent most of the time together. There were always girls there, and now and then a few men, who always explained immediately that they had been turned down for the service, or were going in the fall.

"I'm sure somebody has to stay home and attend to things here," she said to him one August night. "But even when they are in America, they are rushing about, pretending to do things. One would think to see Clayton that he is the entire government. It's absurd."

"I wish I could go," he said unexpectedly.
"Don't be idiotic. You're much too old."
"Not as old as Clay."
"Oh, Clay! He's in a class by himself." She laughed lightly.
"Where is he now?"
"In France, I think. Probably telling them how to run the war."
"When is he coming back?"
"I don't know. What do you mean by wishing you could go?"
"Do you want me to tell you the truth?"
"Not if it's disagreeable."

"Well, I will, and it's not very agreeable. I can't keep this up, Natalie. I can't keep on coming here, being in Clayton's house, and eating his bread, while I'm in love with his wife. It isn't decent."

He flung away his cigaret, and bent forward.
"Don't you see that?" he asked gently. "Not while he is working for the country, and Graham is abroad."
"I don't see why war needs to deprive me of my friends. I've lost everything else."

His morals were matters of his private life, and they had been neither better nor worse than the average. But he had breeding and a sure sense of the fitness of things, and this present week-end visit, with the ostentatious care the younger crowd took to allow him time to see Natalie alone, was galling to him. It put him in a false position; what hurt more, perhaps, in an unfavorable light. The war had changed standards, too. Men were being measured, especially by women, and those who failed to measure up were being eliminated with cruel swiftness, especially the men who stayed at home.

With all this, too, there was a growing admiration for Clayton Spencer in their small circle. His name had been mentioned in connection with an important position in Washington. In the clubs there was considerable praise and some envy. And Rodney knew that his affair with Natalie was the subject of much invidious comment.

"Do you love him?" he asked, suddenly.
"I - why, of course I do."
"Do you mean that?"
"I don't see what that has to do with our friendship."
"Oh - friendship! You know how I feel, and yet you go on, bringing up that silly word. If you love him, you don't- love me, and yet you've let me hang around all these months, knowing I am mad about you. You don't play the game, Natalie."
"What do you want to say?"
"If you don't love Clayton, why don't you tell him so? He's honest enough. And I miss my guess if he wants a wife who - cares for somebody else."

She sat in the dusk, thinking, and he watched her. She looked very lovely in the setting which he himself had designed for her. She hated change; she loathed trouble, of any sort. And she was, those days, just a little afraid of
that strange, quiet Clayton who seemed eternally engrossed in war and the things of war. She glanced about, at the white trellises that gleamed in the garden, at the silvery fleur de lis which was the fountain, at all the lovely things with which Clayton's wealth had allowed her to surround herself. And suddenly she knew she could not give them up.

"I don't see why you have to spoil everything," she said fretfully. "It had been so perfect. Of course I'm not going to say anything to Clay. He has enough to worry him now," she added, virtuously.

Suddenly Rodney stooped and kissed her, almost savagely.

"Then I'm going," he said. And to her great surprise he went.

Alone in his room up-stairs Rodney had, in his anger, a glimpse of insight. He saw her, her life filled with small emotions, lacking the courage for big ones. He saw her, like a child, clutching one piece of cake and holding out a hand for another. He saw her, taking always, giving never.

"She's not worth it," he muttered.

On the way to the station he reflected bitterly over the past year. He did not blame her so much as he blamed himself. He had been playing a game, an attractive game. During the first months of it his interest in Natalie had been subordinate to his interest in her house. He had been creating a beautiful thing, and he had had a very real joy in it. But lately he knew that his work on the house had been that he might build a background for Natalie. He had put into it the best of his ability, and she was not worth it.

For some days he neither wrote nor called her up. He was not happy, but he had a sense of relief. He held his head a trifle higher, was his own man again, and he began to make tentative inquiries as to whether he could be useful in the national emergency or not. He had been playing a game, and he had found out something. The mere fact that he wanted to work in some capacity brought back some of his old friends. They had seemed to drop away, before, but they came back heartily and with hands out.

"Work?" said Terry Mackenzie, at the club one day, looking up from the billiard table, where he was knocking balls about, rather at haphazard. "Why, of course you can work. What about these new cantonments we're building all over the country? You ought to be useful there. They don't want 'em pretty, tho." And Terry had laughed. But he put down his cue and took Rodney by the arm.

"Let's ask Nolan about it," he said. "He's in the reading-room, tearing the British strategy to pieces. He knows everything these days, from the draft law to the month's shipping losses. Come along."

It was from Nolan, however, that Rodney first realized how seriously Clayton's friends were taking his affair with Natalie, and that not at first from anything he said. It was an indefinable aloofness of manner, a hostility of tone. Nolan never troubled himself to be agreeable unless it suited his inclination, and apparently Terry found nothing unusual in his attitude. But Rodney did.

"Something he could build?" said Nolan, repeating Terry's question. "How do I know? There's a lot of building going on, Page, but it's not exactly your sort." And there was a faint note of contempt in his voice.

"Who would be the man to see in Washington?" Rodney inquired.

"I'll look it up and let you know. You might call me up to-morrow."

Old Terry, having got them together, went back to his billiards and left them. Nolan sat down and picked up his paper, with an air of ending the interview. But he put it down again as Rodney turned to leave the room.

"Page!"

"Yes?"

"D'you mind having a few minutes talk?"

Rodney braced himself.

"Not at all."

But Nolan was slow to begin. He sat, newspaper on his knee, his deep-set eyes thoughtful. When he began it was slowly.

"I am one of Clay Spencer's oldest friends," he said. "He's a white man, the whitest man I know. Naturally, anything that touches him touches me, in a way."

"Well?"

"The name stands for a good bit, too. His father and his grandfather were the same sort. It's not often in this town that we have three generations without a breath of scandal against them."

Rodney flushed angrily.

"What has that got to do with me?" he demanded.

"I don't know. I don't want to know. I simply wanted to tell you that there are a good many of us who take a peculiar pride in Clayton Spencer, and who resent anything that reflects on a name we respect rather highly."

"That sounds like a threat."

"Not at all. I was merely calling your attention to something I thought perhaps you had forgotten." Then he got
up' and his tone changed, became brisk, almost friendly. "Now, about this building thing. If you're in earnest I think it can be managed. You won't get any money to speak of, you know."

"I don't want any money," sullenly.

"Fine. You'll probably have to go west somewhere, and you'll be set down in the center of a hundred corn-fields and told to make them overnight into a temporary town. I suppose you've thought of all that?"

"I'll go wherever I'm sent."

"Come along to the telephone, then."

Rodney hesitated. He felt cheap and despicable, and his anger was still hot. They wanted to get him out of town. He saw that. They took little enough trouble to hide it. Well, he would go. He wanted to go anyhow, and he would show them something, too, if he got a chance. He would show them that he was as much a man as Clayton Spencer. He eyed Nolan's insolently slouching figure with furious eyes. But he followed him.

Hadh e secured an immediate appointment things might have been different for him. Like Chris Valentine, he had had one decent impulse, and like Chris too, there was a woman behind it. But Chris had been able to act on his impulse at once, and Rodney was compelled to wait while the mills of the government ground slowly.

Then, on the fourteenth of August, Natalie telegraphed him:

"Have had bad news about Graham. Can you come?"

He thought of Graham ill, possibly dead, and he took the next train, late in the evening. It was mid-week and Natalie was alone. He had thought of that possibility in the train and he was miserably uncomfortable, with all his joy at the prospect of seeing her again. He felt that the emergency must be his justification. Clayton was still abroad, and even his most captious critics would admit that Natalie should have a friend by if she were in trouble. Visions of Graham wounded filled his mind. He was anxious, restless and in a state of the highest nervous tension.

And there was no real emergency.

He found Natalie in the drawing-room, pacing the floor. She was still in her morning dress, and her eyes were red and swollen. She gave him both her hands, and he was surprised to find them cold as ice.

"I knew you would come," she said. "I am so alone, so terrified."

He could hardly articulate.

"What is it?"

"Graham has been ordered abroad."

He stood still, staring at her, and then he dropped her hands.

"Is that all?" he asked, dully.

"No."

"Good heavens, Natalie! Tell me. I've been frantic with anxiety about you."

"He was married to-night to Delight Haverford."

And still he stared at her.

"Then he's not hurt, or ill?"

"I didn't say he was. Good gracious, Rodney, isn't that bad enough?"

"But - what did you expect? He would have to go abroad some time. You knew that. I'm sorry, but - why in God's name didn't you say in your wire what the trouble was?"

"You sound exactly like Clay."

She was entirely incapable of understanding. She stood before him, straight and resentful, and yet strangely wistful and appealing.

"I send you word that my only son is going to France, that he has married without so much as consulting me, that he is going to war and may never come back. I needed you, and you said once that when I needed you, wherever you were, you would come. So I sent for you, and now you act like - like Clay."

"Have you any one here?"

"The servants. Good gracious, Rodney, are you worrying about that?"

"Only for you, Natalie."

"We resent anything that reflects on a name we respect rather highly." That was what Nolan had said.

"I'm sorry about Graham, dearest. I am sorry about any trouble that comes to you. You know that, Natalie. I'm only regretful that you have let me place you in an uncomfortable position. If my being here is known - Look here, Natalie, dear, I hate to bother you, but I'll have to take one of the cars and go back to the city to-night."

"Aren't you being rather absurd?"

He hesitated. He could not tell her of that awkward talk with Nolan. There were many things he would not tell her; his own desire to rehabilitate himself among the men he knew, his own new-born feeling that to take advantage of Clayton's absence on business connected with the war was peculiarly indefensible.

"I shall order the car at once," she said, and touched a bell. When she turned he was just behind her, but altho he
held out his arms she evaded them, her eyes hard and angry.

"I wish you would try to understand," he said.

"I do, very thoroughly. Too thoroughly. You are afraid for yourself, not for me. I am in trouble, but that is a secondary consideration. Don't bother about me, Rodney. I have borne a great deal alone in my life, and I can bear this."

She turned, and went with considerable dignity out of the door.

"Natalie!" he called. But he heard her with a gentle rustle of silks going up the staircase. It did not add to his comfort that she had left him to order the car.

All through the night Rodney rode and thought. He was angry at Natalie, but he was angrier at himself. He felt that he had been brutal, unnecessarily callous. After all, her only son was on his way to war. It was on the cards that he might not come back. And he had let his uneasiness dominate his sympathy. He had lost her, but then he had never had her. He never could have her.

Half way to town, on a back road, the car broke down, and after vainly endeavoring to start it the chauffeur set off on foot to secure help. Rodney slept, uncomfortably, and wakened with the movement of the machine to find it broad day. That was awkward, for Natalie's car was conspicuous, marked too with her initials. He asked to be set down at a suburban railway station, and was dismayed to find it crowded with early commuters, who stared at the big car with interest. On the platform, eyeing him with unfriendly eyes, was Nolan. Rodney made a movement toward him. The situation was intolerable, absurd. But Nolan turned his back and proceeded to read his newspaper.

Perhaps not in years had Rodney Page faced the truth about himself so clearly as he did that morning, riding into the city on the train which carried, somewhere ahead, that quietly contemptuous figure that was Denis Nolan. Faced the truth, saw himself for what he was, and loathed the thing he saw. For a little time, too, it was given to him to see Natalie for what she was, for what she would always be, her sole contribution to life the web of her selfishness, carefully woven, floating apparently aimlessly, and yet snaring and holding relentlessly whatever it touched. Killing freedom. He saw Clayton and Graham and himself, feeders for her monstrous complacency and vanity, and he made a definite determination to free himself.

"I'm through," he reflected savagely. "I'll show them something, too. I'll - "

He hesitated. How lovely she was! And she cared for him. She was small and selfish and unspeakably vain, but she cared for him.

The war had done something for Rodney Page. He no longer dreamed the old dream, of turning her ice to fire. But he dreamed, for a moment, something finer. He saw Natalie his, and growing big and fine through love. He saw himself and Natalie, like cards in the game of life, re-dealt. A new combination; a winning hand -

CHAPTER XLVII

Very quietly Audrey had taken herself out of Clayton's life. She sent him a little note of farewell:

"We have had ten very wonderful months, Clay," she wrote. "We ought to be very happy. So few have as much. And we both know that this can't go on. I am going abroad. I have an opportunity to go over and see what Englishwomen are doing in the way of standing behind their men at war. Then I am to tell our women at home. Not that they need it now, bless them!

"I believe you will be glad to know that I am to be on the same side of the ocean with Graham. I could get to him, I think, if anything should go wrong. Will you send him the enclosed address?

"But, my dear, the address is for him, not for you. You must not write to me. I have used up every particle of moral courage I possess, as it is. And I am holding this in my mind, as you must. Time is a great healer of all wounds. We could have been happy together; oh, my dear, so very happy together! Now that I am going, let me be frank for once. I have given you the finest thing I am capable of. I am better for caring for you as I have, as I do.

"But those days in the hospital told me we couldn't go on. Things like that don't stand still. Maybe - we are only human, Clay - maybe if the old days were still here we might have compromised with life. I don't know. But I do know that we never will, now.

"After all, we have had a great deal, and we still have. It is a wonderful thing to know that somewhere in the world is some one person who loves you. To waken up in the morning to it. To go to sleep remembering it. And to have kept that love fine and clean is a wonderful thing, too.

"I am not always on a pinnacle. There have been plenty of times when the mere human want of you has sent me to the dust. Is it wrong to tell you that? But of course not. You know it. But you and I know this; Clay, dear. Love that is hopeless, that can not end in marriage, does one of two things. Either it degrades or it exalts. It leaves its mark, always, but that mark does not need to be a stain."

Clayton lived, for a time after that, in a world very empty and very full. The new plant was well under way. Not only was he about to make shells for the government at a nominal profit, but Washington was asking him to assume new and wide responsibilities. He accepted. He wanted so to fill the hours that there would be no time to remember.
But, more than that, he was actuated by a fine and glowing desire to serve. Perhaps, underlying it all was the
determination to be, in every way, the man Audrey thought him to be. And there was, too, a square-jawed resolution
to put behind Graham, and other boys like Graham, all the shells and ammunition they needed.

He worked hard; more than hard. Old Terry, meeting him one day in the winter that followed, was shocked at his
haggard face.

"Better take a little time off, Clay," he suggested. "We're going to Miami next week. How about ten days or so?
Fishing is good this year."

"Can't very well take a holiday just now. Too much to do, Terry."

Old Terry went home and told his wife.

"Looks like the devil," he said. "He'll go down sick one of these days. I suppose it's no use telling Natalie."

"None whatever," said Mrs. Terry. "And, anyhow, it's a thing I shouldn't care to tell Natalie."

"What do you mean, not care to tell Natalie?"

"Hard work doesn't make a man forget how to smile."

"Oh, come now. He's cheerful enough. If you mean because Graham's fighting?"

"That's only part of it," said Mrs. Terry, sagely, and relapsed into one of the poignant silences that drove old
Terry to a perfect frenzy of curiosity.

Then, in January of 1918, a crisis came to Clayton and Natalie Spencer. Graham was wounded.

Clayton was at home when the news came. Natalie had been having one of her ill-assorted, meticulously
elaborate dinner-parties, and when the guests had gone they were for a moment alone in the drawing-room of their
town house. Clayton was fighting in himself the sense of irritation Natalie's dinners always left, especially the recent
ones. She was serving, he knew, too much food. In the midst of the agitation on conservation, her dinners ran their
customary seven courses. There was too much wine, too. But it occurred to him that only the wine had made the
dinner endurable.

Then he tried to force himself into better humor. Natalie was as she was, and if, in an unhappy, struggling, dying
world she found happiness in display, God knew there was little enough happiness. He was not at home very often.
He could not spoil her almost childish content in the small things that made up her life.

"I think it was very successful," she said, surveying herself in one of the corner mirrors. "Do you like my gown,
Clay?"

"It's very lovely."

"It's new. I've been getting some clothes, Clay. You'll probably shriek at the bills. But all this talk about not
buying clothes is nonsense, you know. The girls who work in the shops have to live."

"Naturally. Of course there is other work open to them now."

"In munition plants, I daresay. To be blown up!"

He winced. The thought of that night the year before, when the plant went, still turned him sick.

"Don't buy too many things, my dear," he said, gently. "You know how things are."

"I know it's your fault that they are as they are," she persisted. "Oh, I know it was noble of you, and all that. The
country's crazy about you. But still I think it was silly. Every one else is making money out of things, and you - a lot
of thanks you'll get, when the war's over."

"I don't particularly want thanks."

Then the door-bell rang in the back of the house, and Buckham answered it. He was conscious at once that
Natalie stiffened, and that she was watchful and a trifle pale. Buckham brought in a telegram on a tray.

"Give it to me, Buckham," Natalie said, in a strained voice. And held out her hand for it. When she saw it was
for Clayton, however, she relaxed. As he tore it open, Clayton was thinking. Evidently Natalie had been afraid of his
seeing some message for her. Was it possible that Natalie - He opened it. After what seemed a long time he looked
up. Her eyes were on him.

"Don't be alarmed, my dear," he said. "It is not very bad. But Graham has been slightly wounded. Sit down," he
said sharply, as he saw her sway.

"You are lying to me," she said in a dreadful voice. "He's dead!"

"He is not dead, Natalie." He tried to put her into a chair, but she resisted him fiercely.

"Let me alone. I want to see that telegram."

And, very reluctantly, at last he gave it to her. Graham was severely wounded. It was from a man in his own
department at Washington who had just seen the official list. The nature of his wounding had not been stated.

Natalie looked up from the telegram with a face like a painted mask.

"This is your doing," she said. "You wanted him to go. You sent him into this. He will die, and you will have
murdered him."

The thought came to him, in that hour of stress, that she was right. Pitifully, dammably right. He had not wanted
Graham to go, but he had wanted him to want to go. A thousand thoughts flashed through his mind, of Delight, sleeping somewhere quietly after her day's work at the camp; of Graham himself, of that morning after the explosion, and his frank, pitiful confession. And again of Graham, suffering, perhaps dying, and with none of his own about him. And through it all was the feeling that he must try to bring Natalie to reason, that it was incredible that she should call him his own son's murderer.

"We must not think of his dying," he said. "We must only think that he is going to live, and to come back to us, Natalie dear."

She flung off the arm he put around her.

"And that," he went on, feeling for words out of the dreadful confusion in his mind, "if - the worst comes, that he has done a magnificent thing. There is no greater thing, Natalie."

"That won't bring him back to us," she said, still in that frozen voice. And suddenly she burst into hard, terrible crying.

All that night he sat outside her door, for she would not allow him to come in. He had had Washington on the telephone, but when at last he got the connection it was to learn that no further details were known. Toward dawn there came the official telegram from the War Department, but it told nothing more.

Natalie was hysterical. He had sent for a doctor, and with Madeleine in attendance the medical man had worked over her for hours. Going out, toward morning, he had found Clayton in the hall and had looked at him sharply.

"Better go to bed, Mr. Spencer," he advised. "It may not be as bad as you think. And they're doing fine surgery over there."

And, as Clayton shook his head:

"Mrs. Spencer will come round all right. She's hysterical, naturally. She'll be sending for you before long."

With the dawn, Clayton's thoughts cleared. If he and Natalie were ever to get together at all, it should be now, with this common grief between them. Perhaps, after all, it was not too late to re-build his house of life. He had failed. Perhaps they had both failed, but the real responsibility was his. Inside the room he could hear her moaning, a low, monotonous, heart-breaking moan. He was terribly sorry for her. She had no exaltation to help her, no strength of soul, no strength of any sort. And, as men will under stress, he tried to make a bargain with his God.

"Let him live," he prayed. "Bring him back to us, and I will try again. I'll do better. I've been a rotten failure, as far as she is concerned. But I'll try."

He felt somewhat better after that, altho he felt a certain ignominy, too, that always, until such a time, he had gone on his own, as it were, and that now, when he no longer sufficed for himself, he should beseech the Almighty.

Natalie had had a sleeping-powder, and at last he heard her moaning cease and the stealthy movements of her maid as she lowered the window shades. It was dawn.

During the next two days Clayton worked as he never had worked before, still perhaps with that unspoken pact in mind. Worked too, to forget. He had sent several cables, but no reply came until the third day. He did not sleep at night. He did not even go to bed. He sat in the low chair in his dressing-room, dozing occasionally, to waken with a start at some sound in the hall. Now and again, as the trained nurse who was watching Natalie at night moved about the hallways, he would sit up, expecting a summons that did not come.

She still refused to see him. It depressed and frightened him, for how could he fulfill his part of the compact when she so sullenly shut him out of her life?

He was singularly simple in his fundamental beliefs. There was a Great Power somewhere, call it what one might, and it dealt out justice or mercy as one deserved it. On that, of course, had been built an elaborate edifice of creed and dogma, but curiously enough it all fell away now. He was, in those night hours, again the boy who had prayed for fair weather for circus day and had promised in return to read his Bible through during the next year. And had done it.

In the daytime, however, he was a man, suffering terribly, and facing the complexities of his life alone. One thing he knew. This was decisive. Either, under the stress of a common trouble, he and Natalie would come together, to make the best they could of the years to come, or they would be hopelessly alienated.

But that was secondary to Graham. Everything was secondary to Graham, indeed. He had cabled Audrey, and he drew a long breath when, on the third day, a cable came from her. She had located Graham at last. He had been shot in the chest, and there were pneumonia symptoms.

"Shall stay with him," she ended, "and shall send daily reports."

Next to his God, he put his faith in Audrey. Almost he prayed to her.

Dunbar, now a captain in the Military Intelligence Bureau, visiting him in his office one day, found Clayton's face an interesting study. Old lines of repression, new ones of anxiety, marked him deeply.

"The boy, of course," he thought. And then reflected that it takes time to carve such lines as were written in the face of the man across the desk from him. Time and a woman, he considered shrewdly. His mind harked back to that
dinner in the Spencer house when diplomatic relations had been broken off with Germany, and war seemed imminent. It was the wife, probably. He remembered that she had been opposed to war, and to the boy's going. There were such women in the country. There were fewer of them all the time, but they existed, women who saw in war only sacrifice. Women who counted no cost too high for peace. If they only hurt themselves it did not matter, but they could and did do incredible damage.

Clayton was going through some papers he had brought, and Dunbar had time to consider what to him was an interesting problem. Mrs. Spencer had kept the boy from immediate enlistment. He had wanted to go; Dunbar knew that. If she had allowed him to go the affair with Anna Klein would have been ended. He knew all that story now. Then, if there had been no affair, Herman would not have blown up the munition works and a good many lives, valuable to themselves at least, might have been saved.

"Curious!" he reflected. "One woman! And she probably sleeps well at nights and goes to church on Sundays!"

Clayton passed back his papers, and ran a hand over his heavy hair.

"They seem to be all right," he said.

Dunbar rose.

"Hope the next news will be better, Mr. Spencer."

"I hope so."

"I haven't told you, I think, that we have traced Rudolph Klein."

Clayton's face set.

"He's got away, unfortunately. Over the border into Mexico. They have a regular system there, the Germans - an underground railway to Mexico City. They have a paymaster on our side of the line. They even bank in one of our banks! Oh, we'll get them yet, of course, but they're damnably clever."

"I suppose there is no hope of getting Rudolph Klein?"

"Not while the Germans are running Mexico," Captain Dunbar replied, dryly. "He's living in a Mexican town just over the border. We're watching him. If he puts a foot on this side we'll grab him."

Clayton sat back after he had gone. He was in his old office at the mill, where Joey had once formed his unofficial partnership with the firm. Outside in the mill yard there was greater activity than ever, but many of the faces were new. The engineer who had once run the yard engine was building bridges in France. Hutchinson had heard the call, and was learning to fly in Florida, The service flag over his office door showed hundreds of stars, and more were being added constantly. Joey dead. Graham wounded, his family life on the verge of disruption, and Audrey -

Then, out of the chaos there came an exaltation. He had given himself, his son, the wealth he had hoped to have, but, thank God, he had had something to give. There were men who could give nothing, like old Terry Mackenzie, knocking billiard-balls around at the club, and profanely wistful that he had had no son to go. His mind ranged over those pathetic, prosperous, sonless men who filed into the club late in the afternoons, and over the last editions and whisky-and-sodas fought their futile warfare, their battle-ground a newspaper map, their upraised voices their only weapons.

On parade days, when the long lines of boys in khaki went by, they were silent, heavy, inutile. They were too old to fight. The biggest thing in their lives was passing them by, as passed the lines of marching boys, and they had no part in it. They were feeding their hungry spirits on the dregs of war, on committee meetings and public gatherings, and they were being useful. But the great exaltation of offering their best was not for them.

He was living a tragedy, but a greater tragedy was that of the childless. And back of that again was the woman who had not wanted children. There were many men to-day who were feeling the selfishness of a woman at home, men who had lost, somehow, their pride, their feeling of being a part of great things. Men who went home at night to comfortable dwellings, with no vacant chair at the table, and dined in a peace they had not earned.

Natalie had at least given him a son.

He took that thought home with him in the evening. He stopped at a florist's and bought a great box of flowers for her, and sent them into her room with a little note,

"Won't you let me come in and try to comfort you?"

But Madeleine brought the box out again, and there was pity in her eyes.

"Mrs. Spencer can not have them in the room, sir. She says the odor of flowers makes her ill."

He knew Madeleine had invented the excuse, that Natalie had simply rejected his offering. He went down-stairs, and made a pretense of dining alone in the great room.

It was there that Audrey's daily cable found him. Buckham brought it in in shaking fingers, and stood by, white and still, while he opened it.

Clayton stood up. He was very white, but his voice was full and strong.

"He is better, Buckham! Better!"
Suddenly Buckham was crying. His austere face was distorted, his lean body trembling. Clayton put his arm around the bowed old shoulders.

And in that moment, as they stood there, master and man, Clayton Spencer had a flash of revelation. There was love and love. The love of a man for a woman, and of a woman for a man, of a mother for the child at her knee, of that child for its mother. But that the great actuating motive of a man's maturity, of the middle span, was vested along with his dreams, his pride and his love, in his son, his man-child.

Buckham, carrying his coffee into the library somewhat later, found him with his head down on his desk, and the cablegram clutched in his outstretched hands. He tip-toed out, very quietly.

CHAPTER XLVIII

Clayton's first impulse was to take the cable to Natalie, to brush aside the absurd defenses she had erected, and behind which she cowered, terrified but obstinate. To say to her,

"He is living. He is going to live. But this war is not over yet. If we want him to come through, we must stand together. We must deserve to have him come back to us."

But by the time he reached the top of the stairs he knew he could not do it. She would not understand. She would think he was using Graham to further a reconciliation; and, after her first joy was over, he knew that he would see again that cynical smile that always implied that he was dramatizing himself.

Nothing could dim his strong inner joy, but something of its outer glow faded. He would go to her, later. Not now. Nothing must spoil this great thankfulness of his.

He gave Madeleine the cable, and went down again to the library.

After a time he began to go over the events of the past eighteen months. His return from the continent, and that curious sense of unrest that had followed it, the opening of his eyes to the futility of his life. His failure to Natalie and her failure to him. Graham, made a man by war and by the love of a good woman. Chris, ending his sordid life in a blaze of glory, and forever forgiven his tawdry sins because of his one big hour.

War took, but it gave also. It had taken Joey, for instance, but Joey had had his great moment. It was better to have one great moment and die than to drag on through useless years. And it was the same way with a nation. A nation needed its hour. It was only in a crisis that it could know its own strength. How many of them, who had been at that dinner of Natalie's months before, had met their crisis bravely! Nolan was in France now. Doctor Haverford was at the front. Audrey was nursing Graham. Marion Hayden was in a hospital training-school. Rodney Page was still building wooden barracks in a cantonment in Indiana, and was making good. He himself -

They could never go back, none of them, to the old smug, complacent, luxurious days. They could no more go back than Joey could return to life again. War was the irrevocable step, as final as death itself. And he remembered something Nolan had said, just before he sailed.

"We have had one advantage, Clay. Or maybe it is not an advantage, after all. Do you realize that you and I have lived through the Golden Age? We have seen it come and seen it go. The greatest height of civilization, since the world began, the greatest achievements, the most opulent living. And we saw it all crash. It will be a thousand years before the world will be ready for another."

And later,

"I suppose every life has its Golden Age. Generally we think it is youth. I'm not so sure. Youth is looking ahead. It has its hopes and its disappointments. The Golden Age in a man's life ought to be the age of fulfillment. It's nearer the forties than the twenties."

"Have you reached it?"

"I'm going to, on the other side."

And Clayton had smiled.

"You are going to reach it," he said. "We are always going to find it, Nolan. It is always just ahead."

And Nolan had given him one of his quick understanding glances.

There could be no Golden Age for him. For the Golden Age for a man meant fulfillment. The time came to every man when he must sit at the west window of his house of life and look toward the sunset. If he faced that sunset alone -

He heard Madeleine carrying down Natalie's dinner-tray, and when she left the pantry she came to the door of the library.

"Mrs. Spencer would like to see you, sir."

"Thank you, Madeleine. I'll go up very soon."

Suddenly he knew that he did not want to go up to Natalie's scented room. She had shut him out when she was in trouble. She had not cared that he, too, was in distress. She had done her best to invalidate that compact he had made. She had always invalidated him.

To go back to the old way, to the tribute she enforced to feed her inordinate vanity, to the old hypocrisy of their
relationship, to live again the old lie, was impossible.

He got up. He would not try to buy himself happiness at the cost of turning her adrift. But he must, some way, buy his self-respect.

He heard her then, on the staircase, that soft rustle which, it seemed to him, had rasped the silk of his nerves all their years together with its insistence on her dainty helplessness, her femininity, her right to protection. The tap of her high heels came closer. He drew a long breath and turned, determinedly smiling, to face the door.

Almost at once he saw that she was frightened. She had taken pains to look her best - but then she always did that. She was rouged to the eyes, and the floating white chiffon of her negligee gave to her slim body the illusion of youth, that last illusion to which she so desperately clung. But - she was frightened.

She stood in the doorway, one hand holding aside the heavy velvet curtain, and looked at him with wide, penciled eyes.

"Clay?"
"Yes. Come in. Shall I have Buckham light a fire?"
She came in, slowly.
"Do you suppose that cable is reliable?"
"I should think so."
"He may have a relapse."
"We mustn't worry about what may come. He is better now. The chances are that he'll stay better."
"Probably. I suppose, because I have been so ill - "

He felt the demand for sympathy, but he had none to give. And he felt something else. Natalie was floundering, an odd word for her, always so sure of herself. She was frightened, unsure of herself, and - floundering. Why?

"Are you going to be in to-night?"
"Yes."
She gave a curious little gesture. Then she evidently made up her mind and she faced him defiantly.

"Of course, if I had known he was going to be better, I'd - Clay, I wired yesterday for Rodney Page. He arrives to-night."
"Rodney?"
"Yes."
"I don't think I quite understand, Natalie. Why did you wire for him?"
"You wouldn't understand, of course. I was in trouble. He has been my best friend. I tried to bear it alone, but I couldn't. I - "

"Alone! You wouldn't see me."
"I couldn't, Clay."
"Why?"
"Because - if Graham had died - "

Her mouth trembled. She put her hand to her throat.
"You would have blamed me for his death?"
"Yes."
"Then, even now, if - "
"Yes."

The sheer cruelty of it sent him pale. Yet it was not so much deliberate as unconscious. She was forcing herself to an unwonted honesty. It was her honest conviction that he was responsible for Graham's wounding and danger.

"Let me get to the bottom of this," he said quietly. "You hold me responsible. Very well. How far does that take us? How far does that take you? To Rodney!"
"You needn't be brutal. Rodney understands me. He - he cares for me, Clay."
"I see. And, since you sent for him I take it you care for Rodney."
"I don't know, I - "

"Isn't it time you do know? For God's sake, Natalie, make up your mind to some course and stick to it."

But accustomed as he was to the curious turns of her mind, he was still astounded to have her turn on him and accuse him of trying to get rid of her. It was not until later that he realized in that attitude of hers her old instinct of shifting the responsibility from her own shoulders.

And then Rodney was announced.

The unreality of the situation persisted. Rodney's strained face and uneasy manner, his uniform, the blank pause when he had learned that Graham was better, and when the ordinary banalities of greeting were over. Beside Clayton he looked small, dapper, and wretchedly uncomfortable, and yet even Clayton had to acknowledge a sort of dignity in the man.
He felt sorry for him, for the disillusion that was to come. And at the same time he felt an angry contempt for him, that he should have forced so theatrical a situation. That the night which saw Graham's beginning recovery should be tarnished by the wild clutch after happiness of two people who had done so little to earn it.

He saw another, totally different scene, for a moment. He saw Graham in his narrow bed that night in some dimly-lighted hospital ward, and he saw Audrey beside him, watching and waiting and praying. A wild desire to be over there, one of that little group, almost overcame him. And instead -

"Natalie has not been well, Rodney," he said. "I rather think, if you have anything to say to me, we would better talk alone."

Natalie went out, her draperies trailing behind her. Clayton listened, as she moved slowly up the stairs. For the last time he heard that soft rustling which had been the accompaniment to so many of the most poignant hours of his life. He listened until it had died away.

CHAPTER XLIX

For months Rudolph Klein had been living in a little Mexican town on the border. There were really two towns, but they were built together with only a strip of a hundred feet between. Along this strip ran the border itself, with a tent pitched on the American side, and patrols of soldiers guarding it. The American side was bright and clean, orderly and self-respecting, but only a hundred feet away, unkempt, dusty, with adobe buildings and a notorious gambling-hell in plain view, was Mexico itself - leisurely, improvident, not overscrupulous Mexico.

At first Rudolph was fairly contented. It amused him. He liked the idleness of it. He liked kicking the innumerable Mexican dogs out of his way. He liked baiting the croupiers in the "Owl." He liked wandering into that notorious resort and shoving Hindus, Chinamen, and Mexicans out of the way, while he flung down a silver dollar and watched the dealers with cunning, avaricious eyes.

He liked his own situation, too. It amused him to think that here he was safe, while only a hundred feet away he was a criminal, fugitive from the law. He liked to go to the very border itself, and jeer at the men on guard there.

"If I was on that side," he would say, "you'd have me in one of those rotten uniforms, wouldn't you? Come on over, fellows. The liquor's fine."

Then, one day, a Chinaman he had insulted gave him an unexpected shove, and he had managed to save himself by a foot from the clutch of a quiet-faced man in plain clothes who spent a certain amount of time lounging on the other side of the border.

That had sobered him. He kept away from the border itself after that, although the temptation of it drew him. After a few weeks, when the novelty had worn off, he began to hunger for the clean little American town across the line. He wanted to talk to some one. He wanted to boast, to be candid. These Mexicans only laughed when he bragged to them. But he dared not cross.

There was a high-fenced enclosure behind the "Owl," the segregated district of the town. There, in tiny one-roomed houses built in rows like barracks were the girls and women who had drifted to this jumping-off place of the world. In the daytime they slept or sat on the narrow, ramshackle porches, untidy, noisy, unspeakably wretched. At night, however, they blossomed forth in tawdry finery, in the dancing-space behind the gambling-tables. Some of them were fixtures. They had drifted there from New Orleans, perhaps, or southern California, and they lacked the initiative or the money to get away. But most of them came in, stayed a month or two, found the place a nightmare, with its shootings and stabbings, and then disappeared.

At first Rudolph was popular in this hell of the underworld. He spent money easily, he danced well, he had audacity and a sort of sardonic humor. They asked no questions, those poor wretches who had themselves slid over the edge of life. They took what came, grateful for little pleasures, glad even to talk their own tongue.

And then, one broiling August day, late in the afternoon, when the compound was usually seething with the first fetid life of the day, Rudolph found it suddenly silent when he entered it, and hostile, contemptuous eyes on him.

A girl with Anna Klein's eyes, a girl he had begun to fancy, suddenly said,

"Draft-dodger!"

There was a ripple of laughter around the compound. They commenced to bait him, those women he would not have wiped his feet on at home. They literally laughed him out of the compound.

He went home to his stifling, windowless adobe room, with its sagging narrow bed, its candle, its broken crockery, and he stood in the center of the room and chewed his nails with fury. After a time he sat down and considered what to do next. He would have to move on some time. As well now as ever. He was sick of the place.

He began preparations to move on, gathering up the accumulation of months of careless living for destruction. He picked up some newspapers preparatory to throwing them away, and a name caught his attention. Standing there, inside his doorway in the Mexican dusk, he read of Graham's recent wounding, his mending, and the fact that he had won the Croix de Guerre. Supreme bitterness was Rudolph's then.

"Stage stuff!" he muttered. But in the depths of his warped soul there was bitter envy. He knew well with what
frightened yet adoring eyes Anna Klein had devoured that news of Graham Spencer. While for him there was the girl in the compound back of the "Owl," with Anna Klein's eyes, filled when she looked at him with that bitterest scorn of all, the contempt of the wholly contemptible.

That night he went to the Owl. He had shaved and had his hair cut and he wore his only remaining decent suit of clothes. He passed through the swinging gate in the railing which separated the dancing-floor from the tables and went up to the line of girls, sitting in that saddest waiting of all the world, along the wall. There was an ominous silence at his approach. He planted himself in front of the girl with eyes like Anna Klein.

"Are you going to dance?"
"Not with you," she replied, evenly. And again the ripple of laughter spread.
"Why not?"
"Because you're a coward," she said. "I'd rather dance with a Chinaman."
"If you think I'm here because I'm afraid to fight you can think again. Not that I care what you think."

He had meant to boast a little, to intimate that he had pulled off a big thing, but he saw that he was ridiculous. The situation infuriated him. Suddenly he burst into foul-mouthed invective, until one of the girls said, wearily, "Oh, cut that out, you slacker."

And he knew that no single word he had used against them, out of a vocabulary both extensive and horrible, was to them so degraded as that single one applied to him.

Late that night he received a tip from a dealer at one of vingt-et-un tables. There were inquiries being made for him across the border. That very evening he, the dealer, had gone across for a sack of flour, and he had heard about it.

"You'd better get out," said the dealer.
"I'm as safe here as I'd be in Mexico City."
"Don't be too sure, son. You're not any too popular here. There's such a thing as being held up and carried over the border. It's been done before now."

"I'm sick of this hole, anyhow," Rudolph muttered, and moved away in the crowd. The mechanical piano was banging in the dance-hall as he slipped out into the darkness, under the clear starlight of the Mexican night, and the gate of the compound stood open. He passed it with an oath.

Long before, he had provided for such a contingency. By the same agency which had got him to the border, he could now be sent further on. At something after midnight, clad in old clothes and carrying on his back a rough outfit of a blanket and his remaining wardrobe, he knocked at the door of a small adobe house on the border of the town. An elderly German with a candle admitted him.

"Well, I'm off," Rudolph said roughly.
"And time enough, too," said the German, gruffly.

Rudolph was sullenly silent. He was in this man's power, and he knew it. But the German was ready enough to do his part. For months he had been doing this very thing, starting through the desert toward the south slackers and fugitives of all descriptions. He gathered together the equipment, a map with water-holes marked, a canteen covered with a dirty plaid-cloth casing, a small supply of condensed foods, in tins mostly, and a letter to certain Germans in Mexico City who would receive hospitably any American fugitives and ask no questions.

"How about money?" Rudolph inquired.

The German shrugged his shoulders.
"You will not need money in the desert," he said. "And you haf spent much money here, on the women. You should have safed it."

"I was told you would give me money."

But the German shook his head.
"You viii find money in Mexico City, if you get there," he said, cryptically. And Rudolph found neither threats nor entreaties of any avail.

He started out of the town, turning toward the south and west. Before him there stretched days of lonely traveling through the sand and cactus of the desert, of blistering sun and cold nights, of anxious searches for water-holes. It was because of the water-holes that he headed southwest, for such as they were they lay in tiny hidden oases in the canyons. Almost as soon as he left the town he was in the desert; a detached ranch, a suggestion of a road, a fenced-in cotton-field or two, an irrigation ditch, and then - sand.

He was soft from months of inaction, from the cactus whisky of Mexico, too, that ate into a man like a corrosive acid. But he went on steadily, putting behind him as rapidly as possible the border, and the girls who had laughed at him. He traveled by a pointed mountain which cut off the stars at the horizon, and as the miles behind him increased, in spite of his growing fatigue his spirits rose. Before him lay the fulness of life again. Mexico City was a stake worth gambling for. He was gambling, he knew. He had put up his life, and his opponent was thirst. He knew that,
well enough, too, and the figure rather amused him.

"Playing against that, all right," he muttered. He paused and turned around. The sun had lifted over the rim of the desert, a red disc which turned the gleaming white alkali patches to rose. "By God," he said, "that's the ante, is it - A red chip!

A caravan of mules was coming up from the head of the Gulf of California. It moved in a cloud of alkali dust and sand, its ore-sacks coated white. The animals straggled along, wandering out of the line incessantly and thrust back into place by muleteers who cracked long whips and addressed them vilely.

At a place where a small rock placed on another marked a side trail to water, the caravan turned and moved toward the mountains. Close as they appeared, the outfit was three hours getting to the foot hills. There was a low meadow now, covered with pale green grass. Quail scurried away under the mesquite bushes, stealthily whistling, and here and there the two stones still marked the way.

With the instinct of desert creatures the mules hurried their pace. Pack-saddles creaked, spurs jingled. Life, insistent, thirsty life, quickened the dead plain.

A man rode ahead. He dug his spurs into his horse and cantered, elbows flapping, broad-brimmed hat drawn over his eyes. For hours he had been fighting the demon of thirst. His tongue was dry, his lips cracking. The trail continued to be marked with its double stones, but it did not enter the cool canyon ahead. It turned and skirted the base of the bare mountain slope. The man's eyes sharpened. He knew very definitely what he was looking for, and at last he saw it, a circle of flat stones, some twenty feet across, the desert sign for a buried spring.

But there was something inside the circle, something which lay still. The man put his horse to the gallop again. There was a canteen lying in the trail, a canteen covered with a dirty plaid casing. The horse's hoof struck it, and it gave out a dry, metallic sound.

"Poor devil!" muttered the rider.

He dismounted and turned the figure over.

"God!" he said. "And water under him all the time!"

Then he dragged the quiet figure outside the ring of stones, and getting a spade from his saddle, fell to digging in the center. A foot below the surface water began to appear, clear, cold water. He lay down, flat and drank out of the pool.

Clayton Spencer was alone in his house. In the months since Natalie had gone, he had not been there a great deal. He had been working very hard. He had not been able to shoulder arms, but he had, nevertheless, fought a good fight.

He was very tired. During the day, a sort of fierce energy upheld him. Because in certain things he had failed he was the more determined to succeed in others. Not for himself; ambition of that sort had died of the higher desire to serve his country. But because the sense of failure in his private life haunted him.

The house was very quiet. Buckham came in to mend the fire, issuing from the shadows like a lean old ghost and eyeing him with tender, faded old eyes.

"Is there anything else, sir?"

"Thanks, no. Buckham."

"Yes, Mr. Spencer."

"I have not spoken about it, but I think you have understood. Mrs. Spencer is - not coming back."

"Yes, Mr. Spencer."

"I had meant to close the house, but certain things - Captain Spencer's wife expects a child. I would rather like to have her come here, for the birth. After that, if the war is over, I shall turn the house over to them. You would stay on, I hope, Buckham."

"I'll stay, sir. I - " His face worked nervously. "I feel toward the Captain as I would to my own son, sir. I have already thought that perhaps - the old nursery has been cleaned and aired for weeks, Mr. Spencer."

Clayton felt a thrill of understanding for the old man through all the years he had watched and served them. He had reflected their joys and their sorrows. He had suffered the family destiny without having shaped it. He had lived, vicariously, their good hours and their bad. And now, in his old age, he was waiting again for the vicarious joy of Graham's child.

"But you'll not be leaving the house, sir?"

"I don't know. I shall keep my rooms. But I shall probably live at the club. The young people ought to be alone, for a while. There are readjustments - You never married, Buckham?"

"No, Mr. Spencer. I intended to, at one time. I came to this country to make a home, and as I was rather a long time about it, she married some one else."

Clayton caught the echo of an old pain in Buckham's repressed voice. Buckham, too! Was there in the life of every man some woman tragedy? Buckham, sitting alone in his west window and looking toward the sunset,
Buckham had his memories.

"She lost her only son at Neuve Chapelle," Buckham was saying quietly. "In a way, it was as tho I had lost a boy. She never cared for the man she married. He was a fine boy, sir. I - you may remember the night I was taken ill in the pantry."

"Is her husband still living?"
"No, Mr. Spencer."
"Do you ever think of going back and finding her?"

"I have, sir. But I don't know. I like to remember her as she used to be. I have some beautiful memories. And I think sometimes it is better to live on memories. They are more real than - well, than reality, sir."

Long after Buckham had withdrawn, Clayton paced the floor of the library. Was Buckham right? Was the real life of a man his mental life? Was any love so great as a man's dream of love? Peace was on the way. Soon this nightmare of war would be over, and in the great awakening love would again take the place of hate. Love of man for man, of nation for nation. Peace and the things of peace. Time to live. Time to hope, with the death-cloud gone. Time to work and time to play. Time to love a woman and cherish her for the rest of life, if only -

His failure with Natalie had lost him something. She had cost him his belief in himself. Her last words had crystallized his own sense of failure.

"I admit all your good qualities, Clay. Heaven knows they are evident enough. But you are the sort people admire. They don't love you. They never will."

Yet that night he had had a curious sense that old Buckham loved him. Maybe he was the sort men loved and women admired.

He sat down and leaned back in his chair, watching the fire-logs. He felt very tired. What was that Buckham had said about memories? But Buckham was old. He was young, young and strong. There would be many years, and even his most poignant memories would grow dim.

Audrey! Audrey!

From the wall over the mantel Natalie's portrait still surveyed the room with its delicate complacence. He looked up at it. Yes, Natalie had been right, he was not the sort to make a woman happy. There were plenty of men, young men, men still plastic, men who had not known shipwreck, and some such man Audrey would marry. Perhaps already, in France -

He got up. His desk was covered with papers, neatly endorsed by his secretary. He turned out all the lights but his desk lamp. Natalie's gleaming flesh-tones died into the shadows, and he stood for a moment, looking up at it, a dead thing, remote, flat, without significance. Then he sat down at his desk and took up a bundle of government papers.

There was still work. Thank God for work.

CHAPTER L

Audrey was in Paris on the eleventh of November. Now and then she got back there, and revelled for a day or two in the mere joy of paved streets and great orderly buildings. She liked the streets and the crowds. She liked watching the American boys swaggering along, smoking innumerable cigarettes and surveying the city with interested, patronizing eyes. And, always, walking briskly along the Rue Royale or the Avenue de l'Opera, or in the garden of the Tuileries where the school-boys played their odd French games, her eyes were searching the faces of the men she met.

Any tall man in civilian clothes set her heart beating faster. She was quite honest with herself; she knew that she was watching for Clay, and she had a magnificent shamelessness in her quest. And now at last The Daily Mail had announced his arrival in France, and at first every ring of her telephone had sent her to it, somewhat breathless but quite confident. He would, she considered, call up the Red Cross at the Hotel Regina, and they would, by her instructions, give her hotel.

Then, on that Monday morning, which was the eleventh, she realized that he would not call her up. She knew it suddenly and absolutely. She sat down, when the knowledge came to her, with a sickening feeling that if he did not come to her now he never would come. Yet even then she did not doubt that he cared. Cared as desperately as she did. The bond still held.

She tried very hard, sitting there by her wood fire in the orderly uniform which made her so quaintly young and boyish, to understand the twisted mental processes that kept him away from her, now that he was free. And, in the end, she came rather close to the truth: his sense of failure; his loss of confidence in himself where his love life was concerned; the strange twisting and warping that were Natalie's sole legacy from their years together.

For months she had been tending broken bodies and broken spirits. But the broken pride of a man was a strange and terrible thing.

She did not know where he was stopping, and in the congestion of the Paris hotels it would be practically
impossible to trace him. And there, too, her own pride stepped in. He must come to her. He knew she cared. She had been honest with him always, with a sort of terrible honesty.

Surveying the past months she wondered, not for the first time, what had held them apart so long, against the urge that had become the strongest thing in life to them both. The strength in her had come from him. She knew that. But where had Clay got his strength? Men were not like that, often. Failing final happiness, they so often took what they could get. Like Chris.

Perhaps, for the first and last time, she saw Clayton Spencer that morning with her mind, as well as with her heart. She saw him big and generous and fine, but she saw him also not quite so big as his love, conventional, bound by tradition and early training, somewhat rigid, Calvinistic, and dominated still by a fierce sex pride.

At once the weaknesses of the middle span, and its safety. And, woman-fashion, she loved him for both his weakness and his strength. A bigger man might have taken her. A smaller man would have let her go. Clay was - just Clay; single-hearted, intelligent but not shrewd, blundering, honest Clay.

She was one great ache for the shelter of his arms.

She had a small sense of shame that, on that day of all others, she should be obsessed with her own affairs.

This was a great day. That morning, if all went well, the war was to cease. The curtain was to fall on the great melodrama, and those who had watched it and those who had played in it would with the drop of the curtain turn away from the illusion that is war, to the small and quiet things of home.

"Home!" she repeated. She had no home. But it was a great day, nevertheless. Only that morning the white-capped femme de chambre had said, with exaltation in her great eyes:

"So! It is finished, Madame, or soon it will be - in an hour or two."

"It will be finished, Suzanne."

"And Madame will go back to the life she lived before." Her eyes had turned to where, on the dressing-table, lay the gold fittings of Audrey's dressing-case. She visualized Audrey, back in rich, opulent America, surrounded by the luxury the gold trinkets would indicate.

"Madame must be lovely in the costume for a ball," she said, and sighed. For her, a farm in Brittany, the endless round of small duties; for the American -

Sitting there alone Audrey felt already the reactions of peace. The war had torn up such roots as had held her. She was terribly aware, too, that she had outgrown her old environment. The old days were gone. The old Audrey was gone; and in her place was a quiet woman, whose hands had known service and would never again be content to be idle. Yet she knew that, with the war, the world call would be gone. Not again, for her, detached, impersonal service. She was not of the great of the earth. What she wanted, quite simply, was the service of love. To have her own and to care for them. She hoped, very earnestly, that she would be able to look beyond her own four walls, to see distress and to help it, but she knew, as she knew herself, that the real call to her would always be love.

She felt a certain impatience at herself. This was to be the greatest day in the history of the world, and while all the earth waited for the signal guns, she waited for a man who had apparently determined not to take her back into his life.

She went out onto her small stone balcony, on the Rue Danou, and looked out to where, on the Rue de la Paix, the city traffic moved with a sort of sporadic expectancy. Men stopped and consulted their watches. A few stood along the curb, and talked in low voices. Groups of men in khaki walked by, or stopped to glance into the shop windows. They, too, were waiting. She could see, far below, her valet de chambre in his green felt apron, and the concierge in his blue frock coat and brass buttons, unbending in the new democracy of hope to talk to a cabman.

Suddenly Audrey felt the same exaltation that had been in Suzanne's eyes. Those boys below in uniform - they were not tragic now. They were the hope of the world, not its sacrifice. They were going to live.

She went into her bedroom and put on her service hat. And as she opened the door Suzanne was standing outside, one hand upraised. Into the quiet hallway there came the distant sound of the signal guns.

"C'est l'armistice!" cried Suzanne, and suddenly broke into wild hysterical sobbing.

All the way down-stairs Audrey was praying, not articulately, but in her heart, that this was indeed the end; that the grapes of wrath had all been trampled; that the nations of the world might again look forward instead of back. And - because she was not of the great of the earth, but only a loving woman - that somewhere Clay was hearing the guns, as she was, and would find hope in them, and a future.

When a great burden is lifted, the relief is not always felt at once. The galled places still ache. The sense of weight persists. And so with Paris. Not at once did the city rejoice openly. It prayed first, and then it counted the sore spots, and they were many. And it was dazed, too. There had been no time to discount peace in advance.

The streets filled at once, but at first it was with a chastened people. Audrey herself felt numb and unreal. She moved mechanically with the shifting crowd, looking overhead as a captured German plane flew by, trying to
comprehend the incomprehensible. But by mid-day the sober note of the crowds had risen to a higher pitch. A file of American doughboys, led by a corporal with a tin trumpet and officered by a sergeant with an enormous American cigar, goose-stepped down the Avenue de l'Opera, gaining recruits at every step. It snake-danced madly through the crowd, singing that one lyric stand-by of Young America: "Hail! hail! the gang's all here!"

But the gang was not all there, and they knew it. Some of them lay in the Argonne, or at Chateau-Thierry, and for them peace had come too late. But the Americans, like the rest of the world, had put the past behind them. Here was the present, the glorious present, and Paris on a sunny Monday. And after that would be home.

"Hail, hail, the gang's all here, What the hell do we care? What the hell do we care? Hail, hail, the gang's all here, What the hell do we care now?"

Gradually the noise became uproarious. There were no bands in Paris, and any school-boy with a tin horn or a toy drum could start a procession. Bearded little poilus, arm in arm from curb to curb, marched grinning down the center of the streets, capturing and kissing pretty midinettes, or surrounding officers and dancing madly; Audrey saw an Algerian, ragged and dirty from the battle-fields, kiss on both cheeks a portly British Admiral of the fleet, and was herself kissed by a French sailor, with extreme robustness and a slight tinge of vin ordinaire. She went on smiling.

If only Clay were seeing all this! He had worked so hard. He had a right to this wonderful hour, at least. If he had gone to the front, to see Graham - but then it must be rather wonderful at the front, too. She tried to visualize it; the guns quiet, and the strained look gone from the faces of the men, with the wonderful feeling that as there was today, now there would also be to-morrow.

She felt a curious shrinking from the people she knew. For this one day she wanted to be alone. This peace was a thing of the soul, and of the soul alone. She knew what it would be with the people she knew best in Paris, - hastily arranged riotous parties, a great deal of champagne and noise, and, overlying the real sentiment, much sentimentality. She realized, with a faint smile, that the old Audrey would have welcomed that very gayety. She was even rather resentful with herself for her own aloofness.

She quite forgot luncheon, and early afternoon found her on the balcony of the Crillon Hotel, overlooking the Place de la Concorde. Paris was truly awake by that time, and going mad. The long-quiet fountains were playing, Poilus and American soldiers had seized captured German cannon and were hauling them wildly about. If in the morning the crowd had been largely khaki, now the French blue predominated. Flags and confetti were everywhere, and every motor, as it, pushed slowly through the crowd, carried on roof and running board and engine hood crowds of self-invited passengers. A British band was playing near the fountain. A line of helmets above the mass and wild cheers revealed French cavalry riding through, and, heralded by jeers and much applause came a procession of the proletariat, of odds and ends, soldiers and shop-girls, mechanics and street-sweepers and cabmen and students, carrying an effigy of the Kaiser on a gibbet.

As the sun went down, the outlines of the rejoicing city took on the faint mist-blue of a dream city. It softened the outlines of the Eiffel tower to strange and fairy-like beauty and gave to the trees in the Tuileries gardens the lack of definition of an old engraving. And as if to remind the rejoicing of the price of their happiness, there came limping through the crowd a procession of the mutilees. They stumped along on wooden legs or on crutches; they rode in wheeled chairs; they were led, who could not see. And they smiled and cheered. None of them was whole, but every one was a full man, for all that.

Audrey cried, shamelessly like Suzanne, but quietly. And, not for the first time that day, she thought of Chris. She had never loved him, but it was pitiful that he could not have lived. He had so loved life. He would have so relished all this, the pageantry of it, and the gayety, and the night's revelry that was to follow. Poor Chris! He had thrown everything away, even life. The world perhaps was better that these mutilees below had given what they had. But Chris had gone like a pebble thrown into a lake. He had made his tiny ripple and had vanished.

Then she remembered that she was not quite fair. Perhaps she had never been fair to Chris. He had given all he had. He had not lived well, but he had died well. And there was something to be said for death. For the first time in her healthy life she wondered about death, standing here on the Crillon balcony, with the city gone mad with life below her. Death was quiet. It might be rather wonderful. She thought, if Clay did not want her, that perhaps it would be very comforting just to die and forget about everything.

From beneath the balcony there came again, lustily the shouts of a dozen doughboys hauling a German gun: "Hail! hail! the gang's all here! What the hell do we care? What the hell do we care? Hail, hail, the gang's all here! What the hell do we care now?"

Then, that night, Clay came. The roistering city outside had made of her little sitting-room a sort of sanctuary, into which came only faintly the blasts of horns, hoarse strains of the "Marseillaise" sung by an un-vocal people, the shuffling of myriad feet, the occasional semi-hysterical screams of women.

"Mr. Spencer is calling," said the concierge over the telephone, in his slow English. And suddenly a tight band
snapped which had seemed to bind Audrey's head all day. She was calm. She was herself again. Life was very wonderful; peace was very wonderful. The dear old world. The good old world. The kind, loving, tender old world, which separated people that they might know the joy of coming together again. She wanted to sing, she wanted to hang over her balcony and teach the un-vocal French the "Marseillaise."

Yet, when she had opened the door, she could not even speak. And Clay, too, after one long look at her, only held out his arms. It was rather a long time, indeed, before they found any words at all. Audrey was the first, and what she said astounded her. For she said:

"What a dreadful noise outside."

And Clay responded, with equal gravity: "Yes, isn't it!"

Then he took off his overcoat and put it down, and placed his hat on the table, and said, very simply: "I couldn't stay away. I tried to."

"You hadn't a chance in the world, Clay, when I was willing you to come."

Then there was one of those silences which come when words have shown their absolute absurdity. It seemed a long time before he broke it.

"I'm not young, Audrey. And I have failed once."

"It takes two to make a failure," she said dauntlessly. "I - wouldn't let you fail again, Clay. Not if you love me."

"If I love you!" Then he was, somehow, in that grotesque position that is only absurd to the on-looker, on his knees beside her. His terrible self-consciousness was gone. He only knew that, somehow, some way, he must prove to her his humility, his love, his terrible fear of losing her again, his hope that together they might make up for the wasted years of their lives. "I worship you," he said.

The little room was a sanctuary. The war lay behind them. Wasted and troubled years lay behind them. Youth, first youth, was gone, with its illusions and its dreams. But before them lay the years of fulfilment, years of understanding. Youth demanded everything, and was discontented that it secured less than its demands. Now they asked but three things, work, and peace, and love. And the greatest of these was love.

Something like that he said to her, when the first inarticulateness had passed, and when, as is the way of a man with the woman who loves him, he tried to lay his soul as well as his heart at her feet. The knowledge that the years brought. That love in youth was a plant of easy growth, springing up in many soils. But that the love of the middle span of a man's life, whether that love be the early love purified by fire, or a new love, sowed in sacrifice and watered with tears, the love that was to carry a man and a woman through to the end, the last love, was God's infinitely precious gift. A gift to take the place of the things that had gone with youth, of high adventure and the lilt of the singing heart.

The last gift.
The Man in Lower Ten

by Mary Roberts Rinehart

CHAPTER I

I GO TO PITTSBURG

McKnight is gradually taking over the criminal end of the business. I never liked it, and since the strange case of
the man in lower ten, I have been a bit squeamish. Given a case like that, where you can build up a network of clues
that absolutely incriminate three entirely different people, only one of whom can be guilty, and your faith in
circumstantial evidence dies of overcrowding. I never see a shivering, white-faced wretch in the prisoners' dock that
I do not hark back with shuddering horror to the strange events on the Pullman car Ontario, between Washington
and Pittsburg, on the night of September ninth, last.

McKnight could tell the story a great deal better than I, although he can not spell three consecutive words
correctly. But, while he has imagination and humor, he is lazy.

"It didn't happen to me, anyhow," he protested, when I put it up to him. "And nobody cares for second-hand
thrills. Besides, you want the unvarnished and unvarnished truth, and I'm no hand for that. I'm a lawyer."

So am I, although there have been times when my assumption in that particular has been disputed. I am
unmarried, and just old enough to dance with the grown-up little sisters of the girls I used to know. I am fond of
outdoors, prefer horses to the aforesaid grown-up little sisters, am without sentiment (am crossed out and was
substituted.-Ed.) and completely ruled and frequently routed by my housekeeper, an elderly widow.

In fact, of all the men of my acquaintance, I was probably the most prosaic, the least adventurous, the one man in
a hundred who would be likely to go without a deviation from the normal through the orderly procession of the
seasons, summer suits to winter flannels, golf to bridge.

So it was a queer freak of the demons of chance to perch on my unsusceptible thirty-year-old chest, tie me up
with a crime, ticket me with a love affair, and start me on that sensational and not always respectable journey that
ended so surprisingly less than three weeks later in the firm's private office. It had been the most remarkable period
of my life. I would neither give it up nor live it again under any inducement, and yet all that I lost was some twenty
yards off my drive!

It was really McKnight's turn to make the next journey. I had a tournament at Chevy Chase for Saturday, and a
short yacht cruise planned for Sunday, and when a man has been grinding at statute law for a week, he needs
relaxation. But McKnight begged off. It was not the first time he had shirked that summer in order to run down to
Richmond, and I was surly about it. But this time he had a new excuse. "I wouldn't be able to look after the business
if I did go," he said. He has a sort of wide-eyed frankness that makes one ashamed to doubt him. "I'm always car
sick crossing the mountains. It's a fact, Lollie. See-sawing over the peaks does it. Why, crossing the Alleghany
Mountains has the Gulf Stream to Bermuda beaten to a frazzle."

So I gave him up finally and went home to pack. He came later in the evening with his machine, the Cannonball,
and he brought the forged notes in the Bronson case.

"Guard them with your life," he warned me. "They are more precious than honor. Sew them in your chest
protector, or wherever people keep valuables. I never keep any. I'll not be happy until I see Gentleman Andy doing
the lockstep."

He sat down on my clean collars, found my cigarettes and struck a match on the mahogany bed post with one
movement.

"Where's the Pirate?" he demanded. The Pirate is my housekeeper, Mrs. Klopton, a very worthy woman, so
labeled--and libeled--because of a ferocious pair of eyes and what McKnight called a bucaneering nose. I quietly
closed the door into the hall.

"Keep your voice down, Richey," I said. "She is looking for the evening paper to see if it is going to rain. She
has my raincoat and an umbrella waiting in the hall."

The collars being damaged beyond repair, he left them and went to the window. He stood there for some time,
staring at the blackness that represented the wall of the house next door.

"It's raining now," he said over his shoulder, and closed the window and the shutters. Something in his voice
made me glance up, but he was watching me, his hands idly in his pockets.

"Who lives next door?" he inquired in a perfunctory tone, after a pause. I was packing my razor.
"House is empty," I returned absently. "If the landlord would put it in some sort of shape--"

"Did you put those notes in your pocket?" he broke in.

"Yes." I was impatient. "Along with my certificates of registration, baptism and vaccination. Whoever wants them will have to steal my coat to get them."

"Well, I would move them, if I were you. Somebody in the next house was confoundedly anxious to see where you put them. Somebody right at that window opposite."

I scoffed at the idea, but nevertheless I moved the papers, putting them in my traveling-bag, well down at the bottom. McKnight watched me uneasily.

"I have a hunch that you are going to have trouble," he said, as I locked the alligator bag. "Darned if I like starting anything important on Friday."

"You have a congenital dislike to start anything on any old day," I retorted, still sore from my lost Saturday. "And if you knew the owner of that house as I do you would know that if there was any one at that window he is paying rent for the privilege."

Mrs. Klopton rapped at the door and spoke discreetly from the hall.

"Did Mr. McKnight bring the evening paper?" she inquired.

"Sorry, but I didn't, Mrs. Klopton," McKnight called. "The Cubs won, three to nothing." He listened, grinning, as she moved away with little irritated rustles of her black silk gown.

I finished my packing, changed my collar and was ready to go. Then very cautiously we put out the light and opened the shutters. The window across was merely a deeper black in the darkness. It was closed and dirty. And yet, probably owing to Richey's suggestion, I had an uneasy sensation of eyes staring across at me. The next moment we were at the door, poised for flight.

"We'll have to run for it," I said in a whisper. "She's down there with a package of some sort, sandwiches probably. And she's threatened me with overshoes for a month. Ready now!"

I had a kaleidoscopic view of Mrs. Klopton in the lower hall, holding out an armful of such traveling impedimenta as she deemed essential, while beside her, Euphemia, the colored housemaid, grinned over a white-wrapped box.

"Awfully sorry-no time-back Sunday," I panted over my shoulder. Then the door closed and the car was moving away.

McKnight bent forward and stared at the facade of the empty house next door as we passed. It was black, staring, mysterious, as empty buildings are apt to be.

"I'd like to hold a post-mortem on that corpse of a house," he said thoughtfully. "By George, I've a notion to get out and take a look."

"Somebody after the brass pipes," I scoffed. "House has been empty for a year."

With one hand on the steering wheel McKnight held out the other for my cigarette case. "Perhaps," he said; "but I don't see what she would want with brass pipe."

"A woman!" I laughed outright. "You have been looking too hard at the picture in the back of your watch, that's all. There's an experiment like that: if you stare long enough--"

But McKnight was growing sulky: he sat looking rigidly ahead, and he did not speak again until he brought the Cannonball to a stop at the station. Even then it was only a perfunctory remark. He went through the gate with me, and with five minutes to spare, we lounged and smoked in the train shed. My mind had slid away from my surroundings and had wandered to a polo pony that I couldn't afford and intended to buy anyhow. Then McKnight shook off his taciturnity.

"For heaven's sake, don't look so martyred," he burst out; "I know you've done all the traveling this summer. I know you're missing a game to-morrow. But don't be a patient mother; confound it, I have to go to Richmond on Sunday. I--I want to see a girl."

"Oh, don't mind me," I observed politely. "Personally, I wouldn't change places with you. What's her name--North? South?"

"West," he snapped. "Don't try to be funny. And all I have to say, Blakeley, is that if you ever fall in love I hope you make an egregious ass of yourself."

In view of what followed, this came rather close to prophecy.

The trip west was without incident. I played bridge with a furniture dealer from Grand Rapids, a sales agent for a Pittsburg iron firm and a young professor from an eastern college. I won three rubbers out of four, finished what cigarettes McKnight had left me, and went to bed at one o'clock. It was growing cooler, and the rain had ceased. Once, toward morning, I wakened with a start, for no apparent reason, and sat bolt upright. I had an uneasy feeling that some one had been looking at me, the same sensation I had experienced earlier in the evening at the window. But I could feel the bag with the notes, between me and the window, and with my arm thrown over it for security, I
lapsed again into slumber. Later, when I tried to piece together the fragments of that journey, I remembered that my coat, which had been folded and placed beyond my restless tossing, had been rescued in the morning from a heterogeneous jumble of blankets, evening papers and cravat, had been shaken out with profanity and donned with wrath. At the time, nothing occurred to me but the necessity of writing to the Pullman Company and asking them if they ever traveled in their own cars. I even formulated some of the letter.

"If they are built to scale, why not take a man of ordinary stature as your unit?" I wrote mentally. "I can not fold together like the traveling cup with which I drink your abominable water."

I was more cheerful after I had had a cup of coffee in the Union Station. It was too early to attend to business, and I lounged in the restaurant and hid behind the morning papers. As I had expected, they had got hold of my visit and its object. On the first page was a staring announcement that the forged papers in the Bronson case had been brought to Pittsburg. Underneath, a telegram from Washington stated that Lawrence Blakeley, of Blakeley and McKnight, had left for Pittsburg the night before, and that, owing to the approaching trial of the Bronson case and the illness of John Gilmore, the Pittsburg millionaire, who was the chief witness for the prosecution, it was supposed that the visit was intimately concerned with the trial.

I looked around apprehensively. There were no reporters yet in sight, and thankful to have escaped notice I paid for my breakfast and left. At the cab-stand I chose the least dilapidated hansom I could find, and giving the driver the address of the Gilmore residence, in the East end, I got in.

I was just in time. As the cab turned and rolled off, a slim young man in a straw hat separated himself from a little group of men and hurried toward us.

"Hey! Wait a minute there!" he called, breaking into a trot.

But the cabby did not hear, or perhaps did not care to. We jogged comfortably along, to my relief, leaving the young man far behind. I avoid reporters on principle, having learned long ago that I am an easy mark for a clever interviewer.

It was perhaps nine o'clock when I left the station. Our way was along the boulevard which hugged the side of one of the city's great hills. Far below, to the left, lay the railroad tracks and the seventy times seven looming stacks of the mills. The white mist of the river, the grays and blacks of the smoke blended into a half-revealing haze, dotted here and there with fire. It was unlovely, tremendous. Whistler might have painted it with its pathos, its majesty, but he would have missed what made it infinitely suggestive—the rattle and roar of iron on iron, the rumble of wheels, the throbbing beat, against the ears, of fire and heat and brawn welding prosperity.

Something of this I voiced to the grim old millionaire who was responsible for at least part of it. He was propped up in bed in his East end home, listening to the market reports read by a nurse, and he smiled a little at my enthusiasm.

"I can't see much beauty in it myself," he said. "But it's our badge of prosperity. The full dinner pail here means a nose that looks like a flue. Pittsburg without smoke wouldn't be Pittsburg, any more than New York without prohibition would be New York. Sit down for a few minutes, Mr. Blakeley. Now, Miss Gardner, Westinghouse Electric."

The nurse resumed her reading in a monotonous voice. She read literally and without understanding, using initials and abbreviations as they came. But the shrewd old man followed her easily. Once, however, he stopped her.

"D-o is ditto," he said gently, "not do."

As the nurse droned along, I found myself looking curiously at a photograph in a silver frame on the bed-side table. It was the picture of a girl in white, with her hands clasped loosely before her. Against the dark background her figure stood out slim and young. Perhaps it was the rather grim environment, possibly it was my mood, but although as a general thing photographs of young girls make no appeal to me, this one did. I found my eyes straying back to it. By a little finesse I even made out the name written across the corner, "Alison."

Mr. Gilmore lay back among his pillows and listened to the nurse's listless voice. But he was watching me from under his heavy eyebrows, for when the reading was over, and we were alone, he indicated the picture with a gesture.

"I keep it there to remind myself that I am an old man," he said. "That is my granddaughter, Alison West."

I expressed the customary polite surprise, at which, finding me responsive, he told me his age with a chuckle of pride. More surprise, this time genuine. From that we went to what he ate for breakfast and did not eat for luncheon, and then to his reserve power, which at sixty-five becomes a matter for thought. And so, in a wide circle, back to where we started, the picture.

"Father was a rascal," John Gilmore said, picking up the frame. "The happiest day of my life was when I knew he was safely dead in bed and not hanged. If the child had looked like him, I--well, she doesn't. She's a Gilmore, every inch. Supposed to look like me."

"Very noticeably," I agreed soberly.
I had produced the notes by that time, and replacing the picture Mr. Gilmore gathered his spectacles from beside it. He went over the four notes methodically, examining each carefully and putting it down before he picked up the next. Then he leaned back and took off his glasses.

"They're not so bad," he said thoughtfully. "Not so bad. But I never saw them before. That's my unofficial signature. I am inclined to think--" he was speaking partly to himself--"to think that he has got hold of a letter of mine, probably to Alison. Bronson was a friend of her rapscallion of a father."

I took Mr. Gilmore's deposition and put it into my traveling-bag with the forged notes. When I saw them again, almost three weeks later, they were unrecognizable, a mass of charred paper on a copper ashtray. In the interval other and bigger things had happened: the Bronson forgery case had shrunk beside the greater and more imminent mystery of the man in lower ten. And Alison West had come into the story and into my life.

CHAPTER II
A TORN TELEGRAM

I lunched alone at the Gilmore house, and went back to the city at once. The sun had lifted the mists, and a fresh summer wind had cleared away the smoke pall. The boulevard was full of cars flying countryward for the Saturday half-holiday, toward golf and tennis, green fields and babbling girls. I gritted my teeth and thought of McKnight at Richmond, visiting the lady with the geographical name. And then, for the first time, I associated John Gilmore's granddaughter with the "West" that McKnight had irritably flung at me.

I still carried my traveling-bag, for McKnight's vision at the window of the empty house had not been without effect. I did not transfer the notes to my pocket, and, if I had, it would not have altered the situation later. Only the other day McKnight put this very thing up to me.

"I warned you," he reminded me. "I told you there were queer things coming, and to be on your guard. You ought to have taken your revolver."

"It would have been of exactly as much use as a bucket of snow in Africa," I retorted. "If I had never closed my eyes, or if I had kept my finger on the trigger of a six-shooter (which is novelesque for revolver), the result would have been the same. And the next time you want a little excitement with every variety of thrill thrown in, I can put you by way of it. You begin by getting the wrong berth in a Pullman car, and end--"

"Oh, I know how it ends," he finished shortly. "Don't you suppose the whole thing's written on my spinal marrow?"

But I am wandering again. That is the difficulty with the unprofessional story-teller: he yaws back and forth and can't keep in the wind; he drops his characters overboard when he hasn't any further use for them and drowns them; he forgets the coffee-pot and the frying-pan and all the other small essentials, and, if he carries a love affair, he mutters a fervent "Allah be praised" when he lands them, drenched with adventures, at the matrimonial dock at the end of the final chapter.

I put in a thoroughly unsatisfactory afternoon. Time dragged eternally. I dropped in at a summer vaudeville, and bought some ties at a haberdasher's. I was bored but unexpectant; I had no premonition of what was to come. Nothing unusual had ever happened to me; friends of mine had sometimes sailed the high seas of adventure or skirted the coasts of chance, but all of the shipwrecks had occurred after a woman passenger had been taken on. "Ergo," I had always said "no women!" I repeated it to myself that evening almost savagely, when I found my thoughts straying back to the picture of John Gilmore's granddaughter. I even argued as I ate my solitary dinner at a downtown restaurant.

"Haven't you troubles enough," I reflected, "without looking for more? Hasn't Bad News gone lame, with a matinee race booked for next week? Otherwise aren't you comfortable? Isn't your house in order? Do you want to sell a pony in order to have the library done over in mission or the drawing-room in gold? Do you want somebody to count the empty cigarette boxes lying around every morning?"

"Lay it to the long idle afternoon, to the new environment, to anything you like, but I began to think that perhaps I did. I was confoundedly lonely. For the first time in my life its even course began to waver: the needle registered warning marks on the matrimonial seismograph, lines vague enough, but lines.

My alligator bag lay at my feet, still locked. While I waited for my coffee I leaned back and surveyed the people incuriously. There were the usual couples intense on each other: my new state of mind made me regard them with tolerance. But at the next table, where a man and woman dined together, a different atmosphere prevailed. My attention was first caught by the woman's face. She had been speaking earnestly across the table, her profile turned to me. I had noticed casually her earnest manner, her somber clothes, and the great mass of odd, bronze-colored hair on her neck. But suddenly she glanced toward me and the utter hopelessness--almost tragedy--of her expression struck me with a shock. She half closed her eyes and drew a long breath, then she turned again to the man across the table.

Neither one was eating. He sat low in his chair, his chin on his chest, ugly folds of thick flesh protruding over his
collar. He was probably fifty, bald, grotesque, sullen, and yet not without a suggestion of power. But he had been drinking; as I looked, he raised an unsteady hand and summoned a waiter with a wine list.

The young woman bent across the table and spoke again quickly. She had unconsciously raised her voice. Not beautiful, in her earnestness and stress she rather interested me. I had an idle inclination to advise the waiter to remove the bottled temptation from the table. I wonder what would have happened if I had? Suppose Harrington had not been intoxicated when he entered the Pullman car Ontario that night!

For they were about to make a journey, I gathered, and the young woman wished to go alone. I drank three cups of coffee, which accounted for my wakefulness later, and shamelessly watched the tableau before me. The woman's protest evidently went for nothing: across the table the man grunted monosyllabic replies and grew more and more lowering and sullen. Once, during a brief unexpected pianissimo in the music, her voice came to me sharply:

"If I could only see him in time!" she was saying. "Oh, it's terrible!"

In spite of my interest I would have forgotten the whole incident at once, erased it from my mind as one does the inessentials and clutterings of memory, had I not met them again, later that evening, in the Pennsylvania station. The situation between them had not visibly altered: the same dogged determination showed in the man's face, but the young woman--daughter or wife? I wondered--had drawn down her veil and I could only suspect what white misery lay beneath.

I bought my berth after waiting in a line of some eight or ten people. When, step by step, I had almost reached the window, a tall woman whom I had not noticed before spoke to me from my elbow. She had a ticket and money in her hand.

"Will you try to get me a lower when you buy yours?" she asked. "I have traveled for three nights in uppers."

I consented, of course; beyond that I hardly noticed the woman. I had a vague impression of height and a certain amount of stateliness, but the crowd was pushing behind me, and some one was standing on my foot. I got two lowers easily, and, turning with the change and berths, held out the tickets.

"Which will you have?" I asked. "Lower eleven or lower ten?"

"It makes no difference," she said. "Thank you very much indeed."

At random I gave her lower eleven, and called a porter to help her with her luggage. I followed them leisurely to the train shed, and ten minutes more saw us under way.

I looked into my car, but it presented the peculiarly unattractive appearance common to sleepers. The berths were made up; the center aisle was a path between walls of dingy, breeze-repelling curtains, while the two seats at each end of the car were piled high with suitcases and umbrellas. The perspiring porter was trying to be six places at once: somebody has said that Pullman porters are black so they won't show the dirt, but they certainly show the heat.

Nine-fifteen was an outrageous hour to go to bed, especially since I sleep little or not at all on the train, so I made my way to the smoker and passed the time until nearly eleven with cigarettes and a magazine. The car was very close. It was a warm night, and before turning in I stood a short time in the vestibule. The train had been stopping at frequent intervals, and, finding the brakeman there, I asked the trouble.

It seemed that there was a hot-box on the next car, and that not only were we late, but we were delaying the second section, just behind. I was beginning to feel pleasantly drowsy, and the air was growing cooler as we got into the mountains. I said good night to the brakeman and went back to my berth. To my surprise, lower ten was already occupied--a suit-case projected from beneath, a pair of shoes stood on the floor, and from behind the curtains came the heavy, unmistakable breathing of deep sleep. I hunted out the porter and together we investigated.

"Are you asleep, sir?" asked the porter, leaning over deferentially. No answer forthcoming, he opened the curtains and looked in. Yes, the intruder was asleep--very much asleep--and an overwhelming odor of whisky proclaimed that he would probably remain asleep until morning. I was irritated. The car was full, and I was not disposed to take an upper in order to allow this drunken interloper to sleep comfortably in my berth.

"You'll have to get out of this," I said, shaking him angrily. But he merely grunted and turned over. As he did so, I saw his features for the first time. It was the quarrelsome man of the restaurant. I drank three cups of coffee, which accounted for my wakefulness later, and shamelessly watched the tableau before me. The woman's protest evidently went for nothing: across the table the man grunted monosyllabic replies and grew more and more lowering and sullen. Once, during a brief unexpected pianissimo in the music, her voice came to me sharply:

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But sleep did not visit me. The train came to frequent, grating stops, and I surmised the hot box again. I am not a nervous man, but there was something chilling in the thought of the second section pounding along behind us. Once, as I was dozing, our locomotive whistled a shrill warning—"You keep back where you belong," it screamed to my drowsy ears, and from somewhere behind came a chastened "All-right-I-will."

I grew more and more wide-awake. At Cresson I got up on my elbow and blinked out at the station lights. Some passengers boarded the train there and I heard a woman's low tones, a southern voice, rich and full. Then quiet again. Every nerve was tense: time passed, perhaps ten minutes, possibly half an hour. Then, without the slightest warning, as the train rounded a curve, a heavy body was thrown into my berth. The incident, trivial as it seemed, was startling in its suddenness, for although my ears were painfully strained and awake, I had heard no step outside. The next instant the curtain hung limp again; still without a sound, my disturber had slipped away into the gloom and darkness. In a frenzy of wakefulness, I sat up, drew on a pair of slippers and fumbled for my bath-robe.

From a berth across, probably lower ten, came that particular aggravating snore which begins lightly, delicately, faintly soprano, goes down the scale a note with every breath, and, after keeping the listener tense with expectation, ends with an explosion that tears the very air. I was more and more irritable: I sat on the edge of the berth and hoped the snorer would choke to death. He had considerable vitality, however; he withstood one shock after another and survived to start again with new vigor. In desperation I found some cigarettes and one match, piled my blankets over my grip, and drawing the curtains together as though the berth were still occupied, I made my way to the vestibule of the car.

I was not clad for dress parade. Is it because the male is so restricted to gloom in his every-day attire that he blossoms into gaudy colors in his pajamas and dressing-gowns? It would take a Turk to feel at home before an audience in my red and yellow bathrobe, a Christmas remembrance from Mrs. Klopton, with slippers to match.

So, naturally, when I saw a feminine figure on the platform, my first instinct was to dodge. The woman, however, was quicker than I; she gave me a startled glance, wheeled and disappeared, with a flash of two bronze-colored braids, into the next car.

Cigarette box in one hand, match in the other, I leaned against the uncertain frame of the door and gazed after her vanished figure. The mountain air flapped my bath-robe around my bare ankles, my one match burned to the end and went out, and still I stared. For I had seen on her expressive face a haunting look that was horror, nothing less. Heaven knows, I am not psychological. Emotions have to be written large before I can read them. But a woman in trouble always appeals to me, and this woman was more than that. She was in deadly fear.

If I had not been afraid of being ridiculous, I would have followed her. But I fancied that the apparition of a man in a red and yellow bath-robe, with an unkempt thatch of hair, walking up to her and assuring her that he would protect her would probably put her into hysteric. I had done that once before, when burglars had tried to break into the house, and had startled the parlor maid into bed for a week. So I tried to assure myself that I had imagined the lady's distress—or caused it, perhaps—and to dismiss her from my mind. Perhaps she was merely anxious about the unpleasant gentleman of the restaurant. I thought smugly that I could have told her all about him: that he was the mountain man, the placer seeker, the gold digger. He was a little man, but his voice was deep and he spoke with an authority that made me feel faintly superior.

We passed Harrisburg as I stood there. It was starlight, and the great crests of the Alleghanies had given way to low hills. At intervals we passed smudges of gray white, no doubt in daytime comfortable farms, which McKnight says is a good way of putting it, the farms being a lot more comfortable than the people on them.

I was growing drowsy: the woman with the bronze hair and the horrified face was fading in retrospect. It was colder, too, and I turned with a shiver to go in. As I did so a bit of paper fluttered into the air and settled on my sleeve, like a butterfly on a gorgeous red and yellow blossom. I picked it up curiously and glanced at it. It was part of a telegram that had been torn into bits.

There were only parts of four words on the scrap, but it left me puzzled and thoughtful. It read, "ower ten, car seve-.

"Lower ten, car seven," was my berth-the one I had bought and found preempted.

CHAPTER III
ACROSS THE AISLE

No solution offering itself, I went back to my berth. The snorer across had apparently strangled, or turned over, and so after a time I dropped asleep, to be awakened by the morning sunlight across my face.

I felt for my watch, yawning prodigiously. I reached under the pillow and failed to find it, but something scratched the back of my hand. I sat up irritably and nursed the wound, which was bleeding a little. Still drowsy, I felt more cautiously for what I supposed had been my scarf pin, but there was nothing there. Wide awake now, I reached for my traveling-bag, on the chance that I had put my watch in there. I had drawn the satchel to me and had
my hand on the lock before I realized that it was not my own!

Mine was of alligator hide. I had killed the beast in Florida, after the expenditure of enough money to have bought a house and enough energy to have built one. The bag I held in my hand was a black one, sealskin, I think. The staggering thought of what the loss of my bag meant to me put my finger on the bell and kept it there until the porter came.

"Did you ring, sir?" he asked, poking his head through the curtains obsequiously. McKnight objects that nobody can poke his head through a curtain and be obsequious. But Pullman porters can and do.

"No," I snapped. "It rang itself. What in thunder do you mean by exchanging my valise for this one? You'll have to find it if you waken the entire car to do it. There are important papers in that grip."

"Porter," called a feminine voice from an upper berth near-by. "Porter, am I to dangle here all day?"

"Let her dangle," I said savagely. "You find that bag of mine."

The porter frowned. Then he looked at me with injured dignity. "I brought in your overcoat, sir. You carried your own valise."

The fellow was right! In an excess of caution I had refused to relinquish my alligator bag, and had turned over my other traps to the porter. It was clear enough then. I was simply a victim of the usual sleeping-car robbery. I was in a lather of perspiration by that time: the lady down the car was still dangling and talking about it: still nearer a feminine voice was giving quick orders in French, presumably to a maid. The porter was on his knees, looking under the berth.

"Not there, sir," he said, dusting his knees. He was visibly more cheerful, having been absolved of responsibility. "Reckon it was taken while you was wanderin' around the car last night."

"I'll give you fifty dollars if you find it," I said. "A hundred. Reach up my shoes and I'll--"

I stopped abruptly. My eyes were fixed in stupefied amazement on a coat that hung from a hook at the foot of my berth. From the coat they traveled, dazed, to the soft-bosomed shirt beside it, and from there to the collar and cravat in the net hammock across the windows.

"A hundred!" the porter repeated, showing his teeth. But I caught him by the arm and pointed to the foot of the berth.

"What--what color's that coat?" I asked unsteadily.

"Gray, sir." His tone was one of gentle reproof.

"And--the trousers?"

He reached over and held up one creased leg. "Gray, too," he grinned.

"Gray!" I could not believe even his corroboration of my own eyes. "But my clothes were blue!" The porter was amused: he dived under the curtains and brought up a pair of shoes. "Your shoes, sir," he said with a flourish. "Reckon you've been dreaming, sir."

Now, there are two things I always avoid in my dress--possibly an idiosyncrasy of my bachelor existence. These tabooed articles are red neckties and tan shoes. And not only were the shoes the porter lifted from the floor of a gorgeous shade of yellow, but the scarf which was run through the turned over collar was a gaudy red. It took a full minute for the real import of things to penetrate my dazed intelligence. Then I gave a vindictive kick at the offending ensemble.

"They're not mine, any of them," I snarled. "They are some other fellow's. I'll sit here until I take root before I put them on."

"They're nice lookin' clothes," the porter put in, eying the red tie with appreciation. "Ain't everybody would have left you anything."

"Call the conductor," I said shortly. Then a possible explanation occurred to me. "Oh, porter--what's the number of this berth?"

"Seven, sir. If you can't wear those shoes--"

"Seven!" In my relief I almost shouted it. "Why, then, it's simple enough. I'm in the wrong berth, that's all. My berth is nine. Only--where the deuce is the man who belongs here?"

"Likely in nine, sir." The darky was enjoying himself. "You and the other gentleman just got mixed in the night. That's all, sir." It was clear that he thought I had been drinking.

I drew a long breath. Of course, that was the explanation. This was number seven's berth, that was his soft hat, this his umbrella, his coat, his bag. My rage turned to irritation at myself.

The porter went to the next berth and I could hear his softly insinuating voice. "Time to get up, sir. Are you awake? Time to get up."

There was no response from number nine. I guessed that he had opened the curtains and was looking in. Then he came back.

"Number nine's empty," he said.
"Empty! Do you mean my clothes aren't there?" I demanded. "My valise? Why don't you answer me?"

"You doan' give me time," he retorted. "There ain't nothin' there. But it's been slept in."

The disappointment was the greater for my few moments of hope. I sat up in a white fury and put on the clothes that had been left me. Then, still raging, I sat on the edge of the berth and put on the obnoxious tan shoes. The porter, called to his duties, made little excursions back to me, to offer assistance and to chuckle at my discomfiture. He stood by, outwardly decorous, but with little irritating grins of amusement around his mouth, when I finally emerged with the red tie in my hand.

"Bet the owner of those clothes didn't become them any more than you do," he said, as he pried the ubiquitous whisk broom.

"When I get the owner of these clothes," I retorted grimly, "he will need a shroud. Where's the conductor?"

The conductor was coming, he assured me; also that there was no bag answering the description of mine on the car. I slammed my way to the dressing-room, washed, choked my fifteen and a half neck into a fifteen collar, and was back again in less than five minutes. The car, as well as its occupants, was gradually taking on a daylight appearance. I hobbled in, for one of the shoes was abominably tight, and found myself facing a young woman in blue with an unforgettable face. ("Three women already." McKnight says: "That's going some, even if you don't count the Gilmore nurse.") She stood, half-turned toward me, one hand idly drooping, the other steadying her as she gazed out at the flying landscape. I had an instant impression that I had met her somewhere, under different circumstances, more cheerful ones, I thought, for the girl's dejection now was evident. Beside her, sitting down, a small dark woman, considerably older, was talking in a rapid undertone. The girl nodded indifferently now and then. I fancied, although I was not sure, that my appearance brought a startled look into the young woman's face. I sat down and, hands thrust deep into the other man's pockets, stared ruefully at the other man's shoes.

The stage was set. In a moment the curtain was going up on the first act of the play. And for a while we would all say our little speeches and sing our little songs, and I, the villain, would hold center stage while the gallery hissed.

The porter was standing beside lower ten. He had reached in and was knocking valiantly. But his efforts met with no response. He winked at me over his shoulder; then he unfastened the curtains and bent forward. Behind him, I saw him stiffen, heard his muttered exclamation, saw the bluish pallor that spread over his face and neck. As he retreated a step the interior of lower ten lay open to the day.

The man in it was on his back, the early morning sun striking full on his upturned face. But the light did not disturb him. A small stain of red dyed the front of his night clothes and trailed across the sheet; his half-open eyes were fixed, without seeing, on the shining wood above.

I grasped the porter's shaking shoulders and stared down to where the train imparted to the body a grisly suggestion of motion. "Good Lord," I gasped. "The man's been murdered!"

CHAPTER IV

NUMBERS SEVEN AND NINE

Afterwards, when I tried to recall our discovery of the body in lower ten, I found that my most vivid impression was not that made by the revelation of the opened curtain. I had an instantaneous picture of a slender blue-gowned girl who seemed to sense my words rather than hear them, of two small hands that clutched desperately at the seat beside them. The girl in the aisle stood, bent toward us, perplexity and alarm fighting in her face.

With twitching hands the porter attempted to draw the curtains together. Then in a paralysis of shock, he collapsed on the edge of my berth and sat there swaying. In my excitement I shook him.

"For Heaven's sake, keep your nerve, man," I said briskly. "You'll have every woman in the car in hysterics. And if you do, you'll wish you could change places with the man in there." He rolled his eyes.

A man near, who had been reading last night's paper, dropped it quickly and tiptoed toward us. He peered between the partly open curtains, closed them quietly and went back, ostentatiously solemn, to his seat. The very crackle with which he opened his paper added to the bursting curiosity of the car. For the passengers knew that something was amiss: I was conscious of a sudden tension.

With the curtains closed the porter was more himself; he wiped his lips with a handkerchief and stood erect.

"It's my last trip in this car," he remarked heavily. "There's something wrong with that berth. Last trip the woman in it took an overdose of some sleeping stuff, and we found her, jes' like that, dead! And it ain't more'n three months now since there was twins born in that very spot. No, sir, it ain't natural."

At that moment a thin man with prominent eyes and a spare grayish goatee creaked up the aisle and paused beside me.

"Porter sick?" he inquired, taking in with a professional eye the porter's horror-struck face, my own excitement and the slightly gaping curtains of lower ten. He reached for the darky's pulse and pulled out an old-fashioned gold watch.
"Hm! Only fifty! What's the matter? Had a shock?" he asked shrewdly.

"Yes," I answered for the porter. "We've both had one. If you are a doctor, I wish you would look at the man in the berth across, lower ten. I'm afraid it's too late, but I'm not experienced in such matters."

Together we opened the curtains, and the doctor, bending down, gave a comprehensive glance that took in the rolling head, the relaxed jaw, the ugly stain on the sheet. The examination needed only a moment. Death was written in the clear white of the nostrils, the colorless lips, the smoothing away of the sinister lines of the night before. With its new dignity the face was not unhandsome: the gray hair was still plentiful, the features strong and well cut.

The doctor straightened himself and turned to me. "Dead for some time," he said, running a professional finger over the stains. "These are dry and darkened, you see, and rigor mortis is well established. A friend of yours?"

"I don't know him at all," I replied. "Never saw him but once before."

"Then you don't know if he is traveling alone?"

"No, he was not--that is, I don't know anything about him," I corrected myself. It was my first blunder: the doctor glanced up at me quickly and then turned his attention again to the body. Like a flash there had come to me the vision of the woman with the bronze hair and the tragic face, whom I had surprised in the vestibule between the cars, somewhere in the small hours of the morning. I had acted on my first impulse--the masculine one of shielding a woman.

The doctor had unfastened the coat of the striped pajamas and exposed the dead man's chest. On the left side was a small punctured wound of insignificant size.

"Very neatly done," the doctor said with appreciation. "Couldn't have done it better myself. Right through the intercostal space: no time even to grunt."

"Isn't the heart around there somewhere?" I asked. The medical man turned toward me and smiled austerely.

"That's where it belongs, just under that puncture, when it isn't gadding around in a man's throat or his boots."

I had a new respect for the doctor, for any one indeed who could crack even a feeble joke under such circumstances, or who could run an impersonal finger over that wound and those stains. Odd how a healthy, normal man holds the medical profession in half contemptuous regard until he gets sick, or an emergency like this arises, and then turns meekly to the man who knows the ins and outs of his mortal tenement, takes his pills or his patronage, ties to him like a rudderless ship in a gale.

"Suicide, is it, doctor?"

"No, it is not suicide," he announced decisively. "It is murder."

Of course, I had expected that, but the word itself brought a shiver. I was just a bit dizzy. Curious faces through the car were turned toward us, and I could hear the porter behind me breathing audibly. A stout woman in negligee came down the aisle and querulously confronted the porter. She wore a pink dressing-jacket and carried portions of her clothing.

"Porter," she began, in the voice of the lady who had "dangled," "is there a rule of this company that will allow a woman to occupy the dressing-room for one hour and curl her hair with an alcohol lamp while respectable people haven't a place where they can hook their--"

She stopped suddenly and stared into lower ten. Her shining pink cheeks grew pasty, her jaw fell. I remember trying to think of something to say, and of saying nothing at all. Then--she had buried her eyes in the nondescript garments that hung from her arm and tottered back the way she had come. Slowly a little knot of men gathered around us, silent for the most part. The doctor was making a search of the berth when the conductor elbowed his way through, followed by the inquisitive man, who had evidently summoned him. I had lost sight, for a time, of the girl in blue.

"Do it himself?" the conductor queried, after a businesslike glance at the body.

"No, he didn't," the doctor asserted. "There's no weapon here, and the window is closed. He couldn't have thrown it out, and he didn't swallow it. What on earth are you looking for, man?"

Some one was on the floor at our feet, face down, head peering under the berth. Now he got up without apology, revealing the man who had summoned the conductor. He was dusty, alert, cheerful, and he dragged up with him the dead man's suit-case. The sight of it brought back to me at once my predicament.

"I don't know whether there's any connection or not, conductor," I said, "but I am a victim, too, in less degree; I've been robbed of everything I possess, except a red and yellow bath-robe. I happened to be wearing the bath-robe, which was probably the reason the thief overlooked it."

There was a fresh murmur in the crowd. Some body laughed nervously. The conductor was irritated.

"I can't bother with that now," he snarled. "The railroad company is responsible for transportation, not for clothes, jewelry and morals. If people want to be stabbed and robbed in the company's cars, it's their affair. Why didn't you sleep in your clothes? I do."
I took an angry step forward. Then somebody touched my arm, and I unclenched my fist. I could understand the conductor's position, and beside, in the law, I had been guilty myself of contributory negligence.

"I'm not trying to make you responsible," I protested as amiably as I could, "and I believe the clothes the thief left are as good as my own. They are certainly newer. But my valise contained valuable papers and it is to your interest as well as mine to find the man who stole it."

"Why, of course," the conductor said shrewdly. "Find the man who skipped out with this gentleman's clothes, and you've probably got the murderer."

"I went to bed in lower nine," I said, my mind full again of my lost papers, "and I wakened in number seven. I was up in the night prowling around, as I was unable to sleep, and I must have gone back to the wrong berth. Anyhow, until the porter wakened me this morning I knew nothing of my mistake. In the interval the thief--murderer, too, perhaps--must have come back, discovered my error, and taken advantage of it to further his escape."

The inquisitive man looked at me from between narrowed eyelids, ferret-like.

"Did any one on the train suspect you of having valuable papers?" he inquired. The crowd was listening intently.

"No one," I answered promptly and positively. The doctor was investigating the murdered man's effects. The pockets of his trousers contained the usual miscellany of keys and small change, while in his hip pocket was found a small pearl-handled revolver of the type women usually keep around. A gold watch with a Masonic charm had slid down between the mattress and the window, while a showy diamond stud was still fastened in the bosom of his shirt. Taken as a whole, the personal belongings were those of a man of some means, but without any particular degree of breeding. The doctor heaped them together.

"Either robbery was not the motive," he reflected, "or the thief overlooked these things in his hurry."

The latter hypothesis seemed the more tenable, when, after a thorough search, we found no pocketbook and less than a dollar in small change.

The suit-case gave no clue. It contained one empty leather-covered flask and a pint bottle, also empty, a change of linen and some collars with the laundry mark, S. H. In the leather tag on the handle was a card with the name Simon Harrington, Pittsburg. The conductor sat down on my unmade berth, across, and made an entry of the name and address. Then, on an old envelope, he wrote a few words and gave it to the porter, who disappeared.

"I guess that's all I can do," he said. "I've had enough trouble this trip to last for a year. They don't need a conductor on these trains any more; what they ought to have is a sheriff and a posse."

The porter from the next car came in and whispered to him. The conductor rose unhappily.

"Next car's caught the disease," he grumbled. "Doctor, a woman back there has got mumps or bubonic plague, or something. Will you come back?"

CHAPTER V
THE WOMAN IN THE NEXT CAR

With the departure of the conductor and the doctor, the group around lower ten broke up, to re-form in smaller knots through the car. The porter remained on guard. With something of relief I sank into a seat. I wanted to think, to try to remember the details of the previous night. But my inquisitive acquaintance had other intentions. He came up and sat down beside me. Like the conductor, he had taken notes of the dead man's belongings, his name, address, clothing and the general circumstances of the crime. Now with his little note-book open before him, he prepared to enjoy the minor sensation of the robbery.

"And now for the second victim," he began cheerfully. "What is your name and address, please?" I eyed him with suspicion.

"I have lost everything but my name and address," I parried. "What do you want them for? Publication?"

"Oh, no; dear, no!" he said, shocked at my misapprehension. "Merely for my own enlightenment. I like to gather data of this kind and draw my own conclusions. Most interesting and engrossing. Once or twice I have forestalled the results of police investigation--but entirely for my own amusement."

I nodded tolerantly. Most of us have hobbies; I knew a man once who carried his handkerchief up his sleeve and had a mania for old colored prints cut out of Godey's Lady's Book.

"I use that inductive method originated by Poe and followed since with such success by Conan Doyle. Have you ever read Gaboriau? Ah, you have missed a treat, indeed. And now, to get down to business, what is the name of our escaped thief and probable murderer?"

"How on earth do I know?" I demanded impatiently. "He didn't write it in blood anywhere, did he?"

The little man looked hurt and disappointed.

"Do you mean to say," he asked, "that the pockets of those clothes are entirely empty?" The pockets! In the
excitement I had forgotten entirely the sealskin grip which the porter now sat at my feet, and I had not investigated the pockets at all. With the inquisitive man's pencil taking note of everything that I found, I emptied them on the opposite seat.

Upper left-hand waist-coat, two lead pencils and a fountain pen; lower right waist-coat, match-box and a small stamp book; right-hand pocket coat, pair of gray suede gloves, new, size seven and a half; left-hand pocket, gun-metal cigarette case studded with pearls, half-full of Egyptian cigarettes. The trousers pockets contained a gold penknife, a small amount of money in bills and change, and a handkerchief with the initial "S" on it.

Further search through the coat discovered a card-case with cards bearing the name Henry Pinckney Sullivan, and a leather flask with gold mountings, filled with what seemed to be very fair whisky, and monogrammed H. P. S. "His name evidently is Henry Pinckney Sullivan," said the cheerful follower of Poe, as he wrote it down. "Address as yet unknown. Blond, probably. Have you noticed that it is almost always the blond men who affect a very light gray, with a touch of red in the scarf? Fact, I assure you. I kept a record once of the summer attire of men, and ninety per cent, followed my rule. Dark men like you affect navy blue, or brown."

In spite of myself I was amused at the man's shrewdness.

"Yes; the suit he took was dark--a blue," I said. He rubbed his hands and smiled at me delightedly. "Then you wore black shoes, not tan," he said, with a glance at the aggressive yellow ones I wore.

"Right again," I acknowledged. "Black low shoes and black embroidered hose. If you keep on you'll have a motive for the crime, and the murderer's present place of hiding. And if you come back to the smoker with me, I'll give you an opportunity to judge if he knew good whisky from bad."

I put the articles from the pockets back again and got up. "I wonder if there is a diner on?" I said. "I need something sustaining after all this."

I was conscious then of some one at my elbow. I turned to see the young woman whose face was so vaguely familiar. In the very act of speaking she drew back suddenly and colored.

"Oh,--I beg your pardon," she said hurriedly, "I--thought you were--some one else." She was looking in a puzzled fashion at my coat. I felt all the cringing guilt of a man who has accidentally picked up the wrong umbrella: my borrowed collar sat tight on my neck.

"I'm sorry," I said idiotically. "I'm sorry, but--I'm not." I have learned since that she has bright brown hair, with a loose wave in it that drops over her ears, and dark blue eyes with black lashes and--but what does it matter? One enjoys a picture as a whole: not as the sum of its parts.

She saw the flask then, and her errand came back to her. "One of the ladies at the end of car has fainted," she explained. "I thought perhaps a stimulant--"

I picked up the flask at once and followed my guide down the aisle. Two or three women were working over the woman who had fainted. They had opened her collar and taken out her hairpins, whatever good that might do. The stout woman was vigorously rubbing her wrists, with the idea, no doubt, of working up her pulse! The unconscious woman was the one for whom I had secured lower eleven at the station.

I poured a little liquor in a bungling masculine fashion between her lips as she leaned back, with closed eyes. She choked, coughed, and rallied somewhat.

"Poor thing," said the stout lady. "As she lies back that way I could almost think it was my mother; she used to faint so much."

"It would make anybody faint," chimed in another. "Murder and robbery in one night and on one car. I'm thankful I always wear my rings in a bag around my neck--even if they do get under me and keep me awake."

The girl in blue was looking at us with wide, startled eyes. I saw her pale a little, saw the quick, apprehensive glance which she threw at her traveling companion, the small woman I had noticed before. There was an exchange--almost a clash--of glances. The small woman frowned. That was all. I turned my attention again to my patient.

She had revived somewhat, and now she asked to have the window opened. The train had stopped again and the car was oppressively hot. People around were looking at their watches and grumbling over the delay. The doctor bustled in with a remark about its being his busy day. The amateur detective and the porter together mounted guard over lower ten. Outside the heat rose in shimmering waves from the tracks: the very wood of the car was hot to touch. A Camberwell Beauty darted through the open door and made its way, in erratic plunges, great wings waving, down the sunny aisle. All around lay the peace of harvested fields, the quiet of the country.

CHAPTER VI
THE GIRL IN BLUE

I was growing more and more irritable. The thought of what the loss of the notes meant was fast crowding the murder to the back of my mind. The forced inaction was intolerable.

The porter had reported no bag answering the description of mine on the train, but I was disposed to make my own investigation. I made a tour of the cars, scrutinizing every variety of hand luggage, ranging from luxurious
English bags with gold mountings to the wicker nondescripts of the day coach at the rear. I was not alone in my quest, for the girl in blue was just ahead of me. Car by car she preceded me through the train, unconscious that I was behind her, looking at each passenger as she passed. I fancied the proceeding was distasteful, but that she had determined on a course and was carrying it through. We reached the end of the train almost together--empty-handed, both of us.

The girl went out to the platform. When she saw me she moved aside, and I stepped out beside her. Behind us the track curved sharply; the early sunshine threw the train, in long black shadow, over the hot earth. Forward somewhere they were hammering. The girl said nothing, but her profile was strained and anxious.

"I--if you have lost anything," I began, "I wish you would let me try to help. Not that my own success is anything to boast of."

She hardly glanced at me. It was not flattering. "I have not been robbed, if that is what you mean," she replied quietly. "I am perplexed. That is all."

There was nothing to say to that. I lifted my hat--the other fellow's hat--and turned to go back to my car. Two or three members of the train crew, including the conductor, were standing in the shadow talking. And at that moment, from a farm-house near came the swift clang of the breakfast bell, calling in the hands from barn and pasture. I turned back to the girl.

"We may be here for an hour," I said, "and there is no buffet car on. If I remember my youth, that bell means ham and eggs and country butter and coffee. If you care to run the risk--"

"I am not hungry," she said, "but perhaps a cup of coffee--dear me, I believe I am hungry," she finished. "Only--"

"I can bring your companion," I suggested, without enthusiasm. But the young woman shook her head.

"She is not hungry," she objected, "and she is very--well, I know she wouldn't come. Do you suppose we could make it if we run?"

"I haven't any idea," I said cheerfully. "Any old train would be better than this one, if it does leave us behind."

"Yes. Any train would be better than this one," she repeated gravely. I found myself watching her changing expression. I had spoken two dozen words to her and already I felt that I knew the lights and shades in her voice,--I, who had always known how a woman rode to hounds, and who never could have told the color of her hair.

I stepped down on the ties and turned to assist her, and together we walked back to where the conductor and the porter from our car were in close conversation. Instinctively my hand went to my cigarette pocket and came out empty. She saw the gesture.

"If you want to smoke, you may," she said. "I have a big cousin who smokes all the time. He says I am 'kippered."

I drew out the gun-metal cigarette case and opened it. But this most commonplace action had an extraordinary result: the girl beside me stopped dead still and stood staring at it with fascinated eyes.

"Is--where did you get that?" she demanded, with a catch in her voice; her gaze still fixed on the cigarette case.

"Then you haven't heard the rest of the tragedy?" I asked, holding out the case. "It's frightfully bad luck for me, but it makes a good story. You see--"

At that moment the conductor and porter ceased their colloquy. The conductor came directly toward me, tugging as he came at his bristling gray mustache.

"I would like to talk to you in the car," he said to me, with a curious glance at the young lady.

"Can't it wait?" I objected. "We are on our way to a cup of coffee and a slice of bacon. Be merciful, as you are powerful."

"I'm afraid the breakfast will have to wait," he replied. "I won't keep you long." There was a note of authority in his voice which I resented; but, after all, the circumstances were unusual.

"We'll have to defer that cup of coffee for a while," I said to the girl; "but don't despair; there's breakfast somewhere."

As we entered the car, she stood aside, but I felt rather than saw that she followed us. I was surprised to see a half dozen men gathered around the berth in which I had wakened, number seven. It had not yet been made up.

As we passed along the aisle, I was conscious of a new expression on the faces of the passengers. The tall woman who had fainted was searching my face with narrowed eyes, while the stout woman of the kindly heart avoided my gaze, and pretended to look out the window.

As we pushed our way through the group, I fancied that it closed around me ominously. The conductor said nothing, but led the way without ceremony to the side of the berth.

"What's the matter?" I inquired. I was puzzled, but not apprehensive. "Have you some of my things? I'd be thankful even for my shoes; these are confoundedly tight."

Nobody spoke, and I fell silent, too. For one of the pillows had been turned over, and the under side of the white
case was streaked with brownish stains. I think it was a perceptible time before I realized that the stains were blood, and that the faces around were filled with suspicion and distrust.

"Why, it--that looks like blood," I said vacuously. There was an incessant pounding in my ears, and the conductor's voice came from far off.

"It is blood," he asserted grimly.

I looked around with a dizzy attempt at nonchalance. "Even if it is," I remonstrated, "surely you don't suppose for a moment that I know anything about it!"

The amateur detective elbowed his way in. He had a scrap of transparent paper in his hand, and a pencil.

"I would like permission to trace the stains," he began eagerly. "Also"--to me--"if you will kindly jab your finger with a pin--needle--anything--"

"If you don't keep out of this," the conductor said savagely, "I will do some jabbing myself. As for you, sir--" he turned to me. I was absolutely innocent, but I knew that I presented a typical picture of guilt; I was covered with cold sweat, and the pounding in my ears kept up dizzily. "As for you, sir--"

The irrepressible amateur detective made a quick pounce at the pillow and pushed back the cover. Before our incredulous eyes he drew out a narrow steel dirk which had been buried to the small cross that served as a head.

There was a chorus of voices around, a quick surging forward of the crowd. So that was what had scratched my hand! I buried the wound in my coat pocket.

"Well," I said, trying to speak naturally, "doesn't that prove what I have been telling you? The man who committed the murder belonged to this berth, and made an exchange in some way after the crime. How do you know he didn't change the tags so I would come back to this berth?" This was an inspiration; I was pleased with it. "That's what he did, he changed the tags," I reiterated.

There was a murmur of assent around. The doctor, who was standing beside me, put his hand on my arm. "If this gentleman committed this crime, and I for one feel sure he did not, then who is the fellow who got away? And why did he go?"

"We have only one man's word for that," the conductor snarled. "I've traveled some in these cars myself, and no one ever changed berths with me."

Somebody on the edge of the group asserted that hereafter he would travel by daylight. I glanced up and caught the eye of the girl in blue.

"They are all mad," she said. Her tone was low, but I heard her distinctly. "Don't take them seriously enough to defend yourself."

"I am glad you think I didn't do it," I observed meekly, over the crowd. "Nothing else is of any importance."

"Lawrence Blakeley, Washington."

"Your occupation?"

"Attorney. A member of the firm of Blakeley and McKnight."

"Mr. Blakeley, you say you have occupied the wrong berth and have been robbed. Do you know anything of the man who did it?"

"Only from what he left behind," I answered. "These clothes--"

"They fit you," he said with quick suspicion. "Isn't that rather a coincidence? You are a large man."

"Good Heavens," I retorted, stung into fury, "do I look like a man who would wear this kind of a necktie? Do you suppose I carry purple and green barred silk handkerchiefs? Would any man in his senses wear a pair of shoes a full size too small?"

The conductor was inclined to hedge. "You will have to grant that I am in a peculiar position," he said. "I have only your word as to the exchange of berths, and you understand I am merely doing my duty. Are there any clues in the pockets?"

For the second time I emptied them of their contents, which he noted. "Is that all?" he finished. "There was nothing else?"

"Nothing."

"That's not all, sir," broke in the porter, stepping forward. "There was a small black satchel."

"That's so," I exclaimed. "I forgot the bag. I don't even know where it is."

The easily swayed crowd looked suspicious again. I've grown so accustomed to reading the faces of a jury, seeing them swing from doubt to belief, and back again to doubt, that I instinctively watch expressions. I saw that my forgetfulness had done me harm --that suspicion was roused again.

The bag was found a couple of seats away, under somebody's raincoat --another dubious circumstance. Was I hiding it? It was brought to the berth and placed beside the conductor, who opened it at once.

It contained the usual traveling impedimenta--change of linen, collars, handkerchiefs, a bronze-green scarf, and a
safety razor. But the attention of the crowd riveted itself on a flat, Russia leather wallet, around which a heavy gum band was wrapped, and which bore in gilt letters the name "Simon Harrington."

CHAPTER VII
A FINE GOLD CHAIN

The conductor held it out to me, his face sternly accusing.

"Is this another coincidence?" he asked. "Did the man who left you his clothes and the barred silk handkerchief and the tight shoes leave you the spoil of the murder?"

The men standing around had drawn off a little, and I saw the absolute futility of any remonstrance. Have you ever seen a fly, who, in these hygienic days, finding no cobwebs to entangle him, is caught in a sheet of fly paper, finds himself more and more mired, and is finally quiet with the sticky stillness of despair?

Well, I was the fly. I had seen too much of circumstantial evidence to have any belief that the establishing of my identity would weigh much against the other incriminating details. It meant imprisonment and trial, probably, with all the notoriety and loss of practice they would entail. A man thinks quickly at a time like that. All the probable consequences of the finding of that pocket-book flashed through my mind as I extended my hand to take it. Then I drew my arm back.

"I don't want it," I said. "Look inside. Maybe the other man took the money and left the wallet."

The conductor opened it, and again there was a curious surging forward of the crowd. To my intense disappointment the money was still there.

I stood blankly miserable while it was counted out--five one-hundred-dollar bills, six twenties, and some fives and ones that brought the total to six hundred and fifty dollars.

The little man with the note-book insisted on taking the numbers of the notes, to the conductor's annoyance. It was immaterial to me: small things had lost their power to irritate. I was seeing myself in the prisoner's box, going through all the nerve-racking routine of a trial for murder--the challenging of the jury, the endless cross-examinations, the alternate hope and fear. I believe I said before that I had no nerves, but for a few minutes that morning I was as near as a man ever comes to hysteria.

I folded my arms and gave myself a mental shake. I seemed to be the center of a hundred eyes, expressing every shade of doubt and distrust, but I tried not to flinch. Then some one created a diversion.

The amateur detective was busy again with the seal-skin bag, investigating the make of the safety razor and the manufacturer's name on the bronze-green tie. Now, however, he paused and frowned, as though some pet theory had been upset.

Then from a corner of the bag he drew out and held up for our inspection some three inches of fine gold chain, one end of which was blackened and stained with blood!

The conductor held out his hand for it, but the little man was not ready to give it up. He turned to me.

"You say no watch was left you? Was there a piece of chain like that?"

"No chain at all," I said sulkily. "No jewelry of any kind, except plain gold buttons in the shirt I am wearing."

"Where are your glasses?" he threw at me suddenly: instinctively my hand went to my eyes. My glasses had been gone all morning, and I had not even noticed their absence. The little man smiled cynically and held out the chain.

"I must ask you to examine this," he insisted. "Isn't it a part of the fine gold chain you wear over your ear?"

I didn't want to touch the thing: the stain at the end made me shudder. But with a baker's dozen of suspicious eyes--well, we'll say fourteen: there were no one-eyed men--I took the fragment in the tips of my fingers and looked at it helplessly.

"Very fine chains are much alike," I managed to say. "For all I know, this may be mine, but I don't know how it got into that sealskin bag. I never saw the bag until this morning after daylight."

"He admits that he had the bag," somebody said behind me. "How did you guess that he wore glasses, anyhow?" to the amateur sleuth.

That gentleman cleared his throat. "There were two reasons," he said, "for suspecting it. When you see a man with the lines of his face drooping, a healthy individual with a pensive eye,--suspect astigmatism. Besides, this gentleman has a pronounced line across the bridge of his nose and a mark on his ear from the chain."

After this remarkable exhibition of the theoretical as combined with the practical, he sank into a seat near-by, and still holding the chain, sat with closed eyes and pursed lips. It was evident to all the car that the solution of the mystery was a question of moments. Once he bent forward eagerly and putting the chain on the window-sill, proceeded to go over it with a pocket magnifying glass, only to shake his head in disappointment. All the people around shook their heads too, although they had not the slightest idea what it was about.

The pounding in my ears began again. The group around me seemed to be suddenly motionless in the very act of moving, as if a hypnotist had called "Rigid!" The girl in blue was looking at me, and above the din I thought she said
CHAPTER VIII

THE SECOND SECTION

Have you ever been picked up out of your three-meals-a-day life, whirled around in a tornado of events, and landed in a situation so grotesque and yet so horrible that you laugh even while you are groaning, and straining at its hopelessness? McKnight says that is hysteria, and that no man worthy of the name ever admits to it.

Also, as McKnight says, it sounds like a tank drama. Just as the revolving saw is about to cut the hero into stove lengths, the second villain blows up the sawmill. The hero goes up through the roof and alights on the bank of a stream at the feet of his lady love, who is making daisy chains.

Nevertheless, when I was safely home again, with Mrs. Klopton brewing strange drinks that came in paper packets from the pharmacy, and that smelled to heaven, I remember staggering to the door and closing it, and then going back to bed and howling out the absurdity and the madness of the whole thing. And while I laughed my very soul was sick, for the girl was gone by that time, and I knew by all the loyalty that answers between men for honor that I would have to put her out of my mind.

And yet, all the night that followed, filled as it was with the shrieking demons of pain, I saw her as I had seen her last, in the queer hat with green ribbons. I told the doctor this, guardedly, the next morning, and he said it was the morphia, and that I was lucky not to have seen a row of devils with green tails.

I don't know anything about the wreck of September ninth last. You who swallowed the details with your coffee and digested the horrors with your chop, probably know a great deal more than I do. I remember very distinctly that the jumping and throbbing in my arm brought me back to a world that at first was nothing but sky, a heap of clouds that I thought hazily were the meringue on a blue charlotte russe. As the sense of hearing was slowly added to vision, I heard a woman near me sobbing that she had lost her hat pin, and she couldn't keep her hat on.

I think I dropped back into unconsciousness again, for the next thing I remember was of my blue patch of sky clouded with smoke, of a strange roaring and crackling, of a rain of fiery sparks on my face and of somebody beating at me with feeble hands. I opened my eyes and closed them again: the girl in blue was bending over me. With that imperviousness to big things and keenness to small that is the first effect of shock, I tried to be facetious, when a spark stung my cheek.

"You will have to rouse yourself!" the girl was repeating desperately. "You've been on fire twice already." A piece of striped ticking floated slowly over my head. As the wind caught it its charring edges leaped into flame.

"Looks like a kite, doesn't it?" I remarked cheerfully. And then, as my arm gave an excruciating throb--"Jove, how my arm hurts!"

The girl bent over and spoke slowly, distinctly, as one might speak to a deaf person or a child.

"Listen, Mr. Blakeley," she said earnestly. "You must rouse yourself. There has been a terrible accident. The second section ran into us. The wreck is burning now, and if we don't move, we will catch fire. Do you hear?"

Her voice and my arm were bringing me to my senses. "I hear," I said. "I--I'll sit up in a second. Are you hurt?"

"No, only bruised. Do you think you can walk?"

I drew up one foot after another, gingerly.

"They seem to move all right," I remarked dubiously. "Would you mind telling me where the back of my head has gone? I can't help thinking it isn't there."

She made a quick examination. "It's pretty badly bumped," she said. "You must have fallen on it."

I had got up on my uninjured elbow by that time, but the pain threw me back. "Don't look at the wreck," I entreated her. "It's no sight for a woman. If--if there is any way to tie up this arm, I might be able to do something. There may be people under those cars!"

"Then it is too late to help," she replied solemnly. A little shower of feathers, each carrying its fiery lamp, blew over us from some burning pillow. A part the wreck collapsed with a crash. In a resolute to play a man's part in the tragedy going on around, I got to my knees. Then I realized what had not noticed before: the hand and wrist of the broken left arm were jammed through the handle of the sealskin grip. I gasped and sat down suddenly.

"You must not do that," the girl insisted. I noticed now that she kept her back to the wreck, her eyes averted. "The weight of the traveling-bag must be agony. Let me support the valise until we get back a few yards. Then you must lie down until we can get it cut off."

Then I noticed that she was going to cut off the satchel, not the arm. The
dizziness was leaving and I was gradually becoming myself.
"If you pull, it might come," I suggested. "And with that weight gone, I think I will cease to be five feet eleven inches of baby."

She tried gently to loosen the handle, but it would not move, and at last, with great drops of cold perspiration over me, I had to give up.
"I'm afraid I can't stand it," I said. "But there's a knife somewhere around these clothes, and if I can find it, perhaps you can cut the leather."

As I gave her the knife she turned it over, examining it with a peculiar expression, bewilderment rather than surprise. But she said nothing. She set to work deftly, and in a few minutes the bag dropped free.
"That's better," I declared, sitting up. "Now, if you can pin my sleeve to my coat, it will support the arm so we can get away from here."

"The pin might give," she objected, "and the jerk would be terrible." She looked around, puzzled; then she got up, coming back in a minute with a dragged, partly scorched sheet. This she tore into a large square, and after she had folded it, she slipped it under the broken arm and tied it securely at the back of my neck.

The relief was immediate, and, picking up the sealskin bag, I walked slowly beside her, away from the track.

The first act was over: the curtain fallen. The scene was "struck."

CHAPTER IX
THE HALCYON BREAKFAST

We were still dazed, I think, for we wandered like two troubled children, our one idea at first to get as far away as we could from the horror behind us. We were both bareheaded, grimy, pallid through the grit. Now and then we met little groups of country folk hurrying to the track: they stared at us curiously, and some wished to question us. But we hurried past them; we had put the wreck behind us. That way lay madness.

Only once the girl turned and looked behind her. The wreck was hidden, but the smoke cloud hung heavy and dense. For the first time I remembered that my companion had not been alone on the train.

"It is quiet here," I suggested. "If you will sit down on the bank I will go back and make some inquiries. I've been criminally thoughtless. Your traveling companion--"

She interrupted me, and something of her splendid poise was gone. "Please don't go back," she said. "I am afraid it would be of no use. And I don't want to be left alone."

Heaven knows I did not want her to be alone. I was more than content to walk along beside her aimlessly, for any length of time. Gradually, as she lost the exaltation of the moment, I was gaining my normal condition of mind. I was beginning to realize that I had lacked the morning grace of a shave, that I looked like some lost hope of yesterday, and that my left shoe pinched outrageously. A man does not rise triumphant above such handicaps. The girl, for all her disordered hair and the crumpled linen of her waist, in spite of her missing hat and the small gold bag that hung forlornly from a broken chain, looked exceedingly lovely.

"Then I won't leave you alone," I said manfully, and we stumbled on together. Thus far we had seen nobody from the wreck, but well up the lane we came across the tall dark woman who had occupied lower eleven. She was half crouching beside the road, her black hair about her shoulders, and an ugly bruise over her eye. She did not seem to know us, and refused to accompany us. We left her there at last, babbling incoherently and rolling in her hands a dozen pebbles she had gathered in the road.

The girl shuddered as we went on. Once she turned and glanced at my bandage. "Does it hurt very much?" she asked.

"It's growing rather numb. But it might be worse," I answered mendaciously. If anything in this world could be worse, I had never experienced it.

And so we trudged on bareheaded under the summer sun, growing parched and dusty and weary, doggedly leaving behind us the pillar of smoke. I thought I knew of a trolley line somewhere in the direction we were going, or perhaps we could find a horse and trap to take us into Baltimore. The girl smiled when I suggested it.

"We will create a sensation, won't we?" she asked. "Isn't it queer --or perhaps it's my state of mind--but I keep wishing for a pair of gloves, when I haven't even a hat!"

When we reached the main road we sat down for a moment, and her hair, which had been coming loose for some time, fell over her shoulders in little waves that were most alluring. It seemed a pity to twist it up again, but when I suggested this, cautiously, she said it was troublesome and got in her eyes when it was loose. So she gathered it up, while I held a row of little shell combs and pins, and when it was done it was vastly becoming, too. Funny about hair: a man never knows he has it until he begins to lose it, but it's different with a girl. Something of the unconventional situation began to dawn on her as she put in the last hair-pin and patted some stray locks to place.

"I have not told you my name," she said abruptly. "I forgot that because I know who you are, you know nothing about me. I am Alison West, and my home is in Richmond."
So that was it! This was the girl of the photograph on John Gilmore's bedside table. The girl McKnight expected to see in Richmond the next day, Sunday! She was on her way back to meet him! Well, what difference did it make, anyhow? We had been thrown together by the merest chance. In an hour or two at the most we would be back in civilization and she would recall me, if she remembered me at all, as an unshaven creature in a red cravat and tan shoes, with a soiled Pullman sheet tied around my neck. I drew a deep breath.

"Just a twinge," I said, when she glanced up quickly. "It's very good of you to let me know, Miss West. I have been hearing delightful things about you for three months."

"From Richey McKnight?" She was frankly curious.

"Yes. From Richey McKnight," I assented. Was it any wonder McKnight was crazy about her? I dug my heels into the dust.

"I have been visiting near Cresson, in the mountains," Miss West was saying. "The person you mentioned, Mrs. Curtis, was my hostess. We--we were on our way to Washington together." She spoke slowly, as if she wished to give the minimum of explanation. Across her face had come again the baffling expression of perplexity and trouble I had seen before.

"You were on your way home, I suppose? Richey spoke about seeing you," I floundered, finding it necessary to say something. She looked at me with level, direct eyes.

"No," she returned quietly. "I did not intend to go home. I--well, it doesn't matter; I am going home now."

A woman in a calico dress, with two children, each an exact duplicate of the other, had come quickly down the road. She took in the situation at a glance, and was explosively hospitable.

"You poor things," she said. "If you'll take the first road to the left over there, and turn in at the second pigsty, you will find breakfast on the table and a coffee-pot on the stove. And there's plenty of soap and water, too. Don't say one word. There isn't a soul there to see you."

We accepted the invitation and she hurried on toward the excitement and the railroad. I got up carefully and helped Miss West to her feet.

"At the second pigsty to the left," I repeated, "we will find the breakfast I promised you seven eternities ago. Forward to the pigsty!"

We said very little for the remainder of that walk. I had almost reached the limit of endurance: with every step the broken ends of the bone grated together. We found the farm-house without difficulty, and I remember wondering if I could hold out to the end of the old stone walk that led between hedges to the door.

"Allah be praised," I said with all the voice I could muster. "Behold the coffee-pot!" And then I put down the grip and folded up like a jack-knife on the porch floor.

When I came around something hot was trickling down my neck, and a despairing voice was saying, "Oh, I don't seem to be able to pour it into your mouth. Please open your eyes."

"But I don't want it in my eyes," I replied dreamily. "I haven't any idea what came over me. It was the shoes, I think: the left one is a red-hot torture." I was sitting by that time and looking across into her face.

Never before or since have I fainted, but I would do it joyfully, a dozen times a day, if I could waken again to the blissful touch of soft fingers on my face, the hot ecstasy of coffee spilled by those fingers down my neck. There was a thrill in every tone of her voice that morning. Before long my loyalty to McKnight would step between me and the girl he loved: life would develop new complexities. In those early hours after the wreck, full of pain as they were, there was nothing of the suspicion and distrust that came later. Shorn of our gauds and baubles, we were primitive man and woman, together: our world for the hour was the deserted farm-house, the slope of wheat-field that led to the road, the woodland lot, the pasture.

We breakfasted together across the homely table. Our cheerfulness, at first sheer reaction, became less forced as we ate great slices of bread from the granny oven back of the house, and drank hot fluid that smelled like coffee and tasted like nothing that I have ever swallowed. We found cream in stone jars, sunk deep in the chill water of the spring house. And there were eggs, great yellow-brown ones,--a basket of them.

So, like two children awakened from a nightmare, we chattered over our food: we hunted mutual friends, we laughed together at my feeble witticisms, but we put the horror behind us resolutely. After all, it was the hat with the green ribbons that brought back the strangeness of the situation.

All along I had had the impression that Alison West was deliberately putting out of her mind something that obtruded now and then. It brought with it a return of the puzzled expression that I had surprised early in the day, before the wreck. I caught it once, when, breakfast over, she was tightening the sling that held the broken arm. I had prolonged the morning meal as much as I could, but when the wooden clock with the pink roses on the dial pointed to half after ten, and the mother with the duplicate youngsters had not come back, Miss West made the move I had dreaded.

"If we are to get into Baltimore at all we must start," she said, rising. "You ought to see a doctor as soon as
possible."

"Hush," I said warningly. "Don't mention the arm, please; it is asleep now. You may rouse it."

"If I only had a hat," she reflected. "It wouldn't need to be much of one, but--" She gave a little cry and darted to the corner. "Look," she said triumphantly, "the very thing. With the green streamers tied up in a bow, like this--do you suppose the child would mind? I can put five dollars or so here--that would buy a dozen of them."

It was a queer affair of straw, that hat, with a round crown and a rim that flopped dismally. With a single movement she had turned it up at one side and fitted it to her head. Grotesque by itself, when she wore it it was a thing of joy.

Evidently the lack of head covering had troubled her, for she was elated at her find. She left me, scrawling a note of thanks and pinning it with a bill to the table-cloth, and ran up-stairs to the mirror and the promised soap and water.

I did not see her when she came down. I had discovered a bench with a tin basin outside the kitchen door, and was washing, in a helpless, one-sided way. I felt rather than saw that she was standing in the door-way, and I made a final plunge into the basin.

"How is it possible for a man with only a right hand to wash his left ear?" I asked from the roller towel. I was distinctly uncomfortable: men are more rigidly creatures of convention than women, whether they admit it or not. "There is so much soap on me still that if I laugh I will blow bubbles. Washing with rain-water and home-made soap is like motoring on a slippery road. I only struck the high places."

Then, having achieved a brilliant polish with the towel, I looked at the girl.

She was leaning against the frame of the door, her face perfectly colorless, her breath coming in slow, difficult respirations. The erratic hat was pinned to place, but it had slid rakishly to one side. When I realized that she was staring, not at me, but past me to the road along which we had come, I turned and followed her gaze. There was no one in sight; the lane stretched dust white in the sun,--no moving figure on it, no sign of life.

CHAPTER X

MISS WEST'S REQUEST

The surprising change in her held me speechless. All the animation of the breakfast table was gone: there was no hint of the response with which, before, she had met my nonsensical sallies. She stood there, white-lipped, unsmilimg, staring down the dusty road. One hand was clenched tight over some small object. Her eyes dropped to it from the distant road, and then closed, with a quick, indrawn breath. Her color came back slowly. Whatever had caused the change, she said nothing. She was anxious to leave at once, almost impatient over my deliberate masculine way of getting my things together. Afterward I recalled that I had wanted to explore the barn for a horse and some sort of a vehicle to take us to the trolley, and that she had refused to allow me to look. I remembered many things later that might have helped me, and did not. At the time, I was only completely bewildered. Save the wreck, the responsibility for which lay between Providence and the engineer of the second section, all the events of that strange morning were logically connected; they came from one cause, and tended unerringly to one end. But the cause was buried, the end not yet in view.

Not until we had left the house well behind did the girl's face relax its tense lines. I was watching her more closely than I had realized, for when we had gone a little way along the road she turned to me almost petulantly. "Please don't stare so at me," she said, to my sudden confusion. "I know the hat is dreadful. Green always makes me look ghastly."

"Perhaps it was the green." I was unaccountably relieved. "Do you know, a few minutes ago, you looked almost pallid to me!"

She glanced at me quickly, but I was gazing ahead. We were out of sight of the house, now, and with every step away from it the girl was obviously relieved. Whatever she held in her hand, she never glanced at it. But she was conscious of it every second. She seemed to come to a decision about it while we were still in sight of the gate, for she murmured something and turned back alone, going swiftly, her feet stirring up small puffs of dust at every step. She fastened something to the gate-post,--I could see the nervous haste with which she worked. When she joined me again it was without explanation. But the clenched fingers were free now, and while she looked tired and worn, the strain had visibly relaxed.

We walked along slowly in the general direction of the suburban trolley line. Once a man with an empty wagon offered us a lift, but after a glance at the springless vehicle I declined.

"The ends of the bone think they are castanets as it is," I explained. "But the lady--"

The young lady, however, declined and we went on together. Once, when the trolley line was in sight, she got a pebble in her low shoe, and we sat down under a tree until she found the cause of the trouble.

"I--I don't know what I should have done without you," I blundered. "Moral support and--and all that. Do you know, my first conscious thought after the wreck was of relief that you had not been hurt?"
She was sitting beside me, where a big chestnut tree shaded the road, and I surprised a look of misery on her face that certainly my words had not been meant to produce.

"And my first thought," she said slowly, "was regret that I--that I hadn't been obliterated, blown out like a candle. Please don't look like that! I am only talking."

But her lips were trembling, and because the little shams of society are forgotten at times like this, I leaned over and patted her hand lightly, where it rested on the grass beside me.

"You must not say those things," I expostulated. "Perhaps, after all, your friends--"

"I had no friends on the train." Her voice was hard again, her tone final. She drew her hand from under mine, not quickly, but decisively. A car was in sight, coming toward us. The steel finger of civilization, of propriety, of visiting cards and formal introductions was beckoning us in. Miss West put on her shoe.

We said little on the car. The few passengers stared at us frankly, and discussed the wreck, emphasizing its horrors. The girl did not seem to hear. Once she turned to me with the quick, unexpected movement that was one of her charms.

"I do not wish my mother to know I was in the accident," she said. "Will you please not tell Richey about having met me?"

I gave my promise, of course. Again, when we were almost into Baltimore, she asked to examine the gun-metal cigarette case, and sat silent with it in her hands, while I told of the early morning's events on the Ontario.

"So you see," I finished, "this grip, everything I have on, belongs to a fellow named Sullivan. He probably left the train before the wreck,--perhaps just after the murder."

"And so--you think he committed the--the crime?" Her eyes were on the cigarette case.

"Naturally," I said. "A man doesn't jump off a Pullman car in the middle of the night in another man's clothes, unless he is trying to get away from something. Besides the dirk, there were the stains that you, saw. Why, I have the murdered man's pocket-book in this valise at my feet. What does that look like?"

I colored when I saw the ghost of a smile hovering around the corners of her mouth. "That is," I finished, "if you care to believe that I am innocent."

The sustaining chain of her small gold bag gave way just then. She did not notice it. I picked it up and slid the trinket into my pocket for safekeeping, where I promptly forgot it. Afterwards I wished I had let it lie unnoticed on the floor of that dirty little suburban car, and even now, when I see a woman carelessly dangling a similar feminine trinket, I shudder involuntarily: there comes back to me the memory of a girl's puzzled eyes under the brim of a flopping hat, the haunting suspicion of the sleepless nights that followed.

Just then I was determined that my companion should not stray back to the wreck, and to that end I was determinedly facetious.

"Do you know that it is Sunday?" she asked suddenly, "and that we are actually ragged?"

"Never mind that," I retorted. "All Baltimore is divided on Sunday into three parts, those who rise up and go to church, those who rise up and read the newspapers, and those who don't rise up. The first are somewhere between the creed and the sermon, and we need not worry about the others."

"You treat me like a child," she said almost pettishly. "Don't try so hard to be cheerful. It--it is almost ghastly."

After that I subsided like a pricked balloon, and the remainder of the ride was made in silence. The information that she would go to friends in the city was a shock: it meant an earlier separation than I had planned for. But my arm was beginning again. In putting her into a cab I struck it and gritted my teeth with the pain. It was probably for that reason that I forgot the gold bag.

She leaned forward and held out her hand. "I may not have another chance to thank you," she said, "and I think I would better not try, anyhow. I cannot tell you how grateful I am." I muttered something about the gratitude being mine: owing to the knock I was seeing two cabs, and two girls were holding out two hands.

"Remember," they were both saying, "you have never met me, Mr. Blakeley. And--if you ever hear anything about me--that is not--pleasant, I want you to think the best you can of me. Will you?"

The two girls were one now, with little flashes of white light playing all around. "I--I'm afraid that I shall think too well for my own good," I said unsteadily. And the cab drove on.

CHAPTER XI

THE NAME WAS SULLIVAN

I had my arm done up temporarily in Baltimore and took the next train home. I was pretty far gone when I stumbled out of a cab almost into the scandalized arms of Mrs. Klopton. In fifteen minutes I was in bed, with that good woman piling on blankets and blistering me in unprotected places with hot-water bottles. And in an hour I had a whiff of chloroform and Doctor Williams had set the broken bone.

I dropped asleep then, waking in the late twilight to a realization that I was at home again, without the papers that meant conviction for Andy Bronson, with a charge of murder hanging over my head, and with something more
than an impression of the girl my best friend was in love with, a girl moreover who was almost as great an enigma as the crime itself.

"And I'm no hand at guessing riddles," I groaned half aloud. Mrs. Klopton came over promptly and put a cold cloth on my forehead.

"Euphemia," she said to some one outside the door, "telephone the doctor that he is still rambling, but that he has switched from green ribbons to riddles."

"There's nothing the matter with me, Mrs. Klopton," I rebelled. "I was only thinking out loud. Confound that cloth: it's trickling all over me!" I gave it a fling, and heard it land with a soggy thud on the floor.

"Thinking out loud is delirium," Mrs. Klopton said imperturbably. "A fresh cloth, Euphemia."

This time she held it on with a firm pressure that I was too weak to resist. I expostulated feebly that I was drowning, which she also laid to my mental exaltation, and then I finally dropped into a damp sleep. It was probably midnight when I roused again. I had been dreaming of the wreck, and it was inexpressibly comforting to feel the stability of my bed, and to realize the equal stability of Mrs. Klopton, who sat, fully attired, by the night light, reading Science and Health.

"Does that book say anything about opening the windows on a hot night?" I suggested, when I had got my bearings.

She put it down immediately and came over to me. If there is one time when Mrs. Klopton is chastened--and it is the only time--it is when she reads Science and Health. "I don't like to open the shutters, Mr. Lawrence," she explained. "Not since the night you went away."

But, pressed further, she refused to explain. "The doctor said you were not to be excited," she persisted. "Here's your beef tea."

"Not a drop until you tell me," I said firmly. "Besides, you know very well there's nothing the matter with me. This arm of mine is only a false belief." I sat up gingerly. "Now--why don't you open that window?"

Mrs. Klopton succumbed. "Because there are queer goings-on in that house next door," she said. "If you will take the beef tea, Mr. Lawrence, I will tell you."

The queer goings-on, however, proved to be slightly disappointing. It seemed that after I left on Friday night, a light was seen flitting fitfully through the empty house next door. Euphemia had seen it first and called Mrs. Klopton. Together they had watched it breathlessly until it disappeared on the lower floor.

"You should have been a writer of ghost stories," I said, giving my pillows a thump. "And so it was fitting flitfully!"

"That's what it was doing," she reiterated. "Fitting flitfully--I mean flitting fitfully--how you do throw me out, Mr. Lawrence! And what's more, it came again!"

"Oh, come now, Mrs. Klopton," I objected, "ghosts are like lightning; they never strike twice in the same night. That is only worth half a cup of beef tea."

"You may ask Euphemia," she retorted with dignity. "Not more than an hour after, there was a light there again. We saw it through the chinks of the shutters. Only--this time it began at the lower floor and climbed!"

"You oughtn't to tell ghost stories at night," came McKnight's voice from the doorway. "Really, Mrs. Klopton, I'm amazed at you. You old duffer! I've got you to thank for the worst day of my life."

Mrs. Klopton gulped. Then realizing that the "old duffer" was meant for me, she took her empty cup and went out muttering.

"The Pirate's crazy about me, isn't she?" McKnight said to the closing door. Then he swung around and held out his hand.

"By Jove," he said, "I've been laying you out all day, lilies on the door-bell, black gloves, everything. If you had had the sense of a mosquito in a snow-storm, you would have telephoned me."

"I never even thought of it." I was filled with remorse. "Upon my word, Rich, I hadn't an idea beyond getting away from that place. If you had seen what I saw--"

McKnight stopped me. "Seen it? Why, you lunatic, I've been digging for you all day in the ruins! I've lunched and dined on horrors. Give me something to rinse them down, Lollie."

He had fished the key of the cellarette from its hiding-place in my shoe bag and was mixing himself what he called a Bernard Shaw--a foundation of brandy and soda, with a little of everything else in sight to give it snap. Now that I saw him clearly, he looked weary and grimy. I hated to tell him what I knew he was waiting to hear, but there was no use wading in by inches. I ducked and got it over.

"The notes are gone, Rich," I said, as quietly as I could. In spite of himself his face fell.

"I--of course I expected it," he said. "But--Mrs. Klopton said over the telephone that you had brought home a grip and I hoped --well, Lord knows we ought not to complain. You're here, damaged, but here." He lifted his glass.

"Happy days, old man!"
"If you will give me that black bottle and a teaspoon, I'll drink that in arnica, or whatever the stuff is; Rich,—the notes were gone before the wreck!"

He wheeled and stared at me, the bottle in his hand. "Lost, strayed or stolen?" he queried with forced lightness.

"Stolen, although I believe the theft was incidental to something else."

Mrs. Klopton came in at that moment, with an eggnog in her hand. She glanced at the clock, and, without addressing any one in particular, she intimated that it was time for self-respecting folks to be at home in bed. McKnight, who could never resist a fling at her back, spoke to me in a stage whisper.

"Is she talking still? or again?" he asked, just before the door closed. There was a second's indecision with the knob, then, judging discretion the better part, Mrs. Klopton went away.

"Now, then," McKnight said, settling himself in a chair beside the bed, "spit it out. Not the wreck—I know all I want about that. But the theft. I can tell you beforehand that it was a woman."

I had crawled painfully out of bed, and was in the act of pouring the egg-nog down the pipe of the washstand. I paused, with the glass in the air.

"A woman!" I repeated, startled. "What makes you think that?"

"You don't know the first principles of a good detective yarn," he said scornfully. "Of course, it was the woman in the empty house next door. You said it was brass pipes, you will remember. Well --on with the dance: let joy be unconfined."

So I told the story; I had told it so many times that day that I did it automatically. And I told about the girl with the bronze hair, and my suspicions. But I did not mention Alison West. McKnight listened to the end without interruption. When I had finished he drew a long breath.

"Well!" he said. "That's something of a mess, isn't it? If you can only prove your mild and child-like disposition, they couldn't hold you for the murder—which is a regular ten-twenty-thirt crime, anyhow. But the notes—that's different. They are not burned, anyhow. Your man wasn't on the train—therefore, he wasn't in the wreck. If he didn't know what he was taking, as you seem to think, he probably reads the papers, and unless he is a fathead, he's awake by this time to what he's got. He'll try to sell them to Bronson, probably."

"Or to us," I put in.

We said nothing for a few minutes. McKnight smoked a cigarette and stared at a photograph of Candida over the mantel. Candida is the best pony for a heavy mount in seven states.

"I didn't go to Richmond," he observed finally. The remark followed my own thoughts so closely that I started. "Miss West is not home yet from Seal Harbor."

Receiving no response, he lapsed again into thoughtful silence. Mrs. Klopton came in just as the clock struck one, and made preparation for the night by putting a large gaudy comfortable into an arm-chair in the dressing-room, with a smaller, stiff-backed chair for her feet. She was wonderfully attired in a dressing-gown that was reminiscent, in parts, of all the ones she had given me for a half dozen Christmases, and she had a purple veil wrapped around her head, to hide Heaven knows what deficiency. She examined the empty egg-nog glass, inquired what the evening paper had said about the weather, and then stalked into the dressing-room, and prepared, with much ostentatious creaking, to sit up all night.

We fell silent again, while McKnight traced a rough outline of the berths on the white table-cover, and puzzled it out slowly. It was something like this: ____________________________________ | 12 | 10 | 8 | |____________|___________|___________| |_______________AISLE________________| | 11 | 9 | 7 | |____________|___________|___________|

"You think he changed the tags on seven and nine, so that when you went back to bed you thought you were crawling into nine, when it was really seven, eh?"

"Probably-yes."

"Then toward morning, when everybody was asleep, your theory is that he changed the numbers again and left the train."

"I can't think of anything else," I replied wearily.

"Jove, what a game of bridge that fellow would play! It was like finessing an eight-spot and winning out. They would scarcely have doubted your story had the tags been reversed in the morning. He certainly left you in a bad way. Not a jury in the country would stand out against the stains, the stiletto, and the murdered man's pocket-book in your possession."

"Then you think Sullivan did it?" I asked.

"Of course," said McKnight confidently. "Unless you did it in your sleep. Look at the stains on his pillow, and the dirk stuck into it. And didn't he have the man Harrington's pocket-book?"

"But why did he go off without the money?" I persisted. "And where does the bronze-haired girl come in?"

"Search me," McKnight retorted flippantly. "Inflammation of the imagination on your part."
"Then there is the piece of telegram. It said lower ten, car seven. It's extremely likely that she had it. That telegram was about me, Richey."

"I'm getting a headache," he said, putting out his cigarette against the sole of his shoe. "All I'm certain of just now is that if there hadn't been a wreck, by this time you'd be sitting in an eight by ten cell, and feeling like the rhyme for it."

"But listen to this," I contended, as he picked up his hat, "this fellow Sullivan is a fugitive, and he's a lot more likely to make advances to Bronson than to us. We could have the case continued, release Bronson on bail and set a watch on him."

"Not my watch," McKnight protested. "It's a family heirloom."

"You'd better go home," I said firmly. "Go home and go to bed. You're sleepy. You can have Sullivan's red necktie to dream over if you think it will help any."

Mrs. Klopton's voice came drowsily from the next room, punctuated by a yawn. "Oh, I forgot to tell you," she called, with the suspicious lisp which characterizes her at night, "somebody called up about noon, Mr. Lawrence. It was long distance, and he said he would call again. The name was"--she yawned--"Sullivan."

CHAPTER XII
THE GOLD BAG

I have always smiled at those cases of spontaneous combustion which, like fusing the component parts of a seidlitz powder, unite two people in a bubbling and ephemeral ecstasy. But surely there is possible, with but a single meeting, an attraction so great, a community of mind and interest so strong, that between that first meeting and the next the bond may grow into something stronger. This is especially true, I fancy, of people with temperament, the modern substitute for imagination. It is a nice question whether lovers begin to love when they are together, or when they are apart.

Not that I followed any such line of reasoning at the time. I would not even admit my folly to myself. But during the restless hours of that first night after the accident, when my back ached with lying on it, and any other position was torture, I found my thoughts constantly going back to Alison West. I dropped into a doze, to dream of touching her fingers again to comfort her, and awoke to find I had patted a teaspoonful of medicine out of Mrs. Klopton's indignant hand. What was it McKnight had said about making an egregious ass of myself?

And that brought me back to Richey, and I fancy I groaned. There is no use expatiating on the friendship between two men who have gone together through college, have quarreled and made it up, fussed together over politics and debated creeds for years: men don't need to be told, and women can not understand. Nevertheless, I groaned. If it had been any one but Rich!

Some things were mine, however, and I would hold them: the halcyon breakfast, the queer hat, the pebble in her small shoe, the gold bag with the broken chain--the bag! Why, it was in my pocket at that moment.

I got up painfully and found my coat. Yes, there was the purse, bulging with an opulent suggestion of wealth inside. I went back to bed again, somewhat dizzy, between effort and the touch of the trinket, so lately hers. I held it up by its broken chain and gloated over it. By careful attention to orders, I ought to be out in a day or so. Then--I could return it to her. I really ought to do that: it was valuable, and I wouldn't care to trust it to the mail. I could run down to Richmond, and see her once--there was no disloyalty to Rich in that.

I had no intention of opening the little bag. I put it under my pillow--which was my reason for refusing to have the linen slips changed, to Mrs. Klopton's dismay. And sometimes during the morning, while I lay under a virgin field of white, ornamented with strange flowers, my cigarettes hidden beyond discovery, and Science and Health on a table by my elbow, as if by the merest accident, I slid my hand under my pillow and touched it reverently.

McKnight came in about eleven. I heard his car at the curb, followed almost immediately by his slam at the front door, and his usual clamor on the stairs. He had a bottle under his arm, rightly surmising that I had been forbidden stimulant, and a large box of cigarettes in his pocket, suspecting my deprivation.

"Well," he said cheerfully. "How did you sleep after keeping me up half the night?"

I slid my hand around: the purse was well covered. "Have it now, or wait till I get the cork out?" he rattled on.

"I don't want anything," I protested. "I wish you wouldn't be so darned cheerful, Richey." He stopped whistling to stare at me.

"'I am saddest when I sing!'" he quoted unctuously. "It's pure reaction, Lollie. Yesterday the sky was low; I was digging for my best friend. To-day--he lies before me, his peevish self. Yesterday I thought the notes were burned: to-day--I look forward to a good cross-country chase, and with luck we will draw." His voice changed suddenly.

Yesterday--she was in Seal Harbor. To-day--she is here."

"Here in Washington?" I asked, as naturally as I could.

"Yes. Going to stay a week or two."

"Oh, I had a little hen and she had a wooden leg And nearly every morning she used to lay an egg--"
"Will you stop that racket, Rich! It's the real thing this time, I suppose?"
"She's the best little chicken that we have on the farm And another little drink won't do us any harm--"
he finished, twisting out the corkscrew. Then he came over and sat down on the bed.
"Well," he said judicially, "since you drag it from me, I think perhaps it is. You--you're such a confirmed woman-hater that I hardly knew how you would take it."
"Nothing of the sort," I denied testily. "Because a man reaches the age of thirty without making maudlin love to every--"
"I've taken to long country rides," he went on reflectively, without listening to me, "and yesterday I ran over a sheep; nearly went into the ditch. But there's a Providence that watches over fools and lovers, and just now I know darned well that I'm one, and I have a sneaking idea I'm both."
"You are both," I said with disgust. "If you can be rational for one moment, I wish you would tell me why that man Sullivan called me over the telephone yesterday morning."
"Probably hadn't yet discovered the Bronson notes--providing you hold to your theory that the theft was incidental to the murder. May have wanted his own clothes again, or to thank you for yours. Search me: I can't think of anything else." The doctor came in just then.

As I said before, I think a lot of my doctor--when I am ill. He is a young man, with an air of breezy self-confidence and good humor. He looked directly past the bottle, which is a very valuable accomplishment, and shook hands with McKnight until I could put the cigarettes under the bedclothes. He had interdicted tobacco. Then he sat down beside the bed and felt around the bandages with hands as gentle as a baby's.
"Pretty good shape," he said. "How did you sleep?"
"Oh, occasionally," I replied. "I would like to sit up, doctor."
"Nonsense. Take a rest while you have an excuse for it. I wish to thunder I could stay in bed for a day or so. I was up all night."
"Have a drink," McKnight said, pushing over the bottle.
"Twins!" The doctor grinned.
"Have two drinks."
But the medical man refused.
"I wouldn't even wear a champagne-colored necktie during business hours," he explained. "By the way, I had another case from your accident, Mr. Blakeley, late yesterday afternoon. Under the tongue, please." He stuck a thermometer in my mouth.

I had a sudden terrible vision of the amateur detective coming to light, note-book, cheerful impertinence and incriminating data. "A small man?" I demanded, "gray hair--"
"Keep your mouth closed," the doctor said peremptorily. "No. A woman, with a fractured skull. Beautiful case. Van Kirk was up to his eyes and sent for me. Hemorrhage, right-sided paralysis, irregular pupils—all the trimmings. Worked for two hours."
"Did she recover?" McKnight put in. He was examining the doctor with a new awe.
"She lifted her right arm before I left," the doctor finished cheerily, "so the operation was a success, even if she should die."
"Good Heavens," McKnight broke in, "and I thought you were just an ordinary mortal, like the rest of us! Let me touch you for luck. Was she pretty?"
"Yes, and young. Had a wealth of bronze-colored hair. Upon my soul, I hated to cut it."
McKnight and I exchanged glances.
"Do you know her name, doctor?" I asked.
"No. The nurses said her clothes came from a Pittsburg tailor."
"She is not conscious, I suppose?"
"No; she may be, to-morrow—or in a week."
He looked at the thermometer, murmured something about liquid diet, avoiding my eye—Mrs. Klopton was broiling a chop at the time—and took his departure, humming cheerfully as he went down-stairs. McKnight looked after him wistfully.

"Jove, I wish I had his constitution," he exclaimed. "Neither nerves nor heart! What a chauffeur he would make!"
But I was serious.
"I have an idea," I said grimly, "that this small matter of the murder is going to come up again, and that your uncle will be in the deuce of a fix if it does. If that woman is going to die, somebody ought to be around to take her deposition. She knows a lot, if she didn't do it herself. I wish you would go down to the telephone and get the hospital. Find out her name, and if she is conscious."

McKnight went under protest. "I haven't much time," he said, looking at his watch. "I'm to meet Mrs. West and
Alison at one. I want you to know them, Lollie. You would like the mother."

"Why not the daughter?" I inquired. I touched the little gold bag under the pillow.

"Well," he said judicially, "you've always declared against the immaturity and romantic nonsense of very young women--"

"I never said anything of the sort," I retorted furiously.

"'There is more satisfaction to be had out of a good saddle horse!'" he quoted me. "'More excitement out of a polo pony, and as for the eternal matrimonial chase, give me instead a good stubble, a fox, some decent hounds and a hunter, and I'll show you the real joys of the chase!'"

"For Heaven's sake, go down to the telephone, you make my head ache," I said savagely.

I hardly know what prompted me to take out the gold purse and look at it. It was an imbecile thing to do--call it impulse, sentimentality, what you wish. I brought it out, one eye on the door, for Mrs. Klopton has a ready eye and a noiseless shoe. But the house was quiet. Down-stairs McKnight was flirting with the telephone central and there was an odor of boneset tea in the air. I think Mrs. Klopton was fascinated out of her theories by the "boneset" in connection with the fractured arm.

Anyhow, I held up the bag and looked at it. It must have been unfastened, for the next instant there was an avalanche on the snowfield of the counterpane--some money, a wisp of a handkerchief, a tiny booklet with thin leaves, covered with a powdery substance --and a necklace. I drew myself up slowly and stared at the necklace.

It was one of the semi-barbaric affairs that women are wearing now, a heavy pendant of gold chains and carved cameos, swung from a thin neck chain of the same metal. The necklace was broken: in three places the links were pulled apart and the cameos swung loose and partly detached. But it was the supporting chain that held my eye and fascinated with its sinister suggestion. Three inches of it had been snapped off, and as well as I knew anything on earth, I knew that the bit of chain that the amateur detective had found, blood-stain and all, belonged just there.

And there was no one I could talk to about it, no one to tell me how hideously absurd it was, no one to give me a slap and tell me there are tons of fine gold chains made every year, or to point out the long arm of coincidence!

With my one useful hand I fumbled the things back into the bag and thrust it deep out of sight among the pillows. Then I lay back in a cold perspiration. What connection had Alison West with this crime? Why had she stared so at the gun-metal cigarette case that morning on the train? What had alarmed her so at the farm-house? What had she taken back to the gate? Why did she wish she had not escaped from the wreck? And last, in Heaven's name, how did a part of her necklace become torn off and covered with blood?

Down-stairs McKnight was still at the telephone, and amusing himself with Mrs. Klopton in the interval of waiting.

"Why did he come home in a gray suit, when he went away in a blue?" he repeated. "Well, wrecks are queer things, Mrs. Klopton. The suit may have turned gray with fright. Or perhaps wrecks do as queer stunts as lightning. Friend of mine once was struck by lightning; he and the caddy had taken refuge under a tree. After the flash, when they recovered consciousness, there was my friend in the caddy's clothes, and the caddy in his. And as my friend was a large man and the caddy a very small boy--"

McKnight's story was interrupted by the indignant slam of the dining-room door. He was obliged to wait some time, and even his eternal cheerfulness was ebbing when he finally got the hospital.

"Is Doctor Van Kirk there?" he asked. "Not there? Well, can you tell me how the patient is whom Doctor Williams, from Washington, operated on last night? Well, I'm glad of that. Is she conscious? Do you happen to know her name? Yes, I'll hold the line." There was a long pause, then McKnight's voice:

"Hello--yes. Thank you very much. Good-by."

He came up-stairs, two steps at a time.

"Look here," he said, bursting into the room, "there may be something in your theory, after all. The woman's name—it may be a coincidence, but it's curious—her name is Sullivan."

"What did I tell you?" I said, sitting up suddenly in bed. "She's probably a sister of that scoundrel in lower seven, and she was afraid of what he might do."

"Well, I'll go there some day soon. She's not conscious yet. In the meantime, the only thing I can do is to keep an eye, through a detective, on the people who try to approach Bronson. We'll have the case continued, anyhow, in the hope that the stolen notes will sooner or later turn up."

"Confound this arm," I said, paying for my energy with some excruciating throbs. "There's so much to be looked after, and here I am, bandaged, splinted, and generally useless. It's a beastly shame."

"Don't forget that I am here," said McKnight pompously. "And another thing, when you feel this way just remember there are two less desirable places where you might be. One is jail, and the other is--" He strummed on an imaginary harp, with devotional eyes.

But McKnight's light-heartedness jarred on me that morning. I lay and frowned under my helplessness. When by
chance I touched the little gold bag, it seemed to scorch my fingers. Richey, finding me unresponsive, left to keep
his luncheon engagement with Alison West. As he clattered down the stairs, I turned my back to the morning
sunshine and abandoned myself to misery. By what strain on her frayed nerves was Alison West keeping up, I
wondered? Under the circumstances, would I dare to return the bag? Knowing that I had it, would she hate me for
my knowledge? Or had I exaggerated the importance of the necklace, and in that case had she forgotten me already?

But McKnight had not gone, after all. I heard him coming back, his voice preceding him, and I groaned with
irritation.

"Wake up!" he called. "Somebody's sent you a lot of flowers. Please hold the box, Mrs. Klopton; I'm going out
to be run down by an automobile."

I roused to feeble interest. My brother's wife is punctilious about such things; all the new babies in the family
have silver rattles, and all the sick people flowers.

McKnight pulled up an armful of roses, and held them out to me.

"Wonder who they're from?" he said, fumbling in the box for a card. "There's no name--yes, here's one."
He held it up and read it with exasperating slowness.

"Best wishes for an early recovery. A COMPANION IN MISFORTUNE."

"Well, what do you know about that!" he exclaimed. "That's something you didn't tell me, Lollie."

"It was hardly worth mentioning," I said mendaciously, with my heart beating until I could hear it. She had not
forgotten, after all.

McKnight took a bud and fastened it in his button-hole. I'm afraid I was not especially pleasant about it. They
were her roses, and anyhow, they were meant for me. Richey left very soon, with an irritating final grin at the box.

"Good-by, sir woman-hater," he jeered at me from the door.

So he wore one of the roses she had sent me, to luncheon with her, and I lay back among my pillows and tried to
remember that it was his game, anyhow, and that I wasn't even drawing cards. To remember that, and to forget the
broken necklace under my head!

CHAPTER XIII

FADED ROSES

I was in the house for a week. Much of that time I spent in composing and destroying letters of thanks to Miss
West, and in growling at the doctor. McKnight dropped in daily, but he was less cheerful than usual. Now and then I
cought him eying me as if he had something to say, but whatever it was he kept it to himself. Once during the week
he went to Baltimore and saw the woman in the hospital there. From the description I had little difficulty in
recognizing the young woman who had been with the murdered man in Pittsburg. But she was still unconscious. An
elderly aunt had appeared, a gaunt person in black, who sat around like a buzzard on a fence, according to
McKnight, and wept, in a mixed figure, into a damp handkerchief.

On the last day of my imprisonment he stopped in to thrash out a case that was coming up in court the next day,and to play a game of double solitaire with me.

"Who won the ball game?" I asked.

"We were licked. Ask me something pleasant. Oh, by the way, Bronson's out to-day."

"I'm glad I'm not on his bond," I said pessimistically. "He'll clear out."

"Not he," McKnight pounced on my ace. "He's no fool. Don't you suppose he knows you took those notes to
Pittsburg? The papers were full of it. And he knows you escaped with your life and a broken arm from the wreck.
What do we do next? The Commonwealth continues the case. A deaf man on a dark night would know those notes
are missing."

"Don't play so fast," I remonstrated. "I have only one arm to your two. Who is trailing Bronson? Did you try to
get Johnson?"

"I asked for him, but he had some work on hand."

"The murder's evidently a dead issue," I reflected. "No, I'm not joking. The wreck destroyed all the evidence.
But I'm firmly convinced those notes will be offered, either to us or to Bronson very soon. Johnson's a blackguard,
but he's a good detective. He could make his fortune as a game dog. What's he doing?"

McKnight put down his cards, and rising, went to the window. As he held the curtain back his customary grin
looked a little forced.

"To tell you the truth, Lollie," he said, "for the last two days he has been watching a well-known Washington
attorney named Lawrence Blakeley. He's across the street now."

It took a moment for me to grasp what he meant.

"Why, it's ridiculous," I asserted. "What would they trail me for? Go over and tell Johnson to get out of there, or
I'll pot at him with my revolver."

"You can tell him that yourself." McKnight paused and bent forward. "Hello, here's a visitor; little man with
"I won't see him," I said firmly. "I've been bothered enough with reporters."

We listened together to Mrs. Klopton's expostulating tones in the lower hall and the creak of the boards as she came heavily up the stairs. She had a piece of paper in her hand torn from a pocket account-book, and on it was the name, "Mr. Wilson Budd Hotchkiss. Important business."

"Oh, well, show him up," I said resignedly. "You'd better put those cards away, Richey. I fancy it's the rector of the church around the corner."

But when the door opened to admit a curiously alert little man, adjusting his glasses with nervous fingers, my face must have shown my dismay.

It was the amateur detective of the Ontario!

I shook hands without enthusiasm. Here was the one survivor of the wrecked car who could do me any amount of harm. There was no hope that he had forgotten any of the incriminating details. In fact, he held in his hand the very note-book which contained them.

His manner was restrained, but it was evident he was highly excited. I introduced him to McKnight, who has the imagination I lack, and who placed him at once, mentally.

"I only learned yesterday that you had been--er--saved," he said rapidly. "Terrible accident--unspeakable. Dream about it all night and think about it all day. Broken arm?"

"No. He just wears the splint to be different from other people," McKnight drawled lazily. I glared at him: there was nothing to be gained by antagonizing the little man.

"Yes, a fractured humerus, which isn't as funny as it sounds."

"Humerus-humorous! Pretty good," he cackled. "I must say you keep up your spirits pretty well, considering everything."

"You seem to have escaped injury," I parried. He was fumbling for something in his pockets.

"Yes, I escaped," he replied abstractedly. "Remarkable thing, too. I haven't a doubt I would have broken my neck, but I landed on --you'll never guess what! I landed head first on the very pillow which was under inspection at the time of the wreck. You remember, don't you? Where did I put that package?"

He found it finally and opened it on a table, displaying with some theatricalism a rectangular piece of muslin and a similar patch of striped ticking.

"You recognize it?" he said. "The stains, you see, and the hole made by the dirk. I tried to bring away the entire pillow, but they thought I was stealing it, and made me give it up."

Richey touched the pieces gingerly. "By George," he said, "and you carry that around in your pocket! What if you should mistake it for your handkerchief?"

But Mr. Hotchkiss was not listening. He stood bent somewhat forward, leaning over the table, and fixed me with his ferret-like eyes.

"Have you see the evening papers, Mr. Blakeley?" he inquired.

I glanced to where they lay unopened, and shook my head.

"Then I have a disagreeable task," he said with evident relish. "Of course, you had considered the matter of the man Harrington's death closed, after the wreck. I did myself. As far as I was concerned, I meant to let it remain so. There were no other survivors, at least none that I knew of, and in spite of circumstances, there were a number of points in your favor."

"Thank you," I put in with a sarcasm that was lost on him.

"I verified your identity, for instance, as soon as I recovered from the shock. Also--I found on inquiring of your tailor that you invariably wore dark clothing."

McKnight came forward threateningly. "Who are you, anyhow?" he demanded. "And how is this any business of yours?" Mr. Hotchkiss was entirely unruffled.

"I have a minor position here," he said, reaching for a visiting card. "I am a very small patch on the seat of government, sir."

McKnight muttered something about certain offensive designs against the said patch and retired grumbling to the window. Our visitor was opening the paper with a tremendous expenditure of energy.

"Here it is. Listen." He read rapidly aloud:

"The Pittsburg police have sent to Baltimore two detectives who are looking up the survivors of the ill-fated Washington Flier. It has transpired that Simon Harrington, the Wood Street merchant of that city, was not killed in the wreck, but was murdered in his berth the night preceding the accident. Shortly before the collision, John Flanders, the conductor of the Flier, sent this telegram to the chief of police:

"Body of Simon Harrington found stabbed in his berth, lower ten, Ontario, at six-thirty this morning. JOHN FLANDERS, Conductor."
"It is hoped that the survivors of the wrecked car Ontario will be found, to tell what they know of the discovery of the crime.

"Mr. John Gilmore, head of the steel company for which Mr. Harrington was purchasing agent, has signified his intention of sifting the matter to the bottom."

"So you see," Hotchkiss concluded, "there's trouble brewing. You and I are the only survivors of that unfortunate car."

I did not contradict him, but I knew of two others, at least: Alison West, and the woman we had left beside the road that morning, babbling incoherently, her black hair tumbling over her white face.

"Unless we can find the man who occupied lower seven," I suggested.

"I have already tried and failed. To find him would not clear you, of course, unless we could establish some connection between him and the murdered man. It is the only thing I see, however. I have learned this much," Hotchkiss concluded: "Lower seven was reserved from Cresson."

Cresson! Where Alison West and Mrs. Curtis had taken the train!

McKnight came forward and suddenly held out his hand. "Mr. Hotchkiss," he said, "I--I'm sorry if I have been offensive. I thought when you came in, that, like the Irishman and the government, you were 'forninst' us. If you will put those cheerful relics out of sight somewhere, I should be glad to have you dine with me at the Incubator." (His name for his bachelor apartment.) "Compared with Johnson, you are the great original protoplasm."

The strength of this was lost on Hotchkiss, but the invitation was clear. They went out together, and from my window I watched them get into McKnight's car. It was raining, and at the corner the Cannonball skidded. Across the street my detective, Johnson, looked after them with his crooked smile. As he turned up his collar he saw me, and lifted his hat.

I left the window and sat down in the growing dusk. So the occupant of lower seven had got on the car at Cresson, probably with Alison West and her companion. There was some one she cared about enough to shield. I went irritably to the door and summoned Mrs. Klopton.

"You may throw out those roses," I said without looking at her. "They are quite dead."

"They have been quite dead for three days," she retorted spitefully. "Euphemia said you threatened to dismiss her if she touched them."

CHAPTER XIV

THE TRAP-DOOR

By Sunday evening, a week after the wreck, my inaction had goaded me to frenzy. The very sight of Johnson across the street or lurking, always within sight of the house, kept me constantly exasperated. It was on that day that things began to come to a focus, a burning-glass of events that seemed to center on me.

I dined alone that evening in no cheerful frame of mind. There had been a polo game the day before and I had lent a pony, which is always a bad thing to do. And she had wrenched her shoulder, besides helping to lose the game. There was no one in town: the temperature was ninety and climbing, and my left hand persistently cramped under its bandage.

Mrs. Klopton herself saw me served, my bread buttered and cut in tidbits, my meat ready for my fork. She hovered around me maternally, obviously trying to cheer me.

"The paper says still warmer," she ventured. "The thermometer is ninety-two now."

"And this coffee is two hundred and fifty," I said, putting down my cup. "Where is Euphemia? I haven't seen her around, or heard a dish smash all day."

"Euphemia is in bed," Mrs. Klopton said gravely. "Is your meat cut small enough, Mr. Lawrence?" Mrs. Klopton can throw more mystery into an ordinary sentence than any one I know. She can say, "Are your sheets damp, sir?" And I can tell from her tone that the house across the street has been robbed, or that my left hand neighbor has appendicitis. So now I looked up and asked the question she was waiting for.

"What's the matter with Euphemia?" I inquired idly.

"Frightened into her bed," Mrs. Klopton said in a stage whisper. "She's had three hot water bottles and she hasn't done a thing all day but moan."

"She oughtn't to take hot water bottles," I said in my severest tone. "One would make me moan. You need not wait, I'll ring if I need anything."

Mrs. Klopton sailed to the door, where she stopped and wheeled indignantly. "I only hope you won't laugh on the wrong side of your face some morning, Mr. Lawrence," she declared, with Christian fortitude. "But I warn you, I am going to have the police watch that house next door."

I was half inclined to tell her that both it and we were under police surveillance at that moment. But I like Mrs. Klopton, in spite of the fact that I make her life a torment for her, so I refrained.

"Last night, when the paper said it was going to storm, I sent Euphemia to the roof to bring the rugs in. Eliza had
slipped out, although it was her evening in. Euphemia went up to the roof--it was eleven o'clock--and soon I heard her running down-stairs crying. When she got to my room she just folded up on the floor. She said there was a black figure sitting on the parapet of the house next door--the empty house--and that when she appeared it rose and waved long black arms at her and spit like a cat.

I had finished my dinner and was lighting a cigarette. "If there was any one up there, which I doubt, they probably sneezed," I suggested. "But if you feel uneasy, I'll take a look around the roof to-night before I turn in. As far as Euphemia goes, I wouldn't be uneasy about her--doesn't she always have an attack of some sort when Eliza rings in an extra evening on her?"

So I made a superficial examination of the window locks that night, visiting parts of the house that I had not seen since I bought it. Then I went to the roof. Evidently it had not been intended for any purpose save to cover the house, for unlike the houses around, there was no staircase. A ladder and a trap-door led to it, and it required some nice balancing on my part to get up with my useless arm. I made it, however, and found this unexplored part of my domain rather attractive. It was cooler than down-stairs, and I sat on the brick parapet and smoked my final cigarette. The roof of the empty house adjoined mine along the back wing, but investigation showed that the trap-door across the low dividing wall was bolted underneath.

There was nothing out of the ordinary anywhere, and so I assured Mrs. Klopton. Needless to say, I did not tell her that I had left the trap-door open, to see if it would improve the temperature of the house. I went to bed at midnight, merely because there was nothing else to do. I turned on the night lamp at the head of my bed, and picked up a volume of Shaw at random (it was Arms and the Man, and I remember thinking grimly that I was a good bit of a chocolate cream soldier myself), and prepared to go to sleep. Shaw always puts me to sleep. I have no apologies to make for what occurred that night, and not even an explanation that I am sure of. I did a foolish thing under impulse, and I have not been sorry.

It was something after two when the door-bell rang. It rang quickly, twice. I got up drowsily, for the maids and Mrs. Klopton always lock themselves beyond reach of the bell at night, and put on a dressing-gown. The bell rang again on my way down-stairs. I lit the hall light and opened the door. I was wide-awake now, and I saw that it was Johnson. His bald head shone in the light--his crooked mouth was twisted in a smile.

"Good Heavens, man," I said irritably. "Don't you ever go home and go to bed?"

He closed the vestibule door behind him and cavalierly turned out the light. Our dialogue was sharp, staccato.

"Have you a key to the empty house next door?" he demanded. "Somebody's in there, and the latch is caught."

"The houses are alike. The key to this door may fit. Did you see them go in?"

"No. There's a light moving up from room to room. I saw something like it last night, and I have been watching. The patrolman reported queer doings there a week or so ago."

"A light!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean that you--"

"Very likely," he said grimly. "Have you a revolver?"

"All kinds in the gun rack," I replied, and going into the den, I came back with a Smith and Wesson. "I'm not much use," I explained, "with this arm, but I'll do what I can. There may be somebody there. The servants here have been uneasy."

Johnson planned the campaign. He suggested on account of my familiarity with the roof, that I go there and cut off escape in that direction. "I have Robison out there now--the patrolman on the beat," he said. "He'll watch below and you above, while I search the house. Be as quiet as possible."

I was rather amused. I put on some clothes and felt my way carefully up the stairs, the revolver swinging free in my pocket, my hand on the rail. At the foot of the ladder I stopped and looked up. Above me there was a gray rectangle of sky dotted with stars. It occurred to me that with my one serviceable hand holding the ladder, I was hardly in a position to defend myself, that I was about to hoist a body that I am rather careful of into a danger I couldn't see and wasn't particularly keen about anyway. I don't mind saying that the seconds it took me to scramble up the ladder were among the most unpleasant that I recall.

I got to the top, however, without incident. I could see fairly well after the darkness of the house beneath, but there was nothing suspicious in sight. The roofs, separated by two feet of brick wall, stretched around me, unbroken save by an occasional chimney. I went very softly over to the other trap, the one belonging to the suspected house. It was closed, but I imagined I could hear Johnson's footsteps ascending heavily. Then even that was gone. A near-by clock struck three as I stood waiting. I examined my revolver then, for the first time, and found it was empty!

I had been rather skeptical until now. I had had the usual tolerant attitude of the man who is summoned from his bed to search for burglars, combined with the artificial courage of firearms. With the discovery of my empty gun, I felt like a man on the top of a volcano in lively eruption. Suddenly I found myself staring incredulously at the trap-door at my feet. I had examined it early in the evening and found it bolted. Did I imagine it, or had it raised about an inch? Wasn't it moving slowly as I looked? No, I am not a hero: I was startled almost into a panic. I had one arm,
and whoever was raising that trap-door had two. My knees had a queer inclination to bend the wrong way.

Johnson's footsteps were distinct enough, but he was evidently far below. The trap, raised perhaps two inches now, remained stationary. There was no sound from beneath it: once I thought I heard two or three gasping respirations: I am not sure they were not my own. I wanted desperately to stand on one leg at a time and hold the other up out of focus of a possible revolver.

I did not see the hand appear. There was nothing there, and then it was there, clutching the frame of the trap. I did the only thing I could think of; I put my foot on it!

There was not a sound from beneath. The next moment I was kneeling and had clutched the wrist just above the hand. After a second's struggle, the arm was still. With something real to face, I was myself again.

"Don't move, or I'll stand on the trap and break your arm," I panted. What else could I threaten? I couldn't shoot, I couldn't even fight. "Johnson!" I called.

And then I realized the thing that stayed with me for a month, the thing I can not think of even now without a shudder. The hand lay ice cold, strangely quiescent. Under my fingers, an artery was beating feebly. The wrist was as slender as--I held the hand to the light. Then I let it drop.

"Good Lord," I muttered, and remained on my knees, staring at the spot where the hand had been. It was gone now: there was a faint rustle in the darkness below, and then silence.

I held up my own hand in the starlight and stared at a long scratch in the palm. "A woman!" I said to myself stupidly. "By all that's ridiculous, a woman!"

Johnson was striking matches below and swearing softly to himself. "How the devil do you get to the roof?" he inquired. "If you'd been attending to your business, Robison, you'd have watched the back door."

"I'm not twins." Robison was surly.

"Well," I broke in, as cheerfully as I could, "if you are through with this jolly little affair, and can get down my ladder without having my housekeeper ring the burglar alarm, I have some good Monongahela whisky--eh?"

They came without a second invitation across the roof, and with them safely away from the house I breathed more freely. Down in the den I fulfilled my promise, which Johnson drank to the toast, "Coming through the rye."

He examined my gun rack with the eye of a connoisseur, and even when he was about to go he cast a loving eye back at the weapons.

"Ever been in the army?" he inquired.

"No," I said with a bitterness that he noticed but failed to comprehend. "I'm a chocolate cream soldier--you don't read Shaw, I suppose, Johnson?"

"Never heard of him," the detective said indifferently. "Well, good night, Mr. Blakeley. Much obliged." At the door he hesitated and coughed.

"Suppose you understand, Mr. Blakeley," he said awkwardly, "that this--er--surveillance is all in the day's work. I don't like it, but it's duty. Every man to his duty, sir."

"Sometime when you are in an open mood, Johnson," I returned, "you can explain why I am being watched at all."

CHAPTER XV
THE CINEMATOGRAPH

On Monday I went out for the first time. I did not go to the office. I wanted to walk. I thought fresh air and exercise would drive away the blue devils that had me by the throat. McKnight insisted on a long day in his car, but I refused.

"I don't know why not," he said sulkily. "I can't walk. I haven't walked two consecutive blocks in three years. Automobiles have made legs mere ornaments--and some not even that. We could have Johnson out there chasing us over the country at five dollars an hour!"

"He can chase us just as well at five miles an hour," I said. "But what gets me, McKnight, is why I am under surveillance at all. How do the police know I was accused of that thing?"

"The young lady who sent the flowers--she isn't likely to talk, is she?"

"No. That is, I didn't say it was a lady." I groaned as I tried to get my splinted arm into a coat. "Anyhow, she didn't tell," I finished with conviction, and McKnight laughed.
It had rained in the early morning, and Mrs. Klopton predicted more showers. In fact, so firm was her belief and so determined her eye that I took the umbrella she proffered me.

"Never mind," I said. "We can leave it next door; I have a story to tell you, Richey, and it requires proper setting."

McKnight was puzzled, but he followed me obediently round to the kitchen entrance of the empty house. It was unlocked, as I had expected. While we climbed to the upper floor I retailed the events of the previous night.

"It's the finest thing I ever heard of," McKnight said, staring up at the ladder and the trap. "What a vaudeville skit it would make! Only you ought not to have put your foot on her hand. They don't do it in the best circles."

I wheeled on him impatiently.

"You don't understand the situation at all, Richey!" I exclaimed. "What would you say if I tell you it was the hand of a lady? It was covered with rings."

"A lady!" he repeated. "Why, I'd say it was a darned compromising situation, and that the less you say of it the better. Look here, Lawrence, I think you dreamed it. You've been in the house too much. I take it all back: you do need exercise."

"She escaped through this door, I suppose," I said as patiently as I could. "Evidently down the back staircase. We might as well go down that way."

"According to the best precedents in these affairs, we should find a glove about here," he said as we started down. But he was more impressed than he cared to own. He examined the dusty steps carefully, and once, when a bit of loose plaster fell just behind him, he started like a nervous woman.

"What I don't understand is why you let her go," he said, stopping once, puzzled. "You're not usually quixotic."

"When we get out into the country, Richey," I replied gravely, "I am going to tell you another story, and if you don't tell me I'm a fool and a craven, on the strength of it, you are no friend of mine."

We stumbled through the twilight of the staircase into the blackness of the shuttered kitchen. The house had the moldy smell of closed buildings: even on that warm September morning it was damp and chilly. As we stepped into the sunshine McKnight gave a shiver.

"Now that we are out," he said, "I don't mind telling you that I have been there before. Do you remember the night you left, and, the face at the window?"

"When you speak of it--yes."

"Well, I was curious about that thing," he went on, as we started up the street, "and I went back. The street door was unlocked, and I examined every room. I was Mrs. Klopton's ghost that carried a light, and clumb."

"Did you find anything?"

"Only a clean place rubbed on the window opposite your dressing-room. Splendid view of an untidy interior. If that house is ever occupied, you'd better put stained glass in that window of yours."

As we turned the corner I glanced back. Half a block behind us Johnson was moving our way slowly. When he saw me he stopped and proceeded with great deliberation to light a cigar. By hurrying, however, he caught the car that we took, and stood unobtrusively on the rear platform. He looked fagged, and absent-mindedly paid our fares, to McKnight's delight.

"We will give him a run for his money," he declared, as the car moved countryward. "Conductor, let us off at the muddiest lane you can find."

At one o'clock, after a six-mile ramble, we entered a small country hotel. We had seen nothing of Johnson for a half hour. At that time he was a quarter of a mile behind us, and losing rapidly. Before we had finished our luncheon he staggered into the inn. One of his boots was under his arm, and his whole appearance was deplorable. He was coated with mud, streaked with perspiration, and he limped as he walked. He chose a table not far from us and ordered Scotch. Beyond touching his hat he paid no attention to us.

"I'm just getting my second wind," McKnight declared. "How do you feel, Mr. Johnson? Six or eight miles more and we'll all enjoy our dinners." Johnson put down the glass he had raised to his lips without replying.

The fact was, however, that I was like Johnson. I was soft from my week's inaction, and I was pretty well done up. McKnight, who was a well spring of vitality and high spirits, ordered a strange concoction, made of nearly everything in the bar, and sent it over to the detective, but Johnson refused it.

"I hate that kind of person," McKnight said pettishly. "Kind of a fellow that thinks you're going to poison his dog if you offer him a bone."

When we got back to the car line, with Johnson a dragged and drooping tail to the kite, I was in better spirits. I had told McKnight the story of the three hours just after the wreck; I had not named the girl, of course; she had my promise of secrecy. But I told him everything else. It was a relief to have a fresh mind on it: I had puzzled so much over the incident at the farm-house, and the necklace in the gold bag, that I had lost perspective.

He had been interested, but inclined to be amused, until I came to the broken chain. Then he had whistled softly.
"But there are tons of fine gold chains made every year," he said. "Why in the world do you think that the--er--smear piece came from that necklace?"

I had looked around. Johnson was far behind, scraping the mud off his feet with a piece of stick.

"I have the short end of the chain in the sealskin bag," I reminded him. "When I couldn't sleep this morning I thought I would settle it, one way or the other. It was hell to go along the way I had been doing. And--there's no doubt about it, Rich. It's the same chain."

We walked along in silence until we caught the car back to town.

"Well," he said finally, "you know the girl, of course, and I don't. But if you like her--and I think myself you're rather hard hit, old man--I wouldn't give a whoop about the chain in the gold purse. It's just one of the little coincidences that hang people now and then. And as for last night--if she's the kind of a girl you say she is, and you think she had anything to do with that, you--you're addled, that's all. You can depend on it, the lady of the empty house last week is the lady of last night. And yet your train acquaintance was in Altoona at that time."

Just before we got off the car, I reverted to the subject again. It was never far back in my mind.

"About the--young lady of the train, Rich," I said, with what I suppose was elaborate carelessness, "I don't want you to get a wrong impression. I am rather unlikely to see her again, but even if I do, I--I believe she is already 'bespoke,' or next thing to it."

He made no reply, but as I opened the door with my latch-key he stood looking up at me from the pavement with his quizzical smile.

"Love is like the measles," he orated. "The older you get it, the worse the attack."

Johnson did not appear again that day. A small man in a raincoat took his place. The next morning I made my initial trip to the office, the raincoat still on hand. I had a short conference with Miller, the district attorney, at eleven. Bronson was under surveillance, he said, and any attempt to sell the notes to him would probably result in their recovery. In the meantime, as I knew, the Commonwealth had continued the case, in hope of such contingency.

At noon I left the office and took a veterinarian to see Candida, the injured pony. By one o'clock my first day's duties were performed, and a long Sahara of hot afternoon stretched ahead. McKnight, always glad to escape from the grind, suggested a vaudeville, and in sheer ennui I consented. I could neither ride, drive nor golf, and my own company bored me to distraction.

"Coolest place in town these days," he declared. "Electric fans, breezy songs, airy costumes. And there's Johnson just behind--the coldest proposition in Washington."

He gravely bought three tickets and presented the detective with one. Then we went in. Having lived a normal, busy life, the theater in the afternoon is to me about on a par with ice-cream for breakfast. Up on the stage a very stout woman in short pink skirts, with a smile that McKnight declared looked like a slash in a roll of butter, was singing nasally, with a laborious kick at the end of each verse. Johnson, two rows ahead, went to sleep. McKnight prodded me with his elbow.

"Look at the first box to the right," he said, in a stage whisper. "I want you to come over at the end of this act."

It was the first time I had seen her since I put her in the cab at Baltimore. Outwardly I presume I was calm, for no one turned to stare at me, but every atom of me cried out at the sight of her. She was leaning, bent forward, lips slightly parted, gazing raptly at the Japanese conjurer who had replaced what McKnight disrespectfully called the Columns of Hercules. Compared with the draggled lady of the farm-house, she was radiant.

For that first moment there was nothing but joy at the sight of her. McKnight's touch on my arm brought me back to reality.

"Come over and meet them," he said. "That's the cousin Miss West is visiting, Mrs. Dallas."

But I would not go. After he went I sat there alone, painfully conscious that I was being pointed out and stared at from the box. The abominable Japanese gave way to yet more atrocious performing dogs.

"How many offers of marriage will the young lady in the box have?" The dog stopped sagely at 'none,' and then pulled out a card that said eight. Wild shouts of glee by the audience. "The fools," I muttered.

After a little I glanced over. Mrs. Dallas was talking to McKnight, but She was looking straight at me. She was flushed, but more calm than I, and she did not bow. I fumbled for my hat, but the next moment I saw that they were going, and I sat still. When McKnight came back he was triumphant.

"I've made an engagement for you," he said. "Mrs. Dallas asked me to bring you to dinner to-night, and I said I knew you would fall all over yourself to go. You are requested to bring along the broken arm, and any other souvenirs of the wreck that you may possess."

"I'll do nothing of the sort," I declared, struggling against my inclination. "I can't even tie my necktie, and I have to have my food cut for me."

"Oh, that's all right," he said easily. "I'll send Stogie over to fix you up, and Mrs. Dal knows all about the arm. I told her."
(Stogie is his Japanese factotum, so called because he is lean, a yellowish brown in color, and because he claims to have been shipped into this country in a box.)

The Cinematograph was finishing the program. The house was dark and the music had stopped, as it does in the circus just before somebody risks his neck at so much a neck in the Dip of Death, or the hundred-foot dive. Then, with a sort of shock, I saw on the white curtain the announcement:

THE NEXT PICTURE
IS THE DOOMED WASHINGTON FLIER, TAKEN A SHORT DISTANCE FROM THE SCENE OF THE WRECK ON THE FATAL MORNING OF SEPTEMBER TENTH. TWO MILES FARTHER ON IT MET WITH ALMOST COMPLETE ANNIHILATION.

I confess to a return of some of the sickening sensations of the wreck; people around me were leaning forward with tense faces. Then the letters were gone, and I saw a long level stretch of track, even the broken stone between the ties standing out distinctly. Far off under a cloud of smoke a small object was rushing toward us and growing larger as it came.

Now it was on us, a mammoth in size, with huge drivers and a colossal tender. The engine leaped aside, as if just in time to save us from destruction, with a glimpse of a stooping fireman and a grimy engineer. The long train of sleepers followed. From a forward vestibule a porter in a white coat waved his hand. The rest of the cars seemed still wrapped in slumber. With mixed sensations I saw my own car, Ontario, fly past, and then I rose to my feet and gripped McKnight's shoulder.

On the lowest step at the last car, one foot hanging free, was a man. His black derby hat was pulled well down to keep it from blowing away, and his coat was flying open in the wind. He was swung well out from the car, his free hand gripping a small valise, every muscle tense for a jump.

"Good God, that's my man!" I said hoarsely, as the audience broke into applause. McKnight half rose: in his seat ahead Johnson stifled a yawn and turned to eye me.

I dropped into my chair limply, and tried to control my excitement. "The man on the last platform of the train," I said. "He was just about to leap; I'll swear that was my bag."

"Could you see his face?" McKnight asked in an undertone. "Would you know him again?"

"No. His hat was pulled down and his head was bent I'm going back to find out where that picture was taken. They say two miles, but it may have been forty."

The audience, busy with its wraps, had not noticed. Mrs. Dallas and Alison West had gone. In front of us Johnson had dropped his hat and was stooping for it.

"This way," I motioned to McKnight, and we wheeled into the narrow passage beside us, back of the boxes. At the end there was a door leading into the wings, and as we went boldly through I turned the key.

The final set was being struck, and no one paid any attention to us. Luckily they were similarly indifferent to a banging at the door I had locked, a banging which, I judged, signified Johnson.

"I guess we've broken up his interference," McKnight chuckled.

Stage hands were hurrying in every direction; pieces of the side wall of the last drawing-room menaced us; a switchboard behind us was singing like a tea-kettle. Everywhere we stepped we were in somebody's way. At last we were across, confronting a man in his shirt sleeves, who by dots and dashes of profanity seemed to be directing the chaos.

"Well?" he said, wheeling on us. "What can I do for you?"

"I would like to ask," I replied, "if you have any idea just where the last cinematograph picture was taken."

"Broken board--picnickers--lake?"

"No. The Washington Flier."

He glanced at my bandaged arm.

"The announcement says two miles," McKnight put in, "but we should like to know whether it is railroad miles, automobile miles, or policeman miles."

"I am sorry I can't tell you," he replied, more civilly. "We get those pictures by contract. We don't take them ourselves."

"Where are the company's offices?"

"New York." He stepped forward and grasped a super by the shoulder. "What in blazes are you doing with that gold chair in a kitchen set? Take that piece of pink plush there and throw it over a soap box, if you haven't got a kitchen chair."

I had not realized the extent of the shock, but now I dropped into a chair and wiped my forehead. The unexpected glimpse of Alison West, followed almost immediately by the revelation of the picture, had left me limp and unnerved. McKnight was looking at his watch.

"He says the moving picture people have an office down-town. We can make it if we go now."
So he called a cab, and we started at a gallop. There was no sign of the detective. "Upon my word," Richey said, "I feel lonely without him."

The people at the down-town office of the cinematograph company were very obliging. The picture had been taken, they said, at M-, just two miles beyond the scene of the wreck. It was not much, but it was something to work on. I decided not to go home, but to send McKnight's Jap for my clothes, and to dress at the Incubator. I was determined, if possible, to make my next day's investigations without Johnson. In the meantime, even if it was for the last time, I would see Her that night. I gave Stogie a note for Mrs. Klopton, and with my dinner clothes there came back the gold bag, wrapped in tissue paper.

CHAPTER XVI
THE SHADOW OF A GIRL

Certain things about the dinner at the Dallas house will always be obscure to me. Dallas was something in the Fish Commission, and I remember his reeling off fish eggs in billions while we ate our caviar. He had some particular stunt he had been urging the government to for years--something about forbidding the establishment of mills and factories on river-banks--it seems they kill the fish, either the smoke, or the noise, or something they pour into the water.

Mrs. Dallas was there, I think. Of course, I suppose she must have been; and there was a woman in yellow: I took her in to dinner, and I remember she loosened my clams for me so I could get them. But the only real person at the table was a girl across in white, a sublimated young woman who was as brilliant as I was stupid, who never by any chance looked directly at me, and who appeared and disappeared across the candles and orchids in a sort of halo of radiance.

When the dinner had progressed from salmon to roast, and the conversation had done the same thing--from fish to scandal--the yellow gown turned to me. "We have been awfully good, haven't we, Mr. Blakeley?" she asked. "Although I am crazy to hear, I have not said 'wreck' once. I'm sure you must feel like the survivor of Waterloo, or something of the sort."

"If you want me to tell you about the wreck," I said, glancing across the table, "I'm sorry to be disappointing, but I don't remember anything."

"You are fortunate to be able to forget it." It was the first word Miss West had spoken directly to me, and it went to my head.

"There are some things I have not forgotten," I said, over the candles. "I recall coming to myself some time after, and that a girl, a beautiful girl--"

"Ah!" said the lady in yellow, leaning forward breathlessly. Miss West was staring at me coldly, but, once started, I had to stumble on.

"That a girl was trying to rouse me, and that she told me I had been on fire twice already." A shudder went around the table.

"But surely that isn't the end of the story," Mrs. Dallas put in aggrievedly. "Why, that's the most tantalizing thing I ever heard."

"I'm afraid that's all," I said. "She went her way and I went mine. If she recalls me at all, she probably thinks of me as a weak-kneed individual who faints like a woman when everything is over."

"What did I tell you?" Mrs. Dallas asserted triumphantly. "He fainted, did you hear? when everything was over! He hasn't begun to tell it."

I would have given a lot by that time if I had not mentioned the girl. But McKnight took it up there and carried it on.

"Blakeley is a regular geyser," he said. "He never spouts until he reaches the boiling point. And by that same token, although he hasn't said much about the Lady of the Wreck, I think he is crazy about her. In fact, I am sure of it. He thinks he has locked his secret in the caves of his soul, but I call you to witness that he has it nailed to his face. Look at him!"

I squirmed miserably and tried to avoid the startled eyes of the girl across the table. I wanted to choke McKnight and murder the rest of the party.

"It isn't fair," I said as coolly as I could. "I have my fingers crossed; you are five against one."

"And to think that there was a murder on that very train," broke in the lady in yellow. "It was a perfect crescendo of horrors, wasn't it? And what became of the murdered man, Mr. Blakeley?"

McKnight had the sense to jump into the conversation and save my reply.

"They say good Pitts堡ers go to Atlantic City when they die," he said. "So--we are reasonably certain the gentleman did not go to the seashore."

The meal was over at last, and once in the drawing-room it was clear we hung heavy on the hostess' hands. "It is so hard to get people for bridge in September," she wailed, "there is absolutely nobody in town. Six is a dreadful
"It's a good poker number," her husband suggested.

The matter settled itself, however. I was hopeless, save as a dummy; Miss West said it was too hot for cards, and went out on a balcony that overlooked the Mall. With obvious relief Mrs. Dallas had the card-table brought, and I was face to face with the minute I had dreaded and hoped for a week.

Now it had come, it was more difficult than I had anticipated. I do not know if there was a moon, but there was the urban substitute for it—the arc light. It threw the shadow of the balcony railing in long black bars against her white gown, and as it swung sometimes her face was in the light. I drew a chair close so that I could watch her.

"Do you know," I said, when she made no effort at speech, "that you are a much more formidable person tonight, in that gown, than you were the last time I saw you?"

The light swung on her face; she was smiling faintly. "The hat with the green ribbons!" she said. "I must take it back; I had almost forgotten."

"I have not forgotten—anything." I pulled myself up short. This was hardly loyalty to Richey. His voice came through the window just then, and perhaps I was wrong, but I thought she raised her head to listen.

"Look at this hand," he was saying. "Regular pianola: you could play it with your feet."

"He's a dear, isn't he?" Alison said unexpectedly. "No matter how depressed and downhearted I am, I always cheer up when I see Richey."

"He's more than that," I returned warmly. "He is the most honorable fellow I know. If he wasn't so much that way, he would have a career before him. He wanted to put on the doors of our offices, Blakeley and McKnight, P. B. H., which is Poor But Honest."

From my comparative poverty to the wealth of the girl beside me was a single mental leap. From that wealth to the grandfather who was responsible for it was another.

"I wonder if you know that I had been to Pittsburgh to see your grandfather when I met you?" I said.

"You?" She was surprised.

"Yes. And you remember the alligator bag that I told you was exchanged for the one you cut off my arm?" She nodded expectantly. "Well, in that valise were the forged Andy Bronson notes, and Mr. Gilmore's deposition that they were forged."

She was on her feet in an instant. "In that bag!" she cried. "Oh, why didn't you tell me that before? Oh, it's so ridiculous, so—so hopeless. Why, I could—"

She stopped suddenly and sat down again. "I do not know that I am sorry, after all," she said after a pause. "Mr. Bronson was a friend of my father's. I—I suppose it was a bad thing for you, losing the papers?"

"Well, it was not a good thing," I conceded. "While we are on the subject of losing things, do you remember—do you know that I still have your gold purse?"

She did not reply at once. The shadow of a column was over her face, but I guessed that she was staring at me.

"You have it?" She almost whispered.

"I picked it up in the street car," I said, with a cheerfulness I did not feel. "It looks like a very opulent little purse."

Why didn't she speak about the necklace? For just a careless word to make me sane again!

"You!" she repeated, horror-stricken. And then I produced the purse and held it out on my palm. "I should have sent it to you before, I suppose, but, as you know, I have been laid up since the wreck."

We both saw McKnight at the same moment. He had pulled the curtains aside and was standing looking out at us. The tableau of give and take was unmistakable; the gold purse, her outstretched hand, my own attitude. It was over in a second; then he came out and lounged on the balcony railing.

"They're mad at me in there," he said airily, "so I came out. I suppose the reason they call it bridge is because so many people get cross over it."

The heat broke up the card group soon after, and they all came out for the night breeze. I had no more words alone with Alison.

I went back to the Incubator for the night. We said almost nothing on the way home; there was a constraint between us for the first time that I could remember. It was too early for bed, and so we smoked in the living-room and tried to talk of trivial things. After a time even those failed, and we sat silent. It was McKnight who finally broached the subject.

"And so she wasn't at Seal Harbor at all."

"No."

"Do you know where she was, Lollie?"

"Somewhere near Cresson."

"And that was the purse—her purse—with the broken necklace in it?"
"Yes, it was. You understand, don't you, Rich, that, having given her my word, I couldn't tell you?"

"I understand a lot of things," he said, without bitterness.

We sat for some time and smoked. Then Richey got up and stretched himself. "I'm off to bed, old man," he said.

"Need any help with that game arm of yours?"

"No, thanks," I returned.

I heard him go into his room and lock the door. It was a bad hour for me. The first shadow between us, and the shadow of a girl at that.

CHAPTER XVII
AT THE FARM-HOUSE AGAIN

McKnight is always a sympathizer with the early worm. It was late when he appeared. Perhaps, like myself, he had not slept well. But he was apparently cheerful enough, and he made a better breakfast than I did. It was one o'clock before we got to Baltimore. After a half hour's wait we took a local for M-, the station near which the cinematograph picture had been taken.

We passed the scene of the wreck, McKnight with curiosity, I with a sickening sense of horror. Back in the fields was the little farm-house where Alison West and I had intended getting coffee, and winding away from the track, maple trees shading it on each side, was the lane where we had stopped to rest, and where I had--it seemed presumption beyond belief now--where I had tried to comfort her by patting her hand.

We got out at M-, a small place with two or three houses and a general store. The station was a one-roomed affair, with a railed-off place at the end, where a scale, a telegraph instrument and a chair constituted the entire furnishing.

The station agent was a young man with a shrewd face. He stopped hammering a piece of wood over a hole in the floor to ask where we wanted to go.

"We're not going," said McKnight, "we're coming. Have a cigar?"

The agent took it with an inquiring glance, first at it and then at us.

"We want to ask you a few questions," began McKnight, perching himself on the railing and kicking the chair forward for me. "Or, rather, this gentleman does."

"Wait a minute," said the agent, glancing through the window. "There's a hen in that crate choking herself to death."

He was back in a minute, and took up his position near a sawdust-filled box that did duty as a cuspidor.

"Now fire away," he said.

"In the first place," I began, "do you remember the day the Washington Flier was wrecked below here?"

"Do I!" he said. "Did Jonah remember the whale?"

"Were you on the platform here when the first section passed?"

"I was."

"Do you recall seeing a man hanging to the platform of the last car?"

"There was no one hanging there when she passed here," he said with conviction. "I watched her out of sight."

"Did you see anything that morning of a man about my size, carrying a small grip, and wearing dark clothes and a derby hat?" I asked eagerly.

McKnight was trying to look unconcerned, but I was frankly anxious. It was clear that the man had jumped somewhere in the mile of track just beyond.

"Well, yes, I did." The agent cleared his throat. "When the smash came the operator at MX sent word along the wire, both ways. I got it here, and I was pretty near crazy, though I knew it wasn't any fault of mine."

"I was standing on the track looking down, for I couldn't leave the office, when a young fellow with light hair limped up to me and asked me what that smoke was over there."

"That's what's left of the Washington Flier,' I said, 'and I guess there's souls going up in that smoke."

"Do you mean the first section?" he said, getting kind of greenish-yellow.

"That's what I mean,' I said; 'split to kindling wood because Rafferty, on the second section, didn't want to be late."

"He put his hand out in front of him, and the satchel fell with a bang."

"'My God,' he said, and dropped right on the track in a heap."

"I got him into the station and he came around, but he kept on groaning something awful. He'd sprained his ankle, and when he got a little better I drove him over in Carter's milk wagon to the Carter place, and I reckon he stayed there a spell."

"That's all, is it?" I asked.

"That's all--or, no, there's something else. About noon that day one of the Carter twins came down with a note from him asking me to send a long-distance message to some one in Washington."
"To whom?" I asked eagerly.

"I reckon I've forgot the name, but the message was that this fellow --Sullivan was his name--was at M-, and if the man had escaped from the wreck would he come to see him."

"He wouldn't have sent that message to me," I said to McKnight, rather crestfallen. "He'd have every object in keeping out of my way."

"There might be reasons," McKnight observed judicially. "He might not have found the papers then."

"Was the name Blakeley?" I asked.

"It might have been--I can't say. But the man wasn't there, and there was a lot of noise. I couldn't hear well. Then in half an hour down came the other twin to say the gentleman was taking on awful and didn't want the message sent."

"He's gone, of course?"

"Yes. Limped down here in about three days and took the noon train for the city."

It seemed a certainty now that our man, having hurt himself somewhat in his jump, had stayed quietly in the farm-house until he was able to travel. But, to be positive, we decided to visit the Carter place.

I gave the station agent a five-dollar bill, which he rolled up with a couple of others and stuck in his pocket. I turned as we got to a bend in the road, and he was looking curiously after us.

It was not until we had climbed the hill and turned onto the road to the Carter place that I realized where we were going. Although we approached it from another direction, I knew the farm-house at once. It was the one where Alison West and I had breakfasted nine days before. With the new restraint between us, I did not tell McKnight. I wondered afterward if he had suspected it. I saw him looking hard at the gate-post which had figured in one of our mysteries, but he asked no questions. Afterward he grew almost taciturn, for him, and let me do most of the talking.

We opened the front gate of the Carter place and went slowly up the walk. Two ragged youngsters, alike even to freckles and squints, were playing in the yard.

"Is your mother around?" I asked.

"In the front room. Walk in," they answered in identical tones.

As we got to the porch we heard voices, and stopped. I knocked, but the people within, engaged in animated, rather one-sided conversation, did not answer.

"In the front room. Walk in," quoted McKnight, and did so.

In the stuffy farm parlor two people were sitting. One, a pleasant-faced woman with a checked apron, rose, somewhat embarrassed, to meet us. She did not know me, and I was thankful. But our attention was riveted on a little man who was sitting before a table, writing busily. It was Hotchkiss!

He got up when he saw us, and had the grace to look uncomfortable.

"Such an interesting case," he said nervously, "I took the liberty--"

"Look here," said McKnight suddenly. "did you make any inquiries at the station?"

"A few," he confessed. "I went to the theater last night--I felt the need of a little relaxation--and the sight of a picture there, a cinematograph affair, started a new line of thought. Probably the same clue brought you gentlemen. I learned a good bit from the station agent."

"The son-of-a-gun," said McKnight. "And you paid him, I suppose?"

"I gave him five dollars," was the apologetic answer. Mrs. Carter, hearing sounds of strife in the yard, went out, and Hotchkiss folded up his papers.

"I think the identity of the man is established," he said. "What number of hat do you wear, Mr. Blakeley?"

"Seven and a quarter," I replied.

"Well, it's only piling up evidence," he said cheerfully. "On the night of the murder you wore light gray silk underclothing, with the second button of the shirt missing. Your hat had 'L. B.' in gilt letters inside, and there was a very minute hole in the toe of one black sock."

"Hush," McKnight protested. "If word gets to Mrs. Klopton that Mr. Blakeley was wrecked, or robbed, or whatever it was, with a button missing and a hole in one sock, she'll retire to the Old Ladies' Home. I've heard her threaten it."

Mr. Hotchkiss was without a sense of humor. He regarded McKnight gravely and went on:

"I've been in the room where the man lay while he was unable to get away, and there is nothing there. But I found what may be a possible clue in the dust heap."

"Mrs. Carter tells me that in unpacking his grip the other day she took out of the coat of the pajamas some pieces of a telegram. As I figure it, the pajamas were his own. He probably had them on when he effected the exchange."

I nodded assent. All I had retained of my own clothing was the suit of pajamas I was wearing and my bath-robe.

"Therefore the telegram was his, not yours. I have pieces here, but some are missing. I am not discouraged, however."
He spread out some bits of yellow paper, and we bent over them curiously. It was something like this:

Man with p- Get- Br-

We spelled it out slowly.

"Now," Hotchkiss announced, "I make it something like this: The 'p.-' is one of two things, pistol--you remember the little pearl-handled affair belonging to the murdered man--or it is pocket-book. I am inclined to the latter view, as the pocket-book had been disturbed and the pistol had not."

I took the piece of paper from the table and scrawled four words on it.

"Now," I said, rearranging them, "it happens, Mr. Hotchkiss, that I found one of these pieces of the telegram on the train. I thought it had been dropped by some one else, you see, but that's immaterial. Arranged this way it almost makes sense. Fill out that 'p.-' with the rest of the word, as I imagine it, and it makes 'papers,' and add this scrap and you have:

"Man with papers (in) lower ten, car seven. Get (them).'"

McKnight slapped Hotchkiss on the back. "You're a trump," he said. "Br- is Bronson, of course. It's almost too easy. You see, Mr. Blakeley here engaged lower ten, but found it occupied by the man who was later murdered there. The man who did the thing was a friend of Bronson's, evidently, and in trying to get the papers we have the motive for the crime."

"There are still some things to be explained," Mr. Hotchkiss wiped his glasses and put them on. "For one thing, Mr. Blakeley, I am puzzled by that bit of chain."

I did not glance at McKnight. I felt that the hand, with which I was gathering up the bits of torn paper were shaking. It seemed to me that this astute little man was going to drag in the girl in spite of me.

CHAPTER XVIII

A NEW WORLD

Hotchkiss jotted down the bits of telegram and rose.

"Well," he said, "we've done something. We've found where the murderer left the train, we know what day he went to Baltimore, and, most important of all, we have a motive for the crime."

"It seems the irony of fate," said McKnight, getting up, "that a man should kill another man for certain papers he is supposed to be carrying, find he hasn't got them after all, decide to throw suspicion on another man by changing berths and getting out, bag and baggage, and then, by the merest fluke of chance, take with him, in the valise he changed for his own, the very notes he was after. It was a bit of luck for him."

"Then why," put in Hotchkiss doubtfully, "why did he collapse when he heard of the wreck? And what about the telephone message the station agent sent? You remember they tried to countermand it, and with some excitement."

"We will ask him those questions when we get him," McKnight said. We were on the unrailed front porch by that time, and Hotchkiss had put away his notebook. The mother of the twins followed us to the steps.

"Dear me," she exclaimed volubly, "and to think I was forgetting to tell you! I put the young man to bed with a spice poultice on his ankle: my mother always was a firm believer in spice poultices. It's wonderful what they will do in croup! And then I took the children and went down to see the wreck. It was Sunday, and the mister had gone to church; hasn't missed a day since he took the pledge nine years ago. And on the way I met two people, a man and a woman. They looked half dead, so I sent them right here for breakfast and some soap and water. I always say soap is better than liquor after a shock."

Hotchkiss was listening absently: McKnight was whistling under his breath, staring down across the field to where a break in the woods showed a half dozen telegraph poles, the line of the railroad.

"It must have been twelve o'clock when we got back; I wanted the children to see everything, because it isn't likely they'll ever see another wreck like that. Rows of--"

"About twelve o'clock," I broke in, "and what then?"

"The young man up-stairs was awake," she went on, "and hammering at his door like all possessed. And it was locked on the outside!" She paused to enjoy her sensation.

"I would like to see that lock," Hotchkiss said promptly, but for some reason the woman demurred.

"I will bring the key down," she said and disappeared. When she returned she held out an ordinary door key of the cheapest variety.

"He's about to strangle, isn't he," McKnight remarked lazily, "or is that Obadiah?"
Mrs. Carter picked the boy up and inverted him, talking amiably all the time. "He's always doing it," she said, giving him a shake. "Whenever we miss anything we look to see if Obadiah's black in the face." She gave him another shake, and the quarter I had given him shot out as if blown from a gun. Then we prepared to go back to the station.

From where I stood I could look into the cheery farm kitchen, where Alison West and I had eaten our al fresco breakfast. I looked at the table with mixed emotions, and then, gradually, the meaning of something in it penetrated my mind. Still in its papers, evidently just opened, was a hat box, and protruding over the edge of the box was a streamer of vivid green ribbon.

On the plea that I wished to ask Mrs. Carter a few more questions, I let the others go on. I watched them down the flagstone walk; saw McKnight stop and examine the gate-posts and saw, too, the quick glance he threw back at the house. Then I turned to Mrs. Carter.

"I would like to speak to the young lady up-stairs," I said.

She threw up her hands with a quick gesture of surrender. "I've done all I could," she exclaimed. "She won't like it very well, but--she's in the room over the parlor."

I went eagerly up the ladder-like stairs, to the rag-carpeted hall. Two doors were open, showing interiors of four poster beds and high bureaus. The door of the room over the parlor was almost closed. I hesitated in the hallway after all, what right had I to intrude on her? But she settled my difficulty by throwing open the door and facing me.

"I--I beg your pardon, Miss West," I stammered. "It has just occurred to me that I am unpardonably rude. I saw the hat down-stairs and I--I guessed--"

"The hat!" she said. "I might have known. Does Richey know I am here?"

"I don't think so." I turned to go down the stairs again. Then I halted. "The fact is," I said, in an attempt at justification, "I'm in rather a mess these days, and I'm apt to do irresponsible things. It is not impossible that I shall be arrested, in a day or so, for the murder of Simon Harrington."

She drew her breath in sharply. "Murder!" she echoed. "Then they have found you after all!"

"I don't regard it as anything more than--er--inconvenient," I lied. "They can't convict me, you know. Almost all the witnesses are dead."

She was not deceived for a moment. She came over to me and stood, both hands on the rail of the stair. "I know just how grave it is," she said quietly. "My grandfather will not leave one stone unturned, and he can be terrible--terrible. But--she looked directly into my eyes as I stood below her on the stairs--"the time may come--soon--when I can help you. I'm afraid I shall not want to; I'm a dreadful coward, Mr. Blakeley. But--I will." She tried to smile.

"I wish you would let me help you," I said unsteadily. "Let us make it a bargain: each help the other!"

The girl shook her head with a sad little smile. "I am only as unhappy as I deserve to be," she said. And when I protested and took a step toward her she retreated, with her hands out before her.

"Why don't you ask me all the questions you are thinking?" she demanded, with a catch in her voice. "Oh, I know them. Or are you afraid to ask?"

I looked at her, at the lines around her eyes, at the drawn look about her mouth. Then I held out my hand. "Afraid!" I said, as she gave me hers. "There is nothing in God's green earth I am afraid of, save of trouble for you. To ask questions would be to imply a lack of faith. I ask you nothing. Some day, perhaps, you will come to me yourself and let me help you."

The next moment I was out in the golden sunshine: the birds were singing carols of joy: I walked dizzily through rainbow-colored clouds, past the twins, cherubs now, swinging on the gate. It was a new world into which I stepped from the Carter farm-house that morning, for--I had kissed her!

CHAPTER XIX

AT THE TABLE NEXT

McKnight and Hotchkiss were sauntering slowly down the road as I caught up with them. As usual, the little man was busy with some abstruse mental problem.

"The idea is this," he was saying, his brows knitted in thought, "if a left-handed man, standing in the position of the man in the picture, should jump from a car, would he be likely to sprain his right ankle? When a right-handed man prepares for a leap of that kind, my theory is that he would hold on with his right hand, and alight at the proper time, on his right foot. Of course--"

"I imagine, although I don't know," interrupted McKnight, "that a man either ambidextrous or one-armed, jumping from the Washington Flier, would be more likely to land on his head."

"Anyhow," I interposed, "what difference does it make whether Sullivan used one hand or the other? One pair of handcuffs will put both hands out of commission."

As usual when one of his pet theories was attacked, Hotchkiss looked aggrieved.

"My dear sir," he expostulated, "don't you understand what bearing this has on the case? How was the murdered
man lying when he was found?"

"On his back," I said promptly, "head toward the engine."

"Very well," he retorted, "and what then? Your heart lies under your fifth intercostal space, and to reach it a right-handed blow would have struck either down or directly in.

"But, gentleman, the point of entrance for the stiletto was below the heart, striking up! As Harrington lay with his head toward the engine, a person in the aisle must have used the left hand."

McKnight's eyes sought mine and he winked at me solemnly as I unostentatiously transferred the hat I was carrying to my right hand. Long training has largely counterbalanced heredity in my case, but I still pitch ball, play tennis and carve with my left hand. But Hotchkiss was too busy with his theories to notice me.

We were only just in time for our train back to Baltimore, but McKnight took advantage of a second's delay to shake the station agent warmly by the hand.

"I want to express my admiration for you," he said beamingly. "Ability of your order is thrown away here. You should have been a city policeman, my friend."

The agent looked a trifle uncertain.

"The young lady was the one who told me to keep still," he said.

McKnight glanced at me, gave the agent's hand a final shake, and climbed on board. But I knew perfectly that he had guessed the reason for my delay.

He was very silent on the way home. Hotchkiss, too, had little to say. He was reading over his notes intently, stopping now and then to make a penciled addition. Just before we left the train Richey turned to me. "I suppose it was the key to the door that she tied to the gate?"

"Probably. I did not ask her."

"Curious, her locking that fellow in," he reflected. "You may depend on it, there was a good reason for it all. And I wish you wouldn't be so suspicious of motives, Rich," I said warmly.

"Only yesterday you were the suspicious one," he retorted, and we lapsed into strained silence.

It was late when we got to Washington. One of Mrs. Klopton's small tyrannies was exacting punctuality at meals, and, like several other things, I respected it. There are always some concessions that should be made in return for faithful service.

So, as my dinner hour of seven was long past, McKnight and I went to a little restaurant down town where they have a very decent way of fixing chicken a la King. Hotchkiss had departed, economically bent, for a small hotel where he lived on the American plan.

"I want to think some things over," he said in response to my invitation to dinner, "and, anyhow, there's no use dining out when I pay the same, dinner or no dinner, where I am stopping."

The day had been hot, and the first floor dining-room was sultry in spite of the palms and fans which attempted to simulate the verdure and breezes of the country.

It was crowded, too, with a typical summer night crowd, and, after sitting for a few minutes in a sweltering corner, we got up and went to the smaller dining-room up-stairs. Here it was not so warm, and we settled ourselves comfortably by a window.

Over in a corner half a dozen boys on their way back to school were ragging a perspiring waiter, a proceeding so exactly to McKnight's taste that he insisted on going over to join them. But their table was full, and somehow that kind of fun had lost its point for me.

Not far from us a very stout, middle-aged man, apoplectic with the heat, was elephantinely jolly for the benefit of a bored-looking girl across the table from him, and at the next table a newspaper woman ate alone, the last edition propped against the water-bottle before her, her hat, for coolness, on the corner of the table. It was a motley Bohemian crowd.

I looked over the room casually, while McKnight ordered the meal. Then my attention was attracted to the table next to ours. Two people were sitting there, so deep in conversation that they did not notice us. The woman's face was hidden under her hat, as she traced the pattern of the cloth mechanically with her fork. But the man's features stood out clear in the light of the candles on the table. It was Bronson!

"He shows the strain, doesn't he?" McKnight said, holding up the wine list as if he read from it. "Who's the woman?"

"Search me," I replied, in the same way.

When the chicken came, I still found myself gazing now and then at the abstracted couple near me. Evidently the subject of conversation was unpleasant. Bronson was eating little, the woman not at all. Finally he got up, pushed his chair back noisily, thrust a bill at the waiter and stalked out.

The woman sat still for a moment; then, with an apparent resolution to make the best of it, she began slowly to eat the meal before her.
But the quarrel had taken away her appetite, for the mixture in our chafing-dish was hardly ready to serve before
she pushed her chair back a little and looked around the room.

I caught my first glimpse of her face then, and I confess it startled me. It was the tall, stately woman of the
Ontario, the woman I had last seen cowering beside the road, rolling pebbles in her hand, blood streaming from a cut
over her eye. I could see the scar now, a little affair, about an inch long, gleaming red through its layers of powder.

And then, quite unexpectedly, she turned and looked directly at me. After a minute's uncertainty, she bowed,
letting her eyes rest on mine with a calmly insolent stare. She glanced at McKnight for a moment, then back to me.

When she looked away again I breathed easier.

"Who is it?" asked McKnight under his breath.

"Ontario." I formed it with my lips rather than said it. McKnight's eyebrows went up and he looked with
increased interest at the black-gowned figure.

I ate little after that. The situation was rather bad for me, I began to see. Here was a woman who could, if she
wished, and had any motive for so doing, put me in jail under a capital charge. A word from her to the police, and
polite surveillance would become active interference.

Then, too, she could say that she had seen me, just after the wreck, with a young woman from the murdered
man's car, and thus probably bring Alison West into the case.

It is not surprising, then, that I ate little. The woman across seemed in no hurry to go. She loitered over a demi-
tasse, and that finished, sat with her elbow on the table, her chin in her hand, looking darkly at the changing groups
in the room.

The fun at the table where the college boys sat began to grow a little noisy; the fat man, now a purplish shade,
ambled away behind his slim companion; the newspaper woman pinned on her business-like hat and stalked out.
Still the woman at the next table waited.

It was a relief when the meal was over. We got our hats and were about to leave the room, when a waiter
ordered me on the arm.

"I beg your pardon, sir," he said, "but the lady at the table near the window, the lady in black, sir, would like to
speak to you."

I looked down between the rows of tables to where the woman sat alone, her chin still resting on her hand, her
black eyes still insolently staring, this time at me.

"I'll have to go," I said to McKnight hurriedly. "She knows all about that affair and she'd be a bad enemy."

"I don't like her lamps," McKnight observed, after a glance at her. "Better jolly her a little. Good-by."

CHAPTER XX

THE NOTES AND A BARGAIN

I went back slowly to where the woman sat alone.

She smiled rather oddly as I drew near, and pointed to the chair Bronson had vacated.

"Sit down, Mr. Blakeley," she said, "I am going to take a few minutes of your valuable time."

"Certainly." I sat down opposite her and glanced at a cuckoo clock on the wall. "I am sorry, but I have only a
few minutes. If you--"

She laughed a little, not very pleasantly, and opening a small black fan covered with spangles, waved it slowly.

"The fact is," she said, "I think we are about to make a bargain."

"A bargain?" I asked incredulously. "You have a second advantage of me. You know my name"--I paused
suggestively and she took the cue.

"I am Mrs. Conway," she said, and flicked a crumb off the table with an over-manicured finger.

The name was scarcely a surprise. I had already surmised that this might be the woman whom rumor credited as
being Bronson's common-law wife. Rumor, I remembered, had said other things even less pleasant, things which
had been brought out at Bronson's arrest for forgery.

"We met last under less fortunate circumstances," she was saying. "I have been fit for nothing since that terrible
day. And you--you had a broken arm, I think."

"I still have it," I said, with a lame attempt at jocularity; "but to have escaped at all was a miracle. We have
much, indeed, to be thankful for."

"I suppose we have," she said carelessly, "although sometimes I doubt it." She was looking somberly toward the
door through which her late companion had made his exit.

"You sent for me--" I said.

"Yes, I sent for you." She roused herself and sat erect. "Now, Mr. Blakeley, have you found those papers?"

"The papers? What papers?" I parried. I needed time to think.

"Mr. Blakeley," she said quietly, "I think we can lay aside all subterfuge. In the first place let me refresh your
mind about a few things. The Pittsburg police are looking for the survivors of the car Ontario; there are three that I
know of—you yourself, the young woman with whom you left the scene of the wreck, and myself. The wreck, you will admit, was a fortunate one for you."

I nodded without speaking.

"At the time of the collision you were in rather a hole," she went on, looking at me with a disagreeable smile. "You were, if I remember, accused of a rather atrocious crime. There was a lot of corroborative evidence, was there not? I seem to remember a dirk and the murdered man's pocket-book in your possession, and a few other things that were—well, rather unpleasant."

I was thrown a bit off my guard.

"You remember also," I said quickly, "that a man disappeared from the car, taking my clothes, papers and everything."

"I remember that you said so." Her tone was quietly insulting, and I bit my lip at having been caught. It was no time to make a defense.

"You have missed one calculation," I said coldly, "and that is, the discovery of the man who left the train."

"You have found him?" She bent forward, and again I regretted my hasty speech. "I knew it; I said so."

"We are going to find him," I asserted, with a confidence I did not feel. "We can produce at any time proof that a man left the Flier a few miles beyond the wreck. And we can find him, I am positive."

"But you have not found him yet?" She was clearly disappointed. "Well, so be it. Now for our bargain. You will admit that I am no fool."

I made no such admission, and she smiled mockingly.

"How flattering you are!" she said. "Very well. Now for the premises. You take to Pittsburg four notes held by the Mechanics' National Bank, to have Mr. Gilmore, who is ill, declare his indorsement of them forged.

"On the journey back to Pittsburg two things happen to you: you lose your clothing, your valise and your papers, including the notes, and you are accused of murder. In fact, Mr. Blakeley, the circumstances were most singular, and the evidence—well, almost conclusive."

I was completely at her mercy, but I gnawed my lip with irritation.

"Now for the bargain." She leaned over and lowered her voice. "A fair exchange, you know. The minute you put those four notes in my hand—that minute the blow to my head has caused complete forgetfulness as to the events of that awful morning. I am the only witness, and I will be silent. Do you understand? They will call off their dogs."

My head was buzzing with the strangeness of the idea.

"But," I said, striving to gain time, "I haven't the notes. I can't give you what I haven't got."

"You have had the case continued," she said sharply. "You expect to find them. Another thing," she added slowly, watching my face, "if you don't get them soon, Bronson will have them. They have been offered to him already, but at a prohibitive price."

"But," I said, bewildered, "what is your object in coming to me? If Bronson will get them anyhow—"

She shut her fan with a click and her face was not particularly pleasant to look at.

"You are dense," she said insolently. "I want those papers—for myself, not for Andy Bronson."

"Then the idea is," I said, ignoring her tone, "that you think you have me in a hole, and that if I find those papers and give them to you you will let me out. As I understand it, our friend Bronson, under those circumstances, will also be in a hole."

She nodded.

"The notes would be of no use to you for a limited length of time," I went on, watching her narrowly. "If they are not turned over to the state's attorney within a reasonable time there will have to be a nolle pross—that is, the case will simply be dropped for lack of evidence."

"A week would answer, I think," she said slowly. "You will do it, then?"

I laughed, although I was not especially cheerful.

"No, I'll not do it. I expect to come across the notes any time now, and I expect just as certainly to turn them over to the state's attorney when I get them."

She got up suddenly, pushing her chair back with a noisy grating sound that turned many eyes toward us.

"You're more of a fool than I thought you," she sneered, and left me at the table.

CHAPTER XXI

McKNIGHT'S THEORY

I confess I was staggered. The people at the surrounding tables, after glancing curiously in my direction, looked away again.

I got my hat and went out in a very uncomfortable frame of mind. That she would inform the police at once of what she knew I never doubted, unless possibly she would give a day or two's grace in the hope that I would change my mind.
I reviewed the situation as I waited for a car. Two passed me going in the opposite direction, and on the first one I saw Bronson, his hat over his eyes, his arms folded, looking moodily ahead. Was it imagination? or was the small man huddled in the corner of the rear seat Hotchkiss?

As the car rolled on I found myself smiling. The alert little man was for all the world like a terrier, ever on the scent, and scouring about in every direction.

I found McKnight at the Incubator, with his coat off, working with enthusiasm and a manicure file over the horn of his auto.

"It's the worst horn I ever ran across," he groaned, without looking up, as I came in. "The blankety-blank thing won't blow."

He punched it savagely, finally eliciting a faint throaty croak.

"Sounds like croup," I suggested. "My sister-in-law uses camphor and goose grease for it; or how about a spice poultice?"

But McKnight never sees any jokes but his own. He flung the horn clattering into a corner, and collapsed sulkily into a chair.

"Now," I said, "if you're through manicuring that horn, I'll tell you about my talk with the lady in black."

"What's wrong?" asked McKnight languidly. "Police watching her, too?"

"Not exactly. The fact is, Rich, there's the mischief to pay."

Stogie came in, bringing a few additions to our comfort. When he went out I told my story.

"You must remember," I said, "that I had seen this woman before the morning of the wreck. She was buying her Pullman ticket when I did. Then the next morning, when the murder was discovered, she grew hysterical, and I gave her some whisky. The third and last time I saw her, until to-night, was when she crouched beside the road, after the wreck."

McKnight slid down in his chair until his weight rested on the small of his back, and put his feet on the big reading table.

"It is rather a facer," he said. "It's really too good a situation for a commonplace lawyer. It ought to be dramatized. You can't agree, of course; and by refusing you run the chance of jail, at least, and of having Alison brought into publicity, which is out of the question. You say she was at the Pullman window when you were?"

"Yes; I bought her ticket for her. Gave her lower eleven."

"And you took ten?"

"Lower ten."

McKnight straightened up and looked at me.

"Then she thought you were in lower ten."

"I suppose she did, if she thought at all."

"But listen, man." McKnight was growing excited. "What do you figure out of this? The Conway woman knows you have taken the notes to Pittsburg. The probabilities are that she follows you there, on the chance of an opportunity to get them, either for Bronson or herself.

"Nothing doing during the trip over or during the day in Pittsburg; but she learns the number of your berth as you buy it at the Pullman ticket office in Pittsburg, and she thinks she sees her chance. No one could have foreseen that that drunken fellow would have crawled into your berth.

"Now, I figure it out this way: She wanted those notes desperately --does still--not for Bronson, but to hold over his head for some purpose. In the night, when everything is quiet, she slips behind the curtains of lower ten, where the man's breathing shows he is asleep. Didn't you say he snored?"

"He did!" I affirmed. "But I tell you--"

"Now keep still and listen. She gropes cautiously around in the darkness, finally discovering the wallet under the pillow. Can't you see it yourself?"

He was leaning forward, excitedly, and I could almost see the gruesome tragedy he was depicting.

"She draws out the wallet. Then, perhaps she remembers the alligator bag, and on the possibility that the notes are there, instead of in the pocket-book, she gropes around for it. Suddenly, the man awakes and clutches at the nearest object, perhaps her neck chain, which breaks. She drops the pocket-book and tries to escape, but he has caught her right hand.

"It is all in silence; the man is still stupidly drunk. But he holds her in a tight grip. Then the tragedy. She must get away; in a minute the car will be aroused. Such a woman, on such an errand, does not go without some sort of a weapon, in this case a dagger, which, unlike a revolver, is noiseless.

"With a quick thrust--she's a big woman and a bold one--she strikes. Possibly Hotchkiss is right about the left-hand blow. Harrington may have held her right hand, or perhaps she held the dirk in her left hand as she groped with her right. Then, as the man falls back, and his grasp relaxes, she straightens and attempts to get away. The swaying
of the car throws her almost into your berth, and, trembling with terror, she crouches behind the curtains of lower ten
until everything is still. Then she goes noiselessly back to her berth."

I nodded.

"It seems to fit partly, at least," I said. "In the morning when she found that the crime had been not only fruitless,
but that she had searched the wrong berth and killed the wrong man; when she saw me emerge, unhurt, just as she
was bracing herself for the discovery of my dead body, then she went into hysterics. You remember, I gave her some
whisky.

"It really seems a tenable theory. But, like the Sullivan theory, there are one or two things that don't agree with
the rest. For one thing, how did the remainder of that chain get into Alison West's possession?"

"She may have picked it up on the floor."

"We'll admit that," I said; "and I'm sure I hope so. Then how did the murdered man's pocket-book get into the
sealskin bag? And the dirk, how account for that, and the blood-stains?"

"Now what's the use," asked McKnight aggrievedly, "of my building up beautiful theories for you to pull down? We'll take it to Hotchkiss. Maybe he can tell from the blood-stains if the murderer's finger nails were square or
pointed."

"Hotchkiss is no fool," I said warmly. "Under all his theories there's a good hard layer of common sense. And we
must remember, Rich, that neither of our theories includes the woman at Doctor Van Kirk's hospital, that the
charming picture you have just drawn does not account for Alison West's connection with the case, or for the bits of
telegram in the Sullivan fellow's pajamas pocket. You are like the man who put the clock together; you've got half of
the works left over."

"Oh, go home," said McKnight disgustedly. "I'm no Edgar Allan Poe. What's the use of coming here and asking
me things if you're so particular?"

With one of his quick changes of mood, he picked up his guitar.

"Listen to this," he said. "It is a Hawaiian song about a fat lady, oh, ignorant one! and how she fell off her mule."
But for all the lightness of the words, the voice that followed me down the stairs was anything but cheery.
"There was a Kanaka in Balu did dwell, Who had for his daughter a monstrous fat girl-
he sang in his clear tenor. I paused on the lower floor and listened. He had stopped singing as abruptly as he had
begun.

CHAPTER XXII

AT THE BOARDING-HOUSE

I had not been home for thirty-six hours, since the morning of the preceding day. Johnson was not in sight, and I
let myself in quietly with my latchkey. It was almost midnight, and I had hardly settled myself in the library when
the bell rang and I was surprised to find Hotchkiss, much out of breath, in the vestibule.

"Why, come in, Mr. Hotchkiss," I said. "I thought you were going home to go to bed."

"So I was, so I was." He dropped into a chair beside my reading lamp and mopped his face. "And here it is
almost midnight, and I'm wider awake than ever. I've seen Sullivan, Mr. Blakeley."

"You have!"

"I have," he said impressively.

"You were following Bronson at eight o'clock. Was that when it happened?"

"Something of the sort. When I left you at the door of the restaurant, I turned and almost ran into a plain clothes
man from the central office. I know him pretty well; once or twice he has taken me with him on interesting bits of
work. He knows my hobby."

"You know him, too, probably. It was the man Arnold, the detective whom the state's attorney has had watching
Bronson."

Johnson being otherwise occupied, I had asked for Arnold myself.

I nodded.

"Well, he stopped me at once; said he'd been on the fellow's tracks since early morning and had had no time for
luncheon. Bronson, it seems, isn't eating much these days. I at once jotted down the fact, because it argued that he
was being bothered by the man with the notes."

"It might point to other things," I suggested. "Indigestion, you know."

Hotchkiss ignored me. "Well, Arnold had some reason for thinking that Bronson would try to give him the slip
that night, so he asked me to stay around the private entrance there while he ran across the Street and got something
to eat. It seemed a fair presumption that, as he had gone there with a lady, they would dine leisurely, and Arnold
would have plenty of time to get back."

"What about your own dinner?" I asked curiously.

"Sir," he said pompously, "I have given you a wrong estimate of Wilson Budd Hotchkiss if you think that a
question of dinner would even obtrude itself on his mind at such a time as this."

He was a frail little man, and to-night he looked pale with heat and over-exertion.

"Did you have any luncheon?" I asked.

He was somewhat embarrassed at that.

"I--really, Mr. Blakeley, the events of the day were so engrossing--"

"Well," I said, "I'm not going to see you drop on the floor from exhaustion. Just wait a minute."

I went back to the pantry, only to be confronted with rows of locked doors and empty dishes. Downstairs, in the basement kitchen, however, I found two unattractive looking cold chops, some dry bread and a piece of cake, wrapped in a napkin, and from its surreptitious and generally hang-dog appearance, destined for the coachman in the stable at the rear. Trays there were none--everything but the chairs and tables seemed under lock and key, and there was neither napkin, knife nor fork to be found.

The luncheon was not attractive in appearance, but Hotchkiss ate his cold chops and gnawed at the crusts as though he had been famished, while he told his story.

"I had been there only a few minutes," he said, with a chop in one hand and the cake in the other, "when Bronson rushed out and cut across the street. He's a tall man, Mr. Blakeley, and I had had work keeping close. It was a relief when he jumped on a passing car, although being well behind, it was a hard run for me to catch him. He had left the lady.

"Once on the car, we simply rode from one end of the line to the other and back again. I suppose he was passing the time, for he looked at his watch now and then, and when I did once get a look at us face it made me--er--uncomfortable. He could have crushed me like a fly, sir."

I had brought Mr. Hotchkiss a glass of wine, and he was looking better. He stopped to finish it, declining with a wave of his hand to have it refilled, and continued:

"About nine o'clock or a little later he got off somewhere near Washington Circle. He went along one of the residence streets there, turned to his left a square or two, and rang a bell. He had been admitted when I got there, but I guessed from the appearance of the place that it was a boarding-house.

"I waited a few minutes and rang the bell. When a maid answered it, I asked for Mr. Sullivan. Of course there was no Mr. Sullivan there.

"I said I was sorry; that the man I was looking for was a new boarder. She was sure there was no such boarder in the house; the only new arrival was a man on the third floor--she thought his name was Stuart.

"'My friend has a cousin by that name,' I said. 'I'll just go up and see.'

"She wanted to show me up, but I said it was unnecessary. So after telling me it was the bedroom and sitting-room on the third floor front, I went up.

"I met a couple of men on the stairs, but neither of them paid any attention to me. A boarding-house is the easiest place in the world to enter."

"'They're not always so easy to leave,' I put in, to his evident irritation.

"When I got to the third story, I took out a bunch of keys and posted myself by a door near the ones the girl had indicated. I could hear voices in one of the front rooms, but could not understand what they said.

"There was no violent dispute, but a steady hum. Then Bronson jerked the door open. If he had stepped into the hall he would have seen me fitting a key into the door before me. But he spoke before he came out.

"'You're acting like a maniac,' he said. 'You know I can get those things some way; I'm not going to threaten you. It isn't necessary. You know me.'"

"'It would be no use, the other man said. 'I tell you, I haven't seen the notes for ten days.'

"'But you will,' Bronson said savagely. 'You're standing in your own way, that's all. If you're holding out expecting me to raise my figure, you're making a mistake. It's my last offer.'

"'I couldn't take it if it was for a million,' said the man inside the room. 'I'd do it, I expect, if I could. The best of us have our price.'

"Bronson slammed the door then, and flung past me down the hall.

"After a couple of minutes I knocked at the door, and a tall man about your size, Mr. Blakeley, opened it. He was very blond, with a smooth face and blue eyes--what I think you would call a handsome man.

"'I beg your pardon for disturbing you,' I said. 'Can you tell me which is Mr. Johnson's room? Mr. Francis Johnson?'

"'I can not say,' he replied civilly. 'I've only been here a few days.'

"I thanked him and left, but I had had a good look at him, and I think I'd know him readily any place."

I sat for a few minutes thinking it over. "But what did he mean by saying he hadn't seen the notes for ten days? And why is Bronson making the overtures?"

"I think he was lying," Hotchkiss reflected. "Bronson hasn't reached his figure."
"It's a big advance, Mr. Hotchkiss, and I appreciate what you have done more than I can tell you," I said. "And now, if you can locate any of my property in this fellow's room, we'll send him up for larceny, and at least have him where we can get at him. I'm going to Cresson to-morrow, to try to trace him a little from there. But I'll be back in a couple of days, and we'll begin to gather in these scattered threads."

Hotchkiss rubbed his hands together delightedly.

"That's it," he said. "That's what we want to do, Mr. Blakeley. We'll gather up the threads ourselves; if we let the police in too soon, they'll tangle it up again. I'm not vindictive by nature; but when a fellow like Sullivan not only commits a murder, but goes to all sorts of trouble to put the burden of guilt on an innocent man --I say hunt him down, sir!"

"You are convinced, of course, that Sullivan did it?"

"Who else?" He looked over his glasses at me with the air of a man whose mental attitude is unassailable. "Well, listen to this," I said.

Then I told him at length of my encounter with Bronson in the restaurant, of the bargain proposed by Mrs. Conway, and finally of McKnight's new theory. But, although he was impressed, he was far from convinced.

"It's a very vivid piece of imagination," he said drily; "but while it fits the evidence as far as it goes, it doesn't go far enough. How about the stains in lower seven, the dirk, and the wallet? Haven't we even got motive in that telegram from Bronson?"

"Yes," I admitted, "but that bit of chain--"

"Pooh," he said shortly. "Perhaps, like yourself, Sullivan wore glasses with a chain. Our not finding them does not prove they did not exist."

And there I made an error; half confidences are always mistakes. I could not tell of the broken chain in Alison West's gold purse.

It was one o'clock when Hotchkiss finally left. We had by that time arranged a definite course of action--Hotchkiss to search Sullivan's rooms and if possible find evidence to have him held for larceny, while I went to Cresson.

Strangely enough, however, when I entered the train the following morning, Hotchkiss was already there. He had bought a new note-book, and was sharpening a fresh pencil.

"I changed my plans, you see," he said, bustling his newspaper aside for me. "It is no discredit to your intelligence, Mr. Blakeley, but you lack the professional eye, the analytical mind. You legal gentlemen call a spade a spade, although it may be a shovel."

"'A primrose by the river's brim A yellow primrose was to him, And nothing more!'" I quoted as the train pulled out.

CHAPTER XXIII
A NIGHT AT THE LAURELS

I slept most of the way to Cresson, to the disgust of the little detective. Finally he struck up an acquaintance with a kindly-faced old priest on his way home to his convent school, armed with a roll of dance music and surreptitious bundles that looked like boxes of candy. From scraps of conversation I gleaned that there had been mysterious occurrences at the convent,--ending in the theft of what the reverend father called vaguely, "a quantity of undermuslins." I dropped asleep at that point, and when I roused a few moments later, the conversation had progressed. Hotchkiss had a diagram on an envelope.

"With this window bolted, and that one inaccessible, and if, as you say, the--er--garments were in a tub here at X, then, as you hold the key to the other door,--I think you said the convent dog did not raise any disturbance? Pardon a personal question, but do you ever walk in your sleep?"

The priest looked bewildered.

"I'll tell you what to do," Hotchkiss said cheerfully, leaning forward, "look around a little yourself before you call in the police. Somnambulism is a queer thing. It's a question whether we are most ourselves sleeping or waking. Ever think of that? Live a saintly life all day, prayers and matins and all that, and the subconscious mind hikes you out of bed at night to steal undermuslins! Subliminal theft, so to speak. Better examine the roof."

I dozed again. When I wakened Hotchkiss sat alone, and the priest, from a corner, was staring at him dazedly, over his breviary.

It was raining when we reached Cresson, a wind-driven rain that had forced the agent at the newsstand to close himself in, and that beat back from the rails in parallel lines of white spray. As he went up the main street, Hotchkiss was cheerfully oblivious of the weather, of the threatening dusk, of our generally dragged condition. My dragged condition, I should say, for he improved every moment, --his eyes brighter, his ruddy face ruddier, his collar newer and glossier. Sometime, when it does not encircle the little man's neck, I shall test that collar with a match.

I was growing steadily more depressed: I loathed my errand and its necessity. I had always held that a man who
played the spy on a woman was beneath contempt. Then, I admit I was afraid of what I might learn. For a time, however, this promised to be a negligible quantity. The streets of the straggling little mountain town had been clean-washed of humanity by the downpour. Windows and doors were inhospitably shut, and from around an occasional drawn shade came narrow strips of light that merely emphasized our gloom. When Hotchkiss' umbrella turned inside out, I stopped.

"I don't know where you are going," I snarled, "I don't care. But I'm going to get under cover inside of ten seconds. I'm not amphibious."

I ducked into the next shelter, which happened to be the yawning entrance to a livery stable, and shook myself, dog fashion. Hotchkiss wiped his collar with his handkerchief. It emerged gleaming and unwilted.

"This will do as well as any place," he said, raising his voice above the rattle of the rain. "Got to make a beginning."

I sat down on the usual chair without a back, just inside the door, and stared out at the darkening street. The whole affair had an air of unreality. Now that I was there, I doubted the necessity, or the value, of the journey. I was wet and uncomfortable. Around me, with Cresson as a center, stretched an irregular circumference of mountain, with possibly a ten-mile radius, and in it I was to find the residence of a woman whose first name I did not know, and a man who, so far, had been a purely chimerical person.

Hotchkiss had penetrated the steaming interior of the cave, and now his voice, punctuated by the occasional thud of horses' hoofs, came to me.

"Something light will do," he was saying. "A runabout, perhaps." He came forward rubbing his hands, followed by a thin man in overalls. "Mr. Peck says," he began,--"this is Mr. Peck of Peck and Peck,--says that the place we are looking for is about seven miles from the town. It's clearing, isn't it?"

"It is not," I returned savagely. "And we don't want a runabout, Mr. Peck. What we require is hermetically sealed diving suit. I suppose there isn't a machine to be had?" Mr. Peck gazed at me, in silence: machine to him meant other things than motors. "Automobile," I supplemented. His face cleared.

"None but private affairs. I can give you a good buggy with a rubber apron. Mike, is the doctor's horse in?"

I am still uncertain as to whether the raw-boned roan we took out that night over the mountains was the doctor's horse or not. If it was, the doctor may be a good doctor, but he doesn't know anything about a horse. And furthermore, I hope he didn't need the beast that miserable evening.

While they harnessed the horse, Hotchkiss told me what he had learned.

"Six Curtises in the town and vicinity," he said. "Sort of family name around here. One of them is telegraph operator at the station. Person we are looking for is--was--a wealthy widow with a brother named Sullivan! Both supposed to have been killed on the Flier."

"Her brother," I repeated stupidly.

"You see," Hotchkiss went on, "three people, in one party, took the train here that night, Miss West, Mrs. Curtis and Sullivan. The two women had the drawing-room, Sullivan had lower seven. What we want to find out is just who these people were, where they came from, if Bronson knew them, and how Miss West became entangled with them. She may have married Sullivan, for one thing."

I fell into gloom after that. The roan was led unwillingly into the weather, Hotchkiss and I in eclipse behind the blanket. The liveryman stood in the doorway and called directions to us. "You can't miss it," he finished. "Got the name over the gate anyhow, 'The Laurels.' The servants are still there: leastways, we didn't bring them down." He even took a step into the rain as Hotchkiss picked up the lines. "If you're going to settle the estate," he bawled, "don't forget us, Peck and Peck. A half-bushel of name and a bushel of service."

Hotchkiss could not drive. Born a clerk, he guided the roan much as he would drive a bad pen. And the roan spattered through puddles and splashed ink--mud, that is--until I was in a frenzy of irritation.

"What are we going to say when we get there?" I asked after I had finally taken the reins in my one useful hand. "Get out there at midnight and tell the servants we have come to ask a few questions about the family? It's an idiotic trip anyhow; I wish I had stayed at home."

The roan fell just then, and we had to crawl out and help him up. By the time we had partly unharnessed him our matches were gone, and the small bicycle lamp on the buggy was wavering only too certainly. We were covered with mud, panting with exertion, and even Hotchkiss showed a disposition to be surly. The rain, which had lessened for a time, came on again, the lightning flashes doing more than anything else to reveal our isolated position.

Another mile saw us, if possible, more despondent. The water in our clothes had had time to penetrate: the roan had sprained his shoulder, and drew us along in a series of convulsive jerks. And then through the rain-spattered window of the blanket, I saw a light. It was a small light, rather yellow, and it lasted perhaps thirty seconds. Hotchkiss missed it, and was inclined to doubt me. But in a couple of minutes the roan hobbled to the side of the road and stopped, and I made out a break in the pines and an arched gate.
It was a small gate, too narrow for the buggy. I pulled the horse into as much shelter as possible under the trees, and we got out. Hotchkiss tied the beast and we left him there, head down against the driving rain, drooping and dejected. Then we went toward the house.

It was a long walk. The path bent and twisted, and now and then we lost it. We were climbing as we went. Oddly there were no lights ahead, although it was only ten o'clock.--not later. Hotchkiss kept a little ahead of me, knocking into trees now and then, but finding the path in half the time I should have taken. Once, as I felt my way around a tree in the blackness, I put my hand unexpectedly on his shoulder, and felt a shudder go down my back.

"What do you expect me to do?" he protested, when I remonstrated. "Hang out a red lantern? What was that? Listen."

We both stood peering into the gloom. The sharp patter of the rain on leaves had ceased, and from just ahead there came back to us the stealthy padding of feet in wet soil. My hand closed on Hotchkiss' shoulder, and we listened together, warily. The steps were close by, unmistakable. The next flash of lightning showed nothing moving: the house was in full view now, dark and uninviting, looming huge above a terrace, with an Italian garden at the side. Then the blackness again. Somebody's teeth were chattering: I accused Hotchkiss but he denied it.

"Although I'm not very comfortable, I'll admit," he confessed; "there was something breathing right at my elbow here a moment ago."

"Nonsense!" I took his elbow and steered him in what I made out to be the direction of the steps of the Italian garden. "I saw a deer just ahead by the last flash; that's what you heard. By Jove, I hear wheels."

As we neared the house the sense of surveillance we had had in the park gradually left us. Stumbling over flower beds, running afoul of a sun-dial, groping our way savagely along hedges and thorny banks, we reached the steps finally and climbed the terrace.

It was then that Hotchkiss fell over one of the two stone urns which, with tall boxwood trees in them, mounted guard at each side of the door. He didn't make any attempt to get up. He sat in a puddle on the brick floor of the terrace and clutched his leg and swore softly in Government English.

The occasional relief of the lightning was gone. I could not see an outline of the house before me. We had no matches, and an instant's investigation showed that the windows were boarded and the house closed. Hotchkiss, still recumbent, was ascertaining the damage, tenderly peeling down his stocking.

"Upon my soul," he said finally, "I don't know whether this moisture is blood or rain. I think I've broken a bone."

"Blood is thicker than water," I suggested. "Is it sticky? See if you can move your toes."

There was a pause: Hotchkiss moved his toes. By that time I had found a knocker and was making the night hideous. But there was no response save the wind that blew sodden leaves derisively in our faces. Once Hotchkiss declared he heard a window-sash lifted, but renewed violence with the knocker produced no effect.

"There's only one thing to do," I said finally. "I'll go back and try to bring the buggy up for you. You can't walk, can you?"

Hotchkiss sat back in his puddle and said he didn't think he could stir, but for me to go back to town and leave him, that he didn't have any family dependent on him, and that if he was going to have pneumonia he had probably got it already. I left him there, and started back to get the horse.

If possible, it was worse than before. There was no lightning, and only by a miracle did I find the little gate again. I drew a long breath of relief, followed by another, equally long, of dismay. For I had found the hitching strap and there was nothing at the end of it! In a lull of the wind I seemed to hear, far off, the eager thud of stable-bound feet. So for the second time I climbed the slope to the Laurels, and on the way I thought of many things to say.

I struck the house at a new angle, for I found a veranda, destitute of chairs and furnishings, but dry and evidently roofed. It was better than the terrace, and so, by groping along the wall, I tried to make my way to Hotchkiss. That was how I found the open window. I had passed perhaps six, all closed, and to have my hand grope for the next one, and to find instead the soft drapery of an inner curtain, was startling, to say the least.

I found Hotchkiss at last around an angle of the stone wall, and told him that the horse was gone. He was disconcerted, but not abased; maintaining that it was a new kind of knot that couldn't slip and that the horse must have chewed the halter through! He was less enthusiastic than I had expected about the window.

"It looks uncommonly like a trap," he said. "I tell you there was some one in the park below when we were coming up. Man has a sixth sense that scientists ignore—a sense of the nearness of things. And all the time you have been gone, some one has been watching me."

"Couldn't see you," I maintained; "I can't see you now. And your sense of contiguity didn't tell you about that flower crock."

In the end, of course, he consented to go with me. He was very lame, and I helped him around to the open window. He was full of moral courage, the little man: it was only the physical in him that quailed. And as we groped
along, he insisted on going through the window first.

"If it is a trap," he whispered, "I have two arms to your one, and, besides, as I said before, life holds much for
you. As for me, the government would merely lose an indifferent employee."

When he found I was going first he was rather hurt, but I did not wait for his protests. I swung my feet over the
sill and dropped. I made a clutch at the window-frame with my good hand when I found no floor under my feet, but
I was too late. I dropped probably ten feet and landed with a crash that seemed to split my ear-drums. I was
thoroughly shaken, but in some miraculous way the bandaged arm had escaped injury.

"For Heaven's sake," Hotchkiss was calling from above, "have you broken your back?"

"No," I returned, as steadily as I could, "merely driven it up through my skull. This is a staircase. I'm coming up
to open another window."

It was eerie work, but I accomplished it finally, discovering, not without mishap, a room filled with more tables
than I had ever dreamed of, tables that seemed to waylay and strike at me. When I had got a window open,
Hotchkiss crawled through, and we were at last under shelter.

Our first thought was for a light. The same laborious investigation that had landed us where we were, revealed
that the house was lighted by electricity, and that the plant was not in operation. By accident I stumbled across a	tabouret with smoking materials, and found a half dozen matches. The first one showed us the magnitude of the
room we stood in, and revealed also a brass candle-stick by the open fireplace, a candle-stick almost four feet high,
supporting a candle of similar colossal proportions. It was Hotchkiss who discovered that it had been recently
lighted. He held the match to it and peered at it over his glasses.

"Within ten minutes," he announced impressively, "this candle has been burning. Look at the wax! And the
wick! Both soft."

"Perhaps it's the damp weather," I ventured, moving a little nearer to the circle of light. A gust of wind came in
just then, and the flame turned over on its side and threatened demise. There was something almost ridiculous in the
haste with which we put down the window and nursed the flicker to life.

The peculiarly ghost-like appearance of the room added to the uncanniness of the situation. The furniture was
swathed in white covers for the winter; even the pictures wore shrouds. And in a niche between two windows a bust
on a pedestal, similarly wrapped, one arm extended under its winding sheet, made a most life-like ghost, if any ghost
can be life-like.

In the light of the candle we surveyed each other, and we were objects for mirth. Hotchkiss was taking off his
sodden shoes and preparing to make himself comfortable, while I hung my muddy raincoat over the ghost in the
corner. Thus habited, he presented a rakish but distinctly more comfortable appearance.

"When these people built," Hotchkiss said, surveying the huge dimensions of the room, "they must have bought
a mountain and built all over it. What a room!"

It seemed to be a living-room, although Hotchkiss remarked that it was much more like a dead one. It was
probably fifty feet long and twenty-five feet wide. It was very high, too, with a domed ceiling, and a gallery ran
around the entire room, about fifteen feet above the floor. The candle light did not penetrate beyond the dim outlines
of the gallery rail, but I fancied the wall there hung with smaller pictures.

Hotchkiss had discovered a fire laid in the enormous fireplace, and in a few minutes we were steaming before a
cheerful blaze. Within the radius of its light and heat, we were comfortable again. But the brightness merely
emphasized the gloom of the ghostly corners. We talked in subdued tones, and I smoked, a box of Russian cigarettes
which I found in a table drawer. We had decided to stay all night, there being nothing else to do. I suggested a game
of double-dummy bridge, but did not urge it when my companion asked me if it resembled euchre. Gradually, as the
ecclesiastical candle paled in the firelight, we grew drowsy. I drew a divan into the cheerful area, and stretched
myself out for sleep. Hotchkiss, who said the pain in his leg made him wakeful, sat wide-eyed by the fire, smoking a
pipe.

I have no idea how much time had passed when something threw itself violently on my chest. I roused with a
start and leaped to my feet, and a large Angora cat fell with a thump to the floor. The fire was still bright, and there
was an odor of scorched leather through the room, from Hotchkiss' shoes. The little detective was sound asleep, his
dead pipe in his fingers. The cat sat back on its haunches and wailed.

The curtain at the door into the hallway bellied slowly out into the room and fell again. The cat looked toward it
and opened its mouth for another howl. I thrust at it with my foot, but it refused to move. Hotchkiss stirred uneasily,
and his pipe clattered to the floor.

The cat was standing at my feet, staring behind me. Apparently it was following with its eyes, an object unseen
to me, that moved behind me. The tip of its tail waved threateningly, but when I wheeled I saw nothing.

I took the candle and made a circuit of the room. Behind the curtain that had moved the door was securely
closed. The windows were shut and locked, and everywhere the silence was absolute. The cat followed me
majestically. I stooped and stroked its head, but it persisted in its uncanny watching of the corners of the room.

When I went back to my divan, after putting a fresh log on the fire, I was reassured. I took the precaution, and smiled at myself for doing it, to put the fire tongs within reach of my hand. But the cat would not let me sleep. After a time I decided that it wanted water, and I started out in search of some, carrying the candle without the stand. I wandered through several rooms, all closed and dismantled, before I found a small lavatory opening off a billiard room. The cat lapped steadily, and I filled a glass to take back with me. The candle flickered in a sickly fashion that threatened to leave me there lost in the wanderings of the many hallways, and from somewhere there came an occasional violent puff of wind. The cat stuck by my feet, with the hair on its back raised menacingly. I don't like cats; there is something psychic about them.

Hotchkiss was still asleep when I got back to the big room. I moved his boots back from the fire, and trimmed the candle. Then, with sleep gone from me, I lay back on my divan and reflected on many things: on my idiocy in coming; on Alison West, and the fact that only a week before she had been a guest in this very house; on Richey and the constraint that had come between us. From that I drifted back to Alison, and to the barrier my comparative poverty would be.

The emptiness, the stillness were oppressive. Once I heard footsteps coming, rhythmic steps that neither hurried nor dragged, and seemed to mount endless staircases without coming any closer. I realized finally that I had not quite turned off the tap, and that the lavatory, which I had circled to reach, must be quite close.

The cat lay by the fire, its nose on its folded paws, content in the warmth and companionship. I watched it idly. Now and then the green wood hissed in the fire, but the cat never batted an eye. Through an unshuttered window the lightning flashed. Suddenly the cat looked up. It lifted its head and stared directly at the gallery above. Then it blinked, and stared again. I was amused. Not until it had got up on its feet, eyes still riveted on the balcony, tail waving at the tip, the hair on its back a bristling brush, did I glance casually over my head.

From among the shadows a face gazed down at me, a face that seemed a fitting tenant of the ghostly room below. I saw it as plainly as I might see my own face in a mirror. While I stared at it with horrified eyes, the apparition faded. The rail was there, the Bokhara rug still swung from it, but the gallery was empty.

The cat threw back its head and wailed.

**CHAPTER XXIV**

**HIS WIFE'S FATHER**

I jumped up and seized the fire tongs. The cat's wail had roused Hotchkiss, who was wide-awake at once. He took in my offensive attitude, the tongs, the direction of my gaze, and needed nothing more. As he picked up the candle and darted out into the hall, I followed him. He made directly for the staircase, and part way up he turned off to the right through a small door. We were on the gallery itself; below us the fire gleamed cheerfully, the cat was not in sight. There was no sign of my ghostly visitant, but as we stood there the Bokhara rug, without warning, slid over the railing and fell to the floor below.

"Man or woman?" Hotchkiss inquired in his most professional tone.

"Neither--that is, I don't know. I didn't notice anything but the eyes," I muttered. "They were looking a hole in me. If you'd seen that cat you would realize my state of mind. That was a traditional graveyard yowl."

"I don't think you saw anything at all," he lied cheerfully. "You dozed off, and the rest is the natural result of a meal on a buffet car."

Nevertheless, he examined the Bokhara carefully when we went down, and when I finally went to sleep he was reading the only book in sight--Elwell on Bridge. The first rays of daylight were coming mistily into the room when he roused me. He had his finger on his lips, and he whispered sibilantly while I tried to draw on my distorted boots.

"I think we have him," he said triumphantly. "I've been looking around some, and I can tell you this much. Just before we came in through the window last night, another man came. Only--he did not drop, as you did. He swung over to the stair railing, and then down. The rail is scratched. He was long enough ahead of us to go into the dining-room and get a decanter out of the sideboard. He poured out the liquor into a glass, left the decanter there, and took the whisky into the library across the hall. Then--he broke into a desk, using a paper knife for a jimmy."

"Good Lord, Hotchkiss," I exclaimed; "why, it may have been Sullivan himself! Confound your theories--he's getting farther away every minute."

"It was Sullivan," Hotchkiss returned imperturbably. "And he has not gone. His boots are by the library fire."

"He probably had a dozen pairs where he could get them," I scoffed. "And while you and I sat and slept, the very man we want to get our hands on leered at us over that railing."

"Softly, softly, my friend," Hotchkiss said, as I stamped into my other shoe. "I did not say he was gone. Don't jump at conclusions. It is fatal to reasoning. As a matter of fact, he didn't relish a night on the mountains any more than we did. After he had unintentionally frightened you almost into paralysis, what would my gentleman naturally do? Go out in the storm again? Not if I know the Alice-sit-by-the-fire type. He went up-stairs, well up near the roof,
locked himself in and went to bed."
"And he is there now?"
"He is there now."

We had no weapons. I am aware that the traditional hero is always armed, and that Hotchkiss as the low comedian should have had a revolver that missed fire. As a fact, we had nothing of the sort. Hotchkiss carried the fire tongs, but my sense of humor was too strong for me; I declined the poker.

"All we want is a little peaceable conversation with him," I demurred. "We can't brain him first and converse with him afterward. And anyhow, while I can't put my finger on the place, I think your theory is weak. If he wouldn't run a hundred miles through fire and water to get away from us, then he is not the man we want."

Hotchkiss, however, was certain. He had found the room and listened outside the door to the sleeper's heavy breathing, and so we climbed past luxurious suites, revealed in the deepening daylight, past long vistas of hall and boudoir. And we were both badly winded when we got there. It was a tower room, reached by narrow stairs, and well above the roof level. Hotchkiss was glowing.

"It is partly good luck, but not all," he panted in a whisper. "If we had persisted in the search last night, he would have taken alarm and fled. Now--we have him. Are you ready?"

He gave a mighty rap at the door with the fire tongs, and stood expectant. Certainly he was right; some one moved within.

"Hello! Hello there!" Hotchkiss bawled. "You might as well come out. We won't hurt you, if you'll come peaceably."

"Tell him we represent the law," I prompted. "That's the customary thing, you know."

But at that moment a bullet came squarely through the door and flattened itself with a sharp pst against the wall of the tower staircase. We ducked unanimously, dropped back out of range, and Hotchkiss retaliated with a spirited bang at the door with the tongs. This brought another bullet. It was a ridiculous situation. Under the circumstances, no doubt, we should have retired, at least until we had armed ourselves, but Hotchkiss had no end of fighting spirit, and as for me, my blood was up.

"Break the lock," I suggested, and Hotchkiss, standing at the side, out of range, retaliated for every bullet by a smashing blow with the tongs. The shots ceased after a half dozen, and the door was giving, slowly. One of us on each side of the door, we were ready for almost any kind of desperate resistance. As it swung open Hotchkiss poised the tongs; I stood, bent forward, my arm drawn back for a blow.

Nothing happened.

There was not a sound. Finally, at the risk of losing an eye which I justly value, I peered around and into the room. There was no desperado there: only a fresh-faced, trembling-lipped servant, sitting on the edge of her bed, with a quilt around her shoulders and the empty revolver at her feet.

We were victorious, but no conquered army ever beat such a retreat as ours down the tower stairs and into the refuge of the living-room. There, with the door closed, sprawled on the divan, I went from one spasm of mirth into another, becoming sane at intervals, and suffering relapse again every time I saw Hotchkiss' disgruntled countenance. He was pacing the room, the tongs still in his hand, his mouth pursed with irritation. Finally he stopped in front of me and compelled my attention.

"When you have finished cackling," he said with dignity, "I wish to justify my position. Do you think the--er--young woman up-stairs put a pair of number eight boots to dry in the library last night? Do you think she poured the whisky out of that decanter?"

"They have been known to do it," I put in, but his eye silenced me.

"Moreover, if she had been the person who peered at you over the gallery railing last night, don't you suppose, with her--er--belligerent disposition, she could have filled you as full of lead as a window weight?"

"I do," I assented. "It wasn't Alice-sit-by-the-fire. I grant you that. Then who was it?"

Hotchkiss felt certain that it had been Sullivan, but I was not so sure. Why would he have crawled like a thief into his own house? If he had crossed the park, as seemed probable, when we did, he had not made any attempt to use the knocker. I gave it up finally, and made an effort to conciliate the young woman in the tower.

We had heard no sound since our spectacular entrance into her room. I was distinctly uncomfortable as, alone this time, I climbed to the tower staircase. Reasoning from before, she would probably throw a chair at me. I stopped at the foot of the staircase and called.

"Hello up there," I said, in as debonair a manner as I could summon. "Good morning. Wie geht es bei ihen?"

No reply.

"Bon jour, mademoiselle," I tried again. This time there was a movement of some sort from above, but nothing fell on me.

"I--we want to apologize for rousing you so--er--unexpectedly this morning," I went on. "The fact is, we wanted
to talk to you, and you—you were hard to waken. We are travelers, lost in your mountains, and we crave a breakfast and an audience."

She came to the door then. I could feel that she was investigating the top of my head from above. "Is Mr. Sullivan with you?" she asked. It was the first word from her, and she was not sure of her voice.

"No. We are alone. If you will come down and look at us you will find us two perfectly harmless people, whose horse—curses on him—departed without leave last night and left us at your gate."

She relaxed somewhat then and came down a step or two. "I was afraid I had killed somebody," she said. "The housekeeper left yesterday, and the other maids went with her."

When she saw that I was comparatively young and lacked the earmarks of the highwayman, she was greatly relieved. She was inclined to be shy of Hotchkiss, however, for some reason. She gave us a breakfast of a sort, for there was little in the house, and afterward we telephoned to the town for a vehicle. While Hotchkiss examined scratches and replaced the Bokhara rug, I engaged Jennie in conversation.

"Can you tell me," I asked, "who is managing the estate since Mrs. Curtis was killed?"

"No one," she returned shortly.

"Has—any member of the family been here since the accident?"

"No, sir. There was only the two, and some think Mr. Sullivan was killed as well as his sister."

"You don't?"

"No," with conviction.

"Why?"

She wheeled on me with quick suspicion.

"Are you a detective?" she demanded.

"No."

"You told him to say you represented the law."

"I am a lawyer. Some of them misrepresent the law, but I—"

She broke in impatiently.

"A sheriff's officer?"

"No. Look here, Jennie; I am all that I should be. You'll have to believe that. And I'm in a bad position through no fault of my own. I want you to answer some questions. If you will help me, I will do what I can for you. Do you live near here?"

Her chin quivered. It was the first sign of weakness she had shown.

"My home is in Pittsburg," she said, "and I haven't enough money to get there. They hadn't paid any wages for two months. They didn't pay anybody."

"Very well," I returned. "I'll send you back to Pittsburg, Pullman included, if you will tell me some things I want to know."

She agreed eagerly. Outside the window Hotchkiss was bending over, examining footprints in the drive.

"Now," I began, "there has been a Miss West staying here?"

"Yes."

"Mr. Sullivan was attentive to her?"

"Yes. She was the granddaughter of a wealthy man in Pittsburg. My aunt has been in his family for twenty years. Mrs. Curtis wanted her brother to marry Miss West."

"Do you think he did marry her?" I could not keep the excitement out of my voice.

"No. There were reasons"—she stopped abruptly.

"Do you know anything of the family? Are they—were they New Yorkers?"

"They came from somewhere in the south. I have heard Mrs. Curtis say her mother was a Cuban. I don't know much about them, but Mr. Sullivan had a wicked temper, though he didn't look it. Folks say big, light-haired people are easy going, but I don't believe it, sir."

"How long was Miss West here?"

"Two weeks."

I hesitated about further questioning. Critical as my position was, I could not pry deeper into Alison West's affairs. If she had got into the hands of adventurers, as Sullivan and his sister appeared to have been, she was safely away from them again. But something of the situation in the car Ontario was forming itself in my mind: the incident at the farmhouse lacked only motive to be complete. Was Sullivan, after all, a rascal or a criminal? Was the murderer Sullivan or Mrs. Conway? The lady or the tiger again.

Jennie was speaking.

"I hope Miss West was not hurt?" she asked. "We liked her, all of us. She was not like Mrs. Curtis."

I wanted to say that she was not like anybody in the world. Instead --"She escaped with some bruises," I said.
She glanced at my arm. "You were on the train?"
"Yes."
She waited for more questions, but none coming, she went to the door. Then she closed it softly and came back.
"Mrs. Curtis is dead? You are sure of it?" she asked.
"She was killed instantly, I believe. The body was not recovered. But I have reasons for believing that Mr. Sullivan is living."
"I knew it," she said. "I--I think he was here the night before last. That is why I went to the tower room. I believe he would kill me if he could."
As nearly as her round and comely face could express it, Jennie's expression was tragic at that moment. I made a quick resolution, and acted on it at once.
"You are not entirely frank with me, Jennie," I protested. "And I am going to tell you more than I have. We are talking at cross purposes."
"I was on the wrecked train, in the same car with Mrs. Curtis, Miss West and Mr. Sullivan. During the night there was a crime committed in that car and Mr. Sullivan disappeared. But he left behind him a chain of circumstantial evidence that involved me completely, so that I may, at any time, be arrested."
Apparently she did not comprehend for a moment. Then, as if the meaning of my words had just dawned on her, she looked up and gasped:
"You mean--Mr. Sullivan committed the crime himself?"
"I think he did."
"What was it?"
"It was murder," I said deliberately.
Her hands clenched involuntarily, and she shrank back. "A woman?" She could scarcely form her words.
"No, a man; a Mr. Simon Harrington, of Pittsburgh."
Her effort to retain her self-control was pitiful. Then she broke down and cried, her head on the back of a tall chair.
"It was my fault," she said wretchedly, "my fault, I should not have sent them the word."
After a few minutes she grew quiet. She seemed to hesitate over something, and finally determined to say it.
"You will understand better, sir, when I say that I was raised in the Harrington family. Mr. Harrington was Mr. Sullivan's wife's father!"
CHAPTER XXV
AT THE STATION
So it had been the tiger, not the lady! Well, I had held to that theory all through. Jennie suddenly became a valuable person; if necessary she could prove the connection between Sullivan and the murdered man, and show a motive for the crime. I was triumphant when Hotchkiss came in. When the girl had produced a photograph of Mrs. Sullivan, and I had recognized the bronze-haired girl of the train, we were both well satisfied--which goes to prove the ephemeral nature of most human contentments.
Jennie either had nothing more to say, or feared she had said too much. She was evidently uneasy before Hotchkiss. I told her that Mrs. Sullivan was recovering in a Baltimore hospital, but she already knew it, from some source, and merely nodded. She made a few preparations for leaving, while Hotchkiss and I compared notes, and then, with the cat in her arms, she climbed into the trap from the town. I sat with her, and on the way down she told me a little, not much.
"If you see Mrs. Sullivan," she advised, "and she is conscious, she probably thinks that both her husband and her father were killed in the wreck. She will be in a bad way, sir."
"You mean that she--still cares about her husband?"
The cat crawled over on to my knee, and rubbed its head against my hand invitingly. Jennie stared at the undulating line of the mountain crests, a colossal sun against a blue ocean of sky. "Yes, she cares," she said softly.
"Women are made like that. They say they are cats, but Peter there in your lap wouldn't come back and lick your hand if you kicked him. If--if you have to tell her the truth, be as gentle as you can, sir. She has been good to me--that's why I have played the spy here all summer. It's a thankless thing, spying on people."
"It is that," I agreed soberly.
Hotchkiss and I arrived in Washington late that evening, and, rather than arouse the household, I went to the club. I was at the office early the next morning and admitted myself. McKnight rarely appeared before half after ten, and our modest office force some time after nine. I looked over my previous day's mail and waited, with such patience as I possessed, for McKnight. In the interval I called up Mrs. Klopton and announced that I would dine at home that night. What my household subsists on during my numerous absences I have never discovered. Tea, probably, and crackers. Diligent search when I have made a midnight arrival, never reveals anything more substantial. Possibly I imagine it, but the announcement that I am about to make a journey always seems to create a
general atmosphere of depression throughout the house, as though Euphemia and Eliza, and Thomas, the stableman, were already subsisting, in imagination, on Mrs. Klopton's meager fare.

So I called her up and announced my arrival. There was something unusual in her tone, as though her throat was tense with indignation. Always shrill, her elderly voice rasped my ear painfully through the receiver.

"I have changed the butcher, Mr. Lawrence," she announced portentously. "The last roast was a pound short, and his mutton-chops--any self-respecting sheep would refuse to acknowledge them."

As I said before, I can always tell from the voice in which Mrs. Klopton conveys the most indifferent matters, if something of real significance has occurred. Also, through long habit, I have learned how quickest to bring her to the point.

"You are pessimistic this morning," I returned. "What's the matter, Mrs. Klopton? You haven't used that tone since Euphemia baked a pie for the iceman. What is it now? Somebody poison the dog?"

She cleared her throat.

"The house has been broken into, Mr. Lawrence," she said. "I have lived in the best families, and never have I stood by and seen what I saw yesterday--every bureau drawer opened, and my--my most sacred belongings--" she choked.

"Did you notify the police?" I asked sharply.

"Police!" she sniffed. "Police! It was the police that did it--two detectives with a search warrant. I--I wouldn't dare tell you over the telephone what one of them said when he found the whisky and rock candy for my cough."

"Did they take anything?" I demanded, every nerve on edge.

"They took the cough medicine," she returned indignantly, "and they said--"

"Confound the cough medicine!" I was frantic. "Did they take anything else? Were they in my dressing-room?"

"Yes. I threatened to sue them, and I told them what you would do when you came back. But they wouldn't listen. They took away that black sealskin bag you brought home from Pittsburg with you!"

I knew then that my hours of freedom were numbered. To have found Sullivan and then, in support of my case against him, to have produced the bag, minus the bit of chain, had been my intention. But the police had the bag, and, beyond knowing something of Sullivan's history, I was practically no nearer his discovery than before. Hotchkiss hoped he had his man in the house off Washington Circle, but on the very night he had seen him Jennie claimed that Sullivan had tried to enter the Laurels. Then--suppose we found Sullivan and proved the satchel and its contents his? Since the police had the bit of chain it might mean involving Alison in the story. I sat down and buried my face in my hands. There was no escape. I figured it out despondingly.

Against me was the evidence of the survivors of the Ontario that I had been accused of the murder at the time. There had been blood-stains on my pillow and a hidden dagger. Into the bargain, in my possession had been found a traveling-bag containing the dead man's pocket-book.

In my favor was McKnight's theory against Mrs. Conway. She had a motive for wishing to secure the notes, she believed I was in lower ten, and she had collapsed at the discovery of the crime in the morning.

Against both of these theories, I accuse a purely chimerical person named Sullivan, who was not seen by any of the survivors--save one, Alison, whom I could not bring into the case. I could find a motive for his murdering his father-in-law, whom he hated, but again--I would have to drag in the girl.

And not one of the theories explained the telegram and the broken necklace.

Outside the office force was arriving. They were comfortably ignorant of my presence, and over the transom floated scraps of dialogue and the stenographer's gurgling laugh. McKnight had a relative, who was reading law with him, in the intervals between calling up the young women of his acquaintance. He came in singing, and the office boy joined in with the uncertainty of voice of fifteen. I smiled grimly. I was too busy with my own troubles to find any joy in opening the door and startling them into silence. I even heard, without resentment, Blobs of the uncertain voice inquire when "Blake" would be back.

I hoped McKnight would arrive before the arrest occurred. There were many things to arrange. But when at last, impatient of his delay, I telephoned, I found he had been gone for more than an hour. Clearly he was not coming directly to the office, and with such resignation as I could muster I paced the floor and waited.

I felt more alone than I have ever felt in my life. "Born an orphan," as Richey said, I had made my own way, carved out myself such success as had been mine. I had built up my house of life on the props of law and order, and now some unknown hand had withdrawn the supports, and I stood among ruins.

I suppose it is the maternal in a woman that makes a man turn to her when everything else fails. The eternal boy in him goes to have his wounded pride bandaged, his tattered self-respect repaired. If he loves the woman, he wants her to kiss the hurt.

The longing to see Alison, always with me, was stronger than I was that morning. It might be that I would not see her again. I had nothing to say to her save one thing, and that, under the cloud that hung over me, I did not dare
to say. But I wanted to see her, to touch her hand--as only a lonely man can crave it, I wanted the comfort of her, the peace that lay in her presence. And so, with every step outside the door a threat, I telephoned to her.

She was gone! The disappointment was great, for my need was great. In a fury of revolt against the scheme of things, I heard that she had started home to Richmond--but that she might still be caught at the station.

To see her had by that time become an obsession. I picked up my hat, threw open the door, and, oblivious of the shock to the office force of my presence, followed so immediately by my exit, I dashed out to the elevator. As I went down in one cage I caught a glimpse of Johnson and two other men going up in the next. I hardly gave them a thought. There was no hansom in sight, and I jumped on a passing car. Let come what might, arrest, prison, disgrace, I was going to see Alison.

I saw her. I flung into the station, saw that it was empty--empty, for she was not there. Then I hurried back to the gates. She was there, a familiar figure in blue, the very gown in which I always thought of her, the one she had worn when, Heaven help me--I had kissed her, at the Carter farm. And she was not alone. Bending over her, talking earnestly, with all his boyish heart in his face, was Richey.

They did not see me, and I was glad of it. After all, it had been McKnight's game first. I turned on my heel and made my way blindly out of the station. Before I lost them I turned once and looked toward them, standing apart from the crowd, absorbed in each other. They were the only two people on earth that I cared about, and I left them there together. Then I went back miserably to the office and awaited arrest.

CHAPTER XXVI
ON TO RICHMOND

Strangely enough, I was not disturbed that day. McKnight did not appear at all. I sat at my desk and transacted routine business all afternoon, working with feverish energy. Like a man on the verge of a critical illness or a hazardous journey, I cleared up my correspondence, paid bills until I had writer's cramp from signing checks, read over my will, and paid up my life insurance, made to the benefit of an elderly sister of my mother's. I no longer dreaded arrest. After that morning in the station, I felt that anything would be a relief from the tension. I went home with perfect openness, courting the warrant that I knew was waiting, but I was not molested. The delay puzzled me.

The early part of the evening was uneventful. I read until late, with occasional lapses, when my book lay at my elbow, and I smoked and thought. Mrs. Klopton closed the house with ostentatious caution, about eleven, and hung around waiting to enlarge on the outrageousness of the police search. I did not encourage her.

"One would think," she concluded pompously, one foot in the hall, "that you were something you oughtn't to be, Mr. Lawrence. They acted as though you had committed a crime."

"I'm not sure that I didn't, Mrs. Klopton," I said wearily. "Somebody did, the general verdict seems to point my way."

She stared at me in speechless indignation. Then she flounced out. She came back once to say that the paper predicted cooler weather, and that she had put a blanket on my bed, but, to her disappointment, I refused to reopen the subject.

At half past eleven McKnight and Hotchkiss came in. Richey has a habit of stopping his car in front of the house and honking until some one comes out. He has a code of signals with the horn, which I never remember. Two long and a short blast mean, I believe, "Send out a box of cigarettes," and six short blasts, which sound like a police call, mean "Can you lend me some money?" To-night I knew something was up, for he got out and rang the door-bell like a Christian.

They came into the library, and Hotchkiss wiped his collar until it gleamed. McKnight was aggressively cheerful.

"Not pinched yet!" he exclaimed. "What do you think of that for luck! You always were a fortunate devil, Lawrence."

"Yes," I assented, with some bitterness, "I hardly know how to contain myself for joy sometimes. I suppose you know"--to Hotchkiss--"that the police were here while we were at Cresson, and that they found the bag that I brought from the wreck?"

"Things are coming to a head," he said thoughtfully "unless a little plan that I have in mind--" he hesitated.

"I hope so; I am pretty nearly desperate," I said doggedly. "I've got a mental toothache, and the sooner it's pulled the better."

"Tut, tut," said McKnight, "think of the disgrace to the firm if its senior member goes up for life, or--" he twisted his handkerchief into a noose, and went through an elaborate pantomime.

"Although jail isn't so bad, anyhow," he finished, "there are fellows that get the habit and keep going back and going back." He looked at his watch, and I fancied his cheerfulness was strained. Hotchkiss was nervously fumbling my book.

"Did you ever read The Purloined Letter, Mr. Blakeley?" he inquired.
"Probably, years ago," I said. "Poe, isn't it?"

He was choked at my indifference. "It is a masterpiece," he said, with enthusiasm. "I re-read it to-day."

"And what happened?"

"Then I inspected the rooms in the house off Washington Circle. I--I made some discoveries, Mr. Blakeley. For one thing, our man there is left-handed." He looked around for our approval. "There was a small cushion on the dresser, and the scarf pins in it had been stuck in with the left hand."

"Somebody may have twisted the cushion," I objected, but he looked hurt, and I desisted.

"There is only one discrepancy," he admitted, "but it troubles me. According to Mrs. Carter, at the farmhouse, our man wore gaudy pajamas, while I found here only the most severely plain night-shirts."

"Any buttons off?" McKnight inquired, looking again at his watch.

"The buttons were there," the amateur detective answered gravely, "but the buttonhole next the top one was torn through."

McKnight winked at me furtively.

"I am convinced of one thing," Hotchkiss went on, clearing his throat, "the papers are not in that room. Either he carries them with him, or he has sold them."

A sound on the street made both my visitors listen sharply. Whatever it was it passed on, however. I was growing curious and the restraint was telling on McKnight. He has no talent for secrecy. In the interval we discussed the strange occurrence at Cresson, which lost nothing by Hotchkiss' dry narration.

"And so," he concluded, "the woman in the Baltimore hospital is the wife of Henry Sullivan and the daughter of the man he murdered. No wonder he collapsed when he heard of the wreck."

"Joy, probably," McKnight put in. "Is that clock right, Lawrence? Never mind, it doesn't matter. By the way, Mrs. Conway dropped in the office yesterday, while you were away."

"What!" I sprang from my chair.

"Sure thing. Said she had heard great things of us, and wanted us to handle her case against the railroad."

"I would like to know what she is driving at," I reflected. "Is she trying to reach me through you?"

Richey's flippancy is often a cloak for deeper feeling. He dropped it now. "Yes," he said, "she's after the notes, of course. And I'll tell you I felt like a poltroon--whatever that may be--when I turned her down. She stood by the door with her face white, and told me contemptuously that I could save you from a murder charge and wouldn't do it. She made me feel like a cur. I was just as guilty as if I could have obliged her. She hinted that there were reasons and she laid my attitude to beastly motives."

"Nonsense," I said, as easily as I could. Hotchkiss had gone to the window. "She was excited. There are no 'reasons,' whatever she means."

Richey put his hand on my shoulder. "We've been together too long to let any 'reasons' or 'unreasons' come between us, old man," he said, not very steadily. Hotchkiss, who had been silent, here came forward in his most impressive manner. He put his hands under his coat-tails and coughed.

"Mr. Blakeley," he began, "by Mr. McKnight's advice we have arranged a little interview here to-night. If all has gone as I planned, Mr. Henry Pinckney Sullivan is by this time under arrest. Within a very few minutes--he will be here."

"I wanted to talk to him before he was locked up," Richey explained. "He's clever enough to be worth knowing, and, besides, I'm not so cocksure of his guilt as our friend the Patch on the Seat of Government. No murderer worthy of the name needs six different motives for the same crime, beginning with robbery, and ending with an unpleasant father-in-law."

We were all silent for a while. McKnight stationed himself at a window, and Hotchkiss paced the floor expectantly. "It's a great day for modern detective methods," he chittered. "While the police have been guarding houses and standing with their mouths open waiting for clues to fall in and choke them, we have pieced together, bit by bit, a fabric--"

The door-bell rang, followed immediately by sounds of footsteps in the hall. McKnight threw the door open, and Hotchkiss, raised on his toes, flung out his arm in a gesture of superb eloquence.

"Behold--your man!" he declaimed.

Through the open doorway came a tall, blond fellow, clad in light gray, wearing tan shoes, and followed closely by an officer.

"I brought him here as you suggested, Mr. McKnight," said the constable.

But McKnight was doubled over the library table in silent convulsions of mirth, and I was almost as bad. Little Hotchkiss stood up, his important attitude finally changing to one of chagrin, while the blond man ceased to look angry, and became sheepish.

It was Stuart, our confidential clerk for the last half dozen years!
McKnight sat up and wiped his eyes.

"Stuart," he said sternly, "there are two very serious things we have learned about you. First, you jab your scarf pins into your cushion with your left hand, which is most reprehensible; second, you wear--er--night-shirts, instead of pajamas. Worse than that, perhaps, we find that one of them has a buttonhole torn out at the neck."

Stuart was bewildered. He looked from McKnight to me, and then at the crestfallen Hotchkiss.

"I haven't any idea what it's all about," he said. "I was arrested as I reached my boarding-house to-night, after the theater, and brought directly here. I told the officer it was a mistake."

Poor Hotchkiss tried bravely to justify the fiasco. "You can not deny," he contended, "that Mr. Andrew Bronson followed you to your rooms last Monday evening."

Stuart looked at us and flushed. "No, I don't deny it," he said, "but there was nothing criminal about it, on my part, at least. Mr. Bronson has been trying to induce me to secure the forged notes for him. But I did not even know where they were."

"And you were not on the wrecked Washington Flier?" persisted Hotchkiss. But McKnight interfered.

"There is no use trying to put the other man's identity on Stuart, Mr. Hotchkiss," he protested. "He has been our confidential clerk for six years, and has not been away from the office a day for a year. I am afraid that the beautiful fabric we have pieced out of all these scraps is going to be a crazy quilt." His tone was facetious, but I could detect the undercurrent of real disappointment.

I paid the constable for his trouble, and he departed. Stuart, still indignant, left to go back to Washington Circle. He shook hands with McKnight and myself magnanimously, but he hurled a look of utter hatred at Hotchkiss, sunk crestfallen in his chair.

"As far as I can see," said McKnight dryly, "we're exactly as far along as we were the day we met at the Carter place. We're not a step nearer to finding our man."

"We have one thing that may be of value," I suggested. "He is the husband of a bronze-haired woman at Van Kirk's hospital, and it is just possible we may trace him through her. I hope we are not going to lose your valuable co-operation, Mr. Hotchkiss?" I asked.

He roused at that to feeble interest, "I--oh, of course not, if you still care to have me, I--I was wondering about--the man who just went out, Stuart, you say? I--told his landlady to-night that he wouldn't need the room again. I hope she hasn't rented it to somebody else."

We cheered him as best we could, and I suggested that we go to Baltimore the next day and try to find the real Sullivan through his wife. He left sometime after midnight, and Richey and I were alone.

He drew a chair near the lamp and lighted a cigarette, and for a time we were silent. I was in the shadow, and I sat back and watched him. It was not surprising, I thought, that she cared for him: women had always loved him, perhaps because he always loved them. There was no disloyalty in the thought: it was the lad's nature to give and crave affection. Only--I was different. I had never really cared about a girl before, and my life had been singularly loveless. I had fought a lonely battle always. Once before, in college, we had both laid ourselves and our callow devotions at the feet of the same girl. Her name was Dorothy--I had forgotten the rest--but I remembered the sequel. In a spirit of quixotic youth I had relinquished my claim in favor of Richey and had gone cheerfully on my way, elevated by my heroic sacrifice to a somber, white-hot martyrdom. As is often the case, McKnight's first words showed our parallel lines of thought.

"I say, Lollie," he asked, "do you remember Dorothy Browne?"

"Dorothy Browne?" I repeated. "Oh--why yes, I recall her now. Why?"

"Nothing," he said. "I was thinking about her. That's all. You remember you were crazy about her, and dropped back because she preferred me."

"I got out," I said with dignity, "because you declared you would shoot yourself if she didn't go with you to something or other!"

"Oh, why yes, I recall now!" he mimicked. He tossed his cigarette in the general direction of the hearth and got up. We were both a little conscious, and he stood with his back to me, fingering a Japanese vase on the mantel.

"I was thinking," he began, turning the vase around, "that, if you feel pretty well again, and--and ready to take hold, that I should like to go away for a week or so. Things are fairly well cleaned up at the office."

"Do you mean--you are going to Richmond?" I asked, after a scarcely perceptible pause. He turned and faced me, with his hands thrust in his pockets.

"No. That's off, Lollie. The Sieberts are going for a week's cruise along the coast. I--the hot weather has played hob with me and the cruise means seven days' breeze and bridge."

I lighted a cigarette and offered him the box, but he refused. He was looking haggard and suddenly tired. I could not think of anything to say, and neither could he, evidently. The matter between us lay too deep for speech.

"How's Candida?" he asked.
"Martin says a month, and she will be all right," I returned, in the same tone. He picked up his hat, but he had something more to say. He blurted it out, finally, half way to the door.

"The Seiberts are not going for a couple of days," he said, "and if you want a day or so off to go down to Richmond yourself--"

"Perhaps I shall," I returned, as indifferently as I could. "Not going yet, are you?"

"Yes. It is late." He drew in his breath as if he had something more to say, but the impulse passed. "Well, good night," he said from the doorway.

"Good night, old man."

The next moment the outer door slammed and I heard the engine of the Cannonball throbbing in the street. Then the quiet settled down around me again, and there in the lamplight I dreamed dreams. I was going to see her.

Suddenly the idea of being shut away, even temporarily, from so great and wonderful a world became intolerable. The possibility of arrest before I could get to Richmond was hideous, the night without end.

I made my escape the next morning through the stable back of the house, and then, by devious dark and winding ways, to the office. There, after a conference with Blobs, whose features fairly jerked with excitement, I double-locked the door of my private office and finished off some imperative work. By ten o'clock I was free, and for the twentieth time I consulted my train schedule. At five minutes after ten, with McKnight not yet in sight, Blobs knocked at the door, the double rap we had agreed upon, and on being admitted slipped in and quietly closed the door behind him. His eyes were glistening with excitement, and a purple dab of typewriter ink gave him a peculiarly villainous and stealthy expression.

"They're here," he said, "two of 'em, and that crazy Stuart wasn't on, and said you were somewhere in the building."

A door slammed outside, followed by steps on the uncarpeted outer office.

"This way," said Blobs, in a husky undertone, and, darting into a lavatory, threw open a door that I had always supposed locked. Thence into a back hall piled high with boxes and past the presses of a bookbindery to the freight elevator.

Greatly to Blobs' disappointment, there was no pursuit. I was exhilarated but out of breath when we emerged into an alleyway, and the sharp daylight shone on Blobs' excited face.

"Great sport, isn't it?" I panted, dropping a dollar into his palm, inked to correspond with his face. "Regular walk-away in the hundred-yard dash."

"Gimme two dollars more and I'll drop 'em down the elevator shaft," he suggested ferociously. I left him there with his blood-thirsty schemes, and started for the station. I had a tendency to look behind me now and then, but I reached the station unnoticed. The afternoon was hot, the train rolled slowly along, stopping to pant at sweltering stations, from whose roofs the heat rose in waves. But I noticed these things objectively, not subjectively, for at the end of the journey was a girl with blue eyes and dark brown hair, hair that could--had I not seen it?--hang loose in bewitching tangles or be twisted into little coils of delight.

**CHAPTER XXVII**

**THE SEA, THE SAND, THE STARS**

I telephoned as soon as I reached my hotel, and I had not known how much I had hoped from seeing her until I learned that she was out of town. I hung up the receiver, almost dizzy with disappointment, and it was fully five minutes before I thought of calling up again and asking if she was within telephone reach. It seemed she was down on the bay staying with the Samuel Forbeses.

Sammy Forbes! It was a name to conjure with just then. In the old days at college I had rather flouted him, but now I was ready to take him to my heart. I remembered that he had always meant well, anyhow, and that he was explosively generous. I called him up.

"By the fumes of gasoline!" he said, when I told him who I was. "Blakeley, the Fount of Wisdom against Woman! Blakeley, the Great Unkissed! Welcome to our city!"

Whereupon he proceeded to urge me to come down to the Shack, and to say that I was an agreeable surprise, because four times in two hours youths had called up to ask if Alison West was stopping with him, and to suggest that they had a vacant day or two. "Oh--Miss West!" I shouted politely. There was a buzzing on the line. "Is she there?" Sam had no suspicions. Was not I in his mind always the Great Unkissed?--which sounds like the Great Unwashed and is even more of a reproach. He asked me down promptly, as I had hoped, and thrust aside my objections.

"Nonsense," he said. "Bring yourself. The lady that keeps my boarding-house is calling to me to insist. You remember Dorothy, don't you, Dorothy Browne? She says unless you have lost your figure you can wear my clothes all right. All you need here is a bathing suit for daytime and a dinner coat for evening."

"It sounds cool," I temporized. "If you are sure I won't put you out--very well, Sam, since you and your wife are
good enough. I have a couple of days free. Give my love to Dorothy until I can do it myself."

Sam met me himself and drove me out to the Shack, which proved to be a substantial house overlooking the water. On the way he confided to me that lots of married men thought they were contented when they were merely resigned, but that it was the only life, and that Sam, Junior, could swim like a duck. Incidentally, he said that Alison was his wife's cousin, their respective grandmothers having, at proper intervals, married the same man, and that Alison would lose her good looks if she was not careful.

"I say she's worried, and I stick to it," he said, as he threw the lines to a groom and prepared to get out. "You know her, and she's the kind of girl you think you can read like a book. But you can't; don't fool yourself. Take a good look at her at dinner, Blake; you won't lose your head like the other fellows--and then tell me what's wrong with her. We're mighty fond of Allie."

He went ponderously up the steps, for Sam had put on weight since I knew him. At the door he turned around. "Do you happen to know the MacLures at Seal Harbor?" he asked irrelevantly, but Mrs. Sam came into the hall just then, both hands out to greet me, and, whatever Forbes had meant to say, he did not pick up the subject again.

"We are having tea in here," Dorothy said gaily, indicating the door behind her. "Tea by courtesy, because I think tea is the only beverage that isn't represented. And then we must dress, for this is hop night at the club."

"Which is as great a misnomer as the tea," Sam put in, ponderously struggling out of his linen driving coat. "It's bridge night, and the only hops are in the beer."

He was still gurgling over this as he took me upstairs. He showed me my room himself, and then began the fruitless search for evening raiment that kept me home that night from the club. For I couldn't wear Sam's clothes. That was clear, after a perspiring seance of a half hour.

"I won't do it, Sam," I said, when I had draped his dress-coat on me toga fashion. "Who am I to have clothing to spare, like this, when many a poor chap hasn't even a cellar door to cover him. I won't do it; I'm selfish, but not that selfish."

"Lord," he said, wiping his face, "how you've kept your figure! I can't wear a belt any more; got to have suspenders."

He reflected over his grievance for some time, sitting on the side of the bed. "You could go as you are," he said finally. "We do it all the time, only to-night happens to be the annual something or other, and--" he trailed off into silence, trying to buckle my belt around him. "A good six inches," he sighed. "I never get into a hansom cab any more that I don't expect to see the horse fly up into the air. Well, Allie isn't going either. She turned down Granger this afternoon, the Annapolis fellow you met on the stairs, pigeon-breasted chap--and she always gets a headache on those occasions."

He got up heavily and went to the door. "Granger is leaving," he said, "I may be able to get his dinner coat for you. How well do you know her?" he asked, with his hand on the knob.

"If you mean Dolly--?"

"Alison."

"Fairly well," I said cautiously. "Not as well as I would like to. I dined with her last week in Washington. And--I knew her before that."

Forbes touched the bell instead of going out, and told the servant who answered to see if Mr. Granger's suitcase had gone. If not, to bring it across the hail. Then he came back to his former position on the bed.

"You see, we feel responsible for Allie--near relation and all that," he began pompously. "And we can't talk to the people here at the house--all the men are in love with her, and all the women are jealous. Then--there's a lot of money, too, or will be."

"Confound the money!" I muttered. "That is--nothing. Razor slipped."

"I can tell you," he went on, "because you don't lose your head over every pretty face--although Allie is more than that, of course. But about a month ago she went away--to Seal Harbor, to visit Janet MacLure. Know her?"

"She came home to Richmond yesterday, and then came down here--Allie, I mean. And yesterday afternoon Dolly had a letter from Janet--something about a second man--and saying she was disappointed not to have had Alison there, that she had promised them a two weeks' visit! What do you make of that? And that isn't the worst. Allie herself wasn't in the room, but there were eight other women, and because Dolly had put belladonna in her eyes the night before to see how she would look, and as a result couldn't see anything nearer than across the room, some one read the letter aloud to her, and the whole story is out. One of the cats told Granger and the boy proposed to Allie to-day, to show her he didn't care a tinker's dam where she had been."

"Good boy!" I said, with enthusiasm. I liked the Granger fellow--since he was out of the running. But Sam was looking at me with suspicion.

"Blake," he said, "if I didn't know you for what you are, I'd say you were interested there yourself."

Being so near her, under the same roof, with even the tie of a dubious secret between us, was making me heady.
I pushed Forbes toward the door.

"I interested!" I retorted, holding him by the shoulders. "There isn't a word in your vocabulary to fit my condition. I am an island in a sunlit sea of emotion, Sam, an empty place surrounded by longing--a--"

"An empty place surrounded by longing!" he retorted. "You want your dinner, that's what's the matter with you--"

I shut the door on him then. He seemed suddenly sordid. Dinner, I thought! Although, as matter of fact, I made a very fair meal when, Granger's suitcase not having gone, in his coat and some other man's trousers, I was finally fit for the amusements. Alison did not come down to dinner, so it was clear she would not go over to the club-house dance. I pled my injured arm and a fictitious, vaguely located sprain from the wreck, as an excuse for remaining at home. Sam regaled the table with accounts of my distrust of women, my one love affair--with Dorothy; to which I responded, as was expected, that only my failure there had kept me single all these years, and that if Sam should be mysteriously missing during the bathing hour to-morrow, and so on.

And when the endless meal was over, and yards of white veils had been tied over pounds of hair--or is it, too, bought by the yard?--and some eight ensembles with their abject complements had been packed into three automobiles and a trap, I drew a long breath and faced about. I had just then only one object in life--to find Alison, to assure her of my absolute faith and confidence in her, and to offer my help and my poor self, if she would let me, in her service.

She was not easy to find. I searched the lower floor, the verandas and the grounds, circumspectly. Then I ran into a little English girl who turned out to be her maid, and who also was searching. She was concerned because her mistress had had no dinner, and because the tray of food she carried would soon be cold. I took the tray from her, on the glimpse of something white on the shore, and that was how I met the Girl again.

She was sitting on an over-turned boat, her chin in her hands, staring out to sea. The soft tide of the bay lapped almost at her feet, and the draperies of her white gown melted hazily into the sands. She looked like a wraith, a despondent phantom of the sea, although the adjective is redundant. Nobody ever thinks of a cheerful phantom. Strangely enough, considering her evident sadness, she was whistling softly to herself, over and over, some dreary little minor air that sounded like a Bohemian dirge. She glanced up quickly when I made a misstep and my dishes jingled. All considered, the tray was out of the picture: the sea, the misty starlight, the girl, with her beauty--even the sad little whistle that stopped now and then to go bravely on again, as though it fought against the odds of a trembling lip. And then I came, accompanied by a tray of little silver dishes that jingled and an unmistakable odor of broiled chicken!

"Oh!" she said quickly; and then, "Oh! I thought you were Jenkins."

"Timeo Danaos--what's the rest of it?" I asked, tendering my offering. "You didn't have any dinner, you know." I sat down beside her. "See, I'll be the table. What was the old fairy tale? 'Little goat bleat: little table appear!' I'm perfectly willing to be the goat, too."

She was laughing rather tremulously.

"We never do meet like other people, do we?" she asked. "We really ought to shake hands and say how are you."

"I don't want to meet like other people, and I suppose you always think of me as wearing the other fellow's clothes," I returned meekly. "I'm doing it again: I don't seem to be able to help it. These are Granger's that I have on now."

She threw back her head and laughed again, joyously, this time.

"Oh, it's so ridiculous," she said, "and you have never seen me when I was not eating! It's too prosaic!"

"Which reminds me that the chicken is getting cold, and the ice warm," I suggested. "At the time, I thought there could be no place better than the farmhouse kitchen--but this is. I ordered all this for something I want to say to you--the sea, the sand, the stars."

"How alliterative you are!" she said, trying to be flippant. "You are not to say anything until I have had my supper. Look how the things are spilled around!"

But she ate nothing, after all, and pretty soon I put the tray down in the sand. I said little; there was no hurry. We were together, and time meant nothing against that age-long wash of the sea. The air blew her hair in small damp curls against her face, and little by little the tide retreated, leaving our boat an oasis in a waste of gray sand.

"If seven maids with seven mops swept it for half a year Do you suppose, the walrus said, that they could get it clear?"

she threw at me once when she must have known I was going to speak. I held her hand, and as long as I merely held it she let it lie warm in mine. But when I raised it to my lips, and kissed the soft, open palm, she drew it away without displeasure.

"Not that, please," she protested, and fell to whistling softly again, her chin in her hands. "I can't sing," she said, to break an awkward pause, "and so, when I'm fidgety, or have something on my mind, I whistle. I hope you don't
dislike it?"

"I love it," I asserted warmly. I did; when she pursed her lips like that I was mad to kiss them.

"I saw you--at the station," she said, suddenly. "You--you were in a hurry to go." I did not say anything, and after a pause she drew a long breath. "Men are queer, aren't they?" she said, and fell to whistling again.

After a while she sat up as if she had made a resolution. "I am going to confess something," she announced suddenly. "You said, you know, that you had ordered all this for something you--you wanted to say to me. But the fact is, I fixed it all--came here, I mean, because--I knew you would come, and I had something to tell you. It was such a miserable thing I--needed the accessories to help me out."

"I don't want to hear anything that distresses you to tell," I assured her. "I didn't come here to force your confidence, Alison. I came because I couldn't help it." She did not object to my use of her name.

"Have you found--your papers?" she asked, looking directly at me for almost the first time.

"Not yet. We hope to."

"The--police have not interfered with you?"

"They haven't had any opportunity," I equivocated. "You needn't distress yourself about that, anyhow."

"But I do. I wonder why you still believe in me? Nobody else does."

"I wonder," I repeated, "why I do!"

"If you produce Harry Sullivan," she was saying, partly to herself, "and if you could connect him with Mr. Bronson, and get a full account of why he was on the train, and all that, it--it would help, wouldn't it?"

I acknowledged that it would. Now that the whole truth was almost in my possession, I was stricken with the old cowardice. I did not want to know what she might tell me. The yellow line on the horizon, where the moon was coming up, was a broken bit of golden chain: my heel in the sand was again pressed on a woman's yielding fingers: I pulled myself together with a jerk.

"In order that what you might tell me may help me, if it will," I said constrainedly, "it would be necessary, perhaps, that you tell it to the police. Since they have found the end of the necklace--"

"The end of the necklace!" she repeated slowly. "What about the end of the necklace?"

I stared at her. "Don't you remember--I leaned forward--"the end of the cameo necklace, the part that was broken off, and was found in the black sealskin bag, stained with--with blood?"

"Blood," she said dully. "You mean that you found the broken end? And then--you had my gold pocket-book, and you saw the necklace in it, and you--must have thought--"

"I didn't think anything," I hastened to assure her. "I tell you, Alison, I never thought of anything but that you were unhappy, and that I had no right to help you. God knows, I thought you didn't want me to help you."

She held out her hand to me and I took it between both of mine. No word of love had passed between us, but I felt that she knew and understood. It was one of the moments that come seldom in a lifetime, and then only in great crises, a moment of perfect understanding and trust.

Then she drew her hand away and sat, erect and determined, her fingers laced in her lap. As she talked the moon came up slowly and threw its bright pathway across the water. Back of us, in the trees beyond the sea wall, a sleepy bird chirruped drowsily, and a wave, larger and bolder than its brothers, sped up the sand, bringing the moon's silver to our very feet. I bent toward the girl.

"I am going to ask just one question."

"Anything you like." Her voice was almost dreary. "Was it because of anything you are going to tell me that you refused Richey?"

She drew her breath in sharply.

"No," she said, without looking at me. "No. That was not the reason."

CHAPTER XXVIII

ALISON'S STORY

She told her story evenly, with her eyes on the water, only now and then, when I, too, sat looking seaward, I thought she glanced at me furtively. And once, in the middle of it, she stopped altogether.

"You don't realize it, probably," she protested, "but you look like a--a war god. Your face is horrible."

"I will turn my back, if it will help any," I said stormily, "but if you expect me to look anything but murderous, why, you don't know what I am going through with. That's all."

The story of her meeting with the Curtis woman was brief enough. They had met in Rome first, where Alison and her mother had taken a villa for a year. Mrs. Curtis had hovered on the ragged edges of society there, pleading the poverty of the south since the war as a reason for not going out more. There was talk of a brother, but Alison had not seen him, and after a scandal which implicated Mrs. Curtis and a young attache of the Austrian embassy, Alison had been forbidden to see the woman.

"The women had never liked her, anyhow," she said. "She did unconventional things, and they are very
conventional there. And they said she did not always pay her--her gambling debts. I didn't like them. I thought they
didn't like her because she was poor --and popular. Then--we came home, and I almost forgot her, but last spring,
when mother was not well--she had taken grandfather to the Riviera, and it always uses her up--we went to Virginia
Hot Springs, and we met them there, the brother, too, this time. His name was Sullivan, Harry Pinckney Sullivan."

"I know. Go on."

"Mother had a nurse, and I was alone a great deal, and they were very kind to me. I--I saw a lot of them. The
brother rather attracted me, partly--partly because he did not make love to me. He even seemed to avoid me, and I
was piqued. I had been spoiled, I suppose. Most of the other men I knew had--had--"

"I know that, too," I said bitterly, and moved away from her a trifle. I was brutal, but the whole story was a long
torture. I think she knew what I was suffering, for she showed no resentment.

"It was early and there were few people around--none that I cared about. And mother and the nurse played
cribbage eternally, until I felt as though the little pegs were driven into my brain. And when Mrs. Curtis arranged
drives and picnics, I--I slipped away and went. I suppose you won't believe me, but I had never done that kind of
thing before, and I--well, I have paid up, I think."

"What sort of looking chap was Sullivan?" I demanded. I had got up and was pacing back and forward on the
sand. I remember kicking savagely at a bit of water-soaked board that lay in my way.

"Very handsome--as large as you are, but fair, and even more erect."

I drew my shoulders up sharply. I am straight enough, but I was fairly sagging with jealous rage.

"When mother began to get around, somebody told her that I had been going about with Mrs. Curtis and her
brother, and we had a dreadful time. I was dragged home like a bad child. Did anybody ever do that to you?"

"Nobody ever cared. I was born an orphan," I said, with a cheerless attempt at levity. "Go on."

"If Mrs. Curtis knew, she never said anything. She wrote me charming letters, and in the summer, when they
went to Cresson, she asked me to visit her there. I was too proud to let her know that I could not go where I wished,
and so--I sent Polly, my maid, to her aunt's in the country, pretended to go to Seal Harbor, and really went to
Cresson. You see I warned you it would be an unpleasant story."

I went over and stood in front of her. All the accumulated jealousy of the last few weeks had been fired by what
she told me. If Sullivan had come across the sands just then, I think I would have strangled him with my hands, out
of pure hate.

"Did you marry him?" I demanded. My voice sounded hoarse and strange in my ears. "That's all I want to know.
Did you marry him?"

"No."

I drew a long breath.

"You--cared about him?"

She hesitated.

"No," she said finally. "I did not care about him."

I sat down on the edge of the boat and mopped my hot face. I was heartily ashamed of myself, and mingled with
my abasement was a great relief. If she had not married him, and had not cared for him, nothing else was of any
importance.

"I was sorry, of course, the moment the train had started, but I had wired I was coming, and I could not go back,
and then when I got there, the place was charming. There were no neighbors, but we fished and rode and motored,
and--it was moonlight, like this."

I put my hand over both of hers, clasped in her lap. "I know," I acknowledged repentantly, "and--people do queer
things when it is moonlight. The moon has got me to-night, Alison. If I am a boor, remember that, won't you?"

Her fingers lay quiet under mine. "And so," she went on with a little sigh, "I began to think perhaps I cared. But
all the time I felt that there was something not quite right. Now and then Mrs. Curtis would say or do something that
gave me a queer start, as if she had dropped a mask for a moment. And there was trouble with the servants; they
were almost insolent. I couldn't understand. I don't know when it dawned on me that the old Baron Cavalcanti had
been right when he said they were not my kind of people. But I wanted to get away, wanted it desperately."

"Of course, they were not your kind," I cried. "The man was married! The girl Jennie, a housemaid, was a spy in
Mrs. Sullivan's employ. If he had pretended to marry you I would have killed him! Not only that, but the man he
murdered, Harrington, was his wife's father. And I'll see him hang by the neck yet if it takes every energy and every
penny I possess."

I could have told her so much more gently, have broken the shock for her; I have never been proud of that
evening on the sand. I was alternately a boor and a ruffian--like a hurt youngster who passes the blow that has hurt
him on to his playmate, that both may bawl together. And now Alison sat, white and cold, without speech.

"Married!" she said finally, in a small voice. "Why, I don't think it is possible, is it? I--I was on my way to
Baltimore to marry him myself, when the wreck came."

"But you said you didn't care for him!" I protested, my heavy masculine mind unable to jump the gaps in her story. And then, without the slightest warning, I realized that she was crying. She shook off my hand and fumbled for her handkerchief, and failing to find it, she accepted the one I thrust into her wet fingers.

Then, little by little, she told me from the handkerchief, a sordid story of a motor trip in the mountains without Mrs. Curtis, of a lost road and a broken car, and a rainy night when they--she and Sullivan, tramped eternally and did not get home. And of Mrs. Curtis, when they got home at dawn, suddenly grown conventional and deeply shocked. Of her own proud, half-disdainful consent to make possible the hackneyed compromising situation by marrying the rascal, and then--of his disappearance from the train. It was so terrible to her, such a Heaven-sent relief to me, in spite of my rage against Sullivan, that I laughed aloud. At which she looked at me over the handkerchief.

"I know it's funny," she said, with a catch in her breath. "When I think that I nearly married a murderer--and didn't--I cry for sheer joy." Then she buried her face and cried again.

"Please don't," I protested unsteadily. "I won't be responsible if you keep on crying like that. I may forget that I have a capital charge hanging over my head, and that I may be arrested at any moment."

That brought her out of the handkerchief at once. "I meant to be so helpful," she said, "and I've thought of nothing but myself! There were some things I meant to tell you. If Jennie was--what you say, then I understand why she came to me just before I left. She had been packing my things and she must have seen what condition I was in, for she came over to me when I was getting my wraps on, to leave, and said, 'Don't do it, Miss West, I beg you won't do it; you'll be sorry ever after.' And just then Mrs. Curtis came in and Jennie slipped out."

"That was all?"

"No. As we went through the station the telegraph operator gave Har--Mr. Sullivan a message. He read it on the platform, and it excited him terribly. He took his sister aside and they talked together. He was white with either fear or anger--I don't know which. Then, when we boarded the train, a woman in black, with beautiful hair, who was standing on the car platform, touched him on the arm and then drew back. He looked at her and glanced away again, but she reeled as if he had struck her."

"Then what?" The situation was growing clearer.

"Mrs. Curtis and I had the drawing-room. I had a dreadful night, just sleeping a little now and then. I dreaded to see dawn come. It was to be my wedding-day. When we found Harry had disappeared in the night, Mrs. Curtis was in a frenzy. Then--I saw his cigarette case in your hand. I had given it to him. You wore his clothes. The murder was discovered and you were accused of it! What could I do? And then, afterward, when I saw him asleep at the farmhouse, I--I was panic-stricken. I locked him in and ran. I didn't know why he did it, but--he had killed a man."

Some one was calling Alison through a megaphone, from the veranda. It sounded like Sam. "All-ee," he called. "All-ee! I'm going to have some anchovies on toast! All-ee!" Neither of us heard.

"I wonder," I reflected, "if you would be willing to repeat a part of that story--just from the telegram on--to a couple of detectives, say on Monday. If you would tell that, and--how the end of your necklace got into the sealskin bag--"

"My necklace!" she repeated. "But it isn't mine. I picked it up in the car."

"All-ee!" Sam again. "I see you down there. I'm making a julep!"

Alison turned and called through her hands. "Coming in a moment, Sam," she said, and rose. "It must be very late; Sam is home. We would better go back to the house."

"Don't," I begged her. "Anchovies and juleps and Sam will go on for ever, and I have you such a little time. I suppose I am only one of a dozen or so, but--you are the only girl in the world. You know I love you, don't you, dear?"

Sam was whistling, an irritating bird call, over and over. She pursed her red lips and answered him in kind. It was more than I could endure.

"Sam or no Sam," I said firmly, "I am going to kiss you!"

But Sam's voice came strident through the megaphone. "Be good, you two," he bellowed, "I've got the binoculars!" And so, under fire, we walked sedately back to the house. My pulses were throbbing --the little swish of her dress beside me on the grass was pain and ecstasy. I had but to put out my hand to touch her, and I dared not.

Sam, armed with a megaphone and field glasses, bent over the rail and watched us with gleeful malignity.

"Home early, aren't you?" Alison called, when we reached the steps.

"Led a club when my partner had doubled no-trumps, and she fainted. Damn the heart convention!" he said cheerfully. "The others are not here yet."

Three hours later I went up to bed. I had not seen Alison alone again. The noise was at its height below, and I glanced down into the garden, still bright in the moonlight. Leaning against a tree, and staring interestedly into the billiard room, was Johnson.
CHAPTER XXIX
IN THE DINING-ROOM

That was Saturday night, two weeks after the wreck. The previous five days had been full of swift-following events—the woman in the house next door, the picture in the theater of a man about to leap from the doomed train, the dinner at the Dallases', and Richey's discovery that Alison was the girl in the case. In quick succession had come our visit to the Carter place, the finding of the rest of the telegram, my seeing Alison there, and the strange interview with Mrs. Conway. The Cresson trip stood out in my memory for its serio-comic horrors and its one real thrill. Then—the discovery by the police of the seal-skin bag and the bit of chain; Hotchkiss producing triumphantly Stuart for Sullivan and his subsequent discomfort; McKnight at the station with Alison, and later the confession that he was out of the running.

And yet, when I thought it all over, the entire week and its events were two sides of a triangle that was narrowing rapidly to an apex, a point. And the said apex was at that moment in the drive below my window, resting his long legs by sitting on a carriage block, and smoking a pipe that made the night hideous. The sense of the ridiculous is very close to the sense of tragedy. I opened my screen and whistled, and Johnson looked up and grinned. We said nothing. I held up a handful of cigars, he extended his hat, and when I finally went to sleep, it was to a soothing breeze that wafted in salt air and a faint aroma of good tobacco. I was thoroughly tired, but I slept restlessly, dreaming of two detectives with Pittsburg warrants being held up by Hotchkiss at the point of a splint, while Alison fastened their hands with a chain that was broken and much too short. I was roused about dawn by a light rap at the door, and, opening it, I found Forbes, in a pair of trousers and a pajama coat. He was as pleasant as most fleshy people are when they have to get up at night, and he said the telephone had been ringing for an hour, and he didn't know why somebody else in the blankety-blank house couldn't have heard it. He wouldn't get to sleep until noon.

As he was palpably asleep on his feet, I left him grumbling and went to the telephone. It proved to be Richey, who had found me by the simple expedient of tracing Alison, and he was jubilant.

"You'll have to come back," he said. "Got a railroad schedule there?"

"I don't sleep with one in my pocket," I retorted, "but if you'll hold the line I'll call out the window to Johnson. He's probably got one."

"Johnson!" I could hear the laugh with which McKnight comprehended the situation. He was still chuckling when I came back.

"Train to Richmond at six-thirty A.M.," I said. "What time is it now?"

"Four. Listen, Lollie. We've got him. Do you hear? Through the woman at Baltimore. Then the other woman, the lady of the restaurant"--he was obviously avoiding names--"she is playing our cards for us. No--I don't know why, and I don't care. But you be at the Incubator to-night at eight o'clock. If you can't shake Johnson, bring him, bless him."

To this day I believe the Sam Forbeses have not recovered from the surprise of my unexpected arrival, my one appearance at dinner in Granger's clothes, and the note on my dresser which informed them the next morning that I had folded my tents like the Arabs and silently stole away. For at half after five Johnson and I, the former as uninquisitive as ever, were on our way through the dust to the station, three miles away, and by four that afternoon we were in Washington. The journey had been uneventful. Johnson relaxed under the influence of my tobacco, and spoke at some length on the latest improvements in gallows, dilating on the absurdity of cutting out the former free passes to see the affair in operation. I remember, too, that he mentioned the curious anomaly that permits a man about to be hanged to eat a hearty meal. I did not enjoy my dinner that night.

Before we got into Washington I had made an arrangement with Johnson to surrender myself at two the following afternoon. Also, I had wired to Alison, asking her if she would carry out the contract she had made. The detective saw me home, and left me there. Mrs. Klopton received me with dignified reserve. The very tone in which she asked me when I would dine told me that something was wrong.

"Now--what is it, Mrs. Klopton?" I demanded finally, when she had informed me, in a patient and long-suffering tone, that she felt worn out and thought she needed a rest.

"When I lived with Mr. Justice Springer," she began acidly, her mending-basket in her hands, "it was an orderly, well-conducted household. You can ask any of the neighbors. Meals were cooked and, what's more, they were eaten; there was none of this 'here one day and gone the next' business."

"Nonsense," I observed. "You're tired, that's all, Mrs. Klopton. And I wish you would go out; I want to bathe."

"That's not all," she said with dignity, from the doorway. "Women coming and going here, women whose shoes I am not fit--I mean, women who are not fit to touch my shoes--coming here as insolent as you please, and asking for you."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What did you tell them--her, whichever it was?"
"Told her you were sick in a hospital and wouldn't be out for a year!" she said triumphantly. "And when she said she thought she'd come in and wait for you, I slammed the door on her."

"What time was she here?"

"Late last night. And she had a light-haired man across the street. If she thought I didn't see him, she don't know me." Then she closed the door and left me to my bath and my reflections.

At five minutes before eight I was at the Incubator, where I found Hotchkiss and McKnight. They were bending over a table, on which lay McKnight's total armament—a pair of pistols, an elephant gun and an old cavalry saber.

"Draw up a chair and help yourself to pie," he said, pointing to the arsenal. "This is for the benefit of our friend Hotchkiss here, who says he is a small man and fond of life."

Hotchkiss, who had been trying to get the wrong end of a cartridge into the barrel of one of the revolvers, straightened himself and mopped his face.

"We have desperate people to handle," he said pompously, "and we may need desperate means."

"Hotchkiss is like the small boy whose one ambition was to have people grow ashen and tremble at the mention of his name," McKnight jibed. But they were serious enough, both of them, under it all, and when they had told me what they planned, I was serious, too.

"You're compounding a felony," I remonstrated, when they had explained. "I'm not eager to be locked away, but, by Jove, to offer her the stolen notes in exchange for Sullivan!"

"We haven't got either of them, you know," McKnight remonstrated, "and we won't have, if we don't start. Come along, Fido," to Hotchkiss.

The plan was simplicity itself. According to Hotchkiss, Sullivan was to meet Bronson at Mrs. Conway's apartment, at eight-thirty that night, with the notes. He was to be paid there and the papers destroyed. "But just before that interesting finale," McKnight ended, "we will walk in, take the notes, grab Sullivan, and give the police a jolt that will put them out of the count."

I suppose not one of us, slewing around corners in the machine that night, had the faintest doubt that we were on the right track, or that Fate, scurvy enough before, was playing into our hands at last. Little Hotchkiss was in a state of fever; he alternately twitched and examined the revolver, and a fear that the two movements might be synchronous kept me uneasy. He produced and dilated on the scrap of pillow slip from the wreck, and showed me the stiletto, with its point in cotton batting for safekeeping. And in the intervals he implored Richey not to make such fine calculations at the corners.

We were all grave enough and very quiet, however, when we reached the large building where Mrs. Conway had her apartment. McKnight left the power on, in case we might want to make a quick get-away, and Hotchkiss gave a final look at the revolver. I had no weapon. Somehow it all seemed melodramatic to the verge of farce. In the doorway Hotchkiss was a half dozen feet ahead; Richey fell back beside me. He dropped his affectation of gayety, and I thought he looked tired. "Same old Sam, I suppose?" he asked.

"Same, only more of him."

"I suppose Alison was there? How is she?" he inquired irrelevantly.

"Very well. I did not see her this morning."

Hotchkiss was waiting near the elevator. McKnight put his hand on my arm. "Now, look here, old man," he said, "I've got two arms and a revolver, and you've got one arm and a splint. If Hotchkiss is right, and there is a row, you crawl under a table."

"The deuce I will!" I declared scornfully.

We crowded out of the elevator at the fourth floor, and found ourselves in a rather theatrical hallway of draperies and armor. It was very quiet; we stood uncertainly after the car had gone, and looked at the two or three doors in sight. They were heavily, twitched with metal, and sound proof. From somewhere above came the metallic accuracy of a player-piano, and through the open window we could hear—or feel—the thrub of the Cannonball's engine.

"Well, Sherlock," McKnight said, "what's the next move in the game? Is it our jump, or theirs? You brought us here."

None of us knew just what to do next. No sound of conversation penetrated the heavy doors. We waited uneasily for some minutes, and Hotchkiss looked at his watch. Then he put it to his ear.

"Good gracious!" he exclaimed, his head cocked on one side, "I believe it has stopped. I'm afraid we are late."

We were late. My watch and Hotchkiss' agreed at nine o'clock, and, with the discovery that our man might have come and gone, our zest in the adventure began to flag. McKnight motioned us away from the door and rang the bell. There was no response, no sound within. He rang it twice, the last time long and vigorously, without result. Then he turned and looked at us.

"I don't half like this," he said. "That woman is in; you heard me ask the elevator boy. For two cents I'd--"

I had seen it when he did. The door was ajar about an inch, and a narrow wedge of rose-colored light showed
beyond. I pushed the door a little and listened. Then, with both men at my heels, I stepped into the private corridor of the apartment and looked around. It was a square reception hall, with rugs on the floor, a tall mahogany rack for hats, and a couple of chairs. A lantern of rose-colored glass and a desk light over a writing-table across made the room bright and cheerful. It was empty.

None of us was comfortable. The place was full of feminine trifles that made us feel the weakness of our position. Some such instinct made McKnight suggest division.

"We look like an invading army," he said. "If she's here alone, we will startle her into a spasm. One of us could take a look around and--"

"What was that? Didn't you hear something?"

The sound, whatever it had been, was not repeated. We went awkwardly out into the hall, very uncomfortable, all of us, and flipped a coin. The choice fell to me, which was right enough, for the affair was mine, primarily.

"Wait just inside the door," I directed, "and if Sullivan comes, or anybody that answers his description, grab him without ceremony and ask him questions afterwards."

The apartment, save in the hallway, was unlighted. By one of those freaks of arrangement possible only in the modern flat, I found the kitchen first, and was struck a smart and unexpected blow by a swinging door. I carried a handful of matches, and by the time I had passed through a butler's pantry and a refrigerator room I was completely lost in the darkness. Until then the situation had been merely uncomfortable; suddenly it became grisly. From somewhere near came a long-sustained groan, followed almost instantly by the crash of something--glass or china--on the floor.

I struck a fresh match, and found myself in a narrow rear hallway. Behind me was the door by which I must have come; with a keen desire to get back to the place I had started from, I opened the door and attempted to cross the room. I thought I had kept my sense of direction, but I crashed without warning into what, from the resulting jangle, was the dining-table, probably laid for dinner. I cursed my stupidity in getting into such a situation, and I cursed my nerves for making my hand shake when I tried to strike a match. The groan had not been repeated.

I braced myself against the table and struck the match sharply against the sole of my shoe. It flickered faintly and went out. And then, without the slightest warning, another dish went off the table. It fell with a thousand splinterings; the very air seemed broken into crashing waves of sound. I stood still, braced against the table, holding the red end of the dying match, and listened. I had not long to wait; the groan came again, and I recognized it, the cry of a dog in straits. I breathed again.

"Come, old fellow," I said. "Come on, old man. Let's have a look at you."

I could hear the thud of his tail on the floor, but he did not move. He only whimpered. There is something companionable in the presence of a dog, and I fancied this dog in trouble. Slowly I began to work my way around the table toward him.

"Good boy," I said, as he whimpered. "We'll find the light, which ought to be somewhere or other around here, and then--"

I stumbled over something, and I drew back my foot almost instantly. "Did I step on you, old man?" I exclaimed, and bent to pat him. I remember straightening suddenly and hearing the dog pad softly toward me around the table. I recall even that I had put the matches down and could not find them. Then, with a bursting horror of the room and its contents, of the gibbering dark around me, I turned and made for the door by which I had entered.

I could not find it. I felt along the endless wainscoting, past miles of wall. The dog was beside me, I think, but he was part and parcel now, to my excited mind, with the Thing under the table. And when, after aeons of search, I found a knob and stumbled into the reception hall, I was as nearly in a panic as any man could be.

I was myself again in a second, and by the light from the hall I led the way back to the tragedy I had stumbled on. Bronson still sat at the table, his elbows propped on it, his cigarette still lighted, burning a hole in the cloth. Partly under the table lay Mrs. Conway face down. The dog stood over her and wagged his tail.

McKnight pointed silently to a large copper ashtray, filled with ashes and charred bits of paper.

"The notes, probably," he said ruefully. "He got them after all, and burned them before her. It was more than she could stand. Stabbed him first and then herself."

Hotchkiss got up and took off his hat. "They are dead," he announced solemnly, and took his note-book out of his hat-band.

McKnight and I did the only thing we could think of--drove Hotchkiss and the dog out of the room, and closed and locked the door. "It's a matter for the police," McKnight asserted. "I suppose you've got an officer tied to you somewhere, Lawrence? You usually have."

We left Hotchkiss in charge and went down-stairs. It was McKnight who first saw Johnson, leaning against a park railing across the street, and called him over. We told him in a few words what we had found, and he grinned at me cheerfully.
"After while, in a few weeks or months, Mr. Blakeley," he said, "when you get tired of monkeying around with the blood-stain and finger-print specialist up-stairs, you come to me. I've had that fellow you want under surveillance for ten days!"

CHAPTER XXX
FINER DETAILS

At ten minutes before two the following day, Monday, I arrived at my office. I had spent the morning putting my affairs in shape, and in a trip to the stable. The afternoon would see me either a free man or a prisoner for an indefinite length of time, and, in spite of Johnson's promise to produce Sullivan, I was more prepared for the latter than the former.

Blobs was watching for me outside the door, and it was clear that he was in a state of excitement bordering on delirium. He did nothing, however, save to tip me a wink that meant "As man to man, I'm for you." I was too much engrossed either to reprove him or return the courtesy, but I heard him follow me down the hall to the small room where we keep outgrown lawbooks, typewriter supplies and, incidentally, our wraps. I was wondering vaguely if I would ever hang my hat on its nail again, when the door closed behind me. It shut firmly, without any particular amount of sound, and I was left in the dark. I groped my way to it, irritably, to find it locked on the outside. I shook it frantically, and was rewarded by a sibilant whisper through the keyhole.

"Keep quiet," Blobs was saying huskily. "You're in deadly peril. The police are waiting in your office, three of 'em. I'm goin' to lock the whole bunch in and throw the key out of the window."

"Come back here, you imp of Satan!" I called furiously, but I could hear him speeding down the corridor, and the slam of the outer office door by which he always announced his presence. And so I stood there in that ridiculous cupboard, hot with the heat of a steaming September day, musty with the smell of old leather bindings, littered with broken overshoes and handleless umbrellas. I was apoplectic with rage one minute, and choked with laughter the next. It seemed an hour before Blobs came back.

He came without haste, strutting with new dignity, and paused outside my prison door.

"Well, I guess that will hold them for a while," he remarked comfortably, and proceeded to turn the key. "I've got 'em fastened up like sardines in a can!" he explained, working with the lock. "Gee whiz! you'd ought to hear 'em!" When he got his breath after the shaking I gave him, he began to splutter. "How'd I know?" he demanded sulkily. "You nearly broke your neck gettin' away the other time. And I haven't got the old key. It's lost."

"Where's it lost?" I demanded, with another gesture toward his coat collar.

"Down the elevator shaft." There was a gleam of indignant satisfaction through his tears of rage and humiliation.

And so, while he hunted the key in the debris at the bottom of the shaft, I quieted his prisoners with the assurance that the lock had slipped, and that they would be free as lords as soon as we could find the janitor with a pass-key. Stuart went down finally and discovered Blobs, with the key in his pocket, telling the engineer how he had tried to save me from arrest and failed. When Stuart came up he was almost cheerful, but Blobs did not appear again that day.

Simultaneous with the finding of the key came Hotchkiss, and we went in together. I shook hands with two men who, with Hotchkiss, made a not very animated group. The taller one, an oldish man, lean and hard, announced his errand at once.

"A Pittsburg warrant?" I inquired, unlocking my cigar drawer.

"Yes. Allegheny County has assumed jurisdiction, the exact locality where the crime was committed being in doubt." He seemed to be the spokesman. The other, shorter and rotund, kept an amiable silence. "We hope you will see the wisdom of waiving extradition," he went on. "It will save time."

"I'll come, of course," I agreed. "The sooner the better. But I want you to give me an hour here, gentlemen. I think we can interest you. Have a cigar?"

The lean man took a cigar; the rotund man took three, putting two in his pocket.

"How about the catch of that door?" he inquired jovially. "Any danger of it going off again?" Really, considering the circumstances, they were remarkably cheerful. Hotchkiss, however, was not. He paced the floor uneasily, his hands under his coat-tails. The arrival of McKnight created a diversion; he carried a long package and a corkscrew, and shook hands with the police and opened the bottle with a single gesture.

"I always want something to cheer on these occasions," he said. "Where's the water, Blakeley? Everybody ready?" Then in French he toasted the two detectives.

"To your eternal discomfiture," he said, bowing ceremoniously. "May you go home and never come back! If you take Monsieur Blakeley with you, I hope you choke."

The lean man nodded gravely. "Prosit," he said. But the fat one leaned back and laughed consumedly.

Hotchkiss finished a mental synopsis of his position, and put down his glass. "Gentlemen," he said pompously, "within five minutes the man you want will be here, a murderer caught in a net of evidence so fine that a mosquito
could not get through."

The detectives glanced at each other solemnly. Had they not in their possession a sealskin bag containing a wallet and a bit of gold chain, which, by putting the crime on me, would leave a gap big enough for Sullivan himself to crawl through?

"Why don't you say your little speech before Johnson brings the other man, Lawrence?" McKnight inquired. "They won't believe you, but it will help them to understand what is coming."

"You understand, of course," the lean man put in gravely, "that what you say may be used against you."

"I'll take the risk," I answered impatiently.

It took some time to tell the story of my worse than useless trip to Pittsburg, and its sequel. They listened gravely, without interruption.

"Mr. Hotchkiss here," I finished, "believes that the man Sullivan, whom we are momentarily expecting, committed the crime. Mr. McKnight is inclined to implicate Mrs. Conway, who stabbed Bronson and then herself last night. As for myself, I am open to conviction."

"I hope not," said the stout detective quizzically. And then Alison was announced. My impulse to go out and meet her was forestalled by the detectives, who rose when I did. McKnight, therefore, brought her in, and I met her at the door.

"I have put you to a great deal of trouble," I said contritely, when I saw her glance around the room. "I wish I had not--"

"It is only right that I should come," she replied, looking up at me. "I am the unconscious cause of most of it, I am afraid. Mrs. Dallas is going to wait in the outer office."

I presented Hotchkiss and the two detectives, who eyed her with interest. In her poise, her beauty, even in her gown, I fancy she represented a new type to them. They remained standing until she sat down.

"I have brought the necklace," she began, holding out a white-wrapped box, "as you asked me to."

I passed it, unopened, to the detectives. "The necklace from which was broken the fragment you found in the sealskin bag," I explained. "Miss West found it on the floor of the car, near lower ten."

"When did you find it?" asked the lean detective, bending forward.

"In the morning, not long before the wreck."

"Did you ever see it before?"

"I am not certain," she replied. "I have seen one very much like it." Her tone was troubled. She glanced at me as if for help, but I was powerless.

"Where?" The detective was watching her closely. At that moment there came an interruption. The door opened without ceremony, and Johnson ushered in a tall, blond man, a stranger to all of us: I glanced at Alison; she was pale, but composed and scornful. She met the new-comer's eyes full, and, caught unawares, he took a hasty backward step.

"Sit down, Mr. Sullivan," McKnight beamed cordially. "Have a cigar? I beg your pardon, Alison, do you mind this smoke?"

"Not at all," she said composedly. Sullivan had had a second to sound his bearings.

"No--no, thanks," he mumbled. "If you will be good enough to explain--"

"But that's what you're to do," McKnight said cheerfully, pulling up a chair. "You've got the most attentive audience you could ask. These two gentlemen are detectives from Pittsburg, and we are all curious to know the finer details of what happened on the car Ontario two weeks ago, the night your father-in-law was murdered." Sullivan gripped the arms of his chair. "We are not prejudiced, either. The gentlemen from Pittsburg are betting on Mr. Blakeley, over there. Mr. Hotchkiss, the gentleman by the radiator, is ready to place ten to one odds on you. And some of us have still other theories."

"Gentlemen," Sullivan said slowly, "I give you my word of honor that I did not kill Simon Harrington, and that I do not know who did."

"Fiddlededee!" cried Hotchkiss, bustling forward. "Why, I can tell you--" But McKnight pushed him firmly into a chair and held him there.

"I am ready to plead guilty to the larceny," Sullivan went on. "I took Mr. Blakeley's clothes, I admit. If I can reimburse him in any way for the inconvenience--"

The stout detective was listening with his mouth open. "Do you mean to say," he demanded, "that you got into Mr. Blakeley's berth, as he contends, took his clothes and forged notes, and left the train before the wreck?"

"Yes."

"The notes, then?"

"I gave them to Bronson yesterday. Much good they did him!" bitterly. We were all silent for a moment. The two detectives were adjusting themselves with difficulty to a new point of view; Sullivan was looking dejectedly at
the floor, his hands hanging loose between his knees. I was watching Alison; from where I stood, behind her, I could almost touch the soft hair behind her ear.

"I have no intention of pressing any charge against you," I said with forced civility, for my hands were itching to get at him, "if you will give us a clear account of what happened on the Ontario that night."

Sullivan raised his handsome, haggard head and looked around at me. "I've seen you before, haven't I?" he asked. "Weren't you an uninvited guest at the Laurels a few days--or nights--ago? The cat, you remember, and the rug that slipped?"

"I remember," I said shortly. He glanced from me to Alison and quickly away.

"The truth can't hurt me," he said, "but it's devilish unpleasant. Alison, you know all this. You would better go out."

His use of her name crazed me. I stepped in front of her and stood over him. "You will not bring Miss West into the conversation," I threatened, "and she will stay if she wishes."

"Oh, very well," he said with assumed indifference. Hotchkiss just then escaped from Richey's grasp and crossed the room.

"Did you ever wear glasses?" he asked eagerly.

"Never." Sullivan glanced with some contempt at mine.

"I'd better begin by going back a little," he went on sullenly. "I suppose you know I was married to Ida Harrington about five years ago. She was a good girl, and I thought a lot of her. But her father opposed the marriage--he'd never liked me, and he refused to make any sort of settlement.

"I had thought, of course, that there would be money, and it was a bad day when I found out I'd made a mistake. My sister was wild with disappointment. We were pretty hard up, my sister and I."

I was watching Alison. Her hands were tightly clasped in her lap, and she was staring out of the window at the cheerless roof below. She had set her lips a little, but that was all.

"You understand, of course, that I'm not defending myself," went on the sullen voice. "The day came when old Harrington put us both out of the house at the point of a revolver, and I threatened--I suppose you know that, too--I threatened to kill him.

"My sister and I had hard times after that. We lived on the continent for a while. I was at Monte Carlo and she was in Italy. She met a young lady there, the granddaughter of a steel manufacturer and an heiress, and she sent for me. When I got to Rome the girl was gone. Last winter I was all in--social secretary to an Englishman, a wholesale grocer with a new title, but we had a row, and I came home. I went out to the Heaton boys' ranch in Wyoming, and met Bronson there. He lent me money, and I've been doing his dirty work ever since."

Sullivan got up then and walked slowly forward and back as he talked, his eyes on the faded pattern of the office rug.

"If you want to live in hell," he said savagely, "put yourself in another man's power. Bronson got into trouble, forging John Gilmore's name to those notes, and in some way he learned that a man was bringing the papers back to Washington on the Flier. He even learned the number of his berth, and the night before the wreck, just as I was boarding the train, I got a telegram."

Hotchkiss stepped forward once more importantly. "Which read, I think: 'Man with papers in lower ten, car seven. Get them.'"

Sullivan looked at the little man with sulky blue eyes.

"It was something like that, anyhow. But it was a nasty business, and it made matters worse that he didn't care that a telegram which must pass through a half dozen hands was more or less incriminating to me.

"Then, to add to the unpleasantness of my position, just after we boarded the train--I was accompanying my sister and this young lady, Miss West--a woman touched me on the sleeve, and I turned to face--my wife!"

"That took away my last bit of nerve. I told my sister, and you can understand she was in a bad way, too. We knew what it meant. Ida had heard that I was going--"

He stopped and glanced uneasily at Alison.

"Go on," she said coldly. "It is too late to shield me. The time to have done that was when I was your guest."

"Well," he went on, his eyes turned carefully away from my face, which must have presented certainly anything but a pleasant sight. "Miss West was going to do me the honor to marry me, and--"

"You scoundrel!" I burst forth, thrusting past Alison West's chair. "You--you infernal cur!"

One of the detectives got up and stood between us. "You must remember, Mr. Blakeley, that you are forcing this story from this man. These details are unpleasant, but important. You were going to marry this young lady," he said, turning to Sullivan, "although you already had a wife living?"

"It was my sister's plan, and I was in a bad way for money. If I could marry, secretly, a wealthy girl and go to Europe, it was unlikely that Ida--that is, Mrs. Sullivan--would hear of it."
"So it was more than a shock to see my wife on the train, and to realize from her face that she knew what was going on. I don't know yet, unless some of the servants--well, never mind that.

"It meant that the whole thing had gone up. Old Harrington had carried a gun for me for years, and the same train wouldn't hold both of us. Of course, I thought that he was in the coach just behind ours."

Hotchkiss was leaning forward now, his eyes narrowed, his thin lips drawn to a line.

"Are you left-handed, Mr. Sullivan?" he asked.

Sullivan stopped in surprise.

"No," he said gruffly. "Can't do anything with my left hand." Hotchkiss subsided, crestfallen but alert. "I tore up that cursed telegram, but I was afraid to throw the scraps away. Then I looked around for lower ten. It was almost exactly across--my berth was lower seven, and it was, of course, a bit of exceptional luck for me that the car was number seven."

"Did you tell your sister of the telegram from Bronson?" I asked.

"No. It would do no good, and she was in a bad way without that to make her worse."

"Your sister was killed, think." The shorter detective took a small package from his pocket and held it in his hand, snapping the rubber band which held it.

"Yes, she was killed," Sullivan said soberly. "What I say now can do her no harm."

He stopped to push back the heavy hair which dropped over his forehead, and went on more connectedly.

"It was late, after midnight, and we went at once to our berths. I undressed, and then I lay there for an hour, wondering how I was going to get the notes. Some one in lower nine was restless and wide awake, but finally became quiet.

"The man in ten was sleeping heavily. I could hear his breathing, and it seemed to be only a question of getting across and behind the curtains of his berth without being seen. After that, it was a mere matter of quiet searching."

"The car became very still. I was about to try for the other berth, when some one brushed softly past, and I lay back again.

"Finally, however, when things had been quiet for a time, I got up, and after looking along the aisle, I slipped behind the curtains of lower ten. You understand, Mr. Blakeley, that I thought you were in lower ten, with the notes."

I nodded curtly.

"I'm not trying to defend myself," he went on. "I was ready to steal the notes--I had to. But murder!"

He wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Well, I slipped across and behind the curtains. It was very still. The man in ten didn't move, although my heart was thumping until I thought he would hear it.

"I felt around cautiously. It was perfectly dark, and I came across a bit of chain, about as long as my finger. It seemed a queer thing to find there, and it was sticky, too."

He shuddered, and I could see Alison's hands clenching and unclenching with the strain.

"All at once it struck me that the man was strangely silent, and I think I lost my nerve. Anyhow, I drew the curtains open a little, and let the light fall on my hands. They were red, blood-red."

He leaned one hand on the back of the chair, and was silent for a moment, as though he lived over again the awful events of that more than awful night.

The stout detective had let his cigar go out; he was still drawing at it nervously. Richey had picked up a paper-weight and was tossing it from hand to hand; when it slipped and fell to the floor, a startled shudder passed through the room.

"There was something glittering in there," Sullivan resumed, "and on impulse I picked it up. Then I dropped the curtains and stumbled back to my own berth."

"Where you wiped your hands on the bed-clothing and stuck the dirk into the pillow." Hotchkiss was seeing his carefully built structure crumbling to pieces, and he looked chagrined.

"I suppose I did--I'm not very clear about what happened then. But when I rallied a little I saw a Russia leather wallet lying in the aisle almost at my feet, and, like a fool, I stuck it, with the bit of chain, into my bag."

"I sat there, shivering, for what seemed hours. It was still perfectly quiet, except for some one snoring. I thought that would drive me crazy.

"The more I thought of it the worse things looked. The telegram was the first thing against me--it would put the police on my track at once, when it was discovered that the man in lower ten had been killed."

"Then I remembered the notes, and I took out the wallet and opened it."

He stopped for a minute, as if the recalling of the next occurrence was almost beyond him.

"I took out the wallet," he said simply, "and opening it, held it to the light. In gilt letters was the name, Simon Harrington."
The detectives were leaning forward now, their eyes on his face.

"Things seemed to whirl around for a while. I sat there almost paralyzed, wondering what this new development meant for me.

"My wife, I knew, would swear I had killed her father; nobody would be likely to believe the truth.

"Do you believe me now?" He rooked around at us defiantly. "I am telling the absolute truth, and not one of you believes me!

"After a bit the man in lower nine got up and walked along the aisle toward the smoking compartment. I heard him go, and, leaning from my berth, watched him out of sight.

"It was then I got the idea of changing berths with him, getting into his clothes, and leaving the train. I give you my word I had no idea of throwing suspicion on him."

Alison looked scornfully incredulous, but I felt that the man was telling the truth.

"I changed the numbers of the berths, and it worked well. I got into the other man's berth, and he came back to mine. The rest was easy. I dressed in his clothes--luckily, they fitted--and jumped the train not far from Baltimore, just before the wreck."

"There is something else you must clear up," I said. "Why did you try to telephone me from M-, and why did you change your mind about the message?"

He looked astounded.

"You knew I was at M-?" he stammered.

"Yes, we traced you. What about the message?"

"Well, it was this way: of course, I did not know your name, Mr. Blakeley. The telegram said, 'Man with papers in lower ten, car seven,' and after I had made what I considered my escape, I began to think I had left the man in my berth in a bad way.

"He would probably be accused of the crime. So, although when the wreck occurred I supposed every one connected with the affair had been killed, there was a chance that you had survived. I've not been of much account, but I didn't want a man to swing because I'd left him in my place. Besides, I began to have a theory of my own.

"As we entered the car a tall, dark woman passed us, with a glass of water in her hand, and I vaguely remembered her. She was amazingly like Blanche Conway.

"If she, too, thought the man with the notes was in lower ten, it explained a lot, including that piece of a woman's necklace. She was a fury, Blanche Conway, capable of anything."

"Then why did you countermand that message?" I asked curiously.

"When I got to the Carter house, and got to bed--I had sprained my ankle in the jump--I went through the alligator bag I had taken from lower nine. When I found your name, I sent the first message. Then, soon after, I came across the notes. It seemed too good to be true, and I was crazy for fear the message had gone.

"At first I was going to send them to Bronson; then I began to see what the possession of the notes meant to me. It meant power over Bronson, money, influence, everything. He was a devil, that man."

"Well, he's at home now," said McKnight, and we were glad to laugh and relieve the tension.

Alison put her hand over her eyes, as if to shut out the sight of the man she had so nearly married, and I furtively touched one of the soft little curls that nestled at the back of her neck.

"When I was able to walk," went on the sullen voice, "I came at once to Washington. I tried to sell the notes to Bronson, but he was almost at the end of his rope. Not even my threat to send them back to you, Mr. Blakeley, could make him meet my figure. He didn't have the money.

McKnight was triumphant.

"I think you gentlemen will see reason in my theory now," he said. "Mrs. Conway wanted the notes to force a legal marriage, I suppose?"

"Yes."

The detective with the small package carefully rolled off the rubber band, and unwrapped it. I held my breath as he took out, first, the Russia leather wallet.

"These things, Mr. Blakeley, we found in the seal-skin bag Mr. Sullivan says he left you. This wallet, Mr. Sullivan--is this the one you found on the floor of the car?"

Sullivan opened it, and, glancing at the name inside, "Simon Harrington," nodded affirmatively.

"And this," went on the detective--"this is a piece of gold chain?"

"It seems to be," said Sullivan, recoiling at the blood-stained end.

"This, I believe, is the dagger." He held it up, and Alison gave a faint cry of astonishment and dismay. Sullivan's face grew ghastly, and he sat down weakly on the nearest chair.

The detective looked at him shrewdly, then at Alison's agitated face.

"Where have you seen this dagger before, young lady?" he asked, kindly enough.
"Oh, don't ask me!" she gasped breathlessly, her eyes turned on Sullivan. "It's--it's too terrible!"

"Tell him," I advised, leaning over to her. "It will be found out later, anyhow."

"Ask him," she said, nodding toward Sullivan. The detective unwrapped the small box Alison had brought, disclosing the trampled necklace and broken chain. With clumsy fingers he spread it on the table and fitted into place the bit of chain. There could be no doubt that it belonged there.

"Where did you find that chain?" Sullivan asked hoarsely, looking for the first time at Alison.

"On the floor, near the murdered man's berth."

"Now, Mr. Sullivan," said the detective civilly, "I believe you can tell us, in the light of these two exhibits, who really did murder Simon Harrington."

Sullivan looked again at the dagger, a sharp little bit of steel with a Florentine handle. Then he picked up the locket and pressed a hidden spring under one of the cameos. Inside, very neatly engraved, was the name and a date.

"Gentlemen," he said, his face ghastly, "it is of no use for me to attempt a denial. The dagger and necklace belonged to my sister, Alice Curtis!"

CHAPTER XXXI
AND ONLY ONE ARM
Hotchkiss was the first to break the tension.

"Mr. Sullivan," he asked suddenly, "was your sister left-handed?"

"Yes."

Hotchkiss put away his note-book and looked around with an air of triumphant vindication. It gave us a chance to smile and look relieved. After all, Mrs. Curtis was dead. It was the happiest solution of the unhappy affair. McKnight brought Sullivan some whisky, and he braced up a little.

"I learned through the papers that my wife was in a Baltimore hospital, and yesterday I ventured there to see her. I felt if she would help me to keep straight, that now, with her father and my sister both dead, we might be happy together.

"I understand now what puzzled me then. It seemed that my sister went into the next car and tried to make my wife promise not to interfere. But Ida--Mrs. Sullivan--was firm, of course. She said her father had papers, certificates and so on, that would stop the marriage at once.

"She said, also, that her father was in our car, and that there would be the mischief to pay in the morning. It was probably when my sister tried to get the papers that he awakened, and she had to do--what she did." It was over. Save for a technicality or two, I was a free man. Alison rose quietly and prepared to go; the men stood to let her pass, save Sullivan who sat crouched in his chair, his face buried in his hands. Hotchkiss, who had been tapping the desk with his pencil, looked up abruptly and pointed the pencil at me.

"If all this is true, and I believe it is,--then who was in the house next door, Blakeley, the night you and Mr. Johnson searched? You remember, you said it was a woman's hand at the trap door."

I glanced hastily at Johnson, whose face was impassive. He had his hand on the knob of the door and he opened it before he spoke.

"There were a number of scratches on Mrs. Conway's right hand," he observed to the room in general. "Her wrist was bandaged and badly bruised."

He went out then, but he turned as he closed the door and threw at me a glance of half-amused, half-contemptuous tolerance.

McKnight saw Alison, with Mrs. Dallas, to their carriage, and came back again. The gathering in the office was breaking up. Sullivan, looking worn and old, was standing by the window, staring at the broken necklace in his hand. When he saw me watching him, he put it on the desk and picked up his hat.

"If I can not do anything more--" he hesitated.

"I think you have done about enough," I replied grimly, and he went out.

I believe that Richey and Hotchkiss led me somewhere to dinner, and that, for fear I would be lonely without him, they sent for Johnson. And I recall a spirited discussion in which Hotchkiss told the detective that he could manage certain cases, but that he lacked induction. Richey and I were mainly silent. My thoughts would slip ahead to that hour, later in the evening, when I should see Alison again.

I dressed in savage haste finally, and was so particular about my tie that Mrs. Klopton gave up in despair.

"I wish, until your arm is better, that you would buy the kind that hooks on," she protested, almost tearfully. "I'm sure they look very nice, Mr. Lawrence. My late husband always--"

"That's a lover's knot you've tied this time," I snarled, and, jerking open the bow knot she had so painfully executed, looked out the window for Johnson--until I recalled that he no longer belonged in my perspective. I ended by driving frantically to the club and getting George to do it.

I was late, of course. The drawing-room and library at the Dallas home were empty. I could hear billiard balls
rolling somewhere, and I turned the other way. I found Alison at last on the balcony, sitting much as she had that
night on the beach,—her chin in her hands, her eyes fixed unseeingly on the trees and lights of the square across. She
was even whistling a little, softly. But this time the plaintiveness was gone. It was a tender little tune. She did not
move, as I stood beside her, looking down. And now, when the moment had come, all the thousand and one things I
had been waiting to say forsook me, precipitately beat a retreat, and left me unsupported. The arc-moon sent little
fugitive lights over her hair, her eyes, her gown.

"Don't—do that," I said unsteadily. "You—you know what I want to do when you whistle!"

She glanced up at me, and she did not stop. She did not stop! She went on whistling softly, a bit tremulously.
And straightway I forgot the street, the chance of passers-by, the voices in the house behind us. "The world doesn't
hold any one but you," I said reverently. "It is our world, sweetheart. I love you."

And I kissed her.

A boy was whistling on the pavement below. I let her go reluctantly and sat back where I could see her.

"I haven't done this the way I intended to at all," I confessed. "In books they get things all settled, and then kiss
the lady."

"Settled?" she inquired.

"Oh, about getting married and that sort of thing," I explained with elaborate carelessness. "We—we could go
down to Bermuda—or—or Jamaica, say in December."

She drew her hand away and faced me squarely.

"I believe you are afraid!" she declared. "I refuse to marry you unless you propose properly. Everybody does it.
And it is a woman's privilege: she wants to have that to look back to."

"Very well," I consented with an exaggerated sigh. "If you will promise not to think I look like an idiot, I shall
do it, knee and all."

I had to pass her to close the door behind us, but when I kissed her again she protested that we were not really
engaged.

I turned to look down at her. "It is a terrible thing," I said exultantly, "to love a girl the way I love you, and to
have only one arm!" Then I closed the door.

From across the street there came a sharp crescendo whistle, and a vaguely familiar figure separated itself from
the park railing.

"Say," he called, in a hoarse whisper, "shall I throw the key down the elevator shaft?"

Go to Start
CHAPTER I

The old stucco house sat back in a garden, or what must once have been a garden, when that part of the Austrian city had been a royal game preserve. Tradition had it that the Empress Maria Theresa had used the building as a hunting-lodge, and undoubtedly there was something royal in the proportions of the salon. With all the candles lighted in the great glass chandelier, and no sidelights, so that the broken paneling was mercifully obscured by gloom, it was easy to believe that the great empress herself had sat in one of the tall old chairs and listened to anecdotes of questionable character; even, if tradition may be believed, related not a few herself.

The chandelier was not lighted on this rainy November night. Outside in the garden the trees creaked and bent before the wind, and the heavy barred gate, left open by the last comer, a piano student named Scatchett and dubbed "Scatch"—the gate slammed to and fro monotonously, giving now and then just enough pause for a hope that it had latched itself, a hope that was always destroyed by the next gust.

One candle burned in the salon. Originally lighted for the purpose of enabling Miss Scatchett to locate the score of a Tschaikowsky concerto, it had been moved to the small center table, and had served to give light if not festivity to the afternoon coffee and cakes. As it still burned, a gnarled and stubby fragment, in its china holder; round it the disorder of the recent refreshment, three empty cups, a half of a small cake, a crumpled napkin or two,—there were never enough to go round,—and on the floor the score of the concerto, clearly abandoned for the things of the flesh.

The room was cold. The long casement windows creaked in time with the slamming of the gate and the candle flickered in response to a draft under the doors. The concerto flapped and slid along the uneven old floor. At the sound a girl in a black dress, who had been huddled near the tile stove, rose impatiently and picked it up. There was no impatience, however, in the way she handled the loose sheets. She put them together carefully, almost tenderly, and placed them on the top of the grand piano, anchoring them against the draft with a china dog from the stand.

In a sort of desperation she drew a chair underneath the chandelier, and armed with a handful of matches proceeded to the unheard-of extravagance of lighting it, not here and there, but throughout as high as she could reach, standing perilously on her tiptoes on the chair.

The resulting illumination revealed a number of things: It showed that the girl was young and comely and that she had been crying; it revealed the fact that the coal-pail was empty and the stove almost so; it let the initiated into the secret that the blackish fluid in the cups had been made with coffee extract that had been made of Heaven knows what; and it revealed in the cavernous corner near the door a number of trunks. The girl, having lighted all the candles, stood on the chair and looked at the trunks. She was young, very tragic, very feminine. A door slammed down the hall and she stopped crying instantly. Diving into one of those receptacles that are a part of the house hunting-lodge, and undoubtedly there was something royal in the proportions of the salon.

The situation was a difficult one, but hardly, except to Harmony Wells, a tragedy. Few of us are so constructed that the Suite "Arlesienne" will serve as a luncheon, or a faulty fingering of the Waldweben from "Siegfried" will keep us awake at night. Harmony had lain awake more than once over some crime against her namesake, had paid penances of early rising and two hours of scales before breakfast, working with stiffened fingers in her cold little room where there was no room for a stove, and sitting on the edge of the bed in a faded kimono where once pink butterflies sported in a once blue-silk garden. Then coffee, rolls, and honey, and back again to work, with little Scatchett at the piano in the salon beyond the partition, wearing a sweater and fingerless gloves and holding a hot-water bottle on her knees. Three rooms beyond, down the stone hall, the Big Soprano, doing Madama Butterfly in bad German, helped to make an encircling wall of sound in the center of which one might practice peacefully.

Only the Portier objected. Morning after morning, crawling out at dawn from under his featherbed in the lodge below, he opened his door and listened to Harmony doing penance above; and morning after morning he shook his fist up the stone staircase.

"Gott im Himmel!" he would say to his wife, fumbling with the knot of his mustache bandage, "what a people, these Americans! So much noise and no music!"
"And mad!" grumbled his wife. "All the day coal, coal to heat; and at night the windows open! Karl the milkboy has seen it."

And now the little colony was breaking up. The Big Soprano was going back to her church, grand opera having found no place for her. Scatch was returning to be married, her heart full, indeed, of music, but her head much occupied with the trousseau in her trunks. The Harmar sisters had gone two weeks before, their funds having given out. Indeed, funds were very low with all of them. The "Bitte zum speisen" of the little German maid often called them to nothing more opulent than a stew of beef and carrots.

Not that all had been sordid. The butter had gone for opera tickets, and never was butter better spent. And there had been gala days--a fruitcake from Harmony's mother, a venison steak at Christmas, and once or twice on birthdays real American ice cream at a fabulous price and worth it. Harmony had bought a suit, too, a marvel of tailoring and cheapness, and a willow plume that would have cost treble its price in New York. Oh, yes, gala days, indeed, to offset the butter and the rainy winter and the faltering technic and the anxiety about money. For that they all had always, the old tragedy of the American music student abroad--the expensive lessons, the delays in getting to the Master himself, the contention against German greed or Austrian whim. And always back in one's mind the home people, to whom one dares not confess that after nine months of waiting, or a year, one has seen the Master once or not at all.

Or--and one of the Harmar girls had carried back this scar in her soul--to go back rejected, as one of the unfit, on whom even the undermasters refuse to waste time. That has been, and often. Harmony stood on her chair and looked at the trunks. The Big Soprano was calling down the hall.

"Scatch," she was shouting briskly, "where is my hairbrush?"

A wail from Scatch from behind a closed door.

"I packed it, Heaven knows where! Do you need it really? Haven't you got a comb?"

"As soon as I get something on I'm coming to shake you. Half the teeth are out of my comb. I don't believe you packed it. Look under the bed."

Silence for a moment, while Scatch obeyed for the next moment. "Here it is," she called joyously. "And here are Harmony's bedroom slippers. Oh, Harry, I found your slippers!"

The girl got down off the chair and went to the door.

"Thanks, dear," she said. "I'm coming in a minute."

She went to the mirror, which had reflected the Empress Maria Theresa, and looked at her eyes. They were still red. Perhaps if she opened the window the air would brighten them.

Armed with the brush, little Scatchett hurried to the Big Soprano's room. She flung the brush on the bed and closed the door. She held her shabby wrapper about her and listened just inside the door. There were no footsteps, only the banging of the gate in the wind. She turned to the Big Soprano, heating a curling iron in the flame of a candle, and held out her hand.

"Look!" she said. "Under my bed! Ten kronen!"

Without a word the Big Soprano put down her curling-iron, and ponderously getting down on her knees, candle in hand, inspected the dusty floor beneath her bed. It revealed nothing but a cigarette, on which she pounced. Still squatting, she lighted the cigarette in the candle flame and sat solemnly puffing it.

"The first for a week," she said. "Pull out the wardrobe, Scatch; there may be another relic of my prosperous days."

But little Scatchett was not interested in Austrian cigarettes with a government monopoly and gilt tips. She was looking at the ten-kronen piece.

"Where is the other?" she asked in a whisper.

"In my powder-box."

Little Scatchett lifted the china lid and dropped the tiny gold-piece.

"Every little bit," she said flippantly, but still in a whisper, "added to what she's got, makes just a little bit more."

"Have you thought of a place to leave it for her? If Rosa finds it, it's good-bye. Heaven knows it was hard enough to get together, without losing it now. I'll have to jump overboard and swim ashore at New York--I haven't even a dollar for tips."

"New York!" said little Scatchett with her eyes glowing. "If Henry meets me I know he will--"

"Tut!" The Big Soprano got up cumbrously and stood looking down. "You and your Henry! Scatchy, child, has it occurred to your maudlin young mind that money isn't the only thing Harmony is going to need? She's going to be alone--and this is a bad town to be alone in. And she is not like us. You have your Henry. I'm a beefy person who has a stomach, and I'm thankful for it. But she is different--she's got the thing that you are as well without, the thing that my lack of is sending me back to fight in a church choir instead of grand opera."

Little Scatchett was rather puzzled.
"Temperament?" she asked. It had always been accepted in the little colony that Harmony was a real musician, a star in their lesser firmament.

The Big Soprano sniffed.

"If you like," she said. "Soul is a better word. Only the rich ought to have souls, Scatchy, dear."

This was over the younger girl's head, and anyhow Harmony was coming down the hall.

"I thought, under her pillow," she whispered. "She'll find it--"

Harmony came in, to find the Big Soprano heating a curler in the flame of a candle.

CHAPTER II

Harmony found the little hoard under her pillow that night when, having seen Scatch and the Big Soprano off at the station, she had come back alone to the apartment on the Siebensternstrasse. The trunks were gone now. Only the concerto score still lay on the piano, where little Scatchett, mentally on the dock at New York with Henry's arms about her, had forgotten it. The candles in the great chandelier had died in tears of paraffin that spattered the floor beneath. One or two of the sockets were still smoking, and the sharp odor of burning wickends filled the room.

Harmony had come through the garden quickly. She had had an uneasy sense of being followed, and the garden, with its moaning trees and slamming gate and the great dark house in the background, was a forbidding place at best. She had rung the bell and had stood, her back against the door, eyes and ears strained in the darkness. She had fancied that a figure had stopped outside the gate and stood looking in, but the next moment the gate had swung to and the Portier was fumbling at the lock behind her.

The Portier had put on his trousers over his night garments, and his mustache bandage gave him a sinister expression, rather augmented when he smiled at her. The Portier liked Harmony in spite of the early morning practicing; she looked like a singer at the opera for whom he cherished a hidden attachment. The singer had never seen him, but it was for her he wore the mustache bandage. Perhaps some day--hopefully! One must be ready!

The Portier gave Harmony a tiny candle and Harmony held out his tip, the five Hellers of custom. But the Portier was keen, and Rosa was a niece of his wife and talked more than she should. He refused the tip with a gesture.

"Bitte, Fraulein!" he said through the bandage. "It is for me a pleasure to admit you. And perhaps if the Fraulein is cold, a basin of soup."

The Portier was not pleasant to the eye. His nightshirt was open over his hairy chest and his feet were bare to the stone floor. But to Harmony that lonely night he was beautiful. She tried to speak and could not but she held out her hand in impulsive gratitude, and the Portier in his best manner bent over and kissed it. As she reached the curve of the stone staircase, carrying her tiny candle, the Portier was following her with his eyes. She was very like the girl of the opera.

The clang of the door below and the rattle of the chain were comforting to Harmony's ears. From the safety of the darkened salon she peered out into the garden again, but no skulking figure detached itself from the shadows, and the gate remained, for a marvel, closed.

It was when--having picked up her violin in a very passion of loneliness, only to put it down when she found that the familiar sounds echoed and reechoed sadly through the silent rooms--it was when she was ready for bed that she found the money under her pillow, and a scrawl from Scatchy, a breathless, apologetic scrawl, little Scatchett having adored her from afar, as the plain adore the beautiful, the mediocre the gifted:--

DEAREST HARRY [here a large blot, Scatchy being addicted to blots]: I am honestly frightened when I think what we are doing. But, oh, my dear, if you could know how pleased we are with tears of paraffin that spattered the floor beneath. One or two of the sockets were still smoking, and the sharp odor of burning wickends filled the room.

Sadie [Sadie was the Big Soprano] keeps saying awful things about our leaving you here, and she has rather terrified me. You are so beautiful, Harry.--although you never let us tell you so. And Sadie says you have a soul and I haven't, and that souls are deadly things to have. I feel to-night that in urging you to stay I am taking the burden of your soul on me! Do be careful, Harry. If any one you do not know speaks to you call a policeman. And be sure you get into a respectable pension. There are queer ones.

Sadie and I think that if you can get along on what you get from home--you said your mother would get insurance, didn't you?--and will keep this as a sort of fund to take you home if anything should go wrong--. But perhaps we are needlessly worried. In any case, of course it's a loan, and you can preserve that magnificent independence of yours by sending it back when you get to work to make your fortune. And if you are doubtful at all, just remember that hopeful little mother of yours who sent you over to get what she had never been able to have for herself, and who planned this for you from the time you were a kiddy and she named you Harmony.
"I'm not saying good-bye. I can't.

SCATCH."

That night, while the Portier and his wife slept under their crimson feather beds and the crystals of the chandelier in the salon shook in the draft as if the old Austrian court still danced beneath, Harmony fought her battle. And a battle it was. Scatchy and the Big Soprano had not known everything. There had been no insurance on her father's life; the little mother was penniless. A married sister would care for her, but what then? Harmony had enough remaining of her letter of credit to take her home, and she had--the hoard under the pillow. To go back and teach the violin; or to stay and finish under the master, be presented, as he had promised her, at a special concert in Vienna, with all the prestige at home that that would mean, and its resulting possibility of fame and fortune--which?

She decided to stay. There might be a concert or so, and she could teach English. The Viennese were crazy about English. Some of the stores advertised "English Spoken." That would be something to fall back on, a clerkship during the day.

Toward dawn she discovered that she was very cold, and she went into the Big Soprano's deserted and disordered room. The tile stove was warm and comfortable, but on the toilet table there lay a disreputable comb with most of the teeth gone. Harmony kissed this unromantic object! Which reveals the fact that, genius or not, she was only a young and rather frightened girl, and that every atom of her ached with loneliness.

She did not sleep at all, but sat curled up on the bed with her feet under her and thought things out. At dawn the Portier, crawling out into the cold from under his feathers, opened the door into the hall and listened. She was playing, not practicing, and the music was the barcarolle from the "Tales" of Hoffmann. Standing in the doorway in his night attire, his chest open to the frigid morning air, his face upraised to the floor above, he hummed the melody in a throaty tenor.

When the music had died away he went in and closed the door sheepishly. His wife stood over the stove, a stick of firewood in her hand. She eyed him.

"So! It is the American Fraulein now!"

"I did but hum a little. She drags out my heart with her music." He fumbled with his mustache bandage, which was knotted behind, keeping one eye on his wife, whose morning pleasure it was to untie it for him.

"She leaves to-day," she announced, ignoring the knot.

"Why? She is alone. Rosa says--"

"She leaves to-day!"

The knot was hopeless now, double-tied and pulled to smooth compactness. The Portier jerked at it.

"No Fraulein stays here alone. It is not respectable. And what saw I last night, after she entered and you stood moon-gazing up the stair after her! A man in the gateway!"

The Portier was angry. He snarled something through the bandage, which had slipped down over his mouth, and picked up a great knife.

"She will stay if she so desire," he muttered furiously, and, raising the knife, he cut the knotted string. His mustache, faintly gray and sweetly up-curved, stood revealed.

"She will stay!" he repeated. "And when you see men at the gate, let me know. She is an angel!"

"And she looks like the angel at the opera, hein?"

This was a crushing blow. The Portier wilted. Such things come from telling one's cousin, who keeps a brushshop, what is in one's heart. Yesterday his wife had needed a brush, and to-day--Himmel, the girl must go!

Harmony knew also that she must go. The apartment was large and expensive; Rosa ate much and wasted more. She must find somewhere a tiny room with board, a humble little room but with a stove. A room where her playing would not annoy people, that was important.

Harmony gave her an extra krone or two out of sheer gratitude, but she could not keep her. And at noon, having packed her trunk, she went down to interview the Portier and his wife, who were agents under the owner for the old house.

The Portier, entirely subdued, was sweeping out the hallway. He looked past the girl, not at her, and observed impassively that the lease was up and it was her privilege to go. In the daylight she was not so like the angel, and after all she could only play the violin. The angel had a voice, such a voice! And besides, there was an eye at the crack of the door.

The bit of cheer of the night before was gone; it was with a heavy heart that Harmony started on her quest for cheaper quarters.

Winter, which had threatened for a month, had come at last. The cobbledstones glittered with ice and the small
puddles in the gutters were frozen. Across the street a spotted deer, shot in the mountains the day before and hanging from a hook before a wild-game shop, was frozen quite stiff. It was a pretty creature. The girl turned her eyes away. A young man, buying cheese and tinned fish in the shop, watched after her.

"That's an American girl, isn't it?" he asked in American-German.

The shopkeeper was voluble. Also Rosa had bought much from him, and Rosa talked. When the American left the shop he knew everything of Harmony that Rosa knew except her name. Rosa called her "The Beautiful One." Also he was short one krone four beliers in his change, which is readily done when a customer is plainly thinking of a "beautiful one."

Harmony searched all day for the little room with board and a stove and no objection to practicing. There were plenty--but the rates! The willow plume looked prosperous, and she had a way of making the plainest garments appear costly. Landladies looked at the plume and the suit and heard the soft swish of silk beneath, which marks only self-respect in the American woman but is extravagance in Europe, and added to their regular terms until poor Harmony's heart almost stood still. And then at last toward evening she happened on a gloomy little pension near the corner of the Alserstrasse, and it being dark and the plume not showing, and the landlady missing the rustle owing to cotton in her ears for earache, Harmony found terms that she could meet for a time.

A mean little room enough, but with a stove. The bed sagged in the center, and the toilet table had a mirror that made one eye appear higher than the other and twisted one's nose. But there was an odor of stewing cabbage in the air. Also, alas, there was the odor of many previous stewed cabbages, and of dusty carpets and stale tobacco. Harmony had had no lunch; she turned rather faint.

She arranged to come at once, and got out into the comparative purity of the staircase atmosphere and felt her way down. She reeled once or twice. At the bottom of the dark stairs she stood for a moment with her eyes closed, to the dismay of a young man who had just come in with a cheese and some tinned fish under his arm.

He put down his packages on the stone floor and caught her arm.

"Not ill, are you?" he asked in English, and then remembering. "Bist du krank?" He colored violently at that, recalling too late the familiarity of the "du."

Harmony smiled faintly.

"Only tired," she said in English. "And the odor of cabbage--".

Her color had come back and she freed herself from his supporting hand. He whistled softly. He had recognized her.

"Cabbage, of course!" he said. "The pension upstairs is full of it. I live there, and I've eaten so much of it I could be served up with pork."

"I am going to live there. Is it as bad as that?"

He waved a hand toward the parcels on the floor.

"So bad," he observed, "that I keep body and soul together by buying strong and odorous food at the delicatessens--odorous, because only rugged flavors rise above the atmosphere up there. Cheese is the only thing that really knocks out the cabbage, and once or twice even cheese has retired defeated."

"But I don't like cheese." In sheer relief from the loneliness of the day her spirits were rising.

"Then coffee! But not there. Coffee at the coffee-house on the corner. I say--" He hesitated.

"Yes?"

"Would you--don't you think a cup of coffee would set you up a bit?"

"It sounds attractive,"--uncertainly.

"Coffee with whipped cream and some little cakes?"

Harmony hesitated. In the gloom of the hall she could hardly see this brisk young American--young, she knew by his voice, tall by his silhouette, strong by the way he had caught her. She could not see his face, but she liked his voice.

"Do you mean--with you?"

"I'm a doctor. I am going to fill my own prescription."

That sounded reassuring. Doctors were not as other men; they were legitimate friends in need.

"I am sure it is not proper, but--"

"Proper! Of course it is. I shall send you a bill for professional services. Besides, won't we be formally introduced to-night by the landlady? Come now--to the coffee-house and the Paris edition of the 'Herald!'" But the next moment he paused and ran his hand over his chin. "I'm pretty disreputable," he explained. "I have been in a clinic all day, and, hang it all, I'm not shaved."

"What difference does that make?"

"My dear young lady," he explained gravely, picking up the cheese and the tinned fish, "it makes a difference in me that I wish you to realize before you see me in a strong light."
He rapped at the Portier's door, with the intention of leaving his parcels there, but receiving no reply tucked them under his arm. A moment later Harmony was in the open air, rather dazed, a bit excited, and lovely with the color the adventure brought into her face. Her companion walked beside her, tall, slightly stooped. She essayed a fugitive little sidelong glance up at him, and meeting his eyes hastily averted her.

They passed a policeman, and suddenly there flashed into the girl's mind little Scatchett's letter.

"Do be careful, Harry. If any one you do not know speaks to you, call a policeman."

CHAPTER III

The coffee-house was warm and bright. Round its small tables were gathered miscellaneous groups, here and there a woman, but mostly men--uniformed officers, who made of the neighborhood coffee-house a sort of club, where under their breath they criticized the Government and retailed small regimental gossip; professors from the university, still wearing under the beards of middle life the fine horizontal scars of student days; elderly doctors from the general hospital across the street; even a Hofrath or two, drinking beer and reading the "Fliegende Blaetter" and "Simplicissimus"; and in an alcove round a billiard table a group of noisy Korps students. Over all a permeating odor of coffee, strong black coffee, made with a fig or two to give it color. It rose even above the blue tobacco haze and domalated the atmosphere with its spicy and stimulating richness. A hustle of waiters, a hum of conversation, the rattle of newspapers and the click of billiard balls--this was the coffee-house.

Harmony had never been inside one before. The little music colony had been a tight-closed corporation, retaining its American integrity, in spite of the salon of Maria Theresa and three expensive lessons a week in German. Harmony knew the art galleries and the churches, which were free, and the opera, thanks to no butter at supper. But of that backbone of Austrian life, the coffee-house, she was profoundly ignorant.

Her companion found her a seat in a corner near a heater and disappeared for an instant on the search for the Paris edition of the "Herald." The girl followed him with her eyes. Seen under the bright electric lights, he was not handsome, hardly good-looking. His mouth was wide, his nose irregular, his hair a nondescript brown,--but the mouth had humor, the nose character, and, thank Heaven, there was plenty of hair. Not that Harmony saw all this at once. As he tacked to and fro round the tables, with a nod here and a word there, she got a sort of ensemble effect--a tall man, possibly thirty, broad shouldered, somewhat stooped, as tall men are apt to be. And shabby, undeniably shabby!

The shabbiness was a shock. A much-braided officer, trim from the points of his mustache to the points of his shoes, rose to speak to him. The shabbiness was accentuated by the contrast. Possibly the revelation was an easement to the girl's nervousness. This smiling and unpressed individual, blithely waving aloft the Paris edition of the "Herald" and equally blithely ignoring the maledictions of the student from whom he had taken it--even Scatchy could not have called him a vulture or threatened him with the police.

He placed the paper before her and sat down at her side, not to interfere with her outlook over the room.

"Warmer?" he asked.

"Very much."

"Coffee is coming. And cinnamon cakes with plenty of sugar. They know me here and they know where I live. They save the sugariest cakes for me. Don't let me bother you; go on and read. See which of the smart set is getting a divorce--or is it always the same one? And who's President back home."

"I'd rather look round. It's curious, isn't it?"

"Curious? It's heavenly! It's the one thing I am going to take back to America with me--one coffee-house, one dozen military men for local color, one dozen students ditto, and one proprietor's wife to sit in the cage and shortchange the unsuspecting. I'll grow wealthy."

"But what about the medical practice?"

He leaned over toward her; his dark-gray eyes fulfilled the humorous promise of his mouth.

"Why, it will work out perfectly," he said whimsically. "The great American public will eat cinnamon cakes and drink coffee until the feeble American nervous system will be shattered. I shall have an office across the street!"

After that, having seen how tired she looked, he forbade conversation until she had had her coffee. She ate the cakes, too, and he watched her with comfortable satisfaction.

"Nod your head but don't speak," he said. "Remember, I am prescribing, and there's to be no conversation until the coffee is down. Shall I or shall I not open the cheese?"

But Harmony did not wish the cheese, and so signified. Something inherently delicate in the unknown kept him from more than an occasional swift glance at her. He read aloud, as she ate, bits of news from the paper, pausing to sip his own coffee and to cast an eye over the crowded room. Here and there an officer, gazing with too open admiration on Harmony's lovely face, found himself fixed by a pair of steel-gray eyes that were anything but humorous at that instant, and thought best to shift his gaze.

The coffee finished, the girl began to gather up her wraps. But the unknown protested.
"The function of a coffee-house," he explained gravely, "is twofold. Coffee is only the first half. The second half is conversation."

"I converse very badly."

"So do I. Suppose we talk about ourselves. We are sure to do that well. Shall I commence?"

Harmony was in no mood to protest. Having swallowed coffee, why choke over conversation? Besides, she was very comfortable. It was warm there, with the heater at her back; better than the little room with the sagging bed and the doors covered with wall paper. Her feet had stopped aching, too. She could have sat there for hours. And--why evade it?--she was interested. This whimsical and respectful young man with his absurd talk and his shabby clothes had roused her curiosity.

"Please," she assented.

"Then, first of all, my name. I'm getting that over early, because it isn't much, as names go. Peter Byrne it is. Don't shudder."

"Certainly I'm not shuddering."

"I have another name, put in by my Irish father to conciliate a German uncle of my mother's. Augustus! It's rather a mess. What shall I put on my professional brassplate? If I put P. Augustus Byrne nobody's fooled. They know my wretched first name is Peter."

"Or Patrick."

"I rather like Patrick--if I thought it might pass as Patrick! Patrick has possibilities. The diminutive is Pat, and that's not bad. But Peter!"

"Do you know," Harmony confessed half shyly, "I like Peter as a name."

"Peter it shall be, then. I go down to posterity and fame as Peter Byrne. The rest doesn't amount to much, but I want you to know it, since you have been good enough to accept me on faith. I'm here alone, from a little town in eastern Ohio; worked my way through a coeducational college in the West and escaped unmarried; did two years in a drygoods store until, by saving and working in my vacations, I got through medical college and tried general practice. Didn't like it--always wanted to do surgery. A little legacy from the German uncle, trying to atone for the 'Augustus,' gave me enough money to come here. I've got a chance with the Days--surgeons, you know--when I go back, if I can hang on long enough. That's all. Here's a traveler's check with my name on it, to vouch for the truth of this thrilling narrative. Gaze on it with awe; there are only a few of them left!"

Harmony was as delicately strung, as vibrantly responsive as the strings of her own violin, and under the even lightness of his tone she felt many things that met a response in her--loneliness and struggle, and the ever-present anxiety about money, grim determination, hope and fear, and even occasional despair. He was still young, but there were lines in his face and a hint of gray in his hair. Even had he been less frank, she would have known soon enough--the dingy little pension, the shabby clothes--

She held out her hand.

"Thank you for telling me," she said simply. "I think I understand very well because--it's music with me: violin. And my friends have gone, so I am alone, too."

He leaned his elbows on the table and looked out over the crowd without seeing it.

"It's curious, isn't it?" he said. "Here we are, you and I, meeting in the center of Europe, both lonely as the mischief, both working our heads off for an idea that may never pan out! Why aren't you at home to-night, eating a civilized beefsteak and running upstairs to get ready for a nice young man to bring you a box of chocolates? Why am I not measuring out calico in Shipley & West's? Instead, we are going to Frau Schwarz', to listen to cold ham and scorched compote eaten in six different languages."

Harmony made no immediate reply. He seemed to expect none. She was drawing on her gloves, her eyes, like his, roving over the crowd.

Far back among the tables a young man rose and yawned. Then, seeing Byrne, he waved a greeting to him.

"Why do we go so soon?" she demanded fretfully in German. "It is early still."

He replied in English. It was a curious way they had, and eminently satisfactory, each understanding better than he spoke the other's language.

"Because, my beloved," he said lightly, "you are smoking a great many poisonous and highly expensive cigarettes. Also I wish to speak to Peter."

The girl followed his eyes and stiffened jealously.

"Who is that with Peter?"
"We are going over to find out, little one. Old Peter with a woman at last!"

The little Austrian walked delicately, swaying her slim body with a slow and sensuous grace. She touched an officer as she passed him, and paused to apologize, to the officer's delight and her escort's irritation. And Peter Byrne watched and waited, a line of annoyance between his brows. The girl was ahead; that complicated things.

When she was within a dozen feet of the table he rose hastily, with a word of apology, and met the couple. It was adroitly done. He had taken the little Austrian's arm and led her by the table while he was still greeting her. He held her in conversation in his absurd German until they had reached the swinging doors, while her companion followed helplessly. And he bowed her out, protesting his undying admiration for her eyes, while the florid youth alternately raged behind him and stared back at Harmony, interested and unconscious behind her table.

The little Austrian was on the pavement when Byrne turned, unsmiling, to the other man.
"That won't do, you know, Stewart," he said, grave but not unfriendly.
"The Kid wouldn't bite her."
"We'll not argue about it."

After a second's awkward pause Stewart smiled.
"Certainly not," he agreed cheerfully. "That is up to you, of course. I didn't know. We're looking for you to-night."

A sudden repulsion for the evening's engagement rose in Byrne, but the situation following his ungraciousness was delicate.
"I'll be round," he said. "I have a lecture and I may be late, but I'll come."
The "Kid" was not stupid. She moved off into the night, chin in air, angrily flushed.
"You saw!" she choked, when Stewart had overtaken her and slipped a hand through her arm. "He protects her from me! It is because of you. Before I knew you--"

"Before you knew me, little one," he said cheerfully, "you were exactly what you are now."
She paused on the curb and raised her voice.
"So! And what is that?"
"Beautiful as the stars, only--not so remote."
In their curious bi-lingual talk there was little room for subtlety. The "beautiful" calmed her, but the second part of the sentence roused her suspicion.
"Remote? What is that?"
"I was thinking of Worthington."
The name was a signal for war. Stewart repented, but too late.

In the cold evening air, to the amusement of a passing detail of soldiers trundling a breadwagon by a rope, Stewart stood on the pavement and dodged verbal brickbats of Viennese idioms and German epithets. He drew his chin into the up-turned collar of his overcoat and waited, an absurdly patient figure, until the hail of consonants had subsided into a rain of tears. Then he took the girl's elbow again and led her, childishly weeping, into a narrow side street beyond the prying ears and eyes of the Alserstrasse.

Byrne went back to Harmony. The incident of Stewart and the girl was closed and he dismissed it instantly. That situation was not his, or of his making. But here in the coffee-house, lovely, alluring, rather puzzled at this moment, was also a situation. For there was another situation. He had suspected it that morning, listening to the delicatessen-seller's narrative of Rosa's account of the disrupted colony across in the old lodge; he had been certain of it that evening, finding Harmony in the dark entrance to his own rather sordid pension. Now, in the bright light of the coffee-house, surmising her poverty, seeing her beauty, the emotional coming and going of her color, her frank loneliness, and God save the mark!--her trust in him, he accepted the situation and adopted it: his responsibility, if you please.

He straightened under it. He knew the old city fairly well--enough to love it and to loathe it in one breath. He had seen its tragedies and passed them by, or had, in his haphazard way, thrown a greeting to them, or even a glass of native wine. And he knew the musical temperament; the all or nothing of its insistent demands; its heights that are higher than others, its wretchednesses that are hell. Once in the Hofstadt Theater, where he had bought standing room, he had seen a girl he had known in Berlin, where he was taking clinics and where she was cooking her own meals. She had been studying singing. In the Hofstadt Theater she had worn a sable coat and had avoided his eyes.

Perhaps the old coffee-house had seen nothing more absurd, in its years of coffee and billiards and Munchener beer, than Peter's new resolution that night: this poverty adopting poverty, this youth adopting youth, with the altruistic purpose of saving it from itself.

And this, mind you, before Peter Byrne had heard Harmony's story or knew her name, Rosa having called her "The Beautiful One" in her narrative, and the delicatessen-seller being literal in his repetition.

Back to "The Beautiful One" went Peter Byrne, and, true to his new part of protector and guardian, squared his shoulders and tried to look much older than he really was, and responsible. The result was a grimness that alarmed
Harmony back to the forgotten proprieties.

"I think I must go," she said hurriedly, after a glance at his determinedly altruistic profile. "I must finish packing my things. The Portier has promised--"

"Go! Why, you haven't even told me your name!"

"Frau Schwarz will present you to-night," primly and rising.

Peter Byrne rose, too.

"I am going back with you. You should not go through that lonely yard alone after dark."

"Yard! How do you know that?"

Byrne was picking up the cheese, which he had thoughtlessly set on the heater, and which proved to be in an alarming state of dissolution. It took a moment to rewrap, and incidentally furnished an inspiration. He indicated it airily.

"Saw you this morning coming out--delicatessen shop across the street," he said glibly. And then, in an outburst of honesty which the girl's eyes seemed somehow to compel: "That's true, but it's not all the truth. I was on the bus last night, and when you got off alone I--I saw you were an American, and that's not a good neighborhood. I took the liberty of following you to your gate!"

He need not have been alarmed. Harmony was only grateful, and said so. And in her gratitude she made no objection to his suggestion that he see her safely to the old lodge and help her carry her hand-luggage and her violin to the pension. He paid the trifling score, and followed by many eyes in the room they went out into the crisp night together.

At the lodge the doors stood wide, and a vigorous sound of scrubbing showed that the Portier's wife was preparing for the inspection of possible new tenants. She was cleaning down the stairs by the light of a candle, and the steam of the hot water on the cold marble invested her like an aura. She stood aside to let them pass, and then went cumbersomely down the stairs to where, a fork in one hand and a pipe in the other, the Portier was frying chops for the evening meal.

"What have I said?" she demanded from the doorway. "Your angel is here."

"So!"

"She with whom you sing, old cracked voice! Whose money you refuse, because she reminds you of your opera singer! She is again here, and with a man!"

"It is the way of the young and beautiful--there is always a man," said the Portier, turning a chop.

His wife wiped her steaming hands on her apron and turned away, exasperated.

"It is the same man whom I last night saw at the gate," she threw back over her shoulder. "I knew it from the first; but you, great booby, can see nothing but red lips. Bah!"

Upstairs in the salon of Maria Theresa, lighted by one candle and freezing cold, in a stiff chair under the great chandelier Peter Byrne sat and waited and blew on his fingers. Down below, in the Street of Seven Stars, the arc lights swung in the wind.

CHAPTER IV

The supper that evening was even unusually bad. Frau Schwarz, much crimped and clad in frayed black satin, presided at the head of the long table. There were few, almost no Americans, the Americans flocking to good food at reckless prices in more fashionable pensions; to the Frau Gallitzenstein's, for instance, in the Kochgasse, where there was to be had real beefsteak, where turkeys were served at Thanksgiving and Christmas, and where, were one so minded, one might revel in whipped cream.

The Pension Schwarz, however, was not without adornment. In the center of the table was a large bunch of red cotton roses with wire stems and green paper leaves, and over the side-table, with its luxury of compote in tall glass dishes and its wealth of small hard cakes, there hung a framed motto which said, "Nicht Rauchen," "No Smoking,"--and which looked suspiciously as if it had once adorned a compartment of a railroad train.

Peter Byrne was early in the dining-room. He had made, for him, a careful toilet, which consisted of a shave and clean linen. But he had gone further: He had discovered, for the first time in the three months of its defection, a button missing from his coat, and had set about to replace it. He had cut a button from another coat, by the easy method of amputating it with a surgical bistoury, and had sewed it in its new position with a curved surgical needle and a few inches of sterilized catgut. The operation was slow and painful, and accomplished only with the aid of two cigarettes and an artery clip. When it was over he tied the ends in a surgeon's knot underneath and stood back to consider the result. It seemed neat enough, but conspicuous. After a moment or two of troubled thought he blacked the white catgut with a dot of ink and went on his way rejoicing.

Peter Byrne was entirely untroubled as to the wisdom of the course he had laid out for himself. He followed no consecutive line of thought as he dressed. When he was not smoking he was whistling, and when he was doing neither, and the needle proved refractory in his cold fingers, he was swearing to himself. For there was no fire in the
room. The materials for a fire were there, and a white tile stove, as cozy as an obelisk in a cemetery, stood in the corner. But fires are expensive, and hardly necessary when one sleeps with all one’s windows open--one window, to be exact, the room being very small--and spends most of the day in a warm and comfortable shambles called a hospital.

To tell the truth he was not thinking of Harmony at all, except subconsciously, as instance the button. He was going over, step by step, the technic of an operation he had seen that afternoon, weighing, considering, even criticizing. His conclusion, reached as he brushed back his hair and put away his sewing implements, was somewhat to the effect that he could have done a better piece of work with his eyes shut and his hands tied behind his back; and that if it were not for the wealth of material to work on he’d pack up and go home. Which brought him back to Harmony and his new responsibility. He took off the necktie he had absentely put on and hunted out a better one.

He was late at supper--an offense that brought a scowl from the head of the table, a scowl that he met with a cheerful smile. Harmony was already in her place. Seated between a little Bulgarian and a Jewish student from Galicia, she was almost immediately struggling in a sea of language, into which she struck out now and then tentatively, only to be again submerged. Byrne had bowed to her conventionally, even coldly, aware of the sharp eyes and tongues round the table, but Harmony did not understand. She had expected moral support from his presence, and failing that she sank back into the loneliness and depression of the day. Her bright color faded; her eyes looked tragic and rather aloof. She ate almost nothing, and left the table before the others had finished.

What curious little dramas of the table are played under unseeing eyes! What small tragedies begin with the soup and end with dessert! What heartaches with a salad! Small tragedies of averted eyes, looking away from appealing ones; lips that tremble with wretchedness nibbling daintily at a morsel; smiles that sear; foolish bits of talk that mean nothing except to one, and to that one everything! Harmony, freezing at Peter's formal bow and gazing obstinately ahead during the rest of the meal, or no nearer Peter than the red-paper roses, and Peter, showering the little Bulgarian next to her with detestable German in the hope of a glance. And over all the odor of cabbage salad, and the "Nicht Rauchen" sign, and an acrimonious discussion on eugenics between an American woman doctor named Gates and a German matron who had had fifteen children, and who reduced every general statement to a personal insult.

Peter followed Harmony as soon as he dared. Her door was closed, and she was playing very softly, so as to disturb no one. Defiantly, too, had he only known it, her small chin up and her color high again; playing the "Humoresque," of all things, in the hope, of course, that he would hear it and guess from her choice the wild merriment of her mood. Peter rapped once or twice, but obtained no answer, save that the "Humoresque" rose a bit higher; and, Dr. Gates coming along the hall just then, he was forced to light a cigarette to cover his pausing.

Dr. Gates, however, was not suspicious. She was a smallish woman of forty or thereabout, with keen eyes behind glasses and a masculine disregard of clothes, and she paused by Byrne to let him help her into her ulster.

"New girl, eh?" she said, with a birdlike nod toward the door. "Very gay, isn’t she, to have just finished a supper like that! Honestly, Peter, what are we going to do?"

"Growl and stay on, as we have for six months. There is better food, but not for our terms."

Dr. Gates sighed, and picking a soft felt hat from the table put it on with a single jerk down over her hair.

"Oh, darn money, anyhow!" she said. "Come and walk to the corner with me. I have a lecture."

Peter promised to follow in a moment, and hurried back to his room. There, on a page from one of his lecture notebooks, he wrote--

"Are you ill? Or have I done anything?"

P. B."

This with great care he was pushing under Harmony’s door when the little Bulgarian came along and stopped, smiling. He said nothing, nor did Peter, who rose and dusted his knees. The little Bulgarian spoke no English and little German. Between them was the wall of language. But higher than this barrier was the understanding of their common sex. He held out his hand, still smiling, and Peter, grinning sheepishly, took it. Then he followed the woman doctor down the stairs.

To say that Peter Byrne was already in love with Harmony would be absurd. She attracted him, as any beautiful and helpless girl attracts an unattracted man. He was much more concerned, now that he feared he had offended her, than he would have been without this fillip to his interest. But even his concern did not prevent his taking copious and intelligent notes at his lecture that night, or interfere with his enjoyment of the Stein of beer with which, after it was over, he washed down its involved German.

The engagement at Stewart’s irked him somewhat. He did not approve of Stewart exactly, not from any dislike of the man, but from a lack of fineness in the man himself--an intangible thing that seems to be a matter of that unfashionable essence, the soul, as against the clay; of the thing contained, by an inverse metonymy, for the container.
Boyer, a nerve man from Texas, met him on the street, and they walked to Stewart's apartment together. The frosty air and the rapid exercise combined to drive away Byrne's irritation; that, and the recollection that it was Saturday night and that to-morrow there would be no clinics, no lectures, no operations; that the great shambles would be closed down and that priests would read mass to convalescents in the chapels. He was whistling as he walked along.

Boyer, a much older man, whose wife had come over with him, stopped under a street light to consult his watch. "Almost ten!" he said. "I hope you don't mind, Byrne; but I told Jennie I was going to your pension. She detests Stewart."

"Oh, that's all right. She knows you're playing poker?"
"Yes. She doesn't object to poker. It's the other. You can't make a good woman understand that sort of thing."
"Thank God for that!"

After a moment of silence Byrne took up his whistling again. It was the "Humoresque."

Stewart's apartment was on the third floor. Admission at that hour was to be gained only by ringing, and Boyer touched the bell. The lights were still on, however, in the hallways, revealing not overclean stairs and, for a wonder, an electric elevator. This, however, a card announced as out of order. Boyer stopped and examined the card grimly.

"Out of order!" he observed. "Out of order since last spring, judging by that card. Vorwarts!"

They climbed easily, deliberately. At home in God's country Boyer played golf, as became the leading specialist of his county. Byrne, with a driving-arm like the rod of a locomotive, had been obliged to forswear the more expensive game for tennis, with a resulting muscular development that his slight stoop belied. He was as hard as nails, without an ounce of fat, and he climbed the long steep flights with an elasticity that left even Boyer a step or so behind.

Stewart opened the door himself, long German pipe in hand, his coat replaced by a worn smoking-jacket. The little apartment was thick with smoke, and from a room on the right came the click of chips and the sound of beer mugs on wood.

Marie, restored to good humor, came out to greet them, and both men bowed ceremoniously over her hand, clicking their heels together and bowing from the waist. Byrne sniffed.

"What do I smell, Marie?" he demanded. "Surely not sausages!"

Marie dimpled. It was an old joke, to be greeted as one greets an old friend. It was always sausages.

"Sausages, of a truth--fat ones."
"But surely not with mustard?"
"Ach, ja--englisch mustard."

Stewart and Boyer had gone on ahead. Marie laid a detaining hand on Byrne's arm.

"I was very angry with you to-day."
"With me?"

Like the others who occasionally gathered in Stewart's unconventional menage, Byrne had adopted Stewart's custom of addressing Marie in English, while she replied in her own tongue.

"Ja. I wished but to see nearer the American Fraulein's hat, and you--She is rich, so?"
"I really don't know. I think not."
"And good?"
"Yes, of course."

Marie was small; she stood, her head back, her eyes narrowed, looking up at Byrne. There was nothing evil in her face, it was not even hard. Rather, there was a sort of weariness, as of age and experience. She had put on a white dress, cut out at the neck, and above her collarbones were small, cuplike hollows. She was very thin.

"I was sad to-night," she said plaintively. "I wished to jump out the window."

Byrne was startled, but the girl was smiling at the recollection.

"And I made you feel like that?"
"Not you--the other Fraulein. I was dirt to her. I--" She stopped tragically, then sniffled.

"The sausages!" she cried, and gathering up her skirts ran toward the kitchen. Byrne went on into the sitting-room.

Stewart was a single man spending two years in post-graduate work in Germany and Austria, not so much because the Germans and Austrians could teach what could not be taught at home, but because of the wealth of clinical material. The great European hospitals, filled to overflowing, offered unlimited choice of cases. The contempt for human life of overpopulated cities, coupled with the extreme poverty and helplessness of the masses, combined to form that tragic part of the world which dies that others may live.

Stewart, like Byrne, was doing surgery, and the very lack of fineness which Byrne felt in the man promised something in his work, a sort of ruthlessness, a singleness of purpose, good or bad, an overwhelming egotism that in
his profession might only be a necessary self-reliance.

His singleness of purpose had, at the beginning of his residence in Vienna, devoted itself to making him comfortable. With the narrow means at his control he had the choice of two alternatives: To live, as Byrne was living, in a third-class pension, stewing in summer, freezing in winter, starving always; or the alternative he had chosen.

The Stewart apartment had only three rooms, but it possessed that luxury of luxuries, a bath. It was not a bath in the usual sense of water on tap, and shining nickel plate, but a bath for all that, where with premeditation and forethought one might bathe. The room had once been a fuel and store room, but now boasted a tin tub and a stove with a reservoir on top, where water might be heated to the boiling point, at the same time bringing up the atmosphere to a point where the tin tub sizzled if one touched it.

Behind the bathroom a tiny kitchen with a brick stove; next, a bedroom; the whole incredibly neat. Along one side of the wall a clothespress, which the combined wardrobes of two did not fill. And beyond that again, opening through an arch with a dingy chenille curtain, the sitting-room, now in chaotic disorder.

Byrne went directly to the sitting-room. There were four men already there: Stewart and Boyer, a pathology man named Wallace Hunter, doing research work at the general hospital, and a young piano student from Tennessee named MacLean. The cards had been already dealt, and Byrne stood by waiting for the hand to be played.

The game was a small one, as befitted the means of the majority. It was a regular Saturday night affair, as much a custom as the beer that sat in Steins on the floor beside each man, or as Marie's boiled Wiener sausages.

The blue chips represented a Krone, the white ones five Hellers. MacLean, who was hardly more than a boy, was winning, drawing in chips with quick gestures of his long pianist's fingers.

Byrne sat down and picked up his cards. Stewart was staying out, and so, after a glance, did he. The other three drew cards and fell to betting. Stewart leaned back and filled his long pipe, and after a second's hesitation Byrne turned to him.

"I don't know just what to say, Stewart," he began in an undertone. "I'm sorry. I didn't want to hurt Marie, but--"

"Oh, that's all right." Stewart drew at his pipe and bent forward to watch the game with an air of ending the discussion.

"Not at all. I did hurt her and I want to explain. Marie has been kind to me, and I like her. You know that."

"Don't be an ass!" Stewart turned on him sharply. "Marie is a little fool, that's all. I didn't know it was an American girl."

Byrne played in bad luck. His mind was not on the cards. He stayed out of the last hand, and with a cigarette wandered about the room. He glanced into the tidy bedroom and beyond, to where Marie hovered over the stove. She turned and saw him.

"Come," she called. "Watch the supper for me while I go down for more beer."

"But no," he replied, imitating her tone. "Watch the supper for me while I go down for more beer."

"I love thee," she called merrily. "Tell the Herr Doktor I love thee. And here is the pitcher."

When he returned the supper was already laid in the little kitchen. The cards were put away, and young MacLean and Wallace Hunter were replacing the cover and the lamp on the card-table. Stewart was orating from a pinnacle of proprietorshiop.

"Exactly," he was saying, in reply to something gone before; "I used to come here Saturday nights--used to come early and take a bath. Worthington had rented it furnished for a song. Used to sit in a corner and envy Worthington his bathtub, and that lamp there, and decent food, and a bed that didn't suffer from necrosis in the center. Then when he was called home I took it."

"Girl and all, wasn't it?"

"Girl and all. Old Worth said she was straight, and, by Jove, she is. He came back last fall on his wedding trip--he married a wealthy girl and came to see us. I was out, but Marie was here. There was the deuce to pay."

He lowered his voice. The men had gathered about him in a group.

"Jealous, eh?" from Hunter.

"Jealous? No! He tried to kiss her and she hit him--said he didn't respect her!"

"It's a curious code of honor," said Boyer thoughtfully. And indeed to none but Stewart did it seem amusing. This little girl of the streets, driven by God knows what necessity to make her own code and, having made it, living up to it with every fiber of her.

"Bitte zum speisen!" called Marie gayly from her brick stove, and the men trooped out to the kitchen.

The supper was spread on the table, with the pitcher of beer in the center. There were Swiss cheese and cold ham and rolls, and above all sausages and mustard. Peter drank a great deal of beer, as did the others, and sang German songs with a frightful accent and much vigor and sentiment, as also did the others.

Then he went back to the cold room in the Pension Schwarz, and told himself he was a fool to live alone when
one could live like a prince for the same sum properly laid out. He dropped into the hollow center of his bed, where his big figure fitted as comfortably as though it lay in a washtub, and before his eyes there came a vision of Stewart's flat and the slippers by the fire—which was eminently human.

However, a moment later he yawned, and said aloud, with considerable vigor, that he'd be damned if he would—which was eminently Peter Byrne. Almost immediately, with the bed coverings, augmented by his overcoat, drawn snug to his chin, and the better necktie swinging from the gasjet in the air from the opened window, Peter was asleep. For four hours he had entirely forgotten Harmony.

CHAPTER V

The peace of a gray Sunday morning hung like a cloud over the little Pension Schwarz. In the kitchen the elderly maid, with a shawl over her shoulders and stiffened fingers, made the fire, while in the dining-room the little chambermaid cut butter and divided it sparingly among a dozen breakfast trays—on each tray two hard rolls, a butter pat, a plate, a cup. On two trays Olga, with a glance over her shoulder, placed two butter pats. The mistress yet slept, but in the kitchen Katrina had a keen eye for butter—and a hard heart.

Katrina came to the door.
"The hot water is ready," she announced. "And the coffee also. Hast thou been to mass?"
"Ja."
"That is a lie." This quite on general principle, it being one of the cook's small tyrannies to exact religious observance from her underling, and one of Olga's Sunday morning's indulgences to oversleep and avoid the mass. Olga took the accusation meekly and without reply, being occupied at that moment in standing between Katrina and the extra pats of butter.
"For the lie," said Katrina calmly, "thou shalt have no butter this morning. There, the Herr Doktor rings for water. Get it, wicked one!"

Katrina turned slowly in the doorway.
"The new Fraulein is American?"
"Ja."
Katrina shrugged her shoulders.
"Then I shall put more water to heat," she said resignedly. "The Americans use much water. God knows it cannot be healthy!"

Olga filled her pitcher from the great copper kettle and stood with it poised in her thin young arms.
"The new Fraulein is very beautiful," she continued aloud. "Thinkest thou it is the hot water?"
"Is an egg more beautiful for being boiled?" demanded Katrina. "Go, and be less foolish. See, it is not the Herr Doktor who rings, but the new American."

Olga carried her pitcher to Harmony's door, and being bidden, entered. The room was frigid and Harmony, at the window in her nightgown, was closing the outer casement. The inner still swung open. Olga, having put down her pitcher, shivered.
"Surely the Fraulein has not slept with open windows?"
"Always with open windows." Harmony having secured the inner casement, was wrapping herself in the blue silk kimono with the faded butterflies. Merely to look at it made Olga shiver afresh. She shook her head.
"But the air of the night," she said, "it is full of mists and illnesses! Will you have breakfast now?"
"In ten minutes, after I have bathed."

Olga having put a match to the stove went back to the kitchen, shaking her head.
"They are strange, the Americans!" she said to latrine. "And if to be lovely one must bathe daily, and sleep with open windows—"

Harmony had slept soundly after all. Her pique at Byrne had passed with the reading of his note, and the sensation of his protection and nearness had been almost physical. In the virginal little apartment in the lodge of Maria Theresa the only masculine presence had been that of the Portier, carrying up coals at ninety Hellers a bucket, or of the accompanist who each alternate day had played for the Big Soprano to practice. And they had felt no deprivation, except for those occasional times when Scatchy developed a reckless wish to see the interior of a dancing-hall or one of the little theaters that opened after the opera.

But, as calmly as though she had never argued alone with a cabman or disputed the bill at the delicatessen shop, Harmony had thrown herself on the protection of this shabby big American whom she had met but once, and, having done so, slept like a baby. Not, of course, that she realized her dependence. She had felt very old and experienced and exceedingly courageous as she put out her light the night before and took a flying leap into the bed. She was still old and experienced, if a trifle less courageous, that Sunday morning.

Promptly in ten minutes Olga brought the breakfast, two rolls, two pats of butter—shades of the sleeping mistress and Katrina the thrifty—and a cup of coffee. On the tray was a bit of paper torn from a notebook—"
"Part of the prescription is an occasional walk in good company. Will you walk with me this afternoon? I would come in person to ask you, but am spending the morning in my bathrobe, while my one remaining American suit is being pressed.

"P. B."

Harmony got the ink and her pen from her trunk and wrote below:--

"You are very kind to me. Yes, indeed.

"H. W."

When frequent slamming of doors and steps along the passageway told Harmony that the pension was fully awake, she got out her violin. The idea of work obsessed her. To-morrow there would be the hunt for something to do to supplement her resources, this afternoon she had rashly promised to walk. The morning, then, must be given up to work. But after all she did little.

For an hour, perhaps, she practiced. The little Bulgarian paused outside her door and listened, rapt, his eyes closed. Peter Byrne, listening while he sorted lecture memoranda at his little table in bathrobe and slippers, absent[ely filed the little note with the others--where he came across it months later--next to a lecture on McBurney's Point, and spent a sad hour or so over it. Over all the sordid little pension, with its odors of food and stale air, its spotted napery and dusty artificial flowers, the music hovered, and made for the time all things lovely.

In her room across from Harmony's, Anna Gates was sewing, or preparing to sew. Her hair in a knob, her sleeves rolled up, the room in violent disorder, she was bending over the bed, cutting savagely at a roll of pink flannel. Because she was working with curved surgeon's scissors, borrowed from Peter, the cut edges were strangely scalloped. Her method as well as her tools was unique. Clearly she was intent on a body garment, for now and then she picked up the flannel and held it to her. Having thus, as one may say, got the line of the thing, she proceeded to cut again, jaw tight set, small veins on her forehead swelling, a small replica of Peter Byrne sewing a button on his coat.

After a time it became clear to her that her method was wrong. She rolled up the flannel viciously and flung it into a corner, and proceeded to her Sunday morning occupation of putting away the garments she had worn during the week, a vast and motley collection.

On the irritability of her mood Harmony's music had a late but certain effect. She made a toilet, a trifle less casual than usual, seeing that she put on her stays, and rather sheepishly picked up the bundle from the corner. She hunted about for a thimble, being certain she had brought one from home a year before, but failed to find it. And finally, bundle under her arm and smiling, she knocked at Harmony's door.

"Would you mind letting me sit with you?" she asked. "I'll not stir. I want to sew, and my room is such a mess!"

Harmony threw the door wide. "You will make me very happy, if only my practicing does not disturb you."

Dr. Gates came in and closed the door.

"I'll probably be the disturbing element," she said. "I'm a noisy sewer."

Harmony's immaculate room and radiant person put her in good humor immediately. She borrowed a thimble--not because she cared whether she had one or not, but because she knew a thimble was a part of the game--and settled herself in a corner, her ragged pieces in her lap. For an hour she plodded along and Harmony played. Then the girl put down her bow and turned to the corner. The little doctor was jerking at a knot in her thread.

"It's in the most damnable knot!" she said, and Harmony was suddenly aware that she was crying, and heartily ashamed of it.

"Please don't pay any attention to me," she implored. "I hate to sew. That's the trouble. Or perhaps it's not all the trouble. I'm a fool about music."

"Perhaps, if you hate to sew--"

"I hate a good many things, my dear, when you play like that. I hate being over here in this place, and I hate fleas and German cooking and clinics, and I hate being forty years old and as poor as a church-mouse and as ugly as sin, and I hate never having had any children!"

Harmony was very uncomfortable and just a little shocked. But the next moment Dr. Gates had wiped her eyes with a scrap of the flannel and was smiling up through her glasses.

"The plain truth really is that I have indigestion. I dare say I'm really weeping in anticipation over the Sunday dinner! The food's bad and I can't afford to live anywhere else. I'd take a room and do my own cooking, but what time have I?" She spread out the pieces of flannel on her knee. "Does this look like anything to you?"

"A petticoat, isn't it?"

"I didn't intend it as a petticoat."

"I thought, on account of the scallops--"

"Scallops!" Dr. Gates gazed at the painfully cut pink edges and from them to Harmony. Then she laughed, peal after peal of joyous mirth.
“Scallops!” she gasped at last. "Oh, my dear, if you'd seen me cutting 'em! And with Peter Byrne's scissors!"

Now here at last they were on common ground. Harmony, delicately flushed, repeated the name, clung to it conversationally, using little adroitnesses to bring the talk back to him. All roads of talk led to Peter--Peter's future, Peter's poverty, Peter's refusing to have his hair cut, Peter's encounter with a major of the guards, and the duel Peter almost fought. It developed that Peter, as the challenged, had had the choice of weapons, and had chosen fists, and that the major had been carried away. Dr. Gates grew rather weary of Peter at last and fell back on the pink flannel. She confided to Harmony that the various pieces, united, were to make a dressing-gown for a little American boy at the hospital. "Although," she commented, "it looks more like a chair cover."

Harmony offered to help her, and got out a sewing-box that was lined with a piece of her mother's wedding dress. And as she straightened the crooked edges she told the doctor about the wedding dress, and about the mother who had called her Harmony because of the hope in her heart. And soon, by dint of skillful listening, which is always better than questioning, the faded little woman doctor knew all the story.

She was rather aghast.
"But suppose you cannot find anything to do?"
"I must," simply.
"It's such a terrible city for a girl alone."
"I'm not really alone. I know you now."
"An impoverished spinster! Much help I shall be!"
"And there is Peter Byrne."
"Peter!" Dr. Gates sniffed. "Peter is poorer than I am, if there is any comparison in destitution!"

Harmony stiffened a trifle. Of course I do not mean money," she said. "There are such things as encouragement, and--and friendliness."
"One cannot eat encouragement," retorted Dr. Gates sagely. "And friendliness between you and any man--bah! Even Peter is only human, my dear."
"I am sure he is very good."
"So he is. He is very poor. But you are very attractive. There, I'm a skeptic about men, but you can trust Peter. Only don't fall in love with him. It will be years before he can marry. And don't let him fall in love with you. He probably will."

Whereupon Dr. Gates taking herself and her pink flannel off to prepare for lunch, Harmony sent a formal note to Peter Byrne, regretting that a headache kept her from taking the afternoon walk as she had promised. Also, to avoid meeting him, she did without dinner, and spent the afternoon crying herself into a headache that was real enough.

Anna Gates was no fool. While she made her few preparations for dinner she repented bitterly what she had said to Harmony. It is difficult for the sophistry of forty to remember and cherish the innocence of twenty. For illusions it is apt to substitute facts, the material for the spiritual, the body against the soul. Dr. Gates, from her school of general practice, had come to view life along physiological lines.

With her customary frankness she approached Peter after the meal.
"I've been making mischief, Peter. I been talking too much, as usual."
"Certainly not about me, Doctor. Out of my blameless life--"
"About you, as a representative member of your sex. I'm a fool."

Peter looked serious. He had put on the newly pressed suit and his best tie, and was looking distinguished and just now rather stern.
"To whom?"

"To the young Wells person. Frankly, Peter, I dare say at this moment she thinks you are everything you shouldn't be, because I said you were only human. Why it should be evil to be human, or human to be evil--"
"I cannot imagine," said Peter slowly, "the reason for any conversation about me."

"Nor I, when I look back. We seemed to talk about other things, but it always ended with you. Perhaps you were our one subject in common. Then she irritated me by her calm confidence. The world was good, everybody was good. She would find a safe occupation and all would be well."

"So you warned her against me," said Peter grimly.
"I told her you were human and that she was attractive. Shall I make 'way with myself?"
"Cui bono?" demanded Peter, smiling in spite of himself. "The mischief is done."

Dr. Gates looked up at him.
"I'm in love with you myself, Peter!" she said gratefully. "Perhaps it is the tie. Did you ever eat such a meal?"

CHAPTER VI

A very pale and dispirited Harmony it was who bathed her eyes in cold water that evening and obeyed little Olga's "Bitte sum speisen." The chairs round the dining-table were only half occupied--a free concert had taken
some, Sunday excursions others. The little Bulgarian, secretly considered to be a political spy, was never about on
this one evening of the week. Rumor had it that on these evenings, secreted in an attic room far off in the sixteenth
district, he wrote and sent off reports of what he had learned during the week--his gleanings from near-by tables in
coffee-houses or from the indiscreet hours after midnight in the cafe, where the Austrian military was wont to gather
and drink.

Into the empty chair beside Harmony Peter slid his long figure, and met a tremulous bow and silence. From the
head of the table Frau Schwarz was talking volubly--as if, by mere sound, to distract attention from the scantiness of
the meal. Under cover of the Babel Peter spoke to the girl. Having had his warning his tone was friendly, without a
hint of the intimacy of the day before.

"Better?"
"Not entirely. Somewhat."
"I wish you had sent Olga to me for some tablets. No one needs to suffer from headache, when five grains or so
of powder will help them."
"I am afraid of headache tablets."
"Not when your physician prescribes them, I hope!"

This was the right note. Harmony brightened a little. After all, what had she to do with the man himself? He had
constituted himself her physician. That was all.

"The next time I shall send Olga."
"Good!" he responded heartily; and proceeded to make such a meal as he might, talking little, and nursing, by a
careful indifference, her new-growing confidence.

It was when he had pushed his plate away and lighted a cigarette--according to the custom of the pension, which
accorded the "Nicht Rauchen" sign the same attention that it did to the portrait of the deceased Herr Schwarz--that
he turned to her again.

"I am sorry you are not able to walk. It promises a nice night."

Peter was clever. Harmony, expecting an invitation to walk, had nerved herself to a cool refusal. This took her
off guard.

"Then you do not prescribe air?"
"That's up to how you feel. If you care to go out and don't mind my going along as a sort of Old Dog Tray I
haven't anything else to do."

Dr. Gates, eating stewed fruit across the table, gave Peter a swift glance of admiration, which he caught and
acknowledged. He was rather exultant himself; certainly he had been adroit.

"I'd rather like a short walk. It will make me sleep," said Harmony, who had missed the by-play. "And Old Dog
Tray would be a very nice companion, I'm sure."

It is doubtful, however, if Anna Gates would have applauded Peter had she followed the two in their rambling
walk that night. Direction mattering little and companionship everything, they wandered on, talking of immaterial
things--of the rough pavements, of the shop windows, of the gray medieval buildings. They came to a full stop in
front of the Votivkirche, and discussed gravely the twin Gothic spires and the Benk sculptures on the facade. And
there in the open square, casting diplomacy to the winds, Peter Byrne turned to Harmony and blurted out what was
in his heart.

"Look here," he said, "you don't care a rap about spires. I don't believe you know anything about them. I don't.
What did that idiot of a woman doctor say to you to-day?"

"I don't know what you mean."
"You do very well. And I'm going to set you right. She starts out with two premises: I'm a man, and you're young
and attractive. Then she draws some sort of fool deduction. You know what I mean?"
"I don't see why we need discuss it," said poor Harmony. "Or how you know--"
"I know because she told me. She knew she had been a fool, and she came to me. I don't know whether it makes
any difference to you or not, but--we'd started out so well, and then to have it spoiled! My dear girl, you are
beautiful and I know it. That's all the more reason why, if you'll stand for it, you need some one to look after you--
I'll not say like a brother, because all the ones I ever knew were darned poor brothers to their sisters, but some one
who will keep an eye on you and who isn't going to fall in love with you."
"I didn't think you were falling in love with me; nor did I wish you to."
"Certainly not. Besides, I--" Here Peter Byrne had another inspiration, not so good as the first--"Besides, there is
somebody at home, you understand? That makes it all right, doesn't it?"
"A girl at home?"
"A girl," said Peter, lying manfully.
"How very nice!" said Harmony, and put out her hand. Peter, feeling all sorts of a cheat, took it, and got his
reward in a complete restoral of their former comradely relations. From abstractions of church towers and street paving they went, with the directness of the young, to themselves. Thereafter, during that memorable walk, they talked blissful personalities, Harmony's future, Peter's career, money--or its lack--their ambitions, their hopes, even--and here was intimacy, indeed!--their disappointments, their failures of courage, their occasional loss of faith in themselves.

The first real snow of the year was falling as they turned back toward the Pension Schwarz, a damp snow that stuck fast and melted with a chilly cold that had in it nothing but depression. The upper spires of the Votivkirche were hidden in a gray mist; the trees in the park took on, against the gloom of the city hall, a snowy luminosity. Save for an occasional pedestrian, making his way home under an umbrella, the streets were deserted. Byrne and Harmony had no umbrella, but the girl rejected his offer of a taxicab.

"We should be home too quickly," she observed naively. "And we have so much to say about me. Now I thought that perhaps by giving English lessons in the afternoon and working all morning at my music--"

And so on and on, square after square, with Peter listening gravely, his head bent. And square after square it was borne in on him what a precarious future stretched before this girl beside him, how very slender her resources, how more than dubious the outcome.

Poverty, which had only stimulated Peter Byrne in the past, ate deep into his soul that night.

Epochmaking as the walk had been, seeing that it had reestablished a friendship and made a working basis for future comradely relations, they were back at the corner of the Alserstrasse before ten. As they turned in at the little street, a man, lurching somewhat, almost collided with Harmony. He was a short, heavy-set person with a carefully curled mustache, and he was singing, not loudly, but with all his maudlin heart in his voice, the barcarolle from the "Tales" of Hoffmann. He saw Harmony, and still singing planted himself in her path. When Byrne would have pushed him aside Harmony caught his arm.

"It is only the Portier from the lodge," she said.

The Portier, having come to rest on a throaty and rather wavering note, stood before Harmony, bowing.

"The Fraulein has gone and I am very sad," he said thickly. "There is no more music, and Rosa has run away with a soldier from Salzburg who has only one lung."

"But think!" Harmony said in German. "No more practicing in the early dawn, no young ladies bringing mud into your newly scrubbed hall! It is better, is it not? All day you may rest and smoke!"

Byrne led Harmony past the drunken Portier, who turned with caution and bowed after them.

"Gute Nacht," he called. "Kuss die Hand, Fraulein. Four rooms and the salon and a bath of the finest."

As they went up the Hirschengasse they could hear him pursuing his unsteady way down the street and singing lustily. At the door of the Pension Schwarz Harmony paused.

"Do you mind if I ask one question?"

"You honor me, madam."

"Then--what is the name of the girl back home?"

Peter Byrne was suddenly conscious of a complete void as to feminine names. He offered, in a sort of panic, the first one he recalled:

"Emma."

"Emma! What a nice, old-fashioned name!" But there was a touch of disappointment in her voice.

Harmony had a lesson the next day. She was a favorite pupil with the master. Out of so much musical chaff he winnowed only now and then a grain of real ability. And Harmony had that. Scatchy and the Big Soprano had been right--she had the real thing.

The short half-hour lesson had a way with Harmony of lengthening itself to an hour or more, much to the disgust of the lady secretary in the anteroom. On that Monday Harmony had pleased the old man to one of his rare enthusiasms.

"Six months," he said, "and you will go back to your America and show them how over here we teach violin. I will a letter--letters-- give you, and you shall put on the programme, of your concerts that you are my pupil, is it not so?"

Harmony was drawing on her worn gloves; her hands trembled a little with the praise and excitement.

"If I can stay so long," she answered unsteadily.

"You must stay. Have I so long labored, and now before it is finished you talk of going! Gott im Himmel!"

"It is a matter of money. My father is dead. And unless I find something to do I shall have to go back."

The master had heard many such statements. They never ceased to rouse his ire against a world that had money for everything but music. He spent five minutes in indignant protest, then:

"But you are clever and young, child. You will find a way to stay. Perhaps I can now and then find a concert for you." It was a lure he had thrown out before, a hook without a bait. It needed no bait, being always eagerly
swallowed. "And no more talk of going away. I refuse to allow. You shall not go."

Harmony paid the lady secretary on her way out. The master was interested. He liked Harmony and he believed in her. But fifty Kronen is fifty Kronen, and South American beef is high of price. He followed Harmony into the outer room and bowed her out of his studio.

"The Fraulein has paid?" he demanded, turning sharply to the lady secretary.
"Always."
"After the lesson?"
"Ja, Herr Professor."
"It is better," said the master, "that she pay hereafter before the lesson."
"Ja, Herr Professor."

Whereupon the lady secretary put a red-ink cross before Harmony's name. There were many such crosses on the ledger.

CHAPTER VII
For three days Byrne hardly saw Harmony. He was off early in the morning, hurried back to the midday meal and was gone again the moment it was over. He had lectures in the evenings, too, and although he lingered for an hour or so after supper it was to find Harmony taken possession of by the little Bulgarian, seized with a sudden thirst for things American.

On the evening of the second day he had left Harmony, enmeshed and helpless in a tangle of language, trying to explain to the little Bulgarian the reason American women wished to vote. Byrne flung down the stairs and out into the street, almost colliding with Stewart.

They walked on together, Stewart with the comfortably rolling gait of the man who has just dined well, Byrne with his heavy, rather solid tread. The two men were not congenial, and the frequent intervals without speech between them were rather for lack of understanding than for that completeness of it which often fathers long silences. Byrne was the first to speak after their greeting.
"Marie all right?"
"Fine. Said if I saw you to ask you to supper some night this week."
"Thanks. Does it matter which night?"
"Any but Thursday. We're hearing 'La Boheme.'"
"Say Friday, then."
Byrne's tone lacked enthusiasm, but Stewart in his after-dinner mood failed to notice it.
"Have you thought any more about our conversation of the other night?"
"What was that?"
Stewart poked him playfully in the ribs.
"Wake up, Byrne!" he said. "You remember well enough. Neither the Days nor any one else is going to have the benefit of your assistance if you go on living the way you have been. I was at Schwarz's. It is the double drain there that tells on one--eating little and being eaten much. Those old walls are full of vermin. Why don't you take our apartment?"
"Yours?"
"Yes, for a couple of months. I'm through with Schleich and Breidau can't take me for two months. It's Marie's off season and we're going to Semmering for the winter sports. We're ahead enough to take a holiday. And if you want the flat for the same amount you are spending now, or less, you can have it, and--a home, old man."

Byrne was irritated, the more so that he realized that the offer tempted him. To his resentment was added a contempt of himself.
"Thanks," he said. "I think not."
"Oh, all right." Stewart was rather offended. "I can't do more than give you a chance."

They separated shortly after and Byrne went on alone. The snow of Sunday had turned to a fine rain which had lasted all of Monday and Tuesday. The sidewalks were slimy; wagons slid in the ooze of the streets; and the smoke from the little stoves in the street-cars followed them in depressing horizontal clouds. Cabmen sat and smoked in the interior of musty cabs. The women hod-carriers on a new building steamed like horses as they worked.

Byrne walked along, his head thrust down into his up-turned collar; moisture gathered on his face like dew, condensed rather than precipitated. And as he walked there came before him a vision of the little flat on the Hochgasse, with the lamp on the table, and the general air of warmth and cheer, and a figure presiding over the brick stove in the kitchen. Byrne shook himself like a great dog and turned in at the gate of the hospital. He was thoroughly ashamed of himself.

That week was full of disappointments for Harmony. Wherever she turned she faced a wall of indifference or, what was worse, an interest that frightened her. Like a bird in a cage she beat helplessly against barriers of language,
of strange customs, of stolidity that were not far from absolute cruelty.

She held to her determination, however, at first with hope, then, as the pension in advance and the lessons at fifty Kronen--also in advance,--went on, recklessly. She played marvelously those days, crying out through her violin the despair she had sealed her lips against. On Thursday, playing for the master, she turned to find him flourishing his handkerchief, and went home in a sort of daze, incredulous that she could have moved him to tears.

The little Bulgarian was frankly her slave now. He had given up the coffee-houses that he might spend that hour near her, on the chance of seeing her or, failing that, of hearing her play. At night in the Cafe Hungaria he sat for hours at a time, his elbows on the table, a bottle of native wine before him, and dreamed of her. He was very fat, the little Georgiev, very swarthy, very pathetic. The Balkan kettle was simmering in those days, and he had been set to watch the fire. But instead he had kindled a flame of his own, and was feeding it with stray words, odd glances, a bit of music, the curve of a woman's hair behind her ears. For reports he wrote verses in modern Greek, and through one of those inadvertences which make tragedy, the Minister of War down in troubled Bulgaria once received between the pages of a report in cipher on the fortifications of the Danube a verse in fervid hexameter that made even that grim official smile.

Harmony was quite unconscious. She went on her way methodically: so many hours of work, so many lessons at fifty Kronen, so many afternoons searching for something to do, making rounds of shops where her English might be valuable.

And after a few weeks Peter Byrne found time to help. After one experience, when Harmony left a shop with flaming face and tears in her eyes, he had thought it best to go with her. The first interview, under Peter's grim eyes, was a failure. The shopkeeper was obviously suspicious of Peter. After that, whenever he could escape from clinics, Peter went along, but stayed outside, smoking his eternal cigarette, and keeping a watchful eye on things inside the shop.

Only once was he needed. At that time, suspecting that all was not well, from the girl's eyes and the leer on the shopkeeper's face, he had opened the door in time to hear enough. He had lifted the proprietor bodily and flung him with a crash into a glass showcase of ornaments for the hair. Then, entirely cheerful and happy, and unmolested by the frightened clerks, he led Harmony outside and in a sort of atavistic triumph bought her a bunch of valley lilies.

Nevertheless, in his sane moments, Peter knew that things were very bad, indeed. He was still not in love with the girl. He analyzed his own feeling very carefully, and that was his conclusion. Nevertheless he did a quixotic thing--which was Peter, of course, all over.

He took supper with Stewart and Marie on Friday, and the idea came to him there. Hardly came to him, being Marie's originally. The little flat was cozy and bright. Marie, having straightened her kitchen, brought in a waist she was making and sat sewing while the two men talked. Their conversation was technical, a new extirpation of the thyroid gland, a recent nephrectomy.

In her curious way Marie liked Peter and respected him. She struggled with the technicalities of their talk as she sewed, finding here and there a comprehensive bit. At those times she sat, needle poised, intelligent eyes on the speakers, until she lost herself again in the mazes of their English.

At ten o'clock she rose and put away her sewing. Peter saw her get the stone pitcher and knew she was on her way for the evening beer. He took advantage of her absence to broach the matter of Harmony.

"She's up against it, as a matter of fact," he finished. "It ought to be easy enough for her to find something, but it isn't."

"I hardly saw her that day in the coffee-house; but she's rather handsome, isn't she?"

"That's one of the difficulties. Yes."

Stewart smoked and reflected. "No friends here at all?"

"None. There were three girls at first. Two have gone home."

"Could she teach violin?"

"I should think so."

"Aren't there any kids in the American colony who want lessons? There's usually some sort of infant prodigy ready to play at any entertainments of the Doctors' Club."

"They don't want an American teacher, I fancy; but I suppose I could put a card up in the club rooms. Damn it all!" cried Peter with a burst of honest resentment, "why do I have to be poor?"

"If you were rolling in gold you could hardly offer her money, could you?"

Peter had not thought of that before. It was the only comfort he found in his poverty. Marie had brought in the beer and was carefully filling the mugs. "Why do you not marry her?" she asked unexpectedly. "Then you could take this flat. We are going to Semmering for the winter sports. I would show her about the stove."

"Marry her, of course!" said Peter gravely. "Just pick her up and carry her to church! The trifling fact that she does not wish to marry me need have nothing to do with it."
"Ah, but does she not wish it?" demanded Marie. "Are you so certain, stupid big one? Do not women always love you?"

Ridiculous as the thought was, Peter pondered it as he went back to the Pension Schwarz. About himself he was absurdly modest, almost humble. It had never occurred to him that women might care for him for himself. In his struggling life there had been little time for women. But about himself as the solution of a problem—that was different.

He argued the thing over. In the unlikely contingency of the girl's being willing, was Stewart right—could two people live as cheaply as one? Marie was an Austrian and knew how to manage—that was different. And another thing troubled him. He dreaded to disturb the delicate adjustment of their relationship; the terra incognita of a young girl's mind daunted him. There was another consideration which he put resolutely in the back of his mind—his career. He had seen many a promising one killed by early marriage, men driven to the hack work of the profession by the scourge of financial necessity. But that was a matter of the future; the necessity was immediate.

The night was very cold. Gusts of wind from the snow-covered Schneeberg drove along the streets, making each corner a fortress defended by the elements, a battlement to be seized, lost, seized again. Peter Byrne battled valiantly but mechanically. And as he fought he made his decision.

He acted with characteristic promptness. Possibly, too, he was afraid of the strength of his own resolution. By morning sanity might prevail, and in cold daylight he would see the absurdity of his position. He almost ran up the winding staircase. At the top his cold fingers fumbled the key and he swore under his breath. He slammed the door behind him. Peter always slammed doors, and had an apologetic way of opening the door again and closing it gently, as if to show that he could. Harmony's room was dark, but he had surprised her once into a confession that when she was very downhearted she liked to sit in the dark and be very blue indeed. So he stopped and knocked. There was no reply, but from Dr. Gates's room across there came a hum of conversation. He knew at once that Harmony was there.

Peter hardly hesitated. He took off his soft hat and ran a hand over his hair, and he straightened his tie. These preliminaries to a proposal of marriage being disposed of, he rapped at the door.

Anna Gates opened it. She wore a hideous red-flannel wrapper, and in deference to Harmony a thimble. Her flat breast was stuck with pins, and pinkish threads revealed the fact that the bathrobe was still under way.

"Peter!" she cried. "Come in and get warm."

Harmony, in the blue kimono, gave a little gasp, and flung round her shoulders the mass of pink on which she had been working.

"Please go out!" she said. "I am not dressed."

"You are covered," returned Anna Gates. "That's all that any sort of clothing can do. Don't mind her, Peter, and sit on the bed. Look out for pins!"

Peter, however, did not sit down. He stood just inside the closed door and stared at Harmony—Harmony in the red light from the little open door of the stove; Harmony in blue and pink and a bit of white petticoat; Harmony with her hair over her shoulders and tied out of her eyes with an encircling band of rosy flannel.

"Do sit!" cried Anna Gates. "You fill the room so. Bless you, Peter, what a collar!"

No man likes to know his collar is soiled, especially on the eve of proposing marriage to a pink and blue and white vision. Peter, seated now on the bed, writhed.

"I rapped at Miss Wells's door," he said. "You were not there."

This last, of course, to Harmony.

Anna Gates sniffed.

"Naturally!"

"I had something to say to you. I--I dare say it is hardly pension etiquette for you to go over to your room and let me say it there?"

Harmony smiled above the flannel.

"Could you call it through the door?"

"Hardly."

"Fiddlesticks!" said Dr. Gates, rising. "I'll go over, of course, but not for long. There's no fire."

With her hand on the knob, however, Harmony interfered.

"Please!" she implored. "I am not dressed and I'd rather not." She turned to Peter. "You can say it before her, can't you? She--I have told her all about things."

Peter hesitated. He felt ridiculous for the second time that night. Then:--

"It was merely an idea I had. I saw a little apartment furnished—you could learn to use the stove, unless, of course, you don't like housekeeping—and food is really awfully cheap. Why, at these delicatessen places and bakeshops--"
Here he paused for breath and found Dr. Gates's quizzical glance fixed on him, and Harmony's startled eyes.

"What I am trying to say," he exploded, "is that I believe if you would marry me it would solve some of your troubles anyhow." He was talking for time now, against Harmony's incredulous face. "You'd be taking on others, of course. I'm not much and I'm as poor--well, you know. It--it was the apartment that gave me the idea--"

"And the stove!" said Harmony; and suddenly burst into joyous laughter. After a rather shocked instant Dr. Gates joined her. It was real mirth with Harmony, the first laugh of days, that curious laughter of women that is not far from tears.

Peter sat on the bed uncomfortably. He grinned sheepishly and made a last feeble attempt to stick to his guns.

"I mean it. You know I'm not in love with you or you with me, of course. But we are such a pair of waifs, and I thought we might get along. Lord knows I need some one to look after me!"

"And Emma?"

"There is no Emma. I made her up."

Harmony sobered at that.

"It is only"--she gasped a little for breath--"it is only your--your transparency, Peter." It was the first time she had called him Peter. "You know how things are with me and you want to help me, and out of your generosity you are willing to take on another burden. Oh, Peter!"

And here, Harmony being an emotional young person, the tears beat the laughter to the surface and had to be wiped away under the cover of mirth.

Anna Gates, having recovered herself, sat back and surveyed them both sternly through her glasses.

"Once for all," she said brusquely, "let such foolishness end. Peter, I am ashamed of you. Marriage is not for you--not yet, not for a dozen years. Any man can saddle himself with a wife; not every man can be what you may be if you keep your senses and stay single. And the same is true for you, girl. To tide over a bad six months you would sacrifice the very thing you are both struggling for?"

"I'm sure we don't intend to do it," replied Harmony meekly.

"Not now. Some day you may be tempted. When that time comes, remember what I say. Matrimonially speaking, each of you is fatal to the other. Now go away and let me alone. I'm not accustomed to proposals of marriage."

It was in some confusion of mind that Peter Byrne took himself off to the bedroom with the cold tiled stove and the bed that was as comfortable as a washtub. Undeniably he was relieved. Also Harmony's problem was yet unsolved. Also she had called him Peter.

Also he had said he was not in love with her. Was he so sure of that?

At midnight, just as Peter, rolled in the bedclothing, had managed to warm the cold concavity of his bed and had dozed off, Anna Gates knocked at his door.

"Yes?" said Peter, still comfortably asleep.

"It is Dr. Gates."

"Sorry, Doctor--have to 'xcuse me," mumbled Peter from the blanket.

"Peter!"

Peter roused to a chilled and indignant consciousness and sat up in bed.

"Well?"

"Open the door just a crack."

Resignedly Peter crawled out of bed, carefully turning the coverings up to retain as much heat as possible. An icy blast from the open window blew round him, setting everything movable in the little room to quivering. He fumbled in the dark for his slippers, failed to find them, and yawning noisily went to the door.

Anna Gates, with a candle, was outside. Her short, graying hair was out of its hard knot, and hung in an equally uncompromising six-inch plait down her back. She had no glasses, and over the candle-frame she peered shortsightedly at Peter.

"It's about Jimmy," she said. "I don't know what's got into me, but I've forgotten for three days. It's a good bit more than time for a letter."

"Great Scott!"

"Both yesterday and to-day he asked for it and to-day he fretted a little. The nurse found him crying."

"The poor little devil!" said Peter contritely. "Overdue, is it? I'll fix it to-night."

"Leave it under the door where I can get it in the morning. I'm off at seven."

"The envelope?"

"Here it is. And take my candle. I'm going to bed."

That was at midnight or shortly after. Half after one struck from the twin clocks of the Votivkirche and echoed from the Stephansplatz across the city. It found Peter with the window closed, sitting up in bed, a candle balanced on
one knee, a writing-tablet on the other.

He was writing a spirited narrative of a chamois hunt in which he had taken part that day, including a detailed description of the quarry, which weighed, according to Peter, two hundred and fifty pounds, Peter being strong on imagination and short on facts as regards the Alpine chamois. Then, trying to read the letter from a small boy's point of view and deciding that it lacked snap, he added by way of postscript a harrowing incident of avalanche, rope, guide, and ice axe. He ended in a sort of glow of authorship, and after some thought took fifty pounds off the chamois.

The letter finished, he put it in a much-used envelope addressed to Jimmy Conroy—an envelope that stamped the whole episode as authentic, bearing as it did an undecipherable date and the postmark of a tiny village in the Austrian Tyrol.

It was almost two when Peter put out the candle and settled himself to sleep.

It was just two o'clock when the night nurse, making rounds in her ward in the general hospital, found a small boy very much awake on his pillow, and taking off her felt slipper shook it at him in pretended fury.

"Now, thou bad one!" she said. "Awake, when the Herr Doktor orders sleep! Shall I use the slipper?"

The boy replied in German with a strong English accent.

"I cannot sleep. Yesterday the Fraulein Elisabet said that in the mountains there are accidents, and that sometimes—"

"The Fraulein Elisabet is a great fool. Tomorrow comes thy letter of a certainty. The post has been delayed with great snows. Thy father has perhaps captured a great boar, or a—a chamois, and he writes of it."

"Do chamois have horns?"

"Ja. Great horns—so."

"He will send them to me! And there are no accidents?"

"None. Now sleep, or—the slipper."

CHAPTER VIII

So far Harmony's small world in the old city had consisted of Scatchy and the Big Soprano, Peter, and Anna Gates, with far off in the firmament the master. Scatchy and the Big Soprano had gone, weeping anxious postcards from every way station it is true, but nevertheless gone. Peter and Anna Gates remained, and the master as long as her funds held out. To them now she was about to add Jimmy.

The bathrobe was finished. Out of the little doctor's chaos of pink flannel Harmony had brought order. The result, masculine and complete even to its tassels and cord of pink yarn, was ready to be presented. It was with mingled emotions that Anna Gates wrapped it up and gave it to Harmony the next morning.

"He hasn't been so well the last day or two," she said. "He doesn't sleep much—that's the worst of those heart conditions. Sometimes, while I've been working on this thing, I've wondered—Well, we're making a fight anyhow. And better take the letter, too, Harry. I might forget and make lecture notes on it, and if I spoil that envelope—"

Harmony had arranged to carry the bathrobe to the hospital, meeting the doctor there after her early clinic. She knew Jimmy's little story quite well. Anna Gates had told it to her in detail.

"Just one of the tragedies of the world, my dear," she had finished. "You think you have a tragedy, but you have youth and hope; I think I have my own little tragedy, because I have to go through the rest of life alone, when taken in time I'd have been a good wife and mother. Still I have my work. But this little chap, brought over here by a father who hoped to see him cured, and spent all he had to bring him here, and then—died. It gets me by the throat."

"And the boy does not know?" Harmony had asked, her eyes wide.

"No, thanks to Peter. He thinks his father is still in the mountains. When we heard about it Peter went up and saw that he was buried. It took about all the money there was. He wrote home about it, too, to the place they came from. There has never been any reply. Then ever since Peter has written these letters. Jimmy lives for them."

Peter! It was always Peter. Peter did this. Peter said that. Peter thought thus. A very large part of Harmony's life was Peter in those days.

She was thinking of him as she waited at the gate of the hospital for Anna Gates, thinking of his shabby gray suit and unkempt hair, of his letter that she carried to Jimmy Conroy, of his quixotic proposal of the night before. Of the proposal, most of all—it was so eminently characteristic of Peter, from the conception of the plan to its execution. Harmony's thought of Peter was very tender that morning as she stood in the arched gateway out of reach of the wind from the Schneeberg. The tenderness and the bright color brought by the wind made her very beautiful. Little Marie, waiting across the Alserstrasse for a bus, and stamping from one foot to the other to keep warm, recognized and admired her. After all, the American women were chic, she decided, although some of the doctors had wives of a dowdiness—Himmel! And she could copy the Fraulein's hat for two Kronen and a bit of ribbon she possessed.

The presentation of the bathrobe was a success. Six nurses and a Dozent with a red beard stood about and watched Jimmy put into it, and the Dozent, who had been engaged for five years and could not marry because the
hospital board forbade it, made a speech for Jimmy in awe-inspiring German, ending up with a poem that was intended to be funny, but that made the nurses cry. From which it will be seen that Jimmy was a great favorite.

During the ceremony, for such it was, the Germans loving a ceremony, Jimmy kept his eyes on the letter in Anna Gates's hand and waited. That the letter had come was enough. He lay back in anticipatory joy, and let himself be talked over, and bathrobed, and his hair parted Austrian fashion and turned up over a finger, which is very Austrian indeed. He liked Harmony. The girl caught his eyes on her more than once. He interrupted the speech once to ask her just what part of the robe she had made, and whether she had made the tassel. When she admitted the tassel, his admiration became mixed with respect.

It was a bright day, for a marvel. Sunlight came through the barred window behind Jimmy's bed, and brought into dazzling radiance the pink bathrobe, and Harmony's eyes, and fat Nurse Elisabet's white apron. It lay on the bedspread in great squares, outlined by the shadows of the window bars. Now and then the sentry, pacing outside, would advance as far as Jimmy's window, and a warlike silhouette of military cap and the upper end of a carbine would appear on the coverlet. These events, however, were rare, the sentry preferring the shelter of the gateway and the odor of boiling onions from the lodge just inside.

The Dozent retired to his room for the second breakfast; the nurses went about the business of the ward; Dr. Anna Gates drew a hairpin from her hair and made a great show of opening the many times opened envelope.

"The letter at last!" she said. "Shall I read it or will you?"
"You read it. It takes me so long. I'll read it all day, after you are gone. I always do."

Anna Gates read the letter. She read aloud poor Peter's first halting lines, when he was struggling against sleep and cold. They were mainly an apology for the delay. Then forgetting discomfort in the joy of creation, he became more comfortable. The account of the near-accident was wonderfully graphic; the description of the chamois was fervid, if not accurate. But consternation came with the end.

The letter apparently finished, there was yet another sheet. The doctor read on.

"For Heaven's sake," said Peter's frantic postscript, "find out how much a medium-sized chamois--"
Dr. Gates stopped "--ought to weigh," was the rest of it, "and fix it right in the letter. The kid's too smart to be fooled and I never saw a chamois outside of a drug store. They have horns, haven't they?"
"That's funny!" said Jimmy Conway.

"That was one of my papers slipped in by mistake," remarked Dr. Gates, with dignity, and flashing a wild appeal for help to Harmony.

"How did one of your papers get in when it was sealed?"
"I think," observed Harmony, leaning forward, "that little boys must not ask too many questions, especially when Christmas is only six weeks off."
"I know! He wants to send me the horns the way he sent me the boar's tusks."

For Peter, having in one letter unwisely recorded the slaughter of a boar, had been obliged to ransack Vienna for a pair of tusks. The tusks had not been so difficult. But horns!

Jimmy was contented with his solution and asked no more questions. The morning's excitement had tired him, and he lay back. Dr. Gates went to hold a whispered consultation with the nurse, and came back, looking grave.

The boy was asleep, holding the letter in his thin hands.

The visit to the hospital was a good thing for Harmony--to find some one worse off than she was, to satisfy that eternal desire of women to do something, however small, for some one else. Her own troubles looked very small to her that day as she left the hospital and stepped out into the bright sunshine.

She passed the impassive sentry, then turned and went back to him.
"Do you wish to do a very kind thing?" she asked in German.

Now the conversation of an Austrian sentry consists of yea, yea, and nay, nay, and not always that. But Harmony was lovely and the sun was moderating the wind. The sentry looked round; no one was near.
"What do you wish?"
"Inside that third window is a small boy and he is very ill. I do not think--perhaps he will never be well again. Could you not, now and then, pass the window? It pleases him."
"Pass the window! But why?"
"In America we see few of our soldiers. He likes to see you and the gun."

"Ah, the gun!" He smiled and nodded in comprehension, then, as an officer appeared in the door of a coffee-house across the street, he stiffened into immobility and stared past Harmony into space. But the girl knew he would do as she had desired.

That day brought good luck to Harmony. The wife of one of the professors at the hospital desired English conversation at two Kronen an hour.

Peter brought the news home at noon, and that afternoon Harmony was engaged. It was little enough, but it was
something. It did much more than offer her two Kronen an hour; it gave her back her self-confidence, although the immediate result was rather tragic.

The Frau Professor Bergmeister, infatuated with English and with Harmony, engaged her, and took her first two Kronen worth that afternoon. It was the day for a music-lesson. Harmony arrived five minutes late, panting, hat awry, and so full of the Frau Professor Bergmeister that she could think of nothing else.

Obedient to orders she had placed the envelope containing her fifty Kronen before the secretary as she went in. The master was out of humor. Should he, the teacher of the great Koert, be kept waiting for a chit of a girl--only, of course, he said "das Kindchen" or some other German equivalent for chit--and then have her come into the sacred presence breathless, and salute him between gasps as the Frau Professor Bergmeister?

Being excited and now confused by her error, and being also rather tremulous with three flights of stairs at top speed, Harmony dropped her bow. In point of heinousness this classes with dropping one's infant child from an upper window, or sitting on the wrong side of a carriage when with a lady.

The master, thus thrice outraged, rose slowly and glared at Harmony. Then with a lordly gesture to her to follow he stalked to the outer room, and picking up the envelope with the fifty Kronen held it out to her without a word.

Harmony's world came crashing about her ears. She stared stupidly at the envelope in her hand, at the master's retreating back.

Two girl students waiting their turn, envelopes in hand, giggled together. Harmony saw them and flushed scarlet.

But the lady secretary touched her arm.

"It does not matter, Fraulein. He does so sometimes. Always he is sorry. You will come for your next lesson, not so? and all will be well. You are his well-beloved pupil. To-night he will not eat for grief that he has hurt you."

The ring of sincerity in the shabby secretary's voice was unmistakable. Her tense throat relaxed. She looked across at the two students who had laughed. They were not laughing now. Something of fellowship and understanding passed between them in the glance. After all, it was in the day's work--would come to one of them next, perhaps. And they had much in common--the struggle, their faith, the everlasting loneliness, the little white envelopes, each with its fifty Kronen.

Vaguely comforted, but with the light gone out of her day of days, Harmony went down the three long flights and out into the brightness of the winter day.

On the Ring she almost ran into Peter. He was striding toward her, giving a definite impression of being bound for some particular destination and of being behind time. That this was not the case was shown by the celerity with which, when he saw Harmony, he turned about and walked with her.

"I had an hour or two," he explained, "and I thought I'd walk. But walking is a social habit, like drinking. I hate to walk alone. How about the Frau Professor?"

"She has taken me on. I'm very happy. But, Dr. Byrne--"

"You called me Peter last night."

"That was different. You had just proposed to me."

"Oh, if that's all that's necessary--" He stopped in the center of the busy Ring with every evident intention of proposing again.

"Please, Peter!"

"Aha! Victory! Well, what about the Frau Professor Bergmeister?"

"She asks so many questions about America; and I cannot answer them."

"For instance?"

"Well, taxes now. She's very much interested in taxes."

"Never owned anything taxable except a dog--and that wasn't a tax anyhow; it was a license. Can't you switch her on to medicine or surgery, where I'd be of some use?"

"She says to-morrow we'll talk of the tariff and customs duties."

"Well, I've got something to say on that." He pulled from his overcoat pocket a largish bundle--Peter always bulged with packages--and held it out for her to see. "Tell the Frau Professor Bergmeister with my compliments," he said, "that because some idiot at home sent me five pounds of tobacco, hearing from afar my groans over the tobacco here, I have passed from mere financial stress to destitution. The Austrian customs have taken from me to-day the equivalent of ten dollars in duty. I offered them the tobacco on bended knee, but they scorned it."

"Really, Peter?"

"Really."

Under this lightness Harmony sensed the real anxiety. Ten dollars was fifty Kronen, and fifty Kronen was a great deal of money. She reached over and patted his arm.

"You'll make it up in some way. Can't you cut off some little extravagance?"

"I might cut down on my tailor bills." He looked down at himself whimsically. "Or on ties. I'm positively
reckless about ties!"

They walked on in silence. A detachment of soldiery, busy with that eternal military activity that seems to get nowhere, passed on a dog-trot. Peter looked at them critically.

"Bosnians," he observed. "Raw, half-fed troops from Bosnia, nine out of ten of them tubercular. It's a rotten game, this military play of Europe. How's Jimmy?"

"We left him very happy with your letter."

Peter flushed. "I expect it was pretty poor stuff," he apologized. "I've never seen the Alps except from a train window, and as for a chamois--"

"He says his father will surely send him the horns."

Peter groaned.

"Of course!" he said. "Why, in Heaven's name, didn't I make it an eagle? One can always buy a feather or two. But horns? He really liked the letter?"

"He adored it. He went to sleep almost at once with it in his hands."

Peter glowed. The small irritation of the custom-house forgotten, he talked of Jimmy; of what had been done and might still be done, if only there were money; and from Jimmy he talked boy. He had had a boys' club at home during his short experience in general practice. Boys were his hobby.

"Scum of the earth, most of them," he said, his plain face glowing. "Dirty little beggars off the street. At first they stole my tobacco; and one of them pawned a medical book or two! Then they got to playing the game right. By Jove, Harmony, I wish you could have seen them! Used to line 'em up and make 'em spell, and the two best spellers were allowed to fight it out with gloves--my own method, and it worked. Spell! They'd spell their heads off to get a chance at the gloves. Gee, how I hated to give them up!"

This was a new Peter, a boyish individual Harmony had never met before. For the first time it struck her that Peter was young. He had always seemed rather old, solid and dependable, the fault of his elder brother attitude to her, no doubt. She was suddenly rather shy, a bit aloof. Peter felt the change and thought she was bored. He talked of other things.

A surprise was waiting for them in the cold lower hallway of the Pension Schwarz. A trunk was there, locked and roped, and on the trunk, in ulster and hat, sat Dr. Gates. Olga, looking rather frightened, was coming down with a traveling-bag. She put down the bag and scuttled up the staircase like a scared rabbit. The little doctor was grim.

"I've been waiting for you two," she flung at them. "I've had a terrific row upstairs and I'm going. That woman's a devil!"

It had been a bad day for Harmony, and this new development, after everything else, assumed the proportions of a crisis. She had clung, at first out of sheer loneliness and recently out of affection, to the sharp little doctor with her mannish affectations, her soft and womanly heart.

"Sit down, child." Anna Gates moved over on the trunk. "You are fagged out. Peter, will you stop looking murderous and listen to me? How much did it cost the three of us to live in this abode of virtue?"

It was simple addition. The total was rather appalling.

"I thought so. Now this is my plan. It may not be conventional, but it will be respectable enough to satisfy anybody. And it will be cheaper, I'm sure of that: We are all going out to the hunting-lodge of Maria Theresa, and Harmony shall keep house for us!"

CHAPTER IX

It was the middle of November when Anna Gates, sitting on her trunk in the cold entrance hall on the Hirschengasse, flung the conversational bomb that left empty three rooms in the Pension Schwarz.

Mid-December found Harmony back and fully established in the lodge of Maria Theresa on the Street of Seven Stars--back, but with a difference. True, the gate still swung back and forward on rusty hinges, obedient to every whim of the December gales; but the casement windows in the salon no longer creaked or admitted drafts, thanks to Peter and a roll of rubber weather-casing. The grand piano, which had been Scatchy's rented extravagance, had gone never to return, and in its corner stood a battered but still usable upright. Under the great chandelier sat a table with an oil lamp, and evening and morning the white-tiled stove gleamed warm with fire. On the table by the lamp were the combined medical books of Peter and Anna Gates, and an ash-tray which also they used in common.

Shabby still, of course, bare, almost denuded, the salon of Maria Theresa. But at night, with the lamp lighted and the little door of the stove open, and perhaps, when the dishes from supper had been washed, with Harmony playing softly, it took resolution on Peter's part to put on his overcoat and face a lecture on the resection of a rib or a discussion of the function of the pituitary body.

The new arrangement had proved itself in more ways than one not only greater in comfort, but in economy. Food was amazingly cheap. Coal, which had cost ninety Hellers a bucket at the Pension Schwarz, they bought in quantity
and could afford to use lavishly. Oil for the lamp was a trifle. They dined on venison now and then, when the shop across boasted a deer from the mountains. They had other game occasionally, when Peter, carrying home a mysterious package, would make them guess what it might contain. Always on such occasions Harmony guessed rabbits. She knew how to cook rabbits, and some of the other game worried her.

For Harmony was the cook. It had taken many arguments and much coaxing to make Peter see it that way. In vain Harmony argued the extravagance of Rosa, now married to the soldier from Salzburg with one lung, or the tendency of the delicatessen seller to weigh short if one did not watch him. Peter was firm.

It was Dr. Gates, after all, who found the solution.

"Don't be too obstinate, Peter," she admonished him. "The child needs occupation; she can't practice all day. You and I can keep up the financial end well enough, reduced as it is. Let her keep house to her heart's content. That can be her contribution to the general fund."

And that eventually was the way it settled itself, not without demur from Harmony, who feared her part was too small, and who irritated Anna almost to a frenzy by cleaning the apartment from end to end to make certain of her usefulness.

A curious little household surely, one that made the wife of the Portier shake her head, and speak much beneath her breath with the wife of the brushmaker about the Americans having queer ways and not as the Austrians.

The short month had seen a change in all of them. Peter showed it least of all, perhaps. Men feel physical discomfort less keenly than women, and Peter had been only subconsciously wretched. He had gained a pound or two in flesh, perhaps, and he was unmistakably tidier. Anna Gates was growing round and rosy, and Harmony had trimmed her a hat. But the real change was in Harmony herself.

The girl had become a woman. Who knows the curious psychology by which such changes come—not in a month or a year; but in an hour, a breath. One moment Harmony was a shy, tender creature, all emotion, quivering at a word, aloof at a glance, prone to occasional introspection and mysterious daydreams; the next she was a young woman, tender but not shyly so, incredibly poised, almost formidably dignified on occasion, but with little girlish lapses into frolic and high spirits.

The transition moment with Harmony came about in this wise: They had been settled for three weeks. The odor of stewing cabbages at the Pension Schwarz had retired into the oblivion of lost scents, to be recalled, along with its accompanying memory of discomfort, with every odor of stewing cabbages for years to come. At the hospital Jimmy had had a bad week again. It had been an anxious time for all of them. In vain the sentry had stopped outside the third window and smiled and nodded through it; in vain—when the street was deserted and there was none to notice—he went through a bit of the manual of arms on the pavement outside, ending by setting his gun down with a martial and ringing clang.

In vain had Peter exhausted himself in literary efforts, climbing unheard-of peaks, taking walking-tours through such a Switzerland as never was, shooting animals of various sorts, but all hornless, as he carefully emphasized.

And now Jimmy was better again. He was propped up in bed, and with the aid of Nurse Elisabet he had cut out a paper sentry and set it in the barred window. The real sentry had been very much astonished; he had almost fallen over backward. On recovering he went entirely through the manual of arms, and was almost seen by an Oberst-lieutenant. It was all most exciting.

Harmony had been to see Jimmy on the day in question. She had taken him some gelatin, not without apprehension, it being her first essay in jelly and Jimmy being frank with the candor of childhood. The jelly had been a great success.

It was when she was about to go that Jimmy broached a matter very near his heart.

"The horns haven't come, have they?" he asked wistfully.

"No, not yet."

"Do you think he got my letter about them?"

"He answered it, didn't he?"

Jimmy drew a long breath. "It's very funny. He's mostly so quick. If I had the horns, Sister Elisabet would tie them there at the foot of the bed. And I could pretend I was hunting."

Harmony had a great piece of luck that day. As she went home she saw hanging in front of the wild-game shop next to the delicatessen store a fresh deer, and this time it was a stag. Like the others it hung head down, and as it swayed on its hook its great antlers tapped against the shop door as if mutely begging admission.

She could not buy the antlers. In vain she pleaded, explained, implored. Harmony enlisted the Portier, and took him across with her. The wild-game seller was obdurate. He would sell the deer entire, or he would mount head and antlers for his wife's cousin in Galicia as a Christmas gift.

Harmony went back to the lodge and climbed the stairs. She was profoundly depressed. Even the discovery that Peter had come home early and was building a fire in the kitchen brought only a fleeting smile. Anna was not yet
home.

Peter built the fire. The winter dusk was falling and Harmony made a movement to light the candles. Peter stopped her.
"Can't we have the firelight for a little while? You are always beautiful, but--you are lovely in the firelight, Harmony."
"That is because you like me. We always think our friends are beautiful."
"I am fond of Anna, but I have never thought her beautiful."

The kitchen was small. Harmony, rolling up her sleeves by the table, and Peter before the stove were very close together. The dusk was fast fading into darkness; to this tiny room at the back of the old house few street sounds penetrated. Round them, shutting them off together from the world of shops with lighted windows, rumbling busses and hurrying humanity, lay the old lodge with its dingy gardens, its whitewashed halls, its dark and twisting staircases.

Peter had been very careful. He had cultivated a comradely manner with the girl that had kept her entirely at her ease with him. But it had been growing increasingly hard. He was only human after all. And he was very comfortable. Love, healthy human love, thrives on physical ease. Indigestion is a greater foe to it than poverty. Great love songs are written, not by poets starving in hall bedrooms, with insistent hunger gnawing and undermining all that is of the spirit, but by full-fed gentlemen who sing out of an overflowing of content and wide fellowship, and who write, no doubt, just after dinner. Love, being a hunger, does not thrive on hunger.

Thus Peter. He had never found women essential, being occupied in the struggle for other essentials. Women had had little part in his busy life. Once or twice he had seen visions, dreamed dreams, to waken himself savagely to the fact that not for many years could he afford the luxury of tender eyes looking up into his, of soft arms about his neck. So he had kept away from women with almost ferocious determination. And now!

He drew a chair before the stove and sat down. Standing or sitting, he was much too large for the kitchen. He sat in the chair, with his hands hanging, fingers interlaced between his knees.

The firelight glowed over his strong, rather irregular features. Harmony, knife poised over the evening's potatoes, looked at him.
"I think you are sad to-night, Peter."
"Depressed a bit. That's all."
"It isn't money again?"

It was generally money with any of the three, and only the week before Peter had found an error in his bank balance which meant that he was a hundred Kronen or so poorer than he had thought. This discovery had been very upsetting.
"Not more than usual. Don't mind me. I'll probably end in a roaring bad temper and smash something. My moody spells often break up that way!"

Harmony put down the paring-knife, and going over to where he sat rested a hand on his shoulder. Peter drew away from it.
"I have hurt you in some way?"
"Of course not."
"Could--could you talk about whatever it is? That helps sometimes."
"You wouldn't understand."
"You haven't quarreled with Anna?" Harmony asked, real concern in her voice.
"No. Good Lord, Harmony, don't ask me what's wrong! I don't know myself."

He got up almost violently and set the little chair back against the wall. Hurt and astonished, Harmony went back to the table. The kitchen was entirely dark, save for the firelight, which gleamed on the bare floor and the red legs of the table. She was fumbling with a match and the candle when she realized that Peter was just behind her, very close.

"Dearest," he said huskily. The next moment he had caught her to him, was kissing her lips, her hair.

Harmony's heart beat wildly. There was no use struggling against him. The gates of his self-control were down: all his loneliness, his starved senses rushed forth in tardy assertion.

After a moment Peter kissed her eyelids very gently and let her go. Harmony was trembling, but with shock and alarm only. The storm that had torn him root and branch from his firm ground of self-restraint left her only shaken. He was still very close to her; she could hear him breathing. He did not attempt to speak. With every atom of strength that was left in him he was fighting a mad desire to take her in his arms again and keep her there.

That was the moment when Harmony became a woman.

She lighted the candle with the match she still held. Then she turned and faced him.
"That sort of thing is not for you and me, Peter," she said quietly.
"Why not?"
"There isn't any question about it."

He was still reckless, even argumentative; the crying need of her still obsesssed him. "Why not? Why should I not take you in my arms? If there is a moment of happiness to be had in this grind of work and loneliness--"

"It has not made me happy."

Perhaps nothing else she could have said would have been so effectual. Love demands reciprocation; he could read no passion in her voice. He knew then that he had left her unstirred. He dropped his outstretched arms.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do it."

"I would rather not talk about it, please."

The banging of a door far off told them that Anna Gates had arrived and was taking off her galoshes in the entry. Peter drew a long breath, and, after his habit, shook himself.

"Very well, we'll not talk of it. But, for Heaven's sake, Harmony, don't avoid me. I'm not a cad. I'll let you alone."

There was only time for a glance of understanding between them, of promise from Peter, of acceptance from the girl. When Anna Gates entered the kitchen she found Harmony peeling potatoes and Peter filling up an already overfed stove.

That night, during that darkest hour before the dawn when the thrifty city fathers of the old town had shut off the street lights because two hours later the sun would rise and furnish light that cost the taxpayers nothing, the Portier's wife awakened.

The room was very silent, too silent. On those rare occasions when the Portier's wife awakened in the night and heard the twin clocks of the Votivkirche strike three, and listened, perhaps, while the delicatessen seller ambled home from the Schubert Society, singing beerily as he ambled, she was wont to hear from the bed beside hers the rhythmic respiration that told her how safe from Schubert Societies and such like evils was her lord. There was no sound at all.

The Portier's wife raised herself on her elbow and reached over. Owing to the width of the table that stood between the beds and to a sweeping that day which had left the beds far apart she met nothing but empty air. Words had small effect on the Portier, who slept fathoms deep in unconsciousness. Also she did not wish to get up--the floor was cold and a wind blowing. Could she not hear it and the creaking of the deer across the street, as it swung on its hook?

The wife of the Portier was a person of resource. She took the iron candlestick from the table and flung it into the darkness at the Portier's pillow. No startled yell followed.

Suspicion thus confirmed, the Portier's wife forgot the cold floor and the wind, and barefoot felt her way into the hall.

Suspicion was doubly confirmed. The chain was off the door; it even stood open an inch or two.

Armed with a second candlestick she stationed herself inside the door and waited. The stone floor was icy, but the fury of a woman scorned kept her warm. The Votivkirche struck one, two, three quarters of an hour. The candlestick in her hand changed from iron to ice, from ice to red-hot fire. Still the Portier had not come back and the door chain swung in the wind.

At four o'clock she retired to the bedroom again. Indignation had changed to fear, coupled with sneezing. Surely even the Schubert Society--What was that?

From the Portier's bed was coming a rhythmic respiration!

She roused him, standing over him with the iron candlestick, now lighted, and gazing at him with eyes in which alarm struggled with suspicion.

"Thou hast been out of thy bed!"

"But no!"

"An hour since the bed was empty."

"Thou dreamest."

"The chain is off the door."

"Let it remain so and sleep. What have we to steal or the Americans above? Sleep and keep peace."

He yawned and was instantly asleep again. The Portier's wife crawled into her bed and warmed her aching feet under the crimson feather comfort. But her soul was shaken.

The Devil had been known to come at night and take innocent ones out to do his evil. The innocent ones knew it not, but it might be told by the soles of the feet, which were always soiled.

At dawn the Portier's wife cautiously uncovered the soles of her sleeping lord's feet, and fell back gasping. They were quite black, as of one who had trampled in garden mould.

Early the next morning Harmony, after a restless night, opened the door from the salon of Maria Theresa into the
hall and set out a pitcher for the milk.

On the floor, just outside, lay the antlers from the deer across the street. Tied to them was a bit of paper, and on it was written the one word, "Still!"

CHAPTER X

In looking back after a catastrophe it is easy to trace the steps by which the inevitable advanced. Destiny marches, not by great leaps but with a thousand small and painful steps, and here and there it leaves its mark, a footprint on a naked soul. We trace a life by its scars, as a tree by its rings.

Anna Gates was not the best possible companion for Harmony, and this with every allowance for her real kindliness, her genuine affection for the girl. Life had destroyed her illusions, and it was of illusions that Harmony's veil had been woven. To Anna Gates, worn with a thousand sleepless nights, a thousand thankless days, withered before her time with the struggling routine of medical practice, sapped with endless calls for sympathy and aid, existence ceased to be spiritual and became physiological.

Life and birth and death had lost their mysteries. The veil was rent.

To fit this existence of hers she had built herself a curious creed, a philosophy of individualism, from behind which she flung strange bombshells of theories, shafts of distorted moralities, personal liberties, irresponsibilities, a supreme scorn for modern law and the prophets. Nature, she claimed, was her law and her prophet.

In her hard-working, virginal life her theories had wrought no mischief. Temptation had been lacking to exploit them, and even in the event of the opportunity it was doubtful whether she would have had the strength of her convictions. Men love theories, but seldom have the courage of them, and Anna Gates was largely masculine. Women, being literal, are apt to absorb dangerous doctrine and put it to the test. When it is false doctrine they discover it too late.

Harmony was now a woman.

Anna would have cut off her hand sooner than have brought the girl to harm; but she loved to generalize. It amused her to see Harmony's eyes widen with horror at one of her radical beliefs. Nothing pleased her more than to pit her individualism against the girl's rigid and conventional morality, and down her by some apparently unanswerable argument.

On the day after the incident in the kitchen such an argument took place--hardly an argument, for Harmony knew nothing of mental fencing. Anna had taken a heavy cold, and remained at home. Harmony had been practicing, and at the end she played a little winter song by some modern composer. It breathed all the purity of a white winter's day; it was as chaste as ice and as cold; and yet throughout was the thought of green things hiding beneath the snow and the hope of spring.

Harmony, having finished, voiced some such feeling. She was rather ashamed of her thought.

"It seems that way to me," she finished apologetically. "It sounds rather silly. I always think I can tell the sort of person who composes certain things."

"And this gentleman who writes of winter?"

"I think he is very reserved. And that he has never loved any one."

"Indeed!"

"When there is any love in music, any heart, one always feels it, exactly as in books--the difference between a love story and--and--"

"--a dictionary!"

"You always laugh," Harmony complained

"That's better than weeping. When I think of the rotten way things go in this world I want to weep always."

"I don't find it a bad world. Of course there are bad people, but there are good ones."

"Where? Peter and you and I, I suppose."

"There are plenty of good men."

"What do you call a good man?"

Harmony hesitated, then went on bravely:--

"Honorable men."

Anna smiled. "My dear child," she said, "you substitute the code of a gentleman for the Mosaic Law. Of course your good man is a monogamist?"

Harmony nodded, puzzled eyes on Anna.

"Then there are no 'good' people in the polygamous countries, I suppose! When there were twelve women to every man, a man took a dozen wives. To-day in our part of the globe there is one woman--and a fifth over--for every man. Each man gets one woman, and for every five couples there is a derelict like myself, mateless."

Anna's amazing frankness about herself often confused Harmony. Her resentment at her single condition, because it left her childless, brought forth theories that shocked and alarmed the girl. In the atmosphere in which
Harmony had been reared single women were always presumed to be thus by choice and to regard with certain
tolerance those weaker sisters who had married. Anna, on the contrary, was frankly a derelict, frankly regretted her
maiden condition and railed with bitterness against her enforced childlessness. The near approach of Christmas had
for years found her morose and resentful. There are, here and there, such women, essentially mothers but not
necessarily wives, their sole passion that of maternity.

Anna, argumentative and reckless, talked on. She tore away, in her resentment, every theory of existence the girl
had ever known, and offered her instead an incredible liberty in the name of the freedom of the individual. Harmony
found all her foundations of living shaken, and though refusing to accept Anna's theories, found her faith in her own
weakened. She sat back, pale and silent, listening, while Anna built up out of her discontent a new heaven and a new
earth, with liberty written high in its firmament.

When her reckless mood had passed Anna was regretful enough at the girl's stricken face.
"I'm a fool!" she said contritely. "If Peter had been here he'd have throttled me. I deserve it. I'm a theorist, pure
and simple, and theorists are the anarchists of society. There's only one comfort about us--we never live up to our
convictions. Now forget all this rot I've been talking."

Peter brought up the mail that afternoon, a Christmas card or two for Anna, depressingly early, and a letter from
the Big Soprano for Harmony from New York. The Big Soprano was very glad to be back and spent two pages over
her chances for concert work.

"...I could have done as well had I stayed at home. If I had had the money they wanted, to go to Geneva and
sing 'Brunnhilde,' it would have helped a lot. I could have said I'd sung in opera in Europe and at least have had a
hearing at the Met. But I didn't, and I'm back at the church again and glad to get my old salary. If it's at all possible,
stay until the master has presented you in a concert. He's quite right, you haven't a chance unless he does. And now
I'll quit grumbling."

"Scatchy met her Henry at the dock and looked quite lovely, flushed with excitement and having been up since
dawn curling her hair. He was rather a disappointment--small and blond, with light blue eyes, and almost dapper.
But oh, my dear, I wouldn't care how pale a man's eyes were if he looked at me the way Henry looked at her.
"They asked me to luncheon with them, but I knew they wanted to be alone together, and so I ate a bite or two,
all I could swallow for the lump in my throat, by myself. I was homesick enough in old Wien, but I am just as
homesick now that I am here, for we are really homesick only for people, not places. And no one really cared
whether I came back or not."

Peter had been miserable all day, not with regret for the day before, but with fear. What if Harmony should
decide that the situation was unpleasant and decide to leave? What if a reckless impulse, recklessly carried out, were
to break up an arrangement that had made a green oasis of happiness and content for all of them in the desert of their
common despair?

If he had only let her go and apologized! But no, he had had to argue, to justify himself, to make an idiot of
himself generally. He almost groaned aloud as he opened the gate end crossed the wintry garden.

He need not have feared. Harmony had taken him entirely at his word. "I am not a beast. I'll let you alone," he
had said. She had had a bad night, as nights go. She had gone through the painful introspection which, in a
thoroughly good girl, always follows such an outburst as Peter's. Had she said or done anything to make him think--
Surely she had not! Had she been wrong about Peter after all? Surely not again.

While the Portier's wife, waked, as may happen, by an unaccustomed silence, was standing guard in the hall
below, iron candlestick in hand, Harmony, having read the Litany through in the not particularly religious hope of
getting to sleep, was dreaming placidly. It was Peter who tossed and turned almost all night. Truly there had been
little sleep that night in the old hunting-lodge of Maria Theresa.

Peter, still not quite at ease, that evening kept out of the kitchen while supper was preparing. Anna, radical
theories forgotten and wearing a knitted shawl against drafts, was making a salad, and Harmony, all anxiety and
flushed with heat, was broiling a steak.

"Peter," she called, "you may set the table. And try to lay the cloth straight."

"Suppose I refuse?" he questioned. "You--you haven't been very friendly with me to-day, Harry."

"I?"

"Don't quarrel, you children," cried Anna, beating eggs vigorously. "Harmony is always friendly, too friendly.
The Portier loves her."

"I'm sure I said good-evening to you."

"You usually say, 'Good-evening, Peter.'"
"And I did not?"
"You did not."
"Then--Good-evening, Peter."
"Thank you."

His steady eyes met hers. In them there was a renewal of his yesterday's promise, abasement, regret. Harmony met him with forgiveness and restoration.

"Sometimes," said Peter humbly, "when I am in very great favor, you say, 'Good-evening, Peter, dear.'"

"Good-evening, Peter, dear," said Harmony.

CHAPTER XI

The affairs of young Stewart and Marie Jedlicka were not moving smoothly. Having rented their apartment to the Boyers, and through Marie's frugality and the extra month's wages at Christmas, which was Marie's annual perquisite, being temporarily in funds the sky seemed clear enough, and Walter Stewart started on his holiday with a comfortable sense of financial security.

Mrs. Boyer, shown over the flat by Stewart during Marie's temporary exile in the apartment across the hall, was captivated by the comfort of the little suite and by its order. Her housewifely mind, restless with long inactivity in a pension, seized on the bright pans of Marie's kitchen and the promise of the brick-and-sheetiron stove. She disapproved of Stewart, having heard strange stories of him, but there was nothing bacchanal or suspicious about this orderly establishment. Mrs. Boyer was a placid, motherly looking woman, torn from her church and her card club, her grown children, her household gods of thirty years' accumulation, that "Frank" might catch up with his profession.

She had explained it rather tremulously at home.

"Father wants to go," she said. "You children are big enough now to be left. He's always wanted to do it, but we couldn't go while you were little."

"But, mother!" expostulated the oldest girl. "When you are so afraid of the ocean! And a year!"

"What is to be will be," she had replied. "If I'm going to be drowned I'll be drowned, whether it's in the sea or in a bathtub. And I'll not let father go alone."

Fatalism being their mother's last argument and always final, the children gave up. They let her go. More, they prepared for her so elaborate a wardrobe that the poor soul had had no excuse to purchase anything abroad. She had gone through Paris looking straight ahead lest her eyes lead her into the temptation of the shops. In Vienna she wore her home-town outfit with determination, vaguely conscious that the women about her had more style, were different. She priced unsuitable garments wistfully, and went home to her trunks full of best materials that would never wear out. The children, knowing her, had bought the best.

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To this couple, then, Stewart had rented his apartment. It is hard to say by what psychology he found their respectability so satisfactory. It was as though his own status gained by it. He had much the same feeling about the order and decency with which Marie managed the apartment, as if irregularity were thus regularized.

Marie had met him once for a walk along the Graben. She had worn an experimental touch of rouge under a veil, and fine lines were drawn under her blue eyes, darkening them. She had looked very pretty, rather frightened. Stewart had sent her home and had sulked for an entire evening.

Stewart breaking the law and trying to keep the letter!

On the day they left for Semmering Marie was up at dawn. There was much to do. The house must be left clean and shining. There must be no feminine gewgaws to reveal to the Frau Doktor that it was not a purely masculine establishment. At the last moment, so late that it sent her heart into her mouth, she happened on the box of rouge hidden from Stewart's watchful eyes. She gave it to the milk girl.

Finally she folded her meager wardrobe and placed it in the Herr Doktor's American trunk: a marvel, that trunk, so firm, so heavy, bound with iron. And with her own clothing she packed Stewart's, the dress-suit he had worn once to the Embassy, a hat that folded, strange American shoes, and books--always books. The Herr Doktor would study at Semmering. When all was in readiness and Stewart was taking a final survey, Marie ran downstairs and summoned a cab. It did not occur to her to ask him to do it. Marie's small life was one of service, and besides there was an element in their relationship that no one but Marie suspected, and that she hid even from herself. She was very much in love with this indifferent American, this captious temporary god of her domestic altar. Such a contingency had never occurred to Stewart; but Peter, smoking gravely in the little apartment, had more than once caught a look in Marie's eyes as she turned them on the other man, and had surmised it. It made him uncomfortable.

When the train was well under way, however, and he found no disturbing element among the three others in the compartment, Stewart relaxed. Semmering was a favorite resort with the American colony, but not until later in the winter. In December there were rains in the mountains, and low-lying clouds that invested some of the chalets in
constant fog. It was not until the middle of January that the little mountain train became crowded with tourists, knickerbockered men with knapsacks, and jaunty feathers in their soft hats, boys carrying ski, women with Alpine cloaks and iron-pointed sticks.

Marie was childishly happy. It was the first real vacation of her life, and more than that she was going to Semmering, in the very shadow of the Raxalpe, the beloved mountain of the Viennese.

Marie had seen the Rax all her life, as it towered thirty miles or so away above the plain. On peaceful Sundays, having climbed the cog railroad, she had seen its white head turn rosy in the setting sun, and once when a German tourist from Munich had handed her his fieldglass she had even made out some of the crosses that showed where travelers had met their deaths. Now she would be very close. If the weather were good, she might even say a prayer in the chapel on its crest for the souls of those who had died. It was of a marvel, truly; so far may one go when one has money and leisure.

The small single-trucked railway carriages bumped and rattled up the mountain sides, always rising, always winding. There were moments when the track held to the cliffs only by gigantic fingers of steel, while far below were peaceful valleys and pink-and-blue houses and churches with gilded spires. There were vistas of snow-peak and avalanche shed, and always there were tunnels. Marie, so wise in some things, was a child in others; she slid close to Stewart in the darkness and touched him for comfort.

"It is so dark," she apologized, "and it frightens me, the mountain heart. In your America, have you so great mountains?"

Stewart patted her hand, a patronizing touch that sent her blood racing.

"Much larger," he said magnificently. "I haven't seen a hill in Europe I'd exchange for the Rockies. And when we cross the mountains there we use railway coaches. These toy railroads are a joke. At home we'd use 'em as street-cars."

"Really! I should like to see America."

"So should I."

The conversation was taking a dangerous trend. Mention of America was apt to put the Herr Doktor in a bad humor or to depress him, which was even worse. Marie, her hand still on his arm and not repulsed, became silent.

At a small way station the three Germans in the compartment left the train. Stewart, lowering a window, bought from a boy on the platform beer and sausages and a bag of pretzels. As the train resumed its clanking progress they ate luncheon, drinking the beer from the bottles and slicing the sausage with a penknife. It was a joyous trip, a red-letter day in the girl's rather sordid if not uneventful life. The Herr Doktor was pleased with her. He liked her hat, and when she flushed with pleasure demanded proof that she was not rouged. Proof was forthcoming. She rubbed her cheeks vigorously with a handkerchief and produced in triumph its unreddened purity.

"Thou suspicious one!" she pouted. "I must take off the skin to assure thee! When the Herr Doktor says no rouge, I use none."

"You're a good child." He stooped over and kissed one scarlet cheek and then being very comfortable and the beer having made him drowsy, he put his head in her lap and slept.

When he awakened they were still higher. The snow-peak towered above and the valleys were dizzying! Semmering was getting near. They were frequently in darkness; and between the tunnels were long lines of granite avalanche sheds. The little passage of the car was full of tourists looking down.

"We are very close, I am sure," an American girl was saying just outside the doorway. "See, isn't that the Kurhaus? There, it is lost again."

The tourists in the passage were Americans and the girl who had spoken was young and attractive. Stewart noticed them for the first time and moved to a more decorous distance from Marie.

Marie Jedlicka took her cue and lapsed into silence, but her thoughts were busy. Perhaps this girl was going to Semmering also and the Herr Doktor would meet her. But that was foolish! There were other resorts besides Semmering, and in the little villa to which they went there would be no Americans. It was childish to worry about a girl whose back and profile only she had seen. Also profiles were deceptive; there was the matter of the ears. Marie's ears were small and set close to her head. If the American Fraulein's ears stuck out or her face were only short and wide! But no. The American Fraulein turned and glanced once swiftly into the compartment. She was quite lovely.

Stewart thought so, too. He got up with a great show of stretching and yawning and lounged into the passage. He did not speak to the girl; Marie noted that with some comfort. But shortly after she saw him conversing easily with a male member of the party. Her heart sank again. Life was moving very fast for Marie Jedlicka that afternoon on the train.

Stewart was duly presented to the party of Americans and offered his own cards, bowing from the waist and clicking his heels together, a German custom he had picked up. The girl was impressed; Marie saw that. When they drew into the station at Semmering Stewart helped the American party off first and then came back for Marie. Less
keen eyes than the little Austrian's would have seen his nervous anxiety to escape attention, once they were out of the train and moving toward the gate of the station. He stopped to light a cigarette, he put down the hand-luggage and picked it up again, as though it weighed heavily, whereas it was both small and light. He loitered through the gate and paused to exchange a word with the gateman.

The result was, of course, that the Americans were in a sleigh and well up the mountainside before Stewart and Marie were seated side by side in a straw-lined sledge, their luggage about them, a robe over their knees, and a noisy driver high above them on the driving-seat. Stewart spoke to her then, the first time for half an hour.

Marie found some comfort. The villas at Semmering were scattered wide over the mountain breast, set in dense clumps of evergreens, hidden from the roads and from each other by trees and shrubbery separated by valleys. One might live in one part of Semmering for a month and never suspect the existence of other parts, or wander over steep roads and paths for days and never pass twice over the same one. The Herr Doktor might not see the American girl again--and if he did! Did he not see American girls wherever he went?

The sleigh climbed on. It seemed they would never stop climbing. Below in the valley twilight already reigned, a twilight of blue shadows, of cows with bells wandering home over frosty fields, of houses with dark faces that opened an eye of lamplight as one looked.

Across the valley and far above--Marie pointed without words. Her small heart was very full. Greater than she had ever dreamed it, steeper, more beautiful, more deadly, and crowned with its sunset hue of rose was the Rax. Even Stewart lost his look of irritation as he gazed with her. He reached over and covered both her hands with his large one under the robe.

The sleigh climbed steadily. Marie Jedlicka, in a sort of ecstasy, leaned back and watched the mountain; its crown faded from rose to gold, from gold to purple with a thread of black. There was a shadow on the side that looked like a cross. Marie stopped the sleigh at a wayside shrine, and getting out knelt to say a prayer for the travelers who had died on the Rax. They had taken a room at a small villa where board was cheap, and where the guests were usually Germans of the thriftier sort from Bavaria. Both the season and the modest character of the establishment promised them quiet and seclusion.

To Marie the house seemed the epitome of elegance, even luxury. It clung to a steep hillside. Their room, on the third floor, looked out from the back of the building over the valley, which fell away almost sheer from beneath their windows. A tiny balcony outside, with access to it by a door from the bedroom, looked far down on the tops of tall pines. It made Marie dizzy.

She was cheerful again and busy. The American trunk was to be unpacked and the Herr Doktor's things put away, his shoes in rows, as he liked them, and his shaving materials laid out on the washstand. Then there was a new dress to put on, that she might do him credit at supper.

Stewart's bad humor had returned. He complained of the room and the draft under the balcony door; the light was wrong for shaving. But the truth came out at last and found Marie not unprepared.

"The fact is," he said, "I'm not going to eat with you to-night, dear. I'm going to the hotel."

"With the Americans?"

"Yes. I know a chap who went to college with the brother--with the young man you saw."

Marie glanced down at her gala toilet. Then she began slowly to take off the dress, reaching behind her for a hook he had just fastened and fighting back tears as she struggled with it.

"Now, remember, Marie, I will have no sulking."

"I am not sulking."

"Why should you change your clothes?"

"Because the dress was for you. If you are not here I do not wish to wear it."

Stewart went out in a bad humor, which left him before he had walked for five minutes in the clear mountain air. At the hotel he found the party waiting for him, the women in evening gowns. The girl, whose name was Anita, was bewitching in pale green.

That was a memorable night for Walter Stewart, with his own kind once more--a perfect dinner, brisk and clever conversation, enlivened by a bit of sweet champagne, an hour or two on the terrace afterward with the women in furs, and stars making a jeweled crown for the Rax.

He entirely forgot Marie until he returned to the villa and opening the door of the room found her missing.

She had not gone far. At the sound of his steps she moved on the balcony and came in slowly. She was pale and pinched with cold, but she was wise with the wisdom of her kind. She smiled.

"Didst thou have a fine evening?"

"Wonderful!"

"I am sorry if I was unpleasant. I was tired, now I am rested."

"Good, little Marie!"
CHAPTER XII

The card in the American Doctors' Club brought a response finally. It was just in time. Harmony's funds were low, and the Frau Professor Bergmeister had gone to St. Moritz for the winter. She regretted the English lessons, but there were always English at St. Moritz and it cost nothing to talk with them. Before she left she made Harmony a present. "For Christmas," she explained. It was a glass pin-tray, decorated beneath with labels from the Herr Professor's cigars and in the center a picture of the Emperor.

The response came in this wise. Harmony struggling home against an east wind and holding the pin-tray and her violin case, opened the old garden gate by the simple expedient of leaning against it. It flew back violently, almost overthrowing a stout woman in process of egress down the walk. The stout woman was Mrs. Boyer, clad as usual in the best broadcloth and wearing her old sable cape, made over according to her oldest daughter's ideas into a staid stole and muff. The muff lay on the path now and Mrs. Boyer was gasping for breath.

"I'm so sorry!" Harmony exclaimed. "It was stupid of me; but the wind--Is this your muff?"

Mrs. Boyer took the muff coldly. From its depths she proceeded to extract a handkerchief and with the handkerchief she brushed down the broadcloth. Harmony stood apologetically by. It is explanatory of Mrs. Boyer's face, attitude, and costume that the girl addressed her in English.

"I backed in," she explained. "So few people come, and no Americans."

Mrs. Boyer, having finished her brushing and responded to this humble apology in her own tongue, condescended to look at Harmony.

"It really is no matter," she said, still coolly but with indications of thawing. "I am only glad it did not strike my nose. I dare say it would have, but I was looking up to see if it were going to snow." Here she saw the violin case and became almost affable.

"There was a card in the Doctors' Club, and I called--" She hesitated.

"I am Miss Wells. The card is mine."

"One of the women here has a small boy who wishes to take violin lessons and I offered to come. The mother is very busy."

"I see. Will you come in? I can make you a cup of tea and we can talk about it."

Mrs. Boyer was very willing, although she had doubts about the tea. She had had no good tea since she had left England, and was inclined to suspect all of it.

They went in together, Harmony chatting gayly as she ran ahead, explaining this bit of the old staircase, that walled-up door, here an ancient bit of furniture not considered worthy of salvage, there a closed and locked room, home of ghosts and legends. To Harmony this elderly woman, climbing slowly behind her, was a bit of home. There had been many such in her life; women no longer young, friends of her mother's who were friends of hers; women to whom she had been wont to pay the courtesy of a potted hyacinth at Easter or a wreath at Christmas or a bit of custard during an illness. She had missed them all cruelly, as she had missed many things--her mother, her church, her small gayeties. She had thought at first that Frau Professor Bergmeister might allay her longing for these comfortable, middle-aged, placid-eyed friends of hers. But the Frau Professor Bergmeister had proved to be a frivolous and garrulous old woman, who substituted ease for comfort, and who burned a candle on the name-day of her first husband while her second was safely out of the house.

So it was with something of excitement that Harmony led the way up the stairs and into the salon of Maria Theresa.

Peter was there. He was sitting with his back to the door, busily engaged in polishing the horns of the deer. Whatever scruples Harmony had about the horns, Peter had none whatever, save to get them safely out of the place and to the hospital. So Peter was polishing the horns. Harmony had not expected to find him home, and paused, rather startled.

"Oh, I didn't know you were home."

Peter spoke without turning.

"Try to bear up under it," he said. "I'm home and hungry, sweetheart!"

"Peter, please!"

Peter turned at that and rose instantly. It was rather dark in the salon and he did not immediately recognize Mrs. Boyer. But that keen-eyed lady had known him before he turned, had taken in the domesticity of the scene and Peter's part in it, and had drawn the swift conclusion of the pure of heart.

"I'll come again," she said hurriedly. "I--I must really get home. Dr. Boyer will be there, and wondering--"

"Mrs. Boyer!" Peter knew her.

"Oh, Dr. Byrne, isn't it? How unexpected to find you here!"

"I live here."

"So I surmised."
"Three of us," said Peter. "You know Anna Gates, don't you?"
"I'm afraid not. Really I--"

Peter was determined to explain. His very eagerness was almost damning.

"She and Miss Wells are keeping house here and have kindly taken me in as a boarder. Please sit down."

Harmony found nothing strange in the situation and was frankly puzzled at Peter. The fact that there was anything unusual in two single women and one unmarried man, unrelated and comparative strangers, setting up housekeeping together had never occurred to her. Many a single woman whom she knew at home took a gentleman into the house as a roomer, and thereafter referred to him as "he" and spent hours airing the curtains of smoke and even, as "he" became a member of the family, in sewing on his buttons. There was nothing indecorous about such an arrangement; merely a concession to economic pressure.

She made tea, taking off her jacket and gloves to do it, but bustling about cheerfully, with her hat rather awry and her cheeks flushed with excitement and hope. Just now, when the Frau Professor had gone, the prospect of a music pupil meant everything. An American child, too! Fond as Harmony was of children, the sedate and dignified youngsters who walked the parks daily with a governess, or sat with folded hands and fixed eyes through hours of heavy music at the opera, rather daunted her. They were never alone, those Austrian children--always under surveillance, always restrained, always prepared to kiss the hand of whatever relative might be near and to take themselves of to anywhere so it were somewhere else.

"I am so glad you are going to talk to me about an American child," said Harmony, bringing in the tea.

But Mrs. Boyer was not so sure she was going to talk about the American child. She was not sure of anything, except that the household looked most irregular, and that Peter Byrne was trying to cover a difficult situation with much conversation. He was almost glib, was Peter. The tea was good; that was one thing.

She sat back with her muff on her knee, having refused the concession of putting it on a chair as savoring too much of acceptance if not approval, and sipped her tea out of a spoon as becomes a tea-lover. Peter, who loathed tea, lounged about the room, clearly in the way, but fearful to leave Harmony alone with her. She was quite likely, at the first opportunity, to read her a lesson on the conventions, if nothing worse; to upset the delicate balance of the little household he was guarding. So he stayed, praying for Anna to come and bear out his story, while Harmony toyed with her spoon and waited for some mention of the lessons. None came. Mrs. Boyer, having finished her tea, rose and put down her cup.

"That was very refreshing," she said. "Where shall I find the street-car? I walked out, but it is late."
"I'll take you to the car." Peter picked up his old hat.
"Thank you. I am always lost in this wretched town. I give the conductors double tips to put me down where I want to go; but how can they when it is the wrong car?" She bowed to Harmony without shaking hands. "Thank you for the tea. It was really good. Where do you get it?"
"There is a tea-shop a door or two from the Grand Hotel."
"I must remember that. Thank you again. Good-bye."

Not a word about the lessons or the American child!
"You said something about my card in the Doctors' Club--"
Something wistful in the girl's eyes caught and held Mrs. Boyer.
After all she was the mother of daughters. She held out her hand and her voice was not so hard.
"That will have to wait until another time. I have made a social visit and we'll not spoil it with business."
"But--"

"I really think the boy's mother must attend to that herself. But I shall tell her where to find you, and"--here she glanced at Peter--"all about it."
"Thank you," said Harmony gratefully.

Peter had no finesse. He escorted Mrs. Boyer across the yard and through the gate with hardly a word. With the gate closed behind them he turned and faced her:--

"You are going away with a wrong impression, Mrs. Boyer."

Mrs. Boyer had been thinking hard as she crossed the yard. The result was a resolution to give Peter a piece of her mind. She drew her ample proportions into a dignity that was almost majesty.

"Yes?"
"I--I can understand why you think as you do. It is quite without foundation."
"I am glad of that," There was no conviction in her voice.
"Of course," went on Peter, humbling himself for Harmony's sake, "I suppose it has been rather unconventional, but the Gates is not a young woman by any means, and she takes very good care of Miss Wells. There were reasons why this seemed the best thing to do. Miss Wells was alone and--"

"There is a Dr. Gates?"
"Of course. If you will come back and wait she'll be along very soon."

Mrs. Boyer was convinced and defrauded in one breath; convinced that there might be a Dr. Gates, but equally convinced that the situation was anomalous and certainly suspicious; defrauded in that she had lost the anticipated pleasure of giving Peter a piece of her mind. She walked along beside him without speaking until they reached the street-car line. Then she turned.

"You called her--you spoke to her very affectionately, young man," she accused him.

Peter smiled. The car was close. Some imp of recklessness, some perversion of humor seized him.

"My dear Mrs. Boyer," he said, "that was in jest purely. Besides, I did not know that you were there!"

Mrs. Boyer was a literal person without humor. It was outraged American womanhood incarnate that got into the street-car and settled its broadcloth of the best quality indignantly on the cane seat. It was outraged American womanhood that flung open the door of Marie Jedlicka's flat, and stalking into Marie Jedlicka's sitting room confronted her husband as he read a month-old newspaper from home.

"Did you ever hear of a woman doctor named Gates?" she demanded.

Boyer was not unaccustomed to such verbal attacks. He had learned to meet domestic broadsides with a shield of impenetrable good humor, or at the most with a return fire of mild sarcasm.

"I never hear of a woman doctor if it can be avoided."

"Dr. Gates--Anna Gates?"

"There are a number here. I meet them in the hospital, but I don't know their names."

"Where does Peter Byrne live?"

"In a pension, I believe, my dear. Are we going to have anything to eat or do we sup of Peter Byrne?"

Mrs. Boyer made no immediate reply. She repaired to the bedroom of Marie Jedlicka, and placed her hat, coat and furs on one of the beds with the crocheted coverlets. It is a curious thing about rooms. There was no change in the bedroom apparent to the eye, save that for Marie's tiny slippers at the foot of the wardrobe there were Mrs. Boyer's substantial house shoes. But in some indefinable way the room had changed. About it hung an atmosphere of solid respectability, of impeccable purity that soothed Mrs. Boyer's ruffled virtue into peace. Is it any wonder that there is a theory to the effect that things take on the essential qualities of people who use them, and that we are haunted by things, not people? That when grandfather's wraith is seen in his old armchair it is the chair that produces it, while grandfather himself serenely haunts the shades of some vast wilderness of departed spirits?

Not that Mrs. Boyer troubled herself about such things. She was exceedingly orthodox, even in the matter of a hereafter, where the most orthodox are apt to stretch a point, finding no attraction whatever in the thing they are asked to believe. Mrs. Boyer, who would have regarded it as heterodox to substitute any other instrument for the harp of her expectation, tied on her gingham apron before Marie Jedlicka's mirror, and thought of Harmony and of the girls at home.

She told her husband over the supper-table and found him less shocked than she had expected.

"It's not your affair or mine," he said. "It's Byrne's business."

"Think of the girl!"

"Even if you are right it's rather late, isn't it?"

"You could tell him what you think of him."

Dr. Boyer sighed over a cup of very excellent coffee. Much living with a representative male had never taught his wife the reserves among members of the sex masculine.

"I might, but I don't intend to," he said. "And if you listen to me you'll keep the thing to yourself."

"I'll take precious good care that the girl gets no pupils," snapped Mrs. Boyer. And she did with great thoroughness.

We trace a life by its scars. Destiny, marching on by a thousand painful steps, had left its usual mark, a footprint on a naked soul. The soul was Harmony's; the foot--was it not encased at that moment in Mrs. Boyer's comfortable house shoes?

Anna was very late that night. Peter, having put Mrs. Boyer on her car, went back quickly. He had come out without his overcoat, and with the sunset a bitter wind had risen, but he was too indignant to be cold. He ran up the staircase, hearing on all sides the creaking and banging with which the old house resented a gale, and burst into the salon of Maria Theresa.

Harmony was sitting sidewise in a chair by the tea-table with her face hidden against its worn red velvet. She did not look up when he entered. Peter went over and put a hand on her shoulder. She quivered under it and he took it away.

"Crying?"

"A little," very smothered. "Just dis-disappointment. Don't mind me, Peter."

"You mean about the pupil?"
Harmony sat up and looked at him. She still wore her hat, now more than ever askew, and some of the dye from the velvet had stained her cheek. She looked rather hectic, very lovely.
"Why did she change so when she saw you?"
Peter hesitated. Afterward he thought of a dozen things he might have said, safe things. Not one came to him.
"She--she is an evil-thinking old woman, Harry," he said gravely.
"She did not approve of the way we are living here, is that it?"
"Yes."
"But Anna?"
"She did not believe there was an Anna. Not that it matters," he added hastily. "I'll make Anna go to her and explain. It's her infernal jumping to a conclusion that makes me crazy."
"She will talk, Peter. I am frightened."
"I'll take Anna to-night and we'll go to Boyer's. I'll make that woman get down on her knees to you. I'll--"
"You'll make bad very much worse," said Harmony dejectedly. "When a thing has to be explained it does no good to explain it."

The salon was growing dark. Peter was very close to her again. As in the dusky kitchen only a few days before, he felt the compelling influence of her nearness. He wanted, as he had never wanted anything in his life before, to take her in his arms, to hold her close and bid defiance to evil tongues. He was afraid of himself. To gain a moment he put a chair between them and stood, strong hands gripping its back, looking down at her.
"There is one thing we could do."
"What, Peter?"
"We could marry. If you cared for me even a little it--it might not be so bad for you."
"But I am not in love with you. I care for you, of course, but--not that way, Peter. And I do not wish to marry."
"Not even if I wish it very much?"
"No."
"If you are thinking of my future--"
"I'm thinking for both of us. And although just now you think you care a little for me, you do not care enough, Peter. You are lonely and I am the only person you see much, so you think you want to marry me. You don't really. You want to help me."
Few motives are unmixed. Poor Peter, thus accused, could not deny his altruism.
And in the face of his poverty and the little he could offer, compared with what she must lose, he did not urge what was the compelling motive after all, his need of her.
"It would be a rotten match for you," he agreed. "I only thought, perhaps--You are right, of course; you ought not to marry."
"And what about you?"
"I ought not, of course."
Harmony rose, smiling a little.
"Then that's settled. And for goodness' sake, Peter, stop proposing to me every time things go wrong." Her voice changed, grew grave and older, much older than Peter's. "We must not marry, either of us, Peter. Anna is right. There might be an excuse if we were very much in love; but we are not. And loneliness is not a reason."
"I am very lonely," said Peter wistfully.

CHAPTER XIII

Peter took the polished horns to the hospital the next morning and approached Jimmy with his hands behind him and an atmosphere of mystery that enshrouded him like a cloak. Jimmy, having had a good night and having taken the morning's medicine without argument, had been allowed up in a roller chair. It struck Peter with a pang that the boy looked more frail day by day, more transparent.
"I have brought you," said Peter gravely, "the cod-liver oil."
"I've had it!"
"Then guess."
"Dad's letter?"
"You've just had one. Don't be a piggy."
"Animal, vegetable, or mineral?"
"Vegetable," said Peter shamelessly.
"Soft or hard!"
"Soft."
This was plainly a disappointment. A pair of horns might be vegetable; they could hardly be soft.
"A kitten?"
"A kitten is not vegetable, James."

"I know. A bowl of gelatin from Harry!" For by this time Harmony was his very good friend, admitted to the Jimmy club, which consisted of Nurse Elisabet, the Dozent with the red beard, Anna and Peter, and of course the sentry, who did not know that he belonged.

"Gelatin, to be sure," replied Peter, and produced the horns.

It was a joyous moment in the long low ward, with its triple row of beds, its barred windows, its clean, uneven old floor. As if to add a touch of completeness the sentry outside, peering in, saw the wheeled chair with its occupant, and celebrated this advance along the road to recovery by placing on the window-ledge a wooden replica of himself, bayonet and all, carved from a bit of cigar box.

"Everybody is very nice to me," said Jimmy contentedly. "When my father comes back I shall tell him. He is very fond of people who are kind to me. There was a woman on the ship--What is bulging your pocket, Peter?"

"My handkerchief."

"That is not where you mostly carry your handkerchief."

Peter was injured. He scowled ferociously at being doubted and stood up before the wheeled chair to be searched. The ward watched joyously, while from pocket after pocket of Peter's old gray suit came Jimmy's salvage-two nuts, a packet of figs, a postcard that represented a stout colonel of hussars on his back on a frozen lake, with a private soldier waiting to go through the various salutations due his rank before assisting him. A gala day, indeed, if one could forget the grave in the little mountain town with only a name on the cross at its head, and if one did not notice that the boy was thinner than ever, that his hands soon tired of playing and lay in his lap, that Nurse Elisabet, who was much inured to death and lived her days with tragedy, caught him to her almost fiercely as she lifted him back from the chair into the smooth white bed.

He fell asleep with Peter's arm under his head and the horns of the deer beside him. On the bedside stand stood the wooden sentry, keeping guard. As Peter drew his arm away he became aware of the Nurse Elisabet beckoning to him from a door at the end of the ward Peter left the sentinel on guard and tiptoed down the room. Just outside, round a corner, was the Dozent's laboratory, and beyond the tiny closet where he slept, where on a stand was the photograph of the lady he would marry when he had become a professor and required no one's consent.

The Dozent was waiting for Peter. In the amiable conspiracy which kept the boy happy he was arch-plotter. His familiarity with Austrian intrigue had made him invaluable. He it was who had originated the idea of making Jimmy responsible for the order of the ward, so that a burly Trager quarreling over his daily tobacco with the nurse in charge, or brawling over his soup with another patient, was likely to be hailed in a thin soprano, and to stand, grinning sheepishly, while Jimmy, in mixed English and German, restored the decorum of the ward. They were a quarrelsome lot, the convalescents. Jimmy was so busy some days settling disputes and awarding decisions that he slept almost all night. This was as it should be.

The Dozent waited for Peter. His red beard twitched and his white coat, stained from the laboratory table, looked quite villainous. He held out a letter.

"This has come for the child," he said in quite good English. He was obliged to speak English. Day by day he taught in the clinics Americans who scorned his native tongue, and who brought him the money with which some day he would marry. He liked the English language; he liked Americans because they learned quickly. He held out an envelope with a black border and Peter took it.

"From Paris!" he said. "Who in the world--I suppose I'd better open it."

"So I thought. It appears a letter of--how you say it? Ah, yes, condolence."

Peter opened the letter and read it. Then without a word he gave it open to the Dozent. There was silence in the laboratory while the Dozent read it, silence except for his canary, which was chipping at a lump of sugar. Peter's face was very sober.

"So. A mother! You knew nothing of a mother?"

"Something from the papers I found. She left when the boy was a baby--went on the stage, I think. He has no recollection of her, which is a good thing. She seems to have been a bad lot."

"She comes to take him away. That is impossible."

"Of course it is impossible," said Peter savagely. "She's not going to see the child if I can help it. She left because--she's the boy's mother, but that's the best you can say of her. This letter--Well, you've read it."

"She is as a stranger to him?"

"Absolutely. She will come in mourning--look at that black border--and tell him his father is dead, and kill him. I know the type."

The canary chipped at his sugar; the red beard of the Dozent twitched, as does the beard of one who plots. Peter re-read the gushing letter in his hand and thought fiercely.

"She is on her way here," said the Dozent. "That is bad. Paris to Wien is two days and a night. She may hourly
arrive."

"We might send him away--to another hospital."
The Dozent shrugged his shoulders.

"Had I a home--" he said, and glanced through the door to the portrait on the stand. "It would be possible to hide the boy, at least for a time. In the interval the mother might be watched, and if she proved a fit person the boy could be given to her. It is, of course, an affair of police."

This gave Peter pause. He had no money for fines, no time for imprisonment, and he shared the common horror of the great jail. He read the letter again, and tried to read into the lines Jimmy's mother, and failed. He glanced into the ward. Still Jimmy slept. A burly convalescent, with a saber cut from temple to ear and the general appearance of an assassin, had stopped beside the bed and was drawing up the blanket round the small shoulders.

"I can give orders that the woman be not admitted to-day," said the Dozent. "That gives us a few hours. She will go to the police, and to-morrow she will be admitted. In the mean time--"

"In the mean time," Peter replied, "I'll try to think of something. If I thought she could be warned and would leave him here--"

"She will not. She will buy him garments and she will travel with him through the Riviera and to Nice. She says Nice. She wishes to be there for carnival, and the boy will die."

Peter took the letter and went home. He rode, that he might read it again in the bus. But no scrap of comfort could he get from it. It spoke of the dead father coldly, and the father had been the boy's idol. No good woman could have been so heartless. It offered the boy a seat in one of the least reputable of the Paris theaters to hear his mother sing. And in the envelope, overlooked before, Peter found a cutting from a French newspaper, a picture of the music-hall type that made him groan. It was indorsed "Mamma."

Harmony had had a busy morning. First she had put her house in order, working deftly, her pretty hair pinned up in a towel--all in order but Peter's room. That was to have a special cleaning later. Next, still with her hair tied up, she had spent two hours with her violin, standing very close to the stove to save fuel and keep her fingers warm. She played well that morning: even her own critical ears were satisfied, and the Portier, repairing a window lock in an empty room below, was entranced. He sat on the window sill in the biting cold and listened. Many music students had lived in the apartment with the great salon; there had been much music of one sort and another, but none like this.

"She tears my heart from my bosom," muttered the Portier, sighing, and almost swallowed a screw that he held in his teeth.

After the practicing Harmony cleaned Peter's room. She felt very tender toward Peter that day. The hurt left by Mrs. Boyer's visit had died away, but there remained a clear vision of Peter standing behind the chair and offering himself humbly in marriage, so that a bad situation might be made better. And as with a man tenderness expresses itself in the giving of gifts, so with a woman it means giving of service. Harmony cleaned Peter's room.

It was really rather tidy. Peter's few belongings did not spread to any extent and years of bachelorhood had taught him the rudiments of order. Harmony took the covers from washstand and dressing table and washed and ironed them. She cleaned Peter's worn brushes and brought a pincushion of her own for his one extra scarfpin. Finally she brought her own steamer rug and folded it across the foot of the bed. There was no stove in the room; it had been Harmony's room once, and she knew to the full how cold it could be.

Having made all comfortable for the outer man she prepared for the inner. She was in the kitchen, still with her hair tied up, when Anna came home.

Anna was preoccupied. Instead of her cheery greeting she came somberly back to the kitchen, a letter in her hand. History was making fast that day.

"Hello, Harry," she said. "I'm going to take a bite and hurry off. Don't bother, I'll attend to myself." She stuffed the letter in her belt and got a plate from a shelf. "How pretty you look with your head tied up! If stupid Peter saw you now he would fall in love with you."

"Then I shall take it off. Peter must be saved!"

Anna sat down at the tiny table and drank her tea. She felt rather better after the tea. Harmony, having taken the towel off, was busy over the brick stove. There was nothing said for a moment. Then:--

"I am out of patience with Peter," said Anna.

"Why?"

"Because he hasn't fallen in love with you. Where are his eyes?"

"Please, Anna!"

"It's better as it is, no doubt, for both of you. But it's superhuman of Peter. I wonder--"

"Yes?"

"I think I'll not tell you what I wonder."
And Harmony, rather afraid of Anna's frank speech, did not insist.

As she drank her tea and made a pretense at eating, Anna's thoughts wandered from Peter to Harmony to the letter in her belt and back again to Peter and Harmony. For some time she had been suspicious of Peter. From her dozen years of advantage in age and experience she looked down on Peter's thirty years of youth, and thought she knew something that Peter himself did not suspect. Peter being unintrospective, Anna did his heart-searching for him. She believed he was madly in love with Harmony and did not himself suspect it. As she watched the girl over her teacup, revealing herself in a thousand unposed gestures of youth and grace, a thousand lovelinesses, something of the responsibility she and Peter had assumed came over her. She sighed and felt for her letter.

"I've had rather bad news," she said at last.
"From home?"
"Yes. My father--did you know I have a father?"
"You hadn't spoken of him."
"I never do. As a father he hasn't amounted to much. But he's very ill, and--I've a conscience."

Harmony turned a startled face to her.
"You are not going back to America?"
"Oh, no, not now, anyhow. If I become hag ridden with remorse and do go I'll find some one to take my place. Don't worry."

The lunch was a silent meal. Anna was hurrying off as Peter came in, and there was no time to discuss Peter's new complication with her. Harmony and Peter ate together, Harmony rather silent. Anna's unfortunate comment about Peter had made her constrained. After the meal Peter, pipe in mouth, carried the dishes to the kitchen, and there it was that he gave her the letter. What Peter's slower mind had been a perceptible time in grasping Harmony comprehended at once--and not only the situation, but its solution.

"Don't let her have him!" she said, putting down the letter. "Bring him here. Oh, Peter, how good we must be to him!"

And that after all was how the thing was settled. So simple, so obvious was it that these three expatriates, these waifs and estrays, banded together against a common poverty, a common loneliness, should share without question whatever was theirs to divide. Peter and Anna gave cheerfully of their substance, Harmony of her labor, that a small boy should be saved a tragic knowledge until he was well enough to bear it, or until, if God so willed, he might learn it himself without pain.

The friendly sentry on duty again that night proved singularly blind. Thus it happened that, although the night was clear when the twin dials of the Votivkirche showed nine o'clock, he did not notice a cab that halted across the street from the hospital.

Still more strange that, although Peter passed within a dozen feet of him, carrying a wriggling and excited figure wrapped in a blanket and insisting on uncovering its feet, the sentry was able the next day to say that he had observed such a person carrying a bundle, but that it was a short stocky person, quite lame, and that the bundle was undoubtedly clothing going to the laundry.

Perhaps--it is just possible--the sentry had his suspicions. It is undeniable that as Jimmy in the cab on Peter's knee, with Peter's arm close about him, looked back at the hospital, the sentry was going through the manual of arms very solemnly under the stars and facing toward the carriage.

CHAPTER XIV

For two days at Semmering it rained. The Raxalpe and the Schneeberg sulked behind walls of mist. From the little balcony of the Pension Waldheim one looked out over a sea of cloud, pierced here and there by islands that were crags or by the tops of sunken masts that were evergreen trees. The roads were masses of slippery mud, up which the horses steamed and sweated. The gray cloud fog hung over everything; the barking of a dog loomed out of it near at hand where no dog was to be seen. Children cried and wild birds squawked; one saw them not.

During the second night a landslide occurred on the side of the mountain with a rumble like the noise of fifty trains. In the morning, the rain clouds lifting for a moment, Marie saw the narrow yellow line of the slip.

Everything was saturated with moisture. It did no good to close the heavy wooden shutters at night: in the morning the air of the room was sticky and clothing was moist to the touch. Stewart, confined to the house, grew irritable.

Marie watched him anxiously. She knew quite well by what slender tenure she held her man. They had nothing in common, neither speech nor thought. And the little Marie's love for Stewart, grown to be a part of her, was largely maternal. She held him by mothering him, by keeping him comfortable, not by a great reciprocal passion that might in time have brought him to her in chains.

And now he was uncomfortable. He chafed against the confinement; he resented the food, the weather. Even Marie's content at her unusual leisure irked him. He accused her of purring like a cat by the fire, and stamped out
more than once, only to be driven in by the curious thunderstorms of early Alpine winter.

On the night of the second day the weather changed. Marie, awakening early, stepped out on to the balcony and closed the door carefully behind her. A new world lay beneath her, a marvel of glittering branches, of white plain far below; the snowy mane of the Raxalpe was become a garment. And from behind the villa came the cheerful sound of sleigh-bells, of horses' feet on crisp snow, of runners sliding easily along frozen roads. Even the barking of the dog in the next yard had ceased rumbling and became sharp staccato.

The balcony extended round the corner of the house. Marie, eagerly discovering her new world, peered about, and seeing no one near ventured so far. The road was in view, and a small girl on ski was struggling to prevent a collision between two plump feet. Even as Marie saw her the inevitable happened and she went headlong into a drift. A governess who had been kneeling before a shrine by the road hastily crossed herself and ran to the rescue.

It was a marvelous morning, a day of days. The governess and the child went out of vision. Marie stood still, looking at the shrine. A drift had piled about its foot, where the governess had placed a bunch of Alpine flowers. Down on her knees on the balcony went the little Marie, regardless of the snow, and prayed to the shrine of the Virgin below—for what? For forgiveness? For a better life? Not at all. She prayed that the heels of the American girl would keep her in out of the snow.

The prayer of the wicked availeth nothing; even the godly at times must suffer disappointment. And when one prays, who can know of the yearning back of the praying? Marie, rising and dusting her chilled knees, saw the party of Americans on the road, clad in stout boots and swinging along gayly. Marie shrugged her shoulders resignedly. She should have gone to the shrine itself; a balcony was not a holy place. But one thing she determined—the Americans went toward the Sonnwendstein. She would advise against the Sonnwendstein for that day.

Marie's day of days had begun wrong after all. For Stewart rose with the Sonnwendstein in his mind, and no suggestion of Marie's that in another day a path would be broken had any effect on him. He was eager to be off, committed the extravagance of ordering an egg apiece for breakfast, and finally proclaimed that if Marie feared the climb he would go alone.

Marie made many delays: she dressed slowly, and must run back to see if the balcony door was securely closed. At a little shop where they stopped to buy mountain sticks she must purchase postcards and send them at once. Stewart was fairly patient: air and exercise were having their effect.

It was eleven o'clock when, having crossed the valley, they commenced to mount the slope of the Sonnwendstein. The climb was easy; the road wound back and forward on itself so that one ascended with hardly an effort. Stewart gave Marie a hand here and there, and even paused to let her sit on a boulder and rest. The snow was not heavy; he showed her the footprints of a party that had gone ahead, and to amuse her tried to count the number of people. When he found it was five he grew thoughtful. There were five in Anita's party. Thanks to Marie's delays they met the Americans coming down. The meeting was a short one: the party went on down, gayly talking. Marie and Stewart climbed silently. Marie's day was spoiled; Stewart had promised to dine at the hotel.

Even the view at the tourist house did not restore Marie's fallen spirits. What were the Vienna plain and the Styrian Alps to her, with this impatient and frowning man beside her consulting his watch and computing the time until he might see the American again? What was prayer, if this were its answer?

They descended rapidly, Stewart always in the lead and setting a pace that Marie struggled in vain to meet. To her tentative and breathless remarks he made brief answer, and only once in all that time did he volunteer a remark. They had reached the Hotel Erzherzog in the valley. The hotel was still closed, and Marie, panting, sat down on an edge of the terrace.

"We have been very foolish," he said.
"Why?"
"Being seen together like that."
"But why? Could you not walk with any woman?"
"It's not that," said Stewart hastily. "I suppose once does not matter. But we can't be seen together all the time."

Marie turned white. The time had gone by when an incident of the sort could have been met with scorn or with threats; things had changed for Marie Jedlicka since the day Peter had refused to introduce her to Harmony. Then it had been vanity; now it was life itself.

"What you mean," she said with pale lips, "is that we must not be seen together at all. Must I--do you wish me to remain a prisoner while you--" she choked.
"For Heaven's sake," he broke out brutally, "don't make a scene. There are men cutting ice over there. Of course you are not a prisoner. You may go where you like."

Marie rose and picked up her muff.

Marie's sordid little tragedy played itself out in Semmering. Stewart neglected her almost completely; he took fewer and fewer meals at the villa. In two weeks he spent one evening with the girl, and was so irritable that she
went to bed crying. The little mountain resort was filling up; there were more and more Americans. Christmas was
drawing near and a dozen or so American doctors came up, bringing their families for the holidays. It was difficult
to enter a shop without encountering some of them. To add to the difficulty, the party at the hotel, finding it crowded
there, decided to go into a pension and suggested moving to the Waldheim.

Stewart himself was wretchedly uncomfortable. Marie's tragedy was his predicament. He disliked himself very
cordially, loathing himself and his situation with the new-born humility of the lover. For Stewart was in love for the
first time in his life. Marie knew it. She had not lived with him for months without knowing his every thought, every
mood. She grew bitter and hard those days, sitting alone by the green stove in the Pension Waldheim, or leaning,
elbows on the rail, looking from the balcony over the valley far below. Bitter and hard, that is, during his absences;
had he but to enter the room and her rage died, to be replaced with yearning and little, shy, tentative advances that he
only tolerated. Wild thoughts came to Marie, especially at night, when the stars made a crown over the Rax, and in
the hotel an orchestra played, while people dined and laughed and loved.

She grew obstinate, too. When in his desperation Stewart suggested that they go back to Vienna she openly
scoffed.

"Why?" she demanded. "That you may come back here to her, leaving me there?"
"My dear girl," he flung back exasperated, "this affair was not a permanent one. You knew that at the start."
"You have taken me away from my work. I have two months' vacation. It is but one month."
"Go back and let me pay--"
"No!

In pursuance of the plan to leave the hotel the American party came to see the Waldheim, and catastrophe almost
ensued. Luckily Marie was on the balcony when the landlady flung open the door, and announced it as Stewart's
apartment. But Stewart had a bad five minutes and took it out, manlike, on the girl.

Stewart had another reason for not wishing to leave Semmering. Anita was beautiful, a bit of a coquette, too; as
are most pretty women. And Stewart was not alone in his devotion. A member of the party, a New Yorker named
Adam, was much in love with the girl and indifferent who knew it. Stewart detested him.

In his despair Stewart wrote to Peter Byrne. It was characteristic of Peter that, however indifferent people might
be in prosperity, they always turned to him in trouble. Stewart's letter concluded:--

"I have made out a poor case for myself; but I'm in a hole, as you can see. I would like to chuck everything here
and sail for home with these people who go in January. But, confound it, Byrne, what am I to do with Marie? And
that brings me to what I've been wanting to say all along, and haven't had the courage to. Marie likes you and you
rather liked her, didn't you? You could talk her into reason if anybody could. Now that you know how things are,
can't you come up over Sunday? It's asking a lot, and I know it; but things are pretty bad."

Peter received the letter on the morning of the day before Christmas. He read it several times and, recalling the
look he had seen more than once in Marie Jedlicka's eyes, he knew that things were very bad, indeed.

But Peter was a man of family in those days, and Christmas is a family festival not to be lightly ignored. He
wired to Stewart that he would come up as soon as possible after Christmas. Then, because of the look in Marie's
eyes and because he feared for her a sad Christmas, full of heartaches and God knows what loneliness, he bought her
a most hideous brooch, which he thought admirable in every way and highly ornamental and which he could not
afford at all. This he mailed, with a cheery greeting, and feeling happier and much poorer made his way homeward.

CHAPTER XV

Christmas-Eve in the saloon of Maria Theresa! Christmas-Eve, with the great chandelier recklessly ablaze and a
pig's head with cranberry eyes for supper! Christmas-Eve, with a two-foot tree gleaming with candles on the stand,
and beside the stand, in a huge chair, Jimmy!

It had been a busy day for Harmony. In the morning there had been shopping and marketing, and such a
temptation to be reckless, with the shops full of ecstasies and the old flower women fairly overburdened. There had
been anxieties, too, such as the pig's head, which must be done a certain way, and Jimmy, who must be left with the
Portier's wife as nurse while all of them went to the hospital. The house revolved around Jimmy now, Jimmy, who
had but to enter the room and her rage died, to be replaced with yearning and little, shy, tentative advances that he
only tolerated. Wild thoughts came to Marie, especially at night, when the stars made a crown over the Rax, and in
the hotel an orchestra played, while people dined and laughed and loved.

She grew obstinate, too. When in his desperation Stewart suggested that they go back to Vienna she openly
scoffed.

"Why?" she demanded. "That you may come back here to her, leaving me there?"
"My dear girl," he flung back exasperated, "this affair was not a permanent one. You knew that at the start."
"You have taken me away from my work. I have two months' vacation. It is but one month."
"Go back and let me pay--"
"No!"
time after long days and longer nights. And there are those who will never go home and who know it. And because of this the ones who are never going home are most festively clad, as if, by way of compensation, the nurses mean to give them all future Christmases in one. They receive an extra orange, or a pair of gloves, perhaps,--and they are not the less grateful because they understand. And when everything is over they lay away in the bedside stand the gloves they will never wear, and divide the extra orange with a less fortunate one who is almost recovered. Their last Christmas is past.

"How beautiful the tree was!" they say. Or, "Did you hear how the children sang? So little, to sing like that! It made me think--of angels."

Peter led Harmony across the courtyard, through many twisting corridors, and up and down more twisting staircases to the room where she was to play. There were many Christmas trees in the hospital that afternoon; no one hall could have held the thousands of patients, the doctors, the nurses. Sometimes a single ward had its own tree, its own entertainment. Occasionally two or three joined forces, preempted a lecture-room, and wheeled or hobbled or carried in their convalescents. In such case an imposing audience was the result.

Into such a room Peter led Harmony. It was an amphitheater, the seats rising in tiers, half circle above half circle, to the dusk of the roof. In the pit stood the tree, candle-lighted. There was no other illumination in the room. The semi-darkness, the blazing tree, the rows of hopeful, hoping, hopeless, rising above, white faces over white gowns, the soft rustle of expectancy, the silence when the Dozent with the red beard stepped out and began to read an address--all caught Harmony by the throat. Peter, keenly alive to everything she did, felt rather than heard her soft sob.

Peter saw the hospital anew that dark afternoon, saw it through Harmony's eyes. Layer after layer his professional callus fell away, leaving him quick again. He had lived so long close to the heart of humanity that he had reduced its throbbing to beats that might be counted. Now, once more, Peter was back in the early days, when a heart was not a pump, but a thing that ached or thrilled or struggled, that loved or hated or yearned.

The orchestra, insisting on sadly sentimental music, was fast turning festivity into gloom. It played Handel's "Largo"; it threw its whole soul into the assurance that the world, after all, was only a poor place, that Heaven was a better. It preached resignation with every deep vibration of the cello. Harmony fidgeted.

"How terrible!" she whispered. "To turn their Christmas-Eve into mourning! Stop them!"

"Stop a German orchestra?"

"They are crying, some of them. Oh, Peter!"

The music came to an end at last. Tears were dried. Followed recitations, gifts, a speech of thanks from Nurse Elisabet for the patients. Then--Harmony.

Harmony never remembered afterward what she had played. It was joyous, she knew, for the whole atmosphere changed. Laughter came; even the candles burned more cheerfully. When she had finished, a student in a white coat asked her to play a German Volkspiel, and roared it out to her accompaniment with much vigor and humor. The audience joined in, at first timidly, then lustily.

Harmony stood alone by the tree, violin poised, smiling at the applause. Her eyes, running along the dim amphitheater, sought Peter's, and finding them dwelt there a moment. Then she began to play softly and as softly the others sang.

"Still Nacht, heilige Nacht,"--they sang, with upturned eyes.

"Alles schlaeft, einsam wacht..."

Visions came to Peter that afternoon in the darkness, visions in which his poverty was forgotten or mattered not at all. Visions of a Christmas-Eve in a home that he had earned, of a tree, of a still and holy night, of a child.

"Nur das traute, hoch heilige Paar Holder Knabe im lockigen Haar Schlaf' in himmlischer Ruh', Schlaf' in himmlischer Ruh'," they sang.

There was real festivity at the old lodge of Maria Theresa that night.

Jimmy had taken his full place in the household. The best room, which had been Anna's, had been given up to him. Here, carefully tended, with a fire all day in the stove, Jimmy reigned from the bed. To him Harmony brought her small puzzles and together they solved them.

"Shall it be a steak to-night?" thus Harmony humbly. "Or chops?"

"With tomato sauce?"

"If Peter allows, yes."

Much thinking on Jimmy's part, and then:--

"Fish," he would decide. "Fish with egg dressing."

They would argue for a time, and compromise on fish.

The boy was better. Peter shook his head over any permanent improvement, but Anna fiercely seized each crumb
of hope. Many and bitter were the battles she and Peter fought at night over his treatment, frightful the litter of authorities Harmony put straight every morning.

The extra expense was not much, but it told. Peter's carefully calculated expenditures felt the strain. He gave up a course in X-ray on which he had set his heart and cut off his hour in the coffee-house as a luxury. There was no hardship about the latter renunciation. Life for Peter was spelling itself very much in terms of Harmony and Jimmy those days. He resented anything that took him from them.

There were anxieties of a different sort also. Anna's father was failing. He had written her a feeble, half-senile appeal to let bygones be bygones and come back to see him before he died. Anna was Peter's great prop. What would he do should she decide to go home? He had built his house on the sand, indeed.

So far the threatened danger of a mother to Jimmy had not materialized. Peter was puzzled, but satisfied. He still wrote letters of marvelous adventure; Jimmy still watched for them, listened breathless, treasured them under his pillow. But he spoke less of his father. The open page of his childish mind was being written over with new impressions. "Dad" was already a memory; Peter and Harmony and Anna were realities. Sometimes he called Peter "Dad." At those times Peter caught the boy to him in an agony of tenderness.

And as the little apartment revolved round Jimmy, so was this Christmas-Eve given up to him. All day he had stayed in bed for the privilege of an extra hour propped up among pillows in the salon. All day he had strung little red berries that looked like cranberries for the tree, or fastened threads to the tiny cakes that were for trimming only, and sternly forbidden to eat.

A marvelous day that for Jimmy. Late in the afternoon the Portier, with a collar on, had mounted the stairs and sheepishly presented him with a pair of white mice in a wooden cage. Jimmy was thrilled. The cage was on his knees all evening, and one of the mice was clearly ill of a cake with pink icing. The Portier's gift was a stealthy one, while his wife was having coffee with her cousin, the brushmaker. But the spirit Of Christmas does strange things. That very evening, while the Portier was roistering in a beer hall preparatory to the midnight mass, came the Portier's wife, puffing from the stairs, and brought a puzzle book that only the initiated could open, and when one succeeded at last there was a picture of the Christ-Child within.

Young McLean came to call that evening--came to call and remained to worship. It was the first time since Mrs. Boyer that a visitor had come. McLean, interested with everything and palpably not shocked, was a comforting caller. He seemed to Harmony, who had had bad moments since the day of Mrs. Boyer's visit, to put the hallmark of respectability on the household, to restore it to something it had lost or had never had.

She was quite unconscious of McLean's admiration. She and Anna put Jimmy to bed. The tree candles were burned out; Peter was extinguishing the dying remnants when Harmony came back. McLean was at the piano, thrumming softly. Peter, turning round suddenly, surprised an expression on the younger man's face that startled him.

For that one night Harmony had laid aside her mourning, and wore white, soft white, tucked in at the neck, short-sleeved, trailing. Peter had never seen her in white before.

It was Peter's way to sit back and listen: his steady eyes were always alert, good-humored, but he talked very little. That night he was unusually silent. He sat in the shadow away from the lamp and watched the two at the piano: McLean playing a bit of this or that, the girl bending over a string of her violin. Anna came in and sat down near him.

"The boy is quite fascinated," she whispered. "Watch his eyes!"

"He is a nice boy." This from Peter, as if he argued with himself.

"As men go!" This was a challenge Peter was usually quick to accept. That night he only smiled. "It would be a good thing for her: his people are wealthy."

Money, always money! Peter ground his teeth over his pipestem. Eminently it would be a good thing for Harmony, this nice boy in his well-made evening clothes, who spoke Harmony's own language of music, who was almost speechless over her playing, and who looked up at her with eyes in which admiration was not unmixed with adoration.

Peter was restless. As the music went on he tiptoed out of the room and took to pacing up and down the little corridor. Each time as he passed the door he tried not to glance in; each time he paused involuntarily. Jealousy had her will of him that night, jealousy, when he had never acknowledged even to himself how much the girl was to him.

Jimmy was restless. Usually Harmony's music put him to sleep; but that night he lay awake, even after Peter had closed all the doors. Peter came in and sat with him in the dark, going over now and then to cover him, or to give him a drink, or to pick up the cage of mice which Jimmy insisted on having beside him and which constantly slipped off on to the floor. After a time Peter lighted the night-light, a bit of wick on a cork floating in a saucer of lard oil, and set it on the bedside table. Then round it he arranged Jimmy's treasures, the deer antlers, the cage of mice, the box, the wooden sentry. The boy fell asleep. Peter sat in the room, his dead pipe in his teeth, and thought of many
It was very late when young McLean left. The two had played until they stopped for very weariness. Anna had yawned herself off to bed. From Jimmy's room Peter could hear the soft hum of their voices.

"You have been awfully good to me," McLean said as he finally rose to go. "I--I want you to know that I'll never forget this evening, never."

"It has been splendid, hasn't it? Since little Scatchy left there has been no one for the piano. I have been lonely sometimes for some one to talk music to."

Lonely! Poor Peter!

"Then you will let me come back?"

"Will I, indeed! I--I'll be grateful."

"How soon would be proper? I dare say to-morrow you'll be busy--Christmas and all that."

"Do you mean you would like to come to-morrow?"

"If old Peter wouldn't be fussed. He might think--"

"Peter always wants every one to be happy. So if you really care--"

"And I'll not bore you?"

"Rather not!"

"How--about what time?"

"In the afternoon would be pleasant, I think. And then Jimmy can listen. He loves music."

McLean, having found his fur-lined coat, got into it as slowly as possible. Then he missed a glove, and it must be searched for in all the dark corners of the salon until found in his pocket. Even then he hesitated, lingered, loath to break up this little world of two.

"You play wonderfully," he said.

"So do you."

"If only something comes of it! It's curious, isn't it, when you think of it? You and I working our heads off for something that may never pan out."

There was something reminiscent about that to Harmony. It was not until after young McLean had gone that she recalled. It was almost word for word what Peter had said to her in the coffee-house the night they met. She thought it very curious, the coincidence, and pondered it, being ignorant of the fact that it is always a matter for wonder when the man meets the woman, no matter where. Nothing is less curious, more inevitable, more amazing. "You and I," forsooth, said Peter!

"You and I," cried young McLean!

CHAPTER XVI

Quite suddenly Peter's house, built on the sand, collapsed. The shock came on Christmas-Day, after young McLean, now frankly infatuated, had been driven home by Peter.

Peter did it after his own fashion. Harmony, with unflagging enthusiasm, was looking tired. Suggestions to this effect rolled off McLean's back like rain off a roof. Finally Peter gathered up the fur-lined coat, the velours hat, gloves, and stick, and placed them on the piano in front of the younger man.

"I'm sorry you must go," said Peter calmly, "but, as you say, Miss Wells is tired and there is supper to be eaten. Don't let me hurry you."

The Portier was at the door as McLean, laughing and protesting, went out. He brought a cablegram for Anna. Peter took it to her door and waited uneasily while she read it.

It was an urgent summons home; the old father was very low. He was calling for her, and a few days or week would see the end. There were things that must be looked after. The need of her was imperative. With the death the old man's pension would cease and Anna was the bread-winner.

Anna held the paper out to Peter and sat down. Her nervous strength seemed to have deserted her. All at once she was a stricken, elderly woman, with hope wiped out of her face and something nearer resentment than grief in its place.

"It has come, Peter," she said dully. "I always knew it couldn't last. They've always hung about my neck, and now--"

"Do you think you must go? Isn't there some way? If things are so bad you could hardly get there in time, and--you must think of yourself a little, Anna."

"I am not thinking of anything else. Peter, I'm an uncommonly selfish woman, but I--"

Quite without warning she burst out crying, unlovely, audible weeping that shook her narrow shoulders. Harmony heard the sound and joined them. After a look at Anna she sat down beside her and put a white arm over her shoulders. She did not try to speak. Anna's noisy grief subsided as suddenly as it came. She patted Harmony's hand in mute acknowledgment and dried her eyes.
"I'm not grieving, child," she said; "I'm only realizing what a selfish old maid I am. I'm crying because I'm a 
disappointment to myself. Harry, I'm going back to America."

And that, after hours of discussion, was where they ended. Anna must go at once. Peter must keep the apartment, 
having Jimmy to look after and to hide. What was a frightful dilemma to him and to Harmony Anna took rather 
lightly.

"You'll find some one else to take my place," she said. "If I had a day I could find a dozen."

"And in the interval?" Harmony asked, without looking at Peter.

"The interval! Tut! Peter is your brother, to all intents and purposes. And if you are thinking of scandal-mongers, 
who will know?"

Having determined to go, no arguments moved Anna, nor could either of the two think of anything to urge 
beyond a situation she refused to see, or rather a situation she refused to acknowledge. She was not as comfortable 
as she pretended. During all that long night, while snow sifted down into the ugly yard and made it beautiful, while 
Jimmy slept and the white mice played, while Harmony tossed and tried to sleep and Peter sat in his cold room and 
smoked his pipe, Anna packed her untidy belongings and added a name now and then to a list that was meant for 
Peter, a list of possible substitutes for herself in the little household.

She left early the next morning, a grim little person who bent over the sleeping boy hungrily, and insisted on 
carrying her own bag down the stairs. Harmony did not go to the station, but stayed at home, pale and silent, 
hovering around against Jimmy's awakening and struggling against a feeling of panic. Not that she feared Peter or 
herself. But she was conventional; shielded girls are accustomed to lean for a certain support on the proprieties, as 
bridgeplayers depend on rules.

Peter came back to breakfast, but ate little. Harmony did not even sit down, but drank her cup of coffee standing, 
looking down at the snow below. Jimmy still slept.

"Won't you sit down?" said Peter.

"I'm not hungry, thank you."

"You can sit down without eating."

Peter was nervous. To cover his uneasiness he was distinctly gruff. He pulled a chair out for her and she sat 
down. Now that they were face to face the tension was lessened. Peter laid Anna's list on the table between them and 
bent over it toward her.

"You are hurting me very much, Harry," he said. "Do you know why?"

"I? I am only sorry about Anna. I miss her. I--I was fond of her."

"So was I. But that isn't it, Harry. It's something else."

"I'm uncomfortable, Peter."

"So am I. I'm sorry you don't trust me. For that's it."

"Not at all. But, Peter, what will people say?"

"A great deal, if they know. Who is to know? How many people know about us? A handful, at the most, McLean 
and Mrs. Boyer and one or two others. Of course I can go away until we get some one to take Anna's place, but 
you'd be here alone at night, and if the youngster had an attack--"

"Oh, no, don't leave him!"

"It's holiday time. There are no clinics until next week. If you'll put up with me--"

"Put up with you, when it is your apartment I use, your food I eat!" She almost choked. "Peter, I must talk about 
money."

"I'm coming to that. Don't you suppose you more than earn everything? Doesn't it humiliate me hourly to see 
you working here?"

"Peter! Would you rob me of my last vestige of self-respect?"

This being unanswerable, Peter fell back on his major premise.

"If you'll put up with me for a day or so I'll take this list of Anna's and hunt up some body. Just describe the 
person you desire and I'll find her." He assumed a certainty he was far from feeling, but it reassured the girl. "A 
woman, of course?"

"Of course. And not young."

"Not young," wrote Peter. "Fat?"

Harmony recalled Mrs. Boyer's ample figure and shook her head.

"Not too stout. And agreeable. That's most important."

"Agreeable," wrote Peter. "Although Anna was hardly agreeable, in the strict sense of the word, was she?"

"She was interesting, and--and human."

"Human!" wrote Peter. "Wanted, a woman, not young, not too stout, agreeable and human. Shall I advertise?"

The strain was quite gone by that time. Harmony was smiling. Jimmy, waking, called for food, and the morning
of the first day was under way.

Peter was well content that morning, in spite of an undercurrent of uneasiness. Before this Anna had shared his proprietorship with him. Now the little household was his. His vicarious domesticity pleased him. He strutted about, taking a new view of his domain; he tightened a doorknob and fastened a noisy window. He inspected the coal-supply and grumbled over its quality. He filled the copper kettle on the stove, carried in the water for Jimmy's morning bath, cleaned the mouse cage. He even insisted on peeling the little German potatoes, until Harmony cried aloud at his wastefulness and took the knife from him.

And afterward, while Harmony in the sickroom read aloud and Jimmy put the wooden sentry into the cage to keep order, he got out his books and tried to study. But he did little work. His book lay on his knee, his pipe died beside him. The strangeness of the situation came over him, sitting there, and left him rather frightened. He tried to see it from the viewpoint of an outsider, and found himself incredulous and doubting. McLean would resent the situation. Even the Portier was a person to reckon with. The skepticism of the American colony was a thing to fear and avoid.

And over all hung the incessant worry about money; he could just manage alone. He could not, by any method he knew of, stretch his resources to cover a separate arrangement for himself. But he had undertaken to shield a girl-woman and a child, and shield them he would and could.

Brave thoughts were Peter's that snowy morning in the great salon of Maria Theresa, with the cat of the Portier purring before the fire; brave thoughts, cool reason, with Harmony practicing scales very softly while Jimmy slept, and with Anna speeding through a white world, to the accompaniment of bitter meditation.

Peter had meant to go to Semmering that day, but even the urgency of Marie's need faded before his own situation. He wired Stewart that he would come as soon as he could, and immediately after lunch departed for the club, Anna's list in his pocket, Harmony's requirements in mind. He paused at Jimmy's door on his way out.

"What shall it be to-day?" he inquired. "A postcard or a crayon?"
"I wish I could have a dog."
"We'll have a dog when you are better and can take him walking. Wait until spring, son."
"Some more mice?"
"You will have them—but not to-day."
"What holiday comes next?"
"New Year's Day. Suppose I bring you a New Year's card."
"That's right," agreed Jimmy. "One I can send to Dad. Do you think he will come back this year?" wistfully. Peter dropped on his baggy knees beside the bed and drew the little wasted figure to him.
"I think you'll surely see him this year, old man," he said huskily.

Peter walked to the Doctors' Club. On the way he happened on little Georgiev, the Bulgarian, and they went on together. Peter managed to make out that Georgiev was studying English, and that he desired to know the state of health and the abode of the Fraulein Wells. Peter evaded the latter by the simple expedient of pretending not to understand. The little Bulgarian watched him earnestly, his smouldering eyes not without suspicion. There had been much talk in the Pension Schwarz about the departure together of the three Americans. The Jew from Galicia still raved over Harmony's beauty.

Georgiev rather hoped, by staying by Peter, to be led toward his star. But Peter left him at the Doctors' Club, still amiable, but absolutely obtuse to the question nearest the little spy's heart.

The club was almost deserted. The holidays had taken many of the members out of town. Other men were taking advantage of the vacation to see the city, or to make acquaintance again with families they had hardly seen during the busy weeks before Christmas. The room at the top of the stairs where the wives of the members were apt to meet for chocolate and to exchange the addresses of dressmakers was empty; in the reading room he found McLean. Although not a member, McLean was a sort of honorary habitue, being allowed the privilege of the club in exchange for a dependable willingness to play at entertainments of all sorts.

It was in Peter's mind to enlist McLean's assistance in his difficulties. McLean knew a good many people. He was popular, goodlooking, and in a colony where, unlike London and Paris, the great majority were people of moderate means, he was conspicuously well off. But he was also much younger than Peter and intolerant with the insolence of youth. Peter was thinking hard as he took off his overcoat and ordered beer.

The boy was in love with Harmony already; Peter had seen that, as he saw many things. How far his love might carry him, Peter had no idea. It seemed to him, as he sat across the reading-table and studied him over his magazine, that McLean would resent bitterly the girl's position, and that when he learned it a crisis might be precipitated.

One of three things might happen: He might bend all his energies to second Peter's effort to fill Anna's place, to find the right person; he might suggest taking Anna's place himself, and insist that his presence in the apartment would be as justifiable as Peter's; or he might do at once the thing Peter felt he would do eventually, cut the knot of
the difficulty by asking Harmony to marry him. Peter, greeting him pleasantly, decided not to tell him anything, to keep him away if possible until the thing was straightened out, and to wait for an hour at the club in the hope that a solution might stroll in for chocolate and gossip.

In any event explanation to McLean would have required justification. Peter disliked the idea. He could humble himself, if necessary, to a woman; he could admit his asininity in assuming the responsibility of Jimmy, for instance, and any woman worthy of the name, or worthy of living in the house with Harmony, would understand. But McLean was young, intolerant. He was more than that, though Peter, concealing from himself just what Harmony meant to him, would not have admitted a rival for what he had never claimed. But a rival the boy was. Peter, calmly reading a magazine and drinking his Munich beer, was in the grip of the fiercest jealousy. He turned pages automatically, to recall nothing of what he had read.

McLean, sitting across from him, watched him surreptitiously. Big Peter, aggressively masculine, heavy of shoulder, direct of speech and eye, was to him the embodiment of all that a woman should desire in a man. He, too, was jealous, but humbly so. Unlike Peter he knew his situation, was young enough to glory in it. Shameless love is always young; with years comes discretion, perhaps loss of confidence. The Crusaders were youths, pursuing an idea to the ends of the earth and flaunting a lady's guerdon from spear or saddle-bow. The older men among them tucked the handkerchief or bit of a gauntleted glove under jerkin and armor near the heart, and flung to the air the guerdon of some light o' love. McLean would have shouted Harmony's name from the housetops. Peter did not acknowledge even to himself that he was in love with her.

It occurred to McLean after a time that Peter being in the club, and Harmony being in all probability at home, it might be possible to see her alone for a few minutes. He had not intended to go back to the house in the Siebensternstrasse so soon after being peremptorily put out; he had come to the club with the intention of clinching his resolution with a game of cribbage. But fate was playing into his hands. There was no cribbage player round, and Peter himself sat across deeply immersed in a magazine. McLean rose, not stealthily, but without unnecessary noise. So far so good. Peter turned a page and went on reading. McLean sauntered to a window, hands in pockets. He even whistled a trifle, under his breath, to prove how very casual were his intentions. Still whistling, he moved toward the door. Peter turned another page, which was curiously soon to have read two columns of small type without illustrations.

Once out in the hall McLean's movements gained aim and precision. He got his coat, hat and stick, flung the first over his arm and the second on his head, and--

"Going out?" asked Peter calmly.

"Yes, nothing to do here. I've read all the infernal old magazines until I'm sick of them." Indignant, too, from his tone.

"Walking?"

"Yes."

"Mind if I go with you?"

"Not at all."

Peter, taking down his old overcoat from its hook, turned and caught the boy's eye. It was a swift exchange of glances, but illuminating--Peter's whimsical, but with a sort of grim determination; McLean's sheepish, but equally determined.

"Rotten afternoon," said McLean as they started for the stairs. "Half rain, half snow. Streets are ankle-deep."

"I'm not particularly keen about walking, but--I don't care for this tomb alone."

Nothing was further from McLean's mind than a walk with Peter that afternoon. He hesitated halfway down the upper flight.

"You don't care for cribbage, do you?"

"Don't know anything about it. How about pinochle?"

They had both stopped, equally determined, equally hesitating.

"Pinochle it is," acquiesced McLean. "I was only going because there was nothing to do."

Things went very well for Peter that afternoon--up to a certain point. He beat McLean unmercifully, playing with cold deliberation. McLean wearied, fidgeted, railed at his luck. Peter played on grimly.

The club filled up toward the coffee-hour. Two or three women, wives of members, a young girl to whom McLean had been rather attentive before he met Harmony and who bridled at the abstracted bow he gave her. And, finally, when hope in Peter was dead, one of the women on Anna's list.

Peter, laying down pairs and marking up score, went over Harmony's requirements. Dr. Jennings seemed to fit them all, a woman, not young, not too stout, agreeable and human. She was a large, almost bovinely placid person, not at all reminiscent of Anna. She was neat where Anna had been disorderly, well dressed and breezy against Anna's dowdiness and sharpness. Peter, having totaled the score, rose and looked down at McLean.
"You're a nice lad," he said, smiling. "Sometime I shall teach you the game."

"How about a lesson to-night in Seven-Star Street?"

"To-night? Why, I'm sorry. We have an engagement for to-night."

The "we" was deliberate and cruel. McLean writhed. Also the statement was false, but the boy was spared that knowledge for the moment.

Things went well. Dr. Jennings was badly off for quarters. She would make a change if she could better herself. Peter drew her off to a corner and stated his case. She listened attentively, albeit not without disapproval.

Dr. Jennings was badly off for quarters. She would make a change if she could better herself. Peter drew her off to a corner and stated his case. She listened attentively, albeit not without disapproval.

She frankly discredited the altruism of Peter's motives when he told her about Harmony. But as the recital went on she found herself rather touched. The story of Jimmy appealed to her. She scolded and lauded Peter in one breath, and what was more to the point, she promised to visit the house in the Siebensternstrasse the next day.

"So Anna Gates has gone home!" she reflected. "When?"

"This morning."

"Then the girl is there alone?"

"Yes. She is very young and inexperienced, and the boy--it's myocarditis. She's afraid to be left with him."

"Is she quite alone?"

"Absolutely, and without funds, except enough for her lessons. Our arrangement was that she should keep the house going; that was her share."

Dr. Jennings was impressed. It was impossible to talk to Peter and not believe him. Women trusted Peter always.

"You've been very foolish, Dr. Byrne," she said as she rose; "but you've been disinterested enough to offset that and to put some of us to shame. To-morrow at three, if it suits you. You said the Siebensternstrasse?"

Peter went home exultant.

CHAPTER XVII

Christmas-Day had had a softening effect on Mrs. Boyer. It had opened badly. It was the first Christmas she had spent away from her children, and there had been little of the holiday spirit in her attitude as she prepared the Christmas breakfast. After that, however, things happened.

In the first place, under her plate she had found a frivolous chain and pendant which she had admired. And when her eyes filled up, as they did whenever she was emotionally moved, the doctor had come round the table and put both his arms about her.

"Too young for you? Not a bit!" he said heartily. "You're better-looking then you ever were, Jennie; and if you weren't you're the only woman for me, anyhow. Don't you think I realize what this exile means to you and that you're doing it for me?"

"I--I don't mind it."

"Yes, you do. To-night we'll go out and make a night of it, shall we? Supper at the Grand, the theater, and then the Tabarin, eh?"

She loosened herself from his arms.

"What shall I wear? Those horrible things the children bought me--"

"Throw 'em away."

"They're not worn at all."

"Throw them out. Get rid of the things the children got you. Go out to-morrow and buy something you like--not that I don't like you in anything or without--"

"Frank!"

"Be happy, that's the thing. It's the first Christmas without the family, and I miss them too. But we're together, dear. That's the big thing. Merry Christmas."

An auspicious opening, that, to Christmas-Day. And they had carried out the program as outlined. Mrs. Boyer had enjoyed it, albeit a bit horrified at the Christmas gayety at the Tabarin.

The next morning, however, she awakened with a keen reaction. Her head ached. She had a sense of taint over her. She was virtue rampant again, as on the day she had first visited the old lodge in the Siebensternstrasse.

It is hardly astonishing that by association of ideas Harmony came into her mind again, a brand that might even yet be snatched from the burning. She had been a bit hasty before, she admitted to herself. There was a woman doctor named Gates, although her address at the club was given as Pension Schwarz. She determined to do her shopping early and then to visit the house in the Siebensternstrasse. She was not a hard woman, for all her inflexible morality, and more than once she had had an uneasy memory of Harmony's bewildered, almost stricken face the afternoon of her visit. She had been a watchful mother over a not particularly handsome family of daughters. This lovely young girl needed mothering and she had refused it. She would go back, and if she found she had been wrong and the girl was deserving and honest, she would see what could be done.

The day was wretched. The snow had turned to rain. Mrs. Boyer, shopping, dragged wet skirts and damp feet
from store to store. She found nothing that she cared for after all. The garments that looked chic in the windows or
on manikins in the shops, were absurd on her. Her insistent bosom bulged, straight lines became curves or tortuous
zigzags, plackets gaped, collars choked her or shocked her by their absence. In the mirror of Marie Jedlicka, clad in
familiar garments that had accommodated themselves to the idiosyncrasies of her figure, Mrs. Boyer was a plump,
rather comely matron. Here before the plate glass of the modiste, under the glare of a hundred lights, side by side
with a slim Austrian girl who looked like a willow wand, Mrs. Boyer was grotesque, ridiculous, monstrous. She
shuddered. She almost wept.

It was bad preparation for a visit to the Siebensternstrasse. Mrs. Boyer, finding her vanity gone, convinced that
she was an absurdity physically, fell back for comfort on her soul. She had been a good wife and mother; she was
chaste, righteous. God had been cruel to her in the flesh, but He had given her the spirit.

"Madame wishes not the gown? It is beautiful--see the embroidery! And the neck may be filled with chiffon."
"Young woman," she said grimly, "I see the embroidery; and the neck may be filled with chiffon, but not for me!
And when you have had five children, you will not buy clothes like that either."

All the kindliness was gone from the visit to the Siebensternstrasse; only the determination remained. Wounded
to the heart of her self-esteem, her pride in tatters, she took her way to the old lodge and climbed the stairs.

She found a condition of mild excitement. Jimmy had slept long after his bath. Harmony practiced, cut up a
chicken for broth, aired blankets for the chair into which Peter on his return was to lift the boy.

She was called to inspect the mouse-cage, which, according to Jimmy, had strawberries in it.
"Far back," he explained. "There in the cotton, Harry."
But it was not strawberries. Harmony opened the cage and very tenderly took out the cotton nest. Eight tiny pink
baby mice, clean washed by the mother, lay curled in the mother, lay curled in a heap.

It was a stupendous moment. The joy of vicarious parentage was Jimmy's. He named them all immediately and
demanded food for them. On Harmony's delicate explanation that this was unnecessary, life took on a new meaning
for Jimmy. He watched the mother lest she slight one. His responsibility weighed on him. Also his inquiring mind
was very busy.

"But how did they get there?" he demanded.
"God sent them, just as he sends babies of all sorts."
"Did he send me?"
"Of course."
"That's a good one on you, Harry. My father found me in a hollow tree."
"But don't you think God had something to do with it?"

Jimmy pondered this.

"I suppose," he reflected, "God sent Daddy to find me so that I would be his little boy. You never happened to
see any babies when you were out walking, did you, Harry?"

"Not in stumps--but I probably wasn't looking."

Jimmy eyed her with sympathy.

"You may some day. Would you like to have one?"
"Very much," said Harmony, and flushed delightfully.

Jimmy was disposed to press the matter, to urge immediate maternity on her.

"You could lay it here on the bed," he offered, "and I'd watch it. When they yell you let 'em suck your finger. I
knew a woman once that had a baby and she did that. And it could watch Isabella." Isabella was the mother mouse.
"And when I'm better I could take it walking."

"That," said Harmony gravely, "is mighty fine of you, Jimmy boy. I--I'll think about it." She never denied Jimmy
anything, so now she temporized.

"I'll ask Peter."

Harmony had a half-hysterical moment; then:

"Wouldn't it be better," she asked, "to keep anything of that sort a secret? And to surprise Peter?"

The boy loved a secret. He played with it in lieu of other occupation. His uncertain future was sown thick with
secrets that would never flower into reality. Thus Peter had shamelessly promised him a visit to the circus when he
was able to go, Harmony not to be told until the tickets were bought. Anna had similarly promised to send him from
America a pitcher's glove and a baseball bat. To this list of futurities he now added Harmony's baby.

Harmony brought in her violin and played softly to him, not to disturb the sleeping mice. She sang, too, a verse
that the Big Soprano had been fond of and that Jimmy loved. Not much of a voice was Harmony's, but sweet and
low and very true, as became her violinist's ear.

"Ah, well! For us all some sweet hope lies Deeply buried from human eyes,"
she sang, her clear eyes luminous.
"And in the hereafter, angels may Roll the stone from its grave away!"

Mrs. Boyer mounted the stairs. She was in a very bad humor. She had snagged her skirt on a nail in the old gate, and although that very morning she had detested the suit, her round of shopping had again endeared it to her. She told the Portier in English what she thought of him, and climbed ponderously, pausing at each landing to examine the damage.

Harmony, having sung Jimmy to sleep, was in the throes of an experiment. She was trying to smoke.

A very human young person was Harmony, apt to be exceedingly wretched if her hat were of last year's fashion, anxious to be inconspicuous by doing what every one else was doing, conventional as are the very young, fearful of being an exception.

And nearly every one was smoking. Many of the young women whom she met at the master's house had yellowed fingers and smoked in the anteroom; the Big Soprano had smoked; Anna and Scatchy had smoked; in the coffee-houses milliners' apprentices produced little silver mouth-pieces to prevent soiling their pretty lips and smoked endlessly. Even Peter had admitted that it was not a vice, but only a comfortable bad habit. And Anna had left a handful of cigarettes.

Harmony was not smoking; she was experimenting. Peter and Anna had smoked together and it had looked comradely. Perhaps, without reasoning it out, Harmony was experimenting toward the end of establishing her relations with Peter still further on friendly and comradely grounds. Two men might smoke together; a man and a woman might smoke together as friends. According to Harmony's ideas, a girl paring potatoes might inspire sentiment, but smoking a cigarette--never!

She did not like it. She thought, standing before her little mirror, that she looked fast, after all. She tried pursing her lips together, as she had seen Anna do, and blowing out the smoke in a thin line. She smoked very hard, so that she stood in the center of a gray nimbus. She hated it, but she persisted. Perhaps it grew on one; perhaps, also, if she walked about it would choke her less. She practiced holding the thing between her first and second fingers, and found that easier than smoking. Then she went to the salon where there was more air, and tried exhaling through her nose. It made her sneeze.

On the sneeze came Mrs. Boyer's ring. Harmony thought very fast. It might be the bread or the milk, but again--She flung the cigarette into the stove, shut the door, and answered the bell.

Mrs. Boyer's greeting was colder than she had intended. It put Harmony on the defensive at once, made her uncomfortable. Like all the innocent falsely accused she looked guiltier than the guiltiest. Under Mrs. Boyer's searching eyes the enormity of her situation overwhelmed her. And over all, through salon and passage, hung the damning odor of the cigarette. Harmony, leading the way in, was a sheep before her shearer.

"I'm calling on all of you," said Mrs. Boyer, sniping. "I meant to bring Dr. Boyer's cards for every one, including Dr. Byrne."

"I'm sorry. Dr. Byrne is out."

"And Dr. Gates?"

"She--she is away."

Mrs. Boyer raised her eyebrows and ostentatiously changed the subject, requesting a needle and thread to draw the rent together. It had been in Harmony's mind to explain the situation, to show Jimmy to Mrs. Boyer, to throw herself on the older woman's sympathy, to ask advice. But the visitor's attitude made this difficult. To add to her discomfort, through the grating in the stove door was coming a thin thread of smoke.

It was, after all, Mrs. Boyer who broached the subject again. She had had a cup of tea, and Harmony, sitting on a stool, had mended the rent so that it could hardly be seen. Mrs. Boyer, softened by the tea and by the proximity of Harmony's lovely head bent over her task, grew slightly more expansive.

"I ought to tell you something, Miss Wells," she said. "You remember my other visit?"

"Perfectly." Harmony bent still lower.

"I did you an injustice at that time. I've been sorry ever since. I thought that there was no Dr. Gates. I'm sorry, but I'm not going to deny it. People do things in this wicked city that they wouldn't do at home. I confess I misjudged Peter Byrne. You can give him my apologies, since he won't see me."

"But he isn't here or of course he'd see you."

"Then," demanded Mrs. Boyer grimly, "if Peter Byrne is not here, who has been smoking cigarettes in this room? There is one still burning in that stove!"

Harmony's hand was forced. She was white as she cut the brown-silk thread and rose to her feet.

"I think," she said, "that I'd better go back a few weeks, Mrs. Boyer, and tell you a story, if you have time to listen."

"If it is disagreeable--"

"Not at all. It is about Peter Byrne and myself, and--some others. It is really about Peter. Mrs. Boyer, will you
Mrs. Boyer, expecting Heaven knows what, rose with celerity. Harmony led the way to Jimmy's door and opened it. He was still asleep, a wasted small figure on the narrow bed. Beside him the mice frolicked in their cage, the sentry kept guard over Peter's shameless letters from the Tyrol, the strawberry babies wriggled in their cotton.

"We are not going to have him very long," said Harmony softly. "Peter is making him happy for a little while."

Back in the salon of Maria Theresa she told the whole story. Mrs. Boyer found it very affecting. Harmony sat beside her on a stool and she kept her hand on the girl's shoulder. When the narrative reached Anna's going away, however, she took it away. From that point on she sat uncompromisingly rigid and listened.

"Then you mean to say," she exploded when Harmony had finished, "that you intend to stay on here, just the two of you?"

"And Jimmy."

"Bah! What has the child to do with it?"

"We will find some one to take Anna's place."

"I doubt it. And until you do?"

"There is nothing wicked in what we are doing. Don't you see, Mrs. Boyer, I can't leave the boy."

"Since Peter is so altruistic, let him hire a nurse."

Bad as things were, Harmony smiled.

"A nurse!" she said. "Why, do you realize that he is keeping three people now on what is starvation for one?"

"Then he's a fool!" Mrs. Boyer rose in majesty. "I'm not going to leave you here."

"I'm sorry. You must see--"

"I see nothing but a girl deliberately putting herself in a compromising portion and worse."

"Mrs. Boyer!"

"Get your things on. I guess Dr. Boyer and I can look after you until we can send you home."

"I am not going home--yet," said poor Harmony, biting her lip to steady it.

Back and forth waged the battle, Mrs. Boyer assailing, Harmony offering little defense but standing firm on her refusal to go as long as Peter would let her remain.

"It means so much to me," she ventured, goaded. "And I earn my lodging and board. I work hard and--I make him comfortable. It costs him very little and I give him something in exchange. All men are not alike. If the sort you have known are--are different--"

This was unfortunate. Mrs. Boyer stiffened. She ceased offensive tactics, and retired grimly into the dignity of her high calling of virtuous wife and mother. She washed her hands of Harmony and Peter. She tied on her veil with shaking hands, and prepared to leave Harmony to her fate.

"Give me your mother's address," she demanded.

"Certainly not."

"You absolutely refuse to save yourself?"

"From what? From Peter? There are many worse people than Peter to save myself from, Mrs. Boyer--uncharitable people, and--and cruel people."

Mrs. Boyer shrugged her plump shoulders.

"Meaning me!" she retorted. "My dear child, people are always cruel who try to save us from ourselves."

Unluckily for Harmony, one of Anna's specious arguments must pop into her head at that instant and demand expression.

"People are living their own lives these days, Mrs. Boyer; old standards have gone. It is what one's conscience condemns that is wrong, isn't it? Not merely breaking laws that were made to fit the average, not the exception." Anna! Anna!

Mrs. Boyer flung up her hands.

"You are impossible!" she snapped. "After all, I believe it is Peter who needs protection! I shall speak to him."

She started down the staircase, but turned for a parting volley.

"And just a word of advice: Perhaps the old standards have gone. But if you really expect to find a respectable woman to chaperon YOU, keep your views to yourself."

Harmony, a bruised and wounded thing, crept into Jimmy's room and sank on her knees beside the bed. One small hand lay on the coverlet; she dared not touch it for fear of waking him--but she laid her cheek close to it for comfort. When Peter came in, much later, he found the boy wide awake and Harmony asleep, a crumpled heap beside the bed.

"I think she's been crying," Jimmy whispered. "She's been sobbing in her sleep. And strike a match, Peter; there may be more mice."

CHAPTER XVIII
Mrs. Boyer, bursting with indignation, went to the Doctors' Club. It was typical of the way things were going with Peter that Dr. Boyer was not there, and that the only woman in the clubrooms should be Dr. Jennings. Young McLean was in the reading room, eating his heart out with jealousy of Peter, vacillating between the desire to see Harmony that night and fear lest Peter forbid him the house permanently if he made the attempt. He had found a picture of the Fraulein Engel, from the opera, in a magazine, and was sitting with it open before him. Very deeply and really in love was McLean that afternoon, and the Fraulein Engel and Harmony were not unlike. The double doors between the reading room and the reception room adjoining were open. McLean, lost in a rosy future in which he and Harmony sat together for indefinite periods, with no Peter to scowl over his books at them, a future in which life was one long piano-violin duo, with the candles in the chandelier going out one by one, leaving them at last alone in scented darkness together--McLean heard nothing until the mention of the Siebensternstrasse roused him.

After that he listened. He heard that Dr. Jennings was contemplating taking Anna's place at the lodge, and he comprehended after a moment that Anna was already gone. Even then the significance of the situation was a little time in dawning on him. When it did, however, he rose with a stifled oath.

Mrs. Boyer was speaking.

"It is exactly as I tell you," she was saying. "If Peter Byrne is trying to protect her reputation he is late doing it. Personally I have been there twice. I never saw Anna Gates. And she is registered here at the club as living in the Pension Schwarz. Whatever the facts may be, one thing remains, she is not there now."

McLean waited to hear no more. He was beside himself with rage. He found a "comfortable" at the curb. The driver was asleep inside the carriage. McLean dragged him out by the shoulder and shouted an address to him. The cab bumped along over the rough streets to an accompaniment of protests from its frantic passenger.

The boy was white-lipped with wrath and fear. Peter's silence that afternoon as to the state of affairs loomed large and significant. He had thought once or twice that Peter was in love with Harmony; he knew it now in the clearer vision of the moment. He recalled things that maddened him: the dozen intimacies of the little menage, the caress in Peter's voice when he spoke to the girl, Peter's steady eyes in the semi-gloom of the salon while Harmony played.

At a corner they must pause for the inevitable regiment. McLean cursed, bending out to see how long the delay would be. Peter had been gone for half an hour, perhaps, but Peter would walk. If he could only see the girl first, talk to her, tell her what she would be doing by remaining--

He was there at last, flinging across the courtyard like a madman. Peter was already there; his footprints were fresh in the slush of the path. The house door was closed but not locked. McLean ran up the stairs. It was barely twilight outside, but the staircase well was dark. At the upper landing he was compelled to fumble for the bell.

Peter admitted him. The corridor was unlighted, but from the salon came a glow of lamplight. McLean, out of breath and furious, faced Peter.

"I want to see Harmony," he said without preface.

Peter eyed him. He knew what had happened, had expected it when the bell rang, had anticipated it when Harmony told him of Mrs. Boyer's visit. In the second between the peal of the bell and his opening the door he had decided what to do.

"Come in."

McLean stepped inside. He was smaller than Peter, not so much shorter as slenderer. Even Peter winced before the look in his eyes.

"Where is she?"

"In the kitchen, I think. Come into the salon."

McLean flung off his coat. Peter closed the door behind him and stood just inside. He had his pipe as usual. "I came to see her, not you, Byrne."

"So I gather. I'll let you see her, of course, but don't you want to see me first?"

"I want to take her away from here."

"Why? Are you better able to care for her than I am?"

McLean stood rigid. He had thrust his clenched hands into his pockets.

"You're a scoundrel, Byrne," he said steadily. "Why didn't you tell me this this afternoon?"

"Because I knew if I did you'd do just what you are doing."

"Are you going to keep her here?"

Peter changed color at the thrust, but he kept himself in hand.

"I'm not keeping her here," he said patiently. "I'm doing the best I can under the circumstances."

"Then your best is pretty bad."

"Perhaps. If you would try to remember the circumstances, McLean,--that the girl has no place else to go, practically no money, and that I--"
"I remember one circumstance, that you are living here alone with her and that you're crazy in love with her."
"That has nothing to do with you. As long as I treat her--"
"Bah!"

"Will you be good enough to let me finish what I am trying to say? She's safe with me. When I say that I mean it. She will not go away from here with you or with any one else if I can prevent it. And if you care enough about her to try to keep her happy you'll not let her know you have been here. I've got a woman coming to take Anna's place. That ought to satisfy you."
"Dr. Jennings?"
"Yes."

"She'll not come. Mrs. Boyer has been talking to her. Inside of an hour the whole club will have it--every American in Vienna will know about it in a day or so. I tell you, Byrne, you're doing an awful thing."

Peter drew a long breath. He had had his bad half-hour before McLean came; had had to stand by, wordless, and see Harmony trying to smile, see her dragging about, languid and white, see her tragic attempts to greet him on the old familiar footing. Through it all he had been sustained by the thought that a day or two days would see the old footing reestablished, another woman in the house, life again worth the living and Harmony smiling up frankly into his eyes. Now this hope had departed.

"You can't keep me from seeing her, you know," McLean persisted. "I've got to put this thing to her. She's got to choose."

"What alternative have you to suggest?"
"I'd marry her if she'd have me."

After all Peter had expected that. And, if she cared for the boy wouldn't that be best for her? What had he to offer against that? He couldn't marry. He could only offer her shelter, against everything else. Even then he did not dislike McLean. He was a man, every slender inch of him, this boy musician. Peter's heart sank, but he put down his pipe and turned to the door.

"I'll call her," he said. "But, since this concerns me very vitally, I should like to be here while you put the thing to her. After that if you like--"

He called Harmony. She had given Jimmy his supper and was carrying out a tray that seemed hardly touched.
"He won't eat to-night," she said miserably. "Peter, if he stops eating, what can we do? He is so weak!"

Peter, took the tray from her gently.
"Harry dear," he said, "I want you to come into the salon. Some one wishes to speak to you."
"To me?"
"Yes. Harry, do you remember that evening in the kitchen when--Do you recall what I promised?"
"Yes, Peter."
"You are sure you know what I mean?"
"Yes."
"That's all right, then. McLean wants to see you."

She hesitated, looking up at him.
"McLean? You look so grave, Peter. What is it?"
"He will tell you. Nothing alarming."

Peter gave McLean a minute alone after all, while he carried the tray to the kitchen. He had no desire to play watchdog over the girl, he told himself savagely; only to keep himself straight with her and to save her from McLean's impetuousity. He even waited in the kitchen to fill and light his pipe.

McLean had worked himself into a very fair passion. He was intense, almost theatrical, as he stood with folded arms waiting for Harmony. So entirely did the girl fill his existence that he forgot, or did not care to remember, how short a time he had known her. As Harmony she dominated his life and his thoughts; as Harmony he addressed her when, rather startled, she entered the salon and stood just inside the closed door.

"Peter said you wanted to speak to me."

McLean groaned. "Peter!" he said. "It is always Peter. Look here, Harmony, you cannot stay here."

"It is only for a few hours. To-morrow some one is coming. And, anyhow, Peter is going to Semmering. We know it is unusual, but what can we do?"

"Unusual! It's--it's damnable. It's the appearance of the thing, don't you see that?"

"I think it is rather silly to talk of appearance when there is no one to care. And how can I leave? Jimmy needs me all the time--"

"That's another idiocy of Peter's. What does he mean by putting you in this position?"
"I am one of Peter's idiocies."

Peter entered on that. He took in the situation with a glance, and Harmony turned to him; but if she had expected
Peter to support her, she was disappointed. Whatever decision she was to make must be her own, in Peter's troubled mind. He crossed the room and stood at one of the windows, looking out, a passive participant in the scene.

The day had been a trying one for Harmony. What she chose to consider Peter's defection was a fresh stab. She glanced from McLean, flushed and excited, to Peter's impassive back. Then she sat down, rather limp, and threw out her hands helplessly.

"What am I to do?" she demanded. "Every one comes with cruel things to say, but no one tells me what to do."

Peter turned away from the window.

"You can leave here," ventured McLean. "That's the first thing. After that--"

"Yes, and after that, what?"

McLean glanced at Peter. Then he took a step toward the girl.

"You could marry me, Harmony," he said unsteadily. "I hadn't expected to tell you so soon, or before a third person." He faltered before Harmony's eyes, full of bewilderment. "I'd be very happy if you--if you could see it that way. I care a great deal, you see."

It seemed hours to Peter before she made any reply, and that her voice came from miles away.

"Is it really as bad as that?" she asked. "Have I made such a mess of things that some one, either you or Peter, must marry me to straighten things out? I don't want to marry any one. Do I have to?"

"Certainly you don't have to," said Peter. There was relief in his voice, relief and also something of exultation.

"McLean, you mean well, but marriage isn't the solution. We were getting along all right until our friends stepped in. Let Mrs. Boyer howl all over the colony; there will be one sensible woman somewhere to come and be comfortable here with us. In the interval we'll manage, unless Harmony is afraid. In that case--"

"Afraid of what?"

The two men exchanged glances, McLean helpless, Peter triumphant.

"I do not care what Mrs. Boyer says, at least not much. And I am not afraid of anything else at all."

McLean picked up his overcoat.

"At least," he appealed to Peter, "you'll come over to my place?"

"No!" said Peter.

McLean made a final appeal to Harmony.

"If this gets out," he said, "you are going to regret it all your life."

"I shall have nothing to regret," she retorted proudly.

Had Peter not been there McLean would have made a better case, would have pleaded with her, would have made less of a situation that roused her resentment and more of his love for her. He was very hard hit, very young. He was almost hysterical with rage and helplessness; he wanted to slap her, to take her in his arms. He writhed under the restraint of Peter's steady eyes.

He got to the door and turned, furious.

"Then it's up to you," he flung at Peter. "You're old enough to know better; she isn't. And don't look so damned superior. You're human, like the rest of us. And if any harm comes to her--"

Here unexpectedly Peter held out his hand, and after a sheepish moment McLean took it.

"Good-night, old man," said Peter. "And--don't be an ass."

As was Peter's way, the words meant little, the tone much. McLean knew what in his heart he had known all along--that the girl was safe enough; that all that was to fear was the gossip of scandal-lovers. He took Peter's hand, and then going to Harmony stood before her very erect.

"I suppose I've said too much; I always do," he said contritely. "But you know the reason. Don't forget the reason, will you?"

"I am only sorry."

He bent over and kissed her hand lingeringly. It was a tragic moment for him, poor lad! He turned and went blindly out the door and down the dark stone staircase. It was rather anticlimax, after all that, to have Peter discover he had gone without his hat and toss it down to him a flight below.

All the frankness had gone out of the relationship between Harmony and Peter. They made painful efforts at ease, talked during the meal of careful abstractions, such as Jimmy, and Peter's proposed trip to Semmering, avoided each other's eyes, ate little or nothing. Once when Harmony passed Peter his coffee-cup their fingers touched, and between them they dropped the cup. Harmony was flushed and pallid by turns, Peter wretched and silent.

Out of the darkness came one ray of light. Stewart had wired from Semmering, urging Peter to come. He would be away for two days. In two days much might happen; Dr. Jennings might come or some one else. In two days some of the restraint would have worn off. Things would never be the same, but they would be forty-eight hours better.

Peter spent the early part of the evening with Jimmy, reading aloud to him. After the child had dropped to sleep
he packed a valise for the next day's journey and counted out into an envelope half of the money he had with him. This he labeled "Household Expenses" and set it up on his table, leaning against his collar-box. There was no sign of Harmony about. The salon was dark except for the study lamp turned down.

Peter was restless. He put on his shabby dressing-gown and worn slippers and wandered about. The Portier had brought coal to the landing; Peter carried it in. He inspected the medicine bottles on Jimmy's stand and wrote full directions for every emergency he could imagine. Then, finding it still only nine o'clock, he turned up the lamp in the salon and wrote an exciting letter from Jimmy's father, in which a lost lamb, wandering on the mountain-side, had been picked up by an avalanche and carried down into the fold and the arms of the shepherd. And because he stood so in loco parentis, and because it seemed so inevitable that before long Jimmy would be in the arms of the Shepherd, and, of course, because it had been a trying day all through, Peter's lips were none too steady as he folded up the letter.

The fire was dead in the stove; Peter put out the salon lamp and closed the shutters. In the warm darkness he put out his hand to feel his way through the room. It touched a little sweater coat of Harmony's, hanging over the back of a chair. Peter picked it up in a very passion of tenderness and held it to him.

"Little girl!" he choked. "My little girl! God help me!"

He was rather ashamed, considerably startled. It alarmed him to find that the mere unexpected touch of a familiar garment could rouse such a storm in him. It made him pause. He put down the coat and pulled himself up sharply. McLean was right; he was only human stuff, very poor human stuff. He put the little coat down hastily, only to lift it again gently to his lips.

"Good-night, dear," he whispered. "Goodnight, Harmony."

Frau Schwarz had had two visitors between the hours of coffee and supper that day. The reason of their call proved to be neither rooms nor pension. They came to make inquiries. Mrs. Boyer had no German; Dr. Jennings very little and that chiefly medical. There is, however, a sort of code that answers instead of language frequently, when two or three women of later middle life are gathered together, a code born of mutual understanding, mutual disillusion, mutual distrust, a language of outspread hands, raised eyebrows, portentous shakings of the head. Frau Schwarz, on the edge of Peter's tub-shaped bed, needed no English to convey the fact that Peter was a bad lot. Not that she resorted only to the sign language.

"The women were also wicked," she said. "Of a man what does one expect? But of a woman! And the younger one looked--Herr Gott! She had the eyes of a saint! The little Georgiev was mad for her. When the three of them left, disgraced, as one may say, he came to me, he threatened me. The Herr Schwarz, God rest his soul, was a violent man, but never spoke he so to me!"

"She says," interpreted Dr. Jennings, "that they were a bad lot--that the younger one made eyes at the Herr Schwarz!"

"What in the world--" said Olga.

"And, please, tell me where lives the Fraulein Harmony. The Herr Georgiev eats not nor sleeps that he cannot
find her."
Dr. Jennings was puzzled.
"She wishes to know where the girl lives," she interpreted to Mrs. Boyer. "A man wishes to know."
"Naturally!" said Mrs. Boyer. "Well, don't tell her."
Olga gathered from the tone rather than the words that she was not to be told. She burst into a despairing appeal in which the Herr Georgiev, Peter, a necktie Peter had forgotten, open windows, and hot water were inextricably confused. Dr. Jennings listened, then waved her back with a gesture.
"She says," she interpreted as they walked on, "that Dr. Peter--by which I suppose she means Dr. Byrne--has left a necktie, and that she'll be in hot water if she does not return it."
Mrs. Boyer sniffed.
"In love with him, probably, like the others!" she said.

CHAPTER XIX
Peter went to Semmering the next morning, tiptoeing out very early and without breakfast. He went in to cover Jimmy, lying diagonally across his small bed amid a riot of tossed blankets. The communicating door into Harmony's room was open. Peter kept his eyes carefully from it, but his ears were less under control. He could hear her soft breathing. There were days coming when Peter would stand where he stood then and listen, and find only silence.
He tore himself away at last, closing the outer door carefully behind him and lighting a match to find his way down the staircase. The Portier was not awake. Peter had to rouse him, and to stand by while he donned the trousers which he deemed necessary to the dignity of his position before he opened the street door.
Reluctant as he had been to go, the change was good for Peter. The dawn grew rosy, promised sunshine, fulfilled its promise. The hurrying crowds at the depot interested him; he enjoyed his coffee, taken from a bare table in the station. The horizontal morning sunlight, shining in through marvelously clean windows, warmed the marble of the floor, made black shadows beside the heaps of hand luggage everywhere, turned into gold the hair of a toddling baby venturing on a tour of discovery. The same morning light, alas! revealed to Peter a break across the toe of one of his shoes. Peter sighed, then smiled. The baby was catching at the bits of dust that floated in the sunshine.
Suddenly a great wave of happiness overwhelmed Peter. It was a passing thing, born of nothing, but for the instant that it lasted Peter was a king. Everything was well. The world was his oyster. Life was his, to make it what he would--youth and hope and joy. Under the beatific influence he expanded, grew, almost shone. Youth and hope and joy--that cometh in the morning.

The ecstasy passed away, but without reaction. Peter no longer shone; he still glowed. He picked up the golden-haired baby and hugged it. He hunted out a beggar he had passed and gave him five Hellers. He helped a suspicious old lady with an oilcloth-covered bundle; he called the guard on the train "son" and forced a grin out of that dignitary.
Peter traveled third-class, which was quite comfortable, and no bother about "Nicht Rauchen" signs. His unreasonable cheerfulness persisted as far as Gloggnitz. There, with the increasing ruggedness of the scenery and his first view of the Raxalpe, came recollection of the urgency of Stewart's last message, of Marie Jedlicka, of the sordid little tragedy that awaited him at the end of his journey.
Peter sobered. Life was rather a mess, after all, he reflected. Love was a blessing, but it was also a curse. After that he sat back in his corner and let the mountain scenery take care of itself, while he recalled the look he had surprised once or twice in Marie's eyes when she looked at Stewart. It was sad, pitiful. Marie was a clever little thing. If only she'd had a chance!-- Why wasn't he rich enough to help the ones who needed help. Marie could start again in America, with no one the wiser, and make her way.
"Smart as the devil, these Austrian girls!" Peter reflected. "Poor little guttersnipe!"
The weather was beautiful. The sleet of the previous day in Vienna had been a deep snowfall on the mountains. The Schwarza was frozen, the castle of Liechtenstein was gray against a white world. A little pilgrimage church far below seemed snowed in against the faithful. The third-class compartment filled with noisy skiing parties. The old woman opened her oilcloth bundle, and taking a cat out of a box inside fed it a sausage.
Up and up, past the Weinzeettelwand and the Station Breitenstein, across the highest viaduct, the Kalte Rinne, and so at last to Semmering.
The glow had died at last for Peter. He did not like his errand, was very vague, indeed, as to just what that errand might be. He was stiff and rather cold. Also he thought the cat might stifle in the oilcloth, but the old woman too clearly distrusted him to make it possible to interfere. Anyhow, he did not know the German for either cat or oilcloth.
He had wired Stewart; but the latter was not at the station. This made him vaguely uneasy, he hardly knew why. He did not know Stewart well enough to know whether he was punctilious in such matters or not: as a matter of fact
he hardly knew him at all. It was because he had appealed to him that Peter was there, it being only necessary to Peter to be needed, and he was anywhere.

The Pension Waldheim was well up the mountains. He shouldered his valise and started up—first long flights of steps through the pines, then a steep road. Peter climbed easily. Here and there he met groups coming down, men that he thought probably American, pretty women in "tams" and sweaters. He watched for Marie, but there was no sign of her.

He was half an hour, perhaps, in reaching the Waldheim. As he turned in at the gate he noticed a sledge, with a dozen people following it, coming toward him. It was a singularly silent party. Peter, with his hand on the door-knocker, watched its approach with some curiosity.

It stopped, and the men who had been following closed up round it. Even then Peter did not understand. He did not understand until he saw Stewart, limp and unconscious, lifted out of the straw and carried toward him.

Suicide may be moral cowardice; but it requires physical bravery. And Marie was not brave. The balcony had attracted her: it opened possibilities of escape, of unceasing regret and repentance for Stewart, of publicity that would mean an end to the situation. But every inch of her soul was craven at the thought. She crept out often and looked down, and as often drew back, shuddering. To fall down, down on to the tree tops, to be dropped from branch to branch, a broken thing, and perhaps even not yet dead—that was the unthinkable thing, to live for a time and suffer!

Stewart was not ignorant of all that went on in her mind. She had threatened him with the balcony, just as, earlier in the winter, it had been a window-ledge with which she had frightened him. But there was this difference, whereas before he had drawn her back from the window and clapped her into sanity, now he let her alone. At the end of one of their quarrels she had flung out on to the balcony, and then had watched him through the opening in the shutter. He had lighted a cigarette!

Stewart spent every daylight hour at the hotel, or walking over the mountain roads, seldom alone with Anita, but always near her. He left Marie sulking or sewing, as the case might be. He returned in the evening to find her still sulking, still sewing.

But Marie did not sulk all day, or sew. She too was out, never far from Stewart, always watching. Many times she escaped discovery only by a miracle, as when she stooped behind an oxcart, pretending to tie her shoe, or once when they all met face to face, and although she lowered her veil Stewart must have known her instantly had he not been so intent on helping Anita over a slippery gutter.

She planned a dozen forms of revenge and found them impossible of execution. Stewart himself was frightfully unhappy. For the first time in his life he was really in love, with all the humility of the condition. There were days when he would not touch Anita's hand, when he hardly spoke, when the girl herself would have been outraged at his conduct had she not now and then caught him watching her, seen the wretchedness in his eyes.

The form of Marie's revenge was unpremeditated, after all. The light mountain snow was augmented by a storm; roads were ploughed through early in the morning, leaving great banks on either side. Sleigh-bells were everywhere. Coasting parties made the steep roads a menace to the pedestrian; every up-climbing sleigh carried behind it a string of sleds, going back to the starting-point.

Below the hotel was the Serpentine Coast, a long and dangerous course, full of high-banked curves, of sudden descents, of long straightaway dashes through the woodland. Two miles, perhaps three, it wound its tortuous way down the mountain. Up by the highroad to the crest again, only a mile or less. Thus it happened that the track was always clear, except for speeding sleds. No coasters, dragging sleds back up the slide, interfered.

The track was crowded. Every minute a sled set out, sped down the straightaway, dipped, turned, disappeared. A dozen would be lined up, waiting for the interval and the signal. And here, watching from the porch of the church, in the very shadow of the saints, Marie found her revenge.

Stewart had given her a little wrist watch. Stewart and Anita were twelfth in line. By the watch, then, twelve minutes down the mountain-side, straight down through the trees to a curve that Marie knew well, a bad curve, only to be taken by running well up on the snowbank. Beyond the snowbank there was a drop, fifteen feet, perhaps more, into the yard of a Russian villa. Stewart and Anita were twelfth; a man in a green stocking-cap was tenth. The hillside was steep. Marie negotiated it by running from tree to tree, catching herself, steadying for a second, then down again. Once she fell and rolled a little distance. There was no time to think; perhaps had she thought she would have weakened. She had no real courage, only desperation.

As she reached the track the man in the green stocking-cap was in sight. A minute and a half she had then, not more. She looked about her hastily. A stone might serve her purpose, almost anything that would throw the sled out of its course. She saw a tree branch just above the track and dragged at it frantically. Some one was shouting at her from an upper window of the Russian villa. She did not hear. Stewart and Anita had made the curve above and were coming down at frantic speed. Marie stood, her back to the oncoming rush of the sled, swaying slightly. When she
could hear the singing of the runners she stooped and slid the tree branch out against the track.

She had acted almost by instinct, but with devilish skill. The sled swung to one side up the snowbank, and launched itself into the air. Marie heard the thud and the silence that followed it. Then she turned and scuttled like a hunted thing up the mountain side.

Peter put in a bad day. Marie was not about, could not be located. Stewart, suffering from concussion, lay insensible all day and all of the night. Peter could find no fracture, but felt it wise to get another opinion. In the afternoon he sent for a doctor from the Kurhaus and learned for the first time that Anita had also been hurt—a broken arm. "Not serious," said the Kurhaus man. "She is brave, very brave, the young woman. I believe they are engaged?" Peter said he did not know and thought very hard. Where was Marie? Not gone surely. Here about him lay all her belongings, even her purse.

Toward evening Stewart showed some improvement. He was not conscious, but he swallowed better and began to toss about. Peter, who had had a long day and very little sleep the night before, began to look jaded. He would have sent for a nurse from the Kurhaus, but he doubted Stewart's ability to stand any extra financial strain, and Peter could not help any.

The time for supper passed, and no Marie.

The landlady sent up a tray to Peter, stewed meat and potatoes, a salad, coffee. Peter sat in a corner with his back to Stewart and ate ravenously. He had had nothing since the morning's coffee. After that he sat down again by the bed to watch. There was little to do but watch.

The meal had made him drowsy. He thought of his pipe. Perhaps if he got some fresh air and a smoke! He remembered the balcony.

It was there on the balcony that he found Marie, a cowering thing that pushed his hands away when he would have caught her and broke into passionate crying.

"I cannot! I cannot!"
"Cannot what?" demanded Peter gently, watching her. So near was the balcony rail!
"Throw myself over. I've tried, Peter. I cannot!"
"I should think not!" said Peter sternly. "Just now when we need you, too! Come in and don't be a foolish child."

But Marie would not go in. She held back, clinging tight to Peter's big hand, moaning out in the dialect of the people that always confused him her story of the day, of what she had done, of watching Stewart brought back, of stealing into the house and through an adjacent room to the balcony, of her desperation and her cowardice.

She was numb with cold, exhaustion, and hunger, quite childish, helpless. Peter stood out on the balcony with his arm round her, while the night wind beat about them, and pondered what was best to do. He thought she might come in and care for Stewart, at least, until he was conscious. He could get her some supper.

"How can I?" she asked. "I was seen. They are searching for me now. Oh, Peter! Peter!"

"Who is searching for you? Who saw you?"
"The people in the Russian villa."
"Did they see your face?"
"I wore a veil. I think not."
"Then come in and change your clothes. There is a train down at midnight. You can take it."
"I have no money."

This raised a delicate question. Marie absolutely refused to take Stewart's money. She had almost none of her own. And there were other complications—where was she to go? The family of the injured girl did not suspect her since they did not know of her existence. She might get away without trouble. But after that, what?

Peter pondered this on the balcony, while Marie in the bedroom was changing her clothing, soaked with a day in the snow. He came to the inevitable decision, the decision he knew at the beginning that he was going to make.

"If I could only put it up to Harmony first!" he reflected. "But she will understand when I tell her. She always understands."

Standing there on the little balcony, with tragedy the thickness of a pine board beyond him, Peter experienced a bit of the glow of the morning, as of one who stumbling along in a dark place puts a hand on a friend.

He went into the room. Stewart was lying very still and breathing easily. On her knees beside the bed knelt Marie. At Peter's step she rose and faced him.

"I am leaving him, Peter, for always."
"Good!" said Peter heartily. "Better for you and better for him."

Marie drew a long breath. "The night train," she said listlessly, "is an express. I had forgotten. It is double fare."
"What of that, little sister?" said Peter. "What is a double fare when it means life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness? And there will be happiness, little sister."

He put his hand in his pocket.
CHAPTER XX

The Portier was almost happy that morning. For one thing, he had won honorable mention at the Schubert Society the night before; for another, that night the Engel was to sing Mignon, and the Portier had spent his Christmas tips for a ticket. All day long he had been poring over the score.

"Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen blühen?" he sang with feeling while he polished the floors. He polished them with his feet, wearing felt boots for the purpose, and executing in the doing a sort of ungainly dance—a sprinkle of wax, right foot forward and back, left foot forward and back, both feet forward and back in a sort of double shuffle; more wax, more vigorous polishing, more singing, with longer pauses for breath. "Kennst thou the land where the lemon trees bloom?" he bellowed—a sprinkle of wax, right foot, left foot, any foot at all. Now and then he took the score from his pocket and pored over it, humming the air, raising his eyebrows over the high notes, dropping his chin to the low ones. It was a wonderful morning. Between greetings to neighbors he sang—a bit of talk, a bit of song.

"Kennst du das Land"—Good-morning, sir—the old Rax wears a crown. It will snow soon. 'Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen'—Ah, madam the milk Frau, and are the cows frozen up to-day like the pump? No? Marvelous! Dost thou know that to-night is Mignon at the Opera, and that the Engel sings? 'Kennst du das Land'—

At eleven came Rosa with her husband, the soldier from Salzburg with one lung. He was having a holiday from his sentry duty at the hospital, and the one lung seemed to be a libel, for while the women had coffee together and a bit of mackerel he sang a very fair bass to the Portier's tenor. Together they pored over the score, and even on their way to the beer hall hummed together such bits as they recalled.

On one point they differed. The score was old and soiled with much thumbing. At one point, destroyed long since, the sentry sang A sharp: the Portier insisted on A natural. They argued together over three Steins of beer; the waiter, referred to, decided for A flat. It was a serious matter to have one's teeth set, as one may say, for a natural and then to be shocked with an unexpected half-tone up or down! It destroyed the illusion; it disappointed; it hurt.

The sentry stuck to the sharp—it was sung so at the Salzburg opera. The Portier snapped his thumb at the Salzburg opera. Things were looking serious; they walked back in silence. The sentry coughed. Possibly there was something, after all, in the one-lung rumor.

It was then that the Portier remembered Harmony. She would know; perhaps she had the score.

Harmony was having a bad morning. She had slept little until dawn, and Peter's stealthy closing of the outer door had wakened her by its very caution. After that there had been no more sleep. She had sat up in bed with her chin in her hands and thought.

In the pitiless dawn, with no Peter to restore her to cheerfulness, things looked black, indeed. To what had she fallen, that first one man and then another must propose marriage to her to save her. To save her from what? From what people thought, or—each from the other?

Were men so evil that they never trusted each other? McLean had frankly distrusted Peter, had said so. Or could it be that there was something about her, something light and frivolous? She had been frivolous. She always laughed at Peter's foolishnesses. Perhaps that was it. That was it. They were afraid for her. She had thrown herself on Peter's hands—almost into his arms. She had made this situation.

She must get away, of course. If only she had some one to care for Jimmy until Peter returned! But there was no one. The Portier's wife was fond of Jimmy, but not skillful. And suppose he were to wake in the night and call for her and she would not come. She cried a little over this. After a time she pattered across the room in her bare feet and got from a bureau drawer the money she had left. There was not half enough to take her home. She could write; the little mother might get some for her, but at infinite cost, infinite humiliation. That would have to be a final, desperate resort.

She felt a little more cheerful when she had had a cup of coffee. Jimmy wakened about that time, and she went through the details of his morning toilet with all the brightness she could assume—bath blankets, warm bath, toenails, finger-nails, fresh nightgown, fresh sheets, and—final touch of all—a real barber's part straight from crown to brow. After that ten minutes under extra comforters while the room aired.

She hung over the boy that morning in an agony of tenderness—he was so little, so frail, and she must leave him. Only one thing sustained her. The boy loved her, but it was Peter he idolized. When he had Peter he needed nothing else. In some curious process of his childish mind Peter and Daddy mingled in inextricable confusion. More than once he had recalled events in the roving life he and his father had led.

"You remember that, don't you?" he would say.
"Certainly I remember," Peter would reply heartily.
"That evening on the steamer when I ate so many raisins."
"Of course. And were ill."
"Not ill—not that time. But you said I'd make a good pudding! You remember that, don't you?"
And Peter would recall it all.

Peter would be left. That was the girl's comfort.

She made a beginning at gathering her things together that morning, while the boy dozed and the white mice scurried about the little cage. She could not take her trunk, or Peter would trace it. She would have to carry her belongings, a few at a time, to wherever she found a room. Then when Peter came back she could slip away and he would never find her.

At noon came the Portier and the sentry, now no longer friends, and rang the doorbell. Harmony was rather startled. McLean and Mrs. Boyer had been her only callers, and she did not wish to see either of them. But after a second ring she gathered her courage in her hands and opened the door.

She turned pale when she saw the sentry in his belted blue-gray tunic and high cap. She thought, of course, that Jimmy had been traced and that now he would be taken away. If the sentry knew her, however, he kept his face impassive and merely touched his cap. The Portier stated their errand. Harmony's face cleared. She even smiled as the Portier extended to her the thumbed score with its missing corner. What, after all, does it matter which was right—whether it was A sharp or A natural? What really matters is that Harmony, having settled the dispute and clinched the decision by running over the score for a page or two, turned to find the Portier, ecstatic eyes upturned, hands folded on paunch, enjoying a delirium of pleasure, and the sentry nowhere in sight.

He was discovered a moment later in the doorway of Jimmy's room, where, taciturn as ever, severe, martial, he stood at attention, shoulders back, arms at his sides, thumbs in. In this position he was making, with amazing rapidity, a series of hideous grimaces for the benefit of the little boy in the bed: marvelous faces they were, in which nose, mouth, and eyes seemed interchangeable, where features played leapfrog with one another. When all was over—perhaps when his repertoire was exhausted—the sentry returned his nose to the center of his face, replaced eyes and mouth, and wiped the ensemble with a blue cotton handkerchief. Then, still in silence, he saluted and withdrew, leaving the youngster enraptured, staring at the doorway.

Harmony had decided the approximate location of her room. In the higher part of the city, in the sixteenth district, there were many unpretentious buildings. She had hunted board there and she knew. It was far from the Stadt, far from the fashionable part of town, a neighborhood of small shops, of frank indigence. There surely she could find a room, and perhaps in one of the small stores what she failed to secure in the larger, a position.

Rosa having taken her soldier away, Harmony secured the Portier's wife to sit with Jimmy and spent two hours that afternoon looking about for a room. She succeeded finally in finding one, a small and wretchedly furnished bedroom, part of the suite of a cheap dressmaker. The approach was forbidding enough. One entered a cavelike, cobble-paved court under the building, filled with wagons, feeding horses, quarrelsome and swearing teamsters. From the side a stone staircase took off and led, twisting from one landing cave to another, to the upper floor.

Here lived the dressmaker, amid the constant whirring of sewing-machines, the Babel of workpeople. Harmony, seeking not a home but a hiding-place, took the room at once. She was asked for no reference. In a sort of agony lest this haven fail her she paid for a week in advance. The wooden bed, the cracked mirror over the table, even the pigeons outside on the windowsill were hers for a week.

The dressmaker was friendly, almost garrulous.

"I will have it cleaned," she explained. "I have been so busy: the masquerade season is on. The Fraulein is American, is she not?"

"Yes."

"One knows the Americans. They are chic, not like the English. I have some American customers."

Harmony started. The dressmaker was shrewd. Many people hid in the sixteenth district. She hastened to reassure the girl.

"They will not disturb you. And just now I have but one, a dancer. I shall have the room cleaned. Good-bye, Fraulein."

So far, good. She had a refuge now, one spot that the venom of scandal could not poison, where she could study and work--work hard, although there could be no more lessons--one spot where Peter would not have to protect her, where Peter, indeed, would never find her. This thought, which should have brought comfort, brought only new misery. Peace seemed dearly bought all at once; shabby, wholesome, hearty Peter, with his rough hair and quiet voice, his bulging pockets and steady eyes—she was leaving Peter forever, exchanging his companionship for that of a row of pigeons on a window-sill. He would find some one, of course; but who would know that he liked toast made hard and plenty of butter, or to leave his bed-clothing loose at the foot, Peter being very long and apt to lop over? The lopping over brought a tear or two. A very teary and tragic young heroine, this Harmony, prone to go about for the last day or two with a damp little handkerchief tucked in her sleeve.

She felt her way down the staircase and into the cave below. Fate hangs by a very slender thread sometimes. If a wagon had not lumbered by as she reached the lowest step, so that she must wait and thus had time to lower her veil,
she would have been recognized at once by the little Georgiev, waiting to ascend. But the wagon was there, Harmony lowered her veil, the little Georgiev, passing a veiled young woman in the gloom, went up the staircase with even pulses and calm and judicial bearing, up to the tiny room a floor or two below Harmony's, where he wrote reports to the Minister of War and mixed them with sonnets—to Harmony.

Harmony went back to the Siebensternstrasse, having accomplished what she had set out to do and being very wretched in consequence. Because she was leaving the boy so soon she strove to atone for her coming defection by making it a gala evening. The child was very happy. She tucked him up in the salon, lighted all the candles, served him the daintiest of suppers there; she played checkers with him while the supper dishes waited, and went down to defeat in three hilarious games; and last of all she played to him, joyous music at first, then slower, drowsier airs, until his heavy head dropped on his shoulder and she gathered him up in tender arms and carried him to bed.

It was dawn when Marie arrived. Harmony was sleeping soundly when the bell rang. Her first thought was that Peter had come back—but Peter carried a key. The bell rang again, and she slipped on the old kimono and went to the door.

"Is it Peter?" she called, hand on knob.
"I come from Peter. I have a letter," in German.
"Who is it?"
"You do not know me—Marie Jedlicka. Please let me come in."

Bewildered, Harmony opened the door, and like a gray ghost Marie slipped by her and into the hall.

There was a gaslight burning very low; Harmony turned it up and faced her visitor. She recognized her at once—the girl Dr. Stewart had been with in the coffee-house.

"Something has happened to Peter!"
"No. He is well. He sent this to the Fraulein Wells."
"I am the Fraulein Wells."

Marie held out the letter and staggered. Harmony put her in a chair; she was bewildered, almost frightened. Crisis of some sort was written on Marie's face. Harmony felt very young, very incapable. The other girl refused coffee, would not even go into the salon until Peter's letter had been read. She was a fugitive, a criminal; the Austrian law is severe to those that harbor criminals. Let Harmony read:--

DEAR HARRY,—Will you forgive me for this and spread the wings of your splendid charity over this poor child? Perhaps I am doing wrong in sending her to you, but just now it is all I can think of. If she wants to talk let her talk. It will probably help her. Also feed her, will you? And if she cannot sleep, give her one of the blue powders I fixed for Jimmy. I'll be back later to-day if I can make it. "PETER"

Harmony glanced up from the letter. Marie sat drooping in her chair. Her eyes were sunken in her head. She had recognized her at once, but any surprise she may have felt at finding Harmony in Peter's apartment was sunk in a general apathy, a compound of nervous reaction and fatigue. During the long hours in the express she had worn herself out with fright and remorse: there was nothing left now but exhaustion.

Harmony was bewildered, but obedient. She went back to the cold kitchen and lighted a fire. She made Marie as comfortable as she could in the salon, and then went into her room to dress. There she read the letter again, and wondered if Peter had gone through life like this, picking up waifs and strays and shouldering their burdens for them. Decidedly, life with Peter was full of surprises.

She remembered, as she hurried into her clothes; the boys' club back in America and the spelling-matches. Decidedly, also, Peter was an occupation, a state of mind, a career. No musician, hoping for a career of her own, could possibly marry Peter.

That was a curious morning in the old lodge of Maria Theresa, while Stewart in the Pension Waldheim struggled back to consciousness, while Peter sat beside him and figured on an old envelope the problem of dividing among four enough money to support one, while McLean ate his heart out in wretchedness in his hotel.

Marie told her story over the early breakfast, sitting with her thin elbows on the table, her pointed chin in her palms.

"And now I am sorry," she finished. "It has done no good. If it had only killed her but she was not much hurt. I saw her rise and bend over him."

Harmony was silent. She had no stock of aphorisms for the situation, no worldly knowledge, only pity.
"Did Peter say he would recover?"
"Yes. They will both recover and go to America. And he will marry her."

Perhaps Harmony would have been less comfortable, Marie less frank, had Marie realized that this establishment of Peter's was not on the same basis as Stewart's had been, or had Harmony divined her thought.

The presence of the boy was discovered by his waking. Marie was taken in and presented. She looked stupefied.
Certainly the Americans were a marvelous people--to have taken into their house and their hearts this strange child--if he were strange. Marie's suspicious little slum mind was not certain.

In the safety and comfort of the little apartment the Viennese expanded, cheered. She devoted herself to the boy, telling him strange folk tales, singing snatches of songs for him. The youngster took a liking to her at once. It seemed to Harmony, going about her morning routine, that Marie was her solution and Peter's.

During the afternoon she took a package to the branch post-office and mailed it by parcel-post to the Wollbadgasse. On the way she met Mrs. Boyer face to face. That lady looked severely ahead, and Harmony passed her with her chin well up and the eyes of a wounded animal.

McLean sent a great box of flowers that day. She put them, for lack of a vase, in a pitcher beside Jimmy's bed. At dusk a telegram came to say that Stewart was better and that Peter was on his way down to Vienna. He would arrive at eight. Time was very short now--seconds flashed by, minutes galloped. Harmony stewed a chicken for supper, and creamed the breast for Jimmy. She fixed the table, flowers in the center, the best cloth, Peter's favorite cheese. Six o'clock, six-thirty, seven; Marie was telling Jimmy a fairy tale and making the fairies out of rosebuds. The studylamp was lighted, the stove glowing, Peter's slippers were out, his old smoking-coat, his pipe.

A quarter past seven. Peter would be near Vienna now and hungry. If he could only eat his supper before he learned--but that was impossible. He would come in, as he always did, and slam the outer door, and open it again to close it gently, as he always did, and then he would look for her, going from room to room until he found her--only to-night he would not find her.

She did not say good-bye to Jimmy. She stood in the doorway and said a little prayer for him. Marie had made the flower fairies on needles, and they stood about his head on the pillow--pink and yellow and white elves with fluffy skirts. Then, very silently, she put on her hat and jacket and closed the outer door behind her. In the courtyard she turned and looked up. The great chandelier in the salon was not lighted, but from the casement windows shone out the comfortable glow of Peter's lamp.

CHAPTER XXI

Peter had had many things to think over during the ride down the mountains. He had the third-class compartment to himself, and sat in a corner, soft hat over his eyes. Life had never been particularly simple to Peter--his own life, yes; a matter of three meals a day--he had had fewer--a roof, clothing. But other lives had always touched him closely, and at the contact points Peter glowed, fused, amalgamated. Thus he had been many people--good, indifferent, bad, but all needy. Thus, also, Peter had committed vicarious crimes, suffered vicarious illnesses, starved, died, loved--vicariously.

And now, after years of living for others, Peter was living at last for himself--and suffering.

Not that he understood exactly what ailed him. He thought he was tired, which was true enough, having had little sleep for two or three nights. Also he explained to himself that he was smoking too much, and resolutely--lighted another cigarette.

Two things had revealed Peter's condition to himself: McLean had said: "You are crazy in love with her." McLean's statement, lacking subtlety, had had a certain quality of directness. Even then Peter, utterly miserable, had refused to capitulate, when to capitulate would have meant the surrender of the house in the Siebensternstrasse. And the absence from Harmony had shown him just where he stood.

He was in love, crazy in love. Every fiber of his long body glowed with it, ached with it. And every atom of his reason told him what mad folly it was, this love. Even if Harmony cared--and at the mere thought his heart pounded-what madness for her, what idiocy for him! To ask her to accept the half of--nothing, to give up a career to share his struggle for one, to ask her to bury her splendid talent and her beauty under a bushel that he might wave aloft his feeble light!

And there was no way out, no royal road to fortune by the route he had chosen; nothing but grinding work, with a result problematical and years ahead. There were even no legacies to expect, he thought whimsically. Peter had known a chap once, struggling along in gynecology, who had had a fortune left him by a G. P., which being interpreted is Grateful Patient. Peter's patients had a way of living, and when they did drop out, as happened now and then, had also a way of leaving Peter an unpaid bill in token of appreciation; Peter had even occasionally helped to bury them, by way, he defended himself, of covering up his mistakes.

Peter, sitting back in his corner, allowed the wonderful scenery to slip by unnoticed. He put Harmony the Desirable out of his mind, and took to calculating on a scrap of paper what could be done for Harmony the Musician. He could hold out for three months, he calculated, and still have enough to send Harmony home and to get home himself on a slow boat. The Canadian lines were cheap. If Jimmy lived perhaps he could take him along: if not--

He would have to put six months' work in the next three. That was not so hard. He had got along before with less sleep, and thrived on it. Also there must be no more idle evenings, with Jimmy in the salon propped in a chair and
Harmony playing, the room dark save for the glow from the stove and for the one candle at Harmony's elbow.

All roads lead to Rome. Peter's thoughts, having traveled in a circle, were back again to Harmony the Desirable--Harmony playing in the firelight, Harmony Hushed over the brick stove, Harmony paring potatoes that night in the kitchen when he--Harmony! Harmony!

Stewart knew all about the accident and its cause. Peter had surmised as much when the injured man failed to ask for Marie.

He tested him finally by bringing Marie's name into the conversation. Stewart ignored it, accepted her absence, refused to be drawn.

That was at first. During the day, however, as he gained strength, he grew restless and uneasy. As the time approached for Peter to leave, he was clearly struggling with himself. The landlady had agreed to care for him and was bustling about the room. During one of her absences he turned to Peter.

"I suppose Marie hasn't been round?"
"She came back last night."
"Did she tell you?"
"Yes, poor child."
"She's a devil!" Stewart said, and lay silent. Then: "I saw her shoot that thing out in front of us, but there was no time--Where is she now?"
"Marie? I sent her to Vienna."
Stewart fell back, relieved, not even curious.
"Thank Heaven for that!" he said. "I don't want to see her again. I'd do something I'd be sorry for. The kindest thing to say for her is that she was not sane."
"No," said Peter gravely, "she was hardly sane."

Stewart caught his steady gaze and glanced away. For him Marie's little tragedy had been written and erased. He would forget it magnanimously. He had divided what he had with her, and she had repaid him by attempting his life. And not only his life, but Anita's. Peter followed his line of reasoning easily.

"It's quite a frequent complication, Stewart," he said, "but every man to whom it happens regards himself more or less as a victim. She fell in love with you, that's all. Her conduct is contrary to the ethics of the game, but she's been playing poor cards all along."
"Where is she?"
"That doesn't matter, does it?"

Stewart had lain back and closed his eyes. No, it didn't matter. A sense of great relief overwhelmed him. Marie was gone, frightened into hiding. It was as if a band that had been about him was suddenly loosed: he breathed deep, he threw out his arms and laughed from sheer reaction. Then, catching Peter's not particularly approving eyes, he colored.

"Good Lord, Peter!" he said, "you don't know what I've gone through with that little devil. And now she's gone!"
He glanced round the disordered room, where bandages and medicines crowded toilet articles on the dressing-table, where one of Marie's small slippers still lay where it had fallen under the foot of the bed, where her rosary still hung over the corner of the table. "Ring for the maid, Peter, will you? I've got to get this junk out of here. Some of Anita's people may come."

During that afternoon ride, while the train clump-clumped down the mountains, Peter thought of all this. Some of Marie's "junk" was in his bag; her rosary lay in his breastpocket, along with the pin he had sent her at Christmas. He happened on it, still in its box, which looked as if it had been cried over. He had brought it with him. He admired it very much, and it had cost money he could ill afford to spend.

It was late when the train drew into the station. Peter, encumbered with Marie's luggage and his own, lowered his window and added his voice to the chorus of plaintive calls: "Portier! Portier!" they shouted. "Portier!" bawled Peter.

He was obliged to resort to the extravagance of a taxicab. Possibly a fiacre would have done as well, but it cost almost as much and was slower. Moments counted now: a second was an hour, an hour a decade. For he was on his way to Harmony. Extravagance became recklessness. As soon die for a sheep as a lamb! He stopped the taxicab and bought a bunch of violets, stopped again and bought lilies of the valley to combine with the violets, went out of his way to the American grocery and bought a jar of preserved fruit.

By that time he was laden. The jar of preserves hung in one shabby pocket, Marie's rosary dangled from another; the violets were buttoned under his overcoat against the cold.

At the very last he held the taxi an extra moment and darted into the delicatessen shop across the Siebensternstrasse. From there, standing inside the doorway, he could see the lights in the salon across the way, the glow of his lamp, the flicker that was the fire. Peter whistled, stamped his cold feet, quite neglected--in spite of
repeated warnings from Harmony—to watch the Herr Schenkenkaufer weigh the cheese, accepted without a glance a
ten-Kronen piece with a hole in it.

"And how is the child to-day?" asked the Herr Schenkenkaufer, covering the defective gold piece with conversation.

"I do not know; I have been away," said Peter. He almost sang it.

"All is well or I would have heard. Wilhelm the Portier was but just now here."

"All well, of course," sang Peter, eyes on the comfortable Floor of his lamp, the flicker that was the fire. "Auf
wiedersehen, Herr Schenkenkaufer."

"Auf wiedersehen, Herr Doktor."

Violets, lilies-of-the-valley, cheese, rosary, luggage—thus Peter climbed the stairs. The Portier wished to assist
him, but Peter declined. The Portier was noisy. There was to be a moment when Peter, having admitted himself with extreme caution, would present himself without so much as a creak to betray him, would stand in a doorway until some one, Harmony perhaps—ah, Peter!--would turn and see him. She had a way of putting one slender hand over her heart when she was startled.

Peter put down the jar of preserved peaches outside. It was to be a second surprise. Also he put down the
flowers; they were to be brought in last of all. One surprise after another is a cumulative happiness. Peter did not wish to swallow all his cake in one bite.

For once he did not slam the outer door, although he very nearly did, and only caught it at the cost of a bruised finger. Inside he listened. There was no clatter of dishes, no scurrying back and forth from table to stove in the final excitement of dishing up. There was, however, a highly agreeable odor of stewing chicken, a crisp smell of baking biscuit.

In the darkened hall Peter had to pause to steady himself. For he had a sudden mad impulse to shout Harmony's name, to hold out his arms, to call her to him there in the warm darkness, and when she had come, to catch her to him, to tell his love in one long embrace, his arms about her, his rough cheek against her soft one. No wonder he grew somewhat dizzy and had to pull himself together.

The silence rather surprised him, until he recalled that Harmony was probably sewing in the salon, as she did sometimes when dinner was ready to serve. The boy was asleep, no doubt. He stole along on tiptoe, hardly breathing, to the first doorway, which was Jimmy's.

Jimmy was asleep. Round him were the pink and yellow and white flower fairies with violet heads. Peter saw them and smiled. Then, his eyes growing accustomed to the light, he saw Marie, face down on the floor, her head on her arms. Still as she was, Peter knew she was not sleeping, only fighting her battle over again and losing.

Some of the joyousness of his return fled from Peter, never to come back. The two silent figures were too close to tragedy. Peter, with a long breath, stole past the door and on to the salon. No Harmony there, but the great room was warm and cheery. The table was drawn near the stove and laid for Abendessen. The white porcelain coffee-pot had boiled and extinguished itself, according to its method, and now gently steamed.

On to the kitchen. Much odor of food here, two candles lighted but burning low, a small platter with money on it, quite a little money—almost all he had left Harmony when he went away.

Peter was dazed at first. Even when Marie, hastily summoned, had discovered that Harmony's clothing was gone, when a search of the rooms revealed the absence of her violin and her music, when at last the fact stared them, incontestable, in the face, Peter refused to accept it. He sat for a half-hour or even more by the fire in the salon, obstinately refusing to believe she was gone, keeping the supper warm against her return. He did not think or reason, he sat and waited, saying nothing, hardly moving, save when a gust of wind slammed the garden gate. Then he was all alive, sat erect, ears straining for her hand on the knob of the outer door.

The numbness of the shock passed at last, to be succeeded by alarm. During all the time that followed, that condition persisted, fright, almost terror. Harmony alone in the city, helpless, dependent, poverty-stricken. Harmony seeking employment under conditions Peter knew too well. But with his alarm came rage.

Marie had never seen Peter angry. She shrank from this gaunt and gray-faced man who raved up and down the salon, questioning the frightened Portier, swearing fierce oaths, bringing accusation after accusation against some unnamed woman to whom he applied epithets that Marie's English luckily did not comprehend. Not a particularly heroic figure was Peter that night: a frantic, disheveled individual, before whom the Portier cowered, who struggled back to sanity through a berserk haze and was liable to swift relapses into fury again.

To this succeeded at last the mental condition that was to be Peter's for many days, hopelessness and alarm and a grim determination to keep on searching.

There were no clues. The Portier made inquiries of all the cabstands in the neighborhood. Harmony had not taken a cab. The delicatessen seller had seen her go out that afternoon with a bundle and return without it. She had been gone only an hour or so. That gave Peter a ray of hope that she might have found a haven in the neighborhood-
-until he recalled the parcel-post.

One possibility he clung to: Mrs. Boyer had made the mischief, but she had also offered the girl a home. She
might be at the Boyers'. Peter, flinging on a hat and without his overcoat, went to the Boyers'. Time was valuable,
and he had wasted an hour, two hours, in useless rage. So he took a taxicab, and being by this time utterly reckless
of cost let it stand while he interviewed the Boyers.

Boyer himself, partially undressed, opened the door to his ring. Peter was past explanation or ceremonials.
"Is Harmony here?" he demanded.
"Harmony?"
"Harmony Wells. She's disappeared, missing."
"Come in," said Boyer, alive to the strain in Peter's voice. "I don't know, I haven't heard anything. I'll ask Mrs.
Boyer."

During the interval it took for a whispered colloquy in the bedroom, and for Mrs. Boyer to don her flannel
wrapper, Peter suffered the tortures of the damned. Whatever Mrs. Boyer had meant to say by way of protest at the
intrusion on the sacred privacy of eleven o'clock and bedtime died in her throat. Her plump and terraced chin shook
with agitation, perhaps with guilt. Peter, however, had got himself in hand. He told a quiet story; Boyer listened;
Mrs. Boyer, clutching her wrapper about her unstayed figure, listened.

"I thought," finished Peter, "that since you had offered her a refuge--from me--she might have come here."
"I offered her a refuge--before I had been to the Pension Schwarz."
"Ah!" said Peter slowly. "And what about the Pension Schwarz?"
"Need you ask? I learned that you were all put out there. I am obliged to say, Dr. Byrne, that under the
circumstances had the girl come here I could hardly--Frank, I will speak!--I could hardly have taken her in."

Peter went white and ducked as from a physical blow, stumbling out into the hall again. There he thought of
something to say in reply, repudiation, thought better of it, started down the stairs.

Boyer followed him helplessly. At the street door, however, he put his hand on Peter's shoulder. "You know, old
man, I don't believe that. These women--"
"I know," said Peter simply. "Thank you. Good-night."

CHAPTER XXII

Harmony's only thought had been flight, from Peter, from McLean, from Mrs. Boyer. She had devoted all her
energies to losing herself, to cutting the threads that bound her to the life in the Siebensternstrasse. She had drawn
all her money, as Peter discovered later. The discovery caused him even more acute anxiety. The city was full of
thieves; poverty and its companion, crime, lurked on every shadowy staircase of the barracklike houses, or peered,
red-eyed, from every alleyway.

And into this city of contrasts--of gray women of the night hugging gratings for warmth and accosting passers-
by with loathsome gestures, of smug civilians hiding sensuous mouths under great mustaches, of dapper soldiers to
whom the young girl unattended was potential prey, into this night city of terror, this day city of frightful contrasts,
ermine rubbing elbows with frost-nipped flesh, destitution sauntering along the fashionable Prater for lack of shelter,
gilt wheels of royalty and yellow wheels of courtesans--Harmony had ventured alone for the second time.

And this time there was no Peter Byrne to accost her cheerily in the twilight and win her by sheer friendliness.
She was alone. Her funds were lower, much lower. And something else had gone--her faith. Mrs. Boyer had seen to
that. In the autumn Harmony had faced the city clear-eyed and unafraid; now she feared it, met it with averted eyes,
alas! understood it.

It was not the Harmony who had bade a brave farewell to Scatchy and the Big Soprano in the station who fled to
her refuge on the upper floor of the house in the Wollbadgasse. This was a hunted creature, alternately flushed and
pale, who locked her door behind her before she took off her hat, and who, having taken off her hat and surveyed her
hiding-place with tragic eyes, fell suddenly to trembling, alone there in the gaslight.

She had had no plans beyond flight. She had meant, once alone, to think the thing out. But the room was cold,
she had had nothing to eat, and the single slovenly maid was a Hungarian and spoke no German. The dressmaker
had gone to the Ronacher. Harmony did not know where to find a restaurant, was afraid to trust herself to the streets
alone. She went to bed supperless, with a tiny picture of Peter and Jimmy and the wooden sentry under her cheek.

The pigeons, cooing on the window-sill, wakened her early. She was confused at first, got up to see if Jimmy
had thrown off his blankets, and wakened to full consciousness with the sickening realization that Jimmy was not
there.

The dressmaker, whose name was Monia Reiff, slept late after her evening out. Harmony, collapsing with
hunger and faintness, waited as long as she could. Then she put on her things desperately and ventured out. Surely at
this hour Peter would not be searching, and even if he were he would never think of the sixteenth district. He would
make inquiries, of course--the Pension Schwarz, Boyers', the master's.
The breakfast brought back her strength and the morning air gave her confidence. The district, too, was less formidable than the neighborhood of the Karntnerstrasse and the Graben. The shops were smaller. The windows exhibited cheaper goods. There was a sort of family atmosphere about many of them; the head of the establishment in the doorway, the wife at the cashier's desk, daughters, cousins, nieces behind the wooden counters. The shopkeepers were approachable, instead of familiar. Harmony met no rebuffs, was respectfully greeted and cheerfully listened to. In many cases the application ended in a general consultation, shopkeeper, wife, daughters, nieces, slim clerks with tiny mustaches. She got addresses, followed them up, more consultations, more addresses, but no work. The reason dawned on her after a day of tramping, during which she kept carefully away from that part of the city where Peter might be searching for her.

The fact was, of course, that her knowledge of English was her sole asset as a clerk. And there were few English and no tourists in the sixteenth district. She was marketing a commodity for which there was no demand. She lunched at a Konditorei, more to rest her tired body than because she needed food. The afternoon was as the morning. At six o'clock, long after the midwinter darkness had fallen, she stumbled back to the Wollbadgasse and up the whitewashed staircase.

She had a shock at the second landing. A man had stepped into the angle to let her pass. A gasjet dared over his head, and she recognized the short heavy figure and ardent eyes of Georgiev. She had her veil down luckily, and he gave no sign of recognition. She passed on, and she heard him a second later descending. But there had been something reminiscent after all in her figure and carriage. The little Georgiev paused, halfway down, and thought a moment. It was impossible, of course. All women reminded him of the American. Had he not, only the day before, followed for two city blocks a woman old enough to be his mother, merely because she carried a violin case? But there was something about the girl he had just passed--Bah!

A bad week for Harmony followed, a week of weary days and restless nights when she slept only to dream of Peter--of his hurt and incredulous eyes when he found she had gone; of Jimmy--that he needed her, was worse, was dying. More than once she heard him sobbing and wakened to the cooing of the pigeons on the window-sill. She grew thin and sunken-eyed; took to dividing her small hoard, half of it with her, half under the carpet, so that in case of accident all would not be gone.

This, as it happened, was serious. One day, the sixth, she came back wet to the skin from an all-day rain, to find that the carpet bank had been looted. There was no clue. The stolid Hungarian, startled out of her lethargy, protested innocence; the little dressmaker, who seemed honest and friendly, wept in sheer sympathy. The fact remained--half the small hoard was gone.

Two days more, a Sunday and a Monday. On Sunday Harmony played, and Georgiev in the room below, translating into cipher a recent conference between the Austrian Minister of War and the German Ambassador, put aside his work and listened. She played, as once before she had played when life seemed sad and tragic, the "Humoresque." Georgiev, hands behind his head and eyes upturned, was back in the Pension Schwarz that night months ago when Harmony played the "Humoresque" and Peter stooped outside her door. The little Bulgarian sighed and dreamed.

Harmony, a little sadder, a little more forlorn each day, pursued her hopeless quest. She ventured into the heart of the Stadt and paid a part of her remaining money to an employment bureau, to teach English or violin, whichever offered, or even both. After she had paid they told her it would be difficult, almost impossible without references. She had another narrow escape as she was leaving. She almost collided with Olga, the chambermaid, who, having collided with Katrina, the chambermaid, who, having clashed for the last time with Katrina, was seeking new employment. On another occasion she saw Marie in the crowd and was obsessed with a longing to call to her, to ask for Peter, for Jimmy. That meeting took the heart out of the girl. Marie was white and weary--perhaps the boy was worse. Perhaps Peter--Her heart contracted. But that was absurd, of course, Peter was always well and strong.

Two things occurred that week, one unexpected, the other inevitable. The unexpected occurrence was that Monia Reiff, finding Harmony being pressed for work, offered the girl a situation. The wage was small, but she could live on it.

The inevitable was that she met Georgiev on the stairs without her veil.

It was the first day in the workroom. The apprentices were carrying home boxes for a ball that night. Thread was needed, and quickly. Harmony, who did odds and ends of sewing, was most easily spared. She slipped on her jacket and hat and ran down to the shop near by.

It was on the return that she met Georgiev coming down. The afternoon was dark and the staircase unlighted. In the gloom one face was as another. Georgiev, listening intently, hearing footsteps, drew back into the embrasure of a window and waited. His swarthy face was tense, expectant. As the steps drew near, were light feminine instead of stealthy, the little spy relaxed somewhat. But still he waited, crouched.

It was a second before he recognized Harmony, another instant before he realized his good fortune. She had
almost passed. He put out an unsteady hand.

"Fraulein!"

"Herr Georgiev!"

The little Bulgarian was profoundly stirred. His fervid eyes gleamed. He struggled against the barrier of language, broke out in passionate Bulgar, switched to German punctuated with an English word here and there. Made intelligible, it was that he had found her at last. Harmony held her spools of thread and waited for the storm of languages to subside. Then:--

"But you are not to say you have seen me, Herr Georgiev."

"No?"

Harmony colored.

"I am--am hiding," she explained. "Something very uncomfortable happened and I came here. Please don't say you have seen me."

Georgiev was puzzled at first. She had to explain very slowly, with his ardent eyes on her. But he understood at last and agreed of course. His incredulity was turning to certainty. Harmony had actually been in the same building with him while he sought her everywhere else.

"Then," he said at last, "it was you who played Sunday."

"I surely."

She made a move to pass him, but he held out an imploring hand.

"Fraulein, I may see you sometimes?"

"We shall meet again, of course."

"Fraulein,--with all respect,--sometime perhaps you will walk out with me?"

"I am very busy all day."

"At night, then? For the exercise? I, with all respect, Fraulein!"

Harmony was touched.

"Sometime," she consented. And then impulsively: "I am very lonely, Herr Georgiev."

She held out her hand, and the little Bulgarian bent over it and kissed it reverently. The Herr Georgiev's father was a nobleman in his own country, and all the little spy's training had been to make of a girl in Harmony's situation lawful prey. But in the spy's glowing heart there was nothing for Harmony to fear. She knew it. He stood, hat in hand, while she went up the staircase. Then:--

"Fraulein!" anxiously.

"Yes?"

"Was there below at the entrance a tall man in a green velours hat?"

"I saw no one there."

"I thank you, Fraulein."

He watched her slender figure ascend, lose itself in the shadows, listened until she reached the upper floors. Then with a sigh he clapped his hat on his head and made his cautious way down to the street. There was no man in a green velours hat below, but the little spy had an uneasy feeling that eyes watched him, nevertheless. Life was growing complicated for the Herr Georgiev.

Life was pressing very close to Harmony also in those days, a life she had never touched before. She discovered, after a day or two in the work-room, that Monia Reiff's business lay almost altogether among the demi-monde. The sewing-girls, of Marie's type many of them, found in the customers endless topics of conversation. Some things Harmony was spared, much of the talk being in dialect. But a great deal of it she understood, and she learned much that was not spoken. They talked freely of the women, their clothes, and they talked a great deal about a newcomer, an American dancer, for whom Monia was making an elaborate outfit. The American's name was Lillian Le Grande. She was dancing at one of the variety theaters.

Harmony was working on a costume for the Le Grande woman--a gold brocade slashed to the knee at one side and with a fragment of bodice made of gilt tissue. On the day after her encounter with Georgiev she met her.

There was a dispute over the gown, something about the draping. Monia, flushed with irritation, came to the workroom door and glanced over the girls. She singled out Harmony finally and called her.

"Come and put on the American's gown," she ordered. "She wishes--Heaven knows what she wishes!"

Harmony went unwillingly. Nothing she had heard of the Fraulein Le Grande had prepossessed her. Her uneasiness was increased when she found herself obliged to shed her gown and to stand for one terrible moment before the little dressmaker's amused eyes.

"Thou art very lovely, very chic," said Monia. The dress added to rather than relieved Harmony's discomfiture. She donned it in one of the fitting-rooms, made by the simple expedient of curtaining off a corner of the large reception room. The slashed skirt embarrassed her; the low cut made her shrink. Monia was frankly entranced.
Above the gold tissue of the bodice rose Harmony's exquisite shoulders. Her hair was gold; even her eyes looked
golden. The dressmaker, who worshiped beauty, gave a pull here, a pat there. If only all women were so beautiful in
the things she made!

She had an eye for the theatrical also. She posed Harmony behind the curtain, arranged lights, drew down the
chiffon so that a bit more of the girl's rounded bosom was revealed. Then she drew the curtain aside and stood
smiling.

Le Grande paid the picture the tribute of a second's silence. Then:--

"Exquisite!" she said in English. Then in halting German: "Do not change a line. It is perfect."

Harmony must walk in the gown, turn, sit. Once she caught a glimpse of herself and was startled. She had been
wearing black for so long, and now this radiant golden creature was herself. She was enchanted and abashed. The
slash in the skirt troubled her: her slender leg had a way of revealing itself.

The ordeal was over at last. The dancer was pleased. She ordered another gown. Harmony, behind the curtain,
slipped out of the dress and into her own shabby frock. On the other side of the curtain the dancer was talking. Her
voice was loud, but rather agreeable. She smoked a cigarette. Scraps of chatter came to Harmony, and once a laugh.

"That is too pink--something more delicate."

"Here is a shade; hold it to your cheek."

"I am a bad color. I did not sleep last night."

"Still no news, Fraulein?"

"None. He has disappeared utterly. That isn't so bad, is it? I could use more rouge."

"It is being much worn. It is strange, is it not, that a child could be stolen from the hospital and leave no sign!"

The dancer laughed a mirthless laugh. Her voice changed, became nasal, full of venom.

"Oh, they know well enough," she snapped. "Those nurses know, and there's a pig of a red-bearded doctor--I'd
like to poison him. Separating mother and child! I'm going to find him, if only to show them they are not so smart
after all."

In her anger she had lapsed into English. Harmony, behind her curtain, had clutched at her heart. Jimmy's
mother!

CHAPTER XXIII

Jimmy was not so well, although Harmony's flight had had nothing to do with the relapse. He had found Marie a
slavishly devoted substitute, and besides Peter had indicated that Harmony's absence was purely temporary. But the
breaking-up was inevitable. All day long the child lay in the white bed, apathetic but sleepless. In vain Marie made
flower fairies for his pillow, in vain the little mice, now quite tame, played hide-and-seek over the bed, in vain Peter
paused long enough in his frantic search for Harmony to buy colored postcards and bring them to him.

He was contented enough; he did not suffer at all; and he had no apprehension of what was coming. He asked for
nothing, tried obediently to eat, liked to have Marie in the room. But he did not beg to be taken into the salon, as he
once had done. There was a sort of mental confusion also. He liked Marie to read his father's letters; but as he grew
weaker the occasional confusing of Peter with his dead father became a fixed idea. Peter was Daddy.

Peter took care of him at night. He had moved into Harmony's adjacent room and dressed there. But he had
never slept in the bed. At night he put on his shabby dressing-gown and worn slippers and lay on a haircloth sofa at
the foot of Jimmy's bed--lay but hardly slept, so afraid was he that the slender thread of life might snap when it was
drawn out to its slenderest during the darkest hours before the dawn. More than once in every night Peter rose and
stood, hardly breathing, with the tiny lamp in his hand, watching for the rise and fall of the boy's thin little chest.

Peter grew old these days. He turned gray over the ears and developed lines about his mouth that never left him
again. He felt gray and old, and sometimes bitter and hard also. The boy's condition could not be helped: it was
inevitable, hopeless. But the thing that was eating his heart out had been unnecessary and cruel.

Where was Harmony? When it stormed, as it did almost steadily, he wondered how she was sheltered; when the
occasional sun shone he hoped it was bringing her a bit of cheer. Now and then, in the night, when the lamp burned
low and gusts of wind shook the old house, fearful thoughts came to him--the canal, with its filthy depths. Daylight
brought reason, however. Harmony had been too rational, too sane for such an end.

McLean was Peter's great support in those terrible days. He was young and hopeful. Also he had money. Peter
could not afford to grease the machinery of the police service; McLean could and did. In Berlin Harmony could not
have remained hidden for two days. In Vienna, however, it was different. Returns were made to the department, but
irregularly. An American music student was missing. There were thousands of American music students in the city:
one fell over them in the coffee-houses. McLean offered a reward and followed up innumerable music students.

The alternating hope and despair was most trying. Peter became old and haggard; the boy grew thin and white.
But there was this difference, that with Peter the strain was cumulative, hour on hour, day on day. With McLean
each night found him worn and exhausted, but each following morning he went to work with renewed strength and
energy. Perhaps, after all, the iron had not struck so deep into his soul. With Peter it was a life-and-death matter.

Clinics and lectures had begun again, but he had no heart for work. The little household went on methodically. Marie remained; there had seemed nothing else to do. She cooked Peter's food—what little he would eat; she nursed Jimmy while Peter was out on the long search; and she kept the apartment neat. She was never intrusive, never talkative. Indeed, she seemed to have lapsed into definite silence. She deferred absolutely to Peter, adored him, indeed, from afar. She never ate with him, in spite of his protests.

The little apartment was very quiet. Where formerly had been music and Harmony's soft laughter, where Anna Gates had been wont to argue with Peter in loud, incisive tones, where even the prisms of the chandelier had once vibrated in response to Harmony's violin, almost absolute silence now reigned. Even the gate, having been repaired, no longer creaked, and the loud altercations between the Portier and his wife had been silenced out of deference to the sick child.

On the day that Harmony, in the gold dress, had discovered Jimmy's mother in the American dancer Peter had had an unusually bad day. McLean had sent him a note by messenger early in the morning, to the effect that a young girl answering Harmony's description had been seen in the park at Schonbrunn and traced to an apartment near by.

Harmony had liked Schonbrunn, and it seemed possible. They had gone out together, McLean optimistic, Peter afraid to hope. And it had been as he feared—a pretty little violin student, indeed, who had been washing her hair, and only opened the door an inch or two.

McLean made a lame apology, Peter too sick with disappointment to speak. Then back to the city again.

He had taken to making a daily round, to the master's, to the Frau Professor Bergmeister's, along the Graben and the Karntnerstrasse, ending up at the Doctors' Club in the faint hope of a letter. Wrath still smouldered deep in Peter; he would not enter a room at the club if Mrs. Boyer sat within. He had had a long hour with Dr. Jennings, and left that cheerful person writhing in abasement. And he had held a stormy interview with the Frau Schwarz, which left her humble for a week, and exceedingly nervous, being of the impression from Peter's manner that in the event of Harmony not turning up an American gunboat would sail up the right arm of the Danube and bombard the Pension Schwarz.

Schonbrunn having failed them, McLean and Peter went back to the city in the street-car, neither one saying much. Even McLean's elasticity was deserting him. His eyes, from much peering into crowds, had taken on a strained, concentrated look.

Peter was shabbier than ever beside the other man's ultrafashionable dress. He sat, bent forward, his long arms dangling between his knees, his head down. Their common trouble had drawn the two together, or had drawn McLean close to Peter, as if he recognized that there were degrees in grief and that Peter had received almost a death-wound. His old rage at Peter had died. Harmony's flight had proved the situation as no amount of protestation would have done. The thing now was to find the girl; then he and Peter would start even, and the battle to the best man.

They had the car almost to themselves. Peter had not spoken since he sat down. McLean was busy over a notebook, in which he jotted down from day to day such details of their search as might be worth keeping. Now and then he glanced at Peter as if he wished to say something, hesitated, fell to work again over the notebook. Finally he ventured.

"How's the boy?"
"Not so well to-day. I'm having a couple of men in to see him to-night. He doesn't sleep."
"Do you sleep?"
"Not much. He's on my mind, of course."
That and other things, Peter.
"Don't you think—wouldn't it be better to have a nurse. You can't go like this all day and be up all night, you know. And Marie has him most of the day." McLean, of course, had known Marie before. "The boy ought to have a nurse, I think."
"He doesn't move without my hearing him."
"That's an argument for me. Do you want to get sick?"
Peter turned a white face toward McLean, a face in which exasperation struggled with fatigue.
"Good Lord, boy," he rasped, "don't you suppose I'd have a nurse if I could afford it?"
"Would you let me help? I'd like to do something. I'm a useless cub in a sick-room, but I could do that. Who's the woman he liked in the hospital?"
"Nurse Elisabet. I don't know, Mac. There's no reason why I shouldn't let you help, I suppose. It hurts, of course, but—if he would be happier—"
"That's settled, then," said McLean. "Nurse Elisabet, if she can come. And—look here, old man. I've been trying to say this for a week and haven't had the nerve. Let me help you out for a while. You can send it back when you get
it, any time, a year or ten years. I'll not miss it."

But Peter refused. He tempered the refusal in his kindly way.

"I can't take anything now," he said. "But I'll remember it, and if things get very bad I'll come to you. It isn't
costing much to live. Marie is a good manager, almost as good as--Harmony was." This with difficulty. He found it
always hard to speak of Harmony. His throat seemed to close on the name.

That was the best McLean could do, but he made a mental reservation to see Marie that night and slip her a little
money. Peter need never know, would never notice.

At a cross-street the car stopped, and the little Bulgarian, Georgiev, got on. He inspected the car carefully before
he came in from the platform, and sat down unobtrusively in a corner. Things were not going well with him either.
His small black eyes darted from face to face suspiciously, until they came to a rest on Peter.

It was Georgiev's business to read men. Quickly he put together the bits he had gathered from Harmony on the
staircase, added to them Peter's despondent attitude, his strained face, the abstraction which required a touch on the
arm from his companion when they reached their destination, recalled Peter outside the door of Harmony's room in
the Pension Schwarz--and built him a little story that was not far from the truth.

Peter left the car without seeing him. It was the hour of the promenade, when the Ring and the larger business
streets were full of people, when Demel's was thronged with pretty women eating American ices, with military men
drinking tea and nibbling Austrian pastry, the hour when the flower women along the Stephansplatz did a rousing
business in roses, when sterile women burned candles before the Madonna in the Cathedral, when the lottery did the
record business of the day.

It was Peter's forlorn hope that somewhere among the crowd he might happen on Harmony. For some reason he
thought of her always as in a crowd, with people close, touching her, men staring at her, following her. He had spent
a frightful night in the Opera, scanning seat after seat, not so much because he hoped to find her as because inaction
was intolerable.

And so, on that afternoon, he made his slow progress along the Karntnerstrasse, halting now and then to
scrutinize the crowd. He even peered through the doors of shops here and there, hoping while he feared that the girl
might be seeking employment within, as she had before in the early days of the winter.

Because of his stature and powerful physique, and perhaps, too, because of the wretchedness in his eyes, people
noticed him. There was one place where Peter lingered, where a new building was being erected, and where because
of the narrowness of the passage the dense crowd was thinned as it passed. He stood by choice outside a
hairdresser's window, where a brilliant light shone on each face that passed.

Inside the clerks had noticed him. Two of them standing together by the desk spoke of him: "He is there again,
the gray man!"

"Ah, so! But, yes, there is his back!"

"Poor one, it is the Fraulein Engel he waits to see, perhaps."

"More likely Le Grande, the American. He is American."

"He is Russian. Look at his size."

"But his shoes!" triumphantly. "They are American, little one."

The third girl had not spoken; she was wrapping in tissue a great golden rose made for the hair. She placed it in a
box carefully.

"I think he is of the police," she said, "or a spy. There is much talk of war."

"Foolishness! Does a police officer sigh always? Or a spy have such sadness in his face? And he grows thin and
white."

"The rose, Fraulein."

The clerk who had wrapped up the flower held it out to the customer. The customer, however, was not looking.
She was gazing with strange intenstness at the back of a worn gray overcoat. Then with a curious clutch at her heart
she went white. Harmony, of course, Harmony come to fetch the golden rose that was to complete Le Grande's
costume.

She recovered almost at once and made an excuse to leave by another exit.

She took a final look at the gray sleeve that was all she could see of Peter, who had shifted a bit, and stumbled
out into the crowd, walking along with her lip trembling under her veil, and with the slow and steady ache at her
heart that she had thought she had stilled for good.

It had never occurred to Harmony that Peter loved her. He had proposed to her twice, but that had been in each
case to solve a difficulty for her. And once he had taken her in his arms, but that was different. Even then he had not
said he loved her--had not even known it, to be exact. Nor had Harmony realized what Peter meant to her until she
had put him out of her life.

The sight of the familiar gray coat, the scrap of conversation, so enlightening as to poor Peter's quest, that Peter
was growing thin and white, made her almost reel. She had been too occupied with her own position to realize Peter's. With the glimpse of him came a great longing for the house on the Siebensternstrasse, for Jimmy's arms about her neck, for the salon with the lamp lighted and the sleet beating harmlessly against the casement windows, for the little kitchen with the brick stove, for Peter.

Doubts of the wisdom of her course assailed her. But to go back meant, at the best, adding to Peter's burden of Jimmy and Marie, meant the old situation again, too, for Marie most certainly did not add to the respectability of the establishment. And other doubts assailed her. What if Jimmy were not so well, should die, as was possible, and she had not let his mother see him!

Monia Reiff was very busy that day. Harmony did not leave the workroom until eight o'clock. During all that time, while her slim fingers worked over fragile laces and soft chiffons, she was seeing Jimmy as she had seen him last, with the flower fairies on his pillow, and Peter, keeping watch over the crowd in the Karntnerstrasse, looking with his steady eyes for her.

No part of the city was safe for a young girl after night, she knew; the sixteenth district was no better than the rest, rather worse in places. But the longing to see the house on the Siebensternstrasse grew on her, became from an ache a sharp and insistent pain. She must go, must see once again the comfortable glow of Peter's lamp, the flicker that was the fire.

She ate no supper. She was too tired to eat, and there was the pain. She put on her wraps and crept down the whitewashed staircase.

The paved courtyard below was to be crossed and it was poorly lighted. She achieved the street, however, without molestation. To the street-car was only a block, but during that block she was accosted twice. She was white and frightened when she reached the car.

The Siebensternstrasse at last. The street was always dark; the delicatessen shop was closed, but in the wild-game store next a light was burning low, and a flame flickered before the little shrine over the money drawer. The gameseller was a religious man.

The old stucco house dominated the neighborhood. From the time she left the car Harmony saw it, its long flat roof black against the dark sky, its rows of unlighted windows, its long wall broken in the center by the gate. Now from across the street its whole facade lay before her. Peter's lamp was not lighted, but there was a glow of soft firelight from the salon windows. The light was not regular—it disappeared at regular intervals, was blotted out. Harmony knew what that meant. Some one beyond range of where she stood was pacing the floor, back and forward, back and forward. When he was worried or anxious Peter always paced the door.

She did not know how long she stood there. One of the soft rains was falling, or more accurately, condensing. The saturated air was hardly cold. She stood on the pavement unmolested, while the glow died lower and lower, until at last it was impossible to trace the pacing figure. No one came to any of the windows. The little lamp before the shrine in the wild-game shop burned itself out; the Portier across the way came to the door, glanced up at the sky and went in. Harmony heard the rattle of the chain as it was stretched across the door inside.

Not all the windows of the suite opened on the street. Jimmy's windows—and Peter's—opened toward the back of the house, where in a brick-paved courtyard the wife of the Portier hung her washing, and where the Portier himself kept a hutch of rabbits. A wild and reckless desire to see at least the light from the child's room possessed Harmony. Even the light would be something; to go like this, to carry with her only the memory of a dark looming house without cheer was unthinkable. The gate was never locked. If she but went into the garden and round by the spruce tree to the back of the house, it would be something.

She knew the garden quite well. Even the darkness had no horror for her. Little Scatchy had had a habit of leaving various articles on her window-sill and of instigating searches for them at untimely hours of night. Once they had found her hairbrush in the rabbit hutch! So Harmony, ashamed but unalarmed, made her way by the big spruce to the corner of the old lodge and thus to the courtyard.

Ah, this was better! Lights all along the apartment floor and moving shadows; on Jimmy's window-sill a jar of milk. And voices—some one was singing.

Peter was singing, droning softly, as one who puts a drowsy child to sleep. Slower and slower, softer and softer, over and over, the little song Harmony had been wont to sing:—

"Ah well! For us all some sweet hope lies Deeply buried from human eyes. And in the--hereafter--angels may Roll--the--stone--from--its--grave--away."

Slower and slower, softer and softer, until it died away altogether. Peter, in his old dressing-gown, came to the window and turned down the gaslight beside it to a blue point. Harmony did not breathe. For a minute, two minutes, he stood there looking out. Far off the twin clocks of the Votivkirche struck the hour. All about lay the lights of the old city, so very old, so wise, so cunning, so cold.

Peter stood looking out, as he had each night since Harmony went away. Each night he sang the boy to sleep,
turned down the light and stood by the window. And each night he whispered to the city that sheltered Harmony somewhere, what he had whispered to the little sweater coat the night before he went away:--

"Good-night, dear. Good-night, Harmony."

The rabbits stirred uneasily in the hutch; a passing gust shook the great tree overhead and sent down a sharp shower on to the bricks below. Peter struck a match and lit his pipe; the flickering light illuminated his face, his rough hair, his steady eyes.

"Good-night, Peter," whispered Harmony. "Good-night, dear."

CHAPTER XXIV

Walter Stewart had made an uncomplicated recovery, helped along by relief at the turn events had taken. In a few days he was going about again, weak naturally, rather handsomer than before because a little less florid. But the week's confinement had given him an opportunity to think over many things. Peter had set him thinking, on the day when he had packed up the last of Marie's small belongings and sent them down to Vienna.

Stewart, lying in bed, had watched him. "Just how much talk do you suppose this has made, Byrne?" he asked.

"Haven't an idea. Some probably. The people in the Russian villa saw it, you know."

Stewart's brows contracted.

"Damnation! Then the hotel has it, of course!"

"Probably."

Stewart groaned. Peter closed Marie's American trunk of which she had been so proud, and coming over looked down at the injured man.

"Don't you think you'd better tell the girl all about it?"

"No," doggedly.

"I know, of course, it wouldn't be easy, but--you can't get away with it, Stewart. That's one way of looking at it. There's another."

"What's that?"

"Starting with a clean slate. If she's the sort you want to marry, and not a prude, she'll understand, not at first, but after she gets used to it."

"She wouldn't understand in a thousand years."

"Then you'd better not marry her. You know, Stewart, I have an idea that women imagine a good many pretty rotten things about us, anyhow. A sensible girl would rather know the truth and be done with it. What a man has done with his life before a girl--the right girl--comes into it isn't a personal injury to her, since she wasn't a part of his life then. You know what I mean. But she has a right to know it before she chooses."

"How many would choose under those circumstances?" he jibed.

Peter smiled. "Quite a few," he said cheerfully. "It's a wrong system, of course; but we can get a little truth out of it."

"You can't get away with it" stuck in Stewart's mind for several days. It was the one thing Peter said that did stick. And before Stewart had recovered enough to be up and about he had made up his mind to tell Anita. In his mind he had made quite a case for himself; he argued the affair against his conscience and came out victorious.

Anita's party had broken up. The winter sports did not compare, they complained, with St. Moritz. They disliked German cooking. Into the bargain the weather was not good; the night's snows turned soft by midday; and the crowds that began to throng the hotels were solid citizens, not the fashionables of the Riviera. Anita's arm forbade her traveling. In the reassembling of the party she went to the Kurhaus in the valley below the pension with one of the women who wished to take the baths.

It was to the Kurhaus, then, that Stewart made his first excursion after the accident. He went to dinner. Part of the chaperon's treatment called for an early retiring hour, which was highly as he had wished it and rather unnerving after all. A man may decide that a dose of poison is the remedy for all his troubles, but he does not approach his hour with any hilarity. Stewart was a stupid dinner guest, ate very little, and looked haggard beyond belief when the hour came for the older woman to leave.

He did not lack courage however. It was his great asset, physical and mental rather than moral, but courage nevertheless. The evening was quiet, and they elected to sit on the balcony outside Anita's sitting room, the girl swathed in white furs and leaning back in her steamer chair.

Below lay the terrace of the Kurhaus, edged with evergreen trees. Beyond and far below that was the mountain village, a few scattered houses along a frozen stream. The townspeople retired early; light after light was extinguished, until only one in the priest's house remained. A train crept out of one tunnel and into another, like a glowing worm crawling from burrow to burrow.

The girl felt a change in Stewart. During the weeks he had known her there had been a curious restraint in his manner to her. There were times when an avowal seemed to tremble on his lips, when his eyes looked into hers with
the look no women ever mistakes; the next moment he would glance away, his face would harden. They were miles apart. And perhaps the situation had piqued the girl. Certainly it had lost nothing for her by its unusualness.

To-night there was a difference in the man. His eyes met hers squarely, without evasion, but with a new quality, a searching, perhaps, for something in her to give him courage. The girl had character, more than ordinary decision. It was what Stewart admired in her most, and the thing, of course, that the little Marie had lacked. Moreover, Anita, barely twenty, was a woman, not a young girl. Her knowledge of the world, not so deep as Marie's, was more comprehensive. Where Marie would have been merciful, Anita would be just, unless she cared for him. In that case she might be less than just, or more.

Anita in daylight was a pretty young woman, rather incisive of speech, very intelligent, having a wit without malice, charming to look at, keenly alive. Anita in the dusk of the balcony, waiting to hear she knew not what, was a judicial white goddess, formidably still, frightfully potential. Stewart, who had embraced many women, did not dare a finger on her arm.

He had decided on a way to tell the girl the story--a preamble about his upbringing, which had been indifferent, his struggle to get to Vienna, his loneliness there, all leading with inevitable steps to Marie. From that, if she did not utterly shrink from him, to his love for her.

It was his big hour, that hour on the balcony. He was reaching, through love, heights of honesty he had never scaled before. But as a matter of fact he reversed utterly his order of procedure. The situation got him, this first evening absolutely alone with her. That and her nearness, and the pathos of her bandaged, useless arm. Still he had not touched her.

The thing he was trying to do was more difficult for that. General credulity to the contrary, men do not often make spoken love first. How many men propose marriage to their women across the drawing-room or from chair to chair? Absurd! The eyes speak first, then the arms, the lips last. The woman is in his arms before he tells his love. It is by her response that he gauges his chances and speaks of marriage. Actually the thing is already settled; tardy speech only follows on swift instinct. Stewart, wooing as men woo, would have taken the girl's hand, gained an encouragement from it, ventured to kiss it, perhaps, and finding no rebuff would then and there have crushed her to him; What need of words? They would follow in due time, not to make a situation but to clarify it.

But he could not woo as men woo. The barrier of his own weakness stood between them and must be painfully taken down.

"I'm afraid this is stupid for you," said Anita out of the silence. "Would you like to go to the music-room?"
"God forbid. I was thinking."
"Of what?" Encouragement this, surely.
"I was thinking how you had come into my life, and stirred it up."
"Really? I?"
"You know that."
"How did I stir it up?"
"That's hardly the way I meant to put it. You've changed everything for me. I care for you--a very great deal."

He was still carefully in hand, his voice steady. And still he did not touch her. Other men had made love to her, but never in this fashion, or was he making love?

"I'm very glad you like me."
"Like you!" Almost out of hand that time. The thrill in his voice was unmistakable. "It's much more than that, Anita, so much more that I'm going to try to do a hideously hard thing. Will you help a little?"
"Yes, if I can." She was stirred, too, and rather frightened.
Stewart drew his chair nearer to her and sat forward, his face set and dogged.
"Have you any idea how you were hurt? Or why?"
"No. There's a certain proportion of accidents that occur at all these places, isn't there?"
"This was not an accident."
"No?"
"The branch of a tree was thrown out in front of the sled to send us over the bank. It was murder, if intention is crime."

After a brief silence--
"Somebody who wished to kill you, or me?"
"Both of us, I believe. It was done by a woman--a girl, Anita. A girl I had been living with."

A brutal way to tell her, no doubt, but admirably courageous. For he was quivering with dread when he said it--the courage of the man who faces a cannon. And here, where a less-poised woman would have broken into speech, Anita took the refuge of her kind and was silent. Stewart watched her as best he could in the darkness, trying to gather further courage to go on. He could not see her face, but her fingers, touching the edge of the chair, quivered.
"May I tell you the rest?"
"I don't think I want to hear it."
"Are you going to condemn me unheard?"
"There isn't anything you can say against the fact?"

But there was much to say, and sitting there in the darkness he made his plea. He made no attempt to put his case. He told what had happened simply; he told of his loneliness and discomfort. And he emphasized the lack of sentiment that prompted the arrangement.

Anita spoke then for the first time: "And when you tried to terminate it she attempted to kill you!"
"I was acting the beast. I brought her up here, and then neglected her for you."
"Then it was hardly only a business arrangement for her."
"It was at first. I never dreamed of any thing else. I swear that, Anita. But lately, in the last month or two, she--I suppose I should have seen that she--"
"That she had fallen in love with you. How old is she?"
"Nineteen."
A sudden memory came to Anita, of a slim young girl, who had watched her with wide, almost childish eyes.
"Then it was she who was in the compartment with you on the train coming up?"
"Yes."
"Where is she now?"
"In Vienna. I have not heard from her. Byrne, the chap who came up to see me after the--after the accident, sent her away. I think he's looking after her. I haven't heard from him."
"Why did you tell me all this?"
"Because I love you, Anita. I want you to marry me."
"What! After that?"
"That, or something similar, is in many men's lives. They don't tell it, that's the difference. I'm not taking any credit for telling you this. I'm ashamed to the bottom of my soul, and when I look at your bandaged arm I'm suicidal. Peter Byrne urged me to tell you. He said I couldn't get away with it; some time or other it would come out. Then he said something else. He said you'd probably understand, and that if you married me it was better to start with a clean slate."

No love, no passion in the interview now. A clear statement of fact, an offer--his past against hers, his future with hers. Her hand was steady now. The light in the priest's house had been extinguished. The chill of the mountain night penetrated Anita's white furs; and set her--or was it the chill?--to shivering.

"If I had not told you, would you have married me?"
"I think so. I'll be honest, too. Yes."
"I am the same man you would have married. Only--more honest."
"I cannot argue about it. I am tired and cold."

Stewart glanced across the valley to where the cluster of villas hugged the mountain-side. There was a light in his room; outside was the little balcony where Marie had leaned against the railing and looked down, down. Some of the arrogance of his new virtue left the man. He was suddenly humbled. For the first time he realized a part of what Marie had endured in that small room where the light burned.

"Poor little Marie!" he said softly.

The involuntary exclamation did more for him than any plea he could have made. Anita rose and held out her hand.

"Go and see her," she said quietly. "You owe her that. We'll be leaving here in a day or so and I'll not see you again. But you've been honest, and I will be honest, too. I--I cared a great deal, too."
"And this has killed it?"
"I hardly comprehend it yet. I shall have to have time to think."
"But if you are going away--I'm afraid to leave you. You'll think this thing over, alone, and all the rules of life you've been taught will come--"

"Please, I must think. I will write you, I promise."

He caught her hand and crushed it between both of his.
"I suppose you would rather I did not kiss you?" humbly.
"I do not want you to kiss me."

He released her hand and stood looking down at her in the darkness. If he could only have crushed her to him, made her feel the security of his love, of his sheltering arms! But the barrier of his own building was between them. His voice was husky.

"I want you to try to remember, past what I have told you, to the thing that concerns us both--I love you. I never
loved the other woman. I never pretended I loved her. And there will be nothing more like that."

"I shall try to remember."

Anita left Semmering the next day, against the protests of the doctor and the pleadings of the chaperon. She did not see Stewart again. But before she left, with the luggage gone and the fiacre at the door, she went out on the terrace, and looked across to the Villa Waldheim, rising from among its clustering trees. Although it was too far to be certain, she thought she saw the figure of a man on the little balcony standing with folded arms, gazing across the valley to the Kurhaus.

Having promised to see Marie, Stewart proceeded to carry out his promise in his direct fashion. He left Semmering the evening of the following day, for Vienna. The strain of the confession was over, but he was a victim of sickening dread. To one thing only he dared to pin his hopes. Anita had said she cared, cared a great deal. And, after all, what else mattered? The story had been a jolt, he told himself. Girls were full of queer ideas of right and wrong, bless them! But she cared. She cared!

He arrived in Vienna at nine o'clock that night. The imminence of his interview with Marie hung over him like a cloud. He ate a hurried supper, and calling up the Doctors' Club by telephone found Peter's address in the Siebensternstrasse. He had no idea, of course, that Marie was there. He wanted to see Peter to learn where Marie had taken refuge, and incidentally to get from Peter a fresh supply of moral courage for the interview. For he needed courage. In vain on the journey down had he clothed himself in armor of wrath against the girl; the very compartment in the train provoked softened memories of her. Here they had bought a luncheon, there Marie had first seen the Rax. Again at this station she had curled up and put her head on his shoulder for a nap. Ah, but again, at this part of the journey he had first seen Anita!

He took a car to the Siebensternstrasse. His idea of Peter's manner of living those days was exceedingly vague. He had respected Peter's reticence, after the manner of men with each other. Peter had once mentioned a boy he was looking after, in excuse for leaving so soon after the accident. That was all.

The house on the Siebensternstrasse loomed large and unlighted. The street was dark, and it was only after a search that Stewart found the gate. Even then he lost the path, and found himself among a group of trees, to touch the lowest branches of any of which resulted in a shower of raindrops. To add to his discomfort some one was walking in the garden, coming toward him with light, almost stealthy steps.

Stewart by his tree stood still, waiting. The steps approached, were very close, were beside him. So intense was the darkness that even then all he saw was a blacker shadow, and that was visible only because it moved. Then a hand touched his arm, stopped as if paralyzed, drew back slowly, fearfully.

"Good Heavens!" said poor Harmony faintly.

"Please don't be alarmed. I have lost the path." Stewart's voice was almost equally nervous. "Is it to the right or the left?"

It was a moment before Harmony had breath to speak. Then:--

"To the right a dozen paces or so."

"Thank you. Perhaps I can help you to find it."

"I know it quite well. Please don't bother."

The whole situation was so unexpected that only then did it dawn on Stewart that this blacker shadow was a countrywoman speaking God's own language. Together, Harmony a foot or so in advance, they made the path.

"The house is there. Ring hard, the bell is out of order."

"Are you not coming in?"

"No. I--I do not live here."

She must have gone just after that. Stewart, glancing at the dark facade of the house, turned round to find her gone, and a moment later heard the closing of the gate. He was bewildered. What sort of curious place was this, a great looming house that concealed in its garden a fugitive American girl who came and went like a shadow, leaving only the memory of a sweet voice strained with fright?

Stewart was full of his encounter as he took the candle the Portier gave him and followed the gentleman's gruff directions up the staircase. Peter admitted him, looking a trifle uneasy, as well he might with Marie in the salon.

Stewart was too preoccupied to notice Peter's expression. He shook the rain off his hat, smiling.

"How are you?" asked Peter dutifully.

"Pretty good, except for a headache when I'm tired. What sort of a place have you got here anyhow, Byrne?"

"Old hunting-lodge of Maria Theresa," replied Peter, still preoccupied with Marie and what was coming. "Rather interesting old place."

"Rather," commented Stewart, "with goddesses in the garden and all the usual stunts."

"Goddesses?"

"Ran into one just now among the trees. 'A woman I forswore, but thou being a goddess I forswore not thee.'"
English-speaking goddess, by George!"

Peter was staring at him incredulously; now he bent forward and grasped his arm in fingers of steel.

"For Heaven's sake, Stewart, tell me what you mean! Who was in the garden?"

Stewart was amused and interested. It was not for him to belittle a situation of his own making, an incident of his own telling.

"I lost my way in your garden, wandered among the trees, broke through a hedgerow or two, struck a match and consulted the compass--"

Peter's fingers closed.

"Quick," he said.

Stewart's manner lost its jauntiness.

"There was a girl there," he said shortly. "Couldn't see her. She spoke English. Said she didn't live here, and broke for the gate the minute I got to the path."

"You didn't see her?"

"No. Nice voice, though. Young."

The next moment he was alone. Peter in his dressing-gown was running down the staircase to the lower floor, was shouting to the Portier to unlock the door, was a madman in everything but purpose. The Portier let him out and returned to the bedroom.

"The boy above is worse," he said briefly. "A strange doctor has just come, and but now the Herr Doktor Byrne runs to the drug store."

The Portier's wife shrugged her shoulders even while tears filled her eyes.

"What can one expect?" she demanded. "The good Herr Gott has forbidden theft and Rosa says the boy was stolen. Also the druggist has gone to visit his wife's mother."

"Perhaps I may be of service; I shall go up."

"And see for a moment that hussy of the streets! Remain here. I shall go."

Slowly and ponderously she climbed the stairs.

Stewart, left alone, wandered along the dim corridor. He found Peter's excitement rather amusing. So this was where Peter lived, an old house, isolated in a garden where rambled young women with soft voices. Hello, a youngster asleep! The boy, no doubt.

He wandered on toward the lighted door of the salon and Marie. The place was warm and comfortable, but over it all hung the indescribable odor of drugs that meant illness. He remembered that the boy was frail.

Marie turned as he stopped in the salon doorway, and then rose, white-faced. Across the wide spaces of the room they eyed each other. Marie's crisis had come. Like all crises it was bigger than speech. It was after a distinct pause that she spoke.

"Hast thou brought the police?"

Curiously human, curiously masculine at least was Stewart's mental condition at that moment. He had never loved the girl; it was with tremendous relief he had put her out of his life. And yet--

"So it's old Peter now, is it?"

"No, no, not that, Walter. He has given me shelter, that is all. I swear it. I look after the boy."

"Who else is here?"

"No one else; but--"

"Tell that rot to some one who does not know you."

"It is true. He never even looks at me. I am wicked, but I do not lie." There was a catch of hope in her voice.

Marie knew men somewhat, but she still cherished the feminine belief that jealousy is love, whereas it is only injured pride. She took a step toward him. "Walter, I am sorry. Do you hate me?" She had dropped the familiar "thou."

Stewart crossed the room until only Peter's table and lamp stood between them.

"I didn't mean to be brutal," he said, rather largely, entirely conscious of his own magnanimity. "It was pretty bad up there and I know it. I don't hate you, of course. That's hardly possible after--everything."

"You--would take me back?"

"No. It's over, Marie. I wanted to know where you were, that's all; to see that you were comfortable and not frightened. You're a silly child to think of the police."

Marie put a hand to her throat.

"It is the American, of course."

"Yes."

She staggered a trifle, recovered, threw up her head. "Then I wish I had killed her!"

No man ever violently resents the passionate hate of one woman for her rival in his affections. Stewart, finding
the situation in hand and Marie only feebly formidable, was rather amused and flattered by the honest fury in her voice. The mouse was under his paw; he would play a bit. "You'll get over feeling that way, kid. You don't really love me."

"You were my God, that is all."
"Will you let me help you--money, I mean?"
"Keep it for her."
"Peter will be here in a minute." He bent over the table and eyed her with his old, half-bullying, half-playful manner. "Come round here and kiss me for old times."

"No!"
"Come."

She stood stubbornly still, and Stewart, still smiling, took a step or two toward her. Then he stopped, ceased smiling, drew himself up.

"You are quite right and I'm a rotter." Marie's English did not comprehend "rotter," but she knew the tone.
"Listen, Marie, I've told the other girl, and there's a chance for me, anyhow. Some day she may marry me. She asked me to see you."

"I do not wish her pity."
"You are wasting your life here. You cannot marry, you say, without a dot. There is a chance in America for a clever girl. You are clever, little Marie. The first money I can spare I'll send you--if you'll take it. It's all I can do."

This was a new Stewart, a man she had never known. Marie recoiled from him, eyed him nervously, sought in her childish mind for an explanation. When at last she understood that he was sincere, she broke down. Stewart, playing a new part and raw in it, found the situation irritating. But Marie's tears were not entirely bitter. Back of them her busy young mind was weaving a new warp of life, with all of America for its loom. Hope that had died lived again. Before her already lay that great country where women might labor and live by the fruit of their labor, where her tawdry past would be buried in the center of distant Europe. New life beckoned to the little Marie that night in the old salon of Maria Theresa, beckoned to her as it called to Stewart, opportunity to one, love and work to the other. To America!

"I will go," she said at last simply. "And I will not trouble you there."
"Good!" Stewart held out his hand and Marie took it. With a quick gesture she held it to her cheek, dropped it.

Peter came back half an hour later, downcast but not hopeless. He had not found Harmony, but life was not all gray. She was well, still in Vienna, and--she had come back! She had cared then enough to come back. To-morrow he would commence again, would comb the city fine, and when he had found her he would bring her back, the wanderer, to a marvelous welcome.

He found Stewart gone, and Marie feverishly overhauling her few belongings by the salon lamp. She turned to him a face still stained with tears but radiant with hope.

"Peter," she said gravely, "I must prepare my outfit. I go to America."
"With Stewart?"
"Alone, Peter, to work, to be very good, to be something. I am very happy, although--Peter, may I kiss you?"
"Certainly," said Peter, and took her caress gravely, patting her thin shoulder. His thoughts were in the garden with Harmony, who had cared enough to come back.
"Life," said Peter soberly, "life is just one damned thing after another, isn't it?"
But Marie was anxiously examining the hem of a skirt.

The letter from Anita reached Stewart the following morning. She said:--

"I have been thinking things over, Walter, and I am going to hurt you very much--but not, believe me, without hurting myself. Perhaps my uppermost thought just now is that I am disappointing you, that I am not so big as you thought I would be. For now, in this final letter, I can tell you how much I cared. Oh, my dear, I did care!"
"But I will not marry you. And when this reaches you I shall have gone very quietly out of your life. I find that such philosophy as I have does not support me to-night, that all my little rules of life are inadequate. Individual liberty was one--but there is no liberty of the individual. Life--other lives--press too closely. You, living your life as seemed best and easiest, and carrying down with you into shipwreck the little Marie and--myself!"
"For, face to face with the fact, I cannot accept it, Walter. It is not only a question of my past against yours. It is of steady revolt and loathing of the whole thing; not the flash of protest before one succumbs to the inevitable, but a deep-seated hatred that is a part of me and that would never forget.

"You say that you are the same man I would have married, only more honest for concealing nothing. But--and forgive me this, it insists on coming up in my mind--were you honest, really? You told me, and it took courage, but wasn't it partly fear? What motive is unmixed? Honesty--and fear, Walter. You were preparing against a contingency, although you may not admit this to yourself.
"I am not passing judgment on you. God forbid that I should! I am only trying to show you what is in my mind, and that this break is final. The revolt is in myself, against something sordid and horrible which I will not take into my life. And for that reason time will make no difference.

"I am not a child, and I am not unreasonable. But I ask a great deal of this life of mine that stretches ahead, Walter--home and children, the love of a good man, the fulfillment of my ideals. And you ask me to start with a handicap. I cannot do it. I know you are resentful, but--I know that you understand.

"ANITA."

CHAPTER XXV

The little Georgiev was in trouble those days. The Balkan engine was threatening to explode, but continued to gather steam, with Bulgaria sitting on the safety-valve. Austria was mobilizing troops, and there were long conferences in the Burg between the Emperor and various bearded gentlemen, while the military prayed in the churches for war.

The little Georgiev hardly ate or slept. Much hammering went on all day in the small room below Harmony's on the Wollbadgasse. At night, when the man in the green velours hat took a little sleep, mysterious packages were carried down the whitewashed staircase and loaded into wagons waiting below. Once on her window-sill Harmony found among the pigeons a carrier pigeon with a brass tube fastened to its leg.

On the morning after Harmony's flight from the garden in the Street of Seven Stars, she received a visit from Georgiev. She had put in a sleepless night, full of heart-searching. She charged herself with cowardice in running away from Peter and Jimmy when they needed her, and in going back like a thief the night before. The conviction that the boy was not so well brought with it additional introspection--her sacrifice seemed useless, almost childish. She had fled because two men thought it necessary, in order to save her reputation, to marry her; and she did not wish to marry. Marriage was fatal to the career she had promised herself, had been promised. But this career, for which she had given up everything else--would she find it in the workroom of a dressmaker?

Ah, but there was more to it than that. Suppose--how her cheeks burned when she thought of it!--suppose she had taken Peter at his word and married him? What about Peter's career? Was there any way by which Peter's poverty for one would be comfort for two? Was there any reason why Peter, with his splendid ability, should settle down to the hack-work of general practice, the very slough out of which he had so painfully climbed?

Either of two things--go back to Peter, but not to marry him, or stay where she was. How she longed to go back only Harmony knew. There in the little room, with only the pigeons to see, she held out her arms longingly. "Peter!" she said. "Peter, dear!"

She decided, of course, to stay where she was, a burden to no one. The instinct of the young girl to preserve her good name at any cost outweighed the vision of Peter at the window, haggard and tired, looking out. It was Harmony's chance, perhaps, to do a big thing; to prove herself bigger than her fears, stronger than convention. But she was young, bewildered, afraid. And there was this element, stronger than any of the others--Peter had never told her he loved her. To go back, throwing herself again on his mercy, was unthinkable. On his love--that was different. But what if he did not love her? He had been good to her; but then Peter was good to every one.

There was something else. If the boy was worse what about his mother? Whatever she was or had been, she was his mother. Suppose he were to die and his mother not see him? Harmony's sense of fairness rebelled. In the small community at home mother was sacred, her claims insistent.

It was very early, hardly more than dawn. The pigeons cooed on the sill; over the ridge of the church roof, across, a luminous strip foretold the sun. An oxcart, laden with vegetables for the market, lumbered along the streets. Puzzled and unhappy, Harmony rose and lighted her fire, drew on her slippers and the faded silk kimono with the pink butterflies.

In the next room the dressmaker still slept, dreaming early morning dreams of lazy apprentices, overdue bills, complaining customers.

Harmony moved lightly not to disturb her. She set her room in order, fed the pigeons,--it was then she saw the carrier with its message,--made her morning coffee by setting the tiny pot inside the stove. And all the time, moving quietly through her morning routine, she was there in that upper room in body only.

In soul she was again in the courtyard back of the old lodge, in the Street of Seven Stars, with the rabbits stirring in the hutch, and Peter, with rapt eyes, gazing out over the city. Bed, toilet-table, coffee-pot, Peter; pigeons, rolls, Peter; sunrise over the church roof, and Peter again. Always Peter!

Monia Reiff was stirring in the next room. Harmony could hear her, muttering and putting coal on the stove and calling to the Hungarian maid for breakfast. Harmony dressed hastily. It was one of her new duties to prepare the workroom for the day. The luminous streak above the church was rose now, time for the day to begin.

She was not certain at once that some one had knocked at the door, so faint was the sound.

She hesitated, listened. The knob turned slightly. Harmony, expecting Monia, called "Come in."
It was the little Georgiev, very apologetic, rather gray of face. He stood in the doorway with his finger on his lips, one ear toward the stairway. It was very silent. Monia was drinking her coffee in bed, whither she had retired for warmth.

"Pardon!" said the Bulgarian in a whisper. "I listened until I heard you moving about. Ah, Fraulein, that I must disturb you!"

"Something has happened!" exclaimed Harmony, thinking of Peter, of course.

"Not yet. I fear it is about to happen. Fraulein, do me the honor to open your window. My pigeon comes now to you to be fed, and I fear--on the sill, Fraulein."

Harmony opened the window. The wild pigeons scattered at once, but the carrier, flying out a foot or two, came back promptly and set about its breakfast.

"Will he let me catch him?"

"Pardon, Fraulein, If I may enter--"

"Come in, of course."

Evidently the defection of the carrier had been serious. A handful of grain on a wrong window-sill, and kingdoms overthrown! Georgiev caught the pigeon and drew the message from the tube. Even Harmony grasped the seriousness of the situation. The little Bulgarian's face, from gray became livid; tiny beads of cold sweat came out on his forehead.

"What have I done?" cried Harmony. "Oh, what have I done? If I had known about the pigeon--"

Georgiev recovered himself.

"The Fraulein can do nothing wrong," he said. "It is a matter of an hour's delay, that is all. It may not be too late."

Monia Reiff, from the next room, called loudly for more coffee. The sulky Hungarian brought it without a glance in their direction.

"Too late for what?"

"Fraulein, if I may trouble you--but glance from the window to the street below. It is of an urgency, or I--Please, Fraulein!"

Harmony glanced down into the half-light of the street. Georgiev, behind her, watched her, breathless, expectant. Harmony drew in her head.

"Only a man in a green hat," she said. "And down the street a group of soldiers."

"Ah!"

The situation dawned on the girl then, at least partially.

"They are coming for you?"

"It is possible. But there are many soldiers in Vienna."

"And I with the pigeon--Oh, it's too horrible! Herr Georgiev, stay here in this room. Lock the door. Monia will say that it is mine--"

"Ah no, Fraulein! It is quite hopeless. Nor is it a matter of the pigeon. It is war, Fraulein. Do not distress yourself. It is but a matter of--imprisonment."

"There must be something I can do," desperately. "I hear them below. Is there no way to the roof, no escape?"

"None, Fraulein. It was an oversight. War is not my game; I am a man of peace. You have been very kind to me, Fraulein. I thank you."

"You are not going down!"

"Pardon, but it is better so. Soldiers they are of the provinces mostly, and not for a lady to confront."

"They are coming up!"

He listened. The clank of scabbards against the stone stairs was unmistakable. The little Georgiev straightened, threw out his chest, turned to descend, faltered, came back a step or two.

His small black eyes were fixed on Harmony's face.

"Fraulein," he said huskily, "you are very lovely. I carry always in my heart your image. Always so long as I live. Adieu."

He drew his heels together, gave a stiff little bow and was gone down the staircase. Harmony was frightened, stricken. She collapsed in a heap on the floor of her room, her fingers in her ears. But she need not have feared. The little Georgiev made no protest, submitted to the inevitable like a gentleman and a soldier, went out of her life, indeed, as unobtrusively as he had entered it.

The carrier pigeon preened itself comfortably on the edge of the washstand. Harmony ceased her hysterical crying at last and pondered what was best to do. Monia was still breakfasting so incredibly brief are great moments. After a little thought Harmony wrote a tiny message, English, German, and French, and inclosed it in the brass tube.

"The Herr Georgiev has been arrested," she wrote. An hour later the carrier rose lazily from the window-sill,
flapped its way over the church roof and disappeared, like Georgiev, out of her life. Grim-visaged war had touched her and passed on.

The incident was not entirely closed, however. A search of the building followed the capture of the little spy. Protesting tenants were turned out, beds were dismantled, closets searched, walls sounded for hidden hollows. In one room on Harmony's floor was found stored a quantity of ammunition.

It was when the three men who had conducted the search had finished, when the boxes of ammunition had been gathered in the hall, and the chattering sewing-girls had gone back to work, that Harmony, on her way to her dismantled room, passed through the upper passage.

She glanced down the staircase where little Georgiev had so manfully descended.

"I carry always in my heart your image. Always so long as I live."

The clatter of soldiers on their way down to the street came to her ears; the soft cooing of the pigeons, the whirr of sewing-machines from the workroom. The incident was closed, except for the heap of ammunition boxes on the landing, guarded by an impassive soldier.

Harmony glanced at him. He was eying her steadily, thumbs in, heels in, toes out, chest out. Harmony put her hand to her heart.

"You!" she said.

The conversation of a sentry, save on a holiday is, "Yea, yea," and "Nay, nay."

"Yes, Fraulein."

Harmony put her hands together, a little gesture of appeal, infinitely touching.

"You will not say that you have found, have seen me?"

"No, Fraulein."

It was in Harmony's mind to ask all her hungry heart craved to learn--of Peter, of Jimmy, of the Portier, of anything that belonged to the old life in the Siebensternstrasse. But there was no time. The sentry's impassive face became rigid; he looked through her, not at her. Harmony turned.

The man in the green hat was coming up the staircase. There was no further chance to question. The sentry was set to carrying the boxes down the staircase.

Full morning now, with the winter sun shining on the beggars in the market, on the crowds in the parks, on the flower sellers in the Stephansplatz; shining on Harmony's golden head as she bent over a bit of chiffon, on the old milkwoman carrying up the whitewashed staircase her heavy cans of milk; on the carrier pigeon winging its way to the south; beating in through bars to the exalted face of Herr Georgiev; resting on Peter's drooping shoulders, on the neglected mice and the wooden soldier, on the closed eyes of a sick child--the worshiped sun, peering forth--the golden window of the East.

CHAPTER XXVI

Jimmy was dying. Peter, fighting hard, was beaten at last. All through the night he had felt it; during the hours before the dawn there had been times when the small pulse wavered, flickered, almost ceased. With the daylight there had been a trifle of recovery, enough for a bit of hope, enough to make harder Peter's acceptance of the inevitable.

The boy was very happy, quite content and comfortable. When he opened his eyes he smiled at Peter, and Peter, gray of face, smiled back. Peter died many deaths that night.

At daylight Jimmy fell into a sleep that was really stupor. Marie, creeping to the door in the faint dawn, found the boy apparently asleep and Peter on his knees beside the bed. He raised his head at her footstep and the girl was startled at the suffering in his face. He motioned her back.

"But you must have a little sleep, Peter."

"No. I'll stay until--Go back to bed. It is very early."

Peter had not been able after all to secure the Nurse Elisabet, and now it was useless. At eight o'clock he let Marie take his place, then he bathed and dressed and prepared to face another day, perhaps another night. For the child's release came slowly. He tried to eat breakfast, but managed only a cup of coffee.

Many things had come to Peter in the long night, and one was insistent--the boy's mother was in Vienna and he was dying without her. Peter might know in his heart that he had done the best thing for the child, but like Harmony his early training was rising now to accuse him. He had separated mother and child. Who was he to have decided the mother's unfitness, to have played destiny? How lightly he had taken the lives of others in his hand, and to what end? Harmony, God knows where; the boy dying without his mother. Whatever that mother might be, her place that day was with her boy. What a wreck he had made of things! He was humbled as well as stricken, poor Peter!

In the morning he sent a note to McLean, asking him to try to trace the mother and inclosing the music-hall clipping and the letter. The letter, signed only "Mamma," was not helpful. The clipping might prove valuable.

"And for Heaven's sake be quick," wrote Peter. "This is a matter of hours. I meant well, but I've done a terrible
thing. Bring her, Mac, no matter what she is or where you find her." The Portier carried the note. When he came up
to get it he brought in his pocket a small rabbit and a lettuce leaf. Never before had the combination failed to arouse
and amuse the boy. He carried the rabbit down again sorrowfully. "He saw it not," he reported sadly to his wife. "Be
off to the church while I deliver this letter. And this rabbit we will not cook, but keep in remembrance."

At eleven o'clock Marie called Peter, who was asleep on the horsehair sofa.
"He asks for you." Peter was instantly awake and on his feet. The boy's eyes were open and fixed on him.
"Is it another day?" he asked.
"Yes, boy; another morning."
"I am cold, Peter."
They blanketed him, although the room was warm. From where he lay he could see the mice. He watched them
for a moment. Poor Peter, very humble, found himself wondering in how many ways he had been remiss. To see this
small soul launched into eternity without a foreword, without a bit of light for the journey! Peter's religion had been
one of life and living, not of creed.

Marie, bringing jugs of hot water, bent over Peter.
"He knows, poor little one!" she whispered.
And so, indeed, it would seem. The boy, revived by a spoonful or two of broth, asked to have the two tame mice
on the bed. Peter, opening the cage, found one dead, very stiff and stark. The catastrophe he kept from the boy.
"One is sick, Jimmy boy," he said, and placed the mate, forlorn and shivering, on the pillow. After a minute:--
"If the sick one dies will it go to heaven?"
"Yes, honey, I think so."
The boy was silent for a time. Thinking was easier than speech. His mind too worked slowly. It was after a
pause, while he lay there with closed eyes, that Peter saw two tears slip from under his long lashes. Peter bent over
and wiped them away, a great ache in his heart.
"What is it, dear?"
"I'm afraid--it's going to die!"
"Would that be so terrible, Jimmy boy?" asked Peter gently. "To go to heaven, where there is no more death or
dying, where it is always summer and the sun always shines?"

No reply for a moment. The little mouse sat up on the pillow and rubbed its nose with a pinkish paw. The baby
mice in the cage nuzzled their dead mother.
"Is there grass?"
"Yes--soft green grass."
"Do--boys in heaven--go in their bare feet?" Ah, small mind and heart, so terrified and yet so curious!
"Indeed, yes." And there on his knees beside the white bed Peter painted such a heaven as no theologue has ever
had the humanity to paint--a heaven of babbling brooks and laughing, playing children, a heaven of dear departed
puppies and resurrected birds, of friendly deer, of trees in fruit, of speckled fish in bright rivers. Painted his heaven
with smiling eyes and death in his heart, a child's heaven of games and friendly Indians, of sunlight and rain, sweet
sleep and brisk awakening.
The boy listened. He was silent when Peter had finished. Speech was increasingly an effort.
"I should--like--to go there," he whispered at last.
He did not speak again during all the long afternoon, but just at dusk he roused again.
"I would like--to see--the sentry," he said with difficulty.
And so again, and for the last time, Rosa's soldier from Salzburg with one lung.

Through all that long day, then, Harmony sat over her work, unaccustomed muscles aching, the whirring
machines in her ears. Monia, upset over the morning's excitement, was irritable and unreasonable. The gold-tissue
costume had come back from Le Grande with a complaint. Below in the courtyard all day curious groups stood
gaping up the staircase, where the morning had seen such occurrences.

At the noon hour, while the girls heated soup and carried in pails of salad from the corner restaurant, Harmony
had fallen into the way of playing for them. To the music-loving Viennese girls this was the hour of the day. To sit
back, soup bowl on knee, the machines silent, Monia quarreling in the kitchen with the Hungarian servant, and while
the pigeons ate crusts on the window-sills, to hear this American girl play such music as was played at the opera, her
slim figure swaying, her whole beautiful face and body glowing with the melody she made, the girls found the
situation piquant, altogether delightful. Although she did not suspect it, many rumors were rife about Harmony in
the workroom. She was not of the people, they said--the daughter of a great American, of course, run away to escape
a loveless marriage. This was borne out by the report of one of them who had glimpsed the silk petticoat. It was
rumored also that she wore no chemise, but instead an infinitely coquettish series of lace and nainsook garments--of
Harmony played for them that day, played, perhaps, as she had not played since the day she had moved the master to tears, played to Peter as she had seen him at the window, to Jimmy, to the little Georgiev as he went down the staircase. And finally with a choke in her throat to the little mother back home, so hopeful, so ignorant.

In the evening, as was her custom, she took the one real meal of the day at the corner restaurant, going early to avoid the crowd and coming back quickly through the winter night. The staircase was always a peril, to be encountered and conquered night after night and even in the daytime not to be lightly regarded. On her way up this night she heard steps ahead, heavy, measured steps that climbed steadily without pauses. For an instant Harmony thought it sounded like Peter's step and she went dizzy.

But it was not Peter. Standing in the upper hall, much as he had stood that morning over the ammunition boxes, thumbs in, heels in, toes out, chest out, was the sentry.

Harmony's first thought was of Georgiev and more searching of the building. Then she saw that the sentry's impassive face wore lines of trouble. He saluted. "Please, Fraulein."

"Yes?"
"I have not told the Herr Doktor."
"I thank you."
"But the child dies."
"Jimmy?"
"He dies all of last night and to-day. To-night, it is, perhaps, but of moments."

Harmony clutched at the iron stair-rail for support. "You are sure? You are not telling me so that I will go back?"
"He dies, Fraulein. The Herr Doktor has not slept for many hours. My wife, Rosa, sits on the stair to see that none disturb, and her cousin, the wife of the Portier, weeps over the stove. Please, Fraulein, come with me."

"When did you leave the Siebensternstrasse?"
"But now."
"And he still lives?"
"Ja, Fraulein, and asks for you."

Now suddenly fell away from the girl all pride, all fear, all that was personal and small and frightened, before the reality of death. She rose, as women by divine gift do rise, to the crisis; ceased trembling, got her hat and coat and her shabby gloves and joined the sentry again. Another moment's delay--to secure the Le Grande's address from Monia. Then out into the night, Harmony to the Siebensternstrasse, the tall soldier to find the dancer at her hotel, or failing that, at the Ronacher Music-Hall.

Harmony took a taxicab--nothing must be spared now--bribed the chauffeur to greater speed, arrived at the house and ran across the garden, still tearless, up the stairs, past Rosa on the upper flight, and rang the bell.

Marie admitted her with only a little gasp of surprise. There was nothing to warn Peter. One moment he sat by the bed, watch in hand, alone, drear, tragic-eyed. The next he had glanced up, saw Harmony and went white, holding to the back of his chair. Their eyes met, agony and hope in them, love and death, rapture and bitterness. In Harmony's, pleading, promise, something of doubt; in Peter's, only yearning, as of empty arms. Then Harmony dared to look at the bed and fell on her knees in a storm of grief beside it. Peter bent over and gently stroked her hair.

Le Grande was singing; the boxes were full. In the body of the immense theater waiters scurried back and forward among the tables. Everywhere was the clatter of silver and steel on porcelain, the clink of glasses. Smoke was everywhere--pipes, cigars, cigarettes. Women smoked between bites at the tables, using small paper or silver mouthpieces, even a gold one shone here and there. Men walked up and down among the diners, spraying the air with chemicals to clear it. At a table just below the stage sat the red-bearded Dozent with the lady of the photograph. They were drinking cheap native wines and were very happy.

From the height of his worldly wisdom he was explaining the people to her.

"In the box--don't stare, Liebchen, he looks--is the princeling I have told you of. Roses, of course. Last night it was orchids."

"Last night! Were you here?" He coughed.
"I have been told, Liebchen. Each night he sits there, and when she finishes her song he rises in the box, kisses the flowers and tosses them to her."
"Shameless! Is she so beautiful?"
"No. But you shall see. She comes."

Le Grande was very popular. She occupied the best place on the program; and because she sang in American, which is not exactly English and more difficult to understand, her songs were considered exceedingly risque. As a matter of fact they were merely ragtime melodies, with a lilt to them that caught the Viennese fancy, accustomed to
German sentimental ditties and the artificial forms of grand opera. And there was another reason for her success. She carried with her a chorus of a dozen pickaninnies.

In Austria darkies were as rare as cats, and there were no cats! So the little chorus had made good. Each day she walked in the Prater, ermine from head to foot, and behind her two by two trailed twelve little Southern darkies in red-velvet coats and caps, grinning sociably. When she drove a pair sat on the boot.

Her voice was strong, not sweet, spoiled by years of singing against dishes and bottles in smoky music halls; spoiled by cigarettes and absinthe and foreign cocktails that resembled their American prototypes as the night resembles the day.

She wore the gold dress, decolletee, slashed to the knee over rhinestone-spangled stockings. And back of her trailed the twelve little darkies.

She sang "Dixie," of course, and the "Old Folks at Home"; then a ragtime medley, with the chorus showing rows of white teeth and clogging with all their short legs. Le Grande danced to that, a whirling, nimble dance. The little rhinestones on her stockings flashed; her opulent bosom quivered. The Dozent, eyes on the dancer, squeezed his companion's hand.

"I love thee!" he whispered, rather flushed.

And then she sang "Doan ye cry, mah honey." Her voice, rather coarse but melodious, lent itself to the negro rhythm, the swing and lilt of the lullaby. The little darkies, eyes rolling, preternaturally solemn, linked arms and swayed rhythmically, right, left, right, left. The glasses ceased clinking; sturdy citizens forgot their steak and beer for a moment and listened, knife and fork poised. Under the table the Dozent's hand pressed its captive affectionately, his eyes no longer on Le Grande, but on the woman across, his sweetheart, she who would be mother of his children. The words meant little to the audience; the rich, rolling Southern lullaby held them rapt:

"Doan ye Cry, mah honey-- Doan ye weep no mo', Mammy's gwine to hold her baby, All de udder black trash sleepin' on the flo',"

The little darkies swayed; the singer swayed, empty arms cradled.

She picked the tiniest darky up and held him, woolly head against her breast, and crooned to him, rocking on her jeweled heels. The crowd applauded; the man in the box kissed his flowers and flung them. Glasses and dishes clinked again.

The Dozent bent across the table.
"Some day--" he said.

The girl blushed.

Le Grande made her way into the wings, surrounded by her little troupe. A motherly colored woman took them, shooed them off, rounded them up like a flock of chickens.

And there in the wings, grimly impassive, stood a private soldier of the old Franz Josef, blocking the door to her dressing room. For a moment gold dress and dark blue-gray uniform confronted each other. Then the sentry touched his cap.

"Madam," he said, "the child is in the Riebensternstrasse and to-night he dies."

"What child?" Her arms were full of flowers.

"The child from the hospital. Please to make haste."

Jimmy died an hour after midnight, quite peacefully, died with one hand in Harmony's and one between Peter's two big ones.

Toward the last he called Peter "Daddy" and asked for a drink. His eyes, moving slowly round the room, passed without notice the grayfaced woman in a gold dress who stood staring down at him, rested a moment on the cage of mice, came to a stop in the doorway, where stood the sentry, white and weary, but refusing rest.

It was Harmony who divined the child's unspoken wish.

"The manual?" she whispered.

The boy nodded. And so just inside the door of the bedroom across from the old salon of Maria Theresa the sentry, with sad eyes but no lack of vigor, went again through the Austrian manual of arms, and because he had no carbin he used Peter's old walking-stick.

When it was finished the boy smiled faintly, tried to salute, lay still.

CHAPTER XXVII

Peter was going back to America and still he had not told Harmony he loved her. It was necessary that he go back. His money had about given out, and there was no way to get more save by earning it. The drain of Jimmy's illness, the inevitable expense of the small grave and the tiny stone Peter had insisted on buying, had made retreat his only course. True, Le Grande had wished to defray all expenses, but Peter was inexorable. No money earned as the dancer earned hers should purchase peaceful rest for the loved little body. And after seeing Peter's eyes the dancer had not insisted.
A week had seen many changes. Marie was gone. After a conference between Stewart and Peter that had been decided on. Stewart raised the money somehow, and Peter saw her off, palpitant and eager, with the pin he had sent her to Semmering at her throat. She kissed Peter on the cheek in the station, rather to his embarrassment. From the lowered window, as the train pulled out, she waved a moist handkerchief.

"I shall be very good," she promised him. The last words he heard above the grinding of the train were her cheery: "To America!"

Peter was living alone in the Street of Seven Stars, getting food where he might happen to be, buying a little now and then from the delicatessen shop across the street. For Harmony had gone back to the house in the Wollbadgasse. She had stayed until all was over and until Marie's small preparations for departure were over. Then, while Peter was at the station, she slipped away again. But this time she left her address. She wrote:--

"You will come to visit me, dear Peter, because I was so lonely before and that is unnecessary now. But you must know that I cannot stay in the Siebensternstrasse. We have each our own fight to make, and you have been trying to fight for us all, for Marie, for dear little Jimmy, for me. You must get back to work now; you have lost so much time. And I am managing well. The Frau Professor is back and will take an evening lesson, and soon I shall have more money from Fraulein Reiff. You can see how things are looking up for me. In a few months I shall be able to renew my music lessons. And then, Peter,—the career!

"HARMONY."

Her address was beneath.

Peter had suffered much. He was thinner, grayer, and as he stood with the letter in his hand he felt that Harmony was right. He could offer her nothing but his shabby self, his problematic future. Perhaps, surely, everything would have been settled, without reason, had he only once taken the girl in his arms, told her she was the breath of life itself to him. But adversity, while it had roused his fighting spirit in everything else, had sapped his confidence.

He had found the letter on his dressing-table, and he found himself confronting his image over it, a tall, stooping figure, a tired, lined face, a coat that bore the impress of many days with a sick child's head against its breast.

So it was over. She had come back and gone again, and this time he must let her go. Who was he to detain her? She would carry herself on to success, he felt; she had youth, hope, beauty and ability. And she had proved the thing he had not dared to believe, that she could take care of herself in the old city. Only—to go away and leave her there!

McLean would remain. No doubt he already had Harmony's address in the Wollbadgasse. Peter was not subtle, no psychologist, but he had seen during the last few days how the boy watched Harmony's every word, every gesture. And, perhaps, when loneliness and hard work began to tell on her, McLean's devotion would win its reward. McLean's devotion, with all that it meant, the lessons again, community of taste, their common youth! Peter felt old, very tired.

Nevertheless he went that night to the Wollbadgasse. He sent his gray suit to the Portier's wife to be pressed, and getting out his surgical case, as he had once before in the Pension Schwarz, he sewed a button on his overcoat, using the curved needle and the catgut and working with surgeon's precision. Then, still working very carefully, he trimmed the edges of graying hair over his ears, trimmed his cuffs, trimmed his best silk tie, now almost hopeless. He blacked his shoes, and the suit not coming, he donned his dressing-gown and went into Jimmy's room to feed the mice. Peter stood a moment beside the smooth white bed with his face working. The wooden sentry still stood on the bedside table.

It was in Peter's mind to take the mice to Harmony, confess his defeat and approaching retreat, and ask her to care for them. Then he decided against this palpable appeal for sympathy, elected to go empty-handed and discover merely how comfortable she was or was not. When the time came he would slip out of her life, sending her a letter and leaving McLean on guard.

Harmony was at home. Peter climbed the dark staircase—where Harmony had met the little Georgiev, and where he had gone down to his death—climbed steadily, but without his usual elasticity. The place appalled him—its gloom, its dinginess, its somber quiet. In the daylight, with the pigeons on the sills and the morning sunlight printing the cross of the church steeple on the whitewashed wall, it was peaceful, cloisterlike, with landings that were crypts. But at night it was almost terrifying, that staircase.

Harmony was playing. Peter heard her when he reached the upper landing, playing a sad little strain that gripped his heart. He waited outside before ringing, heard her begin something determinedly cheerful, falter, cease altogether. Peter rang.

Harmony herself admitted him. Perhaps—oh, certainly she had expected him! It would be Peter, of course, to come and see how she was getting on, how she was housed. She held out her hand and Peter took it. Still no words, only a half smile from her and no smile at all from Peter, but his heart in his eyes.

"I hoped you would come, Peter. We may have the reception room."

"You knew I would come," said Peter. "The reception room?"
"Where customers wait." She still carried her violin, and slipped back to her room to put it away. Peter had a glimpse of its poverty and its meagerness. He drew a long breath.

Monia was at the opera, and the Hungarian sat in the kitchen knitting a stocking. The reception room was warm from the day's fire, and in order. All the pins and scraps of the day had been swept up, and the portieres that made fitting-rooms of the corners were pushed back. Peter saw only a big room with empty corners, and that at a glance. His eyes were Harmony's.

He sat down awkwardly on a stiff chair, Harmony on a velvet settee. They were suddenly two strangers meeting for the first time. In the squalor of the Pension Schwarz, in the comfortable intimacies of the Street of Seven Stars, they had been easy, unconstrained. Now suddenly Peter was tongue-tied. Only one thing in him clamored for utterance, and that he sternly silenced.

"I--I could not stay there, Peter. You understood?"
"No. Of course, I understood."
"You were not angry?"
"Why should I be angry? You came, like an angel of light, when I needed you. Only, of course,--"
"Yes?"
"I'll not say that, I think."
"Please say it, Peter!"
Peter writhed; looked everywhere but at her.
"Please, Peter. You said I always came when you needed me, only--"
"Only--I always need you!" Peter, Peter!
"Not always, I think. Of course, when one is in trouble one needs a woman; but--"
"Well, of course--but--I'm generally in trouble, Harry dear."

Frightfully ashamed of himself by that time was Peter, ashamed of his weakness. He sought to give a casual air to the speech by stooping for a neglected pin on the carpet. By the time he had stuck it in his lapel he had saved his mental forces from the rout of Harmony's eyes.

His next speech he made to the center table, and missed a most delectable look in the aforesaid eyes.
"I didn't come to be silly," he said to the table. "I hate people who whine, and I've got into a damnable habit of being sorry for myself! It's to laugh, isn't it, a great, hulking carcass like me, to be--"
"Peter," said Harmony softly, "aren't you going to look at me?"
"I'm afraid."
"That's cowardice. And I've fixed my hair a new way. Do you like it?"
"Splendid," said Peter to the center table.
"You didn't look!"

The rout of Harmony's eyes was supplemented by the rout of Harmony's hair. Peter, goaded, got up and walked about. Harmony was half exasperated; she would have boxed Peter's ears with a tender hand had she dared.

His hands thrust savagely in his pockets, Peter turned and faced her at last.
"First of all," he said, "I am going back to America, Harmony. I've got all I can get here, all I came for--" He stopped, seeing her face. "Well, of course, that's not true, I haven't. But I'm going back, anyhow. You needn't look so stricken: I haven't lost my chance. I'll come back sometime again and finish, when I've earned enough to do it."
"You will never come back, Peter. You have spent all your money on others, and now you are going back just where you were, and--you are leaving me here alone!"
"You are alone, anyhow," said Peter, "making your own way and getting along. And McLean will be here."
"Are you turning me over to him?"
No reply. Peter was pacing the floor.
"Peter!"
"Yes, dear?"
"Do you remember the night in Anna's room at the Schwartz when you proposed to me?"
No reply. Peter found another pin.
"And that night in the old lodge when you proposed to me again?"
Peter turned and looked at her, at her slender, swaying young figure, her luminous eyes, her parted, childish lips.
"Peter, I want you to--to ask me again."
"No!"
"Why?"

"Now, listen to me, Harmony. You're sorry for me, that's all; I don't want to be pitied. You stay here and work. You'll do big things. I had a talk with the master while I was searching for you, and he says you can do anything. But he looked at me--and a sight I was with worry and fright--and he warned me off, Harmony. He says you must
"Old pig!" said Harmony. "I will marry if I please."

Nevertheless Peter's refusal and the master's speech had told somewhat. She was colder, less vibrant. Peter came to her, stood close, looking down at her.

"I've said a lot I didn't mean to," he said. "There's only one thing I haven't said, I oughtn't to say it, dear. I'm not going to marry you--I won't have such a thing on my conscience. But it doesn't hurt a woman to know that a man loves her. I love you, dear; you're my heaven and my earth--even my God, I'm afraid. But I will not marry you."

"Not even if I ask you to?"

"Not even then, dear. To share my struggle--"

"I see," slowly. "It is to be a struggle?"

"A hard fight, Harmony. I'm a pauper practically."

"And what am I?"

"Two poverties don't make a wealth, even of happiness," said Peter steadily. "In the time to come, when you would think of what you might have been, it would be a thousand deaths to me, dear."

"People have married, women have married and carried on their work, too, Peter."

"Not your sort of women or your sort of work. And not my sort of man, Harry. I'm jealous--jealous of every one about you. It would have to be the music or me."

"And you make the choice!" said Harmony proudly. "Very well, Peter, I shall do as you say. But I think it is a very curious sort of love."

"I wonder," Peter cried, "if you realize what love it is that loves you enough to give you up."

"You have not asked me if I care, Peter."

Peter looked at her. She was very near to tears, very sad, very beautiful.

"I'm afraid to ask," said Peter, and picking up his hat he made for the door. There he turned, looked back, was lost.

"My sweetest heart!" he cried, and took her in his hungry arms. But even then, with her arms about his neck at last, with her slender body held to him, her head on his shoulder, his lips to her soft throat, Peter put her from him as a starving man might put away food.

He held her off and looked at her.

"I'm a fool and a weakling," he said gravely. "I love you so much that I would sacrifice you. You are very lovely, my girl, my girl! As long as I live I shall carry your image in my heart."

Ah, what the little Georgiev had said on his way to the death that waited down the staircase. Peter, not daring to look at her again, put away her detaining hand, squared his shoulders, went to the door.

"Good-bye, Harmony," he said steadily. "Always in my heart!"

Very near the end now: the little Marie on the way to America, with the recording angel opening a new page in life's ledger for her and a red-ink line erasing the other; with Jimmy and his daddy wandering through the heaven of friendly adventure and green fields, hand in hand; with the carrier resting after its labors in the pigeon house by the rose-fields of Sofia; with the sentry casting martial shadows through the barred windows of the hospital; and the little Georgiev, about to die, dividing his heart, as a heritage, between his country and a young girl.

Very near the end, with the morning light of the next day shining into the salon of Maria Theresa and on to Peter's open trunk and shabby wardrobe spread over chairs. An end of trunks and departure, as was the beginning.

Early morning at the Gottesacker, or God's acre, whence little Jimmy had started on his comfortable journey. Early morning on the frost-covered grass, the frozen roads, the snap and sparkle of the Donau. Harmony had taken her problem there, in the early hour before Monia would summon her to labor--took her problem and found her answer.

The great cemetery was still and deserted. Harmony, none too warmly clad, walked briskly, a bunch of flowers in oiled paper against the cold. Already the air carried a hint of spring; there was a feeling of resurrection and promise. The dead earth felt alive under-foot.

Harmony knelt by the grave and said the little prayer the child had repeated at night and morning. And, because he had loved it, with some vague feeling of giving him comfort, she recited the little verse:

"Ah well! For us all some sweet hope lies Deeply buried from human eyes: And in the hereafter, angels may Roll the stone from its grave away."

When she looked up Le Grande was standing beside her.

There was no scene, hardly any tears. She had brought out a great bunch of roses that bore only too clearly the stamp of whence they came. One of the pickaninnies had carried the box and stood impassively by, gazing at Harmony.

Le Grande placed her flowers on the grave. They almost covered it, quite eclipsed Harmony's.
"I come here every morning," she said simply.
She had a cab waiting, and offered to drive Harmony back to the city. Her quiet almost irritated Harmony, until she had looked once into the woman's eyes. After that she knew. It was on the drive back, with the little darky on the box beside the driver, that Harmony got her answer.
Le Grande put a hand over Harmony's.
"I tried to tell you before how good I know you were to him."
"We loved him."
"And I resented it. But Dr. Byrne was right--I was not a fit person to--to have him."
"It was not that--not only that--"
"Did he ever ask for me? But of course not."
"No, he had no remembrance."
Silence for a moment. The loose windows of the cab clattered.
"I loved him very much when he came," said Le Grande, "although I did not want him. I had been told I could have a career on the stage. Ah, my dear, I chose the career--and look at me! What have I? A grave in the cemetery back there, and on it roses sent me by a man I loathe! If I could live it over again!"

The answer was very close now:--
"Would you stay at home?"
"Who knows, I being I? And my husband did not love me. It was the boy always. There is only one thing worth while--the love of a good man. I have lived, lived hard. And I know."
"But supposing that one has real ability--I mean some achievement already, and a promise--" Le Grande turned and looked at Harmony shrewdly.
"I see. You are a musician, I believe?"
"Yes."
"And--it is Dr. Byrne?"
"Yes."
Le Grande bent forward earnestly.
"My child," she said, "if one man in all the world looked at me as your doctor looks at you, I--I would be a better woman."
"And my music?"
"Play for your children, as you played for my little boy."

Peter was packing: wrapping medical books in old coats, putting clean collars next to boots, folding pajamas and such-like negligible garments with great care and putting in his dresscoat in a roll. His pipes took time, and the wooden sentry he packed with great care and a bit of healthy emotion. Once or twice he came across trifles of Harmony's, and he put them carefully aside--the sweater coat, a folded handkerchief, a bow she had worn at her throat. The bow brought back the night before and that reckless kiss on her white throat. Well for Peter to get away if he is to keep his resolution, when the sight of a ribbon bow can bring that look of suffering into his eyes.

The Portier below was polishing floors, right foot, left foot, any foot at all. And as he polished he sang in a throaty tenor.
"Kennst du das Land wo die Citronen bluhen," he sang at the top of his voice, and coughed, a bit of floor wax having got into the air. The antlers of the deer from the wild-game shop hung now in his bedroom. When the wildgame seller came over for coffee there would be a discussion probably. But were not the antlers of all deer similar?

The Portier's wife came to the doorway with a cooking fork in her hand.
"A cab," she announced, "with a devil's imp on the box. Perhaps it is that American dancer. Run and pretty thyself!"

It was too late for more than an upward twist of a mustache. Harmony was at the door, but not the sad-eyed Harmony of a week before or the undecided and troubled girl of before that. A radiant Harmony, this, who stood in the doorway, who wished them good-morning, and ran up the old staircase with glowing eyes and a heart that leaped and throbbed. A woman now, this Harmony, one who had looked on life and learned; one who had chosen her fate and was running to meet it; one who feared only death, not life or anything that life could offer.

The door was not locked. Perhaps Peter was not up--not dressed. What did that matter? What did anything matter but Peter himself?

Peter, sorting out lectures on McBurney's Point, had come across a bit of paper that did not belong there, and was sitting by his open trunk, staring blindly at it:--
"You are very kind to me. Yes, indeed."
"H. W."
Quite the end now, with Harmony running across the room and dropping down on her knees among a riot of garments--down on her knees, with one arm round Peter's neck, drawing his tired head lower until she could kiss him.

"Oh, Peter, Peter, dear!" she cried. "I'll love you all my life if only you'll love me, and never, never let me go!"

Peter was dazed at first. He put his arms about her rather unsteadily, because he had given her up and had expected to go through the rest of life empty of arm and heart. And when one has one's arms set, as one may say, for loneliness and relinquishment it is rather difficult--Ah, but Peter got the way of it swiftly.

"Always," he said incoherently; "forever the two of us. Whatever comes, Harmony?"

"Whatever comes."

"And you'll not be sorry?"

"Not if you love me."

Peter kissed her on the eyes very solemnly.

"God helping me, I'll be good to you always. And I'll always love you."

He tried to hold her away from him for a moment after that, to tell her what she was doing, what she was giving up. She would not be reasoned with.

"I love you," was her answer to every line. And it was no divided allegiance she promised him. "Career? I shall have a career. Yours!"

"And your music?"

She colored, held him closer.

"Some day," she whispered, "I shall tell you about that."

Late winter morning in Vienna, with the school-children hurrying home, the Alserstrasse alive with humanity--soldiers and chimney-sweeps, housewives and beggars. Before the hospital the crowd lines up along the curb; the head waiter from the coffee-house across comes to the doorway and looks out. The sentry in front of the hospital ceases pacing and stands at attention.

In the street a small procession comes at the double quick--a handful of troopers, a black van with tiny, high-barred windows, more troopers.

Inside the van a Bulgarian spy going out to death--a swarthy little man with black eyes and short, thick hands, going out like a gentleman and a soldier to meet the God of patriots and lovers.

The sentry, who was only a soldier from Salzburg with one lung, was also a gentleman and a patriot. He uncovered his head.
CHAPTER I

PAUL HARLEY OF CHANCERY LANE

Toward the hour of six on a hot summer's evening Mr. Paul Harley was seated in his private office in Chancery Lane reading through a number of letters which Innes, his secretary, had placed before him for signature. Only one more remained to be passed, but it was a long, confidential report upon a certain matter, which Harley had prepared for His Majesty's Principal Secretary of State for the Home Department. He glanced with a sigh of weariness at the little clock upon his table before commencing to read.

"Shall detain you only a few minutes, now, Knox," he said.

I nodded, smiling. I was quite content to sit and watch my friend at work.

Paul Harley occupied a unique place in the maelstrom of vice and ambition which is sometimes called London life. Whilst at present he held no official post, some of the most momentous problems of British policy during the past five years, problems imperilling inter-state relationships and not infrequently threatening a renewal of the world war, had owed their solution to the peculiar genius of this man.

No clue to his profession appeared upon the plain brass plate attached to his door, and little did those who regarded Paul Harley merely as a successful private detective suspect that he was in the confidence of some who guided the destinies of the Empire. Paul Harley's work in Constantinople during the feverish months preceding hostilities with Turkey, although unknown to the general public, had been of a most extraordinary nature. His recommendations were never adopted, unfortunately. Otherwise, the tragedy of the Dardanelles might have been averted.

His surroundings as he sat there, gaze bent upon the typewritten pages, were those of any other professional man. So it would have seemed to the casual observer. But perhaps there was a quality in the atmosphere of the office which would have told a more sensitive visitor that it was the apartment of no ordinary man of business. Whilst there were filing cabinets and bookshelves laden with works of reference, many of them legal, a large and handsome Burmese cabinet struck an unexpected note.

On closer inspection, other splashes of significant colour must have been detected in the scheme, notably a very fine engraving of Edgar Allan Poe, from the daguerreotype of 1848; and upon the man himself lay the indelible mark of the tropics. His clean-cut features had that hint of underlying bronze which tells of years spent beneath a merciless sun, and the touch of gray at his temples only added to the eager, almost fierce vitality of the dark face.

Paul Harley was notable because of that intellectual strength which does not strike one immediately, since it is purely temperamental, but which, nevertheless, invests its possessor with an aura of distinction.

Writing his name at the bottom of the report, Paul Harley enclosed the pages in a long envelope and dropped the envelope into a basket which contained a number of other letters. His work for the day was ended, and glancing at me with a triumphant smile, he stood up. His office was a part of a residential suite, but although, like some old-time burgher of the city, he lived on the premises, the shutting of a door which led to his private rooms marked the close of the business day. Pressing a bell which connected with the public office occupied by his secretary, Paul Harley stood up as Innes entered.

"There's nothing further, is there, Innes?" he asked.

"Nothing, Mr. Harley, if you have passed the Home Office report?"

Paul Harley laughed shortly.

"There it is," he replied, pointing to the basket; "a tedious and thankless job, Innes. It is the fifth draft you have prepared and it will have to do."

He took up a letter which lay unsealed upon the table. "This is the Rokeby affair," he said. "I have decided to hold it over, after all, until my return."

"Ah!" said Innes, quietly glancing at each envelope as he took it from the basket. "I see you have turned down the little job offered by the Marquis."

"I have," replied Harley, smiling grimly, "and a fee of five hundred guineas with it. I have also intimated to that distressed nobleman that this is a business office and that a laundry is the proper place to take his dirty linen. No, there's nothing further to-night, Innes. You can get along now. Has Miss Smith gone?"
But as if in answer to his enquiry the typist, who with Innes made up the entire staff of the office, came in at that moment, a card in her hand. Harley glanced across in my direction and then at the card, with a wry expression.

"Colonel Juan Menendez," he read aloud, "Cavendish Club," and glanced reflectively at Innes. "Do we know the Colonel?"

"I think not," answered Innes; "the name is unfamiliar to me."

"I wonder," murmured Harley. He glanced across at me. "It's an awful nuisance, Knox, but just as I thought the decks were clear. Is it something really interesting, or does he want a woman watched? However, his name sounds piquant, so perhaps I had better see him. Ask him to come in, Miss Smith."

Innes and Miss Smith retiring, there presently entered a man of most striking and unusual presence. In the first place, Colonel Menendez must have stood fully six feet in his boots, and he carried himself like a grandee of the golden days of Spain. His complexion was extraordinarily dusky, whilst his hair, which was close cropped, was iron gray. His heavy eyebrows and curling moustache with its little points were equally black, so that his large teeth gleamed very fiercely when he smiled. His eyes were large, dark, and brilliant, and although he wore an admirably cut tweed suit, for some reason I pictured him as habitually wearing riding kit. Indeed I almost seemed to hear the jingle of his spurs.

He carried an ebony cane for which I mentally substituted a crop, and his black derby hat I thought hardly as suitable as a sombrero. His age might have been anything between fifty and fifty-five.

Standing in the doorway he bowed, and if his smile was Mephistophelean, there was much about Colonel Juan Menendez which commanded respect.

"Mr. Harley," he began, and his high, thin voice afforded yet another surprise, "I feel somewhat ill at ease to--how do you say it?--appropriate your time, as I am by no means sure that what I have to say justifies my doing so."

He spoke most fluent, indeed florid, English. But his sentences at times were oddly constructed; yet, save for a faint accent, and his frequent interpolation of such expressions as "how do you say?"--a sort of nervous mannerism--one might have supposed him to be a Britisher who had lived much abroad. I formed the opinion that he had read extensively, and this, as I learned later, was indeed the case.

"Sit down, Colonel Menendez," said Harley with quiet geniality. "Officially, my working day is ended, I admit, but if you have no objection to the presence of my friend, Mr. Knox, I shall be most happy to chat with you."

He smiled in a way all his own.

"If your business is of a painfully professional nature," he added, "I must beg you to excuse me for fourteen days, as I am taking a badly needed holiday with my friend."

"Ah, is it so?" replied the Colonel, placing his hat and cane upon the table, and sitting down rather wearily in a big leathern armchair which Harley had pushed forward. "If I intrude I am sorry, but indeed my business is urgent, and I come to you on the recommendation of my friend, Senor Don Merry del Val, the Spanish Ambassador."

He raised his eyes to Harley's face with an expression of peculiar appeal. I rose to depart, but:

"Sit down, Knox," said Harley, and turned again to the visitor. "Please proceed," he requested. "Mr. Knox has been with me in some of the most delicate cases which I have ever handled, and you may rely upon his discretion as you may rely upon mine."

Colonel Menendez extracted a slip of rice paper from a little packet which he carried, next, dipping two long, yellow fingers into his coat pocket, he brought out a portion of tobacco, laid it in the paper, and almost in the twinkling of an eye had made, rolled, and lighted a very creditable cigarette. His dexterity was astonishing, and seeing my surprise he raised his heavy eyebrows, and:

"Practice makes perfect, is it not said?" he remarked.

He shrugged his shoulders and dropped the extinguished match in an ash tray, whilst I studied him with increasing interest. Some dread, real or imaginary, was oppressing the man's mind, I mused. I felt my presence to be unwelcome, but:

"Very well," he began, suddenly. "I expect, Mr. Harley, that you will be disposed to regard what I have to tell you rather as a symptom of what you call nerves than as evidence of any agency directed against me."

Paul Harley stared curiously at the speaker. "Do I understand you to suspect that someone is desirous of harming you?" he enquired.

Colonel Menendez slowly nodded his head.

"Such is my meaning," he replied.

"You refer to bodily harm?"

"But yes, emphatically."

"Hm," said Harley; and taking out a tin of tobacco from a cabinet beside him he began in leisurely manner to load a briar. "No doubt you have good reasons for this suspicion?"
"If I had not good reasons, Mr. Harley, nothing could have induced me to trouble you. Yet, even now that I have compelled myself to come here, I find it difficult, almost impossible, to explain those reasons to you."

An expression of embarrassment appeared upon the brown face, and now Colonel Menendez paused and was plainly at a loss for words with which to continue.

Harley replaced the tin in the cupboard and struck a match. Lighting his pipe he nodded good humouredly as if to say, "I quite understand." As a matter of fact, he probably thought, as I did, that this was a familiar case of a man of possibly blameless life who had become subject to that delusion which leads people to believe themselves threatened by mysterious and unnameable danger.

Our visitor inhaled deeply.

"You, of course, are waiting for the facts," he presently resumed, speaking with a slowness which told of a mind labouring for the right mode of expression. "These are so scanty, I fear, of so, shall I say, phantom a kind, that even when they are in your possession you will consider me to be merely the victim of a delusion. In the first place, then, I have reason to believe that someone followed me from my home to your office."

"Indeed," said Paul Harley, sympathetically, for this I perceived was exactly what he had anticipated, and merely tended to confirm his suspicion. "Some member of your household?"

"Certainly not."

"Did you actually see this follower?"

"My dear sir," cried Colonel Menendez, excitement emphasizing his accent, "if I had seen him, so much would have been made clear, so much! I have never seen him, but I have heard him and felt him--felt his presence, I mean."

"In what way?" asked Harley, leaning back in his chair and studying the fierce face.

"On several occasions on turning out the light in my bedroom and looking across the lawn from my window I have observed the shadow of someone--how do you say?--lurking in the garden."

"The shadow?"

"Precisely. The person himself was concealed beneath a tree. When he moved his shadow was visible on the ground."

"You were not deceived by a waving branch?"

"Certainly not. I speak of a still, moonlight night."

"Possibly, then, it was the shadow of a tramp," suggested Harley. "I gather that you refer to a house in the country?"

"It was not," declared Colonel Menendez, emphatically; "it was not. I wish to God I could believe it had been. Then there was, a month ago, an attempt to enter my house."

Paul Harley exhibited evidence of a quickening curiosity. He had perceived, as I had perceived, that the manner of the speaker differed from that of the ordinary victim of delusion, with whom he had become professionally familiar.

"You had actual evidence of this?" he suggested.

"It was due to insomnia, sleeplessness, brought about, yes, I will admit it, by apprehension, that I heard the footsteps of this intruder."

"But you did not see him?"

"Only his shadow"

"What?"

"You can obtain the evidence of all my household that someone had actually entered," declared Colonel Menendez, eagerly. "Of this, at least, I can give you the certain facts. Whoever it was had obtained access through a kitchen window, had forced two locks, and was coming stealthily along the hallway when the sound of his footsteps attracted my attention."

"What did you do?"

"I came out on to the landing and looked down the stairs. But even the slight sound which I made had been sufficient to alarm the midnight visitor, for I had never a glimpse of him. Only, as he went swiftly back in the direction from which he had come, the moonlight shining in through a window in the hall cast his shadow on the carpet."

"Strange," murmured Harley. "Very strange, indeed. The shadow told you nothing?"

"Nothing at all."

Colonel Menendez hesitated momentarily, and glanced swiftly across at Harley.

"It was just a vague--do you say blur?--and then it was gone. But--"

"Yes," said Harley. "But?"

"Ah," Colonel Menendez blew a cloud of smoke into the air, "I come now to the matter which I find so hard to explain."
He inhaled again deeply and was silent for a while.
"Nothing was stolen?" asked Harley.
"Nothing whatever."
"And no clue was left behind?"
"No clue except the filed fastening of a window and two open doors which had been locked as usual when the household retired."
"Hm," mused Harley again; "this incident, of course, may have been an isolated one and in no way connected with the surveillance of which you complain. I mean that this person who undoubtedly entered your house might prove to be an ordinary burglar."
"On a table in the hallway of Cray's Folly," replied Colonel Menendez, impressively--"so my house is named--stands a case containing presentation gold plate. The moonlight of which I have spoken was shining fully upon this case, and does the burglar live who will pass such a prize and leave it untouched?"
"I quite agree," said Harley, quietly, "that this is a very big point."
"You are beginning at last," suggested the Colonel, "to believe that my suspicions are not quite groundless?"
"There is a distinct possibility that they are more than suspicions," agreed Harley; "but may I suggest that there is something else? Have you an enemy?"
"Who that has ever held public office is without enemies?"
"Ah, quite so. Then I suggest again that there is something else."
He gazed keenly at his visitor, and the latter, whilst meeting the look unflinchingly with his large dark eyes, was unable to conceal the fact that he had received a home thrust.
"There are two points, Mr. Harley," he finally confessed, "almost certainly associated one with the other, if you understand, but both these so--shall I say remote?--from my life, that I hesitate to mention them. It seems fantastic to suppose that they contain a clue."
"I beg of you," said Harley, "to keep nothing back, however remote it may appear to be. It is sometimes the seemingly remote things which prove upon investigation to be the most intimate."
"Very well," resumed Colonel Menendez, beginning to roll a second cigarette whilst continuing to smoke the first, "I know that you are right, of course, but it is nevertheless very difficult for me to explain. I mentioned the attempted burglary, if so I may term it, in order to clear your mind of the idea that my fears were a myth. The next point which I have concerns a man, a neighbour of mine in Surrey. Before I proceed I should like to make it clear that I do not believe for a moment that he is responsible for this unpleasant business."

Harley stared at him curiously. "Nevertheless," he said, "there must be some data in your possession which suggest to your mind that he has some connection with it."
"There are, Mr. Harley, but they belong to things so mystic and far away from ordinary crime that I fear you will think me," he shrugged his great shoulders, "a man haunted by strange superstitions. Do you say 'haunted'? Good. You understand. I should tell you, then, that although of pure Spanish blood, I was born in Cuba. The greater part of my life has been spent in the West Indies, where prior to '98 I held an appointment under the Spanish Government. I have property, not only in Cuba, but in some of the smaller islands which formerly were Spanish, and I shall not conceal from you that during the latter years of my administration I incurred the enmity of a section of the population. Do I make myself clear?"

Paul Harley nodded and exchanged a swift glance with me. I formed a rapid mental picture of native life under the governorship of Colonel Juan Menendez and I began to consider his story from a new viewpoint. Seemingly rendered restless by his reflections, he stood up and began to pace the floor, a tall but curiously graceful figure. I noticed the bulldog tenacity of his chin, the intense pride in his bearing, and I wondered what kind of menace had induced him to seek the aid of Paul Harley; for whatever his failings might be, and I could guess at the nature of several of them, that this thin-lipped Spanish soldier knew the meaning of fear I was not prepared to believe.

"Before you proceed further, Colonel Menendez," said Harley, "might I ask when you left Cuba?"
"Some three years ago," was his reply. "Because--" he hesitated curiously--"of health motives, I leased a property in England, believing that here I should find peace."
"In other words, you were afraid of something or someone in Cuba?"
Colonel Menendez turned in a flash, glaring down at the speaker.
"I never feared any man in my life, Mr. Harley," he said, coldly.
"Then why are you here?"
The Colonel placed the stump of his first cigarette in an ash tray and lighted that which he had newly made.
"It is true," he admitted. "Forgive me. Yet what I said was that I never feared any man."
He stood squarely in front of the Burmese cabinet, resting one hand upon his hip. Then he added a remark which surprised me.
"Do you know anything of Voodoo?" he asked.

Paul Harley took his pipe from between his teeth and stared at the speaker silently for a moment. "Voodoo?" he echoed. "You mean negro magic?"

"Exactly."

"My studies have certainly not embraced it," replied Harley, quietly, "nor has it hitherto come within my experience. But since I have lived much in the East, I am prepared to learn that Voodoo may not be a negligible quantity. There are forces at work in India which we in England improperly understand. The same may be true of Cuba."

"The same, is, true of Cuba."

Colonel Menendez glared almost fiercely across the room at Paul Harley.

"And do I understand," asked the latter, "that the danger which you believe to threaten you is associated with Cuba?"

"That, Mr. Harley, is for you to decide when all the facts shall be in your possession. Do you wish that I proceed?"

"By all means. I must confess that I am intensely interested."

"Very well, Mr. Harley. I have something to show you."

From an inside breast pocket Colonel Menendez drew out a gold-mounted case, and from the case took some flat, irregularly shaped object wrapped in a piece of tissue paper. Unfolding the paper, he strode across and laid the object which it had contained upon the blotting pad in front of my friend.

Impelled by curiosity I stood up and advanced to inspect it. It was of a dirty brown colour, some five or six inches long, and appeared to consist of a kind of membrane. Harley, his elbow on the table, was staring down at it questioningly.

"What is it?" I said; "some kind of leaf?"

"No," replied Harley, looking up into the dark face of the Spanish colonel; "I think I know what it is."

"I, also, know what it is."

Colonel Menendez, grimly. "But tell me what to you it seems like, Mr. Harley?"

Paul Harley's expression was compounded of incredulity, wonder, and something else, as, continuing to stare at the speaker, he replied:

"It is the wing of a bat."

CHAPTER II

THE VOODOO SWAMP

Often enough my memory has recaptured that moment in Paul Harley's office, when Harley, myself, and the tall Spaniard stood looking down at the bat wing lying upon the blotting pad.

My brilliant friend at times displayed a sort of prescience, of which I may have occasion to speak later, but I, together with the rest of purblind humanity, am commonly immune from the prophetic instinct. Therefore I chronicle the fact for what it may be worth, that as I gazed with a sort of disgust at the exhibit lying upon the table I became possessed of a conviction, which had no logical basis, that a door had been opened through which I should step into a new avenue of being; I felt myself to stand upon the threshold of things strange and terrible, but withal alluring. Perhaps it is true that in the great crises of life the inner eye becomes momentarily opened.

With intense curiosity I awaited the Colonel's next words, but, a cigarette held nervously between his fingers, he stood staring at Harley, and it was the latter who broke that peculiar silence which had fallen upon us.

"The wing of a bat," he murmured, then touched it gingerly. "Of what kind of bat, Colonel Menendez? Surely not a British species?"

"But emphatically not a British species," replied the Spaniard. "Yet even so the matter would be strange."

"I am all anxiety to learn the remainder of your story, Colonel Menendez."

"Good. Your interest comforts me very greatly, Mr. Harley. But when first I came, you led me to suppose that you were departing from London?"

"Such, at the time, was my intention, sir."

"Accompanied by my friend, Mr. Knox, I had proposed to indulge in a fortnight's fishing upon the Norfolk Broads."

"Fishing?"

"Yes."

"A peaceful occupation, Mr. Harley, and a great rest-cure for one who like yourself moves much amid the fiercer passions of life. You were about to make holiday?"

Paul Harley nodded.

"It is cruel of me to intrude upon such plans," continued Colonel Menendez, dexterously rolling his cigarette around between his fingers. "Yet because of my urgent need I dare to do so. Would yourself and your friend honour
me with your company at Cray's Folly for a few days? I can promise you good entertainment, although I regret that there is no fishing; but it may chance that there will be other and more exciting sport."

Harley glanced at me significantly.

"Do I understand you to mean, Colonel Menendez," he asked, "that you have reason to believe that this conspiracy directed against you is about to come to a head?"

Colonel Menendez nodded, at the same time bringing his hand down sharply upon the table.

"Mr. Harley," he replied, his high, thin voice sunken almost to a whisper, "Wednesday night is the night of the full moon."

"The full moon?"

"It is at the full moon that the danger comes."

Paul Harley stood up, and watched by the Spanish colonel paced slowly across the office. At the outer door he paused and turned.

"Colonel Menendez," he said, "that you would willingly waste the time of a busy man I do not for a moment believe, therefore I shall ask you as briefly as possible to state your case in detail. When I have heard it, if it appears to me that any good purpose can be served by my friend and myself coming to Cray's Folly I feel sure that he will be happy to accept your proffered hospitality."

"If I am likely to be of the slightest use I shall be delighted," said I, which indeed was perfectly true.

Whilst I had willingly agreed to accompany Harley to Norfolk I had none of his passion for the piscatorial art, and the promise of novel excitement held out by Colonel Menendez appealed to me more keenly than the lazy days upon the roads which Harley loved.

"Gentlemen"--the Colonel bowed profoundly--"I am honoured and delighted. When you shall have heard my story I know what your decision will be."

He resumed his seat, and began, it seemed almost automatically, to roll a fresh cigarette.

"I am all attention," declared Harley, and his glance strayed again in a wondering fashion to the bat wing lying on his table.

"I will speak briefly," resumed our visitor, "and any details which may seem to you to be important can be discussed later when you are my guests. You must know then that I first became acquainted with the significance belonging to the term 'Bat Wing' and to the object itself some twenty years ago."

"But surely," interrupted Harley, incredulously, "you are not going to tell me that the menace of which you complain is of twenty years' standing?"

"At your express request, Mr. Harley," returned the Colonel a trifle brusquely, "I am dealing with possibilities which are remote, because in your own words it is sometimes the remote which proves to be the intimate. It was then rather more than twenty years ago, at a time when great political changes were taking place in the West Indies, that my business interests, which are mainly concerned with sugar, carried me to one of the smaller islands which had formerly been under--my jurisdiction, do you say? Here I had a house and estate, and here in the past I had experienced much trouble with the natives.

"I do not disguise from you that I was unpopular, and on my return I met with unmistakable signs of hostility. My native workmen were insubordinate. In fact, it was the reports from my overseers which had led me to visit the island. I made a tour of the place, believing it to be necessary to my interests that I should get once more in touch with negro feeling, since I had returned to my home in Cuba after the upheavals in '98. Very well."

"The manager of my estate, a capable man, was of opinion that there existed a secret organization amongst the native labourers operating-- you understand?--against my interests. He produced certain evidences of this. They were not convincing; and all my enquiries and examinations of certain inhabitants led to no definite results. Yet I grew more and more to feel that enemies surrounded me."

He paused to light his third cigarette, and whilst he did so I conjured up a mental picture of his "examinations of certain inhabitants." I recalled hazily those stories of Spanish mismanagement and cruelty which had directly led to United States interferences in the islands. But whilst I could well believe that this man's life had not been safe in those bad old days in the West Indies, I found it difficult to suppose that a native plot against his safety could have survived for more than twenty years and have come to a climax in England. However, I realized that there was more to follow, and presently, having lighted his cigarette, the Colonel resumed:

"In the neighbourhood of the hacienda which had once been my official residence there was a belt of low-lying pest country--you understand pest country?--which was a hot-bed of poisonous diseases. It followed the winding course of a nearly stagnant creek. From the earliest times the Black Belt--it was so called--had been avoided by European inhabitants, and indeed by the coloured population as well. Apart from the malaria of the swampy ground it was infested with reptiles and with poisonous insects of a greater variety and of a more venomous character than I have ever known in any part of the world.
"I must explain that what I regarded as a weak point in my manager's theory was this: Whilst he held that the native labourers to a man were linked together under some head, or guiding influence, he had never succeeded in surprising anything in the nature of a negro meeting. Indeed, he had prohibited all gatherings of this kind. His answer to my criticism was a curious one. He declared that the members of this mysterious society met and received their instructions at some place within the poison area to which I have referred, believing themselves there to be safe from European interference.

"For a long time I disputed this with poor Valera--for such was my manager's name; when one night as I was dismounting from my horse before the veranda, having returned from a long ride around the estate, a shot was fired from the border of the Black Belt which at one point crept up dangerously close to the hacienda.

"The shot was a good one. I had caught my spur in the stirrup in dismounting, and stumbled. Otherwise I must have been a dead man. The bullet pierced the crown of my hat, only missing my skull by an inch or less. The alarm was given. But no search-party could be mustered, do you say?--which was prepared to explore the poison swamp--or so declared my native servants. Valera, however, seized upon this incident to illustrate his theory that there were those in the island who did not hesitate to enter the Black Belt popularly supposed to cast up noxious vapours at dusk of a sort fatal to any traveller.

"That night over our wine we discussed the situation, and he pointed out to me that now was the hour to test his theory. Orders had evidently been given for my assassination and the attempt had failed.

"'There will be a meeting,' said Valera, 'to discuss the next move. And it will take place to-morrow night!'

"'I challenged him with a glance and I replied:

"'To-morrow night is a full moon, and if you are agreeable we will make a secret expedition into the swamp, and endeavour to find the clearing which you say is there, and which you believe to be the rendezvous of the conspirators.'

"Even in the light of the lamp I saw Valera turn pale, but he was a Spaniard and a man of courage.

"'I agree, senor,' he replied. 'If my information is correct we shall find the way.'

"'I must explain that the information to which he referred had been supplied by a native girl who loved him. That this clearing was a meeting-place she had denied. But she had admitted that it was possible to obtain access to it, and had even described the path.' He paused. 'She died of a lingering sickness.'

Colonel Menendez spoke these last words with great deliberation and treated each of us to a long and significant stare.

"Presently," he added, "I will tell you what was nailed to the wall of her hut on the night that she fell ill. But to continue my narrative. On the following evening, suitably equipped, Valera and myself set out, leaving by a side door and striking into the woods at a point east of the hacienda, where, according to his information, a footpath existed, which would lead us to the clearing we desired to visit. Of that journey, gentlemen, I have most terrible memories.

"Imagine a dense and poisonous jungle, carpeted by rotten vegetation in which one's feet sank deeply and from which arose a visible and stenching vapour. Imagine living things, slimy things, moving beneath the tread, sometimes coiling about our riding boots, sometimes making hissing sounds. Imagine places where the path was overgrown, and we must thrust our way through bushes where great bloated spiders weaved their webs, where clammy night things touched us as we passed, where unfamiliar and venomous insects clung to our garments.

"We proceeded onward for more than half an hour guided by the moonlight, but this, although tropically brilliant, at some places scarcely penetrated the thick vapour which arose from the jungle. In those days I was a young and vigorous man; my companion was several years my senior; and his sufferings were far greater than my own. But if the jungle was horrible, worse was yet to come.

"Presently we stumbled upon an open space almost quite bare of vegetation, a poisonous green carpet spread in the heart of the woods. Here the vapour was more dense than ever, but I welcomed the sight of open ground after the reptile-infested thicket. Alas! it was a snare, a death-trap, a sort of morass, in which we sank up to our knees. Pah! it was filthy--vile! And I became aware of great--lassitude, do you say?-- whilst Valera's panting breath told that he had almost reached the end of his resources.

"A faint breeze moved through the clearing and for a few moments we were enabled to perceive one another more distinctly. I uttered an exclamation of horror.

"My companion's garments were a mass of strange-looking patches.

"Even as I noticed them I glanced rapidly down--and found myself in similar condition. As I did so one of these patches upon the sleeve of my tunic intruded coldly upon my bare wrist. At that I cried out aloud in fear. Valera and I commenced what was literally a fight for life.

"Gentlemen, we were attacked by some kind of blood-red leeches, which came out of the slime! In detaching them one detached patches of skin, and they swarmed over our bodies like ants upon carrion.
"They penetrated beneath our garments, these swollen, lustful, unclean things; and it was whilst we staggered on through the swamp in agony of mind and body that we saw the light of many torches amid the trees ahead of us, and in their smoky glare witnessed the flight of hundreds of bats. The moonlight creeping dimly through the mist, and the torchlight—how do you say?—enflaming the vegetation, created a scene like that of Inferno, in which naked figures danced wildly, uttering animal cries.

"Above the shrieking and howling, which rose and fell in a sort of unholy chorus, I heard one long, wailing sound, repeated and repeated. It was an African word. But I knew its meaning.

"It was 'Bat Wing.'"

"My doubts were dispersed. This was a meeting-place of Devil-worshippers, or devotees of the cult of Voodoo! One man only could I see clearly so as to remember him, a big negro employed upon one of my estates. He seemed to be a sort of high priest or president of the orgies. Attached to his arms were giant imitations of bat wings which he moved grotesquely as if in flight. There were many women in the throng, which numbered fully I should think a hundred people. But the final collapse of my brave, unhappy Valera at this point brought home to me the nature of the peril in which I stood.

"He lay at my feet, moving convulsively, and sinking ever deeper in the swamp, red leeches moving slowly, slowly over his fast-disappearing body."

Colonel Menendez paused in his appalling narrative and wiped his moist forehead with a silk handkerchief. Neither Harley nor I spoke. I knew not if my friend believed the Spaniard's story. For my own part I found it difficult to do so. But that the narrator was deeply moved was a fact beyond dispute.

He suddenly commenced again:

"My next recollection is of awakening in my own bed at the hacienda. I had staggered back as far as the veranda, in raving delirium, and in the grip of a strange fever which prostrated me for many months, and which defied the knowledge of all the specialists who could be procured from Cuba and the United States. My survival was due to an iron constitution; but I have never been the same man. I was ordered to leave the West Indies directly it became possible for me to be moved. I arranged my affairs accordingly, and did not return for many years.

"Finally, however, I again took up my residence in Cuba, and for a time all went well, and might have continued to do so, but for the following incident. One night, being troubled by insomnia—sleeplessness—and the heat, I walked out on to the balcony in front of my bedroom window. As I did so, a figure which had been—"you say lurking?--somewhere under the veranda ran swiftly off; but not so swiftly that I failed to obtain a glimpse of the uplifted face.

"It was the big negro! Although many years had elapsed since I had seen him wearing the bat wings at those unholy rites, I knew him instantly.

"On a little table close behind me where I stood lay a loaded revolver. I snatched it in a flash and fired shot after shot at the retreating figure."

Colonel Menendez shrugged his shoulders and selected a fresh cigarette paper.

"Gentlemen," he continued, "from that moment until this I have gone in hourly peril of my life. Whether I hit my man or missed him, I have never known to this day. If he lives or is dead I cannot say. But—" he paused impressively—"I have told you of something that was nailed to the hut of a certain native girl? Before she died I knew that it was a death-token.

"On the morning after the episode which I have just related attached to the main door of the hacienda was found that same token."

"And it was??" said Harley, eagerly.

"It was the wing of a bat!

"I am perhaps a hasty man. It is in my blood. I tore the unclean thing from the panel and stamped it under my feet. No one of the servants who had drawn my attention to its presence would consent to touch it. Indeed, they all shrank from me as though I, too, were unclean. I endeavoured to forget it. Who was I to be influenced by the threats of natives?

"That night, just at the hour of sunset, a shot was fired at me from a neighbouring clump of trees, only missing me I think by the fraction of an inch. I realized that the peril was real, and was one against which I could not fight.

"Permit me to be brief, gentlemen. Six attempts of various kinds were made upon my life in Cuba. I crossed to the United States. In Washington, the political capital of the country, an assassin gained access to my hotel apartment and but for the fact that a friend chanced to call me up on the telephone at that late hour of the night, thereby awakening me, I should have received a knife in my heart. I saw the knife in the dim light; I saw the shadowy figure. I leapt out on the opposite side of the bed, seized a table-lamp which stood there, and hurled it at my assailant.

"There was a crash, a stifled exclamation, shuffling, the door opened, and my would-be assassin was gone. But I had learned something, and to my old fears a new one was added."
“What had you learned?” asked Harley, whose interest in the narrative was displayed by the fact that his pipe had long since gone out.

“Vaguely, vaguely, you understand, for there was little light, I had seen the face of the man. He wore some kind of black cloak doubtless to conceal his movements. His silhouette resembled that of a bat. But, gentlemen, he was neither a negro nor even a half-caste; he was of the white races, to that I could swear.”

Colonel Menendez lighted the cigarette which he had been busily rolling, and fixed his dark eyes upon Harley.

“You puzzle me, sir,” said the latter. “Do you wish me to believe that this cult of Voodoo claims European or American devotees?”

“I wish you to believe,” returned the Colonel, “that although as the result of the alarm which I gave the hotel was searched and the Washington police exerted themselves to the utmost, no trace was ever found of the man who had tried to murder me, except”—he extended a long, yellow forefinger, and pointed to the wing of the bat lying upon Harley’s table—“a bat wing was found pinned to my bedroom door.”

Silence fell for a while; an impressive silence. Truly this was the strangest story to which I had ever listened.

“How long ago was that?” asked Harley.

“Only two years ago. At about the time that the great war terminated. I came to Europe and believed that at last I had found security. I lived for a time in London amidst a refreshing peace that was new to me. Then, chancing to hear of a property in Surrey which was available, I leased it for a period of years, installing—perhaps?—my cousin, Madame de Staemer, as housekeeper. Madame, alas, is an invalid, but”—he kissed his fingers—“a genius. She has with her, as companion, a very charming English girl, Miss Val Beverley, the orphaned daughter of a distinguished surgeon of Edinburgh. Miss Beverley was with my cousin in the hospital which she established in France during the war. If you will honour me with your presence at Cray’s Folly to-morrow, gentlemen, you will not lack congenial company, I can assure you.”

He raised his heavy eyebrows, looking interrogatively from Harley to myself.

“For my own part,” said my friend, slowly, “I shall be delighted. What do you say, Knox?”

“I also.”

“But,” continued Harley, “your presence here today, Colonel Menendez, suggests to my mind that England has not proved so safe a haven as you had anticipated?”

Colonel Menendez crossed the room and stood once more before the Burmese cabinet, one hand resting upon his hip; a massive yet graceful figure.

“Mr. Harley,” he replied, “four days ago my butler, who is a Spaniard, brought me—” He pointed to the bat wing lying upon the blotting pad. “He had found it pinned to an oaken panel of the main entrance door.”

“Was it prior to this discovery, or after it,” asked Harley, “that you detected the presence of someone lurking in the neighbourhood of the house?”

“Before it.”

“And the burglarious entrance?”

“That took place rather less than a month ago. On the eve of the full moon.”

Paul Harley stood up and relighted his pipe.

“There are quite a number of other details, Colonel,” he said, “which I shall require you to place in my possession. Since I have determined to visit Cray’s Folly, these can wait until my arrival. I particularly refer to a remark concerning a neighbour of yours in Surrey.”

Colonel Menendez nodded, twirling his cigarette between his long, yellow fingers.

“It is a delicate matter, gentlemen,” he confessed.

“I must take time to consider how I shall place it before you. But I may count upon your arrival tomorrow?”

“Certainly. I am looking forward to the visit with keen interest.”

“It is important,” declared our visitor; “for on Wednesday is the full moon, and the full moon is in some way associated with the sacrificial rites of Voodoo.”

CHAPTER III

THE VAMPIRE BAT

An hour had elapsed since the departure of our visitor, and Paul Harley and I sat in the cozy, book-lined study discussing the strange story which had been related to us. Harley, who had a friend attached to the Spanish Embassy, had succeeded in getting in touch with him at his chambers, and had obtained some few particulars of interest concerning Colonel Don Juan Sarmiento Menendez, for such were the full names and titles of our late caller.

He was apparently the last representative of a once great Spanish family, established for many generations in Cuba. His wealth was incalculable, although the value of his numerous estates had depreciated in recent years. His family had produced many men of subtle intellect and powerful administrative qualities; but allied to this they had all possessed traits of cruelty and debauchery which at one time had made the name of Menendez a by-word in the
West Indies. That there were many people in that part of the world who would gladly have assassinated the Colonel, Paul Harley's informant did not deny. But although this information somewhat enlarged our knowledge of my friend's newest client, it threw no fresh light upon that side of his story which related to Voodoo and the extraordinary bat wing episodes.

"Of course," said Harley, after a long silence, "there is one possibility of which we must not lose sight."

"What possibility is that?" I asked.

"That Menendez may be mad. Remorse for crimes of cruelty committed in his youth, and beyond doubt he has been guilty of many, may have led to a sort of obsession. I have known such cases."

"That was my first impression," I confessed, "but it faded somewhat as the Colonel's story proceeded. I don't think any such explanation would cover the facts."

"Neither do I," agreed my friend; "but it is distinctly possible that such an obsession exists, and that someone is deliberately playing upon it for his own ends."

"You mean that someone who knows of these episodes in the earlier life of Menendez is employing them now for a secret purpose of his own?"

"Exactly."

"It renders the case none the less interesting."

"I quite agree, Knox. With you, I believe, that even if the Colonel is not quite sane, at the same time his fears are by no means imaginary."

He gingerly took up the bat wing from the arm of his chair where he had placed it after a detailed examination.

"It seems to be pretty certain," he said, "that this thing is the wing of a Desmodus or Vampire Bat. Now, according to our authority"--he touched a work which lay open on the other arm of his chair--"these are natives of tropical America, therefore the presence of a living vampire bat in Surrey is not to be anticipated. I am personally satisfied, however, that this unpleasant fragment has been preserved in some way."

"You mean that it is part of someone's collection?"

"Quite possibly. But even a collection of such bats would be quite a novelty. I don't know that I can recollect one outside the Museums. To follow this bat wing business further: there was one very curious point in the Colonel's narrative. You recollect his reference to a native girl who had betrayed certain information to the manager of the estate?"

I nodded rapidly.

"A bat wing was affixed to the wall of her hut and she died, according to our informant, of a lingering sickness. Now this lingering sickness might have been anaemia, and anaemia may be induced, either in man or beast, by frequent but unsuspected visits of a Vampire Bat."

"Good heavens, Harley!" I exclaimed, "what a horrible idea."

"It _is_ a horrible idea, but in countries infested by these creatures such things happen occasionally. I distinctly recollect a story which I once heard, of a little girl in some district of tropical America falling into such a decline, from which she was only rescued in the nick of time by the discovery that one of these Vampire Bats, a particularly large one, had formed the habit of flying into her room at night and attaching itself to her bare arm which lay outside the coverlet."

"How did it penetrate the mosquito curtains?" I enquired, incredulously.

"The very point, Knox, which led to the discovery of the truth. The thing, exhibiting a sort of uncanny intelligence, used to work its way up under the edge of the netting. This disturbance of the curtains was noticed on several occasions by the nurse who occupied an adjoining room, and finally led to the detection of the bat!"

"But surely," I said, "such a visitation would awaken any sleeper?"

"On the contrary, it induces deeper sleep. But I have not yet come to my point, Knox. The vengeance of the High Priest of Voodoo, who figured in the Colonel's narrative, was characteristic in the case of the native woman, since her symptoms at least simulated those which would result from the visits of a Vampire Bat, although of course they may have been due to a slow poison. But you will not have failed to note that the several attacks upon the Colonel personally were made with more ordinary weapons. On two occasions at least a rifle was employed."

"Yes," I replied, slowly. "You are wondering why the lingering sickness did not visit him?"

"I am, Knox. I can only suppose that he proved to be immune. You recall his statement that he made an almost miraculous recovery from the fever which attacked him after his visit to the Black Belt? This would seem to point to the fact that he possesses that rare type of constitution which almost defies organisms deadly to ordinary men."

"I see. Hence the dagger and the rifle?"

"So it would appear."

"But, Harley," I cried, "what appalling crime can the man have committed to call down upon his head a vengeance which has survived for so many years?"
Paul Harley shrugged his shoulders in a whimsical imitation of the Spaniard.

"I doubt if the feud dates any earlier," he replied, "than the time of Menendez's last return to Cuba. On that occasion he evidently killed the High Priest of Voodoo."

I uttered an exclamation of scorn.

"My dear Harley," I said, "the whole thing is too utterly fantastic. I begin to believe again that we are dealing with a madman."

Harley glanced down at the wing of the bat.

"We shall see," he murmured. "Even if the only result of our visit is to make the acquaintance of the Colonel's household our time will not have been wasted."

"No," said I, "that is true enough. I am looking forward to meeting Madame de Staemer--"


"And her companion, Miss Beverley."

"Quite so. Nor must we forget the Spanish butler, and the Colonel himself, whose acquaintance I am extremely anxious to renew."

"The whole thing is wildly bizarre, Harley."

"My dear Knox," he replied, stretching himself luxuriously in the long lounge chair, "the most commonplace life hovers on the edge of the bizarre. But those of us who overstep the border become preposterous in the eyes of those who have never done so. This is not because the unusual is necessarily the untrue, but because writers of fiction have claimed the unusual as their particular province, and in doing so have divorced it from fact in the public eye. Thus I, myself, am a myth, and so are you, Knox!"

He raised his hand and pointed to the doorway communicating with the office.

"We owe our mythological existence to that American genius whose portrait hangs beside the Burmese cabinet and who indiscreetly created the character of C. Auguste Dupin. The doings of this amateur investigator were chronicled by an admirer, you may remember, since when no private detective has been allowed to exist outside the pages of fiction. My most trivial habits confirm my unreality."

"For instance, I have a friend who is good enough sometimes to record my movements. So did Dupin. I smoke a pipe. So did Dupin. I investigate crime, and I am sometimes successful. Here I differ from Dupin. Dupin was always successful. But my argument is this--you complain that the life of Colonel Don Juan Sarmiento Menendez, on his own showing, has been at least as romantic as his name. It would not be accounted romantic by the adventurous, Knox; it is only romantic to the prosaic mind. In the same way his name is only unusual to our English ears. In Spain it would pass unnoticed."

"I see your point," I said, grudgingly; "but think of I Voodoo in the Surrey Hills."

"I am thinking of it, Knox, and it affords me much delight to think of it. You have placed your finger I upon the very point I was endeavouring to make. Voodoo in the Surrey Hills! Quite so. Voodoo in some island of the Caribbean Seas, yes, but Voodoo in the Surrey Hills, no. Yet, my dear fellow, there is a regular steamer service between South America and England. Or one may embark at Liverpool and disembark in the Spanish Main. Why, then, may not one embark in the West Indies and disembark at Liverpool? This granted, you will also grant that from Liverpool to Surrey is a feasible journey. Why, then, should you exclaim, 'but Voodoo in the Surrey Hills!' You would be surprised to meet an Esquimaux in the Strand, but there is no reason why an Esquimaux should not visit the Strand. In short, the most annoying thing about fact is its resemblance to fiction. I am looking forward to the day, Knox, when I can retire from my present fictitious profession and become a recognized member of the community; such as a press agent, a theatrical manager, or some other dealer in Fact!"

He burst out laughing, and reaching over to a side-table refilled my glass and his own.

"There lies the wing of a Vampire Bat," he said, pointing, "in Chancery Lane. It is impossible. Yet," he raised his glass, "'Pussyfoot' Johnson has visited Scotland, the home of Whisky!"

We were silent for a while, whilst I considered his remarks.

"The conclusion to which I have come," declared Harley, "is that nothing is so strange as the commonplace. A rod and line, a boat, a luncheon hamper, a jar of good ale, and the peculiar peace of a Norfolk river--these joys I willingly curtail in favour of the unknown things which await us at Cray's Folly. Remember, Knox," he stared at me queerly, "Wednesday is the night of the full moon."

CHAPTER IV

CRAY'S FOLLY

Paul Harley lay back upon the cushions and glanced at me with a quizzical smile. The big, up-to-date car which Colonel Menendez had placed at our disposal was surmounting a steep Surrey lane as though no gradient had existed.

"Some engine!" he said, approvingly.
I nodded in agreement, but felt disinclined for conversation, being absorbed in watching the characteristically English scenery. This, indeed, was very beautiful. The lane along which we were speeding was narrow, winding, and over-arched by trees. Here and there sunlight penetrated to spread a golden carpet before us, but for the most part the way lay in cool and grateful shadow.

On one side a wooded slope hemmed us in blackly, on the other lay dell after dell down into the cradle of the valley. It was a poetic corner of England, and I thought it almost unbelievable that London was only some twenty miles behind. A fit place this for elves and fairies to survive, a spot in which the presence of a modern automobile seemed a desecration. Higher we mounted and higher, the engine running strongly and smoothly; then, presently, we were out upon a narrow open road with the crescent of the hills sweeping away on the right and dense woods dipping valleyward to the left and behind us.

The chauffeur turned, and, meeting my glance:
"Cray's Folly, sir," he said.

He jerked his hand in the direction of a square, gray-stone tower somewhat resembling a campanile, which uprose from a distant clump of woods cresting a greater eminence.

"Ah," murmured Harley, "the famous tower."

Following the departure of the Colonel on the previous evening, he had looked up Cray's Folly and had found it to be one of a series of houses erected by the eccentric and wealthy man whose name it bore. He had had a mania for building houses with towers, in which his rival—and contemporary—had been William Beckford, the author of "Vathek," a work which for some obscure reason has survived as well as two of the three towers erected by its writer.

I became conscious of a keen sense of anticipation. In this, I think, the figure of Miss Val Beverley played a leading part. There was something pathetic in the presence of this lonely English girl in so singular a household; for if the menage at Cray's Folly should prove half so strange as Colonel Menendez had led us to believe, then truly we were about to find ourselves amid unusual people.

Presently the road inclined southward somewhat and we entered the fringe of the trees. I noticed one or two very ancient cottages, but no trace of the modern builder. This was a fragment of real Old England, and I was not sorry when presently we lost sight of the square tower; for amidst such scenery it was an anomaly and a rebuke.

What Paul Harley's thoughts may have been I cannot say, but he preserved an unbroken silence up to the very moment that we came to the gate lodge.

The gates were monstrosities of elaborate iron scrollwork, craftsmanship clever enough in its way, but of an ornate kind more in keeping with the orange trees of the South than with this wooded Surrey countryside.

A very surly-looking girl, quite obviously un-English (a daughter of Pedro, the butler, I learned later), opened the gates, and we entered upon a winding drive literally tunnelled through the trees. Of the house we had never a glimpse until we were right under its walls, nor should I have known that we were come to the main entrance if the car had not stopped.

"Looks like a monastery," muttered Harley.

Indeed that part of the building—the north front—which was visible from this point had a strangely monastic appearance, being built of solid gray blocks and boasting only a few small, heavily barred windows. The eccentricity of the Victorian gentleman who had expended thousands of pounds upon erecting this house was only equalled, I thought, by that of Colonel Menendez, who had chosen it for a home. An out-jutting wing shut us in on the west, and to the east the prospect was closed by the tallest and most densely grown box hedge I had ever seen, trimmed most perfectly and having an arched opening in the centre. Thus, the entrance to Cray's Folly lay in a sort of bay.

But even as we stepped from the car, the great church-like oaken doors were thrown open, and there, framed in the monkish porch, stood the tall, elegant figure of the Colonel.

"Gentlemen," he cried, "welcome to Cray's Folly."

He advanced smiling, and in the bright sunlight seemed even more Mephistophelean than he had seemed in Harley's office.

"Pedro," he called, and a strange-looking Spanish butler who wore his side-whiskers like a bull fighter appeared behind his master; a sallow, furtive fellow with whom I determined I should never feel at ease.

However, the Colonel greeted us heartily enough, and conducted us through a kind of paved, covered courtyard into a great lofty hall. Indeed it more closely resembled a studio, being partly lighted by a most curious dome. It was furnished in a manner quite un-English, but very luxuriously. A magnificent oaken staircase communicated with a gallery on the left, and at the foot of this staircase, in a mechanical chair which she managed with astonishing dexterity, sat Madame de Staemer.

She had snow-white hair crowning the face of a comparatively young woman, and large, dark-brown eyes which reminded me strangely of the eyes of some animal although in the first moment of meeting I could not identify the
resemblance. Her hands were very slender and beautiful, and when, as the Colonel presented us, she extended her fingers, I was not surprised to see Harley stoop and kiss them in Continental fashion; for this Madame evidently expected. I followed suit; but truth to tell, after that first glance at the masterful figure in the invalid chair I had had no eyes for Madame de Staemer, being fully employed in gazing at someone who stood beside her.

This was an evasively pretty girl, or such was my first impression. That is to say, that whilst her attractiveness was beyond dispute, analysis of her small features failed to detect from which particular quality this charm was derived. The contour of her face certainly formed a delightful oval, and there was a wistful look in her eyes which was half appealing and half impish. Her demure expression was not convincing, and there rested a vague smile, or promise of a smile, upon lips which were perfectly moulded, and indeed the only strictly regular feature of a nevertheless bewitching face. She had slightly curling hair and the line of her neck and shoulder was most graceful and charming. Of one thing I was sure: She was glad to see visitors at Cray's Folly.

"And now, gentlemen," said Colonel Menendez, "having presented you to Madame, my cousin, permit me to present you to Miss Val Beverley, my cousin's companion, and our very dear friend."

The girl bowed in a formal English fashion, which contrasted sharply with the Continental manner of Madame. Her face flushed slightly, and as I met her glance she lowered her eyes.

"Now M. Harley and M. Knox," said Madame, vivaciously, "you are quite at home. Pedro will show you to your rooms and lunch will be ready in half an hour."

She waved her white hand coquettishly, and ignoring the proffered aid of Miss Beverley, wheeled her chair away at a great rate under a sort of arch on the right of the hall, which communicated with the domestic offices of the establishment.

"Is she not wonderful?" exclaimed Colonel Menendez, taking Harley's left arm and my right and guiding us upstairs followed by Pedro and the chauffeur, the latter carrying our grips. "Many women would be prostrated by such an affliction, but she--" he shrugged his shoulders.

Harley and I had been placed in adjoining rooms. I had never seen such rooms as those in Cray's Folly. The place contained enough oak to have driven a modern builder crazy. Oak had simply been lavished upon it. My own room, which was almost directly above the box hedge to which I have referred, had a beautiful carved ceiling and a floor as highly polished as that of a ballroom. It was tastefully furnished, but the foreign note was perceptible everywhere.

"We have here some grand prospects," said the Colonel, and truly enough the view from the great, high, wide window was a very fine one.

I perceived that the grounds of Cray's Folly were extensive and carefully cultivated. I had a glimpse of a Tudor sunken garden, but the best view of this was from the window of Harley's room, which because it was the end room on the north front overlooked another part of the grounds, and offered a prospect of the east lawns and distant park land.

When presently Colonel Menendez and I accompanied my friend there I was charmed by the picturesque scene below. Here was a real old herbal garden, gay with flowers and intersected by tiled moss-grown paths. There were bushes exhibiting fantastic examples of the topiary art, and here, too, was a sun-dial. My first impression of this beautiful spot was one of delight. Later I was to regard that enchanted demesne with something akin to horror; but as we stood there watching a gardener clipping the bushes I thought that although Cray's Folly might be adjudged ugly, its grounds were delightful.

Suddenly Harley turned to our host. "Where is the famous tower?" he enquired. "It is not visible from the front of the house, nor from the drive."

"No, no," replied the Colonel, "it is right out at the end of the east wing, which is disused. I keep it locked up. There are four rooms in the tower and a staircase, of course, but it is inconvenient. I cannot imagine why it was built."

"The architect may have had some definite object in view," said Harley, "or it may have been merely a freak of his client. Is there anything characteristic about the topmost room, for instance?"

Colonel Menendez shrugged his massive shoulders. "Nothing," he replied. "It is the same as the others below, except that there is a stair leading to a gallery on the roof. Presently I will take you up, if you wish."

"I should be interested," murmured Harley, and tactfully changed the subject, which evidently was not altogether pleasing to our host. I concluded that he had found the east wing of the house something of a white elephant, and was accordingly sensitive upon the point.

Presently, then, he left us and I returned to my own room, but before long I rejoined Harley. I did not knock but entered unceremoniously.

"Halloa!" I exclaimed. "What have you seen?"

He was standing staring out of the window, nor did he turn as I entered.
"What is it?" I said, joining him.
He glanced at me oddly.
"An impression," he replied; "but it has gone now."
"I understand," I said, quietly.

Familiarity with crime in many guises and under many skies had developed in Paul Harley a sort of sixth sense. It was a fugitive, fickle thing, as are all the powers which belong to the realm of genius or inspiration. Often enough it failed him entirely, he had assured me, that odd, sudden chill as of an abrupt lowering of the temperature, which, I understood, often advised him of the nearness of enmity actively malignant.

Now, standing at the window, looking down into that old-world garden, he was "sensing" the atmosphere keenly, seeking for the note of danger. It was sheer intuition, perhaps, but whilst he could never rely upon its answering his summons, once active it never misled him.

"You think some real menace overhangs Colonel Menendez?"
"I am sure of it." He stared into my face. "There is something very, very strange about this bat wing business."
"Do you still incline to the idea that he has been followed to England?"
Paul Harley reflected for a moment, then:
"That explanation would be almost too simple," he said. "There is something bizarre, something unclean--I had almost said unholy--at work in this house, Knox."
"He has foreign servants."
Harley shook his head.
"I shall make it my business to become acquainted with all of them," he replied, "but the danger does not come from there. Let us go down to lunch."

CHAPTER V
VAL BEVERLEY

The luncheon was so good as to be almost ostentatious. One could not have lunched better at the Carlton. Yet, since this luxurious living was evidently customary in the colonel's household, a charge of ostentation would not have been deserved. The sinister-looking Pedro proved to be an excellent servant; and because of the excitement of feeling myself to stand upon the edge of unusual things, the enjoyment of a perfectly served repast, and the sheer delight which I experienced in watching the play of expression upon the face of Miss Beverley, I count that luncheon at Cray's Folly a memorable hour of my life.

Frankly, Val Beverley puzzled me. It may or may not have been curious, that amidst such singular company I selected for my especial study a girl so freshly and typically English. I had thought at the moment of meeting her that she was provokingly pretty; I determined, as the lunch proceeded, that she was beautiful. Once I caught Harley smiling at me in his quizzical fashion, and I wondered guiltily if I were displaying an undue interest in the companion of Madame.

Many topics were discussed, I remember, and beyond doubt the colonel's cousin-housekeeper dominated the debate. She possessed extraordinary force of personality. Her English was not nearly so fluent as that spoken by the colonel, but this handicap only served to emphasize the masculine strength of her intellect. Truly she was a remarkable woman. With her blanched hair and her young face, and those fine, velvety eyes which possessed a quality almost hypnotic, she might have posed for the figure of a sorceress. She had unfamiliar gestures and employed her long white hands in a manner that was new to me and utterly strange.

I could detect no family resemblance between the cousins, and I wondered if their kinship were very distant. One thing was evident enough: Madame de Staemer was devoted to the Colonel. Her expression when she looked at him changed entirely. For a woman of such intense vitality her eyes were uncannily still; that is to say that whilst she frequently moved her head she rarely moved her eyes. Again and again I found myself wondering where I had seen such eyes before. I lived to identify that memory, as I shall presently relate.

In vain I endeavoured to define the relationship between these three people, so incongruously set beneath one roof. Of the fact that Miss Beverley was not happy I became assured. But respecting her exact position in the household I was reduced to surmises.

The Colonel improved on acquaintance. I decided that he belonged to an order of Spanish grandees now almost extinct. I believed he would have made a very staunch friend; I felt sure he would have proved a most implacable enemy. Altogether, it was a memorable meal, and one notable result of that brief companionship was a kind of link of understanding between myself and Miss Beverley.

Once, when I had been studying Madame de Staemer, and again, as I removed my glance from the dark face of Colonel Menendez, I detected the girl watching me; and her eyes said, "You understand; so do I."
Some things perhaps I did understand, but how few the near future was to show.

The signal for our departure from table was given by Madame de Staemer. She whisked her chair back with
extraordinary rapidity, the contrast between her swift, nervous movements and those still, basilisk eyes being almost uncanny.

"Off you go, Juan," she said; "your visitors would like to see the garden, no doubt. I must be away for my afternoon siesta. Come, my dear"—to the girl—"smoke one little cigarette with me, then I will let you go."

She retired, wheeling herself rapidly out of the room, and my glance lingered upon the graceful figure of Val Beverley until both she and Madame were out of sight.

"Now, gentlemen," said the Colonel, resuming his seat and pushing the decanter toward Paul Harley, "I am at your service either for business or amusement. I think"—to Harley—"you expressed a desire to see the tower?"

"I did," my friend replied, lighting his cigar, "but only if it would amuse you to show me."

"Decidedly. Mr. Knox will join us?"

Harley, unseen by the Colonel, glanced at me in a way which I knew.

"Thanks all the same," I said, smiling, "but following a perfect luncheon I should much prefer to loll upon the lawn, if you don't mind."

"But certainly I do not mind," cried the Colonel. "I wish you to be happy."

"Join you in a few minutes, Knox," said Harley as he went out with our host.

"All right," I replied, "I should like to take a stroll around the gardens. You will join me there later, no doubt."

As I walked out into the bright sunshine I wondered why Paul Harley had wished to be left alone with Colonel Menendez, but knowing that I should learn his motive later, I strolled on through the gardens, my mind filled with speculations respecting these unusual people with whom Fate had brought me in contact. I felt that Miss Beverley needed protection of some kind, and I was conscious of a keen desire to afford her that protection. In her glance I had read, or thought I had read, an appeal for sympathy.

Not the least mystery of Cray’s Folly was the presence of this girl. Only toward the end of luncheon had I made up my mind upon a point which had been puzzling me. Val Beverley’s gaiety was a cloak. Once I had detected her watching Madame de Staemer with a look strangely like that of fear.

Puffing contentedly at my cigar I proceeded to make a tour of the house. It was constructed irregularly. Practically the entire building was of gray stone, which created a depressing effect even in the blazing sunlight, lending Cray’s Folly something of an austere aspect. There were fine lofty windows, however, to most of the ground-floor rooms overlooking the lawns, and some of those above had balconies of the same gray stone. Quite an extensive kitchen garden and a line of glasshouses adjoined the west wing, and here were outbuildings, coach-houses and a garage, all connected by a covered passage with the servants' quarters.

Pursuing my enquiries, I proceeded to the north front of the building, which was closely hemmed in by trees, and which as we had observed on our arrival resembled the entrance to a monastery.

Passing the massive oaken door by which we had entered and which was now closed again, I walked on through the opening in the box hedge into a part of the grounds which was not so sprucely groomed as the rest. On one side were the yews flanking the Tudor garden and before me uprose the famous tower. As I stared up at the square structure, with its uncurtained windows, I wondered, as others had wondered before me, what could have ever possessed any man to build it.

Visible at points for many miles around, it undoubtedly disfigured an otherwise beautiful landscape.

I pressed on, noting that the windows of the rooms in the east wing were shuttered and the apartments evidently disused. I came to the base of the tower, To the south, the country rose up to the highest point in the crescent of hills, and peeping above the trees at no great distance away, I detected the red brick chimneys of some old house in the woods. North and east, velvet sward swept down to the park.

As I stood there admiring the prospect and telling myself that no Voodoo devilry could find a home in this peaceful English countryside, I detected a faint sound of voices far above. Someone had evidently come out upon the gallery of the tower. I looked upward, but I could not see the speakers. I pursued my stroll, until, near the eastern base of the tower, I encountered a perfect thicket of rhododendrons. Finding no path through this shrubbery, I retraced my steps, presently entering the Tudor garden; and there strolling toward me, a book in her hand, was Miss Beverley.

"Holloa, Mr. Knox," she called; "I thought you had gone up the tower?"

"No," I replied, laughing, "I lack the energy."

"Do you?" she said, softly, "then sit down and talk to me."

She dropped down upon a grassy bank, looking up at me invitingly, and I accepted the invitation without demur.

"I love this old garden," she declared, "although of course it is really no older than the rest of the place. I always think there should be peacocks, though."

"Yes," I agreed, "peacocks would be appropriate."

"And little pages dressed in yellow velvet."
She met my glance soberly for a moment and then burst into a peal of merry laughter.

"Do you know, Miss Beverley," I said, watching her, "I find it hard to place you in the household of the Colonel."

"Yes?" she said simply; "you must."

"Oh, then you realize that you are--"

"Out of place here?"

"Quite."

"Of course I am."

She smiled, shook her head, and changed the subject.

"I am so glad Mr. Paul Harley has come down," she confessed.

"You know my friend by name, then?"

"Yes," she replied, "someone I met in Nice spoke of him, and I know he is very clever."

"In Nice? Did you live in Nice before you came here?"

Val Beverley nodded slowly, and her glance grew oddly retrospective.

"I lived for over a year with Madame de Staemer in a little villa on the Promenade des Anglaise," she replied.

"That was after Madame was injured."

"She sustained her injuries during the war, I understand?"

"Yes. Poor Madame. The hospital of which she was in charge was bombed and the shock left her as you see her."

I was there, too, but I luckily escaped without injury."

"What, you were there?"

"Yes. That was where I first met Madame de Staemer. She used to be very wealthy, you see, and she established this hospital in France at her own expense, and I was one of her assistants for a time. She lost both her husband and her fortune in the war, and as if that were not bad enough, lost the use of her limbs, too."

"Poor woman," I said. "I had no idea her life had been so tragic. She has wonderful courage."

"Courage!" exclaimed the girl, "if you knew all that I know about her."

Her face grew sweetly animated as she bent toward me excitedly and confidentially.

"Really, she is simply wonderful. I learned to respect her in those days as I have never respected any other woman in the world; and when, after all her splendid work, she, so vital and active, was stricken down like that, I felt that I simply could not leave her, especially as she asked me to stay."

"So you went with her to Nice?"

"Yes. Then the Colonel took this house, and we came here, but--"

She hesitated, and glanced at me curiously.

"Perhaps you are not quite happy?"

"No," she said, "I am not. You see it was different in France. I knew so many people. But here at Cray's Folly it is so lonely, and Madame is--"

Again she hesitated.

"Yes?"

"Well," she laughed in an embarrassed fashion, "I am afraid of her at times."

"In what way?"

"Oh, in a silly, womanish sort of way. Of course she is a wonderful manager; she rules the house with a rod of iron. But really I haven't anything to do here, and I feel frightfully out of place sometimes. Then the Colonel--Oh, but what am I talking about?"

"Won't you tell me what it is that the Colonel fears?"

"You know that he fears something, then?"

"Of course. That is why Paul Harley is here."

A change came over the girl's face; a look almost of dread.

"I wish I knew what it all meant."

"You are aware, then, that there is something wrong?"

"Naturally I am. Sometimes I have been so frightened that I have made up my mind to leave the very next day."

"You mean that you have been frightened at night?" I asked with curiosity.

"Dreadfully frightened."

"Won't you tell me in what way?"

She looked up at me swiftly, then turned her head aside, and bit her lip.

"No, not now," she replied. "I can't very well."

"Then at least tell me why you stayed?"

"Well," she smiled rather pathetically, "for one thing, I haven't anywhere else to go."

"Have you no friends in England?"

She shook her head.

"No. There was only poor daddy, and he died over two years ago. That was when I went to Nice."

"Poor little girl," I said; and the words were spoken before I realized their undue familiarity.

An apology was on the tip of my tongue, but Miss Beverley did not seem to have noticed the indiscretion.

Indeed my sympathy was sincere, and I think she had appreciated the fact.

She looked up again with a bright smile.

"Why are we talking about such depressing things on this simply heavenly day?" she exclaimed.

"Goodness knows," said I. "Will you show me round these lovely gardens?"

"Delighted, sir!" replied the girl, rising and sweeping me a mocking curtsey.

Thereupon we set out, and at every step I found a new delight in some wayward curl, in a gesture, in the sweet voice of my companion. Her merry laugh was music, but in wistful mood I think she was even more alluring.

The menace, if menace there were, which overhung Cray's Folly, ceased to exist--for me, at least, and I blessed the lucky chance which had led to my presence there.

We were presently rejoined by Colonel Menendez and Paul Harley, and I gathered that my surmise that it had been their voices which I had heard proceeding from the top of the tower to have been only partly accurate.

"I know you will excuse me, Mr. Harley," said the Colonel, "for detailing the duty to Pedro, but my wind is not good enough for the stairs."

He used idiomatic English at times with that facility which some foreigners acquire, but always smiled in a self-satisfied way when he had employed a slang term.

"I quite understand, Colonel," replied Harley. "The view from the top was very fine."

"And now, gentlemen," continued the Colonel, "if Miss Beverley will excuse us, we will retire to the library and discuss business."

"As you wish," said Harley; "but I have an idea that it is your custom to rest in the afternoon."

Colonel Menendez shrugged his shoulders. "It used to be," he admitted, "but I have too much to think about in these days."

"I can see that you have much to tell me," admitted Harley; "and therefore I am entirely at your service."

Val Beverley smiled and walked away swinging her book, at the same time treating me to a glance which puzzled me considerably. I wondered if I had mistaken its significance, for it had seemed to imply that she had accepted me as an ally. Certainly it served to awaken me to the fact that I had discovered a keen personal interest in the mystery which hung over this queerly assorted household.

I glanced at my friend as the Colonel led the way into the house. I saw him staring upward with a peculiar expression upon his face, and following the direction of his glance I could see an awning spread over one of the gray-stone balconies. Beneath it, reclining in a long cane chair, lay Madame de Staemer. I think she was asleep; at any rate, she gave no sign, but lay there motionless, as Harley and I walked in through the open French window followed by Colonel Menendez.

Odd and unimportant details sometimes linger long in the memory. And I remember noticing that a needle of sunlight, piercing a crack in the gaily-striped awning rested upon a ring which Madame wore, so that the diamonds glittered like sparks of white-hot fire.

CHAPTER VI
THE BARRIER

Colonel Menendez conducted us to a long, lofty library in which might be detected the same note of un-English luxury manifested in the other appointments of the house. The room, in common with every other which I had visited in Cray's Folly, was carried out in oak: doors, window frames, mantelpiece, and ceiling representing fine examples of this massive woodwork. Indeed, if the eccentricity of the designer of Cray's Folly were not sufficiently demonstrated by the peculiar plan of the building, its construction wholly of granite and oak must have remarked him a man of unusual if substantial ideas.

There were four long windows opening on to a veranda which commanded a view of part of the rose garden and of three terraced lawns descending to a lake upon which I perceived a number of swans. Beyond, in the valley, lay verdant pastures, where cattle grazed. A lark hung carolling blithely far above, and the sky was almost cloudless. I could hear a steam reaper at work somewhere in the distance. This, with the more intimate rattle of a lawn-mower wielded by a gardener who was not visible from where I stood, alone disturbed the serene silence, except that presently I detected the droning of many bees among the roses. Sunlight flooded the prospect; but the veranda lay in shadow, and that long, oaken room was refreshingly cool and laden with the heavy perfume of the flowers.

From the windows, then, one beheld a typical English summer-scape, but the library itself struck an altogether more exotic note. There were many glazed bookcases of a garish design in ebony and gilt, and these were laden with
a vast collection of works in almost every European language, reflecting perhaps the cosmopolitan character of the colonel's household. There was strange Spanish furniture upholstered in perforated leather and again displaying much gilt. There were suits of black armour and a great number of Moorish ornaments. The pictures were fine but sombre, and all of the Spanish school.

One Velasquez in particular I noted with surprise, reflecting that, assuming it to be an authentic work of the master, my entire worldly possessions could not have enabled me to buy it. It was the portrait of a typical Spanish cavalier and beyond doubt a Menendez. In fact, the resemblance between the haughty Spanish grandee, who seemed about to step out of the canvas and pick a quarrel with the spectator, and Colonel Don Juan himself was almost startling. Evidently, our host had imported most of his belongings from Cuba.

"Gentlemen," he said, as we entered, "make yourselves quite at home, I beg. All my poor establishment contains is for your entertainment and service."

He drew up two long, low lounge chairs, the arms provided with receptacles to contain cooling drinks; and the mere sight of these chairs mentally translated me to the Spanish Main, where I pictured them set upon the veranda of that hacienda which had formerly been our host's residence.

Harley and I became seated and Colonel Menendez disposed himself upon a leather-covered couch, nodding apologetically as he did so.

"My health requires that I should recline for a certain number of hours every day," he explained. "So you will please forgive me."

"My dear Colonel Menendez," said Harley, "I feel sure that you are interrupting your siesta in order to discuss the unpleasant business which finds us in such pleasant surroundings. Allow me once again to suggest that we postpone this matter until, shall we say, after dinner?"

"No, no! No, no," protested the Colonel, waving his hand depreciatingly. "Here is Pedro with coffee and some curacao of a kind which I can really recommend, although you may be unfamiliar with it."

I was certainly unfamiliar with the liqueur which he insisted we must taste, and which was contained in a sort of square, opaque bottle unknown, I think, to English wine merchants. Beyond doubt it was potent stuff; and some cigars which the Spaniard produced on this occasion and which were enclosed in little glass cylinders resembling test-tubes and elaborately sealed, I recognized to be priceless. They convinced me, if conviction had not visited me already, that Colonel Don Juan Sarmiento Menendez belonged to that old school of West Indian planters by whom the tradition of the Golden Americas had been for long preserved in the Spanish Main.

We discussed indifferent matters for a while, sipping this wonderful curacao of our host's. The effect created by the Colonel's story faded entirely, and when, the latter being unable to conceal his drowsiness, Harley stood up, I took the hint with gratitude; for at that moment I did not feel in the mood to discuss serious business or indeed business of any kind.

"Gentlemen," said the Colonel, also rising, in spite of our protests, "I will observe your wishes. My guests' wishes are mine. We will meet the ladies for tea on the terrace."

Harley and I walked out into the garden together, our courteous host standing in the open window, and bowing in that exaggerated fashion which in another might have been ridiculous but which was possible in Colonel Menendez, because of the peculiar grace of deportment which was his.

As we descended the steps I turned and glanced back, I know not why. But the impression which I derived of the Colonel's face as he stood there in the shadow of the veranda was one I can never forget.

His expression had changed utterly, or so it seemed to me. He no longer resembled Velasquez' haughty cavalier; gone, too, was the debonnaire bearing, I turned my head aside swiftly, hoping that he had not detected my backward glance.

I felt that I had violated hospitality. I felt that I had seen what I should not have seen. And the result was to bring about that which no story of West Indian magic could ever have wrought in my mind.

A dreadful, cold premonition claimed me, a premonition that this was a doomed man.

The look which I had detected upon his face was an indefinable, an indescribable look; but I had seen it in the eyes of one who had been bitten by a poisonous reptile and who knew his hours to be numbered. It was uncanny, unnerving; and whereas at first the atmosphere of Colonel Menendez's home had seemed to be laden with prosperous security, now that sense of ease and restfulness was gone--and gone for ever.

"Harley," I said, speaking almost at random, "this promises to be the strangest case you have ever handled."

"Promises?" Paul Harley laughed shortly. "It _is_ the strangest case, Knox. It is a case of wheels within wheels, of mystery crowning mystery. Have you studied our host?"

"Closely."

"And what conclusion have you formed?"

"None at the moment; but I think one is slowly crystalizing."
"Hm," muttered Harley, as we paced slowly on amid the rose trees. "Of one thing I am satisfied."
"What is that?"
"That Colonel Menendez is not afraid of Bat Wing, whoever or whatever Bat Wing may be."
"Not afraid?"
"Certainly he is not afraid, Knox. He has possibly been afraid in the past, but now he is resigned."
"Resigned to what?"
"Resigned to death!"
"Good God, Harley, you are right!" I cried. "You are right! I saw it in his eyes as we left the library."
Harley stopped and turned to me sharply.
"You saw this in the Colonel's eyes?" he challenged.
"I did."
"Which corroborates my theory," he said, softly; "for _I_ had seen it elsewhere."
"Where do you mean, Harley?"
"In the face of Madame de Staemer."
"What?"
"Knox"--Harley rested his hand upon my arm and looked about him cautiously--"_she knows._"
"But knows what?"
"That is the question which we are here to answer, but I am as sure as it is humanly possible to be sure of anything that whatever Colonel Menendez may tell us to-night, one point at least he will withhold."
"What do you expect him to withhold?"
"The meaning of the sign of the Bat Wing."
"Then you think he knows its meaning?"
"He has told us that it is the death-token of Voodoo."
I stared at Harley in perplexity.
"Then you believe his explanation to be false?"
"Not necessarily, Knox. It may be what he claims for it. But he is keeping something back. He speaks all the time from behind a barrier which he, himself, has deliberately erected against me."
"I cannot understand why he should do so," I declared, as he looked at me steadily. "Within the last few moments I have become definitely convinced that his appeal to you was no idle one. Therefore, why should he not offer you every aid in his power?"
"Why, indeed?" muttered Harley.
"The same thing," I continued, "applies to Madame de Staemer. If ever I have seen love-light in a woman's eyes I have seen it in hers, to-day, whenever her glance has rested upon Colonel Menendez. Harley, I believe she literally worships the ground he walks upon."
"She does, she does!" cried my companion, and emphasized the words with beats of his clenched fist. "It is utterly, damnably mystifying. But I tell you, she knows, Knox, she knows!"
"You mean she knows that he is a doomed man?"
Harley nodded rapidly.
"They both know," he replied; "but there is something which they dare not divulge."
He glanced at me swiftly, and his bronzed face wore a peculiar expression.
"Have you had an opportunity of any private conversation with Miss Val Beverley?" he enquired.
"Yes," I said. "Surely you remember that you found me chatting with her when you returned from your inspection of the tower."
"I remember perfectly well, but I thought you might have just met. Now it appears to me, Knox, that you have quickly established yourself in the good books of a very charming girl. My only reason for visiting the tower was to afford you just this opportunity! Don't frown. Beyond reminding you of the fact that she has been on intimate terms with Madame de Staemer for some years, I will not intrude in any way upon your private plans in that direction."
I stared at him, and I suppose my expression was an angry one.
"Surely you don't misunderstand me?" he said. "A cultured English girl of that type cannot possibly have lived with these people without learning something of the matters which are puzzling us so badly. Am I asking too much?"
"I see what you mean," I said, slowly. "No, I suppose you are right, Harley."
"Good," he muttered. "I will leave that side of the enquiry in your very capable hands, Knox."
He paused, and began to stare about him.
"From this point," said he, "we have an unobstructed view of the tower."
We turned and stood looking up at the unsightly gray structure, with its geometrical rows of windows and the
minaret-like gallery at the top.

"Of course"--I broke a silence of some moments duration--"the entire scheme of Cray's Folly is peculiar, but the
rooms, except for a uniformity which is monotonous, and an unimaginative scheme of decoration which makes them
all seem alike, are airy and well lighted, eminently sane and substantial. The tower, however, is quite inexcusable,
unless the idea was to enable the occupant to look over the tops of the trees in all directions."

"Yes," agreed Harley, "it is an ugly landmark. But yonder up the slope I can see the corner of what seems to be a
very picturesque house of some kind."

"I caught a glimpse of it earlier to-day," I replied. "Yes, from this point a little more of it is visible. Apparently
quite an old place."

I paused, staring up the hillside, but Harley, hands locked behind him and chin lowered reflectively, was pacing
on. I joined him, and we proceeded for some little distance in silence, passing a gardener who touched his cap
respectfully and to whom I thought at first my companion was about to address some remark. Harley passed on,
however, still occupied, it seemed, with his reflections, and coming to a gravel path which, bordering one side of the
lawns, led down from terrace to terrace into the valley, turned, and began to descend.

"Let us go and interview the swans," he murmured absently.

CHAPTER VII
AT THE LAVENDER ARMS

In certain moods Paul Harley was impossible as a companion, and I, who knew him well, had learned to leave
him to his own devices at such times. These moods invariably corresponded with his meeting some problem to the
heart of which the lance of his keen wit failed to penetrate. His humour might not display itself in the spoken word,
he merely became oblivious of everything and everybody around him. People might talk to him and he scarce noted
their presence, familiar faces appear and he would see them not. Outwardly he remained the observant Harley who
moved amid the hustle of life he was spiritually alone, communing with the solitude which dwells in every man's
heart.

Presently, then, as we came to the lake at the foot of the sloping lawns, where water lilies were growing and
quite a number of swans had their habitation, I detected the fact that I had ceased to exist so far as Harley was
concerned. Knowing this mood of old, I pursued my way alone, pressing on across the valley and making for a
swing gate which seemed to open upon a public footpath. Coming to this gate I turned and looked back.

Paul Harley was standing where I had left him by the edge of the lake, staring as if hypnotized at the slowly
moving swans. But I would have been prepared to wager that he saw neither swans nor lake, but mentally was far
from the spot, deep in some complex maze of reflection through which no ordinary mind could hope to follow him.

I glanced at my watch and found that it was but little after two o'clock. Luncheon at Cray's Folly was early. I
therefore had some time upon my hands and I determined to employ it in exploring part of the neighbourhood.
Accordingly I filled and lighted my pipe and strolled leisurely along the footpath, enjoying the beauty of the
afternoon, and admiring the magnificent timber which grew upon the southerly slopes of the valley.

Larks sang high above me and the air was fragrant with those wonderful earthy scents which belong to an
English countryside. A herd of very fine Jersey cattle presently claimed inspection, and a little farther on I found
myself upon a high road where a brown-faced fellow seated aloft upon a hay-cart cheerily gave me good-day as I
passed.

Quite at random I turned to the left and followed the road, so that presently I found myself in a very small
village, the principal building of which was a very small inn called the "Lavender Arms."

Colonel Menendez's curacao, combined with the heat of the day, had made me thirsty; for which reason I
stepped into the bar-parlour determined to sample the local ale. I was served by the landlady, a neat, round, red little
person, and as she retired, having placed a foam-capped mug upon the counter, her glance rested for a moment upon
the only other occupant of the room, a man seated in an armchair immediately to the right of the door. A glass of
whisky stood on the window ledge at his elbow, and that it was by no means the first which he had imbibed, his
appearance seemed to indicate.

Having tasted the cool contents of my mug, I leaned back against the counter and looked at this person curiously.
He was apparently of about medium height, but of a somewhat fragile appearance. He was dressed like a country
gentleman, and a stick and soft hat lay upon the ledge near his glass. But the thing about him which had immediately
arrested my attention was his really extraordinary resemblance to Paul Harley's engraving of Edgar Allan Poe.

I wondered at first if Harley's frequent references to the eccentric American genius, to whom he accorded a sort
of hero-worship, were responsible for my imagining a close resemblance where only a slight one existed. But
inspection of that strange, dark face convinced me of the fact that my first impression had been a true one. Perhaps,
in my curiosity, I stared rather rudely.
"You will pardon me, sir," said the stranger, and I was startled to note that he spoke with a faint American
accent, "but are you a literary man?"

As I had judged to be the case, he was slightly bemused, but by no means drunk, and although his question was
abrupt it was spoken civilly enough.

"Journalism is one of the several occupations in which I have failed," I replied, lightly.

"You are not a fiction writer?"

"I lack the imagination necessary for that craft, sir."

The other wagged his head slowly and took a drink of whisky. "Nevertheless," he said, and raised his finger
solemnly, "you were thinking that I resembled Edgar Allan Poe!"

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, for the man had really amazed me. "You clearly resemble him in more ways than
one. I must really ask you to inform me how you deduced such a fact from a mere glance of mine."

"I will tell you, sir," he replied. "But, first, I must replenish my glass, and I should be honoured if you would
permit me to replenish yours."

"Thanks very much," I said, "but I would rather you excused me."

"As you wish, sir," replied the American with grave courtesy, "as you wish."

He stepped up to the counter and rapped upon it with half a crown, until the landlady appeared. She treated me to
a pathetic glance, but refilled the empty glass.

My American acquaintance having returned to his seat and having added a very little water to the whisky went
on:

"Now, sir," said he, "my name is Colin Camber, formerly of Richmond, Virginia, United States of America, but
now of the Guest House, Surrey, England, at your service."

Taking my cue from Mr. Camber's gloomy but lofty manner, I bowed formally and mentioned my name.

"I am delighted to make your acquaintance, Mr. Knox," he assured me; "and now, sir, to answer your question.
When you came in a few moments ago you glanced at me. Your eyes did not open widely as is the case when one
recognizes, or thinks one recognizes, an acquaintance, they narrowed. This indicated retrospection. For a moment
they turned aside. You were focussing a fugitive idea, a memory. You captured it. You looked at me again, and your
successive glances read as follows: The hair worn uncommonly long, the mathematical brow, the eyes of a poet, the
slight moustache, small mouth, weak chin; the glass at his elbow. The resemblance is complete. Knowing how
complete it is myself, sir, I ventured to test my theory, and it proved to be sound."

Now, as Mr. Colin Camber had thus spoken in the serious manner of a slightly drunken man, I had formed the
opinion that I stood in the presence of a very singular character. Here was that seeming mesalliance which not
infrequently begets genius: a powerful and original mind allied to a weak will. I wondered what Mr. Colin Camber's
occupation might be, and somewhat, too, I wondered why his name was unfamiliar to me. For that the possessor of
that brow and those eyes could fail to make his mark in any profession which he might take up I was unwilling to
believe.

"Your exposition has been very interesting, Mr. Camber," I said. "You are a singularly close observer, I
perceive."

"Yes," he replied, "I have passed my life in observing the ways of my fellowmen, a study which I have pursued
in various parts of the world without appreciable benefit to myself. I refer to financial benefit."

He contemplated me with a look which had grown suddenly pathetic.

"I would not have you think, sir," he added, "that I am an habitual toper. I have latterly been much upset by--
domestic worries, and--er--" He emptied his glass at a draught. "Surely, Mr. Knox, you are going to replenish?
Whilst you are doing so, would you kindly request Mrs. Wootton to extend the same favour to myself?"

But at that moment Mrs. Wootton in person appeared behind the counter. "Time, please, gentlemen," she said;
"it is gone half-past two."

"What!" exclaimed Mr. Camber, rising. "What is that? You decline to serve me, Mrs. Wootton?"

"Why, not at all, Mr. Camber," answered the landlady, "but I can serve no one now; it's after time."

"You decline to serve me," he muttered, his speech becoming slurred. "Am I, then, to be insulted?"

I caught a glance of entreaty from the landlady. "My dear sir," I said, genially, "we must bow to the law, I
suppose. At least we are better off here than in America."

"Ah, that is true," agreed Mr. Camber, throwing his head back and speaking the words as though they possessed
some deep dramatic significance. "Yes, but such laws are an insult to every intelligent man."

He sat down again rather heavily, and I stood looking from him to the landlady, and wondering what I should do.
The matter was decided for me, however, in a way which I could never have foreseen. For, hearing a light footfall
upon the step which led up to the bar-parlour, I turned --and there almost beside me stood a wrinkled little
Chinaman!
He wore a blue suit and a tweed cap, he wore queer, thick-soled slippers, and his face was like a smiling mask hewn out of very old ivory. I could scarcely credit the evidence of my senses, since the Lavender Arms was one of the last places in which I should have looked for a native of China.

Mr. Colin Camber rose again, and fixing his melancholy eyes upon the newcomer:

"Ah Tsong," he said in a tone of cold anger, "what are you doing here?"

Quite unmoved the Chinaman replied:

"Blingee you chit, sir, vellee soon go back."

"What do you mean?" demanded Mr. Camber. "Answer me, Ah Tsong; who sent you?"

"Lilly missee," crooned the Chinaman, smiling up into the other's face with a sort of childish entreaty. "Lilly missee."

"Oh," said Mr. Camber in a changed voice. "Oh."

He stood very upright for a moment, his gaze set upon the wrinkled Chinese face. Then he looked at Mrs. Wootton and bowed, and looked at me and bowed, very stiffly.

"I must excuse myself, sir," he announced. "My wife desires my presence at home."

I returned his bow, and as he walked quite steadily toward the door, followed by Ah Tsong, he paused, turned, and said: "Mr. Knox, I should esteem it a friendly action if you would spare me an hour of your company before you leave Surrey. My visitors are few. Any one, any one, will direct you to the Guest House. I am persuaded that we have much in common. Good-day, sir."

He went down the steps, disappearing in company with the Chinaman, and having watched them go, I turned to Mrs. Wootton, the landlady, in silent astonishment.

She nodded her head and sighed.

"The same every day and every evening for months past," she said. "I am afraid it's going to be the death of him."

"Do you mean that Mr. Camber comes here every day and is always fetched by the Chinaman?"

"Twice every day," corrected the landlady, "and his poor wife sends here regularly."

"What a tragedy," I muttered, "and such a brilliant man."

"Ah," said she, busily removing jugs and glasses from the counter, "it does seem a terrible thing."

"Has Mr. Camber lived for long in this neighbourhood?" I ventured to inquire.

"It was about three years ago, sir, that he took the old Guest House at Mid-Hatton. I remember the time well enough because of all the trouble there was about him bringing a Chinaman down here."

"I can imagine it must have created something of a sensation," I murmured. "Is the Guest House a large property?"

"Oh, no, sir, only ten rooms and a garden, and it had been vacant for a long time. It belongs to what is called the Crayland Park Estate."

"Mr. Camber, I take it, is a literary man?"

"So I believe, sir."

Mrs. Wootton, having cleared the counter, glanced up at the clock and then at me with a cheery but significant smile.

"I see that it is after time," I said, returning the smile, "but the queer people who seem to live hereabouts interest me very much."

"I can't wonder at that, sir!" said the landlady, laughing outright. "Chinamen and Spanish men and what-not. If some of the old gentry that lived here before the war could see it, they wouldn't recognize the place, of that I am sure."

"Ah, well," said I, pausing at the step, "I shall hope to see more of Mr. Camber, and of yourself too, madam, for your ale is excellent."

"Thank you, sir, I'm sure," said the landlady much gratified, "but as to Mr. Camber, I really doubt if he would know you if you met him again. Not if he was sober, I mean."

"Really?"

"Oh, it's a fact, believe me. Just in the last six months or so he has started on the rampage like, but some of the people he has met in here and asked to call upon him have done it, thinking he meant it."

"And they have not been well received?" said I, lingering.

"They have had the door shut in their faces!" declared Mrs. Wootton with a certain indignation. "He either does not remember what he says or does when he is in drink, or he pretends he doesn't. Oh, dear, it's a funny world. Well, good-day, sir."

"Good-day," said I, and came out of the Lavender Arms full of sympathy with the views of the "old gentry," as outlined by Mrs. Wootton; for certainly it would seem that this quiet spot in the Surrey Hills had become a rallying
ground for peculiar people.

CHAPTER VIII
THE CALL OF M’KOMBO

Of tea upon the veranda of Cray’s Folly that afternoon I retain several notable memories. I got into closer touch with my host and hostess, without achieving anything like a proper understanding of either of them, and I procured a new viewpoint of Miss Val Beverley. Her repose was misleading. She deliberately subjugated her own vital personality to that of Madame de Staemer, why, I knew not, unless she felt herself under an obligation to do so. That her blue-gray eyes could be wistful was true enough, they could also be gay; and once I detected in them a look of sadness which dispelled the butterfly illusion belonging to her dainty slenderness, to her mobile lips, to the vagabond curling hair of russet brown.

Paul Harley’s manner remained absent, but I who knew his moods so well recognized that this abstraction was no longer real. It was a pose which he often adopted when in reality he was keenly interested in his surroundings. It baffled me, however, as effectively as it baffled others, and whilst at one moment I decided that he was studying Colonel Menendez, in the next I became convinced that Madame de Staemer was the subject upon his mental dissecting table.

That he should find in Madame a fascinating problem did not surprise me. She must have afforded tempting study for any psychologist. I could not fathom the nature of the kinship existing between herself and the Spanish colonel, for Madame de Staemer was French to her fingertips. Her expressions, her gestures, her whole outlook on life proclaimed the fashionable Parisienne.

She possessed a vigorous masculine intelligence and was the most entertaining companion imaginable. She was daringly outspoken, and it was hard to believe that her gaiety was forced. Yet, as the afternoon wore on, I became more and more convinced that such was the case.

I thought that before affliction visited her Madame de Staemer must have been a vivacious and a beautiful woman. Her vivacity remained and much of her beauty, so that it was difficult to believe her snow-white hair to be a product of nature. Again and again I found myself regarding it as a powdered coiffure of the Pompadour period and wondering why Madame wore no patches.

That a deep and sympathetic understanding existed between herself and Colonel Menendez was unmistakable. More than once I intercepted glances from the dark eyes of Madame which were lover-like, yet laden with a profound sorrow. She was playing a role, and I was convinced that Harley knew this. It was not merely a courageous fight against affliction on the part of a woman of the world, versed in masking her real self from the prying eyes of society, it was a studied performance prompted by some deeper motive.

She dressed with exquisite taste, and to see her seated there amid her cushions, gesticulating vivaciously, one would never have supposed that she was crippled. My admiration for her momentarily increased, the more so since I could see that she was sincerely fond of Val Beverley, whose every movement she followed with looks of almost motherly affection. This was all the more strange as Madame de Staemer whose age, I supposed, lay somewhere on the sunny side of forty, was of a type which expects, and wins, admiration, long after the average woman has ceased to be attractive.

One endowed with such a temperament is as a rule unreasonably jealous of youth and good looks in another. I could not determine if Madame’s attitude were to be ascribed to complacent self-satisfaction or to a nobler motive. It sufficed for me that she took an unfeigned joy in the youthful sweetness of her companion.

"Val, dear," she said, presently, addressing the girl, "you should make those sleeves shorter, my dear."

She had a rapid way of speaking, and possessed a slightly husky but fascinatingly vibrant voice.

"Your arms are very pretty. You should not hide them."

Val Beverley blushed, and laughed to conceal her embarrassment.

"Oh, my dear," exclaimed Madame, "why be ashamed of arms? All women have arms, but some do well to hide them."

"Quite right, Marie," agreed the Colonel, his thin voice affording an odd contrast to the deeper tones of his cousin. "But it is the scraggy ones who seem to delight in displaying their angles."

"The English, yes," Madame admitted, "but the French, no. They are too clever, Juan."

"Frenchwomen think too much about their looks," said Val Beverley, quietly. "Oh, you know they do, Madame. They would rather die than be without admiration."

Madame shrugged her shoulders.

"So would I, my dear," she confessed, "although I cannot walk. Without admiration there is"--she snapped her fingers--"nothing. And who would notice a linnet when a bird of paradise was about, however sweet her voice? Tell me that, my dear?"

Paul Harley aroused himself and laughed heartily.
"Yet," he said, "I think with Miss Beverley, that this love of elegance does not always make for happiness. Surely it is the cause of half the domestic tragedies in France?"

"Ah, the French love elegance," cried Madame, shrugging, "they cannot help it. To secure what is elegant a Frenchwoman will sometimes forget her husband, yes, but never forget herself."

"Really, Marie," protested the Colonel, "you say most strange things!"

"Is that so, Juan?" she replied, casting one of her queer glances in his direction; "but how would you like to be surrounded by a lot of drabs, eh? That man, Mr. Knox," she extended one white hand in the direction of Colonel Menendez, the fingers half closed, in a gesture which curiously reminded me of Sarah Bernhardt, "that man would notice if a parlourmaid came into the room with a shoe unbuttoned. Poof! if we love elegance it is because without it the men would never love _us_."

Colonel Menendez bent across the table and kissed the white fingers in his courtier-like fashion.

"My sweet cousin," he said, "I should love you in rags."

Madame smiled and flushed like a girl, but withdrawing her hand she shrugged.

"They would have to be _pretty_ rags!" she added.

During this little scene I detected Val Beverley looking at me in a vaguely troubled way, and it was easy to guess that she was wondering what construction I should place upon it. However:

"I am going into the town," declared Madame de Staemer, energetically. "Half the things ordered from Hartley's have never been sent."

"Oh, Madame, please let _me_ go," cried Val Beverley.

"My dear," pronounced Madame, "I will not let you go, but I will let you come with me if you wish."

She rang a little bell which stood upon the tea-table beside the urn, and Pedro came out through the drawing room.

"Pedro," she said, "is the car ready?"

The Spanish butler bowed.

"Tell Carter to bring it round. Hurry, dear," to the girl, "if you are coming with me. I shall not be a minute."

Thereupon she whisked her mechanical chair about, waved her hand to dismiss Pedro, and went steering through the drawing room at a great rate, with Val Beverley walking beside her.

As we resumed our seats Colonel Menendez lay back with half-closed eyes, his glance following the chair and its occupant until both were swallowed up in the shadows of the big drawing room.

"Madame de Staemer is a very remarkable woman," said Paul Harley.

"Remarkable?" replied the Colonel. "The spirit of all the old chivalry of France is imprisoned within her, I think."

He passed cigarettes around, of a long kind resembling cheroots and wrapped in tobacco leaf. I thought it strange that having thus emphasized Madame's nationality he did not feel it incumbent upon him to explain the mystery of their kinship. However, he made no attempt to do so, and almost before we had lighted up, a racy little two-seater was driven around the gravel path by Carter, the chauffeur who had brought us to Cray's Folly from London.

The man descended and began to arrange wraps and cushions, and a few moments later back came Madame again, dressed for driving. Carter was about to lift her into the car when Colonel Menendez stood up and advanced.

"Sit down, Juan, sit down!" said Madame, sharply.

A look of keen anxiety, I had almost said of pain, leapt into her eyes, and the Colonel hesitated.

"How often must I tell you," continued the throbbing voice, "that you must not exert yourself."

Colonel Menendez accepted the rebuke humbly, but the incident struck me as grotesque; for it was difficult to associate delicacy with such a fine specimen of well-preserved manhood as the Colonel.

However, Carter performed the duty of assisting Madame into her little car, and when for a moment he supported her upright, before placing her among the cushions, I noted that she was a tall woman, slender and elegant.

All smiles and light, sparkling conversation, she settled herself comfortably at the wheel and Val Beverley got in beside her. Madame nodded to Carter in dismissal, waved her hand to Colonel Menendez, cried "Au revoir!" and then away went the little car, swinging around the angle of the house and out of sight.

Our host stood bare-headed upon the veranda listening to the sound of the engine dying away among the trees. He seemed to be lost in reflection from which he only aroused himself when the purr of the motor became inaudible.

"And now, gentlemen," he said, and suppressed a sigh, "we have much to talk about. This spot is cool, but is it sufficiently private? Perhaps, Mr. Harley, you would prefer to talk in the library?"

Paul Harley flicked ash from the end of his cigarette.

"Better still in your own study, Colonel Menendez," he replied.

"What, do you suspect eavesdroppers?" asked the Colonel, his manner becoming momentarily agitated.
He looked at Harley as though he suspected the latter of possessing private information. "We should neglect no possible precaution," answered my friend. "That agencies inimical to your safety are focussed upon the house your own statement amply demonstrates."

Colonel Menendez seemed to be on the point of speaking again, but he checked himself and in silence led the way through the ornate library to a smaller room which opened out of it, and which was furnished as a study.

Here the motif was distinctly one of officioldom. Although the Southern element was not lacking, it was not so marked as in the library or in the hall. The place was appointed for utility rather than ornament. Everything was in perfect order. In the library, with the blinds drawn, one might have supposed oneself in Trinidad; in the study, under similar conditions, one might equally well have imagined Downing Street to lie outside the windows. Essentially, this was the workroom of a man of affairs.

Having settled ourselves comfortably, Paul Harley opened the conversation. "In several particulars," said he, "I find my information to be incomplete."

"For instance," he continued, "your detection of someone watching the house, and subsequently of someone forcing an entrance, had no visible association with the presence of the bat wing attached to your front door?"

"No," replied the Colonel, "these episodes took place a month ago."

"Exactly a month ago?"

"They took place immediately before the last full moon."

"Ah, before the full moon. And because you associate the activities of Voodoo with the full moon, you believe that the old menace has again become active?"

The Colonel nodded emphatically. He was busily engaged in rolling one of his eternal cigarettes. "This belief of yours was recently confirmed by the discovery of the bat wing?"

"I no longer doubted," said Colonel Menendez, shrugging his shoulders. "How could I?"

"Quite so," murmured Harley, absently, and evidently pursuing some private train of thought. "And now, I take it that your suspicions, if expressed in words would amount to this: During your last visit to Cuba you either killed some high priest of Voodoo, or seriously injured him? Assuming the first theory to be the correct one, your death was determined upon by the sect over which he had formerly presided. Assuming the second to be accurate, however, it is presumably the man himself for whom we must look. Now, Colonel Menendez, kindly inform me if you recall the name of this man?"

"I recall it very well," replied the Colonel. "His name was M'kombo, and he was a Benin negro."

"Assuming that he is still alive, what, roughly, would his age be today?"

The Colonel seemed to meditate, pushing a box of long Martinique cigars across the table in my direction. "He would be an old man," he pronounced. "I, myself, am fifty-two, and I should say that M'kombo if alive today would be nearer to seventy than sixty."

"Ah," murmured Harley, "and did he speak English?"

"A few words, I believe."

Paul Harley fixed his gaze upon the dark, aquiline face. "In short," he said, "do you really suspect that it was M'kombo whose shadow you saw upon the lawn, who a month ago made a midnight entrance into Cray's Folly, and who recently pinned a bat wing to the door?"

Colonel Menendez seemed somewhat taken aback by this direct question. "I cannot believe it," he confessed. "Do you believe that this order or religion of Voodooism has any existence outside those places where African negroes or descendants of negroes are settled?"

"I should not have been prepared to believe it, Mr. Harley, prior to my experiences in Washington and elsewhere."

"Then you do believe that there are representatives of this cult to be met with in Europe and America?"

"I should have been prepared to believe it possible in America, for in America there are many negroes, but in England----"

Again he shrugged his shoulders. "I would remind you," said Harley, quietly, "that there are also quite a number of negroes in England. If you seriously believe Voodoo to follow negro migration, I can see no objection to assuming it to be a universal cult."

"Such an idea is incredible."

"Yet by what other hypothesis," asked Harley, "are we to cover the facts of your own case as stated by yourself? Now," he consulted his pencilled notes, "there is another point. I gather that these African sorcerers rely largely upon what I may term intimidation. In other words, they claim the power of wishing an enemy to death."

He raised his eyes and stared grimly at the Colonel.
"I should not like to suppose that a man of your courage and culture could subscribe to such a belief."
"I do not, sir," declared the Colonel, warmly. "No Obeah man could ever exercise his will upon _me!_"
"Yet, if I may say so," murmured Harley, "your will to live seems to have become somewhat weakened." "What do you mean?"
Colonel Menendez stood up, his delicate nostrils dilated. He glared angrily at Harley. "I mean that I perceive a certain resignation in your manner of which I do not approve."
"You do not _approve?_" said Colonel Menendez, softly; and I thought as he stood looking down upon my friend that I had rarely seen a more formidable figure.

Paul Harley had roused him unaccountably, and knowing my friend for a master of tact I knew also that this had been deliberate, although I could not even dimly perceive his object.

"I occupy the position of a specialist," Harley continued, "and you occupy that of my patient. Now, you cannot disguise from me that your mental opposition to this danger which threatens has become slackened. Allow me to remind you that the strongest defence is counter-attack. You are angry, Colonel Menendez, but I would rather see you angry than apathetic. To come to my last point. You spoke of a neighbour in terms which led me to suppose that you suspected him of some association with your enemies. May I ask for the name of this person?"

Colonel Menendez sat down again, puffing furiously at his cigarette, whilst beginning to roll another. He was much disturbed, was fighting to regain mastery of himself.

"I apologize from the bottom of my heart," he said, "for a breach of good behaviour which really was unforgivable. I was angry when I should have been grateful. Much that you have said is true. Because it is true, I despise myself."

He flashed a glance at Paul Harley.
"Awake," he continued, "I care for no man breathing, black or white; but _asleep_"--he shrugged his shoulders. "It is in sleep that these dealers in unclean things obtain their advantage."

"You excite my curiosity," declared Harley.
"Listen," Colonel Menendez bent forward, resting his elbows upon his knees. Between the yellow fingers of his left hand he held the newly completed cigarette whilst he continued to puff vigorously at the old one. "You recollect my speaking of the death of a certain native girl?"

Paul Harley nodded.
"The real cause of her death was never known, but I obtained evidence to show that on the night after the wing of a bat had been attached to her hut, she wandered out in her sleep and visited the Black Belt. Can you doubt that someone was calling her?"

"Calling her?"
"Mr. Harley, she was obeying the call of M'kombo!"
"The _call_ of M'kombo? You refer to some kind of hypnotic suggestions?"
"I illustrate," replied the Colonel, "to help to make clear something which I have to tell you. On the night when last the moon was full--on the night after someone had entered the house--I had retired early to bed. Suddenly I awoke, feeling very cold. I awoke, I say, and where do you suppose I found myself?"

"On the point of entering the Tudor garden--you call it Tudor garden?--which is visible from the window of your room!"

"Most extraordinary," murmured Harley; "and you were in your night attire?"
"I was."
"And what had awakened you?"
"An accident. I believe a lucky accident. I had cut my bare foot upon the gravel and the pain awakened me."
"You had no recollection of any dream which had prompted you to go down into the garden?"
"None whatever."
"Does your room face in that direction?"
"It does not. It faces the lake on the south of the house. I had descended to a side door, unbarred it, and walked entirely around the east wing before I awakened."

"Your room faces the lake," murmured Harley.
"Yes."

Their glances met, and in Paul Harley's expression there seemed to be a challenge. "You have not yet told me," said he, "the name of your neighbour."

Colonel Menendez lighted his new cigarette. "Mr. Harley," he confessed, "I regret that I ever referred to this suspicion of mine. Indeed it is hardly a suspicion, it is what I may call a desperate doubt. Do you say that, a desperate doubt?"
"I think I follow you," said Harley.
"The fact is this, I only know of one person within ten miles of Cray's Folly who has ever visited Cuba."
"Ah."
"I have no other scrap of evidence to associate him I with my shadowy enemy. This being so, you will pardon
me if I ask you to forget that I ever referred to his existence."
He spoke the words with a sort of lofty finality, and accompanied them with a gesture of the hands which really
left Harley no alternative but to drop the subject.
Again their glances met, and it was patent to me that underlying all this conversation was something beyond my
ken. What it was that Harley suspected I could not imagine, nor what it was that Colonel Menendez desired to
conceal; but tension was in the very air. The Spaniard was on the defensive, and Paul Harley was puzzled, irritated.
It was a strange interview, and one which in the light of after events I recognized to possess extraordinary
significance. That sixth sense of Harley's was awake, was prompting him, but to what extent he understood its
promptings at that hour I did not know, and have never known to this day. Intuitively, I believe, as he sat there
staring at Colonel Menendez, he began to perceive the shadow within a shadow which was the secret of Cray's
Folly, which was the thing called Bat Wing, which was the devilish force at that very hour alive and potent in our
midst.
CHAPTER IX
OBEAH
This conversation in Colonel Menendez's study produced a very unpleasant impression upon my mind. The
atmosphere of Cray's Folly seemed to become charged with unrest. Of Madame de Staemer and Miss Beverley I saw
nothing up to the time that I retired to dress. Having dressed I walked into Harley's room, anxious to learn if he had
formed any theory to account for the singular business which had brought us to Surrey.
Harley had excused himself directly we had left the study, stating that he wished to get to the village post-office
in time to send a telegram to London. Our host had suggested a messenger, but this, as well as the offer of a car,
Harley had declined, saying that the exercise would aid reflection. Nevertheless, I was surprised to find his room
empty, for I could not imagine why the sending of a telegram should have detained him so long.
Dusk was falling, and viewed from the open window the Tudor garden below looked very beautiful, part of it
lying in a sort of purplish shadow and the rest being mysteriously lighted as though viewed through a golden veil. To
the whole picture a sort of magic quality was added by a speck of high-light which rested upon the face of the old
sun-dial.
I thought that here was a fit illustration for a fairy tale; then I remembered the Colonel's account of how he had
awakened in the act of entering this romantic plaisance, and I was touched anew by an unrestfulness, by a sense of
the uncanny.
I observed a book lying upon the dressing table, and concluding that it was one which Harley had brought with
him, I took it up, glancing at the title. It was "Negro Magic," and switching on the light, for there was a private
electric plant in Cray's Folly, I opened the book at random and began to read.
"The religion of the negro," said this authority, "is emotional, and more often than not associated with beliefs in
witchcraft and in the rites known as Voodoo or Obi Mysteries. It has been endeavoured by some students to show
that these are relics of the Fetish worship of equatorial Africa, but such a genealogy has never been satisfactorily
demonstrated. The cannibalistic rituals, human sacrifices, and obscene ceremonies resembling those of the Black
Sabbath of the Middle Ages, reported to prevail in Haiti and other of the islands, and by some among the negroes of
the Southern States of America, may be said to rest on doubtful authority. Nevertheless, it is a fact beyond doubt that
among the negroes both of the West Indies and the United States there is a widespread belief in the powers of the
Obeah man. A native who believes himself to have come under the spell of such a sorcerer will sink into a kind of
decline and sometimes die."
At this point I discovered several paragraphs underlined in pencil, and concluding that the underlining had been
done by Paul Harley, I read them with particular care. They were as follows: "According to Hesketh J. Bell, the term
Obeah is most probably derived from the substantive Obi, a word used on the East coast of Africa to denote
witchcraft, sorcery, and fetishism in general. The etymology of Obi has been traced to a very antique source,
stretching far back into Egyptian mythology. A serpent in the Egyptian language was called Ob or Aub. Obion is
still the Egyptian name for a serpent. Moses, in the name of God, forbade the Israelites ever to enquire of the demon,
Ob, which is translated in our Bible: Charmer or wizard, divinator or sorcerer. The Witch of Endor is called Oub or
Ob, translated Pythonissa; and Oubois was the name of the basilisk or royal serpent, emblem of the Sun and an
ancient oracular deity of Africa."
A paragraph followed which was doubly underlined, and pursuing my reading I made a discovery which literally
caused me to hold my breath. This is what I read:
"In a recent contribution to the _Occult Review_, Mr. Colin Camber, the American authority, offered some very curious particulars in support of a theory to show that whereas snakes and scorpions have always been recognized as sacred by Voodoo worshippers, the real emblem of their unclean religion is the bat, especially _the Vampire Bat of South America._

He pointed out that the symptoms of one dying beneath the spell of an Obeah man are closely paralleled in the cases of men and animals who have suffered from nocturnal attacks of blood-sucking bats."

I laid the open book down upon the bed. My brain was in a tumult. The several theories, or outlines of theories which hitherto I had entertained, were, by these simple paragraphs, cast into the utmost disorder. I thought of the Colonel's covert references to a neighbour whom he feared, of his guarded statement that the devotees of Voodoo were not confined to the West Indies, of the attack upon him in Washington, of the bat wing pinned to the door of Cray's Folly.

Incredulously, I thought of my acquaintance of the Lavender Arms, with his bemused expression and his magnificent brow; and a great doubt and wonder grew up in my mind.

I became increasingly impatient for the return of Paul Harley. I felt that a clue of the first importance had fallen into my possession; so that when, presently, as I walked impatiently up and down the room, the door opened and Harley entered, I greeted him excitedly.

"Harley!" I cried, "Harley! I have learned a most extraordinary thing!"

Even as I spoke and looked into the keen, eager face, the expression in Harley's eyes struck me. I recognized that in him, too, intense excitement was pent up. Furthermore, he was in one of his irritable moods. But, full of my own discoveries:

"I chanced to glance at this book," I continued, "whilst I was waiting for you. You have underlined certain passages."

He stared at me queerly.

"I discovered the book in my own library after you had gone last night, Knox, and it was then that I marked the passages which struck me as significant."

"But, Harley," I cried, "the man who is quoted here, Colin Camber, lives in this very neighbourhood!"

"I know."

"What! You know?"

"I learned it from Inspector Aylesbury of the County Police half an hour ago."

Harley frowned perplexedly. "Then, why, in Heaven's name didn't you tell me?" he exclaimed. "It would have saved me a most disagreeable journey into Market Hilton."

"Market Hilton! What, have you been into the town?"

"That is exactly where I have been, Knox. I 'phoned through to Innes from the village post-office after lunch to have the car sent down. There is a convenient garage by the Lavender Arms."

"But the Colonel has three cars," I exclaimed.

"The horse has four legs," replied Harley, irritably, "but although I have only two, there are times when I prefer to use them. I am still wondering why you failed to mention this piece of information when you had obtained it."

"My dear Harley," said I, patiently, "how could I possibly be expected to attach any importance to the matter? You must remember that at the time I had never seen this work on negro sorcery."

"No," said Harley, dropping down upon the bed, "that is perfectly true, Knox. I am afraid I have a liver at times; a distinct Indian liver. Excuse me, old man, but to tell you the truth I feel strangely inclined to pack my bag and leave for London without a moment's delay."

"What!" I cried.

"Oh, I know you would be sorry to go, Knox," said Harley, smiling, "and so, for many reasons, should I. But I have the strongest possible objection to being trifled with."

"I am afraid I don't quite understand you, Harley."

"Well, just consider the matter for a moment. Do you suppose that Colonel Menendez is ignorant of the fact that his nearest neighbour is a recognized authority upon Voodoo and allied subjects?"

"You are speaking, of course, of Colin Camber?"

"Of none other."

"No," I replied, thoughtfully, "the Colonel must know, of course, that Camber resides in the neighbourhood."

"And that he knows something of the nature of Camber's studies his remarks sufficiently indicate," added Harley. "The whole theory to account for these attacks upon his life rests on the premise that agents of these Obeah people are established in England and America. Then, in spite of my direct questions, he leaves me to find out for myself that Colin Camber's property practically adjoins his own!"

"Really! Does he reside so near as that?"
"My dear fellow," cried Harley, "he lives at a place called the Guest House. You can see it from part of the
grounds of Cray's Folly. We were looking at it to-day."
"What! the house on the hillside?"
"That's the Guest House! What do you make of it, Knox? That Menendez suspects this man is beyond doubt.
Why should he hesitate to mention his name?"
"Well," I replied, slowly, "probably because to associate practical sorcery and assassination with such a
character would be preposterous."
"But the man is admittedly a student of these things, Knox."
"He may be, and that he is a genius of some kind I am quite prepared to believe. But having had the pleasure of
meeting Mr. Colin Camber, I am not prepared to believe him capable of murder."
I suppose I spoke with a certain air of triumph, for Paul Harley regarded me silently for a while.
"You seem to be taking this case out of my hands, Knox," he said. "Whilst I have been systematically at work
racing about the county in quest of information you would appear to have blundered further into the labyrinth than
all my industry has enabled me to do."
He remained in a very evil humour, and now the cause of this suddenly came to light.
"I have spent a thoroughly unpleasant afternoon," he continued, "interviewing an impossible country policeman
who had never heard of my existence!"
This display of human resentment honestly delighted me. It was refreshing to know that the omniscient Paul
Harley was capable of pique.
"One, Inspector Aylesbury," he went on, bitterly, "a large person bearing a really interesting resemblance to a
walrus, but lacking that creature's intelligence. It was not until Superintendent East had spoken to him from Scotland
Yard that he ceased to treat me as a suspect. But his new attitude was almost more provoking than the old one. He
adopted the manner of a regimental sergeant-major reluctantly interviewing a private with a grievance. If matters
should so develop that we are compelled to deal with that fish-faced idiot, God help us all!"
He burst out laughing, his good humour suddenly quite restored, and taking out his pipe began industriously to
load it.
"I can smoke while I am changing," he said, "and you can sit there and tell me all about Colin Camber."
I did as he requested, and Harley, who could change quicker than any man I had ever known, had just finished
tying his bow as I completed my story of the encounter at the Lavender Arms.
"Hm," he muttered, as I ceased speaking. "At every turn I realize that without you I should have been lost, Knox.
I am afraid I shall have to change your duties to-morrow."
"Change my duties? What do you mean?"
"I warn you that the new ones will be less pleasant than the old! In other words, I must ask you to tear yourself
away from Miss Val Beverley for an hour in the morning, and take advantage of Mr. Camber's invitation to call
upon him."
"Frankly, I doubt if he would acknowledge me."
"Nevertheless, you have a better excuse than I. In the circumstances it is most important that we should get in
touch with this man."
"Very well," I said, ruefully. "I will do my best. But you don't seriously think, Harley, that the danger comes
from there?"
Paul Harley took his dinner jacket from the chair upon which the man had laid it out, and turned to me.
"My dear Knox," he said, "you may remember that I spoke, recently, of retiring from this profession?"
"You did."
"My retirement will not be voluntary, Knox. I shall be kicked out as an incompetent ass; for, respecting the
connection, if any, between the narrative of Colonel Menendez, the bat wing nailed to the door of the house, and Mr.
Colin Camber, I have not the foggiest notion. In this, at last, I have triumphed over Auguste Dupin. Auguste Dupin
never confessed defeat."

CHAPTER X
THE NIGHT WALKER

If luncheon had seemed extravagant, dinner at Cray's Folly proved to be a veritable Roman banquet. To associate
ideas of selfishness with Miss Beverley was hateful, but the more I learned of the luxurious life of this queer
household hidden away in the Surrey Hills the less I wondered at any one's consenting to share such exile. I had
hitherto counted an American freak dinner, organized by a lucky plunger and held at the Cafe de Paris, as the last
word in extravagant feasting. But I learned now that what was caviare in Monte Carlo was ordinary fare at Cray's
Folly.
Colonel Menendez was an epicure with an endless purse. The excellence of one of the courses upon which I had
commented led to a curious incident.

"You approve of the efforts of my chef?" said the Colonel.

"He is worthy of his employer," I replied.

Colonel Menendez bowed in his cavalierly fashion and Madame de Staemer positively beamed upon me.

"You shall speak for him," said the Spaniard. "He was with me in Cuba, but has no reputation in London. There are hotels that would snap him up."

I looked at the speaker in surprise.

"Surely he is not leaving you?" I asked.

The Colonel exhibited a momentary embarrassment.

"No, no. No, no," he replied, waving his hand gracefully, "I was only thinking that he--" there was a scarcely perceptible pause--"might wish to better himself. You understand?"

I understood only too well; and recollecting the words spoken by Paul Harley that afternoon, respecting the Colonel's will to live, I became conscious of an uncomfortable sense of chill.

If I had doubted that in so speaking he had been contemplating his own death, the behaviour of Madame de Staemer must have convinced me. Her complexion was slightly but cleverly made up, with all the exquisite art of the Parisienne, but even through the artificial bloom I saw her cheeks blanch. Her face grew haggard and her eyes burned unnaturally. She turned quickly aside to address Paul Harley, but I knew that the significance of this slight episode had not escaped him.

He was by no means at ease. In the first place, he was badly puzzled; in the second place, he was angry. He felt it incumbent upon him to save this man from a menace which he, Paul Harley, evidently recognized to be real, although to me it appeared wildly chimerical, and the very person upon whose active cooeperation he naturally counted not only seemed resigned to his fate, but by deliberate omission of important data added to Harley's difficulties.

How much of this secret drama proceeding in Cray's Folly was appreciated by Val Beverley I could not determine. On this occasion, I remember, she was simply but perfectly dressed and, in my eyes, seemed the most sweetly desirable woman I had ever known. Her complexion was slightly but cleverly made up, with all the exquisite art of the Parisienne, but even through the artificial bloom I saw her cheeks blanch. Her face grew haggard and her eyes burned unnaturally. She turned quickly aside to address Paul Harley, but I knew that the significance of this slight episode had not escaped him.

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How much of this secret drama proceeding in Cray's Folly was appreciated by Val Beverley I could not determine. On this occasion, I remember, she was simply but perfectly dressed and, in my eyes, seemed the most sweetly desirable woman I had ever known. Realizing that I had already revealed my interest in the girl, I was oddly self-conscious, and a hundred times during the progress of dinner I glanced across at Harley, expecting to detect his quizzical smile. He was very stern, however, and seemed more reserved than usual. He was uncertain of his ground, I could see. He resented the understanding which evidently existed between Colonel Menendez and Madame de Staemer, and to which, although his aid had been sought, he was not admitted.

It seemed to me, personally, that an almost palpable shadow lay upon the room. Although, save for this one lapse, our host throughout talked gaily and entertainingly, I was obsessed by a memory of the expression which I had detected upon his face that morning, the expression of a doomed man.

What, in Heaven's name, I asked myself, did it all mean? If ever I saw the fighting spirit looking out of any man's eyes, it looked out of the eyes of Don Juan Sarmiento Menendez. Why, then, did he lie down to the menace of this mysterious Bat Wing, and if he counted opposition futile, why had he summoned Paul Harley to Cray's Folly?

With the passing of every moment I sympathized more fully with the perplexity of my friend, and no longer wondered that even his highly specialized faculties had failed to detect an explanation.

Remembering Colin Camber as I had seen him at the Lavender Arms, it was simply impossible to suppose that such a man as Menendez could fear such a man as Camber. True, I had seen the latter at a disadvantage, and I knew well enough that many a genius has been also a drunkard. But although I was prepared to find that Colin Camber possessed genius, I found it hard to believe that this was of a criminal type. That such a character could be the representative of some remote negro society was an idea too grotesque to be entertained for a moment.

I was tempted to believe that his presence in the neighbourhood of this haunted Cuban was one of those strange coincidences which in criminal history have sometimes proved so tragic for their victims.

Madame de Staemer, avoiding the Colonel's glances, which were pathetically apologetic, gradually recovered herself, and:

"My dear," she said to Val Beverley, "you look perfectly sweet to- night. Don't you think she looks perfectly sweet, Mr. Knox?"

Ignoring a look of entreaty from the blue-gray eyes:

"Perfectly," I replied.

"Oh, Mr. Knox," cried the girl, "why do you encourage her? She says embarrassing things like that every time I put on a new dress."

Her reference to a new dress set me speculating again upon the apparent anomaly of her presence at Cray's Folly. That she was not a professional "companion" was clear enough. I assumed that her father had left her suitably provided for, since she wore such expensively simple gowns. She had a delightful trick of blushing when attention
was focussed upon her, and said Madame de Staemer:

"To be able to blush like that I would give my string of pearls--no, half of it."

"My dear Marie," declared Colonel Menendez, "I have seen you blush perfectly."

"No, no," Madame disclaimed the suggestion with one of those Bernhardt gestures, "I blushed my last blush when my second husband introduced me to my first husband's wife."

"Madame!" exclaimed Val Beverley, "how can you say such things?" She turned to me. "Really, Mr. Knox, they are all fables."

"In fables we renew our youth," said Madame.

"Ah," sighed Colonel Menendez; "our youth, our youth."

"Why sigh, Juan, why regret?" cried Madame, immediately. "Old age is only tragic to those who have never been young."

She directed a glance toward him as she spoke those words, and as I had felt when I had seen his tragic face on the veranda that morning I felt again in detecting this look of Madame de Staemer's. The yearning yet selfless love which it expressed was not for my eyes to witness.

"Thank God, Marie," replied the Colonel, and gallantly kissed his hand to her, "we have both been young, gloriously young."

When, at the termination of this truly historic dinner, the ladies left us:

"Remember, Juan," said Madame, raising her white, jewelled hand, and holding the fingers characteristically curled, "no excitement, no billiards, no cards."

Colonel Menendez bowed deeply, as the invalid wheeled herself from the room, followed by Miss Beverley. My heart was beating delightfully, for in the moment of departure the latter had favoured me with a significant glance, which seemed to say, "I am looking forward to a chat with you presently."

"Ah," said Colonel Menendez, when we three men found ourselves alone, "truly I am blessed in the autumn of my life with such charming companionship. Beauty and wit, youth and discretion. Is he not a happy man who possesses all these?"

"He should be," said Harley, gravely.

The saturnine Pedro entered with some wonderful crusted port, and Colonel Menendez offered cigars.

"I believe you are a pipe-smoker," said our courteous host to Harley, "and if this is so, I know that you will prefer your favourite mixture to any cigar that ever was rolled."

"Many thanks," said Harley, to whom no more delicate compliment could have been paid.

He was indeed an inveterate pipe-smoker, and only rarely did he truly enjoy a cigar, however choice its pedigree. With a sigh of content he began to fill his briar. His mood was more restful, and covertly I watched him studying our host. The night remained very warm and one of the two windows of the dining room, which was the most homely apartment in Cray's Folly, was wide open, offering a prospect of sweeping velvet lawns touched by the magic of the moonlight.

A short silence fell, to be broken by the Colonel.

"Gentlemen," he said, "I trust you do not regret your fishing excursion?"

"I could cheerfully pass the rest of my days in such ideal surroundings," replied Paul Harley.

I nodded in agreement.

"But," continued my friend, speaking very deliberately, "I have to remember that I am here upon business, and that my professional reputation is perhaps at stake."

He stared very hard at Colonel Menendez.

"I have spoken with your butler, known as Pedro, and with some of the other servants, and have learned all that there is to be learned about the person unknown who gained admittance to the house a month ago, and concerning the wing of a bat, found attached to the door more recently."

"And to what conclusion have you come?" asked Colonel Menendez, eagerly.

He bent forward, resting his elbows upon his knees, a pose which he frequently adopted. He was smoking a cigar, but his total absorption in the topic under discussion was revealed by the fact that from a pocket in his dinner jacket he had taken out a portion of tobacco, had laid it in a slip of rice paper, and was busily rolling one of his eternal cigarettes.

"I might be enabled to come to one," replied Harley, "if you would answer a very simple question."

"What is this question?"

"It is this--Have you any idea who nailed the bat's wing to your door?"

Colonel Menendez's eyes opened very widely, and his face became more aquiline than ever.

"You have heard my story, Mr. Harley," he replied, softly. "If I know the explanation, why do I come to you?"

Paul Harley puffed at his pipe. His expression did not alter in the slightest.
"I merely wondered if your suspicions tended in the direction of Mr. Colin Camber," he said.
"Colin Camber!"

As the Colonel spoke the name either I became victim of a strange delusion or his face was momentarily convulsed. If my senses served me aright then his pronouncing of the words "Colin Camber" occasioned him positive agony. He clutched the arms of his chair, striving, I thought, to retain composure, and in this he succeeded, for when he spoke again his voice was quite normal.
"Have you any particular reason for your remark, Mr. Harley?"

"I have a reason," replied Paul Harley, "but don't misunderstand me. I suggest nothing against Mr. Camber. I should be glad, however, to know if you are acquainted with him?"

"We have never met."
"You possibly know him by repute?"

"I have heard of him, Mr. Harley. But to be perfectly frank, I have little in common with citizens of the United States."

A note of arrogance, which at times crept into his high, thin voice, became perceptible now, and the aristocratic, aquiline face looked very supercilious.

How the conversation would have developed I know not, but at this moment Pedro entered and delivered a message in Spanish to the Colonel, whereupon the latter arose and with very profuse apologies begged permission to leave us for a few moments.

When he had retired:
"I am going upstairs to write a letter, Knox," said Paul Harley. "Carry on with your old duties to-day, your new ones do not commence until to-morrow."

With that he laughed and walked out of the dining room, leaving me wondering whether to be grateful or annoyed. However, it did not take me long to find my way to the drawing room where the two ladies were seated side by side upon a settee, Madame's chair having been wheeled into a corner.

"Ah, Mr. Knox," exclaimed Madame as I entered, "have the others deserted, then?"

"Scarcely deserted, I think. They are merely straggling."

"Absent without leave," murmured Val Beverley.

I laughed, and drew up a chair. Madame de Staemer was smoking, but Miss Beverley was not. Accordingly, I offered her a cigarette, which she accepted, and as I was lighting it with elaborate care, every moment finding a new beauty in her charming face, Pedro again appeared and addressed some remark in Spanish to Madame.

"My chair, Pedro," she said; "I will come at once."

The Spanish butler wheeled the chair across to the settee, and lifting her with an ease which spoke of long practice, placed her amidst the cushions where she spent so many hours of her life.

"I know you will excuse me, dear," she said to Val Beverley, "because I feel sure that Mr. Knox will do his very best to make up for my absence. Presently, I shall be back."

Pedro holding the door open, she went wheeling out, and I found myself alone with Val Beverley.

At the time I was much too delighted to question the circumstances which had led to this tete-a-tete, but had I cared to give the matter any consideration, it must have presented rather curious features. The call first of host and then of hostess was inconsistent with the courtesy of the master of Cray's Folly, which, like the appointments of his home and his mode of life, was elaborate. But these ideas did not trouble me at the moment.

Suddenly, however, indeed before I had time to speak, the girl started and laid her hand upon my arm.
"Did you hear something?" she whispered, "a queer sort of sound?"

"No," I replied, "what kind of sound?"

"An odd sort of sound, almost like--the flapping of wings."

I saw that she had turned pale, I saw the confirmation of something which I had only partly realised before: that her life at Cray's Folly was a constant fight against some haunting shadow. Her gaiety, her lightness, were but a mask. For now, in those wide-open eyes, I read absolute horror.

"Miss Beverley," I said, grasping her hand reassuringly, "you alarm me. What has made you so nervous to-night?"

"To-night!" she echoed, "to-night? It is every night. If you had not come--" she corrected herself--"if someone had not come, I don't think I could have stayed. I am sure I could not have stayed."

"Doubtless the attempted burglary alarmed you?" I suggested, intending to soothe her fears.

"Burglary?" She smiled unmirthfully. "It was no burglary."

"Why do you say so, Miss Beverley?"

"Do you think I don't know why Mr. Harley is here?" she challenged. "Oh, believe me, I know--I know. I, too, saw the bat's wing nailed to the door, Mr. Knox. You are surely not going to suggest that this was the work of a
"burglar?"

I seated myself beside her on the settee.
"You have great courage," I said. "Believe me, I quite understand all that you have suffered."
"Is my acting so poor?" she asked, with a pathetic smile.
"No, it is wonderful, but to a sympathetic observer only acting, nevertheless."
I noted that my presence reassured her, and was much comforted by this fact.
"Would you like to tell me all about it," I continued; "or would this merely renew your fears?"
"I should like to tell you," she replied in a low voice, glancing about her as if to make sure that we were alone.
"Except for odd people, friends, I suppose, of the Colonel's, we have had so few visitors since we have been at Cray's Folly. Apart from all sorts of queer happenings which really"--she laughed nervously--"may have no significance whatever, the crowning mystery to my mind is why Colonel Menendez should have leased this huge house."

"He does not entertain very much, then?"
"Scarcely at all. The 'County'--do you know what I mean by the 'County'?--began by receiving him with open arms and ended by sending him to Coventry. His lavish style of entertainment they labelled 'swank'--horrible word but very expressive! They concluded that they did not understand him, and of everything they don't understand they disapprove. So after the first month or so it became very lonely at Cray's Folly. Our foreign servants--there are five of them altogether-- got us a dreadfully bad name. Then, little by little, a sort of cloud seemed to settle on everything. The Colonel made two visits abroad, I don't know exactly where he went, but on his return from the first visit Madame de Staemer changed."
"Changed?--in what way?"
"I am afraid it would be hopeless to try to make you understand, Mr. Knox, but in some subtle way she changed. Underneath all her vivacity she is a tragic woman, and--oh, how can I explain?" Val Beverley made a little gesture of despair.
"Perhaps you mean," I suggested, "that she seemed to become even less happy than before?"
"Yes," she replied, looking at me eagerly. "Has Colonel Menendez told you anything to account for it?"
"Nothing," I said, "He has left us strangely in the dark. But you say he went abroad on a second and more recent occasion?"
"Yes, not much more than a month ago. And after that, somehow or other, matters seemed to come to a head. I confess I became horribly frightened, but to have left would have seemed like desertion, and Madame de Staemer has been so good to me."
"Did you actually witness any of the episodes which took place about a month ago?"
Val Beverley shook her head.
"I never saw anything really definite," she replied.
"Yet, evidently you either saw or heard something which alarmed you."
"Yes, that is true, but it is so difficult to explain."
"Could you try to explain?"
"I will try if you wish, for really I am longing to talk to someone about it. For instance, on several occasions I have heard footsteps in the corridor outside my room."
"At night?"
"Yes, at night."
"Strange footsteps?"
She nodded.
"That is the uncanny part of it. You know how familiar one grows with the footsteps of persons living in the same house? Well, these footsteps were quite unfamiliar to me."
"And you say they passed your door?"
"Yes. My rooms are almost directly overhead. And right at the end of the corridor, that is on the southeast corner of the building, is Colonel Menendez's bedroom, and facing it a sort of little smoke-room. It was in this direction that the footsteps went."
"To Colonel Menendez's room?"
"Yes. They were light, furtive footsteps."
"This took place late at night?"
"Quite late, long after everyone had retired."
She paused, staring at me with a sort of embarrassment, and presently:
"Were the footsteps those of a man or a woman?" I asked.
"Of a woman. Someone, Mr. Knox," she bent forward, and that look of fear began to creep into her eyes again,
"with whose footsteps I was quite unfamiliar."

"You mean a stranger to the house?"

"Yes. Oh, it was uncanny." She shuddered. "The first time I heard it I had been lying awake listening. I was nervous. Madame de Staemer had told me that morning that the Colonel had seen someone lurking about the lawns on the previous night. Then, as I lay awake listening for the slightest sound, I suddenly detected these footsteps; and they paused-- right outside my door."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed. "What did you do?"

"Frankly, I was too frightened to do anything. I just lay still with my heart beating horribly, and presently they passed on, and I heard them no more."

"Was your door locked?"

"No." She laughed nervously. "But it has been locked every night since then!"

"And these sounds were repeated on other nights?"

"Yes, I have often heard them, Mr. Knox. What makes it so strange is that all the servants sleep out in the west wing, as you know, and Pedro locks the communicating door every night before retiring."

"It is certainly strange," I muttered.

"It is horrible," declared the girl, almost in a whisper. "For what can it mean except that there is someone in Cray's Folly who is never seen during the daytime?"

"But that is incredible."

"It is not so incredible in a big house like this. Besides, what other explanation can there be?"

"There must be one," I said, reassuringly. "Have you spoken of this to Madame de Staemer?"

"Yes."

Val Beverley's expression grew troubled.

"Had she any explanation to offer?"

"None. Her attitude mystified me very much. Indeed, instead of reassuring me, she frightened me more than ever by her very silence. I grew to dread the coming of each night. Then--" she hesitated again, looking at me pathetically--"twice I have been awakened by a loud cry."

"What kind of cry?"

"I could not tell you, Mr. Knox. You see I have always been asleep when it has come, but I have sat up trembling and dimly aware that what had awakened me was a cry of some kind."

"You have no idea from whence it proceeded?"

"None whatever. Of course, all these things may seem trivial to you, and possibly they can be explained in quite a simple way. But this feeling of something pending has grown almost unendurable. Then, I don't understand Madame and the Colonel at all."

She suddenly stopped speaking and flushed with embarrassment.

"If you mean that Madame de Staemer is in love with her cousin, I agree with you," I said, quietly.

"Oh, is it so evident as that?" murmured Val Beverley. She laughed to cover her confusion. "I wish I could understand what it all means."

At this point our tete-a-tete was interrupted by the return of Madame de Staemer.

"Oh, la la!" she cried, "the Colonel must have allowed himself to become too animated this evening. He is threatened with one of his attacks and I have insisted upon his immediate retirement. He makes his apologies, but knows you will understand."

I expressed my concern, and:

"I was unaware that Colonel Menendez's health was impaired," I said.

"Ah," Madame shrugged characteristically. "Juan has travelled too much of the road of life on top speed, Mr. Knox." She snapped her white fingers and grimaced significantly. "Excitement is bad for him."

She wheeled her chair up beside Val Beverley, and taking the girl's hand patted it affectionately.

"You look pale to-night, my dear," she said. "All this bogey business is getting on your nerves, eh?"

"Oh, not at all," declared the girl. "It is very mysterious and annoying, of course."

"But M. Paul Harley will presently tell us what it is all about," concluded Madame. "Yes, I trust so. We want no Cuban devils here at Cray's Folly."

I had hoped that she would speak further of the matter, but having thus apologized for our host's absence, she plunged into an amusing account of Parisian society, and of the changes which five years of war had brought about. Her comments, although brilliant, were superficial, the only point I recollect being her reference to a certain Baron Bergmann, a Swedish diplomat, who, according to Madame, had the longest nose and the shortest memory in Paris, so that in the cold weather, "he even sometimes forgot to blow his nose."

Her brightness I thought was almost feverish. She chattered and laughed and gesticulated, but on this occasion
she was overacting. Underneath all her vivacity lay something cold and grim.

Harley rejoined us in half an hour or so, but I could see that he was as conscious of the air of tension as I was. All Madame's high spirits could not enable her to conceal the fact that she was anxious to retire. But Harley's evident desire to do likewise surprised me very greatly; for from the point of view of the investigation the day had been an unsatisfactory one. I knew that there must be a hundred and one things which my friend desired to know, questions which Madame de Staemer could have answered. Nevertheless, at about ten o'clock we separated for the night, and although I was intensely anxious to talk to Harley, his reticent mood had descended upon him again, and:

"Sleep well, Knox," he said, as he paused at my door. "I may be awakening you early."

With which cryptic remark and not another word he passed on and entered his own room.

CHAPTER XI
THE SHADOW ON THE BLIND

Perhaps it was childish on my part, but I accepted this curt dismissal very ill-humouredly. That Harley, for some reason of his own, wished to be alone, was evident enough, but I resented being excluded from his confidence, even temporarily. It would seem that he had formed a theory in the prosecution of which my cooperation was not needed. And what with profitless conjectures concerning its nature, and memories of Val Beverley's pathetic parting glance as we had bade one another good-night, sleep seemed to be out of the question, and I stood for a long time staring out of the open window.

The weather remained almost tropically hot, and the moon floated in a cloudless sky. I looked down upon the closely matted leaves of the box hedge, which rose to within a few feet of my window, and to the left I could obtain a view of the close-hemmed courtyard before the doors of Cray's Folly. On the right the yews began, obstructing my view of the Tudor garden, but the night air was fragrant, and the outlook one of peace.

After a time, then, as no sound came from the adjoining room, I turned in, and despite all things was soon fast asleep.

Almost immediately, it seemed, I was awakened. In point of fact, nearly four hours had elapsed. A hand grasped my shoulder, and I sprang up in bed with a stifled cry, but:

"It's all right, Knox," came Harley's voice. "Don't make a noise."

"Harley!" I said. "Harley! what has happened?"

"Nothing, nothing. I am sorry to have to disturb your beauty sleep, but in the absence of Innes I am compelled to use you as a dictaphone, Knox. I like to record impressions while they are fresh, hence my having awakened you."

"But what has happened?" I asked again, for my brain was not yet fully alert.

"No, don't light up!" said Harley, grasping my wrist as I reached out toward the table-lamp.

His figure showed as a black silhouette against the dim square of the window.

"Why not?"

"Well, it's nearly two o'clock. The light might be observed."

"Two o'clock?" I exclaimed.

"Yes. I think we might smoke, though. Have you any cigarettes? I have left my pipe behind."

I managed to find my case, and in the dim light of the match which I presently struck I saw that Paul Harley's face was very fixed and grim. He seated himself on the edge of my bed, and:

"I have been guilty of a breach of hospitality, Knox," he began. "Not only have I secretly had my own car sent down here, but I have had something else sent, as well. I brought it in under my coat this evening."

"To what do you refer, Harley?"

"You remember the silken rope-ladder with bamboo rungs which I brought from Hongkong on one occasion?"

"Yes--"

"Well, I have it in my bag now."

"But, my dear fellow, what possible use can it be to you at Cray's Folly?"

"It has been of great use," he returned, shortly.

"It enabled me to descend from my window a couple of hours ago and to return again quite recently without disturbing the household. Don't reproach me, Knox. I know it is a breach of confidence, but so is the behaviour of Colonel Menendez."

"You refer to his reticence on certain points?"

"I do. I have a reputation to lose, Knox, and if an ingenious piece of Chinese workmanship can save it, it shall be saved."

"But, my dear Harley, why should you want to leave the house secretly at night?"

Paul Harley's cigarette glowed in the dark, then:

"My original object," he replied, "was to endeavour to learn if any one were really watching the place. For instance, I wanted to see if all lights were out at the Guest House."
"And were they?" I asked, eagerly.
"They were. Secondly," he continued, "I wanted to convince myself that there were no nocturnal prowlers from within or without."
"What do you mean by within or without?"
"Listen, Knox." He bent toward me in the dark, grasping my shoulder firmly. "One window in Cray's Folly was lighted up."
"At what hour?"
"The light is there yet."
That he was about to make some strange revelation I divined. I detected the fact, too, that he believed this revelation would be unpleasant to me; and in this I found an explanation of his earlier behaviour. He had seemed distraught and ill at ease when he had joined Madame de Staemer, Miss Beverley, and myself in the drawing room. I could only suppose that this and the abrupt parting with me outside my door had been due to his holding a theory which he had proposed to put to the test before confiding it to me. I remember that I spoke very slowly as I asked him the question:
"Whose is the lighted window, Harley?"
"Has Colonel Menendez taken you into a little snuggery or smoke-room which faces his bedroom in the southeast corner of the house?"
"No, but Miss Beverley has mentioned the room."
"Ah. Well, there is a light in that room, Knox."
"Possibly the Colonel has not retired?"
"According to Madame de Staemer he went to bed several hours ago, you may remember."
"True," I murmured, fumbling for the significance of his words.
"The next point is this," he resumed. "You saw Madame retire to her own room, which, as you know, is on the ground floor, and I have satisfied myself that the door communicating with the servants' wing is locked."
"I see. But to what is all this leading, Harley?"
"To a very curious fact, and the fact is this: The Colonel is not alone."
I sat bolt upright.
"What?" I cried.
"Not so loud," warned Harley.
"But, Harley--"
"My dear fellow, we must face facts. I repeat, the Colonel is not alone."
"Why do you say so?"
"Twice I have seen a shadow on the blind of the smoke-room."
"His own shadow, probably." Again Paul Harley's cigarette glowed in the darkness.
"I am prepared to swear," he replied, "that it was the shadow of a woman."
"Harley---"
"Don't get excited, Knox. I am dealing with the strangest case of my career, and I am jumping to no conclusions. But just let us look at the circumstances judicially. The whole of the domestic staff we may dismiss, with the one exception of Mrs. Fisher, who, so far as I can make out, occupies the position of a sort of working housekeeper, and whose rooms are in the corner of the west wing immediately facing the kitchen garden. Possibly you have not met Mrs. Fisher, Knox, but I have made it my business to interview the whole of the staff and I may say that Mrs. Fisher is a short, stout old lady, a native of Kent, I believe, whose outline in no way corresponds to that which I saw upon the blind. Therefore, unless the door which communicates with the servants' quarters was unlocked again to-night--to what are we reduced in seeking to explain the presence of a woman in Colonel Menendez's room? Madame de Staemer, unassisted, could not possibly have mounted the stairs."
"Stop, Harley!" I said, sternly. "Stop."
He ceased speaking, and I watched the steady glow of his cigarette in the darkness. It lighted up his bronzed face and showed me the steely gleam of his eyes.
"You are counting too much on the locking of the door by Pedro," I continued, speaking very deliberately. "He is a man I would trust no farther than I could see him, and if there is anything dark underlying this matter you depend that he is involved in it. But the most natural explanation, and also the most simple, is this--Colonel Menendez has been taken seriously ill, and someone is in his room in the capacity of a nurse."
"Her behaviour was scarcely that of a nurse in a sick-room," murmured Harley.
"For God's sake tell me the truth," I said. "Tell me all you saw."
"I am quite prepared to do so, Knox. On three occasions, then, I saw the figure of a woman, who wore some kind
of loose robe, quite clearly silhouetted upon the linen blind. Her gestures strongly resembled those of despair."

"Of despair?"

"Exactly. I gathered that she was addressing someone, presumably Colonel Menendez, and I derived a strong
impression that she was in a condition of abject despair."

"Harley," I said, "on your word of honour did you recognize anything in the movements, or in the outline of the
figure, by which you could identify the woman?"

"I did not," he replied, shortly. "It was a woman who wore some kind of loose robe, possibly a kimono. Beyond
that I could swear to nothing, except that it was not Mrs. Fisher."

We fell silent for a while. What Paul Harley's thoughts may have been I know not, but my own were strange and
troubled. Presently I found my voice again, and:

"I think, Harley," I said, "that I should report to you something which Miss Beverley told me this evening."

"Yes?" said he, eagerly. "I am anxious to hear anything which may be of the slightest assistance. You are no
doubt wondering why I retired so abruptly to-night. My reason was this: I could see that you were full of some story
which you had learned from Miss Beverley, and I was anxious to perform my tour of inspection with a perfectly
unprejudiced mind."

"You mean that your suspicions rested upon an inmate of Cray's Folly?"

"Not upon any particular inmate, but I had early perceived a distinct possibility that these manifestations of
which the Colonel complained might be due to the agency of someone inside the house. That this person might be
no more than an accomplice of the prime mover I also recognized, of course. But what did you learn to-night,
Knox?"

I repeated Val Beverley's story of the mysterious footsteps and of the cries which had twice awakened her in the
night.

"Hm," muttered Harley, when I had ceased speaking. "Assuming her account to be true-----"

"Why should you doubt it?" I interrupted, hotly.

"My dear Knox, it is my business to doubt everything until I have indisputable evidence of its truth. I say,
assuming her story to be true, we find ourselves face to face with the fantastic theory that some woman unknown is
living secretly in Cray's Folly."

"Perhaps in one of the tower rooms," I suggested, eagerly. "Why, Harley, that would account for the Colonel's
marked unwillingness to talk about this part of the house."

My sight was now becoming used to the dusk, and I saw Harley vigorously shake his head.

"No, no," he replied; "I have seen all the tower rooms. I can swear that no one inhabits them. Besides, is it
feasible?"

"Then whose were the footsteps that Miss Beverley heard?"

"Obviously those of the woman who, at this present moment, so far as I know, is in the smoking-room with
Colonel Menendez." I sighed wearily.

"This is a strange business, Harley. I begin to think that the mystery is darker than I ever supposed."

We fell silent again. The weird cry of a night hawk came from somewhere in the valley, but otherwise
everything within and without the great house seemed strangely still. This stillness presently imposed its influence
upon me, for when I spoke again, I spoke in a low voice.

"Harley," I said, "my imagination is playing me tricks. I thought I heard the fluttering of wings at that moment."

"Fortunately, my imagination remains under control," he replied, grimly; "therefore I am in a position to inform
you that you did hear the fluttering of wings. An owl has just flown into one of the trees immediately outside the
window."

"Oh," said I, and uttered a sigh of relief.

"It is extremely fortunate that my imagination is so carefully trained," continued Harley; "otherwise, when the
woman whose shadow I saw upon the blind to-night raised her arms in a peculiar fashion, I could not well have
failed to attach undue importance to the shape of the shadow thus created."

"What was the shape of the shadow, then?"

"Remarkably like that of a bat."

He spoke the words quietly, but in that still darkness, with dawn yet a long way off, they possessed the power
which belongs to certain chords in music, and to certain lines in poetry. I was chilled unaccountably, and I peopled
the empty corridors of Cray's Folly with I know not what uncanny creatures; nightmare fancies conjured up from
memories of haunted manors.

Such was my mood, then, when suddenly Paul Harley stood up. My eyes were growing more and more used to
the darkness, and from something strained in his attitude I detected the fact that he was listening intently.
He placed his cigarette on the table beside the bed and quietly crossed the room. I knew from his silent tread that he wore shoes with rubber soles. Very quietly he turned the handle and opened the door.

"What is it, Harley?" I whispered.

Dimly I saw him raise his hand. Inch by inch he opened the door. My nerves in a state of tension, I sat there watching him, when without a sound he slipped out of the room and was gone. Thereupon I arose and followed as far as the doorway.

Harley was standing immediately outside in the corridor. Seeing me, he stepped back, and: "Don't move, Knox," he said, speaking very close to my ear. "There is someone downstairs in the hall. Wait for me here."

With that he moved stealthily off, and I stood there, my heart beating with unusual rapidity, listening--listening for a challenge, a cry, a scuffle--I knew not what to expect.

Cavernous and dimly lighted, the corridor stretched away to my left. On the right it branched sharply in the direction of the gallery overlooking the hall.

The seconds passed, but no sound rewarded my alert listening--until, very faintly, but echoing in a muffled, church-like fashion around that peculiar building, came a slight, almost sibilant sound, which I took to be the gentle closing of a distant door.

Whilst I was still wondering if I had really heard this sound or merely imagined it:

"Who goes there?" came sharply in Harley's voice.

I heard a faint click, and knew that he had shone the light of an electric torch down into the hall.

I hesitated no longer, but ran along to join him. As I came to the head of the main staircase, however, I saw him crossing the hall below. He was making in the direction of the door which shut off the servants' quarters. Here he paused, and I saw him trying the handle. Evidently the door was locked, for he turned and swept the white ray all about the place. He tried several other doors, but found them all to be locked, for presently he came upstairs again, smiling grimly when he saw me there awaiting him.

"Did you hear it, Knox?" he said.

"A sound like the closing of a door?"

Paul Harley nodded.

"It _was_ the closing of a door," he replied; "but before that I had distinctly heard a stair creak. Someone crossed the hall then, Knox. Yet, as you perceive for yourself, it affords no hiding-place."

His glance met and challenged mine.

"The Colonel's visitor has left him," he murmured. "Unless something quite unforeseen occurs, I shall throw up the case to-morrow."

CHAPTER XII

MORNING MISTS

The man known as Manoel awakened me in the morning. Although characteristically Spanish, he belonged to a more sanguine type than the butler and spoke much better English than Pedro. He placed upon the table beside me a tray containing a small pot of China tea, an apple, a peach, and three slices of toast.

"How soon would you like your bath, sir?" he enquired.

"In about half an hour," I replied.

"Breakfast is served at 9.30 if you wish, sir," continued Manoel, "but the ladies rarely come down. Would you prefer to breakfast in your room?"

"Good," I replied, for indeed I felt strangely heavy; "it shall be the heath, then, and breakfast on the veranda."
horse, a beautiful but rather wicked-looking creature.

We proceeded down the drive. Pedro was standing at the door of the lodge, talking to his surly-looking daughter. He saluted me very ceremoniously as I passed.

Pursuing an easterly route for a quarter of a mile or so, we came to a narrow lane which branched off to the left in a tremendous declivity. Indeed it presented the appearance of the dry bed of a mountain torrent, and in wet weather a torrent this lane became, so I was informed by Jim. It was very rugged and dangerous, and here we dismounted, the groom leading the horses.

Then we were upon a well-laid main road, and along this we trotted on to a tempting stretch of heath-land. There was a heavy mist, but the scent of the heather in the early morning was delightful, and there was something exhilarating in the dull thud of the hoofs upon the springy turf. The negro was a natural horseman, and he seemed to enjoy the ride every bit as much as I did. For my own part I was sorry to return. But the vapours of the night had been effectively cleared from my mind, and when presently we headed again for the hills, I could think more coolly of those problems which overnight had seemed well-nigh insoluble.

We returned by a less direct route, but only at one point was the path so steep as that by which we had descended. This brought us out on a road above and about a mile to the south of Cray's Folly. At one point, through a gap in the trees, I found myself looking down at the gray stone building in its setting of velvet lawns and gaily patterned gardens. A faint mist hovered like smoke over the grass.

Five minutes later we passed a queer old Jacobean house, so deeply hidden amidst trees that the early morning sun had not yet penetrated to it, except for one upstanding gable which was bathed in golden light. I should never have recognized the place from that aspect, but because of its situation I knew that this must be the Guest House. It seemed very gloomy and dark, and remembering how I was pledged to call upon Mr. Colin Camber that day, I apprehended that my reception might be a cold one.

Presently we left the road and cantered across the valley meadows, in which I had walked on the previous day, reentering Cray's Folly on the south, although we had left it on the north. We dismounted in the stable-yard, and I noted two other saddle horses in the stalls, a pair of very clean-looking hunters, as well as two perfectly matched ponies, which, Jim informed me, Madame de Staemer sometimes drove in a chaise.

Feeling vastly improved by the exercise, I walked around to the veranda, and through the drawing room to the hall. Manoel was standing there, and:

"Your bath is ready, sir," he said.

I nodded and went upstairs. It seemed to me that life at Cray's Folly was quite agreeable, and such was my mood that the shadowy Bat Wing menace found no place in it save as the chimera of a sick man's imagination. One thing only troubled me: the identity of the woman who had been with Colonel Menendez on the previous night.

However, such unconscious sun worshippers are we all that in the glory of that summer morning I realized that life was good, and I resolutely put behind me the dark suspicions of the night.

I looked into Harley's room ere descending, and, as he had assured me would be the case, there he was, propped up in bed, the _Daily Telegraph_ upon the floor beside him and the _Times_ now open upon the coverlet.

"I am ravenously hungry," I said, maliciously, "and am going down to eat a hearty breakfast."

"Good," he returned, treating me to one of his quizzical smiles. "It is delightful to know that someone is happy."

Manoel had removed my unopened newspapers from the bedroom, placing them on the breakfast table on the south veranda; and I had propped the _Mail_ up before me and had commenced to explore a juicy grapefruit when something, perhaps a faint breath of perfume, a slight rustle of draperies, or merely that indefinable aura which belongs to the presence of a woman, drew my glance upward and to the left. And there was Val Beverley smiling down at me.

"Good morning, Mr. Knox," she said. "Oh, please don't interrupt your breakfast. May I sit down and talk to you?"

"I should be most annoyed if you refused."

She was dressed in a simple summery frock which left her round, sun-browned arms bare above the elbow, and she laid a huge bunch of roses upon the table beside my tray.

"I am the florist of the establishment," she explained. "These will delight your eyes at luncheon. Don't you think we are a lot of barbarians here, Mr. Knox?"

"Why?"

"Well, if I had not taken pity upon you, here you would have bat over a lonely breakfast just as though you were staying at a hotel."

"Delightful," I replied, "now that you are here."

"Ah," said she, and smiled roguishly, "that afterthought just saved you."

"But honestly," I continued, "the hospitality of Colonel Menendez is true hospitality. To expect one's guests to
perform their parlour tricks around a breakfast table in the morning is, on the other hand, true barbarism."

"I quite agree with you," she said, quietly. "There is a perfectly delightful freedom about the Colonel's way of living. Only some horrid old Victorian prude could possibly take exception to it. Did you enjoy your ride?"

"Immensely," I replied, watching her delightedly as she arranged the roses in carefully blended groups. Her fingers were very delicate and tactile, and such is the character which resides in the human hand, that whereas the gestures of Madame de Staemer were curiously stimulating, there was something in the movement of Val Beverley's pretty fingers amidst the blooms which I found most soothing.

"I passed the Guest House on my return," I continued. "Do you know Mr. Camber?"

She looked at me in a startled way.

"No," she replied, "I don't. Do you?"

"I met him by chance yesterday."

"Really? I thought he was quite unapproachable; a sort of ogre."

"On the contrary, he is a man of great charm."

"Oh," said Val Beverley, "well, since you have said so, I might as well admit that he has always seemed a charming man to me. I have never spoken to him, but he looks as though he could be very fascinating. Have you met his wife?"

"No. Is she also American?"

My companion shook her head.

"I have no idea," she replied. "I have seen her several times of course, and she is one of the daintiest creatures imaginable, but I know nothing about her nationality."

"She is young, then?"

"Very young, I should say. She looks quite a child."

"The reason of my interest," I replied, "is that Mr. Camber asked me to call upon him, and I propose to do so later this morning."

"Really?"

Again I detected the startled expression upon Val Beverley's face.

"That is rather curious, since you are staying here."

"Why?"

"Well," she looked about her nervously, "I don't know the reason, but the name of Mr. Camber is anathema in Cray's Folly."

"Colonel Menendez told me last night that he had never met Mr. Camber."

Val Beverley shrugged her shoulders, a habit which it was easy to see she had acquired from Madame de Staemer.

"Perhaps not," she replied, "but I am certain he hates him."

"Hates Mr. Camber?"

"Yes." Her expression grew troubled. "It is another of those mysteries which seem to be part of Colonel Menendez's normal existence."

"And is this dislike mutual?"

"That I cannot say, since I have never met Mr. Camber."

"And Madame de Staemer, does she share it?"

"Fully, I think. But don't ask me what it means, because I don't know."

She dismissed the subject with a light gesture and poured me out a second cup of coffee.

"I am going to leave you now," she said. "I have to justify my existence in my own eyes."

"Must you really go?"

"I must really."

"Then tell me something before you go."

She gathered up the bunches of roses and looked down at me with a wistful expression.

"Yes, what is it?"

"Did you detect those mysterious footsteps again last night?"

The look of wistfulness changed to another which I hated to see in her eyes, an expression of repressed fear.

"No," she replied in a very low voice, "but why do you ask the question?"

Doubt of her had been far enough from my mind, but that something in the tone of my voice had put her on her guard I could see.

"I am naturally curious," I replied, gravely.

"No," she repeated, "I have not heard the sound for some time now. Perhaps, after all, my fears were imaginary."

There was a constraint in her manner which was all too obvious, and when presently, laden with the spoil of the
rose garden, she gave me a parting smile and hurried into the house, I sat there very still for a while, and something of the brightness had faded from the coming, nor did life seem so glad a business as I had thought it quite recently.

CHAPTER XIII
AT THE GUEST HOUSE

I presented myself at the Guest House at half-past eleven. My mental state was troubled and indescribably complex. Perhaps my own uneasy, thoughts were responsible for the idea, but it seemed to me that the atmosphere of Cray's Folly had changed yet again. Never before had I experienced a sense of foreboding like that which had possessed me throughout the hours of this bright summer's morning.

Colonel Menendez had appeared about nine o'clock. He exhibiting no traces of illness that were perceptible to me. But this subtle change which I had detected, or thought I had detected, was more marked in Madame Staemer than in any one. In her strange, still eyes I had read what I can only describe as a stricken look. It had none of the heroic resignation and acceptance of the inevitable which had so startled me in the face of the Colonel on the previous day. There was a bitterness in it, as of one who has made a great but unwilling sacrifice, and again I had found myself questing that faint but fugitive memory, conjured up by the eyes of Madame de Staemer.

Never had the shadow lain so darkly upon the house as it lay this morning with the sun blazing gladly out of a serene sky. The birds, the flowers, and Mother Earth herself bespoke the joy of summer. But beneath the roof of Cray's Folly dwelt a spirit of unrest, of apprehension. I thought of that queer lull which comes before a tropical storm, and I thought I read a knowledge of pending evil even in the glances of the servants.

I had spoken to Harley of this fear. He had smiled and nodded grimly, saying:

"Evidently, Knox, you have forgotten that to-night is the night of the full moon."

It was in no easy state of mind, then, that I opened the gate and walked up to the porch of the Guest House. That the solution of the grand mystery of Cray's Folly would automatically resolve these lesser mysteries I felt assured, and I was supported by the idea that a clue might lie here.

The house, which from the roadway had an air of neglect, proved on close inspection to be well tended, but of an unprosperous aspect. The brass knocker, door knob, and letter box were brilliantly polished, whilst the windows and the window curtains were spotlessly clean. But the place cried aloud for the service of the decorator, and it did not need the deductive powers of a Paul Harley to determine that Mr. Colin Camber was in straitened circumstances.

In response to my ringing the door was presently opened by Ah Tsong. His yellow face exhibited no trace of emotion whatever. He merely opened the door and stood there looking at me.

"Is Mr. Camber at home?" I enquired.

"Master no got," crooned Ah Tsong.

He proceeded quietly to close the door again.

"One moment," I said, "one moment. I wish, at any rate, to leave my card."

Ah Tsong allowed the door to remain open, but:

"No usee palaber so fashion," he said. "No feller comee here. Sabby?"

"I savvy, right enough," said I, "but all the same you have got to take my card in to Mr. Camber."

I handed him a card as I spoke, and suddenly addressing him in "pidgin," of which, fortunately, I had a smattering:

"Belong very quick, Ah Tsong," I said, sharply, "or plenty big trouble, savvy?"

"Sabby, sabby," he muttered, nodding his head; and leaving me standing in the porch he retired along the sparsely carpeted hall.

This hall was very gloomily lighted, but I could see several pieces of massive old furniture and a number of bookcases, all looking incredibly untidy.

Rather less than a minute elapsed, I suppose, when from some place at the farther end of the hallway Mr. Camber appeared in person. He wore a threadbare dressing gown, the silken collar and cuffs of which were very badly frayed. His hair was dishevelled and palpably he had not shaved this morning.

He was smoking a corn cob pipe, and he slowly approached, glancing from the card which he held in his hand in my direction, and then back again at the card, with a curious sort of hesitancy. In spite of his untidy appearance I could not fail to mark the dignity of his bearing, and the almost arrogant angle at which he held his head.

"Mr--er--Malcolm Knox?" he began, fixing his large eyes upon me with a look in which I could detect no sign of recognition. "I am advised that you desire to see me?"

"That is so, Mr. Camber," I replied, cheerily. "I fear I have interrupted your work, but as no other opportunity may occur of renewing an acquaintance which for my part I found extremely pleasant--"

"Of renewing an acquaintance, you say, Mr. Knox?"

"Yes."

"Quite." He looked me up and down critically. "To be sure, we have met before, I understand?"
"We met yesterday, Mr. Camber, you may recall. Having chanced to come across a contribution of yours of the _Occult Review_, I have availed myself of your invitation to drop in for a chat."

His expression changed immediately and the sombre eyes lighted up.

"Ah, of course," he cried, "you are a student of the transcendental. Forgive my seeming rudeness, Mr. Knox, but indeed my memory is of the poorest. Pray come in, sir; your visit is very welcome."

He held the door wide open, and inclined his head in a gesture of curious old-world courtesy which was strange in so young a man. And congratulating myself upon the happy thought which had enabled me to win such instant favour, I presently found myself in a study which I despair of describing.

In some respects it resembled the lumber room of an antiquary, whilst in many particulars it corresponded to the interior of one of those second-hand bookshops which abound in the neighbourhood of Charing Cross Road. The shelves with which it was lined literally bulged with books, and there were books on the floor, books on the mantelpiece, and books, some open and some shut, some handsomely bound, and some having the covers torn off, upon every table and nearly every chair in the place.

Volume seven of Burton's monumental "Thousand Nights and a Night" lay upon a littered desk before which I presumed Mr. Camber had been seated at the time of my arrival. Some wet vessel, probably a cup of tea or coffee, had at some time been set down upon the page at which this volume was open, for it was marked with a dark brown ring. A volume of Fraser's "Golden Bough" had been used as an ash tray, apparently, since the binding was burned in several places where cigarettes had been laid upon it.

In this interesting, indeed unique apartment, East met West, unabashed by Kipling's dictum. Roman tear-vases and Egyptian tomb-offerings stood upon the same shelf as empty Bass bottles; and a hideous wooden idol from the South Sea Islands leered on eternally, unmoved by the presence upon his distorted head of a soft felt hat made, I believe, in Philadelphia.

Strange implements from early British barrows found themselves in the company of _Thuggee_ daggers There were carved mammals' tusks and snake emblems from Yucatan; against a Chinese ivory model of the Temple of Ten Thousand Buddhas rested a Coptic crucifix made from a twig of the Holy Rose Tree. Across an ancient Spanish coffer was thrown a Persian rug into which had been woven the monogram of Shah-Jehan and a text from the Koran.

It was easy to see that Mr. Colin Camber's studies must have imposed a severe strain upon his purse.

"Sit down, Mr. Knox, sit down," he said, sweeping a vellum-bound volume of Eliphas Levi from a chair, and pushing the chair forward. "The visit of a fellow-student is a rare pleasure for me. And you find me, sir," he seated himself in a curious, carved chair which stood before the desk, "you find me engaged upon enquiries, the result of which will constitute chapter forty-two of my present book. Pray glance at the contents of this little box."

He placed in my hands a small box of dark wood, evidently of great age. It contained what looked like a number of shrivelled beans.

Having glanced at it curiously I returned it to him, shaking my head blankly.

"You are puzzled?" he said, with a kind of boyish triumph, which lighted up his face, which rejuvenated him and gave me a glimpse of another man. "These, sir," he touched the shrivelled objects with a long, delicate forefinger "are seeds of the sacred lotus of Ancient Egypt. They were found in the tomb of a priest."

"And in what way do they bear upon the enquiry to which you referred, Mr. Camber?"

"In this way," he replied, drawing toward him a piece of newspaper upon which rested a mound of coarse shag. "I maintain that the vital principle survives within them. Now, Mr. Knox, I propose to cultivate these seeds. Do you grasp the significance, of this experiment?"

He knocked out the corn-cob upon the heel of his slipper and began to refill the hot bowl with shag from the newspaper at his elbow.

"From a physical point of view, yes," I replied, slowly. "But I should not have supposed such an experiment to come within the scope of your own particular activities, Mr. Camber."

"Ah," he returned, triumphantly, at the same time stuffing tobacco into the bowl of the corn-cob, "it is for this very reason that chapter forty-two of my book must prove to be the hub of the whole, and the whole, Mr. Knox, I am egotist enough to believe, shall establish a new focus for thought, an intellectual Rome bestriding and uniting the Seven Hills of Unbelief."

He lighted his pipe and stared at me complacently.

Whilst I had greatly revised my first estimate of the man, my revisions had been all in his favour. Respecting his genius my first impression was confirmed. That he was ahead of his generation, perhaps a new Galileo, I was prepared to believe. He had a pride of bearing which I think was partly racial, but which in part, too, was the insignia of intellectual superiority. He stood above the commonplace, caring little for the views of those around and beneath him. From vanity he was utterly free. His was strangely like the egotism of true genius.

"Now, sir," he continued, puffing furiously at his corn-cob, "I observed you glancing a moment ago at this
volume of the 'Golden Bough.'" He pointed to the scarred book which I have already mentioned. "It is a work of profound scholarship. But having perused its hundreds of pages, what has the student learned? Does he know why the twenty-sixth chapter of the 'Book of the dead' was written upon lapis-lazuli, the twenty-seventh upon green felspar, the twenty-ninth upon cornelian, and the thirtieth upon serpentine? He does not. Having studied Part Four, has he learned the secret of why Osiris was a black god, although he typified the Sun? Has he learned why modern Christianity is losing its hold upon the nations, whilst Buddhism, so called, counts its disciples by millions? He has not. This is because the scholar is rarely the seer."

"I quite agree with you," I said, thinking that I detected the drift of his argument. "Very well," said he. "I am an American citizen, Mr. Knox, which is tantamount to stating that I belong to the greatest community of traders which has appeared since the Phoenicians overran the then known world. America has not produced the mystic, yet Judaea produced the founder of Christianity, and Gautama Buddha, born of a royal line, established the creed of human equity. In what way did these magicians, for a miracle-worker is nothing but a magician, differ from ordinary men? In one respect only: They had learned to control that force which we have to-day termed Will."

As he spoke those words Colin Camber directed upon me a glance from his luminous eyes which frankly thrilled me. The bemused figure of the Lavender Arms was forgotten. I perceived before me a man of power, a man of extraordinary knowledge and intellectual daring. His voice, which was very beautiful, together with his glance, held me enthralled.

"What we call Will," he continued, "is what the Ancient Egyptians called _Khu_. It is not mental: it is a property of the soul. At this point, Mr. Knox, I depart from the laws generally accepted by my contemporaries. I shall presently propose to you that the eye of the Divine Architect literally watches every creature upon the earth."

"Literally?"

"Literally, Mr. Knox. We need no images, no idols, no paintings. All power, all light comes from one source. That source is the sun! The sun controls Will, and the Will is the soul. If there were a cavern in the earth so deep that the sun could never reach it, and if it were possible for a child to be born in that cavern, do you know what that child would be?"

"Almost certainly blind," I replied; "beyond which my imagination fails me."

"Then I will inform you, Mr. Knox. It would be a demon."

"What!" I cried, and was momentarily touched with the fear that this was a brilliant madman. "Listen," he said, and pointed with the stem of his pipe. "Why, in all ancient creeds, is Hades depicted as below? For the simple reason that could such a spot exist and be inhabited, it must be _sunless_, when it could only be inhabited by devils; and what are devils but creatures without souls?"

"You mean that a child born beyond reach of the sun's influence would have no soul?"

"Such is my meaning, Mr. Knox. Do you begin to see the importance of my experiment with the lotus seeds?"

I shook my head slowly. Whereupon, laying his corn-cob upon the desk, Colin Camber burst into a fit of boyish laughter, which seemed to rejuvenate him again, which wiped out the image of the magus completely, and only left before me a very human student of strange subjects, and withal a fascinating companion.

"I fear, sir," he said, presently, "that my steps have led me farther into the wilderness than it has been your fate to penetrate. The whole secret of the universe is contained in the words Day and Night, Darkness and Light. I have studied both the light and the darkness, deliberately and without fear. A new age is about to dawn, sir, and a new age requires new beliefs, new truths. Were you ever in the country of the Hill Dyaks?"

This abrupt question rather startled me, but:

"You refer to the Borneo hill-country?"

"Precisely."

"No, I was never there."

"Then this little magical implement will be new to you," said he.

Standing up, he crossed to a cabinet littered untidily with all sorts of strange-looking objects, carved bones, queer little inlaid boxes, images, untidy manuscripts, and what-not.

He took up what looked like a very ungainly tobacco-pipe, made of some rich brown wood, and, handing it to me:

"Examine this, Mr. Knox," he said, the boyish smile of triumph returning again to his face. I did as he requested and made no discovery of note. The thing clearly was not intended for a pipe. The stem was soiled and, moreover, there was carving inside the bowl. So that presently I returned it to him, shaking my head.

"Unless one should be informed of the properties of this little instrument," he declared, "discovery by experiment is improbable. Now, note."

He struck the hollow of the bowl upon the palm of his hand, and it delivered a high, bell-like note which lingered
curiously. Then:

"Note again."

He made a short striking motion with the thing, similar to that which one would employ who had designed to jerk something out of the bowl. And at the very spot on the floor where any object contained in the bowl would have fallen, came a reprise of the bell note! Clearly, from almost at my feet, it sounded, a high, metallic ring.

He struck upward, and the bell-note sounded on the ceiling; to the right, and it came from the window; in my direction, and the tiny bell seemed to ring beside my ear! I will honestly admit that I was startled, but:

"Dyak magic," said Colin Camber; "one of nature's secrets not yet discovered by conventional Western science. It was known to the Egyptian priesthood, of course; hence the Vocal Memnon. It was known to Madame Blavatsky, who employed an 'astral bell'; and it is known to me."

He returned the little instrument to its place upon the cabinet.

"I wonder if the fact will strike you as significant," said he, "that the note which you have just heard can only be produced between sunrise and sunset?"

Without giving me time to reply:

"The most notable survival of black magic--that is, the scientific employment of darkness against light--is to be met with in Haiti and other islands of the West Indies."

"You are referring to Voodooism?" I said, slowly.

He nodded, replacing his pipe between his teeth.

"A subject, Mr. Knox, which I investigated exhaustively some years ago."

I was watching him closely as he spoke, and a shadow, a strange shadow, crept over his face, a look almost of exaltation--of mingled sorrow and gladness which I find myself quite unable to describe.

"In the West Indies, Mr. Knox," he continued, in a strangely altered voice, "I lost all and found all. Have you ever realized, sir, that sorrow is the price we must pay for joy?"

I did not understand his question, and was still wondering about it when I heard a gentle knock, the door opened, and a woman came in.

CHAPTER XIV
YSOLA CAMBER

I find it difficult, now, to recapture my first impression of that meeting. About the woman, hesitating before me, there was something unexpected, something wholly unfamiliar. She belonged to a type with which I was not acquainted. Nor was it wonderful that she should strike me in this fashion, since my wanderings, although fairly extensive, had never included the West Indies, nor had I been to Spain; and this girl --I could have sworn that she was under twenty--was one of those rare beauties, a golden Spaniard.

That she was not purely Spanish I learned later.

She was small, and girlishly slight, with slender ankles and exquisite little feet; indeed I think she had the tiniest feet of any woman I had ever met. She wore a sort of white pinafore over her dress, and her arms, which were bare because of the short sleeves of her frock, were of a child-like roundness, whilst her creamy skin was touched with a faint tinge of bronze, as though, I remember thinking, it had absorbed and retained something of the Southern sunshine. She had the swaying carriage which usually belongs to a tall woman, and her head and neck were Grecian in poise.

Her hair, which was of a curious dull gold colour, presented a mass of thick, tight curls, and her beauty was of that unusual character which makes a Cleopatra a subject of deathless debate. What I mean to say is this: whilst no man could have denied, for instance, that Val Beverley was a charmingly pretty woman, nine critics out of ten must have failed to classify this golden Spaniard correctly or justly. Her complexion was peach-like in the Oriental sense, that strange hint of gold underlying the delicate skin, and her dark blue eyes were shaded by really wonderful silken lashes.

Emotion had the effect of enlarging the pupils, a phenomenon rarely met with, so that now as she entered the room and found a stranger present they seemed to be rather black than blue.

Her embarrassment was acute, and I think she would have retired without speaking, but:

"Ysola," said Colin Camber, regarding her with a look curiously compounded of sorrow and pride, "allow me to present Mr. Malcolm Knox, who has honoured us with a visit."

He turned to me.

"Mr. Knox," he said, "it gives me great pleasure that you should meet my wife."

Perhaps I had expected this, indeed, subconsciously, I think I had. Nevertheless, at the words "my wife" I felt that I started. The analogy with Edgar Allan Poe was complete.

As Mrs. Camber extended her hand with a sort of appealing timidity, it appeared to me that she felt herself to be intruding. The expression in her beautiful eyes when she glanced at her husband could only be described as one of
adoration; and whilst it was impossible to doubt his love for her, I wondered if his colossal egotism were capable of stooping to affection. I wondered if he knew how to tend and protect this delicate Southern girl wife of his.

Remembering the episode of the Lavender Arms, I felt justified in doubting her happiness, and in this I saw an explanation of the mingled sorrow and pride with which Colin Camber regarded her. It might betoken recognition of his own shortcomings as a husband.

"How nice of you to come and see us. Mr. Knox," she said.

She spoke in a faintly husky manner which was curiously attractive, although lacking the deep, vibrant tones of Madame de Staemer's memorable voice. Her English was imperfect, but her accent good.

"Your husband has been carrying me to enchanted lands, Mrs. Camber," I replied. "I have never known a morning to pass so quickly."

"Oh," she replied, and laughed with a childish glee which I was glad to witness. "Did he tell you all about the book which is going to make the world good? Did he tell you it will make us rich as well?"

"Rich?" said Camber, frowning slightly. "Nature's riches are health and love. If we hold these the rest will come. Now that you have joined us, Ysola, I shall beg Mr. Knox, in honour of this occasion, to drink a glass of wine and break a biscuit as a pledge of future meetings."

I watched him as he spoke, a lean, unkempt figure invested with a curious dignity, and I found it almost impossible to believe that this was the same man who had sat in the bar of the Lavender Arms, sipping whisky and water. The resemblance to the portrait in Harley's office became more marked than ever. There was an air of high breeding about the delicate features which, curiously enough, was accentuated by the unshaven chin. I recognized that refusal would be regarded as a rebuff, and therefore:

"You are very kind," I said.

Colin Camber inclined his head gravely and courteously.

"We are very glad to have you with us, Mr. Knox," he replied.

He clapped his hands, and, silent as a shadow, Ah Tsong appeared. I noted that although it was Camber who had summoned him, it was to Mrs. Camber that the Chinaman turned for orders. I had thought his yellow face incapable of expression, but as his oblique eyes turned in the direction of the girl I read in them a sort of dumb worship, such as one sees in the eyes of a dog.

She spoke to him rapidly in Chinese.

"Hoi, hoi," he muttered, "hoi, hoi," nodded his head, and went out.

I saw that Colin Camber had detected my interest, for:

"Ah Tsong is really my wife's servant," he explained.

"Oh," she said in a low voice, and looked at me earnestly, "Ah Tsong nursed me when I was a little baby so high." She held her hand about four feet from the floor and laughed gleefully. "Can you imagine what a funny little thing I was?"

"You must have been a wonder-child, Mrs. Camber," I replied with sincerity; "and Ah Tsong has remained with you ever since?"

"Ever since," she echoed, shaking her head in a vaguely pathetic way. "He will never leave me, do you think, Colin?"

"Never," replied her husband; "you are all he loves in the world. A case, Mr. Knox," he turned to me, "of deathless fidelity rarely met with nowadays and only possible, perhaps, in its true form in an Oriental."

Mrs. Camber having seated herself upon one of the few chairs which was not piled with books, her husband had resumed his place by the writing desk, and I sought in vain to interpret the glances which passed between them.

The fact that these two were lovers none could have mistaken. But here again, as at Cray's Folly, I detected a shadow. I felt that something had struck at the very root of their happiness, in fact, I wondered if they had been parted, and were but newly reunited for there was a sort of constraint between them, the more marked on the woman's side than on the man's. I wondered how long they had been married, but felt that it would have been indiscreet to ask.

Even as the idea occurred to me, however, an opportunity arose of learning what I wished to know. I heard a bell ring, and:

"There is someone at the door, Colin," said Mrs. Camber.

"I will go," he replied. "Ah Tsong has enough to do."

Without another word he stood up and walked out of the room.

"You see," said Mrs. Camber, smiling in her naive way, "we only have one servant, except Ah Tsong, her name is Mrs. Powis. She is visiting her daughter who is married. We made the poor old lady take a holiday."

"It is difficult to imagine you burdened with household responsibilities, Mrs. Camber," I replied. "Please forgive me but I cannot help wondering how long you have been married?"
"For nearly four years."
"Really?" I exclaimed. "You must have been married very young?"
"I was twenty. Do I look so young?"
I gazed at her in amazement.
"You astonish me," I declared, which was quite true and no mere compliment. "I had guessed your age to be eighteen."
"Oh," she laughed, and resting her hands upon the settee leaned forward with sparkling eyes, "how funny. Sometimes I wish I looked older. It is dreadful in this place, although we have been so happy here. At all the shops they look at me so funny, so I always send Mrs. Powis now."
"You are really quite wonderful," I said. "You are Spanish, are you not, Mrs. Camber?"
She slightly shook her head, and I saw the pupils begin to dilate.
"Not really Spanish," she replied, haltingly. "I was born in Cuba."
"In Cuba?"
She nodded.
"Then it was in Cuba that you met Mr. Camber?"
She nodded again, watching me intently.
"It is strange that a Virginian should settle in Surrey."
"Yes?" she murmured, "you think so? But really it is not strange at all. Colin's people are so proud, so proud. Do you know what they are like, those Virginians? Oh! I hate them."
"You hate them?"
"No, I cannot hate them, for he is one. But he will never go back."
"Why should he never go back, Mrs. Camber?"
"Because of me."
"You mean that you do not wish to settle in America?"
"I could not--not where he comes from. They would not have me."
Her eyes grew misty, and she quickly lowered her lashes.
"Would not have you?" I exclaimed. "I don't understand."
"No?" she said, and smiled up at me very gravely. "It is simple. I am a Cuban, one, as they say, of an inferior race--and of mixed blood."
She shook her golden head as if to dismiss the subject, and stood up, as Camber entered, followed by Ah Tsong bearing a tray of refreshments.

Of the ensuing conversation I remember nothing. My mind was focussed upon the one vital fact that Mrs. Camber was a Cuban Creole. Dimly I felt that here was the missing link for which Paul Harley was groping. For it was in Cuba that Colin Camber had met his wife, it was from Cuba that the menace of Bat Wing came.

What could it mean? Surely it was more than a coincidence that these two families, both associated with the West Indies, should reside within sight of one another in the Surrey Hills. Yet, if it were the result of design, the design must be on the part of Colonel Menendez, since the Cambers had occupied the Guest House before he had leased Cray's Folly.

I know not if I betrayed my absentmindedness during the time that I was struggling vainly with these maddening problems, but presently, Mrs. Camber having departed about her household duties, I found myself walking down the garden with her husband.

"This is the summer house of which I was speaking, Mr. Knox," he said, and I regret to state that I retained no impression of his having previously mentioned the subject. "During the time that Sir James Appleton resided at Cray's Folly, I worked here regularly in the summer months. It was Sir James, of course, who laid out the greater part of the gardens and who rescued the property from the state of decay into which it had fallen."

I aroused myself from the profitless reverie in which I had become lost. We were standing before a sort of arbour which marked the end of the grounds of the Guest House. It overhung the edge of a miniature ravine, in which, over a pebbly course, a little stream pursued its way down the valley to feed the lake in the grounds of Cray's Folly.

From this point of vantage I could see the greater part of Colonel Menendez's residence. I had an unobstructed view of the tower and of the Tudor garden.

"I abandoned my work-shop," pursued Colin Camber, "when the--er--the new tenant took up his residence. I work now in the room in which you found me this morning."

He sighed, and turning abruptly, led the way back to the house, holding himself very erect, and presenting a queer figure in his threadbare dressing gown.

It was now a perfect summer's day, and I commented upon the beauty of the old garden, which in places was bordered by a crumbling wall.
"Yes, a quaint old spot," said Camber. "I thought at one time, because of the name of the house, that it might have been part of a monastery or convent. This was not the case, however. It derives its name from a certain Sir Jaspar Guest, who flourished, I believe, under King Charles of merry memory."

"Nevertheless," I added, "the Guest House is a charming survival of more spacious days."

"True," returned Colin Camber, gravely. "Here it is possible to lead one's own life, away from the noisy world," he sighed again wearily. "Yes, I shall regret leaving the Guest House."

"What! You are leaving?"

"I am leaving as soon as I can find another residence, suited both to my requirements and to my slender purse. But these domestic affairs can be of no possible interest to you. I take it, Mr. Knox, that you will grant my wife and myself the pleasure of your company at lunch?"

"Many thanks," I replied, "but really I must return to Cray's Folly."

As I spoke the words I had moved a little ahead at a point where the path was overgrown by a rose bush, for the garden was somewhat neglected.

"You will quite understand," I said, and turned.

Never can I forget the spectacle which I beheld.

Colin Camber's peculiarly pale complexion had assumed a truly ghastly pallor, and he stood with tightly clenched hands, glaring at me almost insanely.

"Mr. Camber," I cried, with concern, "are you unwell?"

He moistened his dry lips, and:

"You are returning--to Cray's Folly?" he said, speaking, it seemed, with difficulty.

"I am, sir. I am staying with Colonel Menendez."

"Ah!"

He clutched the collar of his pyjama jacket and wrenched so strongly that the button was torn off. His passion was incredible, insane. The power of speech had almost left him.

"You are a guest of--of Devil Menendez," he whispered, and the speaking of the name seemed almost to choke him. "Of--Devil Menendez. You--you-- are a spy. You have stolen my hospitality--you have obtained access to my house under false pretences. God! if I had known!"

"Mr. Camber," I said, sternly, and realized that I, too, had clenched my fists, for the man's language was grossly insulting, "you forget yourself."

"Perhaps I do," he muttered, thickly; "and therefore"--he raised a quivering forefinger--"go! If you have any spark of compassion in your breast, go! Leave my house."

Nostrils dilated, he stood with that quivering finger outstretched, and now having become as speechless as he, I turned and walked rapidly up to the house.

"Ah Tsong! Ah Tsong!" came a cry from behind me in tones which I can only describe as hysterical--"Mr. Knox's hat and stick. Quickly."

As I walked in past the study door the Chinaman came to meet me, holding my hat and cane. I took them from him without a word, and, the door being held open by Ah Tsong, walked out on to the road.

My heart was beating rapidly. I did not know what to think nor what to do. This ignominious dismissal afforded an experience new to me. I was humiliated, mortified, but above all, wildly angry.

How far I had gone on my homeward journey I cannot say, when the sound of quickly pattering footsteps intruded upon my wild reverie. I stopped, turned, and there was Ah Tsong almost at my heels.

"Blinga chit flom lilly missee," he said, and held the note toward me.

I hesitated, glaring at him in a way that must have been very unpleasant; but recovering myself I tore open the envelope, and read the following note, written in pencil and very shakily:

MR. KNOX. Please forgive him. If you knew what we have suffered from Senor Don Juan Menendez, I know you would forgive him. Please, for my sake. YSOLA CAMBER.

The Chinaman was watching me, that strangely pathetic expression in his eyes, and:

"Tell your mistress that I quite understand and will write to her," I said.

"Hoi, hoi."

Ah Tsong turned, and ran swiftly off, as I pursued my way back to Cray's Folly in a mood which I shall not attempt to describe.

CHAPTER XV

UNREST

I sat in Paul Harley's room. Luncheon was over, and although, as on the previous day, it had been a perfect repast, perfectly served, the sense of tension which I had experienced throughout the meal had made me horribly ill at ease.
That shadow of which I have spoken elsewhere seemed to have become almost palpable. In vain I had ascribed it to a morbid imagination: persistently it lingered.

Madame de Staemer's gaiety rang more false than ever. She twirled the rings upon her slender fingers and shot little enquiring glances all around the table. This spirit of unrest, from wherever it arose, had communicated itself to everybody. Madame's several bon mots one and all were failures. She delivered them without conviction like an amateur repeating lines learned by heart. The Colonel was unusually silent, eating little but drinking much. There was something unreal, almost ghastly, about the whole affair; and when at last Madame de Staemer retired, bearing Val Beverley with her, I felt certain that the Colonel would make some communication to us. If ever knowledge of portentous evil were written upon a man's face it was written upon his, as he sat there at the head of the table, staring straightly before him. However:

"Gentlemen," he said, "if your enquiries here have led to no result of, shall I say, a tangible character, at least I feel sure that you must have realized one thing."

Harley stared at him sternly.

"I have realized, Colonel Menendez," he replied, "that something is pending."

"Ah!" murmured the Colonel, and he clutched the edge of the table with his strong brown hands.

"But," continued my friend, "I have realized something more. You have asked for my aid, and I am here. Now you have deliberately tied my hands."

"What do you mean, sir?" asked the other, softly.

"I will speak plainly. I mean that you know more about the nature of this danger than you have ever communicated to me. Allow me to proceed, if you please, Colonel Menendez. For your delightful hospitality I thank you. As your guest I could be happy, but as a professional investigator whose services have been called upon under most unusual circumstances, I cannot be happy and I do not thank you."

Their glances met. Both were angry, wilful, and self-confident. Following a few moments of silence:

"Perhaps, Mr. Harley," said the Colonel, "you have something further to say?"

"I have this to say," was the answer: "I esteem your friendship, but I fear I must return to town without delay."

The Colonel's jaws were clenched so tightly that I could see the muscles protruding. He was fighting an inward battle; then:

"What!" he said, "you would desert me?"

"I never deserted any man who sought my aid."

"I have sought your aid."

"Then accept it!" cried Harley. "This, or allow me to retire from the case. You ask me to find an enemy who threatens you, and you withhold every clue which could aid me in my search."

"What clue have I withheld?"

Paul Harley stood up.

"It is useless to discuss the matter further, Colonel Menendez," he said, coldly.

The Colonel rose also, and:

"Mr. Harley," he replied, and his high voice was ill-controlled, "if I give you my word of honour that I dare not tell you more, and if, having done so, I beg of you to remain at least another night, can you refuse me?"

Harley stood at the end of the table watching him.

"Colonel Menendez," he said, "this would appear to be a game in which my handicap rests on the fact that I do not know against whom I am pitted. Very well. You leave me no alternative but to reply that I will stay."

"I thank you, Mr. Harley. As I fear I am far from well, dare I hope to be excused if I retire to my room for an hour's rest?"

Harley and I bowed, and the Colonel, returning our salutations, walked slowly out, his bearing one of grace and dignity. So that memorable luncheon terminated, and now we found ourselves alone and faced with a problem which, from whatever point one viewed it, offered no single opening whereby one might hope to penetrate to the truth.

Paul Harley was pacing up and down the room in a state of such nervous irritability as I never remembered to have witnessed in him before.

I had just finished an account of my visit to the Guest House and of the indignity which had been put upon me, and:

"Conundrums! conundrums!" my friend exclaimed. "This quest of Bat Wing is like the quest of heaven, Knox. A hundred open doors invite us, each one promising to lead to the light, and if we enter where do they lead?--to mystification. For instance, Colonel Menendez has broadly hinted that he looks upon Colin Camber as an enemy. Judging from your reception at the Guest House to-day, such an enmity, and a deadly enmity, actually exists. But whereas Camber has resided here for three years, the Colonel is a newcomer. We are, therefore, offered the spectacle
of a trembling victim seeking the sacrifice. Bah! it is preposterous."

"If you had seen Colin Camber's face to-day, you might not have thought it so preposterous."

"But I should, Knox! I should! It is impossible to suppose that Colonel Menendez was unaware when he leased Cray's Folly that Camber occupied the Guest House."

"And Mrs. Camber is a Cuban," I murmured.

"Don't, Knox!" my friend implored. "This case is driving me mad. I have a conviction that it is going to prove my Waterloo."

"My dear fellow," I said, "this mood is new to you."

"Why don't you advise me to remember Auguste Dupin?" asked Harley, bitterly. "That great man, preserving his philosophical calm, doubtless by this time would have pieced together these disjointed clues, and have produced an elegant pattern ready to be framed and exhibited to the admiring public."

He dropped down upon the bed, and taking his briar from his pocket, began to load it in a manner which was almost vicious. I stood watching him and offered no remark, until, having lighted the pipe, he began to smoke. I knew that these "Indian moods" were of short duration, and, sure enough, presently:

"God bless us all, Knox," he said, breaking into an amused smile, "how we bristle when someone tries to prove that we are not infallible! How human we are, Knox, but how fortunate that we can laugh at ourselves."

I sighed with relief, for Harley at these times imposed a severe strain even upon my easy-going disposition.

"Let us go down to the billiard room," he continued. "I will play you a hundred up. I have arrived at a point where my ideas persistently work in circles. The best cure is golf; failing golf, billiards."

The billiard room was immediately beneath us, adjoining the last apartment in the east wing, and there we made our way. Harley played keenly, deliberately, concentrating upon the game. I was less successful, for I found myself alternately glancing toward the door and the open window, in the hope that Val Beverley would join us. I was disappointed, however. We saw no more of the ladies until tea-time, and if a spirit of constraint had prevailed throughout luncheon, a veritable demon of unrest presided upon the terrace during tea.

Madame de Staemer made apologies on behalf of the Colonel. He was prolonging his siesta, but he hoped to join us at dinner.

"Is the Colonel's heart affected?" Harley asked.

Madame de Staemer shrugged her shoulders and shook her head, blankly.

"It is mysterious, the state of his health," she replied. "An old trouble, which began years and years ago in Cuba."

Harley nodded sympathetically, but I could see that he was not satisfied. Yet, although he might doubt her explanation, he had noted, and so had I, that Madame de Staemer's concern was very real. Her slender hands were strangely unsteady; indeed her condition bordered on one of distraction.

Harley concealed his thoughts, whatever they may have been, beneath that mask of reserve which I knew so well, whilst I endeavoured in vain to draw Val Beverley into conversation with me.

I gathered that Madame de Staemer had been to visit the invalid, and that she was all anxiety to return was a fact she was wholly unable to conceal. There was a tired look in her still eyes, as though she had undertaken a task beyond her powers to perform, and, so unnatural a quartette were we, that when presently she withdrew I was glad, although she took Val Beverley with her.

Paul Harley resumed his seat, staring at me with unseeing eyes. A sound reached us through the drawing room which told us that Madame de Staemer's chair was being taken upstairs, a task always performed when Madame desired to visit the upper floors by Manoel and Pedro's daughter, Nita, who acted as Madame's maid. These sounds died away, and I thought how silent everything had become. Even the birds were still, and presently, my eye being attracted to a black speck in the sky above, I learned why the feathered choir was mute. A hawk was hovering loftily overhead.

Noting my upward glance, Paul Harley also raised his eyes.

"Ah," he murmured, "a hawk. All the birds are cowering in their nests. Nature is a cruel mistress, Knox."

CHAPTER XVI

RED EVE

Over the remainder of that afternoon I will pass in silence. Indeed, looking backward now, I cannot recollect that it afforded one incident worthy of record. But because great things overshadow small, so it may be that whereas my recollections of quite trivial episodes are sharp enough up to a point, my memories from this point onward to the horrible and tragic happening which I have set myself to relate are hazy and indistinct. I was troubled by the continued absence of Val Beverley. I thought that she was avoiding me by design, and in Harley's gloomy reticence I could find no shadow of comfort.

We wandered aimlessly about the grounds, Harley staring up in a vague fashion at the windows of Cray's Folly;
and presently, when I stopped to inspect a very perfect rose bush, he left me without a word, and I found myself alone.

Later, as I sauntered toward the Tudor garden, where I had hoped to encounter Miss Beverley, I heard the clicking of billiard balls; and there was Harley at the table, practising fancy shots.

He glanced up at me as I paused by the open window, stopped to relight his pipe, and then bent over the table again.

"Leave me alone, Knox," he muttered; "I am not fit for human society."

Understanding his moods as well as I did, I merely laughed and withdrew.

I strolled around into the library and inspected scores of books without forming any definite impression of the contents of any of them. Manoel came in whilst I was there and I was strongly tempted to send a message to Miss Beverley, but common sense overcame the inclination.

When at last my watch told me that the hour for dressing was arrived, I heaved a sigh of relief. I cannot say that I was bored, my ill-temper sprang from a deeper source than this. The mysterious disappearance of the inmates of Cray's Folly, and a sort of brooding stillness which lay over the great house, had utterly oppressed me.

As I passed along the terrace I paused to admire the spectacle afforded by the setting sun. The horizon was on fire from north to south and the countryside was stained with that mystic radiance which is sometimes called the Blood of Apollo. Turning, I saw the disk of the moon coldly rising in the heavens. I thought of the silent birds and the hovering hawk, and I began my preparations for dinner mechanically, dressing as an automaton might dress.

Paul Harley's personality was never more marked than in his evil moods. His power to fascinate was only equalled by his power to repel. Thus, although there was a light in his room and I could hear Lim moving about, I did not join him when I had finished dressing, but lighting a cigarette walked downstairs.

The beauty of the night called to me, although as I stepped out upon the terrace I realized with a sort of shock that the gathering dusk held a menace, so that I found myself questioning the shadows and doubting the rustle of every leaf. Something invisible, intangible yet potent, brooded over Cray's Folly. I began to think more kindly of the disappearance of Val Beverley during the afternoon. Doubtless she, too, had been touched by this spirit of unrest and in solitude had sought to dispel it.

So thinking, I walked on in the direction of the Tudor garden. The place was bathed in a sort of purple half-light, lending it a fairy air of unreality, as though banished sun and rising moon yet disputed for mastery over earth. This idea set me thinking of Colin Camber, of Osiris, whom he had described as a black god, and of Isis, whose silver disk now held undisputed sovereignty of the evening sky.

Resentment of the treatment which I had received at the Guest House still burned hotly within me, but the mystery of it all had taken the keen edge off my wrath, and I think a sort of melancholy was the keynote of my reflections as, descending the steps to the sunken garden, I saw Val Beverley, in a delicate blue gown, coming toward me. She was the spirit of my dreams, and the embodiment of my mood. When she lowered her eyes at my approach, I knew by virtue of a sort of inspiration that she had been avoiding me.

"Miss Beverley," I said, "I have been looking for you all the afternoon."

"Have you? I have been in my room writing letters."

I paced slowly along beside her.

"I wish you would be very frank with me," I said.

She glanced up swiftly, and as swiftly lowered her lashes again.

"Do you think I am not frank?"

"I do think so. I understand why."

"Do you really understand?"

"I think I do. Your woman's intuition has told you that there is something wrong."

"In what way?"

"You are afraid of your thoughts. You can see that Madame de Staemer and Colonel Menendez are deliberately concealing something from Paul Harley, and you don't know where your duty lies. Am I right?"

She met my glance for a moment in a startled way, then: "Yes," she said, softly; "you are quite right. How have you guessed?"

"I have tried very hard to understand you," I replied, "and so perhaps up to a point I have succeeded."

"Oh, Mr. Knox." She suddenly laid her hand upon my arm. "I am oppressed with such a dreadful foreboding, yet I don't know how to explain it to you."

"I understand, I, too, have felt it."

"You have?" She paused, and looked at me eagerly. "Then it is not just morbid imagination on my part. If only I knew what to do, what to believe. Really, I am bewildered. I have just left Madame de Staemer--"

"Yes?" I said, for she had paused in evident doubt.
"Well, she has utterly broken down."
"Broken down?"
"She came to my room and sobbed hysterically for nearly an hour this afternoon."
"But what was the cause of her grief?"
"I simply cannot understand."
"Is it possible that Colonel Menendez is dangerously ill?"
"It may be so, Mr. Knox, but in that event why have they not sent for a physician?"
"True," I murmured; "and no one has been sent for?"
"No one."
"Have you seen Colonel Menendez?"
"Not since lunch-time."
"Have you ever known him to suffer in this way before?"
"Never. It is utterly unaccountable. Certainly during the last few months he has given up riding practically altogether, and in other ways has changed his former habits, but I have never known him to exhibit traces of any real illness."
"Has any medical man attended him?"
"Not that I know of. Oh, there is something uncanny about it all. Whatever should I do if you were not here?"
She had spoken on impulse, and seeing her swift embarrassment:
"Miss Beverley," I said, "I am delighted to know that my company cheers you."
Truth to tell my heart was beating rapidly, and, so selfish is the nature of man, I was more glad to learn that my company was acceptable to Val Beverley than I should have been to have had the riddle of Cray's Folly laid bare before me.

Those sweetly indiscreet words, however, had raised a momentary barrier between us, and we walked on silently to the house, and entered the brightly lighted hall.

The silver peal of a Chinese tubular gong rang out just when we reached the veranda, and as Val Beverley and I walked in from the garden, Madame de Staemer came wheeling through the doorway, closely followed by Paul Harley. In her the art of the toilette amounted almost to genius, and she had so successfully concealed all traces of her recent grief that I wondered if this could have been real.
"My dear Mr. Knox," she cried, "I seem to be fated always to apologize for other people. The Colonel is truly desolate, but he cannot join us for dinner. I have already explained to Mr. Harley."

Harley inclined his head sympathetically, and assisted to arrange Madame in her place.
"The Colonel requests us to smoke a cigar with him after dinner, Knox," he said, glancing across to me. "It would seem that troubles never come singly."

"Ah," Madame shrugged her shoulders, which her low gown left daringly bare, "they come in flocks, or not at all. But I suppose we should feel lonely in the world without a few little sorrows, eh, Mr. Harley?"

I loved her unquenchable spirit, and I have wondered often enough what I should have thought of her if I had known the truth. France has bred some wonderful women, both good and bad, but none I think more wonderful than Marie de Staemer.

If such a thing were possible, we dined more extravagantly than on the previous night. Madame's wit was at its keenest; she was truly brilliant. Pedro, from the big bouffet at the end of the room, supervised this feast of Lucullus, and except for odd moments of silence in which Madame seemed to be listening for some distant sound, there was nothing, I think, which could have told a casual observer that a black cloud rested upon the house.

Once, interrupting a tete-a-tete between Val Beverley and Paul Harley:
"Do not encourage her, Mr. Harley," said Madame, "she is a desperate flirt."
"Oh, Madame," cried Val Beverley and blushed deeply.
"You know you are, my dear, and you are very wise. Flirt all your life, but never fall in love. It is fatal, don't you think so, Mr. Knox?"-- turning to me in her rapid manner.

I looked into her still eyes, which concealed so much.
"Say, rather, that it is Fate," I murmured.
"Yes, that is more pretty, but not so true. If I could live my life again, M. Knox," she said, for she sometimes used the French and sometimes the English mode of address, "I should build a stone wall around my heart. It could peep over, but no one could ever reach it."

Oddly enough, then, as it seems to me now, the spirit of unrest seemed almost to depart for awhile, and in the company of the vivacious Frenchwoman time passed very quickly up to the moment when Harley and I walked slowly upstairs to join the Colonel.

During the latter part of dinner an idea had presented itself to me which I was anxious to mention to Harley, and:
"Harley," I said, "an explanation of the Colonel's absence has occurred to me."
"Really!" he replied; "possibly the same one that has occurred to me."
"What is that?"
Paul Harley paused on the stairs, turning to me.
"You are thinking that he has taken cover from the danger which he believes particularly to threaten him to-night?"
"Exactly."
"You may be right," he murmured, proceeding upstairs.
He led the way to a little smoke-room which hitherto I had never visited, and in response to his knock:
"Come in," cried the high voice of Colonel Menendez.
We entered to find ourselves in a small and very cosy room. There was a handsome oak bureau against one wall, which was littered with papers of various kinds, and there was also a large bookcase occupied almost exclusively by French novels. It occurred to me that the Colonel spent a greater part of his time in this little snuggery than in the more formal study below. At the moment of our arrival he was stretched upon a settee near which stood a little table; and on this table I observed the remains of what appeared to me to have been a fairly substantial repast. For some reason which I did not pause to analyze at the moment I noted with disfavour the presence of a bowl of roses upon the silver tray.
Colonel Menendez was smoking a cigarette, and Manoel was in the act of removing the tray.
"Gentlemen," said the Colonel, "I have no words in which to express my sorrow. Manoel, pull up those armchairs. Help yourself to port, Mr. Harley, and fill Mr. Knox's glass. I can recommend the cigars in the long box."
As we seated ourselves:
"I am extremely sorry to find you indisposed, sir," said Harley.
He was watching the dark face keenly, and probably thinking, as I was thinking, that it exhibited no trace of illness.
Colonel Menendez waved his cigarette gracefully, settling himself amid the cushions.
"An old trouble, Mr. Harley," he replied, lightly; "a legacy from ancestors who drank too deep of the wine of life."
"You are surely taking medical advice?"
Colonel Menendez shrugged slightly.
"There is no doctor in England who would understand the case," he replied. "Besides, there is nothing for it but rest and avoidance of excitement."
"In that event, Colonel," said Harley, "we will not disturb you for long. Indeed, I should not have consented to disturb you at all, if I had not thought that you might have some request to make upon this important night."
"Ah!" Colonel Menendez shot a swift glance in his direction. "You have remembered about to-night?"
"Naturally."
"Your interest comforts me very greatly, gentlemen, and I am only sorry that my uncertain health has made me so poor a host. Nothing has occurred since your arrival to help you, I am aware. Not that I am anxious for any new activity on the part of my enemies. But almost anything which should end this deathly suspense would be welcome."
He spoke the final words with a peculiar intonation. I saw Harley watching him closely.
"However," he continued, "everything is in the hands of Fate, and if your visit should prove futile, I can only apologize for having interrupted your original plans. Respecting to-night"---he shrugged---"what can I say?"
"Nothing has occurred," asked Harley, slowly, "nothing fresh, I mean, to indicate that the danger which you apprehend may really culminate to-night?"
"Nothing fresh, Mr. Harley, unless you yourself have observed anything."
"Ah," murmured Paul Harley, "let us hope that the threat will never be fulfilled."
Colonel Menendez inclined his head gravely.
"Let us hope so," he said.
On the whole, he was curiously subdued. He was most solicitous for our comfort and his exquisite courtesy had never been more marked. I often think of him now---his big but graceful figure reclining upon the settee, whilst he skilfully rolled his eternal cigarettes and chatted in that peculiar, light voice. Before the memory of Colonel Don Juan Sarmiento Menendez I sometimes stand appalled. If his Maker had but endowed him with other qualities of mind and heart equal to his magnificent courage, then truly he had been a great man.
CHAPTER XVII
NIGHT OF THE FULL MOON
I stood at Harley's open window--looking down in the Tudor garden. The moon, like a silver mirror, hung in a cloudless sky. Over an hour had elapsed since I had heard Pedro making his nightly rounds. Nothing whatever of an
unusual nature had occurred, and although Harley and I had listened for any sound of nocturnal footsteps, our vigilance had passed unrewarded. Harley, unrolling the Chinese ladder, had set out upon a secret tour of the grounds, warning me that it must be a long business, since the brilliance of the moonlight rendered it necessary that he should make a wide detour, in order to avoid possible observation from the windows. I had wished to join him, but:

"I count it most important that one of us should remain in the house," he had replied.

As a result, here was I at the open window, questioning the shadows to right and left of me, and every moment expecting to see Harley reappear. I wondered what discoveries he would make. It would not have surprised me to learn that there were lights in many windows of Cray's Folly to-night.

Although, when we had rejoined the ladies for half an hour, after leaving Colonel Menendez's room, there had been no overt reference to the menace overhanging the house, yet, as we separated for the night, I had detected again in Val Beverley's eyes that look of repressed fear. Indeed, she was palpably disinclined to retire, but was carried off by the masterful Madame, who declared that she looked tired.

I wondered now, as I gazed down into the moon-bathed gardens, if Harley and I were the only wakeful members of the household at that hour. I should have been prepared to wager that there were others. I thought of the strange footsteps which so often passed Miss Beverley's room, and I discovered this thought to be an uncomfortable one.

Normally, I was sceptical enough, but on this night of the full moon as I stood there at the window, the horrors which Colonel Menendez had related to us grew very real in my eyes, and I thought that the mysteries of Voodoo might conceal strange and ghastly truths, "The scientific employment of darkness against light." Colin Camber's words leapt unbidden to my mind; and, such is the magic of moonlight, they became invested with a new and a deeper significance. Strange, that theories which one rejects whilst the sun is shining should assume a spectral shape in the light of the moon.

Such were my musings, when suddenly I heard a faint sound as of footsteps crunching upon gravel. I leaned farther out of the window, listening intently. I could not believe that Harley would be guilty of such an indiscretion as this, yet who else could be walking upon the path below?

As I watched, craning from the window, a tall figure appeared, and, slowly crossing the gravel path, descended the moss-grown steps to the Tudor garden.

It was Colonel Menendez!

He was bare-headed, but fully dressed as I had seen him in the smoking-room; and not yet grasping the portent of his appearance at that hour, but merely wondering why he had not yet retired, I continued to watch him. As I did so, something in his gait, something unnatural in his movements, caught hold of my mind with a sudden great conviction. He had reached the path which led to the sun-dial, and with short, queer, ataxic steps was proceeding in its direction, a striking figure in the brilliant moonlight which touched his gray hair with a silvery sheen.

His unnatural, automatic movements told their own story. He was walking in his sleep! Could it be in obedience to the call of M'kombo?

My throat grew dry and I knew not how to act. Unwillingly it seemed, with ever-halting steps, the figure moved onward. I could see that his fists were tightly clenched and that he held his head rigidly upright. All horrors, real and imaginary, which I had ever experienced, culminated in the moment when I saw this man of inflexible character, I could have sworn of indomitable will, moving like a puppet under the influence of some unnameable force.

He was almost come to the sun-dial when I determined to cry out. Then, remembering the shock experienced by a suddenly awakened somnambulist, and remembering that the Chinese ladder hung from the window at my feet, I changed my mind. Checking the cry upon my lips, I got astride of the window ledge, and began to grope for the bamboo rungs beneath me. I had found the first of these, and, turning, had begun to descend, when:

"Knox! Knox!" came softly from the opening in the box hedge, "what the devil are you about?"

It was Paul Harley returned from his tour of the building.

"Harley!" I whispered, descending, "quick! the Colonel has just gone into the Tudor garden!"

"What!" There was a note of absolute horror in the exclamation. "You should have stopped him, Knox, you should have stopped him!" cried Harley, and with that he ran off in the same direction.

Disentangling my foot from the rungs of the ladder which lay upon the ground, I was about to follow, when it happened--that strange and ghastly thing toward which, secretly, darkly, events had been tending.

The crack of a rifle sounded sharply in the stillness, echoing and re-echoing from wing to wing of Cray's Folly and then, more dimly, up the wooded slopes beyond! Somewhere ahead of me I heard Harley cry out:

"My God, I am too late! They have got him!"

Then, hotfoot, I was making for the entrance to the garden. Just as I came to it and raced down the steps I heard another sound the memory of which haunts me to this day.

Where it came from I had no idea. Perhaps I was too confused to judge accurately. It might have come from the
house, or from the slopes beyond the house. But it was a sort of shrill, choking laugh, and it set the ultimate touch of horror upon a scene macabre which, even as I write of it, seems unreal to me.

I ran up the path to where Harley was kneeling beside the sun-dial. Analysis of my emotions at this moment were futile; I can only say that I had come to a state of stupefaction. Face downward on the grass, arms outstretched and fists clenched, lay Colonel Menendez. I think I saw him move convulsively, but as I gained his side Harley looked up at me, and beneath the tan which he never lost his face had grown pale. He spoke through clenched teeth.

"Merciful God," he said, "he is shot through the head."

One glance I gave at the ghastly wound in the base of the Colonel's skull, and then swayed backward in a sort of nausea. To see a man die in the heat of battle, a man one has known and called friend, is strange and terrible. Here in this moon-bathed Tudor garden it was a horror almost beyond my powers to endure.

Paul Harley, without touching the prone figure, stood up. Indeed no examination of the victim was necessary. A rifle bullet had pierced his brain, and he lay there dead with his head toward the hills.

I clutched at Harley's shoulder, but he stood rigidly, staring up the slope past the angle of the tower, to where a gable of the Guest House jutted out from the trees.

"Did you hear--that cry?" I whispered, "immediately after the shot?"

"I heard it."

A moment longer he stood fixedly watching, and then:

"Not a wisp of smoke," he said. "You note the direction in which he was facing when he fell?"

He spoke in a stern and unnatural voice.

"I do. He must have turned half right when he came to the sun-dial."

"Where were you when the shot was fired?"

"Running in this direction."

"You saw no flash?"

"None."

"Neither did I," groaned Harley; "neither did I. And short of throwing a cordon round the hills what can be done? How can I move?"

He had somewhat relaxed, but now as I continued to clutch his arm, I felt the muscles grow rigid again.

"Look, Knox!" he whispered--"look!"

I followed the direction of his fixed stare, and through the trees on the hillside a dim light shone out. Someone had lighted a lamp in the Guest House.

A faint, sibilant sound drew my glance upward, and there overhead a bat circled--circled--dipped--and flew off toward the distant woods. So still was the night that I could distinguish the babble of the little stream which ran down into the lake. Then, suddenly, came a loud flapping of wings. The swans had been awakened by the sound of the shot. Others had been awakened, too, for now distant voices became audible, and then a muffled scream from somewhere within Cray's Folly.

"Back to the house, Knox," said Harley, hoarsely. "For God's sake keep the women away. Get Pedro, and send Manoel for the nearest doctor. It's useless but usual. Let no one deface his footprints. My worst anticipations have come true. The local police must be informed."

Throughout the time that he spoke he continued to search the moon-bathed landscape with feverish eagerness, but except for a faint movement of birds in the trees, for they, like the swans on the lake, had been alarmed by the shot, nothing stirred.

"It came from the hillside," he muttered. "Off you go, Knox."

And even as I started on my unpleasant errand, he had set out running toward the gate in the southern corner of the garden.

For my part I scrambled unceremoniously up the bank, and emerged where the yews stood sentinel beside the path. I ran through the gap in the box hedge just as the main doors were thrown open by Pedro.

He started back as he saw me.

"Pedro! Pedro!" I cried, "have the ladies been awakened?"

"Yes, yes! there is terrible trouble, sir. What has happened? What has happened?"

"A tragedy," I said, shortly. "Pull yourself together. Where is Madame de Staemer?"

Pedro uttered some exclamation in Spanish and stood, pale-faced, swelling before me, a dishevelled figure in a dressing gown. And now in the background Mrs. Fisher appeared. One frightened glance she cast in my direction, and would have hurried across the hall but I intercepted her.

"Where are you going, Mrs. Fisher?" I demanded. "What has happened here?"

"To Madame, to Madame," she sobbed, pointing toward the corridor which communicated with Madame de Staemer's bedchamber.
I heard a frightened cry proceeding from that direction, and recognized the voice of Nita, the girl who acted as Madame's maid. Then I heard Val Beverley.

"Go and fetch Mrs. Fisher, Nita, at once—and try to behave yourself. I have trouble enough."

I entered the corridor and pulled up short. Val Beverley, fully dressed, was kneeling beside Madame de Staemer, who wore a kimono over her night-robe, and who lay huddled on the floor immediately outside the door of her room!

"Oh, Mr. Knox!" cried the girl, pitifully, and raised frightened eyes to me. "For God's sake, what has happened?"

Nita, the Spanish girl, who was sobbing hysterically, ran along to join Mrs. Fisher.

"I will tell you in a moment," I said, quietly, rendered cool, as one always is, by the need of others. "But first tell me—how did Madame de Staemer get here?"

"I don't know, I don't know! I was startled by the shot. It has awakened everybody. And just as I opened my door to listen, I heard Madame cry out in the hall below. I ran down, turned on the light, and found her lying here. She, too, had been awakened, I suppose, and was endeavouring to drag herself from her room when her strength failed her and she swooned. She is too heavy for me to lift," added the girl, pathetically, "and Pedro is out of his senses, and Nita, who was the first of the servants to come, is simply hysterical, as you can see."

I nodded reassuringly, and stooping, lifted the swooning woman. She was much heavier than I should have supposed, but, Val Beverley leading the way, I carried her into her apartment and placed her upon the bed.

"I will leave her to you," I said. "You have courage, and so I will tell you what has happened."

"Yes, tell me, oh, tell me!"

She laid her hands upon my shoulders appealingly, and looked up into my eyes in a way that made me long to take her in my arms and comfort her, an insane longing which I only crushed with difficulty.

"Someone has shot Colonel Menendez," I said, in a low voice, for Mrs. Fisher had just entered.

"You mean—"

I nodded.

"Oh!"

Val Beverley opened and closed her eyes, clutching at me dizzily for a moment, then:

"I think," she whispered, "she must have known, and that was why she swooned. Oh, my God! how horrible."

I made her sit down in an armchair, and watched her anxiously, but although every speck of colour had faded from her cheeks, she was splendidly courageous, and almost immediately she smiled up at me, very wanly, but confidently.

"I will look after her," she said. "Mr. Harley will need your assistance."

When I returned to the hall I found it already filled with a number of servants incongruously attired. Carter the chauffeur, who lived at the lodge, was just coming in at the door, and:

"Carter," I said, "get a car out quickly, and bring the nearest doctor. If there is another man who can drive, send him for the police. Your master has been shot."

CHAPTER XVIII
INSPECTOR AYLESBURY OF MARKET HILTON

"Now, gentlemen," said Inspector Aylesbury, "I will take evidence."

Dawn was creeping grayly over the hills, and the view from the library windows resembled a study by Bastien-Lepage. The lamps burned yellowly, and the exotic appointments of the library viewed in that cold light for some reason reminded me of a stage set seen in daylight. The Velasquez portrait mentally translated me to the billiard room where something lay upon the settee with a white sheet drawn over it; and I wondered if my own face looked as wan and comfortless as did the faces of my companions, that is, of two of them, for I must except Inspector Aylesbury.

Squarely before the oaken mantel he stood, a large, pompous man, but in this hour I could find no humour in Paul Harley's description of him as resembling a walrus. He had a large auburn moustache tinged with gray, and prominent brown eyes, but the lower part of his face, which terminated in a big double chin, was ill-balanced by his small forehead. He was bulkily built, and I had conceived an unreasonable distaste for his puffy hands. His official air and oratorical manner were provoking.

Harley sat in the chair which he had occupied during our last interview with Colonel Menendez in the library, and I had realized—a realization which had made me uncomfortable—that I was seated upon the couch on which the Colonel had reclined. Only one other was present, Dr. Rolleston of Mid-Hatton, a slight, fair man with a brisk, military manner, acquired perhaps during six years of war service. He was standing beside me smoking a cigarette.

"I have taken all the necessary particulars concerning the position of the body," continued the Inspector, "the nature of the wound, contents of pockets, etc., and I now turn to you, Mr. Harley, as the first person to discover the murdered man."
Paul Harley lay back in the armchair watching the speaker.
"Before we come to what happened here to-night I should like to be quite clear about your own position in the matter, Mr. Harley. Now"-- Inspector Aylesbury raised one finger in forensic manner--"now, you visited me yesterday afternoon, Mr. Harley, and asked for certain information regarding the neighbourhood."

"I did," said Harley, shortly.

"The questions which you asked me were," continued the Inspector, slowly and impressively, "did I know of any negro or coloured people living in, or about, Mid-Hatton, and could I give you a list of the residents within a two-mile radius of Cray's Folly. I gave you the information which you required, and now it is your turn to give me some. Why did you ask those questions?"

"For this reason," was the reply--"I had been requested by Colonel Menendez to visit Cray's Folly, accompanied by my friend, Mr. Knox, in order that I might investigate certain occurrences which had taken place here."

"Oh," said the Inspector, raising his eyebrows, "I see. You were here to make investigations?"

"Yes."

"And these occurrences, will you tell me what they were?"

"Simple enough in themselves," replied Harley. "Someone broke into the house one night."

"Broke into the house?"

"Undoubtedly."

"But this was never reported to us."

"Possibly not, but someone broke in, nevertheless. Secondly, Colonel Menendez had detected someone lurking about the lawns, and thirdly, the wing of a bat was nailed to the main door."

Inspector Aylesbury lowered his eyebrows and concentrated a frowning glance upon the speaker.

"Of course, sir," he said, "I don't want to jump to conclusions, but you are not by any chance trying to be funny at a time like this?"

"My sense of humour has failed me entirely," replied Harley. "I am merely stating bald facts in reply to your questions."

"Oh, I see."

The Inspector cleared his throat.

"Someone broke into Cray's Folly, then, a fact which was not reported to me, a suspicious loiterer was seen in the grounds, again not reported, and someone played a silly practical joke by nailing the wing of a bat, you say, to the door. Might I ask, Mr. Harley, why you mention this matter? The other things are serious, but why you should mention the trick of some mischievous boy at a time like this I can't imagine."

"No," said Harley, wearily, "it does sound absurd, Inspector; I quite appreciate the fact. But, you see, Colonel Menendez regarded it as the most significant episode of them all."

"What! The bat wing nailed on the door?"

"The bat wing, decidedly. He believed it to be the token of a negro secret society which had determined upon his death, hence my enquiries regarding coloured men in the neighbourhood. Do you understand, Inspector?"

Inspector Aylesbury took a large handkerchief from his pocket and blew his nose. Replacing the handkerchief he cleared his throat, and:

"Am I to understand," he enquired, "that the late Colonel Menendez had expected to be attacked?"

"You may understand that," replied Harley. "It explains my presence in the house."

"Oh," said the Inspector, "I see. It looks as though he might have done better if he had applied to me."

Paul Harley glanced across in my direction and smiled grimly.

"As I had predicted, Knox," he murmured, "my Waterloo."

"What's that you say about Waterloo, Mr. Harley?" demanded the Inspector.

"Nothing germane to the case," replied Harley. "It was a reference to a battle, not to a railway station."

Inspector Aylesbury stared at him dully.

"You quite understand that you are giving evidence?" he said.

"It were impossible not to appreciate the fact."

"Very well, then. The late Colonel Menendez thought he was in danger from negroes. Why did he think that?"

"He was a retired West Indian planter," replied Harley, patiently, "and he was under the impression that he had offended a powerful native society, and that for many years their vengeance had pursued him. Attempts to assassinate him had already taken place in Cuba and in the United States."

"What sort of attempts?"

"He was shot at, several times, and once, in Washington, was attacked by a man with a knife. He maintained in my presence and in the presence of my friend, Mr. Knox, here, that these various attempts were due to members of a sect or religion known as Voodoo."
"Voodoo?"
"Voodoo, Inspector, also known as Obeah, a cult which has spread from the West Coast of Africa throughout the West Indies and to parts of the United States. The bat wing is said to be a sign used by these people."
Inspector Aylesbury scratched his chin.
"Now let me get this thing clear," said he: "Colonel Menendez believed that people called Voodoos wanted to kill him? Before we go any farther, why?"
"Twenty years ago in the West Indies he had shot an important member of this sect."
"Twenty years ago?"
"According to a statement which he made to me, yes."
"I see. Then for twenty years these Voodoos have been trying to kill him? Then he comes and settles here in Surrey and someone nails a bat wing to his door? Did you see this bat wing?"
"I did. I have it upstairs in my bag if you would care to examine it."
"Oh," said the Inspector, "I see. And thinking he had been followed to England he came to you to see if you could save him?"
Paul Harley nodded grimly.
"Why did he go to you in preference to the local police, the proper authorities?" demanded the Inspector.
"He was advised to do so by the Spanish ambassador, or so he informed me."
"Is that so? Well, I suppose it had to be. Coming from foreign parts. I expect he didn't know what our police are for." He cleared his throat. "Very well, I understand now what you were doing here, Mr. Harley. The next thing is, what were you doing tonight, as I see that both you and Mr. Knox are still in evening dress?"
"We were keeping watch," I replied.
Inspector Aylesbury turned to me ponderously, raising a fat hand. "One moment, Mr. Knox, one moment," he protested. "The evidence of one witness at a time."
"We were keeping watch," said Harley, deliberately echoing my words.
"Why?"
"More or less we were here for that purpose. You see, on the night of the full moon, according to Colonel Menendez, Obeah people become particularly active."
"Why on the night of the full moon?"
"This I cannot tell you."
"Oh, I see. You were keeping watch. Where were you keeping watch?"
"In my room."
"In which part of the house is your room?"
"Northeast. It overlooks the Tudor garden."
"At what time did you retire?"
"About half-past ten."
"Did you leave the Colonel well?"
"No, he had been unwell all day. He had remained in his room."
"Had he asked you to sit up?"
"Not at all; our vigil was quite voluntary."
"Very well, then, you were in your room when the shot was fired?"
"On the contrary, I was on the path in front of the house."
"Oh, I see. The front door was open, then?"
"Not at all. Pedro had locked up for the night."
"And locked you out?"
"No; I descended from my window by means of a ladder which I had brought with me for the purpose."
"With a ladder? That's rather extraordinary, Mr. Harley."
"It is extraordinary. I have strange habits."
Inspector Aylesbury cleared his throat again and looked frowningly across at my friend.
"What part of the grounds were you in when the shot was fired?" he demanded.
"Halfway along the north side."
"What were you doing?"
"I was running."
"Running?"
"You see, Inspector, I regarded it as my duty to patrol the grounds of the house at nightfall, since, for all I knew to the contrary, some of the servants might be responsible for the attempts of which the Colonel complained. I had descended from the window of my room, had passed entirely around the house east to west, and had returned to my
starting-point when Mr. Knox, who was looking out of the window, observed Colonel Menendez entering the Tudor
garden."
"Oh. Colonel Menendez was not visible to you?"
"Not from my position below, but being informed by my friend, who was hurriedly descending the ladder, that
the Colonel had entered the garden, I set off running to intercept him."
"Why?"
"He had acquired a habit of walking in his sleep, and I presumed that he was doing so on this occasion."
"Oh, I see. So being told by the gentleman at the window that Colonel Menendez was in the garden, you started
to run toward him. While you were running you heard a shot?"
"I did."
"Where do you think it came from?"
"Nothing is more difficult to judge, Inspector, especially when one is near to a large building surrounded by
trees."
"Nevertheless," said the Inspector, again raising his finger and frowning at Harley, "you cannot tell me that you
formed no impression on the point. For instance, was it near, or a long way off?"
"It was fairly near."
"Ten yards, twenty yards, a hundred yards, a mile?"
"Within a hundred yards. I cannot be more exact."
"Within a hundred yards, and you have no idea from which direction the shot was fired?"
"From the sound I could form none."
"Oh, I see. And what did you do?"
"I ran on and down into the sunken garden. I saw Colonel Menendez lying upon his face near the sun-dial. He
was moving convulsively. Running up to him, I that he had been shot through the head."
"What steps did you take?"
"My friend, Mr. Knox, had joined me, and I sent him for assistance."
"But what steps did you take to apprehend the murderer?"
Paul Harley looked at him quietly.
"What steps should you have taken?" he asked.
Inspector Aylesbury cleared his throat again, and:
"I don't think I should have let my man slip through my fingers like that," he replied. "Why! by now he may be
out of the county."
"Your theory is quite feasible," said Harley, tonelessly.
"You were actually on the spot when the shot was fired, you admit that it was fired within a hundred yards, yet
you did nothing to apprehend the murderer."
"No," replied Harley, "I was ridiculously inactive. You see, I am a mere amateur, Inspector. For my future
guidance I should be glad to know what the correct procedure would have been."
Inspector Aylesbury blew his nose.
"I know my job," he said. "If I had been called in there might have been a different tale to tell. But he was a
foreigner, and he paid for his ignorance, poor fellow."
Paul Harley took out his pipe and began to load it in a deliberate and lazy manner.
Inspector Aylesbury turned his prominent eyes in my direction.
CHAPTER XIX
COMPLICATIONS
"I am afraid of this man Aylesbury," said Paul Harley. We sat in the deserted dining room. I had contributed my
account of the evening's happenings, Dr. Rolleston had made his report, and Inspector Aylesbury was now
examining the servants in the library. Harley and I had obtained his official permission to withdraw, and the
physician was visiting Madame de Staemer, who lay in a state of utter prostration.
"What do you mean, Harley?"
"I mean that he will presently make some tragic blunder. Good God, Knox, to think that this man had sought my
aid, and that I stood by idly whilst he walked out to his death. I shall never forgive myself." He banged the table
with his fist. "Even now that these unknown fiends have achieved their object, I am helpless, helpless. There was not
a wisp of smoke to guide me, Knox, and one man cannot search a county."
I sighed wearily.
"Do you know, Harley," I said, "I am thinking of a verse of Kipling's."
"I know!" he interrupted, almost savagely.
"A Snider squibbed in the jungle. Somebody laughed and fled--"
"Oh, I know, Knox. I heard that damnable laughter, too."
"My God," I whispered, "who was it? What was it? Where did it come from?"
"As well ask where the shot came from, Knox. Out amongst all those trees, with a house that might have been built for a sounding-board, who could presume to say where either came from? One thing we know, that the shot came from the south."
He leaned upon a corner of the table, staring at me intently.
"From the south?" I echoed.
Harley glanced in the direction of the open door.
"Presently," he said, "we shall have to tell Aylesbury everything that we know. After all, he represents the law; but unless we can get Inspector Wessex down from Scotland Yard, I foresee a miscarriage of justice. Colonel Menendez lay on his face, and the line made by his recumbent body pointed almost directly toward--"
I nodded, watching him.
"I know, Harley--toward the Guest House."
Paul Harley inclined his head, grimly.
"The first light which we saw," he continued, "was in a window of the Guest House. It may have had no significance. Awakened by the sound of a rifle-shot near by, any one would naturally get up."
"And having decided to come downstairs and investigate," I continued, "would naturally light a lamp."
"Quite so." He stared at me very hard. "Yet," he said, "unless Mr. Colin Camber can produce an alibi I foresee a very stormy time for him."
"So do I, Harley. A deadly hatred existed between these two men, and probably this horrible deed was done on the spur of the moment. It is of his poor little girl-wife that I am thinking. As though her troubles were not heavy enough already."
"Yes," he agreed. "I am almost tempted to hold my tongue, Knox, until I have personally interviewed these people. But of course if our blundering friend directly questions me, I shall have no alternative. I shall have to answer him. His talent for examination, however, scarcely amounts to genius, so that we may not be called upon for further details at the moment. I wonder how I can induce him to requisition Scotland Yard?"
He rested his chin in his hand and stared down reflectively at the carpet. I thought that he looked very haggard, as he sat there in the early morning light, dressed as for dinner. There was something pathetic in the pose of his bowed head.
Leaning across, I placed my hand on his shoulder.
"Don't get despondent, old chap," I said. "You have not failed yet."
"Oh, but I have, Knox!" he cried, fiercely, "I have! He came to me for protection. Now he lies dead in his own house. Failed? I have failed utterly, miserably."
I turned aside as the door opened and Dr. Rolleston came in.
"Ah, gentlemen," he said, "I wanted to see you before leaving. I have just been to visit Madame de Staemer again."
"Yes," said Harley, eagerly; "how is she?"
Dr. Rolleston lighted a cigarette, frowning perplexedly the while.
"To be honest," he replied, "her condition puzzles me."
He walked across to the fireplace and dropped the match, staring at Harley with a curious expression.
"Has any one told her the truth?" he asked.
"You mean that Colonel Menendez is dead?"
"Yes," replied Dr. Rolleston. "I understood that no one had told her?"
"No one has done so to my knowledge," said Harley.
"Then the sympathy between them must have been very acute," murmured the physician, "for she certainly knows!"
"Do you really think she knows?" I asked.
"I am certain of it. She must have had knowledge of a danger to be apprehended, and being awakened by the sound of the rifle shot, have realized by a sort of intuition that the expected tragedy had happened. I should say, from the presence of a small bruise which I found upon her forehead, that she had actually walked out into the corridor."
"Walked?" I cried.
"Yes," said the physician. "She is a shell-shock case, of course, and we sometimes find that a second shock counteracts the effect of the first. This, temporarily at any rate, seems to have happened to-night. She is now in a very curious state: a form of hysteria, no doubt, but very curious all the same."
"Miss Beverley is with her?" I asked.
Dr. Rolleston nodded affirmatively.
"Yes, a very capable nurse. I am glad to know that Madame de Staemer is in such good hands. I am calling again early in the morning, and I have told Mrs. Fisher to see that nothing is said within hearing of the room which could enable Madame de Staemer to obtain confirmation of the idea, which she evidently entertains, that Colonel Menendez is dead."

"Does she actually assert that he is dead?" asked Harley.
"My dear sir," replied Dr. Rolleston, "she asserts nothing. She sits there like Niobe changed to stone, staring straight before her. She seems to be unaware of the presence of everyone except Miss Beverley. The only words she has spoken since recovering consciousness have been, 'Don't leave me!'"

"Hm," muttered Harley. "You have not attended Madame de Staemer before, doctor?"
"No," was the reply, "this is the first time I have entered Cray's Folly since it was occupied by Sir James Appleton."

He was about to take his departure when the door opened and Inspector Aylesbury walked in.

"Ah," said he, "I have two more witnesses to interview: Madame de Staemer and Miss Beverley. From these witnesses I hope to get particulars of the dead man's life which may throw some light upon the identity of his murderer."

"It is impossible to see either of them at present," replied Dr. Rolleston briskly.
"What's that, doctor?" asked the Inspector. "Are they hysterical, or something?"
"As a result of the shock, Madame de Staemer is dangerously ill," replied the physician, "and Miss Beverley is remaining with her."

"Oh, I see. But Miss Beverley could come out for a few minutes?"
"She could," admitted the physician, sharply, "but I don't wish her to do so."
"Oh, but the law must be served, doctor."
"Quite so, but not at the expense of my patient's reason."

He was a resolute man, this country practitioner, and I saw Harley smiling in grim approval.

"I have expressed my opinion," he said, finally, walking out of the room; "I shall leave the responsibility to you, Inspector Aylesbury. Good morning, gentlemen."

Inspector Aylesbury scratched his chin.

"That's awkward," he muttered. "The evidence of this woman is highly important."

He turned toward us, doubtingly, whereupon Harley stood up, yawning.

"If I can be of any further assistance to you, Inspector," said my friend, "command me. Otherwise, I feel sure you will appreciate the fact that both Mr. Knox and myself are extremely tired, and have passed through a very trying ordeal."

"Yes," replied Inspector Aylesbury, "that's all very well, but I find myself at a deadlock."

"You surprise me," declared Harley.

"I can see nothing to be surprised about," cried the Inspector. "When I was called in it was already too late."


"One moment, gentlemen," the Inspector insisted, as I stood up. "One moment. There is a little point which you may be able to clear up."

Harley paused, his hand on the door knob, and turned.

"The point is this," continued the Inspector, frowning portentously and lowering his chin so that it almost disappeared into the folds of his neck, "I have now interviewed all the inmates of Cray's Folly except the ladies. It appears to me that four people had not gone to bed. There are you two gentlemen, who have explained why I found you in evening dress, Colonel Menendez, who can never explain, and there is one other."

He paused, looking from Harley to myself.

It had come, the question which I had dreaded, the question which I had been asking myself ever since I had seen Val Beverley kneeling in the corridor, dressed as she had been when we had parted for the night.

"I refer to Miss Val Beverley," the police-court voice proceeded. "This lady had evidently not retired, and neither, it would appear, had the Colonel."

"Neither had I," murmured Harley, "and neither had Mr. Knox."

"Your reason I understand," said the Inspector, "or at least your explanation is a possible one. But if the party broke up, as you say it did, somewhere about half-past ten o'clock, and if Madame de Staemer had gone to bed, why should Miss Beverley have remained up?" He paused significantly. "As well as Colonel Menendez?" he added.

"Look here, Inspector Aylesbury," I interrupted, I speaking in a very quiet tone, I remember, "your insinuations annoy me."

"Oh," said he, turning his prominent eyes in my direction, "I see. They annoy you? If they annoy you, sir,
perhaps you can explain this point which is puzzling me?"

"I cannot explain it, but doubtless Miss Beverley can do so when you ask her."

"I should like to have asked her now, and I can't make out why she refuses to see me."

"She has not refused to see you," replied Harley, smoothly. "She is probably unaware of the fact that you wish to see her."

"I don't know so much," muttered the Inspector. "In my opinion I am being deliberately baffled on all sides. You can throw no light on this matter, then?"

"None," I answered, shortly, and Paul Harley shook his head.

"But you must remember, Inspector," he explained, "that the entire household was in a state of unrest."

"In other words, everybody was waiting for this very thing to happen?"

"Consciously, or subconsciously, everybody was."

"What do you mean by consciously or subconsciously?"

"I mean that those of us who were aware of the previous attempts on the life of the Colonel apprehended this danger. And I believe that something of this apprehension had extended even to the servants."

"Oh, to the servants? Now, I have seen all the servants, except the chef, who lives at a house on the outskirts of Mid-Hatton, as you may know. Can you give me any information about this man?"

"I have seen him," replied Harley, "and have congratulated him upon his culinary art. His name, I believe, is Deronne. He is a Spaniard, and a little fat man. Quite an amiable creature," he added.

"Hm." The Inspector cleared his throat noisily.

"If that is all," said Harley, "I should welcome an opportunity of a few hours' sleep."

"Oh," said the Inspector. "Well, I suppose that is quite natural, but I shall probably have a lot more questions to ask you later."


"Good-night."

Harley walked out of the dining room and across the deserted hall. He slowly mounted the stairs and I followed him into his room. It was now quite light, and as my friend dropped down upon the bed I thought that he looked very tired and haggard.

"Knox," he said, "shut the door."

I closed the door and turned to him.

"You heard that question about Miss Beverley?" I began.

"I heard it, and I am wondering what her answer will be when the Inspector puts it to her personally."

"Surely it is obvious?" I cried. "A cloud of apprehension had settled on the house last night, Harley, which was like the darkness of Egypt. The poor girl was afraid to go to bed. She was probably sitting up reading."

"Hm," said Harley, drumming his feet upon the carpet. "Of course you realize that there is one person in Cray's Folly who holds the clue to the heart of the mystery?"

"Madame de Staemer?"

He nodded grimly.

"When the rifle cracked out, Knox, she knew! Remember, no one had told her the truth. Yet can you doubt that she knows?"

"I don't doubt it."

"Neither do I." He clenched his teeth tightly and beat his fists upon the coverlet. "I was dreading that our friend the Inspector would ask a question which to my mind was very obvious."

"You mean?--"

"Well, what investigator whose skull contained anything more useful than bubbles would have failed to ask if Colonel Menendez had an enemy in the neighbourhood?"

"No one," I admitted; "but I fear the poor man is sadly out of his depth."

"He is wading hopelessly, Knox, but even he cannot fail to learn about Camber to-morrow."

He stared at me in a curiously significant manner.

"Do you mean, Harley," I began, "that you really think-----"

"My dear Knox," he interrupted, "forgetting, if you like, all that preceded the tragedy, with what facts are we left? That Colonel Menendez, at the moment when the bullet entered his brain, must have been standing facing directly toward the Guest House. Now, you have seen the direction of the wound?"

"He was shot squarely between the eyes. A piece of wonderful marksmanship."

"Quite," Harley nodded his head. "But the bullet came out just at the vertex of the spine."

He paused, as if waiting for some comment, and:

"You mean that the shot came from above?" I said, slowly.
"Obviously it came from above, Knox. Keep these two points in your mind, and then consider the fact that someone lighted a lamp in the Guest House only a few moments after the shot had been fired."

"I remember. I saw it."

"So did I," said Harley, grimly, "and I saw something else."

"What was that?"

"When you went off to summon assistance I ran across the lawn, scrambled through the bushes, and succeeded in climbing down into the little gully in which the stream runs, and up on the other side. I had proceeded practically in a straight line from the sun-dial, and do you know where I found myself?"

"I can guess," I replied.

"Of course you can. You have visited the place. I came out immediately beside a little hut, Knox, which stands at the end of the garden of the Guest House. Ahead of me, visible through a tangle of bushes in the neglected garden, a lamp was burning. I crept cautiously forward, and presently obtained a view of the interior of a kitchen. Just as I arrived at this point of vantage the lamp was extinguished, but not before I had had a glimpse of the only occupant of the room—the man who had extinguished the lamp."

"Who was it?" I asked, in a low voice.

"It was a Chinaman."

"Ah Tsong!" I cried.

"Doubtless."

"Good heavens, Harley, do you think—"

"I don't know what to think, Knox. A possible explanation is that the household had been aroused by the sound of the shot, and that Ah Tsong had been directed to go out and see if he could learn what had happened. At any rate, I waited no longer, but returned by the same route. If our portly friend from Market Hilton had possessed the eyes of an Auguste Dupin, he could not have failed to note that my dress boots were caked with light yellow clay; which also, by the way, besmears my trousers."

He stooped and examined the garments as he spoke.

"A number of thorns are also present," he continued. "In short, from the point of view of an investigation, I am a most provoking object."

He sighed wearily, and stared out of the window in the direction of the Tudor garden. There was a slight chilliness in the air, which, or perhaps a sudden memory of that which lay in the billiard room beneath us, may have accounted for the fact that I shivered violently.

Harley glanced up with a rather sad smile.

"The morning after Waterloo," he said. "Sleep well, Knox."

CHAPTER XX
A SPANISH CIGARETTE

Sleep was not for me, despite Harley's injunction, and although I was early afoot, the big house was already astir with significant movements which set the imagination on fire, to conjure up again the moonlight scene in the garden, making mock of the song of the birds and of the glory of the morning.

Manoel replied to my ring, and prepared my bath, but it was easy to see that he had not slept.

No sound came from Harley's room, therefore I did not disturb him, but proceeded downstairs in the hope of finding Miss Beverley about. Pedro was in the hall, talking to Mrs. Fisher, and:

"Is Inspector Aylesbury here?" I asked.

"No, sir, but he will be returning at about half-past eight, so he said."

"How is Madame de Staemer, Mrs. Fisher?" I enquired.

"Oh, poor, poor Madame," said the old lady, "she is asleep, thank God. But I am dreading her awakening."

"The blow is a dreadful one," I admitted; "and Miss Beverley?"

"She didn't go to her room until after four o'clock, sir, but Nita tells me that she will be down any moment now."

"Ah," said I, and lighting a cigarette, I walked out of the open doors into the courtyard.

I dreaded all the ghastly official formalities which the day would bring, since I realized that the brunt of the trouble must fall upon the shoulders of Miss Beverley in the absence of Madame de Staemer.

I wandered about restlessly, awaiting the girl's appearance. A little two seater was drawn up in the courtyard, but I had not paid much attention to it, until, wandering through the opening in the box hedge and on along the gravel path, I saw unfamiliar figures moving in the billiard room, and turned, hastily retracing my steps. Officialdom was at work already, and I knew that there would be no rest for any of us from that hour onward.

As I reentered the hall I saw Val Beverley coming down the staircase. She looked pale, but seemed to be in better spirits than I could have hoped for, although there were dark shadows under her eyes.

"Good morning, Miss Beverley," I said.
"Good morning, Mr. Knox. It was good of you to come down so early."
"I had hoped for a chat with you before Inspector Aylesbury returned," I explained.
She looked at me pathetically.
"I suppose he will want me to give evidence?"
"He will. We had great difficulty in persuading him not to demand your presence last night."
"It was impossible," she protested. "It would have been cruel to make me leave Madame in the circumstances."
"We realized this, Miss Beverley, but you will have to face the ordeal this morning."
We walked through into the library, where a maid white-faced and frightened looking, was dusting in a desultory fashion. She went out as we entered, and Val Beverley stood looking from the open window out into the rose garden bathed in the morning sunlight.
"Oh, Heavens," she said, clenching her hands desperately, "even now I cannot realize that the horrible thing is true." She turned to me. "Who can possibly have committed this cold-blooded crime?" she said in a low voice.
"What does Mr. Harley think? Has he any idea, any idea whatever?"
"Not that he has confided to me," I said, watching her intently. "But tell me, does Madame de Staemer know yet?"
"What do you mean?"
"I mean has she been told the truth?"
The girl shook her head.
"No," she replied; "I am positive that no one has told her. I was with her all the time, up to the very moment that she fell asleep. Yet--"
She hesitated.
"Yes?"
"She knows! Oh, Mr. Knox! to me that is the most horrible thing of all: that she knows, that she must have known all along--that the mere sound of the shot told her everything!"
"You realize, now," I said, quietly, "that she had anticipated the end?"
"Yes, yes. This was the meaning of the sorrow which I had seen so often in her eyes, the meaning of so much that puzzled me in her words, the explanation of lots of little things which have made me wonder in the past."
I was silent for a while, then:
"If she was so certain that no one could save him," I said, "she must have had information which neither he nor she ever imparted to us."
"I am sure she had," declared Val Beverley.
"But can you think of any reason why she should not have confided in Paul Harley?"
"I cannot, I cannot--unless--"
"Yes?"
"Unless, Mr. Knox," she looked at me strangely, "they were both under some vow of silence. Oh! it sounds ridiculous, wildly ridiculous, but what other explanation can there be?"
"What other, indeed? And now, Miss Beverley, I know one of the questions Inspector Aylesbury will ask you."
"What is it?"
"He has learned, from one of the servants I presume, as he did not see you, that you had not retired last night at the time of the tragedy."
"I had not," said Val Beverley, quietly. "Is that so singular?"
"To me it is no more than natural."
"I have never been so frightened in all my life as I was last night. Sleep was utterly out of the question. There was mystery in the very air. I knew, oh, Mr. Knox, in some way I knew that a tragedy was going to happen."
"I believe I knew, too," I said. "Good God, to think that we might have saved him!"
"Do you think--" began Val Beverley, and then paused.
"Yes?" I prompted.
"Oh, I was going to say a strange thing that suddenly occurred to me, but it is utterly foolish, I suppose. Inspector Aylesbury is coming back at nine o'clock, is he not?"
"At half-past eight, so I understand."
"I am afraid I have very little to tell him. I was sitting in my room in an appalling state of nerves when the shot was fired. I was not even reading; I was just waiting, waiting, for something to happen."
"I understand. My own experience was nearly identical."
"Then," continued the girl, "as I unlocked my door and peeped out, feeling too frightened to venture farther in the darkness, I heard Madame's voice in the hall below."
"Crying for help?"
"No," replied the girl, a puzzled frown appearing between her brows. "She cried out something in French. The intonation told me that it was French, although I could not detect a single word. Then I thought I heard a moan."

"And you ran down?"

"Yes. I summoned up enough courage to turn on the light in the corridor and to run down to the hall. And there she was lying just outside the door of her room."

"Was her room in darkness?"

"Yes. I turned on the light and succeeded in partly raising her, but she was too heavy for me to lift. I was still trying to revive her when Pedro opened the door of the servants' quarters. Oh," she closed her eyes wearily, "I shall never forget it."

I took her hand and pressed it reassuringly.

"Your courage has been wonderful throughout," I declared, "and I hope it will remain so to the end."

She smiled, and flushed slightly, as I released her hand again.

"I must go and take a peep at Madame now," she said, "but of course I shall not disturb her if she is still sleeping."

We turned and walked slowly back to the hall, and there just entering from the courtyard was Inspector Aylesbury.

"Ah!" he exclaimed, "good morning, Mr. Knox. This is Miss Beverley, I presume?"

"Yes, Inspector," replied the girl. "I understand that you wish to speak to me?"

"I do, Miss, but I shall not detain you for many minutes."

"Very well," she said, and as she turned and retraced her steps, he followed her back into the library.

I walked out to the courtyard, and avoiding the Tudor garden and the billiard room, turned in the other direction, passing the stables where Jim, the negro groom, saluted me very sadly, and proceeded round to the south side of the house.

Inspector Aylesbury, I perceived, had wasted no time. I counted no fewer than four men, two of them in uniform, searching the lawns and the slopes beyond, although what they were looking for I could not imagine.

Giving the library a wide berth, I walked along the second terrace, and presently came in sight of the east wing and the tower. There, apparently engaged in studying the rhododendrons, I saw Paul Harley.

He signalled to me, and, crossing the lawn, I joined him where he stood.

Without any word of greeting:

"You see, Knox," he said, speaking in the eager manner which betokened a rapidly working brain, "this is the path which the Colonel must have followed last night. Yonder is the door by which, according to his own account, he came out on a previous occasion, walking in his sleep. Do you remember?"

"I remember," I replied.

"Well, Pedro found it unlocked this morning. You see it faces practically due south, and the Colonel's bedroom is immediately above us where we stand." He stared at me queerly. "I must have passed this door last night only a few moments before the Colonel came out, for I was just crossing the courtyard and could see you at my window at the moment when you saw poor Menendez enter the Tudor garden. He must have actually been walking around the east wing at the same time that I was walking around the west. Now, I am going to show you something, Knox, something which I have just discovered."

From his waistcoat pocket he took out a half-smoked cigarette. I stared at it uncomprehendingly.

"Of course," he continued, "the weather has been bone dry for more than a week now, and it may have lain there for a long time, but to me, Knox, to me it looks suspiciously fresh."

"What is the point?" I asked, perplexedly.

"The point is that it is a hand-made cigarette, one of the Colonel's. Don't you recognize it?"

"Good heavens!" I said; "yes, of course it is."

He returned it to his pocket without another word.

"It may mean nothing," he murmured, "or it may mean everything. And now, Knox, we are going to escape."

"To escape?" I cried.

"Precisely. We are going to anticipate the probable movements of our blundering Aylesbury. In short, I wish you to present me to Mr. Colin Camber."

"What?" I exclaimed, staring at him incredulously.

"I am going to ask you," he began, and then, breaking off: "Quick, Knox, run!" he said.

And thereupon, to my amazement, he set off through the rhododendron bushes in the direction of the tower!

Utterly unable to grasp the meaning of his behaviour, I followed, nevertheless, and as we rounded the corner of the tower Harley pulled up short, and:

"I am not mad," he explained rather breathlessly, "but I wanted to avoid being seen by that constable who is
prowling about at the bottom of the lawn making signals in the direction of the library. Presumably he is replying to Inspector Aylesbury who wants to talk to us. I am determined to interview Camber before submitting to further official interrogation. It must be a cross-country journey, Knox. I am afraid we shall be a very muddy pair, but great issues may hang upon the success of our expedition."

He set off briskly toward a belt of shrubbery which marked the edge of the little stream. Appreciating something of his intentions, I followed his lead unquestioningly; and, scrambling through the bushes:

"This was the point at which I descended last night," he said. "You will have to wade, Knox, but the water is hardly above one's ankles."

He dropped into the brook, waded across, and began to climb up the opposite bank. I imitated his movements, and presently, having scrambled up on the farther side, we found ourselves standing on a narrow bank immediately under that summer house which Colin Camber had told me he had formerly used as a study.

"We can scarcely present ourselves at the kitchen door," murmured Harley; "therefore we must try to find a way round to the front. There is barbed wire here. Be careful."

I had now entered with zest into the business, and so the pair of us waded through rank grass which in places was waist high, and on through a perfect wilderness of weeds in which nettles dominated. Presently we came to a dry ditch, which we negotiated successfully, to find ourselves upon the high road some hundred yards to the west of the Guest House.

"I predict an unfriendly reception," I said, panting from my exertions, and surveying my friend, who was a mockery of his ordinarily spruce self.

"We must face it," he replied, grimly. "He has everything to gain by being civil to us."

We proceeded along the dusty high road, almost overarched by trees.

"Harley," I said, "this is going to be a highly unpleasant ordeal for me."

Harley stopped short, staring at me sternly.

"I know, Knox," he replied; "but I suppose you realize that a man's life is at stake."

"You mean--?"

"I mean that when we are both compelled to tell all we know, I doubt if there is a counsel in the land who would undertake the defence of Mr. Colin Camber."

"Good God! then you think he is guilty?"

"Did I say so?" asked Harley, continuing on his way. "I don't recollect saying so, Knox; but I do say that it will be a giant's task to prove him innocent."

"Then you believe him to be innocent?"

"My dear fellow," he replied, somewhat irritably, "I have not yet met Mr. Colin Camber. I will answer your question at the conclusion of the interview."

CHAPTER XXI
THE WING OF A BAT

For a long time our knocking and ringing elicited no response. The brilliant state of the door-brass afforded evidence of the fact that Ah Tsong had arisen, even if the other members of the household were still sleeping, and Harley, growing irritable, executed a loud tattoo upon the knocker. This had its effect. The door opened and Ah Tsong looked out.

"Tell your master that Mr. Paul Harley has called to see him upon urgent business."

"Master no got," replied Ah Tsong, and proceeded to close the door.

Paul Harley thrust his hand against it and addressed the man rapidly in Chinese. I could not have supposed the face of Ah Tsong capable of expressing so much animation. At the sound of his native tongue his eyes lighted up, and:

"_Tchee, tchee,_" he said, turned, and disappeared.

Although he had studiously avoided looking at me, that Ah Tsong would inform his master of the identity of his second visitor I did not doubt. If I had doubted I should promptly have been disillusioned, for:

"Tell them to go away!" came a muffled cry from somewhere within. "No spy of Devil Menendez shall ever pass my doors again!"

The Chinaman, on retiring, had left the door wide open, and I could see right to the end of the gloomy hall. Ah Tsong presently re-appeared, shuffling along in our direction. Unemotionally:

"Master no got," he repeated.

Paul Harley stamped his foot irritably.

"Good God, Knox," he said, "this unreasonable fool almost exhausts my patience."

Again he addressed Ah Tsong in Chinese, and although the man's wrinkled ivory face exhibited no trace of emotion, a deep understanding was to be read in those oblique eyes; and a second time Ah Tsong turned and trotted
back to the study. I could hear a muttered colloquy in progress, and suddenly the gaunt figure of Colin Camber burst into view.

He was shaved this morning, but arrayed as I had last seen him. Whilst he was not in that state of incoherent anger which I remembered and still resented, he was nevertheless in an evil temper.

He strode along the hallway, his large eyes widely opened, and fixing a cold stare upon the face of Harley.

"I learn that your name is Mr. Paul Harley," he said, entirely ignoring my presence, "and you send me a very strange message. I am used to the ways of Senor Menendez, therefore your message does not deceive me. The gateway, sir, is directly behind you."

Harley clenched his teeth, then:

"The scaffold, Mr. Camber," he replied, "is directly in front of you."

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded the other, and despite my resentment of the treatment which I had received at his hands, I could only admire the lofty disdain of his manner.

"I mean, Mr. Camber, that the police are close upon my heels."

"The police? Of what interest can this be to me?"

Harley's keen eyes were searching the pale face of the man before him.

"Mr. Camber," he said, "the shot was a good one."

Not a muscle of Colin Camber's face moved, but slowly he looked Paul Harley up and down, then:

"I have been called a hasty man," he replied, coldly, "but I can scarcely be accused of leaping to a conclusion when I say that I believe you to be mad. You have interrupted me, sir. Good morning."

He stepped back, and would have closed the door, but:

"Mr. Camber," said Paul Harley, and the tone of his voice was arresting.

Colin Camber paused.

"My name is evidently unfamiliar to you," Harley continued. "You regard myself and Mr. Knox as friends of the late Colonel Menendez--"

At that Colin Camber started forward.

"The _late_ Colonel Menendez?" he echoed, speaking almost in a whisper.

But as if he had not heard him Harley continued:

"As a matter of fact, I am a criminal investigator, and Mr. Knox is assisting me in my present case."

Colin Camber clenched his hands and seemed to be fighting with some emotion which possessed him, then:

"Do you mean," he said, hoarsely--"do you mean that Menendez is--dead?"

"I do," replied Harley. "May I request the privilege of ten minutes' private conversation with you?"

Colin Camber stood aside, holding the door open, and inclining his head in that grave salutation which I knew, but on this occasion, I think, principally with intent to hide his emotion.

Not another word did he speak until the three of us stood in the strange study where East grimaced at West, and emblems of remote devil-worship jostled the cross of the Holy Rose. The place was laden with tobacco smoke, and scattered on the carpet about the feet of the writing table lay twenty or more pages of closely written manuscript. Although this was a brilliant summer's morning, an old-fashioned reading lamp, called, I believe, a Victoria, having a nickel receptacle for oil at one side of the standard and a burner with a green glass shade upon the other, still shed its light upon the desk. It was only reasonable to suppose that Colin Camber had been at work all night.

He placed chairs for us, clearing them of the open volumes which they bore, and, seating himself at the desk:

"Mr. Knox," he began, slowly, paused, and then stood up, "I accused you of something when you last visited my house, something of which I would not lightly accuse any man. If I was wrong, I wish to apologize."

"Only a matter of the utmost urgency could have induced me to cross your threshold again," I replied, coldly. "Your behaviour, sir, was inexcusable."

He rested his long white hands upon the desk, looking across at me.

"Whatever I did and whatever I said," he continued, "one insult I laid upon you more deadly than the rest: I accused you of friendship with Juan Menendez. Was I unjust?"

He paused for a moment.

"I had been retained professionally by Colonel Menendez," replied Harley without hesitation, "and Mr. Knox kindly consented to accompany me."

Colin Camber looked very hard at the speaker, and then equally hard at me.

"Was it at behest of Colonel Menendez that you called upon me, Mr. Knox?"

"It was not," said Harley, tersely; "it was at mine. And he is here now at my request. Come, sir, we are wasting time. At any moment--"

Colin Camber held up his hand, interrupting him.

"By your leave, Mr. Harley," he said, and there was something compelling in voice and gesture, "I must first
perform my duty as a gentleman."

He stepped forward in my direction.

"Mr. Knox, I have grossly insulted you. Yet if you knew what had inspired my behaviour I believe you could find it in your heart to forgive me. I do not ask you to do so, however; I accept the humiliation of knowing that I have mortally offended a guest."

He bowed to me formally, and would have returned to his seat, but:

"Pray say no more," I said, standing up and extending my hand. Indeed, so impressive was the man's strange personality that I felt rather as one receiving a royal pardon than as an offended party being offered an apology. "It was a misunderstanding. Let us forget it."

His eyes gleamed, and he seized my hand in a warm grip.

"You are generous, Mr. Knox, you are generous. And now, sir," he inclined his head in Paul Harley's direction, and resumed his seat.

Harley had suffered this odd little interlude in silence but now:

"Mr. Camber," he said, rapidly, "I sent you a message by your Chinese servant to the effect that the police would be here within ten minutes to arrest you."

"You did, sir," replied Colin Camber, drawing toward him a piece of newspaper upon which rested a dwindling mound of shag. "This is most disturbing, of course. But since I have not rendered myself amenable to the law, it leaves me moderately unmoved. Upon your second point, Mr. Harley, I shall beg you, to enlarge. You tell me that Don Juan Menendez is dead?"

He had begun to fill his corn-cob as he spoke the words, but from where I sat I could just see his face, so that although his voice was well controlled, the gleam in his eyes was unmistakable.

"He was shot through the head shortly after midnight."

"What?"

Colin Camber dropped the corn-cob and stood up again, the light of a dawning comprehension in his eyes.

"Do you mean that he was murdered?"

"I do."

"Good God," whispered Camber, "at last I understand."

"That is why we are here, Mr. Camber, and that is why the police will be here at any moment."

Colin Camber stood erect, one hand resting upon the desk.

"So this was the meaning of the shot which we heard in the night," he said, slowly.

Crossing the room, he closed and locked the study door, then, returning, he sat down once more, entirely, master of himself. Frowning slightly he looked from Harley in my direction, and then back again at Harley.

"Gentlemen," he resumed, "I appreciate the urgency of my danger. Preposterous though I know it to be, nevertheless it is perhaps no more than natural that suspicion should fall upon me."

He was evidently thinking rapidly. His manner had grown quite cool, and I could see that he had focussed his keen brain upon the abyss which he perceived to lie in his path.

"Before I commit myself to any statements which might be used as evidence," he said, "doubtless, Mr. Harley, you will inform me of your exact standpoint in this matter. Do you represent the late Colonel Menendez, do you represent the law, or may I regard you as a perfectly impartial enquirer?"

"You may regard me, Mr. Camber, as one to whom nothing but the truth is of the slightest interest. I was requested by the late Colonel Menendez to visit Cray's Folly."

"Professionally?"

"To endeavour to trace the origin of certain occurrences which had led him to believe his life to be in danger."

Harley paused, staring hard at Colin Camber.

"Since I recognize myself to be standing in the position of a suspect," said the latter, "it is perhaps unfair to request you to acquaint me with the nature of these occurrences?"

"The one, sir," replied Paul Harley, "which most intimately concerns yourself is this: Almost exactly a month ago the wing of a bat was nailed to the door of Cray's Folly."

"What?" exclaimed Colin Camber, leaning forward eagerly--"the wing of a bat? What kind of bat?"

"Of a South American Vampire Bat."

The effect of those words was curious. If any doubt respecting Camber's innocence had remained with me at this time I think his expression as he leaned forward across the desk must certainly have removed it. That the man was intellectually unusual, and intensely difficult to understand, must have been apparent to the most superficial observer, but I found it hard to believe that these moods of his were simulated. At the words "A South American Vampire Bat" the enthusiasm of the specialist leapt into his eyes. Personal danger was forgotten. Harley had trenched upon his particular territory, and I knew that if Colin Camber had actually killed Colonel Menendez, then it
had been the act of a maniac. No man newly come from so bloody a deed could have acted as Camber acted now.

"It is the death-sign of Voodoo!" he exclaimed, excitedly.

Yet again he arose, and crossing to one of the many cabinets which were in the room, he pulled open a drawer and took out a shallow tray.

My friend was watching him intently, and from the expression upon his bronzed face I could deduce the fact that in Colin Camber he had met the supreme puzzle of his career. As Camber stood there, holding up an object which he had taken from the tray, whilst Paul Harley sat staring at him, I thought the scene was one transcending the grotesque. Here was the suspected man triumphantly producing evidence to hang himself.

Between his finger and thumb Camber held the wing of a bat!

CHAPTER XXII
COLIN CAMBER'S SECRET

"I brought this bat wing from Haiti," he explained, replacing it in the tray. "It was found beneath the pillow of a negro missionary who had died mysteriously during the night."

He returned the tray to the drawer, closed the latter, and, standing erect, raised clenched hands above his head.

"With no thought of blasphemy," he said, "but with reverence, I thank God from the bottom of my heart that Juan Menendez is dead."

He reseated himself, whilst Harley regarded him silently, then:

"The evil that men do lives after them," he murmured. "A bat wing," he continued, musingly, "a bat wing was nailed to Menendez's door." He stared across at Harley. "Am I to believe, sir, that this was the clue which led you to the Guest House?"

Paul Harley nodded.

"It was."

"I understand. I must therefore take no more excursions into my special subject, but must endeavour to regard the matter from the point of view of the enquiry. Am I to assume that Menendez was acquainted with the significance of this token?"

"He had seen it employed in the West Indies."

"Ah, the black-hearted devil! But I fear I am involving myself more deeply in suspicion. Perhaps, Mr. Harley, the ends of justice would be better served if you were to question me, and I to confine myself to answering you."

"Very well," Harley agreed: "when and where did you meet the late Colonel Menendez?"

"I never met him in my life."

"Do you mean that you had never spoken to him?"

"Never."

"Hm. Tell me, Mr. Camber, where were you at twelve o'clock last night?"

"Here, writing."

"And where was Ah Tsong?"

"Ah Tsong?" Colin Camber stared uncomprehendingly. "Ah Tsong was in bed."

"Oh. Did anything disturb you?"

"Yes, the sound of a rifle shot."

"You knew it for a rifle shot?"

"It was unmistakable."

"What did you do?"

"I was in the midst of a most important passage, and I should probably have taken no steps in the matter but that Ah Tsong knocked upon the study door, to inform me that my wife had been awakened by the sound of the shot. She is somewhat nervous and had rung for Ah Tsong, asking him to see if all were well with me."

"Do I understand that she imagined the sound to have come from this room?"

"When we are newly awakened from sleep, Mr. Harley, we retain only an imperfect impression of that which awakened us."

"True," replied Paul Harley; "and did Ah Tsong return to his room?"

"Not immediately. Permit me to say, Mr. Harley, that the nature of your questions surprises me. At the moment I fail to see their bearing upon the main issue. He returned and reported to my wife that I was writing, and she then requested him to bring her a glass of milk. Accordingly, he came down again, and going out into the kitchen, executed this order."

"Ah. He would have to light a candle for that purpose, I suppose?"

"A candle, or a lamp," replied Colin Camber, staring at Paul Harley. Then, his expression altering: "Of course!" he cried. "You saw the light from Cray's Folly? I understand at last."

We were silent for a while, until:
"How long a time elapsed between the firing of the shot and Ah Tsong's knocking at the study door?" asked Harley.

"I could not answer definitely. I was absorbed in my work. But probably only a minute or two."

"Was the sound a loud one?"

"Fairly loud. And very startling, of course, in the silence of the night."

"The shot, then, was fired from somewhere quite near the house?"

"I presume so."

"But you thought no more about the matter?"

"Frankly, I had forgotten it. You see, the neighbourhood is rich with game; it might have been a poacher."

"Quite," murmured Harley, but his face was very stern. "I wonder if you fully realize the danger of your position, Mr. Camber?"

"Believe me," was the reply, "I can anticipate almost every question which I shall be called upon to answer."

Paul Harley stared at him in a way which told me that he was comparing his features line for line with the etching of Edgar Allen Poe which hung in his office in Chancery Lane, and:

"I do believe you," he replied, "and I am wondering if you are in a position to clear yourself?"

"On the contrary," Camber assured him, "I am only waiting to hear that Juan Menendez was shot in the grounds of Cray's Folly, and not within the house, to propose to you that unless the real assassin be discovered, I shall quite possibly pay the penalty of his crime."

"He was shot in the Tudor garden," replied Harley, "within sight of your windows."

"Ah!" Colin Camber resumed the task of stuffing shag into his corn-cob. "Then if it would interest you, Mr. Harley, I will briefly outline the case against myself. I had never troubled to disguise the fact that I hated Menendez. Many witnesses can be called to testify to this. He was in Cuba when I was in Cuba, and evidence is doubtless obtainable to show that we stayed at the same hotels in various cities of the United States prior to my coming to England and leasing the Guest House. Finally, he became my neighbour in Surrey."

He carefully lighted his pipe, whilst Harley and I watched him silently, then:

"Menendez had the bat wing nailed to the door of his house," he continued. "He believed himself to be in danger, and associated this sign with the source of his danger. Excepting himself and possibly certain other members of his household it is improbable that any one else in Surrey understands the significance of the token save myself. The unholy rites of Voodoo are a closed book to the Western nations. I have opened that book, Mr. Harley. The powers of the Obeah man, and especially of the arch-magician known and dreaded by every negro as 'Bat Wing,' are familiar to me. Since I was alone at the time that the shot was fired, and for some few minutes afterward, and since the Tudor garden of Cray's Folly is within easy range of the Guest House, to fail to place me under arrest would be an act of sheer stupidity."

He spoke the words with a sort of triumph. Like the fakir, he possessed the art of spiritual detachment, which is an attribute of genius. From an intellectual eminence he was surveying his own peril. Colin Camber in the flesh had ceased to exist; he was merely a pawn in a fascinating game.

Paul Harley glanced at his watch.

"Mr. Camber," he said, "I have just sustained the most crushing defeat of my career. The man who had summoned me to his aid was killed almost before my eyes. One thing I must do or accept professional oblivion."

"I understand." Colin Camber nodded. "Apprehend his murderer?"

"Ultimately, yes. But, firstly, I must see that to the assassination of Colonel Menendez a judicial murder is not added."

"You mean--?" asked Camber, eagerly.

"I mean that if you killed Menendez, you are a madman, and I have formed the opinion during our brief conversation that you are brilliantly sane."

Colin Camber rose and bowed in that old-world fashion which was his.

"I am obliged to you, Mr. Harley," he replied. "But has Mr. Knox informed you of my bibulous habits?"

Paul Harley nodded.

"They will, of course, be ascribed," continued Camber, "and there are many suitable analogies, to deliberate contemplation of a murderous deed. I would remind you that chronic alcoholism is a recognized form, of insanity."

His mood changed again, and sighing wearily, he lay back in the chair. Over his pale face crept an expression which I knew, instinctively, to mean that he was thinking of his wife.

"Mr. Harley," he said, speaking in a very low tone which scorned to accentuate the beauty of his voice, "I have suffered much in the quest of truth. Suffering is the gate beyond which we find compassion. Perhaps you have thought my foregoing remarks frivolous, in view of the fact that last night a soul was sent to its reckoning almost at my doors. I revere the truth, however, above all lesser laws and above all expediency. I do not, and I cannot, regret
the end of the man Menendez. But for three reasons I should regret to pay the penalty of a crime which I did not commit, These reasons are--one," he ticked them off upon his delicate fingers--"It would be bitter to know that Devil Menendez even in death had injured me; two--My work in the world, which is unfinished; and, three--My wife."

I watched and listened, almost awed by the strangeness of the man who sat before me. His three reasons were illuminating. A casual observer might have regarded Colin Camber as a monument of selfishness. But it was evident to me, and I knew it must be evident to Paul Harley, that his egotism was quite selfless. To a natural human resentment and a pathetic love for his wife he had added, as an equal clause, the claim of the world upon his genius.

"I have heard you," said Paul Harley, quietly, "and you have led me to the most important point of all."

"What point is that, Mr. Harley?"

"You have referred to your recent lapse from abstemiousness. Excuse me if I discuss personal matters. This you ascribed to domestic troubles, or so Mr. Knox has informed me. You have also referred to your undisguised hatred of the late Colonel Juan Menendez. I am going to ask you, Mr. Camber, to tell me quite frankly what was the nature of those domestic troubles, and what had caused this hatred which survives even the death of its object?"

Colin Camber stood up, angular, untidy, but a figure of great dignity.

"Mr. Harley," he replied, "I cannot answer your questions."

Paul Harley inclined his head gravely.

"May I suggest," he said, "that you will be called upon to do so under circumstances which will brook no denial."

Colin Camber watched him unflinchingly.

"The fate of every man is hung around his neck," he replied.

"Yet, in this secret history which you refuse to divulge, and which therefore must count against you, the truth may lie which exculpates you."

"It may be so. But my determination remains unaltered."

"Very well," answered Paul Harley, quietly, but I could see that he was exercising a tremendous restraint upon himself. "I respect your decision, but you have given me a giant's task, and for this I cannot thank you, Mr. Camber."

I heard a car pulled up in the road outside the Guest House. Colin Camber clenched his hands and sat down again in the carved chair.

"The opportunity has passed," said Harley. "The police are here."

CHAPTER XXIII
INSPECTOR AYLESBURY CROSS-EXAMINES

"Oh, I see," said Inspector Aylesbury, "a little private confab, eh?"

He sank his chin into its enveloping folds, treating Harley and myself each to a stare of disapproval.

"These gentlemen very kindly called to advise me of the tragic occurrence at Cray's Folly," explained Colin Camber. "Won't you be seated, Inspector?"

"Thanks, but I can conduct my examination better standing."

He turned to Paul Harley.

"Might I ask, Mr. Harley," he said, "what concern this is of yours?"

"I am naturally interested in anything appertaining to the death of a client, Inspector Aylesbury."

"Oh, so you slip in ahead of me, having deliberately withheld information from the police, and think you are going to get all the credit. Is that it?"


"Professional jealousy?" cried the Inspector. "Allow me to remind you that you have no official standing in this case whatever. You are merely a member of the public, nothing more, nothing less."

"I am happy to be recognized as a member of that much-misunderstood body."

"Ah, well, we shall see. Now, Mr. Camber, your attention, please."

He raised his finger impressively.

"I am informed by Miss Beverley that the late Colonel Menendez looked upon you as a dangerous enemy."

"Were those her exact words?" I murmured.

"Mr. Knox!"

The inspector turned rapidly, confronting me. "I have already warned your friend. But if I have any interruptions from you, I will have you removed."

He continued to glare at me for some moments, and then, turning again to Colin Camber:

"I say, I have information that Colonel Menendez looked upon you as a dangerous neighbour."

"In that event," replied Colin Camber, "why did he lease an adjoining property?"

"That's an evasion, sir. Answer my first question, if you please."

"You have asked me no question, Inspector."
“Oh, I see. That’s your attitude, is it? Very well, then. Were you, or were you not, an enemy of the late Colonel Menendez?”

“I was.”

“What’s that?”

“I say I was. I hated him, and I hate him no less in death than I hated him living.”

I think that I had never seen a man so taken aback, Inspector Aylesbury, drawing out a large handkerchief blew his nose. Replacing the handkerchief, he produced a note-book.

“I am placing that statement on record, sir,” he said.

He made an entry in the book, and then:

“Where did you first meet Colonel Menendez?” he asked.

“I never met him in my life.”

“What’s that?”

Colin Camber merely shrugged his shoulders.

“I will repeat my question,” said the Inspector, pompously. “Where did you first meet Colonel Juan Menendez?”

“I have answered you, Inspector.”

“Oh, I see. You decline to answer that question. Very well, I will make a note of this.” He did so. “And now,” said he, “what were you doing at midnight last night?”

“I was writing.”

“Where?”

“Here.”

“What happened?”

Very succinctly Colin Camber repeated the statement which he had already made to Paul Harley, and, at its conclusion:

“Send for the man, Ah Tsong,” directed Inspector Aylesbury.

Colin Camber inclined his head, clapped his bands, and silently Ah Tsong entered.

The Inspector stared at him for several moments as a visitor to the Zoo might stare at some rare animal; then:

“Your name is Ah Tsong?” he began.

“Ah Tsong,” murmured the Chinaman.

“I am going to ask you to give an exact account of your movements last night.”

“No sabby.”

Inspector Aylesbury cleared his throat.

“I say I wish to know exactly what you did last night. Answer me.”

Ah Tseng’s face remained quite expressionless, and:

“No sabby,” he repeated.

“Oh, I see,” said the Inspector, “This witness refuses to answer at all.”

“You are wrong,” explained Colin Camber, quietly. “Ah Tsong is a Chinaman, and his knowledge of English is very limited. He does not understand you.”

“He understood my first question. You can’t draw wool over my eyes. He knows well enough. Are you going to answer me?” he demanded, angrily, of the Chinaman.

“No sabby, master,” he said, glancing aside at Colin Camber. “Number- one p’liceeman gotchee no pidgin.”

Paul Harley was leisurely filling his pipe, and:

“If you think the evidence of Ah Tsong important, Inspector,” he said, “I will interpret if you wish.”

“You will do what?”

“I will act as interpreter.”

“Do you want me to believe that you speak Chinese?”

“Your beliefs do not concern me, Inspector; I am merely offering my services.”

“Thanks,” said the Inspector, dryly, “but I won’t trouble you. I should like a few words with Mrs. Camber.”

“Very good.”

Colin Camber bent his head gravely, and gave an order to Ah Tsong, who turned and went out.

“And what firearms have you in the house?” asked Inspector Aylesbury.

“An early Dutch arquebus, which you see in the corner,” was the reply.

“That doesn’t interest me. I mean up-to-date weapons.”

“And a Colt revolver which I have in a drawer here.”

As he spoke, Colin Camber opened a drawer in his desk and took out a heavy revolver of the American Army Service pattern.

“I should like to examine it, if you please.”
Camber passed it to the Inspector, and the latter, having satisfied himself that none of the chambers were loaded, peered down the barrel, and smelled at the weapon suspiciously.

"If it has been recently used it has been well cleaned," he said, and placed it on a cabinet beside him. "Anything else?"

"Nothing."

"No sporting rifles?"

"None. I never shoot."

"Oh, I see."

The door opened and Mrs. Camber came in. She was very simply dressed, and looked even more child-like than she had seemed before. I think Ah Tsong had warned her of the nature of the ordeal which she was to expect, but her wide-eyed timidity was nevertheless pathetic to witness.

She glanced at me with a ghost of a smile, and:

"Ysola," said Colin Camber, inclining his head toward me in a grave gesture of courtesy, "Mr. Knox has generously forgiven me a breach of good manners for which I shall never forgive myself. I beg you to thank him, as I have done."

"It is so good of you," she said, sweetly, and held out her hand. "But I knew you would understand that it was just a great mistake."

"Mr. Paul Harley," Camber continued, "my wife welcomes you; and this, Ysola, is Inspector Aylesbury, who desires a few moments' conversation upon a rather painful matter."

"I have heard, I have heard," she whispered. "Ah Tsong has told me."

The pupils of her eyes dilated, as she fixed an appealing glance upon the Inspector.

In justice to the latter he was palpably abashed by the delicate beauty of the girl who stood before him, by her naivete, and by that childishness of appearance and manner which must have awakened the latent chivalry in almost any man's heart.

"I am sorry to have to trouble you with this disagreeable business, Mrs. Camber," he began; "but I believe you were awakened last night by the sound of a shot."

"Yes," she replied, watching him intently, "that is so."

"May I ask at what time this was heard?"

"Ah Tsong told me it was after twelve o'clock."

"Was the sound a loud one?"

"Yes. It must have been to have awakened me."

"I see. Did you think it was in the house?"

"Oh, no."

"In the garden?"

"I really could not say, but I think that it was farther away than that."

"And what did you do?"

"I rang the bell for Ah Tsong."

"Did he come immediately?"

"Almost immediately."

"He was dressed, then?"

"No, I don't think he was. He had quickly put on an overcoat. He usually answers at once, when I ring for him, you see."

"I see. What did you do then?"

"Well, I was frightened, you understand, and I told him to find out if all was well with my husband. He came back and told me that Colin was writing. But the sound had alarmed me very much."

"Oh, and now perhaps you will tell me, Mrs. Camber, when and where your husband first met Colonel Menendez?"

Every vestige of colour fled from the girl's face.

"So far as I know--they never met," she replied, haltingly.

"Could you swear to that?"

"Yes."

I think that hitherto she had not fully realized the nature of the situation; but now something in the Inspector's voice, or perhaps in our glances, told her the truth. She moved to where Colin Camber was sitting, looking down at him questioningly, pitifully. He put his arm about her and drew her close.

Inspector Aylesbury cleared his throat and returned his note-book to his pocket.

"I am going to take a look around the garden," he announced.
My respect for him increased slightly, and Harley and I followed him out of the study. A police sergeant was sitting in the hall, and Ah Tsong was standing just outside the door.

"Show me the way to the garden," directed the Inspector.

Ah Tsong stared stupidly, whereupon Paul Harley addressed him in his native language, rapidly and in a low voice, in order, as I divined, that the Inspector should not hear him.

"I feel dreadfully guilty, Knox," he confessed, in a murmured aside. "For any Englishman, fictitious characters excepted, to possess a knowledge of Chinese is almost indecent."

Presently, then, I found myself once more in that unkempt garden of which I retained such unpleasant memories.

Inspector Aylesbury stared all about and up at the back of the house, humming to himself and generally behaving as though he were alone. Before the little summer study he stood still, and:

"Oh, I see," he muttered.

What he had seen was painfully evident. The right-hand window, beneath which there was a permanent wooden seat, commanded an unobstructed view of the Tudor garden in the grounds of Cray's Folly. Clearly I could detect the speck of high-light upon the top of the sun-dial.

The Inspector stepped into the hut. It contained a bookshelf upon which a number of books remained, a table and a chair, with some few other dilapidated appointments. I glanced at Harley and saw that he was staring as if hypnotized at the prospect in the valley below. I observed a constable on duty at the top of the steps which led down into the Tudor garden, but I could see nothing to account for Harley's fixed regard, until:

"Pardon me one moment, Inspector," he muttered, brusquely.

Brushing past the indignant Aylesbury, who was examining the contents of the shelves in the hut, he knelt upon the wooden seat and stared intently through the open window.

"One-two-three-four-five-six-seven," he chanted. "Good! That will settle it."

"Oh, I see," said Inspector Aylesbury, standing strictly upright, his prominent eyes turned in the direction of the kneeling Harley. "One, two, three, four, and so on will settle it, eh? If you don't mind me saying so, it was settled already."

"Yes?" replied Harley, standing up, and I saw that his eyes were very bright and that his face was slightly flushed. "You think the case is so simple as that?"

"Simple?" exclaimed the Inspector. "It's the most cunning thing that was ever planned, but I flatter myself that I have a good straight eye which can see a fairly long way."

"Excellent," murmured Harley. "I congratulate you. Myopia is so common in the present generation. You have decided, of course, that the murder was committed by Ah Tsong?"

Inspector Aylesbury's eyes seemed to protrude extraordinarily.

"Ah Tsong!" he exclaimed. "Ah Tsong!"

"Surely it is palpable," continued Harley, "that of the three people residing in the Guest House, Ah Tsong is the only one who could possibly have done the deed."

"Who could possibly--who could possibly-----" stuttered the Inspector, then paused because of sheer lack of words.

"Review the evidence," continued Harley, coolly. "Mrs. Camber was awakened by the sound of a shot. She immediately rang for Ah Tsong. There was a short interval before Ah Tsong appeared--and when he did appear he was wearing an overcoat. Note this point, Inspector: wearing an overcoat. He descended to the study and found Mr. Camber writing. Now, Ah Tsong sleeps in a room adjoining the kitchen on the ground floor. We passed his quarters on our way to the garden a moment ago. Of course, you had noted this? Mr. Camber is therefore eliminated from our list of suspects."

The Inspector was growing very red, but ere he had time to speak Harley continued:

"The first of these three persons to have heard a shot fired at the end of the garden would have been Ah Tsong, and not Mrs. Camber, whose room is upstairs and in the front of the house. If it had been fired by Mr. Camber from the spot upon which we now stand, he would still have been in the garden at the moment when Mrs. Camber was ringing the bell for Ah Tsong. Mr. Camber must therefore have returned from the end of the garden to the study, and have passed Ah Tsong's room--unheard by the occupant--between the time that the bell rang and the time that Ah Tsong went upstairs. This I submit to be impossible. There is an alternative: it is that he slipped in whilst Ah Tsong, standing on the landing above, was receiving his mistress's orders. I submit that the alternative is also impossible. We thus eliminate Mr. Camber from the case, as I have already mentioned."

"Eliminate--eliminate!" cried the Inspector, beginning to recover power of speech. "Do you think you can fuddle me with a mass of words, Mr. Harley? Allow me to point out to you, sir, that you are in no way officially associated with this matter."

"You have already drawn my attention to the fact, Inspector, but it can do no harm to jog my memory."
Harley spoke entirely without bitterness, and I, who knew his every mood, realized that he was thoroughly enjoying himself. Therefore I knew that at last he had found a clue.

"I may add, Inspector," said he, "that upon further reflection I have also eliminated Ah Tsong from the case. I forgot to mention that he lacks the first and second fingers of his right hand; and I have yet to meet the marksman who can shoot a man squarely between the eyes, by moonlight, at a hundred yards, employing his third finger as trigger-finger. There are other points, but these will be sufficient to show you that this case is more complicated than you had assumed it to be."

Inspector Aylesbury did not deign to reply, or could not trust himself to do so. He turned and made his way back to the house.

CHAPTER XXIV
AN OFFICIAL MOVE
We reentered the study to find Mrs. Camber sitting in a chair very close to her husband. Inspector Aylesbury stood in the open doorway for a moment, and then, stepping back into the hall:

"Sergeant Butler," he said, addressing the man who waited there.
"Yes, sir."
"Go out to the gate and get Edson to relieve you. I shall want you to go back to headquarters in a few minutes."
"Very good, sir."
I scented what was coming, and as Inspector Aylesbury reentered the room:
"I should like to make a statement," announced Paul Harley, quietly.
The Inspector frowned, and lowering his chin, regarded him with little favour.
"I have not invited any statement from you, Mr. Harley," said he.
"Quite," returned Harley. I am volunteering it. It is this: I gather that you are about to take an important step officially. Having in view certain steps which I, also, am about to take, I would ask you to defer action, purely in your own interests, for at least twenty-four hours."
"I hear you," said the Inspector, sarcastically.
"Very well, Inspector. You have come newly into this case, and I assure you that its apparent simplicity is illusive. As new facts come into your possession you will realize that what I say is perfectly true, and if you act now you will be acting hastily. All that I have learned I am prepared to place at your disposal. But I predict that the interference of Scotland Yard will be necessary before this enquiry is concluded. Therefore I suggest, since you have rejected my cooperation, that you obtain that of Detective Inspector Wessex, of the Criminal Investigation Department. In short, this is no one-man job. You will do yourself harm by jumping to conclusions, and cause unnecessary trouble to perfectly innocent people."
"Is your statement concluded?" asked the Inspector.
"For the moment I have nothing to add."
"Oh, I see. Very good. Then we can now get to business. Always with your permission, Mr. Harley."

He took his stand before the fireplace, very erect, and invested with his most official manner. Mrs. Camber watched him in a way that was pathetic. Camber seemed to be quite composed, although his face was unusually pale.

"Now, Mr. Camber," said the Inspector, "I find your answers to the questions which I have put to you very unsatisfactory."
"I am sorry," said Colin Camber, quietly.
"One moment, Inspector," interrupted Paul Harley, "you have not warned Mr. Camber."
Thereupon the long-repressed wrath of Inspector Aylesbury burst forth.
"Then I will warn _you_, sir!" he shouted. "One more word and you leave this house."
"Yet I am going to venture on one more word," continued Harley, unperturbed. He turned to Colin Camber. "I happen to be a member of the Bar, Mr. Camber," he said, "although I rarely accept a brief. Have I your authority to act for you?"
"I am grateful, Mr. Harley, and I leave this unpleasant affair in your hands with every confidence."
Camber stood up, bowing formally.

The expression upon the inflamed face of Inspector Aylesbury was really indescribable, and recognizing his mental limitations, I was almost tempted to feel sorry for him. However, he did not lack self-confidence, and:
"I suppose you have scored, Mr. Harley," he said, a certain hoarseness perceptible in his voice, "but I know my duty and I am not afraid to perform it. Now, Mr. Camber, did you, or did you not, at about twelve o'clock last night--"
"Warn the accused," murmured Harley.
Inspector Aylesbury uttered a choking sound, but:
"I have to warn you," he said, "that your answers may be used as evidence. I will repeat: Did you, or did you not, at about twelve o'clock last night, shoot, with intent to murder, Colonel Juan Menendez?"

Ysola Camber leapt up, clutching at her husband's arm as if to hold him back.

"I did not," he replied, quietly.

"Nevertheless," continued the Inspector, looking aggressively at Paul Harley whilst he spoke, "I am going to detain you pending further enquiries."

Colin Camber inclined his head.

"Very well," he said; "you only do your duty."

The little fingers clutching his sleeve slowly relaxed, and Mrs. Camber, uttering a long sigh, sank in a swoon at his feet.

"Ysola! Ysola!" he muttered. Stooping he raised the child-like figure. "If you will kindly open the door, Mr. Knox," he said, "I will carry my wife to her room."

I sprang to the door and held it widely open.

Colin Camber, deadly pale, but holding his head very erect, walked in the direction of the hallway with his pathetic burden. Mis-reading the purpose written upon the stern white face, Inspector Aylesbury stepped forward.

"Let someone else attend to Mrs. Camber," he cried, sharply. "I wish you to remain here."

His detaining hand was already upon Camber's shoulder when Harley's arm shot out like a barrier across the Inspector's chest, and Colin Camber proceeded on his way. Momentarily, he glanced aside, and I saw that his eyes were unnaturally bright.

"Thank you, Mr. Harley," he said, and carried his wife from the room.

Harley dropped his arm, and crossing, stood staring out of the window. Inspector Aylesbury ran heavily to the door.

"Sergeant!" he called, "Sergeant! keep that man in sight. He must return here immediately."

I heard the sound of heavy footsteps following Camber's up the stairs, then Inspector Aylesbury turned, a bulky figure in the open doorway, and:

"Now, Mr. Harley," said he, entering and reclosing the door, "you are a barrister, I understand. Very well, then, I suppose you are aware that you have resisted and obstructed an officer of the law in the execution of his duty."

Paul Harley spun round upon his heel.

"Is that a charge," he inquired, "or merely a warning?"

The two glared at one another for a moment, then:

"From now onward," continued the Inspector, "I am going to have no more trouble with you, Mr. Harley. In the first place, I'll have you looked up in the Law List; in the second place, I shall ask you to stick to your proper duties, and leave me to look after mine."

"I have endeavoured from the outset," replied Harley, his good humour quite restored, "to assist you in every way in my power. You have declined all my offers, and finally, upon the most flimsy evidence, you have detained a perfectly innocent man."

"Oh, I see. A perfectly innocent man, eh?"

"Perfectly innocent, Inspector. There are so many points that you have overlooked. For instance, do you seriously suppose that Mr. Camber had been waiting up here night after night on the off-chance that Colonel Menendez would appear in the grounds of Cray's Folly?"

"No, I don't. I have got that worked out."

"Indeed? You interest me."

"Mr. Camber has an accomplice at Cray's Folly."

"What?" exclaimed Harley, and into his keen grey eyes crept a look of real interest.

"He has an accomplice," repeated the Inspector. "A certain witness was strangely reluctant to mention Mr. Camber's name. It was only after very keen examination that I got it at last. Now, Colonel Menendez had not retired last night, neither had a certain other party. That other party, sir, knows why Colonel Menendez was wandering about the garden at midnight."

At first, I think, this astonishing innuendo did not fully penetrate to my mind, but when it did so, it seemed to galvanize me. Springing up from the chair in which I had been seated:

"You preposterous fool!" I exclaimed, hotly.

It was the last straw. Inspector Aylesbury strode to the door and throwing it open once more, turned to me:

"Be good enough to leave the house, Mr. Knox," he said. "I am about to have it officially searched, and I will have no strangers present."

I think I could have strangled him with pleasure, but even in my rage I was not foolhardy enough to lay myself open to that of which the Inspector was quite capable at this moment.
Without another word I walked out of the study, took my hat and stick, and opening the front door, quitted the
guest house, from which I had thus a second time been dismissed ignominiously.

Appreciation of this fact, which came to me as I stepped into the porch, awakened my sense of humour—a gift
truly divine which has saved many a man from desperation or worse. I felt like a schoolboy who had been turned out
of a class-room, and I was glad that I could laugh at myself.

A constable was standing in the porch, and he looked at me suspiciously. No doubt he perceived something very
sardonic in my merriment.

I walked out of the gate, before which a car was standing, and as I paused to light a cigarette I heard the door of
the guest house open and close. I glanced back, and there was Paul Harley coming to join me.

"Now, Knox," he said, briskly, "we have got our hands full."

"My dear Harley, I am both angry and bewildered. Too angry and too bewildered to think clearly."

"I can quite understand it. I should become homicidal if I were forced to submit for long to the company of
Inspector Aylesbury. Of course, I had anticipated the arrest of Colin Camber, and I fear there is worse to come."

"What do you mean, Harley?"

"I mean that failing the apprehension of the real murderer, I cannot see, at the moment, upon what the case for
the defence is to rest."

"But surely you demonstrated out there in the garden that he could not possibly have fired the shot?"

"Words, Knox, words. I could pick a dozen loopholes in my own argument. I had only hoped to defer the
inevitable. I tell you, there is worse to come. Two things we must do at once."

"What are they?"

"We must persuade the man on duty to allow us to examine the Tudor garden, and we must see the Chief
Constable, whoever he may be, and prevail upon him to requisition the assistance of Scotland Yard. With Wessex in
charge of the case I might have a chance. Whilst this disastrous man Aylesbury holds the keys there is none."

"You heard what he said about Miss Beverley?"

We were now walking rapidly along the high road, and Harley nodded.

"I did," he said. "I had expected it. He was inspired with this brilliant idea last night, and his ideas are too few to
be lightly scrapped. If the Chief Constable is anything like the Inspector, what we are going to do heaven only
knows."

"I take it, Harley, that you are convinced of Colin Camber's innocence?"

Harley did not answer for a moment, whereupon I glanced at him anxiously, then:

"Colin Camber," he replied, "is of so peculiar a type that I could not presume to say of what he is capable or is
not capable. The most significant point in his favour is this: He is a man of unusual intellect. The planning of this
cunning crime to such a man would have been child's play—child's play, Knox. But is it possible to believe that his
genius would have failed him upon the most essential detail of all, namely, an alibi?"

"It is not."

"Of course it is not. Which, continuing to regard Camber as an assassin, reduces us to the theory that the crime
was committed in a moment of passion. This I maintain to be also impossible. It was no deed of impulse."

"I agree with you."

"Now, I believe that the inquiry is going to turn upon a very delicate point. If I am wrong in this, then perhaps I
am wrong in my whole conception of the case. But have you considered the mass of evidence against Colin
Camber?"

"I have, Harley," I replied, sadly, "I have."

"Think of all that we know, and which the Inspector does not know. Every single datum points in the same
direction. No prosecution could ask for a more perfect case. Upon this fact I pin my hopes. Where an Aylesbury
rushes in I fear to tread. The analogy with an angel was accidental, Knox!" he added, smilingly. "In other words, it is
all too obvious. Yet I have failed once, Knox, failed disastrously, and it may be that in my anxiety to justify myself I
am seeking for subtlety where no subtlety exists."

CHAPTER XXV

AYLESBURY'S THEORY

There were strangers about Cray's Folly and a sort of furtive activity, horribly suggestive. We had not pursued
the circular route by the high road which would have brought us to the lodge, but had turned aside where the swing-
gate opened upon a footpath into the meadows. It was the path which I had pursued upon the day of my visit to the
Lavender Arms. A second private gate here gave access to the grounds at a point directly opposite the lake; and as
we crossed the valley, making for the terraced lawns, I saw unfamiliar figures upon the veranda, and knew that the
cumbersome processes of the law were already in motion.

I was longing to speak to Val Beverley and to learn what had taken place during her interview with Inspector
Aylesbury, but Harley led the way toward the tower wing, and by a tortuous path through the rhododendrons we
finally came out on the northeast front and in sight of the Tudor garden.

Harley crossed to the entrance, and was about to descend the steps, when the constable on duty there held out his
arm.

"Excuse me, sir," he said, "but I have orders to admit no one to this part of the garden."

"Oh," said Harley, pulling up short, "but I am acting in this case. My name is Paul Harley."

"Sorry, sir," replied the constable, "but you will have to see Inspector Aylesbury."

My friend uttered an impatient exclamation, but, turning aside:

"Very well, constable," he muttered; "I suppose I must submit. Our friend, Aylesbury," he added to me, as we
walked away, "would appear to be a martinet as well as a walrus. At every step, Knox, he proves himself a tragic
nuisance. This means waste of priceless time."

"What had you hoped to do, Harley?"

"Prove my theory," he returned; "but since every moment is precious, I must move in another direction."

He hurried on through the opening in the box hedge and into the courtyard. Manoel had just opened the doors to
a sepulchral-looking person who proved to be the coroner's officer, and:

"Manoel!" cried Harley, "tell Carter to bring a car round at once."

"Yes, sir."

"I haven't time to fetch my own," he explained.

"Where are you off to?"

"I am off to see the Chief Constable, Knox. Aylesbury must be superseded at whatever cost. If the Chief
Constable fails I shall not hesitate to go higher. I will get along to the garage. I don't expect to be more than an hour.
Meanwhile, do your best to act as a buffer between Aylesbury and the women. You understand me?"

"Quite," I returned, shortly. "But the task may prove no light one, Harley."

"It won't," he assured me, smiling grimly. "How you must regret, Knox, that we didn't go fishing!"

With that he was off, eager-eyed and alert, the mood of dreamy abstraction dropped like a cloak discarded. He
fully realized, as I did, that his unique reputation was at stake. I wondered, as I had wondered at the Guest House,
whether, in undertaking to clear Colin Camber, he had acted upon sheer conviction, or, embittered by the death of
his client, had taken a gambler's chance. It was unlike him to do so. But now beyond reach of that charm of manner
which Colin Camber possessed, and discounting the pathetic sweetness of his girl-wife, I realized how black was the
evidence against him.

Occupied with these, and even more troubled thoughts, I was making my way toward the library, undetermined
how to act, when I saw Val Beverley coming along the corridor which communicated with Madame de Staemer's
room.

I read a welcome in her eyes which made my heart beat the faster.

"Oh, Mr. Knox," she cried, "I am so glad you have returned. Tell me all that has happened, for I feel in some
way that I am responsible for it."

I nodded gravely.

"You know, then, where Inspector Aylesbury went when he left here, after his interview with you?"

She looked at me pathetically.

"He went to the Guest House, of course."

"Yes," I said; "he was close behind us."

"And"--she hesitated--"Mr. Camber?"

"He has been detained."

"Oh!" she moaned. "I could hate myself! Yet what could I say, what could I do?"

"Just tell me all about it," I urged. "What were the Inspector's questions?"

"Well," explained the girl, "he had evidently learned from someone, presumably one of the servants, that there
was enmity between Mr. Camber and Colonel Menendez. He asked me if I knew of this, and of course I had to
admit that I did. But when I told him that I had no idea of its cause, he did not seem to believe me."

"No," I murmured. "Any evidence which fails to dove-tail with his preconceived theories he puts down as a lie."

"He seemed to have made up his mind for some reason," she continued, "that I was intimately acquainted with
Mr. Camber. Whereas, of course, I have never spoken to him in my life, although whenever he has passed me in the
road he has always saluted me with quite delightful courtesy. Oh, Mr. Knox, it is horrible to think of this great
misfortune coming to those poor people." She looked at me pleadingly. "How did his wife take it?"

"Poor little girl," I replied, "it was an awful blow."

"I feel that I want to set out this very minute," declared Val Beverley, "and go to her, and try to comfort her.
Because I feel in my very soul that her husband is innocent. She is such a sweet little thing. I have wanted to speak
to her since the very first time I ever saw her, but on the rare occasions when we have met in the village she has hurried past as though she were afraid of me. Mr. Harley surely knows that her husband is not guilty?"

"I think he does," I replied, "but he may have great difficulty in proving it. And what else did Inspector Aylesbury wish to know?"

"How can I tell you?" she said in a low voice; and biting her lip agitatedly she turned her head aside.

"Perhaps I can guess."

"Can you?" she asked, looking at me quickly. "Well, then, he seemed to attach a ridiculous importance to the fact that I had not retired last night at the time of the tragedy."

"I know," said I, grimly. "Another preconceived idea of his."

"I told him the truth of the matter, which is surely quite simple, and at first I was unable to understand the nature of his suspicions. Then, after a time, his questions enlightened me. He finally suggested, quite openly, that I had not come down from my room to the corridor in which Madame de Staemer was lying, but had actually been there at the time!"

"In the corridor outside her room?"

"Yes. He seemed to think that I had just come in from the door near the end of the east wing and beside the tower, which opens into the shrubbery."

"That you had just come in?" I exclaimed. "He thinks, then, that you had been out in the grounds?"

Val Beverley's face had been very pale, but now she flushed indignantly, and glanced away from me as she replied:

"He dared to suggest that I had been to keep an assignation."

"The fool!" I cried. "The ignorant, impudent fool!"

"Oh," she declared, "I felt quite ill with indignation. I am afraid I may regard Inspector Aylesbury as an enemy from now onward, for when I had recovered from the shock I told him very plainly what I thought about his intellect, or lack of it."

"I am glad you did," I said, warmly. "Before Inspector Aylesbury is through with this business I fancy he will know more about his limitations than he knows at present. The fact of the matter is that he is badly out of his depth, but is not man enough to acknowledge the fact even to himself."

She smiled at me pathetically.

"Whatever should I have done if I had been alone?" she said.

I was tempted to direct the conversation into a purely personal channel, but common sense prevailed, and:

"Is Madame de Staemer awake?" I asked.

"Yes." The girl nodded. "Dr. Rolleston is with her now."

"And does she know?"

"Yes. She sent for me directly she awoke, and asked me."

"And you told her?"

"How could I do otherwise? She was quite composed, wonderfully composed; and the way she heard the news was simply heroic. But here is Dr. Rolleston, coming now."

I glanced along the corridor, and there was the physician approaching briskly.

"Good morning, Mr. Knox," he said.

"Good morning, doctor. I hear that your patient is much improved?"

"Wonderfully so," he answered. "She has enough courage for ten men. She wishes to see you, Mr. Knox, and to hear your account of the tragedy."

"Do you think it would be wise?"

"I think it would be best."

"Do you hold any hope of her permanently recovering the use of her limbs?"

Dr. Rolleston shook his head doubtfully.

"It may have only been temporary," he replied. "These obscure nervous affections are very fickle. It is unsafe to make predictions. But mentally, at least, she is quite restored from the effects of last night's shock. You need apprehend no hysteria or anything of that nature, Mr. Knox."

"Oh, I see," exclaimed a loud voice behind us.

We all three turned, and there was Inspector Aylesbury crossing the hall in our direction.

"Good morning, Dr. Rolleston," he said, deliberately ignoring my presence. "I hear that your patient is quite well again this morning?"

"She is much improved," returned the physician, dryly.

"Then I can get her testimony, which is most important to my case?"

"She is somewhat better. If she cares to see you I do not forbid the interview."
"Oh, that's good of you, doctor." He bowed to Miss Beverley. "Perhaps, Miss, you would ask Madame de Staemer to see me for a few minutes."

Val Beverley looked at me appealingly then shrugged her shoulders, turned aside, and walked in the direction of Madame de Staemer's door.

"Well," said Dr. Rolleston, in his brisk way, shaking me by the hand, "I must be getting along. Good morning, Mr. Knox. Good morning, Inspector Aylesbury."

He walked rapidly out to his waiting car. The presence of Inspector Aylesbury exercised upon Dr. Rolleston a similar effect to that which a red rag has upon a bull. As he took his departure, the Inspector drew out his pocket-book, and, humming gently to himself, began to consult certain entries therein, with a portentous air of reflection which would have been funny if it had not been so irritating.

Thus we stood when Val Beverley returned, and:

"Madame de Staemer will see you, Inspector Aylesbury," she said, "but wishes Mr. Knox to be present at the interview."

"Oh," said the Inspector, lowering his chin, "I see. Oh, very well."

CHAPTER XXVI
IN MADAME’S ROOM

Madame de Staemer's apartment was a large and elegant one. From the window-drapings, which were of some light, figured satiny material, to the bed-cover, the lampshades and the carpet, it was French. Faintly perfumed, and decorated with many bowls of roses, it reflected, in its ornaments, its pictures, its slender-legged furniture, the personality of the occupant. In a large, high bed, reclining amidst a number of silken pillows, lay Madame de Staemer. The theme of the room was violet and silver, and to this everything conformed. The toilet service was of dull silver and violet enamel. The mirrors and some of the pictures had dull silver frames, there was nothing tawdry or glittering. The bed itself, which I thought resembled a bed of state, was of the same dull silver, with a coverlet of delicate violet hue. But Madame's decollete robe was trimmed with white fur, so that her hair, dressed high upon her head, seemed to be of silver, too.

Reclining there upon her pillows, she looked like some grande dame of that France which was swept away by the Revolution. Immediately above the dressing-table I observed a large portrait of Colonel Menendez dressed as I had imagined he should be dressed when I had first set eyes on him, in tropical riding kit, and holding a broad-brimmed hat in his hand. A strikingly handsome, arrogant figure he made, uncannily like the Velasquez in the library.

At the face of Madame de Staemer I looked long and searchingly. She had not neglected the art of the toilette. Blinds tempered the sunlight which flooded her room; but that, failing the service of rouge, Madame had been pale this morning, I perceived immediately. In some subtle way the night had changed her. Something was gone out of her face, and something come into it. I thought, and lived to remember the thought, that it was thus Marie Antoinette might have looked when they told her how the drums had rolled in the Place de la Revolution on that morning of the twenty-first of January.

"Oh, M. Knox," she said, sadly, "you are there, I see. Come and sit here beside me, my friend. Val, dear, remain. Is this Inspector Aylesbury who wishes to speak to me?"

The Inspector, who had entered with all the confidence in the world, seemed to lose some of it in the presence of this grand lady, who was so little impressed by the dignity of his office.

She waved one slender hand in the direction of a violet brocaded chair.

"Sit down, Monsieur l'inspecteur," she commanded, for it was rather a command than an invitation.

Inspector Aylesbury cleared his throat and sat down.

"Ah, M. Knox!" exclaimed Madame, turning to me with one of her rapid movements, "is your friend afraid to face me, then? Does he think that he has failed? Does he think that I condemn him?"

"He knows that he has failed, Madame de Staemer," I replied, "but his absence is due to the fact that at this hour he is hot upon the trail of the assassin."

"What!" she exclaimed, "what!"--and bending forward touched my arm. "Tell me again! Tell me again!"

"He is following a clue, Madame de Staemer, which he hopes will lead to the truth."

"Ah! if I could believe it would lead to the truth," she said. "If I dared to believe this."

"Why should it not?"

She shook her head, smiling with such a resigned sadness that I averted my gaze and glanced across at Val Beverley who was seated on the opposite side of the bed.

"If you knew--if you knew."

I looked again into the tragic face, and realized that this was an older woman than the brilliant hostess I had known. She sighed, shrugged, and:
"Tell me, M. Knox," she continued, "it was swift and merciful, eh?"
"Instantaneous," I replied, in a low voice.
"A good shot?" she asked, strangely.
"A wonderful shot," I answered, thinking that she imposed unnecessary torture upon herself.
"They say he must be taken away, M. Knox, but I reply: not until I have seen him."
"Madame," began Val Beverley, gently.
"Ah, my dear!" Madame de Staemer, without looking at the speaker, extended one hand in her direction, the fingers characteristically curled. "You do not know me. Perhaps it is a good job. You are a man, Mr. Knox, and men, especially men who write, know more of women than they know of themselves, is it not so? You will understand that I must see him again?"
"Madame de Staemer," I said, "your courage is almost terrible."
She shrugged her shoulders.
"I am not proud to be brave, my friend. The animals are brave, but many cowards are proud. Listen again. He suffered no pain, you think?"
"None, Madame de Staemer."
"So Dr. Rolleston assures me. He died in his sleep? You do not think he was awake, eh?"
"Most certainly he was not awake."
"It is the best way to die," she said, simply. "Yet he, who was brave and had faced death many times, would have counted it"----she snapped her white fingers, glancing across the room to where Inspector Aylesbury, very subdued, sat upon the brocaded chair twirling his cap between his hands. "And now, Inspector Aylesbury," she asked, "what is it you wish me to tell you?"
"Well, Madame," began the Inspector, and stood up, evidently in an endeavour to recover his dignity, but: "Sit down, Mr. Inspector! I beg of you be seated," cried Madame. "I will not be questioned by one who stands. And if you were to walk about I should shriek."
He resumed his seat, clearing his throat nervously.
"Very well, Madame," he continued, "I have come to you particularly for information respecting a certain Mr. Camber."
"Oh, yes," said Madame.
Her vibrant voice was very low.
"You know him, no doubt?"
"I have never met him."
"What?" exclaimed the Inspector.
Madame shrugged and glanced at me eloquently.
"Well," he continued, "this gets more and more funny. I am told by Pedro, the butler, that Colonel Menendez looked upon Mr. Camber as an enemy, and Miss Beverley, here, admitted that it was true. Yet although he was an enemy, nobody ever seems to have spoken to him, and he swears that he had never spoken to Colonel Menendez."
"Yes?" said Madame, listlessly, "is that so?"
"It is so, Madame, and now you tell me that you have never met him."
"I did tell you so, yes."
"His wife, then?"
"I never met his wife," said Madame, rapidly.
"But it is a fact that Colonel Menendez regarded him as an enemy?"
"It is a fact-yes."
"Ah, now we are coming to it. What was the cause of this?"
"I cannot tell you."
"Do you mean that you don't know?"
"I mean that I cannot tell you."
"Oh," said the Inspector, blankly, "I see. That's not helping me very much, is it?"
"No, it is no help," said Madame, twirling a ring upon her finger.
The Inspector cleared his throat again, then: "There had been other attempts, I believe, at assassination?" he asked. Madame nodded.
"Several."
"Did you witness any of these?"
"None of them."
"But you know that they took place?"
"Juan--Colonel Menendez--had told me so."
"And he suspected that there was someone lurking about this house?"
"Yes."
"Also, someone broke in?"
"There were doors unfastened, and a great disturbance, so I suppose someone must have done so."

I wondered if he would refer to the bat wing nailed to the door, but he had evidently decided that this clue was without importance, nor did he once refer to the aspect of the case which concerned Voodoo. He possessed a sort of mulish obstinacy, and was evidently determined to use no scrap of information which he had obtained from Paul Harley.

"Now, Madame," said he, "you heard the shot fired last night?"
"I did."
"It woke you up?"
"I was already awake."
"Oh, I see: you were awake?"
"I was awake."
"Where did you think the sound came from?"
"From back yonder, beyond the east wing."
"Beyond the east wing?" muttered Inspector Aylesbury. "Now, let me see." He turned ponderously in his chair, gazing out of the windows. "We look out on the south here? You say the sound of the shot came from the east?"
"So it seemed to me."
"Oh." This piece of information seemed badly to puzzle him. "And what then?"
"I was so startled that I ran to the door before I remembered that I could not walk."

She glanced aside at me with a tired smile, and laid her hand upon my arm in an oddly caressing way, as if to say, "He is so stupid; I should not have expressed myself in that way."

 Truly enough the Inspector misunderstood, for:
"I don't follow what you mean, Madame," he declared. "You say you forgot that you could not walk?"
"No, no, I expressed myself wrongly," Madame replied in a weary voice. "The fright, the terror, gave me strength to stagger to the door, and there I fell and swooned."

"Oh, I see. You speak of fright and terror. Were these caused by the sound of the shot?"
"For some reason my cousin believed himself to be in peril," explained Madame. "He went in dread of assassination, you understand? Very well, he caused me to feel this dread, also. When I heard the shot, something told me, something told me that--" she paused, and suddenly placing her hands before her face, added in a whisper-- "that it had come."

Val Beverley was watching Madame de Staemer anxiously, and the fact that she was unfit to undergo further examination was so obvious that any other than an Inspector Aylesbury would have withdrawn. The latter, however, seemed now to be glued to his chair, and:

"Oh, I see," he said; "and now there's another point: Have you any idea what took Colonel Menendez out into the grounds last night?"

Madame de Staemer lowered her hands and gazed across at the speaker.
"What is that, Monsieur l'inspecteur?"
"Well, you don't think he might have gone out to talk to someone?"
"To someone? To what one?" demanded Madame, scornfully.

"Well, it isn't natural for a man to go walking about the garden at midnight, when he's unwell, is it? Not alone. But if there was a lady in the case he might go."
"A lady?" said Madame, softly. "Yes--continue."
"Well," resumed the Inspector, deceived by the soft voice, "the young lady sitting beside you was still wearing her evening dress when I arrived here last night. I found that out, although she didn't give me a chance to see her."

His words had an effect more dramatic than he could have foreseen.

Madame de Staemer threw her arm around Val Beverley, and hugged her so closely to her side that the girl's curly brown head was pressed against Madame's shoulder. Thus holding her, she sat rigidly upright, her strange, still eyes glaring across the room at Inspector Aylesbury. Her whole pose was instinct with challenge, with defiance, and in that moment I identified the illusive memory which the eyes of Madame so often had conjured up in my mind.

Once, years before, I had seen a wounded tigress standing over her cubs, a beautiful, fearless creature, blazing defiance with dying eyes upon those who had destroyed her, the mother-instinct supreme to the last; for as she fell to rise no more she had thrown her paw around the cowering cubs. It was not in shape, nor in colour, but in expression and in their stillness, that the eyes of Madame de Staemer resembled the eyes of the tigress.
"Oh, Madame, Madame," moaned the girl, "how dare he!"

"Ah!" Madame de Staemer raised her head yet higher, a royal gesture, that unmoving stare set upon the face of the discomfited Inspector Aylesbury. "Leave my apartment." Her left hand shot out dramatically in the direction of the door, but even yet the fingers remained curled. "Stupid, gross fool!"

Inspector Aylesbury stood up, his face very flushed.

"I am only doing my duty, Madame," he said.

"Go, go!" commanded Madame, "I insist that you go!"

Convulsively she held Val Beverley to her side, and although I could not see the girl's face, I knew that she was weeping.

Those implacable flaming eyes followed with their stare the figure of the Inspector right to the doorway, for he essayed no further speech, but retired.

I, also, rose, and:

"Madame de Staemer," I said, speaking, I fear, very unnaturally, "I love your spirit."

She threw back her head, smiling up at me. I shall never forget that look, nor shall I attempt to portray all which it conveyed—for I know I should fail.

"My friend!" she said, and extended her hand to be kissed.

CHAPTER XXVII
AN INSPIRATION

Inspector Aylesbury had disappeared when I came out of the hall, but Pedro was standing there to remind me of the fact that I had not breakfasted. I realized that despite all tragic happenings, I was ravenously hungry, and accordingly I agreed to his proposal that I should take breakfast on the south veranda, as on the previous morning.

To the south veranda accordingly I made my way, rather despising myself because I was capable of hunger at such a time and amidst such horrors. The daily papers were on my table, for Carter drove into Market Hilton every morning to meet the London train which brought them down; but I did not open any of them.

Pedro waited upon me in person. I could see that the man was pathetically anxious to talk. Accordingly, when he presently brought me a fresh supply of hot rolls:

"This has been a dreadful blow to you, Pedro?" I said.

"Dreadful, sir," he returned; "fearful. I lose a splendid master, I lose my place, and I am far, far from home."

"You are from Cuba?"

"Yes, yes. I was with Senor the Colonel Don Juan in Cuba."

"And do you know anything of the previous attempts which had been made upon his life, Pedro?"

"Nothing, sir. Nothing at all."

"But the bat wing, Pedro?"

He looked at me in a startled way.

"Yes, sir," he replied. "I found it pinned to the door here."

"And what did you think it meant?"

"I thought it was a joke, sir—not a nice joke—by someone who knew Cuba."

"You know the meaning of Bat Wing, then?"

"It is Obeah. I have never seen it before, but I have heard of it."

"And what did you think?" said I, proceeding with my breakfast.

"I thought it was meant to frighten."

"But who did you think had done it?"

"I had heard Senor Don Juan say that Mr. Camber hated him, so I thought perhaps he had sent someone to do it."

"But why should Mr. Camber have hated the Colonel?"

"I cannot say, sir. I wish I could tell."

"Was your master popular in the West Indies?" I asked.

"Well, sir—" Pedro hesitated—"perhaps not so well liked."

"No," I said. "I had gathered as much."

The man withdrew, and I continued my solitary meal, listening to the song of the skylarks, and thinking how complex was human existence, compared with any other form of life beneath the sun.

How to employ my time until Harley should return I knew not. Common delicacy dictated an avoidance of Val Beverley until she should have recovered from the effect of Inspector Aylesbury's gross insinuations, and I was curiously disinclined to become involved in the gloomy formalities which ensue upon a crime of violence. Nevertheless, I felt compelled to remain within call, realizing that there might be unpleasant duties which Pedro could not perform, and which must therefore devolve upon Val Beverley.

I lighted my pipe and walked out on to the sloping lawn. A gardener was at work with a big syringe, destroying a
patch of weeds which had appeared in one corner of the velvet turf. He looked up in a sort of startled way as I passed, bidding me good morning, and then resuming his task. I thought that this man's activities were symbolic of the way of the world, in whose eternal progression one poor human life counts as nothing.

Presently I came in sight of that door which opened into the rhododendron shrubbery, the door by which Colonel Menendez had come out to meet his death. His bedroom was directly above, and as I picked my way through the closely growing bushes, which at an earlier time I had thought to be impassable, I paused in the very shadow of the tower and glanced back and upward. I could see the windows of the little smoke-room in which we had held our last interview with Menendez; and I thought of the shadow which Harley had seen upon the blind. I was unable to disguise from myself the fact that when Inspector Aylesbury should learn of this occurrence, as presently he must do, it would give new vigour to his ridiculous and unpleasant suspicions.

I passed on, and considering the matter impartially, found myself faced by the questions—Whose was the shadow which Harley had seen upon the blind? And with what purpose did Colonel Menendez leave the house at midnight? Somnambulism might solve the second riddle, but to the first I could find no answer acceptable to my reason. And now, pursuing my aimless way, I presently came in sight of a gable of the Guest House. I could obtain a glimpse of the hut which had once been Colin Camber's workroom. The window, through which Paul Harley had stared so intently, possessed sliding panes. These were closed, and a ray of sunlight, striking upon the glass, produced, because of an over-leaning branch which crossed the top of the window, an effect like that of a giant eye glittering evilly through the trees. I could see a constable moving about in the garden. Ever and anon the sun shone upon the buttons of his tunic.

By such steps my thoughts led me on to the pathetic figure of Ysola Camber. Save for the faithful Ah Tsong she was alone in that house to which tragedy had come unbidden, unforeseen. I doubted if she had a woman friend in all the countryside. Doubtless, I reflected, the old housekeeper, to whom she had referred, would return as speedily as possible, but pending the arrival of someone to whom she could confide all her sorrows, I found it almost impossible to contemplate the loneliness of the tragic little figure.

Such was my mental state, and my thoughts were all of compassion, when suddenly, like a lurid light, an inspiration came to me.

I had passed out from the shadow of the tower and was walking in the direction of the sentinel yews when this idea, dreadfully complete, leapt to my mind. I pulled up short, as though hindered by a palpable barrier. Vague musings, evanescent theories, vanished like smoke, and a ghastly, consistent theory of the crime unrolled itself before me, with all the cold logic of truth.

"My God!" I groaned aloud, "I see it all. I see it all."

CHAPTER XXVIII
MY THEORY OF THE CRIME

The afternoon was well advanced before Paul Harley returned.

So deep was my conviction that I had hit upon the truth, and so well did my theory stand every test which I could apply to it, that I felt disinclined for conversation with any one concerned in the tragedy until I should have submitted the matter to the keen analysis of Harley. Upon the sorrow of Madame de Staemer I naturally did not intrude, nor did I seek to learn if she had carried out her project of looking upon the dead man.

About mid-day the body was removed, after which an oppressive and awesome stillness seemed to descend upon Cray's Folly.

Inspector Aylesbury had not returned from his investigations at the Guest House, and learning that Miss Beverley was remaining with Madame de Staemer, I declined to face the ordeal of a solitary luncheon in the dining room, and merely ate a few sandwiches, walking over to the Lavender Arms for a glass of Mrs. Wootton's excellent ale.

Here I found the bar-parlour full of local customers, and although a heated discussion was in progress as I opened the door, silence fell upon my appearance. Mrs. Wootton greeted me sadly.

"Ah, sir," she said, as she placed a mug before me; "of course you've heard?"

"I have, madam," I replied, perceiving that she did not know me to be a guest at Cray's Folly.

"Well, well!" She shook her head. "It had to come, with all these foreign folk about."

She retired to some sanctum at the rear of the bar, and I drank my beer amid one of those silences which sometimes descend upon such a gathering when a stranger appears in its midst. Not until I moved to depart was this silence broken, then:

"Ah, well," said an old fellow, evidently a farm-hand, "we know now why he was priming of hisself with the drink, we do."

"Aye!" came a growling chorus.

I came out of the Lavender Arms full of a knowledge that so far as Mid-Hatton was concerned, Colin Camber
was already found guilty.

I had hoped to see something of Val Beverley on my return, but she remained closeted with Madame de Staemer, and I was left in loneliness to pursue my own reflections, and to perfect that theory which had presented itself to my mind.

In Harley's absence I had taken it upon myself to give an order to Pedro to the effect that no reporters were to be admitted; and in this I had done well. So quickly does evil news fly that, between mid-day and the hour of Harley's return, no fewer than five reporters, I believe, presented themselves at Cray's Folly. Some of the more persistent continued to haunt the neighbourhood, and I had withdrawn to the deserted library, in order to avoid observation, when I heard a car draw up in the courtyard, and a moment later heard Harley asking for me.

I hurried out to meet him, and as I appeared at the door of the library:

"Hullo, Knox," he called, running up the steps. "Any developments?"

"No actual development?" I replied, "except that several members of the Press have been here."

"You told them nothing?" he asked, eagerly.

"No; they were not admitted."

"Good, good," he muttered.

"I had expected you long before this, Harley."

"Naturally," he said, with a sort of irritation. "I have been all the way to Whitehall and back."

"To Whitehall! What, you have been to London?"

"I had half anticipated it, Knox. The Chief Constable, although quite a decent fellow, is a stickler for routine. On the strength of those facts which I thought fit to place before him he could see no reason for superseding Aylesbury. Accordingly, without further waste of time, I headed straight for Whitehall. You may remember a somewhat elaborate report which I completed upon the eve of our departure from Chancery Lane?"

I nodded.

"A very thankless job for the Home Office, Knox. But I received my reward to-day. Inspector Wessex has been placed in charge of the case and I hope he will be down here within the hour. Pending his arrival I am tied hand and foot."

We had walked into the library, and, stopping, suddenly, Harley stared me very hard in the face.

"You are bottling something up, Knox," he declared. "Out with it. Has Aylesbury distinguished himself again?"

"No," I replied; "on the contrary. He interviewed Madame de Staemer, and came out with a flea in his ear."

"Good," said Harley, smiling. "A clever woman, and a woman of spirit, Knox."

"You are right," I replied, "and you are also right in supposing that I have a communication to make to you."

"Ah, I thought so. What is it?"

"It is a theory, Harley, which appears to me to cover the facts of the case."

"Indeed?" said he, continuing to stare at me. "And what inspired it?"

"I was staring up at the window of the smoke-room to-day, and I remembered the shadow which you had seen upon the blind."

"Yes?" he cried, eagerly; "and does your theory explain that, too?"

"It does, Harley."

"Then I am all anxiety to hear it."

"Very well, then, I will endeavour to be brief. Do you recollect Miss Beverley's story of the unfamiliar footsteps which passed her door on several occasions?"

"Perfectly."

"You recollect that you, yourself, heard someone crossing the hall, and that both of us heard a door close?"

"We did."

"And finally you saw the shadow of a woman upon the blind of the Colonel's private study. Very well. Excluding the preposterous theory of Inspector Aylesbury, there is no woman in Cray's Folly whose footsteps could possibly have been heard in that corridor, and whose shadow could possibly have been seen upon the blind of Colonel Menendez's room."

"I agree," said Harley, quietly. "I have definitely eliminated all the servants from the case. Therefore, proceed, Knox, I am all attention."

"I will do so. There is a door on the south side of the house, close to the tower and opening into the rhododendron shrubbery. This was the door used by Colonel Menendez in his somnambulistic rambles, according to his own account. Now, assuming his statement to have been untrue in one particular, that is, assuming he was not walking in his sleep, but was fully awake--"

"Eh?" exclaimed Harley, his expression undergoing a subtle change. "Do you think his statement was untrue?"

"According to my theory, Harley, his statement was untrue, in this particular, at least. But to proceed: Might he
not have employed this door to admit a nocturnal visitor?"

"It is feasible," muttered Harley, watching me closely.

"For the Colonel to descend to this side door when the household was sleeping," I continued, "and to admit a
woman secretly to Cray's Folly, would have been a simple matter. Indeed, on the occasions of these visits he might
even have unbolted the door himself after Pedro had bolted it, in order to enable her to enter without his descending
for the purpose of admitting her."

"By heavens! Knox," said Harley, "I believe you have it!"

His eyes were gleaming excitedly, and I proceeded:

"Hence the footsteps which passed Miss Beverley's door, hence the shadow which you saw upon the blind; and
the sounds which you detected in the hall were caused, of course, by this woman retiring. It was the door leading
into the shrubbery which we heard being closed!"

"Continue," said Harley; "although I can plainly see to what this is leading."

"You can see, Harley?" I cried; "of course you can see! The enmity between Camber and Menendez is
understandable at last."

"You mean that Menendez was Mrs. Camber's lover?"

"Don't you agree with me?"

"It is feasible, Knox, dreadfully feasible. But go on."

"My theory also explains Colin Camber's lapse from sobriety. It is legitimate to suppose that his wife, who was a
Cuban, had been intimate with Menendez before her meeting with Camber. Perhaps she had broken the tie at the
time of her marriage, but this is mere supposition. Then, her old lover, his infatuation by no means abated, leases the
property adjoining that of his successful rival."

"Knox!" exclaimed Paul Harley, "this is brilliant. I am all impatience for the _denouement_."

"It is coming," I said, triumphantly. "Relations are reestablished, clandestinely. Colin Camber learns of these. A
passionate quarrel ensues, resulting in a long drinking bout designed to drown his sorrows. His love for his wife is
so great that he has forgiven her this infidelity. Accordingly, she has promised to see her lover no more. Hers was
the figure which you saw outlined upon the blind on the night before the tragedy, Harley! The gestures, which you
described as those of despair, furnish evidence to confirm my theory. It was a final meeting!"

"Hm," muttered Harley. "It would be taking big chances, because we have to suppose, Knox, that these visits to
Cray's Folly were made whilst her husband was at work in the study. If he had suddenly decided to turn in, all would
have been discovered."

"True," I agreed, "but is it impossible?"

"No, not a bit. Women are dreadful gamblers. But continue, Knox."

"Very well. Colonel Menendez has refused to accept his dismissal, and Mrs. Camber had been compelled to
promise, without necessarily intending to carry out the promise, that she would see him again on the following night.
She failed to come; whereupon he, growing impatient, walked out into the grounds of Cray's Folly to look for her.
She may even have intended to come and have been intercepted by her husband. But in any event, the latter, seeing
the man who had wronged him, standing out there in the moonlight, found temptation to be too strong. On the
whole, I favour the idea that he had intercepted his wife, and snatching up a rifle, had actually gone out into the
garden with the intention of shooting Menendez."

"I see," murmured Harley in a low voice. "This hypothesis, Knox, does not embrace the Bat Wing episodes."

"If Menendez has lied upon one point," I returned, "it is permissible to suppose that his entire story was merely a
tissue of falsehood."

"I see. But why did he bring me to Cray's Folly?"

"Don't you understand, Harley?" I cried, excitedly. "He really feared for his life, since he knew that Camber had
discovered the intrigue."

Paul Harley heaved a long sigh.

"I must congratulate you, Knox," he said, gravely, "upon a really splendid contribution to my case. In several
particulars I find myself nearer to the truth. But the definite establishment or shattering of your theory rests upon one
thing."

"What's that?" I asked. "You are surely not thinking of the bat wing nailed upon the door?"

"Not at all," he replied. "I am thinking of the seventh yew tree from the northeast corner of the Tudor garden."

CHAPTER XXIX

A LEE-ENFIELD RIFLE

What reply I should have offered to this astonishing remark I cannot say, but at that moment the library door
burst open unceremoniously, and outlined against the warmly illuminated hall, where sunlight poured down through
the dome, I beheld the figure of Inspector Aylesbury.
"Ah!" he cried, loudly, "so you have come back, Mr. Harley? I thought you had thrown up the case."
"Did you?" said Harley, smilingly. "No, I am still persevering in my ineffectual way."
"Oh, I see. And have you quite convinced yourself that Colin Camber is innocent?"
"In one or two particulars my evidence remains incomplete."
"Oh, in one or two particulars, eh? But generally speaking you don't doubt his innocence?"
"I don't doubt it for a moment."
Harley's words surprised me. I recognized, of course, that he might merely be bluffing the Inspector, but it was totally alien to his character to score a rhetorical success at the expense of what he knew to be the truth; and so sure was I of the accuracy of my deductions that I no longer doubted Colin Camber to be the guilty man.
"At any rate," continued the Inspector, "he is in detention, and likely to remain there. If you are going to defend him at the Assizes, I don't envy you your job, Mr. Harley."
He was blatantly triumphant, so that the fact was evident enough that he had obtained some further piece of evidence which he regarded as conclusive.
"I have detained the man Ah Tsong as well," he went on. "He was an accomplice of your innocent friend, Mr. Harley."
"Was he really?" murmured Harley.
"Finally," continued the Inspector, "I have only to satisfy myself regarding the person who lured Colonel Menendez out into the grounds last night, to have my case complete."
I turned aside, unable to trust myself, but Harley remarked quite coolly:
"Your industry is admirable, Inspector Aylesbury, but I seem to perceive that you have made a very important discovery of some kind."
"Ah, you have got wind of it, have you?"
"I have no information on the point," replied Harley, "but your manner urges me to suggest that perhaps success has crowned your efforts?"
"It has," replied the Inspector. "I am a man that doesn't do things by halves. I didn't content myself with just staring out of the window of that little hut in the grounds of the Guest House, like you did, Mr. Harley, and saying 'twice one are two'--I looked at every book on the shelves, and at every page of those books."
"You must have materially added to your information?"
"Ah, very likely, but my enquiries didn't stop there. I had the floor up."
"The floor of the hut?"
"The floor of the hut, sir. The planks were quite loose. I had satisfied myself that it was a likely hiding place."
"What did you find there, a dead rat?"
Inspector Aylesbury turned, and:
"Sergeant Butler," he called.
The sergeant came forward from the hall, carrying a cricket bag. This Inspector Aylesbury took from him, placing it upon the floor of the library at his feet.
"New, sir," said he, "I borrowed this bag in which to bring the evidence away--the hanging evidence which I discovered beneath the floor of the hut."
I had turned again, when the man had referred to his discovery; and now, glancing at Harley, I saw that his face had grown suddenly very stern.
"Show me your evidence, Inspector?" he asked, shortly.
"There can be no objection," returned the Inspector.
Opening the bag, he took out a rifle!
Paul Harley's hands were thrust in his coat pockets, By the movement of the cloth I could see that he had clenched his fists. Here was confirmation of my theory! A Service rifle," said the Inspector, triumphantly, holding up the weapon. "A Lee-Enfield charger-loader. It contains four cartridges, three undischarged, and one discharged. He had not even troubled to eject it."
The Inspector dropped the weapon into the bag with a dramatic movement.
"Fancy theories about bat wings and Voodoos," he said, scornfully, "may satisfy you, Mr. Harley, but I think this rifle will prove more satisfactory to the Coroner."
He picked up the bag and walked out of the library.
Harley stood posed in a curiously rigid way, looking after him. Even when the door had closed he did not change his position at once. Then, turning slowly, he walked to an armchair and sat down.
"Harley," I said, hesitatingly, "has this discovery surprised you?"
"Surprised me?" he returned in a low voice. "It has appalled me."
"Then, although you seemed to regard my theory as sound," I continued rather resentfully, "all the time you
continued to believe Colin Camber to be innocent?"

"I believe so still."

"What?"

"I thought we had determined, Knox," he said, wearily, "that a man of Camber's genius, having decided upon murder, must have arranged for an unassailable alibi. Very well. Are we now to leap to the other end of the scale, and to credit him with such utter stupidity as to place hanging evidence where it could not fail to be discovered by the most idiotic policeman? Preserve your balance, Knox. Theories are wild horses. They run away with us. I know that of old, for which very reason I always avoid speculation until I have a solid foundation of fact upon which to erect it."

"But, my dear fellow," I cried, "was Camber to foresee that the floor of the hut would be taken up?"

Harley sighed, and leaned back in his chair.

"Do you recollect your first meeting with this man, Knox?"

"Perfectly."

"What occurred?"

"He was slightly drunk."

"Yes, but what was the nature of his conversation?"

"He suggested that I had recognized his resemblance to Edgar Allan Poe."

"Quite. What had led him to make this suggestion?"

"The manner in which I had looked at him, I suppose."

"Exactly. Although not quite sober, from a mere glance he was able to detect what you were thinking. Do you wish me to believe, Knox, that this same man had not foreseen what the police would think when Colonel Menendez was found shot within a hundred yards of the garden of the Guest House?"

I was somewhat taken aback, for Harley's argument was strictly logical, and:

"It is certainly very puzzling," I admitted.

"Puzzling!" he exclaimed; "it is maddening. This case is like a Syrian village-mound. Stratum lies under stratum, and in each we meet with evidence of more refined activity than in the last. It seems we have yet to go deeper."

He took out his pipe and began to fill it.

"Tell me about the interview with Madame de Staemer," he directed.

I took a seat facing him, and he did not once interrupt me throughout my account of Inspector Aylesbury's examination of Madame.

"Good," he commented, when I had told how the Inspector was dismissed. "But at least, Knox, he has a working theory, to which he sticks like an express to the main line, whereas I find myself constantly called upon to readjust my perspective. Directly I can enjoy freedom of movement, however, I shall know whether my hypothesis is a house of cards or a serviceable structure."

"Your hypothesis?" I said. "Then you really have a theory which is entirely different from mine?"

"Not entirely different, Knox, merely not so comprehensive. I have contented myself thus far with a negative theory, if I may so express it."

"Negative theory?"

"Exactly. We are dealing, my dear fellow, with a case of bewildering intricacies. For the moment I have focussed upon one feature only."

"What is that?"

"Upon proving that Colin Camber did not do the murder."

"Did _not_ do it?"

"Precisely, Knox. Respecting the person or persons who did do it, I had preserved a moderately open mind, up to the moment that Inspector Aylesbury entered the library with the Lee-Enfield."

"And then?" I said, eagerly.

"Then," he replied, "I began to think hard. However, since I practise what I preach, or endeavour to do so, I must not permit myself to speculate upon this aspect of the matter until I have tested my theory of Camber's innocence."

"In other words," I said, bitterly, "although you encouraged me to unfold my ideas regarding Mrs. Camber, you were merely laughing at me all the time!"

"My dear Knox!" exclaimed Harley, jumping up impulsively, "please don't be unjust. Is it like me? On the contrary, Knox"--he looked me squarely in the eyes--"you have given me a platform on which already I have begun to erect one corner of a theory of the crime. Without new facts I can go no further. But this much at least you have done."

"Thanks, Harley," I murmured, and indeed I was gratified; "but where do your other corners rest?"

"They rest," he said, slowly, "they rest, respectively, upon a bat wing, a yew tree, and a Lee-Enfield charger-
CHAPTER XXX
THE SEVENTH YEW TREE

Detective-Inspector Wessex arrived at about five o'clock; a quiet, resourceful man, highly competent, and having the appearance of an ex-soldier. His respect for the attainments of Paul Harley alone marked him a student of character. I knew Wessex well, and was delighted when Pedro showed him into the library.

"Thank God you are here, Wessex," said Harley, when we had exchanged greetings. "At last I can move. Have you seen the local officer in charge?"

"No," replied the Inspector, "but I gather that I have been requisitioned over his head."

"You have," said Harley, grimly, "and over the head of the Chief Constable, too. But I suppose it is unfair to condemn a man for the shortcoming with which nature endowed him, therefore we must endeavour to let Inspector Aylesbury down as lightly as possible. I have an idea that I heard him return a while ago."

He walked out into the hall to make enquiries, and a few moments later I heard Inspector Aylesbury's voice.

"Ah, there you are, Inspector Aylesbury," said Harley, cheerily. "Will you please step into the library for a moment?"

The Inspector entered, frowning heavily, followed by my friend.

"There is no earthly reason why we should get at loggerheads over this business," Harley continued; "but the fact of the matter is, Inspector Aylesbury, that there are depths in this case to which neither you nor I have yet succeeded in penetrating. You have a reputation to consider, and so have I. Therefore I am sure you will welcome the cooperation of Detective-Inspector Wessex of Scotland Yard, as I do."

"What's this, what's this?" said Aylesbury. "I have made no application to London."

"Nevertheless, Inspector, it is quite in order," declared Wessex. "I have my instructions here, and I have reported to Market Hilton already. You see, the man you have detained is an American citizen."

"What of that?"

"Well, he seems to have communicated with his Embassy," Wessex glanced significantly at Paul Harley. "And the Embassy communicated with the Home Office. You mustn't regard my arrival as any reflection on your ability, Inspector Aylesbury. I am sure we can work together quite agreeably."

"Oh," muttered the other, in evident bewilderment, "I see. Well, if that's the way of it, I suppose we must make the best of things."

"Good," cried Wessex, heartily. "Now perhaps you would like to state your case against the detained man?"

"A sound idea, Wessex," said Paul Harley. "But perhaps, Inspector Aylesbury, before you begin, you would be good enough to speak to the constable on duty at the entrance to the Tudor garden. I am anxious to take another look at the spot where the body was found."

Inspector Aylesbury took out his handkerchief and blew his nose loudly, continuing throughout the operation to glare at Paul Harley, and finally:

"You are wasting your time, Mr. Harley," he declared, "as Detective-Inspector Wessex will be the first to admit when I have given him the facts of my case. Nevertheless, if you want to examine the garden, do so by all means."

He turned without another word and stamped out of the library across the hall and into the courtyard.

"I will join you again in a few minutes, Wessex," said Paul Harley, following.

"Very good, Mr. Harley," Wessex answered. "I know you wouldn't have had me down if the case had been as simple as he seems to think it is."

I joined Harley, and we walked together up the gravelled path, meeting Inspector Aylesbury and the constable returning.

"Go ahead, Mr. Harley!" cried the Inspector. "If you can find any stronger evidence than the rifle, I shall be glad to take a look at it."

Harley nodded good-humouredly, and together we descended the steps to the sunken garden. I was intensely curious respecting the investigation which Harley had been so anxious to make here, for I recognized that it was associated with something which he had seen from the window of Camber's hut.

He walked along the moss-grown path to the sun-dial, and stood for a moment looking down at the spot where Menendez had lain. Then he stared up the hill toward the Guest House; and finally, directing his attention to the yews which lined the sloping bank:

"One, two, three, four," he counted, checking them with his fingers-- "five, six, seven."

He mounted the bank and began to examine the trunk of one of the trees, whilst I watched him in growing astonishment.

Presently he turned and looked down at me.

"Not a trace, Knox," he murmured; "not a trace. Let us try again."
He moved along to the yew adjoining that which he had already inspected, but presently shook his head and passed to the next. Then:

"Ah!" he cried. "Come here, Knox!"

I joined him where he was kneeling, staring at what I took to be a large nail, or bolt, protruding from the bark of the tree.

"You see!" he exclaimed, "you see!"

I stooped, in order to examine the thing more closely, and as I did so, I realized what it was. It was the bullet which had killed Colonel Menendez!

Harley stood upright, his face slightly flushed and his eyes very bright.

"We shall not attempt to remove it, Knox," he said. "The depth of penetration may have a tale to tell. The wood of the yew tree is one of the toughest British varieties."

"But, Harley," I said, blankly, as we descended to the path, "this is merely another point for the prosecution of Camber. Unless"--I turned to him in sudden excitement, "the bullet was of different--"

"No, no," he murmured, "nothing so easy as that, Knox. The bullet was fired from a Lee-Enfield beyond doubt." I stared at him uncomprehendingly.

"Then I am utterly out of my depth, Harley. It, appears to me that the case against Camber is finally and fatally complete. Only the motive remains to be discovered, and I flatter myself that I have already detected this."

"I am certainly inclined to think," admitted Harley, "that there is a good deal in your theory."

"Then, Harley," I said in bewilderment, "you do believe that Camber committed the murder?"

"On the contrary," he replied, "I am certain that he did not."

I stood quite still.

"You are certain?" I began.

"I told you that the test of my theory, Knox, was to be looked for in the seventh yew from the northeast corner of the Tudor garden, did I not?"

"You did. And it is there. A bullet fired from a Lee-Enfield rifle; beyond any possible shadow of doubt the bullet which killed Colonel Menendez."

"Beyond any possible shadow of doubt, as you say, Knox, the bullet which killed Colonel Menendez."

"Therefore Camber is guilty?"

"On the contrary, therefore Camber is innocent!"

"What!"

"You are persistently overlooking one little point, Knox," said Harley, mounting the steps on to the gravel path.

"I spoke of the seventh yew tree from the northeast corner of the garden."

"Well?"

"Well, my dear fellow, surely you observed that the bullet was embedded in the ninth?"

I was still groping for the significance of this point when, re-crossing the hall, we entered the library again, to find Inspector Aylesbury posed squarely before the mantelpiece stating his case to Wessex.

"You see," he was saying, in his most oratorical manner, as we entered, "every little detail fits perfectly into place. For instance, I find that a woman, called Mrs. Powis, who for the past two years had acted as housekeeper at the Guest House and never taken a holiday, was sent away recently to her married daughter in London. See what that means? Her room is at the back of the house, and her evidence would have been fatal. Ah Tsong, of course, is a liar. I made up my mind about that the moment I clapped eyes on him. Mrs. Camber is the only innocent party. She was asleep in the front of the house when the shot was fired, and I believe her when she says that she cannot swear to the matter of distance."

"A very interesting case, Inspector," said Wessex, glancing at Harley. "I have not examined the body yet, but I understand that it was a clean wound through the head."

"The bullet entered at the juncture of the nasal and frontal bones," explained Harley, rapidly, "and it came out between the base of the occipital and first cervical. Without going into unpleasant surgical details, the wound was a perfectly _straight_ one. There was no ricochet."

"I understand that a regulation rifle was used?"

"Yes," said Inspector Aylesbury; "we have it."

"And at what range did you say, Inspector?"

"Roughly, a hundred yards."

"Possibly less," murmured Harley.

"Hundred yards or less," said Wessex, musingly; "and the obstruction met with in the case of a man shot in that way would be--" He looked towards Paul Harley.

"Less than if the bullet had struck the skull higher up," was the reply. "It passed clean through."
"Therefore," continued Wessex, "I am waiting to hear, Inspector, where you found the bullet lodged?"

"Eh?" said the Inspector, and he slowly turned his prominent eyes in Harley's direction. "Oh, I see. That's why you wanted to examine the Tudor garden, is it?"

"Exactly," replied Harley.

The face of Inspector Aylesbury grew very red.

"I have deferred looking for the bullet," he explained, "as the case was already as clear as daylight. Probably Mr. Harley has discovered it."

"I have," said Harley, shortly.

"Is it the regulation bullet?" asked Wessex.

"It is. I found it embedded in one of the yew trees."

"There you are!" exclaimed Aylesbury. "There isn't the ghost of a doubt."

Wessex looked at Harley in undisguised perplexity.

"I must say, Mr. Harley," he admitted, "that I have never met with a clearer case."

"Neither have I," agreed Harley, cheerfully. "I am going to ask Inspector Aylesbury to return here after nightfall. There is a little experiment which I should like to make, and which would definitely establish my case."

"Your case?" said Aylesbury.

"My case, yes."

"You are not going to tell me that you still persist in believing Camber to be innocent?"

"Not at all. I am merely going to ask you to return at nightfall to assist me in this minor investigation."

"If you ask my opinion," said the Inspector, "no further evidence is needed."

"I don't agree with you," replied Harley, quietly. "Whatever your own ideas upon the subject may be, I, personally, have not yet discovered one single piece of convincing evidence for the prosecution of Camber."

"What!" exclaimed Aylesbury, and even Detective-Inspector Wessex stared at the speaker incredulously.

"My dear Inspector Aylesbury," concluded Harley, "when you have witnessed the experiment which I propose to make this evening you will realize, as I have already realized that we are faced by a tremendous task."

"What tremendous task?"

"The task of discovering who shot Colonel Menendez."

CHAPTER XXXI

YSOLA CAMBER'S CONFESSION

Paul Harley, with Wessex and Inspector Aylesbury, presently set out for Market Hilton, where Colin Camber and Ah Tsong were detained and where the body of Colonel Menendez had been conveyed for the purpose of the post-mortem. I had volunteered to remain at Cray's Folly, my motive being not wholly an unselfish one.

"Refer reporters to me, Mr. Knox," said Inspector Wessex. "Don't let them trouble the ladies. And tell them as little as possible, yourself."

The drone of the engine having died away down the avenue, I presently found myself alone, but as I crossed the hall in the direction of the library, intending to walk out upon the southern lawns, I saw Val Beverley coming toward me from Madame de Staemer's room.

She remained rather pale, but smiled at me courageously.

"Have they all gone, Mr. Knox?" she asked. "I have really been hiding. I suppose you knew?"

"I suspected it," I said, smiling. "Yes, they are all gone. How is Madame de Staemer, now?"

"She is quite calm. Curiously, almost uncannily calm. She is writing. Tell me, please, what does Mr. Harley think of Inspector Aylesbury's preposterous ideas?"

"He thinks he is a fool," I replied, hotly, "as I do."

"But whatever will happen if he persists in dragging me into this horrible case?"

"He will not drag you into it," I said, quietly. "He has been superseded by a cleverer man, and the case is practically under Harley's direction now."

"Thank Heaven for that," she murmured. "I wonder----" She looked at me hesitatingly.

"Yes?" I prompted.

"I have been thinking about poor Mrs. Camber all alone in that gloomy house, and wondering----" "Perhaps I know. You are going to visit her?"

Val Beverley nodded, watching me.

"Can you leave Madame de Staemer with safety?"

"Oh, yes, I think so. Nita can attend to her."

"And may I accompany you, Miss Beverley? For more reasons than one, I, too, should like to call upon Mrs. Camber."

"We might try," she said, hesitatingly. "I really only wanted to be kind. You won't begin to cross-examine her,
"Certainly not," I answered; "although there are many things I should like her to tell us."

"Well, suppose we go," said the girl, "and let events take their own course."

As a result, I presently found myself, Val Beverley by my side, walking across the meadow path. With the unpleasant hush of Cray's Folly left behind, the day seemed to grow brighter. I thought that the skylarks had never sung more sweetly. Yet in this same instant of sheerly physical enjoyment I experienced a pang of remorse, remembering the tragic woman we had left behind, and the poor little sorrowful girl we were going to visit. My emotions were very mingled, then, and I retain no recollection of our conversation up to the time that we came to the Guest House.

We were admitted by a really charming old lady, who informed us that her name was Mrs. Powis and that she was but an hour returned from London, whither she had been summoned by telegram.

She showed us into a quaint, small drawing room which owed its atmosphere quite clearly to Mrs. Camber, for whereas the study was indescribably untidy, this was a model of neatness without being formal or unhomely. Here, in a few moments, Mrs. Camber joined us, an appealing little figure of wistful, almost elfin, beauty. I was surprised and delighted to find that an instant bond of sympathy sprang up between the two girls. I diplomatically left them together for a while, going into Camber's room to smoke my pipe. And when I returned:

"Oh, Mr. Knox," said Val Beverley, "Mrs. Camber has something to tell you which she thinks you ought to know."

"Concerning Colonel Menendez?" I asked, eagerly.

Mrs. Camber nodded her golden head.

"Yes," she replied, but glancing at Val Beverley as if to gather confidence. "The truth can never hurt Colin. He has nothing to conceal. May I tell you?"

"I am all anxiety to hear," I assured her.

"Would you rather I went, Mrs. Camber?" asked Val Beverley.

Mrs. Camber reached across and took her hand.

"Please, no," she replied. "Stay here with me. I am afraid it is rather a long story."

"Never mind," I said. "It will be time well spent if it leads us any nearer to the truth."

"Yes?" she questioned, watching me anxiously, "you think so? I think so, too."

She became silent, sitting looking straight before her, the pupils of her blue eyes widely dilated. Then, at first in a queer, far-away voice, she began to speak again.

"I must tell you," she commenced "that before--my marriage, my name was Isabella de Valera."

I started.

"Ysola was my baby way of saying it, and so I came to be called Ysola. My father was manager of one of Senor Don Juan's estates, in a small island near the coast of Cuba. My mother"--she raised her little hands eloquently--"was half-caste. Do you know? And she and my father--"

She looked pleadingly at Val Beverley.

"I understand," whispered the latter with deep sympathy; "but you don't think it makes any difference, do you?"

"No?" said Mrs. Camber with a quaint little gesture. "To you, perhaps not, but there, where I was born, oh! so much. Well, then, my mother died when I was very little. Ah Tsong was her servant. There are many Chinese in the West Indies, you see, and I can just remember he carried me in to see her. Of course I didn't understand. My father quarrelled bitterly with the priests because they would not bury her in holy ground. I think he no longer believed afterward. I loved him very much. He was good to me; and I was a queen in that little island. All the negroes loved me, because of my mother, I think, who was partly descended from slaves, as they were. But I had not begun to understand how hard it was all going to be when my father sent me to a convent in Cuba."

"I hated to go, but while I was there I learned all about myself. I knew that I was outcast. It was"--she raised her hand--"not possible to stay. I was only fifteen when I came home, but all the same I was a woman. I was no more a child, and happy no longer. After a while, perhaps, when I forgot what I had suffered at the convent, I became less miserable. My father did all in his power to make me happy, and I was glad the work-people loved me. But I was very lonely. Ah Tsong understood."

Her eyes filled with tears.

"Can you imagine," she asked, "that when my father was away in distant parts of the island at night, Ah Tsong slept outside my door? Some of them say, 'Do not trust the Chinese' I say, except my husband and my father, I have never known another one to trust but Ah Tsong. Now they have taken him away from me."

Tears glittered on her lashes, but she brushed them aside angrily, and continued:

"I was still less than twenty, and looked, they told me, only fourteen, when Senor Menendez came to inspect his estate. I had never seen him before. There had been a rising in the island, in the year after I was born, and he had
only just escaped with his life. He was hated. People called him Devil Menendez. Especially, no woman was safe from him, and in the old days, when his power had been great, he had used it for wickedness.

"My father was afraid when he heard he was coming. He would have sent me away, but before it could be arranged Senor the Colonel arrived. He had in his company a French lady. I thought her very beautiful and elegant. It was Madame de Staemer. It is only four years ago, a little more, but her hair was dark brown. She was splendidly dressed and such a wonderful horsewoman. The first time I saw her I felt as they had made me feel at the convent. I wanted to hide from her. She was so grand a lady, and I came from slaves."

She paused hesitatingly and stared down at her own tiny feet.

"Pardon me interrupting you, Mrs. Camber," I said, "but can you tell me in what way these two are related?"

She looked up with her naïve smile.

"I can tell you, yes. A cousin of Senor Menendez married a sister of Madame de Staemer."

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, "a very remote kinship."

"It was in this way they met, in Paris, I think, and"--she raised her hands expressively--"she came with him to the West Indies, although it was during the great war. I think she loved him more than her soul, and me--me she hated. As Senor Menendez dismounted from his horse in front of the house he saw me."

She sighed and ceased speaking again. Then:

"That very night," she continued, "he began. Do you know? I was trying to escape from him when Madame de Staemer found us. She called me a shameful name, and my father, who heard it, ordered her out of the house. Senor Menendez spoke sharply, and my father struck him."

She paused once more, biting her lip agitatedly, but presently proceeded:

"Do you know what they are like, the Spanish, when their blood is hot? Senor Menendez had a revolver, but my father knocked it from his grasp. Then they fought with their bare hands. I was too frightened even to cry out. It was all a horrible dream. What Madame de Staemer did, I do not know. I could see nothing but two figures twined together on the floor. At last one of them arose. I saw it was my father, and I remember no more."

She was almost overcome by her tragic recollections, but presently, with a wonderful courage, which, together with her daintiness of form, spoke eloquently of good blood on one side at any rate, continued to speak:

"My father found he must go to Cuba to make arrangements for the future. Of course, our life there was finished. Ah Tsong stayed with me. You have heard how it used to be in those islands in the old days, but now you think it is so different? I used to think it was different, too. On the first night my father was away, Ah Tsong, who had gone out, was so long returning I became afraid. Then a strange negro came with news that he had been taken ill with cholera, and was lying at a place not far from the house. I forgot my fears and hurried off with this man. Ah!"

She laughed wildly.

"I did not know I should never return, and I did not know I should never see my father again. To you this must seem all wild and strange, because there is a law in England. There is a law in Cuba, too, but in some of those little islands the only law is the law of the strongest."

She raised her hands to her face and there was silence for a while.

"Of course it was a trap," she presently continued. "I was taken to an island called El Manas which belonged to Senor Menendez, and where he had a house. This he could do, but"--she threw back her head proudly--"my spirit he could not break. Lots and lots of money would be mine, and estates of my own; but one thing about him I must tell: he never showed me violence. I was proud of my jewels and fine dresses. But I began to notice that Juan did not present any of his friends to me. We went about, but to strange places, never to visit people of his own kind, and none came to visit us. Then one night I heard someone on the balcony of my room. I was so frightened I could not cry out. It was good I was like
that, for the curtain was pulled open and Ah Tsong came in."
"He told me!" she said in a very low voice.
Then, looking up pitifully:
"Do you know?" she asked in her quaint way. "It was a mock marriage. He had done it and thought no shame, because it was so with my mother. Oh!"
Her beautiful eyes flashed, and for the first time since I had met Ysola Camber I saw the real Spanish spirit of the woman leap to life.
"He did not know me. Perhaps I did not know myself. That night, with no money, without a ring, a piece of lace, a peseta, anything that had belonged to him, I went with Ah Tsong. We made our way to a half-sister of my father's who lived in Puerto Principe, and at first--she would not have me. I was talked about, she said, in all the islands. She told me of my poor father. She told me I had dragged the name of de Valera in the dirt. At last I made her understand—that what everyone else had known, I had never even dreamed of."
She looked up wistfully, as if thinking that we might doubt her.
"Do you know?" she whispered.
"I know—oh! I know!" said Val Beverley. I loved her for the sympathy in her voice and in her eyes. "It is very, very brave of you to tell us this, Mrs. Camber."
"Yes? Do you think so?" asked the girl, simply. "What does it matter if it can help Colin?"
"This aunt of mine," she presently continued, "was a poor woman, and it was while I was hiding in her house—because spies of Senor Menendez were searching for me—that I met—my husband. He was studying in Cuba the strange things he writes about, you see. And before I knew what had happened—I found I loved him more than all else in the world. It is so wonderful, that feeling," she said, looking across at Val Beverley. "Do you know?"
The girl flushed deeply, and lowered her eyes, but made no reply.
"Because you are a woman, too, you will perhaps understand," she resumed. "I did not tell him. I did not dare to tell him at first. I was so madly happy I had no courage to speak. But when"—her voice sank lower and lower—"he asked me to marry him, I told him. Nothing he could ever do would change my love for him now, because he forgave me and made me his wife."
I feared that at last she was going to break down, for her voice became very tremulous and tears leapt again into her eyes. She conquered her emotion, however, and went on:
"We crossed over to the States, and Colin's family who had heard of his marriage—some friend of Senor Menendez had told them—would not know us. It meant that Colin, who would have been a rich man, was very poor. It made no difference. He was splendid. And I was so happy it was all like a dream. He made me forget I was to blame for his troubles. Then we were in Washington—and I saw Senor Menendez in the hotel!"
"Oh, my heart stopped beating. For me it seemed like the end of everything. I knew, I knew, he was following me. But he had not seen me, and without telling Colin the reason, I made him leave Washington, He was glad to go. Wherever we went, in America, they seemed to find out about my mother. I got to hate them, hate them all. We came to England, and Colin heard about this house, and we took it."
"At last we were really happy. No one knew us. Because we were strange, and because of Ah Tsong, they looked at us very funny and kept away, but we did not care. Then Sir James Appleton sold Cray's Folly."
She looked up quickly.
"How can I tell you? It must have been by Ah Tsong that he traced me to Surrey. Some spy had told him there was a Chinaman living here. Oh, I don't know how he found out, but when I heard who was coming to Cray's Folly I thought I should die.
"Something I must tell you now. When I had told my story to Colin, one thing I had not told him, because I was afraid what he might do. I had not told him the name of the man who had caused me to suffer so much. On the day I first saw Senor Menendez walking in the garden of Cray's Folly I knew I must tell my husband what he had so often asked me to tell him—the name of the man. I told him—and at first I thought he would go mad. He began to drink—do you know? It is a failing in his family. But because I knew—because I knew—I forgave him, and hoped, always hoped, that he would stop. He promised to do so. He had given up going out each day to drink, and was working again like he used to work—too hard, too hard, but it was better than the other way."
She stopped speaking, and suddenly, before I could divine her intention, dropped upon her knees, and raised her clasped hands to me.
"He did not, he did not kill him!" she cried, passionately. "He did not! O God! I who love him tell you he did not! You think he did. You do—yes, you do! I can see it in your eyes!"
"Believe me, Mrs. Camber," I answered, deeply moved, "I don't doubt your word for a moment."
She continued to look at me for a while, and then turned to Val Beverley.
"_You_ don't think he did," she sobbed, "do you?"

She looked such a child, such a pretty, helpless child, as she knelt there on the carpet, that I felt a lump rising in my throat.

Val Beverley dropped down impulsively beside her and put her arms around the slender shoulders.

"Of course I don't," she exclaimed, indignantly. "Of course I don't. It's quite unthinkable."

"I know it is," moaned the other, raising her tearful face. "I love him and know his great soul. But what do these others know, and they will never believe me."

"Have courage," I said. "It has never failed you yet. Mr. Paul Harley has promised to clear him by to-night."

"He has promised?" she whispered, still kneeling and clutching Val Beverley tightly. She looked up at me with hope reborn in her beautiful eyes. "He has promised? Oh, I thank him. May God bless him. I know he will succeed."

I turned aside, and walked out across the hall and into the empty study.

CHAPTER XXXII

PAUL HARLEY'S EXPERIMENT

I recognize that whosoever may have taken the trouble to follow my chronicle thus far will be little disposed to suffer any intrusion of my personal affairs at such a point. Therefore I shall pass lightly over the walk back to Cray's Folly, during which I contrived to learn much about Val Beverley's personal history but little to advance the investigation which I was there to assist.

As I had surmised, Miss Beverley had been amply provided for by her father, and was bound to Madame de Staemer by no other ties than those of friendship and esteem. Very reluctantly I released her, on our returning to the house; for she, perforce, hurried off to Madame's room, leaving me looking after her in a state of delightful bewilderment, the significance of which I could not disguise from myself. The absurd suspicions of Inspector Aylesbury were forgotten; so was the shadow upon the blind of Colonel Menendez's study. I only knew that love had come to me, an unbidden guest, to stay for ever.

Manoel informed me that a number of pressmen, not to be denied, had taken photographs of the Tudor garden and of the spot where Colonel Menendez had been found, but Pedro, following my instructions, had referred them all to Market Hilton.

I was standing in the doorway talking to the man when I heard the drone of Harley's motor in the avenue, and a moment later he and Wessex stepped out in front of the porch and joined me. I thought that Wessex looked stern and rather confused, but Harley was quite his old self, his keen eyes gleaming humorously, and an expression of geniality upon his tanned features.

"Hullo, Knox!" he cried, "any developments?"

"Yes," I said. "Suppose we go up to your room and talk."

"Good enough."

Inspector Wessex nodded without speaking, and the three of us mounted the staircase and entered Paul Harley's room. Harley seated himself upon the bed and began to load his pipe, whilst Wessex, who seemed very restless, stood staring out of the window. I sat down in the armchair, and:

"I have had an interesting interview with Mrs. Camber," I said.

"What?" exclaimed Harley. "Good. Tell us all about it."

Wessex turned, hands clasped behind him, and listened in silence to an account which I gave of my visit to the Guest House. When I had finished:

"It seems to me," said the Inspector, slowly, "that the only doubtful point in the case against Camber is cleared up; namely, his motive."

"It certainly looks like it," agreed Harley. "But how strangely Mrs. Camber's story differs from that of Menendez although there are points of contact. I regret, however, that you were unable to settle the most important matter of all."

"You mean whether or not she had visited Cray's Folly?"

"Exactly."

"Then you still consider my theory to be correct?" I asked eagerly.

"Up to a point it has been proved to be," he returned. "I must congratulate you upon a piece of really brilliant reasoning, Knox. But respecting the most crucial moment of all, we are still without information, unfortunately. However, whilst the presence or otherwise, of Mrs. Camber in Cray's Folly on the night preceding the tragedy may prove to bear intimately upon the case, an experiment which I propose to make presently will give the matter an entirely different significance."

"Hm," said Wessex, doubtfully, "I am looking forward to this experiment of yours, Mr. Harley, with great interest. To be perfectly honest, I have no more idea than the man in the moon how you hope to clear Camber."

"No," replied Harley, musingly, "the weight of evidence against him is crushing. But you are a man of great
experience, Wessex, in criminal investigations. Tell me honestly, have you ever known a murder case in which there was such conclusive material for the prosecution?"

"Never," replied the Inspector, promptly. "In this respect, as in others, the case is unique."

"You have seen Camber," continued Harley, "and have been enabled to form some sort of judgment respecting his character. You will admit that he is a clever man, brilliantly clever. Keep this fact in mind. Remember his studies, and he does not deny that they have included Voodoo. Remember his enquiries into the significance of Bat Wing. Remember, as we now learn definitely from Mrs. Camber's evidence, that he was in Cuba at the same time as the late Colonel Menendez, and once, at least, actually in the same hotel in the United States. Consider the rifle found under the floor of the hut; and, having weighed all these points judicially, Wessex, tell me frankly, if in the whole course of your experience, you have ever met with a more perfect frame-up?"

"What!" shouted Wessex, in sudden excitement. "What!"

"I said a frame-up," repeated Harley, quietly. "An American term, but one which will be familiar to you."

"Good God!" muttered the detective, "you have turned all my ideas upside down."

"What may be termed the _physical_ evidence," continued Harley, "is complete, I admit: too complete. There lies the weak spot. But what I will call the psychological evidence points in a totally different direction. A man clever enough to have planned this crime, and Camber undoubtedly is such a man, could not--it is humanly impossible--have been fool enough, deliberately to lay such a train of damning facts. It's a frame-up, Wessex! I had begun to suspect this even before I met Camber. Having met him, I knew that I was right. Then came an inspiration. I saw where there must be a flaw in the plan. It was geographically impossible that this could be otherwise."

"Geographically impossible?" I said, in a hushed voice, for Harley had truly astounded me.

"Geographical is the term, Knox. I admit that the discovery of the rifle beneath the floor of the hut appalled me."

"I could see that it did."

"It was the crowning piece of evidence, Knox, evidence of such fiendish cleverness on the part of those who had plotted Menendez's death that I began to wonder whether after all it would be possible to defeat them. I realized that Camber's life hung upon a hair. For the production of that rifle before a jury of twelve moderately stupid men and true could not fail to carry enormous weight. Whereas the delicate point upon which my counter case rested might be more difficult to demonstrate in court. To-night, however, we shall put it to the test, and there are means, no doubt, which will occur to me later, of making its significance evident to one not acquainted with the locality. The press photographs, which I understand have been taken, may possibly help us in this."

Bewildered by my friend's revolutionary ideas, which explained the hitherto mysterious nature of his enquiries, I scarcely knew what to say; but:

"If it's a frame-up, Mr. Harley," said Wessex, "and the more I think about it the more it has that look to me, practically speaking, we have not yet started on the search for the murderer."

"We have not," replied Harley, grimly. "But I have a dawning idea of a method by which we shall be enabled to narrow down this enquiry."

It must be unnecessary for me to speak of the state of suppressed excitement in which we passed the remainder of that afternoon and evening. Dr. Rolleston called again to see Madame de Staemer, and reported that she was quite calm. In fact, he almost echoed Val Beverley's words spoken earlier in the day.

"She is unnaturally calm, Mr. Knox," he said in confidence. "I understand that the dead man was a cousin, but I almost suspect that she was madly in love with him."

I nodded shortly, admiring his acute intelligence.

"I think you are right, doctor," I replied, "and if it is so, her amazing fortitude is all the more admirable."

"Admirable?" he echoed. "As I said before, she has the courage of ten men."

A formal dinner was out of the question, of course; indeed, no one attempted to dress. Val Beverley excused herself, saying that she would dine in Madame's room, and Harley, Wessex, and I, partook of wine and sandwiches in the library.

Inspector Aylesbury arrived about eight o'clock in a mood of repressed irritation. Pedro showed him in to where the three of us were seated, and:

"Good evening, gentlemen," said he, "here I am, as arranged, but as I am up to my eyes in work on the case, I will ask you, Mr. Harley, to carry out this experiment of yours as quickly as possible."

"No time shall be lost," replied my friend, quietly. "May I request you to accompany Detective-Inspector Wessex and Mr. Knox to the Guest House by the high road? Do not needlessly alarm Mrs. Camber. Indeed, I think you might confine your attention to Mrs. Powis. Merely request permission to walk down the garden to the hut, and be good enough to wait there until I join you, which will be in a few minutes after your arrival."

Inspector Aylesbury uttered an inarticulate, grunting sound, but I, who knew Harley so well, could see that he felt himself to be upon the eve of a signal triumph. What he proposed to do, I had no idea, save that it was designed
to clear Colin Camber. I prayed that it might also clear his pathetic girl-wife; and in a sort of gloomy silence I set out with Wessex and Aylesbury, down the drive, past the lodge, which seemed to be deserted to-night, and along the tree-lined high road, cool and sweet in the dusk of evening.

Aylesbury was very morose, and Wessex, who had lighted his pipe, did not seem to be in a talkative mood either. He had the utmost faith in Paul Harley, but it was evident enough that he was oppressed by the weight of evidence against Camber. I divined the fact that he was turning over in his mind the idea of the frame-up, and endeavouring to re-adjust the established facts in accordance with this new point of view.

We were admitted to the Guest House by Mrs. Powis, a cheery old soul; one of those born optimists whose special task in life seems to be that of a friend in need.

As she opened the door, she smiled, shook her head, and raised her finger to her lips.

"Be as quiet as you can, sir," she said. "I have got her to sleep."

She spoke of Mrs. Camber as one refers to a child, and, quite understanding her anxiety:

"There will be no occasion to disturb her, Mrs. Powis," I replied. "We merely wish to walk down to the bottom of the garden to make a few enquiries."

"Yes, gentlemen," she whispered, quietly closing the door as we all entered the hall.

She led us through the rear portion of the house, and past the quarters of Ah Tsong into that neglected garden which I remembered so well.

"There you are, sir, and may Heaven help you to find the truth."

"Rest assured that the truth will be found, Mrs. Powis," I answered.

Inspector Aylesbury cleared his throat, but Wessex, puffing at his pipe, made no remark whatever until we were all come to the hut overhanging the little ravine.

"This is where I found the rifle, Detective-Inspector," explained Aylesbury.

Wessex nodded absently.

It was another perfect night, with only a faint tracery of cloud to be seen like lingering smoke over on the western horizon. Everything seemed very still, so that although we were several miles from the railway line, when presently a train sped on its way one might have supposed, from the apparent nearness of the sound, that the track was no farther off than the grounds of Cray's Folly.

Toward those grounds, automatically, our glances were drawn; and we stood there staring down at the ghostly map of the gardens, and all wondering, no doubt, what Harley was doing and when he would be joining us.

Very faintly I could hear the water of the little stream bubbling beneath us. Then, just as this awkward silence was becoming intolerable, there came a scraping and scratching from the shadows of the gully, and:

"Give me a hand, Knox!" cried the voice of Harley from below. "I want to avoid the barbed wire if possible."

He had come across country, and as I scrambled down the slope to meet him I could not help wondering with what object he had sent us ahead by the high road. Presently, when he came clambering up into the garden, this in a measure was explained, for:

"You are all wondering," he began, rapidly, "what I am up to, no doubt. Let me endeavour to make it clear. In order that my test should be conclusive, and in no way influenced by pre-knowledge of certain arrangements which I had made, I sent you on ahead of me. Not wishing to waste time, I followed by the shorter route. And now, gentlemen, let us begin."

"Good," muttered Inspector Aylesbury.

"But first of all," continued Harley, "I wish each one of you in turn to look out of the window of the hut, and down into the Tudor garden of Cray's Folly. Will you begin, Wessex?"

Wessex, taking his pipe out of his mouth, and staring hard at the speaker, nodded, entered the hut, and kneeling on the wooden seat, looked out of the window.

"Open the panes," said Harley, "so that you have a perfectly clear view."

Wessex slid the panes open and stared intently down into the valley.

"Do you see anything unusual in the garden?"

"Nothing," he reported.

"And now, Inspector Aylesbury,"

Inspector Aylesbury stamped noisily across the little hut, and peered out, briefly.

"I can see the garden," he said.

"Can you see the sun-dial?"

"Quite clearly."

"Good. And now you, Knox."

I followed, filled with astonishment.

"Do you see the sun-dial?" asked Harley, again.
"Quite clearly."
"And beyond it?"
"Yes, I can see beyond it. I can even see its shadow lying like a black band on the path."
"And you can see the yew trees?"
"Of course."
"But nothing else? Nothing unusual?"
"Nothing."
"Very well," said Harley, tersely. "And now, gentlemen, we take to the rough ground, proceeding due east. Will you be good enough to follow?"

Walking around the hut he found an opening in the hedge, and scrambled down into the place where rank grass grew and through which he and I on a previous occasion had made our way to the high road. To-night, however, he did not turn toward the high road, but proceeded along the crest of the hill.

I followed him, excited by the novelty of the proceedings. Wessex, very silent, came behind me, and Inspector Aylesbury, swearing under his breath, waded through the long grass at the rear.

"Will you all turn your attention to the garden again, please?" cried Harley. We all paused, looking to the right. "Anything unusual?"

We were agreed that there was not. "Very well," said my friend. "You will kindly note that from this point onward the formation of the ground prevents our obtaining any other view of Cray's Folly or its gardens until we reach the path to the valley, or turn on to the high road. From a point on the latter the tower may be seen but that is all. The first part of my experiment is concluded, gentlemen. We will now return."

Giving us no opportunity for comment, he plunged on in the direction of the stream, and at a point which I regarded as unnecessarily difficult, crossed it, to the great discomfiture of the heavy Inspector Aylesbury. A few minutes later we found ourselves once more in the grounds of Cray's Folly.

Harley, evidently with a definite objective in view, led the way up the terraces, through the rhododendrons, and round the base of the tower. He crossed to the sunken garden, and at the top of the steps paused.

"Be good enough to regard the sun-dial from this point," he directed. Even as he spoke, I caught my breath, and I heard Aylesbury utter a sort of gasping sound. Beyond the sun-dial and slightly to the left of it, viewed from where we stood, a faint, elfin light flickered, at a point apparently some four or five feet above the ground!

"What's this?" muttered Wessex. "Follow again, gentlemen," said Harley quietly. He led the way down to the garden and along the path to the sun-dial. This he passed, pausing immediately in front of the yew tree in which I knew the bullet to be embedded.

He did not speak, but, extending his finger, pointed. A piece of candle, some four inches long, was attached by means of a nail to the bark of the tree, so that its flame burned immediately in front of the bullet embedded there! For perhaps ten seconds no one spoke; indeed I think no one moved. Then: "Good God!" murmured Wessex. "You have done some clever things to my knowledge, Mr. Harley, but this crowns them all."

"Clever things!" said Inspector Aylesbury. "I think it's a lot of damned tomfoolery."

"Do you, Inspector?" asked the Scotland Yard man, quietly. "I don't. I think it has saved the life of an innocent man."

"What's that? What's that?" cried Aylesbury. "This candle was burning here on the yew tree," explained Harley, "at the time that you looked out of the window of the hut. You could not see it. You could not see it from the crest adjoining the Guest House-- the only other spot in the neighbourhood from which this garden is visible. Now, since the course of a bullet is more or less straight, and since the nature of the murdered man's wound proves that it was not deflected in any way, I submit that the one embedded in the yew tree before you could not possibly have been fired from the Guest House! The second part of my experiment, gentlemen, will be designed to prove from whence it was fired."

CHAPTER XXXIII
PAUL HARLEY'S EXPERIMENT CONCLUDED

Up to the very moment that Paul Harley, who had withdrawn, rejoined us in the garden, Inspector Aylesbury had not grasped the significance of that candle burning upon the yew tree. He continued to stare at it as if hypnotized, and when my friend re-appeared, carrying a long ash staff and a sheet of cardboard, I could have laughed to witness
the expression upon the Inspector's face, had I not been too deeply impressed with that which underlay this strange business.

Wessex, on the other hand, was watching my friend eagerly, as an earnest student in the class-room might watch a demonstration by some celebrated lecturer.

"You will notice," said Paul Harley, "that I have had a number of boards laid down upon the ground yonder, near the sun-dial. They cover a spot where the turf has worn very thin. Now, this garden, because of its sunken position, is naturally damp. Perhaps, Wessex, you would take up these planks for me."

Inspector Wessex obeyed, and Harley, laying the ash stick and cardboard upon the ground, directed the ray of an electric torch upon the spot uncovered.

"The footprints of Colonel Menendez!" he explained. "Here he turned from the tiled path. He advanced three paces in the direction of the sun-dial, you observe, then stood still, facing we may suppose, since this is the indication of the prints, in a southerly direction."

"Straight toward the Guest House," muttered Inspector Aylesbury.

"Roughly," corrected Harley. "He was fronting in that direction, certainly, but his head may have been turned either to the right or to the left. You observe from the great depth of the toe-marks that on this spot he actually fell. Then, here"--he moved the light--"is the impression of his knee, and here again--"

He shone the white ray upon a discoloured patch of grass, and then returned the lamp to his pocket.

"I am going to make a hole in the turf," he continued, "directly between these two footprints, which seem to indicate that the Colonel was standing in the military position of attention at the moment that he met his death."

With the end of the ash stick, which was pointed, he proceeded to do this.

"Colonel Menendez," he went on, "stood rather over six feet in his shoes. The stick which now stands upright in the turf measures six feet, from the chalk mark up to which I have buried it to the slot which I have cut in the top. Into this slot I now wedge my sheet of cardboard."

As he placed the sheet of cardboard in the slot which he had indicated, I saw that a round hole was cut in it some six inches in diameter. We watched these proceedings in silence, then:

"If you will allow me to adjust the candle, gentlemen," said Harley, "which has burned a little too low for my purpose, I shall proceed to the second part of this experiment."

He walked up to the yew tree, and by means of bending the nail upward he raised the flame of the candle level with the base of the embedded bullet.

"By heavens!" cried Wessex, suddenly divining the object of these proceedings, "Mr. Harley, this is genius!"

"Thank you, Wessex," Harley replied, quietly, but nevertheless he was unable to hide his gratification. "You see my point?"

"Certainly."

"In ten minutes we shall know the truth."

"Oh, I see," muttered Inspector Aylesbury; "we shall know the truth, eh? If you ask me the truth, it's this, that we are a set of lunatics."

"My dear Inspector Aylesbury," said Harley, good humouredly, "surely you have grasped the lesson of experiment number one?"

"Well," admitted the other, "it's funny, certainly. I mean, it wants a lot of explaining, but I can't say I'm convinced."

"That's a pity," murmured Wessex, "because I am."

"You see, Inspector," Harley continued, patiently, "the body of Colonel Menendez as it lay formed a straight line between the sun-dial and the hut in the garden of the Guest House. That is to say: a line drawn from the window of the hut to the sun-dial must have passed through the body. Very well. Such an imaginary line, if continued beyond the sun-dial, would have terminated near the base of the seventh yew tree. Accordingly, I naturally looked for the bullet there. It was not there. But I found it, as you know, in the ninth tree. Therefore, the shot could not possibly have been fired from the Guest House, because the spot in the ninth yew where the bullet had lodged is not visible from the Guest House."

Inspector Aylesbury removed his cap and scratched his head vigorously.

"In order that we may avoid waste of valuable time," said Harley, finally, "let us take a hasty observation from here. As a matter of fact, I have done so already, as nearly as was possible, without employing this rough apparatus."

He knelt down beside the yew tree, lowering his head so that the candlelight shone upon the brown, eager face, and looked upward, over the top of the sun-dial and through the hole in the cardboard.

"Yes," he muttered, a note of rising excitement in his voice. "As I thought, as I thought. Come, gentlemen, let us hurry."

He walked rapidly out of the garden, and up the steps, whilst we followed dumb with wonder--or such at any
rate was the cause of my own silence.

In the hall Pedro was standing, a bunch of keys in his hand, and evidently expecting Harley.

"Will you take us by the shortest way to the tower stairs?" my friend directed.

"Yes, sir."

Doubting, wondering, scarcely knowing whether to be fearful or jubilant, I followed, along a carpeted corridor, and thence, a heavy, oaken door being unlocked, across a dusty and deserted apartment apparently intended for a drawing room. From this, through a second doorway we were led into a small, square, unfurnished room, which I knew must be situated in the base of the tower. Yet a third door was unlocked, and:

"Here is the stair, sir," said Pedro.

In Indian file we mounted to the first floor, to find ourselves in a second, identical room, also stripped of furniture and decorations. Harley barely glanced out of the northern window, shook his head, and:

"Next floor, Pedro," he directed.

Up we went, our footsteps arousing a cloud of dust from the uncarpeted stairs, and the sound of our movements echoing in hollow fashion around the deserted rooms.

Gaining the next floor, Harley, unable any longer to conceal his excitements, ran to the north window, looked out, and:

"Gentlemen," he said, "my experiment is complete!"

He turned, his back to the window, and faced us in the dusk of the room.

"Assuming the ash stick to represent the upright body of Colonel Menendez," he continued, "and the sheet of cardboard to represent his head, the hole which I have cut in it corresponds fairly nearly to the position of his forehead. Further assuming the bullet to have illustrated Euclid's definition of a straight line, such a line, followed back, from the yew tree to the spot where the rifle rested, would pass through the hole in the cardboard! In other words, there is only one place from which it is possible to see the flame of the candle through the hole in the cardboard: the place where the rifle rested! Stand here in the left-hand angle of the window and stoop down! Will you come first, Knox?"

I stepped across the room, bent down, and stared out of the window, across the Tudor garden. Plainly I could see the sun-dial with the ash stick planted before it. I could see the piece of cardboard which surmounted it—and, through the hole cut in the cardboard, I could see the feeble flame of the candle nailed to the ninth yew tree!

I stood upright, knowing that I had grown pale, and conscious of a moist sensation upon my forehead.

"Merciful God!" I said in a hollow voice. "It was from _this window_ that the shot was fired which killed him!"

CHAPTER XXXIV
THE CREEPING SICKNESS

From the ensuing consultation in the library we did not rise until close upon midnight. To the turbid intelligence of Inspector Aylesbury the fact by this time had penetrated that Colin Camber was innocent, that he was the victim of a frame-up, and that Colonel Juan Menendez had been shot from a window of his own house.

By a process of lucid reasoning which must have convinced a junior schoolboy, Paul Harley, there in the library, with its garish bookcases and its Moorish ornaments, had eliminated every member of the household from the list of suspects. His concluding words, I remember, were as follows:

"Of the known occupants of Cray's Folly on the night of the tragedy we now find ourselves reduced to four, any one of whom, from the point of view of an impartial critic uninfluenced by personal character, question, or motive, or any consideration other than that of physical possibility, might have shot Colonel Menendez. They are, firstly:

Myself.

In order to believe me guilty, it would be necessary to discount the evidence of Knox, who saw me on the gravel path below at the time that the shot was fired from the tower window.

Secondly: Knox; whose guilt, equally, could only be assumed by means of eliminating _my_ evidence, since I saw him at the window of my room at the time that the shot was fired.

Thirdly: Madame de Staemer. Regarding this suspect, in the first place she could not have gained access to the tower room without assistance, and in the second place she was so passionately devoted to the late Colonel Menendez that Dr. Rolleston is of opinion that her reason may remain permanently impaired by the shock of his death. Fourthly and lastly: Miss Val Beverley."

Over my own feelings, as he had uttered the girl's name, I must pass in silence.

"Miss Val Beverley is the only one of the four suspects who is not in a position to establish a sound alibi so far as I can see at the moment; but in this case entire absence of motive renders the suspicion absurd. Having dealt with the _known_ occupants, I shall not touch upon the possibility that some stranger had gained access to the house. This opens up a province of speculation which we must explore at greater leisure, for it would be profitless to attempt such an exploration now."
Thus the gathering had broken up, Inspector Aylesbury returning to Market Hilton to make his report and to release Colin Camber and Ah Tsong, and Wessex to seek his quarters at the Lavender Arms.

I remember that having seen them off, Harley and I stood in the hall, staring at one another in a very odd way, and so we stood when Val Beverley came quietly from Madame de Staemer's room and spoke to us.

"Pedro has told me what you have done, Mr. Harley," she said in a low voice. "Oh, thank God you have cleared him. But what, in Heaven's name, does your new discovery mean?"

"You may well ask," Harley answered, grimly. "If my first task was a hard one, that which remains before me looks more nearly hopeless than anything I have ever been called upon to attempt."

"It is horrible, it is horrible," said the girl, shudderingly. "Oh, Mr. Knox," she turned to me, "I have felt all along that there was some stranger in the house----"

"You have told me so."

"Conundrums! Conundrums!" muttered Harley, irritably. "Where am I to begin, upon what am I to erect any feasible theory?" He turned abruptly to Val Beverley. "Does Madame de Staemer know?"

"Yes," she answered, nodding her head; "and hearing the others depart, she asked me to tell you that sleep is impossible until you have personally given her the details of your discovery."

"She wishes to see me?" asked Harley, eagerly.

"She insists upon seeing you," replied the girl, "and also requests Mr. Knox to visit her." She paused, biting her lip. "Madame's manner is very, very odd. Dr. Rolleston cannot understand her at all. I expect he has told you? She has been sitting there for hours and hours, writing."

"Writing?" exclaimed Harley. "Letters?"

"I don't know what she has been writing," confessed Val Beverley. "She declines to tell me, or to show me what she has written. But there is quite a little stack of manuscript upon the table beside her bed. Won't you come in?"

I could see that she was more troubled than she cared to confess, and I wondered if Dr. Rolleston's unpleasant suspicions might have solid foundation, and if the loss of her cousin had affected Madame de Staemer's brain.

Presently, then, ushered by Val Beverley, I found myself once more in the violet and silver room in which on that great bed of state Madame reclined amid silken pillows. Her art never deserted her, not even in moments of ultimate stress, and that she had prepared herself for this interview was evident enough.

I had thought previously that one night of horror had added five years to her apparent age. I thought now that she looked radiantly beautiful. That expression in her eyes, which I knew I must forevermore associate with the memory of the dying tigress, had faded entirely. They remained still, as of old, but to-night they were velvety soft. The lips were relaxed in a smile of tenderness. I observed, with surprise, that she wore much jewelery, and upon her white bosom gleamed the famous rope of pearls which I knew her to treasure above almost anything in her possession.

Again the fear touched me coldly that much sorrow had made her mad. But at her very first word of greeting I was immediately reassured.

"Ah, my friend," she said, as I entered, a caressing note in her deep, vibrant voice, "you have great news, they tell me? Mr. Harley, I was afraid that you had deserted me, sir. If you had done so I should have been very angry with you. Set the two armchairs here on my right, Val, dear, and sit close beside me."

Then, as we seated ourselves:

"You are not smoking, my friends," she continued, "and I know that you are both so fond of a smoke."

Paul Harley excused himself but I accepted a cigarette which Val Beverley offered me from a silver box on the table, and presently:

"I am here, like a prisoner of the Bastille," declared Madame, shrugging her shoulders, "where only echoes reach me. Now, Mr. Harley, tell me of this wonderful discovery of yours."

Harley inclined his head gravely, and in that succinct fashion which he had at command acquainted Madame with the result of his two experiments. As he completed the account:

"Ah," she sighed, and lay back upon her pillows, "so to-night he is again a free man, the poor Colin Camber. And his wife is happy once more?"

"Thank God," I murmured. "Her sorrow was pathetic."

"Only the pure in heart can thank God," said Madame, strangely, "but I, too, am glad. I have written, here--she pointed to a little heap of violet note-paper upon a table placed at the opposite side of the bed-- "how glad I am."

Harley and I stared vaguely across at the table. I saw Val Beverley glancing uneasily in the same direction. Save for the writing materials and little heap of manuscript, it held only a cup and saucer, a few sandwiches, and a medicine bottle containing the prescription which Dr. Rolleston had made up for the invalid.

"I am curious to know what you have written, Madame," declared Harley.

"Yes, you are curious?" she said. "Very well, then, I will tell you, and afterward you may read if you wish." She turned to me. "You, my friend," she whispered, and reaching over she laid her jewelled hand upon my arm, "you
have spoken with Ysola de Valera this afternoon, they tell me?"

"With Mrs. Camber?" I asked, startled. "Yes, that is true."

"Ah, Mrs. Camber," murmured Madame. "I knew her as Ysola de Valera. She is beautiful, in her golden doll way. You think so?" Then, ere I had time to reply: "She told you, I suppose, eh?"

"She told me," I replied with a certain embarrassment, "that she had met you some years ago in Cuba."

"Ah, yes, although I told the fat Inspector it was not so. How we lie, we women! And of course she told you in what relation I stood to Juan Menendez?"

"She did not, Madame de Staemer."

"No-no? Well, it was nice of her. No matter. I will tell you. I was his mistress."

She spoke without bravado, but quite without shame, seeming to glory in the statement.

"I met him in Paris," she continued, half closing her eyes. "I was staying at the house of my sister, and my sister, you understand, was married to Juan's cousin. That is how we met. I was married. Yes, it is true. But in France our parents find our husbands and our lovers find our hearts. Yet sometimes these marriages are happy. To me this good thing had not happened, and in the moment when Juan's hand touched mine a living fire entered into my heart and it has been burning ever since; burning-burning, always till I die.

"Very well, I am a shameless woman, yes. But I have lived, and I have loved, and I am content. I went with him to Cuba, and from Cuba to another island where he had estates, and the name of which I shall not pronounce, because it hurts me so, even yet. There he set eyes upon Ysola de Valera, the daughter of his manager, and, pouf!"

She shrugged and snapped her fingers.

"He was like that, you understand? I knew it well. They did not call him Devil Menendez for nothing. There was a scene, a dreadful scene, and after that another, and yet a third. I have pride. If I had seemed to forget it, still it was there. I left him, and went back to France. I tried to forget. I entered upon works of charity for the soldiers at a time when others were becoming tired. I spent a great part of my fortune upon establishing a hospital, and this child"--she threw her arm around Val Beverley--"worked with me night and day. I think I wanted to die. Often I tried to die. Did I not, dear?"

"You did, Madame," said the girl in a very low voice.

"Twice I was arrested in the French lines, where I had crept dressed like a poilu, from where I shot down many a Prussian. Is it not so?"

"It is true," answered the girl, nodding her head.

"They caught me and arrested me," said Madame, with a sort of triumph. "If it had been the British"--she raised her hand in that Bernhardt gesture--"with me it would have gone hard. But in France a woman's smile goes farther than in England. I had had my fun. They called me 'good comrade!' Perhaps I paid with a kiss. What does it matter? But they heard of me, those Prussian dogs. They knew and could not forgive. How often did they come over to bomb us, Val, dear?"

"Oh, many, many times," said the girl, shudderingly.

"And at last they succeeded," added Madame, bitterly. "God! the black villains! Let me not think of it."

She clenched her hands and closed her eyes entirely, but presently resumed again:

"If they had killed me I should have been glad, but they only made of me a cripple. M. de Staemer had been killed a few weeks before this. I am sorry I forgot to mention it. I was a widow. And when after this catastrophe I could be moved, I went to a little villa belonging to my husband at Nice, to gain strength, and this child came with me, like a ray of sunshine.

"Here, to wake the fire in my heart, came Juan, deserted, broken, wounded in soul, but most of all in pride, in that evil pride which belongs to his race, which is so different from the pride of France, but for which all the same I could never hate him.

"Ysola de Valera had run away from his great house in Cuba. Yes! A woman had dared to leave him, the man who had left so many women. To me it was pathetic. I was sorry for him. He had been searching the world for her. He loved this little golden-haired girl as he had never loved me. But to me he came with his broken heart, and I"--her voice trembled--"I took him back. He still cared for me, you understand. Ah!" She laughed. "I am not a woman who is lightly forgotten. But the great passion that burned in his Spanish soul was revenge.

"He was a broken man not only in mind, but in body. Let me tell you. In that island which I have not named there is a horrible disease called by the natives the Creeping Sickness. It is supposed to come from a poisonous place named the Black Belt, and a part of this Black Belt is near, too near, to the hacienda in which Juan sometimes lived."

Paul Harley started and glanced at me significantly.

"They think, those simple negroes, that it is witchcraft, Voodoo, the work of the Obeah man. It is of two kinds, rapid and slow. Those who suffer from the first kind just decline and decline and die in great agony. Others recover, or seem to do so. It is, I suppose, a matter of constitution. Juan had had this sickness and had recovered, or so the
doctors said, but, ah!"

She lay back, shaking her finger characteristically.

"In one year, in two, three, a swift pain comes, like a needle, you understand? Perhaps in the foot, in the hand, in the arm. It is exquisite, deathly, while it lasts, but it only lasts for a few moments. It is agony. And then it goes, leaving nothing to show what has caused it. But, my friends, it is a death warning!

"If it comes here"--she raised one delicate white hand--"you may have five years to live; if in the foot, ten, or more. But"--she sank her voice dramatically--"the nearer it is to the heart, the less are the days that remain to you of life."

"You mean that it recurs?" asked Harley.

"Perhaps in a week, perhaps not for another year, it comes again, that quick agony. This time in the shoulder, in the knee. It is the second warning. Three times it may come, four times, but at last"--she laid her hand upon her breast--"it comes here, in the heart, and all is finished."

She paused as if exhausted, closing her eyes again, whilst we three who listened looked at one another in an awestricken silence, until the vibrant voice resumed:

"There is only one man in Europe who understands this thing, this Creeping Sickness. He is a Frenchman who lives in Paris. To him Juan had been, and he had told him, this clever man, 'If you are very quiet and do not exert yourself, and only take as much exercise as is necessary for your general health, you have one year to live--'

"My God!" groaned Harley.

"Yes, such was the verdict. And there is no cure. The poor sufferer must wait and wait, always wait, for that sudden pang, not knowing if it will come in his heart and be the finish. Yes. This living death, then, and revenge, were the things ruling Juan's life at the time of which I tell you. He had traced Ysola de Valera to England. A chance remark in a London hotel had told him that a Chinaman had been seen in a Surrey village and of course had caused much silly chatter. He enquired at once, and he found out that Colin Camber, the man who had taken Ysola from him, was living with her at the Guest House, here, on the hill. How shall I tell you the rest?"

"Merciful Heaven!" exclaimed Harley, his glance set upon her, with a sort of horror in his gray eyes, "I think I can guess."

She turned to him rapidly.

"M. Harley," she said, "you are a clever man. I believe you are a genius. And I have the strength to tell you because I am happy to-night. Because of his great wealth Juan succeeded in buying Cray's Folly from Sir James Appleton to whom it belonged. He told everybody he leased it, but really he bought it. He paid him more than twice its value, and so obtained possession.

"But the plan was not yet complete, although it had taken form in that clever, wicked brain of his. Oh! I could tell you stories of the Menendez, and of the things they have done for love and revenge, which even you, who know much of life, would doubt, I think. Yes, you would not believe. But to continue. Shall I tell you upon what terms he had returned to me, eh? I will. Once more he would suffer that pang of death in life, for he had courage, ah! such great courage, and then, when the waiting for the next grew more than even his fearless heart could bear, I, who also had courage, and who loved him, should----" She paused, "Do you understand?"

Harley nodded dumbly, and suddenly I found Val Beverley's little fingers twined about mine.

"I agreed," continued the deep voice. "It was a boon which I, too, would have asked from one who loved me. But to die, knowing another cherished the woman who had been torn from him, was an impossibility for Juan Menendez. What he had schemed to do at first I never knew. But presently, because of our situation here, and because of that which he had asked of me, it came, the great plan.

"On the night he told me, a night I shall never forget, I drew back in horror from him--I, Marie de Staemer, who thought I knew the blackest that was in him. I shrank. And because of that scene it came to him again in the early morning--the moment of agony, the needle pain, here, low down in his left breast.

"He pleaded with me to do the wicked thing that he had planned, and because I dared not refuse, knowing he might die at my feet, I consented. But, my friends, I had my own plan, too, of which he knew nothing. On the next day he went to Paris, and was told he had two months to live, with great, such great care, but perhaps only a week, a day, if he should permit his hot passions to inflame that threatened heart. Very well.

"I said yes, yes, to all that he suggested, and he began to lay the trail--the trail to lead to his enemy. It was his hobby, this vengeance. He was like a big, cruel boy. It was he, himself, Juan Menendez, who broke into Cray's Folly. It was he who nailed the bat wing to the door. It was he who bought two rifles of a kind of which so many millions were made during the war that anybody might possess one. And it was he who concealed the first of these, one cartridge discharged, under the floor of the hut in the garden of the Guest House. The other, which was to be used, he placed--"

"In the shutter-case of one of the tower rooms," continued Paul Harley. "I know! I found it there to-night."
"What?" I asked, "you found it, Harley?"

"I returned to look for it," he said. "At the present moment it is upstairs in my room."

"Ah, M. Harley," exclaimed Madame, smiling at him radiantly, "I love your genius. Then it was," she continued, "that he thought himself ready, ready for revenge and ready for death. He summoned you, M. Harley, to be an expert witness. He placed with you evidence which could not fail to lead to the arrest of M. Camber. Very well. I allowed him to do all this. His courage, mon Dieu, how I worshipped his courage!

"At night, when everyone slept, and he could drop the mask, I have seen what he suffered. I have begged him, begged him upon my knees, to allow me to end it then and there; to forget his dream of revenge, to die without this last stain upon his soul. But he, expecting at any hour, at any minute, to know again the agony which cannot be described, which is unlike any other suffered by the flesh—refused, refused! And I"—she raised her eyes ecstatically—"I have worshipped this courage of his, although it was evil—bad.

"The full moon gives the best light, and so he planned it for the night of the full moon. But on the night before, because of some scene which he had with you, M. Harley, nearly I thought his plans would come to nothing. Nearly I thought the last act of love which he asked of me would never be performed. He sat there, up in the little room which he liked best, the coldness upon him which always came before the pang, waiting, waiting, a deathly dew on his forehead, for the end; and I, I who loved him better than life, watched him. And, so Fate willed it, the pang never came."

"You watched him?" I whispered.

Harley turned to me slowly.

"Don't you understand, Knox?" he said, in a voice curiously unlike his own.

"Ah, my friend," Madame de Staemer laid her hand upon my arm with that caressing gesture which I knew, "you do understand, don't you? The power to use my limbs returned to me during the last week that I lived in Nice."

She bent forward and raised her face, in an almost agonized appeal to Val Beverley.

"My dear, my dear," she said, "forgive me, forgive me! But I loved him so. One day, I think"—her glance sought my face—"you will know. Then you will forgive."  

"Oh, Madame, Madame," whispered the girl, and began to sob silently.

"Is it enough?" asked Madame de Staemer, raising her head, and looking defiantly at Paul Harley. "Last night, you, M. Harley, who have genius, nearly brought it all to nothing. You passed the door in the shrubbery just when Juan was preparing to go out. I was watching from the window above. Then, when you had gone, he came out—smoking his last cigarette.

"I went to my place, entering the tower room by the door from that corridor. I opened the window. It had been carefully oiled. It was soundless. I was cold as one already dead, but love made me strong. I had seen him suffer. I took the rifle from its hiding-place, the heavy rifle which so few women could use. It was no heavier than some which I had used before, and to good purpose."

Again she paused, and I saw her lips trembling. Before my mind's eye the picture arose which I had seen from Harley's window, the picture of Colonel Juan Menendez walking in the moonlight along the path to the sun-dial, with halting steps, with clenched fists, but upright as a soldier on parade. Walking on, dauntlessly, to his execution. Out of a sort of haze, which seemed to obscure both sight and hearing, I heard Madame speaking again.

"He turned his head toward me. He threw me a kiss—and I fired. Did you think a woman lived who could perform such a deed, eh? If you did not think so, it is because you have never looked into the eyes of one who loved with her body, her mind, and with her soul. I think, yes, I think I went mad. The rifle I remember I replaced. But I remember no more. Ah!

"She sighed in a resigned, weary way, untwining her arm from about Val Beverley, and falling back upon her pillows.

"It is all written here," she said; "every word of it, my friends, and signed at the bottom. I am a murderess, but it was a merciful deed. You see, I had a plan of which Juan knew nothing. This was my plan." She pointed to the heap of manuscript. "I would give him relief from his agonies, yes. For although he was an evil man, I loved him better than life. I would let him die happy, thinking his revenge complete. But others to suffer? No, no! a thousand times no! Ah, I am so tired."

She took up the little medicine bottle, poured its contents into the glass, and emptied it at a draught.

Paul Harley, as though galvanized, sprang to his feet. "My God!" he cried, huskily, "Stop her, stop her!" Val Beverley, now desperately white, clutched at me with quivering fingers, her agonized glance set upon the smiling face of Madame de Staemer.

"No fuss, dear friends," said Madame, gently, "no trouble, no nasty stomach-pumps; for it is useless. I shall just fall asleep in a few moments now, and when I wake Juan will be with me."

Her face was radiant. It became lighted up magically. I knew in that grim hour what a beautiful woman Madame
de Staemer must have been. She rested her hand upon Val Beverley's head, and looked at me with her strange, still eyes.

"Be good to her, my friend," she whispered. "She is English, but not cold like some. She, too, can love."

She closed her eyes and dropped back upon her pillows for the last time.

CHAPTER XXXV

AN AFTERWORD

This shall be a brief afterword, for I have little else to say. As Madame had predicted, all antidotes and restoratives were of no avail. She had taken enough of some drug which she had evidently had in her possession for this very purpose to ensure that there should be no awakening, and although Dr. Rolleston was on the spot within half an hour, Madame de Staemer was already past human aid.

There are perhaps one or two details which may be of interest. For instance, as a result of the post-mortem examination of Colonel Menendez, no trace of disease was discovered in any of the organs, but from information supplied by his solicitors, Harley succeeded in tracing the Paris specialist to whom Madame de Staemer had referred; and he confirmed her statement in every particular. The disease, to which he gave some name which I have forgotten, was untraceable, he declared, by any means thus far known to science.

As we had anticipated, the bulk of Colonel Don Juan's wealth he had bequeathed to Madame de Staemer, and she in turn had provided that all of which she might die possessed should be divided between certain charities and Val Beverley.

I thus found myself at the time when all these legal processes terminated engaged to marry a girl as wealthy as she was beautiful. Therefore, except for the many grim memories which it had left with me, nothing but personal good fortune resulted from my sojourn at Cray's Folly, beneath the shadow of that Bat Wing which had had no existence outside the cunning imagination of Colonel Juan Menendez.

THE END
Dope

by Sax Rohmer

PART FIRST

KAZMAH THE DREAM-READER

CHAPTER I

A MESSAGE FOR IRVIN

Monte Irvin, alderman of the city and prospective Lord Mayor of London, paced restlessly from end to end of
the well-appointed library of his house in Prince's Gate. Between his teeth he gripped the stump of a burnt-out cigar.
A tiny spaniel lay beside the fire, his bead black eyes following the nervous movements of the master of the house.

At the age of forty-five Monte Irvin was not ill-looking, and, indeed, was sometimes spoken of as handsome. His
figure was full without being corpulent; his well-groomed black hair and moustache and fresh if rather coarse
complexion, together with the dignity of his upright carriage, lent him something of a military air. This he
assiduously cultivated as befitting an ex-Territorial officer, although as he had seen no active service he modestly
refrained from using any title of rank.

Some quality in his brilliant smile, an oriental expressiveness of the dark eyes beneath their drooping lids, hinted
a Semitic strain; but it was otherwise not marked in his appearance, which was free from vulgarity, whilst essentially
that of a successful man of affairs.

In fact, Monte Irvin had made a success of every affair in life with the lamentable exception of his marriage. Of
late his forehead had grown lined, and those business friends who had known him for a man of abstemious habits
had observed in the City chophouse at which he lunched almost daily that whereas formerly he had been a noted
trencherman, he now ate little but drank much.

Suddenly the spaniel leapt up with that feverish, spider-like activity of the toy species and began to bark.

Monte Irvin paused in his restless patrol and listened.

"Lie down!" he said. "Be quiet."

The spaniel ran to the door, sniffing eagerly. A muffled sound of voices became audible, and Irvin, following a
moment of hesitation, crossed and opened the door. The dog ran out, yapping in his irritating staccato fashion, and
an expression of hope faded from Irvin's face as he saw a tall fair girl standing in the hallway talking to Hinkes, the
butler. She wore soiled Burberry, high-legged tan boots, and a peaked cap of distinctly military appearance. Irvin
would have retired again, but the girl glanced up and saw him where he stood by the library door. He summoned up
a smile and advanced.

"Good evening, Miss Halley," he said, striving to speak genially--for of all of his wife's friends he liked
Margaret Halley the best. "Were you expecting to find Rita at home?"

The girl's expression was vaguely troubled. She had the clear complexion and bright eyes of perfect health, but
to-night her eyes seemed over-bright, whilst her face was slightly pale.

"Yes," she replied; "that is, I hoped she might be at home."

"I am afraid I cannot tell you when she is likely to return. But please come in, and I will make inquiries."

"Oh, no, I would rather you did not trouble and I won't stay, thank you nevertheless. I expect she will ring me up
when she comes in."

"Is there any message I can give her?"

"Well"--she hesitated for an instant--"I wish I could have seen her," she added in a low voice. "I wish I could have seen
her," she added in a low voice.

"She wishes to see you particularly?"

"Yes. She left a note this afternoon." Again she glanced at him in a troubled way. "Well, I suppose it cannot be
helped," she added and smilingly extended her hand. "Good night, Mr. Irvin. Don't bother to come to the door."

But Irvin passed Hinkes and walked out under the porch with Margaret Halley. Humid yellow mist floated past
the street lamps, and seemed to have gathered in a moving reef around the little runabout car which was standing
outside the house, its motor chattering tremulously.

"Phew! a beastly night!" he said. "Foggy and wet."
"It's a brute isn't it?" said the girl laughingly, and turned on the steps so that the light shining out of the hallway gleamed on her white teeth and upraised eyes. She was pulling on big, ugly, furred gloves, and Monte Irvin mentally contrasted her fresh, athletic type of beauty with the delicate, exotic charm of his wife.

She opened the door of the little car, got in and drove off, waving one hugely gloved hand to Irvin as he stood in the porch looking after her. When the red tail-light had vanished in the mist he returned to the house and re-entered the library. If only all his wife's friends were like Margaret Halley, he mused, he might have been spared the insupportable misgivings which were goading him to madness. His mind filled with poisonous suspicions, he resumed his pacing of the library, awaiting and dreading that which should confirm his blackest theories. He was unaware of the fact that throughout the interview he had held the stump of cigar between his teeth. He held it there yet, pacing, pacing up and down the long room.

Then came the expected summons. The telephone bell rang. Monte Irvin clenched his hands and inhaled deeply. His color changed in a manner that would have aroused a physician's interest. Regaining his self-possession by a visible effort, he crossed to a small side-table upon which the instrument rested. Rolling the cigar stump into the left corner of his mouth, he took up the receiver.

"Hallo!" he said.

"Someone named Brisley, sir, wishes--"

"Put him through to me here."

"Very good, sir."

A short interval, then:

"Yes?" said Monte Irvin.

"My name is Brisley. I have a message for Mr. Monte Irvin."

"Monte Irvin speaking. Anything to report, Brisley?"

Irvin's deep, rich voice was not entirely under control.

"Yes, sir. The lady drove by taxicab from Prince's Gate to Albemarle Street."

"Ah!"

"Went up to chambers of Sir Lucien Pyne and was admitted."

"Well?"

"Twenty minutes later came out. Lady was with Sir Lucien. Both walked around to old Bond Street. The Honorable Quentin Gray--"

"Ah!" breathed Irvin.

"--Overtook them there. He got out of a cab. He joined them. All three up to apartments of a professional crystal-gazer styling himself Kazmah 'the dream-reader.'"

A puzzled expression began to steal over the face of Monte Irvin. At the sound of the telephone bell he had paled somewhat. Now he began to recover his habitual florid coloring.

"Go on," he directed, for the speaker had paused.

"Seven to ten minutes later," resumed the nasal voice, "Mr. Gray came down. He hailed a passing cab, but man refused to stop. Mr. Gray seemed to be very irritable."

The fact that the invisible speaker was reading from a notebook he betrayed by his monotonous intonation and abbreviated sentences, which resembled those of a constable giving evidence in a police court.

"He walked off rapidly in direction of Piccadilly. Colleague followed. Near the Ritz he obtained a cab. He returned in same to old Bond Street. He ran upstairs and was gone from four-and-a-half to five minutes. He then came down again. He was very pale and agitated. He discharged cab and walked away. Colleague followed. He saw Mr. Gray enter Prince's Restaurant. In the hall Mr. Gray met a gent unknown by sight to colleague. Following some conversation both gents went in to dinner. They are there now. Speaking from Dover Street Tube."

"Yes, yes. But the lady?"

"A native, possibly Egyptian, apparently servant of Kazmah, came out a few minutes after Mr. Gray had gone for cab, and went away. Sir Lucien Pyne and lady are still in Kazmah's rooms."

"What!" cried Irvin, pulling out his watch and glancing at the disk. "But it's after eight o'clock!"

"Yes, sir. The place is all shut up, and other offices in block closed at six. Door of Kazmah's is locked. I knocked and got no reply."

"Damn it! You're talking nonsense! There must be another exit."

"No, sir. Colleague has just relieved me. Left two gents over their wine at Prince's."

Monte Irvin's color began to fade slowly.

"Then it's Pyne!" he whispered. The hand which held the receiver shook. "Brisley--meet me at the Piccadilly end of Bond Street. I am coming now."

He put down the telephone, crossed to the wall and pressed a button. The cigar stump held firmly between his
teeth, he stood on the rug before the hearth, facing the door. Presently it opened and Hinkes came in.

"The car is ready, Hinkes?"

"Yes, sir, as you ordered. Shall Pattison come round to the door?"

"At once."

"Very good, sir."

He withdrew, closing the door quietly, and Monte Irvin stood staring across the library at the full-length portrait in oils of his wife in the pierrot dress which she had worn in the third act of The Maid of the Masque.

The clock in the hall struck half-past eight.

CHAPTER II

THE APARTMENTS OF KAZMAH

It was rather less than two hours earlier on the same evening that Quentin Gray came out of the confectioner's shop in old Bond Street carrying a neat parcel. Yellow dusk was closing down upon this bazaar of the New Babylon, and many of the dealers in precious gems, vendors of rich stuffs, and makers of modes had already deserted their shops. Smartly dressed show-girls, saleswomen, girl clerks and others crowded the pavements, which at high noon had been thronged with ladies of fashion. Here a tailor's staff, there a hatter's lingered awhile as iron shutters and gratings were secured, and bidding one another good night, separated and made off towards Tube and bus. The working day was ended. Society was dressing for dinner.

Gray was about to enter the cab which awaited him, and his fresh-colored, boyish face wore an expression of eager expectancy, which must have betrayed the fact to an experienced beholder that he was hurrying to keep an agreeable appointment. Then, his hand resting on the handle of the cab-door, this expression suddenly changed to one of alert suspicion.

A tall, dark man, accompanied by a woman muffled in grey furs and wearing a silk scarf over her hair, had passed on foot along the opposite side of the street. Gray had seen them through the cab windows.

His smooth brow wrinkled and his mouth tightened to a thin straight line beneath the fair "regulation" moustache. He fumbled under his overcoat for loose silver, drew out a handful and paid off the taximan.

Sometimes walking in the gutter in order to avoid the throngs upon the pavement, regardless of the fact that his glossy dress-boots were becoming spattered with mud, Gray hurried off in pursuit of the pair. Twenty yards ahead he overtook them, as they were on the point of passing a picture dealer's window, from which yellow light streamed forth into the humid dusk. They were walking slowly, and Gray stopped in front of them.

"Hello, you two!" he cried. "Where are you off to? I was on my way to call for you, Rita."

Flushed and boyish he stood before them, and his annoyance was increased by their failure to conceal the fact that his appearance was embarrassing if not unwelcome. Mrs. Monte Irvin was a petite, pretty woman, although some of the more wonderful bronzed tints of her hair suggested the employment of henna, and her naturally lovely complexion was delicately and artistically enhanced by art. Nevertheless, the flower-like face peeping out from the folds of a gauzy scarf, like a rose from a mist, whilst her soft little chin nestled into the fur, might have explained even in the case of an older man the infatuation which Quentin Gray was at no pains to hide.

She glanced up at her companion, Sir Lucien Pyne, a swarthy, cynical type of aristocrat, imperturbably. Then: "I had left a note for you, Quentin," she said hurriedly. She seemed to be in a dangerously high-strung condition.

"But I have booked a table and a box," cried Gray, with a hint of juvenile petulance.

"My dear Gray," said Sir Lucien coolly, "we are men of the world--and we do not look for consistency in womenfolk. Mrs. Irvin has decided to consult a palmist or a hypnotist or some such occult authority before dining with you this evening. Doubtless she seeks to learn if the play to which you propose to take her is an amusing one."

His smile of sardonic amusement Gray found to be almost insupportable, and although Sir Lucien refrained from looking at Mrs. Irvin whilst he spoke, it was evident enough that his words held some covert significance, for:

"You know perfectly well that I have a particular reason for seeing him," she said.

"A woman's particular reason is a man's feeble excuse," murmured Sir Lucien rudely. "At least, according to a learned Arabian philosopher."

"I was going to meet you at Prince's," said Mrs. Irvin hurriedly, and again glancing at Gray. There was a pathetic hesitancy in her manner, the hesitancy of a weak woman who adheres to a purpose only by supreme effort.

"Might I ask," said Gray, "the name of the pervert you are going to consult?"

Again she hesitated and glanced rapidly at Sir Lucien, but he was staring coolly in another direction.

"Kazmah," she replied in a low voice.

"Kazmah!" cried Gray. "The man who sells perfume and pretends to read dreams? What an extraordinary notion. Wouldn't tomorrow do? He will surely have shut up shop!"

"I have been at pains to ascertain," replied Sir Lucien, "at Mrs. Irvin's express desire, that the man of mystery is still in session and will receive her."
Beneath the mask of nonchalance which he wore it might have been possible to detect excitement repressed with difficulty; and had Gray been more composed and not obsessed with the idea that Sir Lucien had deliberately intruded upon his plans for the evening, he could not have failed to perceive that Mrs. Monte Irvin was feverishly preoccupied with matters having no relation to dinner and the theatre. But his private suspicions grew only the more acute.

"Then if the dinner is not off," he said, "may I come along and wait for you?"

"At Kazmah's?" asked Mrs. Irvin. "Certainly." She turned to Sir Lucien. "Shall you wait? It isn't much use as I'm dining with Quentin."

"If I do not intrude," replied the baronet, "I will accompany you as far as the cave of the oracle, and then bid you good night."

The trio proceeded along old Bond Street. Quentin Gray regarded the story of Kazmah as a very poor lie devised on the spur of the moment. If he had been less infatuated, his natural sense of dignity must have dictated an offer to release Mrs. Irvin from her engagement. But jealousy stimulates the worst instincts and destroys the best. He was determined to attach himself as closely as the old Man of the Sea attached himself to Es-Sindibad, in order that the lie might be unmasked. Mrs. Irvin's palpable embarrassment and nervousness he ascribed to her perception of his design.

A group of shop girls and others waiting for buses rendered it impossible for the three to keep abreast, and Gray, falling to the rear, stepped upon the foot of a little man who was walking close behind them.

"Sorry, sir," said the man, suppressing an exclamation of pain—for the fault had been Gray's.

Gray muttered an ungenerous acknowledgment, all anxiety to regain the side of Mrs. Irvin; for she seemed to be speaking rapidly and excitedly to Sir Lucien.

He recovered his place as the two turned in at a lighted doorway. Upon the wall was a bronze plate bearing the inscription:

KAZMAH Second Floor

Gray fully expected Mrs. Irvin to suggest that he should return later. But without a word she began to ascend the stairs. Gray followed, Sir Lucien standing aside to give him precedence. On the second floor was a door painted in Oriental fashion. It possessed neither bell nor knocker, but as one stepped upon the threshold this door opened noiselessly as if dumbly inviting the visitor to enter the square apartment discovered. This apartment was richly furnished in the Arab manner, and lighted by a fine brass lamp swung upon chains from the painted ceiling. The intricate perforations of the lamp were inset with colored glass, and the result was a subdued and warm illumination. Odd-looking oriental vessels, long-necked jars, jugs with tenuous spouts and squat bowls possessing engraved and figured covers emerged from the shadows of niches. A low divan with gaily colored mattresses extended from the door around one corner of the room where it terminated beside a kind of mushrabiyeh cabinet or cupboard. Beyond this cabinet was a long, low counter laden with statuettes of Nile gods, amulets, mummy-beads and little stoppered flasks of blue enamel ware. There were two glass cases filled with other strange-looking antiquities. A faint perfume was perceptible.

Sir Lucien entering last of the party, the door closed behind him, and from the cabinet on the right of the divan a young Egyptian stepped out. He wore the customary white robe, red sash and red slippers, and a tarbush, the little scarlet cap commonly called a fez, was set upon his head. He walked to a door on the left of the counter, and slid it noiselessly open. Bowing gravely, "The Sheikh el Kazmah awaits," he said, speaking with the soft intonation of a native of Upper Egypt.

It now became evident, even to the infatuated Gray, that Mrs. Irvin was laboring under the influence of tremendous excitement. She turned to him quickly, and he thought that her face looked almost haggard, whilst her eyes seemed to have changed color—become lighter, although he could not be certain that this latter effect was not due to the peculiar illumination of the room. But when she spoke her voice was unsteady.

"Will you see if you can find a cab," she said. "It is so difficult at night, and my shoes will get frightfully muddy crossing Piccadilly. I shall not be more than a few minutes." She walked through the doorway, the Egyptian standing aside as she passed. He followed her, but came out again almost immediately, reclosed the door, and retired into the cabinet, which was evidently his private cubicule.

Silence claimed the apartment. Sir Lucien threw himself nonchalantly upon the divan, and took out his cigarette-case.

"Will you have a cigarette, Gray?" he asked.

"No thanks," replied the other, in tones of smothered hostility. He was ill at ease, and paced the apartment nervously. Pyne lighted a cigarette, and tossed the extinguished match into a brass bowl.

"I think," said Gray jerkily, "I shall go for a cab. Are you remaining?"

"I am dining at the club," answered Pyne, "but I can wait until you return."
"As you wish," jerked Gray. "I don't expect to be long."
He walked rapidly to the outer door, which opened at his approach and closed noiselessly behind him as he made his exit.

CHAPTER III
KAZMAH

Mrs. Monte Irvin entered the inner room. The air was heavy with the perfume of frankincense which smouldered in a brass vessel set upon a tray. This was the audience chamber of Kazmah. In marked contrast to the overcrowded appointments, divans and cupboards of the first room, it was sparsely furnished. The floor was thickly carpeted, but save for an ornate inlaid table upon which stood the tray and incense-burner, and a long, low-cushioned seat placed immediately beneath a hanging lamp burning dimly in a globular green shade, it was devoid of decoration. The walls were draped with green curtains, so that except for the presence of the painted door, the four sides of the apartment appeared to be uniform.

Having conducted Mrs. Irvin to the seat, the Egyptian bowed and retired again through the doorway by which they had entered. The visitor found herself alone.
She moved nervously, staring across at the blank wall before her. With her little satin shoe she tapped the carpet, biting her under lip and seeming to be listening. Nothing stirred. Not even an echo of busy Bond Street penetrated to the place. Mrs. Irvin unfastened her cloak and allowed it to fall back upon the settee. Her bare shoulders looked waxen and unnatural in the weird light which shone down upon them. She was breathing rapidly.

The minutes passed by in unbroken silence. So still was the room that Mrs. Irvin could hear the faint crackling sound made by the burning charcoal in the brass vessel near her. Wisps of blue-grey smoke arose through the perforated lid and she began to watch them fascinatedly, so lithe they seemed, like wraiths of serpents creeping up the green draperies.

So she was seated, her foot still restlessly tapping, but her gaze arrested by the hypnotic movements of the smoke, when at last a sound from the outer world, penetrated to the room. A church clock struck the hour of seven, its clangor intruding upon the silence only as a muffled boom. Almost coincident with the last stroke came the sweeter note of a silver gong from somewhere close at hand.

Mrs. Irvin started, and her eyes turned instantly in the direction of the greenly draped wall before her. Her pupils had grown suddenly dilated, and she clenched her hands tightly.
The light above her head went out.
Now that the moment was come to which she had looked forward with mingled hope and terror, long pent-up emotion threatened to overcome her, and she trembled wildly.
Out of the darkness dawned a vague light and in it a shape seemed to take form. As the light increased the effect was as though part of the wall had become transparent so as to reveal the interior of an inner room where a figure was seated in a massive ebony chair. The figure was that of an oriental, richly robed and wearing a white turban. His long slim hands, of the color of old ivory, rested upon the arms of the chair, and on the first finger of the right hand gleamed a big talismanic ring. The face of the seated man was lowered, but from under heavy brows his abnormally large eyes regarded her fixedly.

So dim the light remained that it was impossible to discern the details with anything like clearness, but that the clean-shaven face of the man with those wonderful eyes was strikingly and intellectually handsome there could be no doubt.
This was Kazmah, "the dream reader," and although Mrs. Irvin had seen him before, his statuesque repose and the weirdness of his unaltering gaze thrilled her uncannily.
Kazmah slightly raised his hand in greeting: the big ring glittered in the subdued light.
"Tell me your dream," came a curious mocking voice; "and I will read its portent."
Such was the set formula with which Kazmah opened all interviews. He spoke with a slight and not unmusical accent. He lowered his hand again. The gaze of those brilliant eyes remained fixed upon the woman's face. Moistening her lips, Mrs. Irvin spoke.
"Dreams! What I have to say does not belong to dreams, but to reality!" She laughed unmirthfully. "You know well enough why I am here."
She paused.
"Why are you here?"
"You know! You know!" Suddenly into her voice had come the unmistakable note of hysteria. "Your theatrical tricks do not impress me. I know what you are! A spy--an eavesdropper who watches--watches, and listens! But you may go too far! I am nearly desperate--do you understand?--nearly desperate. Speak! Move! Answer me!"
But Kazmah preserved his uncanny repose.
"You are distracted," he said. "I am sorry for you. But why do you come to me with your stories of desperation?
You have insisted upon seeing me. I am here."
  
  "And you play with me--taunt me!"
  
  "The remedy is in your hands."
  
  "For the last time, I tell you I will never do it! Never, never, never!"
  
  "Then why do you complain? If you cannot afford to pay for your amusements, and you refuse to compromise in a simple manner, why do you approach me?"
  
  "Oh, my God!" She moaned and swayed dizzily--"have pity on me! Who are you, what are you, that you can bring ruin on a woman because--" She uttered a choking sound, but continued hoarsely, "Raise your head. Let me see your face. As heaven is my witness, I am ruined--ruined!"
  
  "Tomorrow--"
  
  "I cannot wait for tomorrow--"

That quivering, hoarse cry betrayed a condition of desperate febrile excitement. Mrs. Irvin was capable of proceeding to the wildest extremities. Clearly the mysterious Egyptian recognized this to be the case, for slowly raising his hand:

  "I will communicate with you," he said, and the words were spoken almost hurriedly. "Depart in peace--"; a formula wherewith he terminated every seance. He lowered his hand.

Thereupon the unhappy woman acted; the long suppressed outburst came at last. Stepping rapidly to the green transparent veil behind which Kazmah was seated, she wrenched it asunder and leapt toward the figure in the black chair.

  "You shall not trick me!" she panted. "Hear me out or I go straight to the police--now--now!" She grasped the hands of Kazmah as they rested motionless, on the chair-arms.

  Complete darkness came.

  Out of it rose a husky, terrified cry--a second, louder cry; and then a long, wailing scream . . . horror-laden as that of one who has touched some slumbering reptile. . . .

CHAPTER IV
THE CLOSED DOOR

Rather less than five minutes later a taxicab drew up in old Bond Street, and from it Quentin Gray leapt out impetuously and ran in at the doorway leading to Kazmah's stairs. So hurried was his progress that he collided violently with a little man who, carrying himself with a pronounced stoop, was slinking furtively out.

The little man reeled at the impact and almost fell, but:

  "Hang it all!" cried Gray irritably. "Why the devil don't you look where you're going!"

He glared angrily into the face of the other. It was a peculiar and rememberable face, notable because of a long, sharp, hooked nose and very little, foxy, brown eyes; a sly face to which a small, fair moustache only added insignificance. It was crowned by a wide-brimmed bowler hat which the man wore pressed down upon his ears like a Jew pedlar.

  "Why!" cried Gray, "this is the second time tonight you have jostled me!"

He thought he had recognized the man for the same who had been following himself, Mrs. Irvin and Sir Lucien Pyne along old Bond Street.

A smile, intended to be propitiatory, appeared upon the pale face.

  "No, sir, excuse me, sir--""

  "Don't deny it!" said Gray angrily. "If I had the time I should give you in charge as a suspicious loiterer."

Calling to the cabman to wait, he ran up the stairs to the second floor landing. Before the painted door bearing the name of Kazmah he halted, and as the door did not open, stamped impatiently, but with no better result.

At that, since there was neither bell nor knocker, he raised his fist and banged loudly.

  No one responded to the summons.
  "Hi, there!" he shouted. "Open the door! Pyne! Rita!"

Again he banged--and yet again. Then he paused, listening, his ear pressed to the panel.

He could detect no sound of movement within. Fists clenched, he stood staring at the closed door, and his fresh color slowly deserted him and left him pale.

  "Damn him!" he muttered savagely. "Damn him! he has fooled me!"

Passionate and self-willed, he was shaken by a storm of murderous anger. That Pyne had planned this trick, with Rita Irvin's consent, he did not doubt, and his passive dislike of the man became active hatred of the woman he dared not think. He had for long looked upon Sir Lucien in the light of a rival, and the irregularity of his own infatuation for another's wife in no degree lessened his resentment.

Again he pressed his ear to the door, and listened intently. Perhaps they were hiding within. Perhaps this
charlatan, Kazmah, was an accomplice in the pay of Sir Lucien. Perhaps this was a secret place of rendezvous.

To the manifest absurdity of such a conjecture he was blind in his anger. But that he was helpless, befuddled, he recognized; and with a final muttered imprecation he turned and slowly descended the stair. A lingering hope was dispelled when, looking right and left along Bond Street, he failed to perceive the missing pair.

The cabman glanced at him interrogatively. "I shall not require you," said Gray, and gave the man half-a-crown.

Busy with his poisonous conjectures, he remained all unaware of the presence of a furtive, stooping figure which lurked behind the railings of the arcade at this point linking old Bond Street to Albemarle Street. Nor had the stooping stranger any wish to attract Gray's attention. Most of the shops in the narrow lane were already closed, although the florist's at the corner remained open, but of the shadow which lay along the greater part of the arcade this alert watcher took every advantage. From the recess formed by a shop door he peered out at Gray, where the light of a street lamp fell upon him, studying his face, his movements, with unrelaxing vigilance.

Gray, following some moments of indecision, strode off towards Piccadilly. The little man came out cautiously from his hiding-place and looked after him. Out of a dark porch, ten paces along Bond Street, appeared a burly figure to fall into step a few yards behind Gray. The little man licked his lips appreciatively and returned to the doorway below the premises of Kazmah.

Reaching Piccadilly, Gray stood for a time on the corner, indifferent to the jostling of passers-by. Finally he crossed, walked along to the Prince's Restaurant, and entered the lobby. He glanced at his wrist-watch. It registered the hour of seven-twenty-five.

He cancelled his order for a table and was standing staring moodily towards the entrance when the doors swung open and a man entered who stepped straight up to him, hand extended, and:

"Glad to see you, Gray," he said. "What's the trouble?"

Quentin Gray stared as if incredulous at the speaker, and it was with an unmistakable note of welcome in his voice that he replied:

"Seton! Seton Pasha!"

The frown disappeared from Gray's forehead, and he gripped the other's hand in hearty greeting. But:

"Stick to plain Seton!" said the new-comer, glancing rapidly about him. "Ottoman titles are not fashionable."

The speaker was a man of arresting personality. Above medium height, well but leanly built, the face of Seton "Pasha" was burned to a deeper shade than England's wintry sun is capable of producing. He wore a close-trimmed beard and moustache, and the bronze on his cheeks enhanced the brightness of his grey eyes and rendered very noticeable a slight frosting of the dark hair above his temples. He had the indescribable air of a "sure" man, a sound man to have beside one in a tight place; and looking into the rather grim face, Quentin Gray felt suddenly ashamed of himself. From Seton Pasha he knew that he could keep nothing back. He knew that presently he should find himself telling this quiet, brown-skinned man the whole story of his humiliation--and he knew that Seton would not spare his feelings.

"My dear fellow," he said, "you must pardon me if I sometimes fail to respect your wishes in this matter. When I left the East the name of Seton Pasha was on everybody's tongue. But are you alone?"

"I am. I only arrived in London tonight and in England this morning."

"Were you thinking of dining here?"

"No; I saw you through the doorway as I was passing. But this will do as well as another place. I gather that you are disengaged. Perhaps you will dine with me?"

"Splendid!" cried Gray. "Wait a moment. Perhaps my table hasn't gone!"

He ran off in his boyish, impetuous fashion, and Seton watched him, smiling quietly.

The table proved to be available, and ere long the two were discussing an excellent dinner. Gray lost much of his irritability and began to talk coherently upon topics of general interest. Presently, following an interval during which he had been covertly watching his companion:

"Do you know, Seton," he said, "you are the one man in London whose company I could have tolerated tonight."

"My arrival was peculiarly opportune."

"Your arrivals are always peculiarly opportune." Gray stared at Seton with an expression of puzzled admiration.

"I don't think I shall ever understand your turning up immediately before the Senussi raid in Egypt. Do you remember? I was with the armored cars."

"I remember perfectly."

"Then you vanished in the same mysterious fashion, and the C. O. was a sphinx on the subject. I next saw you strolling out of the gate at Baghdad. How the devil you'd got to Baghdad, considering that you didn't come with us and that you weren't with the cavalry, heaven only knows!"

"No," said Seton judicially, gazing through his uplifted wine-glass; "when one comes to consider the matter without prejudice it is certainly odd. But do I know the lady to whose non-appearance I owe the pleasure of your
company tonight?"

Quentin Gray stared at him blankly.

"Really, Seton, you amaze me. Did I say that I had an appointment with a lady?"

"My dear Gray, when I see a man standing biting his nails and glaring out into Piccadilly from a restaurant entrance I ask myself a question. When I learn that he has just cancelled an order for a table for two I answer it."

Gray laughed. "You always make me feel so infernally young, Seton."

"Good!"

"Yes, it's good to feel young, but bad to feel a young fool; and that's what I feel--and what I am. Listen!"

Leaning across the table so that the light of the shaded lamp fell fully upon his flushed, eager face, Gray, not without embarrassment, told his companion of the "dirty trick"--so he phrased it--which Sir Lucien Pyne had played upon him. In conclusion:

"What would you do, Seton?" he asked.

Seton sat regarding him in silence with a cool, calculating stare which some men had termed insolent, absentely tapping his teeth with the gold rim of a monocle which he carried but apparently never used for any other purpose; and it was at about this time that a long low car passed near the door of the restaurant, crossing the traffic stream of Piccadilly to draw up at the corner of old Bond Street.

From the car Monte Irvin alighted and, telling the man to wait, set out on foot. Ten paces along Bond Street he encountered a small, stooping figure which became detached from the shadows of a shop door. The light of a street lamp shone down upon the sharp, hooked nose and into the cunning little brown eyes of Brisley, of Spinker's Detective Agency. Monte Irvin started.

"Ah, Brisley!" he said, "I was looking for you. Are they still there?"

"Probably, sir." Brisley licked his lips. "My colleague, Gunn, reports no one came out whilst I was away 'phoning.'"

"But the whole thing seems preposterous. Are there no other offices in the block where they might be?"

"I personally saw Mr. Gray, Sir Lucien Pyne and the lady go into Kazmah's. At that time--roughly, ten to seven--all the other offices had been closed, approximately, one hour."

"There is absolutely no possibility that they might have come out unseen by you?"

"None, sir. I should not have troubled a client if in doubt. Here's Gunn."

Old Bond Street now was darkened and deserted; the yellow mist had turned to fine rain, and Gunn, his hands thrust in his pockets, was sheltering under the porch of the arcade. Gunn possessed a purple complexion which attained to full vigor of coloring in the nasal region. His moustache of dirty grey was stained brown in the centre as if by frequent potations of stout, and his bulky figure was artificially enlarged by the presence of two overcoats, the outer of which was a waterproof and the inner a blue garment appreciably longer both in sleeve and skirt than the former. The effect produced was one of great novelty. Gunn touched the brim of his soft felt hat, which he wore turned down all round apparently in imitation of a flower-pot.

"All snug, sir," he said, hoarsely and confidentially, bending forward and breathing the words into Irvin's ear. "Snug as a bee in a hive. You're as good as a bachelor again."

Monte Irvin mentally recoiled.

"Lead the way to the door of this place," he said tersely.

"Yes, sir, this way, sir. Be careful of the step there. You may remark that the outer door is not yet closed. I am informed upon reliable authority as the last to go locks the door. Hence we perceive that the last has not yet gone. It is likewise opened by the first to come of a mornin'. Here we are, sir; door on the right."

The landing was in darkness, but as Gunn spoke he directed the ray of a pocket lamp upon a bronze plate bearing the name "Kazmah." He rested one hand upon his hip.

"All snug," he repeated; "as snug as a eel in mud. The decree nisi is yours, sir. As an alderman of the City of London and a Justice of the Peace you are entitled to call a police officer--"

"Hold your tongue!" rapped Irvin. "You've been drinking: and I place no reliance whatever in your evidence. I do not believe that my wife or any one else but ourselves is upon these premises."

The watery eyes of the insulted man protruded unnaturally. "Drinkin'!?" he whispered, "drink--"

But indignation now deprived Gunn of speech and:

"Excuse me, sir," interrupted the nasal voice of Brisley, "but I can absolutely answer for Gunn. Reputation of the Agency at stake. Worked with us for three years. Parties undoubtedly on the premises as reported."

"Drink--" whispered Gunn.

"I shall be glad," said Monte Irvin, and his voice shook emotionally, "if you will lend me your pocket lamp. I am naturally upset. Will you kindly both go downstairs. I will call if I want you."

The two men obeyed, Gunn muttering hoarsely to Brisley; and Monte Irvin was left standing on the landing, the
lamp in his hand. He waited until he knew from the sound of their footsteps that the pair had regained the street, then, resting his arm against the closed door, and pressing his forehead to the damp sleeve of his coat, he stood awhile, the lamp, which he held limply, shining down upon the floor.

His lips moved, and almost inaudibly he murmured his wife's name.

CHAPTER V
THE DOOR IS OPENED

Quentin Gray and Seton strolled out of Prince's and both paused whilst Seton lighted a long black cheroot.
"It seems a pity to waste that box," said Gray. "Suppose we look in at the Gaiety for an hour?"

His humor was vastly improved, and he watched the passing throngs with an expression more suited to his boyish good looks than that of anger and mortification which had rested upon him an hour earlier.

Seton Pasha tossed a match into the road.
"My official business is finished for the day," he replied. "I place myself unreservedly in your hands."

"Well, then," began Gray--and paused.

A long, low car, the chauffeur temporarily detained by the stoppage of a motorbus ahead, had slowed up within three yards of the spot where they were standing. Gray seized Seton's arm in a fierce grip.

"Seton," he said, his voice betraying intense excitement, "Look! There is Monte Irvin!"

"In the car?"

"Yes, yes! But--he has two police with him! Seton, what can it mean?"

The car moved away, swinging to the right across the traffic stream and clearly heading for old Bond Street. Quentin Gray's mercurial color deserted him, and he turned to Seton a face grown suddenly pale.

"Good God," he whispered, "something has happened to Rita!"

Neglectful of his personal safety, he plunged out into the traffic, dodging this way and that, and making after Monte Irvin's car. Of the fact that his friend was close beside him he remained unaware until, on the corner of old Bond Street, a firm grip settled upon his shoulder. Gray turned angrily. But the grip was immovable, and he found himself staring into the unemotional face of Seton Pasha.

"Seton, for God's sake, don't detain me! I must learn what's wrong."

"Pull up, Gray."

Quentin Gray clenched his teeth.

"Listen to me, Seton. This is no time for interference. I--"

"You are about to become involved in some very unsavory business; and I repeat--pull up. In a moment we shall learn all there is to be learned. But are you determined openly to thrust yourself into the family affairs of Mr. Monte Irvin?"

"If anything has happened to Rita I'll kill that damned cur Pyne!"

"You are determined to intrude upon this man in your present frame of mind at a time of evident trouble?"

But Gray was deaf to the promptings of prudence and good taste alike.

"I'm going to see the thing through," he said hoarsely.

"Quite so. Rely upon me. But endeavor to behave more like a man of the world and less like a dangerous lunatic, or we shall quarrel atrociously."

Quentin Gray audibly gnashed his teeth, but the cool stare of the other's eyes was quelling, and now as their glances met and clashed, a sympathetic smile softened the lines of Seton's grim mouth, and:

"I quite understand, old chap," he said, linking his arm in Gray's. "But can't you see how important it is, for everybody's sake, that we should tackle the thing coolly?"

"Seton"--Gray's voice broke--"I'm sorry. I know I'm mad; but I was with her only an hour ago, and now--"

"And now 'her' husband appears on the scene accompanied by a police inspector and a sergeant. What are your relations with Mr. Monte Irvin?"

They were walking rapidly again along Bond Street.

"What do you mean, Seton?" asked Gray.

"I mean does he approve of your friendship with his wife, or is it a clandestine affair?"

"Clandestine?--certainly not. I was on my way to call at the house when I met her with Pyne this evening."

"That is what I wanted to know. Very well; since you intend to follow the thing up, it simplifies matters somewhat. Here is the car."

"At Kazmah's door! What in heaven's name does it mean?"

"It means that we shall get a very poor reception if we intrude. Question the chauffeur."

But Gray had already approached the man, who touched his cap in recognition.

"What's the trouble, Pattison?" he demanded breathlessly. "I saw police in the car a moment ago."

"Yes, sir. I don't rightly know, sir, what's happened. But Mr. Irvin drove from home to the corner of old Bond
Street a quarter of an hour ago and told me to wait, then came back again and drove round to Vine Street to fetch the police. They're inside now."

Even as he spoke, with excitement ill-concealed, a police-sergeant came out of the doorway, and:
"Move on, there," he said to Seton and Gray. "You mustn't hang about this door."
"Excuse me, Sergeant," cried Gray, "but if the matter concerns Mrs. Monte Irvin I can probably supply information."

The Sergeant stared at him hard, saw that both he and his friend wore evening dress, and grew proportionately respectful.
"What is your name, sir?" he asked. "I'll mention it to the officer in charge."
"Quentin Gray. Inform Mr. Monte Irvin that I wish to speak to him."
"Very good, sir." He turned to the chauffeur. "Hand me out the bag I gave you at Vine Street." Pattison leaned over the door at the front of the car, and brought out a big leather grip. With this in hand the police-sergeant returned into the doorway.
"We're in for it now," said Seton grimly, "whatever it is."
Gray returned no answer, moving restlessly up and down before the door in a fever of excitement and dread. Presently the Sergeant reappeared.
"Step this way, please," he said.

Followed by Seton and Gray he led the way up to the landing before Kazmah's apartments. It was vaguely lighted by two police-lanterns. Four men were standing there, and four pairs of eyes were focussed upon the stair-head.

Monte Irvin, his features a distressing ashen color, spoke.
"That you, Gray?" Quentin Gray would not have recognized the voice. "Thanks for offering your help. God knows I need all I can get. You were with Rita tonight. What happened? Where is she?"
"Heaven knows where she is!" cried Gray. "I left her here with Pyne shortly after seven o'clock."
He paused, fixing his gaze upon the face of Brisley, whose shifty eyes avoided him and who was licking his lips in the manner of a dog who has seen the whip.
"Why," said Gray, "I believe you are the fellow who has been following me all night for some reason."
He stepped toward the foxy little man but:
"Never mind, Gray," interrupted Irvin. "I was to blame. But he was following my wife, not you. Tell me quickly: Why did she come here?"

Gray raised his hand to his brow with a gesture of bewilderment.
"To consult this man, Kazmah. I actually saw her enter the inner room, I went to get a cab, and when I returned the door was locked."
"You knocked?"
"Of course. I made no end of a row. But I could get no reply and went away."
Monte Irvin turned, a pathetic figure, to the Inspector who stood beside him.
"We may as well proceed, Inspector Whiteleaf," he said. "Mr. Gray's evidence throws no light on the matter at all."
"Very well, sir," was the reply; "we have the warrant, and have given the usual notice to whoever may be hiding inside. Burton!"

The Sergeant stepped forward, placed the leather bag on the floor, and stooping, opened it, revealing a number of burglarious-looking instruments.
"Shall I try to cut through the panel?" he asked.
"No, no!" cried Monte Irvin. "Waste no time. You have a crowbar there. Force the door from its hinges. Hurry, man!"
"It doesn't work on hinges!" Gray interrupted excitedly. "It slides to the right by means of some arrangement concealed under the mat."
"Pass that lantern," directed Burton, glancing over his shoulder to Gunn.
Setting it beside him, the Sergeant knelt and examined the threshold of the door.
"A metal plate," he said. "The weight moves a lever, I suppose, which opens the door if it isn't locked. The lock will be on the left of the door as it opens to the right. Let's see what we can do."

He stood up, crowbar in hand, and inserted the chisel blade of the implement between the edge of the door and the doorcase.
"Hold steady!" said the Inspector, standing at his elbow.

The dull metallic sound of hammer blows on steel echoed queerly around the well of the staircase. Brisley and Gunn, standing very close together on the bottom step of the stair to the third floor, watched the police furtively.
Irvin and Gray found a common fascination in the door itself, and Seton, cheroot in mouth, looked from group to group with quiet interest.

"Right!" cried the Sergeant.

The blows ceased.

Firmly grasping the bar, Burton brought all his weight to bear upon it. There was a dull, cracking sound and a sort of rasping. The door moved slightly.

"There's where it locks!" said the Inspector, directing the light of a lantern upon the crevice created. "Three inches lower. But it may be bolted as well."

"We'll soon get at the bolts," replied Burton, the lust of destruction now strong upon him.

Wrenching the crowbar from its place he attacked the lower panel of the door, and amid a loud splintering and crashing created a hole big enough to allow of the passage of a hand and arm.

The Inspector reached in, groped about, and then uttered an exclamation of triumph.

"I've unfastened the bolt," he said. "If there isn't another at the top you ought to be able to force the door now, Burton."

The jimmy was thrust back into position, and:

"Stand clear!" cried Burton.

Again he threw his weight upon the bar--and again.

"Drive it further in!" said Monte Irvin; and snatching up the heavy hammer, he rained blows upon the steel butt.

"Now try."

Burton exerted himself to the utmost.

"Take hold up here, someone!" he panted. "Two of us can pull."

Gray leapt forward, and the pair of them bent to the task.

There came a dull report of parting mechanism, more sounds of splintering wood . . . and the door rolled open!

A moment of tense silence, then:

"Is anyone inside there?" cried the Inspector loudly.

Not a sound came from the dark interior.

"The lantern!" whispered Monte Irvin.

He stumbled into the room, from which a heavy smell of perfume swept out upon the landing. Quentin Gray, snatching the lantern from the floor, where it had been replaced, was the next to enter.

"Look for the switch, and turn the lights on!" called the Inspector, following.

Even as he spoke, Gray had found the switch, and the apartment of Kazmah became flooded with subdued light.

A glance showed it to be unoccupied.

Gray ran across to the mushrabiyeh cabinet and jerked the curtains aside. There was no one in the cabinet. It contained a chair and a table. Upon the latter was a telephone and some papers and books. "This way!" he cried, his voice high pitched and unnatural.

He burst through the doorway into the inner room which he had seen Mrs. Irvin enter. The air was laden with the smell of frankincense.

"A lantern!" he called. "I left one on the divan."

But Monte Irvin had caught it up and was already at his elbow. His hand was shaking so that the light danced wildly now upon the carpet, now upon the green walls. This room also was deserted. A black gap in the curtain showed where the material had been roughly torn. Suddenly:

"My God, look!" muttered the Inspector, who, with the others, now stood in the curious draped apartment.

A thin stream of blood was trickling out from beneath the torn hangings!

Monte Irvin staggered and fell back against the Inspector, clutching at him for support. But Sergeant Burton, who carried the second lantern, crossed the room and wrenched the green draperies bodily from their fastenings.

They had masked a wooden partition or stout screen, having an aperture in the centre which could be closed by means of another of the sliding doors. A space some five feet deep was thus walled off from this second room. It contained a massive ebony chair. Behind the chair, and dividing the second room into yet a third section, extended another wooden partition in one end of which was an ordinary office door; and immediately at the back of the chair appeared a little opening or window, some three feet up from the floor. The sound of a groan, followed by that of a dull thud, came from the outer room.

"Hullo!" cried Inspector Whiteleaf. "Mr. Irvin has fainted. Lend a hand."

"I am here," replied the quiet voice of Seton Pasha.

"My God!" whispered Gray. "Seton! Seton!"

"Touch nothing," cried the Inspector from outside, "until I come!"

And now the narrow apartment became filled with all the awe-stricken company, only excepting Monte Irvin,
and Brisley, who was attending to the swooning man.

Flat upon the floor, between the door and the ebony chair, arms extended and eyes staring upward at the ceiling, lay Sir Lucien Pyne, his white shirt front redly dyed. In the hush which had fallen, the footsteps of Inspector Whiteleaf sounded loudly as he opened the final door, and swept the interior of an inner room with the rays of the lantern.

The room was barely furnished as an office. There was another half-glazed door opening on to a narrow corridor. This door was locked.

"Pyne!" whispered Gray, pale now to the lips. "Do you understand, Seton? It's Pyne! Look! He has been stabbed!"

Sergeant Burton knelt down and gingerly laid his hand upon the stained linen over the breast of Sir Lucien.

"Dead?" asked the Inspector, speaking from the inner doorway.

"Yes."

"You say, sir," turning to Quentin Gray, "that this is Sir Lucien Pyne?"

"Yes."

Inspector Whiteleaf rather clumsily removed his cap. The odor of Seton's cheroot announced itself above the oriental perfume with which the place was laden.

"Burton!"

"Yes?"

"See if this telephone in the office is in order. It appears to be an extension from the outer room."

While the others stood grouped about that still figure on the floor, Sergeant Burton entered the little office.

"Hello!" he cried. "Yes?" A momentary interval, then: "It's all right, sir. What number?"

"Gentlemen," said the Inspector, firmly and authoritatively, "I am about to telephone to Vine Street for instructions. No one will leave the premises."

Amid an intense hush:

"Regent 201," called Sergeant Burton.

CHAPTER VI

RED KERRY

Chief Inspector Kerry, of the Criminal Investigation Department, stood before the empty grate of his cheerless office in New Scotland Yard, one hand thrust into the pocket of his blue reefer jacket and the other twirling a malacca cane, which was heavily silver-mounted and which must have excited the envy of every sergeant-major beholding it. Chief Inspector Kerry wore a very narrow-brimmed bowler hat, having two ventilation holes conspicuously placed immediately above the band. He wore this hat tilted forward and to the right.

"Red Kerry" wholly merited his sobriquet, for the man was as red as fire. His hair, which he wore cropped close as a pugilist's, was brilliantly red, and so was his short, wiry, aggressive moustache. His complexion was red, and from beneath his straight red eyebrows he surveyed the world with a pair of unblinking, intolerant steel-blue eyes. He never smoked in public, as his taste inclined towards Irish twist and a short clay pipe; but he was addicted to the use of chewing-gum, and as he chewed—and he chewed incessantly—he revealed a perfect row of large, white, and positively savage-looking teeth. High cheek bones and prominent maxillary muscles enhanced the truculence indicated by his chin.

But, next to this truculence, which was the first and most alarming trait to intrude itself upon the observer's attention, the outstanding characteristic of Chief Inspector Kerry was his compact neatness. Of no more than medium height but with shoulders like an acrobat, he had slim, straight legs and the feet of a dancing master. His attire, from the square-pointed collar down to the neat black brogues, was spotless. His reefer jacket fitted him faultlessly, but his trousers were cut so unfashionably narrow that the protuberant thigh muscles and the line of a highly developed calf could quite easily be discerned. The hand twirling the cane was small but also muscular, freckled and covered with light down. Red Kerry was built on the lines of a whippet, but carried the equipment of an Irish terrier.

The telephone bell rang. Inspector Kerry moved his square shoulders in a manner oddly suggestive of a wrestler, laid the malacca cane on the mantleshelf, and crossed to the table. Taking up the telephone:

"Yes?" he said, and his voice was high-pitched and imperious.

He listened for a moment.

"Very good, sir."

He replaced the receiver, took up a wet oilskin overall from the back of a chair and the cane from the mantleshelf. Then rolling chewing-gum from one corner of his mouth into the other, he snapped off the electric light and walked from the room.

Along the corridor he went with a lithe, silent step, moving from the hips and swinging his shoulders. Before a
door marked "Private" he paused. From his waistcoat pocket he took a little silver convex mirror and surveyed himself critically therein. He adjusted his neat tie, replaced the mirror, knocked at the door and entered the room of the Assistant Commissioner.

This important official was a man constructed on huge principles, a man of military bearing, having tired eyes and a bewildered manner. He conveyed the impression that the collection of documents, books, telephones, and other paraphernalia bestrewing his table had reduced him to a state of stupor. He looked up wearily and met the fierce gaze of the chief inspector with a glance almost apologetic.

"Ah, Chief Inspector Kerry?" he said, with vague surprise. "Yes. I told you to come. Really, I ought to have been at home hours ago. It's most unfortunate. I have to do the work of three men. This is your department, is it not, Chief Inspector?"

He handed Kerry a slip of paper, at which the Chief Inspector stared fiercely.

"Murder!" rapped Kerry. "Sir Lucien Pyne. Yes, sir, I am still on duty."

His speech, in moments of interest, must have suggested to one overhearing him from an adjoining room, for instance, the operation of a telegraphic instrument. He gave to every syllable the value of a rap and certain words he terminated with an audible snap of his teeth.

"Ah," murmured the Assistant Commissioner. "Yes. Divisional Inspector --Somebody (I cannot read the name) has detained all the parties. But you had better report at Vine Street. It appears to be a big case."

He sighed wearily.

"Very good, sir. With your permission I will glance at Sir Lucien's pedigree."

"Certainly--certainly," said the Assistant Commissioner, waving one large hand in the direction of a bookshelf.

Kerry crossed the room, laid his oilskin and cane upon a chair, and from the shelf where it reposed took a squat volume. The Assistant Commissioner, hand pressed to brow, began to study a document which lay before him.


He returned the book to its place, took up his overall and cane, and:

"Very good, sir," he said. "I will proceed to Vine Street."

"Certainly--certainly," murmured the Assistant Commissioner, glancing up absently. "Good night."

"Good night, sir."

"Oh, Chief Inspector!"

Kerry turned, his hand on the door-knob.

"Sir?"

"I--er--what was I going to say? Oh, yes! The social importance of the murdered man raises the case from the--er--you follow me? Public interest will become acute, no doubt. I have therefore selected you for your well known discretion. I met Sir Lucien once. Very sad. Good night."

"Good night, sir."

Kerry passed out into the corridor, closing the door quietly. The Assistant Commissioner was a man for whom he entertained the highest respect. Despite the bewildered air and wandering manner, he knew this big, tired-looking soldier for an administrator of infinite capacity and inexhaustive energy.

Proceeding to a room further along the corridor, Chief Inspector Kerry opened the door and looked in.

"Detective-Sergeant Coombes."

Detective-Sergeant Coombes, a plump, short man having lank black hair and a smile of sly contentment perpetually adorning his round face, rose hurriedly from the chair upon which he had been seated. Another man who was in the room rose also, as if galvanized by the glare of the fierce blue eyes.

"I'm going to Vine Street," said Kerry succinctly; "you're coming with me," turned, and went on his way.

Two taxicabs were standing in the yard, and into the first of these Inspector Kerry stepped, followed by Coombes, the latter breathing heavily and carrying his hat in his hand, since he had not yet found time to put it on.

"Vine Street," shouted Kerry. "Brisk."

He leaned back in the cab, chewing industriously. Coombes, having somewhat recovered his breath, essayed speech.

"Is it something big?" he asked.

"Sure," snapped Kerry. "Do they send me to stop dog-fights?"

Knowing the man and recognizing the mood, Coombes became silent, and this silence he did not break all the way to Vine Street. At the station:

"Wait," said Chief Inspector Kerry, and went swinging in, carrying his overall and having the malacca cane tucked under his arm.
A few minutes later he came out again and reentered the cab.  
"Piccadilly corner of Old Bond Street," he directed the man.  
"Is it burglary?" asked Detective-Sergeant Coombes with interest.  
"No," said Kerry. "It's murder; and there seems to be stacks of evidence. Sharpen your pencil."  
"Oh!" murmured Coombes.  
They were almost immediately at their destination, and Chief Inspector Kerry, dismissing the cabman, set off along Bond Street with his lithe, swinging gait, looking all about him intently. Rain had ceased, but the air was damp and chilly, and few pedestrians were to be seen.  
A car was standing before Kazmah's premises, the chauffeur walking up and down on the pavement and flapping his hands across his chest in order to restore circulation. The Chief Inspector stopped, "Hi, my man!" he said.  
The chauffeur stood still.  
"Whose car?"  
"Mr. Monte Irvin's."  
Kerry turned on his heel and stepped to the office door. It was ajar, and Kerry, taking an electric torch from his overall pocket, flashed the light upon the name-plate. He stood for a moment, chewing and looking up the darkened stairs. Then, torch in hand he ascended.  
Kazmah's door was closed, and the Chief Inspector rapped loudly. It was opened at once by Sergeant Burton, and Kerry entered, followed by Coombes.  
The room at first sight seemed to be extremely crowded. Monte Irvin, very pale and haggard, sat upon the divan beside Quentin Gray. Seton was standing near the cabinet, smoking. These three had evidently been conversing at the time of the detective's arrival with an alert-looking, clean-shaven man whose bag, umbrella, and silk hat stood upon one of the little inlaid tables. Just inside the second door were Brisley and Gunn, both palpably ill at ease, and glancing at Inspector Whiteleaf, who had been interrogating them.  
Kerry chewed silently for a moment, bestowing a fierce stare upon each face in turn, then:  
"Who's in charge?" he snapped.  
"I am," replied Whiteleaf.  
"Why is the lower door open?"  
"I thought--"  
"Don't think. Shut the door. Post your Sergeant inside. No one is to go out. Grab anybody who comes in.
Where's the body?"
"This way," said Inspector Whiteleaf hurriedly; then, over his shoulder: "Go down to the door, Burton."
He led Kerry towards the inner room, Coombes at his heels. Brisley and Gunn stood aside to give them passage; Gray and Monte Irvin prepared to follow. At the doorway Kerry turned.  
"You will all be good enough to stay where you are," he said. He directed the aggressive stare in Seton's direction. "And if the gentleman smoking a cheroot is not satisfied that he has quite destroyed any clue perceptible by the sense of smell I should be glad to send out for some fireworks."
He tossed his oilskin and his cane on the divan and went into the room of seance, savagely biting at a piece of apparently indestructible chewing-gum.  
The torn green curtain had been laid aside and the electric lights turned on in the inside rooms. Pallid, Sir Lucien Pyne lay by the ebony chair glaring horribly upward.  
Always with the keen eyes glancing this way and that, Inspector Kerry crossed the little audience room and entered the enclosure contained between the two screens. By the side of the dead man he stood, looking down silently. Then he dropped upon one knee and peered closely into the white face. He looked up.  
"He has not been moved?"
"No."
Kerry bent yet lower, staring closely at a discolored abrasion on Sir Lucien's forehead. His glance wandered from thence to the carved ebony chair. Still kneeling, he drew from his waistcoat pocket a powerful lens contained in a washleather bag. He began to examine the back and sides of the chair. Once he laid his finger lightly on a protruding point of the carving, and then scrutinised his finger through the glass. He examined the dead man's hands, his nails, his garments. Then he crawled about, peering closely at the carpet.  
He stood up suddenly. "The doctor," he snapped.  
Inspector Whiteleaf retired, but returned immediately with the clean-shaven man to whom Monte Irvin had been talking when Kerry arrived.  
"Good evening, doctor," said Kerry. "Do I know your name? Start your notes, Coombes."
"My name is Dr. Wilbur Weston, and I live in Albemarle Street."
"Who called you?"
"Inspector Whiteleaf telephoned to me about half an hour ago."
"You examined the dead man?"
"I did."
"You avoided moving him?"
"It was unnecessary to move him. He was dead, and the wound was in the left shoulder. I pulled his coat open and unbuttoned his shirt. That was all."
"How long dead?"
"I should say he had been dead not more than an hour when I saw him."
"What had caused death?"
"The stab of some long, narrow-bladed weapon, such as a stiletto."
"Why a stiletto?" Kerry's fierce eyes challenged him. "Did you ever see a wound made by a stiletto?"
"Several—in Italy, and one at Saffron Hill. They are characterised by very little external bleeding."
"Right, doctor. It had reached his heart?"
"Yes. The blow was delivered from behind."
"How do you know?"
"The direction of the wound is forward. I have seen an almost identical wound in the case of an Italian woman stabbed by a jealous rival."
"He would fall on his back."
"Oh, no. He would fall on his face, almost certainly."
"But he lies on his back."
"In my opinion he had been moved."
"Right. I know he had. Good night, doctor. See him out, Inspector."

Dr. Weston seemed rather startled by this abrupt dismissal, but the steel-blue eyes of Inspector Kerry were already bent again upon the dead man, and, murmuring "good night," the doctor took his departure, followed by Whiteleaf.

"Shut this door," snapped Kerry after the Inspector. "I will call when I want you. You stay, Coombes. Got it all down?"
Sergeant Coombes scratched his head with the end of a pencil, and:
"Yes," he said, with hesitancy. "That is, except the word after 'narrow-bladed weapon such as a' I've got what looks like 'steelhatto.'"
Kerry glared.
"Try taking the cotton-wool out of your ears," he suggested. "The word was stiletto, s-t-i-l-e-t-t-o--stiletto."
"Oh," said Coombes, "thanks."
Silence fell between the two men from Scotland Yard. Kerry stood awhile, chewing and staring at the ghastly face of Sir Lucien. Then:
"Go through all pockets," he directed.
Sergeant Coombes placed his notebook and pencil upon the seat of the chair and set to work. Kerry entered the inside room or office. It contained a writing-table (upon which was a telephone and a pile of old newspapers), a cabinet, and two chairs. Upon one of the chairs lay a crush-hat, a cane, and an overcoat. He glanced at some of the newspapers, then opened the drawers of the writing-table. They were empty. The cabinet proved to be locked, and a door which he saw must open upon a narrow passage running beside the suite of rooms was locked also. There was nothing in the pockets of the overcoat, but inside the hat he found pasted the initials L. P. He rolled chewing-gum, stared reflectively at the little window immediately above the table, through which a glimpse might be obtained of the ebony chair, and went out again.
"Nothing," reported Coombes.
"What do you mean--nothing?"
"His pockets are empty!"
"All of them?"
"Every one."
"Good," said Kerry. "Make a note of it. He wears a real pearl stud and a good signet ring; also a gold wrist watch, face broken and hands stopped at seven-fifteen. That was the time he died. He was stabbed from behind as he stood where I'm standing now, fell forward, struck his head on the leg of the chair, and lay face downwards."
"I've got that," muttered Coombes. "What stopped the watch?"
"Broken as he fell. There are tiny fragments of glass stuck in the carpet, showing the exact position in which his body originally lay; and for God's sake stop smiling."
Kerry threw open the door.
"Who first found the body?" he demanded of the silent company.
"I did," cried Quentin Gray, coming forward. "I and Seton Pasha."
"Seton Pasha!" Kerry's teeth snapped together, so that he seemed to bite off the words. "I don't see a Turk present."

Seton smiled quietly.
"My friend uses a title which was conferred upon me some years ago by the ex-Khedive," he said. "My name is Greville Seton."
Inspector Kerry glanced back across his shoulder.
"Notes," he said. "Unlock your ears, Coombes." He looked at Gray. "What is your name?"
"Quentin Gray."
"Who are you, and in what way are you concerned in this case?"
"I am the son of Lord Wrexborough, and I--"

He paused, glancing helplessly at Seton. He had recognized that the first mention of Rita Irvin's name in the police evidence must be made by himself.
"Speak up, sir," snapped Kerry. "Sergeant Coombes is deaf."
Gray's face flushed, and his eyes gleamed angrily.
"I should be glad, Inspector," he said, "if you would remember that the dead man was a personal acquaintance and that other friends are concerned in this ghastly affair."
"Coombes will remember it," replied Kerry frigidly. "He's taking notes."
"Look here--" began Gray.
Seton laid his hand upon the angry man's shoulder.
"Pull up, Gray," he said quietly. "Pull up, old chap." He turned his cool regard upon Chief Inspector Kerry, twirling the cord of his monocle about one finger. "I may remark, Inspector Kerry--for I understand this to be your name—that your conduct of the inquiry is not always characterised by the best possible taste."

Kerry rolled chewing-gum, meeting Seton's gaze with a stare intolerant and aggressive. He imparted that odd writhing movement to his shoulders.
"For my conduct I am responsible to the Commissioner," he replied. "And if he's not satisfied the Commissioner can have my written resignation at any hour in the twenty-four that he's short of a pipe-lighter. If it would not inconvenience you to keep quiet for two minutes I will continue my examination of this witness."

CHAPTER VII
FURTHER EVIDENCE
The examination of Quentin Gray was three times interrupted by telephone messages from Vine Street; and to the unsatisfactory character of these the growing irascibility of Chief Inspector Kerry bore testimony. Then the divisional surgeon arrived, and Burton incurred the wrath of the Chief Inspector by deserting his post to show the doctor upstairs.
"If inspired idiocy can help the law," shouted Kerry, "the man who did this job is as good as dead!" He turned his fierce gaze in Gray's direction. "Thank you, sir. I need trouble you no further."
"Do you wish me to remain?"
"No. Inspector Whiteleaf, see these two gentlemen past the Sergeant on duty."
"But damn it all!" cried Gray, his pent-up emotions at last demanding an outlet, "I won't submit to your infernal dragooning! Do you realize that while you're standing here, doing nothing--absolutely nothing--an unhappy woman is--"

"I realize," snapped Kerry, showing his teeth in canine fashion, "that if you're not outside in ten seconds there's going to be a cloud of dust on the stairs!"

White with passion, Gray was on the point of uttering other angry and provocative words when Seton took his arm in a firm grip. "Gray!" he said sharply. "You leave with me now or I leave alone."

The two walked from the room, followed by Whiteleaf. As they disappeared:
"Read out all the times mentioned in the last witness's evidence," directed Kerry, undisturbed by the rencontre. Sergeant Coombes smiled rather uneasily, consulting his notebook.
"'At about half-past six I drove to Bond Street,'" he began.
"I said the times," rapped Kerry. "I know to what they refer. Just give me the times as mentioned."
"Oh," murmured Coombes, "Yes. 'About half-past six.'" He ran his finger down the page. "'A quarter to seven. Seven o'clock.' Twenty-five minutes past seven. 'Eight o'clock.'"
"Stop!" said Kerry. "That's enough." He fixed a baleful glance upon Gunn, who from a point of the room discreetly distant from the terrible red man was watching with watery eyes. "Who's the smart in all the overcoats?" he demanded.
"My name is James Gunn," replied this greatly insulted man in a husky voice.
"Who are you? What are you? What are you doing here?"
"I'm employed by Spinker's Agency, and--"
"Oh!" shouted Kerry, moving his shoulders. He approached the speaker and glared menacingly into his purple face. "Ho, ho! So you're one of the queer birds out of that roost, are you? Spinker's Agency! Ah, yes!" He fixed his gaze now upon the pale features of Brisley. "I've seen you before, haven't I?"
"Yes, Chief Inspector," said Brisley, licking his lips. "Hayward's Heath. We have been retained by--"
"You have been retained!" shouted Kerry. "You have!"
He twisted round upon his heel, facing Monte Irvin. Angry words trembled on his tongue. But at sight of the broken man who sat there alone, haggard, a subtle change of expression crept into his fierce eyes, and when he spoke again the high-pitched voice was almost gentle. "You had employed these men, sir, to watch--"
He paused, glancing towards Whiteleaf, who had just entered again, and then in the direction of the inner room where the divisional surgeon was at work.
"To watch my wife, Inspector. Thank you, but all the world will know tomorrow. I might as well get used to it."
Monte Irvin's pallor grew positively alarming. He swayed suddenly and extended his hands in a significant groping fashion. Kerry sprang forward and supported him.
"All right, Inspector--all right," muttered Irvin. "Thank you. It has been a great shock. At first I feared--"
"You thought your wife had been attacked, I understand? Well--it's not so bad as that, sir. I am going to walk downstairs to the car with you."
"But there is so much you will want to know--"
"It can keep until tomorrow. I've enough work in this peep-show here to have me busy all night. Come along. Lean on my arm."
Monte Irvin rose unsteadily. He knew that there was cardiac trouble in his family, but he had never realized before the meaning of his heritage. He felt physically ill.
"Inspector"--his voice was a mere whisper--"have you any theory to explain--"
"Mrs. Irvin's disappearance? Don't worry, sir. Without exactly having a theory I think I may say that in my opinion she will turn up presently."
"God bless you," murmured Irvin, as Kerry assisted him out on to the landing.
Inspector Whiteleaf held back the sliding door, the mechanism of which had been broken so that the door now automatically remained half closed.
"Funny, isn't it," said Gunn, as the two disappeared and Inspector Whiteleaf re-entered, "that a man should be so upset about the disappearance of a woman he was going to divorce?"
"Damn funny!" said Whiteleaf, whose temper was badly frayed by contact with Kerry. "I should have a good laugh if I were you."
He crossed the room, going in to where the surgeon was examining the victim of this mysterious crime. Gunn stared after him dismally.
"A person doesn't get much sympathy from the police, Brisley," he declared. "That one's almost as bad as him," jerking his thumb in the direction of the landing.
Brisley smiled in a somewhat sickly manner.
"Red Kerry is a holy terror," he agreed, sotto voce, glancing aside to where Coombes was checking his notes.
"Look out! Here he comes."
"Now," cried Kerry, swinging into the room, "what's the game? Plotting to defeat the ends of justice?"
He stood with hands thrust in reefer pockets, feet wide apart, glancing fiercely from Brisley to Gunn, and from Gunn back again to Brisley. Neither of the representatives of Spinker's Agency ventured any remark, and:
"How long have you been watching Mrs. Monte Irvin?" demanded Kerry.
"Nearly a fortnight," replied Brisley.
"Got your evidence in writing?"
"Yes."
"Up to tonight?"
"Yes."
"Dictate to Sergeant Coombes."
He turned on his heel and crossed to the divan upon which his oilskin overall was lying. Rapidly he removed his reefer and his waistcoat, folded them, and placed them neatly beside his overall. He retained his bowler at its jaunty angle.
A cud of presumably flavorless chewing-gum he deposited in a brass bowl, and from a little packet which he had taken out of his jacket pocket he drew a fresh piece, redolent of mint. This he put into his mouth, and returned the
packet to its resting-place. A slim, trim figure, he stood looking round him reflectively. "Now," he muttered, "what about it?"

CHAPTER VIII
KERRY CONSULTS THE ORACLE
The clock of Brixton Town Hall was striking the hour of 1 a.m. as Chief Inspector Kerry inserted his key in the lock of the door of his house in Spenser Road.
A light was burning in the hallway, and from the little dining-room on the left the reflection of a cheerful fire danced upon the white paint of the half-open door. Kerry deposited his hat, cane, and overall upon the rack, and moving very quietly entered the room and turned on the light. A modestly furnished and scrupulously neat apartment was revealed. On the sheepskin rug before the fire a Manx cat was dozing beside a pair of carpet slippers. On the table some kind of cold repast was laid, the viands concealed under china covers. At a large bottle of Guinness's Extra Stout Kerry looked with particular appreciation.
He heaved a long sigh of contentment, and opened the bottle of stout. Having poured out a glass of the black and foaming liquid and satisfied an evidently urgent thirst, he explored beneath the covers, and presently was seated before a spread of ham and tongue, tomatoes, and bread and butter.
A door opened somewhere upstairs, and:
"Is that yourse', Dan?" inquired a deep but musical female voice.
"Sure it is," replied Kerry; and no one who had heard the high official tones of the imperious Chief Inspector would have supposed that they could be so softened and modulated. "You should have been asleep hours ago, Mary."
"Have ye to go out again?"
"I have, bad luck; but don't trouble to come down. I've all I want and more."
"If 'tis a new case I'll come down."
"It's the devil's own case; but you'll get your death of cold."
Sounds of movement in the room above followed, and presently footsteps on the stairs. Mrs. Kerry, enveloped in a woollen dressing-gown, which obviously belonged to the Inspector, came into the room. Upon her Kerry directed a look from which all fierceness had been effaced, and which expressed only an undying admiration. And, indeed, Mary Kerry was in many respects a remarkable character. Half an inch taller than Kerry, she fully merited the compliment designed by that trite apothegm, "a fine woman." Large-boned but shapely, as she came in with her long dark hair neatly plaited, it seemed to her husband—who had remained her lover—that he saw before him the rosy-cheeked lass whom ten years before he had met and claimed on the chilly shores of Loch Broom. By all her neighbors Mrs. Kerry was looked upon as a proud, reserved person, who had held herself much aloof since her husband had become Chief Inspector; and the reputation enjoyed by Red Kerry was that of an aggressive and uncompanionable man. Now here was a lover's meeting, not lacking the shy, downward glance of dark eyes as steel-blue eyes flashed frank admiration.
Kerry, who quarrelled with everybody except the Assistant Commissioner, had only found one cause of quarrel with Mary. He was a devout Roman Catholic, and for five years he had clung with the bull-dog tenacity which was his to the belief that he could convert his wife to the faith of Rome. She remained true to the Scottish Free Church, in whose precepts she had been reared, and at the end of the five years Kerry gave it up and admired her all the more for her Caledonian strength of mind. Many and heated were the debates he had held with worthy Father O'Callaghan respecting the validity of a marriage not solemnized by a priest, but of late years he had grown reconciled to the parting of the ways on Sunday morning; and as the early mass was over before the Scottish service he was regularly to be seen outside a certain Presbyterian chapel waiting for his heretical spouse.
He pulled her down on to his knee and kissed her.
"It's twelve hours since I saw you," he said.
She rested her arm on the back of the saddle-back chair, and her dark head close beside Kerry's fiery red one.
"I kenned ye had a new case on," she said, "when it grew so late. How long can ye stay?"
"An hour. No more. There's a lot to do before the papers come out in the morning. By breakfast time all England, including the murderer, will know I'm in charge of the case. I wish I could muzzle the Press."
"'Tis a murder, then? The Lord gi'e us grace. Ye'll be wishin' to tell me?"
"Yes. I'm stumped!"
"Ye've time for a rest an' a smoke. Put ye're slippers on."
"I've no time for that, Mary."
She stood up and took the slippers from the hearth.
"Put ye're slippers on," she repeated firmly.
Kerry stooped without another word and began to unlace his brogues. Meanwhile from a side-table his wife
brought a silver tobacco-box and a stumpy Irish clay. The slippers substituted for his shoes, Kerry lovingly filled the cracked and blackened bowl with strong Irish twist, which he first teased carefully in his palm. The bowl rested almost under his nostrils when he put the pipe in his mouth, and how he contrived to light it without burning his moustache was not readily apparent. He succeeded, however, and soon was puffing clouds of pungent smoke into the air with the utmost contentment.

"Now," said his wife, seating herself upon the arm of the chair, "tell me, Dan."

Thereupon began a procedure identical to that which had characterized the outset of every successful case of the Chief Inspector. He rapidly outlined the complexities of the affair in old Bond Street, and Mary Kerry surveyed the problem with a curious and almost fey detachment of mind, which enabled her to see light where all was darkness to the man on the spot. With the clarity of a trained observer Kerry described the apartments of Kazmah, the exact place where the murdered man had been found, and the construction of the rooms. He gave the essential points from the evidence of the several witnesses, quoting the exact times at which various episodes had taken place. Mary Kerry, looking straightly before her with unseeing eyes, listened in silence until he ceased speaking; then:

"There are really but twa rooms," she said, in a faraway voice, "but the second o' these is parteetioned into three parts?"

"That's it."

"A door from the landing opens upon the fairst room, a door free a passage opens upon the second. Where does yon passage lead?"

"From the main stair along beside Kazmah's rooms to a small back stair. This back stair goes from top to bottom of the building, from the end of the same hallway as the main stair."

"There is na either way out but by the front door?"

"No."

"Then if the evidence o' the Spinker man is above suspecion, Mrs. Irvin and this Kazmah were still on the premises when ye arrived?"

"Exactly. I gathered that much at Vine Street before I went on to Bond Street. The whole block was surrounded five minutes after my arrival, and it still is."

"What ither offices are in this passage?"

"None. It's a blank wall on the left, and one door on the right--the one opening into the Kazmah office. There are other premises on the same floor, but they are across the landing."

"What premises?"

"A solicitor and a commission agent."

"The floor below?"

"It's all occupied by a modiste, Renan."

"The top floor?"

"Cubanis Cigarette Company, a servants' and an electrician."

"Nae more?"

"No more."

"Where does yon back stair open on the topmaist floor?"

"In a corridor similar to that alongside Kazmah's. It has two windows on the right overlooking a narrow roof and the top of the arcade, and on the left is the Cubanis Cigarette Company. The other offices are across the landing."

Mary Kerry stared into space awhile.

"Kazmah and Mrs. Irvin could ha' come down to the fairst floor, or gene up to the thaird floor unseen by the Spinker man," she said dreamily.

"But they couldn't have reached the street, my dear!" cried Kerry.

"No--they couldn'a ha' gained the street."

She became silent again, her husband watching her expectantly. Then:

"If puir Sir Lucien Pyne was killed at a quarter after seven--the time his watch was broken--the native sairvent did no' kill him. Frae the Spinker's evidence the black man went awe' before then," she said. "Mrs. Irvin?"

Kerry shook his head.

"From all accounts a slip of a woman," he replied. "It was a strong hand that struck the blow."

"Kazmah?"

"Probably."

"Mr. Quentin Gray came back wi' a cab and went upstairs, free the Spinker's evidence, at aboot a quarter after seven, and came doon five meenites later sair pale an' fretful."

Kerry surrounded himself and the speaker with wreaths of stifling smoke.

"We have only the bare word of Mr. Gray that he didn't go in again, Mary; but I believe him. He's a hot-headed
"Then 'twas yon Kazmah," announced Mrs. Kerry. "Who is Kazmah?"

Her husband laughed shortly.

"That's the point at which I got stumped," he replied. "We've heard of him at the Yard, of course, and we know that under the cloak of a dealer in Eastern perfumes he carried on a fortune-telling business. He managed to avoid prosecution, though. It took me over an hour tonight to explore the thought-reading mechanism; it's a sort of Maskelyne's Mysteries worked from the inside room. But who Kazmah is or what's his nationality I know no more than the man in the moon."

"Pairfume?" queried the far-away voice.

"Yes, Mary. The first room is a sort of miniature scent bazaar. There are funny little imitation antique flasks of Kazmah preparations, creams, perfumes and incense, also small square wooden boxes of a kind of Turkish delight, and a stock of Egyptian mummy-beads, statuettes, and the like, which may be genuine for all I know."

"Nae books or letters?"

"Not a thing, except his own advertisements, a telephone directory, and so on."

"The inside office bureau?"

"Empty as Mother Hubbard's cupboard!"

"The place was ransacked by the same folk that emptied the dead man's pockets so as to leave nae clue," pronounced the sibyl-like voice. "Mr. Gray said he had choc'lates wi' him. Where did he leave them?"

"Mary, you're a wonder!" exclaimed the admiring Kerry. "The box was lying on the divan in the first room where he said he had left it on going out for a cab."

"Does nae o' the evidence show if Mrs. Irvin had been to Kazmah's before?"

"Yes. She went there fairly regularly to buy perfume."

"No' for the fortune-tellin'?"

"No. According to Mr. Gray, to buy perfume."

"Had Mr. Gray been there wi' her before?"

"No. Sir Lucien Pyne seems to have been her pretty constant companion."

"Do ye suspect she was his lady-love?"

"I believe Mr. Gray suspects something of the kind."

"And Mr. Gray?"

"He is not such an old friend as Sir Lucien was. But I fancy nevertheless it was Mr. Gray that her husband doubted."

"Do ye suspect the puir soul had cause, Dan?"

"No," replied Kerry promptly: "I don't. The boy is mad about her, but I fancy she just liked his company. He's the heir of Lord Wrexborough, and Mrs. Irvin used to be a stage beauty. It's a usual state of affairs, and more often than not means nothing."

"I dinna ken sich folk," declared Mary Kerry. "They a'most desairve all they get. They are bound tee come tee nae guid end. Where did ye say Sir Lucien lived?"

"Albermarle Street; just round the corner."

"Ye told me that he only kep' twa sairvent: a cook, hoosekeper, who lived awe', an' a man--a foreigner?"

"A kind of half-baked Dago, named Juan Mareno. A citizen of the United States according to his own account."

"Ye dinna like Juan Mareno?"

"He's a hateful swine!" flashed Kerry, with sudden venom. "I'm watching Mareno very closely. Coombes is at work upon Sir Lucien's papers. His life was a bit of a mystery. He seems to have had no relations living, and I can't find that he even employed a solicitor."

"Ye'll be sairchin' for yon Egyptian?"

"The servant? Yes. We'll have him by the morning, and then we shall know who Kazmah is. Meanwhile, in which of the offices is Kazmah hiding?"

Mary Kerry was silent for so long that her husband repeated the question:

"In which of the offices is Kazmah hiding?"

"In nane," she said dreamily. "Ye surrounded the buildings too late, I ken."

"Eh!" cried Kerry, turning his head excitedly. "But the man Brisley was at the door all night!"

"It doesna' matter. They have escapit."

Kerry scratched his close-cropped head in angry perplexity.

"You're always right, Mary," he said. "But hang me if--Never mind! When we get the servant we'll soon get Kazmah."

"Aye," murmured his wife. "If ye hae na' got Kazmah the now."
"But--Mary! This isn't helping me! It's mystifying me deeper than ever!"

"It's no' clear eno', Dan. But for sure behind this mystery o' the death o' Sir Lucien there's a darker mystery still; sair dark. 'Tis the biggest case ye ever had. Dinna look for Kazmah. Look tee find why the woman went tee him; and try tee find the meanin' o' the sma' window behind the big chair. . . . Yes"--she seemed to be staring at some distant visible object--"watch the man Mareno--"

"But--Mrs. Irvin--"

"Is in God's guid keepin'--"

"You don't think she's dead!"

"She is wa'rise than dead. Her sins have found her out." The fey light suddenly left her eyes, and they became filled with tears. She turned impulsively to her husband. "Oh, Dan! Ye must find her! Ye must find her! Puir weak hait--dinnà ye ken how she is suffering!"

"My dear," he said, putting his arms around her, "What is it? What is it?"

She brushed the tears from her eyes and tried to smile. "'Tis something like the second sight, Dan," she answered simply. "And it's escapit me again. I a'most had the clue to it a' oth, there's some horrible wickedness in it, an' cruelty an' shame."

The clock on the mantel shelf began to peal. Kerry was watching his wife's rosy face with a mixture of loving admiration and wonder. She looked so very bonny and placid and capable that he was puzzled anew at the strange gift which she seemingly inherited from her mother, who had been equally shrewd, equally comely and similarly endowed.

"God bless us all!" he said, kissed her heartily, and stood up. "Back to bed you go, my dear. I must be off. There's Mr. Irvin to see in the morning, too."

A few minutes later he was swinging through the deserted streets, his mind wholly occupied with lover-like reflections to the exclusion of those professional matters which properly should have been engaging his attention. As he passed the end of a narrow court near the railway station, the gleam of his silver mounted malacca attracted the attention of a couple of loafers who were leaning one on either side of an iron pillar in the shadow of the unsavory alley. Not another pedestrian was in sight, and only the remote night-sounds of London broke the silence.

Twenty paces beyond, the footpads silently closed in upon their prey. The taller of the pair reached him first, only to receive a back- handed blow full in his face which sent him reeling a couple of yards.

Round leapt the assaulted man to face his second assailant.

"If you two smarts really want handling," he rapped ferociously, "say the word, and I'll bash you flat."

As he turned, the light of a neighboring lamp shone down upon the savage face, and a smothered yell came from the shorter ruffian:

"Blimey, Bill! It's Red Kerry!"

Whereupon, as men pursued by devils, the pair made off like the wind!

Kerry glared after the retreating figures for a moment, and a grin of fierce satisfaction revealed his gleaming teeth. He turned again and swung on his way toward the main road. The incident had done him good. It had banished domestic matters from his mind, and he was become again the highly trained champion of justice, standing, an unseen buckler, between society and the criminal.

CHAPTER IX

A PACKET OF CIGARETTES

Following their dismissal by Chief Inspector Kerry, Seton and Gray walked around to the latter's chambers in Piccadilly. They proceeded in silence, Gray too angry for speech, and Seton busy with reflections. As the man admitted them:

"Has anyone 'phoned, Willis?" asked Gray.

"No one, sir."

They entered a large room which combined the characteristics of a library with those of a military gymnasium. Gray went to a side table and mixed drinks. Placing a glass before Seton, he emptied his own at a draught.

"If you'll excuse me for a moment," he said, "I should like to ring up and see if by any possible chance there's news of Rita."

He walked out to the telephone, and Seton heard him making a call. Then:

"Hullo! Is that you, Hinkes?" he asked. . . . "Yes, speaking. Is Mrs. Irvin at home?"

A few moments of silence followed, and:

"Thanks! Good-bye," said Gray.

He rejoined his friend.

"Nothing," he reported, and made a gesture of angry resignation. "Evidently Hinkes is still unaware of what has happened. Irvin hasn't returned yet. Seton, this business is driving me mad."
He refilled his glass, and having looked in his cigarette-case, began to ransack a small cupboard.
"Damn it all!" he exclaimed. "I haven't got a cigarette in the place!"
"I don't smoke them myself," said Seton, "but I can offer you a cheroot."
"Thanks. They are a trifle too strong. Hullo! here are some."

From the back of a shelf he produced a small, plain brown packet, and took out of it a cigarette at which he stared oddly. Seton, smoking one of the inevitable cheroots, watched him, tapping his teeth with the rim of his eyeglass.

"Poor old Pyne!" muttered Gray, and, looking up, met the inquiring glance. "Pyne left these here only the other day," he explained awkwardly. "I don't know where he got them, but they are something very special. I suppose I might as well."

He lighted one, and, uttering a weary sigh, threw himself into a deep leather-covered arm-chair. Almost immediately he was up again. The telephone bell had rung. His eyes alight with hope, he ran out, leaving the door open so that his conversation was again audible to the visitor.

"Yes, yes, speaking. What?" His tone changed "Oh, it's you, Margaret. What? . . . Certainly, delighted. No, there's nobody here but old Seton Pasha. What? You've heard the fellows talk about him who were out East. . . . Yes, that's the chap. . . . Come right along."

"You don't propose to lionise me, I hope, Gray?" said Seton, as Gray returned to his seat.

The other laughed.

"I forgot you could hear me," he admitted. "It's my cousin, Margaret Halley. You'll like her. She's a tip-top girl, but eccentric. Goes in for pilling."

"Pilling?" inquired Seton gravely.

"Doctoring. She's an M.R.C.S., and only about twenty-four or so. Fearfully clever kid; makes me feel an infant."

"Flat heels, spectacles, and a judicial manner?"

"Flat heels, yes. But not the other. She's awfully pretty, and used to look simply terrific in khaki. She was an M.O. in Serbia, you know, and afterwards at some nurses' hospital in Kent. She's started in practice for herself now round in Dover Street. I wonder what she wants."

Silence fell between them; for, although prompted by different reasons, both were undesirous of discussing the tragedy; and this silence prevailed until the ringing of the doorbell announced the arrival of the girl. Willis opening the door, she entered composedly, and Gray introduced Seton.

"I am so glad to have met you at last, Mr. Seton," she said laughingly. "From Quentin's many accounts I had formed the opinion that you were a kind of Arabian Nights myth."

"I am glad to disappoint you," replied Seton, finding something very refreshing in the company of this pretty girl, who wore a creased Burberry, and stray locks of whose abundant bright hair floated about her face in the most careless fashion imaginable.

She turned to her cousin, frowning in a rather puzzled way.

"Whatever have you been burning here?" she asked. "There is such a curious smell in the room."

Gray laughed more heartily than he had laughed that night, glancing in Seton's direction.

"So much for your taste in cigars!" he cried

"Oh!" said Margaret, "I'm sure it's not Mr. Seton's cigar. It isn't a smell of tobacco."

"I don't believe they're made of tobacco!" cried Gray, laughing louder yet, although his merriment was forced.

Seton smiled good-naturedly at the joke, but he had perceived at the moment of Margaret's entrance the fact that her gaiety also was assumed. Serious business had dictated her visit, and he wondered the more to note how deeply this odor, real or fancied, seemed to intrigue her.

She sat down in the chair which Gray placed by the fireside, and her cousin unceremoniously slid the brown packet of cigarettes across the little table in her direction.

"Try one of these, Margaret," he said. "They are great, and will quite drown the unpleasant odor of which you complain."

Whereupon the observant Seton saw a quick change take place in the girl's expression. She had the same clear coloring as her cousin, and now this freshness deserted her cheeks, and her pretty face became quite pale. She was staring at the brown packet. "Where did you get them?" she asked quietly.

A smile faded from Gray's lips. Those five words had translated him in spirit to that green-draped room in which Sir Lucien Pyne was lying dead. He glanced at Seton in the appealing way which sometimes made him appear so boyish.

"Er--from Pyne," he replied. "I must tell you, Margaret--"

"Sir Lucien Pyne?" she interrupted.

"Yes."
"Not from Rita Irvin?"
Quentin Gray started upright in his chair.
"No! But why do you mention her?"
Margaret bit her lip in sudden perplexity.
"Oh, I don't know." She glanced apologetically toward Seton. He rose immediately.
"My dear Miss Halley," he said, "I perceive, indeed I had perceived all along, that you have something of a private nature to communicate to your cousin."
But Gray stood up, and:
"Seton! . . . Margaret!" he said, looking from one to the other. "I mean to say, Margaret, if you've anything to tell me about Rita . . . Have you? Have you?"
He fixed his gaze eagerly upon her.
"I have--yes."
Seton prepared to take his leave, but Gray impetuously thrust him back, immediately turning again to his cousin.
"Perhaps you haven't heard, Margaret," he began. "I have heard what has happened tonight--to Sir Lucien."
Both men stared at her silently for a moment.
"Seton has been with me all the time," said Gray. "If he will consent to stay, with your permission, Margaret, I should like him to do so."
"Why, certainly," agreed the girl. "In fact, I shall be glad of his advice."
Seton inclined his head, and without another word resumed his seat. Gray was too excited to sit down again. He stood on the tiger-skin rug before the fender, watching his cousin and smoking furiously.
"Firstly, then," continued Margaret, "please throw that cigarette in the fire, Quentin."
Gray removed the cigarette from between his lips, and stared at it dazedly. He looked at the girl, and the clear grey eyes were watching him with an inscrutable expression.
"Right-o!" he said awkwardly, and tossed the cigarette in the fire. "You used to smoke like a furnace, Margaret. Is this some new 'cult'?"
"I still smoke a great deal more than is good for me," she confessed, "but I don't smoke opium."
The effect of these words upon the two men who listened was curious. Gray turned an angry glance upon the brown packet lying on the table, and "Faugh!" he exclaimed, and drawing a handkerchief from his sleeve began disgustedly to wipe his lips. Seton stared hard at the speaker, tossed his cheroot into the fire, and taking up the packet withdrew a cigarette and sniffed at it critically. Margaret watched him.
He tore the wrapping off, and tasted a strand of the tobacco.
"Good heavens!" he whispered. "Gray, these things are doped!"

CHAPTER X
SIR LUCIEN'S STUDY WINDOW
Old Bond Street presented a gloomy and deserted prospect to Chief Inspector Kerry as he turned out of Piccadilly and swung along toward the premises of Kazmah. He glanced at the names on some of the shop windows as he passed, and wondered if the furriers, jewelers and other merchants dealing in costly wares properly appreciated the services of the Metropolitan Police Force. He thought of the peacefully slumbering tradesmen in their suburban homes, the safety of their stocks wholly dependent upon the vigilance of that Unsleeping Eye--for to an unsleeping eye he mentally compared the service of which he was a member.
A constable stood on duty before the door of the block. Red Kerry was known by sight and reputation to every member of the force, and the constable saluted as the celebrated Chief Inspector appeared.
"Anything to report, constable?"
"Yes, sir."
"What?"
"The ambulance has been for the body, and another gentleman has been."
Kerry stared at the man.
"Another gentleman? Who the devil's the other gentleman?"
"I don't know, sir. He came with Inspector Whiteleaf, and was inside for nearly an hour."
"Inspector Whiteleaf is off duty. What time was this?"
"Twelve-thirty, sir."
Kerry chewed reflectively ere nodding to the man and passing on.
"Another gentleman!" he muttered, entering the hallway. "Why didn't Inspector Warley report this? Who the devil--" Deep in thought he walked upstairs, finding his way by the light of the pocket torch which he carried. A second constable was on duty at Kazmah's door. He saluted.
"Anything to report?" rapped Kerry.
"Yes, sir. The body has been removed, and the gentleman with Inspector--"
"Damn that for a tale! Describe this gentleman."
"Rather tall, pale, dark, clean-shaven. Wore a fur-collared overcoat, collar turned up. He was accompanied by Inspector Whiteleaf."
"H'm. Anything else?"
"Yes. About an hour ago I heard a noise on the next floor--"
"Eh!" snapped Kerry, and shone the light suddenly into the man's face so that he blinked furiously.
"Eh? What kind of noise?"
"Very slight. Like something moving."
"Like something! Like what thing? A cat or an elephant?"
"More like, say, a box or a piece of furniture."
"And you did--what?"
"I went up to the top landing and listened."
"What did you hear?"
"Nothing at all."
Chief Inspector Kerry chewed audibly.
"All quiet?" he snapped.
"Absolutely. But I'm certain I heard something all the same.
"How long had Inspector Whiteleaf and this dark horse in the fur coat been gone at the time you heard the noise?"
"About half an hour, sir."
"Do you think the noise came from the landing or from one of the offices above?"
"An office I should say. It was very dim."
Chief Inspector Kerry pushed upon the broken door, and walked into the rooms of Kazmah. Flashing the ray of his torch on the wall, he found the switch and snapped up the lights. He removed his overall and tossed it on a divan with his cane. Then, tilting his bowler further forward, he thrust his hands into his reefer pockets, and stood staring toward the door, beyond which lay the room of the murder, in darkness.

"Who is he?" he muttered. "What's it mean?"

Taking up the torch, he walked through and turned on the lights in the inner rooms. For a long time he stood staring at the little square window low down behind the ebony chair, striving to imagine uses for it as his wife had urged him to do. The globular green lamp in the second apartment was worked by three switches situated in the inside room, and he had discovered that in this way the visitor who came to consult Kazmah was treated to the illusion of a gradually falling darkness. Then, the door in the first partition being opened, whoever sat in the ebony chair would become visible by the gradual uncovering of a light situated above the chair. On this light being covered again the figure would apparently fade away.

It was ingenious, and, so far, quite clear. But two things badly puzzled the inquirer; the little window down behind the chair, and the fact that all the arrangements for raising and lowering the lights were situated not in the narrow chamber in which Kazmah's chair stood, and in which Sir Lucien had been found, but in the room behind it--the room with which the little window communicated.

The table upon which the telephone rested was set immediately under this mysterious window, the window was provided with a green blind, and the switchboard controlling the complicated lighting scheme was also within reach of anyone seated at the table.

Kerry rolled mint gum from side to side of his mouth, and absently tried the handle of the door opening out from this interior room--evidently the office of the establishment--into the corridor. He knew it to be locked. Turning, he walked through the suite and out on to the landing, passing the constable and going upstairs to the top floor, torch in hand.

From the main landing he walked along the narrow corridor until he stood at the head of the back stairs. The door nearest to him bore the name: "Cubanis Cigarette Company." He tried the handle. The door was locked, as he had anticipated. Kneeling down, he peered into the keyhole, holding the electric torch close beside his face and chewing industriously.

Ere long he stood up, descended again, but by the back stair, and stood staring reflectively at the door communicating with Kazmah's inner room. Then walking along the corridor to where the man stood on, the landing, he went in again to the mysterious apartments, but only to get his cane and his overall and to turn out the lights.

Five minutes later he was ringing the late Sir Lucien's door-bell.

A constable admitted him, and he walked straight through into the study where Coombes, looking very tired but smiling undauntedly, sat at a littered table studying piles of documents.
"Anything to report?" rapped Kerry.

"The man, Mareno, has gone to bed, and the expert from the Home office has been--"

Inspector Kerry brought his cane down with a crash upon the table, whereat Coombes started nervously.

"So that's it!" he shouted furiously, "an 'expert from the Home office'! So that's the dark horse in the fur coat. Coombes! I'm fed up to the back teeth with this gun from the Home office! If I'm not to have entire charge of the case I'll throw it up. I'll stand for no blasted overseer checking my work! Wait till I see the Assistant Commissioner! What the devil has the job to do with the Home office!"

"Can't say," murmured Coombes. "But he's evidently a big bug from the way Whiteleaf treated him. He instructed me to stay in the kitchen and keep an eye on Mareno while he prowled about in here."

"Instructed you!" cried Kerry, his teeth gleaming and his steel-blue eyes creating upon Coombes' mind an impression that they were emitting sparks. "Instructed you! I'll ask you a question, Detective-Sergeant Coombes: Who is in charge of this case?"

"Well, I thought you were."

"You thought I was?"

"Well, you are."

"I am? Very well--you were saying--?"

"I was saying that I went into the kitchen--"

"Before that! Something about 'instructed.'"

Poor Coombes smiled pathetically.

"Look here," he said, bravely meeting the ferocious glare of his superior, "as man to man. What could I do?"

"You could stop smiling!" snapped Kerry. "Hell!" He paced several times up and down the room. "Go ahead, Coombes."

"Well, there's nothing much to report. I stayed in the kitchen, and the man from the Home office was in here alone for about half an hour."

"Alone?"

"Inspector Whiteleaf stayed in the dining-room."

"Had he been 'instructed' too?"

"I expect so. I think he just came along as a sort of guide."

"Ah!" muttered Kerry savagely, "a sort of guide! Any idea what the bogey man did in here?"

"He opened the window. I heard him."

"That's funny. It's exactly what I'm going to do! This smart from Whitehall hasn't got a corner in notions yet, Coombes."

The room was a large and lofty one, and had been used by a former tenant as a studio. The toplights had been roofed over by Sir Lucien, however, but the raised platform, approached by two steps, which had probably been used as a model's throne, was a permanent fixture of the apartment. It was backed now by bookcases, except where a blue plush curtain was draped before a French window.

Kerry drew the curtain back, and threw open the folding leaves of the window. He found himself looking out upon the leads of Albemarle Street. No stars and no moon showed through the grey clouds draping the wintry sky, but a dim and ghostly half-light nevertheless rendered the ugly expanse visible from where he stood.

On one side loomed a huge tank, to the brink of which a rickety wooden ladder invited the explorer to ascend. Beyond it were a series of iron gangways and ladders forming part of the fire emergency arrangements of the neighboring institution. Straight ahead a section of building jutted up and revealed two small windows, which seemed to regard him like watching eyes.

He walked out on to the roof, looking all about him. Beyond the tank opened a frowning gully--the Arcade connecting Albemarle Street with old Bond Street; on the other hand, the scheme of fire gangways was continued. He began to cross the leads, going in the direction of Bond Street. Coombes watched him from the study. When he came to the more northerly of the two windows which had attracted his attention, he knelt down and flashed the ray of his torch through the glass.

A kind of small warehouse was revealed, containing stacks of packages. Immediately inside the window was a rough wooden table, and on this table lay a number of smaller packages, apparently containing cigarettes.

Kerry turned his attention to the fastening of the window. A glance showed him that it was unlocked. Resting the torch on the leads, he grasped the sash and gently raised the window, noting that it opened almost noiselessly. Then, taking up the torch again, he stooped and stepped in on to the table below.

It moved slightly beneath his weight. One of the legs was shorter than its fellows. But he reached the floor as quietly as possible, and instantly snapped off the light of the torch.

A heavy step sounded from outside--someone was mounting the stairs-- and a disk of light suddenly appeared
upon the ground-glass panel of the door.

Kerry stood quite still, chewing steadily.

"Who's there?" came the voice of the constable posted on Kazmah's landing.

The inspector made no reply.

"Is there anyone here?" cried the man.

The disk of light disappeared, and the alert constable could be heard moving along the corridor to inspect the other offices. But the ray had shone upon the frosted glass long enough to enable Kerry to read the words painted there in square black letters. They had appeared reversed, of course, and had read thus:

OC ETTERAGIC SINABUC

CHAPTER XI

THE DRUG SYNDICATE

At six-thirty that morning Margaret Halley was aroused by her maid--the latter but half awake--and sitting up in bed and switching on the lamp, she looked at the card which the servant had brought to her, and read the following:

CHIEF INSPECTOR KERRY, C.I.D. New Scotland Yard, S.W.I.

"Oh, dear," she said sleepily, "what an appallingly early visitor. Is the bath ready yet, Janet?"

"I'm afraid not," replied the maid, a plain, elderly woman of the old-fashioned useful servant type. "Shall I take a kettle into the bathroom?"

"Yes--that will have to do. Tell Inspector Kerry that I shall not be long."

Five minutes later Margaret entered her little consulting-room, where Kerry, having adjusted his tie, was standing before the mirror in the overmantle, staring at a large photograph of the charming lady doctor in military uniform. Kerry's fierce eyes sparkled appreciatively as his glance rested on the tall figure arrayed in a woollen dressing-gown, the masculine style of which by no means disguised the beauty of Margaret's athletic figure. She had hastily arranged her bright hair with deliberate neglect of all affectation. She belonged to that ultra-modern school which scorns to sue masculine admiration, but which cannot dispense with it nevertheless. She aspired to be assessed upon an intellectual basis, an ambition which her unfortunate good looks rendered difficult of achievement.

"Good morning, Inspector," she said composedly. "I was expecting you."

"Really, miss?" Kerry stared curiously. "Then you know what I've come about?"

"I think so. Won't you sit down? I am afraid the room is rather cold. Is it about--Sir Lucien Pyne?"

"Well," replied Kerry, "it concerns him certainly. I've been in communication by telephone with Hinkes, Mr. Monte Irvin's butler, and from him I learned that you were professionally attending Mrs. Irvin."

"I was not her regular medical adviser, but--"

Margaret hesitated, glancing rapidly at the Inspector, and then down at the writing-table before which she was seated. She began to tap the blotting-pad with an ivory paper-knife. Kerry was watching her intently.

"Upon your evidence, Miss Halley," he said rapidly, "may depend the life of the missing woman."

"Oh!" cried Margaret, "whatever can have happened to her? I rang up as late as two o'clock this morning; after that I abandoned hope."

"There's something underlying the case that I don't understand, miss. I look to you to put me wise."

She turned to him impulsively.

"I will tell you all I know, Inspector," she said. "I will be perfectly frank with you."

"Good!" rapped Kerry. "Now--you have known Mrs. Monte Irvin for some time?"

"For about two years."

"You didn't know her when she was on the stage?"

"No. I met her at a Red Cross concert at which she sang."

"Do you think she loved her husband?"

"I know she did."

"Was there any--prior attachment?"

"Not that I know of."

"Mr. Quentin Gray?"

Margaret smiled, rather mirthlessly.

"He is my cousin, Inspector, and it was I who introduced him to Rita Irvin. I sincerely wish I had never done so. He lost his head completely."

"There was nothing in Mrs. Irvin's attitude towards him to justify her husband's jealousy?"

"She was always frightfully indiscreet, Inspector, but nothing more. You see, she is greatly admired, and is used to the company of silly, adoring men. Her husband doesn't really understand the ways of these Bohemian folks. I knew it would lead to trouble sooner or later."

"Ah!"
Chief Inspector Kerry thrust his hands into the pockets of his jacket.

"Now--Sir Lucien?"

Margaret tapped more rapidly with the paper-knife.

"Sir Lucien belonged to a set of which Rita had been a member during her stage career. I think--he admired her; in fact, I believe he had offered her marriage. But she did not care for him in the least--in that way."

"Then in what way did she care for him?" rapped Kerry.

"Well--now we are coming to the point." Momentarily she hesitated, then: "They were both addicted--"

"Yes?"

"--to drugs."

"Eh?" Kerry's eyes grew hard and fierce in a moment. "What drugs?"

"All sorts of drugs. Shortly after I became acquainted with Rita Irvin I learned that she was a victim of the drug habit, and I tried to cure her. I regret to say that I failed. At that time she had acquired a taste for opium."

Kerry said not a word, and Margaret raised her head and looked at him pathetically.

"I can see that you have no pity for the victims of this ghastly vice, Inspector Kerry," she said.

"I haven't!" he snapped fiercely. "I admit I haven't, miss. It's bad enough in the heathens, but for an Englishwoman to dope herself is downright unchristian and beastly."

"Yet I have come across so many of these cases, during the war and since, that I have begun to understand how easy, how dreadfully easy it is, for a woman especially, to fall into the fatal habit. Bereavement or that most frightful of all mental agonies, suspense, will too often lead the poor victim into the path that promises forgetfulness. Rita Irvin's case is less excusable. I think she must have begun drug-taking because of the mental and nervous exhaustion resulting from late hours and over-much gaiety. The demands of her profession proved too great for her impaired nervous energy, and she sought some stimulant which would enable her to appear bright on the stage when actually she should have been recuperating, in sleep, that loss of vital force which can be recuperated in no other way."

"But opium!" snapped Kerry.

"I am afraid her other drug habits had impaired her will, and shaken her self-control. She was tempted to try opium by its promise of a new and novel excitement."

"Her husband, I take it, was ignorant of all this?"

"I believe he was. Quentin--Mr. Gray--had no idea of it either."

"Then it was Sir Lucien Pyne who was in her confidence in the matter?"

Margaret nodded slowly, still tapping the blotting-pad.

"He used to accompany her to places where drugs could be obtained, and on several occasions--I cannot say how many--I believe he went with her to some den in Chinatown. It may have been due to Mr. Irvin's discovery that his wife could not satisfactorily account for some of these absences from home which led him to suspect her fidelity."

"Ah!" said Kerry hardly, "I shouldn't wonder. And now"--he thrust out a pointing finger--"where did she get these drugs?"

Margaret met the fierce stare composedly.

"I have said that I shall be quite frank," she replied. "In my opinion she obtained them from Kazmah."

"Kazmah!" shouted Kerry. "Excuse me, miss, but I see I've been wearing blinkers without knowing it! Kazmah's was a dope-shop?"

"That has been my belief for a long time, Inspector. I may add that I have never been able to obtain a shred of evidence to prove it. I am so keenly interested in seeing the people who pander to this horrible vice unmasked and dealt with as they merit, that I have tried many times to find out if my suspicion was correct."

Inspector Kerry was writhing his shoulders excitedly. "Did you ever visit Kazmah?" he asked.

"Yes. I asked Rita Irvin to take me, but she refused, and I could see that the request embarrassed her. So I went alone."

"Describe exactly what took place."

Margaret Halley stared reflectively at the blotting-pad for a moment, and then described a typical seance at Kazmah's. In conclusion:

"As I came away," she said, "I bought a bottle of every kind of perfume on sale, some of the incense, and also a box of sweetmeat; but they all proved to be perfectly harmless. I analyzed them."

Kerry's eyes glistened with admiration.

"We could do with you at the Yard, miss," he said. "Excuse me for saying so."

Kerry smiled rather wanly.

"Now--this man Kazmah," resumed the Chief Inspector. "Did you ever see him again?"

"Never. I have been trying for months and months to find out who he is."

Kerry's face became very grim.
"About ten trained men are trying to find that out at the present moment!" he rapped. "Do you think he wore a make-up?"

"He may have done so," Margaret admitted. "But his features were obviously undisguised, and his eyes one would recognize anywhere. They were larger than any human eyes I have ever seen."

"He couldn't have been the Egyptian who looked after the shop, for instance?"

"Impossible! He did not remotely resemble him. Besides, the man to whom you refer remained outside to receive other visitors. Oh, that's out of the question, Inspector."

"The light was very dim?"

"Very dim indeed, and Kazmah never once raised his head. Indeed, except for a dignified gesture of greeting and one of dismissal, he never moved. His immobility was rather uncanny."

Kerry began to pace up and down the narrow room, and:

"He bore no resemblance to the late Sir Lucien Pyne, for instance?" he rapped.

Margaret laughed outright and her laughter was so inoffensive and so musical that the Chief Inspector laughed also.

"That's more hopeless than ever!" she said. "Poor Sir Lucien had strong, harsh features and rather small eyes. He wore a moustache, too. But Sir Lucien, I feel sure, was one of Kazmah's clients."

"Ah!" said Kerry. "And what leads you to suppose Miss Halley, that this Kazmah dealt in drugs?"

"Well, you see, Rita Irvin was always going there to buy perfumes, and she frequently sent her maid as well."

"But"--Kerry stared--"you say that the perfume was harmless."

"That which was sold to casual visitors was harmless, Inspector. But I strongly suspect that regular clients were supplied with something quite different. You see, I know no fewer than thirty unfortunate women in the West End of London alone who are simply helpless slaves to various drugs, and I think it more than a coincidence that upon their dressing-tables I have almost invariably found one or more of Kazmah's peculiar antique flasks."

Chief Inspector Kerry's jaw muscles protruded conspicuously.

"You speak of patients?" he asked.

Margaret nodded her head.

"When a woman becomes addicted to the drug habit," she explained, "she sometimes shuns her regular medical adviser. I have many patients who came to me originally simply because they dared not face their family doctor. In fact, since I gave up Army work, my little practice has threatened to develop into that of a drug-habit specialist."

"Have you taxed any of these people with obtaining drugs from Kazmah?"

"Not directly. It would have been undiplomatic. But I have tried to surprise them into telling me. Unfortunately, these poor people are as cunning as any other kind of maniac, for, of course, it becomes a form of mania. They recognize that confession might lead to a stoppage of supplies--the eventuality they most dread."

"Did you examine the contents of any of these flasks found on dressing-tables?"

"I rarely had an opportunity; but when I did they proved to contain perfume when they contained anything."

"H'm," mused Kerry, and although in deference to Margaret, he had denied himself chewing-gum, his jaws worked automatically. "I gather that Mrs. Monte Irvin had expressed a wish to see you last night?"

"Yes. Apparently she was threatened with a shortage of cocaine."

"Cocaine was her drug?"

"One of them. She had tried them all, poor, silly girl! You must understand that for a habitual drug-taker suddenly to be deprived of drugs would lead to complete collapse, perhaps death. And during the last few days I had noticed a peculiar nervous symptom in Rita Irvin which had interested me. Finally, the day before yesterday, she confessed that her usual source of supply had been closed to her. Her words were very vague, but I gathered that some form of coercion was being employed."

"What with?"

"I have no idea. But she used the words, 'They will drive me mad,' and seemed to be in a dangerously nervous condition. She said that she was going to make a final attempt to obtain a supply of the poison which had become indispensable to her. 'I cannot do without it!' she said. 'But if they refuse, will you give me some?'"

"What did you say?"

"I begged of her, as I had done on many previous occasions, to place herself in my hands. But she evaded a direct answer, as is the way of one addicted to this vice. 'If I cannot get some by tomorrow,' she said, 'I shall go mad, or dead. Can I rely on you?"

"I told her that I would prescribe cocaine for her on the distinct understanding that from the first dose she was to place herself under my care for a cure."

"She agreed?"

"She agreed. Yesterday afternoon, while I was away at an important case, she came here. Poor Rita!" Margaret's
soft voice trembled. "Look --she left this note."

From a letter-rack she took a square sheet of paper and handed it to the Chief Inspector. He bent his fierce eyes
upon the writing--large, irregular and shaky.

"'Dear Margaret,'" he read aloud. "'Why aren't you at home? I am wild with pain, and feel I am going mad. Come
to me directly you return, and bring enough to keep me alive. I--', Hullo! there's no finish!"

He glanced up from the page. Margaret Halley's eyes were dim.

"She despaired of my coming and went to Kazmah," she said. "Can you doubt that that was what she went for?"

"No!" snapped Kerry savagely, "I can't. But do you mean to tell me, Miss Halley, that Mrs. Irvin couldn't get
cocaine anywhere else? I know for a fact that it's smuggled in regularly, and there's more than one receiver."

Margaret looked at him strangely.

"I know it, too, Inspector," she said quietly. "Owing to the lack of enterprise on the part of our British drug-
houses, even reputable chemists are sometimes dependent upon illicit stock from Japan and America. But do you
know that the price of these smuggled drugs has latterly become so high as to be prohibitive in many cases?"

"I don't. What are you driving at, miss?"

"At this: Somebody had made a corner in contraband drugs. The most wicked syndicate that ever was formed
has got control of the lives of, it may be, thousands of drug-slaves!"

Kerry's teeth closed with a sharp snap.

"At last," he said, "I see where the smart from the Home office comes in."

"The Secretary of State has appointed a special independent commissioner to inquire into this hellish traffic,"
replied Margaret quietly. "I am glad to say that I have helped in getting this done by the representations which I have
made to my uncle, Lord Wrexborough. But I give you my word, Inspector Kerry, that I have withheld nothing from
you any more than from him."

"Him!" snapped Kerry, eyes fiercely ablaze.

"From the Home Office representative--before whom I have already given evidence."

Chief Inspector Kerry took up his hat, cane and overall from the chair upon which he had placed them and, his
face a savage red mask, bowed with a fine courtesy. He burned to learn particulars; he disdained to obtain them from
a woman.

"Good morning, Miss Halley," he said. "I am greatly indebted to you."

He walked stiffly from the room and out of the flat without waiting for a servant to open the door.

PART SECOND
MRS. SIN
CHAPTER XII
THE MAID OF THE MASQUE

The past life of Mrs. Monte Irvin, in which at this time three distinct groups of investigators became interested--
namely, those of Whitehall, Scotland Yard, and Fleet Street--was of a character to have horrified the prudish, but to
have excited the compassion of the wise.

Daughter of a struggling suburban solicitor, Rita Esden, at the age of seventeen, from a delicate and rather
commonplace child began to develop into a singularly pretty girl of an elusive and fascinating type of beauty, almost
eternal in her dainty coloring, and possessed of large and remarkably fine eyes, together with a wealth of copper-
red hair, a crown which seemed too heavy for her slender neck to support. Her father viewed her increasing charms
and ever-growing list of admirers with the gloomy apprehension of a disappointed man who had come to look upon
each gift of the gods as a new sorrow cunningly disguised. Her mother, on the contrary, fanned the girl's natural
vanity and ambition with a success which rarely attended the enterprises of this foolish old woman, and Rita proving
to be endowed with a moderately good voice, a stage career was determined upon without reference to the contrary
wishes of Mr. Esden.

Following the usual brief "training" which is counted sufficient for an aspirant to musical comedy honors, Rita,
by the prefixing of two letters to her name, set out to conquer the play-going world as Rita Dresden.

Two years of hard work and disappointment served to dispel the girl's illusions. She learned to appreciate at its
true value that masculine admiration which, in an unusual degree, she had the power to excite. Those of her admirers
who were in a position to assist her professionally were only prepared to use their influence upon terms which she
was unprepared to accept. Those whose intentions were strictly creditable, by some malignancy of fate, possessed no
influence whatever. She came to regard herself as a peculiarly unlucky girl, being ignorant of the fact that Fortune,
an impish hierophant, imposes identical tests upon every candidate who aspires to the throne of a limelight princess.

Matters stood thus when a new suitor appeared in the person of Sir Lucien Pyne. When his card was brought up
to Rita, her heart leaped because of a mingled emotion of triumph and fear which the sight of the baronet's name had
occasioned. He was a director of the syndicate in whose production she was playing--a man referred to with awe by
every girl in the company as having it in his power to make or mar a professional reputation. Not that he took any active part in the affairs of the concern; on the contrary, he was an aristocrat who held himself aloof from all matters smacking of commerce, but at the same time one who invested his money shrewdly. Sir Lucien's protégée of today was London's idol of tomorrow, and even before Rita had spoken to him she had fought and won a spiritual battle between her true self and that vain, admiration-loving Rita Dresden who favored capitulation.

She knew that Sir Lucien's card represented a signpost at the cross-roads where many a girl, pretty but not exceptionally talented, had hesitated with beating heart. It was no longer a question of remaining a member of the chorus (and understudy for a small part) or of accepting promotion to "lead" in a new production; it was that of accepting whatever Sir Lucien chose to offer--or of retiring from the profession so far as this powerful syndicate was concerned.

Such was the reputation enjoyed at this time by Sir Lucien Pyne among those who had every opportunity of forming an accurate opinion.

Nevertheless, Rita was determined not to succumb without a struggle. She did not count herself untalented nor a girl to be lightly valued, and Sir Lucien might prove to be less black than rumor had painted him. As presently appeared, both in her judgment of herself and in that of Sir Lucien, she was at least partially correct. He was very courteous, very respectful, and highly attentive.

Her less favored companions smiled significantly when the familiar Rolls-Royce appeared at the stage door night after night, never doubting that Rita Dresden was chosen to "star" in the forthcoming production, but, with rare exceptions, frankly envying her this good fortune.

Rita made no attempt to disillusion them, recognizing that it must fail. She was resigned to being misjudged. If she could achieve success at that price, success would have been purchased cheaply.

That Sir Lucien was deeply infatuated she was not slow to discover, and with an address perfected by experience and a determination to avoid the easy path inherited from a father whose scrupulous honesty had ruined his professional prospects, she set to work to win esteem as well as admiration.

Sir Lucien was first surprised, then piqued, and finally interested by such unusual tactics. The second phase was the dangerous one for Rita, and during a certain luncheon at Romanos her fate hung in the balance. Sir Lucien realized that he was in peril of losing his head over this tantalizingly pretty girl who gracefully kept him at a distance, fencing with an adroitness which was baffling, and Sir Lucien Pyne had set out with no intention of doing anything so preposterous as falling in love. Keenly intuitive, Rita scented danger and made a bold move. Carelessly rolling a bread-crumble along the cloth:

"I am giving up the stage when the run finishes," she said.

"Indeed," replied Sir Lucien imperturbably. "Why?"

"I am tired of stage life. I have been invited to go and live with my uncle in New York and have decided to accept. You see"--she bestowed upon him a swift glance of her brilliant eyes--"men in the theatrical world are not all like you. Real friends, I mean. It isn't very nice, sometimes."

Sir Lucien deliberately lighted a cigarette. If Rita was bluffing, he mused, she had the pluck to make good her bluff. And if she did so? He dropped the extinguished match upon a plate. Did he care? He glanced at the girl, who was smiling at an acquaintance on the other side of the room. Fortune's wheel spins upon a needle point. By an artistic performance occupying less than two minutes, but suggesting that Rita possessed qualities which one day might spell success, she had decided her fate. Her heart was beating like a hammer in her breast, but she preserved an attitude of easy indifference. Without for a moment believing in the American uncle, Sir Lucien did believe, correctly, that Rita Dresden was about to elude him. He realized, too, that he was infinitely more interested than he had ever been hitherto, and more interested than he had intended to become.

This seemingly trivial conversation was a turning point, and twelve months later Rita Dresden was playing the title role in The Maid of the Masque. Sir Lucien had discovered himself to be really in love with her, and he might quite possibly have offered her marriage even if a dangerous rival had not appeared to goad him to that desperate leap--for so he regarded it. Monte Irvin, although considerably Rita's senior, had much to commend him in the eyes of the girl--and in the eyes of her mother, who still retained a curious influence over her daughter. He was much more wealthy than Pyne, and although the latter was a baronet, Irvin was certain to be knighted ere long, so that Rita would secure the appendage of "Lady" in either case. Also, his reputation promised a more reliable husband than Sir Lucien could be expected to make. Moreover, Rita liked him, whereas she had never sincerely liked and trusted Sir Lucien. And there was a final reason--of which Mrs. Esden knew nothing.

On the first night that Rita had been entrusted with a part of any consequence--and this was shortly after the conversation at Romanos--she had discovered herself to be in a state of hopeless panic. All her scheming and fencing would have availed her nothing if she were to break down at the critical moment. It was an eventuality which Sir Lucien had foreseen, and he seized the opportunity at once of securing a new hold upon the girl and of
rendering her more pliable than he had hitherto found her to be. At this time the idea of marriage had not presented itself to Sir Lucien.

Some hours before the performance he detected her condition of abject fright . . . and from his waistcoat pocket he took a little gold snuff-box.

At first the girl declined to follow advice which instinctively she distrusted, and Sir Lucien was too clever to urge it upon her. But he glanced casually at his wrist-watch--and poor Rita shuddered. The gold box was hidden again in the baronet's pocket.

To analyze the process which thereupon took place in Rita's mind would be a barren task, since its result was a foregone conclusion. Daring ambition rather than any merely abstract virtue was the keynote of her character. She had rebuffed the advances of Sir Lucien as she had rebuffed others, primarily because her aim in life was set higher than mere success in light comedy. This she counted but a means to a more desirable end--a wealthy marriage. To the achievement of such an alliance the presence of an accepted lover would be an obstacle; and true love Rita Dresden had never known. Yet, short of this final sacrifice which some women so lightly made, there were few scruples which she was not prepared to discard in furtherance of her designs. Her morality, then, was diplomatic, for the vice of ambition may sometimes make for virtue.

Rita's vivacious beauty and perfect self-possession on the fateful night earned her a permanent place in stageland: Rita Dresden became a "star." She had won a long and hard-fought battle; but in avoiding one master she had abandoned herself to another.

The triumph of her debut left her strangely exhausted. She dreaded the coming of the second night almost as keenly as she had dreaded the ordeal of the first. She struggled, poor victim, and only increased her terrors. Not until the clock showed her that in twenty minutes she must make her first entrance did she succumb. But Sir Lucien's gold snuff-box lay upon her dressing-table--and she was trembling. When at last she heard the sustained note of the oboe in the orchestra giving the pitch to the answering violins, she raised the jewelled lid of the box.

So she entered upon the path which leads down to destruction, and since to conjure with the drug which pharmacists know as methylbenzoyl eponine is to raise the demon Insomnia, ere long she found herself exploring strange by-paths in quest of sleep.

By the time that she was entrusted with the leading part in The Maid of the Masque, she herself did not recognize how tenacious was the hold which this fatal habit had secured upon her. In the company of Sir Lucien Pyne she met other devotees, and for a time came to regard her unnatural mode of existence as something inseparable from the Bohemian life. To the horrible side of it she was blind.

It was her meeting with Monte Irvin during the run of this successful play which first awakened a dawning comprehension; not because she ascribed his admiration to her artificial vivacity, but because she realized the strength of the link subsisting between herself and Sir Lucien. She liked and respected Irvin, and as a result began to view her conduct from a new standpoint. His life was so entirely open and free from reproach while part of her own was dark and secret. She conceived a desire to be done with that dark and secret life.

This was a shadow-land over which Sir Lucien Pyne presided, and which must be kept hidden from Monte Irvin; and it was not until she thus contemplated cutting herself adrift from it all that she perceived the Gordian knot which bound her to the drug coterie. How far, yet how smoothly, by all but imperceptible stages she had glided down the stream since that night when the gold box had lain upon her dressing-table! Kazmah's drug store in Bond Street had few secrets for her; or so she believed. She knew that the establishment of the strange, immobile Egyptian was a source from which drugs could always be obtained; she knew that the dream-reading business served some double purpose; but she did not know the identity of Kazmah.

Two of the most insidious drugs familiar to modern pharmacy were wooing her to slavery, and there was no strong hand to hold her back. Even the presence of her mother might have offered some slight deterrent at this stage of Rita's descent, but the girl had quitted her suburban home as soon as her salary had rendered her sufficiently independent to do so, and had established herself in a small but elegant flat situated in the heart of theatreland.

But if she had walked blindly into the clutches of cocaine and veronal, her subsequent experiments with chandu were prompted by indefensible curiosity, and a false vanity which urged her to do everything that was "done" by the ultra-smart and vicious set of which she had become a member.

Her first introduction to opium-smoking was made under the auspices of an American comedian then appearing in London, an old devotee of the poppy, and it took place shortly after Sir Lucien Pyne had proposed marriage to Rita. This proposal she had not rejected outright; she had pleaded time for consideration. Monte Irvin was away, and Rita secretly hoped that on his return he would declare himself. Meanwhile she indulged in every new craze which became fashionable among her associates. A chandu party took place at the American's flat in Duke Street, and Rita, who had been invited, and who had consented to go with Sir Lucien Pyne, met there for the first time the woman variously known as "Lola" and "Mrs. Sin."
CHAPTER XIII
A CHANDU PARTY

From the restaurant at which she had had supper with Sir Lucien, Rita proceeded to Duke Street. Alighting from
Pyne's car at the door, they went up to the flat of the organizer of the opium party--Mr. Cyrus Kilfane. One other
guest was already present—a slender, fair woman, who was introduced by the American as Mollie Gretna, but whose
weakly pretty face Rita recognized as that of a notorious society divorcee, foremost in the van of every new craze, a
past-mistress of the smartest vices.

Kilfane had sallow, expressionless features and drooping, light-colored eyes. His straw-hued hair, brushed back
from a sloping brow, hung lankly down upon his coat-collar. Long familiarity with China's ruling vice and contact
with those who practiced it had brought about that mysterious physical alteration—apparently reflecting a mental
change—so often to be seen in one who has consorted with Chinamen. Even the light eyes seemed to have grown
slightly oblique; the voice, the unimpassioned greeting, were those of a son of Cathay. He carried himself with a
stoop and had a queer, shuffling gait.

"Ah, my dear daughter," he murmured in a solemnly facetious manner, "how glad I am to welcome you to our
poppy circle."

He slowly turned his half-closed eyes in Pyne's direction, and slowly turned them back again.

"Do you seek forgetfulness of old joys?" he asked. "This is my own case and Pyne's. Or do you, as Mollie does,
seek new joys—youth's eternal quest?"

Rita laughed with a careless abandon which belonged to that part of her character veiled from the outer world.

"I think I agree with Miss Gretna," she said lightly. "There is not so much happiness in life that I want to forget
the little I have had."

"Happiness," murmured Kilfane. "There is no real happiness. Happiness is smoke. Let us smoke."

"I am curious, but half afraid," declared Rita. "I have heard that opium sometimes has no other effect than to
make one frightfully ill."

"Oh, my dear!" cried Miss Gretna, with a foolish giggling laugh, "you will love it! Such fascinating dreams! Such
delightful adventures!"

"Other drugs," drawled Sir Lucien, "merely stimulate one's normal mental activities. Chandu is a key to another
life. Cocaine, for instance enhances our capacity for work. It is only a heretic like De Quincey who prostitutes the
magic gum to such base purposes. Chandu is misunderstood in Europe; in Asia it is the companion of the aesthete's
leisure."

"But surely," said Rita, "one pipe of opium will not produce all these wonders."

"Some people never experience them at all," interrupted Miss Gretna. "The great idea is to get into a comfortable
position, and just resign yourself—let yourself go. Oh, it's heavenly!"

Cyrus Kilfane turned his dull eyes in Rita's direction.

"A question of temperament and adaptability," he murmured. "De Quincey, Pyne"—slowly turning towards the
baronet—"is didactic, of course; but his Confessions may be true, nevertheless. He forgets, you see, that he possessed
an unusual constitution, and the temperament of a Norwegian herring. He forgets, too, that he was a laudanum
drinker, not an opium smoker. Now you, my daughter"—the lustreless eyes again sought Rita's flushed face—"are
vivid—intensely vital. If you can succeed in resigning yourself to the hypnosis induced your experiences will be
delightful. Trust your Uncle Cy."

Leaving Rita chatting with Miss Gretna, Kilfane took Pyne aside, offering him a cigarette from an ornate,
jewelled case.

"Hello," said the baronet, "can you still get these?"

"With the utmost difficulty," murmured Kilfane, returning the case to his pocket. "Lola charges me five guineas
a hundred for them, and only supplies them as a favor. I shall be glad to get back home, Pyne. The right stuff is the
wrong price in London."

Sir Lucien laughed sardonically, lighting Kilfane's cigarette and then his own.

"I find it so myself," he said. "Everything except opium is to be had at Kazmah's, and nothing except opium
interests me."

"He supplies me with cocaine," murmured the comedian. "His figure works out, as nearly as I can estimate it, at
10s 7 1/2d. a grain. I saw him about it yesterday afternoon, pointing out to the brown guy that as the wholesale price
is roughly 2 1/4d., I regarded his margin of profit as somewhat broad."

"Indeed!"

"The first time I had ever seen him, Pyne. I brought an introduction from Dr. Silver, of New York, and Kazmah
supplied me without question—at a price."

"You always saw Rashid?"
"Yes. If there were other visitors I waited. But yesterday I made a personal appointment with Kazmah. He pretended to think I had come to have a dream interpreted. He is clever, Pyne. He never moved a muscle throughout the interview. But finally he assured me that all the receivers in England had amalgamated, and that the price he charged represented a very narrow margin of profit. Of course he is a liar. He is making a fortune. Do you know him personally?"

"No," replied Sir Lucien, "outside his Bond Street home of mystery he is unknown. A clever man, as you say. You obtain your opium from Lola?"

"Yes. Kazmah sent her to me. She keeps me on ridiculously low rations, and if I had not brought my own outfit I don't think she would have sold me one. Of course, her game is beating up clients for the Limehouse dive."

"You have visited 'The House of a Hundred Raptures'?

"Many times, at week-ends. Opium, like wine, is better enjoyed in company."

"Does she post you the opium?"

"Oh, no; my man goes to Limehouse for it. Ah! here she is."

A woman came in, carrying a brown leather attache case. She had left her hat and coat in the hall, and wore a smart blue serge skirt and a white blouse. She was not tall, but she possessed a remarkably beautiful figure which the cut of her garments was not intended to disguise, and her height was appreciably increased by a pair of suede shoes having the most wonderful heels which Rita ever remembered to have seen worn on or off the stage. They seemed to make her small feet appear smaller, and lent to her slender ankles an exaggerated frontal curve.

Her hair was of that true, glossy black which suggests the blue sheen of raven's plumage, and her thickly fringed eyes were dark and southern as her hair. She had full, voluptuous lips, and a bold self-assurance. In the swift, calculating glance which she cast about the room there was something greedy and evil; and when it rested upon Rita Dresden's dainty beauty to the evil greed was added cruelty.

"Another little sister, dear Lola," murmured Kilfane. "Of course, you know who it is? This, my daughter," turning the sleepy glance towards Rita, "is our officiating priestess, Mrs. Sin."

The woman so strangely named revealed her gleaming teeth in a swift, unpleasant smile, then her nostrils dilated and she glanced about her suspiciously.

"Someone smokes the chandu cigarettes," she said, speaking in a low tone which, nevertheless, failed to disguise her harsh voice, and with a very marked accent.

"I am the offender, dear Lola," said Kilfane, dreamily waving his cigarette towards her. "I have managed to make the last hundred spin out. You have brought me a new supply?"

"Oh no, indeed," replied Mrs. Sin, tossing her head in a manner oddly reminiscent of a once famous Spanish dancer. "Next Tuesday you get some more. Ah! it is no good! You talk and talk and it cannot alter anything. Until they come I cannot give them to you."

"But it appears to me," murmured Kilfane, "that the supply is always growing less."

"Of course. The best goes all to Edinburgh now. I have only three sticks of Yezd left of all my stock."

"But the cigarettes."

"Are from Buenos Ayres? Yes. But Buenos Ayres must get the opium before we get the cigarettes, eh? Five cases come to London on Tuesday, Cy. Be of good courage, my dear."

She patted the sallow cheek of the American with her jewelled fingers, and turned aside, glancing about her.

"Yes," murmured Kilfane. "We are all present, Lola. I have had the room prepared. Come, my children, let us enter the poppy portico."

He opened a door and stood aside, waving one thin yellow hand between the first two fingers of which smouldered the drugged cigarette. Led by Mrs. Sin the company filed into an apartment evidently intended for a drawing-room, but which had been hastily transformed into an opium divan.

Tables, chairs, and other items of furniture had been stacked against one of the walls and the floor spread with rugs, skins, and numerous silk cushions. A gas fire was alight, but before it had been placed an ornate Japanese screen whereon birds of dazzling plumage hovered amid the leaves of gilded palm trees. In the centre of the room stood a small card-table, and upon it were a large brass tray and an ivory pedestal exquisitely carved in the form of a nude figure having one arm upraised. The figure supported a lamp, the light of which was subdued by a barrel-shaped shade of Chinese workmanship.

Mollie Gretna giggled hysterically.

"Make yourself comfortable, dear," she cried to Rita, dropping down upon a heap of cushions stacked in a recess beside the fireplace. "I am going to take off my shoes. The last time, Cyrus, when I woke up my feet were quite numb."

"You should come down to my place," said Mrs. Sin, setting the leather case on the little card-table beside the lamp. "You have there your own little room and silken sheets to lie in, and it is quiet--so quiet."
"Oh!" cried Mollie Gretna, "I must come! But I daren't go alone. Will you come with me, dear?" turning to Rita.
"I don't know," was the reply. "I may not like opium."
"But if you do--and I know you will?"
"Why," said Rita, glancing rapidly at Pyne, "I suppose it would be a novel experience."
"Let me arrange it for you," came the harsh voice of Mrs. Sin. "Lucy will drive you both down--won't you, my dear?" The shadowed eyes glanced aside at Sir Lucien Pyne.
"Certainly," he replied. "I am always at the ladies' service."
Rita Dresden settled herself luxuriously into a nest of silk and fur in another corner of the room, regarding the baronet coquettishly through her half-lowered lashes.
"I won't go unless it is my party, Lucy," she said. "You must let me pay."
"A detail," murmured Pyne, crossing and standing beside her.
Interest now became centred upon the preparations being made by Mrs. Sin. From the attache case she took out a lacquered box, silken-lined like a jewel-casket. It contained four singular-looking pipes, the parts of which she began to fit together. The first and largest of these had a thick bamboo stem, an amber mouthpiece, and a tiny, disproportionate bowl of brass. The second was much smaller and was of some dark, highly-polished wood, mounted with silver conceived in an ornate Chinese design representing a long-tailed lizard. The mouthpiece was of jade. The third and fourth pipes were yet smaller, a perfectly matched pair in figured ivory of exquisite workmanship, delicately gold-mounted.
"These for the ladies," said Mrs. Sin, holding up the pair. "You"--glancing at Kilfane--"have got your own pipe, I know."
She laid them upon the tray, and now took out of the case a little copper lamp, a smaller lacquered box and a silver spatula, her jewelled fingers handling the queer implements with a familiarity bred of habit.
"What a strange woman!" whispered Rita to Pyne. "Is she an oriental?"
"Cuban-Jewess," he replied in a low voice.
Mrs. Sin carefully lighted the lamp, which burned with a short, bluish flame, and, opening the lacquered box, she dipped the spatula into the thick gummy substance which it contained and twisted the little instrument round and round between her fingers, presently withdrawing it with a globule of chandu, about the size of a bean, adhering to the end. She glanced aside at Kilfane.
"Chinese way, eh?" she said.
She began to twirl the prepared opium above the flame of the lamp. From it a slight, sickly smelling vapor arose. No one spoke, but all watched her closely; and Rita was conscious of a growing, pleasurable excitement. When by evaporation the chandu had become reduced to the size of a small pea, and a vague spirituous blue flame began to dance round the end of the spatula, Mrs. Sin pressed it adroitly into the tiny bowl of one of the ivory pipes, having first held the bowl inverted for a moment over the lamp. She turned to Rita.
"The guest of the evening," she said. "Do not be afraid. Inhale--oh, so gentle--and blow the smoke from the nostrils. You know how to smoke?"
"The same as a cigarette?" asked Rita excitedly, as Mrs. Sin bent over her.
"The same, but very, very gentle."
Rita took the pipe and raised the mouthpiece to the lips.

CHAPTER XIV

IN THE SHADE OF THE LONELY PALM

Persian opium of good quality contains from ten to fifteen percent morphine, and chandu made from opium of Yezd would contain perhaps twenty-five per cent of this potent drug; but because in the act of smoking distillation occurs, nothing like this quantity of morphine reaches the smoker. To the distilling process, also, may be due the different symptoms resulting from smoking chandu and injecting morphia --or drinking tincture of opium, as De Quincey did.

Rita found the flavor of the preparation to be not entirely unpleasant. Having overcome an initial aversion, caused by its marked medicinal tang, she grew reconciled to it and finished her first smoke without experiencing any other effect than a sensation of placid contentment. Deftly, Mrs. Sin renewed the pipe. Silence had fallen upon the party.

The second "pill" was no more than half consumed when a growing feeling of nausea seized upon the novice, becoming so marked that she dropped the ivory pipe weakly and uttered a faint moan.
Instantly, silently, Mrs. Sin was beside her.
"Lean forward--so," she whispered, softly, as if fearful of intruding her voice upon these sacred rites. "In a moment you will be better. Then, if you feel faint, lie back. It is the sleep. Do not fight against it."

The influence of the stronger will prevailed. Self-control and judgment are qualities among the first to succumb
to opium. Rita ceased to think longingly of the clean, fresh air, of escape from these sickly fumes which seemed now to fill the room with a moving vacuum. She bent forward, her chin resting upon her breast, and gradually the deathly sickness passed. Mentally, she underwent a change, too. From an active state of resistance the ego traversed a descending curve ending in absolute passivity. The floor had seemingly begun to revolve and was moving insidiously, so that the pattern of the carpet formed a series of concentric rings. She found this imaginary phenomenon to be soothing rather than otherwise, and resigned herself almost eagerly to the delusion.

Mrs. Sin allowed her to fall back upon the cushions--so gently and so slowly that the operation appeared to occupy several minutes and to resemble that of sinking into innumerable layers of swansdown. The sinuous figure bending over her grew taller with the passage of each minute, until the dark eyes of Mrs. Sin were looking down at Rita from a dizzy elevation. As often occurs in the case of a neurotic subject, delusion as to time and space had followed the depression of the sensory cells.

But surely, she mused, this could not be Mrs. Sin who towered so loftily above her. Of course, how absurd to imagine that a woman could remain motionless for so many hours. And Rita thought, now, that she had been lying for several hours beneath the shadow of that tall, graceful, and protective shape.

Why--it was a slender palm-tree, which stretched its fanlike foliage over her! Far, far above her head the long, dusty green fronds projected from the mast-like trunk. The sun, a ball of fiery brass, burned directly in the zenith, so that the shadow of the foliage lay like a carpet about her feet. That which she had mistaken for the ever-receding eyes of Mrs. Sin, wondering with a delightful vagueness why they seemed constantly to change color, proved to be a pair of brilliantly plumaged parrakeets perched upon a lofty branch of the palm.

This was an equatorial noon, and even if she had not found herself to be under the influence of a delicious abstraction Rita would not have moved; for, excepting the friendly palm, not another vestige of vegetation was visible right away to the horizon; nothing but an ocean of sand whereon no living thing moved. She and the parrakeets were alone in the heart of the Great Sahara.

But stay! Many, many miles away, a speck on the dusty carpet of the desert, something moved! Hours must elapse before that tiny figure, provided it were approaching, could reach the solitary palm. Delightedly, Rita contemplated the infinity of time. Even if the figure moved ever so slowly, she should be waiting there beneath the palm to witness its arrival. Already, she had been there for a period which she was far too indolent to strive to compute--a week, perhaps. She turned her attention to the parrakeets. One of them was moving, and she noted with delight that it had perceived her far below and was endeavoring to draw the attention of its less observant companion to her presence. For many hours she lay watching it and wondering why, since the one bird was so singularly intelligent, its companion was equally dull. When she lowered her eyes and looked out again across the sands, the figure had approached so close as to be recognizable.

It was that of Mrs. Sin. Rita appreciated the fitness of her presence, and experienced no surprise, only a mild curiosity. This curiosity was not concerned with Mrs. Sin herself, but with the nature of the burden which she bore upon her head.

She was dressed in a manner which Rita dreamily thought would have been inadequate in England, or even in Cuba, but which was appropriate in the Great Sahara. How exquisitely she carried herself, mused the dreamer; no doubt this fine carriage was due in part to her wearing golden shoes with heels like stilts, and in part to her having been trained to bear heavy burdens upon her head. Rita remembered that Sir Lucien had once described to her the elegant deportment of the Arab women, ascribing it to their custom of carrying water-jars in that way.

The appearance of the speck on the horizon had marked the height of her trance. Her recognition of Mrs. Sin had signaled the decline of the chandu influence. Now, the intrusion of a definite, uncontorted memory was evidence of returning cerebral activity.

Rita had no recollection of the sunset; indeed, she had failed to perceive any change in the form and position of the shadow cast by the foliage. It had spread, an ebony patch, equally about the bole of the tree, so that the sun must have been immediately overhead. But, of course, she had lain watching the parrakeets for several hours, and now night had fallen. The desert mounds were touched with silver, the sky was a nest of diamonds, and the moon cast a shadow of the palm like a bar of ebony right across the prospect to the rim of the sky dome.

Mrs. Sin stood before her, one half of her lithe body concealed by this strange black shadow and the other half gleaming in the moonlight so that she resembled a beautiful ivory statue which some iconoclast had cut in two.

Placing her burden upon the ground, Mrs. Sin knelt down before Rita and reverently kissed her hand, whispering: "I am your slave, my poppy queen."

She spoke in a strange language, no doubt some African tongue, but one which Rita understood perfectly. Then she laid one hand upon the object which she had carried on her head, and which now proved to be a large lacquered casket covered with Chinese figures and bound by three hoops of gold. It had a very curious shape.

"Do you command that the chest be opened?" she asked.
"Yes," answered Rita languidly.

Mrs. Sin threw up the lid, and from the interior of the casket which, because of the glare of the moon light, seemed every moment to assume a new form, drew out a bronze lamp.

"The sacred lamp," she whispered, and placed it on the sand. "Do you command that it be lighted?"

Rita inclined her head.

The lamp became lighted; in what manner she did not observe, nor was she curious to learn. Next from the large casket Mrs. Sin took another smaller casket and a very long, tapering silver bodkin. The first casket had perceptibly increased in size. It was certainly much larger than Rita had supposed; for now out from its shadowy interior Mrs. Sin began to take pipes--long pipes and short pipes, pipes of gold and pipes of silver, pipes of ivory and pipes of jade. Some were carved to represent the heads of demons, some had the bodies of serpents wreathed about them; others were encrusted with precious gems, and filled the night with the venomous sheen of emeralds, the blood-rays of rubies and golden glow of topaz, while the spear-points of diamonds flashed a challenge to the stars.

"Do you command that the pipes be lighted?" asked the harsh voice.

Rita desired to answer, "No," but heard herself saying, "Yes."

Thereupon, from a thousand bowls, linking that lonely palm to the remote horizon, a thousand elfin fires arose--blue-tongued and spirituous. Grey pencilings of smoke stole straightly upward to the sky, so that look where she would Rita could discern nothing but these countless thin, faintly wavering, vertical lines of vapor.

The dimensions of the lacquered casket had increased so vastly as to conceal the kneeling figure of Mrs. Sin, and staring at it wonderingly, Rita suddenly perceived that it was not an ordinary casket. She knew at last why its shape had struck her as being unusual.

It was a Chinese coffin.

The smell of the burning opium was stifling her. Those remorseless threads of smoke were closing in, twining themselves about her throat. It was becoming cold, too, and the moonlight was growing dim. The position of the moon had changed, of course, as the night had stolen on towards morning, and now it hung dimly before her. The smoke obscured it.

But was this smoke obscuring the moon? Rita moved her hands for the first time since she had found herself under the palm tree, weakly fending off those vaporous tentacles which were seeking to entwine themselves about her throat. Of course, it was not smoke obscuring the moon, she decided; it was a lamp, upheld by an ivory figure--a lamp with a Chinese shade.

A subdued roaring sound became audible; and this was occasioned by the gas fire, burning behind the Japanese screen on which gaily plumaged birds sported in the branches of golden palms. Rita raised her hands to her eyes. Mist obscured her sight. Swiftly, now, reality was asserting itself and banishing the phantasmagoria conjured up by chandu.

In her dim, cushioned corner Mollie Gretna lay back against the wall, her face pale and her weak mouth foolishly agape. Cyrus Kilfane was indistinguishable from the pile of rugs amid which he sprawled by the table, and of Sir Lucien Pyne nothing was to be seen but the outstretched legs and feet which projected grotesquely from a recess. Seated, oriental fashion, upon an improvised divan near the grand piano and propped up by a number of garish cushions, Rita beheld Mrs. Sin. The long bamboo pipe had fallen from her listless fingers. Her face wore an expression of mystic rapture like that characterizing the features of some Chinese Buddhas.

Fear, unaccountable but uncontrollable, suddenly seized upon Rita. She felt weak and dizzy, but she struggled partly upright.

"Lucy!" she whispered.

Her voice was not under control, and once more she strove to call to Pyne.

"Lucy!" came the hoarse whisper again.

The fire continued its muted roaring, but no other sound answered to the appeal. A horror of the companionship in which she found herself thereupon took possession of the girl. She must escape from these sleepers, whose spirits had been expelled by the potent necromancer, opium, from these empty tenements whose occupants had fled. The idea of the cool night air in the open streets was delicious.

She staggered to her feet, swaying drunkenly, but determined to reach the door. She shuddered, because of a feeling of internal chill which assailed her, but step by step crept across the room, opened the door, and tottered out into the hallway. There was no sound in the flat. Presumably Kilfane's man had retired, or perhaps he, too, was a devotee.

Rita's fur coat hung upon the rack, and although her fingers appeared to have lost all their strength and her arm to have become weak as that of an infant, she succeeded in detaching the coat from the hook. Not pausing to put it on, she opened the door and stumbled out on to the darkened landing. Whereas her first impulse had been to awaken someone, preferably Sir Lucien, now her sole desire was to escape undetected.
She began to feel less dizzy, and having paused for a moment on the landing, she succeeded in getting her coat on. Then she closed the door as quietly as possible, and clutching the handrail began to grope her way downstairs. There was only one flight, she remembered, and a short passage leading to the street door. She reached the passage without mishap, and saw a faint light ahead.

The fastenings gave her some trouble, but finally her efforts were successful, and she found herself standing in deserted Duke Street. There was no moon, but the sky was cloudless. She had no idea of the time, but because of the stillness of the surrounding streets she knew that it must be very late. She set out for her flat, walking slowly and wondering what explanation she should offer if a constable observed her.

Oxford Street showed deserted as far as the eye could reach, and her light footsteps seemed to awaken a hundred echoes. Having proceeded for some distance without meeting anyone, she observed—and experienced a childish alarm—the head-lights of an approaching car. Instantly the idea of hiding presented itself to her, but so rapidly did the big automobile speed along the empty thoroughfare that Rita was just passing a street lamp as the car raced by, and she must therefore have been clearly visible to the occupants.

Never for a moment glancing aside, Rita pressed on as quickly as she could. Then her vague alarm became actual terror. She heard the brakes being applied to the car, and heard the gritty sound of the tires upon the roadway as the vehicle's headlong progress was suddenly checked. She had been seen—perhaps recognized, and whoever was in the car proposed to return to speak to her.

If her strength had allowed she would have run, but now it threatened to desert her altogether and she tottered weakly. A pattering of footsteps came from behind. Someone was running back to overtake her. Recognizing escape to be impossible, Rita turned just as the runner came up with her.

"Rita!" he cried, rather breathlessly. "Miss Dresden!"
She stood very still, looking at the speaker.

It was Monte Irvin.

CHAPTER XV

METAMORPHOSIS

As Irvin seized her hands and looked at her eagerly, half-fearfully, Rita achieved sufficient composure to speak.

"Oh, Mr. Irvin," she said, and found that her voice was not entirely normal, "what must you think—"
He continued to hold her hands, and:

"I think you are very indiscreet to be out alone at three o'clock in the morning," he answered gently. "I was recalled to London by urgent business, and returned by road—fortunately, since I have met you."

"How can I explain—"

"I don't ask you to explain—Miss Dresden. I have no right and no desire to ask. But I wish I had the right to advise you."

"How good you are," she began, "and I—"

Her voice failed her completely, and her sensitive lips began to tremble. Monte Irvin drew her arm under his own and led her back to meet the car, which the chauffeur had turned and which was now approaching.

"I will drive you home," he said, "and if I may call in the morning. I should like to do so."

Rita nodded. She could not trust herself to speak again. And having placed her in the car, Monte Irvin sat beside her, reclaiming her hand and grasping it reassuringly and sympathetically throughout the short drive. They parted at her door.

"Good night," said Irvin, speaking very deliberately because of an almost uncontrollable desire which possessed him to take Rita in his arms, to hold her fast, to protect her from her own pathetic self and from those influences, dimly perceived about her, but which intuitively he knew to be evil.

"If I call at eleven will that be too early?"

"No," she whispered. "Please come early. There is a matinee tomorrow."

"You mean today," he corrected. "Poor little girl, how tired you will be. Good night."

"Good night," she said, almost inaudibly.

She entered, and, having closed the door, stood leaning against it for several minutes. Bleakness and nausea threatened to overcome her anew, and she felt that if she essayed another step she must collapse upon the floor. Her maid was in bed, and had not been awakened by Rita's entrance. After a time she managed to grope her way to her bedroom, where, turning up the light, she sank down helplessly upon the bed.

Her mental state was peculiar, and her thoughts revolved about the journey from Oxford Street homeward. A thousand times she mentally repeated the journey, speaking the same words over and over again, and hearing Monte Irvin's replies.

In those few minutes during which they had been together her sentiments in regard to him had undergone a change. She had always respected Irvin, but this respect had been curiously compounded of the personal and the
mercenary; his well-ordered establishment at Prince's Gate had loomed behind the figure of the man forming a pleasing background to the portrait. Without being showy he was a splendid "match" for any woman. His wife would have access to good society, and would enjoy every luxury that wealth could procure. This was the picture lovingly painted and constantly retouched by Rita's mother.

Now it had vanished. The background was gone, and only the man remained; the strong, reserved man whose deep voice had spoken so gently, whose devotion was so true and unselfish that he only sought to shield and protect her from follies the nature of which he did not even seek to learn. She was stripped of her vanity, and felt loathsome and unworthy of such a love.

"Oh," she moaned, rocking to and fro. "I hate myself--I hate myself!!"

Now that the victory so long desired seemed at last about to be won, she hesitated to grasp the prize. One solacing reflection she had. She would put the errors of the past behind her. Many times of late she had found herself longing to be done with the feverish life of the stage. Envied by those who had been her companions in the old chorus days, and any one of whom would have counted ambition crowned could she have played The Maid of the Masque, Rita thought otherwise. The ducal mansions and rose-bowered Riviera hotels through which she moved nightly had no charm for her; she sighed for reality, and had wearied long ago of the canvas palaces and the artificial Southern moonlight. In fact, stage life had never truly appealed to her--save as a means to an end.

Again and yet again her weary brain reviewed the episodes of the night since she had left Cyrus Kilfane's flat, so that nearly an hour had elapsed before she felt capable of the operation of undressing. Finally, however, she undressed, shuddering although the room was warmed by an electric radiator. The weakness and sickness had left her, but she was quite wide awake, although her brain demanded rest from that incessant review of the events of the evening.

She put on a warm wrap and seated herself at the dressing-table, studying her face critically. She saw that she was somewhat pale and that she had an indefinable air of dishevelling. Also she detected shadows beneath her eyes, the pupils of which were curiously contracted. Automatically, as a result of habit, she unlocked her jewel-case and took out a tiny phial containing minute cachets. She shook several out on to the palm of her hand, and then paused, staring at her reflection in the mirror.

For fully half a minute she hesitated, then:

"I shall never close my eyes all night if I don't!" she whispered, as if in reply to a spoken protest, "and I should be a wreck in the morning."

Thus, in the very apogee of her resolve to reform, did she drive one more rivet into the manacles which held her captive to Kazmah and Company.

Upon a little spirit-stove stood a covered vessel containing milk, which was placed there nightly by Rita's maid. She lighted the burner and warmed the milk. Then, swallowing three of the cachets from the phial, she drank the milk. Each cachet contained three decigrams of malourea, the insidious drug notorious under its trade name of Veronal.

She slept deeply, and was not awakened until ten o'clock. Her breakfast consisted of a cup of strong coffee; but when Monte Irvin arrived at eleven Rita exhibited no sign of nerve exhaustion. She looked bright and charming, and Irvin's heart leapt hotly in his breast at sight of her.

Following some desultory and unnatural conversation:

"May I speak quite frankly to you?" he said, drawing his chair nearer to the settee upon which Rita was seated.

She glanced at him swiftly. "Of course," she replied. "Is it--about my late hours?"

He shook his head, smiling rather sadly.

"That is only one phase of your rather feverish life, little girl," he said. "I don't mean that I want to lecture you or reproach you. I only want to ask you if you are satisfied?"

"Satisfied?" echoed Rita, twirling a tassel that hung from a cushion beside her.

"Yes. You have achieved success in your profession." He strove in vain to banish bitterness from his voice. "You are a 'star,' and your photograph is to be seen frequently in the smartest illustrated papers. You are clever and beautiful and have hosts of admirers. But-- are you satisfied?"

She stared absently at the silk tassel, twirling it about her white fingers more and more rapidly. Then:

"No," she answered softly.

Monte Irvin hesitated for a moment ere bending forward and grasping her hands.

"I am glad you are not satisfied," he whispered. "I always knew you had a soul for something higher--better."

She avoided his ardent gaze, but he moved to the settee beside her and looked into the bewitching face.

"Would it be a great sacrifice to give it all up?" he whispered in a yet lower tone.

Rita shook her head, persistently staring at the tassel.

"For me?"
She gave him a swift, half-frightened glance, pressing her hands against his breast and leaning back.  
"Oh, you don't know me--you don't know me!" she said, the good that was in her touched to life by the man's sincerity. "I--don't deserve it."

"Rita!" he murmured. "I won't hear you say that!"

"You know nothing about my friends--about my life--"

"I know that I want you for my wife, so that I can protect you from those 'friends.'" He took her in his arms, and she surrendered her lips to him.

"My sweet little girl," he whispered. "I cannot believe it--yet."

But the die was cast, and when Rita went to the theatre to dress for the afternoon performance she was pledged to sever her connection with the stage on the termination of her contract. She had luncheon with Monte Irvin, and had listened almost dazedly to his plans for the future. His wealth was even greater than her mother had estimated it to be, and Rita's most cherished dreams were dwarfed by the prospects which Monte Irvin opened up before her. It almost seemed as though he knew and shared her dearest ambitions. She was to winter beneath real Southern palms and to possess a cruising yacht, not one of boards and canvas like that which figured in The Maid of the Masque.

Real Southern palms, she mused guiltily, not those conjured up by opium. That he was solicitous for her health the nature of his schemes revealed. They were to visit Switzerland, and proceed thence to a villa which he owned in Italy. Christmas they would spend in Cairo, explore the Nile to Assouan in a private dahabiyeh, and return home via the Riviera in time to greet the English spring. Rita's delicate, swiftly changing color, her almost ethereal figure, her intense nervous energy he ascribed to a delicate constitution.

She wondered if she would ever dare to tell him the truth; if she ought to tell him.

Pyne came to her dressing-room just before the performance began. He had telephoned at an early hour in the morning, and had learned from her maid that Rita had come home safely and was asleep. Rita had expected him; but the influence of Monte Irvin, from whom she had parted at the stage-door, had prevailed until she actually heard Sir Lucien's voice in the corridor. She had resolutely refrained from looking at the little jewelled casket, engraved "From Lucy to Rita," which lay in her make-up box upon the table. But the imminence of an ordeal which she dreaded intensely weakened her resolution. She swiftly dipped a little nail-file into the white powder which the box contained, and when Pyne came in she turned to him composedly.

"I am so sorry if I gave you a scare last night, Lucy," she said. "But I woke up feeling sick, and I had to go out into the fresh air."

"I was certainly alarmed," drawled Pyne, whose swarthy face looked more than usually worn in the hard light created by the competition between the dressing-room lamps and the grey wintry daylight which crept through the windows. "Do you feel quite fit again?"

"Quite, thanks." Rita glanced at a ring which she had not possessed three hours before. "Oh, Lucy--I don't know how to tell you--"

She turned in her chair, looking up wistfully at Pyne, who was standing behind her. His jaw hardened, and his glance sought the white hand upon which the costly gems glittered. He coughed nervously.

"Perhaps"--his drawling manner of speech temporarily deserted him; he spoke jerkily--"perhaps--I can guess."

She watched him in a pathetic way, and there was a threat of tears in her beautiful eyes; for whatever his earlier intentions may have been, Sir Lucien had proved a staunch friend and, according to his own peculiar code, an honorable lover.

"Is it--Irvin?" he asked jerkily.

Rita nodded, and a tear glistened upon her darkened lashes.

Sir Lucien cleared his throat again, then coolly extended his hand, once more master of his emotions.

"Congratulations, Rita," he said. "The better man wins. I hope you will be very happy."

He turned and walked quietly out of the dressing-room.

CHAPTER XVI
LIMEHOUSE

It was on the following Tuesday evening that Mrs. Sin came to the theatre, accompanied by Mollie Gretna. Rita instructed that she should be shown up to the dressing-room. The personality of this singular woman interested her keenly. Mrs. Sin was well known in certain Bohemian quarters, but was always spoken of as one speaks of a pet vice. Not to know Mrs. Sin was to be outside the magic circle which embraced the exclusively smart people who practiced the latest absurdities.

The so-called artistic temperament is compounded of great strength and great weakness; its virtues are whiter than those of ordinary people and its vices blacker. For such a personality Mrs. Sin embodied the idea of secret pleasure. Her bold good looks repelled Rita, but the knowledge in her dark eyes was alluring.

"I arrange for you for Saturday night," she said. "Cy Kilfane is coming with Mollie, and you bring--"
"Oh," replied Rita hesitatingly, "I am sorry you have gone to so much trouble."

"No trouble, my dear," Mrs. Sin assured her. "Just a little matter of business, and you can pay the bill when it suits you."

"I am frightfully excited!" cried Mollie Gretna. "It is so nice of you to have asked me to join your party. Of course Cy goes practically every week, but I have always wanted another girl to go with. Oh, I shall be in a perfectly delicious panic when I find myself all among funny Chinamen and things! I think there is something so magnificently wicked-looking about a pigtail--and the very name of Limehouse thrills me to the soul!"

That fixity of purpose which had enabled Rita to avoid the cunning snares set for her feet and to snatch triumph from the very cauldron of shame without burning her fingers availed her not at all in dealing with Mrs. Sin. The image of Monte receded before this appeal to the secret pleasure-loving woman, of insatiable curiosity, primitive and unmoral, who dwells, according to a modern cynic philosopher, within every daughter of Eve touched by the fire of genius.

She accepted the arrangement for Saturday, and before her visitors had left the dressing-room her mind was busy with plausible deceits to cover the sojourn in Chinatown. Something of Mollie Gretna's foolish enthusiasm had communicated itself to Rita.

Later in the evening Sir Lucien called, and on hearing of the scheme grew silent. Rita glancing at his reflection in the mirror, detected a black and angry look upon his face. She turned to him.

"Why, Lucy," she said, "don't you want me to go?"

He smiled in his sardonic fashion.

"Your wishes are mine, Rita," he replied.

She was watching him closely.

"But you don't seem keen," she persisted. "Are you angry with me?"

"Angry?"

"We are still friends, aren't we?"

"Of course. Do you doubt my friendship?"

Rita's maid came in to assist her in changing for the third act, and Pyne went out of the room. But, in spite of his assurances, Rita could not forget that fierce, almost savage expression which had appeared upon his face when she had told him of Mrs. Sin's visit.

Later she taxed him on the point, but he suffered her inquiry with imperturbable sangfroid, and she found herself no wiser respecting the cause of his annoyance. Painful twinges of conscience came during the ensuing days, when she found herself in her fiance's company, but she never once seriously contemplated dropping the acquaintance of Mrs. Sin.

She thought, vaguely, as she had many times thought before, of cutting adrift from the entire clique, but there was no return of that sincere emotional desire to reform which she had experienced on the day that Monte Irvin had taken her hand, in blind trust, and had asked her to be his wife. Had she analyzed, or been capable of analyzing, her intentions with regard to the future, she would have learned that daily they inclined more and more towards compromise. The drug habit was sapping will and weakening morale, insidiously, imperceptibly. She was caught in a current of that "sacred river" seen in an opium-trance by Coleridge, and which ran--

"Through caverns measureless to man Down to a sunless sea."

Pyne's big car was at the stage-door on the fateful Saturday night, for Rita had brought her dressing-case to the theatre, and having called for Kilfane and Mollie Gretna they were to proceed direct to Limehouse.

Rita, as she entered the car, noticed that Juan Mareno, Sir Lucien's man, and not the chauffeur with whom she was acquainted, sat at the wheel. As they drove off:

"Why is Mareno driving tonight, Lucy?" she asked.

Sir Lucien glanced aside at her.

"He is in my confidence," he replied. "Fraser is not."

"Oh, I see. You don't want Fraser to know about the Limehouse journey?"

"Naturally I don't. He would talk to all the men at the garage, and from South Audley Street the tit-bit of scandal would percolate through every stratum of society."

Rita was silent for a few moments, then:

"Were you thinking about Monte?" she asked diffidently.

Pyne laughed.

"He would scarcely approve, would he?"

"No," replied Rita. "Was that why you were angry when I told you I was going?"

"This 'anger,' to which you constantly revert, had no existence outside your own imagination, Rita. But" he hesitated--"you will have to consider your position, dear, now that you are the future Mrs. Monte." Rita felt her
cheeks flush, and she did not reply immediately.
"I don't understand you, Lucy," she declared at last. "How odd you are."
"Am I? Well, never mind. We will talk about my eccentricity later. Here is Cyrus."

Kilfane was standing in the entrance to the stage door of the theatre at which he was playing. As the car drew up he lifted two leather grips on to the step, and Mareno, descending, took charge of them.

"Come along, Mollie," said Kilfane, looking back.

Miss Gretna, very excited, ran out and got into the car beside Rita. Pyne lowered two of the collapsible seats for Kilfane and himself, and the party set out for Limehouse.

"Oh!" cried the fair-haired Mollie, grasping Rita's hand, "my heart began palpitating with excitement the moment I woke up this morning! How calm you are, dear."

"I am only calm outside," laughed Rita.

The joie de vivre and apparently unimpaired vitality, of this woman, for whom (if half that which rumor whispered were true) vice had no secrets, astonished Rita. Her physical resources were unusual, no doubt, because the demand made upon them by her mental activities was slight.

As the car sped along the Strand, where theatre-goers might still be seen making for tube, omnibus, and tramcar, and entered Fleet Street, where the car and taxicab traffic was less, a mutual silence fell upon the party. Two at least of the travellers were watching the lighted windows of the great newspaper offices with a vague sense of foreboding, and thinking how, bound upon a secret purpose, they were passing along the avenue of publicity. It is well that man lacks prescience. Neither Rita nor Sir Lucien could divine that a day was shortly to come when the hidden presses which throbbed about them that night should be busy with the story of the murder of one and disappearance of the other.

Around St. Paul's Churchyard whirled the car, its engine running strongly and almost noiselessly. The great bell of St. Paul's boomed out the half-hour.

"Oh!" cried Mollie Gretna, "how that made me jump! What a beautifully gloomy sound!"

Kilfane murmured some inaudible reply, but neither Pyne nor Rita spoke.

Cornhill and Leadenhall Street, along which presently their route lay, offered a prospect of lamp-lighted emptiness, but at Aldgate they found themselves amid East End throngs which afforded a marked contrast to those crowding theatreland; and from thence through Whitechapel and the seemingly endless Commercial Road it was a different world into which they had penetrated.

Rita hitherto had never seen the East End on a Saturday night, and the spectacle afforded by these busy marts, lighted by naphtha flames, in whose smoky glare Jews and Jewesses, Poles, Swedes, Easterns, dagoes, and halfcastes moved feverishly, was a fascinating one. She thought how utterly alien they were, the men and women of a world unknown to that society upon whose borders she dwelled; she wondered how they lived, where they lived, why they lived. The wet pavements were crowded with nondescript humanity, the night was filled with the unmusical voices of Hebrew hucksters, and the air laden with the smoky odor of their lamps. Tramcars and motorbuses were packed unwholesomely with these children of shadowland drawn together from the seven seas by the magnet of London.

She glanced at Pyne, but he was seemingly lost in abstraction, and Kilfane appeared to be asleep. Mollie Gretna was staring eagerly out on the opposite side of the car at a group of three dago sailors, whom Mareno had nearly run down, but she turned at that moment and caught Rita's glance.

"Don't you simply love it!" she cried. "Some of those men were really handsome, dear. If they would only wash I am sure I could adore them!"

"Even such charms as yours can be bought at too high a price," drawled Sir Lucien. "They would gladly do murder for you, but never wash."

Crossing Limehouse Canal, the car swung to the right into West India Dock Road. The uproar of the commercial thoroughfare was left far behind. Dark, narrow streets and sinister-looking alleys lay right and left of them, and into one of the narrowest and least inviting of all Mareno turned the car.

In the dimly-lighted doorway of a corner house the figure of a Chinaman showed as a motionless silhouette.

"Oh!" sighed Mollie Gretna rapturously, "a Chinaman! I begin to feel deliciously sinful!"

The car came to a standstill.

"We get out here and walk," said Sir Lucien. "It would not be wise to drive further. Mareno will deliver our baggage by hand presently."

"But we shall all be murdered," cried Mollie, "murdered in cold blood! I am dreadfully frightened!"

"Something of the kind is quite likely," drawled Sir Lucien, "if you draw attention to our presence in the neighborhood so deliberately. Walk ahead, Kilfane, with Mollie. Rita and I will follow at a discreet distance. Leave the door ajar."
Temporarily subdued by Pyne's icy manner, Miss Gretna became silent, and went on ahead with Cyrus Kilfane, who had preserved an almost unbroken silence throughout the journey. Rita and Sir Lucien followed slowly.

"What a creepy neighborhood," whispered Rita. "Look! Someone is standing in that doorway over there, watching us."

"Take no notice," he replied. "A cat could not pass along this street unobserved by the Chinese, but they will not interfere with us provided we do not interfere with them."

Kilfane had turned to the right into a narrow court, at the entrance to which stood an iron pillar. As he and his companion passed under the lamp in a rusty bracket which projected from the wall, they vanished into a place of shadows. There was a ceaseless chorus of distant machinery, and above it rose the grinding and rattling solo of a steam winch. Once a siren hooted apparently quite near them, and looking upward at a tangled, indeterminate mass which overhung the street at this point, Rita suddenly recognized it for a ship's bow-sprit.

"Why," she said, "we are right on the bank of the river!"

"Not quite," answered Pyne. "We are skirting a dock basin. We are nearly at our destination."

Passing in turn under the lamp, they entered the narrow court, and from a doorway immediately on the left a faint light shone out upon the wet pavement. Pyne pushed the door fully open and held it for Rita to enter. As she did so:

"Hello! hello!" croaked a harsh voice. "Number one p'lice chop, lo! Sin Sin Wa!"

The uncanny cracked voice proceeded to give an excellent imitation of a police whistle, and concluded with that of the clicking of castanets.

"Shut the door, Lucy," came the murmurous tones of Kilfane from the gloom of the stuffy little room, in the centre of which stood a stove wherefrom had proceeded the dim light shining out upon the pavement. "Light up, Sin Sin."

"Sin Sin Wa! Sin Sin Wa!" shrieked the voice, and again came the rattling of imaginary castanets. "Smartest leg in Buenos Ayres--Buenos Ayres--p'lice chop--p'lice chop, lo!"

"Oh," whispered Mollie Gretna, in the darkness, "I believe I am going to scream!"

Pyne closed the door, and a dimly discernible figure on the opposite side of the room stooped and opened a little cupboard in which was a lighted ship's lantern. The lantern being lifted out and set upon a rough table near the stove, it became possible to view the apartment and its occupants.

It was a small, low-ceiled place, having two doors, one opening upon the street and the other upon a narrow, uncarpeted passage. The window was boarded up. The ceiling had once been whitewashed and a few limp, dark fragments of paper still adhering to the walls proved that some forgotten decorator had exercised his art upon them in the past. A piece of well-worn matting lay upon the floor, and there were two chairs, a table, and a number of empty tea-chests in the room.

Upon one of the tea-chests placed beside the cupboard which had contained the lantern a Chinaman was seated. His skin was of so light a yellow color as to approximate to dirty white, and his face was pock-marked from neck to crown. He wore long, snake-like moustaches, which hung down below his chin. They grew from the extreme outer edges of his upper lip, the centre of which, usually the most hirsute, was hairless as the lip of an infant. He possessed the longest and thickest pigtail which could possibly grow upon a human scalp, and his left eye was permanently closed, so that a smile which adorned his extraordinary countenance seemed to lack the sympathy of his surviving eye, which, oblique, beady, held no mirth in its glittering depths.

The garments of the one-eyed Chinaman, who sat complacently smiling at the visitors, consisted of a loose blouse, blue trousers tucked into grey socks, and a pair of those native, thick-soled slippers which suggest to a Western critic the acme of discomfort. A raven, black as a bird of ebony, perched upon the Chinaman's shoulder, head a-tilt, surveying the newcomers with a beady, glittering left eye which strangely resembled the beady, glittering eye of the Chinaman. For, singular, uncanny circumstance, this was a one-eyed raven which sat upon the shoulder of his one-eyed master!

Mollie Gretna uttered a stifled cry. "Oh!" she whispered. "I knew I was going to scream!"

The eye of Sin Sin Wa turned momentarily in her direction, but otherwise he did not stir a muscle.

"Are you ready for us, Sin?" asked Sir Lucien.

"All ready. Lola hate gotchee topside loom ready," replied the Chinaman in a soft, crooning voice.

"Go ahead, Kilfane," directed Sir Lucien.

He glanced at Rita, who was standing very near him, surveying the evil little room and its owner with ill-concealed disgust.

"This is merely the foyer, Rita," he said, smiling slightly. "The state apartments are upstairs and in the adjoining house."

"Oh," she murmured--and no more.
Kilfane and Mollie Gretna were passing through the inner doorway, and Mollie turned.
"Isn't it loathsomely delightful?" she cried.
"Smartest leg in Buenos Ayres!" shrieked the raven. "Sin Sin, Sin Sin!"
Uttering a frightened exclamation, Mollie disappeared along the passage. Sir Lucien indicated to Rita that she was to follow; and he, passing through last of the party, closed the door behind him.
Sin Sin Wa never moved, and the raven, settling down upon the Chinaman's shoulder, closed his serviceable eye.

CHAPTER XVII
THE BLACK SMOKE

Up an uncarpeted stair Cyrus Kilfane led the party, and into a kind of lumber-room lighted by a tin oil lamp and filled to overflowing with heterogeneous and unsavory rubbish. Here were garments, male and female, no less than five dilapidated bowler hats, more tea-chests, broken lamps, tattered fragments of cocoanut-matting, steel bed-laths and straw mattresses, ruins of chairs--the whole diffusing an indescribably unpleasant odor.

Opening a cupboard door, Kilfane revealed a number of pendent, ragged garments, and two more bowler hats. Holding the garments aside, he banged upon the back of the cupboard--three blows, a pause, and then two blows.
Following a brief interval, during which even Mollie Gretna was held silent by the strangeness of the proceedings,
"Who is it?" inquired a muffled voice.
"Cy and the crowd," answered Kilfane.
Thereupon ensued a grating noise, and hats and garments swung suddenly backward, revealing a doorway in which Mrs. Sin stood framed. She wore a Japanese kimona of embroidered green silk and a pair of green and gold brocaded slippers which possessed higher heels than Rita remembered to have seen even Mrs. Sin mounted upon before. Her ankles were bare, and it was impossible to determine in what manner she was clad beneath the kimona. Undoubtedly she had a certain dark beauty, of a bold, abandoned type.
"Come right in," she directed. "Mind your head, Lucy."
The quartette filed through into a carpeted corridor, and Mrs. Sin reclosed the false back of the cupboard, which, viewed from the other side, proved to be a door fitted into a recess in the corridor of the adjoining house. This recess ceased to exist when a second and heavier door was closed upon the first.
"You know," murmured Kilfane, "old Sin Sin has his uses, Lola. Those doors are perfectly made."
"Pooh!" scoffed the woman, with a flash of her dark eyes; "he is half a ship's carpenter and half an ape!"
She moved along the passage, her arm linked in that of Sir Lucien. The others followed, and:
"Is she truly married to that dreadful Chinaman?" whispered Mollie Gretna.
"Yes, I believe so," murmured Kilfane. "She is known as Mrs. Sin Sin Wa."
"Oh!" Mollie's eyes opened widely. "I almost envy her! I have read that Chinamen tie their wives to beams in the roof and lash them with leather thongs until they swoon. I could die for a man who lashed me with leather thongs. Englishmen are so ridiculously gentle to women."

Opening a door on the left of the corridor, Mrs. Sin displayed a room screened off into three sections. One shaded lamp high up near the ceiling served to light all the cubicles, which were heated by small charcoal stoves. These cubicles were identical in shape and appointment, each being draped with quaint Chinese tapestry and containing rugs, a silken divan, an armchair, and a low, Eastern table.
"Choose for yourself," said Mrs. Sin, turning to Rita and Mollie Gretna. "Nobody else come tonight. You two in this room, eh? Next door each other for company."

She withdrew, leaving the two girls together. Mollie clasped her hands ecstatically.
"Oh, my dear!" she said. "What do you think of it all?"
"Well," confessed Rita, looking about her, "personally I feel rather nervous."
"My dear!" cried Mollie. "I am simply quivering with delicious terror!"
Rita became silent again, looking about her, and listening. The harsh voice of the Cuban-Jewess could be heard from a neighboring room, but otherwise a perfect stillness reigned in the house of Sin Sin Wa. She remembered that Mrs. Sin had said, "It is quiet--so quiet."

"The idea of undressing and reclining on these divans in real oriental fashion," declared Mollie, giggling, "makes me feel that I am an odalisque already. I have dreamed that I was an odalisque, dear--after smoking, you know. It was heavenly. At least, I don't know that 'heavenly' is quite the right word."

And now that evil spirit of abandonment came to Rita--communicated to her, possibly, by her companion. Dread, together with a certain sense of moral reluctance, departed, and she began to enjoy the adventure at last. It was as though something in the faintly perfumed atmosphere of the place had entered into her blood, driving out reserve and stifling conscience.

When Sir Lucien reappeared she ran to him excitedly, her charming face flushed and her eyes sparkling.
"Oh, Lucy," she cried, "how long will our things be? I'm keen to smoke!"

His jaw hardened, and when he spoke it was with a drawl more marked than usual.

"Mareno will be here almost immediately," he answered.

The tone constituted a rebuff, and Rita's coquetry deserted her, leaving her mortified and piqued. She stared at Pyne, biting her lip.

"You don't like me tonight," she declared. "If I look ugly, it's your fault; you told me to wear this horrid old costume!"

He laughed in a forced, unnatural way.

"You are quite well aware that you could never look otherwise than maddeningly beautiful," he said harshly.

"Do you want me to recall the fact to you again that you are shortly to be Monte Irvin's wife--or should you prefer me to remind you that you have declined to be mine?"

Turning slowly, he walked away, but:

"Oh, Lucy!" whispered Rita.

He paused, looking back.

"I know now why you didn't want me to come," she said. "I--I'm sorry."

The hard look left Sir Lucien's face immediately and was replaced by a curious, indefinable expression, an expression which rarely appeared there.

"You only know half the reason," he replied softly.

At that moment Mrs. Sin came in, followed by Mareno carrying two dressing-cases. Mollie Gretna had run off to Kilfane, and could be heard talking loudly in another room; but, called by Mrs. Sin, she now returned, wide-eyed with excitement.

Mrs. Sin cast a lightning glance at Sir Lucien, and then addressed Rita.

"Which of these three rooms you choose?" she asked, revealing her teeth in one of those rapid smiles which were mirthless as the eternal smile of Sin Sin Wa.

"Oh," said Rita hurriedly, "I don't know. Which do you want, Mollie?"

"I love this end one!" cried Mollie. "It has cushions which simply reek of oriental voluptuousness and cruelty. It reminds me of a delicious book I have been reading called Musk, Hashish, and Blood."

"Hashish!" said Mrs. Sin, and laughed harshly. "One night you shall eat the hashish, and then--"

She snapped her fingers, glancing from Rita to Pyne.

"Oh, really? Is that a promise?" asked Mollie eagerly.

"No, no!" answered Mrs. Sin. "It is a threat!"

Something in the tone of her voice as she uttered the last four words in mock dramatic fashion caused Mollie and Rita to stare at one another questioningly. That suddenly altered tone had awakened an elusive memory, but neither of them could succeed in identifying it.

Mareno, a lean, swarthy fellow, his foreign cast of countenance accentuated by close-cut side-whiskers, deposited Miss Gretna's case in the cubicle which she had selected and, Rita pointing to that adjoining it, he disposed the second case beside the divan and departed silently. As the sound of a closing door reached them:

"You notice how quiet it is?" she asked, revealing her teeth in one of those rapid smiles which were mirthless as the eternal smile of Sin Sin Wa.

"Yes," replied Rita. "It is extraordinarily quiet."

"This an empty house--'To let,'" explained Mrs. Sin. "We watch it stay so. Sin the landlord, see? Windows all boarded up and everything padded. No sound outside, no sound inside. Sin call it the 'House of a Hundred Raptures,' after the one he have in Buenos Ayres."

The voice of Cyrus Kilfane came, querulous, from a neighboring room.

"Lola, my dear, I am almost ready."

"Ho!" Mrs. Sin uttered a deep-toned laugh. "He is a glutton for chandu! I am coming, Cy."

She turned and went out. Sir Lucien paused for a moment, permitting her to pass, and:

"Good night, Rita," he said in a low voice. "Happy dreams!"

He moved away.

"Lucy!" called Rita softly.

"Yes?"

"Is it--is it really safe here?"

Pyne glanced over his shoulder towards the retreating figure of Mrs. Sin, then:

"I shall be awake," he replied. "I would rather you had not come, but since you are here you must go through with it." He glanced again along the narrow passage created by the presence of the partitions, and spoke in a voice lower yet. "You have never really trusted me, Rita. You were wise. But you can trust me now. Good night, dear."

He walked out of the room and along the carpeted corridor to a little apartment at the back of the house,
furnished comfortably but in execrably bad taste. A cheerful fire was burning in the grate, the flue of which had been ingeniously diverted by Sin Sin Wa so that the smoke issued from a chimney of the adjoining premises. On the mantelshelf, which was garishly draped, were a number of photographs of Mrs. Sin in Spanish dancing costume.

Pyne seated himself in an armchair and lighted a cigarette. Except for the ticking of a clock the room was silent as a padded cell. Upon a little Moorish table beside a deep, low settee lay a complete opium-smoking outfit.

Lolling back in the chair and crossing his legs, Sir Lucien became lost in abstraction, and he was thus seated when, some ten minutes later, Mrs. Sin came in.

"Ah!" she said, her harsh voice softened to a whisper. "I wondered. So you wait to smoke with me?" Pyne slowly turned his head, staring at her as she stood in the doorway, one hand resting on her hip and her shapely figure boldly outlined by the kimono.

"No," he replied. "I don't want to smoke. Are they all provided for?"

Mrs. Sin shook her head.

"Not Cy," she said. "Two pipes are nothing to him. He will need two more--perhaps three. But you are not going to smoke?"

"Not tonight, Lola."

She frowned, and was about to speak, when:

"Lola, my dear," came a distant, querulous murmur. "Give me another pipe."

Sin tossed her head, turned, and went out again. Sir Lucien lighted another cigarette. When finally the woman came back, Cyrus Kilfane had presumably attained the opium-smoker's paradise, for Lola closed the door and seated herself upon the arm of Sir Lucien's chair. She bent down, resting her dusky cheek against his.

"You smoke with me?" she whispered coaxingly.

"No, Lola, not tonight," he said, patting her jewel-laden hand and looking aside into the dark eyes which were watching him intently.

Mrs. Sin became silent for a few moments.

"Something has changed in you," she said at last. "You are different--lately."

"Indeed!" drawled Sir Lucien. "Possibly you are right. Others have said the same thing."

"You have lots of money now. Your investments have been good. You want to become respectable, eh?"

Pyne smiled sardonically.

"Respectability is a question of appearance," he replied. "The change to which you refer would seem to go deeper."

"Very likely," murmured Mrs. Sin. "I know why you don't smoke. You have promised your pretty little friend that you will stay awake and see that nobody tries to cut her sweet white throat."

Sir Lucien listened imperturbably.

"She is certainly nervous," he admitted coolly. "I may add that I am sorry I brought her here."

"Oh," said Mrs. Sin, her voice rising half a note. "Then why do you bring her to the House?"

"She made the arrangement herself, and I took the easier path. I am considering your interests as much as my own, Lola. She is about to marry Monte Irvin, and if his suspicions were aroused he is quite capable of digging down to the 'Hundred Raptures.'"

"You brought her to Kazmah's."

"She was not at that time engaged to Irvin."

"Ah, I see. And now everybody says you are changed. Yes, she is a charming friend."

Pyne looked up into the half-veiled dark eyes.

"She never has been and never can be any more to me, Lola," he said.

At those words, designed to placate, the fire which smouldered in Lola's breast burst into sudden flame. She leapt to her feet, confronting Sir Lucien.

"I know! I know!" she cried harshly. "Do you think I am blind? If she had been like any of the others, do you suppose it would have mattered to me? But you respect her--you respect her!"

Eyes blazing and hands clenched, she stood before him, a woman mad with jealousy, not of a successful rival but of a respected one. She quivered with passion, and Pyne, perceiving his mistake too late, only preserved his wonted composure by dint of a great effort. He grasped Lola and drew her down on to the arm of the chair by sheer force, for she resisted savagely. His ready wit had been at work, and:

"What a little spitfire you are," he said, firmly grasping her arms, which felt rigid to the touch. "Surely you can understand? Rita amused me, at first. Then, when I found she was going to marry Monte Irvin I didn't bother about her any more. In fact, because I like and admire Irvin, I tried to keep her away from the dope. We don't want trouble with a man of that type, who has all sorts of influence. Besides, Monte Irvin is a good fellow."

Gradually, as he spoke, the rigid arms relaxed and the lithe body ceased to quiver. Finally, Lola sank back
against his shoulder, sighing.

"I don't believe you," she whispered. "You are telling me lies. But you have always told me lies; one more does not matter, I suppose. How strong you are. You have hurt my wrists. You will smoke with me now?"

For a moment Pyne hesitated, then:

"Very well," he said. "Go and lie down. I will roast the chandu."

CHAPTER XVIII
THE DREAM OF SIN SIN WA

For a habitual opium-smoker to abstain when the fumes of chandu actually reach his nostrils is a feat of will-power difficult adequately to appraise. An ordinary tobacco smoker cannot remain for long among those who are enjoying the fragrant weed without catching the infection and beginning to smoke also. Twice to redouble the lure of my lady Nicotine would be but loosely to estimate the seductiveness of the Spirit of the Poppy; yet Sir Lucien Pyne smoked one pipe with Mrs. Sin, and perceiving her to be already in a state of dreamy abstraction, loaded a second, but in his own case with a fragment of cigarette stump which smouldered in a tray upon the table. His was that rare type of character whose possessor remains master of his vices.

Following the fourth pipe--Pyne, after the second, had ceased to trouble to repeat his feat of legerdemain, "The sleep" claimed Mrs. Sin. Her languorous eyes closed, and her face assumed that rapt expression of Buddha-like beatitude which Rita had observed at Kilfane's flat. According to some scientific works on the subject, sleep is not invariably induced in the case of Europeans by the use of chandu. Loosely, this is true. But this type of European never becomes an habitue; the habitue always sleeps. That dream-world to which opium alone holds the key becomes the real world "for the delights of which the smoker gladly resigns all mundane interests." The exiled Chinaman returns again to the sampan of his boyhood, floating joyously on the waters of some willow-lined canal; the Malay hears once more the mystic whispering in the mangrove swamps, or scents the fragrance of nutmeg and cinnamon in the far-off golden Chersonese. Mrs. Sin doubtless lived anew the triumphs of earlier days in Buenos Ayres, when she had been La Belle Lola, the greatly beloved, and before she had met and married Sin Sin Wa. Gives much, but claims all, and he who would open the poppy-gates must close the door of ambition and bid farewell to manhood.

Sir Lucien stood looking at the woman, and although one pipe had affected him but slightly, his imagination momentarily ran riot and a pageant of his life swept before him, so that his jaw grew hard and grim and he clenched his hands convulsively. An unbroken stillness prevailed in the opium-house of Sin Sin Wa.

Recovering from his fit of abstraction, Pyne, casting a final keen glance at the sleeper, walked out of the room. He looked along the carpeted corridor in the direction of the cubicles, paused, and then opened the heavy door masking the recess behind the cupboard. Next opening the false back of the cupboard, he passed through to the lumber-room beyond, and partly closed the second door.

He descended the stair and went along the passage; but ere he reached the door of the room on the ground floor:

"Hello! hello! Sin Sin! Sin Sin Wa!" croaked the raven. "Number one p'lice chop, lo!" The note of a police whistle followed, rendered with uncanny fidelity.

Pyne entered the room. It presented the same aspect as when he had left it. The ship's lantern stood upon the table, and Sin Sin Wa sat upon the tea-chest, the great black bird perched on his shoulder. The fire in the stove had burned lower, and its downcast glow revealed less mercilessly the dirty condition of the floor. Otherwise no one, nothing, seemed to have been disturbed. Pyne leaned against the doorpost, taking out and lighting a cigarette. The eye of Sin Sin Wa glanced sideways at him.

"Well, Sin Sin," said Sir Lucien, dropping a match and extinguishing it under his foot, "you see I am not smoking tonight."

"No smokee," murmured the Chinaman. "Velly good stuff."

"Yes, the stuff is all right, Sin."

"Number one proper," crooned Sin Sin Wa, and relapsed into smiling silence.

"Number one p'lice," croaked the raven sleepily. "Smartest--" He even attempted the castanets imitation, but was overcome by drowsiness.

For a while Sir Lucien stood watching the singular pair and smiling in his ironical fashion. The motive which had prompted him to leave the neighboring house and to seek the companionship of Sin Sin Wa was so obscure and belonged so peculiarly to the superdelicacies of chivalry, that already he was laughing at himself. But, nevertheless, in this house and not in its secret annex of a Hundred Raptures he designed to spend the night. Presently:

"Hon'able p'lice patrol come 'long plenty soon," murmured Sin Sin Wa.

"Indeed?" said Sir Lucien, glancing at his wristwatch. "The door is open above."

Sin Sin Wa raised one yellow forefinger, without moving either hand from the knee upon which it rested, and shook it slightly to and fro.

"Will they want to come in?"


"Oh, I see. If I go out into the passage it will be all right?"

"Allee lightee."

Even as he softly crooned the words came a heavy squelch of rubbers upon the wet pavement outside, followed by a rapping on the door. Sin Sin Wa glanced aside at Sir Lucien, and the latter immediately withdrew, partly closing the door. The Chinaman shuffled across and admitted two constables. The raven, remaining perched upon his shoulder, shrieked, "Smartest leg in Buenos Ayres," and, fully awakened, rattled invisible castanets.

The police strode into the stuffy little room without ceremony, a pair of burly fellows, fresh-complexioned, and genial as men are wont to be who have reached a welcome resting-place on a damp and cheerless night. They stood by the stove, warming their hands; and one of them stooped, took up the little poker, and stirred the embers to a brighter glow.

"Been havin' a pipe, Sin?" he asked, winking at his companion. "I can smell something like opium!"


"Ho, ho!" laughed the other constable. "I don't think."

"You likee tly one piecee pipee one time?" inquired the Chinaman. "Gotchee fliend makee smokee."

The man who had poked the fire slapped his companion on the back.

"Now's your chance, Jim!" he cried. "You always said you'd like to have a cut at it."

"H'm!" muttered the other. "A 'double' o' that fifteen over-proof Jamaica of yours, Sin, would hit me in a tender spot tonight."

"Lum?" murmured Sin Sin blandly. "No hate got."

He resumed his seat on the tea-chest, and the raven muttered sleepily, "Sin Sin--Sin."

"H'm!" repeated the constable.

He raised the skirt of his heavy top-coat, and from his trouser-pocket drew out a leather purse. The eye of Sin Sin Wa remained fixed upon a distant corner of the room. From the purse the constable took a shilling, ringing it loudly upon the table.

"Double rum, miss, please!" he said, facetiously. "There's no treason allowed nowadays, so my pal's--"

"I stood yours last night Jim, anyway!" cried the other, grinning. "Go on, stump up!"

Jim rang a second shilling on the table.

"Two double rums!" he called.

Sin Sin Wa reached a long arm into the little cupboard beside him and withdrew a bottle and a glass. Leaning forward he placed bottle and glass on the table, and adroitly swept the coins into his yellow palm.

"Number one p'lice chop," croaked the raven.

"You're right, old bird!" said Jim, pouring out a stiff peg of the spirit and disposing of it at a draught. "We should freeze to death on this blasted riverside beat if it wasn't for Sin Sin."

He measured out a second portion for his companion, and the latter drank the raw spirit off as though it had been ale, replaced the glass on the table, and having adjusted his belt and lantern in that characteristic way which belongs exclusively to members of the Metropolitan Police Force, turned and departed.

"Good night, Sin," he said, opening the door.

"So-long," murmured the Chinaman.

"Good night, old bird," cried Jim, following his colleague.

"So-long."

The door closed, and Sin Sin Wa, shuffling across, rebolted it. As Sir Lucien came out from his hiding-place Sin Sin Wa returned to his seat on the tea-chest, first putting the glass, unwashed, and the rum bottle back in the cupboard.

To the ordinary observer the Chinaman presents an inscrutable mystery. His seemingly unemotional character and his racial inability to express his thoughts intelligibly in any European tongue stamp him as a creature apart, and one whom many are prone erroneously to classify very low in the human scale and not far above the ape. Sir Lucien usually spoke to Sin Sin Wa in English, and the other replied in that weird jargon known as "pidgin." But the silly Sin Sin Wa who murmured gibberish and the Sin Sin Wa who could converse upon many and curious subjects in his own language were two different beings--as Sir Lucien was aware. Now, as the one-eyed Chinaman resumed his seat and the one-eyed raven sank into slumber, Pyne suddenly spoke in Chinese, a tongue which he understood as it is understood by few Englishmen; that strange, sibilant speech which is alien from all Western conceptions of oral intercourse as the Chinese institutions and ideals are alien from those of the rest of the civilized world.

"So you make a profit on your rum, Sin Sin Wa," he said ironically, "at the same time that you keep in the good
graces of the police?"

Sin Sin Wa's expression underwent a subtle change at the sound of his native language. He moved his hands and became slightly animated.

"A great people of the West, most honorable sir," he replied in the pure mandarin dialect, "claim credit for having said that 'business is business.' Yet he who thus expressed himself was a Chinaman."

"You surprise me."

"The wise man must often find occasion for surprise most honorable sir."

Sir Lucien lighted a cigarette.

"I sometimes wonder, Sin Sin Wa," he said slowly, "what your aim in life can be. Your father was neither a ship's carpenter nor a shopkeeper. This I know. Your age I do not know and cannot guess, but you are no longer young. You covet wealth. For what purpose, Sin Sin Wa?"

Standing behind the Chinaman, Sir Lucien's dark face, since he made no effort to hide his feelings, revealed the fact that he attached to this seemingly abstract discussion a greater importance than his tone of voice might have led one to suppose. Sin Sin Wa remained silent for some time, then:

"Most honorable sir," he replied, "when I have smoked the opium, before my eyes—for in dreams I have two—a certain picture arises. It is that of a farm in the province of Ho-Nan. Beyond the farm stretch paddy-fields as far as one can see. Men and women and boys and girls move about the farm, happy in their labors, and far, far away dwell the mountain gods, who send the great Yellow River sweeping down through the valleys where the poppy is in bloom. It is to possess that farm, most honorable sir, and those paddy-fields that I covet wealth."

"And in spite of the opium which you consume, you have never lost sight of this ideal?"

"Never."

"But—your wife?"

Sin Sin Wa performed a curious shrugging movement, peculiarly racial.

"A man may not always have the same wife," he replied cryptically. "The honorable wife who now attends to my requirements, laboring unselfishly in my miserable house and scorning the love of other men as she has always done—and as an honorable and upright woman is expected to do—may one day be gathered to her ancestors. A man never knows. Or she may leave me. I am not a good husband. It may be that some little maiden of Ho-Nan, mild-eyed like the musk-deer and modest and tender, will consent to minister to my old age. Who knows?"

Sir Lucien blew a thick cloud of tobacco smoke into the room, and:

"She will never love you, Sin Sin Wa," he said, almost sadly. "She will come to your house only to cheat you."

Sin Sin Wa repeated the eloquent shrug.

"We have a saying in Ho-Nan, most honorable sir," he answered, "and it is this: 'He who has tasted the poppy-cup has nothing to ask of love.' She will cook for me, this little one, and stroke my brow when I am weary, and light my pipe. My eye will rest upon her with pleasure. It is all I ask."

There came a soft rapping on the outer door—three raps, a pause, and then two raps. The raven opened his beady eye.

"Sin Sin Wa," he croaked, "number one p'lice chop, lo!"

Sin Sin Wa glanced aside at Sir Lucien.

"The traffic. A consignment of opium," he said. "Sam Tuk calls."

Sir Lucien consulted his watch, and:

"I should like to go with you, Sin Sin Wa," he said. "Would it be safe to leave the house—with the upper door unlocked?"

Sin Sin Wa glanced at him again.

"All are sleeping, most honorable sir?"

"All."

"I will lock the room above and the outer door. It is safe."

He raised a yellow hand, and the raven stepped sedately from his shoulder on to his wrist.

"Come, Tling-a-Ling," crooned Sin Sin Wa, "you go to bed, my little black friend, and one day you, too, shall see the paddy-fields of Ho-Nan."

Opening the useful cupboard, he stooped, and in hopped the raven. Sin Sin Wa closed the cupboard, and stepped out into the passage.

"I will bring you a coat and a cap and scarf," he said. "Your magnificent apparel would be out of place among the low pigs who wait in my other disgusting cellar to rob me. Forgive my improper absence for one moment, most honorable sir."

CHAPTER XIX

THE TRAFFIC
Sir Lucien came out into the alley wearing a greasy cloth cap pulled down over his eyes and an old overall, the collar turned up about a red woollen muffler which enveloped the lower part of his face. The odor of the outfit was disgusting, but this man's double life had brought him so frequently in contact with all forms of uncleanness, including that of the Far East, compared with which the dirt of the West is hygienic, that he suffered it without complaint.

A Chinese "boy" of indeterminable age, wearing a slop-shop suit and a cap, was waiting outside the door, and when Sin Sin Wa appeared, carefully locking up, he muttered something rapidly in his own sibilant language.

Sin Sin Wa made no reply. To his indoor attire he had added a pea-jacket and a bowler hat; and the oddly assorted trio set off westward, following the bank of the Thames in the direction of Limehouse Basin. The narrow, ill-lighted streets were quite deserted, but from the river and the riverside arose that ceaseless jangle of industry which belongs to the great port of London. On the Surrey shore whistles shrieked, and endless moving chains sent up their monstrous clangor into the night. Human voices sometimes rose above the din of machinery.

In silence the three pursued their way, crossing inlets and circling around basins dimly divined, turning to the right into a lane flanked by high, eyeless walls, and again to the left, finally to emerge nearly opposite a dilapidated gateway giving access to a small wharf, on the rickety gates bills were posted announcing, "This Wharf to Let." The annexed building appeared to be a mere shell. To the right again they turned, and once more to the left, halting before a two-story brick house which had apparently been converted into a barber's shop. In one of the grimy windows were some loose packets of cigarettes, a soapmaker's advertisement, and a card:

SAM TUK BARBER

Opening the door with a key which he carried, the boy admitted Sir Lucien and Sin Sin Wa to the dimly-lighted interior of a room the pretensions of which to be regarded as a shaving saloon were supported by the presence of two chairs, a filthy towel, and a broken mug. Sin Sin Wa shuffled across to another door, and, followed by Sir Lucien, descended a stone stair to a little cellar apparently intended for storing coal. A tin lamp stood upon the bottom step.

Removing the lamp from the step, Sin Sin Wa set it on the cellar floor, which was black with coal dust, then closed and bolted the door. A heap of nondescript litter lay piled in a corner of the cellar. This Sin Sin Wa disturbed sufficiently to reveal a movable slab in the roughly paved floor. It was so ingeniously concealed by coal dust that one who had sought it unaided must have experienced great difficulty in detecting it. Furthermore, it could only be raised in the following manner:

A piece of strong iron wire, which lay among the other litter, was inserted in a narrow slot, apparently a crack in the stone. About an inch of the end of the wire being bent outward to form a right angle, when the seemingly useless piece of scrap-iron had been thrust through the slab and turned, it formed a handle by means of which the trap could be raised.

Again Sin Sin Wa took up the lamp, placing it at the brink of the opening revealed. A pair of wooden steps rested below, and Sir Lucien, who evidently was no stranger to the establishment, descended awkwardly, since there was barely room for a big man to pass. He found himself in the mouth of a low passage, unpaved and shored up with rough timbers in the manner of a mine-working. Sin Sin Wa followed with the lamp, drawing the slab down into its place behind him.

Stooping forward and bending his knees, Sir Lucien made his way along the passage, the Chinaman following. It was of considerable length, and terminated before a strong door bearing a massive lock. Sin Sin Wa reached over the stooping figure of Sir Lucien and unfastened the lock. The two emerged in a kind of dug-out. Part of it had evidently been in existence before the ingenious Sin Sin Wa had exercised his skill upon it, and was of solid brickwork and stone-paved; palpably a storage vault. But it had been altered to suit the Chinaman's purpose, and one end--that in which the passage came out--was timbered. It contained a long counter and many shelves; also a large oil-stove and a number of pots, pans, and queer-looking jars. On the counter stood a ship's lantern. The shelves were laden with packages and bottles. Behind the counter sat a venerable and perfectly bald Chinaman. The only trace of hair upon his countenance grew on the shrunken upper lip--mere wisps of white down. His skin was shrivelled like that of a preserved fig, and he wore big horn-rimmed spectacles. He never once exhibited the slightest evidence of life, and his head and face, and the horn-rimmed spectacles, might quite easily have passed for those of an unwrapped mummy. This was Sam Tuk.

Bending over a box upon which rested a canvas-bound package was a burly seaman engaged in unknotting the twine with which the canvas was kept in place. As Sin Sin Wa and Sir Lucien came in he looked up, revealing a red-bearded, ugly face, very puffy under the eyes.

"Wotcher, Sin Sin!" he said gruffly. "Who's your long pal?"

"Friend," murmured Sin Sin Wa complacently. "You gotchee pukka stuff thisee time, George?"

"I allus brings the pukka stuff!" roared the seaman, ceasing to fumble with the knots and glaring at Sin Sin Wa.

"Wotcher mean--pukka stuff?"

"Bran!" roared the man, his glance and pose very menacing. "Tin-tacks and glue! Who the flamin' 'ell ever tried to sell you glue?"

"Me only wantchee lemindee you," said Sin Sin Wa. "No pidgin."

"George" glared for a moment, breathing heavily; then he stooped and resumed his task, Sin Sin Wa and Sir Lucien watching him in silence. A sound of lapping water was faintly audible.

Opening the canvas wrappings, the man began to take out and place upon the counter a number of reddish balls of "leaf" opium, varying in weight from about eight ounces to a pound or more.

"H'm!" murmured Sin Sin Wa. "Smyrna stuff."

From a pocket of his pea-jacket he drew a long bodkin, and taking up one of the largest balls he thrust the bodkin in and then withdrew it, the steel stained a coffee color. Sin Sin Wa smelled and tasted the substance adhering to the bodkin, weighed the ball reflectively in his yellow palm, and then set it aside. He took up a second, whereupon:

"Alf a mo', guvnor!" cried the seaman furiously. "D'you think I'm going to wait 'ere while you prods about in all the blasted lot? It's damn near high tide--I shan't get out. 'Alf time! Savvy? Shove it on the scales!"

Sin Sin Wa shook his head.


"What's the game?" inquired George menacingly. "Don't you know a cake o' Smyrna when you smells it?"

"No sabby lead chop till ploddem withee dipper," explained the Chinaman, imperturbably.

"Lead!" shouted the man. "There ain't no bloody lead in 'em!"


He calmly inserted the bodkin in the second cake; seemed to meet with some obstruction, and laid the ball down upon the counter. From beneath his jacket he took out a clasp-knife attached to a steel chain. Undeterred by a savage roar from the purveyor, he cut the sticky mass in half, and digging his long nails into one of the halves, brought out two lead shots. He directed a glance of his beady eye upon the man.

"Bloody liar," he murmured sweetly. "Lobber."

"Who's a robber?" shouted George, his face flushing darkly, and apparently not resenting the earlier innuendo; "Who's a robber?"

"One sarcee Smyrna feller packee stuff so fashion," murmured Sin Sin Wa. "Thief-feller lobbee poor sailorman." George jerked his peaked cap from his head, revealing a tangle of unkempt red hair. He scratched his skull with savage vigor.

"Blimey!" he said pathetically. "'Ere's a go! I been done brown, guv'nor."

"Lough luck," murmured Sin Sin Wa, and resumed his examination of the cakes of opium.

The man watched him now in silence, only broken by exclamations of "Blimey" and "Flaming hell" when more shot was discovered. The tests concluded:

"Gotchee some more?" asked Sin Sin Wa.

From the canvas wrapping George took out and tossed on the counter a square packet wrapped in grease-paper.

"H'm," murmured Sin Sin Wa, "Patna. Where you catchee?"

"Off of a lascar," growled the man.

The cake of Indian opium was submitted to the same careful scrutiny as that which the balls of Turkish had already undergone, but the Patna opium proved to be unadulterated. Reaching over the counter Sin Sin Wa produced a pair of scales, and, watched keenly by George, weighed the leaf and then the cake.


"Eh?" roared George. "Eighty quid! Eighty quid! Flamin' blind o' Riley! D'you think I'm up the pole? Eighty quid? You're barmy!"


"I give more'n that for it!" cried the seaman. "An' I damn near hit a police boat comin' in, too!"

Sir Lucien spoke a few words rapidly in Chinese. Sin Sin Wa performed his curious oriental shrug, and taking a fat leather wallet from his hip-pocket, counted out the sum of eighty-five pounds upon the counter.

"You catchee eighty-five," he murmured. "Too muchee price."

The man grabbed the money and pocketed it without a word of acknowledgment. He turned and strode along the room, his heavy, iron-clamped boots ringing on the paved floor.

"Fetch a grim, Sin Sin," he cried. "I'll never get out if I don't jump to it."

Sin Sin Wa took the lantern from the counter and followed. Opening a door at the further end of the place, he set the lantern at the head of three descending wooden steps discovered. With the opening of the door the sound of lapping water had grown perceptibly louder. George clattered down the steps, which led to a second but much
The relations existing between Kazmah and his clients were of a most peculiar nature, too, and must have piqued the curiosity of anyone but a drug-slave. Having seen him once, in his oracular cave, Rita had been accepted as one of the initiated. Thereafter she had had no occasion to interview the strange, immobile Egyptian, nor had she experienced any desire to do so. The method of obtaining drugs was a simple one. She had merely to present herself at the establishment in Bond Street and to purchase either a flask of perfume or a box of sweetmeats. There were several varieties of perfume, and each corresponded to a particular drug. The sweetmeats corresponded to morphine. Rashid, the attendant, knew all Kazmah's clients, and with the box or flask he gave them a quantity of the required drug. This scheme was precautionary. For if a visitor should chance to be challenged on leaving the place, there was the legitimate purchase to show in evidence of the purpose of the visit.
No conversation was necessary, merely the selection of a scent and the exchange of a sum of money. Rashid retired to wrap up the purchase, and with it a second and smaller package was slipped into the customer's hand. That the prices charged were excessive--nay, ridiculous--did not concern Rita, for, in common with the rest of her kind, she was careless of expenditure.

Opium, alone, Kazmah did not sell. He sold morphine, tincture of opium, and other preparations; but those who sought the solace of the pipe were compelled to deal with Mrs. Sin. She would arrange parties, or would prepare the "Hundred Raptures" in Limehouse for visitors; but, except in the form of opiated cigarettes, she could rarely be induced to part with any of the precious gum. Thus she cleverly kept a firm hold upon the devotees of the poppy.

Drug-takers form a kind of brotherhood, and outside the charmed circle they are secretive as members of the Mafia, the Camorra, or the Catouse-Menegant.

In this secrecy, which, indeed, is a recognized symptom of drug mania, lay Kazmah's security. Rita experienced no desire to peer behind the veil which, literally and metaphorically, he had placed between himself and the world. At first she had been vaguely curious, and had questioned Sir Lucien and others, but nobody seemed to know the real identity of Kazmah, and nobody seemed to care provided that he continued to supply drugs. They all led secret, veiled lives, these slaves of the laboratory, and that Kazmah should do likewise did not surprise them. He had excellent reasons.

During this early stage of faint curiosity she had suggested to Sir Lucien that for Kazmah to conduct a dream-reading business seemed to be to add to the likelihood of police interference.

The baronet had smiled sardonically.

"It is an additional safeguard," he had assured her. "It corresponds to the method of a notorious Paris assassin who was very generally regarded by the police as a cunning pickpocket. Kazmah's business of 'dreamreading' does not actually come within the Act. He is clever enough for that. Remember, he does not profess to tell fortunes. It also enables him to balk idle curiosity."

At the time of her marriage Rita was hopelessly in the toils, and had been really panic-stricken at the prospect--once so golden--of a protracted sojourn abroad. The war, which rendered travel impossible, she regarded rather in the light of a heaven-sent boon. Irvin, though personally favoring a quiet ceremony, recognized that Rita cherished a desire to quit theatreland in a chariot of fire, and accordingly the wedding was on a scale of magnificence which outshone that of any other celebrated during the season. Even the lugubrious Mr. Esden, who gave his daughter away, was seen to smile twice. Mrs. Esden moved in a rarified atmosphere of gratified ambition and parental pride, which no doubt closely resembled that which the angels breathe.

It was during the early days of her married life, and while Sir Lucien was still abroad, that Rita began to experience difficulty in obtaining the drugs which she required. She had lost touch to a certain extent with her former associates; but she had retained her maid, Nina, and the girl regularly went to Kazmah's and returned with the little flasks of perfume. When an accredited representative was sent upon such a mission, Kazmah dispatched the drugs disguised in a scent flask; but on each successive occasion that Nina went to him the prices increased, and finally became so exorbitant that even Rita grew astonished and dismayed.

She mentioned the matter to another habitue, a lady of title addicted to the use of the hypodermic syringe, and learned that she (Rita) was being charged nearly twice as much as her friend.

"I should bring the man to his senses, dear," said her ladyship. "I know a doctor who will be only too glad to supply you. When I say a doctor, he is no longer recognized by the B.M.A., but he's none the less clever and kind for all that."

To the clever and kind medical man Rita repaired on the following day, bearing a written introduction from her friend. The discredited physician supplied her for a short time, charging only moderate fees. Then, suddenly, this second source of supply was closed. The man declared that he was being watched by the police, and that he dared not continue to supply her with cocaine and veronal. His shifty eyes gave the lie to his words, but he was firm in his resolution, whatever may have led him to it, and Rita was driven back to Kazmah. His charges had become more exorbitant than ever, but her need was imperative. Nevertheless, she endeavored to find another drug dealer, and after a time was again successful.

At a certain supper club she was introduced to a suave little man, quite palpably an uninterned alien, who smilingly offered to provide her with any drug to be found in the British Pharmacopeia, at most moderate charges. With this little German-Jew villain she made a pact, reflecting that, provided that his wares were of good quality, she had triumphed over Kazmah.

The craving for chandu seized her sometimes and refused to be exorcised by morphia, laudanum, or any other form of opium; but she had not dared to spend a night at the "House of a Hundred Raptures" since her marriage. Her new German friend volunteered to supply the necessary gum, outfit, and to provide an apartment where she might safely indulge in smoking. She declined--at first. But finally, on Mollie Gretna's return from France, where she had
been acting as a nurse, Rita and Mollie accepted the suave alien's invitation to spend an evening in his private opium divan.

Many thousands of careers were wrecked by the war, and to the war and the consequent absence of her husband Rita undoubtedly owed her relapse into opium-smoking. That she would have continued secretly to employ cocaine, veronal, and possibly morphine was probable enough; but the constant society of Monte Irvin must have made it extremely difficult for her to indulge the craving for chandu. She began to regret the gaiety of her old life. Loneliness and monotony plunged her into a state of suicidal depression, and she grasped eagerly at every promise of excitement.

It was at about this time that she met Margaret Halley, and between the two, so contrary in disposition, a close friendship arose. The girl doctor ere long discovered Rita's secret, of course, and the discovery was hastened by an event which occurred shortly after they had become acquainted.

The suave alien gentleman disappeared.

That was the entire story in five words—or all of the story that Rita ever learned. His apartments were labelled "To Let," and the night clubs knew him no more. Rita for a time was deprived of drugs, and the nervous collapse which resulted revealed to Margaret Halley's trained perceptions the truth respecting her friend.

Kazmah's terms proved to be more outrageous than ever, but Rita found herself again compelled to resort to the Egyptian. She went personally to the rooms in old Bond Street and arranged with Rashid to see Kazmah on the following day, Friday, for Kazmah only received visitors by appointment. As it chanced, Sir Lucien Pyne returned to England on Thursday night and called upon Rita at Prince's Gate. She welcomed him as a friend in need, unfolding the pitiful story, to the truth of which her nervous condition bore eloquent testimony.

Sir Lucien began to pace up and down the charming little room in which Rita had received him. She watched him, haggard-eyed. Presently:

"Leave Kazmah to me," he said. "If you visit him he will merely shield himself behind the mystical business, or assure you that he is making no profit on his sales. Kilfane had similar trouble with him."

"Then you will see him?" asked Rita.

"I will make a point of interviewing him in the morning. Meanwhile, if you will send Nina around to Albemarle Street in about an hour I will see what can be done."

"Oh, Lucy," whispered Rita, "what a pal you are."

Sir Lucien smiled in his cold fashion.

"I try to be," he said enigmatically; "but I don't always succeed." He turned to her. "Have you ever thought of giving up this doping?" he asked. "Have you ever realized that with increasing tolerance the quantities must increase as well, and that a day is sure to come when--"

Rita repressed a nervous shudder.

"You are trying to frighten me," she replied. "You have tried before; I don't know why. But it's no good, Lucy. You know I cannot give it up."

"You can try."

"I don't want to try!" she cried irritably. "It will be time enough when Monte is back again, and we can really 'live.' This wretched existence, with everything restricted and rationed, and all one's friends in Flanders or Mesopotamia or somewhere, drives me mad! I tell you I should die, Lucy, if I tried to do without it now."

The hollow presence of reform contemplated in a hazy future did not deceive Sir Lucien. He suppressed a sigh, and changed the topic of conversation.

CHAPTER XXI

THE CIGARETTES FROM BUENOS AIRES

Sir Lucien's intervention proved successful. Kazmah's charges became more modest, and Rita no longer found it necessary to deprive herself of hats and dresses in order to obtain drugs. But, nevertheless, these were not the halcyon days of old. She was now surrounded by spies. It was necessary to resort to all kinds of subterfuge in order to cover her expenditures at the establishment in old Bond Street. Her husband never questioned her outlay, but on the other hand it was expedient to be armed against the possibility of his doing so, and Rita's debts were accumulating formidably.

Then there was Margaret Halley to consider. Rita had never hitherto given her confidence to anyone who was not addicted to the same practices as herself, and she frequently experienced embarrassment beneath the grave scrutiny of Margaret's watchful eyes. In another this attitude of gentle disapproval would have been irritating, but Rita loved and admired Margaret, and suffered accordingly.

As for Sir Lucien, she had ceased to understand him. An impalpable barrier seemed to have arisen between them. The inner man had become inaccessible. Her mind was not subtle enough to grasp the real explanation of this change in her old lover. Being based upon wrong premises, her inferences were necessarily wide of the truth, and
she believed that Sir Lucien was jealous of Margaret's cousin, Quentin Gray.

Gray met Rita at Margaret Halley's flat shortly after he had returned home from service in the East, and he immediately conceived a violent infatuation for this pretty friend of his cousin's. In this respect his conduct was in no way peculiar. Few men were proof against the seductive Mrs. Monte Irvin, not because she designedly encouraged admiration, but because she was one of those fortunately rare characters who inspire it without conscious effort. Her appeal to men was sweetly feminine and quite lacking in that self-assertive and masculine "take me or leave me" attitude which characterizes some of the beauties of today. There was nothing abstract about her delicate loveliness, yet her charm was not wholly physical. Many women disliked her.

At dance, theatre, and concert Quentin Gray played the doting cavalier; and Rita, who was used to at least one such adoring attendant, accepted his homage without demur. Monte Irvin returned to civil life, but Rita showed no disposition to dispense with her new admirer. Both Gray and Sir Lucien had become frequent visitors at Prince's Gate, and Irvin, who understood his wife's character up to a point, made them his friends.

Shortly after Monte Irvin's return Sir Lucien taxed Rita again with her increasing subjection to drugs. She was in a particularly gay humor, as the supplies from Kazmah had been regular, and she laughingly fenced with him when he reminded her of her declared intention to reform when her husband should return.

"You are really as bad as Margaret," she declared. "There is nothing the matter with me. You talk of 'curing' me as though I were ill. Physician, heal thyself."

The sardonic smile momentarily showed upon Pyne's face, and:

"I know when and where to pull up, Rita," he said. "A woman never knows this. If I were deprived of opium tomorrow I could get along without it."

"I have given up opium," replied Rita. "It's too much trouble, and the last time Mollie and I went--"

She paused, glancing quickly at Sir Lucien.

"Go on," he said grimly. "I know you have been to Sin Sin Wa's. What happened the last time?"

"Well," continued Rita hurriedly, "Monte seemed to be vaguely suspicious. Besides, Mrs. Sin charged me most preposterously. I really cannot afford it, Lucy."

"I am glad you cannot. But what I was about to say was this: Suppose you were to be deprived, not of 'chard', but of cocaine and veronal, do you know what would happen to you?"

"Oh!" whispered Rita. "why will you persist in trying to frighten me! I am not going to be deprived of them."

"I persist, dear, because I want you to try, gradually, to depend less upon drugs, so that if the worst should happen you would have a chance."

Rita stood up and faced him, biting her lip.

"Lucy," she said, "do you mean that Kazmah--"

"I mean that anything might happen, Rita. After all, we do possess a police service in London, and one day there might be an accident. Kazmah has certain influence, but it may be withdrawn. Rita, won't you try?"

She was watching him closely, and now the pupils of her beautiful eyes became dilated.

"You know something," she said slowly, "which you are keeping from me."

He laughed and turned aside.

"I know that I am compelled to leave England again, Rita, for a time; and I should be a happier man if I knew that you were not so utterly dependent upon Kazmah."

"Oh, Lucy, are you going away again?"

"I must. But I shall not be absent long, I hope."

Rita sank down upon the settee from which she had risen, and was silent for some time; then:

"I will try, Lucy," she promised. "I will go to Margaret Halley, as she is always asking me to do."

"Good girl," said Pyne quietly. "It is just a question of making the effort, Rita. You will succeed, with Margaret's help."

A short time later Sir Lucien left England, but throughout the last week that he remained in London Rita spent a great part of every day in his company. She had latterly begun to experience an odd kind of remorse for her treatment of the inscrutably reserved baronet. His earlier intentions she had not forgotten, but she had long ago forgiven them, and now she often felt sorry for this man whom she had deliberately used as a stepping-stone to fortune.

Gray was quite unable to conceal his jealousy. He seemed to think that he had a proprietary right to Mrs. Monte Irvin's society, and during the week preceding Sir Lucien's departure Gray came perilously near to making himself ridiculous on more than one occasion.

One night, on leaving a theatre, Rita suggested to Pyne that they should proceed to a supper club for an hour. "It will be like old times," she said.

"But your husband is expecting you," protested Sir Lucien.
"Let's ring him up and ask him to join us. He won't, but he cannot very well object then."

As a result they presently found themselves descending a broad carpeted stairway. From the rooms below arose the strains of an American melody. Dancing was in progress, or, rather, one of those orgiastic ceremonies which passed for dancing during this pagan period. Just by the foot of the stairs they paused and surveyed the scene.

"Why," said Rita, "there is Quentin--glaring insanely, silly boy."

"Do you see whom he is with?" asked Sir Lucien.

"Mollie Gretna."

"But I mean the woman sitting down."

Rita stood on tiptoe, trying to obtain a view, and suddenly:

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "Mrs. Sin!"

The dance at that moment concluding, they crossed the floor and joined the party. Mrs. Sin greeted them with one of her rapid, mirthless smiles. She was wearing a gown noticeable, but not for quantity, even in that semi-draped assembly. Mollie Gretna giggled rapturously. But Gray's swiftly changing color betrayed a mood which he tried in vain to conceal by his manner. Having exchanged a few words with the new arrivals, he evidently realized that he could not trust himself to remain longer, and:

"Now I must be off," he said awkwardly. "I have an appointment--important business. Good night, everybody."

He turned away and hurried from the room. Rita flushed slightly and exchanged a glance with Sir Lucien. Mrs. Sin, who had been watching the three intently, did not fail to perceive this glance. Mollie Gretna characteristically said a silly thing.

"Oh!" she cried. "I wonder whatever is the matter with him! He looks as though he had gone mad!"

"It is perhaps his heart," said Mrs. Sin harshly, and she raised her bold dark eyes to Sir Lucien's face.

"Oh, please don't talk about hearts," cried Rita, willfully misunderstanding. "Monte has a weak heart, and it frightens me."

"So?" murmured Mrs. Sin. "Poor fellow."

"I think a weak heart is most romantic," declared Mollie Gretna.

But Gray's behavior had cast a shadow upon the party which even Mollie's empty light-hearted chatter was powerless to dispel, and when, shortly after midnight, Sir Lucien drove Rita home to Prince's Gate, they were very silent throughout the journey. Just before the car reached the house:

"Where does Mrs. Sin live?" asked Rita, although it was not of Mrs. Sin that she had been thinking.

"In Limehouse, I believe," replied Sir Lucien; "at The House. But I fancy she has rooms somewhere in town also."

He stayed only a few minutes at Prince's Gate, and as the car returned along Piccadilly, Sir Lucien, glancing upward towards the windows of a tall block of chambers facing the Green Park, observed a light in one of them. Acting upon a sudden impulse, he raised the speaking-tube.

"Pull up, Fraser," he directed.

The chauffeur stopped the car and Sir Lucien alighted, glancing at the clock inside as he did so, and smiling at his own quixotic behavior. He entered an imposing doorway and rang one of the bells. There was an interval of two minutes or so, when the door opened and a man looked out.

"Is that you, Willis?" asked Pyne.

"Oh, I beg pardon, Sir Lucien. I didn't know you in the dark."

"Has Mr. Gray retired yet?"

"Not yet. Will you please follow me, Sir Lucien. The stairway lights are off."

A few moments later Sir Lucien was shown into the apartment of Gray's which oddly combined the atmosphere of a gymnasium with that of a study. Gray, wearing a dressing-gown and having a pipe in his mouth, was standing up to receive his visitor, his face rather pale and the expression of his lips at variance with that in his eyes. But:

"Hello, Pyne," he said quietly. "Anything wrong--or have you just looked in for a smoke?"

Sir Lucien smiled a trifle sadly.

"I wanted a chat, Gray," he replied. "I'm leaving town tomorrow, or I should not have intruded at such an unearthly hour."

"No intrusion," muttered Gray; "try the armchair, no, the big one. It's more comfortable." He raised his voice:

"Willis, bring some fluid!"

Sir Lucien sat down, and from the pocket of his dinner jacket took out a plain brown packet of cigarettes and selected one.

"Here," said Gray, "have a cigar!"

"No, thanks," replied Pyne. "I rarely smoke anything but these."

"Never seen that kind of packet before," declared Gray. "What brand are they?"
"No particular brand. They are imported from Buenos Ayres, I believe."

Willis having brought in a tray of refreshments and departed again, Sir Lucien came at once to the point.

"I really called, Gray," he said, "to clear up any misunderstanding there may be in regard to Rita Irvin."

Quentin Gray looked up suddenly when he heard Rita's name, and:

"What misunderstanding?" he asked.

"Regarding the nature of my friendship with her," answered Sir Lucien coolly. "Now, I am going to speak quite bluntly, Gray, because I like Rita and I respect her. I also like and respect Monte Irvin; and I don't want you, or anybody else, to think that Rita and I are, or ever have been, anything more than pals. I have known her long enough to have learned that she sails straight, and has always sailed straight. Now--listen, Gray, please. You embarrassed me tonight, old chap, and you embarrassed Rita. It was unnecessary." He paused, and then added slowly: "She is as sacred to me, Gray, as she is to you--and we are both friends of Monte Irvin."

For a moment Quentin Gray's fiery temper flickered up, as his heightened color showed, but the coolness of the older and cleverer man prevailed. Gray laughed, stood up, and held out his hand.

"You're right, Pyne!" he said. "But she's damn pretty!" He uttered a loud sigh. "If only she were not married!"

Sir Lucien gripped the outstretched hand, but his answering smile had much pathos in it.

"If only she were not, Gray," he echoed.

He took his departure shortly afterwards, absently leaving a brown packet of cigarettes upon the table. It was an accident. Yet there were few, when the truth respecting Sir Lucien Pyne became known, who did not believe it to have been a deliberate act, designed to lure Quentin Gray into the path of the poppy.

CHAPTER XXII
THE STRANGLE-HOLD

Less than a month later Rita was in a state of desperation again. Kazmah's prices had soared above anything that he had hitherto extorted. Her bank account, as usual, was greatly overdrawn, and creditors of all kinds were beginning to press for payment. Then, crowning catastrophe, Monte Irvin, for the first time during their married life, began to take an interest in Rita's reckless expenditure. By a combination of adverse circumstances, she, the wife of one of the wealthiest aldermen of the City of London, awakened to the fact that literally she had no money.

She pawned as much of her jewellery as she could safely dispose of, and temporarily silenced the more threatening tradespeople; but Kazmah declined to give credit, and cheques had never been acceptable at the establishment in old Bond Street.

Rita feverishly renewed her old quest, seeking in all directions for some less extortionate purveyor. But none was to be found. The selfishness and secretiveness of the drug slave made it difficult for her to learn on what terms others obtained Kazmah's precious goods; but although his prices undoubtedly varied, she was convinced that no one of all his clients was so cruelly victimized as she.

Mollie Gretna endeavored to obtain an extra supply to help Rita, but Kazmah evidently saw through the device, and the endeavor proved a failure.

She demanded to see Kazmah, but Rashid, the Egyptian, blandly assured her that "the Sheikh-el-Kazmah" was away. She cast discretion to the winds and wrote to him, protesting that it was utterly impossible for her to raise so much ready money as he demanded, and begging him to grant her a small supply or to accept the letter as a promissory note to be redeemed in three months. No answer was received, but when Rita again called at old Bond Street, Rashid proposed one of the few compromises which the frenzied woman found herself unwilling to accept.

"The Sheikh-el-Kazmah say, my lady, your friend Mr. Gray never come to him. If you bring him it will be all right."

Rita found herself stricken dumb by this cool proposal. The degradation which awaits the drug slave had never been more succinctly expounded to her. She was to employ Gray's foolish devotion for the commercial advantage of Kazmah. Of course Gray might any day become one of the three wealthiest peers in the realm. She divined the meaning of Kazmah's hitherto incomprehensible harshness (or believed that she did); she saw what was expected of her. "My God!" she whispered. "I have not come to that yet."

Rashid she knew to be incorruptible or powerless, and she turned away, trembling, and left the place, whose faint perfume of frankincense had latterly become hateful to her.

She was at this time bordering upon a state of collapse. Insomnia, which latterly had defied dangerously increased doses of veronal, was telling upon nerve and brain. Now, her head aching so that she often wondered how long she could retain sanity, she found herself deprived not only of cocaine, but also of malourea. Margaret Halley was her last hope, and to Margaret she hastened on the day before the tragedy which was destined to bring to light the sinister operations of the Kazmah group.

Although, perhaps mercifully, she was unaware of the fact, representatives of Spinker's Agency had been following her during the whole of the preceding fortnight. That Rita was in desperate trouble of some kind her
husband had not failed to perceive, and her reticence had quite naturally led him to a certain conclusion. He had
sought to win her confidence by every conceivable means and had failed. At last had come doubt—and the hateful
interview with Spinker.

As Rita turned in at the doorway below Margaret's flat, then, Brisley was lighting a cigarette in the shelter of a
porch nearly opposite, and Gunn was not far away.

Margaret immediately perceived that her friend's condition was alarming. But she realized that whatever the
desire to which it might be due, it gave her the opportunity for which she had been waiting. She wrote a prescription
containing one grain of cocaine, but declined firmly to issue others unless Rita authorized her, in writing, to
undertake a cure of the drug habit.

Rita's disjointed statements pointed to a conspiracy of some kind on the part of those who had been supplying
her with drugs, but Margaret knew from experience that to exhibit curiosity in regard to the matter would be merely
to provoke evasions.

A hopeless day and a pain-racked, sleepless night found Kazmah's unhappy victim in the mood for any measure,
however desperate, which should promise even temporary relief. Monte Irvin went out very early, and at about
eleven o'clock Rita rang up Kazmah's, but only to be informed by Rashid, who replied, that Kazmah was still away.

"This evening he tell me that he see your friend if he come, my lady." As if the Fates sought to test her endurance to
the utmost, Quentin Gray called shortly afterwards and invited her to dine with him and go to a theatre that evening.

For five age-long seconds Rita hesitated. If no plan offered itself by nightfall she knew that her last scruple
would be conquered. "After all," whispered a voice within her brain, "Quentin is a man. Even if I took him to
Kazmah's and he was in some way induced to try opium, or even cocaine, he would probably never become addicted
to drug-taking. But I should have done my part—"

"Very well, Quentin," she heard herself saying aloud. "Will you call for me?"

But when he had gone Rita sat for more than half an hour, quite still, her hands clenched and her face a tragic
mask. (Gunn, of Spinker's Agency, reported telephonically to Monte Irvin in the City that the Hon. Quentin Gray
had called and had remained about twenty-five minutes; that he had proceeded to the Prince's Restaurant, and from
there to Mudie's, where he had booked a box at the Gaiety Theatre.)

Towards the fall of dusk the more dreadful symptoms which attend upon a sudden cessation of the use of
cocaine by a victim of cocainophagia began to assert themselves again. Rita searched wildly in the lining of her
jewel-case to discover if even a milligram of the drug had by chance fallen there from the little gold box. But the
quest was in vain.

As a final resort she determined to go to Margaret Halley again.

She hurried to Dover Street, and her last hope was shattered. Margaret was out, and Janet had no idea when she
was likely to return. Rita had much ado to prevent herself from bursting into tears. She scribbled a few lines, without
quite knowing what she was writing, sealed the paper in an envelope, and left it on Margaret's table.

Of returning to Prince's Gate and dressing for the evening she had only a hazy impression. The hammer-beats in
her head were depriving her of reasoning power, and she felt cold, numbed, although a big fire blazed in her room.

Then as she sat before her mirror, drearily wondering if her face really looked as drawn and haggard as the image in
the glass, or if definite delusions were beginning, Nina came in and spoke to her. Some moments elapsed before Rita
could grasp the meaning of the girl's words.

"Sir Lucien Pyne has rung up, Madam, and wishes to speak to you."

Sir Lucien! Sir Lucien had come back? Rita experienced a swift return of feverish energy. Half dressed as she
was, and without pausing to take a wrap, she ran out to the telephone.

Never had a man's voice sounded so sweet as that of Sir Lucien when he spoke across the wires. He was at
Albemarle Street, and Rita, wasting no time in explanations, begged him to await her there. In another ten minutes
she had completed her toilette and had sent Nina to 'phone for a cab. (One of the minor details of his wife's behavior
which latterly had aroused Irvin's distrust was her frequent employment of public vehicles in preference to either of
the cars.)

Quentin Gray she had quite forgotten, until, as she was about to leave:

"Is there any message for Mr. Gray, Madam?" inquired Nina naively.

"Oh!" cried Rita. "Of course! Quick! Give me some paper and a pencil."

She wrote a hasty note, merely asking Gray to proceed to the restaurant, where she promised to join him, left it
in charge of the maid, and hurried off to Albemarle Street.

Mareno, the silent, yellow-faced servant who had driven the car on the night of Rita's first visit to Limehouse,
admitted her. He showed her immediately into the lofty study, where Sir Lucien awaited.

"Oh, Lucy—Lucy!" she cried, almost before the door had closed behind Mareno. "I am desperate—desperate!"

Sir Lucien placed a chair for her. His face looked very drawn and grim. But Rita was in too highly strung a
condition to observe this fact, or indeed to observe anything.

"Tell me," he said gently.

And in a torrent of disconnected, barely coherent language, the tortured woman told him of Kazmah's attempt to force her to lure Quentin Gray into the drug coterie. Sir Lucien stood behind her chair, and the icy reserve which habitually rendered his face an impenetrable mask deserted him as the story of Rita's treatment at the hands of the Egyptian of Bond Street was unfolded in all its sordid hideousness. Rita's soft, musical voice, for which of old she had been famous, shook and wavered; her pose, her twitching gestures, all told of a nervous agony bordering on prostration or worse. Finally:

"He dare not refuse you!" she cried. "Ring him up and insist upon him seeing me tonight!"

"I will see him, Rita."

She turned to him, wild-eyed.

"You shall not! You shall not!" she said. "I am going to speak to that man face to face, and if he is human he must listen to me. Oh! I have realized the hold he has upon me, Lucy! I know what it means, this disappearance of all the others who used to sell what Kazmah sells. If I am to suffer, he shall not escape! I swear it. Either he listens to me tonight or I go straight to the police!"

"Be calm, little girl," whispered Sir Lucien, and he laid his hand upon her shoulder.

But she leapt up, her pupils suddenly dilating and her delicate nostrils twitching in a manner which unmistakably pointed to the impossibility of thwarting her if sanity were to be retained.

"Ring him up, Lucy," she repeated in a low voice. "He is there. Now that I have someone behind me I see my way at last!"

"There may, nevertheless, be a better way," said Sir Lucien; but he added quickly: "Very well, dear, I will do as you wish. I have a little cocaine, which I will give you."

He went out to the telephone, carefully closing the study door.

That he had counted upon the influence of the drug to reduce Rita to a more reasonable frame of mind was undoubtedly the fact, for presently as they proceeded on foot towards old Bond Street he reverted to something like his old ironical manner. But Rita's determination was curiously fixed. Unmoved by every kind of appeal, she proceeded to the appointment which Sir Lucien had made--ignorant of that which Fate held in store for her--and Sir Lucien, also humanly blind, walked on to meet his death.

PART THIRD
THE MAN FROM WHITEHALL
CHAPTER XXIII
CHIEF INSPECTOR KERRY RESIGNS

"Come in," said the Assistant Commissioner. The door opened and Chief Inspector Kerry entered. His face was as fresh-looking, his attire as spruce and his eyes were as bright, as though he had slept well, enjoyed his bath and partaken of an excellent breakfast. Whereas he had not been to bed during the preceding twenty-four hours, had breakfasted upon biscuits and coffee, and had spent the night and early morning in ceaseless toil. Nevertheless he had found time to visit a hairdressing saloon, for he prided himself upon the nicety of his personal appearance.

He laid his hat, cane and overall upon a chair, and from a pocket of his reefer jacket took out a big notebook.

"Good morning, sir," he said.

"Good morning, Chief Inspector," replied the Assistant Commissioner. "Pray be seated. No doubt--he suppressed a weary sigh--"you have a long report to make. I observe that some of the papers have the news of Sir Lucien Pyne's death."

Chief Inspector Kerry smiled savagely.

"Twenty pressmen are sitting downstairs," he said "waiting for particulars. One of them got into my room." He opened his notebook. "He didn't stay long."

The Assistant Commissioner gazed wearily at his blotting-pad, striking imaginary chords upon the table-edge with his large widely extended fingers. He cleared his throat.

"Er--Chief Inspector," he said, "I fully recognize the difficulties which--you follow me? But the Press is the Press. Neither you nor I could hope to battle against such an institution even if we desired to do so. Where active resistance is useless, a little tact--you quite understand?"

"Quite, sir. Rely upon me," replied Kerry. "But I didn't mean to open my mouth until I had reported to you. Now, sir, here is a precis of evidence, nearly complete, written out clearly by Sergeant Coombes. You would probably prefer to read it?"

"Yes, yes, I will read it. But has Sergeant Coombes been on duty all night?"

"He has, sir, and so have I. Sergeant Coombes went home an hour ago."

"Ah," murmured the Assistant Commissioner
He took the notebook from Kerry, and resting his head upon his hand began to read. Kerry sat very upright in his chair, chewing slowly and watching the profile of the reader with his unwavering steel-blue eyes. The reading was twice punctuated by telephone messages, but the Assistant Commissioner apparently possessed the Napoleonic faculty of doing two things at once, for his gaze travelled uninterruptedly along the lines of the report throughout the time that he issued telephonic instructions.

When he had arrived at the final page of Coombes' neat, schoolboy writing, he did not look up for a minute or more, continuing to rest his head in the palm of his hand. Then:

"So far you have not succeeded in establishing the identity of the missing man, Kazmah?" he said.

"Not so far, sir," replied Kerry, enunciating the words with characteristic swift precision, each syllable distinct as the rap of a typewriter. "Inspector Whiteleaf, of Vine Street, has questioned all constables in the Piccadilly area, and we have seen members of the staffs of many shops and offices in the neighborhood, but no one is familiar with the appearance of the missing man."

"Ah--now, the Egyptian servant?"

Inspector Kerry moved his shoulders restlessly.

"Rashid is his name. Many of the people in the neighborhood knew him by sight, and at five o'clock this morning one of my assistants had the good luck to find out, from an Arab coffee-house keeper named Abdulla, where Rashid lived. He paid a visit to the place--it's off the West India Dock Road--half an hour later. But Rashid had gone. I regret to report that all traces of him have been lost."

"Ah--considering this circumstance side by side with the facts that no scrap of evidence has come to light in the Kazmah premises and that the late Sir Lucien's private books and papers cannot be found, what do you deduce, Chief Inspector?"

"My report indicates what I deduce, sir! An accomplice of Kazmah's must have been in Sir Lucien's household! Kazmah and Mrs. Irvin can only have left the premises by going up to the roof and across the leads to Sir Lucien's flat in Albemarle Street. I shall charge the man Juan Mareno."

"What has he to say?" murmured the Assistant Commissioner, absently turning over the pages of the notebook.

"Ah, yes. 'Claims to be a citizen of the United States but has produced no papers. Engaged by Sir Lucien Pyne in San Francisco. Professes to have no evidence to offer. Admitted Mrs. Monte Irvin to Sir Lucien's flat on night of murder. Sir Lucien and Mrs. Irvin went out together shortly afterwards, and Sir Lucien ordered him (Mareno) to go for the car to garage in South Audley Street and drive to club, where Sir Lucien proposed to dine. Mareno claims to have followed instructions. After waiting near club for an hour, learned from hall porter that Sir Lucien had not been there that evening. Drove car back to garage and returned to Albemarle Street shortly after eight o'clock.' H'm. Is this confirmed in any way?"

Kerry's teeth snapped together viciously.

"Up to a point it is, sir. The club porter remembers Mareno inquiring about Sir Lucien, and the people at the garage testify that he took out the car and returned it as stated."

"No one has come forward who actually saw him waiting outside the club?"

"No one. But unfortunately it was a dark, misty night, and cars waiting for club members stand in a narrow side turning. Mareno is a surly brute, and he might have waited an hour without speaking to a soul. Unless another chauffeur happened to notice and recognize the car nobody would be any wiser."

The Assistant Commissioner sighed, glancing up for the first time.

"You don't think he waited outside the club at all?" he said.

"I don't, sir!" rapped Kerry.

The Assistant Commissioner rested his head upon his hand again.

"It doesn't seem to be germane to your case, Chief Inspector, in any event. There is no question of an alibi. Sir Lucien's wrist-watch was broken at seven-fifteen--evidently at the time of his death; and this man Mareno does not claim to have left the flat until after that hour."

"I know it, sir," said Kerry. "He took out the car at half-past seven. What I want to know is where he went to!"

The Assistant Commissioner glanced rapidly into the speaker's fierce eyes.

"From what you have gathered respecting the appearance of Kazmah, does it seem possible that Mareno may be Kazmah?"

"It does not, sir. Kazmah has been described to me, at first hand and at second hand. All descriptions tally in one respect: Kazmah has remarkably large eyes. In Miss Halley's evidence you will note that she refers to them as 'larger than any human eyes I have ever seen.' Now, Mareno has eyes like a pig!"

"Then I take it you are charging him as accessory?"

"Exactly, sir. Somebody got Kazmah and Mrs. Irvin away, and it can only have been Mareno. Sir Lucien had no other resident servant; he was a man who lived almost entirely at restaurants and clubs. Again, somebody cleaned up
his papers, and it was somebody who knew where to look for them."

"Quite so--quite so," murmured the Assistant Commissioner. "Of course, we shall learn today something of his affairs from his banker. He must have banked somewhere. But surely, Chief Inspector, there is a safe or private bureau in his flat?"

"There is, sir," said Kerry grimly; "a safe. I had it opened at six o'clock this morning. It had been hastily cleaned out; not a doubt of it. I expect Sir Lucien carried the keys on his person. You will remember, sir, that his pockets had been emptied?"

"H'm," mused the Assistant Commissioner. "This Cubanis Cigarette Company, Chief Inspector?"

"Dummy goods!" rapped Kerry. "A blind. Just a back entrance to Kazmah's office. Premises were leased on behalf of an agent. This agent--a reputable man of business--paid the rent quarterly. I've seen him."

"And who was his client?" asked the Assistant Commissioner, displaying a faint trace of interest.

"A certain Mr. Isaacs!"

"Who can be traced?"

"Who can't be traced!"

"His checks?"

Chief Inspector Kerry smiled, so that his large white teeth gleamed savagely.

"Mr. Isaacs represented himself as a dealer in Covent Garden who was leasing the office for a lady friend, and who desired, for domestic reasons, to cover his tracks. As ready money in large amounts changes hands in the market, Mr. Isaacs paid ready money to the agent. Beyond doubt the real source of the ready money was Kazmah's."

"But his address?"

"A hotel in Covent Garden."

"Where he lives?"

"Where he is known to the booking-clerk, a girl who allowed him to have letters addressed there. A man of smoke, sir, acting on behalf of someone in the background."

"Ah! and these Bond Street premises have been occupied by Kazmah for the past eight years?"

"So I am told. I have yet to see representatives of the landlord. I may add that Sir Lucien Pyne had lived in Albemarle Street for about the same time."

Wearily raising his head:

"The point is certainly significant," said the Assistant Commissioner. "Now we come to the drug traffic, Chief Inspector. You have found no trace of drugs on the premises?"

"Not a grain, sir!"

"In the office of the cigarette firm?"

"No."

"By the way, was there no staff attached to the latter concern?"

Kerry chewed viciously.

"No business of any kind seems to have been done there," he replied. "An office-boy employed by the solicitor on the same floor as Kazmah has seen a man and also a woman, go up to the third floor on several occasions, and he seems to think they went to the Cubanis office. But he's not sure, and he can give no useful description of the parties, anyway. Nobody in the building has ever seen the door open before this morning."

The Assistant Commissioner sighed yet more wearily.

"Apart from the suspicions of Miss Margaret Halley, you have no sound basis for supposing that Kazmah dealt in prohibited drugs?" he inquired.

"The evidence of Miss Halley, the letter left for her by Mrs. Irvin, and the fact that Mrs. Irvin said, in the presence of Mr. Quentin Gray, that she had 'a particular reason' for seeing Kazmah, point to it unmistakably, sir. Then, I have seen Mrs. Irvin's maid. (Mr. Monte Irvin is still too unwell to be interrogated.) The girl was very frightened, but she admitted outright that she had been in the habit of going regularly to Kazmah for certain perfumes. She wouldn't admit that she knew the flasks contained cocaine or veronal, but she did admit that her mistress had been addicted to the drug habit for several years. It began when she was on the stage."

"Ah, yes," murmured the Assistant Commissioner; "she was Rita Dresden, was she not--'The Maid of the Masque' A very pretty and talented actress. A pity--a great pity. So the girl, characteristically, is trying to save herself?"

"She is," said Kerry grimly. "But it cuts no ice. There is another point. After this report was made out, a message reached me from Miss Halley, as a result of which I visited Mr. Quentin Gray early this morning."

"Dear, dear," sighed the Assistant Commissioner, "your intense zeal and activity are admirable, Chief Inspector, but appalling. And what did you learn?"

From an inside pocket Chief Inspector Kerry took out a plain brown paper packet containing several cigarettes
and laid the packet on the table.

"I got these, sir," he said grimly. "They were left at Mr. Gray's some weeks ago by the late Sir Lucien. They are doped."

The Assistant Commissioner, his head resting upon his hand, gazed abstractedly at the packet. "If only you could trace the source of supply," he murmured.

"That brings me to my last point, sir. From Mrs. Irvin's maid I learned that her mistress was acquainted with a certain Mrs. Sin."

"Mrs. Sin? Incredible name."

"She's a woman reputed to be married to a Chinaman. Inspector Whiteleaf, of Vine Street, knows her by sight as one of the night-club birds—a sort of mysterious fungus, sir, flowering in the dark and fattening on gilded fools. Unless I'm greatly mistaken, Mrs. Sin is the link between the doped cigarettes and the missing Kazmah."

"Does anyone know where she lives?"

"Lots of 'em know!" snapped Kerry. "But it's making them speak."

"To whom do you more particularly refer, Chief Inspector?"

"To the moneyed asses and the brainless women belonging to a certain West End set, sir," said Kerry savagely. "They go in for every monstrosity from Buenos Ayres, Port Said and Pekin. They get up dances that would make a wooden horse blush. They eat hashish and they smoke opium. They inject morphine, and they would have their hair dyed blue if they heard it was 'being done.'"

"Ah," sighed the Assistant Commissioner, "a very delicate and complex case, Chief Inspector. The agony of mind which Mr. Irvin must be suffering is too horrible for one to contemplate. An admirable man, too; honorable and generous. I can conceive no theory to account for the disappearance of Mrs. Irvin other than that she was a party to the murder."

"No, sir," said Kerry guardedly. "But we have the dope clue to work on. That the Chinese receive stuff in the East End and that it's sold in the West End every constable in the force is well aware. Leman Street is getting busy, and every shady case in the Piccadilly area will be beaten up within the next twenty-four hours, too. It's purely departmental, sir, from now onwards, and merely a question of time. Therefore I don't doubt the issue."

Kerry paused, cleared his throat, and produced a foolscap envelope which he laid upon the table before the Assistant Commissioner.

"With very deep regret, sir," he said, "after a long and agreeable association with the Criminal Investigation Department, I have to tender you this."

The Assistant Commissioner took up the envelope and stared at it vaguely.

"Ah, yes, Chief Inspector," he murmured. "Perhaps I fail entirely to follow you; I am somewhat over-worked, as you know. What does this envelope contain?"

"My resignation, sir," replied Kerry.

CHAPTER XXIV
TO INTRODUCE 719

Some moments of silence followed. Sounds of traffic from the Embankment penetrated dimly to the room of the Assistant Commissioner; ringing of tram bells and that vague sustained noise which is created by the whirring of countless wheels along hard pavements. Finally:

"You have selected a curious moment to retire, Chief Inspector," said the Assistant Commissioner. "Your prospects were never better. No doubt you have considered the question of your pension?"

"I know what I'm giving up, sir," replied Kerry.

The Assistant Commissioner slowly revolved in his chair and gazed sadly at the speaker. Chief Inspector Kerry met his glance with that fearless, unflinching stare which lent him so formidable an appearance.

"You might care to favor me with some explanation which I can lay before the Chief Commissioner?"

Kerry snapped his white teeth together viciously.

"May I take it, sir, that you accept my resignation?"

"Certainly not. I will place it before the responsible authority. I can do no more."

"Without disrespect, sir, I want to speak to you as man to man. As a private citizen I could do it. As your subordinate I can't."

The Assistant Commissioner sighed, stroking his neatly brushed hair with one large hand.

"Equally without disrespect, Chief Inspector," he murmured, "it is news for me to learn that you have ever refrained from speaking your mind either in my presence or in the presence of any man."

Kerry smiled, unable wholly to conceal a sense of gratified vanity.

"Well, sir," he said, "you have my resignation before you, and I'm prepared to abide by the consequences. What I want to say is this: I'm a man that has worked hard all his life to earn the respect and the trust of his employers. I am
supposed to be Chief Inspector of this department, and as Chief Inspector I'll kow-tow to nothing on two legs once
I've been put in charge of a case. I work right in the sunshine. There's no grafting about me. I draw my salary every
week, and any man that says I earn sixpence in the dark is at liberty to walk right in here and deposit his funeral
expenses. If I'm supposed to be under a cloud--there's my reply. But I demand a public inquiry."

At ever increasing speed, succinctly, viciously he rapped out the words. His red face grew more red, and his
steel-blue eyes more fierce. The Assistant Commissioner exhibited bewilderment. As the high tones ceased:
"Really, Chief Inspector," he said, "you pain and surprise me. I do not profess to be ignorant of the cause of
your--annoyance. But perhaps if I acquaint you with the facts of my own position in the matter you will be open to
reconsider your decision."

Kerry cleared his throat loudly.
"I won't work in the dark, sir," he declared truculently. "I'd rather be a pavement artist and my own master than
Chief Inspector with an unknown spy following me about."

"Quite so--quite so."

"Seven-one-nine," said Kerry in a high, strained voice. "Why seven-one-nine? And why all this hocus-pocus?
Am I to understand, sir, that not only myself but all the Criminal Investigation Department is under a cloud?"

The Assistant Commissioner stroked his hair.
"You are to understand, Chief Inspector, that for the first time throughout my period of office I find myself out
of touch with the Chief Commissioner. It is not departmental for me to say so, but I believe the Chief Commissioner
finds himself similarly out of touch with the Secretary of State. Apparently very powerful influences are at work,
and the line of conduct taken up by the Home office suggests to my mind that collusion between the receivers and
distributors of drugs and the police is suspected by someone. That being so, possibly out of a sense of fairness to all
officially concerned, the committee which I understand has been appointed to inquire into the traffic has decided to
treat us all alike, from myself down to the rawest constable. It's highly irritating and preposterous, of course, but I
cannot disguise from you or from myself that we are on trial, Chief Inspector!"

Kerry stood up and slowly moved his square shoulders in the manner of an athlete about to attempt a feat of
weight-lifting. From the Assistant Commissioner's table he took the envelope which contained his resignation, and
tore it into several portions. These he deposited in a waste-paper basket.
"That's that!" he said. "I am very deeply indebted to you, sir. I know now what to tell the Press."

The Assistant Commissioner glanced up.
"Not a word about 719," he said, "of course, you understand this?"

"If we don't exist as far as 719 is concerned, sir," said Kerry in his most snappy tones, "719 means nothing to
me!"

"Quite so--quite so. Of course, I may be wrong in the motives which I ascribe to this Whitehall agent, but
misunderstanding is certain to arise out of a system of such deliberate mystification, which can only be compared to
that employed by the Russian police under the Tsars."

Half an hour later Chief Inspector Kerry came out of New Scotland Yard, and, walking down on to the
Embankment, boarded a Norwood tramcar. The weather remained damp and gloomy, but upon the red face of Chief
Inspector Kerry, as he mounted to the upper deck of the car, rested an expression which might have been described
as one of cheery truculence. Where other passengers, coat collars upturned, gazed gloomily from the windows at the
yellow murk overhanging the river, Kerry looked briskly about him, smiling pleasurably.

He was homeward bound, and when he presently alighted and went swinging along Spenser Road towards his house, he was still smiling. He regarded the case as having developed into a competition between himself and the man appointed by Whitehall. And it was just such a position, disconcerting to one of less aggressive temperament, which stimulated Chief Inspector Kerry and put him in high good humor.

Mrs. Kerry, arrayed in a serviceable rain-coat, and wearing a plain felt hat, was standing by the dining-room door as Kerry entered. She had a basket on her arm. "I was waiting for ye, Dan," she said simply.

He kissed her affectionately, put his arm about her waist, and the two entered the cozy little room. By no ordinary human means was it possible that Mary Kerry should have known that her husband would come home at that time, but he was so used to her prescience in this respect that he offered no comment. She "kenned" his approach always, and at times when his life had been in danger—and these were not of infrequent occurrence—Mary Kerry, if sleeping, had awakened, trembling, though the scene of peril were a hundred miles away, and if awake had blanched and known a deadly sudden fear.

"Ye'll be goin' to bed?" she asked.
"For three hours, Mary. Don't fail to rouse me if I oversleep."
"Is it clear to ye yet?"
"Nearly clear. The dark thing you saw behind it all, Mary, was dope! Kazmah's is a secret drug-syndicate. They've appointed a Home office agent, and he's working independently of us, but . . ."

His teeth came together with a snap.
"Oh, Dan," said his wife, "it's a race? Drugs? A Home office agent? Dan, they think the Force is in it?"
"They do!" rapped Kerry. "I'm for Leman Street in three hours. If there's double-dealing behind it, then the mugs are in the East End, and it's folly, not knavery, I'm looking for. It's a race, Mary, and the credit of the Service is at stake! No, my dear, I'll have a snack when I wake. You're going shopping?"

"I am, Dan. I'd ha' started, but I wanted to see ye when ye came hame. If ye've only three hours go straight up the now. I'll ha' something hot a' ready when ye waken."

Ten minutes later Kerry was in bed, his short clay pipe between his teeth, and The Meditations of Marcus Aurelius in his hand. Such was his customary sleeping-draught, and it had never been known to fail. Half a pipe of Irish twist and three pages of the sad imperial author invariably plunged Chief Inspector Kerry into healthy slumber.

CHAPTER XXV
NIGHT-LIFE OF SOHO

It was close upon midnight when Detective-Sergeant Coombes appeared in a certain narrow West End thoroughfare, which was lined with taxicabs and private cars. He wore a dark overcoat and a tweed cap, and although his chin was buried in the genial folds of a woollen comforter, and his cap was pulled down over his eyes, his sly smile could easily be detected even in the dim light afforded by the car lamps. He seemed to have business of a mysterious nature among the cabmen; for with each of them in turn he conducted a brief conversation, passing unobtrusively from cab to cab, and making certain entries in a notebook. Finally he disappeared. No one actually saw him go, and no one had actually seen him arrive. At one moment, however, he was there; in the next he was gone.

Five minutes later Chief Inspector Kerry entered the street. His dark overcoat and white silk muffler concealed a spruce dress suit, a fact betrayed by black, braided trousers, unusually tight-fitting, and boots which almost glittered. He carried the silver-headed malacca cane, and had retained his narrow-brimmed howler at its customary jaunty angle.

Passing the lines of waiting vehicles, he walked into the entrance of a popular night-club which faced the narrow street. On a lounge immediately inside the doorway a heated young man was sitting fanning his dancing partner and gazing into her weakly pretty face in vacuous adoration.

Kerry paused for a moment, staring at the pair. The man returned his stare, looking him up and down in a manner meant to be contemptuous. Kerry's fierce, intolerant gaze became transferred to the face and then the figure of the woman. He tilted his hat further forward and turned aside. The woman's glance followed him, to the marked disgust of her companion.

"Oh," she whispered, "what a delightfully savage man! He looks positively uncivilized. I have no doubt he drags women about by their hair. I do hope he's a member!"

Mollie Gretna spoke loudly enough for Kerry to hear her, but unmoved by her admiration he stepped up to the reception office. He was in high good humor. He had spent the afternoon agreeably, interviewing certain officials charged with policing the East End of London, and had succeeded, to quote his own language, "in getting a gale up." Despite the coldness of the weather, he had left two inspectors and a speechlessly indignant superintendent bathed in perspiration.
"Are you a member, sir?" inquired the girl behind the desk.

Kerry smiled genially. A newsboy thrust open the swing-door, yelling: "Bond Street murder! A fresh development. Late speshul!"

"Oh!" cried Mollie Gretna to her companion, "get me a paper. Be quick! I am so excited!"

Kerry took up a pen, and in large bold hand-writing inscribed the following across two pages of the visitors' book:

"Chief Inspector Kerry. Criminal Investigation Department."

He laid a card on the open book, and, thrusting his cane under his arm, walked to the head of the stairs.

"Cloak-room on the right, sir," said an attendant.

Kerry paused, glancing over his shoulder and chewing audibly. Then he settled his hat more firmly upon his red head and descended the stairs. The attendant went to inspect the visitors' book, but Mollie Gretna was at the desk before him, and:

"Oh, Bill!" she cried to her annoyed cavalier, "it's Inspector Kerry-- who is in charge of poor Lucy's murder! Oh, Bill! this is lovely! Something is going to happen! Do come down!"

Followed by the obedient but reluctant "Bill," Mollie ran downstairs, and almost into the arms of a tall dark girl, who, carrying a purple opera cloak, was coming up.

"You're not going yet, Dickey?" said Mollie, throwing her arm around the other's waist.

"Ssh!" whispered "Dickey." "Inspector Kerry is here! You don't want to be called as a witness at nasty inquests and things, do you?"

"Good heavens, my dear, no! But why should I be?"

"Why should any of us? But don't you see they are looking for the people who used to go to Kazmah's? It's in the paper tonight. We shall all be served with subpoenas. I'm off!"

Escaping from Mollie's embrace, the tall girl ran up the stairs, kissing her hand to Bill as she passed. Mollie hesitated, looking all about the crowded room for Chief Inspector Kerry. Presently she saw him, standing nearly opposite the stairway, his intolerant blue eyes turning right and left, so that the fierce glance seemed to miss nothing and no one in the room. Hands thrust in his overcoat pockets and his cane held under his arm, he inspected the place and its occupants as a very aggressive country cousin might inspect the monkey-house at the Zoo. To Mollie's intense disappointment he persistently avoided looking in her direction.

Although a popular dance was on the point of commencing, several visitors had suddenly determined to leave. Kerry pretended to be ignorant of the sensation which his appearance had created, passing slowly along the room and submitting group after group to deliberate scrutiny; but as news flies through an Eastern bazaar the name of the celebrated detective, whose association with London's latest crime was mentioned by every evening paper in the kingdom, sped now on magic wings, so that there was a muted charivari out of which, in every key from bass to soprano, arose ever and anon the words "Chief Inspector Kerry."

"It's perfectly ridiculous but characteristically English," drawled one young man, standing beside Mollie Gretna, "to send out a bally red-headed policeman in preposterous glad-rags to look for a clever criminal. Kerry is well known to all the crooks, and nobody could mistake him. Damn silly--damn silly!"

As "damn silly" Kerry's open scrutiny of the members and visitors must have appeared to others, but it was a deliberate policy very popular with the Chief Inspector, and termed by him "beating." Possessed of an undisguisable personality, Kerry had found a way of employing his natural physical peculiarities to his professional advantage. Where other investigators worked in the dark, secretly, Red Kerry sought the limelight--at the right time. That every hour lost in getting on the track of the mysterious Kazmah was a point gained by the equally mysterious man from Whitehall he felt assured, and although the elaborate but hidden mechanism of New Scotland Yard was at work seeking out the patrons of the Bond Street drug-shop, Kerry was indisposed to await the result.

He had been in the night club only about ten minutes, but during those ten minutes fully a dozen people had more or less hurriedly departed. Because of the arrangements already made by Sergeant Coombes, the addresses of many of these departing visitors would be in Kerry's possession ere the night was much older. And why should they have fled, incontinent, if not for the reason that they feared to become involved in the Kazmah affair? All the cabmen had been warned, and those fugitives who had private cars would be followed.

It was a curious scene which Kerry surveyed, a scene to have interested philosopher and politician alike. For here were representatives of every stratum of society, although some of those standing for the lower strata were suitably disguised. The peerage was well represented, so was Judah; there were women entitled to wear coronets dancing with men entitled to wear the broad arrow, and men whose forefathers had signed Magna Charta dancing with chorus girls from the revues and musical comedies.

Waiting until the dance was fully in progress, Inspector Kerry walked slowly around the room in the direction of the stair. Parties seated at tables were treated each to an intolerant stare, alcoves were inspected, and more than one
waiter meeting the gaze of the steely eyes, felt a prickling of conscience and recalled past peccadilloes.

Bill had claimed Mollie Gretna for the dance, but:

"No, Bill," she had replied, watching Kerry as if enthralled; "I don't want to dance. I am watching Chief Inspector Kerry."

"That's evident," complained the young man. "Perhaps you would like to spend the rest of the night in Bow Street?"

"Oh," whispered Mollie, "I should love it! I have never been arrested, but if ever I am I hope it will be by Chief Inspector Kerry. I am positive he would haul me away in handcuffs!"

When Kerry came to the foot of the stairs, Mollie quite deliberately got in his way, murmured an apology, and gave him a sidelong gaze through lowered lashes, which was more eloquent than any thesis. He smiled with fierce geniality, looked her up and down, and proceeded to mount the stairs, with never a backward glance.

His genius for criminal investigation possessed definite limitations. He could not perhaps have been expected in tactics so completely opposed to those which he had anticipated to recognize the presence of a valuable witness. Student of human nature though undoubtedly he was, he had not solved the mystery of that outstanding exception which seems to be involved in every rule.

Thus, a fellow with a low forehead and a weakly receding chin, Kerry classified as a dullard, a witling, unaware that if the brow were but low enough and the chin virtually absent altogether he might stand in the presence of a second Daniel. Physiognomy is a subtle science, and the exceptions to its rules are often of a sensational character. In the same way Kerry looked for evasion, and, where possible, flight, on the part of one possessing a guilty conscience. Mollie Gretna was a phenomenal exception to a rule otherwise sound. And even one familiar with criminal psychology might be forgiven for failing to detect guilt in a woman anxious to make the acquaintance of a prominent member of the Criminal Investigation Department.

Pausing for a moment in the entrance of the club, and chewing reflectively, Kerry swung open the door and walked out into the street. He had one more cover to "beat," and he set off briskly, plunging into the mazes of Soho crossing Wardour Street into old Compton Street, and proceeding thence in the direction of Shaftesbury Avenue. Turning to the right on entering the narrow thoroughfare for which he was bound, he stopped and whistled softly. He stood in the entrance to a court; and from further up the court came an answering whistle.

Kerry came out of the court again, and proceeded some twenty paces along the street to a restaurant. The windows showed no light, but the door remained open, and Kerry entered without hesitation, crossed a darkened room and found himself in a passage where a man was seated in a little apartment like that of a stage-door keeper. He stood up, on hearing Kerry's tread, peering out at the newcomer.

"The restaurant is closed, sir."

"Tell me a better one," rapped Kerry. "I want to go upstairs."

"Your card, sir."

Kerry revealed his teeth in a savage smile and tossed his card on to the desk before the concierge. He passed on, mounting the stairs at the end of the passage. Dimly a bell rang; and on the first landing Kerry met a heavily built foreign gentleman, who bowed.

"My dear Chief Inspector," he said gutturally, "what is this, please? I trust nothing is wrong, eh?"

"Nothing," replied Kerry. "I just want to look round."

"A few friends," explained the suave alien, rubbing his hands together and still bowing, "remain playing dominoes with me."

"Very good," rapped Kerry. "Well, if you think we have given them time to hide the 'wheel' we'll go in. Oh, don't explain. I'm not worrying about sticklebacks tonight. I'm out for salmon."

He opened a door on the left of the landing and entered a large room which offered evidence of having been hastily evacuated by a considerable company. A red and white figured cloth of a type much used in Continental cafes had been spread upon a long table, and three foreigners, two men and an elderly woman, were bending over a row of dominoes set upon one corner of the table. Apparently the men were playing and the woman was watching. But there was a dense cloud of cigar smoke in the room, and mingled with its pungency were sweeter scents. A number of empty champagne bottles stood upon a sideboard and an elegant silk theatre-bag lay on a chair.

"H'm," said Kerry, glaring fiercely from the bottles to the players, who covertly were watching him. "How you two smarts can tell a domino from a door-knocker after cracking a dozen magnums gets me guessing."

He took up the scented bag and gravely handed it to the old woman.

"You have mislaid your bag, madam," he said. "But, fortunately, I noticed it as I came in."

He turned the glance of his fierce eyes upon the man who had met him on the landing, and who had followed him into the room.

"Third floor, von Hindenburg," he rapped. "Don't argue. Lead the way."
For one dangerous moment the man's brow lowered and his heavy face grew blackly menacing. He exchanged a swift look with his friends seated at the disguised roulette table. Kerry's jaw muscles protruded enormously.

"Give me another answer like that," he said in a tone of cold ferocity, "and I'll kick you from here to Paradise."

"No offense--no offense," muttered the man, quailing before the savagery of the formidable Chief Inspector. "You come this way, please. Some ladies call upon me this evening, and I do not want to frighten them."

"No," said Kerry, "you wouldn't, naturally." He stood aside as a door at the further end of the room was opened.

"After you, my friend. I said 'lead the way.'"

They mounted to the third floor of the restaurant. The room which they had just quitted was used as an auxiliary dining and supper-room before midnight, as Kerry knew. After midnight the centre table was unmasked, and from thence onward to dawn, sometimes, was surrounded by roulette players. The third floor he had never visited, but he had a shrewd idea that it was not entirely reserved for the private use of the proprietor.

A babel of voices died away as the two men walked into a room rather smaller than that below and furnished with little tables, cafe fashion. At one end was a grand piano and a platform before which a velvet curtain was draped. Some twenty people, men and women, were in the place, standing looking towards the entrance. Most of the men and all the women but one were in evening dress; but despite this common armor of respectability, they did not all belong to respectable society.

Two of the women Kerry recognized as bearers of titles, and one was familiar to him as a screen-beauty. The others were unclassifiable, but all were fashionably dressed with the exception of a masculine-looking lady who had apparently come straight off a golf course, and who later was proved to be a well-known advocate of woman's rights. The men all belonged to familiar types. Some of them were Jews.

Kerry, his feet widely apart and his hands thrust in his overcoat pockets, stood staring at face after face and chewing slowly. The proprietor glanced apologetically at his patrons and shrugged. Silence fell upon the company. Then:

"I am a police officer," said Kerry sharply. "You will file out past me, and I want a card from each of you. Those who have no cards will write name and address here."

He drew a long envelope and a pencil from a pocket of his dinner jacket. Laying the envelope and pencil on one of the little tables:

"Quick march!" he snapped. "You, sir!" shooting out his forefinger in the direction of a tall, fair young man, "step out!"

Glancing helplessly about him, the young man obeyed, and approaching Kerry:

"I say, officer," he whispered nervously, "can't you manage to keep my name out of it? I mean to say, my people will kick up the deuce. Anything up to a tenner. . . ."

The whisper faded away. Kerry's expression had grown positively ferocious.

"Put your card on the table," he said tersely, "and get out while my hands stay in my pockets!"

Hurriedly the noble youth (he was the elder son of an earl) complied, and departed. Then, one by one, the rest of the company filed past the Chief Inspector. He challenged no one until a Jew smilingly laid a card on the table bearing the legend: "Mr. John Jones, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

"Hi!" rapped Kerry, grasping the man's arm. "One moment, Mr. 'Jones'! The card I want is in the other case. D'you take me for a mug? That 'Jones' trick was tried on Noah by the blue-faced baboon!"

His perception of character was wonderful. At some of the cards he did not even glance; and upon the women he wasted no time at all. He took it for granted that they would all give false names, but since each of them would be followed it did not matter. When at last the room was emptied, he turned to the scowling proprietor, and:

"That's that!" he said. "I've had no instructions about your establishment, my friend, and as I've seen nothing improper going on I'm making no charge, at the moment. I don't want to know what sort of show takes place on your platform, and I don't want to know anything about you that I don't know already. You're a Swiss subject and a dark horse."

He gathered up the cards from the table, glancing at them carelessly. He did not expect to gain much from his possession of these names and addresses. It was among the women that he counted upon finding patrons of Kazmah and Company. But as he was about to drop the cards into his overcoat pocket, one of them, which bore a written note, attracted his attention.

At this card he stared like a man amazed; his face grew more and more red, and:

"Hell!" he said---"Hell! which of 'em was it?"

The card contained the following:--

Lord Wrexborough Great Cumberland Place, V. 1 "To introduce 719. W."

CHAPTER XXVI

THE MOODS OF MOLLIE
Early the following morning Margaret Halley called upon Mollie Gretna.

Mollie's personality did not attract Margaret. The two had nothing in common, but Margaret was well aware of the nature of the tie which had bound Rita Irvin to this empty and decadent representative of English aristocracy. Mollie Gretna was entitled to append the words "The Honorable" to her name, but not only did she refrain from doing so but she even preferred to be known as "Gretna"—the style of one of the family estates.

This pseudonym she had adopted shortly after her divorce, when she had attempted to take up a stage career. But although the experience had proved disastrous, she had retained the nom de guerre, and during the past four years had several times appeared at war charity garden-parties as a classical dancer—to the great delight of the guests and greater disgust of her family. Her maternal uncle, head of her house, said to be the most blase member of the British peerage and known as "the noble tortoise," was generally considered to have pronounced the final verdict upon his golden-haired niece when he declared "she is almost amusing."

Mollie received her visitor with extravagant expressions of welcome.

"My dear Miss Halley," she cried, "how perfectly sweet of you to come to see me! of course, I can guess what you have called about. Look! I have every paper published this morning in London! Every one! Oh! poor, darling little Rita! What can have become of her?"

Tears glistened upon her carefully made-up lashes, and so deep did her grief seem to be that one would never have suspected that she had spent the greater part of the night playing bridge at a "mixed" club in Dover Street, and from thence had proceeded to a military "breakfast-dance."

"It is indeed a ghastly tragedy," said Margaret. "It seems incredible that she cannot be traced."

"Absolutely incredible!" declared Mollie, opening a large box of cigarettes. "Will you have one, dear?"

"No, thanks. By the way, they are not from Buenos Ayres, I suppose?"

Mollie, cigarette in hand, stared, round-eyed, and:

"Oh, my dear Miss Halley!" she cried, "what an idea! Such a funny thing to suggest."

Margaret smiled coolly.

"Poor Sir Lucien used to smoke cigarettes of that kind," she explained, "and I thought perhaps you smoked them, too."

Mollie shook her head and lighted the cigarette.

"He gave me one once, and it made me feel quite sick," she declared.

Margaret glanced at the speaker, and now for the first time she detected sincere emotion in Mollie's voice—and unforced tears in her eyes. Hope was reborn.

"Do you quite realize, Miss Gretna," she said quietly, "that every hour wasted now in tracing Rita may mean, must mean, an hour of agony for her?"

"Oh, don't! please don't!" cried Mollie, clasping her hands. "I cannot bear to think of it."

"God knows in whose hands she is. Then there is poor Mr. Irvin. He is utterly prostrated. One shudders to contemplate his torture as the hours and the days go by and no news comes of Rita."

"Oh, my dear! you are making me cry!" exclaimed Mollie. "If only I could do something to help. . . ."

Margaret was studying her closely, and now for the first time she detected sincere emotion in Mollie's voice—and unforced tears in her eyes. Hope was reborn.

"Perhaps you can," she continued, speaking gently. "You knew all Rita's friends and all Sir Lucien's. You must have met the woman called Mrs. Sin?"

"Mrs. Sin," whispered Mollie, staring in a frightened way so that the pupils of her eyes slowly enlarged. "What about Mrs. Sin?"

"Well, you see, they seem to think that through Mrs. Sin they will be able to trace Kazmah; and wherever Kazmah is one would expect to find poor Rita."

Mollie lowered her head for a moment, then glanced quickly at the speaker, and quickly away again.

"Please let me explain just what I mean," continued Margaret. "It seems to be impossible to find anybody in London who will admit having known Mrs. Sin or Kazmah. They are all afraid of being involved in the case, of course. Now, if you can help, don't hesitate for that reason. A special commission has been appointed by Lord Wrexborough to deal with the case, and their agent is working quite independently of the police. Anything which you care to tell him will be treated as strictly confidential; but think what it may mean to Rita."

Mollie clasped her hands about her right knee and rocked to and fro in her chair.

"No one knows who Kazmah is," she said.

"But a number of people seem to know Mrs. Sin. I am sure you must have met her?"

"If I say that I know her, shall I be called as a witness?"

"Certainly not. I can assure you of that."
Mollie continued to rock to and fro.
"But if I were to tell the police I should have to go to court, I suppose?"
"I suppose so," replied Margaret. "I am afraid I am dreadfully ignorant of such matters. It might depend upon
whether you spoke to a high official or to a subordinate one; an ordinary policeman for instance. But the Home
office agent has nothing whatever to do with Scotland Yard."
Mollie stood up in order to reach an ash-tray, and:
"I really don't think I have anything to say, Miss Halley," she declared. "I have certainly met Mrs. Sin, but I
know nothing whatever about her, except that I believe she is a Jewess."
Margaret sighed, looking up wistfully into Mollie's face. "Are you quite sure?" she pleaded. "Oh, Miss Gretna, if
you know anything-- anything--don't hide it now. It may mean so much."
"Oh, I quite understand that," cried Mollie. "My heart simply aches and aches when I think of poor, sweet little
Rita. But--really I don't think I can be of the least tiny bit of use."
Their glances met, and Margaret read hostility in the shallow eyes. Mollie, who had been wavering, now for
some reason had become confirmed in her original determination to remain silent. Margaret stood up.
"It is no good, then," she said. "We must hope that Rita will be traced by the police. Good-bye, Miss Gretna. I
am so sorry you cannot help."
"And so am I!" declared Mollie. "It is perfectly sweet of you to take such an interest, and I feel a positive worm.
But what can I do?"
As Margaret was stepping into her little runabout car, which awaited her at the door, a theory presented itself to
account for Mollie's sudden hostility. It had developed, apparently, as a result of Margaret's reference to the Home
office inquiry. Of course! Mollie would naturally be antagonistic to a commission appointed to suppress the drug
traffic.
Convinced that this was the correct explanation, Margaret drove away, reflecting bitterly that she had been guilty
of a strategical error which it was now too late to rectify.
In common with others, Kerry among them, who had come in contact with that perverted intelligence, she
misjudged Mollie's motives. In the first place, the latter had no wish to avoid publicity, and in the second place--
although she sometimes wondered vaguely what she should do when her stock of drugs became exhausted--Mollie
was prompted by no particular animosity toward the Home office inquiry. She had merely perceived a suitable
opportunity to make the acquaintance of the fierce red Chief Inspector, and at the same time to secure notoriety for
herself.
Ere Margaret's car had progressed a hundred yards from the door, Mollie was at the telephone.
"City 400, please," she said.
An interval elapsed, then:
"Is that the Commissioner's office, New Scotland Yard?" she asked.
A voice replied that it was.
"Could you put me through to Chief Inspector Kerry?"
"What name?" inquired the voice.
Mollie hesitated for three seconds, and then gave her family name.
"Very well, madam," said the voice respectfully. "Please hold on, and I will enquire if the Chief Inspector is
here."
Mollie's heart was beating rapidly with pleasurable excitement, and she was as confused as a maiden at her first
rendezvous. Then:
"Hello," said the voice.
"Yes?"
"I am sorry, madam. But Chief Inspector Kerry is off duty."
"Oh, dear!" sighed Mollie, "what a pity. Can you tell me where I could find him?"
"I am afraid not, madam. It is against the rules to give private addresses of members of any department."
"Oh, very well. She sighed again. "Thank you."
She replaced the receiver and stood biting her finger thoughtfully. She was making a mental inventory of her
many admirers and wondering which of them could help her. Suddenly she came to a decision on the point. Taking
up the receiver:
"Victoria 8440, please," she said.
Still biting one finger she waited, until:
"Foreign office," announced a voice.
"Please put me through to Mr. Archie Boden-Shaw," she said.
Ere long that official's secretary was inquiring her name, and a moment later:
"Is that you, Archie?" said Mollie. "Yes! Mollie speaking. No, please listen, Archie! You can get to know everything at the Foreign office, and I want you to find out for me the private address of Chief Inspector Kerry, who is in charge of the Bond Street murder case. Don't be silly! I've asked Scotland Yard, but they won't tell me. You can find out. . . . It doesn't matter why I want to know. . . . Just ring me up and tell me. I must know in half an hour. Yes, I shall be seeing you tonight. Good-bye. . . ."

Less than half an hour later, the obedient Archie rang up, and Mollie, all excitement, wrote the following address in a dainty scented notebook which she carried in her handbag.

CHIEF INSPECTOR KERRY, 67 Spenser Road, Brixton.

CHAPTER XXVII
CROWN EVIDENCE

The appearance of the violet-enamelled motor brougham upholstered in cream, and driven by a chauffeur in a violet and cream livery, created some slight sensation in Spenser Road, S.E. Mollie Gretna's conspicuous car was familiar enough to residents in the West End of London, but to lower middle-class suburbia it came as something of a shock. More than one window curtain moved suspiciously, suggesting a hidden but watchful presence, when the glittering vehicle stopped before the gate of number 67; and the lady at number 68 seized an evidently rare opportunity to come out and polish her letter-box.

She was rewarded by an unobstructed view of the smartest woman in London (thus spake society paragraphers) and of the most expensive set of furs in Europe, also of a perfectly gowned slim figure. Of Mollie's disdainful face, with its slightly uptilted nose, she had no more than a glimpse.

A neat maid, evidently Scotch, admitted the dazzling visitor to number 67; and Spenser Road waited and wondered. It was something to do with the Bond Street murder! Small girls appeared from doorways suddenly opened and darted off to advise less-watchful neighbors.

Kerry, who had been at work until close upon dawn in the mysterious underworld of Soho was sleeping, but Mrs. Kerry received Mollie in a formal little drawing-room, which, unlike the cosy, homely dining-room, possessed that frigid atmosphere which belongs to uninhabited apartments. In a rather handsome cabinet were a number of trophies associated with the detective's successful cases. The cabinet itself was a present from a Regent Street firm for whom Kerry had recovered valuable property.

Mary Kerry, dressed in a plain blouse and skirt, exhibited no trace of nervousness in the presence of her aristocratic and fashionable caller. Indeed, Mollie afterwards declared that "she was quite a ladylike person. But rather tin tabernacley, my dear."

"Did ye wish to see Chief Inspector Kerry parteecularly?" asked Mary, watching her visitor with calm, observant eyes.

"Oh, most particularly!" cried Mollie, in a flutter of excitement. "Of course I don't know what you must think of me for calling at such a preposterous hour, but there are some things that simply can't wait."

"Aye," murmured Mrs. Kerry. "Twill be yon Bond Street affair?"

"Oh, yes, it is, Mrs. Kerry. Doesn't the very name of Bond Street turn your blood cold? I am simply shivering with fear!"

"As the wife of a Chief Inspector I am maybe more used to tragedies than yoursel', madam. But it surely is a sair grim business. My husband is resting now. He was hard at work a' the night. Nae doubt ye'll be wishin' tee see him privately?"

"Oh, if you please. I am so sorry to disturb him. I can imagine that he must be literally exhausted after spending a whole night among dreadful people."

Mary Kerry stood up.

"If ye'll excuse me for a moment I'll awaken him," she said. "Our household is sma'."

"Oh, of course! I quite understand, Mrs. Kerry! So sorry. But so good of you."

"Might I offer ye a glass o' sherry an' a biscuit?"

"I simply couldn't dream of troubling you! Please don't suggest such a thing. I feel covered with guilt already. Many thanks nevertheless."

Mary Kerry withdrew, leaving Mollie alone. As soon as the door closed Mollie stood up and began to inspect the trophies in the cabinet. She was far too restless and excited to remain sitting down. She looked at the presentation clock on the mantelpiece and puzzled over the signatures engraved upon a large silver dish which commemorated the joy displayed by the Criminal Investigation Department upon the occasion of Kerry's promotion to the post of Chief Inspector.

The door opened and Kerry came in. He had arisen and completed his toilet in several seconds less than five minutes. But his spotlessly neat attire would have survived inspection by the most lynx-eyed martinet in the Brigade of Guards. As he smiled at his visitor with fierce geniality, Mollie blushed like a young girl.
Chief Inspector Kerry was a much bigger man than she had believed him to be. The impression left upon her memory by his brief appearance at the night club had been that of a small, dapper figure. Now, as he stood in the little drawing-room, she saw that he was not much if anything below the average height of Englishmen, and that he possessed wonderfully broad shoulders. In fact, Kerry was deceptive. His compact neatness and the smallness of his feet and hands, together with those swift, lithe movements which commonly belong to men of light physique, curiously combined to deceive the beholder, but masked eleven stones (*note: 1 stone = 14 pounds) of bone and muscle.

"Very good of you to offer information, miss," he said. "I'm willing to admit that I can do with it."

He opened a bureau and took out a writing-block and a fountain pen. Then he turned and stared hard at Mollie. She quickly lowered her eyes.

"Excuse me," said Kerry, "but didn't I see you somewhere last night?"

"Yes," she said. "I was sitting just inside the door at--"

"Right! I remember," interrupted Kerry. He continued to stare. "Before you say any more, miss, I have to remind you that I am a police officer, and that you may be called upon to swear to the truth of any information you may give me."

"Oh, of course! I know."

"You know? Very well, then; we can get on. Who gave you my address?"

At the question, so abruptly asked, Mollie felt herself blushing again. It was delightful to know that she could still blush. "Oh-- I . . . that is, I asked Scotland Yard"

She bestowed a swift, half-veiled glance at her interrogator, but he offered her no help, and:

"They wouldn't tell me," she continued. "So--I had to find out. You see, I heard you were trying to get information which I thought perhaps I could give."

"So you went to the trouble to find my private address rather than to the nearest police station," said Kerry. "Might I ask you from whom you heard that I wanted this information?"

"Well--it's in the papers, isn't it?"

"It is certainly. But it occurred to me that someone . . . connected might have told you as well."

"Actually, someone did: Miss Margaret Halley."

"Good!" rapped Kerry. "Now we're coming to it. She told you to come to me?"

"Oh, no!" cried Mollie--"she didn't. She told me to tell her so that she could tell the Home office."

"Eh?" said Kerry, "eh?" He bent forward, staring fiercely. "Please tell me exactly what Miss Halley wanted to know."

The intensity of his gaze Mollie found very perturbing, but:

"She wanted me to tell her where Mrs. Sin lived," she replied.

Kerry experienced a quickening of the pulse. In the failure of the C.I.D. to trace the abode of the notorious Mrs. Sin he had suspected double-dealing. He counted it unbelievable that a figure so conspicuous in certain circles could evade official quest even for forty-eight hours. K Division's explanation, too, that there were no less than eighty Chinamen resident in and about Limehouse whose names either began or ended with Sin, he looked upon as a paltry evasion. That very morning he had awakened from a species of nightmare wherein 719 had affected the arrest of Kazmah and Mrs. Sin and had rescued Mrs. Irvin from the clutches of the former. Now--here was hope. 719 would seem to be as hopelessly in the dark as everybody else.

"You refused?" he rapped.

"Of course I did, Inspector," said Mollie, with a timid, tender glance. "I thought you were the proper person to tell."

"Then you know?" asked Kerry, unable to conceal his eagerness.

"Yes," sighed Mollie. "Unfortunately--I know. Oh Inspector, how can I explain it to you?"

"Don't trouble, miss. Just give me the address and I'll ask no questions!"

His keenness was thrilling, infectious. As a result of the night's "beating" he had a list of some twenty names whose owners might have been patrons of Kazmah and some of whom might know Mrs. Sin. But he had learned from bitter experience how difficult it was to induce such people to give useful evidence. There was practically no means of forcing them to speak if they chose, from selfish motives, to be silent. They could be forced to appear in court, but anything elicited in public was worse than useless. Furthermore, Kerry could not afford to wait. Mollie replied excitedly:

"Oh, Inspector, I know you will think me simply an appalling person when I tell you; but I have been to Mrs. Sin's house--"The House of a Hundred Raptures' she calls it--"

"Yes, yes! But--the address?"

"However can I tell you the address, Inspector? I could drive you there, but I haven't the very haziest idea of the
name of the horrible street! One drives along dreadful roads where there are stalls and Jews for quite an interminable time, and then over a sort of canal, and then round to the right all among ships and horrid Chinamen. Then, there is a doorway in a little court, and Mrs. Sin's husband sits inside a smelly room with a positively ferocious raven who shrieks about legs and policemen! Oh! Can I ever forget it!"

"One moment, miss, one moment," said Kerry, keeping an iron control upon himself. "What is the name of Mrs. Sin's husband?"

"Oh, let me think! I can always remember it by recalling the croak of the raven." She raised one hand to her brow, posing reflectively, and began to murmur:

"Sin Sin Ah . . . Sin Sin Jar . . . Sin Sin--Oh! I have it! Sin Sin Wa!"

"Good!" rapped Kerry, and made a note on the block. "Sin Sin Wa, and he has a pet raven, you say, who talks?"

"Who positively talks like some horrid old woman!" cried Mollie. "He has only one eye."

"The raven?"

"The raven, yes--and also the Chinaman."

"What!"

"Oh! it's a nightmare to behold them together!" declared Mollie, clasping her hands and bending forward. She was gaining courage, and now looked almost boldly into the fierce eyes of the Chief Inspector.

"Describe the house," he said succinctly. "Take your time and use your own words."

Thereupon Mollie launched into a description of Sin Sin Wa's opium-house. Kerry, his eyes fixed upon her face, listened silently. Then:

"These little rooms are really next door?" he asked.

"I suppose so, Inspector. We always went through the back of a cupboard!"

"Can you give me names of others who used this place?"

"Well"--Mollie hesitated--"poor Rita, of course and Sir Lucien. Then, Cyrus Kilfane used to go."

"Kilfane? The American actor?"

"Yes."

"H'm. He's back in America, Sir Lucien is dead, and Mrs. Irvin is missing. Nobody else?"

Mollie shook her head.

"Who first took you there?"

"Cyrus Kilfane."

"Not Sir Lucien?"

"Oh, no. But both of them had been before."

"What was Kazmah's connection with Mrs. Sin and her husband?"

"I have no idea, Inspector. Kazmah used to supply cocaine and veronal and trional and heroin, but those who wanted to smoke opium he sent to Mrs. Sin."

"What! he gave them her address?"

"No, no! He gave her their address."

"I see. She called?"

"Yes. Oh, Inspector"--Mollie bent farther forward--"I can see in your eyes that you think I am fabulously wicked! Shall I be arrested?"

Kerry coughed drily and stood up.

"Probably not, miss. But you may be required to give evidence."

"Oh, actually?" cried Mollie, also standing up and approaching nearer.

"Yes. Shall you object?"

Mollie looked into his eyes.

"Not if I can be of the slightest assistance to you, Inspector."

A theory to explain why this social butterfly had sought him out as a recipient of her compromising confidences presented itself to Kerry's mind. He was a modest man, having neither time nor inclination for gallantries, and this was the first occasion throughout his professional career upon which he had obtained valuable evidence on the strength of his personal attractions. He doubted the accuracy of his deduction. But, Mollie at that moment lowering her lashes and then rapidly raising them again, Kerry was compelled to accept his own astonishing theory.

"And she is the daughter of a peer!" he reflected. "No wonder it has been hard to get evidence."

He glanced rapidly in the direction of the door. There were several details which were by no means clear, but he decided to act upon the information already given and to get rid of his visitor without delay. Where some of the most dangerous criminals in Europe and America had failed, Mollie Gretna had succeeded in making Red Kerry nervous.

"I am much indebted to you, miss," he said, and opened the door.

"Oh, it has been delightful to confess to you, Inspector!" declared Mollie. "I will give you my card, and I shall
expect you to come to me for any further information you may want. If I have to be brought to court, you will tell me, won't you?"

"Rely upon me, miss," replied Kerry shortly.

He escorted Mollie to her brougham, observed by no less than six discreetly hidden neighbors. And as the brougham was driven off she waved her hand to him! Kerry felt a hot flush spreading over his red countenance, for the veiled onlookers had not escaped his attention. As he re-entered the house:

"Yon's a bad woman," said his wife, emerging from the dining-room.

"I believe you may be right, Mary," replied Kerry confusedly.

"I kenned it when first I set een upon her painted face. I kenned it the now when she lookit sideways at ye. If yon's a grand lady, she's a woman o' puir repute. The Lord gi'e us grace."

CHAPTER XXVIII
THE GILDED JOS

London was fog-bound. The threat of the past week had been no empty one. Towards the hour of each wintry sunset had come the yellow racks, hastening dusk and driving folks more speedily homeward to their firesides. The dull reports of fog-signals had become a part of the metropolitan bombilation, but hitherto the choking mist had not secured a strangle-hold.

Now, however, it had triumphed, casting its thick net over the city as if eager to stifle the pulsing life of the new Babylon. In the neighborhood of the Docks its density was extraordinary, and the purlieus of Limehouse became mere mysterious gullies of smoke impossible to navigate unless one were very familiar with their intricacies and dangers.

Chief Inspector Kerry, wearing a cardigan under his oilskins, tapped the pavement with the point of his malacca like a blind man. No glimmer of light could he perceive. He could not even see his companion.

"Hell!" he snapped irritably, as his foot touched a brick wall, "where the devil are you, constable?"

"Here beside you, sir," answered P.C. Bryce, of K Division, his guide.

"Which side?"

"Here, sir."

The constable grasped Kerry's arm.

"But we've walked slap into a damn brick wall!"

"Keep the wall on your left, sir, and it's all clear ahead."

"Clear be damned!" said Kerry. "Are we nearly there?"

"About a dozen paces and we shall see the lamp--if it's been lighted."

"And if not we shall stroll into the river, I suppose?"

"No danger of that. Even if the lamp's out, we shall strike the iron pillar."

"I don't doubt it," said Kerry grimly.

They proceeded at a slow pace. Dull reports and a vague clangor were audible. These sounds were so deadened by the clammy mist that they might have proceeded from some gnome's workshop deep in the bowels of the earth. The blows of a pile-driver at work on the Surrey shore suggested to Kerry's mind the phantom crew of Hendrick Hudson at their game of ninepins in the Katskill Mountains. Suddenly:

"Is that you, Bryce?" he asked.

"I'm here, sir," replied the voice of the constable from beside him.

"H'm, then there's someone else about." He raised his voice. "Hi, there! have you lost your way?"

Kerry stood still, listening. But no one answered to his call.

"I'll swear there was someone just behind us, Bryce!"

"There was, sir. I saw someone, too. A Chinese resident, probably. Here we are!"

A sound of banging became audible, and on advancing another two paces, Kerry found himself beside Bryce before a low closed door.

"Hello! hello!" croaked a dim voice. "Number one p'lice chop, lo! Sin Sin Wa!"

The flat note of a police whistle followed.

"Sin Sin is at home," declared Bryce. "That's the raven."

"Does he take the thing about with him, then?"

Kerry stood still, listening. But no one answered to his call.

"I'll swear there was someone just behind us, Bryce!"

"There was, sir. I saw someone, too. A Chinese resident, probably. Here we are!"

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"Does he take the thing about with him, then?"

"I don't think so. But he puts it in a cupboard when he goes out, and it never talks unless it can see a light."

Bolts were unfastened and the door was opened. Out through the moving curtain of fog shone the red glow from a stove. A grotesque silhouette appeared outlined upon the dim redness.

"You wantchee me?" crooned Sin Sin Wa.

"I do!" rapped Kerry. "I've called to look for opium."

He stepped past the Chinaman into the dimly lighted room. As he did so, the cause of an apparent deformity
which had characterized the outline of Sin Sin Wa became apparent. From his left shoulder the raven partly arose, moving his big wings, and:
"Smartest leg!" it shrieked in Kerry's ear and rattled imaginary castanets.
The Chief Inspector started, involuntarily.
"Damn the thing!" he muttered. "Come in, Bryce, and shut the door. What's this?"
On a tea-chest set beside the glowing stove, the little door of which was open, stood a highly polished squat wooden image, gilded and colored red and green. It was that of a leering Chinaman, possibly designed to represent Buddha, and its jade eyes seemed to blink knowingly in the dancing rays from the stove.
"Sin Sin Wa's Joss," murmured the proprietor, as Bryce closed the outer door. "Me shinee him up; makee Joss glad. Number one piecee Joss."
Kerry turned and stared into the pock-marked smiling face. Seen in that dim light it was not unlike the carved face of the image, save that the latter possessed two open eyes and the Chinaman but one. The details of the room were indiscernible, lost in yellowish shadow, but the eye of the raven and the eye of Sin Sin Wa glittered like strange jewels.
"H'm," said Kerry. "Sorry to interrupt your devotions. Light us."
He took up the Joss tenderly and bore it across the room. Opening a little cupboard set low down near the floor he discovered a lighted lantern. This he took out and set upon the dirty table. Then he placed the image on a shelf in the cupboard and turned smirkingly to his visitors.
"Number one p'lice!" shrieked the raven.
"Here!" snapped Kerry. "Put that damn thing to bed!"
"Velly good," murmured Sin Sin Wa complacently.
He raised his hand to his shoulder and the raven stepped sedately from shoulder to wrist. Sin Sin Wa stooped. "Come, Tling-a-Ling," he said softly. "You catchee sleepee."
The raven stepped down from his wrist and walked into the cupboard.
"So fashion, lo!" said Sin Sin Wa, closing the door.
He seated himself upon a tea-chest beside the useful cupboard, resting his hands upon his knees and smiling. Kerry, chewing steadily, had watched the proceedings in silence, but now:
"Constable Bryce," he said crisply, "you recognize this man as Sin Sin Wa, the occupier of the house?"
"Yes, sir," replied Bryce.
He was not wholly at ease, and persistently avoided the Chinaman's oblique, beady eye.
"In the ordinary course of your duty you frequently pass along this street?"
"It's the limit of the Limehouse beat, sir. Poplar patrols on the other side."
"So that at this point, or hereabout, you would sometimes meet the constable on the next beat?"
"Well, sir," Bryce hesitated, clearing his throat, "this street isn't properly in his district."
"I didn't say it was!" snapped Kerry, glaring fiercely at the embarrassed constable. "I said you would sometimes meet him here."
"Yes, sometimes."
"Sometimes. Right. Did you ever come in here?"
The constable ventured a swift glance at the savage red face, and:
"Yes, sir, now and then," he confessed. "Just for a warm on a cold night, maybe."
Kerry never for a moment removed his fixed gaze from the face of Bryce.
"Now, my lad," he said, "I'm going to ask you another question. I'm not saying a word about the warm on a cold night. We're all human. But--did you ever see or hear or smell anything suspicious in this house?"
"Never," affirmed the constable earnestly.
"Did anything ever take place that suggested to your mind that Sin Sin Wa might be concealing something--upstairs, for instance?"
"Never a thing, sir. There's never been a complaint about him."
Kerry stared intently for some moments at Bryce; then, turning suddenly to Sin Sin Wa:
"I want to see your wife," he said. "Fetch her."
Sin Sin Wa gently patted his knees.
"She velly bad woman," he declared. "She no hate topside pidgin."
"Don't talk!" shouted Kerry. "Fetch her!"
Sin Sin Wa turned his hands palms upward.
"Me no hate gotchee wifee," he murmured.
Kerry took one pace forward.
"Fetch her," he said; "or--" He drew a pair of handcuffs from the pocket of his oilskin.
He extended his wrists, meeting the angry glare of the Chief Inspector with a smile of resignation. Kerry bit savagely at his chewing-gum, glancing aside at Bryce.
"Did you ever see his wife?" he snapped.
"No, sir. I didn't know he had one."
"No habgotchee," murmured Sin Sin Wa, "velly bad woman."
"For the last time," said Kerry, stooping and thrusting his face forward so that his nose was only some six inches from that of Sin Sin Wa, "where's Mrs. Sin?"
"Catchee lun off," replied the Chinaman blandly. "Velly bad woman. Thlief woman. Catchee stealee alla my dollars!"
"Eh!"
Kerry stood upright, moving his shoulders and rattling the handcuffs.
"Comee here when Sin Sin Wa hate gone for catchee shavee, liftee alla my dollars, and-pff! chee-lo!"
He raised his hand and blew imaginary fluff into space. Kerry stared down at him with an expression in which animal ferocity and helplessness were oddly blended. Then:
"Bryce," he said, "stay here. I'm going to search the house."
"Very good, sir."
Kerry turned again to the Chinaman.
"Is there anyone upstairs?" he demanded.
Kerry dropped the handcuffs back into the pocket of his overall and took out an electric torch. With never another glance at Sin Sin Wa he went out into the passage and began to mount the stairs, presently finding himself in a room filled with all sorts of unsavory rubbish and containing a large cupboard. He uttered an exclamation of triumph.
Crossing the littered floor, and picking his way amid broken cane chairs, tea-chests, discarded garments and bedlaths, he threw open the cupboard door. Before him hung a row of ragged clothes and a number of bowler hats. Directing the ray of the torch upon the unsavory collection, he snatched coats and hats from the hooks upon which they depended and hurled them impatiently upon the floor.
When the cupboard was empty he stepped into it and began to bang upon the back. The savagery of his expression grew more marked than usual, and as he chewed his maxillary muscles protruded extraordinarily.
"If ever I sounded a brick wall," he muttered, "I'm doing it now."
Tap where he would--and he tapped with his knuckles and with the bone ferrule of his cane--there was nothing in the resulting sound to suggest that that part of the wall behind the cupboard was less solid than any other part.
He examined the room rapidly, then passed into another one adjoining it, which was evidently used as a bedroom. The latter faced towards the court and did not come in contact with the wall of the neighboring house. In both rooms the windows were fastened, and judging from the state of the fasteners were never opened. In that containing the cupboard outside shutters were also closed. Despite this sealing-up of the apartments, traces of fog hung in the air. Kerry descended the stairs.
Snapping off the light of his torch, he stood, feet wide apart, staring at Sin Sin Wa. The latter, smiling imperturbably, yellow hands resting upon knees, sat quite still on the tea-chest. Constable Bryce was seated on a corner of the table, looking curiously awkward in his tweed overcoat and bowler hat, which garments quite failed to disguise the policeman. He stood up as Kerry entered. Then:
"There used to be a door between this house and the next," said Kerry succinctly. "My information is exact and given by someone who has often used that door."
"What!" shouted Kerry. "What did you say, you yellow-faced mongrel!"
He clenched his fists and strode towards the Chinaman.
In the fog-bound silence Kerry could very distinctly be heard chewing. He turned suddenly to Bryce.
"Go back and fetch two men," he directed. "I should never find my way."
"Very good, sir."
Bryce stepped to the door, unable to hide the relief which he experienced, and opened it. The fog was so dense
that it looked like a yellow curtain hung in the opening.

"Phew!" said Bryce. "I may be some little time, sir."

"Quite likely. But don't stop to pick daisies."

The constable went out, closing the door. Kerry laid his cane on the table, then stooped and tossed a cud of chewing-gum into the stove. From his waistcoat pocket he drew out a fresh piece and placed it between his teeth.

Drawing a tea-chest closer to the stove, he seated himself and stared intently into the glowing heart of the fire.

Sin Sin Wa extended his arm and opened the little cupboard.

"Number one p'lice," croaked the raven drowsily.


He took out the green-eyed joss, set it tenderly upon a corner of the table, and closed the cupboard door. With a piece of chamois leather, which he sometimes dipped into a little square tin, he began to polish the hideous figure.

CHAPTER XXIX
DOUBTS AND FEARS

Monte Irvin raised his head and stared dully at Margaret Halley. It was very quiet in the library of the big old-fashioned house at Prince's Gate. A faint crackling sound which proceeded from the fire was clearly audible. Margaret's grey eyes were anxiously watching the man whose pose as he sat in the deep, saddle-back chair so curiously suggested collapse.

"Drugs," he whispered. "Drugs."

Few of his City associates would have recognized the voice; all would have been shocked to see the change which had taken place in the man.

"You really understand why I have told you, Mr. Irvin, don't you?" said Margaret almost pleadingly. "Dr. Burton thought you should not be told, but then Dr. Burton did not know you were going to ask me point blank. And I thought it better that you should know the truth, bad as it is, rather than--"

"Rather than suspect--worse things," whispered Irvin. "Of course, you were right, Miss Halley. I am very, very grateful to you for telling me. I realize what courage it must have called for. Believe me, I shall always remember--"

He broke off, staring across the room at his wife's portrait. Then:

"If only I had known," he added.

Irvin exhibited greater composure than Margaret had ventured to anticipate. She was confirmed in her opinion that he should be told the truth.

"I would have told you long ago," she said, "if I had thought that any good could result from my doing so. Frankly, I had hoped to cure Rita of the habit, and I believe I might have succeeded in time."

"There has been no mention of drugs in connection with the case," said Monte Irvin, speaking monotonously. "In the Press, I mean."

"Hitherto there has not," she replied. "But there is a hint of it in one of this evening's papers, and I determined to give you the exact facts so far as they are known to me before some garbled account came to your ears."

"Thank you," he said, "thank you. I had felt for a long time that I was getting out of touch with Rita, that she had other confidants. Have you any idea who they were, Miss Halley?"

He raised his eyes, looking at her pathetically. Margaret hesitated, then:

"Well," she replied, "I am afraid Nina knew."

"Her maid?"

"I think she must have known."

He sighed.

"The police have interrogated her," he said. "Probably she is being watched."

"Oh, I don't think she knows anything about the drug syndicate," declared Margaret. "She merely acted as confidential messenger. Poor Sir Lucien Pyne, I am sure, was addicted to drugs."

"Do you think--"Irvin spoke in a very low voice--"do you think he led her into the habit?"

Margaret bit her lip, staring down at the red carpet.

"I would hate to slander a man who can never defend himself," she replied finally. "But--I have sometimes thought he did."

Silence fell. Both were contemplating a theory which neither dared to express in words.

"You see," continued Margaret, "it is evident that this man Kazmah was patronized by people so highly placed that it is hopeless to look for information from them. Again, such people have influence. I don't suggest that they are using it to protect Kazmah, but I have no doubt they are doing so to protect themselves."

Monte Irvin raised his eyes to her face. A weary, sad look had come into them.

"You mean that it may be to somebody's interest to hush up the matter as much as possible?"

Margaret nodded her head.
"The prevalence of the drug habit in society--especially in London society--is a secret which has remained hidden so long from the general public," she replied, "that one cannot help looking for bribery and corruption. The stage is made the scapegoat whenever the voice of scandal breathes the word 'dope,' but we rarely hear the names of the worst offenders even whispered. I have thought for a long time that the authorities must know the names of the receivers and distributors of cocaine, veronal, opium, and the other drugs, huge quantities of which find their way regularly to the West End of London. Pharmacists sometimes experience the greatest difficulty in obtaining the drugs which they legitimately require, and the prices have increased extraordinarily. Cocaine, for instance, has gone up from five and sixpence an ounce to eighty-seven shillings, and heroin from three and sixpence to over forty shillings, while opium that was once about twenty shillings a pound is now eight times the price."

Monte Irvin listened attentively.

"In the course of my Guildhall duties," he said slowly, "I have been brought in contact frequently with police officers of all ranks. If influential people are really at work protecting these villains who deal illicitly in drugs, I don't think, and I am not prepared to believe, that they have corrupted the police."

"Neither do I believe so, Mr. Irvin!" said Margaret eagerly.

"But," Irvin pursued, exhibiting greater animation, "you inform me that a Home office commissioner has been appointed. What does this mean, if not that Lord Wrexborough distrusts the police?"

"Well, you see, the police seemed to be unable, or unwilling, to do anything in the matter. Of course, this may have been due to the fact that the traffic was so skilfully handled that it defied their inquiries."

"Take, as an instance, Chief Inspector Kerry," continued Irvin. "He has exhibited the utmost delicacy and consideration in his dealings with me, but I'll swear that a whiter man never breathed."

"Oh, really, Mr. Irvin, I don't think for a moment that men of that class are suspected of being concerned. Indeed, I don't believe any active collusion is suspected at all."

"Lord Wrexborough thinks that Scotland Yard hasn't got an officer clever enough for the dope people?"

"Quite possibly."

"I take it that he has put up a secret service man?"

"I believe--that is, I know he has."

Monte Irvin was watching Margaret's face, and despite the dull misery which deadened his usually quick perceptions, he detected a heightened color and a faint change of expression. He did not question her further upon the point, but:

"God knows I welcome all the help that offers," he said. "Lord Wrexborough is your uncle, Miss Halley; but do you think this secret commission business quite fair to Scotland Yard?"

Margaret stared for some moments at the carpet, then raised her grey eyes and looked earnestly at the speaker. She had learned in the brief time that had elapsed since this black sorrow had come upon him to understand what it was in the character of Monte Irvin which had attracted Rita. It afforded an illustration of that obscure law governing the magnetism which subsists between diverse natures. For not all the agony of mind which he suffered could hide or mar the cleanliness and honesty of purpose which were Monte Irvin's outstanding qualities.

"No," Margaret replied, "honestly, I don't. And I feel rather guilty about it, too, because I have been urging uncle to take such a step for quite a long time. You see--she glanced at Irvin wistfully--"I am brought in contact with so many victims of the drug habit. I believe the police are hampered, and these people who deal in drugs manage in some way to evade the law. The Home office agent will report to a committee appointed by Lord Wrexborough, and then, you see, if it is found necessary to do so, there will be special legislation."

Monte Irvin sighed wearily, and his glance strayed in the direction of the telephone on the side-table. He seemed to be constantly listening for something which he expected but dreaded to hear. Whenever the toy spaniel which lay curled up on the rug before the fire moved or looked towards the door, Irvin started and his expression changed.

"This suspense," he said jerkily, "this suspense is so hard to bear."

"Oh, Mr. Irvin, your courage is wonderful," replied Margaret earnestly. "But he"--she hastily corrected herself--"everybody is convinced that Rita is safe. Under some strange misapprehension regarding this awful tragedy she has run away into hiding. Probably she has been induced to do so by those interested in preventing her from giving evidence."

Monte Irvin's eyes lighted up strangely. "Is that the opinion of the Home office agent?" he asked.

"Yes."

"Inspector Kerry shares it," declared Irvin. "Please God they are right."

"It is the only possible explanation," said Margaret. "Any hour now we may expect news of her."

"You don't think," pursued Monte Irvin, "that anybody--anybody--suspects Rita of being concerned in the death of Sir Lucien?"

He fixed a gaze of pathetic inquiry upon her face.
"Of course not!" she cried. "How ridiculous it would be."
"Yes," he murmured, "it would be ridiculous."
Margaret stood up.
"I am quite relieved now that I have done what I conceived to be my duty, Mr. Irvin," she said. "And, bad as the truth may be, it is better than doubt, after all. You must look after yourself, you know. When Rita comes back we shall have a big task before us to wean her from her old habits." She met his glance frankly. "But we shall succeed."
"How you cheer me," whispered Monte Irvin emotionally. "You are the truest friend that Rita ever had, Miss Halley. You will keep in touch with me, will you not?"
"Of course. Next to yourself there is no one so sincerely interested as I am. I love Rita as I should have loved a sister if I had had one. Please don't stand up. Dr. Burton has told you to avoid all exertion for a week or more, I know."

Monte Irvin grasped her outstretched hand.
"Any news which reaches me," he said, "I will communicate immediately. Thank you. In times of trouble we learn to know our real friends."

CHAPTER XXX
THE FIGHT IN THE DARK
Towards eleven o'clock at night the fog began slightly to lift. As Kerry crossed the bridge over Limehouse Canal he could vaguely discern the dirty water below, and street lamps showed dimly, surrounded each by a halo of yellow mist. Fog signals were booming on the railway, and from the great docks in the neighborhood mechanical clashings and hammerings were audible.

Turning to the right, Kerry walked on for some distance, and then suddenly stepped into the entrance to a narrow cul-de-sac and stood quite still.

A conviction had been growing upon him during the past twelve hours that someone was persistently and cleverly dogging his footsteps. He had first detected the presence of this mysterious follower outside the house of Sin Sin Wa, but the density of the fog had made it impossible for him to obtain a glimpse of the man's face. He was convinced, too, that he had been followed back to Leman Street, and from there to New Scotland Yard. Now, again he became aware of this persistent presence, and hoped at last to confront the spy.

Below footsteps, the footsteps of someone proceeding with the utmost caution, came along the pavement. Kerry stood close to the wall of the court, one hand in a pocket of his overall, waiting and chewing.

Nearer came the footsteps--and nearer. A shadowy figure appeared only a yard or so away from the watchful Chief Inspector. Thereupon he acted.

With one surprising spring he hurled himself upon the unprepared man, grasped him by his coat collar, and shone the light of an electric torch fully into his face.
"Hell!" he snapped. "The smart from Spinker's!"

The ray of the torch lighted up the mean, pinched face of Brisley, blanched now by fright, gleamed upon the sharp, hooked nose and into the cunning little brown eyes. Brisley licked his lips. In Kerry's muscular grip he bore quite a remarkable resemblance to a rat in the jaws of a terrier.

"Ho, ho!" continued the Chief Inspector, showing his teeth savagely. "So we let Scotland Yard make the pie, and then we steal all the plums, do we?"
He shook the frightened man until Brisley's broad-brimmed bowler was shaken off, revealing the receding brow and scanty neutral-colored hair.

"We let Scotland Yard work night and day, and then we present our rat-faced selves to Mr. Monte Irvin and say we have 'found the lady' do we?" Another vigorous shake followed. "We track Chief Inspectors of the Criminal Investigation Department, do we? We do, eh? We are dirty, skulking mongrels, aren't we? We require to be kicked from Limehouse to Paradise, don't we?" He suddenly released Brisley. "So we shall be!" he shouted furiously.

Hot upon the promise came the deed.

Brisley sent up a howl of pain as Kerry's right brogue came into violent contact with his person. The assault almost lifted him off his feet, and hatless as he was he set off, running as a man runs whose life depends upon his speed. The sound of his pattering footsteps was echoed from wall to wall of the cul-de-sac until finally it was swallowed up in the fog.

Kerry stood listening for some moments, then, directing a furious kick upon the bowler which lay at his feet, he snapped off the light of the torch and pursued his way. The lesser mystery was solved, but the greater was before him.

He had made a careful study of the geography of the neighborhood, and although the fog was still dense enough to be confusing, he found his way without much difficulty to the street for which he was bound. Some fifteen paces along the narrow thoroughfare he came upon someone standing by a closed door set in a high brick wall. The street
contained no dwelling houses, and except for the solitary figure by the door was deserted and silent. Kerry took out his torch and shone a white ring upon the smiling countenance of Detective-Sergeant Coombes.

"If that smile gets any worse," he said irritably, "they'll have to move your ears back. Anything to report?"

"Sin Sin Wa went to bed an hour ago."

"Any visitors?"

"No."

"Has he been out?"

"No."

"Got the ladder?"

"Yes."

"All quiet in the neighborhood?"

"All quiet."

"Good."

The street in which this conversation took place was one running roughly parallel with that in which the house of Sin Sin Wa was situated. A detailed search of the Chinaman's premises had failed to bring to light any scrap of evidence to show that opium had ever been smoked there. Of the door described by Mollie Gretna, and said to communicate with the adjoining establishment, not a trace could be found. But the fact that such a door had existed did not rest solely upon Mollie's testimony. From one of the "beat-ups" interviewed that day, Kerry had succeeded in extracting confirmatory evidence.

Inquiries conducted in the neighborhood of Poplar had brought to light the fact that four of the houses in this particular street, including that occupied by Sin Sin Wa and that adjoining it, belonged to a certain Mr. Jacobs, said to reside abroad. Mr. Jacob's rents were collected by an estate agent, and sent to an address in San Francisco. For some reason not evident to this man of business, Mr. Jacobs demanded a rental for the house next to Sin Sin Wa's, which was out of all proportion to the value of the property. Hence it had remained vacant for a number of years. The windows were broken and boarded up, as was the door.

Kerry realized that the circumstance of the landlord of "The House of a Hundred Raptures" being named Jacobs, and the lessee of the Cubanis Cigarette Company's premises in old Bond Street being named Isaacs, might be no more than a coincidence. Nevertheless it was odd. He had determined to explore the place without unduly advertising his intentions.

Two modes of entrance presented themselves. There was a trap on the roof, but in order to reach it access would have to be obtained to one of the other houses in the row, which also possessed a roof-trap; or there were four windows overlooking a little back yard, two upstairs and two down.

By means of a short ladder which Coombes had brought for the purpose Kerry climbed on to the wall and dropped into the yard.

"The jemmy!" he said softly.

Coombes, also mounting, dropped the required implement. Kerry caught it deftly, and in a very few minutes had wrenched away the rough planking nailed over one of the lower windows, without making very much noise.

"Shall I come down?" inquired Coombes in muffled tones from the top of the wall.

"No," rapped Kerry. "Hide the ladder again. If I want help I'll whistle. Catch!"

He tossed the jemmy up to Coombes, and Coombes succeeded in catching it. Then Kerry raised the glass-less sash of the window and stepped into a little room, which he surveyed by the light of his electric torch. It was filthy and littered with rubbish, but showed no sign of having been occupied for a long time. The ceiling was nearly black, and so were the walls. He went out into a narrow passage similar to that in the house of Sin Sin Wa and leading to a stair.

Walking quietly, he began to ascend. Mollie Gretna's description of the opium-house had been most detailed and lurid, and he was prepared for some extravagant scene.

He found three bare, dirty rooms, having all the windows boarded up.

"Hell!" he said succinctly.

Resting his torch upon a dust-coated ledge of the room, which presumably was situated in the front of the house, he deposited a cud of chewing-gum in the empty grate and lovingly selected a fresh piece from the packet which he always carried. Once more chewing he returned to the narrow passage, which he knew must be that in which the secret doorway had opened.

It was uncarpeted and dirty, and the walls were covered with faded filthy paper, the original color and design of which were quite lost. There was not the slightest evidence that a door had ever existed in any part of the wall. Following a detailed examination Kerry returned his magnifying glass to thewashleather bag and the bag to his waistcoat pocket.
"H'm," he said, thinking aloud, "Sin Sin Wa may have only one eye, but it's a good eye."

He raised his glance to the blackened ceiling of the passage, and saw that the trap giving access to the roof was situated immediately above him. He directed the ray of the torch upon it. In the next moment he had snapped off the light and was creeping silently towards the door of the front room.

The trap had moved slightly!

Gaining the doorway, Kerry stood just inside the room and waited. He became conscious of a kind of joyous excitement, which claimed him at such moments; an eagerness and a lust of action. But he stood perfectly still, listening and waiting.

There came a faint creaking sound, and a new damp chilliness was added to the stale atmosphere of the passage. Someone had quietly raised the trap.

Cutting through the blackness like a scimitar shone a ray of light from above, widening as it descended and ending in a white patch on the floor. It was moved to and fro. Then it disappeared. Another vague creaking sound followed—that caused by a man's weight being imposed upon a wooden framework.

Finally came a thud on the bare boards of the floor.

Complete silence ensued. Kerry waited, muscles tense and brain alert. He even suspended the chewing operation. A dull, padding sound reached his ears.

From the quality of the thud which had told of the intruder's drop from the trap to the floor, Kerry had deduced that he wore rubber-soled shoes. Now, the sound which he could hear was that of the stranger's furtive footsteps. He was approaching the doorway in which Kerry was standing.

Just behind the open door Kerry waited. And unheralded by any further sound to tell of his approach, the intruder suddenly shone a ray of light right into the room. He was on the threshold; only the door concealed him from Kerry, and concealed Kerry from the new-comer.

The disc of light cast into the dirty room grew smaller. The man with the torch was entering. A hand which grasped a magazine pistol appeared beyond the edge of the door, and Kerry's period of inactivity came to an end. Leaning back he adroitly kicked the weapon from the hand of the man who held it!

There was a smothered cry of pain, and the pistol fell clattering on the floor. The light went out, too. As it vanished Kerry leapt from his hiding-place. Snapping on the light of his own pocket lamp, he ran out into the passage.

Crack! came the report of a pistol.

Kerry dropped flat on the floor. He had not counted on the intruder being armed with two pistols! His pocket lamp, still alight, fell beside him, and he lay in a curiously rigid attitude on his side, one knee drawn up and his arm thrown across his face.

Carefully avoiding the path of light cast by the fallen torch, the unseen stranger approached silently. Pistol in hand, he bent, nearer and nearer, striving to see the face of the prostrate man. Kerry lay deathly still. The other dropped on one knee and bent closely over him....

Swiftly as a lash Kerry's arm was whipped around the man's neck, and helpless he pitched over on to his head! Uttering a dull groan, he lay heavy and still across Kerry's body.

"Flames!" muttered the Chief Inspector, extricating himself; "I didn't mean to break his neck."

He took up the electric torch, and shone it upon the face of the man on the floor. It was a dirty, unshaven face, unevenly tanned, as though the man had worn a beard until quite recently and had come from a hot climate. He was attired in a manner which suggested that he might be a ship's fireman save that he wore canvas shoes having rubber soles.

Kerry stood watching him for some moments. Then he groped behind him with one foot until he found the pistol, the second pistol which the man had dropped as he pitched on his skull. Kerry picked it up, and resting the electric torch upon the crown of his neat bowler hat-- which lay upon the floor--he stooped, pistol in hand, and searched the pockets of the prostrate man, who had begun to breathe stertorously. In the breast pocket he found a leather wallet of good quality; and at this he stared, a curious expression coming into his fierce eyes. He opened it, and found Treasury notes, some official-looking papers, and a number of cards. Upon one of these cards be directed the light, and this is what he read:

Lord Wrexborough Great Cumberland Place, V. 1 "To introduce 719. W."
"God's truth!" gasped Kerry. "It's the man from Whitehall!"

The stertorous breathing ceased, and a very dirty hand was thrust up to him.

"I'm glad you spoke, Chief Inspector Kerry," drawled a vaguely familiar voice. "I was just about to kick you in the back of the neck!"

Kerry dropped the wallet and grasped the proffered hand. "719" stood up, smiling grimly. Footsteps were clattering on the stairs. Coombes had heard the shot.
"Sir," said Kerry, "if ever you need a testimonial to your efficiency at this game, my address is Sixty-seven
Spenser Road, Brixton. We've met before."

"We have, Chief Inspector," was the reply. "We met at Kazmah's, and later at a certain gambling den in Soho."

The pseudo fireman dragged a big cigar-case from his hip-pocket.

"I'm known as Seton Pasha. Can I offer you a cheroot?"

CHAPTER XXXI

THE STORY OF 719

In a top back room of the end house in the street which also boasted the residence of Sin Sin Wa, Seton Pasha
and Chief Inspector Kerry sat one on either side of a dirty deal table. Seton smoked and Kerry chewed. A smoky oil-
lamp burned upon the table, and two notebooks lay beside it.

"It is certainly odd," Seton was saying, "that you failed to break my neck. But I have made it a practice since
taking up my residence here to wear a cap heavily padded. I apprehend sandbags and pieces of loaded tubing."

"The tube is not made," declared Kerry, "which can do the job. You're harder to kill than a Chinese-Jew."

"Your own escape is almost equally remarkable," added Seton. "I rarely miss at such short range. But you had
nearly broken my wrist with that kick."

"I'm sorry," said Kerry. "You should always bang a door wide open suddenly before you enter into a suspected
room. Anybody standing behind usually stops it with his head."

"I am indebted for the hint, Chief Inspector. We all have something to learn."

"Well, sir, we've laid our cards on the table, and you'll admit we've both got a lot to learn before we see daylight.
I'll be obliged if you'll put me wise to your game. I take it you began work on the very night of the murder?"

"I did. By a pure accident--the finding of an opiated cigarette in Mr. Gray's rooms--I perceived that the business
which had led to my recall from the East was involved in the Bond Street mystery. Frankly, Chief Inspector, I
doubted at that time if it were possible for you and me to work together. I decided to work alone. A beard which I
had worn in the East, for purposes of disguise, I shaved off; and because the skin was whiter where the hair had
grown than elsewhere, I found it necessary after shaving to powder my face heavily. This accounts for the
description given to you of a man with a pale face. Even now the coloring is irregular, as you may notice.

"Deciding to work anonymously, I went post haste to Lord Wrexhorough and made certain arrangements
whereby I became known to the responsible authorities as 719. The explanation of these figures is a simple one. My
name is Greville Seton. G is the seventh letter in the alphabet, and S the nineteenth; hence--'seven-nineteen.'

"The increase of the drug traffic and the failure of the police to cope with it had led to the institution of a Home
office inquiry, you see. It was suspected that the traffic was in the hands of orientals, and in looking about for a
confidential agent to make certain inquiries my name cropped up. I was at that time employed by the Foreign office,
but Lord Wrexhorough borrowed me." Seton smiled at his own expression. "Every facility was offered to me, as you
know. And that my investigations led me to the same conclusion as your own, my presence as lessee of this room, in
the person of John Smiles, seaman, sufficiently demonstrates."

"H'm," said Kerry, "and I take it your investigations have also led you to the conclusion that our hands are
clean?"

Seton Pasha fixed his cool regard upon the speaker.

"Personally, I never doubted this, Chief Inspector," he declared. "I believed, and I still believe, that the people
who traffic in drugs are clever enough to keep in the good books of the local police. It is a case of clever
camouflage, rather than corruption."

"Ah," snapped Kerry. "I was waiting to hear you mention it. So long as we know. I'm not a man that stands for
being pointed at. I've got a boy at a good public school, but if ever he said he was ashamed of his father, the day he
said it would be a day he'd never forget!"

Seton Pasha smiled grimly and changed the topic.

"Let us see," he said, "if we are any nearer to the heart of the mystery of Kazmah. You were at the Regent Street
bank today, I understand, at which the late Sir Lucien Pyne had an account?"

"I was," replied Kerry. "Next to his theatrical enterprises his chief source of income seems to have been a certain
Jose Santos Company, of Buenos Ayres. We've traced Kazmah's account, too. But no one at the bank has ever seen
him. The missing Rashid always paid in. Checks were signed 'Mohammed el-Kazmah,' in which name the account
had been opened. From the amount standing to his credit there it's evident that the proceeds of the dope business
went elsewhere."

"Where do you think they went?" asked Seton quietly, watching Kerry.

"Well," rapped Kerry, "I think the same as you. I've got two eyes and I can see out of both of them."

"And you think?"

"I think they went to the Jose Santos Company, of Buenos Ayres!"
"Right!" cried Seton. "I feel sure of it. We may never know how it was all arranged or who was concerned, but I am convinced that Mr. Isaacs, lessee of the Cubanis Cigarette Company offices, Mr. Jacobs (my landlord!), Mohammed el-Kazmah—whoever he may be—the untraceable Mrs. Sin Sin Wa, and another, were all shareholders of the Jose Santos company."

"I'm with you. By 'another' you mean?"

"Sir Lucien! It's horrible, but I'm afraid it's true."

They became silent for a while. Kerry chewed and Seton smoked. Then:

"The significance of the fact that Sir Lucien's study window was no more than forty paces across the leads from a well-oiled window of the Cubanis Company will not have escaped you," said Seton. "I performed the journey just ahead of you, I believe. Then Sir Lucien had lived in Buenos Ayres; that was before he came into the title, and at a time, I am told, when he was not overburdened with wealth. His man, Mareno, is indisputably some kind of a South American, and he can give no satisfactory account of his movements on the night of the murder.

"That we have to deal with a powerful drug syndicate there can be no doubt. The late Sir Lucien may not have been a director, but I feel sure he was financially interested. Kazmah's was the distributing office, and the importer—"

"Was Sin Sin Wa!" cried Kerry, his eyes gleaming savagely. "He's as clever and cunning as all the rest of Chinatown put together. Somewhere not a hundred miles from this spot where we are now there's a store of stuff big enough to dope all Europe!"

"And there's something else," said Seton quietly, knocking a cone of grey ash from his cheroot on to the dirty floor. "Kazmah is hiding there in all probability, if he hasn't got clear away—and Mrs. Monte Irvin is being held a prisoner!"

"If they haven't—"

"For Irvin's sake I hope not, Chief Inspector. There are two very curious points in the case—apart from the mystery which surrounds the man Kazmah: the fact that Mareno, palpably an accomplice, stayed to face the music, and the fact that Sin Sin Wa likewise has made no effort to escape. Do you see what it means? They are covering the big man—Kazmah. Once he and Mrs. Irvin are out of the way, we can prove nothing against Mareno and Sin Sin Wa! And the most we could do for Mrs. Sin would be to convict her of selling opium."

"To do even that we should have to take a witness to court," said Kerry gloomily; "and all the satisfaction we'd get would be to see her charged ten pounds!"

Silence fell between them again. It was that kind of sympathetic silence which is only possible where harmony exists; and, indeed, of all the things strange and bizarre which characterized the inquiry, this sudden amity between Kerry and Seton Pasha was not the least remarkable. It represented the fruit of a mutual respect.

There was something about the lean, unshaven face of Seton Pasha, and something, too, in his bright grey eyes which, allowing for difference of coloring, might have reminded a close observer of Kerry's fierce countenance. The tokens of iron determination and utter indifference to danger were perceptible in both. And although Seton was dark and turning slightly grey, while Kerry was as red as a man well could be, that they possessed several common traits of character was a fact which the dissimilarity of their complexions wholly failed to conceal. But while Seton Pasha hid the grimness of his nature beneath a sort of humorous reserve, the dangerous side of Kerry was displayed in his open truculence.

Seated there in that Limehouse attic, a smoky lamp burning on the table between them, and one gripping the stump of a cheroot between his teeth, while the other chewed steadily, they presented a combination which none but a fool would have lightly challenged.

"Sin Sin Wa is cunning," said Seton suddenly. "He is a very clever man. Watch him as closely as you like, he will never lead you to the 'store.' In the character of John Smiles I had some conversation with him this morning, and I formed the same opinion as yourself. He is waiting for something; and he is certain of his ground. I have a premonition, Chief Inspector, that whoever else may fall into the net, Sin Sin Wa will slip out. We have one big chance."

"What's that?" rapped Kerry.

"The dope syndicate can only have got control of 'the traffic' in one way—by paying big prices and buying out competitors. If they cease to carry on for even a week they lose their control. The people who bring the stuff over from Japan, South America, India, Holland, and so forth will sell somewhere else if they can't sell to Kazmah and Company. Therefore we want to watch the ships from likely ports, or, better still, get among the men who do the smuggling. There must be resorts along the riverside used by people of that class. We might pick up information there."

Kerry smiled savagely.

"I've got half a dozen good men doing every dive from Wapping to Gravesend," he answered. "But if you think
it worth looking into personally, say the word."

"Well, my dear sir,"--Seton Pasha tossed the end of his cheroot into the empty grate--"what else can we do?"

Kerry banged his fist on the table.

"You're right!" he snapped. "We're stuck! But anything's better than nothing. We'll start here and now; and the
first joint we'll make for is Dougal's."

"Dougal's?" echoed Seton Pasha.

"That's it--Dougal's. A danger spot on the Isle of Dogs used by the lowest type of sea-faring men and not barred
to Arabs, Chinks, and other gaily-colored fowl. If there's any chat going on about dope, we'll hear it in Dougal's."

Seton Pasha stood up, smiling grimly. "Dougal's it shall be," he said.

CHAPTER XXXII
ON THE ISLE OF DOGS

As the police beat left Limehouse Pier, a clammy south-easterly breeze blowing up-stream lifted the fog in
clearly defined layers, an effect very singular to behold. At one moment a great arc-lamp burning above the
Lavender Pond of the Surrey Commercial Dock shot out a yellowish light across the Thames. Then, as suddenly as it
had come, the light vanished again as a stratum of mist floated before it.

The creaking of the oars sounded muffled and ghostly, and none of the men in the boat seemed to be inclined to

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Converse. Heading across stream they made for the unseen promontory of the Isle of Dogs. Navigation was
suspended, and they reached midstream without seeing a ship's light. Then came the damp wind again to lift the fog,
and ahead of them they discerned one of the General Steam Navigation Company's boats awaiting an opportunity to
make her dock at the head of Deptford Creek. The clamor of an ironworks on the Millwall shore burst loudly upon
their ears, and away astern the lights of the Surrey Dock shone out once more. Hugging the bank they pursued a
sotherly course, and from Limehouse Reach crept down to Greenwich Reach.

Fog closed in upon them, a curtain obscuring both light and sound. When the breeze came again it had gathered
force, and it drove the mist before it in wreathing banks, and brought to their ears a dull lowing and to their nostrils a
farmyard odor from the cattle pens. Ghostly flames, leaping and falling, leaping and falling, showed where a
gasworks lay on the Greenwich bank ahead.

Eastward swept the river now, and fresher blew the breeze. As they rounded the blunt point of the "Isle" the fog
banks went swirling past them astern, and the lights on either shore showed clearly ahead. A ship's siren began to
roar somewhere behind them. The steamer which they had passed was about to pursue her course.

Closer in-shore drew the boat, passing a series of wharves, and beyond these a tract of waste, desolate bank very
gloomy in the half light and apparently boasting no habitation of man. The activities of the Greenwich bank seemed
remote, and the desolation of the Isle of Dogs very near, touching them intimately with its peculiar gloom.

A light sprang into view some little distance inland, notable because it shone lonely in an expanse of utter
blackness. Kerry broke the long silence.

"Dougal's," he said. "Put us ashore here."

The police boat was pulled in under a rickety wooden structure, beneath which the Thames water whispered
eerily; and Kerry and Seton disembarked, mounting a short flight of slimy wooden steps and crossing a roughly
planked place on to a shingly slope. Climbing this, they were on damp waste ground, pathless and uninviting.

"Dougal's is being watched," said Kerry. "I think I told you?"

"Yes," replied Seton. "But I have formed the opinion that the dope gang is too clever for the ordinary type of
man. Sin Sin Wa is an instance of what I mean. Neither you nor I doubt that he is a receiver of drugs--perhaps the
receiver; but where is our case? The only real link connecting him with the West-End habitue is his wife. And she
has conveniently deserted him! We cannot possibly prove that she hasn't while he chooses to maintain that she has."

"H'm," grunted Kerry, abruptly changing the subject. "I hope I'm not recognized here."

"Have you visited the place before?"

"Some years ago. Unless there are any old hands on view tonight, I don't think I shall be spotted."

He wore a heavy and threadbare overcoat, which was several sizes too large for him, a muffler, and a weed cap--
the outfit supplied by Seton Pasha; and he had a very vivid and unpleasant recollection of his appearance as viewed
in his little pocket-mirror before leaving Seton's room. As they proceeded across the muddy wilderness towards the
light which marked the site of Dougal's, they presented a picture of a sufficiently villainous pair.

The ground was irregular, and the path wound sinuously about mounds of rubbish; so that often the guiding light
was lost, and they stumbled blindly among nondescript litter, which apparently represented the accumulation of
centuries. But finally they turned a corner formed by a stack of rusty scrap iron, and found a long, low building
before them. From a ground-floor window light streamed out upon the fragments of rubbish strewing the ground,
from amidst which sickly weeds uprose as if in defiance of nature's laws. Seton paused, and:

"What is Dougal's exactly?" he asked; "a public house?"
"No," rapped Kerry. "It's a coffee-shop used by the dockers. You'll see when we get inside. The place never closes so far as I know, and if we made 'em close there would be a dock strike."

He crossed and pushed open the swing door. As Seton entered at his heels, a babel of coarse voices struck upon his ears and he found himself in a superheated atmosphere suggestive of shag, stale spirits, and imperfectly washed humanity.

Dougal's proved to be a kind of hut of wood and corrugated iron, not unlike an army canteen. There were two counters, one at either end, and two large American stoves. Oil lamps hung from the beams, and the furniture was made up of trestle tables, rough wooden chairs, and empty barrels. Coarse, thick curtains covered all the windows but one. The counter further from the entrance was laden with articles of food, such as pies, tins of bully-beef, and "saveloys," while the other was devoted to liquid refreshment in the form of ginger-beer and cider (or so the casks were conspicuously labelled), tea, coffee, and cocoa.

The place was uncomfortably crowded; the patrons congregating more especially around the two stoves. There were men who looked like dock laborers, seamen, and riverside loafers; lascars, Chinese, Arabs, and dagoes; and at the "solid" counter there presided a red-armed, brawny woman, fierce of mien and ready of tongue, while a huge Irishman, possessing a broken nose and deficient teeth, ruled the "liquid" department with a rod of iron and a flow of language which shocked even Kerry. This formidable ruffian, a retired warrior of the ring, was Dougal, said to be the strongest man from Tower Hill to the River Lea.

As they entered, several of the patrons glanced at them curiously, but no one seemed to be particularly interested. Kerry wore his cap pulled well down over his fierce eyes, and had the collar of his topcoat turned up. He looked about him, as if expecting to recognize someone; and as they made their way to Dougal's counter, a big fellow dressed in the manner of a dock laborer stepped up to the Chief Inspector and clapped him on the shoulder.

"Have one with me, Mike," he said, winking. "The coffee's good."

Kerry bent towards him swiftly, and:
"Anybody here, Jervis?" he whispered.
"George Martin is at the bar. I've had the tip that he 'traffics.' You'll remember he figured in my last report, sir."

Kerry nodded, and the trio elbowed their way to the counter. The pseudo-dock hand was a detective attached to Leman Street, and one who knew the night birds of East End London as few men outside their own circles knew them.

"Three coffees, Pat," he cried, leaning across the shoulder of a heavy, red-headed fellow who lolled against the counter. "And two lumps of sugar in each."

"To hell wid yer sugar!" roared Dougal, grasping three cups deftly in one hairy hand and filling them from a steaming urn. "There's no more sugar tonight."

"Not any brown sugar?" asked the customer.

"Yez can have one tayspoon of brown, and no more tonight," cried Dougal.

He stooped rapidly below the counter, then pushed the three cups of coffee towards the detective. The latter tossed a shilling down, at which Dougal glared ferociously.

"'Twas wid sugar ye said!" he roared.

A second shilling followed. Dougal swept both coins into a drawer and turned to another customer, who was also clamoring for coffee. Securing their cups with difficulty, for the red-headed man surlily refused to budge, they retired to a comparatively quiet spot, and Seton tasted the hot beverage.

"H'm," he said. "Rum! Good rum, too!"

"It's a nice position for me," snapped Kerry. "I don't think I would remind you that there's a police station actually on this blessed island. If there was a dive like Dougal's anywhere West it would be raided as a matter of course. But to shut Dougal's would be to raise hell. There are two laws in England, sir; one for Piccadilly and the other for the Isle of Dogs!" He sipped his coffee with appreciation. Jervis looked about him cautiously, and:

"That's George--the red-headed hooligan against the counter," he said. "He's been liquoring up pretty freely, and I shouldn't be surprised to find that he's got a job on tonight. He has a skiff beached below here, and I think he's waiting for the tide."

"Good!" rapped Kerry. "Where can we find a boat?"

"Well," Jervis smiled. "There are several lying there if you didn't come in an R.P. boat."

"We did. But I'll dismiss it. We want a small boat."

"Very good, sir. We shall have to pinch one!"

"That doesn't matter," declared Kerry glancing at Seton with a sudden twinkle discernible in his steely eyes. "What do you say, sir?"

"I agree with you entirely," replied Seton quietly. "We must find a boat, and lie off somewhere to watch for
George. He should be worth following."

"We'll be moving, then," said the Leman Street detective. "It will be high tide in an hour."

They finished their coffee as quickly as possible; the stuff was not far below boiling-point. Then Jervis returned the cups to the counter. "Good night, Pat!" he cried, and rejoined Seton and Kerry.

As they came out into the desolation of the scrap heaps, the last traces of fog had disappeared and a steady breeze came up the river, fresh and salty from the Nore. Jervis led them in a north-easterly direction, threading a way through pyramids of rubbish, until with the wind in their teeth they came out upon the river bank at a point where the shore shelved steeply downwards. A number of boats lay on the shingle.

"We're pretty well opposite Greenwich Marshes," said Jervis. "You can just see one of the big gasometers. The end boat is George's."

"Have you searched it?" rapped Kerry, placing a fresh piece of chewing-gum between his teeth.

"I have, sir. Oh, he's too wise for that!"

"I propose," said Seton briskly, "that we borrow one of the other boats and pull down stream to where that short pier juts out. We can hide behind it and watch for our man. I take it he'll be bound up-stream, and the tide will help us to follow him quietly."

"Right," said Kerry. "We'll take the small dinghy. It's big enough."

He turned to Jervis.

"Nip across to the wooden stairs," he directed, "and tell Inspector White to stand by, but to keep out of sight. If we've started before you return, go back and join him."

"Very good, sir."

Jervis turned and disappeared into the mazes of rubbish, as Seton and Kerry grasped the boat and ran it down into the rising tide. Kerry boarding, Seton thrust it out into the river and climbed in over the stern.

"Phew! The current drags like a tow-boat!" said Kerry.

They were being drawn rapidly up-stream. But as Kerry seized the oars and began to pull steadily, this progress was checked. He could make little actual headway, however.

"The tide races round this bend like fury," he said. "Bear on the oars, sir."

Seton thereupon came to Kerry's assistance, and gradually the dinghy crept upon its course, until, below the little pier, they found a sheltered spot, where it was possible to run in and lie hidden. As they won this haven:

"Quiet!" said Seton. "Don't move the oars. Look! We were only just in time!"

Immediately above them, where the boats were beached, a man was coming down the slope, carrying a hurricane lantern. As Kerry and Seton watched, the man raised the lantern and swung it to and fro.

"Watch!" whispered Seton. "He's signalling to the Greenwich bank!"

Kerry's teeth snapped savagely together, and he chewed but made no reply, until:

"There it is!" he said rapidly. "On the marshes!"

A speck of light in the darkness it showed, a distant moving lantern on the curtain of the night. Although few would have credited Kerry with the virtue, he was a man of cultured imagination, and it seemed to him, as it seemed to Seton Pasha, that the dim light symbolized the life of the missing woman, of the woman who hovered between the gay world from which tragically she had vanished and some Chinese hell upon whose brink she hovered. Neither of the watchers was thinking of the crime and the criminal, of Sir Lucien Pyne or Kazmah, but of Mrs. Monte Irvin, mysterious victim of a mysterious tragedy. "Oh, Dan! ye must find her! ye must find her! Puir weak hait--dinna ye ken how she is suffering!" Clairvoyantly, to Kerry's ears was borne an echo of his wife's words.

"The traffic!" he whispered. "If we lose George Martin tonight we deserve to lose the case!"

"I agree, Chief Inspector," said Seton quietly.

The grating sound made by a boat thrust out from a shingle beach came to their ears above the whispering of the tide. A ghostly figure in the dim light, George Martin clambered into his craft and took to the oars.

"If he's for the Greenwich bank," said Seton grimly, "he has a stiff task."

But for the Greenwich bank the boat was headed; and pulling mightily against the current, the man struck out into mid-stream. They watched him for some time, silently, noting how he fought against the tide, sturdily heading for the point at which the signal had shown. Then:

"What do you suggest?" asked Seton. "He may follow the Surrey bank up-stream."

"I suggest," said Kerry, "that we drift. Once in Limehouse Reach we'll hear him. There are no pleasure parties punting about that stretch."

"Let us pull out, then. I propose that we wait for him at some convenient point between the West India Dock and Limehouse Basin."

"Good," rapped Kerry, thrusting the boat out into the fierce current. "You may have spent a long time in the East, sir, but you're fairly wise on the geography of the lower Thames."

"There it is!" he said rapidly. "On the marshes!"
Gripped in the strongly running tide they were borne smoothly up-stream, using the oars merely for the purpose of steering. The gloomy mystery of the London river claimed them and imposed silence upon them, until familiar landmarks told of the northern bend of the Thames, and the light above the Lavender Pond shone out upon the unctuously moving water.

Each pulling a scull they headed in for the left bank.
"There's a wharf ahead," said Seton, looking back over his shoulder. "If we put in beside it we can wait there unobserved."

"Good enough," said Kerry.

They bent to the oars, stealing stroke by stroke out of the grip of the tide, and presently came to a tiny pool above the wharf structure, where it was possible to lie undisturbed by the eager current.

Those limitations which are common to all humanity and that guile which is peculiar to the Chinese veiled the fact from their ken that the deserted wharf, in whose shelter they lay, was at once the roof and the gateway of Sin Sin Wa's receiving office!

As the boat drew in to the bank, a Chinese boy who was standing on the wharf retired into the shadows. From a spot visible down-stream but invisible to the men in the boat, he signalled constantly with a hurricane lantern.

Three men from New Scotland Yard were watching the house of Sin Sin Wa, and Sin Sin Wa had given no sign of animation since, some hours earlier, he had extinguished his bedroom light. Yet George, drifting noiselessly up-stream, received a signal to the effect "police" while Seton Pasha and Chief Inspector Kerry lay below the biggest dope cache in London. Seton sometimes swore under his breath. Kerry chewed incessantly. But George never came.

At that eerie hour of the night when all things living, from the lowest to the highest, nor excepting Mother Earth herself, grow chilled, when all Nature's perishable handiwork feels the touch of death—a wild, sudden cry rang out, a wailing, sorrowful cry, that seemed to come from nowhere, from everywhere, from the bank, from the stream; that rose and fell and died sobbing into the hushed whisper of the tide.

Seton's hand fastened like a vise on to Kerry's shoulder, and:
"Merciful God!" he whispered; "what was it? Who was it?"

"If it wasn't a spirit it was a woman," replied Kerry hoarsely; "and a woman very near to her end."

"Kerry!"--Seton Pasha had dropped all formality--"Kerry—if it calls for all the men that Scotland Yard can muster, we must search every building, down to the smallest rathole in the floor, on this bank—and do it by dawn!"

"We'll do it," rapped Kerry.

PART FOURTH

THE EYE OF SIN SIN WA

CHAPTER XXXII

CHINESE MAGIC

Detective-Sergeant Coombes and three assistants watched the house of Sin Sin Wa, and any one of the three would have been prepared to swear "on the Book" that Sin Sin Wa was sleeping. But he who watches a Chinaman watches an illusionist. He must approach his task in the spirit of a psychical inquirer who seeks to trap a bogus medium. The great Robert Houdin, one of the master wizards of modern times, quitted Petrograd by two gates at the same hour according to credible witnesses; but his performance sinks into insignificance beside that of a Chinese predecessor who flourished under one of the Ming emperors. The palace of this potentate was approached by gates, each having twelve locks, and each being watched by twelve guards. Nevertheless a distinguished member of the wizard family not only gained access to the imperial presence but also departed again unseen by any of the guards, and leaving all the gates locked behind him! If Detective-Sergeant Coombes had known this story he might not have experienced such complete confidence.

That door of Sin Sin Wa's establishment which gave upon a little backyard was oiled both lock and hinge so that it opened noiselessly. Like a shadow, like a ghost, Sin Sin Wa crept forth, closing the door behind him. He carried a sort of canvas kit-bag, so that one observing him might have concluded that he was "moving."

Resting his bag against the end wall, he climbed up by means of holes in the neglected brickwork until he could peer over the top. A faint smell of tobacco smoke greeted him: a detective was standing in the lane below. Soundlessly, Sin Sin Wa descended again. Raising his bag he lifted it lovingly until it rested upright upon the top of the wall and against the side of the house. The night was dark and still. Only a confused beating sound on the Surrey bank rose above the murmur of sleeping London.

From the rubbish amid which he stood, Sin Sin Wa selected a piece of rusty barrel-hoop. Cautiously he mounted upon a wooden structure built against the end wall and raised himself upright, surveying the prospect. Then he hurled the fragment of iron far along the lane, so that it bounded upon a strip of corrugated roofing in a yard twice removed from his own, and fell clattering among a neighbor's rubbish.

A short exclamation came from the detective in the lane. He could be heard walking swiftly away in the
direction of the disturbance. And ere he had gone six paces, Sin Sin Wa was bending like an inverted U over the wall and was lowering his precious bag to the ground. Like a cat he sprang across and dropped noiselessly beside it.

"Hello! Who's there?" cried the detective, standing by the wall of the house which Sin Sin Wa had selected as a target.

Sin Sin Wa, bag in hand, trotted, soft of foot, across the lane and into the shadow of the dock-building. By the time that the C.I.D. man had decided to climb up and investigate the mysterious noise, Sin Sin Wa was on the other side of the canal and rapping gently upon the door of Sam Tuk's hairdressing establishment.

The door was opened so quickly as to suggest that someone had been posted there for the purpose. Sin Sin Wa entered and the door was closed again.

"Light, Ah Fung," he said in Chinese. "What news?"

The boy who had admitted him took a lamp from under a sort of rough counter and turned to Sin Sin Wa.

"George came with the boat, master, but I signalled to him that the red policeman and the agent who has hired the end room were watching."

"They are gone?"

"They gather men at the head depot and are searching house from house. She who sleeps below awoke and cried out. They heard her cry."

"George waits?"

"He waits, master. He will wait long if the gain is great."

"Good."

Sin Sin Wa shuffled across to the cellar stairs, followed by Ah Fung with the lamp. He descended, and, brushing away the carefully spread coal dust, inserted the piece of bent wire into the crevice and raised the secret trap. Bearing his bag upon his shoulder he went down into the tunnel.

"Reclose the door, Ah Fung," he said softly; "and be watchful."

As the boy replaced the stone trap, Sin Sin Wa struck a match. Then, having the lighted match held in one hand and carrying the bag in the other, he crept along the low passage to the door of the cache. Dropping the smouldering match-end, he opened the door and entered that secret warehouse for which so many people were seeking. Bearing his bag upon his shoulder he went down into the tunnel.

"Hello! hello!" remarked the occupant drowsily. "Number one p'lice chop lo! Sin Sin Wa--Sin Sin..."


He opened the front of the cage and out stepped the raven onto his wrist. Sin Sin Wa raised his arm and Tling-a-Ling settled himself contentedly upon his master's shoulder.

Placing the empty cage on the counter. Sin Sin Wa plunged his hand down into the bag and drew out the gleaming wooden joss. This he set beside the cage. With never a glance at the mummy figure of Sam Tuk, he walked around the counter, raven on shoulder, and grasping the end of the laden shelves, he pulled the last section smoothly to the left, showing that it was attached to a sliding door. The establishments of Sin Sin Wa were as full of surprises as a Sicilian trinketbox.

The double purpose of the timbering which had been added to this old storage vault was now revealed. It not only served to enlarge the store-room, but also shut off from view a second portion of the cellar, smaller than the first, and containing appointments which indicated that it was sometimes inhabited.

There was an oil-stove in the room, which, like that adjoining it, was evidently unprovided with any proper means of ventilation. A paper-shaded lamp hung from the low roof. The floor was covered with matting, and there were arm-chairs, a divan and other items of furniture, which had been removed from Mrs. Sin's sanctum in the dismantled House of a Hundred Raptures. In a recess a bed was placed, and as Sin Sin Wa came in Mrs. Sin was standing by the bed looking down at a woman who lay there.

Mrs. Sin wore her kimona of embroidered green silk and made a striking picture in that sordid setting. Her black hair she had dyed a fashionable shade of red. She glanced rapidly across her shoulder at Sin Sin Wa—a glance of contempt with which was mingled faint distrust.

"So," she said, in Chinese, "you have come at last." Sin Sin Wa smiled. "They watched the old fox," he replied. "But their eyes were as the eyes of the mole."

Still aside, contemptuously, the woman regarded him, and:

"Suppose they are keener than you think?" she said. "Are you sure you have not led them--here?"

"The snail may not pursue the hawk," murmured Sin Sin Wa; "nor the eye of the bat follow his flight."

"Smartest leg," remarked the raven.
"Yes, yes, my little friend," crooned Sin Sin Wa, "very soon now you shall see the paddy-fields of Ho-Nan and watch the great Yellow River sweeping eastward to the sea."

"Pah!" said Mrs. Sin. "Much--very much--you care about the paddy-fields of Ho-Nan, and little, oh, very little, about the dollars and the traffic! You have my papers?"

"All are complete. With those dollars for which I care not, a man might buy the world--if he had but enough of the dollars. You are well known in Poplar as 'Mrs. Jacobs,' and your identity is easily established--as 'Mrs. Jacobs.' You join the Mahratta at the Albert Dock. I have bought you a post as stewardess."

Mrs. Sin tossed her head. "And Juan?"

"What can they prove against your Juan if you are missing?"

Mrs. Sin nodded towards the bed.

With slow and shuffling steps Sin Sin Wa approached. He continued to smile, but his glittering eye held even less of mirth than usual. Tucking his hands into his sleeves, he stood and looked down--at Rita Irvin.

Her face had acquired a waxen quality, but some of her delicate coloring still lingered, lending her a ghastly and mask-like aspect. Her nostrils and lips were blanched, however, and possessed a curiously pinched appearance. It was impossible to detect the fact that she breathed, and her long lashes lay motionless upon her cheeks.

Sin Sin Wa studied her silently for some time, then:

"Yes," he murmured, "she is beautiful. But women are like adder's eggs. He is a fool who warms them in his bosom." He turned his slow regard upon Mrs. Sin. "You have stained your hair to look even as hers. It was discreet, my wife. But one is beautiful and many-shadowed like a copper vase, and the other is like a winter sunset on the poppy-fields. You remind me of the angry red policeman, and I tremble."

"Tremble as much as you like," said Mrs. Sin scornfully, "but do something, think; don't leave everything to me. She screamed tonight--and someone heard her. They are searching the river bank from door to door."

"Lo!" murmured Sin Sin Wa, "even this I had learned, nor failed to heed the beating of a distant drum. And why did she scream?"

"I was--keeping her asleep; and the prick of the needle woke her."

"Tchee, tchee," crooned Sin Sin Wa, his voice sinking lower and lower and his eye nearly closing. "But still she lives--and is beautiful."

"Beautiful!" mocked Mrs. Sin. "A doll-woman, bloodless and nerveless!"

"So--so. Yet she, so bloodless and nerveless, unmasked the secret of Kazmah, and she, so bloodless and nerveless, struck down--"

Mrs. Sin ground her teeth together audibly.

"Yes, yes!" she said in sibilant Chinese. "She is a robber, a thief, a murderess." She bent over the unconscious woman, her jewel-laden fingers crooked and menacing. "With my bare hands I would strangle her, but--"

"There must be no marks of violence when she is found in the river. Tchee, chee--it is a pity."

"Number one p'lice chop, lo!" croaked the raven, following this remark with the police-whistle imitation.

Mrs. Sin turned and stared fiercely at the one-eyed bird.

"Why do you bring that evil, croaking thing here?" she demanded. "Have we not enough risks?"

Sin Sin Wa smiled patiently.

"Too many," he murmured. "For failure is nothing but the taking of seven risks when six were enough. Come--let us settle our affairs. The 'Jacobs' account is closed, but it is only a question of hours or days before the police learn that the wharf as well as the house belongs to someone of that name. We have drawn our last dollar from the traffic, my wife. Our stock we are resigned to lose. So let us settle our affairs."


CHAPTER XXXIV

ABOVE AND BELOW

"Thank the guid God I see ye alive, Dan," said Mary Kerry.

Having her husband's dressing-gown over her night attire, and her usually neat hair in great disorder, she stood just within the doorway of the little dining-room at Spenser Road, her face haggard and the fey light in her eyes. Kerry, seated in the armchair dressed as he had come in from the street, a parody of his neat self with mud on his shoes and streaks of green slime on his overall, raised his face from his hands and stared at her wearily.

"I awakened wi' a cry at some hour afore the dawn," she whispered stretching out her hands and looking like a wild-eyed prophetess of old. "My hairt beat sair fast and then grew caud. I droppit on my knees and prayed as I ha' ne'er prayed afore. Dan, Dan, I thought ye were gene from me."

"I nearly was," said Kerry, a faint spark of his old truculency lighting up the weary eyes. "The man from Whitehall only missed me by a miracle."

"'Twas the miracle o' prayer, Dan," declared his wife in a low, awe-stricken voice. "For as I prayed, a great
comfort came to me an' a great peace. The second sight was wi' me, Dan, and I saw, no' yersel' --whereby I seemed to ken that ye were safe--but a puir dying soul stretched on a bed o' sorrow. At the fuit o' the bed was standing a fearsome figure o' a man--yellow and wicked, wi' his hands tuckit in his sleeves. I thought 'twas a veesion that was opening up tee me and that a' was about to be made clear, when as though a curtain had been droopit before my een, it went awe' an' I kenned it nae more; but plain--plain, I heerd the howling o' a dog."

Kerry started and clutched the arms of the chair.
"A dog!" he said. "A dog!"
"The howling o' a sma' dog," declared his wife; "and I thought 'twas a portent, an' the great fear came o'er me again. But as I prayed 'twas unfold to me that the portent was no' for yersel' but for her--the puir weak hairt ye ha' tee save."

She ceased speaking and the strange fey light left her eyes. She dropped upon her knees beside Kerry, bending her head and throwing her arms about him. He glanced down at her tenderly and laid his hands upon her shoulders; but he was preoccupied, and the next moment, his jaws moving mechanically, he was staring straight before him.
"A dog," he muttered, "a dog!"

Mary Kerry did not move; until, a light of understanding coming into Kerry's fierce eyes, he slowly raised her and stood upright himself.
"I have it!" he said. "Mary, the case is won! Twenty men have spent the night and early morning beating the river bank so that the very rats have been driven from their holes. Twenty men have failed where a dog would have succeeded. Mary, I must be off."
"Ye're no goin' out again, Dan. Ye're weary tee death."
"I must, my dear, and it's you who send me."
"But, Dan, where are ye goin'?"
Kerry grabbed his hat and cane from the sideboard upon which they lay, and:
"I'm going for the dog!" he rapped.

Weary as he was and travel-stained, for once neglectful of that neatness upon which he prided himself, he set out, hope reborn in his heart. His assertion that the very rats had been driven from their holes was scarce an exaggeration. A search-party of twenty men, hastily mustered and conducted by Kerry and Seton Pasha, had explored every house, every shop, every wharf, and, as Kerry believed, every cellar adjoining the bank, between Limehouse Basin and the dock gates. Where access had been denied them or where no one had resided they had never hesitated to force an entrance. But no trace had they found of those whom they sought.

For the first time within Kerry's memory, or, indeed, within the memory of any member of the Criminal Investigation Department, Detective-Sergeant Coombes had ceased to smile when the appalling truth was revealed to him that Sin Sin Wa had vanished--that Sin Sin Wa had mysteriously joined that invisible company which included Kazmah, Mrs. Sin and Mrs. Monte Irvin. Not a word of reprimand did the Chief Inspector utter, but his eyes seemed to emit sparks. Hands plunged deeply in his pockets he had turned away, and not even Seton Pasha had dared to speak to him for fully five minutes.

Kerry began to regard the one-eyed Chinaman with a superstitious fear which he strove in vain to stifle. That any man could have succeeded in converting a chandu-khan such as that described by Mollie Gretina into a filthy deserted dwelling such as that visited by Kerry, within the space of some thirty-six hours, was well nigh incredible. But the Chief Inspector had deduced (correctly) that the exotic appointments depicted by Mollie were all of a detachable nature--merely masking the filthiness beneath; so that at the shortest notice the House of a Hundred Raptures could be dismantled. The communicating door was a larger proposition, but that it was one within the compass of Sin Sin Wa its effectual disappearance sufficiently demonstrated.

Doubtless (Kerry mused savagely) the appointments of the opium-house had been smuggled into that magically hidden cache which now concealed the conjurer Sin Sin Wa as well as the other members of the Kazmah company. How any man of flesh and blood could have escaped from a six-roomed house surrounded by detectives surpassed Kerry's powers of imagination. How any apartment large enough to contain a mouse, much less half a dozen human beings, could exist anywhere within the area covered by the search-party he failed to understand, nor was he prepared to admit it humanly possible.

Kerry chartered a taxicab by Brixton Town Hall and directed the man to drive to Prince's Gate. To the curious glances of certain of his neighbors who had never before seen the Chief Inspector otherwise than a model of cleanliness and spruceness he was indifferent. But the manner in which the taxi-driver looked him up and down penetrated through the veil of abstraction which hitherto had rendered Kerry impervious to all external impressions, and:
"Give me another look like that, my lad," he snapped furiously, "and I'll bash your head through your blasted wind-screen."
A ready retort trembled upon the cabman's tongue, but a glance into the savage blue eyes reduced him to fearful silence. Kerry entered the cab and banged the door; and the man drove off positively trembling with indignation.

Deep in reflection the Chief Inspector was driven westward through the early morning traffic. Fine rain was falling, and the streets presented that curiously drab appearance which only London streets can present in all its dreary perfection. Workers bound Cityward fought for places inside trams and buses. A hundred human comedies and tragedies were to be witnessed upon the highways; but to all of them Kerry was blind as he was deaf to the din of workaday Babylon. In spirit he was roaming the bank of old Father Thames where the river sweeps eastward below Limehouse Causeway—wonder-stricken before the magic of the one-eyed wizard who could at will efface himself as an artist rubs out a drawing, who could camouflage a drug warehouse so successfully that human skill, however closely addressed to the task, failed utterly to detect its whereabouts. Above the discord of the busy streets he heard again and again that cry in the night which had come from a hapless prisoner whom they were powerless to succor. He beat his cane upon the floor of the cab and swore savagely and loudly. The intimidated cabman, believing these demonstrations designed to urge him to a greater speed, performed feats of driving calculated to jeopardize his license. But still the savage passenger stamped and cursed, so that the cabby began to believe that a madman was seated behind him.

At the corner of Kennington Oval Kerry was effectually aroused to the realities. A little runabout car passed his cab, coming from a southerly direction. Proceeding at a rapid speed it was lost in the traffic ahead. Unconsciously Kerry had glanced at the occupants and had recognized Margaret Halley and Seton Pasha. The old spirit of rivalry between himself and the man from Whitehall leapt up hotly within Kerry's breast.

"Now where the hell has he been!" he muttered.

As a matter of fact, Seton Pasha, acting upon a suggestion of Margaret's had been to Brixton Prison to interview Juan Mareno who lay there under arrest. Contents bills announcing this arrest as the latest public development in the Bond Street murder case were to be seen upon every newsstand; yet the problem of that which had brought Seton to the south of London was one with which Kerry grappled in vain. He had parted from the Home office agent in the early hours of the morning, and their parting had been one of mutual despair which neither had sought to disguise.

It was a coincidence which a student of human nature might have regarded as significant, that whereas Kerry had taken his troubles home to his wife, Seton Pasha had sought inspiration from Margaret Halley; and whereas the guidance of Mary Kerry had led the Chief Inspector to hurry in quest of Rita Irvin's spaniel, the result of Seton's interview with Margaret had been an equally hurried journey to the big jail.

Unhappily Seton had failed to elicit the slightest information from the saturnine Mareno. Unmoved alike by promises or threats, he had coolly adhered to his original evidence.

So, while the authorities worked feverishly and all England reading of the arrest of Mareno inquired indignantly, "But who is Kazmah, and where is Mrs. Monte Irvin?" Sin Sin Wa placidly pursued his arrangements for immediate departure to the paddyfields of Ho-Nan, and sometimes in the weird crooning voice with which he addressed the raven he would sing a monotonous chant dealing with the valley of the Yellow River where the opium-poppy grows. Hidden in the cunning vault, the search had passed above him; and watchful on a quay on the Surrey shore whereto his dinghy was fastened, George Martin awaited the signal which should tell him that Kazmah and Company were ready to leave. Any time after dark he expected to see the waving lantern and to collect his last payment from the traffic.

At the very hour that Kerry was hastening to Prince's Gate, Sin Sin Wa sat before the stove in the drug cache, the green-eyed joss upon his knee. With a fragment of chamois leather he lovingly polished the leering idol, crooning softly to himself and smiling his mirthless smile. Perched upon his shoulder the raven studied this operation with apparent interest, his solitary eye glittering bead-like. Upon the opposite side of the stove sat the ancient Sam Tuk and at intervals of five minutes or more he would slowly nod his hairless head.

The sliding door which concealed the inner room was partly open, and from the opening there shone forth a dim red light, cast by the paper-shaded lamp which illuminated the place. The coarse voice of the Cuban-Jewess rose and fell in a ceaseless half-muttered soliloquy, indescribably unpleasant but to which Sin Sin Wa was evidently indifferent.

Propped up amid cushions on the divan which once had formed part of the furniture of the House of a Hundred Raptures, Mrs. Sin was smoking opium. The long bamboo pipe had fallen from her listless fingers, and her dark eyes were partly glazed. Buddha-like immobility was claiming her, but it had not yet effaced that expression of murderous malice with which the smoker contemplated the unconscious woman who lay upon the bed at the other end of the room.

As the moments passed the eyes of Mrs. Sin grew more and more glazed. Her harsh voice became softened, and presently: "Ah!" she whispered; "so you wait to smoke with me?"

Immobile she sat propped up amid the cushions, and only her full lips moved.
"Two pipes are nothing to Cy," she murmured. "He smokes five. But you are not going to smoke?"

Again she paused, then:

"Ah, my Lucy. You smoke with me?" she whispered coaxingly.

Chandu had opened the poppy gates. Mrs. Sin was conversing with her dead lover.

"Something has changed you," she sighed. "You are different--lately. You have lots of money now. Your investments have been good. You want to become--respectable, eh?"

Slightly--ever so slightly--the red lips curled upwards. No sound of life came from the woman lying white and still in the bed. But through the partly open door crept snatches of Sin Sin Wa's crooning melody.

"Yet once," she murmured, "yet once I seemed beautiful to you, Lucy. For La Belle Lola you forgot that English pride." She laughed softly. "You forgot Sin Sin Wa. If there had been no Lola you would never have escaped from Buenos Ayres with your life, my Lucy. You forgot that English pride, and did not ask me where I got them from--the ten thousand dollars to buy your 'honor' back."

She became silent, as if listening to the dead man's reply. Finally:

"No--I do not reproach you, my dear," she whispered. "You have paid me back a thousand fold, and Sin Sin Wa, the old fox, grows rich and fat. Today we hold the traffic in our hands, Lucy. The old fox cares only for his money. Before it is too late let us go--you and I. Do you remember Havana, and the two months of heaven we spent there? Oh, let us go back to Havana, Lucy. Kazmah has made us rich. Let Kazmah die. . . . You smoke with me?"

Again she became silent, then:

"Very likely," she murmured; "very likely I know why you don't smoke. You have promised your pretty little friend that you will stay awake and see that nobody tries to cut her sweet white throat."

She paused momentarily, then muttered something rapidly in Spanish, followed by a short, guttural phrase in Chinese.

"Why do you bring her to the house?" she whispered hoarsely. "And you brought her to Kazmah's. Ah! I see. Now everybody says you are changed. Yes. She is a charming friend."

The Buddha-like face became suddenly contorted, and as suddenly grew placid again.

"I know! I know!" Mrs. Sin muttered harshly. "Do you think I am blind! If she had been like any of the others, do you suppose it would have mattered to me? But you respect her--you respect. . . . " Her voice died away to an almost inaudible whisper: "I don't believe you. You are telling me lies. But you have always told me lies; one more does not matter, I suppose . . . How strong you are. You have hurt my wrists. You will smoke with me now?"

She ceased speaking abruptly, and abruptly resumed again:

"And I do as you wish--I do as you wish. How can I keep her from it except by making the price so high that she cannot afford to buy it? I tell you I do it. I bargain for the pink and white boy, Quentin, because I want her to be indebted to him--because I want her to be so sorry for him that she lets him take her away from you! Why should you respect her--"

Silence fell upon the drugged speaker. Sin Sin Wa could be heard crooning softly about the Yellow River and the mountain gods who sent it sweeping down through the valleys where the opium-poppy grows.

"Go, Juan," hissed Mrs. Sin. "I say--go!"

Her voice changed eerily to a deep, mocking bass; and Rita Irvin lying, a pallid wraith of her once lovely self, upon the untidy bed, stirred slightly--her lashes quivering. Her eyes opened and stared straightly upward at the low, dirty ceiling, horror growing in their shadowy depths.

CHAPTER XXXV
BEYOND THE VEIL

Rita Irvin's awakening was no awakening in the usually accepted sense of the word; it did not even represent a lifting of the veil which cut her off from the world, but no more than a momentary perception of the existence of such a veil and of the existence of something behind it. Upon the veil, in grey smoke, the name "Kazmah" was written in moving characters. Beyond the veil, dimly divined, was life.

As of old the victims of the Inquisition, waking or dreaming, beheld ever before them the instrument of their torture, so before this woman's racked and half-numbed mind panoramically passed, an endless pageant, the incidents of the night which had cut her off from living men and women. She tottered on the border-line which divides sanity from madness. She was learning what Sir Lucien had meant when, once, long long ago, in some remote time when she was young and happy and had belonged to a living world, he had said "a day is sure to come." It had come, that "day." It had dawned when she had torn the veil before Kazmah--and that veil had enveloped her ever since. All that had preceded the fatal act was blotted out, blurred and indistinct; all that had succeeded it lived eternally, passing, an endless pageant, before her tortured mind.

The horror of the moment when she had touched the hands of the man seated in the big ebony chair was of such kind that no subsequent terrors had supplanted it. For those long, slim hands of the color of old ivory were cold,
rigid, lifeless—the hands of a corpse! Thus the pageant began, and it continued as hereafter, memory and delusion
taking the stage in turn.

* * * * *

Complete darkness came.

Rita uttered a wild cry of horror and loathing, shrinking back from the thing which sat in the ebony chair. She
felt that consciousness was slipping from her; felt herself falling, and shrieked to know herself helpless and alone
with Kazmah. She groped for support, but found none; and, moaning, she sank down, and was unconscious of her
fall.

A voice awakened her. Someone knelt beside her in the darkness, supporting her; someone who spoke wildly,
despairingly, but with a strange, emotional reverence curbing the passion in his voice.

"Rita--my Rita! What have they done to you? Speak to me. . . . Oh God! Spare her to me. . . . Let her hate me for
ever, but spare her--spare her. Rita, speak to me! I tried, heaven hear me, to save you little girl. I only want you to be
happy!"

She felt herself being lifted gently, tenderly. And as though the man's passionate entreaty had called her back
from the dead, she reentered into life and strove to realize what had happened.

Sir Lucien was supporting her, and she found it hard to credit the fact that it was he, the hard, nonchalant man of
the world she knew, who had spoken. She clutched his arm with both hands.

"Oh, Lucy!" she whispered. "I am so frightened--and so ill."

"Thank God," he said huskily, "she is alive. Lean against me and try to stand up. We must get away from here."

Rita managed to stand upright, clenching wildly to Sir Lucien. A square, vaguely luminous opening became
visible to her. Against it, silhouetted, she could discern part of the outline of Kazmah's chair. She drew back,
uttering a low, sobbing cry. Sir Lucien supported her, and:

"Don't be afraid, dear," he said reassuringly. "Nothing shall hurt you."

He pushed open a door, and through it shone the same vague light which she had seen in the opening behind the
chair. Sir Lucien spoke rapidly in a language which sounded like Spanish. He was answered by a perfect torrent of
words in the same tongue.

Fiercely he cried something back at the hidden speaker.

A shriek of rage, of frenzy, came out of the darkness. Rita felt that consciousness was about to leave her again.
She swayed forward dizzily, and a figure which seemed to belong to delirium--a lithe shadow out of which gleamed
a pair of wild eyes--leapt upon her. A knife glittered. . . .

In order to have repelled the attack, Sir Lucien would have had to release Rita, who was clinging to him, weak
and terror-stricken. Instead he threw himself before her. . . . She saw the knife enter his shoulder. . . .

Through absolute darkness she sank down into a land of chaotic nightmare horrors. Great bells clanged
maddeningly. Impish hands plucked at her garments, dragged her hair. She was hurried this way and that, bruised,
torn, and tossed helpless upon a sea of liquid brass. Through vast avenues lined with yellow, immobile Chinese
faces she was borne upon a bier. Oblique eyes looked into hers. Knives which glittered greenly in the light of lamps
globular and suspended in immeasurable space, were hurled at her in showers. . . .

Sir Lucien stood before her, supporting her; and all the knives buried themselves in his body. She tried to cry
out, but no sound could she utter. Darkness fell again. . . .

A Chinaman was bending over her. His hands were tucked in his loose sleeves. He smiled, and his smile was
hideous but friendly. He was strangely like Sin Sin Wa, save that he did not lack an eye.

Rita found herself lying in an untidy bed in a room laden with opium fumes and dimly lighted. On a table beside
her were the remains of a meal. She strove to recall having partaken of food, but was unsuccessful. . . .

There came a blank--then a sharp, stabbing pain in her right arm. She thought it was the knife, and shrieked
wildly again and again. . . .

Years seemingly elapsed, years of agony spent amid oblique eyes which floated in space unattached to any
visible body, amid reeking fumes and sounds of ceaseless conflict. Once she heard the cry of some bird, and thought
it must be the parakeet which eternally sat on a branch of a lonely palm in the heart of the Great Sahara. . . . Then,
one night, when she lay shrinking from the plucking yellow hands which reached out of the darkness:

"Tell me your dream," boomed a deep, mocking voice; "and I will read its portent!"

She opened her eyes. She lay in the untidy bed in the room which was laden with the fumes of opium. She stared
upward at the low, dirty ceiling.

"Why do you come to me with your stories of desperation?" continued the mocking voice. "You have insisted
upon seeing me. I am here."

Rita managed to move her head so that she could see more of the room.

On a divan at the other end of the place, propped up by a number of garish cushions, Rita beheld Mrs. Sin. The
long bamboo pipe had fallen from her listless fingers. Her face wore an expression of mystic rapture, like that characterizing the features of some Chinese Buddhas.

In the other corner of the divan, contemplating her from under heavy brows, sat Kazmah.

CHAPTER XXXVI
SAM TUK MOVES

Chinatown was being watched as Chinatown had never been watched before, even during the most stringent enforcement of the Defence of the Realm Act. K Division was on its mettle, and Scotland Yard had sent to aid Chief Inspector Kerry every man that could be spared to the task. The River Police, too, were aflame with zeal; for every officer in the service whose work lay east of London Bridge had appropriated to himself the stigma implied by the creation of Lord Wrexborough's commission.

"Corners" in foodstuffs, metals, and other indispensable commodities are appreciated by every man, because every man knows such things to exist; but a corner in drugs was something which the East End police authorities found very difficult to grasp. They could not free their minds of the traditional idea that every second Chinaman in the Causeway was a small importer. They were seeking a hundred lesser stores instead of one greater one. Not all Seton's quiet explanations nor Kerry's savage language could wean the higher local officials from their ancient beliefs. They failed to conceive the idea of a wealthy syndicate conducted by an educated Chinaman and backed, covered, and protected by a crooked gentleman and accomplished man of affairs.

Perhaps they knew and perhaps they knew not, that during the period ruled by D.O.R.A. as much as £25 was paid by habitues for one pipe of chandu. The power of gold is often badly estimated by an official whose horizon is marked by a pension. This is mere lack of imagination, and no more reflects discredit upon a man than lack of hair on his crown or of color in his cheeks. Nevertheless, it may prove very annoying.

Towards the close of an afternoon which symbolized the worst that London's particular climate can do in the matter of drizzling rain and gloom, Chief Inspector Kerry, carrying an irritable toy spaniel, came out of a turning which forms a V with Limehouse Canal, into a narrow street which runs parallel with the Thames. He had arrived at the conclusion that the neighborhood was sown so thickly with detectives that one could not throw a stone without hitting one. Yet Sin Sin Wa had quietly left his abode and had disappeared from official ken.

Three times within the past ten minutes the spaniel had tried to bite Kerry, nor was Kerry blind to the amusement which his burden had occasioned among the men of K Division whom he had met on his travels. Finally, as he came out into the riverside lane, the ill-tempered little animal essayed a fourth, and successful, attempt, burying his wicked white teeth in the Chief Inspector's wrist.

Kerry hooked his finger into the dog's collar, swung the yapping animal above his head, and hurled it from him into the gloom and rain mist.

"Hell take the blasted thing!" he shouted. "I'm done with it!"

He tenderly sucked his wounded wrist, and picking up his cane, which he had dropped, he looked about him and swore savagely. Of Seton Pasha he had had news several times during the day, and he was aware that the Home office agent was not idle. But to that old rivalry which had leapt up anew when he had seen Seton near Kennington oval had succeeded a sort of despair; so that now he would have welcomed the information that Seton had triumphed where he had failed. A furious hatred of the one-eyed Chinaman around whom he was convinced the mystery centred had grown up within his mind. At that hour he would gladly have resigned his post and sacrificed his pension to know that Sin Sin Wa was under lock and key. His outlook was official, and accordingly peculiar. He regarded the murder of Sir Lucien Pyne and the flight or abduction of Mrs. Monte Irvin as mere minor incidents in a case wherein Sin Sin Wa figured as the chief culprit. Nothing had acted so powerfully to bring about this conviction in the mind of the Chief Inspector as the inexplicable disappearance of the Chinaman under circumstances which had apparently precluded such a possibility.

A whimpering cry came to Kerry's ears; and because beneath the mask of ferocity which he wore a humane man was concealed: "Flames!" he snapped; "perhaps I've broken the poor little devil's leg."

Shaking a cascade of water from the brim of his neat bowler, he set off through the murk towards the spot from whence the cries of the spaniel seemed to proceed. A few paces brought him to the door of a dirty little shop. In a window close beside it appeared the legend:

SAM TUK BARBER.

The spaniel crouched by the door whining and scratching, and as Kerry came up it raised its bready black eyes to him with a look which, while it was not unfeary, held an unmistakable appeal. Kerry stood watching the dog for a moment, and as he watched he became conscious of an exhilarated pulse.

He tried the door and found it to be open. Thereupon he entered a dirty little shop, which he remembered to have searched in person in the grey dawn of the day which now was entering upon a premature dusk. The dog ran in past him, crossed the gloomy shop, and raced down into a tiny coal cellar, which likewise had been submitted during the
early hours of the morning to careful scrutiny under the directions of the Chief Inspector.

A Chinese boy, who had been the only occupant of the place on that occasion and who had given his name as Ah Fung, was surprised by the sudden entrance of man and dog in the act of spreading coal dust with his fingers upon a portion of the paved floor. He came to his feet with a leap and confronted Kerry. The spaniel began to scratch feverishly upon the spot where the coal dust had been artificially spread. Kerry's eyes gleamed like steel. He shot out his hand and grasped the Chinaman by his long hair. "Open that trap," he said, "or I'll break you in half!"

Ah Fung's oblique eyes regarded him with an expression difficult to analyze, but partly it was murder. He made no attempt to obey the order. Meanwhile the dog, whining and scratching furiously, had exposed the greater part of a stone slab somewhat larger than those adjoining it, and having a large crack or fissure in one end.

"For the last time," said Kerry, drawing the man's head back so that his breath began to whistle through his nostrils, "open that trap."

As he spoke he released Ah Fung, and Ah Fung made one wild leap towards the stairs. Kerry's fist caught him behind the ear as he sprang, and he went down like a dead man upon a small heap of coal which filled the angle of the cellar.

Breathing rapidly and having his teeth so tightly clenched that his maxillary muscles protruded lumpishly, Kerry stood looking at the fallen man. But Ah Fung did not move. The dog had ceased to scratch, and now stood uttering short staccato barks and looking up at the Chief Inspector. Otherwise there was no sound in the house, above or below.

Kerry stooped, and with his handkerchief scrupulously dusted the stone slab. The spaniel, resentment forgotten, danced excitedly beside him and barked continuously.

"There's some sort of hook to fit in that crack," muttered Kerry.

He began to hunt about among the debris which littered one end of the cellar, testing fragment after fragment, but failing to find any piece of scrap to suit his purpose. By sheer perseverance rather than by any process of reasoning, he finally hit upon the piece of bent wire which was the key to this door of Sin Sin Wa's drug warehouse.

One short exclamation of triumph he muttered at the moment that his glance rested upon it, and five seconds later he had the trapdoor open and was peering down into the narrow pit in which wooden steps rested. The spaniel began to bark wildly, whereupon Kerry grasped him, tucked him under his arm, and ran up to the room above, where he deposited the furiously wriggling animal. He stepped quickly back again and closed the upper door. By this act he plunged the cellar into complete darkness, and accordingly he took out from the pocket of his rain-drenched overall the electric torch which he always carried. Directing its ray downwards into the cellar, he perceived Ah Fung move and toss his hand above his head. He also detected a faint rattling sound.

"Ah!" said Kerry.

He descended, and stooping over the unconscious man extracted from the pocket of his baggy blue trousers four keys upon a ring. At these Kerry stared eagerly. Two of them belonged to yale locks; the third was a simple English barrel-key, which probably fitted a padlock; but the fourth was large and complicated.

"Looks like the key of a jail," he said aloud.

He spoke with unconscious prescience. This was the key of the door of the vault. Removing his overall, Kerry laid it with his cane upon the scrap-heap, then he climbed down the ladder and found himself in the mouth of that low timbered tunnel, like a trenchwork, which owed its existence to the cunning craftsmanship of Sin Sin Wa. Stooping uncomfortably, he made his way along the passage until the massive door confronted him. He was in no doubt as to which key to employ; his mental condition was such that he was indifferent to the dangers which probably lay before him.

The well-oiled lock operated smoothly. Kerry pushed the door open and stepped briskly into the vault.

His movements, from the moment that he had opened the trap, had been swift and as nearly noiseless as the difficulties of the task had permitted. Nevertheless, they had not been so silent as to escape the attention of the preternaturally acute Sin Sin Wa. Kerry found the place occupied only by the aged Sam Tuk. A bright fire burned in the stove, and a ship's lantern stood upon the counter. Dense chemical fumes rendered the air difficult to breathe; but the shelves, once laden with the largest illicit collection of drugs in London, were bare.

Kerry's fierce eyes moved right and left; his jaws worked automatically. Sam Tuk sat motionless, his hands concealed in his sleeves, bending decrepitly forward in his chair. Then:

"Hi! Guy Fawkes!" rapped Kerry, striding forward. "Who's been letting off fire-works?"

Sam Tuk nodded seniely, but spoke not a word.

Kerry stooped and stared into the heart of the fire. A dense coat of white ash lay upon the embers. He grasped the shoulder of the aged Chinaman, and pushed him back so that he could look into the bleared eyes behind the owlish spectacles.

"Been cleaning up the 'evidence,' eh?" he shouted. "This joint stinks of opium and a score of other dopes. Where
are the gang?" He shook the yielding, ancient frame. "Where's the smart with one eye?"

But Sam Tuk merely nodded, and as Kerry released his hold sank forward again, nodding incessantly.

"H'm, you're a hard case," said the Chief Inspector. "A couple of witnesses like you and the jury would retire to Bedlam!"

He stood glaring fiercely at the limp frame of the old Chinaman, and as he glared his expression changed. Lying on the dirty floor not a yard from Sam Tuk's feet was a ball of leaf opium!

"Ha!" exclaimed Kerry, and he stooped to pick it up.

As he did so, with a lightning movement of which the most astute observer could never have supposed him capable, Sam Tuk whipped a loaded rubber tube from his sleeve and struck Kerry a shrewd blow across the back of the skull.

The Chief Inspector, without word or cry, collapsed upon his knees, and then fell gently forward--forward--and toppled face downwards before his assailant. His bowler fell off and rolled across the dirty floor.

Sam Tuk sank deeply into his chair, and his toothless jaws worked convulsively. The skinny hand which clutched the piece of tubing twitched and shook, so that the primitive deadly weapon fell from its wielder's grasp.

Silently, that set of empty shelves nearest to the inner wall of the vault slid open, and Sin Sin Wa came out. He, too, carried his hands tucked in his sleeves, and his yellow, pock-marked face wore its eternal smile.

"Well done," he crooned softly in Chinese. "Well done, bald father of wisdom. The dogs draw near, but the old fox sleeps not."

CHAPTER XXXVII
SETON PASHA REPORTS

At about the time that the fearless Chief Inspector was entering the establishment of Sam Tuk Seton Pasha was reporting to Lord Wrexborough in Whitehall. His nautical disguise had served its purpose, and he had now finally abandoned it, recognizing that he had to deal with a criminal of genius to whom disguise merely afforded matter for amusement.

In his proper person, as Greville Seton, he afforded a marked contrast to that John Smiles, seaman, who had sat in a top room in Limehouse with Chief Inspector Kerry. And although he had to report failure, the grim, bronzed face and bright grey eyes must have inspired in the heart of any thoughtful observer confidence in ultimate success. Lord Wrexborough, silver-haired, florid and dignified, sat before a vast table laden with neatly arranged dispatch-boxes, books, documents tied with red tape, and the other impressive impedimenta which characterize the table of a Secretary of State. Quentin Gray, unable to conceal his condition of nervous excitement, stared from a window down into Whitehall.

"I take it, then, Seton," Lord Wrexborough was saying, "that in your opinion--although perhaps it is somewhat hastily formed--there is and has been no connivance between officials and receivers of drugs?"

"That is my opinion, sir. The traffic has gradually and ingeniously been 'ringed' by a wealthy group. Smaller dealers have been bought out or driven out, and today I believe it would be difficult, if not impossible, to obtain opium, cocaine, or veronal illicitly anywhere in London. Kazmah and Company had the available stock cornered. Of course, now that they are out of business, no doubt others will step in. It is a trade that can never be suppressed under existing laws."

"I see, I see," muttered Lord Wrexborough, adjusting his pince-nez. "You also believe that Kazmah and Company are in hiding within what you term"--he consulted a written page--"the 'Causeway area'? And you believe that the man called Sin Sin Wa is the head of the organization?"

"I believe the late Sir Lucien Pyne was the actual head of the group," said Seton bluntly. "But Sin Sin Wa is the acting head. In view of his physical peculiarities, I don't quite see how he's going to escape us, either, sir. His wife has a fighting chance, and as for Mohammed el-Kazmah, he might sail for anywhere tomorrow, and we should never know. You see, we have no description of the man."

"His passports?" murmured Lord Wrexborough.

Seton Pasha smiled grimly.

"Not an insurmountable difficulty, sir," he replied, "but Sin Sin Wa is a marked man. He has the longest and thickest pigtail which I ever saw on a human scalp. I take it he is a Southerner of the old school; therefore, he won't cut it off. He has also only one eye, and while there are many one-eyed Chinamen, there are few one-eyed Chinamen who possess pigtails like a battleship's hawser. Furthermore, he travels with a talking raven, and I'll swear he won't leave it behind. On the other hand, he is endowed with an amount of craft which comes very near to genius."

"And--Mrs. Monte Irvin?"

Quentin Gray turned suddenly, and his boyish face was very pale.

"Seton, Seton!" he said. "For God's sake tell me the truth! Do you think--"

He stopped, choking emotionally. Seton Pasha watched him with that cool, confident stare which could either
soothe or irritate; and:

"She was alive this morning, Gray," he replied quietly, "we heard her. You may take it from me that they will
offer her no violence. I shall say no more."

Lord Wrexborough cleared his throat and took up a document from the table.
"Your remark raises another point, Quentin," he said sternly, "which has to be settled today. Your appointment
to Cairo was confirmed this morning. You sail on Tuesday."

Quentin Gray turned again abruptly and stared out of the window.
"You're practically kicking me out, sir," he said. "I don't know what I've done."

"You have done nothing," replied Lord Wrexborough "which an honorable man may not do. But in common
with many others similarly circumstanced, you seem inclined, now that your military duties are at an end, to regard
life as a sort of perpetual 'leave.' I speak frankly before Seton because I know that he agrees with me. My friend the
Foreign Secretary has generously offered you an appointment which opens up a career that should not--I repeat, that
should not prove less successful than his own."

Gray turned, and his face had flushed deeply.
"I know that Margaret has been scaring you about Rita Irvin," he said, "but on my word, sir, there was no need to
do it."

He met Seton Pasha's cool regard, and:
"Margaret's one of the best," he added. "I know you agree with me?"

A faint suggestion of added color came into Seton's tanned cheeks.
"I do, Gray," he answered quietly. "I believe you are good enough to look upon me as a real friend; therefore
allow me to add my advice, for what it is worth, to that of Lord Wrexborough and your cousin: take the Egyptian
appointment. I know where it will lead. You can do no good by remaining in London; and when we find Mrs. Irvin
your presence would be an embarrassment to the unhappy man who waits for news at Prince's Gate. I am frank, but
it's my way."

He held out his hand, smiling. Quentin Gray's mercurial complexion was changing again, but:
"Good old Seton!" he said, rather huskily, and gripped the outstretched hand. "For Irvin's sake, save her!"

He turned to his father.
"Thank you, sir," he added, "you are always right. I shall be ready on Tuesday. I suppose you are off again,
Seton?"

"I am," was the reply. "Chief Inspector Kerry is moving heaven and earth to find the Kazmah establishment, and
I don't want to come in a poor second."

Lord Wrexborough cleared his throat and turned in the padded revolving chair.
"Honestly, Seton," he said, "what do you think of your chance of success?"

Seton Pasha smiled grimly.
"Many ascribe success to wit," he replied, "and failure to bad luck; but the Arab says 'Kismet.'"

CHAPTER XXXVIII
THE SONG OF SIN SIN WA

Mrs. Sin, aroused by her husband from the deep opium sleep, came out into the fume-laden vault. Her dyed hair
was disarranged, and her dark eyes stared glassily before her; but even in this half-drugged state she bore herself
with the lithe carriage of a dancer, swinging her hips lazily and pointing the toes of her high-heeled slippers.

"Awake, my wife," crooned Sin Sin Wa. "Only a fool seeks the black smoke when the jackals sit in a ring."

Mrs. Sin gave him a glance of smiling contempt--a glance which, passing him, rested finally upon the prone
body of Chief Inspector Kerry lying stretched upon the floor before the stove. Her pupils contracted to mere pin-
points and then dilated blackly. She recoiled a step, fighting with the stupor which her ill-timed indulgence had left
behind.

At this moment Kerry groaned loudly, tossed his arm out with a convulsive movement, and rolled over on to his
side, drawing up his knees.

The eye of Sin Sin Wa gleamed strangely, but he did not move, and Sam Tuk who sat huddled in his chair where
his feet almost touched the fallen man, stirred never a muscle. But Mrs. Sin, who still moved in a semi-
phantasmagoric world, swiftly raised the hem of her kimona, affording a glimpse of a shapely silk-clad limb. From a
sheath attached to her garter she drew a thin stilletto. Curiously feline, she crouched, as if about to spring.

Sin Sin Wa extended his hand, grasping his wife's wrist.
"No, woman of indifferent intelligence," he said in his queer sibilant language, "since when has murder gone
unpunished in these British dominions?"

Mrs. Sin snatched her wrist from his grasp, falling back wild-eyed.
"Yellow ape! yellow ape!" she said hoarsely. "One more does not matter --now."
"One more?" crooned Sin Sin Wa, glancing curiously at Kerry.
"They are here! We are trapped!"
"No, no," said Sin Sin Wa. "He is a brave man; he comes alone."
He paused, and then suddenly resumed in pidgin English:
"You likee killa him, eh?"
Perhaps unconscious that she did so, Mrs. Sin replied also in English:
"No, I am mad. Let me think, old fool!"
She dropped the stiletto and raised her hand dazedly to her brow.
"You gotchee tired of knifee chop, eh?" murmured Sin Sin Wa.
Mrs. Sin clenched her hands, holding them rigidly against her hips; and, nostrils dilated, she stared at the smiling Chinaman.
"What do you mean?" she demanded.
Sin Sin Wa performed his curious oriental shrug.
"You putta topside pidgin on Sir Lucy alla lightee," he murmured. "Givee him hell alla velly proper."
The pupils of the woman's eyes contracted again, and remained so. She laughed hoarsely and tossed her head.
"Who told you that?" she asked contemptuously. "It was the doll-woman who killed him--I have said so."
"You tella me so--hoi, hoi! But old Sin Sin Wa catchee wonder. Lo!"-- he extended a yellow forefinger, pointing at his wife--"Mrs. Sin make him catchee die! No bhobbery, no palaber. Sin Sin Wa gotchee you sized up allee timee."

Mrs. Sin snapped her fingers under his nose then stooped, picked up the stiletto, and swiftly restored it to its sheath. Her hands resting upon her hips, she came forward, until her dark evil face almost touched the yellow, smiling face of Sin Sin Wa.
"Listen, old fool," she said in a low, husky voice; "I have done with you, ape-man, for good! Yes! I killed Lucy, I killed him! He belonged to me--until that pink and white thing took him away. I am glad I killed him. If I cannot have him neither can she. But I was mad all the same."
She glanced down at Kerry, and:
"Tie him up," she directed, "and send him to sleep. And understand, Sin, we've shared out for the last time--You go your way and I go mine. No stinking Yellow River for me. New York is good enough until it's safe to go to Buenos Ayres."
"Smartest leg in Buenos Ayres," croaked the raven from his wicker cage, which was set upon the counter.
Sin Sin Wa regarded him smingly.
"Yes, yes, my little friend," he crooned in Chinese, while Tling-a-Ling rattled ghostly castanets. "In Ho-Nan they will say that you are a devil and I am a wizard. That which is unknown is always thought to be magical, my Tling-a-Ling."

Mrs. Sin, who was rapidly throwing off the effects of opium and recovering her normal self-confident personality, glanced at her husband scornfully.
"Tell me," she said, "what has happened? How did he come here?"
"Talk less and act more," said Mrs. Sin. "Tie him up, and if you must talk, talk Chinese. Tie him up."
She pointed to Kerry. Sin Sin Wa tucked his hands into his sleeves and shuffled towards the masked door communicating with the inner room.
"Only by intelligent speech are we distinguished from the other animals," he murmured in Chinese.

Entering the inner room, he began to extricate a long piece of thin rope from amid a tangle of other materials with which it was complicated. Mrs. Sin stood looking down at the fallen man. Neither Kerry nor Sam Tuk gave the slightest evidence of life. And as Sin Sin Wa disentangled yard upon yard of rope from the bundle on the floor by the bed where Rita Irvin lay in her long troubled sleep, he crooned a queer song. It was in the Ho-Nan dialect and intelligible to himself alone.
"Shoa, the evil woman (he chanted), the woman of many strange loves. . . . Shoa, the ghoul. . . . Lo, the Yellow River leaps forth from the nostrils of the mountain god. . . . Shoa, the betrayer of men. . . . Blood is on her brow. Lo, the betrayer is betrayed. Death sits at her elbow. See, the Yellow River bears a corpse upon its tide. . . . Dead men hear her secret. Shoa, the ghoul. . . . Shoa, the evil woman. Death sits at her elbow. Black, the vultures flock about her. . . . Lo, the Yellow River leaps forth from the nostrils of the mountain god."

Meanwhile Kerry, lying motionless at the feet of Sam Tuk was doing some hard and rapid thinking. He had recovered consciousness a few moments before Mrs. Sin had come into the vault from the inner room. There were those, Seton Pasha among them, who would have regarded the groan and the convulsive movements of Kerry's body
with keen suspicion. And because the Chief Inspector suffered from no illusions respecting the genius of Sin Sin Wa, the apparent failure of the one-eyed Chinaman to recognize these preparations for attack nonplussed the Chief Inspector. His outstanding vice as an investigator was the directness of his own methods and of his mental outlook, so that he frequently experienced great difficulty in penetrating to the motives of a tortuous brain such as that of Sin Sin Wa.

That Sin Sin Wa thought him to be still unconscious he did not believe. He was confident that his tactics had deceived the Jewess, but he entertained an almost superstitious respect for the cleverness of the Chinaman. The trick with the ball of leaf opium was painfully fresh in his memory.

Kerry, in common with many members of the Criminal Investigation Department, rarely carried firearms. He was a man with a profound belief in his bare hands--aided when necessary by his agile feet. At the moment that Sin Sin Wa had checked the woman's murderous and half insane outburst Kerry had been contemplating attack. The sudden change of language on the part of the Chinaman had arrested him in the act; and, realizing that he was listening to a confession which placed the hangman's rope about the neck of Mrs. Sin, he lay still and wondered.

Why had Sin Sin Wa forced his wife to betray herself? To clear Mareno? To clear Mrs. Irvin--or to save his own skin?

It was a frightful puzzle for Kerry. Then--where was Kazmah? That Mrs. Irvin, probably in a drugged condition, lay somewhere in that mysterious inner room Kerry felt fairly sure. His maltreated skull was humming like a beehive and aching intensely, but the man was tough as men are made, and he could not only think clearly, but was capable of swift and dangerous action.

He believed that he could tackle the Chinaman with fair prospects of success; and women, however murderous, he habitually disregarded as adversaries. But the mummy-like, deceptive Sam Tuk was not negligible, and Kazmah remained an unknown quantity.

From under that protective arm, cast across his face, Kerry's fierce eyes peered out across the dirty floor. Then quickly he shut his eyes again.

Sin Sin Wa, crooning his strange song, came in carrying a coil of rope--and a Mauser pistol!

"P'licemanee gotchee catchee sleepee," he murmured, "or maybe he catchee die!"

He tossed the rope to his wife, who stood silent tapping the floor with one slim restless foot.

"Number one top-side tie up," he crooned. "Sin Sin Wa watchee withum gun!"

Kerry lay like a dead man; for in the Chinaman's voice were menace and warning.

CHAPTER XXXIX
THE EMPTY WHARF

The suspected area of Limehouse was closely invested as any fortress of old when Seton Pasha once more found himself approaching that painfully familiar neighborhood. He had spoken to several pickets, and had gathered no news of interest, except that none of them had seen Chief Inspector Kerry since some time shortly before dusk.

Seton, newly from more genial climes, shivered as he contemplated the misty, rain-swept streets, deserted and but dimly lighted by an occasional lamp. The hooting of a steam siren on the river seemed to be in harmony with the prevailing gloom, and the most confirmed optimist must have suffered depression amid those surroundings.

He had no definite plan of action. Every line of inquiry hitherto followed had led to nothing but disappointment. With most of the details concerning the elaborate organization of the Kazmah group either gathered or in sight, the whereabouts of the surviving members remained a profound mystery. From the Chinese no information could be obtained. Distrust of the police resides deep within the Chinese heart; for the Chinaman, and not unjustly, regards the police as ever ready to accuse him and ever unwilling to defend him; knows himself for a pariah capable of the worst crimes, and who may therefore be robbed, beaten and even murdered by his white neighbors with impunity. But when the police seek information from Chinatown, Chinatown takes its revenge--and is silent.

Out on the river, above and below Limehouse, patrols watched for signals from the Asiatic quarter, and from a carefully selected spot on the Surrey side George Martin watched also. Not even the lure of a neighboring tavern could draw him from his post. Hour after hour he waited patiently--for Sin Sin Wa paid fair prices, and tonight he bought neither opium nor cocaine, but liberty.

Seton Pasha, passing from point to point, and nowhere receiving news of Kerry, began to experience a certain anxiety respecting the safety of the intrepid Chief Inspector. His mind filled with troubled conjectures, he passed the house formerly occupied by the one-eyed Chinaman--where he found Detective-Sergeant Coombes on duty and very much on the alert--and followed the bank of the Thames in the direction of Limehouse Basin. The narrow, ill-lighted street was quite deserted. Bad weather and the presence of many police had driven the Asiatic inhabitants indoors. But from the river and the docks arose the incessant din of industry. Whistles shrieked and machinery clanked, and sometimes remotely came the sound of human voices.

Musing upon the sordid mystery which seems to underlie the whole of this dingy quarter, Seton pursued his way,
crossing inlets and circling around basins dimly divined, turning to the right into a lane flanked by high eyeless walls, and again to the left, finally to emerge nearly opposite a dilapidated gateway giving access to a small wharf.

All unconsciously, he was traversing the same route as that recently pursued by the fugitive Sin Sin Wa; but now he paused, staring at the empty wharf. The annexed building, a mere shell, had not escaped examination by the search party, and it was with no very definite purpose in view that Seton pushed open the rickety gate. Doubtless Kismet, of which the Arabs speak, dictated that he should do so.

The tide was high, and the water whispered ghostly under the pile-supported structure. Seton experienced a new sense of chill which did not seem to be entirely physical as he stared out at the gloomy river prospect and listened to the uncanny whisperings of the tide. He was about to turn back when another sound attracted his attention. A dog was whimpering somewhere near him.

At first he was disposed to believe that the sound was due to some other cause, for the deserted wharf was not a likely spot in which to find a dog, but when to the faint whimpering there was added a scratching sound, Seton's last doubts vanished.

"It's a dog," he said, "a small dog."

Like Kerry, he always carried an electric pocket-lamp, and now he directed its rays into the interior of the building.

A tiny spaniel, whining excitedly, was engaged in scratching with its paws upon the dirty floor as though determined to dig its way through. As the light shone upon it the dog crouched affrightedly, and, glancing in Seton's direction, revealed its teeth. He saw that it was covered with mud from head to tail, presenting a most woebegone appearance, and the mystery of its presence there came home to him forcibly.

It was a toy spaniel of a breed very popular among ladies of fashion, and to its collar was still attached a tattered and muddy fragment of ribbon.

The little animal crouched in a manner which unmistakably pointed to the fact that it apprehended ill-treatment, but these personal fears had only a secondary place in its mind, and with one eye on the intruder it continued to scratch madly at the floor.

Seton acted promptly. He snapped off the light, and, replacing the lamp in his pocket, stepped into the building and dropped down upon his knees beside the dog. He next lay prone, and having rapidly cleared a space with his sleeve of some of the dirt which coated it, he applied his ear to the floor.

In spite of that iron control which habitually he imposed upon himself, he became aware of the fact that his heart was beating rapidly. He had learned at Leman Street that Kerry had brought Mrs. Irvin's dog from Prince's Gate to aid in the search for the missing woman. He did not doubt that this was the dog which snarled and scratched excitedly beside him. Dimly he divined something of the truth. Kerry had fallen into the hands of the gang, but the dog, evidently not without difficulty, had escaped. What lay below the wharf?

"There's nothing here, old chap," he said to the dog.

Responsive to the friendly tone, the little animal began barking loudly with high staccato notes, which must have been audible on the Surrey shore.

Seton was profoundly mystified by the animal's behavior. He had personally searched every foot of this particular building, and was confident that it afforded no hiding-place. The behavior of the dog, however, was susceptible of only one explanation; and Seton recognizing that the clue to the mystery lay somewhere within this ramshackle building, became seized with a conviction that he was being watched.

Standing upright, he paused for a moment, irresolute, thinking that he had detected a muffled shriek. But the riverside noises were misleading and his imagination was on fire.

That almost superstitious respect for the powers of Sin Sin Wa, which had led Chief Inspector Kerry to look upon the Chinaman as a being more than humanly endowed, began to take possession of Seton Pasha. He regretted having entered the place so overtly, he regretted having shown a light. Keen eyes, vigilant, regarded him. It was perhaps a delusion, bred of the mournful night sounds, the gloom, and the uncanny resourcefulness, already proven, of the Kazmah group. But it operated powerfully.

Theories, wild, improbable, flocked to his mind. The great dope cache lay beneath his feet--and there must be some hidden entrance to it which had escaped the attention of the search-party. This in itself was not improbable, since they had devoted no more time to this building than to any other in the vicinity. That wild cry in the night which had struck so mournful a chill to the hearts of the watchers on the river had seemed to come out of the void of the blackness, had given but slight clue to the location of the place of captivity. Indeed, they could only surmise that it had been uttered by the missing woman. Yet in their hearts neither had doubted it.

He determined to cause the place to be searched again, as secretly as possible; he determined to set so close a guard over it and over its approaches that none could enter or leave unobserved.
Yet Kismet, in whose omnipotence he more than half believed, had ordained otherwise; for man is merely an instrument in the hand of Fate.

CHAPTER XL
COIL OF THE PIGTAIL

The inner room was in darkness and the fume-laden air almost unbreathable. A dull and regular moaning sound proceeded from the corner where the bed was situated, but of the contents of the place and of its other occupant or occupants Kerry had no more than a hazy idea. His imagination supplied those details which he had failed to observe. Mrs. Monte Irvin, in a dying condition, lay upon the bed, and someone or some thing crouched on the divan behind Kerry as he lay stretched upon the matting-covered floor. His wrists, tied behind him, gave him great pain; and since his ankles were also fastened and the end of the rope drawn taut and attached to that binding his wrists, he was rendered absolutely helpless. For one of his fiery temperaments this physical impotence was maddening, and because his own handkerchief had been tied tightly around his head so as to secure between his teeth a wooden stopper of considerable size which possessed an unpleasant chemical taste and smell, even speech was denied him.

How long he had lain thus he had no means of judging accurately; but hours—long, maddening hours—seemed to have passed since, with the puzzle of Sin Sin Wa's Mauser pressed coldly to his ear, he had submitted willy-nilly to the adroit manipulations of Mrs. Sin. At first he had believed, in his confirmed masculine vanity, that it would be a simple matter to extricate himself from the fastenings made by a woman; but when, rolling him sideways, she had drawn back his heels and run the loose end of the line through the loop formed by the lashing of his wrists behind him, he had recognized a Chinese training, and had resigned himself to the inevitable. The wooden gag was a sore trial, and if it had not broken his spirit it had nearly caused him to break an artery in his impotent fury.

Into the darkened inner chamber Sin Sin Wa had dragged him, and there Kerry had lain ever since, listening to the various sounds of the place, to the coarse voice, often raised in anger, of the Cuban Jewess, to the crooning tones of the imperturbable Chinaman. The incessant moaning of the woman on the bed sometimes became mingled with another sound more remote, which Kerry for long failed to identify; but ultimately he concluded it to be occasioned by the tide flowing under the wharf. The raven was silent, because, imprisoned in his wicker cage, he could not observe. Mrs. Monte Irvin, in a dying condition, lay upon the bed, and someone or some thing crouched on the divan behind him. And in upon these dreary musings broke an altercation between Mrs. Sin and her husband.


"Keep the blasted thing covered up!" she cried hoarsely.

"Hello, hello!" croaked the raven drowsily. "Smartest--smartest--smartest leg."
"You catchee sleepee, Tling-a-Ling," murmured the Chinaman. "Mrs. Sin no likee you palaber, lo!"
"Burn it!" cried the woman, "burn the one-eyed horror!"

But when, carrying a lighted lantern, Sin Sin Wa presently came into the inner room, he smiled as imperturbably as ever, and was unmoved so far as external evidence showed.

Sin Sin Wa set the lantern upon a Moorish coffee-table which once had stood beside the divan in Mrs. Sin's sanctum at the House of a Hundred Raptures. A significant glance--its significance an acute puzzle to the recipient--he cast upon Chief Inspector Kerry. His hands tucked in the loose sleeves of his blouse, he stood looking down at the woman who lay moaning on the bed; and:
"Tchee, tchee," he crooned softly, "you hate no catchee die, my beautiful. You sniffee plenty too muchee 'white snow,' hoi, hoi! Velly bad woman tly makee you catchee die, but Sin Sin Wa no hate got for killee chop. Topside pidgin no good enough, lo!"

His thick, extraordinary long pigtail hanging down his back and gleaming in the rays of the lantern, he stood, head bowed, watching Rita Irvin. Because of his position on the floor, Mrs. Irvin was invisible from Kerry's point of view, but she continued to moan incessantly, and he knew that she must be unconscious of the Chinaman's scrutiny.
"Hurry, old fool!" came Mrs. Sin's harsh voice from the outer room. "In ten minutes Ah Fung will give the signal. Is she dead yet--the doll-woman?"
"She hate no catchee die," murmured Sin Sin Wa, "She still vella beautiful--tchee!"

It was at the moment that he spoke these words that Seton Pasha entered the empty building above and found the spaniel scratching at the paved floor. So that, as Sin Sin Wa stood looking down at the wan face of the unfortunate woman who refused to die, the dog above, excited by Seton's presence, ceased to whine and scratch and began to bark.

Faintly to the vault the sound of the high-pitched barking penetrated.
Kerry tensed his muscles and groaned impotently feeling his heart beating like a hammer in his breast. Complete silence reigned in the outer room. Sin Sin Wa never stirred. Again the dog barked, then:
"Hello, hello!" shrieked the raven shrilly. "Number one p'lice chop, lo! Sin Sin Wa! Sin Sin Wa!"
There came a fierce exclamation, the sound of something being hastily overturned, of a scuffle, and:
"Sin--Sin--Wa!" croaked the raven feebly.

The words ended in a screeching cry, which was followed by a sound of wildly beating wings. Sin Sin Wa, hands tucked in sleeves, turned and walked from the inner room, closing the sliding door behind him with a movement of his shoulder.

Resting against the empty shelves, he stood and surveyed the scene in the vault.
Mrs. Sin, who had been kneeling beside the wicker cage, which was upset, was in the act of standing upright. At her feet, and not far from the motionless form of old Sam Tuk who sat like a dummy figure in his chair before the stove, lay a palpitating mass of black feathers. Other detached feathers were sprinkled about the floor. Feebly the raven's wings beat the ground once, twice--and were still.

Sin Sin Wa uttered one sibilant word, withdrew his hands from his sleeves, and, stepping around the end of the counter, dropped upon his knees beside the raven. He touched it with long yellow fingers, then raised it and stared into the solitary eye, now glazed and sightless as its fellow. The smile had gone from the face of Sin Sin Wa.
"My Tling-a-Ling!" he moaned in his native mandarin tongue. "Speak to me, my little black friend!"

A bead of blood, like a ruby, dropped from the raven's beak. Sin Sin Wa bowed his head and knelt awhile in silence; then, standing up, he reverently laid the poor bedraggled body upon a chest. He turned and looked at his wife.

Hands on hips, she confronted him, breathing rapidly, and her glance of contempt swept him up and down.
"I've often threatened to do it," she said in English. "Now I've done it. They're on the wharf. We're trapped--thanks to that black, squalling horror!"
"Tchee, tchee!" hissed Sin Sin Wa.

His gleaming eye fixed upon the woman unblinkingly, he began very deliberately to roll up his loose sleeves. She watched him, contempt in her glance, but her expression changed subtly, and her dark eyes grew narrowed. She looked rapidly towards Sam Tuk but Sam Tuk never stirred.
"Old fool!" she cried at Sin Sin Wa. "What are you doing?"
But Sin Sin Wa, his sleeves rolled up above his yellow, sinewy forearms, now tossed his pigtail, serpentine, across his shoulder and touched it with his fingers, an odd, caressing movement.
"Ho!" laughed Mrs. Sin in her deep scoffing fashion, "it is for me you make all this bhobbery, eh? It is me you are going to chastise, my dear?"

She flung back her head, snapping her fingers before the silent Chinaman. He watched her, and slowly--slowly--
he began to crouch, lower and lower, but always that unblinking regard remained fixed upon the face of Mrs. Sin.

The woman laughed again, more loudly. Bending her lithe body forward in mocking mimicry, she snapped her fingers, once—again—and again under Sin Sin Wa's nose. Then:

"Do you think, you blasted yellow ape, that you can frighten me?" she screamed, a swift flame of wrath lighting up her dark face.

In a flash she had raised the kimona and had the stiletto in her hand. But, even swifter than she, Sin Sin Wa sprang...

Once, twice she struck at him, and blood streamed from his left shoulder. But the pigtail, like an executioner's rope, was about the woman's throat. She uttered one smothered shriek, dropping the knife, and then was silent...

Her dyed hair escaped from its fastenings and descended, a ruddy torrent, about her as she writhed, silent, horrible, in the death-coil of the pigtail.

Rigidly, at arms-length, he held her, moment after moment, immovable, implacable; and when he read death in her empurpled face, a miraculous thing happened.

The "blind" eye of Sin Sin Wa opened!

A husky rattle told of the end, and he dropped the woman's body from his steely grip, disengaging the pigtail with a swift movement of his head. Opening and closing his yellow fingers to restore circulation, he stood looking down at her. He spat upon the floor at her feet.

Then, turning, he held out his arms and confronted Sam Tuk.

"Was it well done, bald father of wisdom?" he demanded hoarsely.

But old Sam Tuk seated lumpish in his chair like some grotesque idol before whom a human sacrifice has been offered up, stirred not. The length of loaded tubing with which he had struck Kerry lay beside him where it had fallen from his nerveless hand. And the two oblique, beady eyes of Sin Sin Wa, watching, grew dim. Step by step he approached the old Chinaman, stooped, touched him, then knelt and laid his head upon the thin knees.

"Old father," he murmured, "Old bald father who knew so much. Tonight you know all."

For Sam Tuk was no more. At what moment he had died, whether in the excitement of striking Kerry or later, no man could have presumed to say, since, save by an occasional nod of his head, he had often simulated death in life—he who was so old that he was known as "The Father of Chinatown."

Standing upright, Sin Sin Wa looked from the dead man to the dead raven. Then, tenderly raising poor Tling-a-Ling, he laid the great dishevelled bird—a weird offering—upon the knees of Sam Tuk.

"Take him with you where you travel tonight, my father," he said. "He, too, was faithful."

A cheap German clock commenced a muted clangor, for the little hammer was muffled.

Sin Sin Wa walked slowly across to the counter. Taking up the gleaming joss, he unscrewed its pedestal. Then, returning to the spot where Mrs. Sin lay, he coolly detached a leather wallet which she wore beneath her dress fastened to a girdle. Next he removed her rings, her bangles and other ornaments. He secreted all in the interior of the joss—his treasure-chest. He raised his hands and began to unplait his long pigtail, which, like his "blind" eye, was camouflage—a false queue attached to his own hair, which he wore but slightly longer than some Europeans and many Americans. With a small pair of scissors he clipped off his long, snake-like moustaches. . . .

CHAPTER XLI

THE FINDING OF KAZMAH

At a point just above the sweep of Limehouse Reach a watchful river police patrol observed a moving speck of light on the right bank of the Thames. As if in answer to the signal there came a few moments later a second moving speck at a point not far above the district once notorious in its possession of Ratcliff Highway. A third light answered from the Surrey bank, and a fourth shone out yet higher up and on the opposite side of the Thames.

The tide had just turned. As Chief Inspector Kerry had once observed, "there are no pleasure parties punting about that stretch," and, consequently, when George Martin tumbled into his skiff on the Surrey shore and began lustily to pull up stream, he was observed almost immediately by the River Police.

Pulling hard against the stream, it took him a long time to reach his destination—stone stairs near the point from which the second light had been shown. Rain had ceased and the mist had cleared shortly after dusk, as often happens at this time of year, and because the night was comparatively clear the pursuing boats had to be handled with care.

George did not disembark at the stone steps, but after waiting there for some time he began to drop down on the tide, keeping close inshore.

"He knows we've spotted him," said Sergeant Coombes, who was in one of the River Police boats. "It was at the stairs that he had to pick up his man."

Certainly, the tactics of George suggested that he had recognized surveillance, and, his purpose abandoned, now sought to efface himself without delay. Taking advantage of every shadow, he resigned his boat to the gentle
current. He had actually come to the entrance of Greenwich Reach when a dock light, shining out across the river, outlined the boat yellowly.

"He's got a passenger!" said Coombes amazedly.

Inspector White, who was in charge of the cutter, rested his arm on Coombes' shoulder and stared across the moving tide.

"I can see no one," he replied. "You're over anxious, Detective-Sergeant—and I can understand it!"

Coombes smiled heroically.

"I may be over anxious, Inspector," he replied, "but if I lost Sin Sin Wa, the River Police had never even heard of him till the C.I.D. put 'em wise."

"H'm!" muttered the Inspector. "D'you suggest we board him?"

"No," said Coombes, "let him land, but don't trouble to hide any more. Show him we're in pursuit."

No longer drifting with the outgoing tide, George Martin had now boldly taken to the oars. The River Police boat close in his wake, he headed for the blunt promontory of the Isle of Dogs. The grim pursuit went on until:

"I bet I know where he's for," said Coombes.

"So do I," declared Inspector White; "Dougal's!"

Their anticipations were realized. To the wooden stairs which served as a water-gate for the establishment on the Isle of Dogs, George Martin ran in openly; the police boat followed, and:

"You were right!" cried the Inspector, "he has somebody with him!"

A furtive figure, bearing a burden upon its shoulder, moved up the slope and disappeared. A moment later the police were leaping ashore. George deserted his boat and went running heavily after his passenger.

"After them!" cried Coombes. "That's Sin Sin Wa!"

Around the maze, rubbish-strewn paths the pursuit went hotly. In sight of Dougal's Coombes saw the swing door open and a silhouette—of a man who carried a bag on his shoulder—pass in. George Martin followed, but the Scotland Yard man had his hand upon his shoulder.

"Police!" he said sharply. "Who's your friend?"

George turned, red and truculent, with clenched fists.

"Mind your own bloody business!" he roared.

"Mind yours, my lad!" retorted Coombes warningly. "You're no Thames waterman. Who's your friend?"

"Wotcher mean?" shouted George. "You're up the pole or canned you are!"

"Grab him!" said Coombes, and he kicked open the door and entered the saloon, followed by Inspector White and the boat's crew.

As they appeared, the Inspector conspicuous in his uniform, backed by the group of River Police, one of whom grasped George Martin by his coat collar:

"Splits!" bellowed Dougal in a voice like a fog-horn.

Twenty cups of tea, coffee and cocoa, too hot for speedy assimilation, were spilled upon the floor.

The place as usual was crowded, more particularly in the neighborhood of the two stoves. Here were dock laborers, seamen and riverside loafers, lascars, Chinese, Arabs, negroes and dagoes. Mrs. Dougal, defiant and red, brawny arms folded and her pose as that of one contemplating a physical contest, glared from behind the "solid" counter. Dougal rested his hairy hands upon the "wet" counter and revealed his defective teeth in a vicious snarl. Many of the patrons carried light baggage, since a P and O boat, an oriental, and the S.S. Mahratta, were sailing that night or in the early morning, and Dougal's was the favorite house of call for a doch-an-dorrich for sailors, particularly for sailors of color.

Upon the police group became focussed the glances of light eyes and dark eyes, round eyes, almond-shaped eyes, and oblique eyes. Silence fell.

"We are police officers," called Coombes formally. "All papers, please."

Thereupon, without disturbance, the inspection began, and among the papers scrutinized were those of one, Chung Chow, an able-bodied Chinese seaman. But since his papers were in order, and since he possessed two eyes and wore no pigtail, he excited no more interest in the mind of Detective-Sergeant Coombes than did any one of the other Chinamen in the place.

A careful search of the premises led to no better result, and George Martin accounted for his possession of a considerable sum of money found upon him by explaining that he had recently been paid off after a long voyage and had been lucky at cards.

The result of the night's traffic, then, spelled failure for British justice, the S.S. Mahratta sailed one stewardess short of her complement; but among the Chinese crew of another steamer Eastward bound was one, Chung Chow, formerly known as Sin Sin Wa. And sometimes in the night watches there arose before him the picture of a black bird resting upon the knees of an aged Chinaman. Beyond these figures dimly he perceived the paddy-fields of Ho-
Nan and the sweeping valley of the Yellow River, where the opium poppy grows.

It was about an hour before the sailing of the ship which numbered Chung Chow among the yellow members of its crew that Seton Pasha returned once more to the deserted wharf whereon he had found Mrs. Monte Irvin's spaniel. Afterwards, in the light of ascertained facts, he condemned himself for a stupidity passing the ordinary. For while he had conducted a careful search of the wharf and adjoining premises, convinced that there was a cellar of some kind below, he had omitted to look for a water-gate to this hypothetical cache.

Perhaps his self-condemnation was deserved, but in justice to the agent selected by Lord Wrexborough, it should be added that Chief Inspector Kerry had no more idea of the existence of such an entrance, and exit, than had Seton Pasha.

Leaving the dog at Leman Street then, and learning that there was no news of the missing Chief Inspector, Seton had set out once more. He had been informed of the mysterious signals flashed from side to side of the Lower Pool, and was hourly expecting a report to the effect that Sin Sin Wa had been apprehended in the act of escaping. That Sin Sin Wa had dropped into the turgid tide from his underground hiding-place, and pushing his property—which was floatable—before him, encased in a waterproof bag, had swum out and clung to the stern of George Martin's boat as it passed close to the empty wharf, neither Seton Pasha nor any other man knew—except George Martin and Sin Sin Wa.

At a suitably dark spot the Chinaman had hoarded the little craft, not without difficulty, for his wounded shoulder pained him, and had changed his sodden attire for a dry outfit which awaited him in the locker at the stern of the skiff. The cunning of the Chinese has the simplicity of true genius.

Not two paces had Seton taken on to the mystifying wharf when:

"Sam Tuk barber! Entrance in cellar!" rapped a ghostly, muffled voice from beneath his feet. "Sam Tuk barber! Entrance in cellar!"

Seton Pasha stood still, temporarily bereft of speech. Then, "Kerry!" he cried. "Kerry! Where are you?"

But apparently his voice failed to reach the invisible speaker, for:

"Sam Tuk barber! Entrance in cellar!" repeated the voice.

Seton Pasha wasted no more time. He ran out into the narrow street. A man was on duty there.

"Call assistance!" ordered Seton briskly, "Send four men to join me at the barber's shop called Sam Tuk's! You know it?"

"Yes, sir; I searched it with Chief Inspector Kerry."

The note of a police whistle followed.

Ten minutes later the secret of Sam Tuk's cellar was unmasked. The place was empty, and the subterranean door locked; but it succumbed to the persistent attacks of axe and crowbar, and Seton Pasha was the first of the party to enter the vault. It was laden with chemical fumes. . . .

He found there an aged Chinaman, dead, seated by a stove in which the fire had burned very low. Sprawling across the old man's knees was the body of a raven. Lying at his feet was a woman, lithe, contorted, the face half hidden in masses of bright red hair.

"End case near the door!" rapped the voice of Kerry. "Slides to the left!"

Seton Pasha vaulted over the counter, drew the shelves aside, and entered the inner room.

By the dim light of a lantern burning upon a moorish coffee-table he discerned an untidy bed, upon which a second woman lay, pallid.

"God!" he muttered; "this place is a morgue!"

"It certainly isn't healthy!" said an irritable voice from the floor. "But I think I might survive it if you could spare a second to untie me."

Kerry's extensive practice in chewing and the enormous development of his maxillary muscles had stood him in good stead. His keen, strong teeth had bitten through the extemporized gag, and as a result the tension of the handkerchief which had held it in place had become relaxed, enabling him to rid himself of it and to spit out the fragments of filthy-tasting wood which the biting operation had left in his mouth.

Seton turned, stooped on one knee to release the captive . . . and found himself looking into the face of someone who sat crouched upon the divan behind the Chief Inspector. The figure was that of an oriental, richly robed. Long, slim, ivory hands rested upon his knees, and on the first finger of the right hand gleamed a big talismanic ring. But the face, surmounted by a white turban, was wonderful, arresting in its immobile intellectual beauty; and from under the heavy brows a pair of abnormally large eyes looked out hypnotically.

"My God!" whispered Seton, then:

"If you've finished your short prayer," rapped Kerry, "set about my little job."

"But, Kerry--Kerry, behind you!"

"I haven't any eyes in my back hair!"
Mechanically, half fearfully, Seton touched the hands of the crouching oriental. A low moan came from the woman in the bed, and:

"It's Kazmah!" gasped Seton. "Kerry . . . Kazmah is--a wax figure!"

"Hell!" said Chief Inspector Kerry.

CHAPTER XLII

A YEAR LATER

Beneath an awning spread above the balcony of one of those modern elegant flats, which today characterize Heliopolis, the City of the Sun, site of perhaps the most ancient seat of learning in the known world, a party of four was gathered, awaiting the unique spectacle which is afforded when the sun's dying rays fade from the Libyan sands and the violet wonder of the afterglow conjures up old magical Egypt from the ashes of the desert.

"Yes," Monte Irvin was saying, "only a year ago; but, thank God, it seems more like ten! Merciful time effaces sadness but spares joy."

He turned to his wife, whose flower-like face peeped out from a nest of white fur. Covertly he squeezed her hand, and was rewarded with a swift, half coquettish glance, in which he read trust and contentment. The dreadful ordeal through which she had passed had accomplished that which no physician in Europe could have hoped for, since no physician would have dared to adopt such drastic measures. Actuated by deliberate cruelty, and with the design of bringing about her death from apparently natural causes, the Kazmah group had deprived her of cocaine for so long a period that sanity, life itself, had barely survived; but for so long a period that, surviving, she had outlived the drug craving. Kazmah had cured her!

Monte Irvin turned to the tall fair girl who sat upon the arm of a cane rest-chair beside Rita.

"But nothing can ever efface the memory of all you have done for Rita, and for me," he said, "nothing, Mrs. Seton."

"Oh," said Margaret, "my mind was away back, and that sounded--so odd."

Seton Pasha, who occupied the lounge-chair upon the broad arm of which his wife was seated, looked up, smiling into the suddenly flushed face. They were but newly returned from their honeymoon, and had just taken possession of their home, for Seton was now stationed in Cairo. He flicked a cone of ash from his cheroot.

"It seems to me that we are all more or less indebted to one another," he declared. "For instance, I might never have met you, Margaret, if I had not run into your cousin that eventful night at Princes; and Gray would not have been gazing abstractedly out of the doorway if Mrs. Irvin had joined him for dinner as arranged. One can trace almost every episode in life right back, and ultimately come--"

"To Kismet!" cried his wife, laughing merrily. "So before we begin dinner tonight--which is a night of reunion--I am going to propose a toast to Kismet!"

"Good!" said Seton, "we shall all drink it gladly. Eh, Irvin?"

"Gladly, indeed," agreed Monte Irvin. "You know, Seton," he continued, "we have been wandering, Rita and I; and ever since your wife handed her patient over to me as cured we have covered some territory. I don't know if you or Chief Inspector Kerry has been responsible, but the press accounts of the Kazmah affair have been scanty to baldness. One stray bit of news reached us--in Colorado, I think."

"What was that, Mr. Irvin?" asked Margaret, leaning towards the speaker.

"It was about Mollie Gretna. Someone wrote and told me that she had eloped with a billiard marker--a married man with five children!"

Seton laughed heartily, and so did Margaret and Rita.

"Right!" cried Seton. "She did. When last heard of she was acting as barmaid in a Portsmouth tavern!"

But Monte Irvin did not laugh.

"Poor, foolish girl!" he said gravely. "Her life might have been so different--so useful and happy."

"I agree," replied Seton, "if she had had a husband like Kerry."

"Oh, please don't!" said Margaret. "I almost fell in love with Chief Inspector Kerry myself."

"A grand fellow!" declared her husband warmly. "The Kazmah inquiry was the triumph of his career."

Monte Irvin turned to him.

"You did your bit, Seton," he said quietly. "The last words Inspector Kerry spoke to me before I left England were in the nature of a splendid tribute to yourself, but I will spare your blushes."

"Kerry is as white as they're made," replied Seton, "but we should never have known for certain who killed Sir Lucien if he had not risked his life in that filthy cellar as he did."

Rita Irvin shuddered slightly and drew her furs more closely about her shoulders.

"Shall we change the conversation, dear?" whispered Margaret.

"No, please," said Rita. "You cannot imagine how curious I am to learn the true details--for, as Monte says, we have been out of touch with things, and although we were so intimately concerned, neither of us really knows the
inner history of the affair to this day. Of course, we know that Kazmah was a dummy figure, posed in the big ebony chair. He never moved, except to raise his hand, and this was done by someone seated in the inner room behind the figure. But who was seated there?"

Seton glanced inquiringly at his wife, and she nodded, smiling.

"Right-o!" he said. "If you will excuse me for a moment I will get my notes. Hello, here's Gray!"

A little two-seater came bowling along the road from Cairo, and drew up beneath the balcony. It was the car which had belonged to Margaret when in practice in Dover Street. Quentin Gray jumped out, waving his hand cheerily to the quartette above, and went in at the doorway. Seton walked through the flat and admitted him.

"Sorry I'm late!" cried Gray, impetuous and boyish as ever, although he looked older and had grown very bronzed. "The chief detained me."

"Go through to them," said Seton informally. "I'm getting my notes; we're going to read the thrilling story of the Kazmah mystery before dinner."

"Good enough!" cried Gray. "I'm in the dark on many points."

He had outlived his youthful infatuation, although it was probable enough that had Rita been free he would have presented himself as a suitor without delay. But the old relationship he had no desire to renew. A generous self-effacing regard had supplanted the madness of his earlier passion. Rita had changed too; she had learned to know herself and to know her husband.

So that when Seton Pasha presently rejoined his guests, he found the most complete harmony to prevail among them. He carried a bulky notebook, and, tapping his teeth with his monocle:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he began whimsically, "I will bore you with a brief account of the extraordinary facts concerning the Kazmah case."

Margaret was seated in the rest-chair which her husband had vacated, and Seton took up a position upon the ledge formed by one of the wide arms. Everyone prepared to listen, with interest undisguised.

"There were three outstanding personalities dominating what we may term the Kazmah group," continued Seton. "In order of importance they were: Sin Sin Wa, Sir Lucien Pyne and Mrs. Sin."

Rita Irvin inhaled deeply, but did not interrupt the speaker.

"I shall begin with Sir Lucien," Seton went on. "For some years before his father's death he seems to have lived a very shady life in many parts of the world. He was a confirmed gambler, and was also somewhat unduly fond of the ladies' society. In Buenos Ayres--the exact date does not matter--he made the acquaintance of a variety artiste known as La Belle Lola, a Cuban-Jewess, good-looking and unscrupulous. I cannot say if Sir Lucien was aware from the outset of his affair with La Belle that she was a married woman. But it is certain that her husband, Sin Sin Wa, very early learned of the intrigue, and condoned it.

"How Sir Lucien came to get into the clutches of the pair I do not know. But that he did so we have ascertained beyond doubt. I think, personally, that his third vice--opium--was probably responsible. For Sin Sin Wa appears throughout in the character of a drug dealer.

"These three people really become interesting from the time that La Belle Lola quitted the stage and joined her husband in the conducting of a concern in Buenos Ayres, which was the parent, if I may use the term, of the Kazmah business later established in Bond Street. From a music-hall illusionist, who came to grief during a South American tour, they acquired the oriental waxwork figure which subsequently mystified so many thousands of dupes. It was the work of a famous French artist in wax, and had originally been made to represent the Pharaoh, Rameses II., for a Paris exhibition. Attired in Eastern robes, and worked by a simple device which raised and lowered the right hand, it was used, firstly, in a stage performance, and secondly, in the character of 'Kazmah the Dream-reader."

"Even at this time Sir Lucien had access to good society, or to the best society which Buenos Ayres could offer, and he was the source of the surprising revelations made to patrons by the 'dream-reader.' At first, apparently, the drug business was conducted independently of the Kazmah concern, but the facilities offered by the latter for masking the former soon became apparent to the wily Sin Sin Wa. Thereupon the affair was reorganized on the lines later adopted in Bond Street. Kazmah's became a secret dope-shop, and annexed to it was an elaborate chandu-khan, conducted by the Chinaman. Mrs. Sin was the go-between.

"You are all waiting to hear--or, to be exact, two are waiting to hear, Gray and Margaret already know--who spoke as Kazmah through the little window behind the chair. The deep-voiced speaker was Juan Mareno, Mrs. Sin's brother! Mrs. Sin's maiden name was Lola Marenो.

"Many of these details were provided by Mareno, who, after the death of his sister, to whom he was deeply attached, volunteered to give crown evidence. Most of them we have confirmed from other sources.

"Behold 'Kazmah the dream-reader,' then, established in Buenos Ayres. The partners in the enterprise speedily acquired considerable wealth. Sir Lucien--at this time plain Mr. Pyne--several times came home and lived in London and elsewhere like a millionaire. There is no doubt, I think, that he was seeking a suitable opportunity to establish a
London branch of the business."

"My God!" said Monte Irvin. "How horrible it seems!"

"Horrible, indeed!" agreed Seton. "But there are two features of the case which, in justice to Sir Lucien, we should not overlook. He, who had been a poor man, had become a wealthy one and had tasted the sweets of wealth; also he was now hopelessly in the toils of the woman Lola.

"With the ingenious financial details of the concern, which were conducted in the style of the 'Jose Santos Company,' I need not trouble you now. We come to the second period, when the flat in Albemarle Street and the two offices in old Bond Street became vacant and were promptly leased by Mareno, acting on Sir Lucien's behalf, and calling himself sometimes Mr. Isaacs, sometimes Mr. Jacobs, and at other times merely posing as a representative of the Jose Santos Company in some other name.

"All went well. The concern had ample capital, and was organized by clever people. Sin Sin Wa took up new quarters in Limehouse; they had actually bought half the houses in one entire street as well as a wharf! And Sin Sin Wa brought with him the good-will of an illicit drug business which already had almost assumed the dimensions of a control.

"Sir Lucien's household was a mere bluff. He rarely entertained at home, and lived himself entirely at restaurants and clubs. The private entrance to the Kazmah house of business was the back window of the Cubanis Cigarette Company's office. From thence down the back stair to Kazmah's door it was a simple matter for Mareno to pass unobserved. Sir Lucien resumed his role of private inquiry agent, and Mareno recited the 'revelations' from notes supplied to him.

"But the 'dream reading' part of the business was merely carried on to mask the really profitable side of the concern. We have recently learned that drugs were distributed from that one office alone to the amount of thirty thousand pounds' worth annually! This is excluding the profits of the House of a Hundred Raptures and of the private chandu orgies organized by Mrs. Sin.

"The Kazmah group gradually acquired control of the entire market, and we know for a fact that at one period during the war they were actually supplying smuggled cocaine, indirectly, to no fewer than twelve R.A.M.C. hospitals! The complete ramifications of the system we shall never know.

"I come, now, to the tragedy, or series of tragedies, which brought about the collapse of the most ingenious criminal organization which has ever flourished, probably, in any community. I will dare to be frank. Sir Lucien was the victim of a woman's jealousy. Am I to proceed?"

Seton paused, glancing at his audience; and:

"If you please," whispered Rita. "Monte knows and I know--why--she killed him. But we don't know--"


"I am anxious to know," replied Irvin, "for I believe Sir Lucien deserved well of me, bad as he was."

Seton clapped his hands, and an Egyptian servant appeared, silently and mysteriously as is the way of his class.

"Cocktails, Mahmoud!"

The Egyptian disappeared.

"There's just time," declared Margaret, gazing out across the prospect, "before sunset."

CHAPTER XLIII
THE STORY OF THE CRIME
"You are all aware," Seton continued, "that Sir Lucien Pyne was an admirer of Mrs. Irvin. God knows, I hold no brief for the man, but this love of his was the one redeeming feature of a bad life. How and when it began I don't profess to know, but it became the only pure thing which he possessed. That he was instrumental in introducing you, Mrs. Irvin, to the unfortunately prevalent drug habit, you will not deny; but that he afterwards tried sincerely to redeem you from it I can positively affirm. In seeking your redemption he found his own, for I know that he was engaged at the time of his death in extricating himself from the group. You may say that he had made a fortune, and was satisfied; that is your view, Gray. I prefer to think that he was anxious to begin a new life and to make himself more worthy of the respect of those he loved.

"There was one obstacle which proved too great for him--Mrs. Sin. Although Juan Mareno was the spokesman of the group, Lola Mareno was the prompter. All Sir Lucien's plans for weaning Mrs. Irvin from the habits which she had acquired were deliberately and malignantly foiled by this woman. She endeavored to inveigle Mrs. Irvin into indebtedness to you, Gray, as you know now. Failing in this, she endeavored to kill her by depriving her of that which had at the time become practically indispensable. A venomous jealousy led her to almost suicidal measures. She risked exposure and ruin in her endeavors to dispose of one whom she looked upon as a rival.

"During Sir Lucien's several absences from London she was particularly active, and this brings me to the closing scene of the drama. On the night that you determined, in desperation, Mrs. Irvin, to see Kazmah personally, you will recall that Sir Lucien went out to telephone to him?"
Rita nodded but did not speak.

"Actually," Seton explained, "he instructed Mareno to go across the leads to Kazmah's directly you had left the flat, and to give you a certain message as 'Kazmah.' He also instructed Mareno to telephone certain orders to Rashid, the Egyptian attendant. In spite of the unforeseen meeting with Gray, all would have gone well, no doubt, if Mrs. Sin had not chanced to be on the Kazmah premises at the time that the message was received!

"I need not say that Mrs. Sin was a remarkable woman, possessing many accomplishments, among them that of mimicry. She had often amused herself by taking Mareno's place at the table behind Kazmah, and, speaking in her brother's oracular voice, had delivered the 'revelations.' Mareno was like wax in his sister's hands, and on this fateful night, when he arrived at the place—which he did a few minutes before Mrs. Irvin, Gray and Sir Lucien—Mrs. Sin peremptorily ordered him to wait upstairs in the Cubanis office, and she took her seat in the room from which the Kazmah illusions were controlled.

"So carefully arranged was every detail of the business that Rashid, the Egyptian, was ignorant of Sir Lucien's official connection with the Kazmah concern. He had been ordered—by Mareno speaking from Sir Lucien's flat—to admit Mrs. Irvin to the room of seance and then to go home. He obeyed and departed, leaving Sir Lucien in the waiting-room.

"Driven to desperation by 'Kazmah's' taunting words, we know that Mrs. Irvin penetrated to the inner room. I must slur over the details of the scene which ensued. Hearing her cry out, Sir Lucien ran to her assistance. Mrs. Sin, enraged by his manner, lost all control of her insane passion. She attempted Mrs. Irvin's life with a stiletto which habitually she carried—and Sir Lucien died like a gentleman who had lived like a blackguard. He shielded her—"

Seton paused. Margaret was biting her lip hard, and Rita was looking down so that her face could not be seen.

"The shock consequent upon the deed sobered the half crazy woman," continued the speaker. "Her usual resourcefulness returned to her. Self-preservation had to be considered before remorse. Mrs. Irvin had swooned, and"—he hesitated—"Mrs. Sin saw to it that she did not revive prematurely. Mareno was summoned from the room above. The outer door was locked.

"It affords evidence of this woman's callous coolness that she removed from the Kazmah premises, and—probably assisted by her brother, although he denies it—from the person and garments of the dead man, every scrap of evidence. They had not by any means finished the task when you knocked at the door, Gray. But they completed it, faultlessly, after you had gone.

"Their unconscious victim, and the figure of Kazmah, as well as every paper or other possible clue, they carried up to the Cubanis office, and from thence across the roof to Sir Lucien's study. Next, while Mareno went for the car, Mrs. Sin rifled the safe, bureaus and desks in Sir Lucien's flat, so that we had the devil's own work, as you know, to find out even the more simple facts of his everyday life.

"Not a soul ever came forward who noticed the big car being driven into Albemarle Street or who observed it outside the flat. The chances run by the pair in conveying their several strange burdens from the top floor, down the stairs and out into the street were extraordinary. Yet they succeeded unobserved. Of course, the street was imperfectly lighted, and is but little frequented after dusk.

"The journey to Limehouse was performed without discovery—aided, no doubt, by the mistiness of the night; and Mareno, returning to the West End, ingeniously inquired for Sir Lucien at his club. Learning, although he knew it already, that Sir Lucien had not been to the club that night, he returned the car to the garage and calmly went back to the flat.

"His reason for taking this dangerous step is by no means clear. According to his own account, he did it to gain time for the fugitive Mrs. Sin. You see, there was really only one witness of the crime (Mrs. Irvin) and she could not have sworn to the identity of the assassin. Rashid was warned and presumably supplied with sufficient funds to enable him to leave the country.

"Well, the woman met her deserts, no doubt at the hands of Sin Sin Wa. Kerry is sure of this. And Sin Sin Wa escaped, taking with him an enormous sum of ready money. He was the true genius of the enterprise. No one, his wife and Mareno excepted—we know of no other—suspected that the real Sin Sin Wa was clean-shaven, possessed two eyes, and no pigtail! A wonderfully clever man!"

The native servant appeared to announce that dinner was served; African dusk drew its swift curtain over the desert, and a gun spoke sharply from the Citadel. In silence the party watched the deepening velvet of the sky, witnessing the birth of a million stars, and in silence they entered the gaily lighted dining-room.

Seton Pasha moved one of the lights so as to illuminate a small oil painting which hung above the sideboard. It represented the head and shoulders of a savage-looking red man, his hair close-cropped like that of a pugilist, and his moustache trimmed in such a fashion that a row of large, fierce teeth were revealed in an expression which might have been meant for a smile. A pair of intolerant steel-blue eyes looked squarely out at the spectator.

"What a time I had," said Seton, "to get him to sit for that! But I managed to secure his wife's support, and the
trick was done. You are down to toast Kismet, Margaret, but I am going to propose the health, long life and prosperity of Chief Inspector Kerry, of the Criminal Investigation Department."
CHAPTER I
"A GENTLEMAN to see you, Doctor."

From across the common a clock sounded the half-hour.
"Ten-thirty!" I said. "A late visitor. Show him up, if you please."

I pushed my writing aside and tilted the lamp-shade, as footsteps sounded on the landing. The next moment I had jumped to my feet, for a tall, lean man, with his square-cut, clean-shaven face sun-baked to the hue of coffee, entered and extended both hands, with a cry:

"Good old Petrie! Didn't expect me, I'll swear!"

It was Nayland Smith--whom I had thought to be in Burma!

"Smith," I said, and gripped his hands hard, "this is a delightful surprise! Whatever--however--"

"Excuse me, Petrie!" he broke in. "Don't put it down to the sun!" And he put out the lamp, plunging the room into darkness.

I was too surprised to speak.
"No doubt you will think me mad," he continued, and dimly, I could see him at the window, peering out into the road, "but before you are many hours older you will know that I have good reason to be cautious. Ah, nothing suspicious! Perhaps I am first this time." And, stepping back to the writing-table he relighted the lamp.

"Mysterious enough for you?" he laughed, and glanced at my unfinished MS. "A story, eh? From which I gather that the district is beastly healthy-- what, Petrie? Well, I can put some material in your way that, if sheer uncanny mystery is a marketable commodity, ought to make you independent of influenza and broken legs and shattered nerves and all the rest."

I surveyed him doubtfully, but there was nothing in his appearance to justify me in supposing him to suffer from delusions. His eyes were too bright, certainly, and a hardness now had crept over his face. I got out the whisky and siphon, saying:
"You have taken your leave early?"

"I am not on leave," he replied, and slowly filled his pipe. "I am on duty."

"On duty!" I exclaimed. "What, are you moved to London or something?"

"I have got a roving commission, Petrie, and it doesn't rest with me where I am to-day nor where I shall be tomorrow."

There was something ominous in the words, and, putting down my glass, its contents untasted, I faced round and looked him squarely in the eyes. "Out with it!" I said. "What is it all about?"

Smith suddenly stood up and stripped off his coat. Rolling back his left shirt-sleeve he revealed a wicked-looking wound in the fleshy part of the forearm. It was quite healed, but curiously striated for an inch or so around.

"Ever seen one like it?" he asked.

"Not exactly," I confessed. "It appears to have been deeply cauterized."

"Right! Very deeply!" he rapped. "A barb steeped in the venom of a hamadryad went in there!"

A shudder I could not repress ran coldly through me at mention of that most deadly of all the reptiles of the East.

"There's only one treatment," he continued, rolling his sleeve down again, "and that's with a sharp knife, a match, and a broken cartridge. I lay on my back, raving, for three days afterwards, in a forest that stank with malaria, but I should have been lying there now if I had hesitated. Here's the point. It was not an accident!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that it was a deliberate attempt on my life, and I am hard upon the tracks of the man who extracted that venom--patiently, drop by drop-- from the poison-glands of the snake, who prepared that arrow, and who caused it to be shot at me."

"What fiend is this?"

"A fiend who, unless my calculations are at fault is now in London, and who regularly wars with pleasant weapons of that kind. Petrie, I have traveled from Burma not in the interests of the British Government merely, but in the interests of the entire white race, and I honestly believe-- though I pray I may be wrong--that its survival depends largely upon the success of my mission."

To say that I was perplexed conveys no idea of the mental chaos created by these extraordinary statements, for

The Insidious Dr. Fu-Manchu

by Sax Rohmer
into my humdrum suburban life Nayland Smith had brought fantasy of the wildest. I did not know what to think, what to believe.

"I am wasting precious time!" he rapped decisively, and, draining his glass, he stood up. "I came straight to you, because you are the only man I dare to trust. Except the big chief at headquarters, you are the only person in England, I hope, who knows that Nayland Smith has quitted Burma. I must have someone with me, Petrie, all the time--it's imperative! Can you put me up here, and spare a few days to the strangest business, I promise you, that ever was recorded in fact or fiction?"

I agreed readily enough, for, unfortunately, my professional duties were not onerous.

"Good man!" he cried, wringing my hand in his impetuous way. "We start now."

"What, to-night?"

"To-night! I had thought of turning in, I must admit. I have not dared to sleep for forty-eight hours, except in fifteen-minute stretches. But there is one move that must be made to-night and immediately. I must warn Sir Crichton Davey."

"Sir Crichton Davey--of the India--"

"Petrie, he is a doomed man! Unless he follows my instructions without question, without hesitation--before Heaven, nothing can save him! I do not know when the blow will fall, how it will fall, nor from whence, but I know that my first duty is to warn him. Let us walk down to the corner of the common and get a taxi."

How strangely does the adventurous intrude upon the humdrum; for, when it intrudes at all, more often than not its intrusion is sudden and unlooked for. To-day, we may seek for romance and fail to find it: unsought, it lies in wait for us at most prosaic corners of life's highway.

The drive that night, though it divided the drably commonplace from the wildly bizarre--though it was the bridge between the ordinary and the outre--has left no impression upon my mind. Into the heart of a weird mystery the cab bore me; and in reviewing my memories of those days I wonder that the busy thoroughfares through which we passed did not display before my eyes signs and portents--warnings.

It was not so. I recall nothing of the route and little of import that passed between us (we both were strangely silent, I think) until we were come to our journey's end. Then:

"What's this?" muttered my friend hoarsely.

Constables were moving on a little crowd of curious idlers who pressed about the steps of Sir Crichton Davey's house and sought to peer in at the open door. Without waiting for the cab to draw up to the curb, Nayland Smith recklessly leaped out and I followed close at his heels.

"What has happened?" he demanded breathlessly of a constable.

The latter glanced at him doubtfully, but something in his voice and bearing commanded respect.

"Sir Crichton Davey has been killed, sir."

Smith lurched back as though he had received a physical blow, and clutched my shoulder convulsively. Beneath the heavy tan his face had blanched, and his eyes were set in a stare of horror.

"My God!" he whispered. "I am too late!"

With clenched fists he turned and, pressing through the group of loungers, bounded up the steps. In the hall a man who unmistakably was a Scotland Yard official stood talking to a footman. Other members of the household were moving about, more or less aimlessly, and the chilly hand of King Fear had touched one and all, for, as they came and went, they glanced ever over their shoulders, as if each shadow cloaked a menace, and listened, as it seemed, for some sound which they dreaded to hear. Smith strode up to the detective and showed him a card, upon glancing at which the Scotland Yard man said something in a low voice, and, nodding, touched his hat to Smith in a respectful manner.

A few brief questions and answers, and, in gloomy silence, we followed the detective up the heavily carpeted stair, along a corridor lined with pictures and busts, and into a large library. A group of people were in this room, and one, in whom I recognized Chalmers Cleeve, of Harley Street, was bending over a motionless form stretched upon a couch. Another door communicated with a small study, and through the opening I could see a man on all fours examining the carpet. The uncomfortable sense of hush, the group about the physician, the bizarre figure crawling, beetle-like, across the inner room, and the grim hub, around which all this ominous activity turned, made up a scene that etched itself indelibly on my mind.

As we entered Dr. Cleeve straightened himself, frowning thoughtfully.

"Frankly, I do not care to venture any opinion at present regarding the immediate cause of death," he said. "Sir Crichton was addicted to cocaine, but there are indications which are not in accordance with cocaine-poisoning. I fear that only a post-mortem can establish the facts--if," he added, "we ever arrive at them. A most mysterious case!"

Smith stepping forward and engaging the famous pathologist in conversation, I seized the opportunity to examine Sir Crichton's body.
The dead man was in evening dress, but wore an old smoking-jacket. He had been of spare but hardy build, with thin, aquiline features, which now were oddly puffy, as were his clenched hands. I pushed back his sleeve, and saw the marks of the hypodermic syringe upon his left arm. Quite mechanically I turned my attention to the right arm. It was unscarred, but on the back of the hand was a faint red mark, not unlike the imprint of painted lips. I examined it closely, and even tried to rub it off, but it evidently was caused by some morbid process of local inflammation, if it were not a birthmark.

Turning to a pale young man whom I had understood to be Sir Crichton's private secretary, I drew his attention to this mark, and inquired if it were constitutional. "It is not, sir," answered Dr. Cleeve, overhearing my question. "I have already made that inquiry. Does it suggest anything to your mind? I must confess that it affords me no assistance."

"Nothing," I replied. "It is most curious."

"Excuse me, Mr. Burboyné," said Smith, now turning to the secretary, "but Inspector Weymouth will tell you that I act with authority. I understand that Sir Crichton was--seized with illness in his study?"

"Yes--at half-past ten. I was working here in the library, and he inside, as was our custom."

"The communicating door was kept closed?"

"Yes, always. It was open for a minute or less about ten-twenty-five, when a message came for Sir Crichton. I took it in to him, and he then seemed in his usual health."

"What was the message?"

"I could not say. It was brought by a district messenger, and he placed it beside him on the table. It is there now, no doubt."

"And at half-past ten?"

"Sir Crichton suddenly burst open the door and threw himself, with a scream, into the library. I ran to him but he waved me back. His eyes were glaring horribly. I had just reached his side when he fell, writhing, upon the floor. He seemed past speech, but as I raised him and laid him upon the couch, he gasped something that sounded like 'The red hand!' Before I could get to bell or telephone he was dead!"

Mr. Burboyné's voice shook as he spoke the words, and Smith seemed to find this evidence confusing.

"Do you not think he referred to the mark on his own hand?"

"I think not. From the direction of his last glance, I feel sure he referred to something in the study."

"What did you do?"

"Having summoned the servants, I ran into the study. But there was absolutely nothing unusual to be seen. The windows were closed and fastened. He worked with closed windows in the hottest weather. There is no other door, for the study occupies the end of a narrow wing, so that no one could possibly have gained access to it, whilst I was in the library, unseen by me. Had someone concealed himself in the study earlier in the evening--and I am convinced that it offers no hiding-place-- he could only have come out again by passing through here."

Nayland Smith tugged at the lobe of his left ear, as was his habit when meditating.

"You had been at work here in this way for some time?"

"Yes, Sir Crichton was preparing an important book."

"Had anything unusual occurred prior to this evening?"

"Yes," said Mr. Burboyné, with evident perplexity; "though I attached no importance to it at the time. Three nights ago Sir Crichton came out to me, and appeared very nervous; but at times his nerves-- you know? Well, on this occasion he asked me to search the study. He had an idea that something was concealed there."

"Some THING or someone?"

"'Something' was the word he used. I searched, but fruitlessly, and he seemed quite satisfied, and returned to his work."

"Thank you, Mr. Burboyné. My friend and I would like a few minutes' private investigation in the study."

CHAPTER II

SIR CRICHTON DAVEY'S study was a small one, and a glance sufficed to show that, as the secretary had said, it offered no hiding-place. It was heavily carpeted, and over-full of Burmese and Chinese ornaments and curios, and upon the mantelpiece stood several framed photographs which showed this to be the sanctum of a wealthy bachelor who was no misogynist. A map of the Indian Empire occupied the larger part of one wall. The grate was empty, for the weather was extremely warm, and a green-shaded lamp on the littered writing-table afforded the only light. The air was stale, for both windows were closed and fastened.

Smith immediately pounced upon a large, square envelope that lay beside the blotting-pad. Sir Crichton had not even troubled to open it, but my friend did so. It contained a blank sheet of paper!

"Smell!" he directed, handing the letter to me. I raised it to my nostrils. It was scented with some pungent perfume.
"What is it?" I asked.

"It is a rather rare essential oil," was the reply, "which I have met with before, though never in Europe. I begin to understand, Petrie."

He tilted the lamp-shade and made a close examination of the scraps of paper, matches, and other debris that lay in the grate and on the hearth. I took up a copper vase from the mantelpiece, and was examining it curiously, when he turned, a strange expression upon his face.

"Put that back, old man," he said quietly.

Much surprised, I did as he directed.

"Don't touch anything in the room. It may be dangerous."

Something in the tone of his voice chilled me, and I hastily replaced the vase, and stood by the door of the study, watching him search, methodically, every inch of the room—behind the books, in all the ornaments, in table drawers, in cupboards, on shelves.

"That will do," he said at last. "There is nothing here and I have no time to search farther."

We returned to the library.

"Inspector Weymouth," said my friend, "I have a particular reason for asking that Sir Crichton's body be removed from this room at once and the library locked. Let no one be admitted on any pretense whatever until you hear from me." It spoke volumes for the mysterious credentials borne by my friend that the man from Scotland Yard accepted his orders without demur, and, after a brief chat with Mr. Burboyne, Smith passed briskly downstairs. In the hall a man who looked like a groom out of livery was waiting.

"Are you Wills?" asked Smith.

"Yes, sir."

"It was you who heard a cry of some kind at the rear of the house about the time of Sir Crichton's death?"

"Yes, sir. I was locking the garage door, and, happening to look up at the window of Sir Crichton's study, I saw him jump out of his chair. Where he used to sit at his writing, sir, you could see his shadow on the blind. Next minute I heard a call out in the lane."

"What kind of call?"

The man, whom the uncanny happening clearly had frightened, seemed puzzled for a suitable description.

"A sort of wail, sir," he said at last. "I never heard anything like it before, and don't want to again."

"Like this?" inquired Smith, and he uttered a low, wailing cry, impossible to describe. Wills perceptibly shuddered; and, indeed, it was an eerie sound.

"The same, sir," he said, "but much louder."

"That will do," said Smith, and I thought I detected a note of triumph in his voice. "But stay! Take us through to the back of the house."

The man bowed and led the way, so that shortly we found ourselves in a small, paved courtyard. It was a perfect summer's night, and the deep blue vault above was jeweled with myriads of starry points. How impossible it seemed to reconcile that vast, eternal calm with the hideous passions and fiendish agencies which that night had loosed a soul upon the infinite.

"Up yonder are the study windows, sir. Over that wall on your left is the back lane from which the cry came, and beyond is Regent's Park."

"Are the study windows visible from there?"

"Oh, yes, sir."

"Who occupies the adjoining house?"

"Major-General Platt-Houston, sir; but the family is out of town."

"Those iron stairs are a means of communication between the domestic offices and the servants' quarters, I take it?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then send someone to make my business known to the Major-General's housekeeper; I want to examine those stairs."

Singular though my friend's proceedings appeared to me, I had ceased to wonder at anything. Since Nayland Smith's arrival at my rooms I seemed to have been moving through the fitful phases of a nightmare. My friend's account of how he came by the wound in his arm; the scene on our arrival at the house of Sir Crichton Davey; the secretary's story of the dying man's cry, "The red hand!"; the hidden perils of the study; the wail in the lane—all were fitter incidents of delirium than of sane reality. So, when a white-faced butler made us known to a nervous old lady who proved to be the housekeeper of the next-door residence, I was not surprised at Smith's saying:

"Lounge up and down outside, Petrie. Everyone has cleared off now. It is getting late. Keep your eyes open and be on your guard. I thought I had the start, but he is here before me, and, what is worse, he probably knows by now
that I am here, too."

With which he entered the house and left me out in the square, with leisure to think, to try to understand.

The crowd which usually haunts the scene of a sensational crime had been cleared away, and it had been circulated that Sir Crichton had died from natural causes. The intense heat having driven most of the residents out of town, practically I had the square to myself, and I gave myself up to a brief consideration of the mystery in which I so suddenly had found myself involved.

By what agency had Sir Crichton met his death? Did Nayland Smith know? I rather suspected that he did. What was the hidden significance of the perfumed envelope? Who was that mysterious personage whom Smith so evidently dreaded, who had attempted his life, who, presumably, had murdered Sir Crichton? Sir Crichton Davey, during the time that he had held office in India, and during his long term of service at home, had earned the good will of all, British and native alike. Who was his secret enemy?

Something touched me lightly on the shoulder.

I turned, with my heart fluttering like a child's. This night's work had imposed a severe strain even upon my callous nerves.

A girl wrapped in a hooded opera-cloak stood at my elbow, and, as she glanced up at me, I thought that I never had seen a face so seductively lovely nor of so unusual a type. With the skin of a perfect blonde, she had eyes and lashes as black as a Creole's, which, together with her full red lips, told me that this beautiful stranger, whose touch had so startled me, was not a child of our northern shores.

"Forgive me," she said, speaking with an odd, pretty accent, and laying a slim hand, with jeweled fingers, confidingly upon my arm, "if I startled you. But--is it true that Sir Crichton Davey has been--murdered?"

I looked into her big, questioning eyes, a harsh suspicion laboring in my mind, but could read nothing in their mysterious depths-- only I wondered anew at my questioner's beauty. The grotesque idea momentarily possessed me that, were the bloom of her red lips due to art and not to nature, their kiss would leave-- though not indelibly-- just such a mark as I had seen upon the dead man's hand. But I dismissed the fantastic notion as bred of the night's horrors, and worthy only of a mediaeval legend. No doubt she was some friend or acquaintance of Sir Crichton who lived close by.

"I cannot say that he has been murdered," I replied, acting upon the latter supposition, and seeking to tell her what she asked as gently as possible.

"But he is--Dead?"

I nodded.

She closed her eyes and uttered a low, moaning sound, swaying dizzily. Thinking she was about to swoon, I threw my arm round her shoulder to support her, but she smiled sadly, and pushed me gently away.

"I am quite well, thank you," she said.

"You are certain? Let me walk with you until you feel quite sure of yourself."

She shook her head, flashed a rapid glance at me with her beautiful eyes, and looked away in a sort of sorrowful embarrassment, for which I was entirely at a loss to account. Suddenly she resumed:

"I cannot let my name be mentioned in this dreadful matter, but--I think I have some information--for the police. Will you give this to-- whomever you think proper?"

She handed me a sealed envelope, again met my eyes with one of her dazzling glances, and hurried away. She had gone no more than ten or twelve yards, and I still was standing bewildered, watching her graceful, retreating figure, when she turned abruptly and came back.

Without looking directly at me, but alternately glancing towards a distant corner of the square and towards the house of Major-General Platt-Houston, she made the following extraordinary request:

"If you would do me a very great service, for which I always would be grateful,"--she glanced at me with passionate intentness--"when you have given my message to the proper person, leave him and do not go near him any more to-night!"

Before I could find words to reply she gathered up her cloak and ran. Before I could determine whether or not to follow her (for her words had aroused anew all my worst suspicions) she had disappeared! I heard the whir of a restarted motor at no great distance, and, in the instant that Nayland Smith came running down the steps, I knew that I had nodded at my post.

"Smith!" I cried as he joined me, "tell me what we must do!" And rapidly I acquainted him with the incident. My friend looked very grave; then a grim smile crept round his lips.

"She was a big card to play," he said; "but he did not know that I held one to beat it."

"What! You know this girl! Who is she?"

"She is one of the finest weapons in the enemy's armory, Petrie. But a woman is a two-edged sword, and treacherous. To our great good fortune, she has formed a sudden predilection, characteristically Oriental, for
yourself. Oh, you may scoff, but it is evident. She was employed to get this letter placed in my hands. Give it to me."
I did so.
"She has succeeded. Smell."
He held the envelope under my nose, and, with a sudden sense of nausea, I recognized the strange perfume.
"You know what this presaged in Sir Crichton's case? Can you doubt any longer? She did not want you to share
my fate, Petrie."
"Smith," I said unsteadily, "I have followed your lead blindly in this horrible business and have not pressed for
an explanation, but I must insist before I go one step farther upon knowing what it all means."
"Just a few steps farther," he rejoined: "as far as a cab. We are hardly safe here. Oh, you need not fear shots or
knives. The man whose servants are watching us now scorns to employ such clumsy, tell-tale weapons."
Only three cabs were on the rank, and, as we entered the first, something hissed past my ear, missed both Smith
and me by a miracle, and, passing over the roof of the taxi, presumably fell in the enclosed garden occupying the
center of the square.
"What was that?" I cried.
"Get in--quickly!" Smith rapped back. "It was attempt number one! More than that I cannot say. Don't let the
man hear. He has noticed nothing. Pull up the window on your side, Petrie, and look out behind. Good! We've
started."
The cab moved off with a metallic jerk, and I turned and looked back through the little window in the rear.
"Someone has got into another cab. It is following ours, I think."
Nayland Smith lay back and laughed unmirthfully.
"Petrie," he said, "if I escape alive from this business I shall know that I bear a charmed life."
I made no reply, as he pulled out the dilapidated pouch and filled his pipe.
"You have asked me to explain matters," he continued, "and I will do so to the best of my ability. You no doubt
wonder why a servant of the British Government, lately stationed in Burma, suddenly appears in London, in the
character of a detective. I am here, Petrie--and I bear credentials from the very highest sources--because, quite by
accident, I came upon a clew. Following it up, in the ordinary course of routine, I obtained evidence of the existence
and malignant activity of a certain man. At the present stage of the case I should not be justified in terming him the
emissary of an Eastern Power, but I may say that representations are shortly to be made to that Power's ambassador
in London."
He paused and glanced back towards the pursuing cab.
"There is little to fear until we arrive home," he said calmly. "Afterwards there is much. To continue: This man,
whether a fanatic or a duly appointed agent, is, unquestionably, the most malign and formidable personality existing
in the known world today. He is a linguist who speaks with almost equal facility in any of the civilized languages,
and in most of the barbaric. He is an adept in all the arts and sciences which a great university could teach him. He
also is an adept in certain obscure arts and sciences which no university of to-day can teach. He has the brains of any
three men of genius. Petrie, he is a mental giant."
"You amaze me!" I said.
"As to his mission among men. Why did M. Jules Furneaux fall dead in a Paris opera house? Because of heart
failure? No! Because his last speech had shown that he held the key to the secret of Tongking. What became of the
Grand Duke Stanislaus? Elopement? Suicide? Nothing of the kind. He alone was fully alive to Russia's growing
peril. He alone knew the truth about Mongolia. Why was Sir Crichton Davey murdered? Because, had the work he
was engaged upon ever seen the light it would have shown him to be the only living Englishman who understood the
importance of the Tibetan frontiers. I say to you solemnly, Petrie, that these are but a few. Is there a man who would
arouse the West to a sense of the awaking of the East, who would teach the deaf to hear, the blind to see, that the
millions only await their leader? He will die. And this is only one phase of the devilish campaign. The others I can
merely surmise."
"But, Smith, this is almost incredible! What perverted genius controls this awful secret movement?"
"Imagine a person, tall, lean and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a
close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire
Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science past and present, with all the
resources, if you will, of a wealthy government--which, however, already has denied all knowledge of his existence.
Imagine that awful being, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the yellow peril incarnate in one man."
CHAPTER III
I SANK into an arm-chair in my rooms and gulped down a strong peg of brandy.
"We have been followed here," I said. "Why did you make no attempt to throw the pursuers off the track, to have
them intercepted?"
"Useless, in the first place. Wherever we went, HE would find us. And of what use to arrest his creatures? We could prove nothing against them. Further, it is evident that an attempt is to be made upon my life to-night--and by the same means that proved so successful in the case of poor Sir Crichton."

His square jaw grew truculently prominent, and he leapt stormily to his feet, shaking his clenched fists towards the window.

"The villain!" he cried. "The fiendishly clever villain! I suspected that Sir Crichton was next, and I was right. But I came too late, Petrie! That hits me hard, old man. To think that I knew and yet failed to save him!"

He resumed his seat, smoking hard.

"Fu-Manchu has made the blunder common to all men of unusual genius," he said. "He has underrated his adversary. He has not given me credit for perceiving the meaning of the scented messages. He has thrown away one powerful weapon--to get such a message into my hands--and he thinks that once safe within doors, I shall sleep, unsuspecting, and die as Sir Crichton died. But without the indiscretion of your charming friend, I should have known what to expect when I receive her 'information'-- which by the way, consists of a blank sheet of paper."

"Smith," I broke in, "who is she?"

"She is either Fu-Manchu's daughter, his wife, or his slave. I am inclined to believe the last, for she has no will but his will, except"--with a quizzical glance--"in a certain instance."

"How can you jest with some awful thing--Heaven knows what-- hanging over your head? What is the meaning of these perfumed envelopes? How did Sir Crichton die?"

"He died of the Zayat Kiss. Ask me what that is and I reply 'I do not know.' The zayats are the Burmese caravanserais, or rest-houses. Along a certain route--upon which I set eyes, for the first and only time, upon Dr. Fu-Manchu--travelers who use them sometimes die as Sir Crichton died, with nothing to show the cause of death but a little mark upon the neck, face, or limb, which has earned, in those parts, the title of the 'Zayat Kiss.' The rest-houses along that route are shunned now. I have my theory and I hope to prove it to-night, if I live. It will be one more broken weapon in his fiendish armory, and it is thus, and thus only, that I can hope to crush him. This was my principal reason for not enlightening Dr. Cleeve. Even walls have ears where Fu-Manchu is concerned, so I feigned ignorance of the meaning of the mark, knowing that he would be almost certain to employ the same methods upon some other victim. I wanted an opportunity to study the Zayat Kiss in operation, and I shall have one."

"But the scented envelopes?"

"In the swampy forests of the district I have referred to a rare species of orchid, almost green, and with a peculiar scent, is sometimes met with. I recognized the heavy perfume at once. I take it that the thing which kills the traveler is attracted by this orchid. You will notice that the perfume clings to whatever it touches. I doubt if it can be washed off in the ordinary way. After at least one unsuccessful attempt to kill Sir Crichton-- you recall that he thought there was something concealed in his study on a previous occasion?--Fu-Manchu hit upon the perfumed envelopes. He may have a supply of these green orchids in his possession-- possibly to feed the creature."

"What creature? How could any kind of creature have got into Sir Crichton's room tonight?"

"You no doubt observed that I examined the grate of the study. I found a fair quantity of fallen soot. I at once assumed, since it appeared to be the only means of entrance, that something has been dropped down; and I took it for granted that the thing, whatever it was, must still be concealed either in the study or in the library. But when I had obtained the evidence of the groom, Wills, I perceived that the cry from the lane or from the park was a signal. I noted that the movements of anyone seated at the study table were visible, in shadow, on the blind, and that the study occupied the corner of a two-storied wing and, therefore, had a short chimney. What did the signal mean? That Sir Crichton had leaped up from his chair, and either had received the Zayat Kiss or had seen the thing which someone on the roof had lowered down the straight chimney. It was the signal to withdraw that deadly thing. By means of the iron stairway at the rear of Major-General Platt-Houston's, I quite easily, gained access to the roof above Sir Crichton's study-- and I found this."

Out from his pocket Nayland Smith drew a tangled piece of silk, mixed up with which were a brass ring and a number of unusually large-sized split-shot, nipped on in the manner usual on a fishing-line.

"My theory proven," he resumed. "Not anticipating a search on the roof, they had been careless. This was to weight the line and to prevent the creature clinging to the walls of the chimney. Directly it had dropped in the grate, however, by means of this ring I assume that the weighted line was withdrawn, and the thing was only held by one slender thread, which sufficed, though, to draw it back again when it had done its work. It might have got tangled, of course, but they reckoned on its making straight up the carved leg of the writing-table for the prepared envelope. From there to the hand of Sir Crichton--which, from having touched the envelope, would also be scented with the perfume--was a certain move."

"My God! How horrible!" I exclaimed, and glanced apprehensively into the dusky shadows of the room. "What
is your theory respecting this creature-- what shape, what color--?

"It is something that moves rapidly and silently. I will venture no more at present, but I think it works in the
dark. The study was dark, remember, save for the bright patch beneath the reading-lamp. I have observed that the
rear of this house is ivy-covered right up to and above your bedroom. Let us make ostentatious preparations to retire,
and I think we may rely upon Fu-Manchu's servants to attempt my removal, at any rate--if not yours."

"But, my dear fellow, it is a climb of thirty-five feet at the very least."

"You remember the cry in the back lane? It suggested something to me, and I tested my idea--successfully. It
was the cry of a dacoit. Oh, dacoity, though quiescent, is by no means extinct. Fu-Manchu has dacoits in his train,
and probably it is one who operates the Zayat Kiss, since it was a dacoit who watched the window of the study this
evening. To such a man an ivy-covered wall is a grand staircase."

The horrible events that followed are punctuated, in my mind, by the striking of a distant clock. It is singular
how trivialities thus assert themselves in moments of high tension. I will proceed, then, by these punctuations, to the
coming of the horror that it was written we should encounter.

The clock across the common struck two.

Having removed all traces of the scent of the orchid from our hands with a solution of ammonia Smith and I had
followed the programme laid down. It was an easy matter to reach the rear of the house, by simply climbing a fence,
and we did not doubt that seeing the light go out in the front, our unseen watcher would proceed to the back.

The room was a large one, and we had made up my camp-bed at one end, stuffing odds and ends under the
clothes to lend the appearance of a sleeper, which device we also had adopted in the case of the larger bed. The
perfumed envelope lay upon a little coffee table in the center of the floor, and Smith, with an electric pocket lamp, a
revolver, and a brassey beside him, sat on cushions in the shadow of the wardrobe. I occupied a post between the
windows.

No unusual sound, so far, had disturbed the stillness of the night. Save for the muffled throb of the rare all-night
cars passing the front of the house, our vigil had been a silent one. The full moon had painted about the floor weird
shadows of the clustering ivy, spreading the design gradually from the door, across the room, past the little table
where the envelope lay, and finally to the foot of the bed.

The distant clock struck a quarter-past two.

A slight breeze stirred the ivy, and a new shadow added itself to the extreme edge of the moon's design.

Something rose, inch by inch, above the sill of the westerly window. I could see only its shadow, but a sharp,
sibilant breath from Smith told me that he, from his post, could see the cause of the shadow.

Every nerve in my body seemed to be strung tensely. I was icy cold, expectant, and prepared for whatever horror
was upon us.

The shadow became stationary. The dacoit was studying the interior of the room.

Then it suddenly lengthened, and, craning my head to the left, I saw a lithe, black-clad form, surmounted by a
Yellow face, sketchy in the moonlight, pressed against the window-panes!

One thin, brown hand appeared over the edge of the lowered sash, which it grasped--and then another. The man
made absolutely no sound whatever. The second hand disappeared--and reappeared. It held a small, square box.

There was a very faint CLICK.

The dacoit swung himself below the window with the agility of an ape, as, with a dull, muffled thud,
SOMETHING dropped upon the carpet!

"Stand still, for your life!“ came Smith's voice, high-pitched.

A beam of white leaped out across the room and played full upon the coffee-table in the center.

Prepared as I was for something horrible, I know that I paled at sight of the thing that was running round the
edge of the envelope.

It was an insect, full six inches long, and of a vivid, venomous, red color! It had something of the appearance of a
great ant, with its long, quivering antennae and its febrile, horrible vitality; but it was proportionately longer of
body and smaller of head, and had numberless rapidly moving legs. In short, it was a giant centipede, apparently of
the scolopendra group, but of a form quite new to me.

These things I realized in one breathless instant; in the next-- Smith had dashed the thing's poisonous life out
with one straight, true blow of the golf club!

I leaped to the window and threw it widely open, feeling a silk thread brush my hand as I did so. A black shape
was dropping, with incredible agility from branch to branch of the ivy, and, without once offering a mark for a
revolver-shot, it merged into the shadows beneath the trees of the garden. As I turned and switched on the light
Nayland Smith dropped limply into a chair, leaning his head upon his hands. Even that grim courage had been tried
sorely.

"Never mind the dacoit, Petrie," he said. "Nemesis will know where to find him. We know now what causes the
mark of the Zayat Kiss. Therefore science is richer for our first brush with the enemy, and the enemy is poorer—unless he has any more unclassified centipedes. I understand now something that has been puzzling me since I heard of it—Sir Crichton's stifled cry. When we remember that he was almost past speech, it is reasonable to suppose that his cry was not 'The red hand!' but 'The red ANT!' Petrie, to think that I failed, by less than an hour, to save him from such an end!"

CHAPTER IV
"THE body of a lascar, dressed in the manner usual on the P. & O. boats, was recovered from the Thames off Tilbury by the river police at six A.M. this morning. It is supposed that the man met with an accident in leaving his ship."

Nayland Smith passed me the evening paper and pointed to the above paragraph.
"For 'lascar' read 'dacoit,'" he said. "Our visitor, who came by way of the ivy, fortunately for us, failed to follow his instructions. Also, he lost the centipede and left a clew behind him. Dr. Fu-Manchu does not overlook such lapses."

It was a sidelight upon the character of the awful being with whom we had to deal. My very soul recoiled from bare consideration of the fate that would be ours if ever we fell into his hands.

The telephone bell rang. I went out and found that Inspector Weymouth of New Scotland Yard had called us up.
"Will Mr. Nayland Smith please come to the Wapping River Police Station at once," was the message.

Peaceful interludes were few enough throughout that wild pursuit.
"It is certainly something important," said my friend; "and, if Fu-Manchu is at the bottom of it—as we must presume him to be—probably something ghastly."

A brief survey of the time-tables showed us that there were no trains to serve our haste. We accordingly chartered a cab and proceeded east.

Smith, throughout the journey, talked entertainingly about his work in Burma. Of intent, I think, he avoided any reference to the circumstances which first had brought him in contact with the sinister genius of the Yellow Movement. His talk was rather of the sunshine of the East than of its shadows.

But the drive concluded—and all too soon. In a silence which neither of us seemed disposed to break, we entered the police depot, and followed an officer who received us into the room where Weymouth waited.

The inspector greeted us briefly, nodding toward the table.
"Poor Cadby, the most promising lad at the Yard," he said; and his usually gruff voice had softened strangely.

Smith struck his right fist into the palm of his left hand and swore under his breath, striding up and down the neat little room. No one spoke for a moment, and in the silence I could hear the whispering of the Thames outside—of the Thames which had so many strange secrets to tell, and now was burdened with another.

The body lay prone upon the deal table—this latest of the river's dead—dressed in rough sailor garb, and, to all outward seeming, a seaman of nondescript nationality—such as is no stranger in Wapping and Shadwell. His dark, curly hair clung clammy about the brown forehead; his skin was stained, they told me. He wore a gold ring in one ear, and three fingers of the left hand were missing.

"It was almost the same with Mason." The river police inspector was speaking. "A week ago, on a Wednesday, he went off in his own time on some funny business down St. George's way—and Thursday night the ten-o'clock boat got the grapnel on him off Hanover Hole. His first two fingers on the right hand were clean gone, and his left hand was mutilated frightfully."

He paused and glanced at Smith.
"That lascar, too," he continued, "that you came down to see, sir; you remember his hands?"

Smith nodded.
"He was not a lascar," he said shortly. "He was a dacoit."

Silence fell again.

I turned to the array of objects lying on the table—those which had been found in Cadby's clothing. None of them were noteworthy, except that which had been found thrust into the loose neck of his shirt. This last it was which had led the police to send for Nayland Smith, for it constituted the first clew which had come to light pointing to the authors of these mysterious tragedies.

It was a Chinese pigtail. That alone was sufficiently remarkable; but it was rendered more so by the fact that the plaited queue was a false one being attached to a most ingenious bald wig.
"You're sure it wasn't part of a Chinese make-up?" questioned Weymouth, his eye on the strange relic. "Cadby was clever at disguise."

Smith snatched the wig from my hands with a certain irritation, and tried to fit it on the dead detective.
"Too small by inches!" he jerked. "And look how it's padded in the crown. This thing was made for a most abnormal head."
He threw it down, and fell to pacing the room again.
"Where did you find him--exactly?" he asked.
"Limehouse Reach--under Commercial Dock Pier--exactly an hour ago."
"And you last saw him at eight o'clock last night?"--to Weymouth.
"Eight to a quarter past."
"You think he has been dead nearly twenty-four hours, Petrie?"
"Roughly, twenty-four hours," I replied.
"Then, we know that he was on the track of the Fu-Manchu group, that he followed up some clew which led him
to the neighborhood of old Ratcliff Highway, and that he died the same night. You are sure that is where he was
going?"
"Yes," said Weymouth; "He was jealous of giving anything away, poor chap; it meant a big lift for him if he
pulled the case off. But he gave me to understand that he expected to spend last night in that district. He left the
Yard about eight, as I've said, to go to his rooms, and dress for the job."
"Did he keep any record of his cases?"
"Of course! He was most particular. Cadby was a man with ambitions, sir! You'll want to see his book. Wait
while I get his address; it's somewhere in Brixton."
He went to the telephone, and Inspector Ryman covered up the dead man's face.
Nayland Smith was palpably excited.
"He almost succeeded where we have failed, Petrie," he said. "There is no doubt in my mind that he was hot on
the track of Fu-Manchu! Poor Mason had probably blundered on the scent, too, and he met with a similar fate.
Without other evidence, the fact that they both died in the same way as the dacoit would be conclusive, for we know
that Fu-Manchu killed the dacoit!"
"What is the meaning of the mutilated hands, Smith?"
"God knows! Cadby's death was from drowning, you say?"
"There are no other marks of violence."
"But he was a very strong swimmer, Doctor," interrupted Inspector Ryman. "Why, he pulled off the quarter-mile
championship at the Crystal Palace last year! Cadby wasn't a man easy to drown. And as for Mason, he was an
R.N.R., and like a fish in the water!"
Smith shrugged his shoulders helplessly.
"Let us hope that one day we shall know how they died," he said simply.
Weymouth returned from the telephone.
"The address is No.--Cold Harbor Lane," he reported. "I shall not be able to come along, but you can't miss it;
it's close by the Brixton Police Station. There's no family, fortunately; he was quite alone in the world. His case-
book isn't in the American desk, which you'll find in his sitting-room; it's in the cupboard in the corner--top shelf.
Here are his keys, all intact. I think this is the cupboard key."
Smith nodded.
"Come on, Petrie," he said. "We haven't a second to waste."
Our cab was waiting, and in a few seconds we were speeding along Wapping High Street. We had gone no more
than a few hundred yards, I think, when Smith suddenly slapped his open hand down on his knee.
"That pigtail!" he cried. "I have left it behind! We must have it, Petrie! Stop! Stop!"
The cab was pulled up, and Smith alighted.
"Don't wait for me," he directed hurriedly. "Here, take Weymouth's card. Remember where he said the book
was? It's all we want. Come straight on to Scotland Yard and meet me there."
"But Smith," I protested, "a few minutes can make no difference!"
"Can't it?" he snapped. "Do you suppose Fu-Manchu is going to leave evidence like that lying about? It's a
thousand to one he has it already, but there is just a bare chance."
It was a new aspect of the situation and one that afforded no room for comment; and so lost in thought did I
become that the cab was outside the house for which I was bound ere I realized that we had quitted the purlieus
of Wapping. Yet I had had leisure to review the whole troop of events which had crowded my life since the return of
Nayland Smith from Burma. Mentally, I had looked again upon the dead Sir Crichton Davey, and with Smith had
waited in the dark for the dreadful thing that had killed him. Now, with those remorseless memories jostling in my
mind, I was entering the house of Fu-Manchu's last victim, and the shadow of that giant evil seemed to be upon it
like a palpable cloud.
Cadby's old landlady greeted me with a queer mixture of fear and embarrassment in her manner.
"I am Dr. Petrie," I said, "and I regret that I bring bad news respecting Mr. Cadby."
"Oh, sir!" she cried. "Don't tell me that anything has happened to him!" And divining something of the mission
on which I was come, for such sad duty often falls to the lot of the medical man: "Oh, the poor, brave lad!"

Indeed, I respected the dead man's memory more than ever from that hour, since the sorrow of the worthy old soul was quite pathetic, and spoke eloquently of the unhappy cause of it.

"There was a terrible wailing at the back of the house last night, Doctor, and I heard it again to-night, a second before you knocked. Poor lad! It was the same when his mother died."

At the moment I paid little attention to her words, for such beliefs are common, unfortunately; but when she was sufficiently composed I went on to explain what I thought necessary. And now the old lady's embarrassment took precedence of her sorrow, and presently the truth came out:

"There's a--young lady--in his rooms, sir."

I started. This might mean little or might mean much.

"She came and waited for him last night, Doctor--from ten until half-past--and this morning again. She came the third time about an hour ago, and has been upstairs since."

"Do you know her, Mrs. Dolan?"

Mrs. Dolan grew embarrassed again.

"Well, Doctor," she said, wiping her eyes the while, "I DO. And God knows he was a good lad, and I like a mother to him; but she is not the girl I should have liked a son of mine to take up with."

At any other time, this would have been amusing; now, it might be serious. Mrs. Dolan's account of the wailing became suddenly significant, for perhaps it meant that one of Fu-Manchu's dacoit followers was watching the house, to give warning of any stranger's approach! Warning to whom? It was unlikely that I should forget the dark eyes of another of Fu-Manchu's servants. Was that lure of men even now in the house, completing her evil work?

"I should never have allowed her in his rooms--" began Mrs. Dolan again. Then there was an interruption.

A soft rustling reached my ears--intimately feminine. The girl was stealing down!

I leaped out into the hall, and she turned and fled blindly before me--back up the stairs! Taking three steps at a time, I followed her, bounded into the room above almost at her heels, and stood with my back to the door.

She cowered against the desk by the window, a slim figure in a clinging silk gown, which alone explained Mrs. Dolan's distrust. The gaslight was turned very low, and her hat shadowed her face, but could not hide its startling beauty, could not mar the brilliancy of the skin, nor dim the wonderful eyes of this modern Delilah. For it was she!

"So I came in time," I said grimly, and turned the key in the lock.

"Oh!" she panted at that, and stood facing me, leaning back with her jewel-laden hands clutching the desk edge.

"Give me whatever you have removed from here," I said sternly, "and then prepare to accompany me."

She took a step forward, her eyes wide with fear, her lips parted.

"I have taken nothing," she said. Her breast was heaving tumultuously. "Oh, let me go! Please, let me go!" And impulsively she threw herself forward, pressing clasped hands against my shoulder and looking up into my face with passionate, pleading eyes.

It is with some shame that I confess how her charm enveloped me like a magic cloud. Unfamiliar with the complex Oriental temperament, I had laughed at Nayland Smith when he had spoken of this girl's infatuation. "Love in the East," he had said, "is like the conjurer's mango-tree; it is born, grows and flowers at the touch of a hand."

Now, in those pleading eyes I read confirmation of his words. Her clothes or her hair exhaled a faint perfume. Like all Fu-Manchu's servants, she was perfectly chosen for her peculiar duties. Her beauty was wholly intoxicating.

But I thrust her away.

"You have no claim to mercy," I said. "Do not count upon any. What have you taken from here?"

She grasped the lapels of my coat.

"I will tell you all I can--all I dare," she panted eagerly, fearfully. "I should know how to deal with your friend, but with you I am lost! If you could only understand you would not be so cruel." Her slight accent added charm to the musical voice. "I am not free, as your English women are. What I do I must do, for it is the will of my master, and I am only a slave. Ah, you are not a man if you can give me to the police. You have no heart if you can forget that I tried to save you once."

I had feared that plea, for, in her own Oriental fashion, she certainly had tried to save me from a deadly peril once--at the expense of my friend. But I had feared the plea, for I did not know how to meet it. How could I give her up, perhaps to stand her trial for murder? And now I fell silent, and she saw why I was silent.

"I may deserve no mercy; I may be even as bad as you think; but what have YOU to do with the police? It is not your work to hound a woman to death. Could you ever look another woman in the eyes--one that you loved, and know that she trusted you--if you had done such a thing? Ah, I have no friend in all the world, or I should not be here. Do not be my enemy, my judge, and make me worse than I am; be my friend, and save me--from HIM." The tremulous lips were close to mine, her breath fanned my cheek. "Have mercy on me."

At that moment I honestly would have given half of my worldly possessions to have been spared the decision
which I knew I must come to. After all, what proof had I that she was a willing accomplice of Dr. Fu-Manchu? Furthermore, she was an Oriental, and her code must necessarily be different from mine. Irreconcilable as the thing may be with Western ideas, Nayland Smith had really told me that he believed the girl to be a slave. Then there remained that other reason why I loathed the idea of becoming her captor. It was almost tantamount to betrayal! Must I soil my hands with such work?

Thus--I suppose--her seductive beauty argued against my sense of right. The jeweled fingers grasped my shoulders nervously, and her slim body quivered against mine as she watched me, with all her soul in her eyes, in an abandonment of pleading despair. Then I remembered the fate of the man in whose room we stood.

"You lured Cadby to his death," I said, and shook her off.

"No, no!" she cried wildly, clutching at me. "No, I swear by the holy name I did not! I did not! I watched him, spied upon him--yes! But, listen: it was because he would not be warned that he met his death. I could not save him! Ah, I am not so bad as that. I will tell you. I have taken his notebook and torn out the last pages and burnt them. Look! in the grate. The book was too big to steal away. I came twice and could not find it. There, will you let me go?"

"If you will tell me where and how to seize Dr. Fu-Manchu--yes."

Her hands dropped and she took a backward step. A new terror was to be read in her face.

"I dare not! I dare not!"

"Then you would--if you dared?"

She was watching me intently.

"Not if YOU would go to find him," she said.

And, with all that I thought her to be, the stern servant of justice that I would have had myself, I felt the hot blood leap to my cheek at all which the words implied. She grasped my arm.

"Could you hide me from him if I came to you, and told you all I know?"

"The authorities--"

"Ah!" Her expression changed. "They can put me on the rack if they choose, but never one word would I speak--never one little word."

She threw up her head scornfully. Then the proud glance softened again.

"But I will speak for you."

Closer she came, and closer, until she could whisper in my ear.

"Hide me from your police, from HIM, from everybody, and I will no longer be his slave."

My heart was beating with painful rapidity. I had not counted on this warring with a woman; moreover, it was harder than I could have dreamt of. For some time I had been aware that by the charm of her personality and the art of her pleading she had brought me down from my judgment seat--had made it all but impossible for me to give her up to justice. Now, I was disarmed--but in a quandary. What should I do? What COULD I do? I turned away from her and walked to the hearth, in which some paper ash lay and yet emitted a faint smell.

Not more than ten seconds elapsed, I am confident, from the time that I stepped across the room until I glanced back. But she had gone!

As I leapt to the door the key turned gently from the outside.

"Ma 'alesh!" came her soft whisper; "but I am afraid to trust you--yet. Be comforted, for there is one near who would have killed you had I wished it. Remember, I will come to you whenever you will take me and hide me."

Light footsteps pattered down the stairs. I heard a stifled cry from Mrs. Dolan as the mysterious visitor ran past her. The front door opened and closed.

CHAPTER V

"Shen-Yan's is a dope-shop in one of the burrows off the old Ratcliff Highway," said Inspector Weymouth.

"`Singapore Charlie's,' they call it. It's a center for some of the Chinese societies, I believe, but all sorts of opium-smokers use it. There have never been any complaints that I know of. I don't understand this."

We stood in his room at New Scotland Yard, bending over a sheet of foolscap upon which were arranged some burned fragments from poor Cadby's grate, for so hurriedly had the girl done her work that combustion had not been complete.

"What do we make of this?" said Smith. "...Hunchback...lascar went up...unlike others...not return...till Shen-Yan' (there is no doubt about the name, I think) 'turned me out...booming sound...lascar in...mortuary I could ident...not for days, or suspici...Tuesday night in a different make...snatch...pigtail...'"

"The pigtail again!" rapped Weymouth.

"She evidently burned the torn-out pages all together," continued Smith. "They lay flat, and this was in the middle. I see the hand of retributive justice in that, Inspector. Now we have a reference to a hunchback, and what follows amounts to this: A lascar (amongst several other persons) went up somewhere--presumably upstairs--at
Shen-Yan's, and did not come down again. Cadby, who was there disguised, noted a booming sound. Later, he identified the lascar in some mortuary. We have no means of fixing the date of this visit to Shen-Yan's, but I feel inclined to put down the 'lascar' as the dacoit who was murdered by Fu-Manchu! It is sheer supposition, however. But that Cadby meant to pay another visit to the place in a different 'make-up' or disguise, is evident, and that the Tuesday night proposed was last night is a reasonable deduction. The reference to a pigtail is principally interesting because of what was found on Cadby's body."

Inspector Weymouth nodded affirmatively, and Smith glanced at his watch.

"Exactly ten-twenty-three," he said. "I will trouble you, Inspector, for the freedom of your fancy wardrobe. There is time to spend an hour in the company of Shen-Yan's opium friends."

Weymouth raised his eyebrows.

"It might be risky. What about an official visit?"

Nayland Smith laughed.

"Worse than useless! By your own showing, the place is open to inspection. No; guile against guile! We are dealing with a Chinaman, with the incarnate essence of Eastern subtlety, with the most stupendous genius that the modern Orient has produced."

"I don't believe in disguises," said Weymouth, with a certain truculence. "It's mostly played out, that game, and generally leads to failure. Still, if you're determined, sir, there's an end of it. Foster will make your face up. What disguise do you propose to adopt?"

"A sort of Dago seaman, I think; something like poor Cadby. I can rely on my knowledge of the brutes, if I am sure of my disguise."

"You are forgetting me, Smith," I said.

He turned to me quickly.

"Petrie," he replied, "it is MY business, unfortunately, but it is no sort of hobby."

"You mean that you can no longer rely upon me?" I said angrily.

Smith grasped my hand, and met my rather frigid stare with a look of real concern on his gaunt, bronzed face.

"My dear old chap," he answered, "that was really unkind. You know that I meant something totally different."

"It's all right, Smith," I said, immediately ashamed of my choler, and wrung his hand heartily. "I can pretend to smoke opium as well as another. I shall be going, too, Inspector."

As a result of this little passage of words, some twenty minutes later two dangerous-looking seafaring ruffians entered a waiting cab, accompanied by Inspector Weymouth, and were driven off into the wilderness of London's night. In this theatrical business there was, to my mind, something ridiculous--almost childish--and I could have laughed heartily had it not been that grim tragedy lurked so near to farce.

The mere recollection that somewhere at our journey's end Fu-Manchu awaited us was sufficient to sober my reflections--Fu-Manchu, who, with all the powers represented by Nayland Smith pitted against him, pursued his dark schemes triumphantly, and lurked in hiding within this very area which was so sedulously patrolled--Fu-Manchu, whom I had never seen, but whose name stood for horrors indefinable! Perhaps I was destined to meet the terrible Chinese doctor to-night.

I ceased to pursue a train of thought which promised to lead to morbid depths, and directed my attention to what Smith was saying.

"We will drop down from Wapping and reconnoiter, as you say the place is close to the riverside. Then you can put us ashore somewhere below. Ryman can keep the launch close to the back of the premises, and your fellows will be hanging about near the front, near enough to hear the whistle."

"Yes," assented Weymouth; "I've arranged for that. If you are suspected, you shall give the alarm?"

"I don't know," said Smith thoughtfully. "Even in that event I might wait awhile."

"Don't wait too long," advised the Inspector. "We shouldn't be much wiser if your next appearance was on the end of a grapnel, somewhere down Greenwich Reach, with half your fingers missing."

The cab pulled up outside the river police depot, and Smith and I entered without delay, four shabby-looking fellows who had been seated in the office springing up to salute the Inspector, who followed us in.

"Guthrie and Lisle," he said briskly, "get along and find a dark corner which commands the door of Singapore Charlie's off the old Highway. You look the dirtiest of the troupe, Guthrie; you might drop asleep on the pavement, and Lisle can argue with you about getting home. Don't move till you hear the whistle inside or have my orders, and note everybody that goes in and comes out. You other two belong to this division?"

The C.I.D. men having departed, the remaining pair saluted again.

"Well, you're on special duty to-night. You've been prompt, but don't stick your chests out so much. Do you know of a back way to Shen-Yan's?"

The men looked at one another, and both shook their heads.
"There's an empty shop nearly opposite, sir," replied one of them. "I know a broken window at the back where we could climb in. Then we could get through to the front and watch from there."

"Good!" cried the Inspector. "See you are not spotted, though; and if you hear the whistle, don't mind doing a bit of damage, but be inside Shen-Yan's like lightning. Otherwise, wait for orders."

Inspector Ryman came in, glancing at the clock.

"Launch is waiting," he said.

"Right," replied Smith thoughtfully. "I am half afraid, though, that the recent alarms may have scared our quarry-your man, Mason, and then Cadby. Against which we have that, so far as he is likely to know, there has been no clew pointing to this opium den. Remember, he thinks Cadby's notes are destroyed."

"The whole business is an utter mystery to me," confessed Ryman. "I'm told that there's some dangerous Chinese devil hiding somewhere in London, and that you expect to find him at Shen-Yan's. Supposing he uses that place, which is possible, how do you know he's there to-night?"

"I don't," said Smith; "but it is the first clew we have had pointing to one of his haunts, and time means precious lives where Dr. Fu-Manchu is concerned."

"Who is he, sir, exactly, this Dr. Fu-Manchu?"

"I have only the vaguest idea, Inspector; but he is no ordinary criminal. He is the greatest genius which the powers of evil have put on earth for centuries. He has the backing of a political group whose wealth is enormous, and his mission in Europe is to PAVE THE WAY! Do you follow me? He is the advance-agent of a movement so epoch-making that not one Britisher, and not one American, in fifty thousand has ever dreamed of it."

Ryman stared, but made no reply, and we went out, passing down to the breakwater and boarding the waiting launch. With her crew of three, the party numbered seven that swung out into the Pool, and, clearing the pier, drew in again and hugged the murky shore.

The night had been clear enough hitherto, but now came scudding rainbanks to curtain the crescent moon, and anon to unveil her again and show the muddy swirls about us. The view was not extensive from the launch. Sometimes a deepening of the near shadows would tell of a moored barge, or lights high above our heads mark the deck of a large vessel. In the floods of moonlight gaunt shapes towered above; in the ensuing darkness only the oily glitter of the tide occupied the foreground of the night-piece.

The Surrey shore was a broken wall of blackness, patched with lights about which moved hazy suggestions of human activity. The bank we were following offered a prospect even more gloomy--a dense, dark mass, amid which, sometimes, mysterious half-tones told of a dock gate, or sudden high lights leapt flaring to the eye.

Then, out of the mystery ahead, a green light grew and crept down upon us. A giant shape loomed up, and frowned crushingly upon the little craft. A blaze of light, the jangle of a bell, and it was past. We were dancing in the wash of one of the Scotch steamers, and the murk had fallen again.

Discords of remote activity rose above the more intimate throbbing of our screw, and we seemed a pigmy company floating past the workshops of Brobdingnagian toilers. The chill of the near water communicated itself to me, and I felt the protection of my shabby garments inadequate against it.

Far over on the Surrey shore a blue light--vaporous, mysterious--flicked translucent tongues against the night's curtain. It was a weird, elusive flame, leaping, wavering, magically changing from blue to a yellowed violet, rising, falling.

"Only a gasworks," came Smith's voice, and I knew that he, too, had been watching those elfin fires. "But it always reminds me of a Mexican teocalli, and the altar of sacrifice."

The simile was apt, but gruesome. I thought of Dr. Fu-Manchu and the severed fingers, and could not repress a shudder.

"On your left, past the wooden pier! Not where the lamp is--beyond that; next to the dark, square building--Shen-Yan's."

It was Inspector Ryman speaking.

"Drop us somewhere handy, then," replied Smith, "and lie close in, with your ears wide open. We may have to run for it, so don't go far away."

From the tone of his voice I knew that the night mystery of the Thames had claimed at least one other victim.

"Dead slow," came Ryman's order. "We'll put in to the Stone Stairs."

CHAPTER VI

A SEEMINGLY drunken voice was droning from a neighboring alleyway as Smith lurched in hulking fashion to the door of a little shop above which, crudely painted, were the words:

"SHEN-YAN, Barber."

I shuffled along behind him, and had time to note the box of studs, German shaving tackle and rolls of twist which lay untidily in the window ere Smith kicked the door open, clattered down three wooden steps, and pulled
himself up with a jerk, seizing my arm for support.

We stood in a bare and very dirty room, which could only claim kinship with a civilized shaving-saloon by virtue of the grimy towel thrown across the back of the solitary chair. A Yiddish theatrical bill of some kind, illustrated, adorned one of the walls, and another bill, in what may have been Chinese, completed the decorations. From behind a curtain heavily brocaded with filth a little Chinaman appeared, dressed in a loose smock, black trousers and thick-soled slippers, and, advancing, shook his head vigorously.

"No shavee--no shavee," he chattered, simian fashion, squinting from one to the other of us with his twinkling eyes. "Too late! Shuttee shop!"

"Don't you come none of it wi' me!" roared Smith, in a voice of amazing gruffness, and shook an artificially dirtied fist under the Chinaman's nose. "Get inside and gimme an' my mate a couple o' pipes. Smokee pipe, you yellow scum--savvy?"

My friend bent forward and glared into the other's eyes with a vindictiveness that amazed me, unfamiliar as I was with this form of gentle persuasion.

"Kop 'old o' that," he said, and thrust a coin into the Chinaman's yellow paw. "Keep me waitin' an' I'll pull the dam' shop down, Charlie. You can lay to it."

"No hab got pipee--" began the other.

Smith raised his fist, and Yan capitulated.

"Allee lightee," he said. "Full up--no loom. You come see."

He dived behind the dirty curtain, Smith and I following, and ran up a dark stair. The next moment I found myself in an atmosphere which was literally poisonous. It was all but unbreathable, being loaded with opium fumes. Never before had I experienced anything like it. Every breath was an effort. A tin oil-lamp on a box in the middle of the floor dimly illuminated the horrible place, about the walls of which ten or twelve bunks were ranged and all of them occupied. Most of the occupants were lying motionless, but one or two were squatting in their bunks noisily sucking at the little metal pipes. These had not yet attained to the opium-smoker's Nirvana.

"No loom--samee tella you," said Shen-Yan, complacently testing Smith's shilling with his yellow, decayed teeth.

Smith walked to a corner and dropped cross-legged, on the floor, pulling me down with him.

"Two pipe quick," he said. "Plenty room. Two piecee pipe-- or plenty heap trouble."

A dreary voice from one of the bunks came:

"Give 'im a pipe, Charlie, curse yer! an' stop 'is palaver."

Yan performed a curious little shrug, rather of the back than of the shoulders, and shuffled to the box which bore the smoky lamp. Holding a needle in the flame, he dipped it, when red-hot, into an old cocoa tin, and withdrew it with a bead of opium adhering to the end. Slowly roasting this over the lamp, he dropped it into the bowl of the metal pipe which he held ready, where it burned with a spirituous blue flame.

"Pass it over," said Smith huskily, and rose on his knees with the assumed eagerness of a slave to the drug.

Yan handed him the pipe, which he promptly put to his lips, and prepared another for me.

"Whatever you do, don't inhale any," came Smith's whispered injunction.

It was with a sense of nausea greater even than that occasioned by the disgusting atmosphere of the den that I took the pipe and pretended to smoke. Taking my cue from my friend, I allowed my head gradually to sink lower and lower, until, within a few minutes, I sprawled sideways on the floor, Smith lying close beside me.

"The ship's sinkin'," dazoned a voice from one of the bunks. "Look at the rats."

Yan had noiselessly withdrawn, and I experienced a curious sense of isolation from my fellows--from the whole of the Western world. My throat was parched with the fumes, my head ached. The vicious atmosphere seemed contaminating. I was as one dropped--

Somewhere East of Suez, where the best is like the worst, And there ain't no Ten Commandments and a man can raise a thirst.

Smith began to whisper softly.

"We have carried it through successfully so far," he said. "I don't know if you have observed it, but there is a stair just behind you, half concealed by a ragged curtain. We are near that, and well in the dark. I have seen nothing suspicious so far--or nothing much. But if there was anything going forward it would no doubt be delayed until we new arrivals were well doped. S-SH!"

He pressed my arm to emphasize the warning. Through my half-closed eyes I perceived a shadowy form near the curtain to which he had referred. I lay like a log, but my muscles were tensed nervously.

The shadow materialized as the figure moved forward into the room with a curiously lithe movement.

The smoky lamp in the middle of the place afforded scant illumination, serving only to indicate sprawling shapes--here an extended hand, brown or yellow, there a sketchy, corpse-like face; whilst from all about rose
obscene sighings and murmurs in far-away voices—an uncanny, animal chorus. It was like a glimpse of the Inferno seen by some Chinese Dante. But so close to us stood the newcomer that I was able to make out a ghastly parchment face, with small, oblique eyes, and a misshapen head crowned with a coiled pigtail, surmounting a slight, hunched body. There was something unnatural, inhuman, about that masklike face, and something repulsive in the bent shape and the long, yellow hands clasped one upon the other.

Fu-Manchu, from Smith's account, in no way resembled this crouching apparition with the death's-head countenance and lithe movements; but an instinct of some kind told me that we were on the right scent— that this was one of the doctor's servants. How I came to that conclusion, I cannot explain; but with no doubt in my mind that this was a member of the formidable murder group, I saw the yellow man creep nearer, nearer, silently, bent and peering.

He was watching us.

Of another circumstance I became aware, and a disquieting circumstance. There were fewer murmurings and sighings from the surrounding bunks. The presence of the crouching figure had created a sudden semi-silence in the den, which could only mean that some of the supposed opium-smokers had merely feigned coma and the approach of coma.

Nayland Smith lay like a dead man, and trusting to the darkness, I, too, lay prone and still, but watched the evil face bending lower and lower, until it came within a few inches of my own. I completely closed my eyes.

Delicate fingers touched my right eyelid. Divining what was coming, I rolled my eyes up, as the lid was adroitly lifted and lowered again. The man moved away.

I had saved the situation! And noting anew the hush about me-- a hush in which I fancied many pairs of ears listened--I was glad. For just a moment I realized fully how, with the place watched back and front, we yet were cut off, were in the hands of Far Easterns, to some extent in the power of members of that most inscrutably mysterious race, the Chinese.

"Good," whispered Smith at my side. "I don't think I could have done it. He took me on trust after that. My God! what an awful face. Petrie, it's the hunchback of Cadby's notes. Ah, I thought so. Do you see that?"

I turned my eyes round as far as was possible. A man had scrambled down from one of the bunks and was following the bent figure across the room.

They passed around us quietly, the little yellow man leading, with his curious, lithe gait, and the other, an impassive Chinaman, following. The curtain was raised, and I heard footsteps receding on the stairs.

"Don't stir," whispered Smith.

An intense excitement was clearly upon him, and he communicated it to me. Who was the occupant of the room above?

Footsteps on the stair, and the Chinaman reappeared, recrossed the floor, and went out. The little, bent man went over to another bunk, this time leading up the stair one who looked like a lascar.

"Did you see his right hand?" whispered Smith. "A dacoit! They come here to report and to take orders. Petrie, Dr. Fu-Manchu is up there."

"What shall we do?"—softly.

"Wait. Then we must try to rush the stairs. It would be futile to bring in the police first. He is sure to have some other exit. I will give the word while the little yellow devil is down here. You are nearer and will have to go first, but if the hunchback follows, I can then deal with him."

Our whispered colloquy was interrupted by the return of the dacoit, who recrossed the room as the Chinaman had done, and immediately took his departure. A third man, whom Smith identified as a Malay, ascended the mysterious stairs, descended, and went out; and a fourth, whose nationality it was impossible to determine, followed. Then, as the softly moving usher crossed to a bunk on the right of the outer door--

"Up you go, Petrie," cried Smith, for further delay was dangerous and further dissimulation useless.

I leaped to my feet. Snatching my revolver from the pocket of the rough jacket I wore, I bounded to the stair and went blundering up in complete darkness. A chorus of brutish cries clamored from behind, with a muffled scream rising above them all. But Nayland Smith was close behind as I raced along a covered gangway, in a purer air, and at my heels when I crashed open a door at the end and almost fell into the room beyond.

What I saw were merely a dirty table, with some odds and ends upon it of which I was too excited to take note, an oil-lamp swung by a brass chain above, and a man sitting behind the table. But from the moment that my gaze rested upon the one who sat there, I think if the place had been an Aladdin's palace I should have had no eyes for any of its wonders.

He wore a plain yellow robe, of a hue almost identical with that of his smooth, hairless countenance. His hands were large, long and bony, and he held them knuckles upward, and rested his pointed chin upon their thinness. He had a great, high brow, crowned with sparse, neutral-colored hair.
Of his face, as it looked out at me over the dirty table, I despair of writing convincingly. It was that of an archangel of evil, and it was wholly dominated by the most uncanny eyes that ever reflected a human soul, for they were narrow and long, very slightly oblique, and of a brilliant green. But their unique horror lay in a certain filminess (it made me think of the membrana nictitans in a bird) which, obscuring them as I threw wide the door, seemed to lift as I actually passed the threshold, revealing the eyes in all their brilliant iridescence.

I know that I stopped dead, one foot within the room, for the malignant force of the man was something surpassing my experience. He was surprised by this sudden intrusion--yes, but no trace of fear showed upon that wonderful face, only a sort of pitying contempt. And, as I paused, he rose slowly to his feet, never removing his gaze from mine.

"IT'S FU-MANCHU!" cried Smith over my shoulder, in a voice that was almost a scream. "IT'S FU-MANCHU! Cover him! Shoot him dead if--"

The conclusion of that sentence I never heard.

Dr. Fu-Manchu reached down beside the table, and the floor slipped from under me.

One last glimpse I had of the fixed green eyes, and with a scream I was unable to repress I dropped, dropped, dropped, and plunged into icy water, which closed over my head.

Vaguely I had seen a spurt of flame, had heard another cry following my own, a booming sound (the trap), the flat note of a police whistle. But when I rose to the surface impenetrable darkness enveloped me; I was spitting filthy, oily liquid from my mouth, and fighting down the black terror that had me by the throat--terror of the darkness about me, of the unknown depths beneath me, of the pit into which I was cast amid stifling stenches and the lapping of tidal water.

"Smith!" I cried... "Help! Help!"

My voice seemed to beat back upon me, yet I was about to cry out again, when, mustering all my presence of mind and all my failing courage, I recognized that I had better employment of my energies, and began to swim straight ahead, desperately determined to face all the horrors of this place--to die hard if die I must.

A drop of liquid fire fell through the darkness and hissed into the water beside me!

I felt that, despite my resolution, I was going mad.

Another fiery drop--and another!

I touched a rotting wooden post and slimy timbers. I had reached one bound of my watery prison. More fire fell from above, and the scream of hysteria quivered, unuttered, in my throat.

Keeping myself afloat with increasing difficulty in my heavy garments, I threw my head back and raised my eyes.

No more drops fell, and no more drops would fall; but it was merely a question of time for the floor to collapse. For it was beginning to emit a dull, red glow.

The room above me was in flames!

It was drops of burning oil from the lamp, finding passage through the cracks in the crazy flooring, which had fallen about me--for the death trap had reclosed, I suppose, mechanically.

My saturated garments were dragging me down, and now I could hear the flames hungrily eating into the ancient rottenness overhead. Shortly that cauldron would be loosed upon my head. The glow of the flames grew brighter... and showed me the half-rotten piles upholding the building, showed me the tidal mark upon the slime-coated walls--showed me that there was no escape!

By some subterranean duct the foul place was fed from the Thames. By that duct, with the outgoing tide, my body would pass, in the wake of Mason, Cadby, and many another victim!

Rusty iron rungs were affixed to one of the walls communicating with a trap--but the bottom three were missing!

Brighter and brighter grew the awesome light the light of what should be my funeral pyre--reddenning the oily water and adding a new dread to the whispering, clammy horror of the pit. But something it showed me... a projecting beam a few feet above the water... and directly below the iron ladder!

"Merciful Heaven!" I breathed. "Have I the strength?"

A desire for laughter claimed me with sudden, all but irresistible force. I knew what it portended and fought it down--grimly, sternly.

My garments weighed upon me like a suit of mail; with my chest aching dully, my veins throbbing to bursting, I forced tired muscles to work, and, every stroke an agony, approached the beam. Nearer I swam... nearer. Its shadow fell black upon the water, which now had all the seeming of a pool of blood. Confused sounds--a remote uproar--came to my ears. I was nearly spent...I was in the shadow of the beam! If I could throw up one arm... A shrill scream sounded far above me!

"Petrie! Petrie!" (That voice must be Smith's!) "Don't touch the beam! For God's sake DON'T TOUCH THE
"Beam! Keep afloat another few seconds and I can get to you!"

Another few seconds! Was that possible?

I managed to turn, to raise my throbbing head; and I saw the strangest sight which that night yet had offered.

Nayland Smith stood upon the lowest iron rung... supported by the hideous, crook-backed Chinaman, who stood upon the rung above!

"I can't reach him!"

It was as Smith hissed the words despairingly that I looked up-- and saw the Chinaman snatch at his coiled pigtail and pull it off! With it came the wig to which it was attached; and the ghastly yellow mask, deprived of its fastenings, fell from position! "Here! Here! Be quick! Oh! be quick! You can lower this to him! Be quick! Be quick!"

A cloud of hair came falling about the slim shoulders as the speaker bent to pass this strange lifeline to Smith; and I think it was my wonder at knowing her for the girl whom that day I had surprised in Cadby's rooms which saved my life.

For I not only kept afloat, but kept my gaze upturned to that beautiful, flushed face, and my eyes fixed upon hers--which were wild with fear...for me!

Smith, by some contortion, got the false queue into my grasp, and I, with the strength of desperation, by that means seized hold upon the lowest rung. With my friend's arm round me I realized that exhaustion was even nearer than I had supposed. My last distinct memory is of the bursting of the floor above and the big burning joist hissing into the pool beneath us. Its fiery passage, striated with light, disclosed two sword blades, riveted, edges up along the top of the beam which I had striven to reach.

"The severed fingers--" I said; and swooned.

How Smith got me through the trap I do not know--nor how we made our way through the smoke and flames of the narrow passage it opened upon. My next recollection is of sitting up, with my friend's arm supporting me and Inspector Ryman holding a glass to my lips.

"Is everybody out?"

"So far as we know."

"Fu-Manchu?"

Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Do you think he may--"

"No," he said tensely. "Not until I see him lying dead before me shall I believe it."

Then memory resumed its sway. I struggled to my feet.

"Smith, where is she?" I cried. "Where is she?"

"I don't know," he answered.

"She's given us the slip, Doctor," said Inspector Weymouth, as a fire-engine came swinging round the corner of the narrow lane. "So has Mr. Singapore Charlie--and, I'm afraid, somebody else. We've got six or eight all sorts, some awake and some asleep, but I suppose we shall have to let 'em go again. Mr. Smith tells me that the girl was disguised as a Chinaman. I expect that's why she managed to slip away."

I recalled how I had been dragged from the pit by the false queue, how the strange discovery which had brought death to poor Cadby had brought life to me, and I seemed to remember, too, that Smith had dropped it as he threw his arm about me on the ladder. Her mask the girl might have retained, but her wig, I felt certain, had been dropped into the water.

It was later that night, when the brigade still were playing upon the blackened shell of what had been Shen-Yan's opium-shop, and Smith and I were speeding away in a cab from the scene of God knows how many crimes, that I had an idea.

"Smith," I said, "did you bring the pigtail with you that was found on Cadby?"

"Yes. I had hoped to meet the owner."

"Have you got it now?"

"No. I met the owner."

I thrust my hands deep into the pockets of the big pea-jacket lent to me by Inspector Ryman, leaning back in my corner.

"We shall never really excel at this business," continued Nayland Smith. "We are far too sentimental. I knew what it meant to us, Petrie, what it meant to the world, but I hadn't the heart. I owed her your life--I had to square
CHAPTER VII

NIGHT fell on Redmoat. I glanced from the window at the nocturne in silver and green which lay beneath me. To the west of the shrubbery, with its broken canopy of elms and beyond the copper beech which marked the center of its mazes, a gap offered a glimpse of the Waverney where it swept into a broad. Faint bird-calls floated over the water. These, with the whisper of leaves, alone claimed the ear.

Ideal rural peace, and the music of an English summer evening; but to my eyes, every shadow holding fantastic terrors; to my ears, every sound a signal of dread. For the deathful hand of Fu-Manchu was stretched over Redmoat, at any hour to loose strange, Oriental horrors upon its inmates.

"Well," said Nayland Smith, joining me at the window, "we had dared to hope him dead, but we know now that he lives!"

The Rev. J. D. Eltham coughed nervously, and I turned, leaning my elbow upon the table, and studied the play of expression upon the refined, sensitive face of the clergyman.

"You think I acted rightly in sending for you, Mr. Smith?"

Nayland Smith smoked furiously.

"Mr. Eltham," he replied, "you see in me a man groping in the dark. I am to-day no nearer to the conclusion of my mission than upon the day when I left Mandalay. You offer me a clew; I am here. Your affair, I believe, stands thus: A series of attempted burglaries, or something of the kind, has alarmed your household. Yesterday, returning from London with your daughter, you were both drugged in some way and, occupying a compartment to yourselves, you both slept. Your daughter awoke, and saw someone else in the carriage--a yellow-faced man who held a case of instruments in his hands."

"Yes; I was, of course, unable to enter into particulars over the telephone. The man was standing by one of the windows. Directly he observed that my daughter was awake, he stepped towards her."

"What did he do with the case in his hands?"

"She did not notice--or did not mention having noticed. In fact, as was natural, she was so frightened that she recalls nothing more, beyond the fact that she strove to arouse me, without succeeding, felt hands grasp her shoulders--and swooned."

"But someone used the emergency cord, and stopped the train."

"Greba has no recollection of having done so."

"Hm! Of course, no yellow-faced man was on the train. When did you awake?"

"I was aroused by the guard, but only when he had repeatedly shaken me."

"Upon reaching Great Yarmouth you immediately called up Scotland Yard? You acted very wisely, sir. How long were you in China?"

Mr. Eltham's start of surprise was almost comical.

"It is perhaps not strange that you should be aware of my residence in China, Mr. Smith," he said; "but my not having mentioned it may seem so. The fact is--his sensitive face flushed in palpable embarrassment--"I left China under what I may term an episcopal cloud. I have lived in retirement ever since. Unwittingly--I solemnly declare to you, Mr. Smith, unwittingly--I stirred up certain deep-seated prejudices in my endeavors to do my duty--my duty. I think you asked me how long I was in China? I was there from 1896 until 1900--four years."

"I recall the circumstances, Mr. Eltham," said Smith, with an odd note in his voice. "I have been endeavoring to think where I had come across the name, and a moment ago I remembered. I am happy to have met you, sir."

The clergyman blushed again like a girl, and slightly inclined his head, with its scanty fair hair.

"Has Redmoat, as its name implies, a moat round it? I was unable to see in the dusk."

"It remains. Redmoat--a corruption of Round Moat--was formerly a priory, disestablished by the eighth Henry in 1536." His pedantic manner was quaint at times. "But the moat is no longer flooded. In fact, we grow cabbages in part of it. If you refer to the strategic strength of the place--"he smiled, but his manner was embarrassed again--"it is considerable. I have barbed wire fencing, and--other arrangements. You see, it is a lonely spot," he added apologetically. "And now, if you will excuse me, we will resume these gruesome inquiries after the more pleasant affairs of dinner."

He left us.

"Who is our host?" I asked, as the door closed.

Smith smiled.

"You are wondering what caused the `episcopal cloud?'" he suggested. "Well, the deep-seated prejudices which our reverend friend stirred up culminated in the Boxer Risings."

"Good heavens, Smith!" I said; for I could not reconcile the diffident personality of the clergyman with the memories which those words awakened.
"He evidently should be on our danger list," my friend continued quickly; "but he has so completely effaced himself of recent years that I think it probable that someone else has only just recalled his existence to mind. The Rev. J. D. Eltham, my dear Petrie, though he may be a poor hand at saving souls, at any rate, has saved a score of Christian women from death--and worse."

"J. D. Eltham--" I began.

"Is 'Parson Dan!'" rapped Smith, "the 'Fighting Missionary,' the man who with a garrison of a dozen cripples and a German doctor held a hospital at Nan-Yang against two hundred Boxers. That's who the Rev. J. D. Eltham is! But what is he up to, now, I have yet to find out. He is keeping something back--something which has made him an object of interest to Young China!"

During dinner the matters responsible for our presence there did not hold priority in the conversation. In fact, this, for the most part, consisted in light talk of books and theaters.

Greba Eltham, the clergyman's daughter, was a charming young hostess, and she, with Vernon Denby, Mr. Eltham's nephew, completed the party. No doubt the girl's presence, in part, at any rate, led us to refrain from the subject uppermost in our minds.

These little pools of calm dotted along the torrential course of the circumstances which were bearing my friend and me onward to unknown issues form pleasant, sunny spots in my dark recollections.

So I shall always remember, with pleasure, that dinner-party at Redmoat, in the old-world dining-room; it was so very peaceful, so almost grotesquely calm. For I, within my very bones, felt it to be the calm before the storm. When, later, we men passed to the library, we seemed to leave that atmosphere behind us.

"Redmoat," said the Rev. J. D. Eltham, "has latterly become the theater of strange doings."

He stood on the hearth-rug. A shaded lamp upon the big table and candles in ancient sconces upon the mantelpiece afforded dim illumination. Mr. Eltham's nephew, Vernon Denby, lolled smoking on the window-seat, and I sat near to him. Nayland Smith paced restlessly up and down the room.

"Some months ago, almost a year," continued the clergyman, "a burglarious attempt was made upon the house. There was an arrest, and the man confessed that he had been tempted by my collection." He waved his hand vaguely towards the several cabinets about the shadowed room.

"It was shortly afterwards that I allowed my hobby for--playing at forts to run away with me." He smiled an apology. "I virtually fortified Redmoat--against trespassers of any kind, I mean. You have seen that the house stands upon a kind of large mound. This is artificial, being the buried ruins of a Roman outwork; a portion of the ancient castrum." Again he waved indicatively, this time toward the window.

"When it was a priory it was completely isolated and defended by its environing moat. Today it is completely surrounded by barbed-wire fencing. Below this fence, on the east, is a narrow stream, a tributary of the Waverney; on the north and west, the high road, but nearly twenty feet below, the banks being perpendicular. On the south is the remaining part of the moat--now my kitchen garden; but from there up to the level of the house is nearly twenty feet again, and the barbed wire must also be counted with.

"The entrance, as you know, is by the way of a kind of cutting. There is a gate at the foot of the steps (they are some of the original steps of the priory, Dr. Petrie), and another gate at the head."

He paused, and smiled around upon us boyishly.

"My secret defenses remain to be mentioned," he resumed; and, opening a cupboard, he pointed to a row of batteries, with a number of electric bells upon the wall behind. "The more vulnerable spots are connected at night with these bells," he said triumphantly. "Any attempt to scale the barbed wire or to force either gate would set two or more of these ringing. A stray cow raised one false alarm," he added, "and a careless rook threw us into a perfect panic on another occasion."

He was so boyish--so nervously brisk and acutely sensitive--that it was difficult to see in him the hero of the Nan-Yang hospital. I could only suppose that he had treated the Boxers' raid in the same spirit wherein he met would-be trespassers within the precincts of Redmoat. It had been an escapade, of which he was afterwards ashamed, as, faintly, he was ashamed of his "fortifications." "But," rapped Smith, "it was not the visit of the burglar which prompted these elaborate precautions."

Mr. Eltham coughed nervously.

"I am aware," he said, "that having invoked official aid, I must be perfectly frank with you, Mr. Smith. It was the burglar who was responsible for my continuing the wire fence all round the grounds, but the electrical contrivance followed, later, as a result of several disturbed nights. My servants grew uneasy about someone who came, they said, after dusk. No one could describe this nocturnal visitor, but certainly we found traces. I must admit that.

"Then--I received what I may term a warning. My position is a peculiar one--a peculiar one. My daughter, too, saw this prowling person, over by the Roman castrum, and described him as a yellow man. It was the incident in the train following closely upon this other, which led me to speak to the police, little as I desired to--er--court publicity."
Nayland Smith walked to a window, and looked out across the sloping lawn to where the shadows of the shrubbery lay. A dog was howling dismally somewhere.

"Your defenses are not impregnable, after all, then?" he jerked. "On our way up this evening Mr. Denby was telling us about the death of his collie a few nights ago."

The clergyman's face clouded.

"That, certainly, was alarming," he confessed.

"I had been in London for a few days, and during my absence Vernon came down, bringing the dog with him. On the night of his arrival it ran, barking, into the shrubbery yonder, and did not come out. He went to look for it with a lantern, and found it lying among the bushes, quite dead. The poor creature had been dreadfully beaten about the head."

"The gates were locked," Denby interrupted, "and no one could have got out of the grounds without a ladder and someone to assist him. But there was no sign of a living thing about. Edwards and I searched every corner."

"How long has that other dog taken to howling?" inquired Smith.

"Only since Rex's death," said Denby quickly.

"It is my mastiff," explained the clergyman, "and he is confined in the yard. He is never allowed on this side of the house."

Nayland Smith wandered aimlessly about the library.

"I am sorry to have to press you, Mr. Eltham," he said, "but what was the nature of the warning to which you referred, and from whom did it come?"

Mr. Eltham hesitated for a long time.

"I have been so unfortunate," he said at last, "in my previous efforts, that I feel assured of your hostile criticism when I tell you that I am contemplating an immediate return to Ho-Nan!"

Smith jumped round upon him as though moved by a spring.

"Then you are going back to Nan-Yang?" he cried. "Now I understand! Why have you not told me before? That is the key for which I have vainly been seeking. Your troubles date from the time of your decision to return?"

"Yes, I must admit it," confessed the clergyman diffidently.

"And your warning came from China?"

"It did."

"From a Chinaman?"

"From the Mandarin, Yen-Sun-Yat."

"Yen-Sun-Yat! My good sir! He warned you to abandon your visit? And you reject his advice? Listen to me."

Smith was intensely excited now, his eyes bright, his lean figure curiously strung up, alert. "The Mandarin Yen-Sun-Yat is one of the seven!"

"I do not follow you, Mr. Smith."

"No, sir. China to-day is not the China of '98. It is a huge secret machine, and Ho-Nan one of its most important wheels! But if, as I understand, this official is a friend of yours, believe me, he has saved your life! You would be a dead man now if it were not for your friend in China! My dear sir, you must accept his counsel."

Then, for the first time since I had made his acquaintance, "Parson Dan" showed through the surface of the Rev. J. D. Eltham.

"No, sir!" replied the clergyman—and the change in his voice was startling. "I am called to Nan-Yang. Only One may deter my going."

The admixture of deep spiritual reverence with intense truculence in his voice was dissimilar from anything I ever had heard.

"Then only One can protect you," cried Smith, "for, by Heaven, no MAN will be able to do so! Your presence in Ho-Nan can do no possible good at present. It must do harm. Your experience in 1900 should be fresh in your memory."

"Hard words, Mr. Smith."

"The class of missionary work which you favor, sir, is injurious to international peace. At the present moment, Ho-Nan is a barrel of gunpowder; you would be the lighted match. I do not willingly stand between any man and what he chooses to consider his duty, but I insist that you abandon your visit to the interior of China!"

"You insist, Mr. Smith?"

"As your guest, I regret the necessity for reminding you that I hold authority to enforce it."

Denby fidgeted uneasily. The tone of the conversation was growing harsh and the atmosphere of the library portentous with brewing storms.

There was a short, silent interval.

"This is what I had feared and expected," said the clergyman. "This was my reason for not seeking official
"The phantom Yellow Peril," said Nayland Smith, "to-day materializes under the very eyes of the Western world."

"The 'Yellow Peril'!

"You scoff, sir, and so do others. We take the proffered right hand of friendship nor inquire if the hidden left holds a knife! The peace of the world is at stake, Mr. Eltham. Unknowingly, you tamper with tremendous issues."

Mr. Eltham drew a deep breath, thrusting both hands in his pockets.

"You are painfully frank, Mr. Smith," he said; "but I like you for it. I will reconsider my position and talk this matter over again with you to-morrow."

Thus, then, the storm blew over. Yet I had never experienced such an overwhelming sense of imminent peril--of a sinister presence--as oppressed me at that moment. The very atmosphere of Redmoat was impregnated with Eastern devilry; it loaded the air like some evil perfume. And then, through the silence, cut a throbbing scream--the scream of a woman in direst fear.

"My God, it's Greba!" whispered Mr. Eltham.

CHAPTER VIII

IN what order we dashed down to the drawing-room I cannot recall. But none was before me when I leaped over the threshold and saw Miss Eltham prone by the French windows.

These were closed and bolted, and she lay with hands outstretched in the alcove which they formed. I bent over her. Nayland Smith was at my elbow.

"Get my bag" I said. "She has swooned. It is nothing serious."

Her father, pale and wide-eyed, hovered about me, muttering incoherently; but I managed to reassure him; and his gratitude when, I having administered a simple restorative, the girl sighed shudderingly and opened her eyes, was quite pathetic.

I would permit no questioning at that time, and on her father's arm she retired to her own rooms.

It was some fifteen minutes later that her message was brought to me. I followed the maid to a quaint little octagonal apartment, and Greba Eltham stood before me, the candlelight caressing the soft curves of her face and gleaming in the meshes of her rich brown hair.

When she had answered my first question she hesitated in pretty confusion.

"We are anxious to know what alarmed you, Miss Eltham."

She bit her lip and glanced with apprehension towards the window.

"I am almost afraid to tell father," she began rapidly. "He will think me imaginative, but you have been so kind. It was two green eyes! Oh! Dr. Petrie, they looked up at me from the steps leading to the lawn. And they shone like the eyes of a cat."

The words thrilled me strangely.

"Are you sure it was not a cat, Miss Eltham?"

"The eyes were too large, Dr. Petrie. There was something dreadful, most dreadful, in their appearance. I feel foolish and silly for having fainted, twice in two days! But the suspense is telling upon me, I suppose. Father thinks--she was becoming charmingly confidential, as a woman often will with a tactful physician--"that shut up here we are safe from--whatever threatens us." I noted, with concern, a repetition of the nervous shudder. "But since our return someone else has been in Redmoat!"

"Whatever do you mean, Miss Eltham?"

"Oh! I don't quite know what I do mean, Dr. Petrie. What does it ALL mean? Vernon has been explaining to me that some awful Chinaman is seeking the life of Mr. Nayland Smith. But if the same man wants to kill my father, why has he not done so?"

"I am afraid you puzzle me."

"Of course, I must do so. But--the man in the train. He could have killed us both quite easily! And--last night someone was in father's room."

"In his room!"

"I could not sleep, and I heard something moving. My room is the next one. I knocked on the wall and woke father. There was nothing; so I said it was the howling of the dog that had frightened me."

"How could anyone get into his room?"

"I cannot imagine. But I am not sure it was a man."

"Miss Eltham, you alarm me. What do you suspect?"

"You must think me hysterical and silly, but whilst father and I have been away from Redmoat perhaps the usual precautions have been neglected. Is there any creature, any large creature, which could climb up the wall to the window? Do you know of anything with a long, thin body?"
For a moment I offered no reply, studying the girl's pretty face, her eager, blue-gray eyes widely opened and fixed upon mine. She was not of the neurotic type, with her clear complexion and sun-kissed neck; her arms, healthily toned by exposure to the country airs, were rounded and firm, and she had the agile shape of a young Diana with none of the anaemic languor which breeds morbid dreams. She was frightened; yes, who would not have been? But the mere idea of this thing which she believed to be in Redmoat, without the apparition of the green eyes, must have prostrated a victim of "nerves."

"Have you seen such a creature, Miss Eltham?"
She hesitated again, glancing down and pressing her finger-tips together.

"As father awoke and called out to know why I knocked, I glanced from my window. The moonlight threw half the lawn into shadow, and just disappearing in this shadow was something-- something of a brown color, marked with sections!"

"What size and shape?"
"It moved so quickly I could form no idea of its shape; but I saw quite six feet of it flash across the grass!"
"Did you hear anything?"
"A swishing sound in the shrubbery, then nothing more."

She met my eyes expectantly. Her confidence in my powers of understanding and sympathy was gratifying, though I knew that I but occupied the position of a father-confessor.

"Have you any idea," I said, "how it came about that you awoke in the train yesterday whilst your father did not?"

"We had coffee at a refreshment-room; it must have been drugged in some way. I scarcely tasted mine, the flavor was so awful; but father is an old traveler and drank the whole of his cupful!"

Mr. Eltham's voice called from below.

"Dr. Petrie," said the girl quickly, "what do you think they want to do to him?"

"Ah!" I replied, "I wish I knew that."

"Will you think over what I have told you? For I do assure you there is something here in Redmoat--something that comes and goes in spite of father's 'fortifications'? Caesar knows there is. Listen to him. He drags at his chain so that I wonder he does not break it."

As we passed downstairs the howling of the mastiff sounded eerily through the house, as did the clank-clank of the tightening chain as he threw the weight of his big body upon it.

I sat in Smith's room that night for some time, he pacing the floor smoking and talking.

"Eltham has influential Chinese friends," he said; "but they dare not have him in Nan-Yang at present. He knows the country as he knows Norfolk; he would see things!"

"His precautions here have baffled the enemy, I think. The attempt in the train points to an anxiety to waste no opportunity. But whilst Eltham was absent (he was getting his outfit in London, by the way) they have been fixing some second string to their fiddle here. In case no opportunity offered before he returned, they provided for getting at him here!"

"But how, Smith?"

"That's the mystery. But the dead dog in the shrubbery is significant."

"Do you think some emissary of Fu-Manchu is actually inside the moat?"

"It's impossible, Petrie. You are thinking of secret passages, and so forth. There are none. Eltham has measured up every foot of the place. There isn't a rathole left unaccounted for; and as for a tunnel under the moat, the house stands on a solid mass of Roman masonry, a former camp of Hadrian's time. I have seen a very old plan of the Round Moat Priory as it was called. There is no entrance and no exit save by the steps. So how was the dog killed?"

I knocked out my pipe on a bar of the grate.

"We are in the thick of it here," I said.

"We are always in the thick of it," replied Smith. "Our danger is no greater in Norfolk than in London. But what do they want to do? That man in the train with the case of instruments--WHAT instruments? Then the apparition of the green eyes to-night. Can they have been the eyes of Fu-Manchu? Is some peculiarly unique outrage contemplated-- something calling for the presence of the master?"

"He may have to prevent Eltham's leaving England without killing him."

"Quite so. He probably has instructions to be merciful. But God help the victim of Chinese mercy!"

I went to my own room then. But I did not even undress, refilling my pipe and seating myself at the open window. Having looked upon the awful Chinese doctor, the memory of his face, with its filmed green eyes, could never leave me. The idea that he might be near at that moment was a poor narcotic.

The howling and baying of the mastiff was almost continuous.

When all else in Redmoat was still the dog's mournful note yet rose on the night with something menacing in it. I
sat looking out across the sloping turf to where the shrubbery showed as a black island in a green sea. The moon swam in a cloudless sky, and the air was warm and fragrant with country scents.

It was in the shrubbery that Denby's collie had met his mysterious death--that the thing seen by Miss Eltham had disappeared. What uncanny secret did it hold?

Caesar became silent.

As the stopping of a clock will sometimes awaken a sleeper, the abrupt cessation of that distant howling, to which I had grown accustomed, now recalled me from a world of gloomy imaginings.

I glanced at my watch in the moonlight. It was twelve minutes past midnight.

As I replaced it the dog suddenly burst out afresh, but now in a tone of sheer anger. He was alternately howling and snarling in a way that sounded new to me. The crashes, as he leapt to the end of his chain, shook the building in which he was confined. It was as I stood up to lean from the window and commanded a view of the corner of the house that he broke loose.

With a hoarse bay he took that decisive leap, and I heard his heavy body fall against the wooden wall. There followed a strange, guttural cry...and the growling of the dog died away at the rear of the house. He was out! But that guttural note had not come from the throat of a dog. Of what was he in pursuit?

At which point his mysterious quarry entered the shrubbery I do not know. I only know that I saw absolutely nothing, until Caesar's lithe shape was streaked across the lawn, and the great creature went crashing into the undergrowth.

Then a faint sound above and to my right told me that I was not the only spectator of the scene. I leaned farther from the window.

"Is that you, Miss Eltham?" I asked.

"Oh, Dr. Petrie!" she said. "I am so glad you are awake. Can we do nothing to help? Caesar will be killed."

"Did you see what he went after?"

"No," she called back, and drew her breath sharply.

For a strange figure went racing across the grass. It was that of a man in a blue dressing-gown, who held a lantern high before him, and a revolver in his right hand. Coincident with my recognition of Mr. Eltham he leaped, plunging into the shrubbery in the wake of the dog.

But the night held yet another surprise; for Nayland Smith's voice came:

"Come back! Come back, Eltham!"

I ran out into the passage and downstairs. The front door was open. A terrible conflict waged in the shrubbery, between the mastiff and something else. Passing round to the lawn, I met Smith fully dressed. He just had dropped from a first-floor window.

"The man is mad!" he snapped. "Heaven knows what lurks there! He should not have gone alone!"

Together we ran towards the dancing light of Eltham's lantern. The sounds of conflict ceased suddenly. Stumbling over stumps and lashed by low-sweeping branches, we struggled forward to where the clergyman knelt amongst the bushes. He glanced up with tears in his eyes, as was revealed by the dim light.

"Look!" he cried.

The body of the dog lay at his feet.

It was pitiable to think that the fearless brute should have met his death in such a fashion, and when I bent and examined him I was glad to find traces of life.

"Drag him out. He is not dead," I said.

"And hurry," rapped Smith, peering about him right and left.

So we three hurried from that haunted place, dragging the dog with us. We were not molested. No sound disturbed the now perfect stillness.

By the lawn edge we came upon Denby, half dressed; and almost immediately Edwards the gardener also appeared. The white faces of the house servants showed at one window, and Miss Eltham called to me from her room:

"Is he dead?"

"No," I replied; "only stunned."

We carried the dog round to the yard, and I examined his head. It had been struck by some heavy blunt instrument, but the skull was not broken. It is hard to kill a mastiff.

"Will you attend to him, Doctor?" asked Eltham. "We must see that the villain does not escape."

His face was grim and set. This was a different man from the diffident clergyman we knew: this was "Parson Dan" again.

I accepted the care of the canine patient, and Eltham with the others went off for more lights to search the shrubbery. As I was washing a bad wound between the mastiff's ears, Miss Eltham joined me. It was the sound of
her voice, I think, rather than my more scientific ministration, which recalled Caesar to life. For, as she entered, his
tail wagged feebly, and a moment later he struggled to his feet-- one of which was injured.

Having provided for his immediate needs, I left him in charge of his young mistress and joined the search party. They had entered the shrubbery from four points and drawn blank.
"There is absolutely nothing there, and no one can possibly have left the grounds," said Eltham amazedly.

We stood on the lawn looking at one another, Nayland Smith, angry but thoughtful, tugging at the lobe of his left ear, as was his habit in moments of perplexity.

CHAPTER IX

WITH the first coming of light, Eltham, Smith and I tested the electrical contrivances from every point. They were in perfect order. It became more and more incomprehensible how anyone could have entered and quitted Redmoat during the night. The barbed-wire fencing was intact, and bore no signs of having been tampered with.

Smith and I undertook an exhaustive examination of the shrubbery.

At the spot where we had found the dog, some five paces to the west of the copper beech, the grass and weeds were trampled and the surrounding laurels and rhododendrons bore evidence of a struggle, but no human footprint could be found.
"The ground is dry," said Smith. "We cannot expect much."
"In my opinion," I said, "someone tried to get at Caesar; his presence is dangerous. And in his rage he broke loose."
"I think so, too," agreed Smith. "But why did this person make for here? And how, having mastered the dog, get out of Redmoat? I am open to admit the possibility of someone's getting in during the day whilst the gates are open, and hiding until dusk. But how in the name of all that's wonderful does he GET OUT? He must possess the attributes of a bird."

I thought of Greba Eltham's statements, reminding my friend of her description of the thing which she had seen passing into this strangely haunted shrubbery.
"That line of speculation soon takes us out of our depth, Petrie," he said. "Let us stick to what we can understand, and that may help us to a clearer idea of what, at present, is incomprehensible. My view of the case to date stands thus:

"(1) Eltham, having rashly decided to return to the interior of China, is warned by an official whose friendship he has won in some way to stay in England.

"(2) I know this official for one of the Yellow group represented in England by Dr. Fu-Manchu.

"(3) Several attempts, of which we know but little, to get at Eltham are frustrated, presumably by his curious 'defenses.' An attempt in a train fails owing to Miss Eltham's distaste for refreshment-room coffee. An attempt here fails owing to her insomnia.

"(4) During Eltham's absence from Redmoat certain preparations are made for his return. These lead to:

"(a) The death of Denby's collie;

"(b) The things heard and seen by Miss Eltham;

"(c) The things heard and seen by us all last night.

"So that the clearing up of my fourth point--id est, the discovery of the nature of these preparations--becomes our immediate concern. The prime object of these preparations, Petrie, was to enable someone to gain access to Eltham's room. The other events are incidental. The dogs HAD to be got rid of, for instance; and there is no doubt that Miss Eltham's wakefulness saved her father a second time."

"But from what? For Heaven's sake, from what?"

Smith glanced about into the light-patched shadows.
"From a visit by someone--perhaps by Fu-Manchu himself," he said in a hushed voice. "The object of that visit I hope we may never learn; for that would mean that it had been achieved."

"Smith," I said, "I do not altogether understand you; but do you think he has some incredible creature hidden here somewhere? It would be like him."

"I begin to suspect the most formidable creature in the known world to be hidden here. I believe Fu-Manchu is somewhere inside Redmoat!"

Our conversation was interrupted at this point by Denby, who came to report that he had examined the moat, the roadside, and the bank of the stream, but found no footprints or clew of any kind.
"No one left the grounds of Redmoat last night, I think," he said. And his voice had awe in it.

That day dragged slowly on. A party of us scoured the neighborhood for traces of strangers, examining every foot of the Roman ruin hard by; but vainly.
"May not your presence here induce Fu-Manchu to abandon his plans?" I asked Smith.
"I think not," he replied. "You see, unless we can prevail upon him, Eltham sails in a fortnight. So the Doctor has
no time to waste. Furthermore, I have an idea that his arrangements are of such a character that they MUST go forward. He might turn aside, of course, to assassinate me, if opportunity arose! But we know, from experience, that he permits nothing to interfere with his schemes."

There are few states, I suppose, which exact so severe a toll from one's nervous system as the ANTICIPATION of calamity.

All anticipation is keener, be it of joy or pain, than the reality whereof it is a mental forecast; but that inactive waiting at Redmoat, for the blow which we knew full well to be pending exceeded in its nerve taxation, anything I hitherto had experienced.

I felt as one bound upon an Aztec altar, with the priest's obsidian knife raised above my breast!

Secret and malign forces throbbed about us; forces against which we had no armor. Dreadful as it was, I count it a mercy that the climax was reached so quickly. And it came suddenly enough; for there in that quiet Norfolk home we found ourselves at hand grips with one of the mysterious horrors which characterized the operations of Dr. Fu-Manchu. It was upon us before we realized it. There is no incidental music to the dramas of real life.

As we sat on the little terrace in the creeping twilight, I remember thinking how the peace of the scene gave the lie to my fears that we bordered upon tragic things. Then Caesar, who had been a docile patient all day, began howling again; and I saw Greba Eltham shudder.

I caught Smith's eye, and was about to propose our retirement indoors, when the party was broken up in more turbulent fashion. I suppose it was the presence of the girl which prompted Denby to the rash act, a desire personally to distinguish himself. But, as I recalled afterwards, his gaze had rarely left the shrubbery since dusk, save to seek her face, and now he leaped wildly to his feet, overturning his chair, and dashed across the grass to the trees.

"Did you see it?" he yelled. "Did you see it?"

He evidently carried a revolver. For from the edge of the shrubbery a shot sounded, and in the flash we saw Denby with the weapon raised.

"Greba, go in and fasten the windows," cried Eltham. "Mr. Smith, will you enter the bushes from the west. Dr. Petrie, east. Edwards, Edwards--" And he was off across the lawn with the nervous activity of a cat.

As I made off in an opposite direction I heard the gardener's voice from the lower gate, and I saw Eltham's plan. It was to surround the shrubbery.

Two more shots and two flashes from the dense heart of greenwood. Then a loud cry--I thought, from Denby--and a second, muffled one.

Following--silence, only broken by the howling of the mastiff.

I sprinted through the rose garden, leaped heedlessly over a bed of geranium and heliotrope, and plunged in among the bushes and under the elms. Away on the left I heard Edwards shouting, and Eltham's answering voice.

"Denby!" I cried, and yet louder: "Denby!"

But the silence fell again.

Dusk was upon Redmoat now, but from sitting in the twilight my eyes had grown accustomed to gloom, and I could see fairly well what lay before me. Not daring to think what might lurk above, below, around me, I pressed on into the midst of the thicket.

"Vernon!" came Eltham's voice from one side.

"Bear more to the right, Edwards," I heard Nayland Smith cry directly ahead of me.

With an eerie and indescribable sensation of impending disaster upon me, I thrust my way through to a gray patch which marked a break in the elmen roof. At the foot of the copper beech I almost fell over Eltham. Then Smith plunged into view. Lastly, Edwards the gardener rounded a big rhododendron and completed the party.

We stood quite still for a moment.

A faint breeze whispered through the beech leaves.

"Where is he?"

I cannot remember who put it into words; I was too dazed with amazement to notice. Then Eltham began shouting:

"Vernon! Vernon! VERNON!"

His voice pitched higher upon each repetition. There was something horrible about that vain calling, under the whispering beech, with shrubs banked about us cloaking God alone could know what.

From the back of the house came Caesar's faint reply.

"Quick! Lights!" rapped Smith. "Every lamp you have!"

Off we went, dodging laurels and privets, and poured out on to the lawn, a disordered company. Eltham's face was deathly pale, and his jaw set hard. He met my eye.

"God forgive me!" he said. "I could do murder to-night!"

He was a man composed of strange perplexities.
It seemed an age before the lights were found. But at last we returned to the bushes, really after a very brief delay; and ten minutes sufficed us to explore the entire shrubbery, for it was not extensive. We found his revolver, but there was no one there--nothing.

When we all stood again on the lawn, I thought that I had never seen Smith so haggard.

"What in Heaven's name can we do?" he muttered. "What does it mean?"

He expected no answer; for there was none to offer one.

"Search! Everywhere," said Eltham hoarsely.

He ran off into the rose garden, and began beating about among the flowers like a madman, muttering: "Vernon! Vernon!" For close upon an hour we all searched. We searched every square yard, I think, within the wire fencing, and found no trace. Miss Eltham slipped out in the confusion, and joined with the rest of us in that frantic hunt. Some of the servants assisted too.

It was a group terrified and awestricken which came together again on the terrace. One and then another would give up, until only Eltham and Smith were missing. Then they came back together from examining the steps to the lower gate.

Eltham dropped on to a rustic seat, and sank his head in his hands.

Nayland Smith paced up and down like a newly caged animal, snapping his teeth together and tugging at his ear.

Possessed by some sudden idea, or pressed to action by his tumultuous thoughts, he snatched up a lantern and strode silently off across the grass and to the shrubbery once more. I followed him. I think his idea was that he might surprise anyone who lurked there. He surprised himself, and all of us.

For right at the margin he tripped and fell flat. I ran to him.

He had fallen over the body of Denby, which lay there!

Denby had not been there a few moments before, and how he came to be there now we dared not conjecture. Mr. Eltham joined us, uttered one short, dry sob, and dropped upon his knees. Then we were carrying Denby back to the house, with the mastiff howling a marche funebre.

We laid him on the grass where it sloped down from the terrace. Nayland Smith's haggard face was terrible. But the stark horror of the thing inspired him to that, which conceived earlier, had saved Denby. Twisting suddenly to Eltham, he roared in a voice audible beyond the river:

"Heavens! we are fools! LOOSE THE DOG!"

"But the dog--" I began.

Smith clapped his hand over my mouth.

"I know he's crippled," he whispered. "But if anything human lurks there, the dog will lead us to it. If a MAN is there, he will fly! Why did we not think of it before. Fools, fools!" He raised his voice again. "Keep him on leash, Edwards. He will lead us."

The scheme succeeded.

Edwards barely had started on his errand when bells began ringing inside the house.

"Wait!" snapped Eltham, and rushed indoors.

A moment later he was out again, his eyes gleaming madly. "Above the moat," he panted. And we were off en masse round the edge of the trees.

It was dark above the moat; but not so dark as to prevent our seeing a narrow ladder of thin bamboo joints and silken cord hanging by two hooks from the top of the twelve-foot wire fence. There was no sound.

"He's out!" screamed Eltham. "Down the steps!"

We all ran our best and swiftest. But Eltham outran us. Like a fury he tore at bolts and bars, and like a fury sprang out into the road. Straight and white it showed to the acclivity by the Roman ruin. But no living thing moved upon it. The distant baying of the dog was borne to our ears.

"Curse it! he's crippled," hissed Smith. "Without him, as well pursue a shadow!"

A few hours later the shrubbery yielded up its secret, a simple one enough: A big cask sunk in a pit, with a laurel shrub cunningly affixed to its movable lid, which was further disguised with tufts of grass. A slender bamboo-jointed rod lay near the fence. It had a hook on the top, and was evidently used for attaching the ladder.

"It was the end of this ladder which Miss Eltham saw," said Smith, "as he trailed it behind him into the shrubbery when she interrupted him in her fathers room. He and whomever he had with him doubtless slipped in during the daytime--whilst Eltham was absent in London-- bringing the prepared cask and all necessary implements with them. They concealed themselves somewhere--probably in the shrubbery-- and during the night made the cache. The excavated earth would be disposed of on the flower-beds; the dummy bush they probably had ready. You see, the problem of getting IN was never a big one. But owing to the 'defenses' it was impossible (whilst Eltham was in residence at any rate) to get OUT after dark. For Fu-Manchu's purposes, then, a working-base INSIDE Redmoat was essential. His servant--for he needed assistance-- must have been in hiding somewhere outside; Heaven knows
During the day they could come or go by the gates, as we have already noted."

"You think it was the Doctor himself?"

"It seems possible. Who else has eyes like the eyes Miss Eltham saw from the window last night?"

Then remains to tell the nature of the outrage whereby Fu-Manchu had planned to prevent Eltham's leaving England for China. This we learned from Denby. For Denby was not dead.

It was easy to divine that he had stumbled upon the fiendish visitor at the very entrance to his burrow; had been stunned (judging from the evidence, with a sand-bag), and dragged down into the cache—to which he must have lain in such dangerous proximity as to render detection of the dummy bush possible in removing him. The quickest expedient, then, had been to draw him beneath. When the search of the shrubbery was concluded, his body had been borne to the edge of the bushes and laid where we found it.

Why his life had been spared, I cannot conjecture, but provision had been made against his recovering consciousness and revealing the secret of the shrubbery. The ruse of releasing the mastiff alone had terminated the visit of the unbidden guest within Redmoat.

Denby made a very slow recovery; and, even when convalescent, consciously added not one fact to those we already had collated; his memory had completely deserted him!

This, in my opinion, as in those of the several specialists consulted, was due, not to the blow on the head, but to the presence, slightly below and to the right of the first cervical curve of the spine, of a minute puncture—undoubtedly caused by a hypodermic syringe. Then, unconsciously, poor Denby furnished the last link in the chain; for undoubtedly, by means of this operation, Fu-Manchu had designed to efface from Eltham's mind his plans of return to Ho-Nan.

The nature of the fluid which could produce such mental symptoms was a mystery—a mystery which defied Western science: one of the many strange secrets of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

CHAPTER X

Since Nayland Smith's return from Burma I had rarely taken up a paper without coming upon evidences of that seething which had cast up Dr. Fu-Manchu. Whether, hitherto, such items had escaped my attention or had seemed to demand no particular notice, or whether they now became increasingly numerous, I was unable to determine.

One evening, some little time after our sojourn in Norfolk, in glancing through a number of papers which I had brought in with me, I chanced upon no fewer than four items of news bearing more or less directly upon the grim business which engaged my friend and I.

No white man, I honestly believe, appreciates the unemotional cruelty of the Chinese. Throughout the time that Dr. Fu-Manchu remained in England, the press preserved a uniform silence upon the subject of his existence. This was due to Nayland Smith. But, as a result, I feel assured that my account of the Chinaman's deeds will, in many quarters, meet with an incredulous reception.

I had been at work, earlier in the evening, upon the opening chapters of this chronicle, and I had realized how difficult it would be for my reader, amid secure and cozy surroundings, to credit any human being with a callous villainy great enough to conceive and to put into execution such a death pest as that directed against Sir Crichton Davey.

One would expect God's worst man to shrink from employing—against however vile an enemy—such an instrument as the Zayat Kiss. So thinking, my eye was caught by the following:—

EXPRESS CORRESPONDENT
NEW YORK.

"Secret service men of the United States Government are searching the South Sea Islands for a certain Hawaiian from the island of Maui, who, it is believed, has been selling poisonous scorpions to Chinese in Honolulu anxious to get rid of their children.

"Infanticide, by scorpion and otherwise, among the Chinese, has increased so terribly that the authorities have started a searching inquiry, which has led to the hunt for the scorpion dealer of Maui.

"Practically all the babies that die mysteriously are unwanted girls, and in nearly every case the parents promptly ascribe the death to the bite of a scorpion, and are ready to produce some more or less poisonous insect in support of the statement.

"The authorities have no doubt that infanticide by scorpion bite is a growing practice, and orders have been given to hunt down the scorpion dealer at any cost."

Is it any matter for wonder that such a people had produced a Fu-Manchu? I pasted the cutting into a scrap-book, determined that, if I lived to publish my account of those days, I would quote it therein as casting a sidelight upon Chinese character.

A Reuter message to The Globe and a paragraph in The Star also furnished work for my scissors. Here were evidences of the deep-seated unrest, the secret turmoil, which manifested itself so far from its center as peaceful
England in the person of the sinister Doctor.

"HONG KONG, Friday.

"Li Hon Hung, the Chinaman who fired at the Governor yesterday, was charged before the magistrate with shooting at him with intent to kill, which is equivalent to attempted murder. The prisoner, who was not defended, pleaded guilty. The Assistant Crown Solicitor, who prosecuted, asked for a remand until Monday, which was granted.

"Snapshots taken by the spectators of the outrage yesterday disclosed the presence of an accomplice, also armed with a revolver. It is reported that this man, who was arrested last night, was in possession of incriminating documentary evidence."

Later.

"Examination of the documents found on Li Hon Hung's accomplice has disclosed the fact that both men were well financed by the Canton Triad Society, the directors of which had enjoined the assassination of Sir F. M. or Mr. C. S., the Colonial Secretary. In a report prepared by the accomplice for dispatch to Canton, also found on his person, he expressed regret that the attempt had failed."--Reuter.

"It is officially reported in St. Petersburg that a force of Chinese soldiers and villagers surrounded the house of a Russian subject named Said Effendi, near Khotan, in Chinese Turkestan.

"They fired at the house and set it in flames. There were in the house about 100 Russians, many of whom were killed.

"The Russian Government has instructed its Minister at Peking to make the most vigorous representations on the subject."--Reuter.

Finally, in a Personal Column, I found the following:--

"HO-NAN. Have abandoned visit.--ELTHAM."

I had just pasted it into my book when Nayland Smith came in and threw himself into an arm-chair, facing me across the table. I showed him the cutting.

"I am glad, for Eltham's sake--and for the girl's," was his comment. "But it marks another victory for Fu-Manchu! Just Heaven! Why is retribution delayed!"

Smith's darkly tanned face had grown leaner than ever since he had begun his fight with the most uncanny opponent, I suppose, against whom a man ever had pitted himself. He stood up and began restlessly to pace the room, furiously stuffing tobacco into his briar.

"I have seen Sir Lionel Barton," he said abruptly; "and, to put the whole thing in a nutshell, he has laughed at me! During the months that I have been wondering where he had gone to he has been somewhere in Egypt. He certainly bears a charmed life, for on the evidence of his letter to The Times he has seen things in Tibet which Fu-Manchu would have the West blind to; in fact, I think he has found a new keyhole to the gate of the Indian Empire!"

Long ago we had placed the name of Sir Lionel Barton upon the list of those whose lives stood between Fu-Manchu and the attainment of his end. Orientalist and explorer, the fearless traveler who first had penetrated to Lhassa, who thrice, as a pilgrim, had entered forbidden Mecca, he now had turned his attention again to Tibet--thereby signing his own death-warrant.

"That he has reached England alive is a hopeful sign?" I suggested.

Smith shook his head, and lighted the blackened briar.

"England at present is the web," he replied. "The spider will be waiting. Petrie, I sometimes despair. Sir Lionel is an impossible man to shepherd. You ought to see his house at Finchley. A low, squat place completely hemmed in by trees. Damp as a swamp; smells like a jungle. Everything topsy-turvy. He only arrived to-day, and he is working and eating (and sleeping I expect), in a study that looks like an earthquake at Sotheby's auction-rooms. The rest of the house is half a menagerie and half a circus. He has a Bedouin groom, a Chinese body-servant, and Heaven only knows what other strange people!"

"Chinese!"

"Yes, I saw him; a squinting Cantonease he calls Kwee. I don't like him. Also, there is a secretary known as Strozza, who has an unpleasing face. He is a fine linguist, I understand, and is engaged upon the Spanish notes for Barton's forthcoming book on the Mayapan temples. By the way, all Sir Lionel's baggage disappeared from the landing-stage-- including his Tibetan notes."

"Significant!"

"Of course. But he argues that he has crossed Tibet from the Kuen-Lun to the Himalayas without being assassinated, and therefore that it is unlikely he will meet with that fate in London. I left him dictating the book from memory, at the rate of about two hundred words a minute."

"He is wasting no time."

"Wasting time! In addition to the Yucatan book and the work on Tibet, he has to read a paper at the Institute next
week about some tomb he has unearthed in Egypt. As I came away, a van drove up from the docks and a couple of fellows delivered a sarcophagus as big as a boat. It is unique, according to Sir Lionel, and will go to the British Museum after he has examined it. The man crams six months' work into six weeks; then he is off again."

"What do you propose to do?"

"What CAN I do? I know that Fu-Manchu will make an attempt upon him. I cannot doubt it. Ugh! that house gave me the shudders. No sunlight, I'll swear, Petrie, can ever penetrate to the rooms, and when I arrived this afternoon clouds of gnats floated like motes wherever a stray beam filtered through the trees of the avenue. There's a steamy smell about the place that is almost malarious, and the whole of the west front is covered with a sort of monkey-creeper, which he has imported at some time or other. It has a close, exotic perfume that is quite in the picture. I tell you, the place was made for murder."

"Have you taken any precautions?"

"I called at Scotland Yard and sent a man down to watch the house, but--"

He shrugged his shoulders helplessly. "What is Sir Lionel like?"

"A madman, Petrie. A tall, massive man, wearing a dirty dressing-gown of neutral color; a man with untidy gray hair and a bristling mustache, keen blue eyes, and a brown skin; who wears a short beard or rarely shaves--I don't know which. I left him striding about among the thousand and one curiosities of that incredible room, picking his way through his antique furniture, works of reference, manuscripts, mummies, spears, pottery and what not--sometimes kicking a book from his course, or stumbling over a stuffed crocodile or a Mexican mask--alternately dictating and conversing. Phew!"

For some time we were silent. "Smith" I said, "we are making no headway in this business. With all the forces arrayed against him, Fu-Manchu still eludes us, still pursues his devilish, inscrutable way."

Nayland Smith nodded. "And we don't know all," he said. "We mark such and such a man as one alive to the Yellow Peril, and we warn him--if we have time. Perhaps he escapes; perhaps he does not. But what do we know, Petrie, of those others who may die every week by his murderous agency? We cannot know EVERYONE who has read the riddle of China. I never see a report of someone found drowned, of an apparent suicide, of a sudden, though seemingly natural death, without wondering. I tell you, Fu-Manchu is omnipresent; his tentacles embrace everything. I said that Sir Lionel must bear a charmed life. The fact that WE are alive is a miracle."

He glanced at his watch. "Nearly eleven," he said. "But sleep seems a waste of time--apart from its dangers."

We heard a bell ring. A few moments later followed a knock at the room door. "Come in!" I cried.

A girl entered with a telegram addressed to Smith. His jaw looked very square in the lamplight, and his eyes shone like steel as he took it from her and opened the envelope. He glanced at the form, stood up and passed it to me, reaching for his hat, which lay upon my writing-table. "God help us, Petrie!" he said.

This was the message: "Sir Lionel Barton murdered. Meet me at his house at once.--WEYMOUTH, INSPECTOR."

CHAPTER XI

ALTHOUGH we avoided all unnecessary delay, it was close upon midnight when our cab swung round into a darkly shadowed avenue, at the farther end of which, as seen through a tunnel, the moonlight glittered upon the windows of Rowan House, Sir Lionel Barton's home.

Stepping out before the porch of the long, squat building, I saw that it was banked in, as Smith had said, by trees and shrubs. The facade showed mantled in the strange exotic creeper which he had mentioned, and the air was pungent with an odor of decaying vegetation, with which mingled the heavy perfume of the little nocturnal red flowers which bloomed luxuriantly upon the creeper.

The place looked a veritable wilderness, and when we were admitted to the hall by Inspector Weymouth I saw that the interior was in keeping with the exterior, for the hall was constructed from the model of some apartment in an Assyrian temple, and the squat columns, the low seats, the hangings, all were eloquent of neglect, being thickly dust-coated. The musty smell, too, was almost as pronounced here as outside, beneath the trees.

To a library, whose contents overflowed in many literary torrents upon the floor, the detective conducted us. "Good heavens!!" I cried, "what's that?"

Something leaped from the top of the bookcase, ambled silently across the littered carpet, and passed from the library like a golden streak. I stood looking after it with startled eyes. Inspector Weymouth laughed dryly.
"It's a young puma, or a civet-cat, or something, Doctor," he said. "This house is full of surprises--and
mysteries."

His voice was not quite steady, I thought, and he carefully closed the door ere proceeding further.
"Where is he?" asked Nayland Smith harshly. "How was it done?"

Weymouth sat down and lighted a cigar which I offered him.
"I thought you would like to hear what led up to it--so far as we know-- before seeing him?"

Smith nodded.

"Well," continued the Inspector, "the man you arranged to send down from the Yard got here all right and took
up a post in the road outside, where he could command a good view of the gates. He saw and heard nothing, until
going on for half-past ten, when a young lady turned up and went in."

"A young lady?"

"Miss Edmonds, Sir Lionel's shorthand typist. She had found, after getting home, that her bag, with her purse in,
was missing, and she came back to see if she had left it here. She gave the alarm. My man heard the row from the
road and came in. Then he ran out and rang us up. I immediately wired for you."

"He heard the row, you say. What row?"

"Miss Edmonds went into violent hysterics!"

Smith was pacing the room now in tense excitement.
"Describe what he saw when he came in."

"He saw a negro footman--there isn't an Englishman in the house-- trying to pacify the girl out in the hall yonder,
and a Malay and another colored man beating their foreheads and howling. There was no sense to be got out of any
of them, so he started to investigate for himself. He had taken the bearings of the place earlier in the evening, and
from the light in a window on the ground floor had located the study; so he set out to look for the door. When he
found it, it was locked from the inside."

"Well?"

"He went out and round to the window. There's no blind, and from the shrubbery you can see into the lumber-
room known as the study. He looked in, as apparently Miss Edmonds had done before him. What he saw accounted
for her hysterics."

Both Smith and I were hanging upon his words.

"All amongst the rubbish on the floor a big Egyptian mummy case was lying on its side, and face downwards,
with his arms thrown across it, lay Sir Lionel Barton."

"My God! Yes. Go on."

"There was only a shaded reading-lamp alight, and it stood on a chair, shining right down on him; it made a
patch of light on the floor, you understand." The Inspector indicated its extent with his hands. "Well, as the man
smashed the glass and got the window open, and was just climbing in, he saw something else, so he says."

He paused.
"What did he see?" demanded Smith shortly.

"A sort of GREEN MIST, sir. He says it seemed to be alive. It moved over the floor, about a foot from the
ground, going away from him and towards a curtain at the other end of the study."

Nayland Smith fixed his eyes upon the speaker.

"Where did he first see this green mist?"

"He says, Mr. Smith, that he thinks it came from the mummy case."

"Yes; go on."

"It is to his credit that he climbed into the room after seeing a thing like that. He did. He turned the body over,
and Sir Lionel looked horrible. He was quite dead. Then Croxted--that's the man's name--went over to this curtain.
There was a glass door--shut. He opened it, and it gave on a conservatory--a place stacked from the tiled floor to the
glass roof with more rubbish. It was dark inside, but enough light came from the study--it's really a drawing-room,
by the way-- as he'd turned all the lamps on, to give him another glimpse of this green, crawling mist. There are
three steps to go down. On the steps lay a dead Chinaman."

"A dead Chinaman!"

"A dead CHINAMAN."

"Doctor seen them?" rapped Smith.

"Yes; a local man. He was out of his depth, I could see. Contradicted himself three times. But there's no need for
another opinion--until we get the coroner's."

"And Croxted?"

"Croxted was taken ill, Mr. Smith, and had to be sent home in a cab."

"What ails him?"
Detective-Inspector Weymouth raised his eyebrows and carefully knocked the ash from his cigar.

"He held out until I came, gave me the story, and then fainted right away. He said that something in the conservatory seemed to get him by the throat."

"Did he mean that literally?"

"I couldn't say. We had to send the girl home, too, of course."

Nayland Smith was pulling thoughtfully at the lobe of his left ear.

"Got any theory?" he jerked.

Weymouth shrugged his shoulders.

"Not one that includes the green mist," he said. "Shall we go in now?"

We crossed the Assyrian hall, where the members of that strange household were gathered in a panic-stricken group. They numbered four. Two of them were negroes, and two Easterns of some kind. I missed the Chinaman, Kwee, of whom Smith had spoken, and the Italian secretary; and from the way in which my friend peered about the shadows of the hall I divined that he, too, wondered at their absence. We entered Sir Lionel's study—an apartment which I despair of describing.

Nayland Smith's words, "an earthquake at Sotheby's auction-rooms," leaped to my mind at once; for the place was simply stacked with curious litter—loot of Africa, Mexico and Persia. In a clearing by the hearth a gas stove stood upon a packing-case, and about it lay a number of utensils for camp cookery. The odor of rotting vegetation, mingled with the insistent perfume of the strange night-blooming flowers, was borne in through the open window.

In the center of the floor, beside an overturned sarcophagus, lay a figure in a neutral-colored dressing-gown, face downwards, and arms thrust forward and over the side of the ancient Egyptian mummy case.

My friend advanced and knelt beside the dead man.

"Good God!"

Smith sprang upright and turned with an extraordinary expression to Inspector Weymouth.

"You do not know Sir Lionel Barton by sight?" he rapped.

"No," began Weymouth, "but--"

"This is not Sir Lionel. This is Strozza, the secretary."

"What!" shouted Weymouth.

"Where is the other—the Chinaman—quick!" cried Smith.

"I have had him left where he was found—on the conservatory steps," said the Inspector.

Smith ran across the room to where, beyond the open door, a glimpse might be obtained of stacked-up curiosities. Holding back the curtain to allow more light to penetrate, he bent forward over a crumpled-up figure which lay upon the steps below.

"It is!" he cried aloud. "It is Sir Lionel's servant, Kwee."

Weymouth and I looked at one another across the body of the Italian; then our eyes turned together to where my friend, grim-faced, stood over the dead Chinaman. A breeze whispered through the leaves; a great wave of exotic perfume swept from the open window towards the curtained doorway.

It was a breath of the East—that stretched out a yellow hand to the West. It was symbolic of the subtle, intangible power manifested in Dr. Fu-Manchu, as Nayland Smith—lean, agile, bronzed with the suns of Burma, was symbolic of the clean British efficiency which sought to combat the insidious enemy.

"One thing is evident," said Smith: "no one in the house, Strozza excepted, knew that Sir Lionel was absent."

"How do you arrive at that?" asked Weymouth.

"The servants, in the hall, are bewailing him as dead. If they had seen him go out they would know that it must be someone else who lies here."

"What about the Chinaman?"

"Since there is no other means of entrance to the conservatory save through the study, Kwee must have hidden himself there at some time when his master was absent from the room."

"Croxted found the communicating door closed. What killed the Chinaman?"

"Both Miss Edmonds and Croxted found the study door locked from the inside. What killed Strozza?" retorted Smith.

"You will have noted," continued the Inspector, "that the secretary is wearing Sir Lionel's dressing-gown. It was seeing him in that, as she looked in at the window, which led Miss Edmonds to mistake him for her employer—and consequently to put us on the wrong scent."

"He wore it in order that anybody looking in at the window would be sure to make that mistake," rapped Smith.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because he came here for a felonious purpose. See." Smith stooped and took up several tools from the litter on the floor. "There lies the lid. He came to open the sarcophagus. It contained the mummy of some notable person who
flourished under Meneptah II; and Sir Lionel told me that a number of valuable ornaments and jewels probably were secreted amongst the wrappings. He proposed to open the thing and to submit the entire contents to examination to-night. He evidently changed his mind--fortunately for himself."

I ran my fingers through my hair in perplexity.
"Then what has become of the mummy?"
Nayland Smith laughed dryly.
"It has vanished in the form of a green vapor apparently," he said. "Look at Strozza's face."

He turned the body over, and, used as I was to such spectacles, the contorted features of the Italian filled me with horror, so--suggestive were they of a death more than ordinarily violent. I pulled aside the dressing-gown and searched the body for marks, but failed to find any. Nayland Smith crossed the room, and, assisted by the detective, carried Kwee, the Chinaman, into the study and laid him fully in the light. His puckered yellow face presented a sight even more awful than the other, and his blue lips were drawn back, exposing both upper and lower teeth. There were no marks of violence, but his limbs, like Strozza's, had been tortured during his mortal struggles into unnatural postures.

The breeze was growing higher, and pungent odor-waves from the damp shrubbery, bearing, too, the oppressive sweetness of the creeping plant, swept constantly through the open window. Inspector Weymouth carefully relighted his cigar.
"I'm with you this far, Mr. Smith," he said. "Strozza, knowing Sir Lionel to be absent, locked himself in here to rifle the mummy case, for Croxted, entering by way of the window, found the key on the inside. Strozza didn't know that the Chinaman was hidden in the conservatory--"

"And Kwee did not dare to show himself, because he too was there for some mysterious reason of his own," interrupted Smith.
"Having got the lid off, something--somebody--"
Weymouth laughed uneasily.
"Suppose we say the mummy?"
"Of a servant of Fu-Manchu. Yes. I am at a loss to account for that."
"Do you think that the sarcophagus entered into the scheme, Smith?"
My friend looked at me in evident perplexity.
"You mean that its arrival at the time when a creature of the Doctor--Kwee--was concealed here, may have been a coincidence?"

I nodded; and Smith bent over the sarcophagus, curiously examining the garish paintings with which it was decorated inside and out. It lay sideways upon the floor, and seizing it by its edge, he turned it over.
"Heavy," he muttered; "but Strozza must have capsized it as he fell. He would not have laid it on its side to remove the lid. Hallo!"

He bent farther forward, catching at a piece of twine, and out of the mummy case pulled a rubber stopper or "cork."
"This was stuck in a hole level with the floor of the thing," he said. "Ugh! it has a disgusting smell."

I took it from his hands, and was about to examine it, when a loud voice sounded outside in the hall. The door was thrown open, and a big man, who, despite the warmth of the weather, wore a fur-lined overcoat, rushed impetuously into the room.
"Sir Lionel!" cried Smith eagerly. "I warned you! And see, you have had a very narrow escape."
Sir Lionel Barton glanced at what lay upon the floor, then from Smith to myself, and from me to Inspector Weymouth. He dropped into one of the few chairs unstacked with books.
"Mr. Smith," he said, with emotion, "what does this mean? Tell me--quickly."
In brief terms Smith detailed the happenings of the night--or so much as he knew of them. Sir Lionel Barton listened, sitting quite still the while--an unusual repose in a man of such evidently tremendous nervous activity.

"He came for the jewels," he said slowly, when Smith was finished; and his eyes turned to the body of the dead Italian. "I was wrong to submit him to the temptation. God knows what Kwee was doing in hiding. Perhaps he had come to murder me, as you surmise, Mr. Smith, though I find it hard to believe. But--I don't think this is the handiwork of your Chinese doctor." He fixed his gaze upon the sarcophagus.

Smith stared at him in surprise. "What do you mean, Sir Lionel?"

The famous traveler continued to look towards the sarcophagus with something in his blue eyes that might have been dread.

"I received a wire from Professor Rembold to-night," he continued. "You were correct in supposing that no one but Strozza knew of my absence. I dressed hurriedly and met the professor at the Traveler's. He knew that I was to read a paper next week upon--again he looked toward the mummy case--"the tomb of Mekara; and he knew that the sarcophagus had been brought, untouched, to England. He begged me not to open it."

Nayland Smith was studying the speaker's face.

"What reason did he give for so extraordinary a request?" he asked.

Sir Lionel Barton hesitated.

"One," he replied at last, "which amused me--at the time. I must inform you that Mekara--whose tomb my agent had discovered during my absence in Tibet, and to enter which I broke my return journey to Alexandria--was a high priest and first prophet of Amen--under the Pharaoh of the Exodus; in short, one of the magicians who contested in magic arts with Moses. I thought the discovery unique, until Professor Rembold furnished me with some curious particulars respecting the death of M. Page le Roi, the French Egyptologist--particulars new to me."

We listened in growing surprise, scarcely knowing to what this tended.

"M. le Roi," continued Barton, "discovered, but kept secret, the tomb of Amenti--another of this particular brotherhood. It appears that he opened the mummy case on the spot--these priests were of royal line, and are buried in the valley of Biban-le-Moluk. His Fellah and Arab servants deserted him for some reason--on seeing the mummy case--and he was found dead, apparently strangled, beside it. The matter was hushed up by the Egyptian Government. Rembold could not explain why. But he begged of me not to open the sarcophagus of Mekara."

A silence fell.

The strange facts regarding the sudden death of Page le Roi, which I now heard for the first time, had impressed me unpleasantly, coming from a man of Sir Lionel Barton's experience and reputation.

"How long had it lain in the docks?" jerked Smith.

"For two days, I believe. I am not a superstitious man, Mr. Smith, but neither is Professor Rembold, and now that I know the facts respecting Page le Roi, I can find it in my heart to thank God that I did not see... whatever came out of that sarcophagus."

Nayland Smith stared him hard in the face. "I am glad you did not, Sir Lionel," he said; "for whatever the priest Mekara has to do with the matter, by means of his sarcophagus, Dr. Fu-Manchu has made his first attempt upon your life. He has failed, but I hope you will accompany me from here to a hotel. He will not fail twice."

CHAPTER XII

IT was the night following that of the double tragedy at Rowan House. Nayland Smith, with Inspector Weymouth, was engaged in some mysterious inquiry at the docks, and I had remained at home to resume my strange chronicle. And--why should I not confess it?--my memories had frightened me.

I was arranging my notes respecting the case of Sir Lionel Barton. They were hopelessly incomplete. For instance, I had jotted down the following queries:--(1) Did any true parallel exist between the death of M. Page le Roi and the death of Kwee, the Chinaman, and of Strozza? (2) What had become of the mummy of Mekara? (3) How had the murderer escaped from a locked room? (4) What was the purpose of the rubber stopper? (5) Why was Kwee hiding in the conservatory? (6) Was the green mist a mere subjective hallucination--a figment of Croxted's imagination--or had he actually seen it?

Until these questions were satisfactorily answered, further progress was impossible. Nayland Smith frankly admitted that he was out of his depth. "It looks, on the face of it, more like a case for the Psychical Research people than for a plain Civil Servant, lately of Mandalay," he had said only that morning.

"Sir Lionel Barton really believes that supernatural agencies were brought into operation by the opening of the high priest's coffin. For my part, even if I believed the same, I should still maintain that Dr. Fu-Manchu controlled those manifestations. But reason it out for yourself and see if we arrive at any common center. Don't work so much upon the datum of the green mist, but keep to the FACTS which are established."

I commenced to knock out my pipe in the ash-tray; then paused, pipe in hand. The house was quite still, for my landlady and all the small household were out.
Above the noise of the passing tramcar I thought I had heard the hall door open. In the ensuing silence I sat and listened.

Not a sound. Stay! I slipped my hand into the table drawer, took out my revolver, and stood up.

There WAS a sound. Someone or something was creeping upstairs in the dark!

Familiar with the ghastly media employed by the Chinaman, I was seized with an impulse to leap to the door, shut and lock it. But the rustling sound proceeded, now, from immediately outside my partially opened door. I had not the time to close it; knowing somewhat of the horrors at the command of Fu-Manchu, I had not the courage to open it. My heart leaping wildly, and my eyes upon that bar of darkness with its gruesome potentialities, I waited—waited for whatever was to come. Perhaps twelve seconds passed in silence.

"Who's there?" I cried. "Answer, or I fire!"

"Ah! no," came a soft voice, thrillingly musical. "Put it down--that pistol. Quick! I must speak to you."

The door was pushed open, and there entered a slim figure wrapped in a hooded cloak. My hand fell, and I stood, stricken to silence, looking into the beautiful dark eyes of Dr. Fu-Manchu's messenger—-if her own statement could be credited, slave. On two occasions this girl, whose association with the Doctor was one of the most profound mysteries of the case, had risked—I cannot say what; unnameable punishment, perhaps—to save me from death; in both cases from a terrible death. For what was she come now?

Her lips slightly parted, she stood, holding her cloak about her, and watching me with great passionate eyes.

"How--" I began.

But she shook her head impatiently.

"HE has a duplicate key of the house door," was her amazing statement. "I have never betrayed a secret of my master before, but you must arrange to replace the lock."

She came forward and rested her slim hands confidingly upon my shoulders. "I have come again to ask you to take me away from him," she said simply.

And she lifted her face to me.

Her words struck a chord in my heart which sang with strange music, with music so barbaric that, frankly, I blushed to find it harmony. Have I said that she was beautiful? It can convey no faint conception of her. With her pure, fair skin, eyes like the velvet darkness of the East, and red lips so tremulously near to mine, she was the most seductively lovely creature I ever had looked upon. In that electric moment my heart went out in sympathy to every man who had bartered honor, country, all for a woman's kiss.

"I will see that you are placed under proper protection," I said firmly, but my voice was not quite my own. "It is quite absurd to talk of slavery here in England. You are a free agent, or you could not be here now. Dr. Fu-Manchu cannot control your actions."

"Ah!" she cried, casting back her head scornfully, and releasing a cloud of hair, through whose softness gleamed a jeweled head-dress. "No? He cannot? Do you know what it means to have been a slave? Here, in your free England, do you know what it means—the razzia, the desert journey, the whips of the drivers, the house of the dealer, the shame. Bah!"

How beautiful she was in her indignation!

"Slavery is put down, you imagine, perhaps? You do not believe that to-day--TO-DAY--twenty-five English sovereigns will buy a Galla girl, who is brown, and--whisper--"two hundred and fifty a Circassian, who is white. No, there is no slavery! So! Then what am I?"

She threw open her cloak, and it is a literal fact that I rubbed my eyes, half believing that I dreamed. For beneath, she was arrayed in gossamer silk which more than indicated the perfect lines of her slim shape; wore a jeweled girdle and barbaric ornaments; was a figure fit for the walled gardens of Stamboul—a figure amazing, incomprehensible, in the prosaic setting of my rooms.

"To-night I had no time to make myself an English miss," she said, wrapping her cloak quickly about her. "You see me as I am." Her garments exhaled a faint perfume, and it reminded me of another meeting I had had with her. I looked into the challenging eyes.

"Your request is but a pretense," I said. "Why do you keep the secrets of that man, when they mean death to so many?"

"Death! I have seen my own sister die of fever in the desert—-seen her thrown like carrion into a hole in the sand. I have seen men flogged until they prayed for death as a boon. I have known the lash myself. Death! What does it matter?"

She shocked me inexpressibly. Enveloped in her cloak again, and with only her slight accent to betray her, it was dreadful to hear such words from a girl who, save for her singular type of beauty, might have been a cultured European.

"Prove, then, that you really wish to leave this man's service. Tell me what killed Strozza and the Chinaman," I
said.

She shrugged her shoulders.

"I do not know that. But if you will carry me off"—she clutched me nervously—"so that I am helpless, lock me up so that I cannot escape, beat me, if you like, I will tell you all I do know. While he is my master I will never betray him. Tear me from him—by force, do you understand, BY FORCE, and my lips will be sealed no longer. Ah! but you do not understand, with your 'proper authorities'—your police! Police! Ah, I have said enough."

A clock across the common began to strike. The girl started and laid her hands upon my shoulders again. There were tears glittering among the curved black lashes.

"You do not understand," she whispered. "Oh, will you never understand and release me from him! I must go. Already I have remained too long. Listen. Go out without delay. Remain out—at a hotel, where you will, but do not stay here."

"And Nayland Smith?"

"What is he to me, this Nayland Smith? Ah, why will you not unseal my lips? You are in danger—you hear me, in danger! Go away from here to-night."

She dropped her hands and ran from the room. In the open doorway she turned, stamping her foot passionately.

"You have hands and arms," she cried, "and yet you let me go. Be warned, then; fly from here—" She broke off with something that sounded like a sob.

I made no move to stay her—this beautiful accomplice of the arch-murderer, Fu-Manchu. I heard her light footsteps pattering down the stairs, I heard her open and close the door—the door of which Dr. Fu-Manchu held the key. Still I stood where she had parted from me, and was so standing when a key grated in the lock and Nayland Smith came running up.

"Did you see her?" I began.

But his face showed that he had not done so, and rapidly I told him of my strange visitor, of her words, of her warning.

"How can she have passed through London in that costume?" I cried in bewilderment. "Where can she have come from?"

Smith shrugged his shoulders and began to stuff broad-cut mixture into the familiar cracked briar.

"She might have traveled in a car or in a cab," he said; "and undoubtedly she came direct from the house of Dr. Fu-Manchu. You should have detained her, Petrie. It is the third time we have had that woman in our power, the third time we have let her go free."

"Smith," I replied, "I couldn't. She came of her own free will to give me a warning. She disarms me."

"Because you can see she is in love with you?" he suggested, and burst into one of his rare laughs when the angry flush rose to my cheek. "She is, Petrie why pretend to be blind to it? You don't know the Oriental mind as I do; but I quite understand the girl's position. She fears the English authorities, but would submit to capture by you! If you would only seize her by the hair, drag her to some cellar, hurl her down and stand over her with a whip, she would tell you everything she knows, and salve her strange Eastern conscience with the reflection that speech was forced from her. I am not joking; it is so, I assure you. And she would adore you for your savagery, deeming you forceful and strong!"

"Smith," I said, "be serious. You know what her warning meant before."

"I can guess what it means now," he rapped. "Hallo!"

Someone was furiously ringing the bell.

"No one at home?" said my friend. "I will go. I think I know what it is."

A few minutes later he returned, carrying a large square package.

"From Weymouth," he explained, "by district messenger. I left him behind at the docks, and he arranged to forward any evidence which subsequently he found. This will be fragments of the mummy."

"What! You think the mummy was abstracted?"

"Yes, at the docks. I am sure of it; and somebody else was in the sarcophagus when it reached Rowan House. A sarcophagus, I find, is practically airtight, so that the use of the rubber stopper becomes evident—ventilation. How this person killed Strozza I have yet to learn."

"Also, how he escaped from a locked room. And what about the green mist?"

Nayland Smith spread his hands in a characteristic gesture.

"The green mist, Petrie, can be explained in several ways. Remember, we have only one man's word that it existed. It is at best a confusing datum to which we must not attach a factitious importance."

He threw the wrappings on the floor and tugged at a twine loop in the lid of the square box, which now stood upon the table. Suddenly the lid came away, bringing with it a lead lining, such as is usual in tea-chests. This lining was partially attached to one side of the box, so that the action of removing the lid at once raised and tilted it.
Then happened a singular thing.

Out over the table billowed a sort of yellowish-green cloud—a oily vapor—and an inspiration, it was nothing less, born of a memory and of some words of my beautiful visitor, came to me.

"RUN, SMITH!" I screamed. "The door! the door, for your life! Fu-Manchu sent that box!" I threw my arms round him. As he bent forward the moving vapor rose almost to his nostrils. I dragged him back and all but pitched him out on to the landing. We entered my bedroom, and there, as I turned on the light, I saw that Smith's tanned face was unusually drawn, and touched with pallor.

"It is a poisonous gas!" I said hoarsely; "in many respects identical with chlorine, but having unique properties which prove it to be something else—God and Fu-Manchu, alone know what! It is the fumes of chlorine that kill the men in the bleaching powder works. We have been blind—I particularly. Don't you see? There was no one in the sarcophagus, Smith, but there was enough of that fearful stuff to have suffocated a regiment!"

Smith clenched his fists convulsively.

"My God!" he said, "how can I hope to deal with the author of such a scheme? I see the whole plan. He did not reckon on the mummy case being overturned, and Kwee's part was to remove the plug with the aid of the string—after Sir Lionel had been suffocated. The gas, I take it, is heavier than air."

"Chlorine gas has a specific gravity of 2.470," I said; "two and a half times heavier than air. You can pour it from jar to jar like a liquid—if you are wearing a chemist's mask. In these respects this stuff appears to be similar; the points of difference would not interest you. The sarcophagus would have emptied through the vent, and the gas have dispersed, with no clew remaining—except the smell."

"I did smell it, Petrie, on the stopper, but, of course, was unfamiliar with it. You may remember that you were prevented from doing so by the arrival of Sir Lionel? The scent of those infernal flowers must partially have drowned it, too. Poor, misguided Strozza inhaled the stuff, capsized the case in his fall, and all the gas—"

"Went pouring under the conservatory door, and down the steps, where Kwee was crouching. Croxted's breaking the window created sufficient draught to disperse what little remained. It will have settled on the floor now. I will go and open both windows."

Nayland raised his haggard face.

"He evidently made more than was necessary to dispatch Sir Lionel Barton," he said; "and contemptuously—you note the attitude, Petrie?—contemptuously devoted the surplus to me. His contempt is justified. I am a child striving to cope with a mental giant. It is by no wit of mine that Dr. Fu-Manchu scores a double failure."

CHAPTER XIII

I WILL tell you, now of a strange dream which I dreamed, and of the stranger things to which I awakened.

Since, out of a blank—a void—this vision burst in upon my mind, I cannot do better than relate it, without preamble. It was thus:

I dreamed that I lay writhing on the floor in agony indescribable. My veins were filled with liquid fire, and but that stygian darkness was about me, I told myself that I must have seen the smoke arising from my burning body.

This, I thought, was death.

Then, a cooling shower descended upon me, soaked through skin and tissue to the tortured arteries and quenched the fire within. Panting, but free from pain, I lay—exhausted.

Strength gradually returning to me, I tried to rise; but the carpet felt so singularly soft that it offered me no foothold. I waded and plunged like a swimmer treading water; and all about me rose impenetrable walls of darkness, darkness all but palpable. I wondered why I could not see the windows. The horrible idea flashed to my mind that I was become blind!

Somehow I got upon my feet, and stood swaying dizzily. I became aware of a heavy perfume, and knew it for some kind of incense.

Then—a dim light was born, at an immeasurable distance away. It grew steadily in brilliance. It spread like a bluish-red stain—like a liquid. It lapped up the darkness and spread throughout the room.

But this was not my room! Nor was it any room known to me.

It was an apartment of such size that its dimensions filled me with a kind of awe such as I never had known: the awe of walled vastness. Its immense extent produced a sensation of sound. Its hugeness had a distinct NOTE.

Tapestries covered the four walls. There was no door visible. These tapestries were magnificently figured with golden dragons; and as the serpentine bodies gleamed and shimmered in the increasing radiance, each dragon, I thought, intertwined its glittering coils more closely with those of another. The carpet was of such richness that I stood knee-deep in its pile. And this, too, was fashioned all over with golden dragons; and they seemed to glide about amid the shadows of the design—stealthily.

At the farther end of the hall—for hall it was—a huge table with dragons' legs stood solitary amid the luxuriance of the carpet. It bore scintillating globes, and tubes that held living organisms, and books of a size and in such
bindings as I never had imagined, with instruments of a type unknown to Western science—a heterogeneous litter quite indescribable, which overflowed on to the floor, forming an amazing oasis in a dragon-haunted desert of carpet. A lamp hung above this table, suspended by golden chains from the ceiling—which was so lofty that, following the chains upward, my gaze lost itself in the purple shadows above.

In a chair piled high with dragon-covered cushions a man sat behind this table. The light from the swinging lamp fell fully upon one side of his face, as he leaned forward amid the jumble of weird objects, and left the other side in purplish shadow. From a plain brass bowl upon the corner of the huge table smoke writhed aloft and at times partially obscured that dreadful face.

From the instant that my eyes were drawn to the table and to the man who sat there, neither the incredible extent of the room, nor the nightmare fashion of its mural decorations, could reclaim my attention. I had eyes only for him.

For it was Dr. Fu-Manchu!

Something of the delirium which had seemed to fill my veins with fire, to people the walls with dragons, and to plunge me knee-deep in the carpet, left me. Those dreadful, filmed green eyes acted somewhat like a cold douche. I knew, without removing my gaze from the still face, that the walls no longer lived, but were merely draped in exquisite Chinese dragon tapestry. The rich carpet beneath my feet ceased to be as a jungle and became a normal carpet—extraordinarily rich, but merely a carpet. But the sense of vastness nevertheless remained, with the uncomfortable knowledge that the things upon the table and overflowing about it were all, or nearly all, of a fashion strange to me.

Then, and almost instantaneously, the comparative sanity which I had temporarily experienced began to slip from me again; for the smoke faintly penciled through the air—from the burning perfume on the table—grew in volume, thickened, and wafted towards me in a cloud of gray horror. It enveloped me, clammy. Dimly, through its oily wreaths, I saw the immobile yellow face of Fu-Manchu. And my stupefied brain acclaimed him a sorcerer, against whom unwittingly we had pitted our poor human wits. The green eyes showed filmy through the fog. An intense pain shot through my lower limbs, and, catching my breath, I looked down. As I did so, the points of the red slippers which I dreamed that I wore increased in length, curled sinuously upward, twined about my throat and choked the breath from my body!

Came an interval, and then a dawning like consciousness; but it was a false consciousness, since it brought with it the idea that my head lay softly pillowed and that a woman's hand caressed my throbbing forehead. Confusedly, as though in the remote past, I recalled a kiss—and the recollection thrilled me strangely. Dreamily content I lay, and a voice stole to my ears:

"They are killing him! they are killing him! Oh! do you not understand?" In my dazed condition, I thought that it was I who had died, and that this musical girl-voice was communicating to me the fact of my own dissolution. But I was conscious of no interest in the matter.

For hours and hours, I thought, that soothing hand caressed me. I never once raised my heavy lids, until there came a resounding crash that seemed to set my very bones vibrating—a metallic, jangling crash, as the fall of heavy chains. I thought that, then, I half opened my eyes, and that in the dimness I had a fleeting glimpse of a figure clad in gossamer silk, with arms covered with barbaric bangles and slim ankles surrounded by gold bands. The girl was gone, even as I told myself that she was an houri, and that I, though a Christian, had been consigned by some error to the paradise of Mohammed.

Then—a complete blank.

My head throbbed madly; my brain seemed to be clogged—inerent; and though my first, feeble movement was followed by the rattle of a chain, some moments more elapsed ere I realized that the chain was fastened to a steel collar—that the steel collar was clasped about my neck.

I moaned weakly.

"Smith!" I muttered, "Where are you? Smith!"

On to my knees I struggled, and the pain on the top of my skull grew all but insupportable. It was coming back to me now; how Nayland Smith and I had started for the hotel to warn Graham Guthrie; how, as we passed up the steps from the Embankment and into Essex Street, we saw the big motor standing before the door of one of the offices. I could recall coming up level with the car—a modern limousine; but my mind retained no impression of our having passed it—only a vague memory of a rush of footsteps—a blow. Then, my vision of the hall of dragons, and now this real awakening to a worse reality.

Groping in the darkness, my hands touched a body that lay close beside me. My fingers sought and found the throat, sought and found the steel collar about it.

"Smith," I groaned; and I shook the still form. "Smith, old man—speak to me! Smith!"

Could he be dead? Was this the end of his gallant fight with Dr. Fu-Manchu and the murder group? If so, what did the future hold for me—what had I to face?
He stirred beneath my trembling hands.

"Thank God!" I muttered, and I cannot deny that my joy was tainted with selfishness. For, waking in that impenetrable darkness, and yet obsessed with the dream I had dreamed, I had known what fear meant, at the realization that alone, chained, I must face the dreadful Chinese doctor in the flesh. Smith began incoherent mutterings.

"Sand-bagged! . . . Look out, Petrie! . . . He has us at last! . . . Oh, Heavens!" . . . He struggled on to his knees, clutching at my hand.

"All right, old man," I said. "We are both alive! So let's be thankful."

A moment's silence, a groan, then:

"Petrie, I have dragged you into this. God forgive me--"

"Dry up, Smith," I said slowly. "I'm not a child. There is no question of being dragged into the matter. I'm here; and if I can be of any use, I'm glad I am here!"

He grasped my hand.

"There were two Chinese, in European clothes--lord, how my head throbs!-- in that office door. They sand-bagged us, Petrie--think of it!-- in broad daylight, within hail of the Strand! We were rushed into the car--and it was all over, before--" His voice grew faint. "God! they gave me an awful knock!"

"Why have we been spared, Smith? Do you think he is saving us for--"

"Don't, Petrie! If you had been in China, if you had seen what I have seen--"

Footsteps sounded on the flagged passage. A blade of light crept across the floor towards us. My brain was growing clearer. The place had a damp, earthen smell. It was slimy--some noisome cellar. A door was thrown open and a man entered, carrying a lantern. Its light showed my surmise to be accurate, showed the slime-coated walls of a dungeon some fifteen feet square-- shone upon the long yellow robe of the man who stood watching us, upon the malignant, intellectual countenance.

It was Dr. Fu-Manchu.

At last they were face to face--the head of the great Yellow Movement, and the man who fought on behalf of the entire white race. How can I paint the individual who now stood before us-- perhaps the greatest genius of modern times?

Of him it had been fitly said that he had a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan. Something serpentine, hypnotic, was in his very presence. Smith drew one sharp breath, and was silent. Together, chained to the wall, two mediaeval captives, living mockeries of our boasted modern security, we crouched before Dr. Fu-Manchu.

He came forward with an indescribable gait, cat-like yet awkward, carrying his high shoulders almost hunched. He placed the lantern in a niche in the wall, never turning away the reptilian gaze of those eyes which must haunt my dreams forever. They possessed a viridescence which hitherto I had supposed possible only in the eye of the cat-- and the film intermittently clouded their brightness-- but I can speak of them no more.

I had never supposed, prior to meeting Dr. Fu-Manchu, that so intense a force of malignancy could radiate-- from any human being. He spoke. His English was perfect, though at times his words were oddly chosen; his delivery alternately was guttural and sibilant.

"Mr. Smith and Dr. Petrie, your interference with my plans has gone too far. I have seriously turned my attention to you."

He displayed his teeth, small and evenly separated, but discolored in a way that was familiar to me. I studied his eyes with a new professional interest, which even the extremity of our danger could not wholly banish. Their greenness seemed to be of the iris; the pupil was oddly contracted--a pin-point.

Smith leaned his back against the wall with assumed indifference.

"You have presumed," continued Fu-Manchu, "to meddle with a world-change. Poor spiders-- caught in the wheels of the inevitable! You have linked my name with the futility of the Young China Movement-- the name of Fu-Manchu! Mr. Smith, you are an incompetent meddler-- I despise you! Dr. Petrie, you are a fool--I am sorry for you!"

He rested one bony hand on his hip, narrowing the long eyes as he looked down on us. The purposeful cruelty of the man was inherent; it was entirely untheatrical. Still Smith remained silent.

"So I am determined to remove you from the scene of your blunders!" added Fu-Manchu.

"Opium will very shortly do the same for you!" I rapped at him savagely.

Without emotion he turned the narrowed eyes upon me.

"That is a matter of opinion, Doctor," he said. "You may have lacked the opportunities which have been mine for studying that subject-- and in any event I shall not be privileged to enjoy your advice in the future."

"You will not long outlive me," I replied. "And our deaths will not profit you, incidentally; because--" Smith's foot touched mine.
"Because?" inquired Fu-Manchu softly.

"Ah! Mr. Smith is so prudent! He is thinking that I have FILES!" He pronounced the word in a way that made me shudder. "Mr. Smith has seen a WIRE JACKET! Have you ever seen a wire jacket? As a surgeon its functions would interest you!"

I stifled a cry that rose to my lips; for, with a shrill whistling sound, a small shape came bounding into the dimly lit vault, then shot upward. A marmoset landed on the shoulder of Dr. Fu-Manchu and peered grotesquely into the dreadful yellow face. The Doctor raised his bony hand and fondled the little creature, crooning to it.

"One of my pets, Mr. Smith," he said, suddenly opening his eyes fully so that they blazed like green lamps. "I have others, equally useful. My scorpions--have you met my scorpions? No? My pythons and hamadryads? Then there are my fungi and my tiny allies, the bacilli. I have a collection in my laboratory quite unique. Have you ever visited Molokai, the leper island, Doctor? No! But Mr. Nayland Smith will be familiar with the asylum at Rangoon! And we must not forget my black spiders, with their diamond eyes--my spiders, that sit in the dark and watch--then leap!"

He raised his lean hands, so that the sleeve of the robe fell back to the elbow, and the ape dropped, chattering, to the floor and ran from the cellar.

"O God of Cathay!" he cried, "by what death shall these die--these miserable ones who would bind thine Empire, which is boundless!"

Like some priest of Tezcat he stood, his eyes upraised to the roof, his lean body quivering--a sight to shock the most unimpressionable mind.

"He is mad!" I whispered to Smith. "God help us, the man is a dangerous homicidal maniac!"

Nayland Smith's tanned face was very drawn, but he shook his head grimly.

"Dangerous, yes, I agree," he muttered; "his existence is a danger to the entire white race which, now, we are powerless to avert."

Dr. Fu-Manchu recovered himself, took up the lantern and, turning abruptly, walked to the door, with his awkward, yet feline gait. At the threshold be looked back.

"You would have warned Mr. Graham Guthrie?" he said, in a soft voice. "To-night, at half-past twelve, Mr. Graham Guthrie dies!"

Smith sat silent and motionless, his eyes fixed upon the speaker.

"You were in Rangoon in 1908?" continued Dr. Fu-Manchu--"you remember the Call?"

From somewhere above us--I could not determine the exact direction--came a low, wailing cry, an uncanny thing of falling cadences, which, in that dismal vault, with the sinister yellow-robed figure at the door, seemed to pour ice into my veins. Its effect upon Smith was truly extraordinary. His face showed grayly in the faint light, and I heard him draw a hissing breath through clenched teeth.

"It calls for you!" said Fu-Manchu. "At half-past twelve it calls for Graham Guthrie!"

The door closed and darkness mantled us again.

"Smith," I said, "what was that?" The horrors about us were playing havoc with my nerves.

"It was the Call of Siva!" replied Smith hoarsely.

"What is it? Who uttered it? What does it mean?"

"I don't know what it is, Petrie, nor who utters it. But it means death!"

CHAPTER XIV

THERE may be some who could have lain, chained to that noisome cell, and felt no fear--no dread of what the blackness might hold. I confess that I am not one of these. I knew that Nayland Smith and I stood in the path of the most stupendous genius who in the world's history had devoted his intellect to crime. I knew that the enormous wealth of the political group backing Dr. Fu-Manchu rendered him a menace to Europe and to America greater than that of the plague. He was a scientist trained at a great university--an explorer of nature's secrets, who had gone farther into the unknown, I suppose, than any living man. His mission was to remove all obstacles--human obstacles--from the path of that secret movement which was progressing in the Far East. Smith and I were two such obstacles; and of all the horrible devices at his command, I wondered, and my tortured brain refused to leave the subject, by which of them were we doomed to be dispatched?

Even at that very moment some venomous centipede might be wriggling towards me over the slime of the stones, some poisonous spider be preparing to drop from the roof! Fu-Manchu might have released a serpent in the cellar, or the air be alive with microbes of a loathsome disease!

"Smith," I said, scarcely recognizing my own voice, "I can't bear this suspense. He intends to kill us, that is certain, but--"

"Don't worry," came the reply; "he intends to learn our plans first."

"You mean--?"
"You heard him speak of his files and of his wire jacket?"
"Oh, my God!" I groaned; "can this be England?"
Smith laughed dryly, and I heard him fumbling with the steel collar about his neck.
"I have one great hope," he said, "since you share my captivity, but we must neglect no minor chance. Try with your pocket-knife if you can force the lock. I am trying to break this one."
Truth to tell, the idea had not entered my half-dazed mind, but I immediately acted upon my friend's suggestion, setting to work with the small blade of my knife. I was so engaged, and, having snapped one blade, was about to open another, when a sound arrested me. It came from beneath my feet.
"Smith," I whispered, "listen!"
The scraping and clicking which told of Smith's efforts ceased. Motionless, we sat in that humid darkness and listened.
Something was moving beneath the stones of the cellar. I held my breath; every nerve in my body was strung up.
A line of light showed a few feet from where we lay. It widened--became an oblong. A trap was lifted, and within a yard of me, there rose a dimly seen head. Horror I had expected--and death, or worse. Instead, I saw a lovely face, crowned with a disordered mass of curling hair; I saw a white arm upholding the stone slab, a shapely arm clasped about the elbow by a broad gold bangle.
The girl climbed into the cellar and placed the lantern on the stone floor. In the dim light she was unreal--a figure from an opium vision, with her clinging silk draperies and garish jewelry, with her feet encased in little red slippers. In short, this was the houri of my vision, materialized. It was difficult to believe that we were in modern, up-to-date England; easy to dream that we were the captives of a caliph, in a dungeon in old Bagdad.
"My prayers are answered," said Smith softly. "She has come to save YOU."
"S-sh!" warned the girl, and her wonderful eyes opened widely, fearfully. "A sound and he will kill us all."
She bent over me; a key jarred in the lock which had broken my penknife-- and the collar was off. As I rose to my feet the girl turned and released Smith. She raised the lantern above the trap, and signed to us to descend the wooden steps which its light revealed.
"Your knife," she whispered to me. "Leave it on the floor. He will think you forced the locks. Down! Quickly!"
Nayland Smith, stepping gingerly, disappeared into the darkness. Last of all came our mysterious friend, a gold band about one of her ankles gleaming in the rays of the lantern which she carried. We stood in a low-arched passage.
"Tie your handkerchiefs over your eyes and do exactly as I tell you," she ordered.
Neither of us hesitated to obey her. Blind-folded, I allowed her to lead me, and Smith rested his hand upon my shoulder. In that order we proceeded, and came to stone steps, which we ascended.
"Keep to the wall on the left," came a whisper. "There is danger on the right."
With my free hand I felt for and found the wall, and we pressed forward. The atmosphere of the place through which we were passing was steamy, and loaded with an odor like that of exotic plant life. But a faint animal scent crept to my nostrils, too, and there was a subdued stir about me, infinitely suggestive--mysterious.
Now my feet sank in a soft carpet, and a curtain brushed my shoulder. A gong sounded. We stopped.
The din of distant drumming came to my ears.
"Where in Heaven's name are we?" hissed Smith in my ear; "that is a tom-tom!"
"S-sh! S-sh!"
The little hand grasping mine quivered nervously. We were near a door or a window, for a breath of perfume was wafted through the air; and it reminded me of my other meetings with the beautiful woman who was now leading us from the house of Fu-Manchu; who, with her own lips, had told me that she was his slave. Through the horrible phantasmagoria she flitted--a seductive vision, her piquant loveliness standing out richly in its black setting of murder and devilry. Not once, but a thousand times, I had tried to reason out the nature of the tie which bound her to the sinister Doctor.
Silence fell.
"Quick! This way!"
Down a thickly carpeted stair we went. Our guide opened a door, and led us along a passage. Another door was opened; and we were in the open air. But the girl never tarried, pulling me along a graveled path, with a fresh breeze blowing in my face, and along until, unmistakably, I stood upon the river bank. Now, planking creaked to our tread; and looking downward beneath the handkerchief, I saw the gleam of water beneath my feet.
"Be careful!" I was warned, and found myself stepping into a narrow boat--a punt.
Nayland Smith followed, and the girl pushed the punt off and poled out into the stream.
"Don't speak!" she directed.
My brain was fevered; I scarce knew if I dreamed and was waking, or if the reality ended with my imprisonment
in the clammy cellar and this silent escape, blindfolded, upon the river with a girl for our guide who might have stepped out of the pages of "The Arabian Nights" were fantasy--the mockery of sleep.

Indeed, I began seriously to doubt if this stream whereon we floated, whose waters plashed and tinkled about us, were the Thames, the Tigris, or the Styx.

The punt touched a bank.

"You will hear a clock strike in a few minutes," said the girl, with her soft, charming accent, "but I rely upon your honor not to remove the handkerchiefs until then. You owe me this."

"We do!" said Smith fervently.

I heard him scrambling to the bank, and a moment later a soft hand was placed in mine, and I, too, was guided on to terra firma. Arrived on the bank, I still held the girl's hand, drawing her towards me.

"You must not go back," I whispered. "We will take care of you. You must not return to that place."

"Let me go!" she said. "When, once, I asked you to take me from him, you spoke of police protection; that was your answer, police protection! You would let them lock me up--imprison me--and make me betray him! For what? For what?" She wrenched herself free. "How little you understand me. Never mind. Perhaps one day you will know! Until the clock strikes!"

She was gone. I heard the creak of the punt, the drip of the water from the pole. Fainter it grew, and fainter.

"What is her secret?" muttered Smith, beside me. "Why does she cling to that monster?"

The distant sound died away entirely. A clock began to strike; it struck the half-hour. In an instant my handkerchief was off, and so was Smith's. We stood upon a towing-path. Away to the left the moon shone upon the towers and battlements of an ancient fortress.

It was Windsor Castle.

"Half-past ten," cried Smith. "Two hours to save Graham Guthrie!"

We had exactly fourteen minutes in which to catch the last train to Waterloo; and we caught it. But I sank into a corner of the compartment in a state bordering upon collapse. Neither of us, I think, could have managed another twenty yards. With a lesser stake than a human life at issue, I doubt if we should have attempted that dash to Windsor station.

"Due at Waterloo at eleven-fifty-one," panted Smith. "That gives us thirty-nine minutes to get to the other side of the river and reach his hotel."

"Where in Heaven's name is that house situated? Did we come up or down stream?"

"I couldn't determine. But at any rate, it stands close to the riverside. It should be merely a question of time to identify it. I shall set Scotland Yard to work immediately; but I am hoping for nothing. Our escape will warn him."

I said no more for a time, sitting wiping the perspiration from my forehead and watching my friend load his cracked briar with the broadcut Latakia mixture.

"Smith," I said at last, "what was that horrible wailing we heard, and what did Fu-Manchu mean when he referred to Rangoon? I noticed how it affected you."

My friend nodded and lighted his pipe.

"There was a ghastly business there in 1908 or early in 1909," he replied: "an utterly mysterious epidemic. And this beastly wailing was associated with it."

"In what way? And what do you mean by an epidemic?"

"It began, I believe, at the Palace Mansions Hotel, in the cantonments. A young American, whose name I cannot recall, was staying there on business connected with some new iron buildings. One night he went to his room, locked the door, and jumped out of the window into the courtyard. Broke his neck, of course."

"Suicide?"

"Apparently. But there were singular features in the case. For instance, his revolver lay beside him, fully loaded!"

"In the courtyard?"

"In the courtyard!"

"Was it murder by any chance?"

Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"His door was found locked from the inside; had to be broken in."

"But the wailing business?"

"That began later, or was only noticed later. A French doctor, named Lafitte, died in exactly the same way."

"At the same place?"

"At the same hotel; but he occupied a different room. Here is the extraordinary part of the affair: a friend shared the room with him, and actually saw him go!"

"Saw him leap from the window?"
"Yes. The friend--an Englishman--was aroused by the uncanny wailing. I was in Rangoon at the time, so that I know more of the case of Lafitte than of that of the American. I spoke to the man about it personally. He was an electrical engineer, Edward Martin, and he told me that the cry seemed to come from above him."

"It seemed to come from above when we heard it at Fu-Manchu's house."

"Martin sat up in bed, it was a clear moonlight night-- the sort of moonlight you get in Burma. Lafitte, for some reason, had just gone to the window. His friend saw him look out. The next moment with a dreadful scream, he threw himself forward-- and crashed down into the courtyard!"

"What then?"

"Martin ran to the window and looked down. Lafitte's scream had aroused the place, of course. But there was absolutely nothing to account for the occurrence. There was no balcony, no ledge, by means of which anyone could reach the window."

"But how did you come to recognize the cry?"

"I stopped at the Palace Mansions for some time; and one night this uncanny howling aroused me. I heard it quite distinctly, and am never likely to forget it. It was followed by a hoarse yell. The man in the next room, an orchid hunter, had gone the same way as the others!"

"Did you change your quarters?"

"No. Fortunately for the reputation of the hotel--a first-class establishment-- several similar cases occurred elsewhere, both in Rangoon, in Prome and in Moulmein. A story got about the native quarter, and was fostered by some mad fakir, that the god Siva was reborn and that the cry was his call for victims; a ghastly story, which led to an outbreak of dacoity and gave the District Superintendent no end of trouble."

"Was there anything unusual about the bodies?"

"They all developed marks after death, as though they had been strangled! The marks were said all to possess a peculiar form, though it was not appreciable to my eye; and this, again, was declared to be the five heads of Siva."

"Were the deaths confined to Europeans?"

"Oh, no. Several Burmans and others died in the same way. At first there was a theory that the victims had contracted leprosy and committed suicide as a result; but the medical evidence disproved that. The Call of Siva became a perfect nightmare throughout Burma."

"Did you ever hear it again, before this evening?"

"Yes. I heard it on the Upper Irrawaddy one clear, moonlight night, and a Colassie--a deck-hand--leaped from the top deck of the steamer aboard which I was traveling! My God! to think that the fiend Fu-Manchu has brought That to England!"


"A new agent of death, Petrie! Something born in a plague-spot of Burma-- the home of much that is unclean and much that is inexplicable. Heaven grant that we be in time, and are able to save Guthrie."

CHAPTER XV

THE train was late, and as our cab turned out of Waterloo Station and began to ascend to the bridge, from a hundred steeples rang out the gongs of midnight, the bell of St. Paul's raised above them all to vie with the deep voice of Big Ben.

I looked out from the cab window across the river to where, towering above the Embankment, that place of a thousand tragedies, the light of some of London's greatest caravanserais formed a sort of minor constellation. From the subdued blaze that showed the public supper-rooms I looked up to the hundreds of starry points marking the private apartments of those giant inns.

I thought how each twinkling window denoted the presence of some bird of passage, some wanderer temporarily abiding in our midst. There, floor piled upon floor above the chattering throngs, were these less gregarious units, each something of a mystery to his fellow-guests, each in his separate cell; and each as remote from real human companionship as if that cell were fashioned, not in the bricks of London, but in the rocks of Hindustan!

In one of those rooms Graham Guthrie might at that moment be sleeping, all unaware that he would awake to the Call of Siva, the summons of death. As we neared the Strand, Smith stopped the cab, discharging the man outside Sotheby's auction-rooms.

"One of the doctor's watch-dogs may be in the foyer," he said thoughtfully, "and it might spoil everything if we were seen to go to Guthrie's rooms. There must be a back entrance to the kitchens, and so on?"

"There is," I replied quickly. "I have seen the vans delivering there. But have we time?"

"Yes. Lead on."

We walked up the Strand and hurried westward. Into that narrow court, with its iron posts and descending steps, upon which opens a well-known wine-cellar, we turned. Then, going parallel with the Strand, but on the
Embankment level, we ran round the back of the great hotel, and came to double doors which were open. An arc lamp illuminated the interior and a number of men were at work among the casks, crates and packages stacked about the place. We entered.

"Hallo!" cried a man in a white overall, "where d'you think you're going?"

Smith grasped him by the arm.

"I want to get to the public part of the hotel without being seen from the entrance hall," he said. "Will you please lead the way?"

"Here--" began the other, staring.

"Don't waste time!" snapped my friend, in that tone of authority which he knew so well how to assume. "It's a matter of life and death. Lead the way, I say!"

"Police, sir?" asked the man civilly.

"Yes," said Smith; "hurry!"

Off went our guide without further demur. Skirting sculleries, kitchens, laundries and engine-rooms, he led us through those mysterious labyrinths which have no existence for the guest above, but which contain the machinery that renders these modern khans the Aladdin's palaces they are. On a second-floor landing we met a man in a tweed suit, to whom our cicerone presented us.

"Glad I met you, sir. Two gentlemen from the police."

The man regarded us haughtily with a suspicious smile.

"Who are you?" he asked. "You're not from Scotland Yard, at any rate!"

Smith pulled out a card and thrust it into the speaker's hand.

"If you are the hotel detective," he said, "take us without delay to Mr. Graham Guthrie."

A marked change took place in the other's demeanor on glancing at the card in his hand.

"Excuse me, sir," he said deferentially, "but, of course, I didn't know who I was speaking to. We all have instructions to give you every assistance."

"Is Mr. Guthrie in his room?"

"He's been in his room for some time, sir. You will want to get there without being seen? This way. We can join the lift on the third floor."

Off we went again, with our new guide. In the lift:

"Have you noticed anything suspicious about the place to-night?" asked Smith.

"I have!" was the startling reply. "That accounts for your finding me where you did. My usual post is in the lobby. But about eleven o'clock, when the theater people began to come in I had a hazy sort of impression that someone or something slipped past in the crowd--something that had no business in the hotel."

"I don't quite follow you," said Smith. "If you thought you saw something entering, you must have formed a more or less definite impression regarding it."

"That's the funny part of the business," answered the man doggedly. "I didn't! But as I stood at the top of the stairs I could have sworn that there was something crawling up behind a party-- two ladies and two gentlemen."

"A dog, for instance?"

"It didn't strike me as being a dog, sir. Anyway, when the party passed me, there was nothing there. Mind you, whatever it was, it hadn't come in by the front. I have made inquiries everywhere, but without result." He stopped abruptly. "No. 189--Mr. Guthrie's door, sir."

Smith knocked.

"Hallo!" came a muffled voice; "what do you want?"

"Open the door! Don't delay; it is important."

He turned to the hotel detective.

"Stay right there where you can watch the stairs and the lift," he instructed; "and note everyone and everything that passes this door. But whatever you see or hear, do nothing without my orders."

The man moved off, and the door was opened. Smith whispered in my ear:

"Some creature of Dr. Fu-Manchu is in the hotel!"

Mr. Graham Guthrie, British resident in North Bhutan, was a big, thick-set man--gray-haired and florid, with widely opened eyes of the true fighting blue, a bristling mustache and prominent shaggy brows. Nayland Smith introduced himself tersely, proffering his card and an open letter.

"Those are my credentials, Mr. Guthrie," he said; "so no doubt you will realize that the business which brings me and my friend, Dr. Petrie, here at such an hour is of the first importance."

He switched off the light.

"There is no time for ceremony," he explained. "It is now twenty-five minutes past twelve. At half-past an
attempt will be made upon your life!"

"Mr. Smith," said the other, who, arrayed in his pajamas, was seated on the edge of the bed, "you alarm me very greatly. I may mention that I was advised of your presence in England this morning."

"Do you know anything respecting the person called Fu-Manchu--Dr. Fu-Manchu?"

"Only what I was told to-day—that he is the agent of an advanced political group."

"It is opposed to his interests that you should return to Bhutan. A more gullible agent would be preferable. Therefore, unless you implicitly obey my instructions, you will never leave England!"

Graham Guthrie breathed quickly. I was growing more used to the gloom, and I could dimly discern him, his face turned towards Nayland Smith, whilst with his hand he clutched the bed-rail. Such a visit as ours, I think, must have shaken the nerve of any man.

"But, Mr. Smith," he said, "surely I am safe enough here! The place is full of American visitors at present, and I have had to be content with a room right at the top; so that the only danger I apprehend is that of fire."

"There is another danger," replied Smith. "The fact that you are at the top of the building enhances that danger. Do you recall anything of the mysterious epidemic which broke out in Rangoon in 1908—the deaths due to the Call of Siva?"

"I read of it in the Indian papers," said Guthrie uneasily. "Suicides, were they not?"

"No!" snapped Smith. "Murders!"

There was a brief silence.

"From what I recall of the cases," said Guthrie, "that seems impossible. In several instances the victims threw themselves from the windows of locked rooms—and the windows were quite inaccessible."

"Exactly," replied Smith; and in the dim light his revolver gleamed dully, as he placed it on the small table beside the bed. "Except that your door is unlocked, the conditions to-night are identical. Silence, please, I hear a clock striking."

It was Big Ben. It struck the half-hour, leaving the stillness complete. In that room, high above the activity which yet prevailed below, high above the supping crowds in the hotel, high above the starving crowds on the Embankment, a curious chill of isolation swept about me. Again I realized how, in the very heart of the great metropolis, a man may be as far from aid as in the heart of a desert. I was glad that I was not alone in that room—marked with the death-mark of Fu-Manchu; and I am certain that Graham Guthrie welcomed his unexpected company.

I may have mentioned the fact before, but on this occasion it became so peculiarly evident to me that I am constrained to record it here—I refer to the sense of impending danger which invariably preceded a visit from Fu-Manchu. Even had I not known that an attempt was to be made that night, I should have realized it, as, strung to high tension, I waited in the darkness. Some invisible herald went ahead of the dreadful Chinaman, proclaiming his coming to every nerve in one's body. It was like a breath of astral incense, announcing the presence of the priests of death.

A wail, low but singularly penetrating, falling in minor cadences to a new silence, came from somewhere close at hand.

"My God!" hissed Guthrie, "what was that?"

"The Call of Siva," whispered Smith.

"Don't stir, for your life!"

Guthrie was breathing hard.

I knew that we were three; that the hotel detective was within hail; that there was a telephone in the room; that the traffic of the Embankment moved almost beneath us; but I knew, and am not ashamed to confess, that King Fear had icy fingers about my heart. It was awful—that tense waiting—for—what?

Three taps sounded—very distinctly upon the window.

Graham Guthrie started so as to shake the bed.

"It's supernatural!" he muttered—all that was Celtic in his blood recoiling from the omen. "Nothing human can reach that window!" "S-sh!" from Smith. "Don't stir."

The tapping was repeated.

Smith softly crossed the room. My heart was beating painfully. He threw open the window. Further inaction was impossible. I joined him; and we looked out into the empty air.

"Don't come too near, Petrie!" he warned over his shoulder.

One on either side of the open window, we stood and looked down at the moving Embankment lights, at the glitter of the Thames, at the silhouetted buildings on the farther bank, with the Shot Tower starting above them all.

Three taps sounded on the panes above us.

In all my dealings with Dr. Fu-Manchu I had had to face nothing so uncanny as this. What Burmese ghoul had
he loosed? Was it outside, in the air? Was it actually in the room?

"Don't let me go, Petrie!" whispered Smith suddenly. "Get a tight hold on me!"

That was the last straw; for I thought that some dreadful fascination was impelling my friend to hurl himself out!

Wildly I threw my arms about him, and Guthrie leaped forward to help.

Smith leaned from the window and looked up.

One choking cry he gave--smothered, inarticulate--and I found him slipping from my grip--being drawn out of the window--drawn to his death!

"Hold him, Guthrie!" I gasped hoarsely. "My God, he's going! Hold him!"

My friend writhed in our grasp, and I saw him stretch his arm upward. The crack of his revolver came, and he collapsed on to the floor, carrying me with him.

But as I fell I heard a scream above. Smith's revolver went hurtling through the air, and, hard upon it, went a black shape-- flashing past the open window into the gulf of the night.

"The light! The light!" I cried.

Guthrie ran and turned on the light. Nayland Smith, his eyes starting from his head, his face swollen, lay plucking at a silken cord which showed tight about his throat.

"It was a Thug!" screamed Guthrie. "Get the rope off! He's choking!"

My hands a-twitch, I seized the strangling-cord.

"A knife! Quick!" I cried. "I have lost mine!"

Guthrie ran to the dressing-table and passed me an open penknife. I somehow forced the blade between the rope and Smith's swollen neck, and severed the deadly silken thing.

Smith made a choking noise, and fell back, swooning in my arms.

When, later, we stood looking down upon the mutilated thing which had been brought in from where it fell, Smith showed me a mark on the brow-- close beside the wound where his bullet had entered.

"The mark of Kali," he said. "The man was a phansigar-- a religious strangler. Since Fu-Manchu has dacoits in his service I might have expected that he would have Thugs. A group of these fiends would seem to have fled into Burma; so that the mysterious epidemic in Rangoon was really an outbreak of thuggee--on slightly improved lines! I had suspected something of the kind but, naturally, I had not looked for Thugs near Rangoon. My unexpected resistance led the strangler to bungle the rope. You have seen how it was fastened about my throat? That was unscientific. The true method, as practiced by the group operating in Burma, was to throw the line about the victim's neck and jerk him from the window. A man leaning from an open window is very nicely poised: it requires only a slight jerk to pitch him forward. No loop was used, but a running line, which, as the victim fell, remained in the hand of the murderer. No clew! Therefore we see at once what commended the system to Fu-Manchu."

Graham Guthrie, very pale, stood looking down at the dead strangler.

"I owe you my life, Mr. Smith," he said. "If you had come five minutes later--"

He grasped Smith's hand.

"You see," Guthrie continued, "no one thought of looking for a Thug in Burma! And no one thought of the ROOF! These fellows are as active as monkeys, and where an ordinary man would infallibly break his neck, they are entirely at home. I might have chosen my room especially for the business!"

"He slipped in late this evening," said Smith. "The hotel detective saw him, but these stranglers are as elusive as shadows, otherwise, despite their having changed the scene of their operations, not one could have survived."

"Didn't you mention a case of this kind on the Irrawaddy?" I asked.

"Yes," was the reply; "and I know of what you are thinking. The steamers of the Irrawaddy flotilla have a corrugated-iron roof over the top deck. The Thug must have been lying up there as the Colassie passed on the deck below."

"But, Smith, what is the motive of the Call?" I continued.

"Partly religious," he explained, "and partly to wake the victims! You are perhaps going to ask me how Dr. Fu-Manchu has obtained power over such people as phansigars? I can only reply that Dr. Fu-Manchu has secret knowledge of which, so far, we know absolutely nothing; but, despite all, at last I begin to score."

"You do," I agreed; "but your victory took you near to death."

"I owe my life to you, Petrie," he said. "Once to your strength of arm, and once to--"

"Don't speak of her, Smith," I interrupted. "Dr. Fu-Manchu may have discovered the part she played! In which event--"

"God help her!"

CHAPTER XVI

UPON the following day we were afoot again, and shortly at handgrips with the enemy. In retrospect, that restless time offers a chaotic prospect, with no peaceful spot amid its turmoils.
All that was reposeful in nature seemed to have become an irony and a mockery to us—who knew how an evil demigod had his sacrificial altars amid our sweetest groves. This idea ruled strongly in my mind upon that soft autumnal day.

"The net is closing in," said Nayland Smith.
"Let us hope upon a big catch," I replied, with a laugh.

Beyond where the Thames tided slumberously seaward showed the roofs of Royal Windsor, the castle towers showing through the autumn haze. The peace of beautiful Thames-side was about us.

This was one of the few tangible clews upon which thus far we had chanced; but at last it seemed indeed that we were narrowing the resources of that enemy of the white race who was writing his name over England in characters of blood. To capture Dr. Fu-Manchu we did not hope; but at least there was every promise of destroying one of the enemy's strongholds.

We had circled upon the map a tract of country cut by the Thames, with Windsor for its center. Within that circle was the house from which miraculously we had escaped—a house used by the most highly organized group in the history of criminology. So much we knew. Even if we found the house, and this was likely enough, to find it vacated by Fu-Manchu and his mysterious servants we were prepared. But it would be a base destroyed.

We were working upon a methodical plan, and although our cooperators were invisible, these numbered no fewer than twelve—all of them experienced men. Thus far we had drawn blank, but the place for which Smith and I were making now came clearly into view: an old mansion situated in extensive walled grounds. Leaving the river behind us, we turned sharply to the right along a lane flanked by a high wall. On an open patch of ground, as we passed, I noted a gypsy caravan. An old woman was seated on the steps, her wrinkled face bent, her chin resting in the palm of her hand.

I scarcely glanced at her, but pressed on, nor did I notice that my friend no longer was beside me. I was all anxiety to come to some point from whence I might obtain a view of the house; all anxiety to know if this was the abode of our mysterious enemy—the place where he worked amid his weird company, where he bred his deadly scorpions and his bacilli, reared his poisonous fungi, from whence he dispatched his murder ministers. Above all, perhaps, I wondered if this would prove to be the hiding-place of the beautiful slave girl who was such a potent factor in the Doctor's plans, but a two-edged sword which yet we hoped to turn upon Fu-Manchu. Even in the hands of a master, a woman's beauty is a dangerous weapon.

A cry rang out behind me. I turned quickly. And a singular sight met my gaze.

Nayland Smith was engaged in a furious struggle with the old gypsy woman! His long arms clasped about her, he was roughly dragging her out into the roadway, she fighting like a wild thing—silently, fiercely.

Smith often surprised me, but at that sight, frankly, I thought that he was become bereft of reason. I ran back; and I had almost reached the scene of this incredible contest, and Smith now was evidently hard put to it to hold his own when a man, swarthy, with big rings in his ears, leaped from the caravan.

One quick glance he threw in our direction, and made off towards the river.

Smith twisted round upon me, never releasing his hold of the woman.

"After him, Petrie!" he cried. "After him. Don't let him escape. It's a dacoit!"

My brain in a confused whirl; my mind yet disposed to a belief that my friend had lost his senses, the word "dacoit" was sufficient.

I started down the road after the fleetly running man. Never once did he glance behind him, so that he evidently had occasion to fear pursuit. The dusty road rang beneath my flying footsteps. That sense of fantasy, which claimed me often enough in those days of our struggle with the titanic genius whose victory meant the victory of the yellow races over the white, now had me fast in its grip again. I was an actor in one of those dream-scenes of the grim Fu-Manchu drama.

Out over the grass and down to the river's brink ran the gypsy who was no gypsy, but one of that far more sinister brotherhood, the dacoits. I was close upon his heels. But I was not prepared for him to leap in among the rushes at the margin of the stream; and seeing him do this I pulled up quickly. Straight into the water he plunged; and I saw that he held some object in his hand. He waded out; he dived; and as I gained the bank and looked to right and left he had vanished completely. Only ever-widening rings showed where he had been. I had him.

For directly he rose to the surface he would be visible from either bank, and with the police whistle which I carried I could, if necessary, summon one of the men in hiding across the stream. I waited. A wild-fowl floated serenely past, untroubled by this strange invasion of his precincts. A full minute I waited. From the lane behind me came Smith's voice:

"Don't let him escape, Petrie!"

Never lifting my eyes from the water, I waved my hand reassuringly. But still the dacoit did not rise. I searched the surface in all directions as far as my eyes could reach; but no swimmer showed above it. Then it was that I
concluded he had dived too deeply, become entangled in the weeds and was drowned. With a final glance to right and left and some feeling of awe at this sudden tragedy--this grim going out of a life at glorious noonday--I turned away. Smith had the woman securely; but I had not taken five steps towards him when a faint splash behind warned me. Instinctively I ducked. From whence that saving instinct arose I cannot surmise, but to it I owed my life. For as I rapidly lowered my head, something hummed past me, something that flew out over the grass bank, and fell with a jangle upon the dusty roadside. A knife!

I turned and bounded back to the river's brink. I heard a faint cry behind me, which could only have come from the gypsy woman. Nothing disturbed the calm surface of the water. The reach was lonely of rowers. Out by the farther bank a girl was poling a punt along, and her white-clad figure was the only living thing that moved upon the river within the range of the most expert knife-thrower.

To say that I was nonplused is to say less than the truth; I was amazed. That it was the dacoit who had shown me this murderous attention I could not doubt. But where in Heaven's name WAS he? He could not humanly have remained below water for so long; yet he certainly was not above, was not upon the surface, concealed amongst the reeds, nor hidden upon the bank.

There, in the bright sunshine, a consciousness of the eerie possessed me. It was with an uncomfortable feeling that my phantom foe might be aiming a second knife at my back that I turned away and hastened towards Smith. My fearful expectations were not realized, and I picked up the little weapon which had so narrowly missed me, and with it in my hand rejoined my friend.

He was standing with one arm closely clasped about the apparently exhausted woman, and her dark eyes were fixed upon him with an extraordinary expression.

"What does it mean, Smith?" I began.

But he interrupted me.

"Where is the dacoit?" he demanded rapidly.

"Since he seemingly possesses the attributes of a fish," I replied, "I cannot pretend to say."

The gypsy woman lifted her eyes to mine and laughed. Her laughter was musical, not that of such an old hag as Smith held captive; it was familiar, too.

I started and looked closely into the wizened face.

"He's tricked you," said Smith, an angry note in his voice. "What is that you have in your hand?"

I showed him the knife, and told him how it had come into my possession.

"I know," he rapped. "I saw it. He was in the water not three yards from where you stood. You must have seen him. Was there nothing visible?"

"Nothing."

The woman laughed again, and again I wondered.

"A wild-fowl," I added; "nothing else."

"A wild-fowl," snapped Smith. "If you will consult your recollections of the habits of wild-fowl you will see that this particular specimen was a RARA AVIS. It's an old trick, Petrie, but a good one, for it is used in decoying. A dacoit's head was concealed in that wild-fowl! It's useless. He has certainly made good his escape by now."

"Smith," I said, somewhat crestfallen, "why are you detaining this gypsy woman?"

"Gypsy woman!" he laughed, hugging her tightly as she made an impatient movement. "Use your eyes, old man."

He jerked the frowsy wig from her head, and beneath was a cloud of disordered hair that shimmered in the sunlight.

"A wet sponge will do the rest," he said.

Into my eyes, widely opened in wonder, looked the dark eyes of the captive; and beneath the disguise I picked out the charming features of the slave girl. There were tears on the whitened lashes, and she was submissive now.

"This time," said my friend hardly, "we have fairly captured her--and we will hold her."

From somewhere up-stream came a faint call.

"The dacoit!"

Nayland Smith's lean body straightened; he stood alert, strung up.

Another call answered, and a third responded. Then followed the flatly shrill note of a police whistle, and I noted a column of black vapor rising beyond the wall, mounting straight to heaven as the smoke of a welcome offering.

The surrounded mansion was in flames!

"Curse it!" rapped Smith. "So this time we were right. But, of course, he has had ample opportunity to remove his effects. I knew that. The man's daring is incredible. He has given himself till the very last moment--and we blundered upon two of the outposts."

"I lost one."
"No matter. We have the other. I expect no further arrests, and the house will have been so well fired by the Doctor's servants that nothing can save it. I fear its ashes will afford us no clew, Petrie; but we have secured a lever which should serve to disturb Fu-Manchu's world."

He glanced at the queer figure which hung submissively in his arms. She looked up proudly.

"You need not hold me so tight," she said, in her soft voice. "I will come with you."

That I moved amid singular happenings, you, who have borne with me thus far, have learned, and that I witnessed many curious scenes; but of the many such scenes in that race-drama wherein Nayland Smith and Dr. Fu-Manchu played the leading parts, I remember none more bizarre than the one at my rooms that afternoon.

Without delay, and without taking the Scotland Yard men into our confidence, we had hurried our prisoner back to London, for my friend's authority was supreme. A strange trio we were, and one which excited no little comment; but the journey came to an end at last. Now we were in my unpretentious sitting-room-- the room wherein Smith first had unfolded to me the story of Dr. Fu-Manchu and of the great secret society which sought to upset the balance of the world--to place Europe and America beneath the scepter of Cathay.

I sat with my elbows upon the writing-table, my chin in my hands; Smith restlessly paced the floor, relighting his blackened briar a dozen times in as many minutes. In the big arm-chair the pseudogypsy was curled up. A brief toilet had converted the wizened old woman's face into that of a fascinatingly pretty girl. Wildly picturesque she looked in her ragged Romany garb. She held a cigarette in her fingers and watched us through lowered lashes.

Seemingly, with true Oriental fatalism, she was quite reconciled to her fate, and ever and anon she would bestow upon me a glance from her beautiful eyes which few men, I say with confidence, could have sustained unmoved. Though I could not be blind to the emotions of that passionate Eastern soul, yet I strove not to think of them. Accomplice of an arch-murderer she might be; but she was dangerously lovely.

"That man who was with you," said Smith, suddenly turning upon her, "was in Burma up till quite recently. He murdered a fisherman thirty miles above Prome only a mouth before I left. The D.S.P. had placed a thousand rupees on his head. Am I right?"

The girl shrugged her shoulders.

"Suppose--What then?" she asked.

"Suppose I handed you over to the police?" suggested Smith. But he spoke without conviction, for in the recent past we both had owed our lives to this girl.

"As you please," she replied. "The police would learn nothing."

"You do not belong to the Far East," my friend said abruptly. "You may have Eastern blood in your veins, but you are no kin of Fu-Manchu."

"That is true," she admitted, and knocked the ash from her cigarette.

"Will you tell me where to find Fu-Manchu?"

She shrugged her shoulders again, glancing eloquently in my direction.

Smith walked to the door.

"I must make out my report, Petrie," he said. "Look after the prisoner."

And as the door closed softly behind him I knew what was expected of me; but, honestly, I shirked my responsibility. What attitude should I adopt? How should I go about my delicate task? In a quandary, I stood watching the girl whom singular circumstances saw captive in my rooms.

"You do not think we would harm you?" I began awkwardly. "No harm shall come to you. Why will you not trust us?"

She raised her brilliant eyes.

"Of what avail has your protection been to some of those others," she said; "those others whom HE has sought for?"

Alas! it had been of none, and I knew it well. I thought I grasped the drift of her words.

"You mean that if you speak, Fu-Manchu will find a way of killing you?"

"Of killing ME!" she flashed scornfully. "Do I seem one to fear for myself?"

"Then what do you fear?" I asked, in surprise.

She looked at me oddly.

"When I was seized and sold for a slave," she answered slowly, "my sister was taken, too, and my brother--a child." She spoke the word with a tender intonation, and her slight accent rendered it the more soft. "My sister died in the desert. My brother lived. Better, far better, that he had died, too."

Her words impressed me intensely.

"Of what are you speaking?" I questioned. "You speak of slave-raids, of the desert. Where did these things take place? Of what country are you?"

"Does it matter?" she questioned in turn. "Of what country am I? A slave has no country, no name."
"No name!" I cried.
"You may call me Karamaneh," she said. "As Karamaneh I was sold to Dr. Fu-Manchu, and my brother also he purchased. We were cheap at the price he paid." She laughed shortly, wildly.
"But he has spent a lot of money to educate me. My brother is all that is left to me in the world to love, and he is in the power of Dr. Fu-Manchu. You understand? It is upon him the blow will fall. You ask me to fight against Fu-Manchu. You talk of protection. Did your protection save Sir Crichton Davey?"
I shook my head sadly.
"You understand now why I cannot disobey my master's orders--why, if I would, I dare not betray him."
I walked to the window and looked out. How could I answer her arguments? What could I say? I heard the rustle of her ragged skirts, and she who called herself Karamaneh stood beside me. She laid her hand upon my arm.
"Let me go," she pleaded. "He will kill him! He will kill him!"
Her voice shook with emotion.
"He cannot revenge himself upon your brother when you are in no way to blame," I said angrily. "We arrested you; you are not here of your own free will."
She drew her breath sharply, clutching at my arm, and in her eyes I could read that she was forcing her mind to some arduous decision.
"Listen." She was speaking rapidly, nervously. "If I help you to take Dr. Fu-Manchu--tell you where he is to be found ALONE--will you promise me, solemnly promise me, that you will immediately go to the place where I shall guide you and release my brother; that you will let us both go free?"
"I will," I said, without hesitation. "You may rest assured of it."
"But there is a condition," she added.
"What is it?"
"When I have told you where to capture him you must release me."
I hesitated. Smith often had accused me of weakness where this girl was concerned. What now was my plain duty? That she would utterly decline to speak under any circumstances unless it suited her to do so I felt assured. If she spoke the truth, in her proposed bargain there was no personal element; her conduct I now viewed in a new light. Humanity, I thought, dictated that I accept her proposal; policy also.
"I agree," I said, and looked into her eyes, which were aflame now with emotion, an excitement perhaps of anticipation, perhaps of fear.
She laid her hands upon my shoulders.
"You will be careful?" she said pleadingly.
"For your sake," I replied, "I shall."
"Not for my sake."
"Then for your brother's."
"No." Her voice had sunk to a whisper. "For your own."
CHAPTER XVII
A COOL breeze met us, blowing from the lower reaches of the Thames. Far behind us twinkled the dim lights of Low's Cottages, the last regular habitations abutting upon the marshes. Between us and the cottages stretched half-a-mile of lush land through which at this season there were, however, numerous dry paths. Before us the flats again, a dull, monotonous expanse beneath the moon, with the promise of the cool breeze that the river flowed round the bend ahead. It was very quiet. Only the sound of our footsteps, as Nayland Smith and I tramped steadily towards our goal, broke the stillness of that lonely place.
Not once but many times, within the last twenty minutes, I had thought that we were ill-advised to adventure alone upon the capture of the formidable Chinese doctor; but we were following out our compact with Karamaneh; and one of her stipulations had been that the police must not be acquainted with her share in the matter.
A light came into view far ahead of us.
"That's the light, Petrie," said Smith. "If we keep that straight before us, according to our information we shall strike the hulk."
I grasped the revolver in my pocket, and the presence of the little weapon was curiously reassuring. I have endeavored, perhaps in extenuation of my own fears, to explain how about Dr. Fu-Manchu there rested an atmosphere of horror, peculiar, unique. He was not as other men. The dread that he inspired in all with whom he came in contact, the terrors which he controlled and hurled at whomsoever cumbered his path, rendered him an object supremely sinister. I despair of conveying to those who may read this account any but the coldest conception of the man's evil power.
Smith stopped suddenly and grasped my arm. We stood listening. "What?" I asked.
"You heard nothing?"
I shook my head.

Smith was peering back over the marshes in his oddly alert way. He turned to me, and his tanned face wore a peculiar expression.

"You don't think it's a trap?" he jerked. "We are trusting her blindly."

Strange it may seem, but something within me rose in arms against the innuendo.

"I don't," I said shortly.

He nodded. We pressed on.

Ten minutes' steady tramping brought us within sight of the Thames. Smith and I both had noticed how Fu-Manchu's activities centered always about the London river. Undoubtedly it was his highway, his line of communication, along which he moved his mysterious forces. The opium den off Shadwell Highway, the mansion upstream, at that hour a smoldering shell; now the hulk lying off the marshes. Always he made his headquarters upon the river. It was significant; and even if to-night's expedition should fail, this was a clew for our future guidance.

"Bear to the right," directed Smith. "We must reconnoiter before making our attack."

We took a path that led directly to the river bank. Before us lay the gray expanse of water, and out upon it moved the busy shipping of the great mercantile city. But this life of the river seemed widely removed from us. The lonely spot where we stood had no kinship with human activity. Its dreariness illuminated by the brilliant moon, it looked indeed a fit setting for an act in such a drama as that wherein we played our parts. When I had lain in the East End opium den, when upon such another night as this I had looked out upon a peaceful Norfolk countryside, the same knowledge of aloofness, of utter detachment from the world of living men, had come to me.

Silently Smith stared out at the distant moving lights.

"Karamaneh merely means a slave," he said irrelevantly.

I made no comment.

"There's the hulk," he added.

The bank upon which we stood dipped in mud slopes to the level of the running tide. Seaward it rose higher, and by a narrow inlet-- for we perceived that we were upon a kind of promontory-- a rough pier showed. Beneath it was a shadowy shape in the patch of gloom which the moon threw far out upon the softly eddying water. Only one dim light was visible amid this darkness.

"That will be the cabin," said Smith.

Acting upon our prearranged plan, we turned and walked up on to the staging above the hulk. A wooden ladder led out and down to the deck below, and was loosely lashed to a ring on the pier. With every motion of the tidal waters the ladder rose and fell, its rings creaking harshly, against the crazy railing.

"How are we going to get down without being detected?" whispered Smith.

"We've got to risk it," I said grimly.

Without further words my friend climbed around on to the ladder and commenced to descend. I waited until his head disappeared below the level, and, clumsily enough, prepared to follow him.

The hulk at that moment giving an unusually heavy heave, I stumbled, and for one breathless moment looked down upon the glittering surface streaking the darkness beneath me. My foot had slipped, and but that I had a firm grip upon the top rung, that instant, most probably, had marked the end of my share in the fight with Fu-Manchu. As it was I had a narrow escape. I felt something slip from my hip pocket, but the weird creaking of the ladder, the groans of the laboring hulk, and the lapping of the waves about the staging drowned the sound of the splash as my revolver dropped into the river.

Rather white-faced, I think, I joined Smith on the deck. He had witnessed my accident, but--

"We must risk it," he whispered in my ear. "We dare not turn back now."

He plunged into the semi-darkness, making for the cabin, I perforce following.

At the bottom of the ladder we came fully into the light streaming out from the singular apartments at the entrance to which we found ourselves. It was fitted up as a laboratory. A glimpse I had of shelves loaded with jars and bottles, of a table strewn with scientific paraphernalia, with retorts, with tubes of extraordinary shapes, holding living organisms, and with instruments--some of them of a form unknown to my experience. I saw too that books, papers and rolls of parchment littered the bare wooden floor. Then Smith's voice rose above the confused sounds about me, incisive, commanding:

"I have you covered, Dr. Fu-Manchu!"

For Fu-Manchu sat at the table.

The picture that he presented at that moment is one which persistently clings in my memory. In his long, yellow robe, his masklike, intellectual face bent forward amongst the riot of singular objects upon the table, his great, high brow gleaming in the light of the shaded lamp above him, and with the abnormal eyes, filmed and green, raised to
us, he seemed a figure from the realms of delirium. But, most amazing circumstance of all, he and his surroundings tallied, almost identically, with the dream-picture which had come to me as I lay chained in the cell!

Some of the large jars about the place held anatomy specimens. A faint smell of opium hung in the air, and playing with the tassel of one of the cushions upon which, as upon a divan, Fu-Manchu was seated, leaped and chattered a little marmoset.

That was an electric moment. I was prepared for anything-- for anything except for what really happened.

The doctor's wonderful, evil face betrayed no hint of emotion. The lids flickered over the filmed eyes, and their greenness grew momentarily brighter, and filmed over again.

"Put up your hands!" rapped Smith, "and attempt no tricks." His voice quivered with excitement. "The game's up, Fu-Manchu. Find something to tie him up with, Petrie."

I moved forward to Smith's side, and was about to pass him in the narrow doorway. The hulk moved beneath our feet like a living thing groaning, creaking--and the water lapped about the rotten woodwork with a sound infinitely dreary.

"Put up your hands!" ordered Smith imperatively.

Fu-Manchu slowly raised his hands, and a smile dawned upon the impassive features--a smile that had no mirth in it, only menace, revealing as it did his even, discolored teeth, but leaving the filmed eyes inanimate, dull, inhuman.

He spoke softly, sibilantly.

"I would advise Dr. Petrie to glance behind him before he moves."

Smith's keen gray eyes never for a moment quitted the speaker. The gleaming barrel moved not a hair's-breadth. But I glanced quickly over my shoulder--and stifled a cry of pure horror.

A wicked, pock-marked face, with wolfish fangs bared, and jaundiced eyes squinting obliquely into mine, was within two inches of me. A lean, brown hand and arm, the great thews standing up like cords, held a crescent-shaped knife a fraction of an inch above my jugular vein. A slight movement must have dispatched me; a sweep of the fearful weapon, I doubt not, would have severed my head from my body.

"Smith!" I whispered hoarsely, "don't look around. For God's sake keep him covered. But a dacoit has his knife at my throat!"

Then, for the first time, Smith's hand trembled. But his glance never wavered from the malignant, emotionless countenance of Dr. Fu-Manchu. He clenched his teeth hard, so that the muscles stood out prominently upon his jaw.

I suppose that silence which followed my awful discovery prevailed but a few seconds. To me those seconds were each a lingering death.

There, below, in that groaning hulk, I knew more of icy terror than any of our meetings with the murder-group had brought to me before; and through my brain throbbed a thought: the girl had betrayed us!

"You supposed that I was alone?" suggested Fu-Manchu. "So I was."

Yet no trace of fear had broken through the impassive yellow mask when we had entered.

"But my faithful servant followed you," he added. "I thank him. The honors, Mr. Smith, are mine, I think?"

Smith made no reply. I divined that he was thinking furiously. Fu-Manchu moved his hand to caress the marmoset, which had leaped playfully upon his shoulder, and crouched there gibing at us in a whistling voice.

"Don't stir!" said Smith savagely. "I warn you!"

Fu-Manchu kept his hand raised.

"May I ask you how you discovered my retreat?" he asked.

"This hulk has been watched since dawn," lied Smith brazenly.

"So?" The Doctor's filmed eyes cleared for a moment. "And to-day you compelled me to burn a house, and you have captured one of my people, too. I congratulate you. She would not betray me though lashed with scorpions."

The great gleaming knife was so near to my neck that a sheet of notepaper could scarcely have been slipped between blade and vein, I think; but my heart throbbed even more wildly when I heard those words.

"An impasse," said Fu-Manchu. "I have a proposal to make. I assume that you would not accept my word for anything?"

"I would not," replied Smith promptly.

"Therefore, pursued the Chinaman, and the occasional guttural alone marred his perfect English, "I must accept yours. Of your resources outside this cabin I know nothing. You, I take it, know as little of mine. My Burmese friend and Doctor Petrie will lead the way, then; you and I will follow. We will strike out across the marsh for, say, three hundred yards. You will then place your pistol on the ground, pledging me your word to leave it there. I shall further require your assurance that you will make no attempt upon me until I have retraced my steps. I and my good servant will withdraw, leaving you, at the expiration of the specified period, to act as you see fit. Is it agreed?"

Smith hesitated. Then:
"The dacoit must leave his knife also," he stipulated. Fu-Manchu smiled his evil smile again.  
"Agreed. Shall I lead the way?"

"No!" rapped Smith. "Petrie and the dacoit first; then you; I last."

A guttural word of command from Fu-Manchu, and we left the cabin, with its evil odors, its mortuary specimens, and its strange instruments, and in the order arranged mounted to the deck.  
"It will be awkward on the ladder," said Fu-Manchu. "Dr. Petrie, I will accept your word to adhere to the terms."

"I promise," I said, the words almost choking me.

A guttural word of command from Fu-Manchu, and we left the cabin, with its evil odors, its mortuary specimens, and its strange instruments, and in the order arranged mounted to the deck.  
"It will be awkward on the ladder," said Fu-Manchu. "Dr. Petrie, I will accept your word to adhere to the terms."

"I promise," I said, the words almost choking me.

We mounted the rising and dipping ladder, all reached the pier, and strode out across the flats, the Chinaman always under close cover of Smith's revolver. Round about our feet, now leaping ahead, now gamboling back, came and went the marmoset. The dacoit, dressed solely in a dark loin-cloth, walked beside me, carrying his huge knife, and sometimes glancing at me with his blood-lustful eyes. Never before, I venture to say, had an autumn moon lighted such a scene in that place.  
"Here we part," said Fu-Manchu, and spoke another word to his follower.  
The man threw his knife upon the ground.  
"Search him, Petrie," directed Smith. "He may have a second concealed."

The Doctor consented; and I passed my hands over the man's scanty garments.  
"Now search Fu-Manchu."

This also I did. And never have I experienced a similar sense of revulsion from any human being. I shuddered, as though I had touched a venomous reptile.

Smith threw down his revolver.  
"I curse myself for an honorable fool," he said. "No one could dispute my right to shoot you dead where you stand."

Knowing him as I did, I could tell from the suppressed passion in Smith's voice that only by his unhesitating acceptance of my friend's word, and implicit faith in his keeping it, had Dr. Fu-Manchu escaped just retribution at that moment. Fiend though he was, I admired his courage; for all this he, too, must have known.

The Doctor turned, and with the dacoit walked back. Nayland Smith's next move filled me with surprise. For just as, silently, I was thanking God for my escape, my friend began shedding his coat, collar, and waistcoat.  
"Pocket your valuables, and do the same," he muttered hoarsely. "We have a poor chance but we are both fairly fit. To-night, Petrie, we literally have to run for our lives."

We live in a peaceful age, wherein it falls to the lot of few men to owe their survival to their fleetness of foot. At Smith's words I realized in a flash that such was to be our fate to-night.

I have said that the hulk lay off a sort of promontory. East and west, then, we had nothing to hope for. To the south was Fu-Manchu; and even as, stripped of our heavier garments, we started to run northward, the weird signal of a dacoit rose on the night and was answered--was answered again.  
"Three, at least," hissed Smith; "three armed dacoits. Hopeless."

"Take the revolver," I cried. "Smith, it's--"

"No," he rapped, through clenched teeth. "A servant of the Crown in the East makes his motto: 'Keep your word, though it break your neck!' I don't think we need fear it being used against us. Fu-Manchu avoids noisy methods."

So back we ran, over the course by which, earlier, we had come. It was, roughly, a mile to the first building--a deserted cottage--and another quarter of a mile to any that was occupied.  
Our chance of meeting a living soul, other than Fu-Manchu's dacoits, was practically nil. At first we ran easily, for it was the second half-mile that would decide our fate. The professional murderers who pursued us ran like panthers, I knew; and I dare not allow my mind to dwell upon those yellow figures with the curved, gleaming knives. For a long time neither of us looked back.  
On we ran, and on--silently, doggedly.  
Then a hissing breath from Smith warned me what to expect.  
Should I, too, look back? Yes. It was impossible to resist the horrid fascination.  
I threw a quick glance over my shoulder.  
And never while I live shall I forget what I saw. Two of the pursuing dacoits had outdistanced their fellow (or fellows), and were actually within three hundred yards of us.

More like dreadful animals they looked than human beings, running bent forward, with their faces curiously upturned. The brilliant moonlight gleamed upon bared teeth, as I could see, even at that distance, even in that quick, agonized glance, and it gleamed upon the crescent-shaped knives.  
"As hard as you can go now," panted Smith. "We must make an attempt to break into the empty cottage. Only chance."

I had never in my younger days been a notable runner; for Smith I cannot speak. But I am confident that the next
half-mile was done in time that would not have disgraced a crack man. Not once again did either of us look back. Yard upon yard we raced forward together. My heart seemed to be bursting. My leg muscles throbbed with pain. At last, with the empty cottage in sight, it came to that pass with me when another three yards looks as unattainable as three miles. Once I stumbled.

"My God!" came from Smith weakly.

But I recovered myself. Bare feet pattered close upon our heels, and panting breaths told how even Fu-Manchu's bloodhounds were hard put to it by the killing pace we had made.

"Smith," I whispered, "look in front. Someone!"

As through a red mist I had seen a dark shape detach itself from the shadows of the cottage, and merge into them again. It could only be another dacoit; but Smith, not heeding, or not hearing, my faintly whispered words, crashed open the gate and hurled himself blindly at the door.

It burst open before him with a resounding boom, and he pitched forward into the interior darkness. Flat upon the floor he lay, for as, with a last effort, I gained the threshold and dragged myself within, I almost fell over his recumbent body.

Madly I snatched at the door. His foot held it open. I kicked the foot away, and banged the door to. As I turned, the leading dacoit, his eyes starting from their sockets, his face the face of a demon leaped wildly through the gateway.

That Smith had burst the latch I felt assured, but by some divine accident my weak hands found the bolt. With the last ounce of strength spared to me I thrust it home in the rusty socket--as a full six inches of shining steel split the middle panel and protruded above my head.

I dropped, sprawling, beside my friend.

A terrific blow shattered every pane of glass in the solitary window, and one of the grinning animal faces looked in.

"Sorry, old man," whispered Smith, and his voice was barely audible. Weakly he grasped my hand. "My fault. I shouldn't have let you come."

From the corner of the room where the black shadows lay flicked a long tongue of flame. Muffled, staccato, came the report. And the yellow face at the window was blotted out.

One wild cry, ending in a rattling gasp, told of a dacoit gone to his account.

A gray figure glided past me and was silhouetted against the broken window.

Again the pistol sent its message into the night, and again came the reply to tell how well and truly that message had been delivered. In the stillness, intense by sharp contrast, the sound of bare soles pattering upon the path outside stole to me. Two runners, I thought there were, so that four dacoits must have been upon our trail. The room was full of pungent smoke. I staggered to my feet as the gray figure with the revolver turned towards me. Something familiar there was in that long, gray garment, and now I perceived why I had thought so.

It was my gray rain-coat.

"Karamaneh," I whispered.

And Smith, with difficulty, supporting himself upright, and holding fast to the ledge beside the door, muttered something hoarsely, which sounded like "God bless her!"

The girl, trembling now, placed her hands upon my shoulders with that quaint, pathetic gesture peculiarly her own.

"I followed you," she said. "Did you not know I should follow you? But I had to hide because of another who was following also. I had but just reached this place when I saw you running towards me."

She broke off and turned to Smith.

"This is your pistol," she said naively. "I found it in your bag. Will you please take it?"

He took it without a word. Perhaps he could not trust himself to speak.

"Now go. Hurry!" she said. "You are not safe yet."

"But you?" I asked.

"You have failed," she replied. "I must go back to him. There is no other way."

Strangely sick at heart for a man who has just had a miraculous escape from death, I opened the door. Coatless, disheveled figures, my friend and I stepped out into the moonlight.

Hideous under the pale rays lay the two dead men, their glazed eyes upcast to the peace of the blue heavens. Karamaneh had shot to kill, for both had bullets in their brains. If God ever planned a more complex nature than hers--a nature more tumultuous with conflicting passions, I cannot conceive of it. Yet her beauty was of the sweetest; and in some respects she had the heart of a child--this girl who could shoot so straight.

"We must send the police to-night," said Smith. "Or the papers--"

"Hurry," came the girl's voice commandingly from the darkness of the cottage.
It was a singular situation. My very soul rebelled against it. But what could we do?
"Tell us where we can communicate," began Smith.
"Hurry. I shall be suspected. Do you want him to kill me!"

We moved away. All was very still now, and the lights glimmered faintly ahead. Not a wisp of cloud brushed the moon's disk.
"Good-night, Karamaneh," I whispered softly.

CHAPTER XVIII

TO pursue further the adventure on the marshes would be a task at once useless and thankless. In its actual and in its dramatic significance it concluded with our parting from Karamaneh. And in that parting I learned what Shakespeare meant by "Sweet Sorrow."

There was a world, I learned, upon the confines of which I stood, a world whose very existence hitherto had been unsuspected. Not the least of the mysteries which peeped from the darkness was the mystery of the heart of Karamaneh. I sought to forget her. I sought to remember her. Indeed, in the latter task I found one more congenial, yet, in the direction and extent of the ideas which it engendered, one that led me to a precipice.

East and West may not intermingle. As a student of world-policies, as a physician, I admitted, could not deny, that truth. Again, if Karamaneh were to be credited, she had come to Fu-Manchu a slave; had fallen into the hands of the raiders; had crossed the desert with the slave-drivers; had known the house of the slave-dealer. Could it be? With the fading of the crescent of Islam I had thought such things to have passed.

But if it were so?

At the mere thought of a girl so deliciously beautiful in the brutal power of slavers, I found myself grinding my teeth--closing my eyes in a futile attempt to blot out the pictures called up.

Then, at such times, I would find myself discrediting her story. Again, I would find myself wondering, vaguely, why such problems persistently haunted my mind. But, always, my heart had an answer. And I was a medical man, who sought to build up a family practice!--who, in short, a very little time ago, had thought himself past the hot follies of youth and entered upon that staid phase of life wherein the daily problems of the medical profession hold absolute sway and such seductive follies as dark eyes and red lips find--no place--are excluded!

But it is foreign from the purpose of this plain record to enlist sympathy for the recorder. The topic upon which, here, I have ventured to touch was one fascinating enough to me; I cannot hope that it holds equal charm for any other. Let us return to that which it is my duty to narrate and let us forget my brief digression.

It is a fact, singular, but true, that few Londoners know London. Under the guidance of my friend, Nayland Smith, I had learned, since his return from Burma, how there are haunts in the very heart of the metropolis whose existence is unsuspected by all but the few; places unknown even to the ubiquitous copy-hunting pressman.

Into a quiet thoroughfare not two minutes' walk from the pulsing life of Leicester Square, Smith led the way. Before a door sandwiched in between two dingy shop-fronts he paused and turned to me.

"Whatever you see or hear," he cautioned, "express no surprise."

A cab had dropped us at the corner. We both wore dark suits and fez caps with black silk tassels. My complexion had been artificially reduced to a shade resembling the deep tan of my friend's. He rang the bell beside the door.

Almost immediately it was opened by a negro woman--gross, hideously ugly.

Smith uttered something in voluble Arabic. As a linguist his attainments were a constant source of surprise. The jargons of the East, Far and Near, he spoke as his mother tongue. The woman immediately displayed the utmost servility, ushering us into an ill-lighted passage, with every evidence of profound respect. Following this passage, and passing an inner door, from beyond whence proceeded bursts of discordant music, we entered a little room bare of furniture, with coarse matting for mural decorations, and a patternless red carpet on the floor. In a niche burned a common metal lamp.

The negress left us, and close upon her departure entered a very aged man with a long patriarchal beard, who greeted my friend with dignified courtesy. Following a brief conversation, the aged Arab--for such he appeared to be--drew aside a strip of matting, revealing a dark recess. Placing his finger upon his lips, he silently invited us to enter.

We did so, and the mat was dropped behind us. The sounds of crude music were now much plainer, and as Smith slipped a little shutter aside I gave a start of surprise.

Beyond lay a fairly large apartment, having divans or low seats around three of its walls. These divans were occupied by a motley company of Turks, Egyptians, Greeks, and others; and I noted two Chinese. Most of them smoked cigarettes, and some were drinking. A girl was performing a sinuous dance upon the square carpet occupying the center of the floor, accompanied by a young negro woman upon a guitar and by several members of the assembly who clapped their hands to the music or hummed a low, monotonous melody.

Shortly after our entrance into the passage the dance terminated, and the dancer fled through a curtained door at
the farther end of the room. A buzz of conversation arose.

"It is a sort of combined Wekaleh and place of entertainment for a certain class of Oriental residents in, or visiting, London," Smith whispered. "The old gentleman who has just left us is the proprietor or host. I have been here before on several occasions, but have always drawn blank."

He was peering out eagerly into the strange clubroom.

"Whom do you expect to find here?" I asked.

"It is a recognized meeting-place," said Smith in my ear. "It is almost a certainty that some of the Fu-Manchu group use it at times."

Curiously I surveyed all these faces which were visible from the spy-hole. My eyes rested particularly upon the two Chinamen.

"Do you recognize anyone?" I whispered.

"S-sh!"

Smith was craning his neck so as to command a sight of the doorway. He obstructed my view, and only by his tense attitude and some subtle wave of excitement which he communicated to me did I know that a new arrival was entering. The hum of conversation died away, and in the ensuing silence I heard the rustle of draperies. The newcomer was a woman, then. Fearful of making any noise I yet managed to get my eyes to the level of the shutter. A woman in an elegant, flame-colored opera cloak was crossing the floor and coming in the direction of the spot where we were concealed. She wore a soft silk scarf about her head, a fold partly draped across her face. A momentary view I had of her--and wildly incongruous she looked in that place--and she had disappeared from sight, having approached someone invisible who sat upon the divan immediately beneath our point of vantage.

From the way in which the company gazed towards her, I divined that she was no habitue of the place, but that her presence there was as greatly surprising to those in the room as it was to me.

Whom could she be, this elegant lady who visited such a haunt--who, it would seem, was so anxious to disguise her identity, but who was dressed for a society function rather than for a midnight expedition of so unusual a character?

I began a whispered question, but Smith tugged at my arm to silence me. His excitement was intense. Had his keener powers enabled him to recognize the unknown?

A faint but most peculiar perfume stole to my nostrils, a perfume which seemed to contain the very soul of Eastern mystery. Only one woman known to me used that perfume--Karamaneh.

Then it was she!

At last my friend's vigilance had been rewarded. Eagerly I bent forward. Smith literally quivered in anticipation of a discovery. Again the strange perfume was wafted to our hiding-place; and, glancing neither to right nor left, I saw Karamaneh--for that it was she I no longer doubted--recross the room and disappear.

"The man she spoke to," hissed Smith. "We must see him! We must have him!"

He pulled the mat aside and stepped out into the anteroom. It was empty. Down the passage he led, and we were almost come to the door of the big room when it was thrown open and a man came rapidly out, opened the street door before Smith could reach him, and was gone, slamming it fast.

I can swear that we were not four seconds behind him, but when we gained the street it was empty. Our quarry had disappeared as if by magic. A big car was just turning the corner towards Leicester Square.

"That is the girl," rapped Smith; "but where in Heaven's name is the man to whom she brought the message? I would give a hundred pounds to know what business is afoot. To think that we have had such an opportunity and have thrown it away!"

Angry and nonplused he stood at the corner, looking in the direction of the crowded thoroughfare into which the car had been driven, tugging at the lobe of his ear, as was his habit in such moments of perplexity, and sharply clicking his teeth together. I, too, was very thoughtful. Clews were few enough in those days of our war with that giant antagonist. The mere thought that our trifling error of judgment tonight in tarrying a moment too long might mean the victory of Fu-Manchu, might mean the turning of the balance which a wise providence had adjusted between the white and yellow races, was appalling.

To Smith and me, who knew something of the secret influences at work to overthrow the Indian Empire, to place, it might be, the whole of Europe and America beneath an Eastern rule, it seemed that a great yellow hand was stretched out over London. Doctor Fu-Manchu was a menace to the civilized world. Yet his very existence remained unsuspected by the millions whose fate he sought to command.

"Into what dark scheme have we had a glimpse?" said Smith. "What State secret is to be filched? What faithful servant of the British Raj to be spirited away? Upon whom now has Fu-Manchu set his death seal?"

"Karamaneh on this occasion may not have been acting as an emissary of the Doctor's."

"I feel assured that she was, Petrie. Of the many whom this yellow cloud may at any moment envelop, to which
one did her message refer? The man's instructions were urgent. Witness his hasty departure. Curse it!" He dashed his right clenched fist into the palm of his left hand. "I never had a glimpse of his face, first to last. To think of the hours I have spent in that place, in anticipation of just such a meeting--only to bungle the opportunity when it arose!"

Scarce heeding what course we followed, we had come now to Piccadilly Circus, and had walked out into the heart of the night's traffic. I just dragged Smith aside in time to save him from the off-front wheel of a big Mercedes. Then the traffic was blocked, and we found ourselves dangerously penned in amidst the press of vehicles.

Somehow we extricated ourselves, jeered at by taxi-drivers, who naturally took us for two simple Oriental visitors, and just before that impassable barrier the arm of a London policeman was lowered and the stream moved on a faint breath of perfume became perceptible to me.

The cabs and cars about us were actually beginning to move again, and there was nothing for it but a hasty retreat to the curb. I could not pause to glance behind, but instinctively I knew that someone--someone who used that rare, fragrant essence-- was leaning from the window of the car.

"ANDAMAN--SECOND!" floated a soft whisper.

Smith had not noticed the perfume worn by the unseen occupant of the car, had not detected the whispered words. But I had no reason to doubt my senses, and I knew beyond question that Fu-Manchu's lovely slave, Karamaneh, had been within a yard of us, had recognized us, and had uttered those words for our guidance.

On regaining my rooms, we devoted a whole hour to considering what "ANDAMAN--SECOND" could possibly mean.

"Hang it all!" cried Smith, "it might mean anything-- the result of a race, for instance."

He burst into one of his rare laughs, and began to stuff broadcut mixture into his briar. I could see that he had no intention of turning in.

"I can think of no one--no one of note--in London at present upon whom it is likely that Fu-Manchu would make an attempt," he said, "except ourselves."

We began methodically to go through the long list of names which we had compiled and to review our elaborate notes. When, at last, I turned in, the night had given place to a new day. But sleep evaded me, and "ANDAMAN--SECOND" danced like a mocking phantom through my brain.

Then I heard the telephone bell. I heard Smith speaking.

A minute afterwards he was in my room, his face very grim.

"I knew as well as if I'd seen it with my own eyes that some black business was afoot last night," he said. "And it was. Within pistol-shot of us! Someone has got at Frank Norris West. Inspector Weymouth has just been on the phone."

"Norris West!" I cried, "the American aviator--and inventor--" "Of the West aero-torpedo--yes. He's been offering it to the English War Office, and they have delayed too long."

I got out of bed.

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that the potentialities have attracted the attention of Dr. Fu-Manchu!"

Those words operated electrically. I do not know how long I was in dressing, how long a time elapsed ere the cab for which Smith had 'phoned arrived, how many precious minutes were lost upon the journey; but, in a nervous swirl, these things slipped into the past, like the telegraph poles seen from the window of an express, and, still in that tense state, we came upon the scene of this newest outrage.

Mr. Norris West, whose lean, stoic face had latterly figured so often in the daily press, lay upon the floor in the little entrance hall of his chambers, flat upon his back, with the telephone receiver in his hand.

The outer door had been forced by the police. They had had to remove a piece of the paneling to get at the bolt. A medical man was leaning over the recumbent figure in the striped pajama suit, and Detective-Inspector Weymouth stood watching him as Smith and I entered.

"He has been heavily drugged," said the Doctor, sniffing at West's lips, "but I cannot say what drug has been used. It isn't chloroform or anything of that nature. He can safely be left to sleep it off, I think."

I agreed, after a brief examination.

"It's most extraordinary," said Weymouth. "He rang up the Yard about an hour ago and said his chambers had been invaded by Chinamen. Then the man at the 'phone plainly heard him fall. When we got here his front door was bolted, as you've seen, and the windows are three floors up. Nothing is disturbed."

"The plans of the aero-torpedo?" rapped Smith.

"I take it they are in the safe in his bedroom," replied the detective, "and that is locked all right. I think he must have taken an overdose of something and had illusions. But in case there was anything in what he mumbled (you could hardly understand him) I thought it as well to send for you."
"Quite right," said Smith rapidly. His eyes shone like steel. "Lay him on the bed, Inspector."

It was done, and my friend walked into the bedroom.

Save that the bed was disordered, showing that West had been sleeping in it, there were no evidences of the extraordinary invasion mentioned by the drugged man. It was a small room--the chambers were of that kind which are let furnished--and very neat. A safe with a combination lock stood in a corner. The window was open about a foot at the top. Smith tried the safe and found it fast. He stood for a moment clicking his teeth together, by which I knew him to be perplexed. He walked over to the window and threw it up. We both looked out.

"You see," came Weymouth's voice, "it is altogether too far from the court below for our cunning Chinese friends to have fixed a ladder with one of their bamboo rod arrangements. And, even if they could get up there, it's too far down from the roof--two more stories--for them to have fixed it from there."

Smith nodded thoughtfully, at the same time trying the strength of an iron bar which ran from side to side of the window-sill. Suddenly he stooped, with a sharp exclamation. Bending over his shoulder I saw what it was that had attracted his attention.

Clearly imprinted upon the dust-coated gray stone of the sill was a confused series of marks--tracks call them what you will.

Smith straightened himself and turned a wondering look upon me.

"What is it, Petrie?" he said amazedly. "Some kind of bird has been here, and recently." Inspector Weymouth in turn examined the marks.

"I never saw bird tracks like these, Mr. Smith," he muttered.

Smith was tugging at the lobe of his ear.

"No," he returned reflectively; "come to think of it, neither did I."

He twisted around, looking at the man on the bed.

"Do you think it was all an illusion?" asked the detective.

"What about those marks on the window-sill?" jerked Smith.

He began restlessly pacing about the room, sometimes stopping before the locked safe and frequently glancing at Norris West.

Suddenly he walked out and briefly examined the other apartments, only to return again to the bedroom.

"Petrie," he said, "we are losing valuable time. West must be aroused."

Inspector Weymouth stared.

Smith turned to me impatiently. The doctor summoned by the police had gone. "Is there no means of arousing him, Petrie?" he said.

"Doubtless," I replied, "he could be revived if one but knew what drug he had taken."

My friend began his restless pacing again, and suddenly pounced upon a little phial of tabloids which had been hidden behind some books on a shelf near the bed. He uttered a triumphant exclamation.

"See what we have here, Petrie!" he directed, handing the phial to me. "It bears no label."

I crushed one of the tabloids in my palm and applied my tongue to the powder.


"A sleeping draught?" suggested Smith eagerly.

"We might try," I said, and scribbled a formula upon a leaf of my notebook. I asked Weymouth to send the man who accompanied him to call up the nearest chemist and procure the antidote.

During the man's absence Smith stood contemplating the unconscious inventor, a peculiar expression upon his bronzed face.

"ANDAMAN--SECOND," he muttered. "Shall we find the key to the riddle here, I wonder?"

Inspector Weymouth, who had concluded, I think, that the mysterious telephone call was due to mental aberration on the part of Norris West, was gnawing at his mustache impatiently when his assistant returned. I administered the powerful restorative, and although, as later transpired, chloral was not responsible for West's condition, the antidote operated successfully.

Norris West struggled into a sitting position, and looked about him with haggard eyes.

"The Chinamen! The Chinamen!" he muttered.

He sprang to his feet, glaring wildly at Smith and me, reeled, and almost fell.

"It is all right," I said, supporting him. "I'm a doctor. You have been unwell."

"Have the police come?" he burst out. "The safe--try the safe!"

"It's all right," said Inspector Weymouth. "The safe is locked--unless someone else knows the combination, there's nothing to worry about."

"No one else knows it," said West, and staggered unsteadily to the safe. Clearly his mind was in a dazed condition, but, setting his jaw with a curious expression of grim determination, he collected his thoughts and opened...
the safe.
   He bent down, looking in.
In some way the knowledge came to me that the curtain was about to rise on a new and surprising act in the Fu-
Manchu drama.
   "God!" he whispered--we could scarcely hear him--"the plans are gone!"

CHAPTER XIX
   I HAVE never seen a man quite so surprised as Inspector Weymouth.
   "This is absolutely incredible!" he said. "There's only one door to your chambers. We found it bolted from the
inside."
   "Yes," groaned West, pressing his hand to his forehead. "I bolted it myself at eleven o'clock, when I came in."
   "No human being could climb up or down to your windows. The plans of the aero-torpedo were inside a safe."
   "I put them there myself," said West, "on returning from the War Office, and I had occasion to consult them after
I had come in and bolted the door. I returned them to the safe and locked it. That it was still locked you saw for
yourselves, and no one else in the world knows the combination."
   "But the plans have gone," said Weymouth. "It's magic! How was it done? What happened last night, sir? What
did you mean when you rang us up?"
   Smith during this colloquy was pacing rapidly up and down the room. He turned abruptly to the aviator.
   "Every fact you can remember, Mr. West, please," he said tersely; "and be as brief as you possibly can."
   "I came in, as I said," explained West, "about eleven o'clock and having made some notes relating to an
interview arranged for this morning, I locked the plans in the safe and turned in."
   "There was no one hidden anywhere in your chambers?" snapped Smith.
   "There was not," replied West. "I looked. I invariably do. Almost immediately, I went to sleep."
   "How many chloral tabloids did you take?" I interrupted.
Norris West turned to me with a slow smile.
   "You're cute, Doctor," he said. "I took two. It's a bad habit, but I can't sleep without. They are specially made up
for me by a firm in Philadelphia."
   "How long sleep lasted, when it became filled with uncanny dreams, and when those dreams merged into reality,
I do not know-- shall never know, I suppose. But out of the dreamless void a face came to me--closer--closer--and
peered into mine.
   "I was in that curious condition wherein one knows that one is dreaming and seeks to awaken--to escape. But a
nightmare-like oppression held me. So I must lie and gaze into the seared yellow face that hung over me, for it
would drop so close that I could trace the cicatized scar running from the left ear to the corner of the mouth, and
drawing up the lip like the lip of a snarling cur. I could look into the malignant, jaundiced eyes; I could hear the dim
whispering of the distorted mouth--whispering that seemed to counsel something--something evil. That whispering
intimacy was indescribably repulsive. Then the wicked yellow face would be withdrawn, and would recede until it
became as a pin's head in the darkness far above me-- almost like a glutinous, liquid thing.
   "Somehow I got upon my feet, or dreamed I did--God knows where dreaming ended and reality began.
Gentlemen maybe you'll conclude I went mad last night, but as I stood holding on to the bedrail I heard the blood
throbbing through my arteries with a noise like a screw-propeller. I started laughing. The laughter issued from my
lips with a shrill whistling sound that pierced me with physical pain and seemed to wake the echoes of the whole
block. I thought myself I was going mad, and I tried to command my will--to break the power of the chloral--for I
concluded that I had accidentally taken an overdose.
   "Then the walls of my bedroom started to recede, till at last I stood holding on to a bed which had shrunk to the
size of a doll's cot, in the middle of a room like Trafalgar Square! That window yonder was such a long way off I
could scarcely see it, but I could just detect a Chinaman--the owner of the evil yellow face--creeping through it. He
was followed by another, who was enormously tall--so tall that, as they came towards me (and it seemed to take
them something like half-an-hour to cross this incredible apartment in my dream), the second Chinaman seemed to
tower over me like a cypress-tree.
   "I looked up to his face--his wicked, hairless face. Mr. Smith, whatever age I live to, I'll never forget that face I
saw last night--or did I see it? God knows! The pointed chin, the great dome of a forehead, and the eyes-- heavens
above, the huge green eyes!"
He shook like a sick man, and I glanced at Smith significantly. Inspector Weymouth was stroking his mustache,
and his mingled expression of incredulity and curiosity was singular to behold.
   "The pumping of my blood," continued West, "seemed to be bursting my body; the room kept expanding and
contracting. One time the ceiling would be pressing down on my head, and the Chinamen--sometimes I thought
there were two of them, sometimes twenty--became dwarfs; the next instant it shot up like the roof of a cathedral.
"Can I be awake,' I whispered, `or am I dreaming?"

"My whisper went sweeping in windy echoes about the walls, and was lost in the shadowy distances up under the invisible roof.

"You are dreaming--yes.' It was the Chinaman with the green eyes who was addressing me, and the words that he uttered appeared to occupy an immeasurable time in the utterance. 'But at will I can render the subjective objective.' I don't think I can have dreamed those singular words, gentlemen.

"And then he fixed the green eyes upon me--the blazing green eyes. I made no attempt to move. They seemed to be draining me of something vital--bleeding me of every drop of mental power. The whole nightmare room grew green, and I felt that I was being absorbed into its greenness.

"I can see what you think. And even in my delirium-- if it was delirium--I thought the same. Now comes the climax of my experience--my vision--I don't know what to call it. I SAW some WORDS issuing from my own mouth!"

Inspector Weymouth coughed discreetly. Smith whisked round upon him.

"This will be outside your experience, Inspector, I know," he said, "but Mr. Norris West's statement does not surprise me in the least. I know to what the experience was due."

Weymouth stared incredulously, but a dawning perception of the truth was come to me, too.

"How I SAW a SOUND I just won't attempt to explain; I simply tell you I saw it. Somehow I knew I had betrayed myself--given something away."

"You gave away the secret of the lock combination!" rapped Smith.

"Eh!" grunted Weymouth.

But West went on hoarsely:

"Just before the blank came a name flashed before my eyes. It was `Bayard Taylor.'"

At that I interrupted West.

"I understand!" I cried. "I understand! Another name has just occurred to me, Mr. West--that of the Frenchman, Moreau."

"You have solved the mystery," said Smith. "It was natural Mr. West should have thought of the American traveler, Bayard Taylor, though. Moreau's book is purely scientific. He has probably never read it."

"I fought with the stupor that was overcoming me," continued West, "striving to associate that vaguely familiar name with the fantastic things through which I moved. It seemed to me that the room was empty again. I made for the hall, for the telephone. I could scarcely drag my feet along. It seemed to take me half-an-hour to get there. I remember calling up Scotland Yard, and I remember no more."

There was a short, tense interval.

In some respects I was nonplused; but, frankly, I think Inspector Weymouth considered West insane. Smith, his hands locked behind his back, stared out of the window.

"ANDAMAN--SECOND" he said suddenly. "Weymouth, when is the first train to Tilbury?"

"Five twenty-two from Fenchurch Street," replied the Scotland Yard man promptly.

"Too late!" rapped my friend. "Jump in a taxi and pick up two good men to leave for China at once! Then go and charter a special to Tilbury to leave in twenty-five minutes. Order another cab to wait outside for me."

Weymouth was palpably amazed, but Smith's tone was imperative. The Inspector departed hastily.

I stared at Smith, not comprehending what prompted this singular course.

"Now that you can think clearly, Mr. West," he said, "of what does your experience remind you? The errors of perception regarding time; the idea of SEEING A SOUND; the illusion that the room alternately increased and diminished in size; your fit of laughter, and the recollection of the name Bayard Taylor. Since evidently you are familiar with that author's work--`The Land of the Saracen,' is it not?--these symptoms of the attack should be familiar, I think."

Norris West pressed his hands to his evidently aching head.

"Bayard Taylor's book," he said dully. "Yes! . . . I know of what my brain sought to remind me--Taylor's account of his experience under hashish. Mr. Smith, someone doped me with hashish!"

Smith nodded grimly.

"Cannabis indica," I said--"Indian hemp. That is what you were drugged with. I have no doubt that now you experience a feeling of nausea and intense thirst, with aching in the muscles, particularly the deltoid. I think you must have taken at least fifteen grains."

Smith stopped his perambulations immediately in front of West, looking into his dulled eyes.

"Someone visited your chambers last night," he said slowly, "and for your chloral tabloids substituted some containing hashish, or perhaps not pure hashish. Fu-Manchu is a profound chemist."

Norris West started.
"Someone substituted--" he began.

"Exactly," said Smith, looking at him keenly; "someone who was here yesterday. Have you any idea whom it could have been?"

West hesitated. "I had a visitor in the afternoon," he said, seemingly speaking the words unwillingly, "but--"

"A lady?" jerked Smith. "I suggest that it was a lady."

West nodded.

"You're quite right," he admitted. "I don't know how you arrived at the conclusion, but a lady whose acquaintance I made recently--a foreign lady."

"Karamaneh!" snapped Smith.

"I don't know what you mean in the least, but she came here--knowing this to be my present address--to ask me to protect her from a mysterious man who had followed her right from Charing Cross. She said he was down in the lobby, and naturally, I asked her to wait here whilst I went and sent him about his business."

He laughed shortly.

"I am over-old," he said, "to be guyed by a woman. You spoke just now of someone called Fu-Manchu. Is that the crook I'm indebted to for the loss of my plans? I've had attempts made by agents of two European governments, but a Chinaman is a novelty."

"This Chinaman," Smith assured him, "is the greatest novelty of his age. You recognize your symptoms now from Bayard Taylor's account?"

"Mr. West's statement," I said, "ran closely parallel with portions of Moreau's book on 'Hashish Hallucinations.' Only Fu-Manchu, I think, would have thought of employing Indian hemp. I doubt, though, if it was pure Cannabis indica. At any rate, it acted as an opiate."

"And drugged Mr. West," interrupted Smith, "sufficiently to enable Fu-Manchu to enter unobserved."

"Whilst it produced symptoms which rendered him an easy subject for the Doctor's influence. It is difficult in this case to separate hallucination from reality, but I think, Mr. West, that Fu-Manchu must have exercised an hypnotic influence upon your drugged brain. We have evidence that he dragged from you the secret of the combination."

"God knows we have!" said West. "But who is this Fu-Manchu, and how--how in the name of wonder did he get into my chambers?"

Smith pulled out his watch. "That," he said rapidly, "I cannot delay to explain if I'm to intercept the man who has the plans. Come along, Petrie; we must be at Tilbury within the hour. There is just a bare chance."

CHAPTER XX

It was with my mind in a condition of unique perplexity that I hurried with Nayland Smith into the cab which waited and dashed off through the streets in which the busy life of London just stirred into being. I suppose I need not say that I could penetrate no farther into this, Fu-Manchu's latest plot, than the drugging of Norris West with hashish? Of his having been so drugged with Indian hemp--that is, converted temporarily into a maniac--would have been evident to any medical man who had heard his statement and noted the distressing after-effects which conclusively pointed to Indian hemp poisoning. Knowing something of the Chinese doctor's powers, I could understand that he might have extracted from West the secret of the combination by sheer force of will whilst the American was under the influence of the drug. But I could not understand how Fu-Manchu had gained access to locked chambers on the third story of a building.

"Smith," I said, "those bird tracks on the window-sill--they furnish the key to a mystery which is puzzling me."

"They do," said Smith, glancing impatiently at his watch. "Consult your memories of Dr. Fu-Manchu's habits--especially your memories of his pets."

I reviewed in my mind the creatures gruesome and terrible which surrounded the Chinaman--the scorpions, the bacteria, the noxious things which were the weapons wherewith he visited death upon whomsoever opposed the establishment of a potential Yellow Empire. But no one of them could account for the imprints upon the dust of West's window-sill.

"You puzzle me, Smith," I confessed. "There is much in this extraordinary case that puzzles me. I can think of nothing to account for the marks."

"Have you thought of Fu-Manchu's marmoset?" asked Smith.

"The monkey!" I cried.

"They were the footprints of a small ape," my friend continued. "For a moment I was deceived as you were, and believed them to be the tracks of a large bird; but I have seen the footprints of apes before now, and a marmoset, though an American variety, I believe, is not unlike some of the apes of Burma."

"I am still in the dark," I said.

"It is pure hypothesis," continued Smith, "but here is the theory--in lieu of a better one it covers the facts. The
marmoset-- and it is contrary from the character of Fu-Manchu to keep any creature for mere amusement--is trained to perform certain duties.

"You observed the waterspout running up beside the window; you observed the iron bar intended to prevent a window-cleaner from falling out? For an ape the climb from the court below to the sill above was a simple one. He carried a cord, probably attached to his body. He climbed on to the sill, over the bar, and climbed down again. By means of this cord a rope was pulled up over the bar, by means of the rope one of those ladders of silk and bamboo. One of the Doctor's servants ascended--probably to ascertain if the hashish had acted successfully. That was the yellow dream-face which West saw bending over him. Then followed the Doctor, and to his giant will the drugged brain of West was a pliant instrument which he bent to his own ends. The court would be deserted at that hour of the night, and, in any event, directly after the ascent the ladder probably was pulled up, only to be lowered again when West had revealed the secret of his own safe and Fu-Manchu had secured the plans. The reclosing of the safe and the removing of the hashish tabloids, leaving no clew beyond the delirious ravings of a drug slave-- for so anyone unacquainted with the East must have construed West's story--is particularly characteristic. His own tabloids were returned, of course. The sparing of his life alone is a refinement of art which points to a past master."

"Karamaneh was the decoy again?" I said shortly.

"Certainly. Hers was the task to ascertain West's habits and to substitute the tabloids. She it was who waited in the luxurious car-- infinitely less likely to attract attention at that hour in that place than a modest taxi--and received the stolen plans. She did her work well.

"Poor Karamaneh; she had no alternative! I said I would have given a hundred pounds for a sight of the messenger's face--the man to whom she handed them. I would give a thousand now!"

"ANDAMAN--SECOND," I said. "What did she mean?"

"Then it has not dawned upon you?" cried Smith excitedly, as the cab turned into the station. "The ANDAMAN, of the Oriental Navigation Company's line, leaves Tilbury with the next tide for China ports. Our man is a second-class passenger. I am wiring to delay her departure, and the special should get us to the docks inside of forty minutes."

Very vividly I can reconstruct in my mind that dash to the docks through the early autumn morning. My friend being invested with extraordinary powers from the highest authorities, by Inspector Weymouth's instructions the line had been cleared all the way.

Something of the tremendous importance of Nayland Smith's mission came home to me as we hurried on to the platform, escorted by the station-master, and the five of us--for Weymouth had two other C.I.D. men with him--took our seats in the special.

Off we went on top speed, roaring through stations, where a glimpse might be had of wondering officials upon the platforms, for a special train was a novelty on the line. All ordinary traffic arrangements were held up until we had passed through, and we reached Tilbury in time which I doubt not constituted a record.

There at the docks was the great liner, delayed in her passage to the Far East by the will of my royally empowered companion. It was novel, and infinitely exciting.

"Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith?" said the captain interrogatively, when we were shown into his room, and looked from one to another and back to the telegraph form which he held in his hand.

"The same, Captain," said my friend briskly. "I shall not detain you a moment. I am instructing the authorities at all ports east of Suez to apprehend one of your second-class passengers, should he leave the ship. He is in possession of plans which practically belong to the British Government!"

"Why not arrest him now?" asked the seaman bluntly.

"Because I don't know him. All second-class passengers' baggage will be searched as they land. I am hoping something from that, if all else fails. But I want you privately to instruct your stewards to watch any passenger of Oriental nationality, and to cooperate with the two Scotland Yard men who are joining you for the voyage. I look to you to recover these plans, Captain."

"I will do my best," the captain assured him.

Then, from amid the heterogeneous group on the dockside, we were watching the liner depart, and Nayland Smith's expression was a very singular one. Inspector Weymouth stood with us, a badly puzzled man. Then occurred the extraordinary incident which to this day remains inexplicable, for, clearly heard by all three of us, a guttural voice said:

"Another victory for China, Mr. Nayland Smith!"

I turned as though I had been stung. Smith turned also. My eyes passed from face to face of the group about us. None was familiar. No one apparently had moved away.

But the voice was the voice of DOCTOR FU-MANCHU.

As I write of it, now, I can appreciate the difference between that happening, as it appealed to us, and as it must
appeal to you who merely read of it. It is beyond my powers to convey the sense of the uncanny which the episode
created. Yet, even as I think of it, I feel again, though in lesser degree, the chill which seemed to creep through my
veins that day.

From my brief history of the wonderful and evil man who once walked, by the way unsuspected, in the midst of
the people of England-- near whom you, personally, may at some time unwittingly, have been-- I am aware that
much must be omitted. I have no space for lengthy examinations of the many points but ill illuminated with which it
is dotted. This incident at the docks is but one such point.

Another is the singular vision which appeared to me whilst I lay in the cellar of the house near Windsor. It has
since struck me that it possessed peculiarities akin to those of a hashish hallucination. Can it be that we were
drugged on that occasion with Indian hemp? Cannabis indica is a treacherous narcotic, as every medical man knows
full well; but Fu-Manchu's knowledge of the drug was far in advance of our slow science. West's experience proved
so much.

I may have neglected opportunities--later, you shall judge if I did so--opportunities to glean for the West some
of the strange knowledge of the secret East. Perhaps, at a future time, I may rectify my errors. Perhaps that wisdom--
the wisdom stored up by Fu-Manchu--is lost forever. There is, however, at least a bare possibility of its survival, in
part; and I do not wholly despair of one day publishing a scientific sequel to this record of our dealings with the
Chinese doctor.

CHAPTER XXI

TIME wore on and seemingly brought us no nearer, or very little nearer, to our goal. So carefully had my friend
Nayland Smith excluded the matter from the press that, whilst public interest was much engaged with some of the
events in the skein of mystery which he had come from Burma to unravel, outside the Secret Service and the special
department of Scotland Yard few people recognized that the several murders, robberies and disappearances formed
each a link in a chain; fewer still were aware that a baneful presence was in our midst, that a past master of the evil
arts lay concealed somewhere in the metropolis; searched for by the keenest wits which the authorities could direct
to the task, but eluding all--triumphant, contemptuous.

One link in that chain Smith himself for long failed to recognize. Yet it was a big and important link.
"Petrie," he said to me one morning, "listen to this:
"`...In sight of Shanghai--a clear, dark night. On board the deck of a junk passing close to seaward of the
Andaman a blue flare started up. A minute later there was a cry of "Man overboard!"
"Mr. Lewin, the chief officer, who was in charge, stopped the engines. A boat was put out. But no one was
recovered. There are sharks in these waters. A fairly heavy sea was running.
"Inquiry showed the missing man to be a James Edwards, second class, booked to Shanghai. I think the name
was assumed. The man was some sort of Oriental, and we had had him under close observation..."

"That's the end of their report," exclaimed Smith.
He referred to the two C.I.D. men who had joined the Andaman at the moment of her departure from Tilbury.
He carefully lighted his pipe.
"IS it a victory for China, Petrie?" he said softly.
"Until the great war reveals her secret resources--and I pray that the day be not in my time--we shall never
know," I replied.

Smith began striding up and down the room.
"Whose name," he jerked abruptly, "stands now at the head of our danger list?"
He referred to a list which we had compiled of the notable men intervening between the evil genius who secretly
had invaded London and the triumph of his cause--the triumph of the yellow races.
I glanced at our notes. "Lord Southery," I replied.
Smith tossed the morning paper across to me.
"Look," he said shortly. "He's dead."

I read the account of the peer's death, and glanced at the long obituary notice; but no more than glanced at it. He
had but recently returned from the East, and now, after a short illness, had died from some affection of the heart.
There had been no intimation that his illness was of a serious nature, and even Smith, who watched over his flock--
the flock threatened by the wolf, Fu-Manchu--with jealous zeal, had not suspected that the end was so near.
"Do you think he died a natural death, Smith?" I asked.
My friend reached across the table and rested the tip of a long finger upon one of the sub-headings to the
account:
"SIR FRANK NARCOMBE SUMMONED TOO LATE."
"You see," said Smith, "Southery died during the night, but Sir Frank Narcombe, arriving a few minutes later,
unhesitatingly pronounced death to be due to syncope, and seems to have noticed nothing suspicious."
I looked at him thoughtfully.
"Sir Frank is a great physician," I said slowly; "but we must remember he would be looking for nothing suspicious."

"We must remember," rapped Smith, "that, if Dr. Fu-Manchu is responsible for Southery's death, except to the eye of an expert there would be nothing suspicious to see. Fu-Manchu leaves no clews."

"Are you going around?" I asked.
Smith shrugged his shoulders.
"I think not," he replied. "Either a greater One than Fu-Manchu has taken Lord Southery, or the yellow doctor has done his work so well that no trace remains of his presence in the matter."

Leaving his breakfast untasted, he wandered aimlessly about the room, littering the hearth with matches as he constantly relighted his pipe, which went out every few minutes.

"It's no good, Petrie," he burst out suddenly; "it cannot be a coincidence. We must go around and see him."

An hour later we stood in the silent room, with its drawn blinds and its deathful atmosphere, looking down at the pale, intellectual face of Henry Stradwick, Lord Southery, the greatest engineer of his day. The mind that lay behind that splendid brow had planned the construction of the railway for which Russia had paid so great a price, had conceived the scheme for the canal which, in the near future, was to bring two great continents, a full week's journey nearer one to the other. But now it would plan no more.

"He had latterly developed symptoms of angina pectoris," explained the family physician; "but I had not anticipated a fatal termination so soon. I was called about two o'clock this morning, and found Lord Southery in a dangerously exhausted condition. I did all that was possible, and Sir Frank Narcombe was sent for. But shortly before his arrival the patient expired."

"I understand, Doctor, that you had been treating Lord Southery for angina pectoris?" I said.
"Yes," was the reply, "for some months."

"You regard the circumstances of his end as entirely consistent with a death from that cause?"
"Certainly. Do you observe anything unusual yourself? Sir Frank Narcombe quite agrees with me. There is surely no room for doubt?"

"No," said Smith, tugging reflectively at the lobe of his left ear. "We do not question the accuracy of your diagnosis in any way, sir."

The physician seemed puzzled.
"But am I not right in supposing that you are connected with the police?" asked the physician.

"Neither Dr. Petrie nor myself are in any way connected with the police," answered Smith. "But, nevertheless, I look to you to regard our recent questions as confidential."

As we were leaving the house, hushed awesomely in deference to the unseen visitor who had touched Lord Southery with gray, cold fingers, Smith paused, detaining a black-coated man who passed us on the stairs.

"You were Lord Southery's valet?"
The man bowed.
"Were you in the room at the moment of his fatal seizure?"
"I was, sir."
"Did you see or hear anything unusual--anything unaccountable?"
"Nothing, sir."
"No strange sounds outside the house, for instance?"
The man shook his head, and Smith, taking my arm, passed out into the street.
"Perhaps this business is making me imaginative," he said; "but there seems to be something tainting the air in yonder--something peculiar to houses whose doors bear the invisible death-mark of Fu-Manchu."

"You are right, Smith!" I cried. "I hesitated to mention the matter, but I, too, have developed some other sense which warns me of the Doctor's presence. Although there is not a scrap of confirmatory evidence, I am as sure that he has brought about Lord Southery's death as if I had seen him strike the blow."

It was in that torturing frame of mind--chained, helpless, in our ignorance, or by reason of the Chinaman's supernormal genius--that we lived throughout the ensuing days. My friend began to look like a man consumed by a burning fever. Yet, we could not act.

In the growing dark of an evening shortly following I stood idly turning over some of the works exposed for sale outside a second-hand bookseller's in New Oxford Street. One dealing with the secret societies of China struck me as being likely to prove instructive, and I was about to call the shopman when I was startled to feel a hand clutch my arm.

I turned around rapidly--and was looking into the darkly beautiful eyes of Karamaneh! She--whom I had seen in so many guises-- was dressed in a perfectly fitting walking habit, and had much of her wonderful hair concealed
beneath a fashionable hat.

She glanced about her apprehensively.

"Quick! Come round the corner. I must speak to you," she said, her musical voice thrilling with excitement.

I never was quite master of myself in her presence. He must have been a man of ice who could have been, I think, for her beauty had all the bouquet of rarity; she was a mystery--and mystery adds charm to a woman. Probably she should have been under arrest, but I know I would have risked much to save her from it.

As we turned into a quiet thoroughfare she stopped and said:

"I am in distress. You have often asked me to enable you to capture Dr. Fu-Manchu. I am prepared to do so."

I could scarcely believe that I heard right.

"Your brother--" I began.

She seized my arm entreatingly, looking into my eyes.

"You are a doctor," she said. "I want you to come and see him now."

"What! Is he in London?"

"He is at the house of Dr. Fu-Manchu."

"And you would have me--"

"Accompany me there, yes."

Nayland Smith, I doubted not, would have counseled me against trusting my life in the hands of this girl with the pleading eyes. Yet I did so, and with little hesitation; shortly we were traveling eastward in a closed cab. Karamaneh was very silent, but always when I turned to her I found her big eyes fixed upon me with an expression in which there was pleading, in which there was sorrow, in which there was something else--something indefinable, yet strangely disturbing. The cabman she had directed to drive to the lower end of the Commercial Road, the neighborhood of the new docks, and the scene of one of our early adventures with Dr. Fu-Manchu. The mantle of dusk had closed about the squalid activity of the East End streets as we neared our destination. Aliens of every shade of color were about us now, emerging from burrow-like alleys into the glare of the lamps upon the main road. In the short space of the drive we had passed from the bright world of the West into the dubious underworld of the East.

I do not know that Karamaneh moved; but in sympathy, as we neared the abode of the sinister Chinaman, she crept nearer to me, and when the cab was discharged, and together we walked down a narrow turning leading riverward, she clung to me fearfully, hesitated, and even seemed upon the point of turning back. But, overcoming her fear or repugnance, she led on, through a maze of alleyways and courts, wherein I hopelessly lost my bearings, so that it came home to me how wholly I was in the hands of this girl whose history was so full of shadows, whose real character was so inscrutable, whose beauty, whose charm truly might mask the cunning of a serpent.

I spoke to her.

"S-SH!" She laid her hand upon my arm, enjoining me to silence.

The high, drab brick wall of what looked like some part of a dock building loomed above us in the darkness, and the indescribable stenches of the lower Thames were borne to my nostrils through a gloomy, tunnel-like opening, beyond which whispered the river. The muffled clanger of waterside activity was about us. I heard a key grate in a lock, and Karamaneh drew me into the shadow of an open door, entered, and closed it behind her.

For the first time I perceived, in contrast to the odors of the court without, the fragrance of the peculiar perfume which now I had come to associate with her. Absolute darkness was about us, and by this perfume alone I knew that she was near to me, until her hand touched mine, and I was led along an uncarpeted passage and up an uncarpeted stair. A second door was unlocked, and I found myself in an exquisitely furnished room, illuminated by the soft light of a shaded lamp which stood upon a low, inlaid table amidst a perfect ocean of silken cushions, strewn upon a Persian carpet, whose yellow richness was lost in the shadows beyond the circle of light.

Karamaneh raised a curtain draped before a doorway, and stood listening intently for a moment.

The silence was unbroken.

Then something stirred amid the wilderness of cushions, and two tiny bright eyes looked up at me. Peering closely, I succeeded in distinguishing, crouched in that soft luxuriance, a little ape. It was Dr. Fu-Manchu's marmoset. "This way," whispered Karamaneh.

Never, I thought, was a staid medical man committed to a more unwise enterprise, but so far I had gone, and no consideration of prudence could now be of avail.

The corridor beyond was thickly carpeted. Following the direction of a faint light which gleamed ahead, it proved to extend as a balcony across one end of a spacious apartment. Together we stood high up there in the shadows, and looked down upon such a scene as I never could have imagined to exist within many a mile of that district.

The place below was even more richly appointed than the room into which first we had come. Here, as there, piles of cushions formed splashes of gaudy color about the floor. Three lamps hung by chains from the ceiling, their
light softened by rich silk shades. One wall was almost entirely occupied by glass cases containing chemical apparatus, tubes, retorts and other less orthodox indications of Dr. Fu-Manchu's pursuits, whilst close against another lay the most extraordinary object of a sufficiently extraordinary room—a low couch, upon which was extended the motionless form of a boy. In the light of a lamp which hung directly above him, his olive face showed an almost startling resemblance to that of Karamaneh—save that the girl's coloring was more delicate. He had black, curly hair, which stood out prominently against the white covering upon which he lay, his hands crossed upon his breast.

Transfixed with astonishment, I stood looking down upon him. The wonders of the "Arabian Nights" were wonders no longer, for here, in East-End London, was a true magician's palace, lacking not its beautiful slave, lacking not its enchanted prince!

"It is Aziz, my brother," said Karamaneh.

We passed down a stairway on to the floor of the apartment. Karamaneh knelt and bent over the boy, stroking his hair and whispering to him lovingly. I, too, bent over him; and I shall never forget the anxiety in the girl's eyes as she watched me eagerly whilst I made a brief examination.

Brief, indeed, for even ere I had touched him I knew that the comely shell held no spark of life. But Karamaneh fondled the cold hands, and spoke softly in that Arabic tongue which long before I had divined must be her native language.

Then, as I remained silent, she turned and looked at me, read the truth in my eyes, and rose from her knees, stood rigidly upright, and clutched me tremblingly.

"He is not dead—he is NOT dead!" she whispered, and shook me as a child might, seeking to arouse me to a proper understanding. "Oh, tell me he is not--"

"I cannot," I replied gently, "for indeed he is."

"No!" she said, wild-eyed, and raising her hands to her face as though half distraught. "You do not understand—yet you are a doctor. You do not understand—"

She stopped, moaning to herself and looking from the handsome face of the boy to me. It was pitiful; it was uncanny. But sorrow for the girl predominated in my mind.

Then from somewhere I heard a sound which I had heard before in houses occupied by Dr. Fu-Manchu—that of a muffled gong.

"Quick!" Karamaneh had me by the arm. "Up! He has returned!"

She fled up the stairs to the balcony, I close at her heels. The shadows veiled us, the thick carpet deadened the sound of our tread, or certainly we must have been detected by the man who entered the room we had just quitted.

It was Dr. Fu-Manchu!

Yellow-robed, immobile, the inhuman green eyes glittering catlike even, it seemed, before the light struck them, he threaded his way through the archipelago of cushions and bent over the couch of Aziz.

Karamaneh dragged me down on to my knees.

"Watch!" she whispered. "Watch!"

Dr. Fu-Manchu felt for the pulse of the boy whom a moment since I had pronounced dead, and, stepping to the tall glass case, took out a long-necked flask of chased gold, and from it, into a graduated glass, he poured some drops of an amber liquid wholly unfamiliar to me. I watched him with all my eyes, and noted how high the liquid rose in the measure. He charged a needle-syringe, and, bending again over Aziz, made an injection.

Then all the wonders I had heard of this man became possible, and with an awe which any other physician who had examined Aziz must have felt, I admitted him a miracle-worker. For as I watched, all but breathless, the dead came to life! The glow of health crept upon the olive cheek—the boy moved—he raised his hands above his head—he sat up, supported by the Chinese doctor!

Fu-Manchu touched some hidden bell. A hideous yellow man with a scarred face entered, carrying a tray upon which were a bowl containing some steaming fluid, apparently soup, what looked like oaten cakes, and a flask of red wine.

As the boy, exhibiting no more unusual symptoms than if he had just awakened from a normal sleep, commenced his repast, Karamaneh drew me gently along the passage into the room which we had first entered. My heart leaped wildly as the marmoset bounded past us to drop hand over hand to the lower apartment in search of its master.

"You see," said Karamaneh, her voice quivering, "he is not dead! But without Fu-Manchu he is dead to me. How can I leave him when he holds the life of Aziz in his hand?"

"You must get me that flask, or some of its contents," I directed. "But tell me, how does he produce the appearance of death?"

"I cannot tell you," she replied. "I do not know. It is something in the wine. In another hour Aziz will be again as
you saw him. But see." And, opening a little ebony box, she produced a phial half filled with the amber liquid.

"Good!" I said, and slipped it into my pocket. "When will be the best time to seize Fu-Manchu and to restore your brother?"

"I will let you know," she whispered, and, opening the door, pushed me hurriedly from the room. "He is going away to-night to the north; but you must not come to-night. Quick! Quick! Along the passage. He may call me at any moment."

So, with the phial in my pocket containing a potent preparation unknown to Western science, and with a last long look into the eyes of Karamaneh, I passed out into the narrow alley, out from the fragrant perfumes of that mystery house into the place of Thames-side stenches.

CHAPTER XXII

"WE must arrange for the house to be raided without delay," said Smith. "This time we are sure of our ally--"

"But we must keep our promise to her," I interrupted.

"You can look after that, Petrie," my friend said. "I will devote the whole of my attention to Dr. Fu-Manchu!" he added grimly.

Up and down the room he paced, gripping the blackened briar between his teeth, so that the muscles stood out squarely upon his lean jaws. The bronze which spoke of the Burmese sun enhanced the brightness of his gray eyes.

"What have I all along maintained?" he jerked, looking back at me across his shoulder--"that, although Karamaneh was one of the strongest weapons in the Doctor's armory, she was one which some day would be turned against him. That day has dawned."

"We must await word from her."

"Quite so."

He knocked out his pipe on the grate. Then:

"Have you any idea of the nature of the fluid in the phial?"

"Not the slightest. And I have none to spare for analytical purposes."

Nayland Smith began stuffing mixture into the hot pipe-bowl, and dropping an almost equal quantity on the floor.

"I cannot rest, Petrie," he said. "I am itching to get to work. Yet, a false move, and--" He lighted his pipe, and stood staring from the window.

"I shall, of course, take a needle-syringe with me," I explained.

Smith made no reply.

"If I but knew the composition of the drug which produced the semblance of death," I continued, "my fame would long survive my ashes."

My friend did not turn. But:

"She said it was something he put in the wine?" he jerked.

"In the wine, yes."

Silence fell. My thoughts reverted to Karamaneh, whom Dr. Fu-Manchu held in bonds stronger than any slave-chains. For, with Aziz, her brother, suspended between life and death, what could she do save obey the mandates of the cunning Chinaman? What perverted genius was his! If that treasury of obscure wisdom which he, perhaps alone of living men, had rifled, could but be thrown open to the sick and suffering, the name of Dr. Fu-Manchu would rank with the golden ones in the history of healing.

Nayland Smith suddenly turned, and the expression upon his face amazed me.

"Look up the next train to L--!" he rapped.

"To L--? What--?"

"There's the Bradshaw. We haven't a minute to waste."

In his voice was the imperative note I knew so well; in his eyes was the light which told of an urgent need for action-- a portentous truth suddenly grasped.

"One in half-an-hour--the last."

"We must catch it."

No further word of explanation he vouchsafed, but darted off to dress; for he had spent the afternoon pacing the room in his dressing-gown and smoking without intermission.

Out and to the corner we hurried, and leaped into the first taxi upon the rank. Smith enjoined the man to hasten, and we were off-- all in that whirl of feverish activity which characterized my friend's movements in times of important action.

He sat glancing impatiently from the window and twitching at the lobe of his ear.

"I know you will forgive me, old man," he said, "but there is a little problem which I am trying to work out in my mind. Did you bring the things I mentioned?"
"Yes."

Conversation lapsed, until, just as the cab turned into the station, Smith said: "Should you consider Lord Southery to have been the first constructive engineer of his time, Petrie?"

"Undoubtedly," I replied.

"Greater than Von Homber, of Berlin?"

"Possibly not. But Von Homber has been dead for three years."

"Three years, is it?"

"Roughly."

"Ah!"

We reached the station in time to secure a non-corridor compartment to ourselves, and to allow Smith leisure carefully to inspect the occupants of all the others, from the engine to the guard's van. He was muffled up to the eyes, and he warned me to keep out of sight in the corner of the compartment. In fact, his behavior had me bursting with curiosity. The train having started:

"Don't imagine, Petrie," said Smith "that I am trying to lead you blindfolded in order later to dazzle you with my perspicacity. I am simply afraid that this may be a wild-goose chase. The idea upon which I am acting does not seem to have struck you. I wish it had. The fact would argue in favor of its being sound."

"At present I am hopelessly mystified."

"Well, then, I will not bias you towards my view. But just study the situation, and see if you can arrive at the reason for this sudden journey. I shall be distinctly encouraged if you succeed."

But I did not succeed, and since Smith obviously was unwilling to enlighten me, I pressed him no more. The train stopped at Rugby, where he was engaged with the stationmaster in making some mysterious arrangements. At L--, however, their object became plain, for a high-power car was awaiting us, and into this we hurried and ere the greater number of passengers had reached the platform were being driven off at headlong speed along the moon-bathed roads.

Twenty minutes' rapid traveling, and a white mansion leaped into the line of sight, standing out vividly against its woody backing.

"Stradwick Hall," said Smith. "The home of Lord Southery. We are first--but Dr. Fu-Manchu was on the train."

Then the truth dawned upon the gloom of my perplexity.

CHAPTER XXIII

"YOUR extraordinary proposal fills me with horror, Mr. Smith!"

The sleek little man in the dress suit, who looked like a head waiter (but was the trusted legal adviser of the house of Southery) puffed at his cigar indignantly. Nayland Smith, whose restless pacing had led him to the far end of the library, turned, a remote but virile figure, and looked back to where I stood by the open hearth with the solicitor.

"I am in your hands, Mr. Henderson," he said, and advanced upon the latter, his gray eyes ablaze. "Save for the heir, who is abroad on foreign service, you say there is no kin of Lord Southery to consider. The word rests with you. If I am wrong, and you agree to my proposal, there is none whose susceptibilities will suffer--"

"My own, sir!"

"If I am right, and you prevent me from acting, you become a murderer, Mr. Henderson."

The lawyer started, staring nervously up at Smith, who now towered over him menacingly.

"Lord Southery was a lonely man," continued my friend. "If I could have placed my proposition before one of his blood, I do not doubt what my answer had been. Why do you hesitate? Why do you experience this feeling of horror?"

Mr. Henderson stared down into the fire. His constitutionally ruddy face was pale.

"It is entirely irregular, Mr. Smith. We have not the necessary powers--"

Smith snapped his teeth together impatiently, snatching his watch from his pocket and glancing at it.

"I am vested with the necessary powers. I will give you a written order, sir."

"The proceeding savors of paganism. Such a course might be admissible in China, in Burma--"

"Do you weigh a life against such quibbles? Do you suppose that, granting MY irresponsibility, Dr. Petrie would countenance such a thing if he doubted the necessity?"

Mr. Henderson looked at me with pathetic hesitance.

"There are guests in the house--mourners who attended the ceremony to-day. They--"

"Will never know, if we are in error," interrupted Smith. "Good God! why do you delay?"

"You wish it to be kept secret?"

"You and I, Mr. Henderson, and Dr. Petrie will go now. We require no other witnesses. We are answerable only to our consciences."
The lawyer passed his hand across his damp brow. "I have never in my life been called upon to come to so momentous a decision in so short a time," he confessed. But, aided by Smith's indomitable will, he made his decision. As its result, we three, looking and feeling like conspirators, hurried across the park beneath a moon whose placidity was a rebuke to the turbulent passions which reared their strangle-growth in the garden of England. Not a breath of wind stirred amid the leaves. The calm of perfect night soothed everything to slumber. Yet, if Smith were right (and I did not doubt him), the green eyes of Dr. Fu-Manchu had looked upon the scene; and I found myself marveling that its beauty had not wilted up. Even now the dread Chinaman must be near to us.

As Mr. Henderson unlocked the ancient iron gates he turned to Nayland Smith. His face twitched oddly. "Witness that I do this unwillingly," he said--"most unwillingly." "Mine be the responsibility," was the reply.

Smith's voice quivered, responsive to the nervous vitality pent up within that lean frame. He stood motionless, listening--and I knew for whom he listened. He peered about him to right and left-- and I knew whom he expected but dreaded to see.

Above us now the trees looked down with a solemnity different from the aspect of the monarchs of the park, and the nearer we came to our journey's end the more somber and lowering bent the verdant arch-- or so it seemed.

By that path, patched now with pools of moonlight, Lord Southery had passed upon his bier, with the sun to light his going; by that path several generations of Stradwicks had gone to their last resting-place.

To the doors of the vault the moon rays found free access. No branch, no leaf, intervened. Mr. Henderson's face looked ghastly. The keys which he carried rattled in his hand.

"Light the lantern," he said unsteadily.

Nayland Smith, who again had been peering suspiciously about into the shadows, struck a match and lighted the lantern which he carried. He turned to the solicitor. "Be calm, Mr. Henderson," he said sternly. "It is your plain duty to your client."

"God be my witness that I doubt it," replied Henderson, and opened the door.

We descended the steps. The air beneath was damp and chill. It touched us as with clammy fingers; and the sensation was not wholly physical.

Before the narrow mansion which now sufficed Lord Southery, the great engineer whom kings had honored, Henderson reeled and clutched at me for support. Smith and I had looked to him for no aid in our uncanny task, and rightly.

With averted eyes he stood over by the steps of the tomb, whilst my friend and myself set to work. In the pursuit of my profession I had undertaken labors as unpleasant, but never amid an environment such as this. It seemed that generations of Stradwicks listened to each turn of every screw.

At last it was done, and the pallid face of Lord Southery questioned the intruding light. Nayland Smith's hand was as steady as a rigid bar when he raised the lantern. Later, I knew, there would be a sudden releasing of the tension of will--a reaction physical and mental-- but not until his work was finished.

That my own hand was steady I ascribed to one thing solely-- professional zeal. For, under conditions which, in the event of failure and exposure, must have led to an unpleasant inquiry by the British Medical Association, I was about to attempt an experiment never before essayed by a physician of the white races.

Though I failed, though I succeeded, that it ever came before the B.M.A., or any other council, was improbable; in the former event, all but impossible. But the knowledge that I was about to practice charlatanry, or what any one of my fellow-practitioners must have designated as such, was with me. Yet so profound had my belief become in the extraordinary being whose existence was a danger to the world that I reveled in my immunity from official censure. I was glad that it had fallen to my lot to take at least one step-- though blindly--into the FUTURE of medical science.

So far as my skill bore me, Lord Southery was dead. Unhesitatingly, I would have given a death certificate, save for two considerations. The first, although his latest scheme ran contrary from the interests of Dr. Fu-Manchu, his genius, diverted into other channels, would serve the yellow group better than his death. The second, I had seen the boy Aziz raised from a state as like death as this.

From the phial of amber-hued liquid which I had with me, I charged the needle syringe. I made the injection, and waited. "If he is really dead!" whispered Smith. "It seems incredible that he can have survived for three days without food. Yet I have known a fakir to go for a week."

Mr. Henderson groaned.

Watch in hand, I stood observing the gray face.

A second passed; another; a third. In the fourth the miracle began. Over the seemingly cold clay crept the hue of
pulsing life. It came in waves—in waves which corresponded with the throbbing of the awakened heart; which swept fuller and stronger; which filled and quickened the chilled body.

As we rapidly freed the living man from the trappings of the dead one, Southery, uttering a stifled scream, sat up, looked about him with half-glazed eyes, and fell back. "My God!" cried Smith.

"It is all right," I said, and had time to note how my voice had assumed a professional tone. "A little brandy from my flask is all that is necessary now."

"You have two patients, Doctor," rapped my friend.

Mr. Henderson had fallen in a swoon to the floor of the vault.

"Quiet," whispered Smith; "HE is here."

He extinguished the light.

I supported Lord Southery. "What has happened?" he kept moaning. "Where am I? Oh, God! what has happened?"

I strove to reassure him in a whisper, and placed my traveling coat about him. The door at the top of the mausoleum steps we had reclosed but not relocked. Now, as I upheld the man whom literally we had rescued from the grave, I heard the door reopen. To aid Henderson I could make no move. Smith was breathing hard beside me. I dared not think what was about to happen, nor what its effects might be upon Lord Southery in his exhausted condition.

Through the Memphian dark of the tomb cut a spear of light, touching the last stone of the stairway.

A guttural voice spoke some words rapidly, and I knew that Dr. Fu-Manchu stood at the head of the stairs. Although I could not see my friend, I became aware that Nayland Smith had his revolver in his hand, and I reached into my pocket for mine.

At last the cunning Chinaman was about to fall into a trap. It would require all his genius, I thought, to save him to-night. Unless his suspicions were aroused by the unlocked door, his capture was imminent.

Someone was descending the steps.

In my right hand I held my revolver, and with my left arm about Lord Southery, I waited through ten such seconds of suspense as I have rarely known.

The spear of light plunged into the well of darkness again.

Lord Southery, Smith and myself were hidden by the angle of the wall; but full upon the purplish face of Mr. Henderson the beam shone. In some way it penetrated to the murk in his mind; and he awakened from his swoon with a hoarse cry, struggled to his feet, and stood looking up the stair in a sort of frozen horror.

Smith was past him at a bound. Something flashed towards him as the light was extinguished. I saw him duck, and heard the knife ring upon the floor.

I managed to move sufficiently to see at the top, as I fired up the stairs, the yellow face of Dr. Fu-Manchu, to see the gleaming, chatoyant eyes, greenly terrible, as they sought to pierce the gloom. A flying figure was racing up, three steps at a time (that of a brown man scantily clad). He stumbled and fell, by which I knew that he was hit; but went on again, Smith hard on his heels.

"Mr. Henderson!" I cried, "relight the lantern and take charge of Lord Southery. Here is my flask on the floor. I rely upon you."

Smith's revolver spoke again as I went bounding up the stair. Black against the square of moonlight I saw him stagger, I saw him fall. As he fell, for the third time, I heard the crack of his revolver.

Instantly I was at his side. Someone was descending the steps. Somewhere along the black aisle beneath the trees receding footsteps pattered.

"Are you hurt, Smith?" I cried anxiously.

He got upon his feet.

"He has a dacoit with him," he replied, and showed me the long curved knife which he held in his hand, a full inch of the blade bloodstained. "A near thing for me, Petrie."

"We have lost him," said Smith.

"But we have saved Lord Southery," I said. "Fu-Manchu will credit us with a skill as great as his own."

"We must get to the car," Smith muttered, "and try to overtake them. Ugh! my left arm is useless."

"It would be mere waste of time to attempt to overtake them," I argued, "for we have no idea in which direction they will proceed."

"I have a very good idea," snapped Smith. "Stradwick Hall is less than ten miles from the coast. There is only one practicable means of conveying an unconscious man secretly from here to London."

"You think he meant to take him from here to London?"

"Prior to shipping him to China; I think so. His clearing-house is probably on the Thames."

"A boat?"
"A yacht, presumably, is lying off the coast in readiness. Fu-Manchu may even have designed to ship him direct to China."

Lord Southery, a bizarre figure, my traveling coat wrapped about him, and supported by his solicitor, who was almost as pale as himself, emerged from the vault into the moonlight.

"This is a triumph for you, Smith," I said.

The throb of Fu-Manchu's car died into faintness and was lost in the night's silence.

"Only half a triumph," he replied. "But we still have another chance-- the raid on his house. When will the word come from Karamaneh?"

Southery spoke in a weak voice.

"Gentlemen," he said, "it seems I am raised from the dead."

It was the weirdest moment of the night wherein we heard that newly buried man speak from the mold of his tomb.

"Yes," replied Smith slowly, "and spared from the fate of Heaven alone knows how many men of genius. The yellow society lacks a Southery, but that Dr. Fu-Manchu was in Germany three years ago I have reason to believe; so that, even without visiting the grave of your great Teutonic rival, who suddenly died at about that time, I venture to predict that they have a Von Homber. And the futurist group in China knows how to MAKE men work!"

CHAPTER XXIV

FROM the rescue of Lord Southery my story bears me mercilessly on to other things. I may not tarry, as more leisurely penmen, to round my incidents; they were not of my choosing. I may not pause to make you better acquainted with the figure of my drama; its scheme is none of mine. Often enough, in those days, I found a fitness in the lines of Omar:

We are no other than a moving show Of Magic Shadow-shapes that come and go Round with the Sun-illumined Lantern held In Midnight by the Master of the Show.

But "the Master of the Show," in this case, was Dr. Fu-Manchu!

I have been asked many times since the days with which these records deal: Who WAS Dr. Fu-Manchu? Let me confess here that my final answer must be postponed. I can only indicate, at this place, the trend of my reasoning, and leave my reader to form whatever conclusion he pleases.

What group can we isolate and label as responsible for the overthrow of the Manchus? The casual student of modern Chinese history will reply: "Young China." This is unsatisfactory. What do we mean by Young China? In my own hearing Fu-Manchu had disclaimed, with scorn, association with the whole of that movement; and assuming that the name were not an assumed one, he clearly can have been no anti-Manchu, no Republican.

The Chinese Republican is of the mandarin class, but of a new generation which veneers its Confucianism with Western polish. These youthful and unbalanced reformers, in conjunction with older but no less ill-balanced provincial politicians, may be said to represent Young China. Amid such turmoils as this we invariably look for, and invariably find, a Third Party. In my opinion, Dr. Fu-Manchu was one of the leaders of such a party.

Another question often put to me was: Where did the Doctor hide during the time that he pursued his operations in London? This is more susceptible of explanation. For a time Nayland Smith supposed, as I did myself, that the opium den adjacent to the old Ratcliff Highway was the Chinaman's base of operations; later we came to believe that the mansion near Windsor was his hiding-place, and later still, the hulk lying off the downstream flats. But I think I can state with confidence that the spot which he had chosen for his home was neither of these, but the East End riverside building which I was the first to enter. Of this I am all but sure; for the reason that it not only was the home of Fu-Manchu, of Karamaneh, and of her brother, Aziz, but the home of something else-- of something which I shall speak of later.

The dreadful tragedy (or series of tragedies) which attended the raid upon the place will always mark in my memory the supreme horror of a horrible case. Let me endeavor to explain what occurred.

By the aid of Karamaneh, you have seen how we had located the whilom warehouse, which, from the exterior, was so drab and dreary, but which within was a place of wondrous luxury. At the moment selected by our beautiful accomplice, Inspector Weymouth and a body of detectives entirely surrounded it; a river police launch lay off the wharf which opened from it on the river-side; and this upon a singularly black night, than which a better could not have been chosen.

"You will fulfill your promise to me?" said Karamaneh, and looked up into my face.

She was enveloped in a big, loose cloak, and from the shadow of the hood her wonderful eyes gleamed out like stars.

"What do you wish us to do?" asked Nayland Smith.

"You--and Dr. Petrie," she replied swiftly, "must enter first, and bring out Aziz. Until he is safe--until he is out of that place-- you are to make no attempt upon--"
"Upon Dr. Fu-Manchu?" interrupted Weymouth; for Karamaneh hesitated to pronounce the dreaded name, as she always did. "But how can we be sure that there is no trap laid for us?"

The Scotland Yard man did not entirely share my confidence in the integrity of this Eastern girl whom he knew to have been a creature of the Chinaman's.

"Aziz lies in the private room," she explained eagerly, her old accent more noticeable than usual. "There is only one of the Burmese men in the house, and he--he dare not enter without orders!"

"But Fu-Manchu?"

"We have nothing to fear from him. He will be your prisoner within ten minutes from now! I have no time for words-- you must believe!" She stamped her foot impatiently. "And the dacoit?" snapped Smith.

"He also."

"I think perhaps I'd better come in, too," said Weymouth slowly.

Karamaneh shrugged her shoulders with quick impatience, and unlocked the door in the high brick wall which divided the gloomy, evil-smelling court from the luxurious apartments of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

"Make no noise," she warned. And Smith and myself followed her along the uncarpeted passage beyond.

Inspector Weymouth, with a final word of instruction to his second in command, brought up the rear. The door was reclosed; a few paces farther on a second was unlocked. Passing through a small room, unfurnished, a farther passage led us to a balcony. The transition was startling.

 Darkness was about us now, and silence: a perfumed, slumberous darkness-- a silence full of mystery. For, beyond the walls of the apartment whereon we looked down waged the unceasing battle of sounds that is the hymn of the great industrial river. About the scented confines which bounded us now floated the smoke-laden vapors of the Lower Thames.

From the metallic but infinitely human clangor of dock-side life, from the unpleasant but homely odors which prevail where ships swallow in and belch out the concrete evidences of commercial prosperity, we had come into this incensed stillness, where one shaded lamp painted dim enlargements of its Chinese silk upon the nearer walls, and left the greater part of the room the darker for its contrast.

Nothing of the Thames-side activity--of the riveting and scraping-- the bumping of bales-- the bawling of orders-- the hiss of steam-- penetrated to this perfumed place. In the pool of tinted light lay the deathlike figure of a dark-haired boy, Karamaneh's muffled form bending over him.

"At last I stand in the house of Dr. Fu-Manchu!" whispered Smith.

Despite the girl's assurance, we knew that proximity to the sinister Chinaman must be fraught with danger. We stood, not in the lion's den, but in the serpent's lair.

From the time when Nayland Smith had come from Burma in pursuit of this advance-guard of a cogent Yellow Peril, the face of Dr. Fu-Manchu rarely had been absent from my dreams day or night. The millions might sleep in peace--the millions in whose cause we labored!--but we who knew the reality of the danger knew that a veritable octopus had fastened upon England-- a yellow octopus whose head was that of Dr. Fu-Manchu, whose tentacles were dacoity, thuggee, modes of death, secret and swift, which in the darkness plucked men from life and left no clew behind.

"Karamaneh!" I called softly.

The muffled form beneath the lamp turned so that the soft light fell upon the lovely face of the slave girl. She who had been a pliant instrument in the hands of Fu-Manchu now was to be the means whereby society should be rid of him.

She raised her finger warningly; then beckoned me to approach.

My feet sinking in the rich pile of the carpet, I came through the gloom of the great apartment in to the patch of light, and, Karamaneh beside me, stood looking down upon the boy. It was Aziz, her brother; dead so far as Western lore had power to judge, but kept alive in that deathlike trance by the uncanny power of the Chinese doctor.

"Be quick," she said; "be quick! Awaken him! I am afraid."

From the case which I carried I took out a needle-syringe and a phial containing a small quantity of amber-hued liquid. It was a drug not to be found in the British Pharmacopoeia. Of its constitution I knew nothing. Although I had had the phial in my possession for some days I had not dared to devote any of its precious contents to analytical purposes. The amber drops spelled life for the boy Aziz, spelled success for the mission of Nayland Smith, spelled ruin for the fiendish Chinaman.

I raised the white coverlet. The boy, fully dressed, lay with his arms crossed upon his breast. I discerned the mark of previous injections as, charging the syringe from the phial, I made what I hoped would be the last of such experiments upon him. I would have given half of my small worldly possessions to have known the real nature of the drug which was now coursing through the veins of Aziz--which was tainting the grayed face with the olive tone of life; which, so far as my medical training bore me, was restoring the dead to life.
But such was not the purpose of my visit. I was come to remove from the house of Dr. Fu-Manchu the living chain which bound Karamaneh to him. The boy alive and free, the Doctor's hold upon the slave girl would be broken.

My lovely companion, her hands convulsively clasped, knelt and devoured with her eyes the face of the boy who was passing through the most amazing physiological change in the history of therapeutics. The peculiar perfume which she wore--which seemed to be a part of her-- which always I associated with her--was faintly perceptible. Karamaneh was breathing rapidly.

"You have nothing to fear," I whispered; "see, he is reviving. In a few moments all will be well with him."

The hanging lamp with its garishly colored shade swung gently above us, wafted, it seemed, by some draught which passed through the apartment. The boy's heavy lids began to quiver, and Karamaneh nervously clutched my arm, and held me so whilst we watched for the long-lashed eyes to open. The stillness of the place was positively unnatural; it seemed inconceivable that all about us was the discordant activity of the commercial East End. Indeed, this eerie silence was becoming oppressive; it began positively to appall me.

Inspector Weymouth's wondering face peeped over my shoulder.

"Where is Dr. Fu-Manchu?" I whispered, as Nayland Smith in turn appeared beside me. "I cannot understand the silence of the house--"

"Look about," replied Karamaneh, never taking her eyes from the face of Aziz.

I peered around the shadowy walls. Tall glass cases there were, shelves and niches: where once, from the gallery above, I had seen the tubes and retorts, the jars of unfamiliar organisms, the books of unfamiliar lore, the impedimenta of the occult student and man of science--the visible evidences of Fu-Manchu's presence. Shelves--cases--niches--were bare. Of the complicated appliances unknown to civilized laboratories, wherewith he pursued his strange experiments, of the tubes wherein he isolated the bacilli of unclassified diseases, of the yellow-bound volumes for a glimpse at which (had they known of their contents) the great men of Harley Street would have given a fortune--no trace remained. The silken cushions; the inlaid tables; all were gone.

The room was stripped, dismantled. Had Fu-Manchu fled? The silence assumed a new significance. His dacoits and kindred ministers of death all must have fled, too.

"You have let him escape us!" I said rapidly. "You promised to aid us to capture him--to send us a message--and you have delayed until--"

"No," she said; "no!" and clutched at my arm again. "Oh! is he not reviving slowly? Are you sure you have made no mistake?"

Her thoughts were all for the boy; and her solicitude touched me. I again examined Aziz, the most remarkable patient of my busy professional career.

As I counted the strengthening pulse, he opened his dark eyes-- which were so like the eyes of Karamaneh--and, with the girl's eager arms tightly about him, sat up, looking wonderingly around.

Karamaneh pressed her cheek to his, whispering loving words in that softly spoken Arabic which had first betrayed her nationality to Nayland Smith. I handed her my flask, which I had filled with wine.

"My promise is fulfilled!" I said. "You are free! Now for Fu-Manchu! But first let us admit the police to this house; there is something uncanny in its stillness."

"No," she replied. "First let my brother be taken out and placed in safety. Will you carry him?"

She raised her face to that of Inspector Weymouth, upon which was written awe and wonder.

The burly detective lifted the boy as tenderly as a woman, passed through the shadows to the stairway, ascended, and was swallowed up in the gloom. Nayland Smith's eyes gleamed feverishly. He turned to Karamaneh.

"You are not playing with us?" he said harshly. "We have done our part; it remains for you to do yours."

"Do not speak so loudly," the girl begged. "HE is near us-- and, oh, God, I fear him so!"

"Where is he?" persisted my friend.

Karamaneh's eyes were glassy with fear now.

"You must not touch him until the police are here," she said-- but from the direction of her quick, agitated glances I knew that, her brother safe now, she feared for me, and for me alone. Those glances sent my blood dancing; for Karamaneh was an Eastern jewel which any man of flesh and blood must have coveted had he known it to lie within his reach. Her eyes were twin lakes of mystery which, more than once, I had known the desire to explore.

"Look--beyond that curtain"--her voice was barely audible--"but do not enter. Even as he is, I fear him."

Her voice, her palpable agitation, prepared us for something extraordinary. Tragedy and Fu-Manchu were never far apart. Though we were two, and help was so near, we were in the abode of the most cunning murderer who ever came out of the East.

It was with strangely mingled emotions that I crossed the thick carpet, Nayland Smith beside me, and drew aside
the draperies concealing a door, to which Karamaneh had pointed. Then, upon looking into the dim place beyond, all else save what it held was forgotten.

We looked upon a small, square room, the walls draped with fantastic Chinese tapestry, the floor strewn with cushions; and reclining in a corner, where the faint, blue light from a lamp, placed upon a low table, painted grotesque shadows about the cavernous face-- was Dr. Fu-Manchu!

At sight of him my heart leaped--and seemed to suspend its functions, so intense was the horror which this man's presence inspired in me. My hand clutching the curtain, I stood watching him. The lids veiled the malignant green eyes, but the thin lips seemed to smile. Then Smith silently pointed to the hand which held a little pipe. A sickly perfume assailed my nostrils, and the explanation of the hushed silence, and the ease with which we had thus far executed our plan, came to me. The cunning mind was torpid-- lost in a brutish world of dreams.

Fu-Manchu was in an opium sleep!

The dim light traced out a network of tiny lines, which covered the yellow face from the pointed chin to the top of the great domed brow, and formed deep shadow pools in the hollows beneath his eyes. At last we had triumphed. I could not determine the depth of his obscene trance; and mastering some of my repugnance, and forgetful of Karamaneh's warning, I was about to step forward into the room, loaded with its nauseating opium fumes, when a soft breath fanned my cheek.

"Do not go in!" came Karamaneh's warning voice--hushed--trembling.

Her little hand grasped my arm. She drew Smith and myself back from the door.

"There is danger there!" she whispered.

"Do not enter that room! The police must reach him in some way-- and drag him out! Do not enter that room!"

The girl's voice quivered hysterically; her eyes blazed into savage flame. The fierce resentment born of dreadful wrongs was consuming her now; but fear of Fu-Manchu held her yet. Inspector Weymouth came down the stairs and joined us.

"I have sent the boy to Ryman's room at the station," he said. "The divisional surgeon will look after him until you arrive, Dr. Petrie. All is ready now. The launch is just off the wharf and every side of the place under observation. Where's our man?"

He drew a pair of handcuffs from his pocket and raised his eyebrows interrogatively. The absence of sound-- of any demonstration from the uncanny Chinaman whom he was there to arrest--puzzled him.

Nayland Smith jerked his thumb toward the curtain.

At that, and before we could utter a word, Weymouth stepped to the draped door. He was a man who drove straight at his goal and saved reflections for subsequent leisure. I think, moreover, that the atmosphere of the place (stripped as it was it retained its heavy, voluptuous perfume) had begun to get a hold upon him. He was anxious to shake it off; to be up and doing.

He pulled the curtain aside and stepped into the room. Smith and I perforce followed him. Just within the door the three of us stood looking across at the limp thing which had spread terror throughout the Eastern and Western world. Helpless as Fu-Manchu was, he inspired terror now, though the giant intellect was inert--stupefied.

In the dimly lit apartment we had quitted I heard Karamaneh utter a stifled scream. But it came too late. As though cast up by a volcano, the silken cushions, the inlaid table with its blue-shaded lamp, the garish walls, the sprawling figure with the ghastly light playing upon its features--quivered, and shot upward!

So it seemed to me; though, in the ensuing instant I remembered, too late, a previous experience of the floors of Fu-Manchu's private apartments; I knew what had indeed befallen us. A trap had been released beneath our feet.

I recall falling--but have no recollection of the end of my fall-- of the shock marking the drop. I only remember fighting for my life against a stifling something which had me by the throat. I knew that I was being suffocated, but my hands met only the deathly emptiness.

Into a poisonous well of darkness I sank. I could not cry out. I was helpless. Of the fate of my companions I knew nothing-- could surmise nothing. Then... all consciousness ended.

CHAPTER XXV

I WAS being carried along a dimly lighted, tunnel-like place, slung, sackwise, across the shoulder of a Burman. He was not a big man, but he supported my considerable weight with apparent ease. A deadly nausea held me, but the rough handling had served to restore me to consciousness. My hands and feet were closely lashed. I hung limply as a wet towel: I felt that this spark of tortured life which had flickered up in me must ere long finally become extinguished.

A fancy possessed me, in these the first moments of my restoration to the world of realities, that I had been smuggled into China; and as I swung head downward I told myself that the huge, puffy things which strewed the path were a species of giant toadstool, unfamiliar to me and possibly peculiar to whatever district of China I now was in.
The air was hot, steamy, and loaded with a smell as of rotting vegetation. I wondered why my bearer so scrupulously avoided touching any of the unwholesome-looking growths in passing through what seemed a succession of cellars, but steered a tortuous course among the bloated, unnatural shapes, lifting his bare brown feet with a catlike delicacy.

He passed under a low arch, dropped me roughly to the ground and ran back. Half stunned, I lay watching the agile brown body melt into the distances of the cellars. Their walls and roof seemed to emit a faint, phosphorescent light.

"Petrie!" came a weak voice from somewhere ahead. . . . "Is that you, Petrie?"

It was Nayland Smith!

"Smith!" I said, and strove to sit up. But the intense nausea overcame me, so that I all but swooned.

I heard his voice again, but could attach no meaning to the words which he uttered. A sound of terrific blows reached my ears, too. The Burman reappeared, bending under the heavy load which he bore. For, as he picked his way through the bloated things which grew upon the floors of the cellars, I realized that he was carrying the inert body of Inspector Weymouth. And I found time to compare the strength of the little brown man with that of a Nile beetle, which can raise many times its own weight. Then, behind him, appeared a second figure, which immediately claimed the whole of my errant attention.

"Fu-Manchu!" hissed my friend, from the darkness which concealed him.

It was indeed none other than Fu-Manchu--the Fu-Manchu whom we had thought to be helpless. The deeps of the Chinaman's cunning--the fine quality of his courage, were forced upon me as amazing facts.

He had assumed the appearance of a drugged opium-smoker so well as to dupe me--a medical man; so well as to dupe Karamaneh--whose experience of the noxious habit probably was greater than my own. And, with the gallows dangling before him, he had waited--played the part of a lure--whilst a body of police actually surrounded the place!

I have since thought that the room probably was one which he actually used for opium debauches, and the device of the trap was intended to protect him during the comatose period.

Now, holding a lantern above his head, the deviser of the trap whereinto we, mouselike, had blindly entered, came through the cellars, following the brown man who carried Weymouth. The faint rays of the lantern (it apparently contained a candle) revealed a veritable forest of the gigantic fungi--poisonously colored--hideously swollen--climbing from the floor up the slimy walls--climbing like horrid parasites to such part of the arched roof as was visible to me.

Fu-Manchu picked his way through the fungi ranks as daintily as though the distorted, tumid things had been viper-headed.

The resounding blows which I had noted before, and which had never ceased, culminated in a splintering crash. Dr. Fu-Manchu and his servant, who carried the apparently insensible detective, passed in under the arch, Fu-Manchu glancing back once along the passages. The lantern he extinguished, or concealed; and whilst I waited, my mind dully surveying memories of all the threats which this uncanny being had uttered, a distant clamor came to my ears.

Then, abruptly, it ceased. Dr. Fu-Manchu had closed a heavy door; and to my surprise I perceived that the greater part of it was of glass. The will-o'-the-wisp glow which played around the fungi rendered the vista of the cellars faintly luminous, and visible to me from where I lay. Fu-Manchu spoke softly. His voice, its guttural note alternating with a sibilance on certain words, betrayed no traces of agitation. The man's unbroken calm had in it something inhuman. For he had just perpetrated an act of daring unparalleled in my experience, and, in the clamor now shut out by the glass door I tardily recognized the entrance of the police into some barricaded part of the house--the coming of those who would save us--who would hold the Chinese doctor for the hangman!

"I have decided," he said deliberately, "that you are more worthy of my attention than I had formerly supposed. A man who can solve the secret of the Golden Elixir (I had not solved it; I had merely stolen some) should be a valuable acquisition to my Council. The extent of the plans of Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith and of the English Scotland Yard it is incumbent upon me to learn. Therefore, gentlemen, you live--for the present!"

"And you'll swing," came Weymouth's hoarse voice, "in the near future! You and all your yellow gang!"

"I trust not," was the placid reply. "Most of my people are safe: some are shipped as lascars upon the liners; others have departed by different means. Ah!"

That last word was the only one indicative of excitement which had yet escaped him. A disk of light danced among the brilliant poison hues of the passages--but no sound reached us; by which I knew that the glass door must fit almost hermetically. It was much cooler here than in the place through which we had passed, and the nausea began to leave me, my brain to grow more clear. Had I known what was to follow I should have cursed the lucidity of mind which now came to me; I should have prayed for oblivion--to be spared the sight of that which ensued.

"It's Logan!" cried Inspector Weymouth; and I could tell that he was struggling to free himself of his bonds.
From his voice it was evident that he, too, was recovering from the effects of the narcotic which had been administered to us all.

"Logan!" he cried. "Logan! This way--HELP!"

But the cry beat back upon us in that enclosed space and seemed to carry no farther than the invisible walls of our prison.

"The door fits well," came Fu-Manchu's mocking voice. "It is fortunate for us all that it is so. This is my observation window, Dr. Petrie, and you are about to enjoy an unique opportunity of studying fungology. I have already drawn your attention to the anaesthetic properties of the lycoperdon, or common puff-ball. You may have recognized the fumes? The chamber into which you rashly precipitated yourselves was charged with them. By a process of my own I have greatly enhanced the value of the puff-ball in this respect. Your friend, Mr. Weymouth, proved the most obstinate subject; but he succumbed in fifteen seconds."

"Logan! Help! HELP! This way, man!"

Something very like fear sounded in Weymouth's voice now. Indeed, the situation was so uncanny that it almost seemed unreal. A group of men had entered the farthest of the cellars, led by one who bore an electric pocket-lamp. The hard, white ray danced from bloated gray fungi to others of nightmare shape, of dazzling, venomous brilliance.

"Note the snowy growth upon the roof, Doctor. Do not be deceived by its size. It is a giant variety of my own culture and is of the order empusa. You, in England, are familiar with the death of the common house-fly-- which is found attached to the window-pane by a coating of white mold. I have developed the spores of this mold and have produced a giant species. Observe the interesting effect of the strong light upon my orange and blue amanita fungus!"

Hard beside me I heard Nayland Smith groan, Weymouth had become suddenly silent. For my own part, I could have shrieked in pure horror. FOR I KNEW WHAT WAS COMING. I realized in one agonized instant the significance of the dim lantern, of the careful progress through the subterranean fungi grove, of the care with which Fu-Manchu and his servant had avoided touching any of the growths. I knew, now, that Dr. Fu-Manchu was the greatest fungologist the world had ever known; was a poisoner to whom the Borgias were as children--and I knew that the detectives blindly were walking into a valley of death.

Then it began--the unnatural scene--the saturnalia of murder.

Like so many bombs the brilliantly colored caps of the huge toadstool-like things alluded to by the Chinaman exploded, as the white ray sought them out in the darkness which alone preserved their existence. A brownish cloud--I could not determine whether liquid or powdery--arose in the cellar.

I tried to close my eyes--or to turn them away from the reeling forms of the men who were trapped in that poison-hole. It was useless:

I must look.

The bearer of the lamp had dropped it, but the dim, eerily illuminated gloom endured scarce a second. A bright light sprang up--doubtless at the touch of the fiendish being who now resumed speech:

"Observe the symptoms of delirium, Doctor!" Out there, beyond the glass door, the unhappy victims were laughing--tearing their garments from their bodies--leaping--waving their arms--were become MANIACS!

"We will now release the ripe spores of giant entpusa," continued the wicked voice. "The air of the second cellar being super-charged with oxygen, they immediately germinate. Ah! it is a triumph! That process is the scientific triumph of my life!"

Like powdered snow the white spores fell from the roof, frosting the writhing shapes of the already poisoned men. Before my horrified gaze, THE FUNGUS GREW; it spread from the head to the feet of those it touched; it enveloped them as in glittering shrouds. . .

"They die like flies!" screamed Fu-Manchu, with a sudden febrile excitement; and I felt assured of something I had long suspected: that that magnificent, perverted brain was the brain of a homicidal maniac--though Smith would never accept the theory.

"It is my fly-trap!" shrieked the Chinaman. "And I am the god of destruction!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE clammy touch of the mist revived me. The culmination of the scene in the poison cellars, together with the effects of the fumes which I had inhaled again, had deprived me of consciousness. Now I knew that I was afloat on the river. I still was bound: furthermore, a cloth was wrapped tightly about my mouth, and I was secured to a ring in the deck.

By moving my aching head to the left I could look down into the oily water; by moving it to the right I could catch a glimpse of the empurpled face of Inspector Weymouth, who, similarly bound and gagged, lay beside me, but only of the feet and legs of Nayland Smith. For I could not turn my head sufficiently far to see more.
We were aboard an electric launch. I heard the hated guttural voice of Fu-Manchu, subdued now to its habitual calm, and my heart leaped to hear the voice that answered him. It was that of Karamaneh. His triumph was complete. Clearly his plans for departure were complete; his slaughter of the police in the underground passages had been a final reckless demonstration of which the Chinaman's subtle cunning would have been incapable had he not known his escape from the country to be assured.

What fate was in store for us? How would he avenge himself upon the girl who had betrayed him to his enemies? What portion awaited those enemies? He seemed to have formed the singular determination to smuggle me into China-- but what did he purpose in the case of Weymouth, and in the case of Nayland Smith?

All but silently we were feeling our way through the mist. Astern died the clangor of dock and wharf into a remote discord. Ahead hung the foggy curtain veiling the traffic of the great waterway; but through it broke the calling of sirens, the tinkling of bells.

The gentle movement of the screw ceased altogether. The launch lay heaving slightly upon the swells.

A distant throbbing grew louder--and something advanced upon us through the haze.

A bell rang and muffled by the fog a voice proclaimed itself-- a voice which I knew. I felt Weymouth writhing impotently beside me; heard him mumbling incoherently; and I knew that he, too, had recognized the voice.

It was that of Inspector Ryman of the river police and their launch was within biscuit-throw of that upon which we lay!

"Hoy! 'Hoy!"

I trembled. A feverish excitement claimed me. They were hailing us. We carried no lights; but now--and ignoring the pain which shot from my spine to my skull I craned my neck to the left--the port light of the police launch glowed angrily through the mist.

I was unable to utter any save mumbling sounds, and my companions were equally helpless. It was a desperate position. Had the police seen us or had they hailed at random? The light drew nearer.

"Launch, 'hoy!"

They had seen us! Fu-Manchu's guttural voice spoke shortly-- and our screw began to revolve again; we leaped ahead into the bank of darkness. Faint grew the light of the police launch--and was gone. But I heard Ryman's voice shouting.

"Full speed!" came faintly through the darkness. "Port! Port!"

Then the munk closed down, and with our friends far astern of us we were racing deeper into the fog banks--speeding seaward; though of this I was unable to judge at the time.

On we raced, and on, sweeping over growing swells. Once, a black, towering shape dropped down upon us. Far above, lights blazed, bells rang, vague cries pierced the fog. The launch pitched and rolled perilously, but weathered the wash of the liner which so nearly had concluded this episode. It was such a journey as I had taken once before, early in our pursuit of the genius of the Yellow Peril; but this was infinitely more terrible; for now we were utterly in Fu-Manchu's power.

A voice mumbled in my ear. I turned my bound-up face; and Inspector Weymouth raised his hands in the dimness and partly slipped the bandage from his mouth.

"I've been working at the cords since we left those filthy cellars," he whispered. "My wrists are all cut, but when I've got out a knife and freed my ankles--"

Smith had kicked him with his bound feet. The detective slipped the bandage back to position and placed his hands behind him again. Dr. Fu-Manchu, wearing a heavy overcoat but no hat, came aft. He was dragging Karamaneh by the wrists. He seated himself on the cushions near to us, pulling the girl down beside him. Now, I could see her face--and the expression in her beautiful eyes made me writhe.

Fu-Manchu was watching us, his discolored teeth faintly visible in the dim light, to which my eyes were becoming accustomed.

"Dr. Petrie," he said, "you shall be my honored guest at my home in China. You shall assist me to revolutionize chemistry. Mr. Smith, I fear you know more of my plans than I had deemed it possible for you to have learned, and I am anxious to know if you have a confidant. Where your memory fails you, and my files and wire jackets prove ineffectual, Inspector Weymouth's recollections may prove more accurate."

He turned to the cowering girl--who shrank away from him in pitiful, abject terror.

"In my hands, Doctor," he continued, "I hold a needle charged with a rare culture. It is the link between the bacilli and the fungi. You have seemed to display an undue interest in the peach and pearl which render my Karamaneh so delightful, In the supple grace of her movements and the sparkle of her eyes. You can never devote your whole mind to those studies which I have planned for you whilst such distractions exist. A touch of this keen point, and the laughing Karamaneh becomes the shrieking hag--the maniacal, mowing--"

Then, with an ox-like rush, Weymouth was upon him!
Karamaneh, wrought upon past endurance, with a sobbing cry, sank to the deck—and lay still. I managed to writhe into a half-sitting posture, and Smith rolled aside as the detective and the Chinaman crashed down together.

Weymouth had one big hand at the Doctor's yellow throat; with his left he grasped the Chinaman's right. It held the needle.

Now, I could look along the length of the little craft, and, so far as it was possible to make out in the fog, only one other was aboard—the half-clad brown man who navigated her—and who had carried us through the cellars. The murk had grown denser and now shut us in like a box. The throb of the motor—the hissing breath of the two who fought—with so much at issue—these sounds and the wash of the water alone broke the eerie stillness.

By slow degrees, and with a reptilian agility horrible to watch, Fu-Manchu was neutralizing the advantage gained by Weymouth. His clawish fingers were fast in the big man's throat; the right hand with its deadly needle was forcing down the left of his opponent. He had been underneath, but now he was gaining the upper place. His powers of physical endurance must have been truly marvelous. His breath was whistling through his nostrils significantly, but Weymouth was palpably tiring.

The latter suddenly changed his tactics. By a supreme effort, to which he was spurred, I think, by the growing proximity of the needle, he raised Fu-Manchu—by the throat and arm—and pitched him sideways.

The Chinaman's grip did not relax, and the two wrestlers dropped, a writhing mass, upon the port cushions. The launch heeled over, and my cry of horror was crushed back into my throat by the bandage. For, as Fu-Manchu sought to extricate himself, he overbalanced—fell back—and, bearing Weymouth with him—slid into the river!

The mist swallowed them up.

There are moments of which no man can recall his mental impressions, moments so acutely horrible that, mercifully, our memory retains nothing of the emotions they occasioned. This was one of them. A chaos ruled in my mind. I had a vague belief that the Burman, forward, glanced back. Then the course of the launch was changed. How long intervened between the tragic end of that Gargantuan struggle and the time when a black wall leaped suddenly up before us I cannot pretend to state.

With a sickening jerk we ran aground. A loud explosion ensued, and I clearly remember seeing the brown man leap out into the fog—which was the last I saw of him.

Water began to wash aboard.

Fully alive to our imminent peril, I fought with the cords that bound me; but I lacked poor Weymouth's strength of wrist, and I began to accept as a horrible and imminent possibility, a death from drowning, within six feet of the bank.

Beside me, Nayland Smith was straining and twisting. I think his object was to touch Karamaneh, in the hope of arousing her. Where he failed in his project, the inflowing water succeeded. A silent prayer of thankfulness came from my very soul when I saw her stir—when I saw her raise her hands to her head—and saw the big, horror-bright eyes gleam through the mist veil.

CHAPTER XXVII

We quitted the wrecked launch but a few seconds before her stern settled down into the river. Where the mud-bank upon which we found ourselves was situated we had no idea. But at least it was terra firma and we were free from Dr. Fu-Manchu.

Smith stood looking out towards the river.

"My God!" he groaned. "My God!"

He was thinking, as I was, of Weymouth.

And when, an hour later, the police boat located us (on the mud-flats below Greenwich) and we heard that the toll of the poison cellars was eight men, we also heard news of our brave companion.

"Back there in the fog, sir," reported Inspector Ryman, who was in charge, and his voice was under poor command, "there was an uncanny howling, and peals of laughter that I'm going to dream about for weeks—"

Karamaneh, who nestled beside me like a frightened child, shivered; and I knew that the needle had done its work, despite Weymouth's giant strength.

Smith swallowed noisily.

"Pray God the river has that yellow Satan," he said. "I would sacrifice a year of my life to see his rat's body on the end of a grappling-iron!"

We were a sad party that steamed through the fog homeward that night. It seemed almost like deserting a staunch comrade to leave the spot—so nearly as we could locate it—where Weymouth had put up that last gallant fight. Our helplessness was pathetic, and although, had the night been clear as crystal, I doubt if we could have acted otherwise, it came to me that this stinking murk was a new enemy which drove us back in coward retreat.

But so many were the calls upon our activity, and so numerous the stimulants to our initiative in those times, that soon we had matter to relieve our minds from this stress of sorrow.
There was Karamaneh to be considered—Karamaneh and her brother. A brief counsel was held, whereat it was decided that for the present they should be lodged at a hotel.

"I shall arrange," Smith whispered to me, for the girl was watching us, "to have the place patrolled night and day."

"You cannot suppose—"

"Petrie! I cannot and dare not suppose Fu-Manchu dead until with my own eyes I have seen him so!"

Accordingly we conveyed the beautiful Oriental girl and her brother away from that luxurious abode in its sordid setting. I will not dwell upon the final scene in the poison cellars lest I be accused of accumulating horror for horror's sake. Members of the fire brigade, helmed against contagion, brought out the bodies of the victims wrapped in their living shrouds. . . .

From Karamaneh we learned much of Fu-Manchu, little of herself.

"What am I? Does my poor history matter—to anyone?" was her answer to questions respecting herself.

And she would droop her lashes over her dark eyes.

The dacoits whom the Chinaman had brought to England originally numbered seven, we learned. As you, having followed me thus far, will be aware, we had thinned the ranks of the Burmans. Probably only one now remained in England. They had lived in a camp in the grounds of the house near Windsor (which, as we had learned at the time of its destruction, the Doctor had bought outright). The Thames had been his highway.

Other members of the group had occupied quarters in various parts of the East End, where sailorsmen of all nationalities congregate. Shen-Yan's had been the East End headquarters. He had employed the hulk from the time of his arrival, as a laboratory for a certain class of experiments undesirable in proximity to a place of residence.

Nayland Smith asked the girl on one occasion if the Chinaman had had a private sea-going vessel, and she replied in the affirmative. She had never been on board, however, had never even set eyes upon it, and could give us no information respecting its character. It had sailed for China.

"You are sure," asked Smith keenly, "that it has actually left?"

"I understood so, and that we were to follow by another route."

"It would have been difficult for Fu-Manchu to travel by a passenger boat?"

"I cannot say what were his plans."

In a state of singular uncertainty, then, readily to be understood, we passed the days following the tragedy which had deprived us of our fellow-worker.

Vividly I recall the scene at poor Weymouth's home, on the day that we visited it. I then made the acquaintance of the Inspector's brother. Nayland Smith gave him a detailed account of the last scene.

"Out there in the mist," he concluded wearily, "it all seemed very unreal."

"I wish to God it had been!"

"Amen to that, Mr. Weymouth. But your brother made a gallant finish. If ridding the world of Fu-Manchu were the only good deed to his credit, his life had been well spent."

James Weymouth smoked awhile in thoughtful silence. Though but four and a half miles S.S.E. of St. Paul's the quaint little cottage, with its rustic garden, shadowed by the tall trees which had so lined the village street before motor 'buses were, was a spot as peaceful and secluded as any in broad England. But another shadow lay upon it today—chilling, fearful. An incarnate evil had come out of the dim East and in its dying malevolence had touched this home.

"There are two things I don't understand about it, sir," continued Weymouth. "What was the meaning of the horrible laughter which the river police heard in the fog? And where are the bodies?"

Karamaneh, seated beside me, shuddered at the words. Smith, whose restless spirit granted him little repose, paused in his aimless wanderings about the room and looked at her.

In these latter days of his Augean labors to purge England of the unclean thing which had fastened upon her, my friend was more lean and nervous-looking than I had ever known him. His long residence in Burma had rendered him spare and had burned his naturally dark skin to a coppery hue; but now his gray eyes had grown feverishly bright and his face so lean as at times to appear positively emaciated. But I knew that he was as fit as ever.

"This lady may be able to answer your first question," he said. "She and her brother were for some time in the household of Dr. Fu-Manchu. In fact, Mr. Weymouth, Karamaneh, as her name implies, was a slave."

Weymouth glanced at the beautiful, troubled face with scarcely veiled distrust. "You don't look as though you had come from China, miss," he said, with a sort of unwilling admiration.

"I do not come from China," replied Karamaneh. "My father was a pure Bedawee. But my history does not matter." (At times there was something imperious in her manner; and to this her musical accent added force.) "When your brave brother, Inspector Weymouth, and Dr. Fu-Manchu, were swallowed up by the river, Fu-Manchu held a poisoned needle in his hand. The laughter meant that the needle had done its work. Your brother had become mad!"
Weymouth turned aside to hide his emotion. "What was on the needle?" he asked huskily.

"It was something which he prepared from the venom of a kind of swamp adder," she answered. "It produces madness, but not always death."

"He would have had a poor chance," said Smith, "even had he been in complete possession of his senses. At the time of the encounter we must have been some considerable distance from shore, and the fog was impenetrable."

"But how do you account for the fact that neither of the bodies have been recovered?"

"Ryman of the river police tells me that persons lost at that point are not always recovered—or not until a considerable time later."

There was a faint sound from the room above. The news of that tragic happening out in the mist upon the Thames had prostrated poor Mrs. Weymouth.

"She hasn't been told half the truth," said her brother-in-law. "She doesn't know about—the poisoned needle. What kind of fiend was this Dr. Fu-Manchu?" He burst out into a sudden blaze of furious resentment. "John never told me much, and you have let mighty little leak into the papers. What was he? Who was he?"

Half he addressed the words to Smith, half to Karamaneh.

"Dr. Fu-Manchu," replied the former, "was the ultimate expression of Chinese cunning; a phenomenon such as occurs but once in many generations. He was a superman of incredible genius, who, had he willed, could have revolutionized science. There is a superstition in some parts of China according to which, under certain peculiar conditions (one of which is proximity to a deserted burial-ground) an evil spirit of incredible age may enter unto the body of a new-born infant. All my efforts thus far have not availed me to trace the genealogy of the man called Dr. Fu-Manchu. Even Karamaneh cannot help me in this. But I have sometimes thought that he was a member of a certain very old Kiangsu family—and that the peculiar conditions I have mentioned prevailed at his birth!"

Smith, observing our looks of amazement, laughed shortly, and quite mirthlessly.

"Poor old Weymouth!" he jerked. "I suppose my labors are finished; but I am far from triumphant. Is there any improvement in Mrs. Weymouth's condition?"

"Very little," was the reply; "she has lain in a semi-conscious state since the news came. No one had any idea she would take it so. At one time we were afraid her brain was going. She seemed to have delusions."

Smith spun round upon Weymouth.

"Of what nature?" he asked rapidly.

The other pulled nervously at his mustache.

"My wife has been staying with her," he explained, "since—it happened; and for the last three nights poor John's widow has cried out at the same time—half-past two—that someone was knocking on the door."

"What door?"

"That door yonder—the street door."

All our eyes turned in the direction indicated.

"John often came home at half-past two from the Yard," continued Weymouth; "so we naturally thought poor Mary was wandering in her mind. But last night—and it's not to be wondered at—my wife couldn't sleep, and she was wide awake at half-past two."

"Well?"

Nayland Smith was standing before him, alert, bright-eyed.

"She heard it, too!"

The sun was streaming into the cozy little sitting-room; but I will confess that Weymouth's words chilled me uncannily. Karamaneh laid her hand upon mine, in a quaint, childish fashion peculiarly her own. Her hand was cold, but its touch thrilled me. For Karamaneh was not a child, but a rarely beautiful girl—a pearl of the East such as many a monarch has fought for.

"What then?" asked Smith.

"She was afraid to move—afraid to look from the window!"

My friend turned and stared hard at me.

"A subjective hallucination, Petrie?"

"In all probability," I replied. "You should arrange that your wife be relieved in her trying duties, Mr. Weymouth. It is too great a strain for an inexperienced nurse."

CHAPTER XXVIII

Of all that we had hoped for in our pursuit of Fu-Manchu how little had we accomplished. Excepting Karamaneh and her brother (who were victims and not creatures of the Chinese doctor's) not one of the formidable group had fallen alive into our hands. Dreadful crimes had marked Fu-Manchu's passage through the land. Not one-half of the truth (and nothing of the later developments) had been made public. Nayland Smith's authority was sufficient to control the press.
In the absence of such a veto a veritable panic must have seized upon the entire country; for a monster—a thing more than humanly evil—existed in our midst.

Always Fu-Manchu's secret activities had centered about the great waterway. There was much of poetic justice in his end; for the Thames had claimed him, who so long had used the stream as a highway for the passage to and fro for his secret forces. Gone now were the yellow men who had been the instruments of his evil will; gone was the giant intellect which had controlled the complex murder machine. Karamaneh, whose beauty he had used as a lure, at last was free, and no more with her smile would tempt men to death— that her brother might live.

Many there are, I doubt not, who will regard the Eastern girl with horror. I ask their forgiveness in that I regarded her quite differently. No man having seen her could have condemned her unheard. Many, having looked into her lovely eyes, had they found there what I found, must have forgiven her almost any crime.

That she valued human life but little was no matter for wonder. Her nationality—her history—furnished adequate excuse for an attitude not condonable in a European equally cultured.

But indeed let me confess that hers was a nature incomprehensible to me in some respects. The soul of Karamaneh was a closed book to my short-sighted Western eyes. But the body of Karamaneh was exquisite; her beauty of a kind that was a key to the most extravagant rhapsodies of Eastern poets. Her eyes held a challenge wholly Oriental in its appeal; her lips, even in repose, were a taunt. And, herein, East is West and West is East.

Finally, despite her lurid history, despite the scornful self-possession of which I knew her capable, she was an unprotected girl— in years, I believe, a mere child—whom Fate had cast in my way. At her request, we had booked passages for her brother and herself to Egypt. The boat sailed in three days. But Karamaneh's beautiful eyes were sad; often I detected tears on the black lashes. Shall I endeavor to describe my tumultuous, conflicting emotions? It would be useless, since I know it to be impossible. For in those dark eyes burned a fire I might not see; those silken lashes veiled a message I dared not read.

Nayland Smith was not blind to the facts of the complicated situation. I can truthfully assert that he was the only man of my acquaintance who, having come in contact with Karamaneh, had kept his head.

We endeavored to divert her mind from the recent tragedies by a round of amusements, though with poor Weymouth's body still at the mercy of unknown waters Smith and I made but a poor show of gayety; and I took a gloomy pride in the admiration which our lovely companion everywhere excited. I learned, in those days, how rare a thing in nature is a really beautiful woman.

One afternoon we found ourselves at an exhibition of water colors in Bond Street. Karamaneh was intensely interested in the subjects of the drawings—which were entirely Egyptian. As usual, she furnished matter for comment amongst the other visitors, as did the boy, Aziz, her brother, anew upon the world from his living grave in the house of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

Suddenly Aziz clutched at his sister's arm, whispering rapidly in Arabic. I saw her peachlike color fade; saw her become pale and wild-eyed— the haunted Karamaneh of the old days.

She turned to me.

"Dr. Petrie—he says that Fu-Manchu is here!"

"Where?"

Nayland Smith rapped out the question violently, turning in a flash from the picture which he was examining.

"In this room!" she whispered glancing furtively, affrightedly about her. "Something tells Aziz when HE is near—and I, too, feel strangely afraid. Oh, can it be that he is not dead!"

She held my arm tightly. Her brother was searching the room with big, velvet black eyes. I studied the faces of the several visitors; and Smith was staring about him with the old alert look, and tugging nervously at the lobe of his ear. The name of the giant foe of the white race instantaneously had strung him up to a pitch of supreme intensity.

Our united scrutinies discovered no figure which could have been that of the Chinese doctor. Who could mistake that long, gaunt shape, with the high, mummy-like shoulders, and the indescribable gait, which I can only liken to that of an awkward cat?

Then, over the heads of a group of people who stood by the doorway, I saw Smith peering at someone— at someone who passed across the outer room. Stepping aside, I, too, obtained a glimpse of this person.

As I saw him, he was a tall, old man, wearing a black Inverness coat and a rather shabby silk hat. He had long white hair and a patriarchal beard, wore smoked glasses and walked slowly, leaning upon a stick.

Smith's gaunt face paled. With a rapid glance at Karamaneh, he made off across the room.

Could it be Dr. Fu-Manchu?

Many days had passed since, already half-choked by Inspector Weymouth's iron grip, Fu-Manchu, before our own eyes, had been swallowed up by the Thames. Even now men were seeking his body, and that of his last victim. Nor had we left any stone unturned. Acting upon information furnished by Karamaneh, the police had searched every known haunt of the murder group. But everything pointed to the fact that the group was disbanded and
dispersed; that the lord of strange deaths who had ruled it was no more.

Yet Smith was not satisfied. Neither, let me confess, was I. Every port was watched; and in suspected districts a kind of house-to-house patrol had been instituted. Unknown to the great public, in those days a secret war waged—a war in which all the available forces of the authorities took the field against one man! But that one man was the evil of the East incarnate.

When we rejoined him, Nayland Smith was talking to the commissionaire at the door. He turned to me.

"That is Professor Jenner Monde," he said. "The sergeant, here, knows him well."

The name of the celebrated Orientalist of course was familiar to me, although I had never before set eyes upon him.

"The Professor was out East the last time I was there, sir," stated the commissionaire. "I often used to see him. But he's an eccentric old gentleman. Seems to live in a world of his own. He's recently back from China, I think."

Nayland Smith stood clicking his teeth together in irritable hesitation. I heard Karamaneh sigh, and, looking at her, I saw that her cheeks were regaining their natural color.

She smiled in pathetic apology.

"If he was here he is gone," she said. "I am not afraid now."

Smith thanked the commissionaire for his information and we quitted the gallery.

"Professor Jenner Monde," muttered my friend, "has lived so long in China as almost to be a Chinaman. I have never met him—never seen him, before; but I wonder—"

"You wonder what, Smith?"

"I wonder if he could possibly be an ally of the Doctor's!"

I stared at him in amazement.

"If we are to attach any importance to the incident at all, I said, "we must remember that the boy's impression—and Karamaneh's—was that Fu-Manchu was present in person."

"I DO attach importance to the incident, Petrie; they are naturally sensitive to such impressions. But I doubt if even the abnormal organization of Aziz could distinguish between the hidden presence of a creature of the Doctor's and that of the Doctor himself. I shall make a point of calling upon Professor Jenner Monde."

But Fate had ordained that much should happen ere Smith made his proposed call upon the Professor. Karamaneh and her brother safely lodged in their hotel (which was watched night and day by four men under Smith's orders), we returned to my quiet suburban rooms.

"First," said Smith, "let us see what we can find out respecting Professor Monde."

He went to the telephone and called up New Scotland Yard. There followed some little delay before the requisite information was obtained. Finally, however, we learned that the Professor was something of a recluse, having few acquaintances, and fewer friends.

He lived alone in chambers in New Inn Court, Carey Street. A charwoman did such cleaning as was considered necessary by the Professor, who employed no regular domestic. When he was in London he might be seen fairly frequently at the British Museum, where his shabby figure was familiar to the officials. When he was not in London—that is, during the greater part of each year—no one knew where he went. He never left any address to which letters might be forwarded.

"How long has he been in London now?" asked Smith.

So far as could be ascertained from New Inn Court (replied Scotland Yard) roughly a week.

My friend left the telephone and began restlessly to pace the room. The charred briar was produced and stuffed with that broad cut Latakia mixture of which Nayland Smith consumed close upon a pound a week. He was one of those untidy smokers who leave tangled tufts hanging from the pipe-bowl and when they light up strew the floor with smoldering fragments.

A ringing came, and shortly afterwards a girl entered.

"Mr. James Weymouth to see you, sir."

"Hullo!" rapped Smith. "What's this?"

Weymouth entered, big and florid, and in some respects singularly like his brother, in others as singularly unlike. Now, in his black suit, he was a somber figure; and in the blue eyes I read a fear suppressed.

"Mr. Smith," he began, "there's something uncanny going on at Maple Cottage."

Smith wheeled the big arm-chair forward.

"Sit down, Mr. Weymouth," he said. "I am not entirely surprised. But you have my attention. What has occurred?"

Weymouth took a cigarette from the box which I proffered and poured out a peg of whisky. His hand was not quite steady.

"That knocking," he explained. "It came again the night after you were there, and Mrs. Weymouth—my wife, I
mean-- felt that she couldn't spend another night there, alone."

"Did she look out of the window?" I asked.

"No, Doctor; she was afraid. But I spent last night downstairs in the sitting-room--and _I_ looked out!"

He took a gulp from his glass. Nayland Smith, seated on the edge of the table, his extinguished pipe in his hand, was watching him keenly.

"I'll admit I didn't look out at once," Weymouth resumed. "There was something so uncanny, gentlemen, in that knocking-- knocking--in the dead of the night. I thought"--his voice shook--"of poor Jack, lying somewhere amongst the slime of the river--and, oh, my God! it came to me that it was Jack who was knocking--and I dare not think what he--what it-- would look like!"

He leaned forward, his chin in his hand. For a few moments we were all silent.

"I know I funk'd," he continued huskily. "But when the wife came to the head of the stairs and whispered to me: "There it is again. What in heaven's name can it be"--I started to unbol't the door. The knocking had stopped. Everything was very still. I heard Mary--HIS widow--sobbing, upstairs; that was all. I opened the door, a little bit at a time."

Pausing again, he cleared his throat, and went on:

"It was a bright night, and there was no one there--not a soul. But somewhere down the lane, as I looked out into the porch, I heard most awful groans! They got fainter and fainter. Then--I could have sworn I heard SOMEONE LAUGHING! My nerves cracked up at that; and I shut the door again."

The narration of his weird experience revived something of the natural fear which it had occasioned. He raised his glass, with unsteady hand, and drained it.

Smith struck a match and relighted his pipe. He began to pace the room again. His eyes were literally on fire.

"Would it be possible to get Mrs. Weymouth out of the house before to-night? Remove her to your place, for instance?" he asked abruptly.

Weymouth looked up in surprise.

"She seems to be in a very low state," he replied. He glanced at me. "Perhaps Dr. Petrie would give us an opinion?"

"I will come and see her," I said. "But what is your idea, Smith?"

"I want to hear that knocking!" he rapped. "But in what I may see fit to do I must not be handicapped by the presence of a sick woman."

"Her condition at any rate will admit of our administering an opiate," I suggested. "That would meet the situation?"

"Good!" cried Smith. He was intensely excited now. "I rely upon you to arrange something, Petrie. Mr. Weymouth"-- he turned to our visitor--"I shall be with you this evening not later than twelve o'clock."

Weymouth appeared to be greatly relieved. I asked him to wait whilst I prepared a draught for the patient. When he was gone:

"What do you think this knocking means, Smith?" I asked.

He tapped out his pipe on the side of the grate and began with nervous energy to refill it again from the dilapidated pouch.

"I dare not tell you what I hope, Petrie," he replied-- "nor what I fear."

CHAPTER XXIX

DUSK was falling when we made our way in the direction of Maple Cottage. Nayland Smith appeared to be keenly interested in the character of the district. A high and ancient wall bordered the road along which we walked for a considerable distance. Later it gave place to a rickety fence.

My friend peered through a gap in the latter.

"There is quite an extensive estate here," he said, "not yet cut up by the builder. It is well wooded on one side, and there appears to be a pool lower down."

The road was a quiet one, and we plainly heard the tread-- quite unmistakable--of an approaching policeman. Smith continued to peer through the hole in the fence, until the officer drew up level with us. Then:

"Does this piece of ground extend down to the village, constable?" he inquired.

Quite willing for a chat, the man stopped, and stood with his thumbs thrust in his belt.

"Yes, sir. They tell me three new roads will be made through it between here and the hill."

"It must be a happy hunting ground for tramps?"

"I've seen some suspicious-looking coves about at times. But after dusk an army might be inside there and nobody would ever be the wiser."

"Burglaries frequent in the houses backing on to it?"

"Oh, no. A favorite game in these parts is snatching loaves and bottles of milk from the doors, first thing, as
they're delivered. There's been an extra lot of it lately. My mate who relieves me has got special instructions to keep his eye open in the mornings!" The man grinned. "It wouldn't be a very big case even if he caught anybody!" "No," said Smith absently; "perhaps not. Your business must be a dry one this warm weather. Good-night."

"Good-night, sir," replied the constable, richer by half-a-crown--"and thank you."

Smith stared after him for a moment, tugging reflectively at the lobe of his ear.

"I don't know that it wouldn't be a big case, after all," he mumbled. "Come on, Petrie."

Not another word did he speak, until we stood at the gate of Maple Cottage. There a plain-clothes man was standing, evidently awaiting Smith. He touched his hat.

"Have you found a suitable hiding-place?" asked my companion rapidly.

"Yes, sir," was the reply. "Kent--my mate--is there now. You'll notice that he can't be seen from here."

"No," agreed Smith, peering all about him. "He can't. Where is he?"

"Behind the broken wall," explained the man, pointing. "Through that ivy there's a clear view of the cottage door."

"Good. Keep your eyes open. If a messenger comes for me, he is to be intercepted, you understand. No one must be allowed to disturb us. You will recognize the messenger. He will be one of your fellows. Should he come--hoot three times, as much like an owl as you can."

We walked up to the porch of the cottage. In response to Smith's ringing came James Weymouth, who seemed greatly relieved by our arrival.

"First," said my friend briskly, "you had better run up and see the patient."

Accordingly, I followed Weymouth upstairs and was admitted by his wife to a neat little bedroom where the grief-stricken woman lay, a wanly pathetic sight.

"Did you administer the draught, as directed?" I asked.

Mrs. James Weymouth nodded. She was a kindly looking woman, with the same dread haunting her hazel eyes as that which lurked in her husband's blue ones.

The patient was sleeping soundly. Some whispered instructions I gave to the faithful nurse and descended to the sitting-room. It was a warm night, and Weymouth sat by the open window, smoking. The dim light from the lamp on the table lent him an almost startling likeness to his brother; and for a moment I stood at the foot of the stairs scarce able to trust my reason. Then he turned his face fully towards me, and the illusion was lost.

"Do you think she is likely to wake, Doctor?" he asked.

"I think not," I replied.

Nayland Smith stood upon the rug before the hearth, swinging from one foot to the other, in his nervously restless way. The room was foggy with the fumes of tobacco, for he, too, was smoking.

At intervals of some five to ten minutes, his blackened briar (which I never knew him to clean or scrape) would go out. I think Smith used more matches than any other smoker I have ever met, and he invariably carried three boxes in various pockets of his garments.

The tobacco habit is infectious, and, seating myself in an arm-chair, I lighted a cigarette. For this dreary vigil I had come prepared with a bunch of rough notes, a writing-block, and a fountain pen. I settled down to work upon my record of the Fu-Manchu case.

Silence fell upon Maple Cottage. Save for the shuddering sigh which whispered through the over-hanging cedars and Smith's eternal match-striking, nothing was there to disturb me in my task. Yet I could make little progress. Between my mind and the chapter upon which I was at work a certain sentence persistently intruded itself. It was as though an unseen hand held the written page closely before my eyes. This was the sentence:

"Imagine a person, tall, lean, and feline, high-shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long, magnetic eyes of the true cat-green: invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race, accumulated in one giant intellect. . ."

Dr. Fu-Manchu! Fu-Manchu as Smith had described him to me on that night which now seemed so remotely distant--the night upon which I had learned of the existence of the wonderful and evil being born of that secret quickening which stirred in the womb of the yellow races.

As Smith, for the ninth or tenth time, knocked out his pipe on a bar of the grate, the cuckoo clock in the kitchen proclaimed the hour.

"Two," said James Weymouth.

I abandoned my task, replacing notes and writing-block in the bag that I had with me. Weymouth adjusted the lamp which had begun to smoke.

I tiptoed to the stairs and, stepping softly, ascended to the sick room. All was quiet, and Mrs. Weymouth whispered to me that the patient still slept soundly. I returned to find Nayland Smith pacing about the room in that state of suppressed excitement habitual with him in the approach of any crisis. At a quarter past two the breeze
dropped entirely, and such a stillness reigned all about us as I could not have supposed possible so near to the ever-throbbing heart of the great metropolis. Plainly I could hear Weymouth's heavy breathing. He sat at the window and looked out into the black shadows under the cedars. Smith ceased his pacing and stood again on the rug very still. He was listening! I doubt not we were all listening.

Some faint sound broke the impressive stillness, coming from the direction of the village street. It was a vague, indefinite disturbance, brief, and upon it ensued a silence more marked than ever. Some minutes before, Smith had extinguished the lamp. In the darkness I heard his teeth snap sharply together.

The call of an owl sounded very clearly three times.

I knew that to mean that a messenger had come; but from whence or bearing what tidings I knew not. My friend's plans were incomprehensible to me, nor had I pressed him for any explanation of their nature, knowing him to be in that high-strung and somewhat irritable mood which claimed him at times of uncertainty—when he doubted the wisdom of his actions, the accuracy of his surmises. He gave no sign.

Very faintly I heard a clock strike the half-hour. A soft breeze stole again through the branches above. The wind I thought must be in a new quarter since I had not heard the clock before. In so lonely a spot it was difficult to believe that the bell was that of St. Paul's. Yet such was the fact.

And hard upon the ringing followed another sound—a sound we all had expected, had waited for; but at whose coming no one of us, I think, retained complete mastery of himself.

Breaking up the silence in a manner that set my heart wildly leaping it came—an imperative knocking on the door!

"My God!" groaned Weymouth—but he did not move from his position at the window.

"Stand by, Petrie!" said Smith.

He strode to the door—and threw it widely open.

I know I was very pale. I think I cried out as I fell back—retreated with clenched hands from before THAT which stood on the threshold.

It was a wild, unkempt figure, with straggling beard, hideously staring eyes. With its hands it clutched at its hair—at its chin; plucked at its mouth. No moonlight touched the features of this unearthly visitant, but scanty as was the illumination we could see the gleaming teeth—and the wildly glaring eyes.

It began to laugh—peal after peal—hideous and shrill.

Nothing so terrifying had ever smote upon my ears. I was palsied by the horror of the sound.

Then Nayland Smith pressed the button of an electric torch which he carried. He directed the disk of white light fully upon the face in the doorway.

"Oh, God!" cried Weymouth. "It's John!"—and again and again: "Oh, God! Oh, God!"

Perhaps for the first time in my life I really believed (nay, I could not doubt) that a thing of another world stood before me. I am ashamed to confess the extent of the horror that came upon me. James Weymouth raised his hands, as if to thrust away from him that awful thing in the door. He was babbling—prayers, I think, but wholly incoherent.

"Hold him, Petrie!"

Smith's voice was low. (When we were past thought or intelligent action, he, dominant and cool, with that forced calm for which, a crisis over, he always paid so dearly, was thinking of the woman who slept above.)

He leaped forward; and in the instant that he grappled with the one who had knocked I knew the visitant for a man of flesh and blood—a man who shrieked and fought like a savage animal, foamed at the mouth and gnashed his teeth in horrid frenzy; knew him for a madman—knew him for the victim of Fu-Manchu—not dead, but living—for Inspector Weymouth—a maniac!

In a flash I realized all this and sprang to Smith's assistance. There was a sound of racing footsteps and the men who had been watching outside came running into the porch. A third was with them; and the five of us (for Weymouth's brother had not yet grasped the fact that a man and not a spirit shrieked and howled in our midst) clung to the infuriated madman, yet barely held our own with him.

"The syringe, Petrie!" gasped Smith. "Quick! You must manage to make an injection!"

I extricated myself and raced into the cottage for my bag. A hypodermic syringe ready charged I had brought with me at Smith's request. Even in that thrilling moment I could find time to admire the wonderful foresight of my friend, who had divined what would befall—isolated the strange, pitiful truth from the chaotic circumstances which saw us at Maple Cottage that night.

Let me not enlarge upon the end of the awful struggle. At one time I despaired (we all despaired) of quieting the poor, demented creature. But at last it was done; and the gaunt, blood-stained savage whom we had known as Detective-Inspector Weymouth lay passive upon the couch in his own sitting-room. A great wonder possessed my mind for the genius of the uncanny being who with the scratch of a needle had made a brave and kindly man into this unclean, brutish thing.
Nayland Smith, gaunt and wild-eyed, and trembling yet with his tremendous exertions, turned to the man whom I knew to be the messenger from Scotland Yard.

"Well?" he rapped.

"He is arrested, sir," the detective reported. "They have kept him at his chambers as you ordered."

"Has she slept through it?" said Smith to me. (I had just returned from a visit to the room above.) I nodded.

"Is HE safe for an hour or two?"—indicating the figure on the couch. "For eight or ten," I replied grimly.

"Come, then. Our night's labors are not nearly complete."

CHAPTER XXX

LATER was forthcoming evidence to show that poor Weymouth had lived a wild life, in hiding among the thick bushes of the tract of land which lay between the village and the suburb on the neighboring hill. Literally, he had returned to primitive savagery and some of his food had been that of the lower animals, though he had not scrupled to steal, as we learned when his lair was discovered.

He had hidden himself cunningly; but witnesses appeared who had seen him, in the dusk, and fled from him. They never learned that the object of their fear was Inspector John Weymouth. How, having escaped death in the Thames, he had crossed London unobserved, we never knew; but his trick of knocking upon his own door at half-past two each morning (a sort of dawning of sanity mysteriously linked with old custom) will be a familiar class of symptom to all students of alienation.

I revert to the night when Smith solved the mystery of the knocking.

In a car which he had in waiting at the end of the village we sped through the deserted streets to New Inn Court. I, who had followed Nayland Smith through the failures and successes of his mission, knew that to-night he had surpassed himself; had justified the confidence placed in him by the highest authorities.

We were admitted to an untidy room—that of a student, a traveler and a crank—by a plain-clothes officer. Amid picturesque and disordered fragments of a hundred ages, in a great carven chair placed before a towering statue of the Buddha, sat a hand-cuffed man. His white hair and beard were patriarchal; his pose had great dignity. But his expression was entirely masked by the smoked glasses which he wore.

Two other detectives were guarding the prisoner.

"We arrested Professor Jenner Monde as he came in, sir," reported the man who had opened the door. "He has made no statement. I hope there isn't a mistake."

"I hope not," rapped Smith.

He strode across the room. He was consumed by a fever of excitement. Almost savagely, he tore away the beard, tore off the snowy wig dashed the smoked glasses upon the floor.

A great, high brow was revealed, and green, malignant eyes, which fixed themselves upon him with an expression I never can forget.

IT WAS DR. FU-MANCHU!

One intense moment of silence ensued—of silence which seemed to throb. Then:

"What have you done with Professor Monde?" demanded Smith.

Dr. Fu-Manchu showed his even, yellow teeth in the singularly evil smile which I knew so well. A manacled prisoner he sat as unruffled as a judge upon the bench. In truth and in justice I am compelled to say that Fu-Manchu was absolutely fearless.

"He has been detained in China," he replied, in smooth, sibilant tones—"by affairs of great urgency. His well-known personality and ungregarious habits have served me well, here!"

Smith, I could see, was undetermined how to act; he stood tugging at his ear and glancing from the impassive Chinaman to the wondering detectives.

"What are we to do, sir?" one of them asked.

"Leave Dr. Petrie and myself alone with the prisoner, until I call you."

The three withdrew. I divined now what was coming.

"Can you restore Weymouth's sanity?" rapped Smith abruptly. "I cannot save you from the hangman, nor"—his fists clenched convulsively—"would I if I could; but—"

Fu-Manchu fixed his brilliant eyes upon him.

"Say no more, Mr. Smith," he interrupted; "you misunderstand me. I do not quarrel with that, but what I have done from conviction and what I have done of necessity are separated—are seas apart. The brave Inspector Weymouth I wounded with a poisoned needle, in self-defense; but I regret his condition as greatly as you do. I respect such a man. There is an antidote to the poison of the needle."

"Name it," said Smith.

Fu-Manchu smiled again.

"Useless," he replied. "I alone can prepare it. My secrets shall die with me. I will make a sane man of Inspector
Weymouth, but no one else shall be in the house but he and I."

"It will be surrounded by police," interrupted Smith grimly.

"As you please," said Fu-Manchu. "Make your arrangements. In that ebony case upon the table are the instruments for the cure. Arrange for me to visit him where and when you will--"

"I distrust you utterly. It is some trick," jerked Smith.

Dr. Fu-Manchu rose slowly and drew himself up to his great height. His manacled hands could not rob him of the uncanny dignity which was his. He raised them above his head with a tragic gesture and fixed his piercing gaze upon Nayland Smith.

"The God of Cathay hear me," he said, with a deep, guttural note in his voice--"I swear--"

The most awful visitor who ever threatened the peace of England, the end of the visit of Fu-Manchu was characteristic--terrible--inexplicable.

Strange to relate, I did not doubt that this weird being had conceived some kind of admiration or respect for the man to whom he had wrought so terrible an injury. He was capable of such sentiments, for he entertained some similar one in regard to myself.

A cottage farther down the village street than Weymouth's was vacant, and in the early dawn of that morning became the scene of outre happenings. Poor Weymouth, still in a comatose condition, we removed there (Smith having secured the key from the astonished agent). I suppose so strange a specialist never visited a patient before--certainly not under such conditions.

For into the cottage, which had been entirely surrounded by a ring of police, Dr. Fu-Manchu was admitted from the closed car in which, his work of healing complete, he was to be borne to prison--to death!

Law and justice were suspended by my royally empowered friend that the enemy of the white race might heal one of those who had hunted him down!

No curious audience was present, for sunrise was not yet come; no concourse of excited students followed the hand of the Master; but within that surrounded cottage was performed one of those miracles of science which in other circumstances had made the fame of Dr. Fu-Manchu to live forever.

Inspector Weymouth, dazed, disheveled, clutching his head as a man who has passed through the Valley of the Shadow--but sane--sane!--walked out into the porch!

He looked towards us--his eyes wild, but not with the fearsome wildness of insanity.

"Mr. Smith!" he cried--and staggered down the path--"Dr. Petrie! What--"

There came a deafening explosion. From every visible window of the deserted cottage flames burst forth!

"QUICK!" Smith's voice rose almost to a scream--"into the house!"

He raced up the path, past Inspector Weymouth, who stood swaying there like a drunken man. I was close upon his heels. Behind me came the police.

The door was impassable! Already, it vomited a deathly heat, borne upon stifling fumes like those of the mouth of the Pit. We burst a window. The room within was a furnace!

"My God!" cried someone. "This is supernatural!"

"Listen!" cried another. "Listen!"

The crowd which a fire can conjure up at any hour of day or night, out of the void of nowhere, was gathering already. But upon all descended a pall of silence.

From the heat of the holocaust a voice proclaimed itself--a voice raised, not in anguish but in TRIUMPH! It chanted barbarically--and was still.

The abnormal flames rose higher--leaping forth from every window.

"The alarm!" said Smith hoarsely. "Call up the brigade!"

I come to the close of my chronicle, and feel that I betray a trust--the trust of my reader. For having limned in the colors at my command the fiendish Chinese doctor, I am unable to conclude my task as I should desire, unable, with any consciousness of finality, to write Finis to the end of my narrative.

It seems to me sometimes that my pen is but temporarily idle--that I have but dealt with a single phase of a movement having a hundred phases. One sequel I hope for, and against all the promptings of logic and Western bias. If my hope shall be realized I cannot, at this time, pretend to state.

The future, 'mid its many secrets, holds this precious one from me.

I ask you then, to absolve me from the charge of ill completing my work; for any curiosity with which this narrative may leave the reader burdened is shared by the writer.

With intent, I have rushed you from the chambers of Professor Jenner Monde to that closing episode at the deserted cottage; I have made the pace hot in order to impart to these last pages of my account something of the breathless scurry which characterized those happenings.

My canvas may seem sketchy: it is my impression of the reality. No hard details remain in my mind of the
dealings of that night. Fu-Manchu arrested--Fu-Manchu, manacled, entering the cottage on his mission of healing; Weymouth, miraculously rendered sane, coming forth; the place in flames.

And then?
To a shell the cottage burned, with an incredible rapidity which pointed to some hidden agency; to a shell about ashes which held NO TRACE OF HUMAN BONES!
It has been asked of me: Was there no possibility of Fu-Manchu's having eluded us in the ensuing confusion? Was there no loophole of escape?
I reply, that so far as I was able to judge, a rat could scarce have quitted the building undetected. Yet that Fu-Manchu had, in some incomprehensible manner and by some mysterious agency, produced those abnormal flames, I cannot doubt. Did he voluntarily ignite his own funeral pyre?

As I write, there lies before me a soiled and creased sheet of vellum. It bears some lines traced in a cramped, peculiar, and all but illegible hand. This fragment was found by Inspector Weymouth (to this day a man mentally sound) in a pocket of his ragged garments.

When it was written I leave you to judge. How it came to be where Weymouth found it calls for no explanation:
"To Mr. Commissioner NAYLAND SMITH and Dr. PETRIE--
"Greeting! I am recalled home by One who may not be denied. In much that I came to do I have failed. Much that I have done I would undo; some little I have undone. Out of fire I came--the smoldering fire of a thing one day to be a consuming flame; in fire I go. Seek not my ashes. I am the lord of the fires! Farewell.
"FU-MANCHU."

Who has been with me in my several meetings with the man who penned that message I leave to adjudge if it be the letter of a madman bent upon self-destruction by strange means, or the gibe of a preternaturally clever scientist and the most elusive being ever born of the land of mystery--China.

For the present, I can aid you no more in the forming of your verdict. A day may come though I pray it do not--when I shall be able to throw new light upon much that is dark in this matter. That day, so far as I can judge, could only dawn in the event of the Chinaman's survival; therefore I pray that the veil be never lifted.

But, as I have said, there is another sequel to this story which I can contemplate with a different countenance. How, then, shall I conclude this very unsatisfactory account?

Shall I tell you, finally, of my parting with lovely, dark-eyed Karamaneh, on board the liner which was to bear her to Egypt?
No, let me, instead, conclude with the words of Nayland Smith:
"I sail for Burma in a fortnight, Petrie. I have leave to break my journey at the Ditch. How would a run up the Nile fit your programme? Bit early for the season, but you might find something to amuse you!"

Go to Start
THE RETURN OF DR. FU-MANCHU

by Sax Rohmer

CHAPTER I

A MIDNIGHT SUMMONS

"When did you last hear from Nayland Smith?" asked my visitor.

I paused, my hand on the syphon, reflecting for a moment.

"Two months ago," I said; "he's a poor correspondent and rather soured, I fancy."

"What--a woman or something?"

"Some affair of that sort. He's such a reticent beggar, I really know very little about it."

I placed a whisky and soda before the Rev. J. D. Eltham, also sliding the tobacco jar nearer to his hand. The refined and sensitive face of the clergy-man offered no indication of the truculent character of the man. His scanty fair hair, already gray over the temples, was silken and soft-looking; in appearance he was indeed a typical English churchman; but in China he had been known as "the fighting missionary," and had fully deserved the title. In fact, this peaceful-looking gentleman had directly brought about the Boxer Risings!

"You know," he said, in his clerical voice, but meanwhile stuffing tobacco into an old pipe with fierce energy, "I have often wondered, Petrie--I have never left off wondering--"

"What?"

"That accursed Chinaman! Since the cellar place beneath the site of the burnt-out cottage in Dulwich Village--I have wondered more than ever."

He lighted his pipe and walked to the hearth to throw the match in the grate.

"You see," he continued, peering across at me in his oddly nervous way, "one never knows, does one? If I thought that Dr. Fu-Manchu lived; if I seriously suspected that that stupendous intellect, that wonderful genius, Petrie, er--" he hesitated characteristically--"survived, I should feel it my duty--"

"Well?" I said, leaning my elbows on the table and smiling slightly.

"If that Satanic genius were not indeed destroyed, then the peace of the world, may be threatened anew at any moment!"

He was becoming excited, shooting out his jaw in the truculent manner I knew, and snapping his fingers to emphasize his words; a man composed of the oddest complexities that ever dwelt beneath a clerical frock.

"He may have got back to China, Doctor!" he cried, and his eyes had the fighting glint in them. "Could you rest in peace if you thought that he lived? Should you not fear for your life every time that a night-call took you out alone? Why, man alive, it is only two years since he was here among us, since we were searching every shadow for those awful green eyes! What became of his band of assassins--his stranglers, his dacoits, his damnable poisons and insects and what-not--the army of creatures--"

He paused, taking a drink.

"You--" he hesitated diffidently--"searched in Egypt with Nayland Smith, did you not?"

I nodded.

"Contradict me if I am wrong," he continued; "but my impression is that you were searching for the girl--the girl--Karamaneh, I think she was called?"

"Yes," I replied shortly; "but we could find no trace--no trace."

"You--er--were interested?"

"More than I knew," I replied, "until I realized that I had--lost her."

"I never met Karamaneh, but from your account, and from others, she was quite unusually--"

"She was very beautiful," I said, and stood up, for I was anxious to terminate that phase of the conversation.

Eltham regarded me sympathetically; he knew something of my search with Nayland Smith for the dark-eyed, Eastern girl who had brought romance into my drab life; he knew that I treasured my memories of her as I loathed and abhorred those of the fiendish, brilliant Chinese doctor who had been her master.

Eltham began to pace up and down the rug, his pipe bubbling furiously; and something in the way he carried his head reminded me momentarily of Nayland Smith. Certainly, between this pink-faced clergyman, with his deceptively mild appearance, and the gaunt, bronzed, and steely-eyed Burmese commissioner, there was externally little in common; but it was some little nervous trick in his carriage that conjured up through the smoky haze one
distant summer evening when Smith had paced that very room as Eltham paced it now, when before my startled eyes he had rung up the curtain upon the savage drama in which, though I little suspected it then, Fate had cast me for a leading role.

I wondered if Eltham's thoughts ran parallel with mine. My own were centered upon the unforgettable figure of the murderous Chinaman. These words, exactly as Smith had used them, seemed once again to sound in my ears: "Imagine a person tall, lean, and feline, high shouldered, with a brow like Shakespeare and a face like Satan, a close-shaven skull, and long magnetic eyes of the true cat green. Invest him with all the cruel cunning of an entire Eastern race accumulated in one giant intellect, with all the resources of science, past and present, and you have a mental picture of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the 'Yellow Peril' incarnate in one man."

This visit of Eltham's no doubt was responsible for my mood; for this singular clergyman had played his part in the drama of two years ago.

"I should like to see Smith again," he said suddenly; "it seems a pity that a man like that should be buried in Burma. Burma makes a mess of the best of men, Doctor. You said he was not married?"

"No," I replied shortly, "and is never likely to be, now."

"Ah, you hinted at something of the kind."

"I know very little of it. Nayland Smith is not the kind of man to talk much."

"Quite so--quite so! And, you know, Doctor, neither am I; but--"he was growing painfully embarrassed--"it may be your due--I--er--I have a correspondent, in the interior of China--"

"Well?" I said, watching him in sudden eagerness.

"Well, I would not desire to raise--vain hopes--nor to occasion, shall I say, empty fears; but--er . . . no, Doctor!" He flushed like a girl--"It was wrong of me to open this conversation. Perhaps, when I know more--will you forget my words, for the time?"

The telephone bell rang.

"Hullo!" cried Eltham--"hard luck, Doctor!"--but I could see that he welcomed the interruption. "Why!" he added, "it is one o'clock!"

I went to the telephone.

"Is that Dr. Petrie?" inquired a woman's voice.

"Yes; who is speaking?"

"Mrs. Hewett has been taken more seriously ill. Could you come at once?"

"Certainly," I replied, for Mrs. Hewett was not only a profitable patient but an estimable lady--"I shall be with you in a quarter of an hour."

I hung up the receiver.

"Something urgent?" asked Eltham, emptying his pipe.

"Sounds like it. You had better turn in."

"I should much prefer to walk over with you, if it would not be intruding. Our conversation has ill prepared me for sleep."

"Right!" I said; for I welcomed his company; and three minutes later we were striding across the deserted common.

A sort of mist floated amongst the trees, seeming in the moonlight like a veil draped from trunk to trunk, as in silence we passed the Mound pond, and struck out for the north side of the common.

I suppose the presence of Eltham and the irritating recollection of his half-confidence were the responsible factors, but my mind persistently dwelt upon the subject of Fu-Manchu and the atrocities which he had committed during his sojourn in England. So actively was my imagination at work that I felt again the menace which so long had hung over me; I felt as though that murderous yellow cloud still cast its shadow upon England. And I found myself longing for the company of Nayland Smith. I cannot state what was the nature of Eltham's reflections, but I can guess; for he was as silent as I.

It was with a conscious effort that I shook myself out of this morbidly reflective mood, on finding that we had crossed the common and were come to the abode of my patient.

"I shall take a little walk," announced Eltham; "for I gather that you don't expect to be detained long? I shall never be out of sight of the door, of course."

"Very well," I replied, and ran up the steps.

There were no lights to be seen in any of the windows, which circumstance rather surprised me, as my patient occupied, or had occupied when last I had visited her, a first-floor bedroom in the front of the house. My knocking and ringing produced no response for three or four minutes; then, as I persisted, a scantily clothed and half awake maid servant unbarred the door and stared at me stupidly in the moonlight.

"Mrs. Hewett requires me?" I asked abruptly.
The girl stared more stupidly than ever.
"No, sir," she said, "she don't, sir; she's fast asleep!"
"But some one 'phoned me!" I insisted, rather irritably, I fear.
"Not from here, sir," declared the now wide-eyed girl. "We haven't got a telephone, sir."
For a few moments I stood there, staring as foolishly as she; then abruptly I turned and descended the steps. At the gate I stood looking up and down the road. The houses were all in darkness. What could be the meaning of the mysterious summons? I had made no mistake respecting the name of my patient; it had been twice repeated over the telephone; yet that the call had not emanated from Mrs. Hewett's house was now palpably evident. Days had been when I should have regarded the episode as preluding some outrage, but to-night I felt more disposed to ascribe it to a silly practical joke.

Eltham walked up briskly.
"You're in demand to-night, Doctor," he said. "A young person called for you almost directly you had left your house, and, learning where you were gone, followed you."
"Indeed!" I said, a trifle incredulously. "There are plenty of other doctors if the case is an urgent one."
"She may have thought it would save time as you were actually up and dressed," explained Eltham; "and the house is quite near to here, I understand."
I looked at him a little blankly. Was this another effort of the unknown jester?
"I have been fooled once," I said. "That 'phone call was a hoax--"
"But I feel certain," declared Eltham, earnestly, "that this is genuine! The poor girl was dreadfully agitated; her master has broken his leg and is lying helpless: number 280, Rectory Grove."
"Where is the girl?" I asked, sharply.
"She ran back directly she had given me her message."
"Was she a servant?"
"I should imagine so: French, I think. But she was so wrapped up I had little more than a glimpse of her. I am sorry to hear that some one has played a silly joke on you, but believe me--" he was very earnest --"this is no jest. The poor girl could scarcely speak for sobs. She mistook me for you, of course."
"Oh!" said I grimly, "well, I suppose I must go. Broken leg, you said? --and my surgical bag, splints and so forth, are at home!"
"My dear Petrie!" cried Eltham, in his enthusiastic way--"you no doubt can do something to alleviate the poor man's suffering immediately. I will run back to your rooms for the bag and rejoin you at 280, Rectory Grove."
"It's awfully good of you, Eltham--"
He held up his hand.
"The call of suffering humanity, Petrie, is one which I may no more refuse to hear than you."
I made no further protest after that, for his point of view was evident and his determination adamant, but told him where he would find the bag and once more set out across the moonbright common, he pursuing a westerly direction and I going east.
Some three hundred yards I had gone, I suppose, and my brain had been very active the while, when something occurred to me which placed a new complexion upon this second summons. I thought of the falsity of the first, of the improbability of even the most hardened practical joker practising his wiles at one o'clock in the morning. I thought of our recent conversation; above all I thought of the girl who had delivered the message to Eltham, the girl whom he had described as a French maid --whose personal charm had so completely enlisted his sympathies. Now, to this train of thought came a new one, and, adding it, my suspicion became almost a certainty.
I remembered (as, knowing the district, I should have remembered before) that there was no number 280 in Rectory Grove.
Pulling up sharply I stood looking about me. Not a living soul was in sight; not even a policeman. Where the lamps marked the main paths across the common nothing moved; in the shadows about me nothing stirred. But something stirred within me--a warning voice which for long had lain dormant.
What was afoot?
A breeze caressed the leaves overhead, breaking the silence with mysterious whisperings. Some portentous truth was seeking for admittance to my brain. I strove to reassure myself, but the sense of impending evil and of mystery became heavier. At last I could combat my strange fears no longer. I turned and began to run toward the south side of the common--toward my rooms--and after Eltham.
I had hoped to head him off, but came upon no sign of him. An all-night tramcar passed at the moment that I reached the high road, and as I ran around behind it I saw that my windows were lighted and that there was a light in the hall.
My key was yet in the lock when my housekeeper opened the door.
"There's a gentleman just come, Doctor," she began--
    I thrust past her and raced up the stairs into my study.

Standing by the writing-table was a tall, thin man, his gaunt face brown as a coffee-berry and his steely gray
    eyes fixed upon me. My heart gave a great leap--and seemed to stand still.

    It was Nayland Smith!
    "Smith," I cried. "Smith, old man, by God, I'm glad to see you!"
    He wrung my hand hard, looking at me with his searching eyes; but there was little enough of gladness in his
    face. He was altogether grayer than when last I had seen him--grayer and sterner.
    "Where is Eltham?" I asked.
    Smith started back as though I had struck him.
    "Eltham!" he whispered--"Eltham! is Eltham here?"
    "I left him ten minutes ago on the common--"
    Smith dashed his right fist into the palm of his left hand and his eyes gleamed almost wildly.
    "My God, Petrie!" he said, "am I fated always to come too late?"
    My dreadful fears in that instant were confirmed. I seemed to feel my legs totter beneath me.
    "Smith, you don't mean--"
    "I do, Petrie!" His voice sounded very far away. "Fu-Manchu is here; and Eltham, God help him . . . is his first
    victim!"

CHAPTER II
ELTHAM VANISHES

Smith went racing down the stairs like a man possessed. Heavy with such a foreboding of calamity as I had not
    known for two years, I followed him--along the hall and out into the road. The very peace and beauty of the night in
    some way increased my mental agitation. The sky was lighted almost tropically with such a blaze of stars as I could
    not recall to have seen since, my futile search concluded, I had left Egypt. The glory of the moonlight yellowed the
    lamps speckled across the expanse of the common. The night was as still as night can ever be in London. The
    dimming pulse of a cab or car alone disturbed the stillness.
    With a quick glance to right and left, Smith ran across on to the common, and, leaving the door wide open
    behind me, I followed. The path which Eltham had pursued terminated almost opposite to my house. One's gaze
    might follow it, white and empty, for several hundred yards past the pond, and further, until it became
    overshadowed and was lost amid a clump of trees.
    I came up with Smith, and side by side we ran on, whilst pantingly, I told my tale.
    "It was a trick to get you away from him!" cried Smith. "They meant no doubt to make some attempt at your
    house, but as he came out with you, an alternative plan--"
    Abreast of the pond, my companion slowed down, and finally stopped.
    "Where did you last see Eltham?" he asked rapidly.
    I took his arm, turning him slightly to the right, and pointed across the moonbathed common.
    "You see that clump of bushes on the other side of the road?" I said. "There's a path to the left of it. I took that
    path and he took this. We parted at the point where they meet--"
    Smith walked right down to the edge of the water and peered about over the surface.
    What he hoped to find there I could not imagine. Whatever it had been he was disappointed, and he turned to me
    again, frowning perplexedly, and tugging at the lobe of his left ear, an old trick which reminded me of gruesome
    things we had lived through in the past.
    "Come on," he jerked. "It may be amongst the trees."
    From the tone of his voice I knew that he was tensed up nervously, and his mood but added to the apprehension
    of my own.
    "What may be amongst the trees, Smith?" I asked.
    He walked on.
    "God knows, Petrie; but I fear--"

    Behind us, along the highroad, a tramcar went rocking by, doubtless bearing a few belated workers homeward.
    The stark incongruity of the thing was appalling. How little those weary toilers, hemmed about with the
    commonplace, suspected that almost within sight from the car windows, in a place of prosy benches, iron railings,
    and unromantic, flickering lamps, two fellow men moved upon the border of a horror-land!
    Beneath the trees a shadow carpet lay, its edges tropically sharp; and fully ten yards from the first of the group,
    we two, hatless both, and sharing a common dread, paused for a moment and listened.
    The car had stopped at the further extremity of the common, and now with a moan that grew to a shriek was
    rolling on its way again. We stood and listened until silence reclaimed the night. Not a footstep could be heard. Then
slowly we walked on. At the edge of the little coppice we stopped again abruptly.

Smith turned and thrust his pistol into my hand. A white ray of light pierced the shadows; my companion carried an electric torch. But no trace of Eltham was discoverable.

There had been a heavy shower of rain during the evening just before sunset, and although the open paths were dry again, under the trees the ground was still moist. Ten yards within the coppice we came upon tracks—the tracks of one running, as the deep imprints of the toes indicated.

Abruptly the tracks terminated; others, softer, joined them, two sets converging from left and right. There was a confused patch, trailing off to the west; then this became indistinct, and was finally lost upon the hard ground outside the group.

For perhaps a minute, or more, we ran about from tree to tree, and from bush to bush, searching like hounds for a scent, and fearful of what we might find. We found nothing; and fully in the moonlight we stood facing one another. The night was profoundly still.

Nayland Smith stepped back into the shadows, and began slowly to turn his head from left to right, taking in the entire visible expanse of the common. Toward a point where the road bisected it he stared intently. Then, with a bound, he set off.

"Come on, Petrie!" he cried. "There they are!"

Vaulting a railing he went away over a field like a madman. Recovering from the shock of surprise, I followed him, but he was well ahead of me, and making for some vaguely seen object moving against the lights of the roadway.

Another railing was vaulted, and the corner of a second, triangular grass patch crossed at a hot sprint. We were twenty yards from the road when the sound of a starting motor broke the silence. We gained the graveled footpath only to see the taillight of the car dwindling to the north!

Smith leaned dizzily against a tree.

"Eltham is in that car!" he gasped. "Just God! are we to stand here and see him taken away to—"

He beat his fist upon the tree, in a sort of tragic despair. The nearest cab-rank was no great distance away, but, excluding the possibility of no cab being there, it might, for all practical purposes, as well have been a mile off.

The beat of the retreating motor was scarcely audible; the lights might but just be distinguished. Then, coming in an opposite direction, appeared the headlamp of another car, of a car that raced nearer and nearer to us, so that, within a few seconds of its first appearance, we found ourselves bathed in the beam of its headlights.

Smith bounded out into the road, and stood, a weird silhouette, with upraised arms, fully in its course!

The brakes were applied hurriedly. It was a big limousine, and its driver swerved perilously in avoiding Smith and nearly ran into me. But, the breathless moment past, the car was pulled up, head on to the railings; and a man in evening clothes was demanding excitedly what had happened. Smith, a hatless, disheveled figure, stepped up to the door.

"My name is Nayland Smith," he said rapidly—"Burmese Commissioner." He snatched a letter from his pocket and thrust it into the hands of the bewildered man. "Read that. It is signed by another Commissioner—the Commissioner of Police."

With amazement written all over him, the other obeyed.

"You see," continued my friend, tersely—"it is carte blanche. I wish to commandeer your car, sir, on a matter of life and death!".

The other returned the letter.

"Allow me to offer it!" he said, descending. "My man will take your orders. I can finish my journey by cab. I am—"

But Smith did not wait to learn whom he might be.

"Quick!" he cried to the stupefied chauffeur—"You passed a car a minute ago—yonder. Can you overtake it?"

"I can try, sir, if I don't lose her track."

Smith leaped in, pulling me after him.

"Do it!" he snapped. "There are no speed limits for me. Thanks! Goodnight, sir!"

We were off! The car swung around and the chase commenced.

One last glimpse I had of the man we had dispossessed, standing alone by the roadside, and at ever increasing speed, we leaped away in the track of Eltham's captors.

Smith was too highly excited for ordinary conversation, but he threw out short, staccato remarks.

"I have followed Fu-Manchu from Hongkong," he jerked. "Lost him at Suez. He got here a boat ahead of me. Eltham has been corresponding with some mandarin up-country. Knew that. Came straight to you. Only got in this evening. He—Fu-Manchu—has been sent here to get Eltham. My God! and he has him! He will question him! The interior of China—a seething pot, Petrie! They had to stop the leakage of information. He is here for that."
The car pulled up with a jerk that pitched me out of my seat, and the chauffeur leaped to the road and ran ahead. Smith was out in a trice, as the man, who had run up to a constable, came racing back.

"Jump in, sir--jump in!" he cried, his eyes bright with the lust of the chase; "they are making for Battersea!"

And we were off again.

Through the empty streets we roared on. A place of gasometers and desolate waste lots slipped behind and we were in a narrow way where gates of yards and a few lowly houses faced upon a prospect of high blank wall.

"Thames on our right," said Smith, peering ahead. "His rathole is by the river as usual. Hi!"--he grabbed up the speaking-tube--"Stop! Stop!"

The limousine swung in to the narrow sidewalk, and pulled up close by a yard gate. I, too, had seen our quarry--a long, low bodied car, showing no inside lights. It had turned the next corner, where a street lamp shone greenly, not a hundred yards ahead.

Smith leaped out, and I followed him.

"That must be a cul de sac," he said, and turned to the eager-eyed chauffeur. "Run back to that last turning," he ordered, "and wait there, out of sight. Bring the car up when you hear a police-whistle."

The man looked disappointed, but did not question the order. As he began to back away, Smith grasped me by the arm and drew me forward.

"We must get to that corner," he said, "and see where the car stands, without showing ourselves."

CHAPTER III

THE WIRE JACKET

I suppose we were not more than a dozen paces from the lamp when we heard the thudding of the motor. The car was backing out!

It was a desperate moment, for it seemed that we could not fail to be discovered. Nayland Smith began to look about him, feverishly, for a hiding-place, a quest in which I seconded with equal anxiety. And Fate was kind to us--doubly kind as after events revealed. A wooden gate broke the expanse of wall hard by upon the right, and, as the result of some recent accident, a ragged gap had been torn in the panels close to the top.

The chain of the padlock hung loosely; and in a second Smith was up, with his foot in this as in a stirrup. He threw his arm over the top and drew himself upright. A second later he was astride the broken gate.

"Up you come, Petrie!" he said, and reached down his hand to aid me.

I got my foot into the loop of chain, grasped at a projection in the gatepost and found myself up.

"There is a crossbar on this side to stand on," said Smith.

He climbed over and vanished in the darkness. I was still astride the broken gate when the car turned the corner, slowly, for there was scanty room; but I was standing upon the bar on the inside and had my head below the gap ere the driver could possibly have seen me.

"Stay where you are until he passes," hissed my companion, below. "There is a row of kegs under you."

The sound of the motor passing outside grew loud--louder--then began to die away. I felt about with my left foot; discerned the top of a keg, and dropped, panting, beside Smith.

"Phew!" I said--"that was a close thing! Smith--how do we know--"

"That we have followed the right car?" he interrupted. "Ask yourself the question: what would any ordinary man be doing motoring in a place like this at two o' clock in the morning?"

"You are right, Smith," I agreed. "Shall we get out again?"

"Not yet. I have an idea. Look yonder."

He grasped my arm, turning me in the desired direction.

Beyond a great expanse of unbroken darkness a ray of moonlight slanted into the place wherein we stood, spilling its cold radiance upon rows of kegs.

"That's another door," continued my friend--I now began dimly to perceive him beside me. "If my calculations are not entirely wrong, it opens on a wharf gate--"

A steam siren hooted dismally, apparently from quite close at hand.

"I'm right!" snapped Smith. "That turning leads down to the gate. Come on, Petrie!"

He directed the light of the electric torch upon a narrow path through the ranks of casks, and led the way to the further door. A good two feet of moonlight showed along the top. I heard Smith straining; then--

"These kegs are all loaded with grease!" he said, "and I want to reconnoiter over that door."

"I am leaning on a crate which seems easy to move," I reported. "Yes, it's empty. Lend a hand."

We grasped the empty crate, and between us, set it up on a solid pedestal of casks. Then Smith mounted to this observation platform and I scrambled up beside him, and looked down upon the lane outside.

It terminated as Smith had foreseen at a wharf gate some six feet to the right of our post. Piled up in the lane beneath us, against the warehouse door, was a stack of empty casks. Beyond, over the way, was a kind of
ramshackle building that had possibly been a dwelling-house at some time. Bills were stuck in the ground-floor window indicating that the three floors were to let as offices; so much was discernible in that reflected moonlight.

I could hear the tide, lapping upon the wharf, could feel the chill from the river and hear the vague noises which, night nor day, never cease upon the great commercial waterway.

"Down!" whispered Smith. "Make no noise! I suspected it. They heard the car following!"

I obeyed, clutching at him for support; for I was suddenly dizzy, and my heart was leaping wildly--furiously.

"You saw her?" he whispered.

Saw her! yes, I had seen her! And my poor dream-world was toppling about me, its cities, ashes and its fairness, dust.

Peering from the window, her great eyes wondrous in the moonlight and her red lips parted, hair gleaming like burnished foam and her anxious gaze set upon the corner of the lane--was Karamaneh . . . Karamaneh whom once we had rescued from the house of this fiendish Chinese doctor; Karamaneh who had been our ally; in fruitless quest of whom,--when, too late, I realized how empty my life was become--I had wasted what little of the world's goods I possessed;--Karamaneh!

"Poor old Petrie," murmured Smith--"I knew, but I hadn't the heart--He has her again--God knows by what chains he holds her. But she's only a woman, old boy, and women are very much alike--very much alike from Charing Cross to Pagoda Road."

He rested his hand on my shoulder for a moment; I am ashamed to confess that I was trembling; then, clenching my teeth with that mechanical physical effort which often accompanies a mental one, I swallowed the bitter draught of Nayland Smith's philosophy. He was raising himself, to peer, cautiously, over the top of the door. I did likewise.

The window from which the girl had looked was nearly on a level with our eyes, and as I raised my head above the woodwork, I quite distinctly saw her go out of the room. The door, as she opened it, admitted a dull light, against which her figure showed silhouetted for a moment. Then the door was reclosed.

"We must risk the other windows," rapped Smith.

Before I had grasped the nature of his plan he was over and had dropped almost noiselessly upon the casks outside. Again I followed his lead.

"You are not going to attempt anything, singlehanded--against him?" I asked.

"Petrie--Eltham is in that house. He has been brought here to be put to the question, in the medieval, and Chinese, sense! Is there time to summon assistance?"

I shuddered. This had been in my mind, certainly, but so expressed it was definitely horrible--revolting, yet stimulating.

"You have the pistol," added Smith--"follow closely, and quietly."

He walked across the tops of the casks and leaped down, pointing to that nearest to the closed door of the house. I helped him place it under the open window. A second we set beside it, and, not without some noise, got a third on top.

Smith mounted.

His jaw muscles were very prominent and his eyes shone like steel; but he was as cool as though he were about to enter a theater and not the den of the most stupendous genius who ever worked for evil. I would forgive any man who, knowing Dr. Fu-Manchu, feared him; I feared him myself--feared him as one fears a scorpion; but when Nayland Smith hauled himself up on the wooden ledge above the door and swung thence into the darkened room, I followed and was in close upon his heels. But I admired him, for he had every ampere of his self-possession in hand; my own case was different.

He spoke close to my ear.

"Is your hand steady? We may have to shoot."

I thought of Karamaneh, of lovely dark-eyed Karamaneh whom this wonderful, evil product of secret China had stolen from me--for so I now adjudged it.

"Rely upon me!" I said grimly. "I . . ."

The words ceased--frozen on my tongue.

There are things that one seeks to forget, but it is my lot often to remember the sound which at that moment literally struck me rigid with horror. Yet it was only a groan; but, merciful God! I pray that it may never be my lot to listen to such a groan again.

Smith drew a sibilant breath.

"It's Eltham!" he whispered hoarsely--"they're torturing--"

"No, no!" screamed a woman's voice--a voice that thrilled me anew, but with another emotion--

"Not that, not--"

I distinctly heard the sound of a blow. Followed a sort of vague scuffling. A door somewhere at the back of the
house opened—and shut again. Some one was coming along the passage toward us!

"Stand back!" Smith's voice was low, but perfectly steady. "Leave it to me!"

Nearer came the footsteps and nearer. I could hear suppressed sobs. The door opened, admitting again the faint light—and Karamaneh came in. The place was quite unfurnished, offering no possibility of hiding; but to hide was unnecessary.

Her slim figure had not crossed the threshold ere Smith had his arm about the girl's waist and one hand clapped to her mouth. A stifled gasp she uttered, and he lifted her into the room.

I stepped forward and closed the door. A faint perfume stole to my nostrils—a vague, elusive breath of the East, reminiscent of strange days that, now, seemed to belong to a remote past. Karamaneh! that faint, indefinable perfume was part of her dainty personality; it may appear absurd--impossible--but many and many a time I had dreamt of it.

"In my breast pocket," rapped Smith; "the light."

I bent over the girl as he held her. She was quite still, but I could have wished that I had had more certain mastery of myself. I took the torch from Smith's pocket, and, mechanically, directed it upon the captive.

She was dressed very plainly, wearing a simple blue skirt, and white blouse. It was easy to divine that it was she whom Eltham had mistaken for a French maid. A brooch set with a ruby was pinned at the point where the blouse opened--gleaming fiercely and harshly against the soft skin. Her face was pale and her eyes wide with fear.

"There is some cord in my right-hand pocket," said Smith; "I came provided. Tie her wrists."

I obeyed him, silently. The girl offered no resistance, but I think I never essayed a less congenial task than that of binding her white wrists. The jeweled fingers lay quite listlessly in my own.

"Make a good job of it!" rapped Smith, significantly.

A flush rose to my cheeks, for I knew well enough what he meant.

"She is fastened," I said, and I turned the ray of the torch upon her again.

Smith removed his hand from her mouth but did not relax his grip of her. She looked up at me with eyes in which I could have sworn there was no recognition. But a flush momentarily swept over her face, and left it pale again.

"We shall have to--gag her--"

"Smith, I can't do it!"

The girl's eyes filled with tears and she looked up at my companion pitifully.

"Please don't be cruel to me," she whispered, with that soft accent which always played havoc with my composure. "Every one--every one is cruel to me. I will promise--indeed I will swear, to be quiet. Oh, believe me, if you can save him I will do nothing to hinder you." Her beautiful head drooped. "Have some pity for me as well."

"Karamaneh" I said. "We would have believed you once. We cannot, now."

She started violently.

"You know my name!" Her voice was barely audible. "Yet I have never seen you in my life--"

"See if the door locks," interrupted Smith harshly.

Dazed by the apparent sincerity in the voice of our lovely captive--vacant from wonder of it all--I opened the door, felt for, and found, a key.

We left Karamaneh crouching against the wall; her great eyes were turned towards me fascinatedly. Smith locked the door with much care. We began a tip-toed progress along the dimly lighted passage.

From beneath a door on the left, and near the end, a brighter light shone. Beyond that again was another door. A voice was speaking in the lighted room; yet I could have sworn that Karamaneh had come, not from there but from the room beyond--from the far end of the passage.

But the voice!--who, having once heard it, could ever mistake that singular voice, alternately guttural and sibilant!

Dr. Fu-Manchu was speaking!

"I have asked you," came with ever-increasing clearness (Smith had begun to turn the knob), "to reveal to me the name of your correspondent in Nan-Yang. I have suggested that he may be the Mandarin Yen-Sun-Yat, but you have declined to confirm me. Yet I know" (Smith had the door open a good three inches and was peering in) "that some official, some high official, is a traitor. Am I to resort again to the question to learn his name?"

Ice seemed to enter my veins at the unseen inquisitor's intonation of the words "the question." This was the Twentieth Century, yet there, in that damnable room...
momentarily, then I realized that a sort of tourniquet of wire-netting was screwed so tightly about him that the flesh swelled out in knobs through the mesh. There was blood--

"God in heaven!" screamed Smith frenziedly--"they have the wire-jacket on him! Shoot down that damned Chinaman, Petrie! Shoot! Shoot!"

Lithely as a cat the man with the knife leaped around--but I raised the Browning, and deliberately--with a cool deliberation that came to me suddenly--shot him through the head. I saw his oblique eyes turn up to the whites; I saw the mark squarely between his brows; and with no word nor cry he sank to his knees and toppled forward with one yellow hand beneath him and one outstretched, clutching--clutching--convulsively. His pigtail came unfastened and began to uncoil, slowly, like a snake.

I handed the pistol to Smith; I was perfectly cool, now; and I leaped forward, took up the bloody knife from the floor and cut Eltham's lashings. He sank into my arms.

"Praise God," he murmured, weakly. "He is more merciful to me than perhaps I deserve. Unscrew . . . the jacket, Petrie . . . I think . . . I was very near to . . . weakening. Praise the good God, Who . . . gave me . . . fortitude . . ."

I got the screw of the accursed thing loosened, but the act of removing the jacket was too agonizing for Eltham--man of iron though he was. I laid him swooning on the floor.

"Where is Fu-Manchu?"

Nayland Smith, from just within the door, threw out the query in a tone of stark amaze. I stood up--I could do nothing more for the poor victim at the moment--and looked about me. The room was innocent of furniture, save for heaps of rubbish on the floor, and a tin oil-lamp hung, on the wall. The dead Chinaman lay close beside Smith. There was no second door, the one window was barred, and from this room we had heard the voice, the unmistakable, unforgettable voice, of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

But Dr. Fu-Manchu was not there!

Neither of us could accept the fact for a moment; we stood there, looking from the dead man to the tortured man who only swooned, in a state of helpless incredulity.

Then the explanation flashed upon us both, simultaneously, and with a cry of baffled rage Smith leaped along the passage to the second door. It was wide open. I stood at his elbow when he swept its emptiness with the ray of his pocket-lamp.

There was a speaking-tube fixed between the two rooms!

Smith literally ground his teeth.

"Yet, Petrie," he said, "we have learnt something. Fu-Manchu had evidently promised Eltham his life if he would divulge the name of his correspondent. He meant to keep his word; it is a sidelight on his character."

"How so?"

"Eltham has never seen Dr. Fu-Manchu, but Eltham knows certain parts of China better than you know the Strand. Probably, if he saw Fu-Manchu, he would recognize him for who he really is, and this, it seems, the Doctor is anxious to avoid."

We ran back to where we had left Karamaneh.

The room was empty!

"Defeated, Petrie!" said Smith, bitterly. "The Yellow Devil is loosed on London again!"

He leaned from the window and the skirl of a police whistle split the stillness of the night.

CHAPTER IV

THE CRY OF A NIGHTHAWK

Such were the episodes that marked the coming of Dr. Fu-Manchu to London, that awakened fears long dormant and reopened old wounds--nay, poured poison into them. I strove desperately, by close attention to my professional duties, to banish the very memory of Karamaneh from my mind; desperately, but how vainly! Peace was for me no more, joy was gone from the world, and only mockery remained as my portion.

Poor Eltham we had placed in a nursing establishment, where his indescribable hurts could be properly tended: and his uncomplaining fortitude not infrequently made me thoroughly ashamed of myself. Needless to say, Smith had made such other arrangements as were necessary to safeguard the injured man, and these proved so successful that the malignant being whose plans they thwarted abandoned his designs upon the heroic clergyman and directed his attention elsewhere, as I must now proceed to relate.

Dusk always brought with it a cloud of apprehensions, for darkness must ever be the ally of crime; and it was one night, long after the clocks had struck the mystic hour "when churchyards yawn," that the hand of Dr. Fu-Manchu again stretched out to grasp a victim. I was dismissing a chance patient.

"Good night, Dr. Petrie," he said.

"Good night, Mr. Forsyth," I replied; and, having conducted my late visitor to the door, I closed and bolted it, switched off the light and went upstairs.
My patient was chief officer of one of the P. and O. boats. He had cut his hand rather badly on the homeward run, and signs of poisoning having developed, had called to have the wound treated, apologizing for troubling me at so late an hour, but explaining that he had only just come from the docks. The hall clock announced the hour of one as I ascended the stairs. I found myself wondering what there was in Mr. Forsyth's appearance which excited some vague and elusive memory. Coming to the top floor, I opened the door of a front bedroom and was surprised to find the interior in darkness.

"Smith!" I called.

"Come here and watch!" was the terse response. Nayland Smith was sitting in the dark at the open window and peering out across the common. Even as I saw him, a dim silhouette, I could detect that tenseness in his attitude which told of high-strung nerves.

I joined him.

"What is it?" I said, curiously.

"I don't know. Watch that clump of elms."

His masterful voice had the dry tone in it betokening excitement. I leaned on the ledge beside him and looked out. The blaze of stars almost compensated for the absence of the moon and the night had a quality of stillness that made for awe. This was a tropical summer, and the common, with its dancing lights dotted irregularly about it, had an unfamiliar look to-night. The clump of nine elms showed as a dense and irregular mass, lacking detail.

Such moods as that which now claimed my friend are magnetic. I had no thought of the night's beauty, for it only served to remind me that somewhere amid London's millions was lurking an uncanny being, whose life was a mystery, whose very existence was a scientific miracle.

"Where's your patient?" rapped Smith. His abrupt query diverted my thoughts into a new channel. No footstep disturbed the silence of the highroad; where was my patient?

I craned from the window. Smith grabbed my arm.

"Don't lean out," he said.

I drew back, glancing at him surprisedly.

"For Heaven's sake, why not?"

"I'll tell you presently, Petrie. Did you see him?"

"I did, and I can't make out what he is doing. He seems to have remained standing at the gate for some reason."

"He has seen it!" snapped Smith. "Watch those elms."

His hand remained upon my arm, gripping it nervously. Shall I say that I was surprised? I can say it with truth. But I shall add that I was thrilled, eerily; for this subdued excitement and alert watching of Smith could only mean one thing:

Fu-Manchu!

And that was enough to set me watching as keenly as he; to set me listening; not only for sounds outside the house but for sounds within. Doubts, suspicions, dreads, heaped themselves up in my mind. Why was Forsyth standing there at the gate? I had never seen him before, to my knowledge, yet there was something oddly reminiscent about the man. Could it be that his visit formed part of a plot? Yet his wound had been genuine enough. Thus my mind worked, feverishly; such was the effect of an unspoken thought--Fu-Manchu.

Nayland Smith's grip tightened on my arm.

"There it is again, Petrie!" he whispered.

"Look, look!"

His words were wholly unnecessary. I, too, had seen it; a wonderful and uncanny sight. Out of the darkness under the elms, low down upon the ground, grew a vaporous blue light. It flared up, elfinish, then began to ascend. Like an igneous phantom, a witch flame, it rose, high--higher--higher, to what I adjudged to be some twelve feet or more from the ground. Then, high in the air, it died away again as it had come!

"For God's sake, Smith, what was it?"

"Don't ask me, Petrie. I have seen it twice. We--"

He paused. Rapid footsteps sounded below. Over Smith's shoulder I saw Forsyth cross the road, climb the low rail, and set out across the common.

Smith sprang impetuously to his feet.

"We must stop him!" he said hoarsely; then, clapping a hand to my mouth as I was about to call out--"Not a sound, Petrie!"

He ran out of the room and went blundering downstairs in the dark, crying:

"Out through the garden--the side entrance!"

I overtook him as he threw wide the door of my dispensing room. Through it he ran and opened the door at the
other end. I followed him out, closing it behind me. The smell from some tobacco plants in a neighboring flower-bed was faintly perceptible; no breeze stirred; and in the great silence I could hear Smith, in front of me, tugging at the bolt of the gate.

Then he had it open, and I stepped out, close on his heels, and left the door ajar.

"We must not appear to have come from your house," explained Smith rapidly. "I will go along the highroad and cross to the common a hundred yards up, where there is a pathway, as though homeward bound to the north side. Give me half a minute's start, then you proceed in an opposite direction and cross from the corner of the next road. Directly you are out of the light of the street lamps, get over the rails and run for the elms!"

He thrust a pistol into my hand and was off.

While he had been with me, speaking in that incisive, impetuous way of his, with his dark face close to mine, and his eyes gleaming like steel, I had been at one with him in his feverish mood, but now, when I stood alone, in that staid and respectable byway, holding a loaded pistol in my hand, the whole thing became utterly unreal.

It was in an odd frame of mind that I walked to the next corner, as directed; for I was thinking, not of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the great and evil man who dreamed of Europe and America under Chinese rule, not of Nayland Smith, who alone stood between the Chinaman and the realization of his monstrous schemes, not even of Karamaneh the slave girl, whose glorious beauty was a weapon of might in Fu-Manchu's hand, but of what impression I must have made upon a patient had I encountered one then.

Such were my ideas up to the moment that I crossed to the common and vaulted into the field on my right. As I began to run toward the elms I found myself wondering what it was all about, and for what we were come. Fifty yards west of the trees it occurred to me that if Smith had counted on cutting Forsyth off we were too late, for it appeared to me that he must already be in the coppice.

I was right. Twenty paces more I ran, and ahead of me, from the elms, came a sound. Clearly it came through the still air--the eerie hoot of a nighthawk. I could not recall ever to have heard the cry of that bird on the common before, but odd enough I attached little significance to it until, in the ensuing instant, a most dreadful scream--a scream in which fear, and loathing, and anger were hideously blended--thrilled me with horror.

After that I have no recollection of anything until I found myself standing by the southernmost elm.

"Smith!" I cried breathlessly. "Smith! my God! where are you?"

As if in answer to my cry came an indescribable sound, a mingled sobbing and choking. Out from the shadows staggered a ghastly figure--that of a man whose face appeared to be streaked. His eyes glared at me madly and he mowed the air with his hands like one blind and insane with fear.

I started back; words died upon my tongue. The figure reeled and the man fell babbling and sobbing at my very feet.

Inert I stood, looking down at him. He writhed a moment--and was still. The silence again became perfect. Then, from somewhere beyond the elms, Nayland Smith appeared. I did not move. Even when he stood beside me, I merely stared at him fatuously.

"I let him walk to his death, Petrie," I heard dimly. "God forgive me --God forgive me!"

The words aroused me.

"Smith"--my voice came as a whisper--"for one awful moment I thought--"

"So did some one else," he rapped. "Our poor sailor has met the end designed for me, Petrie!"

At that I realized two things: I knew why Forsyth's face had struck me as being familiar in some puzzling way, and I knew why Forsyth now lay dead upon the grass. Save that he was a fair man and wore a slight mustache, he was, in features and build, the double of Nayland Smith!

CHAPTER V

THE NET

We raised the poor victim and turned him over on his back. I dropped upon my knees, and with unsteady fingers began to strike a match. A slight breeze was arising and sighing gently through the elms, but, screened by my hands, the flame of the match took life. It illuminated wanly the sun-baked face of Nayland Smith, his eyes gleaming with unnatural brightness. I bent forward, and the dying light of the match touched that other face.

"Oh, God!" whispered Smith.

A faint puff of wind extinguished the match.

In all my surgical experience I had never met with anything quite so horrible. Forsyth's livid face was streaked with tiny streams of blood, which proceeded from a series of irregular wounds. One group of these clustered upon his left temple, another beneath his right eye, and others extended from the chin down to the throat. They were black, almost like tattoo marks, and the entire injured surface was bloated indescribably. His fists were clenched; he was quite rigid.

Smith's piercing eyes were set upon me eloquently as I knelt on the path and made my examination--an
examination which that first glimpse when Forsyth came staggering out from the trees had rendered useless-- a mere matter of form.

"He's quite dead, Smith," I said huskily. "It's--unnatural--it--"

Smith began beating his fist into his left palm and taking little, short, nervous strides up and down beside the dead man. I could hear a car humming along the highroad, but I remained there on my knees staring dully at the disfigured bloody face which but a matter of minutes since had been that of a clean looking British seaman. I found myself contrasting his neat, squarely trimmed mustache with the bloated face above it, and counting the little drops of blood which trembled upon its edge. There were footsteps approaching. I stood up. The footsteps quickened; and I turned as a constable ran up.

"What's this?" he demanded gruffly, and stood with his fists clenched, looking from Smith to me and down at that which lay between us. Then his hand flew to his breast; there was a silvery gleam and--

"Drop that whistle!" snapped Smith--and struck it from the man's hand. "Where's your lantern? Don't ask questions!"

The constable started back and was evidently debating upon his chances with the two of us, when my friend pulled a letter from his pocket and thrust it under the man's nose.

"Read that!" he directed harshly, "and then listen to my orders."

There was something in his voice which changed the officer's opinion of the situation. He directed the light of his lantern upon the open letter and seemed to be stricken with wonder.

"If you have any doubts," continued Smith--"you may not be familiar with the Commissioner's signature--you have only to ring up Scotland Yard from Dr. Petrie's house, to which we shall now return, to disperse them." He pointed to Forsyth. "Help us to carry him there. We must not be seen; this must be hushed up. You understand? It must not get into the press--"

The man saluted respectfully; and the three of us addressed ourselves to the mournful task. By slow stages we bore the dead man to the edge of the common, carried him across the road and into my house, without exciting attention even on the part of those vagrants who nightly slept out in the neighborhood.

We laid our burden upon the surgery table.

"You will want to make an examination, Petrie," said Smith in his decisive way, "and the officer here might phone for the ambulance. I have some investigations to make also. I must have the pocket lamp."

He raced upstairs to his room, and an instant later came running down again. The front door banged.

"The telephone is in the hall," I said to the constable.

"Thank you, sir."

He went out of the surgery as I switched on the lamp over the table and began to examine the marks upon Forsyth's skin. These, as I have said, were in groups and nearly all in the form of elongated punctures; a fairly deep incision with a pear-shaped and superficial scratch beneath it. One of the tiny wounds had penetrated the right eye.

The symptoms, or those which I had been enabled to observe as Forsyth had first staggered into view from among the elms, were most puzzling. Clearly enough, the muscles of articulation and the respiratory muscles had been affected; and now the livid face, dotted over with tiny wounds (they were also on the throat), set me mentally groping for a clue to the manner of his death.

No clue presented itself; and my detailed examination of the body availed me nothing. The gray herald of dawn was come when the police arrived with the ambulance and took Forsyth away.

I was just taking my cap from the rack when Nayland Smith returned.

"Smith!" I cried--"have you found anything?"

He stood there in the gray light of the hallway, tugging at the lobe of his left ear, an old trick of his.

The bronzed face looked very gaunt, I thought, and his eyes were bright with that febrile glitter which once I had disliked, but which I had learned from experience were due to tremendous nervous excitement. At such times he could act with icy coolness and his mental faculties seemed temporarily to acquire an abnormal keenness. He made no direct reply; but--

"Have you any milk?" he jerked abruptly.

So wholly unexpected was the question, that for a moment I failed to grasp it. Then--

"Milk!" I began.

"Exactly, Petrie! If you can find me some milk, I shall be obliged."

I turned to descend to the kitchen, when--

"The remains of the turbot from dinner, Petrie, would also be welcome, and I think I should like a trowel."

I stopped at the stairhead and faced him.

"I cannot suppose that you are joking, Smith," I said, "but--"

He laughed dryly.
"Forgive me, old man," he replied. "I was so preoccupied with my own train of thought that it never occurred to me how absurd my request must have sounded. I will explain my singular tastes later; at the moment, hustle is the watchword."

Evidently he was in earnest, and I ran downstairs accordingly, returning with a garden trowel, a plate of cold fish and a glass of milk.

"Thanks, Petrie," said Smith--"If you would put the milk in a jug--"

I was past wondering, so I simply went and fetched a jug, into which he poured the milk. Then, with the trowel in his pocket, the plate of cold turbot in one hand and the milk jug in the other, he made for the door. He had it open when another idea evidently occurred to him.

"I'll trouble you for the pistol, Petrie."

I handed him the pistol without a word.

"Don't assume that I want to mystify you," he added, "but the presence of any one else might jeopardize my plan. I don't expect to be long."

The cold light of dawn flooded the hallway momentarily; then the door closed again and I went upstairs to my study, watching Nayland Smith as he strode across the common in the early morning mist. He was making for the Nine Elms, but I lost sight of him before he reached them.

I sat there for some time, watching for the first glow of sunrise. A policeman tramped past the house, and, a while later, a belated reveler in evening clothes. That sense of unreality assailed me again. Out there in the gray mists a man who was vested with powers which rendered him a law unto himself, who had the British Government behind him in all that he might choose to do, who had been summoned from Rangoon to London on singular and dangerous business, was employing himself with a plate of cold turbot, a jug of milk, and a trowel!

Away to the right, and just barely visible, a tramcar stopped by the common; then proceeded on its way, coming in a westerly direction. Its lights twinkled yellowly through the grayness, but I was less concerned with the approaching car than with the solitary traveler who had descended from it.

As the car went rocking by below me, I strained my eyes in an endeavor more clearly to discern the figure, which, leaving the highroad, had struck out across the common. It was that of a woman, who seemingly carried a bulky bag or parcel.

One must be a gross materialist to doubt that there are latent powers in man which man, in modern times, neglects, or knows not how to develop. I became suddenly conscious of a burning curiosity respecting this lonely traveler who had descended from it.

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I had slightly miscalculated the distance, as Fate would have it, and with a patch of gorse effectually screening my approach, I came upon her, kneeling on the damp grass and unfastening the bundle which had attracted my attention. I stopped and watched her.

She was dressed in bedraggled fashion in rusty black, wore a common black straw hat and a thick veil; but it seemed to me that the dexterous hands at work untying the bundle were slim and white; and I perceived a pair of hideous cotton gloves lying on the turf beside her. As she threw open the wrappings and lifted out something that looked like a small shrimping net, I stepped around the bush, crossed silently the intervening patch of grass, and stood beside her.

A faint breath of perfume reached me--of a perfume which, like the secret incense of Ancient Egypt, seemed to assail my soul. The glamour of the Orient was in that subtle essence; and I only knew one woman who used it. I bent over the kneeling figure.

"Good morning," I said; "can I assist you in any way?"

She came to her feet like a startled deer, and flung away from me with the lithe movement of some Eastern dancing girl.

Now came the sun, and its heralding rays struck sparks from the jewels upon the white fingers of this woman who wore the garments of a mendicant. My heart gave a great leap. It was with difficulty that I controlled my voice.

"There is no cause for alarm," I added.

She stood watching me; even through the coarse veil I could see how her eyes glittered. I stooped and picked up the net.

"Oh!" The whispered word was scarcely audible, but it was enough; I doubted no longer.

"This is a net for bird snaring," I said. "What strange bird are you seeking--Karamaneh?"

With a passionate gesture Karamaneh snatched off the veil, and with it the ugly black hat. The cloud of wonderful, intractable hair came rumpling about her face, and her glorious eyes blazed out upon me. How beautiful they were, with the dark beauty of an Egyptian night; how often had they looked into mine in dreams!
To labor against a ceaseless yearning for a woman whom one knows, upon evidence that none but a fool might reject, to be worthless—evil; is there any torture to which the soul of man is subject, more pitiless? Yet this was my lot, for what past sins assigned to me I was unable to conjecture; and this was the woman, this lovely slave of a monster, this creature of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

"I suppose you will declare that you do not know me!" I said harshly.

Her lips trembled, but she made no reply.

"It is very convenient to forget, sometimes," I ran on bitterly, then checked myself; for I knew that my words were prompted by a feckless desire to hear her defense, by a fool's hope that it might be an acceptable one.

I looked again at the net contrivance in my hand; it had a strong spring fitted to it and a line attached. Quite obviously it was intended for snaring.

"What were you about to do?" I demanded sharply—but in my heart, poor fool that I was, I found admiration for the exquisite arch of Karamaneh's lips, and reproach because they were so tremulous.

She spoke then.

"Dr. Petrie—"

"Well?"

"You seem to be—angry with me, not so much because of what I do, as because I do not remember you. Yet—"

"Kindly do not revert to the matter," I interrupted. "You have chosen, very conveniently, to forget that once we were friends. Please yourself. But answer my question."

She clasped her hands with a sort of wild abandon.

"Why do you treat me so!" she cried; she had the most fascinating accent imaginable. "Throw me into prison, kill me if you like, for what I have done!" She stamped her foot. "For what I have done! But do not torture me, try to drive me mad with your reproaches—that I forget you! I tell you—again I tell you—that until you came one night, last week, to rescue some one from—" There was the old trick of hesitating before the name of Fu-Manchu—"from him, I had never, never seen you!"

The dark eyes looked into mine, afire with a positive hunger for belief—or so I was sorely tempted to suppose. But the facts were against her.

"Such a declaration is worthless," I said, as coldly as I could. "You are a traitress; you betray those who are mad enough to trust you—"

"I am no traitress!" she blazed at me; her eyes were magnificent.

"This is mere nonsense. You think that it will pay you better to serve Fu-Manchu than to remain true to your friends. Your 'slavery'—for I take it you are posing as a slave again—is evidently not very harsh. You serve Fu-Manchu, lure men to their destruction, and in return he loads you with jewels, lavishes gifts—"

"Ah! so!"

She sprang forward, raising flaming eyes to mine; her lips were slightly parted. With that wild abandon which betrayed the desert blood in her veins, she wrested open the neck of her bodice and slipped a soft shoulder free of the garment. She twisted around, so that the white skin was but inches removed from me.

"These are some of the gifts that he lavishes upon me!"

I clenched my teeth. Insane thoughts flooded my mind. For that creamy skin was red with the marks of the lash!

She turned, quickly rearranging her dress, and watching me the while. I could not trust myself to speak for a moment, then:

"If I am a stranger to you, as you claim, why do you give me your confidence?" I asked.

"I have known you long enough to trust you!" she said simply, and turned her head aside.

"Then why do you serve this inhuman monster?"

She snapped her fingers oddly, and looked up at me from under her lashes. "Why do you question me if you think that everything I say is a lie?"

It was a lesson in logic—from a woman! I changed the subject.

"Tell me what you came here to do," I demanded.

She pointed to the net in my hands.

"To catch birds; you have said so yourself,"

"What bird?"

She shrugged her shoulders.

And now a memory was born within my brain; it was that of the cry of the nighthawk which had harbingered the death of Forsyth! The net was a large and strong one; could it be that some horrible fowl of the air—some creature unknown to Western naturalists—had been released upon the common last night? I thought of the marks upon Forsyth's face and throat; I thought of the profound knowledge of obscure and dreadful things possessed by the Chinaman.
The wrapping, in which the net had been, lay at my feet. I stooped and took out from it a wicker basket. Karamaneh stood watching me and biting her lip, but she made no move to check me. I opened the basket. It contained a large phial, the contents of which possessed a pungent and peculiar smell. I was utterly mystified.

"You will have to accompany me to my house," I said sternly.

Karamaneh upturned her great eyes to mine. They were wide with fear. She was on the point of speaking when I extended my hand to grasp her. At that, the look of fear was gone and one of rebellion held its place. Ere I had time to realize her purpose, she flung back from me with that wild grace which I had met with in no other woman, turned and ran!

Fatuously, net and basket in hand, I stood looking after her. The idea of pursuit came to me certainly; but I doubted if I could have outrun her. For Karamaneh ran, not like a girl used to town or even country life, but with the lightness and swiftness of a gazelle; ran like the daughter of the desert that she was.

Some two hundred yards she went, stopped, and looked back. It would seem that the sheer joy of physical effort had aroused the devil in her, the devil that must lie latent in every woman with eyes like the eyes of Karamaneh.

In the ever brightening sunlight I could see the lithe figure swaying; no rags imaginable could mask its beauty. I could see the red lips and gleaming teeth. Then—and it was music good to hear, despite its taunt --she laughed defiantly, turned, and ran again!

I resigned myself to defeat; I blush to add, gladly! Some evidences of a world awakening were perceptible about me now. Feathered choirs hailed the new day joyously. Carrying the mysterious contrivance which I had captured from the enemy, I set out in the direction of my house, my mind very busy with conjectures respecting the link between this bird snare and the cry like that of a nighthawk which we had heard at the moment of Forsyth's death.

The path that I had chosen led me around the border of the Mound Pond --a small pool having an islet in the center. Lying at the margin of the pond I was amazed to see the plate and jug which Nayland Smith had borrowed recently!

Dropping my burden, I walked down to the edge of the water. I was filled with a sudden apprehension. Then, as I bent to pick up the now empty jug, came a hail:

"All right, Petrie! Shall join you in a moment!"

I started up, looked to right and left; but, although the voice had been that of Nayland Smith, no sign could I discern of his presence!

"Smith!" I cried--"Smith!"

"Coming!"

Seriously doubting my senses, I looked in the direction from which the voice had seemed to proceed--and there was Nayland Smith. He stood on the islet in the center of the pond, and, as I perceived him, he walked down into the shallow water and waded across to me!

"Good heavens!" I began--

One of his rare laughs interrupted me.

"You must think me mad this morning, Petrie!" he said. "But I have made several discoveries. Do you know what that islet in the pond really is?"

"Merely an islet, I suppose--"

"Nothing of the kind; it is a burial mound, Petrie! It marks the site of one of the Plague Pits where victims were buried during the Great Plague of London. You will observe that, although you have seen it every morning for some years, it remains for a British Commissioner resident in Burma to acquaint you with its history! Hullo!"--the laughter was gone from his eyes, and they were steely hard again-- "what the blazes have we here!"

He picked up the net. "What! a bird trap!"

"Exactly!" I said.

Smith turned his searching gaze upon me. "Where did you find it, Petrie?"

"I did not exactly find it," I replied; and I related to him the circumstances of my meeting with Karamaneh.

He directed that cold stare upon me throughout the narrative, and when, with some embarrassment, I had told him of the girl's escape--

"Petrie," he said succinctly, "you are an imbecile!"

I flushed with anger, for not even from Nayland Smith, whom I esteemed above all other men, could I accept such words uttered as he had uttered them. We glared at one another.

"Karamaneh," he continued coldly, "is a beautiful toy, I grant you; but so is a cobra. Neither is suitable for playful purposes."

"Smith!" I cried hotly--"drop that! Adopt another tone or I cannot listen to you!"
"You must listen," he said, squaring his lean jaw truculently. "You are playing, not only with a pretty girl who is the favorite of a Chinese Nero, but with my life! And I object, Petrie, on purely personal grounds!"

I felt my anger oozing from me; for this was strictly just. I had nothing to say, and Smith continued:

"You know that she is utterly false, yet a glance or two from those dark eyes of hers can make a fool of you! A woman made a fool of me, once; but I learned my lesson; you have failed to learn yours. If you are determined to go to pieces on the rock that broke up Adam, do so! But don't involve me in the wreck, Petrie--for that might mean a yellow emperor of the world, and you know it!"

"Your words are unnecessarily brutal, Smith," I said, feeling very crestfallen, "but there--perhaps I fully deserve them all."

"You do!" he assured me, but he relaxed immediately. "A murderous attempt is made upon my life, resulting in the death of a perfectly innocent man in no way concerned. Along you come and let an accomplice, perhaps a participant, escape, merely, because she has a red mouth, or black lashes, or whatever it is that fascinates you so hopelessly!"

He opened the wicker basket, sniffing at the contents.

"Ah!" he snapped, "do you recognize this odor?"

"Certainly."

"Then you have some idea respecting Karamaneh's quarry?"

"Nothing of the kind!"

Smith shrugged his shoulders.

"Come along, Petrie," he said, linking his arm in mine.

We proceeded. Many questions there were that I wanted to put to him, but one above all.

"Smith," I said, "what, in Heaven's name, were you doing on the mound? Digging something up?"

"No," he replied, smiling dryly; "burying something!"

CHAPTER VI
UNDER THE ELMS

Dusk found Nayland Smith and me at the top bedroom window. We knew, now that poor Forsyth's body had been properly examined, that he had died from poisoning. Smith, declaring that I did not deserve his confidence, had refused to confide in me his theory of the origin of the peculiar marks upon the body.

"On the soft ground under the trees," he said, "I found his tracks right up to the point where something happened. There were no other fresh tracks for several yards around. He was attacked as he stood close to the trunk of one of the elms. Six or seven feet away I found some other tracks, very much like this."

He marked a series of dots upon the blotting pad at his elbow.

"Claws!" I cried. "That eerie call! like the call of a nighthawk--is it some unknown species of--flying thing?"

"We shall see, shortly; possibly to-night," was his reply. "Since, probably owing to the absence of any moon, a mistake was made," his jaw hardened at the thoughts of poor Forsyth--"another attempt along the same lines will almost certainly follow--you know Fu-Manchu's system?"

So in the darkness, expectant, we sat watching the group of nine elms. To-night the moon was come, raising her Aladdin's lamp up to the star world and summoning magic shadows into being. By midnight the highroad showed deserted, the common was a place of mystery; and save for the periodical passage of an electric car, in blazing modernity, this was a fit enough stage for an eerie drama.

No notice of the tragedy had appeared in print; Nayland Smith was vested with powers to silence the press. No detectives, no special constables, were posted. My friend was of opinion that the publicity which had been given to the deeds of Dr. Fu-Manchu in the past, together with the sometimes clumsy co-operation of the police, had contributed not a little to the Chinaman's success.

"There is only one thing to fear," he jerked suddenly; "he may not be ready for another attempt to-night."

"Why?"

"Since he has only been in England for a short time, his menagerie of venomous things may be a limited one at present."

Earlier in the evening there had been a brief but violent thunderstorm, with a tropical downpour of rain, and now clouds were scudding across the blue of the sky. Through a temporary rift in the veiling the crescent of the moon looked down upon us. It had a greenish tint, and it set me thinking of the filmed, green eyes of Fu-Manchu.

The cloud passed and a lake of silver spread out to the edge of the coppice, where it terminated at a shadow bank.

"There it is, Petrie!" hissed Nayland Smith.

A lambent light was born in the darkness; it rose slowly, unsteadily, to a great height, and died.

"It's under the trees, Smith!"
But he was already making for the door. Over his shoulder:

"Bring the pistol, Petrie!" he cried; "I have another. Give me at least twenty yards’ start or no attempt may be

made. But the instant I’m under the trees, join me."

Out of the house we ran, and over onto the common, which latterly had been a pageant ground for phantom

warring. The light did not appear again; and as Smith plunged off toward the trees, I wondered if he knew what

uncanny thing was hidden there. I more than suspected that he had solved the mystery.

His instructions to keep well in the rear I understood. Fu-Manchu, or the creature of Fu-Manchu, would attempt

nothing in the presence of a witness. But we knew full well that the instrument of death which was hidden in the elm

coppice could do its ghastly work and leave no clue, could slay and vanish. For had not Forsyth come to a dreadful

end while Smith and I were within twenty yards of him?

Not a breeze stirred, as Smith, ahead of me—for I had slowed my pace—came up level with the first tree. The

moon sailed clear of the straggling cloud wisps which alone told of the recent storm; and I noted that an irregular

patch of light lay silvery on the moist ground under the elms where otherwise lay shadow.

He passed on, slowly. I began to run again. Black against the silvery patch, I saw him emerge—and look up.

"Be careful, Smith!" I cried—and I was racing under the trees to join him.

Uttering a loud cry, he leaped—away from the pool of light.

"Stand back, Petrie!" he screamed—"Back! further!"

He charged into me, shoulder lowered, and sent me reeling!

Mixed up with his excited cry I had heard a loud splintering and sweeping of branches overhead; and now as we

staggered into the shadows it seemed that one of the elms was reaching down to touch us! So, at least, the

phenomenon presented itself to my mind in that fleeting moment while Smith, uttering his warning cry, was hurling

me back.

Then the truth became apparent.

With an appalling crash, a huge bough fell from above. One piercing, awful shriek there was, a crackling of

broken branches, and a choking groan . . .

The crack of Smith’s pistol close beside me completed my confusion of mind.

"Missed!" he yelled. "Shoot it, Petrie! On your left! For God’s sake don’t miss it!"

I turned. A lithe black shape was streaking past me. I fired—once—twice. Another frightful cry made yet more

hideous the nocturne.

Nayland Smith was directing the ray of a pocket torch upon the fallen bough.

"Have you killed it, Petrie?" he cried.

"Yes, yes!"

I stood beside him, looking down. From the tangle of leaves and twigs an evil yellow face looked up at us. The

features were contorted with agony, but the malignant eyes, wherein light was dying, regarded us with inflexible

hatred. The man was pinned beneath the heavy bough; his back was broken; and as we watched, he expired, frothing

slightly at the mouth, and quitted his tenement of clay, leaving those glassy eyes set hideously upon us.

"The pagan gods fight upon our side," said Smith strangely. "Elms have a dangerous habit of shedding boughs in

still weather—particularly after a storm. Pan, god of the woods, with this one has performed Justice’s work of

retribution."

"I don’t understand. Where was this man—"

"Up the tree, lying along the bough which fell, Petrie! That is why he left no footmarks. Last night no doubt he

made his escape by swinging from bough to bough, ape fashion, and descending to the ground somewhere at the

other side of the coppice."

He glanced at me.

"You are wondering, perhaps," he suggested, "what caused the mysterious light? I could have told you this

morning, but I fear I was in a bad temper, Petrie. It’s very simple: a length of tape soaked in spirit or something of

the kind, and sheltered from the view of any one watching from your windows, behind the trunk of the tree; then, the

end ignited, lowered, still behind the tree, to the ground. The operator swinging it around, the flame ascended, of

course. I found the unburned fragment of the tape last night, a few yards from here."

I was peering down at Fu-Manchu’s servant, the hideous yellow man who lay dead in a bower of elm leaves.

"He has some kind of leather bag beside him," I began—

"Exactly!" rapped Smith. "In that he carried his dangerous instrument of death; from that he released it!"

"Released what?"

"What your fascinating friend came to recapture this morning."

"Don’t taunt me, Smith!" I said bitterly. "Is it some species of bird?"

"You saw the marks on Forsyth’s body, and I told you of those which I had traced upon the ground here. They
wre caused by claws, Petrie!!"

"Claws! I thought so! But what claws?"

"The claws of a poisonous thing. I recaptured the one used last night, killed it--against my will--and buried it on
the mound. I was afraid to throw it in the pond, lest some juvenile fisherman should pull it out and sustain a scratch.
I don't know how long the claws would remain venomous."

"You are treating me like a child, Smith," I said slowly. "No doubt I am hopelessly obtuse, but perhaps you will
tell me what this Chinaman carried in a leather bag and released upon Forsyth. It was something which you
recaptured, apparently with the aid of a plate of cold turbot and a jug of milk! It was something, also, which
Karamaneh had been sent to recapture with the aid--"

I stopped.

"Go on," said Nayland Smith, turning the ray to the left, "what did she have in the basket?"

"Valerian," I replied mechanically.

The ray rested upon the lithe creature that I had shot down.

It was a black cat!

"A cat will go through fire and water for valerian," said Smith; "but I got first innings this morning with fish and
milk! I had recognized the imprints under the trees for those of a cat, and I knew, that if a cat had been released here
it would still be hiding in the neighborhood, probably in the bushes. I finally located a cat, sure enough, and came
for bait! I laid my trap, for the animal was too frightened to be approachable, and then shot it; I had to. That yellow
fiend used the light as a decoy. The branch which killed him jutted out over the path at a spot where an opening in
the foliage above allowed some moon rays to penetrate. Directly the victim stood beneath, the Chinaman uttered his
bird cry; the one below looked up, and the cat, previously held silent and helpless in the leather sack, was dropped
accurately upon his head!"

"But"--I was growing confused.

Smith stooped lower.

"The cat's claws are sheathed now," he said; "but if you could examine them you would find that they are coated
with a shining black substance. Only Fu-Manchu knows what that substance is, Petrie, but you and I know what it
can do!"

CHAPTER VII
ENTER MR. ABEL SLATTIN

"I don't blame you!" rapped Nayland Smith. "Suppose we say, then, a thousand pounds if you show us the
present hiding-place of Fu-Manchu, the payment to be in no way subject to whether we profit by your information
or not?"

Abel Slattin shrugged his shoulders, racially, and returned to the armchair which he had just quitted. He reseated
himself, placing his hat and cane upon my writing-table.

"A little agreement in black and white?" he suggested smoothly.

Smith raised himself up out of the white cane chair, and, bending forward over a corner of the table, scribbled
busily upon a sheet of notepaper with my fountain-pen.

The while he did so, I covertly studied our visitor. He lay back in the armchair, his heavy eyelids lowered
deceptively. He was a thought overdressed--a big man, dark-haired and well groomed, who toyed with a monocle
most unsuitable to his type. During the preceding conversation, I had been vaguely surprised to note Mr. Abel
Slattin's marked American accent.

Sometimes, when Slattin moved, a big diamond which he wore upon the third finger of his right hand glittered
magnificently. There was a sort of bluish tint underlying the dusky skin, noticeable even in his hands but
proclaiming itself significantly in his puffy face and especially under the eyes. I diagnosed a laboring valve
somewhere in the heart system.

Nayland Smith's pen scratched on. My glance strayed from our Semitic caller to his cane, lying upon the red
leather before me. It was of most unusual workmanship, apparently Indian, being made of some kind of dark brown,
mottled wood, bearing a marked resemblance to a snake's skin; and the top of the cane was carved in conformity, to
represent the head of what I took to be a puff-adder, fragments of stone, or beads, being inserted to represent the
eyes, and the whole thing being finished with an artistic realism almost startling.

When Smith had tossed the written page to Slattin, and he, having read it with an appearance of carelessness,
had folded it neatly and placed it in his pocket, I said:

"You have a curio here?"

Our visitor, whose dark eyes revealed all the satisfaction which, by his manner, he sought to conceal, nodded
and took up the cane in his hand.

"It comes from Australia, Doctor," he replied; "it's aboriginal work, and was given to me by a client. You
thought it was Indian? Everybody does. It's my mascot."

"Really?"

"It is indeed. Its former owner ascribed magical powers to it! In fact, I believe he thought that it was one of those
staffs mentioned in biblical history--"

"Aaron's rod?" suggested Smith, glancing at the cane.

"Something of the sort," said Slattin, standing up and again preparing to depart.

"You will 'phone us, then?" asked my friend.

"You will hear from me to-morrow," was the reply.

Smith returned to the cane armchair, and Slattin, bowing to both of us, made his way to the door as I rang for the
girl to show him out.

"Considering the importance of his proposal," I began, as the door closed, "you hardly received our visitor with
cordiality."

"I hate to have any relations with him," answered my friend; "but we must not be squeamish respecting our
instruments in dealing with Dr. Fu-Manchu. Slattin has a rotten reputation--even for a private inquiry agent. He is
little better than a blackmailer--"

"How do you know?"

"Because I called on our friend Weymouth at the Yard yesterday and looked up the man's record."

"Whatever for?"

"I knew that he was concerning himself, for some reason, in the case. Beyond doubt he has established some sort
of communication with the Chinese group; I am only wondering--"

"You don't mean--"

"Yes--I do, Petrie! I tell you he is unscrupulous enough to stoop even to that."

No doubt, Slattin knew that this gaunt, eager-eyed Burmese commissioner was vested with ultimate authority in
his quest of the mighty Chinaman who represented things unutterable, whose potentialities for evil were boundless
as his genius, who personified a secret danger, the extent and nature of which none of us truly understood. And,
learning of these things, with unerring Semitic instinct he had sought an opening in this glittering Rialto. But there
were two bidders!

"You think he may have sunk so low as to become a creature of Fu-Manchu?" I asked, aghast.

"Exactly! If it paid him well I do not doubt that he would serve that master as readily as any other. His record is
about as black as it well could be. Slattin is of course an assumed name; he was known as Lieutenant Pepley when
he belonged to the New York Police, and he was kicked out of the service for complicity in an unsavory Chinatown
case."

"Chinatown!"

"Yes, Petrie, it made me wonder, too; and we must not forget that he is undeniably a clever scoundrel."

"Shall you keep any appointment which he may suggest?"

"Undoubtedly. But I shall not wait until tomorrow."

"What!"

"I propose to pay a little informal visit to Mr. Abel Slattin, to-night."

"At his office?"

"No; at his private residence. If, as I more than suspect, his object is to draw us into some trap, he will probably
report his favorable progress to his employer to-night!"

"Then we should have followed him!"

Nayland Smith stood up and divested himself of the old shooting-jacket.

"He has been followed, Petrie," he replied, with one of his rare smiles. "Two C.I.D. men have been watching the
house all night!"

This was entirely characteristic of my friend's farseeing methods.

"By the way," I said, "you saw Eltham this morning. He will soon be convalescent. Where, in heaven's name,
can he--"

"Don't be alarmed on his behalf, Petrie," interrupted Smith. "His life is no longer in danger."

I stared, stupidly.

"No longer in danger!"

"He received, some time yesterday, a letter, written in Chinese, upon Chinese paper, and enclosed in an ordinary
business envelope, having a typewritten address and bearing a London postmark."

"Well?"

"As nearly as I can render the message in English, it reads: 'Although, because you are a brave man, you would
not betray your correspondent in China, he has been discovered. He was a mandarin, and as I cannot write the name
of a traitor, I may not name him. He was executed four days ago. I salute you and pray for your speedy recovery. Fu-Manchu."

"Fu-Manchu! But it is almost certainly a trap."

"On the contrary, Petrie--Fu-Manchu would not have written in Chinese unless he were sincere; and, to clear all doubt, I received a cable this morning reporting that the Mandarin Yen-Sun-Yat was assassinated in his own garden, in Nan-Yang, one day last week."

CHAPTER VIII

DR. FU-MANCHU STRIKES

Together we marched down the slope of the quiet, suburban avenue; to take pause before a small, detached house displaying the hatchet boards of the Estate Agent. Here we found unkempt laurel bushes and acacias run riot, from which arboreal tangle protruded the notice--"To be Let or Sold."

Smith, with an alert glance to right and left, pushed open the wooden gate and drew me in upon the gravel path. Darkness mantled all; for the nearest street lamp was fully twenty yards beyond.

From the miniature jungle bordering the path, a soft whistle sounded.

"Is that Carter?" called Smith, sharply.

A shadowy figure uprose, and vaguely I made it out for that of a man in the unobtrusive blue serge which is the undress uniform of the Force.

"Well?" rapped my companion.

"Mr. Slattin returned ten minutes ago, sir," reported the constable. "He came in a cab which he dismissed--"

"He has not left again?"

"A few minutes after his return," the man continued, "another cab came up, and a lady alighted."

"A lady!"

"The same, sir, that has called upon him before."

"Smith!" I whispered, plucking at his arm--"is it--"

He half turned, nodding his head; and my heart began to throb foolishly. For now the manner of Slattin's campaign suddenly was revealed to me. In our operations against the Chinese murder-group two years before, we had had an ally in the enemy's camp--Karamaneh the beautiful slave, whose presence in those happenings of the past had colored the sometimes sordid drama with the opulence of old Arabia; who had seemed a fitting figure for the romances of Bagdad during the Caliphate--Karamaneh, whom I had thought sincere, whose inscrutable Eastern soul I had presumed, fatuously, to have laid bare and analyzed.

Now, once again she was plying her old trade of go-between; professing to reveal the secrets of Dr. Fu-Manchu, and all the time--I could not doubt it--inveigling men into the net of this awful fisher.

Yesterday, I had been her dupe; yesterday, I had rejoiced in my captivity. To-day, I was not the favored one; to-day I had not been selected recipient of her confidences--confidences sweet, seductive, deadly: but Abel Slattin, a plausible rogue, who, in justice, should be immured in Sing Sing, was chosen out, was enslaved by those lovely mysterious eyes, was taking to his soul the lies which fell from those perfect lips, triumphant in a conquest that must end in his undoing; deeming, poor fool, that for love of him this pearl of the Orient was about to betray her master, to resign herself a prize to the victor!

Companioned by these bitter reflections, I had lost the remainder of the conversation between Nayland Smith and the police officer; now, casting off the succubus memory which threatened to obsess me, I put forth a giant mental effort to purge my mind of this uncleanness, and became again an active participant in the campaign against the Master--the director of all things noxious.

Our plans being evidently complete, Smith seized my arm, and I found myself again out upon the avenue. He led me across the road and into the gate of a house almost opposite. From the fact that two upper windows were illuminated, I adduced that the servants were retiring; the other windows were in darkness, except for one on the ground floor to the extreme left of the building, through the lowered venetian blinds whereof streaks of light shone out.

"Slattin's study!" whispered Smith. "He does not anticipate surveillance, and you will note that the window is wide open!"

With that my friend crossed the strip of lawn, and careless of the fact that his silhouette must have been visible to any one passing the gate, climbed carefully up the artificial rockery intervening, and crouched upon the window-ledge peering into the room.

A moment I hesitated, fearful that if I followed, I should stumble or dislodge some of the larva blocks of which the rockery was composed.

Then I heard that which summoned me to the attempt, whatever the cost.

Through the open window came the sound of a musical voice--a voice possessing a haunting accent, possessing
a quality which struck upon my heart and set it quivering as though it were a gong hung in my bosom.

Karamaneh was speaking.

Upon hands and knees, heedless of damage to my garments, I crawled up beside Smith. One of the laths was slightly displaced and over this my friend was peering in. Crouching close beside him, I peered in also.

I saw the study of a business man, with its files, neatly arranged works of reference, roll-top desk, and Milner safe. Before the desk, in a revolving chair, sat Slattin. He sat half turned toward the window, leaning back and smiling; so that I could note the gold crown which preserved the lower left molar. In an armchair by the window, close, very close, and sitting with her back to me, was Karamaneh!

She, who, in my dreams, I always saw, was ever seeing, in an Eastern dress, with gold bands about her white ankles, with jewel-laden fingers, with jewels in her hair, wore now a fashionable costume and a hat that could only have been produced in Paris. Karamaneh was the one Oriental woman I had ever known who could wear European clothes; and as I watched that exquisite profile, I thought that Delilah must have been just such another as this, that, excepting the Empress Poppaea, history has record of no woman, who, looking so innocent, was yet so utterly vile.

"Yes, my dear," Slattin was saying, and through his monocle ogling his beautiful visitor, "I shall be ready for you to-morrow night."

I felt Smith start at the words.

"There will be a sufficient number of men?"

Karamaneh put the question in a strangely listless way.

"My dear little girl," replied Slattin, rising and standing looking down at her, with his gold tooth twinkling in the lamplight, "there will be a whole division, if a whole division is necessary."

He sought to take her white gloved hand, which rested upon the chair arm; but she evaded the attempt with seeming artlessness, and stood up. Slattin fixed his bold gaze upon her.

"So now, give me my orders," he said.

"I am not prepared to do so, yet," replied the girl, composedly; "but now that I know you are ready, I can make my plans."

She glided past him to the door, avoiding his outstretched arm with an artless art which made me writhe; for once I had been the willing victim of all these wiles.

"But--" began Slattin.

"I will ring you up in less than half an hour," said Karamaneh and without further ceremony, she opened the door.

I still had my eyes glued to the aperture in the blind, when Smith began tugging at my arm.

"Down! you fool!" he hissed harshly--"if she sees us, all is lost!"

Realizing this, and none too soon, I turned, and rather clumsily followed my friend. I dislodged a piece of granite in my descent; but, fortunately, Slattin had gone out into the hall and could not well have heard it.

We were crouching around an angle of the house, when a flood of light poured down the steps, and Karamaneh rapidly descended. I had a glimpse of a dark-faced man who evidently had opened the door for her, then all my thoughts were centered upon that graceful figure receding from me in the direction of the avenue. She wore a loose cloak, and I saw this fluttering for a moment against the white gate posts; then she was gone.

Yet Smith did not move. Detaining me with his hand he crouched there against a quick-set hedge; until, from a spot lower down the hill, we heard the start of the cab which had been waiting. Twenty seconds elapsed, and from some other distant spot a second cab started.

"That's Weymouth!" snapped Smith. "With decent luck, we should know Fu-Manchu's hiding-place before Slattin tells us!"

"But--"

"Oh! as it happens, he's apparently playing the game."--In the half-light, Smith stared at me significantly--"Which makes it all the more important," he concluded, "that we should not rely upon his aid!"

Those grim words were prophetic.

My companion made no attempt to communicate with the detective (or detectives) who shared our vigil; we took up a position close under the lighted study window and waited--waited.

Once, a taxi-cab labored hideously up the steep gradient of the avenue . . . It was gone. The lights at the upper windows above us became extinguished. A policeman tramped past the gateway, casually flashing his lamp in at the opening. One by one the illuminated windows in other houses visible to us became dull; then lived again as mirrors for the pallid moon. In the silence, words spoken within the study were clearly audible; and we heard someone--presumably the man who had opened the door--inquire if his services would be wanted again that night.

Smith inclined his head and hung over me in a tense attitude, in order to catch Slattin's reply.

"Yes, Burke," it came--"I want you to sit up until I return; I shall be going out shortly."
Evidently the man withdrew at that; for a complete silence followed which prevailed for fully half an hour. I sought cautiously to move my cramped limbs, unlike Smith, who seeming to have sinews of piano-wire, crouched beside me immovable, untrarily. Then loud upon the stillness, broke the strident note of the telephone bell.

I started, nervously, clutching at Smith's arm. It felt hard as iron to my grip.

"Hullo!" I heard Slattin call--"who is speaking? . . . Yes, yes! This is Mr. A. S. . . . I am to come at once? . . . I know where--yes I . . . you will meet me there? . . . Good!--I shall be with you in half an hour . . . Good-by!"

Distinctly I heard the creak of the revolving office-chair as Slattin rose; then Smith had me by the arm, and we were flying swiftly away from the door to take up our former post around the angle of the building. This gained:

"He's going to his death!" rapped Smith beside me; "but Carter has a cab from the Yard waiting in the nearest rank. We shall follow to see where he goes--for it is possible that Weymouth may have been thrown off the scent; then, when we are sure of his destination, we can take a hand in the game! We . . ."

The end of the sentence was lost to me--drowned in such a frightful wave of sound as I despair to describe. It began with a high, thin scream, which was choked off staccato fashion; upon it followed a loud and dreadful cry uttered with all the strength of Slattin's lungs--

"Oh, God!" he cried, and again--"Oh, God!"

This in turn merged into a sort of hysterical sobbing.

I was on my feet now, and automatically making for the door. I had a vague impression of Nayland Smith's face beside me, the eyes glassy with a fearful apprehension. Then the door was flung open, and, in the bright light of the hall-way, I saw Slattin standing--swaying and seemingly fighting with the empty air.

"What is it? For God's sake, what has happened!" reached my ears dimly --and the man Burke showed behind his master. White-faced I saw him to be; for now Smith and I were racing up the steps.

Ere we could reach him, Slattin, uttering another choking cry, pitched forward and lay half across the threshold.

We burst into the hall, where Burke stood with both his hands raised dazedly to his head. I could hear the sound of running feet upon the gravel, and knew that Carter was coming to join us.

Burke, a heavy man with a lowering, bull-dog type of face, collapsed onto his knees beside Slattin, and began softly to laugh in little rising peals.

"Drop that!" snapped Smith, and grasping him by the shoulders, he sent him spinning along the hallway, where he sank upon the bottom step of the stairs, to sit with his outstretched fingers extended before his face, and peering at us grotesquely through the crevices.

There were rustlings and subdued cries from the upper part of the house. Carter came in out of the darkness, carefully stepping over the recumbent figure; and the three of us stood there in the lighted hall looking down at Slattin.

"Help us to move him back," directed Smith, tensely; "far enough to close the door."

Between us we accomplished this, and Carter fastened the door. We were alone with the shadow of Fu-Manchu's vengeance; for as I knelt beside the body on the floor, a look and a touch sufficed to tell me that this was but clay from which the spirit had fled!

Smith met my glance as I raised my head, and his teeth came together with a loud snap; the jaw muscles stood out prominently beneath the dark skin; and his face was grimly set in that odd, half-despairful expression which I knew so well but which boded so ill for whomsoever occasioned it.

"Dead, Petrie!--already?"

"Lightning could have done the work no better. Can I turn him over?"

Smith nodded.

Together we stooped and rolled the heavy body on its back. A flood of whispers came sibilantly from the stairway. Smith spun around rapidly, and glared upon the group of half-dressed servants.

"Return to your rooms!" he rapped, imperiously; "let no one come into the hall without my orders."

The masterful voice had its usual result; there was a hurried retreat to the upper landing. Burke, shaking like a man with an ague, sat on the lower step, pathetically drumming his palms upon his uplifted knees.

"I warned him, I warned him!" he mumbled monotonously, "I warned him, oh, I warned him!"

"Stand up!" shouted Smith--"stand up and come here!"

The man, with his frightened eyes turning to right and left, and seeming to search for something in the shadows about him, advanced obediently.

"Have you a flask?" demanded Smith of Carter.

The detective silently administered to Burke a stiff restorative.

"Now," continued Smith, "you, Petrie, will want to examine him, I suppose?" He pointed to the body. "And in the meantime I have some questions to put to you, my man."

He clapped his hand upon Burke's shoulder.
"My God!" Burke broke out, "I was ten yards from him when it happened!"
"No one is accusing you," said Smith, less harshly; "but since you were the only witness, it is by your aid that we hope to clear the matter up."

Exerting a gigantic effort to regain control of himself, Burke nodded, watching my friend with a childlike eagerness. During the ensuing conversation, I examined Slattin for marks of violence; and of what I found, more anon.

"In the first place," said Smith, "you say that you warned him. When did you warn him and of what?"
"I warned him, sir, that it would come to this--"
"That what would come to this?"
"His dealings with the Chinaman!"
"He had dealings with Chinamen?"
"He accidentally met a Chinaman at an East End gaming-house, a man he had known in Frisco--a man called Singapore Charlie--"
"What! Singapore Charlie!"
"Yes, sir, the same man that had a dope-shop, two years ago, down Ratcliffe way--"
"There was a fire--"
"But Singapore Charlie escaped, sir."
"And he is one of the gang?"
"He is one of what we used to call in New York, the Seven Group."
Smith began to tug at the lobe of his left ear, reflectively, as I saw out of the corner of my eye.
"The Seven Group!" he mused. "That is significant. I always suspected that Dr. Fu-Manchu and the notorious Seven Group were one and the same. Go on, Burke."
"Well, sir," the man continued, more calmly, "the lieutenant--"
"The lieutenant!" began Smith; then: "Oh! of course; Slattin used to be a police lieutenant!"
"Well, sir, he--Mr. Slattin--had a sort of hold on this Singapore Charlie, and two years ago, when he first met him, he thought that with his aid he was going to pull off the biggest thing of his life--"
"Forestall me, in fact?"
"Yes, sir; but you got in first, with the big raid and spoiled it."
Smith nodded grimly, glancing at the Scotland Yard man, who returned his nod with equal grimness.
"A couple of months ago," resumed Burke, "he met Charlie again down East, and the Chinaman introduced him to a girl--some sort of an Egyptian girl."
"Go on!" snapped Smith--"I know her."
"He saw her a good many times--and she came here once or twice. She made out that she and Singapore Charlie were prepared to give away the boss of the Yellow gang--"
"For a price, of course?"
"I suppose so," said Burke; "but I don't know. I only know that I warned him."
"H'm!" muttered Smith. "And now, what took place to-night?"
"He had an appointment here with the girl," began Burke
"I know all that," interrupted Smith. "I merely want to know, what took place after the telephone call?"
"Well, he told me to wait up, and I was dozing in the next room to the study--the dining-room--when the 'phone bell aroused me. I heard the lieutenant--Mr. Slattin, coming out, and I ran out too, but only in time to see him taking his hat from the rack--"
"But he wears no hat!"
"He never got it off the peg! Just as he reached up to take it, he gave a most frightful scream, and turned around like lightning as though some one had attacked him from behind!"
"There was no one else in the hall?"
"No one at all. I was standing down there outside the dining-room just by the stairs, but he didn't turn in my direction, he turned and looked right behind him--where there was no one--nothing. His cries were frightful. Burke's voice broke, and he shuddered feverishly. "Then he made a rush for the front door. It seemed as though he had not seen me. He stood there screaming; but, before I could reach him, he fell. . . ."
Nayland Smith fixed a piercing gaze upon Burke.
"Is that all you know?" he demanded slowly.
"As God is my judge, sir, that's all I know, and all I saw. There was no living thing near him when he met his death."
"We shall see," muttered Smith. He turned to me--"What killed him?" he asked, shortly.
"Apparently, a minute wound on the left wrist," I replied, and, stooping, I raised the already cold hand in mine.
A tiny, inflamed wound showed on the wrist; and a certain puffiness was becoming observable in the injured hand and arm. Smith bent down and drew a quick, sibilant breath.

"You know what this is, Petrie?" he cried.

"Certainly. It was too late to employ a ligature and useless to inject ammonia. Death was practically instantaneous. His heart . . . ."

There came a loud knocking and ringing.

"Carter!" cried Smith, turning to the detective, "open that door to no one--no one. Explain who I am--"

"But if it is the inspector?--"

"I said, open the door to no one!" snapped Smith.

"Burke, stand exactly where you are! Carter, you can speak to whoever knocks, through the letter-box. Petrie, don't move for your life! It may be here, in the hallway!--"

CHAPTER IX

THE CLIMBER

Our search of the house of Abel Slattin ceased only with the coming of the dawn, and yielded nothing but disappointment. Failure followed upon failure; for, in the gray light of the morning, our own quest concluded, Inspector Weymouth returned to report that the girl, Karamaneh, had thrown him off the scent.

Again he stood before me, the big, burly friend of old and dreadful days, a little grayer above the temples, which I set down for a record of former horrors, but deliberate, stoical, thorough, as ever. His blue eyes melted in the old generous way as he saw me, and he gripped my hand in greeting.

"Once again," he said, "your dark-eyed friend has been too clever for me, Doctor. But the track as far as I could follow, leads to the old spot. In fact,"--he turned to Smith, who, grim-faced and haggard, looked thoroughly ill in that gray light--"I believe Fu-Manchu's lair is somewhere near the former opium-den of Shen-Yan--'Singapore Charlie.'"

Smith nodded.

"We will turn our attention in that direction," he replied, "at a very early date."

Inspector Weymouth looked down at the body of Abel Slattin.

"How was it done?" he asked softly.

"Clumsily for Fu-Manchu," I replied. "A snake was introduced into the house by some means--"

"By Karamaneh!" rapped Smith.

"Very possibly by Karamaneh," I continued firmly. "The thing has escaped us."

"My own idea," said Smith, "is that it was concealed about his clothing. When he fell by the open door it glided out of the house. We must have the garden searched thoroughly by daylight."

"He"--Weymouth glanced at that which lay upon the floor--"must be moved; but otherwise we can leave the place untouched, clear out the servants, and lock the house up."

"I have already given orders to that effect," answered Smith. He spoke wearily and with a note of conscious defeat in his voice. "Nothing has been disturbed;--he swept his arm around comprehensively--"papers and so forth you can examine at leisure."

Presently we quitted that house upon which the fateful Chinaman had set his seal, as the suburb was awakening to a new day. The clank of milk-cans was my final impression of the avenue to which a dreadful minister of death had come at the bidding of the death lord. We left Inspector Weymouth in charge and returned to my rooms, scarcely exchanging a word upon the way.

Nayland Smith, ignoring my entreaties, composed himself for slumber in the white cane chair in my study. About noon he retired to the bathroom, and returning, made a pretense of breakfast; then resumed his seat in the cane armchair. Carter reported in the afternoon, but his report was merely formal. Returning from my round of professional visits at half past five, I found Nayland Smith in the same position; and so the day waned into evening, and dusk fell uneventfully.

In the corner of the big room by the empty fireplace, Nayland Smith lay, with his long, lean frame extended in the white cane chair. A tumbler, from which two straws protruded, stood by his right elbow, and a perfect continent of tobacco smoke lay between us, wafted toward the door by the draught from an open window. He had littered the hearth with matches and tobacco ash, being the most untidy smoker I have ever met; and save for his frequent rapping-out of his pipe bowl and perpetual striking of matches, he had shown no sign of activity for the past hour. Collarless and wearing an old tweed jacket, he had spent the evening, as he had spent the day, in the cane chair, only quitting it for some ten minutes, or less, to toy with dinner.

My several attempts at conversation had elicited nothing but growls; therefore, as dusk descended, having dismissed my few patients, I busied myself collating my notes upon the renewed activity of the Yellow Doctor, and was thus engaged when the 'phone bell disturbed me. It was Smith who was wanted, however; and he went out
eagerly, leaving me to my task.

At the end of a lengthy conversation, he returned from the 'phone and began, restlessly, to pace the room. I made a pretense of continuing my labors, but covertly I was watching him. He was twitching at the lobe of his left ear, and his face was a study in perplexity. Abruptly he burst out:

"I shall throw the thing up, Petrie! Either I am growing too old to cope with such an adversary as Fu-Manchu, or else my intellect has become dull. I cannot seem to think clearly or consistently. For the Doctor, this crime, this removal of Slattin, is clumsy--unfinished. There are two explanations. Either he, too, is losing his old cunning or he has been interrupted!"

"Interrupted!"

"Take the facts, Petrie,"--Smith clapped his hands upon my table and bent down, peering into my eyes--"is it characteristic of Fu-Manchu to kill a man by the direct agency of a snake and to implicate one of his own damnable servants in this way?"

"But we have found no snake!"

"Karamaneh introduced one in some way. Do you doubt it?"

"Certainly Karamaneh visited him on the evening of his death, but you must be perfectly well aware that even if she had been arrested, no jury could convict her."

Smith resumed his restless pacings up and down.

"You are very useful to me, Petrie," he replied; "as a counsel for the defense you constantly rectify my errors of prejudice. Yet I am convinced that our presence at Slattin's house last night prevented Fu-Manchu from finishing off this little matter as he had designed to do."

"What has given you this idea?"

"Weymouth is responsible. He has rung me up from the Yard. The constable on duty at the house where the murder was committed, reports that some one, less than an hour ago, attempted to break in."

"Break in!"

"Ah! you are interested? I thought the circumstance illuminating, also!"

"Did the officer see this person?"

"No; he only heard him. It was some one who endeavored to enter by the bathroom window, which, I am told, may be reached fairly easily by an agile climber."

"The attempt did not succeed?"

"No; the constable interrupted, but failed to make a capture or even to secure a glimpse of the man."

We were both silent for some moments; then:

"What do you propose to do?" I asked.

"We must not let Fu-Manchu's servants know," replied Smith, "but to-night I shall conceal myself in Slattin's house and remain there for a week or a day--it matters not how long--until that attempt is repeated. Quite obviously, Petrie, we have overlooked something which implicates the murderer with the murder! In short, either by accident, by reason of our superior vigilance, or by the clumsiness of his plans, Fu-Manchu for once in an otherwise blameless career, has left a clue!"

CHAPTER X
THE CLIMBER RETURNS

In utter darkness we groped our way through into the hallway of Slattin's house, having entered, stealthily, from the rear; for Smith had selected the study as a suitable base of operations. We reached it without mishap, and presently I found myself seated in the very chair which Karamaneh had occupied; my companion took up a post just within the widely opened door.

So we commenced our ghostly business in the house of the murdered man --a house from which, but a few hours since, his body had been removed. This was such a vigil as I had endured once before, when, with Nayland Smith and another, I had waited for the coming of one of Fu-Manchu's death agents.

Of all the sounds which, one by one, now began to detach themselves from the silence, there was a particular sound, homely enough at another time, which spoke to me more dreadfully than the rest. It was the ticking of the clock upon the mantelpiece; and I thought how this sound must have been familiar to Abel Slattin, how it must have formed part and parcel of his life, as it were, and how it went on now--tick- tick-tick-tick--whilst he, for whom it had ticked, lay unheeding-- would never heed it more.

As I grew more accustomed to the gloom, I found myself staring at his office chair; once I found myself expecting Abel Slattin to enter the room and occupy it. There was a little China Buddha upon the bureau in one corner, with a gilded cap upon its head, and as some reflection of the moonlight sought out this little cap, my thoughts grotesquely turned upon the murdered man's gold tooth.

Vague creakings from within the house, sounds as though of stealthy footsteps upon the stair, set my nerves
tingling; but Nayland Smith gave no sign, and I knew that my imagination was magnifying these ordinary night sounds out of all proportion to their actual significance. Leaves rustled faintly outside the window at my back: I construed their sibilant whispers into the dreaded name--Fu-Manchu--Fu-Manchu--Fu-Manchu!

So wore on the night; and, when the ticking clock hollowly boomed the hour of one, I almost leaped out of my chair, so highly strung were my nerves, and so appallingly did the sudden clanger beat upon them. Smith, like a man of stone, showed no sign. He was capable of so subduing his constitutionally high-strung temperament, at times, that temporarily he became immune from human dreads. On such occasions he would be icily cool amid universal panic; but, his object accomplished, I have seen him in such a state of collapse, that utter nervous exhaustion is the only term by which I can describe it.

Tick-tick-tick-tick went the clock, and, with my heart still thumping noisily in my breast, I began to count the tickings; one, two, three, four, five, and so on to a hundred, and from one hundred to many hundreds.

Then, out from the confusion of minor noises, a new, arresting sound detached itself. I ceased my counting; no longer I noted the tick-tick of the clock, nor the vague creakings, rustlings and whispers. I saw Smith, shadowly, raise his hand in warning--in needless warning, for I was almost holding my breath in an effort of acute listening.

From high up in the house this new sound came from above the topmost room, it seemed, up under the roof; a regular squeaking, oddly familiar, yet elusive. Upon it followed a very soft and muffled thud; then a metallic sound as of a rusty hinge in motion; then a new silence, pregnant with a thousand possibilities more eerie than any clamor.

My mind was rapidly at work. Lighting the topmost landing of the house was a sort of glazed trap, evidently set in the floor of a loft-like place extending over the entire building. Somewhere in the red-tiled roof above, there presumably existed a corresponding skylight or lantern.

So I argued; and, ere I had come to any proper decision, another sound, more intimate, came to interrupt me. This time I could be in no doubt; some one was lifting the trap above the stairhead--slowly, cautiously, and all but silently. Yet to my ears, attuned to trifling disturbances, the trap creaked and groaned noisily.

Nayland Smith waved to me to take a stand on the other side of the opened door--behind it, in fact, where I should be concealed from the view of any one descending the stair.

I stood up and crossed the floor to my new post.

A dull thud told of the trap fully raised and resting upon some supporting joist. A faint rustling (of discarded garments, I told myself) spoke to my newly awakened, acute perceptions, of the visitor preparing to lower himself to the landing. Followed a groan of woodwork submitted to sudden strain--and the unmistakable pad of bare feet upon the linoleum of the top corridor.

I knew now that one of Dr. Fu-Manchu's uncanny servants had gained the roof of the house by some means, had broken through the skylight and had descended by means of the trap beneath on to the landing.

In such a tensed-up state as I cannot describe, nor, at this hour mentally reconstruct, I waited for the creaking of the stairs which should tell of the creature's descent.

I was disappointed. Removed scarce a yard from me as he was, I could hear Nayland Smith's soft, staccato breathing; but my eyes were all for the darkened hallway, for the smudgy outline of the stair-rail with the faint patterning in the background which, alone, indicated the wall.

It was amid an utter silence, unheralded by even so slight a sound as those which I had acquired the power of detecting--that I saw the continuity of the smudgy line of stair-rail to be interrupted.

A dark patch showed upon it, just within my line of sight, invisible to Smith on the other side of the doorway--behind it, in fact, where I should be concealed from the view of any one descending the stair.

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It was amid an utter silence, unheralded by even so slight a sound as those which I had acquired the power of detecting--that I saw the continuity of the smudgy line of stair-rail to be interrupted.

A dark patch showed upon it, just within my line of sight, invisible to Smith on the other side of the doorway, and some ten or twelve stairs up.

No sound reached me, but the dark patch vanished and reappeared three feet lower down.

Still I knew that this phantom approach must be unknown to my companion--and I knew that it was impossible for me to advise him of it unseen by the dreaded visitor.

A third time the dark patch--the hand of one who, ghostly, silent, was creeping down into the hallway--vanished and reappeared on a level with my eyes. Then a vague shape became visible; no more than a blur upon the dim design of the wall-paper . . . and Nayland Smith got his first sight of the stranger.

The clock on the mantelpiece boomed out the half-hour.

At that, such was my state (I blush to relate it) I uttered a faint cry!

It ended all secrecy--that hysterical weakness of mine. It might have frustrated our hopes; that it did not do so was in no measure due to me. But in a sort of passionate whirl, the ensuing events moved swiftly.

Smith hesitated not one instant. With a panther-like leap he hurled himself into the hall.

"The lights, Petrie!" he cried--"the lights! The switch is near the street-door!"

I clenched my fists in a swift effort to regain control of my treacherous nerves, and, bounding past Smith, and past the foot of the stair, I reached out my hand to the switch, the situation of which, fortunately, I knew.

Around I came, in response to a shrill cry from behind me--an inhuman cry, less a cry than the shriek of some
enraged animal.

With his left foot upon the first stair, Nayland Smith stood, his lean body bent perilously backward, his arms rigidly thrust out, and his sinewy fingers gripping the throat of an almost naked man—a man whose brown body glistened unctuously, whose shaven head was apish low, whose bloodshot eyes were the eyes of a mad dog! His teeth, upper and lower, were bared; they glistened, they gnashed, and a froth was on his lips. With both his hands, he clutched a heavy stick, and once—twice, he brought it down upon Nayland Smith's head!

I leaped forward to my friend's aid; but as though the blows had been those of a feather, he stood like some figure of archaic statuary, nor for an instant relaxed the death grip which he had upon his adversary's throat.

Thrusting my way up the stairs, I wrenched the stick from the hand of the dacoit—for in this glistening brown man, I recognized one of that deadly brotherhood who hailed Dr. Fu-Manchu their Lord and Master.

* * * * *

I cannot dwell upon the end of that encounter; I cannot hope to make acceptable to my readers an account of how Nayland Smith, glassy-eyed, and with consciousness ebbing from him instant by instant, stood there, a realization of Leighton's "Athlete," his arms rigid as iron bars even after Fu-Manchu's servant hung limply in that frightful grip.

In his last moments of consciousness, with the blood from his wounded head trickling down into his eyes, he pointed to the stick which I had torn from the grip of the dacoit, and which I still held in my hand.

"Not Aaron's rod, Petrie!" he gasped hoarsely—"the rod of Moses!--Slattin's stick!"
Even in upon my anxiety for my friend, amazement intruded.
"But," I began—and turned to the rack in which Slattin's favorite cane at that moment reposed—had reposed at the time of his death.

Yes!—there stood Slattin's cane; we had not moved it; we had disturbed nothing in that stricken house; there it stood, in company with an umbrella and a malacca.

I glanced at the cane in my hand. Surely there could not be two such in the world?

Smith collapsed on the floor at my feet.

"Examine the one in the rack, Petrie," he whispered, almost inaudibly, "but do not touch it. It may not be yet. . . ."

I propped him up against the foot of the stairs, and as the constable began knocking violently at the street door, crossed to the rack and lifted out the replica of the cane which I held in my hand.

A faint cry from Smith—and as if it had been a leprous thing, I dropped the cane instantly.

"Merciful God!" I groaned.

Although, in every other particular, it corresponded with that which I held—which I had taken from the dacoit—which he had come to substitute for the cane now lying upon the floor—in one dreadful particular it differed.

Up to the snake's head it was an accurate copy; but the head lived!

Either from pain, fear or starvation, the thing confined in the hollow tube of this awful duplicate was become torpid. Otherwise, no power on earth could have saved me from the fate of Abel Slattin; for the creature was an Australian death-adder.

CHAPTER XI

THE WHITE PEACOCK

Nayland Smith wasted no time in pursuing the plan of campaign which he had mentioned to Inspector Weymouth. Less than forty-eight hours after quitting the house of the murdered Slattin, I found myself bound along Whitechapel Road upon strange enough business.

A very fine rain was falling, which rendered it difficult to see clearly from the windows; but the weather apparently had little effect upon the commercial activities of the district. The cab was threading a hazardous way through the cosmopolitan throng crowding the street. On either side of me extended a row of stalls, seemingly established in opposition to the more legitimate shops upon the inner side of the pavement.

Jewish hawkers, many of them in their shirt-sleeves, acclaimed the rarity of the bargains which they had to offer; and, allowing for the difference of costume, these tireless Israelites, heedless of climatic conditions, sweating at their mongery, might well have stood, not in a squalid London thoroughfare, but in an equally squalid market-street of the Orient.

They offered linen and fine raiment; from footgear to hair-oil their wares ranged. They enlivened their auctioneering with conjuring tricks and witty stories, selling watches by the aid of legerdemain, and fancy vests by grace of a seasonable anecdote.

Poles, Russians, Serbs, Roumanians, Jews of Hungary, and Italians of Whitechapel mingled in the throng. Near East and Far East rubbed shoulders. Pidgin English contested with Yiddish for the ownership of some tawdry article offered by an auctioneer whose nationality defied conjecture, save that always some branch of his ancestry had
drawn nourishment from the soil of Eternal Judea.

Some wearing mens' caps, some with shawls thrown over their oily locks, and some, more true to primitive
instincts, defying, bare- headed, the unkindly elements, bedraggled women--more often than not burdened with
muffled infants--crowded the pavements and the roadway, thronged about the stalls like white ants about some
choice carrión.

And the fine drizzling rain fell upon all alike, pattering upon the hood of the taxi-cab, trickling down the front
windows; glistening upon the unctuous hair of those in the street who were hatless; dewing the bare arms of the
auctioneers, and dripping, melancholy, from the tarpaulin coverings of the stalls. Needless of the rain above and of
the mud beneath, North, South, East, and West mingled their cries, their bids, their blandishments, their raillery,
ingled their persons in that joyless throng.

Sometimes a yellow face showed close to one of the streaming windows; sometimes a black-eyed, pallid face,
but never a face wholly sane and healthy. This was an underworld where squalor and vice went hand in hand
through the beautyless streets, a melting-pot of the world's outcasts; this was the shadowland, which last night had
swallowed up Nayland Smith.

Ceaselessly I peered to right and left, searching amid that rain- soaked company for any face known to me. Whom I expected to find there, I know not, but I should have counted it no matter for surprise had I detected amid
that ungracious ugliness the beautiful face of Karamaneh the Eastern slave-girl, the leering yellow face of a Burmese
dacoit, the gaunt, bronzed features of Nayland Smith; a hundred times I almost believed that I had seen the ruddy
countenance of Inspector Weymouth, and once (at which instant my heart seemed to stand still) I suffered from the
singular delusion that the oblique green eyes of Dr. Fu-Manchu peered out from the shadows between two stalls.

It was mere phantasy, of course, the sick imaginings of a mind overwrought. I had not slept and had scarcely
acted food for more than thirty hours; for, following up a faint clue supplied by Burke, Slattin's man, and, like his
master, an ex-officer of New York Police, my friend, Nayland Smith, on the previous evening had set out in quest of
some obscure den where the man called Shen-Yan--former keeper of an opium-shop--was now said to be in hiding.

Shen-Yan we knew to be a creature of the Chinese doctor, and only a most urgent call had prevented me from
joining Smith upon this promising, though hazardous expedition.

At any rate, Fate willing it so, he had gone without me; and now--although Inspector Weymouth, assisted by a
number of C. I. D. men, was sweeping the district about me--to the time of my departure nothing whatever had been
heard of Smith. The ordeal of waiting finally had proved too great to be borne. With no definite idea of what I
proposed to do, I had thrown myself into the search, filled with such dreadful apprehensions as I hope never again to
experience.

I did not know the exact situation of the place to which Smith was gone, for owing to the urgent case which I
have mentioned, I had been absent at the time of his departure; nor could Scotland Yard enlighten me upon this
point. Weymouth was in charge of the case--under Smith's direction--and since the inspector had left the Yard, early
that morning, he had disappeared as completely as Smith, no report having been received from him.

As my driver turned into the black mouth of a narrow, ill-lighted street, and the glare and clamor of the greater
thoroughfare died behind me, I sank into the corner of the cab burdened with such a sense of desolation as
mercifully comes but rarely.

We were heading now for that strange settlement off the West India Dock Road, which, bounded by Limehouse
Causeway and Pennyfields, and narrowly confined within four streets, composes an unique Chinatown, a miniature
of that at Liverpool, and of the greater one in San Francisco. Inspired with an idea which promised hopefully, I
raised the speaking tube.

"Take me first to the River Police Station," I directed; "along Ratcliffe Highway."

The man turned and nodded comprehendingly, as I could see through the wet pane.

Presently we swerved to the right and into an even narrower street. This inclined in an easterly direction, and
proved to communicate with a wide thoroughfare along which passed brilliantly lighted electric trams. I had lost all
sense of direction, and when, swinging to the left and to the right again, I looked through the window and perceived
that we were before the door of the Police Station, I was dully surprised.

In quite mechanical fashion I entered the depot. Inspector Ryman, our associate in one of the darkest episodes of
the campaign with the Yellow Doctor two years before, received me in his office.

By a negative shake of the head, he answered my unspoken question.

"The ten o'clock boat is lying off the Stone Stairs, Doctor," he said, "and co-operating with some of the Scotland
Yard men who are dragging that district--"

I shuddered at the word "dragging"; Ryman had not used it literally, but nevertheless it had conjured up a dread
possibility--a possibility in accordance with the methods of Dr. Fu-Manchu. All within space of an instant I saw the
tide of Limehouse Reach, the Thames lapping about the green-coated timbers of a dock pier; and rising--falling--
sometimes disclosing to the pallid light a rigid hand, sometimes a horribly bloated face—I saw the body of Nayland Smith at the mercy of those oily waters. Ryman continued:

"There is a launch out, too, patrolling the riverside from here to Tilbury. Another lies at the breakwater"—he jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Should you care to take a run down and see for yourself?"

"No, thanks," I replied, shaking my head. "You are doing all that can be done. Can you give me the address of the place to which Mr. Smith went last night?"

"Certainly," said Ryman; "I thought you knew it. You remember Shen-Yan's place—by Limehouse Basin? Well, further east—east of the Causeway, between Gill Street and Three Colt Street—is a block of wooden buildings. You recall them?"

"Yes," I replied. "Is the man established there again, then?"

"It appears so, but, although you have evidently not been informed of the fact, Weymouth raided the establishment in the early hours of this morning!"

"Well?" I cried.

"Unfortunately with no result," continued the inspector. "The notorious Shen-Yan was missing, and although there is no real doubt that the place is used as a gaming-house, not a particle of evidence to that effect could be obtained. Also—there was no sign of Mr. Nayland Smith, and no sign of the American, Burke, who had led him to the place."

"Is it certain that they went there?"

"Two C. I. D. men who were shadowing, actually saw the pair of them enter. A signal had been arranged, but it was never given; and at about half past four, the place was raided."

"Surely some arrests were made?"

"But there was no evidence!" cried Ryman. "Every inch of the rat-burrow was searched. The Chinese gentleman who posed as the proprietor of what he claimed to be a respectable lodging-house offered every facility to the police. What could we do?"

"I take it that the place is being watched?"

"Certainly," said Ryman. "Both from the river and from the shore. Oh! they are not there! God knows where they are, but they are not there!"

I stood for a moment in silence, endeavoring to determine my course; then, telling Ryman that I hoped to see him later, I walked out slowly into the rain and mist, and nodding to the taxi-driver to proceed to our original destination, I re-entered the cab.

As we moved off, the lights of the River Police depot were swallowed up in the humid murk, and again I found myself being carried through the darkness of those narrow streets, which, like a maze, hold secret within their labyrinth mysteries as great, and at least as foul, as that of Pasiphae.

The marketing centers I had left far behind me; to my right stretched the broken range of riverside buildings, and beyond them flowed the Thames, a stream more heavily burdened with secrets than ever was Tiber or Tigris. On my left, occasional flickering lights broke through the mist, for the most part the lights of taverns; and saving these rents in the veil, the darkness was punctuated with nothing but the faint and yellow luminance of the street lamps.

Ahead was a black mouth, which promised to swallow me up as it had swallowed up my friend.

In short, what with my lowered condition and consequent frame of mind, and what with the traditions, for me inseparable from that gloomy quarter of London, I was in the grip of a shadowy menace which at any moment might become tangible—I perceived, in the most commonplace objects, the yellow hand of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

When the cab stopped in a place of utter darkness, I aroused myself with an effort, opened the door, and stepped out into the mud of a narrow lane. A high brick wall frowned upon me from one side, and, dimly perceptible, there towered a smoke stack, beyond. On my right uprose the side of a wharf building, shadowly, and some distance ahead, almost obscured by the drizzling rain, a solitary lamp flickered. I turned up the collar of my raincoat, shivering, as much at the prospect as from physical chill.

"You will wait here," I said to the man; and, feeling in my breast-pocket, I added: "If you hear the note of a whistle, drive on and rejoin me."

He listened attentively and with a certain eagerness. I had selected him that night for the reason that he had driven Smith and myself on previous occasions and had proved himself a man of intelligence. Transferring a Browning pistol from my hip-pocket to that of my raincoat, I trudged on into the mist.

The headlights of the taxi were swallowed up behind me, and just abreast of the street lamp I stood listening.

Save for the dismal sound of rain, and the trickling of water along the gutters, all about me was silent. Sometimes this silence would be broken by the distant, muffled note of a steam siren; and always, forming a sort of background to the near stillness, was the remote din of riverside activity.

I walked on to the corner just beyond the lamp. This was the street in which the wooden buildings were situated.
I had expected to detect some evidences of surveillances, but if any were indeed being observed, the fact was effectively masked. Not a living creature was visible, peer as I could.

Plans, I had none, and perceiving that the street was empty, and that no lights showed in any of the windows, I passed on, only to find that I had entered a cul-de-sac.

A rickety gate gave access to a descending flight of stone steps, the bottom invisible in the denser shadows of an archway, beyond which, I doubted not, lay the river.

Still uninspired by any definite design, I tried the gate and found that it was unlocked. Like some wandering soul, as it has since seemed to me, I descended. There was a lamp over the archway, but the glass was broken, and the rain apparently had extinguished the light; as I passed under it, I could hear the gas whistling from the burner.

Continuing my way, I found myself upon a narrow wharf with the Thames flowing gloomily beneath me. A sort of fog hung over the river, shutting me in. Then came an incident.

Suddenly, quite near, there arose a weird and mournful cry--a cry indescribable, and inexpressibly uncanny!

I started back so violently that how I escaped falling into the river I do not know to this day. That cry, so eerie and so wholly unexpected, had unnerved me; and realizing the nature of my surroundings, and the folly of my presence alone in such a place, I began to edge back toward the foot of the steps, away from the thing that cried; when--a great white shape uprose like a phantom before me! . . .

There are few men, I suppose, whose lives have been crowded with so many eerie happenings as mine, but this phantom thing which grew out of the darkness, which seemed about to envelope me, takes rank in my memory amongst the most fearsome apparitions which I have witnessed.

I knew that I was frozen with a sort of supernatural terror. I stood there with hands clenched, staring--staring at that white shape, which seemed to float.

As I stared, every nerve in my body thrilling, I distinguished the outline of the phantom. With a subdued cry, I stepped forward. A new sensation claimed me. In that one stride I passed from the horrible to the bizarre.

I found myself confronted with something tangible, certainly, but something whose presence in that place was utterly extravagant--could only be reconciliable in the dreams of an opium slave.

Was I awake, was I sane? Awake and sane beyond doubt, but surely moving, not in the purlieus of Limehouse, but in the fantastic realms of fairyland.

Swooping, with open arms, I rounded up in an angle against the building and gathered in this screaming thing which had inspired in me so keen a terror.

The great, ghostly fan was closed as I did so, and I stumbled back toward the stair with my struggling captive tucked under my arm; I mounted into one of London's darkest slums, carrying a beautiful white peacock!

CHAPTER XII

DARK EYES LOOKED INTO MINE

My adventure had done nothing to relieve the feeling of unreality which held me enthralled. Grasping the struggling bird firmly by the body, and having the long white tail fluttering a yard or so behind me, I returned to where the taxi waited.

"Open the door!" I said to the man--who greeted me with such a stare of amazement that I laughed outright, though my mirth was but hollow.

He jumped into the road and did as I directed. Making sure that both windows were closed, I thrust the peacock into the cab and shut the door upon it.

"For God's sake, sir!" began the driver--

"It has probably escaped from some collector's place on the riverside," I explained, "but one never knows. See that it does not escape again, and if at the end of an hour, as arranged, you do not hear from me, take it back with you to the River Police Station."

"Right you are, sir," said the man, remounting his seat. "It's the first time I ever saw a peacock in Limehouse!"

It was the first time I had seen one, and the incident struck me as being more than odd; it gave me an idea, and a new, faint hope. I returned to the head of the steps, at the foot of which I had met with this singular experience, and gazed up at the dark building beneath which they led. Three windows were visible, but they were broken and neglected. One, immediately above the arch, had been pasted up with brown paper, and this was now peeling off in the rain, a little stream of which trickled down from the detached corner to drop, drearily, upon the stone stairs beneath.

Where were the detectives? I could only assume that they had directed their attention elsewhere, for had the place not been utterly deserted, surely I had been challenged.

In pursuit of my new idea, I again descended the steps. The persuasion (shortly to be verified) that I was close upon the secret hold of the Chinaman, grew stronger, unaccountably. I had descended some eight steps, and was at the darkest part of the archway or tunnel, when confirmation of my theories came to me.
A noose settled accurately upon my shoulders, was snatched tightly about my throat, and with a feeling of insupportable agony at the base of my skull, and a sudden supreme knowledge that I was being strangled--hanged--I lost consciousness!

How long I remained unconscious, I was unable to determine at the time, but I learned later, that it was for no more than half an hour; at any rate, recovery was slow.

The first sensation to return to me was a sort of repetition of the asphyxia. The blood seemed to be forcing itself into my eyes--I choked --I felt that my end was come. And, raising my hands to my throat, I found it to be swollen and inflamed. Then the floor upon which I lay seemed to be rocking like the deck of a ship, and I glided back again into a place of darkness and forgetfulness.

My second awakening was heralded by a returning sense of smell; for I became conscious of a faint, exquisite perfume.

It brought me to my senses as nothing else could have done, and I sat upright with a hoarse cry. I could have distinguished that perfume amid a thousand others, could have marked it apart from the rest in a scent bazaar. For me it had one meaning, and one meaning only-- Karamaneh.

She was near to me, or had been near to me!

And in the first moments of my awakening, I groped about in the darkness blindly seeking her.

Then my swollen throat and throbbing head, together with my utter inability to move my neck even slightly, reminded me of the facts as they were. I knew in that bitter moment that Karamaneh was no longer my friend; but, for all her beauty and charm, was the most heartless, the most fiendish creature in the service of Dr. Fu-Manchu. I groaned aloud in my despair and misery.

Something stirred, near to me in the room, and set my nerves creeping with a new apprehension. I became fully alive to the possibilities of the darkness.

To my certain knowledge, Dr. Fu-Manchu at this time had been in England for fully three months, which meant that by now he must be equipped with all the instruments of destruction, animate and inanimate, which dread experience had taught me to associate with him.

Now, as I crouched there in that dark apartment listening for a repetition of the sound, I scarcely dared to conjecture what might have occasioned it, but my imagination peopled the place with reptiles which writhed upon the floor, with tarantulas and other deadly insects which crept upon the walls, which might drop upon me from the ceiling at any moment.

Then, since nothing stirred about me, I ventured to move, turning my shoulders, for I was unable to move my aching head; and I looked in the direction from which a faint, very faint, light proceeded.

A regular tapping sound now began to attract my attention, and, having turned about, I perceived that behind me was a broken window, in places patched with brown paper; the corner of one sheet of paper was detached, and the rain trickled down upon it with a rhythmical sound.

In a flash I realized that I lay in the room immediately above the archway; and listening intently, I perceived above the other faint sounds of the night, or thought that I perceived, the hissing of the gas from the extinguished lamp-burner.

Unsteadily I rose to my feet, but found myself swaying like a drunken man. I reached out for support, stumbling in the direction of the wall. My foot came in contact with something that lay there, and I pitched forward and fell . . .

I anticipated a crash which would put an end to my hopes of escape, but my fall was comparatively noiseless--for I fell upon the body of a man who lay bound up with rope close against the wall!

A moment I stayed as I fell, the chest of my fellow captive rising and falling beneath me as he breathed. Knowing that my life depended upon retaining a firm hold upon myself, I succeeded in overcoming the dizziness and nausea which threatened to drown my senses, and, moving back so that I knelt upon the floor, I fumbled in my pocket for the electric lamp which I had placed there. My raincoat had been removed whilst I was unconscious, and with it my pistol, but the lamp was untouched.

I took it out, pressed the button, and directed the ray upon the face of the man beside me.

It was Nayland Smith!

Trussed up and fastened to a ring in the wall he lay, having a cork gag strapped so tightly between his teeth that I wondered how he had escaped suffocation.

But, although a grayish pallor showed through the tan of his skin, his eyes were feverishly bright, and there, as I knelt beside him, I thanked heaven, silently but fervently.

Then, in furious haste, I set to work to remove the gag. It was most ingeniously secured by means of leather straps buckled at the back of his head, but I unfastened these without much difficulty, and he spat out the gag, uttering an exclamation of disgust.
"Thank God, old man!" he said, huskily. "Thank God that you are alive! I saw them drag you in, and I thought . . ."

"I have been thinking the same about you for more than twenty-four hours," I said, reproachfully. "Why did you start without--"

"I did not want you to come, Petrie," he replied. "I had a sort of premonition. You see it was realized; and instead of being as helpless as I, Fate has made you the instrument of my release. Quick! You have a knife? Good!"

The old, feverish energy was by no means extinguished in him. "Cut the ropes about my wrists and ankles, but don't otherwise disturb them--"

I set to work eagerly.

"Now," Smith continued, "put that filthy gag in place again--but you need not strap it so tightly! Directly they find that you are alive, they will treat you the same--you understand? She has been here three times--"

"Karamaneh?" . . .

"Ssh!"

I heard a sound like the opening of a distant door.

"Quick! the straps of the gag!" whispered Smith, "and pretend to recover consciousness just as they enter--"

Clumsily I followed his directions, for my fingers were none too steady, replaced the lamp in my pocket, and threw myself upon the floor.

Through half-shut eyes, I saw the door open and obtained a glimpse of a desolate, empty passage beyond. On the threshold stood Karamaneh. She held in her hand a common tin oil lamp which smoked and flickered with every movement, filling the already none too cleanly air with an odor of burning paraffin. She personified the outre; nothing so incongruous as her presence in that place could well be imagined. She was dressed as I remembered once to have seen her two years before, in the gauzy silks of the harem. There were pearls glittering like great tears amid the cloud of her wonderful hair. She wore broad gold bangles upon her bare arms, and her fingers were laden with jewelry. A heavy girdle swung from her hips, defining the lines of her slim shape, and about one white ankle was a gold band.

As she appeared in the doorway I almost entirely closed my eyes, but my gaze rested fascinatedly upon the little red slippers which she wore.

Again I detected the exquisite, elusive perfume, which, like a breath of musk, spoke of the Orient; and, as always, it played havoc with my reason, seeming to intoxicate me as though it were the very essence of her loveliness.

But I had a part to play, and throwing out one clenched hand so that my fist struck upon the floor, I uttered a loud groan, and made as if to rise upon my knees.

One quick glimpse I had of her wonderful eyes, widely opened and turned upon me with such an enigmatical expression as set my heart leaping wildly--then, stepping back, Karamaneh placed the lamp upon the boards of the passage and clapped her hands.

As I sank upon the floor in assumed exhaustion, a Chinaman with a perfectly impassive face, and a Burman, whose pock-marked, evil countenance was set in an apparently habitual leer, came running into the room past the girl.

With a hand which trembled violently, she held the lamp whilst the two yellow ruffians tied me. I groaned and struggled feebly, fixing my gaze upon the lamp-bearer in a silent reproach which was by no means without its effect.

She lowered her eyes, and I could see her biting her lip, whilst the color gradually faded from her cheeks. Then, glancing up again quickly, and still meeting that reproachful stare, she turned her head aside altogether, and rested one hand upon the wall, swaying slightly as she did so.

It was a singular ordeal for more than one of that incongruous group; but in order that I may not be charged with hypocrisy or with seeking to hide my own folly, I confess, here, that when again I found myself in darkness, my heart was leaping not because of the success of my strategy, but because of the success of that reproachful glance which I had directed toward the lovely, dark-eyed Karamaneh, toward the faithless, evil Karamaneh! So much for myself.

The door had not been closed ten seconds, ere Smith again was spitting out the gag, swearing under his breath, and stretching his cramped limbs free from their binding. Within a minute from the time of my trussing, I was a free man again; save that look where I would--to right, to left, or inward, to my own conscience--two dark eyes met mine, enigmatically.

"What now?" I whispered.

"Let me think," replied Smith. "A false move would destroy us."

"How long have you been here?"

"Since last night."
"Is Fu-Manchu--"
"Fu-Manchu is here!" replied Smith, grimly--"and not only Fu-Manchu, but--another."
"Another!"
"A higher than Fu-Manchu, apparently. I have an idea of the identity of this person, but no more than an idea. Something unusual is going on, Petrie; otherwise I should have been a dead man twenty-four hours ago. Something even more important than my death engages Fu-Manchu's attention--and this can only be the presence of the mysterious visitor. Your seductive friend, Karamaneh, is arrayed in her very becoming national costume in honor, I presume." He stopped abruptly; then added: "I would give five hundred pounds for a glimpse of that visitor's face!"

"Is Burke--"

"God knows what has become of Burke, Petrie! We were both caught napping in the establishment of the amiable Shen-Yan, where, amid a very mixed company of poker players, we were losing our money like gentlemen."

"But Weymouth--"

"Burke and I had both been neatly sand-bagged, my dear Petrie, and removed elsewhere, some hours before Weymouth raided the gaming-house. Oh! I don't know how they smuggled us away with the police watching the place; but my presence here is sufficient evidence of the fact. Are you armed?"
"No; my pistol was in my raincoat, which is missing."
In the dim light from the broken window, I could see Smith tugging reflectively at the lobe of his left ear.  
"I am without arms, too," he mused. "We might escape from the window--"
"It's a long drop!"
"Ah! I imagined so. If only I had a pistol, or a revolver--"
"What should you do?"
"I should present myself before the important meeting, which, I am assured, is being held somewhere in this building; and to-night would see the end of my struggle with the Fu-Manchu group--the end of the whole Yellow menace! For not only is Fu-Manchu here, Petrie, with all his gang of assassins, but he whom I believe to be the real head of the group--a certain mandarin--is here also!"

CHAPTER XIII
THE SACRED ORDER

Smith stepped quietly across the room and tried the door. It proved to be unlocked, and an instant later, we were both outside in the passage. Coincident with our arrival there, arose a sudden outcry from some place at the westward end. A high-pitched, grating voice, in which guttural notes alternated with a serpent-like hissing, was raised in anger.

"Dr. Fu-Manchu!" whispered Smith, grasping my arm.

Indeed, it was the unmistakable voice of the Chinaman, raised hysterically in one of those outbursts which in the past I had diagnosed as symptomatic of dangerous mania.

The voice rose to a scream, the scream of some angry animal rather than anything human. Then, chokingly, it ceased. Another short sharp cry followed--but not in the voice of Fu-Manchu--a dull groan, and the sound of a fall.

With Smith still grasping my wrist, I shrank back into the doorway, as something that looked in the darkness like a great ball of fluff came rapidly along the passage toward me. Just at my feet the thing stopped and I made it out for a small animal. The tiny, gleaming eyes looked up at me, and, chattering wickedly, the creature bounded past and was lost from view.

It was Dr. Fu-Manchu's marmoset.

Smith dragged me back into the room which we had just left. As he partly reclosed the door, I heard the clapping of hands. In a condition of most dreadful suspense, we waited; until a new, ominous sound proclaimed itself. Some heavy body was being dragged into the passage. I heard the opening of a trap. Exclamations in guttural voices told of a heavy task in progress; there was a great straining and creaking--whereupon the trap was softly reclosed.

Smith bent to my ear.
"Fu-Manchu has chastised one of his servants," he whispered. "There will be food for the grappling-irons to-night!"

I shuddered violently, for, without Smith's words, I knew that a bloody deed had been done in that house within a few yards of where we stood.

In the new silence, I could hear the drip, drip, drip of the rain outside the window; then a steam siren hooted dismally upon the river, and I thought how the screw of that very vessel, even as we listened, might be tearing the body of Fu-Manchu's servant!

"Have you some one waiting?" whispered Smith, eagerly.
"How long was I insensible?"
"About half an hour."
"Then the cabman will be waiting."
"Have you a whistle with you?"
I felt in my coat pocket.
"Yes," I reported.
"Good! Then we will take a chance."

Again we slipped out into the passage and began a stealthy progress to the west. Ten paces amid absolute darkness, and we found ourselves abreast of a branch corridor. At the further end, through a kind of little window, a dim light shone.

"See if you can find the trap," whispered Smith; "light your lamp."

I directed the ray of the pocket-lamp upon the floor, and there at my feet was a square wooden trap. As I stooped to examine it, I glanced back, painfully, over my shoulder--and saw Nayland Smith tiptoeing away from me along the passage toward the light!

Inwardly I cursed his folly, but the temptation to peep in at that little window proved too strong for me, as it had proved too strong for him.

Fearful that some board would creak beneath my tread, I followed; and side by side we two crouched, looking into a small rectangular room. It was a bare and cheerless apartment with unpapered walls and carpetless floor. A table and a chair constituted the sole furniture.

Seated in the chair, with his back toward us, was a portly Chinaman who wore a yellow, silken robe. His face, it was impossible to see; but he was beating his fist upon the table, and pouring out a torrent of words in a thin, piping voice. So much I perceived at a glance; then, into view at the distant end of the room, paced a tall, high-shouldered figure--a figure unforgettable, at once imposing and dreadful, stately and sinister.

With the long, bony hands behind him, fingers twining and intertwining serpentinely about the handle of a little fan, and with the pointed chin resting on the breast of the yellow robe, so that the light from the lamp swinging in the center of the ceiling gleamed upon the great, dome-like brow, this tall man paced somberly from left to right.

He cast a sidelong, venomous glance at the voluble speaker out of half-shut eyes; in the act they seemed to light up as with an internal luminance; momentarily they sparkled like emeralds; then their brilliance was filmed over as in the eyes of a bird when the membrane is lowered.

My blood seemed to chill, and my heart to double its pulsations; beside me Smith was breathing more rapidly than usual. I knew now the explanation of the feeling which had claimed me when first I had descended the stone stairs. I knew what it was that hung like a miasma over that house. It was the aura, the glamour, which radiated from this wonderful and evil man as light radiates from radium. It was the vril, the force, of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

I began to move away from the window. But Smith held my wrist as in a vise. He was listening raptly to the torrential speech of the Chinaman who sat in the chair; and I perceived in his eyes the light of a sudden comprehension.

As the tall figure of the Chinese doctor came pacing into view again, Smith, his head below the level of the window, pushed me gently along the passage.

Regaining the site of the trap, he whispered to me: "We owe our lives, Petrie, to the national childishness of the Chinese! A race of ancestor worshipers is capable of anything, and Dr. Fu-Manchu, the dreadful being who has rained terror upon Europe stands in imminent peril of disgrace for having lost a decoration."

"What do you mean, Smith?"

"I mean that this is no time for delay, Petrie! Here, unless I am greatly mistaken, lies the rope by means of which you made your entrance. It shall be the means of your exit. Open the trap!"

Handling the lamp to Smith, I stooped and carefully raised the trap-door. At which moment, a singular and dramatic thing happened.

A softly musical voice--the voice of my dreams!--spoke.

"Not that way! O God, not that way!"

In my surprise and confusion I all but let the trap fall, but I retained sufficient presence of mind to replace it gently. Standing upright, I turned . . . and there, with her little jeweled hand resting upon Smith's arm, stood Karamaneh!

In all my experience of him, I had never seen Nayland Smith so utterly perplexed. Between anger, distrust and dismay, he wavered; and each passing emotion was written legibly upon the lean bronzed features. Rigid with surprise, he stared at the beautiful face of the girl. She, although her hand still rested upon Smith's arm, had her dark eyes turned upon me with that same enigmatical expression. Her lips were slightly parted, and her breast heaved tumultuously.
This ten seconds of silence in which we three stood looking at one another encompassed the whole gamut of human emotion. The silence was broken by Karamaneh.

"They will be coming back that way!" she whispered, bending eagerly toward me. (How, in the most desperate moments, I loved to listen to that odd, musical accent!) "Please, if you would save your life, and spare mine, trust me!"--She suddenly clasped her hands together and looked up into my face, passionately--"Trust me--just for once--and I will show you the way!"

Nayland Smith never removed his gaze from her for a moment, nor did he stir.

"Oh!" she whispered, tremulously, and stamped one little red slipper upon the floor. "Won't you heed me? Come, or it will be too late!"

I glanced anxiously at my friend; the voice of Dr. Fu-Manchu, now raised in anger, was audible above the piping tones of the other Chinaman. And as I caught Smith's eye, in silent query--the trap at my feet began slowly to lift!

Karamaneh stifled a little sobbing cry; but the warning came too late. A hideous yellow face with oblique squinting eyes, appeared in the aperture.

I found myself inert, useless; I could neither think nor act. Nayland Smith, however, as if instinctively, delivered a pitiless kick at the head protruding above the trap.

A sickening crushing sound, with a sort of muffled snap, spoke of a broken jaw-bone; and with no word or cry, the Chinaman fell. As the trap descended with a bang, I heard the thud of his body on the stone stairs beneath.

But we were lost. Karamaneh fled along one of the passages lightly as a bird, and disappeared as Dr. Fu-Manchu, his top lip drawn up above his teeth in the manner of an angry jackal, appeared from the other.

"This way!" cried Smith, in a voice that rose almost to a shriek--"this way!"--and he led toward the room overhanging the steps.

Off we dashed with panic swiftness, only to find that this retreat also was cut off. Dimly visible in the darkness was a group of yellow men, and despite the gloom, the curved blades of the knives which they carried glittered menacingly. The passage was full of dacoits!

Smith and I turned, together. The trap was raised again, and the Burman, who had helped to tie me, was just scrambling up beside Dr. Fu-Manchu, who stood there watching us, a shadowy, sinister figure.

"The game's up, Petrie!" muttered Smith. "It has been a long fight, but Fu-Manchu wins!"

"Not entirely!" I cried. I whipped the police whistle from my pocket, and raised it to my lips; but brief as the interval had been, the dacoits were upon me.

A sinewy brown arm shot over my shoulder and the whistle was dashed from my grasp. Then came a whirl of maelstrom fighting with Smith and myself ever sinking lower amid a whirlpool, as it seemed, of blood-lustful eyes, yellow fangs, and gleaming blades.

I had some vague idea that the rasping voice of Fu-Manchu broke once through the turmoil, and when, with my wrists tied behind me, I emerged from the strife to find myself lying beside Smith in the passage, I could only assume that the Chinaman had ordered his bloody servants to take us alive; for saving numerous bruises and a few superficial cuts, I was unwounded.

The place was utterly deserted again, and we two panting captives found ourselves alone with Dr. Fu-Manchu. The scene was unforgettable; that dimly lighted passage, its extremities masked in shadow, and the tall, yellow-robed figure of the Satanic Chinaman towering over us where we lay.

He had recovered his habitual calm, and as I peered at him through the gloom I was impressed anew with the tremendous intellectual force of the man. He had the brow of a genius, the features of a born ruler; and even in that moment I could find time to search my memory, and to discover that the face, saving the indescribable evil of its expression, was identical with that of Seti, the mighty Pharaoh who lies in the Cairo Museum.

Down the passage came leaping and gamboling the doctor's marmoset. Uttering its shrill, whistling cry, it leaped onto his shoulder, clutched with its tiny fingers at the scanty, neutral-colored hair upon his crown, and bent forward, peering grotesquely into that still, dreadful face.

Dr. Fu-Manchu stroked the little creature; and crooned to it, as a mother to her infant. Only this crooning, and the labored breathing of Smith and myself, broke that impressive stillness.

Suddenly the guttural voice began:

"You come at an opportune time, Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith, and Dr. Petrie; at a time when the greatest man in China flatters me with a visit. In my absence from home, a tremendous honor has been conferred upon me, and, in the hour of this supreme honor, dishonor and calamity have befallen! For my services to China--the New China, the China of the future--I have been admitted by the Sublime Prince to the Sacred Order of the White Peacock."

Warming to his discourse, he threw wide his arms, hurling the chattering marmoset fully five yards along the corridor.
"O god of Cathay!" he cried, sibilantly, "in what have I sinned that this catastrophe has been visited upon my head! Learn, my two dear friends, that the sacred white peacock brought to these misty shores for my undying glory, has been lost to me! Death is the penalty of such a sacrilege; death shall be my lot, since death I deserve."

Covertly Smith nudged me with his elbow. I knew what the nudge was designed to convey; he would remind me of his words—anent the childish trifles which sway the life of intellectual China.

Personally, I was amazed. That Fu-Manchu's anger, grief, sorrow and resignation were real, no one watching him, and hearing his voice, could doubt.

He continued:

"By one deed, and one deed alone, may I win a lighter punishment. By one deed, and the resignation of all my titles, all my lands, and all my honors, may I merit to be spared to my work—which has only begun."

I knew now that we were lost, indeed; these were confidences which our graves should hold inviolate! He suddenly opened fully those blazing green eyes and directed their baneful glare upon Nayland Smith.

"The Director of the Universe," he continued, softly, "has relented toward me. To-night, you die! To-night, the arch-enemy of our caste shall be no more. This is my offering—the price of redemption . . ."

My mind was working again, and actively. I managed to grasp the stupendous truth—and the stupendous possibility.

Dr. Fu-Manchu was in the act of clapping his hands, when I spoke.

"Stop!" I cried.

He paused, and the weird film, which sometimes became visible in his eyes, now obscured their greenness, and lent him the appearance of a blind man.

"Dr. Petrie," he said, softly, "I shall always listen to you with respect."

"I have an offer to make," I continued, seeking to steady my voice. "Give us our freedom, and I will restore your shattered honor--I will restore the sacred peacock!"

Dr. Fu-Manchu bent forward until his face was so close to mine that I could see the innumerable lines which, an intricate network, covered his yellow skin.

"Speak!" he hissed. "You lift up my heart from a dark pit!"

"I can restore your white peacock," I said; "I and I alone, know where it is!"—and I strove not to shrink from the face so close to mine.

Upright shot the tall figure; high above his head Fu-Manchu threw his arms—and a light of exaltation gleamed in the now widely opened, catlike eyes.

"O god!" he screamed, frenziedly—"O god of the Golden Age! like a phoenix I arise from the ashes of myself!"

He turned to me. "Quick! Quick! make your bargain! End my suspense!"

Smith stared at me like a man dazed; but, ignoring him, I went on:

"You will release me, now, immediately. In another ten minutes it will be too late; my friend will remain. One of your—servants—can accompany me, and give the signal when I return with the peacock. Mr. Nayland Smith and yourself, or another, will join me at the corner of the street where the raid took place last night. We shall then give you ten minutes grace, after which we shall take whatever steps we choose."

"Agreed!" cried Fu-Manchu. "I ask but one thing from an Englishman; your word of honor?"

"I give it."

"I, also," said Smith, hoarsely.

***

Ten minutes later, Nayland Smith and I, standing beside the cab, whose lights gleamed yellowly through the mist, exchanged a struggling, frightened bird for our lives—capitulated with the enemy of the white race.

With characteristic audacity—and characteristic trust in the British sense of honor—Dr. Fu-Manchu came in person with Nayland Smith, in response to the wailing signal of the dacoit who had accompanied me. No word was spoken, save that the cabman suppressed a curse of amazement; and the Chinaman, his sinister servant at his elbow, bowed low—and left us, surely to the mocking laughter of the gods!

CHAPTER XIV

THE COUGHING HORROR

I leaped up in bed with a great start.

My sleep was troubled often enough in these days, which immediately followed our almost miraculous escape, from the den of Fu-Manchu; and now as I crouched there, nerves a-quiver—listening—listening—I could not be sure if this dank panic which possessed me had its origin in nightmare or in something else.

Surely a scream, a choking cry for help, had reached my ears; but now, almost holding my breath in that sort of nervous tenacity peculiar to one aroused thus, I listened, and the silence seemed complete. Perhaps I had been dreaming . . .
"Help! Petrie! Help! . . ."

It was Nayland Smith in the room above me!

My doubts were dissolved; this was no trick of an imagination disordered. Some dreadful menace threatened my friend. Not delaying even to snatch my dressing-gown, I rushed out on to the landing, up the stairs, bare-footed as I was, threw open the door of Smith's room and literally hurled myself in.

Those cries had been the cries of one assailed, had been uttered, I judged, in the brief interval of a life and death struggle; had been choked off . . .

A certain amount of moonlight found access to the room, without spreading so far as the bed in which my friend lay. But at the moment of my longheaded entrance, and before I had switched on the light, my gaze automatically was directed to the pale moonbeam streaming through the window and down on to one corner of the sheep-skin rug beside the bed.

There came a sound of faint and muffled coughing.

What with my recent awakening and the panic at my heart, I could not claim that my vision was true; but across this moonbeam passed a sort of gray streak, for all the world as though some long thin shape had been withdrawn, snakelike, from the room, through the open window . . . From somewhere outside the house, and below, I heard the cough again, followed by a sharp cracking sound like the lashing of a whip.

I depressed the switch, flooding the room with light, and as I leaped forward to the bed a word picture of what I had seen formed in my mind; and I found that I was thinking of a gray feather boa.

"Smith!" I cried (my voice seemed to pitch itself, unwilled, in a very high key), "Smith, old man!"

He made no reply, and a sudden, sorrowful fear clutched at my heart-strings. He was lying half out of bed flat upon his back, his head at a dreadful angle with his body. As I bent over him and seized him by the shoulders, I could see the whites of his eyes. His arms hung limply, and his fingers touched the carpet.

"My God!" I whispered--"what has happened?"

I heaved him back onto the pillow, and looked anxiously into his face. Habitually gaunt, the flesh so refined away by the consuming nervous energy of the man as to reveal the cheekbones in sharp prominence, he now looked truly ghastly. His skin was so sunbaked as to have changed constitutionally; nothing could ever eradicate that tan. But to-night a fearful grayness was mingled with the brown, his lips were purple . . . and there were marks of strangulation upon the lean throat--ever darkening weals made by clutching fingers.

He began to breathe stentoriously and convulsively, inhalation being accompanied by a significant gurgling in the throat. But now my calm was restored in face of a situation which called for professional attention.

I aided my friend's labored respirations by the usual means, setting to work vigorously; so that presently he began to clutch at his inflamed throat which that murderous pressure had threatened to close.

I could hear sounds of movement about the house, showing that not I alone had been awakened by those hoarse screams.

"It's all right, old man," I said, bending over him; "brace up!"

He opened his eyes--they looked blearred and bloodshot--and gave me a quick glance of recognition.

"It's all right, Smith!" I said--"no! don't sit up; lie there for a moment."

I ran across to the dressing-table, whereon I perceived his flask to lie, and mixed him a weak stimulant with which I returned to the bed.

As I bent over him again, my housekeeper appeared in the doorway, pale and wide-eyed.

"There is no occasion for alarm," I said over my shoulder; "Mr. Smith's nerves are overwrought and he was awakened by some disturbing dream. You can return to bed, Mrs. Newsome."

Nayland Smith seemed to experience much difficulty in swallowing the contents of the tumbler which I held to his lips; and, from the way in which he fingered the swollen glands, I could see that his throat, which I had vigorously massaged, was occasioning him great pain. But the danger was past, and already that glassy look was disappearing from his eyes, nor did they protrude so unnaturally.

"God, Petrie!" he whispered, "that was a near shave! I haven't the strength of a kitten!"

"The weakness will pass off," I replied; "there will be no collapse, now. A little more fresh air . . ."

I stood up, glancing at the windows, then back at Smith, who forced a wry smile in answer to my look.

"Couldn't be done, Petrie," he said, huskily.

His words referred to the state of the windows. Although the night was oppressively hot, these were only opened some four inches at top and bottom. Further opening was impossible because of iron brackets screwed firmly into the casements which prevented the windows being raised or lowered further.

It was a precaution adopted after long experience of the servants of Dr. Fu-Manchu.

Now, as I stood looking from the half-strangled man upon the bed to those screwed-up windows, the fact came home to my mind that this precaution had proved futile. I thought of the thing which I had likened to a feather boa;
and I looked at the swollen weals made by clutching fingers upon the throat of Nayland Smith.

The bed stood fully four feet from the nearest window.

I suppose the question was written in my face; for, as I turned again to Smith, who, having struggled upright, was still fingering his injured throat ruefully:

"God only knows, Petrie!" he said; "no human arm could have reached me . . ."

For us, the night was ended so far as sleep was concerned. Arrayed in his dressing-gown, Smith sat in the white cane chair in my study with a glass of brandy-and-water beside him, and (despite my official prohibition) with the cracked briar which had sent up its incense in many strange and dark places of the East and which yet survived to perfume these prosy rooms in suburban London, steaming between his teeth. I stood with my elbow resting upon the mantelpiece looking down at him where he sat.

"By God! Petrie," he said, yet again, with his fingers straying gently over the surface of his throat, "that was a narrow shave--a damned narrow shave!"

"Narrower than perhaps you appreciate, old man," I replied. "You were a most unusual shade of blue when I found you . . ."

"I managed," said Smith evenly, "to tear those clutching fingers away for a moment and to give a cry for help. It was only for a moment, though. Petrie! they were fingers of steel--of steel!"

"The bed," I began . . .

"I know that," rapped Smith. "I shouldn't have been sleeping in it, had it been within reach of the window; but, knowing that the doctor avoids noisy methods, I had thought myself fairly safe so long as I made it impossible for any one actually to enter the room . . ."

"I have always insisted, Smith," I cried, "that there was danger! What of poisoned darts? What of the damnable reptiles and insects which form part of the armory of Fu-Manchu?"

"Familiarity breeds contempt, I suppose," he replied. "But as it happened none of those agents was employed. The very menace that I sought to avoid reached me somehow. It would almost seem that Dr. Fu-Manchu deliberately accepted the challenge of those screwed-up windows! Hang it all, Petrie! one cannot sleep in a room hermetically sealed, in weather like this! It's positively Burmese; and although I can stand tropical heat, curiously enough the heat of London gets me down almost immediately."

"The humidity; that's easily understood. But you'll have to put up with it in the future. After nightfall our windows must be closed entirely, Smith."

Nayland Smith knocked out his pipe upon the side of the fireplace. The bowl sizzled furiously, but without delay he stuffed broad-cut mixture into the hot pipe, dropping a liberal quantity upon the carpet during the process. He raised his eyes to me, and his face was very grim.

"Petrie," he said, striking a match on the heel of his slipper, "the resources of Dr. Fu-Manchu are by no means exhausted. Before we quit this room it is up to us to come to a decision upon a certain point." He got his pipe well alight. "What kind of thing, what unnatural, distorted creature, laid hands upon my throat to-night? I owe my life, primarily, to you, old man, but, secondarily, to the fact that I was awakened, just before the attack--by the creature's coughing--by its vile, high-pitched coughing . . ."

I glanced around at the books upon my shelves. Often enough, following some outrage by the brilliant Chinese doctor whose genius was directed to the discovery of new and unique death agents, we had obtained a clue in those works of a scientific nature which bulk largely in the library of a medical man. There are creatures, there are drugs, which, ordinarily innocuous, may be so employed as to become inimical to human life; and in the distorting of nature, in the disturbing of balances and the diverting of beneficent forces into strange and dangerous channels, Dr. Fu-Manchu excelled. I had known him to enlarge, by artificial culture, a minute species of fungus so as to render it a powerful agent capable of attacking man; his knowledge of venomous insects has probably never been paralleled in the history of the world; whilst, in the sphere of pure toxicology, he had, and has, no rival; the Borgias were children by comparison. But, look where I would, think how I might, no adequate explanation of this latest outrage seemed possible along normal lines.

"There's the clue," said Nayland Smith, pointing to a little ash-tray upon the table near by. "Follow it if you can."

But I could not.

"As I have explained," continued my friend, "I was awakened by a sound of coughing; then came a death grip on my throat, and instinctively my hands shot out in search of my attacker. I could not reach him; my hands came in contact with nothing palpable. Therefore I clutched at the fingers which were dug into my windpipe, and found them to be small--as the marks show--and hairy. I managed to give that first cry for help, then with all my strength I tried to unfasten the grip that was throttling the life out of me. At last I contrived to move one of the hands, and I called out again, though not so loudly. Then both the hands were back again; I was weakening; but I clawed like a madman at the thin, hairy arms of the strangling thing, and with a blood-red mist dancing before my eyes, I seemed to be
whirling madly round and round until all became a blank. Evidently I used my nails pretty freely—and there's the trophy."

For the twentieth time, I should think, I carried the ash-tray in my hand and laid it immediately under the table-lamp in order to examine its contents. In the little brass bowl lay a blood-stained fragment of grayish hair attached to a tatter of skin. This fragment of epidermis had an odd bluish tinge, and the attached hair was much darker at the roots than elsewhere. Saving its singular color, it might have been torn from the forearm of a very hirsute human; but although my thoughts wandered unfettered, north, south, east and west; although, knowing the resources of Fu-Manchu, I considered all the recognized Mongolian types, and, in quest of hirsute mankind, even roamed far north among the blubbering Esquimo; although I glanced at Australasia, at Central Africa, and passed in mental review the dark places of the Congo, nowhere in the known world, nowhere in the history of the human species, could I come upon a type of man answering to the description suggested by our strange clue.

Nayland Smith was watching me curiously as I bent over the little brass ash-tray.

"You are puzzled," he rapped in his short way.

"So am I—utterly puzzled. Fu-Manchu's gallery of monstrosities clearly has become reinforced; for even if we identified the type, we should not be in sight of our explanation."

"You mean," I began . . .

"Fully four feet from the window, Petrie, and that window but a few inches open! Look"—he bent forward, resting his chest against the table, and stretched out his hand toward me. "You have a rule there; just measure."

Setting down the ash-tray, I opened out the rule and measured the distance from the further edge of the table to the tips of Smith's fingers.

"Twenty-eight inches—and I have a long reach!" snapped Smith, withdrawing his arm and striking a match to relight his pipe. "There's one thing, Petrie, often proposed before, which now we must do without delay. The ivy must be stripped from the walls at the back. It's a pity, but we can not afford to sacrifice our lives to our sense of the aesthetic. What do you make of the sound like the cracking of a whip?"

"I make nothing of it, Smith," I replied, wearily. "It might have been a thick branch of ivy breaking beneath the weight of a climber."

"Did it sound like it?"

"I must confess that the explanation does not convince me, but I have no better one."

Smith, permitting his pipe to go out, sat staring straight before him, and tugging at the lobe of his left ear.

"The old bewilderment is seizing me," I continued. "At first, when I realized that Dr. Fu-Manchu was back in England, when I realized that an elaborate murder-machine was set up somewhere in London, it seemed unreal, fantastical. Then I met—Karamaneh! She, whom we thought to be his victim, showed herself again to be his slave. Now, with Weymouth and Scotland Yard at work, the old secret evil is established again in our midst, unaccountably—our lives are menaced—sleep is a danger—every shadow threatens death . . . oh! it is awful."

Smith remained silent; he did not seem to have heard my words. I knew these moods and had learnt that it was useless to seek to interrupt them. With his brows drawn down, and his deep-set eyes staring into space, he sat there gripping his cold pipe so tightly that my own jaw muscles ached sympathetically. No man was better equipped than this gaunt British Commissioner to stand between society and the menace of the Yellow Doctor; I respected his meditations, for, unlike my own, they were informed by an intimate knowledge of the dark and secret things of the East, of that mysterious East out of which Fu-Manchu came, of that jungle of noxious things whose miasma had been wafted Westward with the implacable Chinaman.

I walked quietly from the room, occupied with my own bitter reflections.

CHAPTER XV
BEWITCHMENT

"You say you have two items of news for me?" said Nayland Smith, looking across the breakfast table to where Inspector Weymouth sat sipping coffee.

"There are two points—yes," replied the Scotland Yard man, whilst Smith paused, egg-spoon in hand, and fixed his keen eyes upon the speaker. "The first is this: the headquarters of the Yellow group is no longer in the East End."

"How can you be sure of that?"

"For two reasons. In the first place, that district must now be too hot to hold Dr. Fu-Manchu; in the second place, we have just completed a house-to-house inquiry which has scarcely overlooked a rathole or a rat. That place where you say Fu-Manchu was visited by some Chinese mandarin; where you, Mr. Smith," and—glancing in my direction—"you, Doctor, were confined for a time—"

"Yes?" snapped Smith, attacking his egg.

"Well," continued the inspector, "it is all deserted, now. There is not the slightest doubt that the Chinaman has fled to some other abode. I am certain of it. My second piece of news will interest you very much, I am sure. You
were taken to the establishment of the Chinaman, Shen-Yan, by a certain ex-officer of New York Police--Burke.

"Good God!" cried Smith, looking up with a start; "I thought they had him!"

"So did I," replied Weymouth grimly; "but they haven't! He got away in the confusion following the raid, and has been hiding ever since with a cousin, a nurseryman out Upminster way . . ."

"Hiding?" snapped Smith.

"Exactly--hiding. He has been afraid to stir ever since, and has scarcely shown his nose outside the door. He says he is watched night and day."

"Then how . . ."

"He realized that something must be done," continued the inspector, "and made a break this morning. He is so convinced of this constant surveillance that he came away secretly, hidden under the boxes of a market-wagon. He landed at Covent Garden in the early hours of this morning and came straight away to the Yard."

"What is he afraid of exactly?"

Inspector Weymouth put down his coffee cup and bent forward slightly.

"He knows something," he said in a low voice, "and they are aware that he knows it!"

"And what is this he knows?"

Nayland Smith stared eagerly at the detective.

"Every man has his price," replied Weymouth with a smile, "and Burke seems to think that you are a more likely market than the police authorities."

"I see," snapped Smith. "He wants to see me?"

"He wants you to go and see him," was the reply. "I think he anticipates that you may make a capture of the person or persons spying upon him."

"Did he give you any particulars?"

"Several. He spoke of a sort of gipsy girl with whom he had a short conversation one day, over the fence which divides his cousin's flower plantations from the lane adjoining."

"Gipsy girl!" I whispered, glancing rapidly at Smith.

"I think you are right, Doctor," said Weymouth with his slow smile; "it was Karamaneh. She asked him the way to somewhere or other and got him to write it upon a loose page of his notebook, so that she should not forget it."

"You hear that, Petrie?" rapped Smith.

"I hear it," I replied, "but I don't see any special significance in the fact."

"I do!" rapped Smith; "I didn't sit up the greater part of last night thrashing my weary brains for nothing! But I am going to the British Museum to-day, to confirm a certain suspicion." He turned to Weymouth. "Did Burke go back?"

"He returned hidden under the empty boxes," was the reply. "Oh! you never saw a man in such a funk in all your life!"

"He may have good reasons," I said.

"He has good reasons!" replied Nayland Smith grimly; "if that man really possesses information inimical to the safety of Fu-Manchu, he can only escape doom by means of a miracle similar to that which has hitherto protected you and me."

"Burke insists," said Weymouth at this point, "that something comes almost every night after dusk, slinking about the house--it's an old farmhouse, I understand; and on two or three occasions he has been awakened (fortunately for him he is a light sleeper) by sounds of coughing immediately outside his window. He is a man who sleeps with a pistol under his pillow, and more than once, on running to the window, he has had a vague glimpse of some creature leaping down from the tiles of the roof, which slopes up to his room, into the flower beds below . . ."

"Creature!" said Smith, his gray eyes ablaze now--"you said creature!"

"I used the word deliberately," replied Weymouth, "because Burke seems to have the idea that it goes on all fours."

There was a short and rather strained silence. Then:

"In descending a sloping roof," I suggested, "a human being would probably employ his hands as well as his feet."

"Quite so," agreed the inspector. "I am merely reporting the impression of Burke."

"Has he heard no other sound?" rapped Smith; "one like the cracking of dry branches, for instance?"

"He made no mention of it," replied Weymouth, staring.

"And what is the plan?"

"One of his cousin's vans," said Weymouth, with his slight smile, "has remained behind at Covent Garden and will return late this afternoon. I propose that you and I, Mr. Smith, imitate Burke and ride down to Upminster under
Nayland Smith stood up, leaving his breakfast half finished, and began to wander up and down the room, reflectively tugging at his ear. Then he began to fumble in the pockets of his dressing-gown and finally produced the inevitable pipe, dilapidated pouch, and box of safety matches. He began to load the much-charred agent of reflection.

"Do I understand that Burke is actually too afraid to go out openly even in daylight?" he asked suddenly.

"He has not hitherto left his cousin's plantations at all," replied Weymouth. "He seems to think that openly to communicate with the authorities, or with you, would be to seal his death warrant."

"He's right," snapped Smith.

"Therefore he came and returned secretly," continued the inspector; "and if we are to do any good, obviously we must adopt similar precautions. The market wagon, loaded in such a way as to leave ample space in the interior for us, will be drawn up outside the office of Messrs. Pike and Pike, in Covent Garden, until about five o'clock this afternoon. At, say, half past four, I propose that we meet there and embark upon the journey."

The speaker glanced in my direction interrogatively.

"Include me in the program," I said. "Will there be room in the wagon?"

"Certainly," was the reply; "it is most commodious, but I cannot guarantee its comfort."

Nayland Smith promenaded the room, unceasingly, and presently he walked out altogether, only to return ere the inspector and I had had time to exchange more than a glance of surprise, carrying a brass ash-tray. He placed this on a corner of the breakfast table before Weymouth.

"Ever seen anything like that?" he inquired.

The inspector examined the gruesome relic with obvious curiosity, turning it over with the tip of his little finger and manifesting considerable repugnance--in touching it at all. Smith and I watched him in silence, and, finally, placing the tray again upon the table, he looked up in a puzzled way.

"It's something like the skin of a water rat," he said.

Nayland Smith stared at him fixedly.

"A water rat? Now that you come to mention it, I perceive a certain resemblance--yes. But"--he had been wearing a silk scarf about his throat and now he unwrapped it--"did you ever see a water rat that could make marks like these?"

Weymouth started to his feet with some muttered exclamation.

"What is this?" he cried. "When did it happen, and how?"

In his own terse fashion, Nayland Smith related the happenings of the night. At the conclusion of the story:

"By heaven!" whispered Weymouth, "the thing on the roof--the coughing thing that goes on all fours, seen by Burke . . ."

"My own idea exactly!" cried Smith . . .

"Fu-Manchu," I said excitedly, "has brought some new, some dreadful creature, from Burma . . ."

"No, Petrie," snapped Smith, turning upon me suddenly. "Not from Burma--from Abyssinia."

That day was destined to be an eventful one; a day never to be forgotten by any of us concerned in those happenings which I have to record. Early in the morning Nayland Smith set off for the British Museum to pursue his mysterious investigations, and having performed my brief professional round (for, as Nayland Smith had remarked on one occasion, this was a beastly healthy district), I found, having made the necessary arrangements, that, with over three hours to spare, I had nothing to occupy my time until the appointment in Covent Garden Market. My lonely lunch completed, a restless fit seized me, and I felt unable to remain longer in the house. Inspired by this restlessness, I attired myself for the adventure of the evening, not neglecting to place a pistol in my pocket, and, walking to the neighboring Tube station, I booked to Charing Cross, and presently found myself rambling aimlessly along the crowded streets. Led on by what link of memory I know not, I presently drifted into New Oxford Street, and looked up with a start--to learn that I stood before the shop of a second-hand book-seller where once two years before I had met Karamaneh.

The thoughts conjured up at that moment were almost too bitter to be borne, and without so much as glancing at the books displayed for sale, I crossed the roadway, entered Museum Street, and, rather in order to distract my mind than because I contemplated any purchase, began to examine the Oriental Pottery, Egyptian statuettes, Indian armor, and other curios, displayed in the window of an antique dealer.

But, strive as I would to concentrate my mind upon the objects in the window, my memories persistently haunted me, and haunted me to the exclusion even of the actualities. The crowds thronging the Pavement, the traffic in New Oxford Street, swept past unheeded; my eyes saw nothing of pot nor statuette, but only met, in a misty imaginative world, the glance of two other eyes--the dark and beautiful eyes of Karamaneh. In the exquisite tinting of a Chinese vase dimly perceptible in the background of the shop, I perceived only the blushing cheeks of
Karamaneh; her face rose up, a taunting phantom, from out of the darkness between a hideous, gilded idol and an Indian sandalwood screen.

I strove to dispel this obsessing thought, resolutely fixing my attention upon a tall Etruscan vase in the corner of the window, near to the shop door. Was I losing my senses indeed? A doubt of my own sanity momentarily possessed me. For, struggle as I would to dispel the illusion--there, looking out at me over that ancient piece of pottery, was the bewitching face of the slave-girl!

Probably I was glaring madly, and possibly I attracted the notice of the passers-by; but of this I cannot be certain, for all my attention was centered upon that phantasmal face, with the cloudy hair, slightly parted red lips, and the brilliant dark eyes which drew mine out of the shadows of the shop.

It was bewildering—it was uncanny; for, delusion or verity, the glamour prevailed. I exerted a great mental effort, stepped to the door, turned the handle, and entered the shop with as great a show of composure as I could muster.

A curtain draped in a little door at the back of one counter swayed slightly, with no greater violence than may have been occasioned by the draught. But I fixed my eyes upon this swaying curtain almost fiercely . . . as an impassive half-caste of some kind who appeared to be a strange cross between a Graeco-Hebrew and a Japanese, entered and quite unemotionally faced me, with a slight bow.

So wholly unexpected was this apparition that I started back.

"Can I show you anything, sir?" inquired the new arrival, with a second slight inclination of the head.

I looked at him for a moment in silence. Then:

"I thought I saw a lady of my acquaintance here a moment ago," I said. "Was I mistaken?"

"Quite mistaken, sir," replied the shopman, raising his black eyebrows ever so slightly; "a mistake possibly due to a reflection in the window. Will you take a look around now that you are here?"

"Thank you," I replied, staring him hard in the face; "at some other time."

I turned and quitted the shop abruptly. Either I was mad, or Karamaneh was concealed somewhere therein.

However, realizing my helplessness in the matter, I contented myself with making a mental note of the name which appeared above the establishment--J. Salaman--and walked on, my mind in a chaotic condition and my heart beating with unusual rapidity.

CHAPTER XVI

THE QUESTING HANDS

Within my view, from the corner of the room where I sat in deepest shadow, through the partly opened window (it was screwed, like our own) were rows of glass-houses gleaming in the moonlight, and, beyond them, orderly ranks of flower-beds extending into a blue haze of distance. By reason of the moon's position, no light entered the room, but my eyes, from long watching, were grown familiar with the darkness, and I could see Burke quite clearly as he lay in the bed between my post and the window. I seemed to be back again in those days of the troubled past when first Nayland Smith and I had come to grips with the servants of Dr. Fu-Manchu. A more peaceful scene than this flower-planted corner of Essex it would be difficult to imagine; but, either because of my knowledge that its peace was chimerical, or because of that outflung consciousness of danger which, actually, or in my imagination, preceded the coming of the Chinaman's agents, to my seeming the silence throbbed electrically and the night was laden with stilly omens.

Already cramped by my journey in the market-cart, I found it difficult to remain very long in any one position. What information had Burke to sell? He had refused, for some reason, to discuss the matter that evening, and now, enacting the part allotted him by Nayland Smith, he feigned sleep consistently, although at intervals he would whisper to me his doubts and fears.

All the chances were in our favor to-night; for whilst I could not doubt that Dr. Fu-Manchu was set upon the removal of the ex-officer of New York police, neither could I doubt that our presence in the farm was unknown to the agents of the Chinaman. According to Burke, constant attempts had been made to achieve Fu-Manchu's purpose, and had only been frustrated by his (Burke's) wakefulness.

There was every probability that another attempt would be made to-night.

Any one who has been forced by circumstance to undertake such a vigil as this will be familiar with the marked changes (corresponding with phases of the earth's movement) which take place in the atmosphere, at midnight, at two o'clock, and again at four o'clock. During those fours hours falls a period wherein all life is at its lowest ebb, and every Physician is aware that there is a greater likelihood of a patient's passing between midnight and four A. M., than at any other period during the cycle of the hours.

To-night I became specially aware of this lowering of vitality, and now, with the night at that darkest phase which precedes the dawn, an indescribable dread, such as I had known before in my dealings with the Chinaman, assailed me, when I was least prepared to combat it. The stillness was intense. Then:

"Here it is!" whispered Burke from the bed.
The chill at the very center of my being, which but corresponded with the chill of all surrounding nature at that hour, became intensified, keener, at the whispered words.

I rose stealthily out of my chair, and from my nest of shadows watched --watched intently, the bright oblong of the window . . .

Without the slightest heralding sound--a black silhouette crept up against the pane . . . the silhouette of a small, malformed head, a dog-like head, deep-set in square shoulders. Malignant eyes peered intently in. Higher it arose--that wicked head--against the window, then crouched down on the sill and became less sharply defined as the creature stooped to the opening below. There was a faint sound of sniffing.

Judging from the stark horror which I experienced, myself, I doubted, now, if Burke could sustain the role allotted him. In beneath the slightly raised window came a hand, perceptible to me despite the darkness of the room. It seemed to project from the black silhouette outside the pane, to be thrust forward--and forward--and forward . . . that small hand with the outstretched fingers.

The unknown possesses unique terrors; and since I was unable to conceive what manner of thing this could be, which, extending its incredibly long arms, now sought the throat of the man upon the bed, I tasted of that sort of terror which ordinarily one knows only in dreams.

"Quick, sir--quick!" screamed Burke, starting up from the pillow.

The questing hands had reached his throat!

Choking down an urgent dread that I had of touching the thing which reached through the window to kill the sleeper, I sprang across the room and grasped the rigid, hairy forearms.

Heavens! Never have I felt such muscles, such tendons, as those beneath the hirsute skin! They seemed to be of steel wire, and with a sudden frightful sense of impotence, I realized that I was as powerless as a child to relax that strangle-hold. Burke was making the most frightful sounds and quite obviously was being asphyxiated before my eyes!

"Smith!" I cried, "Smith! Help! help! for God's sake!"

Despite the confusion of my mind I became aware of sounds outside and below me. Twice the thing at the window coughed; there was an incessant, lash-like cracking, then some shouted words which I was unable to make out; and finally the staccato report of a pistol.

Snarling like that of a wild beast came from the creature with the hairy arms, together with renewed coughing. But the steel grip relaxed not one iota.

I realized two things: the first, that in my terror at the suddenness of the attack I had omitted to act as pre-arranged: the second, that I had discredited the strength of the visitant, whilst Smith had foreseen it.

Desisting in my vain endeavor to pit my strength against that of the nameless thing, I sprang back across the room and took up the weapon which had been left in my charge earlier in the night, but which I had been unable to believe it would be necessary to employ. This was a sharp and heavy axe, which Nayland Smith, when I had met him in Covent Garden, had brought with him, to the great amazement of Weymouth and myself.

As I leaped back to the window and uplifted this primitive weapon, a second shot sounded from below, and more fierce snarling, coughing, and guttural mutterings assailed my ears from beyond the pane.

Lifting the heavy blade, I brought it down with all my strength upon the nearer of those hairy arms where it crossed the window-ledge, severing muscle, tendon and bone as easily as a knife might cut cheese . . .

A shriek--a shriek neither human nor animal, but gruesomely compounded of both--followed . . . and merged into a choking cough. Like a flash the other shaggy arm was withdrawn, and some vaguely-seen body went rolling down the sloping red tiles and crashed on to the ground beneath.

With a second piercing shriek, louder than that recently uttered by Burke, wailing through the night from somewhere below, I turned desperately to the man on the bed, who now was become significantly silent. A candle, with matches, stood upon a table hard by, and, my fingers far from steady, I set about obtaining a light. This accomplished, I stood the candle upon the little chest-of-drawers and returned to Burke's side.

"Merciful God!" I cried.

Of all the pictures which remain in my memory, some of them dark enough, I can find none more horrible than that which now confronted me in the dim candle-light. Burke lay crosswise on the bed, his head thrown back and sagging; one rigid hand he held in the air, and with the other grasped the hairy forearm which I had severed with the ax; for, in a death-grip, the dead fingers were still fastened, vise-like, at his throat.

His face was nearly black, and his eyes projected from their sockets horribly. Mastering my repugnance, I seized the hideous piece of bleeding anatomy and strove to release it. It defied all my efforts; in death it was as implacable as in life. I took a knife from my pocket, and, tendon by tendon, cut away that uncanny grip from Burke's throat . . .

But my labor was in vain. Burke was dead!

I think I failed to realize this for some time. My clothes were sticking clammily to my body; I was bathed in
perspiration, and, shaking furiously, I clutched at the edge of the window, avoiding the bloody patch upon the ledge, and looked out over the roofs to where, in the more distant plantations, I could hear excited voices. What had been the meaning of that scream which I had heard but to which in my frantic state of mind I had paid comparatively little attention?

There was a great stirring all about me.
"Smith!" I cried from the window; "Smith, for mercy's sake where are you?"
Footsteps came racing up the stairs. Behind me the door burst open and Nayland Smith stumbled into the room.
"God!" he said, and started back in the doorway.
"Have you got it, Smith?" I demanded hoarsely. "In sanity's name what is it--what is it?"
"Come downstairs," replied Smith quietly, "and see for yourself." He turned his head aside from the bed.

Very unsteadily I followed him down the stairs and through the rambling old house out into the stone-paved courtyard. There were figures moving at the end of a long alleyway between the glass houses, and one, carrying a lantern, stooped over something which lay upon the ground.

"That's Burke's cousin with the lantern," whispered Smith in my ear; "don't tell him yet."

I nodded, and we hurried up to join the group. I found myself looking down at one of those thick-set Burmans whom I always associated with Fu-Manchu's activities. He lay quite flat, face downward; but the back of his head was a shapeless blood-dotted mass, and a heavy stock-whip, the butt end ghastly because of the blood and hair which clung to it, lay beside him. I started back appalled as Smith caught my arm.

"It turned on its keeper!" he hissed in my ear. "I wounded it twice from below, and you severed one arm; in its insensate fury, its unreasoning malignity, it returned--and there lies its second victim . . ."

"Then . . ."
"It's gone, Petrie! It has the strength of four men even now. Look!"
He stooped, and from the clenched left hand of the dead Burman, extracted a piece of paper and opened it.
"Hold the lantern a moment," he said.
In the yellow light he glanced at the scrap of paper.
"As I expected--a leaf of Burke's notebook; it worked by scent." He turned to me with an odd expression in his gray eyes. "I wonder what piece of my personal property Fu-Manchu has pilfered," he said, "in order to enable it to sleuth me?"

He met the gaze of the man holding the lantern.
"Perhaps you had better return to the house," he said, looking him squarely in the eyes.
The other's face blanched.
"You don't mean, sir--you don't mean . . ."
"Brace up!" said Smith, laying his hand upon his shoulder. "Remember-- he chose to play with fire!"
One wild look the man cast from Smith to me, then went off, staggering, toward the farm.
"Smith," I began . . .
He turned to me with an impatient gesture.

"Weymouth has driven into Upminster," he snapped; "and the whole district will be scoured before morning. They probably motored here, but the sounds of the shots will have enabled whoever was with the car to make good his escape. And exhausted from loss of blood, its capture is only a matter of time, Petrie."

CHAPTER XVII
ONE DAY IN RANGOON
Nayland Smith returned from the telephone. Nearly twenty-four hours had elapsed since the awful death of Burke.

"No news, Petrie," he said, shortly. "It must have crept into some inaccessible hole to die."
I glanced up from my notes. Smith settled into the white cane armchair, and began to surround himself with clouds of aromatic smoke. I took up a half-sheet of foolscap covered with penciled writing in my friend's cramped characters, and transcribed the following, in order to complete my account of the latest Fu-Manchu outrage:

"The Amharun, a Semitic tribe allied to the Falashas, who have been settled for many generations in the southern province of Shoa (Abyssinia) have been regarded as unclean and outcast, apparently since the days of Menelek--son of Suleyman and the Queen of Sheba--from whom they claim descent. Apart from their custom of eating meat cut from living beasts, they are accused because of their alleged association with the Cynocephalus hamadryas (Sacred Baboon). I, myself, was taken to a hut on the banks of the Hawash and shown a creature . . . whose predominant trait was an unreasoning malignity toward . . . and a ferocious tenderness for the society of its furry brethren. Its powers of scent were fully equal to those of a bloodhound, whilst its abnormally long forearms possessed incredible strength . . . a Cynocephalyte such as this, contracts phthisis even in the more northern provinces of Abyssinia . . ."
Manchu; how you learnt that he was not dead, as we had supposed, but living--active."

Nayland Smith stood up and fixed his steely eyes upon me with an indefinable expression in them. Then:

"No," he replied; "I haven't. Do you wish to know?"

"Certainly," I said with surprise; "is there any reason why I should not?"

"There is no real reason," said Smith; "or"--staring at me very hard-- "I hope there is no real reason."

"What do you mean?"

"Well"--he grabbed up his pipe from the table and began furiously to load it--"I blundered upon the truth one day in Rangoon. I was walking out of a house which I occupied there for a time, and as I swung around the corner into the main street, I ran into--literally ran into . . .".

Again he hesitated oddly; then closed up his pouch and tossed it into the cane chair. He struck a match.

"I ran into Karamaneh," he continued abruptly, and began to puff away at his pipe, filling the air with clouds of tobacco smoke.

I caught my breath. This was the reason why he had kept me so long in ignorance of the story. He knew of my hopeless, uncrushable sentiments toward the gloriously beautiful but utterly hypocritical and evil Eastern girl who was perhaps the most dangerous of all Dr. Fu-Manchu's servants; for the power of her loveliness was magical, as I knew to my cost.

"What did you do?" I asked quietly, my fingers drumming upon the table.

"Naturally enough," continued Smith, "with a cry of recognition I held out both my hands to her, gladly. I welcomed her as a dear friend regained; I thought of the joy with which you would learn that I had found the missing one; I thought how you would be in Rangoon just as quickly as the fastest steamer could get you there . . ."

"Well?"

"Karamaneh started back and treated me to a glance of absolute animosity. No recognition was there, and no friendliness--only a sort of scornful anger."

He shrugged his shoulders and began to walk up and down the room.

"I do not know what you would have done in the circumstances, Petrie, but I--"

"Yes?"

"I dealt with the situation rather promptly, I think. I simply picked her up without another word, right there in the public street, and raced back into the house, with her kicking and fighting like a little demon! She did not shriek or do anything of that kind, but fought silently like a vicious wild animal. Oh! I had some scars, I assure you; but I carried her up into my office, which fortunately was empty at the time, plumped her down in a chair, and stood looking at her."

"Go on," I said rather hollowly; "what next?"

"She glared at me with those wonderful eyes, an expression of implacable hatred in them! Remembering all that we had done for her; remembering our former friendship; above all, remembering you--this look of hers almost made me shiver. She was dressed very smartly in European fashion, and the whole thing had been so sudden that as I stood looking at her I half expected to wake up presently and find it all a day-dream. But it was real--as real as her enmity. I felt the need for reflection, and having vainly endeavored to draw her into conversation, and elicited no other answer than this glare of hatred--I left her there, going out and locking the door behind me."

"Very high-handed?"

"A commissioner has certain privileges, Petrie, and any action I might choose to take was not likely to be questioned. There was only one window to the office, and it was fully twenty feet above the level; it overlooked a narrow street off the main thoroughfare (I think I have explained that the house stood on a corner) so I did not fear her escaping. I had an important engagement which I had been on my way to fulfil when the encounter took place, and now, with a word to my native servant--who chanced to be downstairs--I hurried off."

Smith's pipe had gone out as usual, and he proceeded to relight it, whilst, with my eyes lowered, I continued to drum upon the table.

"This boy took her some tea later in the afternoon," he continued, "and apparently found her in a more placid frame of mind. I returned immediately after dusk, and he reported that when last he had looked in, about half an hour earlier, she had been seated in an armchair reading a newspaper (I may mention that everything of value in the office was securely locked up!) I was determined upon a certain course by this time, and I went slowly upstairs, unlocked the door, and walked into the darkened office. I turned up the light . . . the place was empty!"

"Empty?"

"The window was open, and the bird flown! Oh! it was not so simple a flight--as you would realize if you knew the place. The street, which the window overlooked, was bounded by a blank wall, on the opposite side, for thirty or forty yards along; and as we had been having heavy rains, it was full of glutinous mud. Furthermore, the boy whom I had left in charge had been sitting in the doorway immediately below the office window watching for my return
ever since his last visit to the room above . . ."

"She must have bribed him," I said bitterly--"or corrupted him with her infernal blandishments."

"I'll swear she did not," rapped Smith decisively. "I know my man, and I'll swear she did not. There were no marks in the mud of the road to show that a ladder had been placed there; moreover, nothing of the kind could have been attempted whilst the boy was sitting in the doorway; that was evident. In short, she did not descend into the roadway and did not come out by the door . . ."

"Was there a gallery outside the window?"

"No; it was impossible to climb to right or left of the window or up on to the roof. I convinced myself of that."

"But, my dear man!" I cried, "you are eliminating every natural mode of egress! Nothing remains but flight."

"I am aware, Petrie, that nothing remains but flight; in other words I have never to this day understood how she quitted the room. I only know that she did."

"And then?"

"I saw in this incredible escape the cunning hand of Dr. Fu-Manchu--saw it at once. Peace was ended; and I set to work along certain channels without delay. In this manner I got on the track at last, and learned, beyond the possibility of doubt, that the Chinese doctor lived--nay! was actually on his way to Europe again!"

There followed a short silence. Then:

"I suppose it's a mystery that will be cleared up some day," concluded Smith; "but to date the riddle remains intact." He glanced at the clock. "I have an appointment with Weymouth; therefore, leaving you to the task of solving this problem which thus far has defied my own efforts, I will get along."

He read a query in my glance.

"Oh! I shall not be late," he added; "I think I may venture out alone on this occasion without personal danger."

Nayland Smith went upstairs to dress, leaving me seated at my writing table, deep in thought. My notes upon the renewed activity of Dr. Fu-Manchu were stacked at my left hand, and, opening a new writing block, I commenced to add to them particulars of this surprising event in Rangoon which properly marked the opening of the Chinaman's second campaign. Smith looked in at the door on his way out, but seeing me thus engaged, did not disturb me.

I think I have made it sufficiently evident in these records that my practice was not an extensive one, and my hour for receiving patients arrived and passed with only two professional interruptions.

My task concluded, I glanced at the clock, and determined to devote the remainder of the evening to a little private investigation of my own. From Nayland Smith I had preserved the matter a secret, largely because I feared his ridicule; but I had by no means forgotten that I had seen, or had strongly imagined that I had seen, Karamaneh--that beautiful anomaly, who (in modern London) asserted herself to be a slave--in the shop of the curio dealer not a hundred yards from the British Museum!

A theory was forming in my brain, which I was burningly anxious to put to the test. I remembered how, two years before, I had met Karamaneh near to this same spot; and I had heard Inspector Weymouth assert positively that Fu-Manchu's headquarters were no longer in the East End, as of yore. There seemed to me to be a distinct probability that a suitable center had been established for his reception in this place, so much less likely to be suspected by the authorities. Perhaps I attached too great a value to what may have been a delusion; perhaps my theory rested upon no more solid foundation than the belief that I had seen Karamaneh in the shop of the curio dealer. If her appearance there should prove to have been phantasmal, the structure of my theory would be shattered at its base. To-night I should test my premises, and upon the result of my investigations determine my future action.

CHAPTER XVIII
THE SILVER BUDDHA

Museum Street certainly did not seem a likely spot for Dr. Fu-Manchu to establish himself, yet, unless my imagination had strangely deceived me, from the window of the antique dealer who traded under the name of J. Salaman, those wonderful eyes of Karamaneh like the velvet midnight of the Orient, had looked out at me.

As I paced slowly along the pavement toward that lighted window, my heart was beating far from normally, and I cursed the folly which, in spite of all, refused to die, but lingered on, poisoning my life. Comparative quiet reigned in Museum Street, at no time a busy thoroughfare, and, excepting another shop at the Museum end, commercial activities had ceased there. The door of a block of residential chambers almost immediately opposite to the shop which was my objective, threw out a beam of light across the pavement, but not more than two or three people were visible upon either side of the street.

I turned the knob of the door and entered the shop.

The same dark and immobile individual whom I had seen before, and whose nationality defied conjecture, came out from the curtained doorway at the back to greet me.

"Good evening, sir," he said monotonously, with a slight inclination of the head; "is there anything which you desire to inspect?"
"I merely wish to take a look around," I replied. "I have no particular item in view."

The shop man inclined his head again, swept a yellow hand comprehensively about, as if to include the entire stock, and seated himself on a chair behind the counter.

I lighted a cigarette with such an air of nonchalance as I could summon to the operation, and began casually to inspect the varied objects of interest loading the shelves and tables about me. I am bound to confess that I retain no one definite impression of this tour. Vases I handled, statuettes, Egyptian scarabs, bead necklaces, illuminated missals, portfolios of old prints, bronzes, fragments of rare lace, early printed books, Assyrian tablets, daggers, Roman rings, and a hundred other curiosities, leisurely, and I trust with apparent interest, yet without forming the slightest impression respecting any one of them.

Probably I employed myself in this way for half an hour or more, and whilst my hands busied themselves among the stock of J. Salaman, my mind was occupied entirely elsewhere. Furtively I was studying the shopman himself, a human presentment of a Chinese idol; I was listening and watching; especially I was watching the curtained doorway at the back of the shop.

"We close at about this time, sir," the man interrupted me, speaking in the emotionless, monotonous voice which I had noted before.

I replaced upon the glass counter a little Sekhet boat, carved in wood and highly colored, and glanced up with a start. Truly my methods were amateurish; I had learnt nothing; I was unlikely to learn anything. I wondered how Nayland Smith would have conducted such an inquiry, and I racked my brains for some means of penetrating into the recesses of the establishment. Indeed, I had been seeking such a plan for the past half an hour, but my mind had proved incapable of suggesting one.

Why I did not admit failure I cannot imagine, but, instead, I began to tax my brains anew for some means of gaining further time; and, as I looked about the place, the shopman very patiently awaiting my departure, I observed an open case at the back of the counter. The three lower shelves were empty, but upon the fourth shelf squatted a silver Buddha.

"I should like to examine the silver image yonder," I said; "what price are you asking for it?"

"It is not for sale, sir," replied the man, with a greater show of animation than he had yet exhibited.

"Not for sale!" I said, my eyes ever seeking the curtained doorway; "how's that?"

"It is sold."

"Well, even so, there can be no objection to my examining it?"

"It is not for sale, sir."

Such a rebuff from a tradesman would have been more than sufficient to call for a sharp retort at any other time, but now it excited the strangest suspicions. The street outside looked comparatively deserted, and prompted, primarily, by an emotion which I did not pause to analyze, I adopted a singular measure; without doubt I relied upon the unusual powers vested in Nayland Smith to absolve me in the event of error. I made as if to go out into the street, then turned, leaped past the shopman, ran behind the counter, and grasped at the silver Buddha!

That I was likely to be arrested for attempted larceny I cared not; the idea that Karamaneh was concealed somewhere in the building ruled absolutely, and a theory respecting this silver image had taken possession of my mind. Exactly what I expected to happen at that moment I cannot say, but what actually happened was far more startling than anything I could have imagined.

At the instant that I grasped the figure I realized that it was attached to the woodwork; in the next I knew that it was a handle . . . as I tried to pull it toward me I became aware that this handle was the handle of a door. For that door swung open before me, and I found myself at the foot of a flight of heavily carpeted stairs.

Anxious as I had been to proceed a moment before, I was now trebly anxious to retire, and for this reason: on the bottom step of the stair, facing me, stood Dr. Fu-Manchu!

CHAPTER XIX

DR. FU-MANCHU'S LABORATORY

I cannot conceive that any ordinary mortal ever attained to anything like an intimacy with Dr. Fu-Manchu; I cannot believe that any man could ever grow used to his presence, could ever cease to fear him. I suppose I had set eyes upon Fu-Manchu some five or six times prior to this occasion, and now he was dressed in the manner which I always associated with him, probably because it was thus I first saw him. He wore a plain yellow robe, and, with his pointed chin resting upon his bosom, he looked down at me, revealing a great expanse of the marvelous brow with its sparse, neutral-colored hair.

Never in my experience have I known such force to dwell in the glance of any human eye as dwelt in that of this uncanny being. His singular affliction (if affliction it were), the film or slight membrane which sometimes obscured the oblique eyes, was particularly evident at the moment that I crossed the threshold, but now, as I looked up at Dr. Fu-Manchu, it lifted--revealing the eyes in all their emerald greenness.
The idea of physical attack upon this incredible being seemed childish -- inadequate. But, following that first instant of stupefaction, I forced myself to advance upon him.

A dull, crushing blow descended on the top of my skull, and I became oblivious of all things.

My return to consciousness was accompanied by tremendous pains in my head, whereby, from previous experience, I knew that a sandbag had been used against me by some one in the shop, presumably by the immobile shopman. This awakening was accompanied by none of those hazy doubts respecting previous events and present surroundings which are the usual symptoms of revival from sudden unconsciousness; even before I opened my eyes, before I had more than a partial command of my senses, I knew that, with my wrists handcuffed behind me, I lay in a room which was also occupied by Dr. Fu-Manchu. This absolute certainty of the Chinaman's presence was evidenced, not by my senses, but only by an inner consciousness, and the same that always awoke into life at the approach not only of Fu-Manchu in person but of certain of his uncanny servants.

A faint perfume hung in the air about me; I do not mean that of any essence or of any incense, but rather the smell which is suffused by Oriental furniture, by Oriental draperies; the indefinable but unmistakable perfume of the East.

Thus, London has a distinct smell of its own, and so has Paris, whilst the difference between Marseilles and Suez, for instance, is even more marked.

Now, the atmosphere surrounding me was Eastern, but not of the East that I knew; rather it was Far Eastern. Perhaps I do not make myself very clear, but to me there was a mysterious significance in that perfumed atmosphere. I opened my eyes.

I lay upon a long low settee, in a fairly large room which was furnished as I had anticipated in an absolutely Oriental fashion. The two windows were so screened as to have lost, from the interior point of view, all resemblance to European windows, and the whole structure of the room had been altered in conformity, bearing out my idea that the place had been prepared for Fu-Manchu's reception some time before his actual return. I doubt if, East or West, a duplicate of that singular apartment could be found.

The end in which I lay, was, as I have said, typical of an Eastern house, and a large, ornate lantern hung from the ceiling almost directly above me. The further end of the room was occupied by tall cases, some of them containing books, but the majority filled with scientific paraphernalia; rows of flasks and jars, frames of test-tubes, retorts, scales, and other objects of the laboratory. At a large and very finely carved table sat Dr. Fu-Manchu, a yellow and faded volume open before him, and some dark red fluid, almost like blood, bubbling in a test-tube which he held over the flame of a Bunsen-burner.

The enormously long nail of his right index finger rested upon the opened page of the book to which he seemed constantly to refer, dividing his attention between the volume, the contents of the test-tube, and the progress of a second experiment, or possibly a part of the same, which was taking place upon another corner of the littered table.

A huge glass retort (the bulb was fully two feet in diameter), fitted with a Liebig's Condenser, rested in a metal frame, and within the bulb, floating in an oily substance, was a fungus some six inches high, shaped like a toadstool, but of a brilliant and venomous orange color. Three flat tubes of light were so arranged as to cast violet rays upward into the retort, and the receiver, wherein condensed the product of this strange experiment, contained some drops of a red fluid which may have been identical with that boiling in the test-tube.

These things I perceived at a glance: then the filmy eyes of Dr. Fu-Manchu were raised from the book, turned in my direction, and all else was forgotten.

"I regret," came the sibilant voice, "that unpleasant measures were necessary, but hesitation would have been fatal. I trust, Dr. Petrie, that you suffer no inconvenience?"

To this speech no reply was possible, and I attempted none.

"You have long been aware of my esteem for your acquirements," continued the Chinaman, his voice occasionally touching deep guttural notes, "and you will appreciate the pleasure which this visit affords me. I kneel at the feet of my silver Buddha. I look to you, when you shall have overcome your prejudices--due to ignorance of my true motives--to assist me in establishing that intellectual control which is destined to be the new World Force. I bear you no malice for your ancient enmity, and even now"--he waved one yellow hand toward the retort--"I am conducting an experiment designed to convert you from your misunderstanding, and to adjust your perspective."

Quite unemotionally he spoke, then turned again to his book, his test-tube and retort, in the most matter-of-fact way imaginable. I do not think the most frenzied outburst on his part, the most fiendish threats, could have produced such effect upon me as those cold and carefully calculated words, spoken in that unique voice which rang about the room sibilantly. In its tones, in the glance of the green eyes, in the very pose of the gaunt, high-shouldered body, there was power--force.

I counted myself lost, and in view of the doctor's words, studied the progress of the experiment with frightful interest. But a few moments sufficed in which to realize that, for all my training, I knew as little of chemistry--of
chemistry as understood by this man's genius--as a junior student in surgery knows of trephining. The process in operation was a complete mystery to me; the means and the end alike incomprehensible.

Thus, in the heavy silence of that room, a silence only broken by the regular bubbling from the test tube, I found my attention straying from the table to the other objects surrounding it; and at one of them my gaze stopped and remained chained with horror.

It was a glass jar, some five feet in height and filled with viscous fluid of a light amber color. Out from this peered a hideous, dog-like face, low browed, with pointed ears and a nose almost hoggishly flat. By the death-grin of the face the gleaming fangs were revealed; and the body, the long yellow-gray body, rested, or seemed to rest, upon short, malformed legs, whilst one long limp arm, the right, hung down straightly in the preservative. The left arm had been severed above the elbow.

Fu-Manchu, finding his experiment to be proceeding favorably, lifted his eyes to me again.

"You are interested in my poor Cynocephalyte?" he said; and his eyes were filmed like the eyes of one afflicted with cataract. "He was a devoted servant, Dr. Petrie, but the lower influences in his genealogy, sometimes conquered. Then he got out of hand; and at last he was so ungrateful toward those who had educated him, that, in one of those paroxysms of his, he attacked and killed a most faithful Burman, one of my oldest followers."

Fu-Manchu returned to his experiment.

Not the slightest emotion had he exhibited thus far, but had chatted with me as any other scientist might chat with a friend who casually visits his laboratory. The horror of the thing was playing havoc with my own composure, however. There I lay, fettered, in the same room with this man whose existence was a menace to the entire white race, whilst placidly he pursued an experiment designed, if his own words were believable, to cut me off from my kind--to wreak some change, psychological or physiological I knew not; to place me, it might be, upon a level with such brute-things as that which now hung, half floating, in the glass jar!

Something I knew of the history of that ghastly specimen, that thing neither man nor ape; for within my own knowledge had it not attempted the life of Nayland Smith, and was it not I who, with an ax, had maimed it in the instant of one of its last slayings?

Of these things Dr. Fu-Manchu was well aware, so that his placid speech was doubly, trebly horrible to my ears. I sought, furtively, to move my arms, only to realize that, as I had anticipated, the handcuffs were chained to a ring in the wall behind me. The establishments of Dr. Fu-Manchu were always well provided with such contrivances as these.

I uttered a short, harsh laugh. Fu-Manchu stood up slowly from the table, and, placing the test-tube in a rack, stood the latter carefully upon a shelf at his side.

"I am happy to find you in such good humor," he said softly. "Other affairs call me; and, in my absence, that profound knowledge of chemistry, of which I have had evidence in the past, will enable you to follow with intelligent interest the action of these violet rays upon this exceptionally fine specimen of Siberian amanita muscaria. At some future time, possibly when you are my guest in China--which country I am now making arrangements for you to visit--I shall discuss with you some lesser-known properties of this species; and I may say that one of your first tasks when you commence your duties as assistant in my laboratory in Kiang-su, will be to conduct a series of twelve experiments, which I have outlined, into other potentialities of this unique fungus."

He walked quietly to a curtained doorway, with his cat-like yet awkward gait, lifted the drapery, and, with a slight nod in my direction, went out of the room.

CHAPTER XX

THE CROSS BAR

How long I lay there alone I had no means of computing. My mind was busy with many matters, but principally concerned with my fate in the immediate future. That Dr. Fu-Manchu entertained for me a singular kind of regard, I had had evidence before. He had formed the erroneous opinion that I was an advanced scientist who could be of use to him in his experiments and I was aware that he cherished a project of transporting me to some place in China where his principal laboratory was situated. Respecting the means which he proposed to employ, I was unlikely to forget that this man, who had penetrated further along certain byways of science than seemed humanly possible, undoubtedly was master of a process for producing artificial catalepsy. It was my lot, then, to be packed in a chest (to all intents and purposes a dead man for the time being) and despatched to the interior of China!

What a fool I had been. To think that I had learned nothing from my long and dreadful experience of the methods of Dr. Fu-Manchu; to think that I had come alone in quest of him; that, leaving no trace behind me, I had deliberately penetrated to his secret abode!

I have said that my wrists were manacled behind me, the manacles being attached to a chain fastened in the wall. I now contrived, with extreme difficulty, to reverse the position of my hands; that is to say, I climbed backward through the loop formed by my fettered arms, so that instead of being locked behind me, they now were locked
Then I began to examine the fetters, learning, as I had anticipated, that they fastened with a lock. I sat gazing at the steel bracelets in the light of the lamp which swung over my head, and it became apparent to me that I had gained little by my contortion.

A slight noise disturbed these unpleasant reveries. It was nothing less than the rattling of keys!

For a moment I wondered if I had heard aright, or if the sound portended the coming of some servant of the doctor, who was locking up the establishment for the night. The jangling sound was repeated, and in such a way that I could not suppose it to be accidental. Some one was deliberately rattling a small bunch of keys in an adjoining room.

And now my heart leaped wildly--then seemed to stand still.

With a low whistling cry a little gray shape shot through the doorway by which Fu-Manchu had retired, and rolled, like a ball of fluff blown by the wind, completely under the table which bore the weird scientific appliances of the Chinaman; the advent of the gray object was accompanied by a further rattling of keys.

My fear left me, and a mighty anxiety took its place. This creature which now crouched chattering at me from beneath the big table was Fu-Manchu's marmoset, and in the intervals of its chattering and grimacing, it nibbled, speculatively, at the keys upon the ring which it clutched in its tiny hands. Key after key it sampled in this manner, evincing a growing dissatisfaction with the uncrackable nature of its find.

One of those keys might be that of the handcuffs!

I could not believe that the tortures of Tantulus were greater than were mine at this moment. In all my hopes of rescue or release, I had included nothing so strange, so improbable as this. A sort of awe possessed me; for if by this means the key which should release me should come into my possession, how, ever again, could I doubt a beneficent Providence?

But they were not yet in my possession; moreover, the key of the handcuffs might not be amongst the bunch.

Were there no means whereby I could induce the marmoset to approach me?

Whilst I racked my brains for some scheme, the little animal took the matter out of my hands. Tossing the ring with its jangling contents a yard or so across the carpet in my direction, it leaped in pursuit, picked up the ring, whirled it over its head, and then threw a complete somersault around it. Now it snatched up the keys again, and holding them close to its ear, rattled them furiously. Finally, with an incredible spring, it leaped onto the chain supporting the lamp above my head, and with the garish shade swinging and spinning wildly, clung there looking down at me like an acrobat on a trapeze. The tiny, bluish face, completely framed in grotesque whiskers, enhanced the illusion of an acrobatic comedian. Never for a moment did it release its hold upon the key-ring.

My suspense now was intolerable. I feared to move, lest, alarming the marmoset, it should run off again, taking the keys with it. So as I lay there, looking up at the little creature swinging above me, the second wonder of the night came to pass.

A voice that I could never forget, strive how I would, a voice that haunted my dreams by night, and for which by day I was ever listening, cried out from some adjoining room.

"Ta'ala hina!" it called. "Ta'ala hina, Peko!"

It was Karamaneh!

The effect upon the marmoset was instantaneous. Down came the bunch of keys upon one side of the shade, almost falling on my head, and down leaped the ape upon the other. In two leaps it had traversed the room and had vanished through the curtained doorway.

If ever I had need of coolness it was now; the slightest mistake would be fatal. The keys had slipped from the mattress of the divan, and now lay just beyond reach of my fingers. Rapidly I changed my position, and sought, without undue noise, to move the keys with my foot.

I had actually succeeded in sliding them back on to the mattress, when, unheralded by any audible footstep, Karamaneh came through the doorway, holding the marmoset in her arms. She wore a dress of fragile muslin material, and out from its folds protruded one silk-stockinged foot, resting in a high-heeled red shoe. . . .

For a moment she stood watching me, with a sort of enforced composure; then her glance strayed to the keys lying upon the floor. Slowly, and with her eyes fixed again upon my face, she crossed the room, stooped, and took up the key-ring.

It was one of the poignant moments of my life; for by that simple act all my hopes had been shattered!

Any poor lingering doubt that I may have had, left me now. Had the slightest spark of friendship animated the bosom of Karamaneh most certainly she would have overlooked the presence of the keys--of the keys which represented my one hope of escape from the clutches of the fiendish Chinaman.

There is a silence more eloquent than words. For half a minute or more, Karamaneh stood watching me--forcing herself to watch me--and I looked up at her with a concentrated gaze in which rage and reproach must have been
strangely mingled. What eyes she had!--of that blackly lustrous sort nearly always associated with unusually dark
complexions; but Karamaneh's complexion was peachlike, or rather of an exquisite and delicate fairness which
reminded me of the petal of a rose. By some I had been accused of raving about this girl's beauty, but only by those
who had not met her; for indeed she was astonishingly lovely.

At last her eyes fell, the long lashes drooped upon her cheeks. She turned and walked slowly to the chair in
which Fu-Manchu had sat. Placing the keys upon the table amid the scientific litter, she rested one dimpled elbow
upon the yellow page of the book, and with her chin in her palm, again directed upon me that enigmatical gaze.

I dared not think of the past, of the past in which this beautiful, treacherous girl had played a part; yet, watching
her, I could not believe, even now, that she was false! My state was truly a pitiable one; I could have cried out in
sheer anguish. With her long lashes partly lowered, she watched me awhile, then spoke; and her voice was music
which seemed to mock me; every inflection of that elusive accent reopened, lancet-like, the ancient wound.

"Why do you look at me so?" she said, almost in a whisper. "By what right do you reproach me?--Have you ever
offered me friendship, that I should repay you with friendship? When first you came to the house where I was, by
the river--came to save some one from" (there was the familiar hesitation which always preceded the name of Fu-
Manchu) "from--him, you treated me as your enemy, although--I would have been your friend . . ."

There was appeal in the soft voice, but I laughed mockingly, and threw myself back upon the divan.

Karamaneh stretched out her hands toward me, and I shall never forget the expression which flashed into those
glorious eyes; but, seeing me intolerant of her appeal, she drew back and quickly turned her head aside. Even in this
hour of extremity, of impotent wrath, I could find no contempt in my heart for her feeble hypocrisy; with all the old
wonder I watched that exquisite profile, and Karamaneh's very deceitfulness was a salve--for had she not cared she
would not have attempted it!

Suddenly she stood up, taking the keys in her hands, and approached me.

"Not by word, nor by look," she said, quietly, "have you asked for my friendship, but because I cannot bear you
to think of me as you do, I will prove that I am not the hypocrite and the liar you think me. You will not trust me,
but I will trust you."

I looked up into her eyes, and knew a pagan joy when they faltered before my searching gaze. She threw herself
upon her knees beside me, and the faint exquisite perfume inseparable from my memories of her, became
perceptible, and seemed as of old to intoxicate me. The lock clicked . . . and I was free.

With Fu-Manchu's marmoset again gamboling before us, she walked through the curtained doorway into the
room beyond. It was in darkness, but I could see the slave-girl in front of me, a slim silhouette, as she walked to a
screened window, and, opening the screen in the manner of a folding door, also threw up the window.

"Look!" she whispered.

I crept forward and stood beside her. I found myself looking down into Museum Street from a first-floor
window! Belated traffic still passed along New Oxford Street on the left, but not a solitary figure was visible to the
right, as far as I could see, and that was nearly to the railings of the Museum. Immediately opposite, in one of the
flats which I had noticed earlier in the evening, another window was opened. I turned, and in the reflected light saw
that Karamaneh held a cord in her hand. Our eyes met in the semi-darkness.

She began to haul the cord into the window, and, looking upward, I perceived that it was looped in some way
over the telegraph cables which crossed the street at that point. It was a slender cord, and it appeared to be passed
across a joint in the cables almost immediately above the center of the roadway. As it was hauled in, a second and
stronger line attached to it was pulled, in turn, over the cables, and thence in by the window. Karamaneh twisted a
length of it around a metal bracket fastened in the wall, and placed a light wooden crossbar in my hand.

"Make sure that there is no one in the street," she said, craning out and looking to right and left, "then swing
across. The length of the rope is just sufficient to enable you to swing through the open window opposite, and there
is a mattress inside to drop upon. But release the bar immediately, or you may be dragged back. The door of the
room in which you will find yourself is unlocked, and you have only to walk down the stairs, and out into the street."

I peered at the crossbar in my hand, then looked hard at the girl beside me. I missed something of the old fire of
her nature; she was very subdued, tonight.

"Thank you, Karamaneh," I said, softly.
She suppressed a little cry as I spoke her name, and drew back into the shadows.

"I believe you are my friend," I said, "but I cannot understand. Won't you help me to understand?"

I took her unresisting hand, and drew her toward me. My very soul seemed to thrill at the contact of her lithe
body . . .
She was trembling wildly and seemed to be trying to speak, but although her lips framed the words no sound followed. Suddenly comprehension came to me. I looked down into the street, hitherto deserted . . . and into the upturned face of Fu-Manchu.

Wearing a heavy fur-collared coat, and with his yellow, malignant countenance grotesquely horrible beneath the shade of a large tweed motor cap, he stood motionless, looking up at me. That he had seen me, I could not doubt; but had he seen my companion?

In a choking whisper Karamaneh answered my unspoken question.

"He has not seen me! I have done much for you; do in return a small thing for me. Save my life!"

She dragged me back from the window and fled across the room to the weird laboratory where I had lain captive. Throwing herself upon the divan, she held out her white wrists and glanced significantly at the manacles.

"Lock them upon me!" she said, rapidly. "Quick! quick!"

Great as was my mental disturbance, I managed to grasp the purpose of this device. The very extremity of my danger found me cool. I fastened the manacles, which so recently had confined my own wrists, upon the slim wrists of Karamaneh. A faint and muffled disturbance, doubly ominous because there was nothing to proclaim its nature, reached me from some place below, on the ground floor.

"Tie something around my mouth!" directed Karamaneh with nervous rapidity. As I began to look about me:--

"Tear a strip from my dress," she said; "do not hesitate--be quick! be quick!"

I seized the flimsy muslin and tore off half a yard or so from the hem of the skirt. The voice of Dr Fu-Manchu became audible. He was speaking rapidly, sibilantly, and evidently was approaching--would be upon me in a matter of moments. I fastened the strip of fabric over the girl's mouth and tied it behind, experiencing a pang half pleasurable and half fearful as I found my hands in contact with the foamy luxuriance of her hair.

Dr. Fu-Manchu was entering the room immediately beyond.

Snatching up the bunch of keys, I turned and ran, for in another instant my retreat would be cut off. As I burst once more into the darkened room I became aware that a door on the further side of it was open; and framed in the opening was the tall, high-shouldered figure of the Chinaman, still enveloped in his fur coat and wearing the grotesque cap. As I saw him, so he perceived me; and as I sprang to the window, he advanced.

I turned desperately and hurled the bunch of keys with all my force into the dimly-seen face . . .

Either because they possessed a chatoyant quality of their own (as I had often suspected), or by reason of the light reflected through the open window, the green eyes gleamed upon me vividly like those of a giant cat. One short guttural exclamation paid tribute to the accuracy of my aim; then I had the crossbar in my hand. I threw one leg across the sill, and dire as was my extremity, hesitated for an instant ere trusting myself to the flight . . .

A vise-like grip fastened upon my left ankle.

Hazily I became aware that the dark room was flooded with figures. The whole yellow gang were upon me--the entire murder-group composed of units recruited from the darkest place of the East!

I have never counted myself a man of resource, and have always envied Nayland Smith his possession of that quality, in him extraordinarily developed; but on this occasion the gods were kind to me, and I resorted to the only device, perhaps, which could have served. Without releasing my hold upon the crossbar, I clutched at the ledge with the fingers of both hands and swung back into the room my right leg, which was already across the sill. With all my strength I kicked out. My heel came in contact, in sickening contact, with a human head; beyond doubt that I had split the skull of the man who held me.

The grip upon my ankle was released automatically; and now consigning all my weight to the rope I slipped forward, as a diver, across the broad ledge and found myself sweeping through the night like a winged thing . . .

The line, as Karamaneh had assured me, was of well-judged length. Down I swept to within six or seven feet of the street level, then up, at ever decreasing speed, toward the vague oblong of the open window beyond.

I hope I have been successful, in some measure, in portraying the varied emotions which it was my lot to experience that night, and it may well seem that nothing more exquisite could remain for me. Yet it was written otherwise; for as I swept up to my goal, describing the inevitable arc which I had no power to check, I saw that one awaited me.

Crouching forward half out of the open window was a Burmese dacoit, a cross-eyed, leering being whom I well remember to have encountered two years before in my dealings with Dr. Fu-Manchu. One bare, sinewy arm held rigidly at right angles before his breast, he clutched a long curved knife and waited--waited--for the critical moment when my throat should be at his mercy!

I have said that a strange coolness had come to my aid; even now it did not fail me, and so incalculably rapid are the workings of the human mind that I remember complimenting myself upon an achievement which Smith himself could not have bettered, and this in the immeasurable interval which intervened between the commencement of my upward swing and my arrival on a level with the window.
I threw my body back and thrust my feet forward. As my legs went through the opening, an acute pain in one calf told me that I was not to escape scatheless from the night's melee. But the dacoit went rolling over in the darkness of the room, as helpless in face of that ramrod stroke as the veriest infant.

Back I swept upon my trapeze, a sight to have induced any passing citizen to question his sanity. With might and main I sought to check the swing of the pendulum, for if I should come within reach of the window behind I doubted not that other knives awaited me. It was no difficult feat, and I succeeded in checking my flight. Swinging there above Museum Street I could even appreciate, so lucid was my mind, the ludicrous element of the situation.

I dropped. My wounded leg almost failed me; and greatly shaken, but with no other serious damage, I picked myself up from the dust of the roadway. It was a mockery of Fate that the problem which Nayland Smith had set me to solve, should have been solved thus; for I could not doubt that by means of the branch of a tall tree or some other suitable object situated opposite to Smith's house in Rangoon, Karamaneh had made her escape as tonight I had made mine.

Apart from the acute pain in my calf I knew that the dacoit's knife had bitten deeply, by reason of the fact that a warm liquid was trickling down into my boot. Like any drunkard I stood there in the middle of the road looking up at the vacant window where the dacoit had been, and up at the window above the shop of J. Salaman where I knew Fu-Manchu to be. But for some reason the latter window had been closed or almost closed, and as I stood there this reason became apparent to me.

The sound of running footsteps came from the direction of New Oxford Street. I turned—to see two policemen bearing down upon me!

This was a time for quick decisions and prompt action. I weighed all the circumstances in the balance, and made the last vital choice of the night; I turned and ran toward the British Museum as though the worst of Fu-Manchu's creatures, and not my allies the police, were at my heels!

No one else was in sight, but, as I whirled into the Square, the red lamp of a slowly retreating taxi became visible some hundred yards to the left. My leg was paining me greatly, but the nature of the wound did not interfere with my progress; therefore I continued my headlong career, and ere the police had reached the end of Museum Street I had my hand upon the door handle of the cab—for, the Fates being persistently kind to me, the vehicle was for hire.

"Dr. Cleeve's, Harley Street!" I shouted at the man. "Drive like hell! It's an urgent case."

I leaped into the cab.

Within five seconds from the time that I slammed the door and dropped back panting upon the cushions, we were speeding westward toward the house of the famous pathologist, thereby throwing the police hopelessly off the track.

Faintly to my ears came the purr of a police whistle. The taxi-man evidently did not hear the significant sound. Merciful Providence had rung down the curtain; for to-night my role in the yellow drama was finished.

CHAPTER XXI

CRAGMIRE TOWER

Less than two hours later, Inspector Weymouth and a party of men from Scotland Yard raided the house in Museum Street. They found the stock of J. Salaman practically intact, and, in the strangely appointed rooms above, every evidence of a hasty outgoing. But of the instruments, drugs and other laboratory paraphernalia not one item remained. I would gladly have given my income for a year, to have gained possession of the books, alone; for, beyond all shadow of doubt, I knew them to contain formula calculated to revolutionize the science of medicine.

Exhausted, physically and mentally, and with my mind a whispering-galley of conjectures (it were needless for me to mention whom respecting) I turned in, gratefully, having patched up the slight wound in my calf.

I seemed scarcely to have closed my eyes, when Nayland Smith was shaking me into wakefulness.

"You are probably tired out," he said; "but your crazy expedition of last night entitles you to no sympathy. Read this; there is a train in an hour. We will reserve a compartment and you can resume your interrupted slumbers in a corner seat."

As I struggled upright in bed, rubbing my eyes sleepily, Smith handed me the Daily Telegraph, pointing to the following paragraph upon the literary page:

Messrs. M---- announce that they will publish shortly the long delayed work of Kegan Van Roon, the celebrated American traveler, Orientalist and psychic investigator, dealing with his recent inquiries in China. It will be remembered that Mr. Van Roon undertook to motor from Canton to Siberia last winter, but met with unforeseen difficulties in the province of Ho-Nan. He fell into the hands of a body of fanatics and was fortunate to escape with his life. His book will deal in particular with his experiences in Ho-Nan, and some sensational revelations regarding the awakening of that most mysterious race, the Chinese, are promised. For reasons of his own he has decided to remain in England until the completion of his book (which will be published simultaneously in New York and London) and has leased Cragmire Tower, Somersethire, in which romantic and historical residence he will collate
his notes and prepare for the world a work ear-marked as a classic even before it is published.

I glanced up from the paper, to find Smith's eyes fixed upon me, inquiringly.

"From what I have been able to learn," he said, evenly, "we should reach Saul, with decent luck, just before dusk."

As he turned, and quitted the room without another word, I realized, in a flash, the purport of our mission; I understood my friend's ominous calm, betokening suppressed excitement.

The Fates were with us (or so it seemed); and whereas we had not hoped to gain Saul before sunset, as a matter of fact, the autumn afternoon was in its most glorious phase as we left the little village with its oldtime hostelry behind us and set out in an easterly direction, with the Bristol Channel far away on our left and a gently sloping upland on our right.

The crooked high-street practically constituted the entire hamlet of Saul, and the inn, "The Wagoners," was the last house in the street. Now, as we followed the ribbon of moor-path to the top of the rise, we could stand and look back upon the way we had come; and although we had covered fully a mile of ground, it was possible to detect the sunlight gleaming now and then upon the gilt lettering of the inn sign as it swayed in the breeze. The day had been unpleasantly warm, but was relieved by this same sea breeze, which, although but slight, had in it the tang of the broad Atlantic. Behind us, then, the foot-path sloped down to Saul, unpeopled by any living thing; east and northeast swelled the monotony of the moor right out to the hazy distance where the sky began and the sea remotely lay hidden; west fell the gentle gradient from the top of the slope which we had mounted, and here, as far as the eye could reach, the country had an appearance suggestive of a huge and dried-up lake. This idea was borne out by an odd blotchiness, for sometimes there would be half a mile or more of seeming moorland, then a sharply defined change (or it seemed sharply defined from that bird's-eye point of view). A vivid greenness marked these changes, which merged into a dun-colored smudge and again into the brilliant green; then the moor would begin once more.

"That will be the Tor of Glastonbury, I suppose," said Smith, suddenly peering through his field-glasses in an easterly direction; "and yonder, unless I am greatly mistaken, is Cragmire Tower."

Shading my eyes with my hand, I also looked ahead, and saw the place for which we were bound; one of those round towers, more common in Ireland, which some authorities have declared to be of Phoenician origin. Ramshackle buildings clustered untidily about its base, and to it a sort of tongue of that oddly venomous green which patched the lowlands, shot out and seemed almost to reach the towerbase. The land for miles around was as flat as the palm of my hand, saving certain hummocks, lesser tors, and irregular piles of boulders which dotted its expanse. Hills and uplands there were in the hazy distance, forming a sort of mighty inland bay which I doubted not in some past age had been covered by the sea. Even in the brilliant sunlight the place had something of a mournful aspect, looking like a great dried-up pool into which the children of giants had carelessly cast stones.

We met no living soul upon the moor. With Cragmire Tower but a quarter of a mile off, Smith paused again, and raising his powerful glasses swept the visible landscape.

"Not a sign, Petrie," he said, softly; "yet . . . ."

Dropping the glasses back into their case, my companion began to tug at his left ear.

"Have we been over-confident?" he said, narrowing his eyes in speculative fashion. "No less than three times I have had the idea that something, or some one, has just dropped out of sight, behind me, as I focused . . . ."

"What do you mean, Smith?"

"Are we"--he glanced about him as though the vastness were peopled with listening Chinamen--"followed?"

Silently we looked into one another's eyes, each seeking for the dread which neither had named. Then:

"Come on Petrie!" said Smith, grasping my arm; and at quick march we were off again.

Cragmire Tower stood upon a very slight eminence, and what had looked like a green tongue, from the moorland slopes above, was in fact a creek, flanked by lush land, which here found its way to the sea. The house which we were come to visit consisted in a low, two-story building, joining the ancient tower on the east with two smaller outbuildings. There was a miniature kitchen-garden, and a few stunted fruit trees in the northwest corner; the whole being surrounded by a gray stone wall.

The shadow of the tower fell sharply across the path, which ran up almost alongside of it. We were both extremely warm by reason of our long and rapid walk on that hot day, and this shade should have been grateful to us. In short, I find it difficult to account for the unwelcome chill which I experienced at the moment that I found myself at the foot of the time-worn monument. I know that we both pulled up sharply and looked at one another as though acted upon by some mutual disturbance.

But not a sound broke the stillness save a remote murmuring, until a solitary sea gull rose in the air and circled directly over the tower, uttering its mournful and unmusical cry. Automatically to my mind sprang the lines of the poem:

Far from all brother-men, in the weird of the fen,
With God's creatures I bide, 'mid the birds that I ken;
Where
the winds ever dree, where the hymn of the sea Brings a message of peace from the ocean to me.

Not a soul was visible about the premises; there was no sound of human activity and no dog barked. Nayland Smith drew a long breath, glanced back along the way we had come, then went on, following the wall, I beside him, until we came to the gate. It was unfastened, and we walked up the stone path through a wilderness of weeds. Four windows of the house were visible, two on the ground floor and two above. Those on the ground floor were heavily boarded up, those above, though glazed, boasted neither blinds nor curtains. Cragmire Tower showed not the slightest evidence of tenancy.

We mounted three steps and stood before a tremendously massive oaken door. An iron bell-pull, ancient and rusty, hung on the right of the door, and Smith, giving me an odd glance, seized the ring and tugged it.

From somewhere within the building answered a mournful clangor, a cracked and toneless jangle, which, seeming to echo through empty apartments, sought and found an exit apparently by way of one of the openings in the round tower; for it was from above our heads that the noise came to us.

It died away, that eerie ringing—that clanging so dismal that it could chill my heart even then with the bright sunlight streaming down out of the blue; it awoke no other response than the mournful cry of the sea gull circling over our heads. Silence fell. We looked at one another, and we were both about to express a mutual doubt when, unheralded by any unfastening of bolts or bars, the oaken door was opened, and a huge mulatto, dressed in white, stood there regarding us.

I started nervously, for the apparition was so unexpected, but Nayland Smith, without evidence of surprise, thrust a card into the man's hand.

"Take my card to Mr. Van Roon, and say that I wish to see him on important business," he directed, authoritatively.

The mulatto bowed and retired. His white figure seemed to be swallowed up by the darkness within, for beyond the patch of uncarpeted floor revealed by the peeping sunlight, was a barn-like place of densest shadow. I was about to speak, but Smith laid his hand upon my arm warningly, as, out from the shadows the mulatto returned. He stood on the right of the door and bowed again.

"Be pleased to enter," he said, in his harsh, negro voice. "Mr. Van Roon will see you."

The gladness of the sun could no longer stir me; a chill and sense of foreboding bore me company, as beside Nayland Smith I entered Cragmire Tower.

CHAPTER XXII
THE MULATTO

The room in which Van Roon received us was roughly of the shape of an old-fashioned keyhole; one end of it occupied the base of the tower, upon which the remainder had evidently been built. In many respects it was a singular room, but the feature which caused me the greatest amazement was this:--it had no windows!

In the deep alcove formed by the tower sat Van Roon at a littered table, upon which stood an oil reading-lamp, green shaded, of the "Victoria" pattern, to furnish the entire illumination of the apartment. That bookshelves lined the rectangular portion of this strange study I divined, although that end of the place was dark as a catacomb. The walls were wood-paneled, and the ceiling was oaken beamed. A small bookshelf and tumble-down cabinet stood upon either side of the table, and the celebrated American author and traveler lay propped up in a long split-cane chair. He wore smoked glasses, and had a clean-shaven, olive face, with a profusion of jet black hair. He was garbed in a dirty red dressing-gown, and a perfect fog of cigar smoke hung in the room. He did not rise to greet us, but merely extended his right hand, between two fingers whereof he held Smith's card.

"You will excuse the seeming discourtesy of an invalid, gentlemen?" he said; "but I am suffering from undue temerity in the interior of China!"

He waved his hand vaguely, and I saw that two rough deal chairs stood near the table. Smith and I seated ourselves, and my friend, leaning his elbow upon the table, looked fixedly at the face of the man whom we had come from London to visit. Although comparatively unfamiliar to the British public, the name of Van Roon was well-known in American literary circles; for he enjoyed in the United States a reputation somewhat similar to that which had rendered the name of our mutual friend, Sir Lionel Barton, a household word in England. It was Van Roon who, following in the footsteps of Madame Blavatsky, had sought out the haunts of the fabled mahatmas in the Himalayas, and Van Roon who had essayed to explore the fever swamps of Yucatan in quest of the secret of lost Atlantis; lastly, it was Van Roon, who, with an overland car specially built for him by a celebrated American firm, had undertaken the journey across China.

I studied the olive face with curiosity. Its natural impassivity was so greatly increased by the presence of the colored spectacles that my study was as profitless as if I had scrutinized the face of a carven Buddha. The mulatto had withdrawn, and in an atmosphere of gloom and tobacco smoke, Smith and I sat staring, perhaps rather rudely, at the object of our visit to the West Country.
"Mr. Van Roon," began my friend abruptly, "you will no doubt have seen this paragraph. It appeared in this morning's Daily Telegraph."

He stood up, and taking out the cutting from his notebook, placed it on the table.

"I have seen this--yes," said Van Roon, revealing a row of even, white teeth in a rapid smile. "Is it to this paragraph that I owe the pleasure of seeing you here?"

"The paragraph appeared in this morning's issue," replied Smith. "An hour from the time of seeing it, my friend, Dr. Petrie, and I were entrained for Bridgewater."

"Your visit delights me, gentlemen, and I should be ungrateful to question its cause; but frankly I am at a loss to understand why you should have honored me thus. I am a poor host, God knows; for what with my tortured limb, a legacy from the Chinese devils whose secrets I surprised, and my semi-blindness, due to the same cause, I am but sorry company."

Nayland Smith held up his right hand deprecatingly. Van Roon tendered a box of cigars and clapped his hands, whereupon the mulatto entered.

"I see that you have a story to tell me, Mr. Smith," he said; "therefore I suggest whisky-and-soda--or you might prefer tea, as it is nearly tea time?"

Smith and I chose the former refreshment, and the soft-footed half-breed having departed upon his errand, my companion, leaning forward earnestly across the littered table, outlined for Van Roon the story of Dr. Fu-Manchu, the great and malign being whose mission in England at that moment was none other than the stoppage of just such information as our host was preparing to give to the world.

"There is a giant conspiracy, Mr. Van Roon," he said, "which had its birth in this very province of Ho-Nan, from which you were so fortunate to escape alive; whatever its scope or limitations, a great secret society is established among the yellow races. It means that China, which has slumbered for so many generations, now stirs in that age-long sleep. I need not tell you how much more it means, this seething in the pot . . ."

"In a word," interrupted Van Roon, pushing Smith's glass across the table "you would say?--"

"That your life is not worth that!" replied Smith, snapping his fingers before the other's face.

A very impressive silence fell. I watched Van Roon curiously as he sat propped up among his cushions, his smooth face ghastly in the green light from the lamp-shade. He held the stump of a cigar between his teeth, but, apparently unnoticed by him, it had long since gone out. Smith, out of the shadows, was watching him, too. Then:

"Your information is very disturbing," said the American. "I am the more disposed to credit your statement because I am all too painfully aware of the existence of such a group as you mention, in China, but that they had an agent here in England is something I had never conjectured. In seeking out this solitary residence I have unwittingly done much to assist their designs . . . But--my dear Mr. Smith, I am very remiss! Of course you will remain tonight, and I trust for some days to come?"

Smith glanced rapidly across at me, then turned again to our host.

"It seems like forcing our company upon you," he said, "but in your own interests I think it will be best to do as you are good enough to suggest. I hope and believe that our arrival here has not been noticed by the enemy; therefore it will be well if we remain concealed as much as possible for the present, until we have settled upon some plan."

"Hagar shall go to the station for your baggage," said the American rapidly, and clapped his hands, his usual signal to the mulatto.

Whilst the latter was receiving his orders I noticed Nayland Smith watching him closely; and when he had departed:

"How long has that man been in your service?" snapped my friend.

Van Roon peered blindly through his smoked glasses.
"For some years," he replied; "he was with me in India--and in China."
"Where did you engage him?"
"Actually, in St. Kitts."
"H'm," muttered Smith, and automatically he took out and began to fill his pipe.

"I can offer you no company but my own, gentlemen," continued Van Roon, "but unless it interferes with your plans, you may find the surrounding district of interest and worthy of inspection, between now and dinner time. By the way, I think I can promise you quite a satisfactory meal, for Hagar is a model chef."

"A walk would be enjoyable," said Smith, "but dangerous."
"Ah! perhaps you are right. Evidently you apprehend some attempt upon me?"
"At any moment!"

"To one in my crippled condition, an alarming outlook! However, I place myself unreservedly in your hands. But really, you must not leave this interesting district before you have made the acquaintance of some of its
historical spots. To me, steeped as I am in what I may term the lore of the odd, it is a veritable wonderland, almost as interesting, in its way, as the caves and jungles of Hindustan depicted by Madame Blavatsky.

His high-pitched voice, with a certain labored intonation, not quite so characteristically American as was his accent, rose even higher; he spoke with the fire of the enthusiast.

"When I learned that Cragmire Tower was vacant," he continued, "I leaped at the chance (excuse the metaphor, from a lame man!). This is a ghost hunter's paradise. The tower itself is of unknown origin, though probably Phoenician, and the house traditionally sheltered Dr. Macleod, the necromancer, after his flight from the persecution of James of Scotland. Then, to add to its interest, it borders on Sedgemoor, the scene of the bloody battle during the Monmouth rising, whereat a thousand were slain on the field. It is a local legend that the unhappy Duke and his staff may be seen, on stormy nights, crossing the path which skirts the mire, after which this building is named, with flaming torches held aloft."

"Merely marsh-lights, I take it?" interjected Smith, gripping his pipe hard between his teeth.

"Your practical mind naturally seeks a practical explanation," smiled Van Roon, "but I myself have other theories. Then in addition to the charms of Sedgemoor--haunted Sedgemoor--on a fine day it is quite possible to see the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey from here; and Glastonbury Abbey, as you may know, is closely bound up with the history of alchemy. It was in the ruins of Glastonbury Abbey that the adept Kelly, companion of Dr. Dee, discovered, in the reign of Elizabeth, the famous caskets of St. Dunstan, containing the two tinctures . . ."

So he ran on, enumerating the odd charms of his residence, charms which for my part I did not find appealing. Finally:

"We cannot presume further upon your kindness," said Nayland Smith, standing up. "No doubt we can amuse ourselves in the neighborhood of the house until the return of your servant."

"Look upon Cragmire Tower as your own, gentlemen!" cried Van Roon. "Most of the rooms are unfurnished, and the garden is a wilderness, but the structure of the brickwork in the tower may interest you archaeologically, and the view across the moor is at least as fine as any in the neighborhood."

So, with his brilliant smile and a gesture of one thin yellow hand, the crippled traveler made us free of his odd dwelling. As I passed out from the room close at Smith's heels, I glanced back, I cannot say why. Van Roon already was bending over his papers, in his green shadowed sanctuary, and the light shining down upon his smoked glasses created the odd illusion that he was looking over the tops of the lenses and not down at the table as his attitude suggested. However, it was probably ascribable to the weird chiaroscuro of the scene, although it gave the seated figure an oddly malignant appearance, and I passed out through the utter darkness of the outer room to the front door. Smith opening it, I was conscious of surprise to find dusk come--to meet darkness where I had looked for sunlight.

The silver wisps which had raced along the horizon, as we came to Cragmire Tower, had been harbingers of other and heavier banks. A stormy sunset smeared crimson streaks across the skyline, where a great range of clouds, like the oily smoke of a city burning, was banked, mountain topping mountain, and lighted from below by this angry red. As we came down the steps and out by the gate, I turned and looked across the moor behind us. A sort of reflection from this distant blaze enrimsoned the whole landscape. The inland bay glowed sullenly, as if internal fires and not reflected light were at work; a scene both wild and majestic.

Nayland Smith was staring up at the cone-like top of the ancient tower in a curious, speculative fashion. Under the influence of our host's conversation I had forgotten the reasonless dread which had touched me at the moment of our arrival, but now, with the red light blazing over Sedgemoor, as if in memory of the blood which had been shed there, and with the tower of unknown origin looming above me, I became very uncomfortable again, nor did I envy Van Roon his eerie residence. The proximity of a tower of any kind, at night, makes in some inexplicable way for awe, and to-night there were other agents, too.

"What's that?" snapped Smith suddenly, grasping my arm.

He was peering southward, toward the distant hamlet, and, starting violently at his words and the sudden grasp of his hand, I, too, stared in that direction.

"We were followed, Petrie," he almost whispered. "I never got a sight of our follower, but I'll swear we were followed. Look! there's something moving over yonder!"

Together we stood staring into the dusk; then Smith burst abruptly into one of his rare laughs, and clapped me upon the shoulder.

"It's Hagar, the mulatto!" he cried--"and our grips. That extraordinary American with his tales of witch-lights and haunted abbeys has been playing the devil with our nerves."

Together we waited by the gate until the half-caste appeared on the bend of the path with a grip in either hand. He was a great, muscular fellow with a stoic face, and, for the purpose of visiting Saul, presumably, he had doffed his white raiment and now wore a sort of livery, with a peaked cap.
Smith watched him enter the house. Then:

"I wonder where Van Roon obtains his provisions and so forth," he muttered. "It's odd they knew nothing about
the new tenant of Cragmire Tower at 'The Wagoners.'"

There came a sort of sudden expectancy into his manner for which I found myself at a loss to account. He turned
his gaze inland and stood there tugging at his left ear and clicking his teeth together. He stared at me, and his eyes
looked very bright in the dusk, for a sort of red glow from the sunset touched them; but he spoke no word, merely
taking my arm and leading me off on a rambling walk around and about the house. Neither of us spoke a word until
we stood at the gate of Cragmire Tower again; then:

"I'll swear, now, that we were followed here today!" muttered Smith.

The lofty place immediately within the doorway proved, in the light of a lamp now fixed in an iron bracket, to be
a square entrance hall meagerly furnished. The closed study door faced the entrance, and on the left of it ascended an
open staircase up which the mulatto led the way. We found ourselves on the floor above, in a corridor traversing the
house from back to front. An apartment on the immediate left was indicated by the mulatto as that allotted to Smith.
It was a room of fair size, furnished quite simply but boasting a wardrobe cupboard, and Smith's grip stood beside
the white enameled bed. I glanced around, and then prepared to follow the man, who had awaited me in the
doorway.

He still wore his dark livery, and as I followed the lithe, broad-shouldered figure along the corridor, I found
myself considering critically his breadth of shoulder and the extraordinary thickness of his neck.

I have repeatedly spoken of a sort of foreboding, an elusive stirring in the depths of my being of which I became
conscious at certain times in my dealings with Dr. Fu-Manchu and his murderous servants. This sensation, or
something akin to it, claimed me now, unaccountably, as I stood looking into the neat bedroom, on the same side of
the corridor but at the extreme end, wherein I was to sleep.

A voiceless warning urged me to return; a kind of childish panic came fluttering about my heart, a dread of
entering the room, of allowing the mulatto to come behind me.

Doubtless this was no more than a sub-conscious product of my observations respecting his abnormal breadth of
shoulder. But whatever the origin of the impulse, I found myself unable to disobey it. Therefore, I merely nodded,
turned on my heel and went back to Smith's room.

I closed the door, then turned to face Smith, who stood regarding me.

"Smith," I said, "that man sends cold water trickling down my spine!"

Still regarding me fixedly, my friend nodded his head.

"You are curiously sensitive to this sort of thing," he replied slowly; "I have noticed it before as a useful
capacity. I don't like the look of the man myself. The fact that he has been in Van Roon's employ for some years
goes for nothing. We are neither of us likely to forget Kwee, the Chinese servant of Sir Lionel Barton, and it is quite
possible that Fu-Manchu has corrupted this man as he corrupted the other. It is quite possible . . ."

His voice trailed off into silence, and he stood looking across the room with unseeing eyes, meditating deeply. It
was quite dark now outside, as I could see through the uncurtained window, which opened upon the dreary expanse
stretching out to haunted Sedgemoor. Two candles were burning upon the dressing table; they were but recently
lighted, and so intense was the stillness that I could distinctly hear the spluttering of one of the wicks, which was
damp. Without giving the slightest warning of his intention, Smith suddenly made two strides forward, stretched out
his long arms, and snuffed the pair of candles in a twinkling.

The room became plunged in impenetrable darkness.

"Not a word, Petrie!" whispered my companion.

I moved cautiously to join him, but as I did so, perceived that he was moving too. Vaguely, against the window I
perceived him silhouetted. He was looking out across the moor, and:

"See! see!" he hissed.

With my heart thumping furiously in my breast, I bent over him; and for the second time since our coming to
Cragmire Tower, my thoughts flew to "The Fenman."

There are shades in the fen; ghosts of women and men Who have sinned and have died, but are living again. O'er
the waters they tread, with their lanterns of dread, And they peer in the pools--in the pools of the dead . . .

A light was dancing out upon the moor, a witchlight that came and went unaccountably, up and down, in and
out, now clearly visible, now masked in the darkness!

"Lock the door!" snapped my companion--"if there's a key."

I crept across the room and fumbled for a moment; then:

"There is no key," I reported.

"Then wedge the chair under the knob and let no one enter until I return!" he said, amazingly.

With that he opened the window to its fullest extent, threw his leg over the sill, and went creeping along a wide
concrete ledge, in which ran a leaded gutter, in the direction of the tower on the right!

Not pausing to follow his instructions respecting the chair, I craned out of the window, watching his progress, and wondering with what sudden madness he was bitten. Indeed, I could not credit my senses, could not believe that I heard and saw aright. Yet there out in the darkness on the moor moved the will-o’-the-wisp, and ten yards along the gutter crept my friend, like a great gaunt cat. Unknown to me he must have prospected the route by daylight, for now I saw his design. The ledge terminated only where it met the ancient wall of the tower, and it was possible for an agile climber to step from it to the edge of the unglazed window some four feet below, and to scramble from that point to the stone fence and thence on to the path by which we had come from Saul.

This difficult operation Nayland Smith successfully performed, and, to my unbounded amazement, went racing into the darkness toward the dancing light, headlong, like a madman! The night swallowed him up, and between my wonder and my fear my hands trembled so violently that I could scarce support myself where I rested, with my full weight upon the sill.

I seemed now to be moving through the fevered phases of a nightmare. Around and below me Cragmire Tower was profoundly silent, but a faint odor of cookery was now perceptible. Outside, from the night, came a faint whispering as of the distant sea, but no moon and no stars relieved the impenetrable blackness. Only out over the moor the mysterious light still danced and moved.

One--two--three--four--five minutes passed. The light vanished and did not appear again. Five more age-long minutes elapsed in absolute silence, whilst I peered into the darkness of the night and listened, every nerve in my body tense, for the return of Nayland Smith. Yet two more minutes, which embraced an agony of suspense, passed in the same fashion; then a shadowy form grew, phantomesque, out of the gloom; a moment more, and I distinctly heard the heavy breathing of a man nearly spent, and saw my friend scrambling up toward the black embrasure in the tower. His voice came huskily, pantingly:

"Creep along and lend me a hand, Petrie! I am nearly winded."

I crept through the window, steadied my quivering nerves by an effort of the will, and reached the end of the ledge in time to take Smith’s extended hand and to draw him up beside me against the wall of the tower. He was shaking with his exertions, and must have fallen, I think, without my assistance. Inside the room again:

"Quick! light the candles!" he breathed hoarsely.

"Did any one come?"

"No one--nothing."

Having expended several matches in vain, for my fingers twitched nervously, I ultimately succeeded in relighting the candles.

"Get along to your room!" directed Smith. "Your apprehensions are unfounded at the moment, but you may as well leave both doors wide open!"

I looked into his face—it was very drawn and grim, and his brow was wet with perspiration, but his eyes had the fighting glint, and I knew that we were upon the eve of strange happenings.

CHAPTER XXIII

A CRY ON THE MOOR

Of the events intervening between this moment and that when death called to us out of the night, I have the haziest recollections. An excellent dinner was served in the bleak and gloomy dining-room by the mulatto, and the crippled author was carried to the head of the table by this same Herculean attendant, as lightly as though he had but the weight of a child.

Van Roon talked continuously, revealing a deep knowledge of all sorts of obscure matters; and in the brief intervals, Nayland Smith talked also, with almost feverish rapidity. Plans for the future were discussed. I can recall no one of them.

I could not stifle my queer sentiments in regard to the mulatto, and every time I found him behind my chair I was hard put to repress a shudder. In this fashion the strange evening passed; and to the accompaniment of distant, muttering thunder, we two guests retired to our chambers in Cragmire Tower. Smith had contrived to give me my instructions in a whisper, and five minutes after entering my own room, I had snuffed the candles, slipped a wedge, which he had given me, under the door, crept out through the window onto the guttered ledge, and joined Smith in his room. He, too, had extinguished his candles, and the place was in darkness. As I climbed in, he grasped my wrist to silence me, and turned me forcibly toward the window.

"Listen!" he said.

I turned and looked out upon a prospect which had been a fit setting for the witch scene in Macbeth. Thunder clouds hung low over the moor, but through them ran a sort of chasm, or rift, allowing a bar of lurid light to stretch across the drear, from east to west—a sort of lane walled by darkness. There came a remote murmuring, as of a troubled sea—a hushed and distant chorus; and sometimes in upon it broke the drums of heaven. In the west
lightning flickered, though but faintly, intermittently.
Then came the call.
Out of the blackness of the moor it came, wild and distant--"Help! help!"
"Smith!" I whispered--"what is it? What..."
"Mr. Smith!" came the agonized cry..."Nayland Smith, help! for God's sake..."
"Quick, Smith!" I cried, "quick, man! It's Van Roon--he's been dragged out... they are murdering him..."
Nayland Smith held me in a vise-like grip, silent, unmoved!
Louder and more agonized came the cry for aid, and I became more than ever certain that it was poor Van Roon who uttered it.
"Mr. Smith! Dr. Petrie! for God's sake come... or... it will be... too... late..."
"Smith!" I said, turning furiously upon my friend, "if you are going to remain here whilst murder is done, I am not!"

My blood boiled now with hot resentment. It was incredible, inhuman, that we should remain there inert whilst a fellow man, and our host to boot, was being done to death out there in the darkness. I exerted all my strength to break away; but although my efforts told upon him, as his loud breathing revealed, Nayland Smith clung to me tenaciously. Had my hands been free, in my fury, I could have struck him, for the pitiable cries, growing fainter, now, told their own tale. Then Smith spoke shortly and angrily--breathing hard between the words.
"Be quiet, you fool!" he snapped; "it's little less than an insult, Petrie, to think me capable of refusing help where help is needed!"

Like a cold douche his words acted; in that instant I knew myself a fool.
"You remember the Call of Siva?" he said, thrusting me away irritably, "--two years ago, and what it meant to those who obeyed it?"
"You might have told me..."
"Told you! You would have been through the window before I had uttered two words!"
I realized the truth of his assertion, and the justness of his anger.
"Forgive me, old man," I said, very crestfallen, "but my impulse was a natural one, you'll admit. You must remember that I have been trained never to refuse aid when aid is asked."
"Shut up, Petrie!" he groaned; "forget it."
The cries had ceased now, entirely, and a peal of thunder, louder than any yet, echoed over distant Sedgemoor. The chasm of light splitting the heavens closed in, leaving the night wholly black.
"Don't talk!" rapped Smith; "act! You wedged your door?"
"Yes."
"Good. Get into that cupboard, have your Browning ready, and keep the door very slightly ajar."

He was in that mood of repressed fever which I knew and which always communicated itself to me. I spoke no further word, but stepped into the wardrobe indicated and drew the door nearly shut. The recess just accommodated me, and through the aperture I could see the bed, vaguely, the open window, and part of the opposite wall. I saw Smith cross the floor, as a mighty clap of thunder boomed over the house.
A gleam of lightning flickered through the gloom.
I saw the bed for a moment, distinctly, and it appeared to me that Smith lay therein, with the sheets pulled up over his head. The light was gone, and I could hear big drops of rain pattering upon the leaden gutter below the open window.

My mood was strange, detached, and characterized by vagueness. That Van Roon lay dead upon the moor I was convinced; and--although I recognized that it must be a sufficient one--I could not even dimly divine the reason why we had refrained from lending him aid. To have failed to save him, knowing his peril, would have been bad enough; to have refused, I thought was shameful. Better to have shared his fate--yet...

The downpour was increasing, and beating now a regular tattoo upon the gutterway. Then, splitting the oblong of greater blackness which marked the casement, quivered dazzlingly another flash of lightning in which I saw the bed again, with that impression of Smith curled up in it. The blinding light died out; came the crash of thunder, harsh and fearsome, more imminently above the tower than ever. The building seemed to shake.

Coming as they did, horror and the wrath of heaven together, suddenly, crashingly, black and angry after the fairness of the day, these happenings and their setting have terrorized the stoutest heart; but somehow I seemed detached, as I have said, and set apart from the whirl of events; a spectator. Even when a vague yellow light crept across the room from the direction of the door, and flickered unsteadily on the bed, I remained unmoved to a certain degree, although passively alive to the significance of the incident. I realized that the ultimate issue was at hand, but either because I was emotionally exhausted, or from some other cause, the pending climax failed to disturb me.

Going on tiptoe, in stockinged feet, across my field of vision, passed Kegan Van Roon! He was in his shirt-
sleeves and held a lighted candle in one hand whilst with the other he shaded it against the draught from the window. He was a cripple no longer, and the smoked glasses were discarded; most of the light, at the moment when first I saw him, shone upon his thin, olive face, and at sight of his eyes much of the mystery of Cragmire Tower was resolved. For they were oblique, very slightly, but nevertheless unmistakably oblique. Though highly educated, and possibly an American citizen, Van Roon was a Chinaman!

Upon the picture of his face as I saw it then, I do not care to dwell. It lacked the unique horror of Dr. Fu-Manchu's unforgettable countenance, but possessed a sort of animal malignancy which the latter lacked . . . He approached within three or four feet of the bed, peering--peering. Then, with a timidity which spoke well for Nayland Smith's reputation, paused and beckoned to some one who evidently stood in the doorway behind him. As he did so I noted that the legs of his trousers were caked with greenish brown mud nearly up to the knees.

The huge mulatto, silent-footed, crossed to the bed in three strides. He was stripped to the waist, and, excepting some few professional athletes, I had never seen a torso to compare with that which, brown and glistening, now bent over Nayland Smith. The muscular development was simply enormous; the man had a neck like a column, and the thews around his back and shoulders were like ivy tentacles wreathing some gnarled oak.

Whilst Van Roon, his evil gaze upon the bed, held the candle aloft, the mulatto, with a curious preparatory writhing movement of the mighty shoulders, lowered his outstretched fingers to the disordered bed linen . . .

I pushed open the cupboard door and thrust out the Browning. As I did so a dramatic thing happened. A tall, gaunt figure shot suddenly upright from beyond the bed. It was Nayland Smith!

Upraised in his hand he held a heavy walking cane. I knew the handle to be leaded, and I could judge of the force with which he wielded it by the fact that it cut the air with a keen swishing sound. It descended upon the back of the mulatto's skull with a sickening thud, and the great brown body dropped inert upon the padded bed--in which not Smith, but his grip, reposed. There was no word, no cry. Then:

"Shoot, Petrie! Shoot the fiend! Shoot . . ."

Van Roon, dropping the candle, in the falling gleam of which I saw the whites of the oblique eyes turned and leaped from the room with the agility of a wild cat. The ensuing darkness was split by a streak of lightning . . . and there was Nayland Smith scrambling around the foot of the bed making for the door in hot pursuit.

We gained it almost together. Smith had dropped the cane, and now held his pistol in his hand. Together we fired into the chasm of the corridor, and in the flash, saw Van Roon hurling himself down the stairs. He went silently in his stockinged feet, and our own clatter was drowned by the awful booming of the thunder which now burst over us again.

Crack!--crack!--crack! Three times our pistols spat venomously after the flying figure . . . then we had crossed the hall below and were in the wilderness of the night with the rain descending upon us in sheets. Vaguely I saw the white shirt-sleeves of the fugitive near the corner of the stone fence. A moment he hesitated, then darted away inland, not toward Saul, but toward the moor and the cup of the inland bay.

"Steady, Petrie! steady!" cried Nayland Smith. He ran, panting, beside me. "It is the path to the mire." He breathed sibilantly between every few words. "It was out there . . . that he hoped to lure us . . . with the cry for help."

A great blaze of lightning illuminated the landscape as far as the eye could see. Ahead of us a flying shape, hair lank and glistening in the downpour, followed a faint path skirting that green tongue of morass which we had noted from the upland. It was Kegan Van Roon. He glanced over his shoulder, showing a yellow, terror-stricken face. We were gaining upon him. Darkness fell, and the thunder cracked and boomed as though the very moor were splitting about us.

"Another fifty yards, Petrie," breathed Nayland Smith, "and after that it's unchartered ground."

On we went through the rain and the darkness; then:

"Slow up! slow up!" cried Smith. "It feels soft!"

Indeed, already I had made one false step--and the hungry mire had fastened upon my foot, almost tripping me.

"Lost the path!"

We stopped dead. The falling rain walled us in. I dared not move, for I knew that the mire, the devouring mire, stretched, eager, close about my feet. We were both waiting for the next flash of lightning. I think, but, before it came, out of the darkness ahead of us rose a cry that sometimes rings in my ears to this hour. Yet it was no more than a repetition of that which had called to us, deathfully, awhile before.

"Help! help! for God's sake help! Quick! I am sinking . . ."

Nayland Smith grasped my arm furiously.

"We dare not move, Petrie--we dare not move!" he breathed. "It's God's justice--visible for once."

Then came the lightning; and--ignoring a splitting crash behind us--we both looked ahead, over the mire.

Just on the edge of the venomous green path, not thirty yards away, I saw the head and shoulders and upstretched, appealing arms of Van Roon. Even as the lightning flickered and we saw him, he was gone; with one
last, long, drawn-out cry, horribly like the mournful wail of a sea gull, he was gone!

That eerie light died, and in the instant before the sound of the thunder came shatteringly, we turned about... in time to see Cragmire Tower, a blacker silhouette against the night, topple and fall! A red glow began to be perceptible above the building. The thunder came booming through the caverns of space. Nayland Smith lowered his wet face close to mine and shouted in my ear:

"Kegan Van Roon never returned from China. It was a trap. Those were two creatures of Dr. Fu-Manchu..."

"That light on the moor to-night?"

"You have not learned the Morse Code, Petrie. It was a signal, and it read:--S M I T H... SOS."

"Well?"

"I took the chance, as you know. And it was Karamaneh! She knew of the plot to bury us in the mire. She had followed from London, but could do nothing until dusk. God forgive me if I've misjudged her--for we owe her our lives to-night."

Flames were bursting up from the building beside the ruin of the ancient tower which had faced the storms of countless ages only to succumb at last. The lightning literally had cloven it in twain.

"The mulatto?..."

Again the lightning flashed, and we saw the path and began to retrace our steps. Nayland Smith turned to me; his face was very grim in that unearthly light, and his eyes shone like steel.

"I killed him, Petrie... as I meant to do."

From out over Sedgemoor it came, cracking and rolling and booming toward us, swelling in volume to a stupendous climax, that awful laughter of Jove the destroyer of Cragmire Tower.

CHAPTER XXIV

STORY OF THE GABLES

In looking over my notes dealing with the second phase of Dr. Fu-Manchu's activities in England, I find that one of the worst hours of my life was associated with the singular and seemingly inconsequent adventure of the fiery hand. I shall deal with it in this place, begging you to bear with me if I seem to digress.

Inspector Weymouth called one morning, shortly after the Van Roon episode, and entered upon a surprising account of a visit to a house at Hampstead which enjoyed the sinister reputation of being uninhabitable.

"But in what way does the case enter into your province?" inquired Nayland Smith, idly tapping out his pipe on a bar of the grate.

We had not long finished breakfast, but from an early hour Smith had been at his eternal smoking, which only the advent of the meal had interrupted.

"Well," replied the inspector, who occupied a big armchair near the window, "I was sent to look into it, I suppose, because I had nothing better to do at the moment."

"Ah!" jerked Smith, glancing over his shoulder.

The ejaculation had a veiled significance; for our quest of Dr. Fu-Manchu had come to an abrupt termination by reason of the fact that all trace of that malignant genius, and of the group surrounding him, had vanished with the destruction of Cragmire Tower.

"The Gables," continued the Scotland Yard man, "are a dead-end, with not a ghost of a clue to the whereabouts of the yellow fiend, has been getting on my nerves--"
"Although Dr. Fu-Manchu has been in England for some months, now," continued Weymouth, "I have never set
eyes upon him; the house we raided in Museum Street proved to be empty; in a word, I am wasting my time. So that
I volunteered to run up to Hampstead and look into the matter of the Gables, principally as a distraction. It's a queer
business, but more in the Psychical Research Society's line than mine, I'm afraid. Still, if there were no Dr. Fu-
Manchu it might be of interest to you--and to you, Dr. Petrie, because it illustrates the fact, that, given the right sort
of subject, death can be brought about without any elaborate mechanism--such as our Chinese friends employ."

"You interest me more and more," declared Smith, stretching himself in the long, white cane rest-chair.

"Two men, both fairly sound, except that the first one had an asthmatic heart, have died at the Gables without
any one laying a little finger upon them. Oh! there was no jugglery! They weren't poisoned, or bitten by venomous
insects, or suffocated, or anything like that. They just died of fear--stark fear."

With my elbows resting upon the table cover, and my chin in my hands, I was listening attentively, now, and
Nayland Smith, a big cushion behind his head, was watching the speaker with a keen and speculative look in those
steely eyes of his.

"You imply that Dr. Fu-Manchu has something to learn from the Gables?" he jerked.

Weymouth nodded stolidly.

"I can't work up anything like amazement in these days," continued the latter; "every other case seems stale and
hackneyed alongside the case. But I must confess that when the Gables came on the books of the Yard the second
time, I began to wonder. I thought there might be some tangible clue, some link connecting the two victims; perhaps
some evidence of robbery or of revenge--of some sort of motive. In short, I hoped to find evidence of human agency
at work, but, as before, I was disappointed."

"It's a legitimate case of a haunted house, then?" said Smith.

"Yes; we find them occasionally, these uninhabitable places, where there is something, something malignant and
harmful to human life, but something that you cannot arrest, that you cannot hope to bring into court."

"Ah," replied Smith slowly; "I suppose you are right. There are historic instances, of course: Glamys Castle and
Spedlins Tower in Scotland, Peel Castle, Isle of Man, with its Maudhe Dhug, the gray lady of Rainham Hall, the
headless horses of Caistor, the Wesley ghost of Epworth Rectory, and others. But I have never come in personal
contact with such a case, and if I did I should feel very humiliated to have to confess that there was any agency
which could produce a physical result--death--but which was immune from physical retaliation."

Weymouth nodded his head again.

"I might feel a bit sour about it, too," he replied, "if it were not that I haven't much pride left in these days,
considering the show of physical retaliation I have made against Dr. Fu-Manchu."

"A home thrust, Weymouth!" snapped Nayland Smith, with one of those rare, boyish laughs of his. "We're
children to that Chinese doctor, Inspector, to that weird product of a weird people who are as old in evil as the
pyramids are old in mystery. But about the Gables?"

"Well, it's an uncanny place. You mentioned Glamys Castle a moment ago, and it's possible to understand an old
stronghold like that being haunted, but the Gables was only built about 1870; it's quite a modern house. It was built
for a wealthy Quaker family, and they occupied it, uninterruptedly and apparently without anything unusual
occurring, for over forty years. Then it was sold to a Mr. Maddison--and Mr. Maddison died there six months ago."

"Maddison?" said Smith sharply, staring across at Weymouth. "What was he? Where did he come from?"

"He was a retired tea-planter from Colombo," replied the inspector.

"Colombo?"

"There was a link with the East, certainly, if that's what you are thinking; and it was this fact which interested me
at the time, and which led me to waste precious days and nights on the case. But there was no mortal connection
between this liverish individual and the schemes of Dr. Fu-Manchu. I'm certain of that."

"And how did he die?" I asked, interestedly.

"He just died in his chair one evening, in the room which he used as a library. It was his custom to sit there every
night, when there were no visitors, reading, until twelve o'clock--or later. He was a bachelor, and his household
consisted of a cook, a housemaid, and a man who had been with him for thirty years, I believe. At the time of Mr.
Maddison's death, his household had recently been deprived of two of its members. The cook and housemaid both
resigned one morning, giving as their reason the fact that the place was haunted."

"In what way?"

"I interviewed the precious pair at the time, and they told me absurd and various tales about dark figures
wandering along the corridors and bending over them in bed at night, whispering; but their chief trouble was a
continuous ringing of bells about the house."

"Bells?"

"They said that it became unbearable. Night and day there were bells ringing all over the house. At any rate, they
went, and for three or four days the Gables was occupied only by Mr. Maddison and his man, whose name was Stevens. I interviewed the latter also, and he was an altogether more reliable witness; a decent, steady sort of man whose story impressed me very much at the time."

"Did he confirm the ringing?"

"He swore to it—a sort of jangle, sometimes up in the air, near the ceilings, and sometimes under the floor, like the shaking of silver bells."

Nayland Smith stood up abruptly and began to pace the room, leaving great trails of blue-gray smoke behind him.

"Your story is sufficiently interesting, Inspector," he declared, "even to divert my mind from the eternal contemplation of the Fu-Manchu problem. This would appear to be distinctly a case of an 'astral bell' such as we sometimes hear of in India."

"It was Stevens," continued Weymouth, "who found Mr. Maddison. He (Stevens) had been out on business connected with the household arrangements, and at about eleven o'clock he returned, letting himself in with a key. There was a light in the library, and getting no response to his knocking, Stevens entered. He found his master sitting bolt upright in a chair, clutching the arms with rigid fingers and staring straight before him with a look of such frightful horror on his face, that Stevens positively ran from the room and out of the house. Mr. Maddison was stone dead. When a doctor, who lives at no great distance away, came and examined him, he could find no trace of violence whatever; he had apparently died of fright, to judge from the expression on his face."

"Anything else?"

"Only this: I learnt, indirectly, that the last member of the Quaker family to occupy the house had apparently witnessed the apparition, which had led to his vacating the place. I got the story from the wife of a man who had been employed as gardener there at that time. The apparition—which he witnessed in the hallway, if I remember rightly—took the form of a sort of luminous hand clutching a long, curved knife."

"Oh, Heavens!" cried Smith, and laughed shortly; "that's quite in order!"

"This gentleman told no one of the occurrence until after he had left the house, no doubt in order that the place should not acquire an evil reputation. Most of the original furniture remained, and Mr. Maddison took the house furnished. I don't think there can be any doubt that what killed him was fear at seeing a repetition—"

"Of the fiery hand?" concluded Smith.

"Quite so. Well, I examined the Gables pretty closely, and, with another Scotland Yard man, spent a night in the empty house. We saw nothing; but once, very faintly, we heard the ringing of bells."

Smith spun around upon him rapidly.

"You can swear to that?" he snapped.

"I can swear to it," declared Weymouth stolidly. "It seemed to be over our heads. We were sitting in the dining-room. Then it was gone, and we heard nothing more whatever of an unusual nature. Following the death of Mr. Maddison, the Gables remained empty until a while ago, when a French gentleman, name Lejay, leased it—"

"Furnished?"

"Yes; nothing was removed—"

"Who kept the place in order?"

"A married couple living in the neighborhood undertook to do so. The man attended to the lawn and so forth, and the woman came once a week, I believe, to clean up the house."

"And Lejay?"

"He came in only last week, having leased the house for six months. His family were to have joined him in a day or two, and he, with the aid of the pair I have just mentioned, and assisted by a French servant he brought over with him, was putting the place in order. At about twelve o'clock on Friday night this servant ran into a neighboring house screaming 'the fiery hand!' and when at last a constable arrived and a frightened group went up the avenue of the Gables, they found M. Lejay, dead in the avenue, near the steps just outside the hall door! He had the same face of horror..."

"What a tale for the press!" snapped Smith.

"The owner has managed to keep it quiet so far, but this time I think it will leak into the press—yes."

There was a short silence; then:

"And you have been down to the Gables again?"

"I was there on Saturday, but there's not a scrap of evidence. The man undoubtedly died of fright in the same way as Maddison. The place ought to be pulled down; it's unholy."

"Unholy is the word," I said. "I never heard anything like it. This M. Lejay had no enemies?—there could be no possible motive?"

"None whatever. He was a business man from Marseilles, and his affairs necessitated his remaining in or near
London for some considerable time; therefore, he decided to make his headquarters here, temporarily, and leased the Gables with that intention."

Nayland Smith was pacing the floor with increasing rapidity; he was tugging at the lobe of his left ear and his pipe had long since gone out.

CHAPTER XXV
THE BELLS

I started to my feet as a tall, bearded man swung open the door and hurled himself impetuously into the room. He wore a silk hat, which fitted him very ill, and a black frock coat which did not fit him at all.

"It's all right, Petrie!" cried the apparition; "I've leased the Gables!"

It was Nayland Smith! I stared at him in amazement

"The first time I have employed a disguise," continued my friend rapidly, "since the memorable episode of the false pigtail." He threw a small brown leather grip upon the floor. "In case you should care to visit the house, Petrie, I have brought these things. My tenancy commences to-night!"

Two days had elapsed, and I had entirely forgotten the strange story of the Gables which Inspector Weymouth had related to us; evidently it was otherwise with my friend, and utterly at a loss for an explanation of his singular behavior, I stooped mechanically and opened the grip. It contained an odd assortment of garments, and amongst other things several gray wigs and a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles.

Kneeling there with this strange litter about me, I looked up amazedly. Nayland Smith, with the unsuitable silk hat set right upon the back of his head, was pacing the room excitedly, his fuming pipe protruding from the tangle of factitious beard.

"You see, Petrie," he began again, rapidly, "I did not entirely trust the agent. I've leased the house in the name of Professor Maxton . . ."

"But, Smith," I cried, "what possible reason can there be for disguise?"

"There's every reason," he snapped.

"Why should you interest yourself in the Gables?"

"Does no explanation occur to you?"

"None whatever; to me the whole thing smacks of stark lunacy."

"Then you won't come?"

"I've never stuck at anything, Smith," I replied, "however undignified, when it has seemed that my presence could be of the slightest use."

As I rose to my feet, Smith stepped in front of me, and the steely gray eyes shone out strangely from the altered face. He clapped his hands upon my shoulders.

"If I assure you that your presence is necessary to my safety," he said--"that if you fail me I must seek another companion--will you come?"

Intuitively, I knew that he was keeping something back, and I was conscious of some resentment, but nevertheless my reply was a foregone conclusion, and--with the borrowed appearance of an extremely untidy old man--I crept guiltily out of my house that evening and into the cab which Smith had waiting.

The Gables was a roomy and rambling place lying back a considerable distance from the road. A semicircular drive gave access to the door, and so densely wooded was the ground, that for the most part the drive was practically a tunnel--a verdant tunnel. A high brick wall concealed the building from the point of view of any one on the roadway, but either horn of the crescent drive terminated at a heavy, wrought-iron gateway.

Smith discharged the cab at the corner of the narrow and winding road upon which the Gables fronted. It was walled in on both sides; on the left the wall being broken by tradesmen's entrances to the houses fronting upon another street, and on the right following, uninterruptedly, the grounds of the Gables. As we came to the gate:

"Nothing now," said Smith, pointing into the darkness of the road before us, "except a couple of studios, until one comes to the Heath."

He inserted the key in the lock of the gate and swung it creakingly open. I looked into the black arch of the avenue, thought of the haunted residence that lay hidden somewhere beyond, of those who had died in it--especially of the one who had died there under the trees-- and found myself out of love with the business of the night.

"Come on!" said Nayland Smith briskly, holding the gate open; "there should be a fire in the library and refreshments, if the charwoman has followed instructions."

I heard the great gate clang to behind us. Even had there been any moon (and there was none) I doubted if more than a patch or two of light could have penetrated there. The darkness was extraordinary. Nothing broke it, and I think Smith must have found his way by the aid of some sixth sense. At any rate, I saw nothing of the house until I stood some five paces from the steps leading up to the porch. A light was burning in the hallway, but dimly and inhospitably; of the facade of the building I could perceive little.
When we entered the hall and the door was closed behind us, I began wondering anew what purpose my friend hoped to serve by a vigil in this haunted place. There was a light in the library, the door of which was ajar, and on the large table were decanters, a siphon, and some biscuits and sandwiches. A large grip stood upon the floor, also. For some reason which was a mystery to me, Smith had decided that we must assume false names whilst under the roof of the Gables; and:

"Now, Pearce," he said, "a whisky-and-soda before we look around?"

The proposal was welcome enough, for I felt strangely dispirited, and, to tell the truth, in my strange disguise, not a little ridiculous.

All my nerves, no doubt, were highly strung, and my sense of hearing unusually acute, for I went in momentary expectation of some uncanny happening. I had not long to wait. As I raised the glass to my lips and glanced across the table at my friend, I heard the first faint sound heralding the coming of the bells.

It did not seem to proceed from anywhere within the library, but from some distant room, far away overhead. A musical sound it was, but breaking in upon the silence of that ill-omened house, its music was the music of terror. In a faint and very sweet cascade it rippled; a ringing as of tiny silver bells.

I set down my glass upon the table, and rising slowly from the chair in which I had been seated, stared fixedly at my companion, who was staring with equal fixity at me. I could see that I had not been deluded; Nayland Smith had heard the ringing, too.

"The ghosts waste no time!" he said softly. "This is not new to me; I spent an hour here last night and heard the same sound . . ."

I glanced hastily around the room. It was furnished as a library, and contained a considerable collection of works, principally novels. I was unable to judge of the outlook, for the two lofty windows were draped with heavy purple curtains which were drawn close. A silk shaded lamp swung from the center of the ceiling, and immediately over the table by which I stood. There was much shadow about the room; and now I glanced apprehensively about me, but especially toward the open door.

In that breathless suspense of listening we stood awhile; then:

"There it is again!" whispered Smith, tensely.

The ringing of bells was repeated, and seemingly much nearer to us; in fact it appeared to come from somewhere above, up near the ceiling of the room in which we stood. Simultaneously, we looked up, then Smith laughed, shortly.

"Instinctive, I suppose," he snapped; "but what do we expect to see in the air?"

The musical sound now grew in volume; the first tiny peal seemed to be reinforced by others and by others again, until the air around about us was filled with the pealings of these invisible bell-ringers.

Although, as I have said, the sound was rather musical than horrible, it was, on the other hand, so utterly unaccountable as to touch the supreme heights of the uncanny. I could not doubt that our presence had attracted these unseen ringers to the room in which we stood, and I knew quite well that I was growing pale. This was the room in which at least one unhappy occupant of the Gables had died of fear. I recognized the fact that if this mere overture were going to affect my nerves to such an extent, I could not hope to survive the ordeal of the night; a great effort was called for. I emptied my glass at a gulp, and stared across the table at Nayland Smith with a sort of defiance. He was standing very upright and motionless, but his eyes were turning right and left, searching every visible corner of the big room.

"Good!" he said in a very low voice. "The terrorizing power of the Unknown is boundless, but we must not get in the grip of panic, or we could not hope to remain in this house ten minutes."

I nodded without speaking. Then Smith, to my amazement, suddenly began to speak in a loud voice, a marked contrast to that, almost a whisper, in which he had spoken formerly.

"My dear Pearce," he cried, "do you hear the ringing of bells?"

Clearly the latter words were spoken for the benefit of the unseen intelligence controlling these manifestations; and although I regarded such finesse as somewhat wasted, I followed my friend's lead and replied in a voice as loud as his own:

"Distinctly, Professor!"

Silence followed my words, a silence in which both stood watchful and listening. Then, very faintly, I seemed to detect the silvery ringing receding away through distant rooms. Finally it became inaudible, and in the stillness of the Gables I could distinctly hear my companion breathing. For fully ten minutes we two remained thus, each momentarily expecting a repetition of the ringing, or the coming of some new and more sinister manifestation. But we heard nothing and saw nothing.

"Hand me that grip, and don't stir until I come back!" hissed Smith in my ear.

He turned and walked out of the library, his boots creaking very loudly in that awe-inspiring silence.
Standing beside the table, I watched the open door for his return, crushing down a dread that another form than
his might suddenly appear there.

I could hear him moving from room to room, and presently, as I waited in hushed, tense watchfulness, he came
in, depositing the grip upon the table. His eyes were gleaming feverishly.

"The house is haunted, Pearce!" he cried. "But no ghost ever frightened me! Come, I will show you your room."

CHAPTER XXVI
THE FIERY HAND

Smith walked ahead of me upstairs; he had snapped up the light in the hallway, and now he turned and cried
back loudly:

"I fear we should never get servants to stay here."

Again I detected the appeal to a hidden Audience; and there was something very uncanny in the idea. The house
now was deathly still; the ringing had entirely subsided. In the upper corridor my companion, who seemed to be well
acquainted with the position of the switches, again turned up all the lights, and in pursuit of the strange comedy
which he saw fit to enact, addressed me continuously in the loud and unnatural voice which he had adopted as part
of his disguise.

We looked into a number of rooms all well and comfortably furnished, but although my imagination may have
been responsible for the idea, they all seemed to possess a chilly and repellent atmosphere. I felt that to essay sleep
in any one of them would be the merest farce, that the place to all intents and purposes was uninhabitable, that
something incalculably evil presided over the house.

And through it all, so obtuse was I, that no glimmer of the truth entered my mind. Outside again in the long,
brightly lighted corridor, we stood for a moment as if a mutual anticipation of some new event pending had come to
us. It was curious that sudden pulling up and silent questioning of one another; because, although we acted thus, no
sound had reached us. A few seconds later our anticipation was realized. From the direction of the stairs it came—a
low wailing in a woman's voice; and the sweetness of the tones added to the terror of the sound. I clutched at Smith's
arm convulsively whilst that uncanny cry rose and fell—rose and fell—and died away.

Neither of us moved immediately. My mind was working with feverish rapidity and seeking to run down a
memory which the sound had stirred into faint quickness. My heart was still leaping wildly when the wailing began
again, rising and falling in regular cadence. At that instant I identified it.

During the time Smith and I had spent together in Egypt, two years before, searching for Karamaneh, I had
found myself on one occasion in the neighborhood of a native cemetery near to Bedrasheen. Now, the scene which I
had witnessed there rose up again vividly before me, and I seemed to see a little group of black-robed women
clustered together about a native grave; for the wailing which now was dying away again in the Gables was the
same, or almost the same, as the wailing of those Egyptian mourners.

The house was very silent again, now. My forehead was damp with perspiration, and I became more and more
convinced that the uncanny ordeal must prove too much for my nerves. Hitherto, I had accorded little credence to
tales of the supernatural, but face to face with such manifestations as these, I realized that I would have faced rather
a group of armed dacoits, nay! Dr. Fu-Manchu himself, than have remained another hour in that ill-omened house.

My companion must have read as much in my face. But he kept up the strange, and to me, purposeless comedy,
when presently he spoke.

"I feel it to be incumbent upon me to suggest," he said, "that we spend the night at a hotel after all."

He walked rapidly downstairs and into the library and began to strap up the grip.

"After all," he said, "there may be a natural explanation of what we've heard; for it is noteworthy that we have
actually seen nothing. It might even be possible to get used to the ringing and the wailing after a time. Frankly, I am
loath to go back on my bargain!"

Whilst I stared at him in amazement, he stood there indeterminate as it seemed, Then:

"Come, Pearce!" he cried loudly, "I can see that you do not share my views; but for my own part I shall return
to-morrow and devote further attention to the phenomena."

Extinguishing the light, he walked out into the hallway, carrying the grip in his hand. I was not far behind him.
We walked toward the door together, and:

"Turn the light out, Pearce," directed Smith; "the switch is at your elbow. We can see our way to the door well
enough, now."

In order to carry out these instructions, it became necessary for me to remain a few paces in the rear of my
companion, and I think I have never experienced such a pang of nameless terror as pierced me at the moment of
extinguishing the light; for Smith had not yet opened the door, and the utter darkness of the Gables was horrible
beyond expression. Surely darkness is the most potent weapon of the Unknown. I know that at the moment my hand
left the switch, I made for the door as though the hosts of hell pursued me. I collided violently with Smith. He was
evidently facing toward me in the darkness, for at the moment of our collision, he grasped my shoulder as in a vise.

"My God, Petrie! look behind you!" he whispered.

I was enabled to judge of the extent and reality of his fear by the fact that the strange subterfuge of addressing me always as Pearce was forgotten. I turned, in a flash. . . .

Never can I forget what I saw. Many strange and terrible memories are mine, memories stranger and more terrible than those of the average man; but this thing which now moved slowly down upon us through the impenetrable gloom of that haunted place, was (if the term be understood) almost absurdly horrible. It was a medieval legend come to life in modern London; it was as though some horrible chimera of the black and ignorant past was become create and potent in the present.

A luminous hand--a hand in the veins of which fire seemed to run so that the texture of the skin and the shape of the bones within were perceptible--in short a hand of glowing, fiery flesh clutching a short knife or dagger which also glowed with the same hellish, internal luminance, was advancing upon us where we stood--was not three paces removed!

What I did or how I came to do it, I can never recall. In all my years I have experienced nothing to equal the stark panic which seized upon me then. I know that I uttered a loud and frenzied cry; I know that I tore myself like a madman from Smith's restraining grip . . .

"Don't touch it! Keep away, for your life!" I heard . . .

But, dimly I recollect that, finding the thing approaching yet nearer, I lashed out with my fists--madly, blindly--and struck something palpable . . .

What was the result, I cannot say. At that point my recollections merge into confusion. Something or some one (Smith, as I afterwards discovered) was hauling me by main force through the darkness; I fell a considerable distance onto gravel which lacerated my hands and gashed my knees. Then, with the cool night air fanning my brow, I was running, running--my breath coming in hysterical sobs. Beside me fled another figure. . . . And my definite recollections commence again at that point. For this companion of my flight from the Gables threw himself roughly against me to alter my course.

"Not that way! not that way!" came pantingly.

"Not on to the Heath . . . we must keep to the roads . . ."

It was Nayland Smith. That healing realization came to me, bringing such a gladness as no words of mine can express nor convey. Still we ran on.

"There's a policeman's lantern," panted my companion. "They'll attempt nothing, now!"

* * * * *

I gulped down the stiff brandy-and-soda, then glanced across to where Nayland Smith lay extended in the long, cane chair.

"Perhaps you will explain," I said, "for what purpose you submitted me to that ordeal. If you proposed to correct my skepticism concerning supernatural manifestations, you have succeeded."

"Yes," said my companion, musingly, "they are devilishly clever; but we knew that already."

I stared at him, fatuously.

"Have you ever known me to waste my time when there was important work to do?" he continued. "Do you seriously believe that my ghost-hunting was undertaken for amusement? Really, Petrie, although you are very fond of assuring me that I need a holiday, I think the shoe is on the other foot!"

From the pocket of his dressing-gown, he took out a piece of silk fringe which had apparently been torn from a scarf, and rolling it into a ball, tossed it across to me.

"Smell!" he snapped.

I did as he directed--and gave a great start. The silk exhaled a faint perfume, but its effect upon me was as though some one had cried aloud:--

"Karamaneh!"

Beyond doubt the silken fragment had belonged to the beautiful servant of Dr. Fu-Manchu, to the dark-eyed, seductive Karamaneh. Nayland Smith was watching me keenly.

"You recognize it--yes?"

I placed the piece of silk upon the table, slightly shrugging my shoulders.

"It was sufficient evidence in itself," continued my friend, "but I thought it better to seek confirmation, and the obvious way was to pose as a new lessee of the Gables . . ."

"But, Smith," I began . . .

"Let me explain, Petrie. The history of the Gables seemed to be susceptible of only one explanation; in short it was fairly evident to me that the object of the manifestations was to insure the place being kept empty. This idea suggested another, and with them both in mind, I set out to make my inquiries, first taking the precaution to disguise
my identity, to which end Weymouth gave me the freedom of Scotland Yard's fancy wardrobe. I did not take the agent into my confidence, but posed as a stranger who had heard that the house was to let furnished and thought it might suit his purpose. My inquiries were directed to a particular end, but I failed to achieve it at the time. I had theories, as I have said, and when, having paid the deposit and secured possession of the keys, I was enabled to visit the place alone, I was fortunate enough to obtain evidence to show that my imagination had not misled me.

"You were very curious the other morning, I recall, respecting my object in borrowing a large brace and bit. My object, Petrie, was to bore a series of holes in the wainscoating of various rooms at the Gables--in inconspicuous positions, of course . . ."

"But, my dear Smith!" I cried, "you are merely adding to my mystification."

He stood up and began to pace the room in his restless fashion.

"I had cross-examined Weymouth closely regarding the phenomenon of the bell-ringing, and an exhaustive search of the premises led to the discovery that the house was in such excellent condition that, from ground-floor to attic, there was not a solitary crevice large enough to admit of the passage of a mouse."

I suppose I must have been staring very foolishly indeed, for Nayland Smith burst into one of his sudden laughs.

"A mouse, I said, Petrie!" he cried. "With the brace-and-bit I rectified that matter. I made the holes I have mentioned, and before each set a trap baited with a piece of succulent, toasted cheese. Just open that grip!"

The light at last was dawning upon my mental darkness, and I pounced upon the grip, which stood upon a chair near the window, and opened it. A sickly smell of cooked cheese assailed my nostrils.

"Mind your fingers!" cried Smith; "some of them are still set, possibly."

Out from the grip I began to take mouse-traps! Two or three of them were still set but in the case of the greater number the catches had slipped. Nine I took out and placed upon the table, and all were empty. In the tenth there crouched, panting, its soft furry body dank with perspiration, a little white mouse!

"Only one capture!" cried my companion, "showing how well-fed the creatures were. Examine his tail!"

But already I had perceived that to which Smith would draw my attention, and the mystery of the "astral bells" was a mystery no longer. Bound to the little creature's tail, close to the root, with fine soft wire such as is used for making up bouquets, were three tiny silver bells. I looked across at my companion in speechless surprise.

"Almost childish, is it not?" he said; "yet by means of this simple device the Gables has been emptied of occupant after occupant. There was small chance of the trick being detected, for, as I have said, there was absolutely no aperture from roof to basement by means of which one of them could have escaped into the building."

"Then . . ."

"They were admitted into the wall cavities and the rafters, from some cellar underneath, Petrie, to which, after a brief scamper under the floors and over the ceilings, they instinctively returned for the food they were accustomed to receive, and for which, even had it been possible (which it was not) they had no occasion to forage."

I, too, stood up; for excitement was growing within me. I took up the piece of silk from the table.

"Where did you find this?" I asked, my eyes upon Smith's keen face.

"In a sort of wine cellar, Petrie," he replied, "under the stair. There is no cellar proper to the Gables--at least no such cellar appears in the plans."

"But . . ."

"But there is one beyond doubt--yes! It must be part of some older building which occupied the site before the Gables was built. One can only surmise that it exists, although such a surmise is a fairly safe one, and the entrance to the subterranean portion of the building is situated beyond doubt in the wine cellar. Of this we have at least two evidences:--the finding of the fragment of silk there, and the fact that in one case at least--as I learned--the light was extinguished in the library unaccountably. This could only have been done in one way: by manipulating the main switch, which is also in the wine cellar."

"But Smith!" I cried, "do you mean that Fu-Manchu . . ."

Nayland Smith turned in his promenade of the floor, and stared into my eyes.

"I mean that Dr. Fu-Manchu has had a hiding-place under the Gables for an indefinite period!" he replied. "I always suspected that a man of his genius would have a second retreat prepared for him, anticipating the event of the first being discovered. Oh! I don't doubt it! The place probably is extensive, and I am almost certain--though the point has to be confirmed--that there is another entrance from the studio further along the road. We know, now, why our recent searchings in the East End have proved futile; why the house in Museum Street was deserted; he has been lying low in this burrow at Hampstead!"

"But the hand, Smith, the luminous hand . . ."

Nayland Smith laughed shortly.

"Your superstitious fears overcame you to such an extent, Petrie--and I don't wonder at it; the sight was a ghastly one--that probably you don't remember what occurred when you struck out at that same ghostly hand?"
"I seemed to hit something."
"That was why we ran. But I think our retreat had all the appearance of a rout, as I intended that it should. Pardon my playing upon your very natural fears, old man, but you could not have simulated panic half so naturally! And if they had suspected that the device was discovered, we might never have quitted the Gables alive. It was touch-and-go for a moment."
"But . . ."
"Turn out the light!" snapped my companion.
Wondering greatly, I did as he desired. I turned out the light . . . and in the darkness of my own study I saw a fiery fist being shaken at me threateningly! . . . The bones were distinctly visible, and the luminosity of the flesh was truly ghastly.
"Turn on the light, again!" cried Smith.
Deeply mystified, I did so . . . and my friend tossed a little electric pocket-lamp on to the writing-table.
"They used merely a small electric lamp fitted into the handle of a glass dagger," he said with a sort of contempt.
"It was very effective, but the luminous hand is a phenomenon producible by any one who possesses an electric torch."
"The Gables--will be watched?"
"At last, Petrie, I think we have Fu-Manchu--in his own trap!"
CHAPTER XXVII
THE NIGHT OF THE RAID
"Dash it all, Petrie!" cried Smith, "this is most annoying!"
The bell was ringing furiously, although midnight was long past. Whom could my late visitor be? Almost certainly this ringing portended an urgent case. In other words, I was not fated to take part in what I anticipated would prove to be the closing scene of the Fu-Manchu drama.
"Every one is in bed," I said, ruefully; "and how can I possibly see a patient--in this costume?"
Smith and I were both arrayed in rough tweeds, and anticipating the labors before us, had dispensed with collars and wore soft mufflers. It was hard to be called upon to face a professional interview dressed thus, and having a big tweed cap pulled down over my eyes.
Across the writing-table we confronted one another in dismayed silence, whilst, below, the bell sent up its ceaseless clangor.
"It has to be done, Smith," I said, regretfully. "Almost certainly it means a journey and probably an absence of some hours."
I threw my cap upon the table, turned up my coat to hide the absence of collar, and started for the door. My last sight of Smith showed him standing looking after me, tugging at the lobe of his ear and clicking his teeth together with suppressed irritability. I stumbled down the dark stairs, along the hall, and opened the front door. Vaguely visible in the light of a street lamp which stood at no great distance away, I saw a slender man of medium height confronting me. From the shadowed face two large and luminous eyes looked out into mine. My visitor, who, despite the warmth of the evening, wore a heavy greatcoat, was an Oriental!
I drew back, apprehensively; then:
"Ah! Dr. Petrie!" he said in a softly musical voice which made me start again, "to God be all praise that I have found you!"
Some emotion, which at present I could not define, was stirring within me. Where had I seen this graceful Eastern youth before? Where had I heard that soft voice?
"Do you wish to see me professionally?" I asked--yet even as I put the question, I seemed to know it unnecessary.
"So you know me no more?" said the stranger--and his teeth gleamed in a slight smile.
Heavens! I knew now what had struck that vibrant chord within me! The voice, though infinitely deeper, yet had an unmistakable resemblance to the dulcet tones of Karamaneh--of Karamaneh whose eyes haunted my dreams, whose beauty had done much to embitter my years.
The Oriental youth stepped forward, with outstretched hand.
"So you know me no more?" he repeated; "but I know you, and give praise to Allah that I have found you!"
I stepped back, pressed the electric switch, and turned, with leaping heart, to look into the face of my visitor. It was a face of the purest Greek beauty, a face that might have served as a model for Praxiteles; the skin had a golden pallor, which, with the crisp black hair and magnetic yet velvety eyes, suggested to my fancy that this was the young Antinious risen from the Nile, whose wraith now appeared to me out of the night. I stifled a cry of surprise, not unmixed with gladness.
It was Aziz--the brother of Karamaneh!
Never could the entrance of a figure upon the stage of a drama have been more dramatic than the coming of Aziz upon this night of all nights. I seized the outstretched hand and drew him forward, then reclosed the door and stood before him a moment in doubt.

A vaguely troubled look momentarily crossed the handsome face; with the Oriental's unerring instinct, he had detected the reserve of my greeting. Yet, when I thought of the treachery of Karamaneh, when I remember how she, whom we had befriended, whom we had rescued from the house of Fu-Manchu, now had turned like the beautiful viper that she was to strike at the hand that caressed her; when I thought how to-night we were set upon raiding the place where the evil Chinese doctor lurked in hiding, were set upon the arrest of that malignant genius and of all his creatures, Karamaneh amongst them, is it strange that I hesitated? Yet, again, when I thought of my last meeting with her, and of how, twice, she had risked her life to save me . . .

So, avoiding the gaze of the lad, I took his arm, and in silence we two ascended the stairs and entered my study. . . where Nayland Smith stood bolt upright beside the table, his steely eyes fixed upon the face of the new arrival.

No look of recognition crossed the bronzed features, and Aziz who had started forward with outstretched hands, fell back a step and looked pathetically from me to Nayland Smith, and from the grim commissioner back again to me. The appeal in the velvet eyes was more than I could tolerate, unmoved.

"Smith," I said shortly, "you remember Aziz?"
Not a muscle visibly moved in Smith's face, as he snapped back:
"I remember him perfectly."
"He has come, I think, to seek our assistance."
"Yes, yes!" cried Aziz laying his hand upon my arm with a gesture painfully reminiscent of Karamaneh--"I came only to-night to London. Oh, my gentlemen! I have searched, and searched, and searched, until I am weary. Often I have wished to die. And then at last I come to Rangoon . . ."
"To Rangoon!" snapped Smith, still with the gray eyes fixed almost fiercely upon the lad's face.
"To Rangoon--yes; and there I heard news at last. I hear that you have seen her--have seen Karamaneh--that you are back in London." He was not entirely at home with his English. "I know then that she must be here, too. I ask them everywhere, and they answer 'yes.' Oh, Smith Pasha!"--he stepped forward and impulsively seized both Smith's hands--"You know where she is--take me to her!"

Smith's face was a study in perplexity, now. In the past we had befriended the young Aziz, and it was hard to look upon him in the light of an enemy. Yet had we not equally befriended his sister?--and she . . .

At last Smith glanced across at me where I stood just within the doorway.
"What do you make of it, Petrie?" he said harshly. "Personally I take it to mean that our plans have leaked out."
He sprang suddenly back from Aziz and I saw his glance traveling rapidly over the slight figure as if in quest of concealed arms. "I take it to be a trap!"

A moment he stood so, regarding him, and despite my well-grounded distrust of the Oriental character, I could have sworn that the expression of pained surprise upon the youth's face was not simulated but real. Even Smith, I think, began to share my view; for suddenly he threw himself into the white cane rest-chair, and, still fixedly regarding Aziz:
"Perhaps I have wronged you," he said. "If I have, you shall know the reason presently. Tell your own story!"

There was a pathetic humbleness in the velvet eyes of Aziz--eyes so like those others that were ever looking into mine in dreams--as glancing from Smith to me he began, hands outstretched, characteristically, palms upward and fingers curling, to tell in broken English the story of his search for Karamaneh . . .

"It was Fu-Manchu, my kind gentlemen--it was the hakim who is really not a man at all, but an efreet. He found us again less than four days after you had left us, Smith Pasha! . . . He found us in Cairo, and to Karamaneh he made the forgetting of all things--even of me--even of me . . ."
Nayland Smith snapped his teeth together sharply; then:
"What do you mean by that?" he demanded.

For my own part I understood well enough, remembering how the brilliant Chinese doctor once had performed such an operation as this upon poor Inspector Weymouth; how, by means of an injection of some serum prepared (as Karamaneh afterwards told us) from the venom of a swamp adder or similar reptile, he had induced amnesia, or complete loss of memory. I felt every drop of blood recede from my cheeks.

"Smith!" I began . . .
"Let him speak for himself," interrupted my friend sharply.
"They tried to take us both," continued Aziz still speaking in that soft, melodious manner, but with deep seriousness. "I escaped, I, who am swift of foot, hoping to bring help."--He shook his head sadly-- "But, except the All Powerful, who is so powerful as the Hakim Fu-Manchu? I hid, my gentlemen, and watched and waited, one--two--three weeks. At last I saw her again, my sister, Karamaneh; but ah! she did not know me, did not know me,
Aziz her brother! She was in an arabeeyeh, and passed me quickly along the Sharia en-Nahhasin. I ran, and ran, and ran, crying her name, but although she looked back, she did not know me--she did not know me! I felt that I was dying, and presently I fell--upon the steps of the Mosque of Abu."

He dropped the expressive hands wearily to his sides and sank his chin upon his breast.

"And then?" I said, huskily--for my heart was fluttering like a captive bird.

"Alas! from that day to this I see her no more, my gentlemen. I travel, not only in Egypt, but near and far, and still I see her no more until in Rangoon I hear that which brings me to England again"--he extended his palms naively--"and here I am--Smith Pasha."

Smith sprang upright again and turned to me.

"Either I am growing over-credulous," he said, "or Aziz speaks the truth. But"--he held up his hand--"you can tell me all that at some other time, Petrie! We must take no chances. Sergeant Carter is downstairs with the cab; you might ask him to step up. He and Aziz can remain here until our return."

CHAPTER XXVIII
THE SAMURAI'S SWORD

The muffled drumming of sleepless London seemed very remote from us, as side by side we crept up the narrow path to the studio. This was a starry but moonless night, and the little dingy white building with a solitary tree peeping, in silhouette, above the glazed roof, bore an odd resemblance to one of those tombs which form a city of the dead so near to the city of feverish life on the slopes of the Mokattam Hills. This line of reflection proved unpleasant, and I dismissed it sternly from my mind.

The shriek of a train-whistle reached me, a sound which breaks the stillness of the most silent London night, telling of the ceaseless, febrile life of the great world-capital whose activity ceases not with the coming of darkness. Around and about us a very great stillness reigned, however, and the velvet dusk which, with the star-jeweled sky, was strongly suggestive of an Eastern night--gave up no sign to show that it masked the presence of more than twenty men. Some distance away on our right was the Gables, that sinister and deserted mansion which we assumed, and with good reason, to be nothing less than the gateway to the subterranean abode of Dr. Fu-Manchu; before us was the studio, which, if Nayland Smith's deductions were accurate, concealed a second entrance to the same mysterious dwelling.

As my friend, glancing cautiously all about him, inserted the key in the lock, an owl hooted dismally almost immediately above our heads. I caught my breath sharply, for it might be a signal; but, looking upward, I saw a great black shape float slantingly from the tree beyond the studio into the coppice on the right which hemmed in the Gables. Silently the owl winged its uncanny flight into the greater darkness of the trees, and was gone. Smith opened the door and we stepped into the studio. Our plans had been well considered, and in accordance with these, I now moved up beside my friend, who was dimly perceptible to me in the starlight which found access through the glass roof, and pressed the catch of my electric pocket-lamp . . .

I suppose that by virtue of my self-imposed duty as chronicler of the deeds of Dr. Fu-Manchu--the greatest and most evil genius whom the later centuries have produced, the man who dreamt of an universal Yellow Empire--I should have acquired a certain facility in describing bizarre happenings. But I confess that it fails me now as I attempt in cold English to portray my emotions when the white beam from the little lamp cut through the darkness of the studio, and shone fully upon the beautiful face of Karamaneh!

Less than six feet away from me she stood, arrayed in the gauzy dress of the harem, her fingers and slim white arms laden with barbaric jewelry! The light wavered in my suddenly nerveless hand, gleaming momentarily upon bare ankles and golden anklets, upon little red leather shoes.

I spoke no word, and Smith was as silent as I; both of us, I think, were speechless rather from amazement than in obedience to the evident wishes of Fu-Manchu's slave-girl. Yet I have only to close my eyes at this moment to see her as she stood, one finger raised to her lips, enjoining us to silence. She looked ghastly pale in the light of the lamp, but so lovely that my rebellious heart threatened already, to make a fool of me.

So we stood in that untidy studio, with canvases and easels heaped against the wall and with all sorts of litter about us, a trio strangely met, and one to have amused the high gods watching through the windows of the stars.

"Go back!" came in a whisper from Karamaneh.

I saw the red lips moving and read a dreadful horror in the widely opened eyes, in those eyes like pools of mystery to taunt the thirsty soul. The world of realities was slipping past me; I seemed to be losing my hold on things actual; I had built up an Eastern palace about myself and Karamaneh wherein, the world shut out, I might pass the hours in reading the mystery of those dark eyes. Nayland Smith brought me sharply to my senses.

"Steady with the light, Petrie!" he hissed in my ear. "My skepticism has been shaken, to-night, but I am taking no chances."

He moved from my side and forward toward that lovely, unreal figure which stood immediately before the
model's throne and its background of plush curtains. Karamaneh started forward to meet him, suppressing a little
cry, whose real anguish could not have been simulated.

"Go back! go back!" she whispered urgently, and thrust out her hands against Smith's breast. "For God's sake, go
back! I have risked my life to come here to-night. He knows, and is ready!" . . .

The words were spoken with passionate intensity, and Nayland Smith hesitated. To my nostrils was wafted that
faint, delightful perfume which, since one night, two years ago, it had come to disturb my senses, had taunted me
many times as the mirage taunts the parched Sahara traveler. I took a step forward.

"Don't move!" snapped Smith.

Karamaneh clutched frenziedly at the lapels of his coat.

"Listen to me!" she said, beseechingly and stamped one little foot upon the floor--"listen to me! You are a clever
man, but you know nothing of a woman's heart--nothing--nothing--if seeing me, hearing me, knowing, as you do
know, I risk, you can doubt that I speak the truth. And I tell you that it is death to go behind those curtains-- that he . . ."

"That's what I wanted to know!" snapped Smith. His voice quivered with excitement.

Suddenly grasping Karamaneh by the waist, he lifted her and set her aside; then in three bounds he was on to the
model's throne and had torn the Plush curtains bodily from their fastenings.

How it occurred I cannot hope to make dear, for here my recollections merge into a chaos. I know that Smith
seemed to topple forward amid the purple billows of velvet, and his muffled cry came to me:

"Petrie! My God, Petrie!" . . .

The pale face of Karamaneh looked up into mine and her hands were clutching me, but the glamour of her
personality had lost its hold, for I knew--heavens, how poignantly it struck home to me!--that Nayland Smith was
gone to his death. What I hoped to achieve, I know not, but hurling the trembling girl aside, I snatched the Browning
pistol from my coat pocket, and with the ray of the lamp directed upon the purple mound of velvet, I leaped forward.

I think I realized that the curtains had masked a collapsible trap, a sheer pit of blackness, an instant before I was
precipitated into it, but certainly the knowledge came too late. With the sound of a soft, shuddering cry in my ears, I
fell, dropping lamp and pistol, and clutching at the fallen hangings. But they offered me no support. My head
seemed to be bursting; I could utter only a hoarse groan, as I fell--fell--fell . . .

When my mind began to work again, in returning consciousness, I found it to be laden with reproach. How often
in the past had we blindly hurled ourselves into just such a trap as this? Should we never learn that where Fu-
Manchu was, impetuosity must prove fatal? On two distinct occasions in the past we had been made the victims of
this device, yet even although we had had practically conclusive evidence that this studio was used by Dr. Fu-
Manchu, we had relied upon its floor being as secure as that of any other studio, we had failed to sound every foot of
it ere trusting our weight to its support. . . .

"There is such a divine simplicity in the English mind that one may lay one's plans with mathematical precision,
and rely upon the Nayland Smiths and Dr. Petries to play their allotted parts. Excepting two faithful followers, my
friends are long since departed. But here, in these vaults which time has overlooked and which are as secret and as
serviceable to-day as they were two hundred years ago, I wait patiently, with my trap set, like the spider for the fly! . . ."

To the sound of that taunting voice, I opened my eyes. As I did so I strove to spring upright--only to realize that I
was tied fast to a heavy ebony chair inlaid with ivory, and attached by means of two iron brackets to the floor.

"Even children learn from experience," continued the unforgettable voice, alternately guttural and sibilant, but
always as deliberate as though the speaker were choosing with care words which should perfectly clothe his
thoughts. "For 'a burnt child fears the fire,' says your English adage. But Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith, who
enjoys the confidence of the India Office, and who is empowered to control the movements of the Criminal
Investigation Department, learns nothing from experience. He is less than a child, since he has twice rashly
precipitated himself into a chamber charged with an anesthetic prepared, by a process of my own, from the
lycoperdon or Common Puff-ball."

I became fully master of my senses, and I became fully alive to a stupendous fact. At last it was ended; we were
utterly in the power of Dr. Fu-Manchu; our race was run.

I sat in a low vaulted room. The roof was of ancient brickwork, but the walls were draped with exquisite Chinese
fabric having a green ground whereon was a design representing a grotesque procession of white peacocks. A green
carpet covered the floor, and the whole of the furniture was of the same material as the chair to which I was
strapped, viz:--ebony inlaid with ivory. This furniture was scanty. There was a heavy table in one corner of the
dungeonesque place, on which were a number of books and papers. Before this table was a high-backed, heavily
carven chair. A smaller table stood upon the right of the only visible opening, a low door partially draped with bead
work curtains, above which hung a silver lamp. On this smaller table, a stick of incense, in a silver holder, sent up a
pencil of vapor into the air, and the chamber was loaded with the sickly sweet fumes. A faint haze from the incense-
stick hovered up under the roof.

In the high-backed chair sat Dr. Fu-Manchu, wearing a green robe upon which was embroidered a design, the
subject of which at first glance was not perceptible, but which presently I made out to be a huge white peacock. He
wore a little cap perched upon the dome of his amazing skull, and with one clawish hand resting upon the ebony
of the table, he sat slightly turned toward me, his emotionless face a mask of incredible evil. In spite of, or because of,
the high intellect written upon it, the face of Dr. Fu-Manchu was more utterly repellent than any I have ever known,
and the green eyes, eyes green as those of a cat in the darkness, which sometimes burned like witch lamps, and
sometimes were horribly filmed like nothing human or imaginable, might have mirrored not a soul, but an emanation
of hell, incarnate in this gaunt, high-shouldered body.

Stretched flat upon the floor lay Nayland Smith, partially stripped, his arms thrown back over his head and his
wrists chained to a stout iron staple attached to the wall; he was fully conscious and staring intently at the Chinese
doctor. His bare ankles also were manacled, and fixed to a second chain, which quivered tautly across the green
carpet and passed out through the doorway, being attached to something beyond the curtain, and invisible to me
from where I sat.

Fu-Manchu was now silent. I could hear Smith's heavy breathing and hear my watch ticking in my pocket. I
suddenly realized that although my body was lashed to the ebony chair, my hands and arms were free. Next, looking
dazedly about me, my attention was drawn to a heavy sword which stood hilt upward against the wall within reach
of my hand. It was a magnificent piece, of Japanese workmanship; a long, curved Damascened blade having a
double-handed hilt of steel, inlaid with gold, and resembling fine Kufi work. A host of possibilities swept through
my mind. Then I perceived that the sword was attached to the wall by a thin steel chain some five feet in length.

"Even if you had the dexterity of a Mexican knife-thrower," came the guttural voice of Fu-Manchu, "you would
be unable to reach me, dear Dr. Petrie."

The Chinaman had read my thoughts.

Smith turned his eyes upon me momentarily, only to look away again in the direction of Fu-Manchu. My friend's
face was slightly pale beneath the tan, and his jaw muscles stood out with unusual prominence. By this fact alone
did he reveal his knowledge that he lay at the mercy of this enemy of the white race, of this inhuman being who
himself knew no mercy, of this man whose very genius was inspired by the cool, calculated cruelty of his race, of
that race which to this day disposes of hundreds, nay! thousands, of its unwanted girl-children by the simple
measure of throwing them down a well specially dedicated to the purpose.

"The weapon near your hand," continued the Chinaman, imperturbably, "is a product of the civilization of our
near neighbors, the Japanese, a race to whose courage I prostrate myself in meekness. It is the sword of a samurai,
Dr. Petrie. It is of very great age, and was, until an unfortunate misunderstanding with myself led to the extinction
of the family, a treasured possession of a noble Japanese house . . ."

The soft voice, into which an occasional sibilance crept, but which never rose above a cool monotone, gradually
was lashing me into fury, and I could see the muscles moving in Smith's jaws as he convulsively clenched his teeth;
whereby I knew that, impotent, he burned with a rage at least as great as mine. But I did not speak, and did not
move.

"The ancient tradition of seppuku," continued the Chinaman, "or hara-kiri, still rules, as you know, in the great
families of Japan. There is a sacred ritual, and the samurai who dedicates himself to this honorable end, must follow
strictly the ritual. As a physician, the exact nature of the ceremony might possibly interest you, Dr. Petrie, but a
technical account of the two incisions which the sacrificant employs in his self-dismissal, might, on the other hand,
bore Mr. Nayland Smith. Therefore I will merely enlighten you upon one little point, a minor one, but interesting to
the student of human nature. In short, even a samurai--and no braver race has ever honored the world--sometimes
hesitates to complete the operation. The weapon near to your hand, my dear Dr. Petrie, is known as the Friend's
Sword. On such occasions as we are discussing, a trusty friend is given the post--an honored one of standing behind
the family, a treasured possession of a noble Japanese house . . ."

Some dim perceptions of the truth was beginning to creep into my mind. When I say a perception of the truth, I
mean rather of some part of the purpose of Dr. Fu-Manchu; of the whole horrible truth, of the scheme which had
been conceived by that mighty, evil man, I had no glimmering, but I foresaw that a frightful ordeal was before us
both.

"That I hold you in high esteem," continued Fu-Manchu, "is a fact which must be apparent to you by this time,
but in regard to your companion, I entertain very different sentiments. . . ."
Always underlying the deliberate calm of the speaker, sometimes showing itself in an unusually deep guttural,
sometimes in an unusually serpentine sibilance, lurked the frenzy of hatred which in the past had revealed itself
occasionally in wild outbursts. Momentarily I expected such an outburst now, but it did not come.

"One quality possessed by Mr. Nayland Smith," resumed the Chinaman, "I admire; I refer to his courage. I
would wish that so courageous a man should seek his own end, should voluntarily efface himself from the path of
that world-movement which he is powerless to check. In short, I would have him show himself a samurai. Always
his friend, you shall remain so to the end, Dr. Petrie. I have arranged for this."

He struck lightly a little silver gong, dependent from the corner of the table, whereupon, from the curtained
doorway, there entered a short, thickly built Burman whom I recognized for a dacoit. He wore a shoddy blue suit,
which had been made for a much larger man; but these things claimed little of my attention, which automatically
was directed to the load beneath which the Burman labored.

Upon his back he carried a sort of wire box rather less than six feet long, some two feet high, and about two feet
wide. In short, it was a stout framework covered with fine wire-netting on the top, sides and ends, but being open at
the bottom. It seemed to be made in five sections or to contain four sliding partitions which could be raised or
lowered at will. These were of wood, and in the bottom of each was cut a little arch. The arches in the four partitions
varied in size, so that whereas the first was not more than five inches high, the fourth opened almost to the wire roof
of the box or cage; and a fifth, which was but little higher than the first, was cut in the actual end of the contrivance.

So intent was I upon this device, the purpose of which I was wholly unable to divine, that I directed the whole of
my attention upon it. Then, as the Burman paused in the doorway, resting a corner of the cage upon the brilliant
carpet, I glanced toward Fu-Manchu. He was watching Nayland Smith, and revealing his irregular yellow teeth--the
teeth of an opium smoker--in the awful mirthless smile which I knew.

"God!" whispered Smith--"the Six Gates!"

"The knowledge of my beautiful country serves you well," replied Fu-Manchu gently.

Instantly I looked to my friend . . . and every drop of blood seemed to recede from my heart, leaving it cold in
my breast. If I did not know the purpose of the cage, obviously Smith knew it all too well. His pallor had grown
more marked, and although his gray eyes stared defiantly at the Chinaman, I, who knew him, could read a deathly
horror in their depths.

The dacoit, in obedience to a guttural order from Dr. Fu-Manchu, placed the cage upon the carpet, completely
covering Smith's body, but leaving his neck and head exposed. The seared and pock-marked face set in a sort of
placid leer, the dacoit adjusted the sliding partitions to Smith's recumbent form, and I saw the purpose of the
graduated arches. They were intended to divide a human body in just such fashion, and, as I realized, were most
cunningly shaped to that end. The whole of Smith's body lay now in the wire cage, each of the five compartments
whereof was shut off from its neighbor.

The Burman stepped back and stood waiting in the doorway. Dr. Fu-Manchu, removing his gaze from the face of
my friend, directed it now upon me.

"Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith shall have the honor of acting as hierophant, admitting himself to the
Mysteries," said Fu-Manchu softly, "and you, Dr. Petrie, shall be the Friend."

CHAPTER XXIX
THE SIX GATES

He glanced toward the Burman, who retired immediately, to re-enter a moment later carrying a curious leather
sack, in shape not unlike that of a sakka or Arab water-carrier. Opening a little trap in the top of the first
compartment of the cage (that is, the compartment which covered Smith's bare feet and ankles) he inserted the neck
of the sack, then suddenly seized it by the bottom and shook it vigorously. Before my horrified gaze four huge rats
came tumbling out from the bag into the cage! The dacoit snatched away the sack and snapped the shutter fast. A
moving mist obscured my sight, a mist through which I saw the green eyes of Dr. Fu-Manchu fixed upon me, and
through which, as from a great distance, his voice, sunk to a snake-like hiss, came to my ears.

"Cantonese rats, Dr. Petrie, the most ravenous in the world . . . they have eaten nothing for nearly a week!"

Then all became blurred as though a painter with a brush steeped in red had smudged out the details of the
picture. For an indefinite period, which seemed like many minutes yet probably was only a few seconds, I saw
nothing and heard nothing; my sensory nerves were dulled entirely. From this state I was awakened and brought
back to the realities by a sound which ever afterward I was doomed to associate with that ghastly scene.

This was the squealing of the rats.

The red mist seemed to disperse at that, and with frightfully intense interest, I began to study the awful torture to
which Nayland Smith was being subjected. The dacoit had disappeared, and Fu-Manchu placidly was watching the
four lean and hideous animals in the cage. As I also turned my eyes in that direction, the rats overcame their
temporary fear, and began . . .
"You have been good enough to notice," said the Chinaman, his voice still sunk in that sibilant whisper, "my partiality for dumb allies. You have met my scorpions, my death-adders, my baboon-man. The uses of such a playful little animal as a marmoset have never been fully appreciated before, I think, but to an indiscretion of this last-named pet of mine, I seem to remember that you owed something in the past, Dr. Petrie . . ."

Nayland Smith stifled a deep groan. One rapid glance I ventured at his face. It was a grayish hue, now, and dank with perspiration. His gaze met mine.

The rats had almost ceased squealing.

"Much depends upon yourself, Doctor," continued Fu-Manchu, slightly raising his voice. "I credit Mr. Commissioner Nayland Smith with courage high enough to sustain the raising of all the gates; but I estimate the strength of your friendship highly, also, and predict that you will use the sword of the samurai certainly not later than the time when I shall raise the third gate. . . ."

A low shuddering sound, which I cannot hope to describe, but alas I can never forget, broke from the lips of the tortured man.

"In China," resumed Fu-Manchu, "we call this quaint fancy the Six Gates of joyful Wisdom. The first gate, by which the rats are admitted, is called the Gate of joyous Hope; the second, the Gate of Mirthful Doubt. The third gate is poetically named, the Gate of True Rapture, and the fourth, the Gate of Gentle Sorrow. I once was honored in the friendship of an exalted mandarin who sustained the course of joyful Wisdom to the raising of the Fifth Gate (called the Gate of Sweet Desires) and the admission of the twentieth rat. I esteem him almost equally with my ancestors. The Sixth, or Gate Celestial-- whereby a man enters into the joy of Complete Understanding--I have dispensed with, here, substituting a Japanese fancy of an antiquity nearly as great and honorable. The introduction of this element of speculation, I count a happy thought, and accordingly take pride to myself."

"The sword, Petrie!" whispered Smith. I should not have recognized his voice, but he spoke quite evenly and steadily. "I rely upon you, old man, to spare me the humiliation of asking mercy from that yellow fiend!"

My mind throughout this time had been gaining a sort of dreadful clarity. I had avoided looking at the sword of hara-kiri, but my thoughts had been leading me mercilessly up to the point at which we were now arrived. No vestige of anger, of condemnation of the inhuman being seated in the ebony chair, remained; that was past. Of all that had gone before, and of what was to come in the future, I thought nothing, knew nothing. Our long fight against the yellow group, our encounters with the numberless creatures of Fu-Manchu, the dacoits-- even Karamaneh--were forgotten, blotted out. I saw nothing of the strange appointments of that subterranean chamber; but face to face with the supreme moment of a lifetime, I was alone with my poor friend --and God.

The rats began squealing again. They were fighting . . .

"Quick, Petrie! Quick, man! I am weakening . . . ."

I turned and took up the samurai sword. My hands were very hot and dry, but perfectly steady, and I tested the edge of the heavy weapon upon my left thumb-nail as quietly as one might test a razor blade. It was as keen, this blade of ghastly history, as any razor ever wrought in Sheffield. I seized the graven hilt, bent forward in my chair, and raised the Friend's Sword high above my head. With the heavy weapon poised there, I looked into my friend's eyes. They were feverishly bright, but never in all my days, nor upon the many beds of suffering which it had been my lot to visit, had I seen an expression like that within them.

"The raising of the First Gate is always a crucial moment," came the guttural voice of the Chinaman. Although I did not see him, and barely heard his words, I was aware that he had stood up and was bending forward over the lower end of the cage.

"Now, Petrie! now! God bless you . . . and good-by . . ."

From somewhere--somewhere remote--I heard a hoarse and animal-like cry, followed by the sound of a heavy fall. I can scarcely bear to write of that moment, for I had actually begun the downward sweep of the great sword when that sound came--a faint Hope, speaking of aid where I had thought no aid possible.

How I contrived to divert the blade, I do not know to this day; but I do know that its mighty sweep sheared a lock from Smith's head and laid bare the scalp. With the hilt in my quivering hands I saw the blade bite deeply through the carpet and floor above Nayland Smith's skull. There, buried fully two inches in the woodwork, it stuck, and still clutching the hilt, I looked to the right and across the room--I looked to the curtained doorway.

Fu-Manchu, with one long, claw-like hand upon the top of the First Gate, was bending over the trap, but his brilliant green eyes were turned in the same direction as my own--upon the curtained doorway.

Upright within it, her beautiful face as pale as death, but her great eyes blazing with a sort of splendid madness, stood Karamaneh!

She looked, not at the tortured man, not at me, but fully at Dr. Fu-Manchu. One hand clutched the trembling draperies; now she suddenly raised the other, so that the jewels on her white arm glittered in the light of the lamp above the door. She held my Browning pistol! Fu-Manchu sprang upright, inhaling sibilantly, as Karamaneh pointed
the pistol point blank at his high skull and fired. . . .

I saw a little red streak appear, up by the neutral colored hair, under the black cap. I became as a detached intelligence, unlinked with the corporeal, looking down upon a thing which for some reason I had never thought to witness.

Fu-Manchu threw up both arms, so that the sleeves of the green robe fell back to the elbows. He clutched at his head, and the black cap fell behind him. He began to utter short, guttural cries; he swayed backward--to the right--to the left then lurched forward right across the cage. There he lay, writhing, for a moment, his baneful eyes turned up, revealing the whites; and the great gray rats, released, began leaping about the room. Two shot like gray streaks past the slim figure in the doorway, one darted behind the chair to which I was lashed, and the fourth ran all around against the wall . . . Fu-Manchu, prostrate across the overturned cage, lay still, his massive head sagging downward.

I experienced a mental repetition of my adventure in the earlier evening--I was dropping, dropping, dropping into some bottomless pit . . . warm arms were about my neck; and burning kisses upon my lips.

CHAPTER XXX
THE CALL OF THE EAST

I seemed to haul myself back out of the pit of unconsciousness by the aid of two little hands which clasped my own. I uttered a sigh that was almost a sob, and opened my eyes.

I was sitting in the big red-leathern armchair in my own study . . . and a lovely but truly bizarre figure, in a harem dress, was kneeling on the carpet at my feet; so that my first sight of the world was the sweetest sight that the world had to offer me, the dark eyes of Karamaneh, with tears trembling like jewels upon her lashes!

I looked no further than that, heeded not if there were others in the room beside we two, but, gripping the jewel-laden fingers in what must have been a cruel clasp, I searched the depths of the glorious eyes in ever growing wonder. What change had taken place in those limpid, mysterious pools? Why was a wild madness growing up within me like a flame? Why was the old longing returned, ten-thousandfold, to snatch that pliant, exquisite shape to my breast?

No word was spoken, but the spoken words of a thousand ages could not have expressed one tithe of what was held in that silent communion. A hand was laid hesitatingly on my shoulder. I tore my gaze away from the lovely face so near to mine, and glanced up.

Aziz stood at the back of my chair.

"God is all merciful," he said. "My sister is restored to us" (I loved him for the plural); "and she remembers."

Those few words were enough; I understood now that this lovely girl, who half knelt, half lay, at my feet, was not the evil, perverted creature of Fu-Manchu whom we had gone out to arrest with the other vile servants of the Chinese doctor, but was the old, beloved companion of two years ago, the Karamaneh for whom I had sought long and wearily in Egypt, who had been swallowed up and lost to me in that land of mystery.

The loss of memory which Fu-Manchu had artificially induced was subject to the same inexplicable laws which ordinarily rule in cases of amnesia. The shock of her brave action that night had begun to effect a cure; the sight of Aziz had completed it.

Inspector Weymouth was standing by the writing-table. My mind cleared rapidly now, and standing up, but without releasing the girl's hands, so that I drew her up beside me, I said:

"Weymouth--where is--?"

"He's waiting to see you, Doctor," replied the inspector.

A pang, almost physical, struck at my heart.

"Poor, dear old Smith!" I cried, with a break in my voice.

Dr. Gray, a neighboring practitioner, appeared in the doorway at the moment that I spoke the words.

"It's all right, Petrie," he said, reassuringly; "I think we took it in time. I have thoroughly cauterized the wounds, and granted that no complication sets in, he'll be on his feet again in a week or two."

I suppose I was in a condition closely bordering upon the hysterical. At any rate, my behavior was extraordinary. I raised both my hands above my head.

"Thank God!" I cried at the top of my voice, "thank God!--thank God!"

"Thank Him, indeed," responded the musical voice of Aziz. He spoke with all the passionate devoutsness of the true Moslem.

Everything, even Karamaneh was forgotten, and I started for the door as though my life depended upon my speed. With one foot upon the landing, I turned, looked back, and met the glance of Inspector Weymouth.

"What have you done with--the body?" I asked.

"We haven't been able to get to it. That end of the vault collapsed two minutes after we hauled you out!"

As I write, now, of those strange days, already they seem remote and unreal. But, where other and more dreadful memories already are grown misty, the memory of that evening in my rooms remains clear-cut and intimate. It
marked a crisis in my life.

During the days that immediately followed, whilst Smith was slowly recovering from his hurts, I made my plans deliberately; I prepared to cut myself off from old associations--prepared to exile myself, gladly; how gladly I cannot hope to express in mere cold words.

That my friend approved of my projects, I cannot truthfully state, but his disapproval at least was not openly expressed. To Karamaneh I said nothing of my plans, but her complete reliance in my powers to protect her, now, from all harm, was at once pathetic and exquisite.

Since, always, I have sought in these chronicles to confine myself to the facts directly relating to the malignant activity of Dr. Fu-Manchu, I shall abstain from burdening you with details of my private affairs. As an instrument of the Chinese doctor, it has sometimes been my duty to write of the beautiful Eastern girl; I cannot suppose that my readers have any further curiosity respecting her from the moment that Fate freed her from that awful servitude. Therefore, when I shall have dealt with the episodes which marked our voyage to Egypt--I had opened negotiations in regard to a practice in Cairo--I may honorably lay down my pen.

These episodes opened, dramatically, upon the second night of the voyage from Marseilles.

CHAPTER XXXI
"MY SHADOW LIES UPON YOU"

I suppose I did not awake very readily. Following the nervous vigilance of the past six months, my tired nerves, in the enjoyment of this relaxation, were rapidly recuperating. I no longer feared to awake to find a knife at my throat, no longer dreaded the darkness as a foe.

So that the voice may have been calling (indeed, had been calling) for some time, and of this I had been hazily conscious before finally I awoke. Then, ere the new sense of security came to reassure me, the old sense of impending harm set my heart leaping nervously. There is always a certain physical panic attendant upon such awakening in the still of night, especially in novel surroundings. Now, I sat up abruptly, clutching at the rail of my berth and listening.

There was a soft thudding on my cabin door, and a voice, low and urgent, was crying my name.

Through the open porthole the moonlight streamed into my room, and save for a remote and soothing throb, inseparable from the progress of a great steamship, nothing else disturbed the stillness; I might have floated lonely upon the bosom of the Mediterranean. But there was the drumming on the door again, and the urgent appeal:
"Dr. Petrie! Dr. Petrie!"

I threw off the bedclothes and stepped on to the floor of the cabin, fumbling hastily for my slippers. A fear that something was amiss, that some aftermath, some wraith of the dread Chinaman, was yet to come to disturb our premature peace, began to haunt me. I threw open the door.

Upon the gleaming deck, blackly outlined against a wondrous sky, stood a man who wore a blue greatcoat over his pyjamas, and whose unstockinged feet were thrust into red slippers. It was Platts, the Marconi operator.

"I'm awfully sorry to disturb you, Dr. Petrie," he said, "and I was even less anxious to arouse your neighbor; but somebody seems to be trying to get a message, presumably urgent, through to you."

"To me!" I cried.

"I cannot make it out," admitted Platts, running his fingers through disheveled hair, "but I thought it better to arouse you. Will you come up?"

I turned without a word, slipped into my dressing-gown, and with Platts passed aft along the deserted deck. The sea was as calm as a great lake. Ahead, on the port bow, an angry flambeau burned redly beneath the peaceful vault of the heavens. Platts nodded absently in the direction of the weird flames.

"Stromboli," he said; "we shall be nearly through the Straits by breakfast-time."

We mounted the narrow stair to the Marconi deck. At the table sat Platts' assistant with the Marconi attachment upon his head--an apparatus which always set me thinking of the electric chair.

"Have you got it?" demanded my companion as we entered the room.

"It's still coming through," replied the other without moving, "but in the same jerky fashion. Every time I get it, it seems to have gone back to the beginning--just Dr. Petrie--Dr. Petrie."

He began to listen again for the elusive message. I turned to Platts.

"Where is it being sent from?" I asked.

Platts shook his head.

"That's the mystery," he declared. "Look!"--and he pointed to the table; "according to the Marconi chart, there's a Messagerie boat due west between us and Marseilles, and the homeward-bound P. & O. which we passed this morning must be getting on that way also, by now. The Isis is somewhere ahead, but I've spoken to all these, and the message comes from none of them."

"Then it may come from Messina."
'It doesn't come from Messina,' replied the man at the table, beginning to write rapidly.

Platts stepped forward and bent over the message which the other was writing.

"Here it is!" he cried, excitedly; "we're getting it."

Stepping in turn to the table, I leaned over between the two and read these words as the operator wrote them down:

Dr. Petrie--my shadow . . .

I drew a quick breath and gripped Platts' shoulder harshly. His assistant began fingering the instrument with irritation.

"Lost it again!" he muttered.

"This message," I began . . .

But again the pencil was traveling over the paper:

--lies upon you all . . . end of message.

The operator stood up and unclasped the receivers from his ears. There, high above the sleeping ship's company, with the carpet of the blue Mediterranean stretched indefinitely about us, we three stood looking at one another. By virtue of a miracle of modern science, some one, divided from me by mile upon mile of boundless ocean, had spoken --and had been heard.

"Is there no means of learning," I said, "from whence this message emanated?"

Platts shook his head, perplexedly.

"They gave no code word," he said. "God knows who they were. It's a strange business and a strange message. Have you any sort of idea, Dr. Petrie, respecting the identity of the sender?"

I stared him hard in the face; an idea had mechanically entered my mind, but one of which I did not choose to speak, since it was opposed to human possibility.

But, had I not seen with my own eyes the bloody streak across his forehead as the shot fired by Karamaneh entered his high skull, had I not known, so certainly as it is given to man to know, that the giant intellect was no more, the mighty will impotent, I should have replied:

"The message is from Dr. Fu-Manchu!"

My reflections were rudely terminated and my sinister thoughts given new stimulus, by a loud though muffled cry which reached me from somewhere in the ship, below. Both my companions started as violently as I, whereby I knew that the mystery of the wireless message had not been without its effect upon their minds also. But whereas they paused in doubt, I leaped from the room and almost threw myself down the ladder.

It was Karamaneh who had uttered that cry of fear and horror!

Although I could perceive no connection betwixt the strange message and the cry in the night, intuitively I linked them, intuitively I knew that my fears had been well-grounded; that the shadow of Fu-Manchu still lay upon us.

Karamaneh occupied a large stateroom aft on the main deck; so that I had to descend from the upper deck on which my own room was situated to the promenade deck, again to the main deck and thence proceed nearly the whole length of the alleyway.

Karamaneh and her brother, Aziz, who occupied a neighboring room, met me, near the library. Karamaneh's eyes were wide with fear; her peerless coloring had fled, and she was white to the lips. Aziz, who wore a dressing-gown thrown hastily over his night attire, had his arm protectively about the girl's shoulders.

"The mummy!" she whispered tremulously--"the mummy!"

There came a sound of opening doors, and several passengers, whom Karamaneh cries had alarmed, appeared in various stages of undress. A stewardess came running from the far end of the alleyway, and I found time to wonder at my own speed; for, starting from the distant Marconi deck, yet I had been the first to arrive upon the scene.

Stacey, the ship's doctor, was quartered at no great distance from the spot, and he now joined the group. Anticipating the question which trembled upon the lips of several of those about me:

"Come to Dr. Stacey's room," I said, taking Karamaneh arm; "we will give you something to enable you to sleep." I turned to the group. "My patient has had severe nerve trouble," I explained, "and has developed somnambulistic tendencies."

I declined the stewardess' offer of assistance, with a slight shake of the head, and shortly the four of us entered the doctor's cabin, on the deck above. Stacey carefully closed the door. He was an old fellow student of mine, and already he knew much of the history of the beautiful Eastern girl and her brother Aziz.

"I fear there's mischief afoot, Petrie," he said.

"Thanks to your presence of mind, the ship's gossips need know nothing of it."

I glanced at Karamaneh who, since the moment of my arrival had never once removed her gaze from me; she remained in that state of passive fear in which I had found her, the lovely face palpit; and she stared at me fixedly in a childish, expressionless way which made me fear that the shock to which she had been subjected, whatever its
nature, had caused a relapse into that strange condition of forgetfulness from which a previous shock had aroused her. I could see that Stacey shared my view, for:

"Something has frightened you," he said gently, seating himself on the arm of Karamaneh's chair and patting her hand as if to reassure her. "Tell us all about it."

For the first time since our meeting that night, the girl turned her eyes from me and glanced up at Stacey, a sudden warm blush stealing over her face and throat and as quickly departing, to leave her even more pale than before. She grasped Stacey's hand in both her own—and looked again at me.

"Send for Mr. Nayland Smith without delay!" she said, and her sweet voice was slightly tremulous. "He must be put on his guard!"

I started up.

"Why?" I said. "For God's sake tell us what has happened!"

Aziz who evidently was as anxious as myself for information, and who now knelt at his sister's feet looking at her with that strange love, which was almost adoration, in his eyes, glanced back at me and nodded his head rapidly.

"Something"—Karamaneh paused, shuddering violently—"some dreadful thing, like a mummy escaped from its tomb, came into my room to-night through the porthole . . ."

"Through the porthole?" echoed Stacey, amazedly.

"Yes, yes, through the porthole! A creature tall and very, very thin. He wore wrappings—yellow wrappings—swathed about his head, so that only his eyes, his evil gleaming eyes, were visible. . . . From waist to knees he was covered, also, but his body, his feet, and his legs were bare . . ."

"Was he—?" I began . . .

"He was a brown man, yes,"--Karamaneh divining my question, nodded, and the shimmering cloud of her wonderful hair, hastily confined, burst free and rippled about her shoulders. "A gaunt, fleshless brown man, who bent, and writhed bony fingers--so!"

"A thug!" I cried.

"He--it--the mummy thing--would have strangled me if I had slept, for he crouched over the berth--seeking--seeking . . ."

I clenched my teeth convulsively.

"But I was sitting up--"

"With the light on?" interrupted Stacey in surprise.

"No," added Karamaneh; "the light was out." She turned her eyes toward me, as the wonderful blush overspread her face once more. "It all happened within a few seconds, and quite silently. As the mummy crouched over the berth, I unlocked the door and leaped out into the passage. I think I screamed; I did not mean to. Oh, Dr. Stacey, there is not a moment to spare! Mr. Nayland Smith must be warned immediately. Some horrible servant of Dr. Fu-Manchu is on the ship!"

CHAPTER XXXII

THE TRAGEDY

Nayland Smith leaned against the edge of the dressing-table, attired in pyjamas. The little stateroom was hazy with smoke, and my friend gripped the charred briar between his teeth and watched the blue-gray clouds arising from the bowl, in an abstracted way. I knew that he was thinking hard, and from the fact that he had exhibited no surprise when I had related to him the particulars of the attack upon Karamaneh I judged that he had half anticipated something of the kind. Suddenly he stood up, staring at me fixedly.

"Your tact has saved the situation, Petrie," he snapped. "It failed you momentarily, though, when you proposed to me just now that we should muster the lascars for inspection. Our game is to pretend that we know nothing—that we believe Karamaneh to have had a bad dream."

"But, Smith," I began--

"It would be useless, Petrie," he interrupted me. "You cannot suppose that I overlooked the possibility of some creature of the doctor's being among the lascars. I can assure you that not one of them answers to the description of the midnight assailant. From the girl's account we have to look (discarding the idea of a revivified mummy) for a man of unusual height—and there's no lascar of unusual height on board; and from the visible evidence, that he entered the stateroom through the porthole, we have to look for a man more than normally thin. In a word, the servant of Dr. Fu-Manchu who attempted the life of Karamaneh is either in hiding on the ship, or, if visible, is disguised."

With his usual clarity of vision, Nayland Smith had visualized the facts of the case; I passed in mental survey each of the passengers, and those of the crew whose appearances were familiar to me, with the result that I had to admit the justice of my friend's conclusions. Smith began to pace the narrow strip of carpet between the dressing-table and the door. Suddenly he began again. "From our knowledge of Fu-Manchu and of the group surrounding him
(and, don't forget, surviving him)--we may further assume that the wireless message was no gratuitous piece of melodrama, but that it was directed to a definite end. Let us endeavor to link up the chain a little. You occupy an upper deck berth; so do I. Experience of the Chinaman has formed a habit in both of us; that of sleeping with closed windows. Your port was fastened and so was my own. Karamaneh is quartered on the main deck, and her brother's stateroom opens into the same alleyway. Since the ship is in the Straits of Messina, and the glass set fair, the stewards have not closed the portholes nightly at present. We know that that of Karamaneh's stateroom was open. Therefore, in any attempt upon our quartet, Karamaneh would automatically be selected for the victim, since failing you or myself she may be regarded as being the most obnoxious to Dr. Fu-Manchu."

I nodded comprehendingly. Smith's capacity for throwing the white light of reason into the darkest places often amazed me.

"You may have noticed," he continued, "that Karamaneh's room is directly below your own. In the event of any outcry, you would be sooner upon the scene than I should, for instance, because I sleep on the opposite side of the ship. This circumstance I take to be the explanation of the wireless message, which, because of its hesitancy (a piece of ingenuity very characteristic of the group), led to your being awakened and invited up to the Marconi deck; in short, it gave the would-be assassin a better chance of escaping before your arrival."

I watched my friend in growing wonder. The strange events, seemingly having no link, took their places in the drama, and became well-ordered episodes in a plot that only a criminal genius could have devised. As I studied the keen, bronzed face, I realized to the full the stupendous mental power of Dr. Fu-Manchu, measuring it by the criterion of Nayland Smith's. For the cunning Chinaman, in a sense, had foiled this brilliant man before me, whereby, if by nought else, I might know him a master of his evil art.

"I regard the episode," continued Smith, "as a posthumous attempt of the doctor's; a legacy of hate which may prove more disastrous than any attempt made upon us by Fu-Manchu in life. Some fiendish member of the murder group is on board the ship. We must, as always, meet guile with guile. There must be no appeal to the captain, no public examination of passengers and crew. One attempt has failed; I do not doubt that others will be made. At present, you will enact the role of physician-in-attendance upon Karamaneh, and will put it about for whom it may interest that a slight return of her nervous trouble is causing her to pass uneasy nights. I can safely leave this part of the case to you, I think?"

I nodded rapidly.

"I haven't troubled to make inquiries," added Smith, "but I think it probable that the regulation respecting closed ports will come into operation immediately we have passed the Straits, or at any rate immediately there is any likelihood of bad weather."

"You mean--"

"I mean that no alteration should be made in our habits. A second attempt along similar lines is to be apprehended--to-night. After that we may begin to look out for a new danger."

"I pray we may avoid it," I said fervently.

As I entered the saloon for breakfast in the morning, I was subjected to solicitous inquiries from Mrs. Prior, the gossip of the ship. Her room adjoined Karamaneh's and she had been one of the passengers aroused by the girl's cries in the night. Strictly adhering to my role, I explained that my patient was threatened with a second nervous breakdown, and was subject to vivid and disturbing dreams. One or two other inquiries I met in the same way, ere escaping to the corner table reserved to us.

That iron-bound code of conduct which rules the Anglo-Indian, in the first days of the voyage had threatened to ostracize Karamaneh and Aziz, by reason of the Eastern blood to which their brilliant but peculiar type of beauty bore witness. Smith's attitude, however--and, in a Burmese commissioner, it constituted something of a law--had done much to break down the barriers; the extraordinary beauty of the girl had done the rest. So that now, far from finding themselves shunned, the society of Karamaneh and her romantic-looking brother was universally courted. The last inquiry that morning, respecting my interesting patient, came from the bishop of Damascus, a benevolent old gentleman whose ancestry was not wholly innocent of Oriental strains, and who sat at a table immediately behind me. As I settled down to my porridge, he turned his chair slightly and bent to my ear.

"Mrs. Prior tells me that your charming friend was disturbed last night," he whispered. "She seems rather pale this morning; I sincerely trust that she is suffering no ill-effect."

I swung around, with a smile. Owing to my carelessness, there was a slight collision, and the poor bishop, who had been invalided to England after typhoid, in order to undergo special treatment, suppressed an exclamation of pain, although his fine dark eyes gleamed kindly upon me through the pebbles of his gold-rimmed pince-nez.

Indeed, despite his Eastern blood, he might have posed for a Sadler picture, his small and refined features seeming out of place above the bulky body.

"Can you forgive my clumsiness," I began--
But the bishop raised his small, slim fingered hand of old ivory hue, deprecatingly.

His system was supercharged with typhoid bacilli, and, as sometimes occurs, the superfluous "bugs" had sought exit. He could only walk with the aid of two stout sticks, and bent very much at that. His left leg had been surgically scraped to the bone, and I appreciated the exquisite torture to which my awkwardness had subjected him. But he would entertain no apologies, pressing his inquiry respecting Karamaneh in the kindly manner which had made him so deservedly popular on board.

"Many thanks for your solicitude," I said; "I have promised her sound repose to-night, and since my professional reputation is at stake, I shall see that she secures it."

In short, we were in pleasant company, and the day passed happily enough and without notable event. Smith spent some considerable time with the chief officer, wandering about unfrequented parts of the ship. I learned later that he had explored the lascars' quarters, the forecastle, the engine-room, and had even descended to the stokehold; but this was done so unostentatiously that it occasioned no comment.

With the approach of evening, in place of that physical contentment which usually heralds the dinner-hour, at sea, I experienced a fit of the seemingly causeless apprehension which too often in the past had harbingered the coming of grim events; which I had learnt to associate with the nearing presence of one of Fu-Manchu's death-agents. In view of the facts, as I afterwards knew them to be, I cannot account for this.

Yet, in an unexpected manner, my forebodings were realized. That night I was destined to meet a sorrow surpassing any which my troubled life had known. Even now I experience great difficulty in relating the matters which befell me, in speaking of the sense of irrevocable loss which came to me. Briefly, then, at about ten minutes before the dining hour, whilst all the passengers, myself included, were below, dressing, a faint cry arose from somewhere aft on the upper deck—a cry which was swiftly taken up by other voices, so that presently a deck steward echoed it immediately outside my own stateroom:

"Man overboard! Man overboard!"

All my premonitions rallying in that one sickening moment, I sprang out on the deck, half dressed as I was, and leaping past the boat which swung nearly opposite my door, craned over the rail, looking astern.

For a long time I could detect nothing unusual. The engine-room telegraph was ringing—and the motion of the screws momentarily ceased; then, in response to further ringing, recommenced, but so as to jar the whole structure of the vessel; whereby I knew that the engines were reversed. Peering intently into the wake of the ship, I was but dimly aware of the ever growing turmoil around me, of the shouted orders of the third-officer. Suddenly I saw it—the sight which was to haunt me for succeeding days and nights.

Half in the streak of the wake and half out of it, I perceived the sleeve of a white jacket, and, near to it, a soft felt hat. The sleeve rose up once into clear view, seemed to describe a half-circle in the air then sink back again into the glassy swell of the water. Only the hat remained floating upon the surface.

By the evidence of the white sleeve alone I might have remained unconvinced, although upon the voyage I had become familiar enough with the drill shooting-jacket, but the presence of the gray felt hat was almost conclusive.

The man overboard was Nayland Smith!

I cannot hope, writing now, to convey in any words at my command, a sense, even remote, of the utter loneliness which in that dreadful moment closed coldly down upon me.

To spring overboard to the rescue was a natural impulse, but to have obeyed it would have been worse than quixotic. In the first place, the drowning man was close upon half a mile astern; in the second place, others had seen the hat and the white coat as clearly as I; among them the third-officer, standing upright in the stern of the boat—which, with commendable promptitude had already been swung into the water. The steamer was being put about, describing a wide arc around the little boat dancing on the deep blue rollers. . . .

Of the next hour, I cannot bear to write at all. Long as I had known him, I was ignorant of my friend's powers as a swimmer, but I judged that he must have been a poor one from the fact that he had sunk so rapidly in a calm sea. Except the hat, no trace of Nayland Smith remained when the boat got to the spot.

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE MUMMY

Dinner was out of the question that night for all of us. Karamaneh who had spoken no word, but, grasping my hands, had looked into my eyes—her own glassy with unshed tears—and then stolen away to her cabin, had not since reappeared. Seated upon my berth, I stared unseeing before me, upon a changed ship, a changed sea and sky upon another world. The poor old bishop, my neighbor, had glanced in several times, as he hobbled by, and his spectacles were unmistakably humid; but even he had vouchsafed no word, realizing that my sorrow was too deep for such consolation.

When at last I became capable of connected thought, I found myself faced by a big problem. Should I place the facts of the matter, as I knew them to be, before the captain? or could I hope to apprehend Fu-Manchu's servant by
the methods suggested by my poor friend? That Smith's death was an accident, I did not believe for a moment; it was impossible not to link it with the attempt upon Karamaneh. In my misery and doubt, I determined to take counsel with Dr. Stacey. I stood up, and passed out on to the deck.

Those passengers whom I met on my way to his room regarded me in respectful silence. By contrast, Stacey's attitude surprised and even annoyed me.

"I'd be prepared to stake all I possess--although it's not much," he said, "that this was not the work of your hidden enemy."

He blankly refused to give me his reasons for the statement and strongly advised me to watch and wait but to make no communication to the captain.

At this hour I can look back and savor again something of the profound dejection of that time. I could not face the passengers; I even avoided Karamaneh and Aziz. I shut myself in my cabin and sat staring aimlessly into the growing darkness. The steward knocked, once, inquiring if I needed anything, but I dismissed him abruptly. So I passed the evening and the greater part of the night.

Those groups of promenaders who passed my door, invariably were discussing my poor friend's tragic end; but as the night wore on, the deck grew empty, and I sat amid a silence that in my miserable state I welcomed more than the presence of any friend, saving only the one whom I should never welcome again.

Since I had not counted the bells, to this day I have only the vaguest idea respecting the time whereat the next incident occurred which it is my duty to chronicle. Perhaps I was on the verge of falling asleep, seated there as I was; at any rate, I could scarcely believe myself awake, when, unheralded by any footsteps to indicate his coming, some one who seemed to be crouching outside my stateroom, slightly raised himself and peered in through the porthole--which I had not troubled to close.

He must have been a fairly tall man to have looked in at all, and although his features were indistinguishable in the darkness, his outline, which was clearly perceptible against the white boat beyond, was unfamiliar to me. He seemed to have a small, and oddly swathed head, and what I could make out of the gaunt neck and square shoulders in some way suggested an unnatural thinness; in short, the smudgy silhouette in the porthole was weirdly like that of a mummy!

For some moments I stared at the apparition; then, rousing myself from the apathy into which I had sunk, I stood up very quickly and stepped across the room. As I did so the figure vanished, and when I threw open the door and looked out upon the deck... the deck was wholly untenanted!

I realized at once that it would be useless, even had I chosen the course, to seek confirmation of what I had seen from the officer on the bridge: my own berth, together with the one adjoining--that of the bishop--was not visible from the bridge.

For some time I stood in my doorway, wondering in a disinterested fashion which now I cannot explain, if the hidden enemy had revealed himself to me, or if disordered imagination had played me a trick. Later, I was destined to know the truth of the matter, but when at last I fell into a troubled sleep, that night, I was still in some doubt upon the point.

My state of mind when I awakened on the following day was indescribable; I found it difficult to doubt that Nayland Smith would meet me on the way to the bathroom as usual, with the cracked briar fuming between his teeth. I felt myself almost compelled to pass around to his stateroom in order to convince myself that he was not really there. The catastrophe was still unreal to me, and the world a dream-world. Indeed I retain scarcely any recollections of the traffic of that day, or of the days that followed it until we reached Port Said.

Two things only made any striking appeal to my dulled intelligence at that time. These were: the aloof attitude of Dr. Stacey, who seemed carefully to avoid me, and a curious circumstance which the second officer mentioned in conversation one evening as we strolled up and down the main deck together.

"Either I was fast asleep at my post, Dr. Petrie," he said, "or last night, in the middle watch, some one or something came over the side of the ship just aft the bridge, slipped across the deck, and disappeared."

I stared at him wonderingly.

"Do you mean something that came up out of the sea?" I said.

"Nothing could very well have come up out of the sea," he replied, smiling slightly, "so that it must have come up from the deck below."

"Was it a man?"

"It looked like a man, and a fairly tall one, but he came and was gone like a flash, and I saw no more of him up to the time I was relieved. To tell you the truth, I did not report it because I thought I must have been dozing; it's a dead slow watch, and the navigation on this part of the run is child's play."

I was on the point of telling him what I had seen myself, two evenings before, but for some reason I refrained from doing so, although I think had I confided in him he would have abandoned the idea that what he had seen was
phantasmal; for the pair of us could not very well have been dreaming. Some malignant presence haunted the ship; I
could not doubt this; yet I remained passive, sunk in a lethargy of sorrow.

We were to reach Port Said at about eight o’clock in the evening, but by reason of the delay occasioned so tragically, I learned that in all probability we should not arrive earlier than midnight, whilst
passengers would not go ashore until the following morning. Karamaneh who had been staring ahead all day,
seeking a first glimpse of her native land, was determined to remain up until the hour of our arrival, but after dinner
a notice was posted up that we should not be in before two A.M. Even those passengers who were the most
enthusiastic thereupon determined to postpone, for a few hours, their first glimpse of the land of the Pharaohs and
even to forego the sight—one of the strangest and most interesting in the world–of Port Said by night.

For my own part, I confess that all the interest and hope with which I had looked forward to our arrival, had left
me, and often I detected tears in the eyes of Karamaneh whereby I knew that the coldness in my heart had
manifested itself even to her. I had sustained the greatest blow of my life, and not even the presence of so lovely a
companion could entirely recompense me for the loss of my dearest friend.

The lights on the Egyptian shore were faintly visible when the last group of stragglers on deck broke up. I had
long since prevailed upon Karamaneh to retire, and now, utterly sick at heart, I sought my own stateroom,
mechanically undressed, and turned in.

It may, or may not be singular that I had neglected all precautions since the night of the tragedy; I was not even
conscious of a desire to visit retribution upon our hidden enemy; in some strange fashion I took it for granted that
there would be no further attempts upon Karamaneh, Aziz, or myself. I had not troubled to confirm Smith’s surmise
respecting the closing of the portholes; but I know now for a fact that, whereas they had been closed from the time
of our leaving the Straits of Messina, to-night, in sight of the Egyptian coast, the regulation was relaxed again. I
cannot say if this is usual, but that it occurred on this ship is a fact to which I can testify—a fact to which my
attention was to be drawn dramatically.

The night was steamingly hot, and because I welcomed the circumstance that my own port was widely opened, I
reflected that those on the lower decks might be open also. A faint sense of danger stirred within me; indeed, I sat
upright and was about to spring out of my berth when that occurred which induced me to change my mind.

All passengers had long since retired, and a midnight silence descended upon the ship, for we were not yet close
enough to port for any unusual activities to have commenced.

Clearly outlined in the open porthole there suddenly arose that same grotesque silhouette which I had seen once
before.

Prompted by I know not what, I lay still and simulated heavy breathing; for it was evident to me that I must be
partly visible to the watcher, so bright was the night. For ten–twenty–thirty seconds he studied me in absolute
silence, that gaunt thing so like a mummy; and, with my eyes partly closed, I watched him, breathing heavily all the
time. Then, making no more noise than a cat, he moved away across the deck, and I could judge of his height by the
fact that his small, swathed head remained visible almost to the time that he passed to the end of the white boat
which swung opposite my stateroom.

In a moment I slipped quietly to the floor, crossed, and peered out of the porthole; so that at last I had a clear
view of the sinister mummy-man. He was crouching under the bow of the boat, and attaching to the white rails,
below, a contrivance of a kind with which I was not entirely unfamiliar. This was a thin ladder of silken rope, having
bamboo rungs, with two metal hooks for attaching it to any suitable object.

The one thus engaged was, as Karamaneh had declared, almost superhumanly thin. His loins were swathed in a
sort of linen garment, and his head so bound about, turban fashion, that only his gleaming eyes remained visible.
The bare limbs and body were of a dusky yellow color, and, at sight of him, I experienced a sudden nausea.

My pistol was in my cabin-trunk, and to have found it in the dark, without making a good deal of noise, would
have been impossible. Doubting how I should act, I stood watching the man with the swathed head whilst he threw
the end of the ladder over the side, crept past the bow of the boat, and swung his gaunt body over the rail, exhibiting
the agility of an ape. One quick glance fore and aft he gave, then began to swarm down the ladder: in which instant I
knew his mission.

With a choking cry, which forced itself unwillingly from my lips, I tore at the door, threw it open, and sprang
across the deck. Plans, I had none, and since I carried no instrument wherewith to sever the ladder, the murderer
might indeed have carried out his design for all that I could have done to prevent him, were it not that another took a
hand in the game. . . .

At the moment that the mummy-man--his head now on a level with the deck--perceived me, he stopped dead.
Coincident with his stopping, the crack of a pistol shot sounded—from immediately beyond the boat.

Uttering a sort of sobbing sound, the creature fell--then clutched, with straining yellow fingers, at the rails, and,
seemingly by dint of a great effort, swarmed along aft some twenty feet, with incredible swiftness and agility, and
clambered onto the deck.

A second shot cracked sharply; and a voice (God! was I mad!) cried: "Hold him, Petrie!"

Rigid with fearful astonishment I stood, as out from the boat above me leaped a figure attired solely in shirt and trousers. The newcomer leaped away in the wake of the mummy-man--who had vanished around the corner by the smoke-room. Over his shoulder he cried back at me:

"The bishop's stateroom! See that no one enters!"

I clutched at my head--which seemed to be fiery hot; I realized in my own person the sensation of one who knows himself mad.

For the man who pursued the mummy was Nayland Smith!

* * * * *

I stood in the bishop's state-room, Nayland Smith, his gaunt face wet with perspiration, beside me, handling certain odd looking objects which littered the place, and lay about amid the discarded garments of the absent cleric.

"Pneumatic pads!" he snapped. "The man was a walking air-cushion!" He gingerly fingered two strange rubber appliances. "For distending the cheeks," he muttered, dropping them disgustedly on the floor. "His hands and wrists betrayed him, Petrie. He wore his cuff unusually long but he could not entirely hide his bony wrists. To have watched him, whilst remaining myself unseen, was next to impossible; hence my device of tossing a dummy overboard, calculated to float for less than ten minutes! It actually floated nearly fifteen, as a matter of fact, and I had some horrible moments!"

"Smith!" I said--"how could you submit me . . ."

He clapped his hands on my shoulders.

"My dear old chap--there was no other way, believe me. From that boat I could see right into his stateroom, but, once in, I dare not leave it--except late at night, stealthily! The second spotted me one night and I thought the game was up, but evidently he didn't report it."

"But you might have confided . . ."

"Impossible! I'll admit I nearly fell to the temptation that first night; for I could see into your room as well as into his!" He slapped me boisterously on the back, but his gray eyes were suspiciously moist. "Dear old Petrie! Thank God for our friends! But you'd be the first to admit, old man, that you're a dead rotten actor! Your portrayal of grief for the loss of a valued chum would not have convinced a soul on board!"

"Therefore I made use of Stacey, whose callous attitude was less remarkable. Gad, Petrie! I nearly bagged our man the first night! The elaborate plan--Marconi message to get you out of the way, and so forth--had miscarried, and he knew the porthole trick would be useless once we got into the open sea. He took a big chance. He discarded his clerical guise and peeped into your room--you remember?--but you were awake, and I made no move when he slipped back to his own cabin; I wanted to take him red-handed."

"Have you any idea . . ."

"Who he is? No more than where he is! Probably some creature of Dr. Fu-Manchu specially chosen for the purpose; obviously a man of culture, and probably of thug ancestry. I hit him--in the shoulder; but even then he ran like a hare. We've searched the ship, without result. He may have gone overboard and chanced the swim to shore . . ."

We stepped out onto the deck. Around us was that unforgettable scene--Port Said by night. The ship was barely moving through the glassy water, now. Smith took my arm and we walked forward. Above us was the mighty peace of Egypt's sky ablaze with splendor; around and about us moved the unique turmoil of the clearing-house of the Near East.

"I would give much to know the real identity of the bishop of Damascus," muttered Smith.

He stopped abruptly, snapping his teeth together and grasping my arm as in a vise. Hard upon his words had followed the rattling clangor as the great anchor was let go; but horribly intermingled with the metallic roar there came to us such a fearful, inarticulate shrieking as to chill one's heart.

The anchor plunged into the water of the harbor; the shrieking ceased. Smith turned to me, and his face was tragic in the light of the arc lamp swung hard by.

"We shall never know," he whispered. "God forgive him--he must be in bloody tatters now. Petrie, the poor fool was hiding in the chainlocker!"

A little hand stole into mine. I turned quickly. Karamaneh stood beside me. I placed my arm about her shoulders, drawing her close; and I blush to relate that all else was forgotten.

For a moment, heedless of the fearful turmoil forward, Nayland Smith stood looking at us. Then he turned, with his rare smile, and walked aft.

"Perhaps you're right, Petrie!" he said.
PART I

CHAPTER I

THE SHADOW OF A COWL

Keppel Stuart, M.D., F. R. S., awoke with a start and discovered himself to be bathed in cold perspiration. The moonlight shone in at his window, but did not touch the bed, therefore his awakening could not be due to this cause. He lay for some time listening for any unfamiliar noise which might account for the sudden disturbance of his usually sound slumbers. In the house below nothing stirred. His windows were widely open and he could detect that vague drumming which is characteristic of midnight London; sometimes, too, the clashing of buffers upon some siding of the Brighton railway where shunting was in progress and occasional siren notes from the Thames. Otherwise--nothing.

He glanced at the luminous disk of his watch. The hour was half-past two. Dawn was not far off. The night seemed to have become almost intolerably hot, and to this heat Stuart felt disposed to ascribe both his awakening and also a feeling of uncomfortable tension of which he now became aware. He continued to listen, and, listening and hearing nothing, recognized with anger that he was frightened. A sense of some presence oppressed him. Someone or something evil was near him--perhaps in the room, veiled by the shadows. This uncanny sensation grew more and more marked.

Stuart sat up in bed, slowly and cautiously, looking all about him. He remembered to have awakened once thus in India--and to have found a great cobra coiled at his feet. His inspection revealed the presence of nothing unfamiliar, and he stepped out on to the floor.

A faint clicking sound reached his ears. He stood quite still. The clicking was repeated.

"There is someone downstairs in my study!" muttered Stuart.

He became aware that the fear which held him was such that unless he acted and acted swiftly he should become incapable of action, but he remembered that whereas the moonlight poured into the bedroom, the staircase would be in complete darkness. He walked barefooted across to the dressing-table and took up an electric torch which lay there. He had not used it for some time, and he pressed the button to learn if the torch was charged. A beam of white light shone out across the room, and at the same instant came another sound.

If it came from below or above, from the adjoining room or from outside in the road, Stuart knew not. But following hard upon the mysterious disturbance which had aroused him it seemed to pour ice into his veins, it added the complementary touch to his panic. For it was a kind of low wail--a ghostly minor wail in falling cadences--unlike any sound he had heard. It was so excessively horrible that it produced a curious effect.

Discovering from the dancing of the torch-ray that his hand was trembling, Stuart concluded that he had awakened from a nightmare and that this fiendish wailing was no more than an unusually delayed aftermath of the imaginary horrors which had bathed him in cold perspiration.

He walked resolutely to the door, threw it open and cast the beam of light on to the staircase. Softly he began to descend. Before the study door he paused. There was no sound. He threw open the door, directing the torch-ray into the room.

Cutting a white lane through the blackness, it shone fully upon his writing-table, which was a rather fine Jacobean piece having a sort of quaint bureau superstructure containing cabinets and drawers. He could detect nothing unusual in the appearance of the littered table. A tobacco jar stood there, a pipe resting in the lid. Papers and books were scattered untidily as he had left them, surrounding a tray full of pipe and cigarette ash. Then, suddenly, he saw something else.

One of the bureau drawers was half opened.

Stuart stood quite still, staring at the table. There was no sound in the room. He crossed slowly, moving the light
from right to left. His papers had been overhauled methodically. The drawers had been replaced, but he felt assured
that all had been examined. The light switch was immediately beside the outer door, and Stuart walked over to it and
switched on both lamps. Turning, he surveyed the brilliantly illuminated room. Save for himself, it was empty. He
looked out into the hallway again. There was no one there. No sound broke the stillness. But that consciousness of
some near presence asserted itself persistently and uncannily.

"My nerves are out of order!" he muttered. "No one has touched my papers. I must have left the drawer open
myself."

He switched off the light and walked across to the door. He had actually passed out intending to return to his
room, when he became aware of a slight draught. He stopped.

Someone or something, evil and watchful, seemed to be very near again. Stuart turned and found himself gazing
fearfully in the direction of the open study door. He became persuaded anew that someone was hiding there, and
snatching up an ash stick which lay upon a chair in the hall he returned to the door. One step into the room he took
and paused--palsied with a sudden fear which exceeded anything he had known.

A white casement curtain was drawn across the French windows ... and outlined upon this moon-bright screen he
saw a tall figure. It was that of a _cowled man_!

Such an apparition would have been sufficiently alarming had the cowl been that of a monk, but the outline of
this phantom being suggested that of one of the Misericordia brethren or the costume worn of old by the familiars of
the Inquisition!

His heart leapt wildly, and seemed to grow still. He sought to cry out in his terror, but only emitted a dry gasping
sound.

The psychology of panic is obscure and has been but imperfectly explored. The presence of the terrible cowled
figure afforded a confirmation of Stuart's theory that he was the victim of a species of waking nightmare.

Even as he looked, the shadow of the cowled man moved--and was gone.

Stuart ran across the room, jerked open the curtains and stared out across the moon-bathed lawn, its prospect
terminated by high privet hedges. One of the French windows was wide open. There was no one on the lawn; there
was no sound.

"Mrs. M'Gregor swears that I always forget to shut these windows at night!" he muttered.

He closed and bolted the window, stood for a moment looking out across the empty lawn, then turned and went
out of the room.

CHAPTER II

THE PIBROCH OF THE M'GREGORS

Dr. Stuart awoke in the morning and tried to recall what had occurred during the night. He consulted his watch
and found the hour to be six a. m. No one was stirring in the house, and he rose and put on a bath robe. He felt
perfectly well and could detect no symptoms of nervous disorder. Bright sunlight was streaming into the room, and
he went out on to the landing, fastening the cord of his gown as he descended the stairs.

His study door was locked, with the key outside. He remembered having locked it. Opening it, he entered and
looked about him. He was vaguely disappointed. Save for the untidy litter of papers upon the table, the study was as
he had left it on retiring. If he could believe the evidence of his senses, nothing had been disturbed.

Not content with a casual inspection, he particularly examined those papers which, in his dream adventure, he
had believed to have been submitted to mysterious inspection. They showed no signs of having been touched. The
casement curtains were drawn across the recess formed by the French windows, and sunlight streamed in where,
silhouetted against the pallid illumination of the moon, he had seen the man in the cowl. Drawing back the curtains,
he examined the window fastenings. They were secure. If the window had really been open in the night, he must
have left it so himself.

"Well," muttered Stuart--"of all the amazing nightmares!"

He determined, immediately he had bathed and completed his toilet, to write an account of the dream for the
Psychical Research Society, in whose work he was interested. Half an hour later, as the movements of an awakened
household began to proclaim themselves, he sat down at his writing-table and commenced to write.

Keppel Stuart was a dark, good-looking man of about thirty-two, an easy-going bachelor who, whilst not over
ambitious, was nevertheless a brilliant physician. He had worked for the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and
had spent several years in India studying snake poisons. His purchase of this humdrum suburban practice had been
dictated by a desire to make a home for a girl who at the eleventh hour had declined to share it. Two years had
elapsed since then, but the shadow still lay upon Stuart's life, its influence being revealed in a certain apathy, almost
indifference, which characterised his professional conduct.

His account of the dream completed, he put the paper into a pigeon-hole and forgot all about the matter. That
day seemed to be more than usually dull and the hours to drag warily on. He was conscious of a sort of suspense.
He was waiting for something, or for someone. He did not choose to analyse this mental condition. Had he done so, the explanation was simple—and one that he dared not face.

At about ten o'clock that night, having been called out to a case, he returned to his house, walking straight into the study as was his custom and casting a light Burberry with a soft hat upon the sofa beside his stick and bag. The lamps were lighted, and the book-lined room, indicative of a studious and not over-wealthy bachelor, looked cheerful enough with the firelight dancing on the furniture.

Mrs. M'Gregor, a grey-haired Scotch lady, attired with scrupulous neatness, was tending the fire at the moment, and hearing Stuart come in she turned and glanced at him.

"A fire is rather superfluous to-night, Mrs. M'Gregor," he said. "I found it unpleasantly warm walking."

"May is a fearsome treacherous month, Mr. Keppel," replied the old housekeeper, who from long association with the struggling practitioner had come to regard him as a son. "An' a wheen o' dry logs is worth a barrel o' phesies. To which I would add that if ye're hintin' it's time ye shed ye're woolies for ye're summer wear, all I have to reply is that I hope sincerely ye're patients are more prudent than yoursel'."

She placed his slippers in the fender and took up the hat, stick and coat from the sofa. Stuart laughed.

"Most of the neighbors exhibit their wisdom by refraining from becoming patients of mine, Mrs. M'Gregor."

"That's no weesdom; it's just preejudice." "Prejudice!" cried Stuart, dropping down upon the sofa.

"Aye," replied Mrs. M'Gregor firmly--"preejudice! They're no' that daft but they're well aware o' who's the cleverest physeecian in the deestrict, an' they come to nane other than Dr. Keppel Stuart when they're sair sick and think they're dying; but ye'll never establish the practice you desairve, Mr. Keppel--never--until--"

"Until when, Mrs. M'Gregor?"

"Until ye take heed of an auld wife's advice and find a new housekeeper."

"Mrs. M'Gregor!" exclaimed Stuart with concern. "You don't mean that you want to desert me? After—let me see—how many years is it, Mrs. M'Gregor?"

"Thirty years come last Shrove Tuesday; I dandled ye on my knee, and eh! but ye were bonny! God forbid, but I'd like to see ye thriving as ye desaive, and that ye'll never do whilst ye're a bachelor."

"Oh!" cried Stuart, laughing again--"oh, that's it, is it? So you would like me to find some poor inoffensive girl to share my struggles?"

Mrs. M'Gregor nodded wisely. "She'd have nane so many to share. I know ye think I'm old-fashioned, Mr. Keppel and it may be I am; but I do assure you I would be sair harassed, if stricken to my bed—which, please God, I won't be—to receive the veesits of a pairsonable young bachelor."

"Er--Mrs. M'Gregor!" interrupted Stuart, coughing in mock rebuke--"quite so! I fancy we have discussed this point before, and as you say your ideas are a wee bit, just a wee bit, behind the times. On this particular point I mean. But I am very grateful to you, very sincerely grateful, for your disinterested kindness; and if ever I should follow your advice——"

Mrs. M'Gregor interrupted him, pointing to his boots. "Ye're no' that daft as to sit in wet boots?"

"Really they are perfectly dry. Except for a light shower this evening, there has been no rain for several days. However, I may as well, since I shall not be going out again."

He began to unlace his boots as Mrs. M'Gregor pulled the white casement curtains across the windows and then prepared to retire. Her hand upon the door knob, she turned again to Stuart.

"The foreign lady called half an hour since, Mr. Keppel."

"Mlle. Dorian! Did she leave any message?"

"She obairved that she might repeat her veesit later," replied Mrs. M'Gregor, and, after a moment's hesitation; "she awaited ye're return with exemplary patience."

"Really, I am sorry I was detained," declared Stuart, replacing his boot. "How long has she been gone, then?"

"Just the now. No more than two or three minutes. I trust she is no worse."

"Worse!"

"The lass seemed o'er anxious to see you."

"Well, you know, Mrs. M'Gregor, she comes a considerable distance."

"So I am given to understand, Mr. Keppel," replied the old lady; "and in a grand luxurious car."

Stuart assumed an expression of perplexity to hide his embarrassment. "Mrs. M'Gregor," he said rather ruefully, "you watch over me as tenderly as my own mother would have done. I have observed a certain restraint in your manner whenever you have had occasion to refer to Mlle. Dorian. In what way does she differ from my other lady patients?" And even as he spoke the words he knew in his heart that she differed from every other woman in the world.

Mrs. M'Gregor sniffed. "Do your other lady patients wear furs that your airnings for six months could never pay
for, Mr. Keppel?” she inquired.

“No, unfortunately they pin their faith, for the most part, to gaily coloured shawls. All the more reason why I should bless the accident which led Mlle. Dorian to my door.”

Mrs. M’Gregor, betraying, in her interest, real suspicion, murmured _sotto voce_: “Then she _is_ a patient?”

“What’s that?” asked Stuart, regarding her surprisingly. “A patient? Certainly. She suffers from insomnia.”

“I’m no’ surprised to hear it.”

“What do you mean, Mrs. M’Gregor?”

“Now, Mr. Keppel, laddie, ye’re angry with me, and like enough I am a meddlesome auld woman. But I know what a man will do for shining een and a winsome face--nane better to my sorrow--and twa times have I heard the Warning.”

Stuart stood up in real perplexity. “Pardon my density, Mrs. M’Gregor, but--er--the Warning? To what ‘warning’ do you refer?”

Seating herself in the chair before the writing-table, Mrs. M’Gregor shook her head pensively. “What would it be,” she said softly, “but the Pibroch o’ the M’Gregors?”

Stuart came across and leaned upon a corner of the table. “The Pibroch of the M’Gregors?” he repeated.

“Nane other. ’Tis said to be Rob Roy’s ain piper that gives warning when danger threatens ane o’ the M’Gregors or any they love.”

Stuart restrained a smile, and, “A well-meaning but melancholy retainer!” he commented.

“As well as I hear you now, laddie, I heard the pibroch on the day a certain woman first crossed my threshold, nigh thirty years ago, in Inverary. And as plainly as I heard it wailing then, I heard it the first evening that Miss Dorian came to this house!”

Torn between good-humoured amusement and real interest, “If I remember rightly,” said Stuart, “Mlle. Dorian first called here just a week ago, and immediately before I returned from an Infirmary case?”

“Your memory is guid, Mr. Keppel.”

“And when, exactly, did you hear this Warning?”

“Twa minutes before you entered the house; and I heard it again the now.”

“What! you heard it to-night?”

“I heard it again just the now and I lookit out the window.”

“Did you obtain a glimpse of Rob Roy’s piper?”

“Ye’re laughing at an old wife, laddie. No, but I saw Miss Dorian away in her car and twa minutes later I saw yourself coming round the corner.”

“If she had only waited another two minutes,” murmured Stuart. “No matter; she may return. And are these the only occasions upon which you have heard this mysterious sound, Mrs. M’Gregor?”

“No, Master Keppel, they are not. I assure ye something threatens. It wakened me up in the wee sma’ hours last night--the piping--an’ I lay awake shaking for long eno’.”

“How extraordinary. Are you sure your imagination is not playing you tricks?”

“Ah, you’re no’ takin’ me seriously, laddie.”

“Mrs. M’Gregor”--he leaned across the table and rested his hands upon her shoulders--“you are a second mother to me, your care makes me feel like a boy again; and in these grey days it’s good to feel like a boy again. You think I am laughing at you, but I’m not. The strange tradition of your family is associated with a tragedy in your life; therefore I respect it. But have no fear with regard to Mlle. Dorian. In the first place she is a patient; in the second--I am merely a penniless suburban practitioner. Good-night, Mrs. M’Gregor. Don’t think of waiting up. Tell Mary to show Mademoiselle in here directly she arrives--that is if she really returns.”

Mrs. M’Gregor stood up and walked slowly to the door. “I’ll show Mademoiselle in mysel’, Mr. Keppel,” she said,--“and show her out.”

She closed the door very quietly.

CHAPTER III

THE SCORPION’S TAIL

Seating himself at the writing-table, Stuart began mechanically to arrange his papers. Then from the tobacco jar he loaded his pipe, but his manner remained abstracted. Yet he was not thinking of the phantom piper but of Mlle. Dorian.

Until he had met this bewilderingly pretty woman he had thought that his heart was for evermore proof against the glances of bright eyes. Mademoiselle had disillusioned him. She was the most fragrantly lovely creature he had ever met, and never for one waking moment since her first visit, had he succeeded in driving her bewitching image from his mind. He had tried to laugh at his own folly, then had grown angry with himself, but finally had settled down to a dismayed acceptance of a wild infatuation.
He had no idea who Mlle. Dorian was; he did not even know her exact nationality, but he strongly suspected there was a strain of Eastern blood in her veins. Although she was quite young, apparently little more than twenty years of age, she dressed like a woman of unlimited means, and although all her visits had been at night he had had glimpses of the big car which had aroused Mrs. M'Gregor's displeasure.

Yes--so ran his musings, as, pipe in mouth, he rested his chin in his hands and stared grimly into the fire--she had always come at night and always alone. He had supposed her to be a Frenchwoman, but an unmarried French girl of good family does not make late calls, even upon a medical man, unattended. Had he perchance unwittingly made himself a party to the escapade of some unruly member of a noble family? From the first he had shrewdly suspected the ailments of Mlle. Dorian to be imaginary--Mlle. Dorian? It was an odd name.

"I shall be imagining she is a disguised princess if I wonder about her any more!" he muttered angrily.

Detecting himself in the act of heaving a weary sigh, he coughed in self-reproval and reached into a pigeon-hole for the MS. of his unfinished paper on "Snake Poisons and Their Antidotes." By chance he pulled out the brief account, written the same morning, of his uncanny experience during the night. He read it through reflectively.

It was incomplete. A certain mental haziness which he had noted upon awakening had in some way obscured the facts. His memory of the dream had been imperfect. Even now, whilst recognizing that some feature of the experience was missing from his written account, he could not identify the omission. But one memory arose starkly before him--that of the cowled man who had stood behind the curtains. It had power to chill him yet. The old incredulity returned and methodically he re-examined the contents of some of the table drawers. Ere long, however, he desisted impatiently.

"What the devil could a penniless doctor have hidden in his desk that was worth stealing!" he said aloud. "I must avoid cold salmon and cucumber in future."

He tossed the statement aside and turned to his scientific paper.

There came knock at the door.

"Come in!" snapped Stuart irritably; but the next moment he had turned, eager-eyed to the servant who had entered.

"Inspector Dunbar has called, sir."

"Oh, all right," said Stuart, repressing another sigh. "Show him in here."

There entered, shortly, a man of unusual height, a man gaunt and square both of figure and of face. He wore his clothes and his hair untidily. He was iron grey and a grim mouth was ill concealed by the wiry moustache. The most notable features of a striking face were the tawny leonine eyes, which could be fierce, which could be pensive and which were often kindly.

"Good evening, doctor," he said--and his voice was pleasant and unexpectedly light in tome. "Hope I don't intrude."

"Not at all, Inspector," Stuart assured him.

"Make yourself comfortable in the armchair and fill your pipe."

"Thanks," said Dunbar. "I will." He took out his pipe and reached out a long arm for the tobacco jar. "I came to see if you could give me a tip on a matter that has cropped up."

"Something in my line?" asked Stuart, a keen professional look coming momentarily into his eyes.

"It's supposed to be a poison case, although I can't see it myself," answered the detective--to whom Keppel Stuart's unusual knowledge of poisons had been of service in the past; "but if what I suspect is true, it's a very big case all the same."

Laying down his pipe, which he had filled but not lighted, Inspector Dunbar pulled out from the inside pocket of his tweed coat a bulging note-book and extracted therefrom some small object wrapped up in tissue paper. Unwrapping this object, he laid it upon the table.

"Tell me what that is, doctor," he said, "and I shall be obliged."

Stuart peered closely at that which lay before him. It was a piece of curiously shaped gold, cunningly engraved in a most unusual way. Rather less than an inch in length, it formed a crescent made up of six oval segments joined one to another, the sixth terminating in a curled point. The first and largest segment ended jaggedly where it had evidently been snapped off from the rest of the ornament--if the thing had formed part of an ornament. Stuart looked up, frowning in a puzzled way.

"It is a most curious fragment of jewellery--possibly of Indian origin," he said.

Inspector Dunbar lighted his pipe and tossed the match-end into the fire. "But what does it represent?" he asked.

"Oh, as to that--I said a _curious_ fragment advisedly, because I cannot imagine any woman wearing such a beastly thing. It is the _tail_ of a scorpion._"

"Ah!" cried Dunbar, the tawny eyes glittering with excitement. "The tail of a scorpion! I thought so! And Sowerby would have it that it represented the stem of a Cactus or Prickly Pear!"
"Not so bad a guess," replied Stuart. "There _are_ resemblances--not in the originals but in such a miniature reproduction as this. He was wrong, however. May I ask where you obtained the fragment?"

"I'm here to tell you, doctor, for now that I know it's a scorpion's tail I know that I'm out of my depth as well. You've travelled in the East and lived in the East--two very different things. Now, while you were out there, in India, China, Burma, and so on, did you ever come across a religion or a cult that worshipped scorpions?"

Stuart frowned thoughtfully, rubbing his chin with the mouthpiece of his pipe. Dunbar watched him expectantly.


Inspector Dunbar nodded, stood up and crossed the room, where he busied himself with syphon and decanter. Presently he returned, carrying two full glasses, one of which he set before Stuart. "What's the answer, doctor?" he asked.

"The answer is _no_. I am not acquainted with any sect of scorpion-worshippers, Inspector. But I once met with a curious experience at Su-Chow in China, which I have never been able to explain, but which may interest you. It wanted but a few minutes to sunset, and I was anxious to get back to my quarters before dusk fell. Therefore I hurried up my boy, who was drawing the rickshaw, telling him to cross the Canal by the Wu-men Bridge. He ran fleetly in that direction, and we were actually come to the steep acclivity of the bridge, when suddenly the boy dropped the shafts and fell down on his knees, hiding his face in his hands.

"'Shut your eyes tightly, master!' he whispered. 'The Scorpion is coming!'

"I stared down at him in amazement, as was natural, and not a little angrily; for his sudden action had almost pitched me on my head. But there he crouched, immovable, and staring up the slope I say that it was entirely deserted except for one strange figure at that moment crossing the crown of the bridge and approaching. It was the figure of a tall and dignified Chinaman, or of one who wore the dress of a Chinaman. For the extra-ordinary thing about the stranger's appearance was this; he also wore a thick green veil!"

"Covering his face?"

"So as to cover his face completely. I was staring at him in wonder, when the boy, seeming to divine the other's approach, whispered, 'Turn your head away! Turn your head away!'

"He was referring to the man with the veil?"

"Undoubtedly. Of course I did nothing of the kind, but it was impossible to discern the stranger's features through the thick gauze, although he passed quite close to me. He had not proceeded another three paces, I should think, before my boy had snatched up the shafts and darted across the bridge as though all hell were after him! Here's the odd thing, though; I could never induce him to speak a word on the subject afterwards! I bullied him and bribed him, but all to no purpose. And although I must have asked more than a hundred Chinamen in every station of society from mandarin to mendicant, 'Who or what is _The Scorpion?_' one and all looked stupid, blandly assuring me that they did not know what I meant."

"H'm!" said Dunbar, "it's a queer yarn, certainly. How long ago would that be, doctor?"

"Roughly--five years."

"It sounds as though it might belong to the case. Some months back, early in the winter, we received instructions at the Yard to look out everywhere in the press, in buffets, theatres, but particularly in criminal quarters, for any reference (of any kind whatever) to a scorpion. I was so puzzled that I saw the Commissioner about it, and he could tell me next to nothing. He said the word had come through from Paris, but that Paris seemed to know no more about it than we did. It was associated in some way with the sudden deaths of several notable public men about that time; but as there was no evidence of foul play in any of the cases, I couldn't see what it meant at all. Then, six weeks ago, Sir Frank Narcombe, the surgeon, fell dead in the foyer of a West-End theatre--you remember?"

CHAPTER IV

MADEMOISELLE DORIAN

The telephone bell rang.

Stuart reached across for the instrument and raised the receiver. "Yes," he said--"Dr. Stuart speaking. Inspector Dunbar is here. Hold on."

He passed the instrument to Dunbar, who had stood up on hearing his name mentioned. "Sergeant Sowerby at Scotland Yard wishes to speak to you, Inspector."

"Hullo," said Dunbar--"that you, Sowerby. Yes--but I arrived here only a short time ago. What's that?--Max? Good God! what does it all mean! Are you sure of the number--49685? Poor chap--he should have worked with us instead of going off alone like that. But he was always given to that sort of thing. Wait for me. I'll be with you in a few minutes. I can get a taxi. And, Sowerby--listen! It's 'The Scorpion' case right enough. That bit of gold found on the dead man is not a cactus stem; it's a scorpion's tail!"

He put down the telephone and turned to Stuart, who had been listening to the words with growing concern.
Dunbar struck his open palm down on to the table with a violent gesture.

"We have been asleep!" he exclaimed. "Gaston Max of the Paris Service has been at work in London for a month, and we didn't know it!"

"Gaston Max!" cried Start--"then it must be a big case indeed."

As a student of criminology the name of the celebrated Frenchman was familiar to him as that of the foremost criminal investigator in Europe, and he found himself staring at the fragment of gold with a new and keener interest.

"Poor chap," continued Dunbar--"it was his last. The body brought in from Hanover Hole has been identified as his."

"What! it is the body of Gaston Max!"

"Paris has just wired that Max's reports ceased over a week ago. He was working on the case of Sir Frank Narcombe, it seems, and I never knew! But I predicted a long time ago that Max would play the lone-hand game once too often. They sent particulars. The identification disk is his. Oh! there's no doubt about it, unfortunately. The dead man's face is unrecognizable, but it's not likely there are two disks of that sort bearing the initials G.M. and the number 49685. I'm going along now. Should you care to come, doctor?"

"I am expecting a patient, Inspector," replied Stuart--"er--a special case. But I hope you will keep me in touch with this affair?"

"Well, I shouldn't have suggested your coming to the Yard if I hadn't wanted to do that. As a matter of fact, this scorpion job seems to resolve itself into a case of elaborate assassination by means of some unknown poison; and although I should have come to see you in any event, because you have helped me more than once, I came to-night at the suggestion of the Commissioner. He instructed me to retain your services if they were available."

"I am honoured," replied Stuart. "But after all, Inspector, I am merely an ordinary suburban practitioner. My reputation has yet to be made. What's the matter with Halesowen of Upper Wimpole Street? He's the big man."

"And if Sir Frank Narcombe was really poisoned--as Paris seems to think he was--he's also a big fool." retorted Dunbar bluntly. "He agreed that death was due to heart trouble."

"I know he did; unsuspected ulcerative endocarditis. Perhaps he was right."

"If he was right," said Dunbar, taking up the piece of gold from the table, "what was Gaston Max doing with this thing in his possession?"

"There may be no earthly connection between Max's inquiries and the death of Sir Frank."

"On the other hand--there may! Leaving Dr. Halesowen out of the question, are you open to act as expert adviser in this case?"

"Certainly; delighted."

"Your fee is your own affair, doctor. I will communicate with you later, if you wish, or call again in the morning."

Dunbar wrapped up the scorpion's tail in the piece of tissue paper and was about to replace it in his note-case. Then:

"I'll leave this with you, doctor," he said. "I know it will be safe enough, and you might like to examine it at greater leisure."

"Very well," replied Stuart. "Some of the engraving is very minute. I will have a look at it through a glass later."

He took the fragment from Dunbar, who had again unwrapped it, and, opening a drawer of the writing-table in which he kept his cheque-book and some few other personal valuables, he placed the curious piece of gold-work within and relocked the drawer.

"I will walk as far as the cab-rank with you," he said, finding himself to be possessed of a spirit of unrest. Whereupon the two went out of the room, Stuart extinguishing the lamps as he came to the door.

They had not left the study for more than two minutes ere a car drew up outside the house, and Mrs. M'Gregor ushered a lady into the room but lately quit by Stuart and Dunbar, turning up the lights as she entered.

"The doctor has gone out but just now, Miss Dorian," she said stiffly. "I am sorry that ye are so unfortunate in your veesits. But I know he'll be no more than a few minutes."

The girl addressed was of a type fully to account for the misgivings of the shrewd old Scotswoman. She had the slim beauty of the East allied to the elegance of the West. Her features, whilst cast in a charming European mould, at the same time suggested in some subtle way the Oriental. She had the long, almond-shaped eyes of the Egyptian, and her hair, which she wore unconventionally in a picturesque fashion reminiscent of the _harem_, was inclined to be "fuzzy," but gleamed with coppery tints where the light touched its waves.

She wore a cloak of purple velvet having a hooded collar of white fox fur; it fastened with golden cords. Beneath it was a white and gold robe, cut with classic simplicity of line and confined at the waist by an ornate Eastern girdle. White stockings and dull gold shoes exhibited to advantage her charming little feet and slim ankles, and she carried a handbag of Indian beadwork. Mlle. Dorian was a figure calculated to fire the imagination of any man and to linger
long and sweetly in the memory.

Mrs. M'Gregor, palpably ill at ease, conducted her to an armchair.

"You are very good," said the visitor, speaking with a certain hesitancy and with a slight accent most musical and fascinating. "I wait a while if I may."

"Dear, dear," muttered Mrs. M'Gregor, beginning to poke the fire, "he has let the fire down, of course! Is it out? No ... I see a wee sparkie!"

She set the poker upright before the nearly extinguished fire and turned triumphantly to Mlle. Dorian, who was watching her with a slight smile.

"That will be a comforting blaze in a few minutes, Miss Dorian," she said, and went towards the door.

"If you please," called the girl, detaining her--"do you permit me to speak on the telephone a moment? As Dr. Stuart is not at home, I must explain that I wait for him."

"Certainly, Miss Dorian," replied Mrs. M'Gregor; "use the telephone by all means. But I think the doctor will be back any moment now."

"Thank you so much."

Mrs. M'Gregor went out, not without a final backward glance at the elegant figure in the armchair. Mlle. Dorian was seated, her chin resting in her hand and her elbow upon the arm of the chair, gazing into the smoke arising from the nearly extinguished ember of the fire. The door closed, and Mrs. M'Gregor's footsteps could be heard receding along the corridor.

Mlle. Dorian sprang from the chair and took out of her handbag a number of small keys attached to a ring. Furtively she crossed the room, all the time listening intently, and cast her cloak over the back of the chair which was placed before the writing-table. Her robe of white and gold clung to her shapely figure as she bent over the table and tried three of the keys in the lock of the drawer which contained Stuart's cheque-book and in which he had recently placed the mysterious gold ornament. The third key fitted the lock, and Mlle. Dorian pulled open the drawer. She discovered first the cheque-book and next a private account-book; then from under the latter she drew out a foolscap envelope sealed with red wax and bearing, in Stuart's handwriting, the address:

Lost Property Office, Metropolitan Police, New Scotland Yard, S. W. I.

She uttered a subdued exclamation; then, as a spark of light gleamed within the open drawer, she gazed as if stupefied at the little ornament which she had suddenly perceived lying near the cheque-book. She picked it up and stared at it aghast. A moment she hesitated; then, laying down the fragment of gold and also the long envelope upon the table, she said, "Yes--yes!"

"Miska speaks. Listen! One of the new keys--it fits. I have the envelope. But, also in the same drawer, I find a part of a broken gold _'agrab_ (scorpion). Yes, it is broken. It must be they find it, on him." Her manner grew more and more agitated. "Shall I bring it? The envelope it is very large. I do not know if----"

From somewhere outside the house came a low, wailing cry--a cry which Stuart, if he had heard it, must have recognized to be identical with that which he had heard in the night--but which he had forgotten to record in his written account.

"Ah!" whispered the girl--"there is the signal! It is the doctor who returns." She listened eagerly, fearfully, to the voice which spoke over the wires. "Yes--yes!"

Always glancing toward the door, she put down the instrument, took up the long envelope and paused for a moment, thinking that she had heard the sound of approaching footsteps. She exhibited signs of nervous indecision, tried to thrust the envelope into her little bag and realized that even folded it would not fit so as to escape observation. She ran across to the grate and dropped the envelope upon the smouldering fire. As she did so, the nicely balanced poker fell with a clatter upon the tiled hearth.

She started wildly, ran back to the table, took up the broken ornament and was about to thrust it into the open drawer, when the study door was flung open and Stuart came in.

CHAPTER V
THE SEALED ENVELOPE

"MADEMOISELLE DORIAN!" cried Stuart joyously, advancing with outstretched hand. She leaned back against the table watching him--and suddenly he perceived the open drawer. He stopped. His expression changed to one of surprise and anger, and the girl's slim fingers convulsively clutched the table edge as she confronted him. Her exquisite colour fled and left her pallid, dark-eyed and dismayed.

"So," he said bitterly--"I returned none too soon, Mlle.--_Dorian_"

"Oh! she whispered, and shrank from him as he approached nearer.

"Your object in selecting an obscure practitioner for your medical adviser becomes painfully evident to me.
Diagnosis of your case would have been much more easy if I had associated your symptoms with the presence in my table drawer of"--he hesitated--"of something which you have taken out. Give me whatever you have stolen and compose yourself to await the arrival of the police."

He was cruel in his disillusionment. Here lay the explanation of his romance; here was his disguised princess--a common thief! She stared at him wildly.

"I take nothing!" she cried. "Oh, let me go! Please, please let me go!"
"Pleading is useless. What have you stolen?"
"Nothing--see." She cast the little gold ornament on the table. "I look at this, but I do not mean to steal it."

She raised her beautiful eyes to his face again, and he found himself wavering. That she had made his acquaintance in order to steal the fragment of the golden scorpion was impossible, for he had not possessed it at the time of her first visit. He was hopelessly mystified and utterly miserable.

"How did you open the drawer?" he asked sternly.

She took up the bunch of keys which lay upon the table and naively exhibited that which fitted the lock of the drawer. Her hands were shaking.

"Where did you obtain this key; and why?"

She watched him intently, her lips trembling and her eyes wells of sorrow into which he could not gaze unmoved.

"If I tell you--will you let me go?"
"I shall make no promises, for I can believe nothing that you may tell me. You gained my confidence by a lie--and now, by another lie, you seem to think that you can induce me to overlook a deliberate attempt at burglary--common burglary." He clenched his hands. "Heavens! I could never have believed it of you!"

She flinched as though from a blow and regarded him pitifully as he stood, head averted.

"Oh, please listen to me," she whispered. "At first I tell you a lie, yes."
"And now?"
"Now--I tell you the truth."
"That you are a petty thief?"
"Ah! you are cruel--you have no pity! You judge me as you judge--one of your Englishwomen. Perhaps I cannot help what I do. In the East a woman is a chattel and has no will of her own."

"A chattel!" cried Stuart scornfully. "Your resemblance to the 'chattels' of the East is a remote one. There is Eastern blood in your veins, no doubt, but you are educated, you are a linguist, you know the world. Right and wrong are recognizable to the lowest savage."

"And if they recognize, but are helpless?"

Stuart made a gesture of impatience.

"You are simply seeking to enlist my sympathy," he said bitterly. "But you have said nothing which inclines me to listen to you any longer. Apart from the shock of finding you to be--what you are, I am utterly mystified as to your object. I am a poor man. The entire contents of my house would fetch only a few hundred pounds if sold tomorrow. Yet you risk your liberty to rifle my bureau. For the last time--what have you taken from that drawer?"

She leaned back against the table, toying with the broken piece of gold and glancing down at it as she did so. Her long lashes cast shadows below her eyes, and a hint of colour was returning to her cheeks. Stuart studied her attentively--even delightfully, for all her shortcomings, and knew in his heart that he could never give her in charge of the police. More and more the wonder of it all grew upon him, and now he suddenly found himself thinking of the unexplained incident of the previous night.

"You do not answer," he said. "I will ask you another question: have you attempted to open that drawer prior to this evening?"

Mlle. Dorian looked up rapidly, and her cheeks, which had been pale, now flushed rosily.

"I try twice before," she confessed, "and cannot open it."
"Ah! And--has someone else tried also?"

Instantly her colour fled again, and she stared at him wide-eyed, fearful.

"Someone else?" she whispered.

"Yes--someone else. A man ... wearing a sort of cowl--"-

"Oh?" she cried and threw out her hands in entreaty. "Do not ask me of _him_! I dare not answer--I dare not!"

"You have answered," said Stuart, in a voice unlike his own; for a horrified amazement was creeping upon him and supplanting the contemptuous anger which the discovery of this beautiful girl engaged in pilfering his poor belongings had at first aroused.

The mystery of her operations was explained--explained by a deeper and a darker mystery. The horror of the night had been no dream but an almost incredible reality. He now saw before him an agent of the man in the cowl;
he perceived that he was in some way entangled in an affair vastly more complex and sinister than a case of petty larceny.

"Has the golden scorpion anything to do with the matter?" he demanded abruptly.

And in the eyes of his beautiful captive he read the answer. She flinched again as she had done when he had taunted her with being a thief; but he pressed his advantage remorselessly.

"So you were concerned in the death of Sir Frank Narcombe!" he said.

"I was not!" she cried at him fiercely, and her widely opened eyes were magnificent. "Sir Frank Narcombe is----"

She faltered—and ceased speaking, biting her lip which had become tremulous again.

"Sir Frank Narcombe is?" prompted Stuart, feeling himself to stand upon the brink of a revelation.

"I know nothing of him—this Sir Frank Narcombe."

Stuart laughed unmirthfully.

"Am I, by any chance, in danger of sharing the fate of that distinguished surgeon?" he asked.

His question produced an unforeseen effect. Mlle. Dorian suddenly rested her jewelled hands upon his shoulders, and he found himself looking hungrily into those wonderful Eastern eyes.

"If I swear that I speak the truth, will you believe me?" she whispered, and her fingers closed convulsively upon his shoulders.

He was shaken. Her near presence was intoxicating. "Perhaps," he said unsteadily.

"Listen, then. _Now_ you are in danger, yes. Before, you were not, but now you must be very careful. Oh! indeed, indeed, I tell you true! I tell you for your own sake. Do with me what you please. I do not care. It does not matter. You ask me why I come here. I tell you that also. I come for what is in the long envelope—look, I cannot hide it. It is on the fire!"

Stuart turned and glanced toward the grate. A faint wisp of brown smoke was arising from a long white envelope which lay there. Had the fire been actually burning, it must long ago have been destroyed. More than ever mystified, for the significance of the envelope was not evident to him, he ran to the grate and plucked the smouldering paper from the embers.

As he did so, the girl, with one quick glance in his direction, snatched her cloak, keys and bag and ran from the room. Stuart heard the door close, and racing back to the table he placed the slightly charred envelope there beside the fragment of gold and leapt to the door.

"Damn!" he said.

His escaped prisoner had turned the key on the outside. He was locked in his own study!

Momentarily nonplussed, he stood looking at the closed door. The sound of a restarted motor from outside the house spurred him to action. He switched off the lamps, crossed the darkened room and drew back the curtain, throwing open the French windows. Brilliant moonlight bathed the little lawn with its bordering of high privet hedges. Stuart ran out as the sound of the receding car reached his ears. By the time that he had reached the front of the house the street was vacant from end to end. He walked up the steps to the front door, which he unfastened with his latch-key. As he entered the hall, Mrs. M'Gregor appeared from her room.

"I did no' hear ye go out with Miss Dorian," she said.

"That's quite possible, Mrs. M'Gregor, but she has gone, you see."

"Now tell me, Mr. Keppel, did ye or did ye no' hear the wail o' the pibroch the night?"

"No--I am afraid I cannot say that I did, Mrs. M'Gregor," replied Stuart patiently. "I feel sure you must be very tired and you can justifiably turn in now. I am expecting no other visitor. Good-night."

Palpably dissatisfied and ill at ease, Mrs. M'Gregor turned away.

"Good-night, Mr. Keppel," she said.

Stuart, no longer able to control his impatience, hurried to the study door, unlocked it and entered. Turning on the light, he crossed and hastily drew the curtains over the window recess, but without troubling to close the window which he had opened. Then he returned to the writing-table and took up the sealed envelope whose presence in his bureau was clearly responsible for the singular visitation of the cowled man and for the coming of the lovely Mlle. Dorian.

The "pibroch of the M'Gregors": He remembered something—something which, unaccountably, he hitherto had failed to recall: that fearful wailing in the night—which had heralded the coming of the cowled man!—or had it been a _signal_ of some kind?

He stared at the envelope blankly, then laid it down and stood looking for some time at the golden scorpion's tail. Finally, his hands resting upon the table, he found that almost unconsciously he had been listening—listening to the dim night sounds of London and to the vague stirrings within the house.

"_Now_, you are in danger. Before, you were not...."

Could he believe her? If in naught else, in this at least surely she had been sincere? Stuart started—then laughed.
grimly.

A clock on the mantel-piece had chimed the half-hour.

CHAPTER VI

THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER

Detective-Inspector Dunbar arrived at New Scotland Yard in a veritable fever of excitement. Jumping out of the cab he ran into the building and without troubling the man in charge of the lift went straight on upstairs to his room. He found it to be in darkness and switched on the green-shaded lamp which was suspended above the table. Its light revealed a bare apartment having distempered walls severely decorated by an etching of a former and unbeautiful Commissioner. The blinds were drawn. A plain, heavy deal table (bearing a blotting-pad, a pewter ink-pot, several pens and a telephone), together with three uncomfortable chairs, alone broke the expanse of highly polished floor. Dunbar glanced at the table and then stood undecided in the middle of the bare room, tapping his small, widely separated teeth with a pencil which he had absently drawn from his waistcoat pocket. He rang the bell.

A constable came in almost immediately and stood waiting just inside the door.

"When did Sergeant Sowerby leave?" asked Dunbar.

"About three hours ago, sir."

"What!" cried Dunbar. "Three hours ago! But I have been here myself within that time—in the Commissioner's office."

"Sergeant Sowerby left before then. I saw him go."

"But, my good fellow, he has been back again. He spoke to me on the telephone less than a quarter of an hour ago."

"Not from here, sir."

"But I say it was from here!" shouted Dunbar fiercely; "and I told him to wait for me."

"Very good, sir. Shall I make inquiries?"

"Yes. Wait a minute. Is the Commissioner here?"

"Yes, sir, I believe so. At least I have not seen him go."

"Find Sergeant Sowerby and tell him to wait here for me," snapped Dunbar.

He walked out into the bare corridor and along to the room of the Assistant Commissioner. Knocking upon the door, he opened it immediately, and entered an apartment which afforded a striking contrast to his own. For whereas the room of Inspector Dunbar was practically unfurnished, that of his superior was so filled with tables, cupboards, desks, bureaux, files, telephones, bookshelves and stacks of documents that one only discovered the Assistant Commissioner sunk deep in a padded armchair and a cloud of tobacco smoke by dint of close scrutiny. The Assistant Commissioner was small, sallow and satanic. His black moustache was very black and his eyes were of so dark a brown as to appear black also. When he smiled he revealed a row of very large white teeth, and his smile was correctly Mephistophelean. He smoked a hundred and twenty Egyptian cigarettes per diem, and the first and second fingers of either hand were coffee-coloured.

"Good-evening, Inspector," he said courteously. "You come at an opportune moment." He lighted a fresh cigarette. "I was detained here unusually late to-night or this news would not have reached us till the morning." He laid his finger upon a yellow form. "There is an unpleasant development in 'The Scorpion' case."

"So I gather, sir. That is what brought me back to the Yard."

The Assistant Commissioner glanced up sharply.

"What brought you back to the Yard?" he asked.

"The news about Max."

The Assistant Commissioner leaned back in his chair. "Might I ask, Inspector," he said, "what news you have learned and how you have learned it?"

Dunbar stared uncomprehendingly.

"Sowerby 'phoned me about half an hour ago, sir. Did he do so without your instructions?"

"Most decidedly. What was his message?"

"He told me," replied Dunbar, in ever-growing amazement, "that the body brought in by the River Police last night had been identified as that of Gaston Max."

The Assistant Commissioner handed a pencilled slip to Dunbar. It read as follows:—


"But, sir," said Dunbar—"this is exactly what Sowerby told me!"

"Quite so. That is the really extraordinary feature of the affair. Because, you see, Inspector, I only finished decoding this message at the very moment that you knocked at my door!"

"But----"
“There is no room for a 'but,' Inspector. This confidential message from Paris reached me ten minutes ago. You
know as well as I know that there is no possibility of leakage. No one has entered my room in the interval, yet you
tell me that Sergeant Sowerby communicated this information to you, by telephone, half an hour ago.”

Dunbar was tapping his teeth with the pencil. His amazement was too great for words.

"Had the message been a false one," continued the Commissioner, "the matter would have been resolved into a
meaningless hoax, but the message having been what it was, we find ourselves face to face with no ordinary
problem. Remember, Inspector, that voices on the telephone are deceptive. Sergeant Sowerby has marked vocal
mannerisms----"

"Which would be fairly easy to imitate? Yes, sir--that's so."
"But it brings us no nearer to the real problems; viz., first, the sender of the message; and, second, his purpose."
There was a dull purring sound and the Assistant Commissioner raised the telephone.
"Yes. Who is it that wishes to speak to him? Dr. Keppel Stuart? Connect with my office."
He turned again to Dunbar.

"Dr. Stuart has a matter of the utmost urgency to communicate, Inspector. It was at the house of Dr. Stuart, I take
it, that you received the unexplained message?"
"It was--yes."
"Did you submit to Dr. Stuart the broken gold ornament?"
"Yes. It's a scorpion's tail."
"Ah!" The Assistant Commissioner smiled satanically and lighted a fresh cigarette. "And is Dr. Stuart agreeable
to placing his unusual knowledge at our disposal for the purposes of this case?"

"He is, sir."
The purring sound was repeated.
"You are through to Dr. Stuart," said the Assistant Commissioner.
"Hullo" cried Dunbar, taking up the receiver--"is that Dr. Stuart? Dunbar speaking."
He stood silent for a while, listening to the voice over the wires. Then: "You want me to come around now,
doctor? Very well. I'll be with you in less than half an hour."
He put down the instrument.

"Something extraordinary seems to have taken place at Dr. Stuart's house a few minutes after I left, sir," he said.
"I'm going back there, now, for particulars. It sounds as though the 'phone message might have been intended to get
me away." He stared down at the pencilled slip which the Assistant Commissioner had handed him, but stared
vacantly, and: "Do you mind if I call someone up, sir?" he asked. "It should be done at once."
"Call by all means, Inspector."
Dunbar again took up the telephone.
"Battersea 0996," he said, and stood waiting. Then:
"Is that Battersea 0996?" he asked. "Is Dr. Stuart there? He is speaking? Oh, this is Inspector Dunbar. You called
me up here at the Yard a few moments ago, did you not? Correct, doctor; that's all I wanted to know. I am coming
now."
"Good," said the Assistant Commissioner, nodding his approval. "You will have to check 'phone messages in
that way until you have run your mimic to earth, Inspector. I don't believe for a moment that it was Sergeant
Sowerby who rang you up at Dr. Stuart's.

"Neither do I," said Dunbar grimly. "But I begin to have a glimmer of a notion who it was. I'll be saying good-
night, sir. Dr. Stuart seems to have something very important to tell me."

As a mere matter of form he waited for the report of the constable who had gone in quest of Sowerby, but it
merely confirmed the fact that Sowerby had left Scotland Yard over three hours earlier. Dunbar summoned a taxicab
and proceeded to the house of Dr. Stuart.

CHAPTER VII
CONTENTS OF THE SEALED ENVELOPE
Stuart personally admitted Dunbar, and once more the Inspector found himself in the armchair in the study. The
fire was almost out and the room seemed to be chilly. Stuart was labouring under the influence of suppressed
excitement and was pacing restlessly up and down the floor.

"Inspector," he began, "I find it difficult to tell you the facts which have recently come to my knowledge bearing
upon this most mysterious 'Scorpion' case. I clearly perceive, now, that without being aware of the fact I have
nevertheless been concerned in the case for at least a week."

Dunbar stared surprisedly, but offered no comment.

"A fortnight ago," Stuart continued, "I found myself in the neighbourhood of the West India Docks. I had been
spending the evening with a very old friend, chief officer of a liner in dock. I had intended to leave the ship at about
ten o'clock and to walk to the railway station, but, as it fell out, the party did not break up until after midnight. Declining the offer of a berth on board, I came ashore determined to make my way home by tram and afoot. I should probably have done so and have been spared—much; but rain began to fall suddenly and I found myself, foolishly unprovided with a top-coat, in those grey East End streets without hope of getting a lift.

"It was just as I was crossing Limehouse Causeway that I observed, to my astonishment, the head-lamps of a cab or car shining out from a dark and forbidding thoroughfare which led down to the river. The sight was so utterly unexpected that I paused, looking through the rainy mist in the direction of the stationary vehicle. I was still unable to make out if it were a cab or a car, and accordingly I walked along to where it stood and found that it was a taxicab and apparently for hire.

"Are you disengaged?" I said to the man. "Well, sir, I suppose I am," was his curious reply. 'Where do you want to go?'

I gave him this address and he drove me home. On arriving, so grateful did I feel that I took pity upon the man, for it had settled down into a brute of a night, and asked him to come in and take a glass of grog. He was only too glad to do so. He turned out to be quite an intelligent sort of fellow, and we chatted together for ten minutes or so.

"I had forgotten all about him when, I believe on the following night, he reappeared in the character of a patient. He had a badly damaged skull, and I gathered that he had had an accident with his cab and had been pitched out into the road.

"When I had fixed him up, he asked me to do him a small favour. From inside his tunic he pulled out a long stiff envelope, bearing no address but the number 30 in big red letters. It was secured at both ends with black wax bearing the imprint of a curious and complicated seal.

"'A gentleman left this behind in the cab today, sir,' said the man—'perhaps the one who was with me when I had the spill, and I've got no means of tracing him; but he may be able to trace _me_ if he happened to notice my number, or he may advertise. It evidently contains something valuable.'

"'Then why not take it to Scotland Yard?' I asked. 'Isn't that the proper course?'

"'It is,' he admitted; 'but here's the point: if the owner reclains it from Scotland Yard he's less likely to dub up handsome than if he gets it direct from me!'

"I laughed at that, for the soundness of the argument was beyond dispute. 'But what on earth do you want to leave it with _me_ for?' I asked."

"Self-protection,' was the reply. 'They can't say I meant to pinch it! Whereas, directly there's any inquiry I can come and collect it and get the reward; and your word will back me up if any questions are asked; that's if you don't mind, sir.'

"I told him I didn't mind in the least, and accordingly I sealed the envelope in a yet larger one which I addressed to the Lost Property Office and put into a private drawer of my bureau. 'You will have no objection,' I said, 'to this being posted if it isn't reclaimed within a reasonable time?'

"He said that would be all right and departed—since which moment I have not set eyes upon him. I now come to the sequel, or what I have just recognized to be the sequel."

Stuart's agitation grew more marked and it was only by dint of a palpable effort that he forced himself to resume. "On the evening of the following day a lady called professionally. She was young, pretty, and dressed with extraordinary elegance. My housekeeper admitted her, as I was out at the time but momentarily expected. She awaited my return here, in this room. She came again two days later. The name she gave was an odd one: Mademoiselle Dorian. There is her card,—Stuart opened a drawer and laid a visiting-card before Dunbar—"no initials and no address. She travelled in a large and handsome car. That is to say, according to my housekeeper's account it is a large and handsome car. I personally, have had but an imperfect glimpse of it. It does not await her in front of the house, for some reason, but just around the corner in the side turning. Beyond wondering why Mademoiselle Dorian had selected me as her medical advisor I had detected nothing suspicious in her behaviour up to the time of which I am about to speak.

"Last night there was a singular development, and to-night matters came to a head."

Thereupon Stuart related as briefly as possible the mysterious episode of the cowled man, and finally gave an account of the last visit of Mlle. Dorian. Inspector Dunbar did not interrupt him, but listened attentively to the singular story.

"And there," concluded Stuart, "on the blotting-pad, lies the sealed envelope!"

Dunbar took it up eagerly. A small hole had been burned in one end of the envelope and much of the surrounding paper was charred. The wax with which Stuart had sealed it had lain uppermost, and although it had been partly melted, the mark of his signet-ring was still discernible upon it. Dunbar stood staring at it.

"In the circumstances, Inspector, I think you would be justified in opening both envelopes," said Stuart.

"I am inclined to agree. But let me just be clear on one or two points." He took out the bulging note-book and
also a fountain-pen with which he prepared to make entries. "About this cabman, now. You didn't by any chance note the number of his cab?"

"I did not."
"What build of man was he?"
"Over medium height and muscular. Somewhat inclined to flesh and past his youth, but active all the same."
"Dark or fair?"
"Dark and streaked with grey. I noted this particularly in dressing his skull. He wore his hair cropped close to the scalp. He had a short beard and moustache and heavily marked eyebrows. He seemed to be very short-sighted and kept his eyes so screwed up that it was impossible to detect their colour, by night at any rate."
"What sort of wound had he on his skull?"
"A short ugly gash. He had caught his head on the footboard in falling. I may add that on the occasion of his professional visit his breath smelled strongly of spirits, and I rather suspected that his accident might have been traceable to his condition."
"But he wasn't actually drunk?"
"By no means. He was perfectly sober, but he had recently been drinking--possibly because his fall had shaken him, of course."
"His hands?"
"Small and very muscular. Quite steady. Also very dirty."
"What part of the country should you say he hailed from?"
"London. He had a marked cockney accent."
"What make of cab was it?"
"I couldn't say."
"An old cab?"
"Yes. The fittings were dilapidated, I remember, and the cab had a very musty smell."
"Ah," said Dunbar, making several notes. "And now--the lady: about what would be her age?"
"Difficult to say, Inspector. She had Eastern blood and may have been much younger than she appeared to be. Judged from a European standpoint and from her appearance and manner of dress, she might be about twenty-three or twenty-four."
"Complexion?"
"Wonderful. Fresh as a flower."
"Eyes?"
"Dark. They looked black at night."
"Hair?"
"Brown and 'fuzzy' with copper tints."
"Tall?"
"No; slight but beautifully shaped."
"Now--from her accent what should you judge her nationality to be?"
Stuart paced up and down the room, his head lowered in reflection, then:
"She pronounced both English and French words with an intonation which suggested familiarity with Arabic."
"Arabic? That still leaves a fairly wide field."
"It does, Inspector, but I had no means of learning more. She had certainly lived for a long time somewhere in the Near East."
"Her jewellery?"
"Some of it was European and some of it Oriental, but not characteristic of any particular country of the Orient."
"Did she use perfume?"
"Yes, but it was scarcely discernible. Jasmine--probably the Eastern preparation."
"Her ailment was imaginary?"
"I fear so."
"H'm--and now you say that Mrs. M'Gregor saw the car?"
"Yes, but she has retired."
"Her evidence will do to-morrow. We come to the man in the hood. Can you give me any kind of a description of him?"
"He appeared to be tall, but a shadow is deceptive, and his extraordinary costume would produce that effect, too. I can tell you absolutely nothing further about him. Remember, I thought I was dreaming. I could not credit my senses."
Inspector Dunbar glanced over the notes which he had made, then returning the note-book and pen to his pocket,
he took up the long smoke-discoloured envelope and with a paper-knife which lay upon the table slit one end open. Inserting two fingers, he drew out the second envelope which the first enclosed. It was an ordinary commercial envelope only notable by reason of the number, 30, appearing in large red figures upon it and because it was sealed with black wax bearing a weird-looking device:

Stuart bent over him intently as he slit this envelope in turn. Again, he inserted two fingers--and brought forth the sole contents... a plain piece of cardboard, roughly rectangular and obviously cut in haste from the lid of a common cardboard box!

CHAPTER VIII
THE ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER'S THEORY

On the following morning Inspector Dunbar, having questioned Mrs. M'Gregor respecting the car in which Mlle. Dorian had visited the house and having elicited no other evidence than that it was "a fine luxurious concern," the Inspector and Dr. Stuart prepared to set out upon gruesome business. Mrs. M'Gregor was very favourably impressed with the Inspector. "A grand, paisonable body," she confided to Stuart. "He'd look bonny in the kilt."

To an East-End mortuary the cab bore them, and they were led by a constable in attendance to a stone-paved, ill-lighted apartment in which a swathed form lay upon a long deal table. The spectacle presented, when the covering was removed, was one to have shocked less hardened nerves than those of Stuart and Dunbar; but the duties of a police officer, like those of a medical man, not infrequently necessitate such inspections. The two bent over the tragic flotsam of the Thames unmoved and critical.

"H'm," said Stuart--"he's about the build, certainly. Hair iron-grey and close cropped and he seems to have worn a beard. Now, let us see."

He bent, making a close inspection of the skull; then turned and shook his head.

"No, Inspector," he said definitely. "This is not the cabman. There is no wound corresponding to the one which I dressed."

"Right," answered Dunbar, covering up the ghastly face. "That's settled."

"You were wrong, Inspector. It was not Gaston Max who left the envelope with me."

"No," mused Dunbar, "so it seems."

"Your theory that Max, jealously working alone, had left particulars of his inquiries, and clues, in my hands, knowing that they would reach Scotland Yard in the event of his death, surely collapsed when the envelope proved to contain nothing but a bit of cardboard?"

"Yes--I suppose it did. But it sounded so much like Max's round-about methods. Anyway I wanted to make sure that the dead man from Hanover Hole and your mysterious cabman were not one and the same."

Stuart entertained a lively suspicion that Inspector Dunbar was keeping something up his sleeve, but with this very proper reticence he had no quarrel, and followed by the constable, who relocked the mortuary behind them, they came out into the yard where the cab waited which was to take them to Scotland Yard. Dunbar, standing with one foot upon the step of the cab, turned to the constable.

"Has anyone else viewed the body?" he asked.

"No sir."

"No one is to be allowed to do so--you understand?--_no one_, unless he has written permission from the Commissioner."

"Very good, sir."

Half an hour later they arrived at New Scotland Yard and went up to Dunbar's room. A thick-set, florid man of genial appearance, having a dark moustache, a breezy manner and a head of hair resembling a very hard-worked blacking-brush, awaited them. This was Detective-Sergeant Sowerby with whom Stuart was already acquainted.

"Good-morning, Sergeant Sowerby," he said.

"Good-morning, sir. I hear that someone was pulling your leg last night."

"What do you mean exactly, Sowerby?" inquired Dunbar, fixing his fierce eyes upon his subordinate.

Sergeant Sowerby exhibited confusion.

"I mean nothing offensive, Inspector. I was referring to the joker who gave so good an imitation of my voice that even _you_ were deceived."  

"Ah," replied Dunbar--"I see. Yes--he did it well. He spoke just like you. I could hardly make out a word he said."

With this Caledonian shaft and a side-glance at Stuart, Inspector Dunbar sat down at the table.

"Here's Dr. Stuart's description of the missing cabman," he continued, taking out his note-book. "Dr. Stuart has viewed the body and it is not the man. You had better take a proper copy of this."

"Then the cabman wasn't Max?" cried Sowerby eagerly. "I thought not."

"I believe you told me so before," said Dunbar sourly. "I also seem to recall that you thought a scorpion's tail
was a Prickly Pear. However--here, on the page numbered twenty-six, is a description of the woman known as Mlle. Dorian. It should be a fairly easy matter to trace the car through the usual channels, and she ought to be easy to find, too."

He glanced at his watch. Stuart was standing by the lofty window looking out across the Embankment.
"Ten o'clock," said Dunbar. "The Commissioner will be expecting us."
"I am ready," responded Stuart.
Leaving Sergeant Sowerby seated at the table studying the note-book, Stuart and Dunbar proceeded to the smoke-laden room of the Assistant Commissioner. The great man, suavely satanic, greeted Stuart with that polished courtesy for which he was notable.
"You have been of inestimable assistance to us in the past, Dr. Stuart," he said, "and I feel happy to know that we are to enjoy the aid of your special knowledge in the present case. Will you smoke one of my cigarettes? They are some which a friend is kind enough to supply to me direct from Cairo, and are really quite good."
"Thanks," replied Stuart. "May I ask in what direction my services are likely to prove available?"
The Commissioner lighted a fresh cigarette. Then from a heap of correspondence he selected a long report typed upon blue foolscap.
"I have here," he said, "confirmation of the telegraphic report received last night. The name of M. Gaston Max will no doubt be familiar to you?"
Stuart nodded.
"Well," continued the Commissioner, "it appears that he has been engaged in England for the past month endeavouring to trace the connection which he claims to exist between the sudden deaths of various notable people, recently--a list is appended--and some person or organisation represented by, or associated with, a scorpion. His personal theory not being available--poor fellow, you have heard of his tragic death--I have this morning consulted such particulars as I could obtain respecting these cases. If they were really cases of assassination, some obscure poison was the only mode of death that could possibly have been employed. Do you follow me?"
"Perfectly."
"Now, the death of Gaston Max under circumstances not yet explained, would seem to indicate that his theory was a sound one. In other words, I am disposed to believe that he himself represents the most recent outrage of what we will call 'The Scorpion.' Even at the time that the body of the man found by the River Police had not been identified, the presence upon his person of a fragment of gold strongly resembling the tail of a scorpion prompted me to instruct Inspector Dunbar to consult you. I had determined upon a certain course. The identification of the dead man with Gaston Max merely strengthens my determination and enhances the likelihood of my idea being a sound one."
He flicked the ash from his cigarette and resumed:
"Without mentioning names, the experts consulted in the other cases which--according to the late Gaston Max--were victims of 'The Scorpion,' do not seem to have justified their titles. I am arranging that you shall be present at the autopsy upon the body of Gaston Max. And now, permit me to ask you a question: are you acquainted with any poison which would produce the symptoms noted in the case of Sir Frank Narcombe, for instance?"
Stuart shook his head slowly.
"All that I know of the case," he said, "is that he was taken suddenly ill in the foyer of a West-End theatre, immediately removed to his house in Half Moon Street, and died shortly afterward. Can you give me copies of the specialists' reports and other particulars? I may then be able to form an opinion."
"I will get them for you," replied the Commissioner, the exact nature of whose theory was by no means evident to Stuart. He opened a drawer. "I have here," he continued, "the piece of cardboard and the envelope left with you by the missing cab-man. Do you think there is any possibility of invisible writing?"
"None," said Stuart confidently. "I have tested in three or four places as you will see by the spots, but my experiments will in no way interfere with those which no doubt your own people will want to make. I have also submitted both surfaces to a microscopic examination. I am prepared to state definitely that there is no writing upon the cardboard, and except for the number, 30, none upon the envelope."
"It is only reasonable to suppose," continued the Commissioner, "that the telephone message which led Inspector Dunbar to leave your house last night was originated by that unseen intelligence against which we find ourselves pitted. In the first place, no one in London, myself and, presumably, 'The Scorpion' excepted, knew at that time that M. Gaston Max was in England or that M. Gaston Max was dead. I say, presumably 'The Scorpion' because it is fair to assume that the person whom Max pursued was responsible for his death."
"Of course"--the Commissioner reached for the box of cigarettes--"were it not for the telephone message, we should be unjustified in assuming that Mlle. Dorian and this"--he laid his finger upon the piece of cardboard--"had any connection with the case of M. Max. But the message was so obviously designed to facilitate the purloining of
the sealed envelope and so obviously emanated from one already aware of the murder of M. Max, that the sender is identified at once with--"The Scorpion."

The Assistant Commissioner complacently lighted a fresh cigarette.

"Finally," he said, "the mode of death in the case of M. Max may not have been the same as in the other cases. Therefore, Dr. Stuart"--he paused impressively--"if you fail to detect anything suspicious at the post mortem examination I propose to apply to the Home Secretary for power to exhume the body of the late Sir Frank Narcombe!"

Deep in reflection, Stuart walked alone along the Embankment. The full facts contained in the report from Paris the Commissioner had not divulged, but Stuart concluded that this sudden activity was directly due, not to the death of M. Max, but to the fact that he (Max) had left behind him some more or less tangible clue. Stuart fully recognized that the Commissioner had accorded him an opportunity to establish his reputation—or to wreck it.

Yet, upon closer consideration, it became apparent that it was to Fate and not to the Commissioner that he was indebted. Strictly speaking, his association with the matter dated from the night of his meeting with the mysterious cabman in West India Dock road. Or had the curtain first been lifted upon this occult drama that evening, five years ago, as the setting sun reddened the waters of the Imperial Canal and a veiled figure passed him on the Wu-Men Bridge?

"Shut your eyes tightly, master--the Scorpion is coming!"

He seemed to hear the boy's words now, as he passed along the Embankment; he seemed to see again the tall figure. And suddenly he stopped, stood still and stared with unseeing eyes across the muddy waters of the Thames. He was thinking of the cowled man who had stood behind the curtains in his study--of that figure so wildly bizarre that even now he could scarcely believe that he had ever actually seen it. He walked on.

Automatically his reflections led him to Mlle. Dorian, and he remembered that even as he paced along there beside the river the wonderful mechanism of New Scotland Yard was in motion, its many tentacles seeking--seeking tirelessly--for the girl, whose dark eyes haunted his sleeping and waking hours. _He_ was responsible, and if she were arrested _he_ would be called upon to identify her. He condemned himself bitterly.

After all, what crime had she committed? She had tried to purloin a letter--which did not belong to Stuart in the first place. And she had failed. Now--the police were looking for her. His reflections took a new form.

What of Gaston Max, foremost criminologist in Europe, who now lay dead and mutilated in an East-End mortuary? The telephone message which had summoned Dunbar away had been too opportune to be regarded as a mere coincidence. Mlle. Dorian was, therefore, an accomplice of a murderer.

Stuart sighed. He would have given much--more than he was prepared to admit to himself--to have known her to be guiltless.

The identity of the missing cabman now engaged his mind. It was quite possible, of course, that the man had actually found the envelope in his cab a was in no other way concerned in the matter. But how had Mlle. Dorian, or the person instructing her, traced the envelope to his study? And why, if they could establish a claim to it, had they preferred to attempt to steal it? Finally, why all this disturbance about a blank piece of cardboard?

A mental picture of the envelope arose before him, the number, 30, written upon it and the two black seals securing the lapels. He paused again in his walk. His reflections had led him to a second definite point and he fumbled in his waistcoat pocket for a time, seeking a certain brass coin about the size of a halfpenny, having a square hole in the middle and peculiar characters engraved around the square, one on each of the four sides.

He failed to find the coin in his pocket, however, but he walked briskly up a side street until he came to the entrance to a tube station. Entering a public telephone call-box, he asked for the number, City 400. Being put through and having deposited the necessary fee in the box:

"Is that the Commissioner's Office, New Scotland Yard?" he asked. "Yes! My name is Dr. Keppel Stuart. If Inspector Dunbar is there, would you kindly allow me to speak to him."

There was a short interval, then:

"Hullo!" came--"is that Dr. Stuart?"

"Yes. That you, Inspector? I have just remembered something which I should have observed in the first place if I had been really wide-awake. The envelope--you know the one I mean?--the one bearing the number, 30, has been sealed with a Chinese coin, known as _cash_. I have just recognized the fact and thought it wise to let you know at once."

"Are you sure?" asked Dunbar.

"Certain. If you care to call at my place later to-day I can show you some _cash_. Bring the envelope with you and you will see that the coins correspond to the impression in the wax. The inscriptions vary in different provinces, but the form of all _cash_ is the same."

"Very good. Thanks for letting me know at once. It seems to establish a link with China, don't you think?"
"It does, but it merely adds to the mystery."

Coming out of the call-box, Stuart proceeded home, but made one or two professional visits before he actually returned to the house. He now remembered having left his particular _cash_ piece (which he usually carried) in his dispensary, which satisfactorily accounted for his failure to find the coin in his waistcoat pocket. He had broken the cork of a flask, and in the absence of another of correct size had manufactured a temporary stopper with a small cork to the top of which he had fixed the Chinese coin with a drawing-pin. His purpose served he had left the extemporised stopper lying somewhere in the dispensary.

Stuart's dispensary was merely a curtained recess at one end of the waiting-room and shortly after entering the house he had occasion to visit it. Lying upon a shelf among flasks and bottles was the Chinese coin with the cork still attached. He took it up in order to study the inscription. Then:

"Have I cultivated somnambulism!" he muttered.

Fragments of black sealing-wax adhered to the coin!

Incredulous and half fearful he peered at it closely. He remembered that the impression upon the wax sealing the mysterious envelope had had a circular depression in the centre. It had been made by the head of the drawing-pin!

He found himself staring at the shelf immediately above that upon which the coin had lain. A stick of black sealing-wax used for sealing medicine was thrust in beside a bundle of long envelopes in which he was accustomed to post his Infirmary reports!

One hand raised to his head, Stuart stood endeavouring to marshal his ideas into some sane order. Then, knowing what he should find, he raised the green baize curtain hanging from the lower shelf, which concealed a sort of cupboard containing miscellaneous stores and not a little rubbish, including a number of empty cardboard boxes.

A rectangular strip had been roughly cut from the lid of the topmost box!

The mysterious envelope and its contents, the wax and the seal--all had come from his own dispensary!

CHAPTER IX

THE CHINESE COIN

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CHAPTER X

"CLOSE YOUR SHUTTERS AT NIGHT"

Inspector Dunbar stood in the little dispensary tapping his teeth with the end of a fountain-pen.

"The last time he visited you, doctor--the time when he gave you the envelope--did the cabman wait here in the waiting-room?"

"He did--yes. He came after my ordinary consulting hours and I was at supper, I remember, as I am compelled to dine early."

"He would be in here alone?"

"Yes. No one else was in the room."

"Would he have had time to find the box, cut out the piece of cardboard from the lid, put it in the envelope and seal it?"

"Ample time. But what could be his object? And why mark the envelope 30?"

"It was in your consulting-room that he asked you to take charge of the envelope?"

"Yes."

"Might I take a peep at the consulting room?"

"Certainly, Inspector."

From the waiting-room they went up a short flight of stairs into the small apartment in which Stuart saw his
patients. Dunbar looked slowly about him, standing in the middle of the room, then crossed and stared out of the window into the narrow lane below.

"Where were you when he gave you the envelope?" he snapped suddenly.

"At the table," replied Stuart with surprise.

"Was the table-lamp alight?"

"Yes. I always light it when seeing patients."

"Did you take the letter into the study to seal it in the other envelope?"

"I did, and he came along and witnessed me do it."

"Ah," said Dunbar, and scribbled busily in his note-book. "We are badly tied at Scotland Yard, doctor, and this case looks like being another for which somebody else will reap the credit. I am going to make a request that will surprise you."

He tore a leaf out of the book and folded it carefully.

"I am going to ask you to seal up something and lock it away! But I don't think you'll be troubled by cowled burglars or beautiful women because of it. On this piece of paper I have written--_a_--he ticked off the points on his fingers: "what I believe to be the name of the man who cut out the cardboard and sealed it in an envelope; _b_: the name of the cabman; and, _c_: the name of the man who rang me up here last night and gave me information which had only just reached the Commissioner. I'll ask you to lock it away until it's wanted, doctor."

"Certainly, if you wish it," replied Stuart. "Come into the study and you shall see me do as you direct. I may add that the object to be served is not apparent to me."

Entering the study, he took an envelope, enclosed the piece of paper, sealed the lapel and locked the envelope in the same drawer of the bureau which once had contained that marked 30.

"Mlle. Dorian has a duplicate key to this drawer," he said. "Are you prepared to take the chance?"

"Quite," replied Dunbar, smiling; "although my information is worth more than that which she risked so much to steal."

"It's most astounding. At every step the darkness increases. Why should _anyone_ have asked me to lock up a blank piece of cardboard?"

"Why, indeed," murmured Dunbar. "Well, I may as well get back. I am expecting a report from Sowerby. Look after yourself, sir. I'm inclined to think your pretty patient was talking square when she told you there might be danger."

Stuart met the glance of the tawny eyes.

"What d'you mean, Inspector? Why should _I_ be in danger?"

"Because," replied Inspector Dunbar, "if 'The Scorpion' is a poisoner, as the chief seems to think, there's really only one man in England he has to fear, and that man is Dr. Keppel Stuart."

When the Inspector had taken his departure Stuart stood for a long time staring out of the study window at the little lawn with its bordering of high neatly-trimmed privet above which at intervals arose the mop crowns of dwarf acacias. A spell of warm weather seemed at last to have begun, and clouds of gnats floated over the grass, their minute wings glittering in the sunshine. Despite the nearness of teeming streets, this was a backwater of London's stream.

He sighed and returned to some work which the visit of the Scotland Yard man had interrupted.

Later in the afternoon he had occasion to visit the institution to which he had recently been appointed as medical officer, and in contemplation of the squalor through which his steps led him he sought forgetfulness of the Scorpion problem--and of the dark eyes of Mlle. Dorian. He was not entirely successful, and returning by a different route he lost himself in memories which were sweetly mournful.

A taxicab passed him, moving slowly very close to the pavement. He scarcely noted it until it had proceeded some distance ahead of him. Then its slow progress so near to the pavement at last attracted his attention, and he stared vacantly towards the closed vehicle.

Mlle. Dorian was leaning out of the window and looking back at him!

Stuart's heart leapt high. For an instant he paused, then began to walk rapidly after the retreating vehicle. Perceiving that she had attracted his attention, the girl extended a white-gloved hand from the window and dropped a note upon the edge of the pavement. Immediately she withdrew into the vehicle--which moved away at accelerated speed, swung around the next corner and was gone.

Stuart ran forward and picked up the note. Without pausing to read it, he pressed on to the corner. The cab was already two hundred yards away, and he recognized pursuit to be out of the question. The streets were almost deserted at the moment, and no one apparently had witnessed the episode. He unfolded the sheet of plain note-paper, faintly perfumed with jasmine, and read the following, written in an uneven feminine hand:

"Close your shutters at night. Do not think too bad of me."
Dusk found Stuart in a singular frame of mind. He was torn between duty--or what he conceived to be his duty--to the community, and ... something else. A messenger from New Scotland Yard had brought him a bundle of documents relating to the case of Sir Frank Narcombe, and a smaller packet touching upon the sudden end of Henrik Ericksen, the Norwegian electrician, and the equally unexpected death of the Grand Duke Ivan. There were medical certificates, proceedings of coroners, reports of detectives, evidence of specialists and statements of friends, relatives and servants of the deceased. A proper examination of all the documents represented many hours of close study.

Stuart was flattered by the opinion held of his ability by the Assistant Commissioner, but dubious of his chance of detecting any flaw in the evidence which had escaped the scrutiny of so many highly trained observers.

He paced the study restlessly. Although more than six hours had elapsed, he had not communicated to Scotland Yard the fact of his having seen Mlle. Dorian that afternoon. A hundred times he had read the message, although he knew it by heart, knew the form of every letter, the odd crossing of the _t'_s and the splashy dotting of the _i'_s.

If only he could have taken counsel with someone--with someone not bound to act upon such information--it would have relieved his mental stress. His ideas were so chaotic that he felt himself to be incapable of approaching the task presented by the pile of papers lying upon his table.

The night was pleasantly warm and the sky cloudless. Often enough he found himself glancing toward the opened French windows, and once he had peered closely across into the belt of shadow below the hedge, thinking that he had detected something which moved there. Stepping to the window, the slinking shape had emerged into the moonlight--and had proclaimed itself to be that of a black cat!

Yet he had been sorely tempted to act upon the advice so strangely offered. He refrained from doing so, however, reflecting that to spend his evenings with closed and barred shutters now that a spell of hot weather seemed to be imminent would be insufferable. Up and down the room he paced tirelessly, always confronted by the eternal problem.

Forcing himself at last to begin work if only as a sedative, he filled and lighted his pipe, turned off the centre lamp and lighted the reading lamp upon his table. He sat down to consider the papers bearing upon the death of Eriksen. For half an hour he read on steadily and made a number of pencil notes. Then he desisted and sat staring straight before him.

What possible motive could there be in assassinating these people? The case of the Grand Duke might be susceptible of explanation, but those of Henrik Ericksen and Sir Frank Narcombe were not. Furthermore he could perceive no links connecting the three, and no reason why they should have engaged the attention of a common enemy. Such crimes would seem to be purposeless. Assuming that "The Scorpion" was an individual, that individual apparently was a dangerous homicidal maniac.

But, throughout the documents, he could discover no clue pointing to the existence of such an entity. "The Scorpion" might be an invention of the fertile brain of M. Gaston Max; for it had become more and more evident, as he had read, that the attempt to trace these deaths to an identical source had originated at the Service de Surete, and it was from Paris that the name "The Scorpion" had come. The fate of Max was significant, of course. The chances of his death proving to have been due to accident were almost negligible and the fact that a fragment of a golden scorpion had actually been found upon his body was certainly curious.

"Close your shutters at night...."

How the words haunted him and how hotly he despised himself for a growing apprehension which refused to be ignored. It was more mental than physical, this dread which grew with the approach of midnight, and it resembled that which had robbed him of individuality and all but stricken him inert when he had seen upon the moon-bright screen of the curtains the shadow of a cowled man.

Dark forces seemed to be stirring, and some unseen menace crept near to him out of the darkness.

The house was of early Victorian fashion and massive folding shutters were provided to close the French windows. He never used them, as a matter of fact, but now he tested the fastenings which kept them in place against the inner wall and even moved them in order to learn if they were still serviceable.

Of all the mysteries which baffled him, that of the piece of cardboard in the envelope sealed with a Chinese coin was the most irritating. It seemed like the purposeless trick of a child, yet it had led to the presence of the cowled man--and to the presence of Mlle. Dorian. Why?

He sat down at his table again.

"Damn the whole business!" he said. "It is sending me crazy."

Selecting from the heap of documents a large sheet of note-paper bearing a blue diagram of a human bust, marked with figures and marginal notes, he began to read the report to which it was appended--that of Dr. Halesowen. It stated that the late Sir Frank Narcombe had a "horizontal" heart, slightly misplaced and dilatated, with
other details which really threw no light whatever upon the cause of his death.

"_I_ have a horizontal heart," growled Stuart--"and considering my consumption of tobacco it is certainly
dilated. But I don't expect to drop dead in a theatre nevertheless."

He read on, striving to escape from that shadowy apprehension, but as he read he was listening to the night
sounds of London, to the whirring of distant motors, the whistling of engines upon the railway and dim hooting of
sirens from the Thames. A slight breeze had arisen and it rustled in the feathery foliage of the acacias and made a
whispering sound as it stirred the leaves of the privet hedge.

The drone of an approaching car reached his ears. Pencil in hand, he sat listening. The sound grew louder, then
ceased. Either the car had passed or had stopped somewhere near the house. Came a rap on the door.

"Yes," called Stuart and stood up, conscious of excitement.

Mrs. M'Gregor came in.

"There is nothing further you'll be wanting to-night?" she asked.

"No," said Stuart, strangely disappointed, but smiling at the old lady cheerfully. "I shall turn in very shortly."

"A keen east wind has arisen," she continued, severely eyeing the opened windows, "and even for a medical man
you are strangely imprudent. Shall I shut the windows?"

"No, don't trouble, Mrs. M'Gregor. The room gets very stuffy with tobacco smoke, and really it is quite a warm
night. I shall close them before I retire, of course."

"Ah well," sighed Mrs. M'Gregor, preparing to depart. "Good-night, Mr. Keppel."

"Good-night, Mrs. M'Gregor."

She retired, and Stuart sat staring out into the darkness. He was not prone to superstition, but it seemed like
tempting providence to remain there with the windows open any longer. Yet paradoxically, he lacked the moral
courage to close them—to admit to himself that he was afraid!

The telephone bell rang, and he started back in his chair as though to avoid a blow.

By doing so he avoided destruction.

At the very instant that the bell rang out sharply in the silence—so exact is the time-table of Kismet—a needle-like
ray of blue light shot across the lawn from beyond and above the hedge and—"but for that nervous start—must have
struck fully upon the back of Stuart's skull. Instead, it shone past his head, which it missed only by inches, and he
experienced a sensation as though some one had buffeted him upon the cheek furiously. He pitched out of his chair
and on to the carpet.

The first object which the ray touched was the telephone; and next, beyond it, a medical dictionary; beyond that
again, the grate, in which a fire was laid.

"My God!" groaned Stuart—"what is it!"

An intense crackling sound deafened him, and the air of the room seemed to have become hot as that of an oven.
There came a series of dull reports—an uncanny wailing ... and the needle-ray vanished. A monstrous shadow,
moon-cast, which had lain across the carpet of the lawn—the shadow of a cowled man—vanished also.

Clutching the side of his head, which throbbed and tingled as though from the blow of an open hand, Stuart
struggled to his feet. There was smoke in the room, a smell of burning and of fusing metal. He glared at the table
madly.

The mouthpiece of the telephone had vanished!

"My God!" he groaned again, and clutched at the back of the chair.

His dictionary was smouldering slowly. It had a neat round hole some three inches in diameter, bored completely
through, cover to cover! The fire in the grate was flaring up the chimney!

He heard the purr of a motor in the lane beside the house. The room was laden with suffocating fumes. Stuart
stood clutching the chair and striving to retain composure—sanity. The car moved out of the lane.

Someone was running towards the back gate of the house ... was scrambling over the hedge ... was racing across
the lawn!

A man burst into the study. He was a man of somewhat heavy build, clean-shaven and inclined to pallor. The
hirsute blue tinge about his lips and jaw lent added vigour to a flexible but masterful mouth. His dark hair was
tinged with grey, his dark eyes were brilliant with excitement. He was very smartly dressed and wore light tan
gloves. He reeled suddenly, clutching at a chair for support.

"Quick! quick!" he cried—"the telephone! ... Ah!"

Just inside the window he stood, swaying and breathing rapidly, his gaze upon the instrument.

"_Mon Dieu!_" he cried—"what has happened, then!"

Stuart stared at the new-comer dazedly.

"Hell has been in my room!" he replied. "That's all!"

"Ah!" said the stranger—"again he eludes me! The telephone was the only chance. _Pas d'blaque!_ we are
He dropped into a chair, removed his light grey hat and began to dry his moist brow with a fine silk handkerchief. Stuart stared at him like a man who is stupefied. The room was still laden with strange fumes.

"Blimey!" remarked the new-comer, and his Whitechapel was as perfect as his Montmatre. He was looking at the decapitated telephone. "This is a knock-out!"

"Might I ask," said Stuart, endeavouring to collect his scattered senses, "where you came from?"

"From up a tree!" was the astonishing reply. "It was the only way to get over!"

"Up a tree!"

"Exactly. Yes, I was foolish. I am too heavy. But what could I do! We must begin all over again."

Stuart began to doubt his sanity. This was no ordinary man.

"Might I ask," he said, "who you are and what you are doing in my house?"

"Ah!" The stranger laughed merrily. "You wonder about me--I can see it. Permit me to present myself--Gaston Max, at your service!"

"Gaston Max!" Stuart glared at the speaker incredulously. "Gaston Max! Why, I conduct a _post mortem_ examination upon Gaston Max tomorrow, in order to learn if he was poisoned!"

"Do not trouble, doctor. That poor fellow is not Gaston Max and he was not poisoned. You may accept my word for it. I had the misfortune to strangle him."

PART II

STATEMENT OF GASTON MAX
I. THE DANCER OF MONTMARTRE

CHAPTER I

ZARA EL-KHALA

The following statement which I, Gaston Max, am drawing up in duplicate for the guidance of whoever may inherit the task of tracing "The Scorpion"--a task which I have begun--will be lodged--one copy at the Service de Surete in Paris, and the other copy with the Commissioner of Police, New Scotland Yard. As I apprehend that I may be assassinated at any time, I propose to put upon record all that I have learned concerning the series of murders which I believe to be traceable to a certain person. In the event of my death, my French colleagues will open the sealed packet containing this statement and the English Assistant Commissioner of the Special Branch responsible for international affairs will receive instructions to open that which I shall have lodged at Scotland Yard.

This matter properly commenced, then, with the visit to Paris, incognito, of the Grand Duke Ivan, that famous soldier of whom so much was expected, and because I had made myself responsible for his safety during the time that he remained in the French capital, I (also incognito be it understood) struck up a friendship with one Casimir, the Grand Duke's valet. Nothing is sacred to a valet, and from Casimir I counted upon learning the real reason which had led this nobleman to visit Paris at so troublous a time. Knowing the Grand Duke to be a man of gallantry, I anticipated finding a woman in the case--and I was not wrong.

Yes, there was a woman, and _nom d'nom!_ she was beautiful. Now in Paris we have many beautiful women, and in times of international strife it is true that we have had to shoot some of them. For my own part I say with joy that I have never been instrumental in bringing a woman to such an end. Perhaps I am sentimental; it is a French weakness; but on those few occasions when I have found a guilty woman in my power--and she has been pretty--_morbleu!_--she has escaped! It may be that I have seen to it that she was kept out of further mischief, but nevertheless she has never met a firing-party because of me. Very well.

From the good fellow Casimir I learned that a certain dancer appearing at one of our Montmartre theatres had written to the Grand Duke craving the honour of his autograph--and enclosing her photograph.

Pf! it was enough. One week later the autograph arrived--attached to an invitation to dine with the Grand Duke at his hotel in Paris. Yes--he had come to Paris. I have said that he was susceptible and I have said that she was beautiful. I address myself to men of the world, and I shall not be in error if I assume that they will say, "A wealthy fool and a designing woman. It is an old story." Let us see.

The confidences of Casimir interested me in more ways than one. In the first place I had particular reasons for suspecting anyone who sought to obtain access to the Grand Duke. These were diplomatic. And in the second place I had suspicions of Zara el-Khala. These were personal.

Yes--so she called herself--Zara el-Khala, which in Arabic is "Flower of the Desert." She professed to be an Egyptian, and certainly she had the long, almond-shaped eyes of the East, but her white skin betrayed her, and I knew that whilst she might possess Eastern blood, she was more nearly allied to Europe than to Africa. It is my business to note unusual matters, you understand, and I noticed that this beautiful and accomplished woman of whom all Paris was beginning to speak rapturously remained for many weeks at a small Montmartre theatre. Her performance, which was unusually decorous for the type of establishment at which she appeared, had not apparently
led to an engagement elsewhere.

This aroused the suspicions to which I have referred. In the character of a vaudeville agent I called at the Montmartre theatre and was informed by the management that Zara-el-Khala received no visitors, professional or otherwise. A small but expensive car awaited her at the stage door. My suspicions increased. I went away, but returned on the following night, otherwise attired, and from a hiding-place which I had selected on the previous evening I watched the dancer depart.

She came out so enveloped in furs and veils as to be unrecognizable, and a Hindu wearing a chauffeur's uniform opened the door of the car for her, and then, having arranged the rugs to her satisfaction, mounted to the wheel and drove away.

I traced the car. It had been hired for the purpose of taking Zara el-Khala from her hotel--to the theatre and home nightly. I sent a man to call upon her at the hotel--in order to obtain press material, ostensibly. She declined to see him. I became really interested. I sent her a choice bouquet, having the card of a nobleman attached to it, together with a message of respectful admiration. It was returned. I prevailed upon one of the most handsome and gallant cavalry officers in Paris to endeavour to make her acquaintance. He was rebuffed.

_Eh bien!_ I knew then that Mlle. Zara of the Desert was unusual.

You will at once perceive that when I heard from the worthy Casimir how this unapproachable lady had actually written to the Grand Duke Ivan and had gone so far as to send him her photograph, I became excited. It appeared to me that I found myself upon the brink of an important discovery. I set six of my first-class men at work: three being detailed to watch the hotel of the Grand Duke Ivan and three to watch Zara el-Khala. Two more were employed in watching the Hindu servant and one in watching my good friend Casimir. Thus, nine clever men and myself were immediately engaged upon the case.

Why do I speak of a "case" when thus far nothing of apparent importance had occurred? I will explain. Although the Grand Duke travelled incognito, his Government knew of the journey and wished to learn with what object it had been undertaken.

At the time that I made the acquaintance of Casimir the Grand Duke had been in Paris for three days, and he was--according to my informant--"like a raging lion." The charming dancer had vouchsafed no reply to his invitation and he had met with the same reception, on presenting himself in person, which had been accorded to myself and to those others who had sought to obtain an interview with Zara el-Khala!

My state of mystification grew more and more profound. I studied the reports of my nine assistants.

It appeared that the girl had been in Paris for a period of two months. She occupied a suite of rooms in which all her meals were served. Except the Hindu who drove the hired car, she had no servant. She never appeared in the public part of the hotel unless veiled, and then merely in order to pass out to the car or in from it on returning. She drove out every day. She had been followed, of course, but her proceedings were unexceptionable. Leaving the car at a point in the Bois De Boulogne, she would take a short walk, if the day was fine enough, never proceeding out of sight of the Hindu, who followed with the automobile, and would then drive back to her hotel. She never received visits and never met any one during these daily excursions.

I turned to the report dealing with the Hindu. He had hired a room high up under the roof of an apartment house where foreign waiters and others had their abodes. He bought and cooked his own food, which apparently consisted solely of rice, lentils and fruit. He went every morning to the garage and attended to the car, called for his mistress, and having returned remained until evening in his own apartment. At night, after returning from the theatre, he sometimes went out, and my agent had failed to keep track of him on every occasion that he had attempted pursuit. I detached the man who was watching Casimir and whose excellent reports revealed the fact that Casimir was an honest fellow--as valets go--and instructed him to assist in tracing the movements of the Hindu.

Two nights later they tracked him to a riverside cafe kept by a gigantic quadroon from Dominique and patronized by that type which forms a link between the lowest commercial and the criminal classes: itinerant vendors of Eastern rugs, street performers and Turkish cigarette makers.

At last I began to have hopes. The Grand Duke at this time was speaking of leaving Paris, but as he had found temporary consolation in the smiles of a lady engaged at the "Folies" I did not anticipate that he would depart for several days at any rate. Also he was the kind of man who is stimulated by obstacles.

The Hindu remained for an hour in the cafe, smoking and drinking some kind of syrup, and one of my fellows watched him. Presently the proprietor called him into a little room behind the counter and closed the door. The Hindu and the quadroon remained there for a few minutes, then the Hindu came out and left the cafe, returning to his abode. There was a telephone in this inner room, and my agent was of opinion that the Indian had entered either to make or to receive a call. I caused the line to be tapped.

On the following night the Hindu came back to the cafe, followed by one of my men. I posted myself at a selected point and listened for any message that might pass over the line to or from the cafe. At about the same hour
as before—according to the report—someone called up the establishment, asking for "Miguel." This was the quadroon, and I heard his thick voice replying. The other voice—which had first spoken—was curiously sibilant but very distinct. Yet it did not sound like the voice of a Frenchman or of any European. This was the conversation:

"Miguel."
"Miguel speaks."
"_Scorpion._ A message for Chunda Lal."
"Very good."

Almost holding my breath, so intense was my excitement, I waited whilst Miguel went to bring the Hindu. Suddenly a new voice spoke—that of the Hindu.

"Chunda Lal speaks," it said.
I clenched by teeth; I knew that I must not miss a syllable.
"Scorpion" replied ... in voluble _Hindustani_—a language of which I know less than a dozen words!

CHAPTER II
CONCERNING THE GRAND DUKE

Although I had met with an unforeseen check, I had nevertheless learned three things. I had learned that Miguel the quadroon was possibly in league with the Hindu; that the Hindu was called Chunda Lal; and that Chunda Lal received messages, probably instructions, from a third party who announced his presence by the word "_Scorpion._"

One of my fellows, of course, had been in the cafe all the evening, and from him I obtained confirmation of the fact that it had been the Hindu who had been summoned to the telephone and whom I had heard speaking. Instant upon the man at the cafe replacing the telephone and disconnecting, I called up the exchange. They had been warned and were in readiness.

"From what subscriber did that call come?" I demanded.

Alas! another check awaited me. It had originated in a public call office, and "Scorpion" was untraceable by this means!

Despair is not permitted by the traditions of the Service de Surete. Therefore I returned to my flat and recorded the facts of the matter thus far established. I perceived that I had to deal, not with a designing woman, but with some shadowy being of whom she was an instrument. The anomaly of her life was in a measure explained. She sojourned in Paris for a purpose—a mysterious purpose which was concerned (I could not doubt it) with the Grand Duke Ivan. This was not an amorous but a political intrigue.

I communicated, at a late hour, with the senior of the three men watching the Grand Duke. The Grand Duke that evening had sent a handsome piece of jewellery purchased in Rue de la Paix to the dancer. It had been returned.

In the morning I met with the good Casimir at his favorite cafe. He had just discovered that Zara el-Khala drove daily to the Bois de Boulogne, alone, and that afternoon the Grand Duke had determined to accost her during her solitary walk. I prepared myself for this event. Arrayed in a workman's blouse and having a modest luncheon and a small bottle of wine in a basket, I concealed myself in that part of the Bois which was the favourite recreation ground of the dancer, and awaited her appearance.

The Grand Duke appeared first upon the scene, accompanied by Casimir. The latter pointed out to him a path through the trees along which Zara el-Khala habitually strolled and showed him the point at which she usually rejoined the Hindu who followed along the road with the car. They retired. I seated myself beneath a tree from whence I could watch the path and the road and began to partake of the repast which I had brought with me.

At about three o'clock the dancer's car appeared, and the girl, veiled as usual, stepped out, and having exchanged a few words with the Indian, began to walk slowly towards me, sometimes pausing to watch a bird in the boughs above her and sometimes to examine some wild plant growing beside the way. I ate cheese from the point of a clasp-knife and drank wine out of the bottle.

Suddenly she saw me.

She had cast her veil aside in order to enjoy the cool and fragrant air, and as she stopped and regarded me doubtfully where I sat, I saw her beautiful face, undefiled, now, by make-up and unspoiled by the presence of garish Eastern ornaments. _Nom d'un nom!_ but she was truly a lovely woman! My heart went out in sympathy to the poor Grand Duke. Had I received such a mark of favour from her as he had received, and had I then been scorned as now she scorned him, I should have been desperate indeed.

Coming around a bend in the path, then, she stood only a few paces away, looking at me. I touched the peak of my cap.

"Good-day, mademoiselle," I said. "The weather is very beautiful."

"Good-day," she replied.

I continued to eat cheese, and reassured she walked on past me. Twenty yards beyond, the Grand Duke was waiting. As I laid down my knife upon the paper which had been wrapped around the bread and cheese, and raised
the bottle to my lips, the enamoured nobleman stepped out from the trees and bowed low before Zara el-Khala.

She started back from him—a movement of inimitable grace, like that of a startled gazelle. And even before I had time to get upon my feet she had raised a little silver whistle to her lips and blown a short shrill note.

The Grand Duke, endeavouring to seize her hand, was pouring out voluble expressions of adoration in execrable French, and Zara el-Khala was retreating step by step. She had quickly thrown the veil about her again. I heard the pad of swiftly running feet. If I was to intervene before the arrival of the Hindu, I must act rapidly. I raced along the path and thrust myself between the Grand Duke and the girl.

"Mademoiselle," I said, "is this gentleman annoying you?"

"How dare you, low pig!" cried the Grand Duke, and with a sweep of his powerful arm he hurled me aside.

"Thank you," replied Zara el-Khala with great composure. "But my servant is here."

As I turned, Chunda Lal hurled himself upon the Grand Duke from behind. I had never seen an expression in a man's eyes like that in the eyes of the Hindu at this moment. They blazed like the eyes of a tiger, and his teeth were bared in a savage grin which I cannot hope to describe. His lean body seemed to shoot through the air, and he descended upon his burly adversary as a jungle beast falls upon its prey. Those long brown fingers clasping his neck, the Grand Duke fell forward upon his face.

"Chunda Lal!" said the dancer.

Kneeling, his right knee thrust between the shoulder blades of the prostrate man, the Hindu looked up—and I read murder in those glaring eyes. That he was an accomplished wrestler—or perhaps a strangler—I divined from the helplessness of the Grand Duke, who lay inert, robbed of every power except that of his tongue. He was swearing savagely.

"Chunda Lal!" said Zara el-Khala again. The Hindu shifted his grip from the neck to the arms of the Grand Duke. He pinioned him as is done in _jiu-jitsu_ and forced him to stand upright. It was a curious spectacle—the impotency of this burly nobleman in the hands of his slight adversary. As they swayed to their feet, I thought I saw the glint of metal in the right hand of the Indian, but I could not be sure, for my attention was diverted. At this moment Casimir appeared upon the scene, looking very frightened.

Suddenly releasing his hold altogether, the Hindu glaring into the empurpled face of the Grand Duke, shot out one arm and pointed with a quivering finger along the path.

"Go!" he said.

The Grand Duke clenched his fists, looked from face to face as if calculating his chances, then shrugged his shoulders, very deliberately wiped his neck and wrists, where the Indian had held him, with a large silk handkerchief and threw the handkerchief on the ground. I saw a speck of blood upon the silk. Without another glance he walked away, Casimir following sheepishly. It is needless, perhaps, to add that Casimir had not recognized me.

I turned to the dancer, touching the peak of my cap.

"Can I be of any assistance to mademoiselle?" I asked.

"Thank you--no," she replied.

She placed five francs in my hand and set off rapidly through the trees in the direction of the road, her bloodthirsty but faithful attendant at her heels!

I stood scratching my head and looking after her.

That afternoon I posted a man acquainted with Hindustani to tap any message which might be sent to or from the cafe used by Chunda Lal. I learned that the Grand Duke had taken a stage box at the Montmartre theatre at which the dancer was appearing, and I decided that I would be present also.

A great surprise was in store for me.

Zara el-Khala had at this time established a reputation which extended beyond those circles from which the regular patrons of this establishment were exclusively drawn and which had begun to penetrate to all parts of Paris. You will remember that it was the extraordinary circumstance of her remaining at this obscure place of entertainment so long which had first interested me in the lady. I had learned that she had rejected a number of professional offers, and, as I have already stated, I had assured myself of this unusual attitude by presenting the card of a well-known Paris agency—and being refused admittance.

Now, as I leaned upon the rail at the back of the auditorium and the time for the dancer's appearance grew near, I could not fail to observe that there was a sprinkling of evening-dress in the stalls and that the two boxes already occupied boasted the presence of parties of well-known men of fashion. Then the Grand Duke entered as a troupe of acrobats finished their performance. Zara el-Khala was next upon the programme. I glanced at the Grand Duke and thought that he looked pale and unwell.

The tableau curtain fell and the manager appeared behind the footlights. He, also, seemed to be much perturbed.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "I greatly regret to announce that Mlle. Zara el-Kahla is indisposed and unable to appear. We have succeeded in obtaining the services----"
Of whom he had succeeded in obtaining the services I never heard, for the rougher section of the audience rose
at him like a menacing wave! They had come to see the Egyptian dancer and they would have their money back! It
was a swindle; they would smash the theatre!

If one had doubted the great and growing popularity of Zara el-Kahla, this demonstration must have proved
convincing. Over the heads of the excited audience, I saw the Grand Duke rise as if to retire. The other box parties
were also standing up and talking angrily.

"Why was it not announced outside the theatre?" someone shouted. "We did not know until twenty minutes
ago!" cried the manager in accents of despair.

I hurried from the theatre and took a taxicab to the hotel of the dancer. Running into the hall, I thrust a card in
the hand of a concierge who stood there.

"Announce to Mlle. Zara el-Khala that I must see her at once," I said.

The man smiled and returned the card to me.

"Mlle. Zara el-Khala left Paris at seven o'clock, monsieur!"

"What! I cried--left Paris!"

"But certainly. Her baskets were taken to the Gare du Nord an hour earlier by her servant and she went off by the
seven-fifty rapid for Calais. The theatre people were here asking for her an hour ago."

I hurried to my office to obtain the latest reports of my men, I had lost touch with them, you understand, during
the latter part of the afternoon and evening. I found there the utmost confusion. They had been seeking me all over
Paris to inform me that Zara el-Khala had left. Two men had followed her and had telephoned from Calais for
instructions. She had crossed by the night mail for Dover. It was already too late to instruct the English police.

For a few hours I had relaxed my usual vigilance--and this was the result. What could I do? Zara el-Khala had
committed no crime, but her sudden flight--for it looked like flight you will agree--was highly suspicious. And as I
sat there in my office filled with all sorts of misgivings, in ran one of the men engaged in watching the Grand Duke.

The Grand Duke had been seized with illness as he left his box in the Montmartre theatre and had died before his
car could reach the hotel!

CHAPTER III

A STRANGE QUESTION

A conviction burst upon my mind that a frightful crime had been committed. By whom and for what purpose I
knew not. I hastened to the hotel of the Grand Duke. Tremendous excitement prevailed there, of course. There is no
more certain way for a great personage to court publicity than to travel incognito. Everywhere that "M. de Stahler"
had appeared all Paris had cried, "There goes the Grand Duke Ivan!" And now as I entered the hotel, press, police
and public were demanding: "Is it true that the Grand Duke is dead?" Just emerging from the lift I saw Casimir. _In
propria persona_--as M. Max--he failed to recognize me.

"My good man," I said--"are you a member of the suite of the late Grand Duke?"

"I am, or was, the valet of M. de Stahler, monsieur," he replied.

I showed him my card.

"To me 'M. de Stahler' is the Grand Duke Ivan. What other servants had he with him?" I asked, although I knew
very well.

"None, monsieur."

"Where and when was he taken ill?"

"At the Theatre Coquerico. Montmartre, at about a quarter past ten o'clock to-night."

"Who was with him?"

"No one, monsieur. His Highness was alone in a box. I had instructions to call with the car at eleven o'clock."

"Well?"

"The theatre management telephoned at a quarter past ten to say that His Highness had been taken ill and that a
physician had been sent for. I went in the car at once and found him lying in one of the dressing-rooms to which he
had been carried. A medical man was in attendance. The Grand Duke was unconscious. We moved him to the car---"

"We?"

"The doctor, the theatre manager, and myself. The Grand Duke was then alive, the physician declared, although
he seemed to me to be already dead. But just before we reached the hotel, the physician, who was watching His
Highness anxiously, cried, 'Ah, _mon Dieu!_ It is finished. What a catastrophe!'"

"He was dead?"

"He was dead, monsieur."

"Who has seen him?"

"They have telephoned for half the doctors in Paris, monsieur, but it is too late."
He was affected, the good Casimir. Tears welled up in his eyes. I mounted in the lift to the apartment in which
the Grand Duke lay. Three doctors were there, one of them being he of whom Casimir had spoken. Consternation
was written on every face.

"It was his heart," I was assured by the doctor who had been summoned to the theatre. "We shall find that he
suffered from heart trouble."

They were all agreed upon the point.

"He must have sustained a great emotional shock," said another.

"You are convinced that there was no foul play, gentlemen?" I asked.

They were quite unanimous on the point.

"Did the Grand Duke make any statement at the time of the seizure which would confirm the theory of a heart
attack?"

No. He had fallen down unconscious outside the door of his box, and from this unconsciousness he had never
recovered. (Depositions of witnesses, medical evidence and other documents are available for the guidance of
whoever may care to see them, but, as is well known, the death of the Grand Duke was ascribed to natural causes
and it seemed as though my trouble would after all prove to be in vain.) Let us see what happened.

Leaving the hotel, on the night of the Grand Duke's death, I joined the man who was watching the cafe
telephone.

There had been a message during the course of the evening, but it had been for a Greek cigarette-maker and it
referred to the theft of several bales of Turkish tobacco--useful information, of minor kind, but of little interest to
me. I knew that it would be useless to question the man Miguel, although I strongly suspected him of being a
member of "The Scorpion's" organization. Any patron of the establishment enjoyed the privilege of receiving private
telephone calls at the cafe on payment of a small fee.

A man of less experience in obscure criminology might now have assumed that he had been misled by a series of
striking coincidences. Remember, there was not a shadow of doubt in the minds of the medical experts that the
Grand Duke had died from syncope. His own professional advisor had sent written testimony to show that there was
hereditary heart trouble, although not of a character calculated to lead to a fatal termination except under
extraordinary circumstances. His own Government, which had every reason to suspect that the Grand Duke's
assassination might be attempted, was satisfied. _Eh bien!_. I was not.

I cross-examined the manager of the Theatre Coquerico. He admitted that Mlle. Zara el-Khala had been a
mystery throughout her engagement. Neither he nor anyone else connected with the house had ever entered her
dressing-room or held any conversation with her, whatever, except the stage-manager and the musical director.
These had spoken to her about her music and about lighting and other stage effects. She spoke perfect French.

Such a state of affairs was almost incredible, but was explained by the fact that the dancer, at a most modest
salary, had doubled the takings of the theatre in a few days and had attracted capacity business throughout the
remainder of her engagement. She had written from Marseilles, enclosing press notices and other usual matter and
had been booked direct for one week. She had remained for two months, and might have remained for ever, the poor
manager assured me, at five times the salary!

A curious fact now came to light. In all her photographs Zara el-Khala appeared veiled, in the Eastern manner;
that is to say, she wore a white silk _yashmak_ which concealed all her face except her magnificent eyes! On the
stage the veil was discarded; in the photographs it was always present.

And the famous picture which she had sent to the Grand Duke? He had destroyed it, in a fit of passion, on
returning from the Bois de Boulogne after his encounter with Chunda Lal!

It is Fate after all--Kismet--and not the wit of man which leads to the apprehension of really great criminals--a
tireless Fate which does their footsteps, a remorseless Fate from which they fly in vain. Long after the funeral of the
Grand Duke, and at a time when I had almost forgotten Zara el-Khala, I found myself one evening at the opera with
a distinguished French scientist and he chanced to refer to the premature death (which had occurred a few months
earlier) of Henrik Ericksen, the Norwegian.

"A very great loss to the century, M. Max," he said. "Ericksen was as eminent in electrical science as the Grand
Duke Ivan was eminent in the science of war. Both were stricken down in the prime of life--and under almost
identical circumstances."

"That is true," I said thoughtfully.

"It would almost seem," he continued, "as if Nature had determined to foil any further attempts to rifle her
secrets and Heaven to check mankind in the making of future wars. Only three months after the Grand Duke's death,
the American admiral, Mackney, died at sea--you will remember? Now, following Ericksen, Van Rembold,
undoubtedly the greatest mining engineer of the century and the only man who has ever produced radium in
workable quantities, is seized with illness at a friend's house and expires even before medical aid can be

summoned."

"It is very strange.'

"It is uncanny."

"Were you personally acquainted with the late Van Rembold?" I asked.

"I knew him intimately--a man of unusual charm, M. Max; and I have particular reason to remember his death, for I actually met him and spoke to him less than an hour before he died. We only exchanged a few words--we met on the street; but I shall never forget the subject of our chat."

"How is that?" I asked.

"Well, I presume Van Rembold's question was prompted by his knowledge of the fact that I had studied such subjects at one time; but he asked me if I knew of any race or sect in Africa or Asia who worshipped scorpions."

"_Scorpions!_" I cried. "_Ah, mon Dieu!_ monsieur say it again-- _scorpions?_"

"But yes, certainly. Does it surprise you?"

"Did it not surprise _you_?"

"Undoubtedly. I could not imagine what had occurred to account for his asking so strange a question. I replied that I knew of no such sect, and Van Rembold immediately changed the subject, nor did he revert to it. So that I never learned why he had made that singular inquiry."

You can imagine that this conversation afforded me much food for reflection. Whilst I could think of no reason why anyone should plot to assassinate Grand Dukes, admirals and mining engineers, the circumstances of the several cases were undoubtedly similar in a number of respects. But it was the remarkable question asked by Van Rembold which particularly aroused my interest.

Of course it might prove to be nothing more than a coincidence, but when one comes to consider how rarely the word "scorpion" is used, outside those in which these insects abound, it appears to be something more. Van Rembold, then, had had some occasion to feel curious about the scorpions; the name "Scorpion" was associated with the Hindu follower of Zara el-Khala; and she was who had brought the Grand Duke to Paris, where he had died.

Oh! it was a very fragile thread, but by following such a thread as this we are sometimes led to the heart of a labyrinth.

Beyond wondering if some sinister chain bound together this series of apparently natural deaths I might have made no move in the matter, but something occurred which spurred me to action. Sir Frank Narcombe, the great English surgeon, collapsed in the foyer of a London theatre and died shortly afterwards. Here again I perceived a case of a notable man succumbing unexpectedly in a public place--a case parallel to that of the Grand Duke, of Ericksen, of Van Rembold! it seemed as though some strange epidemic had attacked men of science--yes! they were all men of science, even including the Grand Duke, who was said to be the most scientific soldier in Europe, and the admiral, who had perfected the science of submarine warfare.

"The Scorpion!" ... that name haunted me persistently. So much so that at last I determined to find out for myself if Sir Frank Narcombe had ever spoken about a scorpion or if there was any evidence to show that he had been interested in the subject.

I could not fail to remember, too, that Zara el-Khala had last been reported as crossing to England.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT IN THE CAFE

New Scotland Yard had been advised that any reference to a scorpion, in whatever form it occurred, should be noted and followed up, but nothing had resulted and as a matter of fact I was not surprised in the least. All that I had learned--and this was little enough--I had learned more or less by accident. But I came to the conclusion that a visit to London might be advisable.

I had caused a watch to be kept upon the man Miguel, whose establishment seemed to be a recognized resort of shady characters. I had no absolute proof, remember, that he knew anything of the private affairs of the Hindu, and no further reference to a scorpion had been made by anyone using the cafe telephone. Nevertheless I determined to give him a courtesy call before leaving for London ... and to this determination I cannot doubt that once again I was led by providence.

Attired in a manner calculated to enable me to pass unnoticed among the patrons of the establishment, I entered the place and ordered cognac. Miguel having placed it before me, I lighted a cigarette and surveyed my surroundings.

Eight or nine men were in the cafe, and two women. Four of the men were playing cards at a corner table, and the others were distributed about the place, drinking and smoking. The women, who were flashily dressed but who belonged to that order of society which breeds the Apache, were deep in conversation with a handsome Algerian. I recognized only one face in the cafe--that of a dangerous character, Jean Sach, who had narrowly escaped the electric chair in the United States and who was well known to the Bureau. He was smiling at one of the two women-
-the woman to whom the Algerian seemed to be more particularly addressing himself.

Another there was in the cafe who interested me as a student of physiognomy--a dark, bearded man, one of the card-players. His face was disfigured by a purple scar extending from his brow to the left corner of his mouth, which it had drawn up into a permanent snarl, so that he resembled an enraged and dangerous wild animal. Mentally I classified this person as "Le Balafre."

I had just made up my mind to depart when the man Sach arose, crossed the cafe and seated himself insolently between the Algerian and the woman to whom the latter was talking. Turning his back upon the brown man, he addressed some remark to the woman, at the same time leering in her face.

Women of this class are difficult, you understand? Sach received from the lady a violent blow upon the face which rolled him on the floor! As he fell, the Algerian sprang up and drew a knife. Sach rolled away from him and also reached for the knife which he carried in a hip-pocket.

Before he could draw it, Miguel, the quadroon proprietor, threw himself upon him and tried to pitch him into the street. But Sach, although a small man, was both agile and ferocious. He twisted out of the grasp of the huge quadroon and turned, raising the knife. As he did so, the Algerian deftly kicked it from his grasp and left Sach to face Miguel unarmed. Screaming with rage, he sprang at Miguel's throat, and the tow fell writhing upon the floor.

There could only be one end to such a struggle, of course, as the Algerian recognized by replacing his knife in his pocket and resuming his seat. Miguel obtained a firm hold upon Sacah and raised him bodily above his head, as one has seen a professional weight-lifter raise a heavy dumb-bell. Thus he carried him, kicking and foaming at the mouth with passion, to the open door. From the step he threw him into the middle of the street.

At this moment I observed something glittering upon the floor close to the chair occupied by the Algerian. Standing up--for I had determined to depart--I crossed in that direction, stooped and picked up this object which glittered. As my fingers touched it, so did my heart give a great leap.

The object was a _golden scorpion!_

Forgetful of my dangerous surroundings I stood looking at the golden ornament in my hand ... when suddenly and violently it was snatched from me! The Algerian, his brown face convulsed with rage, confronted me.

"Where did you find that charm?" he cried. "It belongs to me."

"Very well," I replied--"you have it."

He glared at me with a ferocity which the incident scarcely seemed to merit and exchanged a significant glance with someone who had approached and who now stood behind me. "Did you find it on the floor?" asked Miguel suspiciously.

"I did."

He turned to the Algerian.

"It fell when you kicked the knife from the hand of that pig," he said. "You should be more careful."

Again they exchanged significant glances, but the Algerian resumed his seat and Miguel went behind the counter. I left the cafe conscious of the fact that black looks pursued me.

The night was very dark, and as I came out on to the pavement someone touched me on the arm. I turned in a flash.

"Walk on, friend," said the voice of Jean Sach. "What was it that you picked up from the floor?"

"A golden scorpion," I answered quickly.

"Ah!" he whispered--"I thought so! It is enough. They shall pay for what they have done to me--those two. Hurry, friend, as I do."

Before I could say another word or strive to detain him, he turned and ran off along a narrow courtway which at this point branched from the street.

I stood for a moment, nonplussed, staring after him. By good fortune I had learned more in ten minutes than by the exercise of all my ingenuity and the resources of the Service I could have learned in ten months! _Par al barbe du prophete_, the Kismet which dogs the footsteps of malefactors assisted me!

Recollecting the advice of Jean Sach, I set off at a brisk pace along the street, which was dark and deserted and which passed through a district marked red on the Paris crimes-map. Arriving at the corner, above which projected a lamp, I paused and glanced back into the darkness. I could see no one, but I thought I could detect the sound of stealthy footsteps following me.

The suspicion was enough. I quickened my pace, anxious to reach the crowded boulevard upon which this second street opened. I reached it unmolested, but intending to throw any pursuer off the track, I dodged and doubled repeatedly on the way to my flat and arrived there about midnight, convinced that I had eluded pursuit--if indeed I had been pursued.

All my arrangements were made for leaving Paris, and now I telephoned to the assistant on duty in my office,
instructing him to take certain steps in regard to the proprietor of the cafe and the Algerian and to find the hiding-place of the man Jean-Sach. I counted it more than ever important that I should go to London at once.

In this belief I was confirmed at the very moment that I boarded the Channel steamer at Boulogne: for as I stepped upon the deck I found myself face to face with a man who was leaning upon the rail and apparently watching the passengers coming on board. He was a man of heavy build, dark and bearded, and his face was strangely familiar.

Turning, as I lighted a cigarette, I glanced back at him in order to obtain a view of his profile. I knew him instantly—for now the scar was visible. It was "Le Balafre" who had been playing cards in Miguel's cafe on the previous night!

I have sometimes been criticised, especially by my English confreres, for my faith in disguise. I have been told that no disguise is impenetrable to the trained eye. I reply that there are many disguises but few trained eyes! To my faith in disguise I owed the knowledge that a golden scorpion was the token of some sort of gang, society, or criminal group, and to this same faith which an English inspector of police once assured me to be a misplaced one I owed, on boarding the steamer, my escape from detection by this big bearded fellow who was possibly looking out for me!

Yet, I began to wonder if after all I had escaped the shadowy pursuer whose presence I had suspected in the dark street outside the cafe or if he had tracked me and learned my real identity. In any event, the roles were about to be reversed! "Le Balafre" at Folkestone took a seat in a third-class carriage of the London train. I took one in the next compartment.

Arrived at Charing Cross, he stood for a time in the booking-hall, glanced at his watch, and then took up the handbag which he carried and walked out into the station yard. I walked out also.

"Le Balafre" accosted a cabman; and as he did so I passed close behind him and overheard a part of the conversation.

"... Bow Road Station East! It's too far. What?"

I glanced back. The bearded man was holding up a note—a pound note apparently. I saw the cabman nod. Without an instant's delay I rushed up to another cabman who had just discharged a passenger.

"To Bow Road Station East!" I said to the man. "Double fare if you are quick!"

It would be a close race. But I counted on the aid of that Fate which dogs the steps of wrong-doers! My cab was off first and the driver had every reason for hurrying. From the moment that we turned out into the Strand until we arrived at our destination I saw no more of "Le Balafre." My extensive baggage I must hope to recover later.

At Bow Road Station I discovered a telephone box in a dark corner which commanded a view of the street. I entered this box and waited. It was important that I should remain invisible. Unless my bearded friend had been unusually fortunate he could not well have arrived before me.

As it chanced I had nearly six minutes to wait. Then, not ten yards away, I saw "Le Balafre" arrive and dismiss the cabman outside the station.

There was nothing furtive in his manner; he was evidently satisfied that no one pursued him; and he stood in the station entrance almost outside my box and lighted a cigar!

Placing his bag upon the floor, he lingered, looking to left and right, when suddenly a big closed car painted dull yellow drew up beside the pavement. It was driven by a brown-faced chauffeur whose nationality I found difficulty in placing, for he wore large goggles. But before I could determine upon my plan of action, "Le Balafre" crossed the pavement and entered the car—and the car glided smoothly away, going East. A passing lorry obstructed my view and I even failed to obtain a glimpse of the number on the plate.

But I had seen something which had repaid me for my trouble. As the man of the scar had walked up to the car, had exhibited to the brown-skinned chauffeur some object which he held in the palm of his hand ... an object which glittered like gold!

II. "LE BALAFRE"

CHAPTER I

I BECOME CHARLES MALET

Behold me established in rooms in Battersea and living retired during the day while I permitted my beard to grow. I had recognized that my mystery of "The Scorpion" was the biggest case which had ever engaged the attention of the Service de Surete, and I was prepared, if necessary, to devote my whole time for twelve months to its solution. I had placed myself in touch with Paris, and had had certain papers and licenses forwarded to me. A daily bulletin reached me, and one of these bulletins was sensational.

The body of Jean Sach had been recovered from the Seine. The man had been stabbed to the heart. Surveillance of Miguel and his associates continued unceasingly, but I had directed that no raids or arrests were to be made without direct orders from me.
I was now possessed of a French motor license and also that of a Paris taxi-driver, together with all the other
documents necessary to establish the identity of one Charles Malet. Everything was in order. I presented myself--
now handsomely bearded--at New Scotland Yard and applied for a license. The "knowledge of London" and other
tests I passed successfully and emerged a fully-fledged cabman!

Already I had opened negotiations for the purchase of a dilapidated but serviceable cab which belonged to a small
proprietor who had obtained a car of more up-to-date pattern to replace this obsolete one. I completed these
negotiations by paying down a certain sum and arranged to garage my cab in the disused stable of a house near my
rooms in Battersea.

Thus I now found myself in a position to appear anywhere at any time without exciting suspicion, enabled
swiftly to proceed from point to point and to pursue anyone either walking or driving whom it might please me to
pursue. It was a _modus operandi_ which had served me well in Paris and which had led to one of my biggest
successes (the capture of the French desperado known as "Mr. Q.") in New York.

I had obtained, _via_ Paris, particulars of the recent death of Sir Frank Narcombe, and the circumstances
attendant upon his end were so similar to those which had characterized the fate of the Grand Duke, of Van
Rembold and the others, that I could not for a moment believe them to be due to mere coincidence. Acting upon my
advice Paris advised Scotland Yard to press for a _post mortem_ examination of the body, but the influence of Sir
Frank's family was exercised to prevent this being carried out--and exercised successfully.

Meanwhile, I hovered around the houses, flats, clubs and offices of everyone who had been associated with the
late surgeon, noting to what addresses they directed me to drive and who lived at those address. In this way I
obtained evidence sufficient to secure three judicial separations, but not a single clue leading to "The Scorpion"! No
matter.

At every available opportunity I haunted the East-End streets, hoping for a glimpse of the big car and the brown-
skinned chauffeur or of my scarred man from Paris. I frequented all sorts of public bars and eating-houses used by
foreign and Asians. By day and by night I roamed about the dismal thoroughfares of that depressing district,
usually with my flag down to imply that I was engaged.

Such diligence never goes long unrewarded. One evening, having discharged a passenger, a mercantile officer, at
the East India Docks, as I was drifting, watchfully, back through Limehouse, I saw a large car pull up just ahead of
me in the dark. A man got out and the car was driven off.

Two courses presented themselves. I was not sure that this was the car for which I sought, but it strangely
resembled it. Should I follow the car or the man? A rapid decision was called for. I followed the man.

That I had not been mistaken in the identity of the car shortly appeared. The man took out a cigar and standing
on the corner opposite the Town Hall, lighted it. I was close to him at the time, and by the light of the match, which
he sheltered with his hands, I saw the scarred and bearded face! _Triomphe!_ it was he!

Having lighted his cigar, he crossed the road and entered the saloon of a neighbourhood public-house. Locking
my cab I, also, entered that saloon. I ordered a glass of bitter beer and glanced around at the object of my interest.
He had obtained a glass of brandy and was contorting his hideous face as he sipped the beverage. I laughed.

"Have they tried to poison you, mister!" I said.
"Ah,_pardieu!_ poison--yes!" he replied.
"You want to have it out of a bottle," I continued confidentially-- "Martell's Three Stars."

He stared at me uncomprehendingly.
"I don't know," he said haltingly. "I have very little English."
"Oh, that's it!" I cried, speaking French with a barbarous accent. "You only speak French?"
"Yes, yes," he replied eagerly. "It is so difficult to make oneself understood. This spirit is not cognac, it is some
kind of petrol!"

Finishing my bitter, I ordered two glasses of good brandy and placed one before "Le Balafre."
"Try that," I said, continuing to speak in French, "You will find it is better."

He sipped from his glass and agreed that I was right. We chatted together for ten minutes and had another drink,
after which my dangerous-looking acquaintance wished me good-night and went out. The car had come from the
West, and I strongly suspected that my man either lived in the neighbourhood or had come there to keep an
appointment. Leaving my cab outside the public-house, I followed him on foot, down Three Colt Street to
Ropemaker Street, where he turned into a narrow alley leading to the riverside. It was straight and deserted, and I
dared not follow further until he had reached the corner. I heard his footsteps pass right to the end. Then the sound
died away. I ran to the corner. The back of a wharf building--a high blank wall--faced a row of ramshackle
tenements, some of them built of wood; but not a soul was in sight.

I reluctantly returned to the spot at which I had left the cab--and found a constable there who wanted to know
what I meant by leaving a vehicle in the street unattended. I managed to enlist his sympathy by telling him that I had
been in pursuit of a "fare" who had swindled me with a bad half-crown. The ruse succeeded.

"Which street did he go down, mate?" asked the constable.

I described the street and described the scarred man. The constable shook his head.

"Sounds like one o' them foreign sailormen," he said. "But I don't know what he can have gone down there for.
It's nearly all Chinese, that part."

His words came as a revelation; they changed the whole complexion of the case. It dawned upon me even as he spoke the word "Chinese" that the golden scorpion which I had seen in the Paris cafe was of Chinese workmanship!

I started my engine and drove slowly to that street in which I had lost the track of "Le Balafre." I turned the cab so that I should be ready to drive off at a moment's notice, and sat there wondering what my next move should be. How long I had been there I cannot say, when suddenly it began to rain in torrents.

What I might have done or what I had hoped to do is of no importance; for as I sat there staring out at the dismal rain-swept street, a man came along, saw the head-lamps of the cab and stopped, peering in my direction. Evidently perceiving that I drove a cab and not a private car, he came towards me.

"Are you disengaged?" he asked.

Whether it was that I sympathized with him--he had no topcoat or umbrella--or whether I was guided by Fate I know not, but as he spoke I determined to give up my dreary vigil for that night. _Pardieu!_ but certainly it was Fate again!

"Well, I suppose I am, sir," I said, and asked him where he wanted to go.

He gave an address not five hundred yards from my own rooms! I thought this so curious that I hesitated no longer.

"Jump in," I said; and still seeking in my mind for a link between the scorpion case and China, I drove off, and in less than half an hour, for the streets were nearly empty, arrived at my destination.

The passenger, whose name was Dr. Keppel Stuart, very kindly suggested a glass of hot grog, and I did not refuse his proferred hospitality. When I came out of his house again, the rain had almost ceased, and just as I stooped to crank the car I thought I saw a shadowy figure moving near the end of a lane which led to the tradesmen's entrance of Dr. Stuart's house. A sudden suspicion laid hold upon me--a horrible doubt.

Having driven some twenty yards along the road, I leaned from my seat and looked back. A big man wearing a black waterproof overall was standing looking after me!

Remembering how cleverly I had been trailed from Miguel's cafe to my flat, in Paris (for I no longer doubted that someone had followed me on that occasion), I now perceived that I might again be the object of the same expert's attention. Stopping my engine half-way along the next road, I jumped out and ran back, hiding in the bushes which grew beside the gate of a large empty house. I had only a few seconds to wait.

A big closed car, running almost silently, passed before me ... and "Le Balafre" was leaning out of the window!

At last I saw my chance of finding the headquarters of "The Scorpion." Alas! The man of the scar was as swift to recognize that possibility as I. A moment after he had passed my stationary cab, and found it to be deserted, his big car was off like the wind, and even before I could step out from the bushes the roar of the powerful engine was growing dim in the distance!

I was detected. I had to deal with dangerously clever people.

CHAPTER II

BAITING THE TRAP

The following morning I spent at home, in my modest rooms, reviewing my position and endeavouring to adjust my plans in accordance with the latest development. "The Scorpion" had scored a point. What had aroused the suspicions "Le Balafre," I knew not; but I was inclined to think that he had been looking from some window or peep-hole in the narrow street with the wooden houses when I had, injudiciously, followed him there.

On the other hand, the leakage might be in Paris--or in my correspondence system. The man of the scar might have been looking for me as I was looking for him. That he was looking for someone on the cross-channel boat I had not doubted.

He was aware, then that Charles Malet, cabman, was watching him. But was he aware that Charles Malet was Gaston Max? And did he know where I lived? Also--did he perchance think that my meeting with Dr. Stuart in Limehouse had been prearranged? Clearly he had seen Dr. Stuart enter my cab, for he had pursued us to Battersea.

This course of reflection presently led me to a plan. It was a dangerous plan, but I doubted if I should ever find myself in greater danger than I was already. _Nom d'un nom!_ I had not forgotten the poor Jean Sach!

That night, well knowing that I carried my life in my hands, I drove again to Limehouse Town Hall, and again leaving my cab outside went into the bar where I had preciously me "Le Balafre." If I had doubted that my movements were watched I must now have had such doubts dispelled; for two minutes later the man with the scar came in and greeted me affably!
I had learned something else. He did not know that I had recognized him as the person who had tracked me to Dr. Stuart's house!

He invited me to drink with him, and I did so. As we raised our glasses I made a move. Looking all about me suspiciously:

"Am I right in supposing that you have business in this part of London?" I asked.
"Yes," he replied "My affairs bring me here sometimes."
"You are well acquainted with the neighbourhood?"
"Fairly well. But actually of course I am a stranger to London."

I tapped him confidentially upon the breast.
"Take my advice, as a friend," I said, "and visit these parts as rarely as possible."
"Why do you say that?"

"It is dangerous. From the friendly manner in which you entered into conversation with me, I perceived that you were of a genial and unsuspicious nature. Very well. I warn you. Last night I was followed from a certain street not far from here to the house of a medical man who is a specialist in certain kinds of criminology, you understand."

He stared at me very hard, his teeth bared by that fearful snarl. "You are a strange cabman."

"Perhaps I am. No matter. Take my advice. I have things written here"--I tapped the breast of my tunic--"which will astonish all the world shortly. I tell you, my friend, my fortune is made."

I finished my drink and ordered another for myself and one for my acquaintance. He was watching me doubtfully. Taking up my replenished glass, I emptied it at a draught and ordered a third. I leaned over towards the scarred man, resting my hand heavily upon his shoulder.

"Five thousand pounds," I whispered thickly, "has been offered for the information which I have here in my pocket. It is not yet complete, you understand, and because they may murder me before I obtain the rest of the facts, do you know what I am going to do with this?"

Again I tapped my tunic pocket. "Le Balafre" frowned perplexedly.

"I don't even know what you are talking about, my friend," he replied.

"I _know_ what I am talking about," I assured him, speaking more and more huskily. "Listen, then: I am going to take all my notes to my friend, the doctor, and leave them with him, sealed--sealed, you follow me? If I do not come back for them, In a week, shall we say?--he sends them to the police. "I should not profit, you think? No._morbleu!_ but there are some who hang!"

Emptying my third glass, I ordered a fourth and one for my companion. He checked me.

"No more for me, thank you," he said. "I have--business to attend to. I will wish you good-night."

"Good-night!" I cried boisterously--"good-night, friend! take heed of my good advice!"

As he went out, the barman brought me my fourth glass of cognac, staring at me doubtfully. Our conversation had been conducted in French, but the tone of my voice had attracted attention.

"Had about enough, ain't you, mate?" he said. "Your ugly pal jibbed!"

"Quite enough!" I replied, in English now of course. "But I've had a stroke of luck to-night and I feel happy. Have one with me. This is a final."

On going out into the street I looked cautiously about me, for I did not expect to reach the house of Dr. Stuart unmolested. I credited "Le Balafre" with sufficient acumen to distrust the genuineness of my intoxication, even if he was unaware of my real identity. I never make the mistake of underestimating an opponent's wit, and whilst acting on the assumption that the scarred man knew me to be forcing his hand, I recognized that whether he believed me to be drunk or sober, Gaston Mas or another, his line of conduct must be the same. He must take it for granted that I actually designed to lodge my notes with Dr. Stuart and endeavour to prevent me doing so.

I could detect no evidence of surveillance whatever and cranking the engine I mounted and drove off. More than once, as I passed along Commercial Road, I stopped and looked back. But so far as I could make out no one was following me. The greater part of my route lay along populous thoroughfares, and of this I was not sorry; but I did not relish the prospect of Thames Street, along which presently my course led me.

Leaving the city behind me, I turned into that thoroughfare, which at night is almost quite deserted, and there I pulled up. _Pardieu!_ I was disappointed! It seemed as though my scheme had miscarried. It could not understand why I had been permitted to go unmolested, and I intended to walk back to the corner for a final survey before continuing my journey. This survey was never made.

As I stopped the cab and prepared to descend, a faint--a very faint-- sound almost in my ear, set me keenly on the alert. Just in the nick of time I ducked ... as the blade of a long knife flashed past my head, ripping its way through my cloth cap!

Yes! That movement had saved my life, for otherwise the knife must have entered my shoulder--and pierced to my heart!
Someone was hidden in the cab!
He had quietly opened one of the front windows and had awaited a suitable opportunity to stab me. Now, recognizing failure, he leapt out on the near side as I lurched and stumbled from my seat, and ran off like the wind. I never so much as glimpsed him.

"_Mon Dieu!_" I muttered, raising my hand to my head, from which blood was trickling down my face, "the plan succeeds!"

I bound a handkerchief as tightly as possible around the wound in my scalp and put my cap on to keep the bandage in place. The wound was only a superficial one, and except for the bleeding I suffered no inconvenience from it. But I had now a legitimate reason for visiting Dr. Stuart, and as I drove on towards Battersea I was modifying my original plan in accordance with the unforeseen conditions.

It was long past Dr. Stuart's hours of consultation when I arrived at his house, and the servant showed me into a waiting-room, informing me that the doctor would join me in a few minutes. Directly she had gone out I took from the pocket of my tunic the sealed envelope which I had intended to lodge with the doctor. Pah! it was stained with blood which had trickled down from the wound in my scalp!

Actually, you will say, there was no reason why I should place a letter in the hand of Dr. Stuart; my purpose would equally well be served by _pretending_ that I had done so. Ah, but I knew that I had to deal with clever people--with artists in crime--and it behooved me to be an artist also. I had good reason to know that their system of espionage was efficient; and the slipshod way is ever the wrong way.

The unpleasantly sticky letter I returned to my pocket, looking around me for some means of making up any kind of packet which could do duty as a substitute. Beyond a certain draped over a recess at one end of the waiting-room I saw a row of boxes, a box of lint and other medical paraphernalia. It was the doctor's dispensary. Perhaps I might find there an envelope.

I crossed the room and looked. Immediately around the corner, on a level with my eyes, was a packet of foolscap envelopes and a stick of black sealing-wax! _Bien!_ all that I now required was a stout sheet of paper to enclose in one of those envelopes. But not a scrap of paper could I find, except the blood-stained letter in my pocket--towards which I had formed a strong antipathy. I had not even a newspaper in my possession. I thought of folding three or four envelopes, but there were only six in all, and the absence of so many might be noted.

Drawing aside a baize curtain which hung from the bottom shelf, I discovered a number of old card-board boxes. It was sufficient. With a pair of surgical scissors I cut a piece from the lid of one and thrust it into an envelope, gumming down the lapel. At a little gas jet intended for the purpose I closed both ends with wax and--singular coincidence!--finding a Chinese coin fastened to a cork lying on the shelf, my sense of humour prompted me to use it as a seal! Finally, to add to the verisimilitude of the affair I borrowed a pen which rested in a bottle of red ink and wrote upon the envelope the number: 30, that day being the thirtieth day of the month.

It was well that the artist within me had dictated this careful elaboration, as became evident a few minutes later when the doctor appeared at the head of a short flight of stairs and requested me to step up to his consulting-room. It was a small room, so that the window, over which a linen blind was drawn, occupied nearly the whole of one wall. As Dr. Stuart, having examined the cut on my scalp, descended to the dispensary for lint, the habits of a lifetime asserted themselves.

I quickly switched off the light and peeped out of the window around the edge of the blind, which I drew slightly aside. In the shadow of the wall upon the opposite side of the narrow lane a man was standing! I turned on the light again. The watcher should not be disappointed!

My skull being dressed, I broached the subject of the letter, which I said I had found in my cab after the accident which had caused the injury.

"Someone left this behind to-day, sir," I said; "perhaps the gentleman who was with me when I had the accident; and I've got no means of tracing him. He may be able to trace _me_, though, or he may advertise. It evidently contains something valuable. I wonder if you would do me a small favour? Would you mind taking charge of it for a week or so, until it is claimed?"

He asked me why I did not take it to Scotland Yard.

"Because," said I, "if the owner claims it from Scotland Yard he is less likely to be generous than if he gets it direct from me!"

"But what is the point," asked Dr. Stuart, "in leaving it here?"

I explained that if I kept the letter I might be suspected of an intention of stealing it, whereas directly there was any inquiry, he could certify that I had left it in his charge. He seemed to be satisfied and asked me to come into his study for a moment. The man in the lane was probably satisfied, too. I had stood three paces from the table-lamp all the time, waving the letter about as I talked, and casting a bold shadow on the linen blind!

The first thing that struck me as I entered the doctor's study was that the French windows, which opened on a
sheltered lawn, were open. I acted accordingly.

"You see," said Dr. Stuart, "I am enclosing your letter in this big envelope which I am sealing."

"Yes, sir," I replied, standing at some distance from him, so that he had to speak loudly. "And would you mind
addressing it to the Lost Property Office."

"Not at all," said he, and did as I suggested. "If not reclaimed within a reasonable time, it will be sent to Scotland Yard."

I edged nearer to the open window.

"If it is not reclaimed," I said loudly, "it goes to Scotland Yard--yes."

"Meanwhile," concluded the doctor, "I am locking it in this private drawer in my bureau."

"It is locked in your bureau. Very good."

CHAPTER III

DISAPPEARANCE OF CHARLES MALET

Knowing, and I knew it well, that people of "The Scorpion" were watching, I do not pretend that I felt at my ease as I drove around to the empty house in which I garaged my cab. My inquiry had entered upon another stage, and Charles Malet was about to disappear from the case. I was well aware that if he failed in his vigilance for a single moment he might well disappear from the world!

The path which led to the stables was overgrown with weeds and flanked by ragged bushes; weeds and grass sprouted between the stones paving the little yard, also, although they were withered to a great extent by the petrol recently spilled there. Having run the cab into the yard, I alighted and looked around the deserted grounds, mysterious in the moonlight. Company would have been welcome, but excepting a constable who had stopped and chatted with me on one or two evenings I always had the stables to myself at night.

I determined to run the cab into the stable and lock it up without delay, for it was palpably dangerous in the circumstances to remain longer than necessary in that lonely spot. Hurriedly I began to put out the lamps. I unlocked the stable doors and stood looking all about me again. I was dreading the ordeal of driving the cab those last ten yards into the garage, for whilst I had my back to the wilderness of bushes it would be an easy matter for anyone in hiding there to come up behind me.

Nevertheless, it had to be done. Seating myself at the wheel I drove into the narrow building, stopped the engine and peered cautiously around toward the bright square formed by the open doors. Nothing was to be seen. No shadow moved.

A magazine pistol held in my hand, I crept, step by step, along the wall until I stood just within the opening. There I stopped.

I could hear a sound of quick breathing! There was someone waiting outside!

Dropping quietly down upon the pavement, I slowly protruded my head around the angle of the brick wall at a point not four inches above the ground. I knew that whoever waited would have his eyes fixed upon the doorway at the level of a man's head.

Close to the wall, a pistol in his left hand and an upraised stand-bag in his right, stood "Le Balafre!" His eyes gleamed savagely in the light of the moon and his teeth were bared in that fearful animal snarl. But he had not seen me.

Inch by inch I thrust my pistol forward, the barrel raised sharply. I could not be sure of my aim, of course, nor had I time to judge it carefully.

I fired.

The bullet was meant for his right wrist, but it struck him in the fleshy part of his arm. Uttering a ferocious cry he leapt back, dropped his pistol--and perceiving me as I sprang to my feet, lashed at my head with the sand-bag. I raised my left arm to guard my skull and sustained the full force of the blow upon it.

I staggered back against the wall, and my own pistol was knocked from my grasp. My left arm was temporarily useless and the man of the scar was deprived of the use of his right. _Pardieu!_ I had the better chance!

He hurled himself upon me.

Instantly he recovered the advantage, for he grasped me by the throat with his left hand--and, _nom d'un nom!_ what a grip he had! Flat against the wall he held me, and began, his teeth bared in that fearful grin, to crush the life from me.

To such an attack there was only one counter. I kicked him savagely--and that death-grip relaxed. I writhed, twisted--and was free! As I regained my freedom I struck up at him, and by great good fortune caught him upon the point of the jaw. He staggered. I struck him over the heart, and he fell I pounced upon him, exulting, for he had sought my life and I knew no pity.

Yet I had not thought so strong a man would choke so easily, and for some moments I stood looking down at him, believing that he sought to trick me. But it was not so. His affair was finished.
I listened. The situation in which I found myself was full of difficulty. An owl screeched somewhere in the trees, but nothing else stirred. The sound of the shot had not attracted attention, apparently. I stooped and examined the garments of the man who lay at my feet.

He carried a travel coupon to Paris bearing that day's date, together with some other papers, but, although I searched all his pockets, I could find nothing of real interest, until in an inside pocket of his coat I felt some hard, irregularly shaped object. I withdrew it, and in the moonlight it lay glittering in my palm—a golden scorpion!

It had apparently been broken in the struggle. The tail was missing, nor could I find it: but I must confess that I did not prolong the search.

Some chance effect produced by the shadow of the moonlight, and the presence of that recently purchased ticket, gave me the idea upon which without delay I proceeded to act. Satisfying myself that there was no mark upon any of his garments by which the man could be identified, I unlocked from my wrist an identification disk which I habitually wore there, and locked it upon the wrist of the man with the scar!

Clearly, I argued, he had been detailed to dispatch me and then to leave at once for France. I would make it appear that he had succeeded.

Behold me, ten minutes later, driving slowly along a part of the Thames Embankment which I chanced to remember, a gruesome passenger riding behind me in the cab. I was reflecting as I kept a sharp look-out for a spot which I had noted one day during my travels, how easily one could commit murder in London, when a constable ran out and intercepted me!

_Mon Dieu!_ how my heart leapt!

"I'll trouble you for your name and number, my lad," he said.

"What for?" I asked, and remembering a rare fragment of idiom: "What's up with you?" I added.

"Your lamp's out!" he cried, "that's what's up with me!"

"Oh," said I, climbing from my seat—"very well. I'm sorry. I didn't know. But here is my license."

I handed him the little booklet and began to light my lamps, cursing myself for a dreadful artist because I had forgotten to do so.

"All right," he replied, and handed it back to me. "But how the devil you've managed to get _all_ your lamps out, I can't imagine!"

"This is my first job since dusk," I explained hurrying around to the tail-light. "And _he_ don't say much!" remarked the constable.

I replaced my matches in my pocket and returned to the front of the cab, making a gesture as of one raising a glass to his lips and jerking my thumb across my shoulder in the direction of my unseen fare.

"Oh, that's it!" said the constable, and moved off.

Never in my whole career have I been so glad to see the back of any man!

I drove on slowly. The point for which I was making was only some three hundred yards further along, but I had noted that the constable had walked off in the opposite direction. Therefore, arriving at my destination—a vacant wharf open to the road—I pulled up and listened.

Only the wash of the tide upon the piles of the wharf was audible, for the night was now far advanced.

I opened the door of the cab and dragged out "Le Balafre." Right and left I peered, truly like a stage villain, and then hauled my unpleasant burden along the irregularly paved path and on to the little wharf. Out in mid-stream a Thames Police patrol was passing, and I stood for a moment until the creak of the oars grew dim.

Then: there was a dull splash far below ... and silence again.

Gaston Max had been consigned to a watery grave!

Returning again to the garage, I wondered very much who he had been, this one, "Le Balafre." Could it be that he was "The Scorpion"? I could not tell, but I had hopes very shortly of finding out. I had settled up my affairs with my landlady and had removed from my apartments all papers and other effects. In the garage I placed a good suit of clothes and other necessities, and by telephone I had secured a room at a West-End hotel.

The cab returned to the stable, I locked the door, and by the light of one of the lamps, shaved off my beard and moustache. My uniform and cap I hung up on the hook where I usually left them after working hours, and changed into the suit which I had placed there in readiness. I next destroyed all evidences of identity and left the place in a neat condition. I extinguished the lamp, went out and locked the door behind me, and carrying a travelling-grip and a cane set off for my new hotel.

Charles Malet had disappeared!

**CHAPTER IV**

**I MEET AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE**

On the corner opposite Dr. Stuart's establishment stood a house which was "to be let or sold." From the estate-agent whose name appeared upon the notice-board I obtained the keys—and had a duplicate made of that which
opened the front door. It was a simple matter, and the locksmith returned both keys to me within an hour. I informed
the agent that the house would not suit me.

Nevertheless, having bolted the door, in order that prospective purchasers might not surprise me, I "camped out"
in an upper room all day, watching from behind the screen of trees all who came to the house of Dr. Stuart. Dusk
found me still at my post, armed with a pair of good binoculars. Every patient who presented himself I scrutinized
carefully, and finding as the darkness grew that it became increasingly difficult to discern the features of visitors, I
descended to the front garden and resumed my watch from the lower branches of a tree which stood some twenty
feet from the roadway.

At selected intervals I crept from my post and surveyed the lane upon which the window of the consulting-room
opened and also the path leading to the tradesmen's entrance, from which one might look across the lawn and in at
the open study windows. It was during one of these tours of inspection and whilst I was actually peering through a
gap in the hedge, that I heard the telephone bell. Dr. Stuart was in the study and I heard him speaking.

I gathered that his services were required immediately at some institution in the neighbourhood. I saw him take
his hat, stick and bag from the sofa and go out of the room. Then I returned to the front garden of my vacant house.

No one appeared for some time. A policeman walked slowly up the road, and flashed his lantern in at the gate of
the house I had commandeered. His footsteps died away. Then, faintly, I heard the hum of a powerful motor. I held
my breath. The approaching car turned into the road at a point above me to the right, came nearer ... and stopped
before Dr. Stuart's door.

I focussed my binoculars upon the chauffeur.

It was the brown-skinned man! _Nom d'un nom!_ a _woman_ was descending form the car. She was enveloped
in furs and I could not see her face. She walked up the steps to the door and was admitted.

The chauffeur backed the car into the lane beside the house.

My heart beating rapidly with excitement, I crept out by the further gate of the drive, crossed the road at a point
fifty yards above the house and walking very quietly came back to the tradesmen's entrance. Into its enveloping
darkness I glided and on until I could peep across the lawn.

The elegant visitor, as I hoped, had been shown, not into the ordinary waiting-room but into the doctor's study.
She was seated with her back to the window, talking to a grey-haired old lady--probably the doctor's housekeeper.
Impatiently I waited for this old lady to depart, and the moment that she did so, the visitor stood up, turned and ... it
was _Zara el-Khala!_

It was only with difficulty that I restrained the cry of triumph which arose to my lips. On the instant that the
study door closed, Zara el-Khala began to try a number of keys which she took from her handbag upon the various
drawers of the bureau!

"So!" I said--"they are uncertain of the drawer!"

Suddenly she desisted, looking nervously at the open windows; then, crossing the room, she drew the curtains. I
crept out into the road again and by the same roundabout route came back to the empty house. Feeling my way in
the darkness of the shrubbery, I found the motor bicycle which I had hidden there and I wheeled it down to the
further gate of the drive and waited.

I could see the doctor's door, and I saw him returning along the road. As he appeared, from somewhere----I could
not determine from where--came a strange and uncanny wailing sound, a sound that chilled me like an evil omen.

Even as it died away, and before Dr. Stuart had reached his door I knew what it portended--that horrible wail.
Some one hidden I knew not where, had warned Zara el-Khala that the doctor returned! But stay! Perhaps that some
one was the dark-skinned chauffeur!

How I congratulated myself upon the precautions which I had taken to escape observation. Evidently the watcher
had placed himself somewhere where he could command a view of the front door and the road.

Five minutes later the girl came out, the old housekeeper accompanying her to the door, the car emerged from
the lane, Zara el-Khala entered it and was driven away. I could see no one seated beside the chauffeur. I started my
"Indian" and leapt in pursuit.

As I had anticipated, the route was Eastward, and I found myself traversing familiar ground. From the south-
wester to the east of London whirled the big car of mystery--and I was ever close behind it. Sometimes, in the
crowded streets, I lost sight of my quarry for a time, but always I caught up again, and at last I found myself
whirling along Commercial Road and not fifty yards behind the car.

Just by the canal bridge a drunken sailor lurched out in front of my wheel, and only by twisting perilously right
into a turning called, I believe, Salmon Lane, did I avoid running him down.

_Sacre nom!_ how I cursed him! The lane was too narrow for me to turn and I was compelled to dismount and to
wheel my "Indian" back to the highroad. The yellow car had vanished, of course, but I took it for granted that it had
followed the main road. At a dangerous speed, pursued by execrations from the sailor and all his friends, I set off
east once more turning to the right down West India Dock Road.

Arriving at the dock, and seeing nothing ahead of me but desolation and ships' masts, I knew that that inebriated pig had spoiled everything! I could have sat down upon the dirty pavement and wept, so mortified was I! For if Zara el-Khala had secured the envelope I had missed my only chance.

However, _paradieul!_ I have said that despair is not permitted by the Bureau. I rode home to my hotel, deep in reflection. Whether the girl had the envelope or not, at least she had escaped detection by the doctor; therefore if she had failed she would try again. I could sleep in peace until the morrow.

Of the following day, which I spent as I had spent the preceding one, I have nothing to record. At about the same time in the evening the yellow car again rolled into view, and on this occasion I devoted all my attention to the dark-skinned chauffeur, upon whom I directed my glasses.

As the girl alighted and spoke to him for a moment, he raised the goggles which habitually he wore and I saw his face. A theory which I had formed on the previous night proved correct. The chauffeur was the Hindu, Chunda Lal! As Zara el-Khala walked up the steps he backed the car into the narrow lane and I watched him constantly. Yet, watch as closely as I might, I could not see where he concealed himself in order to command a view of the road.

On this occasion, as I know, Dr. Stuart was at home. Nevertheless, the girl stayed for close upon half an hour, and I began to wonder if some new move had been planned. Suddenly the door opened and she came out.

I crept through the bushes to my bicycle and wheeled it on to the drive. I saw the car start; but Madame Fortune being in playful mood, my own engine refused to start at all, and when ten minutes later I at last aroused a spark of life in the torpid machine I knew that pursuit would be futile.

Since this record is intended for the guidance of those who take up the quest of "The Scorpion" either in co-operation with myself or, in the event of my failure, alone, it would be profitless for me to record my disasters. Very well, I had one success. One night I pursued the yellow car from Dr. Stuart's house to the end of Limehouse Causeway without once losing sight of it.

A string of lorries form the docks, drawn by a traction engine, checked me at the corner for a time, although the yellow car passed. But I raced furiously on and by great good luck overtook it near the Dock Station. From thence onward pursuing a strangely tortuous route, I kept it in sight to Canning Town, when it turned into a public garage. I followed—to purchase petrol.

Chunda Lal was talking to the man in charge; he had not yet left his seat. But the car was empty!

At first I was stupid with astonishment. _Par la barbe du prophete!_ I was astounded. Then I saw that I had really made a great discovery. The street into which I had injudiciously followed "Le Balafre" lay between Limehouse Causeway and Ropemaker Street, and it was at no great distance from this point that I had lost sight of the yellow car. In that street, which according to my friend the policeman was "nearly all Chinese," Zara el-Khala had descended; in that street was "The Scorpion's" lair!

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION OF STATEMENT

I come now to the conclusion of this statement and to the strange occurrence which led to my proclaiming myself. The fear of imminent assassination which first had prompted me to record what I knew of "The Scorpion" had left me since I had ceased to be Charles Malet. And that the disappearance of "Le Balafre" had been accepted by his unknown chief as evidence of his success in removing _me_, I did not doubt. Therefore I breathed more freely ... and more freely still when my body was recovered!

Yes, my body was recovered from Hanover Hole; I read of it--a very short paragraph, but it is the short paragraphs that matter--in my morning paper. I knew then that I should very shortly be dead indeed--officially dead. I had counted on this happening before, you understand, for I more than ever suspected that "The Scorpion" knew me to be in England and I feared that he would "lie low" as the English say. However, since a fortunate thing happens better late than never, I say in this paragraph two things: (1) that the enemy would cease to count upon Gaston Max; (2) that the Scotland Yard Commissioner would be authorised to open Part First of this Statement which had been lodged at his office two days after I landed in England--the portion dealing with my inquiries in Paris and with my tracking of "Le Balafre" to Bow Road Station and observing that he showed a golden scorpion to the chauffeur of the yellow car.

This would happen because Paris would wire that the identification disk found on the dead man was that of Gaston Max. Why would Paris do so? Because my reports had been discounted since I had ceased to be Charles Malet and Paris would be seeking evidence of my whereabouts. My reports had discontinued because I had learned that I had to do with a criminal organization of whose ramifications I knew nothing. Therefore I took no more chances. I died.

I return to the night when Inspector Dunbar, the grim Dunbar of Scotland Yard, came to Dr. Stuart's house. His appearance there puzzled me. I could not fail to recognize him, for as dusk had fully come I had descended from my
top window and was posted among the bushes of the empty house from whence I commanded a perfect view of the doctor's door. The night was unusually chilly--there had been some rain--and when I crept around to the lane bordering the lawn, hoping to see or hear something of what was taking place in the study, I found that the windows were closed and the blinds drawn.

Luck seemed to have turned against me; for that night, at dusk, when I had gone to a local garage where I kept my motor bicycle, I had discovered the back tire to be perfectly flat and had been forced to contain my soul in patience whilst the man repaired a serious puncture. The result was of course that for more than half an hour I had not had Dr. Stuart's house under observation. And a hundred and one things can happen in half an hour.

Had Dr. Stuart sent for the Inspector? If so, I feared that the envelope was missing, or at any rate that he had detected Zara el-Khala in the act of stealing it and had determined to place the matter in the hands of the police. It was a maddening reflection. Again--I shrewdly suspected that I was not the only watcher of Dr. Stuart's house. The frequency with which the big yellow car drew up at the door a few moments after the doctor had gone out could not be due to accident. Yet I had been unable to detect the presence of this other watcher, nor had I any idea of the spot where the car remained hidden--if my theory was a correct one. Nevertheless I did not expect to see it come along whilst the Inspector remained at the house--always supposing that Zara el-Khala had not yet succeeded. I wheeled out the "Indian" and rode to a certain tobacconist's shop at which I had sometimes purchased cigarettes.

He had a telephone in a room at the rear which customers were allowed to use on payment of a fee, and a public call-box would not serve my purpose, since the operator usually announces to a subscriber the fact that a call emanated from such an office. The shop was closed, but I rang the bell at the side door and obtained permission to use the telephone upon pleading urgency. I had assiduously cultivated a natural gift for mimicry, having found it of inestimable service in the practice of my profession. It served me now. I had worked in the past with Inspector Dunbar and his subordinate Sergeant Sowerby, and I determined to trust to my memory of the latter's mode of speech.

I rang up Dr. Stuart and asked for the Inspector, saying Sergeant Sowerby spoke from Scotland Yard. "Hullo!" he cried, "is that you, Sowerby?"

"Yes," I replied in Sowerby's voice. "I thought I should find you there. About the body of Max."

"Eh!" said Dunbar--"what's that? Max?"

I knew immediately that Paris had not yet wired, therefore I told him that Paris _had_ done so, and that the disk numbered 49685 was that of Gaston Max. He was inexpressibly shocked, deploring the rashness of Max in working alone.

"Come to Scotland Yard," I said, anxious to get him away from the house.

He said he would be with me in a few minutes, and I was racking my brains for some means of learning what business had taken him to Dr. Stuart when he gave me the desired information spontaneously.

"Sowerby, listen," said he: "It's 'The Scorpion' case right enough! That bit of gold found on the dead man is not a cactus stem; it's a scorpion's tail!"

So! they had found what I had failed to find! It must have been attached, I concluded, to some inner part of "Le Balafre's" clothing. There had been no mention of Zara el-Khala; therefore, as I rode back to my post I permitted myself to assume that she would come again, since presumably she had thus far failed. I was right.

_Morbleu!_ quick as I was the car was there before me! But I had not overlooked this possibility and I had dismounted at a good distance from the house and had left the "Indian" in someone's front garden. As I had turned out of the main road I had seen Dr. Stuart and Inspector Dunbar approaching a rank upon which two or three cabs usually stood.

I watched _la Bell_ Zara enter the house, a beautiful woman most elegantly attired, and then, even before Chunda Lal had backed the car into the lane I was off ... to the spot at which I had abandoned my motor bicycle. In little more than half an hour I had traversed London, and was standing in the shadow of that high, blank wall to which I have referred as facing a row of wooden houses in a certain street adjoining Limehouse Causeway.

You perceive my plan? I was practically sure of the street; all I had to learn was which house sheltered "The Scorpion"!

I had already suspected that this night was to be for me an unlucky night. _Nom d'un p'tit bon-homme!_ it was so. Until an hour before dawn I crouched under that wall and saw no living thing except a very old Chinaman who came out of one of the houses and walked slowly away. The other houses appeared to be empty. No vehicle of any kind passed that way all night.

Turning over in my mind the details of this most perplexing case, it became evident to me that the advantages of working alone were now outweighed by the disadvantages. The affair had reached a stage at which ordinary police methods should be put into operation. I had collected some of the threads; the next thing was for Scotland Yard to weave these together whilst I sought for more.
I determined to remain dead. It would afford me greater freedom of action. The disappearance of "Le Balafre" which must by this time have been noted by his associates, might possibly lead to a suspicion that the dead man was _not_ Gaston Max; but providing no member of "The Scorpion" group obtained access to the body I failed to see how this suspicion could be confirmed. I reviewed my position.

The sealed letter had achieved its purpose in part. Although I had failed to locate the house from which these people operated, I could draw a circle on the map within which I knew it to be; and I had learned that Zara el-Khala and the Hindu were in London. What it all meant—to what end "The Scorpion" was working I did not know. But having learned so much, be sure I did not despair of learning more.

It was now imperative that I should find out exactly what had occurred at Dr. Stuart's house. Accordingly I determined to call upon the Inspector at Scotland Yard. I presented myself towards evening of the day following my vigil in Limehouse, sending up the card of a Bureau confrere, for I did not intend to let it be generally known that I was alive.

Presently I was shown up to that bare and shining room which I remembered having visited in the past. I stood just within the doorway, smiling. Inspector Dunbar rose, as the constable went out, and stood looking across at me. I had counted on striking him dumb with astonishment. He was Scottishly unmoved.

"Well," he said, coming forward with outstretched hand, "I'm glad to see you. I knew you would have come to us sooner or later!"

I felt that my eyes sparkled. There was no resentment within my heart. I rejoiced.

"Look," he continued, taking a slip of paper from his note-book. "This is a copy of a note I left with Dr. Stuart some time ago. Read it."

I did so, and this is what I read:

"A: the name of the man who cut out the lid of the cardboard box and sealed it in the envelope--Gaston Max!

"B: the name of the missing cabman--Gaston Max!

"C: the name of the man who rang me up at Dr. Stuart's and told me that Gaston Max was dead--Gaston Max!"

I returned the slip to Inspector Dunbar. I bowed.

"It is a pleasure and a privilege to work with you, Inspector," I said ....

This statement is nearly concluded. The whole of the evening I spent in the room of the Assistant Commissioner discussing the matters herein set forth and comparing notes with Inspector Dunbar. One important thing I learned: that I had abandoned my nightly watches too early. For one morning just before dawn someone who was _not_ Zara had paid a visit to the house of Dr. Stuart! I determined to call upon the doctor.

As it chanced I was delayed and did not actually arrive until so late an hour that I had almost decided not to present myself ... when a big yellow car flashed past the taxicab in which I was driving!

_Nom d'un nom!_ I could not mistake it! This was within a few hundred yards of the house of Dr. Stuart, you understand, and I instantly dismissed my cabman and proceeded to advance cautiously on foot. I knew that I could run almost noiselessly. As I crept along in that friendly shadow cast by a high hedge which had served me so well before, I saw the yellow car. It was standing on the opposite side of the road. I reached the tradesman's entrance.

From my left, in the direction of the back lawn of the house, came a sudden singular crackling noise and I discerned a flash of blue flame resembling faint "summer lightning." A series of muffled explosions followed ... and in the darkness I tripped over something which lay along the ground at my feet—a length of cable it seemed to be.

Stumbling, I uttered a slight exclamation ... and instantly received a blow on the head that knocked me flat upon the ground! Everything was swimming around me, but I realized that someone—Chunda Lal probably—had been hiding in the very passage which I had entered! I heard again that uncanny wailing, close beside me. Vaguely I discerned an incredible figure—like that of a tall cowled monk, towering over me. I struggled to retain consciousness—there was a rush of feet ... the throb of a motor. It stimulated me— that sound! I must get to the telephone and cause the yellow car to be intercepted.

I staggered to my feet and groped my way along the hedge to where I had observed a tree by means of which one might climb over. I was dizzy as a drunken man; but I half climbed and half fell on to the lawn. The windows were open. I rushed into the study of Dr. Stuart.

_Pah!_ it was full of fumes. I looked around me. _Mon Dieu!_ I staggered. For I knew that in this fume-laden room a thing more horrible and more strange than any within my experience had taken place that night.

Part III

AT THE HOUSE OF AH-FANG-FU
CHAPTER I
THE BRAIN-THIEVES
The Assistant Commissioner lighted a cigarette. "It would appear, then," he said, "that whilst some minor
difficulties have been smoothed away, we remain face to face with the major problem: who is 'The Scorpion' and to
what end are his activities directed?"

Gaston Max shrugged his shoulders and smiled at Dr. Stuart.

"Let us see," he suggested, "what we really know about this 'Scorpion'. Let us make a brief survey of our
position in the matter. Let us take first what we have learned of him—if it is a 'him' with whom we have to deal—
from the strange experiences of Dr. Stuart. Without attaching too much importance to that episode five years ago on
the Wu-Men Bridge; perhaps he is not. We will talk about this one again presently.

"We come to the arrival on the scene of Zara el-Khala, also called Mlle. Dorian. She comes because of what I
have told to the scarred man from Paris, she comes to obtain that dangerous information which is to be sent to
Scotland Yard, she comes, in a word, from 'The Scorpion.' We have two links binding the poor one 'Le Balafre' to
'The Scorpion': (1) his intimacy with Miguel and those others with whom 'Scorpion' communicated by telephone; (2)
his possession of the golden ornament which lies there upon the table and which I took from his pocket. What can
we gather from the statement made to Dr. Stuart by Mlle. Dorian? Let us study this point for a moment.

"In the first place we can only accept her words with a certain skepticism. Her story may be nothing but a
fabrication. However, it is interesting because she claims to be the unwilling servant of a dreaded master. She lays
stress upon the fact that she is an Oriental and does not enjoy the same freedom as a European woman. This is
possible, up to a point. On the other hand she seems to enjoy not only freedom but every luxury. Therefore it may
equally well be a lie. Some slight colour is lent to her story by the extraordinary mode of life which she followed in
Paris. In the midst of Bohemianism she remained secluded as an odalisque in some harem garden of Stambul,
whether by her own will or by will of another we do not know. One little point her existence seems to strengthen:
that we are dealing with Easterns; for Zara el-Khala is partly of Eastern blood and her follower Chunda Lal is a
Hindu. _Eh bien._

"Consider the cowled man whose shadow Dr. Stuart has seen on two occasions: once behind the curtain of his
window and once cast by the moonlight across the lawn of his house. The man himself he has never seen. Now this
hooded man cannot have been 'Le Balafre', for 'Le Balafre' was already dead at the time of his first appearance. He
may be 'The Scorpion'!!"

Max paused impressively, looking around at those in the Commissioner's room.

"For a moment I return to the man of the Wu Men Bridge. The man of the Wu-Men Bridge was veiled and this
one is hooded! The man of the Wu-Men Bridge was known as 'The Scorpion,' and this one also is associated with a
scorpion. We will return yet again to this point in a moment.

"Is there something else which we may learn from the experiences of Dr. Stuart? Yes! We learn that 'The
Scorpion' suddenly decides that Dr. Stuart is dangerous, either because of his special knowledge (which would be
interesting) or because the 'Scorpion' believes that he has become acquainted with the contents of the sealed
envelope— which is not so interesting although equally dangerous for Dr. Stuart. 'The Scorpion' acts. He pays a
second visit, again accompanied by Chunda Lal, who seems to be a kind of watch-dog who not only guards the
person of Zara el-Kahla but who also howls when danger threatens the cowled man!

"And what is the weapon which the cowled man (who may be 'The Scorpion') uses to remove Dr. Stuart? It is a
frightful weapon, my friends; it is a novel and deadly weapon. It is a weapon of which science knows nothing—a
blue ray of the colour produced by a Mercury Vapour Lamp, according to Dr. Stuart who has seen it, and producing
an odour like that of a blast furnace according to myself, who smelled it! Or this odour might have been caused by
the fusing of the telephone; for the blue ray destroys such fragile things as telephones as easily as it destroys wood
and paper! There is even a large round hole burned through the clay at the back of the study grate and through the
brick wall behind it! Very well. 'The Scorpion' is a scientist and he is also the greatest menace to the world which the
world has ever been called upon to deal with. You agree with me?"

Inspector Dunbar heaved a great sigh, Stuart silently accepted a cigarette from the Assistant Commissioner's box
and the Assistant Commissioner spoke, slowly.

"I entirely agree with you, M. Max. Respecting this ray, as well as some one or two other _minutiae_, I have
made a short note which we will discuss when you have completed your admirably lucid survey of the case."

"These are the things, then, which we learn from the terrible experiences of Dr. Stuart. Placing these experiences
side by side with my own in Paris and in London—which we have already discussed in detail—we find that we have
to deal with an organisation—the object of which is unknown—comprising among its members both Europeans (Le
Balafre' was a Frenchman, I believe), cross-breeds such as Miguel and Zara el-Khala" (Stuart winced), "one
Algerian and a Hindu. It is then an organisation having ramifications throughout Europe, the East and, _mon Dieu!_—
where not? To continue. This little image"—he took up from the Commissioner's table the golden scorpion, and the
broken fragment of tail—"is now definitely recognized by Dr. Stuart—who is familiar with the work of Oriental
It may possibly be Tibetan," interrupted Stuart; "but it comes to the same thing."

"Very well," continued Max. "It is Chinese. We hope, very shortly, to identify a house situated somewhere within this red ink circle"--he placed his finger on a map of London which lay open on the table--"and which I know to be used as a meeting-place by members of this mysterious group. That circle, my friends, surrounds what is now known as 'Chinatown!' For the third time I return to the man of the Wu-Men Bridge; for the man of the Wu-Men Bridge was, apparently, a Chinese! Do I make myself clear?"

"Remarkably so," declared the Assistant Commissioner, taking a fresh cigarette. "Pray continue, M. Max."

"I will do so. One of my most important investigations, in which I had the honour and the pleasure to be associated with Inspector Dunbar, led to the discovery of a dangerous group controlled by a certain 'Mr. King'----"

"Ah!" cried Dunbar, his tawny eyes sparkling with excitement, "I was waiting for that!"

"I knew you would be waiting for it, Inspector. Your powers of deductive reasoning more and more are earning my respect. You recall that singular case? The elaborate network extending from London to Buenos Ayres, from Peking to Petrograd? Ah! a wonderful system. It was an opium syndicate, you understand,"--turning again to the Assistant Commissioner.

"I recall the case," replied the Commissioner, "although I did not hold my present appointment at the time. I believe there were unsatisfactory features?"

"There were," agreed Max. "We never solved the mystery of the identity of 'Mr. King,' and although we succeeded in destroying the enterprise I have since thought that we acted with undue precipitation."

"Yes," said Dunbar rapidly; "but there was that poor girl to be rescued, you will remember? We couldn't waste time."

"I agree entirely, Inspector. Our hands were forced. Yet, I repeat, I have since thought that we acted with undue precipitation. I will tell you why. Do you recall the loss--not explained to this day--of the plans of the Haley torpedo?"

"Perfectly," replied the Commissioner; and Dunbar also nodded affirmatively.

"Very well. A similar national loss was sustained about the same time by my own Government. I am not at liberty to divulge its exact nature, as in the latter case the loss never became known to the public. But the only member of the French Chamber who had seen this document to which I refer was a certain 'M. Blank,' shall we say? I believe also that I am correct in stating that the late Sir Brian Malpas was a member of the British Cabinet at the time that the Haley plans were lost?"

"That is correct," said the Assistant Commissioner, "but surely the honour of the late Sir Brian was above suspicion?"

"Quite," agreed Max; "so also was that of 'M. Blank.' But my point is this: Both 'M. Blank' and the late Sir Brian were clients of the opium syndicate!"

Dunbar nodded again eagerly.

"Hard work I had to hush it up," he said. "It would have finished his political career."

The Assistant Commissioner looked politely puzzled.

"It was generally supposed that Sir Brian Malpas was addicted to drugs," he remarked; "and I am not surprised to learn that he patronised this syndicate to which you refer. But----" he paused, smiling satanically. "Ah!" he added--"I see! I see!"

"You perceive the drift of my argument?" cried Max. "You grasp what I mean when I say that we were too hasty? This syndicate existed for a more terrible purpose than the promulgating of a Chinese vice; it had in its clutches men entrusted with national secrets, men of genius but slaves of a horrible drug. Under the influence of that drug, my friends, how many of those secrets may they not have divulged?"

His words were received in hushed silence.

"What became of those stolen plans?" he continued, speaking now in a very low voice. "In the stress of recent years has the Haley torpedo made its appearance so that we might learn to which Government the plans had been taken? No! the same mystery surrounds the fate of the information filched from the drugged brain of 'M. Blank.' In a word"-- he raised a finger dramatically--"someone is hoarding up those instruments of destruction! Who is it that collects such things and for what purpose does he collect them?"

Following another tense moment of silence:

"Let us have your own theory, M. Max," said the Assistant Commissioner.

Gaston Max shrugged his shoulders.

"It is not worthy of the name of a theory," he replied, "the surmise which I have made. But recently I found myself considering the fact that 'The Scorpion' might just conceivably be a Chinaman. Now, 'Mr. King,' we believe was a Chinaman, and 'Mr. King,' as I am now convinced, operated not for a personal but for a deeper, political
purpose. He stole the brains of genius and accumulated that genius. Is it not possible that these contrary operations may be part of a common plan?"

CHAPTER II
THE RED CIRCLE

"You are not by any chance," suggested Stuart, smiling slightly, "hinting at that defunct bogey, the 'Yellow Peril'?"

"Ah!" cried Max, "but certainly I am not! Do not misunderstand me. This group with which we are dealing is shown to be not of a national but of an international character. The same applied to the organisation of 'Mr. King.' But a Chinaman directed the one, and I begin to suspect that a Chinaman directs the other. No, I speak of no ridiculous 'Yellow Peril,' my friends. John Chinaman, as I have known him, is the whitest man breathing; but can you not imagine"--he dropped his voice again in that impressive way which was yet so truly Gallic--"can you not imagine a kind of Oriental society which like a great, a formidable serpent, lies hidden somewhere below that deceptive jungle of the East? These are troubled times. It is a wise state to-day that knows its own leaders. Can you not imagine a dreadful sudden menace, not of men and guns but of brains and capital?"

"You mean," said Dunbar slowly, "that 'The Scorpion' may be getting people out of the way who might interfere with this rising or invasion or whatever it is?"

"Just as 'Mr. King' accumulated material for it," interjected the Assistant Commissioner. "It is a bold conception, M. Max, and it raises the case out of the ordinary category and invests it with enormous international importance."

All were silent for a time, Stuart, Dunbar and the Commissioner watching the famous Frenchman as he sat there, arrayed in the latest fashion of Saville Row, yet Gallic to his finger-tips and in every gesture. It was almost impossible at times to credit the fact that a Parisian was speaking, for the English of Gaston Max was flawless except that he spoke with a faint American accent. Then, suddenly, a gesture, an expletive, would betray the Frenchman.

But such betrayals never escaped him when, in one of his inimitable disguises, he penetrated to the purlieu of Whitechapel, to the dens of Limehouse. Then he was the perfect Hooligan, as, mingling with the dangerous thieves of Paris, he was the perfect Apache. It was an innate gift of mimicry which had made him the greatest investigator of his day. He could have studied Chinese social life for six months and thereupon have become a mandarin whom his own servants would never have suspected to be a "foreign barbarian." It was pure genius, as opposed to the brilliant efficiency of Dunbar.

But in the heart of the latter, as he studied Gaston Max and realized the gulf that separated them, there was nothing but generous admiration of a master; yet Dunbar was no novice, for by a process of fine deductive reasoning he had come to the conclusion, as has appeared, that Gaston Max had been masquerading as a cabman and that the sealed letter left with Dr. Stuart had been left as a lure. By one of those tricks of fate which sometimes perfect the plans of men but more often destroy them, the body of "Le Balafre" had been so disfigured during the time that it had been buffeted about in the Thames that it was utterly unrecognizable and indescribable. But even the disk had not deceived Dunbar. He had seen in it another ruse of his brilliant confrere, and his orders to the keeper of the mortuary to admit no one without a written permit had been dictated by the conviction that Max wished the body to be mistaken for his own. In Inspector Dunbar, Gaston Max immediately had recognized an able colleague as Mrs. M'Gregor had recognized "a grand figure of a man."

The Assistant Commissioner broke the silence.

"There have been other cases," he said reflectively, "now that one considers the matter, which seemed to point to the existence of such a group or society as you indicate, M. Max, notably one with which, if I remember rightly, Inspector--"turning his dark eyes towards Dunbar--"Inspector Weymouth, late of this Branch, was associated?"

"Quite right, sir. It was his big case, and it got him a fine billet as Superintendent in Cairo if you remember?"

"Yes," mused the Assistant Commissioner--"he transferred to Egypt--a very good appointment, as you say. That, again, was before my term of office, but there were a number of very ghastly crimes connected with the case and it was more or less definitely established, I believe, that some extensive secret society did actually exist throughout the East, governed, I fancy, by a Chinaman."

"And from China," added Dunbar.

"Yes, yes, from China as you say, Inspector." He turned to Gaston Max. "Can it really be, M. Max, that we have to deal with an upcrop of some deeply-seated evil which resides in the Far East? Are all these cases, not the work of individual criminal but manifestations of a more sinister, a darker force?"

Gaston Max met his glance and Max's mouth grew very grim.

"I honestly believe so." he answered. "I have believed it for nearly two years--ever since the Grand Duke died. And now, you said, I remember, that you had made a note the nature of which you would communicate."

"Yes," replied the Assistant Commissioner--"a small point, but one which may be worthy of attention. This ray,
Dr. Stuart, which played such havoc in your study--do you know of anything approaching to it in more recent scientific devices?"

"Well," said Stuart, "it my be no more than a development of one of several systems, notably of that of the late Henrik Ericksen upon which he was at work at the time of his death."

"Exactly." The Assistant Commissioner smiled in his most Mephistophelean manner. "Of the late Henrik Ericksen, as you say."

He said no more for a moment and sat smoking and looking from face to face. Then:

"That is the subject of my note, gentlemen," he added. "The other _minutiae_ are of no immediate importance."

"_Non d'un p'tit bonhomme!_" whispered Gaston Max. "I see! You think that Ericksen had completed his experiments before he died, but that he never lived to give them to the world?"

The Assistant Commissioner waved one hand in the air so that he discoloration of the first and second fingers was very noticeable.

"It is for you to ascertain these points, M. Max," he said--"I only suggest. But I begin to share your belief that a series of daring and unusual assassinations has been taking place under the eyes of the police authorities of Europe. It can only be poison--an unknown poison, perhaps. We shall be empowered to exhume the body of the late Sir Frank Narcombe in a few days' time, I hope. His case puzzles me hopelessly. What obstacle did a surgeon offer to this hypothetical Eastern movement? On the other hand, what can have been filched from him before his death? The death of an inventor, a statesman, a soldier, can be variously explained by your 'Yellow' hypothesis, M. Max, but what of the death of a surgeon?"

Gaston Max shrugged, and his mobile mouth softened in a quaint smile.

"We have learned a little," he said, "and guessed a lot. Let us hope to guess more--and learn everything!"

"May I suggest," added Dunbar, "that we hear Sowerby's report, sir?"

"Certainly," agreed the Assistant Commissioner--"call Sergeant Sowerby."

A moment later Sergeant Sowerby entered, his face very red and his hair bristling more persistently than usual.

"Anything to report, Sowerby?" asked Dunbar.

"Yes, Inspector," replied Sowerby, in his Police Court manner;--he faced the Assistant Commissioner, "with your permission, sir."

He took out a note-book which appeared to be the twin of Dunbar's and consulted it, assuming an expression of profound reflection.

"In the first place, sir," he began, never raising his eyes from the page, "I have traced the cab sold on the hire-purchase system to a certain Charles _Mallett._"

"Ha, ha!" laughed Max breezily--"he calls me a hammer! It is not Mallett, Sergeant Sowerby--you have got too many _l's_ in that name; it is Malet and is called like one from the Malay States!"

"Oh," commented Sowerby, glancing up--"indeed. Very good, sir. The owner claims the balance of purchase money!"

Every one laughed at that, even the satanic Assistant Commissioner.

"Pay your debts, M. Max," he said. "You will bring the Service de Surete into bad repute! Carry on, Sergeant."

"This cab," continued Sowerby, when Dunbar interrupted him.

"Cut out the part about the cab, Sowerby," he said. "We've found that out from M. Max. Have you anything to report about the yellow car?"

"Yes," replied Sowerby, unperturbed, and turning over to the next page. "It was hired from Messrs. Wickers' garage, at Canning Town, by the week. The lady who hired it was a Miss Dorian, a French lady. She gave no reference, except that of the Savoy Hotel, where she was stopping. She paid a big deposit and had her own chauffeur, a colored man of some kind.

"Is it still in use by her?" snapped Dunbar eagerly.

"No, Inspector. She claimed her deposit this morning and said she was leaving London."

"The cheque?" cried Dunbar.

"Was cashed half an hour later."

"At what bank?"

"London County & Birmingham, Canning Town. Her own account at a Strand bank was closed yesterday. The details all concern milliners, jewellers, hotels and so forth. There's nothing there. I've been to the Savoy, of course."

"Yes!"

A lady named Dorian has had rooms there for six weeks, has dined there on several occasions, but was more often away than in the hotel."

"Visitors?"

"Never had any."
"She used to dine alone, then?"
"Always."
"In the public dining-room?"
"No. In her own room."
"Morbleu! " muttered Max. "It is she beyond doubt. I recognize her sociable habits!"
"Has she left now?" asked Dunbar.
"She left a week ago."
Sowerby closed his note-book and returned it to his pocket.
"Is that all you have to report, Sergeant?" asked the Assistant Commissioner.
"That's all, sir."
"Very good."
Sergeant Sowerby retired.
"Now, sir," said Dunbar, "I've got Inspector Kelly here. He looks after the Chinese quarter. Shall I call him?"
"Yes, Inspector."
Presently there entered a burly Irishman, bluff and good-humoured, a very typical example of the intelligent superior police officer, looking keenly around him.
"Ah, Inspector," the Assistant Commissioner greeted him--"we want your assistance in a little matter concerning the Chinese residential quarter. You know this district?"
"Certainly, sir. I know it very well."
"On this map"--the Assistant Commissioner laid a discoloured forefinger upon the map of London--"you will perceive that we have drawn a circle."
Inspector Kelly bent over the table.
"Yes, sir."
"Within that circle, which is no larger in circumference that a shilling as you observe, lies a house used by a certain group of people. It has been suggested to me that these people may be Chinese or associates of Chinese."
"Well, sir," said Inspector Kelly, smiling broadly, "considering the patch inside the circle I think it more than likely! Seventy-five or it may be eighty per cent of the rooms and cellars and attics in those three streets are occupied by Chinese."
"For your guidance, Inspector, we believe these people to be a dangerous gang of international criminals. Do you know of any particular house, or houses, likely to be used as a meeting-place by such a gang?"
Inspector Kelly scratched his close-cropped head.
"A woman was murdered just there, sir," he said, taking up a pen from the table and touching a point near the corner of Three Colt Street, "about a twelve-month ago. We traced the man--a Chinese sailor--to a house lying just about here." Again he touched the map. "It's a sort of little junk-shop with a ramshackle house attached, all cellars and rabbit-hutches, as you might say, overhanging a disused cutting which is filled at high tide. Opium is to be had there and card-playing goes on, and I won't swear that you couldn't get liquor. But it's well conducted as such dives go."
"Why is it not closed?" inquired the Assistant Commissioner, seizing an opportunity to air his departmental ignorance.
"Well, sir," replied Inspector Kelly, his eyes twinkling--"if we shut up all these places we should never know where to look for some of our regular customers! As I mentioned, we found the wanted Chinaman, three parts drunk, in one of the rooms."
"It's a sort of lodging-house, then?"
"Exactly. There's a moderately big room just behind the shop, principally used by opium-smokers, and a whole nest of smaller rooms above and below. Mind you, sir, I don't say this is the place you're looking for, but it's the most likely inside your circle."
"Who is the proprietor?"
"A retired Chinese sailor called Ah-Fang-Fu, but better known as 'Pidgin.' His establishment is called locally 'The Pidgin House.'"
"Ah." The Commissioner lighted a cigarette. "And you know of no other house which might be selected for such a purpose as I have mentioned?"
"I can't say I do, sir. I know pretty well all the business affairs of that neighbourhood, and none of the houses inside your circle have changed hands during the past twelve months. Between ourselves, sir, nearly all the property in the district belongs to Ah-Fang-Fu, and anything that goes on in Chinatown _he_ knows about!"
"Ah, I see. Then in any event he is the man we want to watch?"
"Well, sir, you ought to keep an eye on his visitors, I should say."
"I am obliged to you, Inspector," said the courteous Assistant Commissioner, "for your very exact information. If necessary I shall communicate with you again. Good-day."

"Good-day, sir," replied the Inspector. "Good-day, gentlemen."

He went out.

Gaston Max, who had diplomatically remained in the background throughout this interview, now spoke.

"Pardieu! but I have been thinking," he said. "Although 'The Scorpion,' as I hope, believes that that troublesome Charles Malet is dead, he may also wonder if Scotland Yard has secured from Dr. Stuart's fire any fragments of the information sealed in the envelope! What does it mean, this releasing of the yellow car, closing of the bank account and departure from the Savoy?"

"It means flight!" cried Dunbar, jumping violently to his feet. "By gad, sir!" he turned to the Assistant Commissioner--"the birds may have flown already!"

The Assistant Commissioner leaned back in his chair.

"I have sufficient confidence in M. Max," he said, "to believe that, having taken the responsibility of permitting this dangerous group to learn that they were under surveillance, he has good reason to suppose that they have not slipped through our fingers."

Gaston Max bowed.

"It is true," he replied, and from his pocket he took a slip of flimsy paper. "This code message reached me as I was about to leave my hotel. The quadroon, Miguel, left Paris last night and arrived in London this morning----"

"He was followed?" cried Dunbar.

"But certainly. He was followed to Limehouse, and he was definitely seen to enter the establishment described to us by Inspector Kelly!"

"Gad!" said Dunbar--"then _someone_ is still there?"

"Someone, as you say, is still there," replied Max. "But everything points to the imminent departure of this someone. Will you see to it, Inspector, that not a rat--_pardieu_ not a little mouse--is allowed to slip out of our red circle to-day. For to-night we shall pay a friendly visit to the house of Ah-Fang-Fu, and I should wish all the company to be present."

CHAPTER III
MISKA'S STORY

Stuart returned to his house in a troubled frame of mind. He had refrained so long from betraying the circumstances of his last meeting with Mlle. Dorian to the police authorities that this meeting now constituted a sort of guilty secret, a link binding him to the beautiful accomplice of "The Scorpion"--to the dark-eyed servant of the uncanny cowled thing which had sought his life by strange means. He hugged this secret to his breast, and the pain of it afforded him a kind of savage joy.

In his study he found a Post Office workman engaged in fitting a new telephone. As Stuart entered the man turned.

"Good-afternoon, sir," he said, taking up the destroyed instrument from the litter of flux, pincers and screw drivers lying upon the table. "If it's not a rude question, how on earth did _this_ happen?"

Stuart laughed uneasily.

"It got mixed up with an experiment which I was conducting," he replied evasively. The man inspected the headless trunk of the instrument. "It seems to be fused, as though the top of it had been in a blast furnace," he continued. "Experiments of that sort are a bit dangerous outside a proper laboratory, I should think."

"They are," agreed Stuart. "But I have no facilities here, you see, and I was--er--compelled to attempt the experiment. I don't intend to repeat it."

"That's lucky," murmured the man, dropping the instrument into a carpet-bag. "If you do, it will cost you a tidy penny for telephones!"

Walking out towards the dispensary, Stuart met Mrs. M'Gregor.

"A Post Office messenger brought this letter for you, Mr. Keppel, just the now," she said, handing Stuart a sealed envelope.

He took the envelope from her hand, and turned quickly away. He felt that he had changed colour. For it was addressed in the handwriting of ... Mlle. Dorian!

"Thank you, Mrs. M'Gregor," he said and turned into the dining-room.

Mrs. M'Gregor proceeded about her household duties, and as her footsteps receded, Stuart feverishly tore open the envelope. That elusive scent of jasmine crept to his nostrils. In the envelope was a sheet of thick note-paper (having the top cut off evidently in order to remove the printed address), upon which the following singular message was written:
"Before I go away there is something I want to say to you. You do not trust me. It is not wonderful that you do not. But I swear that I only want to save you from a _great_ danger. If you will promise not to tell the police anything of it, I will meet you at six o'clock by the Book Stall at Victoria Station--on the Brighton side. If you agree you will wear something white in your button-hole. If not you cannot find me there. Nobody ever sees me again."

There was no signature, but no signature was necessary.

Stuart laid the letter on the table, and began to pace up and down the room. His heart was beating ridiculously. His self-contempt was profound. But he could not mistake his sentiments.

His duty was plain enough. But he had failed in it once, and even as he strode up and down the room, already he knew that he must fail again. He knew that, rightly or wrongly, he was incapable of placing this note in the hands of the police ... and he knew that he should be at Victoria Station at six o'clock.

He would never have believed himself capable of becoming accessory to a series of crimes--for this was what his conduct amounted to; he had thought that sentiment no longer held any meaning for him. Yet the only excuse which he could find wherewith to solace himself was that this girl had endeavoured to save him from assassination. Weighed against the undoubted fact that she was a member of a dangerous criminal group what was it worth? If the supposition of Gaston Max was correct, "The Scorpion" had at least six successful murders to his credit, in addition to the attempt upon his (Stuart's) life and that of "Le Balafre", upon the life of Gaston Max.

It was an accomplice of this nameless horror called "The Scorpion" with whom at six o'clock he had a tryst, whom he was protecting from justice, by the suppression of whose messages to himself he was adding difficulties to the already difficult task of the authorities!

Up and down he paced, restlessly, every now and again glancing at a clock upon the mantelpiece. His behavior he told himself was contemptible.

Yet, at a quarter to six, he went out--and seeing a little cluster of daisies growing amongst the grass bordering the path, he plucked one and set it in his button-hole!

A few minutes before the hour he entered the station and glanced sharply around at the many groups scattered about in the neighbourhood of the bookstall. There was no sign of Mlle. Dorian. He walked around the booking office without seeing her and glanced into the waiting-room. Then, looking up at the station clock, he saw that the hour had come, and as he stood there staring upward he felt a timid touch upon his shoulder.

He turned--and she was standing by his side!

She was Parisian from head to foot, simply but perfectly gowned. A veil hung from her hat and half concealed her face, but could not hide her wonderful eyes nor disguise the delightful curves of her red lips. Stuart automatically raised his hat, and even as he did so wondered what she should have said and done had she suddenly found Gaston Max standing at his elbow! He laughed shortly.

"You are angry with me," said Mlle. Dorian, and Stuart thought that her quaint accent was adorable. "Or are you angry with yourself for seeing me?"

"I am angry with myself," he replied, "for being so weak."

"Is it so weak," she said, rather tremulously, "not to judge a woman by what she seems to be and not to condemn her before you hear what she has to say? If that is weak, I am glad; I think it is how a man should be."

Her voice and her eyes completed the spell, and Stuart resigned himself without another struggle to this insane infatuation.

"We cannot very well talk here," he said. "Suppose we go into the hotel and have late tea, Mlle. Dorian."

"Yes. Very well. But please do not call me that. It is not my name."

Stuart was on the point of saying, "Zara el-Khala then," but checked himself in the nick of time. He might hold communication with the enemy, but at least he would give away no information.

"I am called Miska," she added. "Will you please call me Miska?"

"Of course, if you wish," said Stuart, looking down at her as she walked by his side and wondering what he would do when he had to stand up in Court, look at Miska in the felon's dock and speak words which would help to condemn her--perhaps to death, at least to penal servitude! He shuddered.

"Have I said something that displeases you?" she asked, resting a white-gloved hand on his arm. "I am sorry."

"No, no," he assured her. "But I was thinking--I cannot help thinking ..."

"How wicked I am?" she whispered.

"How lovely you are!" he said hotly, "and how maddening it is to remember that you are an accomplice of criminals!"

"Oh," she said, and removed her hand, but not before he had felt how it trembled. They were about to enter the tea-room when she added: "Please don't say that until I have told you why I do what I do."

Obeying a sudden impulse, he took her hand and drew it close under his arm.

"No," he said; "I won't. I was a brute, Miska. Miska means 'musk', surely?"
"Yes." She glanced up at him timidly. "Do you think it a pretty name?"

"Very," he said, laughing.

Underlying the Western veneer was the fascinating naivete of the Eastern woman, and Miska had all the suave grace, too, which belongs to the women of the Orient, so that many admiring glances followed her charming figure as she crossed the room to a vacant table.

"Now," said Stuart, when he had given an order to the waiter, "what do you want to tell me? Whatever it may be, I am all anxiety to hear it. I promise that I will only act upon anything you may tell me in the event of my life, or that of another, being palpably endangered by my silence."

"Very well. I want to tell you," replied Miska, "why I stay with Fo-Hi."

"Who is Fo-Hi?"

"I do not know!"

"What!" said Stuart. "I am afraid I don't understand you."

"If I speak in French will you be able to follow what I say?"

"Certainly. Are you more at ease with French?"

"Yes," replied Miska, beginning to speak in the latter language. "My mother was French, you see, and although I can speak in English fairly well I cannot yet _think_ in English. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly. So perhaps you will now explain to whom you refer when you speak of Fo-Hi."

Miska glanced apprehensively around her, bending further forward over the table.

"Let me tell you from the beginning," she said in a low voice, "and then you will understand. It must not take me long. You see me as I am to-day because of a dreadful misfortune that befell me when I was fifteen years old."

"My father was _Wali_ of Aleppo, and my mother, his third wife, was a Frenchwoman, a member of a theatrical company which had come to Cairo, where he had first seen her. She must have loved him, for she gave up the world, embraced Islam and entered his _harem_ in the great house on the outskirts of Aleppo. Perhaps it was because he, too, was half French, that they were mutually attracted. My father's mother was a Frenchwoman also, you understand.

"Until I was fifteen years of age, I never left the _harem_, but my mother taught me French and also a little English; and she prevailed upon my father not to give me in marriage so early as is usual in the East. She taught me to understand the ways of European women, and we used to have Paris journals and many books come to us regularly. Then an awful pestilence visited Aleppo. People were dying in the mosques and in the streets, and my father decided to send my mother and myself and some others of the _harem_ to his brother's house in Damaskus.

"Perhaps you will think that such things do not happen in these days, and particularly to members of the household of a chief magistrate, but I can only tell you what is true. On the second night of our journey a band of Arabs swept down upon the caravan, overpowered the guards, killing them all, and carried of everything of value which we had. Me, also, they carried off--me and one other, a little Syrian girl, my cousin. Oh!" she shuddered violently--"even now I can sometimes hear the shrieks of my mother ... and I can hear, also, the way they suddenly ceased, those cries ..."

Stuart looked up with a start to find a Swiss waiter placing tea upon the table. He felt like rubbing his eyes. He had been dragged rudely back from the Syrian desert to the prosaic realities of a London hotel.

"Perhaps," continued Miska, "you will think that we were ill-treated, but it was not so. No one molested us. We were given every comfort which desert life can provide, servant to wait upon us and plenty of good food. After several weeks' journeying we came to a large city, having many minarets and domes glimmering in the moonlight; for we entered at night. Indeed, we always travelled at night. At the time I had no idea of the name of this city but I learned afterwards that it was Mecca.

"As we proceeded through the streets, the Assyrian girl and I peeped out through the little windows of the _shibriyeh_--which is a kind of tent on the back of a camel--in which we travelled, hoping to see some familiar face or someone to whom we could appeal. But there seemed to be scarcely anyone visible in the streets, although lights shone out from many windows, and the few men we saw seemed to be anxious to avoid us. In fact, several ran down side turnings as the camels approached.

"We stopped before the gate of a large house which was presently opened, and the camels entered the courtyard. We descended, and I saw that a number of small apartments surrounded the courtyard in the manner of a _caravanseria_. Then, suddenly, I saw something else, and I knew why we had been treated with such consideration on the journey; I knew into what hand I had fallen--I knew that I was in the house of a _slave-dealer_!"

"Good heavens!" muttered Stuart--"this is almost incredible."

"I knew you would doubt what I had to tell you," declared Miska plaintively; "but I solemnly swear what I tell you is the truth. Yes, I was in the house of a slave-dealer, and on the very next day, because I was proficient in languages, in music and in dancing, and also because--according to their Eastern ideas--I was pretty, the dealer,
Mohammed Abd-el-Bali ... offered me for sale."

She stopped, lowering her eyes and flushing hotly, then continued with hesitancy.

"In a small room which I can never forget I was offered the only indignity which I had been called upon to suffer
since my abduction. I was _exhibited_ to prospective purchasers."

"As she spoke the words, Miska's eyes flashed passionately and her hand, which lay on the table, trembled. Stuart silently reached across and rested his own upon it.

"There were all kinds of girls," Miska continued, "black and brown and white, in the adjoining rooms, and some
of them were singing and some dancing, whilst others wept. Four different visitors inspected me critically, two of
them being agents for royal _harems_ and the other two--how shall I say it?--wealthy connoisseurs. But the price
asked by Mohammed Abd-el-Bali was beyond the purses of all except one of the agents. He had indeed settled
the bargain, when the singing and dancing and shouting--every sound it seemed--ceased about me ... and into the
little room in which I crouched amongst perfumed cushions at the feet of the two men, walked Fo-Hi."

CHAPTER IV

MISKA'S STORY _(concluded)_

"Of course, I did not know that this was his name at the time; I only knew that a tall Chinaman had entered the
room--and that his face was entirely covered by a green veil."

Stuart started, but did not interrupt Miska's story.

"This veil gave him in some way a frightfully malign and repellent appearance. As he stood in the doorway
looking down I seemed to _feel_ his gaze passing over me like a flame, although of course I could not see his eyes. For
a moment he stood there looking at me; and much as his presence had affected me, its affect upon the slave-
dealer and my purchaser was extraordinary. They seemed to be stricken dumb. Suddenly the Chinaman spoke, in
perfect Arabic. 'Her price?'

"Mohammed Abd-el-Bali, standing trembling before him, replied:

"'Miska is already sold, lord, but----'

"'Her price?' repeated Fo-Hi, in the same hard metallic voice and without the slightest change of
intonation.

"The _harem_ agent who had bought me now said, his voice shaking so that the words were barely audible:

"'I give her up, Mohammed--I give her up. Who am I to dispute with the Mandarin Fo-Hi;' and performing an
abject obeisance he backed out of the room.

"At the same moment, Mohammed, whose knees were trembling so that they seemed no longer capable of
supporting him, addressed the Chinaman.

"'Accept the maiden as an unworthy gift;' he began--

"'Her price?' repeated Fo-Hi.

"Mohammed, whose teeth had begun to chatter, asked him twice as much as he had agreed to accept from the
other, Fo-Hi clapped his hands, and a fierce-eyed Hindu entered the room.

"Fo-Hi addressed him in a language which I did not understand, although I have since learned that it was
Hindustani, and the Indian from a purse which he carried counted out the amount demanded by the dealer and
placed the money upon a little inlaid table which stood in the room. Fo-Hi gave him some brief order, turned and
walked out of the room. I did not see him again for four years--that is until my nineteenth birthday.

"I know that you are wondering about many things and I will try to make some of them clear to you. You are
wondering, no doubt, how such a trade as I have described is carried on in the East to-day almost under the eyes of
European Governments. Now I shall surprise you. When I was taken from the house of the slave-dealer, in charge of
Chunda Lal--for this was the name of the Hindu--do you know where I was carried to? I will tell you: to _Cairo!_"

"Cairo!" cried Stuart--then, perceiving that he had attracted attention by speaking so loudly, he lowered his
voice. "Do you mean to tell me that you were taken as a _slave_ to Cairo?"

Miska smiled--and her smile was the taunting smile of the East, which is at once a caress and an invitation.

"You think, no doubt, that there are no slaves in Cairo!" she said. "So do most people, and so did I--once. I
learned better. There are palaces in Cairo, I assure you, in which there are many slaves. I myself lived in such a
palace for four years, and I was not the only slave there. What do British residents and French residents know of the
inner domestic life of their Oriental neighbours? Are they ever admitted to the _harem?_ And the slaves--are they
ever admitted outside the walls of the palace? Sometimes, yes, but never alone!

"By slow stages, following the ancient caravan routes, and accompanied by an extensive retinue of servants in
charge of Chunda Lal, we came to Cairo; and one night, approaching the city from the north-east and entering by the
Bab en-Nasr, I was taken to the old palace which was to be my prison for four years. How I passed those four years
has no bearing upon the matters which I have to tell you, but I lived the useless, luxurious life of some Arabian
princess, my lightest wish anticipated and gratified; nothing was denied me, except freedom.
Then, one day--it was actually my nineteenth birthday--Chunda Lal presented himself and told me that I was to have an interview with Fo-Hi. Hearing these words, I nearly swooned, for a hundred times during the years of my strange luxurious captivity I had awakened trembling in the night, thinking that the figure of the awful veiled Chinaman had entered the room.

You must understand that having spent my childhood in a harem, the mode of life which I was compelled to follow in Cairo was not so insufferable as it must have been for a European woman. Neither was my captivity made unduly irksome. I often drove through the European quarters, always accompanied by Chunda Lal, and closely veiled, and I regularly went shopping in the bazaars--but never alone. The death of my mother--and later that of my father, of which Chunda Lal had told me--were griefs that time had dulled. But the horror of Fo-Hi was one which lived with me, day and night.

To a wing of the palace kept closely locked, and which I had never seen opened, I was conducted by Chunda Lal. There, in a room of a kind with which was part library and part mandarah, part museum and part laboratory, I found the veiled man seated at a great littered table. As I stood trembling before him he raised a long yellow hand and waved to Chunda Lal to depart. When he obeyed and I heard the door close I could scarcely repress a shriek of terror.

For what seemed an interminable time he sat watching me. I dared not look at him, but again I felt his gaze passing over me like a flame. Then he began to speak, in French, which he spoke without a trace of accent.

He told me briefly that my life of idleness had ended and that a new life of activity in many parts of the world was about to commence. His manner was quite unemotional, neither harsh nor kindly, his metallic voice conveyed no more than the bare meaning of the words which he uttered. When, finally, he ceased speaking, he struck a gong which hung from a corner of the huge table, and Chunda Lal entered.

"Fo-Hi addressed a brief order to him in Hindustani--and a few moments later a second Chinaman walked slowly into the room."

Miska paused, as if to collect her ideas, but continued almost immediately.

"He wore a plain yellow robe and had a little black cap on his head. His face, his wonderful evil face I can never forget, and his eyes--I fear you will think I exaggerate--but his eyes were green as emeralds! He fixed them upon me.

"'This,' said Fo-Hi, 'is Miska.'

"The other Chinaman continued to regard me with those dreadful eyes; then:

"'You have chosen well.' he said, turned and slowly went out again.

"I thank God that I have never seen him since, for his dreadful face haunted my dreams for long afterwards. But I have learned of him, and I know that next to Fo-Hi he is the most dangerous being in the known world. He has invented horrible things--poisons and instruments, which I cannot describe because I have never seen them; but I have seen... some of their effects."

She paused, overcome with the horror of her memories.

"What is the name of this other man?" asked Stuart eagerly. Miska glanced at him rapidly.

"Oh, do not ask me questions, please!" she pleaded. "I will tell you all I can, all I dare; what I do not tell you I cannot tell you--and this is one of the things I dare not tell. He is a Chinese scientist and, I have heard, the greatest genius in the whole world, but I can say no more--yet."

"Is he still alive--this man?"

"I do not know that. If he is alive, he is in China--at some secret palace in the province of Ho-Nan, which is the headquarters of what is called the 'Sublime Order.' I have never been there, but there are Europeans there, as well as Orientals."

"What! in the company of these fiends!"

"It is useless to ask me--oh! indeed, I would tell you if I could, but I cannot! Let me go on from the time when I saw Fo-Hi in Cairo. He told me that I was a member of an organization dating back to remote antiquity which was destined to rule all the races of mankind--the Celestial age he called their coming triumph. Something which they had lacked in order to achieve success had been supplied by the dreadful man who had entered the room and expressed his approval of me.

"For many years they had been at work in Europe, secretly, as well as in the East. I understood that they had acquired a quantity of valuable information of some kind by means of a system of opium-houses situated in the principal capitals of the world and directed by Fo-Hi and a number of Chinese assistants. Fo-Hi had remained in China most of the time, but had paid occasional visits to Europe. The other man--the monster with the black skull cap--had been responsible for the conduct of the European enterprises."

"Throughout this interview," interrupted Stuart, forgetful of the fact that Miska had warned him of the futility of asking questions, "and during others which you must have had with Fo-Hi, did you never obtain a glimpse of his
"Never! No one has ever seen his face! I know that his eyes are a brilliant and unnatural yellow colour, but otherwise I should not know him if I saw him unveiled, to-morrow. Except," she added, "by a sense of loathing which his presence inspires in me. But I must hurry. If you interrupt me, I shall not have time.

"From that day in Cairo--oh! how can I tell you! I began the life of an adventuress! I do not deny it. I came here to confess it to you. I went to New York, to London, to Paris, to Petrograd; I went all over the world. I had beautiful dresses, jewels, admiration--all that women live for! And in the midst of it all mine was the life of the cloister; no nun could be more secluded!

"I see the question in your eyes--why did I do it? Why did I lure men into the clutches of Fo-Hi? For this is what I did; and when I have failed, I have been punished."

Stuart shrank from her.

"You confess," he said hoarsely, "that you knowing lured men to _death?_"

"Ah, no!" she whispered, looking about her fearfully--"never! never! I swear it--never!"

"Then"--he stared at her blankly--"I do not understand you!"

"I dare not make it clearer--now: I dare not--dare not! But _believe_ me! Oh, please, please," she pleaded, her soft voice dropping to a whisper--"believe me! Oh, please, please," she pleaded, her soft voice dropping to a whisper--"believe me! If you know what I risked to tell you so much, you would be more merciful. A horror which cannot be described"--again she shuddered--"will fall upon me if _he_ ever suspects! You think me young and full of life, with all the world before me. You do not know. I am, literally, _already dead!_ Oh! I have followed a strange career. I have danced in a Paris theatre and I have sold flowers in Rome; I have had my box at the Opera and I have filled opium pipes in a den at San Francisco! But never, never have I lured a man to his death. And through it all, from first to last, no man has so much as kissed my finger-tips!

"At a word, at a sign, I have been compelled to go from Monte Carlo to Buenos Ayres; at another sign from there to Tokio! Chunda Lal has guarded me as only the women of the East are guarded. Yet, in his fierce way, he has always tried to befriend me, he has always been faithful. But ah! I shrink from him many times, in horror, because I know _what_ he is! But I may not tell you. Look! Chunda Lal has never been out of sound of this whistle"--she drew a little silver whistle from her dress--"for a moment since that day when he came into the house of the slave-dealer in Mecca, except----"

And now, suddenly, a wave of glorious colour flooded her beautiful face and swiftly she lowered her eyes, replacing the little whistle. Stuart's rebellious heart leapt madly, for whatever he might think of her almost incredible story, that sweet blush was no subterfuge, no product of acting.

"You almost drive me mad," he said in low voice, resembling the tones of repressed savagery. "You tell me so much, but withhold so much that I am more bewildered than ever. I can understand your helplessness in an Eastern household, but why should you obey the behests of this veiled monster in London, in New York, in Paris?"

She did not raise her eyes.

"I dare not tell you. But I dare not disobey him."

"Who is he?"

"No one knows, because no one has ever seen his face! Ah! you are laughing! But I swear before heaven I speak the truth! Indoors he wears a Chinese dress and a green veil. In passing from place to place, which he always does at night, he is attired in a kind of cowl which only exposes his eyes----"

"But how _can_ such a fantastic being travel?"

"By road, on land, and in a steam yacht, at sea. Why should _you_ doubt my honesty?" She suddenly raises her glance to Stuart's face and he saw that she had grown pale. "I have risked what I cannot tell you, and more than once--for you! I tried to call you on the telephone on the night that he set out from the house near Hampton Court to kill you, but I could get no reply, and----"

"Stop!" said Stuart, almost too exited to note at the time that she had betrayed a secret. "It was _you_ who rang up that night?"

"Yes. Why did you not answer?"

"Never mind. Your call saved my life. I shall not forget." He looked into her eyes. "But can you not tell me what it all means? What or whom is 'The Scorpion'?"

She flinched.

"The Scorpion is--a passport. See." From a little pocket in the coat of her costume she drew out a golden scorpion! "I have one." She replaced it hurriedly. "I dare not, dare not tell you more. But this much I had to tell you, because ... I shall never see you again!"

"What?"

"A French detective, a very clever man, learned a lot about 'The Scorpion' and he followed one of the members to England. This man killed him. Oh, I know I belong to a horrible organization!" she cried bitterly. "But I tell you I
am helpless and _I_ have never aided in such a thing. You should know that! But all he found out he left with you—and I do not know if I succeeded in destroying it. I do not ask you. I do not care. But I leave England to-night. Good-bye."

She suddenly stood up. Stuart rose also. He was about to speak when Miska's expression changed. A look of terror crept over her face, and hastily lowering her veil she walked rapidly away from the table and out of the room!

Many curious glances followed the elegant figure to the door. Then those glances were directed upon Stuart.

Flushed with embarrassment, he quickly settled the bill and hurried out of the hotel. Gaining the street, he looked eagerly right and left.

But Miska had disappeared!

CHAPTER V
THE HEART OF CHUNDA LAL

Dusk had drawn a grey mantle over the East-End streets when Miska, discharging the cab in which she had come from Victoria, hurried furtively along a narrow alley tending Thamesward. Unconsciously she crossed a certain line—a line invisible except upon a map of London which lay upon the table of the Assistant Commissioner in New Scotland Yard—the line forming the "red circle" of M. Gaston Max. And, crossing this line, she became the focus upon which four pairs of watchful eyes were directed.

Arriving at the door of a mean house some little distance removed from that of Ah-Fang-Fu, Miska entered, for the door was open, and disappeared from the view of the four detectives who were watching the street. Her heart was beating rapidly. For she had thought, as she had stood up to leave the restaurant, that the fierce eyes of Chunda Lal had looked in through the glass panel of one of the doors.

This gloomy house seemed to swallow her up, and the men who watched wondered more and more what had become of the elegant figure, grotesque in such a setting, which had vanished into the narrow doorway—and which did not reappear. Even Inspector Kelly, who knew so much about Chinatown, did not know that the cellars of the three houses left and right of Ah-Fang-Fu's were connected by a series of doors planned and masked with Chinese cunning.

Half an hour after Miska had disappeared into the little house near the corner, the hidden door in the damp cellar below "The Pidgin House" opened and a bent old woman, a ragged, grey-haired and dirty figure, walked slowly up the rickety wooden stair and entered a bare room behind and below the shop and to the immediate left of the den of the opium-smoker. This room, which was windowless, was lighted by a tin paraffin lamp hung upon a nail in the dirty plaster wall. The floor presented a litter of straw, paper and broken packing-cases. Two steps led up to a second door, a square heavy door of great strength. The old woman, by means of a key which she carried, was about to open this door when it was opened from the other side.

Lowering his head as he came through, Chunda Lal descended. He wore European clothes and a white turban. Save for his ardent eyes and the handsome fanaticical face of the man, he might have passed for a lascar. He turned and half closed the door. The woman shrank from him, but extending a lean brown hand he gripped her arm. His eyes glittered feverishly.

"So!" he said, "we are all leaving England? Five of the Chinese sail with the P. and O. boat to-night. Ali Khan goes to-morrow, and Rama Dass, with Miguel, and the _Andaman_. I meet them at Singapore. But you?"

The woman raised her finger to her lips, glancing fearfully towards the open door. But the Hindu, drawing her nearer, repeated with subdued fierceness:

"I ask it again—but _you_?"

"I do not know," muttered the woman, keeping her head lowered and moving in the direction of the steps. But Chunda Lal intercepted her.

"Stop!" he said—"not yet are you going. There is something I have to speak to you."

"Ssh!" she whispered, half turning and pointing up toward the door.

"Those!" said the Hindu contemptuously—"the poor slaves of the black smoke! Ah! they are floating in their dream paradise; they have no ears to hear, no eyes to see!" He grasped her wrist again. "They contest for shadow smiles and dream kisses, but Chunda Lal have eyes to see and ears to hear. He dream, too but of lips more sweet than honey, of a voice like the Song of the Daood! _Inshalla!_"

Suddenly he clutched the grey hair of the bent old woman and with one angry jerk snatched it from her head—for it was a cunning wig. Disorderèd, hair gleaming like bronze waves in the dim lamplight was revealed and the great dark eyes of Miska looked out from the artificially haggard face—eyes wide open and fearful.

"Bend not that beautiful body so," whispered Chunda Lal, "that is straight and supple as the willow branch. O, Miska!—his voice trembled emotionally and he that had been but a moment since so fierce stood abashed before her—"for you I become as the meanest and the lowest; for you I die!"

Miska started back from him as a muffled outcry sounded in the room beyond the half-open door. Chunda Las
started also, but almost immediately smiled—and his smile was tender as a woman's.

"It is the voice of the black smoke that speaks, Miska. We are alone. Those are dead men speaking from their tombs."

"Ah-Fang-Fu is in the shop," whispered Miska.

"And there he remain."

"But what of ... _him!_
Miska pointed toward the eastern wall of the room in which they stood.
Chunda Lal clenched his hands convulsively and turned his eyes in the same direction.

"It is of _him_," he replied in a voice of suppressed vehemence, "it is of _him_, I would speak." He bent close to Miska's ear. "In the creek, below the house, is lying the motor-boat. I go to-day to bring it down for him. He goes to-night to the other house up the river. To-morrow I am gone. Only you remaining."

"Yes, yes. He also leaves England to-morrow."

"And you?"

"I go with him," she whispered.
Chunda Lal glanced apprehensively toward the door. Then:

"Do not go with him!" he said, and sought to draw Miska into his arms. "O, light of my eyes, do not go with him!"

Miska repulsed him, but not harshly.

"No, no, it is no good, Chunda Lal. I cannot hear you."

"You think"—the Hindu's voice was hoarse with emotion—"that _he_ will trace you—and kill you?"

"Trace me!" exclaimed Miska with sudden scorn. "Is it necessary for him to trace me? Am I not already dead except for _him_! _Would_ I be his servant, his lure, his slave for one little hour, for one short minute, if my life was my own!"

Beads of perspiration gleamed upon the brown forehead of the Hindu, and his eyes turned from the door to the eastern wall and back again to Miska. He was torn by conflicting desires, but suddenly came resolution.

"Listen, then." His voice was barely audible. "If I tell you that your life _is_ your own—if I reveal to you a secret which I learned in the house of Abdul Rozan in Cairo—--"

Miska watched him with eyes in which a new, a wild expression was dawning.

"If I tell you that life and not death awaits you, will you come away to-night, and we sail for India to-morrow! Ah! I have money! Perhaps I am rich as well as—someone; perhaps I can buy you the robes of a princess"—he drew her swiftly to him—"and cover those white arms with jewels."

Miska shrank from him.

"All this means nothing," she said. "How can the secret of Abdul Rozan help me to live! And you—you will be dead before I die!—yes! One little hour after _he_ finds out that I go!"

"Listen again," hissed Chunda Lal intensely. "Promise me, and I will open for you a gate of life. For you, Miska, I will do it, and we shall be free. _He_ will never find out. He shall not be living to find out!"

"No, no, Chunda Lal," she moaned. "You have been my only friend, and I have tried to forget ..."

"I will forsake Kali forever," he said fervently, "and shed no blood for all my life! I will live for you alone and be your slave."

"It is no good. I cannot, Chunda Lal, I cannot."

"Miska!" he pleaded tenderly.

"No, no," she repeated, her voice quivering—"I cannot ... Oh! do not ask it; I cannot!"

She picked up the hideous wig, moving towards the door. Chunda Lal watched her, clenching his hands; and his eyes, which had been so tender, grew fierce.

"Ah!" he cried—"and it may be I know a reason!"

She stopped, glancing back at him.

"It may be," he continued, and his repressed violence was terrible, "it may be that I, whose heart is never sleeping, have seen and heard! One night"—he crept towards her—"one night when I cry the warning that the Doctor Sahib returns to his house, you do not come! He goes in at the house and you remain. But at last you come, and I see in your eyes—--"

"Oh!" breathed Miska, watching him fearfully.

"Do I not see it in your eyes now! Never before have I thought so until you go to that house, never before have you escaped from my care as here in London. Twice again I have doubted, and because there was other work to do I have been helpless to find out. _To-night_"—he stood before her, glaring madly into her face—"I think so again—that you have gone to him—--"

"Oh, Chunda Lal!" cried Miska piteously and extended her hands towards him. "No, no—do not say it!"
"So!" he whispered—"I understand! You risk so much for him—for me you risk nothing! If he--the Doctor Sahib—say to you: 'Come with me, Miska—'"

"No, no! Can I never have one friend in all the world! I hear you call, Chunda Lal, but I am burning the envelope and--Doctor Stuart-- finds me. I am trapped. You know it so.

"I know you say so. And because he--Fo-Hi--is not sure and because of the piece of the scorpion which you find there, we go to that house-- _he_ and I--and we fail in what we go for." Chunda Lal's hand dropped limply to his sides. "Ah! I cannot understand, Miska. If we are not sure then, are we sure _now?_ It may be"—he bent towards her--"we are trapped!"

"Oh, what do you mean?"

"We do not know how much they read of what he had written. Why do we wait?"

_"He_ has some plan, Chunda Lal," replied Miska wearily. "Does he ever fail?"

Her words rekindled the Hindu's ardour; his eyes lighted up anew.

"I tell you his plan," he whispered tensely. "Oh! you shall hear me! He watch you grow from a little lovely child, as he watch his death-spiders and his grey scorpions grow! He tend you and care for you and make you perfect, and he plan for you as he plan for this other creatures. Then, he see what I see, that you are not only his servant but also a woman and that you have a woman's heart. He learn—who think he knows all—that he, too, is not yet a spirit but only a man, and have a man's heart, a man's blood, a man's longings! It is because of the Doctor Sahib that he learn it----"

He grasped Miska again, but she struggled to elude him. "Oh, let me go!" she pleaded. "It is madness you speak!"

"It is madness, yes—_for you!_ Always I have watched, always I have waited; and I also have seen you bloom like a rose in the desert. To-night I am here—watching ... and _he_ knows it! Tomorrow I am gone! Do you stay, for-_him_?"

"Oh," she whispered fearfully, "it cannot be."

"You say true when you say I have been your only friend, Miska. To-morrow _he_ plan that you have no friend."

He released her, and slowly, from the sleeve of his coat, slipped into view the curved blade of a native knife.

_"Ali Khan Bhai Salam!"_ he muttered—by which formula he proclaimed himself a _Thug!_

Rolling his eyes in the direction of the eastern wall, he concealed the knife.

"Chunda Lal!" Miska spoke wildly. "I am frightened! Please let me go, and tomorrow----"

"To-morrow!" Chunda Lal raised his eyes, which were alight with the awful light of fanaticism. "For me there may be no tomorrow! _Jey Bhowani! Yah Allah!_"

"Oh, _he_ may hear you!" whispered Miska pitifully. "Please go now. I shall know that you are near me, if----"

"And then?"

"I will ask your aid."

Her voice was very low.

"And if it is written that I succeed?"

Miska averted her head.

"Oh, Chunda Lal ... I cannot."

She hid her face in her hands.

Chunda Lal stood watching her for a moment in silence, then he turned toward the cellar door, and then again to Miska. Suddenly he dropped upon one knee before her, took her hand and kissed it, gently.

"I am your slave," he said, his voice shaken with emotion. "For myself I ask nothing—only your pity."

He rose, opened the door by which Miska had entered the room and went down into the cellars. She watched him silently, half fearfully, yet her eyes were filled with compassionate tears. Then, readjusting the hideous grey wig, she went up the steps and passed through the doorway into the den of the opium smokers.

CHAPTER VI

THE MAN WITH THE SCAR

Stuart read through a paper, consisting of six closely written pages, then he pinned the sheets together, folded them and placed them in one of those long envelopes associated in his memory with the opening phase of "The Scorpion" mystery. Smiling grimly, he descended to his dispensary and returned with the Chinese coin attached to the cork. With this he sealed the envelope.

He had volunteered that night for onerous service, and his offer had been accepted. Gaston Max's knowledge of Eastern languages was slight, whilst Stuart's was sound and extensive, and the Frenchman had cordially welcomed the doctor's proposal that he should accompany him to the house of Ah-Fang-Fu. Reviewing the facts gleaned from Miska during the earlier part of the evening, Stuart perceived that, apart from the additional light which they shed
upon her own relations with the group, they could be of slight assistance to the immediate success of the inquiry--unless the raid failed. Therefore he had determined upon the course which now he was adopting.

As he completed the sealing of the envelope and laid it down upon the table, he heard a cab drawn up in front of the house, and presently Mrs. M'Gregor knocked and entered the study.

"Inspector Dunbar to see you, Mr. Keppel," she said--"and he has with him an awful-looking body, all cuts and bandages. A patient, no doubt."

Stuart stood up, wondering what this could mean.

"Will you please show them up, Mrs. M'Gregor," he replied.

A few moments later Dunbar entered, accompanied by a bearded man whose head was bandaged so as to partly cover one eye and who had an evil-looking scar running from his cheekbone, apparently--or at any rate from the edge of the bandage--to the corner of his mouth, so that the lip was drawn up in a fierce and permanent snarl.

At this person Stuart stared blankly, until Dunbar began to laugh.

"It's a wonderful make-up, isn't it?" he said. "I used to say that disguises were out of date, but M. Max has taught me I was wrong."

"Max!" cried Stuart.

"At your service," replied the apparition, "but for this evening only I am 'Le Belafre.' Yes, _pardieu!_ I am a real dead man!"

The airy indifference which he proclaimed himself to represent one whose awful body had but that day been removed from a mortuary, and one whom in his own words he had "had the misfortune to strangle," was rather ghastly and at the same time admirable. For "Le Belafre" had deliberately tried to murder him, and false sentiment should form no part of the complement of a criminal investigator.

"It is a daring idea," said Stuart, "and relies for its success upon the chance that 'The Scorpion' remains ignorant of the fate of his agent and continues to believe that the body found off Hanover Hole was yours."

"The admirable precautions of my clever colleague," replied Max, laying his hand upon Dunbar's shoulder, "in closing the mortuary and publishing particulars of the identification disk, made it perfectly safe. 'Le Balafre' has been in hiding. He emerges!"

Stuart had secret reasons for knowing that Max's logic was not at fault, and this brought him to the matter of the sealed paper. He took up the envelope.

"I have here," he said slowly, "a statement. Examine the seal."

He held it out, and Max and Dunbar looked at it. The latter laughed shortly.

"Oh, it is a real statement," continued Stuart, "the nature of which I am not at liberty to divulge. But as to-night we take risks, I propose to leave it in your charge, Inspector."

He handed the envelope to Dunbar, whose face was blank with astonishment.

"In the event of failure to-night," added Stuart, "or catastrophe, I authorise you to read this statement--and act upon it. If, however, I escape safely, I ask you to return it to me, unread."

"Eh bien,_," said Max, and fixed that eye the whole of which was visible upon Stuart. "Perhaps I understand, and certainly_--he removed his hand from Dunbar's shoulder and rested it upon that of Stuart-- but certainly, my friend, I sympathise!"

Stuart started guiltily, but Max immediately turned aside and began to speak about their plans.

"In a bag which Inspector Dunbar has thoughtfully left in the cab," he said----

Dunbar hastily retired and Max laughed.

"In that bag," he continued, "is a suit of clothes such as habitues of 'The Pidgin House' rejoice to wear. I, who have studied disguise almost as deeply as the great Willy Clarkson, will transform you into a perfect ruffian. It is important, you understand, that someone should be inside the house of Ah-Fang-Fu, as otherwise by means of some secret exit the man we seek may escape. I believe that he contemplates departing at any moment, and I believe that the visit of Miguel means that what I may term the masters of the minor lodges are coming to London for parting instructions--or, of course Miguel may have come about the disappearance of 'Le Balafre.'"

"Suppose you meet Miguel!"

"My dear friend, I must trust to the Kismet who pursues evil-doers! The only reason which has led me to adopt this daring disguise is a simple one. Although I believe 'The Pidgin House' to be open to ordinary opium-smokers, it may not be open on 'lodge nights.' Do you follow me? Very well. I have the golden scorpion--which I suppose to be a sort of passport."

Stuart wondered more and more at the reasoning powers of this remarkable man, which could lead him to such an accurate conclusion.

"The existence of such a passport," continued Max, "would seem to point to the fact that all the members of this organisation are not known personally to one another. At the same time those invited or expected at present _may_
be known to Ah-Fang-Fu or to whoever acts as concierge. You see? Expected or otherwise, I assume that 'Le
Balafre' would be admitted—and at night I shall pass very well for 'Le Balafre'—somewhat damaged as a result of my
encounter with the late Charles Malet, but still recognisable!"

"And I?"

"You will be 'franked' in. The word of 'Le Balafre' should be sufficient for that! Of course I may be conducted
immediately into the presence of the Chief—'The Scorpion'—and he may prove to be none other than Miguel, for
instance—or my Algerian acquaintance—or may even be a 'she'—the fascinating Zara el-Khalal! We do not know. But
I _think_—oh, decidedly I think—that the cowled one is a male creature, and his habits and habitat suggests to me
that he is a Chinaman."

"And in that event how shall you act?"

"At once! I shall hold him, if I can, or shoot him if I cannot hold him! Both of us will blow police-whistles with
which we shall be provided and Inspectors Dunbar and Kelly will raid the premises. But I am hoping for an interval.
I do not like these inartistic scrimmages! The fact that these people foregather at an opium-house suggests to me that
a certain procedure may be followed which I observed during the course of the celebrated 'Mr. Q' case in New York.
'Mr. Q.' also had an audience-chamber adjoining and opium den, and his visitors went there ostensibly to smoke
opium. The opium-den was a sort of anteroom."

"Weymouth's big Chinese case had similar features," said Inspector Dunbar, who re-entered at that moment
carrying a leathern grip. "If you are kept waiting and you keep your ears open, doctor, that's when your knowledge
of the lingo will come in useful. We might rope in the whole gang and find we hadn't a scrap of evidence against
them, for except the attempt on yourself, Dr. Stuart, there's nothing so far that I can see to connect 'The Scorpion'
with Sir Frank Newcombe!"

"It is such a bungle that I fear!" cried Max. "Ah! how this looped-up lip annoys me!" He adjusted the bandage
carefully.

"We've got the place comfortably surrounded," continued Dunbar, "and whoever may be inside is booked! A
lady, answering to the description of Mlle. Dorian, went in this evening, so Sowerby reports."

Stuart felt that he was changing colour, and he stooped hastily to inspect the contents of the bag which Dunbar
had opened.

_"Eh bien!"_ said Gaston Max. "We shall not go empty-handed, then. And now to transfigure you, my friend!"

CHAPTER VII
IN THE OPIUM DEN

Interrupting a spell of warm, fine weather the night had set in wet and stormy. The squalid streets through which
Stuart and Gaston Max made their way looked more than normally deserted and uninviting. The wind moaned and
the rain accompanied with a dreary tattoo. Sometimes a siren wailed out upon the river.

"We are nearly there," said Max. _"Pardieu!_ they are well concealed, those fellows. I have not seen so much as
an eyebrow."

"It would be encouraging to get a glimpse of some one!" replied Stuart.

"Ah, but bad—inartistic. It is the next door, I think ... yes. I hope they have no special way of knocking."

Upon the door of a dark and apparently deserted shop he rapped.

Both had anticipated an interval of waiting, and both were astonished when the door opened almost at once,
revealing a blackly cavernous interior.

"Go off! Too late! Shuttee shop!" chattered a voice out of the darkness.

Max thrust his way resolutely in, followed by Stuart. "Shut the door, Ah-Fang-Fu!" he said curtly, speaking with
a laboured French accent. _"Scorpion!"_

The door was closed by the invisible Chinaman, there was a sound of soft movements and a hurricane-lantern
suddenly made its appearance. Its light revealed the interior of a nondescript untidy little shop and revealed the
presence of an old and very wrinkled Chinaman who held the lantern. He wore a blue smock and a bowler hat and
his face possessed the absolute impassivity of an image. As he leaned over the counter, scrutinising his visitors, Max
thrust forward the golden scorpion held in the palm of his hand.

_"Hoi, hoi"_ chattered the Chinaman. "Fo-Hi fellers, eh? You hab got plenty much late. Other fellers Fo-Hi
pidgin plenty much sooner. You one time catchee allee same bhobbery, b'long number one joss-pidgin man!"

Being covertly nudged by Max:

"Cut the palaver, Pidgin," growled Stuart.

_"Allee lightee,"_ chattered Ah-Fang-Fu, for evidently this was he. "You play one piecee pipee till Fo-Hi got."

Raising the lantern, he led the way through a door at the back of the shop. Descending four wooden steps, Stuart and
Max found themselves in the opium-den.

"Full up. No loom," said the Chinaman.
It was a low-ceilinged apartment, the beams of the roof sloping slightly upward from west to east. The centre part of the wall at the back was covered with matting hung from the rough cornice supporting the beams. To the right of the matting was the door communicating with the shop, and to the left were bunks. Other bunks lined the southerly wall, except where, set in the thickness of the bare brick and plaster, a second strong door was partly hidden by a pile of empty packing-cases and an untidy litter of straw and matting.

Along the northern wall were more bunks, and an open wooden stair, with a handrail, ascended to a small landing or platform before a third door high up in the wall. A few mats were strewn about the floor. The place was dimly lighted by a red-shaded lamp swung from the centre of the ceiling and near the foot of the stairs another lamp (of the common tin variety) stood upon a box near which was a broken cane chair. Opium-pipes, tins, and a pack of cards were on this box.

All the bunks appeared to be occupied. Most of the occupants were lying motionless, but one or two were noisily sucking at the opium-pipes. These had not yet attained to the opium-smokers Nirvana. So much did Gaston Max, a trained observer, gather in one swift glance. Then Ah-Fang-Fu, leaving the lantern in the shop, descended the four steps and crossing the room began to arrange two mats with round head-cushions near to the empty packing-cases. Stuart and Max remained by the door.

"You see," whispered Max, "he has taken you on trust! And he did not appear to recognise me. It is as I thought. The place is 'open to the public' as usual, and Ah-Fang-Fu does a roaring trade, one would judge. For the benefit of patrons not affiliated to the order we have to pretend to smoke."

"Yes," replied Stuart with repressed excitement--"until someone called Fo-Hi is at home, or visible; the word 'got' may mean either of those things."

"Fo-Hi," whispered Max, "is The Scorpion!"

"I believe you are right," said Stuart--who had good reason to know it. "My God! what a foul den! The reek is suffocating. Look at that yellow lifeless face yonder, and see that other fellow whose hand hangs limply down upon the floor. Those bunks might be occupied by corpses for all the evidence of life that some of them show."

"Morbleu! do not raise your voice; for some of them are occupied by 'Scorpions.' You noted the words of Ah-Fang? _Ssh!_"

The old Chinaman returned with his curious shuffling walk, raising his hand to beckon to them.

"Number one piece bunk, lo!" he chattered.

"Good enough," growled Stuart.

The two crossed and reclined upon the uncleanly mats.

"Make special loom," explained Ah-Fang-Fu. "Velly special chop!"

He passed from bunk to bunk, and presently came to a comatose Chinaman from whose limp hand, which hung down upon the floor, the pipe had dropped. This pipe Ah-Fang-Fu took from the sleeper's fingers and returning to the box upon which the tin lamp was standing began calmly to load it.

"Good heavens!" muttered Stuart--"he is short of pipes! Pah! how the place reeks!"

Ah-Fang-Fu busied himself with a tin of opium, the pipe which he had taken from the sleeper, and another pipe--apparently the last of his stock--which lay near the lamp. Igniting the two, he crossed and handed them to Stuart and Max.

"Velly soon-lo!" he said and made a curious sign, touching his brow, his lips and his breast in a manner resembling that of a Moslem.

Max repeated the gesture and then lay back upon his elbow, raising the mouthpiece of the little pipe to his lips--but carefully avoiding contact.

Ah-Fang-Fu shuffled back to the broken cane chair, from which he had evidently arisen to admit his late visitors. Inarticulate sounds proceeded from the bunks, breaking the sinister silence which now descended upon the den. Ah-Fang-Fu began to play Patience, constantly muttering to himself. The occasional wash of tidal water became audible, and once there came a scampering and squealing of rates from beneath the floor.

"Do you notice the sound of lapping water" whispered Stuart. "The place is evidently built upon a foundation of piles and the cellars must actually be submerged at high-tide."

"Pardieu! it is a death trap. What is this!

A loud knocking sounded upon the street door. Ah-Fang-Fu rose and shuffled up the steps into the shop. He could be heard unbarring the outer door. Then:

"Too late! shuttee shop, shuttee shop!" sounded.

"I don't want nothin' out of your blasted shop, Pidgin!" roared a loud and thick voice. "I'm old Bill Bean, I am, and I want a pipe, I do!"

"Hullo, Bill!" replied the invisible 'Pidgin.' "Allee samee dlnk again!"

A red-bearded ship's fireman, wearing sea-boots, a rough blue suit similar to that which Stuart wore, a muffler
and a peaked cap, lurched into view at the head of the steps.

"Blimey!" he roared, over his shoulder. "Drunk! _Me_ drunk! An' all the pubs in these parts sell barley-water coloured brown! Blimey! Chuck it, Pidgin!"


"'Taint 'umanly possible," declared the new arrival, staggering down the steps, "fer a 'ealthy sailorman to git drunk on coloured water just 'cause the publican calls it beer! I ain't drunk; I'm only miserable. Gimme a pipe, Pidgin."

Ah-Fang-Fu barred the door and ascended.

"Comee here," he muttered, "my placee, all full up and no other placee b'long open."

Bill Bean slapped him boisterously on the back.

"Cut the palaver, Pidgin, and gimme a pipe. Piecee pipe, Pidgin!"

He lurched across the floor, nearly falling over Stuart's legs, took up a mat and a cushion, lurched into the further corner and cast himself down.

"Ain't I one o' yer oldest customers, Pidgin?" he inquired. "One o' yer oldest, I am."

"Blight side twelve-time," muttered the Chinaman. "Getchee me in tlouble, Bill. Number one police chop."

"Not the first time it wouldn't be!" retorted the fireman. "Not the first time as you've been in trouble, Pidgin. An' unless they 'ung yer--which it ain't 'umanly possible to 'ang a Chink--it wouldn't be the last--an' not by a damn long way .... an'_ not by a damn long way!"

Ah-Fang-Fu, shrugging resignedly, shuffled from bunk to bunk in quest of a disused pipe, found one, and returning to the extemporised table, began to load it, muttering to himself.

"Don't like to 'ear about your wicked past, do you?" continued Bill. "Wicked old yellow-faced 'eathen! Remember the 'dive' in Frisco, Pidgin? _Wot_ a rough 'ouse! Remember when I come in--full up I was: me back teeth well under water--an' you tried to Shanghai me?"

"You cutee palaber! All damn lie," muttered the Chinaman.

"Ho! a lie is it?" roared the other. "Wot about me wakin' up all of a tremble aboard o' the old _Nancy Lee_--aboard of a blasted wind-jammer! Me--a fireman! Wot about it? Wasn't that Shanghain? Blighter! _An'_ not a 'oat' in me pocket--not a 'bean! Broke to the wide an' aboard o' a old wind-jammer wot was a coffin-ship--a coffin-ship she was; an' er old man was the devil's father-in-law. Ho! lies! I _don't_ think!"

"You cutee palaber!" chattered Ah-Fang-Fu, busy with the pipe. "You likee too much chin-chin. You make nice piece bhobbery."

"Not a 'bean'," continued Bill reminiscently--"not a 'oat." He sat up violently. "Even me pipe an' baccy was gone!" he shouted. "You'd even pinched me pipe an' baccy! You'd pinch the whiskers off a blind man, _you_ would, Pidgin! And over the dope. Thank Gawd somebody's still the right stuff!"

Suddenly, from a bunk on the left of Gaston Max came a faint cry.

"Ah! He has bitten me!"

"Ullo!" said Bill--"wotcher bin given' _im_, Pidgin? _Chandu_ or hyderphobia?"

Ah-Fang-Fu crossed and handed him the pipe.

"One piecee pipee. No more hab."

Bill grasped the pipe eagerly and raised it to his lips. Ah-Fang-Fu returned unmoved to his Patience and silence reclaimed the den, only broken by the inarticulate mumuring and the lapping of the tide.

"A genuine customer!" whispered Max.

"Ah!" came again, more faintly--"he ... has ... bitten ... me."

"Blimey!" said Bill in a drowsy voice--"eave the chair at 'im, Pidgin."

Stuart was about to speak when Gaston Max furtively grasped his arm. "Ssh!" he whispered. "Do not move, but look ... at the top of the stair!"

Stuart turned his eyes. On the platform at the head of the stairs a Hindu was standing!

"Chunda Lal!" whispered Max. "Prepare for--anything!"

"Chunda Lal descended slowly. Ah-Fang-Fu continued to play Patience. The Hindu stood behind him and began to speak in a voice of subdued fervour and with soft Hindu modulations.

"Why do you allow them, strangers, coming here to-night?"

Ah-Fang-Fu continued complacently to arrange the cards.

"S'pose hab gotchee pidgin allee samee Chunda Lal hab got? Fo-Hi no catchee buy bled and cheese for Ah-Fang-Fu. He--noddling casually in the direction of Bill Bean--"plitty soon all blissful."

"Be very careful, Ah-Fang-Fu," said Chunda Lal tensely. He lowered his voice. "Do you forget so soon what happen last week?"

"No sabby."
"Some one comes here--we do not know how close he comes; perhaps he comes in--and he is of the _police._"

Ah-Fang-Fu shivered uneasily in his chair.

"No police chop for Pidgin!" he muttered. "Same feller tumble in liver?"

"He is killed--yes; but suppose they find the writing he has made! Suppose he has written that it is _here_ people meet together?"

"Makee chit tell my name? Muchee hard luck! Number one police chop."

"You say Fo-Hi not buying you bread and cheese. Perhaps it is Fo-Hi that save you from hanging!"

Ah-Fang-Fu haggled himself.

"_Yak pozee!_ (Very good) he muttered.

Chunda Lal raised his finger.

"Be very careful, Ah-Fang-Fu!"

"Allee time velly careful."

"But admit no more of them to come in, these strangers."

"Tchee, tchee!_ Velly ploper. Sometime big feller come in if Pidgin palaber or not. Pidgin never lude to big feller."

"Your life may depend on it," said Chunda Lal impressively. "How many are here?"

Ah-Fang-Fu turned at last from his cards, pointing in three directions, and, finally, at Gaston Max.

"Four?" said the Hindu--"how can it be?"

He peered from bunk to bunk, muttering something--a name apparently--after scrutinizing each. When his gaze rested upon Max he started, stared hard, and meeting the gaze of the one visible eye, made the strange sign.

Max repeated it; and Chunda Lal turned again to the Chinaman. "Because of that drunken pig," he said, pointing at Bill Bean--"we must wait. See to it that he is the last."

He walked slowly up the stairs, opened the door at the top and disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII

THE GREEN-EYED JOSS

Sinister silence reclaimed the house of Ah-Fang-Fu. And Ah-Fang-Fu resumed his solitary game.

"He_ recognised 'Le Belafre'" whispered Max--"and was surprised to see him! So there are three of the gang here! Did you particularly observe in which bunks they lay, doctor. _Ssh!"

A voice from a bunk had commenced to sing monotonously.

"Peyala peah,"_ it sang, weird above the murmured accompaniment of the other dreaming smokers and the _wash-wash_ of the tide--"To myn-na-peah-Phir Kysee ko kyah ..."

"He is speaking from an opium-trance," said Stuart softly. "A native song: 'If a cup of wine is drunk, and I have drunk it, what of that?'

"_Mon Dieu!_ it is uncanny!" whispered Max. "_Brr!_ do you hear those rats? I am wondering in what order we shall be admitted to the 'Scorpion's' presence, or if we shall see him together."

"He may come in here."

"All the better."

"Gimme 'nother pipe, Pidgin," drawled a very drowsy voice from Bill Bean's corner.

Ah-Fang-Fu left his eternal arranging and rearranging of the cards and crossed the room. He took the opium-pipe from the fireman's limp fingers and returning to the box, refilled and lighted it. Max and Stuart watched him in silence until he had handed the second pipe to the man and returned to his chair.

"We must be very careful," said Stuart. "We do not know which are real smokers and which are not."

Again there was a weird interruption. A Chinaman lying in one of the bunks began to chant in a monotonous far-off voice:

"Chong-liou-chouay Om mani padme hum."

"The Buddhist formula," whispered Stuart. "_He_ is a real smoker. Heavens! the reek is choking me!"

The chant was repeated, the words dying away into a long murmur. Ah-Fang-Fu continued to shuffle the cards. And presently Bill Bean's second pipe dropped from his fingers. His husky voice spoke almost inaudibly.

"I'm ... old ... Bill ... Bean ... I ..."

A deep-noted siren hooted dimly.

"A steamer making for dock," whispered Max. "_Brr!_ it is a nightmare, this! I think in a minute something will happen._Ssh!"

Ah-Fang-Fu glanced slowly around. Then he stood up, raised the lamp from the table and made a tour of the bunks, shining the light in upon the faces of the occupants. Max watched him closely, hoping to learn in which bunks the members of 'The Scorpion's' group lay. But he was disappointed. Ah-Fang-Fu examined _all_ the bunks and even shone the light down upon Stuart and Max. He muttered to himself constantly, but seemed to address no
Replacing the lamp on the box, he whistled softly; and:

"Look!" breathed Max. "The stair again!"
Stuart cautiously turned his eyes toward the open stair.

On the platform above stood a bent old hag whose witch-eyes were searching the place keenly! With a curiously lithe step, for all her age, she descended, and standing behind Ah-Fang-Fu tapped him on the shoulder and pointed to the outer door. He stood up and shuffled across, went up the four steps and unbarred the door.


He went out and closed the door.

"Something happens!" whispered Max.
A gong sounded.

"Ah!"

The old woman approached the matting curtain hung over a portion of the wall, raised it slightly in the centre—where it opened—and disappeared beyond.

"You see!" said Stuart excitedly.

"Yes! it is the audience-chamber of 'The Scorpion!'"
The ancient hag came out again, crossed to a bunk and touched its occupant, a Chinaman, with her hand. He immediately shot up and followed her. The two disappeared beyond the curtain.

"What shall we do," said Stuart, "if you are summoned?"

"I shall throw open those curtains the moment I reach them, and present my pistol at the head of whoever is on the other side. You—ssh!"

The old woman reappeared, looked slowly around and then held the curtains slightly apart to allow of the Chinaman's coming out. He saluted her by touching his head, lips and breast with his right hand, then passed up to the door communicating with the shop, which he opened, and went out.

His voice came, muffled:

"Fo-Hi!"
"Fo-Hi," returned the high voice of Ah-Fang-Fu.
The outer door was opened and shut. The old woman went up and barred the inner door, then returned and stood by the matting curtain. The sound of the water below alone broke the silence. It was the hour of high tide.

"There goes the first fish into Dunbar's net!" whispered Max.
The gong sounded again.

Thereupon the old woman crossed to another bunk and conducted a brown-skinned Eastern into the hidden room. Immediately they had disappeared:

"As I pull the curtains aside," continued Max rapidly, "blow the whistle and run across and unbar the door...."

So engrossed was he in giving these directions, and so engrossed was Stuart in listening to them, that neither detected a faint creak which proceeded from almost immediately behind them. This sound was occasioned by the slow and cautious opening of that sunken, heavy door near to which they lay—the door which communicated with the labyrinth of cellars. Inch by inch from the opening protruded the head of Ah-Fang-Fu!

"If the Chinaman offers any resistance," Max went on, speaking very rapidly—"morbleu! you have the means to deal with him! In a word, admit the police. _Sh!_ what is that!"

A moaning voice from one of the bunks came.

"Cheal kegur-men, mas ka dheer!"

"A native adage," whispered Stuart. "He is dreaming. There is always meat in a kite's nest."

"Eh bien!_ very true—and I think the kite is at home!"
The head of Ah-Fang-Fu vanished. A moment later the curtains opened again slightly and the old woman came out, ushering the brown man. He saluted her and unbarred the door, going out.

"Fo-Hi," came dimly.
There was no definite answer—only the sound of a muttered colloquy; and suddenly the brown man returned and spoke to the old woman in a voice so low that his words were inaudible to the two attentive listeners in the distant corner.

"Ah!" whispered Max—"what now?"

"Shall we rush the curtain!" said Stuart.

"No!" Max grasped his arm—"wait! wait! See! he is going out. He has perhaps forgotten something. A second fish in the net."
The Oriental went up the steps into the shop. The old woman closed and barred the door, then opened the matting curtain and disappeared within.
"I was right," said Max.

But for once in his career he was wrong.

She was out again almost immediately and bending over a bunk close to the left of the masked opening. The occupant concealed in its shadow did not rise and follow her, however. She seemed to be speaking to him. Stuart and Max watched intently.

The head of Ah-Fang-Fu reappeared in the doorway behind them.

"Now is our time!" whispered Max tensely. "As I rush for the curtains, you run to the shop door and get it unbolted, whistling for Dunbar----"

Ah-Fang-Fu, fully opening the door behind them, crept out stealthily.

"Have your pistol ready," continued Max, "and first put the whistle between your teeth----"

Ah-Fang-Fu silently placed his bowler hat upon the floor, shook down his long pigtail, and moving with catlike tread, stooping, drew nearer.

"Now, doctor!" cried Max.

Both sprang to their feet. Max leapt clear of the matting and other litter and dashed for the curtain. He reached it, seized it and tore bodily from its fastenings. Behind him the long flat note of a police whistle sounded--and ended abruptly.

"Ah! Nom d'un nom!" cried Max.

A cunningly devised door--looking like a section of solid brick and plaster wall--was closing slowly--heavily. Through the opening which yet remained he caught a glimpse of a small room, draped with Chinese dragon tapestry and having upon a raised, carpeted dais a number of cushions forming a _diwan_ and an inlaid table bearing a silver snuff vase. A cowled figure was seated upon the dais. The door closed completely. Within a niche in its centre sat a yellow leering idol, green eyed and complacent.

Wild, gurgling cries brought Max sharply about.

An answering whistle sounded from the street outside ... a second ... a third.

Ah-Fang-Fu, stooping ever lower, at the instant that Stuart had sprung to his feet had seized his ankle from behind, pitching him on to his face. It was then that the note of the whistle had ceased. Now, the Chinaman had his long pigtail about Stuart's neck, at which Stuart, prone with the other kneeling upon his body, plucked vainly.

Max raised his pistol ... and from the bunk almost at his elbow leapt Miguel the quadroon, a sand-bag raised. It descended upon the Frenchman's skull ... and he crumbled up limply and collapsed upon the floor. There came a crash of broken glass from the shop.

Uttering a piercing cry, the old woman staggered from the door near which she had been standing as if stricken helpless, during the lightning moments in which these things had happened--and advanced in the direction of Ah-Fang-Fu.

"Ah, God! You kill him! You _kill_ him?" she moaned.

"Through the window, Sowerby! This way!" came Dunbar's voice. "Max! Max!"

The sustained note of a whistle, a confusion of voices and a sound of heavy steps proclaimed the entrance of the police into the shop and the summoning of reinforcements.

Ah-Fang-Fu rose. Stuart had ceased to struggle. The Chinaman replaced his hat and looked up at the woman, whose eyes glared madly into his own.

"Tche', tche'e,"," he said sibilantly---"Tchon-dzee-ti Fan-Fu.*"*

* "Yes, yes. It is the will of the Master."

"Down with the door!" roared Dunbar.

The woman threw herself, with a wild sob, upon the motionless body of Stuart.

Ensued a series of splintering crashes, and finally the head of an axe appeared through the panels of the door. Ah-Fang-Fu tried to drag the woman away, but she clung to Stuart desperately and was immovable. Thereupon the huge quadroon, running across the room, swept them both up into his giant embrace, man and woman together, and bore them down by the sunken doorway into the cellars below!

The shop door fell inwards, crashing down the four steps, and Dunbar sprang into the place, revolver in hand, followed by Inspector Kelly and four men of the River Police, one of whom carried a hurricane lantern. Ah-Fang-Fu had just descended after Miguel and closed the heavy door.

"Try this way, boys!" cried Kelly, and rushed up the stair. The four men followed him. The lantern was left on the floor. Dunbar stared about him. Sowerby and several other men entered. Suddenly Dunbar saw Gaston Max lying on the floor.

"My God!" he cried--"they have killed him!"

He ran across, knelt and examined Max, pressing his ear against his breast.

Inspector Kelly reaching the top of the stairs and finding the door locked, hurled his great bulk against it and
burst it open.

"Follow me, boys!" he cried. "Take care! Bring the lantern, somebody."

The fourth man grasped the lantern and all followed the Inspector up the stair and out through the doorway. His voice came dimly:

"Mind the beam! Pass the light forward...."

Sowerby was struggling with the door by which Miguel and Ah-Fang-Fu unseen had made their escape and Dunbar, having rested Max's head upon a pillow, was glaring all about him, his square jaw set grimly and his eyes fierce with anger.

A voice droned from a bunk:

"Cheal kegur men ms ka-dheer!"

The police were moving from bunk to bunk, scrutinising the occupants. The uproar had penetrated to them even in their drugged slumbers. There were stirrings and mutterings and movements of yellow hands.

"But where is 'The Scorpion'?"

He turned and stared at the wall from which the matting had been torn. And out of the little niche in the cunningly masked door the green-eyed joss leered at him complacently.

PART IV

THE LAIR OF THE SCORPION

CHAPTER I

THE SUBLIME ORDER

Stuart awoke to a discovery so strange that for some time he found himself unable to accept its reality. He passed his hands over his face and eyes and looked about him dazedly. He experienced great pain in his throat, and he could feel that his neck was swollen. He stared down at his ankles, which also were throbbing agonisingly--to learn that they were confined in gyves attached by a short chain to a ring in the floor!

He was lying upon a deep _diwan_, which was covered with leopard-skins and which occupied one corner of the most extraordinary room he had ever seen or ever could have imagined. He sat up, but was immediately overcome with faintness which he conquered with difficulty.

The apartment, then, was one of extraordinary Oriental elegance, having two entrances closed with lacquer sliding doors. Chinese lamps swung from the ceiling, illuminated it warmly, and a great number of large and bright silk cushions were strewn about the floor. There were tapestries in black and gold, rich carpets and couches, several handsome cabinets and a number of tall cases of Oriental workmanship containing large and strangely bound books, scientific paraphernalia, curios and ornaments.

At the further end of the room was a deep tiled hearth in which stood a kind of chemical furnace which hissed constantly. Upon ornate small tables and pedestals were vases and cases--one of the latter containing a number of orchids, in flower.

Preserved lizards, snakes, and other creatures were in a row of jars upon a shelf, together with small skeletons of animals in frames. There was also a perfect human skeleton. Near the centre of the room was a canopied chair, of grotesque Chinese design, upon a dais, a big bronze bell hanging from it; and near to the _diwan_ upon which Stuart was lying stood a large, very finely carved table upon which were some open faded volumes and a litter of scientific implements. Near the table stood a very large bowl of what looked like platinum, upon a tripod, and several volumes lay scattered near it upon the carpet. From a silver incense-burner arose a pencilling of blue smoke.

One of the lacquer doors slid noiselessly open and a man entered, Stuart inhaled sibilantly and clenched his fists.

The new-comer wore a cowled garment of some dark blue material which enveloped him from head to feet. It possessed oval eye-holes, and through these apertures gleamed two eyes which looked scarcely like the eyes of a human being. They were of that brilliant yellow color sometimes seen in the eyes of tigers, and their most marked and awful peculiarity was their unblinking regard. They seemed always to be open to their fullest extent, and Stuart realized with anger that it was impossible to sustain for long the piercing gaze of Fo-Hi ... for he knew that he was in the presence of "The Scorpion!

Walking with a slow and curious dignity, the cowled figure came across to the table, first closing the lacquer sliding doors. Stuart's hands convulsively clutched the covering of the _diwan_ as the sinister figure approached. The intolerable gaze of those weird eyes had awakened a horror, a loathing horror, within him, such as he never remembered to have experienced in regard to any human being. It was the sort of horror which the proximity of a poisonous serpent occasions--or the nearness of a scorpion....

Fo-Hi seated himself at the table.

Absolute silence reigned in the big room, except for the hissing of the furnace. No sound penetrated from the outer world. Having no means of judging how long he had been insensible, Stuart found himself wondering if the raid on the den of Ah-Fang-Fu had taken place hours before, days earlier, or weeks ago.
Taking up a test-tube from a rack on the table, Fo-Hi held it near a lamp and examined the contents—a few drops of colourless fluid. These he poured into a curious long-necked yellow bottle. He began to speak, but without looking at Stuart.

His diction was characteristic, resembling his carriage in that it was slow and distinctive. He seemed deliberately to choose each word and to give to it all its value, syllable by syllable. His English was perfect to the verge of the pedantic; and his voice was metallic and harsh, touching at time, when his words were vested with some subtle or hidden significance, guttural depths which betrayed the Chinaman. He possessed uncanny dignity as of tremendous intellect and conscious power.

"I regret that you were so rash as to take part in last night's abortive raid, Dr. Stuart," he said.

Stuart started. So he had been unconscious for many hour!

"Because of your professional acquirements at one time I had contemplated removing you," continued the unemotional voice. "But I rejoice to think that I failed. It would have been an error of judgement. I have useful work for such men. You shall assist in the extensive laboratories of my distinguished predecessor."

"Never!" snapped Stuart.

The man's callousness was so purposeful and deliberate that it awed. He seemed like one who stands above all ordinary human frailties and emotions.

"Your prejudice is natural," rejoined Fo-Hi calmly. "You are ignorant of our sublime motives, but you shall nevertheless assist us to establish that intellectual control which is destined to be the new World Force. No doubt you are conscious of a mental hiatus extending from the moment when you found the pigtail of the worthy Ah-Fang-Fu about your throat until that when you recovered consciousness in this room. It has covered a period roughly of twenty-four hours, Dr. Stuart."

"I don't believe it," muttered Stuart—and found his own voice to seem as unreal as everything else in the nightmare apartment. "If I had not revived earlier, I should never have revived at all."

He raised his hand to his swollen throat, touching it gingerly.

"Your unconsciousness was prolonged," explained Fo-Hi, consulting an open book written in Chinese characters, "by an injection which I found it necessary to make. Otherwise, as you remark, it would have been prolonged indefinitely. Your clever but rash companion was less happy."

"What!" cried Stuart—"he is dead? You fiend! You damned yellow fiend!" Emotion shook him and he sat clutching the leopard-skins and glaring madly at the cowled figure.

"Fortunately," resumed Fo-Hi, "my people—with one exception—succeeded in making their escape. I may add that the needless scuffling attendant upon arresting this unfortunate follower of mine, immediately outside the door of the house, led to the discovery of your own presence. Nevertheless, the others departed safely. My own departure is imminent; it has been because of certain domestic details and by the necessity of awaiting nightfall. You see, I am frank with you."

"Because the grave is silent!"

"The grave, and ... China. There is no other alternative in your case."

"Are you sure that there is no other in your own?" asked Stuart huskily.

"An alternative to my returning to China? Can you suggest one?"

"The scaffold!" cried Stuart furiously, "for you and the scum who follow you!"

Fo-Hi lighted a Bunsen burner.

"I trust not," he rejoined placidly. "With two exceptions, all my people are out of England."

Stuart's heart began to throb painfully. With two exceptions! Did Miska still remain? He conquered his anger and tried to speak calmly, recognising how he lay utterly in the power of this uncanny being and how closely his happiness was involved even if he escaped with life.

"And you?" he said.

"In these matters, Dr. Stuart," replied Fo-Hi, "I have always modelled my behavior upon that of the brilliant scientist who preceded me as European representative of our movement. Your beautiful Thames is my highway as it was his highway. No one of my immediate neighbours has ever seen me or my once extensive following enter this house." He selected an empty test-tube. "No one shall see me leave."

The unreality of it all threatened to swamp Stuart's mind again, but he forced himself to speak calmly.

"Your own escape is just possible, if some vessel awaits you; but do you imagine for a moment that you can carry me to China and elude pursuit?"

Fo-Hi, again consulting the huge book with its yellow faded characters, answered him absently.

"Do you recall the death of the Grand Duke Ivan?" he said. "Does your memory retain the name of Van Rembold and has your Scotland Yard yet satisfied itself that Sir Frank Narcombe died from 'natural causes'? Then, there was Ericksen, the most brilliant European electrical expert of the century, who died quite suddenly last year. I
honor you, Dr. Stuart, by inviting you to join a company so distinguished."

"You are raving! What have these men in common with me?"

Stuart found himself holding his breath as he awaited a reply—for he knew that he was on the verge of learning that which poor Gaston Max had given his life to learn. A moment Fo-Hi hesitated—and in that moment his captive recognised, and shuddered to recognise, that he won this secret too late. Then:

"The Grand Duke is a tactician who, had he remained in Europe, might well have readjusted the frontiers of his country. Van Rembold, as a mining engineer, stands alone, as does Henrik Ericksen in the electrical world. As for Sir Frank Narcombe, he is beyond doubt the most brilliant surgeon of today, and I, a judge of men, count you his peer in the realm of pure therapeutics. Whilst your studies in snake-poisons (which were narrowly watched for us in India) give you an unique place in toxicology. These great men will be some of your companions in China."

"In China!"

"In China, Dr. Stuart, where I hope you will join them. You misapprehend the purpose of my mission. It is not destructive, although neither I nor my enlightened predecessor have ever scrupled to remove any obstacle from the path of that world-change which no human power can check or hinder; it is primarily constructive. No state or group of states can hope to resist the progress of a movement guided and upheld by a monopoly of the world's genius. The Sublime Order, of which I am an unworthy member, stands for such a movement."

"Rest assured it will be crushed."

"Van Rembold is preparing radium in quantities hitherto unknown from the vast pitchblend deposits of Ho-Nan—which industry we control. He visited China arrayed in his shroud, and he travelled in a handsome Egyptian sarcophagus purchased at Sotheby's on behalf of a Chinese collector."

Fo-Hi stood up and crossed to the hissing furnace. He busied himself with some obscure experiment which proceeded there, and:

"Your own state-room will be less romantic, Dr. Stuart," he said, speaking without turning his head; "possibly a packing-case. In brief, that intellectual giant who achieved to much for the Sublime Order—my immediate predecessor in office—devised a means of inducing artificial catalepsy——"

"My God!" muttered Stuart, as the incredible, the appalling truth burst upon his mind.

"My own rather hazardous delay," continued Fo-Hi, "is occasioned in some measure by my anxiety to complete the present experiment. Its product will be your passport to China."

Carrying a tiny crucible, he returned to the table.

Stuart felt that his self-possession was deserting him. Madness threatened ... If he was not already mad. He forced himself to speak.

"You taunt me because I am helpless. I do not believe that those men have been spirited into China. Even if it were so, they would die, as I would die, rather than prostitute their talents to such mad infamy."

Fo-Hi carefully poured the contents of the crucible into a flat platinum pan.

"In China, Dr. Stuart," he said, "we know how to _make_ men work! I myself am the deviser of a variant of the unduly notorious _kite_ device and the scarcely less celebrated 'Six Gates of Wisdom.' I term it The Feast of a Thousand Ants. It is performed with the aid of African driver ant, a pair of surgical scissors and a pot of honey. I have observed you studying with interest the human skeleton yonder. It is that of one of my followers—a Nubian mute—who met with an untimely end quite recently. You are wondering, no doubt, how I obtained the frame in so short a time? My African driver ants, Dr. Stuart, of which I have three large cases in a cellar below this room, performed the task for me in exactly sixty-nine minutes."

Stuart strained frenziedly at his gyves.

"My God!" he groaned. "All I have heard of you was the merest flattery. You are either a fiend or a madman!"

"When you are enlisted as a member of the Sublime Order," said Fo-Hi softly, "and you awaken in China, Dr. Stuart—you will work. We have no unwilling recruits."

"Stop your accursed talk. I have heard enough."

But the metallic voice continued smoothly:

"I appreciate the difficulty which you must experience in grasping the true significance of this movement. You have seen mighty nations, armed with every known resource of science, at a deadlock on the battlefield. You naturally fail to perceive how a group of Oriental philosophers can achieve what the might of Europe failed to achieve. You will remember, in favour of my claims, that we command the service of the world's genius, and have a financial backing which could settle the national loans of the world! In other words, exhumation of a large percentage of the great men who have died in recent years would be impossible. Their tombs are empty."

"I have heard enough. Drug me, kill me; but spare me your confidences."

"In the crowded foyer of a hotel," continued Fo-Hi imperturbably, "of a theatre, of a concert-room; in the privacy of their home, of their office; wherever opportunity offered, I caused them to be touched with the point of a
hypodermic needle such as this." He held up a small hypodermic syringe.

"It contained a minute quantity of the serum which I am now preparing--the serum whose discovery was the crowning achievement of a great scientist's career (I refer, Dr. Stuart, to my brilliant predecessor). They were buried alive; but no surgeon in Europe or America would have hesitated to certify them dead. Aided by a group of six Hindu fanatics, trained as _Lughais_ (grave-diggers), it was easy to gain access to their resting-places. One had the misfortune to be cremated by his family--a great loss to my Council. But the others are now in China, at our headquarters. They are labouring day and night to bring this war-scarred world under the sceptre of an Eastern Emperor."

"Faugh!" cried Stuart. "The whole of that war-scarred world will stand armed before you!"

"We realise that, doctor; therefore we are prepared for it. We spoke of the Norwegian Henrick Ericksen. This is his most recent contribution to our armament."

Fo-Hi rested on long yellow hand upon a kind of model searchlight.

"I nearly committed the clumsy indiscretion of removing you with this little instrument," he said. "You recall the episode? Ericksen's Disintegrating Ray, Dr. Stuart. The model, here, possesses a limited range, of course, but the actual instrument has a compass of seven and a half miles. It can readily be carried by a heavy plane! One such plane in a flight from Suez to Port Said, could destroy all the shipping in the Canal and explode every grain of ammunition on either shore! Since I must leave England to-night, the model must be destroyed, and unfortunately a good collection of bacilli has already suffered the same fate."

Placidly, slowly, and unmoved from his habit of unruffled dignity, Fo-Hi placed the model in a deep mortar, whilst Stuart watched him speechless and aghast. He poured the contents of a large pan into the mortar, whereupon a loud hissing sound broke the awesome silence of the room and a cloud of fumes arose.

"Not a trace, doctor!" said the cowled man. "A little preparation of my own. It destroys the hardest known substance--with the solitary exception of a certain clay--in the same way that nitric acid would destroy tissue paper. You see I might have aspired to become famous among safe-breakers."

"You have preferred to become infamous among murderers!" snapped Stuart.

"To murder, Dr. Stuart, I have never stooped. I am a specialist in selective warfare. When you visit the laboratory of our chief chemist in Kiangsu you will be shown the whole of the armory of the Sublime Order. I regret that the activities of your zealous and painfully inquisitive friend, M. Gaston Max, have forced me to depart from England before I had completed my work here."

"I pray you may never depart," murmured Stuart.

Fo-Hi having added some bright green fluid to that in the flat pan, had now poured the whole into a large test-tube, and was holding it in the flame of the burner. At the moment that it reached the boiling point it became colourless. He carefully placed the whole of the liquid in a retort to which he attached a condensor. He stood up.

Crossing to a glass case which rested upon a table near the _diwan_ he struck it lightly with his hand. The case contained sand and fragments of rock, but as Fo-Hi struck it, out from beneath the pieces of rock darted black active creatures.

"The common black scorpion of Southern India," he said softly. "Its venom is the basis of the priceless formula, _F. Katalepsis_, upon which the structure of our Sublime Order rests, Dr. Stuart; hence the adoption of a scorpion as our device."

He took up a long slender flask.

"This virus prepared from a glandular secretion of the Chinese swamp-adder is also beyond price. Again-the case upon the pedestal yonder contains five perfect bulbs, three already in flower, as you observe, of an orchid discovered by our chief chemist in certain forests of Burma. It only occurs at extremely rare intervals--eighty years or more--and under highly special conditions. If the other two bulbs flower, I shall be enabled to obtain from the blooms a minimum quantity of an essential oil for which the nations of the earth, if they knew its properties, would gladly empty their treasuries. This case must at all costs accompany me."

"Yet because you are still in England," said Stuart huskily, "I venture to hope that your devil dreams may end on the scaffold."

"That can never be, Dr. Stuart," returned Fo-Hi placidly. "The scaffold is not for such as I. Moreover, it is a crude and barbaric institution which I deplore. Do you see that somewhat peculiarly constructed chair, yonder? It is an adaptation, by a brilliant young chemist of Canton, of Ericksen's Disintegrating Ray. A bell hangs beside it. If you were seated in that chair and I desire to dismiss you, it would merely be necessary fro me to strike the bell once with the hammer. Before the vibration of the note had become inaudible you would be seeking your ancestors among the shades. It is the throne of the gods. Such a death is poetic."

He returned to the table and, observing meticulous care, emptied the few drops of colourless liquid from the condenser into a test-tube. Holding the tube near a lamp, he examined the contents, then poured the liquid into the
curious yellow bottle. A faint vapour arose from it.

"You would scarcely suppose," he said, "that yonder window opens upon an ivy-grown balcony commanding an excellent view of that picturesque Tudor survival, Hampton Court? I apprehend, however, that the researches of your late friend, M. Gaston Max, may ere long lead Scotland Yard to my doors, although there has been nothing in the outward seeming of this house, in the circumstances of my tenancy, or in my behaviour since I have--secretly--resided here, to excite local suspicion."

"Scotland Yard men may surround the house now!" said Stuart viciously.

"One of the two followers I have retained here with me, watches at the gate," replied Fo-Hi. "An intruder seeking to enter by any other route, through the hedge, over the wall, or from the river, would cause electric bells to ring loudly in this room, the note of the bell signifying the point of entry. Finally, in the event of such a surprise, I have an exit whereby one emerges at a secret spot on the river bank. A motor-boat, suitably concealed, awaits me there."

He placed a thermometer in the neck of the yellow bottle and the bottle in a rack. He directed the intolerable gaze of his awful eyes upon the man who sat, teeth tightly clenched, watching him from the _diwan._

"Ten minutes of life--in England--yet remain to you, Dr. Stuart. In ten minutes this fluid will have cooled to a temperature of 99 degrees, when I shall be enabled safely make an injection. You will be reborn in Kiangsu."

Fo-Hi walked slowly to the door whereby he had entered, opened it and went out. The door closed.

CHAPTER II
THE LIVING DEATH
The little furnace hissed continuously. A wisp of smoke floated up from the incense-burner. Stuart sat with his hands locked between his knees, and his gaze set upon the yellow flask.

Even now he found it difficult to credit the verity of his case. He found it almost impossible to believe that such a being as Fo-Hi existed, that such deeds had been done, were being done, in England, as those of which he had heard from the sinister cowled man. Save for the hissing of the furnace and the clanking of the chain as he strove with all his strength to win freedom, that wonderful evil room was silent as the King's Chamber at the heart of the Great Pyramid.

His gaze reverted to the yellow flask.

"Oh, my God!" he groaned.

Terror claimed him--the terror which he had with difficulty been fending off throughout that nightmare interview with Fo-Hi. Madness threatened him, and he was seized by an almost uncontrollable desire to shout execrations--prayers--he knew not what. He clenched his teeth grimly and tried to think, to plan.

He had two chances:
The statement left with Inspector Dunbar, in which he had mentioned the existence of a house "near Hampton Court," and ... Miska.

That she was one of the two exceptions mentioned by Fo-Hi he felt assured. But was she in this house, and did she know of his presence there? Even so, had she access to that room of mysteries--of horrors?

And who was the other who remained? Almost certainly it was the fanatical Hindu, Chunda Lal, of whom she had spoken with such palpable terror and who watched her unceasingly, untiringly. _He_ would prevent her intervening even if she had power to intervene.

His great hope, then, was in Dunbar ... for Gaston Max was dead.

At the coming of that thought, the foul doing to death of the fearless Frenchman, he gnashed his teeth savagely and strained at the gyves until the pain in his ankles brought out beads of perspiration upon his forehead.

He dropped his head into his hands and frenziedly clutched at his hair with twitching fingers.

The faint sound occasioned by the opening of one of the sliding doors brought him sharply upright.

Miska entered!

She looked so bewilderingly beautiful that terror and sorrow fled, leaving Stuart filled only with passionate admiration. She wore an Eastern dress of gauzy shimmering silk and high-heeled gilt Turkish slippers upon her stockingless feet. About her left ankle was a gold bangle, and there was barbaric jewellery upon her arms. She was a figure unreal as all lose in that house of dreams, but a figure so lovely that Stuart forgot the yellow flask ... forgot that less than ten minutes of life remained to him.

"Miska!" he whispered--"Miska!"

She exhibited intense but repressed excitement and fear. Creeping to the second door--that by which Fo-Hi had gone out--she pressed her ear to the lacquered panel and listened intently. Then, coming swiftly to the table, she took up a bunch of keys, approached Stuart and, kneeling, unlocked the gyves. The scent of jasmine stole to his nostrils.

"God bless you!" he said with stifled ardour.

She rose quickly to her feet, standing before him with head downcast. Stuart rose with difficulty. His legs were
cramped and aching. He grasped Miska's hand and endeavoured to induce her to look up. One swift glance she gave him and looked away again.

"You must go--this instant," she said. "I show you the way. There is not a moment to lose...."

"Miska!"
She glanced at him again.
"You must come with me!"
"Ah!" she whispered--"that is impossible! Have I not told you so?"
"You have told me, but I cannot understand. Here, in England, you are free. Why should you remain with that cowled monster?"

"Shall I tell you?" she asked, and he could feel how she trembled. "If I tell you, will you promise to believe me--and to go?"

"Not without you!"
"Ah! no, no! If I tell you that my only chance of life--such a little, little chance--is to stay, will you go?"
Stuart secured her other hand and drew her toward him, half resisting.
"Tell me," he said softly. "I will believe you--and if it can spare you one moment of pain or sorrow, I will go as you ask me."

"Listen," she whispered, glancing fearfully back toward the closed door--"Fo-Hi has something that make people to die; and only he can bring them to life again. Do you believe this?"
She looked up at him rapidly, her wonderful eyes wide and fearful. He nodded.
"Ah! you know! Very well. On that day in Cairo, which I am taken before him--you remember, I tell you?--he ... oh!"
She shuddered wildly and hid her beautiful face against Stuart's breast. He threw his arms about her.
"Tell me," he said.
"With the needle, he ... inject ..."
"Miska!"
Stuart felt the blood rushing to his heart and knew that he had paled.
"There is something else," she went on, almost inaudibly, "with which he gives life again to those he had made dead with the needle. It is a light green liquid tasting like bitter apples; and once each week for six months it must be drunk or else ... the living death comes. Sometimes I have not seen Fo-Hi for six months at a time, but a tiny flask, one draught, of the green liquid, always comes to me wherever I am, every week ... and twice each year I see him--Fo-Hi ... and he ..."
Her voice quivered and ceased. Moving back, she slipped a soft shoulder free of its flimsy covering.
Stuart looked--and suppressed a groan.
Her arm was dotted with the tiny marks made by a hypodermic syringe!
"You see!" she whispered tremulously. "If I go, I die, and I am buried alive ... or else I live until my body ..."
"Oh, God!" moaned Stuart--"the fiend! the merciless, cunning fiend! Is there _nothing_ ...
"Yes, yes!" said Miska, looking up. "If I can get enough of the green fluid and escape. But he tell me once--it was in America--that he only prepares one tiny draught at a time! Listen! I must stay, and if he can be captured he must be forced to make this antidote ... Ah! go! go!"
Her words ended in a sob, and Stuart held her to him convulsively, his heart filled with such helpless, fierce misery and bitterness as he had never known.
"Go, please go!" she whispered. "It is my only chance--there is no other. There is not a moment to wait. Listen to me! You will go by that door by which I come in. There is a better way, through a tunnel he has made to the river bank; but I cannot open the door. Only _he_ has the key. At the end of the passage some one is waiting----"
"Chunda Lal!" Miska glanced up rapidly and then dropped her eyes again.
"Yes--poor Chunda Lal. He is my only friend. Give him this."
She removed an amulet upon a gold chain from about her neck and thrust it into Stuart's hand.
"It seems to you silly, but Chunda Lal is of the East; and he has promised. Oh! be quick! I am afraid. I tell you something. Fo-Hi does not know, but the police Inspector and many men search the river bank for the house! I see them from a window----"
"What!" cried Stuart--"Dunbar is here!"
_"Ssh! ssh!"_ Miska clutched him wildly. _"He_ is not far away. You will go and bring him here. No! for me do not fear. I put the keys back and he will think you have opened the lock by some trick----"
"Miska!"
"Oh, no more!"
She slipped from his arms, crossed and reopened the lacquered door, revealing a corridor dimly lighted. Stuart
followed and looked along the corridor.

"Right to the end," she whispered, "and down the steps. You know"-- touching the amulet which Stuart carried--"how to deal with--Chunda Lal."

But still he hesitated; until she seized his hand and urged him. Thereupon he swept her wildly into his arms.

"Miska! how can I leave you! It is maddening!"

"You must! you must!"

He looked into her eyes, stooped and kissed her upon the lips. Then, with no other word, he tore himself away and walked quickly along the corridor. Miska watched him until he was out of sight, then re-entered the great room and closed the door. She turned, and:

"Oh, God of mercy," she whispered.

Just within the second doorway stood Fo-Hi watching her.

CHAPTER III
THE FIFTH SECRET OF RACHE CHURAN

Stricken silent with fear, Miska staggered back against the lacquered door, dropping the keys which she held in her hand. Fo-Hi had removed the cowled garment and was now arrayed in a rich mandarin robe. Through the grotesque green veil which obscured his features the brilliant eyes shone catlike.

"So," he said softly, "you speed the parting guest. And did I not hear the sound of a chaste salute?"

Miska watched him, wild-eyed.

"And he knows," continued the metallic voice, "how to deal with Chunda Lal? But it may be that Chunda Lal will know how to deal with _him_! I had suspected that Dr. Keppel Stuart entertained an unprofessional interest in his charming patient. Your failure to force the bureau drawer in his study excited my suspicion--unjustly, I admit; for did not I fail also when I paid the doctor a personal visit? True, I was disturbed. But this suspicion later returned. It was in order that some lingering doubt might be removed that I afforded you the opportunity of interviewing my guest. But whatever surprise his ingenuity, aided by your woman's wit, has planned for Chunda Lal, I dare to believe that Chunda Lal, being forewarned, will meet successfully. He is expecting an attempt, by Dr. Stuart, to leave this house. He has my orders to detain him."

At that, anger conquered terror in the heart of Miska, and:

"You mean he has your orders to kill him!" she cried desperately.

Fo-Hi closed the door.

"On the contrary, he has my orders to take every possible care of him. Those blind, tempestuous passions which merely make a woman more desirable find no place in the trained mind of the scientist. That Dr. Stuart covets my choicest possession in no way detracts from his value to my Council."

Miska had never moved from the doorway by which Stuart had gone out; and now, having listened covertly and heard no outcry, her faith in Chunda Lal was restored. Her wonderful eyes narrowed momentarily, and she spoke with the guile, which seems so naive, of the Oriental woman.

"I care nothing for him--this Dr. Stuart. But he had done you no wrong------"

"Beyond seeking my death--none. I have already said"--the eyes of Fo-Hi gleamed through the hideous veil--"that I bear him no ill will."

"But you plan to carry him to China--like those others."

"I assign him a part in the New Renaissance--yes. In the Deluge that shall engulf the world, his place is in the Ark. I honor him."

"Perhaps he rather remain a--nobody--than be so honored."

"In his present state of imperfect understanding it is quite possible," said Fo-Hi smoothly. "But if he refuses to achieve greatness he must have greatness thrust upon him. Van Rembold, I seem to recall, hesitated for some time to direct his genius to the problem of producing radium in workable quantities from the pitchblend deposits of Ho-Nan. But the _split rod_ had not been applied to the soles of his feet more than five times ere he reviewed his prejudices and found them to be surmountable."

Miska, knowing well the moods of the monstrous being whose unveiled face she had never seen, was not deceived by the suavity of his manner. Nevertheless, she fought down her terror, knowing how much might depend upon her retaining her presence of mind. How much of her interview with Stuart he had overheard she did not know, nor how much he had witnessed.

"But," she said, moving away from him, "he does not matter--this one. Forgive me if I think to let him go; but I am afraid------"

Fo-Hi crossed slowly, intercepting her.

"Ah!" said Miska, her eyes opening widely--"you are going to punish me again! For why? Because I am a woman and cannot always be cruel?"
From its place on the wall Fo-Hi took a whip. At that:

"Ah! no, no!" she cried. "You drive me mad! I am only in part of the East and I cannot bear it--I cannot bear it! You teach me to be like the women of England, who are free, and you treat me like the women of China, who are slaves. Once, it did not matter. I thought it was a part of a woman's life to be treated so. But now I cannot bear it!"

She stamped her foot fiercely upon the floor. "I tell you I cannot bear it!"

Whip in hand, Fo-Hi stood watching her.

"You release that man--for whom you 'care nothing'--in order that he may bring my enemies about me, in order that he may hand me over to the barbarous law of England. Now, you 'cannot bear' so light a rebuke as the whip. Here, I perceive, is some deep psychological change. Such protests do not belong to the women of my country; they are never heard in the _zenana_, and would provoke derision in the _harems_ of Stambul.

"You have trained me to know that life in a _harem_ is not life, but only the existence of an animal."

"I have trained you--yes. What fate was before you when I intervened in that Mecca slave-market? You who are 'only in part of the East.' Do you forget so soon how you cowered there amongst the others, Arabs, Circassians, Georgians, Nubians, striving to veil your beauty from those ravenous eyes? From _what_ did I rescue you?"

"And _for_ what?" cried Miska bitterly. "To use me as a lure--and beat me if I failed."

Fo-Hi stood watching her, and slowly, as he watched, terror grew upon her and she retreated before him, step by step. He made no attempt to follow her, but continued to watch. Then, raising the whip he broke it across his knee and dropped the pieces on the floor.

At that she extended her hands towards him pitifully.

"Oh! what are you going to do to me!" she said. "Let me go! let me go! I can no more be of use to you. Give me back my life and let me go-- et me go and hide away from them all--from all ... the world...."

Her words died away and ceased upon a suppressed hysterical sob. For, in silence, Fo-Hi stood watching her, unmoved.

"Oh!" she moaned, and sank cowering upon a _diwan--_ "why do you watch me so!"

"Because," came the metallic voice, softly--"you are beautiful with a beauty given but rarely to the daughters of men. The Sublime Order has acquired many pretty women--for they are potent weapons--but none so fair as you. Miska, I would make life sweet for you."

"Ah! you do not mean that!" she whispered fearfully.

"Have I not clothed you in the raiment of a princess!" continued Fo-Hi. "To-night, at my urgent request, you wear the charming national costume in which I delight to see you. But is there a woman of Paris, of London, of New York, who has such robes, such jewels, such apartments as you possess? Perhaps the peculiar duties which I have required you to perform, the hideous disguises, which you have sometimes been called upon to adopt, have disgusted you."

Her heart beating wildly, for she did not know this mood but divined it to portend some unique horror, Miska crouched, head averted.

"To-night the hour has come to break the whip. To-night the master in me dies. My cloak of wise authority has fallen from me and I offer myself in bondage to _you_, my slave!"

"This is some trap you set for me!" she whispered.

But Fo-Hi, paying no heed to her words, continued in the same rapt voice:

"Truly have you observed that the Chinese wife is but a slave to her lord. I have said that the relation of master and slave is ended between us. I offer you a companionship that signifies absolute freedom and perfect understanding. Half of all I have--and the world lies in my grasp--is yours. I offer a throne set upon the Seven Mountains of the Universe. Look into my eyes and read the truth."

But lower and lower she cowered upon the _diwan._

"No, no! I am afraid!"

Fo-Hi approached her closely and abject terror now had robbed her of strength. Her limbs seemed to have become numbed, her tongue clave to the roof of her mouth.

"Fear me no more, Miska," said Fo-Hi. "I _will_ you nothing but joy. The man who has learned the Fifth Secret of Rache Churan--who has learned how to control his will--holds a power absolute and beyond perfectability. You know, who have dwelt beneath my roof, that there is no escape from my will." His calm was terrible, and his glance, through the green veil, was like a ray of scorching heat. His voice sank lower and lower.

"There is one frailty, Miska, that even the Adept cannot conquer. It is inherent in every man. Miska, I would not _force_ you to grasp the joy I offer; I would have you _accept_ it willingly. No! do not turn from me! No woman in all the world has ever heard me plead, as I plead to you. Never before have I _sued_ for favours. Do not turn from me, Miska."

Slightly, the metallic voice vibrated, and the ruffling of that giant calm was a thing horrible to witness. Fo-Hi
extended his long yellow hands, advancing step by step until he stood over the cowering girl. Irresistibly her glance was drawn to those blazing eyes which the veil could not hide, and as she met that unblinking gaze her own eyes dilated and grew fixed as those of a sleep-walker. A moment Fo-Hi stood so. Then passion swept him from his feet and he seized her fiercely.

"Your eyes drive me mad!" he hissed. "Your lips taunt me, and I know all earthly greatness to be a mirage, its conquests visions, and its fairness dust. I would rather be a captive in your white arms than the emperor of heaven! Your sweetness intoxicates me, Miska. A fever burns me up!"

Helpless, enmeshed in the toils of that mighty will, Miska raised her head; and gradually her expression changed. Fear was smoothed away from her lovely face as by some magic brush. She grew placid; and finally she smiled—the luresome, caressing smile of the East. Nearer and nearer drew the green veil. Then, uttering a sudden fierce exclamation, Fo-Hi thrust her from him.

"That smile is not for _me_, the man!" he cried gutterally. "Ah! I could curse the power that I coveted and set above all earthly joys! I who boasted that he could control his will—I read in your eyes that I am _willing_ you to love me! I seek a gift and can obtain but a tribute!"

Miska, with a sobbing moan, sank upon the _diwan._ Fo-Hi stood motionless, looking straight before him. His terrible calm was restored.

"It is the bitter truth," he said—"that to win the world I have bartered the birthright of men; the art of winning a woman's heart. There is much in our Chinese wisdom. I erred in breaking the whip. I erred in doubting my own prescience, which told me that the smiles I could not woo were given freely to another ... and perhaps the kisses. At least I can set these poor frail human doubts at rest."

He crossed and struck a gong which hung midway between the two doors.

CHAPTER IV
THE GUILE OF THE EAST

Her beautiful face a mask of anguish, Miska cowered upon the _diwan_, watching the closed doors. Fo-Hi stood in the centre of the great room with his back to the entrance. Silently one of the lacquered panels slid open and Chunda Lal entered. He saluted the figure of the veiled Chinaman but never once glanced in the direction of the _diwan_ from which Miska wildly was watching him.

Without turning his head, Fo-Hi, who seemed to detect the presence of the silent Hindu by means of some fifth sense, pointed to a bundle of long rods stacked in a corner of the room.

"_Tum samajhte ho?_" (Do you understand?) said Fo-Hi. Chunda Lal inclined his head.

"_Main tumhari bat manunga_" (Your orders shall be obeyed), he replied.

"_Ah, God! no!_" whispered Miska—"what are you going to do?"

"Your Hindustani was ever poor, Miska," said Fo-Hi.

He turned to Chunda Lal.

"Until you hear the gong," he said in English.

Miska leapt to her feet, as Chunda Lal, never once glancing at her, went out bearing the rods, and closed the door behind him. Fo-Hi turned and confronted her.

"_Ta’ala hina_ (come hither), Miska!" he said softly. "Shall I speak to you in the soft Arab tongue? Come to me, lovely Miska. Let me feel how that sorrowful heart will leap like a captive gazelle."

But Miska shrank back from him, pale to the lips.

"Very well." His metallic voice sank to a hiss. "I employ no force. You shall yield to me your heart as a love offering. Of such motives as jealousy and revenge you know me incapable. What I do, I do with a purpose. That compassion of yours shall be a lever to cast you into my arms. Your hatred you shall conquer."

"Oh, have you no mercy? Is there _nothing_ human in your heart? Did I say I hate you!"

"Your eyes are eloquent, Miska. I cherish two memories of those beautiful eyes. One is of their fear and loathing—of _me_; the other is of their sweet softness when they watched the departure of my guest. Listen! Do you hear nothing?"

In an attitude of alert and fearful attention Miska stood listening. Fo-Hi watched her through the veil with those remorseless blazing eyes.

"I will open the door," he said smoothly, "that we may more fully enjoy the protests of one for whom you 'care nothing'—of one whose lips have pressed—your hand."

He opened the door by which Chunda Lal had gone out and turned again to Miska. Her eyes looked unnaturally dark by contrast with the pallor of her face.

Chunda Lal had betrayed her. She no longer doubted it. For he had not dared to meet her glance. His fear of Fo-Hi had overcome his love for her ... and Stuart had been treacherously seized somewhere in the corridors and
rendered helpless by the awful art of the thug.

"There is a brief interval," hissed the evil voice. "Chunda Lal is securing him to the frame and baring the soles of his feet for the caresses of the rod."

Suddenly, from somewhere outside the room, came the sound of dull, regular blows ... then, a smothered moan! Miska sprang forward and threw herself upon her knees before Fo-Hi, clutching at his robe frantically. "Ah! merciful God! he is there! Spare him! spare him! No more--no more!"

"He is there?" repeated Fo-Hi suavely. "Assuredly he is there, Miska. I know not by what trick he hoped to 'deal with' Chunda Lal. But, as I informed you, Chunda Lal was forewarned."

The sound of blows continued, followed by that of another, louder groan. "Stop him! Stop him!" shrieked Miska.

"You 'care nothing' for this man. Why do you tremble?"

"Oh!" she wailed piteously. "I cannot bear it ... oh, I cannot bear it! Do what you like with me, but spare him. Ah! you have no mercy."

Fo-Hi handed her the hammer for striking the gong. "It is you who have no mercy," he replied. "I have asked but one gift. The sound of the gong will end Dr. Stuart's discomfort ... and will mean that you voluntarily accept my offer. What! you hesitate?" A stifled scream rang out sharply. "Ah, yes! yes!"

Miska ran and struck the gong, then staggered back to the _diwan_ and fell upon it, hiding her face in her hands. The sounds of torture ceased.

Fo-Hi closed the door and stood looking at her where she lay.

"I permit you some moments of reflection," he said, "in order that you may compose yourself to receive the addresses which I shall presently have the honour, and joy, of making to you. Yes--this door is unlocked." He threw the keys on the table. "I respect your promise ... and Chunda Lal guards the _outer_ exits."

He opened the further door, by which he had entered, and went out. Miska, through the fingers of her shielding hands, watched him go.

When he had disappeared she sprang up, clenching her teeth, and her face was contorted with anguish. She began to move aimlessly about the room, glancing at the many strange objects on the big table and fearfully at the canopied chair beside which hung the bronze bell. Finally:

"Oh, Chunda Lal! Chunda Lal!" she moaned, and threw herself face downward on the _diwan_, sobbing wildly.

So she lay, her whole body quivering with the frenzy of her emotions, and as she lay there, inch by inch, cautiously, the nearer door began to open. Chunda Lal looked in.

Finding the room to be occupied only by Miska, he crossed rapidly to the _diwan_, bending over her with infinite pity and tenderness.

"Miska!" he whispered softly.

As though an adder had touched her, Miska sprang to her feet--and back from the Hindu. Her eyes flashed fiercely. "Ah! _you! you!_" she cried at him, with a repressed savagery that spoke of the Oriental blood in her veins. "Do not speak to me--look at me! Do not come near me! I hate you! God! how I hate you!"

"Miska! Miska!" he said beseechingly--"you pierce my heart! you kill me! Can you not understand----"

"Go! go!"

She drew back from him, clenching and unclenching her jewelled fingers and glaring madly into his eyes.

"Look, Miska!" He took the gold chain and amulet from his bosom. "Your token! Can you not understand! _Yah Allah!_ how little you trust me-- and I would die for one glance of your eyes! "_He_--Stuart Sahib--has gone, gone long since!"

"Ah! Chunda Lal!"

Miska swayed dizzily and extended her hands towards him. Chunda Lal glanced fearfully about him.

"Did I not," he whispered, with an intense ardour in his soft voice,--"did I not lay my life, my service, all I have, at your feet? Did I not vow to serve you in the name of _Bhowani_! He is long since gone to bring his friends--who are searching from house to house along the river. At any moment they may be here!"

Miska dropped weakly upon her knees before him and clasped his hand. "Chunda Lal, my friend! Oh, forgive me!" Her voice broke. "Forgive ..."

Chunda Lal raised her gently. "Not upon your knees to _me_, Miska. It was a little thing to do--for you. Did I not tell you that _he_ had cast his eyes upon you? Mine was the voice you heard to cry out. Ah! you do not know; it is to gain _time_ that I seem to serve _him_! Only this, Miska"--he revealed the blade of a concealed knife--"stand between Fo-Hi and--you! Had I
not read it in his eyes!"

He raised his glance upward frantically.

_"Jey Bhowani!_ give me strength, give me courage! For if I fail ..."

He glared at her passionately, clutching his bosom; then, pressing the necklet to his lips, he concealed it again, and bent, whispering urgently:

"Listen again--I reveal it to you without price or hope of reward, for I know there is no love in your heart to give, Miska; I know that it takes you out of my sight for always. But I tell you what I learn in the house of Abdul Rozan. Your life is your own, Miska! With the needle"-yet closer he bent to her ear and even softer he spoke-"he pricks your white skin--no more! The vial he sends contains a harmless cordial!"

"Chunda Lal!"

Miska swayed again dizzily, clutching at the Hindu for support.

"Quick! fly!" he said, leading her to the door. "I will see _he_ does not pursue!"

"No, no! you shall shed no blood for me! Not even _his_. You come also!"

"And if he escape, and know that I was false to him, he will _call me back_ and I shall be dragged to those yellow eyes, though I am a thousand miles away! _Inshalla!_ those eyes! No--I must strike swift, or he robs me of my strength."

For a long moment Miska hesitated.

"Then, I also remain, Chunda Lal, my friend! We will wait--and watch -and listen for the bells--here--that tell they are in the grounds of the house."

"Ah, Miska!" the glance of the Hindu grew fearful--"you are clever--but _he_ is the Evil One! I fear for you. Fly now. There is yet time ..."

A faint sound attracted Miska's attention. Placing a quivering finger to her lips, she gently thrust Chunda Lal out into the corridor.

"He returns!" she whispered: "If I call--come to me, my friend. But we have not long to wait!"

She closed the door.

CHAPTER V

WHAT HAPPENED TO STUART

Stuart had gained the end of the corridor, unmolested. There he found a short flight of steps, which he descended and came to a second corridor forming a right angle with the first. A lamp was hung at the foot of the steps, and by its light he discerned a shadowy figure standing at the further end of this second passage.

A moment he hesitated, peering eagerly along the corridor. The man who waited was Chunda Lal. Stuart approached him and silently placed in his hand the gold amulet.

Chunda Lal took it as one touching something holy, and raising it he kissed it with reverence. His dark eyes were sorrowful. Long and ardently he pressed the little trinket to his lips, then concealed it under the white robe which he wore and turned to Stuart. His eyes were sorrowful no more, but fierce as the eyes of a tiger.

"Follow!" he said.

He unlocked a door and stepped out into a neglected garden, Stuart close at his heels. The sky was cloudy, and the moon obscured. Never glancing back, Chunda Lal led the way along a path skirting a high wall upon which climbing fruit trees were growing until they came to a second door and this also the Hindu unlocked. He stood aside.

"To the end of this lane," he said, in his soft queerly modulated voice, "and along the turning to the left to the river bank. Follow the bank towards the palace and you will meet them."

"I owe you my life," said Stuart.

"Go! you owe me nothing," returned the Hindu fiercely.

Stuart turned and walked rapidly along the lane. Once he glanced back. Chunda Lal was looking after him ... and he detected something that gleamed in his hand, gleamed not like gold but like the blade of a knife!

Turning the corner, Stuart began to run. For he was unarmed and still weak, and there had been that in the fierce black eyes of the Hindu when he had scorned Stuart's thanks which had bred suspicion and distrust.

From the position of the moon, Stuart judged the hour to be something after midnight. No living thing stirred about him. The lane in which now he found himself was skirted on one side by a hedge beyond which was open country and on the other by a continuation of the high wall which evidently enclosed the grounds of the house that he had just quitted. A cool breeze fanned his face, and he knew that he was approaching the Thames. Ten more paces and he came to the bank.

In his weak condition the short run had exhausted him. His bruised throat was throbbing painfully, and he experienced some difficulty in breathing. He leaned up against the moss-grown wall, looking back into the darkness of the lane.

No one was in sight. There was no sound save the gently lapping of the water upon the bank.
He would have liked to bathe his throat and to quench his feverish thirst, but a mingled hope and despair spurred him and he set off along the narrow path towards where dimly above some trees he could discern in the distance a group of red-roofed buildings. Having proceeded for a considerable distance, he stood still, listening for any sound that might guide him to the search-party—or warn him that he was followed. But he could hear nothing.

Onward he pressed, not daring to think of what the future held for him, not daring to dwell upon the memory, the maddening sweetness, of that parting kiss. His eyes grew misty, he stumbled as he walked, and became oblivious of his surroundings. His awakening was a rude one.

Suddenly a man, concealed behind a bush, sprang out upon him and bore him irresistibly to the ground!

"Not a word!" rapped his assailant, "or I'll knock you out!"

Stuart glared into the red face lowered so threateningly over his own, and:

"Sergeant Sowerby!" he gasped.

The grip upon his shoulders relaxed.

"Damn!" cried Sowerby--"if it isn't Dr. Stuart?"

"What is that?" cried another voice from the shelter of the bush. "Pardieu! say it again! ... Dr. Stuart!"

And Gaston Max sprang out!

"Max!" murmured Stuart, staggering to his feet--"Max!"

"Nom d'un nom! Two dead men meet!" exclaimed Gaston Max. "But indeed"--he grasped Stuart by both hands and his voice shook with emotion--"I thank God that I see you!"

Stuart was dazed. Words failed him, and he swayed dizzily.

"I thought you were murdered," said Max, still grasping his hand, "and I perceive that you had made the same mistake about me! Do you know what saved me, my friend, from the consequences of that frightful blow? It was the bandage of 'Le Balafre'!"

"You must possess a skull like a negro's!" said Stuart feebly.

"I believe I have a skull like a baboon!" returned Max, laughing with joyous excitement. "And you, doctor, you must possess a steel wind-pipe; for flesh and blood could never have survived the pressure of that horrible pigtail. You will rejoice to learn that Miguel was arrested on the Dover boat-train this morning and Ah-Fang-Fu at Tilbury Dock some four hours ago. So we are both avenged! But we waste time!"

He unscrewed a flask and handed it to Stuart.

"A terrible experience has befallen you," he said. "But tell me--do you know where it is--the lair of 'The Scorpion'?"

"I do!" replied Stuart, having taken a welcome draught from the flask. "Where is Dunbar? We must carefully surround the place or he will elude us."

"Ah! as he eluded us at 'The Pidgin House!'" cried Max. "Do you know what happened? They had a motorboat in the very cellar of that warren. At high tide they could creep out into the cutting, drawing their craft along from pile to pile, and reach the open river at a point fifty yards above the house! In the damnable darkness they escaped. But we have two of them."

"It was all my fault," said Sowerby guiltily. "I missed my spring when I went for the Chinaman who came out first, and he gave one yell. The old fox in the shop heard it and the fat was in the fire."

"You didn't miss your spring at me!" retort Stuart ruefully.

"No," agreed Sowerby. "I didn't mean to miss a second time!"

"What's all this row," came a gruff voice.

"Ah! Inspector Dunbar!" said Max.

Dunbar walked up the path, followed by a number of men. At first he did not observe Stuart, and:

"You'll be waking all the neighborhood," he said. "It's the next big house, Sowerby, the one we thought, surrounded by the brick wall. There's no doubt, I think ... Why!"

He had seen Stuart, and he sprang forward with outstretched hand.

"Thank God!" he cried, disregarding his own counsel about creating a disturbance. "This is fine! Eh, man! but I'm glad to see you!"

"And I am glad to be here!" Stuart assured him.

They shook hands warmly.

"You have read my statement, of course?" asked Stuart.

"I have," replied the Inspector, and gave him a swift glance of the tawny eyes. "And considering that you've nearly been strangled, I'll forgive you! But I wish we'd known about this house----"

"Ah! Inspector," interrupted Gaston Max, "but you have never seen Zara el-Khala! I have seen her--and I forgive him, also!"

Stuart continued rapidly:
"We have little time to waste. There are only three people in the house, so far as I am aware: Miska--known to
you, M. Max, as Zara el-Khala--the Hindu, Chunda Lal, and--Fo-Hi-----"

"Ah!" cried Max--"'The Scorpion.' Chunda Lal, for some obscure personal reason, not entirely unconnected with
Miska, enabled me to make my escape in order that I might lead you to the house. Therefore we may look upon
Chunda Lal, as well as Miska, in the light of an accomplice----"

"Eh, bien! a spy in the camp! This is where we see how fatal to the success of any enterprise, criminal or
otherwise, is the presence of a pretty woman! Proceed, my friend!"

"There are three entrances to the apartment in which Fo-Hi apparently spends the greater part of his time. Two of
these I know, although I am unaware where one of them leads to. But the third, of which he alone holds the key,
communicates with a tunnel leading to the river bank, where a motorboat is concealed."

"Ah, that motor-boat!" cried Max. "He travels at night, you understand----"

"Always, I am told."

"Yes, always. Therefore, once he is out on the river, he is moderately secure between the first lock and the Nore!
When a police patrol is near he can shut off his engine and lie under the bank. Last night he crept away from us in
that fashion. Tonight is not so dark, and the River Police are watching all the way down."

"Furthermore," replied Stuart, "Chunda Lal, who acts as engineer, has it in his power to prevent Fo-Hi's escape
by that route! But we must count upon the possibility of his attempting to leave by water. Therefore, in disposing
your forces, place a certain number of men along the bank and below the house. Is there a River Police boat near?"

"Not nearer than Putney Bridge," answered Dunbar. "We shall have to try and block that exit."

"There's no time to waste," continued Stuart excitedly--"and I have a very particular request to make: that you
will take Fo-Hi _alive._"

"But of course," said Gaston Max, "if it is humanly possible."

Stuart repressed a groan; for even so he had little hope of inducing the awful veiled man to give back life to the
woman who would have been instrumental in bringing him to the scaffold ... and no compromise was possible!

"If you will muster your men, Inspector," he said, "I will lead you to the spot. Once we have affected an entrance
we must proceed with dispatch. He has alarm-bells connected with every possible point of entry."

"Lead on, my friend," cried Gaston Max. "I perceive that time is precious."

CHAPTER VI

"JEY BHOWANI!"

As the door closed upon Chunda Lal, Miska stepped back from it and stood, unconsciously, in a curiously rigid
and statuesque attitude, her arms pressed to her sides and her hands directed outward. It was the physical expression
of an intense mental effort to gain control of herself. Her heart was leaping wildly in her breast--for the future that
had held only horror and a living tomb, now opened out sweetly before her. She had only to ply her native wiles for
a few precious moments ... and _someone_ would have her in his arms, to hold her safe from harm! If the will of the
awful Chinaman threatened to swamp her individuality, then--there was Chunda Lal!

But because of his helpless, unselfish love, she hesitated even at the price of remaining alone again with Fo-Hi,
to demand any further sacrifice of the Hindu. Furthermore--he might fail!

The lacquer door slid noisely open and Fo-Hi entered. He paused, watching her.

"Ah," he said, in that low-pitched voice which was so terrifying--"a _gaziyeh_ of Ancient Egypt! How beautiful
you are, Miska! You transport me to the court of golden Pharaoh. Miska! daughter of the moon-magic of Isis--Zara
el-Khala! At any hour my enemies may be clamoring at my doors. But _this_ hour is mine!"

He moved at his customary slow gait to the table, took up the keys ... and locked both doors!

Miska, perceiving in this her chance of aid from Chunda Lal utterly destroyed, sank slowly upon the _diwan,_
hers face expressing the utmost consternation. Suppose the police did not come!

Fo-Hi dropped the keys on the table again and approached her. She stood up, retreating before him. He inhaled
sibilantly and paused.

"So your 'acceptance' was only a trick," he said. "Your loathing of my presence is as strong as ever. Well!" At
the word, as a volcano leaps into life, the hidden fires which burned within this terrible man leapt up consumingly--
"if the gift of the flower is withheld, at least I will grasp the Dead Sea Fruit!"

He leapt toward Miska--and she fled shrieking before him. Running around a couch which stood near the centre
of the room, she sprang to the door and beat upon it madly.

"Chunda Lal!!" she cried--"Chunda Lal!!"

Fo-Hi was close upon her, and she turned striving to elude him.

"Oh, merciful God! _Chunda Lal!!_"

The name burst from her lips in a long frenzied scream. Fo-Hi had seized her!

Grasping her shoulders, he twisted her about so that he could look into her eyes. A low, shuddering cry, died
away, and her gaze became set, hypnotically, upon Fo-Hi. He raised one hand, fingers outstretched before her. She swayed slightly.

"Forget!" he said in a deep, guttural voice of command--"forget. I _will_ it. We stand in an empty world, you and I; you, Miska, and I, Fo-Hi, your master."

"My master," she whispered mechanically.

"Your master."

"My lover."

"You give me your life, to do with as I will."

"As you will."

Fo-Hi momentarily raised the blazing eyes.

"Oh, empty shell of a vanished joy!" he cried.

Then, frenziedly grasping Miska by her arms, he glared into her impassive face.

"Your heart leaps wildly in your breast!" he whispered tenderly. "Look into my eyes...."

Miska sighed and opened her eyes yet more widely. She shuddered and a slow smile appeared upon her lips.

The lacquer screen making the window was pushed open and Chunda Lal leapt in over the edge. As Fo-Hi drew the yielding, hypnotised girl towards him, Chunda Lal, a gleaming _kukri_ held aloft, ran with a silent panther step across the floor.

He reached Fo-Hi, drew himself upright; the glittering blade quivered ... and Fo-Hi divined his presence.

Uttering a short, guttural exclamation, he thrust Miska aside. She staggered dazedly and fell prone upon the floor. The quivering blade did not descend.

Fo-Hi drew himself rigidly upright, extending his hands, palms downward, before him. He was exerting a superhuman effort. The breath whistled through his nostrils. Chunda Lal, knife upraised, endeavored to strike; but his arm seemed to have become incapable of movement and to be held, helpless, aloft.

Staring at the rigid figure before him, he began to pant like a man engaged in a wrestle for life.

Fo-Hi stretched his right arm outward, and with a gesture of hand and fingers beckoned to Chunda Lal to come before him.

And now, Miska, awakening as from a fevered dream, looked wildly about her, and then, serpentine, began to creep to the table upon which the keys were lying. Always watching the awful group of two, she rose slowly, snatched the keys and leapt across to the open window....

Chunda Lal, swollen veins standing out cord-like on his brow, his gaze set hypnotically upon the moving hand, dropped his knife and began to move in obedience to the will of Fo-Hi.

As he came finally face to face with the terrible Adept of Rache Churan, Miska disappeared into the shadow of the balcony. Fo-Hi by an imperious gesture commanded Chunda Lal to kneel and bow his head. The Hindu, gasping, obeyed.

Thereupon Fo-Hi momentarily relaxed his giant concentration and almost staggered as he glared down at the kneeling man. But never was that dreadful gaze removed from Chunda Lal. And now the veiled man drew himself rigidly upright again and stepped backward until the fallen _kukri_ lay at his feet. He spoke, "Chunda Lal!"

The Hindu rose, gazing before him with unseeing eyes. His forehead was wet with perspiration.

Fo-Hi pointed to the knife.

Chunda Lal, without removing his sightless gaze from the veiled face, stooped, groped until he found the knife and rose with it in his hand.

Back stepped Fo-Hi, and back, until he could touch the big table. He moved a brass switch--and a trap opened in the floor behind Chunda Lal. Fo-Hi raised his right hand, having the fingers tightly closed as if grasping the hilt of a knife. With his left hand he pointed to the trap. Again he spoke.

_"Tum samaha ho?"_

Mechanically Chunda Lal replied:

_"Ah, Sahib, tumhara heen jaldi: kiya' jaega"_ (Yes, I hear and obey.)

As Fo-Hi raised his clenched right hand, so did Chunda Lal raise the _kukri_. Fo-Hi extended his left hand rigidly towards the Hindu and seemed to force him, step by step, back towards the open trap. Almost at the brink, Chunda Lal paused, swayed, and began to utter short, agonised cries. Froth appeared upon his lips.

Raising his right hand yet further aloft, Fo-Hi swiftly brought it down, performing the gesture of stabbing himself to the heart. His ghastly reserve deserted him.

_"Jey Bhowana!"_ he screamed--""Yah Allah!"

Chunda Lal, uttering a loud groan, stabbed himself and fell backward into the opening. Ensued a monstrous crash of broken glass.

As he fell, Fo-Hi leapt to the brink of the trap, glaring down madly into the cellar below. His yellow fingers
opened and closed spasmodically.

"Lie there," he shrieked—"my 'faithful' servant! The ants shall pick your bones!"

He grasped the upstanding door of the trap and closed it. It descended with a reverberating boom. Fo-Hi raised his clenched fists and stepped to the door. Finding it locked, he stood looking toward the open screen before the window.

"Miska!" he whispered despairingly.

He crossed to the window and was about to look out, when a high-pitched electric bell began to ring in the room. Instantly Fo-Hi closed the screen and turned, looking in the direction from whence the sound of ringing proceeded. As he did so, a second bell, in another key, began to ring—a third—a fourth.

Momentarily the veiled man exhibited evidence of indecision. Then, from beneath his robe he took a small key. Approaching an ornate cabinet set against the wall to the left of one of the lacquer doors, he inserted the key in a hidden lock, and slid the entire cabinet partly aside revealing an opening.

Fo-Hi bent, peering down into the darkness of the passage below. A muffled report came, a flash out of the blackness of the river tunnel, and a bullet passed through the end of the cabinet upon which his hand was resting, smashing an ivory statuette and shattering the glass.

Hurriedly he slid the cabinet into place again and stood with his back to it, arms outstretched.

"Miska!" he said—and a note of yet deeper despair had crept into the harsh voice.

Awhile he stood thus; then he drew himself up with dignity. The bells had ceased.

Methodically Fo-Hi began to take certain books from the shelves and to cast them into the great metal bowl which stood upon the tripod. Into the bowl he poured the contents of a large glass jar. Flames and clouds of smoke arose. He paused, listening.

Confused voices were audible, seemingly from all around him, together with a sound of vague movements.

Fo-Hi took up vials and jars and dashed them to pieces upon the tiled hearth in which the furnace rested. Test-tubes, flasks and retorts he shattered, and finally, raising the large glass case of orchids he dashed it down amid the debris of the other nameless and priceless monstrosities unknown to Western science.

CHAPTER VII
THE WAY OF A SCORPION

A black cloud swept past the face of the moon and cold illumination flooded the narrow lane and patched with light the drive leading up to the front of the isolated mansion. Wrought-iron gates closed both entrances and a high wall, surmounted by broken glass and barbed wire, entirely surrounded the grounds.

"This one also is locked," said Gaston Max, trying the gate and then peering through the bars in the direction of the gloomy house.

All the visible windows were shuttered. No ray of light showed anywhere. The house must have been pronounced deserted by anyone contemplating it.

"Upon which side do you suppose the big room to be?" asked Max.

"It is difficult to judge," replied Stuart. "But I am disposed to believe that it is in the front of the house and on the first floor, for I traversed a long corridor, descended several stairs, turned to the right and emerged in a part of the garden bordering the lane in which Inspector Kelly is posted."

"I was thinking of the window and the balcony which 'The Scorpion' informed you commanded a view of Hampton Court. Hampton Court," he turned half-left, "lies about yonder. Therefore you are probably right, doctor; the room as you say should be in front of the house. Since we do not know how to disconnect the alarms, once we have entered the grounds it is important that we should gain access to the house immediately. Ah! _morbleu!_ the moon disappears again!"

Darkness crept over the countryside.

"There is an iron balcony jutting out amongst the ivy just above and to the right of the porch!" cried Stuart, who had also been peering up the moon-patched drive. "I would wager that that is the room!"

"Ah!" replied Max. "I believe you are right. This, then is how we shall proceed: Inspector Kelly, with the aid of two men, can get over the wall near that garden door by which you came out. If they cannot force it from inside, you also must get over and lead the way to the entrance you know of. Sowerby and two more men will remain to watch the lane. The river front is well guarded. We will post a man here at this gate and one at the other. Dunbar and I will climb this one and rush straight for that balcony which we must hope to reach by climbing up the ivy. Ah! here comes Inspector Dunbar ... and _someone_ is with him!"

Dunbar appeared at the double around the corner of the lane which led riverward, and beside him ran a girl who presented a bizarre figure beside the gaunt Scotsman and a figure wildly out of place in that English riverside setting.

It was Miska, arrayed in her flimsy _harem_ dress!
"Miska!" cried Stuart, and sprang towards her, sweeping her hungrily into his arms--forgetful of, indifferent to, the presence of Max and Dunbar.

"Ah!" sighed the Frenchman--"yes, she is beautiful!"

Trembling wildly, Miska clung to Stuart and began to speak, her English more broken than ever, because of her emotion.

"Listen--quick!" she panted. "Oh! do not hold me so tight. I have the house-keys--look!"--she held up a bunch of keys--"but not the keys of the gates. Two men have gone to the end of the tunnel where the boat is hid beside the river. Someone--he better climb this gate and by the ivy he can reach the room in which Fo-Hi is! I come down so. You do not see me because the moon goes out and I run to the side-door. It is open. _You_ come with me!"

She clung to Stuart, looking up into his eyes.

"Yes, yes, Miska!"

"Oh! Chunda Lal"--she choked down a sob. "Be quick! be quick! _He_ will kill him! he will kill him!"

"Off you go, doctor!" cried Max. "Come along, Dunbar!"

He began to climb the ironwork of the gate.

"This way!" said Miska, dragging Stuart by the arm. "Oh! I am wild with fear and sorrow and joy!"

"With joy, dear little Miska!" whispered Stuart, as he followed her.

They passed around the bend into the narrower lane which led toward the river and upon which the garden-door opened. Stuart detained her. If the fate of the whole world had hung in the balance--as indeed, perhaps it did--he could not have acted otherwise. He raised her bewitching face and kissed her ardently.

She trembled and clung to him rapturously.

"I _live_!" she whispered. "Oh! I am mad with happiness! It is Chunda Lal that gives me life--for he tells me the truth. It is not with the living-death that _he_ touches me; it is a trick, it is all a trick to bind me to him! Oh, Chunda Lal! Hurry! he is going to kill him!"

But supreme above all the other truths in the world, the joyous truth that Miska was to live set Stuart's heart on fire.

"Thank God!" he said fervently--"oh, thank God! Miska!"

At the garden-door a group of men awaited them. Sergeant Sowerby and two assistants remaining to watch the entrance and the lane, Miska led Stuart and the burly Inspector Kelly along that path beside the wall which Stuart so well remembered.

"Hurry!" she whispered urgently. "We must try to reach him before ..."

"You fear for Chunda Lal?" said Stuart.

"Oh, yes! He has a terrible power--Fo-Hi--which he never employs with me, until to-night. Ah! it is only Chunda Lal, who saved me! But Chunda Lal he can command with his _Will._ From it, once he has made anyone a slave to it, there is no escape. I have seen one in the city of Quebec, in Canada, forget all else and begin to act in obedience to the will of Fo-Hi who is thousands of miles away!"

"My God!" murmured Stuart, "what a horrible monster!"

They had reached the open door beyond which showed the dimly lighted passage. Miska hesitated.

"Oh! I am afraid!" she whispered.

She thrust the keys into the hand of Inspector Kelly, pointing to one of them, and:

"That is the key!" she said. "Have your pistol ready. Do not touch anything in the room and do not go in if I tell you not to. Come!"

They pressed along the passage, came to the stair and were about to ascend, when there ensued a dull reverberating boom, and Miska shrank back into Stuart's arms with a stifled shriek.

"Oh! Chunda Lal!" she moaned--"Chunda Lal! It is the trap!"

"The trap!" said Inspector Kelly.

"The cellar trap. He has thrown him down ... to the ants!"

Inspector Kelly uttered a short laugh; but Stuart repressed a shudder. He was never likely to forget the skeleton of the Nubian mute which had been stripped by the ants in sixty-nine minutes!

"We are too late!" whispered Miska. "Oh! listen! listen!"

Bells began to ring somewhere above them.

"Max and Dunbar are in!" said Kelly. "Come on, sir! Follow closely, boys!"

He ran up the stairs and along the corridor to the door at the end.

A muffled shot sounded from somewhere in the depths of the house.

"That's Harvey!" said one of the men who followed--"Our man must have tried to escape by the tunnel to the river bank!"

Inspector Kelly placed the key in the lock of the door.
It was at this moment that Gaston Max, climbing up to the front balcony by means of the natural ladder afforded by the ancient ivy, grasped the iron railing and drew himself up to the level of the room. By this same stairway Chunda Lal had ascended to death and Miska had climbed down to life.

"Mind the ironwork doesn't give way, sir!" called Dunbar from below.

"It is strong," replied Max. "Join me here, my friend."

Max, taking a magazine pistol from his pocket, stepped warily over the ledge into the mysterious half-light behind the great screen. As he did so, one of the lacquer doors was unlocked from the outside, and across the extraordinary, smoke-laden room he saw Inspector Kelly enter. He saw something else.

Seated in a strangely-shaped canopied chair was a figure wearing a rich mandarin robe, but having its face covered with a green veil.

"Mon Deiu!_ at last!" he cried, and leapt into the room. "The Scorpion!"

Even as he leapt, and as the Scotland Yard men closed in upon the chair also, all of them armed and all half fearful, a thing happened which struck awe to every heart—for it seemed to be supernatural.

Raising a metal hammer which he held in his hand, Fo-Hi struck the bronze bell hung beside the chair. It emitted a deep, loud note....

There came a flash of blinding light, and intense crackling sound, the crash of broken glass, and a dense cloud of pungent fumes rose in the heated air.

Dunbar had just climbed in behind Gaston Max. Bother were all but hurled from their feet by the force of the explosion. Then:

"Oh, my God!" cried Dunbar, staggering, half blinded, _"look--look!"

A deathly silence claimed them all. Just within the doorway Stuart appeared, having his arm about the shoulders of Miska.

The Throne of the Gods was empty! A thin coating of grey dust was settling upon it and upon the dais which supported it.

They had witnessed a scientific miracle ... the complete and instantaneous disintegration of a human body. Gaston Max was the first to recover speech.

"We are defeated," he said. "The Scorpion, surrounded, destroys himself. It is the way of a scorpion."
CHAPTER I

What shall we say when Dream-Pictures leave their frames of night and push us from the waking world?

As the part I played in the events I am about to narrate was rather that of a passive observer than of an active participant, I need say little of myself. I am a graduate of a Western university and, by profession, a physician. My practice is now extensive, owing to my blundering into fame in a somewhat singular manner, but a year ago I had, I assure you, little enough to do. Inasmuch as my practice is now secure, I feel perfectly free to confess that the cure I effected in the now celebrated case of Mrs. P-- was altogether the result of chance, and not, as I was then only too glad to have people believe, due to an almost supernatural power of diagnosis.

Mrs. P-- was not more surprised at the happy result than was I; the only difference being that she showed her astonishment, while I endeavoured to conceal mine, and affected to look upon the whole thing as a matter of course.

My fame spread; the case got into the medical journals, where my skill was much lauded, and my practice became enormous. There is but one thing further I need mention regarding myself: that is, that I am possessed of a memory which my friends are pleased to consider phenomenal. I can repeat a lecture, sermon, or conversation almost word for word after once hearing it, provided always, that the subject commands my interest. My humble abilities in this direction have never ceased to be a source of wonderment to my acquaintance, though I confess, for my own part, when I compare them with those of Blind Tom, or of the man who, after a single reading, could correctly repeat the London Times, advertisements and all, they seem modest indeed.

It was about the time when, owing to the blessed Mrs. P--, my creditors were beginning to receive some attention, that I first met George Maitland. He had need, he said, of my professional services; he felt much under the weather; could I give him something which would brace him up a bit; he had some important chemical work on hand which he could not afford to put by; in fact, he didn't mind saying that he was at work upon a table of atomical pitches to match Dalton's atomic weights; if he succeeded in what he had undertaken he would have solved the secret of the love and hatred of atoms, and unions hitherto unknown could easily be effected.

I do not know how long he would have continued had not my interest in the subject caused me to interrupt him. I was something of an experimenter myself, and here was a man who could help me.

He proceeded to tell me how he felt, but I could make nothing of it, so I forthwith did the regulation thing; what should we doctors do without it! I looked at his tongue, pulled down his eyelid, and pronounced him bilious. Yes, there were the little brown spots under his skin--freckles, perhaps--and probably he had an occasional ringing in his ears. He was willing to admit that he was dizzy on suddenly rising from a stooping posture, and that eggs, milk, and coffee were poison to him; and he afterward told me he should have said the same of any other three articles I might have mentioned, for he looked so hale and vigorous, and felt so disgracefully well, that he was ashamed of himself.

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know as much about it as I, and, doubtless, be quite as capable of answering the question, for candour compels me to own that my knowledge of the human heart is entirely professional. Think of searching for Cupid's darts with a stethoscope!

"I was standing," Maitland said, "before a masterpiece of sea and rock, such as only Richards can paint. It was a view of Land's End, Cornwall, and in the artist's very best vein. My admiration made me totally unmindful of my surroundings, so much so, indeed, that, although the gallery was crowded, I caught myself expressing my delight in a perfectly audible undertone. My enthusiasm, since it was addressed to no one, soon began to attract attention, and people stopped looking at the pictures to look at me. I was conscious of this in a vague, far-off way, much as one is conscious of a conversation which seems to have followed him across the borderland of sleep, and I even thought that I ought to be embarrassed. How long I remained thus transported I do not know. The first thing I remember is hearing someone close beside me take a quick, deep breath, one of those full inhalations natural to all sensitive natures when they come suddenly upon something sublime. I turned and looked. I have said I was transported by that canvas of sea and rocks, and have, therefore, no word left to describe the emotion with which I gazed upon the exquisite, living, palpitating picture beside me. A composite photograph of all the Madonnas ever painted, from the Sistine to Bodenhausen's, could not have been more lovely, more ineffably womanly than that young girl, radiant with the divine glow of artistic delight—at least, that is my opinion, which, by the bye, I should, perhaps, have stated a little more gingerly, inasmuch as you are yourself acquainted with the young lady. Now, don't look incredulous [noticing my surprise]. Black hair—-not brown, black; clear pink and white complexion; large, deep violet eyes with a remarkable poise to them."—Here I continued the description for him: "Slight of figure; a full, honest waist, without a suggestion of that execrable death-trap, Dame Fashion's hideous cuirass; a little above middle height; deliberate, and therefore graceful, in all her movements; carries herself in a way to impress one with the idea that she is innocent, without that time-honoured concomitant, ignorance; half girl, half woman; shy, yet strong; and in a word, very beautiful—that's Gwen Darrow." I paused here, and Maitland went on somewhat dubiously: "Yes, it's not hard to locate such a woman. She makes her presence as clearly felt among a million of her sex as does a grain of fuchsin in a hogshead of water. If, with a few ounces of this, Tyndall could colour Lake Geneva, so with Gwen Darrow one might, such is the power of the ideal, change the ethical status of a continent."

He then told me how he had made a study of Miss Darrow's movements, and had met her many times since; in fact, so often that he fancied, from something in her manner, that she had begun to wonder if his frequent appearance were not something more than a coincidence. The fear that she might think him dogging her footsteps worried him, and he began as sedulously to avoid the places he knew she frequented, as he previously had sought them. This, he confessed, made him utterly miserable. He had, to be sure, never spoken to her, but it was everything to be able to see her. When he could endure it no longer he had come to me under pretence of feeling ill, that he might, when he had made my acquaintance, get me to introduce him to the Darrows.

You will understand, of course, that I did not learn all this at our first interview. Maitland did not take me into his confidence until we had had a conference at his laboratory devoted entirely to scientific speculations. On this occasion he surprised me not a little by turning to me suddenly and saying: "Some of the grandest sacrifices the world has ever known, if one may judge by the fortitude they require, and the pain they cause, have occurred in the laboratory." I looked at him inquiringly, and he continued: "When a man, simply for the great love of truth that is in him, has given his life to the solution of some problem, and has at last arrived, after years of closest application, at some magnificent generalisation—when he has, perhaps, published his conclusions, and received the grateful homage of all lovers of truth, his life has, indeed, borne fruit. Of him may it then be justly said that his life hath blossomed downward like The purple bell-flower.'

But suddenly, in the privacy of his laboratory, a single fact arises from the test-tube in his trembling hand and confronts him! His brain reels; the glass torment falls upon the floor, and shatters into countless pieces, but he is not conscious of it, for he feels it thrust through his heart. When he recovers from the first shock, he can only ejaculate: 'Is it possible?' After a little he is able to reason. 'I was fatigued,' he says; 'perhaps my senses erred. I can repeat the experiment again, and be sure. But if it overthrow those conclusions for which I have given my life?' he gasps. 'My generalisation is firmly established in the minds of all—all but myself—no one will ever chance upon this particular experiment, and it may not disprove my theory after all; better, much better, that the floor there keep the secret of it all both from me and from others!' But even as he says this to himself he has taken a new tube from the rack and crawled—ten years older for that last ten minutes—to his chemical case. The life-long habit of truth is so strong in him that self-interest cannot submerge it. He repeats the experiment, and confirms his fears. The battle between his life and a few drops of liquid in a test-tube has been mercilessly fought, and he has lost! The elasticity of the man is gone forever, and the only indication the world ever receives of this terrible conflict between a human soul and its destiny is some half a dozen lines in Nature, giving the experiment and stating that it utterly refutes its author's previous conclusions. Half a dozen lines—the epitaph of a dead, though unburied, life!"
My companion paused there, but I found myself unable to reply. He had spoken with such intensity, such dramatic fervour, that I was completely swept away by his eloquence; so much so, indeed, that it did not even occur to me to ask myself why he should have burst out in this peculiar strain. I have given you the incident in order that you may see the strange moods into which Maitland occasionally relapsed—at least, at that time. After a quick glance at me he continued, in a quieter vein: "All of us men of science have felt something, however little, of this, and I believe, as a class, scientists transcend all other men in their respect for absolute truth." He cast another one of his searching glances at me, and said quickly: "This is precisely why I am going to confide in you and rely upon your assistance in a matter, the successful termination of which would please me as much as the discovery of an absolute standard of measurement."

He then made the confession which I have already given you, and ended by asking me to secure him an introduction to Miss Darrow. I cheerfully promised to bring this about at the first opportunity. He asked me if I thought, on account of his having met her so frequently, she would be likely to think it was all a "put up job."

"I do not know," I replied. "Miss Darrow is a singularly close observer. On the whole I think you had better reach her through her father. Do you play croquet?" He replied that he was considered something of an expert in that line. That, then, was surely the best way. John Darrow was known in the neighbourhood as a "crank" on the subject of croquet. He had spent many hundreds of dollars on his grounds. His wickets were fastened to hard pine planks, and these were then carefully buried two feet deep. The surface of the ground, he was wont to descant, must be of a particular sort of gravel, sifted just so, and rolled to a nicety. The balls must be of hard rubber, and have just one-eighth inch clearance in passing through the wickets, with the exception of the two wires forming the "cage," where it was imperative that this clearance should be reduced to one-sixteenth of an inch—"but I need not state more to show how he came to be considered a "crank" upon the subject.

It was easy enough to bring Maitland and Darrow together. "My friend is himself much interested in the game; he heard of your superb ground; may he be permitted to examine it closely?" Darrow was all attention. He would be delighted to show it. Suppose they make a practical test of it by playing a game. This they did and Maitland played superbly, but he was hardly a match for the old gentleman, who sought to palliate his defeat by saying: "You play an excellent game, sir; but I am a trifle too much for you on my own ground. Now, if you can spare the time, I should like to witness a game between you and my daughter; I think you will be pretty evenly matched."

If he could spare the time! I laughed outright at the idea. Why, with the prospect of meeting Gwen Darrow before him, an absolute unit of measure, with a snail's pace, would have made good its escape from him. As it is a trick of poor humanity to refuse when offered the very thing one has been madly scheming to obtain, I hastened to accept Darrow's invitation for my friend, and to assure him on my own responsibility, that time was just then hanging heavily on Maitland's hands. Well, the game was played, but Maitland was so unnerved by the girl's presence that he played execrably, so poorly, indeed, that the always polite Darrow remarked: "You must charge your easy victory, Gwen, to your opponent's gallantry, not to his lack of skill, for I assure you he gave me a much harder rub." The young lady cast a quick glance at Maitland, which said so plainly that she preferred a fair field and no favour that he hastened to say: "Your father puts too high an estimate upon my play. I did my best to win, but--but I was a little nervous; I see, however, that you would have defeated me though I had been in my best form." Gwen gave him one of those short, searching looks, so peculiarly her own, which seem to read, with mathematical certainty, one's innermost thoughts,—and the poor fellow blushed to the tips of his ears. --But he was no boy, this Maitland, and betrayed no other sign of the tempest that was raging within him. His utterance remained as usual, deliberate and incisive, and I thought this perplexed the young lady. Before leaving, both Maitland and I were invited to become parties to a six-handed game to be played the following week, after the grounds had been redressed with gravel.

Maitland looked forward to this second meeting with Miss Darrow with an eagerness which made every hour seem interminably long, and he was in such a flutter of expectancy that I was sure if

"We live . . . in thoughts, not breaths; In feelings, not in figures on a dial We should count time by heart-throbs," he must have passed through a period as long as that separating the Siege of Troy from the "late unpleasantness."

The afternoon came at last, however. The party consisted, besides Darrow and his daughter, Maitland and myself, of two young gentlemen with whom personally I had but a slight acquaintance, although I knew them somewhat by reputation. The younger one, Clinton Browne, is a young artist whose landscapes were beginning to attract wide attention in Boston, and the elder, Charles Herne, a Western gentleman of some literary attainments, but comparatively unknown here in the East. There is nothing about Mr. Herne that would challenge more than passing attention. If you had said of him, "He is well-fleshed, well-groomed, and intellectually well-thatched," you would have voiced the opinion of most of his acquaintances.

This somewhat elaborately upholstered old world has a deal of mere filling of one kind and another, and Mr. Herne is a part of it. To be sure, he leaves the category of excelsior very far behind and approaches very nearly to
the best grade of curled hair, but, in spite of all this, he is simply a sort of social filling.

Mr. Browne, on the other hand, is a very different personage. Of medium height, closely knit, with the latent activity and grace of the cat flowing through every movement and even stagnating in his pose, he is a man that the first casual gaze instantly returns to with sharpened focus. You have seen gymnasts whose normal movements were slowly performed springs, just as rust is a slow combustion and fire the same thing in less time. Well, Clinton Browne strongly suggested that sort of athlete. Add to this a regularly formed, clearly cut, and all-but-beautiful face, with a pair of wonderfully piercing, albeit somewhat shifty, black eyes, and one need not marvel that men as well as women stared at him. I have spoken of his gaze as "somewhat shifty," yet am not altogether sure that in that term I accurately describe it. What first fastened my attention was this vague, unfocussed, roving, quasi-introspective vision flashing with panther-like suddenness into a directness that seemed to burn and pierce one like the thrust of a hot stiletto, His face was clean-shaven, save for a mere thumb-mark of black hair directly under the centre of his lower lip. This Iago-like tab and the almost fierce brilliancy of his concentrated gaze gave to his countenance at times a sinister, Machiavellian expression that was irresistible and which, to my thinking, seriously marred an otherwise fine face. Of course due allowance must be made for the strong prejudice I have against any form of beard. However, I'd wager a box of my best liver-pills against any landscape Browne ever painted, --I don't care if it's as big as a cyclorama,--that if he had known how completely Gwen shared my views,--how she disliked the appearance of bewhiskered men,--that delicately nurtured little imperial would soon have been reduced to a tender memory,--that is to say, if a physician can diagnose a case of love from such symptoms as devouring glances and an attentiveness so marked that it quite disgusted Maitland, who repeatedly measured his rival with the apparent cold precision of a mathematician, albeit there was warmth enough underneath.

This singular self-poise is one of Maitland's most noticeable characteristics and is, I think, rather remarkable in a man of such strong emotional tendencies and lightning-like rapidity of thought. No doubt some small portion of it is the result of acquirement, for life can hardly fail to teach us all something of this sort; still I cannot but think that the larger part of it is native to him. Born of well-to-do parents, he had never had the splendid tuition of early poverty. As soon as he had left college he had studied law, and had been admitted to the bar. This he had done more to gratify the wishes of his father than to further any desires of his own, but he had soon found the profession, so distasteful to him that he practically abandoned it in favour of scientific research. True, he still occasionally took a legal case when it turned upon scientific points which interested him, but, as he once confessed to me, he swallowed, at such times, the bitter pill of the law for the sugar coating of science which enshrouded it. This legal training could, therefore, it seems to me, have made no deep or radical change in his character, which leads me to think that the self-control he exhibited, despite the angry disgust with which I know Browne's so apparent attentions to Gwen inspired him, must, for the most part, have been native to him rather than acquired.

Nothing worthy of record occurred until evening; at least nothing which at the time impressed me as of import, though I afterward remembered that Darrow's behaviour was somewhat strange. He appeared singularly preoccupied, and on one occasion started nervously when I coughed behind him. He explained that a disagreeable dream had deprived him of his sleep the previous night and left his nerves somewhat unstrung, and I thought no more of it.

When the light failed we were all invited into the parlour to listen to a song by Miss Darrow. The house, as you are perhaps aware, overlooks Dorchester Bay. The afternoon had been very hot, but at dusk a cold east wind had sprung up, which, as it was still early in the season, was not altogether agreeable to our host, sitting as he was, back to, though fully eight feet from, an open window looking to the east. Maitland, with his usual quick observation, noticed his discomfort and asked if he should not close the window. The old gentleman did not seem to hear the question until it was repeated, when, starting as if from a reverie, he said: "If it will not be too warm for the rest of

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The house, as you are perhaps aware, overlooks Dorchester Bay. The afternoon had been very hot, but at dusk a cold east wind had sprung up, which, as it was still early in the season, was not altogether agreeable to our host, sitting as he was, back to, though fully eight feet from, an open window looking to the east. Maitland, with his usual quick observation, noticed his discomfort and asked if he should not close the window. The old gentleman did not seem to hear the question until it was repeated, when, starting as if from a reverie, he said: "If it will not be too warm for the rest of
Maitland, who had been startled by the old gentleman's conduct, now returned to the window and opened it about six inches. There was no other window open in the room, and yet so fresh was the air that we were not uncomfortable. Darrow, with ill-concealed pride, then asked his daughter to sing, and she left him and went to the piano. "Shall I not light the lamp?" I asked. "I think we shall not need it," the old gentleman replied, "music is always better in the gloaming."

In order that you may understand what follows, it will be necessary for me to describe to you our several positions in the room. The apartment is large, nearly square, and occupies the southeast corner of the house. The eastern side of the room has one window, that which had been left open about six inches, and on the southern side of the room there were two windows, both of which were securely fastened and the blinds of which had been closed by the painters who, that morning, had primed the eastern and southern sides of the house, preparatory to giving it a thorough repainting. On the north side of the room, but much nearer to the western than the eastern end, are folding doors. These on this occasion were closed and fastened. On the western side of the room is the piano, and to the left of it, near the southwest corner, is a door leading to the hallway. This door was closed. As I have already told you, Darrow sat in a high-backed easy-chair facing the piano and almost in the centre of the room. The partly opened window on the east side was directly behind him and fully eight feet away. Herne and Browne sat upon Darrow's right and a little in front of him against the folding doors, while Maitland and I were upon his left, between him and the hall door. Gwen was at the piano. There are no closets, draperies, or niches in the room. I think you will now be able to understand the situation fully.

Whether the gloom of the scene suggested it to her, or whether it was merely a coincidence, I do not know, but Miss Darrow began to sing "In the Gloaming" in a deep, rich contralto voice which seemed fraught with a weird, melancholy power. When I say that her voice was ineffably sympathetic I would not have you confound this quality either with the sepulchral or the aspirated tone which usually is made to do duty for sympathy, especially in contralto voices. Every note was as distinct, as brilliantly resonant, as a cello in a master's hand. So clear, so full the notes rang out that I could plainly feel the chair vibrate beneath me. "In the gloaming, O my darling! When the lights are dim and low, And the quiet shadows falling Softly come and softly go. When the winds are sobbing faintly With a gentle unknown woe, Will you think of me and love me As you did once, long ago?"

"In the gloaming, O my darling! Think not bitterly of me, Though I passed away in silence, Left you lonely, set you free. For my heart was crushed with longing. What had been could never be: It was best to leave you thus, dear, Best for you and best--"

But the line was never finished. With a wild cry, more of fear than of pain, Darrow sprang from his chair. "Gentlemen, I have been stabbed!" was all he said, and fell back heavily into his seat. Gwen was kneeling before him in an instant, even before I could assist him. His right hand was pressed to his throat and his eyes seemed starting from their sockets as he shouted hoarsely: "A light, a light! For God's sake, don't let him strike me again in the dark!" Maitland was already lighting the gas and Herne and Browne, so Browne afterward told me, were preparing to seize the assailant. I remembered, after it all was over, a quick movement Browne had made toward the darkest corner of the room.

The apartment was now flooded with light, and I looked for the assassin. He was not to be found! The room contained only Gwen, Darrow, and his four invited guests! The doors were closed; the windows had not been touched. No one could possibly have entered or left the room, and yet the assassin was not there. But one solution remained; Darrow was labouring under a delusion, and Gwen's voice would restore him. As she was about to speak I stepped back to note the effect of her words upon him. "Do not fear, father," she said in a low voice as she laid her face against his cheek, "there is nothing here to hurt you. You are ill,--I will get you a glass of cordial and you will be yourself again in a moment." She was about to rise when her father seized her frantically by the arm, exclaiming in a hoarse whisper: "Don't leave me! Can't you see? Don't leave me!" and for the first time he removed his hand from his throat, and taking her head between his palms, gazed wistfully into her face. He tried to speak again, but could not, and glanced up at us with a helpless expression which I shall never forget. Maitland, his eyes riveted upon the old gentleman, whose thoughts he seemed to divine, hurriedly produced a pencil and note-book and held them toward him, but he did not see them, for he had drawn Gwen's face down to him and was kissing her passionately. The next instant he was on his feet and from the swollen veins that stood out like cords upon his neck and forehead, we could see the terrible effort he was making to speak. At last the words came,--came as if they were torn hissing from his throat, for he took a full breath between each one of them. "Gwen--I--knew--it! Good-bye! Remember--your--promise!"--and he fell a limp mass into his chair, overcome, I felt sure, by the fearful struggle he had made. Maitland seized a glass of water and threw it in his face. I loosened the clothing about his neck and, in doing so, his head fell backward and his face was turned upward toward me. The features were drawn,--the eyes were glazed and set. I felt of his heart; he was dead!
CHAPTER II

Silence is the only tender Death can make to Mystery.

The look of pain and astonishment upon my face said plainly enough to Gwen:

"Your father is dead." I could not speak. In the presence of her great affliction we all stood silent, and with bowed heads. I had thought Darrow's attack the result of an overwrought mental condition which would speedily readjust itself, and had so counted upon his daughter's influence as all but certain to immediately result in a temporary cure. When, therefore, I found him dead without any apparent cause, I was, for the time being, too dazed to think, much less to act, and I think the other gentlemen were quite as much incapacitated as I. My first thought, when I recovered so that I could think, was of Gwen. I felt sure her reason must give way under the strain, and I thought of going nearer to her in case she should fall, but refrained when I noticed that Maitland had noiselessly glided within easy reach of her. To move seemed impossible to me. Such a sudden transition from warm, vigorous life to cold, impassive death seems to chill the dynamic rivers of being into a horrible winter, static and eternal. Though death puts all things in the past tense, even we physicians cannot but be strangely moved when the soul thus hastily deserts the body without the usual farewell of an illness.

Contrary to my expectations Gwen did not faint. For a long time, --it may not have been more than twenty minutes, but it seemed, under the peculiar circumstances, at least an hour,--she remained perfectly impassive. She neither changed colour nor exhibited any other sign of emotion. She stood gazing quietly, tenderly, at her father's body as if he were asleep and she were watching for some indication of his awakening. Then a puzzled expression came over her countenance. There was no trace of sorrow in it, only the look of perplexity. I decided to break the gruesome silence, but the thought of how my own voice would sound in that awe-inspired stillness frightened me. Gwen herself was the first to speak. She looked up with the same impassive countenance, from which now the perplexed look had fled, and said simply:

"Gentlemen, what is to be done?" Her voice was firm and sane,--that it was pitched lower than usual and had a suggestion of intensity in it, I thought it was not perfectly natural. I thought she did not realise her loss and said: "He has gone past recall." "Yes," she replied, "I know that, but should we not send for an officer?" "An officer!" I exclaimed. "Is it possible you entertain a doubt that your father's death resulted from natural causes?" She looked at me a moment fixedly, and then said deliberately: "My father was murdered!" I was so surprised and pained that, for a moment, I could not reply, and no one else sought to break the silence.

Maitland, as if Gwen's last remark had given rise to a sudden determination, glided to the body. He examined the throat, raised the right hand and looked at the fingers: then he stepped back a little and wrote something in his notebook. This done, he tried the folding doors and found them locked on the inside; then the two windows on the south side of the room, which he also found fastened. He opened the hall door slightly and the hinges creaked noisily, of all of which he made a note. Then taking a rule from his pocket he went to the east window, and measured the opening, and then the distance between this window and the chair in which the old gentleman had sat, recording his results as before. His next act astonished me not a little and had the effect of recalling me to my senses. With his penknife he cut a circle in the carpet around each leg of the chair on which the body rested. He continued his examinations with quiet thoroughness, but I ceased now to follow him closely, since I had begun to feel the necessity of convincing Gwen of her error, and was casting about for the best way to do so.

"My dear Miss Darrow," I said at length; "you attach too much importance to the last words of your father, who, it is clear, was not in his right mind. You must know that he has, for some months, had periods of temporary aberration, and that all his delusions have been of a sanguinary nature. Try to think calmly," I said, perceiving from her expression that I had not shaken her conviction in the least. "Your father said he had been stabbed. You must see that such a thing is physically impossible. Had all the doors and windows been open, no object so large as a man could possibly have entered or left the room without our observing him; but the windows were closed and fastened, with the exception of the east window, which, as you may see for yourself, is open some six inches or so, in which position it is secured by the spring fastening. The folding doors are locked on the inside and the only possible means of entrance, therefore, would have been by the hall door. Directly in front of that, between it and your father, sat Mr. Maitland and myself. You see by my chair that I was less than two feet from the door. It is inconceivable that, in that half-light, anyone could have used that entrance and escaped observation. Do you not see how untenable your idea is? Had your father been stabbed he would have bled, but I am as certain as though I had made a thorough examination that there is not so much as a scratch anywhere upon his body." Gwen heard me through in silence and then said wearily, in a voice which had now neither intensity nor elasticity, "I understand fully the apparent absurdity of my position, yet I know my father was murdered. The wound which caused his death has escaped your notice, but--"

"My dear Miss Darrow," I interrupted, "there is no wound, you may be sure of that!" For the first time since Darrow's death Maitland spoke. "If you will look at the throat a little more closely, you will see what may be a
wound," he said, and went on quietly with his examinations. He was right; there was a minute abrasion visible. The
girl's quick observation had detected what had escaped me, convinced as I was that there was nothing to be found by
a scrutiny however close.

Gwen now transferred her attention to Maitland, and asked: "Had not one of us better go for an officer?"
Maitland, whose power of concentration is so remarkable as on some occasions to render him utterly oblivious of his
surroundings, did not notice the question and Browne replied to it for him. "I should be only too happy to fetch an
officer for you, if you wish," he said. Have you ever noticed how acute the mind is for trifles and slight incongruities
when under the severe tension of such a shock as we had experienced? Such attacks, threatening to invade and
forever subjugate our happiness, seem to have the effect of so completely manning the ramparts of our intellect the
nothing, however trivial, escapes observation. Gwen's father, her only near relative, lay cold before her,--his death,
from her standpoint, the most painful of mysteries, --and yet the incongruity of Browne's "only too happy " did not
escape her, as was evident by the quick glance and sudden relaxation of the mouth into the faintest semblance of a
smile. All this was momentary and, I doubt not, half unconscious. She replied gravely:

"I would indeed be obliged if you would do so."

Maitland, who had now finished his examination, noticed that Browne was about to depart. When the artist
would have passed him on his way to the hall door, he placed his hand upon that gentleman's shoulder, saying:
"Pardon me, sir, but I would strongly urge that you do not leave the room!"

Browne paused. Both men stood like excited animals at gaze.

CHAPTER III

Nothing is so full of possibilities as the seemingly impossible.

Maitland's request that Browne should not leave the room seemed to us all a veritable thunderbolt. It impressed
me at the time as being a thinly veneered command, and I remember fearing lest the artist should be injudicious
enough to disregard it. If he could have seen his own face for the next few moments, he would have had a lesson in
expression which years of portrait work may fail to teach him. At length the rapidly changing kaleidoscope of his
mind seemed to settle, to group its varied imaginings about a definite idea,--the idea that he had been all but openly
accused, in the presence of Miss Darrow, of being instrumental in her father's death. For a moment, as he faced
Maitland, whom he instinctively felt to be a rival, he looked so dark and sinister that one could easily have believed
him capable of almost any crime.

Gwen was no less surprised than the rest of us at Maitland's interference, but she did not permit it to show in her
voice as she said quietly: "Mr. Browne has consented to go for an officer." As I felt sure she must have thought
Maitland already knew this, as anyone else must have heard what had passed, I looked upon her remark as a polite
way of saying:

"I am mistress here."

Maitland apparently so regarded it, for he replied quickly: "I hope you will not think me officious, or unmindful
of your right to dictate in a matter so peculiarly your own affair. My only desire is to help you. Mr. Browne's
departure would still further complicate a case already far to difficult of solution. My legal training has given me
some little experience in these matters, and I only wish that you may have the benefit thereof. It is now nearly three-
quarters of an hour since your father's death, and, I assure you, time at this particular juncture may be of the utmost
importance. Not a moment should be wasted in needless discussion. If you will consent to despatch a servant to the
police station I will, in due time, explain to you why I have taken the liberty of being so insistent on this point."

He had hardly ceased speaking before Gwen rang for a servant. She hurriedly told him what had transpired and
sent him to the nearest police station. As this was but a few rods away and the messenger was fleet of foot, an officer
was soon upon the scene. "We were able," he said to us generally as he entered the room, "to catch Medical
Examiner Ferris by 'phone at his home in F-- Street, and he will be here directly. In the meantime I have been sent
along merely to see that the body is not moved before his examination and that everything in the room remains
exactly as it was at the time of the old gentleman's death. Did I not understand," he said to Maitland in an undertone,
"that there is a suspicion of foul play?"

"Yes," replied George, "that is one explanation which certainly will have to be considered."

"I thought I heard the Cap'n say 'murder' when he 'phoned in town for some specials. They're for detective work
on this case, I reckon. Hello! That sounds like the Doctor's rig."

A moment later the bell rang and Dr. Ferris entered the room.

"Ah, Doctor," he said extending his hand to me, "what have we here?"

Before I could answer he had noticed Maitland and advanced to shake hands with him.

"Is this indeed so serious as I have been told?" he asked, after his greeting.

"It seems to me likely," replied Maitland slowly, "to develop into the darkest mystery I have ever known."

"Hum!" replied the Examiner. "Has the body been moved or the disposition of its members altered?"
"Not since I arrived," replied Officer Barker.
"And before?" queried Dr. Ferris, turning to Maitland.
"Everything is absolutely intact. I have made a few notes and measurements, but I have disturbed nothing," replied Maitland.
"Good," said the Examiner. "May I see those notes before I go? You were on that Parker case and you have, you know, something of a reputation for thoroughness. Perhaps you may have noted something that would escape me."
"The notes, Doctor, are at your service," George replied.

Dr. Ferris' examination of the body was very thorough, yet, since it was made with the rapid precision which comes from extended practice, it was soon over. Short as it was, however, it was still an ordeal under which Gwen suffered keenly, to judge from her manner.

The Examiner then took Maitland aside, looked at his notes, and conversed earnestly with him in an undertone for several minutes. I do not know what passed between them. When he left, a few moments later, Officer Barker accompanied him.

As soon as the door closed behind them Gwen turned to Maitland.
"Did he give you his opinion?" she asked with a degree of interest which surprised me.
"He will report death as having resulted from causes at present unknown," rejoined Maitland.

Gwen seemed greatly relieved by this answer, though I confess I was utterly at a loss to see why she should be.

Observing this change in her manner Maitland approached her, saying:
"Will you now permit me to explain my seeming rudeness in interfering with your plan to make Mr. Browne your messenger, and at the same time allow me to justify myself in the making of yet another request?"

Gwen bowed assent and he proceeded to state the following case as coolly and accurately as if it were a problem in geometry.

"Mr. Darrow," he began, "has just died under peculiar circumstances. Three possible views of the case at once suggest themselves. First: his death may have been due to natural causes and his last expressions the result of an hallucination under which he was labouring. Second: he may have committed suicide, as the result, perhaps, of a mania which in that case would also serve to explain his last words and acts; or,—you will pardon me, Miss Darrow,—these last appearances may have been intentionally assumed with a view to deceiving us. The officers you have summoned will not be slow in looking for motives for such a deception, and several possible ones cannot fail at once to suggest themselves to them. Third: your father may have been murdered and his last expressions a more or less accurate description of the real facts of the case. It seems to me that these three theories exhaust the possibilities of the case. Can anyone suggest anything further?" And he paused for a reply.

"It is clear," replied Mr. Herne with portly deliberation, "that all deaths must be either natural or unnatural; and equally clear that when unnatural the agent, if human, must be either the victim himself, or some person external to him."

"Precisely so," continued Maitland. "Now our friend, the Doctor, believes that Mr. Darrow's death resulted from natural causes. The official authorities will at first, in all probability, agree with him, but it is impossible to tell what theory they will ultimately adopt. If sufficient motive for the act can be found, some are almost certain to adopt the suicide theory. Miss Darrow has expressed her conviction that we are dealing with a case of murder. Mr. Browne and Mr. Herne have expressed no opinion on the subject, so far as I am aware."

At this point Gwen, with an eagerness she had not before displayed, —or possibly it was nervousness,—exclaimed: "And your own view of the case?" "I believe," Maitland replied deliberately, "that your father's death resulted from poison injected into the blood; but this is a matter so easily settled that I prefer not to theorise upon it. There are several poisons which might have produced the effects we have observed. If, however, I am able to prove this conjecture correct I have still only eliminated one of the three hypotheses and resolved the matter to a choice between the suicide and murder theories, yet that is something gained. It is because I believe it can be shown death did not result from natural causes that I have so strongly urged Mr. Browne not to leave the room."

"Pardon me, sir!" ejaculated Browne, growing very dark and threatening. "You mean to insinuate—" "Nothing," continued Maitland, finishing his sentence for him, and then quietly ignoring the interruption. "As I have already said, I am somewhat familiar with the usual methods of ferreting out crime. As a lawyer, and also as a chemical expert, I have listened to a great deal of evidence in criminal cases, and in this and other ways, learned the lines upon which detectives may confidently be expected to act, when once they have set up an hypothesis. The means by which they arrive at their hypotheses occasionally surpass all understanding, and we have, therefore, no assurance as to the view they will take of this case. The first thing they will do will be to make what they will call a 'thorough examination' of the premises; but a study of chemistry gives to the word 'thorough' a significance of which they have no conception. It is to shorten this examination as much as possible,—to prevent it from being more tiresome to you than is absolutely necessary," he said to Gwen, "that I have taken the liberty of ascertaining and recording most of
the data the officers will require."

"Believe me," Gwen said to him in an undertone not intended for the rest of us, though we heard it, "I am duly grateful for your consideration and shall find a fitting time to thank you."

With no other reply than a deprecating gesture, Maitland continued:

"Now let us look at the matter from the standpoint of the officers. They must first determine in their own minds how Mr. Darrow met his death. This will constitute the basis of their first hypothesis. I say 'first' because they are liable to change it at any moment it seems to them untenable. If they conclude that death resulted from natural causes, I shall doubtless be able to induce them to waive that view of the case until I have been given time to prove it untenable—if I can—and to act for the present upon one of the other two possible theories. It appears, from our present knowledge of the case, that, whichever one of these they choose, the same difficulty will confront them."

Gwen looked at him inquiringly and he continued, answering the question in her eyes:

"This is what I mean. Your father, whether he committed suicide or was murdered, in all probability met his death through that almost imperceptible wound under his chin. This wound, so far as I have yet been able to examine it without a glass, was made with a somewhat blunt instrument, able, apparently, to little more than puncture the skin and draw a drop or so of blood. Of course, on such a theory, death must have resulted from poisoning. The essential point is: Where is the instrument that inflicted the wound?"

"Might it not be buried in the flesh?" Gwen asked.

"Possibly, but as I have not been able to find it I cannot believe it very likely, though closer search may reveal it," replied Maitland. "Your father's right forefinger," he continued, "is slightly stained with blood, but the wound is of a nature which could not have been caused by a finger nail previously poisoned. Since we know he pressed his hand to his throat this blood-stain makes no more strongly toward the truth of the suicide theory than it does toward that of the murder hypothesis. Suppose now, for we must look at all sides of the question, the officers begin to act upon the assumption that murder has been committed. What will they then do? They will satisfy themselves that the east window was opened six and three-quarters inches and securely fastened in that position; that the two south windows were closed and fastened and that the blinds thereof were also closed. They will ascertain the time when death occurred,—we can easily tell them,—and this will show them that neither of the blinds on the south side could have been opened without so increasing the light in the room as to be sure to attract our attention. They will learn also that the folding doors were locked, as they are now, on this side and that these two gentlemen [indicating Browne and Herne] sat against them. They will then turn to the hall door as the only possible means of entrance and I shall tell them that the Doctor and I sat directly in front of this door and between it and Mr. Darrow. I have taken the liberty to cut the carpet to mark the positions of our chairs. In view of all these facts what must they conclude? Simply this: no one entered the room, did the deed, and then left it, at least not without being observed." "But surely," I ventured to suggest, "you do not think they will presume to question the testimony of all of us that no one was observed."

"That is all negative evidence," he replied, "and does not conclusively prove that another might not have observed what we failed to detect. However, it is all so self-evident that they will not question it. I know so well their methods of reasoning that I am already prepared to refute their conclusions at every point, without, I regret to say, being myself able to solve the mystery, though I may say in passing that I purposely am refraining from formulating any theory whatever until I have ascertained everything which it is possible to learn in the matter. In this way I hope to avoid the error into which the detective is so prone to fall. Once you set up an hypothesis you unconsciously, and in spite of yourself, accentuate unduly the importance of all data making toward that hypothesis, while, on the other hand you either utterly neglect, misconstrue, or fail to fully appreciate, the evidence oppugnant to your theory. In chemical research I gather the material for an entire series of experiments before performing any, so that the first few shall not, either by satisfying or discouraging me, cause me to leave the bush half beaten.

"Let us see how, from the officers' standpoint, the murder hypothesis now stands. No assassin, it will be clear to them, could have entered or left this room unobserved. If, therefore, a man did enter the room and kill our friend, we, all of us, must be his accomplices." This remark drew some sort of exclamatory protest from every other person in the room save Browne.

"Ah, that is probably the true solution," said the artist with ill-concealed disgust.

This remark and the tone in which it was uttered would have been discourteous under any circumstances; at this particular time and in the painful situation in which we all found ourselves it was boorish almost beyond endurance.

There was nothing in Maitland's manner to indicate that he had heard Browne's remark, as he quietly continued:

"You see this cold-blooded view, the mere statement of which causes you all to shudder,—the more so because one of our number is the daughter of the dead man,—is not to be entertained a moment and is only mentioned to show the logical chain which will force the officers into the certain conviction that no assassin did enter or leave this room. What, then, remains of their theory? Two possibilities. First, the murderer may have done the deed without
entering. If so, it is clear that he must have made use of the partly-opened window. This seems so likely that they will seize upon it with avidity. At first they will suggest that the assassin reached in at the window and struck his victim as he sat by it. This, they will urge, accounts for our not finding the weapon, and they will be so sure that this is the correct solution of the problem that I shall probably have to point out to them its patent absurdity. This illustrates the danger of forming an hypothesis from imperfect data. Remind them that Mr. Darrow did not sit by the window, but eight feet three and one-half inches from it, in almost the exact centre of the room, and their theory falls to the ground, only to be hastily replaced, as a drowning man catches at a straw, by a slightly varied theory. If the victim sat that distance from the window, they will inform us, it is clear the murderous implement must have been thrown or shot at him by the assassin.

"Indeed," said Mr. Herne, "though I had not thought of that theory it seems to me so plausible, now that you mention it, that I think the officers will show rare acumen if they adopt it. Very properly may they hold that some projectile might have been shot through the partly opened window and none of us have detected the act."

"Ah, yes," rejoined Maitland; "but when I ask them where this implement is under this assumption, and remind them of what I shall already have told them, viz., that Mr. Darrow sat back to the window as well as over eight feet from it, and sat in a chair, the solid back of which extended, like a protecting shield, fully six inches above the top of his head, they will find it difficult to show how, unless projectiles travel in sharp curves or angles, a man in this position could thus receive a wound directly beneath his chin, a wound so slight as not to penetrate the thyroid cartilage immediately under it.

"The abandonment of this hypothesis will force them to relinquish the idea that the murder was committed from without. What then remains? Only the second alternative. They must either give up altogether the idea of murder, or have recourse to what is known as the theory of exclusive opportunity."

"Theory of exclusive opportunity," repeated Gwen, as a puzzled look overspread her countenance. "I--I fear I do not quite understand what you mean."

"Pardon me, Miss Darrow, for not making my meaning clearer to you," said Maitland with a deferential inclination of the head. "The theory of exclusive opportunity, to state it plainly in this case, means simply this: if Mr. Darrow were murdered, some one of us five, we being the only ones having an opportunity to do the deed, must be the assassin. Whether this view be taken, or that of suicide, it becomes of paramount importance to find the weapon. Do you not now see why I objected to having anyone leave the room? If, as appears likely from my search, the weapon is not to be found, and if, as I feel reasonably certain, either the suicide or the murder theory be substantiated, then, anyone who left the room before official search was made would be held to have taken the weapon with him and disposed of it, because his would have been the exclusive opportunity of so doing. Someone must have disposed of it, and no one else had a chance to do so; that would be the way it would be stated. But, since no one of us has left the room, a thorough search both of it and of our persons, must convince the officers that we, at least, are not responsible for the fact that the weapon is not forthcoming."

Maitland paused and looked at Browne as if he expected him to speak, but that gentleman only shut his square jaws the more firmly together and held his peace,--at least in so far as words were concerned. If looks, like actions, "speak louder than words," this black visage with its two points of fire made eloquent discourse. I charged all this display of malice to jealousy. It is not altogether pleasant to be placed at a disadvantage before the one being whose good opinion one prizes above all things else,--that is to say, I have read that such is the case. I do not consider my own views upon such matters expert testimony. In all affairs of the heart my opinions cease to have weight at exactly the point where that organ ceases to be a pump.

Even Gwen, I think, noticed Browne's determined silence, for she said to Maitland:

"I am very grateful that your forethought prevented me from causing Mr. Browne even temporary annoyance by making him my messenger."

She paused a moment and then continued:

"You were speaking of the officers' theories. When they have convinced themselves that no one of us has removed the weapon, what then?"

"In my opinion," said Maitland, "they will ultimately fall back upon the suicide theory, but they must find the weapon here before they can substantiate it; for if it be not here someone must have taken it away and that someone could have only been the one who used it --the assassin, in short--but here are the officers. Let each one of us insist upon being searched. They can send to the station for a woman to search you," he said in an undertone to Gwen and then added: "I trust you will pardon my suggesting a course which, in your case, seems so utterly unnecessary, but, believe me, there are urgent reasons for it which I can explain later. If we would hope to solve this mystery, everything depends upon absolute thoroughness at this juncture."

"I should evince but poor appreciation," Gwen replied, "of the ability you have already shown should I fail to follow your slightest suggestion. It is all I can offer you by way of thanks for the kind interest you have taken."
The return of Officer Barker, accompanied by three other men, now changed the tide of conversation. Maitland advanced and shook hands with one whom he introduced as Mr. Osborne, and this gentleman in turn introduced his brother officer, a Mr. Allen, and M. Godin, a special detective.

Osborne impressed me as a man of only mediocre ability, thoroughly imbued with the idea that he is exceptionally clever. He spoke loudly and, I thought, a bit ostentatiously, yet withal in a manner so frank and hearty that I could not help liking the fellow.

M. Godin, on the contrary, seemed retiring almost to the point of self-abnegation. He said but little, apparently preferring to keep in the background, where he could record his own observations in his note-book without too frequent interruption. His manner was polished in the extreme, and so frank withal that he seemed to me like a man of glass through whom every thought shone unhindered. I wondered how one who seemed powerless to conceal his own emotions should possess a detective's ability to thread his way through the dark and hidden duplicity of crime. When he spoke it was in a low, velvety, and soothing voice, that fell upon the ear with an irresistible charm. When Osborne would make some thoughtless remark fraught with bitterness for Gwen, such an expression of pain would flit across M. Godin's fine face as one occasionally sees in those highly organised and sympathetic natures, -- usually found among women if a doctor's experience may be trusted, -- which catch the throb of another's hurt, even as adjacent strings strive to sing each other's songs.

M. Godin seemed to me more priest than detective. His clean-shaven face, its beautifully chiselled features suffused with that peculiar pallor which borrows the transparency of marble; the large, limpid brown eyes and the delicate, kindly mouth -- all these, combined with a faultless manner and a carriage suggestive of power in reserve, so fascinated me that I found myself watching him continually. I remember saying to myself: "What a rival he would make in a woman's affections!"

At just that time he was looking at Gwen with tender, solicitous sympathy written in every feature, and that doubtless suggested my thought.

Mr. Allen was even more ordinary than Mr. Osborne in manner and appearance. I do not presume to judge his real merits, for I did not notice him sufficiently to properly portray him to you, even if I had the gift of description, which I think you will admit I have not. He lives in my memory only as a something tall, spare, coarse of texture, red, hairy, and redolent of poor tobacco.

How different men are! (Of course women are all alike!) While Osborne, like a good-natured bumble-bee, was buzzing noisily about, as though all the world were his clover-blossom; and Allen, so far as I know, was doing nothing; M. Godin, alert and keen despite his gentleness and a modesty which kept him for the most part unobtrusively in the shadow of his chosen corner, was writing rapidly in a note-book and speaking no word. It seemed as if nothing escaped him. Clearly he was there to enlighten himself rather than others. At length, pausing to make a measurement, he noticed my gaze and said to me in an undertone, as he glanced solicitously at Gwen lest she should hear:

"Pardon me, but did any of you observe anything, at or about the time of Mr. Darrow's death, which impressed you as singular, -- any noise, any shadow, any draught or change of temperature, say a rushing or I might say swishing sound, -- anything, in fact, that would seem to you as at all unusual?"


"Hum! Strange!" he said, and returned to his notes.

I felt sure M. Godin had had a theory and that my testimony had not strengthened it, but he did not volunteer any information, neither did he take part in the conversation of his companions, and so my curiosity remained ungratified. It was clear that M. Godin's methods were very different from those of Osborne and Allen.

I need not weary you by further narrating what occurred at this official examination. Suffice it to say that, with one or two minor exceptions, Osborne and Allen followed the precise course of reasoning prophesied by Maitland, and, as for M. Godin, he courteously, but firmly, held his peace. The two officers did not, however, lean as strongly to the theory that death resulted from natural causes as Maitland had anticipated, and, I think, this surprised him. He had already told them that he expected to be able to show death to have resulted from poison hypodermically applied, and, as I overheard a remark made by Osborne to Allen, I readily understood their speedy abandonment of their natural-death theory. They were engaged in verifying Maitland's measurement of the east side of the room when Osborne said softly to his companion: "He has figured in several of my cases as a chemical expert, and when he expresses an opinion on a matter it's about the same as proved. He's not the kind that jumps in the dark. He's a lawyer as well as chemist and knows what's evidence, so I reckon we'd better see if we can make anything out of the suicide and murder theories."

Maitland had asked them to send to the station for a woman to search Gwen and she had just arrived. We all requested that a most thorough examination should now be made to assure the officers that no one of us possessed the missing weapon. This done, the officers and departed for the night, assuring Gwen that there was nothing further
to be done till morning, and Osborne, doubtless with a view to consoling her, said: "It may be a relief to you, miss, to know that there is scarcely a doubt that your father took his own life." This had an effect upon Gwen very different from that which had been intended. Her face contracted, and it was plain to see she was beginning to think everyone was determined to force a falsehood upon her. Herne and Browne also prepared to take their leave. A glance from Maitland told me he wished me to remain with him a moment after the others had departed, and I accordingly did so.

When we were alone with Gwen he said to her: "I think I understand your feeling with regard to Mr. Osborne's remark, as well as your conviction that it does not represent the truth. I foresaw they would come to this conclusion, and know very well the pains they will take to prove their hypothesis." "Can nothing be done?" she asked beseechingly. "It is that of which I wish to speak," he replied. "If you have sufficient confidence in me to place the case in my hands, I will do everything in my power to establish the truth,—on one condition," and he glanced at her face, now pale and rigid from her long-continued effort of self-control. "And that condition is?" she said quickly. "That you follow my directions and permit me to order your movements in all things, so long as the case remains in my hands; if at any time I seek to abuse your faith, you are as free to discharge me as if I were a paid detective." Gwen looked searchingly at him; then, extending her hand to him, she said impulsively: "You are very kind; I accept the condition. What shall I do?"

I tried to catch Maitland's eye to tell him what he should counsel her, but a man with his ability to observe conditions and grasp situations can very well do without prompting. "First," he said, "you must return home with the Doctor and spend the rest of the night with his sister; I shall stay here until morning; and second, I desire that you use your utmost endeavour to keep the incidents of this evening out of your mind. You cannot, of course, forget your loss, unless you sleep,"—and he gave me a look which said: "I depend on you to see to that,"—"but you must not continually re-enact the scene in imagination. In the morning the Doctor will come here to bring me my camera, microscope, and a few things I shall require"—and he passed me a list he had written. "If you have slept well you can be of considerable service, and may accompany him—if not, you must remain quietly at his house." With this he turned to me, and said: "She is making a condenser of herself, Doctor, and will soon break through the insulation. Sparks will be dangerous—you must secure the brush effect." He spoke quickly, and used electrical terms, that she might not understand him, but either he failed of his purpose, or the observation she immediately made was a strange coincidence. I believe she understood, for, while young women educated by their mothers are usually ignorant upon all the more masculine subjects, those who have long been their father's companions are ever prone to startle one with the most unexpected flashes of intelligence. "I am in rather a high state of tension now," she said, turning calmly to Maitland; "but when alone the expression which has been denied me here will afford relief." Maitland glanced at her quickly, and then at me, and I knew he was wondering if she had understood. Then he said: "It is getting late. I shall expect you to sleep well and to come in the morning. Please say to the servants as you go that I shall stay here all night, and that no one must enter without permission. Good-night." She held out her hand to him, but made no reply; then she fervently kissed her father's lips, and together we left the chamber of death.

CHAPTER IV

Death speaks with the tongue of Memory, and his ashen hand reaches out of the great unknown to seize and hold fast our plighted souls.

What Maitland's reason was for spending the night with the dead body of Darrow, or how he busied himself until morning, I do not know. Perhaps he desired to make sure that everything remained untouched, or, it may be, that he chose this method of preventing Gwen from performing a vigil by the body. I thought this latter view very probable at the time, as I had been singularly impressed with the remarkable foresight my friend had displayed in so quickly and adroitly getting Gwen away from everything connected with her father's sad and mysterious death.

Arriving at my house my sister took an early opportunity to urge upon Gwen a glass of wine, in which I had placed a generous sedative. The terrible tension soon began to relax, and in less than half an hour she was sleeping quietly. I dreaded the moment when she should awake and the memory of all that had happened should descend like an avalanche upon her. I told my sister that this would be a critical moment, cautioning her to stay by Gwen and to give her, immediately upon her arising, a draught I had prepared for the purpose of somewhat deadening her sensibilities. I arose early, and went to Maitland's laboratory to collect the things he desired. When I returned Gwen was awake, and to my intense gratification in even a better condition than I had dared to hope.

It was quite late when we reached her house, and Maitland had evidently been at work several hours. He looked sharply at Gwen when she entered, and seemed much pleased at her condition. "You have obeyed my instructions, I see, and slept," he said, as he gave her his hand. "Yes," she replied, "I was very tired, and the doctor's cordial quite overcame me;" and she cast an inquiring glance at the network of white string which Maitland had stretched across the carpet, dividing it into squares like an immense checker-board. In reply to her questioning look, he said: "French detectives are the most thorough in the world, and I am about to make use of their method of instituting an
exhaustive search. Each one of the squares formed by these intersecting strings is numbered, and represents one square foot of carpet, the numbers running from one to two hundred and eighty-eight. Every inch of every one of these squares I shall examine under a microscope, and anything found which can be of any possible interest will be carefully preserved, and its exact location accurately marked upon this chart I have prepared, which, as you will see, has the same number of squares as the room, the area of each square being reduced from one square foot to one square inch. You will note that I have already marked the location of all doors, windows, and furniture. The weapon, if there be one, may be very minute, but if it be on the floor we may be assured the microscope will find it. The walls of the room, especially any shelving projections, and the furniture, I shall examine with equal thoroughness, though I have now some additional reasons for believing the weapon is not here."

"Have you discovered anything new?" Gwen exclaimed, unable to control the excitement caused by this last remark. "You must pardon me," Maitland rejoined, "if I ask you and the Doctor a question before replying." She nodded assent, and he continued: "I wish to know if you agree with me that we shall be more likely to arrive at a solution of the problem before us if we keep our own counsel than if we take the officers of the law, or, for that matter, anyone else, into our confidence. You undoubtedly noticed how carefully M. Godin kept his own counsel. Official methods, and the hasty generalisations which form a part thereof—to say nothing of the petty rivalries and the passion for notoriety—can do much to hinder our own work, and, I believe, nothing to help it. What say you?"

"That we keep our work to ourselves," Gwen quickly rejoined, and I signified that I was of the same opinion. "Then," Maitland continued, "I may say this in answer to your question. I have ascertained something which may bear upon the case in hand. You will remember that part of the gravel for redressing the croquet ground was dumped under the east window there. The painters, I learn, finished painting that side of the house yesterday forenoon before the gravel was removed and placed upon the ground, so that any footprints they may have made in it while about their work were obliterated. As you see, there was loose gravel left under the window to the depth of about two inches. I carefully examined this gravel this morning—there were no footprints."

I glanced at Gwen; her face had a set expression, and she was deathly pale. "There were, however," he continued, "places where the gravel had been tamped down as if by the pressure of a rectangular board. I examined these minutely and, by careful measurement and close scrutiny of some peculiar markings suggestive of the grain of wood, satisfied myself that the depressions in the gravel were made by two, and not, as I had at first thought, by one small piece of wood. I found further that these two boards had always borne certain relative relations to each other, and that when one had been turned around the other had undergone a similar rotation. This last is, in my mind, a most important point, for, when coupled with the fact that between any two impressions of the same board the distance was sensibly constant, and was that of a short stride, there could be no reasonable doubt but these boards had been worn upon some person's feet. They could not have been thrown down merely to be stepped upon, for, in that case, they would not have borne fixed relations to each other—probably would not have been turned end for end at all—and certainly, both would not always have happened to get turned at the same time. I procured a board of the combined area of the two supposed to have made the impressions in the gravel, and weighted it down until, as nearly as I could measure, it impacted the soil to the same extent the others had. The weight was one hundred and thirty-five pounds, which is about right for a man five feet five inches tall. The position of the depressions in the gravel indicated a stride just about right for a man of that height.

"There was one other most important discovery which I made after I had divided the impressions into two classes—according as they were produced by the right or left board—which was that when the right foot was thrown forward the stride was from three to four inches longer than when the left foot led. Directly under the window there was a deep impression in the sand. I took a plaster cast of it, and here it is," he said, producing an excellent facsimile. "There can be little doubt," he continued, "from the position occupied by the depression, of which this is a reverse copy, that it was either accidentally made by someone who, stooping before the east window to avoid obstructing its light, suddenly lost his balance and regained his equilibrium by thus thrusting out his hand, or—and this seems far more likely to me—that the hand was deliberately placed in the gravel in order to steady its possessor while he performed some peculiar operation."

At this point I ventured to ask why he regarded the latter view as so much more tenable than the former. "There are several reasons," he replied, "which render the view I prefer to take all but certain. First, the impression was made by the left hand. Second, it is the impression of a closed hand, with the upper joints of the fingers underneath. Did you ever know one to save himself from falling by thrusting out a closed hand? Certainly not. There is a certain amount of fear, however slight, invariably associated with losing one's balance. This sentiment, so far as the hand is concerned, is expressed by opening it and spreading the fingers. This he would instinctively have done, if falling. Then there is the position of the impression relative to the window and some slight testimony upon the sill and glass, for the thorough investigation of which I have been obliged to await my microscope. I have worked diligently, but that is all I have been able to accomplish."
"All!" exclaimed Gwen, regarding him with ill-concealed admiration. "It seems to me a very great deal. The thoroughness, the minuteness of it all, overwhelms me; but, tell me, have your discoveries led you to any conclusion?" "No," he replied, "nothing definite yet; I must not allow myself to become wedded to any theory, so long as there is anything further to be learned. If I were to hazard a few idle guesses, I should say your father was murdered in some mysterious way--by a person about five feet five inches tall, weighing, say, one hundred and thirty-five pounds, and having a lame leg, or, perhaps, one limb shorter than the other,--at all events having some deformity or ailment causing a variation in the length of the strides. I should guess also that this person's feet had some marked peculiarity, since such pains had been taken to conceal the footprints. Then the cast of the hand here encourages speculation. Fingers long, slim, and delicate, save at the nails, where, with the exception of the little finger, are to be found unmistakable signs of the habit of biting the nails,--see, here are the hang-nails, --but, strange to say, the nail of the little finger has been spared, and suffered to grow to an unusual length. I ask myself why this particular nail has been so favoured, and can only answer, 'because it has some peculiar use.' It is clear this is not the hand of a manual labourer; the joints are too small, the fingers too delicate, the texture of the skin, which is clearly visible, much too fine--in short, wouldn't it pass anywhere for a woman's hand? Say a woman who bit her nails. If it were really such there would be a pair of feminine feet also to be concealed, and boards would do it very nicely--but this is all guesswork, and must not be allowed to affect any subsequent conclusions. If you will excuse me a few minutes I will use the microscope a little on the sill of the east window before we are interrupted by our friends the officers, who will be sure to be here soon."

While Maitland was thus engaged I did all in my power to distract Gwen's attention, as much as possible, from her father's body. Whenever she regarded it, the same intense and set expression overspread her countenance as that which at first had alarmed me. I was glad when Maitland returned from the window and began mixing some of the chemicals I had brought him, for Gwen invariably followed all his movements, as if her very existence depended upon her letting nothing escape her. Maitland, who had asked me for a prescription blank, now dipped it in the chemicals he had mixed and, this accomplished, put the paper in his microscope box to dry.

"I have something here," he said, "which I desire to photograph quite as much as this room and some of its larger objects," and he panned a tiny, crumpled mass against the wall, and made an exposure of it in that condition. "Do you know what this is?" he said, as he carefully smoothed it out for another picture. "I haven't the slightest idea," I said. "It is plain enough under the microscope," he continued, placing it upon the slide, and adjusting the focus. "Would you like to examine it, Miss Darrow?" Gwen had scarcely put her eye to the instrument before she exclaimed: "Why, it's a piece of thin outside bark from a twig of alder." Maitland's face was a study... "Would you mind telling me," he said deliberately, "how you found that out so quickly?" She hesitated a moment, and then said methodically, pointing toward the water, "I know the alder well--our boat is moored near a clump of them." "You are a keen observer," he replied, as he took the prepared paper from his box and spread the film of bark upon it to take a blue print of it. "There is one other object upon the sill which, unfortunately, I cannot take away with me," he continued, "but shall have to content myself with photographing. I refer to a sinuous line made in the paint, while green, and looking as if a short piece of rope, or, more properly, rubber tubing, since there is no rope-like texture visible, had been dropped upon it, and hastily removed--but see, here are Osborne and Allen looking for all the world as if they were prepared to demonstrate a fourth dimension of space. Now we shall see the suicide theory proved--to their own satisfaction, at least. But, whatever they say, don't forget we are to keep our own work to ourselves."

The two officers were alone. M. Godin had apparently decided to work by himself. This did not in the least surprise me, since I could easily see that he had nothing to gain by working with these two officers.

"We've solved the matter," was the first thing Osborne said after passing the time of day. "Indeed?" replied Maitland in a tone which was decidedly ambiguous; "you make it suicide, I suppose?" "That's just what we make it," returned the other. "We hadn't much doubt of it last night, but there were some things, such as the motive, for example, not quite clear to us; but it is all as plain as daylight now."

"And what says M. Godin?" asked Maitland.

Mr. Osborne burst into a loud guffaw.

"Oho, but that's good! What says M. Godin? I say, Allen, Maitland wants to know what 'Frenchy' says," and the pair laughed boisterously. "It's plain enough you don't know," he continued, addressing Maitland. "He's tighter'n any champagne bottle you ever saw. The corkscrew ain't invented that'll draw a word out of M. Godin. You saw him making notes here last night. Well, the chances are that if this were a murder case, which it isn't, you'd see no more of M. Godin till he bobbed up some day, perhaps on the other side of the earth, with a pair of twisters on the culprit. He's a 'wiz,' is M. Godin. What does he think? He knows what he thinks, and he's the only individual on the planet that enjoys that distinction. I say, Allen, do you pump 'Frenchy' for the gentleman's enlightenment," and again the pair laughed long and heartily.
"Well, then," said Maitland, "since we can't have M. Godin's views we shall have to content ourselves with those of your more confiding selves. Let's hear all about the suicide theory."

"I think," said Osborne in an undertone, "you had better ask Miss Darrow to withdraw for a few moments, as there are some details likely to pain her." This suggestion was intended only for Maitland, but the officer, used to talking in the open air, spoke so loudly that we all overheard him. "I thank you for your consideration," Gwen said to him, "but I would much prefer to remain. There can be nothing connected with this matter which I cannot bear to hear, or should not know. Pray proceed."

Osborne, anxious to narrate his triumph, needed no further urging. "We felt sure," he began, "that it was a case of suicide, but were perplexed to know why Mr. Darrow should wish to make it appear a murder. Of course, we thought he might wish to spare his daughter the shame such an act would visit upon her, but when this was exchanged for the horrible notoriety of murder, the motive didn't seem quite sufficient, so we looked for a stronger one--and found it." "Ah! you are getting interesting," Maitland observed.

Osborne cast a furtive glance at Gwen, and then continued: "We learned on inquiry that certain recent investments of Mr. Darrow's had turned out badly. In addition to this he had been dealing somewhat extensively in certain electric and sugar stocks, and when the recent financial crash came, he found himself unable to cover his margins, and was so swept clean of everything. Nor is this all; he had lost a considerable sum of money in yet another way--just how my informant would not disclose--and all of these losses combined made his speedy failure inevitable. Under such conditions many another man has committed suicide, unable to face financial ruin. But this man had a daughter to consider, and, as I have already said, he would wish to spare her the disgrace which the taking of his own life would visit upon her, and, more than all, would desire that she should not be left penniless. The creditors would make away with his estate, and his daughter be left a beggar. We could see but one way of his preventing this, and that was to insures his life in his daughter's favour. We instituted inquiries at the insurance offices, and found that less than a month ago he had taken out policies in various companies aggregating nearly fifty thousand dollars, whereas, up to that time, he had been carrying only two thousand dollars insurance. Why this sudden and tremendous increase? Clearly to provide for his daughter after his act should have deprived her of his own watchful care. And now we can plainly see why he wished his suicide to pass for murder. He had been insured but a month, and immediate ruin stared him in the face. His death must be consummated at once, and yet, by our law, a man who takes his life before the payment of his second annual insurance premium relieves the company issuing his policy of all liability thereunder, and robs his beneficiary of the fund intended for her. Here, then, is a sufficient motive, and nothing more is required to make the whole case perfectly clear. Of course, it would be a little more complete if we could find the weapon, but even without it, there can be no doubt, in the light of our work, that John Darrow took his own life with the intentions, and for the purposes, I have already set forth."

"Upon my soul, gentlemen," exclaimed Maitland, "you have reasoned that out well! Did you carefully read the copies of the various policies when interrogating the companies insuring Mr. Darrow?" "Hardly," Osborne replied. "We learned from the officials all we needed to know, and didn't waste any time in gratifying idle curiosity." A long-drawn "hm-m" was the only reply Maitland vouchsafed to this. "We regret," said Osborne, addressing Gwen, "that our duty, which has compelled us to establish the truth in this matter, has been the means of depriving you of the insurance money which your father intended for you. Here, then, is a sufficient motive, and nothing more is required to make the whole case perfectly clear. Of course, it would be a little more complete if we could find the weapon, but even without it, there can be no doubt, in the light of our work, that John Darrow took his own life with the intentions, and for the purposes, I have already set forth."

"I wish to ask you a few questions," Maitland said to Gwen as soon as the door had closed behind Osborne and his companion, "and I beg you will remember that in doing so, however personal my inquiries may seem, they have but one object in view--the solution of this mystery." "I have already had good proof of your singleness of purpose," she replied. "Only too gladly will I give you any information in my possession. Until this assassin is found, and my father's good name freed from the obloquy which has been cast upon it, my existence will be but a blank,--yes, worse, it will be an unceasing torment; for I know my father's spirit--if the dead have power to return to this earth--can never rest with this weight of shame upon it." As she spoke these words the depth of grief she had hitherto so well concealed became visible for a moment, and her whole frame shook as the expression of her emotion reacted upon her. The next instant she regained her old composure, and said calmly:

"You see I have every reason to shed whatever light I can upon this dark subject."

"Please, then, to answer my questions methodically, and do not permit yourself to reason why I have asked them. What was your father's age?"

"Sixty-two."

"Did he drink?"

"No."

"Did he play cards?"
"Yes."
"Poker?"
"Yes, and several other games."
"Was he as fond of them as of croquet?"
"No; nothing pleased him as croquet did--nothing, unless it were chess."
"Hum! Do you play chess?"
"Yes; I played a good deal with father."
"What kind of a game did he play?"
"I do not understand you. He played a good game; my father did not enjoy doing anything that he could not do well."
"I mean to ask if his positions were steadily sustained--or if, on the other hand, his manoeuvres were swift, and what you might call brilliant."
"I think you would call them brilliant."
"Hum! How old are you?"
"Twenty-two."
"Tell me your relations with your father."
"We were most constant companions. My mother--she and my father--they were not altogether companionable--in short, they were ill-mated, and, being wise enough to find it out, and having no desire to longer embitter each other's lives, they agreed to separate when I was only four. They parted without the slightest ill-feeling, and I remained with father. He was very fond of me, and would permit no one else to teach me. At seven I was drawing and painting under his guidance. At eight the violin was put into my hands and my studies in voice began. In the meantime father was most careful not to neglect my physical training; he taught me the use of Indian clubs, and how to walk easily. At eight I could walk four miles an hour without fatigue. The neighbours used to urge that I be put to school, but my father would reply--many a time I have heard him say it--'a child's brain is like a flower that blossoms in perceptions and goes to seed in abstractions. Correct concepts are the raw material of reason. Every desk in your school is an intellectual loom which is expected to weave a sound fabric out of rotten raw material. While your children are wasting their fibre in memorising the antique errors of classical thought my child is being fitted to perceive new truths for herself.' It is needless to say his friends considered these views altogether too radical. But for all that I was never sent to school. My father's library was always at my disposal, and I was taught how to use it. We were constantly together, and grew so into each other's lives that"--but her voice failed her, and her eyes moistened. Maitland, though he apparently did not notice her emotion, so busy was he in making notes, quickly put a question which diverted her attention.
"Your father seemed last night to have a presentiment of some impending calamity. Was this a common experience?"
"Of late, yes. He has told me some six or seven times of dreaming the same dreams--a dream in which some assassin struck him out of the darkness." "Did you at any of these times notice anything which might now lead you to believe this fancied repetition was the result of any mental malady?"
"No."
"Was his description of the dreams always the same?"
"No; never were they twice alike, save in the one particular of the unseen assassin."
"Hum!, Did the impression of these dreams remain long with him?"
"He never recovered from it, and each dream only accentuated his assurance that the experience was prophetic. When once I tried to dissuade him from this view, he said to me: 'Gwen, it is useless; I am making no mistake. When I am gone you will know why I am now so sure--I cannot tell you now, it would only--here he stopped short, and, turning abruptly to me, said with a fierceness entirely alien to his disposition: 'Hatred is foreign to my nature, but I hate that man with a perfect hell of loathing! Have I been a kind father to you, Gwen? If so, promise me--and he seized me by the wrist--'promise me if I'm murdered--I may as well say when I'm murdered--you will look upon the man who brings my assassin to justice--the thought that he may escape is damning--as your dearest friend on earth! You will deny him nothing. You will learn later that I have taken care to reward him. My child, you will owe this man a debt you can never repay, for he will have enabled your father's soul to find repose. I dreamed last night that I came back from the dead, and heard my avenger ask you to be his wife. You refused, and at your ingratitude my restless soul returned to torment everlasting. Swear to me, Gwen, that you'll deny him nothing, nothing, nothing! I promised him, and he seemed much reassured. 'I am satisfied,' he said, 'and now can die in peace, for you are an anomaly, Gwen--a woman who fully knows the nature of a covenant,' and he put his arm about me, and drew me to him. His fierceness had subsided as quickly as it had appeared, and he was now all tenderness.'"
have, of course, no doubt that your father was the victim of a mental malady—at least, at such times as those of which you speak?"

Gwen replied deliberately: "Indeed, I have grave doubts. My father was possessed by a strange conviction, but I never saw anything which impressed me as indicating an unsound mind. I am, of course, scarcely fitted to judge in such matters."

Maitland's face darkened as he asked: "You would not have me infer that you would consider your promise in any sense binding?"

"And why not?" she ejaculated in astonishment.

"Because," he continued, "the request is so unnatural as to be in itself sufficient evidence that it was not made by a man in his right mind."

"I cannot agree with you as to my father's condition," Gwen replied firmly; "yet you may be right; I only know that I, at least, was in my right mind, and that I promised. If it cost me my life to keep that pledge, I shall not hesitate a moment. Have you forgotten that my father's last words were, 'remember your promise'?! She glanced up at Maitland as she said this, and started a little as she saw the expression of pain upon his face. "I seem to you foolishly deluded," she said apologetically; "and you are displeased to see that my purpose is not shaken. Think of all my father was to me, and then ask yourself if I could betray his faith. The contemplation of the subject is painful at best; its realisation may, from the standpoint of a sensitive woman, be fraught with unspeakable horror, --I dare not think of it! May we not change the subject?"

For a long time Maitland did not speak, and I forbore to break the silence. At last he said: "Let us hope, if the supposed assassin be taken, the discovery may be made by someone worthy the name of man--someone who will not permit you to sacrifice either yourself or your money." Gwen glanced at him quickly, for his voice was strangely heavy and inelastic, and an unmistakable gloom had settled upon him. I thought she was a little startled, and I was considering if I had not better call her aside and explain that he was subject to these moods, when he continued, apparently unaware of the impression he had made: "Do you realise how strong a case of suicide the authorities have made out? Like all of their work it has weak places. We must search these in order to overthrow their conclusion. The insurance policies they were 'too busy' to read we must peruse. Then, judging from your story, there seems little doubt that your father has left some explanation of affairs hitherto not confided to you--some document which he has reserved for your perusal after his death. No time should be lost in settling this question. The papers may be here, or in the hands of his attorney. Let us search here first."

"His private papers," Gwen said, rising to lead the way, "are in his desk in the study."

"One moment, please," Maitland interrupted, calling her back, "I have something I have been trying to ask you for the last hour, but have repeatedly put off. I believe your father's death to have resulted from poisoning. You know the result of the post-mortem inquest. It is necessary to make an analysis of the poison, if there be any, and an absolutely thorough microscopic examination of the wound. I--I regret to pain you--but to do this properly it will be necessary to cut away the wounded portion. Have we your permission to do so?"

For a moment Gwen did not answer. She fell upon her knees before her father's body, and kissed the cold face passionately. For the first time since the tragedy she found relief in tears. When she arose a great change had come over her. She was very pale and seized a chair for support as she replied to Maitland's question between the convulsive sobs which she seemed powerless to check: "I--I have bidden him good-bye. We shall but obey his command in sparing no pains to reach the assassin. You--you have my permission to do anything--everything--that may be--necessary to that end. I--I know you will be as gentle--" But she could not finish her sentence. The futility of gentleness--the realisation that her father was forever past all need of tenderness, fell like a shroud about her soul. The awakening I had dreaded had come. Her hand fell from the chair, she staggered, and would have fallen to the floor had not Maitland caught her in his arms.

THE EPISODE OF THE SEALED DOCUMENT

CHAPTER 1

Father of all surveyors, Time drags his chain of rust through every life, and only Love--unaging God of the Ages--immeasurable, keeps his untarnished youth.

Maitland carried the unconscious girl into the study, and for some time we busied ourselves in bringing her to herself. When this task was accomplished we did not feel like immediately putting any further tax upon her strength. Maitland insisted that she should rest while he and I ransacked the desk, and, ever mindful of her promise to obey his instructions, she yielded without remonstrance. Our search revealed the insurance policies, and a sealed envelope bearing the inscription: "To Miss Gwen Darrow, to be opened after the death of John Darrow," and three newspapers with articles marked in blue pencil. I read the first aloud. It ran as follows:

I have reason to believe an attempt will sooner or later be made upon my life, and that the utmost cunning will be employed to lead the authorities astray. The search for the assassin will be long, expensive, and discouraging--
I glanced at the other two papers—the marked article was the same in each. "I wonder what your friend Osborne would say to that," I said to Maitland.

"How old are the papers?" he replied.

"March 15th,—only a little over a month," I answered.

"Let me see them, please," he said. "Hum! All of the same date, and each in the paid part of the paper! It is clear Mr. Darrow inserted these singular notices himself. I will tell you what Osborne will say when he learns of these articles. He will say they strengthen his theory; that no sane man would publish such a thing, except as a weak attempt to deceive the insurance companies. As for the money all being paid to the discoverer of the assassin, instead of to his daughter, he will simply dispose of that by saying: 'No assassin, no reward, and the fund remains intact.' If now, the other papers permit Miss Darrow to use the interest of this fund while holding the principal in trust, we do not at present know enough of this matter to successfully refute Osborne's reasoning. This mystery seems to grow darker rather than lighter. The one thing upon which we seem continually to get evidence is the question of sanity. If Mr. Darrow's suspicions were directed against no one in particular, then it is clear his dreams, and all the rest of his fears for that matter, had a purely subjective origin, which is to say that upon this one subject, at least, he was of unsound mind."

"I cannot think so," Gwen interrupted. "He was so rational in everything else."

"That is quite possible," I replied. "I have known people to be monomaniacs upon the subject of water, and to go nowhere without a glass of it in their hands. There is also a well-authenticated case of a man who was as sane as you or I until he heard the words 'real estate.' One day while quietly carving the meat at a dinner to which he had invited several guests, a gentleman opposite him inadvertently spoke the fatal words, when, without a word of warning, he sprang at him across the table, using the carving-knife with all the fury of the most violent maniac; and yet, under all other conditions, he was perfectly rational."

"If, on the other hand," said Maitland, continuing his remarks as if unaware of our interruption, "Mr. Darrow's suspicions had any foundation in fact, it is almost certain they must have been directed against some specific person or persons. If so, why did he not name them?—but, stay—how do we know that he did not? Let us proceed with our examination of the papers," and he began perusing the insurance policies. Neither Gwen nor I spoke till he had finished and thrown them down, when we both turned expectantly toward him.

"All in Osborne's favour so far," he said. "Principal to be held in trust by Miss Darrow under the terms of a will which we have yet to find; the income, until the discharge of the trust, to go to Miss Darrow. Now for this," and he passed Gwen the sealed envelope addressed to her.

She broke the seal with much agitation. "Shall I read it aloud?" she asked.

We signified our desire to hear it, and she read as follows:

MY DEAR GWEN:

My forebodings have seemed to you strange and uncalled for, but when this comes to your hand you will know whether or not they were groundless. Of one episode in my career which shook the structure of my being to its foundation stone, you have been carefully kept in ignorance. It is necessary that you should know it when I am gone, and I have accordingly committed it to this paper, which will then fall into your hands. My early life, until two years after I married your mother, was spent in India, the adult portion thereof being devoted to the service of the East India Company. I had charge of a department in their depot at Bombay. You have seen Naples. Add to the beauties of that city the interesting and motley population of Cairo and you can form some idea of the attractions of Bombay. I was very happy there until the occurrence of the event I am about to narrate.

One morning, my duties calling me to one of the wharves, my attention was attracted by a young girl dancing upon the flags by the water's edge. The ordinary bayadere is so common an object in India as to attract but little notice from anyone of refined tastes, but this girl, judging from the chaste beauty of her movements, was of a very different type. As my curiosity drew me nearer to her she turned her face toward me, and in that instant I knew my heart had come.

Though many years her senior she was still my first love,—the one great passion of my life. I do not attempt to describe her ineffable loveliness, for, like the beauty of a flower, it was incapable of analysis. Nothing that I could write would give you any adequate idea of this girl's seraphic face, for she was like unto no one you have ever seen in this cold Western world. I watched in a wild, nervous transport, I know not how long—time and space had no part in this new ecstasy of mine! I could think of nothing, do nothing—only feel,—feel the hot blood deluge my brain only to fall back in scalding torrents upon my heart with a pain that was exquisite pleasure.
Suddenly she changed her step and executed a quick backward movement toward the water, stopping just as her heels touched the curb at the edge of the wharf; then forward, and again a quick return to the backward movement, but this time she mistook the distance, her heels struck the curb forcibly, and she was precipitated backward into the water. For a moment I stood as one petrified, unable to reason, much less to act; then the excited voices of the crowd recalled me. They had thrown a rope into the water and were waiting for her to come to the surface and grasp it. The wall from which she had fallen must have been at least fifteen feet above the water, which was littered with broken spars, pieces of timber, and other odd bits of wood. It seemed as if she would never come to the surface, and when at length she did, she did not attempt to seize the rope thrown to her, but sank without a movement. The truth flashed upon me in an instant. She had struck her head against some of the floating drift and was unconscious! Something must be done at once. I seized the rope and sprang in after her, taking good care to avoid obstructions, and although, as you know, I never learned to swim, I succeeded in reaching her, and we were drawn up together. I bore her in my arms into one of the storerooms close by, and, laying her upon a bale of cotton, used such restoratives as could be quickly procured.

I was kneeling by her, my arm under her neck, in the act of raising her head, when she opened her eyes, and fastened them, full of wonderment, upon my face. A moment more, her memory returning to her, she made a little movement, as if to free herself. I was too excited then to heed it, and continued to support her head. She did not repeat the movement, but half closed her eyes and leaned back resignedly against my arm. If, I thought, these few minutes could be expanded into an eternity, it would be my idea of heaven. She was recovering rapidly now and soon raised herself into a sitting posture, saying, in very good English, "I think I can stand now, Sahib." I gave her my arm and assisted her to her feet. Her hand closed upon my sleeve as if to see how wet it was, and glancing at my dripping garments, she said simply: "You have been in the water, Sahib, and it is to you I owe my life. I shall never forget your kindness." She raised her eyes to my face and met my gaze for a moment, as she spoke. We are told that the eye is incapable of any expression save that lent it by the lids and brow,—that the eyeball itself, apart from its direction, and the changes of the pupil resulting from variations in the intensity of light, can carry no message whatsoever. This may be so, but, without any noticeable movement of the eyes that met mine, I learned with ineffable delight that this young girl's soul and mine were threaded upon the same cord of destiny. My emotion so overpowered me that I could not speak, and when my self-possession returned the young girl had vanished.

From the height of bliss I now plunged into the abyss of despair. I had let her go without a word. I did not even know her name. I had caught her to myself from the ocean only to suffer her to drown herself among the half-million inhabitants of Bombay. What must she think of me? I asked the wharfinger if he knew her, but he had never seen her before. All my other inquiries proved equally fruitless. I wondered if she knew that I loved her, but hardly dared to hope she had been able to correctly interpret my boorish conduct. I could think of but one thing to do. If I did not know her name, neither did she know mine, and so if she desired a further acquaintance, she, like myself, must rely upon a chance meeting. If she had detected my admiration for her she must know that I too would strive to meet her again. Where would she be most likely to expect me to look for her? Clearly at the same place we had met before, and at the same time of day. She might naturally think my duties called me there daily at that hour. I determined to be there at the same time the next day.

I arrived to find her there before me, anxiously peering at the passers-by. She was certainly looking for me,—there was ecstasy in the thought!

It is not necessary, my dear child, that I should describe the details of our love-making, for my present purpose is not merely to interest you, but rather to acquaint you with certain occurrences which I now deem it wise you should know. Time only intensified our love for each other, and for several months all went well. One serious obstacle to our union presented itself,—that of caste. Her people, Lona said, would never permit her to marry outside her own station in life, besides which there was another ground upon which we might be equally sure of their opposition. They had already chosen for her and she was betrothed to Rama Ragobah. It is of this man that I have chiefly to speak. By birth he was of the same Vaisya caste as Lona. Early in life his lot had fallen among fakirs and he had acquired all their secrets. This did not satisfy his ambitions, for he wished to be numbered among therishis or adepts, and subjected himself to the most horrible asceticism to qualify himself for adeptsip. His indifference to physical pain was truly marvellous. He had rolled his naked body to the Ganges over hundreds of miles of burning sands! He had held his hands clinched until the nails had worn through the palm and out at the back of the hand. He had at one time maintained for weeks a slow fire upon the top of his head, keeping the skin burned to the skull.

When he came wooing Lona, his rigid asceticism had much relaxed, but he would still seek to amuse her by driving knives into his body until she would sicken at the blood, a condition of affairs which, she said, afforded him great enjoyment. Ragobah was a man of gigantic build and immense physical strength. His features were heavy and forbidding. You are familiar with pictures of Nana Sahib. If I had not known this fiend to have died while beset in a swamp, I should have mistaken Ragobah for him. It was to such a being that Lona was betrothed in spite of the
loathing her parents knew she felt for him. She told me all this one night at our accustomed tryst on Malabar Hill. We had chosen to meet here on account of the beauty of the place and the seclusion it offered. There, on bright moonlit nights, with the sea and the city below me, the "Tower of Silence" in the Parsees' burial plot ablaze with reflected glory, the majestic banyan over me rustling gently in the soft sea breeze, while Lona nestled close beside me,—the exquisite perfume of the luxuriant garden less welcome than the delicious fragrance of her breath,—hours fraught with years of bliss would pass as if but pulse-beats. In the world of love the heart is the only true timepiece. On one or two occasions Lona had thought she had been followed when coming to meet me, and she began to conceive a strange dislike for a little cavelike recess in the rocks just back of the tree by which we sat. I tried on one occasion to reassure her by telling her it was so shallow that, with the moonlight streaming into it, I could see clear to the back wall, and arose to enter it to convince her there was no one there, but she clung to me in terror, saying: "Don't go! Don't leave me! I was foolish to mention it. I cannot account for my fear,—and yet, do you know," she continued in a low, frightened tone, "there is a shaft at the back of the cave that has, they say, no bottom, but goes down, --down,--down,---hundreds of feet to the sea?" It is useless, as you know only too well, to strive to reason down a presentiment, and so, instead, I sought to make use of her fear in the accomplishment of my dearest wish. "Why need we," I urged, "come here; why longer continue these clandestine meetings? Let us be brave, darling, in our loves. Your people have chosen another husband for you,—my people another wife for me; but we are both quite able to choose for ourselves. We have done so, and it is our most sacred duty to adhere to and consummate that choice. Let us, I beseech you, do so without further delay. Dearest, meet me here to-morrow night prepared for a journey. We will take the late train for Matheron Station, where I have friends who can be trusted. We will be married immediately upon our arrival, and can communicate by post with our respective families, remaining away from them until they are glad to welcome us with open arms."

She raised some few objections to my plan and expressed some misgivings, but she loved me and I was able to reason away the one and kiss away the other, and with our souls upon our lips we parted for the night. The last thing I had said to her,—"I remember it as if it all happened yesterday,—was: "Think of it, dear heart, there will be no more such partings between us after to-night!" and she had replied by silently nestling closer to me and twining her arms about my neck. And so we parted on that never-to-be-forgotten night more than a score of years ago.

The twenty-four hours intervening between this parting and our next meeting may be passed over in silence, as nothing occurred during that time at all essential to the purpose this narrative subserves. The longed-for time came at last and, with a depth of happiness I had never known before,—a peace passing all understanding,—I set out for Malabar Hill. The night was perfect and the moonlight so bright I could distinctly see the air-roots of our trysting tree when more than a quarter of a mile away. I thought at the time how this tree, with its crown of luxuriant foliage and its writhing roots, might well pass for some gigantic Medusa-head with its streaming serpent-hair. As I neared the tree Lona stepped from behind it and awaited my approach. She was even more impatient than I, I thought, and my heart beat more wildly than ever. "Sweet saint, have I kept you waiting?" I asked, as I came within speaking distance of her. She stood motionless against the tree and apparently did not hear me. I waited till I was within ten feet of her and repeated the question, but, although she fixed her unfathomable eyes full upon mine, she made no reply, and gave no evidence of having heard me. I stood as if petrified. A nameless dread was settling in me, paralysing my faculties. She had always before sprung forward at sight of me and thrown herself with a bewitching little pirouette into my arms, now she stood coldly aloof, silent and motionless, on this, our wedding night! I waited for some word of explanation, but none came. The suspense became unbearable,—I could endure it no longer!

"For God's sake, what has happened?" I cried, rushing forward to seize her in my arms. She raised her right hand above her head and, as I had almost reached her, threw something full in my face! Instinctively I struck at it with my walking-stick, and it fell in the grass at my feet,—it was a young Indian cobra—Naja tripudians,—a serpent of the deadliest sort. I did not pause to reason how this sweet angel had been so quickly changed into a venomous fiend, although the thought that somehow she had been led to think me false to her, and that this act was the swift vengeance of her hot Eastern blood, flashed momentarily through my mind,—all that could be explained as soon as I had her nestling in my arms. I reached forward to embrace her, but she struck me in the face and fled! For an instant my heart stood still. It seemed to me it would never start, but it soon began to throb again like a thing of lead, and the blood it pumped was cold, for the winter had closed in upon it. The elasticity of my life, that ineffable resiliency of the soul which makes us more than beasts of burden, was gone forever. An automaton, informed only with the material life, remained,—the spirit followed that fleeting figure down the hill. More than twenty years have passed and still the unrewarded chase continues!

But it is to facts I have to call your attention, rather than to their effects. A flutter of white muslin in the moonlit distance was all that was visible of the retreating girl when I started mechanically, and without any particular purpose in view, in pursuit of her. My path lay by the banyan tree under which we had so often sat, but every air-root seemed changed to a writhing serpent. As I threaded my way among them, a man stepped from behind the trunk.
and disputed my passage. His gigantic form was silhouetted against the mass of rock forming the entrance to the little cave. The bright moonlight did what it could to illumine that sinister face. It was Rama Ragobah! For fully a minute we stood silently face to face, each expecting the assault of the other. It was Ragobah who spoke first. "She is mine, body and soul; and the English cur may find a mate in his own kennel!" He bent toward me and hissed these words in my very face. His hot breath seemed to poison me. It made me beside myself. I knew he meant to take advantage of his physical superiority and attack me, by the narrow watch he kept upon the heavy walking-stick I still carried in my right hand. He had expected I would attempt to strike with this, but my constant practice at boxing had made my fists the more natural weapon. I was so enraged I did not notice he was too close to use my stick to advantage. I simply acted without any thought whatever. His attitude was such, as he hissed his venom into my face, as to enable me to give him a powerful "upper cut" under the jaw. This, as I was so much lighter than he, was the most effective blow I could deliver; yet, although it took him off his feet, it did not disable him. I had not succeeded in placing it as I had intended, and it had only the effect of rendering him demoniacal. In an instant he was again upon his feet, and unsheathing a long knife. I knew it meant death for me if he were able to close with me. It was useless for me to call for help, for in those days this part of Malabar Hill was as deserted as a wilderness. Now, the very spot on which we stood is highly cultivated, and forms a part of the garden of the Blasehek villa. There, early in the eighties, as the guest of the hospitable Herr Blasehek, Professor Ernst Haeckel botanised a week, on his way to Ceylon. Now, in response to a cry from his intended victim, an assassin might be frustrated by assistance from a dozen bungalows, but at the time of which I write, the victim, if he were wise, saved his breath for the struggle which he knew he must make unaided.

Ragobah paused, and coolly bared his right arm to the elbow. There was a studied deliberation in his movements, which said only too plainly: "There is no hurry in killing you, for you cannot escape." I grasped my stick firmly as my only hope, and awaited his onslaught. My early military drill now stood me in good stead, and to it I owe my life. Without the knowledge which I had derived from the use of the broadsword, I should have been all but certain to have attempted to strike him a downward blow upon the head. This is just what he was expecting, and it would have cost me my life. He would have had only to throw up his left arm to catch the blow, while with his right hand he plunged the knife into my heart. My experience had taught me how much easier it is to protect one's self from a cutting blow than from a thrust, and I determined to adopt this latter means of assault. Ragobah advanced upon me slowly, much as a cat steals upon an unsuspecting bird. I raised my stick as if to strike him, and he instinctively threw up his left arm, and advanced upon me. My opportunity had come; I lowered the point of my cane to the level of his face, and made a vigorous lunge forward, throwing my whole weight upon the thrust. As nearly as I could tell, the point of my stick caught him in the socket of the left eye, just as he sprang forward, and hurled him backward, blinded and stupefied. Before he had recovered sufficiently to protect himself, I dealt him a blow upon the head that brought him quickly to the earth. Without stopping to ascertain whether or not I had killed him, I fled precipitately to my lodgings, hastily packed my belongings, and set out for Matheron Station by the same train I had so fondly believed would convey Lona and me to our nuptial altar. Words cannot describe the suffering I endured upon that journey. For the first time since my terrible desertion I had an opportunity to think, and I did think, if the pulse of an overwhelming pain, perpetually recurring like the beat of a loaded wheel, can be called thought. Although there is no insanity in our family nearer than a great-uncle, I marvel that I retained my wits under this terrible blow. I seriously contemplated suicide, and probably should have taken my life had not my mental condition gradually undergone a change. I was no longer conscious of suffering, nor of a desire to end my life. I was simply indifferent. It was all one to me whether I lived or died. The power of loving or caring for anything or anybody had entirely left me, and when I would reflect how utterly indifferent I was even to my own father and mother, I would regard myself as an unnatural monster. I tried to conceal my lack of affection by a greater attention to their wishes, and it was in this way that I yielded, without remonstrance, to those same views regarding my marriage, to which, but a little while before, I had made such strenuous objections as to quite enrage my father. I was an only child, and (as often happens in such cases) my father never could be brought to realise that I had many years since attained my majority. It had been his wish, ever since my boyhood, that I should marry your mother, and he made use, when I was nearly forty, of the selfsame insistent and coercive methods with which he had sought to subdue my will when I was but twenty, and at last he attained his end. I had learned from friends in Bombay that not only had Rama Ragobah recovered from the blows I had given him, but that, shortly after my encounter with him, he had married Lona, she whom I had loved, God only knows how madly! It was all one to me now whether I was married or single, living or dead. So it was all arranged. I myself told the lady that, so far as I then understood my feelings, I had no affection for any person on earth; but it seemed only to pique her, and I think she determined then and there to make herself an exception to this universal rule. This is how I came to marry your mother. There was not the slightest community of thought, sentiment, or interest between us. The things I liked did not interest her; what she liked bored me; yet she was pre-eminently a sensible woman, and when she learned the real state of affairs
was the first to suggest a separation, which was effected. We parted with the kindliest feelings, and, as you know, remained fast friends up to her death.

It was nearly a year after the affair on Malabar Hill before I had the heart to return with your mother to Bombay. I had thought all emotion forever dead within me, but, ah! how little do we understand ourselves. Twelve months had not passed, and already I was conscious of a vague ache—a feeling that something, I scarcely knew what, had gone wrong, so terribly wrong! I told myself that I was now married, and had a duty both to my wife and society, and I tried hard to ignore the ache, on the one hand, and not to permit myself to define and analyse it on the other. But a man does not have to understand anatomy in order to break his heart, and so my longing defined itself even by itself. The old fire, built on a virgin hearth, was far from out. Society had heaped a mouthful of conventional ashes upon it, but they had served only to preserve it. From the fiat of the human heart there is no court of appeal.

One night, to my utter amazement, I received a letter from Lona which you will find filed away among my other valuable documents.

It was addressed in her own quaint little hand, and I trembled violently as I opened the envelope. It was but a brief note, and ran as follows:

"I am dying, and have much to explain before I go. Be generous, and do not think too harshly of me. Suspend your judgment until I have spoken. You must come by stealth, or you will not be permitted to see me. Follow my directions carefully and you will have no trouble in reaching me. Go at once to the cave on Malabar Hill, whistle thrice, and one will appear who will conduct you safely to me. Follow him, and whatever happens, make no noise. Do not delay—I can last but little longer. "LONA."

I did not even pause to re-read the letter, or to ask why it was necessary to follow such singular directions in order to be led to her. I simply knew she had written to me; that she was dying; that she wanted me; that was all, but it was enough. Dazed, filled with a strange mixture of dread and yearning, I hurried to the cave. It was already night when I reached it—just such a moonlit night as that on which, nearly a year before, Lona and I had planned our elopement; and now that heart, which then had beaten so wildly against mine, was slowly throbbing itself into eternal silence, --and I—I had been more than dead ever since.

I looked about on all sides, but no human being was visible. I whistled thrice, but no sound came in response. Again I whistled, with the same result. Where was my guide? Perhaps he was in the cave and had not heard me. I entered it to see, but had barely passed the narrow portal when a voice said close behind me: "Did you whistle, Sahib?" The suddenness, the strangeness of this uncanny appearance, so close to me that I felt the breath of the words upon my neck, sent a chill over me. I shall never forget that feeling! Many times since then have I dreamt of a hand that struck me from out the darkness, while the same unspeakable dread froze up my life, until, by repetition, it has sunk deep into my soul with the weight of a positive conviction. I know, as I now write, that this will be my end, and his will be the hand that strikes. The fibre of our lives is twisted in a certain way, and each has its own fixed mode of unravelling,—this will be mine.

When I had recovered from the first momentary shock I turned and looked behind me. There, close upon me, with his huge form blocking the narrow entrance, stood Rama Ragobah, my rival, his face hideous with malignant triumph! I was trapped, and that, too, by a man whom my hatred, could it have worked its will, would have plunged into the uttermost hell of torment. I felt sure my hour had come, but my assassin should not have the satisfaction of thinking I feared him. I did not permit myself to betray the slightest concern as to my position—indeed, after the shock of the first surprise, I did not care so very much what fate awaited me. Why should I? Had I not seriously thought of taking my own life? Was it not clear now that Lona, whose own handwriting had decoyed me, had most basely betrayed me into her husband's hands? If I had wished to end my own life before, surely now, death, at the hands of another, was no very terrible thing. Could I have dragged that other down with me, I would have rejoiced at the prospect!

Ragobah broke the silence. "You have left your stick this time, I see," he said, as he unsheathed the long knife I had once before escaped, and ostentatiously felt its edge as if he were about to shave with it.

"You were in haste, Sahib, when you left me last time, or I should not now have the pleasure of this interview. Be assured I shall do my work more thoroughly this time. Behind you there is a hole partly filled with water. If you drop a stone into this well, it is several seconds before you hear the splash, and there is a saying hereabouts that it is bottomless. I am curious to know if this be true, and I am going to send you to see. Of course, if the story is well founded, I shall not expect you to come back. That would be unreasonable, Sahib."

All this was said with a refined sarcasm which maddened me, and, as he concluded, he began to edge stealthily toward me. So strong is the instinct of self-preservation within us that I doubt not a would-be suicide, caught in the act of hanging himself, would struggle madly for his life were someone else to forcibly adjust the noose about his neck. At all events, I found myself unwilling, at the last moment, to have someone else launch me into eternity and, as I wished to gain time to think what I should do to escape, I said to him:
"Why do you bear me such malice? Can you not see that any injury I may have done you was purely in self-defence? You sought the quarrel, and I took the only means at hand to protect myself. I did not, as you know, seek to kill you, a thing I could easily have done, but was content merely to make good my escape. I--"

"Bah!" he said, interrupting me savagely. "That has nothing to do with it. Had you only pounded my head you might live, but you have pounded my heart! It is for that I hate you, and for that you die!"

"What have I done?" I asked.

"What have you done?" he roared, furious with rage. "I will tell you. You have by magic possessed the mind of my wife. Your name, your cursed name is ever upon her lips! My entreaties, my supplications are answered by nothing else. Even in her sleep she starts up and calls for you. You have cast a spell upon her. Day by day she droops and withers like a lotus-flower whose root is severed; yet ever and always, is your cursed name upon her lips, goading me to madness, until at last I have registered a sacred oath to kill you, and remove the accursed spell you have thrown upon her."

Had he advanced upon me at this moment he would have found me as helpless as a child, so overcome was I by the sudden joy which seized upon me, and seemed to turn my melancholy inside out. Those words of hatred had been as a torch illumining the gloom of my despair, for they had shown me that my existence was not altogether barren and unproductive. The life which has known the heaven of true love cannot be called a failure. There is no wall so high, no distance so great, no separation so complete as to defy the ineffable commerce of two loving hearts! Lona, then, was still mine, despite all obstacles. What a change this knowledge made! In an instant life became an inexpressible benefaction, for it permitted me to realise I was beloved,--and death was dowered with a new horror--the fear that I should cease to know it.

I was roughly aroused from my reflections by Rama Ragobah.

"Come, Sahib," he said, as his thick lips curled sneeringly, "suppose you try your spells upon me? You will never have a better chance than now to show your power," and again he made a slight movement toward me with the gleaming knife. The moon, low down upon the horizon, sent a broad beam of light into the entrance of the cave and over the head and shoulders of the Indian. Its cold light shimmered along the blade which was now held threateningly toward me. The crisis had been reached.

In times of such great urgency one has frequently an inspiration--instantaneous, disconnected, unbidden--which no amount of quiet, peaceful thought would suggest. Such extraordinary flashes are the result of reasoning too rapid for consciousness to note. The Indian had already laid bare his right arm to the elbow before I had determined upon the desperate course I would pursue, and upon which I must hazard all. As he advanced upon me I seized the large, white sola hat from my head, and hurled it full in his face. It was a schoolboy trick, yet upon its success depended my life. Instinctively, and in spite of himself, Ragobah dodged, closed his eyes, and raised his right hand, knife and all, to shield his face. I sprang upon him at the same instant I threw my hat, and so was able to reach him before he opened his eyes. I had well calculated his movements, and had made no mistake. As I reached him his head was bent downward and forward to let the hat pass over him. His position could not have been better for my purpose. I opened his eyes. I had well calculated his movements, and had made no mistake. As I reached him his head was bent downward and forward to let the hat pass over him. His position could not have been better for my purpose. I "swung on him," as we used to say at the gymnasium, catching him under his protruded jaw, not far from the region of the carotid artery. The blow was well placed, and desperation lent me phenomenal strength. It raised him bodily off his feet, and hurled him backward out of the cave, where he lay motionless. He was now in my power. I seized his knife and bent over him. Words cannot express the hatred, the loathing I felt for him then and always. Between me and the light of my happiness he had ever stood, an impenetrable black mass. Twice had he sought my life, yet now, when he was in my power, I could not plunge his weapon into his heart. Would it not be just, I thought, to drag him into the cave, and hurl him down the abyss he had intended for me? Yes; he certainly merited it; yet I could not do that either. I wished the snake a thousand times dead, yet I could not stamp it into the earth.

He was beginning to slightly move now, and something must be done. It was useless to run, for the way was long, and he could easily overtake me. You may wonder why I did not take to the thicket, but if you had ever had any experience with Indian jungles you would know that, without the use of fire and axe, they are practically impenetrable. Professor Haeckel, botanising near that same spot, spent an hour in an endeavour to force his way into one of these jungles, but only succeeded in advancing a few steps into the thicket, when, stung by mosquitoes, bitten by ants, his clothing torn from his bleeding arms and legs, wounded by the thousands of sharp thorns of the calamus, hibiscus, euphorbias, lantanas, and myriad other jungle plants, he was obliged, utterly discomfited, to desist. If this were the result of his efforts, made in broad daylight, and with deliberation, what might I expect rushing into the thicket at night, as a refuge from a pursuer far my superior in physical strength and fleetness of foot, and who, moreover, had known the jungle from his boyhood? Once overtaken by my enemy, the long knife in my hands would be of no avail against a stick in his. I saw all this clearly, and realised that he must be prevented from following me.

There was no time to be lost, for he was rapidly recovering possession of his powers. I seized a large rock and
hurled it with all the force I could command upon his left foot and ankle. Notwithstanding his immense strength his hands and feet were scarcely larger than a woman's, and the small bones cracked like pipe-stems. Though I had not the will to kill him, my own safety demanded that I should maim him as the only other means of making good my escape. As the rock crushed his foot the pain seemed to bring him immediately into full possession of his faculties, and he roared like an enraged bull. I turned and looked back as I beat a hasty retreat down the hill. He had seized one of the air-roots of the banyan tree, and raised himself upon his right leg. The expression of his face as the moonlight fell upon it was something never to be forgotten. It riveted me to the spot with the fascination of horror. He shook his fist at me fiercely, as he shrieked from the back of his throat:

"You infidel cur! You may as well try to brush away the Himalayas with a silk handkerchief as to escape the wrath of Rama Ragobah. Go! Bury yourself in seclusion at the farthermost corner of the earth, and on one night Ragobah and the darkness shall be with you!"

These were the last words this fiend incarnate ever spoke to me, but I know they are prophetic, and that he will keep his oath.

The next day I learned that Lona was dead. She had died with my name upon her lips, and her secret—the explanation of her strange conduct on that night—died with her. I shall never know it. Bitterly did I repent my inability to reach her. The thought that she had waited in vain for me, that with her last breath she had called upon me, and I had answered not, was unendurable torture, and I fled India and came to America in the futile endeavour to forget it all. Out of my black past there shone but one bright star--her love! All these long years have I oriented my soul by that sweet, unforgettable radiance, prizing it above a galaxy of lesser joys.

There is little more to be said. I shall meet death as I have stated--I am sure of it—and no man will see the blow given. Remember, as I loved that Indian maiden with a passion which death has not chilled, so I loathe my rival with a hatred infinite and all-consuming; for, somehow, I know that demon crushed out the life of my fragile lotus-flower. He will work his will upon me, but if his cunning enable him to escape the gallows, my soul, if there be a conscious hereafter, will never rest in peace. Remember this, my dear child, and your promise, that God may bless you even as I bless you.

It was some time after Gwen had finished this interesting document before any of us spoke. The narrative, and the peculiar circumstances under which it had been read, deeply impressed us. At length Maitland said in a subdued voice, as if he feared to break some spell:

"The Indian girl's letter; let us find that, and also the will."

Gwen went to the drawer in which her father kept his private papers, and soon produced them both. Maitland glanced hastily at the letter, and said: "You have already heard its contents"; then turning to Gwen, he said: "I will keep it with your permission. Now for the will." It was handed to him, and his face fell as he read it. In a moment he turned to us, and said: "The interest on the insurance money is to go to Miss Darrow, the entire principal to be held in trust and paid to the person bringing the assassin to justice, unless said person shall wed Miss Darrow, in which case half of the fund shall go to the husband, and the other half to the wife in her own right. The balance of the estate, which, by the way, is considerable, despite the reports given to Osborne, is to go to Miss Darrow. This is all the will contains having any bearing upon the case in hand. Let us proceed with the rest of the papers." We made a long and diligent search, but nothing of importance came to light. When we had finished Maitland said:

"Our friend Osborne would say the document we have just perused made strongly for his theory, and was simply another fabrication to blind the eyes of the insurance company. That's what comes of wedding one's self to a theory founded on imperfect data."

"And what do you think?" Gwen inquired.

"That Rama Ragobah has small hands and feet," he replied. "That his left foot has met with an injury, and is probably deformed; that most likely he is lame in the left leg; that he had the motive for which we have been looking; that he may or may not have the habit of biting his nails; that he is crafty, and that if he were to do murder it is almost certain his methods would be novel and surprising, as well as extremely difficult to fathom—in short, that suspicion points unmistakably to Rama Ragobah. That is easily said, but to bring the deed home to him is quite another thing. I shall analyse the poison of the wound and microscopically examine the nature of the abrasion this afternoon. To-night I take the midnight train for New York. To-morrow I shall sail for Bombay, via London and the Continent. I will keep you informed of my address. While I am away I would ask that you close the house here, leaving everything just as it is now dismiss the servants, and take up your abode with the Doctor and his sister." He rose to go as he said this, and then continued, as he turned to me: "I shall depend upon you to look after Miss Darrow's immediate interests in my absence." I knew this meant that I was to guard her health, not permitting her to be much by herself, and I readily acquiesced.

The look of amazement which had at first overspread Gwen's face at the mention of this precipitate departure gave place to one of modest concern, as she said softly to Maitland: "Is it necessary that you should encounter the
dangers of such a journey, to say nothing, of the time and inconvenience it will cost?” He looked down at her
quickly, and then said reassuringly: “Do you know one is, by actual statistics, safer in an English railway carriage
than when walking the crowded streets of London? I am daily subjecting myself to laboratory dangers which, I
believe, are graver than any I am likely to meet between here and Bombay, or, for that matter, even at Bombay in the
presence of our recent acquaintance Ragobah.”

“I deeply appreciate,” she replied, ”the generous sacrifice you would make in my interests--but Bombay is such a
long way--and--”

“If suspicion directed me to the North Pole,” he interrupted, “I should start with equal alacrity,” and he held out
his hand to her to bid her farewell. She took it in a way that bespoke a world of gratitude, if nothing more. He
retained the small hand, while he said: “Have you forgotten, my friend, your promise to your father? Do you not see
in what terrible relations it may place you? How important, then, that no effort should be spared to prevent you from
becoming indebted to one unmanly enough to take advantage of your position. I shall use every means within my
power to myself discover your father's murderer, and you may comfort yourself with the assurance that, if
successful, I shall make no demand of any kind whatsoever upon your gratitude. I think you understand me.”

As he said this Gwen looked him full in the face. A little nervous tremor seized the corners of her mouth, and the
tears sprang to her eyes. “Good-bye” was all she could say before she was compelled to turn aside to conceal her
emotion.

Maitland, observing her agitation, said to her tenderly: “Your gratitude for the little that I have already done is
reward, more than ample, for all I shall ever be able to do. Good-bye,” and he left the room.

Oh, man with your microscope! How is it that you find the smallest speck of dust, yet miss the mountain? Does
the time seem too short? It would not if you realised that events, not clocks, were the real measure thereof.

THE EPISODE OF RAMA RAGOBAH

CHAPTER I

Life is but a poor accountant when it leaves the Future to balance its entries long years after the parties to the
transactions are but a handful of insolvent dust. When, in such wise, the chieftest item of one side of the sheet fails to
explain itself to the other, the tragic is attained.

On the day following Maitland's departure for New York, Mr. Darrow was buried. The Osborne theory seemed
to be universally accepted, and many women who had never seen Mr. Darrow during his life attended his funeral,
curious to see what sort of a person this suicide might be. Gwen bore the ordeal with a fortitude which spoke
volumes for her strength of character, and I took good care, when it was all over, that she should not be left alone. In
compliance with Maitland's request, whose will, since her promise to him, was law to her, she prepared to close the
house and take up her abode with us.

It was on the night of the funeral, just after the lamps were lighted, that an event occurred which made a deep
impression upon Gwen, though neither she nor I fully appreciated its significance till weeks afterward.

Gwen, who was to close the house on the morrow, was going from room to room collecting such little things as
she wished to take with her. The servants had been dismissed and she was entirely alone in the house. She had
gathered the things she had collected in a little heap upon the sitting-room table, preparatory to doing them up. She
could think of but one thing more which she must take—a cabinet photograph of her father. This was upon the top of
the piano in the room where he had met his death. She knew its exact location and could have put her hand right
upon it had it been perfectly dark, which it was not. She arose, therefore, and, without taking a light with her, went
into the parlour. A faint afterglow illumined the windows and suffused the room with an uncertain, dim, ghostly
light which lent to all its objects that vague flatness from which the imagination carves what shapes it lists. As Gwen
reached for the picture, a sudden conviction possessed her that her father stood just behind her in the exact spot
where he had met his death, --that if she turned she would see him again with his hand clutching his throat and his
eyes starting from their sockets with that never-to-be-forgotten look of frenzied helplessness.

It would be difficult to find a woman upon whom superstition has so slight a hold as it has upon Gwen Darrow,
yet, for all that, it required an effort for her to turn and gaze toward the centre of the room. A dim, ill-defined stain of
light fell momentarily upon the chair in which the dead man had sat, and then flickered unsteadily across the room
and, as it seemed to her, out through its western side, the while a faint, rustling sound caught her ear. She was
plainly conscious, too, of a something swishing by her, as if a strong draught had just fallen upon her. She was not
naturally superstitious, as I have said before, yet there was something in the gloom, the deserted house, and this fatal
room with its untold story of death which, added to her weird perceptions and that indescribable conviction of an
unseen presence, caused even Gwen to press her hand convulsively upon her throbbing heart. For the first time in
her life the awful possibilities of darkness were fully borne in upon her and she knew just how her father had felt.

In a moment, however, she had recovered from her first shock and had begun to reason. Might not the sound she
had heard, and the movement she had felt, both be explained by an open window? She knew she had closed and
locked all the windows of the room when she had finished airing it after the funeral, and she was not aware that anyone had been there since, yet she said to herself that perhaps one of the servants had come in and opened a window without her knowledge. She turned and looked. The lower sash of the eastern window—the one through which she felt sure death had approached her father—was raised to its utmost.

"How fortunate," she murmured, "that I discovered this before leaving."

She was all but fully reassured now, as she stepped to the window to close it. Remembering how the sash stuck in the casing she raised both hands to forcibly lower it. As she did so a strong arm caught the sash from the outer side, and a stalwart masculine form arose directly in front of her. His great height brought his head almost to a level with her own, despite the fact that he was standing upon the ground outside. He was so near that she could feel his breath upon her face. His eyes, like two great coals of fire, blazed into hers with a sinister and threatening light. His countenance seemed to utterly surpass any personal malignancy and to exhibit itself as a type of all the hatreds that ever poisoned human hearts.

Only a moment before Gwen had felt a creepy, sickening sensation stealing over her as the result of an ill-defined and apparently causeless dread. Now an actual, imminent, and fearful peril confronted her. Under such circumstances most women would have fainted, and, indeed, if Gwen had herself been asked how she would have acted under such a supreme test, she would have prophesied the same maidenly course as her own, yet, in the real exigency—how little do we know of ourselves, save what actual experience has taught us!—this is precisely what she did not do. When the horrible apparition first rose in her very face, as it were, a momentary weakness caught her and she clung to the sash for support. Then the wonderful fire of the malignant eyes, green, serpentine, opalescent, with the wave-like flux of a glowworm's light seen under a glass, riveted her attention. She had ceased to tremble. Our fear of death varies with our desire for life. Dulled by a great grief, she did not so very much care what became of her. The future's burden was heavy, and if it were necessary she now put it down, there would still be a sense of relief. As this thought passed like a shadow over her consciousness she felt herself irresistibly attracted to the awful face before her. Her assailant's gaze seemed to have wound itself about her own till she could not disentangle it. She was dimly conscious that she was falling under a spell and summoned all her remaining strength to break it. Quick as the uncoiling of a released spring, and without the slightest movement of warning, she threw her entire weight upon the sash in a last endeavour to close the window, but the man's upraised arm held both her weight and it, as if its muscles had been rods of steel. Gwen saw a long knife in his free hand, saw the light shimmer along its blade, saw him raise it aloft to plunge it into her bosom, yet made no movement to withdraw beyond his reach and uttered no cry for help. It seemed to her that all this was happening to another and that she herself was only a fascinated spectator. She was wondering whether or not the victim would try to defend herself when the knife began its descent. It seemed ages in its downward passage,—so long, indeed, that it gave her time to think of most of the main experiences of her life. At last it paused irresolutely within an inch of her bosom. She wondered that the victim made no attempt to escape, uttered no cry for help. Suddenly she felt something whirling and buzzing in her brain, while a wild fluttering filled both her ears; then the swirling, fluttering torment rose in a swift and awful crescendo which seemed to involve all creation in its vortex; then a pang like a lightning-thrust and a crash like the thunder that goes with it, and she saw a tall man striding rapidly from the window. She was still sure it was no personal concern of hers, yet an idle curiosity noted his great height, his dark, mulatto-like skin, and a slight halt in his walk as he passed through a narrow beam of light and off into the engulfing darkness.

It was many minutes before Gwen regained any considerable command of her faculties, and she afterwards told me that she was even then more than half inclined to consider the whole thing as a weird dream of an overwrought mind. At length, however, she realised that she had had an actual experience, and that it was of sufficient importance to make it known at once. She accordingly hastened to lay the whole matter before me, and I, in my turn, notified the police, who, at once instituted as thorough a search as Gwen's description made possible. She had told me that her assailant was dark-skinned, yet with straight hair, and a cast of features that gave no hint of any Ethiopian taint.

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I had had some hopes of this clue, but they were doomed to disappointment. It seemed evident to us that if anything were ever done in bringing Mr. Darrow's assassin to justice, Maitland would have to do it, unless, indeed, M. Godin solved the problem. Osborne, Allen, and their associates were simply out of the question.

We debated for some time as to whether or not we should write Maitland about Gwen's strange experience, and finally decided that the knowledge would be a constant source of worriment without being of the least assistance to him while he was so far away. We, therefore, decided to keep our own counsel, for the present at least.

Maitland had written us a few lines from New York telling us the result of his analysis, and ended by saying:

There is no doubt that Mr. Darrow died of poison injected into the blood through the slight wound in the throat. This wound was not deep, and seemed to have been torn rather than cut in the flesh. What sort of weapon or
projectile produced that wound is a question of the utmost importance, shrouded in the deepest of mysteries. Once this point is settled, however, its very uniqueness will be greatly in our favour. I have an idea our friend Ragobah might be able to throw some light upon this subject, therefore I am starting on my way to visit him this afternoon, and shall write you en route whenever occasion offers. My kindest regards to Miss Darrow. Yours sincerely, GEORGE MAITLAND.

P. S. I shall have leisure now on shipboard to set tie that question of atomic pitches, which is still a thorn in my intellectual flesh.

I handed this letter to Gwen, and, after she had read it through very carefully, she questioned me about this new theory of Maitland's. I went through the form of telling her, after the usual practice of amiable men discoursing to women, feeling sure she would be no wiser when I had finished, and was dumfounded when she replied: "It looks very reasonable. Professor Bjerknes, if I remember the name, has produced all the phenomena of magnetic attraction, repulsion, and polarisation, by air vibrations corresponding, I suppose, to certain fixed musical notes. Why might not something similar to this be true of atomic, as well as of larger, bodies?"

If the roof of my house had fallen in, I should not have been more surprised than at this quiet remark. How many times had I said: "You can always count on a young woman, however much she flutter over the surface of things, being ignorant of all the great underlying verities of existence"? I promptly decided, on all future occasions, to add to that--"When not brought up by her father." I was convinced that of the attainments of a girl educated by her father absolutely nothing could be definitely predicted.

We had a short note from Maitland written at Trieste. He excused its brevity by saying he had been obliged to travel night and day in order to reach this port in time to catch the Austrian Lloyd steamer Helois, bound for Aden, Bombay, Ceylon, Singapore, and Hong Kong. From Aden I received the following:

MY DEAR DOCTOR:

We have just been through the Red Sea, and I know now the real origin of the Calvinistic hell. Imagine it! A cloudless sky; the sun beating down with an intolerable fierceness; not a breath stirring, and the thermometer registering 120 degrees F. in the shade! It seemed as though reason must desert us. The constant motion of the punkas in the saloons, and an unlimited supply of ice-water was all that saved us. Sleep was hardly to be thought of, for at no time during the night did the mercury drop below 100 deg. F. Apart from the oppressive heat referred to, the entire voyage has been exceedingly pleasant. I have not solved the atomic-pitch problems, as attendance at meals has left me little time for anything else. They seem to eat all the time on these boats. At 8 A. M. coffee and bread; at ten a hearty breakfast of meat, eggs, curry and rice, vegetables and fruit; at 1 P. M. a luncheon, called "tiffin," of cold meats, bread and butter, potatoes, and tea; at five o'clock a regular dinner of soups, meats with relishes, farinaceous dishes, dessert, fruits, and coffee, and lastly, at 8 P. M., the evening meal of tea, bread and butter, and other light dishes. Five meals a day, and there are some English people who fill up the gaps between them by constantly munching nuts and sweets! Verily, if specialisation of function means anything, some of these people will soon become huge gastric balloons with a little wart on top representing the atrophied brain structure. They run their engines of digestion wholly on the high-pressure system.

After eight days' voyage on the Indian Ocean we shall be in Bombay. I must close now, for there is really nothing to say, and, besides, I am wanted on deck. My engagement is with a Rev. Mr. Barrows, who is bound as missionary to Hong Kong. This worthy Methodist gentleman is very much exercised because I insist that potentiality is necessity and rebut his arguments on free-will. He got quite excited yesterday, and said to me severely: "Do you mean to say, young man, that I can't do as I please?" I must say I don't think his warmth was much allayed by my replying: "I certainly mean to say you can't please as you please. You may eat sugar because you prefer it to vinegar, but you can't prefer it just because you will to do so." He has probably got some new arguments now and is anxious to try their effect, so, with kind regards to Miss Darrow --I trust she is well--I remain, Cordially your friend, GEORGE MAITLAND.

P. S. (Like a woman I always write a postscript.) You shall hear again from me as soon as I reach Bombay.

This last promise was religiously kept, though his letter was short and merely announced his safe arrival early that morning. He closed by saying: "I have not yet breakfasted, preferring to do so on land, and I feel that I can do justice to whatever is set before me. I intend, as soon as I have taken the edge off my appetite, to set out immediately for Malabar Hill, as I believe that to be our proper starting-point. I inclose a little sketch I made of Bombay as we came up its harbour, thinking it may interest Miss Darrow. Kindly give it to her with my regards. You will note that there are two tongues of land in the picture. On the eastern side is the suburb of Calaba, and on the western our Malabar Hill. Good-bye until I have something of interest to report."

I gave the sketch to Gwen, and she seemed greatly pleased with it.

"Are you aware," she said to me, "that Mr. Maitland draws with rare precision?"

"I am fully persuaded," I rejoined, "that he does not do anything which he cannot do well."
"I believe there is nothing," she continued, "which so conduces to the habit of thoroughness as the experiments of chemistry. When one learns that even a grain of dust will, in some cases, vitiate everything, he acquires a new conception of the term 'clean' and is likely to be thorough in washing his apparatus. From this the habit grows upon him and widens its application until it embraces all his actions."

This remark did not surprise me as it would have a few weeks before, for I had come to learn that Gwen was liable at any time to suddenly evince a very unfeminine depth of observation and firmness of philosophical grasp.

Maitland had been gone just six weeks to a day when we received from him the first news having any particular bearing upon the matter which had taken him abroad. I give this communication in his own words, omitting only a few personal observations which I do not feel justified in disclosing, and which, moreover, are not necessary to the completeness of this narrative:

MY DEAR DOCTOR:

I have at last something to report bearing upon the case that brought me here, and perhaps I can best relate it by simply telling you what my movements have been since my arrival. My first errand was to Malabar Hill. I thought it wise to possess myself, so far as possible, of facts proving the authenticity of Mr. Darrow's narrative. I found without difficulty the banyan tree which had been the trysting-place, and close by it the little cave with its mysterious well,—everything in fact precisely as related, even to the "Farsees" garden or cemetery, with its "Tower of Silence," or "Dakhma," as it is called by the natives. The cave and the banyan are among the many attractions of what is now Herr Blaschek's villa. This gentleman, with true German hospitality, asked me to spend a few days with him, and I was only too glad to accept his invitation, as I believed his knowledge of Bombay might be of great service to me. In this I did not mistake. I told him I wished to ascertain the whereabouts of a Rama Ragobah, who had been something between a rishi and a fakir, and he directed me at once to a fakir named Parinama who, he said, would be able to locate my man, if he were still alive and in Bombay.

You can imagine how agreeably surprised I was to find that Parinama knew Ragobah well. I had anticipated some considerable difficulty in learning the latter's whereabouts, and here was a man who could—for a sufficient consideration—tell me much, if not all, about him. I secured an interpreter, paid Parinama my money, and proceeded to catechise him. I give you my questions and his answers just as I jotted them down in my notebook:

Q. What is Ragobah's full name?
A. Rama Ragobah.
Q. How long have you known him?
A. Thirty-five year.
Q. Has he always lived in Bombay?
A. No, Sahib,
Q. Where else?
A. For a good many year he have travel all the time.
Q. Is he in Bombay now?
A. No, Sahib.
Q. Where is he?
A. Over the sea, Sahib.
Q. Do you know where?
A. He sail for America; New York.
Q. When?
A. About eleven week ago.
Q. Do you know for what he undertook this journey?
A. Some personal affair of long time ago which he wish to settle—the same which make him so many year travel through India.
Q. Was he in search of someone?
A. Yes, Sahib.
Q. Some Indian woman?
A. No, Sahib.
Q. Some other woman, then?
A. No, Sahib.
Q. A man, then; an Englishman,
A. Yes, Sahib.
Q. What kind of a man is this Ragobah?
A. He very big man.
Q. What is his disposition? Is he generally liked?
A. No. His temper bad. He cruel, revengeful, overbearing, and selfish. He most hated by those who best know him.

Q. He is a friend of yours, you say?
A. I say no such thing! Do you think I sell secret of friend? I have great reason for hating him, or I not now be earning your money.

Q. Ah! I see. What did you say he wanted of this Englishman?
A. I no say, Sahib.

Q. You said some personal affair of long standing, I believe.
A. Yes, Sahib.

Q. Do you know its nature?
A. No; I not know it, but I have not much doubt about it, Sahib.

Q. What do you think, then?
A. I think there but one passion strong enough in Ragobah to make plain his hunt like dog for last twenty year. Such persevere mean strong motive, and as I have good reason to remember how quick he forget a kindness, I know he not moved by friendship, Sahib.

Q. His motive then is--
A. Revenge.

Q. Have you any idea why he cherishes this malice?
A. I think it because some old love affair; some rival in his wife's love.

Q. Indeed! Then he has been married?
A. Yes, Sahib.

Q. Where shall I find his wife?
A. All that is left of her is in the bottomless well in the cave on Malabar Hill.

Q. Did Ragobah kill her?
A. No; that is, not with his own hand.

Q. How long ago did she die?
A. More than twenty year, Sahib.

Q. Are any of her relatives living?
A. Her husband, Sahib, and a cousin, that is all.

Q. Is there anyone else who could tell me of this woman?
A. Moro Scindia could, but he not do it.

Q. Why? Is he Ragobah's friend?
A. Ragobah has no friends, Sahib.

Q. Why, then?
A. He under oath to tell what was told him only to one person. He has keep his secret out of every year for more as twenty year, and can no be expect to tell to you, Sahib.

Q. Can you bring this man to me? You will both be well paid for your time, of course.
A. I bring him, Sahib, but I not make him speak.

Q. Let me see you both, then, to-night at eight, at Herr Blaschek's villa on Malabar Hill. Ask for Mr. Maitland.
A. We be there. Anything more, Sahib?

Q. Yes. When is Ragobah expected to return?
A. He write that he think he return on the Dalmatia. She due next day after to-morrow.

Q. Has Ragobah any physical peculiarities?
A. His hands and feet they very small for man so big and strong.

Q. Anything else?
A. His left leg been hurt. The foot very bad shape, and the whole leg some bad, and,--what you call--halt when he walk.

Q. Has he the habit of biting his finger nails?
A. I not know he has, Sahib.

This completed the list of questions which I had desired to ask him, so, after once more receiving his assurance that he would meet me in the evening with his friend Scindia, I left him. As you know, I am not wont to draw conclusions until all the evidence is in, but I must confess that, looking at the whole matter from start to finish, there seems to have fallen upon Ragobah a net of circumstantial evidence so strong, and with a mesh of detail so minute, that it does not seem possible a mosquito could escape from it. Look at it a moment from this standpoint. Ragobah alone, so far as we know, has a motive for the murder. His victim has related the feud existing between them and foretold, with an air of the utmost assurance, just such an outcome thereof. Add to this that this man leaves India on
a mission which those about him do not hesitate to pronounce one of vengeance, at just such a time as would enable him to reach Boston just a little before the commission of the murder; that this mission is the culmination of twenty years of unremitting search for revenge; that this malignity is supposed to be directed against some rival in his wife's affections, and the chain of circumstantial evidence possesses, so far as it extends, no weak link. Then, too, Ragobah has very small hands, a deformed left foot, and a limping gait,—everything almost which we had already predicted of the assassin. So sure am I that Ragobah is the guilty man that I shall ask for his arrest upon his arrival day after to-morrow should he return then, a thing which, I regret to say, does not impress me as altogether likely. Should he not come I shall cable you to institute a search for your end of the line. The next thing in order which I have to relate is my interview with Moro Scindia. I had engaged an interpreter, but was able to dismiss him as my guest spoke English with more ease and fluency than he, being an intelligent and well-to-do member of the Vaisya caste. I thought it wise to see the venerable Scindia alone, and accordingly sent Parinama out of the room with the interpreter. As before; I give you what passed between us as I jotted it down in my notebook.

Q. You are a friend of Rama Ragobah, are you not?
A. No, Sahib; he has no friends.
Q. You speak as if you disliked him.
A. It is not Mono Scindia's habit to play the hypocrite. I have good reason to hate him.
Q. You would not, then, had he committed a crime, assist him to escape justice?
A. I would track him like a bloodhound to the ends of the earth.
Q. You knew Ragobah's wife?
A. She was my cousin, Sahib.
Q. Were your relations friendly?
A. They were more than friendly. I loved her dearly, and would have tried to win her had I not been so much her senior.
Q. Did she live happily with Ragobah?
A. No, Sahib.
Q. Why?
A. I cannot answer. I have sworn to reveal the last experiences of my cousin to but one person.
Q. And that person is?
A. I must decline to answer that also, Sahib.
Q. If I succeed in naming him will you acknowledge it?
A. You will not succeed, Sahib.
Q. But if I should?
A. I will acknowledge it.
Q. The person is John Hinton Darrow.
The old man started as if he had been stabbed, and looked at me in amazement. He seemed at first to think I had read his thoughts and riveted his dark eyes upon me as if, by way of return, he would read my very soul. I think he did so, for his scrutiny seemed to satisfy him. He replied, somewhat reassured: "I can speak only to John Hinton Darrow."

"John Darrow is dead," I said.
"Dead!" he exclaimed, springing to his feet; "Darrow Sahib dead!" and he fell back into his chair, covering his face with his hands. "Ah, my poor Lona!" he muttered feebly; "I have failed to keep my promise. Do not reproach me, for I have done my best. For twenty years have I searched in vain for this man that I might fulfil your last request, and the very first information I receive is the news of his death. I have been no less vigilant than Ragobah, yet I have failed, even as he has failed."
I took this opportunity to again question him.
Q. Are you sure Ragobah failed?
A. Yes; had he found Darrow Sahib he would have killed him. His mission was one of revenge; mine one of love and justice; both have failed utterly since their object is dead. My pledge is broken!
Q. In its letter, yes; but the chance is still left you to keep the spirit of your covenant.
A. I do not understand you, Sahib.
Q. I will explain. Lona Ragobah confided to you certain facts in explanation of her conduct toward John Darrow. She loved him passionately, and it was her desire to stand acquitted in his sight. Were she alive now, any wish he had expressed during his life would be fulfilled by her as a sacred and pleasurable duty. This, then, as one who lovingly performs her will, should be your attitude also. John Darrow was the only man she ever loved, and, were she living, every drop of her loyal blood would rise against anyone who had done him injury. Do I not speak the truth?
A. Yes; she was loyal unto death and so shall I be. My hand has ever been against all who have done her harm; Ragobah knows that full well.

Q. Were she alive, you certainly would aid her in bringing to justice one who has done her the most cruel of wrongs and, at the same time, fulfilling the dying request of the man who to her was more than life.

A. I should do her bidding, Sahib.

Q. How much more need, then, now that the poor woman is dead, that you should act for her as she would, were she here.

A. You have not told me all; speak your mind freely, Sahib. You may depend upon my doing whatever I believe Lona would do were she here.

Q. I ask nothing more, and am now prepared to fully confide in you. As you doubtless know, Rama Ragobah left Bombay for New York about eleven weeks ago. He went, I have been told, on an errand of revenge. Six weeks ago John Darrow was murdered. He left behind him a written statement describing his wooing of Lona Scindia and his experiences with Rama Ragobah. He asserted, furthermore, his belief that he would die by Ragobah's hand,—the hand which twice before had attempted his life. Even as he loved your cousin, so he hated her husband, and, confident that he would ultimately be killed by him, he was haunted by the fear that he would escape the just penalty for his crime. He bound his heir by the most solemn of promises to use, in the event of his murder, every possible means to bring the assassin to justice. There can, of course, be little doubt that the assassin and Rama Ragobah are one and the same person. The last request John Darrow ever made— it was after he had been attacked by the assassin—had for its object the punishment of his murderer. Were your cousin living, do you think she would be deaf to that entreaty?

A. No. She would make its fulfilment the one object of her life, and, acting in her stead, I shall do all in my power to see justice done. If I can render you any aid in that direction you may command me, Sahib.

Q. You can assist me by telling me all you know of your cousin's married life, and, more especially, the message she confided to you.

A. In doing this I shall break the letter of my oath, but, were I not to do it, I should break the spirit thereof, therefore listen:

You have, I suppose, already learned from the statement of Darrow Sahib what occurred at his last meeting with my cousin on Malabar Hill. Her act, in throwing a venomous serpent in his face, was one which doubtless led him to believe she wished to kill him, although it must have puzzled him to assign any reason for such a desire. Not long after this incident my cousin married Ragobah, a man for whom she had always cherished an ill-concealed hatred. I saw but little of her at this time, yet, for all that, I could not but observe that she was greatly changed. But one solution suggested itself to me, and that was that she had discovered her lover false to her and had, out of spite as it is called, hastily married Ragobah. I confess that when this conclusion forced itself home upon me, I felt much dissatisfied with Lona, for I thought such a course unworthy of her. As I saw more of her I noted still greater changes in her character. As I had known her from childhood, she had been most uniform in her temper and her conduct; now all this was changed. To-day, perhaps, she would be like her old self,— only weaker and more fragile,—to-morrow a new being entirely, stronger and more restless, with a demoniac light in her eyes, and a sort of feverish malignancy dominating her whole personality. When I noticed this I studied to avoid her. If the Lona I had known were merely an ideal of which no actual prototype existed, I wished to be allowed to cherish that ideal rather than to have it cruelly shattered to make room for the real Lona. I had not seen her for many weeks when one day, to my surprise, I received a note from her. It was short, and so impressed me that I can remember every word of it.

"My DEAR COUSIN:

"I send this note to you by Kandia that you may get it before it is too late for you to do what I wish. I am a caged bird in my husband's house. My every movement is watched, and they would not let you come to me were my husband at home, so, I beseech you, come at once lest he should return before I have had time to intrust to you my last request. I am dying, Moro, and it is within your power to say whether my spirit shall rest in peace, or be torn forever and ever by the fangs of a horrible regret. My secret is as lead upon my soul and to you only can I tell it. Come—come at once!

"LONA."

You can imagine the effect of this revelation upon me better than I can describe it. I did not even know she was seriously ill, and with her urgent request for an interview came the sad tidings that she was dying, and the confirmation of my fear—that she had adopted the religion of her English lover. I lost no time in going to her. I found her in a state of feverish expectation, fearful lest I should either not be able to come at all, or her husband would return before my arrival. She was worn to a shadow of her former self, and I realised with a pang that she was indeed dying.

"I knew I could depend upon you, Moro," she said as I entered, "even though you think I have lost all claim upon
those periods when my feeble, overridden consciousness flickered back to dimly light for a time the gloom of this
was under Ragobah's control,--the horrible night on Malabar Hill being one of them,--and the waking moments,
his limbs. All was now clear. The long sleep, crowded with unremembered dreams, represented the period when I
a snuffer upon a candle. I was Ragobah's wife, his slave, his tool, as powerless to resist his will as if I were one of
molten lead. How long this agony continued I do not know, for the thread of consciousness broke under its terrible
dead than alive. As he disclosed his fiendish secret something about my heart kept tightening with every word till, at
hands, to cut or tangle it as I list--yield you must!' With this he strode frantically from the room, leaving me more
with his infidel blood. You will do well to yield peaceably. The thread of your very existence passes through my
powerless you are? I have but to will you to kill him and your first cursed failure on Malabar Hill will be washed out
not yet weaned from that English cur whose life, let me tell you, is in my hands. Fool, can you not see how
word, and when I had finished said with slow and studied malice:
permitted him to learn my detestation of him. He heard me through in silence, his face growing darker with every
suit the more my loathing grew until, maddened by references made to Darrow Sahib, I lost all self-control and
me and sought to conquer my all too apparent aversion for him by terms of endearment, but the more he pressed his
sense of falling, falling, falling, and I knew no more, at least for some little time.

The next thing I remember is seeing my lover stretch out his arms to me, while I was inspired with an
unaccountable hatred of him so bitter that it left me mute and transfixed. Then he sought to embrace me, and I threw
a young cobra, which, coiled in a wicker basket, had been placed in my hand, full in his face. I think, also, that I
struck him, and then ran down the hill and straight to the house of Ragobah. What happened during the next few
months I know not. I seemed to have been in a continual sleep full of dreams. When I awoke I seemed conscious
of falling, falling, falling, and I knew no more, at least for some little time.

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months I know not. I seemed to have been in a continual sleep full of dreams. When I awoke I seemed conscious
that I had dreamt, but could not tell of what. You can imagine my horror, my despair, when I was first addressed as
Ragobah's wife. I denied the relation, but everyone told me the same story--I was Ragobah Sahibah. This shock,
coming as it did with the memory of my conduct that terrible night on Malabar Hill, nearly killed me, and was
followed by another long period of the dream existence. I began to think I was a sufferer from some terrible brain
disease, and to doubt which was my real existence, the dreams or the waking moments.

One day when, for the first time in several weeks, I was in possession of my normal faculties, Ragobah came
into my room and sat down beside me. I arose instantly and fled to the farther corner of the apartment. He pursued
me and sought to conquer my all too apparent aversion for him by terms of endearment, but the more he pressed his
suit the more my loathing grew until, maddened by references made to Darrow Sahib, I lost all self-control and
permitted him to learn my detestation of him. He heard me through in silence, his face growing darker with every
word, and when I had finished said with slow and studied malice:

"You forget that you are my wife and that I can follow my entreaty by command. You spurn my love. You are
not yet weaned from that English cur whose life, let me tell you, is in my hands. Fool, can you not see how powerless
you are? I have but to will you to kill him and your first cursed failure on Malabar Hill will be washed out
with his infidel blood. You will do well to yield peaceably. The thread of your very existence passes through my
hands, to cut or tangle it as I list--yield you must!' With this he strode frantically from the room, leaving me more
dead than alive. As he disclosed his fiendish secret something about my heart kept tightening with every word till, at
length, it seemed as if it must burst, so terrible was the pressure. I could not breathe. My lungs seemed filled with
molten lead. How long this agony continued I do not know, for the thread of consciousness broke under its terrible
tension and I fell senseless upon the floor.

When I recovered from my swoon the inexpressible horror of my situation again descended upon my spirit like
a snuffer upon a candle. I was Ragobah's wife, his slave, his tool, as powerless to resist his will as if I were one of
his limbs. All was now clear. The long sleep, crowded with unremembered dreams, represented the period when I
was under Ragobah's control,--the horrible night on Malabar Hill being one of them,--and the waking moments,
those periods when my feeble, overridden consciousness flickered back to dimly light for a time the gloom of this
intellectual night. There was no hope for me. Already had I been so dominated by his will and inspired by his malice as to attempt the life of my lover. What might I not be made to do in future? As I thought of this, Ragobah's last threat rang with a sinister warning upon my ears till it seemed as if it would drive me into madness. The suspicion grew to be a certainty from which there was but one means of escape--death--and I determined at once to embrace it before I could be made the instrument for the infliction of further injury upon my lover. I seized a little dagger which in my normal moments I always kept concealed about me, and was about to plunge it into my bosom when I was smitten by the thought,--and it cut me as the steel could not have done,--that Darrow Sahib would never know the truth, and that his love for me would be forever buried beneath a mass of black misgivings. The certainty of this conviction paralysed my will, and my arm dropped nervelessly at my side. It would be a simple matter, I thought, to find some way of confiding my story to you and pledging you to explain everything to Darrow Sahib, after which I could die in peace, if not without regret. But it was not so easy to communicate with you as I had expected. Days passed before I had a chance to make the attempt, and the only result of it was to show me how closely I was watched. If Ragobah were absent, there was always someone in his employ who made it his business to acquaint himself with my every movement. I dare not take the time to tell you how I succeeded in obtaining this interview further than to say that I was able to win to my cause the man who bore my message to you--a servant in whom Ragobah has the utmost confidence. When my husband departed this morning Kandia was left in charge of me, and so your visit was made possible.

"You are now acquainted with the trust I would impose upon you: swear to me, Moro, that you will make this explanation for me to John Darrow and to no other human being! Swear it by the love you once said you bore me!"

She sank back exhausted and awaited my response. For a moment I dared not trust myself to speak, yet something must be said. As I noted her impatience I replied: "Lona, you have lifted a great weight from my heart and placed a lesser one upon it. Forgive me that I have ever doubted you. Even as you have been true to yourself, I swear by the love I still bear you to deliver your message to Darrow Sahib and to no other human being. I shall commit your words at once to writing that nothing may be lost through the failure of my memory."

She reached her hand out feebly to me, and never shall I forget the look of gratitude which accompanied its tremulous pressure as she murmured: "After John, Moro, you are dearest. I shall not try to thank you. May the ineffable peace which you bring my aching heart return a thousand-fold into your own. Farewell. Ragobah may return at any moment. Let us not needlessly imperil your safety. Once more good-bye. The dew-drop now may freely fall into the shining sea." Poor distraught child! She had tried to adopt her lover's religion without abandoning her own. I bent over and kissed her. It was my first and last kiss and she gave it with a sweet sadness, the memory of which, through all these years, has dwelt in the better part of me, like a fragrance in the vesture of the soul. One long, lingering look and I departed, never to see again this woman I had so fondly, so hopelessly loved.

You now know the exact nature of the covenant I have felt constrained to violate. I have told you her story in her own words. I wrote it out immediately after my interview with her and have read it so many times, during the last twenty years, that I have committed it to memory. The recollection of that last meeting, of her kiss and her grateful look has been throughout all these long, weary years the one verdant spot in the desert of my life.

[Moro Scindia paused here, as one who had reached the end of his narrative, and I continued my interrogations.]

Q. Although you never again saw your cousin you must, I think, have heard something of her fate.

A. I learned of it through Nana Kandia, the servant who had secretly embraced Lona's cause, and who had borne her message to me. It seems that, after my interview with her, my cousin was seized with a consuming desire to see her English lover once more before her death; so she devised a plan by which, with Kandia's help, Darrow Sahib was to be secretly conducted to her under cover of night. She wrote a letter asking him, as a last request, to meet her messenger on Malabar Hill, and instructing him how to make himself known. This she gave to Kandia to post early in the morning of the day upon which their plan was to be put into execution. As he was about leaving the house Ragobah called him into his chamber and demanded to know what was taking him forth so early in the morning. Kandia saw at once that the purpose of his errand had been discovered, and determined to meet the issue bravely. "I was going to post a letter, Sahib," he replied quietly. "Let me see it!" Ragobah roared. "I have no right to do so," Kandia replied, springing toward the door. But he was not quick enough for the wary Ragobah, who felled him to the floor with a chair before he had reached the threshold. When he returned to consciousness he found his assailant, who had skilfully opened the letter, standing over him perusing it in malicious glee. When he had finished reading he carefully resealed it and placed it in his pocket. Then he called two of his servants and gave Kandia into their charge with orders to gag him, to bind him hand and foot, and, as they valued their lives, not to permit him to leave the room till he ordered it.

What occurred between that time and the return of Ragobah, wounded and furious, late in the evening, we can only surmise. He doubtless posted the letter, and went himself to meet Darrow Sahib on Malabar Hill. When he returned home he hobbled into his wife's apartment and then ordered Kandia to be sent to him. His left leg was badly
crushed and his face, contorted with pain and fiendish malevolence, was horrible to look upon.

"Our trusting friend here," he said, addressing his wife and pointing to Kandia, "could not conveniently post your letter this morning, my dear, so I did it myself." Lona's face turned ashen pale, but she made no reply.

"I thought," he continued in his sweetest accents and with the same demoniac sarcasm, "that you would be anxious to know if the Sahib received it,—our mail service is so lax of late,—so I went tonight to Malabar Hill to see, for I felt certain he would come if he got your note, and, sure enough, he was there even ahead of time. I was obliged to forego the pleasure of bringing him to you on account of two most unfortunate accidents. As you see I hurt my foot, and poor Darrow Sahib slipped and fell headlong into the well in the little cave. As it has no bottom I could not, of course, get the Sahib out, and so was obliged to return, as best I could, alone." As he finished this heartless lie, every word of which he knew was a poisoned dart, Lona fell fainting upon the floor. Kandia raised her gently, expecting to find her dead, but was able at length to revive her. The first words she said were directed to Ragobah in a voice devoid of passion or reproach,—of everything in fact save an unutterable weariness.

"I am ill," she said; "will you permit Nana to get me some medicine which has helped me in similar attacks?" Ragobah's reply was directed to Kandia.

"You may do as the Sahibah bids you," was all he said.

Kandia turned to Lona for instructions and she said to him, "Get me half an ounce of--stay, there are several ingredients—I had better write them down." She wrote upon a little slip of paper, naming aloud the ingredients and quantities as she did so, and then asked Kandia to move her chair to an open window before he left. When he had done so, she passed him the note, saying, "Please get it as quickly as possible." As he took the paper she seized his hand for a moment and pressed it firmly. He noticed this at the time, but its significance did not dawn upon him until he had nearly reached his destination, when, all at once, he realised with a pang that the momentary pressure of the hand and the mute gratitude which shone from the eyes were meant as a farewell. His first impulse was to hurriedly retrace his steps, but before he had acted upon it, the thought occurred to him that she intended to poison herself with the drugs he was about to procure. If this were the case, there was no great need of hurry. Then he began to recall to mind the names of the drugs she had mentioned as she wrote and to reflect that not one of them was poisonous. With this new light all his former uneasiness returned. He strove to reassure himself with the thought that she might, in order to mislead Ragobah, have spoken the name of a harmless drug while she wrote down that of a poisonous one. It was easy to settle this question, and he determined to do so at the next light. He unfolded the paper, expecting to see a prescription, but read instead these words:

"To MORO SCINDIA;

"My Dear Cousin: Death has relieved you of the task I imposed upon you. John Darrow's body is in the well in the cave on Malabar Hill, where, before this reaches you, my body will have also gone to meet it. To this fragment of paper, then, must I confide the debt of gratitude I owe to you and to him who will bear it to you, Nana Kandia. Good-bye. If I had had two hearts, I should have given you one. Do not mourn me, but rather rejoice that my struggle and its agony are over. John has already gone--one tomb shall inclose both our bodies--how could it have been better? "LONA."

No sooner had Kandia grasped the import of this letter than he rushed with all speed to Malabar Hill, but he was too late, for scarcely had he left the house upon Lona's errand before she had sprung out of the window by which he had placed her. Ragobah's wound prevented his following her, and when he had summoned others to pursue her, the darkness had closed about her form and none knew the way she had taken. At the edge of the fatal well Kandia found a piece of paper beneath a stone and on it these words:

"Farewell, Moro and Nana, the only beings on earth I regret to leave! --Lona."

The body was never recovered. The news of his wife's death, and the knowledge that he was the cause of it, produced an effect upon Ragobah from which he never recovered. More than twenty years have passed since then, yet from that day to this he has never been known to smile. Long before his mangled limb had healed it became evident to all who knew him that he had henceforth but one purpose in life, --revenge, and that nothing save death could turn him from his purpose, so long as his rival lived. The knowledge of this made my search for Darrow Sahib more than ever difficult from the fact that it must be prosecuted secretly. I could only learn that he had left Bombay for the interior, nothing more. My inquiries in all the Indian cities proved fruitless, and in many instances, I was informed that Ragobah had instituted a search for the same man. I think, in spite of my precautions, some of my agents ultimately told Ragobah of my efforts, for I found myself so closely watched by men in his interests that I was at length compelled to give up the personal conduct of the search, and to continue it through a deputy, unknown to him. All my endeavours to find the Sahib were, as you are already aware, fruitless, and, until I met you, I had no doubt Ragobah's efforts were equally unproductive. You have now all the information I can offer upon the subject. If I can be of any further service to you, you need not hesitate to command me.

As he said this he rose to depart and I promised to keep him informed of what occurred. I have nothing now to
do but to await, with such patience as I can command, the arrival of the Dalmatia. It does not seem to me altogether probable that Ragobah will return upon this boat, but if he should I shall have him arrested the moment he sets foot on shore. If he escape the net that has been woven about him, I shall be a convert to Eastern occultism and no mistake. I trust Miss Darrow is well and hopeful. I know she will religiously keep the promise she made, for she is one of those women who fully understand the nature of a covenant, and I am easier, therefore, than I otherwise could be regarding her condition. Give her my kind regards and tell her that she may expect news of importance by my next communication. It is very late, so good-bye, until the arrival of the Dalmatia. Your friend, GEORGE MAITLAND.

This letter was delivered one morning when Gwen, my sister Alice, and I were at breakfast. As I broke the seal I noticed that both ladies put down their knives and forks and ceased to eat. A glance at Gwen's eager face convinced me that she had no appetite for anything but my letter, and I accordingly read it aloud. When I came to the last part of it, where Maitland referred to her, a flush, of pride I thought at the time, overspread her face, and when I had finished she said with some show of excitement, "If Mr. Maitland succeed in bringing Ragobah to justice I--I shall owe him a debt of gratitude I can never repay! It all seems like a romance, only so frightfully real. We may expect another letter in a few days, may we not? And Mr. Maitland, when may we expect him?"

I replied that I thought we might reasonably expect news of importance within five or six days, and that, so far as Maitland's return was concerned, I did not look for it for as many weeks, as he would doubtless have to cope with the law's delay there, as he would if here, and to comply with many tedious formalities before the government would allow Ragobah to be brought to this country for trial. The only reply Gwen vouchsafed to this statement was a long-drawn unconscious sigh, which I interpreted as meaning, "Will it never end?"

CHAPTER II

He who shakes the tree of Vengeance but harvests apples of Sodom in whose fruit of ashes he becomes buried, for the wage of the sinner is death.

There was no doubt of Ragobah's guilt in any of our minds, so that action at our end of the line seemed entirely useless, and nothing was left us but to quietly await whatever developments Maitland should disclose. We were not kept long in suspense, for in less than a week his next letter arrived. I broke its seal in the presence of Gwen and my sister who, if possible, were even more excited than I myself. Is it to be wondered at? Here was the letter which was to tell us whether or not the murderer of John Darrow had been caught. We felt that if Ragobah had returned to India, according to his expressed intention, there could be no doubt upon this point. But had he so returned? I read as follows:

MY DEAR DOCTOR:

The Dalmatia arrived as expected on Thursday, and on her came Ragobah. I had him arrested as he stepped from the boat. When examined he did not seem in the least disconcerted at the charges I preferred against him. This did not surprise me, however, as I had expected that a man who could roll his naked body over the burning sands from Mabajan to the Ganges, and who could rise from the Vaisyan to the Brahman caste,--albeit he fell again,--would not be likely to betray his cause by exhibiting either fear or excitement. He acknowledged his acquaintance with Mr. Darrow and the ill-feeling existing between them. When charged with his murder at Dorchester on the night of the 22d of April he coolly asked if I were aware when and how he had left India. I had not neglected to look this matter up and told him he had left on the same steamer which had brought him back--the Dalmatia--which should have arrived at New York on the 21st of April, thus leaving him ample time to get to Boston before the night of the 22d. To this he replied with the utmost assurance. (I give you the exact gist of what he said. Since I was not able to immediately commit his language to writing, you will, of course, hardly expect me to remember those peculiar Oriental idioms which an Indian, however great his command of English, never drops. What I say here is, of course, true of all conversations I put before you except such as I practically reported.)--But to return to our muttons. As I was saying, he replied with the utmost assurance:

"The Sahib is right. I did sail upon the Dalmatia, due at New York on the 21st of April. This steamer, as you are perhaps aware, is propelled by twin screws. On the trip in question she broke one of her propellers in mid-Atlantic and in consequence, arrived in New York on the 24th of April, three days late, without the transference of any of her passengers to other boats. If you will take the trouble to at once verify this statement at the steamship office, you will be able to relieve me of the annoyance of further detention."

All this was said with a rare command of language and a cold, cynical politeness which cut like a knife. I at first thought it was merely a ruse to gain time, but the steamship officials substantiated every word uttered by Ragobah relative to their vessel. The Dalmatia had steamed into New York at eleven o'clock on the morning of the 24th day of April with a broken screw!

Imagine my amazement! The net of circumstantial evidence wound around Ragobah seemed to be such as to leave no possibility of escape, and yet, the very first effort made to draw it tighter about him had resulted in his
walking, with the utmost ease, right through its meshes! There is no gainsaying such an alibi, and I am, therefore, forced to acknowledge that Rama Ragobah could not, by any possibility, have murdered John Darrow. That he may have planned the deed and that he may have intended to be present at its execution is quite possible, but we may at once dismiss the idea of his having personally committed the act. You will immediately appreciate that nearly all of the evidence which we secured against Ragobah was directed against him as the assassin, and is of little or no use to prove his complicity in an affair committed by another. In his hatred of Mr. Darrow we have, I believe, a sufficient motive for the act, but what evidence have we to support the theory that the murder was committed by anyone acting in his interests? I must confess my inability to detect, at present writing, the slightest evidence that Ragobah acted through an accomplice. So, here the matter rests.

I may state in closing that Ragobah has requested the "pleasure" (sic) of a private interview with me on Malabar Hill to-morrow night. As there is a bare possibility he may let fall something which may shed some light upon the accomplice hypothesis, I have agreed to meet him at the entrance to the little cave at nine o'clock. He has requested that I come alone and I shall do so, but, lest you fear for my safety, let me assure you that I know very well the unscrupulous nature of the man with whom I am to deal and that I shall take good care not to afford him any opportunity to catch me unawares. You will hear from me again after I meet Ragobah.

Remember me kindly to Miss Darrow. The failure of my enterprise will, I know, be a bitter disappointment to her, and you must temper this acknowledgment of it with such a hope of ultimate success as you may enjoy. Tell her I shall never cease my efforts to solve this mystery so long as I am able to find a clue, however slight, to follow. At present I am at all sea, and it looks as if I should have to go clear back and start all over again. Ragobah, as a point of departure, has not proved a success. With my kind regards to you all, I remain, cordially yours, GEORGE MAITLAND.

I read this through aloud, despite the fact that I knew some parts of it were intended only for my perusal. Gwen did not speak until some minutes after I had finished, and then only to express a fear that, despite his caution, harm might come to Maitland at his interview with Ragobah. She seemed to be far less disappointed at Maitland's failure to convict Ragobah than she was fearful for her friend's personal safety. She was restless and ill at ease for the next two or three days—in fact, until the arrival of Maitland's next letter. This came during my absence on a professional call, and when I returned home she met me with it at the door with an expression of relief upon her countenance so plain as not to be misconstrued. We went into the sitting-room, where my sister was awaiting the news, and I read as follows:

MY DEAR DOCTOR:

I kept my appointment last night with Rama Ragobah and, although nothing transpired at all likely to assist me in locating Mr. Darrow's assassin, yet the interview, though short, was interesting and worth narrating. Promptly at nine o'clock I was at my post by the little cave. I am still staying with Herr Blaschek and, as I had but a few rods to travel, I did not quit the house until within five minutes of the time appointed for our meeting. As I stepped out into the darkness I noticed a tall form glide behind a tree, about a rod away from the door. I could not be sure it was Ragobah, yet I had little doubt of it. I was a trifle taken aback at the moment, and instinctively placed my hand upon my revolver and grasped my cane more firmly. Should occasion require it, I counted upon this cane quite as much as upon my revolver, for, innocent and inoffensive as it looked, it was capable of most deadly execution. I had chosen it in preference to many other more pretentious weapons which had suggested themselves to me. It consisted of a small, flexible steel wire hardly bigger than the blade of a foil, surmounted by a good-sized lead ball, and the whole covered with a closely woven fabric. By grasping the cane by its lower end a tremendously heavy blow could be struck with the ball, and, if an attempt were made to shield the head by throwing up the arm, it was almost certain to fail of its object since the flexibility of the wire permitted it to bend about an obstruction until its loaded end was brought home. You will perhaps think that, since I did not make use of this weapon, I need not have troubled myself to describe it. Perhaps that is so, but, let me assure you, when I saw Ragobah, for it was he, glide behind that tree, and reflected how capable he was of every kind of treachery, I wouldn't have parted with that cane for its weight in gold. The Indian had pledged me to come alone and had promised to do likewise, but I felt any tree might conceal one of his minions, hired to assassinate me while he engaged my attention. All this, of course, did not in the least affect my decision. I had promised to go alone, and Miss Darrow's interests required that I should keep my covenant. I should have done so, even though I had known Ragobah meant to betray me. I may as well, however, tell you at once that my suspicions wronged the fellow. He had evidently taken his station behind a tree to satisfy himself, without exposure, that I meant to keep my promise and come alone.

When I reached the cave I found him awaiting me. How he was able to get there before me passes my comprehension, but there he was. He did not waste time, but addressed me at once, and, as my memory is excellent and our interview was short, I am able to give you an accurate report of what passed between us. I copy it here just as I entered it in my notebook, immediately upon my return to the house.

MY DEAR DOCTOR:

When I reached the cave I found him awaiting me. How he was able to get there before me passes my comprehension, but there he was. He did not waste time, but addressed me at once, and, as my memory is excellent and our interview was short, I am able to give you an accurate report of what passed between us. I copy it here just as I entered it in my notebook, immediately upon my return to the house.
"You naturally wish to know," Ragobah began, "why I have sought this interview. That is easily explained. You have done me the honour, Sahib, for I feel it is such, to suspect me of the murder of John Darrow. You have come here from America to fasten the crime upon me, and, from the bottom of my heart, I regret your failure to do so. I would give everything I possess on earth, and would gladly suffer a life of torment, to be able truthfully to say: 'I, Rama Ragobah, killed John Darrow.' But despite all my efforts, I, wretch that I am, am innocent! For more than twenty years I have had but one purpose,—one thought,—and that was to track down and slay John Darrow. This desire consumed me. It led me all over India in vain search for him. For nineteen years I laboured incessantly, without discovering so much as a trace of him. When he fled Bombay his belongings went inland, so I was told. I believed the story and felt sure I should one day find him on Indian soil. Years passed and I did not find him. It was but a few months ago that I discovered his ruse and learned his whereabouts. I could scarcely contain myself for joy. My life-work was at last to be completed. Nothing now remained but to plan his destruction. This, however, was not so easy a thing to do, since, in order to make my revenge complete, I must disclose my identity before killing him. At length I decided upon a plan. I would come upon him at night, when asleep, gag him and bind him to his bed. Then he should learn the name of his doomsmen, and the horrible nature of the death that awaited him."

Ragobah paused here as if overcome by his disappointment, and I said, "And how did you intend to kill him?" He gave a throaty chuckle, as he replied: "It was all so very pretty! I had only to saturate the bedclothes with oil and set fire to them. I should have lighted them at his feet and watched the flames creep upward toward his head till safety compelled my retreat. It was for this purpose I went to New York. You already know the fatal delay I incurred. When I landed I made all haste to the home of Darrow Sahib, in Dorchester, only to learn that he had killed himself a few days before my arrival. The morsel for which I had striven and hungered for twenty long years was whipped from my hand, even as I raised it to my mouth. My enemy was dead, beyond the power of injury, and my hands were unstained by his blood.

"I then determined to kill his daughter. It was the night of my enemy's burial. The Sahibah was alone in the house and was intending to leave it that night. I knew she would see that everything was securely fastened before she went away, and so, when I opened one of the windows, I was sure she would come to close it. Crouching down outside I awaited her approach, intending to spring up and stab her while she was pulling the window down. Everything happened as I planned,—what ails the Sahib? I did not kill her! No, at the last moment something—never mind what—stayed my arm! The death of an innocent girl did not promise me any lasting satisfaction and I gave up the idea, returned to New York, and re-embarked for Bombay as innocent in act as when I left it. My life had been a failure and I had no desire to prolong it. When you arrested me on the charge of murder, nothing would have given me greater pleasure than to have been able to plead guilty.

"You already know why I so hated Darrow. He robbed me of the only woman I ever loved. Maddened by jealousy, I told her I had thrown him into the well in the cave here. It was a lie, but she believed it, and fled from me, and in a few minutes had thrown herself into that bottomless hole. See, Sahib," he said, entering the cave and pointing down the dark shaft,—"that is the road she took in order that her bones might rest with his, and, after all, they are thousands of miles apart. It's not the triumph I planned, but it's all I have! And this is why I brought you here; that you may take back to my enemy's family the knowledge that in death I am triumphant. Tell them," he said, rising to his full height, "that while the carcass of the English cobra rots in a foreign land, Rama Ragobah's bones lie mingled with those of his beautiful Lona!"—My blood was up, and I rushed fiercely at him. With the quickness of a cat he dodged me, spat in my face as I turned, and, with a horrible laugh, sprang headlong into the well. Down deeper and deeper sank the laugh—then it died away—then a faint plash—and all was silent. Rama Ragobah was gone! For fully ten minutes I stood dazed and irresolute and then returned mechanically to the house. I at first thought of informing the authorities of the whole affair, but, when I realised how hard it would be for me to prove my innocence were I charged with Ragobah's murder, I decided to keep the secret of the well.

I shudder when I think of Miss Darrow's narrow escape. Did you suspect who her assailant really was? I wonder you have written me nothing about it, but suppose you thought it would only needlessly alarm me. If you had known it was our friend Ragobah, you would doubtless have felt it imperative that I should know of it,—so I conclude from your silence that you did not discover his identity.

I need not, of course, tell you, my dear Doctor, that we have reached the end of our Indian clue, and that I deem it wise, all things considered, for me to get out of India just as soon as possible. If this letter is in any way delayed, you need not be surprised if I have the pleasure of relating its contents in person. Remember me to Miss Darrow and tell her how sorry I am that, thus far, I have been unable to be of any real service to her. As I shall see you so soon I need write nothing further. Kind regards to Miss Alice. Ever yours, GEORGE MAITLAND.

When I had finished reading this letter I looked up at Gwen, expecting to see that its news had depressed her. I must confess, however, that I could not detect any such effect. On the contrary, she seemed to be in much better spirits than when I began reading. "According to this letter, then," she said, addressing me somewhat excitedly, "we
may--" but she let fall her eyes and did not complete her sentence. My sister bestowed upon her one of those glances described in the vernacular of woman as "knowing" and then said to me: "We may expect Mr. Maitland at any time, it seems." "Yes," I replied; "he will lose no time in getting here. He undoubtedly feels much chagrined at his failure and will now be more than ever determined to see the affair through to a successful conclusion. He is in the position of a hound that has lost its scent, and is eager to return to its point of departure for a fresh start. I fancy it will be no easy task to discover a new clue, and I shall watch Maitland's work in this direction with a great deal of curiosity." Gwen did not speak, but she listened to our conversation with a nearer approach to a healthy interest than I had known her to display on any other occasion since her father's death. I regarded this as a good omen. Her condition, since that sad occurrence, had worried me a good deal. She seemed to have lost her hold on life and to exist in a state of wearied listlessness. Nothing seemed to impress her and she would at times forget, in the midst of a sentence, what she had intended to say when she began it! Her elasticity was gone and every effort a visible burden to her. I knew the consciousness of her loss was as a dull, heavy weight bearing her down, and I knew, too, that she could not marshal her will to resist it,--that, in fact, she really didn't care, so tired was she of it all. Experience had taught me how the dull, heavy ache of a great loss will press upon the consciousness with the regular, persistent, relentless throbbing of a loaded wheel and eat out one's life with the slow certainty of a cancer. This I knew to have been Gwen's state since her father's death, and all my attempts to bring about a healthful reaction had hitherto been futile. It is not to be wondered at, therefore, that even the transient interest she had evinced was hailed by me with delight as the beginning of that healthful reaction for which I had so long sought. When a human bark in the full tide of life is suddenly dashed upon the rocks of despair the wreckage is strewn far and wide, and it is with no little difficulty that enough can be rescued to serve in the rebuilding of even the smallest of craft. The thought, therefore, that Gwen's intellectual flotsam was beginning at length to swirl about a definite object in a way to facilitate the rescue of her faculties was to me a decidedly reassuring one, and I noted with pleasure that the state of excited expectancy which she had tried in vain to conceal did not wane, but waxed stronger as the days went by.

THE EPISODE OF THE PARALLEL READERS

CHAPTER I

The events of the present are all strung upon the thread of the past, and in telling over this chronological rosary, it not infrequently happens that strange, unlike beads follow each other between our questioning fingers.

It was nearly a week after his letter before Maitland arrived. He sent us no further word, but walked in one evening as we were talking about him. He came upon us so suddenly that we were all taken aback and, for a moment, I felt somewhat alarmed about Gwen. She had started up quickly when the servant had mentioned Maitland's name and pressed her hand convulsively upon her heart, while her face and neck became of a deep crimson colour. I was saying to myself that this was a common effect of sudden surprise, when I saw her clutch quickly at the back of her chair, as if to steady herself. A moment later she sank into her seat. Her face was now as pale as ashes, and I felt I had good reason to be alarmed. I think she was conscious of my scrutiny, for she turned her face from me and remained motionless. The movement told me she was trying to regain command of her faculties and I forbore to interfere in the struggle, though I watched her with some solicitude. My fears were at once dispelled, however, when Maitland entered, for Gwen was the first to welcome him. She extended her hand with much of her old impulsiveness, saying: "I have so much for which to thank you--" but Maitland interrupted her. "Indeed, I regret to say," he rejoined, "that I have been unable thus far to be of any real service to you. The Ragobah clue was a miserable failure, though we may do ourselves the justice to admit that we had no alternative but to follow it to the end. I confess I have never been more disappointed than in the outcome of this affair." "My dear fellow," I said, "we all have much to be thankful for in your safe return, let us not forget that." Maitland laughed: "That reminds me," he said, "of the man who passed the hat at a coloured camp-meeting. When asked how much he had collected, he replied: 'I didn't get no money, but I've done got de hat back.' You've got your hat back, and that's about all. However, with Miss Darrow's permission, I shall go back to the starting point and begin all over again."

"You are making me your debtor," Gwen replied slowly, "beyond my power ever to repay you."

"It is in the hope that no payment may ever be demanded of you," he rejoined, "that I am busying myself in your affairs." The colour sprang to Gwen's cheeks, but she only replied by a grateful glance. I knew what was passing through her mind. She was thinking of her promise--of her father's last words, and of the terrible possibilities thereof from which Maitland was seeking to rescue her. She felt that she could safely owe him any debt of gratitude, however great, while he, on his part, took what I fancied, both then and afterward, were unnecessary pains to assure her that, in the event of his finding the assassin, she need have no fear of his making any claim whatsoever upon her. And so the whole affair was dropped for the time being and the rest of the evening devoted to listening to Maitland's account of his experiences while abroad.

The next morning I called upon our detective at his laboratory and asked him what he intended to do next. He replied that he had no plans as yet, but that he wished to review with me all the evidence at hand.
"You see," he said, "the thing that renders the solution of this mystery so difficult is the fact that all our clues, while they would be of the utmost service in the conviction of the assassin had we found him, are almost destitute of any value until he has been located. Add to this that we are now unable to find any motive for the crime and you can see how slight are our hopes of success. If ever we chance to find the man,—for I feel that such a consummation would result more from chance than from anything else,—I think we can convict him.

"Here, for example," he said, taking up a small slip of glass which he had cut from the eastern parlour window of the Darrow house, "is something I have never shown either you or Miss Darrow. It is utterly worthless, so far as assisting us to track the assassin is concerned, but, if ever we suspect the right man, the evidence on that glass would probably convict him, though there were ten thousand other suspects."

I took the glass from him and, examining it with the utmost care, I detected a smutch of yellowish paint upon it, nothing more. "For Heaven's sake, Maitland!" I said in astonishment, "of what possible use can that formless daub of paint be, or is there something else on the glass that has escaped me?" He laughed at my excitement as he replied:

"There is nothing there but the paint spot. Regarding that, however, you have come to a very natural though erroneous conclusion. It is not formless;" and he passed me a jeweller's eye-glass to assist me in a closer examination. He was right. The paint lay upon the glass in little irregular furrows which arranged themselves concentrically about a central oval groove somewhat imperfect in shape. "Well," continued Maitland, as I returned him the magnifying glass, "what do you make of it?" "If you hadn't already attached so much importance to the thing," I said, "I should pronounce it a daub of paint transferred to the glass by somebody's thumb, but, as such a thing would be clearly useless, I am at a loss to know what it is."

"Well," he rejoined, "you've hit the nail on the head,—that's just what it is, but you are entirely wrong in your assumption that the thumb-mark can have no value as evidence. Do you not know that there are no two thumbs in the world which are capable of making indistinguishable marks?" I was not aware of this. "How do you know," I asked, "that this mark was made by the assassin? It seems to me there can hardly be a doubt that one of the painters, while priming the sill, accidentally pressed his thumb against the glass. His hands would naturally have been painty, and this impression would as naturally have resulted."

"What you say," replied Maitland, "is very good, so far as it goes. My reasons for believing this thumb-mark was made by the assassin are easily understood. First: there was another impression of a thumb in the moist paint of the sill directly under that upon the glass. Both marks were made by the same thumb and, in the lower one, the microscope revealed minute traces of gravel dust, not elsewhere discernible upon the sill. The thumb carried the dust there, and was the thumb of the hand pressed into the gravel,—the hand of which I have a cast. You see how this shows how the thumb came to have paint upon it when pressed upon the glass. Second: the two men engaged in priming the house, James Cogan and Charles Rice, were the only persons save the assassin known to have been upon that side of the house the day of the murder. "Here," he said, carefully removing two strips of glass from a box, "are the thumb-marks of Cogan and Rice made with the same paint. You see that neither of these men could, by any possibility, have made the mark upon the glass. So there you are. But we are missing the question before us. What line of procedure can you suggest, Doc? I'm all at sea."

"We must find someone," I said, "who could have had a motive. This someone ought to have a particularly good reason for concealing his footprints, and is evidently lame besides. I can't for the life of me see anything else we have to go by, unless it be the long nail of the little finger, and I don't see how that is going to help us find the assassin—unless we can find out why it was worn long. If we knew that it might assist us. As I have already suggested, a Chinaman might have a long nail on the little finger, but he would also have the other nails long, wouldn't he? Furthermore, he might use the boards to conceal the prints of his telltale foot-gear; but why should he not have put on shoes of the ordinary type? If he had time to prepare the boards,—the whole affair shows premeditation,—clearly he had time to change his boots. The Chinese are usually small, and this might easily account for the smallness of the hand as shown by your cast. These are the pros and cons of the only clue that suggests itself to me. By the way, Maitland, it's a shame we did not try, before it was too late, to track this fellow down with a dog."

"Ah," he replied, "there is another little thing I have not told you. After you had left the house with Miss Darrow on the night of the murder, and all the servants had retired, I locked the parlour securely and quietly slipped out to look about a bit. As you know, the moon was very bright and any object moderately near was plainly visible. I went around to the eastern side of the house where the prints of the hand and boards were found, and examined them with extreme care. What I particularly wished to learn was the direction taken by the assassin as he left the house and the point at which he had removed the boards from his feet. The imprints of the boards were clearly discernible so far as the loose gravel extended, but beyond that nothing could be discovered. I sat down and pondered over the matter. I had about concluded to drive two nails into the heels of my boots to enable me to distinguish my own footprints from any other trail I might intersect, and then, starting with the house as a centre, to describe an involute about it in
the hope of being able to detect some one or more points where my course crossed that of the assassin, when I
remembered that my friend Burwell, whose Uncle Tom's Cabin Combination recently stranded at Brockton was at
home. As you are perhaps aware an Uncle Tom Company consists of a 'Legree,' one or two 'Markses,' one or two
'Topsies,' 'Uncle Tom,' a 'Little Eva,' who should not be over fifty years old,--or at least should not appear to be,--
two bloodhounds, and anybody else that happens to be available. It really doesn't make the least difference how
many or how few people are in the cast. I have heard that an Uncle Tom manager on a Western circuit, most of
whose company deserted him because the 'ghost' never walked, succeeded in cutting and rewriting the piece so as to
double 'George Harris' and 'Legree,' ' Marks' and 'Topsy,' 'Uncle Tom' and 'Little Eva.' As for the rest he had it so
arranged that he could himself 'get off the door' in time to 'do,' with the aid of the dogs, all the other characters. You
see the dogs held the stage while he changed, say, from 'Eliza' to Eva's father. 'George Harris' would look off left
second entrance and say that 'Legree' was after him. Then he would discharge a revolver, rush off right first
entrance, where he would pass his weapon to 'Eva' and 'Uncle Tom,' and this bisexual individual would discharge it
in the wings at the imaginary pursuer, while 'Harris' would put on a wire beard, slouch hat, black melodramatic cape,
and, rushing behind the flat, enter left as 'Legree.'

"The hardest thing to manage was the death of 'Little Eva' with 'Uncle Tom' by the bedside, but managerial
genius overcame the difficulty after the style of Mantell's 'Corsican Brothers.' You see it is all easy enough when
you know how. 'Little Eva' is discovered, sitting up in bed with the curtains drawn back. She says what she has to
to her father and the rest. Then her father has a line in which he informs 'Eva' that she is tired and had better try
to sleep. She says she will try, just to please him, and he gently lowers her back upon the pillows and draws the
curtains in front of the bed. But instead of utilising this seclusion for a refreshing sleep 'Eva' rolls out at the back
side of the bed. 'Legree' snatches off 'Eva's' wig and 'Topsy' defily removes the white nightdress concealing his--
'Eva's'--'Uncle Tom' make-up, while the erstwhile little girl hastily blackens his face and hands, puts on a negro wig,
and in less than a minute is changed in colour, race, and sex. He 'gets round' left and enters the sick room as 'Uncle
Tom' with 'Topsy.' They are both told that 'Little Eva' is asleep, and 'Topsy' peeps cautiously between the curtains
and remarks that the child's eyes are open and staring. The father looks in and, overcome by grief, informs the
audience that his child is dead. 'Topsy,' tearful and grief-stricken, 'gets off' right and washes up to 'do' 'Little Eva'
climbing the golden stair in the last tableau. Meanwhile 'Uncle Tom,' in a paroxysm of grief, throws himself upon
the bed and holds the stage till he smells the red fire for the vision; then he staggers down stage, strikes an attitude;
the others do likewise; picture of 'Little Eva,' curtain. Talk about doubling 'Marcellus,' 'Polonius,' 'Osric,' and the
'First Grave Digger! Why, that's nothing to these 'Uncle Tom' productions. But hold on, where did I get side-
tracked? Oh, yes, the dogs.

"Well, as I was saying, as soon as I thought of Burwell I made up my mind at once to borrow one of his hounds.
It was late when I got to his house. When I knocked at the door both Pompey and Caesar began sub-bass solos of
growls, and Burwell was awake in a minute. I told him I wanted a dog for private business and took Caesar off with
me. He found the trail with no difficulty, and followed it in a bee-line down to the water, where he raised his big
muzzle and howled in dismal impotency. The assassin had taken to the water. I took the dog up and down the shore
to see if he had returned to land, but all I found of interest was a clump of alders from which a pole had been cut. I
knew by the dog's actions that the assassin had been there, for Caesar immediately took a new trail back to the
house. Try as I might I could learn nothing further, and I at once returned the dog. There is no doubt that the
murderer made his escape in a boat and took with him the pole he had cut, the boards he had worn, and everything
else, I dare say, connected with his crime. One thing seems clear, and that is that we are dealing with no ordinary
criminal. I would wager a good deal that this fellow, if ever he is caught, will be found to be a man of brains. I don't
place much confidence in the Chinese theory, Doc, but as I have nothing better to offer, let us go see Miss Darrow.
If her father has ever had any dealings with Chinamen, we shall probably deem it wise to look the Orientals up a
bit."

We immediately acted upon this suggestion, waiting upon Gwen at my house. She said she and her father had
spent a year in San Francisco when she was about seven years of age. While there their household was looked after
by two Chinese servants, named Wah Sing and Sam Lee. The latter had been discharged by her father because of his
refusal to perform certain minor duties which, through oversight, had not been set down as part of his work when he
was engaged. So far as she knew no altercation had taken place and there were no hard feelings on either side. Sam
Lee had bade her good-bye and had seemed sorry to leave, notwithstanding which, however, he refused, with true
Chinese pertinacity, to assume the new duties. She did not think it likely that either of these Chinamen had been
instrumental in her father's death, yet she agreed with Maitland that it would be a point gained to be assured of this
fact. Maitland accordingly determined to depart at once for San Francisco, and the next day he was off.

We received no letters from him during his absence and were, accordingly, unable to tell when he expected to
get back. Since his return from India Gwen had given evidence of a reviving interest in life, but now that he was
again away, she relapsed into her old listless condition, from which we found it impossible to arouse her. Alice, who did her utmost to please her, was at her wit's end. She could never tell which of two alternatives Gwen preferred, since that young lady would invariably express herself satisfied with either and did not seem to realise why she should be expected to have any choice in the matter. Alice was quite at a loss to understand this state of affairs, until I told her that Gwen was in a condition of semi-torpor in which even the effort of choice seemed an unwarrantable outlay. She simply did not care what happened. She felt nothing, save a sense of fatigue, and even what she saw was viewed as from afar, and seemed to her a drama in which she took no other part than that of an idle, tired, and listless spectator. Clearly she was losing her hold on life. I told Alice we must do our utmost to arouse her, to stimulate her will, to awaken her interest, and we tried many things in vain.

Maitland had been gone, I think, about three weeks when my sister and I hit upon a plan which we thought might have the desired effect upon Gwen. Before her father's death she had been one of the most active members of a Young People's Club which devoted every Wednesday evening to the study of Shakespeare. She had attended none of its meetings since her bereavement, but Alice and I soon persuaded her to accompany us on the following week and I succeeded, by a little quiet wire-pulling, in getting her appointed to take charge of the following meeting, which was to be devoted to the study of "Antony and Cleopatra." When informed of the task which had been imposed upon her Gwen was for declining the honour at once, and the most Alice and I were able to do was to get her to promise to think it over a day or so before she refused.

The next morning Maitland walked in upon us. He had found both of Mr. Darrow's former servants and satisfied himself that they were in San Francisco on the night of the murder. So that ended my Chinese clue. While Alice and Gwen were discussing the matter, I took occasion to draw Maitland aside, and told him of Gwen's appointment to take charge of the Cleopatra night, and how necessary it was to her health that she should be aroused from her torpor. It doesn't take long for Maitland to see a thing, and before I had whispered a dozen sentences he had completely grasped the situation. He crossed the room, drew a chair up beside Gwen, and sat down. "Miss Darrow," he began, "I am afraid you will have a poor opinion of me as a detective. This is the second time I have failed. I feel that I should remind you again of our compact, at least, that part of it which permits you to dispense with my services whenever you shall see fit to do so, and, at the same time, to relieve you from your obligation to let me order your actions. I tell you frankly it will be necessary for you to discharge me, if you would be rid of me, for, unless you do so, or I find the assassin, I shall never cease my search so long as I have the strength and means to conduct it. What do you say? Have I not proved my uselessness?" This was said in a tentative, half-jesting tone. Gwen answered it very seriously.

"You have done for me," she said, in the deep, vibrating tones of her rich contralto voice, "all that human intelligence could suggest. You have examined the evidence and conducted the whole affair with a thoroughness which I never could have obtained elsewhere. That your search has been unavailing is due, not to any fault of yours, but rather to the consummate skill of the assassin, who, I think, we may conclude, is no ordinary criminal. I do not know much of the abilities of Messrs. Osborne and Allen, but I understand that M. Godin has the reputation of being the cleverest detective in America. I cannot learn that he has made any progress whatsoever in the solution of this terrible mystery. I do not feel, therefore, that you have any right to reproach yourself. Such hope as I have that my father's murderer may ever be brought to justice rests in your efforts; else I should feel bound to relieve you of a task which I never could have obtained elsewhere. That your search has been unavailing is due, not to any fault of yours, but rather to the consummate skill of the assassin, who, I think, we may conclude, is no ordinary criminal. I do not know much of the abilities of Messrs. Osborne and Allen, but I understand that M. Godin has the reputation of being the cleverest detective in America. I cannot learn that he has made any progress whatsoever in the solution of this terrible mystery. I do not feel, therefore, that you have any right to reproach yourself. Such hope as I have that my father's murderer may ever be brought to justice rests in your efforts; else I should feel bound to relieve you of a task which, though self-imposed, is, none the less, onerous and ill-paid. Do not consider me altogether selfish if I ask that you still continue the search, and that I--that I still be held to my covenant. I am aware that I can never fully repay the kindness I am asking of you, but--"

Maitland did not wait for her to finish. "Let us not speak of that," he said. "It is enough to know that you are still satisfied with my, thus far, unsuccessful efforts in your behalf. There is nothing affords me keener pleasure than to struggle with and solve an intricate problem, whether it be in algebra, geometry, or the mathematics of crime; and then--well, even if I succeed, I shall quit the work your debtor."

He had spoken this last impulsively, and when he had finished he remained silent, as if surprised and a bit nettled at his own failure to control himself. Gwen made no reply, not even raising her eyes; but I noticed that her fingers at once busied themselves with the entirely uncalled-for labour of readjusting the tidy upon the arm of her chair, and I thought that, if appearances were to be trusted, she was very happy and contented at the change she had made in the bit of lacework beneath her hands. With singular good sense, with which she was always surprising me, Alice now introduced the subject of the Young People's Club, and mentioned incidentally that Gwen was to have charge of the next meeting. Before Gwen had time to inform Maitland that she intended to decline this honour, he congratulated her upon it, and rendered her withdrawal difficult by saying: "I feel that I should thank you, Miss Darrow, for the faithful way in which you fulfil the spirit of your agreement to permit me to order your actions. I know, if you consulted your own desires, you would probably decline the honour conferred upon you, and that in accepting it, you are influenced by the knowledge that you are pursuing just the course I most wish you to follow.
Verily, you make my office of tyrant over you a perfect sinecure. I had expected you to chafe a little under restraint, but, instead, I find you voluntarily yielding to my unexpressed desires."

Gwen made no reply, but we heard no more of her resignation. She applied herself at once to the preparation of her paper upon "Antony and Cleopatra." Maitland, who, like all vigorous, healthy, and informed intellects, was an ardent admirer of Shakespeare, found time to call on Gwen and to discuss the play with her. This seemed to please her very much, and I am sure his interest in the play was abnormal. He confessed to me that every morning, as he awoke, the first thing which flashed into his mind, even before he had full possession of his senses, was these words of Antony:

"I am dying, Egypt, dying."

He professed himself utterly unable to account for this, and asked me what I thought was the cause of it. He furthermore suddenly decided that he would ask Gwen to propose his name for membership at the next meeting of the Young People's Club. I hastily indorsed this resolution, for I had a vague sort of feeling that it would please Gwen.

The "Antony and Cleopatra" night at length arrived. We all attended the meeting and listened to a very able paper upon the play. One of the most marked traits of Gwen's character is that whatever she does she does thoroughly, and this was fully exemplified on the night in question. Maitland was very much impressed by some verse Gwen had written for the occasion, and a copy of which he succeeded in procuring from her. I think, from certain remarks he made, that it was the broad and somewhat unfeminine charity expressed in the verse which most astonished and attracted him, but of this, after what I have said, you will, when you have perused it, be as good a judge as I:

**CLEOPATRA**

In Egypt, where the lotus sips the waters Of ever-fruitful Nile, and the huge Sphinx In awful silence,--mystic converse with The stars,--doth see the pale moon hang her crescent on The pyramid's sharp peak,--e'en there, well in The straits of Time's perspective. Went out, by Caesarean gusts from Rome, The low-burned candle of the Ptolemies: Went out without a flicker in full glare Of noon-day glory. When her flame lacked oil Too proud was Egypt's queen to be The snuff of Roman spirits; so she said, "Good-night," and closed the book of life half read And little understood; perchance misread The greater part,--yet, who shall say? Are we An ermined bench to call her culprit failings up And make them plead for mercy? Or can we, Upon whom soon shall fall the awful shadow of The Judgment Seat, stand in her light and throw Ourselves that shadow? Rather let fall upon Her memory the softening gauze of Time, As mantle of a charity which else We might not serve. She was a woman, And as a woman loved! What though the fierce Simoom blew ever hot within the sail Of her desire? What if it shifted with Direction of her breath? Or if the rudder of Her will did lean as many ways as trampled straws, And own as little worth? She was a woman still, And queen. They do best understand themselves Who trust themselves the least; as they are wisest Who, for their safety, thank more the open sea Than pilot will. Oh, Egypt's self-born Isis! Ought we to fasten in thy memory the fangs Of unalloyed distrust? We know how little Better is History's page than leaf whereat the ink Is thrown. Nor yet should we forget how much The nearer thou than we didst come to The rough-hewn corner-stone of Time. We know Thy practised love enfolded Antony; And that around the heart of Hercules' Descendant, threading through and through, Like the red rivers of its life, in tangled mesh No circumstance could e'er unravel, thou Didst coil,--the dreamy, dazzling "Serpent of The Nile!" Thy sins stick jagged out From history's page, and bleeding tear Fair Judgment from thy merits. We perchance Do wrong thee, Isis; for that coward, History, Who binds in death his coils,--the dreamy, dazzling "Serpent of The Nile!" Thy sins stick jagged out From history's page, and bleeding tear Fair Judgment from thy merits. We perchance Do wrong thee, Isis; for that coward, History, Who binds in death his coil,--the dreamy, dazzling "Serpent of The Nile!"

The exercises of the evening concluded with the reading of the familiar poem, beginning:

"I am dying, Egypt, dying; Ebbs the crimson life-tide fast."

It was about noon the next day when Maitland called upon me. "See here, Doc," he began at once, "do you believe in coincidences?" I informed him that his question was not altogether easy to understand. "Wait a moment," he said, "while I explain. For at least two years prior to my recent return from California the name 'Cleopatra' has not entered my mind. You were the first to mention it to me, and from you I learned that Miss Darrow was to have
charge of the 'Antony and Cleopatra' night. That is all natural enough. But why should I, on every morning since you first mentioned the subject to me, awake with Antony's words upon my lips? Why should every book or paper I pick up contain some reference to Cleopatra? Why, man, if I were superstitious, it would seem positively spookish. I am getting to believe that I shall be confronted either by Cleopatra's name, or some allusion to her, every time I pick up a book. It's getting to be decidedly interesting."

"I have had," I replied, "similar, though less remarkable, experiences. It is quite a common occurrence to learn of a thing, say, this morning for the first time in one's life, and then to find, in the course of the day's reading, three or four independent references to the same thing. Suppose we step into the library, and pick out a few books haphazard, just to see if we chance upon any reference to Cleopatra."

To this Maitland agreed, and, entering the library, I pushed the Morning Herald across the table to him, saying: "One thing's as good as another; try that." He started a little, but did not touch the paper. "You will have to find something harder than that," he said, pointing to the outspread paper.

I followed the direction of his finger, and read:

"Boston Theatre. Special engagement of Miss Fanny Davenport. For one week. Beginning Monday, the 12th of December, Sardou's 'Cleopatra.'"

I was indeed surprised, but I said nothing. The next thing I handed him was a copy of Godey's Magazine, several years old. He opened it carelessly, and in a moment read the following line: "I am dying, sweetheart, dying." "Doesn't that sound familiar? It reminds me at once of the poetic alarm clock that wakens me every morning,—"I am dying, Egypt, dying." There is no doubt that Higginson's poem suggested this one. Here is the whole of the thing as it is printed here," he said, and read the following:

**LOVE'S TWILIGHT**

I am dreaming, loved one, dreaming Of the sweet and beauteous past When the world was as its seeming, Ere the fatal shaft was cast.

I am sobbing, sad-eyed, sobbing, At the darkly sullen west, Of the smile of ignorance robbing The pale face against the breast.

I am smiling, tear-stained, smiling, As the sun glints on the crest Of the troubled wave, beguiling Shipwrecked Hope to its long rest.

I am parting, broken, parting, From a soul that I hold dear, And the music of whose beauty Fades a dead strain on my ear.

I am dying, sweetheart, dying, Drips life's gold through palsied hands,— See; the dead'ning Sun is sighing His last note in red'ning bands.

So I'm sighing, sinking, sighing, Flows life's river to the sea. Death my throbbing heart is tying With the strings that ache for thee.

"Yes," I said, when he had finished. "I shall have to admit that immediately suggests Higginson's poem and Cleopatra's name. But here, try this," and I threw an old copy of the Atlantic Monthly upon the table. Maitland opened it and laughed. "This may be mere chance, Doc," he said, "but it is remarkable, none the less. See here!" He held the magazine toward me, and I read: "Cleopatra's Needle. The Historic Significance of Central Park's New Monument. Some of the Difficulties that Attended its Transportation and Erection. By James Theodore Wright, Ph. D." I was dumfounded. Things were indeed getting interesting.

"Magazines and newspapers," I said, "seem to be altogether too much in your line. We'll try a book this time. Here," and I pulled the first one that came to hand, "is a copy of Tennyson's Poems I fancy it will trouble you to find your reference in that." Maitland took it in silence, and, opening it at random, began to read. The result surprised him even more than it did me. He had chanced upon these verses from "A Dream of Fair Women":

"'We drank the Libyan Sun to sleep, and lit Lamps which outburn'd Canopus. O my life In Egypt! O the dalliance and the wit, The flattery and the strife.

'And the wild kiss when fresh from war's alarms, My Hercules, my Roman Antony, My mailed Bacchus leapt into my arms, Contended there to die!"

"And there he died! And when I heard my name Sigh'd forth with life, I would not brook my fear Of the other! With a worm I balked his fame. What else was left? look here!"

"With that she tore her robe apart and half The polished argent of her breast to sight Laid bare. Thereto she pointed with a laugh, Showing the aspic's bite."

"There is no doubt about that," I said, as he laid the book upon the table. "I want to try this thing once more. Here is Pascal; if you can find any reference to the 'Serpent of the Nile' in that, you needn't go any farther, I shall be satisfied," and I passed the book to him. He turned the pages over in silence for half a minute, or so, and then said: "I guess this counts as a failure,—no, though, by Jove! Look here!" His face was of almost deathly pallor, and his finger trembled upon the passage it indicated as he held the book toward me. I glanced with some anxiety from his face to
the book, and read, as nearly as I now can remember: "If Cleopatra's nose had been shorter, the entire face of the world would have been changed."

It was some minutes before Maitland fully regained his composure, and during that time neither of us spoke. "Well, Doc," he said at length, and his manner was decidedly grave, even for him: "What do you make of it?" I didn't know what to make of it, and I admitted my ignorance with a frankness at which, considering my profession, I have often since had occasion to marvel. I told him that I could scarcely account for it on the ground of mere coincidence, and I called his attention to that part of "The Mystery of Marie Roget," where Poe figures out the mathematical likelihood of a certain combination of peculiarities of clothing being found to obtain in the case of two young women who were unknown to each other. If the finding of a single reference to Cleopatra had been a thing of so infrequent occurrence as to at once challenge Maitland's attention, what was to be said when, all of a sudden, her name, or some reference to her, seemed to stare at him from every page he read?

"There is something in this more than natural, if philosophy could find it out," murmured Maitland, more to himself than to me. "Come, what do you say?" and he turned abruptly to me with one of those searching looks so peculiar to him in moments of excitement. "I see," I replied, "that you are determined I should give my opinion now and here, without a moment's reflection. Very well; you have just quoted 'Hamlet'; I will do likewise:

"'There are more things in Heaven and Earth, Horatio, Than are dreamt of in your philosophy!'

"You seem in some strange way to be dominated by the shade of Cleopatra. Now, if I believed in metempsychosis, I should think you were Mark Antony brought down to date. There, with that present sober air of yours, you'd pass anywhere for such an anachronism. But to be serious, and to give you advice which is positively bilious with gravity, I should say, investigate this thing fully; make a study of this ancient charmer. By the way, why not begin by going to see Davenport in Sardou's 'Cleopatra'? You have never seen her in it, have you?"

In this way, I succeeded in getting him out of his depressed state. We got into an argument concerning the merits of Miss Davenport's work. I know of nothing Maitland would sooner do than argue, and, if attacked on a subject upon which he feels strongly, he is, for the time being, totally oblivious of everything else. For this reason I trapped him into this argument. I abominate what is now known as "realism" just as much as he does, but you don't have much of an argument without some apparent difference of opinion, so, for the nonce, I became a realist of whom Zola himself would have been proud. "Why, man," I said, "realism is truth. You certainly can't have any quarrel with that." I knew this would have the effect of a red rag flounced in the face of a bull.

"Truth! Bah!" he exclaimed excitedly. "I have no patience with such aesthetic hod-carriers! Truth, indeed! Is there no other truth in art but that coarse verisimilitude, that vulgar trickery, which appeals to the eyes and the ears of the rabble? Are there not psychological truths of immensely greater importance? What sane man imagines for a moment that the pleasure he derives from seeing that greatest of all tragedians, Edwin Booth, in one of Shakespeare's matchless tragedies, is dependent upon his believing that this or that character is actually killed? Why, even the day of the cranberry-juice dagger is long since passed. When Miss Davenport shrieks in 'Fedora,' the shriek is literal--'real,' you would call it--and you find yourself instinctively saying, 'Don't!--don't!' and wishing you were out of the house. When Mr. Booth, as 'Shylock' shrieks at 'Tubal's news, the cry is not real, is not literal, but is suggestive, and you see at once the fiendish glee of which it is the expression. The difference between the two is the difference between vocal cords and grey matter."

"But surely," I rejoined, "one doesn't want untruth; one wants--" but he did not let me finish.

"Always that cry of truth!" he retorted. "Do you not see how absurd it is, as used by your exponents of realism? With a bit of charcoal some Raphael draws a face with five lines, and some photographer snaps a camera at the same face. Which would any sane man choose as the best work of art? The five-line face, of course. Why? Is the work of the camera unreal? Is it not more accurate in drawing, more subtle in gradation than the less mechanical picture? To be sure. What, then, makes the superiority of the few lines of our Raphael? That which makes the superiority of all noble art--its truth, not on a low, but on a high, plane: its power of interpreting. See!" he said, fairly aglow with excitement. "What does your realist do, even assuming that he has reached that never-to-be-attained perfection which is the lifelong Mecca of his desires? He gives you, by his absolutely realistic goes with you, and interprets its grandeur to you. Stand before his canvas and enjoy it as you would Nature herself if there. Surely, you say, nothing more could be desired, and you clap your hands, and shout, 'Bravo!' But wait a bit; the other side is yet to be heard from. What does the true artist do for you by his picture of Yosemite Valley? He not only gives you a free conveyance to it, but he goes with you, and interprets its grandeur to you. He translates into the language of your consciousness beauties which, without him, you would entirely miss. It is this very capability of seeing more in Nature than is ever perceived by the common throng that constitutes the especial genius of the artist, and a work that is not aglow with its creator's personality--personality, mind you, not coarse realism--can never rank as a masterpiece. But, come, this won't do. Why did you want to get me astride my hobby?"
I thought it advisable to answer this question by asking another, so I said: "But how about Davenport? Will you go?"

"Yes," he replied. "Anything with a Cleopatra to it interests me. I'll go now and see about the tickets," and he left me.

I have related Maitland's aesthetic views as expressed to me upon this occasion, not because they have any particular bearing upon the mystery I am narrating, but because they cast a strong side-light upon the young man's character, and also for the reason that I believe his personality to be sufficiently strong and unique to be of general interest.

We went that same night to see Sardou's "Cleopatra." I asked Maitland how he liked the piece, and the only reply he vouchsafed was: "I have recently read Shakespeare's treatment of the same theme."

CHAPTER II

If events spread themselves out fanwise from the past into the future, then must the occurrences of the present exhibit convergence toward some historical burning-point,--some focal centre whereat the potential was warmed into the kinetic.

It was nearly a week after the events last narrated before I saw Maitland again, and then only by chance. We happened to meet in the Parker House, and, as he had some business pertaining to a case he was on, to transact at the Court House, I walked up Beacon Street with him. There is a book or stationery store, on Somerset Street, just before you turn down toward Pemberton Square. As we were passing this store, Maitland espied a large photographic reproduction of some picture.

"Let us cross over and see what it is," he said. We did so. It was a photograph of L. Alma-Tadema's painting of Antony and Cleopatra. Maitland started a little as he read the title, and then said lightly: "Do you suppose, Doc, that woman's mummy is in existence? I should like to find it. I've an idea she left some hieroglyphic message for me on her mummy-case, and doesn't propose to let me rest easy until I find and translate it. Now, if I believed in transmigration of souls--do you see any mark of Antony about me? Say, though, just imagine the spirit of Marcus Antonius in a rubber apron, making an analysis of oleomargarine! But here we are; good-bye," and he left me without awaiting any reply. He seemed to me to be in decidedly better spirits than formerly, and I was at the time at a loss to account for it. The cause of his levity, however, was soon explained, for that night, as Gwen, my sister, and I were sitting cosily in the study according to our usual custom, Maitland walked in, unannounced. He had come now to be a regular visitor, and I invented not a few subterfuges to get him to call even oftener than he otherwise would, for I perceived that his coming gave pleasure to Gwen. She exhibited less depression when in his presence than at any other time. I had learned that hers was one of those deep natures in which grief crystallises slowly, but with an unconquerable persistence. Instead of her forgetting her bereavement, or the sense thereof waxing weaker by time, she seemed to be drifting toward that ever-present consciousness of loss in which the soul feels itself gradually, but surely, sinking under an insupportable burden--a burden so long borne, so well known, that the mind no longer thinks of it. The heart beats solidly under its load, and seems to forget the time when it was not so oppressed. No one knows better than we physicians the danger of this autocracy of grief, and I watched Gwen with a solicitude at times almost bordering on despair. But, as I said before, she always seemed to show more interest in affairs when Maitland was present, and, on the night in question, his abrupt and unexpected entrance surprised her into the betrayal of more pleasure than she would have wished us to note, and, indeed, so quickly did she conceal her confusion that I was the only one who noticed it. Maitland was too busy with the news he brought.

"Well, Miss Darrow," he began at once, "at last your detective has got a clue--not much of a one--but still a clue. I can pick the man for whom we are looking from among a million of his fellows--if I am ever fortunate enough to get the chance."

Somebody has already called attention to the fact that women are more or less curious, and there are well-authenticated cases on record where this inquisitiveness has even extended to things which did not immediately concern themselves; so I have little doubt I shall be believed when I say the women folk were in a fever of expectancy, and besought Maitland with an earnestness quite unnecessary--(it would have required a great deal to have prevented his telling it) to begin at the beginning, and relate the whole thing. He readily acceded to this request, and began by telling them the experiences which I have just narrated. It was, he said, during the last act of Sardou's "Cleopatra" that the idea had suddenly come to him to change the plan of search from the analytical to the synthetical.

"You see," he continued, "I had from the first been trying to find the assassin without knowing the exact way in which the crime was committed. I now determined to ascertain how, under the same circumstances, I could commit such a crime, and leave behind no other evidences of the deed than those which are in our possession. I began to read detective stories, with all the avidity of a Western Union Telegraph messenger, and, of course, read those by Conan Doyle. The assertion of 'Sherlock Holmes' that there is no novelty in crime; that crimes, like history, repeat
Marryat. Marryat.

purpose behind it.

seven. Not so, however, with Messrs. Weltz and Rizzi. The reading of these men at once impressed me as having a 'The Dolly Dialogues,' 'The Yellow Aster,' 'The Superfluous Woman,' and 'Ideala.' This is a fair sample of the other 'Copperfield,' 'The Story of an African Farm,' 'A Study in Scarlet,' 'The Sign of the Four,' 'The Prisoner of Zenda,' I can remember the books in the order in which they were borrowed--'Thelma,' 'Under Two Flags,' 'David Copperfield,' 'The Story of an African Farm,' 'A Study in Scarlet,' 'The Sign of the Four,' 'The Prisoner of Zenda,' 'The Dolly Dialogues,' 'The Yellow Aster,' 'The Superfluous Woman,' and 'Ideala.' This is a fair sample of the other seven. Not so, however, with Messrs. Weltz and Rizzi. The reading of these men at once impressed me as having a purpose behind it.

"I will read you a list of the books taken by Weltz and Rizzi, just to see what you will make out of it:

WELTZ RIZZI

1. 'Lecons de Toxicologic,' 1. 'Traite de Toxicologic,' par M. Orifia. par C. P. Galtier.


that bit of glass. There were two reasons for it. The house had been primed that day and there were two smutches of
under my microscope and laid beside it the piece of glass which, you will perhaps remember, I cut from a window of
and I hastened home with the whole lot. You may imagine with what interest I put the page I wished to examine
books home with me, if only for a day, explaining to him the vital importance of my request. He readily consented
microscope bore me out, I would be able to stake my life that the murderer of John Darrow had read that book. I was
discovered something that fairly took my breath away. I was not sure that I was right, but I knew that, if my
Happily the books I had been consulting were still on the table. I picked out those borrowed under the names of
indeed, that I gave up an engagement I had for the evening and decided to camp right there until the Library closed.
was collecting the slips I re-examined the list of books taken by Weltz and Rizzi, especially those which had been
taken by both men. One thing at once struck my attention, and that was that most of these latter were large books
which would take a long time to peruse and would require to be borrowed several times for hall use, were they to be
examined with any care. I put this fact down for future reference and gave my attention to the green slips, the whole
which they had procured their books, and I accordingly asked the attendant to kindly let me look at them. While she
was collecting the slips I re-examined the list of books taken by Weltz and Rizzi, especially those which had been
taken by both men. One thing at once struck my attention, and that was that most of these latter were large books
which would take a long time to peruse and would require to be borrowed several times for hall use, were they to be
examined with any care. I put this fact down for future reference and gave my attention to the green slips, the whole
twenty of which the attendant now placed before me. The residence of Weltz was given as No. 15 Staniford Place,
ascertaining where they lived as a preparatory step toward learning more of them, I consulted a Boston directory,
only to learn that it contained no such names. I was about to examine some of the directories of neighbouring towns
when it occurred to me that the easiest way to find their places of residence would be to consult the green slips upon
which they had procured their books, and I accordingly asked the attendant to kindly let me look at them. While she
was collecting the slips I re-examined the list of books taken by Weltz and Rizzi, especially those which had been
taken by both men. One thing at once struck my attention, and that was that most of these latter were large books
which would take a long time to peruse and would require to be borrowed several times for hall use, were they to be
examined with any care. I put this fact down for future reference and gave my attention to the green slips, the whole
twenty of which the attendant now placed before me. The residence of Weltz was given as No. 15 Staniford Place,
Boston, while that of Rizzi was No. 5 Oak Street, Boston. I was about to walk over to Oak Street to see if Rizzi were
still there when, in returning the slips to the attendant, I noticed a peculiarity in Weltz's 'z' which I had thought I had
seen in Rizzi's signature. I immediately compared the slips. There was the same oddly shaped 'z' in both. It was
made like this"--and he handed us a slip of paper with this z* upon it.

"You see," he continued, "it is so unusual a way of making the letter that it at once attracted my attention,
notwithstanding the fact that Rizzi wrote with his left hand. Closer examination revealed other peculiarities, as in the
r*'s, common to both hands. Well, to make a long story short, I satisfied myself that the same person wrote the
whole twenty slips and was, moreover, ambidextrous. This I considered as a very promising discovery, so much so,
indeed, that I gave up an engagement I had for the evening and decided to camp right there until the Library closed.
Happily the books I had been consulting were still on the table. I picked out those borrowed under the names of
Weltz and Rizzi, and began a most careful examination of them. I had been working about two hours when I
discovered something that fairly took my breath away. I was not sure that I was right, but I knew that, if my
microscope bore me out, I would be able to stake my life that the murderer of John Darrow had read that book. I was
aware, however, that even then I should not be able to name the man who had put his mark upon the book, but I
could take oath that the record was made by the same hand that committed the murder.

transcriber's note: the symbols designated z* and r* are shown as script which is not reproducible here.
paint upon the glass and two almost identical smutches upon the sill. One was a sinuous line, as if the glass had been
struck with a short bit of rope,—or possibly rubber tubing since no rope-like texture was visible,—which had
previously been soiled with the paint from the sill. The other mark was that of a human thumb. I had seen at the
World's Fair an exhibit of these thumbmarks collected by a Frenchman who has made an exhaustive study of the
subject, and had learned there for the first time that no two thumbs in the world can make the same mark. I knew,
therefore, that this slip of glass would at any time tell me whether or not a suspected man were guilty. I had not
failed to get the thumb-marks of the men who painted the house on that day, as well as those of every other person
known to be about the place. The marks upon the glass could not, by any possibility, have been made by any of
them. The deduction was inevitable. They were made by the man who stood by the window when the murder was
committed.

"You will be surprised when I tell you it was some moments before I could summon up courage to look through
my microscope upon the page beneath it. You see, I had been seized by an unaccountable conviction that I had at
last found a real clue to the murderer, and I dreaded lest the first glance should show this to have been an idle
delusion. At length I looked. The thumb that had pressed the paper was the thumb that had pressed the glass! There
was not a doubt of it. My suspicions were confirmed. Everything now regarding this book was of immense
importance. The page upon which the mark was found,—well, I think you would open your eyes if I were to read it to
you. I will defer this pleasure, however, till I see if my suspicions are correct. The thumb-mark is upon page 469 of
'Poisons, Their Effects and Detection,' by Alexander Wynter Blyth.

"No sooner had I made sure of my discovery than I set out for No. 5 Oak Street, the address given by Rizzi.
There was no such person there, nor had there been anyone of that name in the house during the three years of the
present tenant's occupancy. I went to 15 Staniford Place with the same result. A young woman about twenty-five
years of age came to the door. She informed me that she had been born in the house and had always lived there. She
had never known anyone by the name of Weltz. This was just what I had expected. The man for whom we are
searching is shrewd almost beyond belief, and if we succeed in finding him it will not, we may be assured, be the
result of any bungling on his part.

"I have now told you all I have learned, or rather all that is sufficiently definite to communicate—-it is not much,
yet it is a clue and may serve to give our hope a new lease of life. What do you think of it, Miss Darrow?"

"I think what you have learned," Gwen replied, "will be of the utmost importance. You have now something
definite to guide you. I am most fortunate in having the services of such a detective, --indeed, I am at a loss to know
how to thank you for all you have done,--for all you are doing, I--"

"My dear Miss Darrow," Maitland interrupted, "I need no thanks. Be assured I am selfish in all I do. It is a
pleasure to me, therefore I do it. You see I deserve no credit. If I am able to free you from the danger of sacrificing
yourself, I shall be more than repaid."

Gwen made no reply, but I, sitting as I did close beside her, saw the moisture gather between her drooping lids.
Maitland took his leave almost immediately, having, he said, a long evening's work before him; while Gwen, Alice,
and I discussed the news he had brought us, until far into the night. I did not see him the next day, which was
Tuesday, and I believe not on Wednesday. It was Thursday afternoon, if I do not mistake, that he sent me a note
asking me to call on him at his office. I went at once, thinking it might be something very important. I found him
alone and waiting for me.

"I wanted," he began as soon as I was seated, "to talk this matter over with you. You see the great difficulty
which besets me in this case is that nearly all our evidence, while it is of a nature to enable us to convict our man
once he have him, is yet of almost no assistance to us in finding him. What do we know of him up to date; or at
least of what do we feel reasonably assured? Let us see. John Darrow was poisoned in some mysterious way by a
man who was stationed just outside the partly opened window. The weapon, or whatever was used as such, was
taken away by the murderer. Nothing in the nature of a projectile could have been employed, since the wound was
upon a part of the victim's throat known to have been turned away from the window and to have been completely
shielded upon that side by the high and massive back of the chair in which the victim sat.

"He was fully eight feet from the casement, so that the assassin could not have reached in and struck him. There
were no footprints by the window, as the assassin had strapped small boards upon his feet. It is most likely,
therefore, that he has some peculiarity about his feet which he thought best to conceal. He is about five feet five
inches tall, weighs about one hundred and thirty-five pounds, and steps three or four inches longer when the right
foot is thrown forward than he does when the left foot leads. We have a cast of the assassin's hand showing
unmistakable evidence of the habit of biting the nails, with the exception of that of the little finger, which nail, by
the way, is abnormally long, and could only have been spared for some special reason. The murderer is most likely a
foreigner. His handwriting would indicate this even if we did not know, from the books he read, how conversant he
is with at least one foreign tongue. Again, he has some decided interest in the subject of cancers and, perhaps, some
interest in legerdemain, if we may judge from his perusal of Robert Houdin's book.

"There are one or two things I have learned, but this, so far as any present effect is concerned, is about all
we know, and it doesn't seem to make the conduct of our search a very easy matter. We have clearly to deal with a
man who is possessed not merely of low criminal cunning, but, I have reason to believe, with one who has education
and culture, and, if anything can be judged from handwriting, rare strength of character as well. If we could only
find some motive! No one but a maniac would do such a deed without a motive, yet we can't find one. A maniac! By
Jove! I hadn't thought of that. What do you think of the idea? 'Though this be madness, yet there is method in't,' eh?"

I told him that the maniac theory did not appeal to me very strongly. "Madness, to be sure, is often exceedingly
cunning," I said, "but it is hardly capable of such sustained masterfulness as our criminal has evinced."

"Look here, Doc," Maitland said, breaking out suddenly, "I've an idea. Might not this fellow's interest in cancers
be due to his having one himself? Suppose you make a canvass of the specialists on cancer in Boston and vicinity,
and see if any of them remember being consulted by a patient answering the description with which I will provide
you. In addition to this I will insert an ad in the papers calling attention to a new method for the cure of cancer, and
asking all interested to call at your office for further particulars. The plan does not promise much, still it may bring
him. What do you say?"

I expressed my willingness to do all in my power to aid him, and he left me. The next morning's papers
contained the advertisement and I had several calls in answer to it. These would have caused me much
inconvenience had I not explained the whole ruse in confidence to a medical friend who made a specialty of the
treatment of cancers, and persuaded him to come to my office during the hours specified in the advertisement. When
a patient would call I would satisfy myself that it was neither the person we were searching for, nor anyone sent by
him to make inquiries, and then turn him over to my colleague, Dr. Rhodes. It would never have occurred to me to
interest myself in any patient who did not answer the description given me by Maitland, had he not especially
cautioned me in this regard.

"We have," he said, "to deal with a man possessed of ability of no common order. We have already seen that he
never runs a risk, however slight, which he can avoid. It is more than likely, therefore, if our advertisement meets his
eye and interests him, he will inquire into it through some second party. Again, we are by no means certain that his
interest in cancers is a purely personal one. Perhaps it is a wife, a sister, or some other relative who is afflicted. In
this case we could hardly expect him to come himself. Let me caution you, therefore, to closely scrutinise all
applicants and question them until you are satisfied they are in nowise connected with the man for whom we are
searching."

I followed this advice most carefully and had no difficulty in convincing myself that none of my callers had any
relation whatsoever with the murderer of John Darrow. This order of things was continued for several days with the
same result. In the meantime Maitland was working upon a new clue he had discovered. He would tell me all about
it, he said, when he had followed it to the end. This was on Tuesday. On Friday he came to the house and informed
us that he had met a man who had known a M. Henri Cazot, a Frenchman whose description seemed to tally
perfectly with nearly all we knew of Mr. Darrow's murderer.

"It came about in this way," Maitland began in response to Gwen's request that he should tell us all about it: "I
determined to thoroughly search every book on the 'Welz-Rizzi' list, to see if I might not get some additional clue.
In the work by Robert Houdin entitled 'TheSharper Detected and Exposed' I found the statement that gamblers often
neutralised a cut in a pack of cards by a rapid and dexterous sleight. This, the book went on to say, was
accomplished in the following manner: When the cards are cut and left in two packets upon the table, the sharper
picks up with his right hand the parcel of cards which was originally at the bottom of the pack. This is brought above
the other packet, as in an honest cut, but, just before releasing the cards, the lower parcel is deftly tilted up by
inserting the right little finger under it, and the upper packet quickly slid beneath it, leaving the cards in precisely the
position they occupied before cutting; For this purpose, the book continued, the nail of the right little finger is worn
very long, so as to facilitate its being thrust beneath a packet of cards. Here, I said to myself, is a possible
explanation of one of the peculiarities of my plaster cast. The long nail on the left little finger may have served its
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promptly responded to my inquiries: 'Gad! that's Henri Cazot fast enough, in all but the height and gait. Dick there, he'll tell you all about him. He owes him a little debt of honour of about a hundred plunks. He gave him his note for it, and Dick carries it around with him, not because he thinks he'll ever get it, but he likes the writing. M. Henri Cazot! eh, Dick?' and he burst into a coarse laugh. I turned to Dick for further information. He had already produced a much-crumpled paper and was smoothing it out upon the table.

"There's the article,' he said, bringing his hand down emphatically upon it. 'The cuss was hard up. Luck had gone agin him and he had lost every cent he had. Jem Macey was a dealer and Cazot didn't seem to grasp that fact, but kept bettin' heavy. You see, young feller, ye ain't over likely to win at cards when yer playin' agin the dealer. Cazot didn't know this and I wouldn't tell him, for he was rather fly with the cards himself when he wasn't watched too close. Well, he struck me for a loan; said his little girl was hungry and he hadn't a cent to buy bread. Gad, but he looked wild though! I always thought he was more'n half loony. Well, as I had helped to fleece him I lent him a hundred and took this here note. That's the last I ever see of M. Henri Cazot,' and he handed the paper to me. I glanced at the signature. It was the same hand that had written 'Weltz' and 'Rizzi' upon the library slips. There was that unmistakable z and the peculiar r which had just attracted my attention! It required considerable effort on my part to so restrain my feelings as not to appear especially interested in what I had learned. I think, however, I succeeded, as they freely answered my questions regarding Cazot and the daughter of whom he had spoken. They knew nothing further, they said, than what they had told me.

"It was a year ago come next month that I lent him the money,' my informant continued. He pocketed it, hurried out, and that is the last I have ever seen or heard of him. Shouldn't wonder if he'd blown his brains out long ago. He used to have a mighty desperate look at times. He was one of them Monte Carlo fellers, I reckon.'

"That's all I have been able to learn thus far. It isn't very much, but it shows we are on the right track. By the way, Doc, I'm going to change that ad to-morrow, offering treatment by letter. Perhaps our man is too shy to apply in person. At all events we'll give the other method a trial."

CHAPTER III

When we least expect it the Ideal meets us in the street of the Commonplace and locks arms with us. Nevermore shall we choose our paths uninfluenced. A new heaven has entered our personality to dominate and direct it.

The new advertisement duly appeared and on the next day, which was Wednesday--I remember it because it was my hospital day--I received several written answers, and among them, one in which I felt confident I recognised the peculiar z*'s and r*'s of Weltz and Rizzi.

I took it at once to Maitland. He glanced at it a moment and then impulsively grasped my hand. "By Jove, Doc!" he exclaimed, "if this crafty fox doesn't scent the hound, we shall soon run him to earth. You see he has given no address and signs a new name. We are to write to Carl Cazenove, General Delivery, Boston. Good! we will do so at once, and I will then arrange with the postal authorities to notify me when they deliver the letter. Of course this will necessitate a continuous watch, perhaps for several days, of the general delivery window. It is hardly likely our crafty friend will himself call for the letter, so it will be imperative that someone be constantly on hand to shadow whomsoever he may send as a substitute. May I depend on your assistance in this matter?"

"I will stand by you till we see the thing through," I said, "though I have to live in the Post Office a month."

Well, I wrote and mailed the decoy letter and Maitland explained the situation to the postal authorities, who furnished us a comfortable place inside and near the general delivery window. They promised to notify us when anyone called for our letter. Our vigil was not a very long one. On Thursday afternoon the postal clerk signalled to us that Carl Cazenove's mail had been asked for, and, whilst he was consuming as much time as possible in finding our letter, Maitland and I quietly stepped out into the corridor. The sight that met our gaze was one for which we had not been at all prepared. There at the window stood a beautiful young girl just on the verge of womanhood. Her frank blue eyes met mine with the utmost candour as I passed by her so that she should be between Maitland and me, and thus unable to elude us, whichever way she turned upon leaving the window. We had previously planned how we should shadow our quarry, one on each side of the street in order not to attract attention, but these tactics seemed to be entirely unnecessary, for the young lady did not have the slightest suspicion that anyone could be in the least interested in her movements. She walked leisurely along, stopping now occasionally to gaze at the shop windows and never once turning to look back. She did not even conceal the letter, but held it in her hand with her porte-monnaie, and I could see that the address was uppermost. A strange sensation came over me as I dogged her steps. I felt as an assassin must feel who tracks his victim into some lonely spot where he may dare to strike him. It was useless for me to tell myself that I was on the side of justice and engaged in an honourable errand. A single glance at the girl's delicate face, as frank and open as the morning light, brought the hot blush of shame to my cheek. In following her I dimly felt that, in some way, I was seeking to associate her with evil, which seemed little less than sacrilege. I could do nothing, however, but keep on, so I followed her through Devonshire Street, to New Washington and thence down Hanover Street almost to the ferry. Here she turned into an alleyway and, waiting for
Maitland to come up, we both saw her enter a house at its farther end.

George glanced hastily up at the house and then said, as he seized me impatiently by the arm: "It's a tenement house; come on, the chase is not up yet; we, too, must go in!"

So in we went. The young lady had disappeared, but as we entered we heard a door close on the floor above, and felt sure we knew where she had gone. We mounted the stairs as noiselessly as possible and listened in the hall. We could distinguish a woman's voice and occasionally that of a man, but we could not hear what passed between them. On our right there was a door partly ajar. Maitland pushed it open, and looked in. The room was empty and unfurnished, with the exception of a dilapidated stove which stood against the partition separating this room from the one the young lady had entered. Maitland beckoned to me and I followed him into the room. There was a key on the inside of the door which he noiselessly turned in the lock. He then began to investigate the premises. Three other rooms communicated with the one of which we had taken possession, forming, evidently, a suite which had been let for housekeeping. Everything was in ill-repair, as is the case with most of the cheap tenements in this locality. The previous tenant had not thought it necessary to clean the apartments when quitting them,—for altruism does not flourish at the North End,—but had been content to leave all the dirt for the next occupant.

When we had finished reconnoitering we returned to the room we first entered, which apparently was the kitchen. We could still hear the voices, but not distinctly. "Do you stay here, Doc," whispered Maitland, "while I get into some old clothes and hunt up the landlord of this place. I'm going to rent these rooms long enough to acquaint myself with my neighbours on the other side of the wall. I'll be back soon. Don't let any man leave that room without your knowing where he goes." With this he left me and I soon found a way to busy myself in his absence. In the wall above the stove, where the pipe passed through the partition into our neighbour's apartment, there was a chink large enough to permit me, when mounted upon the stove, to overlook the greater part of the adjacent room. I availed myself of this privilege, though not without those same twinges of conscience which I had felt some minutes before when following the young lady. The apartment was poorly furnished, and yet, despite this scantiness of appointment, there was unmistakable evidence of refinement. Everything visible in the room was scrupulously neat and the few pictures that adorned the walls, while they were inexpensive half-tones, were yet reproductions of masterpieces. In the centre of the room stood a small, deal table, on the opposite side of which sat the man who had answered my letter.

At one end of the table, poised upon a back of a chair, sat a small Capucin monkey of the Weeper or Sai species. He watched the man with that sober, judicial air which is by no means confined exclusively to supreme benches. I, too, observed the man carefully. He was tall and spare. He must have measured nearly six feet in height and could not, I think, have weighed over one hundred and fifty pounds. His face was pinched and careworn, but this effect was more than redeemed by a pair of full, black eyes having a depth and penetration I have never seen equalled, albeit there was, ever and anon, a suggestion of wildness which somewhat marred their deep, contemplative beauty. The brows and the carriage of the head at once bespoke the scholar. While thus I watched him, the young girl came from a corner of the room I could not overlook and laid my letter before him. She stood behind his chair as he opened it, smoothing his hair caressingly and, every now and then, kissing him gently. He paused with the open letter before him, reached up both arms, drew her down to him, kissed her passionately, sighed, and picked up the letter again. I took pains that no act, word, or look should escape me. This show of affection surprised me, and I remember the thought flashed through my mind, "What inconsistent beings we all are! Here is a man apparently capable of a causeless and cold-blooded assassination of a harmless old man. You would say such a murderer must be hopelessly selfish and brutal, amenable to none of the better sentiments of mankind, and yet it needs but a casual glance to see how his whole life is bound up in the young girl before him."

While this was passing through my mind the man had glanced through my letter and thrown it upon the table with an exclamation of disgust. "Bah! he has had the effrontery," he said petulantly, "to send me what he calls a new mode of treatment and it is in every essential that of Broadbent, well known for more than a quarter of a century. New indeed! I shall never find a doctor who has any scientific acumen. I may as well abandon the search now. Mon Dieu! and they call medicine a science! Bah!" and with a frown he dropped his head despondently upon his hand. The young girl passed her hand gently, soothingly, over his forehead and did not speak for nearly a minute.

"You are not feeling well to-night, father," she said at length. "M. Godin has been here during my absence."

"M. Godin!" I exclaimed half aloud, catching at the stovepipe lest I should fall from the stove. "So our rival is hot upon the scent,—probably even ahead of us. How on earth—" But I did not finish the exclamation. My seizure of the pipe upon my side of the partition had produced an audible vibration of that portion extending over the heads of my neighbours. The young girl's quick ear had detected the sound and she had ceased speaking and fastened her eyes suspiciously upon the aperture through which I was gazing. It seemed to me as if she must see me, yet I dared not move. After a little she seemed reassured and continued: "I knew he had been here. You are always this way after his visits. Why, of late, does he always come when I am away?" The question seemed innocent enough, yet the
man to whom it was addressed turned crimson and then as pale as ashes. When he spoke the effort his self-control cost him was terribly apparent.

"We have private business, dear," he said, "private business." He hesitated a moment and again his eyes wore the wild look I had first noticed. "I am selling him something," he continued, "very dear to me--as dear as my heart's blood, and I expect to get enough for it to guard you from want."

"And you, father?" the young girl questioned fervently. I thought I noticed a tremor run through his frame, as drawing her face down to his, he said, kissing her, "Me? Never mind me, Puss; this cancer here will take care of me."

She made no reply, but turned away to hide the tears that sprang to her eyes. As she did so she raised her face toward me. I have never been considered particularly sympathetic,—that is, no more than the average,—but there was something in the expression of her face that went to my heart like a knife. I felt as if I were about to sob with her. I do not know what it was that so aroused my sympathies. We are, I fancy, more apt to feel for those whose beauty is like to the ideals we have learned to love, than we are to be moved by the suffering of those whose looks repel us,—and this may have had something to do with my condition,—for the young girl was radiantly beautiful,—yet it could hardly have been the real cause of it.

So rapt was I in the sympathetic contemplation of her that I did not see Maitland's entrance or realise I was observed till he plucked me by the coat and motioned me to get down. I did so and he told me he had rented the rooms, and laid before me the plan he meant to pursue.

As soon as he had ceased speaking I said to him: "George, you are undoubtedly on the right track. The man in there is the one we are looking for, fast enough, but I am afraid we are a bit too late."

"Too late!" he exclaimed in a tone that I feared might be overheard. "What the mischief do you mean?"

"I mean," I replied, "that M. Godin is already upon the scene."

In the next ten seconds Maitland turned all colours and I edged nearer to him, expecting him to fall, but he did not.

"M. Godin!" he ejaculated at length. "How in the name of all the gods at once--Doc, he's all they claim for him, and as fascinating as he is clever;" at which last remark a heavy cloud passed over Maitland's face. "Come," he continued listlessly, "you may as well tell me all you know about it."

I then confided to him what I had heard and ended by asking him what he proposed to do.

"Do?" he replied. "There is but one thing I can do, which makes the choice decidedly easy," and he set his jaws together with a determined expression, the meaning of which I knew full well.

"I shall camp right here," he said, "till I learn all I wish to know of our neighbours yonder. I have already provided myself with instruments which will enable me to note every movement they make, indeed to photograph them, if necessary, and to hear and record every word they utter. You look surprised, but it is easily done. I will place my lenses there at the chink through which you were gazing and bring the image down into my camera obscura by a prism arranged for total internal reflection. As for the hearing, that is easier yet. I will carefully work away the plaster on this side to-night till I get through to the paper covering their wall. This I will leave intact to use as a diaphragm. I have then only to fasten my carbon to it, and, behold, we have a microphone or telephone—whichever you choose to call it. All I have to look out for is that I get it high enough to avoid the danger of the paper being accidentally broken from the other side, and that I work quietly while removing the plaster. I shall, of course, cover it with a bit of black felt to prevent our light from showing, and to deaden any sounds from this side. This will enable us to hear all that goes on in the other room, but this may not be enough. We may need a phonographic record of what transpires.

"The device whereby I secure this at such a distance is an invention of my own which, for patent reasons—I might almost say 'patent patent reasons'—I will ask you to kindly keep to yourself. To the diaphragm there I fasten this bit of burnished silver. Upon this I concentrate a pencil of light which, when reflected, acts photographically upon a sensitised moving tape in this little box, and perfectly registers the minutest movement of the receiving diaphragm. How I develop, etch, and reproduce this record, and transform it into a record of the ordinary type, you will see in due time—and will kindly keep secret for the present. You had better go now and send me the things on this list, as soon as possible," and he passed me a paper, continuing:

"We will not despair yet. Our clever rival may not be ready to prove his case so quickly as we. At all events, when he comes again I shall be in a condition to ascertain how far he has progressed. I have some things I must settle before I can ask for an arrest, and I am not at all sure that M. Godin is in any better condition in this regard than I am. By Jove! I'd give something to know how that wizard has gotten so far without so much as a single sign to indicate that he had even moved in the matter. I say, Doc, it beats me, blessed if it doesn't! Please say to Miss Darrow that I am at work upon a promising clue—promising for someone, anyway—and may not see her for some time yet."
I did as he requested, and, if I am any judge of feminine indications, my message did not yield Gwen unmixed pleasure; still, she said nothing to warrant such a supposition on my part. I visited Maitland every day to learn what he might wish me to bring him, and also to carry him his mail, for he had determined to remain constantly on the watch at his new quarters.

I have thus far, in the narration of these incidents been perfectly candid both as regards my friends and myself, and, therefore, that I may continue in like manner to the end, I shall suppress certain qualms which are urging me to silence, and confess myself guilty of some things of which you will, perhaps, think I may well be ashamed. Be that as it may, you shall have the whole truth, however it may affect your opinion of me. One reason why I went to Maitland's new quarters so often, and stayed there so long, was because I was always permitted to relieve him of his watch. With a telephone receiver strapped to my right ear, and my eyes fastened upon the screen of the camera obscura, I would sit by the hour prying into the affairs of the two people in the next room. I tried for a number of days to ease my conscience by telling myself that I was labouring in the cause of justice, and was not a common eavesdropper. This permitted me to retain a sort of quasi self-respect for a day or two till my honesty rallied itself, and forced me to realise and to admit that I was, to all intents and purposes, a common Paul Pry, performing a disreputable act for the gratification it gave me. I determined I would at least be honest with myself--and this was my verdict. You will, perhaps, fancy that when I arrived at this decision I at once mended my ways and resigned my seat of observation to Maitland's entirely professional care. This, doubtless, I should have done, if we fallible human beings governed our conduct by our knowledge of what is right and proper. Inasmuch, however, as desires and emotions are the determining factors of human conduct, I did nothing of the sort. I simply watched there day after day, with ever-increasing avidity, until at length I got to be impatient of the duties that took me away, and more than half inclined to neglect them.

I shall gain nothing by attempting to make you believe it was the man in the neighbouring room that interested me, so I shall not essay it. I confess, with a feeling of guilt because I am not more ashamed of it--that it was the young lady who attracted me. You will, I trust, assume I had enough interest in her father to palliate my conduct in a measure. Be generous in your judgment. How do you know you will not be in the same predicament? Think of it! A young woman beautiful beyond my feeble powers of description; her eyes of a heavenly blue; her luxuriant hair like a mass of spun gold; her complexion matched to the tint and transparency of the blush rose--and such a throat! From a voice as musical as the unguided waters when Winter rushes down the hills in search of Spring. Never you mind, that's the way I felt about it, and, if you had been in my place, you'd have been just as bad as I; come, now, you know you would. Suppose I was a bachelor, and almost old enough to be her father. Does that help matters any? Is the heart less hungry because it has been starved? Just look at your history. When nuns have relapsed from other-worldliness to this-worldliness how have they been? I'll tell you. They have been just a round baker's dozen times worse than they would have been if they had never undertaken to cheat Nature. Look at the thing fairly. I don't expect to dodge any blame that I deserve, yet I do want all the palliating circumstances duly noted. Many months have passed since then, and yet the thought of that sweet girl sends a thrill all over me. I wonder where she is now? I feel that we shall meet again some time, and perhaps you will see her yourself. If so, you will see that I couldn't be expected to withstand any such temptation.

On these visits Maitland and I talked but very little, and while I was spying nothing of interest occurred--i. e., nothing of interest to him--or, if it did, things of interest to me prevented my observing it. On several occasions he alluded vaguely to things he had learned which he said he should not divulge even to me until the proper time came.

Things went on in this way for about two weeks. I visited Maitland daily, and daily the little lady in the next room wove her spell around me. If, as I am inclined to believe, thinking a great deal of a person is much the same thing as thinking of a person a great deal, I must have adored her.

One night, about a fortnight after Maitland's change of abode, I found Alice in a terrible state of excitement upon my arrival home. She met me at the door, and said Gwen needed my attention at once. I did not stop to hear further particulars, but hastened to the sitting-room, where Gwen lay upon the lounge. She was in a stupor from which it seemed impossible to arouse her. In vain I tried to attract her attention. Her fixed, staring eyes looked through me as if I had been glass. I saw she had received a severe shock, and so, after giving her some medicine, I took Alice aside and asked her what had happened. She said that Gwen and she had been sitting sewing by the window all the afternoon, and talking about Maitland's recent discoveries. At about five o'clock the Evening Herald was brought in as usual. She, Alice, had picked it up to glance over the news, when, in the column headed "Latest," she had seen the heading: 'The Darrow Mystery Solved!' This she had read aloud, without thinking of the shock the unexpected announcement might give Gwen, when the sudden pallor that had overspread the young woman's face had brought her to her senses, and she had paused. Her companion, however, had seized the paper when she had hesitated and, in a fever of excitement, had read in a half-audible voice:

John Darrow was murdered. --The assassin's inability to pay a gambling debt the motive for the crime. --
Extraordinary work of a French detective!--The net--

But at this juncture the paper had dropped from Gwen's hands, and she had fallen upon the floor before Alice could reach her.

THE EPISODE OF THE TELLTALE THUMB

CHAPTER I

When Disaster is bigger than its victim its bolt o'erlaps the innocent.

It was some time after Gwen had fallen before Alice had succeeded in getting her upon the lounge, and then all her efforts to revive her had failed. She had remained in the same nerveless stupor as that in which I had found her. I asked Alice if she knew why this announcement had produced such an effect upon Gwen, and she returned my question with a look of amazement.

"Have you forgotten Gwen's promise to her father in this matter?" she replied. "Has she not already told you that she should keep that promise, whatever the sacrifice cost her? She is, therefore, entirely at the mercy of this M. Godin, and she is also obliged to advise him of this fact, if she would carry out her father's wishes. Is this nothing for a sensitive nature like hers? If she has any love for anyone else she must crush it out of her heart, for she is M. Godin's now. Surely, Ned, you are not so stupid as your question would indicate."

"We won't discuss that," I rejoined. "Let us go to Gwen and get her to bed."

This done, and the sufferer made easy for the night, I glanced at the article which had so upset her, and read its sensational "scare-head." In full it ran as follows:

THE DARROW MYSTERY SOLVED! JOHN DARROW WAS MURDERED!

The Assassin's Inability to Pay a Gambling Debt the Motive for the Crime.

EXTRAORDINARY WORK OF A FRENCH DETECTIVE!

The Net so Completely Woven About the Alleged Assassin That it is Thought He Will Confess.

The Arrest Entirely Due to the Unassisted Efforts of M. LOUIS GODIN!

I did not stop to read the article, but seized my hat and hastened at once to Maitland.

A copy of the Herald lay upon his table, advising me that he was already acquainted with the strange turn affairs had taken. He told me that he had heard the newsboys in the street calling out "The Darrow Mystery Solved!" and had at once rushed out and bought a paper.

I informed him of Gwen's condition and he wished to go to her at once, but I told him he must wait until the morrow, as she had already retired, and was, I had reason to hope, fast asleep. I reassured him with the information that a night's sleep and the medicine I had given her would probably put Gwen in full possession of her faculties. Having thus satisfied his fears, I thought it fitting he should satisfy mine. I asked him what had become of the young woman in the next room. He did not reply, but quietly led me into his camera obscura that I might see for myself.

She was sitting at the table in the centre of the room, with her face buried in her hands. I watched her for a long time, and the only movement I could discern was that occasioned ever and anon by a convulsive catching of her breath. The pet monkey was nowhere to be seen.

"They took her father away early this morning," Maitland said, "and, after the first shock, she sank into this condition. She has not moved since. When I see the despair her father's arrest has occasioned I am almost tempted to rejoice that I had no hand in it, and yet--well, there's no great harm without some small good--no one will say now that John Darrow took his own life, eh? What do you think our friends, Osborne and Allen, will say now? They were so sure their theory was the only tenable one. Ah, well! we should ever hold ourselves in readiness for surprises."

"And for emergencies too," I continued; "and this strikes me as being very like one. That young woman needs attention, if I am any judge of appearances, and I'm going in there."

"No use, Doc," Maitland replied, "the door is locked, and she either cannot or will not open it. I knocked there for an hour, hoping to be able to comfort her. It's no use for you to try, she won't open the door."

"Won't, eh! then I'll go through it!" I exclaimed, in a tone that so amazed Maitland that he seized me by the shoulders and gazed fixedly into my face. "It's all right, George," I said, answering his look. "I'm going in there, and I'm not going to be all delicate about my entrance either."

He looked at me a little doubtfully, but I could see that, on the whole, he was pleased with my decision. I went into the hall and knocked loudly on the door. There was no response. I kicked it till I must have been heard all over the house, but still there was no response. It was now clear I should not enter by invitation, so I went up four or five stairs of the flight opposite the door and from that position sprang against it. I am not, if you remember, a heavy man, but momentum is MV and I made up in the 'V' what I lacked in the 'M.' The door opened inwardly, and I tore it from its hinges and precipitated both myself and it into the centre of the apartment. As I look back upon this incident I regard it as the most precipitous thing I ever did in the way of a professional visit. If the young lady started at all, she did so before I had gathered myself together sufficiently to notice it. I spoke to her, but she gave no evidence of hearing me. I raised her head. Her eyes were wide open and stared full at me, yet in such a blank way that I knew she did not hear me. The contraction of the brows, the knotted appearance of the forehead, and the rigor of the face
told me she was under an all-but-breaking tension. There were tear-stains from tears which long since had ceased to flow. The fire of fever had dried them up. I regarded her case as far more desperate than Gwen's and determined to lose no time in taking charge of it. It seemed to me so like sacrilege to touch her without an explanation that, though I knew she could not understand me, I said to her, as I took her in my arms. "You are ill, and I must take you away from here."

She was just blossoming into womanhood and her form had that exquisite roundness and grace which it is the particular function of fashion to annihilate. If I held her closely, I think all bachelors will agree that it was because this very roundness made her heavy; if I did not put her down immediately I reached Maitland's room, it is because, as a doctor of medicine, I have my own ideas as to how a couch should be fixed before a patient is laid upon it. Maitland may say what he pleases, but I know how important these things are in sickness, and you know, quick as he is in most things, George has moments when his head is so much in the clouds that he doesn't know what he is doing, and moves as if he were in a dream set to dirge music. He kept telling me to "put her on the couch! --put her on the couch!" To this day, he fondly believes that when I finally did release her, it was as the result of his advice, rather than because he had at last made a suitable bed for her.

I sent Maitland for some medicine, which I knew would relax the tension she was under and make it possible for her to sleep. When I had administered this, Maitland and I talked the matter over and we decided to take her at once to my house, where, with Gwen, she could share the watchful care of my sister Alice. This we did, though I was not without some misgivings as to Gwen's attitude in the matter when she should recover sufficiently to know of it. I expressed my doubts to Maitland and he replied: "Give yourself no uneasiness on that score; Miss Darrow is too womanly to visit the sins of a guilty father upon an unoffending daughter, and, besides, this man,--it seems that his real name is Latour, not Cazenove,-- has a right to be judged innocent until his guilt is proved."

I found this to be sage counsel, for, when Gwen was able to understand what I had done, she exhibited no antipathy toward the new member of our household, but, on the contrary, became exceedingly interested in her. I was especially glad of this, not only on account of Miss Latour, the suspect's daughter, but also because the one thing Gwen needed above all others was something to challenge her interest. She had again relapsed into the old, state of passive endurance, wherein nothing seemed to reach her consciousness. Her actions appeared to flow more from her nerve-centres than from her mind. She moved like an automaton. There is scarcely any condition of which I am more fearful than this. The patient becomes wax in one's hands. She will do anything without a murmur, or as willingly refrain from anything. She simply is indifferent to life and all that therein is. Is it any wonder, then, that I rejoiced to see Gwen interest herself in poor Jeannette? It was a long time, however, before Jeannette repaid this interest with anything more than a dreamy, far-off gaze, that refused to focus itself upon anything. As time wore on, however, I noticed with relief that there was a faint expression of wonder in her look, and, as this grew stronger, I knew she was beginning to realise her novel surroundings and to ask herself if she were still dreaming. Yet she did not speak; she seemed to fear the sound of her own voice and to determine to solve, unaided, the mystery confronting her. I requested that no one question her or make any attempt to induce her to break silence, for I knew the time would come when she would do so of her own free will. As it happened, her first words were spoken to me, and, as my writing this recalls the event, a thrill of pleasurable pain passes through me. You may think this foolish, the more so, indeed, when you learn that nothing was said to warrant such a feeling, but I must urge upon you not to let your satisfied heart set itself up as judge in bachelor regions.

I had been mixing some medicine for her and was holding the cup to her lips that she might drink the draught. She laid her hand upon my wrist and gently put the cup aside, saying, as she gazed thoughtfully at me: "Did you not bring me here?" "Yes," I replied. She reached for the cup, and drinking its contents, sank back upon the pillows with a half-satisfied look upon her face, as if my reply had cleared up one mystery, but left many more to be solved.

From this day Jeannette steadily improved, and within two weeks she and Gwen had come to a very good understanding. It was plainly evident that Alice, too, came in for a very good share of the little French girl's love. They did not exchange confidences to any great degree, for, as Maitland used to say, Alice was one of those rare, sweet women who say but little, but seem to act upon all around them by a sort of catalysis, sweetening the atmosphere by their very presence.

CHAPTER II

Belief, though it be as ample as the ocean, does not always similarly swell in crystallising. It has, however, its point of maximum density, but this, not infrequently, is also its point of minimum knowledge.

During all these days Gwen was gaining rapidly. Maitland came to visit us almost every night, and he told Gwen that he did not feel altogether certain that, in arresting M. Latour, the law had secured her father's real assassin. It would be necessary to account for, he told her, some very singular errors in his early calculations if M. Latour was the man.

"When first I took up my abode under the same roof with him," he said, "I had no doubt that we had at last run
down our man. Now, although another detective has come to the same conclusion, I myself have many misgivings,
and you may be assured, Miss Darrow, that I shall lose no time in getting these doubts answered one way or the
other. At present you may say to your friend Jeannette that I am straining every nerve in her father's behalf."

Why all this should so please Gwen I was at a loss to comprehend, but I could not fail to see that it did please her
greatly. She had been the most anxious of us all to see her father's murderer brought to justice, and now, when
through the efforts of M. Godin, a man stood all but convicted of the crime, she was pleased to hear Maitland, whose
efforts to track Latour she had applauded in no equivocal way, say that he should spare no pains to give the suspect
every possible chance to prove his innocence. There was certainly a reason, whatever it might have been, for Gwen's
attitude in this matter, for that young woman was exceptionally rational in all things. Nothing of especial moment
occurred between this time and the beginning of the trial. Maitland, for the most part, kept his own counsel and gave
us little information other than a hint that he still thought there was a chance of clearing M. Latour.

With this end in view he had become an associate attorney with Jenkins in order the better to conduct M.
Latour's case along the lines which seemed to him the most promising. I asked him on one occasion what led him to
entertain a hope that Latour could be cleared and he replied: "A good many things." "Well, then," I rejoined, "what
are some of them?" He hesitated a moment and then replied laughingly: "You see I hate to acknowledge the falsity
of my theories. I said shortly after the murder was committed that I thought the assassin was short and probably did
not weigh over one hundred and thirty-five pounds; that he most likely had some especial reason for concealing his
footprints, and that he had a peculiarity in his gait. I felt tolerably sure then of all this, but now it turns out that M.
Latour is six feet tall in his stockings, and thin; and that, emaciated as he is, he tips the scales at one hundred and
fifty pounds by reason of his large frame. His feet are as commonplace as--as yours, Doc, and his gait as regular as--
mine. Is it to be expected that I am going to give up all my pet illusions without a struggle?"

When the hour for the trial arrived Gwen insisted on accompanying us to the court-room. She had a great deal of
confidence in George and felt sure that, as he expressed a strong doubt of the prisoner's guilt, he would triumph in
proving him innocent. She determined, therefore, to be present at the trial, even before her attendance should be
required as a witness.

M. Latour, when he was led into the prisoner's box, seemed to have aged greatly during his incarceration. It was
with a marked effort that he arose and straightened himself up as the indictment was read to him. When the words:
"Are you guilty or not guilty?" were addressed to him every eye was turned upon him and every ear listened to catch
the first sound of his voice, but no sound came. The question was repeated more loudly, "Are you guilty or not
 guilty?" Like one suddenly awakened from a reverie M. Latour started, turned toward his questioner, and in a full,
firm voice replied: "Guilty!" I was so dumfounded that I could offer Gwen no word of comfort to alleviate this
sudden shock. Maitland and Godin seemed about the only ones in the court-room who were not taken off their feet,
so to speak, by this unexpected plea, and George was at Gwen's side in a moment and whispered something to her
which I could not hear, but which I could see had a very beneficial effect upon her. We had all expected a long,
complicated trial, and here the whole matter was reduced to a mere formality by M. Latour's simple confession,
"Guilty!" Is it any wonder, therefore, that we were taken aback?

While we were recovering from our surprise at this sudden turn of affairs, Maitland was engaged in private
conversation with the Judge, with whom, he afterward told me, he had become well acquainted both in his own
cases and in those of other lawyers requiring his services as an expert chemist. He never told me what passed
between them, nor the substance of any of the brief interviews which followed with the prosecuting attorney, his
associate counsel, and other legal functionaries. All I know is that when the case was resumed M. Latour's senior
counsel, Jenkins, kept carefully in the background, leaving the practical conduct of the case in Maitland's hands.

If a hazelnut had the shell of a cocoanut, its meat would, in my opinion, sustain about the same relation to its
bulk as the gist of the usual legal proceeding sustains to the mass of verbiage in which it is enshrouded. For this
reason you will not expect me to give a detailed account of this trial. I couldn't if I would, and I wouldn't if I could.
My knowledge of legal procedure is far from profound, albeit I once began the study of law. My memories of
Blackstone are such as need prejudice no ambitious aspirant for legal honours. I have a recollection that somewhere
Blackstone says something about eavesdropping,--I mean in its literal sense--something about the drippings from A's
roof falling on B's estate; but for the life of me I couldn't tell what he says. More distinctly do I remember this
learned lawgiver stated that there could be no doubt of the evidence of witchcraft, because the Bible was full of it,
and that witches should be punished with death. This made an impression upon me, because it was an instance, rare
to me then, but common enough now, of how minds, otherwise exceptionally able, may have a spot so encanked
with creed, bigotry, and superstition as to render their judgments respecting certain classes of phenomena erroneous
and illogical, puerile and ridiculous.

But to return to those points of the trial which I can remember, and which I think of sufficient interest to put
before you. These refer chiefly to Maitland's examination of M. Latour, and of the government's chief witness, M.
Godin. Such portions of their testimony as I shall put before you I shall quote exactly as it was given and reported by
Maitland's friend, Simonds.

When Maitland began for the defence he said:

"At about half-past seven on the night of the 22d of April, John Darrow met his death at his home in Dorchester.
He died in the presence of his daughter, Messrs. Willard, Browne, Herne, and myself. His death was caused by
injecting a virulent poison into his system through a slight incision in his neck. That wound the prisoner before you
confesses he himself inflicted. I would like to know a little more definitely how he succeeded in doing it without
detection, in the presence, not only of his victim, but of five other persons sitting close about him. M. Latour will
please take the stand."

As M. Latour stepped into the witness-box, a wave of suppressed excitement ran all over the court-room. Every
nerve was strained to its tensest pitch, every ear eager for the slightest syllable he might utter. What could be done
for a man who had confessed, and what would be the solution of the crime which had so long defied the authorities?
The explanation was now to be made and it is no wonder that the excitement was intense.

I omit all uninteresting formalities.

Q. Have you ever seen me before to-day?
A. Not to my knowledge.
Q. Have you any reason to believe I have ever seen you before to-day?
A. None whatever--er—that is—unless on the night of the murder.
Q. Were you acquainted with John Darrow?
A. Yes.
Q. How long have you known him?
A. About six months—perhaps seven.
Q. What were your relations?
A. I don't understand.—We had gambled together.
Q. Where?
A. In this city--Decatur Street.
Q. What motive led you to kill him?
A. He cheated me at cards, and I swore to be even with him.
Q. Had you any other reason?
A. I owed him twelve hundred and thirty-five dollars which I borrowed of him hoping my luck would change.

He won it all back from me by false play, and when I could not meet it he pressed me over hard.

Q. You say this occurred on Decatur Street. What was the date?
A. I do not remember.
Q. What month was it?
A. It was in March. Early in March.
Q. You are sure it was in March?
A. Yes.
Q. Should you say it was between the 1st and 15th of March?
A. Yes. I am positive it was before the 15th of March.
Q. Have you long known that M. Godin was at work upon this case?
A. No.
Q. When did you first become aware of it?
A. Not until my arrest.
Q. When did you first see M. Godin?
A. When I was arrested.
Q. Did he ever call at your rooms?
A. Never—not to my knowledge— I never saw him till the day of my arrest.
Q. With what weapon did you kill Mr. Darrow?
A. I made use of a specially constructed hypodermic syringe.

Half-smothered exclamations of surprise were heard from every part of the room. Even the Judge gave a start at
this astounding bit of testimony. Every person present knew perfectly well that no human being could have entered
or left the Darrow parlour without certain discovery, yet here was a man, apparently in his right mind, who soberly asserted that he had used a hypodermic syringe. Maitland and Godin alone seemed cool and collected. Throughout all Latour's testimony, M. Godin watched the witness with a burning concentration. It seemed as if the great detective meant to bore through Latour's gaze down to the most secret depths of his soul. Not for an instant did he take his eyes from Latour. I said to myself at the time that this power of concentration explained, in a great measure,
this detective's remarkable success. Nothing was permitted to escape him, and little movements which another man
would doubtless never notice, had, for M. Godin, I felt sure, a world of suggestive significance.

Maitland's calm demeanour, so resourceful in its serenity, caused all eyes to turn at length to him as if for
explanation. He continued with slow deliberation.

Q. In what particulars was this hypodermic syringe of special construction?

M. Latour seemed nervous and ill at ease. He shifted from side to side as if M. Godin's glance had pierced him
like a rapier, and he were trying vainly to wriggle off of it. He seemed unable to disengage himself and at length
replied in a wearied and spiritless tone:

A. In two particulars only. In the first place, it was very small, having a capacity of but five or six drops, and, in
the second place, it was provided with an internal spring which, when released, worked the plunger and ejected the
contents with extreme rapidity.

Q. What operated this spring?

A. Around the needle-like point of the syringe, less than a quarter of an inch from its end, was a tiny, annular bit
of metal. This little metallic collar was forced upward by the pressure of the flesh as the sharp point entered it, and
this movement released the spring and instantly and forcibly ejected the contents of the cylinder.

Q. Did you use a poison in this syringe?

A. Yes, sir.

Q. What did you use?

M. LATOUR hesitated and shifted helplessly about as if he dreaded to go farther into these particulars, and
fondly hoped someone might come to his rescue. His gaze seemed to shift about the room without in the least being
able to disentangle itself from that of M. Godin. He remained silent and the question was repeated.

Q. What did you use?

Again the witness hesitated while everyone, save only Maitland and Godin, leaned eagerly forward to catch his
reply. At length it came in a voice scarcely above a whisper.

A. Anhydrous hydrocyanic acid.

Q. I understand you to say you used anhydrous hydrocyanic or cyanhydric acid.

A. Yes, sir.

Q. Do you sufficiently understand chemistry to use these terms with accuracy? Might you not have used
potassium cyanide or prussiate of potash?

A. I am a tolerably good chemist, and have spoken understandingly. Potassium cyanide, KCN, is a white,
crystalline compound, and could hardly be used in a hypodermic syringe save in solution, in which condition it
would not have been sufficiently poisonous to have served my purpose.

At this reply many of the audience exchanged approving glances. They believed M. Latour had shown himself
quite a match for Maitland in not falling easily into what they regarded as a neat little trap which had been set to
prove his lack of chemical knowledge. They attributed Maitland's failure to further interrogate Latour upon his
understanding of chemistry as evidence that he had met an equal. To be sure, they were not quite clear in their own
minds why Latour's counsel should be at such pains to carefully examine a man who had already confessed, but they
believed they knew when a lawyer had met his match, and felt sure that this was one such instance. Clinton Browne,
who sat in one of the front seats, seemed to find a deal more to amuse him in this incident than was apparent to me.
Some men have such a wonderful sense of humour!

Maitland continued:

Q. When Mr. Darrow was murdered he sat in the centre of his parlour, surrounded by his daughter and invited
guests. Will you tell the Court how you entered and left this room without detection?

Again the witness hesitated and looked irresolutely, almost tremulously, about him, but seemed finally to steady
himself, as it were, upon Godin's glance. It's a strange thing how the directness and intense earnestness of a strong
man will pull the vacillation of a weak one into line with it, even as great ships draw lesser ones into their wakes.
The excited audience hung breathlessly upon Latour's utterance. At last they were to know how this miracle of crime had been performed. Every auditor leaned forward in his seat, and those who were a trifle dull of hearing placed their hands to their ears, fearful lest some syllable of the riddle's solution should escape them. M. Latour remained dumb. The Judge regarded him sternly and said:

"Answer the question. How did you enter the Darrow parlour?"

A. I--I did--I did not enter it.

Again a half-suppressed exclamation of surprise traversed the room.

Q. If you did not enter the room how did you plunge the hypodermic syringe into your victim's neck?

It seemed for a moment as if the witness would utterly collapse, but he pulled himself together, as with a mighty effort, and fairly took our breath away with his astounding answer:

A. I--I did not strike Mr. Darrow with the syringe.

The audience literally gasped in open-mouthed amazement, while the Court turned fiercely upon Latour and said:

"What do you mean by first telling us you killed Mr. Darrow by injecting poison into his circulation from a specially prepared hypodermic syringe, and then telling us that you did not strike him with this syringe. What do you mean, sir? Answer me!"

A sudden change came over M. Latour. All his timidity seemed to vanish in a moment, as he drew himself up to his full height and faced the Judge. It seemed to me as if till now he had cherished a hope that he might not be forced to give the details of his awful crime, but that he had at last concluded he would be obliged to disclose all the particulars, and had decided to manfully face the issue.

Every eye was fixed upon him, and every ear strained to its utmost as he turned slowly toward the Judge and said with a calm dignity which surprised us all:

A. Your Honour is in error. I said that I made use of a specially constructed hypodermic syringe. I have not said that I struck Mr. Darrow with it. There is, therefore, nothing contradictory in my statements.

The audience literally gasped in open-mouthed amazement, while the Court turned fiercely upon Latour and said:

"What do you mean by first telling us you killed Mr. Darrow by injecting poison into his circulation from a specially prepared hypodermic syringe, and then telling us that you did not strike him with this syringe. What do you mean, sir? Answer me!"

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Again the prisoner had scored, and again the audience exchanged approving glances which plainly said: "He's clever enough for them all!"

Then the Court continued the examination.

Q. Were you upon the Darrow estate when Mr. Darrow met his death?
A. Yes, your Honour.
Q. Where?
A. Just outside the eastern parlour-window, your Honour.
Q. Did you strike the blow which caused Mr. Darrow's death?
A. No, your Honour.
Q. What! Have you not said you are responsible for his murder?
A. Yes, your Honour.
Q. Ah, I see! You had some other person for an accomplice?
A. No, your Honour.
Q. Look here, sir! Do you propose to tell us anything of your own accord, or must we drag it out of you piecemeal?
A. No power can make me speak if I do not elect to, and I only elect to answer questions. Commission for contempt will hardly discipline a man in my position, and may lead me to hold my peace entirely.

The Court turned away with an expression of disgust and engaged Jenkins and Maitland in a whispered conversation. The prisoner had again scored. There is enough of the bully in many judges to cause the public to secretly rejoice when they are worsted. It was plain to be seen that the audience was pleased with Latour's defiance.

Maitland now resumed the examination with his accustomed ease. One would have thought he was addressing a church sociable,--if he judged by his manner.

Q. You have testified to being responsible for the death of John Darrow. The instrument with which he was killed was directly or indirectly your handiwork, yet you did not strike the blow, and you have said you had no other person for an accomplice. Am I substantially correct in all this?
A. You are quite correct.
Q. Very good. Did John Darrow's death result from a poisoned wound made by the instrument you have described?
A. It did.

This reply seemed to nonplus us all with the exception of Maitland and Godin. These two seemed proof against all surprises. The rest of us looked helplessly each at his neighbour as if to say, "What next?" and we all felt,--at least I did and the others certainly looked it,--as if the solution of the enigma were farther away than ever.
Maitland proceeded in the same methodical strain.
Q. A blow was given, yet neither you nor any person acting as your accomplice gave it. Did Mr. Darrow himself give the blow?
A. No, sir.
Q. I thought not. Did any person give it?
A. No, sir.
The audience drew a deep inspiration, as if with one accord! They had ceased to reason. Again and again had we been brought, as we all felt sure, within a single syllable of the truth, only to find ourselves at the next word more mystified than ever. It would hardly have surprised us more if the prisoner had informed us that Mr. Darrow still lived. The excitement was so intense that thought was impossible, so we could only listen with bated breath for someone else to solve the thing for our beleaguered and discouraged minds. After a word with his colleague, Maitland resumed.
Q. A blow was given, yet no person gave it. Was it given by anything which is alive?
A. It was not.
You could have heard a pin drop, so silent was the room during the pause which preceded Maitland's next question.
Q. Did you arrange some inanimate object or objects outside the eastern window, or elsewhere, on the Darrow estate so that it or they might wound Mr. Darrow?
A. No,--no inanimate object other than the hypodermic syringe already referred to.
Q. To my question: "A blow was given, yet no person gave it. Was it given by anything which is alive?" you have answered: "It was not." Let me now ask: Was it given by anything which was at that time alive?
A. It was.
There was a stir all over the court-room. Here at last was a suggestive admission. The examination was approaching a crisis!
Q. And you have said it was not a person. Was it not an animal?
A. It was.
"An animal!" we all ejaculated with the unanimity of a Greek chorus. So audible were the exclamations of incredulity which arose from the spellbound audience that the crier's gavel had to be brought into requisition before Maitland could proceed.
Q. Did you train a little Capucin monkey to strike this blow?
A. I did.
A great sigh, the result of suddenly relieved tension, liberally interlarded with unconscious exclamations, swept over the court-room and would not be gavelled into silence until it had duly spent itself.
Even the Judge so far forgot his dignity as to give vent to a half-stifled exclamation.
Maitland proceeded:
Q. In order that this monkey might not attack the wrong man after you had armed him, you taught him to obey certain signals given by little twitches upon the cord by which you held him. A certain signal was to creep stealthily forward, another to strike, and still another to crawl quickly back with the weapon. When circumstances seemed most favourable to the success of your designs,--that is, when Miss Darrow's voice and the piano prevented any slight sound from attracting attention,--you gently dropped the monkey in at the window and signalled him what to do. When Mr. Darrow sprang to his feet you recalled the monkey and hastened away. Is not this a fairly correct description of what occurred?
A. It is true to the letter.
Q. And subsequently you killed the monkey lest he should betray you by exhibiting his little tricks, at an inopportune moment in a way to compromise you. Is it not so?
A. It is. I killed him, though he was my daughter's pet.
We were stricken aghast at Maitland's sudden grasp of the case. Even Godin was surprised. What could it all mean? Had Maitland known the facts all along? Had he simply been playing with the witness for reasons which we could not divine? M. Godin's face was a study. He ceased boring holes in Latour with his eyes and turned those wonderful orbs full upon Maitland, in whom they seemed to sink to the depths of his very soul. Clearly M. Godin was surprised at this exhibition of Maitland's power.
Browne, who throughout the trial had glared at Maitland with an unfriendliness which must have been apparent to everyone, now lowered blacker than ever, it seemed to me. I wondered what could have occurred to still further displease him, and finally concluded it must either be some transient thought which had come uncalled into his mind, or else a feeling of envy at his rival's prominence in the case, and the deservedly good reputation he was making. His general ill-feeling I, of course, charged to jealousy, for I could not but note his uncontrollable
admiration for Gwen. I fully believed he would have given his own life—or anyone else's for that matter—to possess her, and I decided to speak a word of warning to George. After a short, whispered consultation with Jenkins and the prosecuting attorney, Maitland turned to the prisoner and said:

"That will do. M. Latour may leave the stand."

It seemed to the spectators that the affair was now entirely cleared up, and they accordingly settled themselves comfortably for the formal denouement. They were, therefore, much taken aback when Maitland continued, addressing the jury:

"The evidence against the prisoner would indeed seem overwhelming, even had we not his confession. Apart from this confession we have no incriminating evidence save such as has been furnished by the government's chief witness, M. Godin. As it is through this gentleman's efforts that Latour was brought within reach of justice, it is but natural that much should be clear to him which may be puzzling to those who have not made so close a study of the case. I think he will enlighten us upon a few points. M. Godin will please take the stand."

At this there was much whispering in the courtroom. Maitland's course seemed decidedly anomalous. Everyone wondered why he should be at such pains to prove that which had been already admitted and which, moreover, since he was representing Latour, it would seem he would most naturally wish to disprove. M. Godin, however, took the stand and Maitland proceeded to examine him in a way which only added amazement to wonder.

Q. How long have you been at work on this case?
A. Ever since the murder.
Q. When did you first visit M. Latour's rooms?
A. Do you mean to enter them?
Q. Yes.
A. I did not enter his rooms until the day he was arrested. I went to other rooms of the same tenement-house on previous occasions.
Q. Have you reason to believe M. Latour ever saw you prior to the day of his arrest?
A. No. I am sure he did not. I was especially careful to keep out of his way.
Q. You are certain that on the several occasions when you say you entered his rooms you were not observed by him while there?
A. I did not say I entered his rooms on several occasions.
Q. What did you say?
A. I said I never was in his rooms but once, and that was upon the day of his arrest.
Q. I understand. Were you not assisted in your search for Mr. Darrow's murderer by certain library books which you discovered M. Latour had been reading?
A. I--I don't quite understand.
Q. M. Latour obtained some books from the Public Library for hall use, giving his name as--as--
A. Weltz. Yes, they did assist me. There were some also taken under the name of Rizzi.
Q. Exactly. Those are the names, I think. How was your attention called to these books?
A. I met Latour at the library by accident, and he at once struck me as a man anxious to avoid observation. This made it my business to watch him. I saw that he signed his name as "Weltz" on the slips. The next day I saw him there again, and this time he signed the slips "Rizzi." This was long before the murder, and I was not at work upon any case into which I could fit this "Weltz" or "Rizzi." I was convinced in my own mind, however, that he was guilty of some crime, and so put him down in my memory for future reference. During my work upon this present case this incident recurred to me, and I followed up the suggestion as one which might possibly throw some light upon the subject.
Q. Did you peruse the books M. Latour borrowed under the names of Weltz and Rizzi?
A. I did not.
Q. Did you not look at any of them?
A. No. It did not occur to me to examine their names.
Q. You probably noticed that there were several of them. Among the pile was one by Alexander Wynter Blyth entitled, "Poisons, Their Effects and Detection." Did you notice that?
A. No. I did not notice any of them.
Q. But after you became suspicious of M. Latour, did you not then look up the slips, find this work, and read it?
A. No. I have never seen the book in my life and did not even know such a work existed.
Q. Oh! Then the perusal of the books had no part in the tracking of M. Latour.
A. None whatever.
Q. Do you ever play cards?
A. Yes, sometimes, to pass the time.
Q. Do you play for money?
A. Sometimes for a small stake—just enough to make it interesting.

Q. Are you familiar with the house in which Mr. Darrow was murdered?
A. I have only such knowledge of it as I acquired at the examination immediately after the murder. You will remember I entered but the one room.

Q. And the grounds about the house? Surely you examined them?
A. On the contrary, I did not.

Q. Did you not even examine the eastern side of the house?
A. I did not. I have never been within the gate save on the night in question, and then only to traverse the front walk to and from the house in company with Messieurs Osborne and Allen. I was convinced that the solution of the problem was to be found within the room in which the murder was committed, and that my notes taken the night of the tragedy contained all the data I could hope to get.

Q. Was not this rather a singular assumption?
A. For many doubtless it would be; but I have my own methods, and I think I may say they have been measurably successful in most cases. [This last was said with a good-natured smile and a modest dignity that completely won the audience.]

At this point Maitland dismissed M. Godin and the court adjourned for the day. That night M. Godin made his first call upon Gwen. Their interview was private, and Gwen had nothing to say about it further than that her caller had not hesitated to inform her that he was aware a reward had been offered and that he considered he had earned it. Maitland questioned her as to what he had claimed as his due, but Gwen, with her face alternately flushed and ashen, begged to be permitted to keep silence.

This attitude was, of course, not without its significance to Maitland, and it was easy to see that M. Godin’s visit had much displeased him. But he was not the only one who was displeased that night. I regret that my promise of utter candour compels me to bear witness to my own foolishness; for when Maitland found it necessary to take Jeannette into the back parlour and to remain there alone with her in earnest conversation one hour and twelve minutes—I happened to notice the exact time—it seemed to me he was getting unpleasantly confidential, and it nettled me. You may fancy that I was jealous, but it was, most likely, only pique, or, at the worst, envy. I was provoked at the nonchalant ease with which this fellow did offhand a thing I had been trying to work myself up to for several days, and had finally abandoned from sheer lack of courage. Why couldn’t I carelessly say to her, “Miss Jeannette, a word with you if you please,” and then take her into the parlour and talk a “whole history.” Oh, it was envy, that’s what it was! And then the change in Jeannette! If he had not been making love to her—well, I have often wondered since if it were all envy, after all.

The next morning M. Latour’s trial was resumed, and Maitland again put M. Godin upon the stand. The object of this did not appear at the time, though I think the Judge fully understood it. Maitland’s first act was to show the Judge and Jury a glass negative and a letter, which he asked them to examine carefully as he held the articles before them. He then passed the negative to M. Godin, saying:

"Please take this by the lower corner, between your thumb and forefinger, so that you may be sure not to touch the sight of the picture; hold it to the light, and tell me if you recognise the face." M. Godin did as directed and replied without hesitancy: “It is a picture of M. Latour.” “Good,” rejoined Maitland, taking back the negative and passing him the letter; “now tell me if you recognise that signature.” M. Godin looked sharply at the letter, holding it open between the thumb and forefinger of each hand, and read the signature, "Carl Cazenove." I should say that was M. Latour’s hand.

"Good again," replied Maitland, reaching for the paper and appearing somewhat disconcerted as he glanced at it. "You have smudged the signature;—however, it doesn’t matter," and he exhibited the paper to the Judge and Jury. "The negative must have been oily—yes, that’s where it came from," and he quietly examined it with a magnifying glass, to the wonderment of us all. “That is all, M. Godin; thank you.”

As the celebrated detective left the stand we were all doing our best to fathom what possible bearing all this could have upon Latour’s confession. M. Godin for once seemed equally at a loss to comprehend the trend of affairs, if I may judge by the deep furrows which gathered between his eyes.

Maitland then proceeded to address the Court and to sum up his case, the gist of which I shall give you as nearly as possible in his own words, omitting only such portions as were purely formal, uninteresting, or unnecessarilly verbose.

"Your Honour and Gentlemen of the Jury: John Darrow was murdered and the prisoner, M. Gustave Latour, has confessed that he did the deed. When a man denies the commission of a crime we do not feel bound to consider his testimony of any particular value; but when, on the other hand, a prisoner accused of so heinous a crime as murder responds to the indictment, ‘I am guilty,’ we instinctively feel impelled to believe his testimony. Why is this? Why
do we doubt his word when he asserts his innocence and accept it when he acknowledges his guilt? I will tell you. It is all a question of motive. Could we see as cogent a motive for asseverating his guilt as we find for his insisting upon his innocence, we should lend as much credence to the one as to the other. I propose to show that M. Latour has what seems to him the strongest of motives for confessing to the murder of John Darrow. If I am able to do this to your satisfaction, I shall practically have thrown M. Latour's entire testimony out of court, and nothing of importance will then remain but the evidence of the government's witness, M. Godin."

A great wave of excitement swept over the room at these remarks. "What!" each said to himself, "is it possible that this lawyer will try to prove that Latour, despite his circumstantial confession, did not commit the murder after all?" We did not dare let such a thought take hold of us, yet could not see what else could explain Maitland's remarks. Is it any wonder, therefore, that we all waited breathlessly for him to continue? M. Godin's face was dark and lowering. It was evident he did not propose to have his skill as a detective,--and with it the Darrow reward,--set aside without a struggle--at least so it seemed to me. The room was as quiet as the grave when Maitland continued.

"I shall show you that M. Godin's testimony is utterly unreliable, and, moreover, that it is intentionally so."

This was a direct accusation, and at it M. Godin's face became of ashen pallor. I felt that he was striving to control his anger and saw the effort that it cost him as he fastened Maitland with a stiletto-like look that was anything but reassuring. George did not appear to notice it and continued easily:

"I shall prove to you beyond a doubt that, in the actual murder of John Darrow, only one person was concerned,--by which I mean, that only one person was outside the east window when he met his death. I shall also show that M. Latour was not, and could not by any possibility have been, that person. [At this juncture Browne arose and walked toward the door. He was very pale and looked anything but well. I thought he was going to leave, but he reseated himself at the back of the room near the door.] I shall convince you that M. Latour's description of the way the murder was committed is false."

All eyes were turned toward Latour, but he made no sign either of affirmation or dissent. With his eyes closed and his hands falling listlessly in front of him, he sat in a half-collapsed condition, like one in a stupor. M. Godin shifted uneasily in his chair, as if he could not remain silent much longer. Maitland proceeded with calm deliberation:

"Mr. Clinton Browne--"

But he did not finish the sentence. At the name "Mr. Clinton Browne" he was interrupted by a sudden commotion at the rear of the room, followed by a heavy fall which shook the whole apartment. We all turned and looked toward the door. Several men had gathered about someone lying upon the floor, and one of them was throwing water in the face of the prostrate man. Presently he revived a little, and they bore him out into the cooler air of the corridor. It was Clinton Browne. The great tension of the trial, his own strong emotions, and the closeness of the room had doubtless been too much for him. I could not but marvel at it, however. Here were delicate women with apparently little or no staying power, and yet this athlete, with the form of a Mars and the fibre of a Hercules, must be the first to succumb. Verily, even physicians are subject to surprises!

When quiet had been fully restored Maitland continued:

"I was about to say when the interruption occurred that Mr. Clinton Browne and Mr. Charles Herne would both testify to the fact that a very sensible time elapsed between the delivery of the blow and the death of the victim. You will see, therefore, that I shall prove to your satisfaction that Mr. Darrow's death did not result from prussic acid, as stated by the prisoner. I shall show you that a chemical analysis of the wound made in my laboratory shortly after the murder gave none of the well-known prussic-acid reactions. I shall prove to you that John Darrow sprang to his feet after receiving the blow which caused his death. That he clutched at his throat, and that, after an effort consuming several seconds, he spoke disjointedly. I shall convince you that if he had been poisoned in the manner described he would have been dead before he could have so much as raised his hand to his throat. We have been very particular to make sure the exact nature of the poison which it is claimed was used, so there can be no possible doubt upon this point. I shall show you further that the little Capucin monkey which M. Latour says he killed is still alive, and I will produce him, if necessary, and will challenge M. Latour, or anyone else for that matter, to put him through the drill which it is claimed he has been taught. I shall inform you that, since I claim the monkey had no part in Mr. Darrow's death, I could not, during my examination of the prisoner, have been stating anything from knowledge when I spoke of the manner in which he had trained the animal, and gave details which M. Latour accepted as those of the murder. My sole effort was to state a plausible way, in order to see if the prisoner would not adopt it as the actual course pursued. I also coupled with this the killing of the monkey (though I knew the animal was still alive), that I might see if M. Latour would follow my lead in this also. You have seen that he did so; that he indorsed my guesses where they were purely guesses, and that he also accepted the one statement I knew to be false. I shall therefore ask you to consider about what the chances are that a series of guesses like those which I made would represent the exact facts as M. Latour has claimed, while at the same time you do not lose sight of the
undeniable fact that upon the only detail regarding which I had positive information, M. Latour bore false testimony."

Here Maitland whispered to Jenkins, who in turn spoke to the sheriff or some other officer of the court. I would have given a good deal just then to have been able to translate M. Godin's thoughts. His face was a study. Maitland immediately resumed:

"It has been positively stated by M. Latour that he gambled with Mr. Darrow on Decatur Street between the 1st and 15th day of March. This is false. In the first place it can be shown that while Mr. Darrow occasionally played cards at his own home, he never gambled, uniformly refusing to play for even the smallest stake. Furthermore, Mr. Darrow's physician will testify that Mr. Darrow was confined to his bed from the 25th day of February to the 18th day of March, and that he visited him during that time at least once, and oftener twice, every day.

"Again; M. Latour asserts that he never saw M. Godin till the day of his arrest, and M. Godin asserts that he never entered M. Latour's rooms until that day. I have a photograph and here a phonographic record. The picture shows M. Latour's rooms with that gentleman and M. Godin sitting at a table and evidently engaged in earnest conversation. This cylinder is a record of a very interesting portion of that conversation--M. Godin will please not leave the room!"

This last was said as M. Godin started toward the door. The officer to whom Jenkins had recently spoken laid his hand upon the detective and detained him. "We may need M. Godin," Maitland continued, "to explain things to us.

"I invite your attention to the fact that M. Godin has testified that he was assisted in his search for Mr. Darrow's murderer by certain library slips which he saw M. Latour make out in two different names. He has also testified that he did not know even the names of any of the books procured on these slips, and that one of them, entitled 'Poisons, Their Effects and Detection,' he not only never read, but never even heard of. I shall show you that all of these books were procured with M. Godin's knowledge, and that most of them were read by him. I shall prove to you beyond a doubt that he has not only heard of this particular work on poisons, but that he has read it and placed his unmistakable signature on page 469 thereof beside the identical paragraph which suggested to Mr. Darrow's murderer the manner of his assassination!" M. Godin started as if he had been stabbed, but quickly regained his self-control as Maitland continued: "Here is the volume in question. You will please note the thumb-mark in the margin of page 469. There is but one thumb in the world that could have made that mark, and that is the thumb you have seen register itself upon this letter. It is also the thumb that made this paint smutch upon this slip of glass."

All eyes were turned upon M. Godin. He was very pale, yet his jaw was firmly set and something akin to a defiant smile played about his handsome mouth. To say that the audience was amazed is to convey no adequate idea of their real condition. We felt prepared for anything. I almost feared lest some sudden turn in the case might cast suspicion upon myself, or even Maitland. Without apparently noticing M. Godin's discomfiture, George continued:

"M. Godin has testified that he sometimes plays cards, but only for a small stake--just enough, he says, to make it interesting. I shall show you that he is a professional gambler as well as a detective.

"The morning after the murder was committed I made a most careful examination of the premises, particularly of the grounds near the eastern window. As the result of my observations, I informed Miss Darrow that I had reason to believe that her father had been murdered by a person who had some good motive for concealing his footprints, and who also had a halting gait. The weight of this person I was able to estimate at not far from one hundred and thirty-five pounds, and his height as about five feet and five inches. I also stated it as my opinion that the person who did the deed had the habit of biting his finger nails, and a particular reason for sparing the nail of the little finger and permitting it to grow to an abnormal length. This was not guesswork on my part, for in the soft soil beneath the eastern window I found a perfect impression of a closed hand. Here is the cast of that hand. Look well at it. Notice the wart upon the upper joint of the thumb, and the crook in the third finger where it has evidently been broken. M. Godin says he never entered the yard of the Darrow estate, except on the night of the murder in company with Messrs. Osborne and Allen, and that then he merely passed up and down the front walk on his way to and from the house, yet the paint-mark on this slip of glass was made by his thumb, and the glass itself was cut by me from the eastern window of the Darrow house--the window through which the murder was committed. This plaster cast was taken from an impression in the soil beneath the same window on the morning after the murder. The hand is the hand of M. Godin. You will note that one of this gentleman's feet is deformed and that he habitually halts in his walk."

We all glanced at M. Godin to verify these assertions, but that gentleman folded his arms in a way to conceal his hands and thrust his feet out of sight beneath the chair in front of him, while he smiled at us with the utmost apparent good nature. He would be game to the last, there was no doubt of that.

Maitland recalled our attention by saying:

"Officer, you will please arrest M. Godin!"

An excited whisper was heard from every corner, and many were the half-audible comments that were broken
off by the imperative fall of the crier's gavel. So tense had been the strain that it was some time before complete order could be restored. When it was again quiet Maitland continued:

"Your Honour and Gentlemen of the Jury: We will rest our case here for to-day. To-morrow, or rather on Monday, we shall show the strange influence which M. Godin exercised over M. Latour, as well as M. Latour's reasons for his confession. We shall endeavour to make clear to you how M. Latour was actually led to believe he had murdered John Darrow, and how he was bribed to confess a crime committed by another. Of the hypnotic power of M. Godin over M. Latour I have indisputable proof, though we shall see that M. Godin by no means relied wholly upon this power. We shall show you also that sufficient time elapsed to enable M. Godin, by great skill and celerity, to make away with the evidences of his guilt in time to enable him to be present with Messrs. Osborne and Allen at the examination. In short, we shall unravel before you a crime which, for cleverness of conception and adroitness of execution, has never been equalled in the history of this community."

Maitland having thus concluded his remarks by dropping into a courteous plural in deference to Mr. Jenkins, the court adjourned until Monday, and I left Gwen in Maitland's charge while I hurried home, fearful lest I should not be the first to bring to Jeannette the glad news of her father's innocence, for I had not the slightest doubt of Maitland's ability to prove conclusively all he had undertaken.

I need not describe to you my interview with Jeannette. There are things concerning it which, even at this late day, when their roseate hue glows but dimly in the blue retrospect of the past,—it would seem sacrilege for me to mention to another. Believe me, I am perfectly aware of your inquisitive nature, and I know that this omission may nettles you. Charge it all up, then, to the perversity of a bachelor in the throes of his first, last, and only love experience. You must see that such things cannot be conveyed to another with anything like their real significance.

Were I to say I was carried beyond myself by her protestations of gratitude until, in a delirium of joy, I seized her in my arms and covered her with kisses, do you for a moment fancy you could appreciate my feelings? Do you imagine that the little tingle of sympathy which you might experience were I to say that, instead of pushing me from her, I felt her clasp tighten about me,—would tell you anything of the great torrent of hot blood that deluged my heart as she lay there in my arms, quivering ecstatically at every kiss? No! a thousand times no! Therefore have I thought best to say nothing about it. Our love can keep its own secrets.—But alas! this was long ago, and as I sit here alone writing this to you, I cannot but wonder, with a heavy sense of ever-present longing, where on this great earth Jeannette—'my Jeannette,' I have learned to call her— is now. You see a bachelor's love-affair is a serious thing, and years cannot always efface it. But to return to the past:

Jeannette, I think, was not more pleased than Gwen at the turn affairs had taken. Indeed, so exuberant was Gwen in her quiet way that I marvelled much at the change in her, so much, indeed, that finally I determined to question Alice about it.

"I can understand," I said to her, "why Gwen, on account of her sympathy and love for Jeannette, should be glad that M. Latour is likely to be acquitted. I can also appreciate the distaste she may have felt at the prospect of having to deal with M. Godin under the terms of her father's will; but even both of these considerations seem to me insufficient to account for her present almost ecstatic condition. There is an immanence to her joy which could hardly result from mere release from a future disagreeable possibility. How do you account for it, sis?" Alice's answer was somewhat enigmatic and didn't give me the information I sought. "Ned," she replied, "I'll pay for the tickets to the first circus that comes here, just to see if you can find the trunks on the elephants." Do my best, I couldn't make her enlighten me any further, for, to every question, she replied with a most provoking laugh.

Maitland called and spent most of the next day, which was Sunday, with us, and we all talked matters over. He did not seem either to share or understand Gwen's exuberance of spirits, albeit one could easily observe that he had a measure of that satisfaction which always comes from success. More than once I saw him glance questioningly at Jeannette, but could not seem either to share or understand her exuberance of spirits.

CHAPTER III

The Devil throws double sixes when he turns genius heliward.

The next morning after the events last narrated I was utterly dumbfounded by an article which met my gaze the instant I took up my paper. It was several moments before I sufficiently recovered my faculties to read it aloud to Gwen, Alice, and Jeannette, all of whom had noticed my excitement, and were waiting with such patience as they could command. I read the following article through from beginning to end without pause or comment:

M. Godin Anticipates the Law.—The Real Murderer of John Darrow Writes His Confession and Then Suicides in His Cell.—Contrived to Mix His Own Poison Under the Very Nose of His Jailer!—The Dorchester Mystery Solved at Last.—Full Description of the Life of One of the Cleverest Criminals of the Century.

At 4.30 this morning M. Godin was found dead in his cell, No. 26, at Charles Street Jail. The manner of his
death might still be a mystery had he not left a written confession of his crime and the summary manner of his
taking off. This was written yesterday afternoon and evening, M. Godin being permitted to have a light on the
ground that he had important legal documents to prepare for use on the morrow. We give below the confession in
full.

"I am beaten at a game in which I did my own shuffling. I never believe in trying to bluff a full hand. Had I had
but ordinary detectives with whom to deal, I make bold to say I should have come off rich and triumphant. I had no
means of knowing that I was to play with a chemist who would use against me the latest scientific implements of
criminal warfare. It is, therefore, to the extraordinary means used for my detection that I impute my defeat, rather
than to any bungling of my own. This is a grim consolation, but it is still a consolation, for I have always prided
myself upon being an artist in my line. As I propose to put myself beyond the reach of further cross-examination, I
take this opportunity to make a last statement of such things as I care to have known. After this is finished I shall sup
on acetate of lead and bid good-night to the expectant public.

"Lest some may marvel how I came by this poison, and even lay suspicions upon my jailers, let me explain that
there is a small piece of lead water-pipe crossing the west angle of my room. This being Sunday, I was permitted to
have beans and brown bread for breakfast. I asked for a little vinegar for my beans, and a small cruets was brought to
me. I had no difficulty in secreting a considerable quantity of the vinegar in order that I might, when occasion
served, apply it to the lead pipe. This I have done, and have now by me enough acetate of lead to kill a dozen men.
This form of death will not be particularly pleasant, I am aware, but I prefer it to its only alternative. So much for
that.

"I was born in Marseilles, and my right name is Jean Fouchet. My father intended me for the priesthood, and
gave me a good college education in Paris. His hopes, however, were destined to disappointment. In college I
formed the habit of gambling, and a year after my graduation found me at Monte Carlo. While there I quarrelled
with a gambling accomplice and ended by killing him. This made my stay in France dangerous for me, and I took
the first opportunity which presented itself to embark for America.

"Familiarity with criminals had made me familiar with crime, and I added the occupation of detective to my
profession of gambling. These two avocations had now become my sole means of support, and I plied my trades in
New York, Boston, and Philadelphia for several years, during which time I became a naturalised citizen of the
United States.

"When the Cuban rebellion broke out I could not restrain my longing for adventure, and joined a filibustering
expedition sailing from New York. I did this from no love I bore the Cuban cause, but merely for the excitement it
promised. While handling a heavy shot during my first engagement I accidentally dropped it upon my left foot,
crushing that member so badly that it has never regained its shape. This deformity has rendered it impossible for me
to conceal my identity. Three months after this accident I was taken prisoner by the Spanish and shipped to Spain as
a political malefactor. A farce of a trial was granted to me, not to see whether or not I was guilty, but simply to
determine between the dungeon and the garrote. It would have been far better for me had I been sentenced to the
latter instead of the former.

"As a political offender I was doomed to imprisonment at Ceuta, an old Moorish seaport town in Morocco,
ophosite Gibraltar and upon the side of the ancient mountain Abyla. This mountain forms one of the 'Pillars of
Hercules,' the Rock of Gibraltar being the other. It is almost impregnable, and is used by Spain as Siberia is used by
Russia, only it is far, far more horrible. The town was built by the Moors in 945, and nowhere else on earth are there
to be found an equal number of devices for the torture of human beings. If anyone thinks the horrors of the
Inquisition are no longer perpetrated let him get sent to Ceuta: I have good cause to believe that the Inquisition itself
is far from dead in Spain. Alas for the person who is sent to Ceuta! The town is small, and, to guard against possible
attack, the Moors constructed a chain of fortresses around it. It is in the black cellars of these disintegrating
fortresses that the dungeons are located. They are in tiers to the depth of fifty or sixty feet, and are hewn out of the
solid rock. They are reached through narrow openings in the stone floors of the fortresses, and when one of these
horrible holes is opened the foul odor of filth and decomposition is utterly overpowering. Some of these dungeons
contain as many as thirty or forty men. I was placed in a cell reserved for solitary confinement. I have never been a
man who regarded life seriously, or feared to risk it upon sufficient occasion, but my heart froze within me when the
horror of my situation was revealed to me. A stone box perhaps eight feet square --as I lay upon the floor I could
touch its opposite sides with my hands and feet--had been prepared for my entrance by cutting a slit in one of its
walls just large enough for the passage of my body. Through this narrow opening I was dropped into the total
darkness within. A blacksmith followed and welded my fetters, for locks and keys are never used. A chain having a
heavy weight pendant from it was riveted to my ankle, and an iron band was similarly fastened to my waist. This
band was fastened by a chain to an iron ring deeply sunk in the solid rock. When these horrible preparations were
completed the blacksmith left me and a mason bricked up the slit through which I had entered, leaving only a hand-
broad of space for air and the thrusting through of such scraps of food as were to be allowed me. Language is powerless to describe the feelings of a man in such a position. He realises that his only hope is in disease --disease bred of the darkness, the dampness, the starvation, and the horrible filth. He says to himself: 'How long, O God! how long?'--For hours I remained prone and inert--how long I do not know; night and day are all one in the dungeons of Ceuta. Then I began to think. Could I escape? I felt that all power of thought, all cleverness would soon desert me, and I said to myself: 'If anything is to be done, it must be done at once.' I knew not then what long-drawn horrors a mortal could endure. Whenever I attempted to walk the iron mass fastened to my leg would 'bring me up short,' often, in my early forgetfulness of it, throwing me prone upon my face. After a little I learned to move with a halting gait, striding out with the free limb and pausing to pull my burden after me with the other. This habit, learned in the squalor and darkness of the dungeon hells of Ceuta, I have never been able to unlearn.

'It was many days before I could see how anything short of a miracle could enable me to escape. I tried to calmly reason it all out, and every time came to the same horrible conclusion, viz.: I must rot there unless help came to me from without. This seemed impossible, and all the horrors of a lingering death stared me in the face. Every two or three days one of the jailers would come to the slit in the masonry and leave there a dish of water and a few crusts of bread. I tried on one occasion to speak with him, but he only laughed in my face and turned away. Finally I hit upon a plan which seemed to offer the only possible means of escape. In my college days I was well acquainted with M. Charcot, and even assisted in some of his earlier hypnotic experiments. The subject interested me, and I followed it closely till I became something of an adept myself. There were in those days but few people I could not mesmerise, provided sufficient opportunity were allowed me for hypnotic suggestion. I determined to see if any of this old power still remained with me, and, if so, to strive to render my jailer subservient to my will. But how should I keep him within ear-shot long enough to work upon him? Clearly all appeals to pity were useless. I must excite his greed, nothing else would reach him. This was not an easy thing to do without a sou in my possession, yet I did it. When I heard his step I crawled to the opening in the wall and mumbled in a crazy sort of a way about a hidden treasure. At the word 'treasure' I saw him pause and listen, but I pretended not to be aware of his presence and rambled on, in a loose, disjointed fashion, about piracies committed by me and the great amount of booty I had secreted. My plan worked perfectly. The jailer came to the aperture in the wall and called me to him. Muttering incoherently, I obeyed. He asked me what offence brought me there, and I, with a good deal of intentional misunderstanding, told him I was a pirate and a smuggler. He asked me where the treasure I had been talking about was hidden. My reply,--I remember the exact words in which I couched it,--made him mine completely. I said: 'We buried it near Fez--Treasure? I don't know anything about any treasure.'

'To all the many questions he then asked me I returned only incoherent replies, but I was careful to be again raving about buried riches upon the next visit. In this way I kept him by me long enough to influence him, and in less than a month he was completely subject to my will. I tested my power over him in divers ways. Any delicacy I wished I compelled him to bring me. In this way I was enabled to regain a portion of my lost strength. When I concluded the time had come for me to make good my escape, I caused him to come to my cell at midnight and remove the bricks from the slit while I put on the disguise he had brought me. Once out of my stone tomb we carefully walled it up again and then departed to find my imaginary hidden treasure. We made our way without trouble to Algiers, for my companion had money, and sailed thence via Gibraltar for England. During the trip my companion jumped overboard and was drowned in the Bay of Biscay. Thus I was completely freed from Ceuta and its terrible pest-hole.

'From England I sailed to New York, reaching America penniless and in ill health. Things not going to my liking in New York, I came to Boston and took up my old callings of gambler and detective. It was at this time that I saw John Darrow's curious notice in the newspaper, offering, in the event of his murder, a most liberal reward to anyone who would bring the assassin to justice.

'Mon Dieu! How I needed money. I would have bartered my soul for a tithe of that amount. It was the old, old story, only new in Eden. Ah! but how I loved her! She must have money, money, always money! That was ever her cry. When I could not supply it she sought it of others, and this drove me mad. If, I said to myself, I could only get this reward! This was something really worth working for, and if I could but get it, she should be mine only. I at once set to work upon the problem.

'It was not an easy thing to solve. I might be able to hire a man to do the deed for me, but he would hardly be willing to hang for it without disclosing my part in the transaction. It was at this time that I first met M. Latour on Decatur Street. He at once impressed me as being just the man I wanted, and I began to gradually subdue his will. In these circumstances greatly aided me. When I found him he was in very poor health and without any means of sustenance. His daughter was able to earn a little, but not nearly enough to keep the wolf from the door. Add to this that he had a cancer, which several physicians had assured him would prove fatal within a year, that he was afflicted with an almost insane fear that his daughter would come to want after his death, and you have before you the
conditions which determined my course. My first thought was to influence him to do the deed himself, but, recalling the researches of M. Charcot in these matters, I came to the conclusion that such a course would be almost certain to lead to detection, since a hypnotic subject can only be depended upon so long as the conditions under which he acts are precisely those which have been suggested to him. Any unforeseen variations in these conditions and he fails to act, exposes everything, and the whole carefully planned structure falls to the ground. When, therefore, the time came which I had set for the deed, I found it possible to drug M. Latour, abduct him from his home, and to keep him confined and unconscious until I had killed Mr. Darrow in a manner I will describe in due course. As soon as I had committed the murder and established what I fondly believed would be a perfect alibi in my attendance at the examination, I secretly conveyed the still unconscious M. Latour to his rooms and awaited his return to consciousness. I then asked him how he came in such a state and what he was doing in Dorchester. He was, of course, ignorant of everything. Little by little I worked upon him till he came to believe himself guilty of John Darrow's murder.

"I had availed myself of his interest in the subject of cancer to get him to the library. It is one of my maxims never to take an avoidable risk, for which reason I made Latour apply for the books I wanted, as well as for the medical works he desired to peruse. As he was ambidextrous, I suggested the use of the two names Weltz and Rizzi, the former to be written with his right and the latter with his left hand. I was actuated in all this by two motives. First, I was manufacturing evidence which might stand me in good stead later, as well as minimising somewhat my own risk in getting the information I needed; and, secondly, I was getting Latour into a good atmosphere for my hypnotic influence. Not a word of all these matters did he relate to his daughter, whom he loves with a devotion I have never seen equalled. Indeed, it was this very affection that made my plan feasible. When I had convinced him he was a murderer I showed him Mr. Darrow's curious advertisement offering a reward, should he be assassinated, to anyone bringing about the conviction of his assailant.

"In a year," I said to him, 'you will die of cancer, if your crime be not previously discovered and punished. Your daughter will then be penniless. How much better for you to permit me in a few months to accuse you of the murder. You then confess; I claim and secure the reward and secretly divide with you; you are sentenced; but as considerable time will transpire between this and the date set for your execution, you in the meantime will die of cancer, leaving Jeannette well provided for.'

"I think my influence over him would have been sufficient to have compelled him to all this, could he have reasoned out no benefit accruing to himself or daughter by such a course, but with circumstances thus in my favour my task was an easy one. The public knows all it need know of what occurred after this. This man, Maitland, was in the next room to Latour's, overheard our conversation, and even phonographed our words and photographed our positions. It has always been a matter of pride with me to gracefully acknowledge that three aces are not so good as a full house, therefore I confess myself beaten, though not subdued.

"I consider this the very best tribute I can pay to the genius of the man who has undone me. I take my punishment, however, into my own hands.

"In my haste to have done with all this and to start on my long and chartless journey, I had well-nigh forgotten to tell just how I killed Mr. Darrow. No hypodermic syringe had anything to do with it. The white plan came to me while reading that fatal page upon which I left my telltale thumb-signature in my search for some feasible plan of making away with my victim. I need not go into particulars, for I know perfectly well that this Maitland knows to a nicety how the thing was done. The Daboia Russellii, or Russell's viper, is one of the best known and most deadly of Indian vipers. I procured one of these reptiles at the cost of great delay and some slight risk. That is the whole story. On the night of the murder I took the viper in a box and went down to the water-front, near the Darrow estate. Here I cut a small pole from a clump of alders, made a split in one end of it, and thrust it over the tail of the viper. It pinched him severely and held him fast despite his angry struggles to free himself and to attack anything within his reach. All that remained to be done was to thrust this through the window into the darkened room and to bring the viper within reach of Mr. Darrow. This I did, being careful to crouch so as not to obstruct the light of the window. When I heard my victim's outcry I withdrew the pole, and with it, of course, the viper, and made good my escape. That the reptile bit Mr. Darrow under the chin while his back was toward the window was mere chance, though I regarded it as a very lucky occurrence, since it seemed to render the suicide theory at first inevitable.

"I had some fear lest the hissing of the viper might have been heard, for which reason I hazarded the only question I asked at the examination, and was completely reassured by its answer. I should perhaps state that my purpose in keeping in the background at this examination was my desire to avoid attracting attention to my deformed foot and my halting gait. This latter I had taken pains to conceal at my entrance, but I knew that the first step I took in forgetfulness would expose my halting habit. I had no fear of either Osborne or Allen, but there was something about this Maitland that bade me at once be on my guard, and, as I have said before, I never take an avoidable risk. For this reason I sat at once in the darkest corner I could find and remained there throughout the
exertion. I thought it extremely unlikely, though possible, that an attempt might be made to track the assassin with dogs, yet, since that is precisely the first thing I myself would have done, I decided that the risk was worth avoiding. I accordingly set the boat adrift to indicate an escape by water, and then waded along the beach for half a mile or so, carrying the pole, boards, etc., with me. As I kept where the water was at least six inches deep I knew no dog could follow my trail. At the point where I left the water I sat down upon a rock and put on my stockings and shoes, thoroughly saturating them at the same time with turpentine, and pouring the remainder of the bottle upon the rock where I had sat. As I had known prisoners escaped from Libby Prison to pass in this way undetected within twenty feet of bloodhounds upon their trail, I felt that my tracks had been well covered, and made all possible haste to get ready to attend the examination with the special detail.

"And now I have finished. Before this meets any other eye than mine I shall be dead--beyond the punishment of this world and awaiting the punishment of the next. Lest some may fancy I do not believe this,--thinking that if I did I could not so have acted,--let me say there is no moral restraining power in fear. Fear is essentially selfish, and selfishness is at the bottom of all crimes, my own among the rest. I leave behind me none who will mourn me, and have but one satisfaction, viz.: the knowledge that I shall be regarded as an artist in crime. I take this occasion to bid the public an adieu not altogether, I confess, unmixed with regrets. I am now on that eminence called 'Life'; in a few minutes I shall have jumped off into the darkness, and then---all is mystery."

When I had finished reading this article we all remained silent for a long time. Gwen was the first to speak, and then only to say slowly, as if thinking aloud: "And so it is all over."

CHAPTER IV

It often happens that two souls who love are, like the parts of a Mexican gemel-ring, the more difficult to intertwine the better they fit each other.

You may be assured that, after reading M. Godin's confession, we looked forward to seeing Maitland with a good deal of interest. We knew this new turn of affairs would cause him to call at once, so we all strove to possess our souls in patience while we awaited his coming. In less than half an hour he was with us. "The news of your success has preceded you," said Gwen as soon as he was seated. "I wish to be the first to offer you my congratulations. You have done for me what none other could have done and I owe you a debt of gratitude I can never repay. The thought that I was unable to carry out my father's wishes,--that I could do nothing to free his name from the reproaches which had been cast upon it, was crushing my heart like a leaden weight. You have removed this burden, and, believe me, words fail to express the gratitude I feel. I shall beg of you to permit me to pay you the sum my father mentioned and to--to--" She hesitated and Maitland did not permit her to finish her sentence.

"You must pardon me, Miss Darrow," he replied, "but I can accept no further payment for the little I have done. It has been a pleasure to do it and the knowledge that you are now released from the disagreeable possibilities of your father's will is more than sufficient remuneration. If you still feel that you owe me anything, perhaps you will be willing to grant me a favour."

"There is nothing," she said earnestly, "within my power to grant for which you shall ask in vain."

"Let me beg of you then," he replied, "never again to seek to repay me for any services you may fancy I have rendered. There is nothing you could bestow upon me which I would accept." She gave him a quick, searching glance and I noticed a look of pain upon her face, but Maitland gave it no heed, for, indeed, he seemed to have much ado either to know what he wanted to say, or knowing it, to say it.

"And now," he continued, "I must no longer presume to order your actions. You have considered my wishes so conscientiously, have kept your covenant so absolutely, that what promised to be a disagreeable responsibility has become a pleasure which I find myself loth to discontinue. All power leads to tyranny. Man cannot be trusted with it. Its exercise becomes a consuming passion, and he abuses it. The story is the same, whether nations or individuals be considered. I myself, you see, am a case in point. I thank you for the patience you have shown and the pains you have taken to make everything easy and pleasant for me; and now I must be going, as I have yet much to do in this matter. It may be a long time," he said, extending his hand to her, "before we meet again. We have travelled the same path--" but he paused as if unable to proceed, and a deadly pallor overspread his face as he let fall both her hand and his own. He made a heroic effort to proceed.

"I--I shall miss--very--very much miss--pray pardon me--I--I believe I'm ill--a little faint I'd--I'd better get out into the air--I shall--shall miss--pardon--I--I'm not quite myself-- goodbye, good-bye!" and he staggered unsteadily, half blindly to the door and out into the street without another word. He certainly did look ill.

Gwen's face was a study. In it surprise, fear, pain, and dismay, each struggled for predominance. She tried to retain her self-control while I was present, but it was all in vain. A moment later she threw herself upon the sofa, and, burying her face in the cushions, wept long and bitterly. I stole quietly away and sent Alice to her, and after a time she regained her self-control, if not her usual interest in affairs.

As day after day passed, however, and Maitland neglected to call, transacting such business as he had through
me, the shadow on Gwen's face deepened, and the elasticity of manner, whereof she had given such promise at Maitland's last visit, totally deserted her, giving place to a dreamy, far-away stolidity of disposition which I knew full well boded no good. I stood this sort of thing as long as I could, and then I determined to call on Maitland and give him a "piece of my mind."

I did call, but when I saw him all my belligerent resolutions vanished. He was sitting at his table trying to work out some complicated problem, and he was utterly unfitted for a single minute's consecutive thought. I had not seen him for more than two weeks, and during that time he had grown to look ten years older. His face was drawn, haggard, and deathly pale.

"For Heaven's sake, George," I exclaimed, "what is the matter with you?"

"I've an idea I'm spleeny," he replied with a ghastly attempt at a smile. This was too much for me. He should have the lecture after all. The man who thinks he is dying may be spleeny, but the man who says he is spleeny is, of the two, the one more likely to be dying.

"See here, old man," I began, "don't you get to thinking that when you hide your own head in the sand no one can see the colour of your feathers. You might as well try to cover up Bunker Hill Monument with a wisp of straw. Don't you suppose I know you love Gwen Darrow? That's what's the matter with you."

"Well," he replied, "and if it is, what then?"

"What then?" I ejaculated. "What then? Why go to her like a man; tell her you love her and ask her to be your wife. That's what I'd do if I loved--" But he interrupted me before I had finished the lie, and I was not sorry, for, if I had thought before I became involved in that last sentence, how I feared to speak to Jeannette --well, I should have left it unsaid. I have made my living giving advice till it has become a fixed habit.

"See here, Doc," he broke in upon me, "I do love Gwen Darrow as few men ever love a woman, and the knowledge that she can never be my wife is killing me. Don't interrupt me! I know what I am saying. She can never be my wife! Do you think I would see for her hand? Do you think I would be guilty of making traffic of her gratitude? Has she not her father's command to wed me if I but ask her, even as she would have wed that scoundrel, Godin, had things gone as he planned them? Did she not tell us both that she should keep her covenant with her father though it meant for her a fate worse than death? And you would have me profit by her sacrifice? For shame! Love may wither my heart till it rustles in my breast like a dried leaf, but I will never, never let her know how I love her. And see here, Doc, promise me that you will not tell her I love her--nay, I insist on it."

Thus importuned I said, though it went much against the grain, for that was the very thing I had intended, "She shall not learn it first through me." This seemed to satisfy him, for he said no more upon the subject. When I went back to Gwen I was in no better frame of mind than when I left her. Here were two people so determined to be miserable in spite of everything and everybody that I sought Jeannette by way of counter-irritant for my wounded sympathy.

Ah, Jeannette! Jeannette! to this day the sound of your sweet name is like a flash of colour to the eye. You were a bachelor's first and last love, and he will never forget you.

CHAPTER V

All human things cease--some end. Happy are they who can spring the hard and brittle bar of experience into a bow of promise. For such, there shall ever more be an orderly gravitation.

My next call on Maitland was professional. I found him abed and in a critical condition. I blamed myself severely that I had allowed other duties to keep me so long away, and had him at once removed to the house, where I might, by constant attendance in the future, atone for my negligence in the past. Despite all our efforts, however, Maitland steadily grew worse. Gwen watched by him night and day until I was finally obliged to insist, on account of her own health, that she should leave the sick room long enough to take the rest she so needed. Indeed, I feared lest I should soon have two invalids upon my hands, but Gwen yielded her place to Jeannette and Alice during the nights and soon began to show the good effects of sleep.

I should have told you that, during all this time, Jeannette was staying with us as a guest. I had convinced her father that it was best she should remain with us until the unpleasant notoriety caused by his arrest had, in a measure, subsided. Then, too, I told him with a frankness warranted, I thought, by circumstances that he could not hope to live many weeks longer, and that every effort should be made to make the blow his death would deal Jeannette as light as possible. At this he almost lost his self-control. "What will become of my child when I am gone?" he moaned. "I shall leave her penniless and without any means of support."

"My dear Mr. Latour," I replied, "you need give yourself no uneasiness on that score. I will give you my word, as a man of honour, that so long as Miss Darrow and I live we will see that your daughter wants for none of the necessities of life,--unless she shall find someone who shall have a better right than either of us to care for her." This promise acted like magic upon him. He showered his blessings upon me, exclaiming, "You have lifted a great load from my heart, and I can now die in peace!" And so, indeed, he did. In less than a week he was dead. I had prepared
Jeannette for the shock and so had her father, but, for all this, her grief was intense, for she loved her father with a strength of love few children give their parents. In time, however, her grief grew less insistent and she began to gain something of her old buoyancy.

In the meantime, Maitland's life seemed to hang by a single thread. It was the very worst case of nervous prostration I have ever been called to combat, and for weeks we had to be contented if we enabled him to hold his own. During all this time Gwen watched both Maitland and myself with a closeness that suffered nothing to escape her. I think she knew the changes in his condition better even than I did.

And now I am to relate a most singular action on Gwen's part. I doubt not most of her own sex would have considered it very unfeminine, but anyone who saw it all as I did could not, I think, fail to appreciate the nobility of womanhood which made it possible. Gwen was not dominated by those characteristics usually epitomised in the epithet 'lady.' She was a woman, and she possessed, in a remarkable degree, that fineness of fibre, that solidity of character, and that largeness of soul which rise above the petty conventionalities of life into the broad realm of the real verities of existence.

It occurred on the afternoon of the first day that Maitland showed the slightest improvement. I remember distinctly how he had fallen into a troubled sleep from which he would occasionally cry out in a half-articulate manner, and how Gwen and I sat beside him waiting for him to awaken. Suddenly he said something in his sleep that riveted our attention. "I tell you, Doc," he muttered, "though love of her burn my heart to a cinder, I will never trade upon her gratitude, nor seek to profit by the promise she made her father. Never, so help me God!"

Gwen gave me one hurried, sweeping glance and then, throwing herself upon the sofa, buried her face in the cushions. I forbore to disturb her till I saw that Maitland was waking, when I laid my hand upon her head and asked her to dry her eyes lest he should notice her tears.

"May I speak to him?" she said, with a look of resolution upon her face. I could not divine her thoughts, as she smiled at me through her tears, but I had no hesitancy in relying upon her judgment, so I gave her permission and started to leave the room.

"Please don't go," she said to me. "I would prefer you should hear what I have to say." I reseated myself and Gwen drew near the bedside. Maitland was now awake and following her every motion.

"I have something I want to say to you," she said, bending over him. "Do you feel strong enough to listen?" He nodded his head and she continued. "You have already done a great deal for me, yet I come to you now to ask a further favour,--I will not say a sacrifice --greater than all the rest. Will you try to grant it?"

The rich, deep tones of her voice, vibrant with tender earnestness, seemed to me irresistible.

"I will do anything in my power," the invalid replied, never once moving his eyes from hers.

"Then Heaven grant it be within your power!" she murmured, scarcely above a whisper. "Try not to despise me for what I am about to say. Be lenient in your judgment. My happiness, perhaps my very life, depends upon this issue. I love you more than life; try to love me, if only a little!"

I watched the effect of this declaration with a good deal of anxiety. For fully half a minute Maitland seemed to doubt the evidence of his senses. I saw him pinch himself to see if he were awake, and being thus reassured, he said slowly: "Try--to--love--you! In vain have I tried not to love you from the moment I first saw you. Oh, my God! how I adore you!" He reached his arms out toward her, and, in a moment, they were locked in each other's embrace.

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I saw the first kiss given and then stole stealthily from the room. There was now no need of a doctor. The weird, irresistible alchemy of love was at work and the reign of medicine was over. I did not wish to dim the newly found light by my shadow, and,--well,--I wanted to see Jeannette, so I left.

I need not tell you, even though you are a bachelor, how fast Maitland improved. Gwen would permit no one else to nurse him, and this had much to do with the rapidity of his recovery. In a month he was able to go out, and in another month Gwen became Mrs. Maitland. A happier pair, or one better suited to each other, it has never been my privilege to know. As I visited them in their new home I became more and more dissatisfied with bachelor existence, and there were times when I had half a mind to go straight to Jeannette and ask her advice in the matter. Ah, those days! They will never come to me again. Never again will a pink and white angel knock so loudly at my heart, or be something of her old buoyancy.

In the meantime, Maitland's life seemed to hang by a single thread. It was the very worst case of nervous prostration I have ever been called to combat, and for weeks we had to be contented if we enabled him to hold his own. During all this time Gwen watched both Maitland and myself with a closeness that suffered nothing to escape her. I think she knew the changes in his condition better even than I did.

And now I am to relate a most singular action on Gwen's part. I doubt not most of her own sex would have considered it very unfeminine, but anyone who saw it all as I did could not, I think, fail to appreciate the nobility of womanhood which made it possible. Gwen was not dominated by those characteristics usually epitomised in the epithet 'lady.' She was a woman, and she possessed, in a remarkable degree, that fineness of fibre, that solidity of character, and that largeness of soul which rise above the petty conventionalities of life into the broad realm of the real verities of existence.

It occurred on the afternoon of the first day that Maitland showed the slightest improvement. I remember distinctly how he had fallen into a troubled sleep from which he would occasionally cry out in a half-articulate manner, and how Gwen and I sat beside him waiting for him to awaken. Suddenly he said something in his sleep that riveted our attention. "I tell you, Doc," he muttered, "though love of her burn my heart to a cinder, I will never trade upon her gratitude, nor seek to profit by the promise she made her father. Never, so help me God!"

Gwen gave me one hurried, sweeping glance and then, throwing herself upon the sofa, buried her face in the cushions. I forbore to disturb her till I saw that Maitland was waking, when I laid my hand upon her head and asked her to dry her eyes lest he should notice her tears.

"May I speak to him?" she said, with a look of resolution upon her face. I could not divine her thoughts, as she smiled at me through her tears, but I had no hesitancy in relying upon her judgment, so I gave her permission and started to leave the room.

"Please don't go," she said to me. "I would prefer you should hear what I have to say." I reseated myself and Gwen drew near the bedside. Maitland was now awake and following her every motion.

"I have something I want to say to you," she said, bending over him. "Do you feel strong enough to listen?" He nodded his head and she continued. "You have already done a great deal for me, yet I come to you now to ask a further favour,--I will not say a sacrifice --greater than all the rest. Will you try to grant it?"

The rich, deep tones of her voice, vibrant with tender earnestness, seemed to me irresistible.

"I will do anything in my power," the invalid replied, never once moving his eyes from hers.

"Then Heaven grant it be within your power!" she murmured, scarcely above a whisper. "Try not to despise me for what I am about to say. Be lenient in your judgment. My happiness, perhaps my very life, depends upon this issue. I love you more than life; try to love me, if only a little!"

I watched the effect of this declaration with a good deal of anxiety. For fully half a minute Maitland seemed to doubt the evidence of his senses. I saw him pinch himself to see if he were awake, and being thus reassured, he said slowly: "Try--to--love--you! In vain have I tried not to love you from the moment I first saw you. Oh, my God! how I adore you!" He reached his arms out toward her, and, in a moment, they were locked in each other's embrace.

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And now I may as well stop, for my narrative is over, and I hear someone coming along the hail, doubtless after me. It is only Harold, so I may add a word or two more. I am writing now with difficulty, for some frolicsome individual has placed a hand over my eyes and says, "Guess." I can just see to write between the fingers. Again I am commanded, "Guess!" so I say carelessly, "Alice." Then, would you believe it, someone kisses me and says: "Will you ever have done with that writing? The children wish me to inform you that they have some small claim upon your time." You see how it is. I've got to stop, so I say, as becomes an obedient gentleman: "Very well, I will quit upon one condition. I have been wondering where on earth you were. Tell me what you have been doing with yourself. I have been repeating in retrospect all the horrors of bachelordom."
"Why, Ned dear," my wife replies, "I've only been down-town shopping for Harold and little Jeannette. Bless me, I should think I'd been gone a year!"

"Bless you, my dear Jeannette," I reply; "I should think you had," and I draw her down gently into my lap and kiss her again and again for the sake of the conviction it will carry. She says I am smothering her, which means she is convinced.

You see I have learned some things since I was a bachelor.
CHAPTER I
PUTTING OUT

There was nothing in that clear, calm day, with its blue sky and its flooding sunshine, to suggest in the slightest degree the awful tragedy so close at hand - that tragedy which so puzzled the authorities and which came so close to wrecking the happiness of several innocent people.

The waters of the inlet sparkled like silver, and over those waters poised the osprey, his rapidly moving wings and fan-spread tail suspending him almost stationary in one spot, while, with eager and far-seeing eyes, he peered into the depths below. The bird was a dark blotch against the perfect blue sky for several seconds, and then, suddenly folding his pinions and closing his tail, he darted downward like a bomb dropped from an aeroplane.

There was a splash in the water, a shower of sparkling drops as the osprey arose, a fish vainly struggling in its talons, and from a dusty gray roadster, which had halted along the highway while the occupant watched the hawk, there came an exclamation of satisfaction.

"Did you see that, Harry?" called the occupant of the gray car to a slightly built, bronzed companion in a machine of vivid yellow, christened by some who had ridden in it the "Spanish Omelet." "Did you see that kill? As clean as a hound's tooth, and not a lost motion of a feather. Some sport-that fish-hawk! Gad!"

"Yes, it was a neat bit of work, Gerry. But rather out of keeping with the day."

"Out of keeping? What do you mean?"

"Well, out of tune, if you like that better. It's altogether too perfect a day for a killing of any sort, seems to me."

"Oh, you're getting sentimental all at once, aren't you, Harry?" asked Captain Gerry Poland, with just the trace of a covert sneer in his voice. "I suppose you wouldn't have even a fish-hawk get a much needed meal on a bright, sunshiny day, when, if ever, he must have a whale of an appetite. You'd have him wait until it was dark and gloomy and rainy, with a north-east wind blowing, and all that sort of thing. Now for me, a kill is a kill, no matter what the weather."

"The better the day the worse the deed, I suppose," and Harry Bartlett smiled as he leaned forward preparatory to throwing the switch of his machine's self-starter, for both automobiles had come to a stop to watch the osprey.

"Oh, well, I don't know that the day has anything to do with it," said the captain - a courtesy title, bestowed because he was president of the Maraposa Yacht Club. "I was just interested in the clean way the beggar dived after that fish. Flounder, wasn't it?"

"Yes, though usually the birds are glad enough to get a moss-bunker. Well, the fish will soon be a dead one, I suppose."

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"Yes, food for the little ospreys, I imagine. Well, it's a good death to die - serving some useful purpose, even if it's only to be eaten. Gad! I didn't expect to get on such a gruesome subject when we started out. By the way, speaking of killings, I expect to make a neat one to-day on this cup-winners' match."

"How? I didn't know there was much betting."

"Oh, but there is; and I've picked up some tidy odds against our friend Carwell. I'm taking his end, and I think he's going to win."

"Better be careful, Gerry. Golf is an uncertain game, especially when there's a match on among the old boys like Horace Carwell and the crowd of past-performers and cup-winners he trails along with. He's just as likely to pull or slice as the veriest novice, and once he starts to slide he's a goner. No reserve comeback, you know."

"Oh, I've not so sure about that. He'll be all right if he'll let the champagne alone before he starts to play. I'm banking on him. At the same time I haven't bet all my money. I've a ten spot left that says I can beat you to the clubhouse, even if one of my cylinders has been missing the last two miles. How about it?"

"You're on!" said Harry Bartlett shortly.

There was a throb from each machine as the electric motors started the engines, and then they shot down the wide road in clouds of dust - the sinister gray car and the more showy yellow - while above them, driving its talons deeper into the sides of the fish it had caught, the osprey circled off toward its nest of rough sticks in a dead pine tree on the edge of the forest.

And on the white of the flounder appeared bright red spots of blood, some of which dripped to the ground as the cruel talons closed until they met inside.
It was only a little tragedy, such as went on every day in the inlet and adjacent ocean, and yet, somehow, Harry Bartlett, as he drove on with ever-increasing speed in an endeavor to gain a length on his opponent, could not help thinking of it in contrast to the perfect blue of the sky, in which there was not a cloud. Was it prophetic?

Ruddy-faced men, bronze-faced men, pale-faced men; young women, girls, matrons and "flappers"; caddies burdened with bags of golf clubs and pockets bulging with cunningly found balls; skillful waiters hurrying here and there with trays on which glasses of various shapes, sizes, and of diversified contents tinkled musically—such was the scene at the Maraposa Club on this June morning when Captain Gerry Poland and Harry Bartlett were racing their cars toward it.

It was the chief day of the year for the Maraposa Golf Club, for on it were to be played several matches, not the least in importance being that of the cup-winners, open only to such members as had won prizes in hotly contested contests on the home links.

In spite of the fact that on this day there were to be played several matches, in which visiting and local champions were to try their skill against one another, to the delight of a large gallery, interest centered in the cup-winners' battle. For it was rumored, and not without semblance of truth, that large sums of money would change hands on the result.

Not that it was gambling—oh, my no! In fact any laying of wagers was strictly prohibited by the club's constitution. But there are ways and means of getting cattle through a fence without taking down the bars, and there was talk that Horace Carwell had made a pretty stiff bet with Major Turpin Wardell as to the outcome of the match, the major and Mr. Carwell being rivals of long standing in the matter of drives and puts.

"Beastly fine day, eh, what?" exclaimed Bruce Garrigan, as he set down on a tray a waiter held out to him a glass he had just emptied with every indication of delight in its contents. "If it had been made to order couldn't be improved on," and he flicked from the lapel of Tom Sharwell's coat some ashes which had blown there from the cigarette which Garrigan had lighted.

"You're right for once, Bruce, old man," was the laughing response. "Never mind the ashes now, you'll make a spot if you rub any harder."

"Right for once? I'm always right!" cried Garrigan "And it may interest you to know that the total precipitation, including rain and melted snow in Yuma, Arizona, for the calendar year 1917, was three and one tenth inches, being the smallest in the United States."

"It doesn't interest me a bit, Bruce!" laughed Sharwell. "And to prevent you getting any more of those statistics out of your system, come on over and we'll do a little precipitating on our own account. I can stand another Bronx cocktail."

"I'm with you! But, speaking of statistics, did you know that from the national forests of the United States in the last year there was cut 840,612,030 board feet of lumber? What the thirty feet were for I don't know, but—"

"And I don't care to know," interrupted Tom. "If you spring any more of those beastly dry figures—Say, there comes something that does interest me, though!" he broke in with. "Look at those cars take that turn!"

"Some speed," murmured Garrigan. "It's Bartlett and Poland," he went on, as a shift of wind blew the dust to one side and revealed the gray roadster and the Spanish Omelet. "The rivals are at it again."

Bruce Garrigan, who had a name among the golf club members as a human encyclopaedia, and who, at times, would inform his companions on almost any subject that chanced to come uppermost, tossed away his cigarette and, with Tom Sharwell, watched the oncoming automobile racers.

"They're rivals in more ways than one," remarked Sharwell. "And it looks, now, as though the captain rather had the edge on Harry, in spite of the fast color of Harry's car."

"That's right," admitted Garrigan. "Is it true what I've heard about both of them—that each hopes to place the diamond hoop of proprietorship on the fair Viola?"

"I guess if you've heard that they're both trying for her, it's true enough," answered Sharwell. "And it also happens, if that old lady, Mrs. G. O. Sipp, is to be believed, that there, also, the captain has the advantage."

"How's that? I thought Harry had made a tidy sum on that ship-building project he put through."

"He did, but it seems that he and his family have a penchant for doing that sort of thing, and, some years ago, in one of the big mergers in which his family took a prominent part, they, or some one connected with them, pinched the Honorable Horace Carwell so that he squealed for mercy like a lamb led to the Wall street slaughter house."

"So that's the game, is it?"

"Yes. And ever since then, though Viola Carwell has been just as nice to Harry as she has to Gerry— as far as any one can tell—there has been talk that Harry is persona non grata as far as her father goes. He never forgives any business beat, I understand."

"Was it anything serious?" asked Garrigan, as they watched the racing automobiles swing around the turn of the road that led to the clubhouse.
"I don't know the particulars. It was before my time - I mean before I paid much attention to business."

"Rot! You don't now. You only think you do. But I'm interested. I expect to have some business dealing with Carwell myself, and if I could get a line - "

"Sorry, but I can't help you out, old man. Better see Harry. He knows the whole story, and he insists that it was all straight on his relatives' part. But it's like shaking a mince pie at a Thanksgiving turkey to mention the matter to Carwell. He hasn't gone so far as to forbid Harry the house, but there's a bit of coldness just the same."

"I see. And that's why the captain has the inside edge on the love game. Well, Miss Carwell has a mind of her own, I fancy."

"Indeed she has! She's more like her mother used to be. I remember Mrs. Carwell when I was a boy. She was a dear, somewhat conventional lady. How she ever came to take up with the sporty Horace, or he with her, was a seven-days' wonder. But they lived happily, I believe."

"Then Mrs. Carwell is dead?"

"Oh, yes-some years. Mr. Carwell's sister, Miss Mary, keeps The Haven up to date for him. You've been there?"

"Once, at a reception. I'm not on the regular calling list, though Miss Viola is pretty enough to - "

"Look out!" suddenly cried Sharwell, as though appealing to the two automobilists, far off as they were. For the yellow car made a sudden swerve and seemed about to turn turtle.

But Bartlett skillfully brought the Spanish Omelet back on the road again, and swung up alongside his rival for the home stretch—the broad highway that ran in front of the clubhouse.

The players who were soon to start out on the links; the guests, the gallery, and the servants gathered to see the finish of the impromptu race, murmurs arising as it was seen how close it was likely to be. And close it was, for when the two machines, with doleful whinings of brakes, came to a stop in front of the house, the front wheels were in such perfect alignment that there was scarcely an inch of difference.

"A dead heat!" exclaimed Bartlett, as he leaped out and motioned for one of the servants to take the car around to the garage.

"Yes, you win!" agreed Captain Poland, as he pushed his goggles back on his cap. He held out a bill.

"What's it for?" asked Bartlett, drawing back.

"Why, I put up a ten spot that I'd beat you. I didn't, and you win."

"Buy drinks with your money!" laughed Bartlett. "The race was to be for a finish, not a dead heat. We'll try it again, sometime."

"All right—any time you like!" said the captain crisply, as he pushed his goggles back on his cap. He held out a bill.

"No. My throat is as dusty as a vacuum cleaner. Have any of the matches started yet, Bruce?" he asked, turning to the Human Encyclopedia.

"Only some of the novices. And, speaking of novices, do you know that in Scotland there are fourteen thousand, seven hundred - "

"Cut it, Bruce! Cut it!" begged the captain. "Sit in — you and Tom — and we'll make it two bottles. Anything to choke off your flow of useless statistics!" and he laughed good-naturedly.

"When does the cup-winners' match start?" asked Bartlett, as the four young men sat about the table under the veranda. "That's the one I'm interested in."

"In about an hour," announced Sharwell, as he consulted a card. "Hardly any of the veterans are here yet."

"Has Mr. Carwell arrived?" asked Captain Poland, as he raised his glass and seemed to be studying the bubbles that spiraled upward from the hollow stem.

"You'll know when he gets here," answered Bruce Garrigan.

"How so?" asked the captain. "Does he have an official announcer?"

"No, but you'll hear his car before you see it."

"New horn?"

"No, new car—new color—new everything!" said Garrigan. "He's just bought a new ten thousand dollar French car, and it's painted red, white and blue, and—"

"Red, white and blue?" chorused the other three men.

"Yes. Very patriotic. His friends don't know whether he's honoring Uncle Sam or the French Republic. However, it's all the same. His car is a wonder."

"I must have a brush with him!" murmured Captain Poland.

"Don't. You'll lose out," advised Garrigan. "It can do eighty on fourth speed, and Carwell is sporty enough to slip it into that gear if he needed to."

"Um! Guess I'll wait until I get my new machine, then," decided the captain. There was more talk, but Bartlett gradually dropped out of the conversation and went to walk about the club.
grounds.

Maraposa was a social, as well as a golfing, club, and the scene of many dances and other affairs. It lay a few miles back from the shore near Lakeside, in New Jersey. The clubhouse was large and elaborate, and the grounds around it were spacious and well laid out.

Not far away was Loch Harbor, where the yachts of the club of which Captain Gerry Poland was president anchored, and a mile or so in the opposite direction was Lake Tacoma, on the shore of which was Lakeside. A rather exclusive colony summered there, the hotel numbering many wealthy persons among its patrons.

Harry Bartlett, rather wishing he had gone in for golf more devotedly, was wandering about, casually greeting friends and acquaintances, when he heard his name called from the cool and shady depths of a summer-house on the edge of the golf links.

"Oh, Minnie! How are you?" he cordially greeted a rather tall and dark girl who extended her slim hand to him.

"I didn't expect to see you today."

"Oh, I take in all the big matches, though I don't play much myself," answered Minnie Webb. "I'm surprised to find you without a caddy, though, Harry."

"Too lazy, I'm afraid. I'm going to join the gallery to-day. Meanwhile, if you don't mind, I'll sit in here and help you keep cool."

"It isn't very hard to do that to-day," and she moved over to make room for him. "Isn't it just perfect weather!"

At one time Minnie Webb and Harry Bartlett had been very close friends - engaged some rumors had it. But now they were jolly good companions, that was all.

"Seen the Carwells' new machine?" asked Bartlett.

"No, but I've heard about it. I presume they'll drive up in it to-day."

"Does Viola run it?"

"I haven't heard. It's a powerful machine, some one said-more of a racer than a touring car, Mr. Blossom was remarking."

"Well, he ought to know. I understand he's soon to be taken into partnership with Mr. Carwell."

"I don't know," murmured Minnie, and she seemed suddenly very much interested in the vein structure of a leaf she pulled from a vine that covered the summer-house.

Bartlett smiled. Gossip had it that Minnie Webb and Le Grand Blossom, Mr. Carwell's private secretary, were engaged. But there had been no formal announcement, though the two had been seen together more frequently of late than mere friendship would warrant.

There was a stir in front of the clubhouse, followed by a murmur of voices, and Minnie, peering through a space in the vines, announced:

"There's the big car now. Oh, I don't like that color at all! I'm as patriotic as any one, but to daub a perfectly good car up like that - well, it's - "

"Sporty, I suppose Carwell thinks," finished Bartlett. He had risen as though to leave the summer-house, but as he saw Captain Poland step up and offer his hand to Viola Carwell, he drew back and again sat down beside Minnie.

A group gathered about the big French car, obviously to the delight of Mr. Carwell, who was proud of the furor created by his latest purchase.

Though he kept up his talk with Minnie in the summer-house, Harry Bartlett's attention was very plainly not on his present companion nor the conversation. At any other time Minnie Webb would have noticed it and taxed him with it, but now, she, too, had her attention centered elsewhere. She watched eagerly the group about the big machine, and her eyes followed the figure of a man who descended from the rear seat and made his way out along a path that led to a quiet spot.

"I think I'll go in now," murmured Minnie Webb. "I have to see - " Bartlett was not listening. In fact he was glad of the diversion, for he saw Viola Carwell turn with what he thought was impatience aside from Captain Poland, and that was the very chance the other young man had been waiting for.

He followed Minnie Webb from the little pavilion, paying no attention to where she drifted. But he made his way through the press of persons to where Viola stood, and he saw her eyes light up as he approached. His, too, seemed brighter.

"I was wondering if you would come to see dad win," she murmured to him, as he took her hand, and Captain Poland, with a little bow, stepped back.

"You knew I'd come, didn't you?" Bartlett asked in a low voice.

"I hoped so," she murmured. "Now, Harry," she went on in a low voice, as they moved aside, "this will be a good time for you to smooth things over with father. If he wins, as he feels sure he will, you must congratulate him very heartily - exceptionally so. Make a fuss over him, so to speak. He'll be club champion, and it will seem natural for you to bubble over about it."
"But why should I, Viola? I haven't done anything to merit his displeasure."

"I know. But you remember what a touch-fire he is. He's always held that business matter against you, though I'm sure you had nothing to do with it. Now, if he wins, and I hope he will, you can take advantage of it to get on better terms with him, and - "

"Well, I'm willing to be friends, you know that, Viola. But I can't pretend - I never could!"

"You're stubborn, Harry!" and Viola pouted.

"Well, perhaps I am. When I know I'm right - "

"Couldn't you forget it just once?"

"I don't see how!"

"Oh, you provoke me! But if you won't you won't, I suppose. Only it would be such a good chance - "

"Well, I'll see him after the match, Viola. I'll do my best to be decent."

"You must go a little farther than that, Harry. Dad will be all worked up if he wins, and he'll want a fuss made over him. It will be the very chance for you."

"All right-I'll do my best," murmured Bartlett. And then a servant came up to summon him to the telephone.

Viola was not left long alone, for Captain Poland was watching her from the tail of his eye, and he was at her side before Harry Bartlett was out of sight.

"Perhaps you'd like to come for a little spin with me, Miss Carwell," said the captain. "I just heard that they've postponed the cup-winners' match an hour; and unless you want to sit around here - "

"Come on!" cried Viola, impulsively. "It's too perfect a day to sit around, and I'm only interested in my father's match."

There was another reason why Viola Carwell was glad of the chance to go riding with Captain Poland just then. She really was a little provoked with Bartlett's stubbornness, or what she called that, and she thought it might "wake him up," as she termed it, to see her with the only man who might be classed as his rival.

As for herself, Viola was not sure whether or not she would admit Captain Poland to that class. There was time enough yet.

And so, as Bartlett went in to the telephone, to answer a call that had come most inopportune for him, Viola Carwell and Captain Poland swept off along the pleasantly shaded country road.

Left to herself, for which just then she was thankful, Minnie Webb drifted around until she met LeGrand Blossom.

"What's the matter, Lee?" she asked him in a low voice, and he smiled with his eyes at her, though his face showed no great amount of jollity. "You're as solemn as though every railroad stock listed had dropped ten points just after you bought it."

"No, it isn't quite as bad as that," he said, as he fell into step beside her, and they strolled off on one of the less-frequented walks.

"I thought everything was going so well with you. Has there been any hitch in the partnership arrangement?" asked Minnie.

"No, not exactly."

"Have you lost money?"

"No, I can't say that I have."

"Then for goodness' sake what is it? Do I have to pump you like a newspaper reporter?" and Minnie Webb laughed, showing a perfect set of teeth that contrasted well against the dark red and tan of her cheeks.

"Oh, I don't know that it's anything much," replied LeGrand Blossom.

"It's something!" insisted Minnie.

"Well, yes, it is. And as it'll come out, sooner or later, I might as well tell you now," he said, with rather an air of desperation, and as though driven to it. "Have you heard any rumors that Mr. Carwell is in financial difficulties?"

"Why, no! The idea! I always thought he had plenty of money. Not a multi-millionaire, of course, but better off financially than any one else in Lakeside." He was once; but he won't be soon, if he keeps up the pace he's set of late," went on LeGrand Blossom, and his voice was gloomy.

"What do you mean?"

"Well, things don't look so well as they did. He was very foolish to buy that ten-thousand-dollar yacht so soon after spending even more than that on this red, white and blue monstrosity of his!"

"You don't mean to tell me he's bought a yacht, too?"

"Yes, the Osprey that Colonel Blakeson used to sport up and down the coast in. Paid a cool ten thousand for it, though if he had left it to me I could have got it for eight, I'm sure."

"Well, twenty thousand dollars oughtn't to worry Mr. Carwell, I should think," returned Minnie.
"It wouldn't have, a year ago," answered LeGrand. "But he's been on the wrong side of the market for some time. Then, too, something new has cropped up about that old Bartlett deal."

"You mean the one over which Harry's uncle and Mr. Carwell had such a fuss?"

"Yes, Mr. Carwell's never got over that. And there are rumors that he lost quite a sum in a business transaction with Captain Poland."

"Oh, dear!" sighed the girl. "Isn't business horrid! I'm glad I'm not a man. But what is this about Captain Poland?"

"I don't know?haven't heard it all yet, as Mr. Carwell doesn't tell me everything, even if he has planned to take me into partnership with him. But now I'm not so keen on it."

"Keen on what, Lee?" and Minnie Webb leaned just the least bit nearer to his side.

"On going into partnership with a man who spends money so lavishly when he needs all the ready cash he can lay his hands on. But don't mention this to any one, Minnie. If it got out it might precipitate matters, and then the whole business would tumble down like a house of cards. As it is, I may be able to pull him out. But I've put the soft pedal on the partnership talk."

"Has Mr. Carwell mentioned it of late?"

"No. All he seems to be interested in is this golf game that may make him club champion. But keep secret what I have told you."

Minnie Webb nodded assent, and they turned back toward the clubhouse, for they had reached a too secluded part of the grounds.

Meanwhile, Viola Carwell was not enjoying her ride with Captain Poland as much as she had expected she would. As a matter of fact it had been undertaken largely to cause Bartlett a little uneasiness; and as the Seeing this, the latter changed his mind concerning something he had fully expected to speak to Viola about that day, if he got the chance.

Captain Poland was genuinely in love with Viola, and he had reason to feel that she cared for him, though whether enough to warrant a declaration of love on his part was hard to understand.

"But I won't take a chance now," mused the captain, rather moodily; and the talk descended to mere monosyllables on the part of both of them. "I must see Carwell and have it out with him about that insurance deal. Maybe he holds that against me, though the last time I talked with him he gave me to understand that I'd stand a better show than Harry. I must see him after the game. If he wins he'll be in a mellow humor, particularly after a bottle or so. That's what I'll do."

The captain spun his car up in front of the clubhouse and helped Viola out. "I think we are in plenty of time for your father's match," he remarked.

"Yes," she assented. "I don't see any of the veterans on the field yet," and she looked across the perfect course. "I'll go to look for dad and wish him luck. He always wants me to do that before he starts his medal play. See you again, Captain"; and with a friendly nod she left the somewhat chagrined yachtsman.

When Captain Poland had parked his car he took a short cut along a path that led through a little clump of bushes. Midway he heard voices. In an instant he recognized them as those of Horace Carwell and Harry Bartlett. He heard Bartlett say:

"But don't you see how much better it would be to drop it all - to have nothing more to do with her?"

"Look here, young man, you mind your own business!" snapped Mr. Carwell. "I know what I'm doing!"

"I haven't any doubt of it, Mr. Carwell; but I ventured to suggest?" went on Bartlett.

"Keep your suggestions to yourself, if you please. I've had about all I want from you and your family. And if I hear any more of your impudent talk - "

Then Captain Poland moved away, for he did not want to hear any more.

In the meantime Viola hurried back to the clubhouse, and forced herself to be gay. But, somehow, a cloud seemed to have come over her day.

The throng had increased, and she caught sight, among the press, of Jean Forette, their chauffeur.

"Have you seen my father since he arrived, Jean?" asked Viola.

"Oh, he is somewhere about, I suppose," was the answer, and it was given in such a surly tone with such a churlish manner that Viola flushed with anger and bit her lips to keep back a sharp retort.

At that moment Minnie Webb strolled past. She had heard the question and the answer.

"I just saw your father going out with the other contestants, Viola," said Minnie Webb, for they were friends of some years' standing. "I think they are going to start to play. I wonder why they say the French are such a polite race she went on, speaking lightly to cover Viola's confusion caused by the chauffeur's manner. "He was positively insulting."

"He was," agreed Viola. "But I shouldn't mind him, I suppose. He does not like the new machine, and father has
told him to find another place by the end of the month. I suppose that has piqued him.”

While there were many matches to be played at the Maraposa Club that day, interest, as far as the older members and their friends were concerned, was centered in that for cup-winners. These constituted the best players - the veterans of the game - and the contest was sure to be interesting and close.

Horace Carwell was a "sport," in every meaning of the term. Though a man well along in his forties, he was as lithe and active as one ten years younger. He motored, fished, played golf, hunted, and of late had added yachting to his amusements. He was wealthy, as his father had been before him, and owned a fine home in New York, but he spent a large part of every year at Lakeside, where he might enjoy the two sports he loved best-golfing and yachting.

Viola was an only child, her mother having died when she was about sixteen, and since then Mr. Carwell's maiden sister had kept watch and ward over the handsome home, The Haven. Viola, though loving her father with the natural affection of a daughter and some of the love she had lavished on her mother, was not altogether in sympathy with the sporting proclivities of Mr. Carwell.

True, she accompanied him to his golf games and sailed with him or rode in his big car almost as often as he asked her. And she thoroughly enjoyed these things. But what she did not enjoy was the rather too jovial comradeship that followed on the part of the men and women her father associated with. He was a good liver and a good spender, and he liked to have about him such persons-men "sleek and fat," who if they did not "sleep o' nights," at least had the happy faculty of turning night into day for their own amusement.

So, in a measure, Viola and her father were out of sympathy, as had been husband and wife before her; though there had never been a whisper of real incompatibility; nor was there now, between father and daughter.

"Fore!"

It was the warning cry from the first tee to clear the course for the start of the cup-winners' match. In anticipation of some remarkable playing, an unusually large gallery would follow the contestants around. The best caddies had been selected, clubs had been looked to with care and tested, new balls were got out, and there was much subdued excitement, as befitted the occasion.

Mr. Carwell, his always flushed face perhaps a trifle more like a mild sunset than ever, strolled to the first tee. He swung his driver with freedom and ease to make sure it was the one that best suited him, and then turned to Major Wardell, his chief rival. "Do you want to take any more?" he asked meaningly.

"No, thank you," was the laughing response. "I've got all I can carry. Not that I'm going to let you beat me, but I'm always a stroke or two off in my play when the sun's too bright, as it is now. However, I'm not crawling."

"You'd better not!" declared his rival. As for me, the brighter the sun the better I like it. Well, are we all ready?"

The officials held a last consultation and announced that play might start. Mr. Carwell was to lead.

The first hole was not the longest in the course, but to place one's ball on fair ground meant driving very surely, and for a longer distance than most players liked to think about. Also a short distance from the tee was a deep ravine, and unless one cleared that it was a handicap hard to overcome.

Mr. Carwell made his little tee of sand with care, and placed the ball on the apex. Then he took his place and glanced back for a moment to where Viola stood between Captain Poland and Harry Bartlett. Something like a little frown gathered on the face of Horace Carwell as he noted the presence of Bartlett, but it passed almost at once.

"Well, here goes, ladies and gentlemen!" exclaimed Mr. Carwell in rather loud tones and with a free and easy manner he did not often assume. "Here's where I bring home the bacon and make my friend, the major, eat humble pie."

Viola flushed. It was not like her father to thus boast. On the contrary he was usually what the Scotch call a "canny" player. He never predicted that he was going to win, except, perhaps, to his close friends. But he was now boasting like the veriest schoolboy.

"Here I go!" he exclaimed again, and then he swung at the ball with his well-known skill.

It was a marvelous drive, and the murmurs of approbation that greeted it seemed to please Mr. Carwell.

"Let's see anybody beat that!" he cried as he stepped off the tee to give place to Major Wardell.

Mr. Carwell's white ball had sailed well up on the putting green of the first hole, a shot seldom made at Maraposa.

"A few more strokes like that and he'll win the match," murmured Bartlett.

"And when he does, don't forget what I told you," whispered Viola to him.

He found her hand, hidden at her side in the folds of her dress, and pressed it. She smiled up at him, and then they watched the major swing at his ball.

"It's going to be a corking match," murmured more than one member of the gallery, as they followed the players down the field.

"If any one asked me, I should say that Carwell had taken just a little too much champagne to make his strokes true toward the last hole," said Tom Sharwell to Bruce Garrigan.
"Perhaps," was the admission. "But I'd like to see him win. And, for the sake of saying something, let me inform you that in Africa last year there were used in nose rings alone for the natives seventeen thousand four hundred and twenty-one pounds of copper wire. While for anklets - "

"I'll buy you a drink if you chop it off short!" offered Sharwell.

"Taken!" exclaimed Garrigan, with a grin.

The cup play went on, the four contestants being well matched, and the shots duly applauded from hole to hole. The turn was made and the homeward course began, with the excitement increasing as it was seen that there would be the closest possible finish, between the major and Mr. Carwell at least.

"What's the row over there?" asked Bartlett suddenly, as he walked along with Viola and Captain Poland.

"Where?" inquired the captain.

"Among those autos. Looks as if one was on fire."

"It does," agreed Viola. "But I can see our patriotic palfrey, so I guess it's all right. There are enough people over there, anyhow. But it issomething!"

There was a dense cloud of smoke hovering over the place where some of the many automobiles were parked at one corner of the course. Still it might be some one starting his machine, with too much oil being burned in the cylinders.

"Now for the last hole!" exulted Mr. Carwell, as they approached the eighteenth. "I've got you two strokes now, Major, and I'll have you fourby the end of the match."

"I'm not so sure of that," was the laughing and good-natured reply.

There was silence in the gallery while the players made ready for the last hole.

There was a sharp impact as Mr. Carwell's driver struck the little white ball and sent it sailing in a graceful curve well toward the last hole.

"A marvelous shot!" exclaimed Captain Poland. "On the green again! Another like that and he'll win the game!"

"And I can do it, too!" boasted Carwell, who overheard what was said.

The others drove off in turn, and the play reached the final stage of putting. Viola turned as though to go over and see what the trouble was among the automobiles. She looked back as she saw her father stoop to send the ball into the little depressed cup. She felt sure that he would win, for she had kept a record of his strokes and those of his opponents. The game was all but over.

"I wonder if there can be anything the matter with our car?" mused Viola, as she saw the smoke growing denser. "Dad's won, so I'm going over to see. Perhaps that chauffeur - "

She did not finish the sentence. She turned to look back at her father once more, and saw him make the putt that won the game at the last hole. Then, to her horror she saw him reel, throw up his hands, and fall heavily in a heap, while startled cries reached her ears.

"Oh! Oh! What has happened?" she exclaimed, and deadly fear clutched at her heart - and not without good cause.

CHAPTER II
THE NINETEENTH HOLE

For several seconds after Mr. Carwell fell so heavily on the putting green, having completed the last stroke that sent the white ball into the cup and made him club champion, there was not a stir among the other players grouped about him; nor did the gallery, grouped some distance back, rush up. The most natural thought, and one that was in the minds of the majority, was that the clubman had overbalanced himself in making his stance for the putt shot, and had fallen. There was even a little thoughtless laughter from some in the gallery. But it was almost instantly hushed, for it needed but a second glance to tell that something more serious than a simple fall had occurred.

Or if it was a fall caused by an unsteady position, taken when he made his last shot, it had been such a heavy one that Mr. Carwell was overlong in recovering from it. He remained in a huddled heap on the short-cropped, velvety turf of the putting green.

Then the murmurs of wonder came, surging from many throats, and the friends of Mr. Carwell closed around to help him to his feet-to render what aid was needed. Among them were Captain Poland and Harry Bartlett, and as the latter stepped forward he glanced what aid, for an instant, at the blue sky.

Far above the Maraposa golf links circled a lone osprey on its way to the inlet or ocean. Rather idly Bartlett wondered if it was the same one he and Captain Poland had seen dart down and kill the fish just before the beginning of the big match.

"What's the matter, Horace? Sun too much for you?" asked Major Wardell, as he leaned over his friend and rival. "It is a bit hot; I feel it myself. But I didn't think it would knock you out. Or are you done up because you beat me? Come - "

He ceased his rather railing talk, and a look came over his face that told those near him something serious had
happened. There was a rush toward the prostrate man.

"Keep back, please!" exclaimed the major. "He seems to have fainted. He needs air. Is Dr. Rowland here? I thought I saw him at the clubhouse a while ago. Some one get him, please. If not - "

"I'll get him!" some one offered

"Here, give him a sip of this - it's brandy!" and an automobilist, who had come across the links from the nearest point to the highway, offered his flask.

The major unscrewed the silver top, which formed a tiny cup, and tried to let some of the potent liquor trickle between the purplish lips of the unconscious victor in the cup-winners' match. But more of the liquid was spilled on his face and neck than went into his mouth. The air reeked with the odor of it.

"What has happened? Is he hurt?" gasped Viola, who made her way through the press of people, which opened for her, till she stood close beside her father. "What is it? Oh, is he - ?"

"He fell," some one said.

"Just as he made his winning stroke," added another.

"Oh!" and Viola herself reeled unsteadily.

"It's all right," a voice said in her ear, and though it was in the ordinary tones of Captain Poland, to the alarmed girl it seemed as though it came from the distant peaks of the hills. "He'll be all right presently," went on the captain, as he supported Viola and led her out of the throng.

"It's just a touch of the sun, I fancy. They've gone for a doctor."

"Oh, but, Captain Poland - father was never like this before - he was always so strong and well - I never knew him to complain of the heat. And as for fainting - why I believe I almost did it myself, just now, didn't I?"

"Almost, yes."

"But father never did. Oh, I must go to him!"

She struggled a little and moved away from his half encircling arm, for he had seen that her strength was failing her and had supported her as he led her away. "I must go to him!"

"Better not just now," said Captain Poland gently. "Harry is there with him, the major and other friends. They will look after him. You had better come with me to the clubhouse and lie down. I will get you a cup of tea."

"No! I must be with my father!" she insisted. "He will need me when he - when he revives. Please let me go to him!"

The captain saw that it was of little use to oppose her so he led her back toward the throng that was still about the prostrate player. A clubman was hurrying back with a young man who carried a small black bag.

"They've got a doctor, I think," said Gerry. "Not Dr. Rowland, though. However, I dare say it will be all right."

A fit of trembling seized Viola, and it was so violent that, for a moment, Captain Poland thought she would fall. He had to hold her close, and he wished there was some place near at hand to which he might take her. But the clubhouse was some distance away, and there were no conveyances within call.

However, Viola soon recovered her composure, or at least seemed to, and smiled up at him, though there was no mirth in it.

"I'll be all right now," she said. "Please take me to him. He will ask for me as soon as he recovers."

The young doctor had made his way through the throng and now knelt beside the prostrate man. The examination was brief - a raising of the eyelids, an ear pressed over the heart, supplemented by the use of the stethoscope, and then the young medical man looked up, searching the ring of faces about him as though seeking for some one in authority to whom information might be imparted. Then he announced, generally:

"He is dead."

"Dead!" exclaimed several.

"Hush!" cautioned Harry Bartlett "She'll hear you!"

He looked in the direction whence Viola and Captain Poland were approaching the scene.

"Are you sure, Dr. Baird?" he asked.

"Positive. The heart action has entirely stopped."

"But might that not be from some cause - some temporary cause?"

"Yes, but not in this case. Mr. Carwell is dead. I can do nothing for him."

It sounded brutal, but it was only a medical man's plain statement of the case.

"Some one must tell her," murmured Minnie Webb, who had been attracted to the crowd, though she was not much of a golf enthusiast. "Poor Viola! Some one must tell her."

"I will," offered Bartlett, and he made his way through a living lane that opened for him. Then it closed again, hiding the body from sight. Some one placed a sweater over the face that had been so ruddy, and was now so pale.

Captain Poland, still supporting Viola on his arm, saw Bartlett approaching. Somehow he surmised what his fellow clubman was going to say.
"Oh, Harry!" exclaimed Viola, impulsively holding out her hands to him. "Is he all right? Is he better?"
"I am sorry," began Harry, and then she seemed to sense what he was going to add.
"He isn't - Oh, don't tell me he is - "
"The doctor says he is dead, Viola," answered Bartlett gently. "He passed away without pain or suffering. It must have been heart disease."

But Viola Carwell never heard the last words, for she really fainted this time, and Captain Poland laid her gently down on the soft, green grass.

"Better get the doctor for her," he advised Bartlett. "She'll need him, if her father doesn't." As Harry Bartlett turned aside, waving back the curiosity seekers that were already leaving the former scene of excitement for the latest, LeGrand Blossom came up. He seemed very cool and not at all excited, considering what had happened.

"I will look after Miss Carwell," he said.

"Perhaps you had better see to Mr. Carwell - Mr. Carwell's remains, Blossom," suggested Captain Poland. "Miss Carwell will be herself very soon. She has only fainted. Her father is dead.

"Dead? Are you sure?" asked LeGrand Blossom, and his manner seemed a trifle more naturally excited.

"Dr. Baird says so. You'd better go to him. He may want to ask some questions, and you were more closely associated with Carwell than any of the rest of us."

"Very well, I'll look after the body," said the secretary. "Did the doctor say what killed him?"

"No. That will be gone into later, I dare say. Probably heart disease; though I never knew he had it," said Bartlett.

"Nor I," added Blossom. "I'd be more inclined to suspect apoplexy. But are you sure Miss Carwell will be all right?"

"Yes," answered Captain Poland, who had raised her head after sprinkling in her face some water a caddy brought in his cap. "She is reviving."

Dr. Baird came up just then and gave her some aromatic spirits of ammonia.

Viola opened her eyes. There was no comprehension in them, and she looked about in wonder. Then, as her benumbed brain again took up its work, she exclaimed:

"Oh, it isn't true! It can't be true! Tell me it isn't!"

"I am sorry, but it seems to be but too true," said Captain Poland gently. "Did he ever speak of trouble with his heart, Viola?"

"Never, Gerry. He was always so well and strong."

"You had better come to the clubhouse," suggested Bartlett, and she went with them both.

A little later the body of Horace Carwell was carried to the "nineteenth hole" - that place where all games are played over again in detail as the contestants put away their clubs.

A throng followed the silent figure, borne on the shoulders of some grounds workmen, but only club members were admitted to the house. And among them buzzed talk of the tragedy that had so suddenly ended the day of sports.

"He looked all right when he started to play," said one. "Never saw him in better form, and some of his shots were marvelous."

"He'd been drinking a little too much for a man to play his best, especially on a hot day," ventured another. "He must have been taken ill from that, and the excitement of trying to win over the major, and it affected his heart."

"Never knew him to have heart disease," declared Bruce Garrigan.

"Lots of us have it and don't know it," commented Tom Sharwell. "I suppose it will take an autopsy to decide."

"Rather tough on Miss Carwell," was another comment.

"That's true!" several agreed.

The body of Horace Carwell was placed in one of the small card rooms, and the door locked. Then followed some quick telephoning on the part of Dr. Baird, who had recently joined the golf club, and who had arrived at the clubhouse shortly before Mr. Carwell dropped dead.

It was at the suggestion of Harry Bartlett that Dr. Addison Lambert, the Carwell family physician, was sent for, and that rather aged practitioner arrived as soon as possible.

He was taken in to view the body, together with Dr. Baird, who was almost pathetically deferential to his senior colleague. The two medical men were together in the room with the body for some time, and when they came out Viola Carwell was there to meet them. Dr. Lambert put his arms about her. He had known her all her life - since she first ventured into this world, in fact - and his manner was most fatherly.

"Oh, Uncle Add!" she murmured to him - for she had long called him by this endearing title - Oh, Uncle Add! What is it? Is my father - is he really - "

"My dear little girl, your father is dead, I am sorry to say. You must be very brave, and bear up. Be the brave
woman he would want you to be."

"I will, Uncle Add. But, oh, it is so hard! He was all I had! Oh, what made him die?"

She questioned almost as a little child might have done.

"That I don't know, my dear," answered Dr. Lambert gently. "We shall have to find that out later by - Well, we'll find out later, Dr. Baird and I. You had better go home now. I'll have your car brought around. Is that - that Frenchman here - your chauffeur?"

"Yes, he was here a little while ago. But I had rather not go home with him - at least, unless some one else comes with me. I don't like - I don't like that big, new car.

"If you will come with me, Viola - " began Bartlett.

"Yes, Harry, I'll go with you. Oh, poor Aunt Mary! This will be a terrible shock to her. I - "

"I'll telephone, offered Dr. Lambert. "She'll know when you arrive. And I'll be over to see you, Viola, as soon as I make some arrangements."

"And will you look after - after poor father?"

"Yes, you may leave it all to me.

And so, while the body of the dead clubman remained at the nineteenth hole, Viola Carwell was taken to The Haven by Harry Bartlett, while Captain Poland, nodding farewell to LeGrand Blossom and some of his other friends, left the grounds in his gray car.

And as he rode down past the inlet where the tide was now running out to the sea, he saw an osprey dart down and strike at an unseen fish.

But the bird rose with dripping pinions, its talons empty.

"You didn't get any one that time!" murmured the captain.

CHAPTER III

"WHY?"

Through the silent house echoed the vibration of the electric bell, sounding unnecessarily loud, it seemed. The maid who answered took the caller's card to Miss Mary Carwell, Viola's aunt.

"He wants to see Miss Viola," the servant reported. "Shall I tell her?"

"You had better, yes. She went to lie down, but she will want to see Captain Poland. Wait, I'll tell her myself. Where is he?"

"In the library, ma am.

"Very well. I'll see him."

Mr. Carwell's sister literally swept down the stairs, her black silk dress rustling somberly and importantly. She was a large woman, and her bearing and air were in keeping.

"It was very good of you to come," she murmured, as she sank, with more rustling and shimmerings, into a chair, while the captain waited for her to be settled, like a boat at anchor, before he again took his place. "Viola will be down presently. I gave her a powder the doctor left for her, and she slept, I hope, since we were both awake nearly all of last night."

"I should imagine so. The strain and shock must have been intense. But please don't disturb her if she is resting. I merely called to see if I could do anything."

"Thank you so much. We are waiting for the doctors' report. It was necessary to have an autopsy, I understand?" she questioned.

"Yes. The law requires it in all cases of sudden and mysterious death."

"Mysterious death, Captain Poland!"

Mary Carwell seemed to swell up like a fretful turkey.

"Well, by that I mean unexplained. Mr. Carwell dropped dead suddenly and from no apparent cause."

"But it was heart disease - or apoplexy - of course! What else could it be?"

"It must have been one or the other of those, Miss Carwell, I am sure," the captain murmured sympathetically.

"But the law requires that such a fact be established to the satisfaction of the county physician."

"And who is he?"

"Dr. Rowland."

"Will there be a coroner's inquest, such as I have read about? I couldn't hear anything like that."

"It is not at all necessary, Miss Carwell," went on the captain. "The law of New Jersey does not demand that in cases of sudden and unexplained death, unless the county physician is not satisfied with his investigation. In that matter New Jersey differs from some of the other states. The county physician will make an autopsy to determine the cause of death. If he is satisfied that it was from natural causes he gives a certificate to that effect, and that ends the matter."

"Oh, then it will be very simple."
"Yes, I imagine so. Dr. Rowland will state that your brother came to his death from heart disease, or from apoplexy, or whatever it was, and then you may proceed with the funeral arrangements. I shall be glad to help you in any way I can."

"It is very kind of you. This has been so terrible - so sudden and unexpected. It has perfectly unnerved both poor Viola and myself, and we are the only ones to look after matters."

"Then, let me help," urged Captain Poland. "I shall only be too glad. The members of the golf club, too, will do all in their power. We had a meeting this morning and passed resolutions of sympathy. I have also called a meeting of our yacht club, of which your brother was a member. We will take suitable action."

"Thank you. And when do you think we may expect the certificate from Dr. Rowland?"

"Very soon. He is performing the autopsy now, at the club. Dr. Lambert and Dr. Baird are with him. It was thought best to have it there, rather than at the undertaking rooms."

"I shall be glad when matters can proceed as they ought to proceed. This publicity is very distasteful to me."

"I can readily believe that, Miss Carwell. And now, if you will ask Miss Viola if I may be of any service to her, I shall - "

"Before I call her, there is one matter I wish to ask you about," said Mr. Carwell's sister. "You are familiar with business, I know. I was going to ask Mr. Bartlett, as this seemed more in his line, but perhaps you can advise me."

"I shall do my best, Miss Carwell. What is it?"

"One of the clerks came from my brother's office this morning with a note from the bank. It seems that Horace borrowed a large sum for some business transaction, and put up as collateral certain bonds. He often does that, as I have heard him mention here time and again to Mr. Blossom, when they sat in consultation in the library."

"But now it appears, according to the note from the bank, that more securities are needed. There has been a depreciation, or something - I am not familiar with the terms. At any rate the bank sends word that it wants more bonds. I was wondering what I had better do. Of course I have securities in my own private box that I might send, but - "

"Why didn't Mr. Blossom attend to this?" asked Captain Poland, a bit sharply, it would have seemed to a casual listener. "That was his place. He knows all about Mr. Carwell's affairs."

"I asked the clerk from the office why Mr. Blossom - did you ever hear such an absurd name as he has? - LeGrand Blossom - I asked the clerk why the matter was not attended to," went on Miss Carwell, "and he said Mr. Blossom must have forgotten it."

"Rather odd," commented the captain. "However, I'll look after it for you. If necessary, I'll loan the bank enough additional securities as collateral to cover the loan. Don't let it disturb you, Miss Carwell. It is merely a small detail of business that often crops up. Securities in these days so often fluctuate that banks are forced to call for more, and different ones, to cover loans secured by them. I'll attend to the matter for you."

"Thank you so much. And now I believe I may safely call Viola. She would not forgive me if she knew you had been here and she had not seen you to thank you for your care of her yesterday."

"Oh, that was nothing. I was very glad - "

Captain Poland was interrupted by a ring at the door.

"Perhaps that is a message from the doctors now," suggested Miss Carwell.

"It is Dr. Lambert himself," announced the captain, looking from a window that gave a view of the front porch. "Dr. Baird is with him. They must have completed the autopsy. Shall I see them for you?"

"Please do. And please tell me at once that everything is all right, and that we may proceed with the funeral arrangements," begged the sister of the dead man.

"I will do so, Miss Carwell."

Captain Poland, anticipating the maid, went into the hall and himself opened the door for the medical men.

"Oh! I'm glad you're here!" exclaimed the rather gruff voice of Dr. Lambert. "Yes, I'm glad you're here."

The captain was on the point of asking why, when Dr. Lambert motioned to him to step into a little reception room off the main hall. Somewhat wonderingly, Captain Poland obeyed, and when the door had closed, shutting him in with the two doctors, he turned to the older physician and asked:

"Is anything the matter?"

"Well, we have completed the autopsy," said Dr. Lambert.

"That's good. Then you are ready to sign a certificate, or at least get Dr. Rowland to, so that we can proceed with the arrangements. Miss Mary Carwell is anxious to have - "

"Well, I suppose the funeral will have to be held," said Dr. Lambert slowly. "That can't be held up very long, even if it was worse than it is;"

"Worse than it is! What do you mean?" cried Captain Poland sharply. "Is there any suspicion - "

"There is more than suspicion, my dear sir," went on Dr. Lambert, as he sank into a chair as though very, very
tired. "There is, I regret to say, certainty."
"Certainty of what?"
"Certainty that my old friend, Horace Carwell, committed suicide!"
"Suicide!"
"By poisoning," added Dr. Baird, who had been anxious to get in a word. "We found very plain evidences of it when we examined the stomach and viscera."
"Poison!" cried Captain Poland. "A suicide? I don't believe it! Why should Horace Carwell kill himself? He hadn't a reason in the world for it! There must be some mistake! Why did he do it? Why? Why?"
And then suddenly he became strangely thoughtful.

CHAPTER IV
VIOLA'S DECISION

"That is the very question we have been asking ourselves, my dear Captain," said Dr. Lambert wearily. "And we are no nearer an answer now than, apparently, you are. Why did he do it?"

The three men, two gravely professional, one, the younger, more so than his elder colleague, and the third plainly upset over the surprising news, looked at one another behind the closed door of the little room off the imposing reception hall at The Haven. They were in the house of death, and they had to do with more than death, for there was, in the reputed action of Horace Carwell, the hint of disgrace which suicide always engenders.

"I suppose," began Captain Poland, rather weakly, "that there can be no chance of error He looked from one medical man to the other.
"Not the least in the world!" quickly exclaimed Baird. "We made a most careful examination of the deceased's organs. They plainly show traces of a violent poison, though whether it was irritant or one of the neurotics, we are not yet prepared to say."
"It couldn't have been an irritant," said Dr. Lambert gently. It was as though he had corrected a too zealous student reciting in class. Dr. Baird was painfully young, though much in earnest.
"Perhaps not an irritant," he agreed. "Though I know of no neurotic that would produce such effects as we saw.
"You are right there," said Dr. Lambert. "Whatever poison was used it was one the effects of which I have never seen before. But we have not yet finished our analysis. We have only reached a certain conclusion that may ultimately be changed."
"You mean as to whether or not it was suicide?" asked Captain Poland eagerly.
"No, I don't see how we can get away from that," said Dr. Lambert. "That fact remains. But if we establish the kind of poison used it may lead us to the motive. That is what we must find."
"And we will find the kind of poison!" declared Dr. Baird.
The older medical man shook his head.
"There are some animal and vegetable poisons for which there is no known test," he said gently. "It may turn out to be one of these."
"Then may it not develop that Mr. Carwell, assuming that he did take poison, did it by mistake?" asked the captain.
"I hope so," murmured Dr. Lambert.
"But from the action of the poison, as shown by the condition of the mucous coat of the alimentary canal, I hardly see how Mr. Carwell could not have known that he took poison," declared Dr. Baird.
"Yet he seemed all right except for a little pardonable exhilaration during the game of golf," remarked Captain Poland. "He was feeling 'pretty good' as we say. I don't see how he could have taken poison knowingly or unknowingly."
"There are some poisons which, taken in combination, might mix and form a comparatively harmless mixture," said Dr. Lambert. "Though I confess this is a very remote possibility. Some poisons are neutralized by an alcoholic condition. And some persons, who may have been habitual users of a drug, may take a dose of it that would kill several persons not so addicted."
"Do you mean that Mr. Carwell was a drug user?" demanded the captain.
"I would hesitate very long before saying so," answered Dr. Lambert, "and I have known him many years."
"Then what was it? What in the world does it all mean?" asked Captain Poland. "What's the answers in other words?"
"I wish I knew," replied Dr. Lambert, and he shook his head. Something more than the weight of years seemed bowing him down. Dr. Baird seemed duly impressed by the circumstances that had brought him - a young and as yet unestablished physician - to a connection with such a startling case in the well known and wealthy Carwell family.

As for Captain Gerry Poland, he was clearly startled by the news the physicians had brought. He looked toward the closed door as though seeking to see beyond it - into the room where Viola was waiting. To her, sooner or later,
the tragic verdict must be told.
"Can't you say anything?" he asked, a bit sharply, looking from one physician to the other "Is this all you came
to tell - that Mr. Carwell was a suicide? Isn't there any mitigating circumstance?"

"I believe he poisoned himself before he began his championship game," said Dr. Baird, with startling frankness
- almost brutal it seemed.
"But why should he do such a thing?" demanded the captain, rather petulantly.
"He may have taken some dope, thinking would brace him up," went on the young medical man, "and it had the
opposite effect - a depressing action on the heart. Or, he may have taken a overdose of his favorite drug. That is
what shall have to find out by making suitable inquiries of members of the family."

"Oh, must we tell-them" exclaimed Captain Poland in startled tones. And it was easy to determine by his voice
that by "them" he meant Viola. "Must we tell?" he repeated.

"I must do my duty as a physician both to the public and to the family," said Dr. Lambert, and he straightened up
as though ready to assume the burden he knew would fall heavily on his shoulders. "I must also think of Viola. I feel
like another father to her now. I have always, more or less, regarded her as my little girl, though she is a young lady
now. But the facts must come out. Even if I were disposed to aid in a concealment - which I am far from doing-Dr.
Rowland, the county physician, was present at the autopsy. He knows."

"Does he know the poison used?" asked Captain Poland quickly, and then, almost as soon as the words had left
his lips, he seemed sorry he had uttered them.

"No, no more than we," said Dr. Baird. "It will require some nice work in medical jurisprudence, and also a very
delicate analysis, to determine that. I am inclined to think - "

But what he thought no one heard or cared to hear at that moment, for, even as he spoke, the door of the little
room was thrown hastily and somewhat violently open, and Viola Carwell confronted the three men. Her face
showed traces of grief, but it had lost little of the beauty for which she was noted.
Tall and dark, with hair of that blue - black sheen so rarely observed, with violet eyes and a poise and grace that
made her much observed, Viola Carwell was at the height of her beauty. In a sense she had the gentle grace of her
mother and with that the verve and sprightliness of her father mingled perfectly. It was no wonder that Captain
Poland and Harry Bartlett and many others, for that matter, were rivals for her favors.

"I thought you were here," she said quietly to Dr. Lambert. "Oh, Uncle Add, what is it? Tell me the truth!" she
begged as she placed a hand on his arm, a hand that trembled in spite of her determination to remain calm. "Please
tell me the truth!"

"The truth, Viola?" he questioned gently.

"Yes. I'm afraid you are trying to keep something back from me. This looks like it - you men in here talking
- consulting as to what is best to do. Tell me. My father is dead. But that, I know, is not the worst that can happen.
Tell me! Is there-is there any disgrace? I know - "

Viola stopped as though she herself feared the words she was about to utter. Dr. Lambert quickly spoke.
"There has been no disgrace, my dear Viola," he said, gently. "We have just come from the - from having made
an investigation - Dr. Baird and myself and Dr. Rowland. We discovered that your father was poisoned, and - "

"Poisoned?" she gasped, and started back as though struck, while her rapid glances went from face to face,
resting longest on the countenance of Captain Poland. It was as though, in this great emergency, she looked to him
for comfort more than to the old doctor who had ushered her into the world.

"I am sorry to have to say it, Viola, but such is the case," went on the family physician. "Your father was
poisoned. But the kind of poison we have not yet determined."

"But who gave it to him?" she cried. "Oh, it doesn't seem that any one would hate him so, not even his worst
enemy. And he had so many friends-too many, perhaps."

"We don't know that any one gave him the poison, Viola," said Dr. Lambert, gently. "In fact, it does not seem
that any one did, or your father would have known it. Certainly if any one had tried to make him take poison there
would have been a struggle that he would have mentioned. But he died of poison, nevertheless."

"Then there can be but one other explanation," she murmured, and her voice was tense and strained. "He must
have - "

"We fear he took it himself," blurted out Dr. Baird, in spite of the warning look cast at him by his colleague.
"Oh, I won't believe that! It can't be true!" cried Viola, and she burst into a storm of sobs. Dr. Lambert placed his
arms about her.
"Tell me it isn't true, Uncle Add! Tell me it isn't true!" she sobbed.

The three men, looking at one another - Dr. Lambert's glance coming over the bowed head of Viola - said
nothing for a few moments. Then as her sobs died away, and she became calmer, the old physician said:

"You mustnot take on so, Vi. I know it is hard, but you must meet the issue squarely. At the same time you must
realize that even the most suspicious circumstances may be explained away. While it does look as though your father had deliberately taken the poison, it may easily be established by an investigation that it was an accident - an accident of which even your father was ignorant."

"There are so many poisons that do not manifest themselves for a long time - often days - after they are taken, that there is every chance of proving this to have been an accident."

"Then there must be an investigation!" was Viola's quick decision. There were still tears in her eyes, but she looked through them now, as through a veil that must be torn aside. "I can not believe that my father was a - a suicide - " she halted at the awful word. "I will not believe it!" she went on more firmly. "It can not be true!"

Hardly had she uttered the last word than a figure passed through the hall, flitting past the half-opened door of the little room where Viola stood with the three men.

"Who is there?" she called sharply, for she had spoken rather loudly, and she did not want any of the servants to hear. "Who is there?"

"It is I - Minnie," was the answer. "Dear Viola, I have come to see if I could do anything. I rang and rang, but no one answered the bell, and, as the door was open, I walked in."

"I'm afraid I didn't close it when I let you in," said Captain Poland to Dr. Lambert.

"Dear Viola!" said Minnie Webb, as she placed cheek against that of her friend. "Is there anything I can do in your terrible trouble? Please let me do something!"

"Thank you, Minnie. You are very kind. I don't know. We are in such distress. Tell me - " and Viola seemed to nerve herself for some effort. "Tell me! Did you hear what I said just now - as you passed the door?"

"Do you mean about not believing that your father was a suicide?" asked Minnie, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"I - I heard you."

"Then the only thing you can do is to help me prove otherwise," said Viola. "That would be the greatest help. It can't be true, and we want that made plain. Father never killed himself. He was not that kind of man. He did not fear death, but he would not go deliberately to meet it. It is not true that he killed himself!" and Viola's voice seemed to ring out.

A strange look came over the face of Minnie Webb. There was a great pity shining in her eyes as she said:

"I - I am sorry, Viola, but - but I am afraid it may be true."

"What! That my father committed suicide?"

"Yes," whispered Minnie. "I - I'm afraid it may be true!"

CHAPTER V

HARRY'S MISSION

Minnie Webb's announcement affected her four hearers in four different ways. It shocked Viola - shocked her greatly, for she had, naturally, expected kindly sympathy and agreement from her friend.

Dr. Baird, who had involuntarily begun to twist his small mustache at the entrance of Miss Webb, looked at her in admiration of her good looks and because she upheld a theory to which he felt himself committed - a theory that Mr. Carwell was a plain out-and-out suicide.

Dr. Lambert was plainly indignant at the bald manner in which Minnie Webb made her statement, and at the same time he had pity for the ignorance of the lay mind that will pronounce judgment against the more cautious opinions of science. And this was not the first poisoning case with which the aged practitioner had dealt.

As for Captain Poland, he gazed blankly at Miss Webb for a moment following her statement, and then he looked more keenly at the young woman, as though seeking to know whence her information came.

And when Viola had recovered from her first shock this was the thought that came to her:

"What did Minnie know?"

And Viola asked that very question - asked it sharply and with an air which told of her determination to know.

"Oh, please don't ask me!" stammered Minnie Webb. "But I have heard that your father's affairs are involved, Viola."

"His affairs? You mean anything in his - private life?" and the daughter of Horace Carwell - "Carwell the sport," as he was frequently called - seemed to feel this blow more than the shock of death.

"Oh, no, nothing like that!" exclaimed Minnie, as though abashed at the mere suggestion. "But I did hear - and I can not tell where I heard it - that he was involved financially, and that, perhaps - well, you know some men have a horror of facing the world poor and - "

"That can't be true!" declared Viola stoutly. "While I do not know anything about my father's financial affairs, I know he had no fear of failure - no fear of becoming poor."

"I do not believe he would have feared to face poverty if there was need. But there was not, I'm sure. Minnie, who told you this?"
"I - I can not tell!" said Minnie, with a memory of the insinuating manner in which LeGrand Blossom had spoken. Bearing in mind her promise to him not to mention the matter, she began to wish that she had not spoken.

"But you must tell!" insisted Dr. Lambert. "This amounts to an accusation against a dead man, and you owe it to Viola to give the source of your information."

"No, Doctor, I can not! Please don't ask me, Viola. Oh, I shouldn't have spoken, but I thought only to help you solve the problem."

"You have only made it harder, unless you tell us more," said Dr. Lambert gently. "Why can not you tell us, Miss Webb?"

"Because I - I promised not to. Oh, can't you find out for yourselves - in your own way, about his affairs? Surely an examination - "

"Yes, of course, that would be the proper way, said Dr. Lambert gravely. "And it must be done, I suppose."

"It will lead to nothing - it will prove nothing," insisted Viola. "I am sure my father's affairs were not involved. Wait, I'll call Aunt Mary. She was in close touch with all the money matters of our household. Father trusted her with many business matters. Call Aunt Mary!"

Her eyes red with weeping, but bearing up bravely withal, Miss Mary Carwell joined the conference. She, it seemed, had guessed something when Dr. Lambert and Dr. Baird were closeted so long with Captain Poland.

"We must face the facts, however unpleasant they are," said Dr. Lambert, in a low voice. "We must recognize that this will be public talk in a little while. A man - so well-known a character as was my old friend Horace Carwell - can not die suddenly in the midst of a championship golf game, and let the matter rest there."

"The papers will take it up," said Dr. Baird.

"The papers!" broke in Viola.

"Yes, even now I have been besieged by reporters demanding to know the cause of death. It will have to come out. The report of the county physician, on which only a burial certificate can be obtained, is public property. The bureau of vital statistics is open to the public and the reporters. There is bound to be an inquiry, and, as I have said, Dr. Rowland has already announced it as a suicide. We must face the issue bravely."

"But even if it should prove true, that he took the poison, I am sure it will turn out to be a mistake!" declared Viola. "As for my father's affairs being in danger financially - Aunt Mary, did you ever hear of such a thing?"

"Well, my dear, your father kept his affairs pretty much to himself," was the answer of her aunt. "He did tell me some things, and only to-day something came up that makes me think - Oh, I don't know what to think - now!"

"What is it?" asked Dr. Lambert, quietly but firmly. "It is best to know the worst at once."

"I can't say that it is the worst," replied Miss Carwell; "but there was something about a loan to the bank, and not enough collateral to cover - Mr. Blossom should have attended to it, but he did not, it seems, and - Won't you tell them?" she appealed to Captain Poland.

"Certainly," he responded. "It is a simple matter," he went on. "Mr. Carwell, as all of us do at times, borrowed money from his bank, giving certain securities as collateral for the loan.

"The bank, as all banks do, kept watch this security, and when it fell in market value below a certain point, where there was no longer sufficient margin to cover the loan safely, demanded more collateral.

"This, for some reason, Mr. Carwell did not put up, nor did his clerk, Mr. Blossom. I know nothing more in this respect than Miss Carwell told me," and he bowed to indicate the dead man's sister. "I offered to see to the matter for her, putting up some collateral of my own until Mr. Carwell's affairs could be straightened out. It is a mere technicality, I imagine, and can have nothing to do with - with the present matter, even though Miss Webb seems to think so."

"Oh, I am so sorry if I have made a mistake!" exclaimed Minnie, now very penitent. "But I only thought it would be helping - "

"It will be - to know the truth," said Dr. Lambert. "Is this all that you heard, Miss Webb?"

"No, it was nothing like that. It had nothing to do with a bank loan. Oh, please don't ask me. I promised not to tell."

"Very well, we won't force you to speak," said the family physician. "But this matter must be gone into. What one person knows others are sure to find out. We must see Blossom. He is the one who would have the most complete knowledge of your father's affairs, Viola. Did I hear something about his going into partnership with your father?"

"Yes, there was some such plan. Father decided that he needed help, and he spoke of taking in Mr. Blossom. I know no more than that," Viola answered.

"Then LeGrand Blossom is the person to throw more light on that subject," said Dr. Lambert.

To himself he added a mental reservation that he did not count much on what information might come from the head clerk. Blossom, in the mind of Dr. Lambert, was a person of not much strength of character. There had been
certain episodes in his life, information as to which had come to the physician in a roundabout way, that did not reflect on him very well; though, in truth, he felt that the man was weak rather than bad.

"Then is it to be believed that my father was a suicide?" asked Viola, as though seeking to know the worst, that she might fight to make it better.

"On the bare facts in the case - yes," answered Dr. Lambert. "But that is only a starting point. We will make no hard and fast decision."

"Indeed we will not," declared Viola. "There must be a most rigid investigation."

And when the others had gone, Dr. Lambert to make funeral arrangements for his old friend, Captain Poland to see the bank officials, Dr. Baird to his office, taking Minnie Webb home in his car, and Miss Garwell to her room to lie down, Viola, left alone, gave herself up to grief. She felt utterly downcast and very much in need of a friend.

And perhaps this feeling made her welcome, more cordially than when she had last seen him, Harry Bartlett, who was announced soon after the others left.

"Oh, Harry, have you heard the terrible news?" faltered Viola.

"You mean about your father? Yes," he said gently. "But I do not believe it. I may as well speak plainly, Viola. Your father, for some reason best known to himself, did not care for me. But I respected him, and in spite of a feeling between us I admired him. I feel sure he did not commit suicide."

"But they say it looks very suspicious, Harry! Oh, tell me what to do!" and, impulsively, Viola held out her hands to him. Bartlett pressed them warmly.

"I'll serve you in any way I can," he said, gazing fondly into her eyes. "But I confess I am puzzled. I don't know what to do. Perhaps it would be better, as Dr. Lambert says, to look into your father's affairs."

"Yes. But I want more than that!" declared Viola. "I want his name cleared from any suspicion of suicide. And I want you to undertake it, Harry!"

"You want me?" he exclaimed, drawing back. "Me?"

"Yes. I feel that you will do better than anyone else. Oh, you will help me, won't you?" she pleaded.

"Of course, Viola. But I don't know how."

"Then let me tell you," and she seemed to be in better control of herself than at any time that day. "This must be gone into systematically, and we can best do it through a detective."

"A detective!" cried Harry Bartlett, and he started from his chair. "Why, my dear Viola, a detective would be the worst possible person to call in on a case like this! Let me investigate, if you think it wise, but a detective - "

"I am not speaking of an ordinary detective, Harry. I have in mind an elderly man who was a friend of my father. He has an extraordinary reputation for solving mysteries."

"Well, of course, if you know the man it makes a difference." Bartlett eyed the girl curiously. "I didn't know you knew any detectives."

"The man I have in mind was in some business deal with my father once, and they became very well acquainted. I met him several times, and liked him immensely. He is well along in years, but I think sharper than many younger men. But there is one difficulty."

"What is that?"

"More than likely he will shy at having anything to do with the case. He told my father he was going to retire and devote his leisure time to fishing - that being his great pastime."

"Humph! he can't be much of a detective if he wants to spend most of his time fishing," was Bartlett's comment. "You're mistaken, Harry. My father, and other men too, considered him one of the greatest detectives in the world, even though he sometimes works in a very peculiar and apparently uninterested manner."

"All right then, Viola. If you say so, I'll look up this wonderful detective for you and get him to take hold of the case."

CHAPTER VI

BY A QUIET STREAM

Drooping willows dipped their pendant branches in the stream that foamed and rippled over green, mossy stones. In a meadow that stretched fair and wide on either side of the water, innumerable grasshoppers were singing their song of summer. On a verdant bank reclined a man, whose advanced age might be indicated in his whitening locks, but whose bright eyes, and the quick, nervous movements as he leafed the pages of a small, green-covered book, made negative the first analysis. A little distance from him, where the sun beat down warmly, unhindered by any shade, lolled a colored man whose look now and then strayed to the reading figure.

A glance over the shoulder of the reader, were one so impolite as to take that liberty, would have disclosed, among others, this passage on the printed page:

"But yet you are to note, that as you see some willows or palm trees bud and blossom sooner than others do, so some trouts be, in rivers, sooner in season; and as some hollies or oaks are longer before they cast their leaves, so are some trouts in rivers longer before they go out of season."
The gray-haired man closed the book, thereby revealing the title "Walton's Compleat Angler," and looked across
the stream. The sunlight flickered over its rippling surface, and now and then there was a splash in the otherwise
quiet waters - a splash that to the reader was illuminating indeed.
"Shag!" he suddenly exclaimed, thereby galvanizing into life the somnolent negro.
"Yes, sah, Colonel! Yes, sah!" came the response.
"Hum! Asleep, weren't you?"
"Well, no, sah. Not zactly asleep, Colonel. I were jest takin' the fust of mab forty winks, an' - "
"Well, postpone the rest for this evening. I think I'll make some casts here. I don't expect any trout, my friend
Walton to the contrary. Besides they're out of season now. But I may get something. Get me the rod, Shag!"
"Yes, sah, Colonel! Yes, sah!"

And while the fishing paraphernalia was being put in readiness by his colored servant, Colonel Robert Lee
Ashley once more opened the little green book, as though to draw inspiration therefrom. And he read:
"Only thus much is necessary for you to know, and to be mindful and careful of, that if the pike or perch do
breed in that river, they will be sure to bite first and must first be taken. And for the most part they are very large."
"Well, large or small, it doesn't much matter, so I catch some," observed the colonel.

Then he carefully baited the hook, after he had taken the rod and line from Shag, who handled it as though it was
a rare object of art; which, indeed, it was to his master.
"I think we shall go back with a fine mess of perch, Shag," observed the fisherman.
"Yes, sah, Colonel, dat's what we will," was the cheerful answer.
"And this time we won't, under any consideration, let anything interfere with our vacation, Shag."
"No, sah, Colonel. No, sah!"
"If you see me buying a paper, Shag, mind, if you ever hear me asking if the last edition is out, stop me at once."
"I will, Colonel."

"And if any one tries to tell me of a murder mystery, of a big robbery, or of anything except where the fish are
biting best, Shag, why, you just - "
"I'll jest natchully knock 'em down, Colonel! Dat's what I'll do!" exclaimed the colored man, as cheerfully as
though he would relish such "Well, I can't advise that, of course," said the colonel with a smile, "but you may use
your own judgment. I came here for a rest, and I don't want to run into another diamond cross mystery, or anything
like it."
"No, sah, ColQnel. But yo' suah did elucidate dat one most expeditious like. I nevah saw sech - "
"That will do now, Shag. I don't want to be reminded of it. I came here to fish, not to work, nor hold any post-
mortems on past cases. Now for it!" and the elderly man cast in where a little eddy, under the grassy bank, indicated
deep water, in which the perch or other fish might lurk this sunny day.

And yet, in spite of his determination not to recall the details of the diamond cross mystery to which Shag had
alluded, Colonel Ashley could not help dwelling on one or two phases of what, with justifiable pride, he regarded as
one of the most successful of his many cases.

Colonel Robert Lee Ashley was a detective by instinct and profession, though of late years he had endeavored,
but with scant success, to turn the more routine matters of his profession over to his able assistants.

To those who have read of his masterly solution of the diamond cross mystery the colonel needs no introduction.
He was a well known character in police and criminal circles, because of his success in catching many a slippery
representative of the latter.

He had served in the secret service during the Spanish-American war, and later had become the head of the
police department of a large Eastern city. From that he had built up a private business of his own that assumed large
proportions, until advancing age and a desire to fish and reflect caused him virtually to retire from active work. And
now, as he had so often done before, he had come to this quiet stream to angle.

And yet, even as he dropped his bait into the water, he could not keep his active mind from passing in rapid
review over some of the events of his career - especially the late episode of the Darcy diamond cross.

"Well, I'm glad I helped out in that case," mused the colonel, as he sat up more alertly, for there came a tremor to
his line that told much to his practiced and sensitive hands.

A moment later the reel clicked its song of a strike, and the colonel got first to his knees and then to his feet as
he prepared to play his fish.
"I've hooked one, Shag!" he called in a low but tense voice. "I've hooked one, and I think it's a beauty!"
"Yes, sah, Colonel! Yes, sah! Dat's fine! I'll be ready as soon as yo' is!"

Shag caught up a landing net, for, though the colonel was not anticipating any gamy fish in this quiet, country
stream, yet for such as he caught he used such light tackle that a net was needed to bring even a humble perch to
shore.
"I've got him, Shag! I've got him!" the colonel cried, as the fish broke water, a shimmering shower of sparkling drops falling from his sides. "I've got him, and it's a bass, too! I didn't think there were any here! I've got him!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel! Yo' suah has!" exclaimed the delighted George Washington Shag. "You suah has got a beauty!"

And as Shag started forward with the landing net, while the colonel was playing with the skill of long years of practice the fish which had developed unexpected fighting powers, there was a movement among the bushes that lined the stream below the willows, and a young man, showing every evidence of eagerness, advanced toward the fisherman. Shag saw him and called:

"Keep back! Keep back, sah, if yo' please! De Colonel, he's done got a bite, an' - "

"Bite! You mean that something's bitten him?" asked the young man, for he could not see the figure of the colonel, who, just then, in allowing the bass to have a run, had followed him up stream.

"No, he's catchin' a fish - he's got a strike - a big one! Don't disturb him."

"But I must see him. I've come a long distance to - "

"Distance or closeness don't make no matter of difference to de colonel when he's got a bite, sah! I'm sorry, but I can't let yo' go any closer, an' I se got to go an' land de fish. Aftah dat, if you wants to hab a word wif de colonel, well, maybe he'll see yo', sah," and Shag, with a warning gesture, like that of a traffic policeman halting a line of automobiles, started toward the colonel, who was still playing his fish.

Harry Bartlett, for he it was who had thus somewhat rudely interrupted the detective's fishing, stopped in the shade of the willows, somewhat chagrined. He had come a long way for a talk, and now to be thus held back by a colored man who seemed to have no idea of the importance of the mission was provoking.

But there was something authoritative in Shag's manner, and, being a business man, Harry Bartlett knew better than to make an inauspicious approach. It would be as bad as slicing his golf ball on the drive.

So he waited beside the silent stream, not so silent as it had been, for it was disturbed by the movements, up and down, of Colonel Ashley, who was playing his fish with consummate skill.

Seeing a little green book on the grass where it had fallen, Harry Bartlett picked it up. Idly opening the pages, he read:

"There is also a fish called a sticklebag, a fish without scales, but he hath his body fenced with several prickles. I know not where he dwells in winter, nor what he is good for in summer, but only to make sport for boys and women anglers, and to feed other fish that be fish of prey, as trout in particular, who will bite at him as at a penk, and better, if your hook be rightly baited with him; for he may be so baited, as, his tail turning like a sail of a windmill, will make him turn more quick than any penk or minnow can."

"I guess I've got the right man," said Harry Bartlett with a smile.

CHAPTER VII
THE INQUEST

"Ready, now, Shag! Ready!" called Colonel Ashley, in tense tones. "Ready with the net!"

"Yes, sah! All ready!"

"I've got him about ready for you! And he's better than I thought!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel! I won't miss!"

"If you do you may look for another place!" At this dire threat Shag turned as white as he would ever become, and took a firmer grip on the "Ready now, Shag!" called the colonel, at the same time directing his helper to come down the bank toward a little pool whither he was leading the now well-played fish. "Ready!"

Shag did not speak, but while the colonel slowly reeled in and the tip of the slender pole bent like a bow, he slipped the net into the water, under the fish, and, a moment later, had it out on the grass.

"There!" exclaimed the famous detective, with a sigh of relief. "There he is, and as fine a fish as I've ever landed in these parts! Now, Shag - "

But there came an interruption. Reasoning that now was a most propitious time to make his appeal, Harry Bartlett advanced to where the colonel and Shag were bending over the panting bass. As the detective, with a smart blow back of its head, put his catch out of misery, Bartlett spoke.

"Excuse me," he said, deferentially enough, for he saw the type of man with whom he had to deal, "but are you not Colonel Ashley?"

"I am, sir!" and the colonel looked up as he slipped the fish into his grass-lined creel.

"I am Mr. Bartlett. I followed you here from New York, and I wish to - "

"If it's anything about business, Mr. Bartlett, let me save your time and my own - both valuable, I take it - by stating that I came here to fish, and not to talk business. Excuse me for putting it thus bluntly, but I see no reason for many words. I can not consider any business. That is all attended to at my New York office, and I am surprised that they should even have given you my address. I told them not to."
"It was no easy matter to get it, Colonel, I assure you," and - Bartlett smiled genially. "And please don't blame any one in your office for disclosing your whereabouts. I did not get your address from them, I assure you."

"From whom, then, if I may ask?"

"From Spotty." And again Bartlett smiled. 

"What? Spotty Morgan?" "Yes."

"Are you - do you know him?" and the detective could not keep the interest out of his voice.

"Rather well. I saved him from drowning once some years ago, and he hasn't forgotten it. It was at a summer resort, and Spotty, though he is a good swimmer, didn't estimate the force of the undertow. I pulled him out just in time."

"Strange," murmured the colonel. "A strange coincidence."

"I beg pardon," said Harry politely.

"Oh, nothing," went on the detective. "Only, as it happens, Spotty saved my life some time ago. It's just a coincidence, that's all. So Spotty gave you my address, did he?"

"Yes. I had called at your New York office, and, as you say, your clerks had orders not to disclose your whereabouts. I used every cajolery and device of which I was master, but it was no avail. I urged the importance it was to myself and others to know where you were, but they were obdurate. I was coming out, much disappointed, when I saw Spotty emerging from an inner office. He knew me at once, though it is years since we met, and going down in the elevator I mentioned that I was looking for you. I told him something of the reason for wanting to find you and - Well, he told me you were here."

"And he is about the only person in New York outside of my most confidential man who could have done that," observed the colonel, as he slowly reeled up his line. "One reason why the clerks in my office could not give you my address was because they did not have it. So Spotty, who must just have finished his bit, told."

"But please don't hold that against him," urged Bartlett. "If he violated a confidence - "

"He did, in a way, yes," observed the disciple of Izaak Walton. "But I shall have to forgive him, I suppose. It must have been rather a strong reason that induced him to tell you where I had gone."

"It was, Colonel Ashley, the strongest reason in the world. It is to help clear up the mystery - "

"Stop!" fairly shouted the colonel. "If it's a detective case I don't want to hear it! Not a word! Shag, show this gentleman the door - I beg your pardon, I didn't mean to be rude," went on the colonel with his usual politeness. "But I really can not listen. I came here to rest and fish, not to take up new detective cases. You know where my office is. They will attend to you there. I have given up business for the time being."

"And yet, Colonel Ashley, the person who sent me will have no one but you. She says you are the only one who can get at the bottom of the puzzling case."

In spite of himself the colonel's face lighted up at the words "puzzling case," but as his eyes fell on the creel containing his fish he turned aside. "No," he said, "I am sorry, but I can not listen to you. Shag, kindly - "

Harry Bartlett was not a successful business man for nothing. He knew how to make an appeal. "I came to see you at the request of Miss Viola Carwell," he said slowly. "She sent me to find you - told me not to come back to her without you. A change came over the colonel's face at the mention of Viola's name.

"You came from her - from the daughter of Horace Carwell?" he asked quickly.

"I did," answered Bartlett.

"Well, of course, that might make a difference. I hope my old friend is not in trouble - nor his daughter," and there was a new quality in the voice.

"Mr. Carwell's troubles are all over - if he had any," returned Bartlett simply.

"You mean - "

"He is dead."

The colonel uttered an exclamation.

"Pardon my rather brusk reception of you," he apologized. "I did not know that. Was it recently - suddenly?"

"Both recently and suddenly."

"I did not know that I seldom read the papers, and have not looked at one lately. I had not heard that he was ill."

"He wasn't, Colonel Ashley. Mr. Carwell died very suddenly on the Maraposa Golf Club links, after making a stroke that gave him the championship."

"Heart disease or apoplexy?"

"Neither one. It was poison."

"You amaze me, Mr. - er - Mr. - "

"Bartlett. Yes, Mr. Carwell died of poison, asthe autopsy showed."

"Was he - did he - "

"That is what we want to find out," interrupted the messenger eagerly. "The county physician says Mr. Carwell
is a suicide. His daughter, Miss Viola, can not believe it. Nor can I. There has been some talk that his affairs are involved. As you may have known, he was somewhat of a - 

"His sporting proclivities were somewhat different from mine," said the old detective dryly. "You needn't explain. Every man must live his own life. But tell me more."

Thereupon Bartlett gave the details as he knew them, bearing on the death of the father of the girl he loved.

"And she sent you to find me?" asked the detective.

"Yes. Miss Viola said you were an old friend of her father's, and if any one could solve the mystery of his death you could. For that there is a mystery about it, many of us believe."

"There may be. Poison is always more or less of a mystery. But just what do you want me to do?"

"Come back with me if you will, Colonel Ashley. Miss Carwell wants you to aid her - aid all of us, for we are all at sea. Will you? She sent me to plead with you. I went to your New York office, and from Spotty Morgan learned you were here. I - "

"I suppose I shall have to forgive Spotty," murmured the fisherman.

"They told me at the hotel you had come here," went on Bartlett, "so I followed. I was lucky in finding you."

"I don't know about that," murmured the colonel, smiling. "It may be unfortunate. Well, I am deeply shocked at my old friend's death - and such a tragic taking off. Horace Carwell was my very good friend. He once did me a great service, when I needed money badly, by helping me make an investment in copper that turned out extremely well. I feel myself under obligations to him; and, since he is no more, I must transfer that obligation to his daughter."

"Then you'll come with me to see her, Colonel Ashley?"

"Yes. Shag, pack up! We're going back to civilization."

The colored man's face was a study. He looked at the quiet stream, at the drooping willows, at the fish rod in his master's hand, and at the creel. He opened his mouth and spoke:

"But, Colonel, yo' done tol me t - "

"No matter what I told you, Shag, these are new orders. Pack up!" came the crisp command. "We're going back to town. I'll do what I can in this case," he went on to Bartlett. "I came here for some quiet fishing, and to get my mind off detective work. I was dragged into a diamond cross mystery not long since, sorely against my will, and now - "

"I am sorry - " began Bartlett.

"Oh, well, it can't be helped," the colonel said. "I'd give up more than a fishing trip for a daughter of Horace Carwell. You may let her know that I'll come, if it will give her any comfort. Though, mind you," the colonel's manner was impressive, "I promise nothing."

"That is understood," said Bartlett eagerly. "I'll wire her that you are coming. There's a train that leaves right after supper. We can get that - "

"I'll take it!" decided the colonel. Now that he had given up his cherished fishing he was all business again.

"Shag!" "Yes, sah, Colonel!"

"Pack up for the evening train. Give that fish to the cook and have it served for Mr. Bartlett and myself. You'll dine with me," he went on. It was an order, not an invitation, but Bartlett understood, and accepted with a bow.

A few hours later he and the colonel left the little town where the detective had gone for such a short vacation, and were on their way to Lakeside, which they reached early in the morning.

"Now if you'll tell me the best hotel to stop at here," said the colonel, as they alighted from the train, "I'll put up there and see Miss Carwell "She requested me to bring you at once to her home," said Bartlett. "You are to be her guest. She thought perhaps you would want to examine the - to see Mr. Carwell's body - before - "

"Oh, yes. I suppose I had better. Then the funeral has not been held?"

"No, it was postponed at the request of the county physician."

"Has there been a coroner's inquest?"

"No. None was deemed necessary at the time I left, at the solicitation of Miss Carwell, to get you."

"I see. Inquests are less often held in New Jersey than in some of the other states. Well, then I suppose I may as well go to the Carwell home with you."

"Yes. I wired for my car to meet us. It's here I see. Right over here."

Bartlett led the way, the colonel following, and Shag bringing up the rear with the bags.

As the machine started from the station Bartlett looked up to the morning sky. There was a little speck in it, no larger than a man's hand. It grew larger, and became an osprey on its way to the sea in search of a fish.

As the car drew up in front of the Carwell mansion, from the bell of which fluttered a dismal length of crepe, a man stepped from the shadow of the gate posts and held out a paper to Harry Bartlett.

"What is it?" asked Bartlett.

"A subpoena," was the rather gruff answer.
"A subpoena? What for?"

"The coroner's inquest. You'll have to appear and give evidence. They're going to have an inquest to find out more about Mr. Carwell's death. That's all I know. I'm from police headquarters. I was told to wait around here, as you were expected, and to serve that on you. Don't forget to be there. It's a court order," and the man slunk away.

"An inquest," murmured Bartlett, as he looked at the paper in his hand. "I thought they weren't going to have any," and he glanced quickly at Colonel Ashley.

CHAPTER VIII
ON SUSPICION

Colonel Robert Lee Ashley was used to surprises. This was natural, considering his calling, and at some of the surprises he was a silent spectator, while at others he furnished the surprise. In this case he served in his former capacity, merely noting the rather startled look on the face of Harry Bartlett when handed the subpoena to the coroner's inquest.

"I thought they weren't going to have any," Bartlett repeated, but whether to himself in a sort of daze, to Colonel Ashley, or to the man from headquarters was not clear. At any rate Colonel Ashley answered him by saying:

"You never can tell what Jersey justice is going to do. Coroner's inquests are not usual in this state, but they are lawful."

"But why do they consider one necessary?" asked Bartlett, as they prepared to enter the house of death.

"That, my dear sir, I don't know. Perhaps the county physician may have requested it, or the prosecutor of the pleas. He may want to be backed up by the verdict of twelve men before taking any action."

"But if Mr. Carwell's death was due to suicide who can be held guilty but himself?"

"No one. But I thought you said there was a doubt as to its being suicide," commented the detective.

"Miss Carwell doubts," returned Bartlett; "and I admit that it does seem strange that a man of Mr. Carwell's character would do such a thing, particularly when he had shown no previous signs of being in trouble. But you can never tell."

"No, you can never tell," agreed Colonel Ashley, and none knew, better than himself, how true that was.

"But why should they subpoena me?" asked Bartlett.

"Don't fret over that," advised his companion, with a calm smile. "You probably aren't the only one. A coroner's inquest is, as some one has said, a sort of fishing excursion. They start out not expecting much, not knowing what they are going to get, and sometimes they catch nothing - or no one - and again, a big haul is made. It's merely a sort of clearing house, and I, for one, will be glad to listen to what is brought out at the hearing."

"Well, then I suppose it will be all right," assented the young man, but the manner in which he looked again at the legal document was distinctly nervous.

"Had we better tell - her?" and he motioned to the house, on the steps of which they stood, Shag having pressed the bell for his master.

"Miss Carwell probably knows all about it," said Colonel Ashley.

They found Viola waiting for them in the library, passing on their way the darkened and closed room which held all that was mortal of the late owner of The Haven - no, not quite all of him, for certain portions were, even then, being subjected to the minute and searching analysis of a number of chemists, under the direction of the county prosecutor.

"It was very good of you to come, Colonel Ashley," said Viola quietly. "I appreciate it more than I can express - at this time."

"I'm very glad to come," said the colonel as he held her hand in his warm, firm clasp. "I am only sorry that it was necessary to send for me on such an occasion. Believe me, I will do all I can for you, Miss Carwell. Your father was my very good friend."

"Thank you. What most I want is to clear my father's name from the imputation of having - of having killed himself," and she halted over the words.

"You mean that you suspect - " began Colonel Ashley.

"Oh, I don't know what to think, and certainly I don't dare suspect any one!" exclaimed Viola. "It is all so terrible! But one thing I would like all father's friends to know - that he did not take his own life. He would not do such a thing."

"Then," said Colonel Ashley, "we must show that it was either an accident - that he took the fatal dose by mistake or that some one gave it to him. Forgive me for thus brutally putting it, but that is what it simmers down to."

"Yes, I have thought of that," returned Viola, and her shrinking form and the haunted look in her eyes told what an ordeal it was for her. "I leave it all to you, Colonel Ashley. Father often spoke of you, and he often said, if ever he had any mystery to clear up, that you were the only man he would trust. Now that I am alone I must trust you," and she smiled at the colonel. It was something of her former smile - a look that had turned many a man's head, some
even as settled in life and years as Colonel Ashley.

"Well, I'll do my best for the sake of you and your father," replied the detective. "I don't mind saying that I hoped I was done with all mystery cases, but fate seems to be against me.

"Mind, I am not complaining!" he said quickly, as he saw Viola about to protest. "It's just my luck. And I can't promise you anything. From what Mr. Bartlett told me, there seem to be very few suspicious circumstances connected with the case."

"I realize that," answered Viola. "And that makes it all the stranger. But tell me, Colonel, haven't you often found that the cases which, at first, seemed perfectly plain and simple, afterward turned out to be the most mysterious?"

"Jove, but that's true!" exclaimed the former soldier. "You spoke the truth then, Miss Viola. My friend Izaak never put a statement more plainly. And that's the theory I always go on. Now then, let me have all the facts in your possession. And you too, "he added, turning to Bartlett. "You might remain while Miss Carwell talks to me, and you can add anything she may forget, while she can do the same in your case. I suppose you know there is to be a coroner's inquest?" he added to the girl.

"Yes," she answered. "I have received a subpoena. I think it is well to have it, for it will show the public how mistaken a verdict arrived at when all the facts are not known may be. I shall attend."

"I just received a summons," said Bartlett, and he seemed to breathe more easily.

"Shag - Where's that black boy of mine?" exclaimed the colonel.

"I sent him to the servants' quarters," said Miss Mary Carwell, coming in just then. "How do you do, Colonel Ashley. I don't know whether you remember me, but - "

"Indeed I do. And I remember that the last time I dined with you we had chicken and waffles that - well, the taste lingers yet!" and the colonel bowed gallantly, which seemed to please Miss Carwell very much indeed. "So you have looked after Shag, have you?"

"Yes. We have plenty of spare rooms, and I thought you'd want him near you."

"I want him this moment," said the detective. "If you will be so good as to send him here I'll get him to open my bag and take out a note-book I wish to use."

A little later Colonel Ashley had thrown himself heart and soul into the "Golf Course Mystery," as he marked it on a page in his note-book.

On the preceding page were the last entries in a case, the beginning of which was inscribed "The Diamond Cross Mystery." It was thus that Colonel Ashley kept the salient facts of his problems before him as he worked.

Between them Viola Carwell and Harry Bartlett told the colonel such facts leading up to the death of Mr. Carwell as they knew. They spoke of the day of the big golf matches, and the exhilaration of Mr. Carwell as he anticipated winning the championship contest.

The scene at the links was portrayed, the little excitement among the parked cars, caused, as developed later, by a blaze in a machine standing next the big red, white, and blue car belonging to Mr. Carwell, and then the sudden collapse of Carwell as he make his winning stroke. The finding of some peculiar poison in the stomach and viscera of the dead man was spoken of, and then Viola made her appeal again for a disclosure of such truth as Colonel Ashley might reveal.

"I'll do my best," he promised. "But I believe it will be better to wait until after the inquest before I take an active part. And I think I can best work if I remain unknown - that is if it is not published broadcast that I am here in my official capacity."

To this Viola and Bartlett agreed. As neither of them had, as yet, spoken of bringing the colonel into the case, it was a comparatively easy matter to pass him off as an old friend of the family; which, in truth, he was.

So Colonel Ashley was given the guest chamber, Shag was provided with comfortable quarters, and then Viola seemed more content.

"I know," she said to her aunt, "that the truth will be found out now."

"But suppose the truth is more painful than uncertainty, Viola?"

"How can it be?" asked the girl, as tears filled her eyes.

"I don't know," answered Miss Carwell softly. "It is all so terrible, that I don't believe it can be any worse. But we must hope for the best. I trust business matters will go along all right. I confess I don't like the forgetting, on the part of LeGrand Blossom, of attending to the bank matter."

"It was probably only an oversight."

"Yes. But it has started a rumor that your poor father's affairs might not be in the best shape. Oh, dear, it's all so terrible!"

But there were other terrors to come.

Following his plan of acting merely as a guest and an old friend of the family who had journeyed from afar to
attend the funeral, Colonel Ashley went about as silent as though on a fishing trip. He looked and listened, but said little. He was not yet ready for a cast. He was but inspecting the stream - several streams, in fact, to see where he could best toss in his baited hook.

And it was in this same spirit that he attended the coroner's inquest, which was held in the town hall. Over the deliberations, which were, at best, rather informal, Coroner Billy Teller presided.

The office of coroner was, in Lakeside, as in most New Jersey cities or towns, much of an empty title. At every election the names of certain men were put on the ticket to be voted for as coroners.

Few took the trouble to ballot for them, scarcely any one against them, and they were automatically inducted into office by reason of a few votes.

Just what their functions were few knew and less cared. There used to be a rumor, perhaps it is current yet in many Jersey counties, that a coroner was the only official who could legally arrest the sheriff in case that official needed taking into custody. As to the truth of this it is not important.

Certain it is that Billy Teller had never before found himself in such demand and prominence. He was to act in the capacity of judge, though the verdict in the case, providing one could be returned, would be given by the jury he might impanel.

There was a large throng in attendance at the town hall when the inquest began. Reporters had been sent out by metropolitan papers, for Horace Carwell was a well known figure in the sporting and the financial world, and the mere fact that there was a suspicion that his death was not from natural causes was enough to make it a good story.

Billy Teller was, frankly, unacquainted with the method of procedure, and he confessed as much to the prosecutor, an astute lawyer. As the latter would have the conducting of the case for the state in case it came to a trial in the upper courts, Mr. Stryker saw to it that legal forms were followed in the selection of a jury and the swearing in of the members of the panel. Then began the taking of testimony.

The doctors told of the finding of evidences of poison in Mr. Carwell's body. Its nature was as yet undetermined, for it was not of the common type.

This much Dr. Lambert stated calmly, and without attempting to go into technical details. Not so Dr. Baird. He spoke learnedly of Reinsch's test for arsenic, of Bloxam's method, of the distillation process. He juggled with words, and finally, when pinned down by a direct but homely question from Billy Teller, admitted that he did not know what had killed Mr. Carwell.

Testimony to the same effect was given by several chemists who had analyzed the stomach and viscera of the dead man. There was a sediment of poison present, they admitted, and sufficient had been extracted in a free state to end the lives of several guinea pigs on which it had been tested. But as to the exact nature of the poison they could not yet say. More time for analysis was needed.

It was certain that Mr. Carwell had come to his death by an active agent in the nature of some substance, as yet unknown, which he either swallowed purposely, by accident, or because some one gave it to him either knowingly or unknowingly. This was a sufficiently broad hypothesis on which to base almost anything, thought Colonel Ashley, as he sat and listened in the corner of the improvised courtroom.

There was a stir of excitement and anticipation when Viola was called, but beyond testifying that her father was in his usual health when he went with her to the golf game, she could throw no light on the puzzle, nor could the dead man's sister or any of the servants.

"Call Jean Forette," said the prosecutor, and the chauffeur, a decidedly nervous man on whom the excitement of testifying plainly told, came to the stand.

He made a poor showing, and there were several whispers that ran around the courtroom, but poor Jean's rather distressing manner was improved when Mr. Stryker took him in hand to question him. The prosecutor, observing that the man was more frightened than anything else, soon put him at his ease, and then the witness told a clear and connected story. He admitted frankly that because he had not the faculty, or, perhaps, the desire to drive the big, new car, he and his late employer were to part company at the end of the month. That was no secret, and there were no hard feelings on either side. It was in the course of business, and natural.

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Yes, he had driven Mr. Carwell and his daughter to the links that day in the big red, white and blue machine. Mr. Carwell had been in his usual jolly spirits, and had greeted several acquaintances on the road.

Had they stopped at any place? Oh, yes. The golfer was thirsty, and halted at a roadhouse for a pint of champagne - his favorite wine. Jean had alighted from the car to get it for him, and Viola, recalled to the stand, testified that she had seen her father drink some of the bubbling liquor. It was obvious why she had not spoken of it before, and that point was not pressed. It was known she did not share her father's love for sports and high living.

A little delay was caused while the innkeeper was sent for, but pending his arrival some other unimportant witnesses were called, among them Major Wardell, who was Mr. Carwell's rival in the golf game.

Had he heard his friend speak of feeling ill? No, not until a moment before the final stroke was made. Then Mr.
Carwell had said he felt "queer," and had acted as though dizzy. The major, who was himself quite a convivial spirit, attributed it to some highballs he and his friend had had in the clubhouse just prior to the game.

Mr. Carwell had drunk nothing during his round of golf, and had associated during the progress of the game with no one except the players who were with him from the start to the finish. He was not seen to have taken any tablets or powders that might have contained poison, and a thorough search of his person and clothing after his death had revealed nothing.

At this point the innkeeper appeared. He testified to having served Mr. Carwell's chauffeur with a pint of champagne which Jean Forette was seen to carry directly from the cafe to the waiting automobile. The champagne was from a bottle newly opened, and the innkeeper himself had selected a clean glass and carefully washed it before pouring in the wine. He knew Mr. Carwell was fastidious about such matters, as he had often spent many hours in the roadhouse.

"LeGrand Blossom!"

Now something might come out. It was known that Blossom was Mr. Carwell's chief clerk, and more than one person knew of the impending partnership, for Mr. Carwell was rather talkative at times.

"Mr. Blossom," asked the prosecutor, after some preliminary questions, "it has been intimated - not here but outside - that the financial affairs of Mr. Carwell were not in such good shape as might be wished. Do you know anything about this?"

"I do, sir.
"Tell what you know."
"I know he was hard pushed for money, and had to get loans from the bank and otherwise."
"Was that unusual?"
"Yes, it was. Before he bought the big car and the yacht he carried a good balance. But I told him - "
"Never mind what you told him or he told you. That is not admissible under the circumstances. Just tell what you know."
"Well, then I know that Mr. Carwell's affairs were in bad shape, and that he was trying to raise some ready cash."
"How do you know this?"
"Because he asked me to put a large sum into his business and become a member of the firm."
"He asked you to invest money and become a partner?"
"Yes."
"Well, that is not unusual, is it? Many a business man might do the same if he wanted to branch out, mightn't he?"
"Yes. But before this Mr. Carwell had offered to take me into partnership without any advance of money on my part. Then he suddenly said he needed a large sum. He knew I had inherited eleven thousand dollars and had, moreover, made from investments."
"And did you agree to it?"
"I said I'd think it over. I was to give him my answer the day he died."
"Did you?"
"No."
"What would have been your answer?"
"It would have been 'no.' I didn't think I wanted to tie up with a man who was on the verge of ruin; and if you ask me I'll say I think he committed suicide because he was on the verge of financial ruin and couldn't face the music, and - "
"That will do!" came sternly from the prosecutor. "We didn't ask your opinion as to the suicide theory, and, what is more, we don't want it. I ask, your honor," and he turned to Billy Teller, who was secretly delighted at being thus addressed, "that the last remark of the witness be stricken from the record."

"Rub it out," ordered the coroner, looking over at the stenographer; and the latter, with a smile, ran his pen through the curious hooks and curves that represented the "opinion" of LeGrand Blossom.

He was allowed to leave the stand, and Harry Bartlett was called next. He nodded and smiled at Viola as he walked forward through the crowd, and Captain Poland, who was sitting in front, waved his hand to his rival. For the young men were friends, even if both were in love with Viola Carwell.

"Mr Bartlett," began the prosecutor, after some unimportant preliminary questions, "I haye been informed that you had a conversation with Mr. Carwell shortly before his death. Is that true?"
"Yes, we had a talk."

Viola started at hearing this - started so visibily that several about her noticed it, and even Colonel Ashley turned his head.
"What was the nature of the talk?" asked Mr. Stryker.
"That I can not tell," said Bartlett firmly. "But it had nothing to do with the matter in hand."
There was a rustle of expectancy on hearing this, and the prosecutor quickly asked:
"What do you mean by 'the matter in hand'?"
"Well, his death."
"Naturally you didn't talk about his death, for it hadn't taken place," said Mr. Stryker. "Nor could it have been foreseen, I imagine. But what did you talk about?"
"I decline to answer."
There was a gasp that swept over the courtroom, and Billy Teller banged the gavel as he had seen real judges do.
"You decline to answer," repeated the prosecutor. "Is it on the ground that it might incriminate you?"
"No"
"Then I must insist on an answer. However, I will not do so now, but at the proper time. I will now ask you one other question, and I think you will answer that. Did you resume friendly relations with Mr. Carwell after your quarrel with him that day?" and Mr. Stryker fairly hurled the question at Harry Bartlett.
If this was a trap it was a most skillfully set one. For there must be an answer, and either no or yes would involve explanations.
"Answer me!" exclaimed the prosecutor. "Did you make up after the quarrel?"
There was a tense silence as Bartlett, whose face showed pale under his tan, said:
"I did not."
"Then you admit that you had a quarrel with Mr. Carwell?"
"Yes, but - "
Just at this moment Viola Carwell fainted in the arms of her aunt, the resultant commotion being such that an adjournment was taken while she was carried to an anteroom, where Dr. Lambert attended her.
"We will resume where we left off," said the prosecutor, when Bartlett again took the stand, and it might have been noticed that during the temporary recess one of the regular court constables from the county building at Loch Harbor remained close at his side. "Will you now state the nature of your quarrel with Mr. Carwell?" asked Mr. Stryker.
"I do not feel that I can."
"Very well," was the calm rejoinder. "Then, your honor, and again Billy Teller seemed to swell with importance at the title, "I ask that this witness be held without bail to await a further session of this court, and I ask for an adjournment to summon other witnesses."
"Granted," replied Teller, who had been coached what to answer.
"Held!" exclaimed Bartlett, as he rose to his feet in indignation. "You are going to hold me! On what grounds?"
"On suspicion," answered the prosecutor.
"Suspicion of what?"
"Of knowing something concerning the death of Mr. Carwell."
An exclamation broke from the crowd, and Bartlett reeled slightly. He was quickly approached by the same constable who had remained at his side during the recess, and a moment later Coroner Billy Teller adjourned court.
CHAPTER IX
58 C. H.- 161*
There was considerable excitement when it became known to the crowd, as it speedily did, that Harry Bartlett, almost universally accepted as the fiance of Viola Carwell, had been held as having vital knowledge of her father's death. Indeed there were not a few wild rumors which insisted that he had been held on a charge of murder.
"Oh, I can't believe it! I can't believe it!" exclaimed Viola, when they told her. "It can't be possible that they can hold him on such a charge. It's unfair!"
"Perhaps," gently admitted Dr. Lambert. "The law is not always fair; but it seeks to know the truth."
Viola and her aunt were again in the room where Viola had been revived from her indisposition caused by the shock of Bartlett's testimony. Colonel Ashley, who, truth to tell, had been expecting some such summons, went with Dr. Lambert.
"Oh, isn't it terrible, Colonel?" began Viola. "Have they a right to - to lock him up on this charge?"
"It isn't exactly a charge, Viola, my dear, and they have, I am sorry to say, a right to lock him up. But it will not be in a cell."
"Not in a - a cell?"
"No, as a witness, merely, he has a right to better quarters; and I understand that he will be given them on the order of the prosecutor."
"He'll be in jail, though, won't he?"
"Yes; but in very decent quarters. The witness rooms are not at all like cells, though they have barred windows."
"But why can't he get out on bail?" asked Viola, rather petulantly. "I'm sure the charge, absurd as it is, is not such as would make them keep him locked up without being allowed to get bail. I thought only murder cases were not bailable."

"That is usually the case," said Colonel Ashley. "But if this is not a suicide case it is a murder case, and though Harry is not accused of murder, in law the distinction is so fine that the prosecutor, doubtless, feels justified in refusing bail."

"But we could give it - I could - I have money!" cried Viola. "Aunt Mary has money, too. You'd go his bail, wouldn't you?" and the girl appealed to her father's sister.

"Well, Viola, I - of course I'd do anything for you in the world. You know that, dearie. But if the law feels that Harry must be locked up I wouldn't like to interfere."

"Oh, Aunt Mary!"

"Besides, he says he did quarrel with your father," went on Miss Carwell. "And he won't say what it was about. I don't want to talk about any one, Vi, but it does look suspicious for Mr. Bartlett."

"Oh, Aunt Mary! Oh, I'll never forgive you for that!" and poor Viola broke into tears.

They left the courtroom and returned to The Haven. Harry Bartlett sent a hastily written note to Viola, asking her to suspend judgment and trust in him, and then he was taken to the county jail by the sheriff - being assured that he would be treated with every consideration and lodged in one of the witness rooms.

"Isn't there some process by which we could free him?" asked Viola. "Seems to me I've heard of some process - a habeas corpus writ, or something like that."

"Often persons, who can not be gotten out of the custody of the law in any other way, may be temporarily freed by habeas corpus proceedings," said Colonel Ashley. "In brief that means an order from the court, calling on the sheriff, or whoever has the custody of a prisoner, to produce his body in court. Of course a live body is understood in such cases.

"But such an expedient is only temporary. Its use is resorted to in order to bring out certain testimony that might be the means of freeing the accused. In this case, if Harry persisted in his refusal not to tell about the quarrel, the judge would have no other course open but to return him to jail. So I can't see that a habeas corpus would be of any service."

"In that case, no," sighed Viola. "But, oh, Colonel Ashley, I am sure something can be done. You must solve this mystery!"

"I am going to try, my dear Viola. I'll try both for your sake and that of the memory of your father. I loved him very much."

The day passed, and night settled down on the house of death. Throughout Lakeside and Loch Harbor, as well as the neighboring seaside places, talk of the death of Mr. Carwell under suspicious circumstances multiplied with the evening editions of many newspapers.

Colonel Ashley in his pleasant room at The Haven - more pleasant it would have been except for the dark chamber with its silent occupant - was putting his fishing rod together. There came a knock on the door, and Shag entered.

"Oh!" he exclaimed at the sight of the familiar equipment. "Is we - is yo' done on dish yeah case, Colonel?"

"No, Shag. I haven't even begun yet."

"But - "

"Yes, I know. I've just heard that there's pretty good fishing at one end of the golf course that's so intimately mixed up in this mystery, and I don't see why I shouldn't keep my hand in. Come here, you black rascal, and see if you can make this joint fit any better. Seems to me the ferrule is loose."

"Yes, sah, Colonel, I'll 'tend to it immejit. I - er I done brung in - you ain't no 'jections to lookin' at papers now, has you?" he asked hesitatingly. For when he went fishing the mere sight of a newspaper sometimes set Shag's master wild.

"No," was the answer. "In fact I was going to send you out for the latest editions, Shag."

"I'se done got 'em," was the chuckling answer, and Shag pulled out from under his coat a bundle of papers that he had been hiding until he saw that it was safe to display them.

And while Shag was occupied with the rod, the colonel read the papers, which contained little he did not already know.

The next day he went fishing.

It was on his return from a successful day of sport, which was added to by some quiet and intensive thinking, that Viola spoke to him in the library. The colonel laid aside a paper he had been reading, and looked up.

In lieu of other news one of the reporters had written an interview with Dr. Baird, in which that physician
discoursed learnedly on various poisons and the tests for them, such as might be made to determine what caused the death of Mr. Carwell. The young doctor went very much into details, even so far as giving the various chemical symbols of poison, dwelling long on arsenious acid, whose symbol, he told the reporter, was As₂O₅, while if one desired to test the organs for traces of strychnine, it would be necessary to use "sodium and potassium hydroxide, ammonia and alkaline carbonate, to precipitate the free base strychnine from aqueous solutions of its salts as a white, crystalline solid," while this imposing formula was given:

\[ C₂₁H₂₂ + NaOH \rightarrow C₂₁H₂₂ + H₂O + NaNO₃. \]

And so on for a column and a half.

"Oh, Colonel! Have you found out anything yet?" the girl besought.

"Nothing of importance, I am sorry to say." "But you are working on it?"

"Oh, yes. Have you anything to tell me?"

"No; except that I am perfectly miserable. It is all so terrible. And we can't even put poor father's body in the grave, where he might rest."

"No, the coroner is waiting for permission from the prosecutor. It seems they are trying to find some one who knows about the quarrel between Harry and your father." "I don't believe there was a quarrel - at least not a serious one. Harry isn't that kind. I'm sure he is not guilty. Harry Bartlett had nothing to do with his death. If my father was not a suicide - " "But if he was not a suicide, for the sake of justice and to prove Harry Bartlett innocent, we must find out who did kill your father," said the colonel.

"You don't believe Harry did it, do you?" Viola asked appealingly.

Colonel Ashley did not answer for a moment. Then he said slowly:

"My dear Viola, if some one were ill of a desperate disease, in which the crisis had not yet been passed, you would not expect a physician to say for certainty that such a person was to recover, would you?"

"No."

"Well, I am in much the same predicament. I am a sort of physician in this mystery case. It has only begun. The crisis is still far off, and nothing can be said with certainty. I prefer not to express an opinion."

"I'm not afraid!" cried Viola. "I know Harry Bartlett is not guilty!"

"If he is not - who then?" asked the colonel.

"Oh, I don't know! I don't know what to think! I suspect - No, I mustn't say that - Oh, I'm almost distracted!"

And, with sobs shaking her frame, Viola Carwell rushed from the room.

Colonel Ashley looked after her for a moment, as though half of a mind to follow, and then, slowly shaking his head, he again picked up the paper he had been reading, delving through a maze of technical poisoning detection formulae, from Vortmann's nitroprusside test to a consideration of the best method of estimating the toxicity of chemical compounds by blood hemolysis. The reporter and young Dr. Baird certainly left little to the imagination.

Colonel Ashley read until rather late that evening, and his reading was not altogether from Izaak Walton's "Compleat Angler." He delved into several books, and again read, very carefully, the article on the effects of various poisons as it appeared in the paper he had been glancing over when Viola talked with him.

As the colonel was getting ready to retire a servant brought him a note. It was damp, as though it had been splashed with water, and when the detective had read it and had noted Viola's signature, he knew that her tears had blurred the writing.

"Please excuse my impulsiveness," she penned. "I am distracted. I know Harry is not guilty. Please do something!"

"I am trying to," mused the colonel as he got into bed, and turned his thoughts to a passage he had read in Walton just before switching off his light. It was an old rhyme, the source of which was not given, but which seemed wonderfully comforting under the circumstances. It was a bit of advice given by our friend Izaak, and as part of what a good fisherman should provide specified: "My rod and my line, my float and my lead, My hook and my plummet, my whetstone and knife. My basket, my baits, both living and dead, My net and my meat (for that is the chief): Then I must have thread, and hairs green and small, With mine angling purse - and so you have all."

"And," reflected Colonel Ashley, as he dozed off, "I guess I'll need all that and more to solve this mystery."

The detective was up betimes the next morning, as he would have said had he been discoursing in the talk of Mr. Walton, and on going to the window to fill his lungs with fresh air, he saw a letter slipped under his door.

"From Viola, I imagine," he mused, as he picked it up. "Unless it's from Shag, telling me the fish are biting unusually well. I hope they're not, for I must do considerable to-day, and I don't want to be tempted to stray to the fields."

"It isn't from Shag, though. He never could muster as neat a pen as this. Nor yet is it from Viola. Printed, too!
The old device to prevent detection of the handwriting. Well, mysterious missive, what have you to say this fine morning?"

He opened the envelope carefully, preserving it and not tearing the address, which, as he had said, was printed, not written. It bore his name, and nothing else.

Within the envelope was a small piece of paper on which was printed this:
"Ask Miss Viola what this means. 58 C. H. - 161*."

Colonel Ashley read the message through three times without saying a word. Then he held the paper and envelope up to the light to see if they bore a water mark. Neither did, and the paper was of a cheap, common variety which might be come upon in almost any stationery store. The colonel read the message again, looked at the back and front of the envelope, and then, placing both in his pocket, went down to breakfast, the bell for which he heard just as he finished his simple breathing exercises.

The morning papers were at his place, which was the only one at the table. Either Viola and her aunt had already breakfasted, or would do so later. The colonel ate and read.

There was not much new in the papers. Harry Bartlett was still held as a witness, and the prosecutor's detectives were still working on the case. As yet no one had connected Colonel Ashley officially with the matter. The reporters seemed to have missed noting that a celebrated - not to say successful - detective was the guest of Viola Carwell. It was an hour after the morning meal, and the colonel was in the library, rather idly glancing over the titles of the books, which included a goodly number on yachting and golfing, when Viola entered.
"Oh, I didn't know you were here!" she exclaimed, drawing back.
"Oh, come in! Come in!" invited the colonel. "I am just going out. I was wondering if there happened to be a book on chemistry here - or one on poisons."

"Poisons!" exclaimed the girl, half drawing back.
"Yes. I have one, but I left it in New York. If there happened to be one - Or perhaps you can tell me. Did you ever study chemistry?"
"As a girl in school, yes. But I'm afraid I've forgotten all I ever knew."
"My case, too," said the colonel with a laugh. "Then there isn't a book giving the different symbols of chemicals?"

"Not that I know of," Viola answered. "Still I might help you out if it wasn't too complicated. I remember that water is H two 0 and that sulphuric acid is H two S 0 four. But that's about all."

"Would you know what fifty-eight C H one sixty-one, with a period after the C, a dash after the H and a star after the last number was?" the colonel asked casually.

Viola shook her head.
"I'm afraid I wouldn't," she answered. "That is too complicated for me. Isn't it a shame we learn so much that we forget?"

"Still it may have its uses," said the colonel. "I'll have to get a book on chemistry, I think."

He turned to go out.
"Have you learned anything more?" Viola asked timidly.
"Nothing to speak about," was the answer.
"Oh, I wish you would find out something - and soon," she murmured. "This suspense is terrible!" and she shuddered as the detective went out.

It was late that afternoon when Colonel Ashley, having seen Miss Mary Carwell and Viola walking at the far end of the garden, went softly up the stairs to the room of the girl who had summoned him to The Haven. With a skill of which he was master he looked quickly but carefully through Viola's desk, which was littered with many letters and telegrams of condolence that had been answered.

Colonel Ashley worked quickly and silently, and he was about to give up, a look of disappointment on his face, when he found a slip of paper in one of the pigeon holes. And the slip bore this, written in pencil:
58 C. H. - 161*

CHAPTER X
A WATER HAZARD

"Isn't there some place where you can take her for a few days - some relative's where she can rest and forget, as much as possible, the scenes here?"

"Yes, there is," replied Miss Mary Carwell to Colonel Ashley's question. "I'll go with her myself to Pentonville. I have a cousin there, and it's the quietest place I know of, outside of Philadelphia," and she smiled faintly at the detective.

"Good!" he announced. "Then get her away from here. It will do you both good."

"But what about the case - solving the mystery? Won't you want either Viola or me here to help you?"
"I shall do very well by myself for a few days. Indeed I shall need the help of both of you, but you will be all the better fitted to render it when you return. So take her away - go yourself, and try to forget as much of your grief as possible."

"And you will stay - "

"I'll stay here, yes. Shag and I will manage very nicely, thank you. I'm glad you have colored help. I can always get along with that kind. I've been used to them since a boy in the South."

And so Viola and Miss Carwell went away.

It was after the sufficiently imposingly somber funeral of Horace Carwell, for since the adjourned inquest - adjourned at the request of the prosecutor - it was not considered necessary to keep the poor, maimed body out of its last resting place any longer. It had been sufficiently viewed and examined. In fact, parts of it were still in the hands of the chemists.

"And now, Shag, that we're left to ourselves - " said Colonel Ashley, when Viola and Miss Carwell had departed the day following the funeral, "now that we are by ourselves - "

"I reckon as how you'll fix up as to who it were whut done killed de gen'man, an' hab him 'rested, won't yo', Colonel, sah?" asked Shag, with the kindly concern and freedom of an old and loved servant.

"Indeed I'll do nothing of the sort!" exclaimed Colonel Ashley. "I'm going fishing, Shag, and I'll be obliged to you if you'll lay out my Kennebec rod and the sixteen line. I think there are some fighting fish in that little river that runs along at the end of the golf course. Get everything ready and then let me know," and the colonel, smoking his after-breakfast cigar, sat on the shady porch of The Haven and read:

"0, Sir, doubt not that angling is an art: is it not an art to deceive a trout with an artificial fly? a trout! that is more sharp-sighted than any hawk you have named, and more watchful and timorous than your high-mettled merlin is bold; and yet I doubt not to catch a brace or two to-morrow for a friend's breakfast."

"Um," mused the colonel. "Too bad it isn't the trout season. That passage from Walton just naturally makes me hungry for the speckled beauties. But I can wait. Meanwhile we'll see what else the stream holds. Shag, are you coming?"

"Yes, sah! Comm' right d'rectly, sah! Yes, sah, Colonel!" and Shag shuffled along the porch with the fishing tackle.

And so Colonel Ashley sat and fished, and as he fished he thought, for the sport was not so good that it took up his whole attention. In fact he was rather glad that the fish were not rising well, for he had entered into this golf course mystery with a zest he seldom brought to any case, and he was anxious to get to the bottom.

"I didn't want to get into that diamond cross affair, but I was dragged in by the heels," he mused. "And now, just because some years ago Horace Carwell did me a favor and enabled me to make money in the copper market, I am trying to find out who killed him, or if, in a fit of despondency, he killed himself."

"And yet, if it was despondency, he disguised it marvelously well. And if it was an accident it was a most skillful and fateful one. How he could swallow poison and not know it is beyond me. And now to consider who might have given it to him, arguing that it was not an accident"

The colonel had walked up and down the stream at the turn of the Maraposa golf course, Shag following at a discreet distance, and, after trying out several places had settled down under a shady tree at an eddy where the waters, after rushing down the bed of the small river, met with an obstruction and turned upon themselves. Here they had worn out a place under an overhanging bank, making a deep pool where, if ever, fish might he expected to lurk.

And there the colonel threw in his bait and waited.

And now, that I am waiting," he mused, "let me consider, as my friend Walton would, matters in their sequence. Horace Carwell is dead. Let us argue that some one gave him the poison. Who was it?"

And then, like some file index, the colonel began to pass over in his mind the various persons who had come under his observation, as possible perpetrators of the crime.

"Let us begin with one the law already suspects," mused the fisherman. "Not that that is any criterion, but that it disposes of him in a certain order - disposes of him or - involves him more deeply," and the colonel looked to where a ground spider had woven a web in which a small but helpless grass hopper was then struggling.

"Could Harry Bartlett have given the poison?" the colonel asked himself. And the answer, naturally, was that such could have been the case.

Then came the question: "Why?"

"Had he an object? What was the quarrel about, concerning which he refuses to speak? Why is Viola so sure Harry could not have done it? I think I can see a reason for the last. She loves him as much as he does her. That's natural. She's a sweet girl!!"

And, being unable to decide definitely as to the status of Harry Bartlett, Colonel Ashley mentally passed that card in his file and took up another, bearing the name Captain Gerry Poland.
"Could he have had an object in getting Horace Carxvell out of the way?" mused the detective. "At first thought I'd say he could not, and, just because I would say so, I must keep him on my list. He also is in love with Viola, - just as much as Bartlett is. I shall list Captain Poland as a remote possibility. I can't afford to eliminate him altogether, as it may develop that Mr. Carwell objected to his paying his attentions to Viola. Well, we shall see."

The next mental index card bore the name Jean Forette; and concerning him Colonel Ashley had secured some information the day before. He had got, by adroit questioning, a certain knowledge of the French chauffeur, and this was now spread out on the card that, in fancy, Colonel Ashley could see in his filing cabinet.

"Forette? Oh, yes, I know him," the mechanician of the best garage in Lakeside had told the detective. "He's a good driver, and knows more about an ignition system than I ever shall. He's a shark at it. But he's a queer Dick."

"How do you mean?"

"Well, sometimes he's a regular devil at driving. Once he had a big Rilat car in here for repairs. He had to tell me what was wrong with it, as I couldn't dope it out. Then when we got it running for him, he took it out for a trial run on the road. Drive! Say, it's a wonder I have any hair on my head!"

"Did he go fast?"

"Fast? Say, a racing man had nothing on that Forette. And yet the next day, when he came to take the car away, after we'd charged the storage battery, he drove like a snail. One of my men went with him a little way, to see that everything was all right, for Mr. Carwell is very particular - I mean he was - and Forette didn't let her out for a cent. My man was disappointed, for he's a fast devil, too, and he asked the Frenchman why he didn't kick her along."

"What did the chauffeur say?"

"Well, it wasn't so much what he said as how he acted. He was as nervous as a cat. Kept looking behind to see that no other machine was coming, and when he passed anything on the road he almost went in the ditch himself to make sure there was room enough to pass."

"Seemed afraid, did he?"

"That's it. And considering how bold he was the day I was out with him, I put it down that he must have had a few drinks when he took me for a "Well, I never saw him, but how else can you account for it? Drink will make a man drive like old Nick, and get away with it, too, sometimes, though the stuff'll get 'em sooner or later. But that's how I sized it up."

"He might have taken something other than drink."

"What do you mean?"

"Dope!"

"Oh, yes, I s'pose so, and him bein' French might account for it. Anyhow he was like two different men. That one day he was as bold as brass, and I guess he'd have driven one of them there airships if any one had dared him to. Then, the next day he was like a chap trying for his license with the motor inspector lookin' on. I can't account for it. That Jean Forette sure is a card!"

"Then he really seemed afraid to speed the Dilat car?"

"That's it. And he spoke of Mr. Carwell going to get a more powerful French machine. He said then he'd never driven it to the limit, and didn't want to handle it at all. And he spoke the truth, for I heard that he and the old man didn't get along at all with that red, white and blue devil Mr. Carwell imported."

"So they say. Forette was to leave at the end of the month. Well, I'm much obliged to you. A friend of mine was going to engage him, but if he has such a reputation - not reliable, you know, I guess I'll look farther. Much obliged," and the colonel, who, it is needless to say, had not revealed his true character to the garage owner, turned aside.

"Oh, I wouldn't want what I said to keep Forette out of a place!" protested the man quickly. "If I'd thought that -"

"You needn't worry. You haven't done him any harm. He's out of a place anyhow, since Mr. Carwell died, and I'll treat what you told me in strict confidence."

"I wish you would. You know we have to be careful."

"I understand."

And this information passed again in review before the mind of the fisherman as he took Jean Forette's card from the pack.

"I wonder if he can be a dope fiend?" mused the colonel. "It's worth looking up, at any rate. He'd be a bad kind to drive a car. I'm glad he isn't in my employ, and I'm better pleased that he won't take Viola out. This dope - bad stuff, whether it's morphine, cocaine, or something else. We'll just keep this card up in front where we can get at it easily."

The next mental card had on it the name of LeGrand Blossom.

"Curious chap, him," mused the detective. "He's very fond of the sound of his own voice, particularly where he
can get an audience, as he had at the inquest. Well, I don't know anything about you, Mr. Blossom, neither for nor against you, but I'll keep your card within reach, also. Can't neglect any possibilities in cases like this. And now for some others."

There were many cards in the colonel's index, and he ran rapidly over them as he waited for a bite. They bore the names of many members of the golf and yachting clubs of which Mr. Carwell had been a member. There were also the names of the household servants, and the dead man's nearest relatives, including his sister and Viola. But the colonel did not linger long over any of these memoranda. The card of Viola Carwell, however, had mentally penciled on it the somewhat mystic symbol 58 C. H. - i6i* and this the colonel looked at from every angle.

"I really must get a book on chemistry," he mused. "I may need it to find out what kind of dope Forette uses - if he takes any."

And thus the colonel sat in the shade, beside the quiet stream, the little green book by his side. But he did not open it now, and though his gaze was on his line, where it cut the water in a little swirl, he did not seem to see it.

"Shag!" suddenly exclaimed the colonel, breaking a stillness that was little short of idyllic.

"Yes, sah, Colonel! Yes, sah!" and the colored man awoke with a skill perfected by long practice under similar circumstances.

"Shag, the fishing here is miserable!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel. Shall we-all move?"

"Might as well. I haven't had a nibble, and from the looks of everything - even the evidence of Mr. Walton himself - it ought to have been a most choice location. However, there will be other days, and - "

The colonel's voice was cut short by a shrill call from his delicate reel, and a moment later he had leaped to his feet and cried:

"Shag, I'm a most monumental liar!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel. Dat's whut yo' suah is!"

"I've got the biggest bite I ever had! Get that landing net and see if you can forget that you're a cross between a snail and a mud turtle!" cried the colonel excitedly.

"Yes, sah!"

Shag moved on nimble feet, and presently stood down on the shore, near the edge of the stream, while the colonel, on the bank above the eddy, played the fish that had taken his bait and sought to depart with it to some watery fastness to devour it at his leisure. But the hook and tackle held him.

Up and down in the pool rushed the fish, and the colonel's rod bent to the strain, but it did not break. It had been tested in other piscatorial battles and was tried and true.

The battle progressed, not so unequal as it might seem, considering the frail means used to ensnare the big fish. And the prize was gradually being brought within reach of the landing net.

"Get ready now, Shag!" ordered the colonel.

"Yes, sah, I'se all ready!"

There was a final rush and swirl in the water. Shag leaned over, his eyes shining in delight, for the fish was an extraordinarily large one. He was about to scoop it up in the net, to take the strain off the rod which was curved like a bow, when there came a streak of something white sailing through the air. It fell with a splash into the water so close to the fish that it must have bruised its scaly side, and then, in some manner, the denizen of the stream, either in a desperate flurry, or because the blow of the white object broke its hold on the hook, was free, and with a dart scurried back into the element that was life itself.

For a moment there was portentous silence on the part of Colonel Ashley. He gazed at his dangling line and at the straightened pole. Then he solemnly said:

"Shag!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel!"

"What happened?"

"By golly, Colonel! dat's whut I'd laik t' know. Must hab been a shootin' star, or suffin laik dat! I never done see - "

At that moment a drawling voice from somewhere back of the fringe of trees and bushes broke in with:

"I fancy I made that water hazard all right, though it was a close call. Which reminds me of the perhaps interesting fact that forty-five and sixty-four hundredths cylindrical feet of water will weigh twenty-two hundred and forty pounds, figuring one cubic foot of salt water at sixty-four and three-tenths pounds, if you get my meaning!" and there was a genial laugh.

"Well, I don't get it, and I don't care to," was the rejoinder. "But I'm ready to bet you a cold bottle that you've gone into instead of over that water hazard."

"Done! Come on, we'll take a look!"
CHAPTER XI
POISONOUS PLANTS

Colonel Ashley still stood, holding his now useless rod and line, gazing first at that, then at Shag and, anon, at
the little swirl of the waters, marking where the big fish had disappeared from view.

"Shag!" exclaimed the colonel in an ominously, quiet voice.

"Yes, sah!"

"Do you know what that was?"

"No, sab, Colonel, I don't."

"Well, that was a spirit manifestation of Izaak Walton. It was jealous of my success and took that revenge. It was
the spirit of the old fisherman himself."

"Good land ob massy!" gasped Shag. "Does yo' - does yo' mean a - ghost?"

"You might call it that, Shag. Yes, a ghost."

The colored man looked frightened for a moment, and then a broad grin spread over his face.

"Well, sah, Colonel," he began, deferentially, "maybe yo' kin call it dat, but hit looks t' me mo' laik one ob dem
li'l white balls de gen'mens an' ladies done knock aroun' wif iron-headed clubs. Dat's whut it looks laik t' me, sah,
Colonel," and Shag picked up a golf ball from the water, where it floated.

"By Jove!" exclaimed the fisherman. "If it was that - ".

His indignant protest was interrupted by the appearance, breaking through the underbrush on the edge of the
stream, of two men, each one carrying a bag of golf clubs.

"Did you - " began one, and then, as he caught sight of Shag holding up in his black fingers the white ball, there
was added:

"I see you did! Thank you. You were right, Tom. I did go into the water. I sliced worse than I thought."

Then the two men seemed, for the first time, to have caught sight of Colonel Ashley. They noticed his attitude,
the dangling line and his disappointed look.

"I beg pardon," said the one who had already spoken, "but did we interfere with your fishing?"

"Did you interfere with it?" stormed the colonel. "You just naturally knocked it all to the devil, sir! That's what
you did!" And then, as he saw a curious look on the faces of the two men, he added:

"I beg your pardon. I shouldn't have said that. I'm an interloper, I realize - a trespasser. It's my own fault for
fishing so near the golf course. But I - ".

"Excuse me," broke in the other man. "But you are Colonel Ashley, aren't you?"

"I am."

"My name is Sharwell - Tom Sharwell, and this is Bruce Garrigan. I thought I had seen you at the club. Pray
excuse our interruption of your sport. We had no idea any one was fishing here."

"It's entirely my fault," declared the colonel, as he removed his cap and bowed, a courtesy the two golfers, after a
moment of hesitation, returned. "I was taking chances when I threw in here."

"And did we scare the fish?" asked Garrigan. "I suppose so. Never was much of a fisherman myself. All I know
about them is seventeen million, four hundred and eighty-eight thousand nine hundred and twenty one boxes of
sardines were imported into the United States last year. I read it in the paper so it must be true. I know I ate the one
box."

"Be quiet, Bruce," said Sharwell in a low voice, but the colonel smiled. There was no affront to his dignity, as
the golfer had feared.

"I had on a most beautiful catch," said the colonel, "and then what I thought, at first, was the embodied spirit of
Izaak Walton suddenly came zipping into the water just as Shag was about to land the beauty, and knocked it off the
hook. Since then I have been informed by my servant that it was no spirit, but a golf ball."

"It was mine," confessed Garrigan. "I'm all kinds of sorry about it. Never had the least notion any one was here.
Never saw any one fish here before; did we, Tom?"

"Well, I thought there were fish here, and events proved I was right," said the colonel. "I hope the water isn't
posted?" he inquired anxiously, for he was a stickler for the rights of others.

"Oh, no, nothing like that!" Garrigan hastened to add. "You're welcome to fish here as long and as often as you
like. Only, as this water hazard is often played from the fifth hole, it would be advisable to post a sign just outside
the trees, or station your man there to give notice."

"I'll do it after this," said the colonel, as he reeled in.

"You're not going to quit just because I was so unfortunate as to spoil your first catch, are you?" asked Garrigan.

"I think I'd better," the colonel said. "I don't believe I could land anything after what happened. The fish must
have thought it was a thunderbolt, from the way that ball landed."

"I did drive rather hard," admitted Garrigan. "But we can cut this out of our game, take a stroke apiece and go on
with the play. That is, I'm willing. I don't feel very keen for the game to-day. How about you, Tom?"

"I'm ready to quit, and I think the least we can do, considering that we have spoiled Colonel Ashley's day, is to ask him if we won't share with us the bottle I won from you on the water hazard."

"Done!" exclaimed Garrigan. "There were eleven million, four hundred and ten thousand six hundred and six dollars' worth of soya beans imported into the United States in 1917," he added, "which, of course, has nothing to do with the number of cold bottles of champagne the steward, at the nineteenth hole, has on the ice for us. So I suggest that we adjourn and - "

"I will, on one condition," said Sharwell.

"What is it?" asked his companion.

"That you kindly refrain from telling us how many spools of thread were sent to the cannibals of the Friendly Islands for the fiscal year ending June 30, 1884."

"Done!" cried Garrigan with a laugh. "I'll never hint of it. Colonel, will you accept our hospitality? I believe you are already put up at the club?"

"Yes, Miss Carwell was kind enough to secure a visitor's card for me."

"Then let's forget our sorrows; drown them in the bubbling glasses with hollow stems!" cried Garrigan, gayly.

"Here, Shag," called the colonel, as he gave his rod to his colored servant. "I don't know when I'll be back."

"Well said!" exclaimed Sharwell.

Then they adjourned to the nineteenth hole.

If it is always good weather when good fellows get together, it was certainly a most delightful day as the colonel and his two hosts sat on the shady veranda of the Maraposa Golf Club. They talked of many things, and, naturally, the conversation veered around to the death of Mr. Carwell. Out of respect to his memory, an important match had been called off on the day of his funeral. But now those last rites were over, the clubhouse was the same gay place it had been. Though more than one veteran member sat in silent reverie over his cigar as he recalled the friend who never again would tee a ball with him.

"It certainly is queer why Harry Bartlett doesn't come out and say what it was that he and Mr. Carwell had words about," commented Sharwell. "There he stays, in that rotten jail. Bah! I can smell it yet, for I called to see if I could do anything. And yet he won't talk."

"It is queer," said Garrigan. "If he'd only let his friends speak for him it could be cleared. We all know what the quarrel was about."

"What?" asked the colonel. He had his own theory, but he wanted to see how it jibed with another's.

"It's an old story," went on Bruce Garrigan. "It goes back to the time, about three years ago, when the fair Viola and Harry began to be talked about as more than ordinary friends. Just about then Mr. Carwell lost a large sum of money in a stock deal, or a bond issue, or something - I've forgotten what - and he always said that Harry and his clique engineered the plan by which he was mulcted."

"And did Mr. Bartlett have anything to do with it?" asked the colonel.

"Well, some say he did, and some say he didn't. Harry himself denied all knowledge of it. Anyhow the colonel lost a stiffish sum, and some of Harry's people took in a goodly pile. Naturally there was a bit of coldness between the families, and I did hear Harry was told his presence around Viola wasn't desired."

"If he was so warned he didn't heed it, for they went out together as much as ever, though I can't say he called at the house very often."

"And you think it was about this he and Mr. Carwell quarreled just before Mr. Carwell was stricken?" asked the colonel.

"I think so, yes," answered Garrigan. "And I think Harry refuses to admit it, from a notion that it would be dragging in a lady's name. But it wouldn't be airing anything that isn't already pretty well known. Mr. Carwell has a violent temper - or he had one - and Harry isn't exactly an angel when he's roused, though I'll say say for him that I have rarely seen him angry. And there you are. Boy, another bottle, and have it colder than the last."

"Yes," mused the colonel, "there you are - or aren't, according to your viewpoint."

And so the day grew more sunshiney and mellow, and Colonel Ashley did not regret the fish that the golf ball cheated him of, for he added several new cards to his index file and jotted down, mentally, new facts on some already in it.

"Will return to-morrow. Viola too restless here."

That was the telegram Colonel Ashley received the day following his acquaintance at the nineteenth hole with Bruce Garrigan and Tom Sharwell.

"She stayed away longer than I thought she would," mused the detective, "Yes, sah!" "See if that French chauffeur, Forette, can drive me into town."

"Yes, sah, Colonel."
A little later Jean brought the roadster to the front of the house and waited for Colonel Ashley. The latter came forth holding a slip of paper in his hand, and, to the chauffeur, he said:

"Do you know where Dr. Baird lives?"
"Oh, yes, sir."
"Take me there, please. He was one of the physicians called in when Mr. Carwell was poisoned, was he not?"
"Yes," and the chauffeur nodded and smiled. "You are not ill, I hope, monsieur. If you are, there is a physician nearer."

"Oh, no. I'm all right. I just want to have a talk with the doctor. Did you ever consult him?"
"Me? Oh, no, monsieur, I have no need of a doctor. I am never sick. I feel most excellent!" and certainly he looked it. There was a sparkle in his eyes - perhaps too brilliant a sparkle, but he did not look like a "dope fiend."
"If you are in a hurry," went on the chauffeur, "I can - "
"No, no hurry," responded the colonel. "Why, do you feel like driving fast?"
"Very fast, monsieur. I always like to drive fast, only there is seldom call for it. Mr. Carwell, he at times would like speed, and again he was like the tortoise. But as for me - poof! What would you?" and he shrugged his shoulders and reverted to his own tongue.

"Hum," mused the colonel. "Rather a different story from the garage man's. However, we shall see."

Dr. Baird was in. In fact, being a very young doctor indeed, he was rather more in than out - too much in to suit his own inclination and pocketbook, for, as yet, the number of his patients was small.

"I did not come to see you for myself, professionally," said Colonel Ashley, as he took a seat in the office, and introduced himself. "I am trying to establish, for the satisfaction of Miss Carwell, that her father was not a suicide, and - "

"What else could it be?" asked Dr. Baird.

"I do not know. But I read with great interest the interview, you gave the Globe on the effects and detection of various poisons."
"Yes?" and young Dr. Baird rubbed his hands in delight, and stroked his still younger moustache.
"Yes. And I called to ask what poison or chemical symbol that might be."

The colonel extended a paper on which was inscribed: 58 C. H. - 161*

That! Hum, why that is not a chemical symbol at all!" promptly declared Dr. Baird.
"Are you sure?"
"Positive."
"Could it be some formula for poison?"

"It could not. Of course that is not to say it could not be some person's private memorandum for some combination of elements. C might stand for carbon and H for hydrogen. But that would not make a poison in the ordinary accepted meaning of the term. I am sure you are mistaken if you think that is a chemical symbol."

"I am sure, also," said the detective with a smile. "I just wanted your opinion, that is all. Then those letters and figures would mean nothing to you?"

"Nothing at all. Wait though - "

Young Dr. Percy Baird looked at the slip again. "No, it would mean nothing to me," he said finally.

"Thank you," said the colonel.

He came out of the physician's office to find Jean Forette calmly reading in his side of the car. The paper was put away at once, and with a whirr from the self-starter the motor throbbed.

"It there a free public library in town, Jean?" asked the detective.
"Yes, monsieur."
"Take me there."

The library was one built partly with the money donated by a celebrated millionaire, and contained a fair variety of books. To the main desk, behind which sat a pretty girl, marched Colonel Ashley.

"Have you any books on poisons?" he asked.
"Poisons?" She looked up at him, startled, a flush mantling her fair cheeks.
"Yes. Any works on poisons - a chemistry would do."

"Oh, yes, we have books on poisons. I'll jot down the numbers for you. We have not many, I'm afraid. It is - it isn't a pleasant subject."

"No, I imagine not."

She busied herself with the card index, and came back to him in a moment with a slip of paper.

"I'm sorry," said the pretty girl, "but we seem to have only one book on poisons, and I'm afraid that isn't what you want. It is entitled 'Poisonous Plants of New Jersey,' and is one of the bulletins of the New Jersey Agricultural Experiment Station at New Brunswick. But it is out at present. Here is the number of it, and if it comes in - "
"I should be glad to see it," interrupted the colonel pleasantly.
"Here is the number," and the pretty girl extended to him a slip which read: 58 C. H - i6i*
"What is the star for?" asked the colonel.
"It indicates that the book was donated by the state and was not purchased with the endowment appropriation," she informed him.
"And it is out now. I wonder if you could tell me who has it?"
"Why, yes, sir. Just a moment."
She looked at some more cards, and came back to him. She looked a bit disturbed.
"The book, 'Poisonous Plants of New Jersey' was taken out by Miss Viola Carwell," said the girl.

CHAPTER XII
BLOSSOM'S SUSPICIONS

Characteristic as it was of Colonel Ashley not to show surprise, he could hardly restrain an indication of it when he reached The Haven, and found Miss Mary Carwell and Viola there. They were not expected until the next day, but while her niece was temporarily absent Miss Carwell explained the matter.

"She couldn't stand it another minute. She insisted that I should pack and come with her. Something seemed to drive her home."
"I hope," said the Colonel gently, "that she didn't imagine that I wasn't doing all possible, under the circumstances."

"Oh, no, it wasn't anything like that. She just wanted to be at home. And I think, too," and Miss Carwell lowered her voice, after a glance at the door, "that she wanted to see him."
"You mean - ?"
"Mr. Bartlett! There's no use disguising the fact that his family and ours aren't on friendly terms. I think he did a grave injustice to my brother in a business way, and I'll never forgive him for it. I don't want to see Viola marry him - that is I didn't. I hardly believe, now, after he has been arrested, that she will. But there is no doubt she cares for him, and would do anything to prove that this charge was groundless."

"Well, yes, I suppose that's natural," assented the detective. "I'd be glad, myself, to believe that Harry Bartlett had nothing to do with the death of Mr. Carwell."

"But you believe he did have, don't you?"
"I haven't yet made up my mind," was the cautious answer. "The golf course mystery, I don't mind admitting, is one of the most puzzling I've ever run across. It won't do to make up one's mind at once."

"But my brother either committed suicide, or else he was deliberately poisoned!" insisted Miss Carwell. "And those of us who knew him feel sure he would never take his own life. He must have been killed, and if Harry Bartlett didn't do it who did?"

"I don't know," frankly replied the colonel. "That's what I'm going to try to find out. So Miss Viola feels much sympathy for him, does she?"

"Yes. And she wants to go to see him at the jail. Of course I know they don't exactly call it a jail, but that's what I call it!"

Miss Carwell was nothing if not determined in her language.
"Would you let her go if you were I - go to see him?" she asked.
"I don't see how you are going to prevent it," replied the colonel. "Miss Viola is of legal age, and she seems to have a will of her own. But I hardly believe that she will see Mr. Bartlett."

"Oh, but she said she was going to. That's one reason she made me come home ahead of time, I believe. She says she's going to see him, and what she says she'll do she generally does."

"However I don't believe she'll see him," went on the detective. "The prosecutor has given orders since yesterday that no one except Mr. Bartlett's legal adviser must communicate with him; so I don't believe Miss Viola will be admitted."

This proved to be correct. Viola was very insistent, but to no avail. The warden at the jail would not admit her to the witness rooms, where Harry Bartlett paced up and down, wondering, wondering, and wondering. And much of his wonder had to do with the girl who tried so hard to see him.

She had sent word by his lawyer that she believed in his innocence and that she would do all she could for him, but he wanted more than that. He wanted to see her - to feast his hungry eyes on her - to hold her hand, to - Oh, well, what was the use? he wearily asked himself. Would the horrible tangle ever be straightened out? He shook his head and resumed his pacing of the rooms - for there were two at his disposal. He was weary to death of the dismal view to be had through the barred windows.

"Did you see him?" asked her aunt, when Viola, much dispirited, returned home.

"No, and I suppose you're glad of it!"
"I am. There's no use saying I'm not."

"Aunt Mary, I think it's perfectly horrid of you to think, even for a moment, that Harry had anything to do with this terrible thing. He'd never dream of it, not if he had quarreled with my father a dozen times. And I don't see what they quarreled about, either. I'm sure I was with Harry a good deal of the time before the game, and I didn't hear him and my father have any words."

"Perhaps, as it was about you, they took care you shouldn't hear."

"Who says it was about me?"

"Can't you easily guess that it was, and that's why Harry doesn't want to tell?" asked Miss Mary.

"I don't believe anything of the sort!" declared Viola.

"Well," sighed Miss Carwell, "I don't know what to believe. If your poor, dear father wasn't a suicide, some one must have killed him, and it may well have been - "

"Don't dare say it was Harry!" cried Viola excitedly. "Oh, this is terrible! I'm going to see Colonel Ashley and ask him if he can't end this horrible suspense."

"I wish that as eagerly as you do," said Miss Mary. "You'll find the colonel in the library. He's poring over some papers, and Shag, that funny colored man, is getting some fish lines ready; so it's easy enough to guess where the colonel is going. If you want to speak to him you'd better hurry. But there's another matter I want to call to your attention. What about our business affairs? Have we money enough to go on living here and keeping up our big winter house? We must think of that, Viola."

"Yes, we must think of that," agreed the girl. "That's one of the reasons why I wanted to come back. Father's affairs must be gone into carefully. He left no will, and the lawyer says it will take quite a while to find out just how things stand. If only Harry were here to help. He's such a good business man."

"There are others," sniffed Miss Mary. "Why don't you ask the colonel - or Captain Poland?"

"Captain Poland!" exclaimed Viola, startled. "Yes. He helped us out in the matter of the bank when more collateral was asked for, and he'll be glad to go over the affairs with us, I'm sure."

"I don't want him to!" snapped Viola. "Mr. Blossom is the proper one to do that. He is the chief clerk, and since he was going to form a partnership with father he will, most likely, know all the details. We'll have him up here and ask him how matters stand."

"Perhaps that will be wise," agreed Miss Carwell. "But I can't forget how careless LeGrand Blossom was in the matter of the loan your father had from the bank. If he's that careless, his word won't be worth much, I'm afraid."

"Oh, any one is likely to make a mistake," said Viola. "I'll telephone to Mr. Blossom and ask him to come here and have a talk with us. It will give me something to think about. Besides - "

She did not finish, but went to the instrument and was soon talking to the chief clerk in the office Mr. Carwell maintained while at his summer home.

"He'll be up within an hour," Viola reported. "Now I'm going to have a talk with the colonel," and she hastened to the library.

The old detective was smoking a cigar, which he hastened to lay aside when Viola made her entrance, but she raised a restraining hand.

"Smoke as much as you like," she said. "I am used to it."

"Thank you," and he pulled forward a chair for her.

"Oh, haven't you found out anything yet?" she burst out. "Can't you say anything definite?"

Colonel Ashley shook his head in negation.

"I'm sorry," he said softly. "I'm just as sorry about it as you are. But I have seldom had a case in which there were so many clews that lead into blind allies. I was just trying to arrange a plan of procedure that I thought might lead to something."

"Can you?" she asked eagerly.

"I haven't finished yet. What I need most is a book on poisons-a comprehensive chemistry would do, but I haven't been able to find one around here," and he glanced at the books lining the library walls. "Your father didn't go in for that sort of thing."

"No. But can't you send to New York for one?"

"I suppose I could - yes. I wonder if they might have one in the local library?"

"I'm sure I don't know," and Viola leaned over to pick a thread from the carpet. "I don't draw books from there. When it was first opened I took out a card, but when I saw how unclean some of the volumes were I never afterward patronized the place."

"Then you wouldn't know whether they had a book on poisons, or poison plants or not?"

"I wouldn't in the least," she answered, as she arose. "As I said, I don't believe I have been in the place more than twice, and that was two years ago."
"Then I'll have to inquire myself," said the colonel, and he remained standing while Viola left the room. And for some little time he stood looking at the door as it closed after her. And on Colonel Ashley's face there was a peculiar look.

LeGrand Blossom came to The Haven bearing a bundle of books and papers, and with rather a wry face - for he had no heart for business of this nature. Miss Mary Carwell sat down at the table with him and Viola.

"We want to know just where we stand financially," said Viola. "What is the condition of my father's affairs, Mr. Blossom?"

The confidential clerk hesitated a moment before answering. Then he said slowly:

"Well, the affairs are anything but good. There is a great deal of money gone, and some of the securities left are pledged for loans."

"You mean my father spent a lot of money just before he died?" asked Viola. "He either spent it or - Well, yes, he must have spent it, for it is gone. The car cost ten thousand, and he spent as much, if not more, on the yacht."

"But they can be sold. I don't want either of them. I'm afraid in the big car," said Viola, "and the yacht isn't seaworthy, I've heard. I wouldn't take a trip in her."

"I don't know anything about that," said LeGrand Blossom. "But even if the car and yacht were sold at a forced sale they would not bring anything like what they cost. I have gone carefully over your father's affairs, as you requested me, and I tell you frankly they are in bad shape."

"What can be done?" asked Miss Carwell.

"I don't know," LeGrand Blossom frankly admitted. "You may call in an expert, if you like, to go over the books; but I don't believe he would come to any other conclusion than I have. As a matter of fact, I had a somewhat selfish motive in looking into your father's affairs of late. You know I was thinking of going into partnership with him, and - and -" He did not finish.

Viola nodded.

"Perhaps I might say that he was good enough to offer me the chance," the young man went on. And, as I was to invest what was, to me, a large sum, I wanted to see how matters were. So I examined the books carefully, as your father pressed me to do. At that time his affairs were in good shape. But of late he had lost a lot of money."

"Will it make any difference to us?" and Viola included her aunt in her gesture.

"Well, you, Miss Carwell," and Blossom nodded to the older lady, "have your own money in trust funds. Mr. Carwell could not touch them. But he did use part of the fortune left you by your mother," he added to Viola.

"I don't mind that," was her steady answer. "If my father needed my money he was welcome to it. That is past and gone. What now remains to me?"

"Very little," answered LeGrand Blossom. "I may be able to pull the business through and save something, but there is a lot of money lost - spent or gone somewhere. I haven't yet found out. Your father speculated too much, and unwisely. I told him, but he would pay no heed to me."

"Do you think he knew, before his death, that his affairs were in such bad shape?" asked the dead man's sister.

"He must have, for I saw him going over the books several times."

"Do you think this knowledge impelled him to end his life?" faltered Viola.

LeGrand Blossom considered a moment before answering. Then he slowly said:

"It was either that, or - or, well, some one killed him. There are no two ways about it."

"I believe some one killed him!" burst out Viola. "But I think the authorities have made a horrible mistake in detaining Mr. Bartlett," she added. "Don't you, Mr. Blossom?"

"I - er - I don't know what to think. Your father had some enemies, it is true. Every business man has. And a person with a temper easily aroused, such as - "

LeGrand Blossom stopped suddenly.

"You were about to name some one?" asked Viola.

"Well, I was about to give, merely as an instance, Jean Forette the chauffeur. Not that I think the Frenchman had a thing to do with the matter. But he has a violent temper at times, and again he is as meek as any one I ever knew. But say a person did give way to violent passion, such as I have seen him do at times when something went wrong with the high, new car, might not such a person, for a fancied wrong, take means of ending the life of a person who had angered him?"

"I never liked Jean Forette," put in Miss Carwell, "and I was glad when I heard Horace was to let him go."

"Do you think he had anything to do with your father's death?" asked Viola quickly.

"Not the least in the world," answered the head clerk hastily. "I just used him as an illustration."

"But he quarreled with my father," the girl went on. "They had words, I know."

"Yes, they did, and I heard some of them," admitted LeGrand Blossom. "But that passed over, and they were
friendly enough the day of the golf game. So there could not have been murder in the heart of that Frenchman. No, I
don't mean even to hint at him: hut I believe some one, angry at, and with a grudge against, your father, ended his
life."

"I believe that, too!" declared Viola firmly. "And while I feel, as you do, about Jean, still it is a clue that must
not be overlooked. I'll tell Colonel Ashley."

I fancy he knows it already," said LeGrand Blossom. "There isn't much that escapes that fisherman."

CHAPTER XIII

CAPTAIN POLAND CONFESSES

When LeGrand Blossom had taken his departure, carrying with him the books and papers, he left behind two
very disconsolate persons.

"It's terrible!" exclaimed Mr. Carwell's sister. "To think that poor Horace could be so careless! I knew his
sporting life would bring trouble, but I never dreamed of this."

"We must face it, terrible as it is," said Viola. "Nothing would matter if he - if he were only left to us. I'm sure he
never meant to spend so much money. It was just because - he didn't think."

"That always was a fault of his," sighed Miss Mary, "even when a boy. It's terrible!"

"It's terrible to have him gone and to think of the terrible way he was taken," sighed Viola. "But any one is likely
to lose money."

She no more approved of many of her late father's sporting proclivities than did her aunt, and there were many
rather startling stories and rumors that came to Viola as mere whispers to which she turned a deaf ear. Since her
mother's death her father had, it was common knowledge, associated with a fast set, and he had been seen in
company with persons of both sexes who were rather notorious for their excesses.

"Well, Mr. Blossom will do the best he can, I suppose," said Miss Carwell, with rather an intimation that the
head clerk's best would be very bad indeed.

"I'm sure he will," assented Viola. "He knows all the details of poor father's affairs, and he alone can straighten
them out. Oh, if we had only known of this before, we might have stopped it."

"But your father was always very close about his matters," said his sister. "He resented even your mother
knowing how much money he made, and how. I think she felt that, too, for she liked to have a share in all he did. He
was kindness itself to her, but she wanted more than that. She wanted to have a part in his success, and he kept her
out - or she felt that he did. Well, I'm sure I hope all mistakes are straightened out in Heaven. It's certain they aren't
here."

Viola pondered rather long and deeply on what LeGrand Blossom had told her. She made it a point to go for a
drive the next afternoon with Jean Forette in the small car, taking a maid with her on a pretense of doing some
shopping. And Viola closely observed the conduct of the chauffeur.

On her return, the girl could not help admitting that the Frenchman was all a careful car driver should be. He had
shown skill and foresight in guiding the car through the summer-crowded traffic of Lakeside, and had been cheerful
and polite.

"I am sorry you are going to leave us, Jean," she said, when he had brought her back to The Haven.

"I, too, am regretful," he said in his careful English. "But your father had other ideas, and I - I am really afraid of
that big new car. It is not a machine, mademoiselle, it is - pardon - it is a devil! It will be the death of some one yet. I
could never drive it."

"But if we sold that car, Jean, as we are going to do - "

"I could not stay, Miss Viola. I have a new place, and to that I go in two weeks. I am sorry, for I liked it here,
though - Oh, well, of what use?" and he shrugged his shoulders.

"Was there something you did not like? Did my father not treat you well?" asked Viola quickly.

"Oh, as to that, mademoiselle, I should not speak. I liked your father. We, at times, did have difference; as who
has not? But he was a friend to me. What would you have? I am sorry!" And he touched his hat and drove around to
the garage.

As Viola was about to enter the house she chanced to look down the street and saw Minnie Webb approaching.
She looked so thoroughly downcast that Viola was surprised.

"Hello, Minnie!" she exclaimed pleasantly. "Anything new or startling?"

"Nothing," was the somewhat listless reply. "Is there anything new here?" and Minnie Webb's face showed a
momentary interest.

"I can't say that there is," returned Viola. She paused for a moment. "Won't you come in?"

"I don't think so-not to-day," stammered the other girl. And then as she looked at Viola her face began to flush.

"I - I don't feel very well. I have a terrible headache. I think I'll go home and lie down," and she hurried on without
another word.
"There is certainly something wrong with Minnie," speculated Viola, as she looked after her friend. "I wonder if it is on account of LeGrand Blossom."

She did not know how much Minnie Webb was in love with the man who had been her father's confidential clerk and who was now in charge of Mr. Carwell's business affairs, and, not knowing this, she could, of course, not realize under what a strain Minnie was now living with so many suspicions against Blossom.

Divesting herself of her street dress for a more simple gown, Viola inquired of the maid whether Colonel Ashley was in the house. When informed that he had gone fishing with Shag, the girl, with a little gesture of impatience, took her seat near a window to look over some mail that had come during her absence.

As she glanced up after reading a belated letter of sympathy she saw, alighting from his car which had stopped in front of The Haven, Captain Gerry Poland. He caught sight of her, and waved his hand.

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed Viola. "If he hadn't seen me I could have said I was not at home, but now - "

She heard his ring at the door and resigned herself to meeting him, but if the captain had not been so much in love with Viola Carwell he could not have helped noticing her rather cold greeting.

"I called," he said, "to see if there was anything more I could do for you or for your aunt. I saw Blossom, and he says he is working over the books. I've had a good deal of experience in helping settle up estates that were involved. I mean - " he added hastily - "where no will was left, and, my dear Viola, if I could be of any assistance - "

"Thank you," broke in Viola rather coldly, "I don't know that there is anything you can do. It is very kind of you, but Mr. Blossom has charge and - "

"Oh, of course I realize that," went on Captain Poland quickly. "But I thought there might be something."

"There is nothing," and now the yachtsman could not help noticing the coldness in Viola's voice. He seemed to nerve himself for an effort as he said:

"Viola" - he paused a moment before adding - "why can't we be friends? You were decent enough to me some days ago, and now - Have I done anything - said anything? I want to be friends with you. I want to be - "

He took a step nearer her, but she drew back.

"Please don't think, Captain Poland, that I am not appreciative of what you have done for me," the girl said quickly. "But - Oh, I really don't know what to think. It has all been so terrible."

"Indeed it has," said the captain, in a low voice. "But I would like to help."

"Then perhaps you can!" suddenly exclaimed Viola, and there was a new note in her voice. "Have you been to see Harry Bartlett in - in jail?" and she faltered over that word.

"No, I have not," said the captain, and there was a sharp tone in his answer. "I understood no one was allowed to see him."

"That is true enough," agreed Viola. "They wouldn't let me see him, and I wanted to - so much. I presume you know how he comes to be there?"

"It isn't exactly a prison."

"To him it is - and to me," she said. "But you know how he comes to be there?"

"Yes. I was present at the inquest. By the way, they are to resume it this week, I heard. The chemists have finished their analyses and are ready to testify."

"Oh, I didn't know that."

"Yes. But, speaking of Harry - poor chap - it's terrible, of course, but he may be able to clear himself."

"Clear himself, Captain Poland? What do you mean?" and indignant Viola faced her caller.

"Oh, well, I mean - " He seemed in some confusion.

"I want to know something," went on Viola. "Did you bring it to the attention of the coroner or the prosecutor that Harry Bartlett saw my father just before - his death, and quarreled with him? Did you tell that, Captain Poland?"

Viola Carwell was like a stem accuser now.

"Did you?" she demanded again.

"I did," answered Captain Poland, not, however, without an effort. "I felt that it was my duty to do so. I merely offered it as a suggestion, however, to one of the prosecutor's detectives. I didn't think it would lead to anything. I happened to hear your father and Harry having some words - about what I couldn't catch - and I thought it no more than right that all the facts should be brought out in court. I made no secret about it. I did not send word anonymously to the coroner, as I might have done. He knew the source of the information, and he could have called me to the stand had he so desired."

"Would you have told the same story on the stand?"

"I would. It was the truth."

"Even if it sent him - sent Harry to jail?"

"I would - yes. I felt it was my duty, and - "
"Oh-duty!"
Viola made a gesture of impatience.
"So-you-you told, Captain Poland! That is enough! Please don't try to see me again."
"Viola!" he pleaded. "Please listen - "
"I mean it!" she said, sternly. "Go! I never want to see you again! Oh, to do such a thing!"
The captain, nonplussed for a moment, lingered, as though to appeal from the decision. Then, without a word, he turned sharply on his heel and left the room.
Viola sank on a sofa, and gave way to her emotion.
"It can't be true! It can't!" she sobbed. "I won't believe it. It must not be true! Oh, how can I prove otherwise? But I will! I must! Harry never did that horrible thing, and I will prove it!
"Why should Captain Poland try to throw suspicion on him? It isn't right. He had no need to tell the detective that! I must see Colonel Ashley at once and tell him what I think. Oh, Captain Poland, if I - "
Viola twisted in her slender hands a sofa cushion, and then threw it violently from her.
"I'll see Colonel Ashley at once!" she decided.
Inquiry of a maid disclosed the fact that the colonel was still fishing, and from Patrick, the gardener, she learned that he had gone to try his luck at a spot in the river at the end of the golf course where Patrick himself had hooked more than one fish.
"I'll follow him there," said Viola. "I suppose he won't want to be interrupted while he's fishing, but I can't help it! I must talk to some one - tell somebody what I think."
She donned a walking skirt and stout shoes, for the way to the river was rough, and set out. On the way she thought of many things, and chiefly of the man pacing his lonely walk back and forth behind windows that had steel bars on them.
Viola became aware of some one walking toward her as she neared the bend of the river whither Patrick had directed her, and a second glance told her it was the faithful Shag.
He bowed with a funny little jerk and took off his cap.
"Is the colonel there?" and she indicated what seemed to be an ideal fishing place among the willows.
"He was, Miss Viola, but he done gone now."
"Gone? Where? Do you mean back to the house?"
"No'm. He done gone t' N'York."
"New York?"
"Yes'm. On de afternoon train. He say he may be back t'night, an' mebby not 'twell mornin'."
"But New York-and so suddenly! Why did he go, Shag?"
"I don't know all de `ticklers, Miss Viola, but I heah him say he got t' git a book on poisons."
"A book on poisons?" and Viola started.
"Yes'm. He done want one fo' de case he's wukin' on, an' he can't git none at de library, so he go to N'York after one. I se bringin' back his tackle. De fish didn't bite nohow, so he went away, de colonel did."
"Oh!"
Viola stood irresolute a moment, and then turned back toward the house, Shag walking beside her.

CHAPTER XIV
THE PRIVATE SAFE
Divided as she was among several opinions, torn by doubts and sufferings from grief, Viola Carwell found distinct relief in a message that awaited her on her return to the house after her failure to find Colonel Ashley. The message, given her by a maid, was to the effect:
"The safe man has come."
"The who?" asked Viola, not at first understanding.
"The safe man. He said you sent for him to open a safe and - "
"Oh, yes, I understand, Jane. Where is he?"
"In the library, Miss Viola."
Viola hastened to the room where so many fateful talks had taken place of late, and found there a quiet man, beside whose chair was a limp valise that rattled with a metallic jingle as his foot brushed against it when he arose on her entrance.
"Have you come from the safe company?" she asked.
"Yes. I understood that there was one of our safes which could not be opened, and they sent me. Here is the order," and he held out the paper.
He spoke with quiet dignity, omitting the "ma'am," from his salutation. And Viola was glad of this. He was a relief from the usual plumber or carpenter, who seemed to lack initiative.
"It is my father's private safe that we wish opened," she said. "He alone had the combination to it, and he - he is dead," she added softly.

"So I understood," he responded with appreciation of what her grief must be. "Well, I think I shall be able to open the safe without damaging it. That was what you wanted, was it not?"

"Yes. Father never let any one but himself open the safe when he was alive. I don't believe my mother or I saw it open more than ten times, and then by accident. In it he kept his private papers. But, now that he is - is gone, there is need to see how his affairs stand. The lawyer tells me I had better open the safe.

"When we found that none of us knew the combination, and when it was not found written down anywhere among father's other papers, and when his clerk, Mr. Blossom, did not have it, we sent to the company."

"I understand," said the safe expert. "If you will show me - "

Viola touched a button on the wall, a button so cleverly concealed that the ordinary observer would never have noticed it, and a panel slid back, revealing the door of the safe.

"It was one of father's ideas that his strong box was better hidden this way," said Viola, with a little wan smile. "Is there room enough for you to work? The safe is built into the wall."

"Oh, there is plenty of room, thank you. I can very easily get at it. It isn't the first safe I've had to work on this way. Many families have safes hidden like this. It's a good idea."

He looked at the safe, noted the manufacturer's number, and consulted a little book he carried with him. Then he began to turn the knob gently, listening the while, with acute and trained ears, to the noise the tumblers made as they clicked their way, unseen, amid the mazes of the combination.

"Will it be difficult, do you think?" asked Viola. "Will it take you long?"

"That is hard to say."

"Do you mind if I watch you?" she asked eagerly. She wanted something to take her mind off the many things that were tearing at it as the not far distant sea tore at the shore which stood as a barrier in its way.

"Not at all," answered the expert. Then he went on with his work.

In a way it was as delicate an operation as that which sometimes confronts a physician who is in doubt as to what ails his patient. There was a twisting and a turning of the knob, a listening with an ear to the heavy steel door, as a doctor listens to the breathing of a pneumonia victim. Then with his little finger held against the numbered dial, the expert again twirled the nickel knob, seeking to tell, by the vibration, when the little catches fell into the slots provided for them.

It was rather a lengthy operation, and he tried several of the more common and usual combinations without result. As he straightened up to rest Viola asked:

"Do you think you can manage it? Can you open it?"

"Oh, yes. It will take a little time, but I can do it. Your father evidently used a more complicated combination than is usually set on these safes. But I shall find it."

Viola's determination to open the safe had been arrived at soon after the funeral, when it was found that, as far as could be ascertained, her father had left no will. A stickler for system, in its many branches and ramifications, and insisting for minute detail on the part of his subordinates, Horace Carwell did what many a better and worse man has done - put off the making of his will. And that made it necessary for the surrogate to appoint an administrator, who, in this case, Viola renouncing her natural rights, was Miss Mary Carwell.

"I'd rather you acted than I," Viola had said, though she, being of age and the direct heir, could well and legally have served.

Miss Carwell had agreed to act. Then it became necessary to find out certain facts, and when they were not disclosed by a perusal of the papers of the dead man found in his office and in the safe deposit box at the bank, recourse was had to the private safe. LeGrand Blossom knew nothing of what was in the strong box-not even being entrusted with the combination.

"There! It's open!" announced the expert at length, and he turned the handle and swung back the door.

"Thank you," said Viola. Then, as she looked within the safe, she exclaimed:

"Oh, there is an inner compartment, and that's locked, too!"

"Only with a key. That will give no trouble at all," said the man. He proved it by opening it with the third key he tried from a bunch of many he took from his valise.

That was all there was for him to do, save to set the combination with a simpler system, which he did, giving Viola the numbers.

"Was it as easy as you thought?" she asked, when the expert was about to leave.

"Not quite - no. The combination was a double one. That is, in two parts. First the one had to be disposed of, and then the other worked."

"Why was that?"
"Well, it is on the same principle as the safe deposit boxes in a bank. The depositor has one key, and the bank the other. The box cannot be opened by either party alone. Both keys must be used. That insures that no one person alone can get into the box. It was the same way with this safe. The combination was in two parts."

"And did my father set it that way?"

"He must have done so, or had some one arrange the combination for him."

"Then he - he must have shared the combination with some one else!" There was fright in Viola's eyes, and a catch in her voice.

"Yes," assented the expert. "Either that or he set it that way merely for what we might call a 'bluff,' to throw any casual intruder off the track. Your father might have possessed both combinations himself."

"And yet he might have shared them with - with another person?"

"Yes."

"And the other-the other person" - Viola hesitated noticeably over the word - "would have to be present when the safe was opened?" She did not say "he" or "she."

"Well, not necessarily," answered the expert. "He might have had the combination in two parts, and used both of them himself. It is often done. Though, of course, he could, at any time, have shared the secret of the safe with some one else."

"That would only be in the event of there being something in it that both he and some other person would want to take out at the same time; something that one could not get at without the knowledge of the other; would it not?"

"Naturally, yes. But, as I say, it might be the other way - that the double combination was used merely as an additional precaution."

"Thank you," said Viola.

She sat for several minutes in front of the opened safe after the expert had gone, and did not offer to take out any of the papers that were now exposed to view. There was a strange look on her face.

"Two persons!" she murmured. "Two persons! Did he share the secrets of this safe with some one - some one else?"

Viola reached forth her hand and took hold of a bundle of papers tied with a red band-tape it was, of the kind used in lawyers' offices. The bundle appeared to contain letters - old letters, and the handwriting was that of a woman.

"I wonder if I had better get Aunt Mary?" mused the girl. "She is the administrator, and she will have to know. But there are some things I might keep from her - if I had to."

She looked more closely at the letters, and when she saw that they were in the well-remembered hand of her mother she breathed more easily.

"If he kept - these - it must be - all right!" she faltered to herself. "I will call Aunt Mary."

The two women, seeing dimly through their tears at times, went over the contents of the private safe. There were letters that told of the past - of the happy days of love and courtship, and of the early married life. Viola put them sacredly aside, and delved more deeply into the strong box.

"It was like Horace to keep something away from every one else," said his sister. "He did love a secret. But we don't seem to be getting at anything, Viola, that will tell us where there is any more money, and that's what we need now, more than anything else. At least you do, if LeGrand Blossom is right, and you intend to keep on living in the style you're used to."

"I don't have to do that, Aunt Mary. Being poor would not frighten me."

"I didn't think it would. Fortunately I have enough for both of us, though I won't spend anything on a big yacht nor a car that looks like a Fourth of July procession, however much I love the Star Spangled Banner."

"Oh, no, we mustn't dream of keeping the big car nor the yacht," said Viola. "They are to be sold as soon as possible. I only hope they will bring a good price. But here are more papers, Aunt Mary. We must see what they are. Poor father had so many business interests. It's going to be a dreadful matter to straighten them all out."

"Well, LeGrand Blossom and Captain Poland will help us."

"Captain Poland?" questioned Viola.

"Yes. Why not? He is a fine business man, and he has large interests of his own. Have you any objection?"

"Oh, I don't know. Of course not!" she added quickly, as she caught sight of a rather odd look on her aunt's face. "If we have to - I mean if you find it necessary, you can ask his advice, I suppose."

"Wouldn't you?"

"Why, yes, I believe I would - just as a matter of business."

Viola's voice was calm and cool, but it might have been because her attention was focused on a bundle of papers she was taking from the safe. And a casual perusal of these showed that they had a bearing on subjects that might explain certain things.
"Look, Aunt Mary!" the girl exclaimed. "Father seems to have kept a diary. It tells - it tells about that trouble he had with Harry - Rather, it wasn't with Harry at all. It was Harry's uncle. It's that same old trouble father so often referred to. He always declared he was cheated in a certain business deal, but I always imagined it was because he didn't make as much money as he thought he ought to. Father was like that. But see-this puts a different face on it."

Together they looked over the papers, and among them-among the memoranda, copies of contracts and other documents - was a diary, or perhaps it might be called a business man's journal. Both Viola and her aunt were familiar enough with business to understand the import of what they read.

It was to the effect that Mr. Amos Bartlett, Harry's paternal uncle, had been associated with Mr. Carwell in several transactions involving some big business deals. Mr. Bartlett had been smart enough, by forming a directorate within a directorate and by means of a dummy company, to get a large sum to his credit, while Mr. Carwell was left to face a large deficit.

"And Harry Bartlett acted as agent for his uncle in the transactions!" exclaimed Miss Carwell as she looked over the papers.

"But I don't believe he knew anything wrong was being done!" declared Viola. "I'm positive he didn't. Harry isn't that kind of a man."

"These papers don't say so."

"Naturally you wouldn't expect father to say a good word for one he considered his business rival, not to say enemy. I don't believe Harry had anything more to do with it than he had with - with poor father's death."

Miss Carwell said nothing. She was busy looking over some other papers which the opening of the private safe had revealed. And then, while her aunt was engaged with these, Viola found a little bundle that had on it her name.

For a moment she debated with herself whether or not to open it. The handwriting was that of her father, and it seemed as though something stayed her. But she broke the string at last and there tumbled into her lap some photographs of herself, taken at different ages, a number of them - in fact, most of them - amateur attempts, some snapped by her mother and some by her father, as Viola knew from seeing them. She recalled some very well - especially one taken on the back of a little Shetland pony. On the reverse of this picture Mr. Carwell had written: "My dear little girl!"

Viola burst into tears, and her aunt, seeing the cause, felt the strings of her heart being tugged.

"Well, one thing seems to be proved," said the older woman, when they were again going over the papers, "and that is that your father didn't think very much of Harry Bartlett."

"That was his fault - I mean father's," retorted Viola. "He had no reason for it, even with what this paper says. I don't believe Harry would do such a thing."

"Do you suppose the quarrel could have been about this?" and Miss Carwell held out the journal.

"I don't know what to think," said Viola. "But here is another memorandum. We must see what this is."

Together they bent over the remaining documents the safe had given up - secrets of the dead.

As they read a strange look came over Viola's face.

"Memo. of certain matters between Captain Poland and myself. And while I think of it let me state that but for his timely and generous financial aid I would have been ruined by that scoundrel Bartlett. Captain Poland saved me. And should the stock of the concern ever be on a paying basis I intend to repay him not only all he advanced me but any profit I may secure shall be divided with him in gratitude. That there will be a profit I very much doubt, though this does not lessen my gratitude to Captain Poland for his aid."

"Have a drink, Colonel?"

"Eh?"

"I said - Here, boy! A Scotch high and a mint julep."

Colonel Ashley, roused from his reverie as he sat in his club, gazing out on the busy, fashionable, hurrying, jostling, worried, happy, sad, and otherwise throngs that swept past the big Fifth avenue windows, shifted himself in the comfortable leather chair, and looked at his cigar. It had gone out, and he decided that it was not worth relighting.

"Cigars, too!" ordered Bruce Garrigan.

"Oh, were you speaking to me?" and the colonel seemed wholly awake now.

"Not only to you, but in your interests," went on Garrigan, with a smile. "Hope I didn't disturb your nap, but - "
"Oh, no," the colonel hastened to assure his companion with his usual affability. "I had finished sleeping."

"So I inferred. Do you know how many hours, minutes and seconds the average human being has passed in sleep when he reaches the age of forty-five years?" and Garrigan smiled quizzically.

"No, sir," answered Colonel Ashley, "I do not."

"Neither do I," confessed Mr. Garrigan as he sank down in a chair beside the colonel and accepted the glass from a tray which the much-buttoned club attendant held out to him. "I don't know, and I don't much care."

Then, when cigars were glowing and the smoke arose in graceful clouds, an aroma as of incense shrouding the two as they gazed out on the afternoon throngs, Garrigan remarked:

"I didn't know you were here. In fact, I didn't know you were a member of this club."

"You wouldn't know it if my attendance here were needed to prove it," said the colonel with a smile. "I don't get here very often, but I had to run up on some business, and I found this the most convenient stopping place."

"Are you going back to Lakeside?"

"Oh, yes!" There was prompt decision in the answer.

"Then you haven't finished that unfortunate affair? You haven't found out what caused the death of Mr. Carwell?"

"Oh, yes, I know what killed him."

"But not who?"

"Not yet."

"Do you hold to the suicide theory?"

"I don't hold to anything, my dear Mr. Garrigan," answered the colonel, who was in a sufficiently mellow mood to be amused by the rather vapid talk of his host - for such he had constituted himself on the ordering of the drinks and cigars. "That is I haven't such a hold on any theory that I can't let go and take a new one if occasion warrants it."

"I see. And so you came up to get away from the rather gruesome atmosphere down there?"

"Not exactly. I came up on business - I have a business in New York you know, in spite of the fact that I am here," and the colonel smiled as he looked about the room where were gathered men of wealth and leisure, who did not seem to have a care or worry in the world.

"Oh, yes, I know that," agreed Garrigan. "Well, has your trip been satisfactory?"

"I can't say that it has. In fact it's pretty poor fishing around here, and I'm thinking of going back. I want to hear the click of the reel and the music of the brook. I wasn't cut out for a city man, and the longer I stay here the worse I hate the place, even if I do have a business here."

"Then you don't care for - this," and Garrigan waved his hand at the congestion of automobiles and stages which had come to a halt opposite the big windows of the exclusive and fashionable club.

It was four in the afternoon, just when traffic both of automobiles and pedestrians is at its height on the avenue. Of horse-drawn equipages they were so few as to be a novelty.

"I care so little for it that I am going back to-night," the detective responded.

"Then you have found what you came looking for?"

"I told you the fishing was very poor," said the colonel with a smile. "My friend Mr. Walton, were he alive now, would never forgive me for deserting the place I left to come here. When did you come up?"

"Last night. They insisted I had to put in an appearance at the office merely to take away the salary that's been accumulating for me - said it cluttered up the place. So I obliged. Do you know how many automobiles pass this window every twenty-four hours?" Garrigan asked suddenly.

"I do not."

"Neither do I. It would be interesting to know, however. I think I shall count them, when I have nothing else to do. I understand there is a checking or tabulating machine made for such purposes. But perhaps I am keeping you from - "

"You are merely keeping me from ordering another portion of liquid refreshment," interrupted the colonel with a smile. "Boyo!"

And once again there was diffused the aroma of mint and the more pronounced odor of the Scotch.

"Yes, it's pretty poor fishing," mused the colonel, when Garrigan had gone off to engage in a game of billiards with some insistent friends, whose advent the detective was thankful for, as he wanted to be alone. He was gregarious by nature, but there were times when he had to be alone, and it was because of this trait in his nature that he had taken up with the rod and reel, becoming a disciple of Izaak Walton.

Until dusk began to fall, changing the character of the throngs on the avenue, the colonel lingered in his easy chair before the broad, plate windows. And then, as the electric lights began to sparkle, as had the diamonds on some of the over-dressed women in the afternoon, he arose and started out.

"Will you be dining here, sir?" asked one of the stewards.
"Mr. Garrigan asked me to inquire, sir, and, if you were, to say that he would appreciate it if you would be his guest."

"Thank him for me, and tell him I can't stay." And the colonel, tossing aside the cigar which had gone out and been frequently relighted, soon found himself making a part of the avenue's night throng.

It was a warm summer evening-altogether too warm to be in New York when one had the inclination and means to be elsewhere, but the colonel, in spite of the fact that he had been in a hurry to leave the club, seemed to find no occasion for haste now.

He sauntered along, seemingly without an object, though the rather frequent consultations he made of his watch appeared to indicate otherwise. Finally, he seemed either to have come to a sudden decision or to have noted the demise of the time he was trying to kill, for with a last quick glance at his timepiece he put it back into his pocket, and, turning a corner where there was a taxicab stand, he entered one of the vehicles and gave an order to the chauffeur.

"Columbia College-yes, sir!" and the driver looked rather oddly at the figure of the colonel.

"Wonder what he teaches, and what he's going up there this time of night for?" was the mental comment of the chauffeur. "Maybe they have evening classes, but this guy looks as though he could give 'em a post-graduate course in poker."

Colonel Ashley sat back in the corner of the cab, glad of the rather long ride before him. He scarcely moved, save when the sway or jolt of the vehicle tossed him about, and he sat with an unlighted cigar between his teeth.

"Yes," he muttered once, "pretty poor fishing. I might better have stayed where I was. Well, I'll go back tomorrow."

Leaving the taxicab, the colonel made his way along the raised plaza on which some of the college buildings front, and turned into the faculty club, where he stayed for some time. When he came out, having told his man to wait, he bore under his arm a package which, even to the casual observer, contained books.

"Pennsylvania station," was the order he gave, and again he sat back in the corner of the cab, scarcely glancing out of the window to note the busy scenes all about him.

It was not until he had purchased his ticket and was about to board the last Jersey Shore train, to take him back to the 'scene of the death of Horace Carwell, that Colonel Ashley, as he caught sight of a figure in the crowd ahead of him, seemed galvanized into new life.

For a moment he gazed at a certain man, taking care to keep some women with large hats between the object of his attention and himself. And then, as he made sure of the identity, the colonel murmured:

"Poor fishing did I say? Well, it seems to me it's getting better."

He looked at his watch, made a rapid calculation that showed him he had about five minutes before the train's departure, and then he hurried off to his right and down the stairs that led to the lavatories.

It was Colonel Robert Lee Ashley, as Bruce Garrigan had seen him at the Fifth Avenue club, who entered one of the pay compartments where so many in-coming and out-going travelers may, for the modest sum of ten cents, enjoy in the railroad station a freshening up by means of soap, towels and plenty of hot water.

But it was a typical Southern politician, with slouch hat, long frock coat, a moustache and goatee, who emerged from the same private wash-room a little later, carrying a small, black valise.

"I don't like to do this," said Colonel Ashley, making sure the spirit gum had set, so his moustache and goatee would not come off prematurely, "but I have to. This fishing is getting better, and I don't want any of the fish to see me."

Then he went down the steps to the train that soon would be whirling him under the Hudson river, along the Jersey meadows, and down to the cool shore. He passed through the string of coaches until he came to one where he found a seat behind a certain man. Into this vantage point the colonel, looking more the part than ever, slumped himself and opened his paper.

"Yes, the fishing is getting better - decidedly better," he mused. "I shouldn't wonder but what I got a bite soon."

CHAPTER XVI
SOME LETTERS

When Jean Forette, whose month was not quite up and who had not yet completed arrangements for his new position, alighted from the Shore Express at Lakeside and made his way-afoot and not in a machine - to the Three Pines, the picturesque figure of the Southern gentleman followed.

"I wonder," mused Colonel Ashley, "whether he takes Scotch Highballs or absinthe, and what dope he mixes with it? Absinthe is rather hard to get out here, I should imagine, but they might have a green brand of whiskey they'd sell for it. But that Frenchman ought to know the genuine stuff. However, we'll see."

Carrying his limp, leather bag, which had served him in such good stead when he entered the lavatory, the colonel slouched silently along the road. It was close to midnight, and there would be no other trains to the shore
The lights of the Three Pines glowed in pleasant and inviting fashion across the sandy highway. Out in front stood several cars, for the tavern was one much patronized by summer visitors, and was a haven of refuge, a "life-saving station," as it had been dubbed by those who fancied they were much in need of alcoholic refreshment.

Jean Forette entered, and Colonel Ashley, waiting a little and making sure that the "tap room," as it was ostentatiously called, was sufficiently filled to enable him to mingle with the patrons without attracting undue notice, followed.

He looked about for a sight of the chauffeur, and saw him leaning up against the bar, sipping a glass of beer, and, between imbibitions, talking earnestly to the white-aproned bartender.

"I'd like to hear what they're saying," mused the colonel. "I wonder if I can get a bit nearer."

He ordered some rye, and, having disposed of it, took out a cigar, and began searching in his pockets as though for a match.

"Here you are!" observed a bartender, as he held out a lighted taper.

The colonel had anticipated this, and quickly moved down the mahogany rail toward the end where Jean Forette was standing. At that end was a little gas jet kept burning as a convenience to smokers.

"I'll use that," said the colonel. "I don't like the flavor of burnt wood in my smoke."

"Fussy old duck," murmured the barkeeper as he let the flame he had ignited die out, flicking the blackened end to the floor.

And, being careful to keep his face as much as possible in the shadow of his big, slouch hat, Colonel Ashley lighted his cigar at the gas flame.

And, somehow or other, that cigar required a long and most careful lighting. The smoker got the tip glowing, and then inspected it critically. It was not to his satisfaction, as he drew a few puffs on it, and again he applied the end to the flame.

He sent forth a perfect cloud of smoke this time, and it seemed to veil him as the fog, blowing in from the sea, veils the tumbling billows. Once more there was a look at the end, but the "fussy old duck" was not satisfied, and, again had recourse to the flame.

All this while Colonel Ashley was straining his ears to catch what Jean Forette was saying to the attendant who had drawn the frothing glass of beer for him.

But the men talked in too low a tone, or the colonel had been a bit too late, for all he heard was a murmur of automobile talk. Jean seemed to be telling something about a particularly fast car he had formerly driven.

"The fishing isn't as good as I hoped," mused the colonel.

Then, as he turned to go out, he heard distinctly:

"Sure I remember you paying for the drink. I can prove that if you want me to. Are they tryin' to double-cross you?"

"Something like that, yes."

"Well, you leave it to me, see? I'll square you all right."

"Thanks," murmured Jean, and then he, too, turned aside.

"There may be something in it after all," was the colonel's thought, and then he, too, hurried from the Three Pines, passing beneath the big trees, with their sighing branches, which gave the name to the inn.

On toward The Haven, through the silence and darkness of the night, went the detective. And at a particularly dark and lonely place he stopped. The pungent, clean smell of grain alcohol filled the air, and a little later a man, devoid of goatee and moustache, passing out into the starlight, while a black, slouch hat went into the bag, and a Panama, so flexible that it had not suffered from having been thrust rather ruthlessly into the valise, came out.

"I don't like that sort of detective work," mused the colonel, "but it has its uses."

Viola Carwell, alone in her room, sat with a bundle of letters on a table before her. They were letters she had found in a small drawer of the private safe - a drawer she had, at first, thought contained nothing. The discovery of the letters had been made in a peculiar manner.

Viola and Miss Carwell, going over the documents, had sorted them into two piles - one to be submitted to the lawyer, the other being made up of obviously personal matters that could have no interest for any but members of the family.

Then Miss Carwell had been called away to attend to some household matters, and Viola had started to return to the safe such of the papers as were not to go to the lawyer.

She opened a small drawer, to slip back into it a bundle of letters her mother had written to Mr. Carwell years before. Then Viola became aware of something else in the drawer. It was something that caught on the end of her finger nail, and she was stung by a little prick-like that of a pin.

"A sliver-under my nail!" exclaimed Viola. "The bottom of the wooden drawer must be loose."
It was loose, as she discovered as soon as she looked in the compartment. But it was a looseness that meant nothing else than that the drawer had a false bottom.

It was not such a false bottom as would have been made use of in the moving pictures. That is to say it was very poorly made, and an almost casual glance would have revealed it. All that had been done was to take a piece of wood the exact size and shape of the bottom of the drawer, and fit it in. This extra piece of wood covered anything that might be put in the drawer under it, and then, on top of the false bottom other things might be placed so that when they were taken out, and the person doing it saw bare wood, the conclusion would naturally follow that all the contents of the drawer had been removed.

But such was not the case. Beneath the smoothfitting piece of wood, which had sprung loose and been the means of driving a splinter under Viola's nail, thus apprising her of the fact that there was something in the drawer she had not seen, had been found some letters. And Viola had not told her aunt about them.

"I want to see what they are myself, first," the girl decided.

Now they were spread out on her dressing table in front of her. She sat with her glorious blue-black hair unbound, and falling over her shoulders, which gleamed pink through the filmy thinness of her robe.

"I wonder if I shall be shocked when I read them?" she mused.

That was what Viola had been living in continual fear of since her father's death - that some disclosure would shock her - that she might come upon some phase of his past life which would not bear the full light of day. For Horace Carwell had not stinted himself of the pleasures of life as he saw them. He had eaten and drunk and he had made merry. And he was a gregarious man - one who did not like to take his pleasures alone.

And so Viola was afraid.

The letters were held together with an elastic band, and this gave some hope.

"If they were from a woman, he wouldn't have used a rubber band on them," reasoned Viola. "He was too sentimental for that. They can't be mother's letters - they were in another compartment. I wonder -"

Viola had done much wondering since her mother's death, and considerable of it had been due to the life her father led. That he would marry again she doubted, but he was fond of the society of the men, and particularly the women of their own set, and some sets with which Viola preferred to have nothing to do.

And if Mr. Carwell had no intentions of marrying again, then his interest in women -

But here Viola ceased wondering.

With a more resolute air she reached forth hand to the bundle of letters and took one out. There was distinct relief in her manner as she quickly turned to the signature and read: "Gerry Poland."

And then, quickly, she ascertained that all the letters comprised correspondence between her father and the yacht club captain.

"But why did he hide these letters away?" mused Viola. "They seem to be about business, as the others were - the others showing that Captain Poland perhaps saved my father from financial ruin. Why should they be under the false bottom of the drawer?"

She could not answer that question.

"I must read them all," she murmured, and she went through the entire correspondence. There were several letters, sharp in tone, from both men, and the subject was as Greek to Viola. But there was one note from the captain to her father that brought a more vivid color to her dark cheeks, for Captain Poland had written:

"You care little for what I have done for you, otherwise you would not so oppose my attentions to your daughter. They are most honorable, as you well know, yet you are strangely against me. I can not understand it."

"Oh!" murmured Viola. "It is as if I were being bargained for! How I hate him!"

Almost blinded by her tears she read another letter. It was another appeal to her father to use his influence in assisting the captain's suit.

But this letter - or at least that portion of it relating to Viola - had been torn, and all that remained was:

"As members of the same lo-"

"What can that have meant?" she mused. "Is it the word 'lodge'?"

She read on, where the letter was whole again:

"I must ask you to reconsider your actions. Let me hear from you by the twenty-third or -"

Again was that mystifying and tantalizing tear. Viola hastily searched among the other letters, hoping the missing pieces might be found.

"I simply must see what it meant," she said. "I wonder if they can be in another part of the safe? I'm going to look!"

She started for her bath robe, and, at that moment, with a suddenness that unnerved her, there came a knock on her door.

CHAPTER XVII
OVER THE TELEPHONE

Viola's first movement was of concealment - to toss over the scattered letters on her desk a lace shawl she had been wearing earlier in the evening. Then satisfied that should the unknown knocker prove to be some one whom she might admit - her Aunt Mary or one of the maids - satisfied that no one would, at first glance, see the letters which might mean nothing or much, Viola asked in a voice that slightly trembled:

"Who is it?"
"I did not mean to disturb you," came the answer, and with a sense of relief Viola recognized the voice of Colonel Ashley. "But I have just returned from New York, and, seeing a light under your door, I thought I would-report, as it were."

"Oh, thank you-thank you!" the girl exclaimed, relief evident in her voice.
"Is there anything I can do for you?" the colonel went on, as he stood outside the closed door. "Has anything happened since I went away?"
"No - no," said Viola, rather hesitatingly. "There is nothing new to tell you. I was sitting up - reading."
Her glance went to the desk where the letters were scattered.
"Oh," answered the colonel. "Well, don't sit up too late. It is getting on toward morning."
"Have you anything to tell me, Colonel Ashley?" asked Viola. "Did you discover anything?"
There was silence on the other side of the door for a moment, and then came the answer, given slowly:
"No, nothing to report. I will have a talk with you in the morning."
And then the footsteps of the detective were heard, lessening in their sound, as he made his way to his room.

Viola, perplexed, puzzled, and bewildered, went back to her desk. She took up the letters again. The torn one with its strange reference: "As members of the same - "
What could it be? Was it some secret society to which her father and Gerry Poland belonged, the violation of the secrets of which carried a death penalty?

No, it could not be anything as sensational as that. Clearly the captain was in love with her - he had frankly confessed as much, and Viola knew it anyhow. She was not at all sure whether he loved her for her position or because she was good to look upon and desirable in every way.

As for her own heart, she was sure of that. In spite of the fact that she had tried to pique him that fatal day, merely to "stir him up," as she phrased it, Viola was deeply and earnestly in love with Harry Bartlett, and she was sure enough of his feeling toward her to find in it a glow of delight.

Then there was in the letter the hint of a threat. "Let me hear from you by the twenty-third, or - "
"Oh, what does it mean? What does it mean?" and Viola bent her weary head down on the letters and her tears stained them. Puzzled as she was over the contents of the letters - torn and otherwise - which she had found hidden in the drawer of the private safe, Viola Carwell was not yet ready to share her secret with her Aunt Mary or Colonel Ashley. These two were her nearest and most natural confidants under the circumstances.

"I would like to tell Harry, but I can't," she reasoned, when she had awakened after a night of not very refreshing slumber. "Of course Captain Poland could explain - if he would. But I'll keep this a secret a little longer. But, oh! I wonder what it means?"
And so, when she greeted Colonel Ashley at the breakfast table she smiled and tried to appear her usual self.
"I did not hear you come in," said Miss Carwell, as she poured the coffee.
"No, I did not want to disturb any one," answered the colonel. "I saw a light under Miss Viola's door, and reported myself to her," he went on. "But I don't imagine you slept much more than I did, for your eyes are not as bright as usual," and he smiled at the girl.
"Aren't they?" countered Viola. "Well, I did read later than I should. But tell me, Colonel Ashley, are you making any progress at all?"
He did not answer for a moment. He seemed very much occupied in buttering a piece of roll - trying to get the little dab of yellow in the exact center of the white portion. Then, when it was arranged to his satisfaction, he said:
"I am making progress, that is all I can say now."
"And does that progress carry with it any hope that Harry Bartlett will be proved innocent?" asked Viola eagerly.
"That I can not say - now. I hope it will, though."
"Thank you for that!" exclaimed Viola earnestly.
Miss Carwell said nothing. She had her own opinion, and was going to hold to it, detectives or no detectives.
"Will you send Shag to me?" the colonel requested a maid, as he arose from the table. "Tell him we are going fishing."
"Isn't there anything you can do - I mean toward - toward the - case?" faltered Viola. "Not that I mean - of course I don't want to seem - "
"I understand, my dear," said the colonel gently. "And I am not going fishing merely to shirk a responsibility.
But I have to think some of these puzzles out quietly, and fishing is the quietest pastime I know."

"Oh, yes, I know," Viola hastened to add. "I shouldn't have said anything. I wish I could get quiet myself. I'm almost tempted to take your recipe."

"Why don't you?" urged the colonel. "Come along with me. I can soon teach you the rudiments, though to become a finished angler, so that you would be not ashamed to meet Mr. Walton, takes years. But I think it would rest you to come. Shall I tell Shag to fit you out with one of my rods?"

Viola hesitated a moment. This might give her an opportunity for talking with the colonel in secret and confidence. But she put it aside.

"No, thank you," she answered. "I'll go another time. I must stop at the office and leave some bills that have come here to the house. Mr. Blossom attends to the payment."

"Let me leave them for you," offered the colonel. "I have to go into town for some bait, and I can easily stop at the office for you."

"If you will be so good," returned Viola, and she got the bundle of bills - some relating to Mr. Carwell's funeral and others that had been mailed to the house instead of to the office.

The colonel might have sent Shag to purchase the shedder crabs he was going to use for bait that day in fishing in the inlet, and the colored servant might have left the bills. But the colonel was particular about his bait, and would let none select it but himself. Consequently he had Jean Forette drive him in, telling Shag to meet him at a certain dock where they would drop down the inlet and try for "snappers," young bluefish, elusive, gamy and delicious eating.

"You have not yet found a place?" asked the colonel of the chauffeur, as they rolled along.

"No, monsieur - none to my satisfaction, though I have been offered many. One I could have I refused yesterday."

"You liked it with Mr. Carwell, then?"

"Truly the situation was in itself delightful. But I could not manage the big car as he liked, and we had to part. There was no other way."

The detective narrowly observed the driver beside whom he sat. Jean did not look well. He had much of the appearance of the "morning after the night before," and his hand was not very steady as he shifted the gear lever.

"How much longer have you to stay here, Jean?

"About two weeks. My month will be up then."

"And then you go -"

"I do not know, monsieur. Probably to New York. That is a great headquarters."

"So I believe."

"If monsieur should hear of a family that -"

"Yes, I'll bear you in mind, Jean. You are steady and reliable, I presume?" and the colonel smiled.

"I have most excellent letters!" he boasted, and for the moment he seemed to rouse himself from the sluggishness that marked him that morning.

"I'll bear it in mind," said the colonel again.

But as they drove on, and Colonel Ashley noted with what exaggerated care Jean Forette passed other cars - giving them such a wide berth that often his own machine was almost in the ditch - the impression grew on the detective that the Frenchman was not as skillful as he would have it believed.

"He drives Like an amateur, or a woman out alone in her machine for the first time," mused the colonel. "He'd never do for a smart car. Wonder what ails him. He wasn't drunk last night by any means, and yet - "

They reached the town, and paused at the only place where there was any congestion of traffic - where two main seashore highways crossed in the center of Lakeside. Jean held the runabout there so long, waiting for other traffic to pass, that the officer who was on duty called:

"What's the matter - going to sleep there?"

Then Jean, with a start, threw in the clutch and shot ahead.

"That's queer," mused the colonel. "He seems afraid."

The purchase of the shedder crabs was gone into care fully, and having questioned the bait-seller as to the best location in the inlet, the detective again got into the machine and was driven to the office of the late Horace Carwell. It was a branch of the New York office, and thither, every summer, came LeGrand Blossom and a corps of clerks to manage affairs for their employer.

Colonel Ashley, who by this time was known to the office boy at the outer gate, was admitted at once.

"Mr. Blossom is at the telephone," said the lad, "but you can go right in and wait for him."

This the colonel did, having left Jean outside in the car.

The telephone in LeGrand Blossom's private office was in a booth, put there to get it away from the noise of
traffic in the street outside. And, as the boy had said, Blossom was in this booth as Colonel Ashley entered.

It so happened that the chief clerk was standing in the booth with his back turned to the main door, and did not see the colonel enter. And the latter, coming in with easy steps, as he always went everywhere, heard a snatch of the talk over the telephone that made him wonder.

Though the little booth was meant to keep sounds from entering, as well as coming out, the door was not tightly closed and as LeGrand Blossom spoke rather loudly Colonel Ashley heard distinctly.

"Yes," said the head clerk over the wire, "I'll pay the money tonight sure. Yes, positive." There was a period of waiting, while he listened, and then he went on: "Yes, on the Allawanda. I'll be there. Yes, sure! Now don't bother me any more."

Colonel Ashley, through the glass door of the telephone booth, saw LeGrand Blossom make a move as though to hang up the receiver. And then the detective turned suddenly, and swung back, as though he had entered the room at the moment Blossom had emerged from the booth.

"Oh!" exclaimed the head clerk, and, for a second, he seemed nonplused. But Colonel Ashley took up the talk instantly.

"I will keep you but a minute," he said. "Miss Viola asked me to leave these bills for you. I came in to town to buy some bait. There they are. I'm going fishing," and before LeGrand Blossom could answer the colonel was saying good-bye and making his way out.

"I wonder," mused the colonel, as he started for the car where Jean awaited him, "what or who or where the Allawanda is? I must find out."

He found further cause for wonder as he started off in the car with the French chauffeur for the boat dock, at the conduct of Jean himself.

For the man appeared to be a wholly different person. His face was all smiles, and there was a jaunty air about him as though he had received good news. His management of the car, too, left nothing to be desired. He started off swiftly, but with a smoothness that told of perfect mastery of the clutch and gears. He took chances, too, as he dashed through town, cutting corners, darting before this car, back of the other until, used as the colonel was to taxicabs in New York, he held his breath more than once.

"What's the matter - in a hurry?" he asked Jean, as they narrowly escaped a collision.

"Oh, no, monsieur, but this is the way I like to drive. It is much more - what you call pep!"

"Yes," mused the colonel to himself, "it's pep all right. But I wonder what put the pep into you? You didn't have it when we started out. Some French dope you take, I'll wager. Well, it may put pep into you now, but it'll take the starch out of you later on."

Jean left the colonel at the dock, whither Shag had already made his way, coming in a more prosaic trolley car from The Haven, and soon they were ready to row down the inlet in a boat.

"Shall I call for you?" asked Jean, as he prepared to drive back.

"No," answered the colonel, "I can't tell what luck I'll have. We'll come home when it suits us."

"Very good, monsieur."

And so the colonel went fishing, and his thoughts were rather more on the telephone talk he had overheard than on his rod and line.

Contrary to the poor luck that had held all week, so the dockman said, the colonel's good luck was exceptional. Shag had a goodly string of snappers of large size to carry back with him.

"How'd you do it?" asked the boatman, as he made fast the skiff.

"Oh, they just bit and I hauled 'em in," said he colonel. "By the way," he went on, "is there a place around here called Allawanda?"

"Yes, there's a little village named that, about ten miles back in the country," said the boatman.

"Nothing there, though, but a few houses and one store."

"Oh, I thought it might be quite a place."

"No, and nobody'd know it was there if there wasn't a boat around here named after it."

"Is there a boat called that?" asked the colonel, and he tried to keep the eagerness out of his voice.

"Yes. The ferryboat that runs from Lakeside to Loch Elarbor is named that. Seems that one of the men in the company that owns it used to live at Allawanda when he was a boy, and he called the boat that. It's an old tub of a ferry, though, about like the town itself, I guess. Well, you sure did have good luck!"

"Yes, indeed," agreed the colonel, and his luck was better than the boatman guessed, and of a different kind.

It was in pursuance of this same luck that caused the colonel, later that day, when the shadows of evening were falling, to take his limp satchel and slip out of the house. He went afoot to the ferry dock, and when the Allawanda floundered in like a porpoise he went on board. It was his first visit to this part of the inlet that separated Lakeside from Loch Harbor, and this means of getting to the yachting center was seldom used by any guests of The Haven.
They went around by the highway in automobiles.

"Well," mused the colonel, as he went to the men's cabin with his limp valise, "I hope Mr. Blossom keeps his promise and comes here to-night. I shall be interested in noting to whom he pays the money."

Then, seeing that the little cabin of the ramshackle boat was deserted at that hour, the colonel went to a dark corner, and from it emerged, a little later, with a beard on that would have done credit to the most orthodox inhabitant of New York's Ghetto.

Still the colonel did not look like a Jew, and he was not going to attempt that character. He made his way to the stern of the craft, where he could watch all who came aboard, and finding a deck hand who was sweeping, said:

"I'm not feeling very well. Thought maybe a ride back and forth across the inlet would do me good if I stayed out in the air. So if you see me here don't think I'm trying to beat my fare. Here's a dollar, you may keep the change."

"Thanks - ride all you like," said the man. At five cents a trip, with the boat stopping at midnight, there would still be a good tip in it for him. The colonel ensconced himself in a dark corner and waited.

The first two trips over and back were fruitless as far as his object was concerned. But just as the Allawanda was about to pull out for her third voyage across the inlet, there came on board a woman, with a shawl so closely wrapped about her that her features were completely hidden. There were only a few oil lamps on the old-fashioned craft, and the illumination was poor.

The colonel thought there was something vaguely familiar about the figure, but he was not certain. He tried to get near enough to her, in a casual walk up and down the deck, to view her countenance, but, either by accident or design, she turned away and looked over the rail. He was close enough, however, to note that the shawl was of fine texture and of a peculiar pattern.

Retiring again to his corner in the stern of the boat, and noting that the woman kept her place there, Colonel Ashley waited in patience. And he had his reward.

The Allawanrda was whistling to tell the deck hands to cast off the mooring ropes, when LeGrand Blossom came running down the inclined gangway and got on board. He seemed in a hurry and excited, and, apparently unaware of the presence of the detective in the dark corner, he went directly to the woman in the shawl. The boat began to move from her slip.

"Did you think I was never coming?" asked LeGrand Blossom.

"No, I was detained," the woman answered, and at the sound of her voice Colonel Ashley started and uttered a smothered exclamation. "I but just arrived," the woman went on. "Did you bring it?"

"Hush! Yes. Not so loud. Some one may hear you."

"There is no one here. One man, with a heavy beard, passed by me as I came on board. At first I thought it was you, disguised, but when I saw it was not I kept to myself. There is no one here."

"I hope not," murmured LeGrand Blossom, as he looked cautiously around. The after deck was but dimly lighted.

For a time the woman and man talked in tones so low that the detective could hear nothing, and he dared not leave his hidden corner to come closer.

But, just as the Allawanda was nearing her slip on the other side, the man spoke in louder tones. "And so we come to the end!" he said.

"No, please don't say that!" begged the woman.

"I must," Blossom answered. "We can't go on this way any longer. Here is what I promised you. It is all I can raise, and I had a hard time doing that. Every one is suspicious, and that detective is all eyes and ears. It is the best I can do. You must not bother me any more."

The lights from a passing boat fell on the couple as they stood close to the rail, and, from his vantage point in the darkness, the colonel saw LeGrand Blossom hand the woman in the shawl a package. She took it eagerly, and thrust it into her bosom. Then, turning to the man, she said reproachfully:

"You say this is the end. Then you don't love me any more?"

LeGrand Blossom did not answer for a moment.

"You don't - do you?" the woman insisted.

"No," was the slow reply. "I might as well be brutally frank about it, and say I don't. And you don't care either."

"Oh, I do! I do!" she eagerly protested.

"No, you only think you do. It is better for both of us to have it end this way. But let us make sure that it is an end. There must be no more of it. I have given you all I can. You must go away as you promised."

"Yes, I suppose I must," and her voice was broken. "Oh, I wish I had never met you!"

"Perhaps it would have been better that way," was Blossom's cold response. "However, it's too late for that now. Good-bye," he added, as the boat was grating her way along the Loch Harbor slip. "I'm not going to get off. Don't telephone me again. This is all I can ever give you."
“Oh, yes, I suppose, now you've finished, you can get rid of me. Well, let it be so,” she said bitterly. And then, as
the boat bumped to a landing she cried: "If I could only find - "

But the rattle of the chains and the clatter of the wheels on the ferry bridge drowned her voice. She rushed away
from LeGrand Blossom's side and, clutching her shawl close around her as if to make sure of the package the man
had given her, she disappeared into the interior of the ferryboat.

Colonel Ashley started to follow, but as LeGrand Blossom remained on board he decided to watch him instead
of the woman, though he was vaguely disquieted trying to remember where he had heard her voice before.

CHAPTER XVIII

A LARGE BLONDE LADY

Reaching The Haven, Colonel Ashley, who had trailed LeGrand Blossom to the latter's boarding place without
anything having developed, was met by Shag, who was up later than usual, for it was now close to midnight.

"What now, Shag!" exclaimed the colonel. "Don't tell me there are any more detective cases for me to work on. I
simply won't listen. I wish I hadn't to this one. It's getting more and more tangled every minute, and the fish are
biting well. Hang it all, Shag, why did you let me take up this golf course mystery?"

"I didn't do it, Colonel, no, sah!"

"What's the use of talking that way, Shag! You know you did!"

"Yes, sah, Colonel. Dat's what I did!" confessed Shag with a grin. When the colonel was in this mood there was
nothing for it but to agree with him.

"And it's the worst tangle you ever got me into!" went on Shag's master. "There's no head or tail to it."

"Den it ain't laik a fish; am it?" asked Shag, with the freedom of long years of faithful service.

"No, it isn't - worse luck!" stormed the colonel. "I never saw such a case. The diamond cross mystery was
nothing like it."

"But I thought, Colonel, sah, dat de mo' of a puzzle it were, de bettah yo' laiked it!" ventured Shag.

Colonel Ashley tried to repress a smile.

"Get to bed, you black rascal!" he said with an affectionate pat on Shag's back. "Get to bed! What are you
staying up so late for, anyhow?"

"To gib yo' a message, Colonel, sah," answered Shag. "Miss Viola done say I was t' wait up, an', when yo' come
in, t' tell yo' dat she wants t' see you."

"Oh, all right. Where is she?"

"In de liberry, Colonel, sah!"

The detective made his way through the dimly-lighted hall, and, on tapping at the library door, was bidden by
Viola to enter.

"Still up?" he asked. "It was time for you to be asleep long ago if you want your eyes to keep as bright as they
always are."

"They don't feel very bright," she answered, with a little laugh. "They seem to be full of sticks. But I wanted to
ask you something - to consult with you - and I didn't want to go to sleep without doing it. I want you to read these,"
and she spread out before him the letters she had found hidden in the drawer of the safe.

Colonel Ashley, in silence, looked over one document after another, including the torn ones. When he had
finished he looked across the table at Viola.

"What do you make of it?" she asked. "I don't know," he frankly confessed. "But we must find out if your father
owed the captain anything - for money advanced in an emergency, or for anything else. Who would know about the
money affairs?"

"Mr. Blossom. He has full charge of the office now, and access to all the books. Aunt Mary and I have to trust to
him for everything. It is all we can do."

"Yes, I suppose so," agreed the detective. And he did not speak of the scene of which he had recently been a
witness.

"Then if you will come with me, we will go the first thing in the morning to father's office and see LeGrand
Blossom," decided Viola. "We will ask Mr. Blossom if he knows anything about the debt between my father and
Captain Poland."

"It would be wise, I think."

And as the colonel retired that night he said, musingly:

"Another angle, and another tangle. I must read a little Izaak Walton to compose my mind."

So he opened the little green book and read this observation from the Venator:

"And as for the dogs that we use, who can commend their excellency to that height which they deserve? How
perfect is the hound at smelling, who never leaves or forsakes his first scent, but follows it through so many changes
and varieties of other scents, even over and in the water, and into the earth."
"Ah," mused the colonel, "I think I must cling to my first scent, and follow it through or over the water or into the earth."

Then, laying aside the little green book, with its atmosphere of calm delight, he picked up a little thin volume, which bore on its title page "The Poisonous Plants of New Jersey."

And in that he read:

"The water hemlock (Cicuta maculata L.) is the most poisonous plant in the flora of the United States, and has probably destroyed more human lives than all our other toxic plants combined. As a member of the parsley family (Umbellifera) it resembles in general appearance the carrot and parsnip of the same group of plants. It grows in swampy land. The poisoning of the human is chiefly with the fleshy roots.

"The active principle of this cicuta is the volatile alkaloid canine, common also to the poison hemlock (Conium macula turn L.) The symptoms of the poisoning are many, including violent contraction of the muscles, dilated pupils and epilepsy. . . No antidote for canine poisoning is known. . . The active canine . . . was the poison employed by the Greeks in putting prisoners to death, Socrates being one of its illustrious victims."

And having read that much, Colonel Ashley looked at a little slip in the book. It bore the penciled memorandum "58 C. H.- ~I6F*."

"I wonder - I wonder," mused the colonel, and so wondering, and with fitful dreams attending his slumbers, he passed the night.

Jean Forette drove the colonel and Viola to the office. They arrived rather early. In fact LeGrand Blossom was not yet in, and when he did enter, a few minutes later, he was plainly surprised to see them.

"Is anything the matter?" asked the confidential clerk, as he quickly opened his desk. "I am sorry I was late this morning. But I had some matters to look after - "

"No apology necessary," said Colonel Ashley, quickly. "We have not been waiting long. We have discovered something."

"You mean you have found out who killed Mr. Carwell?" he asked, and his tongue went quickly around his dry lips.

"Not that," the colonel answered. "But we have found some letters that seem to need explaining. Here they are."

Then when Viola had told how she discovered them, she asked:

"Did my father ever owe Captain Poland any money?"

"Yes," answered LeGrand Blossom, frankly, "he did."

"How much?"

"Fifteen thousand dollars."

"Was it ever paid back?" asked Colonel Ashley.

"That I cannot say," replied the head clerk. "The papers in that particular transaction are missing. I looked for them the other day, but failed to find them. I was intending to ask you, Miss Carwell, if you knew anything about them. Now, it seems you do not. The fact remains that your father was at one time indebted to the captain for fifteen thousand dollars. Whether it was repaid I can not say."

"Who would know?" asked Colonel Ashley.

"Why, Captain Poland, of course," answered Mr. Blossom. "One would think that it would be paid by check, but in that case the canceled one would come back from the bank, which it has not. It is possible that Mr. Carwell had an account in some other bank, or he may have paid the captain in cash. In either case a receipt would be given, I should say. Captain Poland is the only one who now would know."

"Then we had better see him," suggested Colonel Ashley. "Shall we call on him, Viola?"

She hesitated a moment before answering, and then replied in a low voice:

"I think it would be better. We must end this mystery!"

They left LeGrand Blossom and again entered the car. Jean Forette was driving, and the detective again noticed the strange and sudden change in his manner. Whereas he had been morose and sullen the first part of the trip, timid and watchful of every crossing and turning, now he put on full speed and drove with the confidence of an expert.

"He must have had another shot of dope," mused the colonel. "I'll have to keep an eye on you, my Frenchie, else you may be ramming a stone wall when you're feeling pretty well elated."

They were half way to the home of Captain Poland when Viola suddenly changed her mind.

"I - I don't believe I care to go to see him," she said. "Can't you go without me, Colonel Ashley? You can find out better than I can. I - I really don't feel equal to it."

"Of course, I can," was the ready answer. "Drive Miss Carwell home, Jean, and then I'll go on to see Captain Poland myself."

The car was swung around, and was soon in front of The Haven. The colonel, with his usual gallantry, walked
with Viola to the steps. As the maid opened the door she said to her mistress:

"There is a lady to see you."

"A lady to see me?" exclaimed Viola, in some surprise.

"Yes. She is in the library, waiting. I said I did not know how long you would be away, but she said she was a friend of the family and would wait."

"Who is she?" asked Viola.

"I don't know. But she is a large, blonde lady."

"I can't imagine," murmured Viola. "Won't you come in, Colonel Ashley? It may be some one I would want you to see, also."

As Viola, followed at a little distance by the colonel, entered the library, a large, blonde woman arose to meet her.

"I am so glad to see you, my dear Miss Carwell," began the woman, and then Colonel Ashley had one of his questions answered. The voice was the same as that of the shawled woman LeGrand Blossom had met on the ferryboat the night before, and it was the voice of Annie Tighe, alias Maude Warren, alias Morocco Kate, one of the cleverest of New York's de luxe crooks.

"So you have a hand in the game, have you, my dear?" mused the colonel, as he caught the now well-remembered tones. "Well, I guess you don't want to see me right away, and I don't want you to."

He had kept behind Viola during the walk down the hall, and the large blonde had not noticed him, he hoped. He whispered to Viola, who stood just at the entrance to the room:

"Learn all you can from her. I'll be back pretty soon - as soon as she has gone. Find out where she's stopping. Don't mention me."

The hall was dimly lighted, and he had a chance to say this to Viola without getting into full view of the caller, and without her overhearing. Then, turning quickly, Colonel Ashley hurried out of the house.

"Morocco Kate," he mused as he got into the car again, and told Jean to drive to Captain Poland's. "Morocco Kate! I wonder if she is just beginning her game, or if this is merely a phase of it, started before Mr. Carwell's death? Another link added to the puzzle."

He was still pondering over this when he reached the captain's home. It was a rather elaborate summer "cottage," with magnificent grounds, and the captain's mother kept house for him. But there was a curious deserted air about the place as Jean drove up the gravel road. A man was engaged in putting up boards at the windows.

"Is the captain here?" asked the colonel.

"The place is being closed for the season, sir," answered the man, evidently a caretaker.

"Closed? So early?" exclaimed the colonel, in surprise.

"The captain has gone away," the man went on. "I got orders yesterday to close the place for the season. Captain Poland will not be back."

"Oh!" softly exclaimed the colonel. And then to himself he added: "He won't be back! Well, perhaps I shall have to bring him back. Another link! There may be three people in this instead of two!"

CHAPTER XIX

"UNKNOWN"

"So sweet of you to see me, Miss Carwell, in all your grief, and I must apologize for troubling you."

Miss Tighe, alias Morocco Kate, fairly gushed out the words as she extended a hand to Viola in the library. The first glance at the "large blonde," as the maid had described her, shocked the girl. She could hardly repress a shudder of disgust as she looked at the bleached hair. But, nerving herself for the effort, Viola let her hand rest limply for a moment in the warm moist grip of Miss Tighe.

"Won't you sit down?" asked Viola.

"Thank you. I won't detain you long. I called merely on business, though I suppose you think I'm not a very business-like looking person. But I am strictly business, all the way through," and she tittered. "I find it pays better to really dress the part," she added.

"I was so sorry to hear about your dear father's death. I knew him - quite well I may say - he was very good to me."

"Yes," murmured Viola, and somehow her heart was beating strangely. What did it all mean? Who was this - this impossible person who claimed business relations, yes, even friendliness, with the late Mr. Carwell?

"And now to tell you what I came for," went on Miss Tighe. "Your dear father - and in his death I feel that I have lost a very dear friend and adviser - your dear father purchased many valuable books of me. I sell only the rarest and most expensive bindings, chiefly full morocco. Your father was very fond of books, wasn't he?"

Viola could not help admitting it, as far as purchasing expensive, if unread, editions was concerned. The library shelves testified to this.
"Yes, indeed, he just loved them, and he was always glad when I brought his attention to a new set, my dear Miss Carwell. Well, that is what I came about now. Just before his terrible death - it was terrible, wasn't it? Oh, I feel so sorry for you," and she dabbed a much-perfumed handkerchief to her eyes. "Just before his lamented death he bought a lovely white morocco set of the Arabian Nights from me. Forty volumes, unexpurgated, my dear. Mind you that - unexpurgated!" and Morocco Kate seemed to dwell on this with relish. "As I say, he bought a lovely set from me. It was the most expensive set I ever sold - forty-five hundred dollars."

"Forty-five hundred dollars for a set of books!" exclaimed Viola, in unaffected wonder.

"Oh, my dear, that is nothing. These were some books," and she winked understandingly.

"It isn't everybody who could get them! The edition was limited. But I happened on a set and I knew your father wanted them, so I got them for him. He made the first payment, and then he died - I read it in the papers. Naturally I didn't want to bother you while the terrible affair was so fresh, so I waited. And now I'm here!"

She seemed to be - very much so, as she settled herself back in the big leather chair, and made sure that her hair was properly fluffed around her much-powdered face.

"You are here to - " faltered Viola. "To get the balance for the books - that's it, dear Miss Carwell. Naturally I'm not in for my health, and of course I don't publish books myself. I'm only a poor business woman, and I work on commission. The firm likes have all contracts cleaned up, but in this case they didn't press matters, knowing Mr. Carwell was all right; or, if he wasn't, his estate was. I've sold him many a choice and rare book - books you don't see in every library, my dear. Of course there were - ahem - some you wouldn't care to read, and I can't say I care much about 'em myself. A good French novel is all right, I say, but some of 'em well, you know!" and she winked boldly, and dabbed her face with the handkerchief which was quickly filling the room with an overpowering odor.

"You mean my father owes you money?" faltered Viola.

"Well, not me, exactly - the firm. But I don't mind telling you I get my rake-off. I have to so I can live. The balance is only three thousand dollars, and if you could give me a check - "

"Excuse me," interrupted Viola, "but I have nothing to do with the business end of my father's affairs."

"You're his daughter, aren't you?"

"Yes."

"And you'll get all his property?" Morocco Kate was getting vindictive now.

"I cannot discuss that with you," said Viola, simply. "All matters of business are attended to at the office. You will have to see Mr. Blossom."

"Huh! LeGrand Blossom! No use seeing him. I've tried. But I'll try again, and say you sent me." The voice was back to its original dulcet tones now. "That's what I'll do, my dear Miss Carwell. I'll tell LeGrand Blossom you sent me. He neendn't think he can play fast and loose with me as he has. If he doesn't want to pay this bill, contracted by your father in the regular way - and I must say he was very nice to me - well, there are other ways of collecting. I haven't told all I know."

"What do you mean?" demanded Viola hotly. "Oh, there's time enough to tell later," was the answer. "I haven't been in the rare edition business for nothing, nor just for my health. But wait until I see LeGrand Blossom. Then I may call on you again!" And with this rather veiled threat Morocco Kate took her leave.

"What horrible person was that?" asked Miss Mary Carwell, who met Viola in the hail after her visitor's departure. "She was positively vulgar, I should say, though I didn't see her."

"Oh, she was just a book agent. I sent her to Mr. Blossom."

"To Mr. Blossom, my dear! I didn't know he was literary."

"Neither was this person, Aunt Mary. I think I shall go and lie down. I have a headache."

And as she locked herself in her room shed bitter tears on her pillow. Who was this person who seemed to know Mr. Carwell so well, who boasted of how "good" he was to her? Why did Colonel Ashley want to gain all the information he could about her?

"Oh, what does it all mean?" asked Viola in shrinking terror. "Is there to be some terrible - some horrible scandal?"

She put the question to Colonel Ashley a little later.

"Who is this woman?"

The colonel considered a moment before replying. Then, with a shrewd look at Viola, he replied:

"Well, my dear, she isn't your kind, of course, but I've known her, and known of her, for several years. She, and those she associates with, work the de luxe game."

"The de luxe game? What is it?"

"In brief, it's a blackmailing scheme. A woman of the type of Miss Tighe, to give her one of her names, associates herself with some men. They arrange to have a set of some books - usually well known enough and of a certain value - bound in expensive leather - full morocco - hand tooled and all that. They call on rich men and
women, and induce them to buy the expensive and rare set, of which they say there is only one or two on the market.  
"Sometimes the sales are straight enough - particularly where women are the buyers - but the books, even if delivered, are not worth anything like the price paid.  
"But, in the case of wealthy men the game is different."  
"Different?"  
"Yes, particularly where a woman like Morocco Kate is the agent. They are not satisfied with the enormous profit made on selling a common edition of books, falsely dressed in a garish binding, but they endeavor to compromise the man in some business or social way, and then threaten to expose him unless he pays a large sum, - ostensibly, of course, for the books.  
"Morocco Kate, who called on you, has more than one killing to her credit in this game, and she has managed to keep out of jail because her victims were afraid of the publicity of prosecuting. And it was so foolish of them for, in most cases, it was just mere foolishness on their part, and nothing criminally, or even morally, wrong, though they may have been indiscreet."

"And you think my father - "  
I don't know anything about it, Viola, my dear!" was the prompt answer. "Your father may have dealt in a legitimate way with this woman, buying books from her because she cajoled him into it, though he could have done much better with any reputable house. As I say, he may have simply bought some books from her, and not have made the final payments on account of his death. Whether the contract he entered into is binding or not I can't say until I have seen it."  
"But I found nothing about books among his papers!"

"No? Then perhaps it was a verbal contract. Or he may have been - " The colonel stopped. Viola guessed what he intended to say.  
"Do you think he was - Do you think this woman may make trouble?" she asked bravely.  
"I don't know. We must find out more about her. If she comes again, hold her and send for me. I didn't want her to see me to-day to know that I was on this case. But I don't mind now."

"Oh, suppose there should be some - some disgrace?"

"Don't worry about that, Viola. But now, I have some rather startling news for you."

Oh, more - "  
"Not exactly trouble. But Captain Poland has gone away - his place is closed."

"The captain gone away!" faltered the girl.  
"Yes. I wondered if you knew he was going. Did he intimate to you anything of the kind?"

The colonel watched Viola narrowly as he asked this question.  
"No, I never knew he contemplated ending the season here so early," Viola said. "Usually he is the last to go, staying until late in October. Is there anything - "  
"That is all I know - he is gone," said the detective. "I wanted to ask him about that fifteen-thousand-dollar matter, but I shall have to write, I suppose. And the sooner I get the letter off the better."

"Please write it here," suggested Viola, indicating the table where pens, ink and stationery were always kept. "I am going to look again among the papers of the private safe to see if there was anything about books - the Arabian Nights, she said it was."

"Yes, that's her favorite set. But don't worry, my dear. Everything will come out all right."

And as Viola left him alone in the library, the detective added to himself:  
"I wonder if it will?"

Colonel Ashley wrote a brief, business-like letter to Captain Poland, addressing it to his summer home at Lakeside, arguing that the yachtsman would have left some forwarding address.  
Then, lighting a cigar, the colonel sat back in a deep, leather chair - the same one Morocco Kate had sat in and perfumed - and mused.  
"There are getting to be too many angles to this," he reflected. "I need a little help. Guess I'll send for Jack Young. He'll be just the chap to look after Jean and follow that French dope artist to his new place, provided he leaves here suddenly. Yes, I need Jack."

And having telephoned a telegram, summoning from New York one of his most trusted lieutenants, Colonel Ashley refreshed himself by reading a little in the "Compleat Angler."

Jack Young appeared at Lakeside the next day, well dressed, good looking, a typical summer man of pleasing address.  
"Another diamond cross mystery?" he asked the colonel.  
"How is your golf?" was the unexpected answer.  
"Oh, I guess I can manage to drive without topping," was the ready answer. "Have I got to play?"
"It might be well. I'll get you a visitor's card at the Maraposa Club here, and you can hang around the links and see what you can pick up besides stray balls. Now I'll tell you the history of the case up to the present."

And Jack Young, having heard, and having consumed as many cigarettes as he considered the subject warranted, remarked:

"All right. Get me a bag of clubs, and I'll see what I can do. So you want me to pay particular attention to this dope fiend?"

"Yes, if he proves to be one, and I think he will. I'll have my hands full with Blossom, Morocco Kate and some others."

"What about Poland and Bartlett?"

"Well, Harry is still held, but I imagine he'll be released soon, Jack."

"Nothing on him?"

"I wouldn't go so far as to say that. You know my rule. Believe no one innocent until proved not guilty. I can keep my eye on him. Besides, he's pretty well anchored."

"You mean by Miss Viola?"

"Yes."

"How about the captain?"

"He's a puzzle, at present. But I wish you'd find out if that chauffeur has a girl. That's the best way to do, or undo, a man that I know of. Find out if he has a girl. That'll be your trick."

"All right - that and golf. I'm ready."

And Jack Young worked to such good advantage that three days later he had a pretty complete report ready for his chief.

"Jean Forette has a girl," said Jack; "and she's a little beauty, too. Mazi Rochette is her name. She's a maid in one of the swell families here, and she's dead gone on our friend Jean. I managed to get a talk with her, and she thinks he's going to marry her as soon as he gets another place. A better place than with the Carwells, she says he must have. This place was pretty much on the blink, she confided to me."

"Or words to that effect," laughed the colonel.

"Exactly. I'm not much on the French, you know. Still I got along pretty well with her. She took a notion to me."

"I thought you might be able to get something in that direction," said the colonel with a smile. "Did you learn where Jean was just prior to the golf game which was the last Mr. Carwell played?"

"Yes, he was with her, the girl says, and she didn't know why I was asking, either, I flatter myself. I led around to it in a neat way. He was with her until just before he drove Mr. Carwell to the links. In fact, Jean had the girl out for a spin in the new car, she says. She's afraid of it, though. Revolutionary devil, she calls it."

"Hum! If Jean was with her just before he picked up Carwell to go to the game - well, the thing is turning out a bit different from what I expected. Jack, we still have plenty of work before us. Did I tell you Morocco Kate was mixed up in this?"

"No! Is she?"

"Seems to be."

"Good night, nurse! Whew! If he fell for her - "

"I don't believe he did, Jack. My old friend was a sport, but not that kind. He was clean, all through."

"Glad to hear you say so, Colonel. Well, what next?"

They sat talking until far into the night.

There was rather a sensation in Lakeside two days later when it became known that the coroner's jury was to be called together again, to consider more evidence in the Carwell case.

"What does it mean?" Viola asked Colonel Ashley. "Does it mean that Harry will be - "

"Now don't distress yourself, my dear," returned the detective, soothingly. "I have been nosing around some, and I happen to know that the prosecutor and coroner haven't a bit more evidence than they had at first when they held Mr. Bartlett."

"Does that mean Harry will be released?"

"I think so."

"Does it mean he will be proved innocent?"

"That I can't say. I hardly think the verdict will be conclusive in any case. But they haven't any more evidence than at first - that he had a quarrel with your father just before the fatal end. As to the nature of the quarrel, Harry is silent - obstinately silent even to his own counsel; and in this I can not uphold him. However, that is his affair."

"But I'm sure, Colonel, that he had nothing to do with my father's death; aren't you?"

"If I said I was sure, my dear, and afterward, through force of evidence and circumstance, were forced to change my opinion, you would not thank me for now saying what you want me to say," was the reply. "It is better for me to
say that I do not know. I trust for the best. I hope, for your sake and his, that he had nothing to do with the terrible crime. I want to see the guilty person discovered and punished, and to that end I am working night and day. And if I find out who it is, I will disclose him - or her - no matter what anguish it costs me personally - no matter what anguish it may bring to others. I would not be doing my full duty otherwise."

"No, I realize that, Colonel. Oh, it is hard - so hard! If we only knew!"

"We may know," said the colonel gently.

"Soon?" she asked hopefully.

"Sooner than you expect," he answered with a smile. "Now I must attend the jury session."

It was brief, and not at all sensational, much to the regret of the reporters for the New York papers who flocked to the quiet and fashionable seaside resort. The upshot of the matter was that the chemists for the state reported that Mr. Carwell had met his death from the effects of some violent poison, the nature of which resembled several kinds, but which did not analyze as being any particular one with which they were, at present, familiar.

There were traces of both arsenic and strychnine, but mingled with them was some narcotic of strange composition, which was deadly in its effect, as had been proved on guinea pigs, some of the residue from the stomach and viscera of the dead man having been injected into the hapless animals.

Harry Bartlett was not called to the stand, but, pale from his confinement, sat an interested and vital spectator of the proceedings.

The prosecutor announced that the efforts of his detectives had resulted in nothing more. There was not sufficient evidence to warrant accusing any one else, and that against Harry Bartlett was of so slender and circumstantial a character that it could not be held to have any real value before the grand jury nor in a trial court.

"What is your motion, then?" asked the coroner.

Well, I don't know that I have any motion to make," said Mr. Stryker. "If this were before a county judge, and the prisoner's counsel demanded it, I should have to agree to a nolle pros. As it is I simply say I have no other evidence to offer at this time."

"Then the jury may consider that already before it?" asked Billy Teller.

"Yes."

"You have heard what the prosecutor said, gentlemen," went on the coroner. "You may retire and consider your verdict."

This they did, for fifteen minutes - fifteen nerve-racking minutes for more than one in the improvised courtroom. Then the twelve men filed back, and in answer to the usual questions the foreman announced:

"We find that Horace Carwell came to his death through poison administered by a person, or persons, unknown."

There was silence for a moment, and then, as Bartlett started from his seat, a flush mantling his pale face, Viola, with a murmured "Thank God!" fainted.

CHAPTER XX
A MEETING

Harry Bartlett walked from the court a free man, physically, but not mentally. He felt, and others did also, that there was a stain on him - something unexplained, and which he would not, or could not, clear up - the quarrel with Mr. Carwell just before the latter's death. And even to Viola, when, in the seclusion of her home, she asked Harry about it after the trial, or rather, the verdict, he replied:

"I can not tell. It was nothing that concerns you or me or this case. I will never tell."

And Colonel Ashley, hearing this, pondered over it more and more.

The little green book was all but forgotten during these days, and as for the rods, lines, and reels, Shag arranged them, polished them and laid them out, in hourly expectation of being called on for them, but the call did not come. The colonel was after bigger fish than dwelt in the sea or the rivers that ran into the sea.

It was a week after the rather unsatisfactory verdict of the coroner's jury that Bartlett, out in his "Spanish Omelet," came most unexpectedly on Captain Gerry Poland, some fifty miles from Lakeside. The captain was in his big machine, and he seemed surprised on meeting Bartlett.

"Oh!" he exclaimed. "Then you are - "

"Out, at any rate," was the somewhat bitter reply. "Where have you been, Gerry?"

"Away. I couldn't stand it around there."

"I suppose you know they have been looking for you?"

"Looking for me? Oh, you mean Colonel Ashley wanted some information about certain business matters. Well, I didn't see that I owed him any explanation about private matters between Mr. Carwell and myself, so I didn't answer."

"You know what the imputation is, Gerry?" questioned Bartlett, as each man sat in his car, near a lonely stretch of woods.
"I don't know that I do," was the calm reply. "Well, Viola has told me of the finding of the papers in her father's private safe. I told her I would see you, if I could, and get an explanation. I did not think I would find you so soon."

"I didn't know you were looking, Harry, or I would have come to you. What do you mean about papers in a private safe?"

"I mean those which indicate that Mr. Carwell owed you fifteen thousand dollars."

"Well, he did owe me that," said the captain calmly. "He did?" and Harry Bartlett accented the last word.

"Yes, but it was paid. He did not owe me a dollar at the time of his death."

"That is astonishing news! There is no record of the money having been paid!"

"Nevertheless the debt is canceled," insisted the captain. "I sent the receipt and the canceled note to LeGrand Blossom."

"It's false!" cried Bartlett. "He hasn't any such documents!"

For a moment Captain Poland seemed about to leap from his car and attack the man who had given him the lie direct. Then, by an effort, he composed himself, and quietly answered:

"I can prove every word I say, and I will take immediate steps to do so. Mr. Carwell paid me the fifteen thousand dollars on the twenty-third, and I - "

"He paid you the money on the twenty-third? the very day he died?" cried Harry.

"Yes."

"Then - Why, good heavens, man! Don't you see what this means? It means you were with him just before his death, the same as I was. We're both in the same boat as far as that goes!"

"Yes, I admit that I was with him, and that he paid me the fifteen thousand dollars shortly before his unfortunate end," returned Captain Poland. "But our meeting was a most peaceful one, even friendly, and - "

"You mean that I - Oh, I see!" and Bartlett's voice was full of meaning. "So that's what you are driving at. Well, two can play at that game. I've learned something, anyhow!"

There was a grinding of gears, and the "Spanish Omelet" shot away. Captain Poland watched it for a moment, and then, with a shrug of his shoulders, threw in the clutch and speeded down the road in the opposite direction.

Harry Bartlett lost no time in acquainting Colonel Ashley with the admission made by Captain Poland.

"I'll come with you," offered Bartlett. "I want to see this thing through now. Shall we tell her?" and he motioned toward Viola's room.

"Not now. We'll see Blossom first."

If the head clerk was perturbed at all by the visit to the office of Colonel Ashley and Harry Bartlett, he did not disclose it. He welcomed the two visitors, and took them to his private room.

Colonel Ashley went bluntly into the business in hand.

"Have you any papers to show that Captain Poland acknowledged the receipt of the fifteen thousand dollars owed to him by Mr. Carwell?"

"I have not," was the frank answer. "I have been searching for something to prove that the debt was paid, as I knew of its contraction. It was not canceled as far as I can find."

"Yet Captain Poland says it was paid," said Bartlett, "and that he sent you the receipt."

"I never got it!" insisted LeGrand Blossom. Harry Bartlett and Colonel Ashley looked at one another, and then the detective, with an effort at cheerfulness which he did not feel, said:

"Oh, well, perhaps in the confusion the papers were mislaid. I shall ask Viola about them. Another search must be made."

And so the two went back to The Haven, not much more enlightened than when they left it.

"What is to be done?" asked Bartlett. "Blossom says he knows nothing of it."

"Then I must know a little more about Mr. Blossom," mentally decided the colonel. "I think I shall shadow him a bit. It may prove fruitful."

And when two nights later LeGrand Blossom left his boarding place and met a veiled woman at a lonely spot on the beach, Colonel Ashley, who had been waiting as he so well knew how to do, hid himself on the sand behind some sedge grass and began to think that the game was coming his way after all.

"For a man who pretends to be open and above board, his actions are very quiet," mused the detective, as he silently crawled nearer to where eGrand Blossom and the woman stood talking in low tones on the lonely sands. "I don't see what object he could have in making away with Carwell, and yet it begins to look black for him. Maybe there is more than the fifteen thousand dollars involved. There are so many angles to the case now. I must find out
who this woman is.

And when she spoke in louder tones than usual, drawing from LeGrand Blossom an impatient "Hush!" the
colonel had his answer.

"Morocco Kate again! What's her part now?"

The detective was near enough now to hear some of the talk.

"Did you bring it?" asked the woman eagerly.

"Hush! can't you?" snapped LeGrand Blossom.

"Pooh! What's the harm? There's no one in this lonely place! It gives me the creeps. Li'l ole Broadway for mine!"

"You never know who's anywhere these days!" muttered LeGrand. "That infernal detective seems to be all over.
He looks at me - oh, he looks at me, and I don't like it."

Morocco Kate laughed.

"Shut up!" ordered the head clerk. "Do you think this is funny?"

"It used to be," was the answer. "It used to be funny, when you thought you were in love with me. Oh, it was
delicious!"

"I was a bigger fool than I ever thought I'd be!" growled LeGrand Blossom.

"You aren't the only one," was the consoling answer. "But what I'm interested in now, is - did you bring the
mazumma - the cush - the dope?"

"All I could get," was the answer. "I'm in a devil of a mess, and the estate hasn't been settled yet. I may get some
more out of it then, but you'll have to quit bleeding me. I'm through with you, I tell you!"

"But I'm not with you," was the sharp rejoinder. "I'll take this now, but I'll need more. The game isn't going as it
used to. Mind, I'll need more, and soon."

"You won't get it!"

"Oh, won't I? Well, there are others that'll pay well for what I'm able to tell, I guess. I rather think you'll see me
again, Lee. So-long now, but I'll see you again!"

She moved off in the darkness, laughing mirthlessly, and with muttered imprecations LeGrand Blossom turned
in the opposite direction, passing within a few feet of the hidden detective. "Blackmail, or is it a division of the
spoils?" mused Colonel Ashley. "I've got to find out which. Mr. Blossom, I think I'll have to stick to you until you
fall into the sear and yellow leaf."

The next day as Colonel Ashley sat trying to fix his attention on a passage from Walton, a messenger brought
him a note. It was from a young man who, at the colonel's suggestion, had been given a clerical place in the office of
the late Horace Carwell. Not even Viola knew that the young man was one of the colonel's aides.

"Blossom just sent out a note to a Miss Minnie Webb," the screech, which the colonel perused, read. "He's going
to meet her in the park at Silver Lake at nine to-night. Thought I'd let you know."

"I'm glad he did," mused the detective. "I'll be there."

And he was, skillfully though not ostentatiously attired as a loitering fisherman of the native type, of which there
were many in and about Lakeside.

The fisherman strolled about the little park in the center of which was a body of fresh water known as Silver
Lake. It was little more than a pond, and was fed by springs and by drainage. In the park were trees and benches, and
it was a favorite trysting spot.

Up and down the paths walked Colonel Ashley, his clothes odorous of fish, and he was beginning to think he
might have his trouble for his pains when he saw a woman coming along hesitatingly.

It needed but a second glance to disclose to the trained eyes of the detective that it was none other than Minnie
Webb, whom he had met several times at the home of Viola Carwell. Not even Viola knew that the young man was one of the colonel's aides.

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Webb, whom he had met several times at the home of Viola Carwell. Minnie advanced until she came to a certain
bench, and she stopped long enough to count and make sure that it was the third from one end of a row, and the
seventh from the other end.

"The appointed place," mused the colonel as he sauntered past. And then, making a detour, he came up in the
rear and hid in the bushes back of the bench, where he could hear without being observed - in fact the bench was in
such shadow that even the casual passerby in front could not after darkness had fallen tell who occupied it.

Minnie Webb sat in silence, but by the way she fidgeted about the colonel, hearing the shuffling of her feet on
the gravel walk, knew she was nervous and impatient.

Then quick footsteps were heard coming along through the little park. They increased in sound, and came to a
stop in front of the bench on which sat the shrouded and dark figure of the girl.

"Minnie?"

"LeGrand! Oh, I'm so glad you came! What is it? Why did you send me a note to meet you in this lonely place?
I'm so afraid!"

"Afraid? Lonely? Why, it's early evening, and this is a public park," the man answered in a low voice. "I wanted
you to come here as it's the best place for us to talk - where we can't be overheard."

"But why are you so afraid of being overheard?"

"Oh, things are so mixed up - one can't be too careful. Minnie, we must settle our affairs."

"Settle them? You mean - ?"

"I mean we can't go on this way. I must have you! I've waited long enough. You know I love you - that I've never loved any one else as I've loved you! I can't stand it any longer without you. I have asked you to marry me several times. Each time you have put it off for some reason or other. Now we must settle it. Are you going to marry me or not? No matter what your folks say about me and this Carwell affair. Do you - do you care for me?"

The answer was so low and so muffled that the colonel was glad he could not hear it.

"Confound it all!" he murmured, "that's the worst of this business! I don't mind anything but the love-making. I hate to break in on that!"

There was an eloquent silence, and then LeGrand Blossom said:

"I am very happy, Minnie."

"And so am I. Now what shall we do?"

"Get married as soon as possible, of course. I've got to wind up matters here, and as soon as I can I may take up an offer that came from Boston. It's a very good one. Would you go there with me?"

"Yes, LeGrand. I'd go anywhere with you - you know that."

"I'm glad I do, my dear. It may be necessary to go very soon, and - well, we won't stop to say good-bye, either."

"Why! what do you mean " and the hidden detective knew that the girl had drawn away from the young man.

"Oh, I mean that we won't bother about the fuss of a farewell-party. I'm not tied to the Carwell business. In fact I'd be glad to chuck it. There's nothing in it any more, since there's no chance for a partnership. We'll just go off by ourselves and be happy - won't we, Minnie?"

"I hope so, LeGrand. But must we go away? Can't you get something else here?"

"I think we must, yes."

"You haven't had trouble with - with Viola, have you?"

"No. What made you think of that?"

"Oh, it was just a notion. Well, if we have to leave we will. I shall hate to go, however. But, I'll be with you - "

and again the words were smothered.

"I wonder what sort of a double-cross game he's playing," mused the colonel when the two had left the park and he, rather stiff from his position, shuffled to the lonely spot where he had before made a change of garments. Attired as his usual self, he went back to The Haven, and spent rather a restless night.

Minnie Webb was perplexed. She loved LeGrand Blossom - there was no doubt of that - but she did not see why he should have to leave the vicinity of Lakeside where she had lived so many years - at least during the summer months. All her friends and acquaintances were there.

"I wonder if Viola has given him notice to leave since she came into her father's property," mused Minnie. "I'm going to ask her. He may never get such a good place in Boston as he has here. I'll see if I can't find out why he wants to leave. It can't be just because father does not care much for him."

So she called on Viola, as she had done often of late, and found her friend sitting silent, and with unseeing eyes staring at the rows of books in the library.

"Oh, Minnie, it was so good of you to come! I'm very glad to see you. Since father went it has been very lonely. You look extremely well."

"I am well - and - happy. Oh, Viola, you're the first I have told, but - but Mr. Blossom has - asked me to marry him, and - "

"Oh, how lovely! And you've said 'yes!' I can tell that!" and Viola smiled and kissed her friend impulsively.

"Tell me all about it!"

"And so it's all settled," went on Minnie, after much talk and many questions and answers. "Only I'm sorry he's going to leave you."

"Going to leave me!" exclaimed Viola. Her voice was incredulous.

"Well, I mean going to give up the management of your business. I'm sure you'll miss him."

"I shall indeed! But I did not know Mr. Blossom was going to leave. He has said nothing to me or Aunt Mary about it. In fact, I - "

"Oh, is there something wrong?" asked Minnie quickly, struck by something in Viola's voice.

"Well, nothing wrong, as far as we know. But - "

"Oh, please tell me!" begged Minnie. "I am sure you are concealing something."

"Well, I will tell you!" said Viola at last. "I feel that I ought to, as you may hear of it publicly. It concerns fifteen thousand dollars," and she went into details about the loan, which one party said had been paid, and of which
Blossom said there was no record.

"Oh!" gasped Minnie Webb. "Oh, what does it mean?" and, worried and heartsick, lest she should have made a mistake, she sat looking dumbly at Viola...

CHAPTER XXI
THE LIBRARY POSTAL

"My dear, I am sorry if I have told you anything that distresses you," said Viola gently. "But I thought -"

"Oh, yes, it is best to know," was the low response. "Only - only I was so happy a little while ago, and now -"

"But perhaps it may all be explained!" interrupted Viola. "It is only some tiresome business deal, I'm sure. I never could understand them, and I don't want to. But it does seem queer that there is no record of that fifteen thousand dollars being paid back."

"What does Captain Poland say about it?"

"Oh, he told Harry, very frankly, that father paid the money, and that the receipt was sent to Mr. Blossom. But the latter says it can not be found."

"And do you suspect Mr. Blossom?" asked Minnie, and her voice held a challenge.

"Well," answered Viola slowly, "there isn't much of which to suspect him. It isn't as if Captain Poland claimed to have paid father the fifteen thousand dollars, and the money couldn't be found. It's only a receipt for money which the captain admits having gotten back that is missing. But it makes such confusion. And there are so many other things involved -"

"You mean about the poisoning?"

"Yes, Oh, I wish it were all cleared up! Don't let's talk of it. I must find out about Mr. Blossom going away. We shall have to get some one in his place. Aunt Mary will be so disturbed -"

"Don't say that I told you!" cautioned Minnie. "Perhaps I should not have mentioned it. Oh, dear, I am so miserable!" And she certainly looked it.

"And so am I!" confessed Viola. "If only Harry would tell what he is keeping back."

"You mean about that quarrel with your father?"

"Yes. And he acts so strangely of late, and looks at me in such a queer way. Oh, I'm afraid, and I don't know what I'm afraid of!"

"I'm the same way, Viola!" admitted Minnie.

I wonder why we two should have all the trouble in the world?"

And the two were miserable together.

They were not the only ones to suffer in those days. Captain Gerry Poland could not drive Viola from his mind. To the yachtsman, she was the most beautiful woman he had ever met, and he wondered if fortune would ever make it possible for him to approach her again on the subject that lay so close to his heart.

And then there was Bartlett. It was true he walked the streets - or rather rode around them in his "Spanish Omelet" - a free man; yet the finger of suspicion was constantly pointed at him.

More than once in the town he met people who sneered openly at him, as if to say, "You are guilty, but we can't prove it." And once on the golf course he went up to three men who had formerly been quite friendly and suggested a game of golf, upon which one after another the others made trivial excuses and begged to be excused. Upon this occasion the young man had rushed away, his face scarlet, and he had only calmed down after a mad tour of many miles in his racing machine.

"It's an outrage!" he had muttered to himself. "A dastardly outrage! But what is a fellow going to do?"

Meanwhile Colonel Ashley and Jack Young were puzzling their heads over many matters connected with the golf course mystery. Jack had obeyed the colonel's instructions to the letter. He had played many rounds on the links and had gotten to a certain degree of friendship with Jean Forette. He had even formed a liking for Bruce Garrigan, who, offhand, informed him that the amount of India ink used in tattooing sailors during the past year was less by fifteen hundred ounces than the total output of radium salts for 1916, while the wheat crop of Minnesota for the same period was 66,255 bushels. All of which information, useful in a way, no doubt, was accepted by Jack with a smile. He was there to look and listen, and, well, he did it.

"But I've got to pass it up," he told Colonel Ashley. "I've stuck to that Jean chap until I guess he must think I want him for a chauffeur if ever I'm able to own a car bigger than a flivver. And aside from the fact that he does use some kind of dope, in which he isn't alone in this world, I can't get a line on him."

"No, I didn't expect you would," said Colonel Ashley, with a smile. "But are you well enough acquainted with him to have a talk with his sweetheart?"

"You mean Mazi?"

"Yes."

"Well, I s'pose I might get a talk with her. But what's the idea?"
"Nothing special, only I'd like to see if she tells you the same story she told me. Have a try at it when you get a chance."

"On the theory, I suppose, of in any trouble, look for the lady?"

"Somewhat, yes."

They were talking in The Haven, for Jack had been put up there as a guest at the request of Colonel Ashley. And when the bell rang, indicating some one at the door, they looked at one another questioningly.

Then came the postman's whistle, for Lakeside, though but a summer resort, with a population much larger in summer than in winter, boasted of mail delivery.

A maid placed the letters in their usual place on the hall table, and the colonel quickly ran through them, for he had reports sent him from his New York office from time to time.

"Here's one for you, Jack," he announced, handing his assistant a letter.

While Jack Young was reading it the colonel caught sight of a postal, with the address side down, lying among the other missives. It was a postal which bore several lines of printing, the rest being filled in by a pen, and the import of it was that a certain library book, under the number 58 C. H - 161*, had been out the full time allowed under the rules, and must either be returned for renewal, or a fine of two cents a day paid, and the recipient was asked to give the matter prompt attention.

The colonel turned the card over. It was addressed to Miss Viola Carwell at The Haven.

"So the book is out on her card," murmured the detective. "I must look for her copy of 'Poison Plants of New Jersey,' and see if it is like the one I have."

"Were you speaking to me?" asked Jack, having finished his letter.

"No, but I will now. We've got to get busy on this case, and close it up. I've been too long on it now. Shag is getting impatient."

"Shag?"

"Yes, he wants me to go fishing."

"Oh, I see. Well, I'm ready. What are the orders?"

Two busy days on the part of Colonel Ashley and his assistant followed. They went on many mysterious errands and were out once all night. But where they went, what they did or who they saw they told no one.

It was early one evening that Colonel Ashley waited for his assistant in the library of The Haven. Jack had gone out to send a message and was to return soon. And as the colonel waited in the dim light of one electric bulb, much shaded, he saw a figure come stealing to the portieres that separated the library from the hall. Cautiously the figure advanced and looked into the room. A glance seemed to indicate that no one was there, for the colonel was hidden in the depths of a big chair, "slumping," which was his favorite mode of relaxing.

"I wonder if some one is looking for me?" mused the colonel. "Well, just for fun, I'll play hide and seek. I can disclose myself later." And so he remained in the chair, hardly breathing the silent figure parted the heavy curtains, within, dropped something white on the floor, and then quickly hurried away, the feet making no sound on the thick carpet of the hall.

"Now," mused the colonel to himself, "I wonder that is a note for me, or a love missive for one the maids from the butler or the gardener, who too bashful to deliver it in person. I'd better look."

Without turning on more light the colonel picked up the thing that had fluttered so silently to the floor. It was a scrap of paper, and as he held it under the dimly glowing bulb he saw, scrawled inprined letters:

"Viola Carwell has a poison book."

"As if I didn't know it!" softly exclaimed the colonel.

And then, as he resumed his comfortable, but not very dignified position, he heard some one coming boldly along the hall, and the voice of Jack Young asked:

"Are you in here, Colonel?"

"Yes, come in. Did you get a reply?"

"Surely. Your friend must have been waiting for your telegram."

"I expected he would be. Let me see it," and the detective read a brief message which said:

"Thomas much better after a long sleep."

"Ah," mused the colonel. "I'm very glad Thomas is better."

"Is Thomas, by any chance, a cat?" asked Jack, who read the telegram the colonel handed him.

"He is - just that - a cat and nothing more. And now, Jack, my friend, I think we're about ready to close in."

"Close in? Why - "

"Oh, there are a few things I haven't told you yet. Sit down and I'll just go over them. I've been on this case a little longer than you have, and I've done some elimination which you haven't had a chance to do."

"And you have eliminated all but - "
"Captain Poland and LeGrand Blossom."

At these words Jack started, and made a motion of silence. They were still in the library, but more lights had been turned on, and the place was brilliant.

"What's the matter?" asked the colonel, quickly. "I thought I heard a noise in the hall," and Jack stepped to the door and looked out. But either he did not see, or did not want to see, a shrinking figure which quickly crouched down behind a chair not far from the portal.

"Guess I was mistaken," said Jack. "Anyhow I didn't see anything." Did he forget that coming out of a light room into a dim hall was not conducive to good seeing? Jack Young ought to have remembered that.

"One of the servants, likely, passing by," suggested the colonel. "Yes, Jack, I think we must pin it down to either the captain or Blossom."

"Do you really think Blossom could have done it?"

"He could, of course. The main question is, did he have an object in getting Mr. Carwell out of the way?"

"And did he have?"

"I think he did. I've been trailing him lately, when he didn't suspect it, and I've seen him in some queer situations. I know he needed a lot of money and - well, I'm going to take him into custody as the murderer of Mr. Carwell. "I Want you to - "

But that was as far as the detective got, for there was a shriek in the hall - a cry of mortal anguish that could only come from a woman - and then, past the library door, rushed a figure in white.

"Quick!" cried Colonel Ashley. "Who was that?"

"I don't know!" answered Jack. "Must have been the person I thought I heard in the hall."

"We must find out who it was!" went on the detective. "You make some inquiries. I'll take after her."

"Could it have been Miss Viola?"

The question was answered almost as soon as it was asked, for, at that moment, Viola herself came down the front stairs.

"What is it?" she asked the two detectives. "Who cried out like that? Is some one hurt?"

"I don't know," answered Colonel Ashley. "Mr. Young and I were talking in the library when we heard the scream. Then a woman rushed out."

"It must have been Minnie Webb!" cried Viola. "She was here a moment ago. The maid told me she was waiting in the parlor, and I was detained upstairs. It must have been Minnie. But why did she scream so?"

Colonel Ashley did not stop to answer.

"Look after things here, Jack!" he called to his assistant. "I'm going to follow her. If ever there was a desperate woman she is."

And he sped through the darkness after the figure in white.

CHAPTER XXII

THE LARGE BLONDE AGAIN

The trail was not a difficult one to follow. The night was particularly black, with low-hanging clouds which seemed to hold a threat of rain, and the wind sighed dolefully through the scrub pines. Against this dim murkiness the figure of the woman in white stood out ghostily.

"Poor Minnie Webb!" mused Colonel Ashley, as he hurried on after her. "She must be desperate now - after what she heard. I wonder - "

He did not put his wonder into words then, but his suspicion was confirmed as he saw her head for the bridge that spanned a creek, not far from where the ferry ran over to Loch Harbor.

At certain times this creek was not deep enough to afford passage for small rowboats, but when the tide was in there was draught enough for motor launches.

"And the tide is in now," mused the colonel, as he remembered passing among the sand dunes late that afternoon, and noting the state of the sea. "Too bad, poor little woman!" he added gently, as he followed her. "Not so fast! Not so fast! There is no need of rushing to destruction. It comes soon enough without our going out to meet it. Poor girl!"

He went on through the darkness, following, following, following distracted Minnie, who, with the fateful words still ringing in her ears, hardly knew whither she hurried.

Colonel Ashley, in spite of the desperate manner in which the chase had begun, felt that he was safe from observation. He had on dark clothes, which did not contrast so strongly with the night as did the light and filmy dress of Minnie Webb. Besides, she was too distracted to notice that she was being followed.

"She is going to the bridge, and the tide is in," mused the detective. "I didn't think she had that much spunk - for it does take spunk to attempt anything like this in the dark. However, I'll try to get there as soon as she does."
The fleeing girl in white passed over an open moor, fleeced here and there with scanty bushes, which gave the
detective all the cover he needed. But the girl did not look back, and the night was dark. The clouds were thicker
too, and the very air seemed so full of rain that an incautious movement would bring it spattering about one's head,
as a shake of a tree, after a shower, precipitates the drops.

And then there suddenly loomed, like grotesque shadows on the night, two other figures at the very end of the
bridge that Minnie Webb sought to cross. They seemed to bar her way, and yet they were as much startled as she, for
they drew back on her approach.

And Colonel Ashley, stealing his way up unseen, heard from Minnie Webb the startled ejaculation:
"LeGrand! You here? And who - who is this?"

Then, as if in defiance, or perhaps to see who the challenger was, the figure standing beside that of LeGrand
Blossom flashed a little pocket electric torch. And by the gleam of it Colonel Ashley saw the large blonde woman
again.

"Morocco Kate!" he murmured. "So she is mixed up in it after all! I think I begin to see daylight in spite of the
darkness. Morocco Kate!"

Then, crouching down behind some bushes, he waited and listened and thought swiftly.

"Speak to me!" implored Minnie of the young man. "What does it mean, LeGrand? Why are you here with - with
- "

"He knows my name well enough, if he wants to tell it," broke in the other. "I'm not ashamed of it, either. But
who are you, I'd like to know? I never saw you before!" and the blonde woman flashed her light full on Minnie's
white face.

And as the girl shrank back, Morocco Kate, so called, sneered:
"Some one else he's got on a string, I suppose! Ho! It's a merry life you lead, LeGrand Blossom!"

"Stop!" the young man exclaimed. "I can't let you go on this way. Minnie, please leave us for a moment. I'll
come to you as soon as I can."

"Oh, yes! Of course!" sneered the other. "She's younger and prettier than I - quite a flapper. I was that way -
onece. And I suppose you said the same thing to some one else you wanted to get rid of before you took me on. Oh,
to the devil with the men, anyhow!"

Minnie gasped.
"Shocked you, did I, kid? Well, you'll hear worse than that, believe me. If I was to tell - "

"Stop!" and LeGrand Blossom snapped out the words in such a manner that the desperate woman did stop.

"Minnie, go away," he pleaded, more gently. "I'll come to you as soon as I can, and explain everything. Please
believe in me!"

"I - I don't believe I can - again, LeGrand," faltered Minnie. "I - I heard what you said to her just now - that you
couldn't do anything more for her. Oh, what have you been doing for her? Who is she? Tell me! Oh, I must hear it,
though I dread it!"

"Yes, you shall hear it!" cried LeGrand Blossom, and there was desperation in his voice. "I was going to tell
you, anyhow, before I married you - "

"Oh, you're really going to marry her, are you?" sneered the blonde. "Really? How interesting!"

"Will you be quiet?" said LeGrand, and there was that in his voice which seemed to cow the blonde woman.

"Minnie," went on LeGrand Blossom, its a hard thing for a man to talk about a woman, but sometimes it has to
be done. And it's doubly hard when it's about a woman a man once cared for. But I'm going to take my medicine,
and she's got to take hers."

"I'm no quitter! I'm a sport, I am!" was the defiant remark. "So was Mr. Carwell - Old Carwell we used to call
him. But he had more pep than some of you younger chaps.

"Leave his name out of this!" growled LeGrand, like some dog trying to keep his temper against the attacks of a
cur.

"This woman - I needn't tell you her name now, for she has several," he went on to Minnie. "This woman and I
were once engaged to be married. She was younger then - and - different. But she began drinking and - well, she
became impossible. Believe me," he said, turning to the figure beside him, "I don't want to tell this, but I've got to
square myself."

"Yes," and the other's voice was broken. "I may as well give up now as later. If anything can be saved out of the
wreck - my wreck - go to it! Shoot, kid! Tell the worst! I'll stand the gaff!"

"Well, that makes it easier," resumed Blossom. "We were going to be married, but she got in with a fast crowd,
and I couldn't stand the pace. I admit, I wasn't sport enough."

"I'm glad you weren't," murmured Minnie, her breast heaving.

"The result was," went on Blossom, "that she and I separated. It was as much her wish as mine - toward the end.
And she married a Frenchman with whom she seemed to be fascinated."

"Yes, he sure had me hypnotized," agreed the blonde woman. "It was more my fault than yours, Lee. Perhaps if you'd taken a whip to me, and made me behave - Some of us women need a beating now and then. But it's too late now." Of a sudden she seemed strangely subdued. LeGrand Blossom went on with the sordid tale.

"Well, the marriage didn't turn out happily. It was - "

"It was hell! I'm not afraid to use the word!" interrupted the blonde. "It was just plain, unadulterated hell! And I went into it with my eyes open. That's what it was - hell! I've had such a lot here on earth that maybe they'll give me a discount when I get - well, when I get where I'm going!" and she laughed, but there was no mirth in it.

Minnie shuddered, and drew nearer to LeGrand. And it did not seem to be because of the chill night wind, either.

"It was the same old story," went on the clerk. "No need of going over that, Minnie. It doesn't concern the question now. In the end the Frenchman cast her off, and she had to live, somehow. She came to me, and I, for the sake of old times, agreed to help her. I didn't think I was doing anything wrong; but it seems I was. I thought the rare and expensive book publishing business she said she was in was legitimate. Instead it was - "

"Yes, it was a blackmailing scheme!" interrupted Morocco Kate, not without some curious and perverted sense of pride. "I admit that. I got you in wrong, LeGrand, but it wasn't because I hated you, for I didn't. I really loved you, and I was a fool to take up with Jean. But that's past and gone. Only I didn't really mean to make trouble for you. I thought you might be able to wiggle out, knowing business men as you did."

"Instead," said the clerk, "I only became the more involved. It began to look as though I was a partner in the infernal schemes, and she and those she worked with held the threat over my head to extort money from me."

"Believe me, LeGrand, I didn't do that willingly," interrupted Morocco Kate. "The others had a hold over me, and they forced me to use you as their tool. They bled me, as I, in turn, bled you. Oh, it was all a rotten game, and I'm glad the end's at hand. I suppose it's all up now?" she asked Blossom.

"The end is, as far as it concerns you and me," he said. "I'm going to confess, and take my medicine. Minnie, I've lied to give this woman money to prevent her exposing me. Now I'm through. I've told my last lie, and given my last dollar. Thank God - who has been better to me than I deserve - thank God! I'm still young enough to make good the money I've lost. The lies I can't undo, but I can tell the truth. I'm going to confess everything!"

"Oh, LeGrand!" cried Minnie, and she held out her hands to him. "Not - not everything!"

"Yes, the whole rotten business. That's the only way to begin over again, and begin clean. I'll come through clean!"

"Oh!" murmured Minnie. "It will be so - so hard!"

"Yes," and LeGrand gritted his teeth, "it isn't going to be easy; but it'll be a bed of roses compared to what I've been lying on the last year. This woman had such a hold on me that I couldn't clear myself before - that is, clear myself of grave charges. But now I can. This is the end. I can prove that I wasn't mixed up in the Roswell de luxe book case, and that's what she's been holding over me."

"The Roswell case!" faltered Minnie.

"Yes, you don't know about it, but I'll tell you, later. Now I'm free. This is the end. I came here to-night to tell her so. How you happened to follow me I don't know."

"I didn't follow, LeGrand. It was all an accident."

"Then it's a lucky accident, Minnie. This is the end. From now on - "

"Yes, it's the end!" bitterly cried the other woman. "It's the end of everything. Oh, if I could only make it the end for Jean Carnot, I'd be satisfied. He made me what I am - an outcast from the world. If I could find Jean Carnot - "

And then, with the suddenness of a bird wheeling in mid air, the blonde woman turned and rushed away in the darkness.

For an instant Colonel Ashley hesitated in his hiding place. And then he murmured:

"I guess you'll keep, LeGrand Blossom, and you, too, Minnie Webb. Morocco Kate needs watching. And I think, now, she'll lead me right where I've been wanting to go for a long time. The darkness is fast fading away," which was a strange thing to say, seeing that the night was blacker than ever.

Back on the desolate moor, near the bridge under which the black tide was now hurrying, murmuring and whispering to the rushes tales of the deep and distant sea, stood two figures.

"Do you believe in me, Minnie?" asked the man brokenly.

There was a pause. The murmuring of the tide grew louder, and it seemed to sing now, as it rose higher and higher.

"Do you?" he repeated, wistfully.

"Yes," was the whispered reply. "And, Lee, I'll help you to come through - clean! I believe in you!"

And the tide washed up the shores of the creek so that, even in the darkness, the white sands seemed to gleam.
CHAPTER XXIII
MOROCCO KATE, ALLY

"Who are you? Who is trailing me? Is that you, LeGrand?"
The challenge came sharply out of the darkness, and Colonel Ashley, who had been following Morocco Kate, plodding along through the sand, stumbling over the hillocks of sedge grass, halted.

"Who's there?" was the insistent demand. "I know some one is following me. Is it you, LeGrand Blossom? Have you - have you -"

The voice died out in a choking sob. "She's gamer than I thought," mused the detective. "And, strange as it may seem, I believe she cares." Then he answered, almost as gently as to a grieving child:

"It is not LeGrand Blossom. But it is a friend of his, and I want to be a friend to you. Wait a moment."

Then, as he came close to her side and flashed on his face a gleam from an electric torch he always carried, she started back, and cried:

"Colonel Ashley! Heavens!"

"Exactly!" he chuckled. "You didn't expect to see me here, did you? Well, it's all right."

"Then you're not after me for - " She gasped and could not go on. "That last deal was straight. I'm not the one you want."

"Don't get Spotty's habit, and throw up your hands just because you see me, Kate," went on the colonel soothingly. "I'm not after you professionally this time. In fact, if things turn out the way I want, I may shut my eyes to one or two little phases of your - er - let us call it career. I may ignore one or two little things that, under other circumstances, might need explaining."

"You mean you want me for a stool pigeon?"

"Something like that, yes."

"And suppose I refuse?"

"That's up to you, Kate. I may be able to get along without you - I don't say I can, but I may. However it would mean harder work and a delay, and I don't mind, seeing it's you, saying that I'd like to get back to my fishing. So if you'll come to reason, and tell me what I want to know, it will help you and - Blossom."

"Blossom!" she gasped. "Then you know - "

"I may as well tell you that I was back there - a while ago," and the colonel nodded vaguely to the splotch of blackness from whence Morocco Kate had rushed with that despairing cry on her lips.

"I'm a friend of LeGrand Blossom's - at least, I am now since I overheard what he had to say to you and Miss Webb," went on the detective. "Now then, if you'll tell me what I want to know, I'll help him to come across - clean, and I'll help you to the extent I mentioned."

Morocco Kate seemed to be considering as she stood in the darkness. Then a long sigh came from her lips, and it was as though she had come to the end of everything.

"I'll tell," she said simply. "What do you want to know? But first, let me say I didn't no more have an idea that Sport Carwell was going to die than you have Do you believe that?" she asked fiercely.

"I believe you, Kate. Now let's get down to brass tacks. Who is Jean Carnot, and where can I find him?"

"Oh!" she murmured. "You want him?"

"Very much, I think. Don't you?"

"Yes, I do! I - I would like to tear out his eyes! I'd like to - "

"Now, Kate, be nice! No use losing your temper. That's got you into trouble more than once. Try to play the lady - you can do it when you have to. Calling names isn't going to get us anywhere. Just tell me where I can find your former husband - or the one you thought was your husband - Jean Carnot."

"You're right, Colonel Ashley, I did think him my husband," said Morocco Kate simply. "And when I found out he had tricked me by a false marriage, and wouldn't make it good - well, I just went to the devil and hell - that's all."

"I know it, Kate, and I appreciate your position. I'm not throwing any stones at you. I've seen enough of life to know that none of us can do that with impunity. Now tell me all you can. And I'll say this - that after this is all over, if you want to try and do as Blossom is going to do - come through clean - I'll help you to the best of my ability."

"Will you, Colonel?" the big blonde woman asked eagerly.

"I will - and here's my hand on it!"

He reached out in the darkness, but there was no answering clasp. The woman seemed to shrink away. And then she said:

"I don't believe it would be of any use. I guess I'm too far down to crawl up. But I'll help you all I can."

"Don't give up, Kate!" said the detective gently. "I've seen lots worse than you - you notice I'm not mincing words - I've seen lots worse than you start over again. All I'll say is that I'll give you the chance if you want it. There's nothing in this life you're leading. You know the end and the answer as well as I do. You've seen it many a
"God help me - I have!" she murmured. "Well, I - I'll think about it."

"And, meanwhile, tell me about this Jean Carnot," went on the colonel. "You were married to him?"

"I thought I was."

"What sort of man was he? Come, sit down on this sand dune and tell me all about it. I think I want that man."

"No more than I do," she said fiercely. "He left me as he would an old coat he couldn't use any more! He cast me aside, trampled on me, left me like a sick dog! Oh, God - "

For a moment she could not go on. But she calmed herself and resumed. Then, by degrees, she told the whole, sordid story. It was common enough - the colonel had listened to many like it before. And when it was finished, brokenly and in tears, he put forth his hand on the shoulder of Morocco Kate and said:

"Now, Kate, let's get down to business. Are you willing to help me finish this up?"

"I'll do all I can, Colonel Ashley. But I don't see how we're going to find this devil of a Jean."

"Leave that to me. Now where can I find you when I want you - in a hurry, mind. Where can I find you?"

"I'm stopping in the village. I'll arrange to be within call for the next few days. Will it take long?"

"No, not very. If I can I'll clean it all up tomorrow. Things are beginning to clear up. And now allow me the pleasure of walking back to town with you. It's getting late and beginning to rain. I have an umbrella, and you haven't."

And through the rain which began to fall, as though it might wash away some of the sordid sin that had been told of in the darkness, the strangely different couple walked through the dark night, Morocco Kate as an ally of Colonel Ashley.

The clean, fresh sun was shining in through the windows of Colonel Ashley's room at The Haven when he awakened the next morning. As he sprang up and made ready for his bath he called toward the next apartment:

"Are you up, Jack?"

"Just getting. Any rush?"

"Well, I think this may be our busy day, and again it may not. Better tumble out."

Just as you say. How you feeling, Colonel?"

"Never better. I feel just like fishing, and you - "

"'Nough said. I'm with you."

And then, as he started toward his bath, the colonel saw a dirty slip of paper under the door of his room. "Ha!" he ejaculated. "Another printed message. The writer is getting impatient. I think it's time to act."

And he read:

"Why does not the great detective arrest the poisoner of her father? If he will look behind the book case he will find something that will prove everything - the poison book and - something else."

The printed scrawl was signed: "Justice."

"Well, 'Justice,' I'll do as you say, for once," said the colonel softly, and there was a grim smile on his face.

And so it came about that after his bath and a breakfast Colonel Ashley, winking mysteriously to Jack Young, indicated to his helper that he was wanted in the library.

"What is it?" asked Jack, when they were alone in the room. "A new clew?"

"No, just a blind trail, but I want to clean it up. Help me move out some of the bookcases."

"Good night! Some job! Are you looking for a secret passage, or is there a body concealed here?" and Jack laughed as he took hold of some of the heavy furniture and helped the colonel move it.

Not until they had lifted out the third massive case of volumes was their search successful. There was a little thud, as though something had fallen to the floor, and, looking, the colonel said:

"I have it."

He reached in and brought out a thin volume. Its title page was inscribed "The Poisonous Plants of New Jersey."

Something was in the book - something more bulky than a mere marker; and, opening the slender volume at page 4, a spray of dried leaves and some thin, whitish roots were disclosed.

"Somebody trying to press wild flowers?" asked Jack. "Why all this trouble for that? Hum! Doesn't smell like violets," he added, as he picked up the spray of leaves and roots.

"No, it doesn't," agreed the colonel. "But if you are not a little careful in handling it you'll be a fit subject for a bunch of violets - tied with crepe."

"You mean - "

Jack was startled, and he dropped the dried leaves on the library floor.

"A specimen of the water hemlock," went on the colonel. "One of the deadliest poisons of the plant world. And as we don't want any one else to suffer the fate of Socrates, I'll put this away."
He looked at the compound leaves, the dried flowers, small, but growing in the characteristic large umbels, and at the cluster of fleshy roots, though now pressed flat, and noted the hollow stems of the plant itself. The bunch of what had been verdure once had made a greenish, yellow stain in the book, which, as the colonel noted, was from the local public library, and bore the catalogue number 58 C. H. - 161*.

"Well, maybe you see through it, but I don't," confessed Jack. "Now, what's the next move?"

"Get these book cases back where they belong."

This was done, and then the colonel, sitting down to rest, for the labor was not slight, went on:

"You are sure that the French chauffeur has been told that The Haven is to be closed, and that he will be no longer required here, nor in the city? That he must leave at once though his month is not up?"

"Oh, yes, I heard Miss Viola tell him that herself. She told me she didn't see why you wanted that done, but as you had charge of the case the house would be closed, even if they had to open it again, for they stay here until late in the fall, you know.

"Yes, I know. Then you are sure Forette thinks they are all going away and that he will have to go, too?"

"Oh, yes, he's all packed. Been paid off, too, I believe, for he was sporting a roll of bills."

"And he is to see Mazi - when?"

"This evening."

"Very good. Now I don't want you to let him out of your sight. Stick to him like a life insurance agent on the trail of a prospect. Don't let him suspect, of course, but follow him when he goes to see the pretty little French girl tonight, and stay within call."

"Very good. Is that all?"

"For now, yes."

"What are you going to do, Colonel?"

"Me? I'm going fishing. I haven't thrown a line in over a week, and I'm afraid I'll forget how. Yes, I'm going fishing, but I'll see you some time to-night."

And a little later Shag was electrified by his master's call:

"Get things ready!"

"Good lan' ob massy, Colonel, sah! Are we suah gwine fishin'?"

"That's what we are, Shag. Lively, boy!"

"I'se runnin', sah, dat's whut I'se doin'! I'se runnin'!" And Shag's hands fairly trembled with eagerness, while the colonel, opening a little green book, read:

"Of recreation there is none So free as fishing is alone; All other pastimes do no less Than mind and body both possess; My hand alone my work can do, So I can fish and study too!"

"Old Isaac never wrote a truer word than that!" chuckled the colonel. "And now for a little studying."

And presently he was beside a quiet stream.

Luck was with the colonel and Shag that day, for when they returned to The Haven the creel carried by the colored man squeaked at its willow corners, for it bore a goodly mess of fish.

"Oh, Colonel, I've been so anxious to see you!" exclaimed Viola, when the detective greeted her after he had directed Shag to take the fish to the kitchen.

"Sorry I delayed so long afield," he answered with a gallant bow. "But the sport was too good to leave. What is it, my dear? Has anything happened?" Her face was anxious.

"Well, not exactly happened," she answered; "but I don't know what it means. And it seems so terrible! Look. I just discovered this - or rather, it was handed to me by one of the maids a little while ago," and she held out the postal from the library, telling of the overdue book.

"Well?" asked the colonel, though he could guess what was coming.

"Why, I haven't drawn a book from the library here for a long time," went on Viola. "I did once or twice, but that was when the library was first opened, some years ago. This postal is dated a week ago, but the maid just gave it to me."

"Very likely it was mislaid."

"That's what I supposed. But I went at once to the library, and I found that the book had been taken out on my card. And, oh, Colonel Ashley, it is a book on - poisons!"

"I know it, my dear."

"You know it! And did you think - "

"Now don't get excited. Come, I'll show you the very book. It's been here for some time, and I've known all about it. In fact I have a copy of it that I got from New York. There isn't anything to be worried about."

"But a book on poisons - poisonous plants it is, as I found out at the library - and poor father was killed by some mysterious poison! Oh - "
She was rapidly verging on an attack of hysterics, and the colonel led her gently to the dining room whence, in a little while, she emerged, pale, but otherwise self-possessed.

"Then you really want Aunt Mary and me to go away?" she asked.

"Yes, for a day or so. Make it appear that the house is closed for the season. You dismissed Forette, didn't you, as I suggested?"

"Yes, and paid him in full. I never want to see him again. He's been so insolent of late - he'd hardly do a thing I asked him. And he looked at me in such a queer, leering, impudent way."

"Don't worry about that, my dear. Everything will soon be all right."

"And will - will Harry be cleared?"

The colonel did not have time to answer, for Miss Mary Carwell appeared just then, lamenting the many matters that must be attended to on the closing of the house for even a short time. The colonel left her and Viola to talk it over by themselves.

On slowly moving pinions, a lone osprey beat its way against a quartering south-east wind to the dead tree where the little birds waited impatiently in the nest, giving vent to curious, whistling sounds. Slowly the osprey flew, for it had played in great luck that day, and had swooped down on a fish that would make a meal for him and his mate and the little ones. The fish was not yet dead, but every now and then would contort its length in an effort to escape from the talons which were thrust deeper and deeper into it, making bright spots of blood on the scaly sides.

And a man, walking through the sand, looked up, and in the last rays of the setting sun saw the drops of blood on the sides of the fish.

"A good kill, old man! A good kill!" he said aloud, and as though the osprey could hear him. "A mighty good kill!"

When it was dark a procession of figures began to wend its way over the lonely moor and among the sand dunes to where a tiny cottage nestled in a lonely spot on the beach. From the cottage a cheerful light shone, and now and then a pretty girl went to the door to look out. Seeing nothing, she went back and sat beside a table, on which gleamed a lamp.

By the light of it a woman was knitting, her needles flying in and out of the wool. The girl took up some sewing, but laid it down again and again, to go to the door and peer out.

"He is not coming yet, Mazi?" asked the woman in French.

"No, mamma, but he will. He said he would. Oh, I am so happy with him! I love him so! He is all life to me!"

"May you ever feel like that!" murmured the older woman.

Soon after that, the first of the figures in the procession reached the little cottage. The girl flew to the door, crying:

"Jean! Jean! What made you so late?"

"I could not help it, sweetheart. I but waited to get the last of my wages. Now I am paid, and we shall go on our honeymoon!"

"Oh, Jean! I am so happy!"

"And I, too, Mazi!" and the man drew the girl to him, a strange light shining in his eyes.

They sat down just outside the little cottage, where the gleam from the lamp would not reflect on them too strongly, and talked of many things. Of old things that are ever new, and of new things that are destined to be old.

The second figure of the procession that seemed to make the lonely cottage on the moor a rendezvous that evening, was not far behind that of the lover. It was a figure of a man in a natty blue serge suit. A panama hat of expensive make sat jauntily on top of his head on which curled close, heavy black hair.

"I wonder if the colonel is coming?" mused Jack Young, as he stopped to let Jean Forette hurry on a little in advance. Then a backward lance told him that two other figures were joining the procession. These last two - a man and a woman - walked more slowly, and they did not talk, except now and then to pass a few words.

"Then the marriage was legal, after all?" the woman asked.

"Yes, Kate, it was," answered Colonel Ashley. "You are his lawful wife."

"And he only told me I wasn't, so as to shame me - to make me leave him, and render me desperate?"

"That, and for other reasons. But the fact remains that you are his wife."

"And this other ceremony - this other woman?"

"No legal wife at all."

"I am sorry for her."

"Yes, she is but a girl. If I had known in time I might have stopped it. But it is too late now. Is he there, Jack?" he asked, as he joined the man in the panama hat.

"Yes, sitting outside with Mazi. Going to close in?"

"Might as well. Watch him carefully. He's desperate, and - "
"I know - full of dope. Well I’m ready for him."

And so the trio - the last of the procession, if we except Fate - went closer to the cottage whence so cheerfully gleamed the light.

"Who is there? What do you want?"

It was the snarling voice of Jean Forette, late chauffeur for the Carwells, challenging.

"Who is it?" he cried.

The three figures came on.

Suddenly there was a blinding flash, and the gleam from a powerful electric torch shone in the faces of Jack Young, Morocco Kate and Colonel Ashley.

There was a gasp of surprise and terror from the man beside Mazi - the man who had thrust out the torch to see who it was advancing and closing in on him through the darkness.

"Ah!" sneered the Frenchman, recovering his self-possession. "It is my friend the officer. Ah, I am glad to see you - but just now - not!" and he seemed to spit out the words.

"Maybe not. I can't always come when I'm expected, nor where I'm wanted," said Colonel Ashley coolly. "Now, my friend - Jack!" he cried sharply.

"I've got him, Colonel," was the cool answer, and there was a cry of agony from the chauffeur as his wrist was turned, almost to the breaking point, while there dropped from his paralyzed hand a magazine pistol, thudding to the sand at his feet.

"Go on, Colonel," said Jack, who had slipped off to one side, out of the focus of the glaring light, just in time to prevent Jean Forette from using the weapon he had quickly taken from a side pocket. "Go on, close in. I've drawn his stinger."

"Messieurs, what does this mean?" demanded the girl beside Jean. "Who are you? What do you want? Ah, it is you - and you!" and she turned first to Colonel Ashley and then to Jack Young. "You who have talked so kindly to me - who have asked me so much about - about my husband! It is you who come like thieves and assassins! Speak to them, Jean! Tell them to go!"

The Frenchman was breathing heavily, for Jack had a merciless grip on him.

"Speak to them, Jean!" implored the girl, while her mother, standing in the door with her knitting, looked wonderingly on. "Why do they come to take you like a traitor?"

"It - it's all a mistake!" panted the chauffeur.

"You've got me wrong, messieurs. I - I didn't do it. It was all an accident. He - I - Oh, my God! You!" and he started back as Morocco Kate stepped toward him, pulling from her face the veil that had covered it when the glaring light showed. Jack Young now held the electric torch.

"You!" he murmured hoarsely.

"Yes, I!" she cried. "The woman you kicked out like a sick dog! I've found you at last, and now I'll make you suffer all I did and more - you - devil!"

"Softly, Kate, softly!" murmured the colonel. But she did not heed him.

"You - you spawn of hell!" she cried. "It was you who sent me down where I am - where not a decent woman will look at me and a decent man won't speak to me. You did it - you left me to rot in my shame so you could find some one else - some one younger and prettier to fondle and kiss and - Oh, God!"

She sank in a shuddering heap on the sand at the feet of the man who had broken her body and spirit, and lay there, sobbing out her anger.

"Let her stay there a little," said the colonel softly. "She'll feel better after this outburst."

"Jean! Jean! What is it all about?" begged the girl who still maintained her place beside him. "Oh, speak to me! Tell me! Who is she?" and she pointed to the huddled figure on the sand.

"I'll tell you who she is," said Colonel Ashley. "She is the legal wife of Jean Carnot, alias Jean Forette, and -"

A scream from Mazi stopped him.

"Tell me it isn't true, Jean! Tell me it isn't true!" begged the girl.

Jean Carnot did not speak.

"He knows it is true," said the colonel. "And now, my French auto friend, I've come to take you into custody on a charge of -"

"I didn't do it! I didn't do it!" cried the man. "I swear I didn't do it. I was going to throw the glass away but he grabbed it from me, and -"

"I arrest you on a charge of bigamy," went on the calm voice of Colonel Ashley. And then, as he saw Mazi stagger as though about to fall, he added:

"All right, Jack. I'll take care of her. You put the bracelets on him. And see that they're good and tight. We don't want him slipping out and getting married again. He doesn't have much regard for bonds of any sort, matrimonial or
legal."
And then he lifted poor, little Mazi up and carried her into the cottage, while Morocco Kate got slowly to her feet and sat down on the bench in the darkest shadows, sobbing.

CHAPTER XXIV
STILL WATERS
"The records show that Henri Margot, alias Jean Carnot alias Jean Forette was married to Isabel Pelubit in Paris on March 17, four years ago, and that she died under suspicious circumstances three months later, leaving her husband all of a snug little fortune she possessed.
"All lies, monsieur - all lies! I do not believe anything you tell me!"
"Well, that's very foolish of you, Mazi, for you can easily prove for yourself everything I tell you, and it will be better for you, in the end, if you do believe."
"I do not. But go on with - more lies!" She shrugged her shoulders contumaciously.
Colonel Ashley leafed over a sheaf of papers he had spread out on the table in front of him. He and Mazi sat in a room in police headquarters in Lakeside. It was the day following the procession to the cottage on the moor.
"The records show," went on the detective, "that Henri Margot was arrested in Paris, charged with having poisoned his wife so that he might spend on another woman the money she possessed. But he was not convicted, chiefly because the chemists could not agree on the kind of poison that had caused death."
"All lies - I do not believe," said Mazi, stolidly.
"Um!" mused the colonel. "Well, Mazi, you're more stubborn than I thought. But it doesn't make any difference to me, you know. I'm paid for all this. Now let's see - what's next? Oh, yes. Then the records show that Henri, or Jean, whichever you choose to call him, came to this country. He fell in love with a pretty girl - she wasn't as pretty as you, Mazi, I'll say that - but he fell in love with her and married her - or pretended to. However, it was a fake ceremony, and she couldn't prove anything when he had spent all her money and tossed her aside. So there wasn't anything we could do to him that time."
"More lies," said Mazi, calmly - or at least with the appearance of calmness.
"The records show," went on the inexorable voice of Colonel Ashley, that next Jean Carnot, as he called himself then, became infatuated with a pretty girl - and this time I'll say she was just about as pretty as you, Mazi - and her name was Annie Tighe. She was an Irish girl, and she insisted on being married by a priest, so there wasn't any faking there. Jean was properly married at least."
"What do I care for all these lies?" sneered the girl, impatiently tapping her foot on the floor. "Why do you bore me? I am not interested! I should like to see Jean. Ha! Where have you put him?"
"You'll see him soon enough, Mazi. I've got just a few more records to show you, and then I'm done. Now we come to the time when, after he found he couldn't get out of a legal marriage, Jean put his foot in it, so to speak. He was tied right, this time, so he took refuge in a lie when he wanted to shake off the bonds of matrimony, as my friend Jack Young would say. He told his wife - and she was his wife, and is yet - he told her the ceremony was a fake, that the priest was a false one, in his pay."
"All lies! What do I care?" sneered Mazi, again shrugging her shoulders.
"Well, now let's get along. After our friend Jean found he was tired of his wife he shamed her into leaving him and she went - well, that isn't pleasant to dwell on, either. Except that he's the villain responsible for her going to the dogs. He sent her there just as he would have sent you, Mazi, except for what has happened."
"You mean he is not my husband?"
"Not in the least."
"I do not believe you. It is all lies. These women are but jealous. Proceed."
"That's about all there is to it, Mazi, except to show you the letter from your own priest, who confirms the fact that the priest who married Jean Carnot and Annie Tighe was legally authorized to do so, both by the laws of his own church and those of New York State, where the ceremony took place. You will believe Father Capoti, won't you?" and he laid beside the girl a letter which she read eagerly.
This time she said nothing about lies, but her face turned deadly pale.
"And this is the last exhibit," went on the colonel, as he laid a photograph before Mazi. It showed a man and a girl, evidently in their wedding finery, and the face of the man was that of Jean Forette, and that of the girl was of the woman who had groveled on the sand at the feet of the chauffeur the night before, - Morocco Kate.
"Look on the back," suggested the detective, and when Mazi turned the photograph over she read: "The happiest day of my life - Jean Carnot."
"If you happen to have any love letters from him - and I guess you have," went on the colonel, "you might compare the writing and - "
"I have no need, monsieur," was the low answer. "I - God help me. - I believe now! Oh, the liar! If I could see
"I rather thought you'd want to," murmured the colonel. "Bring him in!" he called.

The door opened, and, handcuffed to a stalwart officer, in slunk Jean of the many names.

Mazi sprang to her feet, her face livid. She would have leaped at the prisoner, but the colonel held her back. But he could not hold back the flood of voluble French that poured from her lips.

"Liar! Dog!" she hissed at him. "And so you have deceived me as you deceived others! You lied - and I thought he lied!" and she motioned to the colonel. "Oh, what a silly fool I've been! But now my eyes are open! I see! I see!"

With a quick gesture, before the colonel could stop her, she tore in half the picture that had swept away all her doubts.

"Mustn't do that!" chided the colonel, as he picked up the pieces which she was about to grind under her feet. "I'll need that at the trial."

"You - you beast!" whispered the girl, but the whisper seemed louder than a shout would have been. "You beast! No longer will I lie for you. Why you wanted me to, I do not know. Yes, I do! It was so that you might be with some one else when you should have been with me. Listen, all of you!" she cried, as she flung her arms wide. "No longer will I shield him. He told me to say that he was with me when that golf man - Monsieur Carwell died - before he died - but he was not. No more will I lie for you, Jean of the many names! You were not with me! I did not even see you that day. Bah! You were kissing some other fool maybe! Oh, my God! I - I -"

And the colonel gently laid the trembling, shrieking girl down on a bench, while the eyes of the shrinking figure of Jean the chauffeur followed every movement.

He raised his free hand, and seemed to be struggling to loosen his collar that appeared to choke him. For a moment the attention of Colonel Ashley was turned toward Mazi, who was sobbing frantically. Then, when he saw that she was becoming quieter, he turned to the prisoner.

"You heard all that went on, I know," said the detective. "That's why I put you in the next room."

"Yes, I heard," was the calm answer. "But what of it? You can prove nothing only that women are fools. I shall hire a good lawyer and - pooh! What would you have - a man must live. Bigamy, it is not such a serious charge."

"Oh, no, there are worse," said the colonel calmly. "You're going to hear one presently. She told me just what I wanted to know, as I thought she would if I could get her roused up enough against you. So, you weren't riding, as you said, with her the day Mr. Carwell came to his end. I never thought you were, Jean of the many names. And now, officer, if you'll take him back and lock him up, I guess this will be about all to-day."

"But I want to get bail!" exclaimed the prisoner. "I have a right to be bailed. My lawyer says so."

"There isn't any bail in your case," said the detective.

"Pooh! Nonsense! Bigamy, it is not such a serious charge."

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I meant to," said the colonel gently. "You're under another accusation now. Jean Forette, to call you by your latest alias, you're under arrest, charged with the murder, by poison, of Horace Carwell, and I think we'll come pretty near convicting you by the testimony of Mazi. Ah, would you - not quite!"

He struck down the hand the prisoner had raised to his mouth, and there rolled over the floor a little capsule. The top came off and a white powder spilled out.

"Don't step on it!" warned the colonel as several other officers came in to assist in handling the prisoner, who was struggling violently. "It's probably the same poison, mixed with French dope, that killed Mr. Carwell. Jean had it hidden in the collar band of his shirt ready for emergencies. But you shan't cheat the chair, Jean of the many names!"

They led the Frenchman away, struggling and screaming that he was innocent, that it was all a mistake. By turns he prayed and blasphemed horribly.

"That's the way they usually do when they can't get a shot of their dope," said the jail physician, after he had visited the prisoner and given him a big dose of bromide. "He'll be a wreck from now on. He's rotten with some French drug, the like of which I've never seen used before."

The coroner's jury had been called together again. Once more the sordid evidence was gone over, but this time there was more of it, and it had to do with a story told weepingly on the stand by Mazi, and corroborated by Colonel Ashley.

And a little later, when the jury filed in, it was to report:

"We find that Horace Carwell came to his death through poison administered by Jean Carnot, alias Jean Forette, with intent to kill."

And a little later, when the grand jury had indicted him, the man's nerve failed him completely, because his supply of drug was kept from him and he babbled the truth like a child, weeping.

He had stolen two hundred dollars from the pocketbook of Mr. Carwell the day before the championship golf game, and, the crime having been detected by Viola's father, the chauffeur had been given twenty-four hours in
which to return the money or be exposed. He was in financial straits, and, as developed later, had stolen elsewhere, so that he feared arrest and exposure and was at his wit's end. He had spent much of the money on Mazi, whom he induced to go through a secret marriage ceremony with him.

Then Jean, like a cornered rat, and crazy from the drug he had filled himself with, conceived the idea of poisoning Mr. Carwell. That would prevent arrest and exposure, he reasoned.

The chauffeur found his opportunity when he was ordered to stop the big red, white and blue car at a roadhouse just prior to the game. Mr. Carwell was thirsty, and in bad humor, and ordered the chauffeur to bring out some champagne. It was into this that Jean slipped the poison, mixed with some of his own drug which he knew would retard the action of the deadly stuff for some time. And it worked just as he had expected, dropping Mr. Carwell in his tracks about two hours later, as he made the stroke that won the game.

"But how did a chauffeur know so much about poison and dope as to be able to mix a dose that would fool the chemists?" asked Jack Young of his chief, a little later.

"Jean's father was a French chemist, and a clever one. It was there that Jean learned to mix the powder dope he took, and he learned much of other drugs. I suspect, though I can't prove it, that he poisoned his first wife. A devil all the way through," answered the colonel.

"But what did Bartlett and Mr. Carwell quarrel about so seriously that Bartlett wouldn't tell?"

"It was about Morocco Kate. Harry learned that she had sold Mr. Carwell a set of books, and, knowing her reputation, he feared she might have compromised Mr. Carwell because of his sporting instincts. So Harry begged Viola's father to come out plainly and repudiate the book contract. But Mr. Carwell was stiff about it, and told Harry to mind his own business. That was all. Naturally, after Harry found that Morocco Kate really was mixed up in the case - though innocently enough - he didn't want to tell what the quarrel was about for fear of bringing out a scandal. As a matter of fact there never was any shadow of one."

"And the mysterious notes to you about Viola having a poison book?"

"All sent by Jean, of course, to throw suspicion on her. I heard it rumored, in more than one quarter, that Viola strongly disapproved of her father's sporty life, and it was said she had stated that she would rather see him dead than disgraced. Which was natural enough. I've said that myself many a time about friends.

"Jean found Miss Carwell's library card, and took out the poison book in her name, afterward anonymously sending me word about it. I admit that, for a moment, I was staggered, but it was only for a moment. Here is what I found in his room."

Colonel Ashley held out a piece of paper. There was no writing on it, but it bore the indentations, identical with one of the penciled, printed notes.

"He wrote it on a pad," said the colonel, "and tore off the top sheet. But he used a hard pencil, and the impression went through. Just one of the few mistakes he made."

"Fine work on your part, Colonel."

"As for Captain Poland, the money transactions did look a bit queer, but we've since found the receipt and it's all right. A new clerk in Carwell's office had mislaid it. It wasn't Blossom's fault, either. He's a weak chap, but not morally bad. The worst thing he did was to fall for Morocco Kate. But better men than he have done the same thing. However, they won't again."

"Why, she hasn't -"

"Oh, no; nothing as rash as that. She's going to take a new route, that's all. She's a natural born saleswoman, and I've gotten her a place with a big firm that owes me some favors."

"And did Blossom come through 'clean' as he said he would?"

"He did, and he didn't. It seems that a year or so ago he inherited eleven thousand dollars. He invested half of the money in copper and made quite a little on the deal. Then, a short while before Carwell died, he got Blossom to lend him some money, which he was to pay back inside of a month or two. When Carwell's death occurred, Blossom was in financial difficulties on account of the demands of Morocco Kate. He could not get hold of the money he had invested, nor could he get hold of the money he had loaned Carwell. In his quandary he took certain securities belonging to Carwell and hypothecated them, expecting, later on, to make good as soon as he got some of his own money back. Of course the whole transaction was a rather shady one, and yet I still believe the young fellow wanted to be honest."

"How does he stand now?"

"Oh, he has managed to get hold of some of his money, and with that got back the Carwell securities. And, of course, the Carwell estate will have to settle with him later on, and Viola and Miss Mary Carwell are going to keep him in his present position.

"He and Minnie Webb are to be married very soon - which reminds me that I have an invitation for you."

"For me?"
"Yes. It's to the wedding of Viola and Harry Bartlett. The affair is going to be very quiet, so you can come without worrying about a dress-suit, which I know you hate as much as I do."

"I should say so!"

"And did Bartlett's uncle really mulct Mr. Carwell in that insurance deal?"

"Well, that's according to how you look at the ins and outs of modern high finance. It was a case of skin or be skinned, and I guess Harry's uncle skinned first and beat Mr. Carwell to it. It was six of one and a half dozen of the other. The deal would have been legitimate either way it swung, but it made Mr. Carwell sore for a time, and that, more than anything else, made him quarrel with Harry when Morocco Kate was mentioned."

The letters in the secret drawer, which had so worried Viola, proved to be very simple, after all. They referred to a certain local committee, organized for an international financial deal which Mr. Carwell was endeavoring to swing with Captain Poland. The latter thought, because of his intimate association with Viola's father, that the latter might use his influence in the captain's love affair. But that was not to be. So Viola's worry was for naught in this respect.

And so the golf course mystery was cleared up, though even to the end, when he had paid the penalty for his crime, the chauffeur would not reveal the nature of the poison he had mixed with the dope which had made him a wreck.

Beside the still water, that ran in a deep eddy where the stream curved under the trees, Colonel Ashley sat fishing. Beside him on the grass a little boy, with black, curling hair, and deep, brown eyes, sat clicking a spare reel.

"Hey, Unk Bob!" lisped the little boy. "Don't Shag make an awful funny noise?"

"He certainly does, Gerry! He certainly does!"

"Just 'ike a saw bitin' wood."

"That's it, Gerry! I'll have to speak to Shag about it. But now, Gerry, my boy, you must keep still while Unk Bob catches a big fish."

"Ess, I keep still. But you tell me a 'tory after?"

"Yes, I'll tell you a story."

"Will you tell me how you was a fissin', an' a big white ball comed an', zipp! knocked ze fiss off your hook? Will you tell me dat fiss 'tory?"

"Yes, Gerry, I'll tell you that if you'll be quiet now."

And Shag's snores mingled with the gentle whisper of the water and the sighing of the wind in the willows.

And then, when the creel had been emptied and Colonel Robert Lee Ashley sat on the porch with Gerry Ashley Bartlett snugly curled in his lap and told the story of the golf ball and the fish, while Shag cleaned the fish fresh from the brook, two figures stood in the door of the house.

"Look, Harry!" softly said the woman's voice. "Isn't that a picture?"

"It is, indeed, my dear. Gerry adores the colonel."

"No wonder. I do myself. Oh, by the way, Harry, I had a letter from Captain Poland today."

"Did you? Where is he now?" asked Harry Bartlett, as his eyes turned lovingly from the figure of his little son in the colonel's lap to that of his wife beside him.

"In the Philippines. He says he thinks he'll settle there. He was so pleased that we named the Boy after him."

"Was he?" and then, as his wife went over to steal up behind her little son and clasp her hands over his eyes, the man, standing alone on the porch, murmured:

"Poor Gerry!" And it was of the lonely man in the Philippines he was speaking.

In the silent shadows Colonel Robert Lee Ashley fished again. This time he was alone, save for the omnipresent Shag. And as the latter netted a fish, and slipped it into the grass-lined creel, he spoke and said:

"Mr. Young, he done ast me to-day when we gwine back t' de city. He done say dere's a big case waitin' fo' you, Colonel, sah. When is we-all gwine back?"

"Never, Shag!"

"Nevah, Colonel, sah?"

"No. I'm going to spend all the rest of my life fishing. I've resigned from the detective business! I'll never take another case Never!"

And Shag chuckled silently as he closed the creel.
CHAPTER I

THE FALLING STAR

I was genuinely tired when I got back to the office, that Wednesday afternoon, for it had been a trying day—the last of the series of trying days which had marked the progress of the Minturn case; and my feeling of depression was increased by the fact that our victory had not been nearly so complete as I had hoped it would be. Besides, there was the heat; always, during the past ten days, there had been the heat, unprecedented for June, with the thermometer climbing higher and higher and breaking a new record every day.

As I threw off coat and hat and dropped into the chair before my desk, I could see the heat-waves quivering up past the open windows from the fiery street below. I turned away and closed my eyes, and tried to evoke a vision of white surf falling upon the beach, of tall trees swaying in the breeze, of a brook dropping gently between green banks.

"Fountains that frisk and sprinkle The moss they overspill; Pools that the breezes crinkle,"

and then I stopped, for the door had opened. I unclosed my eyes to see the office-boy gazing at me in astonishment. He was a well-trained boy, and recovered himself in an instant.

"Your mail, sir," he said, laid it at my elbow, and went out.

"Your mail, sir," he said, laid it at my elbow, and went out.

I turned to the letters with an interest the reverse of lively. The words of Henley's ballade were still running through my head--

"Vale-lily and periwinkle; Wet stone-crop on the sill; The look of leaves a-twinkle With windlets,"...

Again I stopped, for again the door opened, and again the office-boy appeared.

"Mr. Godfrey, sir," he said, and close upon the words, Jim Godfrey entered, looking as fresh and cool and invigorating as the fountains and brooks and pools I had been thinking of.

"How do you do it, Godfrey?" I asked, as he sat down.

"Do what?"

"Keep so fit."

"By getting a good sleep every night. Do you?"

I groaned as I thought of the inferno I called my bedroom.

"I haven't really slept for a week," I said.

"Well, you're going to sleep to-night. That's the reason I'm here. I saw you in court this afternoon--one glance was enough."

"Yes," I assented; "one glance would be. But what's the proposition?"
"I'm staying at a little place I've leased for the summer up on the far edge of the Bronx. I'm going to take you up with me to-night and I'm going to keep you there till Monday. That will give you five nights' sleep and four days' rest. Don't you think you deserve it?"

"Yes," I agreed with conviction, "I do;" and I cast my mind rapidly over the affairs of the office. With the Minturn case ended, there was really no reason why I should not take a few days off.

"You'll come, then?" said Godfrey, who had been following my thoughts. "Don't be afraid," he added, seeing that I still hesitated. "You won't find it dull."

I looked at him, for he was smiling slightly and his eyes were very bright.

"Won't I?"

"No," he said, "for I've discovered certain phenomena in the neighbourhood which I think will interest you."

When Godfrey spoke in that tone, he could mean only one thing, and my last vestige of hesitation vanished.

"All right," I said; "I'll come."

"Good. I'll call for you at the Marathon about ten-thirty. That's the earliest I can get away," and in another moment he was gone.

So was my fatigue, and I turned with a zest to my letters and to the arrangements necessary for a three days' absence. Then I went up to my rooms, put a few things into a suit-case, got into fresh clothes, mounted to the Astor roof-garden for dinner, and a little after ten was back again at the Marathon. I had Higgins bring my luggage down, and sat down in the entrance-porch to wait for Godfrey.

Just across the street gleamed the lights of the police-station where he and I had had more than one adventure. For Godfrey was the principal police reporter of the _Record_; it was to him that journal owed those brilliant and glowing columns in which the latest mystery was described and dissected in a way which was a joy alike to the intellect and to the artistic instinct. For the editorial policy of the _Record_, for its attitude toward politics, Wall Street, the trusts, "society," I had only aversion and disgust; but whenever the town was shaken with a great criminal mystery, I never missed an issue.

Godfrey and I had been thrown together first in the Holladay case, and that was the beginning of a friendship which had strengthened with the years. Then came his brilliant work in solving the Marathon mystery, in which I had also become involved. I had appealed to him for help in connection with that affair at Elizabeth; and he had cleared up the remarkable circumstances surrounding the death of my friend, Philip Vantine, in the affair of the Boule cabinet. So I had come to turn to him instinctively whenever I found myself confronting one of those intricate problems which every lawyer has sometimes to untangle.

Reciprocally, Godfrey sometimes sought my assistance; but, of course, it was only with a very few of his cases that I had any personal connection. The others I had to be content to follow, as the general public did, in the columns of the Record, certain that it would be the first to reach the goal. Godfrey had a peculiar advantage over the other police reporters in that he had himself, years before, been a member of the detective force, and had very carefully fostered and extended the friendships made at that time. He was looked on rather as an insider, and he was always scrupulously careful to give the members of the force every bit of credit they deserved--sometimes considerably more than they deserved.

In consequence, he had the entree at times when other reporters were rigorously barred.

It was nearly eleven o'clock before Godfrey arrived that evening, but I was neither surprised nor impatient. I knew how many and unexpected were the demands upon his time; and I always found a lively interest in watching the comings and goings at the station across the way--where, alas, the entrances far exceeded the exits! But finally, a car swung in from the Avenue at a speed that drew my eyes, and I saw that Godfrey was driving it.

"Jump in," he said, pushing out his clutch and pausing at the curb; and as I grabbed my suit-case and sprang to the seat beside him, he let the clutch in again and we were off. "No time to lose," he added, as he changed into high, and turned up Seventh Avenue.

At the park, he turned westward to the Circle, and then northward again out Amsterdam Avenue. There was little traffic, and we were soon skimming along at a speed which made me watch the cross-streets fearfully. In a few minutes we were across the Harlem and running northward along the uninteresting streets beyond. At this moment, it occurred to me that Godfrey was behaving singularly as though he were hastening to keep an appointment; but I judged it best not to distract his attention from the street before us, and restrained the question which rose to my lips.

At last, the built-up portion of the town was left behind; we passed little houses in little yards, then meadows and gardens and strips of woodland, with a house only here and there. We were no longer on a paved street, but on a macadam road--a road apparently little used, for our lamps, sending long streamers of light ahead of us, disclosed far empty stretches, without vehicle of any kind. There was no moon, and the stars were half-obscured by a haze of cloud, while along the horizon to the west, I caught the occasional glow of distant lightning.

And then the sky was suddenly blotted out, and I saw that we were running along an avenue of lofty trees. The
road at the left was bordered by a high stone wall, evidently the boundary of an important estate. We were soon past this, and I felt the speed of the car slacken.

"Hold tight!" said Godfrey, turned sharply through an open gateway, and brought the car to a stop. Then, snapping out his watch, he leaned forward and held it in the glare of the side-lamp. "Five minutes to twelve," he said. "We can just make it. Come on, Lester."

He sprang from the car, and I followed, realising that this was no time for questions.

"This way," he said, and held out a hand to me, or I should have lost him in the darkness. We were in a grove of lofty trees, and at the foot of one of these, Godfrey paused. "Up with you," he added; "and don't lose any time," and he placed my hand upon the rung of a ladder.

Too amazed to open my lips, I obeyed. The ladder was a long one, and, as I went up and up, I could feel Godfrey mounting after me. I am not expert at climbing ladders, even by daylight, and my progress was not rapid enough to suit my companion, for he kept urging me on. But at last, with a breath of relief, I felt that I had reached the top.

"What now?" I asked.

"Do you see that big straight limb running out to your right?"

"Yes," I said, for my eyes were growing accustomed to the darkness.

"Sit down on it, and hold on to the ladder."

I did so somewhat gingerly, and in a minute Godfrey was beside me.

"Now," he said, in a voice low and tense with excitement, "look out, straight ahead. And remember to hold on to the ladder."

I could see the hazy mist of the open sky, and from the fitful light along the horizon, I knew that we were looking toward the west. Below me was a mass of confused shadows, which I took for clumps of shrubbery.

Then I felt Godfrey's hand close upon my arm.

"Look!" he said.

For an instant, I saw nothing; then my eyes caught what seemed to be a new star in the heavens; a star bright, sharp, steel blue--

"Why, it's moving!" I cried.

He answered with a pressure of the fingers.

The star was indeed moving; not rising, not drifting with the breeze, but descending, descending slowly, slowly.... I watched it with parted lips, leaning forward, my eyes straining at that falling light.

"Falling" is not the word; nor is "drifting." It did not fall and it did not drift. It deliberately descended, in a straight line, at a regular speed, calmly and evenly, as though animated by some definite purpose. Lower and lower it sank; then it seemed to pause, to hover in the air, and the next instant it burst into a shower of sparks and vanished.

And those sparks fell upon the shoulders of two white-robed figures, standing apparently in space, their arms rigidly extended, their faces raised toward the heavens.

CHAPTER II
A STRANGE NEIGHBOUR

Mechanically I followed Godfrey down the ladder, and, guided by the flaring lights, made my way back to the car. I climbed silently into my seat, while Godfrey started the motor. Then we rolled slowly up the driveway, and stopped before the door of a house standing deep among the trees.

"Wait for me here a minute," Godfrey said, and, when I had got out, handed me my suit-case, and then drove the car on past the house, no doubt to its garage.

He was soon back, opened the house-door, switched on the lights, and waved me in.

"Here we are," he said. "I'll show you your room," and he led the way up the stairs, opening a door in the hall at the top. "This is it," he added, and switched on the lights here also. "The bath-room is right at the end of the hall. Wash up, if you need to, and then come down, and we will have a good-night smoke."

It was a pleasant room, with the simplest of furniture. The night-breeze ruffled the curtains at the windows, and filled the room with the cool odour of the woods--how different it was from the odour of dirty asphalt! But I was in no mood to linger there--I wanted an explanation of that strange light and of those two white-robed figures. So I paused only to open my grip, change into a lounging-coat, and brush off the dust of the journey. Then I hastened downstairs.

Godfrey met me at the stair-foot, and led the way into what was evidently a lounging-room. A tray containing some cold meat, bread and butter, cheese, and a few other things, stood on a side-table, and to this Godfrey added two bottles of Bass.

"No doubt you're hungry after the ride," he said. "I know I am," and he opened the bottles. "Help yourself," and he proceeded to make himself a sandwich. "You see, I live the simple life out here. I've got an old couple to look after the place--Mr. and Mrs. Hargis. Mrs. Hargis is an excellent cook--but to ask her to stay awake till midnight
would be fiendish cruelty. So she leaves me a lunch in the ice-box, and goes quietly off to bed. I'll give you some 
berries for breakfast such as you don't often get in New York--and the cream--wait till you try it! Have a cigar?"

"No," I said, sitting down very content with the world, "I've got my pipe," and I proceeded to fill up.

Godfrey took down his own pipe from the mantelshelf and sat down opposite me. A moment later, two puffs of 
smoke circled toward the ceiling.

"Now," I said, looking at him, "go ahead and tell me about it."

Godfrey watched a smoke-ring whirl and break before he answered.

"About ten days ago," he began, "just at midnight, I happened to glance out of my bedroom window, as I was 
turning in, and caught a glimpse of a queer light apparently sinking into the tree-tops. I thought nothing of it; but two 
nights later, at exactly the same time, I saw it again. I watched for it the next night, and again saw it--just for an 
instant, you understand, as it formed high in the air and started downward. The next night I was up a tree and saw 
more of it; but it was not until night before last that I found the place from which the whole spectacle could be seen. 
The trees are pretty thick all around here, and I doubt if there is any other place from which those two figures would 
be visible."

"Then there _were_ two figures!" I said, for I had begun to think that my eyes had deceived me.

"There certainly were."

"Standing in space?"

"Oh, no; standing on a very substantial roof."

"But what is it all about?" I questioned. "Why should that light descend every midnight? What _is_ the light, 
anyway?"

"That's what I've brought you out here to find out. You've got four clear days ahead of you--and I'll be at your 
disposal from midnight on, if you happen to need me."

"But you must have some sort of idea about it," I persisted. "At least you know whose roof those figures were 
standing on."

"Yes, I know that. The roof belongs to a man named Worthington Vaughan. Ever hear of him?"

I shook my head.

"Neither had I," said Godfrey, "up to the time I took this place. Even yet, I don't know very much. He's the last 
of an old family, who made their money in real estate, and are supposed to have kept most of it. He's a widower with 
one daughter. His wife died about ten years ago, and since then he has been a sort of recluse, and has the reputation 
of being queer. He has been abroad a good deal, and it is only during the last year that he has lived continuously at 
this place next door, which is called Elmhurst. That's about all I've been able to find out. He certainly lives a retired 
life, for his place has a twelve-foot wall around it, and no visitors need apply."

"How do you know?"

"I tried to make a neighbourly call yesterday, and wasn't admitted. Mr. Vaughan was engaged. Getting ready for 
his regular midnight hocus-pocus, perhaps!"

I took a meditative puff or two.

"_Is_ it hocus-pocus, Godfrey?" I asked, at last. "If it is, it's a mighty artistic piece of work."

"And if it isn't hocus-pocus, what is it?" Godfrey retorted. "A spiritual manifestation?"

I confess I had no answer ready. Ideas which seem reasonable enough when put dimly to oneself, become absurd 
sometimes when definitely clothed with words.

"There are just two possibilities," Godfrey went on. "Either it's hocus-pocus, or it isn't. If it is, it is done for some 
purpose. Two men don't go out on a roof every night at midnight and fire off a Roman candle and wave their arms 
around, just for the fun of the thing."

"It wasn't a Roman candle," I pointed out. "A Roman candle is visible when it's going up, and bursts and 
vanishes at the top of its flight. That light didn't behave that way at all. It formed high in the air, remained there 
stationary for a moment, gradually grew brighter, and then started to descend. It didn't fall, it came down slowly, and 
at an even rate of speed. And it didn't drift away before the breeze, as it would have done if it had been merely 
floating in the air. It descended in a straight line. It gave me the impression of moving as though a will actuated it--
as though it had a distinct purpose. There was something uncanny about it!"

Godfrey nodded thoughtful agreement.

"I have felt that," he said, "and I admit that the behaviour of the light is extraordinary. But that doesn't prove it 
supernatural. I don't believe in the supernatural. Especially I don't believe that any two mortals could arrange with 
the heavenly powers to make a demonstration like that every night at midnight for their benefit. That's _too_ 
absurd!"

"It is absurd," I assented, "and yet it isn't much more absurd than to suppose that two men would go out on the 
roof every night to watch a Roman candle, as you call it, come down. Unless, of course, they're lunatics."
“No,” said Godfrey, “I don’t believe they’re lunatics—at least, not both of them. I have a sort of theory about it; but it’s a pretty thin one, and I want you to do a little investigating on your own account before I tell you what it is. It’s time we went to bed. Don’t get up in the morning till you’re ready to. Probably I’ll not see you till night; I have some work to do that will take me off early. But Mrs. Hargis will make you comfortable, and I’ll be back in time to join you in another look at the Roman candle!”

He uttered the last words jestingly, but I could see that the jest was a surface one, and that, at heart, he was deeply serious. Evidently, the strange star had impressed him even more than it had me—though perhaps in a different manner.

I found that it had impressed me deeply enough, for I dreamed about it that night—dreamed, and woke, only to fall asleep and dream and wake again. I do not remember that I saw any more in the dream than I had seen with my waking eyes, but each time I awoke trembling with apprehension and bathed in perspiration. As I lay there the second time, staring up into the darkness and telling myself I was a fool, there came a sudden rush of wind among the trees outside; then a vivid flash of lightning and an instant rending crash of thunder, and then a steady downpour of rain. I could guess how the gasping city welcomed it, and I lay for a long time listening to it, as it dripped from the leaves and beat against the house. A delightful coolness filled the room, an odour fresh and clean; and when, at last, with nerves quieted, I fell asleep again, it was not to awaken until the sun was bright against my curtains.

CHAPTER III
THE DRAMA IN THE GARDEN

I glanced at my watch, as soon as I was out of bed, and saw that it was after ten o’clock. All the sleep I had lost during the hot nights of the previous week had been crowded into the last nine hours; I felt like a new man, and when, half an hour later, I ran downstairs, it was with such an appetite for breakfast as I had not known for a long time.

There was no one in the hall, and I stepped out through the open door to the porch beyond, and stood looking about me. The house was built in the midst of a grove of beautiful old trees, some distance back from the road, of which I could catch only a glimpse. It was a small house, a story and a half in height, evidently designed only as a summer residence.

“Good morning, sir,” said a voice behind me, and I turned to find a pleasant-faced, grey-haired woman standing in the doorway.

“Good morning,” I responded. “I suppose you are Mrs. Hargis?”

“Yes, sir; and your breakfast’s ready.”

“Has Mr. Godfrey gone?”

“Yes, sir; he left about an hour ago. He was afraid his machine would waken you.”

“It didn’t,” I said, as I followed her back along the hall. “Nothing short of an earthquake would have wakened me. Ah, this is fine!”

She had shown me into a pleasant room, where a little table was set near an open window. It made quite a picture, with its white cloth and shining dishes and plate of yellow butter, and bowl of crimson berries, and— but I didn’t linger to admire it. I don’t know when I have enjoyed breakfast so much. Mrs. Hargis, after bringing in the eggs and bacon and setting a little pot of steaming coffee at my elbow, sensibly left me alone to the enjoyment of it. Ever since that morning, I have realised that, to start the day exactly right, a man should breakfast by himself, amid just such surroundings, leisurely and without distraction. A copy of the morning’s _Record_ was lying on the table, but I did not even open it. I did not care what had happened in the world the day before!

At last, ineffably content, I stepped out upon the driveway at the side of the house, and strolled away among the trees. At the end of a few minutes, I came to the high stone wall which bounded the estate of the mysterious Worthington Vaughan, and suddenly the wish came to me to see what lay behind it. Without much difficulty, I found the tree with the ladder against it, which we had mounted the night before. It was a long ladder, even in the daytime, but at last I reached the top, and settled myself on the limb against which it rested. Assuring myself that the leaves hid me from any chance observer, I looked down into the grounds beyond the wall.

There was not much to see. The grounds were extensive and had evidently been laid out with care, but there was an air of neglect about them, as though the attention they received was careless and inadequate. The shrubbery was too dense, grass was invading the walks, here and there a tree showed a dead limb or a broken one. Near the house was a wide lawn, designed, perhaps, as a tennis-court or croquet-ground, with rustic seats under the trees at the edge.

About the house itself was a screen of magnificent elms, which doubtless gave the place its name, and which shut the house in completely. All I could see of it was one corner of the roof. This, however, stood out clear against the sky, and it was here, evidently, that the mysterious midnight figures had been stationed. As I looked at it, I realised the truth of Godfrey’s remark that probably from no other point of vantage but just this would they be visible.
It did not take me many minutes to exhaust the interest of this empty prospect, more especially since my perch was anything but comfortable, and I was just about to descend, when two white-robed figures appeared at the edge of the open space near the house and walked slowly across it. I settled back into my place with a tightening of interest which made me forget its discomfort, for that these were the two star-worshippers I did not doubt.

The distance was so great that their faces were the merest blurs; but I could see that one leaned heavily upon the arm of the other, as much, or so it seemed to me, for moral as for physical support. I could see, too, that the hair of the feebler man was white, while that of his companion was jet black. The younger man's face appeared so dark that I suspected he wore a beard, and his figure was erect and vigorous, in the prime of life, virile and full of power.

He certainly dominated the older man. I watched them attentively, as they paced back and forth, and the dependence of the one upon the other was very manifest. Both heads were bent as though in earnest talk, and for perhaps half an hour they walked slowly up and down. Then, at a sign of fatigue from the older figure, the other led him to a garden-bench, where both sat down.

The elder man, I told myself, was no doubt Worthington Vaughan. Small wonder he was considered queer if he dressed habitually in a white robe and worshipped the stars at midnight! There was something monkish about the habits which he and his companion wore, and the thought flashed into my mind that perhaps they were members of some religious order, or some Oriental cult or priesthood. And both of them, I added to myself, must be a little mad!

As I watched, the discussion gradually grew more animated, and the younger man, springing to his feet, paced excitedly up and down, touching his forehead with his fingers from time to time, and raising his hands to heaven, as though calling it as a witness to his words. At last the other made a sign of assent, got to his feet, bent his head reverently as to a spiritual superior and walked slowly away toward the house. The younger man stood gazing after him until he passed from sight, then resumed his rapid pacing up and down, evidently deeply moved.

At last from the direction of the house came the flutter of a white robe. For a moment, I thought it was the old man returning; then as it emerged fully from among the trees, I saw that it was a woman—a young woman, I guessed, from her slimness, and from the mass of dark hair which framed her face. And then I remembered that Godfrey had told me that Worthington Vaughan had a daughter.

The woman was at her side in an instant, held out his hand, and said something, which caused her to shrink away. She half-turned, as though to flee, but the other laid his hand upon her arm, speaking earnestly, and, after a moment, she permitted him to lead her to a seat. He remained standing before her, sometimes raising his hands to heaven, sometimes pointing toward the house, sometimes bending close above her, and from time to time making that peculiar gesture of touching his fingers to his forehead, whose meaning I could not guess. But I could guess at the torrent of passionate words which poured from his lips, and at the eager light which was in his eyes!

The woman sat quite still, with bowed head, listening, but making no sign either of consent or refusal. Gradually, the man grew more confident, and at last stooped to take her hand, but she drew it quickly away, and, raising her head, said something slowly and with emphasis. He shook his head savagely, then, after a rapid turn up and down, seemed to agree, bowed low to her, and went rapidly away toward the house. The woman sat for some time where he had left her, her face in her hands; then, with a gesture of weariness and discouragement, crossed the lawn and disappeared among the trees.

For a long time I sat there motionless, my eyes on the spot where she had disappeared, trying to understand. What was the meaning of the scene? What was it the younger man had urged so passionately upon her, but at which she had rebelled? What was it for which he had pled so earnestly? The obvious answer was that he pled for her love, that he had urged her to become his wife; but the answer did not satisfy me. His attitude had been passionate enough, but it had scarcely been lover-like. It had more of admonition, of warning, even of threat, than of entreaty in it. It was not the attitude of a lover to his mistress, but of a master to his pupil.

And what had been the answer, wrung from her finally by his insistence—the answer to which he had at first violently dissented, and then reluctantly agreed?

No doubt, if these people had been garbed in the clothes of every day, I should have felt at the outset that all this was none of my business, and have crept down the ladder and gone away. But their strange dress gave to the scene an air at once unreal and theatrical, and not for an instant had I felt myself an intruder. It was as though I were looking at the rehearsal of a drama designed for the public gaze and enacted upon a stage; or, more properly, a pantomime, dim and figurative, but most impressive. Might it not, indeed, be a rehearsal of some sort—private theatrics—make-believe? But that scene at midnight—that could not be make-believe! No, nor was this scene in the garden. It was in earnest—in deadliest earnest; there was about it something sinister and threatening; and it was the realisation of this—the realisation that there was something here not right, something demanding scrutiny—which kept me chained to my uncomfortable perch, minute after minute.

But nothing further happened, and I realised, at last, that if I was to escape an agonising cramp in the leg, I must get down. I put my feet on the ladder, and then paused for a last look about the grounds. My eye was caught by a
flutter of white among the trees. Someone was walking along one of the paths; in a moment, straining forward, I saw it was the woman, and that she was approaching the wall.

And then, as she came nearer, I saw that she was not a woman at all, but a girl—a girl of eighteen or twenty, to whom the flowing robes gave, at a distance, the effect of age. I caught only a glimpse of her face before it was hidden by a clump of shrubbery, but that glimpse told me that it was a face to set the pulses leaping. I strained still farther forward, waiting until she should come into sight again....

Along the path she came, with the sunlight about her, kissing her hair, her lips, her cheeks—and the next instant her eyes were staring upwards into mine.

I could not move. I could only stare down at her. I saw the hot colour sweep across her face; I saw her hand go to her bosom; I saw her turn to flee. Then, to my amazement, she stopped, as though arrested by a sudden thought, turned toward me again, and raised her eyes deliberately to mine.

For fully a minute she stood there, her gaze searching and intent, as though she would read my soul; then her face hardened with sudden resolution. Again she put her hand to her bosom, turned hastily toward the wall, and disappeared behind it.

The next instant, something white came flying over it, and fell on the grass beneath my tree. Staring down at it, I saw it was a letter.

CHAPTER IV
ENTER FREDDIE SWAIN

I fell, rather than climbed, down the ladder, snatched the white missile from the grass, and saw that it was, indeed, a sealed and addressed envelope. I had somehow expected that address to include either Godfrey's name or mine; but it did neither. The envelope bore these words:

Mr. Frederic Swain, 1010 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

If not at this address, please try the Calumet Club.

I sat down on the lowest rung of the ladder, whistling softly to myself. For Freddie Swain's address was no longer 1010 Fifth Avenue, nor was he to be found in the luxurious rooms of the Calumet Club. In fact, it was nearly a year since he had entered either place. For some eight hours of every week-day, he laboured in the law offices of Royce & Lester; he slept in a little room on the top floor of the Marathon; three hours of every evening, Saturdays, Sundays and holidays excepted, were spent at the law school of the University of New York; and the remaining hours of the twenty-four in haunts much less conspicuous and expensive than the Calumet Club.

For Freddie Swain had taken one of these toboggan slides down the hill of fortune which sometimes happen to the most deserving. His father, old General Orlando Swain, had, all his life, put up a pompous front and was supposed to have inherited a fortune from somewhere; but, when he died, this edifice was found to be all facade and no foundation, and Freddie inherited nothing but debts. He had been expensively educated for a career as an Ornament of Society, but he found that career cut short, for Society suddenly ceased to find him ornamental. I suppose there were too many marriageable daughters about!

I am bound to say that he took the blow well. Instead of attempting to cling to the skirts of Society as a vendor of champagne or an organiser of fetes champetres, he—to use his own words—decided to cut the whole show.

Our firm had been named as the administrators of the Swain estate, and when the storm was over and we were sitting among the ruins, Freddie expressed the intention of going to work.

"What will you do?" Mr. Royce inquired. "Ever had any training in making money?"

"No, only in spending it," retorted Freddie, easily. "But I can learn. I was thinking of studying law. That's a good trade, isn't it?"

"Splendid!" assented Mr. Royce, warmly. "And there are always so many openings. You see, nobody studies law—lawyers are as scarce as hen's teeth."

"Just the same, I think I'll have a try at it," said Freddie, sturdy. "There's always room at the top, you know," he added, with a grin. "I can go to the night-school at the University, and I ought to be able to earn enough to live on, as a clerk or something. I know how to read and write."

"That will help, of course," agreed Mr. Royce. "But I'm afraid that, right at first, anyway, you can scarcely hope to live in the style to which you have been accustomed."

Freddie turned on him with fire in his eyes.

"Look here," he said, "suppose you give me a job. I'll do my work and earn my wages--try me and see."

There was something in his face that touched me, and I glanced at Mr. Royce. I saw that his gruffness was merely a mantle to cloak his real feelings; and the result was that Freddie Swain was set to work as a copying-clerk at a salary of fifteen dollars a week. He applied himself to his work with an energy that surprised me, and I learned that he was taking the night-course at the University, as he had planned. Finally, one night, I met him as I was turning in to my rooms at the Marathon, and found that he had rented a cubby-hole on the top floor of the building.
After that, I saw him occasionally, and when six months had passed, was forced to acknowledge that he was thoroughly in earnest. I happened to remark to Mr. Royce one day that Swain seemed to be making good.

"Yes," my partner agreed; "I didn't think he had it in him. He had a rude awakening from his dream of affluence, and it seems to have done him good."

But, somehow, I had fancied that it was from more than a dream of affluence he had been awakened; and now, as I sat staring at this letter, I began to understand dimly what the other dream had been.

The first thing was to get the letter into his hands, for I was certain that it was a cry for help. I glanced at my watch and saw that it was nearly half past twelve. Swain, I knew, would be at lunch, and was not due at the office until one o'clock. Slipping the letter into my pocket, I turned back to the house, and found Mrs. Hargis standing on the front porch.

"I declare, I thought you was lost, Mr. Lester," she said. "I was just going to send William to look for you. Ain't you 'most starved?"

"Scarcely starved, Mrs. Hargis," I said, "but with a very creditable appetite, when you consider that I ate breakfast only two hours ago."

"Well, come right in," she said. "Your lunch is ready."

I suppose there's a telephone somewhere about?" I asked, as I followed her through the hall.

"Yes, sir, in here," and she opened the door into a little room fitted up as a study. "It's here Mr. Godfrey works sometimes."

"Thank you," I said, "I've got to call up the office. I won't be but a minute."

I found Godfrey's number stamped on the cover of the telephone book, and then called the office. As I had guessed, Swain was not yet back from lunch, and I left word for him to call me as soon as he came in. Then I made my way to the dining-room, where Mrs. Hargis was awaiting me.

"How does one get out here from New York, Mrs. Hargis?" I asked, as I sat down. "That is, if one doesn't happen to own a motor car?"

"Why, very easily, sir. Take the Third Avenue elevated to the end of the line, and then the trolley. It runs along Dryden Road, just two blocks over."

"Where does one get off?"

"At Prospect Street, sir."

"And what is this place called?"

"This is the old Bennett place, sir."

"Thank you. And let me tell you, Mrs. Hargis," I added, "that I have never tasted a better salad."

Her kindly old face flushed with pleasure.

"It's nice of you to say that, sir," she said. "We have our own garden, and William takes a great pride in it."

"I must go and see it," I said. "I've always fancied I'd like to potter around in a garden. I must see if Mr. Godfrey won't let me in on this."

"He spends an hour in it every morning. Sometimes he can hardly tear himself away. I certainly do like Mr. Godfrey."

"So do I," I agreed heartily. "He's a splendid fellow--one of the nicest, squarest men I ever met--and a friend worth having."

"He's all of that, sir," she agreed, and stood for a moment, clapping and unclasping her hands nervously, as though there was something else she wished to say. But she evidently thought better of it. "There's the bell, sir," she added. "Please ring if there's anything else you want," and she left me to myself.

I had pushed back my chair and was filling my pipe when the telephone rang. It was Swain.

"Swain," I said, "this is Mr. Lester. I'm at a place up here in the Bronx, and I want you to come up right away."

"Very good, sir," said Swain. "How do I get there?"

"Take the Third Avenue elevated to the end of the line, and then the trolley which runs along Dryden Road. Get off at Prospect Street, walk two blocks west and ask for the old Bennett place. I'll have an eye out for you."

"All right, sir," said Swain, again. "Do you want me to bring some papers, or anything?"

"No; just come as quickly as you can," I answered, and hung up.

I figured that, even at the best, it would take Swain an hour and a half to make the journey, and I strolled out under the trees again. Then the thought came to me that I might as well make a little exploration of the neighbourhood, and I sauntered out to the road. Along it for some distance ran the high wall which bounded Elmhurst, and I saw that the wall had been further fortified by ugly pieces of broken glass set in cement along its top.

I could see a break in the wall, about midway of its length, and, walking past, discovered that this was where the gates were set--heavy gates of wrought iron, very tall, and surmounted by sharp spikes. The whole length of the wall
was, I judged, considerably over a city block, but there was no other opening in it.

At the farther end, it was bounded by a crossroad, and, turning along this, I found that the wall extended nearly the same distance in this direction. There was an opening about midway--a small opening, closed by a heavy, iron-banded door--the servants’ entrance, I told myself. The grounds of a row of houses facing the road beyond ran up to the wall at the back, and I could not follow it without attracting notice, but I could see that there was no break in it. I was almost certain that the wall which closed the estate on Godfrey’s side was also unbroken. There were, then, only the two entrances.

I walked back again to the front, and paused for a glance through the gates. But there was nothing to be seen. The driveway parted and curved away out of sight in either direction, and a dense mass of shrubbery opposite the gate shut off any view of the grounds. Even of the house, there was nothing to be seen except the chimneys and one gable. Evidently, Mr. Vaughan was fond of privacy, and had spared no pains to secure it.

Opposite the Vaughan place, a strip of woodland ran back from the road. It was dense with undergrowth, and, I reflected, would form an admirable hiding-place. The road itself seemed little travelled, and I judged that the main artery of traffic was the road along which the trolley ran, two blocks away.

I returned to my starting point, and assured myself that the wall on that side was indeed without a break. Some vines had started up it here and there, but, for the most part, it loomed grey and bleak, crowned along its whole length by that threatening line of broken glass. I judged it to be twelve feet high, so that, even without the glass, it would be impossible for anyone to get over it without assistance. As I stood there looking at it, resenting the threat of that broken glass, and pondering the infirmity of character which such a threat revealed, it suddenly struck me that the upper part of the wall differed slightly from the lower part. It was a little lighter in colour, a little newer in appearance; and, examining the wall more closely, I discovered that originally it had been only eight or nine feet high, and that the upper part had been added at a later date--and last of all, of course, the broken glass!

As I turned back, at last, toward the house, I saw someone coming up the drive. In a moment, I recognised Swain, and quickened my steps.

"You made good time," I said.
"Yes, sir; I was fortunate in catching an express and not having to wait for the trolley."
"We’d better go into the house," I added. "I have a message for you--a confidential message."

He glanced at me quickly, but followed silently, as I led the way into Godfrey's study and carefully closed the door.

"Sit down," I said, and I sat down myself and looked at him.

I had always thought Swain a handsome, thoroughbred-looking fellow; and I saw that, in the past few months, he had grown more thoroughbred-looking than ever. His face was thinner than when he had first gone to work for us, there was a new line between his eyebrows, and the set of his lips told of battles fought and won. A year ago, it had seemed natural to call him Freddie, but no one would think of doing so now. His father’s creditors had not attempted to take from him his wardrobe--a costly and extensive one--so that he was dressed as carefully, if not quite as fashionably, as ever, in a way that suggested a young millionaire, rather than a fifteen-dollar-a-week clerk. At this moment, his face was clouded, and he drummed the arm of his chair with nervous fingers. Then he shifted uneasily under my gaze, which was, perhaps, more earnest than I realised.

"You said you had a message for me, sir," he reminded me.
"Yes," I said. "Have you ever been out this way before?"
"Yes, I have been out this way a number of times."
"You know this place, then?"
"I have heard it mentioned, but I have never been here before."
"Do you know whose place that is next door to us?"
"Yes," and his voice sank to a lower key. "It belongs to Worthington Vaughan."
"And you know him?"
"At one time, I knew him quite well, sir," and his voice was still lower.
"No doubt," I went on, more and more interested, "you also knew his very fascinating daughter."

A wave of colour crimsoned his face.
"Why are you asking me these questions, Mr. Lester?" he demanded.
"Because," I said, "the message I have is from that young lady, and is for a man named Frederic Swain."

He was on his feet, staring at me, and all the blood was gone from his cheeks.
"A message!" he cried. "From her! From Marjorie! What is it, Mr. Lester? For God’s sake..."
"Here it is," I said, and handed him the letter.

He seized it, took one look at the address, then turned away to the window and ripped the envelope open. He unfolded the sheet of paper it contained, and as his eyes ran along it, his face grew whiter still. At last he raised his
eyes and stared at me with the look of a man who felt the world tottering about him.

CHAPTER V

A CALL FOR HELP

"For heaven's sake, Swain," I said, "sit down and pull yourself together."

But he did not seem to hear me. Instead he read the letter through again, then he turned toward me.

"How did you get this, Mr. Lester?" he asked.

"I found it lying under the trees. It had been thrown over the wall."

"But how did you know it was thrown over by Miss Vaughan?"

"That was an easy guess," I said, sparring feebly. "Who else would attempt to conduct a surreptitious correspondence with a handsome young man?"

But he did not smile; the look of intensity in his eyes deepened.

"Come, Mr. Lester," he protested, "don't play with me. I have a right to know the truth."

"What right?" I queried.

He paused an instant, as though nerving himself to speak, as though asking himself how much he should tell me. Then he came toward me impulsively.

"Miss Vaughan and I are engaged to be married," he said. "Some persons may tell you that the engagement has been broken off; more than once, I have offered to release her, but she refuses to be released. We love each other."

The word "love" is a difficult one for us Anglo-Saxons to pronounce; the voice in which Swain uttered it brought me to my feet, with outstretched hand.

"If there's anything I can do for you, my boy," I said, "tell me."

"Thank you, Mr. Lester," and he returned my clasp. "You have done a great deal already in giving me this letter so promptly. The only other thing you can do is to permit me to stay here until to-night."

"Until to-night?"

"Miss Vaughan asks me to meet her to-night."

"In her father's grounds?"

"Yes."

"Unknown to him?"

"Yes."

"He is not friendly to you?"

"No."

I had a little struggle with myself.

"See here, Swain," I said, "sit down and let us talk this thing over calmly. Before I promise anything, I should like to know more of the story. From the glimpse I caught of Miss Vaughan, I could see that she is very beautiful, and she also seemed to me to be very young."

"She is nineteen," said Swain.

"Her father is wealthy, I suppose?"

"Very wealthy."

"And her mother is dead?"

"Yes."

"Well," I began, and hesitated, fearing to wound him.

"I know what you are thinking," Swain burst in, "and I do not blame you. You are thinking that she is a young, beautiful and wealthy girl, while I am a poverty-stricken nonentity, without any profession, and able to earn just enough to live on--perhaps I couldn't do even that, if I had to buy my clothes! You are thinking that her father is right to separate us, and that she ought to be protected from me. Isn't that it?"

"Yes," I admitted, "something like that."

"And I answer, Mr. Lester, by saying that all that is true, that I am not worthy of her, and that nobody knows it better than I do. There are thousands of men who could offer her far more than I can, and who would be eager to offer it. But when I asked her to marry me, I thought myself the son of a wealthy man. When I found myself a pauper, I wrote at once to release her. She replied that when she wished her release, she would ask for it; that it wasn't my money she was in love with. Then I came out here and had a talk with her father. He was kind enough, but pointed out that the affair could not go further until I had established myself. I agreed, of course; I agreed, too, when he suggested that it would only be fair to her to leave her free--not to see her or write to her, or try to influence her in any way. I wanted to be fair to her. Since then, I have not seen her, nor heard from her. But her father's feelings have changed toward me."

"In what way?"

"I thought he might be interested to know what I was doing, and two or three months ago, I called and asked to
see him. Instead of seeing me, he sent word by a black-faced fellow in a white robe that neither he nor his daughter wished to see me again."

His face was red with the remembered humiliation.
"I wrote to Miss Vaughan once, after that," he added, "but my letter was not answered."
"Evidently she didn't get your letter."
"Why do you think so?"
"If she had got it, she would have known that you were no longer at 1010 Fifth Avenue. Her father, no doubt, kept it from her."

He flushed still more deeply, and started to say something, but I held him silent.
"He was justified in keeping it," I said. "You had promised not to write to her. And I don't see that you have given me any reason why I should assist you against him.

"I haven't," Swain admitted more calmly, "and under ordinary circumstances, my self-respect would compel me to keep away. I am not a fortune-hunter. But I can't keep away; I can't stand on my dignity. When she calls for aid, I _must_ go to her, not for my own sake but for hers, because she needs to be protected from her father far more than from me."

"What do you mean by that?" I demanded.
"Mr. Lester," he said, leaning forward in his chair and speaking in a lowered voice and with great earnestness, "her father is mad--I am sure of it. No one but a madman would live and dress as he does; no one but a madman would devote his whole time to the study of the supernatural; no one but a madman would believe in the supernatural as he does."

But I shook my head.
"I'm afraid that won't do, Swain. A good many fairly sane people believe in the supernatural and devote themselves to its study--there is William James, for instance."

"But William James doesn't dress in flowing robes, and worship the sun, and live with a Hindu mystic."
"No," I smiled, "he doesn't do that," and I thought again of the mysterious light and of the two white-clad figures. "Does he live with a Hindu mystic?"
"Yes," said Swain, bitterly. "An adept, or whatever they call it. He's the fellow who kicked me out."
"Does he speak English?"
"Better than I do. He seems a finely-educated man."
"Is he a lunatic, too?"
Swain hesitated.
"I don't know," he said, finally. "I only saw him once, and I was certainly impressed--I wasn't one, two, three with him. I suppose mysticism comes more or less natural to a Hindu; but I'm convinced that Mr. Vaughan has softening of the brain."

"How old is he?"
"About sixty."
"Has he always been queer?"
"He has always been interested in telepathy and mental suggestion, and all that sort of thing. But before his wife's death, he was fairly normal. It was her death that started him on this supernatural business. He hasn't thought of anything else since."

"Are there any relatives who could be asked to interfere?"
"None that I know of."
I thought over what he had told me.
"Well," I said at last, "I can see no harm in your meeting Miss Vaughan and finding out what the condition of affairs really is. If her father is really mad, he may be a good deal worse now than he was when you saw him last. It would, of course, be possible to have his sanity tested--but his daughter would scarcely wish to do that."

"No, of course not," Swain agreed.
"Her letter tells you nothing?"
"Nothing except that she is in great trouble, and wishes to see me at once."
"You are to go to the house?"
"No; there is an arbour in one corner of the grounds. She says that she will be there at eleven-thirty every night for three nights. After that, she says it will be no use for me to come--that it will be too late."

"What does she mean by 'too late'?"
"I have no idea," he answered, and turned to another anxious perusal of the letter.

I turned the situation over in my mind. Evidently Miss Vaughan believed that she had grave cause for alarm, and yet it was quite possible she might be mistaken. She was being urged to consent to something against her will, but
perhaps it was for her own good. In any event, I had seen no indication that her consent was being sought by violence. There must be no interference on our part until we were surer of our ground.

"Well, Swain," I said, at last, "I will help you on one condition."

"What is that?"

"You will meet Miss Vaughan to-night and hear her story, but you will take no action until you and I have talked the matter over. She, herself, says that she has three days," I went on, as he started to protest, "so there is no necessity for leaping in the dark. And I would point out to you that she is not yet of age, but is still under her father's control."

"She is nineteen," he protested.

"In this state, the legal age for women, as for men, is twenty-one. The law requires a very serious reason for interfering between a child and its father. Moreover," I added, "she must not be compromised. If you persuade her to accompany you to-night, where would you take her? In no case, will I be a party to an elopement--I will do all I can to prevent it."

He took a short turn up and down the room, his hands clenched behind him.

"Mr. Lester," he said, at last, stopping before me, "I want you to believe that I have not even thought of an elopement--that would be too base, too unfair to her. But I see that you are right. She must not be compromised."

"And you promise to ask my advice?"

"Suppose I make such a promise, what then?"

"If you make such a promise, and I agree with you as to the necessity for Miss Vaughan to leave her father, I think I can arrange for her to stay with Mr. and Mrs. Royce for a time. There she will be safe. Should legal proceedings become necessary, our firm will help you. I want to help you, Swain," I added, warmly, "but I must be convinced that you deserve help. That's reasonable, isn't it?"

"Yes," he agreed, and held out his hand. "And I promise."

"Good. And now for the arrangements."

Two twelve-foot ladders were necessary, one for either side of the wall; but, beyond a short step-ladder, the place possessed none except the long one by which Godfrey and I had mounted into the tree. Swain suggested that this might do for one, but I felt that it would better stay where it was, and sent Hargis over to Yonkers to buy two new ones, instructing him to bring them back with him.

Then Swain and I reconnoitred the wall, and chose for the crossing a spot where the glass escarpment seemed a little less formidable than elsewhere.

"You can step from one ladder to the other," I pointed out, "without touching the top of the wall. A mere touch would be dangerous in the dark."

He nodded his agreement, and finally we went back to the house. Getting there, we found suddenly that we had nothing more to say. Swain was soon deep in his own thoughts; and, I must confess, that, after the first excitement, I began to find the affair a little wearying. Another man's love-affair is usually wearying; and, besides that, the glimpse which I had caught of Marjorie Vaughan made me think that she was worthy of a bigger fish than Swain would ever be. He was right in saying that there were thousands of men who had more to give her, and who would be eager to give.

I examined Swain, as he sat there staring at nothing, with eyes not wholly friendly. He was handsome enough, but in a stereotyped way. And he was only an insignificant clerk, with small prospect of ever being anything much better, for he had started the battle of life too late. Honest, of course, honourable, clean-hearted, but commonplace, with a depth of soul easily fathomed. I know now that I was unjust to Swain, but, at the moment, my scrutiny of him left me strangely depressed.

A rattle of wheels on the drive brought us both out of our thoughts. It was Hargis returning with the ladders. I had him hang them up against the shed where he kept his gardening implements, for I did not wish him to suspect the invasion we had planned; then, just to kill time and get away from Swain, I spent an hour with Hargis in his garden; and finally came the summons to dinner. An hour later, as we sat on the front porch smoking, and still finding little or nothing to say, Mrs. Hargis came out to bid us good-night.

"Mr. Swain can use the bedroom next to yours, Mr. Lester," she said.

"Perhaps he won't stay all night," I said. "If he does, I'll show him the way to it. And thank you very much, Mrs. Hargis."

"Is there anything else I can do, sir?"

"No, thank you."

"Mr. Godfrey will be here a little before midnight--at least, that's his usual time."

"We'll wait up for him," I said. "Good night, Mrs. Hargis."

"Good night, sir," and she went back into the house.
I have never passed through a longer or more trying hour than the next one was, and I could tell by the way Swain twitched about in his chair that he felt the tedium as much as I. Once or twice I tried to start a conversation, but it soon trickled dry; and we ended by smoking away moodily and staring out into the darkness.

At last Swain sprang to his feet.
"I can't stand this any longer," he said. "I'm going over the wall."
I struck a match and looked at my watch.
"It isn't eleven o'clock yet," I warned him.
"I don't care. Perhaps she'll be ahead of time. Anyway, I might as well wait there as here."
"Come on, then," I agreed, for I felt myself that another such hour would be unendurable.

Together we made our way back to the shed and took down the ladders. A moment later, we were at the wall. Swain placed his ladder against it, and mounted quickly to the top. As he paused there, I handed him up the other one. He caught it from my hands, lifted it over the wall, and lowered it carefully on the other side. As he did so, I heard him give a muffled exclamation of mingled pain and annoyance, and knew that he had cut himself.
"Not bad, is it?" I asked.
"No; only a scratch on the wrist," he answered shortly, and the next instant he had swung himself over the wall and disappeared.

CHAPTER VI
THE SCREAM IN THE NIGHT

For some moments, I stood staring up into the darkness, half-expecting that shadowy figure to reappear, descend the ladder, and rejoin me. Then I shook myself together. The fact that our plot was really moving, that Swain was in the enemy's country, so to speak, gave the affair a finality which it had lacked before. It was too late now to hesitate or turn back; we must press forward. I felt as though, after a long period of uncertainty, war had been declared and the advance definitely begun. So it was with a certain sense of relief that I turned away, walked slowly back to the house, and sat down again upon the porch to wait.

Now waiting is seldom a pleasant or an easy thing, and I found it that night most unpleasant and uneasy. For, before long, doubts began to crowd upon me--doubts of the wisdom of the course I had subscribed to. It would have been wiser, I told myself, if it had been I, and not Swain, who had gone to the rendezvous; wiser still, perhaps, to have sought an interview openly, and to have made sure of the facts before seeming to encourage what might easily prove to be a girl's more or less romantic illusions. A midnight interview savoured too much of melodrama to appeal to a middle-aged lawyer like myself, however great its appeal might be to youthful lovers. At any rate, I would be certain that the need was very great before I consented to meddle further!

Somewhat comforted by this resolution and by the thought that no real harm had as yet been done, I struck a match and looked at my watch. It was half-past eleven. Well, whatever the story was, Swain was hearing it now, and I should hear it before long. And then I caught the hum of an approaching car, and was momentarily blinded by the glare of acetylene lamps.
"Hello, Lester," called Godfrey's voice, "I'll be back in a minute," and he ran the car on toward the rear of the house.

I stood up with a gasp of thankfulness. Here was someone to confide in and advise with. The stretch of lonely waiting was at an end; it had been a trying evening!

I think the warmth of my greeting surprised Godfrey, for he looked at me curiously.
"Sit down, Godfrey," I said. "I've got something to tell you."
"What, discoveries already?" he laughed, but he drew a chair close to mine and sat down. "Well, what are they?"

I began at the beginning and related the day's adventures. He listened without comment, but I could see how his interest grew.
"So young Swain is over in those grounds now," he said thoughtfully, when I had finished.
"Yes; he's been there three-quarters of an hour."
"Why do you suppose Miss Vaughan named so late an hour?"
"I don't know. Perhaps because she was afraid of being discovered earlier than that--or perhaps merely because she's just a romantic girl."

Godfrey sat with his head bent in thought for a moment.
"I have it!" he said. "At eleven-thirty every night her father and the adept go up to the roof, to remain there till midnight. That is the one time of the whole day when she is absolutely sure to be alone. Come along, Lester!"

He was on his feet now, and his voice was quivering with excitement.
"Where are you going?" I asked.
"Up the ladder. It's nearly twelve. If the star falls as usual, we'll know that everything is all right. If it doesn't ..."

He did not finish, but hurried away among the trees. In a moment we were at the ladder; in another moment we
were high among the leaves, straining our eyes through the darkness.

"I'm going to look at my watch," said Godfrey, in a low voice. "Lean back and screen me."

I heard the flash of the match and saw a little glare of light against the nearest leaves. Then Godfrey's voice spoke again.

"It's three minutes of twelve," he said.

There was a tension in his voice which sent a shiver through me, though I understood but dimly what it was he feared. The stars were shining brightly, and once I fancied that I saw the strange star appear among them; but when I closed my eyes for an instant and looked again, it was gone. Slow minute followed minute, and the hand with which I clutched the ladder began to tremble. The sight of that mysterious light had shaken me the night before, but not half so deeply as its absence shook me now. At last the suspense grew unendurable.

"It must be long past midnight," I whispered.

"It is," agreed Godfrey gravely; "we may as well go down."

He paused an instant longer to stare out into the darkness, then descended quickly. I followed, and found him waiting, a dark shadow. He put his hand on my arm, and stood a moment, as though in indecision. For myself, I felt as though an intolerable burden had been laid upon my shoulders.

"Well," I asked, at last, "what now?"

"We must see if Swain has returned," he answered. "If he has, all right. If he hasn't, we'll have to go and look for him."

"What is it you fear, Godfrey?" I demanded. "Do you think Swain's in danger?"

"I don't know what I fear; but there's something wrong over there. This is the first night for a week that that light hasn't appeared."

"Still," I pointed out, "that may have nothing to do with Swain."

"No; but it's a coincidence that he should be in the grounds--and I'm always afraid of coincidences. Let us see if he is back," and he turned toward the house.

But I held his arm.

"If he's back," I said, "he'll have taken the ladders down from the wall."

"That's true," and together we made our way forward among the trees. Then we reached the wall, and there was the dim white line of the ladder leaning against it. Without a word, Godfrey mounted it, stood an instant at the top, and then came down again.

"The other ladder is still there," he said, and took off his cap and rubbed his head perplexedly. I could not see his face, but I could guess how tense it was. I had been with him in many trying situations, but only once before had I seen him use that gesture!

"It won't do to alarm the house," he said, at last. "Do you know where he was to meet Miss Vaughan?"

"At an arbour in one corner of the grounds," I answered.

"Then we'll start from there and take a quiet look for him. Wait here for me a minute."

He melted into the darkness, and I stood holding on to the ladder as though in danger of falling, and staring at the top of the wall, where I had last seen Swain. An hour and a half had passed since then....

A touch on the arm brought me around with a start.

"Here, put this pistol in your pocket," said Godfrey's voice, and I felt the weapon pressed into my hand. "And here's an electric torch. Do you feel the button?"

"Yes," I said, and pressed it. A ray of light shot toward the wall, but I released the button instantly.

"You'd better keep it in your hand," he added, "ready for action. No telling what we'll run across. And now come ahead."

He put his foot on the ladder, but I stopped him.

"Look here, Godfrey," I said, "do you realise that what we're about to do is pretty serious? Swain might have a legal excuse, since the daughter of the house invited him to a meeting; but if we go over the wall, we're trespassers pure and simple. Anybody who runs across us in the darkness has the right to shoot us down without asking any questions--and we'd have no legal right to shoot back!"

I could hear Godfrey chuckling, and I felt my cheeks redden.

"You remind me of Tartarin," he said; "the adventurer-Tartarin urging you on, the lawyer-Tartarin holding you back. My advice is to shake the lawyer, Lester. He's out of his element here to-night. But if he's too strong for you, why, stay here," and he started up the ladder.

Burning with vexation, I started after him, but suddenly he stopped.

"Listen!" he whispered.

I heard something rattle against the other side of the wall; then a dark figure appeared on the coping.

I felt Godfrey press me back, and descended cautiously. A moment later, something slid down the wall, and I
knew that the person at the top had lifted the other ladder over. Then the figure descended, and then a distorted face
stared into the circle of Godfrey's torch.

For a breath, I did not recognise it; then I saw that it was Swain's.

I shall never forget the shock it gave me, with its starting eyes and working mouth and smear of blood across the
forehead. Godfrey, I knew, was also startled, for the light flashed out for an instant, and then flashed on again.

"What is it, Swain?" I cried, and seized him by the arm; but he shook me off roughly.

"Stand back!" he cried, hoarsely. "Who is it? What do you want?"

"It's Lester," I said, and Godfrey flashed his torch into my face, then back to Swain's.

"But you're not alone."

"No; this is Mr. Godfrey."

"Mr. Godfrey?"

"Whose house we're staying at," I explained.

"Ah!" said Swain, and put one hand to his head and leaned heavily against the ladder.

"I think we'd better go to the house," Godfrey suggested, soothingly. "We all need a bracer. Then we can talk.
Don't you think so, Mr. Swain?"

Swain nodded vacantly, but I could see that he had not understood. His face was still working and he seemed to
be in pain.

"I want to wash," he said, thickly. "I cut my wrist on that damned glass, and I'm blood all over, and my head's
wrong, somehow." His voice trailed off into an unintelligible mumble, but he held one hand up into the circle of
light, and I saw that his cuff was soaked with blood and his hand streaked with it.

"Come along, then," said Godfrey peremptorily. "You're right--that cut must be attended to," and he started
toward the house.

"Wait!" Swain called after him, with unexpected vigour. "We must take down the ladders. We mustn't leave
them here."

"Why not?"

"If they're found, they'll suspect--they'll know ..." He stopped, stammering, and again his voice trailed away into
a mumble, as though beyond his control.

Godfrey looked at him for a moment, and I could guess at the surprise and suspicion in his eyes. I myself was ill
at ease, for there was something in Swain's face--a sort of vacant horror and dumb shrinking--that filled me with a
vague repulsion. And then to see his jaw working, as he tried to form articulate words and could not, sent a shiver
over my scalp.

"Very well," Godfrey agreed, at last. "We'll take the ladders, since you think it so important. You take that one,
Lester, and I'll take this."

I stooped to raise the ladder to my shoulder, when suddenly, cutting the darkness like a knife, came a scream so
piercing, so vibrant with fear, that I stood there crouching, every muscle rigid. Again the scream came, more
poignant, more terrible, wrung from a woman's throat by the last extremity of horror; and then a silence sickening
and awful. What was happening in that silence?

I stood erect, gaping, suffocated, rising as from a long submersion. Godfrey's finger had slipped from the button
of his torch, and we were in darkness; but suddenly a dim figure hurled itself past us, up the ladder.

With a low cry, Godfrey snatched at it, but his hand clutched only the empty air. The next instant, the figure
poised itself on the coping of the wall and then plunged forward out of sight. I heard the crash of breaking branches,
a scramble, a patter of feet, and all was still.

"It's Swain!" said Godfrey, hoarsely; "and that's a twelve-foot drop! Why, the man's mad! Hand me that ladder,
Lester!" he added, for he was already at the top of the wall.

I lifted it, as I had done once before that night, and saw Godfrey slide it over the wall.

"Come on!" he said. "We must save him if we can!" and he, too, disappeared.

The next instant, I was scrambling desperately after him. The lawyer-Tartarin had vanished!

CHAPTER VII

THE TRAGEDY

The wall was masked on the other side by a dense growth of shrubbery, and struggling through this, I found
myself on the gravelled path where I had seen Marjorie Vaughan. Before me, along this path, sped a shadow which I
knew to be Godfrey, and I followed at top speed. At the end of a moment, I caught a flash of light among the trees,
and knew that we were nearing the house; but I saw no sign of Swain.

We came to the stretch of open lawn, crossed it, and, guided by the light, found ourselves at the end of a short
avenue of trees. At the other end, a stream of light poured from an open door, and against that light a running figure
was silhouetted. Even as I saw it, it bounded through the open door and vanished.
"It's Swain!" gasped Godfrey; and then we, too, were at that open door. For an instant, I thought the room was empty. Then, from behind the table in the centre, a demoniac, blood-stained figure rose into view, holding in its arms a white-robed woman. With a sort of nervous shock, I saw that the man was Swain, and the woman Marjorie Vaughan. A thrill of fear ran through me as I saw how her head fell backwards against his shoulder, how her arms hung limp....

Without so much as a glance in our direction, he laid her gently on a couch, fell to his knees beside it, and began to chafe her wrists.

It was Godfrey who mastered himself first, and who stepped forward to Swain's side.

"Is she dead?" he asked.

Swain shook his head impatiently, without looking up.

"How is she hurt?" Godfrey persisted, bending closer above the unconscious girl.

Swain shot him one red glance.

"She's not hurt!" he said, hoarsely. "She has fainted—that's all. Go away."

But Godfrey did not go away. After one burning look at Swain's lowering face, he bent again above the still figure on the couch, and touched his fingers to the temples. What he saw or felt seemed to reassure him, for his voice was more composed when he spoke again.

"I think you're right, Swain," he said. "But we'd better call someone."

"Call away!" snarled Swain.

"You mean there's no one here? Surely, her father ..."

He stopped, for at the words Swain had burst into a hoarse laugh.

"Her father!" he cried. "Oh, yes; he's here! Call him! He's over there!"

He made a wild gesture toward a high-backed easy-chair beside the table, his eyes gleaming with an almost fiendish excitement; then the gleam faded, and he turned back to the girl.

Godfrey cast one astonished glance at him and strode to the chair. I saw his face quiver with sudden horror, I saw him catch at the table for support, and for an instant he stood staring down. Then he turned stiffly toward me and motioned me to approach.

In the chair a man sat huddled forward—a grey-haired man, clad in a white robe. His hands were gripping the chair-arms as though in agony. His head hung down almost upon his knees.

Silently Godfrey reached down and raised the head. And a cry of horror burst from both of us.

The face was purple with congested blood, the tongue swollen and horribly protruding, the eyes suffused and starting from their sockets. And then, at a motion from Godfrey's finger, I saw that about the neck a cord was tightly knotted. The man had been strangled.

Godfrey, after a breathless moment in which he made sure that the man was quite dead, let the head fall forward again. It turned me sick to see how low it sagged, how limp it hung. And I saw that the collar of the white robe was spotted with blood.

I do not know what was in Godfrey's mind, but, by a common impulse, we turned and looked at Swain. He was still on his knees beside the couch. Apparently he had forgotten our presence.

"It's plain enough," said Godfrey, his voice thick with emotion. "She came in and found the body. No wonder she screamed like that! But where are the servants? Where is everybody?"

The same thought was in my own mind. The utter silence of the house, the fact that no one came, added, somehow, to the horror of the moment. Those wild screams must have echoed from cellar to garret—and yet no one came!

Godfrey made a rapid scrutiny of the room, which was evidently the library, with a double door opening upon the grounds and another opposite opening into the hall. On the wall beside the inner door, he found an electric button, and he pushed it for some moments, but there was no response. If it rang a bell, the bell was so far away that we could not hear it.

A heavy curtain hung across the doorway. Godfrey pulled it aside and peered into the hall beyond. The hall was dark and silent. With face decidedly grim, he took his torch from one pocket and his pistol from another.

"Come along, Lester," he said. "We've got to look into this. Have your torch ready—and your pistol. God knows what further horrors this house contains!"

He pulled back the curtain, so that the hall was lighted to some extent from the open doorway, and then passed through, I after him. The hall was a broad one, running right through the centre of the house from front to rear. Godfrey proceeded cautiously and yet rapidly the whole length of it, flashing his torch into every room. They were all luxuriously furnished, but were empty of human occupants. From the kitchen, which closed the hall at the rear, a flight of stone steps led down into the basement, and Godfrey descended these with a steadiness I could not but admire. We found ourselves in a square, stone-flagged room, evidently used as a laundry. Two doors opened out of
it, but both were secured with heavy padlocks.

"Store-rooms or wine-cellar, perhaps," Godfrey ventured, mounted the stairs again to the kitchen, and returned
to the room whence we had started.

Everything there was as we had left it. The dead man sat huddled forward in his chair; Swain was still on his
knees beside the couch; the girl had not stirred. Godfrey went to the side of the couch, and, disregarding Swain's
fierce glance, again placed his fingers lightly on the girl's left temple. Then he came back to me.

"If she doesn't revive pretty soon," he said, "we'll have to try heroic measures. But there must be somebody in
the house. Let's look upstairs."

He led the way up the broad stairs, which rose midway of the hall, sending a long ray of light ahead of him. I
followed in no very happy frame of mind, for I confess that this midnight exploration of an unknown house, with a
murdered man for its only occupant, was getting on my nerves. But Godfrey proceeded calmly and systematically.

The hall above corresponded to that below, with two doors on each side, opening into bedroom suites. The first
was probably that of the master of the house. It consisted of bedroom, bath and dressing-room, but there was no one
there. The next was evidently Miss Vaughan's. It also had a bath and a daintily-furnished boudoir; but these, too,
were empty.

Then, as we opened the door across the hall, a strange odour saluted us--an odour suggestive somehow of the
East--which, in the first moment, caught the breath from the throat, and in the second seemed to muffle and retard
the beating of the heart.

A flash of Godfrey's torch showed that we were in a little entry, closed at the farther end by a heavy drapery.
Godfrey strode forward and swept the drapery aside. The rush of perfume was overpowering, and through the
opening came a soft glow of light.

It was a moment before I got my breath; then a mist seemed to fall from before my eyes and a strange sense of
exaltation and well-being stole through me. I saw Godfrey standing motionless, transfixed, with one hand holding
back the drapery, and his torch hanging unused in the other, and I crept forward and peered over his shoulder at the
strangest scene I have ever gazed upon.

Just in front of us, poised in the air some three feet from the floor, hung a sphere of crystal, glowing with a soft
radiance which seemed to wax and wane, to quiver almost to darkness and then to burn more clearly. It was like a
dreamer's pulse, fluttering, pausing, leaping, in accord with his vision. And as I gazed at the sphere, I fancied I
could see within it strange, elusive shapes, which changed and merged and faded from moment to moment, and yet grew
always clearer and more suggestive. I bent forward, straining my eyes to see them better, to fathom their meaning ...

Godfrey, turning to speak to me, saw my attitude and shook me roughly by the arm.

"Don't do that, Lester!" he growled in my ear. "Take your eyes off that crystal!"

I tried to move my eyes, but could not, until Godfrey pulled me around to face him. I stood blinking at him
stupidly.

"I was nearly gone, myself, before I realised the danger," he said. "A sphere like that can hypnotise a man more
quickly than anything else on earth, especially when his resistance is lessened, as it is by this heavy perfume."

"It was rather pleasant," I said. "I should like to try it some time."

"Well, you can't try it now. You've got something else to do. Besides, it has two victims already."

"Two victims?"

"Look carefully, but keep your eyes off the sphere," he said, and swung me around toward the room again.

The room was shrouded in impenetrable darkness, except for the faint and quivering radiance which the sphere
emitted, and as I plunged my eyes into its depths in an effort to see what lay there, it seemed to me that I had never
seen blackness so black. As I stared into it, with straining eyes, a vague form grew dimly visible beside the glowing
sphere; and then I recoiled a little, for suddenly it took shape and I saw it was a man.

I had a queer fancy, as I stood there, that it was really a picture into which I was gazing--one of Rembrandt's--
for, gradually, one detail after another emerged from the darkness, vague shadows took on shape and meaning, but
farther back there was always more shadow, and farther back still more ...

The man was sitting cross-legged on a low divan, his hands crossed in front of him and hanging limply between
his knees. His clothing I could see but vaguely, for it was merged into the darkness about him, but his hands stood
out white against it. He was staring straight at the crystal, with unwavering and unwinking gaze, and sat as
motionless as though carved in stone. The glow from the sphere picked out his profile with a line of light--I could
see the high forehead, the strong, curved nose, the full lips shaded by a faint moustache, and the long chin, only
partially concealed by a close-clipped beard. It was a wonderful and compelling face, especially as I then saw it, and
I gazed at it for a long moment.

"It's the adept, I suppose," said Godfrey, no longer taking care to lower his voice.

It sounded unnaturally loud in the absolute stillness of the room, and I looked at the adept quickly, but he had not
"Can't he hear you?" I asked.

"No--he couldn't hear a clap of thunder. That is, unless he's faking."

I looked again at the impassive figure.

"He's not faking," I said.

"I don't know," and Godfrey shook his head sceptically. "It looks like the real thing--but these fellows are mighty clever. Do you see the other victim? There's no fake about it!"

"I see no one else," I said, after a vain scrutiny.

"Look carefully on the other side of the sphere. Don't you see something there?"

My eyes were smarting under the strain, and for a moment longer I saw nothing; then a strange, grey shape detached itself from the blackness. It was an ugly and repulsive shape, slender below, but swelling hideously at the top, and as I stared at it, it seemed to me that it returned my stare with malignant eyes screened by a pair of white-rimmed glasses. Then, with a sensation of dizziness, I saw that the shape was swaying gently back and forth, in a sort of rhythm. And then, quite suddenly, I saw what it was, and a chill of horror quivered up my back.

It was a cobra.

To and fro it swung, to and fro, its staring eyes fixed upon the sphere, its spectacled hood hideously distended.

The very soul within me trembled as I gazed at those unwinking eyes. What did they see in the sphere? What was passing in that inscrutable brain? Could it, too, reconstruct the past, read the mysteries of the future...

Some awful power, greater than my will, seemed stretching its tentacles from the darkness: I felt them dragging at me, certain, remorseless, growing stronger and stronger...

With something very like a shriek of terror, I tore myself away, out of the entry, into the hall, to the stairs, and down them into the lighted room below.

And as I stood there, gasping for breath, Godfrey followed me, and I saw that his face, too, was livid.

CHAPTER VIII

A FRESH ENIGMA

Godfrey met my eyes with a little deprecating smile, put his torch in one pocket, took a handkerchief from another, and mopped his forehead.

"Rather nerve-racking, wasn't it, Lester?" he remarked, and then his gaze wandered to the couch, and he stepped toward it quickly.

I saw that a change had come in Miss Vaughan's condition. Her eyes were still closed, but her body no longer lay inert and lifeless, for from moment to moment it was shaken by a severe nervous tremor. Godfrey's face was very grave as he looked at her.

"Stop stroking her wrists, Swain," he said; "that does no good," and when Swain, without answering or seeming to hear, kept on stroking them, Godfrey drew the hands away, took Swain by the arm, and half-lifted him to his feet.

"Listen to me," he said, more sternly, and shook him a little, for Swain's eyes were dull and vacant. "I want you to sit quietly in a chair for a while, till you get your senses back. Miss Vaughan is seriously ill and must not be disturbed in any way. I'm going to get a doctor and a nurse at once; they'll do what needs to be done. Until then, she must be left alone. Understand?"

Swain nodded vaguely, and permitted Godfrey to lead him to a chair near the outer door, where he sat down. As his hand fell across the arm of the chair, I could see that a little blood was still oozing from the wound on the wrist. Godfrey saw it, too, and picked up the hand and looked at it. Then he laid it gently down again and glanced at his watch. I followed his example, and saw that it was half-past one.

"Have you nerve enough to stay here half an hour by yourself, Lester?" he asked.

"By myself?" I echoed, and glanced at the dead man and at the quivering girl.

"I've got to run over to my place to get a few things and do some telephoning," he explained. "We must get a doctor up here at once; and then there's the police--I'll try to get Simmonds. Will you stay?"

"Yes," I said, "of course. But please get back as soon as you can."

"I will," he promised, and, after a last look around the room, stepped out upon the walk.

I went to the door and looked after him until the sound of his footsteps died away. Then, feeling very lonely, I turned back into the room. Those regular tremors were still shaking the girl's body in a way that seemed to me most alarming, but there was nothing I could do for her, and I finally pulled a chair to Swain's side. He, at least, offered a sort of companionship. He was sitting with his head hanging forward in a way that reminded me most unpleasantly of the huddled figure by the table, and did not seem to be aware of my presence. I tried to draw him into talk, but a slight nod from time to time was all I could get from him, and I finally gave it up. Mechanically, my hand sought my coat pocket and got out my pipe--yes, that was what I needed; and, sitting down in the open doorway, I filled it and lighted up.
My nerves grew calmer, presently, and I was able to think connectedly of the events of the night, but there were two things which, looked at from any angle, I could not understand. One was Swain's dazed and incoherent manner; the other was the absence of servants.

As to Swain, I believed him to be a well-poised fellow, not easily upset, and certainly not subject to attacks of nerves. What had happened to him, then, to reduce him to the pitiable condition in which he had come back to us over the wall, and in which he was still plunged? The discovery of the murder and of Miss Vaughan's senseless body might have accounted for it, but his incoherence had antedated that--unless, indeed, he knew of the murder before he left the grounds. That thought gave me a sudden shock, and I put it away from me, not daring to pursue it farther.

As to the house, its deserted condition seemed sinister and threatening. It was absurd to suppose that an establishment such as this could be carried on without servants, or with less than three or four. But where were they? And then I remembered that Godfrey and I had not completed our exploration of the house. We had stopped at the gruesome room where the adept and his serpent gazed unwinking into the crystal sphere. There was at least one suite on the same floor we had not looked into, and no doubt there were other rooms on the attic floor above. But that any one could have slept on undisturbed by those piercing screams and by our own comings and goings seemed unbelievable. Perhaps there were separate quarters in the grounds somewhere--

And then, without conscious will of my own, I felt my body stiffen and my fingers grip my pipe convulsively. A slow tremor seemed to start from the end of my spine, travel up it, and pass off across my scalp. There was someone in the room behind me; someone with gleaming eyes fixed upon me; and I sat there rigidly, straining my ears, expecting I knew not what--a blow upon the head, a cord about the neck.

A rapid step came up the walk and Godfrey appeared suddenly out of the darkness.

"Well, Lester," he began; but I sprang to my feet and faced the room, for I could have sworn that I had heard behind me the rustle of a silken dress. But there was no one there except Swain and Miss Vaughan and the dead man--and none of them had moved.

"What is it?" Godfrey asked, stepping past me into the room.

"There was someone there, Godfrey," I said. "I'm sure of it--I felt someone--I felt his eyes on me--and then, as you spoke, I heard the rustle of a dress."

"Of a dress?"
"Or of a robe," and my thoughts were on the bearded man upstairs.

Godfrey glanced at me, crossed the room, and looked out into the hall. Then he turned back to me.

"Well, whoever it was," he said, and I could see that he thought my ears had deceived me, "he has made good his escape. There'll be a doctor and a nurse here in a few minutes, and I got Simmonds and told him to bring Goldberger along. He can't get here for an hour anyway. And I've got a change here for Swain," he added, with a gesture toward some garments he carried over one arm; "also a bracer to be administered to him," and he drew a flask from his pocket and handed it to me. "Maybe you need one, yourself," he added, smiling drily, "since you've taken to hearing rustling robes."

"I do," I said, "though not on that account," and I raised the flask to my lips and took a long swallow.

"Suppose you take Swain up to the bath-room," Godfrey suggested, "and help him to get cleaned up. I'll go down to the gate and wait for the doctor."

"The gate's probably locked."

"I thought of that," and he drew a small but heavy hammer from his pocket. "I'll smash the lock, if there's no other way. I'd like you to get Swain into shape before anyone arrives," he added. "He's not a prepossessing object as he is."

"No, he isn't," I agreed, looking at him, and I took the garments which Godfrey held out to me. Then I went over to Swain and put the flask into his uninjured hand. "Take a drink of that," I said.

He did not understand at first; then he put the flask to his lips and drank eagerly--so eagerly that I had to draw it away. He watched me longingly as I screwed on the cap and slipped it into my pocket; and there was more colour in his face and a brighter light in his eyes.

"Now, come along," I said, "and get that cut fixed up."

He rose obediently and followed me out into the hall. Godfrey had preceded us, found the light-switch after a brief search, and turned it on.

"There's a switch in the bath-room, too, no doubt," he said. "Bring him down again, as soon as you get him fixed up. You'll find some cotton and gauze in one of the pockets of the coat."

Swain followed me up the stair and into the bath-room. He seemed to understand what I intended doing, for he divested himself of coat and shirt and was soon washing arms and face vigorously. Then he dried himself, and stood patiently while I washed and bandaged the cut on the wrist. It was not a deep one, and had about stopped bleeding.

"Feel better?" I asked.
"Yes," he said, and without waiting for me to tell him, slipped into the clean shirt which Godfrey had brought, attached the collar and tied the tie, all this quite composedly and without hesitation or clumsiness. Yet I felt, in some indefinable way, that something was seriously wrong with him. His eyes were vacant and his face flabby, as though the muscles were relaxed. It gave me the feeling that his intelligence was relaxed, too!

He picked up his own coat, but I stopped him.

"Don't put that on," I said, speaking to him as I would have spoken to a child. "The sleeve is blood-stained and there's a long tear down the side. Take this one," and I held out the light lounging-coat Godfrey had brought with him.

Swain laid down his own garment without a word and put on the other one. I rolled the soiled garments into a bundle, took them under my arm, turned out the lights, and led the way downstairs.

A murmur of voices from the library told me that someone had arrived, and when I reached the door, I saw that it was the doctor and the nurse. The former was just rising from a rapid examination of the quivering figure on the couch.

"We must get her to bed at once," he said, turning to Godfrey. "Her bedroom's upstairs, I suppose?"

"Yes," said Godfrey; "shall I show you the way?"

The doctor nodded and, lifting the girl carefully in his arms, followed Godfrey out into the hall. The nurse picked up a medicine-case from the floor and followed after.

I had expected Swain to rush forward to the couch, to make a scene, perhaps, and had kept my hand upon his arm; but to my astonishment he did not so much as glance in that direction. He stood patiently beside me, with his eyes on the floor, and when my restraining hand fell away, he walked slowly to the chair in which he had been sitting, and dropped into it, relaxing limply as with fatigue.

Godfrey was back in a moment.

"That doctor was the nearest one I could find," he said. "He seems to be all right. But if Miss Vaughan isn't better in the morning, I'll get a specialist out."

"Godfrey," I said, in a low tone, "there's something the matter with Swain," and I motioned to where he sat, flaccid and limp, apparently half-asleep. "He is suffering from shock, or something of that sort. It's something more, anyway, than over-wrought nerves. He seems to be only half-conscious."

"I noticed it," said Godfrey, with a little nod. "We'll have the doctor look at him when he comes down," and he sank wearily into a chair. "This has been a pretty strenuous night, Lester."

"Yes; and it isn't over yet. I wonder what the man with the snake is doing?"

"Still staring into the crystal, no doubt. Do you want to go and see?"

"No," I said decidedly, "I don't. Godfrey," I added, "doesn't the absence of servants seem strange to you?"

"Very strange. But, I dare say, we'll find them around somewhere--though they seem to be sound sleepers! We didn't look through the whole house, you know. I'm not going to, either; I'm going to let the police do that. They ought to be here pretty soon. I told Simmonds to bring two or three men with him."

I glanced at the huddled body of the murdered man. With all the night's excitements and surprises, we had not even touched upon that mystery. Not a single gleam of light had been shed upon it, and yet it was the centre about which all these other strange occurrences revolved. Whose hand was it had thrown that cord about the throat and drawn it tight? What motive lay behind? Fearsome and compelling must the motive be to drive a man to such a crime! Would Simmonds be able to divine that motive, to build the case up bit by bit until the murderer was found? Would Godfrey?

I turned my head to look at him. He was lying back in his chair, his eyes closed, apparently lost in thought, and for long minutes there was no movement in the room.

At last the doctor returned, looking more cheerful than when he had left the room. He had given Miss Vaughan an opiate and she was sleeping calmly; the nervous trembling had subsided and he hoped that when she waked she would be much better. The danger was that brain fever might develop; she had evidently suffered a very severe shock.

"Yes," said Godfrey, "she discovered her father strangled in the chair yonder."

"I saw the body when I came in," the doctor remarked, imperturbably. "So it's her father, is it?"

"Yes."

"And strangled, you say?"

Godfrey answered with a gesture, and the doctor walked over to the body, glanced at the neck, then disengaged one of the tightly clenched hands from the chair-arm, raised it and let it fall. I could not but envy his admirable self-control.

"How long has he been dead?" Godfrey asked.

"Not more than two or three hours," the doctor answered. "The muscles are just beginning to stiffen. It looks like
murder," he added, and touched the cord about the neck.

"It _is_ murder."

"You've notified the police?"

"They will be here soon."

I saw the doctor glance at Godfrey and then at me, plainly puzzled as to our footing in the house; but if there was a question in his mind, he kept it from his lips and turned back again to the huddled body.

"Any clue to the murderer?" he asked, at last.

"We have found none."

And then the doctor stooped suddenly and picked up something from the floor beside the chair.

"Perhaps this is a clue," he said, quietly, and held to the light an object which, as I sprang to my feet, I saw to be a blood-stained handkerchief.

He spread it out under our eyes, handling it gingerly, for it was still damp, and we saw it was a small handkerchief--a woman's handkerchief--of delicate texture. It was fairly soaked with blood, and yet in a peculiar manner, for two of the corners were much crumpled but quite unstained.

The doctor raised his eyes to Godfrey's.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"A clue, certainly," said Godfrey; "but scarcely to the murderer."

The doctor looked at it again for a moment, and then nodded. "I'd better put it back where I found it, I guess," he said, and dropped it beside the chair.

And then, suddenly, I remembered Swain. I turned to find him still drooping forward in his chair, apparently half-asleep.

"Doctor," I said, "there is someone else here who is suffering from shock," and I motioned toward the limp figure. "Or perhaps it's something worse than that."

The doctor stepped quickly to the chair and looked down at its occupant. Then he put his hand under Swain's chin, raised his head and gazed intently into his eyes. Swain returned the gaze, but plainly in only a half-conscious way.

"It looks like a case of concussion," said the doctor, after a moment. "The left pupil is enlarged," and he ran his hand rapidly over the right side of Swain's head. "I thought so," he added. "There's a considerable swelling. We must get him to bed." Then he noticed the bandaged wrist. "What's the matter here?" he asked, touching it with his finger.

"He cut himself on a piece of glass," Godfrey explained. "You'd better take him over to my place, where he can be quiet."

"I've got my car outside," said the doctor, and together he and I raised Swain from the chair and led him to it.

He went docilely and without objection, and ten minutes later, was safely in bed, already dozing off under the influence of the opiate the doctor had given him. "He'll be all right in the morning," the latter assured me. "But he must have got quite a blow over the head."

"I don't know what happened to him," I answered. "You'll come back with me, won't you?"

"Yes; I may be useful," and he turned the car back the way we had come. "Besides," he added, frankly, "I'm curious to learn what happened in that house to-night."

He had certainly shown himself equal to emergencies, I reflected; and I liked his voice and his manner, which was cool and capable.

"My name is Lester," I said. "I'm a lawyer staying with Mr. Godfrey. We heard Miss Vaughan scream and ran over to the house, but we don't know any more than you do."

"My name is Hinman, and I'm just a country doctor," said my companion; "but if I can be of any help, I hope you'll call upon me. Hello!" he added, as we turned through the gate into the grounds of Elmhurst, and he threw on the brake sharply, for a uniformed figure had stepped out into the glare of our lamps and held up his hand.

The police had arrived.

CHAPTER IX
FIRST STEPS

We found a little group of men gathered about the chair in which sat the huddled body. Two of them I already knew. One was Detective-sergeant Simmonds, and the other Coroner Goldberger, both of whom I had met in previous cases. Simmonds was a stolid, unimaginative, but industrious and efficient officer, with whom Godfrey had long ago concluded an alliance offensive and defensive. In other words, Godfrey threw what glory he could to Simmonds, and Simmonds such stories as he could to Godfrey, and so the arrangement was to their mutual advantage.

Goldberger was a more astute man than the detective, in that he possessed a strain of Semitic imagination, a quick wit, and a fair degree of insight. He was in his glory in a case like this. This was shown now by his gleaming
eyes and the trembling hand which pulled nervously at his short, black moustache. Goldberger’s moustache was a
good index to his mental state—the more ragged it grew, the more baffling he found the case in hand!

Both he and Simmonds glanced up at our entrance and nodded briefly. Then their eyes went back to that huddled
figure.

There were three other men present whom I did not know, but I judged them to be the plain-clothes-men whom
Simmonds had brought along at Godfrey’s suggestion. They stood a little to one side until their superiors had
completed the examination.

“I didn’t stop to pick up my physician,” Goldberger was saying. “But the cause of death is plain enough.”

“Doctor Hinman here is a physician,” I said, bringing him forward. “If he can be of any service....”

Goldberger glanced at him, and was plainly favorably impressed by Hinman’s dark, eager face, and air of
intelligence and self-control.

“I shall be very glad of Dr. Hinman’s help,” said Goldberger, shaking hands with him. “Have you examined the
body, sir?”

“Only very casually,” answered Hinman. “But it is evident that the cause of death was strangulation.”

“How long has he been dead?”

Hinman lifted the stiff hand again and ran his fingers along the muscles of the arm.

“About four hours, I should say.”

Goldberger glanced at his watch.

“That would put his death at a little before midnight. The murderer must have come in from the grounds, crept
up behind his victim, thrown the cord about his neck and drawn it tight before his presence was suspected. The
victim would hardly have remained seated in the chair if he had known his danger. After the cord was round his
throat, he had no chance—he could not even cry out. There’s one thing I don’t understand, though,” he added, after a
moment. “Where did that blood come from?” and he pointed to the dark spots on the collar of the white robe.

Hinman looked up with a little exclamation.

“I forgot,” he said. “Did you find the handkerchief? No, I see you didn’t,” and he pointed to where it lay on the
floor. “I noticed it when I first looked at the body.”

Without a word, Goldberger bent and picked up the blood-stained handkerchief. Then he and Simmonds
examined it minutely. Finally the coroner looked at Godfrey, and his eyes were very bright.

“There can be only one inference,” he said. “The dead man is not bleeding—the cord did not cut the flesh. The
blood, then, must have come from the murderer. He must have been injured in some way—bleeding profusely. Look
at this handkerchief—it is fairly soaked.”

I am sure that, at that instant, the same thought was in Godfrey’s mind which flashed through mine, for our eyes
met, and there was a shadow in his which I knew my own reflected. Then I glanced at Hinman. He was looking at
the handkerchief thoughtfully, his lips tightly closed. I could guess what he was thinking, but he said nothing.

Goldberger laid the handkerchief on the table, at last, and turned back to the body. He bent close above it,
examining the blood spots, and when he stood erect again there was in his face a strange excitement.

“Lend me your glass, Simmonds,” he said, and when Simmonds handed him a small pocket magnifying-glass, he
unfolded it and bent above the stains again, scrutinising each in turn. At last he closed the glass with an emphatic
little snap. “This case isn’t going to be so difficult, after all,” he said. “Those spots are finger-prints.”

With an exclamation of astonishment, Simmonds took the glass and examined the stains; then he handed it to
Godfrey, who finally passed it on to me. Looking through it, I saw that Goldberger was right. The stains had been
made by human fingers. Most of them were mere smudges, but here and there was one on which faint lines could be
dimly traced.

“They seem to be pretty vague,” I remarked, passing the glass on to Hinman.

“They’re plenty clear enough for our purpose,” said Goldberger; “besides they will come out much clearer in
photographs. It’s lucky this stuff is so smooth and closely-woven,” he added, fingering a corner of the robe, “or we
wouldn’t have got even those. It’s as hard and fine as silk.”

“How do you suppose those marks came there, Mr. Goldberger?” Godfrey asked, and there was in his tone a
polite scepticism which evidently annoyed the coroner.

“Why, there’s only one way they could come there,” Goldberger answered impatiently. “They were put there by
the murderer’s fingers as he drew the cord tight. Do you see anything improbable in that?”

“Only that it seems too good to be true,” Godfrey answered, quietly, and Goldberger, after looking at him a
moment, turned away with a shrug of the shoulders.

“See if you can get the cord loose, Simmonds,” he said.

The cord was in the form of a running noose, which had been knotted to hold it in place after being drawn tight.
Although it had not cut the flesh of the neck, it had sunk deeply into it, and Simmonds worked at the knot for some
moments without result. I suspect his fingers were not quite as steady as they might have been; but it was evidently an intricate knot.

"That's a new one on me," he said, at last. "I can't get it loose."

Godfrey bent close above it and looked at it.

"It _is_ a peculiar knot," he agreed. "If you'll permit a suggestion, Mr. Goldberger, you'll cut the cord and leave the knot as it is. It may help us to find the man who made it."

"You're right," agreed Goldberger, promptly. "Cut the cord, Simmonds."

Simmonds got out his pocket-knife, opened it and slipped the blade under the cord, cut it, and pulled it out of the ridge of flesh. He looked at it a moment, and then handed it to Goldberger. The latter examined it carefully.

"It's stained with blood, too," he remarked, and passed it on to Godfrey.

"It looks like curtain-cord," Godfrey said, and made a little tour of the room. "Ah!" he added, after a moment, from the door opening into the grounds. "See here!"

He was holding up the end of the cord by which the curtains covering the upper part of the double doors were controlled.

"You were right, Mr. Coroner," he said, "in thinking that the murderer entered by this door, for he stopped here and cut off a piece of this cord before going on into the room."

"Then he must also have stopped to make it into a noose," remarked Goldberger. "If he did that, he was certainly a cool customer. It's a wonder his victim didn't hear the noise he made."

"Making a knot isn't a noisy operation," Godfrey pointed out; "besides, the back of the chair was toward the door. And then, of course, it's possible his victim _did_ hear him."

"But then he would have jumped from the chair," objected Simmonds.

"Not necessarily. Suppose you were sitting there, and heard a noise, and looked around and saw me standing here, you wouldn't jump from the chair, would you?"

"No; I'd have no reason to jump from you."

"Perhaps Vaughan thought he had no reason to jump from the man _he_ saw—if he saw anyone. I'm inclined to think, however, that he didn't suspect anyone else was in the room until he felt the cord about his throat."

"And, of course," said Goldberger, taking the cord again and looking at it, "it was while the murderer was making it into a noose with his blood-stained fingers that he stained it in that way. Don't you agree, Mr. Godfrey?"

"That is a possible explanation," Godfrey conceded.

"But why did he make this second knot?" inquired the coroner; "the knot which holds the noose tight and prevents it from slipping?"

"If he hadn't knotted it like that he would have had to stand there holding it until his victim was dead. As it was, he didn't have to wait."

I shivered a little at the thought of the scoundrel calmly tying the knot to secure his noose, and then leaving his victim to twitch his life out.

"It's no little trick to tie a knot like that," Godfrey added, thoughtfully. "I should like to study it."

"All right," agreed Goldberger; "you can have it whenever you want it," and he got a heavy manila envelope out of his pocket and placed the cord carefully inside. "Now we must get that robe off. We can't run any risk of having those finger-prints smeared."

It was a difficult job and a revolting one, for the body had stiffened into its huddled posture, but at last the robe was removed and the body itself lying at full length on its back on the couch. Seen thus, with the light full on it, the face was horrible, and Goldberger laid his handkerchief over the swollen and distorted features, while, at a sign from him, Simmonds pulled down the portiere from the inner door and placed it over the body. Then the coroner picked up the robe and held it out at arms' length.

"What kind of a freak dress is this, anyway?" he asked.

"It's a robe," said Godfrey. "Mr. Vaughan was a mystic."

"A what?"

"A mystic—A believer in Hinduism or some other Oriental religion."

"Did he dress this way all the time?"

"I believe so. It is probably the dress of his order."

Goldberger rolled the robe up carefully, and said nothing more; but I could see from his expression that he had ceased to wonder why Vaughan had come to a strange and violent end. Surely anything might happen to a mystic! Then he placed the blood-stained handkerchief in another envelope, and finally put his hand in his pocket and brought out half a dozen cigars.

"Now," he said, "let's sit down and rest awhile. Simmonds tells me it was you who called him, Mr. Godfrey. How did you happen to discover the crime?"
The question was asked carelessly, but I could feel the alert mind behind it. I knew that Godfrey felt it, too, from the way in which he told the story, for he told it carefully, and yet with an air of keeping nothing back.

Of the mysterious light he said nothing, but, starting with my finding of the letter and summoning Swain to receive it, told of the arrangements for the rendezvous, dwelling upon it lightly, as a love-affair which could have no connection with the tragedy. He passed on to his own arrival from the city, to Swain's return from the rendezvous, and finally to the screams which had reached us, and to the discovery we had made when we burst into the house.

"I summoned Dr. Hinman immediately," he added, "for Miss Vaughan seemed to be in a serious condition; then I called Simmonds, and suggested that he stop for you, Mr. Coroner, for I knew that the case would interest you. Dr. Hinman arrived perhaps half an hour ahead of you, and had Miss Vaughan put to bed at once. And I guess you know the rest," he concluded.

We had all listened intently. I was pretty sure that Simmonds would make no inferences which Godfrey wished to avoid; but I feared the more penetrating mind of the coroner. His first question proved that I was right to do so.

"Where is this man Swain?" he asked.

"He was suffering from the shock," said Godfrey, "and Lester and Dr. Hinman took him over to my place and put him to bed. That's where they were when you got here."

"He seemed to be suffering from a slight concussion," Hinman explained. "There was a swelling on one side of his head, as though some one had struck him, and the pupils of his eyes were unsymmetrical. He had also a cut on the wrist," he added, after an instant's hesitation.

"Ah!" commented Goldberger, with a glance at Godfrey. "Had it been bleeding?"

"He cut himself when crossing the wall," Godfrey explained; "a mere scratch, but I believe it did bleed a good deal."

"Ah!" said Goldberger again; and then he turned to the doctor. "Did I understand you to say that he went to sleep?"

"He certainly did. I gave him a good strong opiate to make sure of it."

"Do you think he'll sleep till morning?"

"He'll sleep nine or ten hours, at least."

"Then that's all right," said Goldberger, and settled back in his chair again. "But didn't anybody live in this house except that old man and his daughter? Aren't there any servants?"

"There must be some somewhere about," answered Godfrey, to whom the question was addressed; "but Lester and I looked through the lower floor and part of the upper one and didn't find any. There's a bell there by the door, but nobody answered when I rang. We didn't have time to go all over the house. We did find one thing, though," he added, as if by an afterthought.

"What was that?"

"There's an adept in one of the rooms upstairs."

Goldberger sat up and stared at him.

"An adept?" he repeated. "What's that?"

"An expert in mysticism. I judge that Vaughan was his pupil."

"Do you mean he's a Hindu?" asked the coroner, as though that would explain everything. But Godfrey was having his revenge.

"I don't know whether he's a Hindu or not," he said, airily. "I didn't get a very good look at him."

"What was he doing?" Goldberger demanded.

"He was just sitting there."

Again Goldberger stared at him, this time suspiciously.

"But, good heavens, man!" he cried. "That was three or four hours ago! You don't suppose he's sitting there yet!"

"Yes," said Godfrey drily, "I think he is."

Goldberger's face flushed, and he sprang to his feet impatiently.

"Show me the room," he commanded.

"Glad to," said Godfrey laconically, and led the way out into the hall.

The whole crowd tailed along after him. As I rose to follow, I saw that the outside world was turning grey with the approaching dawn.

The nurse, hearing our footsteps on the stairs, looked out in alarm, and held up a warning finger. Godfrey paused for a word with her.

"How is she?" he asked.

"Sleeping quietly," said the nurse; "but please don't make any more noise than you can help."

"We won't," Godfrey promised, and crossed the hall to the door leading into the little entry. Then he paused and looked around at Goldberger. "Better go slow here," he cautioned. "The adept has a pet cobra."
"A snake?"
"The deadliest snake in the world."
Goldberger drew back a little, as did all the others.
"I don't think it will bite us, though," added Godfrey, cheerfully, "if we don't crowd it. It's sitting there, too," and he opened the outer door, passed through, and held back the curtain at the farther end.
I was just behind Goldberger and Simmonds, and I heard their gasp of amazement, as they saw what lay beyond.
The scene had not changed in the slightest detail. The crystal sphere still softly glowed, with intangible shadows flitting across its surface; the adept still sat cross-legged staring into its depths; opposite him, the cobra, its hood distended, swayed slowly to and fro.

But as we stood there staring, a single delicate ray of sunlight coming through a pin-hole in the curtained window, struck the sphere and seemed to extinguish it. The glow within it flickered and fluttered and finally vanished, and it hung there dull and grey. An instant later, the motionless figure raised its arms high in air, with a motion somehow familiar; then it got slowly to its feet, crossed to the window, drew back the curtain and flung wide the shutter.
The sun was just peeping over the trees to the east, and for a second its light blinded me. Then I saw the adept bowing low before it, his arms still extended. Once, twice, thrice he bowed, as before a deity, while we stood there staring. Then he turned slowly toward us.
"Enter, friends," he said calmly. "The peace of the Holy One be on you, and his love within your hearts!"

CHAPTER X
THE WHITE PRIEST OF SIVA
The adept was an impressive figure, as he stood there with the sun behind him, throwing a yellow nimbus around his head. The robe he wore was of a rich purple, and gave an added effect of height and dignity to a figure already tall. His hair was dark and crinkled like wind-swept water, his complexion dark, but with an under-blush of red in the cheeks. His lips were scarlet and his eyes coal-black and of an arresting brilliance. The whole effect he gave was of transcendent energy and magnetism, nor did he show the slightest fatigue from his long vigil.
His eyes swept our faces, as we stood crowded there in the doorway. He did not seem surprised. If there was any expression in his face except courteous inquiry, it was one of carefully suppressed amusement.
"Enter, friends," he repeated. "What is it you desire?"
His voice was rich and deep, and he spoke with a peculiar intonation, but without accent. It was something of a shock to hear the ordinary words of English speech coming from his lips, for they seemed formed to utter prophecies in unknown tongues.

Goldberger took one step into the room, and then stopped abruptly. Following his eyes, I saw that the cobra had also awakened from its trance, and was regarding us steadily and hissing slightly. The adept smiled as he saw us shrink back.
"Do not fear," he said. "Come, Toto," and stepping across the room, he lifted the cobra in one hand and held it a moment close to him, gently stroking the distended hood. The snake curled itself about his arm and seemed to cuddle to him, but it kept its eyes fixed on us. I could not but smile at the incongruity of its name. Toto was well enough for a French poodle, but for a cobra!
After a moment, the adept lifted the lid of a round basket which stood on the floor near the divan, dropped the snake gently into it, and fastened down the lid. Then he clapped his hands softly, and an instant later the curtains at the rear of the room parted and a strange figure appeared between them.

It was the figure of a man, not over five feet tall and very thin. He was almost as dark as a full-blooded negro, and the white burnoose which was thrown about his shoulders and covered him to just below the hips, made him look even darker. His legs were bare and seemed to be nothing but skin and bone. The flat-nosed face, with its full lips and prominent eyes, reminded me of an idol I had seen pictured somewhere.
The newcomer bowed low before the adept, and, at a sign from him, picked up Toto's basket and disappeared with it through the curtains. He had not even glanced in our direction. The adept turned back to us.
"Now, friends," he said, "will you not enter?"

Goldberger led the way into the room and stopped to look about it. The walls were hung with black velvet, so arranged that windows and doors could be covered also, and the room was absolutely devoid of furniture, save for a low, circular divan in the centre of which stood the crystal sphere, supported, as I saw now, by a slender pedestal.
"I have a few questions to ask you," began Goldberger at last, in a voice deferential despite himself.
"Proceed, sir," said the adept, courteously.
"Do you know that Mr. Vaughan is dead?"
The adept made a little deprecating gesture.
"Not dead," he protested. "A man does not die. His soul rejoins the Over-soul, that is all. Yes, I know that at
midnight the soul of my pupil passed over."
  "How did you learn that?" Goldberger demanded.
  "I saw it in the sphere," replied the adept calmly.
  "Where were you at the time?"
  "I was gazing at the sphere."
  "Do you mean," asked Goldberger incredulously, "that you sat for five hours and more staring at that thing?"
  "My vigil began at sundown," said the adept, with a slight smile. "Last night was the White Night of Siva. It
must be spent in meditation by all who follow him."
Goldberger worried his moustache with nervous fingers, as he stared at the adept, plainly at a loss how to
proceed.
"Perhaps," ventured Godfrey, softly, "your crystal could give us some further information which we very much
desire."
The adept turned his dark eyes on the speaker, and it seemed to me that they glittered more coldly, as though they
recognised an adversary.
"What information, sir?" he asked.
"Information as to the manner of Mr. Vaughan's passing--can you tell us anything of that?"
The adept shook his head.
"I only saw the soul as it passed over. I knew, however, that it had been torn from the body by violence."
"How did you know that?" broke in Goldberger.
"Because of its colour," answered the adept; and then, when he saw our benumbed expressions, he explained.
"Souls which pass in peace are white; souls which the body has driven forth by its own hands are black; souls which
are torn from the body by an alien hand are red. My pupil's soul was red."
I could see that Goldberger did not know whether to snort with derision or to be impressed. He ended by smiling
feeble. As for me, I admit I was impressed.
"When an alien hand, as you put it, is used," said the coroner, "we call it murder in this country, and the law tries
to get hold of the alien and to send his soul after his victim's. That's what we are trying to do now. We are officers of
the law."
The adept bowed.
"Any assistance I can give you," he said, softly, "I shall be glad to give; though to do murder, as you call it, is
not always to do wrong."
"Our law doesn't make such nice distinctions," said Goldberger, drily. "May I ask your profession?"
"I am a White Priest of Siva," said the adept, touching his forehead lightly with the fingers of his left hand, as in
reverence.
"Who is Siva?"
"The Holy One, the Over-soul, from whom we come and to whom we all return."
Again Goldberger worried his moustache.
"Well," he said, at last, "until the mystery is cleared up, I must ask you not to leave this house."
"I have no wish to leave it, sir."
"And the other fellow--the fellow who took away the snake--where was he last night?"
"He slept in a small room opening into this one."
"May I look into it?"
"Certainly," and the adept swept aside the curtains.
The room into which we looked was not more than ten feet square, and empty of furniture, except for a mat in
the middle of the floor and three or four baskets set against the wall. On the mat was squatted the attendant, his legs
crossed with feet uppermost, and his hands held palm to palm before him. On the floor in front of him were what
looked to me like a strip of cloth, a bone and a tooth. He did not raise his eyes at our entrance, but sat calmly
contemplating these relics.
Goldberger's moustache lost a few more hairs as he stood staring down at this strange figure.
"What are those things? His grandmother's remains?" he asked, at last.
"Those are the attributes of Kali," said the adept gravely, as one rebuking blasphemy.
"Very interesting, no doubt," commented the coroner drily. "Would it disturb the gentleman too much to ask him
a few questions?"
"He speaks no English, but I shall be glad to translate for you."
The coroner thought this over for a moment, and then shook his head.
"No," he said; "I'll wait for the court interpreter. You might tell him, though, that there will be officers of the law
on duty below, and that he is not to leave the house."
"I will caution him," answered the adept, and let the curtain fall, as we passed out.
"I suppose there are some other servants somewhere about the place?" asked Goldberger.
"There are three--they sleep on the floor above."
"Are they Hindus, too?"
"Oh, no," and the adept smiled. "Two of them are German and the other is Irish."
The coroner reddened a little, for the words somehow conveyed a subtle rebuke.
"That is all for to-day," he said; "unless Mr. Simmonds has some questions?" and he looked at his companion.
But Simmonds, to whom all these inquiries had plainly been successive steps into the darkness, shook his head.
"Then we will bid you good-morning," added Goldberger, still a little on his dignity. "And many thanks for your courtesy."
The adept responded with a low bow and with a smile decidedly ironical. I, at least, felt that we had got the worst of the encounter.

Goldberger, without a word, led the way up the stair that mounted to the attic story, and there soon succeeded in routing out the three servants. The Germans proved to be a man and wife, well past middle age, the former the gardener and the latter the cook. Erin was represented by a red-haired girl who was the housemaid. All of them were horrified when told their master had been murdered, but none of them could shed any light on the tragedy. They had all been in bed long before midnight, and had not been disturbed by any of the noises of the night.

This could be the more readily understood when, as a little investigation showed, we found that they had all slept with doors locked and windows closed and shuttered. Any sounds from the house would really have to penetrate two doors to reach them, for their rooms were at the end of an entry, closed by an outer door. As to the windows, it was the rule of the house that they should always be closed and tightly shuttered during the night. They knew of no especial reason for the rule, though the Irish girl remarked that, with heathen in the house and lunatics, there was no telling how the nights were spent.

They were all evidently innocent of any connection with the tragedy; but Goldberger, for some ridiculous reason, brought them downstairs with him and made them look at their master's body. This had no result except to send the Irish girl into hystericis, and Hinman for a few minutes had another patient on his hands.
"Well," said Goldberger, passing his hand wearily across his forehead, "I guess there's nothing more to be done. And I'm dead tired. I had just got to bed when Simmonds called me. I'll set the inquest for ten o'clock to-morrow morning, and I'll hold it here in this room. We'll want you here, Mr. Godfrey, and you, Mr. Lester. And--oh, yes," he added suddenly, "we'll want that Mr. Swain, whose story I haven't heard yet. No doubt of his appearing is there?"
"I could put him under guard, of course," said Goldberger, pensively, "for I'm sure he'll prove to be a very important witness; but if you will be personally responsible for him, Mr. Lester...."
"I will," I agreed, and Goldberger nodded.
"Have him here at ten o'clock, then," he said.
"Dr. Hinman would better see him again to-day," I suggested.
"I'll call about four o'clock this afternoon," the doctor promised; and, leaving Goldberger to complete his arrangements and Simmonds to post his men, Godfrey and I stepped out upon the lawn.

It was after five o'clock and the sun was already high. It scarcely seemed possible that, only six hours before, Swain had crossed the wall for the first time!

"We'd better go out as we came," Godfrey said, and turned across the lawn. He walked with head down and face puckered with thought.
"Can you make anything of it?" I asked, but he only shook his head.

We soon reached the ladder, and Godfrey paused to look about him. The shrubbery was broken in one place, as though some heavy body had fallen on it, and this was evidently the mark of Swain's wild jump from the wall.
At last, Godfrey motioned me to precede him, and, when I was over, reached one ladder down to me and descended to my side. We replaced the ladders against the shed, and then walked on toward the house. As we turned the corner, we found Mrs. Hargis standing on the front porch.
"Well, you _are_ out early!" she said.
"Yes," laughed Godfrey; "fact is, we haven't been to bed yet. Will you have something to eat, Lester, before you turn in?"
A glass of milk was all I wanted; and five minutes later I mounted to my room. I glanced in for a moment at Swain, who seemed to be sleeping peacefully; and then darkened my room as well as I could and tumbled into bed. I must have dropped asleep the moment my head touched the pillow, for I remember nothing more until I opened my eyes to find Godfrey standing over me.

CHAPTER XI
SWAIN'S STORY

"I hate to wake you, Lester," Godfrey said, smiling, "but it's nearly four o'clock. Dr. Hinman will be here before long, and if you're going to hear Swain's story, you'll have to be getting up."

I sat up in bed at once, all trace of sleepiness vanished.

"How is he?" I asked.

"He seems to be all right. He's been up for some time. I haven't said anything to him about last night--I wanted the doctor to see him first; besides, I thought you ought to be present."

"I'll be down right away," I said, and twenty minutes later, I found Godfrey and Swain sitting together on the front porch. As Swain returned my greeting, I was relieved to see that his eyes were no longer fixed and staring, but seemed quite normal.

"Mrs. Hargis has your breakfast ready," said Godfrey, "and I think I'll join you. Will you come, Mr. Swain?"

"No, thank you," Swain replied. "I had my breakfast only about an hour ago. I'll just sit here, if you don't mind."

"All right," said Godfrey, "we won't be long," and together we went back to the dining-room.

Mrs. Hargis was there, and greeted us as though stopping out till dawn and breakfasting at four o'clock in the afternoon were the most ordinary things in the world. A copy of the _Record_ was lying, as usual, on the table, and a black headline caught my eye:

WORTHINGTON VAUGHAN MURDERED

RICH RECLUSE STRANGLED TO DEATH AT HIS HOME IN THE BRONX

I glanced at Godfrey in surprise.

"Yes," he said, reddening a little, "I was just in time to 'phone the story in for the last edition. I called the doctor first, though, Lester--you must give me credit for that! And it was a beautiful scoop!"

"What time did you get up?" I asked.

"About noon. I sent down the full story for to-morrow morning's paper just before I called you."

"Any developments?"

"None that I know of. Of course, I haven't heard Swain's story yet."

"Godfrey," I said, "it seems to me that this thing is going to look bad for Swain--I think Goldberger suspects him already. A good deal depends upon his story."

"Yes, it does," Godfrey agreed.

We finished the meal in silence. It was not a long one, for I, at least, was anxious to get back to Swain. As we rejoined him on the porch, Dr. Hinman's car came up the drive. He got out and shook hands with us. As he greeted Swain, I saw him glance anxiously into his eyes--and saw also that the glance reassured him.

"You're feeling better to-day," he said, sitting down by Swain's side.

"Yes," said Swain quietly, "I'm feeling all right again."

"How is Miss Vaughan, doctor?" I asked.

Swain jerked round toward the doctor.

"Is Miss Vaughan ill?" he demanded.

"She had a shock last night," answered the doctor, slowly; "but she's getting along nicely. She'll have to be kept quiet for a few days."

I was looking at Swain curiously. He was rubbing his head perplexedly, as though trying to bring some confused memory to the surface of his mind.

"I seem to remember," he said, "that Miss Vaughan fainted, and that I picked her up." Then he stopped and stared at us. "Is her father dead?"

"Yes," I said, and he fell to rubbing his head again.

I glanced at Hinman, and he nodded slightly. I took it for assurance that Swain might be questioned. Godfrey, who had gone indoors to get some cigars, came back with a handful. All of us, including Swain, lighted up.

"Now, Swain," I began, "I want you to tell us all that you remember of last night's happenings. Both Mr. Godfrey and Dr. Hinman are in my confidence and you may speak freely before them. I want them to hear your story, because I want their advice."

There was a pucker of perplexity on Swain's face.

"I've been trying, ever since I woke up this morning, to straighten out my remembrance of last night," he began, slowly; "but I haven't succeeded very well. At least, everything seems to stop right in the middle."

"Go ahead," I said, "and tell us what you do remember. Maybe it will grow clearer as you recall it, or maybe we can fill in the gaps. Begin at the moment you went over the wall. We know everything that happened up to that time. You remember that clearly, don't you?"
"Oh, yes," said Swain. "I remember all that," and he settled back in his chair. "Well, after I went down the ladder, I found myself in a clump of shrubbery, and beyond that was a path. I knew that the arbour where I was to meet Miss Vaughan was in the corner of the grounds at the back next to Mr. Godfrey's place, so I turned back along the wall, leaving the path, which curved away from it. It was very dark under the trees, and I had to go slowly for fear of running into one of them. But I finally found the arbour. I struck a match to assure myself that it was empty, and then sat down to wait. Once or twice I fancied I heard some one moving outside, but it was only the wind among the trees, I guess, for it was fully half an hour before Miss Vaughan came."

I could see how his hand was trembling on the arm of his chair, and he paused a moment to collect himself.

"What Miss Vaughan told me," he went on, at last, and I saw that of the details of the meeting he did not intend to speak, "convinced me that her father was quite mad--much worse than I had suspected. I knew, of course, that he was a student of the supernatural, but since the coming of this yogi...."

"This what?" Hinman interrupted.

"A yogi," Swain answered, turning toward him, "is, as nearly as I can make out, a sort of high priest of Hinduism. He knows all its secrets, and is supposed to be able to do all sorts of supernatural things. This fellow who lived with Mr. Vaughan is a yogi. Mr. Vaughan was his disciple."

"Where did the yogi come from?" Godfrey asked.

"I don't know. I don't think Miss Vaughan knows. He arrived, with his attendant, about six months ago; and since then things have gone from bad to worse. There has been crystal-gazing and star-worship and necromancy of all sorts. I confess I didn't understand very much of it," he added. "It was all so wild and weird; but it ended not only in Mr. Vaughan's becoming a convert to whatever religion it is the yogi practises, but in a determination that his daughter should become a priestess of the cult. It was from that she wished me to help her to escape."

He stopped and again rubbed his head slowly.

"As I tell it," he went on, at last, "it sounds absurd and unbelievable; but as she told it, there in the darkness, with those strange rustlings round us, it sent the chills up and down my spine. Perhaps those Orientals _do_ know more about the supernatural than we give them credit for; at any rate, I know that Miss Vaughan had been impressed with the yogi's power. It fascinated and at the same time horrified her. She said he had a hideous snake, a cobra, which he petted as she would pet a kitten...."

His voice broke off again, and he wiped the perspiration from his forehead. I myself felt decidedly nervous.

Godfrey threw away his cigar, which had broken in his fingers.

"At any rate," Swain went on, "I was so upset by what she told me that I could think of nothing to do except to beg her to come away with me at once. I remembered my promise to you, Mr. Lester, but I was sure you would approve. I told her about you--that it was into your hands the letter had fallen. She said she had seen you looking at her from a tree and had known at a glance that she could trust you. You didn't tell me you were in a tree," he added.

"Yes," I said, awkwardly. "I was just taking a little look over the landscape. Rather foolish of me, wasn't it?"

"Well, it was mighty fortunate, anyway. She had written the letter, but she had no idea how she was going to get it to me."

"You mean she couldn't go out when she wanted to?" demanded Godfrey.

"I gathered from what she told me," said Swain, his face flushing with anger, "that she has been practically a prisoner ever since the yogi arrived. Besides, even if she had succeeded in mailing the letter, it wouldn't have reached me until too late."

"In what way too late?"

"Her father seems to have had a sudden turn for the worse yesterday; he became almost violent in insisting that she consent to his plan. He told her that the life of his own soul as well as of hers depended upon it. He threatened--I don't know what. The yogi talked to her afterwards. He, of course, believed, or pretended to believe, as her father did; moreover, he told her that her father would certainly suffer a serious mental shock if she refused, perhaps a fatal one. In despair, she finally agreed, on the condition that she be given three days in which to prepare herself. If she did not hear from me in that time, she had made up her mind to consent."

Swain stopped again, and I lay back in my chair, wondering if such things were possible in this twentieth century, here within the boundaries of Greater New York! My brain reeled at the absurdity of it!

"Vaughan was undoubtedly suffering from mania," said Dr. Hinman, in a low voice. "The symptoms, as Mr. Swain describes them, are unmistakable."

"It was that argument I used," said Swain. "I told her that, since he was clearly mad, she must, in self-defence, place herself beyond his reach. But she refused to leave him. Then, I argued, in kindness to him she must have him committed to some institution where he would be taken care of, and where he might, in time, regain his sanity. I told her that it would be criminal folly to permit him to remain longer under the influence of the yogi. She had to agree with me; and she finally consented to sign an affidavit to the facts as I have told them, and a petition asking that a
commission be appointed to examine her father. You were to have drawn up the papers to-day, Mr. Lester, and I was to have taken them to her for signature to-night."

"That would have settled the matter," said Godfrey, thoughtfully. "It's too bad it wasn't settled in that way. What else happened, Mr. Swain?"

"Miss Vaughan had grown very nervous, with all this discussion, and at last she sprang to her feet and said she must go, or her father would discover her absence. We rose to leave the arbour, and at that instant, a white-robed figure sprang to her side, seized her and tore her away from me. I was too startled for an instant to resist; then, as I started toward them, Marjorie pushed me back.

"'Go! Go!' she cried. 'It is my father!'

"But he stopped me. In a voice shaking and husky with rage, he warned me that if I entered the place again, my life would be forfeit. I can't repeat the horrible things he said. I could see his eyes gleaming like a wild beast's. He cursed me. I had never been cursed before," and Swain smiled thinly, "and I confess it wasn't pleasant. Then he led his daughter away.

"I stood staring after them. I didn't know what to do. I felt like a madman myself. I sat down and tried to collect my thoughts. I saw that some new plan must be made—that there was no hope of meeting Marjorie again. I was sick with fear for her; I thought of following to the house and compelling her to come with me at once. And then, suddenly, I saw two eyes gleaming at me. They were not human eyes—they were too close together—and they were swaying gently back and forth in the air, about a foot from the ground. I gazed at them, fascinated, and then I heard a soft, low whistle, followed by a faint hissing, as the eyes fell forward.

"In a flash, I knew what it was—the cobra; I knew why it was there—Vaughan had said my life was forfeit. I sprang up with a shriek, dashed along the seat to the door and out into the darkness. I struck my head against something—a tree, I suppose; but I kept on, and reached the wall and got over it somehow—it is all confused, after that. I seem to remember hearing Marjorie scream, and finding her lying beside her father, who was dead—but I can't put things together," and he rubbed his head helplessly.

"I'll put them together for you," said Godfrey. "When you ran into the tree, you suffered a partial concussion. It's lucky it wasn't total, or Toto would have got you!"

"Toto?"

"That, I believe, is the cobra's name," explained Godfrey, with a smile; "unless, of course, there are two of them." And he told Swain in detail of the events which had followed.

Swain listened with staring eyes. I did not blame him. Indeed, I felt that my own eyes were staring a little, though I already knew the story. But Godfrey, with a gift of narration born of long newspaper experience, told it in a way that made its horror salient and left one gasping.

"There is one question I want to ask you, Swain," he said, in conclusion, "and I want you to think carefully before you answer it. During your altercation with Mr. Vaughan, did you at any time touch him?"

"Touch him? No, of course not," and Swain shook his head decidedly.

"You are sure of that?" asked Godfrey earnestly.

"Perfectly sure," said Swain, looking at him in astonishment. "I was never within three feet of him."

Godfrey sprang to his feet with a gesture of relief.

"'I seem to need a cocktail," he said, in another tone. "Isn't that the prescription for all of us, doctor?"
"Yes," assented Hinman, smiling, "and, after that, complete change of subject!"

CHAPTER XII

GUESSES AT THE RIDDLE

We tried to follow Dr. Hinman's prescription, but not with any great success, for it is difficult to talk about one thing and think about another. So the doctor took himself off, before long, and Swain announced that he himself would have to return to the city. He had come out without so much as a tooth-brush; he pointed out; his trousers were in a lamentable condition, and, while Godfrey's coat was welcome, it was far from a perfect fit.

"Which reminds me," he added, "that I don't know what has become of my own coat and shirt."

I looked at Godfrey quickly.

"No, I forgot them," he said. "They're over in the library at Elmhurst," he added to Swain. "You can get them to-morrow."

"I shall have to be there to-morrow, then?"

"Yes, at the inquest; I've promised to produce you there," I said.

"At what time?"

"You'd better be there by ten."

"Very well; that's all the more reason for getting back to my base of supplies. If I went on the stand looking like this, the jury would probably think I was the murderer!" he added, laughing.
My answering smile was decidedly thin. Godfrey did not even try to force one.

"Wait a few minutes," he suggested, "and I'll take you down in my car. I'll try to get back early, Lester," he added, apologetically. "I'm far from an ideal host--but you'll find some books on my desk that may interest you--I got them up to-day. Take a look at them after dinner."

He went back to bring out his car, and Swain sat down again beside me.

"Mr. Lester," he said, in a low voice, "I hope you haven't forgotten your promise."

"What promise?"

"To put Miss Vaughan in a safe place and to look after her interests."

"No," I said, "I haven't forgotten. I am going to ask to see her after the inquest to-morrow. If she wishes us to represent her, we will."

"And to protect her," he added, quickly. "She hasn't even a mad father now!"

"She's safe enough for the present," I pointed out. "Dr. Hinman has employed another nurse, so that one is with her all the time."

"I won't be satisfied," said Swain, "till you get her out of that house and away from those damned Hindus. One nurse, or even two, wouldn't stop them."

"Stop them from what?"

"I don't know," and he twisted his fingers helplessly.

"Well, the police will stop them. There are three or four men on duty there, with orders to let no one in or out."

His face brightened.

"Ah, that's better," he said. "I didn't know that. How long will they be there?"

"Till after the inquest, anyway."

"And you will see Miss Vaughan after the inquest?"

"Yes."

"And urge her to go to Mr. and Mrs. Royce?"

"Yes--but I don't think she'll need much urging. I'll get a note from Mrs. Royce. I'll telephone to Mr. Royce now, and you can stop and get the note as you come up in the morning."

Godfrey's car glided up the drive and stopped at the porch. Swain held out his hand and clasped mine warmly.

"Thank you, Mr. Lester," he said; and a moment later the car turned into the highway and passed from sight.

Then I went in, got Mr. Royce on the 'phone, and gave him a brief outline of the incidents of the night before. He listened with an exclamation of astonishment from time to time, and assented heartily when I suggested that Miss Vaughan might be placed in Mrs. Royce's care temporarily.

"She's a beautiful girl," I concluded, "and very young. I agree with Swain that she mustn't be left alone in that house."

"Certainly she mustn't," said my partner. "I'll have Mrs. Royce write the note, and get a room ready for her."

"Of course," I said, "it's possible she won't come--though I believe she'll be glad to. Or there may be a family lawyer who will want to look after her. Only she didn't appear to know of any when she was talking to Swain."

"Well, bring her along if you can," said Mr. Royce. "We'll be glad to have her. And take your time about coming back, if you're needed up there. We're getting along all right."

I thanked him, and hung up; and presently Mrs. Hargis came to summon me to dinner. That meal over, I went in to Godfrey's desk to see what the books were he had suggested that I look at. There was quite a pile of them, and I saw that they all related to mysticism or to the religions of India. There was Sir Monier Williams's "Brahmanism and Hinduism," Hopkins's "The Religions of India," a work on crystalomancy, Mr. Lloyd Tuckey's standard work on "Hypnotism and Suggestion," and some half dozen others whose titles I have forgotten. And as I looked at them, I began to understand one reason for Godfrey's success as a solver of mysteries--no detail of a subject ever escaped him.

I lit my pipe, sat down, and was soon deep in the lore of the East. I must confess that I did not make much of it. In that maze of superstition, the most I could do was to pick up a thread here and there. The yogi had referred to the White Night of Siva, and I soon found out that Siva is one of the gods of Hinduism--one of a great trilogy: Brahma the creator, Vishnu the preserver, and Siva the destroyer. He had also spoken of the attributes of Kali, and, after a little further search, I discovered that Kali was Siva's wife--a most unprepossessing and fiendish female.

But when I passed on to Hinduism itself, and tried to understand its tenets and its sects, I soon found myself out of my depth. They were so jumbled, so multitudinous, and so diverse that I could get no clear idea of them. I read of the Vedas, the Upanishads, the Brahmanas; of metaphysical abstractions too tenuous to grasp; of karma or action, of maya or illusion, and I know not what "tangled jumble of ghosts and demons, demi-gods, and deified saints, household gods, village gods, tribal gods, universal gods, with their countless shrines and temples and din of discordant rites." At last, in despair, I gave it up, and turned to the book on crystalomancy.
Here, at least, was something comprehensible, if not altogether believable, and I read with interest of the antiquity of crystal-gazing as a means of inducing hallucination for the purpose of seeking information not to be gained by any normal means. I read of its use in China, in Assyria, in Egypt, in Arabia, in India, in Greece and Rome; of how its practitioners in the Middle Ages were looked upon as heretics and burnt at the stake or broken on the wheel; of the famous Dr. Dee, and so down to the present time. The scyrs or seers sometimes used mirrors, sometimes vessels filled with water, but usually a polished stone, and beryl was especially esteemed.

The effect of gazing at these intently for a time was to abstract the mind from normal sensory impressions, and to induce a state of partial hypnosis during which the scryer claimed he could perceive in the crystal dream-pictures of great vividness, scenes at a distance, occurrences of the past, and of the future.

I was still deep in this, when I heard a step outside, the door opened, and Godfrey came in. He smiled when he saw what I was doing.

"How have you been getting along?" he asked.

"Not very well," and I threw the book back on the table. "The crystal-gazing isn't so bad--one can understand that; but the jumble of abstractions which the Hindus call religion is too much for me. I didn't know it was so late," I added, and looked at my watch; but it was not yet eleven o'clock.

"I'm earlier than usual," said Godfrey. "I cut loose as soon as I could, because I thought we'd better talk things over. I saw Simmonds in town to-night."

"Ah," I said; "and what did he tell you?"

"Nothing I didn't know already. The police have discovered nothing new--or, if they have, they're keeping it dark until to-morrow. Simmonds did, however, regale me with his theory of the case. He says the murder was done either by one of the Hindus or by young Swain."

"What do _you_ think?" I asked.

"I'm inclined to agree with Simmonds," said Godfrey, grimly. "With the emphasis on the Hindus," he added, seeing the look on my face, "I don't believe Swain had any hand in it."

"Neither do I," I agreed, heartily. "In fact, such a theory is too absurd to discuss."

"Just the same," said Godfrey, slowly, "I'm glad he didn't touch Vaughan. If he had happened to seize him by the neck, while they were struggling together,--in other words, if those finger-prints Goldberger found had happened to be Swain's--things would have looked bad for him. I'm hoping they'll turn out to belong to one of the Hindus--but, as I said to Goldberger, I'm afraid that's too good to be true."

"Which one of the Hindus?" I asked.

"Oh, the Thug, of course."

"The Thug?" I echoed.

"Didn't you get that far?" and Godfrey picked up one of the books and ran rapidly through the pages. "You remember we found him squatting on the floor with a rag and a tooth and a bone in front of him?"

"Yes."

"And do you remember how the yogi described them, when Goldberger asked him about them?"

"Very distinctly--he called them the attributes of Kali."

"Now listen to this: 'The Thugs are a religious fraternity, committing murders in honor of Kali, the wife of Siva, who, they believe, assists them and protects them. Legend asserts that she presented her worshippers with three things, the hem of her lower garment to use as a noose, a rib to use as a knife, and a tooth to use as a pick-axe in burying the victims.' He glanced at me, and then went on: 'But the knife was little used, for the religious character of an assassination came to depend more and more upon its bloodless character, and for this a noose was used, with which the victim was strangled. The aversion to bloodshed became in time so great that many sects of Thuggee consider it defiling to touch human blood!'" He closed the book and threw it on the table. "Don't you think that proves the case?"

"Yes," I said, thoughtfully. "And the yogi--is he also a Thug?"

"Oh, no; a White Priest of Siva could never be a Thug. The worship of Siva and of Kali are the very opposites of each other. The Saivas are ascetics. That is," he added, in another tone, "if the fellow is really a Saiva and not just a plain fraud."

"All these fellows are frauds, more or less, aren't they?" I questioned.

"No," was Godfrey's unexpected answer; "the real yogi are no doubt sincere; but a real yogi wouldn't waste his time on a soft-brained old man, and fire sky-rockets off at midnight to impress him. My own opinion is that this fellow is a fakir--a juggler, a sleight-of-hand man--and, of course, a crook."

"Well?" I asked, as Godfrey stopped and failed to continue.

"Well, that's as far as I've got. Oh, yes--there's Toto. A cobra is one of a fakir's stock properties."
"But, Godfrey," I protested, "he is no ignorant roadside juggler. He's a cultivated man--an unusual man."

"Certainly he is--most unusual. But that doesn't disprove my guess; it only makes the problem harder. Even a roadside juggler doesn't do his tricks for nothing--what reward is it this fellow's working for? It must be a big one, or it wouldn't tempt him."

"I suppose Vaughan paid him well," I ventured.

"Yes; but did you look at him, Lester? You've called him unusual, but that word doesn't begin to express him. He's extraordinary. No doubt Vaughan _did_ pay him well, but it would take something more than that to persuade such a man to spend six months in a place like that. And I think I can guess at the stake he's playing for."

"You mean Miss Vaughan?"

"Just that," and Godfrey leaned back in his chair.

I contemplated this theory for some moments in silence. It was, at least, a theory and an interesting one--but it rested on air. There was no sort of foundation for it that I could see, and at last I said so.

"I know it's pretty thin," Godfrey admitted, "but it's the best I've been able to do--there's so little to build a theory out of. But I'm going to see if I can't prove one part of it true to-night."

"Which part?"

"About his being a fakir. Here's my theory: that hocus-pocus on the roof at midnight was for the purpose of impressing Vaughan. No doubt he believed it a real spiritual manifestation, whereas it was only a clever bit of jugglery. Now that Vaughan is dead, that particular bit of jugglery will cease until there is some new victim to impress. In fact, it has ceased already. There was no star last night."

"But you know why," I pointed out. "The yogi spent the night in contemplation. We can bear witness to that."

"We can't bear witness to when he started in," said Godfrey, drily. "We didn't see him till after half-past twelve. However, accepting his explanation, there would be no reason for omitting the phenomenon to-night, if it's a genuine one."

"No," I agreed.

"And if it _is_ omitted," Godfrey went on, "it will be pretty conclusive evidence that it isn't genuine. Although," he went on hurriedly, "I don't need any proof of that--anything else would be unbelievable." He glanced at his watch. "It's ten minutes to twelve," he said. "Come along."

I followed him out of the house and through the grove with very mixed sensations. If the star _didn't_ fall, it would tend to prove that it was, as Godfrey had said, merely a fake arranged to impress a credulous old man; but suppose it _did_ fall! That was a part of the test concerning which Godfrey had said nothing. Suppose it _did_ fall! What then?

So it was in silence that I followed Godfrey up the ladder and took my place on the limb. But Godfrey seemed to have no uneasiness.

"We won't have long to wait," he said. "We'll wait till five minutes after twelve, just to make sure. It must be twelve now. I wish I could persuade that fellow to show me how the fake was worked, for it was certainly a good one--one of the best...."

He stopped abruptly, staring out into the darkness. I was staring, too, for there, against the sky, a light began to glow and brighten. It hung for a moment motionless, and then began slowly to descend, steadily, deliberately, as of set purpose. Lower and lower it sank, in a straight line, hovered for an instant, and burst into a million sparks.

In the flare of light, a white-robed figure stood, gazing upwards, its arms strained toward the sky.

As we went silently down the ladder, a moment later, it seemed to me that I could hear Godfrey's theory crashing about his ears.

CHAPTER XIII

FRANCISCO SILVA

It was not quite ten o'clock when Godfrey and I turned in at the gates of Elmhurst, next morning, and made our way up the drive to the house, but in the library we found a considerable company already assembled. Goldberger was there, with Freylinghuisen his physician, his clerk, his stenographer, and the men who were to constitute the jury; Simmonds was there, and with him was an alert little man in glasses, who, Godfrey told me in an aside, was Sylvester, the head of the Identification Bureau, and the greatest expert on finger-prints in America. The district attorney had sent up an assistant, also with a stenographer, and altogether the room was decidedly crowded.

It became impossible a moment later, when a string of automobiles puffed up the drive and disgorged a mob of reporters and photographers. As many as the room would hold pushed into it, and the others stood outside in the drive and complained loudly. The complaints of the photographers were especially varied and forceful. Goldberger looked around him in despair, mopping his face angrily, for the crowded room was very hot.

"You fellows will have to get out of here," he said to the reporters. "There's no room. I'll give you a transcript of the proceedings after they're over."
The protests redoubled. How were they to get any human interest out of a transcript? Besides, there were the photographers. What did he expect them to do—photograph the transcript? And finally, the law required that the hearing be public, so they had a right to be present. It was a tense moment, the more so since Goldberger was by no means insensible of the value of newspaper popularity to a man in public life.

"Why not go out on the lawn?" Godfrey suggested. "It's only a question of moving some chairs and tables, and the boys will all lend a hand."

The boys applauded, almost forgiving Godfrey his scoop, protested their entire willingness to lend two hands if necessary, and, when Goldberger nodded his approval, fell to work with a will. The lower floor of the house was denuded, the garden seats pressed into service, and at the end of five minutes, the court was established amid the circle of trees, the reporters had their coats off and their pipes lighted, the photographers ditto and their cameras placed. Good humour was restored; peace reigned; and Goldberger smiled again, for he knew that the adjectives with which the reporters would qualify his name would be complimentary ones!

He took his place, rapped for order, and instructed his clerk to swear the jury. Nobody paid much attention to the jury, for it was a recognised device for paying small political debts, and its verdict was usually in strict accord with the wishes of the presiding officer. Then Goldberger looked at the vacant chair which I had kept beside me.

"By the way, Mr. Lester," he said, "I don't see Mr. Swain."

"He had to go back to the city last night," I explained, "to get some fresh clothes. He had an errand or two to do this morning, and may have been detained. I left word at the house for him to come over here at once."

"You seem to have a good deal of confidence in him," Goldberger remarked.

"I have," I answered quietly. "A great deal."

Goldberger frowned a little, but proceeded to open the case without further delay. Godfrey was the first witness, and told his story much as he had told it the night before. I followed him, but contributed no new details. Both of us were excused without cross-examination.

To my great satisfaction, Swain arrived while I was testifying, and I could not deny myself a triumphant glance at Goldberger, but he was studying some memoranda and affected not to notice it. As soon as I left the stand, Swain came and sat down beside me and gave me a letter. It was addressed to Miss Vaughan.

"It's from Mrs. Royce," he said. "She's a trump! She's determined that Marjorie shall come to her. She says if you don't bring her, she'll come after her herself. Do you know how she is this morning?"

"No," I said; "I haven't seen Hinman. But how are you?"

"Oh, I'm all right again--head a little sore yet where I bumped it--but otherwise as fit as a fiddle."

"You look it!" I said; and I was glad, because I wanted him to make a good impression on the stand. I knew what weight appearances often had; and no jury, I told myself, would believe that this bright-eyed, fresh-coloured boy could have had any hand in a brutal murder.

Just then Hinman's name was called, and an officer hurried away to the house after him. They returned together almost at once, and Hinman was placed on the stand. He told of being summoned by Godfrey, and of the events which followed. He said that the murder had been committed about midnight, that death had been due to strangulation; and identified the cord and the blood-stained handkerchief which the coroner submitted to him. I fancied that Swain lost a little of his colour when he saw the handkerchief and learned where it had been found, but he made no remark.

"Will Miss Vaughan be able to testify?" Goldberger inquired, just before the doctor stepped down.

"Unless it is absolutely necessary, I think she would better be excused," Hinman answered. "She is still very nervous. The ordeal might cause a serious collapse."

"We will try to get along without her," assented Goldberger. "If necessary, I can take her deposition. Is she in bed?"

"Yes; I am keeping her as quiet as possible."

"Very well; we won't disturb her," said Goldberger, and Hinman was excused, and Freylinghuysen called. He merely testified to the cause of death and that the autopsy had shown that the deceased was in fair health and without organic disease.

Then the servants were called, but their evidence was unimportant. They had gone to bed about ten o'clock, and had not awakened until the coroner himself had pounded at the door. They had heard no unusual sound. Yes, they had slept with their doors locked and windows shuttered because that was the rule of the house. Yes, even in the hottest weather; that made no difference, since each of their rooms was fitted with a ventilator.

Questioned as to the manner of life of the other inmates of the house, the German and his wife were non-committal. They had been with the family a long time; had taken care of the place when their master was abroad; only after his return had it been necessary to get another servant. He had been at home for a year, and the Hindus had arrived about six months later. Yes, they knew their master was studying some strange religion, but that was no
affair of theirs, and they had never seen anything wrong. He had always treated them well; was a little strange and absent-minded at times; but neither of them really saw much of him. He never interfered in the household affairs, Miss Vaughan giving such instructions as were necessary. The man spent most of his time in the grounds, and the woman in the kitchen. She was a little petulant over the fact that one of the Hindus—the "ugly one"—refused to eat her cooking, but insisted on preparing his own food. Also, the housemaid had told her that there was a snake, but she had never seen it.

From the Irish housemaid a little more information was obtained. Neither Mr. Vaughan nor the yogi ate any breakfast; indeed, they rarely left their rooms before noon. The other Hindu mixed himself up some sort of mess over the kitchen stove. Miss Vaughan breakfasted alone at nine o'clock. At such times, she was accustomed to talk over household affairs with the maid, and after breakfast would visit the kitchen and make a tour of the grounds and garden. The remainder of her day would be spent in reading, in playing the piano, in doing little household tasks, or in walking about the grounds with her father. Yes, sometimes the yogi would join them, and there would be long discussions. After dinner, in the library, there would also be long discussions, but the girl had no idea what they were about. She heard a fragment of them occasionally, but had never been able to make anything of them. In fact, from the way they dressed and all, she had come to the conclusion that Mr. Vaughan and the yogi were both a little crazy, but quite inoffensive and harmless.

"And how about Miss Vaughan?" asked the coroner.

"Miss Vaughan, bless her heart, wasn't crazy," said the girl quickly; "not a bit of it. She was just sad and lonely,—as who wouldn't be! She never went out—in the five months I've been here, she's never been off the place; and them front gates was never opened to let anybody in. The only people who come in were the grocer and milk-man and such-like, through the little door at the side."

"You say you have been here five months?"

"Yes, sir."

"How did you come to apply for the place?"

"I didn't apply for it. I was sent here by an employment bureau. Miss Marjorie engaged me. I didn't see the Hindus till afterwards, or I don't think I'd have took it. After that, I stayed for Miss Marjorie's sake."

"You thought she needed you?"

"Yes, I did. With her father moonin' round in a kind of trance, and the yogi lookin' at her with eyes like live coals, and a snake that stood on its tail, and the other naygur going around with nothin' on but a diaper, I thought she needed somebody to look after her; and says I, 'Annie Crogan, you're the girl to do it!'"

There was a ripple of laughter and the pencils of the reporters flew across their paper. It was the first gleam to enliven a prosaic and tiresome hearing.

"Were the Hindus obtrusive in any way?" asked the coroner.

"Oh, no; they minded their business; I've no complaint on that score."

"Did you see any of their religious practices?"

"I wouldn't call them religious—quite the contrary. I've seen them wavin' their arms and bowin' to the sun and settin' in the dark starin' at a glass globe with a light in it; that's about all. I got used to it, after a while, and just went on about my work without takin' any notice."

There was little more to be got from her, and finally she was excused. The reporters yawned. The jury twitched nervously. Worthington Vaughan was dead; he had been strangled—so much was clear; but not a scintilla of evidence had as yet been introduced as to who had strangled him. Then a movement of interest ran through the crowd, for a policeman came from the direction of the house accompanied by two strange figures. One was the yogi, in robes of dazzling white; the other his attendant, wearing something more than a diaper, indeed, but with his thin brown legs bare.

The yogi bowed to Goldberger with grave courtesy, and, at a word from the attendant policeman, sat down in the witness-chair. Everybody was leaning forward looking at him, and the cameras were clicking in chorus, but he seemed scarcely aware of the circle of eager faces.

"Hold up your right hand, please," began Goldberger, after contemplating him for a moment.

"For what purpose?" asked the yogi.

"I'm going to swear you."

"I do not understand."

"I'm going to put you on oath to tell nothing but the truth," explained the coroner.

"An oath is unnecessary," said the yogi with a smile. "To speak the truth is required by my religion."

There was something impressive in the words, and Goldberger slowly lowered his arm.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Francisco Silva."
"You are not a Hindu?"
"I am of their faith."
"But by birth?"
"I am a Portuguese."
"Born in India?"
"Born at Goa."

The coroner paused. He had never heard of Goa. Neither had I. Neither, I judged, had any one else present. In this, however, I was wrong. Godfrey had heard of it, and afterwards referred me to Marryat's "Phantom Ship" as his source of information.

"Goa," Silva explained, seeing our perplexity, "is a colony owned by Portugal on the Malabar coast, some distance below Bombay."

"How does it come that you speak English so well?"
"I was educated at Bombay, and afterwards at Oxford and at Paris."
"But you are by religion a Hindu?"
"I am a Saiva--a follower of Siva, the Lord of life and death."

As he spoke, he touched his forehead with the fingers of his left hand. There was a moment's silence. Goldberger's moustache, I noted with a smile, was beginning to suffer again.

"You are what is called an adept?" he asked, at last.
"Some may call me that," said Silva, "but incorrectly. Among my fellow Saivas, I am known as a White Priest, a yogi, a teacher of the law."

"Mr. Vaughan was your pupil?"
"Yes; for six months he was my pupil."
"In what way did you come to accept this position?"
"Two years ago, Mr. Vaughan visited the monastery of our order in Crete. He was at that time merely a student of Orientalism, and came to us from curiosity. But his interest grew; and after a year spent in studying the holy books, he asked that a teacher be sent to him. There was none at that time who could be spared; but six months ago, having completed a task which had occupied me in Paris, I was assigned to this."

"Do you always go to so much trouble to secure converts?" questioned Goldberger, a little cynically.

"Usually we require that the period of study be passed at one of our monasteries. But this case was exceptional."
"In what way?"

"It was our hope," explained the yogi, calmly, "that Mr. Vaughan would assist us in spreading the Great Truth by endowing a monastery for us in this country."

"Ah!" and Goldberger looked at him. "Did he agree to do so?"

"He did," answered the yogi, still more calmly. "This estate was to have been given to us for that purpose, together with an endowment sufficient to maintain it. Mr. Vaughan himself hoped to gain the White Robe and become a teacher."

"What was to become of his daughter?"
"It was his hope that she would become a priestess of our order."
"You hoped so, too, no doubt?" inquired Goldberger sweetly.

"I did. It is an office of high honour and great influence. She would walk all her days in the shadow of the Holy One. So sweet a cup is offered to few women. The number of priestesses is limited to nine."

Goldberger pulled at his moustache helplessly. Evidently the witness's calm self-control was not to be broken down, or even ruffled.

"Please tell me where you were night before last," said the coroner, finally.
"I was in this house."
"Did you see Mr. Vaughan?"
"I did not."
"How did you spend the night?"
"In contemplation. It was, as I have told you, the White Night of Siva, sacred to him from sunset to sunrise."

"Do you mean that you spent the whole night sitting before that crystal?" asked the coroner, incredulously.

"That is my meaning."
"You know nothing, then, of the death of Mr. Vaughan?"
"I saw his soul pass in the night. More than that I know not."

Again Goldberger twitched at his moustache. He was plainly at a loss how to proceed.

"Was your attendant with you?" he asked, at last.
"He was in his closet."
"At his devotions too, perhaps?"
"The White Night of Siva is also the Black Night of Kali," said the yogi, gravely, as one rebuking an unworthy
levity.
"What do you mean by that?" Goldberger demanded.
"Mahbub is of the cult of Kali, who is the wife of Siva," said the yogi, touching his forehead reverently as he
spoke the words. "He spent the night in adoration of her attributes."

Goldberger's stenographer was having his difficulties; the pencils of the reporters were racing wildly in unison;
everyone was listening with strained attention; there was, somehow, a feeling in the air that something was about to
happen. I saw Godfrey write a line upon a sheet of paper, fold it, and toss it on the table in front of Goldberger. The
coroner opened it, read the line, and stared at the impassive Mahbub, who stood beside his master with folded arms,
staring over the heads of the crowd.

"In other words," said Goldberger, slowly, "your attendant is a Thug."
The yogi bowed.
"Yes," he said, calmly; "Mahbub is Thuggee."

CHAPTER XIV
THE FINGER-PRINTS

A shiver ran through the crowd, like a gust of wind across a field of wheat. The words, "Mahbub is Thuggee,"
seemed to rend the veil which obscured the tragedy. Surely it was clear enough, now: here was a man killed by
Thuggee's peculiar method, and here was the Thug. It was as simple as two and two!

Every eye was on the bare-legged Hindu, impassive as ever, staring straight before him. The camera-men hastily
pushed in fresh plates and trained their machines upon him. Two policemen edged close to his side.

But Francisco Silva looked about him with scornful eyes, and presently he opened his lips as though to speak,
and then he closed them.

Goldberger seemed perplexed. He looked as though, while rolling smoothly along the road toward a well-
understood goal, he had suddenly struck an unforeseen obstacle. The possibility of Mahbub's guilt seemed to
interfere with some theory of his own. He called Simmonds and the district attorney to him, and they exchanged a
few low words. Then he turned back to the witness.

"I should like to question your attendant," he said. "Will you translate for me? I have not been able to find a
Hindu interpreter."

Silva bowed his consent.
"Ask him, please, where he spent Thursday night."
There was a brief interchange between Silva and Mahbub, then the former turned to Goldberger.
"It was as I thought," he said. "He spent the night in the worship of the attributes of Kali."
The coroner opened an envelope which lay on the table at his elbow and took out a piece of knotted cord.
"Ask him if he ever saw this before," he said, and passed it to the witness.

"I notice that it is stained," said Silva, looking at it. "Is it with blood?"
"Yes."
"Then Mahbub will not touch it. For him to do so, would be to defile himself."
"He doesn't need to touch it. Show it to him."

Silva spoke to his servant, holding up the cord. The latter glanced at it and shook his head. Without a word, Silva
handed the cord back to the coroner.

"Are there any further questions?" he asked.

Goldberger pulled at his moustache impatiently.
"There are a lot of questions I'd like to ask," he said, "but I feel a good deal as though I were questioning the
Sphinx. Isn't it a little queer that a Thug should be so particular about a few blood-stains?"

"I fear that you are doing Mahbub an injustice in your thoughts," Silva said, gravely. "You have heard certain
tales of the Thugs, perhaps--tales distorted and magnified and untrue. In the old days, as worshippers of Kali, they
did, sometimes, offer her a human sacrifice; but that was long ago. To say a man is a Thug is not to say he is also a
murderer."

"It will take more than that to convict him, anyway," assented Goldberger, quickly. "That is all for the present,
professor." I bit back a smile at the title which came so unconsciously from Goldberger's lips.

Silva bowed and walked slowly away toward the house, Mahbub following close behind. At a look from
Simmonds, two of his men strolled after the strange couple.

Goldberger stared musingly after them for a moment, then shook his head impatiently, and turned back to the
business in hand.

"Will Mr. Swain please take the stand?" he said; and Swain took the chair. "Now, Mr. Swain," Goldberger
began, after swearing him, “please tell us, in your own way, of what part you had in the incidents of Thursday night.”

Swain told his story much as he had told it to Godfrey and me, and I noticed how closely both Goldberger and the district attorney followed it. When he had finished, Goldberger asked the same question that Godfrey had asked.

"While you were having the altercation with Mr. Vaughan, did you grasp hold of him?"

"No, sir; I did not touch him."

"You are quite sure?"

"Yes, sir."

"You didn't touch him at any time, then or afterwards?"

"No, sir. I didn't see him afterwards."

"What were your feelings when he took his daughter away?"

"I was profoundly grieved."

"And angry?"

"Yes, I suppose I was angry. He was most unjust to me."

"He had used very violent language to you, had he not?"

"Yes."

"He had threatened your life if you tried to see his daughter again?"

"Yes."

"Now, Mr. Swain, as you stood there, angry and humiliated, didn't you make up your mind to follow him to the house and have it out with him?"

Swain smiled.

"I'm lawyer enough to know," he said, "that a question like that isn't permissible. But I'll answer it. I may have had such an impulse--I don't know; but the sight of the cobra there in the arbour put it effectually out of my head."

"You still think there was a cobra?"

"I am sure of it."

"And you ran out of the arbour so fast you bumped your head?"

"I suppose that's what happened. It's mighty sore, anyway," and Swain put his hand to it ruefully.

"Mr. Swain," went on the coroner, slowly, "are you prepared to swear that, after you hurt your head, you might not, in a confused and half-dazed condition, have followed your previous impulse to go to the house and see Mr. Vaughan?"

"Yes," answered Swain, emphatically, "I am. Although I was somewhat dazed, I have a distinct recollection of going straight to the wall and climbing back over it."

"You cut your wrist as you were crossing the wall the first time?"

[Illustration: "I'm lawyer enough to know," he said, "that a question like that isn't permissible"]

"Yes," and Swain held up his hand and showed the strip of plaster across the wound.

"Your right wrist?"

"Yes."

"It bled freely, did it not?"

"Very freely."

"What became of the clothes you took off when you changed into those brought by Mr. Godfrey?"

"I don't know. Mr. Lester told me they were left here. I intended to inquire for them."

At a sign from Goldberger, Simmonds opened a suit-case and placed a bundle on the table. Goldberger unrolled it and handed it to Swain.

"Are these the clothes?" he asked.

"Yes," said Swain, after a moment's examination.

"Will you hold the shirt up so the jury can see it?"

Swain held the garment up, and everybody's eyes were fixed upon the blood-soaked sleeve.
"There seems to have been a good deal of blood," remarked Goldberger. "It must have run down over your hand."

"It did. It was all over my fingers."

"So that it would probably stain anything you touched?"

"Yes, very probably."

"Did you think of that when you were in the arbour with Miss Vaughan?"

Swain's face suddenly crimsoned and he hung his head.

"I'm afraid not," he said.

"How was she dressed?"

"In a white robe of some silk-like material."

"A robe that would show a blood-stain?"

"Undoubtedly."

Goldberger paused for an instant, and then produced a pad, such as one uses for inking rubber stamps, opened it and placed it on the table before him.

"Have you any objection to giving me a set of your finger-prints?" he asked.

"None whatever," and Swain stepped toward the table and placed the tips of his fingers on the pad. Then he pressed each one carefully upon the pad of paper which the coroner placed before him. Goldberger watched him curiously, until all ten impressions had been made.

"You did that as though you had done it before," he remarked.

"I made a set once for Mr. Vaughan," said Swain, sitting down again. "He had a most interesting collection."

Goldberger passed the prints over to the head of the Bureau of Identification, then he turned back to the witness.

"Mr. Swain," he said, "have you ever seen this cord before?" and he handed him the knotted cord.

Swain took it and examined it curiously, without hesitation or repugnance.

"No," he answered, finally, "I never saw it before."

"Do you know what it is?" and Goldberger watched him closely.

"I infer that it is the cord with which Mr. Vaughan was strangled."

"That is so. You did not see it around his neck?"

"I have no recollection of having done so."

"Please look at the cord again, Mr. Swain," said Goldberger, still watching him. "You will see that it is knotted. Can you describe those knots for me?"

Swain looked at the knots, and I was glad to see that his hands were absolutely steady and his face free from fear. No murderer could handle so unconcernedly the instrument of his crime! Surely the jury would see that!

"The knots," said Swain, at last, "seem to be an ordinary square knot with which the cord was made into a noose, and then a double bowline to secure it."

"A double bowline? Can you tie such a knot?"

"Certainly. Anyone who has ever owned a boat can do so. It is the best knot for this purpose."

The coroner reached out for the cord and replaced it in the envelope. Then he produced the handkerchief.

"Can you identify this?" he asked, and handed it to the witness.

Swain changed colour a little as he took it.

"I cannot identify it," he said, in a low voice; "but I will say this: when Miss Vaughan found that my wrist was bleeding, she insisted upon tying her handkerchief around it. This may be the handkerchief."

Again a little shiver ran through the crowd, and Goldberger's eyes were gleaming.

"You notice that two corners of the handkerchief are free from stain," he said, "and are crumpled as though they had been tied in a knot. The handkerchief Miss Vaughan used would probably be in that condition, would it not?"

"Yes," Swain answered, his voice still low.

"You heard Dr. Hinman testify that he found the handkerchief beside the chair in which Mr. Vaughan was murdered?"

"Yes."

"Can you explain its presence there?"

"I cannot, unless it dropped from my wrist when I stooped to raise Miss Vaughan."

Goldberger looked at the witness for a moment, then he glanced at Sylvester, who nodded almost imperceptibly.

"That is all for the present, Mr. Swain," the coroner said, and Swain sat down again beside me, very pale, but holding himself well in hand.

Then Simmonds took the stand. His story developed nothing new, but he told of the finding of the body and of its appearance and manner of death in a way which brought back the scene to me very vividly. I suspected that he made his story deliberately impressive in order to efface the good impression made by the previous witness.
Finally, the coroner dipped once more into the suit-case, brought out another bundle and unrolled it. It proved to
be a white robe with red stains about the top. He handed it to Simmonds.

"Can you identify this?" he asked.

"Yes," said Simmonds; "it is the garment worn by Mr. Vaughan at the time of his murder."

"How do you identify it?"

"By my initials in indelible ink, on the right sleeve, where I placed them."

"There are stains on the collar of the robe. What are they?"

"Blood-stains."

"Human blood?"

"Yes, sir."

"How do you know?"

"I have had them tested."

"Did any blood come from the corpse?"

"No, sir; the skin of the neck was not broken."

"Where, then, in your opinion, did this blood come from?"

"From the murderer," answered Simmonds, quietly.

There was a sudden gasp from the reporters, as they saw whither this testimony was tending. I glanced at Swain.

He was a little paler, but was smiling confidently.

Goldberger, his face hawklike, stooped again to the suit-case, produced a third bundle, and, unrolling it,
disclosed another robe, also of white silk. This, too, he handed to Simmonds.

"Can you identify that?" he asked.

"Yes," said Simmonds. "It is the robe worn by Miss Vaughan on the night of the tragedy. My initials are on the
left sleeve."

"That also has blood-marks on it, I believe?"

"Yes, sir;" and, indeed, we could all perceive the marks.

"Human blood?"

"Yes, sir. I had it tested, too."

"That is all," said Goldberger, quickly, and placed on the stand the head of the Identification Bureau.

"Mr. Sylvester," he began, "you have examined the marks on these garments?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you make of them?"

"They are all unquestionably finger-marks, but most of them are mere smudges. However, the fabric of which
these robes are made is a very hard and finely-meshed silk, with an unusually smooth surface, and I succeeded in
discovering a few marks on which the lines were sufficiently distinct for purposes of identification. These I have
photographed. The lines are much plainer in the photographs than on the cloth."

"Have you the photographs with you?"

"I have," and Sylvester produced them from a pocket. "These are the prints on the robe belonging to the
murdered man," he added, passing four cards to the coroner. "You will notice that two of them show the right
thumb, though one is not very distinct; another shows the right fore-finger, and the fourth the right middle-finger."

"You consider these plain enough for purposes of identification?"

"Undoubtedly. Any one of them would be enough."

Goldberger passed the photographs to the foreman of the jury, who looked at them vacantly.

"And the other photographs?" he asked.

"I got only two prints from the other robe," said Sylvester. "All but these were hopelessly smudged, as though
the hand had moved while touching the garment."

"You mean they were all made by one hand?" asked Goldberger.

"Yes, sir; by the right hand. Again I have a print of the thumb and one of the third finger."

He passed the photographs over, and again Goldberger handed them on to the jury.

"Mr. Sylvester," said the coroner, "you consider the finger-print method of identification a positive one, do you
not?"

"Absolutely so."

"Even with a single finger?"

"Perhaps with a single finger there may be some doubt, if there is no other evidence. Somebody has computed
that the chance of two prints being exactly the same is one in sixty-four millions."

"And where is there other evidence?"

"I should say that a single finger was enough."
"Suppose you have two fingers?"
"Then it is absolutely certain."
"And three fingers?"
Sylvester shrugged his shoulders to indicate that proof could go no further. Goldberger took back the photographs from the foreman of the jury and ranged them before him on the table.

"Now, Mr. Sylvester," he said, "did you notice any correspondence between these prints?"
"Yes," answered the witness, in a low voice; "the thumb-prints on both robes were made by the same hand."

The audience sat spell-bound, staring, scarce breathing. I dared not glance at Swain. I could not take my eyes from that pale-faced man on the witness-stand, who knew that with every word he was riveting an awful crime to a living fellow-being.

"One question more," said Goldberger. "Have you any way of telling by whom these prints were made?"
"Yes," said Sylvester again, and his voice was so low I could scarcely hear it. "They were made by Frederic Swain. The prints he made just now correspond with them in every detail!"

CHAPTER XV
THE CHAIN TIGHTENS

An instant's silence followed Sylvester's words, and then a little murmur of interest and excitement, as the reporters bent closer above their work. I heard a quick, deep intaking of the breath from the man who sat beside me, and then I was on my feet.

"Your Honour," I said to Goldberger, "it seems that an effort is to be made to incriminate Mr. Swain in this affair, and he should therefore be represented by counsel. I myself intend to represent him, and I ask for an hour's adjournment in order to consult with my client."

Goldberger glanced at his watch.

"I intended to adjourn for lunch," he said, "as soon as I had finished with Mr. Sylvester. We will adjourn now, if you wish--until one-thirty," he added.

The battery of cameras was clicking at Swain, and two or three artists were making sketches of his head; there was a great bustle as the reporters gathered up their papers and hurried to their cars to search for the nearest telephone; the jury walked heavily away in charge of an officer to get their lunch at some near-by road-house; Sylvester was gathering up his prints and photographs and putting them carefully in his pocket; Simmonds was replacing the blood-stained clothing in the suit-case, to be held as evidence for the trial; but Swain sat there, with arms folded, staring straight before him, apparently unconscious of all this.

Goldberger looked at him closely, as he came down to speak to me, but Swain did not glance up.

"I can parole him in your custody, I suppose, Mr. Lester?" the coroner asked.
"Yes; certainly," I assented.

"Sylvester's evidence makes it look bad for him."
"Will you introduce me to Sylvester? I should like to go over the prints with him."

"Certainly;" and, a moment later, with the prints spread out before us, Sylvester was showing me their points of similarity.

Godfrey came forward while he was talking and stood looking over his shoulder.

I had heard of finger-print identification, of course, many times, but had made no study of the subject, and, I confess, the blurred photographs which Sylvester offered for my inspection seemed to me mighty poor evidence upon which to accuse a man of murder. The photographs showed the prints considerably larger than life-size, but this enlargement had also exaggerated the threads of the cloth, so that the prints seemed half-concealed by a heavy mesh. To the naked eye, the lines were almost indistinguishable, but under Sylvester's powerful glass they came out more clearly.

"The thumb," said Sylvester, following the lines first to the right and then to the left with the point of a pencil, "is what we call a double whorl. It consists of fourteen lines, or ridges. With the micrometer," and he raised the lid of a little leather box which stood on the table, took out an instrument of polished steel and applied it to one of the photographs, "we get the angle of these ridges. See how I adjust it," and I watched him, as, with a delicate thumbscrew, he made the needle-like points of the finder coincide with the outside lines of the whorl. "Now here is a photograph from the other robe, also showing the thumb," and he applied the machine carefully to it. "It also is a double whorl of fourteen lines, and you see the angles are the same. And here is the print of the right thumb which your client made for me." He applied the micrometer and drew back that I might see for myself.

"But these photographs are enlarged," I objected.

"That makes no difference. Enlargement does not alter the angles. Here are the other prints."

He compared them one by one, in the same manner. When he had finished, there was no escaping the conviction that they had been made by the same hand--that is, unless one denied the theory of finger-print identification
altogether, and that, I knew, would be absurd. As he finished his demonstration, Sylvester glanced over my shoulder
with a little deprecating smile, as of a man apologising for doing an unpleasant duty, and I turned to find Swain
standing there, his face lined with perplexity.

"You heard?" I asked.

"Yes; and I believe Mr. Sylvester is right. I can't understand it."

"Well," I said, "suppose we go and have some lunch, and then we can talk it over," and thanking Sylvester for
his courtesy, I led Swain away. Godfrey fell into step beside us, and for some moments we walked on in silence.

"There is only one explanation that I can see," said Godfrey, at last. "Swain, you remember, got to the library
about a minute ahead of us, and when we reached the door he was lifting Miss Vaughan to the couch. In that minute,
he must have touched the dead man."

Swain shook his head doubtfully.

"I don't see why I should have done that," he said.

"It isn't a question of why you did it," Godfrey pointed out. "It's a question of whether you did it. Go over the
scene in your mind, recalling as many details as you can, and then we'll go over it together, step by step, after
lunch."

It was a silent meal, and when it was over, Godfrey led the way into his study.

"Now," he began, when we were seated, "where was Miss Vaughan at the moment you sprang through the
door?"

"She was lying on the floor by the table, in front of her father's chair," Swain replied.

"You are sure of that?"

"Yes; I didn't see her until I ran around the table."

"I was hoping," said Godfrey, "that she had fainted with her arms clasped about her father's neck, and that, in
freeing them, you made those marks on his robe."

But Swain shook his head."

"No," he said; "I'm positive I didn't touch him."

"Then how did the marks get there?"

"I don't know," said Swain helplessly.

"Now, see here, Swain," said Godfrey, a little sternly, "there is only one way in which those finger-prints could
have got on that garment, and that is from your fingers. If you didn't put them there consciously, you must have done
so unconsciously. If they aren't explained in some way, the jury will very probably hold you responsible for the
crime."

"I understand that," Swain answered thickly; "but how can they be explained? I don't see why I should put my
hands on Mr. Vaughan's throat, even unconsciously. And then there's the fact that at no time during the evening was
I really unconscious--I was only confused and dazed."

"Goldberger's theory is plain enough," said Godfrey, turning to me; "and I must say that it's a good one. He
realises that there wasn't provocation enough to cause a man like Swain to commit murder, with all his senses about
him; but his presumption is that the crime was committed while Swain was in a dazed condition and not wholly self-
controlled. Such a thing is possible."

"No, it isn't!" cried Swain, his face livid. "It isn't possible! I'm not a murderer. I remember everything else--do
you think I wouldn't remember a thing like that?"

"I don't know what to think," Godfrey admitted, a straight line between his brows. "Besides, there's the
handkerchief."

"I don't see any mystery about that," said Swain. "There's only one way that could have come there. It dropped
from my wrist when I stooped over Miss Vaughan."

Godfrey looked at me, and I nodded. Swain might as well know the worst.

"That would be an explanation, sure enough," said Godfrey, slowly, "but for one fact--you didn't have any
bandage on your wrist when you came back over the wall. Both Lester and I saw your wrist and the cut on it
distinctly. Therefore, if you dropped the handkerchief there, it must have been before that."

The blood had run from Swain's cheeks, as though drained by an open artery, and for a moment he sat silent,
stars at the speaker. Then he raised his trembling right hand and looked at it, as though it might bear some mark to
tell him whether it were indeed guilty.

"But--but I don't understand!" he cried thickly. "You--you don't mean to intimate--you don't believe--but I wasn't
unconscious, I tell you! I wasn't near the house until after we heard the screams! I'm sure of it! I'd stake my soul on
it!"

"Get a grip of yourself, Swain," said Godfrey, soothingly. "Don't let yourself go like that. No, I don't believe you
killed Worthington Vaughan, consciously or unconsciously. I said Goldberger's theory was a good one, and it is; but
I don't believe it. My belief is that the murder was done by the Thug; but there's nothing to support it, except the fact that he was on the ground and that a noose was used. There's not a bit of direct evidence to connect him with the crime, and there's a lot of direct evidence to connect you with it. It's up to us to explain it away. Now, think carefully before you answer my questions: Have you any recollection, however faint, of having seen Mahbub before this morning?"

Swain sat for quite a minute searching his consciousness. Then, to my great disappointment, he shook his head. "No," he said; "I am sure I never saw him before."

"Nor Silva?"

"No, nor Silva--except, of course, the time, three or four months ago, when he gave me Mr. Vaughan's message."

"Have you a distinct recollection that the library was empty when you sprang into it?"

"Yes; very distinct. I remember looking about it, and then running past the table and discovering Miss Vaughan."

"You saw her father also?"

"Yes; but I merely glanced at him. I realised that he was dead."

"And you also have a distinct recollection that you did not approach him or touch him?"

"I am quite certain of that," answered Swain, positively.

"Then I give it up," said Godfrey, and lay back in his chair.

There was a queer boiling of ideas in my mind; ideas difficult to clothe with words, and composed of I know not what farrago of occultism, mysticism, and Oriental magic; but at last I managed to simmer them down to a timid question:

"I know it sounds foolish, but wouldn't it be possible, Godfrey, to explain all this by hypnosis, or occult influence, or something of that sort?"

Godfrey turned and looked at me.

"Silva seems to have impressed you," he said.

"He has. But isn't such an explanation possible?"

"I don't think so. I don't deny that the Orientals have gone farther along certain paths of psychology than we have, but as to their possessing any occult power, it is, in my opinion, all bosh. As for hypnosis, the best authorities agree that no man can be hypnotised to do a thing which, in his normal condition, would be profoundly repugnant to him. Indeed, few men can be hypnotised against their will. To be hypnotised, you have to yield yourself. Of course, the more you yield yourself, the weaker you grow, but that doesn't apply to Swain. I shouldn't advise you to use that line of argument to a jury," he added, with a smile. "You'd better just leave the whole thing up in the air."

"Well," I said, "I'll make the best fight I can. I was hoping Swain could help me; since he can't, we'll have to trust to luck."

Godfrey left us to get his story of the morning hearing into shape, and I fell into a gloomy revery. I could see no way out of the maze; either Swain had touched Vaughan's body, or it had been touched by another man with the same finger-markings. I sat suddenly upright, for if there was such a man, he must be one of two....

"What is it?" Swain asked, looking at me.

"A long shot," I said. "An exceedingly long shot--a three-hundred-million to one shot. How many people are there in the world, Swain?"

"I'm sure I don't know," and he stared at me in bewilderment.

"I think it's something like a billion and a half. If that is true, then it's possible that there are four people in the world, beside yourself, with the thumb and two fingers of the right hand marked exactly as yours are."

"We must have a reunion, some day," Swain remarked, with irony.

But I refused to be diverted.

"Allowing for imperceptible differences," I went on, "I think it is safe to assume that there are ten such people."

"Well," said Swain, bitterly, "I know one thing that it isn't safe to assume, and that is that either of those Hindus is one of those ten. I suppose that is the assumption you will make next?"

"It's an assumption I intend to put to the proof, anyway," I answered, somewhat testily, "and if it fails, I'm afraid you'll have to go to jail till I can dig up some more evidence."

He turned toward me quickly, his face working.

"See here, Mr. Lester," he said, "don't misunderstand me. I'm awfully grateful for all you're doing for me; but I don't mind going to jail—not on my own account. I'm innocent, and I'll be able to prove it in time. But Marjorie mustn't be left alone. I'd be ready to face anything if I knew that she was safe. She mustn't be left in that house—not a single night. Promise me that you'll take her with you as soon as the inquest's over!"

"I'll promise that, Swain, gladly," I said, "provided, of course, the doctor consents."

"We must get him," and Swain sprang to his feet. "We must explain to him how important it is."

"Perhaps I can get him on the 'phone," I said; but the person who answered told me that he had already started
for the inquest. And, a moment later, Mrs. Hargis tapped at the door of the study and said that the doctor was outside. I told her to show him in at once.

"The truth is," said Hinman, shaking hands with both of us, "I thought I'd drop in to find out if there was anything I could do. No reasonable person," he went on, turning to Swain, "believes you killed that defenceless old man; but those finger-prints certainly do puzzle me."

"They puzzle me, too," said Swain; "but I'll prove my innocence--though it will take time."

"It looks to me," said the doctor, slowly, "that about the only way you can prove your innocence is to catch the real murderer."

"That's exactly what we're going to try to do," I assented.

"And meanwhile Mr. Swain will be in jail?" asked the doctor.

"I'm afraid there's no help for it," I admitted ruefully.

"I was just telling Mr. Lester that I didn't mind that," said Swain earnestly, "that I could stand anything, if I was only sure that Miss Vaughan was safe. She isn't safe in that house. Mr. Lester has arranged to place her with the family of his partner, Mr. Royce, where she will be properly taken care of. Is there any reason why she can't be taken there to-day?"

The doctor considered for a moment.

"Ordinarily," he said, at last, "I would advise that she be left where she is for a few days; but, under the circumstances, perhaps she would better be moved. You can get an easy-riding carriage—or a car will do, if you drive carefully. The nurses, will, of course, go along. The only thing is, she will probably wish to attend her father's funeral, which takes place to-morrow."

Swain bit his lips nervously.

"I have a horror of her staying in that house another night," he said; "but I hadn't thought of the funeral. There is one nurse on duty all the time, isn't there, doctor?"

"Yes."

"All right, then; we'll risk one night more. But you promise me that she shall be taken away immediately after the funeral?"

"Yes," I said, "I promise."

"And I," said the doctor. Then he looked at his watch. "It's time we were getting back," he added.

He took us over in his car, and we found the jury, under the guidance of Simmonds, just coming out of the house, each member smoking a fat black cigar at the expense of the State. They had been viewing the body and the scene of the crime, but as they filed back into their seats, I noted that they seemed anything but depressed. The lunch had evidently been a good one.

Sylvester was recalled to finish his testimony. He explained the system of curves and angles by which finger-prints are grouped and classified, and the various points of resemblance by which two prints could be proved to have been made by the same finger. There was, first of all, the general convolution, whether a flexure, a stria, a sinus, a spiral, a circle, or a whorl; there was, secondly, the number of ridges in the convolution; and there was, thirdly, the angles which these ridges made. If two prints agreed in all these details, their identity was certain. He then proceeded to show that the prints made that morning by Swain did so agree with the photographs of the prints on the garments. Finally the witness was turned over to me for cross-examination.

"Mr. Sylvester," I began, "are you willing to assert that those finger-prints could have been made by no man in the world except Mr. Swain?"

Sylvester hesitated, just as I hoped he would do.

"No," he answered, at last, "I can't assert that, Mr. Lester. There may be three or four other men in the world with finger-prints like these. But the probabilities against any of these men having made these prints are very great. Besides, it is a thing easily proved—the number of persons who might have committed the crime is limited, and it is an easy thing to secure prints of their fingers."

"That is what I was about to propose," I agreed. "I should like the finger-prints taken of every one who was in the house Thursday night."

"Do I understand that your case stands or falls upon this point?" asked the coroner.

"Your Honor," I answered, "my client cannot explain how the prints of his fingers, if they are his, came to be upon that robe. The one thing he is certain of is that they were not placed there by him. Not once, during the entire evening, was my client near enough to Mr. Vaughan to touch him; not once did he so far lose consciousness as to be unable to remember what occurred. We have racked our brains for an explanation, and the only possible one seems to be that the prints of the real murderer resemble those of my client. And when I say the real murderer," I added, "I do not necessarily mean one of the persons whom we know to have been in the house. Outside of these finger-prints, there has been absolutely no evidence introduced here to prove that the crime might not have been committed by
some person unknown to us."

"You can scarcely expect the jury to believe, however," Goldberger pointed out, "that this supposititious person
had finger-tips like your client's."

"No," I agreed, "I make no such assertion; my hope is that we shall soon have the prints of the real murderer; and
when I say the real murderer," I added, looking at the jury, "I believe every one present understands who I mean."

The coroner rapped sharply; but I had said what I wished to say, and sat down. The witnesses of the morning
were ordered to be brought out. Sylvester arranged his ink-pad and sheets of paper.

"It seems to me," remarked the coroner, with a smile, "that you and Mr. Godfrey would better register, too. You
were within striking distance."

"That is right," I agreed, and was the first to register; but Sylvester, after a glance at my prints, shook his head.
"Your thumb is a left sinus," he said. "You're cleared, Mr. Lester."

Godfrey came forward and registered, too, and after him the three servants. In each case, a shake of Sylvester's
head told the result.

Then Simmonds came from the house, with Silva and Mahbub after him, and the coroner explained to Silva
what was wanted. I fancied that the yogi's brow contracted a little.

"The registration of the fingers," he said, "of the foot or of the palm, is with us a religious ceremony, not to be
lightly performed. By some, it is also held that the touch of ink, unless compounded by a priest of the temple
according to a certain formula, is defiling; and, above all, it is impossible for a believer to permit such relics of
himself to remain in the hands of an infidel."

"The relics, as you call them," Goldberger explained, "won't need to remain in our hands. My expert here can tell
in a minute whether your prints resemble those of his photographs. If they do not, they will be returned to you."

"And if they do?"

Goldberger laughed.
"Well, you can have them back, anyway. In that case, I guess we can persuade you, later on, to make another
set."

The yogi flushed angrily, but controlled himself.
"I rely upon your promise, sir," he said, and laid his fingers first upon the pad and then upon the paper.
He stood with closed eyes and moving lips, his inked fingers held carefully away from him, during the breathless
moment that Sylvester bent above the prints. Then the expert looked up and shook his head.
"No resemblance at all," he said, and held out the sheet of paper on which the prints were.
Silva accepted it silently, and rolled it into a ball in the palm of his hand.
"Now for the other fellow," said Goldberger.
Silva glanced at his follower doubtfully.
"I am not sure that I can make him understand," he said, and for some moments talked energetically to Mahbub
in a language which I suppose was Hindu. Mahbub listened, scowling fiercely, speaking a brief sentence now and
then. "He would know," Silva asked, at last, turning to the coroner, "whether blood is a constituent of that ink."

"It is a purely chemical compound," Sylvester explained. "There is no blood in it, nor any other animal matter."
This was repeated to Mahbub, and, after some further hesitation, he advanced to the table.
A moment later, Sylvester was bending above the prints. Then he looked up, his face red with astonishment, and
motioned me to approach.
"Look at that!" he said, and laid the prints before me.
My heart was leaping with the hope that the incredible had happened; that here lay the clue to the mystery. But
the first glance told me that such was not the case. The prints resembled Swain's not at all. And then, when I looked
at them again, I perceived that they resembled no other print which I had ever seen.
For the prints of all ten fingers were exactly alike, and consisted, not of whorls and spirals, but of straight lines
running right across the finger. Sylvester was staring at them in bewilderment.
"These," he said, when he could find his voice, "are the most remarkable prints I ever saw."
"Do they resemble those on the robe?" asked the coroner.
"Not in the least."
"Then that settles that point," said Goldberger, with what seemed to me a sigh of relief.
"There is one thing, though," said Sylvester, eying Mahbub curiously; "I wish I knew the secret of these
extraordinary prints."

"I can tell it to you," said Silva, with a little smile. "It is not at all extraordinary. The system of finger-print
identification has been in use among the Hindus for many centuries, and was adopted by the English courts in India
nearly a hundred years ago, after every other method had failed. The caste of Thuggee, which was at war with all
other castes, and especially at war with the English, evaded it by stimulating on the fingers of their male children the
formation of these artificial ridges. It became a sacred rite, performed by the priests, and has been maintained by the more devout members of the caste, although the need for it has ceased."

Sylvester looked at the prints again.
"I should like to keep these," he said. "They would be a great addition to my collection."
Silva bowed.
"Mahbub will have no objection," he said. "To him, they are of no importance, since there are many hundreds of men in the world with finger-tips identical with his. That is all?"
Goldberger nodded, and the two strange figures walked slowly away toward the house.

CHAPTER XVI
MISS VAUGHAN'S STORY
Sylvester was still bending in ecstasy over those strange finger-prints--the absorbed ecstasy of the collector who has come unexpectedly upon a specimen wonderful and precious.

"Well," he said, looking up, at last, "I've learned something new to-day. These prints shall have the place of honour. They might not be a means of identification among the Thugs, but I'll wager there's no collection in America has a set like them! They're unique!"
"But not in the least like the photographs," put in Goldberger, drily.
"No," and Sylvester flushed a little as he felt himself jerked from his hobby. "None of the prints we have taken this afternoon resemble the photographs in any way."
"But those made by Mr. Swain _do_ resemble them?"
"It is more than a resemblance. They are identical with them."
"What inference do you draw from that?"
"It is more than an inference," Sylvester retorted. "It is a certainty. I am willing to swear that the finger-prints on the robe worn by the murdered man were made by Frederic Swain."

"You realise the serious nature of this assertion?" asked the coroner, slowly.
"I realise it fully."
"And that realisation does not cause you to modify it in any way?"
"It cannot be modified," said Sylvester, firmly, "however serious it may be, however reluctant I may be to make it--it cannot be modified because it is the truth."
There was a moment's silence, then Goldberger turned to me.
"Have you any questions to ask the witness, Mr. Lester?"
"No," I answered; "I have none."
Sylvester bent again above his prints, while the coroner and the prosecutor held a brief consultation. Then Goldberger turned to me.
"Have you anything further, Mr. Lester?" he asked. "Our evidence is all in, I believe."

I was driven to my last entrenchment.
"I should like to call Miss Vaughan," I said, "if Dr. Hinman thinks she is strong enough."
Swain's chair creaked as he swung toward me.
"No, no!" he whispered, angrily. "Don't do that! Spare her that!"
But I waved him away, for it was his honour and welfare I had to consider, not Miss Vaughan's convenience, and turned to Dr. Hinman, who was evidently struggling between two duties. One was his duty to his patient; the other his duty to a man cruelly threatened, whom his patient's testimony might save.
"Well, what do you say, doctor?" asked the coroner.
"Miss Vaughan is no doubt able to testify," said the doctor, slowly, "but I should like to spare her as much as possible. Couldn't her deposition be taken privately? I think you mentioned something of the sort."
Goldberger looked at me.
"I shall be satisfied," I said, "to question her in the presence of Mr. Goldberger, reserving the right to put her on the stand, should I deem it necessary to do so."
"Very well," agreed the doctor. "I will prepare her," and he hurried away toward the house.
Swain was gripping my arm savagely.
"See here, Mr. Lester," he said in my ear, his voice shaking with anger, "I'm in deadly earnest about this. Take Miss Vaughan's deposition if you wish, but under no circumstances shall she be hauled before this crowd, in her present condition, and compelled to testify."
"Why not?" I asked, surprised at his vehemence.
"Because, in the first place, her testimony can't help me; and, in the second place, I won't have her tortured."
"She wouldn't be tortured."
"Look around at these reporters and these photographers, and then tell me she wouldn't be tortured!"
"How do you know her evidence won't help you?"
"How can it?"
"It will confirm your story."
"Can it explain away the finger-prints?"

At the words, I suddenly realised that there was one person within striking distance of the murdered man whose prints we had not taken--his daughter. Not that they were necessary ...

Dr. Hinman appeared at the edge of the lawn and beckoned. As I arose from my chair, Swain gave my arm a last savage grip.

"Remember!" he said.

But I kept my lips closed. If Miss Vaughan really loved him, and could help him, I would not need to urge her to the stand!

Goldberger joined me and together we followed Hinman into the house and up the stairs. He opened the door at the stair-head, waited for us to precede him, followed us into the room, and closed the door gently.

Miss Vaughan was half-sitting, half-reclining in a large chair. The blinds were drawn and the room in semi-darkness, but even in that light I could see how changed she was from the girl of whom I had caught a glimpse two days before. Her face was dead white, as though every drop of blood had been drained from it; her eyes were heavy and puffed, as from much weeping, and it seemed to me that there still lingered in their depths a shadow of horror and shrinking fear.

"This is Mr. Goldberger," said the doctor, "and this is Mr. Lester."

She inclined her head to each of us, as we took the chairs the doctor drew up, and I fancied that her cheeks flushed a little as her eyes met mine.

"I have explained to Miss Vaughan," the doctor continued, "that an inquiry is in progress, as the law requires, to determine the manner of her father's death, and that her story of what happened that night is essential to it."

"It will, at least, be a great help to us," said Goldberger gently, and I saw how deeply the girl's delicate beauty appealed to him. It was a beauty which no pallor could disguise, and Goldberger's temperament was an impressionable one.

"I shall be glad to tell you all I know," said Miss Vaughan, "but I fear it will not help you much."
"Will you tell us something, first, of your father's mental state?" I suggested.

"For many years," she began, "father had been a student of mysticism, and until quite recently he remained merely a student. I mean by that that he approached the subject with a detached mind and with no interest in it except a scientific interest."

"I understand," I said. "And that has changed recently?"

"It has changed completely in the last few months. He became a disciple, a convert anxious to win other converts."

"A convert to what?"
"To Hinduism--to the worship of Siva."
"That is the cult to which Francisco Silva belongs?"
"Yes; he is a White Priest of Siva."
"And this change in your father has been since the coming of this man?"
"Yes."
"Do you know anything of him?"
"Only that he is a very wonderful man."
"You know nothing of his past?"
"No."
"Did your father wish you to become a convert?"
"Yes, he desired it deeply."
"A priestess of Siva, I believe it is called?"
"Yes."
"And the yogi also desired it?"
"He believed it would be a great destiny. But he urged it only for my father's sake."

"So you determined to appeal to Mr. Swain?"

The colour deepened in her cheeks again.
"I decided to ask his advice," she said.
"Please tell us what happened that evening."

"Mr. Swain met me at the arbour in the corner of the grounds, as I had asked him to, and convinced me that my father's mind had given way under his long study of the occult. We decided that he should be placed in a sanitarium
where he could have proper attention, and Mr. Swain was to make the necessary arrangements. All I would have to do would be to sign some papers. We were just saying good-night, when my father appeared at the entrance of the arbour."

"This was about midnight, was it not?"
"Yes."
"Why did you choose that hour for the meeting?"
"Because at that hour my father and the yogi were always engaged in invoking an astral benediction."

Even I, who knew the significance of the words, paused a little at them. The doctor and Goldberger were hopelessly at sea. After all, the words were a very good description of the weird ceremony.

"Well," I said, "and after your father appeared, what happened?"

"He was very excited and spoke to Mr. Swain in a most violent manner. Mr. Swain attempted to take me away from him, not knowing, at first, who it was had seized me; but I pushed him back and led my father away toward the house."

"Did Mr. Swain touch your father?"
"No; I was between them all the time. I was determined that they should not touch each other. I was afraid, if they came together, that something terrible would happen."

Goldberger glanced at me.
"Something terrible to your father?" he asked.
"Oh, no," she answered, quickly; "Mr. Swain would not have harmed my father, but father did not know what he was doing and might have harmed Mr. Swain."

It was my turn to look at Goldberger.
"After you left the arbour," I asked, "did you see Mr. Swain again?"
"No, I did not see him again."
"You went straight to the house?"
"Yes; father was still very violent. He had forbidden me to see Mr. Swain or to write to him. He had taken a violent dislike to him."
"Do you know why?"
"Yes," and she flushed a little, but went on bravely; "He believed that Mr. Swain wished to marry me."
"As, in fact, he did," I commented.
"Yes; or, at least, he did before his financial troubles came. After that, he wished to give me up."
"But you refused to be given up?"
"Yes," she said, and looked at me with eyes beautifully radiant. "I refused to be given up."

I felt that I was rushing in where angels would hesitate to enter, and beat a hasty retreat.
"Was your father always opposed to your marriage?" I asked.

"No; he has wanted me to wait until I was of age; but he never absolutely forbade it until a few months ago. It was at the time he first tried to persuade me to become a convert to Hinduism."

"What occurred after you and your father reached the house?"

"Father was very angry, and demanded that I promise never to see Mr. Swain again. When I refused to promise, he sent me to my room, forbidding me to leave it without his permission. I came up at once, more than ever convinced that father needed medical attention. I was very nervous and over-wrought, and I sat down by the window to control myself before going to bed. And then, suddenly, I remembered something the yogi had told me--that father was not strong, and that a fit of anger might be very serious. I knew the servants had gone to bed, and that he must be downstairs alone, since I had heard no one come up."

"You had heard no one in the hall at all?" I asked.

"No, I had heard no one. But I remember, as I started down the stairs, a curious feeling of dread seized me. It was so strong that I stood for some moments on the top step before I could muster courage to go down. At last, I _did_ go down and--and found my father!"

She stopped, her hands over her eyes, as though to shut away the remembrance of that dreadful sight.
"Have you strength to tell me just what happened, Miss Vaughan?" I asked gently.
She controlled herself with an effort and took her hands from her face.
"Yes," she said; "I can tell you. I remember that I stood for a moment at the door, looking about the room, for at the first glance I thought there was no one there. I thought, for an instant, that father had gone into the grounds, for the curtain at the other door was trembling a little, as though someone had just passed."

"Ah!" I said, and looked at Goldberger.
"It might have been merely the breeze, might it not?" he asked.
"I suppose so. The next instant I saw my father huddled forward in his chair. I was sure he had had a seizure of
some sort; I ran to him, and raised his head...."

Again she stopped, her eyes covered, and a slow shudder shook her from head to foot. I could guess what a shock the sight of that horrible face had been!

"I do not remember anything more," she added, in a whisper.

For a moment, we all sat silent. The only portion of her evidence which could in any way help Swain was her discovery of the swaying curtain, and even that, as Goldberger had pointed out, might easily mean nothing.

"Miss Vaughan," I said, at last, "how long a time elapsed from the moment you left your father in the library until you found him?"

"I don't know. Perhaps fifteen minutes."

"Was he quite dead when you found him?"

"Yes, I--I think so."

"Then," I said to Goldberger, "the murder must have been committed very soon after Miss Vaughan came upstairs."

"Yes," agreed Goldberger, in a low tone, "and by somebody who came in from the grounds, since she met no one in the hall and heard no one."

Miss Vaughan leaned toward him, her hands clasping and unclasping.

"Do you know who it was?" she gasped. "Have you found out who it was?"

"We suspect who it was," answered Goldberger gravely.

"Tell me," she began.

"Wait a minute, Miss Vaughan," I broke in. "Tell me, first--did you hear anyone following you across the garden?"

"Yes," she answered thoughtfully; "once or twice I fancied that someone was following us. It seemed to me I heard a step, but when I looked back I saw no one."

"Did that fact make you uneasy?"

"No," she said, with a little smile, "I thought it was Mr. Swain."

I saw Goldberger's sudden movement. I myself could not repress a little shudder.

"You thought that would be the natural thing for Mr. Swain to do, did you not?" the coroner inquired.

"Yes--I thought he might wish to see me safe." Then she stopped, leaning forward in her chair and staring first at Goldberger and then at me. "What is it?" she whispered, her hands against her heart. "Oh, what is it? You don't mean--you can't mean--oh, tell me! It isn't Fred you suspect! It can't be Fred!"

It was Dr. Hinman who laid a gentle and quieting hand upon her shoulder, and it was his grave voice which answered her.

"Yes," he said, "there are some things which seem to implicate Mr. Swain; but both Mr. Lester and I are certain he isn't guilty. We're going to prove it!"

She looked up at him with a grateful smile.

"Thank you!" she gasped. "I--wait a moment--I was silly to give way so. Of course you will prove it! It's absurd!" And then she stopped and looked at Goldberger. "Do you believe it?" she demanded.

Goldberger flushed a little under her gaze.

"I don't know what to believe, Miss Vaughan," he said. "I'm searching for the truth."

"So are we all," I said. "I am counsel for Mr. Swain, Miss Vaughan, and I have come to you, hoping that your story would help to clear him."

"Oh, I wish it might!" she cried.

"You know Mr. Swain cut his wrist as he came over the wall that night?"

"Yes, he told me. He didn't know it was bleeding, at first; then he felt the blood on his hand, and I wrapped his wrist in my handkerchief."

"Was it this handkerchief?" asked Goldberger, and took from his pocket the blood-stained square and handed it to her.

She took it with a little shiver, looked at it, and passed it back to him.

"Yes," she said; "that is it."

Then she sat upright, her clenched hands against her breast, staring at us with starting eyes.

"I remember now!" she gasped. "I remember now! I saw it--a blotch of red--lying on the floor beside my father's chair! How did it get there, Mr. Lester? Had he been there? Did he follow us?" She stopped again, as she saw the look in Goldberger's eyes, and then the look in mine. With a long, indrawn breath of horror, she cowered back into the chair, shaking from head to foot. "Oh, what have I done!" she moaned. "What have I done?"

There could be no question as to what she had done, I told myself, bitterly: she had added another link to the chain of evidence about her lover. I could see the same thought in the sardonic gaze which Goldberger turned upon
me; but before either of us could say a word, the doctor, with a peremptory gesture, had driven us from the room.

CHAPTER XVII
THE VERDICT

Goldberger paused at the stair-head and looked at me, an ironical light in his eyes. I knew he suspected that Miss Vaughan's story of the handkerchief was no great surprise to me.

"Well," he asked, "will you wish to put her on the stand?"

I shook my head and started down the stairs, for I was far from desiring an argument just then, but he stopped me with a hand upon the sleeve.

"You realise, Mr. Lester," he said, more seriously, "that it is plainly my duty to cause Swain's arrest?"

"Yes," I assented. "I realise that. Under the circumstances, you can do nothing else."

He nodded, and we went downstairs together. I saw Swain's eager eyes upon us as we came out upon the lawn, and his lips were at my ear the instant I had taken my seat.

"Well?" he whispered.

"She cannot help you," I said. I did not think it necessary to say how deeply she would hurt him when her testimony was called for in open court, as, of course, it would be.

"And you won't put her on the stand?"

"No," I answered, and he sank back with a sigh of relief. Then something in my face seemed to catch his eye, for he leaned forward again. "You don't mean that she believes I did it?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Oh, no," I hastened to assure him; "she says such an accusation is absurd; she was greatly overcome when she learned that you were even suspected; she said...."

But the coroner rapped for order.

"Have you any other evidence to introduce, Mr. Lester?" he asked.

"No, Your Honour," I answered, and I saw the cloud of disappointment which fell upon the faces of reporters and photographers. To have been able to feature Miss Vaughan would have meant an extra column. I could also see, from the expression on the faces of the jury, that my failure to put her on the stand made an unfavourable impression. There was, indeed, only one inference to draw from it.

Goldberger turned aside for a few words with the prosecutor, and I suspected that he was telling him of Miss Vaughan's discovery of the blood-stained handkerchief; but there was no way to get the story before the jury without calling her. They seemed to agree, at last, that they had evidence enough, for the jury was instructed to prepare its verdict. Its members withdrew a little distance under the trees, and gathered into a group to talk it over.

I watched them for a moment, and then I turned to Swain.

"I suppose you know," I said, "that they're certain to find against you? Even if they don't, the district attorney will cause your arrest right away."

He nodded.

"I'm not worrying about that. I'm worrying about Miss Vaughan. You won't forget your promise?"

"No."

"She'll have no one but you," he went on rapidly. "Neither will I! You mustn't fail us!"

"I shan't," I promised. "But you'd better think about yourself a little, Swain."

"Plenty of time for that when I'm sure that Marjorie's safe. The minute you tell me she's at the Royces', I'll begin to think about myself. I'm not afraid. I didn't kill that man. No jury would convict me."

I might have told him that convictions are founded on evidence, and that the evidence in this case was certainly against him, but I thought it better to hold my peace. The more confident he was, the less irksome he would find imprisonment. So I sat silent until the members of the jury filed back into their places.

"Have you reached a verdict, gentlemen?" the coroner asked, after his clerk had polled them.

"Yes, Your Honour," the foreman answered.

"What is the verdict?"

The foreman held out a folded paper to the clerk, who took it, opened it, and read:

"We, the jury in the inquest held this thirteenth day of June, 1908, into the death of one Worthington Vaughan, residing in the Borough of the Bronx, City of New York, do find that the deceased came to his death by strangulation at the hands of one Frederic Swain."

There was an instant's silence, and then Goldberger turned to the jury.

"Is this your verdict, gentlemen?" he asked quietly; and each jurymen replied in the affirmative as his name was called. "I thank you for your services," Goldberger added, directed his clerk to give them their vouchers on the city treasurer, and dismissed them.

Simmonds and the assistant district attorney came toward us, and I arose to meet them. Swain got up, also, and when I glanced at him I saw that he was smiling.
"I don't know whether you have met Mr. Blake, Mr. Lester," said Simmonds, and the prosecutor and I shook hands. I introduced him to Swain, but Swain did not offer his hand.

"I suppose you've come to take me along?" he said, the smile still on his lips.

"I'm afraid we'll have to."

"Would bail be considered?" I asked.

"I'm afraid not," and Blake shook his head. "It isn't a bailable offence."

I knew, of course, that he was right and that it was of no use to argue or protest. Swain turned to me and held out his hand.

"Then I'll say good-bye, Mr. Lester," he said. "I'll hope to see you Monday."

"You shall," I promised.

"And with good news," he added.

"Yes--and with good news."

"Can we give you a lift?" Blake asked.

"No," I said, "thank you; but I'm staying out here for the present."

I watched them as they climbed into a car--Goldberger, Blake, Simmonds and Swain; I saw the latter take one last look at the house; then he waved to me, as the car turned into the highroad--at least, he was taking it bravely! The coroner's assistants climbed into a second car, and the four or five policemen into a third. Then the reporters and photographers piled into the others, the few stragglers who had straggled in straggled on again, and in five minutes the place was deserted. As I looked around, I was surprised to see that even Godfrey had departed. There was something depressing about the jumble of chairs and tables, the litter of paper on the grass--something sordid, as of a banquet-hall deserted by the diners.

I turned away and started for the gate; and then, suddenly, I wondered who was in charge of the house. Who would give orders to clear away this litter? Who would arrange for the funeral on the morrow? How could Miss Vaughan do it, ill as she was? With quick resolution, I turned back toward the house. As I did so, I was surprised to see a man appear at the edge of the lawn and run toward me. It was Hinman.

"I was afraid I'd missed you," he said. "Miss Vaughan wishes to see you. She's all alone here and needs some help."

"I'd thought of that," I said. "I was just coming to offer it. Is she better?"

"Yes, much better. I think she has realised the necessity of conquering her nerves. Of course, we must still be careful."

I nodded, and followed him into the house. Then I stopped in astonishment, for Miss Vaughan was sitting in a chair in the library. She rose as I entered, came a step toward me and held out her hand.

"You must not think too badly of me, Mr. Lester," she said. "I won't give way again, I promise you."

"You have had a great deal to bear," I protested, taking her hand in mine. "I think you have been very brave. I only hope that I can be of some service to you."

"Thank you. I am sure you can. Let us all sit down, for we must have quite a talk. Dr. Hinman tells me that I shall need a lawyer."

"Undoubtedly," I assented. "Your father's estate will have to be settled, and that can only be done in the courts. Besides, in the eyes of the law, you are still a minor."

"Will you be my lawyer, Mr. Lester?"

"It will be a great privilege," I answered.

"Then we will consider that settled?"

"Yes," I agreed, "we will consider that settled."

"But it is not business I wish to discuss to-day," she went on, quickly. "There are other things more urgent. First, I wish to get acquainted with you. Have you not wondered, Mr. Lester, why it was that I chose you to deliver my letter?"

"I suppose it was because there was no one else," I answered, looking at her in some astonishment for the way she was rattling on. The colour was coming and going in her cheeks and her eyes were very bright. I wondered if she had escaped brain fever, after all.

"No," she said, smiling audaciously, "it was because I liked your face--I knew you could be trusted. Of course, for a moment I was startled at seeing you looking down at me from a tree. I wondered afterwards how you came to be there."

"Just idle curiosity," I managed to stammer, my face very hot. "I am sorry if I annoyed you."

"Oh, but it was most fortunate," she protested; "and a great coincidence, too, that you should be Mr. Swain's employer, and able to get hold of him at once."

"It didn't do much good," I said, gloomily; "and it has ended in putting Swain in jail."
I happened to glance at her hands, folded in her lap, and saw that they were fairly biting into each other.

"In jail!" she whispered, and now there was no colour in her face.

"Forgive me, Miss Vaughan," I said, hastily. "That was brutal. I forgot you didn't know."

"Tell me!" she panted. "Tell me! I can stand it! Oh, you foolish man, didn't you see--I was trying to nerve myself--I was trying to find out...."

I caught the hands that were bruising themselves against each other and held them fast.

"Miss Vaughan," I said, "listen to me and believe that I am telling you the whole truth. The coroner's jury returned a verdict that Swain was guilty of your father's death. As the result of that verdict, he has been taken to the Tombs. But the last words he said to me before the officers took him away were that he was innocent, and that he had no fear."

"Surely," she assented, eagerly, "he should have no fear. But to think of him in prison--it tears my heart!"

"Don't think of it that way!" I protested. "He is bearing it bravely--when I saw him last, he was smiling."

"But the stain--the disgrace."

"There will be none; he shall be freed without stain--I will see to that."

"But I cannot understand," she said, "how the officers of the law could blunder so."

"All of the evidence against him," I said, "was purely circumstantial, except in one particular. He was in the grounds at the time the murder was committed; your father had quarrelled with him, and it was possible that he had followed you and your father to the house, perhaps not knowing clearly what he was doing, and that another quarrel had occurred. But that amounted to nothing. Young men like Swain, even when half-unconscious, don't murder old men by strangling them with a piece of curtain-cord. To suppose that Swain did so would be absurd, but for one thing--no, for two things."

"What are they?" she demanded.

"One is that the handkerchief which you had tied about his wrist was found beside your father's chair--but it was not upon that the jury made its finding."

"What was it, then?"

"It was this: Swain swore positively that at no time during the evening had he touched your father."

"Yes, yes; and that was true. He could not have touched him."

"And yet," I went on slowly, "prints of Swain's blood-stained fingers were found on your father's robe."

"But," she gasped, pulling her hands away from me and wringing them together, "how could that be? That is impossible!"

"I should think so, too," I agreed, "if I had not seen the prints with my own eyes."

"You are sure they were his--you are sure?"

"I am afraid there can be no doubt of it," and I told her how Sylvester had proved it.

She listened motionless, mute, scarce-breathing, searching my face with distended eyes. Then, suddenly, her face changed, she rose from her chair, flew across the room, opened a book-case and pulled out a bulky volume bound in vellum. She turned the pages rapidly, giving each of them only a glance. Suddenly she stopped, and stared at a page, her face livid.

"What is it?" I asked, and hastened to her.

"It is the book of finger-prints," she gasped. "A great many--oh, a great many--my father collected and studied them for years. He believed--I do not know what he believed."

She paused, struggling for breath.

"Well," I said; "what then?"

"Mr. Swain's was among them," she went on, in the merest whisper. "They were here--page two hundred and thirty--see, there is an index--Swain, F., page two hundred and thirty." She pointed at the entry with a shaking finger.

"Well," I said again, striving to understand, "what of it?"

"Look!" she whispered, holding the book toward me, "that page is no longer there! It has been torn out!"

Then, with a convulsive shudder, she closed the book, thrust it back into its place, and ran noiselessly to the door leading to the hall. She swept back the curtain and looked out.

"Oh, is it you, Annie?" she said, and I saw the Irish maid standing just outside. "I was about to call you. Please tell Henry to bring those tables and chairs in from the lawn."

"Yes, ma'am," said the girl, and turned away.

Miss Vaughan stood looking after her for a moment, then dropped the curtain and turned back again into the room. I saw that she had mastered her emotion, but her face was still dead white.

As for me, my brain was whirling. What if Swain's finger-prints were missing from the book? What connection could that have with the blood-stains on the robe? What was the meaning of Miss Vaughan's emotion?
Who was it she had expected to find listening at the door? I could only stare at her, and she smiled slightly as she saw my look.

"But what is it you suspect?" I stammered. "I don't see...."

"Neither do I," she broke in. "But I am trying to see--I am trying to see!" and she wrung her hands together.

"The disappearance of the prints seems plain enough to me," said Hinman, coming forward. "Mr. Vaughan no doubt tore them out himself, when he took his violent dislike to Swain. The act would be characteristic of a certain form of mania. Nobody else would have any motive for destroying them; in fact, no one else would dare mutilate a book he prized so highly."

Miss Vaughan seemed to breathe more freely, but her intent inward look did not relax.

"At least that is an explanation," I agreed.

"It is the true explanation," said Hinman, confidently. "Can you suggest any other, Miss Vaughan?"

"No," she said, slowly; "no," and walked once or twice up and down the room. Then she seemed to put the subject away from her. "At any rate, it is of no importance. I wish to speak to you about my father's funeral, Dr. Hinman," she went on, in another tone. "It is to be to-morrow?"

"Yes--at eleven o'clock. I have made such arrangements as I could without consulting you. But there are some things you will have to tell me."

"What are they?"

"Do you desire a minister?"

"No. He would not have wished it. If there is any priest, it will be his own."

"You mean the yogi?"

"Yes."

"Are there any relatives to inform?"

"No."

"Where shall the body be buried?"

"It must not be buried. It must be given to the flames. That was his wish."

"Very well. I will arrange for cremation. Will you wish to accompany it?"

"No, no!" she cried, with a gesture of repugnance. "That is all, then, I believe," said Hinman slowly. "And now I must be going. I beg you not to overtax yourself."

"I shall not," she promised, and he bowed and left us.

The afternoon was fading into evening, and the shadows were deepening in the room. I glanced about me with a little feeling of apprehension.

"The nurses are still here, are they not?" I asked.

"Yes; but I shall dismiss them to-morrow."

I hesitated a moment. I did not wish to alarm her, and yet....

"After they are gone, it will be rather lonesome for you here," I ventured.

"I am used to being lonesome."

"My partner's wife, Mrs. Royce, would be very glad if you would come to her," I said. "I have a letter from her," and I gave it to her.

She stood considering it with a little pucker of perplexity between her brows. She did not attempt to open it.

"She is very kind," she murmured, and her tone surprised and disappointed me.

"May I see you to-morrow?"

"If you wish."

"I shall come some time during the afternoon," I said, and took up my hat. "There is nothing else I can do for you?"

"No, I believe not."

She was plainly preoccupied and answered almost at random, with a coldness in sharp contrast to the warmth of her previous manner.

"Then I will say good-bye."

"Good-bye, Mr. Lester; and thank you."

She went with me to the door, and stood for a moment looking after me; then she turned back into the house.

And I went on down the avenue with a chill at my heart.

CHAPTER XVIII
BUILDING A THEORY

I was surprised, when I came down for dinner an hour later, to find Godfrey awaiting me.

"I always try to make it, Saturday night," he explained. "The chief throws the work on the other fellows, if he can. That's the reason I hustled away after the inquest. The story's all in, and now we'll have a good dinner--if I do
say it myself--and then a good talk. I feel the need of a talk, Lester."

"So do I," I said; "though I'm afraid talking won't help us much."

"The funny thing about this case is," mused Godfrey, "that the farther we get into it the thicker it grows."

"Yes," I agreed, "and the more one thinks about it, the less one understands."

"Well, suppose we get away from it for a while," said Godfrey, and turned the talk to other things. No man could talk more delightfully of music, of art, of letters. How he managed it I could never guess, but he seemed to have read everything, to have seen everything, to have heard everything. Marryat, for instance; who reads Marryat nowadays? And yet he had read the "Phantom Ship," and so knew something of Goa. An hour passed very quickly, but at last he rose and led the way into his study.

"A friend of mine dropped in to see me to-day at the office," he remarked, "a Cuban planter who comes up to New York occasionally, and whom I happened to help out of a rather serious difficulty a few years ago. Perhaps some day I'll tell you about it. He always brings me a bundle of his own special cigars. I didn't see him to-day, but he left the cigars, and I want you to try one. Perhaps it will give you an inspiration."

He went to his desk, opened a tin-foiled package that lay there, and carefully extracted two long cigars of a rich and glowing brown.

"Perhaps you've heard of the special cigars that are made for Pierpont Morgan," he went on, as he handed one to me, after carefully replacing the wrappings of the bundle. "Well, I smoked one of Morgan's cigars once--it was good, mighty good; but it wasn't in the same class with these. Light up."

I did. Never before had I drawn between my lips a breath so satisfying--so rich, so smooth, so full of flavour. I exhaled the fragrant smoke slowly.

"Godfrey," I said, "I never knew what tobacco was before. Are these cigars purchasable? I'm only a poor lawyer, but even one a month would be a thing to look forward to and dream about."

But Godfrey shook his head.

"I've felt like that," he said; "but they're not to be had for money. And now about Swain."

"Let's postpone it a little longer," I begged. "I don't want my mind distracted."

Godfrey laughed, but fell silent; and for the next half hour, no sound was heard.

"Now," I said, at last, "I'm ready to listen, so fire ahead whenever you want to."

"I haven't much to tell," he began; "nothing new about the case. But I stopped at the Tombs, before I started back, to make sure that Swain had everything he wanted. They'd given him an upper cell, and sent over to the Marathon and got him his things, and I arranged to have his meals sent in to him from Moquin's."

"I ought to have thought of that," I said, contritely. "I'm much obliged to you, Godfrey. Did you see him?"

"Only for a minute. He seemed fairly cheerful. He'd had them bring some of his law books to him, and remarked that he'd have plenty of time to study. I like the way he's taking it. He gave me a message for you."

"What was it?"

"That you are not to forget your promise."

I smoked on for a few moments in silence.

"I promised him I'd get Miss Vaughan away from that house," I said at last. "I had Mrs. Royce write her a note, inviting her to stay with her. I gave it to her this afternoon."

"What did she say?"

"She didn't say anything, but I could see the idea didn't impress her. And I had thought all along that she would jump at it."

Godfrey gave a little grunt, whether of surprise or satisfaction I could not tell.

"Why didn't you put her on the stand to-day, Lester?" he asked. "Afraid of upsetting her?"

"I wouldn't have stopped for that, if her evidence would have helped Swain. But it would only have put him deeper in the hole."

"In what way?"

"Well, in the first place, she says that as she and her father returned to the house, she heard footsteps behind them and thought it was Swain following them, because that would be a natural thing for him to do; and, in the second place, she saw that blood-stained handkerchief on the floor beside her father's chair when she came into the room and found him dead."

"So," said Godfrey slowly, "it couldn't have been dropped there by Swain when he stooped to pick her up."

"No; besides, we know perfectly well that it wasn't about his wrist when he came back over the wall. Goldberger knows it, too, and we'll be asked about it, next time."

"It might have been pushed up his sleeve--we weren't absolutely certain. But this new evidence settles it."

I assented miserably and Godfrey smoked on thoughtfully. But my cigar had lost some of its flavour.

"How did Miss Vaughan come to find the body?" he asked at last, and I told him the story as she had told it to
me. He thought it over for some moments; then he leaned forward and laid his hand on my knee.

"Now, Lester," he said, "let's review this thing. It can't be as dark as it seems--there's light somewhere. Here is the case, bared of all inessentials: Swain crosses the wall about eleven o'clock, cutting his wrist as he does so; Miss Vaughan meets him about eleven-thirty, and after a time, finds that his wrist is bleeding and ties her handkerchief about it; they agree to have her father examined for lunacy, arrange a meeting for the next night, and are about to separate, when her father rushes in upon them, savagely berates Swain and takes his daughter away. That must have been about twelve o'clock.

"Swain, according to his story, sits there for ten or fifteen minutes, finally sees the cobra, or thinks he does, and makes a dash for safety, striking his head sharply against a tree. He tumbles over the wall in a half-dazed condition. The handkerchief is no longer about his wrist. That, you will remember, was about twelve-twenty.

"Almost at once we heard Miss Vaughan's screams. After that, Swain isn't out of our sight for more than a minute--too short a time, anyway, for anything to have happened we don't know about.

"Meanwhile, Miss Vaughan has returned with her father to the house, hearing steps behind her and taking it for granted that it is Swain following at a distance. She goes to her room, stays there fifteen minutes or so, and comes downstairs again to find her father dead.

"Now let us see what had happened. You were right in saying that her father must have been strangled immediately after she left him. Otherwise he would still have been twitching in such a way that she must have noticed it. No doubt he dropped into the chair exhausted by his fit of rage; the murderer entered through the garden door, stopped to cut off the end of the curtain-cord and make a noose of it--that would have taken at least a minute--and then strangled his victim. Then he heard her coming down the stairs, and escaped through the garden-door again just as she entered at the other. She saw the curtain still shaking. Then she fainted.

"Now, what are the clues to the murderer? A string tied with a peculiar knot, the blood-stained handkerchief, and the finger-prints on the dead man's robe."

Godfrey paused for a moment. Freed of its inessentials, in this way, the case was beautifully clear--and beautifully baffling. It was a paved way, smooth and wide and without obstruction of any kind; but it ended in a cul-de-sac!

"One thing is certain," Godfrey went on, at last; "the murder was committed by somebody--either by Swain, or by one of the Hindus, or by some unknown. Let us weigh the evidence for and against each of them.

"Against Swain it may be urged that he was on the ground, that he had time to do it, and some provocation, though the provocation, as we know it, seems to be inadequate, provided Swain was in his right mind; a handkerchief which was tied about his wrist is found beside the body, and his finger-prints are found upon it. Miss Vaughan believed he was following them; he admits that he thought of doing so.

"In his favour, it may be urged that a man like Swain doesn't commit murder--though, as a matter of fact, this is a dangerous generalisation, for all sorts of men commit murder; but if he should do so, it would be only under great provocation and in the heat of anger, certainly not in cold blood with a noose; and, finally, if the motion of the curtain Miss Vaughan noticed was made by the murderer, it couldn't possibly have been Swain, because he was with us at that moment. You will see that there is a mass of evidence against him, and practically the whole defence is that such a crime would be impossible to one of his temperament. You know yourself how flimsy such a defence is.

"Against the Hindus, on the other hand, practically the only basis for suspicion is that such a crime might be temperamentally possible to them. They may have been on the ground, and the method of the murder savours strongly of Thuggee--though don't forget that Swain admitted he could have tied that knot. Besides, if it was the Thug who followed them, he wouldn't have made any noise, and most certainly he couldn't have left the prints of Swain's fingers on the body. But if Swain is right in his assertion that he saw the snake in the arbour, it is probable that the Thug wasn't far away.

"Against an unknown it may be urged that neither Swain nor the Hindus could have committed the crime; but I don't see how an unknown could either, unless he happened to be one of the three or four people in the world with finger-tips like Swain's. And that is too far-fetched to be believable.

"But this I am sure of, Lester," and Godfrey leaned forward again: "the murder was committed either by Swain or by someone anxious to implicate Swain. We agree that it wasn't Swain. Very well, then: the person who committed the murder made a noise in following Miss Vaughan and her father so that she should think it was Swain who was following them; he picked up the blood-stained handkerchief, which Swain had dropped perhaps when he fled from the arbour, and placed it beside the body; and in some way inconceivable to me he pressed the prints of Swain's fingers on the dead man's robe. Now, to do that, he must have known that Swain was injured--the blood-stained handkerchief would tell him that; but he must also have known that it was his right hand that was injured. There was no blood on Swain's left hand."

Again Godfrey paused. I was following his reasoning with such absorbed attention that I could feel my brain
crinkle with the effort.

"Now, listen," said Godfrey, and I could have smiled at the uselessness of the admonition—as if I were not already listening with all my faculties! "There is only one way in which the murderer could have known that it was Swain's right hand, and that was by overhearing the conversation in the arbour. But if he overheard that much, he overheard it all, and he knew therefore what it was Swain proposed to do. He knew that Vaughan's sanity was to be questioned; he knew that he would probably be placed in a sanitarium; he knew that Miss Vaughan would probably marry Swain. Presuming that it was Silva, he knew that, unless something was done to stop it, a very few days would place both Vaughan and his daughter beyond his reach."

"That is true," I admitted; "but Vaughan was beyond his reach a good deal more certainly dead than he would have been in a sanitarium. Besides, it isn't at all certain that he would have been sent to a sanitarium."

"That's an objection, surely," Godfrey agreed; "but I must find out if Vaughan is really beyond his reach dead." I stared at him.

"You don't mean...."

"I don't know what I mean, Lester. I can feel a sort of dim meaning at the back of my mind, but I can't get it out into the light."

"Besides," I went on, "if the yogi did it, how did he get back into the house before we got there?"

"He peeped in at the door, saw the coast was clear, and went back through the library. Remember, Miss Vaughan was unconscious. That doesn't bother me. And another thing, Lester. How did Miss Vaughan's father come to burst in on her and Swain like that? How did he know they were in the arbour? It was dark and he couldn't have seen either of them."

"He might have been walking about the grounds and overheard them."

"I don't believe it. I believe somebody told him they were there. And only one person could have told him—that is Silva. No—there's only one point I can't get past—that's the finger-prints."

And then I remembered.

"Godfrey," I cried, "there's one thing—I forgot to tell you. You heard Swain remark that Vaughan was a collector of finger-prints?"

"Yes."

"And that he had a set of Swain's?"

"Yes."

"Well, when I told Miss Vaughan about the prints on her father's robe, she ran to a book-case and got out a book. It had Vaughan's collection in it, all bound together. But the page on which Swain's were had been torn out."

Godfrey sat for a moment, staring at me spell-bound. Then he began pacing up and down the study, like a tiger in its cage; up and down, up and down.

"I'm bound to add," I went on finally, "that Hinman suggested a very plausible reason for their disappearance."

"What was it?"

"He said they were probably destroyed by Vaughan himself, because of his dislike of Swain. He said that would be characteristic of Vaughan's form of insanity."

Godfrey took another turn up and down, then he stopped in front of my chair.

"What did Miss Vaughan think of that explanation?" he asked.

"It didn't seem to impress her, but I don't remember that she made any comment."

He stood a moment longer staring down at me, and I could feel the intense concentration of his mind; then he ran his fingers impatiently through his hair.

"I can't get it, Lester!" he said. "I can't get it. But I _will_ get it! It's there! It's there, just out of reach." He shrugged his shoulders and glanced at his watch. "I'm getting dippy," he added, in another tone. "Let's go out and get a breath of air."

I followed him out into the yard—I knew where he was going—among the trees and up the ladder. Silently we took our places on the limb; silently we stared out into the darkness.

And there, presently, the strange star glowed and burned steel-blue, and floated slowly down, and burst above a white-robed figure, standing as though carved in marble, its arms extended, its head thrown back.

"That fellow is certainly an artist," Godfrey muttered, as he led the way back to the house.

CHAPTER XIX

THE YOGI CONQUERS

The events of the day that followed—Sunday—I shall pass over as briefly as may be. It was for me a day of disappointment, culminating in despair, and, looking back at it, I remember it as a grey day, windy, and with gusts of rain.

Dr. Hinman stopped for us, and Godfrey and I accompanied him to the service over the body of the murdered
man. We were the only outsiders there, besides the undertaker and his assistants, and they were not admitted to the ceremony. This was witnessed only by Miss Vaughan, Mahbub and us three. The servants were not there, and neither were Miss Vaughan's nurses.

I have never seen a more impressive figure than Silva made that morning. His robes were dead black, and in contrast to them and to his hair and beard, his face looked white as marble. But, after the first moments, the ceremony failed to interest me; for Silva spoke a language which I supposed to be Hindustani, and there was a monotony about it and about his gestures which ended in getting on my nerves. It lasted half an hour, and the moment it was over, Miss Vaughan slipped away. The yogi and Mahbub followed her, and then we three stepped forward for a last look at the body.

It was robed all in white. The undertaker had managed to compose the features, and the high stock concealed the ugly marks upon the neck. So there was nothing to tell of the manner of his death, and there was a certain majesty about him as he lay with hands crossed and eyes closed.

We left the room in silence, and Hinman signed to the undertaker that the service was ended.

"I am going with the body to the crematory," he said, and presently drove away with the undertaker, ahead of the hearse. Godfrey and I stood gazing after it until it passed from sight, then, in silence, we walked down the drive to the entrance. The gardener was standing there, and regarded us with eyes which seemed to me distinctly unfriendly. He made no sign of recognition, and, the moment we were outside, he closed the gates and locked them carefully, as though obeying precise instructions.

"So," said Godfrey, in a low tone, as we went on together, "the lock has been repaired. I wonder who ordered that done?"

"Miss Vaughan, no doubt," I answered. "She wouldn't want those gates gaping open."

"Perhaps not," Godfrey assented; "but would she want the barrier intact? Remember, Lester, it's as much a barrier from one side as from the other."

"Well, she won't be inside it much longer," I assured him. "I'm going to get her out this afternoon."

The words were uttered with a confidence I was far from feeling, and I rather expected Godfrey to challenge it, but he walked on without replying, his head bent in thought, and did not again speak of Miss Vaughan or her affairs.

He drove into the city shortly after lunch, and it was about the middle of the afternoon when I presented myself again at the gates of Elmhurst and rang the bell. I waited five minutes and rang again. Finally the gardener came shuffling down the drive and asked me what I wanted. I told him I had an appointment with his mistress; but, instead of admitting me, he took my card and shuffled away with it.

I confess that I grew angry, as I stood there kicking my heels at the roadside, for he was gone a long time, and all these precautions and delays were incomprehensible to me. But he came back at last, unlocked the gate without a word, and motioned me to enter. Then he locked it again, and led the way up the drive to the house. The housemaid met us at the door of the library, as though she had been stationed there.

"If you will wait here, sir," she said, "Miss Vaughan will see you."

"I hope she is well," I ventured, thinking the girl might furnish me with some clue to all this mystery, but she was already at the door.

"Quite well, sir," she said, and the next instant had disappeared.

Another ten minutes elapsed, and then, just as I was thinking seriously of putting on my hat and leaving the house, I heard a step coming down the stair. A moment later Miss Vaughan stood on the threshold.

I had taken it for granted that, relieved of her father's presence, she would return to the clothing of every day; but she still wore the flowing white semi-Grecian garb in which I had first seen her. I could not but admit that it added grace and beauty to her figure, as well as a certain impressiveness impossible to petticoats; and yet I felt a sense of disappointment. For her retention of the costume could only mean that her father's influence was still dominant.

"You wished to see me?" she asked; and again I was surprised, for I had supposed she would apologise for the delay to which I had been subjected. Instead, she spoke almost as to a stranger.

"I had an appointment for this afternoon," I reminded her, striving to keep my vexation from my voice.

"Oh, yes," and she came a few steps into the room, but her face lost none of its coldness. "I had forgotten. It is not to speak of business?"

"No," I said; "it is to speak of your going to friends of Mr. Swain and me--for a time, at least."

"You will thank your friends for me," she answered, calmly; "but I have decided to remain here."

"But--but," I stammered, taken aback at the finality of her tone, "do you think it wise?"

"Yes--far wiser than going to people I do not know and who do not know me."

"And safe," I persisted; "do you think it safe?"

"Safe?" she echoed, looking at me in astonishment. "Certainly. What have I to fear?"

I had to confess that I myself did not know very clearly what she had to fear, so I temporised.
"Are you keeping the nurses?"
"No; I do not need them. They left an hour ago."
"But the servants," I said, in a panic, "they are here? They are going to stay?"
Again she looked at me.
"Your questions seem most extraordinary to me, Mr. Lester. Of course the servants will stay."
"And--and the Hindus?" I blurted out.
"Yes, and the Hindus, as you call them. This is their home. It was my father's wish."
I gave it up; her manner indicated that all this was no concern of mine, and that my interference was a mere impertinence. But I tried one parting shot.
"Mr. Swain is very anxious you should not stay here," I said. "He will be deeply grieved when he learns your decision."
To this she made no answer, and, finding nothing more to say, sore at heart, and not a little angry and resentful, I started to leave the room.
"There is one thing more," I said, turning back at the threshold. "I shall have to go in to the city to-morrow, but I shall come out again in the evening. Would it be convenient to have our business conference after dinner?"
"Yes," she agreed; "that will do very well."
"At eight o'clock, then?"
"I shall expect you at that time," she assented; and with that I took my leave.
It was in a most depressed state of mind that I made my way back to Godfrey's; and I sat down on the porch and smoked a pipe of bitter meditation. For I felt that, somehow, Miss Vaughan was slipping away from me. There had been a barrier between us to-day which had not been there before, a barrier of coldness and reserve which I could not penetrate. Some hostile influence had been at work; in death, even more than in life, perhaps, her father's will weighed upon her. I could imagine how a feeling of remorse might grow and deepen, and urge her toward foolish and useless sacrifice.
And just then Mrs. Hargis came out and told me that someone wanted me on the 'phone. It was Swain.
"They let me come out here to 'phone to you," he said, as he heard my exclamation of surprise. "Simmonds happened in and told them it would be all right. He's here now."
"And they're treating you all right?"
"They're treating me like the star boarder," he laughed. And then his voice grew suddenly serious. "Have you seen Miss Vaughan?"
"Yes," I answered; for I knew of course that the question was coming.
"Well?"
"Miss Vaughan refuses to go to the Royces', Swain."
There was a moment's silence.
"Then where will she go?"
"She won't go anywhere."
"You don't mean," he cried, panic in his voice, "that she's going to stay out there?"
"Yes; she laughed when I mentioned danger. There's one consolation--the servants will stay."
"Did you tell her how anxious I was for her?"
"Yes; I did my best, Swain."
"And it made no difference?"
"No; it made no difference. The fact is, Swain, I fancy she's a little remorseful about her father--his death has unnerved her--and there was the funeral to-day--and, as a sort of atonement, she's trying to do what she imagines he would wish her to do."
"He wished her to become a priestess," said Swain, his voice ghastly.
"Oh, well, she won't go that far," I assured him cheerfully; "and no doubt in a few days, when the first impression of the tragedy has worn off, she will be ready to go to the Royces'. I'll keep suggesting it, and I'm going to have Mrs. Royce call on her."
"Thank you, Mr. Lester," he said, but his voice was still shaking. "I--this sort of knocks me out--I hadn't foreseen it. I'll have to think it over. But there's one thing you _can_ do."
"What is it?"
"Watch the house!" he cried. "Watch the house! And be ready if she screams again."
"All right," I said, soothingly, "I'll do that. But tell me, Swain, what is it you fear?"
"I fear Silva!" said Swain, in a voice husky with emotion. "It isn't remorse for her father--it's Silva who's working on her. I feel it, some way--I'm sure of it. God knows what he'll try--any villainy. You must watch the house, Mr. Lester--day and night you must watch the house!"
"All right," I said, again, strangely impressed by his words. "You may count on me."

"Thank you," he said. "Remember, we've only you. Good-bye."

Swain's words gave me plenty to think over, and left me so troubled and uneasy that I made a trip to the top of the ladder to take a look over Elmhurst. But everything appeared as usual. Perhaps Swain was right--perhaps it was Silva who was using every minute to increase his influence; but what could I do? So long as he committed no overt act, there was no excuse for interference, and Miss Vaughan would undoubtedly resent it. As Swain had said, there was nothing that I could do but watch.

Two hours later, just as I was getting up from a dinner to which, in my perturbed condition, I had done small justice, I heard a ring at the bell, and presently Mrs. Hargis entered to tell me that there was a gentleman asking for me. I went out to meet him, and was astonished to find that it was Simmonds.

"I don't wonder you're surprised," he said, as we sat down. "Fact is, I'm surprised myself, for I don't know exactly what I'm to do out here. But Swain, after he got back to his cell, was like a crazy man; he was sure something dreadful was going to happen to Miss Vaughan if she stayed in the house with those Hindus. In the end, he got me kind of scared, too, and made me promise to come out and help you keep watch. I went down to the _Record_ office and had a talk with Godfrey before I started. I half expected him to laugh at me; but he seemed to think I'd better come. The fact is," concluded Simmonds, shifting his cigar to the other side of his mouth, "he was so serious about it, that I brought two men along. One of them's patrolling the road in front of the house, and the other the road along the side. I've arranged for two others to relieve them at midnight. Now, what's it all about, anyway?"

"Well," I said, "in the first place, neither Godfrey nor I believes that Swain strangled that man."

"I can't hardly believe it myself," agreed Simmonds, "for he seems a nice young feller; but it's a clear case: there's the motive, he was on the ground, and there's the finger-prints. How can you explain them away?"

"I can't explain them away. But, just the same, Godfrey believes the murder was committed by one of those Hindus."

"He intimated something of the sort to me," said Simmonds; "but there's no evidence against them."

"No," I conceded; "that's what we've got to find."

"Where are we going to look for it?"

"There's only one place to look for it, and that's in the house where the murder was committed. I only wish we could get Miss Vaughan out of it--that would give us a freer hand."

"What's the matter with the fool girl, anyway?" demanded Simmonds. "I should think she'd jump at a chance to get away."

"So should I--but she isn't reasonable, just now. I can't make her out. Perhaps she'll come round in a day or two, but meanwhile, if she should happen to need help, I don't see how your men out on the road, on the other side of a twelve-foot wall, could do any good."

Simmonds rubbed his chin thoughtfully.

"What would you suggest?" he asked, at last.

"Why not put them in the grounds, as soon as it is dark, and let them conceal themselves near the house? They can get over the wall on this side. We've got ladders. Besides," I added, "it would be a great mistake to give Silva any reason to suspect he's being watched. He'd see the men out on the road, sooner or later; but they could keep out of sight among the shrubbery."

Simmonds considered this for a moment.

"I don't know but what you're right," he agreed, at last. "We'll arrange it that way, then," and he went away presently to call in his men. He soon came back with them, and gave them careful and detailed instructions as to what he wanted them to do, dwelling especially upon the importance of their keeping carefully concealed. Then we got the ladders and put them in place.

"Be careful not to touch the top of the wall," I cautioned them; "there's broken glass on top, and the merest touch may mean a bad injury."

"When you get down on the other side," Simmonds added, "take down the ladder and hide it in the shrubbery at the foot of the wall. Somebody might see it if you left it standing there. But for heaven's sake, don't get mixed up so you can't find it again. Be back here at eleven-thirty, and your relief will be ready. You've got your whistles? Well, blow them good and hard if there's any trouble. And be mighty careful not to let anyone see you, or you may get snake-bit!"

The men mounted the ladder, crossed the wall and disappeared on the other side, and Simmonds and I turned back to the house. I felt as though a great load had been lifted from my shoulders. With those two men so close at hand, surely nothing very serious could happen to Miss Vaughan!

Simmonds and I spent the remainder of the evening in discussing the case, but neither of us was able to shed any new light upon it. Shortly after eleven, the two men who were to form the relief arrived, and just as we started for
the wall, Godfrey drove in from the highway. It needed but a moment to tell him of our arrangements, which he heartily approved. He joined us, and we were soon at the foot of the ladder. While we waited, Simmonds gave the new men the same minute instructions he had given the others; and presently we heard a slight scraping against the wall, and the men who had been on duty recrossed it.

They had nothing of especial interest to report. The yogi and Miss Vaughan had taken a stroll through the grounds early in the evening; and my heart sank as the detective added that they seemed to be talking earnestly together. Then they had re-entered the house, and Miss Vaughan had remained in the library looking at a book, while her companion passed on out of sight. At the end of an hour, she had closed the book, shut and locked the outer door, and turned out the light. Another light had appeared shortly afterwards in a room upstairs. It, too, had been extinguished half an hour later, and the detectives presumed that she had gone to bed. After that, the house had remained in complete darkness. The servants had spent the evening sitting on a porch at the rear of the house, talking together, but had gone in early, presumably to bed.

When the men had finished their report, Simmonds dismissed them, and the two who were to take up the watch crossed the wall and passed from sight.

"And now, Simmonds," said Godfrey, "come along and I'll show you what started me to watching that house, and caused me to get Lester out here."

Simmonds followed him up the ladder without a word, and I came along behind. We were soon on the limb.

"Of course," Godfrey added, when we were in place, "it is just possible that nothing will happen. But I think the show will come off as usual. Look straight out over the trees, Simmonds--ah!"

High in the heavens that strange star sprang suddenly into being, glowed, brightened, burned steel-blue; then slowly and slowly it floated down, straight down; hovered, burst into a thousand sparks....

And, scarcely able to believe my eyes, I saw standing there against the night two white-robed figures, with arms extended and faces raised; and then they vanished again into the darkness.

For an instant we sat there silent, still staring. Then Godfrey drew a deep breath.

"I feared so!" he said. "Miss Vaughan has become a convert!"

And he led the way down the ladder.

CHAPTER XX
CHECKMATE!

I was honestly glad to get back to the office, next morning, for I felt the need of work--absorbing work--to take my mind off the problem of Worthington Vaughan's death, and especially to relieve me from the depression into which his daughter's inexplicable conduct had plunged me. When I thought of her, it was with impatience and aversion, for I felt that she had deserted to the enemy and turned her back upon the man who loved her, in the hour of his utmost need.

As I saw it, her conduct was little short of heartless. She had summoned her lover to her side, and he had come; instantly and without hesitation, without pausing to consider the danger to himself, he had answered her call; in consequence of that high devotion, he was now in prison, charged with a dreadful crime; but, instead of hastening to him, instead of standing by his side and proclaiming to the whole world her belief in his innocence, she deliberately stood aloof. It was almost as if she herself believed in his guilt! The world, at least, could draw no other inference.

But she had done more than that. She had abandoned herself to the fate from which he had tried to save her. Her presence at Silva's side could have only one meaning--she had become his disciple, had accepted his faith, was ready to follow him. The thought turned me sick at heart, for her as well as for Swain, but for Swain most of all, for he had done nothing to merit such misfortune, while she, at least, had chosen her road and was following it with open eyes. Small wonder that I thought of her with anger and resentment, yes, and with a vague distrust, for, at the very back of my mind was the suspicion that she had been a decoy to lure Swain to his destruction.

I threw myself feverishly into the work which had accumulated at the office, in order to tear my mind away from thoughts like these; but when Mr. Royce arrived, I had to go over the case with him, and I have seldom seen a man more puzzled or astonished.

"I shall defend Swain, of course," I concluded, "and I'm hoping that something in his favour will turn up before long, but I haven't the remotest idea what it will be. He can't be tried till fall, and meanwhile I'm afraid he'll have to stay in jail."

"Yes; I see no way of getting him out," agreed my partner. "But the girl's danger is much more serious. Can't we do something for her?"

"It's difficult to do anything against her will," I pointed out. "Besides, I've lost interest in her a little."

"Don't blame her too much--we must do everything we can. Since she isn't of age, she'll have to have a guardian appointed. He might do something."

"I had thought of that; I'll suggest to her to-night that she let me arrange for a guardian. But if we wait for a court
to take action, I'm afraid we'll be too late. Swain seems to think that the danger is very pressing."

"At least we can make one more effort," said Mr. Royce. "I'll have my wife drive out to see her this afternoon. Perhaps she can do something," and he went to the 'phone to make the arrangements.

I turned back to my work, but found myself unable to take it up, for my conscience told me that I ought to see Swain, make sure that he was comfortable, and do what I could to relieve his anxiety. It was not a pleasant task, for I should have to admit my failure, but at last I put my work aside, made my way reluctantly to the Tombs, and asked to see him.

They had given him a well-lighted cell on the upper tier, and some of his own things had been brought in to soften its bareness, but my first glance at Swain told me that he was in a bad way.

"Is she all right?" was his first question, and his eyes seemed to burn into me.

"Yes," I answered a little testily, "she's all right--that is, if you mean Miss Vaughan. For heaven's sake, Swain, be a little sensible. What's the use of working yourself up into a state like this! Did you sleep any last night?"

"No," said Swain, after thinking a minute. "No, I believe not."

"How about breakfast?"

"I don't seem to remember about breakfast," he answered, after another moment's thought.

I stepped to the door, called the guard, and, putting a bill into his hand, asked him to send up the prison barber and to have a good meal sent in in the course of half an hour. When the barber arrived, I had him take Swain in hand, give him a shave and shampoo and general freshening up. Then I saw that he got into clean things; and then the breakfast arrived, and I made him sit down and eat. He obeyed passively, and I could see the food did him good. When he had finished his coffee, I handed him a cigar.

"Now, Swain," I began, sitting down opposite him, "I'm going to talk to you seriously. In the first place, Miss Vaughan is in no danger. Simmonds had two men in the grounds watching the house all last night, ready to interfere at the least sign of anything wrong. That watch will be kept up as long as Miss Vaughan remains there."

"That's good," he said. "I didn't know that. But just the same, she mustn't remain there. Even with the men on guard, you may be too late."

"Just what is it you're afraid of?" I asked him, curiously. "Do you think her life's in danger?"

"Worse than that!" said Swain thickly, his face suddenly livid. "Oh, worse than that!"

I confess that I caught something of his horror; but I shook myself impatiently.

"I can't believe that," I said. "But, in any case, our men will be at hand. At the least outcry they will burst into the house. And remember, the three servants are there."

"They cut no figure. If they didn't hear those screams the other night, do you think they would hear any others? You must get her away from there, Mr. Lester," he went on rapidly. "If she won't come of her own accord, you must use force."

"But, my dear Swain," I objected, "I can't do that. Do you want me to kidnap her?"

"Just that--if it's necessary."

"Then I'd soon be occupying a cell here, too. I don't see what good that would do."

"It would save her," he asserted, doggedly. "It would save her. That's the only thing to consider."

But I rose to my feet in sudden impatience; what consideration was she showing for him or for me or for anyone?

"You're talking foolishly," I said. "You'd much better be thinking of your own danger; it's much more real than hers." I had an impulse to add that, since she had chosen her path, it was folly to waste pity upon her, but I managed to check the words. "Has any new light on the case occurred to you?"

"No," he answered, listlessly, "I haven't thought about it. When do you see her again, Mr. Lester?"

"I'm to see her to-night."

"Will you give her a note from me?"

"Yes," I agreed.

His face lighted again at that, and he cleared a corner of his table and sat down to write the note. It was evidently difficult to compose, for he tore up two drafts before he got one to suit him. But at last it was done, and he folded it, rummaged an envelope out of a pile of papers on a chair, slipped the note into it, and handed it to me.

"There," he said, and his face was bright with hope. "I think that will settle it."

I was far from sharing his certainty, but I put the envelope in my pocket, assured myself that there was nothing more I could do for him, and returned to the office. Just as I was getting ready to leave, Mr. Royce came in, a chagrined look on his face.

"Mrs. Royce just telephoned me," he said. "She drove out there, as I asked her to, but Miss Vaughan refused to see her."

I had expected it, but the certainty that we had failed again did not add to my cheerfulness.
"Swain wants us to kidnap her," I said, with a twisted smile.
"I'm not sure but that he's right," said my partner, and went thoughtfully away.

I went to my rooms, changed, had dinner at a quiet restaurant, and then took the elevated for the long trip to the Bronx. It was after eight o'clock when I pulled the bell beside the tall gates to Elmhurst. The gardener was evidently expecting me, for he appeared almost at once and admitted me. Without waiting for him, I walked up the drive toward the house. The lights were on in the library, and I stepped up to the open door.

Then I stopped, and my heart fell. For there were two white-robed figures in the room. One was Miss Vaughan and the other was Francisco Silva. The girl was sitting at his feet.

They had evidently heard my footsteps, for they were looking toward the door, and Miss Vaughan arose as soon as I came within the circle of light. But if I expected her to show any embarrassment, I was disappointed.

"Come in, Mr. Lester," she said. "I believe you have not met Senor Silva."

The yogi had risen, and now he bowed to me.

"Our encounters heretofore have been purely formal," he said, smiling. "I am happy to meet you, Mr. Lester."

His manner was friendly and unaffected, and imperceptibly some of my distrust of him slipped away.

"I have told Senor Silva," Miss Vaughan continued, when we were seated, "that you have consented to act as my man of business."

"And it is my intention," broke in Silva, "to beseech Mr. Lester to consent to act as my man of business also. I am sure that I shall need one."

I was not at all sure of it, for he seemed capable of dealing with any situation.

"It would not be possible for me to represent divergent interests," I pointed out.

"My dear sir," protested the yogi, "there will be no divergent interests. Suppose we put it in this way: you will represent Miss Vaughan, and will dispose of my interests from that standpoint. There could be no objection to that, I suppose?"

"No," I answered, slowly; "but before we go into that, let me understand exactly what these interests are. Mr. Vaughan's estate I understand, is a large one."

Silva shrugged his shoulders.

"I have understood so," he said, "but I know nothing about it, beyond what Mr. Vaughan himself told me."

"What was that?"

"That it was his intention to give this place as a monastery for the study of our religion, and to endow it."

"Did he mention the amount of the endowment?"

"He asked me, not long ago, if a million dollars would be sufficient."

"Had he drawn up a deed of gift?"

"I do not know."

"Or made a will?"

Again Silva shrugged indifferently to indicate that he was also ignorant on that point, and I turned to Miss Vaughan.

"If there is a will," I asked, "where would it probably be?"

"There is a safe here," she said, "in which my father kept his papers of value," and she went to the wall and swung out a hinged section of shelving. The door of a safe appeared behind it.

I approached and looked at it, then tried the door, but it was locked.

"To open this, we must know the combination," I said; "or else we shall have to get an expert."

"I know the combination," she broke in; "it is ..."

But I stopped her.

"My dear Miss Vaughan," I laughed, "one doesn't go around proclaiming the combination of a safe. How do you happen to know it?"

"My father often had me open the safe for him."

"Does anyone else know it?"

"I do not think so."

"Well, suppose we see what is in the safe," I suggested, and, as she knelt before it, turned away. I, at least, did not wish to know the combination. That Silva already knew it I accepted as certain.

I heard the twirling of the knob, and a sharp click as the bolts were thrown back. Then I walked to Miss Vaughan's side and knelt beside her. The interior of the safe was divided into the usual compartments, one of them equipped with a Yale lock. The key was in the lock, and I turned it, swung the little door open, and drew out the drawer which lay behind it.

"If there is a will, it is probably here," I said; "let us see," and I carried the drawer over to the light.

Miss Vaughan followed me, but Silva had sunk back into his chair, and was staring abstractedly through the
open door out into the darkness, as though our proceedings interested him not at all. Then, as I looked into the
drawer, I gave a little gasp of astonishment, for it was almost filled with packets of bills. There were five of them,
neatly sealed in wrappers of the National City Bank, and each endorsed to contain ten thousand dollars.

"Why did your father require all this money?" I asked, but Miss Vaughan shook her head.

"He always kept money there," she said, "though I never knew the amount."

I glanced at the yogi, but his revery remained unbroken. Then I laid the packets on the table and dipped deeper
into the drawer. There were two bank-books, some memoranda of securities, a small cash-book, and, at the very
bottom, an unsealed envelope endorsed, "Last will and testament of Worthington Vaughan."

"Here we are," I said, took it out, and replaced the rest of the contents. "Shall we read it now?"

"Yes, I should like to read it," she answered quietly.

The document was a short one. It had evidently been drawn by Vaughan himself, for it was written simply and
without legal phrases. It had been witnessed by Henry and Katherine Schneider, and was dated only a week
previously--but three days before the murder.

"Who are these witnesses?" I asked.

"They are the cook and the gardener."

"Do you recognise your father's writing?"

"Oh, yes; there can be no question as to that."

It was a peculiar writing, and a very characteristic one; not easy to read until one grew accustomed to it. But at
the end of a few minutes I had mastered it. The provisions of the will were simple: Elmhurst and the sum of one
million dollars in negotiable securities were left absolutely to "my dear and revered Master, Francisco Silva, Priest
of the Third Circle of Siva, and Yogi of the Ninth Degree, to whom I owe my soul's salvation," the bequest to be
used for the purpose of founding a monastery for the study of the doctrines of Saivaism, and as an asylum for all true
believers. The remainder of his estate was left absolutely to his daughter, to dispose of as she saw fit. "It is, however,
my earnest wish", the will concluded, "that my daughter Marjorie should enter upon the Way, and accept the high
destiny which the Master offers her as a Priestess of our Great Lord. May the All-Seeing One guide her steps
aright!"

There was a moment's silence as I finished; then I glanced at Miss Vaughan. Her eyes were fixed; her face was
rapt and shining.

She felt my gaze upon her, and turned to face me.

"As your attorney, Miss Vaughan," I said, "it is my duty to advise you that this will would probably not hold in
law. I think it would be comparatively easy to convince any court that your father was not of sound mind when he
drew it. You see, Senor Silva," I added, "that there is at once a conflict of interests."

But Silva shook his head with a little smile.

"There is no conflict," he said. "If Miss Vaughan does not approve her father's wishes, they are as though they
were not!"

"I do approve them," the girl cried passionately, her hands against her heart. "I do approve them!"

"All of them?" I asked.

She swung full upon me, her eyes afame.

"Yes, all of them!" she cried. "Oh, Master, receive me!" and she flung herself on her knees by Silva's chair.

CHAPTER XXI
THE VISION IN THE CRYSTAL
Silva laid a hand tenderly upon the bowed head, as though in benediction, but I could have sworn there was unholy triumph in his eyes. I caught but a glimpse of it, for he veiled them instantly and bowed his head, and his lips moved as if in prayer. The kneeling figure was quivering with sobs; I could hear them in her throat; and my heart turned sick as I saw how she permitted his caressing touch. Then, suddenly, she sprang, erect, and, without a glance at me, hurried from the room.

There was silence for a moment, then Silva arose and faced me.
"You see how it is, Mr. Lester," he said.
"Yes," I answered drily, "I see how it is."

I refolded the will, slipped it back into its envelope, restored it to the drawer, made sure that all the packets were there, too, replaced the drawer in the safe, closed the door, twirled the knob, swung the shelves into place in front of it, and finally, my self-control partially regained, turned back to Silva.
"Well," I said, and my voice sounded very flat, "let us sit down and talk it over."

He wheeled his chair around to face me and sat down. I looked at him in silence for a moment. The man was virile, dominant; there was in his aspect something impressive and compelling. Small wonder this child of nineteen had found herself unable to stand against him!
"I know what is in your mind," he said, at last. "But, after all, it was her father's wish. That should weigh with you."

"Her father was mad."
"I deny it. He was very sane. He found the Way, and he has set her feet upon it."
"What way?" I demanded. "Where does it lead?"
"The Way of life. It leads to peace and happiness."

He uttered the words as with finality; but I shrugged them impatiently away.
"Don't float off into your mysticism," I said. "Let us keep our feet on the earth. You may be sincere, or you may not--it is impossible for me to say. But I know this--it is not fair to that child to take her at her word. She doesn't realise what she is doing. I don't know what it is you plan for her, but before you do anything, she must have a chance to find herself. She must be taken out of this atmosphere into a healthier one, until she has rallied from the shock of her father's death, and emerged from the shadow of his influence. She must have time to get back her self-control. Then, if she chooses to return, well and good."

"To all your 'musts,' Mr. Lester," retorted Silva, "I can only say that I am willing. I have not lifted a finger to detain her. But what if she will not go?"

"Then she must be made to go."

"Another 'must'!" he rejoined lightly. "I would remind you that she is mistress of her own actions. Neither you nor I can compel her to do anything she does not wish to do. It has been a great happiness to me that she has chosen as she has; it would have been a great sorrow to me had she decided differently. But I should have acquiesced. Now it is for you to acquiesce. After all, what claim have you upon her?"

"I admit that I have no claim," I said, more calmly. "But there is one who has a claim, and to whom she is bound to listen."

"You refer, no doubt, to that misguided young man who is now in prison."

"I refer to Frederic Swain, yes," I retorted hotly. "It is true he is in prison. And how did he get there? By coming when she called him; by trying to assist her."

"Was it assisting her to kill her father?" queried Silva, and his lips were curled with scorn.

I paused a moment to make sure of my self-control, for it seemed to be slipping from me.
"Senor Silva," I said, at last, "how her father came to his death I do not know; but I do know that Swain had no hand in it."

"Yet he is in prison," he reminded me.
"Innocent men have been in prison before this. I will get him out."
"By what means?"
"By finding the real murderer!" I said, and looked at him with eyes which I know were bloodshot.

He returned my gaze steadily.
"So you think I am the murderer?" he asked, quietly.

I got a grip of myself--I saw that I had gone too far.
"I do not know what to think," I answered. "I am seeking light. In any event, Swain merits some consideration. Miss Vaughan should, at least, listen to what he has to say. She promised to marry him."

"She has withdrawn that promise."

"She has never said so."

"She has withdrawn it in choosing as she has chosen. They who serve in the temple of Siva turn their backs on..."
marriage."

"That means nothing to me," I said. "I know nothing of the temple of Siva. I wish to know nothing, for mysticism repels me. But I do know that she gave her word; I do know that she loved him."

"Earthly love fades and passes," said the yogi, solemnly. "She has given her heart to the Master," and he made his gesture of reverence.

There was anger in my eyes as I looked at him. How was one to reply to such jargon?

"I would point out to you, Senor Silva," I said, "that Miss Vaughan is not yet of legal age, and so not quite her own mistress."

"Does your law interfere in matters of the heart?" he inquired blandly; "or in matters of religion?"

"No," I said, flushing at his irony; "but the law demands that, until she is of age, she have a guardian to protect her interests. I shall ask that one be appointed at once."

"To that," said the yogi, mildly, "I have not the least objection. In fact, Mr. Lester, I do not know why you should tell me your plans. But, for some reason, you seem to regard me as an adversary. I am not--I am no man's adversary. I object to nothing; I have no right to object to anything. I am simply Miss Vaughan's friend and well-wisher, and seek her happiness. I should like to be your friend also."

"And Swain's?" I queried, a little brutally.

"The friend of all men," said the yogi, simply. "They are all my brothers. We are children of the same Great Spirit."

I was silent for a moment. Then I took Swain's letter from my pocket.

"If you are sincere," I said, "you can easily prove it. I have a letter here from Swain. He gave it to me to-day, and I promised to give it to Miss Vaughan to-night."

Without a word, he crossed to the bell and rang it. The maid answered.

"Mr. Lester has a letter which you will give to your mistress," he said.

"And you will wait for an answer," I added.

The girl took the letter and went away. Silva sat down again, and when I glanced at him, I saw that his eyes were closed. Five minutes passed, and the girl appeared again at the door.

"Miss Vaughan says there is no answer, sir," she said, and let the curtain fall into place again.

I made a gesture of despair; I felt that the game was lost.

"After all, Mr. Lester," said Silva, kindly, "what is this fate that you would prepare for her? You seek her marriage with a young man who, when I saw him, appeared to me merely commonplace. Admitting for the moment that he is innocent of this crime, you would nevertheless condemn her to an existence flat and savourless, differing in no essential from that of the beasts of the field."

"It is the existence of all normal people," I pointed out, "and the one which they are happiest in."

"But Miss Vaughan would not be happy. She has too great a soul; that young man is not worthy of her. You yourself have felt it!"

I could not deny it.

"Few men are worthy of a good woman," I said lamely.

"Faugh! Good woman!" and he snapped his fingers. "I abhor the words! They are simply cant! But a great woman, a woman of insight, of imagination--ah, for such a woman the Way that I prepare is the only Way. There she will find joy and inspiration; there she will grow in knowledge; there she will breathe the breath of life! Mr. Lester," and he leaned forward suddenly, "have you the courage to consult the sphere?"

"What do you mean?"

"You saw how I spent the White Night of Siva," and he made his gesture of reverence. "Will you gaze for an hour on the crystal?"

"For what purpose?"

"I do not know what may be revealed to you," he answered. "That is in the keeping of the Holy One. Perhaps nothing; perhaps much. Will you make the trial?"

His eyes were distended with excitement, his lips were trembling with eagerness.

"I feel that it will not be in vain!" he added.

There was something compelling in his gaze. After all, why not? I struggled to my feet.

With a strange smile, he held back the curtain, and I passed before him into the hall and up the stairs. As I hesitated at the top, he opened the door into the entry, and again my senses were assaulted by a heavy, numbing odour. In the middle of the room the crystal sphere glowed softly.

"Take your place upon the couch," he said; "sit thus, with your legs crossed, and your hands folded before you. But first, listen to me. There is in this no magic; this sphere is merely a shell of crystal, in which a small lamp burns.
It serves only to concentrate the mind, to enable it to forget the world and to turn in upon itself. The visions which will come to you, if any come, will come from within and not from without. They will be such visions as the Holy One may will; and by the Holy One I mean that Spirit which pervades the universe, even to its farthest bound; the Spirit which is in all of us alike; the Spirit which is in good men and in bad, men like you and me, and men like the one who slew my pupil. It is with this Spirit, if the Holy One so wills, that you will commune, so that you will see no longer with the poor eyes of the body, but with eyes from which nothing is concealed, either in the past or in the future. Do you understand?"

"I think so," I murmured, unable to take my eyes from the glowing circle.

"Then to the Holy One I commend thee!" said the yogi, and sat down on the couch opposite me.

I felt that his eyes were upon me, but mine were upon the sphere, and in a moment I was no longer aware of him. I was aware only of the glowing circle, which seemed to widen and widen until the whole universe revolved within it. The sun and the moon and the stars were there, and I gazed at them as from a great distance. I saw stars glow and fade; I saw great nebulae condense to points of light, and disintegrate to dust; then, slowly, slowly, a single planet swung into view, a million miles away, at first, but growing clearer and more clear, until I was looking down upon its seas and continents; and suddenly, as it turned before me, I recognised the earth. Europe, Asia, the broad Pacific swung below me; then land again—America! I saw great mountains, broad plains, and mighty rivers.

The motion ceased. I was gazing down upon a great city, built upon a narrow spur of land between two rivers, a city of towering buildings and busy streets; then upon a single house, set in the midst of lofty elms; then I was in a room, a room with books against the walls, and a door opening upon a garden. From the garden the light faded, and the darkness came, and a clock somewhere struck twelve. Then, suddenly, at the door appeared two white-robed figures, an old man and a girl. The man was talking violently, but the girl crossed the room without a backward glance, and passed through a door on its farther side. The man stood for a moment looking after her, then flung himself into a chair, and put his hands before his face. With creeping flesh, I looked again at the outer door, waiting who would enter. And slowly, slowly, the drapery was put aside, and a face peered in. I could see its flashing eyes and working mouth. A hand, in which a knife gleamed, was raised cautiously to the cord, and when it was lowered, it held a piece of the cord within its grasp. I could see the eager fingers fashioning a knot; then, with head bent, the figure crept forward, foot by foot; it was at the chair-back, and even as the old man, conscious at last of the intruder, raised his head, the cord was cast about his throat and drawn tight. There was a moment's struggle, and I saw that the hand which held the cord was red with blood. From the wrist, a stained handkerchief fell softly to the floor.

And then the assassin turned to steal away; but as he went, he cast one awful glance over his shoulder. The light fell full upon his face—and I saw that it was Swain's!

* * * * *

I opened my eyes to find myself extended full length on the divan, with Silva standing over me, a tiny glass of yellow liquid in his hand.

"Drink this," he said, and I swallowed it obediently.

It had a pungent, unpleasant taste, but I could feel it running through my veins, and it cleared my mind and steadied my nerves as though by magic. I sat up and looked at the crystal. The other lights in the room had been switched on, and the sphere lay cold and lifeless. I passed my hand before my eyes, and looked at it again; then my eyes sought Silva's. He was smiling softly.

"The visions came," he said. "Your eyes tell me that the visions came. Is it not so?"

"Yes," I answered; "strange visions, Senor Silva. I wish I knew their origin."

"Their origin is in the Universal Spirit," he said, quietly. "Even yet you do not believe."

"No," and I looked again at the crystal. "There are some things past belief."

"Nothing is past belief," he said, still more quietly, "You think so because your mind is wrapped in the conventions amid which you exist. Free it from those wrappings, and you will begin really to live. You have never known what life is."

"How am I to free it, Senor Silva?" I questioned.

He took a step nearer to me.

"By becoming a disciple of the Holy One," he said, most earnestly.

But I was myself again, and I rose to my feet and shook my head, with a smile.

"No," I said. "You will get no convert here. I must be going."

"I will open the gate for you," he said, in another tone, and led the way down the stairs, through the library, and out upon the gravelled walk.

After the drugged atmosphere of his room, the pure night air was like a refreshing bath, and I drew in long breaths of it. Silva walked beside me silently; he unlocked the gate with a key which he carried in his hand, and
pulled it open.

"Good-night, Mr. Lester," he said. "The sphere is at your service should you desire again to test it. Think over what I have said to you."

"Good-night," I answered, and stepped through into the road.

The gate swung shut and the key grated in the lock. Mechanically I turned my steps toward Godfrey's house; but I seemed to be bending under a great burden—the burden of the vision.

CHAPTER XXII
THE SUMMONS

I was confused and shaken; I had no idea of the hour; I did not know whether that vision had lasted a minute or a thousand years. But when I blundered up the path to Godfrey's house, I found him and Simmonds sitting on the porch together.

"I had Godfrey bring me out," said Simmonds, as he shook hands, "because I wanted another look at those midnight fireworks. Did you come up on the elevated?"

"Yes," I answered; and I felt Godfrey turn suddenly in his chair, at the sound of my voice, and scrutinise my face. "I had dinner in town and came up afterwards."

"What time was that?" asked Godfrey, quietly.

"I got up here about eight o'clock. I had an engagement with Miss Vaughan."

"You have been with her since?"

"With her and Silva," and I dropped into a chair and mopped my face with my handkerchief. "The experience was almost too much for me," I added, and told them all that had occurred.

They listened, Godfrey motionless and intent, and Simmonds with a murmur of astonishment now and then.

"I'm bound to confess," I concluded, "that my respect for Silva has increased immensely. He's impressive; he's consistent; I almost believe he's sincere."

"Have you considered what that belief implies?" asked Godfrey.

"What does it imply?"

"If Silva is sincere," said Godfrey, slowly; "if he is really what he pretends to be, a mystic, a priest of Siva, intent only on making converts to what he believes to be the true religion, then our whole theory falls to the ground; and Swain is guilty of murder."

I shivered a little, but I saw that Godfrey was right.

"We are in this dilemma," Godfrey continued, "either Silva is a fakir and charlatan, or Swain is a murderer."

"I wish you could have witnessed that horrible scene, as I did," I broke in; "it would have shaken your confidence, too! I wish you could have seen his face as he glanced back over his shoulder! It was fiendish, Godfrey; positively fiendish! It made my blood run cold. It makes it run cold now, to remember it!"

"How do you explain all that crystal sphere business, anyway?" asked Simmonds, who had been chewing his cigar perplexedly.

"Lester was hypnotised and saw what Silva willed him to see," answered Godfrey. "You'll remember he sat facing him."

"But," I objected, "no one remembers what happens during hypnosis."

"They do if they are willed to remember. Silva willed you to remember. It was cleverly done, and his explanation of the origin of the vision was clever, too. Moreover, it had some truth in it, for the secret of crystal-gazing is that it awakens the subjective consciousness, or Great Spirit, as Silva called it. But you weren't crystal-gazing, to-night, Lester—you were simply hypnotised."

"You may be right," I admitted; "I remember how his eyes stared at me. But it was wonderful—I'm more impressed with him than ever."

"It isn't the fact that he hypnotised you that bothers me," said Godfrey, after a moment. "It's the fact that he has also hypnotised Miss Vaughan."

"Lester was hypnotised and saw what Silva willed him to see," answered Godfrey. "You'll remember he sat facing him."

"But," I objected, "no one remembers what happens during hypnosis."

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"You may be right," I admitted; "I remember how his eyes stared at me. But it was wonderful—I'm more impressed with him than ever."

"It isn't the fact that he hypnotised you that bothers me," said Godfrey, after a moment. "It's the fact that he has also hypnotised Miss Vaughan."

The words startled me.

"You think that's the reason of her behaviour?" I asked, quickly.

"What other reason can there be?" Godfrey demanded. "Here we have a girl who thinks herself in danger and summons to her aid the man who loves her and whom, presumably, she loves. And two days later, when he has been imprisoned for a crime of which she declares it is absurd to suspect him, instead of hastening to him or trying to carry out his wishes, she turns her back on him and deliberately walks into the danger from which, up to that moment, she had shrunk with loathing. Contrast her behaviour of Saturday, when she declared her faith in Swain and begged your assistance, with her behaviour of yesterday and to-day, when she throws you and Swain aside and announces that she is going to follow Silva—to become a priestess of Siva. Do you know what that means, Lester—to become a priestess of Siva?"
"No," I answered, slowly; "I don't know. Silva said it was a great destiny; yes, and that it meant turning one's back on marriage."

"That is right," said Godfrey, in an indescribable tone, "there is no marriage--there are only revolting, abominable, unspeakable rites and ceremonies. I ran across Professor Sutro, the Orientalist, to-day, and had a talk with him about it. He says the worship of Siva is merely the worship of the reproductive principle, as it runs through all creation, and that the details of this worship are inconceivably disgusting. That is the sort of destiny Miss Vaughan has chosen."

My hands were clammy with the horror of it.

"We must save her!" I said, hoarsely. "Of course she doesn't know--doesn't suspect! We must get her away from Silva!"

"Undoubtedly we must do something," Godfrey agreed. "I don't know how we can get her away from Silva, but we might get Silva away from her. Couldn't you arrest him on suspicion and keep him locked up for two or three days, Simmonds?"

"I might," Simmonds grunted.

"And while he's away, you can work with her, Lester; take Mrs. Royce to see her, give her a hint of what Saivaism really is--or get Mrs. Royce to. If that doesn't have any effect, we can try stronger measures; but I believe, if we can get her away from Silva's influence for a few days, she will be all right again."

"I hope so," I agreed, "but I'm not at all certain. She didn't behave like a hypnotised person, Godfrey; she seemed to be acting of her own free will. I couldn't see that Silva was trying to influence her in any way. She said she was trying to carry out her father's wish. And it certainly was his wish--the will proves that. If anybody is hypnotising her, I should say it was he."

"Well, I can't arrest him," said Simmonds, with a grin.

"Her father's wishes may have had some weight with her at the outset," admitted Godfrey, "but they couldn't have driven her to the length to which she has gone. And about the will. If Vaughan had not been killed, if he had been found insane, the will would have been at once invalidated. Don't you get the glimmer of a motive for his murder there, Lester?"

"It can be invalidated now, if Miss Vaughan contests it," I pointed out.

"Yes; but unless she _does_ contest it, it will stand. But if Vaughan had been declared insane, the will could never have been probated--no contest would have been necessary. Do you see the difference?"

"I see what you mean; but I don't think it amounts to much. Silva declares that if Miss Vaughan contests the will, he will not defend it."

"But he knows perfectly well that she will not contest it. The surest way to prevent a contest is by adopting just such an attitude. Besides, if we don't save her, he'll get her share, too. Vaughan's estate and Vaughan's daughter and everything else that was Vaughan's will disappear into his maw. Oh, he's playing for a big stake, Lester, and it looks to me as though he were going to win it!"

It looked so to me, too, and I fell into gloomy thought.

"You've got your men watching the house, I suppose?" I asked, at last, turning to Simmonds.

"Yes; and we managed to score one little point to-day."

"What was that?"

"I found out that Annie Crogan, the housemaid over there, had a cousin on the force, so I got him out here and he managed to have a talk with her. He didn't find out anything," he added; "that is, anything we don't know; but she promised to leave the door of her bedroom open at night, and, if anything happened, to show a light at her window."

"Splendid!" I said. "And of course she'll keep her eyes open in the daytime."

"Sure she will. She's a bright girl. The only thing I'm afraid of is that the Hindu will get on to her and fire her. But she's been warned to be mighty careful. If they don't suspect her, maybe she'll have something to tell us, in a day or two."

"Perhaps she will," I agreed; and I drew a breath of relief. Surely with all these guardians, inside the house and out, Miss Vaughan was safe. The least outcry would bring swift assistance. Besides, I could not bring myself to believe that Silva was such a brute as Godfrey seemed to think him. I had been attracted by him, not repelled, and I have always believed in the accuracy of these instinctive feelings.

And Godfrey himself, I reflected, did not seem to be very clear in the matter. If Silva was merely a fakir and a charlatan, there was no reason why he should wish to induct Miss Vaughan into the mysteries of a religion which he wore only as a cloak, to be dropped as soon as his plans were accomplished. On the other hand, if he was sincere and really wished to convert the girl, it was only reasonable to suppose that he was sincere in other things as well.

"It reduces itself to this," I said finally to Godfrey. "If Silva is a charlatan, there is no reason why he should hypnotise Miss Vaughan; but if he really wishes to make a priestess of her, then, by the same token, he is sincere..."
and not a charlatan at all."

Godfrey nodded.

"There's a twist there which I can't seem to get straight," he admitted. "We'll have to watch Silva a little longer to find out what his game really is. Of course, it's just possible that he'd be glad to get rid of the girl, but that she really is obsessed by the idea of carrying out her father's wish. If that's the case, Silva is rather up a tree."

"That's where _we'd_ better be getting," broke in Simmonds, who had taken out his watch and held it up to the light. "It's nearly twelve o'clock, and I don't want to miss the fireworks. Besides, you fellows don't gain anything by all this jawing. You've been at it for an hour, and you're more tangled up now than when you started. My motto with a case of this kind is just to sit quiet and watch it; and pretty soon the rat thinks the coast is clear, and pokes out his head, and you nab him."

"There's a good deal in that," agreed Godfrey, with a little laugh. "I admit that our arguing doesn't seem to lead anywhere. Come along," and he led the way out among the trees.

"Now take these fireworks," went on Simmonds, in a low tone, when we were sitting side by side on the limb. "I don't understand what they mean; but they must mean something. Am I laying awake nights worrying about them? Not me! I'm just going to keep on watching till I find out what the meaning is. I know you're a great fellow for theory and deduction, and all that sort of thing, Godfrey, and I know you've pulled off some mighty clever stunts; but, after all, there's nothing like patience."

"Yes--it's dogged as does it," agreed Godfrey. "Patience is a great thing. I only wish I had more of it."

"It would be a good thing," assented Simmonds, candidly; and then we fell silent, gazing out into the darkness.

"Surely," said Godfrey, at last, "it must be twelve o'clock."

Simmonds got out his watch and flashed upon it a ray from his electric torch.

"Yes," he said, "it's four minutes after."

I felt Godfrey's hand stiffen on my arm.

"Then there's something wrong," he whispered. "You remember, Lester, what happened the other time that light failed to appear. A man was murdered!"

The darkness into which I stared seemed suddenly to grow threatening and sinister, full of vague terrors. Even Simmonds grew uneasy, and I could feel his arm twitching.

Godfrey put his foot on the ladder, and began to descend. Simmonds and I followed him silently.

"I'm going over the wall," he said, when we were on the ground. "Something's wrong, and we've got to find out what it is."

"How will we get down?" asked Simmonds. "There's no ladder there."

Godfrey considered a moment.

"We can stand on the top of the wall," he said, at last, "and lift this ladder over. It won't be easy, but it can be done. Go ahead, Lester, and be careful of the glass."

I mounted the ladder, felt cautiously along the top of the wall and found a place where I could put my feet; Simmonds followed me, and then came Godfrey. His was the difficult part, to draw up the ladder and lower it again. As for me, it was all I could do to keep from falling. I felt absurdly as though I were standing on a tremulous tightrope, high in the air; but Godfrey managed it somehow and started down.

And at that instant, there shrilled through the night the high, piercing note of a police-whistle. It rose and fell, rose and fell, rose and fell; and then came poignant silence. The sound stabbed through me. Without hesitation or thought of peril, I let myself go and plunged downward into the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIII
DEADLY PERIL

There must be a providence which protects fools and madmen, for I landed in a heavy clump of shrubbery, and got to my feet with no injury more serious than some scratches on hands and face, which at the time I did not even feel. In a moment, I had found the path and was speeding toward the house. Ahead of me flitted a dark shadow which I knew to be Godfrey, and behind me came the pad-pad of heavy feet, which could only belong to Simmonds. And then, from the direction of the house, came the crash of broken glass.

I reached the lawn, crossed it, and traversed the short avenue which ended at the library door. Three men were there, and Simmonds came panting up an instant later. The detectives had their torches in their hands, and I saw that they had broken one of the glass panels of the doors, and that one of them had passed a hand through the opening and was fumbling about inside. There was a sharp click, and the hand came back.

"There you are," he said, threw the door open, and stood aside for his superior officer to lead the way.

"What's wrong?" Simmonds asked.

"I don't know--but the girl showed a light at her window."

"You heard nothing?"
"Not a sound."

Simmonds hesitated. No doubt the same thought occurred to him as to me; for the lawyer-Tartarin in me suggested that we scarcely had warrant to break our way into a sleeping house in the middle of the night.

But no such doubts seemed to disturb Godfrey. Without a word, he caught the torch from Simmonds's hand, and passed through the doorway. Simmonds followed, I went next, and the two other men came last, their torches also flaring. Three beams of light flashed about the library and showed it to be empty. One of them--Godfrey's--lingered on the high-backed chair, but this time it had no occupant.

Then Godfrey switched on the light, passed into the hall and switched on the light there. The hall, too, was empty, and only the ticking of a tall clock disturbed the silence. I was faltering and ready to turn back, but, to my amazement, Godfrey crossed the hall at a bound and sprang up the stair, three steps at a time.

"Make all the noise you can!" he shouted over his shoulder, and the clatter of our feet seemed enough to wake the dead.

The upper hall was also empty; and then my heart gave a sudden leap, for the circle of light from Godfrey's torch had come to rest upon a white-robed figure, which had stolen half-way down the stair from the upper story. It was the maid, holding her night-dress about her; and her face was as white as her gown.

Godfrey sprang to her side.

"What is it?" he asked. "What is wrong?"

"I heard a cry," gasped the girl. "Down here somewhere. And a scuffle in the dark. A woman's cry. It was choked off short."

Godfrey leaped down among us, and, as the light of a torch flashed across it, I saw that his face was livid.

"Who's got an extra gun?" he demanded, and one of the detectives pressed one into his hand. "Ready, now, men," he added, crossed the hall, threw open the outer door into Silva's room, and flung back the drapery beyond.

My heart was in my throat as I peered over Godfrey's shoulder at what lay within; and then a gasp of amazement from my companions mingled with my own.

For the crystal sphere was glowing softly, and seated cross-legged on the divan, his hands folded, his eyes fixed in meditation, was Silva.

We all stood for a moment staring at him, then Godfrey passed his hand dazedly before his eyes.

"You two men stay on guard here," he said. "One of you keep your torch on this fellow, and the other keep his torch on the floor. There's a cobra around somewhere."

An arc of light swept shakily across the floor, as one of the men turned his torch toward it. But I saw no sign of Toto.

"Lester, you and Simmonds come with me," Godfrey added, stepped back into the hall, and tapped at the door of Miss Vaughan's bedroom.

There was no response, and he tapped again. Then he tried the door, found it unlocked, and opened it. He sent a ray of light skimming about the room; then he found the switch, turned on the lights, and entered.

The room was empty, as were the dressing-room and bath-room adjoining. The covers of the bed had been turned back, ready for its occupant, but the bed was undisturbed.

Godfrey glanced about the room again, a sort of frenzied concentration in his gaze, and then went out, leaving the lights burning. It took but a moment or two to look through the other suites. They were all empty.

"If Miss Vaughan was anywhere about, and unharmed," said Godfrey, "the noise we made would have brought her out to investigate. There's only one place she can be," and he led the way resolutely back to the door of Silva's room.

The yogi had not moved.

Godfrey contemplated him for a moment, with his torch full on the bearded face. Then he crossed the threshold, his torch sweeping the floor in front of him.

"Let's see what the Thug is up to," he said, crossed the room, drew back the drapery, and opened the door into the little closet where we had seen Mahbub once before.

There was a burst of acrid smoke into the room, and Godfrey stepped back with a stifled exclamation.

"Come here, you fellows!" he cried, and Simmonds and I sprang to his side.

For a moment I could see nothing; the rolling clouds of smoke blinded and choked me; I could feel the tears running down my cheeks and my throat burned as though it had been scalded.

Then the smoke lifted a little, and I caught a glimpse of what lay within the room.

In the middle of the floor stood an open brazier, with a thin yellow flame hovering above it, now bright, now dim, as the smoke whirled about it. Before the brazier, sat Mahbub, his legs crossed with feet uppermost, his hands pressed palm to palm before his face.

"But he'll suffocate!" I gasped, and, indeed, I did not see how any human being could breathe in such an
atmosphere.

And then, as the smoke whirled aside again, I saw the snake. Its head was waving slowly to and fro, its horrible hood distended, its yellow, lidless eyes fixed upon us.

Simmonds saw it too, and retreated a step.

"We'd better keep out of there," he gasped, "till that little pet's put away in his basket."

But Godfrey seized his arm and dragged him back to the threshold of the door.

"Look, Simmonds," he cried, rubbing his dripping eyes fiercely, "there against the wall?--is there something there--or is it just the smoke?"

I looked, too, but at first saw nothing, for a cloud of smoke rolled down and blotted out the light from Godfrey's torch. Then it swirled aside, and against the farther wall I fancied I saw something--a shape, a huddled shape--grotesque--horrible, somehow....

I heard Godfrey's startled cry, saw his hand swing up, saw a tongue of yellow flame leap from his revolver.

And with the echo of the shot, came a scream--a scream piercing, unearthly, of terror unspeakable....

I saw the Thug spring into the air, his face distorted, his mouth open--I saw him tearing at something that swung from his neck--something horrible, that clung and twisted....

He tore the thing loose--it was only an instant, really, but it seemed an age--and, still shrieking, flung it full at us.

I was paralysed with terror, incapable of movement, staring dumbly--but Godfrey swept me aside so sharply that I almost fell.

And that foul shape swished past us, fell with a thud, and was lost in the darkness.

CHAPTER XXIV
KISMET!

Words cannot paint the nauseating horror of that moment. Fear--cold, abject, awful fear--ran through my veins like a drug; my face was clammy with the sweat of utter terror; my hands clutched wildly at some drapery, which tore from its fastenings and came down in my grasp....

Three shafts of lights swept across the floor, and almost at once picked up that horrid shape. It was coiled with head raised, ready to strike, and I saw that one side of its hood had been shot away.

I have, more than once, referred to Simmonds as hard-headed and wanting in imagination--not always, I fear, in terms the most respectful. For that I ask his pardon; I shall not make that mistake again. For, in that nerve-racking moment, he never lost his coolness. Revolver in hand, he crept cautiously forward, while we others held our breath; then the pistol spoke, one, twice, thrice, and the ugly head fell forward to the floor.

At the same moment, Godfrey sprang to the door from which volumes of heavy, scented smoke still eddied, and disappeared inside.

I scarcely noticed him; I was staring at that foul object on the floor; and then I stared at Francisco Silva, motionless on the divan, his eyes fixed on the crystal sphere, undisturbed amid all this terror and tumult. It is impossible for me to remember him, as he was in that moment, without admiration--yes, and a little awe.

But Godfrey's voice, shrill with excitement, brought me around with a start.

"Lester!" he shouted. "Lend a hand here!"

Wondering what new horror lay in wait, I fought my way into the other room, stumbled over the body of the Thug, barely saved myself, my scalp prickling with terror, from falling upon it, and pitched forward to where Godfrey was bending above that huddled shape I had glimpsed through the smoke.

"Catch hold!" he panted; and choking, staggering, suffocating, we dragged it into the outer room. "Get a window open!" he gasped. "Get a window open!"

And Simmonds, whom nothing seemed to shake, groped along the wall until he found a window, pulled the hangings back, threw up the sash, and flung back the shutters.

"Quick!" said Godfrey. "Over there. Now hold the torch."

And as I took it and pressed the button with a trembling finger, the halo of light fell upon a bloodless face--the face of Marjorie Vaughan.

Simmonds was supporting her, and Godfrey, with frantic fingers, was loosening her robe at the throat. My terrified eyes, staring at that throat, half-expect ed to find a cruel mark there, but its smoothness was unsullied. The robe loosened, Godfrey snatched his cap from his head and began to fan the fresh air in upon her.

"Pray heaven it is not too late!" he murmured, and kept on fanning, watching the white lips and delicate nostrils, so drawn and livid. "We must try artificial respiration," he said, after a moment. "But not here--this atmosphere is stifling. Take her feet, Lester."

We staggered out with her, somehow, across the hall, into her room, and laid her on her bed. Godfrey, kneeling above her, began to raise and lower her arms, with a steady, regular rhythm.

"Open the windows wide," he commanded, without looking up. "Wet a towel, or something, in cold water, and
bring it here."

Simmonds threw open the windows, while I went mechanically to the bath-room, wet a towel, and slapped it against her face and neck as Godfrey directed. The moments passed, and at last the lips opened in a fluttering sigh, the bosom rose with a full inhalation, and a spot of colour crept into either cheek.

"Thank God!" said Godfrey, in a voice that was almost a sob. "Now, Simmonds, go out and bring that Irish girl, and send one of your men to 'phone for Hinman."

Simmonds sent one of his men scurrying with a word, and himself dashed up the stairs to the other floor. He was back in a moment, almost dragging the frightened girl with him. Her teeth were chattering and she started to scream when she saw that still form on the bed, but Simmonds shook her savagely.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Godfrey assured her. "Your mistress isn't dead--she'll soon come around. But you must get her undressed and to bed. And then keep bathing her face with cold water till the doctor comes. Understand?"

"Ye--yes, sir," faltered the girl. "But--oh!" and a burst of hysterical sobbing choked her.

Simmonds shook her again.

"Don't be a fool, Annie Crogan!" he said. "Get hold of yourself!"

Godfrey stepped off the bed and picked up one of the limp wrists.

"Her pulse is getting stronger," he said, after a moment. "It will soon--hello, what's this!"

Clasped tight in the slender fingers was something that looked like a torn and crumpled rubber glove. He tried to unclasp the fingers, but when he touched them, they contracted rigidly, and a low moan burst from the unconscious girl. So, after a moment, he desisted and laid the hand down again.

"You understand what you're to do?" he asked the maid, and she nodded mutely. "Then come along, boys," he added, and led the way back to the hall. His face was dripping with perspiration and his hands were shaking, but he managed to control them. "And now for Senor Silva," he said, in another tone, taking the torch from my hand. "I fear he will have a rude awakening."

"He sat there like a statue, even when I shot the snake," remarked Simmonds. "He's a wonder, he is."

"Yes," agreed Godfrey, as he stepped into the entry, "he's a wonder." Then he stopped, glanced around, and turned a stern face on Simmonds. "Where's the man I left on guard here?" he asked.

"Why," faltered Simmonds, "I remember now--he helped us carry the young lady. But we were all right there in the hall--you don't mean ..."

Godfrey stepped to the inner door and flashed his torch about the room. The divan was empty.

Simmonds paused only for a single glance.

"He can't be far away!" he said. "He can't get away in that white robe of his. Come along, Tom!" and, followed by his assistant, he plunged down the stairs.

I saw Godfrey half-turn to follow; then he stopped, ran his hand along the wall inside the door, found the button, and turned on the lights. His face was pale and angry.

"It's my fault as much as anyone's," he said savagely. "I might have known Silva would see the game was up, and try to slip away in the excitement. I ought to have kept an eye on him."

"Your eyes were fairly busy as it was," I remarked. "Besides, maybe he hasn't got away."

Godfrey's face, as he glanced about the room, showed that he cherished no such hope.

"Let's see what happened to Mahbub," he said. "Maybe he got away, too," and he crossed to the inner door.

The flame in the brazier had died away, and the smoke came only in fitful puffs, heavy with deadening perfume. The Thug had not got away. He lay on the floor--a dreadful sight. He was lying on his back, his hands clenched, his body arched in a convulsion, his head drawn far back. The black lips were parted over the ugly teeth, and the eyes had rolled upward till they gleamed, two vacant balls of white. At the side of his neck, just under the jaw, was a hideous swelling.

Godfrey's torch ran over the body from head to foot, and I sickened as I looked at it.

"I'm going out," I said. "I can't stand this!" and I hurried to the open window.

Godfrey joined me there in a moment.

"I'm feeling pretty bad myself," he said, putting the torch in his pocket and mopping his shining forehead. "It's plain enough what happened. I caught a glimpse of Miss Vaughan on the floor there, realised that we couldn't do anything with the snake in the way, and shot at it, but I only ripped away a portion of the hood, and the thing, mad with rage, sprang upon the Hindu. Nothing on earth could have saved him after it got its fangs in his neck. Ugh!"

He shivered slightly, and stood gazing for a moment down into the garden. Then he turned back to me with a smile.

"It's a good night's work, Lester," he said, "even if we don't catch Silva. I fancy Miss Vaughan will change her mind, now, about becoming a priestess of Siva!"
"But, Godfrey," I asked, "what happened? What was she doing in there? What ..."
He stopped me with a hand upon my arm.
"I don't know. But she'll tell us when she comes around. I only hope they'll get Silva. That would make the victory complete."
He paused, for the hum of a motor-car came up the drive, and an instant later we caught the glare of the acetylenes. Then a voice hailed us.
"Hello, there," it called. "Shall I come up?"
"Is it you, doctor?" asked Godfrey, leaning out.
"Yes."
"Come right up, then, to Miss Vaughan's room."
We met him at the stair-head.
"Oh, it's you!" he said, recognising us. "What has happened now?"
"It's Miss Vaughan--she's been half-suffocated. But how did you get in?"
"The gates were open," Hinman answered, "so I drove right through. Is Miss Vaughan in here?" and when Godfrey nodded, he opened the door and closed it softly behind him.
"Open!" repeated Godfrey, staring at me. "Open! Then that is the way Silva went!"
"Yes, yes," I agreed. "He had the key. It was he who let me out."
"And locked the gate after you?"
"Yes--I heard the key turn."
Without a word, Godfrey hurried down the stairs. At the foot we met Simmonds.
"We've searched the grounds," he said, "but haven't found anyone. I've left my men on guard. I phoned for some more men, and notified headquarters."
"He's not in the grounds," said Godfrey. "He went out by the gate," and he told of Hinman's discovery.
"I'll stretch a net over the whole Bronx," said Simmonds. "I don't see how a fellow dressed as he is can get away," and he hastened off to do some more telephoning.
"Well, we can't do anything," said Godfrey, "so we might as well rest awhile," and he passed into the library and dropped into a chair.
I followed him, but as I sat down and glanced about the room I saw something that fairly jerked me to my feet.
A section of the shelving had been swung forward, and behind it the door of the safe stood open.
In an instant, I had flung myself on my knees before it, groped for the locked drawer, pulled it out, and hurried with it to the table.
The five packets of money were gone.
"What is it, Lester?" asked Godfrey, at my side.
"There was--fifty thousand dollars--in money in--this drawer," I answered, trying to speak coherently.
Godfrey took the drawer from my hands and examined its contents.
"Well, it isn't there now," he said, and replaced the drawer in the safe. "Sit down, Lester," and he pressed me back into my chair and flung himself into another. "I wish I knew where Vaughan kept his whiskey!" he murmured, and ran his fingers furiously through his hair. "This is getting too strenuous, even for me!"
He fell silent for a moment, and sat looking at the open safe.
"What astonishes me," he mused, "is the nerve of the man, stopping at such a moment to work that combination. Think what that means, Lester; to work a combination, a man has to be cool and collected."
"A man who could sit without stirring through that scene upstairs," I said, "has nerve enough for anything. Nothing Silva does can surprise me after that!"
"I wonder how he knew the combination?"
"I was sure he knew it. I had to stop Miss Vaughan to keep her from telling it to me."
"Well, he lessened his chance of escape by just that much. Every minute he spent before that safe was a minute lost. Ah, here's Simmonds. What do you think of that, Simmonds?" he added, and pointed to the safe. "Senor Silva stopped on his way out to gather up fifty thousand dollars in cash to pay his travelling expenses."
Simmonds walked over to the safe and looked at it.
"Fifty thousand?" he repeated. "But Vaughan must have been a fool to keep that much money here."
"Oh, I don't know. It's a fireproof safe, and mighty well concealed."
"I'll tell you what I think," I said; "I think he intended to give the money to Silva. He was going to give him a million--left him that in his will, you know."
"So Silva was only taking what belonged to him, eh?" and Godfrey laughed. "Well, I hope you'll get him, Simmonds."
It was at this moment that Dr. Hinman entered, a curious, repressed excitement in his face, and his eyes shining
"How is she, doctor?" Godfrey asked.

"She'll be all right in the morning. She is still pretty nervous, so I gave her a sleeping-draught and waited till it took effect."

Godfrey looked at him more closely.

"Did she tell you anything?" he asked.

"Not much," said Hinman; "I wouldn't let her talk. But she told me enough to let me guess one thing--she's the bravest girl I ever knew or heard of!"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean," cried Hinman, his eyes glowing more and more, "that she stayed in this house and faced the deadliest peril out of love for that man Swain; I mean that, if he's cleared, as he's certain to be now, it will be she who clears him; I mean that, if the real murderer is brought to justice, it will be because of the evidence she stayed here to get, and did get!"

His voice had mounted shrilly, and his face was working as though he could scarcely keep back the tears.

"Wait a minute, doctor," broke in Godfrey. "Don't go too fast. What evidence?"

For answer, Hinman flipped something through the air to him. Godfrey caught it, and stared at it an instant in bewilderment; then, with a stifled exclamation, he sprang to the light and held the object close under it.

"By all the gods!" he cried, in a voice as shrill as Hinman's own. "The finger-prints!"

CHAPTER XXV

THE BLOOD-STAINED GLOVE

I do not know what it was I expected to see, as I leaped from my chair and peered over Godfrey's shoulder; but certainly it was something more impressive than the soiled and ragged object he held in his hand. It was, apparently, an ordinary rubber glove, such as surgeons sometimes use, and it was torn and crumpled, as though it had been the subject of a struggle.

Then I remembered that I had seen it crushed in Miss Vaughan's unconscious fingers, and I recalled how the fingers had stiffened when Godfrey tried to remove it, as though some instinct in her sought to guard it, even in the face of death.

"But I don't understand," said Simmonds, who was staring over the other shoulder. "What's that thing got to do with the finger-prints?"

"Look here," said Godfrey, and held the glove so that the ends of the fingers lay in the full light.

Then I saw that against the end of every finger had been glued a strip of rubber, about an inch in length and half as wide; and, bending closer, I perceived that the surface of each of these strips was covered with an intricate pattern of minute lines.

"Forged finger-prints! That's a new idea in crime, isn't it, Simmonds?" and Godfrey laughed excitedly.

Simmonds took the glove, got out his pocket-glass, and examined the finger-tips minutely.

"You think these reproduce Swain's finger-prints?" he asked, sceptically.

"I'm sure they do! You see it's the right hand; look at the thumb--you see it's a double whorl. Wait till we put them side by side with Swain's own, and you'll see that they correspond, line for line. Yes, and look at those stains. Do you know what those stains are, Simmonds? They're blood. Did you notice the stains, doctor?"

"Yes," said Hinman. "I think they're blood-stains. That will be easy enough to determine."

"Whose blood is it?" asked Simmonds, and I could see that even his armour had been penetrated.

"Well," answered Godfrey, smiling, "science isn't able, as yet, to identify the blood of individuals; but I'd be willing to give odds that it's Swain's blood. My idea is that Silva got the blood for the finger-prints from the blood-soaked handkerchief, which Swain probably dropped when he fled from the arbour, and which Silva picked up and dropped beside the chair, after he was through with it, as an additional bit of evidence."

"That's reasonable enough," agreed Hinman, with a quick nod, "but what I can't understand is how he made these reproductions."

Godfrey sat down again and contemplated the glove pensively for some moments. Then he turned to me.

"Where is that book of finger-prints you spoke about, Lester?" he asked.

I went to the book-case and got it out. Godfrey took it and began to turn the pages quickly.

"Swain's name is in the index," I said, and he glanced at it, and then turned to the place where the page had been.

"Which reminds me," said Hinman, with a rueful smile, "that I concocted a very pretty theory to account for that missing page. I felt quite chesty about it! I'm glad it didn't throw Miss Vaughan off the scent!"

"So am I!" agreed Godfrey, "for it must have been this missing page which gave Miss Vaughan her first suspicion of the truth. Perhaps it was pure inspiration--or perhaps she knew that Silva could reproduce finger-prints. We shall learn when we hear her story. In any event, it's a clever trick--and easy enough when you know how!"
"Like standing the egg on end," I suggested.

"Precisely. Every trick is easy when you work it backwards. But just think, Simmonds," he added, "what problems the police will have to face, if gloves like these become fashionable among cracksmen!"

Simmonds groaned dismally.

"You haven't told us yet how it's done," he said.

I bit back a smile, for Simmonds's tone was that of pupil to master.

"Well," said Godfrey, slowly, "it might be done in several ways. The first thing is to get a good set of the prints to be reproduced. That Silva got from this album. The moulds might be made by cutting them in wood or metal; but that would take an expert—and besides, I fancy it would be too slow for Silva. He had a quicker way than that—perhaps by transferring them to a plate of zinc or copper and then eating them out with acid. Once the mould is secured, it is merely a question of pressing india-rubber-mixture into it and then heating the rubber until it hardens—just as a rubber-stamp is made. The whole process would take only a few hours."

Simmonds drew a deep breath.

"It may be simple," he said, "but that fellow’s a genius, just the same. He's much too clever to be at large. We've got to get him!"

"Be sure of one thing," retorted Godfrey. "You'll find it harder to catch him than it was to let him go! He won't walk into your arms. Not that I blame you, Simmonds," he added; "but I blame those muckle-headed men of yours—and I blame myself for not keeping my eyes open. Here's the glove—take good care of it. It means Swain's acquittal.

And now there is one other thing I want to see before we go to bed. Suppose we make a little excursion to the roof."

"To the roof? What for?" demanded Simmonds, as he wrapped the glove in his handkerchief and put it in his pocket.

"You know how fond you are of fire-works!" retorted Godfrey, smiling, and started for the door.

"I haven't the slightest idea what you're talking about," said Hinman, "but I'm as curious as an old woman,--and I like fire-works, too!"

"Come along, then," laughed Godfrey, and led the way up the stairs. "This time we'll go as quietly as we can!" he added, over his shoulder.

In the entry at the top of the stairs leading to the attic story was a heavy closed door, and Godfrey looked at it with a smile.

"Do you suppose those two German servants have slept on through all this excitement?" he asked; and we found afterwards that they had!

The flare of Godfrey's torch disclosed a third flight of stairs at the end of the entry, and, when we reached the foot of these and looked up, we found ourselves gazing at the stars.

"Ah!" said Godfrey; "I thought so! The stage was set, ready for the curtain, and then the leading lady failed to appear. So the villain went in search of her, found her with the glove in her hand, and started to suppress her, when our timely arrival interrupted him! Gentlemen, I think I can promise you a most interesting demonstration. What did Miss Vaughan call it, Lester?"

"An astral benediction," I said.

"That's it!" said Godfrey, and led the way up the steps.

There was a wide, hinged trap-door at the top, lying open, and we stepped through it out upon the roof. Here had been built a platform about eight feet square, with a low railing around it. I saw Godfrey's torch playing rapidly over the boards of the platform, then he marshalled us in the middle of it.

"Stand here in a row," he said, "facing the west. Extend your arms to the heavens and concentrate your gaze upon that big star up yonder. Go ahead, doctor," he urged, as Hinman hesitated. "We're trying to persuade an astral visitor to pay us a call, and it takes team-work."

We stood silent a moment, with our arms above our heads, and I could hear Godfrey shifting his feet cautiously along the boards of the floor.

"What's that!" cried Simmonds, for, from the darkness at our feet, had come a soft whirr as of a bird taking flight.

"Look!" cried Hinman. "Look!"

High above our heads a point of flame appeared, brightened and burned steel-blue. For a moment it hung there, then it grew brighter and brighter, and I knew that it was descending. Lower and lower it came, until it hovered in the air just above us; then it burst into a million sparks and vanished.

For a moment, no one spoke; then I heard Hinman's voice, and it was decidedly unsteady.

"What is this, anyway?" he demanded. "The Arabian Nights?"

"No," said Godfrey, and in his voice was the ring of triumph. "It's merely a device of one of the cleverest fakirs who ever lived. Take the torch, Simmonds, and let us see how it works."
He dropped to his knees, while Simmonds lighted him, and I saw that there was a hole in the floor about three inches in diameter. Godfrey felt carefully about it for a moment, and then, with a little exclamation of triumph, found a hold for his fingers, pulled sharply, and raised a hinged section of the floor, about eighteen inches square.

"Now give us the light," he said, and plunged it into the opening.

In line with the little hole was an upright metal tube about a foot long, ending in a small square box. Beside the tube, a slender iron rod ran from the platform down into the box.

"That's the lever that sets it off," remarked Godfrey, tapping the rod. "A pressure of the foot did it."

He pulled the rod loose, seized the tube, and lifted the whole apparatus out upon the platform.

"Let's take it down where we can look at it," he said, and, carrying it easily in one hand, led the way back to the library, cleared a place on the table and set it down. Then, after a moment's examination, he pulled back a little bolt and tilted the top of the box, with the tube attached, to one side.

A curious mechanism lay revealed. There was a powerful spring, which could be wound up with a key, and a drum wound with filament-like wire and connected with a simple clock-work to revolve it. Two small dry-batteries were secured to one side of the box, their wires running to the drum.

"Why, it's nothing but a toy catapult!" I said.

"That's all," and Godfrey nodded. "It remained for Silva to add a few trimmings of his own and to put it to a unique use. Instead of a missile, he loaded it with his little aerial shell, attached to the end of this wire. Then he shot it off with a pressure of the foot; when it reached the end of the wire, the pull brought this platinum coil against the battery wires and closed the circuit. The spark fired the shell, and the drum began to revolve and pull it down. That explains, Lester, why it descended so steadily and in a straight line. The fellow who could devise a thing like that deserves to succeed! Here's health to him!"

"He ought to be behind the bars," growled Simmonds. "The cleverer he is, the more dangerous he is."

"Well," retorted Godfrey, "I admire him, anyway; and he isn't behind the bars yet. No doubt you'll find some of his shells to-morrow about the house somewhere, and you might amuse yourself by shooting one off every night at midnight, on the chance that he sees it and comes back to see who's stealing his thunder!"

But this brilliant suggestion didn't seem to appeal to Simmonds, who merely grunted and continued his examination of the catapult.

"Silva had loaded it for to-night's performance," Godfrey went on, "but, as I remarked before, the leading lady failed to answer her cue, and it remained for us to touch it off. There it is, Simmonds; I turn it over to you. It and the glove will make unique additions to the museum at headquarters. And now," he added, with the wide yawn of sudden relaxation, "you fellows can make a night of it, if you want to, but I'm going to bed."

I glanced at my watch. It was half-past four. Another dawn was brightening along the east.

Hinman ran upstairs, took a look at his patient, and came down to tell us that she was sleeping calmly.

"She'll be all right in the morning," he assured us; "and while I don't want to butt in, I'd certainly like to hear her story. Adventures like this don't happen very often to a country doctor! May I come?"

"Most surely!" I assented warmly. "I think we were very fortunate to have had you in this case, doctor."

"So do I!" echoed Godfrey, while Hinman flushed with pleasure. "And don't forget, Lester, that it was I who picked him out, with nothing better than the telephone-book to guide me! That was my infallible instinct!"

"Suppose we say ten o'clock, then?" I suggested, smiling at Godfrey's exuberance--but then, I was feeling rather exuberant myself!

"I'll be here!" said Hinman. "And thank you," and a moment later we heard his car chugging away down the drive.

We listened to it for a moment, then Godfrey yawned again.

"Come along, Lester," he said, "or I'll go to sleep on my feet. Can I give you a bed, Simmonds?"

"No, thanks," said Simmonds. "I'm not ready for bed. I'm going to comb this whole neighbourhood, as soon as it's light. Silva can't escape--unless he just fades away into the air."

"You've found no trace of him?"

"I've had no reports yet," and Simmonds walked beside us down the drive to the gate; "but my men ought to be coming in pretty soon. There's a thick grove just across the road, where he may be hiding...."

He stopped, for a man was hastening toward us, carrying under one arm a small white bundle.

Simmonds quickened his pace.

"What's that you've got?" he asked.

The man saluted.

"I found it just now, sir, in the bushes near the gate. Looks like a dress."

Simmonds unrolled it slowly. It was the robe of the White Priest of Siva.

Godfrey looked at it and then at Simmonds, whose face was a study. Then he took me by the arm and led me
"I'm afraid Simmonds has his work cut out for him," he said, when we were out of earshot. "I thought so from the first. A fellow as clever as Silva would be certain to keep his line of retreat open. He's far away by this time."

He walked on thoughtfully, a little smile on his lips.

"I'm not altogether sorry," he continued. "It adds an interest to life to know that he's running around the world, and that we may encounter him again some day. He's a remarkable fellow, Lester; one of the most remarkable I ever met. He comes close to being a genius. I'd give something to hear the story of his life."

That wish was destined to be gratified, for, three years later, we heard that story, or a part of it, from Silva's lips, as he lay calmly smoking a cigarette, looking in the face of death,--and without flinching. Perhaps, some day, I shall tell that story.

"But, Godfrey," I said, as we turned in at his gate, "all this scheme of lies--the star, the murder, the finger-prints--what was it all about? I can't see through it, even yet."

"There are still a few dark places," he agreed; "but the outlines are pretty clear, aren't they?"

"Not to me--it's all a jumble."

"Suppose we wait till we hear Miss Vaughan's story," he suggested. "After that, I think, we can reconstruct the whole plot. There's one foundation-stone that's missing," he added, thoughtfully. "I wonder if Miss Vaughan uses a blotting-book? It all depends upon that!"

"A blotting-book?" I echoed. "But I don't see...."

He shook himself out of his thoughts with a little laugh.

"Not now, Lester. It's time we were in bed. Look, there's the sun!" and he led the way into the house. "I'll have you called at nine," he added, as he bade me good-night at my door.

CHAPTER XXVI
THE MYSTERY CLEARS

Godfrey's powers of recuperation have astonished me more than once, and never more so than when I found him at the breakfast-table, as fresh and rosy as though he had had a full night's sleep. But even I felt better by the time the meal was over. It is wonderful what a cup of coffee can do for a man!

"I 'phoned a message to Swain, as soon as I was up," Godfrey said, "telling him, in your name, that we had the evidence to clear him, and that Miss Vaughan was safe."

"I must go down to him," I said, "and start proceedings to set him free. I'll get Simmonds to go with me before Goldberger, and then before the magistrate. We ought to get an order of release at once."

"You've got something to do before that," Godfrey reminded me. "We're to hear Miss Vaughan's story at ten o'clock. I'm taking it for granted," he added, with a smile, "that I'll be welcome, as well as Hinman."

"That doesn't need saying," I retorted, and ten minutes later, we were on the way to Elmhurst.

There was a man on guard at the library door, but he allowed us to pass when we gave our names, having evidently had his instructions from Simmonds. In answer to Godfrey's question, he said that, so far as he knew, no trace had been found of Silva.

We went on into the room, and found that some one, Simmonds presumably, had closed the safe and swung the section of shelving back into place before it. It was not locked, however, and I opened it and went through its contents carefully, with the faint hope that the money might have been thrust into some other compartment. But I found no trace of it, and was replacing the contents, when a voice at the threshold brought me to my feet.

"Mr. Lester!" it said, and I turned to behold a vision which made me catch my breath--a vision of young womanhood, with smiling lips and radiant eyes--a vision which came quickly toward me, with hands outstretched.

"Miss Vaughan!" I cried, and took the hands and held them.

"Can you forgive me?" she demanded.

"For what?"

"For treating you so badly! Oh, I could see what you thought of me, and I longed to tell you it was only make-believe, but I didn't dare! I could see your grimace of disgust, when I fell on my knees beside the chair yonder...."

"Miss Vaughan," I broke in, "whatever my sentiments may have been--and I was an idiot not to suspect the truth!--they have all changed into enthusiastic admiration. You were wiser and braver than all of us."

A wave of colour swept into her cheeks.

"I might add," I said, "and I turned to behold a vision which made me catch my breath--a vision of young womanhood, with smiling lips and radiant eyes--a vision which came quickly toward me, with hands outstretched."

"Miss Vaughan!" I cried, and took the hands and held them.

"Can you forgive me?" she demanded.

"For what?"

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"Miss Vaughan," I broke in, "whatever my sentiments may have been--and I was an idiot not to suspect the truth!--they have all changed into enthusiastic admiration. You were wiser and braver than all of us."

A wave of colour swept into her cheeks.

"I might add," I went on, "that I thought white robes becoming, but they were not nearly so becoming as this gown!"

"It is of the last century!" she protested. "But anything is better than that masquerade! And when--when...."

"I think I can get Swain free this afternoon," I answered. "I'm going to try, anyway. Mr. Godfrey 'phoned him the good news the first thing this morning. This is Mr. Godfrey, Miss Vaughan," I added, "and very eager to shake hands with you."
"Very proud, too," said Godfrey, coming forward and suiting the action to the word.
There was a step on the walk outside, and Dr. Hinman appeared at the door.
"Well!" he cried, coming in, his face beaming. "There's no need for me to ask how my patient's doing!"
"I'm afraid you haven't got any patient, any more, doctor," I laughed.
"I'm afraid not," agreed Hinman. "I'll have to go back to my office and wait for another one. But before I go, Miss Vaughan, I want to hear the story. Mr. Lester promised me I should."
Miss Vaughan looked at me.
"We all want to hear it," I said; "how you came to suspect--how you got the glove--everything."
Her face grew sober, and a shadow flitted across it.
"Suppose we sit down," she said, and just then the sentry at the door saluted and Simmonds stepped into the room.
I saw him shake his head in answer to Godfrey's questioning look and knew that Silva had not been found. Then I brought him forward to Miss Vaughan and introduced him.
"Mr. Simmonds," I explained, "has been in charge of this case; and it was he who arranged to watch the house, for fear some harm would befall you...."
"I know," broke in Miss Vaughan, clasping Simmonds's hand warmly. "Annie told me all about it this morning. I don't know how to thank you, Mr. Simmonds."
"Oh, it wasn't me, especially," protested Simmonds, red to the ears. "It was really Godfrey there, and Mr. Lester. They were worried to death."
"We were rather worried," Godfrey admitted; "especially after we saw you at that midnight fireworks party."
"You saw that?" she asked quickly; "but how...."
"Oh, we had seen the show every night for a week. It was its failure to come off last night which first told us something was wrong."
"Well," said Miss Vaughan, with a deep breath, sitting down again and motioning us to follow her example, "it seems to me that you have a story to tell, too! But I'll tell mine first. Where shall I begin?"
"Begin," I suggested, "at the moment when you first suspected the plot."
"That was when you were telling me of Fred's arrest. When you told me of the handkerchief and then of the finger-prints, I knew that someone was plotting against him. And then, quite suddenly, I thought of something."
"You jumped up," I said, "as though you were shot, and ran to the book-case over there and got down that album of finger-prints, and found that Swain's were missing. That seemed to upset you completely."
"It did; and I will tell you why. My father, for many years, had been a collector of finger-prints. All of his friends were compelled to contribute; and whenever he made a new acquaintance, he got his prints, too, if he could. He believed that one's character was revealed in one's finger-prints, and he studied them very carefully. It was a sort of hobby; but it was, for some reason, distasteful to Senor Silva. He not only refused to allow prints to be made of his fingers, but he pooh-poohed my father's theories, and they used to have some terrific arguments about it. One night, after a particularly hot argument, Senor Silva made the assertion that he could, by hypnotic suggestion, cause his servant Mahbub to reproduce any finger-prints he desired. Mahbub's finger-tips had been manipulated in some way, so that they showed only a series of straight lines."
"Yes," I said, "his prints were taken at the inquest."
"Father said that if Senor Silva could show him proof of that assertion, he would never look at finger-prints again. Senor Silva asked for a week in which to make a study of the prints, in order to impress them upon his memory; at the end of that time, the test was made. It was a most extraordinary one. Senor Silva, father, and I sat at the table yonder, under the light, with the book of prints before us. Mahbub was placed at a little table in the far corner, with his back to us, and Senor Silva proceeded to hypnotise him. It took only a moment, for he could hypnotise Mahbub by pointing his finger at him. He said Mahbub was a splendid subject, because he had hypnotised him hundreds of times, and had him under perfect control. Then he placed an ink-pad on the table in front of him--nothing else. My father wrote his name and the date upon the top sheet of a pad of paper, and Senor Silva placed it before Mahbub. Then he sat down with us, selected a page of prints, and asked us to concentrate our minds upon it. At the end of a few moments, he asked me to bring the pad from before Mahbub. I did so, and we found the prints upon it to be identical with those on the page we had been looking at. My father touched them with his finger and found that they were fresh, as the ink smeared readily. His name was on the corner of the page, where he had written it. There could be no doubt that in some way Mahbub had been able to duplicate the prints."
"Senor Silva repeated the experiment with another set of prints and then with another. I think there were six altogether, and every one of them was successful."
"Was Swain's one of them?" asked Godfrey.
"No; but when Mr. Lester told me that Fred was suspected because of those finger-prints, the thought flashed
into my mind that if Senor Silva and Mahbub could imitate those of other people, they could imitate Fred's, too; and when I looked at the album and found that sheet torn out, I was sure that was what had happened."

"And so you decided to stay in the house, to win Senor Silva's confidence by pretending to become a convert, and to search for evidence against him," I said. "That was a brave thing to do, Miss Vaughan."

"Not so brave as you think," she objected, shaking her head. "I did not believe that there would be any real danger, with the three servants in the house. Only at the last did I realise the desperate nature of the man...."

She stopped and shivered slightly.

"Tell us what happened," I said.

"It was on Sunday afternoon," she continued, "that I went to Senor Silva and told him that I had decided to carry out my father's wish, renounce the world, and become a priestess of Siva. I shall never forget the fire in his eyes as he listened--they fairly burned into me."

"Ah!" said Godfrey. "So that was it!"

She looked at him inquiringly.

"Except upon one hypothesis," he explained, "that action on your part would have embarrassed Silva, and he would have tried to dissuade you. He had left him by your father's will this valuable place and a million dollars. If money had been all he sought, that would have satisfied him, and he would have tried to get rid of you. That he did not--that his eyes burned with eagerness when you told him of your decision--proves that he loved you and wanted you also."

A brighter colour swept into Miss Vaughan's cheeks, but she returned his gaze bravely.

"I think that is true," she assented, in a low voice. "It was my suspicion of that which made me hesitate--but finally I decided that there was no reason why I should spare him and let an innocent man suffer for him."

"Especially when you loved the innocent man," I added to myself, but managed to keep the words from my lips.

"As soon as I told him of my decision," Miss Vaughan continued, "he led me to the room where the crystal sphere is, placed me on the divan, sat down opposite me, and began to explain to me the beliefs of his religion. Meditation, it seems, is essential to it, and it was by gazing at the crystal that one could separate one's soul from one's body and so attain pure and profound meditation."

"Was that your first experience of crystal-gazing?" Godfrey asked.

"Yes; both he and my father had often tried to persuade me to join them. They often spent whole nights there. But it seemed to me that the breaking down of father's will was due to it in some way; I grew to have a fear and horror of it, and so I always refused."

"The change in your father was undoubtedly directly traceable to it," Godfrey agreed. "During those periods of crystal-gazing, he was really in a state of hypnosis, induced by Silva, with his mind bare to Silva's suggestions; and as these were repeated, he became more and more a mere echo of Silva's personality. That was what Silva desired for you, also."

"I felt something of the sort, though I never really understood it," said Miss Vaughan; "and as I sat there on the divan that Sunday afternoon, with his burning eyes upon me, I was terribly afraid. His will was so much stronger than mine, and besides, I could not keep my eyes from the crystal. In the end, I had a vision--a dreadful vision."

She pressed her hands to her eyes, as though it was still before her.

"The vision of your father's death?" I questioned.

She nodded.

"With Swain as the murderer?"

"How did you know?" she asked, astonished.

"Because he induced the same vision in me the next evening. But don't let me interrupt."

"I don't know how long the seance lasted," she continued; "some hours, I suppose, for it was dark when I again realised where I was. And after dinner, there was another; and then at midnight he led me to the roof and invoked what he called an astral benediction--a wonderful, wonderful thing...."

Godfrey smiled drily.

"You were over-wrought, Miss Vaughan," he said, "and straight from a spell of crystal-gazing. No wonder it impressed you. But it was really only a clever trick."

"I realise, now, that it must have been a trick," she agreed; "but at the time it seemed an unquestionable proof of his divine power. When it was over, I had just sufficient strength of will remaining to tear myself away from him and gain my own room and lock the door."

"You mean he tried to detain you?"

"Not with his hands. But I could feel his will striving to conquer mine. Even after I was in my room, I could feel him calling me. In the morning, I was stronger. I lay in bed until nearly noon, trying to form some plan; but I began to fear that I must give it up. I realised that, after a few more nights like the night before, I should no longer have a
will of my own--that what I was pretending would became reality. I decided that I could risk one more day--perhaps two; but I felt very weak and discouraged. You see, I did not know what to look for, or where to look. I wanted evidence against him, but I had no idea what the evidence would be. I wanted to search his room, but I had not been able to, because he was scarcely ever out of it, except when he was with me; and, besides, Mahbub was always squatting in the little closet next to it.

"I got up, at last, and after breakfast he met me here in the library. He suggested another seance, but I pleaded a headache, and he walked with me about the grounds. I remembered that you were to come in the evening, Mr. Lester, and I determined to leave you with him, on some pretext, and search his room then. I told him you were coming, that I had asked you to take charge of my affairs; and it was then he told me of the legacy he believed my father had left him, adding that whether the legacy should stand or not was entirely in my hands. Then I began to feel his influence again, and managed to excuse myself and go indoors.

"You know what happened in the evening, Mr. Lester. As soon as I left you, I flew to his room, determined to search it at any cost. But I was scarcely inside, when I heard the outer door open, and I had just time to get behind the curtains in one corner, when someone entered. Peering out, I saw that it was Mahbub. He looked about for a moment, and then sat down on the divan, folded his feet under him, and fell into a contemplation of the sphere. I scarcely dared to breathe. I was always afraid of Mahbub," she added; "far more so than of Senor Silva. About Senor Silva there was at least something warm and human; but Mahbub impressed me somehow as a brother to the snake, he seemed so cold and venomous."

"You knew he was dead?" I asked, as she paused.

"Yes; Annie told me," and she shuddered slightly.

"The cobra, too, is dead," added Godfrey. "I agree with you, Miss Vaughan. There was a kinship between them--though the cobra turned against him in the end. How long did he sit there?"

"I do not know--but it seemed an age to me. Finally, in despair, I had made up my mind to try to steal away, when I heard steps in the entry. Mahbub slipped from the divan and disappeared behind the curtains, and then the door opened and Senor Silva and Mr. Lester entered. I saw, at once, that there was to be another seance, and that I could not escape, for Senor Silva sat down facing the corner where I was. I could only brace myself against the wall and wait. It was a dreadful ordeal. But it had its reward," she added, with a smile.

"And that was?" I asked.

"The discovery of the glove. Senor Silva suddenly switched on the lights, and I knew that the seance was over; but he had some difficulty in arousing you--the trance must have been a very deep one--and finally, leaving you lying on the divan, he went to the wall, drew aside the hangings, and pressed his hand against a panel. A little door flew open, and I saw that there was a cupboard in the wall. He filled a glass with some liquid, pulled the hangings into place, and went back to you and made you drink it. It seemed to do you good."

"Yes," I said; "it brought me around at once. And then?"

"And then, as soon as you went out together, I ran to the cupboard and looked into it. But for a moment I was confused--I saw nothing which seemed of any importance--some bottles and decanters and glasses, a glass tray or two, a pile of rubber gloves. I couldn't understand. I picked up one of the gloves and looked at it, but it was just an ordinary glove. Then farther back, I saw some others--their finger-tips were stained with ink--and then another, lying by itself. I looked at it, I saw the patches on the finger-tips--I saw the stains--and then I understood. I do not know how I understood, or why--it was like a flash of lightning, revealing everything. And then, as I stood there, with the glove in my hand, I heard Senor Silva returning."

She paused a moment, and I could see the shiver which ran through her at the recollection.

"It was not that I was afraid," she said; "it was that I seemed to be lost. I let the draperies fall, ran to the divan and sat down before the sphere. I could think of nothing else to do. I can still see his astonished face when he entered and found me sitting there.

"I was waiting for you,' I said, trying to smile. 'You remember I was to have another lesson to-night.'

"Yes,' he said, and looked at me, his eyes kindling.

"I was trembling inwardly, for suddenly I began to fear him; I knew that I must keep my head, that I must not yield to his will, or I would be swept away.

"I thought Mr. Lester would never go,' I said.

"He came to the divan and sat down close beside me, and looked into my eyes.

"Did the time really seem so long?" he asked.

"It seemed very long,' I said.

"He gazed at me for another moment, then rose quickly and turned on the light.

"Sit where you are,' he said, 'and I will sit here. Fix your eyes upon the sphere and your mind upon the Infinite Mind--so shall great wisdom come to you.'
"I felt my will crumbling to pieces; I closed my eyes and crushed the glove within my hand, and thought of this man's villainy and of the part I must play, if I were to defeat him. His voice went on and on, but gradually I ceased to hear it--I was thinking of the glove, of escape, of Fred...."

Yea, love is strong, I told myself, and it giveth to the dove the wisdom of the serpent, else how had this child come victorious from such an ordeal!

"I do not know how long I sat there," Miss Vaughan continued, "but Senor Silva rose suddenly with an exclamation of impatience and switched on the light.

"'There is something wrong,' he said, coming back and standing over me. 'Some hostile influence is at work. What is it?'

"'I do not know,' I said. 'I cannot lose myself as I did last night.'

"'Something holds you to earth--some chain. Perhaps it is your own wish.'

"'No, no!' I protested. 'Let us try again.'

"He switched off the light and sat down facing me, and again I felt his will trying to enter and conquer me. And again I clasped the glove, and kept my mind upon it, thinking only of escape."

You can guess how we were leaning forward, listening breathless to this narrative. I fancied I could see her sitting there in the darkness, with Silva's evil influence visibly about her, but held at bay by her resolute innocence, as Christian's shield of Faith turned aside the darts of Apollyon. It was, indeed, a battle of good and evil, the more terrible because it was fought, not with bodily weapons, but with spiritual ones.

"At last, Senor Silva rose again," Miss Vaughan continued, "and turned on the lights, and I shivered when I met his gaze.

"'You are defying me,' he said, very low. 'But I will break you yet,' and he clapped his hands softly together.

[Illustration: "I knew that I was lost"]

"Mahbub appeared at the inner door, received a sharp order, and disappeared again. A moment later, there was a little swirl of smoke from the door of his room, and a sharp, over-powering odour, which turned me faint.

"And then Senor Silva, who had been pacing, up and down the room, stopped suddenly and looked at me, his face distorted.

"'Is it that?' he muttered. 'Can it be that?'

"And he strode to the curtain which hung before his secret cupboard and swept it back.

"I knew that I was lost. I sprang for the outer door, managed to get it open and set a foot in the hall, before he seized me. I remember that I screamed, and then his hand was at my throat--and I suppose I must have fainted," she added, with a little smile, "for the next thing I remember is looking up and seeing Dr. Hinman."

I sat back in my chair with a long breath of relief. My tension during the telling of the story had been almost painful; and it was not until it was ended that I saw two other men had entered while Miss Vaughan was speaking. I was on my feet as soon as I saw them, for I recognised Goldberger and Sylvester:

"Simmonds telephoned me this morning that I was needed out here again," Goldberger explained. "But first I want to shake hands with Miss Vaughan."

"You have met Mr. Goldberger, Miss Vaughan," I said, as he came forward, "but Dr. Hinman didn't tell you that he's the cleverest coroner in greater New York."

"He doesn't really think so, Miss Vaughan," Goldberger laughed. "You ought to read some of the things he's written about me! But I want to say that I heard most of your story, and it's a wonder. About that glove, now, Simmonds," he added, turning to the detective. "I'd like to see it--and Sylvester here is nearly dying to."

"Here it is," said Simmonds, and took it from his pocket and passed it over.
Goldberger looked at it, then handed it to Sylvester, who fairly seized it, carried it to the door, and examined it with gleaming eyes. Then, without a word, he took an ink-pad from his pocket, slipped the glove upon his right hand, inked the tips of the fingers and pressed them carefully upon a sheet of paper. From an inner pocket, he produced a sheaf of photographs, laid them beside the prints, and carefully compared them. Finally he straightened up and looked at us, his face working.

"Do you know what this does, gentlemen?" he asked, in a voice husky with emotion. "It strikes at the foundation of the whole system of finger-print identification! It renders forever uncertain a method we thought absolutely safe! It's the worst blow that has ever been struck at the police!"

"You mean the prints agree with the photographs?" asked Godfrey, going to his side.

"Absolutely!" said Sylvester, and mopped his face with a shaking hand.

CHAPTER XXVII
THE END OF THE CASE

To Sylvester, head of the Identification Bureau, it seemed that the world was tottering to its fall; but the rest of us, who had not really at the bottom of our hearts, perhaps, believed in the infallibility of the finger-print system, took it more calmly. And presently we went upstairs to take a look at the contents of Silva's secret cupboard. When he had first come to the house, Miss Vaughan explained, he had been given carte-blanche in this suite of rooms. He had them remodelled, installed the circular divan and crystal sphere, selected the hangings, and had at the same time, no doubt, caused the secret cupboard to be built.

Its contents were most interesting. There was a box of aerial bombs, which Godfrey turned over to Simmonds with the injunction to go and amuse himself. For Sylvester's contemplation and further confusion were the gloves with which Silva had managed his parlour mystification scheme, six pairs of them; and there was also the very simple apparatus with which the finger-print reproductions had been made--an apparatus, as Godfrey had suggested, similar in every way to that used for making rubber stamps. There, too, were the plates of zinc upon which the impressions of the prints had been etched with acid. And, finally, there were various odds and ends of a juggler's outfit, as well as various bottles of perfumes, essences, and liquids whose properties we could not guess.

Godfrey looked at the gloves carefully, as though in search of something, and at last selected one of them with a little exclamation of satisfaction.

"I thought so!" he said, and held it up. "Look at this glove, Sylvester. You see it has never been used--there is no ink on it. Do you know what it is? It's the print of Swain's left hand."

Sylvester took it and looked at it.

"It's a left hand all right," he said. "But what makes you think it is Swain's?"

"Because Silva expected to use both hands, till he learned that Swain had injured one of his. But for that, the blood needed to make the prints would have come from the victim, and Silva would have worn this glove, too; but Swain's injury gave Silva a happy inspiration! Wonderful man!" he added, half to himself.

Goldberger and Simmonds went on into the inner room to arrange for the disposition of the body of Mahbub; but Godfrey and Miss Vaughan and I turned back together, for we did not wish to see the Thug. At her boudoir door Godfrey paused.

"The case is clear," he said, "from first to last, provided you can supply us with a final detail, Miss Vaughan."

"What is that?" she asked.

"Did you write that note to Swain in your own room?"

"Yes."

"And will you show me the table at which you wrote it?"

"Certainly," and she opened the door. "Come in. I wrote it at that little desk by the window."

Godfrey walked to it, picked up a blotting-book which lay upon it, and turned over the leaves.

"Ah!" he said, after a moment. "I was sure of it. Here is the final link. Have you a small hand-mirror, Miss Vaughan?"

She brought one from her toilet-table and handed it to him in evident astonishment.

"What do you see in the mirror?" he asked, and held a page of the blotting-book at an angle in front of it.

Miss Vaughan uttered an exclamnation of surprise, as she read the words reflected there:

MR. FREDERIC SWAIN, 1010 Fifth Avenue, New York City.
If not at this address, please try the Calumet Club.

"Tall oaks from little acorns grow," quoted Godfrey, tossing the book back upon the desk. "But for the fact that you blotted the envelope, Miss Vaughan, young Swain would never have been accused of murder."

"I do not understand," she murmured.

"Don't you see," he pointed out, "the one question which we have been unable to answer up to this moment has been this: how did Silva know you were going to meet Swain? He had to know it, and know it several hours before
the meeting, in order to have those finger-prints ready. I concluded, at last, that there _must_ be a blotting-book—and there it is."

Miss Vaughan stared at him.
"You seem to be a very wonderful man!" she said.
Godfrey laughed.
"It is my every-day business to reconstruct mysteries," he said. "Shall I reconstruct this one?"
"Please do!" she begged, and motioned us to be seated.
Godfrey's face was glowing with the sort of creative fire which, I imagine, illumines the poet's brow at the moment of inspiration.

"Where did you first meet Silva?" he asked.

"In Paris."
"What was he doing there?"

"He was practising mysticism. My father went to consult him; he was much impressed by him, and they became very intimate."

"And Silva, of course, at once saw the possibilities of exploiting an immensely rich old man, whose mind was failing. So he comes here as his instructor in Orientalism; he does some very marvellous things; by continued hypnosis, he gets your father completely under his control. He secures a promise of this estate and a great endowment; he causes your father to make a will in which these bequests are specifically stated. Then he hesitates, for during his residence in this house, a new desire has been added to the old ones. It had not often been his fortune to be thrown in daily contact with an innocent and beautiful girl, and he ends by falling in love with you. He knows of your love for Swain. He has caused Swain to be forbidden the house; but he finds you still indifferent. At last, by means of his own entreaties and your father's, he secures your consent to become his disciple. He knows that, if once you consent to sit with him, he will, in the end, dominate your will, also.

"But you ask for three days' delay, and this he grants. During every moment of those three days, he will keep you under surveillance. Almost at once, he guesses at your plan, for you return to the house, you write a letter, and, the moment you leave your room, he enters it and sees the impression on the blotter. He follows you into the grounds, he sees you throw the letter over the wall, and suspects that you are calling Swain to your aid. More than that, Lester," he added, turning to me, "he saw you in the tree, and so kept up his midnight fire-works, on the off-chance that you might be watching!"

"Yes; that explains that, too," I agreed thoughtfully.

"When he realises that you are asking your lover's aid," Godfrey continued to Miss Vaughan, "a fiendish idea springs into his mind. If Swain answers the call, if he enters the grounds, he will separate him from you once for all by causing him to be found guilty of killing your father. He hastens back to the house, tears the leaf from the album of finger-prints and prepares the rubber gloves. That night, he follows you when you leave the house; he overhears your talk in the arbour; and he finds that there is another reason than that of jealousy why he must act at once. If your father is found to be insane, the will drawn up only three days before will be invalid. Silva will lose everything—not only you, but the fortune already within his grasp.

"He hurries to the house and tells your father of the rendezvous. Your father rushes out and brings you back, after a bitter quarrel with Swain, which Silva has, of course, foreseen. You come up to your room; your father flings himself into his chair again. It is Silva who has followed you—who has purposely made a noise in order that you might think it was Swain. And he carries in his hand the blood-soaked handkerchief which Swain dropped when he fled from the arbour.

"Up to this point," Godfrey went on, more slowly, "everything is clear—every detail fits every other detail perfectly. But, in the next step of the tragedy, one detail is uncertain—whose hand was it drew the cord around your father's throat? I am inclined to think it was Mahbub's. If Silva had done the deed, he would probably have chosen a method less Oriental; but Mahbub, even under hypnotic suggestion, would kill only in the way to which he was accustomed—with a noose. Pardon me," he added, quickly, as she shrank into her chair, "I have forgotten how repellent this must be to you. I have spoken brutally."

"Please go on," she murmured. "It is right that I should hear it. I can bear it."

"There is not much more to tell," said Godfrey, gently. "Whoever it was that drew the cord, it was Silva who moistened the glove from the blood-soaked handkerchief, made the marks upon your father's robe, and then dropped the handkerchief beside his chair. Then he returned softly to his room, closed the door, put away the glove, cleansed his hands, made sure that Mahbub was in his closet, took his place upon the divan, and waited. I think we know the rest. And now, Lester," he added, turning to me, "we would better be getting to town. Remember, Swain is still in the Tombs."

"You are right," I said, and rose to take my leave, but Miss Vaughan, her eyes shining, stopped me with a hand
upon the sleeve.

"I should like to go with you, Mr. Lester," she said. "May I?"

The colour deepened in her cheeks as she met my gaze, and I understood what was in her heart. So did Godfrey.

"I'll have my car around in ten minutes," he said, and hastened away.

"I have only to put on my hat," said Miss Vaughan; and I found her waiting for me in the library, when I entered it after arranging with Simmonds and Goldberger to appear with me in the Tombs court and join me in asking for Swain's release.

Godfrey's car came up the drive a moment later, and we were off.

The hour that followed was a silent one. Godfrey was soon sufficiently occupied in guiding the car through the tangle of traffic. Miss Vaughan leaned back in a corner of the tonneau lost in thought. It was just six days since I had seen her first; but those six days had left their mark upon her. Perhaps, in time, happiness would banish that shadow from her eyes, and that tremulousness from her lips. Every battle leaves its mark, even on the victor; and the battle she had fought had been a desperate one. But, as I looked at her, she seemed more complete, more desirable than she had ever been; I could only hope that Swain would measure up to her.

At last, we drew up before the grey stone building, whose barred windows and high wall marked the prison.

"Here we are," I said, and helped her to alight.

Godfrey greeted the door-keeper as an old friend, and, after a whispered word, we were allowed to pass. A guard showed us into a bare waiting-room, and Godfrey hastened away to explain our errand to the warden.

"Won't you sit down?" I asked, but my companion shook her head, with a frightened little smile, and paced nervously up and down, her hands against her heart. How riotously it was beating I could guess—with what hope, what fear....

There was a quick step in the corridor, and she stood as if turned to stone.

Then the door was flung open, and, with radiant face, she walked straight into the outstretched arms of the man who stood there. I heard her muffled sob, as the arms closed about her and she hid her face against his shoulder; then a hand was laid upon my sleeve.

"Come along, Lester," said Godfrey softly. "This case is ended!"

THE END

Go to Start
I

I was a great solitary when I was young. I made it my pride to keep aloof and suffice for my own entertainment; and I may say that I had neither friends nor acquaintances until I met that friend who became my wife and the mother of my children. With one man only was I on private terms; this was R. Northmour, Esquire, of Graden Easter, in Scotland. We had met at college; and though there was not much liking between us, nor even much intimacy, we were so nearly of a humor that we could associate with ease to both. Misanthropes, we believed ourselves to be; but I have thought since that we were only sulky fellows. It was scarcely a companionship, but a co-existence in unsociability. Northmour's exceptional violence of temper made it no easy affair for him to keep the peace with anyone but me; and as he respected my silent ways, and let me come and go as I pleased, I could tolerate his presence without concern. I think we called each other friends.

When Northmour took his degree and I decided to leave the university without one, he invited me on a long visit to Graden Easter; and it was thus that I first became acquainted with the scene of my adventures. The mansion house of Graden stood in a bleak stretch of country some three miles from the shore of the German Ocean. It was as large as a barrack; and as it had been built of a soft stone, liable to consume in the eager air of the seaside, it was damp and draughty within and half ruinous without. It was impossible for two young men to lodge with comfort in such a dwelling. But there stood in the northern part of the estate, in a wilderness of links and blowing sand hills, and between a plantation and the sea, a small pavilion or belvedere, of modern design, which was exactly suited to our wants; and in this hermitage, speaking little, reading much, and rarely associating except at meals, Northmour and I spent four tempestuous winter months. I might have stayed longer; but one March night there sprung up between us a dispute, which rendered my departure necessary. Northmour spoke hotly, I remember, and I suppose I must have made some tart rejoinder. He leaped from his chair and grappled me; I had to fight, without exaggeration, for my life; and it was only with a great effort that I mastered him, for he was near as strong in body as myself, and seemed filled with the devil. The next morning, we met on our usual terms; but I judged it more delicate to withdraw; nor did he attempt to dissuade me.

It was nine years before I revisited the neighborhood. I traveled at that time with a tilt-cart, a tent, and a cooking stove, tramping all day beside the wagon, and at night, whenever it was possible, gypsying in a cove of the hills, or by the side of a wood. I believe I visited in this manner most of the wild and desolate regions both in England and Scotland; and, as I had neither friends nor relations, I was troubled with no correspondence, and had nothing in the nature of headquarters, unless it was the office of my solicitors, from whom I drew my income twice a year. It was a life in which I delighted; and I fully thought to have grown old upon the march, and at last died in a ditch.

It was my whole business to find desolate corners, where I could camp without the fear of interruption; and hence, being in another part of the same shire, I bethought me suddenly of the Pavilion on the Links. No thoroughfare passed within three miles of it. The nearest town, and that was but a fisher village, was at a distance of six or seven. For ten miles of length, and from a depth varying from three miles to half a mile, this belt of barren country lay along the sea. The beach, which was the natural approach, was full of quicksands. Indeed I may say there is hardly a better place of concealment in the United Kingdom. I determined to pass a week in the Sea-Wood of Graden Easter, and making a long stage, reached it about sundown on a wild September day.

The country, I have said, was mixed sand hill and links; links being a Scottish name for sand which has ceased drifting and become more or less solidly covered with turf. The pavilion stood on an even space: a little behind it, the wood began in a hedge of elders huddled together by the wind; in front, a few tumbled sand hills stood between it and the sea. An outcropping of rock had formed a bastion for the sand, so that there was here a promontory in the coast line between two shallow bays; and just beyond the tides, the rock again cropped out and formed an islet of small dimensions but strikingly designed. The quicksands were of great extent at low water, and had an infamous reputation in the country. Close in shore, between the islet and the promontory, it was said they would swallow a man in four minutes and a half; but there may have been little ground for this precision. The district was alive with rabbits, and haunted by gulls which made a continual piping about the pavilion. On summer days the outlook was bright and even gladsome; but at sundown in September, with a high wind, and a heavy surf rolling in close along the links, the place told of nothing but dead mariners and sea disaster. A ship beating to windward on the horizon,
and a huge truncheon of wreck half buried in the sands at my feet, completed the innuendo of the scene.

The pavilion—it had been built by the last proprietor, Northmour's uncle, a silly and prodigal virtuoso—presented little signs of age. It was two stories in height, Italian in design, surrounded by a patch of garden in which nothing had prospered but a few coarse flowers; and looked, with its shuttered windows, not like a house that had been deserted, but like one that had never been tenanted by man. Northmour was plainly from home; whether, as usual, sulking in the cabin of his yacht, or in one of his fitful and extravagant appearances in the world of society, I had, of course, no means of guessing. The place had an air of solitude that daunted even a solitary like myself; the wind cried in the chimneys with a strange and wailing note; and it was with a sense of escape, as if I were going indoors, that I turned away and, driving my cart before me, entered the skirts of the wood.

The Sea-Wood of Graden had been planted to shelter the cultivated fields behind, and check the encroachments of the blowing sand. As you advanced into it from coastward, elders were succeeded by other hardy shrubs; but the timber was all stunted and bushy; it led a life of conflict; the trees were accustomed to swing there all night long in fierce winter tempests; and even in early spring, the leaves were already flying, and autumn was beginning, in this exposed plantation. Inland the ground rose into a little hill, which, along with the islet, served as a sailing mark for seamen. When the hill was open of the islet to the north, vessels must bear well to the eastward to clear Graden Ness and the Graden Bullers. In the lower ground, a streamlet ran among the trees, and, being dammed with dead leaves and clay of its own carrying, spread out everywhere and there, and lay in stagnant pools. One or two ruined cottages were dotted about the wood; and, according to Northmour, these were ecclesiastical foundations, and in their time had sheltered pious hermits.

I found a den, or small hollow, where there was a spring of pure water; and there, clearing away the brambles, I pitched the tent, and made a fire to cook my supper. My horse I picketed farther in the wood where there was a patch of sward. The banks of the den not only concealed the light of my fire, but sheltered me from the wind, which was cold as well as high.

The life I was leading made me both hardy and frugal. I never drank but water, and rarely eat anything more costly than oatmeal; and I required so little sleep, that, although I rose with the peep of day, I would often lie long awake in the dark or starry watches of the night. Thus in Graden Sea-Wood, although I fell thankfully asleep by eight in the evening I was awake again before eleven with a full possession of my faculties, and no sense of drowsiness or fatigue. I rose and sat by the fire, watching the trees and clouds tumultuously tossing and fleeing overhead, and hearkening to the wind and the rollers along the shore; till at length, growing weary of inaction, I quitted the den, and strolled toward the borders of the wood. A young moon, buried in mist, gave a faint illumination to my steps; and the light grew brighter as I walked forth into the links. At the same moment, the wind, smelling salt of the open ocean and carrying particles of sand, struck me with its full force, so that I had to bow my head.

When I raised it again to look about me, I was aware of a light in the pavilion. It was not stationary; but passed from one window to another, as though some one were reviewing the different apartments with a lamp or candle. I watched it for some seconds in great surprise. When I had arrived in the afternoon the house had been plainly deserted; now it was as plainly occupied. It was my first idea that a gang of thieves might have broken in and been now ransacking Northmour's cupboards, which were many and not ill supplied. But what should bring thieves at Graden Easter? And, again, all the shutters had been thrown open, and it would have been more in the character of such gentry to close them. I dismissed the notion, and fell back upon another. Northmour himself must have arrived, and was now airing and inspecting the pavilion.

I have said that there was no real affection between this man and me; but, had I loved him like a brother, I was then so much more in love with solitude that I should none the less have shunned his company. As it was, I turned and ran for it; and it was with genuine satisfaction that I found myself safely back beside the fire. I had escaped an uncomfortable illusion; and, according to Northmour, these were ecclesiastical foundations, and in their time had sheltered pious hermits.

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But when morning came, I thought the situation so diverting that I forgot my shyness. Northmour was at my mercy; I arranged a good practical jest, though I knew well that my neighbor was not the man to jest with in security; and, chuckling beforehand over its success, took my place among the elders at the edge of the wood, whence I could command the door of the pavilion. The shutters were all once more closed, which I remember thinking odd; and the house, with its white walls and green venetians, looked spruce and habitable in the morning light. Hour after hour passed, and still no sign of Northmour. I knew him for a sluggard in the morning; but, as it drew on toward noon, I lost my patience. To say the truth, I had promised myself to break my fast in the pavilion, and hunger began to prick me sharply. It was a pity to let the opportunity go by without some cause for mirth; but drowsiness or fatigue. I rose and sat by the fire, watching the trees and clouds tumultuously tossing and fleeing overhead, and hearkening to the wind and the rollers along the shore; till at length, growing weary of inaction, I quitted the den, and strolled toward the borders of the wood. A young moon, buried in mist, gave a faint illumination to my steps; and the light grew brighter as I walked forth into the links. At the same moment, the wind, smelling salt of the open ocean and carrying particles of sand, struck me with its full force, so that I had to bow my head.

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The appearance of the house affected me, as I drew near, with disquietude. It seemed unchanged since last evening; and I had expected it, I scarce knew why, to wear some external signs of habitation. But no: the windows
were all closely shuttered, the chimneys breathed no smoke, and the front door itself was closely padlocked. Northmour, therefore, had entered by the back; this was the natural, and indeed, the necessary conclusion; and you may judge of my surprise when, on turning the house, I found the back door similarly secured.

My mind at once reverted to the original theory of thieves; and I blamed myself sharply for my last night's inaction. I examined all the windows on the lower story, but none of them had been tampered with; I tried the padlocks, but they were both secure. It thus became a problem how the thieves, if thieves they were, had managed to enter the house. They must have got, I reasoned, upon the roof of the outhouse where Northmour used to keep his photographic battery; and from thence, either by the window of the study or that of my old bedroom, completed their burglarious entry.

I followed what I supposed was their example; and, getting on the roof, tried the shutters of each room. Both were secure; but I was not to be beaten; and, with a little force, one of them flew open, grazing, as it did so, the back of my hand. I remember, I put the wound to my mouth, and stood for perhaps half a minute licking it like a dog, and mechanically gazing behind me over the waste links and the sea; and, in that space of time, my eye made note of a large schooner yacht some miles to the northeast. Then I threw up the window and climbed in.

I went over the house, and nothing can express my mystification. There was no sign of disorder, but, on the contrary, the rooms were unusually clean and pleasant. I found fires laid, ready for lighting; three bedrooms prepared with a luxury quite foreign to Northmour's habits, and with water in the ewers and the beds turned down; a table set for three in the dining-room; and an ample supply of cold meats, game, and vegetables on the pantry shelves. There were guests expected, that was plain; but why guests, when Northmour hated society? And, above all, why was the house thus stealthily prepared at dead of night? and why were the shutters closed and the doors padlocked?

I effaced all traces of my visit, and came forth from the window feeling sobered and concerned.

The schooner yacht was still in the same place; and it flashed for a moment through my mind that this might be the "Red Earl" bringing the owner of the pavilion and his guests. But the vessel's head was set the other way.

II

I returned to the den to cook myself a meal, of which I stood in great need, as well as to care for my horse, whom I had somewhat neglected in the morning. From time to time I went down to the edge of the wood; but there was no change in the pavilion, and not a human creature was seen all day upon the links. The schooner in the offing was the one touch of life within my range of vision. She, apparently with no set object, stood off and on lay to, hour after hour; but as the evening deepened, she drew steadily nearer. I became more convinced that she carried Northmour and his friends, and that they would probably come ashore after dark; not only because that was of a piece with the secrecy of the preparations, but because the tide would not have flowed sufficiently before eleven to cover Graden Floe and the other sea quags that fortified the shore against invaders.

All day the wind had been going down, and the sea along with it; but there was a return toward sunset of the heavy weather of the day before. The night set in pitch dark. The wind came off the sea in squalls, like the firing of a battery of cannon; now and then there was a flaw of rain, and the surf rolled heavier with the rising tide. I was down at my observatory among the elders, when a light was run up to the masthead of the schooner, and showed she was closer in than when I had last seen her by the dying daylight. I concluded that this must be a signal to Northmour's associates on shore; and, stepping forth into the links, looked around me for something in response.

A small footpath ran along the margin of the wood, and formed the most direct communication between the pavilion and the mansion house; and, as I cast my eyes to that side, I saw a spark of light, not a quarter of a mile away, and rapidly approaching. From its uneven course it appeared to be the light of a lantern carried by a person who followed the windings of the path, and was often staggered, and taken aback by the more violent squalls. I concealed myself once more among the elders, and waited eagerly for the newcomer's advance. It proved to be a woman; and, as she passed within half a rod of my ambush, I was able to recognize the features. The deaf and silent old dame, who had nursed Northmour in his childhood, was his associate in this underhand affair.

I followed her at a little distance, taking advantage of the innumerable heights and hollows, concealed by the darkness, and favored not only by the nurse's deafness, but by the uproar of the wind and surf. She entered the pavilion, and, going at once to the upper story, opened and set a light in one of the windows that looked toward the sea. Immediately afterwards the light at the schooner's masthead was run down and extinguished. Its purpose had been attained, and those on board were sure that they were expected. The old woman resumed her preparations; although the other shutters remained closed, I could see a glimmer going to and fro about the house; and a gush of sparks from one chimney after another soon told me that the fires were being kindled.
Northmour and his guests, I was now persuaded, would come ashore as soon as there was water on the floe. It was a wild night for boat service; and I felt some alarm mingle with my curiosity as I reflected on the danger of the landing. My old acquaintance, it was true, was the most eccentric of men; but the present eccentricity was both disquieting and lugubrious to consider. A variety of feelings thus led me toward the beach, where I lay flat on my face in a hollow within six feet of the track that led to the pavilion. Thence, I should have the satisfaction of recognizing the arrivals, and, if they should prove to be acquaintances, greeting them as soon as they landed.

Some time before eleven, while the tide was still dangerously low, a boat's lantern appeared close in shore; and, my attention being thus awakened, I could perceive another still far to seaward, violently tossed, and sometimes hidden by the billows. The weather, which was getting dirtier as the night went on, and the perilous situation of the yacht upon a lee shore, had probably driven them to attempt a landing at the earliest possible moment.

A little afterwards, four yachtsmen carrying a very heavy chest, and guided by a fifth with a lantern, passed close in front of me as I lay, and were admitted to the pavilion by the nurse. They returned to the beach, and passed me a third time with another chest, larger but apparently not so heavy as the first. A third time they made the transit; and on this occasion one of the yachtsmen carried a leather portmanteau, and the others a lady's trunk and carriage bag. My curiosity was sharply excited. If a woman were among the guests of Northmour, it would show a change in his habits, and an apostasy from his pet theories of life, well calculated to fill me with surprise. When he and I dwelt there together, the pavilion had been a temple of misogyny. And now, one of the detested sex was to be installed under its roof. I remembered one or two particulars, a few notes of daintiness and almost of coquetry which had struck me the day before as I surveyed the preparations in the house; their purpose was now clear, and I thought myself dull not to have perceived it from the first.

While I was thus reflecting, a second lantern drew near me from the beach. It was carried by a yachtsman whom I had not yet seen, and who was conducting two other persons to the pavilion. These two persons were unquestionably the guests for whom the house was made ready; and, straining eye and ear, I set myself to watch them as they passed. One was an unusually tall man, in a traveling hat slouched over his eyes, and a highland cape closely buttoned and turned up so as to conceal his face. You could make out no more of him than that he was, as I have said, unusually tall, and walked feebly with a heavy stoop. By his side, and either clinging to him or giving him support--I could not make out which--was a young, tall, and slender figure of a woman. She was extremely pale; but in the light of the lantern her face was so marred by strong and changing shadows, that she might equally well have been as ugly as sin or as beautiful as I afterwards found her to be.

When they were just abreast of me, the girl made some remark which was drowned by the noise of the wind.

"Hush!" said her companion; and there was something in the tone with which the word was uttered that thrilled and rather shook my spirits. It seemed to breathe from a bosom laboring under the deadliest terror; I have never heard another syllable so expressive; and I still hear it again when I am feverish at night, and my mind runs upon old times. The man turned toward the girl as he spoke; I had a glimpse of much red beard and a nose which seemed to have been broken in youth; and his light eyes seemed shining in his face with some strong and unpleasant emotion.

But these two passed on and were admitted in their turn to the pavilion.

One by one, or in groups, the seamen returned to the beach. The wind brought me the sound of a rough voice crying, "Shove off!" Then, after a pause, another lantern drew near. It was Northmour alone.

My wife and I, a man and a woman, have often agreed to wonder how a person could be, at the same time, so handsome and so repulsive as Northmour. He had the appearance of a finished gentleman; his face bore every mark of intelligence and courage; but you had only to look at him, even in his most amiable moment, to see that he had the temper of a slaver captain. I never knew a character that was both explosive and revengeful to the same degree; and both traits were plainly the temper of a slaver captain. I never knew a character that was both explosive and revengeful to the same degree; but you had only to look at him, even in his most amiable moment, to see that he had

At that moment he was somewhat paler than by nature; he wore a heavy frown; and his lips worked, and he looked sharply round him as he walked, like a man besieged with apprehensions. And yet I thought he had a look of triumph underlyng all, as though he had already done much, and was near the end of an achievement.

Partly from a scruple of delicacy--which I dare say came too late--partly from the pleasure of startling an acquaintance, I desired to make my presence known to him without delay.

I got suddenly to my feet, and stepped forward.

"Northmour!" said I.

I have never had so shocking a surprise in all my days. He leaped on me without a word; something shone in his hand; and he struck for my heart with a dagger. At the same moment I knocked him head over heels. Whether it was my quickness, or his own uncertainty, I know not; but the blade only grazed my shoulder, while the hilt and his fist struck me violently on the mouth.
I fled, but not far. I had often and often observed the capabilities of the sand hills for protracted ambush or stealthy advances and retreats; and, not ten yards from the scene of the scuffle, plumped down again upon the grass. The lantern had fallen and gone out. But what was my astonishment to see Northmour slip at a bound into the pavilion, and hear him bar the door behind him with a clang of iron!

He had not pursued me. He had run away. Northmour, whom I knew for the most implacable and daring of men, had run away! I could scarce believe my reason; and yet in this strange business, where all was incredible, there was nothing to make a work about in an incredibility more or less. For why was the pavilion secretly prepared? Why had Northmour landed with his guests at dead of night, in half a gale of wind, and with the floe scarce covered? Why had he sought to kill me? Had he not recognized my voice? I wondered. And, above all, how had he come to have a dagger ready in his hand? A dagger, or even a sharp knife, seemed out of keeping with the age in which we lived; and a gentleman landing from his yacht on the shore of his own estate, even although it was at night and with some mysterious circumstances, does not usually, as a matter of fact, walk thus prepared for deadly onslaught. The more I reflected, the further I felt at sea. I recapitulated the elements of mystery, counting them on my fingers: the pavilion secretly prepared for guests; the guests landed at the risk of their lives and to the imminent peril of the yacht; the guests, or at least one of them, in undisguised and seemingly causeless terror; Northmour with a naked weapon; Northmour stabbing his most intimate acquaintance at a word; last, and not least strange, Northmour fleeing from the man whom he had sought to murder, and barricading himself, like a hunted creature, behind the door of the pavilion. Here were at least six separate causes for extreme surprise; each part and parcel with the others, and forming all together one consistent story. I felt almost ashamed to believe my own senses.

As I thus stood, transfixed with wonder, I began to grow painfully conscious of the injuries I had received in the scuffle; skulked round among the sand hills; and, by a devious path, regained the shelter of the wood. On the way, the old nurse passed again within several yards of me, still carrying her lantern, on the return journey to the mansion house of Graden. This made a seventh suspicious feature in the case. Northmour and his guests, it appeared, were to cook and do the cleaning for themselves, while the old woman continued to inhabit the big empty barrack among the policies. There must surely be great cause for secrecy, when so many inconveniences were confronted to preserve it.

So thinking, I made my way to the den. For greater security, I trod out the embers of the fire, and lighted my lantern to examine the wound upon my shoulder. It was a trifling hurt, although it bled somewhat freely, and I dressed it as well as I could (for its position made it difficult to reach) with some rag and cold water from the spring.

Fresh provisions were brought under cover of darkness by the old woman from the mansion house. Northmour, and the young lady, sometimes together, but more often singly, would walk for an hour or two at a time on the beach beside the quicksand. I could not but conclude that this promenade was chosen with an eye to secrecy; for the spot was open only to seaward. But it suited me not less excellently; the highest and most accidented of the sand hills immediately adjoined; and from these, lying flat in a hollow, I could overlook Northmour or the young lady as they walked.

The tall man seemed to have disappeared. Not only did he never cross the threshold, but he never so much as showed face at a window; or, at least, not so far as I could see; for I dared not creep forward beyond a certain distance in the day, since the upper floors commanded the bottoms of the links; and at night, when I could venture further, the lower windows were barricaded as if to stand a siege. Sometimes I thought the tall man must be confined to bed, for I remembered the feebleness of his gait; and sometimes I thought he must have gone clear away, and that Northmour and the young lady remained alone together in the pavilion. The idea, even then, displeased me.

Whether or not this pair were man and wife, I had seen abundant reason to doubt the friendliness of their relation. Although I could hear nothing of what they said, and rarely so much as glean a decided expression on the
face of either, there was a distance, almost a stiffness, in their bearing which showed them to be either unfamiliar or at enmity. The girl walked faster when she was with Northmour than when she was alone; and I conceived that any inclination between a man and a woman would rather delay than accelerate the step. Moreover, she kept a good yard free of him, and trailed her umbrella, as if it were a barrier, on the side between them. Northmour kept sidling closer; and, as the girl retired from his advance, their course lay at a sort of diagonal across the beach, and would have landed them in the surf had it been long enough continued. But, when this was imminent, the girl would unostentatiously change sides and put Northmour between her and the sea. I watched these maneuvers, for my part, with high enjoyment and approval, and chuckled to myself at every move.

On the morning of the third day, she walked alone for some time, and I perceived, to my great concern, that she was more than once in tears. You will see that my heart was already interested more than I supposed. She had a firm yet airy motion of the body, and carried her head with unimaginable grace; every step was a thing to look at, and she seemed in my eyes to breathe sweetness and distinction.

The day was so agreeable, being calm and sunny, with a tranquil sea, and yet with a healthful piquancy and vigor in the air, that, contrary to custom, she was tempted forth a second time to walk. On this occasion she was accompanied by Northmour, and they had been but a short while on the beach, when I saw him take forcible possession of her hand. She struggled, and uttered a cry that was almost a scream. I sprung to my feet, unmindful of my strange position; but, ere I had taken a step, I saw Northmour bareheaded and bowing very low, as if to apologize; and dropped again at once into my ambush. A few words were interchanged; and then, with another bow, he left the beach to return to the pavilion. He passed not far from me, and I could see him, flushed and lowering, and cutting savagely with his cane among the grass. It was not without satisfaction that I recognized my own handiwork in a great cut under his right eye, and a considerable discoloration round the socket.

For some time the girl remained where he had left her, looking out past the islet and over the bright sea. Then with a start, as one who throws off preoccupation and puts energy again upon its mettle, she broke into a rapid and decisive walk. She also was much incensed by what had passed. She had forgotten where she was. And I beheld her walk straight into the borders of the quicksand where it is most abrupt and dangerous. Two or three steps farther and her life would have been in serious jeopardy, when I slid down the face of the sand hill, which is there precipitous, and, running halfway forward, called to her to stop.

She did so, and turned round. There was not a tremor of fear in her behavior, and she marched directly up to me like a queen. I was barefoot, and clad like a common sailor, save for an Egyptian scarf round my waist; and she probably took me at first for some one from the fisher village, straying after bait. As for her, when I thus saw her face to face, her eyes set steadily and imperiously upon mine, I was filled with admiration and astonishment, and thought her even more beautiful than I had looked to find her. Nor could I think enough of one who, acting with so much boldness, yet preserved a maidenly air that was both quaint and engaging; for my wife kept an old-fashioned precision of manner through all her admirable life--an excellent thing in woman, since it sets another value on her sweet familiarities.

“What does this mean?” she asked.

“You were walking,” I told her, “directly into Graden Floe.”

“You do not belong to these parts,” she said again. “You speak like an educated man.”

“I believe I have a right to that name,” said I, “although in this disguise.”

But her woman’s eye had already detected the sash.

“Oh!” she said; “your sash betrays you.”

“You have said the word betray,” I resumed. “May I ask you not to betray me? I was obliged to disclose myself in your interest; but if Northmour learned my presence it might be worse than disagreeable for me.”

“Do you know,” she asked, “to whom you are speaking?”

“Not to Mr. Northmour’s wife?” I asked, by way of answer.

She shook her head. All this while she was studying my face with an embarrassing intentness. Then she broke out--

“You have an honest face. Be honest like your face, sir, and tell me what you want and what you are afraid of. Do you think I could hurt you? I believe you have far more power to injure me! And yet you do not look unkind. What do you mean--you, a gentleman--by skulking like a spy about this desolate place? Tell me,” she said, “who is it you hate?”

“I hate no one,” I answered; “and I fear no one face to face. My name is Cassilis--Frank Cassilis. I lead the life of a vagabond for my own good pleasure. I am one of Northmour’s oldest friends; and three nights ago, when I addressed him on these links, he stabbed me in the shoulder with a knife.”

“It was you!” she said.

“Why he did so,” I continued, disregarding the interruption, “is more than I can guess, and more than I care to
know. I have not many friends, nor am I very susceptible to friendship; but no man shall drive me from a place by terror. I had camped in the Graden Sea-Wood ere he came; I camp in it still. If you think I mean harm to you or yours, madame, the remedy is in your hand. Tell him that my camp is in the Hemlock Den, and to-night he can stab me in safety while I sleep.

With this I doffed my cap to her, and scrambled up once more among the sand hills. I do not know why, but I felt a prodigious sense of injustice, and felt like a hero and a martyr; while as a matter of fact, I had not a word to say in my defense, nor so much as one plausible reason to offer for my conduct. I had stayed at Graden out of a curiosity natural enough, but undignified; and though there was another motive growing in along with the first, it was not one which, at that period, I could have properly explained to the lady of my heart.

Certainly, that night, I thought of no one else; and, though her whole conduct and position seemed suspicious, I could not find it in my heart to entertain a doubt of her integrity. I could have staked my life that she was clear of blame, and, though all was dark at the present, that the explanation of the mystery would show her part in these events to be both right and needful. It was true, let me cudgel my imagination as I pleased, that I could invent no theory of her relations to Northmour; but I felt none the less sure of my conclusion because it was founded on instinct in place of reason, and, as I may say, went to sleep that night with the thought of her under my pillow.

Next day she came out about the same hour alone, and, as soon as the sand hills concealed her from the pavilion, drew nearer to the edge, and called me by name in guarded tones. I was astonished to observe that she was deadly pale, and seemingly under the influence of strong emotion.

"Mr. Cassilis!" she cried; "Mr. Cassilis!"

I appeared at once, and leaped down upon the beach. A remarkable air of relief overspread her countenance as soon as she saw me.

"Oh!" she cried, with a hoarse sound, like one whose bosom had been lightened of a weight. And then, "Thank God you are still safe!" she added; "I knew, if you were, you would be here." (Was not this strange? So swiftly and wisely does Nature prepare our hearts for these great lifelong intimacies, that both my wife and I had been given a presentiment on this the second day of our acquaintance. I had even then hoped that she would seek me; she had felt sure that she would find me.) "Do not," she went on swiftly, "do not stay in this place. Promise me that you sleep no longer in that wood. You do not know how I suffer; all last night I could not sleep for thinking of your peril.

"Peril!" I repeated. "Peril from whom? From Northmour?"

"Not so," she said. "Did you think I would tell him after what you said?"

"Not from Northmour?" I repeated. "Then how? From whom? I see none to be afraid of."

"You must not ask me," was her reply, "for I am not free to tell you. Only believe me, and go hence--believe me, and go away quickly, quickly, for your life!"

An appeal to his alarm is never a good plan to rid oneself of a spirited young man. My obstinacy was but increased by what she said, and I made it a point of honor to remain. And her solicitude for my safety still more confirmed me in the resolve.

"You must not think me inquisitive, madame," I replied, "but, if Graden is so dangerous a place, you yourself perhaps remain here at some risk."

She only looked at me reproachfully.

"You and your father--" I resumed; but she interrupted me almost with a gasp.

"My father! How do you know that?" she cried.

"I saw you together when you landed," was my answer; and I do not know why, but it seemed satisfactory to both of us, as indeed it was truth. "But," I continued, "you need have no fear from me. I see you have some reason to be secret, and, you may believe me, your secret is as safe with me as if I were in Graden Floe. I have scarce spoken to anyone for years; my horse is my only companion, and even he, poor beast, is not beside me. You see, then, you may count on me for silence. So tell me the truth, my dear young lady, are you not in danger?"

"Mr. Northmour says you are an honorable man," she returned, "and I believe it when I see you. I will tell you so much; you are right; we are in dreadful, dreadful danger, and you share it by remaining where you are."

"Ah!" said I; "you have heard of me from Northmour? And he gives me a good character?"

"I asked him about you last night," was her reply. "I pretended," she hesitated, "I pretended to have met you long ago, and spoken to you of him. It was not true; but I could not help myself without betraying you, and you had put me in a difficulty. He praised you highly."

"And--you may permit me one question--does this danger come from Northmour?" I asked.

"From Mr. Northmour?" she cried. "Oh, no, he stays with us to share it."

"While you propose that I should run away?" I said. "You do not rate me very high."

"Why should you stay?" she asked. "You are no friend of ours."

I know not what came over me, for I had not been conscious of a similar weakness since I was a child, but I was
so mortified by this retort that my eyes pricked and filled with tears, as I continued to gaze upon her face.

"No, no," she said, in a changed voice; "I did not mean the words unkindly."

"It was I who offended," I said; and I held out my hand with a look of appeal that somehow touched her, for she gave me hers at once, and even eagerly. I held it for awhile in mine, and gazed into her eyes. It was she who first tore her hand away, and, forgetting all about her request and the promise she had sought to extort, ran at the top of her speed, and without turning, till she was out of sight. And then I knew that I loved her, and thought in my glad heart that she--she herself--was not indifferent to my suit. Many a time she has denied it in after days, but it was with a smiling and not a serious denial. For my part, I am sure our hands would not have lain so closely in each other if she had not begun to melt to me already. And, when all is said, it is no great contention, since, by her own avowal, she began to love me on the morrow.

And yet on the morrow very little took place. She came and called me down as on the day before, upbraided me for lingering at Graden, and, when she found I was still obdurate, began to ask me more particularly as to my arrival. I told her by what series of accidents I had come to witness their disembarkation, and how I had determined to remain, partly from the interest which had been awakened in me by Northmour's guests, and partly because of his own murderous attack. As to the former, I fear I was disingenuous, and led her to regard herself as having been an attraction to me from the first moment that I saw her on the links. It relieves my heart to make this confession even now, when my wife is with God, and already knows all things, and the honesty of my purpose even in this; for while she lived, although it often pricked my conscience, I had never the hardihood to undeceive her. Even a little secret, in such a married life as ours, is like the rose leaf which kept the princess from her sleep.

From this the talk branched into other subjects, and I told her much about my lonely and wandering existence; she, for her part, giving ear, and saying little. Although we spoke very naturally, and latterly on topics that might seem indifferent, we were both sweetly agitated. Too soon it was time for her to go; and we separated, as if by mutual consent, without shaking hands, for both knew that, between us, it was no idle ceremony.

The next, and that was the fourth day of our acquaintance, we met in the same spot, but early in the morning, with much familiarity and yet much timidity on either side. While she had once more spoken about my danger--and that, I understood, was her excuse for coming--I, who had prepared a great deal of talk during the night, began to tell her how highly I valued her kind interest, and how no one had ever cared to hear about my life, nor had I ever cared to relate it, before yesterday. Suddenly she interrupted me, saying with vehemence--

"And yet, if you knew who I was, you would not so much as speak to me!"

I told her such a thought was madness, and, little as we had met, I counted her already a dear friend; but my protestations seemed only to make her more desperate.

"My father is in hiding!" she cried.

"My dear," I said, forgetting for the first time to add "young lady," "what do I care? If I were in hiding twenty times over, would it make one thought of change in you?"

"Ah, but the cause!" she cried, "the cause! It is"--she faltered for a second--"it is disgraceful to us!"

IV

This was my wife's story, as I drew it from her among tears and sobs. Her name was Clara Huddlestone: it sounded very beautiful in my ears; but not so beautiful as that other name of Clara Cassilis, which she wore during the longer and, I thank God, the happier portion of her life. Her father, Bernard Huddlestone, had been a private banker in a very large way of business. Many years before, his affairs becoming disordered, he had been led to try dangerous, and at last criminal, expedients to retrieve himself from ruin. All was in vain; he became more and more cruelly involved, and found his honor lost at the same moment with his fortune. About this period, Northmour had been courting his daughter with great assiduity, though with small encouragement; and to him, knowing him thus disposed in his favor, Bernard Huddlestone turned for help in his extremity. It was not merely ruin and dishonor, nor merely a legal condemnation, that the unhappy man had brought upon his head. It seems he could have gone to prison with a light heart. What he feared, what kept him awake at night or recalled him from slumber into frenzy, was some secret, sudden, and unlawful attempt upon his life. Hence, he desired to bury his existence and escape to one of the islands in the South Pacific, and it was in Northmour's yacht, the "Red Earl," that he designed to go. The yacht picked them up clandestinely upon the coast of Wales, and had once more deposited them at Graden, till she could be refitted and provisioned for the longer voyage. Nor could Clara doubt that her hand had been stipulated as the price of passage. For, although Northmour was neither unkind, nor even discourteous, he had shown himself in several instances somewhat overbold in speech and manner.

I listened, I need not say, with fixed attention, and put many questions as to the more mysterious part. It was in
vain. She had no clear idea of what the blow was, nor of how it was expected to fall. Her father's alarm was
unfeigned and physically prostrating, and he had thought more than once of making an unconditional surrender to
the police. But the scheme was finally abandoned, for he was convinced that not even the strength of our English
prisons could shelter him from his pursuers. He had had many affairs in Italy, and with Italians resident in London,
in the latter years of his business; and these last, as Clara fancied, were somehow connected with the doom that
threatened him. He had shown great terror at the presence of an Italian seaman on board the "Red Earl," and had
bitterly and repeatedly accused Northmour in consequence. The latter had protested that Beppo (that was the
seaman's name) was a capital fellow, and could be trusted to the death; but Mr. Huddlestone had continued ever
since to declare that all was lost, that it was only a question of days, and that Beppo would be the ruin of him yet.

I regarded the whole story as the hallucination of a mind shaken by calamity. He had suffered heavy loss by his
Italian transactions; and hence the sight of an Italian was hateful to him, and the principal part in his nightmare
would naturally enough be played by one of that nation.

"What your father wants," I said, "is a good doctor and some calming medicine."

"But Mr. Northmour?" objected Clara. "He is untroubled by losses, and yet he shares in this terror."

I could not help laughing at what I considered her simplicity.

"My dear," said I, "you have told me yourself what reward he has to look for. All is fair in love, you must
remember; and if Northmour foments your father's terrors, it is not at all because he is afraid of any Italian man, but
simply because he is infatuated with a charming English woman."

She reminded me of his attack upon myself on the night of the disembarkation, and this I was unable to explain.
In short, and from one thing to another, it was agreed between us that I should set out at once for the fisher village,
Graden Wester, as it was called, look up all the newspapers I could find, and see for myself if there seemed any
basis of fact for these continued alarms. The next morning, at the same hour and place, I was to make my report to
Clara. She said no more on that occasion about my departure; nor, indeed, did she make it a secret that she clung to
the thought of my proximity as something helpful and pleasant; and, for my part, I could not have left her, if she had
gone upon her knees to ask it.

I reached Graden Wester before ten in the forenoon; for in those days I was an excellent pedestrian, and the
distance, as I think I have said, was little over seven miles; fine walking all the way upon the springy turf. The
village is one of the bleakest on that coast, which is saying much: there is a church in the hollow; a miserable haven
in the rocks, where many boats have been lost as they returned from fishing; two or three score of stone houses
arranged along the beach and in two streets, one leading from the harbor, and another striking out from it at right
angles; and, at the corner of these two, a very dark and cheerless tavern, by way of principal hotel.

I had dressed myself somewhat more suitably to my station in life, and at once called upon the minister in his
little manse beside the graveyard. He knew me, although it was more than nine years since we had met; and when I
told him that I had been long upon a walking tour, and was behind with the news, readily lent me an armful of
newspapers, dating from a month back to the day before. With these I sought the tavern, and, ordering some
breakfast, sat down to study the "Huddlestone Failure."

It had been, it appeared, a very flagrant case. Thousands of persons were reduced to poverty; and one in
particular had blown out his brains as soon as payment was suspended. It was strange to myself that, while I read
these details, I continued rather to sympathize with Mr. Huddlestone than with his victims; so complete already was
the empire of my love for my wife. A price was naturally set upon the banker's head; and, as the case was
inexcusable and the public indignation thoroughly aroused, the unusual figure of £750 was offered for his capture.

He was reported to have large sums of money in his possession. One day, he had been heard of in Spain; the next,
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In the very last paper, however, there was one item not so clear. The accountants who were charged to verify the
failure had, it seemed, come upon the traces of a very large number of thousands, which figured for some time in the
transactions of the house of Huddlestone; but which came from nowhere, and disappeared in the same mysterious
fashion. It was only once referred to by name, and then under the initials "X.X.", but it had plainly been floated for
the first time into the business at a period of great depression some six years ago. The name of a distinguished royal
personage had been mentioned by rumor in connection with this sum. "The cowardly desperado"--such, I remember,
were the editorial expression--was supposed to have escaped with a large part of this mysterious fund still in his
possession.

I was still brooding over the fact, and trying to torture it into some connection with Mr. Huddlestone's danger,
when a man entered the tavern and asked for some bread and cheese with a decided foreign accent.

"Siete Italiano?" said I.
"Si, Signor," was his reply.

I said it was unusually far north to find one of his compatriots; at which he shrugged his shoulders, and replied that a man would go anywhere to find work. What work he could hope to find at Graden Wester, I was totally unable to conceive; and the incident struck so unpleasantly upon my mind, that I asked the landlord, while he was counting me some change, whether he had ever before seen an Italian in the village. He said he had once seen some Norwegians, who had been shipwrecked on the other side of Graden Ness and rescued by the lifeboat from Cauldhaven.

"No!" said I; "but an Italian, like the man who has just had bread and cheese."

"What?" cried he, "yon black-avised fellow wi' the teeth? Was he an I-talian? Weel, yon's the first that ever I saw, an' I dare say he's like to be the last."

Even as he was speaking, I raised my eyes, and, casting a glance into the street, beheld three men in earnest conversation together, and not thirty yards away. One of them was my recent companion in the tavern parlor; the other two, by their handsome sallow features and soft hats, should evidently belong to the same race. A crowd of village children stood around them, gesticulating and talking gibberish in imitation. The trio looked singularly foreign to the bleak dirty street in which they were standing and the dark gray heaven that overspread them; and I confess my incredulity received at that moment a shock from which it never recovered. I might reason with myself as I pleased, but I could not argue down the effect of what I had seen, and I began to share in the Italian terror.

It was already drawing toward the close of the day before I had returned the newspapers to the manse, and got well forward on to the links on my way home. I shall never forget that walk. It grew very cold and boisterous; the wind sung in the short grass about my feet; thin rain showers came running on the gusts; and an immense mountain range of clouds began to arise out of the bosom of the sea. It would be hard to imagine a more dismal evening; and whether it was from these external influences, or because my nerves were already affected by what I had heard and seen, my thoughts were as gloomy as the weather.

The upper windows of the pavilion commanded a considerable spread of links in the direction of Graden Wester. To avoid observation, it was necessary to hug the beach until I had gained cover from the higher sand hills on the little headland, when I might strike across, through the hollows, for the margin of the wood. The sun was about setting; the tide was low, and all the quicksands uncovered; and I was moving along, lost in unpleasant thought, when I was suddenly thunderstruck to perceive the prints of human feet. They ran parallel to my own course, but low down upon the beach, instead of along the border of the turf; and, when I examined them, I saw at once, by the size and coarseness of the impression, that it was a stranger to me and to those of the pavilion who had recently passed that way. Not only so; but from the recklessness of the course which he had followed, steering near to the most formidable portions of the sand, he was evidently a stranger to the country and to the ill-repute of Graden beach.

Step by step I followed the prints; until, a quarter of a mile farther, I beheld them die away into the southeastern boundary of Graden Floe. There, whoever he was, the miserable man had perished. One or two gulls, who had, perhaps, seen him disappear, wheeled over his sepulcher with their usual melancholy piping. The sun had broken through the clouds by a last effort, and colored the wide level of quicksands with a dusky purple. I stood for some time gazing at the spot, chilled and disheartened by my own reflections, and with a strong and commanding consciousness of death. I remember wondering how long the tragedy had taken, and whether his screams had been audible at the pavilion. And then, making a strong resolution, I was about to tear myself away, when a gust fiercer than usual fell upon this quarter of the beach, and I saw, now whirling high in air, now skimming lightly across the surface of the sands, a soft, black, felt hat, somewhat conical in shape, such as I had remarked already on the heads of the Italians.

I believe, but I am not sure, that I uttered a cry. The wind was driving the hat shoreward, and I ran round the border of the floe to be ready against its arrival. The gust fell, dropping the hat for awhile upon the quicksand, and then, once more freshening, landed it a few yards from where I stood. I seized it with the interest you may imagine. It had seen some service; indeed, it was rustier than either of those I had seen that day upon the street. The lining was red, stamped with the name of the maker, which I have forgotten, and that of the place of manufacture, Venedig. This (it is not yet forgotten) was the name given by the Austrians to the beautiful city of Venice, then, and for long after, a part of their dominions.

The shock was complete. I saw imaginary Italians upon every side; and for the first, and, I may say, for the last time in my experience, became overpowered by what is called a panic terror. I knew nothing, that is, to be afraid of, and yet I admit that I was heartily afraid; and it was with sensible reluctance that I returned to my exposed and solitary camp in the Sea-Wood.

There I eat some cold porridge which had been left over from the night before, for I was disinclined to make a fire; and, feeling strengthened and reassured, dismissed all these fanciful terrors from my mind, and lay down to
sleep with composure.

How long I may have slept it is impossible for me to guess; but I was awakened at last by a sudden, blinding flash of light into my face. It woke me like a blow. In an instant I was upon my knees. But the light had gone as suddenly as it came. The darkness was intense. And, as it was blowing great guns from the sea, and pouring with rain, the noises of the storm effectually concealed all others.

It was, I dare say, half a minute before I regained my self-possession. But for two circumstances, I should have thought I had been awakened by some new and vivid form of nightmare. First, the flap of my tent, which I had shut carefully when I retired, was now unfastened; and, second, I could still perceive, with a sharpness that excluded any theory of hallucination, the smell of hot metal and of burning oil. The conclusion was obvious. I had been awakened by some one flashing a bull's-eye lantern in my face. It had been but a flash, and away. He had seen my face, and then gone. I asked myself the object of so strange a proceeding, and the answer came pat. The man, whoever he was, had thought to recognize me, and he had not. There was another question unresolved; and to this, I may say, I feared to give an answer; if he had recognized me, what would he have done?

My fears were immediately diverted from myself, for I saw that I had been visited in a mistake; and I became persuaded that some dreadful danger threatened the pavilion. It required some nerve to issue forth into the black and intricate thicket which surrounded and overhung the den; but I groped my way to the links, drenched with rain, beaten upon and deafened by the gusts, and fearing at every step to lay my hand upon some lurking adversary. The darkness was so complete that I might have been surrounded by an army and yet none the wiser, and the uproar of the gale so loud that my hearing was as useless as my sight.

For the rest of that night, which seemed interminably long, I patrolled the vicinity of the pavilion, without seeing a living creature or hearing any noise but the concert of the wind, the sea, and the rain. A light in the upper story filtered through a cranny of the shutter, and kept me company till the approach of dawn.

With the first peep of day, I retired from the open to my old lair among the sand hills, there to await the coming of my wife. The morning was gray, wild, and melancholy; the wind moderated before sunrise, and then went about, and blew in puffs from the shore; the sea began to go down, but the rain still fell without mercy. Over all the wilderness of links there was not a creature to be seen. Yet I felt sure the neighborhood was alive with skulking foes. The light that had been so suddenly and surprisingly flashed upon my face as I lay sleeping, and the hat that had been blown ashore by the wind from over Graden Floe, were two speaking signals of the peril that environed Clara and the party in the pavilion.

It was, perhaps, half-past seven, or nearer eight, before I saw the door open, and that dear figure come toward me in the rain. I was waiting for her on the beach before she had crossed the sand hills.

"I have had such trouble to come!" she cried. "They did not wish me to go walking in the rain."

"Clara," I said, "you are not frightened!"

"No," said she, with a simplicity that filled my heart with confidence. For my wife was the bravest as well as the best of women; in my experience, I have not found the two go always together, but with her they did; and she combined the extreme of fortitude with the most endearing and beautiful virtues.

I told her what had happened; and, though her cheek grew visibly paler, she retained perfect control over her senses.

"You see now that I am safe," said I, in conclusion. "They do not mean to harm me; for, had they chosen, I was a dead man last night."

She laid her hand upon my arm.

"And I had no presentiment!" she cried.

Her accent thrilled me with delight. I put my arm about her, and strained her to my side; and, before either of us was aware, her hands were on my shoulders and my lips upon her mouth. Yet up to that moment no word of love had passed between us. To this day I remember the touch of her cheek, which was wet and cold with the rain; and many a time since, when she has been washing her face, I have kissed it again for the sake of that morning on the beach. Now that she is taken from me, and I finish my pilgrimage alone, I recall our old loving kindesses and the deep honesty and affection which united us, and my present loss seems but a trifle in comparison.

We may have thus stood for some seconds—for time passes quickly with lovers—before we were startled by a peal of laughter close at hand. It was not natural mirth, but seemed to be affected in order to conceal an angrier feeling. We both turned, though I still kept my left arm about Clara's waist; nor did she seek to withdraw herself; and there, a few paces off upon the beach, stood Northmour, his head lowered, his hands behind his back, his nostrils
Ah! Cassilis!" he said, as I disclosed my face.

"That same," said I; for I was not at all put about.

"And so, Miss Huddlestone," he continued slowly, but savagely, "this is how you keep your faith to your father and to me? This is the value you set upon your father's life? And you are so infatuated with this young gentleman that you must brave ruin, and decency, and common human caution--"

"Miss Huddlestone--" I was beginning to interrupt him, when he, in his turn, cut in brutally--

"You hold your tongue," said he; "I am speaking to that girl."

"That girl, as you call her, is my wife," said I; and my wife only leaned a little nearer, so that I knew she had affirmed my words.

"Your what?" he cried. "You lie!"

"Northmour," I said, "we all know you have a bad temper, and I am the last man to be irritated by words. For all that, I propose that you speak lower, for I am convinced that we are not alone."

He looked round him, and it was plain my remark had in some degree sobered his passion. "What do you mean?" he asked.

I only said one word: "Italians."

He swore a round oath, and looked at us, from one to the other.

"Mr. Cassilis knows all that I know," said my wife.

"What I want to know," he broke out, "is where the devil Mr. Cassilis comes from, and what the devil Mr. Cassilis is doing here. You say you are married; that I do not believe. If you were, Graden Floe would soon divorce you; four minutes and a half, Cassilis. I keep my private cemetery for my friends."

"It took somewhat longer," said I, "for that Italian."

He looked at me for a moment half daunted, and then, almost civilly, asked me to tell my story. "You have too much the advantage of me, Cassilis," he added. I complied of course; and he listened, with several ejaculations, while I told him how I had come to Graden: that it was I whom he had tried to murder on the night of landing; and what I had subsequently seen and heard of the Italians.

"Well," said he, when I had done, "it is here at last; there is no mistake about that. And what, may I ask, do you propose to do?"

"I propose to stay with you and lend a hand," said I.

"You are a brave man," he returned, with a peculiar intonation.

"I am not afraid," said I.

"And so," he continued, "I am to understand that you two are married? And you stand up to it before my face, Miss Huddlestone?"

"We are not yet married," said Clara; "but we shall be as soon as we can."

"Bravo!" cried Northmour. "And the bargain? D----n it, you're not a fool, young woman; I may call a spade a spade with you. How about the bargain? You know as well as I do what your father's life depends upon. I have only to put my hands under my coat tails and walk away, and his throat would be cut before the evening."

"Yes, Mr. Northmour," returned Clara, with great spirit; "but that is what you will never do. You made a bargain that was unworthy of a gentleman; but you are a gentleman for all that, and you will never desert a man whom you have begun to help."

"Aha!" said he. "You think I will give my yacht for nothing? You think I will risk my life and liberty for love of the old gentleman; and then, I suppose, be best man at the wedding, to wind up? Well," he added, with an odd smile, "perhaps you are not altogether wrong. But ask Cassilis here. He knows me. Am I a man to trust? Am I safe and scrupulous? Am I kind?"

"I know you talk a great deal, and sometimes, I think, very foolishly," replied Clara, "but I know you are a gentleman, and I am not the least afraid."

He looked at her with a peculiar approval and admiration; then, turning to me, "Do you think I would give her up without a struggle, Frank?" said he. "I tell you plainly, you look out. The next time we come to blows--"

"Will make the third," I interrupted, smiling.

"Aye, true; so it will," he said. "I had forgotten. Well, the third time's lucky."

"The third time, you mean, you will have the crew of the 'Red Earl' to help," I said.

"Do you hear him?" he asked, turning to my wife.

"I hear two men speaking like cowards," said she. "I should despise myself either to think or speak like that. And neither of you believe one word that you are saying, which makes it the more wicked and silly."

"She's a trump!" cried Northmour. "But she's not yet Mrs. Cassilis. I say no more. The present is not for me."

Then my wife surprised me.
"I leave you here," she said suddenly. "My father has been too long alone. But remember this: you are to be friends, for you are both good friends to me."

She has since told me her reason for this step. As long as she remained, she declares that we two would have continued to quarrel; and I suppose that she was right, for when she was gone we fell at once into a sort of confidentiality.

Northmour stared after her as she went away over the sand hill. "She is the only woman in the world!" he exclaimed with an oath. "Look at her action."

I, for my part, leaped at this opportunity for a little further light. "See here, Northmour," said I; "we are all in a tight place, are we not?"

"I believe you, my boy," he answered, looking me in the eyes, and with great emphasis. "We have all hell upon us, that's the truth. You may believe me or not, but I'm afraid of my life."

"Tell me one thing," said I. "What are they after, these Italians? What do they want with Mr. Huddlestone?"

"Don't you know?" he cried. "The black old scamp had carbonari funds on a deposit--two hundred and eighty thousand; and of course he gambled it away on stocks. There was to have been a revolution in the Tridentino, or Parma; but the revolution is off, and the whole wasp's nest is after Huddlestone. We shall all be lucky if we can save our skins."

"The carbonari!" I exclaimed; "God help him indeed!"

"Amen!" said Northmour. "And now, look here: I have said that we are in a fix; and, frankly, I shall be glad of your help. If I can't save Huddlestone, I want at least to save the girl. Come and stay in the pavilion; and, there's my hand on it, I shall act as your friend until the old man is either clear or dead. But," he added, "once that is settled, you become my rival once again, and I warn you--mind yourself."

"Done!" said I; and we shook hands.

"And now let us go directly to the fort," said Northmour; and he began to lead the way through the rain.

VI

We were admitted to the pavilion by Clara, and I was surprised by the completeness and security of the defenses. A barricade of great strength, and yet easy to displace, supported the door against any violence from without; and the shutters of the dining-room, into which I was led directly, and which was feebly illuminated by a lamp, were even more elaborately fortified. The panels were strengthened by bars and crossbars; and these, in their turn, were kept in position by a system of braces and struts, some abutting on the floor, some on the roof, and others, in fine, against the opposite wall of the apartment. It was at once a solid and well-designed piece of carpentry; and I did not seek to conceal my admiration.

"I am the engineer," said Northmour. "You remember the planks in the garden? Behold them?"

"I did not know you had so many talents," said I.

"Are you armed?" he continued, pointing to an array of guns and pistols, all in admirable order, which stood in line against the wall or were displayed upon the sideboard.

"Thank you," I returned; "I have gone armed since our last encounter. But, to tell you the truth, I have had nothing to eat since early yesterday evening."

Northmour produced some cold meat, to which I eagerly set myself, and a bottle of good Burgundy, by which, wet as I was, I did not scruple to profit. I have always been an extreme temperance man on principle; but it is useless to push principle to excess, and on this occasion I believe that I finished three quarters of the bottle. As I eat, I still continued to admire the preparations for defense.

"We could stand a siege," I said at length.

"Ye--es," drawled Northmour; "a very little one, per--haps. It is not so much the strength of the pavilion I misdoubt; it is the double danger that kills me. If we get to shooting, wild as the country is, some one is sure to hear it, and then--why then it's the same thing, only different, as they say: caged by law, or killed by carbonari. There's the choice. It is a devilish bad thing to have the law against you in this world, and so I tell the old gentleman upstairs. He is quite of my way of thinking."

"Speaking of that," said I, "what kind of person is he?"

"Oh, he!" cried the other; "he's a rancid fellow, as far as he goes. I should like to have his neck wrung to-morrow by all the devils in Italy. I am not in this affair for him. You take me? I made a bargain for missy's hand, and I mean to have it too."

"That, by the way," said I. "I understand. But how will Mr. Huddlestone take my intrusion?"

"Leave that to Clara," returned Northmour.
I could have struck him in the face for his coarse familiarity; but I respected the truce, as, I am bound to say, did Northmour, and so long as the danger continued not a cloud arose in our relation. I bear him this testimony with the most unfeigned satisfaction; nor am I without pride when I look back upon my own behavior. For surely no two men were ever left in a position so invidious and irritating.

As soon as I had done eating, we proceeded to inspect the lower floor. Window by window we tried the different supports, now and then making an inconsiderable change; and the strokes of the hammer sounded with startling loudness through the house. I proposed, I remember, to make loop-holes; but he told me they were already made in the windows of the upper story. It was an anxious business, this inspection, and left me down-hearted. There were two doors and five windows to protect, and, counting Clara, only four of us to defend them against an unknown number of foes. I communicated my doubts to Northmour, who assured me, with unmoved composure, that he entirely shared them.

"Before morning," said he, "we shall all be butchered and buried in Graden Floe. For me, that is written."

I could not help shuddering at the mention of the quicksand, but reminded Northmour that our enemies had spared me in the wood.

"Do not flatter yourself," said he. "Then you were not in the same boat with the old gentleman; now you are. It's the floe for all of us, mark my words."

I trembled for Clara; and just then her dear voice was heard calling us to come upstairs. Northmour showed me the way, and, when he had reached the landing, knocked at the door of what used to be called My Uncle's Bedroom, as the founder of the pavilion had designed it especially for himself.

"Come in, Northmour; come in, dear Mr. Cassilis," said a voice from within.

Pushing open the door, Northmour admitted me before him into the apartment. As I came in I could see the daughter slipping out by the side door into the study, which had been prepared as her bedroom. In the bed, which was drawn back against the wall, instead of standing, as I had last seen it, boldly across the window, sat Bernard Huddlestone, the defaulting banker. Little as I had seen of him by the shifting light of the lantern on the links, I had no difficulty in recognizing him for the same. He had a long and sallow countenance, surrounded by a long red beard and side-whiskers. His broken nose and high cheek-bones gave him somewhat the air of a Kalmuck, and his light eyes shone with the excitement of a high fever. He wore a skull-cap of black silk; a huge Bible lay open before him on the bed, with a pair of gold spectacles in the place, and a pile of other books lay on the stand by his side. The green curtains lent a cadaverous shade to his cheek; and, as he sat propped on pillows, his great stature was painfully hunched, and his head protruded till it overhung his knees. I believe if he had not died otherwise, he must have fallen a victim to consumption in the course of but a very few weeks.

He held out to me a hand, long, thin, and disagreeably hairy.

"Cassilis is a good man," said he. "Another protector--ahem!--another protector. Always welcome as a friend of my daughter's, Mr. Cassilis. How they have rallied about me, my daughter's friends! May God in heaven bless and reward them for it!"

I gave him my hand, of course, because I could not help it; but the sympathy I had been prepared to feel for Clara's father was immediately soured by his appearance, and the wheedling, unreal tones in which he spoke.

"Cassilis is a good man," said Northmour; "worth ten."

"So I hear," cried Mr. Huddlestone eagerly; "so my girl tells me. Ah, Mr. Cassilis, my sin has found me out, you see! I am very low, very low; but I hope equally penitent. We must all come to the throne of grace at last, Mr. Cassilis. For my part, I come late indeed; but with unfeigned humility, I trust."

"Fiddle-de-dee!" said Northmour roughly.

"No, no, dear Northmour!" cried the banker. "You must not say that; you must not try to shake me. You forget, my dear, good boy, you forget I may be called this very night before my Maker."

His excitement was pitiful to behold; and I felt myself grow indignant with Northmour, whose infidel opinions I well knew, and heartily despised, as he continued to taunt the poor sinner out of his humor of repentance.

"Pooh, my dear Huddlestone!" said he. "You do yourself injustice. You are a man of the world inside and out, and were up to all kinds of mischief before I was born. Your conscience is tanned like South American leather--only you forgot to tan your liver, and that, if you will believe me, is the seat of the annoyance."

"Rogue, rogue! bad boy!" said Mr. Huddlestone, shaking his finger. "I am no precisian, if you come to that; I always hated a precisian; but I never lost hold of something better through it all. I have been a bad boy, Mr. Cassilis; I do not seek to deny that, but it was after my wife's death, and you know, with a widower, it's a different thing: sinful--I won't say no; but there is a gradation, we shall hope. And talking of that--Hark!" he broke out suddenly, his hand raised, his fingers spread, his face racked with interest and terror. "Only the rain, bless God!" he added, after a pause, and with indescribable relief.

For some seconds he lay back among the pillows like a man near to fainting; then he gathered himself together,
and, in somewhat tremulous tones, began once more to thank me for the share I was prepared to take in his defense.

"One question, sir," said I, when he had paused. "Is it true that you have money with you?"

He seemed annoyed by the question, but admitted with reluctance that he had a little.

"Well," I continued, "is it their money they are after, is it not? Why not give it up to them?"

"Ah!" replied he, shaking his head, "I have tried that already, Mr. Cassilis; and alas! that it should be so, but it is blood they want."

"Huddlestone, that's a little less than fair," said Northmour. "You should mention that what you offered them was upward of two hundred thousand short. The deficit is worth a reference; it is for what they call a cool sum, Frank. Then, you see, the fellows reason in their clear Italian way; and it seems to them, as indeed it seems to me, that they may just as well have both while they're about it--money and blood together, by George, and no more trouble for the extra pleasure."

"Is it in the pavilion?" I asked.

"It is; and I wish it were in the bottom of the sea instead," said Northmour; and then suddenly--"What are you making faces at me for?" he cried to Mr. Huddlestone, on whom I had unconsciously turned my back. "Do you think Cassilis would sell you?"

Mr. Huddlestone protested that nothing had been further from his mind.

"It is a good thing," retorted Northmour in his ugliest manner. "You might end by wearying us. What were you going to say?" he added, turning to me.

"I was going to propose an occupation for the afternoon," said I. "Let us carry that money out, piece by piece, and lay it down before the pavilion door. If the carbonari come, why, it's theirs at any rate."

"No, no," cried Mr. Huddlestone; "it does not, it cannot, belong to them! It should be distributed pro rata among all my creditors."

"Come now, Huddlestone," said Northmour, "none of that."

"Well, but my daughter," moaned the wretched man.

"Your daughter will do well enough. Here are two suitors, Cassilis and I, neither of us beggars, between whom she has to choose. And as for yourself, to make an end of arguments, you have no right to a farthing, and, unless I'm much mistaken, you are going to die."

It was certainly very cruelly said; but Mr. Huddlestone was a man who attracted little sympathy; and, although I saw him wince and shudder, I mentally indorsed the rebuke; nay, I added a contribution of my own.

"Northmour and I," I said, "are willing enough to help you to save your life, but not to escape with stolen property."

He struggled for awhile with himself, as though he were on the point of giving way to anger, but prudence had the best of the controversy.

"My dear boys," he said, "do with me or my money what you will. I leave all in your hands. Let me compose myself."

And so we left him, gladly enough I am sure.

The last that I saw, he had once more taken up his great Bible, and with tremulous hands was adjusting his spectacles to read.

VII

The recollection of that afternoon will always be graven on my mind. Northmour and I were persuaded that an attack was imminent; and if it had been in our power to alter in any way the order of events, that power would have been used to precipitate rather than delay the critical moment. The worst was to be anticipated; yet we could conceive no extremity so miserable as the suspense we were now suffering. I have never been an eager, though always a great, reader; but I never knew books so insipid as those which I took up and cast aside that afternoon in the pavilion. Even talk became impossible, as the hours went on. One or other was always listening for some sound, or peering from an upstairs window over the links. And yet not a sign indicated the presence of our foes.

We debated over and over again my proposal with regard to the money; and had we been in complete possession of our faculties, I am sure we should have condemned it as unwise; but we were flustered with alarm, grasped at a straw, and determined, although it was as much as advertising Mr. Huddlestone's presence in the pavilion, to carry my proposal into effect.

The sum was part in specie, part in bank paper, and part in circular notes payable to the name of James Gregory. We took it out, counted it, inclosed it once more in a dispatch box belonging to Northmour, and prepared a letter in Italian which he tied to the handle. It was signed by both of us under oath, and declared that this was all the money
which had escaped the failure of the house of Huddlestone. This was, perhaps, the maddest action ever perpetrated by two persons professing to be sane. Had the dispatch box fallen into other hands than those for which it was intended, we stood criminally convicted on our own written testimony; but, as I have said, we were neither of us in a condition to judge soberly, and had a thirst for action that drove us to do something, right or wrong, rather than endure the agony of waiting. Moreover, as we were both convinced that the hollows of the links were alive with hidden spies upon our movements, we hoped that our appearance with the box might lead to a parley, and, perhaps, a compromise.

It was nearly three when we issued from the pavilion. The rain had taken off; the sun shone quite cheerfully. I had never seen the gulls fly so close about the house or approach so fearlessly to human beings. On the very doorstep one flapped heavily past our heads, and uttered its wild cry in my very ear.

"There is an omen for you," said Northmour, who like all freethinkers was much under the influence of superstition. "They think we are already dead."

I made some light rejoinder, but it was with half my heart; for the circumstance had impressed me.

A yard or two before the gate, on a patch of smooth turf, we set down the dispatch box; and Northmour waved a white handkerchief over his head. Nothing replied. We raised our voices, and cried aloud in Italian that we were there as ambassadors to arrange the quarrel, but the stillness remained unbroken save by the seagulls and the surf. I had a weight at my heart when we desisted; and I saw that even Northmour was unusually pale. He looked over his shoulder nervously, as though he feared that some one had crept between him and the pavilion door.

"By God," he said in a whisper, "this is too much for me!"

I replied in the same key: "Suppose there should be none, after all!"

"Look there," he returned, nodding with his head, as though he had been afraid to point.

I glanced in the direction indicated; and there, from the northern quarter of the Sea-Wood, beheld a thin column of smoke rising steadily against the now cloudless sky.

"Northmour," I said (we still continued to talk in whispers), "it is not possible to endure this suspense. I prefer death fifty times over. Stay you here to watch the pavilion; I will go forward and make sure, if I have to walk right into their camp."

He looked once again all round him with puckered eyes, and then nodded assentingly to my proposal.

My heart beat like a sledge hammer as I set out walking rapidly in the direction of the smoke; and, though up to that moment I had felt chill and shivering, I was suddenly conscious of a glow of heat all over my body. The ground in this direction was very uneven; a hundred men might have lain hidden in as many square yards about my path. But I who had not practiced the business in vain, chose such routes as cut at the very root of concealment, and, by keeping along the most convenient ridges, commanded several hollows at a time. It was not long before I was rewarded for my caution. Coming suddenly on to a mound somewhat more elevated than the surrounding hummocks, I saw, not thirty yards away, a man bent almost double, and running as fast as his attitude permitted, along the bottom of a gully. I had dislodged one of the spies from his ambush. As soon as I sighted him, I called loudly both in English and Italian; and he, seeing concealment was no longer possible, straightened himself out, leaped from the gully, and made off as straight as an arrow for the borders of the wood. It was none of my business to pursue; I had learned what I wanted--that we were beleaguered and watched in the pavilion; and I returned at once, and walked as nearly as possible in my old footsteps, to where Northmour awaited me beside the dispatch box.

He was even paler than when I had left him, and his voice shook a little.

"Could you see what he was like?" he asked.

"He kept his back turned," I replied.

"Let us get into the house, Frank. I don't think I'm a coward, but I can stand no more of this," he whispered.

All was still and sunshiny about the pavilion, as we turned to reenter it; even the gulls had flown in a wider circuit, and were seen flickering along the beach and sand hills; and this loneliness terrified me more than a regiment under arms. It was not until the door was barricaded that I could draw a full inspiration and relieve the weight that lay upon my bosom. Northmour and I exchanged a steady glance; and I suppose each made his own reflections on the white and startled aspect of the other.

"You were right," I said. "All is over. Shake hands, old man, for the last time."

"Yes," replied he, "I will shake hands; for, as sure as I am here, I bear no malice. But, remember, if, by some impossible accident, we should give the slip to these blackguards, I'll take the upper hand of you by fair or foul."

"Oh," said I, "you weary me!"

He seemed hurt, and walked away in silence to the foot of the stairs, where he paused.

"You do not understand," said he. "I am not a swindler, and I guard myself; that is all. I may weary you or not, Mr. Cassilis, I do not care a rush; I speak for my own satisfaction, and not for your amusement. You had better go upstairs and court the girl; for my part, I stay here."
"And I stay with you," I returned. "Do you think I would steal a march, even with your permission?"

"Frank," he said, smiling, "it's a pity you are an ass, for you have the makings of a man. I think I must be fey today; you cannot irritate me even when you try. Do you know," he continued softly, "I think we are the two most miserable men in England, you and I? we have got on to thirty without wife or child, or so much as a shop to look after--poor, pitiful, lost devils, both! And now we clash about a girl! As if there were not several millions in the United Kingdom! Ah, Frank, Frank, the one who loses his throw, be it you or me, he has my pity! It were better for him--how does the Bible say?--that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the depth of the sea. Let us take a drink," he concluded suddenly, but without any levity of tone.

I was touched by his words, and consented. He sat down on the table in the dining-room, and held up the glass of sherry to his eye.

"If you beat me, Frank," he said, "I shall take to drink. What will you do, if it goes the other way?"

"God knows," I returned.

"Well," said he, "here is a toast in the meantime: 'Italia irredenta!'"

The remainder of the day was passed in the same dreadful tedium and suspense. I laid the table for dinner, while Northmour and Clara prepared the meal together in the kitchen. I could hear their talk as I went to and fro, and was surprised to find it ran all the time upon myself. Northmour again bracketed us together, and rallied Clara on a choice of husbands; but he continued to speak of me with some feeling, and uttered nothing to my prejudice unless he included himself in the condemnation. This awakened a sense of gratitude in my heart, which combined with the immediateness of our peril to fill my eyes with tears. After all, I thought--and perhaps the thought was laughably vain--we were here three very noble human beings to perish in defense of a thieving banker.

Before we sat down to table, I looked forth from an upstairs window. The day was beginning to decline; the links were utterly deserted; the dispatch box still lay untouched where we had left it hours before.

Mr. Huddlestone, in a long yellow dressing gown, took one end of the table, Clara the other; while Northmour and I faced each other from the sides. The lamp was brightly trimmed; the wine was good; the viands, although mostly cold, excellent of their sort. We seemed to have agreed tacitly; all reference to the impending catastrophe was carefully avoided; and, considering our tragic circumstances, we made a merrier party than could have been expected. From time to time, it is true, Northmour or I would rise from table and make a round of the defenses; and, on each of these occasions, Mr. Huddlestone was recalled to a sense of his tragic predicament, glanced up with ghastly eyes, and bore for an instant on his countenance the stamp of terror. But he hastened to empty his glass, wiped his forehead with his handkerchief, and joined again in the conversation.

I was astonished at the wit and information he displayed. Mr. Huddlestone's was certainly no ordinary character; he had read and observed for himself; his gifts were sound; and, though I could never have learned to love the man, I began to understand his success in business, and the great respect in which he had been held before his failure. He had, above all, the talent of society; and though I never heard him speak but on this one and most unfavorable occasion, I set him down among the most brilliant conversationalists I ever met.

He was relating with great gusto, and seemingly no feeling of shame, the maneuvers of a scoundrelly commission merchant whom he had known and studied in his youth, and we were all listening with an odd mixture of mirth and embarrassment, when our little party was brought abruptly to an end in the most startling manner.

A noise like that of a wet finger on the window pane interrupted Mr. Huddlestone's tale; and in an instant we were all four as white as paper, and sat tongue-tied and motionless round the table.

"A snail," I said at last; for I had heard that these animals make a noise somewhat similar in character.

"Snail be d----d!" said Northmour. "Hush!"

The same sound was repeated twice at regular intervals; and then a formidable voice shouted through the shutters the Italian word, "Traditore!"

Mr. Huddlestone threw his head in the air; his eyelids quivered; next moment he fell insensible below the table. Northmour and I had each run to the armory and seized a gun. Clara was on her feet with her hand at her throat.

So we stood waiting, for we thought the hour of attack was certainly come; but second passed after second, and all but the surf remained silent in the neighborhood of the pavilion.

"Quick," said Northmour; "upstairs with him before they come."

VIII

Somehow or other, by hook and crook, and between the three of us, we got Bernard Huddlestone bundled upstairs and laid upon the bed in My Uncle's Room. During the whole process, which was rough enough, he gave no sign of consciousness, and he remained, as we had thrown him, without changing the position of a finger. His
daughter opened his shirt and began to wet his head and bosom; while Northmour and I ran to the window. The weather continued clear; the moon, which was now about full, had risen and shed a very clear light upon the links; yet, strain our eyes as we might, we could distinguish nothing moving. A few dark spots, more or less, on the uneven expanse were not to be identified; they might be crouching men, they might be shadows; it was impossible to be sure.

"Thank God," said Northmour, "Aggie is not coming to-night."

Aggie was the name of the old nurse; he had not thought of her until now; but that he should think of her at all was a trait that surprised me in the man.

We were again reduced to waiting. Northmour went to the fireplace and spread his hands before the red embers, as if he were cold. I followed him mechanically with my eyes, and in so doing turned my back upon the window. At that moment a very faint report was audible from without, and a ball shivered a pane of glass, and buried itself in the shutter two inches from my head. I heard Clara scream; and though I whipped instantly out of range and into a corner, she was there, so to speak, before me, beseeching to know if I were hurt. I felt that I could stand to be shot at every day and all day long, with such remarks of solicitude for a reward; and I continued to reassure her, with the tenderest caresses and in complete forgetfulness of our situation, till the voice of Northmour recalled me to myself.

"An air gun," he said. "They wish to make no noise."

I put Clara aside, and looked at him. He was standing with his back to the fire and his hands clasped behind him; and I knew by the black look on his face, that passion was boiling within. I had seen just such a look before he attacked me, that March night, in the adjoining chamber; and, though I could make every allowance for his anger, I confess I trembled for the consequences. He gazed straight before him; but he could see us with the tail of his eye, and his temper kept rising like a gale of wind. With regular battle awaiting us outside, this prospect of an internecine strife within the walls began to daunt me.

Suddenly, as I was thus closely watching his expression and prepared against the worst, I saw a change, a flash, a look of relief, upon his face. He took up the lamp which stood beside him on the table, and turned to us with an air of some excitement.

"There is one point that we must know," said he. "Are they going to butcher the lot of us, or only Huddlestone? Did they take you for him, or fire at you for your own beaux yeux?"

"They took me for him, for certain," I replied. "I am near as tall, and my head is fair."

"I am going to make sure," returned Northmour; and he stepped up to the window, holding the lamp above his head, and stood there, quietly affronting death, for half a minute.

Clara sought to rush forward and pull him from the place of danger; but I had the pardonable selfishness to hold her back by force.

"Yes," said Northmour, turning coolly from the window, "it's only Huddlestone they want."

"Oh, Mr. Northmour!" cried Clara; but found no more to add; the temerity she had just witnessed seeming beyond, the reach of words.

He, on his part, looked at me, cocking his head, with a fire of triumph in his eyes; and I understood at once that he had thus hazarded his life, merely to attract Clara's notice, and depose me from my position as the hero of the hour. He snapped his fingers.

"The fire is only beginning," said he. "When they warm up to their work, they won't be so particular."

A voice was now heard hailing us from the entrance. From the window we could see the figure of a man in the moonlight; he stood motionless, his face uplifted to ours, and a rag of something white on his extended arm; and as we looked right down upon him, though he was a good many yards distant on the links, we could see the moonlight glitter on his eyes.

He opened his lips again, and spoke for some minutes on end, in a key so loud that he might have been heard in every corner of the pavilion, and as far away as the borders of the wood. It was the same voice that had already shouted, "Traditore!" through the shutters of the dining-room; this time it made a complete and clear statement. If the traitor "Oddlestone" were given up, all others should be spared; if not, no one should escape to tell the tale.

"Well, Huddlestone, what do you say to that?" asked Northmour, turning to the bed.

Up to that moment the banker had given no sign of life, and I, at least, had supposed him to be still lying in a faint; but he replied at once, and in such tones as I have never heard elsewhere, save from a delirious patient, adjured and besought us not to desert him. It was the most hideous and abject performance that my imagination can conceive.

"Enough," cried Northmour; and then he threw open the window, leaned out into the night, and in a tone of exultation, and with a total forgetfulness of what was due to the presence of a lady, poured out upon the ambassador a string of the most abominable raillery both in English and Italian, and bade him be gone where he had come from. I believe that nothing so delighted Northmour at that moment as the thought that we must all infallibly perish before
the night was out.

Meantime, the Italian put his flag of truce into his pocket, and disappeared, at a leisurely pace, among the sand hills.

"They make honorable war," said Northmour. "They are all gentlemen and soldiers. For the credit of the thing, I wish we could change sides--you and I, Frank, and you, too, missy, my darling--and leave that being on the bed to some one else. Tut! Don't look shocked! We are all going post to what they call eternity, and may as well be above board while there's time. As far as I am concerned, if I could first strangle Huddlestone and then get Clara in my arms, I could die with some pride and satisfaction. And as it is, by God, I'll have a kiss!"

Before I could do anything to interfere, he had rudely embraced and repeatedly kissed the resisting girl. Next moment I had pulled him away with fury, and flung him heavily against the wall. He laughed loud and long, and I feared his wits had given way under the strain; for even in the best of days he had been a sparing and a quiet laugher.

"Now, Frank," said he, when his mirth was somewhat appeased, "it's your turn. Here's my hand. Good-bye, farewell!" Then, seeing me stand rigid and indignant, and holding Clara to my side--"Man!" he broke out, "are you angry? Did you think we were going to die with all the airs and graces of society? I took a kiss; I'm glad I did it; and now you can take another if you like, and square accounts."

I turned from him with a feeling of contempt which I did not seek to dissemble.

"As you please," said he. "You've been a prig in life; a prig you'll die."

And with that he sat down in a chair, a rifle over his knee, and amused himself with snapping the lock; but I could see that his ebullition of light spirits (the only one I ever knew him to display) had already come to an end, and was succeeded by a sullen, scowling humor.

All this time our assailants might have been entering the house, and we been none the wiser; we had in truth almost forgotten the danger that so imminently overhung our days. But just then Mr. Huddlestone uttered a cry, and leaped from the bed.

I asked him what was wrong.

"Fire!" he cried. "They have set the house on fire!"

Northmour was on his feet in an instant, and he and I ran through the door of communication with the study. The room was illuminated by a red and angry light. Almost at the moment of our entrance, a tower of flame arose in front of the window, and, with a tingling report, a pane fell inward on the carpet. They had set fire to the lean-to outhouse, where Northmour used to nurse his negatives.

"Hot work," said Northmour. "Let us try in your old room."

We ran thither in a breath, threw up the casement, and looked forth. Along the whole back wall of the pavilion piles of fuel had been arranged and kindled; and it is probable they had been drenched with mineral oil, for, in spite of the morning's rain, they all burned bravely. The fire had taken a firm hold already on the outhouse, which blazed higher and higher every moment; the back door was in the center of a red-hot bonfire; the eaves we could see, as we looked upward, were already smoldering, for the roof overhung, and was supported by considerable beams of wood. At the same time, hot, pungent, and choking volumes of smoke began to fill the house. There was not a human being to be seen to right or left.

"Ah, well!" said Northmour, "here's the end, thank God!"

And we returned to My Uncle's Room. Mr. Huddlestone was putting on his boots, still violently trembling, but with an air of determination such as I had not hitherto observed. Clara stood close by him, with her cloak in both hands ready to throw about her shoulders, and a strange look in her eyes, as if she were half hopeful, half doubtful of her father.

"Well, boys and girls," said Northmour, "how about a sally? The oven is heating; it is not good to stay here and be baked; and, for my part, I want to come to my hands with them, and be done."

"There's nothing else left," I replied.

And both Clara and Mr. Huddlestone, though with a very different intonation, added, "Nothing."

As we went downstairs the heat was excessive, and the roaring of the fire filled our ears; and we had scarce reached the passage before the stairs window fell in, a branch of flame shot brandishing through the aperture, and the interior of the pavilion became lighted up with that dreadful and fluctuating glare. At the same moment we heard the fall of something heavy and inelastic in the upper story. The whole pavilion, it was plain, had gone alight like a box of matches, and now not only flamed sky high to land and sea, but threatened with every moment to crumble and fall in about our ears.

Northmour and I cocked our revolvers. Mr. Huddlestone, who had already refused a firearm, put us behind him with a manner of command.

"Let Clara open the door," said he. "So, if they fire a volley, she will be protected. And in the meantime stand behind me. I am the scapegoat; my sins have found me out."
I heard him, as I stood breathless by his shoulder, with my pistol ready, pattering off prayers in a tremulous, rapid whisper; and, I confess, horrid as the thought may seem, I despised him for thinking of supplications in a moment so critical and thrilling. In the meantime, Clara, who was dead white but still possessed her faculties, had displaced the barricade from the front door. Another moment, and she had pulled it open. Firelight and moonlight illuminated the links with confused and changeful luster, and far away against the sky we could see a long trail of glowing smoke.

Mr. Huddlestone, filled for the moment with a strength greater than his own, struck Northmour and myself a back-hander in the chest; and while we were thus for the moment incapacitated from action, lifting his arms above his head like one about to dive, he ran straight forward out of the pavilion.

"Here am I!" he cried--"Huddlestone! Kill me, and spare the others!"

His sudden appearance daunted, I suppose, our hidden enemies; for Northmour and I had time to recover, to seize Clara between us, one by each arm, and to rush forth to his assistance, ere anything further had taken place. But scarce had we passed the threshold when there came near a dozen reports and flashes from every direction among the hollows of the links. Mr. Huddlestone staggered, uttered a weird and freezing cry, threw up his arms over his head, and fell backward on the turf.

"Traditore! Traditore!" cried the invisible avengers.

And just then a part of the roof of the pavilion fell in, so rapid was the progress of the fire. A loud, vague, and horrible noise accompanied the collapse, and a vast volume of flame went soaring up to heaven. It must have been visible at that moment from twenty miles out at sea, from the shore at Graden Wester, and far inland from the peak of Graystiel, the most eastern summit of the Caulder Hills. Bernard Huddlestone, although God knows what were his obsequies, had a fine pyre at the moment of his death.

IX

I should have the greatest difficulty to tell you what followed next after this tragic circumstance. It is all to me, as I look back upon it, mixed, strenuous, and ineffectual, like the struggles of a sleeper in a nightmare. Clara, I remember, uttered a broken sigh and would have fallen forward to earth, had not Northmour and I supported her insensible body. I do not think we were attacked: I do not remember even to have seen an assailant; and I believe we deserted Mr. Huddlestone without a glance. The first moment at which I became definitely sure, Clara had been suffered to fall against the outside of my little tent, Northmour and I were tumbling together on the ground, and he, with contained ferocity, was striking for my head with the butt of his revolver. He had already twice wounded me on the scalp; and it is to the consequent loss of blood that I am tempted to attribute the sudden clearness of my mind.

I caught him by the wrist.

"Northmour," I remember saying, "you can kill me afterwards. Let us first attend to Clara."

He was at that moment uppermost. Scarcely had the words passed my lips, when he had leaped to his feet and ran toward the tent; and the next moment, he was straining Clara to his heart and covering her unconscious hands and face with his caresses.

"Shame!" I cried. "Shame to you, Northmour!"

And, giddy though I still was, I struck him repeatedly upon the head and shoulders. He relinquished his grasp, and faced me in the broken moonlight.

"I had you under, and I let you go," said he; "and now you strike me! Coward!"

"You are the coward," I retorted. "Did she wish your kisses while she was still sensible of what you wanted? Not she! And now she may be dying; and you waste this precious time, and abuse her helplessness. Stand aside, and let me help her."

He confronted me for a moment, white and menacing; then suddenly he stepped aside.

"Help her then," said he.

I threw myself on my knees beside her, and loosened, as well as I was able, her dress and corset; but while I was thus engaged, a grasp descended on my shoulder.

"Keep your hands off her," said Northmour, fiercely. "Do you think I have no blood in my veins?"

"Northmour," I cried, "if you will neither help her yourself, nor let me do so, do you know that I shall have to kill you?"

"That is better!" he cried. "Let her die also, where's the harm? Step aside from that girl! and stand up to fight."
"You will observe," said I, half rising, "that I have not kissed her yet."

"I dare you to," he cried.

I do not know what possessed me; it was one of the things I am most ashamed of in my life, though, as my wife used to say, I knew that my kisses would be always welcome were she dead or living; down I fell again upon my knees, parted the hair from her forehead, and, with the dearest respect, laid my lips for a moment on that cold brow. It was such a caress as a father might have given; it was such a one as was not unbecoming from a man soon to die to a woman already dead.

"And now," said I, "I am at your service, Mr. Northmour."

But I saw, to my surprise, that he had turned his back upon me.

"Do you hear?" I asked.

"Yes," said he, "I do. If you wish to fight, I am ready. If not, go on and save Clara. All is one to me."

I did not wait to be twice bidden; but, stooping again over Clara, continued my efforts to revive her. She still lay white and lifeless; I began to fear that her sweet spirit had indeed fled beyond recall, and horror and a sense of utter desolation seized upon my heart. I called her by name with the most endearing inflections; I chafed and beat her hands; now I laid her head low, now supported it against my knee; but all seemed to be in vain, and the lids still lay heavy on her eyes.

"Northmour," I said, "there is my hat. For God's sake bring some water from the spring."

Almost in a moment he was by my side with the water.

"I have brought it in my own," he said. "You do not grudge me the privilege?"

"Northmour," I was beginning to say, as I laved her head and breast; but he interrupted me savagely.

"Oh, you hush up!" he said. "The best thing you can do is to say nothing."

I had certainly no desire to talk, my mind being swallowed up in concern for my dear love and her condition; so I continued in silence to do my best toward her recovery, and, when the hat was empty, returned it to him, with one word--"More." He had, perhaps, gone several times upon this errand, when Clara reopened her eyes.

"Now," said he, "since she is better, you can spare me, can you not? I wish you a good night, Mr. Cassilis."

And with that he was gone among the thicket. I made a fire, for I had now no fear of the Italians, who had even spared all the little possessions left in my encampment; and, broken as she was by the excitement and the hideous catastrophe of the evening, I managed, in one way or another--by persuasion, encouragement, warmth, and such simple remedies as I could lay my hand on--to bring her back to some composure of mind and strength of body.

Day had already come, when a sharp "Hist!" sounded from the thicket. I started from the ground; but the voice of Northmour was heard adding, in the most tranquil tones: "Come here, Cassilis, and alone; I want to show you something."

I consulted Clara with my eyes, and, receiving her tacit permission, left her alone, and clambered out of the den. At some distance off I saw Northmour leaning against an elder; and, as soon as he perceived me, he began walking seaward. I had almost overtaken him as he reached the outskirts of the wood.

"Look," said he, pausing.

A couple of steps more brought me out of the foliage. The light of the morning lay cold and clear over that well-known scene. The pavilion was but a blackened wreck; the roof had fallen in, one of the gables had fallen out; and, far and near, the face of the links was cicatrized with little patches of burned furze. Thick smoke still went straight upward in the windless air of the morning, and a great pile of ardent cinders filled the bare walls of the house, like coals in an open grate. Close by the islet a schooner yacht lay to, and a well-manned boat was pulling vigorously for the shore.

"The 'Red Earl'!" I cried. "The 'Red Earl' twelve hours too late!"

"Feel in your pocket, Frank. Are you armed?" asked Northmour.

I obeyed him, and I think I must have become deadly pale. My revolver had been taken from me.

"You see, I have you in my power," he continued. "I disarmed you last night while you were nursing Clara; but this morning--here--take your pistol. No thanks!" he cried, holding up his hand. "I do not like them; that is the only way you can annoy me now."

He began to walk forward across the links to meet the boat, and I followed a step or two behind. In front of the pavilion I paused to see where Mr. Huddlestone had fallen; but there was no sign of him, nor so much as a trace of blood.

"Graden Floe," said Northmour.

He continued to advance till we had come to the head of the beach.

"No farther, please," said he. "Would you like to take her to Graden House?"

"Thank you," replied I; "I shall try to get her to the minister at Graden Wester."

The prow of the boat here grated on the beach, and a sailor jumped ashore with a line in his hand.
"Wait a minute, lads!" cried Northmour; and then lower and to my private ear, "You had better say nothing of all this to her," he added.

"On the contrary!" I broke out, "she shall know everything that I can tell."

"You do not understand," he returned, with an air of great dignity. "It will be nothing to her; she expects it of me. Good-by!" he added, with a nod.

I offered him my hand.

"Excuse me," said he. "It's small, I know; but I can't push things quite so far as that. I don't wish any sentimental business, to sit by your hearth a white-haired wanderer, and all that. Quite the contrary: I hope to God I shall never again clap eyes on either one of you."

"Well, God bless you, Northmour!" I said heartily.

"Oh, yes," he returned.

He walked down the beach; and the man who was ashore gave him an arm on board, and then shoved off and leaped into the bows himself. Northmour took the tiller; the boat rose to the waves, and the oars between the tholepins sounded crisp and measured in the morning air.

They were not yet half way to the "Red Earl," and I was still watching their progress, when the sun rose out of the sea.

One word more, and my story is done. Years after, Northmour was killed fighting under the colors of Garibaldi for the liberation of the Tyrol.
Chapter I.

THE SWEETHEART OF A KING.

The scene was not exactly new to me. Moved by the spirit of adventure, or by an access of ennui which overtook me at times, I had several times visited the gaudy establishment of Mercer, on the fashionable side of Fifth Avenue in the Fifties. In either case I had found disappointment; where the stake is a matter of indifference there can be no excitement; and besides, I had been always in luck.

But on this occasion I had a real purpose before me, though not an important one, and I surrendered my hat and coat to the servant at the door with a feeling of satisfaction.

At the entrance to the main room I met Bob Garforth, leaving. There was a scowl on his face and his hand trembled as he held it forth to take mine.

"Harry is inside. What a rotten hole," said he, and passed on. I smiled at his remark— it was being whispered about that Garforth had lost a quarter of a million at Mercer's within the month— and passed inside.

Gaudy, I have said it was, and it needs no other word. Not in its elements, but in their arrangement.

The rugs and pictures and hangings testified to the taste of the man who had selected them; but they were abominably disposed, and there were too many of them.

The room, which was unusually large, held two or three leather divans, an English buffet, and many easy chairs. A smoking-table, covered, stood in one corner.

Groups of men were gathered about each of the three roulette wheels ranged along the farther side. Through a door to the left could be seen the poker tables, surrounded by grave or jocular faces. Above the low buzz of conversation there sounded the continual droning voices of the croupiers as they called the winning numbers, and an occasional exclamation from a "customer."

I made my way to the center wheel and stood at the rear of the crowd surrounding it.

The ball rolled; there was a straining of necks amid an intense silence; then, as the little pellet wavered and finally came to a rest in the hole number twenty-four a fervent oath of disappointment came from some one in front of me.

The next moment, rising on tiptoe to look over the intervening shoulders, I found myself looking into the white face of my younger brother Harry.

"Paul!" he exclaimed, turning quickly away.

I pushed my way through and stood at his side. There was no sound from the group of onlookers; it is not to be wondered at if they hesitated to offend Paul Lamar.

"My dear boy," said I, "I missed you at dinner. And though this may occupy your mind, it can scarcely fill your stomach. Haven't you had enough?"

Harry looked at me. His face was horribly pale and his eyes bloodshot; they could not meet mine.

"For Heaven's sake, Paul, let me alone," he said, hardly above a whisper. "I have lost ninety thousand."

In spite of myself I started. No wonder he was pale! And yet—

"That's nothing," I whispered back. "But you are making a show of yourself. Just now you were swearing like a sailor. See how your hand trembles! You were not made for this, Harry; it makes you forget that you're a gentleman. They are laughing at you. Come."

"But I say I have lost ninety thousand dollars," said the boy, and there was wildness in his eye. "Let me alone, Paul."

"I will repay you."

"No. Let me alone!"

"Harry!"

"I say no!"

His mouth was drawn tight and his eyes glared sullenly as those of a stubborn child. Clearly it was impossible to get him away without making a scene, which was unthinkable. For a moment I was at a complete loss; then the croupier's voice sounded suddenly in my ear:

"You are interrupting us, sir."

I silenced him with a glance and turned to my brother, having decided in an instant on the only possible course.
"Here, let me have your chair. I will get it back for you. Come!"

He looked at me for a moment in hesitation, then rose without a word and I took his place.

The thing was tiresome enough, but how could I have avoided it? The blood that rushes to the head of the gambler is certainly not food for the intellect; and, besides, I was forced by circumstances into an heroic attitude—and nothing is more distasteful to a man of sense. But I had a task before me; if a man lays bricks he should lay them well; and I do not deny that there was a stirring of my pulse as I sat down.

Is it possible for a mind to directly influence the movements of a little ivory ball? I do not say yes, but will you say no? I watched the ball with the eye of an eagle, but without straining; I played with the precision of a man with an unerring system, though my selections were really made quite at random; and I handled my bets with the sureness and swift dexterity with which a chess-master places his pawn or piece in position to demoralize his opponent.

This told on the nerves of the croupier. Twice I corrected a miscalculation of his, and before I had played an hour his hand was trembling with agitation.

And I won.

The details would be tiresome, but I won; and when, after six hours of play without an instant's rest, I rose exhausted from my chair and handed my brother the amount he had lost—I pocketed a few thousands for myself in addition. There were some who tried to detain me with congratulations and expressions of admiration, but I shook them off and led Harry outside to my car.

The chauffeur, poor devil, was completely stiff from the long wait, and I ordered him into the tonneau and took the wheel myself.

Partly was this due to pity for the driver, partly to a desire to leave Harry to his own thoughts, which I knew must be somewhat turbulent. He was silent during the drive, which was not long, and I smiled to myself in the darkness of the early morning as I heard, now and then, an uncontrollable sigh break through his dry lips. Of thankfulness, perhaps.

I preceded him up the stoop and into the hall of the old house on lower Fifth Avenue, near Tenth Street, that had been the home of our grandfather and our father before us. There, in the dim light, I halted and turned, while Evans approached from the inner rooms, rubbing eyes heavy with sleep.

Good old Evans! Yet the faithfulness of such a servant has its disadvantages.

"Well?" said Harry in a thin, high voice.

The boy's nerves were stretched tightly; two words from me would have produced an explosion. So I clapped him on the shoulder and sent him off to bed. He went sulkily, without looking round, and his shoulders drooped like those of an old man; but I reflected that that would all be changed after a few hours of sleep.

"After all, he is a Lamar," I said to myself as I ordered Evans to bring wine and sandwiches to the library.

It was the middle of the following afternoon before Harry appeared down-stairs. He had slept eleven hours. I was seated in the library when I heard his voice in the hall:

"Breakfast! Breakfast for five at once!"

I smiled. That was Harry's style of wit.

After he had eaten his "breakfast for five" he came in to see me with the air of a man who was determined to have it out.

I myself was in no mood for talk; indeed, I scarcely ever am in such a mood, unless it be with a pretty woman or a great sinner. You may regard that sentence as tautological if you like; I sha'n't quarrel about it.

What I mean to say is that I was with some effort I set myself to the distasteful task before me, rendered necessary by the responsibility of my position as elder brother and head of the family.

Harry began by observing with assumed indifference: "Well, and now there's the deuce to pay, I suppose."

"As his representative I am not a hard creditor," I smiled.

"I know, I know--" he began impetuously and stopped.

I continued:

"My boy, there is always the deuce to pay. If not for one thing, then for another. So your observation would serve for any other time as well as now. The point is this: you are ten years younger than I, and you are under my care; and much as I dislike to talk, we must reach an understanding."

"Well?" said Harry, lighting a cigarette and seating himself on the arm of a chair.

"You have often thought," I continued, "that I have been trying to interfere with your freedom. But you are mistaken; I have merely been trying to preserve it—and I have succeeded."

"When our father and mother died you were fifteen years of age. You are now twenty-two; and I take some credit for the fact that those seven years have left no stain, however slight, on the name of Lamar."

"Do I deserve that?" cried Harry. "What have I done?"

"Nothing irredeemable, but you must admit that now and then I have been at no small pains to--er--assist you.
But there, I don't intend to speak of the past; and to tell the truth, I suspect that we are of one mind. You regard me as more or less of an encumbrance; you think your movements are hampered; you consider yourself to be treated as a child unjustly.

"Well, for my part, I find my duty--for such I consider it--grows more irksome every day. If I am in your way, you are no less in mine. To make it short, you are now twenty-two years old, you chafe at restraint, you think yourself abundantly able to manage your own affairs. Well--I have no objection."

Harry stared at me.
"You mean--" he began.
"Exactly."
"But, Paul--"

"There is no need to discuss it. For me, it is mostly selfishness."

But he wanted to talk, and I humored him. For two hours we sat, running the scale from business to sentiment, and I must confess that I was more than once surprised by a flash from Harry. Clearly he was developing, and for the first time I indulged a hope that he might prove himself fit for self-government.

At least I had given him the rope; it remained for time to discover whether or not he would avoid getting tangled up in it. When we had finished we understood each other better, I think, than we ever had before; and we parted with the best of feeling.

Three days later I sailed for Europe, leaving Harry in New York. It was my first trip across in eighteen months, and I aimed at pleasure. I spent a week in London and Munich, then, disgusted with the actions of some of my fellow countrymen with whom I had the misfortune to be acquainted, I turned my face south for Madrid.

There I had a friend.

A woman not beautiful, but eminently satisfying; not loose, but liberal, with a character and a heart. In more ways than one she was remarkable; she had an affection for me; indeed, some years previously I had been in a way to play Albert Savaron to her Francesca Colonna, an arrangement prevented only by my constitutional dislike for any prolonged or sustained effort in a world the slave of vanity and folly.

It was from the lips of this friend that I first heard the name of Desiree Le Mire.

It was late in the afternoon on the fashionable drive. Long, broad, and shady, though scarcely cool, it was here that we took our daily carriage exercise; anything more strenuous is regarded with horror by the ladies of Spain.

There was a shout, and a sudden hush; all carriages were halted and their occupants uncovered, for royalty was passing. The coach, a magnificent though cumbersome affair, passed slowly and gravely by. On the rear seat were the princess and her little English cousin, while opposite them sat the great duke himself.

By his side was a young man of five and twenty with a white face and weak chin, and glassy, meaningless eyes. I turned to my companion and asked in a low tone who he was. Her whispered answer caused me to start with surprise, and I turned to her with a question.

"But why is he in Madrid?"

"Oh, as to that," said my friend, smiling, "you must ask Desiree."

"And who is Desiree?"

"What! You do not know Desiree! Impossible!" she exclaimed.

"My dear," said I, "you must remember that for the past year and a half I have been buried in the land of pork and gold. The gossip there is neither of the poet nor the court. I am ignorant of everything."

"You would not have been so much longer," said my friend, "for Desiree is soon going to America. Who is she? No one knows. What is she? Well, she is all things to some men, and some things to all men. She is a courtesan among queens and a queen among courtesans.

"She dances and loves, and, I presume, eats and sleeps. For the past two years she has bewitched him"--she pointed down the drive to where the royal coach was disappearing in the distance--"and he has given her everything."

"It was for her that the Duke of Bellarmine built the magnificent chalet of which I was telling you on Lake Lucerne. You remember that Prince Dolansky shot himself 'for political reasons' in his Parisian palace? But for Desiree he would be alive to-day. She is a witch and a she-devil, and the most completely fascinating woman in the world."

I smiled.

"What a reputation! And you say she is going to America?"

"Yes. It is to be supposed that she has heard that every American is a king, and it is no wonder if she is tired of only one royal lover at a time. And listen, Paul--"

"Well?"

"You--you must not meet her. Oh, but you do not know her power!"

I laughed and pressed her hand, assuring her that I had no intention of allowing myself to be bewitched by a she-
devil; but as our carriage turned and started back down the long drive toward the hotel I found myself haunted by the white face and staring eyes of the young man in the royal coach.

I stayed two weeks longer in Madrid. At the end of that time, finding myself completely bored (for no woman can possibly be amusing for more than a month at a time), I bade my friend au revoir and departed for the East. But I found myself just too late for an archeological expedition into the heart of Egypt, and after a tiresome week or so in Cairo and Constantinople I again turned my face toward the west.

At Rome I met an old friend, one Pierre Janvour, in the French diplomatic service, and since I had nothing better to do I accepted his urgent invitation to join him on a vacation trip to Paris.

But the joys of Paris are absurd to a man of thirty-two who has seen the world and tasted it and judged it. Still I found some amusement; Janvour had a pretty wife and a daughter eight years old, daintily beautiful, and I allowed myself to become soaked in domestic sentiment.

I really found myself on the point of envying him; Mme. Janvour was a most excellent housekeeper and manager. Little Eugenie and I would often walk together in the public gardens, and now and then her mother would join us; and, as I say, I found myself on the point of envying my friend Janvour.

This diversion would have ended soon in any event; but it was brought to an abrupt termination by a cablegram from my New York lawyers, asking me to return to America at once. Some rascality it was, on the part of the agent of my estate, which had alarmed them; the cablegram was bare of detail. At any rate, I could not afford to disregard it, and arranged passage on a liner sailing from Cherbourg the following day.

My hostess gave me a farewell dinner, which heightened my regret at being forced to leave, and little Eugenie seemed really grieved at my departure. It is pleasant to leave a welcome behind you; that is really the only necessary axiom of the traveler.

Janvour took me to the railroad station, and even offered to accompany me to Cherbourg; but I refused to tear him away from his little paradise.

We stood on the platform arguing the matter, when I suddenly became aware of that indistinct flutter and bustle seen in public places at some unusual happening or the unexpected arrival of a great personage.

I turned and saw that which was worthy of the interest it had excited.

In the first place, the daintiest little electric brougham in the world, fragile and delicate as a toy--a fairy's chariot.

Then the fairy herself descended. She cannot be described in detail.

I caught a glimpse of glorious golden hair, softly massive; gray-blue eyes shot with lightning, restless, devouring, implacable, indescribably beautiful; a skin wondrously fine, with the purity of marble and the warmth of velvet; nose and mouth rather too large, but perfectly formed and breathing the fire and power of love. Really it was rather later that I saw all this; at the time there was but a confused impression of elegance and beauty and terrible power.

She passed from the brougham to her railway carriage supremely unconscious of the hundreds of eyes turned on her, and a general sigh of satisfaction and appreciation came from the throng as she disappeared within her compartment. I turned to Janvour.

"Who is she?"
"What?" he exclaimed in surprise. "But my dear Lamar, not to know her argues one a barbarian."
"Nevertheless, I do not know her."
"Well, you will have an opportunity. She is going to America, and, since she is on this train, she will, of course, take the same boat as yourself. But, my friend, beware!"
"But who is she?"
"Desiree Le Mire."

Chapter II.
BEGINNING THE DANCE.

It developed, luckily for me, that my lawyers had allowed themselves to become unduly excited over a trifle. A discrepancy had been discovered in my agent's accounts; it was clearly established that he had been speculating; but the fellow's excessive modesty and moderation had saved me from any serious inconvenience or loss.

Some twenty thousand or so was the amount, and I did not even put myself to the trouble of recovering it. I placed a friend of mine, a plodder and one of those chaps who are honest on account of lack of imagination, in the position thus vacated and sighed with mild relief.

My experiment with Harry had proved a complete success. Left to the management of his own affairs, he had shown a wisdom and restraint none the less welcome because unexpected. He was glad to see me, and I was no less glad to see him.

There was little new in town.
Bob Garforth, having gambled away his entire patrimony, had shot and killed himself on the street; Mrs.
Ludworth had publicly defied gossip and smiled with favor on young Driscoll; the new director of the Metropolitan Museum had announced himself an enemy to tradition and a friend of progress; and Desiree Le Mire had consented to a two weeks' engagement at the Stuyvesant.

The French dancer was the favorite topic of discussion in all circles.

The newspapers were full of her and filled entire columns with lists of the kings, princes, and dukes who had been at her feet.

Bets were made on her nationality, the color of her eyes, the value of her pearls, the number of suicides she had caused--corresponding, in some sort, to the notches on the gun of a Western bad man. Gowns and hats were named for her by the enterprising department stores.

It was announced that her engagement at the Stuyvesant would open in ten days, and when the box-office opened for the advance sale every seat for every performance was sold within a few hours.

In the mean time the great Le Mire kept herself secluded in her hotel. She had appeared but once in the public dining-room, and on that occasion had nearly caused a riot, whereupon she had discreetly withdrawn. She remained unseen while the town shouted itself hoarse.

I had not mentioned her name to Harry, nor had I heard him speak of her, until one evening about two weeks after my return.

We were at dinner and had been discussing some commonplace subject, from which, by one of the freaks of association, the conversation veered and touched on classical dancing.

"The Russians are preeminent," said I, "because they possess both the inspiration--the fire--and the training. In no other nation or school are the two so perfectly joined. In the Turkish dancers there is perfect grace and freedom, but no life. In Desiree Le Mire, for example, there is indeed life; but she has not had the necessary training."

"What? Le Mire! Have you seen her?" cried Harry.

"Not on the stage," I answered; "but I crossed on the same ship with her, and she was kind enough to give me a great deal of her time. She seems to understand perfectly her own artistic limitations, and I am taking her word for it."

But Harry was no longer interested in the subject of dancing. I was besieged on the instant with a thousand questions.

Had I known Le Mire long? What was she like? Was it true that Prince Dolansky had shot himself in despair at losing her? Was she beautiful? How well did I know her? Would I take him to see her?

And within half an hour the last question was repeated so many times and with such insistence that I finally consented and left Harry delighted beyond words.

My own experience with Desiree Le Mire had been anything but exciting. The woman was interesting; there could be no doubt of that; but she possessed little attraction for me. Her charms, on close inspection, were really quite too evident.

I require subtlety in a woman, and so far as I could discover Le Mire knew not the meaning of the word. We had spent many hours during the trip across in pleasant companionship; she had done me the honor to tell me that she found my conversation amusing; and, after all, she was undeniably a pretty woman. She had invited me with evident sincerity to call on her in New York; but I had not as yet taken advantage of the invitation.

I did not then think, and I do not now believe, that I acted foolishly when I took Harry to see her. In any event, he would have seen her sooner or later, and since all temptations meet us at one time or another, it is best to have it out with them at as early a date as possible. At the time, indeed, I gave the subject no thought whatever; but if I had I should not have hesitated.

We took tea with her the following afternoon in her apartment, and I must confess that I myself was more than a little impressed when I entered. I realized then that on the ship nothing had been in her favor; she had been completely out of her element, and she was not a good sailor.

Here all was different. The stiffly ostentatious hotel rooms, by her own genius or that of her maid, had been transformed into something very nearly approaching perfection. I was amazed at the excellent taste displayed in her furniture and its arrangement, for it was clear that these were no hotel properties. Certainly a woman is at her best only when she is able to choose or create her own surroundings.

Harry was captivated, and I can scarcely blame him. But the poor lad betrayed himself so frankly! Though I suppose Le Mire was more or less accustomed to immediate surrender.

On that day, at least, she had reason to expect it. She satisfied the eye, which is saying a great deal and is the highest praise possible for a woman's beauty, when you consider the full strength of the word.

She was radiant, adorable, irresistible; I had to own that my first impression of her had been far too weak.

We talked for an hour. Harry had little to say as he sat devouring Le Mire with his eyes, and whenever she turned to him for an answer to a question or confirmation of an opinion he stammered and kept his composure with...
difficulty. Never, I suppose, did woman have clearer evidence of her power, nor sweeter, for Harry was by no means a fool to be carried away by the first pretty face that came in his way.

She simply overwhelmed him, and I repeat that I do not wonder at it, for my own pulse was not exactly steady. She asked us to dine with her.

I pleaded an engagement at the club and signed to Harry to do likewise; but he was completely gone and paid no attention to me.

He accepted the invitation gratefully, with frank delight, and I left them together.

It was about ten o'clock when he came home that evening. I was seated in the library and, hearing him enter the hall, called to him.

What a face was his! His lips trembled with nervous feeling, his eyes glowed like the eyes of a madman. I half started from my chair in amazement.

"I have no time," said he in answer to my invitation to join me with a bottle. "I have a letter or two to write, and--and I must get some sleep."

"Did you just leave Le Mire?"

"Yes."

I looked at my watch.

"What under the sun did you find to talk about?"

"Oh, anything--nothing. I say, she's charming."

His essay at indifference was amusing.

"You find her so?"

"Rather."

"She seems to have taken a fancy to you."

Harry actually grew red.

"Hardly," he said; but there was hope in the word.

"She is hardly your kind, Harry. You know that. You aren't going in for this sort of thing?"

"This sort--I don't know what you mean."

"Yes, you do, Hal. You know exactly what I mean. To put the thing plainly, Le Mire is a dangerous woman--none more so in all the world; and, Harry boy, be sure you keep your head and watch your step."

He stood for a moment looking at me in silence with a half-angry frown, then opened his mouth as though to speak, and finally turned, without a word, and started for the door. There he turned again uncertainly, hesitating.

"I am to ride with Desiree in the morning," said he, and the next moment was gone.

"Desiree!"

He called her Desiree!

I think I smiled for an hour over that; and, though my reflections were not free from apprehension, I really felt but little anxiety. Not that I underrated Le Mire's fascination and power; to confess the truth, my ease of mind was the result of my own vanity. Le Mire had flattered me into the belief that she was my friend.

A week passed--a dull week, during which I saw little of Harry and Le Mire not at all. At the time, I remember, I was interested in some chemical experiments--I am a dabbler with the tubes--and went out but little. Then--this was on Friday--Harry sought me out in the laboratory to tell me he was going away. In answer to my question, "Where?" he said, "I don't know."

"How long will you be gone?"

"Oh, a week--perhaps a month."

I looked at him keenly, but said nothing. It would have done no good to force him into an equivocation by questions. Early the next morning he departed, with three trunks, and with no further word to me save a farewell. No sooner was he gone than I started for the telephone to call up Le Mire; but thought better of it and with a shrug of the shoulders returned to the laboratory.

It was the following Monday that was to see the first appearance of Le Mire at the Stuyvesant. I had not thought of going, but on Monday afternoon Billy Du Mont telephoned me that he had an extra ticket and would like to have me join him. I was really a little curious to see Le Mire perform and accepted.

We dined at the club and arrived at the theater rather late. The audience was brilliant; indeed, though I had been an ardent first-nighter for a year or two in my callow youth, I think I have never seen such a representation of fashion and genius in America, except at the opera.

Billy and I sat in the orchestra--about the twelfth row--and half the faces in sight were well known to me. Whether Le Mire could dance or not, she most assuredly was, or had, a good press-agent. We were soon to receive an exemplification of at least a portion of the reputation that had preceded her.

Many were the angry adjectives heaped on the head of the dancer on that memorable evening. Mrs. Frederick
Marston, I remember, called her an insolent hussy; but then Mrs. Frederick Marston was never original. Others: rash, impudent, saucy, impertinent; in each instance accompanied by threats.

Indeed, it is little wonder if those people of fashion and wealth and position were indignant and sore. For they had dressed and dined hastily and come all the way down-town to see Le Mire; they waited for her for two hours and a half in stuffy theater seats, and Le Mire did not appear.

The announcement was finally made by the manager of the theater at a little before eleven-o'clock. He could not understand, he said—the poor fellow was on the point of wringing his hands with agitation and despair—he could not understand why the dancer did not arrive.

She had rehearsed in the theater on the previous Thursday afternoon, and had then seemed to have every intention of fulfilling her engagement. No one connected with the theater had seen her since that time, but everything had gone smoothly; they had had no reason to fear such a contretemps as her nonappearance.

They had sent to her hotel; she was gone, bag and baggage. She had departed on Friday, leaving no word as to her destination. They had asked the police, the hotels, the railroads, the steamship companies—and could find no trace of her.

The manager only hoped—he hoped with all his heart—that his frank and unreserved explanation would appease his kind patrons and prevent their resentment; that they would understand--

I made my way out of the theater as rapidly as possible, with Billy Du Mont at my side, and started north on Broadway.

My companion was laughing unrestrainedly.

"What a joke!" he exclaimed. "And gad, what a woman! She comes in and turns the town upside down and then leaves it standing on its head. What wouldn't I give to know her!"

I nodded, but said nothing. At Forty-Second Street we turned east to Fifth Avenue, and a few minutes later were at the club. I took Du Mont to a secluded corner of the grill, and there, with a bottle of wine between us, I spoke.

"Billy," said I, "there's the deuce to pay. You're an old friend of mine, and you possess a share of discretion, and you've got to help me. Le Mire is gone. I must find her."

"Find Le Mire?" He stared at me in amazement. "What for?"

"Because my brother Harry is with her."

Then I explained in as few words as possible, and I ended, I think, with something like this:

"You know, Billy, there are very few things in the world I consider of any value. She can have the lad's money, and, if necessary, my own into the bargain. But the name of Lamar must remain clean; and I tell you there is more than a name in danger. Whoever that woman touches she kills. And Harry is only a boy."

Billy helped me, as I knew he would; nor did he insist on unnecessary details. I didn't need his assistance in the search, for I felt that I could accomplish that as well alone.

But it was certainly known that Harry had been calling on Le Mire at her hotel; conjectures were sure to be made, leading to the assertions of busy tongues; and it was the part of my friend to counteract and smother the inevitable gossip. This he promised to do; and I knew Billy. As for finding Harry, it was too late to do anything that night, and I went home and to bed.

The next morning I began by calling at her hotel. But though the manager of the theater had gotten no information from them, he had pumped them dry. They knew nothing.

I dared not go to the police, and probably they would have been unable to give me any assistance if I had sought it. The only other possible source of information I disliked to use; but after racking my brain for the better part of the day I decided that there was nothing else for it, and started on a round of the ticket offices of the railroads and steamship companies.

I had immediate success. My first call was at the office where Harry and I were accustomed to arrange our transportation. As I entered the head clerk—or whatever they call him—advanced to greet me with a smile.

"Yes," said he in response to my question; "Mr. Lamar got his tickets from me. Let's see--Thursday, wasn't it? No, Friday. That's right--Friday."

"Tickets!" I muttered to myself. And in my preoccupation I really neglected to listen to him. Then aloud: "Where were the--tickets for?"

"Denver."

"For Friday's train?"

"Yes. The Western Express."

That was all I wanted to know. I hurried home, procured a couple of hastily packed bags, and took the afternoon train for the West.

Chapter III.

A MODERN MARANA.
My journey westward was an eventful one; but this is not a "History of Tom Jones," and I shall refrain from detail. Denver I reached at last, after a week's stop-over in Kansas City. It was a delightful adventure--but it had nothing to do with the story.

I left the train at the Rocky Mountain city about the middle of the afternoon. And now, what to do? I think I am not a fool, but I certainly lack the training of a detective, and I felt perfectly rudderless and helpless as I ordered the taxi-driver to take me to the Alcazar Hotel.

I was by no means sure that Harry had come to Denver. He was traveling with a bundle of animated caprice, a creature who would have hauled him off the train at Rahway, New Jersey, if she had happened to take a fancy to the place. At the moment, I reflected, they might be driving along Michigan Boulevard, or attending a matinee at the Willis Wood, or sipping mint juleps at the Planters'.

Even if they were in Denver, how was I to find them? I keenly regretted the week I had lost. I was sure that Harry would avoid any chance of publicity and would probably shun the big hotels. And Denver is not a village.

It was the beauty of Le Mire that saved me. Indeed, I might have foreseen that; and I have but poorly portrayed the force of her unmatchable fascination unless you have realized that she was a woman who could pass nowhere without being seen; and, seen, remembered.

I made inquiries of the manager of the hotel, of course, but was brought up sharply when he asked me the names of my friends for whom I was asking. I got out of it somehow, some foolish evasion or other, and regarded my task as more difficult than ever.

That same evening I dined at the home of my cousin, Hovey Stafford, who had come West some years before on account of weak lungs, and stayed because he liked it. I met his wife that evening for the first time; she may be introduced with the observation that if she was his reason for remaining in the provinces, never did man have a better one.

We were on the veranda with our after-dinner cigars. I was congratulating Hovey on the felicity of his choice and jocularly sympathizing with his wife.

"Yes," said my cousin, with a sigh, "I never regretted it till last week. It will never be the same again."

Mrs. Hovey looked at him with supreme disdain.

"I suppose you mean Senora Ramal," said she scornfully.

Her husband, feigning the utmost woe, nodded mournfully; whereupon she began humming the air of the Chanson du Colonel, and was stopped by a smothering kiss.

"And who is the Senora Ramal?" I asked.

"The most beautiful woman in the world," said Mrs. Hovey.

This from a woman who was herself beautiful! Amazing! I suppose my face betrayed my thought.

"It isn't charity," she smiled. "Like John Holden, I have seen fire-balloons by the hundred, I have seen the moon, and--then I saw no more fire-balloons."

"But who is she?"

Hovey explained. "She is the wife of Senor Ramal. They came here some ten days ago, with letters to one or two of the best families, and that's all we know about them. The senora is an entrancing mixture of Cleopatra, Sappho, Helen of Troy, and the devil. She had the town by the ears in twenty-four hours, and you wouldn't wonder at it if you saw her."

Already I felt that I knew, but I wanted to make sure.

"Byron has described her," I suggested, "in Childe Harold."

"Hardly," said Hovey. "No midnight beauty for hers, thank you. Her hair is the most perfect gold. Her eyes are green; her skin remarkably fair. What she may be is unknowable, but she certainly is not Spanish; and, odder still, the senor himself fits the name no better."

But I thought it needless to ask for a description of Harry; for I had no doubt of the identity of Senor Ramal and his wife. I pondered over the name, and suddenly realized that it was merely "Lamar" spelled backward!

The discovery removed the last remaining shadow of doubt.

I asked in a tone of assumed indifference for their hotel, expressing a desire to meet them--and was informed by Hovey that they had left Denver two days previously, nor did he know where they had gone.

Thus did I face another obstacle. But I was on the track; and the perfume of a woman's beauty is the strongest scent in the world as well as the sweetest. I thanked my cousin for a pleasant evening--though he did not know the extent of my debt to him--and declined his urgent invitation to have my luggage brought to his home.

On my way to the hotel I was struck by a sudden thought: Senor Ramal could not be my brother or my cousin would have recognized him! But I immediately reflected that the two had not seen each other for some ten years, at which time Harry had been a mere boy.

The following morning, with little difficulty, I ascertained the fact that the Ramals had departed--at least
ostensibly--for Colorado Springs.

I followed. That same evening, when I registered at the Antlers Hotel, a few minutes before the dinner hour, I turned over two pages of the book, and there before me was the entry, "Senor and Senora Ramal, Paris." It was in Harry's handwriting.

After dinner--a most excellent dinner, with melons from La Junta and trout from the mountain streams--I descended on the hotel clerk with questions. He was most obliging--a sharp, pleasant fellow, with prominent ears and a Rocky Mountain twang.

"Senor and Senora Ramal? Most assuredly, sir. They have been here several days. No, they are not now in the hotel. They left this afternoon for Manitou, to take dinner there, and are going to make the night trip up the Peak."

An idea immediately suggested itself to me. They would, of course, return to the hotel in the morning. All I had to do was to sit down and wait for them; but that would have been dull sport. My idea was better.

I sought out the hotel's wardrobe--there is nothing the Antlers will not do for you--and clothed myself in khaki, leggings, and boots. Then I ordered a car and set out for Manitou, at the foot of the mountain.

By ten o'clock I was mounted on a donkey, headed for the top, after having been informed by a guide that "the man and the beautiful lady" had departed an hour previous.

Having made the ascent twice before, I needed no guide. So I decided; but I regretted the decision. Three times I lost the path; once I came perilously near descending on the village below--well, without hesitation. It was well after midnight when I passed the Half-way House, and I urged my donkey forward with a continual rat-a-tat-tat of well-directed kicks in the effort to make my goal.

You who have experienced the philosophical calm and superb indifference of the Pike's Peak donkey may imagine the vocabulary I used on this occasion--I dare not print it. Nor did his speed increase.

I was, in fact, a quarter of an hour late. I was still several hundred yards from the summit when the sun's first rays shot through the thin atmosphere, creating colorful riot among the clouds below, and I stopped, holding my breath in awe.

There is no art nor poetry in that wonderful sight; it is glorious war. The sun charges forth in a vast flame of inconceivable brilliance; you can almost hear the shout of victory. He who made the universe is no artist; too often He forgets restraint, and blinds us.

I turned, almost regretting that I had come, for I had been put out of tune with my task. Then I mounted the donkey and slowly traversed the few remaining yards to the Peak.

There, seated in the dazzling sunshine on the edge of a huge boulder near the eastern precipice, were the two I sought.

Le Mire's head was turned from me as she sat gazing silently at the tumbling, gorgeous mass of clouds that seemed almost to be resting on her lap; Harry was looking at her. And such a look!

There was no rival even in nature that could conquer Le Mire; never, I believe, did woman achieve a more notable victory than hers of that morning. I watched them for several minutes before I moved or spoke; and never once did Harry's eyes leave her face.

Then I advanced a step, calling his name; and they turned and caught sight of me.

"Paul!" cried Harry, leaping to his feet; then he stopped short and stared at me half defiantly, half curiously, moving close to Le Mire and placing his hand on her shoulder like a child clinging to a toy.

His companion had not moved, except to turn her head; but after the first swift shadow of surprise her face brightened with a smile of welcome, for all the world as though this were a morning call in her boudoir.

"Senor and Senora Ramal, I believe?" said I with a smile, crossing to them with an exaggerated bow.

I could see Harry cocking his ear to catch the tone of my first words, and when he heard their friendliness a grin overspread his face. He took his hand from Le Mire's shoulder and held it out to me.

"How did you come here? How did you find us?"

"You forgot to provide Le Mire with a veil," said I by way of answer. Harry looked at me, then at his companion. "Of course," he agreed--"of course. By Jove! that was stupid of us."

Whereupon Le Mire laughed with such frank enjoyment of the boy's simplicity that I couldn't help but join her.

"And now," said Harry, "I suppose you want to know--"

"I want to know nothing--at present," I interrupted. "It's nearly six o'clock, and since ten last night I've been on top of the most perfectly imbecile donkey ever devised by nature. I want breakfast."

Velvet lids were upraised from Le Mire's eyes. "Here?" she queried.

I pointed to the place--extreme charity might give it the title of inn--where smoke was rising from a tin chimney.

Soon we were seated inside with a pot of steaming black coffee before us. Harry was bubbling over with gaiety and good will, evidently occasioned by my unexpected friendliness, while Le Mire sat for the most part silent. It was easy to see that she was more than a little disturbed by my arrival, which surprised me.
I gazed at her with real wonder and increasing admiration. It was six in the morning; she had had no sleep, and had just finished a most fatiguing journey of some eight hours; but I had never seen her so beautiful.

Our host approached, and I turned to him:

"What have you?"
There was pity in his glance.
"Aigs," said he, with an air of finality.
"Ah!" said Le Mire. "I want them--let's see--au beurre noire, if you please."
The man looked at her and uttered the single word: "Fried."
"Fried?" said she doubtfully.
"Only fried," was the inexorable answer. "How many?"
Le Mire turned to me, and I explained. Then she turned again to the surly host with a smile that must have caused him to regret his gruffness.

"Well, then, fr-r-ied!" said she, rolling the "r" deliciously. "And you may bring me five, if you please."
It appeared that I was not the only hungry one. We ate leisurely and smoked more leisurely still, and started on our return journey a little before eight o'clock.

It was late in the afternoon when we arrived at the Antlers. The trip was accomplished without accident, but Le Mire was thoroughly exhausted and Harry was anything but fresh. That is the worst of mountain climbing: the exaltation at the summit hardly pays you for the reaction at the foot. We entered the broad portico with frank sighs of relief.

I said something about joining them at dinner and left for my own rooms.

At dinner that evening Harry was in high spirits and took great delight in everything that was said, both witty and dull, while Le Mire positively sparkled.

She made her impression; not a man in the well-filled room but sent his tribute of admiring glances as she sat seemingly unconscious of all but Harry and myself. That is always agreeable; a man owes something to the woman who carries a room for him.

I had intended to have a talk with Harry after dinner, but I postponed it; the morning would assuredly be better. There was dancing in the salon, but we were all too tired to take advantage of it; and after listening to one or two numbers, during which Le Mire was kept busy turning aside the importunities of would-be partners, we said good night and sought our beds.

It was late the next morning when the precious pair joined me in the garden, and when we went in for breakfast we found the dining-room quite empty. We did not enjoy it as on the morning previous; the cuisine was of the kind usually--and in this case justly--described as "superior," but we did not have the same edge on our appetite.

We were not very talkative; I myself was almost taciturn, having before me the necessity of coming to an understanding with Harry, a task which I was far from relishing. But there were certain things I must know.

"What do you say to a ride down the valley?" said Harry. "They have excellent horses here; I tried one of 'em the other day."
"I trust that they bear no resemblance to my donkey," said I with feeling.
"Ugh!" said Le Mire with a shudder. "Never shall I forget that ride. Besides," she added, turning to Harry, "this morning I would be in the way. Don't you know that your brother has a thousand things to say to you? He wants to scold you; you must remember that you are a very bad boy."
And she sent me a glance half defiant, half indifferent, which plainly said: "If I fight you, I shall win; but I really care very little about it one way or the other."

After breakfast she went to her room--to have her hair dressed, she said--and I led Harry to a secluded corner of the magnificent grounds surrounding the hotel. During the walk we were both silent: Harry, I suppose, was wondering what I was going to say, while I was trying to make up my own mind.

"I suppose," he began abruptly, "you are going to tell me I have acted like a fool. Go ahead; the sooner it's over the better."
"Nothing of the sort," said I, glad that he had opened it.
He stopped short, demanding to know what I meant.
"Of course," I continued, "Le Mire is a most amazing prize. Not exactly my style perhaps, but there are few men in the world who wouldn't envy you. I congratulate you.

"But there were two things I feared for several reasons--Le Mire's fascination, your own youth and impulsive recklessness, and the rather curious mode of your departure. I feared first and most that you would marry her; second, that you would achieve odium and publicity for our name."

Harry was regarding me with a smile which had in it very little of amusement; it held a tinge of bitterness.
"And so," he burst out suddenly, "you were afraid I would marry her! Well, I would. The last time I asked her"--
again the smile--"was this morning."
  "And--"
  "She won't have me."
  "Bah!" I concealed my surprise, for I had really not thought it possible that the lad could be such a fool. "What's her game, Harry?"
  "Game the deuce! I tell you she won't have me."
  "You have asked her?"
  "A thousand times. I've begged her on my knees. Offered her--anything."
  "And she refuses?"
  "Positively."
  "Refuses?"
  "With thanks."

I stared at him for a moment in silence. Then I said: "Go and get her and bring her here. I'll find out what she wants," and sat down on a bench to wait. Harry departed for the hotel without a word.

In a few minutes he returned with Le Mire. I rose and proffered her a seat on the bench, which she accepted with a smile, and Harry sat down at her side. I stood in front of them.

"Le Mire," said I, and I believe I frowned, "my brother tells me that you have been offered the name of Lamar in marriage."
  "I have thanked him for it," said she with a smile.
  "And declined it."
  "And--declined it," she agreed.
  "Well," said I, "I am not a man of half measures, as you will soon see, Le Mire. Besides, I appreciate your power. On the day," I continued with slow precision--"on the day that you give me a contract to adhere to that refusal you may have my check for one million dollars."

She surprised me; I admit it. I had expected a burst of anger, with a touch of assumed hauteur; the surrender to follow, for I had made the stake high. But as I stood looking down at her, waiting for the flash of her eye, I was greeted by a burst of laughter--the frank laughter of genuine mirth. Then she spoke:
  "Oh, you Americans! You are so funny! A million dollars! It is impossible that I should be angry after such a compliment. Besides, you are so funny! Do you not know Le Mire? Am I not a princess if I desire it--tomorrow--today? Bah! There is the world--is it not mine? Mrs. Lamar? Ugh! Pardon me, my friend, but it is an ugly name.

"You know my ancestors? De L'Enclos, Montalais, Maintenon, La Marana! They were happy--in their way--and they were great. I must do nothing unworthy of them. Set your mind at rest, Mr. Lamar; but, really, you should have known better--you who have seen the world and Le Mire in Paris! And now our amusement is perhaps ended? Now we must return to that awful New York? Voila!"

Indeed I had not understood her. And how could I? There is only one such woman in a generation; sometimes none, for nature is sparing of her favorites. By pure luck she sat before me, this twentieth-century Marana, and I acknowledged her presence with a deep bow of apology and admiration.

"If you will forgive me, madame," I said, "I will--not attempt to make reparation, for my words were not meant for you. Consider them unspoken. As for our amusement, why need it end? Surely, we can forget? I see plainly I am not a St. Evremond, but neither am I a fool. My brother pleases you--well, there he is. As for myself, I shall either stay to take care of you two children, or I shall return to New York, as you desire."

Le Mire looked at me uncertainly for a moment, then turned to Harry and with a fluttering gesture took his hand in her own and patted it gaily. Then she laughed the happy laugh of a child as she said:
  "Then it is well! And, monsieur, you are less an American than I thought. By all means, stay--we shall be so jolly! Will we not, my little friend?"

Harry nodded, smiling at her. But there was a troubled look in his face.

Chapter IV.

ALLONS!

The events of the month that followed, though exciting enough, were of a similarity that would make their narration tedious, and I shall pass over them as speedily as possible.

We remained at Colorado Springs only two days after that morning in the garden. Le Mire, always in search of novelty, urged us away, and, since we really had nothing in view save the satisfaction of her whims, we consented. Salt Lake City was our next resting-place, but Le Mire tired of it in a day.

"I shall see the Pacific," she said to Harry and me, and we immediately set out for San Francisco.

Is it necessary for me to explain my attitude? But surely it explains itself. For one thing, I was disinclined to leave Harry in a position where he was so abundantly unable to take care of himself. For another, I take amusement
wherever it offers itself, and I was most certainly not bored.

The vagaries and caprices of a beautiful woman are always interesting, and when you are allowed to study them at close range without being under the necessity of acting the part of a faithful lover they become doubly so.

Le Mire managed Harry with wonderful tact and finesse; I sat back and laughed at the performance, now and then applying a check when her riotous imagination seemed likely to run away with us.

At San Francisco she achieved a triumph, notorious to the point of embarrassment. Paul Lamar, of New York, had introduced himself into the highest circle of society, and in turn had introduced his friends, Senor and Senora Ramal. The senora captured the town in a single night at a reception and ball on Telegraph Hill.

The day following there were several dozens of cards left for her at our hotel; invitations arrived by the score. She accepted two or three and made the fortune of two drawing-rooms; then suddenly tired of the sport and insulted a most estimable lady, our hostess, by certain remarks which inadvertently reached the ears of the lady's husband.

"You have done for yourself, Le Mire," I told her.

She answered me with a smile--straightway proceeded to issue invitations for an "entertainment" at our hotel. I had no idea what she meant to do; but gave the thing no thought, feeling certain that few, or none, of the invitations would be accepted--wherein I was badly mistaken, for not one was refused.

Well, Le Mire danced for them.

For myself it was barely interesting; I have passed the inner portals of the sacred temples of India, and the human body holds no surprises for me. But the good people of San Francisco were shocked, astonished, and entranced. Not a man in the room but was Le Mire's slave; even the women were forced to applaud. She became at once a goddess and an outcast.

The newspapers of the following morning were full of it, running the scale of eulogy, admiration, and wonder. And one of the articles, evidently written by a man who had been considerably farther east than San Francisco, ended with the following paragraph:

"In short, it was sublime, and with every movement and every gesture there was a something hidden, a suggestion of a personality and mysterious charm that we have always heretofore considered the exclusive property of just one woman in the world. But Desiree Le Mire is not in San Francisco; though we declare that the performance of last evening was more than enough to rouse certain suspicions, especially in view of Le Mire's mysterious disappearance from New York.

I took the paper to Desiree in her room, and while she read the article stood gazing idly from a window. It was about eleven in the morning; Harry had gone for a walk, saying that he would return in half an hour to join us at breakfast.

"Well?" said Desiree when she had finished.

"But it is not well," I retorted, turning to face her. "I do not reproach you; you are being amused, and so, I confess, am I. But your name--that is, Le Mire--has been mentioned, and discovery is sure to follow. We must leave San Francisco at once."

"But I find it entertaining."

"Nevertheless, we must leave."

"But if I choose to stay?"

"No; for Harry would stay with you."

"Well, then--I won't go."

"Le Mire, you will go?"

She sent me a flashing glance, and for a moment I half expected an explosion. Then, seeming to think better of it, she smiled:

"But where? We can't go west without falling into the ocean, and I refuse to return. Where?"

"Then we'll take the ocean."

She looked up questioning, and I continued:

"What would you say to a yacht--a hundred and twenty foot steamer, with a daredevil captain and the coziest little cabins in the world?"

"Bah!" Le Mire snapped her fingers to emphasize her incredulity. "It does not exist."

"But it does. Afloat and in commission, to be had for the asking and the necessary check. Dazzling white, in perfect order, a second Antoine for a chef, rooms furnished as you would your own villa. What do you say?"

"Really?" asked Le Mire with sparkling eyes.

"Really."

"Here--in San Francisco?"

"In the harbor. I saw her myself this morning."

"Then I say--allons! Ah, my friend, you are perfection! I want to see it. Now! May I? Come!"
I laughed at her eager enthusiasm as she sprang up from her chair.
"Le Mire, you are positively a baby. Something new to play with! Well, you shall have it. But you haven't had
breakfast. We'll go out to see her this afternoon; in fact, I have already made an appointment with the owner."
"Ah! Indeed, you are perfection. And--how well you know me." She paused and seemed to be searching for
words; then she said abruptly: "M. Lamar, I wish you to do me a favor."
"Anything, Le Mire, in or out of reason."
Again she hesitated; then:
"Do not call me Le Mire."
I laughed.
"But certainly, Senora Ramal. And what is the favor?"
"That."
"That--"
"Do not call me Le Mire--nor Senora Ramal."
"Well, but I must address you occasionally."
"Call me Desiree."
I looked at her with a smile.
"But I thought that that was reserved for your particular friends."
"So it is."
"Then, my dear senora, it would be impertinent of me."
"But if I request it?"
"I have said--anything in or out of reason. And, of course, I am one of the family."
"Is that the only reason?"
I began to understand her, and I answered her somewhat dryly: "My dear Desiree, there can be none other."
"Are you so--cold?"
"When I choose."
"Ah!" It was a sigh rather than an exclamation. "And yet, on the ship--do you remember? Look at me, M. Lamar.
Am I not--am I so little worthy of a thought?"
Her lips were parted with tremulous feeling; her eyes glowed with a strange fire, and yet were tender. Indeed,
she was "worthy of a thought"--dangerously so; I felt my pulse stir. It was necessary to assume a stoicism I was far
from feeling, and I looked at her with a cynical smile and spoke in a voice as carefully deliberate as I could make it.
"Le Mire," I said, "I could love you, but I won't." And I turned and left her without another word.
Why? I haven't the slightest idea. It must have been my vanity. Some few men had conquered Le Mire; others
had surrendered to her; certainly none had ever been able to resist her. There was a satisfaction in it. I walked about
the lobby of the hotel till Harry returned, idiotically pleased with myself.
At the breakfast table I acquainted Harry with our plans for a cruise, and he was fully as eager about it as Le
Mire had been. He wanted to weigh anchor that very afternoon. I explained that it was necessary to wait for funds
from New York.
"How much?" said he. "I'm loaded."
"I've sent for a hundred thousand," said I.
"Are you going to buy her?" he demanded with astonishment.
Then we fell to a discussion of routes. Harry was for Hawaii; Le Mire for South America.
We tossed a coin.
"Heads," said Desiree, and so it fell.
I requested Le Mire to keep to the hotel as closely as possible for the days during which it was necessary for us
to remain in San Francisco. She did so, but with an apparent effort.
I have never seen a creature so full of nervous energy and fire; only by severe restraint could she force herself to
even a small degree of composure. Harry was with her nearly every minute, though what they found to talk about
was beyond my comprehension. Neither was exactly bubbling over with ideas, and one cannot say "I love you" for
twenty-four hours a day.
It was a cool, sunny day in the latter part of October when we weighed anchor and passed through the Golden
Gate. I had leased the yacht for a year, and had made alternative plans in case Le Mire should tire of the sport, which
I thought extremely probable.
She and Harry were delighted with the yacht, which was not surprising, for she was as perfect a craft as I have
seen. Sides white as sea-foam; everything above decks of shining brass, below mahogany, and as clean and
shipshape as a Dutch kitchen. There were five rooms besides the captain's, and a reception-room, dining-room, and
library. We had provisioned her well, and had a jewel of a cook.
Our first port was Santa Catalina. We dropped anchor there at about five o'clock in the afternoon of such a day as only southern California can boast of, and the dingey was lowered to take us ashore.

"What is there?" asked Le Mire, pointing to the shore as we stood leaning on the rail waiting for the crew to place the ladder.

I answered: "Tourists."

Le Mire shrugged her shoulders. "Tourists? Bah! Merci, non. Allons!"

I laughed and went forward to the captain to tell him that madame did not approve of Santa Catalina. In another minute the dingey was back on its davits, the anchor up, and we were under way. Poor captain! Within a week he became used to Le Mire's sudden whims.

At San Diego we went ashore. Le Mire took a fancy to some Indian blankets, and Harry bought them for her; but when she expressed an intention to take an Indian girl—about sixteen or seventeen years old—aboard the yacht as a "companion," I interposed a firm negative. And, after all, she nearly had her way.

For a month it was "just one port after another." Mazatlan, San Bias, Manzanillo, San Salvador, Panama City—at each of these we touched, and visited sometimes an hour, sometimes two or three days. Le Mire was loading the yacht with all sorts of curious relics. Ugly or beautiful, useful or worthless, genuine or faked, it mattered not to her; if a thing suited her fancy she wanted it—and got it.

At Guayaquil occurred the first collision of wills. It was our second evening in port. We were dining on the deck of the yacht, with half a dozen South American generals and admirals as guests.

Toward the end of the dinner Le Mire suddenly became silent and remained for some minutes lost in thought; then, suddenly, she turned to the bundle of gold lace at her side with a question:

"Where is Guayaquil?"

He stared at her in amazement.

"It is there, senora," he said finally, pointing to the shore lined with twinkling lights.

"I know, I know," said Le Mire impatiently; "but where is it? In what country?"

The poor fellow, too surprised to be offended, stammered the name of his native land between gasps, while Harry and I had all we could do to keep from bursting into laughter.

"Ah," said Desiree in the tone of one who has made an important discovery, "I thought so. Ecuador. Monsieur, Quito is in Ecuador."

The general—or admiral, I forget which—I acknowledged the correctness of her geography with a profound bow.

"But yes. I have often heard of Quito, monsieur. It is a very interesting place. I shall go to Quito."

There ensued immediately a babel. Each of our guests insisted on the honor of accompanying us inland, and the thing would most assuredly have ended in a bloody quarrel on the captain's polished deck, if I had not interposed in a firm tone:

"But, gentlemen, we are not going to Quito."

Le Mire looked at me—and such a look! Then she said in a tone of the utmost finality:

"I am going to Quito."

I shook my head, smiling at her, whereupon she became furious.

"M. Lamar," she burst forth, "I tell you I am going to Quito! In spite of your smile! Yes! Do you hear? I shall go!"

Without a word I took a coin from my pocket and held it up. I had come to know Le Mire. She frowned for a moment in an evident attempt to maintain her anger, then an irresistible smile parted her lips and she clapped her hands gaily.

"Very well," she cried, "toss, monsieur! Heads!"

The coin fell tails, and we did not go to Quito, much to the disappointment of our guests. Le Mire forgot all about it in ten minutes.

Five days later we dropped anchor at Callao.

This historic old port delighted Le Mire at once. I had told her something of its story: its successive bombardments by the liberators from Chile, the Spanish squadron, buccaneering expeditions from Europe and the Chilean invaders; not to mention earthquakes and tidal waves. We moored alongside the stone pier by the lighthouse; the old clock at its top pointed to the hour of eight in the morning.

But as soon as Le Mire found out that Lima was but a few miles away, Callao no longer held any interest for her. We took an afternoon train and arrived at the capital in time for dinner.

There it was, in picturesque old Lima, that Le Mire topped her career. On our first afternoon we betook ourselves to the fashionable paseo, for it was a band day, and all Lima was out.

In five minutes every eye in the gay and fashionable crowd was turned on Le Mire. Then, as luck would have it, I met, quite by chance, a friend of mine who had come to the University of San Marcos some years before as a
professor of climatology. He introduced us, with an air of importance, to several of the groups of fashion, and finally to the president himself. That night we slept as guests under the roof of a luxurious and charming country house at Miraflores.

Le Mire took the capital by storm. Her style of beauty was peculiarly fitted for their appreciation, for pallor is considered a mark of beauty among Lima ladies. But that could scarcely account for her unparalleled triumph. I have often wondered--was it the effect of a premonition?

The president himself sat by her at the opera. There were two duels attributed to her within a week; though how the deuce that was possible is beyond me.

On society day at the bull-ring the cues were given by Le Mire; her hand flung the rose to the matador, while the eight thousand excited spectators seemed uncertain whether they were applauding her or him. Lima was hers, and never have I seen a fortnight so crowded with incidents.

But Le Mire soon tired of it, as was to be expected. She greeted me one morning at the breakfast table:

"My friend Paul, let us go to Cerro de Pasco. They have silver--thousands and thousands of tons--and what you call them? Ornaments."

"And then the Andes?" I suggested.

"Why not?"

"But, my dear Desiree, what shall we do with the yacht?"

"Pooh! There is the captain. Come--shall I say please?"

So we went to Cerro de Pasco. I wrote to Captain Harris, telling him not to expect us for another month or so, and sending him sufficient funds to last till our return.

I verily believe that every one of note in Lima came to the railroad station to see us off.

Our compartment was a mass of flowers, which caused me to smile, for Le Mire, curiously enough, did not like them. When we had passed out of the city she threw them out of the window, laughing and making jokes at the expense of the donors. She was in the best of humor.

We arrived at Oroya late in the afternoon, and departed for Cerro de Pasco by rail on the following morning.

This ride of sixty-eight miles is unsurpassed in all the world. Snow-capped peaks, bottomless precipices, huge masses of boulders that seem ready to crush the train surround you on every side, and now and then are directly above or beneath you.

Le Mire was profoundly impressed; indeed, I had not supposed her to possess the sensibility she displayed; and as for me, I was most grateful to her for having suggested the trip. You who find yourselves too well-acquainted with the Rockies and the Alps and the Himalayas should try the Andes. There is a surprise waiting for you.

But for the story.

We found Cerro de Pasco, interesting as its situation is, far short of our expectations. It is a mining town, filled with laborers and speculators, noisy, dirty, and coarse. We had been there less than forty-eight hours when I declared to Harry and Le Mire my intention of returning at once.

"But the Andes!" said Le Mire. "Shall we not see them?"

"Well--there they are."

I pointed through the window of the hotel.

"Bah! And you call yourself a traveler? Look! The snow! My friend Paul, must I ask twice for a favor?"

Once again we tossed a coin.

Ah, if Le Mire had only seen the future! And yet--I often wonder--would she have turned her back? For the woman craved novelty and adventure, and the gameness of centuries was in her blood--well, she had her experience, which was shared only in part by Harry and myself.

Those snow-capped peaks! Little did we guess what they held for us. We were laughing, I remember, as we left behind us the edge of civilization represented by Cerro de Pasco.

We found it impossible to procure a complete outfit in the mining town, and were forced to despatch a messenger to Lima. He returned in two days with mules, saddles, saddle-bags, boots, leather leggings, knickerbockers, woolen ponchos, and scores of other articles which he assured us were absolutely necessary for any degree of comfort. By the time we were ready to start we had a good-sized pack-train on our hands.

The proprietor of the hotel found us an arriero, whom he declared to be the most competent and trustworthy guide in all the Andes--a long, loose-jointed fellow with an air of complete indifference habitually resting on his yellow, rather sinister-looking face. Le Mire did not like him, but I certainly preferred the hotel proprietor's experience and knowledge to her volatile fancy, and engaged the arriero on the spot.

Our outfit was complete, and everything in readiness, when Harry suddenly announced that he had decided not to go, nor to allow Le Mire to do so.

"I don't like it," he said in troubled tones. "I tell you, Paul, I don't like it. I've been talking to some of the miners
and arrieros, and the thing is foolhardy and dangerous."

Then, seeing the expression on my face, he continued hastily: "Oh, not for myself. You know me; I'll do anything that any one else will do, and more, if I can. But Desiree! I tell you, if anything happened to her I--well--"

I cut him short:

"My dear boy, the idea is Desiree's own. And to talk of danger where she is concerned! She would laugh at you."

"She has," Harry confessed with a doubtful smile.

I clapped him roughly on the shoulder.

"Come, brace up! Our caravan awaits us--and see, the fairy, too. Are you ready, Desiree?"

She came toward us from the inner rooms of the hotel, smiling, radiant. I shall never forget the picture she presented. She wore white knickerbockers, a white jacket, tan-leather boots and leggings and a khaki hat.

Her golden hair, massed closely about her ears and upon her forehead, shimmered in the bright sun dazzlingly; her eyes sparkled; her little white teeth gleamed in a happy, joyous smile.

We lifted her to the back of her mule, then mounted our own. Suddenly a recollection shot through my brain with remarkable clearness, and I turned to Le Mire:

"Desiree, do you know the first time I ever saw you? It was in an electric brougham at the Gare du Nord. This is somewhat different, my lady."

"And infinitely more interesting," she answered. "Are you ready? See that stupid arriero! Ah! After all, he knew what he was about. Then, messieurs--allons!"

The arriero, receiving my nod uttered a peculiar whistle through his teeth. The mules pricked up their ears, then with one common movement started forward.

"Adios! Adios, senora! Adios, senores!"

With the cry of our late host sounding in our ears we passed down the narrow little street of Cerro de Pasco on our way to the snow-capped peaks of the Andes.

Chapter V.
The Cave of the Devil.

You may remember that I made some remark concerning the difficulty of the ascent of Pike's Peak. Well, that is mere child's play--a morning constitutional compared to the paths we found ourselves compelled to follow in the great Cordillera.

Nor was it permitted us to become gradually accustomed to the danger; we had not been two hours out of Cerro de Pasco before we found ourselves creeping along a ledge so narrow there was scarcely room for the mules to place their hoofs together, over a precipice three thousand feet in the air--straight. And, added to this was the discomfort, amounting at times to positive pain, caused by the soroche.

Hardly ever did we find ground sufficiently broad for a breathing space, save when our arriero led us, almost by magic it seemed, to a camping place for the night. We would ascend the side of a narrow valley; on one hand roared a torrent some hundreds of feet below; on the other rose an uncompromising wall of rock. So narrow would be the track that as I sat astride my mule my outside leg would be hanging over the abyss.

But the grandeur, the novelty, and the variety of the scenery repaid us; and Le Mire loved the danger for its own sake. Time and again she swayed far out of her saddle until her body was literally suspended in the air above some frightful chasm, while she turned her head to laugh gaily at Harry and myself, who brought up the rear.

"But Desiree! If the girth should break!"

"Oh, but it won't."

"But if it should?"

"Tra-la-la! Come, catch me!"

And she would try to urge her mule into a trot--a futile effort, since the beast had a much higher regard for his skin than she had for hers; and the mule of the arriero was but a few feet ahead.

Thus we continued day after day, I can't say how many. There was a fascination about the thing that was irresistible. However high the peak we had ascended, another could be seen still higher, and that, too, must be scaled.

The infinite variety of the trail, its surprises, its new dangers, its apparent vanishings into thin air, only to be found, after an all but impossible curve, up the side of another cliff, coaxed us on and on; and when or where we would have been able to say, "thus far and no farther" is an undecided problem to this day.

About three o'clock one afternoon we camped in a small clearing at the end of a narrow valley. Our arriero, halting us at that early hour, had explained that there was no other camping ground within six hours' march, and no hacienda or pueblo within fifty miles. We received his explanation with the indifference of those to whom one day is like every other day, and amused ourselves by inspecting our surroundings while he prepared the evening meal and arranged the camp beds.
Back of us lay the trail by which we had approached—a narrow, sinuous ribbon clinging to the side of the huge cliffs like a snake fastened to a rock. On the left side, immediately above us, was a precipice some thousand feet in height; on the right a series of massive boulders, of quartzite and granite, misshapen and lowering.

There were three, I remember, placed side by side like three giant brothers; then two or three smaller ones in a row, and beyond these many others ranged in a mass unevenly, sometimes so close together that they appeared to be jostling one another out of the way.

For several days we had been in the region of perpetual snow; and soon we gathered about the fire which the arriero had kindled for our camp. Its warmth was grateful, despite our native woolen garments and heavy ponchos.

The wind whistled ominously; a weird, senseless sound that smote the ear with madness. The white of the snow and the dull gray of the rocks were totally unrelieved by any touch of green or play of water; a spot lonely as the human soul and terrifying as death.

Harry had gone to examine the hoofs of his mule, which had limped slightly during the afternoon; Le Mire and I sat side by side near the fire, gazing at the play of the flames. For some minutes we had been silent.

"In Paris, perhaps—" she began suddenly, then stopped short and became again silent.

But I was fast dropping into melancholy and wanted to hear her voice, and I said:

"Well? In Paris—"

She looked at me, her eyes curiously somber, but did not speak. I insisted:

"You were saying, Desiree, in Paris—"

She made a quick movement and laughed unpleasantly.

"Yes, my friend—but it is useless. I was thinking of you. 'Ah! A card! Mr. Paul Lamar. Show him in, Julie. But no, let him wait—I am not at home.' That, my friend, would be in Paris."

I stared at her.

"For Heaven's sake, Desiree, what nonsense is this?"

She disregarded my question as she continued:

"Yes, that is how it would be. Why do I talk thus? The mountains hypnotize me. The snow, the solitude—for I am alone. Your brother, what is he? And you, Paul, are scarcely aware of my existence.

"I had my opportunity with you, and I laughed it away. And as for the future—look! Do you see that waste of snow and ice, glittering, cold, pitiless? Ha! Well, that is my grave."

I tried to believe that she was merely amusing herself, but the glow in her eyes did not proceed from mirth. I followed her fixed gaze across the trackless waste and, shivering, demanded:

"What morbid fancy is this, Desiree? Come, it is scarcely pleasant."

She rose and crossed the yard or so of ground between us to my side. I felt her eyes above me, and try as I would I could not look up to meet them. Then she spoke, in a voice low but curiously distinct:

"Paul, I love you.

"My dear Desiree!"

"I love you."

At once I was myself, calm and smiling. I was convinced that she was acting, and I dislike to spoil a good scene. So I merely said:

"I am flattered, senora."

She sighed, placing her hand on my shoulder.

"You laugh at me. You are wrong. Have I chosen this place for a flirtation? Before, I could not speak; now you must know. There have been many men in my life, Paul; some fools, some not so, but none like you. I have never said, 'I love you.' I say it now. Once you held my hand—you have never kissed me."

I rose to my feet, smiling, profoundly fatuous, and made as if to put my arm around her.

"A kiss? Is that all, Desiree? Well—"

But I had mistaken her tone and overreached. Not a muscle did she move, but I felt myself repulsed as by a barrier of steel. She remained standing perfectly still, searching me with a gaze that left me naked of levity and cynicism and the veneer of life; and finally she murmured in a voice sweet with pain:

"Must you kill me with words, Paul? I did not mean that—now. It is too late."

Then she turned swiftly and called to Harry, who came running over to her only to meet with some trivial request, and a minute later the arriero announced dinner.

I suppose that the incident had passed with her, as it had with me; little did I know how deeply I had wounded her. And when I discovered my mistake, some time later and under very different circumstances, it very nearly cost me my life, and Harry's into the bargain.

During the meal Le Mire was in the jolliest of moods apparently. She retold the tale of Balzac's heroine who crossed the Andes in the guise of a Spanish officer, performing wondrous exploits with her sword and creating
havoc among the hearts of the fair ladies who took the dashing captain's sex for granted from his clothing.

The story was a source of intense amusement to Harry, who insisted on the recital of detail after detail, until Desiree allowed her memory to take a vacation and substitute pure imagination. Nor was the improvisation much inferior to the original.

It was still light when we finished dinner, a good three hours till bedtime. And since there was nothing better to do, I called to the arriero and asked him to conduct us on a tour of exploration among the mass of boulders, gray and stern, that loomed up on our right.

He nodded his head in his usual indifferent manner, and fifteen minutes later we started, on foot. The arriero led the way, with Harry at his heels, and Desiree and I brought up the rear.

Thrice I tried to enter into conversation with her; but each time she shook her head without turning round, and I gave it up. I was frankly puzzled by her words and conduct of an hour before; was it merely one of the trickeries of Le Mire or--

I was interested in the question as one is always interested in a riddle; but I tossed it from my mind, promising myself a solution on the morrow, and gave my attention to the vagaries of nature about me.

We were passing through a cleft between two massive rocks, some three or four hundred yards in length. Ahead of us, at the end of the passage, a like boulder fronted us.

Our footfalls echoed and reechoed from wall to wall; the only other sound was the eerie moaning of the wind that reached our ears with a faintness which only served to increase its effect. Here and there were apertures large enough to admit the entrance of a horse and rider, and in many places the sides were crumbling.

I was reflecting, I remember, that the formation was undoubtedly one of limestone, with here and there a layer of quartzite, when I was aroused by a shout from Harry.

I approached. Harry and Desiree, with Felipe, the arriero, had halted and were gazing upward at the wall of rock which barred the exit from the passage. Following their eyes, I saw lines carved on the rock, evidently a rude and clumsy attempt to reproduce the form of some animal.

"I say it's a llama," Harry was saying as I stopped at his side. "My dear boy," returned Desiree, "don't you think I know a horse when I see one?"

"When you see one, of course," said Harry sarcastically. "But who ever saw a horse with a neck like that?"

As for me, I was really interested, and I turned to the arriero for information.

"Si, senor," said Felipe, "Un caballo."

"But who carved it?"

Felipe shrugged his shoulders.

"Is it new--Spanish?"

Another shrug. I became impatient.

"Have you no tongue?" I demanded. "Speak! If you don't know the author of that piece of equine art say so."

"I know, senor."

"You know?"

"Si, senor."

"Then, for Heaven's sake, tell us."

"His story?" pointing to the figure on the rock.

"Yes, idiot!"

Without a sign of interest, Felipe turned twice around, found a comfortable rock, sat down, rolled a cigarette, lighted it, and began. He spoke in Spanish dialect; I shall preserve the style as far as translation will permit.

"Many, many years ago, senor, Atahualpa, the Inca, son of Huayna-Capac, was imprisoned at Cajamarco. Four, five hundred years ago, it was. By the great Pizarro. And there was gold at Cuzco, to the south, and Atahualpa, for his ransom, ordered that this gold be brought to Pizarro."

"Messengers carried the order like the wind, so swift that in five days the priests of the sun carried their gold from the temples to save the life of Atahualpa."

Felipe paused, puffing at his cigarette, glanced at his audience, and continued:

"But Hernando Pizarro, brother of the great Pizarro, suspected a delay in the carriers of gold. From Pachacamac he came with twenty horsemen, sowing terror in the mountains, carrying eighty loads of gold. Across the Juaja River and past Lake Chinchaycocha they came, till they arrived at the city of Huanuco."

"There were temples and gold and priests and soldiers. But when the soldiers of the Inca saw the horses of the Spaniards and heard the guns, they became frightened and ran away like little children, carrying their gold. Never before had they seen white men, or guns, or horses."

"With them came many priests and women, to the snow of the mountains. And after many days of suffering they
came to a cave, wherein they disappeared and no more were seen, nor could Hernando Pizarro and his twenty
horsemens find them to procure their gold.

"And before they entered the cave they scaled a rock near its entrance and carved thereon the likeness of a horse
to warn their Inca brethren of the Spaniards who had driven them from Huanuco. That is his story, senor."

"But who told you all this, Felipe?"
The arriero shrugged his shoulders and glanced about, as much as to say, "It is in the wind."

"But the cave?" cried Desiree. "Where is the cave?"

"It is there, senora," said Felipe, pointing through a passage to the right.

Then nothing would do for Desiree but to see the cave. The arriero informed her that it was difficult of access,
but she turned the objection aside with contempt and commanded him to lead.

Harry, of course, was with her, and I followed somewhat unwillingly; for, though Felipe's history was fairly
accurate, I was inclined to regard his fable of the disappearing Incas as a wild tradition of the mountains.

He had spoken aright--the path to the cave was not an easy one. Here and there deep ravines caused us to make a
wide detour or risk our necks on perilous steeps.

Finally we came to a small clearing, which resembled nothing so much as the bottom of a giant well, and in the
center of one of the steep walls was an opening some thirty or forty feet square, black and rugged, and somehow
terrifying.

It was the entrance to the cave.

There Felipe halted.

"Here, senor. Here entered the Incas of Huanuco with their gold."

He shivered as he spoke, and I fancied that his face grew pale.

"We shall explore it!" cried Desiree, advancing.

"But no, senora!" The arriero was positively trembling. "No! Senor, do not let her go within! Many times have
my countrymen entered in search of the gold, and americanos, too, and never did they return. It is a cave of the
devil, senor. He hides in the blackness and none who enter may escape him."

Desiree was laughing gaily.

"Then I shall visit the devil!" she exclaimed, and before either Harry or I could reach her she had sprung across
the intervening space to the entrance and disappeared within.

With shouts of consternation from Felipe ringing in our ears, we leaped after her.

"Desiree!" cried Harry. "Come back, Desiree!"

There was no answer, but echoing back from the night before us came faint reverberations--could they be
footsteps? What folly! For I had thought that she had merely intended to frighten poor Felipe, and now--

"Desiree!" Harry called again with all the strength of his lungs. "Desiree!"

Again there was no answer. Then we entered the cave together. I remember that as we passed within I turned and
saw Felipe staring with white face and eyes filled with terror.

A hundred feet and we were encompassed by the most intense darkness. I muttered: "This is folly; let us get a
light," and tried to hold Harry back. But he pushed me aside and groped on, crying: "Desiree! Come back, Desiree!"

What could I do? I followed.

Suddenly a scream resounded through the cavern. Multiplied and echoed by the black walls, it was inhuman,
shot with terror, profoundly horrible.

A tremor ran through me from head to foot; beside me I heard Harry gasp with a nameless fear. An instant later
we dashed forward into the darkness.

How long we ran I could never tell; probably a few seconds, possibly as many minutes.

On we rushed, blindly, impelled not by reason, but by the memory of that terrible cry, side by side, gasping,
fearful. And then--

A step into thin air--a mighty effort to recover a footing--a wild instant of despair and pawing helpless agony.
Then blackness and oblivion.

Chapter VI.

CAPTURED.

The fall--was it ten feet or a thousand? I shall never know. Hurtling headlong through space, a man can scarcely
be expected to keep his wits about him.

Actually, my only impression was of righteous indignation; my memory is that I cursed aloud, but Harry denies
it.

But it could not have been for long, for when we struck the water at the bottom we were but slightly stunned by
the impact. To this Harry has since agreed; he must have been as lucky as myself, for I took it headlong with a clean
cleavage.
I rose to the top, sputtering, and flung out my arms in the attempt to swim—or, rather, to keep afloat—and was overjoyed to find my arms and legs answer to the call of the brain.

About me was blackest night and utter silence, save a low, unbroken murmur, unlike any other sound, hardly to be heard. It was in my effort to account for it that I first became aware of the fact that the water was a stream, and a moving one—moving with incredible swiftness, smooth and all but silent. As soon as I became convinced of this I gave up all attempt to swim, and satisfied myself with keeping my head above the surface and drifting with the current.

Then I thought of Harry, and called his name aloud many times. The reverberations throughout the cave were as the report of a thousand cannon; but there was no response.

The echoes became fainter and fainter and died away, and again all was silence and impenetrable night, while I battled with the strong suction of the unseen current, which was growing swifter and swifter, and felt my strength begin to leave me.

Terror, too, began to call to me as the long minutes passed endlessly by. I thought, "If I could only see!" and strained my eyes in the effort till I was forced to close them from the dizzy pain. The utter, complete darkness hid from me all knowledge of what I passed or what awaited me beyond.

The water, carrying me swiftly onward with its silent, remorseless sweep, was cold and black; it pressed with tremendous power against me; now and then I was forced beneath the surface and fought my way back, gasping and all but exhausted.

I forgot Desiree and Harry; I lost all consciousness of where I was and what I was doing; the silent fury of the stream and the awful blackness maddened me; I plunged and struggled desperately, blindly, sobbing with rage. This could not have lasted much longer; I was very near the end.

Suddenly, with a thrill of joy, I realized that the speed of the current was decreasing. Then a reaction of despair seized me; I tried to strangle hope and resign myself to the worst. But soon there was no longer any doubt; the water carried me slower and slower.

I floated with little difficulty, wondering—could it be an approach to a smaller outlet which acted as a dam? Or was it merely a lessening of the incline of the bed of the stream? I cursed the darkness for my helplessness.

Finally the water became absolutely still, as I judged by the absence of pressure on my body, and I turned sharply at a right angle and began to swim. My weariness left me as by magic, and I struck out with bold and sweeping strokes; and by that lack of caution all but destroyed myself when my head suddenly struck against a wall of stone, unseen in the darkness.

I was stunned completely and sank; but the ducking revived me; and when I returned to the surface I swam a few careful strokes, searching for the wall. It was not there, and I had no idea of its direction. But I had now learned caution; and by swimming a few feet first one way, then another, and taking care not to go far in any one direction, I finally discovered it.

My hand easily reached the top, and, grasping the slippery surface with a grip made firm by despair, and concentrating every ounce of strength in one final effort, I drew myself out of the water and fell completely exhausted on the ground.

Under such circumstances time has no place in a man's calculations; he is satisfied to breathe. I believe that I lay barely conscious for several hours, but it may have been merely as many minutes. Then I felt life stir within me; I stretched my arms and legs and sat up. Gradually entered my mind the thought of Desiree and Harry and the Andes above and Felipe shuddering with terror as he flew from the cave of the devil.

First came Harry; but hope did not enter. It was inconceivable that he, too, should have escaped that fearful torrent; stupendous luck alone had saved me from being dashed senseless against the rocks and guided me to the ledge on which I rested.

Then he was gone! I had no thought of my own peril. I had gone through the world with but little regard for what it held; nothing had been sacred to me; no affection had been more than a day's caprice; I had merely sucked amusement from its bitter fruit.

But I loved Harry; I realized it with something like astonishment. He was dear to me; a keen, intense pain contracted my chest at the thought of having lost him; tears filled my eyes; and I raised up my voice and sang out wildly:

"Harry! Harry, lad! Harry!"

The cavern resounded. The call went from wall to wall, then back again, floating through black space with a curious tremor, and finally died away in some dim, unseen corridor. And then—then came an answering call! Owing to the conflicting echoes of the cavern, the tone could not be recognized. But the word was unmistakable; it was "Paul."

I sprang to my feet with a shout, then stood listening. Out of the blackness surrounding me came the words, in
Harry's voice, much lower, but distinct:

"Paul! Paul, where are you?"

"Thank Heaven!" I breathed; and I answered:

"Here, Harry boy, here."

"But where?"

"I don't know. On a ledge of rock at the edge of the water. Where are you?"

"Same place. Which side are you on?"

"The right side," I answered with heartfelt emphasis. "That is to say, the outside. If it weren't for this infernal darkness--Listen! How far away does my voice sound?"

But the innumerable echoes of the cavern walls made it impossible to judge of distance by sound. We tried it over and over; sometimes it seemed that we were only a few feet apart, sometimes a mile or more.

Then Harry spoke in a whisper, and his voice appeared to be directly in my ear. Never have I seen a night so completely black as that cavern; we had had several hours, presumably, for our eyes to adjust themselves to the phenomenon; but when I held my hand but six inches in front of my face I could not get even the faintest suggestion of its outline.

"This is useless," I declared finally. "We must experiment. Harry!"

"Yes."

"Turn to your left and proceed carefully along the edge. I'll turn to my right. Go easy, lad; feel your way."

I crawled on my hands and knees, no faster than a snail, feeling every inch of the ground. The surface was wet and slippery, and in places sloped at an angle that made me hang on for dear life to keep from shooting off into space.

Meantime I kept calling to Harry and he to me; but, on account of our painfully slow progress, it was half an hour or more before we discovered that the distance between us was being increased instead of lessened.

He let fly an oath at this, and his tone was dangerous; no wonder if the lad was half crazed! I steadied him as well as I could with word of encouragement, and instructed him to turn about and proceed to the right of his original position. I, also, turned to the left.

Our hope of meeting lay in the probability that the ledge surrounded a circular body of water and was continuous. At some point, of course, was the entrance of the stream which had carried us, and at some other point there was almost certainly an outlet; but we trusted to luck to avoid these. Our chances were less than one in a thousand; but, failing that, some other means must be invented.

The simplest way would have been for me to take to the water and swim across to Harry, counting on his voice as a guide; but the conflicting echoes produced by the slightest sound rendered such an attempt dangerous.

I crept along that wet, slimy, treacherous surface, it seemed, for hours. I could see nothing--absolutely nothing; everything was black void; it was hard to appreciate reality in such a nightmare. On the one side, nameless dangers; on the other, the unseen, bottomless lake; enough, surely, to take a man's nerve. My fear for Harry killed anxiety on my own account. We kept continually calling:

"Harry!"

"Yes."

"Steady."

"Yes. I'm coming along. I say, we're closer, Paul."

I hesitated to agree with him, but finally there was no longer any doubt of it. His voice began to reach me almost in natural tones, which meant that we were near enough for the vibrations to carry without interference from the walls.

Nearer still it came; it was now only a matter of a few feet; Harry gave a cry of joy, and immediately afterward I heard his low gasp of terror and the sound of his wild scrambling to regain a foothold. In his excitement he had forgotten caution and had slipped to the edge of the water.

I dared not try to go to his assistance; so I crouched perfectly still and called to him to throw himself flat on his face. How my eyes strained despairingly as I cursed the pitiless darkness! Then the scrambling ceased and the boy's voice sounded:

"All right, Paul! All right! Gad, I nearly went!"

A minute later I held his hand in mine. At that point the incline was at a sharp angle, and we lay flat on our backs. For many minutes we lay silently gripping hands; Harry was trembling violently from nervous fatigue, and I myself was unable to speak.

What strength is there in companionship! Alone, either of us would probably have long before succumbed to the strain of our horrible situation; but we both took hope and courage from that hand-clasp.

Finally he spoke:
"In Heaven's name, where are we, Paul?"
"You know as much as I do, Harry. This cursed darkness makes it impossible even to guess at anything. According to Felipe, we are being entertained by the devil."
"But where are we? What happened? My head is dizzy--I don't know--"
I gripped his hand.
"And no wonder. 'Tis hardly an every-day occurrence to ride an underground river several miles under the Andes. Above us a mountain four miles high, beneath us a bottomless lake, round us darkness. Not a very cheerful prospect, Hal; but, thank Heaven, we take it together! It is a grave--ours and hers. I guess Desiree knew what she was talking about."
There came a cry from Harry's lips--a cry of painful memory:
"Desiree! I had forgotten, Desiree!"
"She is probably better off than we are," I assured him.
I felt his gaze--I could not see it--and I continued:
"We may as well meet the thing squarely like men. Pull yourself together, Harry; as for Desiree, let us hope that she is dead. It's the best thing that could happen to her."
"Then we are--no, it isn't possible."
"Harry boy, we're buried alive! There! That's the worst of it. Anything better than that is velvet."
"But there must be a way out, Paul! And Desiree--Desiree--"
His voice faltered. I clapped him roughly on the shoulder.
"Keep your nerve. As for a way out--at the rate that stream descends it must have carried us thousands of feet beneath the mountain. There is probably a mile of solid rock between us and the sunshine. You felt the strength of that current; you might as well try to swim up Niagara."
"But there must be an outlet at the other end."
"Yes, and most probably forty or fifty miles away--that's the distance to the western slope. Besides, how can we find it? And there may be none. The water is most probably gradually absorbed by the porous formation of the rocks, and that is what causes this lake."
"But why isn't it known? Felipe said that the cave had been explored. Why didn't they discover the stream?"
Well, it was better to talk of that than nothing; at least, it kept Harry from his childish cries for Desiree. So I explained that the precipice over which we had fallen was presumably of recent origin.
Geologically the Andes are yet in a chaotic and formative condition; huge slides of Silurian slates and diorite are of frequent occurrence. A ridge of one of these softer stones had most probably been encased in the surrounding granite for many centuries; then, loosened by water or by time, had crumbled and slid into the stream below.
"And," I finished, "we followed it."
"Then we may find another," said Harry hopefully.
I agreed that it was possible. Then he burst out:
"In the name of Heaven, don't be so cool! We can't get out till we try. Come! And who knows--we may find Desiree."
Then I decided it was best to tell him. Evidently the thought had not entered his mind, and it was best for him to realize the worst. I gripped his hand tighter as I said:
"Nothing so pleasant, Harry. Because we're going to starve to death."
"Starve to death?" he exclaimed. Then he added simply, with an oddly pathetic tone: "I hadn't thought of that."
After that we lay silent for many minutes in that awful darkness. Thoughts and memories came and went in my brain with incredible swiftness; pictures long forgotten presented themselves; an endless, jumbled panorama. They say that a drowning man reviews his past life in the space of a few seconds; it took me a little more time, but the job was certainly a thorough one. Nor did I find it more interesting in retrospect than it had been in reality.
I closed my eyes to escape the darkness. It was maddening; easy enough then to comprehend the hysterics of the blind and sympathize with them. It finally reached a point where I was forced to grit my teeth to keep from breaking out into curses; I could lie still no longer, exhausted as I was, and Harry, too. I turned on him:
"Come on, Hal; let's move."
"Where?" he asked in a tone devoid of hope.
"Anywhere--away from this beastly water. We must dry out our clothing; no use dying like drowned rats. If I only had a match!"
We rose to our hands and knees and crawled painfully up the slippery incline. Soon we had reached dry ground and stood upright; then, struck by a sudden thought, I turned to Harry:
"Didn't you drink any of that water?"
He answered: "No."
"Well, let's try it. It may be our last drink, Hal; make it a good one."

We crept back down to the edge of the lake (I call it that in my ignorance of its real nature), and, settling myself as firmly as possible, I held Harry's hand while he lowered himself carefully into the water. He was unable to reach its surface with his mouth without letting go of my hand, and I shook off my poncho and used it as a line.

"How does it taste?" I asked.

"Fine!" was the response. "It must be clear as a bell. Lord, I didn't know I was so thirsty!"

I was not ignorant of the fact that there was an excellent chance of the water being unhealthful, possibly poisoned, what with the tertiary deposits of copper ores in the rock-basins; but the thought awakened hope rather than fear. There is a choice even in death.

But when I had pulled Harry up and descended myself I soon found that there was no danger--or chance. The water had a touch of alkali, but nothing more.

Then we crept back up the wet ledge, and once more stood on dry ground.

The surface was perfectly level, and we set off at a brisk pace, hand in hand, directly away from the lake. But when, about a hundred yards off, we suddenly bumped our heads against a solid wall of rock, we decided to proceed with more caution.

The darkness was intensified, if anything. We turned to the right and groped along the wall, which was smooth as glass and higher than my best reach. It seemed to the touch to be slightly convex, but that may have been delusion.

We had proceeded in this manner some hundred yards or more, advancing cautiously, when we came to a break in the wall. A few feet farther the wall began again.

"It's a tunnel," said Harry.

I nodded, forgetting he could not see me. "Shall we take it?"

"Anything on a chance," he answered, and we entered the passage.

It was quite narrow--so narrow that we were forced to advance very slowly, feeling our way to avoid colliding with the walls. The ground was strewn with fragments of rock, and a hasty step meant an almost certain fall and a bruised shin. It was tedious work and incredibly fatiguing.

We had not rested a sufficient length of time to allow our bodies to recuperate from the struggle with the torrent; also, we began to feel the want of food. Harry was the first to falter, but I spurred him on. Then he stumbled and fell and lay still.

"Are you hurt?" I asked anxiously, bending over him.

"No," was the answer. "But I'm tired--tired to death--and I want to sleep."

I was tempted myself, but I brought him to his feet, from some impulse I know not what. For what was the use? One spot was as good as another. However, we struggled on.

Another hour and the passage broadened into a clearing. At least so it seemed; the walls abruptly parted to the right and left. And still the impenetrable, maddening darkness and awful silence!

We gave it up; we could go no farther. A few useless minutes we wasted, searching for a soft spot to lie on--moss, reeds, anything. We found none, of course; but even the hard, unyielding rock was grateful to our exhausted bodies. We lay side by side, using our ponchos for pillows; our clothing at least was dry.

I do not know how long I slept, but it seemed to me that I had barely dozed off when I was awakened by something--what?

There was no sound to my strained ears. I sat up, gazing intently into the darkness, shuddering without apparent reason. Then I reflected that nothing is dangerous to a man who faces death, and I laughed aloud--then trembled at the sound of my own voice. Harry was in sound sleep beside me; his regular breathing told of its depth.

Again I lay down, but I could not sleep. Some instinct, long forgotten, quivered within me, telling me that we were no longer alone. And soon my ear justified it.

At first it was not a sound, but the mere shadow of one. It was rhythmic, low, breathing like a pulse. What could it be? Again I sat up, listening and peering into the darkness. And this time I was not mistaken--there was a sound, rustling, sibilant.

Little by little it increased, or rather approached, until it sounded but a few feet from me on every side, sinister and menacing. It was the silent, suppressed breathing of something living--whether animal or man--creeping ever nearer.

Then was the darkness doubly horrible. I sat paralyzed with my utter helplessness, though fear, thank Heaven, did not strike me! I could hear no footstep; no sound of any kind but that low, rushing breathing; but it now was certain that whatever the thing was, it was not alone.

From every side I heard it--closer, closer--until finally I felt the hot, fetid breath in my very face. My nerves quivered in disgust, not far from terror.
I sprang to my feet with a desperate cry to Harry and swung toward him. There was no answering sound, no rush of feet, nothing; but I felt my throat gripped in monstrous, hairy fingers. I tried to struggle, and immediately was crushed to the ground by the overpowering weight of a score of soft, ill-smelling bodies.

The grasp on my throat tightened; my arms relaxed, my brain reeled, and I knew no more.

Chapter VII.

THE FIGHT IN THE DARK.

I returned to consciousness with a sickening sensation of nausea and unreality. Only my brain was alive; my entire body was numb and as though paralyzed. Still darkness and silence, for all my senses told me I might have been still in the spot where I had fallen.

Then I tried to move my arms, and found that my hands and feet were firmly bound. I strained at the thongs, making some slight sound; and immediately I heard a whisper but a few feet away:

"Are you awake, Paul?"

I was still half dazed, but I recognized Harry's voice, and I answered simply: "Yes. Where are we?"

"The Lord knows! They carried us. You have been unconscious for hours."

"They carried us?"

"Yes. A thousand miles, I think, on their backs. What--what are they, Paul?"

"I don't know. Did you see them?"

"No. Too dark. They are strong as gorillas and covered with hair; I felt that much. They didn't make a sound all the time. No more than half as big as me, and yet one of them carried me as if I were a baby--and I weigh one hundred and seventy pounds."

"What are we bound with?"

"Don't know; it feels like leather; tough as rats. I've been working at it for two hours, but it won't give."

"Well, you know what that means. Dumb brutes don't tie a man up."

"But it's impossible."

"Nothing is impossible. But listen!"

There was a sound--the swift patter of feet; they were approaching. Then suddenly a form bent over me close; I could see nothing, but I felt a pressure against my body and an ill-smelling odor, indescribable, entered my nostrils. I felt a sawing movement at my wrists; the thongs pulled back and forth, and soon my hands were free. The form straightened away from me, there was a clatter on the ground near my head, and then silence.

There came an oath from Harry:

"Hang the brute! He's cut my wrist. Are your hands free, Paul?"

"Yes."

"Then bind this up; it's bleeding badly. What was that for?"

"I have an idea," I answered as I tore a strip from my shirt and bandaged the wound, which proved to be slight. Then I searched on the ground beside me, and found my surmise correct.

"Here you go, Hal! here's some grub. But what the deuce is it? By Jove, it's dried fish! Now, where in the name of--"

But we wasted no more time in talk, for we were half starved. The stuff was not bad; to us who had been fasting for something like thirty-six hours--for our idea of time was extremely hazy--it was a gorgeous banquet. And close by there was a basin full of water.

"Pretty decent sort of beggars, I say," came Harry's voice in the darkness. "But who are they?"

"Ask Felipe," I answered, for by this time I was well convinced of the nature and identity of our captors. "As I said, dumb brutes don't bind men with thongs, nor feed them on dried fish. Of course it's incredible, but a man must be prepared to believe anything."

"But, Paul! You mean--"

"Exactly. We are in the hands of the Incas of Huanuco--or rather their descendants."

"But that was four hundred years ago!"

"Your history is perfect, like Desiree's geography," said I dryly. "But what then? They have merely chosen to live under the world instead of on it; a rather wise decision, a cynic might say--not to mention the small circumstance that they are prisoners.

"My dear Hal, never allow yourself to be surprised at anything; it is a weakness. Here we are in total darkness, buried in the Andes, surrounded by hairy, degenerate brutes that are probably allowing us to eat in order that we may be in condition to be eaten, with no possibility of ever again beholding the sunshine; and what is the thought that rises to the surface of my mind? Merely this: that I most earnestly desire and crave a Carbajal perfecto and a match."
"Paul, you say--eat--"

"Most probably they are cannibals. The Lord knows they must have some sort of mild amusement in this fearful
hole. Of course, the idea is distasteful; before they cut us up they'll have to knock us down."

"That's a damned silly joke," said Harry with some heat.

"But it's sober truth, my boy. You know me; I never pose. There is nothing particularly revolting in the thought
of being eaten; the disadvantage of it lies in the fact that one must die first. We all want to live; Heaven knows why.
And we stand a chance.

"We know now that there is food to be had here and sufficient air. It is nearly certain that we won't get out, but
that can come later. And what an experience! I know a dozen anthropologists that would give their degrees for it. I
can feel myself getting enthusiastic about it."

"But what if they--they--"

"Say it. Eat us? We can fight. It will be strange if we can't outwit these vermin. And now silence; I'm going to
begin. Listen hard--hard! The brutes are noiseless, but if they are near we can hear their breathing."

"But, Paul--"

"No more talk. Listen!"

We lay silent for many minutes, scarcely breathing. Not the slightest sound reached our ears through the
profound darkness; utter, intense silence. Finally I reached over and touched Harry on the shoulder, and arose to my
knees.

"Good enough! We're alone. We'll have to crawl for it. Keep close behind me; we don't want to get separated.
The first thing is to find a sharp stone to cut through these thongs. Feel on the ground with your hands as we go."

It was not easy to rise at all, and still harder to make any progress, for our ankles were bound together most
effectively; but we managed somehow to drag ourselves along. I was in front; suddenly I felt Harry pull at my coat,
and turned.

"Just the thing, Paul. Sharp as a knife. Look!"

I groped for his hand in the darkness and took from it the object he held out to me--a small flat stone with a
sharp-saw edge.

"All right; let me work on you first."

I bent down to the thongs which bound his ankles. I was convinced that they were not of leather, but they were
tough as the thickest hide. Twice my overeagerness caused the tool to slip and tear the skin from my hand; then I
went about it more carefully with a muttered oath. Another quarter of an hour and Harry was free.

"Gad, that feels good!" he exclaimed, rising to his feet. "Here, Paul; where's the stone?"

I handed it to him and he knelt down and began sawing away at my feet.

What followed happened so quickly that we were hardly aware that it had begun when it was already finished.
A quick, pattering rush of many feet warned us, but not in time. Hurtling, leaping bodies came at us headlong
through the air and crushed us to the ground, buried beneath them, gasping for breath; there must have been scores
of them. Resistance was impossible; we were overwhelmed.

I heard Harry give a despairing cry, and the scuffle followed; I myself was utterly helpless, for the thongs which
bound my ankles had not been cut through. Not a sound came from our assailants save their heavy, labored
breathing.

I remember that, even while they were sitting on my head and chest and body, I noted their silence with a sort of
impersonal curiosity and wondered if they were, after all, human. Nor were they unnecessarily violent; they merely
subdued us, rebound our wrists and ankles more tightly than before, and departed.

But--faugh! The unspeakable odor of their hairy bodies is in my nostrils yet.

"Are you hurt, Paul?"

"Not a bit, Harry lad. How do you like the perfume?"

"To the deuce with your perfume! But we're done for. What's the use? They've lived in this infernal hole so long
they can see in the dark better than we can in the light."

Of course he was right, and I was a fool not to have thought of it before and practised caution. The knowledge
was decidedly unpleasant. No doubt our every movement was being watched by a hundred pairs of eyes, while we
lay helpless in the darkness, bound even more tightly than before.

"Look here," said Harry suddenly, "why can't we see their eyes? Why don't they shine."

"My dear boy," said I, "in this darkness you couldn't see the Kohinoor diamond if it were hanging on your nose,
drawing-room travelers to the contrary notwithstanding. We have one advantage--they can't understand what we say,
but they even up for it by not saying anything."

There was a short silence, then Harry's voice:

"Paul--"
"Well?"
"I wonder--do you think Desiree--" He hesitated, his voice faltering.
"I think the same as you do," said I.
"But I don't know--after all, there is a chance. Just a bare chance, isn't there?"
"You know as well as I do, Harry. The chances are a million to one that Desiree--thank Heaven--has escaped all this! And isn't that best! Would you have her here with us?"
"No--no. Only--"
"Lying here, bound hand and foot? She would make a dainty morsel for our friends."
"For the Lord's sake, Paul--"
"Well, let us forget her--for the present. Nor do we want to make a dainty morsel if we can help it. Come, brace up, Hal. It's up to us to turn a trick."
"Well?"
"I don't know why I didn't think of it before. I guess we were both too dazed to have good sense. What have you got strapped to your belt?"
"A gun," said Harry. "Of course I thought of that. But what good is it after that ducking? And I have only six cartridges."
"Nothing else?"
I could almost feel his silent gaze; then suddenly he cried out:
"A knife!"
"At last!" said I sarcastically. "And so have I. A six-inch, double-edged knife, sharp as a razor and pointed like a needle. They didn't have sense enough to search us, and we didn't have sense enough to realize it. I can feel mine under me now against the ground."
"But they'll see us."
"Not if we use a decent amount of caution. The trouble is, I can't reach my knife with my wrists bound. There's only one way. Lie perfectly still; let them think we've given it up. I'm going to try something."

I drew up my knees, twisted over on the hard rock, and lay flat on my belly. Then I drew up my hands and let my face rest on them, like a dog with his head on his paws. And then, keeping my body perfectly still, and with as little movement of the jaws as possible, I sought the tough thongs with my teeth.

That was a tedious job and a distasteful one. For many minutes I gnawed away at those thick cords like a dog on a bone. It was considerably later that I discovered what those cords were made of; thank Heaven, I was ignorant of it at the time! All I knew was that they were, to use one of Harry's phrases, "tough as rats."

I did not dare pull with my wrists, for fear they would fly suddenly apart and betray me to the unseen watchers. It was necessary to cut clear through with my teeth, and more than once I was on the point of giving it up. There was a nauseating, rancid taste to the stuff, but I dared not even raise my head to expectorate.

Finally my teeth met; the cords were severed. I felt carefully about with my tongue to make sure there were no others; then, without moving my hands in the slightest degree, carefully raised my head.

It was then that I first noticed—not light, but a thinning out of the darkness. It was, of course, merely the adjustment of my eyes to the new conditions. I could make out no forms surrounding me, but, looking down, I could clearly distinguish the outline of my hands as they lay on the ground before me.

And, again looking up, I fancied that I could see, some twenty or thirty feet to the right, that the darkness again became suddenly dense and impenetrable.

"That must be a wall," I muttered, straining my eyes toward it.
"What's that?" asked Harry sharply.

Obedient to my instructions, the lad had lain perfectly motionless and silent for over an hour, for it must have taken me at least that long to gnaw through the cords.

"I said that must be a wall. Look, Harry, about thirty feet to the right. Doesn't it appear to you that way?"
"By Jove," he exclaimed after a moment of silence, "it's getting light! Look!"
I explained that, instead of "it's getting light," his eyes were merely becoming accustomed to the darkness.
"But what do you think of that? Is it a wall?"

After a moment's silence he answered: "Ye-es," and then more positively: "Yes. But what good does that do us?"
"That's what I am about to tell you. Listen! I've cut the cords on my wrists, and I'm going to get my knife--"
"How the deuce did you manage that?" Harry interrupted.

"With my teeth. I've been rather busy. I'm going to get my knife--cautiously, so they won't suspect if they are watching us. We must lie close together on our sides, facing each other, so I can cut the thongs on your wrists without being seen. Then you are to get your knife--carefully. Do you understand?"

"Yes."
For the first time there was fight in Harry's voice; the curious, barely perceptible tremor of the man of courage.

"All right. Go easy."

We went about the thing slowly, turning but an inch at a time; a second mistake might prove fatal. We heard no sound of any kind, and ten minutes later we were lying flat on our backs side by side, keeping our hands hidden between our bodies, that the absence of the thongs might not be discovered. Each of us held in his right hand the hilt of a six inch knife. Cold steel is by no means the favorite weapon of an American, but there are times--

"Have you got your knife, Harry?"

"Yes."

"Good! Now listen close and act quick. When I give the word reach down and grasp the cords round your ankles in your left hand, then cut them through with one stroke. Then to your feet; grasp my jacket, and together to the wall--that's for our backs. And then--let 'em come!"

"All right, old man."

"Don't waste any time; they'll probably start for us the instant we sit up. Be sure you get your feet free at the first stroke; feel them well with your left hand first. Are you ready?"

"Yes." And his voice was now calm and perfectly steady.

"Then--one, two, three--go!"

We bent and cut and sprang to our feet, and dashed for the wall. There was a sound of rushing feet--our backs hugged the kindly rock--I heard Harry's shout, "Here they come!"--dim, rushing forms--fingers clutching at my throat.

I felt the blade of my knife sink into soft and yielding flesh, and a warm, thick liquid flow over my hand and arm.

Chapter VIII.

THE DANCE OF THE SUN.

It seemed to me then in the minutes that followed that there were thousands of black demons in that black hole. At the first rushing impact I shouted to Harry: "Keep your back to the wall," and for response I got a high, ringing laugh that breathed the joy of battle.

The thing was sickening. Harry is a natural fighting man; I am not. Without the wall at our backs we would have been overpowered in thirty seconds; as it was, we were forced to handle half a dozen of them at once, while the others surged in from behind. They had no weapons, but they had the advantage of being able to see us.

They clutched my throat, my arms, my legs, my body; there was no room to strike; I pushed the knife home. They fastened themselves to my legs and feet and tried to bring me down from beneath; once, in slashing at the head of one whose teeth were set in my calf, I cut myself on the knee. It was difficult to stand in the wet, slippery pool that formed at my feet.

Suddenly I heard a sound that I understood too well--the curious, rattling sound of a man who is trying to call out when he is being strangled.

"Harry!" I cried, and I fought like a wild man to get to him, with knife, feet, hands, teeth. I reached his coat, his arm; it was dangerous to strike so near him in the dark, but I felt him sinking to the ground.

Then I found the taut, straining fingers about his throat, and lunged forward with the knife--and the fingers relaxed.

Again we were fighting together side by side.

As their bodies fell in front of us we were pressed harder, for those behind climbed up on the corpses of their fellows and literally descended on our heads from the air. We could not have held out much longer; our breath was coming in quick, painful gasps; Harry stumbled on one of the prostrate brutes and fell; I tried to lift him and was unequal to the task.

It appeared to be the end.

Suddenly there rang throughout the cavern a sound as of a gigantic, deep-toned bell. The walls sent it back and forth with deafening echoes; it was as though the mountain had descended with one tremendous crash into its own bowels.

As though by magic, the assault ceased.

The effect was indescribable. We could see nothing; we merely became suddenly aware that there were no longer hands clutching at our throats or hairy bodies crushing us to the ground. It was as though the horde of unseen devils had melted into thin air. There were movements on the ground, for many of them had been wounded; a man cannot always reach the spot in the dark. This lasted for two or three minutes; they were evidently removing those who still had life in them, for the straining breath of men dragging or lifting burdens was plainly audible.

Gradually that, too, died away with the last reverberations of the mysterious sound that had saved us, and we found ourselves alone--or at least unmolested--for in the darkness we could see nothing, except the dim outlines of
the prostrate forms at our feet.

The cavern was a shambles. The smell was that of a slaughter-house. I had had no idea of the desperateness of our defense until I essayed to scramble over the heap of bodies to dry ground; I shuddered and grew faint, and Harry was in no better case.

Worse, he had dropped his knife when we stumbled, and we were forced to grope round in that unspeakable mess for many minutes before we found it.

"Are you hurt, lad?" I asked when once we stood clear.

"Nothing bad, I think," he answered. "My throat is stiff, and two or three of the brutes got their teeth in me. In the name of Heaven, Paul, what are they? And what was that bell?"

These were foolish questions, and I told him so. My leg was bleeding badly where I had slashed myself, and I, too, had felt their teeth. But, despite our utter weariness and our wounds, we wanted nothing—not even rest—so badly as we wanted to get away from that awful heap of flesh and blood and the odor of it.

Besides, we did not know at what moment they might return. So I spoke, and Harry agreed. I led the way; he followed.

But which way to turn? We wanted water, both for our dry and burning throats and for our wounds; and rest and food. We thought little of safety. One way seemed as likely as another, so we set out with our noses as guides.

A man encounters very few misfortunes in this world which, later in life, he finds himself unable to laugh at; well, for me that endless journey was one of the few.

Every step was torture. I had bandaged the cut on my leg as well as possible, but it continued to bleed. But it was imperative that we should find water, and we struggled on, traversing narrow passages and immense caverns, always in complete darkness, stumbling over unseen rocks and encountering sharp corners of cross passages.

It lasted I know not how many hours. Neither of us would have survived alone. Time and again Harry sank to the ground and refused to rise until I perforce lifted him; once we nearly came to blows. And I was guilty of the same weakness.

But the despair of one inspired the other with fresh strength and courage, and we struggled forward, slower and slower. It was soul-destroying work. I believe that in the last hour we made not more than half a mile. I know now that for the greater part of the time we were merely retracing our steps in a vicious circle!

It was well that it ended when it did, for we could not have held out much longer. Harry was leading the way, for I had found that that slight responsibility fortified him. We no longer walked, we barely went forward, staggering and reeling like drunken men.

Suddenly Harry stopped short, so suddenly that I ran against him; and at the same time I felt a queer sensation—for I was too far gone to recognize it—about my feet.

Then Harry stooped over quickly, half knocking me down as he did so, and dropped to his knees; and the next instant gave an unsteady cry of joy:

"Water! Man, it's water!"

How we drank and wallowed, and wallowed and drank! That water might have contained all the poisons in the world and we would have neither known nor cared. But it was cool, fresh, living—and it saved our lives.

We bathed our wounds and bandaged them with strips from our shirts. Then we arranged our clothing for cushions and pillows as well as possible, took another drink, and lay down to sleep.

We must have slept a great many hours. There was no way to judge of time, but when we awoke our joints were as stiff as though they had gotten rusty with the years. I was brought to consciousness by the sound of Harry's voice calling my name.

Somehow—for every movement was exquisite pain—we got to our feet and reached the water, having first removed our clothing. But we were now at that point where to drink merely aggravated our hunger. Harry was in a savage humor, and when I laughed at him he became furious.

"Have some sense. I tell you, I must eat! If it were not for your—"

"Go easy, Hal. Don't say anything you'll be sorry for. And I refuse to consider the sordid topic of food as one that may rightfully contain the elements of tragedy. We seem to be in the position of the king of vaudeville. If we had some ham we'd have some ham and eggs—if we had some eggs."

"You may joke, but I am not made of iron!" he cried.

"And what can we do but die?" I demanded. "Do you think there is any chance of our getting out of this? Take it like a man. Is it right for a man who has laughed at the world to begin to whine when it becomes necessary to leave it?

"You know I'm with you; I'll fight, and what I find I'll take; in the mean time I prefer not to furnish amusement for the devil. There comes a time, I believe, when the stomach debases us against our wills. May I die before I see it."
"But what are we to do?"
"That's more like it. There's only one hope. We must smell out the pantry that holds the dried fish."

We talked no more, but set about bathing and dressing our wounds. Gad, how that cold water took them! I was forced to set my teeth deep into my lip to keep from crying out, and once or twice Harry gave an involuntary grunt of pain that would not be suppressed.

When we had finished we waded far to the right to take a last deep drink; then sought our clothing and prepared to start on our all but hopeless search. We had become fairly well limbered up by that time and set out with comparative ease.

We had gone perhaps a hundred yards, bearing off to the right, when Harry gave a sudden cry: "My knife is gone!" and stopped short. I clapped my hand to my own belt instinctively, and found it empty both of knife and gun! For a moment we stood in silence; then:
"Have you got yours?" he demanded.

When I told him no he let out an oath.

His gun was gone, also. We debated the matter, and decided that to attempt a search would be a useless waste of time; it was next to certain that the weapons had been lost in the water when we had first plunged in. And so, doubly handicapped by this new loss, we again set out.

There was but one encouragement allowed to us: we were no longer in total darkness. Gradually our eyes were becoming accustomed to the absence of light; and though we could by no means see clearly, nor even could properly be said to see at all, still we began to distinguish the outlines of walls several feet away; and, better than that, each of us could plainly mark the form and face of the other.

Once we stood close, less than a foot apart, for a test; and when Harry cried eagerly, "Thank Heaven, I can see your nose!" our strained feelings were relieved by a prolonged burst of genuine laughter.

There was little enough of it in the time that followed, for our sufferings now became a matter not of minutes or hours, but of days. The assault of time is the one that unnerves a man, especially when it is aided by gnawing pain and weariness and hunger; it saps the courage and destroys the heart and fires the brain.

We dragged ourselves somehow ever onward. We found water; the mountain was honeycombed with underground streams; but no food. More than once we were tempted to trust ourselves to one of those rushing torrents, but what reason we had left told us that our little remaining strength was unequal to the task of keeping our heads above the surface. And yet the thought was sweet--to allow ourselves to be peacefully swept into oblivion.

We lost all idea of time and direction, and finally hope itself deserted us. What force it was that propelled us forward must have been buried deep within the seat of animal instinct, for we lost all rational power. The thing became a nightmare, like the crazy wanderings of a lost soul.

Forward--forward--forward! It was a mania.

Then Harry was stricken with fever and became delirious. And I think it was that seeming misfortune that saved us, for it gave me a spring for action and endowed me with new life. As luck would have it, a stream of water was near, and I half carried and half dragged him to its edge.

I made a bed for him with my own clothing on the hard rock, and bathed him and made him drink, while all the time a string of delirious drivel poured forth from his hot, dry lips.

That lasted many hours, until finally he fell into a deep, calm sleep. But his body was without fuel, and I was convinced he would never awaken; yet I feared to touch him. Those were weary hours, squatting by his side with his hand gripped in my own, with the ever-increasing pangs of hunger and weariness turning my own body into a roaring furnace of pain.

Suddenly I felt a movement of his hand; and then came his voice, weak but perfectly distinct:
"Well, Paul, this is the end."
"Not yet, Harry boy; not yet."

I tried to put cheer and courage into my own voice, but with poor success.
"I--think--so. I say, Paul--I've just seen Desiree."

"All right, Hal."

"Oh, you don't need to talk like that; I'm not delirious now. I guess it must have been a dream. Do you remember that morning on the mountain--in Colorado--when you came on us suddenly at sunrise? Well, I saw her there--only you were with her instead of me. So, of course, she must be dead."

His logic was beyond me, but I pressed his hand to let him know that I understood.

"And now, old man, you might as well leave me. This is the end. You've been a good sport. We made a fight, didn't we? If only Desiree--but there! To Hades with women, I say!"

"Not that--don't be a poor loser, Hal. And you're not gone yet. When a man has enough fight in him to beat out an attack of fever he's very much alive."
But he would not have it so. I let him talk, and he rambled on, with scarcely an idea of what he was saying. The old days possessed his mind, and, to tell the truth, the sentiment found a welcome in my own bosom. I said to myself, "This is death."

And then, lifting my head to look down the dark passage that led away before us, I sprang to my feet with a shout and stood transfixed with astonishment. And the next instant there came a cry of wonder from Harry:

"A light! By all the gods, a light!"

So it was. The passage lay straight for perhaps three hundred yards. There it turned abruptly; and the corner thus formed was one blaze of flickering but brilliant light which flowed in from the hidden corridor.

It came and went, and played fitfully on the granite walls; still it remained. It was supernaturally brilliant; or so it seemed to us, who had lived in utter darkness for many days.

I turned to Harry, and the man who had just been ready to die was rising to his feet!

"Wait a minute--not so fast!" I said half angrily, springing to support him. "And, for Heaven's sake, don't make any noise! We're in no condition to fight now, and you know what that light means."

"But what is it?" demanded the boy excitedly. "Come on, man--let's go!"

To tell the truth, I felt as eager as he. For the first time I understood clearly why the Bible and ancient mythology made such a fuss about the lighting up of the world. Modern civilization is too far away from its great natural benefits to appreciate them properly.

And here was a curious instance of the force of habit--or, rather, instinct--in man. So long as Harry and I had remained in the dark passage and byways of the cavern we had proceeded almost entirely without caution, with scarcely a thought of being discovered.

But the first sight of light made us wary and careful and silent; and yet we knew perfectly well that the denizens of this underworld could see as well in the darkness as in the light--perhaps even better. So difficult is it to guide ourselves by the human faculty of pure reason.

Harry was so weak he was barely able to stand, even in the strength of this new excitement and hope, and we were forced to go very slowly; I supported him as well as I was able, being myself anything but an engine of power. But the turn in the passage was not far away, and we reached it in a quarter of an hour or less.

Before we made the turn we halted. Harry was breathing heavily even from so slight an exertion, and I could scarcely suppress a cry of amazement when, for the first time in many days, the light afforded me a view of his face.

It was drawn and white and sunken; the eyes seemed set deep in his skull as they blinked painfully; and the hair on his chin and lip and cheeks had grown to a length incredible in so short a space of time. I soon had reason to know that I probably presented no better an appearance, for he was staring at me as though I were some strange monster.

"Good Heavens, man, you took like a ghost!" he whispered.

I nodded; my arm was round his shoulder.

"Now, let's see what this light means. Be ready for anything, Harry--though Heaven knows we can find nothing worse than we've had. Here, put your arm on my shoulder. Take it easy."

We advanced to the corner together within the patch of light and turned to the right, directly facing its source.

It is impossible to convey even a faint idea of the wild and hugely fantastic sight that met our gaze. These are the details:

Before us was an immense cavern, circular in shape, with a diameter of some half a mile. It seemed to me then much larger; from where we stood it appeared to be at least two miles to the opposite side. There was no roof to be seen; it merely ascended into darkness, though the light carried a great distance.

All round the vast circumference, on terraced seats of rock, squatted row after row of the most completely hideous beings within possibility.

They were men; I suppose they must have the name. They were about four feet tall, with long, hairy arms and legs, bodies of a curious, bloated appearance, and eyes--the remainder of the face was entirely concealed by thick hair--eyes dull and vacant, of an incredibly large size; they had the appearance of ghouls, apes, monsters--anything but human beings.

They sat, thousands of them, crouched silently on their stone seats, gazing, motionless as blocks of wood.

The center of the cavern was a lake, taking up something more than half of its area. The water was black as night, and curiously smooth and silent. Its banks sloped by degrees for a hundred feet or so, but at its edge there was a perpendicular bank of rock fifteen or twenty feet in height.

Near the middle of the lake, ranged at an equal distance from its center and from each other, were three--what shall I call them?--islands, or columns. They were six or eight feet across at their top, which rose high above the water.

On top of each of these columns was a huge vat or urn, and from each of the urns arose a steady, gigantic
column of fire. These it was that gave the light, and it was little wonder we had thought it brilliant, since the flames rose to a height of thirty feet or more in the air.

But that which left us speechless with profound amazement was not the endless rows of silent, grinning dwarfs, nor the black, motionless lake, nor the leaping tongues of flame. We forgot these when we followed the gaze of that terrifying audience and saw a sight that printed itself on my brain with a vividness which time can never erase. Closing my eyes, I see it even now, and I shudder.

Exactly in the center of the lake, in the midst of the columns of fire, was a fourth column, built of some strangely lustrous rock. Prisms of a formation new to me—innumerable thousands of them—caused its sides to sparkle and glisten like an immense tower of whitest diamonds, blinding the eye.

The effect was indescribable. The huge cavern was lined and dotted with the rays shot forth from their brilliant angles. The height of this column was double that of the others; it rose straight toward the unseen dome of the cavern to the height of a hundred feet.

It was cylindrical in shape, not more than ten feet in diameter. And on its top, high above the surface of the lake, surrounded by the mounting tongues of flame, whirled and swayed and bent the figure of a woman.

Her limbs and body, which were covered only by long, flowing strands of golden hair, shone and glistened strangely in the lurid, weird light. And of all the ten thousand reflections that shot at us from the length of the column not one was so brilliant, so blinding, as the wild glow of her eyes.

She had promised me then that she would dance it for me some day—

I looked at Harry, who had remained standing beside me, gazing as I had gazed. His eyes were opened wide, staring at the swaying figure on the column in the most profound astonishment.

He took his hand from my shoulder and stood erect, alone; and I saw the light of recognition and hope and deepest joy slowly fill his eyes and spread over his face. Then I realized the danger, and I endeavored once more to put my arm round his shoulder; but he shook me off with hot impatience. He leaped forward with the quickness of lightning, eluding my frantic grasp, and dashed straight into the circle of blazing light!

I followed, but too late. At the edge of the lake he stopped, and, stretching forth his arms toward the dancer on the column, he cried out in a voice that made the cavern ring:

"Desiree! Desiree! Desiree!"

Chapter IX.

BEFORE THE COURT.

I expected I know not what result from Harry's hysterical rashness: confusion, pandemonium, instant death; but none of these followed.

I had reached his side and stood by him at the edge of the lake, where he had halted. Desiree Le Mire stopped short in the midst of the mad sweep of the Dance of the Sun.

For ten silent, tense seconds she looked down at us from the top of the lofty column, bending dangerously near its edge. Her form straightened and was stretched to its fullest height; her white, superb body was distinctly outlined against the black background of the upper cavern. Then she stepped backward slowly, without taking her eyes from us.

Suddenly as we gazed she appeared to sink within the column itself and in another instant disappeared from view.

We stood motionless, petrified; how long I know not. Then I turned and faced our own danger. It was time.

The Incas—for I was satisfied of the identity of the creatures—had left their seats of granite and advanced to the edge of the lake. Not a sound was heard—no command from voice or trumpet or reed; they moved as with one impulse and one brain.

We were utterly helpless, for they numbered thousands. And weak and starving as we were, a single pair of them would have been more than a match for us.

I looked at Harry; the reaction from his moment of superficial energy was already upon him. His body swayed
slightly from side to side, and he would have fallen if I had not supported him with my arm. There we stood, waiting.

Then for the first time I saw the ruler of the scene. The Incas had stopped and stood motionless. Suddenly they dropped to their knees and extended their arms—I thought—toward us; but something in their attitude told me the truth. I wheeled sharply and saw the object of their adoration.

Built into the granite wall of the cavern, some thirty feet from the ground, was a deep alcove. At each side of the entrance was an urn resting on a ledge, similar to those on the columns, only smaller, from which issued a mounting flame.

On the floor of the alcove was a massive chair, or throne, which seemed to be itself of fire, so brilliant was the glow of the metal of which it was constructed. It could have been nothing but gold. And seated on this throne was an ugly, misshapen dwarf.

"God save the king!" I cried, with a hysterical laugh; and in the profound silence my voice rang from one side of the cavern to the other in racing echoes.

Immediately following my cry the figure on the throne arose; and as he did so the creatures round us fell flat on their faces on the ground. For several seconds the king surveyed them thus, without a sound or movement; then suddenly he stretched forth his hand in a gesture of dismissal. They rose as one man and with silent swiftness disappeared, seemingly melting away into the walls of rock. At the time the effect was amazing; later, when I discovered the innumerable lanes and passages which served as exits, it was not so difficult to understand.

We were apparently left alone, but not for long. From two stone stairways immediately in front of us, which evidently led to the alcove above, came forth a crowd of rushing forms. In an instant they were upon us; but if they expected resistance they were disappointed.

We were apparently left alone, but not for long. From two stone stairways immediately in front of us, which evidently led to the alcove above, came forth a crowd of rushing forms. In an instant they were upon us; but if they expected resistance they were disappointed.

At the first impact we fell. And in another moment we had been raised in their long, hairy arms and were carried swiftly from the cavern. Scarcely five minutes had elapsed since we had first entered it.

They did not take us far. Down a broad passage directly away from the cavern, then a turn to the right, and again one to the left. There they dropped us, quite as though we were bundles of merchandise, without a word.

By this time I had fairly recovered my wits—small wonder if that amazing scene had stunned them—and I knew what I wanted. As the brute that had been carrying me turned to go I caught his arm. He hesitated, and I could feel his eyes on me, for we were again in darkness.

But he could see—I thanked Heaven for it—and I began a most expressive pantomime, stuffing my fingers in my mouth and gnawing at them energetically. This I alternated with the action of one drinking from a basin. I hadn't the slightest idea whether he understood me; he turned and disappeared without a sign—at least, without an audible one.

But the creature possessed intelligence, for I had barely had time to turn to Harry and ascertain that he was at least alive, when the patter of returning footsteps was heard. They approached; there was the clatter of stone on the ground beside us.

I stood eagerly; a platter, heaped, and a vessel, full! I think I cried out with joy.

"Come, Harry lad; eat!"

He was too weak to move; but when I tore some of the dried fish into fragments and fed it to him he devoured it ravenously. Then he asked for water, and I held the basin to his lips.

We ate as little as it is possible for men to eat who have fasted for many days, for the stuff had a sharp, concentrated taste that recommended moderation. And, besides, we were not certain of getting more.

I wrapped the remainder carefully in my poncho, leaving the platter empty, and lay down to rest, using the poncho for a pillow. I had enough, assuredly, to keep me awake, but there are bounds beyond which nature cannot go. I slept close by Harry's side, with my arm across his body, that any movement of his might awaken me.

When I awoke Harry was still asleep, and I did not disturb him. I myself must have slept many hours, for I felt considerably refreshed and very hungry. And thirsty; assuredly the provender of those hairy brutes would have been most excellent stuff for the free-lunch counter of a saloon.

I unwrapped the poncho; then, crawling on my hands and knees, searched about the ground. As I had expected, I found another full platter and basin. I had just set the latter down after taking a hearty drink when I heard Harry's voice.

"Paul."

"Here, lad."

"I was afraid you had gone. I've just had the most devilish dream about Desiree. She was doing some crazy dance on top of a mountain or something, and there was fire, and--Paul! Paul, was it a dream?"

"No, Hal; I saw it myself. But come, we'll talk later. Here's some dried fish for breakfast."

"Ah! That—that—now I remember! And she fell! I'm going--"

But I wanted no more fever or delirium, and I interrupted him sternly:
"Harry! Listen to me! Are you a baby or a man? Talk straight or shut up, and don't whine like a fool. If you have any courage, use it."

It was stiff medicine, but he needed it, and it worked. There was a silence, then his voice came, steady enough:

"You know me better than that, Paul. Only—if it were not for Desiree—let me swallow it. I think I've been sick, haven't I?"

Poor lad! I wanted to take his hand in mine and apologize. But that would have been bad for both of us, and I answered simply:

"Yes, a little fever. But you're all right now. And now you must eat and drink. Not much of a variety, but it's better than nothing."

I carried the platter and basin over to him, and sat down by his side, and we fell to together.

But he would talk of Desiree, and I humored him. There was little enough to say, but he pressed my hand hopefully and gratefully when I expressed my belief that her disappearance had been a trick of some sort and no matter for apprehension.

"We must find her, Paul."

"Yes."

"At once."

But there I objected.

"On the contrary, we must delay. Right now we are utterly helpless from our long fast. They would handle us like babies if it came to a fight. Try yourself; stand up."

He rose to his hands and knees, then sank back to the ground.

"You see. To move now would be folly. And of course they are watching us at this minute—every minute. We must wait."

His only answer was a groan of despair.

In some manner the weary hours passed by.

Harry lay silent, but not asleep; now and then he would ask me some question, but more to hear my voice than to get an answer. We heard or saw nothing of our captors, for all our senses told us we were quite alone, but our previous experience with them had taught us better than to believe it.

I found myself almost unconsciously reflecting on the character and nature of the tribe of dwarfs.

Was it possible that they were really the descendants of the Incas driven from Huanuco by Hernando Pizarro and his horsemen nearly four hundred years before? Even then I was satisfied of it, and I was soon to have that opinion confirmed by conclusive evidence.

Other questions presented themselves. Why did they not speak? What fuel could they have found in the bowels of the Andes for their vats of fire? And how did sufficient air for ten thousand pairs of lungs find its way miles underground? Why, in the centuries that had passed, had none of them found his way to the world outside?

Some of these questions I answered for myself, others remained unsolved for many months, until I had opportunity to avail myself of knowledge more profound than my own. Easy enough to guess that the hidden deposits of the mountain had yielded oil which needed only a spark from a piece of flint to fire it; and any one who knows anything of the geological formation of the Andes will not wonder at their supply of air.

Nature is not yet ready for man in those wild regions. Huge upheavals and convulsions are of continual occurrence; underground streams are known which rise in the eastern Cordillera and emerge on the side of the Pacific slope. And air circulates through these passages as well as water.

Their silence remains inexplicable; but it was probably the result of the nature of their surroundings. I have spoken before of the innumerable echoes and reverberations that followed every sound of the voice above a whisper. At times it was literally deafening; and time may have made it so in reality.

The natural effect through many generations of this inconvenience or danger would be the stoppage of speech, leading possibly to a complete loss of the faculty. I am satisfied that they were incapable of vocalization, for even the women did not talk! But that is ahead of the story.

I occupied myself with these reflections, and found amusement in them; but it was impossible to lead Harry into a discussion. His mind was anything but scientific, anyway; and he was completely obsessed by fear for the safety of Desiree. And I wasn't sorry for it; it is better that a man should worry about some one else than about himself.

Our chance of rescuing her, or even of saving ourselves, appeared to me woefully slim. One fear at least was gone, for the descendants of Incas could scarcely be cannibals; but there are other fates equally final, if less distasteful. The fact that they had not even taken the trouble to bind us was an indication of the strictness of their watch.

The hours crept by. At regular intervals our food was replenished and we kept the platter empty, storing what we could not eat in our ponchos against a possible need.
It was always the same—dried fish of the consistency of leather and a most aggressive taste. I tried to convey to one of our captors the idea that a change of diet would be agreeable, but either he did not understand me or didn't want to.

Gradually our strength returned, and with it hope. Harry began to be impatient, urging action. I was waiting for two things besides the return of strength; first, to lay in a supply of food that would be sufficient for many days in case we escaped, and second, to allow our eyes to accustom themselves better to the darkness.

Already we were able to see with a fair amount of clearness; we could easily distinguish the forms of those who came to bring us food and water when they were fifteen or twenty feet away. But the cavern in which we were confined must have been a large one, for we were unable to see a wall in any direction, and we did not venture to explore for fear our captors would be moved to bind us.

But Harry became so insistent that I finally consented to a scouting expedition. Caution seemed useless; if the darkness had eyes that beheld us, doubly so. We strapped our ponchos, heavy with their food, to our backs, and set out at random across the cavern.

We went slowly, straining our eyes ahead and from side to side. It was folly, of course, in the darkness—like trying to beat a gambler at his own game. But we moved on as noiselessly as possible.

Suddenly a wall loomed up before us not ten feet away. I gave a tug at Harry's arm, and he nodded. We approached the wall, then turned to the right and proceeded parallel with it, watching for a break that would mean the way to freedom.

I noticed a dark line that extended along the base of the wall, reaching up its side to a height of about two feet and seemingly melting away into the ground. At first I took it for a separate strata of rock, darker than that above. But there was a strange brokenness about its appearance that made me consider it more carefully.

It appeared to be composed of curious knots and protuberances. I stopped short, and, advancing a step or two toward the wall, gazed intently. Then I saw that the dark line was not a part of the wall at all; and then—well, then I laughed aloud in spite of myself. The thing was too ludicrous.

For that "dark line" along the bottom of the wall was a row of squatting Incas! There they sat, silent, motionless; even when my laugh rang out through the cavern they gave not the slightest sign that they either heard or saw. Yet it was certain that they had watched our every move.

There was nothing for it but retreat. With our knives we might have fought our way through; but we were unarmed, and we had felt one or two proofs of their strength.

Harry took it with more philosophy than I had expected. As for me, I had not yet finished my laugh. We sought our former resting-place, recognizing it by the platter and basin which we had emptied before our famous and daring attempt to escape.

Soon Harry began:
"I'll tell you what they are, Paul; they're frogs. Nothing but frogs. Did you see 'em? The little black devils! And Lord, how they smell!"

"That," I answered, "is the effect of—"

"To the deuce with your mineralogy or anthromorphism or whatever you call it. I don't care what makes 'em smell. I only know they do—as Kipling says of the oonts—'most awful vile.' And there the beggars sit, and here we sit!"

"If we could only see—" I began.

"And what good would that do us? Could we fight? No. They'd smother us in a minute. Say, wasn't there a king in that cave the other day?"

"Yes; on a golden throne. An ugly little devil—the ugliest of all."

"Sure; that why he's got the job. Did he say anything?"

"Not a word; merely stuck out his arm and out we went."

"Why the deuce don't they talk?"

I explained my theory at some length, with many and various scientific digressions. Harry listened politely.

"I don't know what you mean," said he when I had finished, "but I believe you. Anyway, it's all a stupendous joke. In the first place, we shouldn't be here at all. And, secondly, why should they want us to stay?"

"How should I know? Ask the king. And don't bother me; I'm going to sleep."

"You are not. I want to talk. Now, they must want us for something. They can't intend to eat us, because there isn't enough to go around. And there is Desiree. What the deuce was she doing up there without any clothes on? I say, Paul, we've got to find her."

"With pleasure. But, first, how are we going to get out of this?"

"I mean, when we get out."

Thus we rattled on, arriving nowhere. Harry's loquacity I understood; the poor lad meant to show me that he had
resolved not to "whine." Yet his cheerfulness was but partly assumed, and it was most welcome. My own temper was getting sadly frayed about the edge.

We slept through another watch uneventfully, and when we woke found our platter of fish and basin of water beside us. I estimated that some seventy-two hours had then passed since we had been carried from the cavern; Harry said not less than a hundred.

However that may be, we had almost entirely recovered our strength. Indeed, Harry declared himself perfectly fit; but I still felt some discomfort, caused partly by the knife-wound on my knee, which had not entirely healed, and partly, I think, by the strangeness and monotony of our diet. Harry's palate was less particular.

On awaking, and after breaking our fast, we were both filled with an odd contentment. I really believe that we had abandoned hope, and that the basis of our listlessness was despair; and surely not without reason. For what chance had we to escape from the Incas, handicapped as we were by the darkness, and our want of weapons, and their overwhelming numbers?

And beyond that—if by some lucky chance we did escape—what remained? To wander about in the endless caves of darkness and starve to death. At the time I don't think I stated the case, even to myself, with such brutal frankness, but facts make their impression whether you invite them or not. But, as I say, we were filled with an odd contentment. Though despair may have possessed our hearts, it was certainly not allowed to infect our tongues.

Breakfast was hilarious. Harry sang an old drinking-song to the water-basin with touching sentiment; I gave him hearty applause and joined in the chorus. The cavern rang.

"The last time I sang that," said Harry as the last echoes died away, "was at the Midlothian. Bunk Stafford was there, and Billy Du Mont, and Fred Marston—I say, do you remember Freddie? And his East Side crocodiles?

"My, but weren't they daisies? And polo? They could play it in their sleep. And—what's this? Paul! Something's up! Here they come—Mr. and Mrs. Inca and all the children!"

I sprang hastily to my feet and stood by Harry's side. He was right.

Through the half darkness they came, hundreds of them, and, as always, in utter silence. Dimly we could see their forms huddled together round us on every side, leaving us in the center of a small circle in their midst.

"Now, what the deuce do they want?" I muttered. "Can't they let us eat in peace?"

Harry observed: "Wasn't I right? 'Most awful vile!'"

I think we both felt that we were joking in the face of death.

The forms surrounding us stood silent for perhaps ten seconds. Then four of their number stepped forward to us, and one made gestures with a hairy arm, pointing to our rear. We turned and saw a narrow lane lined on either side by our captors. Nothing was distinct; still we could see well enough to guess their meaning.

"It's up to us to march," said Harry.

I nodded.

"And step high, Hal; it may be our last one. If we only had our knives! But there are thousands of 'em."

"But if it comes to the worst—""

"Then—I'm with you. Forward!"

We started, and as we did so one of the four who had approached darted from behind and led the way. Not a hand had touched us, and this appeared to me a good sign, without knowing exactly why.

"They seem to have forgotten their manners," Harry observed. "The approved method is to knock us down and carry us. I shall speak to the king about it."

We had just reached the wall of the cavern and entered a passage leading from it, when there came a sound, sonorous and ear-destroying, from the farther end. We had heard it once before; it was the same that had ended our desperate fight some days before. Then it had saved our lives; to what did it summon us now?

The passage was not a long one. At its end we turned to the right, following our guide. Once I looked back and saw behind us the crowd that had surrounded us in the cave. There was no way but obedience.

We had advanced perhaps a hundred, possibly two hundred yards along the second passage when our guide suddenly halted. We stood beside him.

He turned sharply to the left, and, beckoning to us to follow, began to descend a narrow stairway which led directly from the passage. It was steep, and the darkness allowed a glimpse only of black walls and the terrace immediately beneath our feet; so we went slowly. I counted the steps; there were ninety-six.

At the bottom we turned again to the right. Just as we turned I heard Harry's voice, quite low:

"There are only a dozen following us, Paul. Now—"

But I shook my head. It would have been mere folly, for, even if we had succeeded in breaking through, we could never have made our way back up the steps. This I told Harry; he admitted reluctantly that I was right.

We now found ourselves in a lane so low and narrow that it was necessary for us to stoop and proceed in single file. Our progress was slow; the guide was continually turning to beckon us on with gestures of impatience.
At length he halted and stood facing us. The guard that followed gathered close in the rear, the guide made a curious upward movement with his arm, and when we stood motionless repeated it several times.

"I suppose he wants us to fly," said Harry with so genuine a tone of sarcasm that I gave an involuntary smile.

The guide's meaning was soon evident. It took some seconds for my eye to penetrate the darkness, and then I saw a spiral stair ascending perpendicularly, apparently carved from the solid rock. Harry must have perceived it at the same moment, for he turned to me with a short laugh:

"Going up? Not for me, thank you. The beggar means for us to go alone."

For a moment I hesitated, glancing round uncertainly at the dusky forms that were ever pressing closer upon us. We were assuredly between the devil and the deep sea.

Then I said, shrugging my shoulders: "It's no good pulling, Harry. Come on; take a chance. You said it--going up!"

I placed my foot on the first step of the spiral stair.

Harry followed without comment. Up we went together, but slowly. The stair was fearfully steep and narrow, and more than once I barely escaped a fall.

Suddenly I became aware that light was descending on us from above. With every step upward it became brighter, until finally it was as though a noonday sun shone in upon us.

There came an exclamation from Harry, and we ascended faster. I remember that I counted a hundred and sixty steps--and then, as a glimmering of the truth shot through my brain into certainty, I counted no more.

Harry was crowding me from below, and we took the last few steps almost at a run. Then the end, and we stumbled out into a blaze of light and surveyed the surrounding scene with stupefaction and wonder.

It was not new to us; we had seen it before, but from a different angle.

We were on the top of the column in the center of the lake; on the spot where Desiree had whirled in the dance of the sun.

Chapter X.

THE VERDICT.

For many seconds we stood bewildered, too dazed to speak or move. The light dazzled our eyes; we seemed surrounded by an impenetrable wall of flame. There was no sensation of heat, owing, no doubt, to the immense height of the cavern and our comparatively distant removal from the flames, which mounted upward in narrow tongues.

Then the details began to strike me.

I have said the scene was the same as that we had previously beheld. Round the walls of the immense circular cavern squatted innumerable rows of the Incas on terraced seats.

Below, at a dizzy distance, was the smooth surface of the lake, black and gloomy save where the reflections from the blazing urns pierced its depths. And directly facing us, set in the wall of the cavern, was the alcove containing the throne of gold.

And on the throne was seated--not the diminutive, misshapen king, but Desiree Le Mire!

She sat motionless, gazing directly at us. Her long gold hair streamed over her shoulders in magnificent waves; a stiffly flowing garment of some unknown texture covered her limbs and the lower part of her body; her shoulders and breasts and arms were bare, and shone with a dazzling whiteness.

Beside her was a smaller seat, also of gold, and on this crouched the form of an Inca--the king. About them, at a respectful distance, were ranged attendants and guards--a hundred or more, for the alcove was of an impressive size. The light from the four urns shone in upon it with such brightness that I could clearly distinguish the whites of Desiree's eyes.

All this I saw in a single flash, and I turned to Harry:

"Not a word, on your life! This is Desiree's game; trust her to play it."

"But what the deuce is she doing there?"

I shrugged my shoulders.

"She seems to have found another king. You know her fondness for royalty."

"Paul, for Heaven's sake--"

"All right, Hal. But we're safe enough, I think. Most probably our introduction to court. This is what they call 'the dizzy heights of prominence.' Now keep your eyes open--something is going to happen."

There was a movement in the alcove. Four of the attendants came forward, carrying a curious framework apparently composed of reeds and leather, light and flexible, from the top bar of which hung suspended several rope-like ribbons, of various lengths and colors and tied in curious knots. They placed it on the ground before the double throne, at the feet of Desiree.

All doubt was then removed from my mind concerning the identity of our captors and their king. For these
bundles of knotted cords of different sizes and colors I recognized at once.

They were the famous Inca quipos—the material for their remarkable mnemonic system of communication and historical record. At last we were to receive a message from the Child of the Sun.

But of what nature? Every cord and knot and color had its meaning—but what? I searched every avenue of memory to assist me; for I had latterly confined my studies exclusively to Eastern archeology, and what I had known of the two great autochthonous civilizations of the American Continent was packed in some dim and little used corner of my brain. But success came, with an extreme effort.

I recollected first the different disposition of the quipos for different purposes—historical, sacred, narrative, et cetera. Then the particulars came to me, and immediately I recognized the formula of the quipos before the throne. They were arranged for adjudication—for the rendering of a verdict.

Harry and I were prisoners before the bar of the quipos! I turned to him, but there was not time for talk. The king had risen and stretched out his hand.

Immediately the vast assemblage rose from their stone seats and fell flat on their faces. It was then that I noticed, for the first time, an oval or elliptical plate of shining gold set in the wall of the cavern just above the outer edge of the alcove.

This, of course, was the representation of Pachacamac, the "unknown god" in the Inca religion. Well, I would as soon worship a plate of gold as that little black dwarf.

For perhaps a minute the king stood with outstretched arm and the Incas remained motionless on their faces. Then he resumed his seat and they rose. And then the trial began.

The king turned on his throne and laid his hand on Desiree's arm; we could see her draw away from his touch with an involuntary shudder. But this apparent antipathy bothered his kingship not at all; it was probably a most agreeable sensation to feel her soft, white flesh under his black, hairy hand, and he kept it there, while with the other arm he made a series of sweeping gestures which I understood at once, but which had no meaning for Desiree. By her hand he meant the quipos to speak.

We had a friend in court, but she was dumb, and I must give her voice. There was no time to be lost; I stepped to the edge of the column and spoke in a voice loud enough to carry across the cavern—which was not difficult in the universal silence.

"He means that you are to judge us by the quipos. The meaning is this—yellow, slavery, white, mercy; purple, reward; black, death. The lengths of the cords and the number of knots indicate the degree of punishment or reward. Attached to the frame you will find a knife. With that detach the cord of judgment and lay it at the feet of the king."

Again silence; and not one of the vast throng, nor the king himself, appeared to pay the slightest attention to my voice. The king continued his gestures to Desiree.

She rose and walked to the frame of quipos and took in her hand the knife which she found there suspended by a cord. There she hesitated, with the knife poised in the air, while her eyes sought mine—and found them.

I felt a tug at my arm, but I had no time for Harry then. I was looking at Desiree, and what I saw caused a cold shudder to flutter through my body. Not of fear; it was the utter surprise of the thing—its incredible horror. To die by the hands of those hairy brutes was not hard, but Desiree to be the judge!

For she meant death for us; I read it in her eyes. One of the old stale proverbs of the stale old world was to have another justification. I repeat that I was astounded, taken completely by surprise; and yet I had known something of "the fury of a woman scorned."

It was as though our eyes shot out to meet each other in an embrace of death. She saw that I understood and she smiled—what a smile! It was triumphant, and yet sad; a vengeance, and a farewell. She put forth her hand.

It wavered among the quipos as though uncertainly, then closed firmly on the black cord of death.

A thought flashed through my mind with the speed of lightning. I raised my voice and sang out:

"Desiree!"

She hesitated; the hand which held the knife fell to her side and again her eyes sought mine.

"What of Harry?" I called. "Take two—the white for him, the black for me."

She shook her head and again raised the knife; and I played my last card.

"Bah! Who are you? For you are not Le Mire!" I weighted my voice with contempt. "Le Mire is a child of fortune, but not of hell!"

At last she spoke.

"I play a fair hand, monsieur!" she cried, and her voice trembled.

"With marked cards!" I exclaimed scornfully. "The advantage is yours, madame; may you find pleasure in it."

There was a silence, while our eyes met. I thought I had lost. Le Mire stood motionless. Not a sound came from the audience. I felt Harry pulling at my arm, but shook myself free, without taking my eyes from Le Mire's face.

Suddenly she spoke:
"You are right, my friend Paul. I take no advantage. Leave it to Fortune. Have you a coin?"

I had won my chance. That was all—a chance—but that was better than nothing. I took a silver peseta from my pocket—by luck it had not been lost—and held it in the air above my head.

"Heads!" cried Desiree.

I let the coin fall. It rolled half-way across the top of the column and stopped at the very edge. I crossed and stooped over it. It lay heads up!

Harry was behind me; as I straightened up I saw his white, set face and eyes of horror. He, too, had seen the verdict; but he was moved not by that, but by the thought of Desiree, for Harry was not a man to flinch at sight of death.

I stood straight, and my voice was calm. It cost me an effort to clear it of bitterness and reproach. I could not avoid the reflection that but for Desiree we would never have seen the cave of the devil and the Children of the Sun; but I said simply and clearly:

"You win, madame."

Desiree stared at me in the most profound surprise. I understood her, and I laughed scornfully aloud, and held my head high; and I think a voice never held so complete a disdain as did mine as I called to her:

"I am one who plays fair, even with death, Le Mire. The coin fell heads—you win your black cord fairly."

She made no sign that she had heard; she was raising the knife. Suddenly she stopped, again her hand fell, and she said:

"You say the purple for reward, Paul?"

I nodded—I could not speak. Her hand touched the white cord and passed on; the yellow, and again passed on. Then there was a flash of the knife—another—and she approached the king and laid at his feet the purple cord.

Then, without a glance toward us, she resumed her seat on the golden throne.

A lump rose to my throat and tears to my eyes. Which was very foolish, for the thing had been completely theatrical. It was merely a tribute from one of nature's gamblers to the man who "played fair, even with death"; nevertheless, there was feeling in it, and the eternal mercy of woman.

For all that was visible to the eye the verdict made not the slightest impression on the rows of silent Incas. Not a movement was seen; they might have been carved from the stone on which they were seated.

Their black, hairy bodies, squat and thick, threw back the light from the flaming torches as though even those universal rays could not penetrate such grossness.

Suddenly they rose—the king had moved. He picked the purple cord from the ground, and, after passing his hand over it three times, handed it to an attendant who approached.

Then he stretched out his hand, and the Incas, who had remained standing, turned about and began to disappear. As before, the cavern was emptied in an incredibly short space of time; in two minutes we were alone with those in the alcove.

There was a sound behind us. We turned and saw a great slab of stone slowly slide to one side in the floor, leaving an aperture some three feet square. Evidently it had been closed behind us when we had ascended; we had had no time to notice it then. In this hole presently appeared the head and shoulders of our guide, who beckoned to us to follow and then disappeared below.

I started to obey, but turned to wait for Harry, who was gazing at Desiree. His back was toward me and I could not see his face; his eyes must have held an appeal, for I saw Desiree's lips part in a smile and heard her call:

"You will see me!"

Then he joined me, and we began the descent together.

I found myself wondering how these half-civilized brutes had possibly managed to conceive the idea of the spiral stair. It was known to neither the Aztecs nor the Incas, in America; nor to any of the primitive European or Asiatic civilizations. But they had found a place where nothing else would do—and they made it. Another of the innumerable offspring of Mother Necessity.

I took time to note its construction. It was rude enough, but a good job for all that. It was not exactly circular; there were many angles, evidently following the softer strata in the rock; they had bowed to their material—the way of the artist.

Even the height of the steps was irregular; some were scarcely more than three inches, while others were twelve or fourteen. You may know we descended slowly and with care, especially when we had reached the point where no light came from above to aid us. We found our guide waiting for us at the bottom, alone.

We followed him down the low and narrow passage through which we had previously come. But when we reached the steps which led up to the passage above and to the cave where we had formerly been confined, he ignored them and turned to the right. We hesitated.

"He's alone," said Harry. "Shall we chuck the beggar?"
"We shall not, for that very reason," I answered. "It means that we are guests instead of captives, and far be it from us to outrage the laws of hospitality. But seriously, the safest thing we can do is to follow him."

The passage in which we now found ourselves was evidently no work of nature. Even in the semidarkness the mark of man's hand was apparent. And the ceiling was low; another proof, for dwarfs do not build for the accommodation of giants. But I had some faint idea of the pitiful inadequacy of their tools, and I found myself reflecting on the stupendous courage of the men who had undertaken such a task, even allowing for the fact that four hundred years had been allowed them for its completion.

Soon we reached a veritable maze of these passages. We must have taken a dozen or more turns, first to the right, then to the left. I had been marking our way on my memory as well as possible, but I soon gave up the attempt as hopeless.

Several times our guide turned so quickly that we could scarcely follow him. When we signified by gestures our desire to go slower he seemed surprised; of course, he expected us to see in the dark as well as he.

Then a dim light appeared, growing brighter as we advanced. Soon I saw that it came through an opening in the wall to our left, which we were approaching. Before opening the guide halted, motioning us to enter.

We did so, and found ourselves in an apartment no less than royal.

Several blazing urns attached to the walls furnished the light, wavering but brilliant. There were tables and rude seats, fashioned from the same prismatic stones which covered the column in the lake, and from their surfaces a thousand points of color shone dazzlingly.

At one side was a long slab of granite covered with the skins of some animal, dry, thick, and soft. The walls themselves were of the hardest granite, studded to a height of four or five feet with tiny, innumerable spots of gold.

Harry crossed to the middle of the apartment and stood gazing curiously about him. I turned to the door and looked down the outer passage in both directions--our guide had disappeared.

"We appear to be friends of the family," said Harry with a grin.

"Thanks to Desiree, yes."

"Thanks to the devil! What did she mean--what could she mean? Was it one of her jokes? For I can't believe that she would--would--"

"Have sent us to death? Well--who knows? Yes, it may have been one of her jokes," I lied.

For, of course, Harry knew nothing of the cause of Desiree's desire for revenge on me, and it would have served no good purpose to tell him.

We talked for an hour or more, examining our apartment meanwhile with considerable curiosity.

The gold excited our wonder; had it come from Huanuco four hundred years ago, or had they found it here in the mountain?

I examined the little blocks of metal or gems with which the tables and seats were inlaid, but could make nothing of them. They resembled a carbon formation sometimes found in quartzite, but were many times more brilliant than anything I had ever seen, excepting precious stones.

The hides which covered the granite couch were also unknown to me; they were of an amazing thickness and incredibly soft.

We were amusing ourselves with an attempt to pry one of the bits of gold from the wall when we heard a sound behind us.

We turned and saw Desiree.

She stood in the entrance, smiling at us as though we had been caught in her boudoir examining the articles on her dressing-table. She was clothed as she had been on the throne; a rope girdle held her single garment, and her hair fell across her shoulders, reaching to her knees. Her arms and shoulders appeared marvelously white, but they may have been by way of contrast.

Harry sprang across to her with a single bound. In another moment his arms were round her; she barely submitted to the embrace, but she gave him her lips, then drew herself away and crossed to me, extending her hands in a sort of wavering doubt.

But that was no time for hostilities, and I took the hands in my own and bent over them till my lips touched the soft fingers.

"A visit from the queen!" I said with a smile. "This is an honor, your majesty."

"A doubtful one," said Desiree. "First of all, my friend, I want to congratulate you on your savoir faire. Par Bleu, that was the part of a man!"

"But you!" cried Harry. "What the deuce did you mean by pretending to play the black? I tell you, that was a shabby trick. Most unpleasant moment you gave us."

Desiree sent me a quick glance; she was plainly surprised to find Harry in ignorance of what had passed between us that evening in the camp on the mountain. Wherein she was scarcely to be blamed, for her surprise came from a
deep knowledge of the ways of men.

"I am beginning to know you, Paul," she said, looking into my eyes.

"Now what's up?" demanded Harry, looking from her to me and back again. "For Heaven's sake, don't talk
riddles. What does that mean?"

But Desiree silenced him with a gesture, placing her fingers playfully on his lips. They were seated side by side on the granite couch; I stood in front of them, and there flitted across my memory a picture of that morning scene in the grounds of the Antlers at Colorado Springs, when Desiree and I had had our first battle.

We talked; or, rather, Harry and Desiree talked, and I listened. First he insisted on a recital of her experiences since her reckless dash into the "cave of the devil," and she was most obliging, even eager, for she had had no one to talk to for many days, and she was a woman. She found in Harry a perfect audience.

Her experience had been much the same as our own. She, too, had fallen down the unseen precipice into the torrent beneath.

She asserted that she had been carried along by its force scarcely more than a quarter of an hour, and had been violently thrown upon a ledge of rock. It was evident that this must have been long before the stream reached the lake where Harry and I had found each other, for we had been in the water hardly short of an hour.

She had been found on the ledge by our hairy friends, who had carried her on their backs for many hours. I remembered the sensations of Harry and myself, who were men, and together, and gave a shudder of sympathy as Desiree described her own horror and fear, and her one attempt to escape.

Still the brutes had shown her no great violence, evidently recognizing the preciousness of their burden. They had carried her as gently as possible, but had absolutely refused to allow her to walk. At regular intervals they gave her an opportunity to rest, and food and water.

"Dried fish?" I asked hopefully.

Desiree nodded, with a most expressive grimace, and Harry burst into laughter.

Then of the elevation to her evident authority. Brought before the king, she had inspired the most profound wonder and curiosity. Easy, indeed, to understand how the whiteness of her skin and the beauty of her form and face had awakened the keenest admiration in the breast of that black and hairy monarch. He had shown her the most perfect respect; and she had played up to the role of goddess by displaying to the utmost her indifferent contempt for royalty and its favors.

Here her remarks grew general and evasive, and when pressed with questions she refused details. She declared that nothing had happened; she had been fed and fawned upon, nor been annoyed by any violence or unwelcome attentions.

"That is really too bad," said I, with a smile. "I was, then, mistaken when I said 'your majesty'?"

"Faugh!" said Desiree. "That is hardly witty. For a time I was amused, but I am becoming bored. And yet--"

"Well?"

"I--don't--know. They are mine, if you know what I mean. Eh, bien, since you ask me--for I see the question in your eye, friend Paul--I am content. If the world is behind me forever, so be it. Yes, they are unattractive to the eye, but they have power. And they worship me."

"Desiree!" cried Harry in astonishment; and I was myself a little startled.

"Why not?" she demanded. "They are men. And besides, it is impossible for us to return. With all your cleverness, M. Paul, can you find the sunlight? To remain is a necessity; we must make the best of it; and I repeat that I am satisfied."

"That's bally rot," said Harry, turning on her hotly. "Satisfied? You are nothing of the sort. I'll tell you one thing- -Paul and I are going to find our way out of this, and you are coming with us."

For reply Desiree laughed at him--a laugh that plainly said, "I am my own mind, and obey no other." It is one of the most familiar cards of the woman of beauty, and the most effective. It conquered Harry.

He gazed at her for a long moment in silence, while his eyes filled with an expression which one man should never show to another man. It is the betrayal of the masculine sex and the triumph of the feminine.

Suddenly he threw himself on his knees before her and took her hands in his own. She attempted to withdraw them; he clasped her about the waist.

"Do you not love me, Desiree?" he cried, and his lips sought hers.

They met; Desiree ceased to struggle.

At that moment I heard a sound--the faintest sound--behind me.

I turned.

The king of the Incas was standing within the doorway, surveying the lovers with beadlike, sparkling eyes.

Chapter XI.

A ROYAL VISITOR.
If it had not been for the manifest danger, I could have laughed aloud at what I read in the eyes of the king. Was it not supremely ridiculous for Desiree Le Mire, who had been sought after by the great and the wealthy and the powerful of all Europe, to be regarded with desire by that ugly dwarf? And it was there, unmistakably.

I sang out a sharp warning, but it was unnecessary; Desiree had already caught sight of the royal visitor. She pushed Harry from her bodily. He sprang to his feet in angry surprise; then, enlightened by the confusion in her face, turned quickly and swore as he, too, saw the intruder.

How critical the situation was I did not know, despite Desiree's assertions. His eyes were human and easily read; they held jealousy; and when power is jealous there is danger.

But Desiree proved herself equal to the occasion. She remained seated on the granite couch for a long minute without moving; confusion left her eyes as she gazed at us apparently with the utmost composure; but I who knew her could see that her brain was working with the rapidity of lightning. Then her glance passed to the figure at the doorway, and with a gesture commanding and truly royal in its simplicity, she held her hand forth, palm down, to the Inca king.

Like an obedient trained monkey he trotted across the intervening space, grasped her soft white hand in his monstrous paw, and touched his lips to her fingers.

That was all, but it spoke volumes to one who could divine the springs of action. I remember that at the time there shot through my mind a story I had heard concerning Desiree in Paris. The Duke of Bellarmine, then her protector, had one evening entered her splendid apartment on the Rue Jonteur--furnished, of course, by himself--and had founded his divinity entertaining one Jules Chavot, a young and beautiful poet. Whereupon he had launched forth into the most bitter reproaches and scurrilous denunciations.

"Monsieur," Desiree had said, with the look of a queen outraged, when he had finished, "you are annoying. Little Chavot amuses me. You are aware that I never refuse myself anything which I consider necessary to my amusement, and just now I find you very dull."

And the noble duke, conquered by that glance of fire and those terrible words, had retired with humble apologies, after receiving a gracious permission to call on the following day!

In short, Desiree was irresistible; the subjection of the Inca king was but another of her triumphs, and not the most remarkable.

And then I looked at Harry, and was aware of a new danger. He was glaring at the Inca with eyes which told their own story of the fire within, and which were waiting only for suspicion to become certainty. I called to him:

"Harry! Hold fast!"

He glanced at me, gave a short laugh, and nodded.

Then came Desiree's voice, in a low tone of warning:

"On your knees!"

Her meaning was clear; it was to us she spoke. The king had turned from her and was regarding us steadily with eyes so nearly closed that their meaning was impenetrable. Harry and I glanced at each other and remained standing. Then Desiree's voice again:

"Harry! If you love me!"

It was the appeal to a child; but love is young. Immediately Harry dropped to his knees, facing the king; and I followed him, wondering at myself. To this day I do not know what the compelling force was that pulled me down.

Was it another instance of the power of Desiree? For perhaps a minute we remained motionless on our knees while the king stood gazing at us, it seemed to me with an air of doubt. Then slowly, and with a gait that smacked of majesty despite his ungainly appearance and diminutive stature, he stalked across to the doorway and disappeared in the corridor without.

Harry and I looked at each other, kneeling like two heathen idols, and burst into unrestrained laughter. But with it was mixed a portion of anger, and I turned to Desiree.

"In the name of Heaven, was that necessary?"

"You do it very prettily," said she, with a smile.

"That is well, but I don't care to repeat it. Harry, for the sake of my dignity, employ a little discretion. And what do you suppose the beggar will do about it?"

"Nothing," said Desiree, shrugging her shoulders. "Only he must be pacified. I must go. I wonder if you know you are lodged in the royal apartments? His majesty's room--he has but one--is in the corridor to the left of this.

"Mine is on the right--and he is probably stamping the place to pieces at this moment." She left the granite couch and advanced half way to the door. "Au revoir, messieurs. Till later--I shall come to see you."

The next moment she was gone.

Harry and I, left alone, had enough to think and talk about, but there was ten minutes of silence before we spoke. I sat on one of the stone seats, wondering what the result would be--if any--of the king's visit and his discovery.
Harry paced up and down the length of the apartment with lowered head. Presently he spoke abruptly:

"Paul, I want to know exactly what you think of our chances for getting out of this."

"Why--" I hesitated. "Harry, I don't know."

"But you've thought about it, and you know something about these things. What do you think?"

"Well, I think they are slim."

"What are they?"

"Nothing less than miracles. There are just two. First--and I've spoken of this before--we might find an underground stream that would carry us to the western slope."

"That is impossible--at least, for Desiree. And the second?"

"Nature herself. She plays queer tricks in the Andes. She might turn the mountain upside down, in which case we would find ourselves on top. Seriously, the formation here is such that almost anything is possible. Upheavals of vast masses of rock are of ordinary occurrence. A passage might be opened in that way to one of the lower peaks."

"We are surrounded by layers of limestone, granite, and quartzite, which are of marked difference both in the quality of hardness and in their ability to withstand the attacks of time. When one finds itself unable to support the other, something happens."

"But it might not happen for a hundred years."

"Or never," I agreed.

Again silence. Harry stood gazing at one of the flaming urns, buried in thought--easy to guess of what nature. I did not think fit to disturb him, till presently he spoke again.

"What do you suppose that ugly devil will do about--what he saw in here?"

I smiled. "Nothing."

"But if he should? We are helpless."

"Trust Desiree. It's true that she can't even talk to him, but she'll manage him somehow. You saw what happened just now."

"But the creature is no better than a dumb brute. He is capable of anything. I tell you, we ought to get her away from here."

"To starve?"

"And we're none too safe ourselves. As for starving, we could carry enough of their darned fish to last a year. And one thing is sure: we won't get back to New York lying round here waiting for something to turn up--even a mountain."

"What do you want to do?"

"Clear out. Get Desiree away from that ugly brute. If we only had our knives!"

"Where would we go?"

In that question was the whole matter. To escape with Desiree was possible--but then what? We knew by experience what it meant to wander hopelessly about in the darkness of those desolate caverns, without food, and depending on Providence for water. Neither of us cared to repeat that trial, especially with the added difficulty of a woman to care for. But what to do?

We decided to wait for the future, and in the mean time lay in a supply of provisions, and, if possible, devise some sort of weapons.

It is worth remarking here that the Incas, so far as we had seen, used no weapons whatever. This was most probably the result of their total isolation and consequent freedom from foreign hostility.

In the matter of food we were soon to receive an agreeable surprise. It was about an hour after Desiree had left us that the royal steward--I give him the title on my own responsibility--arrived, with pots and pans on a huge tray.

In the first place, the pots and pans were of solid gold. Harry stared in amazement as they were placed in brilliant array on one of the stone tables; and when we essayed to lift the empty tray from another table on which it had been placed we understood why the steward had found it necessary to bring four assistants along as cup-bearers.

There was a king's ransom on that table, in sober truth, for there could be no doubt but that this was part of the gold which had been carried from Huanuco when it had been demanded by Pizarro as payment for the life of Atahualpa.

But better even than the service was that which it contained. It may not have been such as would enhance the reputation of a French chef, but to us then it seemed that the culinary art could go no farther.

There was a large platter; Harry lifted its cover in an ecstasy of hope; but the next instant his face fell ludicrously.

"Our old friend, Mr. Dried Fish," he announced sadly, and gave it up.

Then I tried my luck, and with better success.

First I uncovered a dish of stew, steaming hot! To be sure, it was fish, but it was hot. Then a curious, brittle kind
of bread; I call it that, though on trial it appeared to be made from the roe of some kind of fish. Also there was some excellent fish-soup, also hot, and quite delicious.

Four hundred years of development had taught the royal chefs to prepare fish in so many different ways that we almost failed to recognize them as of the same family.

"Couldn't be better," said Harry, helping himself liberally to the stew. "We can eat this, and cache the dried stuff. We'll have enough for an army in a week."

"As for me, I saw before me the raw material for our weapons. When we had emptied the golden platter that held our "bread," I secreted it under the cover of the granite couch. When the serving-men called to remove the dishes they apparently did not notice its absence. So far, success.

Some hours later Desiree paid us a second call. She appeared to be in the gayest of spirits, and I eyed her curiously from a seat in the corner as she and Harry sat side by side, chatting for all the world as though they had been in her own Paris drawing-room.

Was it possible that she was really satisfied, as she had said? What imaginable food could these black dwarfs find to appease her tremendous vanity? Or was she merely living the motto of the French philosopher?

Harry was demanding that he be allowed to visit her apartment; this she refused, saying that if he were found there by the king nothing could avert a catastrophe. Harry's brow grew black; I could see his effort to choke back his anger. Then Desiree led him away from the topic, and soon they were both again laughing merrily.

Some forty-eight hours passed; in that perpetual blackness there was no such thing as day. We saw no one save Desiree and the serving men. Once a messenger appeared carrying a bundle of quipos; I was able to decipher their meaning sufficiently to understand that we were invited to some religious ceremony in the great cavern. But I thought it injudicious to allow a meeting between Harry and the king, and returned a polite refusal.

It may be of interest to some to know the method, which was extremely simple, as in ordinary communications the quipos are easy to read. I removed two knots from the white cord--the sign of affirmative--and placed two additional ones on the black cord--the sign of negative. Then on the yellow cord--the sign of the Child of the Sun and submission to him--I tied two more knots to show that our refusal meant no lack of respect to their deity.

Which, by the way, was not a little curious.

Here were the descendants of the subjects of Manco-Capac, himself a son of the orb of day, still holding to their worship of the sun, though they had not seen its light for four centuries. Deserted by their god, they did not abandon him; an example from which the followers of another and more "civilized" religion might learn something of the potency of faith.

But to the story.

As I say, I was anxious to avoid a meeting between Harry and the king, and subsequent events proved my wisdom. Harry was acting in a manner quite amazing; it was impossible for me to mention the king even in jest without him flying into a violent temper.

As I look back now I am not surprised; for our harrowing experiences and the hopelessness of our situation and the wilfulness of Desiree were enough, Heaven knows, to jerk his nerves; but at the time I regarded his actions as those of a thoughtless fool, and told him so, thinking to divert his anger to myself. He took no notice of me.

We were left entirely to ourselves. At regular intervals our food was brought to us, and within a week we had accumulated a large supply of the dried fish against necessity, besides my collection of six golden platters, of which more later.

Once in about twenty-four hours two Incas, who appeared to be our personal attendants--for we were actually able to recognize them after half a dozen visits--arrived to perform the offices of chambermaid and valet. The floor of the apartment was scrubbed, the urns refilled with oil, and the skin cover of the granite couch was changed. It seemed that another belief--in cleanliness--had refused to be dislodged from the Inca breast.

When I managed, by dint of violent and expressive gestures, to convey to our valet the idea that we desired a bath, he led us down the corridor some two hundred feet to a stream of cool running water. We took advantage of the opportunity to scrub our clothing, which was sadly in need of the operation.

I had early made an examination of the urns which furnished our light. They were of gold and perfect in form, which convinced me that they had been brought by the fugitives from Huanuco, as, indeed, the quipos also, and several other articles we found, including our golden table service.

The urns were filled with an oil which I was unable to recognize. There was no wick, but round the rim or lip of each was set a broad ring carved of stone, which made the opening at the top only about two inches in diameter. Through this the flame arose to a height of about two feet.

Of smoke there was none, or very little, a circumstance which was inexplicable, as there seemed to be no possibility of the generation of gas within so small space. But the oil itself was strange to me, and its properties may be charged to nature.
As I say, I had collected six of the golden platters, one at a time. Together they weighed about twenty pounds—for they were small and rather thin—which was near the amount required for my purpose. I explained the thing to Harry, and we set to work.

We first procured a vessel of granite from the attendant on some pretext or other—this for melting the gold. Then we pried a slab of limestone from a corner of one of the seats; luckily for us it was very soft, having been selected by the Incas for the purpose of inserting in its face the crystal prisms. Then we procured a dozen or more of the prisms themselves, and, using them as chisels, and small blocks of granite as hammers, set to work at the block of limestone.

It was slow work, but we finally succeeded in hollowing out a groove in its surface about eighteen inches long and two inches deep. That was our mold.

Then to melt the golden platters. We took four of the urns, placing them in a group on the floor, and just at the tip of the flames placed the granite vessel, supported by four blocks of stone which we pried loose from one of the seats. In the vessel we placed the golden platters.

But we found, after several hours, that we did not have sufficient heat—or rather that the vessel was too thick to transmit it. And again we set to work with our improvised chisels and hammers, to shave off its sides and bottom. That was more difficult and required many hours for completion.

Finally, with the profane portion of our vocabularies completely exhausted and rendered meaningless by repetition, and with bruised and bleeding hands, we again arranged our furnace and sat down to wait. We had waited until the dishes from our dinner had been removed, and we were fairly certain to be alone for several hours.

Finally the gold was melted, stubbornly but surely. We took the thick hide cover from the couch and, one on each side, lifted the vessel of liquid metal and filled our mold. In an hour it was hardened into a bar the shape of a half-cylinder. We removed it and poured in the remainder of the gold.

It would appear that the gain was hardly worth the pains, and I admit it. But at the least I had kept Harry occupied with something besides his amatory troubles, and at the best we had two heavy, easily handled bars of metal that would prove most effective weapons against foes who had none whatever.

We had just removed the traces of our work as completely as possible and secreted the clubs of yellow metal in a corner of the apartment when the sound of pattering footsteps came from the corridor.

Harry gave me a quick glance; I moved between him and the door. But it was Desiree.

She entered the room hurriedly and crossed to the farther side, then turned to face the door. Her cheeks were glowing brightly, her eyes flashed fire, and her breast heaved with unwonted agitation. Before either she or I had time to speak Harry had sprung to her side and grasped her arm.

"What has he done now?" he demanded in a tone scarcely audible in its intensity.

"I--don't--know," said Desiree without removing her eyes from the door. "Let me go, Harry; let me sit down. Paul! Ah! I was afraid."

"For us?" I asked.

"Yes--partly. The brute! But then, he is human, and that is his way. And you--I was right--you should have gone to the Cave of the Sun when he required your presence."

"But it was merely an invitation. Cannot one refuse an invitation?" I protested.

"But, my dear Paul, the creature is royal—his invitations are commands."

"Well, we were busy, and we've already seen the Cave of the Sun."

"Still it was an error, and I think you will pay for it. There have been unusual preparations under way for many hours. The king has been in my apartment, and messengers and guards have been arriving constantly, each with his little bundle of quipos, as you call them."

"Did you see the quipos?"

"Yes."

"Did any of them contain a red cord, suspended alone, with a single knot at either end?"

"Yes, all of them," said Desiree without an instant's hesitation.

"That means Harry and me," I observed. "But the message! Can you remember any of them?"

She tried, but without success. Which will not surprise any one who has ever seen the collection at the museum at Lima.

Then Harry broke in:

"Something else has happened, Desiree. No bunch of cords tied in silly knots ever made you look as you did just now. What was it?"

"Nothing—nothing, Harry."

"I say yes! And I want to know! And if it's what I think it is we're going to clear out of here now!"

"As though we could!"
"We can! We have enough provisions to last for weeks. And see here," he ran to the corner where he had hidden the golden clubs and returned with them in his hands, "with these we could make our way through them all. Tell me!"

There was a strange smile on Desiree's lips.

"And so you would fight for me, Harry?" she said half-wistfully, half--I know not what. Then she continued in a tone low but quite distinct: "Well, it is too late. I am the king's."

She lied--I saw it in her eyes. Perhaps she meant to save Harry from his folly, to quiet him by the knowledge that he need not fight for what was no longer his own; but she was mistaken in her man.

Harry did not stop to read her eyes--he heard her words. He took two slow steps backward, then stood quite still, while his face grew deadly white and his eyes were fastened on hers with a look that made me turn my own away.

His soul looked out from them--how he loved the woman--and I could not bear it!

Nor, after a moment, could Desiree. She took a step forward, extending her arms to him and cried out:

"Harry! No! It was a lie, Harry! Don't--don't!"

And they gazed at each other, and I at Desiree, and thus we were unaware that a fourth person had entered the room, until he had crossed its full length and stood before me. It was the Inca king.

I took no time for thought, but jumped straight for Harry and threw my arms round him, dragging him back half-way across the room. Taken completely by surprise, he did not struggle. I noticed that he still held in his hands the bars of gold he had shown to Desiree.

The king regarded us for a second with a scowl, then turned to her.

She stood erect, with flashing eyes. The king approached; she held out her hand to him with an indescribable gesture of dignity.

For a moment he looked at her, then his lips curled in an ugly snarl, and, dashing her hand aside, he leaped forward in swift fury and grasped her white throat with his fingers.

There was a strangled scream from Desiree, a frantic cry from Harry--and the next instant he had torn himself free from my arms, dropping the bars of gold at my feet.

A single bound and he was across the room; a single blow with his fist and the king of the Incas dropped senseless to the floor.

Chapter XII.

AT THE DOOR.

Desiree shrank back against the wall, covering her face with her hands. Harry stood above the prostrate figure of the king, panting and furious.

As for me, I gave no thought to what had been done--the imminent peril of the situation possessed my mind and stung my brain to action.

I ran to the figure on the floor and bent over him. There was no movement--his eyes were closed. Calling to Harry to watch the corridor without, I quickly tore my woolen jacket into strips--my fingers seemed to be made of steel--and bound the wrists and ankles of the Inca firmly, trussing him up behind.

Then with another strip I gagged him, thinking it best to err on the side of prudence. In another moment I had dragged him to the corner of the room behind the granite couch and covered him with its hide-cover.

Then I turned to Harry:

"Is the coast clear?"

"Yes," he answered from the doorway.

"Then here--quick, man! Get the clubs and the grub. Desiree--come! There's not a second to lose."

"But, Paul--" she began; then, seeing the utter folly of any other course than instant flight, she sprang to Harry's side to assist him with the bundles of provisions.

There was more than we could carry. Harry and I each took a bundle under our left arm, carrying the clubs in the other hand. Desiree attempted to take two bundles, but they were too heavy for her, and she was forced to drop one.

With a last hasty glance at the motionless heap in the corner we started, Harry leading and myself in the rear, with Desiree between us.

But it was not to be so easy. We were nearly to the door when there came a grating, rumbling sound from above, and a huge block of granite dropped squarely across the doorway with a crash that made the ground tremble beneath our feet.

Stupefied, we realized in a flash that the cunning of the Incas had proved too much for us. Harry and I ran forward, but only to invite despair; the doorway was completely covered by the massive rock, an impenetrable curtain of stone weighing many tons, and on neither side was there an opening more than an inch wide. We were imprisoned beyond all hope of escape.

We stood stunned; Desiree even made no sound, but gazed at the blocked doorway in a sort of stupid wonder.
was one of those sudden and overwhelming catastrophes that deprive us for a moment of all power to reason or even to realize.

Then Harry said quietly:
"Well, the game's up."

And Desiree turned to me with the calm observation:
"They must have been watching us. We were fools not to have known it."
"Impossible!" Harry asserted; but I agreed with Desiree; and though I could see no opening or crevice of any sort in the walls or ceiling, I was convinced that even then the eyes of the Incas were upon us.

Our situation was indeed desperate. With our every movement spied upon, surrounded by four solid walls of stone, and beyond them ten thousand savage brutes waiting to tear us to pieces—what wildest fancy could indulge in hope?

Then, glancing up, my eye was arrested by the heap under the cover in the corner. There, in the person of the Inca king, lay our only advantage. But how could we use it?
Desiree's voice came in the calm tones of despair:
"We are lost."

Harry crossed to her and took her in his arms.
"I thank Heaven," he said, "that you are with us." Then he turned to me: "I believe it is for the best, Paul. There never was a chance for us; we may as well say it now. And it is better to die here, together, than—the other way."

I smiled at his philosophy, knowing its source. It came not from his own head, but from Desiree's arms. But it was truth.

We sat silent. The thing was beyond discussion; too elemental to need speech for its explanation or understanding. I believe it was not despair that kept back our words, but merely the dumb realization that where all hope is gone words are useless—worse, a mockery.

Finally I crossed the room and removed the cover from the body of the Child of the Sun. He had recovered consciousness; his little wicked eyes gleamed up at me with an expression that would have been terrifying in the intensity of its malignant hatred if he had not been utterly helpless. I turned to Harry:
"What are we going to do with him?"
"By Jove, I had forgotten!" exclaimed the lad. "Paul, perhaps if we could communicate with them—" He stopped, glancing at the closed doorway; then added: "But it's impossible."
"I believe it is possible," I contradicted. "If the Incas were able to lower that stone at any moment you may be sure they are prepared to raise it. How, Heaven only knows; but the fact is certain. Do you think they would have condemned their precious king to starvation?"
"Then the king can save us!"
"And how?"
"Our lives for his. We'll give him nothing to eat, and if, as you say, they have some way of watching us, they'll be forced to negotiate. You can talk with the quipos, and tell them that unless they give us our freedom and let us go in safety they'll have a dead king. From the way they seem to worship him they'd come through in a minute."
"Oh, they'd promise, all right," I agreed; "but how could we hold them to it?"
"Well, a promise is a promise. And it's our only chance."
"No, Harry; to trust them would be folly. The minute we stepped through that doorway they would be on us—the whole beggarly, smelly lot of them."
"Then there is no chance—none whatever?" put in Desiree.
"None. We may as well admit the worst. And the worst is best for us now. Really, we are in luck; we die in our own way and at our own time. But there is one difficulty."

Then, in answer to their glances of inquiry, I added significantly: "We have no weapons. We cannot allow ourselves to starve—the end must come before that, for as soon as they saw us weakening we would be at their mercy."

There was comprehension and horror in Desiree's eyes, but she looked at me with a brave attempt to smile as she took from her hair something which gleamed and shone in the light from the flaming urns. It was a tiny steel blade with a handle of pearl studded with diamonds.

I had seen it before many times—a present, Desiree had told me, from the young man I had seen in the royal coach on that day in Madrid when I had first heard the name of Le Mire.
"Will that do?" she asked calmly, holding it out to me with a firm hand.

Brave Le Mire! I took the dagger and placed it in my pocket, and, looking at Harry, exchanged with him a nod of understanding. No words were necessary.
"But I must confess I am a coward," said Desiree. "When the time comes I—I could not bear to see—to wait—"
I looked at her and said simply: “You shall be first,” and she gave me a smile of thanks that spoke of a heart that would not fail when the final moment arrived. And in my admiration of her high courage I forgot the horror of the task that must be mine.

It was a relief to have admitted the worst and discussed it calmly; there is no torment like suspense, and ours was at an end. A load was lifted from our hearts, and a quiet sympathy created between us, sincere as death itself. And it was in our power to choose for ourselves the final moment—we were yet masters of our fates.

All action seems useless when hope is dead, but certain things needed to be done, and Harry and I bestirred ourselves. We extinguished the flame in all the urns but one to save the oil, not caring to depart in darkness.

Our supply of water, we found, was quite sufficient to last for several days, if used sparingly; for we intended to support life so long as we had the fuel. Then responsibility ceases; man has a right to hasten that which fortune has made inevitable.

The hours passed by.

We talked very little; at times Desiree and Harry conversed in subdued tones which I did not overhear; I was engaged with my own thoughts. And they were not unpleasant; if, looking death in the face, a man can preserve his philosophy unchanged, he has made the only success in life that is worth while.

We ate and drank, but gave neither water nor food to our fellow prisoner. Not because I really expected to force negotiations with the Incas—but the thing was possible and was worth a trial. I knew them well enough to appraise correctly the value of any safe-conduct they might give us.

I was a little surprised to find in Desiree no levity, the vulgar prop for courage based on ignorance. There was a tenderness in her manner, especially toward Harry, that spoke of something deeper and awoke in my own breast a deeper respect for her. The world had not known Desiree Le Mire—it had merely been fascinated and amused by her.

Many hours had passed in this tomblike apathy. Two or three times I had advised Desiree to lie down to rest and, if possible, to sleep. She had refused, but I became insistent, and Harry added his voice to my own. Then, to please us, she consented; we arranged the cover on the granite couch and made her as comfortable as possible.

In five minutes she was fast asleep. Harry stood a few feet away from the couch, looking down at her. I spoke to him, in a low tone:

"And you must rest too, Hal. One of us must remain on watch; I'll take it first and call you when I feel drowsy. It may be a needless precaution, but I don't care to wake up and find myself in the condition of our friend yonder."

He wanted to take the first watch himself, but I insisted, and he arranged our ponchos on the ground, and soon he too was sleeping easily and profoundly. I looked from him to Desiree with a smile, and reflection that Socrates himself could not have met misfortune with more sublime composure.

It was possible that the stone curtain across the doorway could be raised noiselessly, and that made it necessary to keep my eyes fastened on it almost continuously. This became irksome; besides, twice I awoke to the fact that my thoughts had carried me so far away from my surroundings that the stone could have been raised to the roof and I would not have noticed it.

So, using my jacket for a cushion, I seated myself on the ground in the threshold, leaning my back against the stone, and gave myself up to meditation.

I had sat thus for three hours or more, and was thinking of calling Harry to relieve me, when I felt a movement at my back. I turned quickly and saw that the stone was moving upward.

Slowly it rose, by little frequent jerks, not more than an eighth of an inch at a time. In fifteen minutes it was only about four inches from the ground. There was no sound save a faint grating noise from above.

I stood several feet away, holding one of the golden clubs in my hand, thinking it unnecessary to rouse Harry until the space was wide enough to cause apprehension. Or rather, because I had no fear of an assault—I was convinced that our ruse had succeeded, and that they were about to communicate with us by means of the quipos.

The stone was raised a little over a foot, then became stationary. I waited, expecting to see a bundle of quipos thrust through the opening, but they did not appear.

Instead, five golden vessels were pushed across the ground until they were inside, clear of the stone; I could see the black, hairy hands and arms, which were immediately withdrawn.

Then the granite curtain fell with a crash that caused me to start with its suddenness and awakened both Harry and Desiree.

Two of the vessels contained water, two oil, and the other dried fish. Harry, who had sprung to his feet excitedly, grumbled in disgust.

"At least, they might have sent us some soup. But what's their idea?"

"It means that Desiree was right," I observed. "They have some way of watching us. And, seeing that we refused to provide their beloved monarch with provender, they have sent him an allowance from the pantry."

Harry grinned.
"Will he get it?"

"Hardly," said I with emphasis. "We'll make 'em treat with us if it's only to observe their diplomacy. There'll be a message from them within twenty-four hours. You'll see."

"Anyway, we know now that they can raise that stone whenever they feel like it. But in the name of Archimedes, how?"

He advanced to the doorway and examined the block of granite curiously, but there was no clue to its weight or thickness from the inside. I explained that there were several ways by which the thing could be raised, but that the most probable one was by means of a rolling pulley, which required merely some rounded stones and a flat surface above, with ropes of hide for stays.

It had been several hours since we had last eaten, and we decided to at once convey to the spies without our intentions concerning our prisoner. So we regaled ourselves with dried fish and water, taking care not to approach the king, who had rolled over on his side and lay facing us, looking for all the world, in the dim light, like a black dog crouched on the floor.

Harry relieved me at my post against the door, and I lay down to sleep. Desiree had seated herself beside him, and the low tones of their voices came to me as I lay on the couch (which Desiree had insisted I should occupy) in an indistinct, musical murmur. This for perhaps ten minutes; then I slept.

That became our routine. During the many weary hours that followed there was never a moment when one of us was not seated with his back against the stone across the doorway; we dared not trust our eyes. Usually Harry and Desiree watched together, and, when I relieved them, slept side by side on the couch.

Sometimes, when we were all awake, Desiree was left on guard alone; but Harry and I were never both asleep at the same time.

An estimate of the time we spent thus would be the wildest guess, for time was heavy and passed on leaden feet. But I should say we had been imprisoned for something like four days, possibly five, when the monotony came to an abrupt end.

I had come off watch, and Harry and Desiree had taken my place. Before I lay down I had taken some water to the prisoner, for we had some time before admitted the necessity of giving him drink. But of food he had had none.

Harry told me afterward that I had slept for two or three hours, but it seemed to me rather as many minutes, when I was awakened by the sound of his voice calling my name. Glancing at the doorway, I sprang to my feet.

The stone was slowly rising from the floor; already there was a space of a foot or more. Desiree and Harry stood facing it in silence.

"You have seen nothing?" I asked, joining them.

"Nothing," said Harry. "Here, take one of these clubs. Something's up."

"Of course--the stone," I observed facetiously, yawning. "Probably nothing more important than a bundle of quipos. Lord, I'm sleepy!"

Still the stone moved upward, very slowly. It reached a height of two feet, yet did not halt.

"This is no quipos" said Harry, "or if it is, they must be going to send us in a whole library. Six inches would have been enough for that."

I nodded, keeping my eyes on the ever-widening space at our feet.

"This means business, Hal. Stand ready with your club. Desiree, go to the further corner, behind that seat."

She refused; I insisted; she stamped her foot in anger.

"Do you think I'm a child, to run and hide?" she demanded obstinately.

I wasted no time in argument.

"You will go", I said sternly, "or I shall carry you and tie you. This is not play. We must have room and know that you are safe."

To my surprise, she made no reply, but quietly obeyed. Then, struck by a sudden thought, I crossed to where she stood behind a stone seat in the corner.

"Here," I said in a low tone, taking the little jeweled dagger from my pocket and holding it out to her, "in case--"

"I understand," she said simply, and her hand closed over the hilt.

By that time the stone was half-way to the top of the doorway, leaving a space over three feet high, and was still rising. I stood on one side and Harry on the other, not caring to expose ourselves immediately in front.

Suddenly he left his post and ran to one of the stone seats and began prying at the blocks of granite. I saw at once his intention and our mistake; we should have long before barricaded the door on the inside. But it was too late now; I knew from experience the difficulty of loosening those firmly wedged blocks, and I called out:

"No good, Hal. We were fools not to have thought of it before, but there is no time for it now. Come back; I couldn't stop 'em alone."

Nevertheless, he continued his exertions, and succeeded in getting one of the blocks partially free; but by that
time the doorway was almost completely uncovered, and he saw the folly of attempting further.

He resumed his post on the right of the door--I was on the left.

The stone appeared to be going faster. It reached the top--passed it--and quickly swung in toward the wall and disappeared, probably to rest on a ledge above.

We stood waiting, tense and alert. The open doorway gaped on the black, empty corridor, into which the light from our single urn shone dimly. We could see or hear nothing, no indication that any one was in the passage, but we dared not look out in that darkness. The suspense was trying enough; Harry ripped out an impatient oath and made a movement as though to step in the entrance, but I waved him back.

Then came the avalanche, with a suddenness and fury that nigh overwhelmed us.

Crouching, rushing forms filled the doorway from both directions and leaped savagely at us. After so many weary days of dull inaction and helpless, hopeless apathy, a mad joy fired my brain and thrilled my heart as I raised my club on high and struck a blow for freedom and life.

That blow crushed the skull of one whose fingers were at my throat, and he dropped like a log at my feet; but his place was already filled. Again I swung the club; another swayed, toppling against the doorway and leaning there with the blood streaming from his broken head, quite dead, but held erect by the pressure of his fellows from behind.

If the doorway had been but a foot wider we would have been overwhelmed almost instantly. As it was, but three or four could get to us at once, and they found the gold which their ancestors had carried from the temples of Huanuco waiting for them. My arm seemed to have the strength of a hundred arms; it swung the heavy club as though it had been a feather, and with deadly accuracy.

Harry fought like a demon. I think I did all that a man could do, but he did more, and withal more coolly. I brought down my club on heads, shoulders, chests, and rarely failed to get my man.

But the impact of Harry's blows was like the popping of a Maxim. I saw him reach over and grasp the throat of one who had his teeth set in my shoulder, and, holding him straight before him with his arm extended, break his neck with one blow. Again, his club descended on one black skull with a glancing blow and shot off to the head of another with the force of a sledge-hammer.

At the time I did not know that I saw these things; it was all one writhing, struggling, bloody horror; but afterward the eyes of memory showed them to me.

Still they came. My arm rose and fell seemingly without order from the brain; I was not conscious that it moved. It seemed to me that ever since the beginning of time I had stood in that butcher's doorway and brought down that bar of gold on thick, black skulls and distorted, grinning faces. But they would not disappear. One fell; another took his place; and another, and another, and another.

The bodies of those who fell were dragged away from underneath. I did not see it, but it must have been so, or soon we would have raised our own barricade for defense--a barricade of flesh. And there was none.

I began to weaken, and Harry saw it, for he gasped out: "Steady--Paul. Take it--easy. They can't--last--forever."

His blows were redoubled in fury as he moved closer to me, taking more than his share of the attack, so that I almost had time to breathe.

But we could not have held out much longer. My brain was whirling madly and a weight of a thousand tons seemed dragging me remorselessly, inevitably to the ground. I kept my feet through the force of some crazy instinct, for will and reason were gone.

And then, for an instant, Harry's eyes met mine, and I read in them what neither of us could say, nor would. With the fury of despair we struck out together in one last effort.

Whether the Incas saw in that effort a renewed strength that spoke of immortality, or whether it happened just at that moment that the pressure from behind was removed, no longer forcing them to their death, I do not know. It may have been that, like some better men, they had merely had enough.

From whatever cause, the attack ceased almost with the suddenness with which it had begun; they fell back from the doorway; Harry lunged forward with raised club, and the forms melted away into the darkness of the corridor.

Harry turned and looked at me as I stood swaying from side to side in the doorway. Neither of us could speak. Together we staggered back across the room, but I had not gone more than half way when my legs bent under me and I sank to the floor. Dimly I saw Harry's face above me, as though through a veil--then another face that came close to my own--and a voice:

"Paul! My love! They have killed him!"

Soft white arms were about my neck, and a velvet cheek was pressed against my own.

"Desiree!" I gasped. "Don't! Harry! No, they have not killed me--"

Then Harry's voice:

"That's all right, old fellow. I know--I have known she loves you. This is no time to talk of that. Listen, Paul--what you were going to do for Desiree--if you can--they will be back at any moment--"
That thought kindled my brain; I raised myself onto my elbow.
"I haven't the strength," I said, hardly knowing how I spoke. "You must do it, Harry; you must. And quick, lad!
The dagger! Desiree--the dagger!"
What followed came to me as in a dream; my eyes were dim with the exhaustion that had overcome my body.
Desiree's face disappeared from before my face--then a silence--then the sound of her voice as though from a distance:
"Harry--come! I can't find it! I dropped it when I ran across--it must be here--on the floor--"
And then another sound came that I knew only too well--the sound of rushing, pattering feet.
I think I tried to rise to my own feet. I heard Harry's voice crying in a frenzy: "Quick--here they come! Desiree, where is it?"
There was a ringing cry of despair from Desiree, a swinging oath from Harry, and the next instant I found myself pinned to the floor by the weight of a score of bodies.

Chapter XIII.
INTO THE WHIRLPOOL.
I hardly know what happened after that. I was barely conscious that there was movement round me, and that my wrists and ankles were being tightly bound. Harry told me afterward that he made one last desperate stand, and was halted by a cry from Desiree, imploring him to employ the club in the intended office of the dagger.
He wheeled about and raised it to strike; then his arm dropped, unable to obey for the brutal horror of it. In another instant he and Desiree, too, had been overpowered and carried to the floor by the savage rush.
This he told me as we lay side by side in a dark cavern, whither we had been carried by the victorious Incas. I had expected instant death; the fact that our lives had been spared could have but one meaning, I thought: to the revenge of death was to be added the vindictiveness of torture.
We knew nothing of Desiree's fate. Harry had not seen her since he had been crushed to the floor by that last assault. And instead of fearing for her life, we were convinced that a still more horrible doom was to be hers, and hoped only that she would find the means to avoid it by the only possible course.
I have said that we again found ourselves in darkness, but it was much less profound than it had been before. We could distinctly see the four walls of the cavern in which we lay; it was about twelve feet by twenty, and the ceiling was very low. The ground was damp and cold, and we had neither ponchos nor jackets to protect us.
A description of our state of mind as we lay exhausted, wounded, and bound so tightly that any movement was impossible, would seem to betray a weakness. Perhaps it was so; but we prayed for the end--Harry with curses and oaths, myself in silence. There is a time when misery becomes so acute that a man wants only deliverance and gives no thought to the means.
That was reaction, and gradually it lessened. And when, after we had lain unconscious for many hours (we can hardly be said to have slept) they came to bathe our wounds and bruises and bring us food and drink, the water was actually grateful to our hot, suffering flesh, and we ate almost with relish. But before they left they again bound our wrists firmly behind us, and tightened the cords on our ankles.
If they meditated punishment they certainly seemed to be in no hurry about it. The hours passed endlessly by. We were cared for as tenderly as though we had been wounded comrades instead of vanquished foes, and though we were allowed to remain on the damp, hard rock of the cavern, we gradually recovered from the effects of that gruesome struggle in the doorway, and our suffering bodies began to feel comparative comfort.
"What the deuce are they waiting for?" Harry growled, after one of their visits with food and water. "Why don't they end it?"
"Most likely because a well man can appreciate torture better than a sick one," I answered, not having seen fit to speak of it before. "You may be sure we'll get all that's coming to us."
"But what will they do?"
"Heaven knows. They are capable of anything. We'll get the worst."
There was a silence; then Harry said slowly, hesitating:
"Paul--do you think--Desiree--"
"I don't think--I dare not think about her," I interrupted. "And it is our fault; we failed her. I should have put her beyond their reach, as I promised. I have reproached myself bitterly, Hal; you need add nothing."
"Do you think I would? Only--there is something else. About what she said to you. I knew that, you know."
I was silent; he continued:
"I knew it long ago. Do you think I am blind? And I want to say this while I have a chance--it was uncommon good of you. To take it the way you did, I mean."
His simplicity made me uncomfortable, and I made no answer. Indeed, the thing was beyond discussion; it was merely a bare fact which, when once stated, left nothing to be said. So I refused to humor Harry's evident desire to
we thrashed out the topic, and abruptly changed the subject.

We must have lain bound in that cavern little short of a week. Our wounds and bruises were completely healed, save one gash on Harry's side where he had been hurled against the sharp edge of one of the stone seats as he had been borne to the floor. But it was not painful, and was nearly closed. And we could feel the return of strength even through the stiffness caused by the inactivity of our muscles.

We had given up wondering at the delay by the time it came to an end. When they finally came and cut our bonds and led us from the cavern we felt nothing keener than a mere curiosity as to what awaited us at the end of our journey. For myself, there was a distinct sensation of thankfulness that uncertainty was to end.

They took no chances with us, but paid us the compliment of a truly royal escort—at least, in number. There could not have been less than two hundred of them in front, behind, and on either side, as we left the cavern and proceeded along a narrow, winding passage to the left.

Once, as we started, we stretched our arms high and stood on tiptoe to relieve the stiffness of our joints; and immediately found ourselves clutched on every side by a score of hands.

"Gad! We seem to have made an impression!" Harry grinned. On the way down the passage we marched with the Prussian goose-step, and felt the blood quickening to life in our legs and arms.

We had proceeded in this manner for some ten minutes when we rounded a corner which I recognized at once by the peculiar circular formation of the walls. We were on our way to the great cavern—the cavern where we had first seen Desiree, and where later she had won the toss for our lives and then preserved them.

Another minute and we had reached the steps leading to the tunnel under the lake. Here our guards seemed in doubt as to just what to do; those in front halted and stood hesitant, and it seemed to me that as they gazed below down the stone stair their eyes held a certain shrinking terror. Then one came up from behind and with a commanding gesture ordered them to descend, and they obeyed.

Harry and I still found ourselves surrounded by a full company; there were fifty or sixty ahead of us and at least twice that number behind. The idea of a successful struggle was so patently impossible that I believe it never entered our minds.

There was further delay at the bottom of the steps, for, as I have said before, the tunnel was extremely narrow and it was barely possible to walk two abreast. None of them turned back, but Harry and I could scarcely restrain a laugh at the sight of those immediately in front of us treading on the toes of their fellows to keep out of our way. With all their savage brutality I believe they possessed little real bravery.

Five minutes more and we had reached the end of the tunnel and found ourselves at the foot of the spiral stairway. The passage was so blocked by those ahead that we were unable to approach it; they flattened their squatty bodies against the wall and we were forced to squeeze our way past them.

There we stood, barely able to make out their black forms against the blacker wall, when the one who appeared to be the leader approached and motioned to us to ascend. We hesitated, feeling instinctively that this was our last chance to make a stand, weighing our fate.

That was a dark moment, but though I did not know it, Providence was with us. For, happening to glance downward, beneath the spiral stair—for there was no ground immediately beneath it—I saw a faint glimmer and a movement as though of a dim light in the black, yawning space at my feet. (You must understand that we were now inside the base of the column in the center of the great cavern.)

Moved either by curiosity or a command of Providence, I stooped and peered intently downward, and saw that the movement was the almost imperceptible reflection of a stray ray of light from above on the surface of water. At the time I merely wondered idly if the water came from the same source as that in the lake outside, not thinking it sufficiently important to mention to Harry.

Then a question came from him:

"No good, Paul. They are a hundred to one, and we are empty-handed. Do we go?"

"There is nothing else to do," I answered, and I placed my foot on the first step of the spiral stair.

Behind us came the guide, with a dozen others at his heels.

The ascent seemed even longer and more arduous than before, for then we had been propelled by keen curiosity. Twice I stumbled in the darkness, and would have fallen if it had not been for Harry's supporting hand behind me. But finally we reached the top and stepped out into the glare of the great cavern. I saw the stone slab close to behind us, noiselessly, and wondered if I should ever see it open again.

We looked about us, and as our eyes sought the alcove in the wall opposite, we gave a simultaneous start of surprise, and from Harry's lips came a cry, half of gladness, half of wonder. For, seated on the golden throne, exactly as before, was Desiree. By her side was seated the Inca king; round them, guards and attendants.

We gazed at her in astonishment, but she did not look at us; even at that distance we could see that her eyes were lowered to the ground. Harry called her name—there was no answer. Again he called, and I caught him by the arm.
"Don't, Hal! She can't possibly do us any good, and you may do her harm. If she doesn't answer, it is because she has a reason."

He was silent, but not convinced, and would probably have argued the matter if our attention had not been arrested by a movement in the alcove.

The king rose and extended an arm, and the Incas who filled the seats surrounding the cavern fell flat on their faces.

"We don't seem to have thinned them out any," I observed. "I believe there are actually more than before. Where do they all come from?"

"The Lord knows!"

"And, by the way, it is now apparent why they waited so long to attend to us. The king naturally wanted to be present at the entertainment, and he had to take time to recover from his little fasting operation. But now, what in the name of--my word, the thing is to be done in all propriety! Look!"

The king had dropped his arm, and the Incas were again sitting as Nature had intended they should sit, instead of on their noses. And four attendants had approached the throne, bearing a frame of quipos.

"So we are to have a fair trial," Harry observed.

"With the king for judge."

"And a hundred dead rats as evidence."

"Right; they can't get even with us, anyway; there are only two of us. And as far as the other is concerned, I have an idea."

The king had left his throne and approached the outer edge of the alcove, until he stood almost directly under the oval plate of gold representing Pachacamac or the unknown god.

To this he knelt and made a succession of weird, uncouth gestures that suggested a lunatic or a traveling hypnotist. Evidently the good Pachacamac approved whatever suggestions the royal priest communicated, for he rose to his feet with a solemn grin and strutted majestically to the rear, facing the frame of quipos.

It was evident that he no longer had faith in Desiree's interpretation of the divine will of the great Pachacamac. It is a royal privilege to be able to judge your own enemies.

The hand of the Child of the Sun passed slowly up and down the frame of quipos, betraying a commendable reluctance. It touched the yellow cord and passed on; grasped the white and dropped it.

"The old hypocrite!" exclaimed Harry in disgust. "Does he imagine he is playing with us?"

Then there was an imperceptible movement, rather felt than seen, throughout the vast assemblage, and Desiree sank back on her throne of gold with a shudder as the king severed with the knife the black cord of death and laid it on the ground at her feet.

I looked at Harry; his face became slightly pale, but his eyes met mine firmly, speaking of a fortitude unconquerable. Then we again riveted our gaze on the alcove opposite.

An attendant approached from the rear and stood before thegolden throne, while the king motioned to Desiree to take up the black cord. For a moment she did not understand him, then she drew back, shaking her head firmly.

The king did not wait to argue the matter, but stooped himself and picked up the cord and handed it to the attendant, who received it with a great show of respect and retired to the rear, where a commotion was created by its appearance.

The judgment was passed, but what was to be the nature of the execution? That uncertainty and the weirdness of the scene gave to the thing an air of unreality that shut out the tragic and admitted only the grotesque.

I have many times in my life felt nearer to death than when I stood on the top of that lofty column, surrounded by the thousands of squatting dwarfs, whose black bodies reflected dully the mounting light from the flaming urns.

I cannot say what we expected, for we knew not what to expect. Many conjectures entered my mind, but none of them approached the fact. But, thinking that our guide might now return at any moment to lead us below, and not caring to be surprised by an attack from behind on that narrow precipice, I moved across to the rear, where I could keep my eyes on the alcove opposite, and at the same time watch the stone slab which closed the opening to the spiral stairway. A word to Harry and he joined me.

"Perhaps we can open it from above," he suggested.

"Not likely," I answered, "and, anyway, what's the use?"

He knelt down and tugged at it, but there was no edge on which to obtain a purchase. The thing was immovable. Five minutes passed, during which there was no movement, either in the audience on the stone seats or in the alcove. But there was an indefinable air of expectancy on the faces of the king and those surrounding him, and I kept a sharp eye on the stone slab.

Another five minutes and still nothing happened. Harry called across to Desiree, or rather began to call, for I stopped him with a jerk. It was impossible for her to aid us, and her situation was already sufficiently perilous.
Then, becoming impatient, I decided to try to move the stone slab myself. Kneeling down, I placed the palms of my hands firmly against its surface and pressed with all my weight.

And then I knew. Complete comprehension flashed through my brain on the instant. I sprang to my feet, and my thought must have shown on my face, for Harry looked at me in surprise, demanding:

"What is it? What is it, Paul?"

And I answered calmly:

"We're caught, Hal. Like rats in a trap. Oh, the black devils! Listen! We have no time to lose. Bend over and touch the palm of your hand to the ground."

He did so, plainly puzzled. Then he drew his hand hastily away, exclaiming: "It's hot!"

"Yes." I spoke quickly. "Our boots kept us from feeling it before, and the stone doesn't throw out enough heat to feel it in the air. They've built a fire under us in the column. The stone is thick and heats slowly."

"But what—that means—"

"It means one of two things. In a few minutes this floor will be baking hot. Then we either fry on their stone griddle or drown in the lake. You see the distance below—only a man crazed by suffering or one incredibly brave would take that leap. This is their little entertainment—they expect us to dance for them."

"But the lake! If we could take it clean—"

I saw that the lake was our only chance, if there could be said to be any in so desperate a situation. To be sure, there seemed to be no possibility of escaping, even if we took the water without injury. On every side its bank was lined with the watching Incas, and the bank itself was so steep that to ascend it would have required wings.

The heat began to be felt even through the soles of our heavy boots; involuntarily I lifted one foot, then the other. I saw the Child of the Sun in the alcove lean forward with an appreciative grin. Another minute—

I jerked my wits together—never did my brain answer with better speed. And then I remembered that flash of water I had seen under the spiral stairway at the base of the column. I had thought at the time that it might be connected with the lake itself. If that were so—

I turned to Harry and conveyed my idea to him in as few words as possible as we walked up and down, side by side. It was impossible longer to stand still—the stone was so hot that the bare hand could not be held against it for an instant. I saw that he did not comprehend what I said about the water in the column, but he did understand my instructions, and that was all that was necessary.

We ran to the edge of the column nearest the alcove.

Removing our woolen knickerbockers—for better ease in the water—we placed them on the hot stone, and on top of them our boots, which we had also removed. Thus our feet were protected as we stood on the extreme edge of the column, taking a deep breath for strength and nerve.

I saw the thousands of black savages—who had been cheated of their dance—crane their necks forward eagerly. I saw the king gesture excitedly to an attendant, who turned and flew from the alcove.

I saw Desiree spring up from the golden throne and run to the edge of the alcove, crying to us in a tone of despair. But I did not hear her words, for I myself was calling:

"Take it clean, Hal. Ready—go!"

The next instant we were flying headlong through the air toward the surface of the lake a hundred feet below.

Men have told me since that I never made that dive, or that I greatly overestimated the distance, and I admit that as I look back at it now it appears incredible. Well, they are welcome to their opinion, but I would not advise them to try to argue the matter with Harry.

The impact with the water all but completely stunned me; as I struck the surface it seemed that a thousand cannons had exploded in my ears. Down, down I went—lucky for us that the lake was apparently bottomless!

I seemed to have gone as far below the water as I had been above it before I was able to twist myself about and meet it with my belly. Then, striking out with every ounce of strength in me, I made for the surface as rapidly as possible. I had started with my lungs full of air, but that headlong plunge had emptied them.

I made the surface at last and looked round for Harry, calling his name. For perhaps thirty seconds I called in vain, then there came an unanswering shout off to the left. The urns were far above us now, and the light on the surface of the lake was very dim, but soon I made out Harry's head. He was swimming easily toward me, apparently unhurt.

"All right, Hal?"

"Right. And you?"

"Sound as a whistle. Now make for the column."

At the instant that we turned to swim toward the column I became aware of a strong current in the water carrying us off to the right. It was inexplicable, but there was no time then for speculation, and we struck out with bold, sweeping strokes.
The Incas had left the stone seats and advanced to the water's edge. I could see their black, sinister faces, thousands of them, peering intently at us through the dim light, but they made no sound.

Once I cast a glance over my shoulder and saw Desiree standing at the edge of the alcove with her clenched fists pressed to her throat. Beside her stood the Child of the Sun. Harry, too, saw her and sent her a shout of farewell, but there was no answer.

We were now less than thirty feet from the column. Its jeweled sides sparkled and shone before us; looking up, our eyes were dazzled. Something struck the water near me. I glanced to the right and saw what moved me to hasten my stroke and call to Harry to do likewise.

The black devils were increasing the fun by hurling stones at us from the bank--apparently with the kind approval of Pachacamac.

As we neared the column the current which tended to carry us to the right became stronger, but still we seemed not to be approaching the bank. What could it mean? The struggle against it was fast taking our strength.

Looking up, I saw that we had swung round to the other side of the column--it was between us and the alcove. Then I understood. We were in a whirlpool, ever increasing in force, which was carrying us swiftly in a circle from left to right and approaching the column.

I called a swift warning to Harry, who was some ten feet to my left, and he answered that he understood. The stones from the bank were falling thick about us now; one struck me on the shoulder, turning me half round.

The current became swifter--so swift that we were almost helpless against it and were carried around and around the column, which was but a few feet away. And always complete silence.

Nearer and nearer we were carried, till, thrusting out my arm, the tips of my fingers brushed against the side of the column. The water whirled with the rapidity of a mill-stream; ten more seconds and our brains would have been dashed against the unyielding stone. It was now but half an arm's length away. I kept thrusting out my arm in a wild endeavor to avoid it.

Suddenly my outstretched hand found a purchase in a break in the wall, but the force of the water tore it loose and swept me away. But when I reached the same spot again I thrust out both hands, and, finding the edge, held on desperately. The next instant Harry's body was swept against mine, doubling the strain on my fingers.

"The column!!" I gasped. "Inside--through the wall--opening--I am holding--"

He understood, and the next moment he, too, had grasped the edge. Together we pulled ourselves, little by little, toward the opening; for our strength was nearly spent, and the force of the maelstrom was nigh irresistible.

It was as I had thought. The base of the column consisted merely of two massive pillars, some twelve feet in length and circular in shape. The water rushed in through each of the two openings thus left, and inside of the column was the center of the whirlpool, sucking the water from both sides. The water I had seen; I had not counted on the whirlpool.

We had pulled ourselves round till our bodies rested against the edge of the opening, clinging to either side. Inside all was blackness, but we could judge of the fury of the maelstrom by the force of the current outside. Stones hurled by the Incas were striking against the sides of the column and in the water near us.

We were being hunted from life like dogs, and a hot, unreasoning anger surged through my brain--anger at the grinning savages on the bank, at the whirling black water, at Harry, at myself.

Whichever way we looked was death, and none worth choosing.

"I can't hold--much longer," Harry gasped. "What's the use--old man--Paul--come--I'm going--"

He disappeared into the black, furious whirlpool with that word. The next instant my own fingers were torn from their hold by a sudden jerk of the water, and I followed.

Chapter XIV.

A FISHING PARTY.

Water, when whirling rapidly, has a keen distaste for any foreign object; but when once the surface breaks, that very repulsion seems to multiply the indescribable fury with which it endeavors to bury the object beneath its center.

Once in the whirlpool, I was carried in a swift circle round its surface for what seemed an age, and I think could not have been less than eight or ten seconds in reality. Then suddenly I was turned completely over, my limbs seemed to be torn from my body, there was a deafening roar in my ears, and a crushing weight pressed against me from every side.

Any effort of any kind was worse than useless, as well as impossible; indeed, I could hardly have been said to be conscious, except for the fact that I retained sufficient volition to avoid breathing or swallowing the water.

The pressure against my body was terrific; I wondered vaguely why life had not departed, since--as I supposed--there was not a whole bone left in my body. My head was bursting with dizziness and pain; my breast was a furnace of torture.

Suddenly the pressure lessened and the whirling movement gradually ceased, but still the current carried me on.
I struck out wildly with both arms--in an effort, I suppose, to grasp the proverbial straw.

I found no straw, but something better--space. Instinct led the fight to reach it with my head to get air, but the swiftness of the current carried me again beneath the surface. My arms seemed powerless; I was unable to direct them.

I hardly know what happened after that. A feeling of most intense suffocation in my chest; a relaxation of all my muscles; a sensation of light in my smarting eyes; a gentle pressure from the water beneath, like the rising gait of a saddle-horse; and suddenly, without knowing why or when or how, I found myself lying on hard ground, gasping, choking, sputtering, not far from death, but nearer to life than I had thought ever to be again.

I lay for several minutes unable to move; then my brain awoke and called for life. I twisted over on my face, and moved my arms out and in with the motion of a swimmer; the most exquisite pains shot through my chest and abdomen. My head weighed tons.

Water ran from my nose and mouth in gurgling streams. The roaring, scarcely abated, pounded in my ears. I was telling myself over and over with a most intense earnestness: "But if I were really dead I shouldn't be able to move." It appears that the first sense to leave a drowning man, and the last to return, is the sense of humor.

In another ten minutes, having rid my lungs of the water that had filled them, I felt no pain and but little fatigue. My head was dizzly, and there was still a feeling of oppression on my chest; but otherwise I was little the worse for wear. I twisted carefully over on my side and took note of my surroundings.

I lay on a narrow ledge of rock at the entrance to a huge cavern. Not two feet below rushed the stream which had carried me; it came down through an opening in the wall at a sharp angle with tremendous velocity, and must have hurled me like a cork from its foaming surface. Below, it emptied into a lake which nearly filled the cavern, some hundreds of yards in diameter. Rough boulders and narrow ledges surrounded it on every side.

This I saw in time, but the first thing that caught my eye was no work of nature. Fastened to the wall on the opposite side of the cavern, casting a dim, flickering light throughout its vast space, were two golden, flaming urns.

It was not fear, but a sort of nausea, that assailed me as I realized that I was still in the domain of the Incas.

The ledge on which I lay was exposed to view from nearly every point of the cavern, and the sight of those urns caused me to make a swift decision to leave it without delay. It was wet and slippery and not over three feet in width; I rose to my feet cautiously, having no appetite for another ducking.

At a distance of several feet lay another ledge, broad and level, at the farther end of which rose a massive boulder. I cleared the gap with a leap, barely made my footing, and passed behind the boulder through a crevice just wide enough to admit my body.

Then through a narrow lane onto another ledge, and from that I found my way into a dark recess which gave assurance at least of temporary safety. The sides of the cavern were a veritable maze of boulders, sloping ledges, and narrow crevices. Nature here scarcely seemed to have known what to do with herself.

I seated myself on a bit of projecting limestone, still wet and shivering. I had no boots nor trousers; my feet were bruised and swollen, and my flannel shirt and woolen underwear were but scanty protection against the chill air, damp as they were. Also, I seemed to feel a cold draft circling about me, and was convinced of the fact by the flickering flames in the golden urns.

Desolate, indeed, for I gave Harry up as lost. The thought generated no particular feeling in me; death, by force of contrast, may even appear agreeable; and I told myself that Harry had been favored of the gods.

And there I sat in the half-darkness, shrinking from a danger of whose existence I was not certain, clinging miserably to the little that was left of what the world of sunshine had known as Paul Lamar, gentleman, scientist, and connoisseur of life; sans philosophy, sans hope, and--sans-culotte.

But the senses remain; and suddenly I became aware of a movement in the water of the lake. It was as though an immense trout had leaped and split the surface. This was repeated several times, and was followed by a rhythmic sound like the regular splash of many oars. Then silence.

I peered intently forth from my corner in the recess, but could see nothing, and finally gave it up.

As the minutes passed by my discomfort increased and stiffness began to take my joints. I realized the necessity of motion, but lacked the will, and sat in a sort of dumb, miserable apathy. This, I should say, for an hour; then I saw something that roused me.

I had before noticed that on the side of the cavern almost directly opposite me, under the flaming urns, there was a ledge some ten or twelve feet broad and easily a hundred in length. It met the surface of the lake at an easy, gradual slope. In the rear, exactly between the two urns, could be seen the dark mouth of a passage, evidently leading directly away from the cavern.

Out of this passage there suddenly appeared the forms of two Incas. In the hand of each was what appeared to be a long spear--I had evidently been mistaken in my presumption of their ignorance of weapons.

They walked to one end of the long ledge and dragged out into the light an object with a flat surface some six
feet square. This they launched on the surface of the lake; then embarked on it, placing their spears by their sides and taking up, instead, two broad, short oars. With these they began to paddle their perilous craft toward the center of the lake with short, careful strokes.

About a hundred feet from the shore they ceased paddling and exchanged the oars for their spears, and stood motionless and silent, waiting, apparently, for nothing. I, also, remained motionless, watching them in dull curiosity. There was little danger of being seen; for, aside from the darkness of my corner, which probably would have been no hindrance to them, a projecting ledge partly screened my body from view.

The wait was not a long one, and when it ended things happened with so startling a suddenness that I scarcely grasped the details.

There was a loud splash in the water like that I had heard before, a swift ripple on the surface of the lake, and simultaneously the two Indians lunged with their spears, which flew to their mark with deadly accuracy. I had not before noticed the thongs, one end of which was fastened to the shaft of the spear and the other about the waist of the savage.

There followed a battle royal. Whatever the thing was that had felt the spears, it certainly lost no time in showing its resentment. It thrashed the water into furious waves until I momentarily expected the raft to be swamped.

One Inca stood on the farther edge of the craft desperately plying an oar; the other tugged lustily at the spear-thongs. I could see a black, twisting form leap from the water directly toward the raft, and the oarsman barely drew from under it before it fell. It struck the corner of the raft, which tipped perilously.

It appeared to have been a final effort, for there the battle ended. The oarsman made quickly for the shore, paddling with remarkable dexterity and swiftness, while the other stood braced, holding firmly to the spear-thongs. Another minute and they had leaped upon the ledge, drawing the raft after them, and, by tugging together on the lines, had landed their victim of the deep.

It appeared to be a large black fish of a shape I had never before seen. But it claimed little of my attention; my eye was on the two spears which had been drawn from the still quivering body and which now lay on the ground well away from the water's edge, while the two Incas were dragging their catch toward the mouth of the passage leading from the cavern.

I wanted those spears. I did not stop to ask myself what I intended to do with them; if I had I would probably have been hard put to it for an answer. But I wanted them, and I sat in my dark corner gazing at them with greedy eyes.

The Incas had disappeared in the passage.

Finally I rose and began to search for an exit from the recess in which I had hidden myself. At first there appeared to be none, but at length I found a small crevice between two boulders in the rear. Into this I squeezed my body with some difficulty.

The rock pressed tightly against me on both sides, and the sharp corners bruised my body, but I wormed my way through for a distance of fifteen or twenty feet. Then the crevice opened abruptly, and I found myself on a broad ledge ending apparently in space. I advanced cautiously to its edge, but intervening boulders shut off the light, and I could see no ground below.

Throwing prudence to the winds, I let myself over the outermost corner, hung for a moment by my hands, and dropped. My feet touched ground almost instantly--the supposedly perilous fall amounted to something like twelve inches.

I turned round, feeling a little foolish, and saw that from where I stood the ledge and part of the lake were in full view. I could see the spears still lying where they had been thrown down.

But as I looked the two Incas emerged from the passage. They picked up the spears, walked to the raft, and again launched it and paddled toward the center of the lake.

I thought, "Here is my chance; I must make that ledge before they return," and I started forward so precipitately that I ran head on into a massive boulder and got badly stunned for my pains. Half dazed, I went on, groping my way through the semidarkness.

The trail was one to try a llama. I climbed boulders and leaped across chasms and clung to narrow, slippery edges with my finger-nails. Several times I narrowly escaped dumping myself into the lake, and half the time I was in plain view of the Incas on the raft.

My hands and feet were bruised and bleeding, and I had bumped into walls and boulders so often that I was surprised when I took a step without getting a blow. I wanted those spears.

I found myself finally within a few yards of my destination. A narrow crevice led from where I stood directly to the ledge from which the Incas had embarked. It was now necessary to wait till they returned to the shore, and I drew back into the darkness of a near-by corner and stood motionless.
They were still on the raft in the middle of the lake, waiting, spear in hand. I watched them in furious impatience, on the border of mania.

Suddenly I saw a dark, crouching form outlined against a boulder not ten feet away from where I stood. The form was human, but in some way unlike the Incas I had seen. I could not see its face, but the alertness suggested by its attitude made me certain that I had been discovered.

Vaguely I felt myself surrounded on every side; I seemed to feel eyes gazing unseen from every direction, but I could not force myself to search the darkness; my heart rose to my throat and choked me, and I stood absolutely powerless to make a sound or movement, gazing in a sort of dumb fascination at that silent, crouching figure.

Suddenly it crouched lower still against the black background of the boulder.

"Another second and he will be at my throat," I thought—but I stood still, unable to move.

But the figure did not spring. Instead, it suddenly straightened up to almost twice the height of an Inca, and I caught a glimpse of a white face and ragged, clinging garments.

"Harry!" I whispered. I wonder yet that it was not a shout.

"Thank God!" came his voice, also in a whisper; and in another moment he had reached my side.

A hurried word or two—there was no time for more—and I pointed to the Incas on the raft, saying: "We want those spears."

"I was after them," he grinned. "What shall we do?"

"There's no use taking them while the Incas are away," I replied, "because they would soon return and find them gone. Surely we can handle two of them."

As I spoke there came a sound from the lake—a sudden loud splash followed by a commotion in the water. I looked around the corner of the boulder and saw that the spears again found their mark.

"Come," I whispered, and began to pick my way toward the ledge.

Harry followed close at my heels. It was easier here, and we soon found ourselves close to the shore of the lake, with a smooth stretch of rock between us and the fisherman's landing-place. The urns, whose light was quite sufficient here, were about fifty feet to the right and rear.

The Incas had made their kill and were paddling for the shore. As they came near, Harry and I sank back against the boulder, which extended to the boundary of the ledge. Soon the raft was beached and pulled well away from the water, and the fish—Harry was amazed at its size—followed.

They drew forth the spears and laid them on the ground, as they had done formerly; and, laying hold on the immense fish, still floundering ponderously about, began to drag it toward the mouth of the passage.

"Now," whispered Harry, and as he stood close at my side I could feel his body draw together for the spring.

I laid a hand on his arm.

"Not yet. Others may be waiting for them in the passage. Wait till they return."

In a few minutes they reappeared in the light of the flaming urns. I waited till they had advanced half-way to the water's edge, some thirty feet away. Then I whispered to Harry: "You for the left, me for the right," and released my hold on his arm, and the next instant we were bounding furiously across the ledge.

Taken by surprise, the Incas offered no resistance whatever. The momentum of our assault carried them to the ground; their heads struck the hard granite with fearful force and they lay stunned.

Harry, kneeling over them, looked up at me with a question in his eyes.

"The lake," said I, for it was no time for squeamishness.

Our friend the king thought us dead, and we wanted no witnesses that we had returned to life. We laid hold of the unconscious bodies, dragged them to the edge of the lake, and pushed them in. The shock of the cold water brought one of them to life, and he started to swim, and we—well, we did what had to be done.

We had our spears. I examined them curiously.

The head appeared to be of copper and the shaft was a long, thin rod of the same material. But when I tried it against a stone and saw its hardness I found that it was much less soft, and consequently more effective, than copper would have been. That those underground savages had succeeded in combining metals was incredible, but there was the evidence; and, besides, it may have been a trick of nature herself.

The point was some six inches long and very sharp. It was set on the shaft in a wedge, and bound with thin, tough strips of hide. Altogether, a weapon not to be laughed at.

We carried the spears, the raft, and the oars behind a large boulder to the left of the ledge with considerable difficulty. The two latter not because we expected them to be of any service, but in order not to leave any trace of our presence, for if any searchers came and found nothing they could know nothing.

We expected them to arrive at any moment, and we waited for hours. We had about given up watching from our vantage point behind the boulder when two Incas appeared at the mouth of the passage. But they brought only oil to fill the urns, and after performing this duty departed, without a glance at the lake or any exhibition of surprise at the
absence of their fellows.

Every now and then there was a commotion in some part of the lake, and we could occasionally see a black, glistening body leap into the air and fall again into the water.

"I'm hungry," Harry announced suddenly. "I wonder if we couldn't turn the trick on that raft ourselves?"

The same thought had occurred to me, but Harry's impulsiveness had made me fearful of expressing it. I hesitated.

"We've got to do something," he continued.

I suggested that it might be best to wait another hour or two.

"And why? Now is as good a time as any. If we intend to find Desiree--"

"In the name of Heaven, how can we?" I interrupted.

"You don't mean to say you don't intend to try?" he exclaimed.

"Hal, I don't know. In the first place, it's impossible. And where could we take her and what could we do--in short, what's the use? Why the deuce should we prolong the thing any further?

"In the world I refused to struggle because nothing tempted me; in this infernal hole I have fought when there was nothing to fight for. If civilization held no prize worth an effort, why should I exert myself to preserve the life of a rat? Faugh! It's sickening! I wondered why I wanted those spears. Now I know. I have an idea I'm going to be coward enough to use one--or enough of a philosopher."

"Paul, that isn't like you."

"On the contrary, it is consistent with my whole life. I have never been overly keen about it. To end it in a hole like this-- well, that isn't exactly what I expected; but it is all one--after. Understand me, Hal; I don't want to desert you; haven't I stuck? And I would still if there were the slightest possible chance. Where can we go? What can we do?"

There was a long silence; then Harry's voice came calmly:

"I can stay in the game. You call yourself a philosopher. I won't quarrel about it, but the world would call you a quitter. Whichever it is, it's not for me. I stay in the game. I'm going to find Desiree if I can, and, by the Lord, some day I'm going to cock my feet up on the fender at the Midlothian and make 'em open their mouths and call me a liar!"

"A worthy ambition."

"My own. And, Paul, you can't--you're not a quitter."

"Personally, yes. If I were here alone, Hal"--I picked up one of the spears and passed my palm over its sharp point--"I would quit cold. But not--not with you. I can't share your enthusiasm, but I'll go fifty-fifty on the rest of it, including the fender-- when we see it."

"That's the talk, old man. I knew you would."

"But understand me. I expect nothing. It's all rot. If by any wild chance we should pull out in the end I'll admit you were right. But I eat under compulsion, and I fight for you. You're the leader unless you ask my advice."

"And I begin right now," said Harry with a grin. "First, to get Desiree. What about it?"

We discussed plans all the way from the impossible to the miraculous and arrived nowhere. One thing only we decided--that before we tried to find our way back to the great cavern and the royal apartments we would lay in a supply of food and cache it among the boulders and ledges where we then were. For if ever a place were designed for a successful defense by two men against thousands it was that one. And we had the spears.

Still no one had appeared in the cavern, and we decided to wait no longer. We carried the raft back to the ledge. It was fairly light, being made of hide stretched tightly across stringers of bone, but was exceedingly clumsy. Once Harry fell, and the thing nearly toppled over into the lake with him on top of it; but I caught his arm just in time.

Another trip for the oars and spears, and everything was ready. We launched the raft awkwardly, nearly shipping it beneath; but finally got it afloat with ourselves aboard. We had fastened the loose ends of the spear-thongs about our waists.

I think that raft was the craziest thing that ever touched water. It was a most excellent diver, but was in profound ignorance of the first principle of the art of floating.

After a quarter of an hour of experimentation we found that by standing exactly in a certain position, one on each side and paddling with one hand, it was possible to keep fairly level. If either of us shifted his foot a fraction of an inch the thing ducked like a stone.

We finally got out a hundred feet or so and ceased paddling. Then, exchanging our oars for the spears, we waited.

The surface of the lake was perfectly still, save for a barely perceptible ripple, caused no doubt by the undercurrent which was fed by the stream at the opposite side. The urns were so far away that the light was very dim; no better than half darkness. The silence was broken by the sound of the rushing stream.
Suddenly the raft swayed gently; there was a parting of the water not a foot away toward the front, and then—well, the ensuing events happened so quickly that their order is uncertain.

A black form arose from the water with a leap like lightning and landed squarely on the raft, which proceeded to perform its favorite dive. It would have done so with much less persuasion, for the fish was a monster—it appeared to me at that moment to be twenty feet long.

On the instant, as the raft capsized, Harry and I lunged with our spears, tumbling forward and landing on each other and on top of the fish. I felt my spear sinking into the soft fish almost without resistance.

The raft slipped from under, and we found ourselves floundering in the water.

I have said the spear-thongs were fastened about our waists. Otherwise, we would have let the fish go; but we could hardly allow him to take us along. That is, we didn't want to allow it; but we soon found that we had nothing to say in the matter. Before we had time to set ourselves to stroke we were being towed as though we had been corks toward the opposite shore.

But it was soon over, handicapped as he was by four feet of spears in his body. We felt the pull lessen and twisted ourselves about, and in another minute had caught the water with a steady dog-stroke and were holding our own. Soon we made headway, but it was killing work.

"He weighs a thousand tons," panted Harry, and I nodded.

Pulling and puffing side by side, we gradually neared the center of the lake, passed it, and approached the ledge. We were well-nigh exhausted when we finally touched bottom and were able to stand erect.

Hauling the fish onto the ledge, we no longer wondered at his strength. He could not have been an ounce under four hundred pounds, and was fully seven feet long. One of the spears ran through the gills; the other was in his middle, just below the backbone. We got them out with some difficulty and rolled him up high and dry.

We straightened to return for the spears which we had left at the edge of the water.

"He's got a hide like an elephant," said Harry. "What can we skin him with?"

But I did not answer.

I was gazing straight ahead at the mouth of the passage where stood two Incas, spear in hand, returning my gaze stolidly.

Chapter XV.

THE RESCUE.

I was quick to act, but the Incas were quicker still. I turned to run for our spears, and was halted by a cry of warning from Harry, who had wheeled like a flash at my quick movement. I turned barely in time to see the Incas draw back their powerful arms, then lunge forward, the spears shooting from their hands.

I leaped aside; something struck my leg; I stooped swiftly and grasped the spear-thong before there was time for the Inca to recover and jerk it out of my reach. The other end was fastened about his waist; I had him, and giving an instant for a glance at Harry, saw that he had adopted the same tactics as myself.

Seeing that escape was impossible, they dashed straight at us.

It wasn't much of a fight. One came at me with his head lowered like a charging bull; I sidestepped easily and floored him with a single blow. He scrambled to his feet, but by that time I had recovered the spear and had it ready for him.

I waited until he was quite close, then let him have it full in the chest. The fool literally ran himself through, hurling himself on the sharp point in a brutal frenzy. He lay on his back, quite still, with the spear-head buried in his chest and the shaft sticking straight up in the air.

I turned to Harry, and in spite of myself smiled at what I saw. He stood with his right arm upraised, holding his spear ready. His left foot was placed well and gracefully forward, and his body bent to one side like the classic javelin-thrower. And ten feet in front of him the other Inca had fallen flat on his face on the ground with arms extended in mute supplication for quarter.

"What shall I do?" asked Harry. "Let him have it?"

"Can you?"

"The fact is, no. Look at the poor beggar—scared silly. But we can't let him go."

It was really a question. Mercy and murder were alike impossible. We finally compromised by binding his wrists and ankles and trussing him up behind, using a portion of one of the spear-thongs for the purpose, and gagging him. Then we carried him behind a large boulder some distance from the ledge and tucked him away in a dark corner.

"And when we get back—if we ever do—we can turn him loose," said Harry.

"In that case I wouldn't give much for his chances of a happy existence," I observed.

We wasted no time after that, for we wanted no more interruptions. Some fifteen precious minutes we lost trying to withdraw the spear I had buried in the body of the Inca, but the thing had become wedged between two ribs and refused to come out. Finally we gave it up and threw the corpse in the lake.
We then removed the oars and spears and raft—which had floated so near to the ledge that we had no difficulty in recovering it—to our hiding-place, and last we tackled our fish.

It was a task for half a dozen men, but we dared not remain on the ledge to skin him and cut him up. After an hour of exertion and toil that left us completely exhausted, we managed to get him behind a large boulder to the left of the ledge, but it was impossible to carry him to the place we had selected, which could be reached only by passing through a narrow crevice.

The only knives we had were the points of the spears, but they served after a fashion, and in another hour we had him skinned and pretty well separated. He was meaty and sweet. We discovered that with the first opportunity, for we were hungry as wolves. Nor did we waste much time bewailing our lack of a fire, for we had lived so long on dried stuff that the opposite extreme was rather pleasant than otherwise.

We tore him into strips as neatly as possible, stowing them away beneath a ledge, a spot kept cool by the water but a foot below.

"That'll be good for a month," said Harry. "And there's more where that came from. And now--"

I understood, and I answered simply: "I'm ready."

We had but few preparations to make. The solidiest parts of the fish which we had laid aside we now strapped together with one of the extra spear-thongs and slung them on our backs. We secreted the oars and raft and the extra spear as snugly as possible.

Then, having filled ourselves with raw fish and a last hearty drink from the lake, we each took a spear and started on a search wilder than any ever undertaken by Amadis of Gaul or Don Quixote himself. Even the Bachelor of Salamanca, in his saddest plight, did not present so outrageous an appearance to the eye as we. We wore more clothing than the Incas, which is the most that can be said for us.

We were unable to even guess at the direction we should take; but that was settled for us when we found that there were but two exits from the cavern. One led through the boulders and crevices to a passage full of twists and turns and strewn with rocks, almost impassable; the other was that through which the Incas had entered. We chose the latter.

Fifty feet from the cavern we found ourselves in darkness. I stopped short.

"Harry, this is impossible. We cannot mark our way."

"But what can we do?"

"Carry one of those urns."

"Likely! They'd spot us before we even got started."

"Well--let them."

"No. You're in for the finish. I know that. I want to find Desiree. And we'll find her. After that, if nothing else is left, I'll be with you."

"But I don't want a thousand of those brutes falling on us in the dark. If they would end it I wouldn't care."

"Keep your spear ready."

I had given him my promise, so I pushed on at his side. I had no stomach for it. In a fight I can avoid disgracing myself, because it is necessary; but why seek it when there is nothing to be gained? Thus I reflected, but I pushed on at Harry's side.

As he had said, I was in for the finish. What I feared was to be taken again by the Incas unseen in the darkness. But that fear was soon removed when I found that we could see easily some thirty or forty feet ahead—enough for a warning in case of attack.

Our flannel shirts and woolen undergarments hung from us in rags and tatters. Our feet were bare and bruised and swollen. Our faces were covered with a thick, matted growth of hair. Placed side by side with the Incas it is a question which of us would have been judged the most terrifying spectacles by an impartial observer.

I don't think either of us realized the extreme foolhardiness of that expedition. The passage was open and unobstructed, and since it appeared to be the only way to their fishing-ground, was certain to be well traveled. The alarm once given, there was no possible chance for us.

We sought the royal apartments. Those we knew to be on a level some forty or fifty feet below the surface of the great cavern, at the foot of the flight of steps which led to the tunnel to the base of the column. I had counted ninety-six of those steps, and allowing an average height of six inches, they represented a distance of forty-eight feet.

How far the whirlpool and the stream which it fed had carried us downward we did not know, but we estimated it at one hundred feet. That calculation left us still fifty feet below the level of the royal apartments.

But we soon found that in this we were mistaken. We had advanced for perhaps a quarter of an hour without incident when the passage came to an abrupt end. To the right was an irregular, twisting lane that disappeared around a corner almost before it started; to the left a wide and straight passage, sloping gently upward. We took the latter.
We had followed this for about a hundred yards when we saw a light ahead. Caution was useless; the passage was straight and unbroken and only luck could save us from discovery. We pushed on, and soon stood directly within the light which came from an apartment adjoining the passage. It was not that which we sought, however, and we gave it barely a glance before we turned to the right down a cross passage, finding ourselves again in darkness.

Soon another light appeared. We approached. It came from a doorway leading into an apartment some twenty feet square. It was empty, and we entered.

There were two flaming urns fastened to the wall above a granite couch. Stone seats were placed here and there about the room. The walls were studded with spots of gold to a height of four or five feet.

We stopped short, gazing about us.

"It looks like--" Harry whispered, and then exclaimed: "It is! See, here is where we took the blocks from this seat!"

So it was. We were in the room where we had imprisoned the Inca king and where we ourselves had been imprisoned with Desiree.

"She said her room was to the right of this," whispered Harry excitedly. "What luck! If only--"

He left the sentence unfinished, but I understood his fear. And with me there was even no doubt; I had little hope of finding Desiree, and was sorry, for Harry's sake, that we had been so far successful.

Again we sought the passage. A little farther on it was crossed by another, running at right angles in both directions. But to the right there was nothing but darkness, and we turned to the left, where, some distance ahead, we could see a light evidently proceeding from a doorway similar to the one we had just left.

We went rapidly, but our feet made scarcely any sound on the granite floor. Still we were incautious, and it was purely by luck that I glanced ahead and discovered that which made me jerk Harry violently back and flatten myself against the wall.

"What is it?" he whispered.

In silence I pointed with my finger to where two Incas stood in the passage ahead of us, just without the patch of light from the doorway, which they were facing. They made no movement; we were as yet undiscovered. They were about a hundred feet away from where we stood.

"Then she's here!" whispered Harry. "They are on guard."

I nodded; I had had the same thought.

There was no time to lose; at any moment that they should chance to glance in our direction they were certain to see us. I whispered hastily and briefly to Harry. He nodded.

The next instant we were advancing slowly and noiselessly, hugging the wall. We carried our spears ready, though we did not mean to use them, for a miss would have meant an alarm.

"If she is alone!" I was saying within myself, almost a prayer, when suddenly one of the Incas turned, facing us squarely, and gave a start of surprise. We leaped forward.

Half a dozen bounds and we were upon them, before they had had time to realize their danger or move to escape it. With a ferocity taught us by the Incas themselves we gripped their throats and bore them to the floor.

No time then for the decencies; we had work to do, and we crushed and pounded their lives out against the stone floor. There had not been a sound. They quivered and lay still; and then, looking up at some slight sound in the doorway, we saw Desiree.

She stood in the doorway, regarding us with an expression of terror that I did not at first understand; then suddenly I realized that, having seen us disappear beneath the surface of the take after our dive from the column, she had thought us dead.

"Bon Dieu!" she exclaimed in a hollow voice of horror. "This, too! Do you come, messieurs?"

"For you," I answered. "We are flesh and bone, Desiree, though in ill repair. We have come for you."

"Paul! Harry, is it really you?"

Belief crept into her eyes, but nothing more, and she stood gazing at us curiously. Harry had sprung to her side; she did not move as he embraced her.

"Are you alone?"

"Yes."

"Good. Here, Harry--quick! Help me. Stand aside, Desiree."

We carried the bodies of the two Incas within the room and deposited them in a corner. Then I ran and brought the spears, which we had dropped when we attacked the Incas. Desiree stood just within the doorway, seemingly half dazed.

"Come," I said; "there is no time to be lost. Come!"

"Where?" She did not move.

"With us. Isn't that enough? Do you want to stay here?"
She shuddered violently.
"You don't know--what has happened. I want to die. Where are you going to take me?"
"Desiree," Harry burst out, "for Heaven's sake, come! Must we carry you?"
He grasped her arm.
Then she moved and appeared to acquiesce. I started ahead; Harry brought up the rear, with an arm round Desiree's shoulders. She started once more to speak, but I wheeled sharply with a command for silence, and she obeyed.
We reached the turn in the corridor and passed to the right, moving as swiftly and noiselessly as possible. Ahead of us was the light from the doorway of the room in which we had formerly been imprisoned.
We had nearly reached it when I saw, some distance down the corridor, moving forms. The light was very dim, but there appeared to be a great many of them.
I turned, with a swift gesture to Harry and Desiree to follow, and dashed forward to the light and through the doorway into the room. Discovery was inevitable, I thought, in any event, but it was better to meet them at the door to the room than in the open passage. And we had our spears.
But by a rare stroke of luck we had not been seen. As we stood within the room on either side of the doorway, out of the line of view from the corridor, we heard the patter of many footsteps approaching.
They neared the doorway, and I glanced at Harry, pointing to his spear significantly. He gave me a nod of understanding. Let them come; we would not again fall into their hands alive.
The footsteps sounded just without the doorway; I stood tense and alert, with spear ready, expecting a rush momentarily. Then they passed, passed altogether, and receded down the corridor in the direction whence we had come. I wanted to glance out at their number, but dared not. We stood still till all was again perfectly silent.
Then Desiree spoke in a whisper:
"It is useless; we are lost. That was the king. He is going to my room. In ten seconds he will be there and find me gone."
There was only one thing to do, and I wasted no time in discussing it. A swift command to Harry, and we dashed from the doorway and down the corridor to the left, each holding an arm of Desiree. But she needed little of our assistance; the presence of the Inca king seemed to have inspired her with a boundless terror, and she flew, rather than ran, between us.
We reached the bend in the passage, and just beyond it the light--the first one we had seen on our way in. I had our route marked on my memory with complete distinctness. Soon we found ourselves in the wide, sloping passage that carried us to the level below, and in another five seconds had reached its end and the beginning of the last stretch.
At the turn Harry stumbled and fell flat, dragging Desiree to her knees. I lifted her, and he sprang to his feet unhurt.
She was panting heavily. Harry had dropped his spear in the fall, and we wasted a precious minute searching for it in the darkness, finally finding it where it had slid, some twenty feet ahead. Again we dashed forward.
A light appeared ahead in the distance, dim but unmistakable --the light of the urns in the cavern for which we were headed. Suddenly Desiree faltered and would have fallen but for our supporting arms.
"Courage!" I breathed. "We are near the end."
She stopped short and sank to the ground.
"It is useless," she gasped. "I hurt my ankle when I fell. I can go no farther. Leave me!"
Harry and I with one impulse stooped over to pick her up, and as we did so she fainted away in our arms. We were then but a few hundred feet from our goal; the light from the urns could be plainly seen gleaming on the broad ledge by the lake.
Suddenly the sound of many footsteps came from behind. I turned quickly, but the passage was too dark. I could see nothing. The sound came closer and closer; there seemed to be many of them, advancing swiftly. I straightened and raised my spear.
Harry grasped my arm.
"Not yet!" he cried. "One more try; we can make it."
He thrust his spear into my hand, and in another instant had thrown Desiree's unconscious body over his shoulder and was staggering forward toward the cavern. I followed, while the sound of the footsteps behind grew louder and louder.
We neared the end of the passage; we reached it; we were on the ledge. Even with Desiree for a burden, Harry moved so swiftly that I found it difficult to keep up with him. The strength of a god was in him, which was but just, since he had his goddess in his arms.
On the ledge, near the edge of the water, stood two Incas. They turned at our approach and rushed at us. Unlucky
for them, for Harry's example had fired my brain and put the strength of a giant in me.

To this day I don't know what followed--whether I used my spear or my fists or my head. I know only that I leaped at them in irresistible fury and left them stretched on the ground before they had reached Harry or halted him.

We crossed the ledge and made for the boulders to the left. The crevice which led to our hiding-place was too narrow for Harry and his burden. I sprang forward and grasped Desiree's shoulders; he held her ankles, and we got her through to the ledge beyond.

Then I leaped back through the crevice, and barely in time. As I looked out a black, rushing horde emerged from the passage and dashed across the ledge toward us. I stood at the entrance to the narrow crevice, spear in hand.

They appeared to have no sense of the fact that my position was impregnable, but dashed blindly at me. The crevice in which I stood and which was the only way through to the ledge where Harry had taken Desiree, was not more than two feet wide. With unarmed savages for foes, one man could have held it against a million.

But they came and I met them. I stood within the crevice, some three or four feet from its end, and when one appeared in the opening I let him have the spear. Another rushed in and fell on top of the first.

As I say, they appeared to be deprived of the power to reason. In five minutes the mouth of the crevice was completely choked with bodies, some more wounded, struggling and squirming to extricate themselves from the bloody tangle.

I heard Harry's voice at my back:
"How about it? Want some help?"

"Not unless they find some gunpowder," I answered. "The idiots eat death as though it were candy. We're safe; they can never break through here."

"Are they still coming?"

"They can't; they've blocked the way with their smelly black carcasses. How is Desiree?"

"Better; she's awake. I've been bathing her ankle with cold water. She has a bad sprain; how the deuce she ever managed to hobble on it even two steps is beyond me."

"A sprain? Are you sure?"

"I think so; it's badly swollen. Maybe only a twist; a few hours will tell."

I heard him return to the ledge back of me; I dared not turn my head.

Thinking I heard a sound above, I looked up; but there was nothing to fear in that direction. The boulders which formed the sides of the crevice extended straight up to the roof of the cavern. We appeared, in fact, to be fortified against any attack.

With one exception--hunger. But there would be plenty of time to think of that; for the present we had our fish, which was sufficient for the three of us for a month, if we could keep it fresh that long. And the water was at our very feet.

The bodies wedged in the mouth of the crevice began to disappear, allowing the light from the urns to filter through; they were removing their dead. I could see the black forms swaying and pulling not five feet away. But I stood motionless, saving my spear and my strength for any who might try to force an entrance.

Soon the crevice was clear, and from where I stood I commanded a view of something like three-quarters of the ledge. It was one mass of black forms, packed tightly together, gazing at our retreat. We appeared, in fact, to be fortified against any attack.

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They looked particularly silly and helpless to me then, rendered powerless as they were by a little bit of rock. Brute force was all they had; and nature, being the biggest brute of all, laughed at them.

But I soon found that they were not devoid of resource. For perhaps fifteen minutes the scene remained unchanged; not one ventured to approach the crevice. Then there was a sudden movement and shifting in the mass; it split suddenly in the middle; they pressed off to either side, leaving an open lane between them leading directly toward me.

Down this lane suddenly dashed a dozen or more of the savages, with spears aloft in their brawny arms. I was taken by surprise and barely had time to cut and run for the ledge within.

As it was I did not entirely escape; the spears came whistling through the crevice, and one of them lodged in my leg just below the thigh.

I jerked it out with an oath and turned to meet the attack. I was now clear of the crevice, standing on the ledge inside, near Harry and Desiree. I called to them to go to one side, out of the range of the spears that might come through. Harry took Desiree in his arms and carried her to safety.

As I expected, the Incas came rushing through the crevice--that narrow lane where a man could barely push through without squeezing. The first got my spear full in the face--a blow rather than a thrust, for I had once or twice had difficulty in retrieving it when I had buried it deep.

As he fell I struck at the one behind. He grasped the spear with his hand, but I jerked it free and brought it down on his head, crushing him to the ground. It was mere butchery; they hadn't a chance in the world to get at me.
Another fell, and the rest retreated. The crevice was again clear, save for the bodies of the three who had fallen.

I turned to where Harry and Desiree were seated on the further edge of the ledge. Her body rested against his; her head lay on his shoulder.

As I looked at them, smiling, her eyes suddenly opened wide and she sprang to her feet and started toward me. "Paul! You are hurt! Harry, a bandage--quick; your shirt--anything!"

I looked down at the gash on my leg, which was bleeding somewhat freely. "It's nothing," I declared; "a mere tear in the skin. But your ankle! I thought it was sprained?"

She had reached my side and bent over to examine my wound; but I raised her in my arms and held her before me. "That," I said, "is nothing. Believe me, it isn't even painful. I shall bandage it myself; Harry will take my place here. But your foot?"

"That, too, is nothing," she answered with a half-smile. "I merely twisted it; it is nearly well already. See!"

She placed her weight on the injured foot, but could not suppress a faint grimace of pain.

Calling to Harry to watch the crevice, I took Desiree in my arms and carried her back to her seat.

"Now sit still," I commanded. "Soon we'll have dinner; in the mean time allow me to say that you are the bravest woman in the world, and the best sport. And some day we'll drink to that--from a bottle."

But facts have no respect for sentiment and fine speeches. The last words were taken from my very mouth by a ringing cry from Harry:

"Paul! By gad, they're coming at us from the water!"

Chapter XVI.

THE ESCAPE.

The ledge on which we rested was about forty feet square. Back of us was a confused mass of boulders and chasms, across which I had come when I first encircled the cavern and found Harry.

In front was the crevice, guarded by the two massive boulders. On the right the ledge met the solid wall of the cavern, and on the left was the lake itself, whose waters rippled gently at our very feet.

At sound of Harry's warning cry I ran to the water's edge and peered round the side of the boulder. He was right; but what I saw was not very alarming.

Two rafts had been launched from the enemy's camp. Each raft held three Incas--more would have sunk them. Two were paddling, while the third balanced himself in the center, brandishing a spear aloft.

Turning to Desiree, I called to her to move behind a projecting bit of rock. Then, leaving Harry to guard the crevice in case of a double attack, I took three of our four spears--one of which had made the wound in my leg--and stood at the water's edge awaiting the approach of the rafts.

They came slowly, and their appearance was certainly anything but terrifying.

"Not much of a navy," I called to Harry; and he answered, with a laugh: "Lucky for us! Look at our coast defense!"

One of the rafts was considerably ahead of the other, and in another minute it had approached within fifty feet of the ledge. The Inca in the center stood with legs spread apart and his spear poised above his head; I made no movement, thinking that on such precarious footing he would have difficulty to hurl the thing at all. Wherein I underrated his skill, and it nearly cost me dear.

Suddenly, with hardly a movement of his body, his arm snapped forward. I ducked to one side instinctively and heard the spear whistle past my ear with the speed of a bullet, so close that the butt of the shaft struck the side of my head a glancing blow and toppled me over.

I sprang quickly to my feet, and barely in time, for I saw the Inca stoop over, pick up another spear from the raft, and draw it back above his head. At the same moment the second raft drew up alongside, and as I fell to the ground flat on my face I heard the two spears whistle shrewdly over me.

At that game they were my masters; it would have been folly to have tried conclusions with them with their own weapons. As the spears clattered on the ground thirty feet away I sprang to my feet and ran to the farther side of the ledge, where I had before noticed some loose stones in a corner.

With two or three of these in my hands I ran back to the water's edge, meeting two more of the spears that came twisting at me through the air, one of which tore the skin from my left shoulder.

A quick glance at the crevice as I passed showed me Harry fighting at its entrance; they were at us there, too. I heard Desiree shout something at me, but didn't catch the words.

My first stone found its goal. The two rafts, side by side not forty feet away, were a fair mark. The stone was nearly the size of a man's head and very heavy; I had all I could do to get the distance.

It struck the raft on the right fairly; the thing turned turtle in a flash, precipitating its occupants onto the other raft. The added weight carried that, too, under the surface, and the six Incas were floundering about in the water.
I expected to see them turn and swim for the landing opposite; but, instead, they headed directly toward me! The light from the urns was but faint, and it was not easy to distinguish their black heads against the black water; still, I could see their approach. Two of them held spears in their hands; I saw the copper heads flash on high.

I stood at the edge of the lake, wondering at their folly as I waited; they were now scarcely ten feet away. Another few strokes and the foremost stretched out his hand to grasp the slippery ledge; my spear came down crushingly on his head and he fell back into the water.

By that time another had crawled half onto the ledge, and another; a blow and a quick thrust, and they, too, slipped back beneath the surface, pawing in agony, not to rise again.

Just in time I saw that one of the remaining three had lifted himself in the water not five feet away, with his spear aimed at my breast. But the poor devil had no purchase for his feet and the thing went wide.

The next instant he had received a ten-pound stone full in the face and went down with a gurgle. At that the remaining two, seeming to acquire a glimmering of intelligence, turned and swam hastily away. I let them go.

Turning to Harry, I saw that the crevice also was clear. He had left his post and started toward me, but I waved him back.

"All right here, Hal: have they given it up?"

There was an expression of the most profound disgust on his face.

"Paul, it's rank butchery. I'm wading in blood. Will this thing never stop?"

I looked at him and said merely: "Yes."

No need to ask when; he understood me; he sent me the glance of a man who has become too familiar with death to fear it, and answered:

"Another hour of this, and--I'm ready."

I told him to keep an eye on both points of attack and went across to where Desiree sat crouched on the ground. I hadn't many words.

"How is your foot?"

"Oh, it is better; well. But your leg--"

"Never mind that. Could you sleep?"

"Bon Dieu--no!"

"We have only raw fish. Can you eat?"

"I'll try," she answered, with a grimace.

I went to the edge of the ledge where we had the fish stowed away near the water and took some of it both to her and Harry. We ate, but with little relish. The stuff did not seem very fresh.

I remained on guard at the mouth of the crevice while Harry went to the lake for a drink, having first helped Desiree to the water and back to her seat. Her foot gave her a great deal of pain, but instead of a sprain it appeared that there had been merely a straining of the ligaments. After bathing it in the cold water she was considerably relieved.

I remained on watch at the mouth of the crevice, from where I could also obtain a pretty fair view of the lake, and commanded Harry to rest. He demurred, but I insisted. Within two minutes he was sleeping like a log, completely exhausted.

Several hundred of the Incas remained huddled together on the ledge without, but they made no effort to attack us. I had been watching perhaps three hours when they began to melt away into the passage. Soon but a scant dozen or so remained. These squatted along the wall just under the lighted urns, evidently in the capacity of sentinels.

Soon I became drowsy--intolerably so; I was scarcely able to stand. I dozed off once or twice on my feet; and, realizing the danger, I called Harry to take my place.

Desiree also had been asleep, lying on the raft which Harry and I had concealed along with our fish. At sound of my voice she awoke and sat up, rubbing her eyes; then, as I assured her that all was quiet, she fell back again on her rude bed.

I have never understood the delay of the Incas at this juncture; possibly they took time to consult the great Pachacamac and found his advice difficult to understand. At the time I thought they had given up the attack and intended to starve us out, but they were incapable of a decision so sensible.

Many hours had passed, and we had alternated on four watches. We had plenty of rest and were really quite fit. The gash on my leg had proven a mere trifle; I was a little stiff, but there was no pain.

Desiree's foot was almost entirely well; she was able to walk with ease, and had insisted on taking a turn at watch, making such a point of it that we had humored her.

Something had to happen, and I suppose it was as well that the Incas should start it. For we had met with a misfortune that made us see the beginning of the end. Our fish was no longer fit to eat, and we had been forced to throw the remainder of it in the lake.
Then we held a council of war. The words we uttered, standing together at the mouth of the crevice, come to me now as in a dream; if my memory of them were not so vivid I should doubt their reality. We discussed death with a calmness that spoke eloquently of our experience.

Desiree's position may be given in a word--she was ready for the end, and invited it.

I was but little behind her, but advised waiting for one more watch--a sop to Harry. And there was one other circumstance that moved me to delay--the hope for a sight of the Inca king and a chance at him.

Desiree had refused to tell us her experiences between the time of our dive from the column and our rescue of her; but she had said enough to cause me to guess at its nature. There was a suppressed but ever present horror in her eyes that made me long to stand once more before the Child of the Sun; then to go, but not alone.

Harry advised retreat. I have mentioned that when he and I had started on our search for Desiree we had found two exits from the cavern--the one which we had taken and another which led through the maze of boulders and chasms back of us to a passage full of twists and turns and choked with massive rocks, almost impassable.

Through this he advised making our way to whatever might await us beyond.

The question was still undecided when our argument was brought to a halt and the decision was taken away from us. Through the crevice I saw a band of Incas emerge from the passage opposite and advance to the water's edge. At their head was the Inca king.

Soon the landing was completely covered with them--probably three hundred or more--and others could be seen in the mouth of the passage. Each one carried a spear; their heads of copper, upraised in a veritable forest, shone dully in the light of the urns on the wall above.

Harry and Desiree stood close behind me, looking through at the fantastic sight. I turned to him:

"This time they mean business."

He nodded.

"But what can they do? Except get knocked on the head, and I'm sick of it. If we had only left an hour ago!"

"For my part," I retorted, "I'm glad we didn't. Desiree, I'm going to put you in my debt, if fortune will only show me one last kindness and let me get within reach of him."

I pointed to where the Inca king stood in the forefront, at the very edge of the lake.

She shuddered and grew pale.

"He is a monster," she said in a voice so low that I scarcely heard, "and--I thank you, Paul."

Harry seemed not to have heard.

"But what can they do?" he repeated.

They did not leave us long in doubt. As he spoke there was a sudden sharp movement in the ranks of the Incas. Those in front leaped in the water, and others after them, until, almost before we had time to realize their purpose, hundreds of the hairy brutes were swimming with long, powerful strokes directly toward the ledge on which we stood. Between his teeth each man carried his spear.

I left Harry to guard the crevice, and ran to repel the attack at the water. Desiree stood just behind me. I called to her to go back, but she did not move. I grasped her by the arm and led her forcibly to a break in the rock at our rear, and pointed out a narrow ascending lane in the direction of the other exit.

When I returned to the ledge of the water the foremost of the Incas were but a few feet away. But I looked in vain for the one face I wanted to see and could recognize; the king was not among them. A hasty glance across the landing opposite discovered him standing motionless with folded arms.

The entire surface of the lake before me was one mass of heads and arms and spears as far as I could see. There were hundreds of them. I saw at once that the thing was hopeless, but I grasped my spear firmly and stood ready.

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The first two or three reached the ledge. At the same instant I heard Harry call:

"They're coming through, Paul! It's you alone!"

I did not turn my head, for I was busy. My spear was whirling about my head like a circle of flame. Black, dusky forms swam to the ledge and grasped its slippery surface, but they got no farther. The shaft of the spear bent in my hand; I picked up another, barely losing a second.

A wild and savage delight surged through me at the sight of those struggling, writhing, slipping forms. I swung the spear in vicious fury. Not one had found footing on the ledge.

Something suddenly struck me in the left arm and stuck there; I shook it loose impatiently and it felt as though my arm went with it.

I did not care to glance up even for an instant; they were pressing me closer and closer; but I knew that they had begun to hurl their spears at me from the water, and that the game was up. Another struck me on the leg; soon they were falling thick about me.

Calling to Harry to follow, I turned and ran for the opening in the rock to which I had led Desiree. In an instant he had joined me.
By that time scores of the Incas had scrambled out of the water onto the ledge and started toward us, and as many more came rushing through the crevice, finding their way no longer contested.

Harry carried three spears. I had four. We sprang up a lane encircling the rock to the rear and at its top found Desiree.

A projecting bit of rock gave us some protection from the spears that were being hurled at us from below, but they came uncomfortably close, and black forms began to appear in the lane through which we had come.

Harry shouted something which I didn't hear, and, taking Desiree in his arms, sprang from the rock to another ledge some ten feet below.

I followed. At the bottom he stumbled and fell, but I helped him to his feet and then turned barely in time to beat back three or four of the Incas who had tumbled down almost on our very heads.

Immediately in front of us was a chasm several feet across. Harry cried to Desiree, "Can you make it?" and she shook her head, pointing to her injured foot.

"To me!" I shouted desperately; they were coming down from above despite my efforts to hold them back.

Then, in answer to a call from Harry, I turned and leaped across the chasm, throwing the spears ahead of me. Harry took Desiree in his arms and swung her far out; I braced myself for the shock and caught her on my feet.

I set her down unhurt, and a minute later Harry had joined us and we were scrambling up the face of a boulder nearly perpendicular, while the spears fell thick around us.

Desiree lost her footing and fell against Harry, who rolled to the bottom, pawing for a hold. I turned, but he shouted: "Go on; I'll make it!" Soon he was again at my side, and in another minute we had gained the top of the boulder, quite flat and some twenty feet square. We commanded Desiree to lie flat on the ground to avoid the spears from below, and paused for a breath and a survey of the situation.

It can be described only with the word chaotic.

The light of the urns were now hidden from us, and we were in comparative darkness, though we could see with a fair amount of clearness. Nothing could be made of the mass of boulders, but we knew that somewhere beyond them was the passage from the cavern which we sought.

The Incas came leaping across the chasm to the foot of the rock. Several of them scrambled up the steep surface, but with our spears we pushed them back and they tumbled onto the heads of their fellows below.

But we were too exposed for a stand there, and I shouted to Harry to take Desiree down the other side of the rock while I stayed behind to hold them off. He left me, and in a moment later I heard his voice crying to me to follow. I did so, sliding down the face of the rock feet first.

Then began a wild and desperate scramble for safety, with the Incas ever at our heels. Without Desiree we would have made our goal with little difficulty, but half of the time we had to carry her.

Several times Harry hurled her bodily across a chasm or a crevice, while I received her on the other side.

Often I covered the retreat, holding the Incas at bay while Harry assisted Desiree up the steep face of a boulder or across a narrow ledge. There was less danger now from their spears, protected as we were by the maze of rocks, but I was already bleeding in a dozen places on my legs and arms and body, and Harry was in no better case.

Suddenly I saw ahead of us an opening which I thought I recognized. I pointed it out to Harry.

"The exit!" he cried out, and made for it with Desiree. But they were brought to a halt by a cliff at their very feet, no less than twenty feet high.

I started to join them, but hearing a clatter behind, turned just in time to see a score of Incas rush at us from the left, through a narrow lane that led to the edge of the cliff.

I sprang toward them, calling to Harry for assistance. He was at my side in an instant, and together we held them back.

In five minutes the mouth of the lane was choked with their bodies; some behind attempted to scramble over the pile to get at us, but we made them sick of their job. I saw that Harry could hold it alone then, and calling to him to stand firm till I called, I ran to Desiree.

I let myself over the edge of the cliff and hung by my hands, then dropped to the ground below. It was even further than I had thought; my legs doubled up under me and I toppled over, half fainting.

I gritted my teeth and struggled to my feet, calling to Desiree. She was already hanging to the edge of the cliff, many feet above me. But there was nothing else for it, and I shouted: "All right, come on!"

She came, and knocked me flat on my back. I had tried to catch her, and did succeed in breaking her fall, at no little cost to myself. I was one mass of bruises and wounds. But again I struggled to my feet and shouted at the top of my voice:

"Harry! Come!"

He did not come alone. I suppose the instant he left the lane unguarded the Incas poured in after him. They followed him over the edge of the cliff, tumbling on top of each other in an indistinguishable mass.
Some rose to their feet; their comrades, descending from above, promptly knocked them flat on their backs.

Harry and Desiree and I were making for the exit, which was not but a few feet away. As I have said, the thing was choked up till it was almost impassable. We squeezed in between two rocks, with Desiree between us. Harry was in front, and I brought up the rear.

Once through that lane and we might hold our own.

"In Heaven's name, come on!" Harry shouted suddenly; for I had turned and halted, gazing back at the Incas tumbling over the cliff and rushing toward the mouth of the exit.

But I did not heed him, for, standing on the top of the cliff, waving his arms wildly at those below, I had seen the form of the Inca king. He was less than thirty feet away.

With cries from Harry and Desiree ringing in my ears, I braced my feet as firmly as possible on the uneven rock and poised my spear above my head. The Incas saw my purpose and stopped short.

The king must also have seen me, but he stood absolutely motionless. I lunged forward; the spear left my hand and flew straight for his breast.

But it failed to reach the mark. A shout of triumph was on my lips, but was suddenly cut short when an Inca standing near the king sprang forward and hurled himself in the path of the spear just as its point was ready to take our revenge. The Inca fell to the foot of the cliff with the spear buried deep in his side. The king stood as he had before, without moving.

Then there was a wild rush into the mouth of the exit, and I turned to follow Harry and Desiree. With extreme difficulty we scrambled forward over the rocks and around them.

Desiree's breath was coming in painful gasps, and we had to support her on either side. The Incas approached closer at our rear; I felt one of them grasp me from behind, and in an excess of fury I shook him off and dashed him backward against the rocks. We were able to make little headway, or none; by taking to the exit we appeared to have set our own death-trap.

Harry went on with Desiree, and I stayed behind in the attempt to check the attack. They came at me from both sides. I was faint and bleeding, and barely able to wield my spear—my last one. I gave way by inches, retreating backward step by step, fighting with the very end of my strength.

Suddenly Harry's voice came, shouting that they had reached the end of the passage. I turned then and sprang desperately from rock to rock after them, with the Incas crowding close after me.

I stumbled and nearly fell, but recovered my footing and staggered on. And suddenly the mass of rocks ended abruptly, and I fell forward onto flat, level ground by the side of Desiree and Harry.

"Your spear!" I gasped. "Quick—they are upon us!"

But they grasped my arms and dragged me away from the passage to one side. I was half fainting from exhaustion and loss of blood, and scarcely knew what they did. They laid me on the ground and bent over me.

"The Incas!" I gasped.

"They are gone," Harry answered.

At that I struggled to rise and rested my body on my elbows, gazing at the mouth of the passage. It was so; the Incas were not to be seen! Not one had issued from the passage.

It was incomprehensible to us then; later we understood. And we had not long to wait.

Harry and Desiree were bending over me, attempting to stop the flow of blood from a cut on my shoulder.

"We must have water," said Desiree. Harry straightened up to look about the cavern, which was so dark that we could barely see one another's faces but a few feet away.

Suddenly an exclamation of wonder came from his lips.

Desiree and I followed the direction of his gaze, and saw the huge, black, indistinct form of some animal suddenly detach itself from the wall of the cavern and move slowly toward us through the darkness.

Chapter XVII.

THE EYES IN THE DARK.

The thing was at a considerable distance; we could barely see that it was there and that it was moving. It was of an immense size; so large that it appeared as though the very side of the cavern itself had moved noiselessly from its bed in the mountain.

At the same moment I became aware of a penetrating, disagreeable odor, nauseating and horrible. I had risen to my knees and remained so, while Harry and Desiree stood on either side of me.

The thing continued to move toward us, very slowly. There was not a sound. The strength of the odor increased until it was almost suffocating.

Still we did not move. I could not, and Harry and Desiree seemed rooted to the spot with wonder. The thing came closer, and we could see the outlines of its huge form looming up indistinctly against the black background of the cavern.
I saw, or thought I saw, a grotesque and monstrous slimy head stretched toward us from about the middle of its bulk.

That doubt became a certainty when suddenly, as though they had been lit by a fire from within, two luminous, glowing spots appeared about three feet apart. The creature's eyes—if eyes they were—were turned full on us, growing more brilliant as the thing came closer. It was now less than fifty feet away. The massive form blocked our view of the entire cavern.

I pinched my nostrils to exclude the horrible odor which, like the fumes of some deadly poison, choked and smothered me. It came now in puffs, like a draft of a fetid wind, and I realized that it was the creature's breath. I could feel it against my body, my neck and face, and knew that if I breathed it full into my lungs I should be overcome.

But still more terrifying were the eyes. There was something compelling, supernaturally compelling, about their steadfast and brilliant gaze. A mysterious power seemed to emanate from them; a power that hypnotized the mind and deadened the senses. I closed my eyes to avoid it, but was unable to keep them closed. They opened despite my extreme effort, and again I met that gaze of fire.

There was a movement at my side. I turned and saw that it came from Desiree. Her hands were raised to her face; she was holding them before her as though in a futile attempt to cover her eyes.

The thing came closer and closer; it was but a few feet away, and still we did not move, as though rooted to the spot by some power beyond our control.

Suddenly there came a cry from Desiree's lips—a scream of terror and wild fear. Her entire form trembled violently.

She extended her arms toward the thing, now almost upon us, and took a step forward. Her feet dragged unwilling along the ground, as though she were being drawn forward by some irresistible force.

I tried to put out my hand to pull her back, but was absolutely unable to move. Harry stood like a man of rock, immovable.

She took another step forward, with arms outstretched in front of her. A low moan of terror and piteous appeal came from between her slightly parted lips.

Suddenly the eyes disappeared. The huge form ceased to advance and stood perfectly still. Then it began to recede, so slowly that I was barely conscious of the movement.

I was gasping and choking for air; my chest seemed swelling with the poisonous breath. Still slowly the thing receded into the dimness of the cavern; the eyes were no longer to be seen—merely the huge, formless bulk. Desiree had stopped short with one foot advanced, as though hesitating and struggling with the desire to go forward.

The thing now could barely be seen at a distance; it would have been impossible if we had not known it was there. Finally it disappeared, melting away into the semi-darkness; no slightest movement was discernible. I breathed more freely and stepped forward.

As I did so Desiree threw her hands groppingly above her head and fell fainting to the ground.

Harry sprang forward in time to keep her head from striking on the rock and knelt with his arms round her shoulders. We had nothing, not even water, with which to revive her; he called her name aloud appealingly. Soon her eyes opened; she raised her hand and passed it across her brow wonderingly.

"God help me!" she murmured in a low voice, eloquent of distress and pain.

Then she pushed Harry aside and rose slowly to her feet, refusing his assistance.

"In the name of Heaven, what is it?" Harry demanded, turning to me.

"We have found the devil at last," I answered, for even his voice was unsteady.

Desiree could tell us nothing, except that she had felt herself drawn forward by some strange power that had seemed to come from the baneful, glittering eyes. She was bewildered and stunned and unable to talk coherently. We assisted her to the wall, and she sat there with her back propped against it, breathing heavily from the exhaustion of terror.

"We must find water," I said, and Harry nodded, hesitating.

I understood him. Danger could not have stayed him nor fear, but the horror of the thing which roamed about the cavern, dark as darkness itself and possessed of some strange power that could not be withstood, was enough to make him pause. For myself it was impossible; I was barely able to stand. So Harry went off alone in search of water and I stayed with Desiree.

It was perhaps half an hour before he returned, and we were shaken with fear for him long before he appeared. When he did so it was with a white face and trembling limbs, in spite of his evident effort at steadiness.

"There is water over there," said he, pointing across the cavern. "A stream runs across the corner and disappears beneath the wall. There is nothing to carry it in. You must come with me."

"What has happened?" I asked, for even his voice was unsteady.
"I saw it," he replied simply, but expressing enough in those three words to cause a shudder to run through me. Then, speaking in a low tone that Desiree might not hear, he told me that the thing had confronted him suddenly as he was following the opposite wall, and that he, too, had been drawn forward, as it were, by a spell impossible to shake off. He had tried to cry aloud, but had been unable to utter a sound. And suddenly, as before, the eyes had disappeared, leaving him barely able to stand.

"No wonder the Incas wouldn't follow us in here," he finished. "We must get out of this. I'm not a coward, but I wouldn't go through that again for my life."

"You take Desiree," said I. "I want that water."

He led us around the wall several hundred feet. The ground was level and clear of obstruction; but we went slowly, for I could scarcely move. Harry kept his eyes strained intently on all sides; his experience had left him more profoundly impressed even than he had been willing to admit to me.

Soon we heard the low music of running water, and a minute later we reached the stream Harry had found. The fact that there was something to be done seemed to infuse a new spirit into Desiree, and soon her deft fingers were bathing my wounds and bandaging them as well as her poor material would allow.

The cold water took the heat from my pumping veins and left me almost comfortable. Harry had come off much easier than I, since I had so often sent him ahead with Desiree, and myself brought up the rear and withstood the brunt of the attack.

As Harry had said, the stream cut across a corner of the cavern, disappearing beneath the opposite wall, forming a triangle bound by two sides of the cavern and the stream itself. I saw plainly that it would be impossible for me to move any distance for at least a few days, and that triangle appeared to offer the safest and most comfortable retreat.

I spoke to Harry, and he waded across the stream to try its depth. From the other side he called that the water was at no point more than waist-high, and Desiree and I started to cross; but about the middle I felt the current about to sweep me off my feet. Harry waded in and helped me ashore.

On that hard rock we lay for many weary hours. We had no food; but for that I would soon have been myself again, for, though my wounds were numerous, they were little more than scratches, with the exception of the gash on my shoulder. Weakened as I was by loss of blood, and lacking nourishment, I improved but slowly, and only the cold water kept the fever from me.

Twice Harry went out in search of food and of an exit from the cavern. The first time he was away for several hours, and returned exhausted and empty-handed and without having found any exit other than the one by which we had entered.

He had ventured through that far enough to see a group of Incas on watch at the other end. They had seen him and sprung after him, but he had returned without injury, and at the entrance into the cavern where we lay they had halted abruptly.

The second time he was gone out more than half an hour, and the instant I saw his face when he returned I knew what had happened.

But I was not in the best of humor; his terror appeared to me to be ridiculously childish, and I said so in no uncertain terms.

But he was too profoundly agitated to show any anger.

"You don't know, you don't know," was all he said in answer to me; then he added; "I can't stand this any longer. I tell you we've got to get out of here. You don't know how awful--"

"Yes," said Desiree, looking at me.

"But I can scarcely walk," I objected.

"True," said Harry. "I know. But we can help you. There must be another exit, and we'll start now."

"Very well," I said quite calmly; and I picked up one of the spears which we had carried with us, and, rising to my knees, placed the butt of the shaft against the wall near which I lay.

But Harry saw my purpose, and was too quick for me. He sprang across and snatched the spear from my hand and threw it on the ground a dozen feet away.

"Are you crazy?" he shouted angrily.

"No," I answered; "but I am little better, and I doubt if I shall be. Come--why not? I hinder you and become bored with myself."

"You blame me," he said bitterly; "but I tell you you don't know. Very well--we stay. You must give me your promise not to act the fool."

"In any event, you must go soon," I answered, "or starve to death. Perhaps in another twenty-four hours I shall be stronger. Come, Desiree; will that satisfy you?"

She did not answer; her back was turned to us as she stood gazing across the stream into the depths of the cavern. There was a curious tenseness in her attitude that made me follow her gaze, and what I saw left me with no
wonder at it—a huge, black, indistinct form that moved slowly toward us through the darkness.

Harry caught sight of it at the same moment as myself, and on the instant he turned about, covering his face with his hands, and called to Desiree and me to do likewise.

Desiree obeyed; I had risen to my knees and remained so, gazing straight ahead, ready for a combat if it were not a physical one. I will not say that a certain feeling of dread did not rise in my heart, but I intended to show Desiree and Harry the childishness of their terror.

Nothing could be seen but the uncertain outline of the immense bulk; but the same penetrating, sickening odor that had before all but suffocated me came faintly across the surface of the stream, growing stronger with each second that passed. Suddenly the eyes appeared—two glowing orbs of fire that caught my gaze and held it as with a chain.

I did not attempt to avoid it, but returned the gaze with another as steadfast. I was telling myself: "Let us see this trick and play one stronger." My nerves centered throbbingly back of my eyes, and I gave them the whole force of my will.

The thing came closer and the eyes seemed to burn into my very brain. With a great effort I brought myself back to control, dropping to my hands and knees and gripping the ground for strength.

"This is nothing, this is nothing," I kept saying to myself aloud—until I realized suddenly that my voice had risen almost to a scream, and I locked my teeth tight on my lip.

I no longer returned the gaze from my own power; it held me of itself. I felt my brain grow curiously numb and every muscle in my body contracted with a pain almost unbearable. Still the thing came closer and closer, and it seemed to me, half dazed as I was, that it advanced much faster than before.

Then suddenly I felt a sensation of cold and moisture on my arms and legs and a pressure against my body, and I realized, as in a dream, that I had entered the stream of water!

I was crawling toward the thing on my hands and knees, without having even been conscious that I had moved. That brought despair and a last supreme struggle to resist whatever mysterious power it was that dragged me forward.

Cold beads of sweat rolled from my forehead. Beneath the surface of the water my hands gripped the rocks as in a vise. My teeth had sunk deep into my lower lip and covered my chin with blood, though I did not know that till afterward.

But I was pulled loose from my hold, and forward. I bent the whole force of my will to the effort not to move, but my hand left the rock and crept forward. I was fully conscious of what I was doing. I knew that if I could once draw my eyes away from that compelling gaze the spell would be broken, but the power to do so was not in me.

The thing had halted on the farther bank of the stream. Still I moved forward. The water now lapped against my chest; soon it was about my shoulders.

I was fully conscious of the fact that in another ten feet the surface would close over my head, and that I had not the strength to swim or fight the current; but still I went forward. I tried to cry out, but could force no sound through my lips.

Then suddenly the eyes began to disappear. But that at least was comprehensible, for I could distinctly see the black and heavy lids closing over them, like the curtain on a stage. They fell slowly.

The eyes became half moons, then narrowed to a thin slit. I rose, panting like a man exhausted with extreme and prolonged physical exertion.

The eyes were gone.

A mad impulse rushed into my brain to dash forward and touch the monster, to see if that dim, black form were really a thing of flesh and blood or some contrivance of the devil. I smile at that phrase as I write it now in my study, but I did not smile then. I was standing above my knees in the water, trembling from head to foot, divided between the impulse to go forward and the inclination to flee in terror.

I did neither; I stood still. I could see the thing with a fair amount of distinctness and forced my brain to take the record of my eyes. But I could make nothing of it.

I guessed at rather than saw a hideous head rolling from side to side at the end of a long and sinuous neck, and writhing, reptilian coils lashing the rock at the edge of the water, like the tentacles of an octopus, only many times larger. The body itself was larger than that of any animal I had ever seen, and blacker even than the darkness.

Suddenly the huge mass began to move slowly backward. The sharpness of the odor had ceased with the opening of the eyes, which did not reappear. I could dimly see its huge legs slowly rise and recede and again meet the ground. Soon the thing was barely discernible.

I took a step forward as though to follow; but the strength of the current warned me of the danger of proceeding farther, and, besides, I feared every moment to see the lids again raised from the terrible eyes. The thought attacked my brain with horror, and I turned and fled in a sudden panic to the rear, calling to Harry and Desiree.
They met me at the edge of the stream, and their eyes told me that they read in my face what had happened, though they had seen nothing.

"You--you saw it--" Harry stammered.

I nodded, scarcely able to speak.

"Then--perhaps now--"

"Yes," I interposed. "Let's get out of here. It's horrible. And yet how can we go? I can hardly stand."

But Harry was now the one who argued for delay, saying that our retreat was the safest place we could find, and that we should wait at least until I had had time to recover from the strain of the last half-hour. Realizing that in my weakened condition I would be a hindrance to them rather than a help, I consented. Besides, if the thing reappeared I could avoid it as Harry and Desiree had done.

"What is it?" Harry asked presently.

We were sitting side by side, well up against the wall. It was an abrupt question, with no apparent pertinence, but I understood.

"Heaven knows!" I answered shortly. I was none too pleased with myself.

"But it must be something. Is it an animal?"

"Do you remember," I asked by way of answer, "a treatise of Aristotle concerning which we had a discussion one day? Its subject was the hypnotic power possessed by the eyes of certain reptiles. I laughed the idea to scorn; you maintained that it was possible. Well, I agree with you; and I'd like to have about a dozen of our modern skeptical scientists in this cave with me for about five minutes."

"But what is it? A reptile!" Harry exclaimed. "The thing is as big as a house!"

"Well, and why not? I should guess that it is about thirty feet in height and forty or fifty in length. There have been species, now extinct, several times as large."

"Then you think it is just--just an animal?" put in Desiree.

"What did you think it was?" I nearly smiled. "An infernal machine?"

"I don't know. Only I have never before known what it was to fear."

A discussion which led us nowhere, but at least gave us the sound of one another's voices.

We passed many hours in that manner. Utterly blank and wearisome, and all but hopeless. I have often wondered at the strange tenacity with which we clung to life in conditions that made of it a burden almost insupportable; and with what chance of relief?

The instinct of self-preservation, it is called by the learned, but it needs a stronger name. It is more than an instinct. It is the very essence of life itself.

But soon we were impelled to action by something besides the desire to escape from the cavern: the pangs of hunger. It had been many hours since we had eaten; I think we had fasted not less than three or four days.

Desiree began to complain of a dizziness in her temples, and to weaken with every hour that passed. My own strength did not increase, and I saw that it would not unless I could obtain nourishment. Harry did not complain, but only because he would not.

"It is useless to wait longer," I declared finally. "I grow weaker instead of stronger."

We had little enough with which to burden ourselves. There were three spears, two of which Harry had brought, and myself the other. Harry and I wore only our woolen undergarments, so ragged and torn that they were but sorry covering.

Desiree's single garment, made from some soft hide, was held about her waist by a girdle of the same material. The upper half of her body was bare. Her hair hung in a tangled mass over her shoulders and down her back. None of us had any covering for our feet.

We crossed the stream, using the spears as staffs; but instead of advancing cross the middle of the cavern we turned to the left, hugging the wall. Harry urged us on, saying that he had already searched carefully for an exit on that side, but we went slowly, feeling for a break in the wall. It was absolutely smooth, which led me to believe that the cavern had at one time been filled with water.

We reached the farther wall and, turning to the right, were about to follow it.

"This is senseless," said Harry impatiently. "I tell you I have examined this side, too; every inch of it."

"And the one ahead of us, at right angles to this?" I asked.

"That too," he answered.

"And the other--the one to the right of the stream?"

"No. 1--I didn't go there."

"Why didn't you say so?" I demanded.

"Because I didn't want to," he returned sullenly. "You can go there if you care to; I don't. It was from there that--it came."
I did not answer, but pushed forward, not, however, leaving the wall. Perhaps it was cowardly; you are welcome to the word if you care to use it. Myself, I know.

Another half-hour and we reached the end of the lane by which we had first entered the cavern. We stood gazing at it with eyes of desire, but we knew how little chance there was of the thing being unguarded at the farther end. We knew then, of course, and only too well, why the Incas had not followed us into the cavern.

"Perhaps they are gone," said Harry. "They can't stay there forever. I'm going to find out."

He sprang on the edge of a boulder at the mouth of the passage and disappeared on the other side. In fifteen minutes he returned, and I saw by the expression on his face that there was no chance of escape in that direction.

"They're at the other end," he said gloomily; "a dozen of 'em. I looked from behind a rock; they didn't see me. But we could never get through."

We turned then, and proceeded to the third wall and followed it. But we really had no hope of finding an exit since Harry had said that he had previously explored it. We were possessed, I know, by the same thought: should we venture to follow the fourth wall? Alone, none of us would have dared; but the presence of the others lessen the fear of each.

Finally we reached it. The corner was a sharp right angle, and there were rifts and crevices in the rock.

"This is limestone," I said, "and if we find an exit anywhere it will be here."

I turned to the right and proceeded slowly along the wall, feeling its surface with my hand.

We had advanced in this manner several hundred yards when Desiree suddenly sprang forward to my side.

"See!" she cried, pointing ahead with her spear.

I followed the direction with my eye, and saw what appeared to be a sharp break in the wall.

It was some fifty feet away. We reached it in another moment, and I think none of us would have been able to express the immeasurable relief we felt when we saw a broad and clear passage leading directly away from the cavern. It was very dark, but we entered it almost at a run.

I think we had not known the extent of our fear of that thing in the cavern until we found the means of escape from it.

We had gone about a hundred feet when we came to a turn to the left. Harry stumbled against the corner, and we halted for an instant to wait for him.

Then we made the turn, side by side--and then we came to a sudden and abrupt stop, and a simultaneous gasp of terror burst from our lips.

Not three feet in front of us, blocking the passage completely, stood the thing we thought we had escaped!

The terrible, fiery eyes rolled from side to side as they stared straight into our own.

Chapter XVIII.

A VICTORY AND A CONVERSATION.

We stood for a long moment rooted to the spot, unable to move. Then, calling to Harry and grasping Desiree by the arm, I started to turn.

But too late. For Desiree, inspired by a boundless terror, suddenly raised her spear high above her head and hurled it straight at the glowing, flashing eyes.

The point struck squarely between them with such force that it must have sunk clear to the shaft. The head of the monster rolled for an instant from side to side, and then, before I was aware of what had happened, so rapid was the movement, a long, snakelike coil had reached out through the air and twisted itself about Desiree's body.

As she felt the thing tighten about her waist and legs she gave a scream of terror and twisted her face round toward me. The next instant the snaky tentacle had dragged her along the ground and lifted her to the head of the monster, where her white body could be seen in sharp outline sprawling over its black form, between the terrible eyes.

Harry and I sprang forward.

As we did so the eyes closed and the reptile began to move backward with incredible swiftness, lashing about on the ground before us with other tentacles similar to the one that had captured Desiree.

I cried out to Harry to avoid them. He did not answer, but rushed blindly forward.

Desiree's agonized shrieks rose to the pitch of madness.

The eyes were closed, leaving but a vague mark for our spears, and besides, there was the danger of striking Desiree. We were barely able to keep pace with the thing as it receded swiftly down the broad passage. Desiree had twisted her body half round, and her face was turned toward us, shadowy as a ghost. Then her head fell forward and hung loosely and her lips were silent. She had fainted.

The thing moved swifter than ever; we were barely able to keep up with it. Harry made a desperate leap forward.

I cried out a warning, but one of the writhing tentacles swept against him and knocked him to the ground. He was up again on the instant and came rushing up from behind.
Suddenly the passage broadened until the walls were no longer visible; we had entered another cavern. I heard the sound of running water somewhere ahead of us. The pace of the reptile had not slackened for an instant.

Harry had again caught up with us, and as he ran at my side I saw him raise his spear aloft; but I caught his arm and held it.

"Desiree!" I panted.

Her body covered the only part of the thing that presented a fair mark. Harry swore, but his arm fell.

"To the side!" he gasped. "We can't get at it here!"

I saw his meaning and followed at his heels as he swerved suddenly to the right and sprang forward in an attempt to get past the reptile's head.

But in our eagerness we forgot caution and went too close. I felt one of the snaky tentacles wrap itself round my legs and body, and raised my voice in a warning to Harry, but too late. He, too, was ensnared, and a moment later we had both been lifted bodily from the ground and swung through the air to the side of Desiree. She was still unconscious.

I writhed and twisted desperately, but that muscular coil held me firmly as a band of steel, tight against the huge and hideous head.

Harry was on the other side of Desiree, not three feet from me. I could see his muscles strain and pull in his violent efforts to tear himself free. I had given it up.

But suddenly, quite near my shoulder, I saw the lid suddenly begin to raise itself from one of the terrible eyes. I was almost on top of the thing and a little above it. I turned my head aside and called to Harry.

"The eye!" I gasped. "To your right! The spear! Are your arms free?"

Then as I saw he understood, I turned a quarter of the way round--as far as I could get--and raised my spear the full extent of my arm, and brought it down with every ounce of my strength into the very center of the glowing eye beneath me.

At the same moment I saw Harry's arm descend and the flash of his spear. The point of my own had sunk until the copper head was completely buried.

I grasped the shaft and pulled and twisted it about until it finally was jerked forth. From the opening it had made there issued a black stream.

Suddenly the body of the reptile quivered convulsively. The head rolled from side to side. There was a quick tightening of the tentacle round my body until my bones felt as though they were being crushed into shapelessness; and as suddenly it loosened.

Other tentacles lashed and beat on the ground furiously. The reptile's swift backward movement halted jerkily. I made a desperate effort to tear myself free. The tentacle quivered and throbbed violently, and suddenly flew apart like a released spring, and I fell to the ground.

In an instant Harry was at my side, and we both leaped forward with our spears, slashing at the tentacle which still held Desiree in its grasp. Others writhed on the ground about our feet, but feebly. There came a sudden cry from Harry, and his spear clattered on the ground as he opened his arms to receive Desiree's unconscious body, which came tumbling down with the severed coil still wrapped about it.

But there was life in the reptile's immense body. It staggered and swayed from side to side in drunken agony. Its monstrous head rolled about, sweeping the air in a prodigious circle. The poison of its breath came to us in great puffs. There was something supremely horrible about the thing in its very helplessness, and I was shuddering violently as I stooped to help Harry lift Desiree from the ground and carry her away.

We did not go far, for we were barely able to carry her. We laid her on the hard rock with her head in Harry's lap. Her body was limp as a rag.

For many minutes we worked over her, rubbing her temples and wrists, and pressing the nerve centers at the back of the neck, but without effect.

"She is dead," said Harry with a curious calm.

I shook my head.

"She has a pulse--see! But we must find that water. I think she isn't injured; it is her weakened condition from the lack of food that keeps her so. Wait for me."

I started out across the cavern in the direction from which the sound of the water appeared to come, bearing off to the right from the huge, quivering form of the monster whose gigantic body rose and fell on the ground with a force that seemed to shake the very walls of the cavern.

I found the stream with little difficulty, not far away, and returned to Harry. Together we carried Desiree to its edge. The blood was stubborn, and for a long time refused to move, but the cold water at length revived her; her eyes slowly opened, and she raised her hand to her head with a faltering gesture.

But she was extremely weak, and we saw that the end was near unless nourishment could be found for her.
I stayed by her side, with my arms round her shoulders, and Harry set out with one of the spears. He bore off to the left, toward the spot where the body of the immense reptile lay; I was too far away to see it in the darkness.

"It isn't possible that the thing is fit to eat," I had objected, and he had answered me with a look which I understood, and was silenced.

Soon a sound as of a scuffle on the rocks came through the darkness from the direction he had taken. I called out to ask if he needed me, but there was no answer. Ten minutes longer I waited, while the sound continued unabated. Once I heard the clatter of his spear on the rock.

I was just rising to my feet to run to the scene when suddenly he appeared in the semidarkness. He was coming slowly, and was dragging along the ground what appeared to be the form of some animal. Another minute and he stood at my side as I sat holding Desiree.

"A peccary!" I cried, bending over the body of the four-footed creature that lay at his feet. "How the deuce did it ever get down here?"

"Peccary--my aunt!" observed Harry, bending down to look at Desiree. "Do peccaries live in the water? Do they have snouts like catfish? This animal is my own invention. There's about ten million more of 'em over there making a gorgeous banquet off our late lamented friend. And now, let's see."

He knelt down by the still warm body and with the point of his spear ripped it open from neck to rump. Desiree stirred about in my arms.

"Gad, that smells good!" cried Harry.

I shuddered.

He dragged the thing a few feet away, and I heard him slashing away at it with his spear. A minute later he came running over to us with his hands full of something.

That was not exactly a pretty meal. How Desiree, in her frightfully weakened condition, ever managed to get the stuff down and keep it there is beyond me. But she did, and I was not behind her. And, after all, it was fresh. Harry said it was "sweet." Well, perhaps it was.

We bathed Desiree's hands and face and gave her water to drink, and soon after she passed into a seemingly healthy sleep. There was about ten pounds of meat left. Harry washed it in the stream and stowed it away on a rock beneath the surface of the water. Then he announced his intention of going back for more.

"I'm going with you," I declared. "Here--help me fix Desiree."

"Hardly," said Harry. "Didn't I say there are millions of those things over there? Anyway, there are hundreds. If they should happen to scatter in this direction and find her, she wouldn't stand a chance. You take the other spear and stay here."

So I sat still, with Desiree's body in my arms, and waited for him. My sensations were not unpleasant. I could actually feel the blood quicken in my veins.

Civilization places the temple of life in the soul or the heart, as she speaks through the mouth of the preacher or the poet; but let civilization go for four or five days without anything to eat and see what happens. The organ is vulgar, but its voice is loud. I need not name it.

In five minutes Harry returned, dragging two more of the creatures at his heels. In half an hour there were a dozen of them lying in a heap at the edge of the water.

"That's all," he announced, panting heavily from his exertions. "The rest have taken to the woods, which, I imagine, is quite a journey from here. You ought to see our friend--the one who couldn't make his eyes behave. They've eaten him full of holes. He's the most awful mess--sickening beast. He didn't have a bone in him--all crumpled up like an accordion. Utterly spineless."

"And who, in the name of goodness, do you think is going to eat all that?" I demanded, pointing to the heap of bodies.

Harry grinned.

"I don't know. I was so excited at the very idea of a square meal that I didn't know when to stop. I'd give five fingers for a fire and some salt. Just a nickel's worth of salt. Now, you lie down and sleep while I cut these things up, and then I'll take a turn at it myself?"

He brought me one of the hides for a pillow, and I lay back as gently as possible that I might not awaken Desiree. Her head and shoulders rested against my body as she lay peacefully sleeping.

I was awakened by Harry's hand tugging at my arm. Rising on my elbows, I demanded to know how long I had slept.

"Six or seven hours," said Harry. "I waited as long as I could. Keep a lookout."

Desiree stirred uneasily, but seemed to be still asleep. I sat up, rubbing my eyes. The heap of bodies had disappeared; no wonder Harry was tired! I reproached myself for having slept so long.

Harry had arranged himself a bed that was really comfortable with the skins of his kill.
"That is great stuff," I heard him murmur wearily; then all was still.
I sat motionless, stiff and numb, but afraid to move for fear of disturbing Desiree.
Presently she stirred again, and, bending over her, I saw her eyes slowly open. They met my own with a curious, steadfast gaze--she was still half asleep.
"Is that you, Paul?" she murmured.
"Yes."
"I am glad. I seem to feel--what is it?"
"I don't know, Desiree. What do you mean?"
"Nothing--nothing. Oh. it feels so good--good--to have you hold me like this."
"Yes?" I smiled.
"But, yes. Where is Harry?"
"Asleep. Are you hungry?"
"Yes--no. Not now. I don't know why. I want to talk. What has happened?"
I told her of everything that had occurred since she had swooned; she shuddered as memory returned, but forgot herself in my attempt at a humorous description of Harry's valor as a hunter of food.
"You don't need to turn up your nose," I retorted to her expressive grimace; "you ate some of the stuff yourself."
There was a silence; then suddenly Desiree's voice came:
"Paul--" She hesitated and stopped.
"Yes."
"What do you think of me?"
"Do you want a lengthy review?" I smiled.
What a woman she was! Under those circumstances, and amid those surroundings, she was still Desiree Le Mire.
"Don't laugh at me," she said. "I want to know. I have never spoken of what I did that time in the cavern--you know what I mean. I am sorry now. I suppose you despise me."
"But you did nothing," I objected. "And you wouldn't. You were merely amusing yourself."
She turned on me quickly with a flash of her old fire.
"Don't play with me!" she burst out. "My friend, you have never yet given me a serious word."
"Nor any one else," I answered. "My dear Desiree, do you not know that I am incapable of seriousness? Nothing in the world is worth it."
"At least, you need not pretend," she retorted. "I meant once for you to die. You know it. And since you pretend not to understand me, I ask you--these are strange words from my lips--will you forgive me?"
"There is nothing to forgive."
"My friend, you are becoming dull. An evasive answer should always be a witty one. Must I ask you again?"
"That--depends," I answered, hardly knowing what to say.
"On--"
"On whether or not you were serious, once upon a time, when you made a--shall we call it a confession? If you were, I offended you in my own conceit, but let us be frank. I thought you were acting, and I played my role. I do not yet believe that you were; I am not conceited enough to think it possible."
"I do not say," Desiree began; then she stopped and added hastily: "But that is past. I shall not tell you that again. Perhaps I forgot myself. Perhaps it was a pretty play. You have not answered me."
I looked at her. Strange and terrible as her experiences and sufferings had been, she had lost little of her beauty. Her face was rendered only the more delicate by its pallor. Her white and perfect body, only half seen in the half-darkness, conveyed a sense of the purest beauty with no hint of immodesty.
But I was moved not by what I saw, but by what I knew. I had admired her always as Le Mire; but her bravery, her hardihood, her sympathy for others under circumstances when any other woman would have been thinking only of herself--had these awakened in my breast a feeling stronger than admiration?
I did not know. But my voice trembled a little as I said: "I need not answer you, Desiree. I repeat that there is nothing to forgive. You sought revenge, then sacrificed it; but still revenge is yours."
She looked at me for a moment in silence, then said slowly: "I do not understand you."
For reply I took her hand in my own from where it lay idly on my knee, and, carrying it to my lips, pressed a long kiss on the top of each of the slender white fingers. Then I held the hand tight between both of mine as I asked simply, looking into her eyes:
"Do you understand me now?"
Another silence.
"My revenge," she breathed.
I nodded and again pressed her hand to my lips.
"Yes, Desiree. We are not children. I think we know what we mean. But you have not told me. Did you mean what you said that day on the mountain?"

"Ah, I thought that was a play!" she murmured.

"Tell me! Did you mean it?"

"I never confess the same sin twice, my friend."

"Desiree, did you mean it?"

Then suddenly, with the rapidity of lightning, her manner changed. She bent toward me with parted lips and looked straight into my eyes. There was passion in the gaze; but when she spoke her voice was quite even and so low I scarcely heard.

"Paul," she said, "I shall not again say I love you. Such words should not be wasted. Not now, perhaps; but that is because we are where we are. And if we should return?

"You have said that nothing is worth a serious word to you; and you are right. You are too cynical; things are bitter in your mouth, and doubly so when they leave it. Just now you are amusing yourself by pretending to care for me. Perhaps you do not know it, but you are. Search your heart, my friend, and tell me--do you want my love?"

Well, there was no need to search my heart, she had laid it open. I hated myself then; and I turned away, unable to meet her eyes, as I said:

"Bon Dieu!" she cried. "That is an ugly speech, monsieur!" And she laughed aloud.

"But we must not awaken Harry," she continued with sudden softness. "What a boy he is--and what a man! Ah, he knows what it is to love!"

That topic suited me little better, but I followed her. We talked of Harry, Le Mire with an amount of enthusiasm that surprised me. Suddenly she stopped abruptly and announced that she was hungry.

I found Harry's pantry after a few minutes' search and took some of its contents to Desiree. Then I returned to the edge of the water and ate my portion alone. That meal was one scarcely calculated for the pleasures of companionship or conviviality.

It was several hours after that before Harry awoke, the greater part of which Desiree and I were silent.

I would have given something to have known her thoughts; my own were not very pleasant. It is always a disagreeable thing to discover that some one else knows you better than you know yourself. And Desiree had cut deep. At the time I thought her unjust; time alone could have told which of us was right. If she were here with me now--but she is not.

Finally Harry awoke. He was delighted to find Desiree awake and comparatively well, and demonstrated the fact with a degree of effusion that prompted me to leave them alone together. But I did not go far; a hundred paces made me sit down to rest before returning, so weak was I from wounds and fasting.

Harry's spirits were high, for no apparent reason other than that we were still alive, for that was the best that could be said for us. So I told him; he retorted with a hearty clap on the back that sent me sprawling to the ground.

"What the deuce!" he exclaimed, stooping to help me up. "Are you as weak as that? Gad, I'm sorry!"

"That is the second fall he has had," said Desiree, with a meaning smile.

Indeed, she was having her revenge!

But my strength was not long in returning. Over a long stretch our diet would hardly have been conducive to health, but it was exactly what I needed to put blood and strength in me. And Harry and Desiree, too, for that matter. Again I had to withstand Harry's eager demands for action. He began within two hours to insist on exploring the cave, and if possible, find an exit on the opposite side from the one where we had entered, we left Desiree behind, seated on a pile of skins, with a spear on the ground at her side.

"I won't stir a foot until I am able to knock you down," I declared finally and flatly. "Never again will I attempt to perform the feats of a Hercules when I am fit only for an invalid's chair." And he was forced to wait.

As I say, however, my strength was not long in returning, and when it started it came with a rush. My wounds were healing perfectly; only one remained open. Harry, with his usual phenomenal luck, had got nothing but the merest scratches.

Desiree improved very slowly. The strain of those four days in the cavern had been severe, and her nerves required more pleasant surroundings than a dark and damp cavern and more agreeable diet than raw meat, to adjust themselves.

Thus it was that when Harry and I found ourselves ready to start out to explore the cavern and, if possible, find an exit on the opposite side from the one where we had entered, we left Desiree behind, seated on a pile of skins, with a spear on the ground at her side.

"We'll be back in an hour," said Harry, stooping to kiss her; and the phrase, which might have come from the lips of a worthy Harlem husband leaving for a little sojourn with friends on the corner, brought a smile to my face.

We went first toward the spot where lay the remains of "our friend with the eyes," as Harry called him, and we were guided straight by our noses, for the odor of the thing was beginning to be--to use another phrase of Harry's--
There was little to see except a massive pile of crumpled hide and sinking flesh. As we approached, several hundred of the animals with which Harry had filled our larder scampered away toward the water.

"They're not fighters," I observed, turning to watch them disappear in the darkness.

"No," Harry agreed. "See here," he added suddenly, holding up a piece of the hide of the reptile; "this stuff is an inch thick and tough as rats. It ought to be good for something."

But by that time I was pinching my nostrils with my fingers, and I pulled him away.

Several hundred yards farther on we came to the wall of the cavern. We followed it, turning to the right; but though it was uneven and marked by projecting boulders and deep crevices, we found no exit. We had gone at least half a mile, I think, when we came to the end. There it turned in a wide circle to the right, and we took the new direction, which was toward the spot where we had left Desiree, only considerably to the left.

Another five minutes found us at the edge of the stream, which at that point was much swifter than it was farther up. We waded in and discovered that the cause was its extreme narrowness.

"But where does the thing go to?" asked Harry, taking the words from my mouth.

We soon found out. Proceeding along the bank to the left, within fifty feet we came to the wall. There the stream entered and disappeared. But, unlike the others we had seen, above this there was a wide and high arch, which made it appear as though the stream were passing under a massive bridge. The current was swift but not turbulent, and there was something about the surface of that stream flowing straight through the mountain ahead of us--

Harry and I glanced at each other quickly, moved by the same thought. There was an electric thrill in that glance.

But we did not speak--then.

For suddenly, startlingly, a voice sounded throughout the cavern--Desiree's voice, raised in a shrill cry of terror.

It was repeated twice before our startled senses found themselves; then we turned with one impulse and raced into the darkness toward her.

Chapter XIX.

AFLOAT.

As we ran swiftly, following the edge of the stream, the cries continued, filling the cavern with racing echoes. They could not quicken our step; we were already straining every muscle as we bounded over the rock. Luckily, the way was clear, for in the darkness we could see but a few feet ahead. Desiree's voice was sufficient guide for us.

Finally we reached her. I don't know what I expected to see, but certainly not that which met our eyes.

"Your spear!" cried Harry, dashing off to the right, away from the stream.

My spear was ready. I followed.

Desiree was standing exactly in the spot where we had left her, screaming at the top of her voice.

Around her, on every side, was a struggling, pushing mass of the animals we had frightened away from the carcass of the reptile. There were hundreds of them packed tightly together, crowding toward her, some leaping on the backs of others, some trampled to the ground beneath the feet of their fellows. They did not appear to be actually attacking her, but we could not see distinctly.

This we saw in a flash and an instant later had dashed forward into the mass with whirling spears. It was a farce, rather than a fight.

We brought our spears down on the swarm of heads and backs without even troubling to take aim. They pressed against our legs; we waded through as though it were a current of water. Those we hit either fell or ran; they waited for no second blow.

Desiree had ceased her cries.

"They won't hurt you!" Harry had shouted. "Where's your spear?"

"Gone. They came on me before I had time to get it."

"Then kick 'em, push 'em--anything. They're nothing but pigs."

They had the senseless stubbornness of pigs, at least. They seemed absolutely unable to realize that their presence was not desired till they actually felt the spear--utterly devoid even of instinct.

"So this is what you captured for us at the risk of your life!" I shouted to Harry in disgust. "They haven't even sense enough to squeal."

We finally reached Desiree's side and cleared a space round her. But it took us another fifteen minutes of pushing and thrusting and indiscriminate massacre before we routed the brutes. When they did decide to go they lost no time, but scampered away toward the water with a sliding, tumbling rush.

"Gad!" exclaimed Harry, resting on his spear. "And here's a pretty job. Look at that! I wish they'd carry off the dead ones."

"Ugh! The nasty brutes! I was never so frightened in my life," said Desiree.

"You frightened us, all right," Harry retorted. "Uterly fungoed. I never ran so fast in my life. And all you had to
do was shake your spear at 'em and say boo! I thought it was the roommate of our friend with the eyes."

"Have I been eating those things?" Desiree demanded.

Harry grinned.

"Yes, and that isn't all. You'll continue to eat 'em as long as I'm the cook. Come on, Paul; it's a day's work."

We dragged the bodies down to the edge of the stream and tossed them into the current, saving three or four for the replenishment of the larder.

I then first tried my hand at the task of skinning and cleaning them, and by the time I had finished was thoroughly disgusted with it and myself. Harry had become hardened to it; he whistled over the job as though he had been born in a butcher's shop.

"I'd rather go hungry," I declared, washing my hands and arms in the cool water.

"Oh, sure," said Harry; "my efforts are never appreciated. I've fed you up till you've finally graduated from the skeleton class, and you immediately begin to criticize the table. I know now what it means to run a boarding-house. Why don't you change your hotel?"

By the time we had finished we were pretty well tired out, but Harry wouldn't hear of rest. I was eager myself for another look at the exit of that stream. So, again taking up our spears, we set out across the cavern, this time with Desiree between us. She swallowed Harry's ridicule of her fear and refused to stay behind.

Again we stood at the point where the stream left the cavern through the broad arch of a tunnel.

"There's a chance there," said Harry, turning to me. "It looks good."

"Yes, if we had a boat," I agreed. "But that's a ten-mile current, and probably deep."

I waded out some twenty feet and was nearly swept beneath the surface as the water circled about my shoulders.

"We couldn't follow that on our feet," I declared, returning to the shore. "But it does look promising. At ten miles an hour we'd reach the western slope in four hours. Four hours to sunshine--but it might as well be four hundred. It's impossible."

We turned then and retraced our steps to our camp, if I may give it so dignified a title. I hated to give up the idea of following the bed of the stream, for it was certain that somewhere it found the surface of the earth, and I revolved in my brain every conceivable means to do so. The same thought was in Harry's mind, for he turned to me suddenly:

"If we only had something for stringers, I could make a raft that would carry us to the Pacific and across it. The hide of that thing over yonder would be just the stuff, and we could get a piece as big as we wanted."

I shook my head.

"I thought of that. But we have absolutely nothing to hold it. There wasn't a bone in his body; you know that."

But the idea was peculiarly tempting, and we spent an hour discussing it. Desiree was asleep on her pile of skins. We sat side by side on the ground some distance away, talking in low tones.

Suddenly there was a loud splash in the stream, which was quite close to us.

"By gad!" exclaimed Harry, springing to his feet. "Did you hear that? It sounded like--remember the fish we pulled in from the Inca's raft?"

"Which has nothing to do with this," I answered. "It's nothing but the water-pigs. I've heard 'em a thousand times in the last few days. And the Lord knows we have enough of them."

But Harry protested that the splash was much too loud to have been caused by any water-pig and waded into the stream to investigate. I rose to my feet and followed him leisurely, for no reason in particular, but was suddenly startled by an excited cry from his lips:

"Paul--the spear! Quick! It's a whale!"

I ran as swiftly as I could to the shore and returned with our spears, but when I reached Harry he greeted me with an oath of disappointment and the information that the "whale" had disappeared. He was greatly excited.

"I tell you he was twenty feet long! A big black devil, with a head like a cow."

"You're sure it wasn't like a pig?" I asked skeptically.

Harry looked at me.

"I have drunk nothing but water for a month," he said dryly. "It was a fish, and some fish."

"Well, there's probably more like him," I observed. "But they can wait. Come on and get some sleep, and then--we'll see."

Some hours afterward, having filled ourselves with sleep and food (I had decided, after mature deliberation, not to change my hotel), we started out, armed with our spears. Desiree accompanied us. Harry told her bluntly that she would be in the way, but she refused to stay behind.

We turned upstream, thinking our chances better in that direction than toward the swifter current, and were surprised to find that the cavern was much larger than any we had before seen. In something over a mile we had not yet reached the farther wall, for we walked at a brisk pace for a quarter of an hour or more.

At this point the stream was considerably wider than it was below, and there was very little current. Desiree
stood on the bank while Harry and I waded out above our waists.

There was a long and weary wait before anything occurred. The water was cold, and my limbs became stiff and numb; I called to Harry that it was useless to wait longer, and was turning toward the shore when there was a sudden commotion in the water not far from where he stood.

I turned and saw Harry plunge forward with his spear.

"I've got him!" he yelled. "Come on!"

I went. But I soon saw that Harry didn't have him. He had Harry. They were all of ten yards away from me, and by the time I reached the spot there was nothing to be seen but flying water threshed into foam and fury.

I caught a glimpse of Harry being jerked through the air; he was holding on for dear life with both hands to the shaft of his spear. The water was over my head there; I was swimming with all the strength I had.

"I've got him--through the belly," Harry gasped as I fought my way through the spray to his side. "His head! Find his head!"

I finally succeeded in getting my hand on Harry's spear-shaft near where it entered the body of the fish; but the next instant it was jerked from me, dragging me beneath the surface. I came up puffing and made another try, but missed it by several feet.

Harry kept shouting: "His head! Get him in the head!"

For that I was saving my spear. But I could make nothing of either head or tail as the immense fish leaped furiously about in the water, first this way, then that.

Once he came down exactly on top of me and carried me far under; I felt his slippery, smooth body glide over me, and the tail struck me a heavy blow in the face as it passed. Blinded and half choked, I fought my way back to the surface and saw that they had got fifty feet away.

I swam to them, breathing hard and nearly exhausted. The water foamed less furiously about them now. As I came near the fish leaped half out of the water and came down flat on his side; I saw his ugly black head pointed directly toward me.

"He's about gone!" Harry gasped.

He was still clinging to the spear.

I set myself firmly against the water and waited. Soon it parted violently not ten feet in front of me, and again the head appeared; he was coming straight for me. I could see the dull beady eyes on either side, and I let him have the spear right between them.

There was little force to the blow, but the fish himself furnished that; he was coming like lightning. I hurled my body aside with a great effort and felt him sweep past me.

I turned to swim after them and heard Harry's great shout: "You got him!"

By the time I reached him the fish had turned over on his back and was floating on the surface, motionless.

We had still to get him ashore, and, exhausted as we were, it was no easy task. But there was very little current, and after half an hour of pulling and shoving we got him into shallow water, where we could find the bottom with our feet. Then it was easier. Desiree waded out to us and lent a hand, and in another ten minutes we had him high and dry on the rock.

He was even larger than I had thought. No wonder Harry had called him--or one like him--a whale. It was all of fifteen feet from his snout to the tip of his tail. The skin was dead black on top and mottled irregularly on the belly.

As we sat sharpening the points of our spears on the rock, preparatory to skinning him, Desiree stood regarding the fish with unqualified approval. She turned to us:

"Well, I'd rather eat that than those other nasty things."

"Oh, that isn't what we want him for," said Harry, rubbing his finger against the edge of his spear-point. "He's probably not fit to eat."

"Then why all this trouble?" asked Desiree.

"Dear lady, we expect to ride him home," said Harry, rising to his feet.

Then he explained our purpose, and you may believe that Desiree was the most excited of the lot as we ripped down the body of the fish from tail to snout and began to peel off the tough skin.

"If you succeed you may choose the new hangings for my boudoir," she said, with an attempt at lightness not altogether successful.

"As for me," I declared, "I shall eat fish every day of my life out of pure gratitude."

"You'll do it out of pure necessity," Harry put in, "if you don't get busy."

It took us three hours of whacking and slashing and tearing to pull the fish to pieces, but we worked with a purpose and a will. When we had finished, this is what we had to show: A long strip of bone, four inches thick and twelve feet long, and tough as hickory, from either side of which the smaller bones projected at right angles. They were about an inch in thickness and two inches apart. The lower end of the backbone, near the tail, we had broken
off.

We examined it and lifted it and bent it half double.

"Absolutely perfect!" Harry cried in jubilation. "Three more like this and we'll sail down the coast to Callao."

"If we can get 'em," I observed. "But two would do. We could make it a triangle."

Harry looked at me.

"Paul, you're an absolute genius. But would it be big enough to hold us?"

We discussed that question on our way back to camp, whither we carried the backbone of our fish, together with some of the meat. Then, after a hearty meal, we slept. After seven hours of the hardest kind of work we were ready for it.

That was our program for the time that followed—time that stretched into many weary hours, for, once started, we worked feverishly, so impatient had we become by dint of that faint glimmer of hope. We were going to try to build a raft, on which we were going to try to embank on the stream, by which we were going to try to find our way out of the mountain. The prospect made us positively hilarious, so slender is the thread by which hope jerks us about.

The first part of our task was the most strenuous. We waited and waded round many hours before another fish appeared, and then he got away from us. Another attempt was crowned with success after a hard fight. The second one was even larger than the first.

The next two were too small to be of use in the raft, but we saved them for another purpose. Then, after another long search, lasting many hours, we ran into half a dozen of them at once.

By that time we were fairly expert with our spears, besides having discovered their vulnerable spot—the throat, just forward from the gills. To this day I don't know whether or not they were man-eaters. Their jaws were roomy and strong as those of any shark; but they never closed on us.

Thus we had four of the large backbones and two smaller ones. Next we wanted a covering, and for that purpose we visited the remains of the reptile which had first led us into the cavern.

Its hide was half an inch thick and tough as the toughest leather. There was no difficulty in loosening it, for by that time the flesh was so decayed and sunken that it literally fell off. That job was the worst of all.

Time and again, after cutting away with the points of our spears—our only tools—until we could stand it no longer, we staggered off to the stream like drunken men, sick and faint with the sight and smell of the mess.

But that, too, came to an end, and finally we marched off to the camp, which we had removed a half-mile upstream, dragging after us a piece of the hide about thirty feet long and half as wide. It was not as heavy as we had thought, which made it all the better for our purpose.

The remainder of our task, though tedious, was not unpleasant.

We first made the larger bones, which were to serve as the beams of our raft, exactly the same length by filing off the ends of the longer ones with rough bits of granite. I have said it was tedious. Then we filed off each of the smaller bones projecting from the neural arch until they were of equal length.

They extended on either side about ten inches, which, allowing four inches for the width of the larger bone and one inch for the covering, would make our raft slightly over a foot in depth.

To make the cylindrical column rigid, we bound each of the vertebrae to the one in direct juxtaposition on either side firmly with strips of hide, several hundred feet of which we had prepared.

This gave us four beams held straight and true, without any play in either direction, with only a slight flexibility resulting from the cartilages within the center cord.

With these four beams we formed a square, placing them on their edges, end to end. At each corner of the square we lashed the ends together firmly with strips of hide. It was both firm and flexible after we had lashed the corners over and over with the strips, that there might be no play under the strain of the current.

Over this framework we stretched the large piece of hide so that the ends met on top, near the middle. The bottom was thus absolutely watertight. We folded the corners in and caught them up with strips over the top. Then, with longer strips, we fastened up the sides, passing the strips back and forth across the top, from side to side, having first similarly secured the two ends. As a final precaution, we passed broader strips around both top and bottom, lashing them together in the center of the top. And there was our raft, twelve feet square, over a foot deep, watertight as a town drunkard, and weighing not more than a hundred pounds. It has taken me two minutes to tell it; it took us two weeks to do it.

But we discovered immediately that the four beams on the sides and ends were not enough, for Desiree's weight alone caused the skin to sag clear through in the center, though we had stretched it as tightly as possible. We were forced to unleash all the strips running from side to side and insert supports, made of smaller bones, across the middle each way. These we reinforced on their ends with the thickest hide we could find, that they might not puncture the bottom. After that it was fairly firm; though its sea-worthiness was not improved, it was much easier to navigate
than it would have been before.

For oars we took the lower ends of the backbones of the two smaller fish and covered them with hide. They were about five feet long and quite heavy; but we intended to use them more for the purpose of steering than for propulsion. The current of the stream would attend to that for us.

Near the center of the raft we arranged a pile of the skins of the water-pigs for Desiree; a seat by no means uncomfortable. The strips which ran back and forth across the top afforded a hold as security against the tossing of the craft; but for her feet we arranged two other strips to pass over her ankles what time she rested. This was an extreme precaution, for we did not expect the journey to be a long one.

Finally we loaded on our provisions--about thirty pounds of the meat of the fish and water-pigs, wrapping it securely in two or three of the skins and strapping them firmly to the top.

"And now," said I, testing the strips on the corners for the last time, "all we need is a name for her and a bottle of wine."

"And a homeward-bound pennant," put in Harry.

"The name is easy enough," said Desiree. "I hereby christen her Clarte du Soleil."

"Which means?" asked Harry, whose French came only in spots.

"Sunshine," I told him. "Presumably after the glorious King of the Incas, who calls himself the Child of the Sun. But it's a good name. May Heaven grant that it takes us there!"

"I think we ought to take more grub," said Harry--an observation which he had made not less than fifty times in the preceding fifty minutes. He received no support and grumbled to himself something about the horrible waste of leaving so much behind.

Why it was I don't know, but we were fully persuaded that we were about to say good-by forever to this underground world and its dangers. Somehow, we had coaxed ourselves into the belief that success was certain; it was as though we had seen the sunlight streaming in from the farther end of the arched tunnel into which the stream disappeared. There was an assurance about the words of each that strengthened this feeling in the others, and hope had shut out all thought of failure as we prepared to launch our craft.

It took us some time to get it to the edge of the water, though it was close by, for we handled it with extreme care, that it might not be torn on the rocks. Altogether, with the provisions, it weighed close to one hundred and fifty pounds.

We were by no means sure that the thing would carry us, and when once we had reached the water we forgot caution in our haste to try it. We held it at the edge while Desiree arranged herself on the pile of skins. The spears lay across at her feet, strapped down for security.

Harry stepped across to the farther edge of the raft.

"Ready!" he called, and I shoved off, wading behind. When the water was up to my knees I climbed aboard and picked up my oar.

"By all the nine gods, look at her!" cried Harry in huge delight. "She takes about three inches! Man, she'd carry an army!"

"Allons!" cried Desiree, with gay laughter. "C'est Perfection!"

"Couldn't be better," I agreed; "but watch yourself, Hal. When we get into the current things are going to begin to happen. If it weren't for the beastly darkness 'twould be easy enough. As it is, one little rock the size of your head could send us to the bottom."

We were still near the bank, working our way out slowly. Harry and I had to maintain positions equidistant from the center in order to keep the raft balanced; hence I had to push her out alone.

Considering her bulk, she answered to the oar very well.

Another five minutes and we were near the middle of the stream. At that point there was but little current and we drifted slowly. Harry went to the bow, while I took up a position on the stern--if I may use such terms for such a craft--directly behind Desiree. We figured that we were then about a mile from the Point where the stream left the cavern.

Gradually, as the stream narrowed, the strength of the current increased. Still it was smooth, and the raft sailed along without a tremor. Once or twice, caught by some trick of the current, she turned half round, poking her nose ahead, but she soon righted herself.

The water began to curl up on the sides as we were carried more and more swiftly onward, with a low murmur that was music to us. The stream became so narrow that we could see the bank on either side, though dimly, and I knew we were approaching the exit.

I called to Harry: "Keep her off to the right as we make the turn!" and he answered: "Aye, aye, sir!" with a wave of the hand. This, at least, was action with a purpose.

Another minute and we saw the arch directly ahead of us, round a bend in the stream. The strength of the current
carried us toward the off bank, but we plied our oars desperately and well, and managed to keep fairly well in to the end of the curve.

We missed the wall of the tunnel--black, grim rock that would have dashed out our brains--by about ten feet, and were swept forward under the arch, on our way--so we thought--to the land of sunshine.

Chapter XX.
AN INCA SPEAR.

Here I might most appropriately insert a paragraph on the vanity of human wishes and endeavor. But events, they say, speak for themselves; and still, for my own part, I prefer the philosopher to the historian. Mental digestion is a wearisome task; you are welcome to it.

To the story. As I have said, we missed the wall of the tunnel by a scant ten feet, and we kept on missing it. Once under the arch, our raft developed a most stubborn inclination to bump up against the rocky banks instead of staying properly in the middle of the current, as it should.

First to one side, then to the other, it swung, while Harry and I kept it off with our oars, often missing a collision by inches. But at least the banks were smooth and level, and as long as the stream itself remained clear of obstruction there was but little real danger.

The current was not nearly so swift as I had expected it would be. In the semidarkness it was difficult to calculate our rate of speed, but I judged that we were moving at about six or seven miles an hour.

We had gone perhaps three miles when we came to a sharp bend in the stream, to the left, almost at a right angle. Harry, at the bow, was supposed to be on the lookout, but he failed to see it until we were already caught in its whirl.

Then he gave a cry of alarm, and together we swung the raft to the left, avoiding the right bank of the curve by less than a foot. Once safely past, I sent Harry to the stern and took the bow myself, which brought down upon him a deal of keen banter from Desiree.

There the tunnel widened, and the raft began to glide easily onward, without any of its sudden dashes to right or left. I rested on my oar, gazing intently ahead; at the best I could make out the walls a hundred yards ahead, and but dimly. All was silence, save the gentle swish of the water against the sides of the raft and the patter of Harry's oar dipping idly on one side or the other.

Suddenly Desiree's voice came through the silence, soft and very low:

"Pendant une annee toute entiere, Le regiment na Pas r'paru. Au Ministere de la Guerre On le r'porta comme perdu.

"On se r'noncait a r'trouver sa trace, Quand un matin subitement, On le vit r'paraitre sur la place, L'Colonel toujours en avant."

I waited until the last note had died away in the darkness.

"Are those your thoughts?" I asked then, half turning.

"No," said Desiree, "but I want to kill my thoughts. As for them--"

She hesitated, and after a short pause her voice again broke into melody:

"Fresh as the first beam glittering on a sail That brings our friends up from the underworld; Sad as the last which reddens over one That sinks with all we love below the verge; So sad, so fresh, the days that are no more."

Her voice, subdued and low, breathed a sweetness that seemed almost to be of another world. My ear quivered with the vibrations, and long after she was silent the last mellow note floated through my brain.

Suddenly I became conscious of another sound, scarcely less musical. It, too, was low; so low and faint that at first I thought my ear deceived me, or that some distant echo was returning Desiree's song down the dark tunnel.

Gradually, very gradually, it became louder and clearer, until at length I recognized it. It was the rush of water, unbroken, still low and at a great distance. I turned to remark on it to Harry, but Desiree took the words from my mouth.

"I seem to hear something--like the surf," she said. "That isn't possible, is it?"

I could have smiled but for the deep note of hope in her voice.

"Hardly," I answered. "I have heard it for several minutes. It is probably some shallows. We must look sharp."

Another fifteen minutes, and I began to notice that the speed of the current was increasing. The sound of the rushing water, too, was quite distinct. Still the raft moved more and more swiftly, till I began to feel alarmed. I turned to Harry:

"That begins to sound like rapids. See that the spears are fastened securely, and stand ready with your oar. Sit tight, Desiree."

One thing was certain: there was nothing to do but go ahead. On both sides the walls of the tunnel rose straight up from the surface of the water; there was nowhere room for a landing-place --not even a foot for a purchase to stay our flight. To go back was impossible; at the rate the current was now carrying us we could not have held the raft even for a moment without oars.
Soon we were gliding forward so swiftly that the raft trembled under us; from the darkness ahead came the sound of the rapids, now increased to a roar that filled the tunnel and deafened us. I heard Harry shouting something, but could not make out the words; we were shooting forward with the speed of an express train and the air about us was full of flying water.

The roar of the rapids became louder and louder. I turned for an instant, shouting at the top of my voice: "Flat on your faces, and hold on for dear life!" Then I dropped down with my oar under me, passing my feet under two of the straps and clinging to two others with my hands.

Another few seconds passed that seemed an hour. The raft was swaying and lurching with the mad force of the current. I called out again to Harry and Desiree, but my words were completely drowned by the deafening, stunning roar of the water. All was darkness and confusion. I kept asking myself: "Why doesn't it come?" It seemed an age since I had thrown myself on my face.

Suddenly the raft leaped up under me and away. It seemed as though some giant hand had grasped it from beneath and jerked it down with tremendous force. The air was filled with water, lashing my face and body furiously. The raft whirled about like a cork. I gripped the straps with all the strength that was in me. Down, down we went into the darkness; my breath was gone and my brain whirled dizzily.

There was a sudden sharp lurch, a jerk upward, and I felt the surface of the water close over me. Blinded and dazed, I clung to my hold desperately, struggling with the instinct to free myself. For several seconds the roar of the cataract sounded in my ears with a furious faintness, as though it were at a great distance; then I felt the air again and a sudden cessation of motion.

I opened my eyes, choking and sputtering. For a time I could see nothing; then I made out Desiree's form, and Harry's, stretched behind me on the raft. At the same instant Harry's voice came:
"Paul! Ah, Desiree!"

In another moment we were at her side. Her hands held to the straps on each side with a grip as of death; we had to pry off each of her fingers separately to loosen them. Then we bent her over Harry's knee and worked her arms up and down, and soon her chest heaved convulsively and her lungs freed themselves of the water they had taken. Presently she turned about; her eyes opened and she pressed her hands to her head.

"Don't say 'Where am I?'' said Harry, "because we don't know. How do you feel?"

"I don't know," she answered, still gasping for breath. "What was it? What did we do?"

I left them then, turning to survey the extent of our damage. There was absolutely none; we were as intact as when we started. The provisions and spears remained under their straps; my oar lay where I had fallen on it. The raft appeared to be floating easily as before, without a scratch.

The water about us was churned into foam, though we had already been carried so far from the cataract that it was lost behind us in the darkness; only its roar reached our ears. To this day I haven't the faintest idea of its height; it may have been ten feet or two hundred. Harry says a thousand.

We were moving slowly along on the surface of what appeared to be a lake, still carried forward by the force of the falls behind us. For my part, I found its roar bewildering and confusing, and I picked up my oar and commenced to paddle away from it; at least, so I judged.

Harry's voice came from behind:
"In the name of goodness, where did you get that oar?"

I turned.

"Young man, a good sailor never loses an oar. How do you feel, Desiree?"

"Like a drowned rat," she answered, but with a laugh in her voice. "I'm faint and sick and wet, and my throat is ready to burst, but I wouldn't have missed that for anything. It was glorious! I'd like to do it again."

"Yes, you would," said Harry skeptically. "You're welcome, thank you. But what I want to know is, where did that oar come from?"

I explained that I had taken the precaution to fall on it.

"Do you never lose your head?" asked Desiree.

"No, merely my heart."

"Oh, as for that," she retorted, with a lightness that still had a sting, "my good friend, you never had any."

Whereupon I returned to my paddling in haste.

Soon I discovered that though, as I have said, we appeared to be in a lake—for I could see no bank on either side—there was still a current. We drifted slowly, but our movement was plainly perceptible, and I rested on my oar.

Presently a wall loomed up ahead of us and I saw that the stream again narrowed down as it entered the tunnel, much lower than the one above the cataract. The current became swifter as we were carried toward its mouth, and I called to Harry to get his spear to keep us off from the walls if it should prove necessary. But we entered exactly in the center and were swept forward with a rush.
The ceiling of the tunnel was so low that we could not stand upright on the raft, and the stream was not more than forty feet wide. That was anything but promising; if the stream really ran through to the western slope, its volume of water should have been increasing instead of diminishing. I said nothing of that to Harry or Desiree.

We had sailed along thus without incident for upward of half an hour, when my carelessness, or the darkness, nearly brought us to grief. Suddenly, without warning, there was a violent jar and the raft rebounded with a force that all but threw us into the water. Coming to a bend in the stream, the current had dashed us against the other bank.

But, owing to the flexibility of its sides, the raft escaped damage. I had my oar against the wall instantly, shoving off, and we swung round and caught the current again round the curve.

But that bend was to the left, as the other had been, which meant that we were now going in exactly the opposite direction of that in which we had started! Which, in turn, meant the death of hope; we were merely winding in and out in a circle and getting nowhere. Harry and Desiree had apparently not noticed the fact, and I said nothing of it. Time enough when they should find out for themselves; and besides, there was still a chance, though a slim one.

Soon the bed of the stream became nearly level, for we barely moved. The roof of the tunnel was very low--but a scant foot above our heads as we sat or crouched on the raft. It was necessary to keep a sharp lookout ahead; a rock projecting from above would have swept us into the water.

The air, too, was close and foul; our breath became labored and difficult; and Desiree, half stifled and drowsy, passed into a fitful and broken sleep, stirring restlessly and panting for air. Harry had taken the bow and I lay across the stern. Suddenly his voice came, announcing that we had left the tunnel.

I sat up quickly and looked round. The walls were no longer to be seen; we had evidently entered a cavern similar to the one in which we had embarked.

"Shall we lay off?" I asked, stepping across to Harry's side.

He assented, and I took the oar and worked the raft over to the left. There was but little current and she went well in. In a few minutes we were in shallow water, and Harry and I jumped off and shoved her to the bank.

Desiree sat up, rubbing her eyes.

"Where are we?" she asked.

Harry explained while we beached the raft. Then we broke out our provisions and partook of them.

"But why do we stop?" asked Desiree.

The words "Because we are not getting anywhere" rose to my lips, but I kept them back.

"For a rest and some air," I answered.

Desiree exclaimed: "But I want to go on!"

So as soon as we had eaten our fill we loaded the stuff again and prepared to shove off. By that time I think Harry, too, had realized the hopelessness of our expedition, for he had lost all his enthusiasm; but he said nothing, nor did I. We secured Desiree on her pile of skins and again pushed out into the current.

The cavern was not large, for we had been under way but a few minutes when its wall loomed up ahead and the stream again entered a tunnel, so low and narrow that I hesitated about entering at all. I consulted Harry.

"Take a chance," he advised. "Why not? As well that as anything."

We slipped through the entrance.

The current was extremely sluggish, and we barely seemed to move. Still we went forward.

"If we only had a little speed we could stand it," Harry grumbled.

Which shows that a man does not always appreciate a blessing. It was not long before we were offering up thanks that our speed had been so slight.

To be exact, about an hour, as well as I could measure time, which passed slowly; for not only were the minutes tedious, but the foulness of the air made them also extremely uncomfortable. Desiree was again lying down, half-unconscious but not asleep, for now and then she spoke drowsily. Harry complained of a dizziness in the head, and my own seemed ready to burst through my temples. The soroche of the mountains was agreeable compared to that.

Suddenly the swiftness of the current increased appreciably on the instant; there was a swift jerk as we were carried forward. I rose to my knees--the tunnel was too low to permit of standing--and gazed intently ahead. I could see nothing save that the stream had narrowed to half its former width, and was still becoming narrower.

We went faster and faster, and the stream narrowed until the bank was but a few feet away on either side.

"Watch the stern!" I called to Harry. "Keep her off with your spear!"

Then a wall loomed up directly ahead. I thought it meant another bend in the stream, and I strained my eyes intently in the effort to discover its direction, but I could see nothing save the black wall. We approached closer; I shouted to Harry and Desiree to brace themselves for a shock, praying that the raft would meet the rock squarely and not on a corner.

I had barely had time to set myself and grasp the straps behind when we struck with terrific force. The raft rebounded several feet, trembling and shaking violently. The water was rushing past us with noisy impetuosity.
There was a cry from Desiree, and from Harry, "All right!" I crawled to the bow. Along the top the hide covering had been split open for several feet, but the water did not quite reach the opening.

And we had reached the end of our ambitious journey. For that black wall marked the finish of the tunnel; the stream entered it through a narrow hole, which accounted for the sudden, swift rush of the current. Above the upper rim of the hole the surface of the water whirled about in a widening circle; to this had we been led by the stream that was to have carried us to the land of sunshine.

When I told Desiree she stared at me in silence! I had not realized before the strength of her hope. Speechless with disappointment, she merely sat and stared straight ahead at the black, unyielding rock. Harry knelt beside her with his arm across her shoulders.

I roused him with a jerk of the arm.

"Come--get busy! A few hours in this hole and we'd suffocate. Do you realize that we've got to pull this raft back against the current?"

First it was necessary to repair the rent in the hide covering. This we did with strips of hide; and barely in time, for it was becoming wider every minute, and the water was beginning to creep in over the edge. But we soon had the ends sewed firmly together and turned our hands to the main task.

It appeared to be not only difficult, but actually impossible to force the raft back up-stream against the swift current. We were jammed against the rock with all the force of many tons of water. The oar was useless.

Getting a purchase on the wall with our hands, we shoved the raft to one side; but as soon as we got to the wall on the left the whirling stream turned us around again, and we found ourselves back in our original position, only with a different side of the raft against the rock. That happened three times.

Then we tried working to the right instead of the left, but with no better success. The force of the current, coming with all its speed against the unwieldy raft, was irresistible. Time and again we shoved round and started upstream, after incredible labor, only to be dashed back again against the rock.

We tried our spears, but their shafts were so slender that they were useless. We took the oar and, placing its end against the wall, shoved with all our strength. The oar snapped in two and we fell forward against the wall. We tore off some of the strips of hide from the raft and tried to fasten them to the wall on either side, but there was no protuberance that would hold them. Nothing remained to be done.

Harry and I held a consultation then and agreed on the only possible means of escape. I turned to Desiree:

"Can you swim?"

"Parfaitement," she replied. "But against that"--pointing to the whirling water--"I do not know. I can try."

I, who remember the black fury of that stream as it swept past us, can appreciate the courage of her.

We lost no time, for the foulness of the air was weakening us with every breath we took. Our preparations were few.

The two spears and about half of the provisions we strapped to our backs--an inconsiderable load which would hamper us but little. We discarded all our clothing, which was very little. I took the heavy skin which Desiree had worn and began to strap it also on top of my bundle, but she refused to allow it.

"I will not permit you to be handicapped with my modesty," she observed.

Then, with Desiree between us, we stepped to the edge of the raft and dived off together.

Driven as we were by necessity, we would have hesitated longer if we had known the full force of the undercurrent that seized us from beneath. Desiree would have disappeared without a struggle if it had not been for the support which Harry and I rendered her on either side.

But we kept on top--most of the time--and fought our way forward by inches. The black walls frowning at us from either side appeared to me to remain exactly the same, stationary, after a long and desperate struggle; but when I gave a quick glance behind I saw that we had pulled so far away from the raft that it was no longer in sight. That gave me renewed strength, and, shouting assurance to Harry and Desiree, I redoubled my efforts. Desiree was by now almost able to hold her own, but we still supported her.

Every stroke made the next one easier, carrying us away from the whirlpool, and soon we swam smoothly. Less and less strong became the resistance of the current, until finally it was possible to float easily on our backs and rest.

"How far is it to the cavern?" Harry panted.

"Somewhere between one and ten miles," was my answer. "How the deuce should I know? But we'll make it now, I think. Can you hold out, Desiree?"

"Easily," she answered. "If only I could get some air! Just one good, long breath."

There was the danger, and on that account no time was to be lost. Again we struck out into the blackness ahead. I felt myself no longer fresh, and began to doubt seriously if we should reach our goal.

But we reached it. No need to recount our struggles, which toward the end were inspired by suffering amounting to agony as we choked and gasped for sufficient air to keep us up.
Another hundred yards would have been too much for us; but it is enough that finally we staggered onto the bank at the entrance to the cavern in which we had previously rested, panting, dizzy, and completely exhausted.

But an hour in the cavern, with its supply of air, revived us; and then we sat up and asked ourselves: "What for?"

"And all that brings us--to this," said Harry, with a sweeping gesture round the cavern.

"At least, it is a better tomb," I retorted. "And it was a good fight. We still have something in us. Desiree, a good man was lost in you."

Harry rose to his feet.

"I'm going to look round," he announced. "We've got to do something. Gad, and it took us a month to build that raft!"

"The vanity of human endeavor," said I, loosening the strap round my shoulders and dropping my bundle to the ground. "Wait a minute; I'm going with you. Are you coming, Desiree?"

But she was too tired to rise to her feet, and we left her behind, arranging what few skins we had as well as possible to protect her from the hard rock.

"Rest your weary bones," said Harry, stooping to kiss her. "There's meat here if you want it. We'll be back soon."

So we left her, with her white body stretched out at its full length on the rude mat.

"We'd better go back to Desiree," said Harry when we reached the ground again. "She'll wonder what's become of us. We've been gone nearly two hours."

After fifteen minutes' search we found the stream, and followed it to the left. We had gone farther than we thought, and we were looking for the end, where we had left Desiree, long before we reached it. Several times we called her name, but there was no answer.

"She's probably asleep," said Harry. "And a minute later: "There's the wall at last! But where is she?"

My foot struck something on the ground, and I stooped over to examine it.

It was the pile of skins on which Desiree had lain!

I called to Harry, and at the same instant heard his shout of consternation as he came running toward me, holding something in his hand.

"They've got her! Look! Look at this! I found it on the ground over there."

He held the thing in his hand out before me.

It was an Inca spear.

Chapter XXI.

THE MIDST OF THE ENEMY.

Harry and I stood gazing at each other blankly in the semidarkness of the cavern.

"But it isn't possible," I objected finally to my own thoughts. "She would have cried out and we would have heard her. The spear may have been there before."

Then I raised my voice, calling her name many times at the top of my lungs. There was no answer.

"They've got her," said Harry, "and that's all there is to it. The cursed brutes crept up on her in the dark--much chance she had of crying out when they got their hands on her. I know it. Why did we leave her?"

"Where did you find the spear?" I asked.

Harry pointed toward the wall, away from the stream.

"On the ground?"

"Yes."

"Is there an exit from the cavern on that side?"

"I don't know."

"Well, that's our only chance. Come on!"

We found the exit, and another, and a third. Which to take? They were very similar to one another, except that the one in the middle sloped upward at a gentle incline, while the others were level.

"One is as good as another," I observed, and entered the one on the left.

Once started, we advanced with a rush. The passage was straight and narrow, clear of obstruction, and we kept at a steady run.
"They may have an hour's start of us," came Harry's voice at my side.

"Or five minutes," I returned. "We have no way of knowing. But I'm afraid we're on the wrong trail."

Still as I had said, one chance was as good as another, and we did not slacken our pace. The passage went straight forward, without a bend. The roof was low, just allowing us to pass without stooping, and the walls were rough and rugged.

It was not long before we found that we had taken the wrong chance, having covered, I think, some two or three miles when a wall loomed up directly in our path.

"At last, a turn!" panted Harry.

But it was not a turn. It was the end of the passage. We had been following a blind alley.

Harry let out a string of oaths, and I seconded him. Twenty minutes wasted, and another twenty to return!

There was nothing else for it. We shouldered our spears and started to retrace our steps.

"No use running now," I declared. "We can't keep it up forever, and we may as well save our strength. We'll never catch up with 'em, but we may find 'em."

Harry, striding ahead two or three paces in front, did not answer.

Finally we reached the cavern from which we had started.

"And now what?" asked Harry in a tone of the most utter dejection.

I pointed to the exit in the middle. "That! We should have taken it in the first place. On the raft we probably descended altogether something like five hundred feet from the level where we started--possibly twice that distance. And this passage which slopes upward will probably take us back."

"At least, it's as good as the other," Harry agreed; and we entered it.

We had not proceeded far before we found ourselves in difficulties. The gentle slope became a steep incline.

Great rocks loomed up in our path.

In spots the passage was so narrow that two men could hardly have walked abreast through it, and its walls were rough and irregular, with sharp points projecting unexpectedly into our very faces.

Still we went forward and upward, scrambling over, under, round, between. At one point, when Harry was a few yards in front of me, he suddenly disappeared from sight as though swallowed by the mountain.

Rushing forward, I saw him scrambling to his feet at the bottom of a chasm some ten feet below. Luckily he had escaped serious injury, and climbed up on the other side, while I leaped across--a distance of about six feet.

"They could never have brought her through this," he declared, rubbing a bruised knee.

"Do you want to go back?" I asked.

But he said that would be useless, and I agreed with him. So we struggled onward, painfully and laboriously. The sharp corners of the rocks cut our feet and hands, and I had an ugly bruise on my left shoulder, besides many lesser ones. Harry's injured knee caused him to limp and thus further retarded our progress.

At times the passage broadened out until the wall on either side was barely visible, only to narrow down again till it was scarcely more than a crevice between the giant boulders. The variation of the incline was no less, being at times very nearly level, and at others mounting upward at an angle whose ascent was all but impossible. Somehow we crawled up, like flies on a wall.

When we came to a stream of water rushing directly across our path at the foot of a towering rock Harry gave a cry of joy and ran forward. I had not known until then how badly his knee was hurt, and when I came up to where he was bathing it in the stream and saw how black and swollen it was, I insisted that he give it a rest. But he absolutely refused, and after we had quenched our thirst and gotten an easy breath or two we struggled to our feet and on.

After another hour of scrambling and failing and hanging on by our finger nails, the way began to be easier. We came to level, clear stretches with only an occasional boulder or ravine, and the rock became less cruel to our bleeding feet. The relief came almost too late, for by that time every movement was painful, and we made but slow progress.

Soon we faced another difficulty when we came to a point where a split in the passage showed a lane on either side. One led straight ahead; the other branched off to the right. They were very similar, but somehow the one on the right looked more promising to us, and we took it.

We had followed this but a short distance when it broadened out to such an extent that the walls on either side could be seen but dimly. It still sloped upward, but at a very slight angle, and we had little difficulty in making our way. Another half-hour and it narrowed down again to a mere lane.

We were proceeding at a fairly rapid gait, keeping our eyes strained ahead, when there appeared an opening in the right wall at a distance of a hundred feet or so. Not having seen or heard anything to recommend caution, we advanced without slackening our pace until we had reached it.

I said aloud to Harry, "Probably a cross-passage," and then jerked him back quickly against the opposite wall as I saw the real nature of the opening.
It led to a small room, with a low ceiling and rough walls, dark as the passage in which we stood, for it contained no light.

We could see its interior dimly, but well enough to discover the form of an Inca standing just within the doorway. His back was toward us, and he appeared to be fastening something to the ceiling with strips of hide.

It was evident that we had not been seen, and I started to move on, grasping Harry's arm. It was then that I became aware of the fact that the wall leading away in front of us--that is, the one on the right--was marked as far as the eye could reach with a succession of similar openings.

They were quite close together; from where we stood I could see thirty or forty of them. I guessed that they, too, led to rooms similar to the one in front of us, probably likewise occupied; but it was necessary to go on in spite of the danger, and I pulled again at Harry's arm.

Then, seeing by his face that something had happened, I turned my eyes again on the Inca in the room. He had turned about, squarely facing us. As we stood motionless he took a hasty step forward; we had been discovered.

There was but one thing to do, and we didn't hesitate about doing it. We leaped forward together, crossing the intervening space in a single bound, and bore the Inca to the floor under us.

My fingers were round his throat, Harry sat on him. In a trice we had him securely bound and gagged, using some strips of hide which we found suspended from the ceiling.

"By gad!" exclaimed Harry in a whisper. "Look at him! He's a woman!"

It was quite evident--disgustingly so. Her eyes, dull and sunken, appeared as two large, black holes set back in her skull. Her hair, matted about her forehead and shoulders, was thick and coarse, and blacker than night. Her body was innocent of any attempt at covering.

Altogether, not a very pleasant sight; and we bundled her into a corner and proceeded to look round the room, being careful to remain out of the range of view from the corridor as far as possible.

The room was not luxuriously furnished. There were two seats of stone, and a couch of the same material covered with thick hides. In one corner was a pile of copper vessels; in another two or three of stone, rudely carved. Some torn hides lay in a heap near the center of the room. From the ceiling were suspended other hides and some strips of dried fish.

Some of the latter we cut down with the points of our spears and retired with it to a corner.

"Ought we to ask our hostess to join us?" Harry grinned.

"This tastes good, after the other," I remarked.

Hungry as we were, we made sad havoc with the lady's pantry. Then we found some water in a basin in the corner and drank--not without misgivings. But we were too thirsty to be particular.

Then Harry became impatient to go on, and though I had no liking for the appearance of that long row of open doorways, I did not demur. Taking up our spears, we stepped out into the corridor and turned to the right.

We found ourselves running a gantlet wherein discovery seemed certain. The right wall was one unbroken series of open doorways, and in each of the rooms, whose interiors we could plainly see, were one or more of the Inca Women; and sometimes children rolled about on the stony floor.

In one of them a man stood; I could have sworn that he was gazing straight at us, and I gathered myself together for a spring; but he made no movement of any kind and we passed swiftly by.

Once a little black ball of flesh--a boy it was, perhaps five or six years old--tumbled out into the corridor under our very feet. We strode over him and went swiftly on.

We had passed about a hundred of the open doorways, and were beginning to entertain the hope that we might, after all, get through without being discovered, when Harry suddenly stopped short, pulling at my arm. At the same instant I saw, far down the corridor, a crowd of black forms moving toward us.

Even at that distance something about their appearance and gait told us that they were not women. Their number was so great that as they advanced they filled the passage from wall to wall.

There was but one way to escape certain discovery; and distasteful as it was, we did not hesitate to employ it. In a glance I saw that we were directly opposite an open doorway; with a whispered word to Harry I sprang across the corridor and within the room. He followed.

Inside were a woman and two children. As we entered they looked up, startled, and stood gazing at us in terror. For an instant we held back, but there was nothing else for it; and in another minute we had overpowered and bound and gagged them and carried them to a corner.

The children were ugly little devils and the woman very little above a brute; still we handled them as tenderly as possible. Then we crouched against the wall where we could not be seen from the corridor, and waited.

Soon the patter of many footsteps reached our ears. They passed; others came, and still others. For many minutes the sound continued steadily, unbroken, while we sat huddled up against the wall, scarcely daring to breathe.

Immediately in front of me lay the forms of the woman and the children; I could see their dull eyes, unblinking,
looking up at me in abject terror. Still the patter of footsteps sounded from without, with now and then an interval of quiet.

Struck by a sudden thought, I signaled to Harry; and when he had moved further back into his corner I sprang across the room in one bound to his side. A word or two of whispering, and he nodded to show that he understood. We crouched together flat against the wall.

My thought had come just in time, for scarcely another minute had passed when there suddenly appeared in the doorway the form of an Inca. He moved a step inside, and I saw that there was another behind him. I had not counted on two of them! In the arms of each was a great copper vessel, evidently very heavy, for their effort was apparent as they stooped to place the vessels on the ground just within the doorway.

As they straightened up and saw that the room before them was empty, their faces filled with surprise. At the same moment a movement came from the woman in the corner; the two men glanced at them with a start of wonder; and as I had foreseen, they ran across and bent over the prostrate forms.

The next instant they, too, were prone on the floor, with Harry and me on top of them. They did not succumb without a struggle, and the one I had chosen proved nearly too much for me.

The great muscles of his chest and legs strained under me with a power that made me doubtful for a moment of the outcome; but the Incas themselves had taught us how to conquer a man when you attack him from behind, and I grasped his throat with all the strength there was in my fingers.

With a desperate effort he got to his knees and grasped my wrists in his powerful black hands and tore my own grip loose. He was half-way to his feet, and far more powerful than I; I changed my tactics. Wrenching myself loose, I fell back a step; then, as he twisted round to get at me, I lunged forward and let him have my fist squarely between the eyes.

The blow nearly broke my hand, but he dropped to the floor. The next instant I was joined by Harry, who had overcome the other Inca with little difficulty, and in a trice we had them both bound and gagged along with the remainder of the family in the corner.

Owing to my strategy in withholding our attack until the Incas had got well within the room and to one side, we had not been seen by those constantly passing up and down in the corridor without; at least, none of them had entered. We seemed by this stroke to have assured our safety so long as we remained in the room.

But it was still necessary to remain against the wall, for the soft patter of footsteps could still be heard in the corridor.

They now came at irregular intervals, and there were not many of them. Otherwise the silence was unbroken.

"What does it all mean?" Harry whispered.

"The Incas are coming home to their women," I guessed. "Though, after seeing the women, it is little wonder if they spend most of their time away from them. He is welcome to his repose in the bosom of his family."

There passed an uneventful hour. Long before it ended the sound of footsteps had entirely ceased; but we thought it best to take no chances, and waited for the last minute our impatience would allow us. Then, uncomfortable and stiff from the long period of immobility and silence, we rose to our feet and made ready to start.

Harry was for appropriating some of the strips of dried fish we saw suspended from the ceiling, but I objected that our danger lay in any direction other than that of hunger, and we set out with only our spears.

The corridor was deserted. One quick glance in either direction assured us of that; then we turned to the right and set out at a rapid pace, down the long passage past a succession of rooms exactly similar to the one we had just left--scores, hundreds of them.

Each one was occupied by from one to ten of the Incas lying on the couch which each contained, or stretched on hides on the floor. No one was stirring. Everywhere was silence save the patter of our own feet, which we let fall as noiselessly as possible.

"Will it never end?" whispered Harry at length, after we had traversed upward of a mile without any sign of a cross-passage or a termination.

"Forward, and silence!" I breathed for a reply.

The end--at least, of the silence--came sooner than we had expected. Hardly were the last words out of my mouth when a whirring noise sounded behind us. We glanced over our shoulders as we ran, and at the same instant an Inca spear flew by not two inches from my head and struck the ground in front.

Not a hundred feet to the rear we saw a group of Incas rushing along the passage toward us. Harry wheeled about, raising his spear, but I grasped him by the arm, crying, "Run; it's our only chance!" The next moment we were leaping forward side by side down the passage.

It would have fared ill with any who appeared to block our way in that mad dash; but it remained clear. The corridor led straight ahead, with never a turn. We were running as we had never run before; the black walls flashed past us an indistinguishable blur, and the open doorways were blended into one.
Glancing back over my shoulder, I saw that the small group of Incas was no longer small. Away to the rear the corridor was filled with rushing black forms. But I saw plainly that we were gaining on them; the distance that separated us was twice as great as when we had first started to run.

"How about it?" I panted. "Can you hold out?"

"If it weren't for this knee," Harry returned between breaths and through clenched teeth. "But--I'm with you." He was limping painfully, and I slackened my pace a little, but he urged me forward with an oath, and himself sprang to the front. His knee must have been causing him the keenest agony; his face was white as death.

Then I uttered a cry of joy as I saw a bend in the passage ahead. We reached it, and wheeled to the right. There was solid wall on either side; the series of doors was ended.

"We'll shake 'em off now," I panted.

Harry nodded.

A short distance ahead we came to another cross-passage, and turned to the left. Glancing over my shoulder, I saw that our pursuers had not yet reached the first turn. Harry kept in the lead, and was giving me all I could do to keep up with him.

We found ourselves now in a veritable maze of lanes and cross-passages, and we turned to one side or the other at every opportunity. At length I grasped Harry by the arm and stopped him. We stood for two full minutes listening intently. There was absolutely no sound of any kind.

"Thank Heaven!" Harry breathed, and would have fallen to the ground if I had not supported him.

We started out then in search of water, moving slowly and cautiously. But we found none, and soon Harry declared that he could go no further. We sat down with our backs against the wall of the passage, still breathing heavily and all but exhausted.

In that darkness and silence the minutes passed into hours. We talked but little, and then only in whispers. Finally Harry fell into a restless sleep, if it may be called that, and several times I dozed off and was awakened by my head nodding against the stone wall.

At length, finding Harry awake, I urged him to his feet. His knee barely supported his weight, but he gritted his teeth and told me to lead on.

"We can wait--" I began; but he broke in savagely:

"No! I want to find her, that's all--and end it. Just one more chance!"

We searched for an hour before we found the stream of water we sought. After Harry had bathed his knee and drunk his fill he felt more fit, and we pushed on more rapidly, but still quite at random.

We turned first one way, then another, in the never-ending labyrinth, always in darkness and silence. We seemed to get nowhere; and I for one was about to give up the disheartening task when suddenly a sound smote our ears that caused us first to start violently, then stop and gaze at each other in comprehension and eager surprise.

"The bell!" cried Harry. "They are being summoned to the great cavern!"

It was the same sound we had heard twice before; a sound as of a great, deep-toned bell ringing sonorously throughout the passages and caverns with a roar that was deafening. And it seemed to be close--quite close.

"It came from the left," said Harry; but I disagreed with him and was so sure of myself that we started off to the right. The echoes of the bell were still floating from wall to wall as we went rapidly forward. I do not know what we expected to find, and the Lord knows what we intended to do after we found it.

A short distance ahead we came to another passage, crossing at right angles, broad and straight, and somehow familiar. As with one impulse we took it, turning to the left, and then flattened ourselves back against the wall as we saw a group of Incas passing at its farther end, some two hundred yards away.

There we stood, motionless and scarcely breathing, while group after group of the savages passed in the corridor ahead. Their number swelled to a continuous stream, which in turn gradually became thinner and thinner until only a few stragglers were seen trotting behind. Finally they, too, ceased to appear; the corridor was deserted.

We waited a while longer, then as no more appeared we started forward and soon had reached the corridor down which they had passed. We followed in the direction they had taken, turning to the right.

We had no sooner turned than we saw that which caused us to glance quickly at each other and hasten our step, while I smothered the ejaculation that rose to my lips. The corridor in which we now found ourselves stretched straight ahead for a distance, then turned to one side; and the corner thus formed was flooded with a brilliant blaze of light!

There was no longer any doubt of it: we were on our way to the great cavern. For a moment I hesitated, asking myself for what purpose we hastened on thus into the very arms of our enemies; then, propelled by instinct or premonition—I know not what--I took a firmer grasp on my spear and followed Harry without word, throwing caution to the winds.

Yet we avoided foolishness, for as we approached the last turn we proceeded slowly, keeping an eye on the
rear. But all the Incas appeared to have assembled within, for the corridor remained deserted.

We crept silently to the corner, avoiding the circle of light as far as possible, and, crouching side by side on the rock, looked out together on a scene none the less striking because we had seen it twice before.

It was the great cavern. We saw it from a different viewpoint than before; the alcove which held the golden throne was far off to our left, nearly half-way round the vast circumference. On the throne was seated the king, surrounded by guards and attendants.

As before, the stone seats which surrounded the amphitheater on every side were filled with the Incas, crouching motionless and silent. The flames in the massive urns mounted in steady tongues, casting their blinding glare in every direction.

All this I saw in a flash, when suddenly Harry's fingers sank into the flesh of my arm with such force that I all but cried out in actual pain. And then, glancing at him and following the direction of his gaze, I saw Desiree.

She was standing on the top of the lofty column in the center of the lake.

Her white body, uncovered, was outlined sharply against the black background of the cavern above.

Chapter XXII.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

Neither Harry nor I spoke; our eyes were concentrated on the scene before us, trying to comprehend its meaning.

It was something indefinable in Desiree's attitude that told me the truth--what, I cannot tell. Her profile was toward us; it could not have been her eyes or any expression of her face; but there was a tenseness about her pose, a stiffening of the muscles of her body, an air of lofty scorn and supreme triumph coming somehow from every line of her motionless figure, that flashed certainty into my brain.

And on the instant I turned to Harry.

"Follow me," I whispered; and he must have read the force of my knowledge in my eyes, for he obeyed without a word. Back down the passage we ran, halting at its end. Harry opened his lips to speak, but I took the words from his mouth; seconds were precious.

"They have fired the column--you remember. Follow me; keep your spear ready; not a sound, if you love her."

I saw that he understood, and saw too, by the expression that shot into his face, that it would go ill with any Incas who tried to stop us then.

We rushed forward side by side, guessing at our way, seeking the entrance to the tunnel that led to the foot of the column. A prayer was on my lips that we might not be too late; Harry's lips were compressed together tightly as a vise. Death we did not fear, even for Desiree; but we remembered the horror of our own experience on the top of that column, and shuddered as we ran.

As I have said, we had entered the great cavern at a point almost directly opposite the alcove, and therefore at a distance from the entrance we sought. It was necessary to half encircle the cavern, and the passages were so often crossed by other passages that many times we had to guess at the proper road.

But not for an instant did we hesitate; we flew rather than ran. I felt within me the strength and resolve of ten men, and I knew then that there was something I must do and would do before I died, though a thousand devils stood in my way.

I do not know what led us; whether a remorseful Providence, who suddenly decided that we had been played with long enough, or the mere animal instinct of direction, or blind luck. But so fast did we go that it seemed to me we had left the great cavern scarcely a minute behind us when I suddenly saw the steps of a steep stairway leading down from an opening on our right.

How my heart leaped then! Harry uttered a hoarse cry of exultation. The next instant we were dashing headlong down the steps, avoiding a fall by I know not what miracle. And there before us was the entrance to the tunnel.

I held Harry back, almost shouting: "You stay here; guard the entrance. I'll get her."

"No," he cried, pushing forward. "I can't stay."

"Fool!" I cried, dashing him back. "We would be caught like rats in a trap. Defend that entrance--with your life!"

I saw him hesitate, and, knowing that he would obey, I dashed forward into the tunnel. When nearly to its end I made a misstep on the uneven ground and precipitated myself against the wall. A sharp pain shot through my left shoulder, but at the time I was scarcely conscious of it as I picked myself up and leaped forward. The end was in sight.

Just as I reached the foot of the spiral stairway I saw a black form descending from it. That Inca never knew what hit him. I did not use my spear; time was too precious. He disappeared in the whirlpool beneath the base of the column through which Harry and I had once miraculously escaped.

But despair filled my heart as, with my feet on the first step of the spiral stairway, I cast a quick glance upward. The upper half of the inside of the column was a raging furnace of fire. How or from what it came I did not stop to inquire; I bounded up the stairway in desperate fury.
I did not know then that the stone steps were baking and blistering my feet; I did not know, as I came level with the base of the flames, that every hair was being singed from my head and body--I only knew that I must reach the top of the column.

Then I saw the source of the flames as I reached them. Huge vats of oil--six, a dozen, twenty--I know not how many--were ranged in a circle on a ledge of stone encircling the column, and from their tops the fire leaped upward to a great height. I saw what must be done; how I did it God only knows; I shut my eyes now as I remember it.

Hooking the rim of the vat nearest me with the point of my spear, I sent it tumbling down the length of the column into the whirlpool, many feet below. Then another, and another, and another, until the ledge was empty.

Some of the burning oil, flying from the overturned vats, alighted on the stairway, casting weird patches of light up and down the whole length of the column. Some of it landed on my body, my face, my hands. It was a very hell of heat; my lungs, all the inside of me, was on fire.

My brain sang and whirled. My eyes felt as though they were being burned from their sockets with red-hot irons. I bounded upward.

A few more steps--I could not see, I could hardly feel--and my head bumped against the stone at the top of the column. I put out my hand, groping around half crazily, and by some wild chance it came in contact with the slide that moved the stone stab. I pushed, hardly knowing what I did, and the stone flew to one side. I stuck my head through the opening and saw Desiree.

Her back was toward me. As I emerged from the opening the Incas seated round the vast amphitheater and the king, seated on the golden throne in the alcove, rose involuntarily from their seats in astonished wonder.

Desiree saw the movement and, turning, caught sight of me. A sudden cry of amazement burst from her lips; she made a hasty step forward and fell fainting into my arms.

I shook her violently, but she remained unconscious, and this added catastrophe all but unnerved me. For a moment I stood on the upper step with the upper half of my body, swaying from side to side, extending beyond the top of the column; then I turned and began to descend with Desiree in my arms.

Every step of that descent was unspeakable agony. Feeling was hardly in me; my whole body was an engine of pain. Somehow, I staggered and stumbled downward; at every step I expected to fall headlong to the bottom with my burden. Desiree's form remained limp and lifeless in my arms.

I reached the ledge on which the vats had been placed and passed it; air entered my burning lungs like a breeze from the mountains. Every step now made the next one easier. I began to think that I might, after all, reach the bottom in safety. Another twenty steps and I could see the beginning of the tunnel below.

Desiree's form stirred slightly in my arms. A glance showed me her eyes looking up into mine as her head lay back on my shoulder.

"Why?" she moaned. "In the name of Heaven above us, why?" I had no time for answer; my lips were locked tightly together as I sought the step below with a foot that had no feeling even for the stone. We were nearly to the bottom; we reached it.

I placed Desiree on her feet.

"Can you stand?" I gasped; and the words were torn from my throat with a great effort.

"But you!" she cried, and I saw that her eyes were filled with horror. No doubt I was a pitiful thing to look at. But there was no time to be lost, and, seeing that her feet supported her, I grasped her arm and started down the tunnel just as Harry's voice, raised in a great shout, came to us from its farther end.

"No!" cried Desiree, shrinking back in terror. "Paul--!" I dragged her forward.

Then, as Harry's cry was repeated, she seemed to understand and sprang forward beside me.

Another second wasted and we would have been too late. Just as we reached Harry's side, at the end of the tunnel, the Incas, warned by my appearance at the top of the column, appeared above on the stairway, at the foot of which Harry had made his stand.

At the sight of Desiree Harry uttered a cry of joy, then gazed in astonishment as I appeared behind her.

"Run for your lives!" he shouted, pointing down the passage leading to the apartments beyond. As he spoke a shower of spears descended from above, rattling on the steps and on the ground beside us. I stooped to pick up two of them, and as Desiree and I darted forward into the passage, with Harry bringing up the rear, the Incas dashed down the stairway after us.

We found ourselves at once in the maze of lanes and passages leading to the royal apartments. That, I thought, was as good a goal as any; and, besides, the way led to the cavern where we had once before successfully withstood our enemies. But the way was not so easy to find.

Turn and twist about as we would, we could not shake off our pursuers. Harry kept urging me forward, but I was using every ounce of strength that was left to me. Desiree, too, was becoming weaker at every step, and I could hear Harry's cry of despair as she perceptibly faltered and slackened her pace.
I soon realized that we were no longer in the passage or group of passages that led to the royal apartments and the cavern beyond. But there was no time to seek our way; well enough if we went forward. We found ourselves in a narrow lane, strewn with rocks, crooked and winding.

Desiree stumbled and would have fallen but for my outstretched arm. A spear from behind whistled past my ear as we again bounded forward. Harry was shouting to us that the Incas were upon us.

I caught Desiree's arm and pulled her on with a last great effort. The lane became narrower still; we brushed the wall on either side, and I pushed Desiree ahead of me and followed behind. Suddenly she stopped short, turning to face me so suddenly that I was thrown against her, nearly knocking her down.

"Your spear!" she cried desperately. "I can go no farther," and she sank to the ground.

At the same moment there came a cry from Harry in the rear—a cry that held joy and wonder—and I turned to see him standing some distance away, gazing down the lane through which we had come.

"They've given up!" he called. "They're gone!"

And I saw that it was true. No sound came, and no Inca was to be seen.

Then, seeing Desiree on the ground, Harry ran to us and sprang to her side. "Desiree!" he cried, lifting her in his arms. She opened her eyes and smiled at him, and he kissed her many times—her hair, her lips, her eyes. Then he placed her gently on her feet, and, supporting her with his arm, moved forward slowly. I led the way.

The lane ahead of us was scarcely more than a crevice between the rocks; I squeezed my way through with difficulty. Then the walls ended abruptly, just when I had begun to think we could go no farther, and we found ourselves at the entrance to a cavern so large that no wall was to be seen on any side save the one behind us.

On the instant I guessed at the reason why the Incas had ceased their pursuit so abruptly, and I turned to Harry:

"I'm afraid we've jumped from the frying-pan into the fire. If this cavern holds anything like that other—you remember—"

"If it does, we shall see," he replied.

Supporting Desiree on either side, we struck out directly across the cavern, halting every few steps to listen for a sound, either of the Incas, which we feared, or of running water, which we desired. We heard neither. All was blackness and the most complete silence.

Then I became aware, for the first time, of intolerable pains shooting up through my legs into my body. The danger past, reason returned and feeling. I could not suppress a low cry, wrung inexorably from my chest, and I halted, leaning my whole weight on Desiree's shoulder.

"What is it?" she cried, and for answer—though I strained every atom of my will and strength to prevent it—I toppled to the ground, dragging her with me.

What followed came to me as in a dream, though I was not wholly unconscious. I was aware that Harry and Desiree were bending over me; then I felt my head and shoulders being lifted from the ground, and a soft, warm arm supporting me.

A minute passed, or an hour—I did not know—and I felt hot drops of moisture fall on my cheek. I struggled to open my eyes, and saw Desiree's face quite near my own; my head was resting on her shoulder. She was weeping silently, and great tears rolled down her cheeks unrestrained.

To have seen the sun or stars shining down upon me would not have astonished me more. I gazed at her a long moment in silence; she saw that I did so, but made no effort to turn her head or avoid my gaze. Finally I found my tongue.

"Where is Harry?" I asked.

"He is gone to look for water," she replied; and, curiously enough, her voice was quite steady.

I smiled.

"It is useless. I am done for!"

"That isn't true," she denied, in a voice almost of anger. "You will get well. You are—injured badly—" After a short pause she added, "for me."

There was a long silence—I thought it hardly worth while to contradict her—and then I said simply, "Why are you crying, Desiree?"

She looked at me as though she had not heard; then, after another silence, her voice came, so low that it barely reached my ears:

"For this—and for what might have been, my friend."

"But you have said—"

"I know! Would you make me doubt again? Do not! Ah"—she passed her hand gently over my forehead and touched the tips of her fingers to my burning eyes—"you must have cared for me in that other world. I will not doubt it; unless you speak, and you must not. Nothing would have been too high for us. We could have opened any door—even the door to happiness."
"But you said once--forgive me if I remind you of it now--you said that you are--you called yourself 'La Marana.'"

She shrank back, exclaiming: "Paul! Indeed, I need to forgive you!"

"Still, it is true," I persisted, turning to look at her. The movement caused me to halt, closing my eyes, while a great wave of pain swept over me from head to foot. Then I went on: "Could you expect to confine your heart? You say we could have opened any door--well, tell me, what could we have done, you and I?"

"But that is what I do not think of!" cried Desiree impatiently. "I would perhaps have placed my hand on your heart, as I do now; you would perhaps have fought for me, as you have done. I might even--" She hesitated, while the ghost of a smile that had died before it reached the light appeared on her lips, as her head was lowered close, quite close, to mine.

A long moment, and then, "Must I ask for it?" I breathed.

She jerked her head up sharply.

"You do not want it," she said dryly.

I raised my hand, groping for her fingers, but could not find them. She saw, and slowly, very slowly, her hand crept to mine and was caught and held there.

"Desiree--I want it," I said half fiercely, and I forgot our pain and our danger--forgot everything but her white face in dim outline above me, and her eyes, glowing and tender against her wish, and her hand that nestled in my hand. "Be merciful to me--I want it as I have never wanted anything in my life. Desiree, I love you."

At that I felt her hand move quickly, as for freedom, but I held it fast. And then slowly her head was lowered. I waited breathlessly. I felt her quick breath on my face, and the next moment her lips had found my lips, hot and dry, and remained there.

Then she raised her head, saying tremulously:

"That was my soul, and it is the first time it has ever escaped me."

At the same instant we were startled by the sound of Harry's voice in the darkness:

"Desiree! Where are you?"

I waited for her to answer, but she was silent, and I called out to him our direction. A moment later his form appeared at a distance, and soon he had joined us.

"How about it, old man?" he asked, bending over me.

Then he told us that he had found no water. He had explored two sides of the cavern, one at a distance of half a mile or more, and was crossing to find the third when he had called to us.

"But there is little use," he finished gloomily. "The place is silent as the grave. If there were water we would hear it. I can't even find an exit except the crevice that let us in."

Desiree's hand was still in mine.

"It may be--perhaps I can go with you," I suggested. But he would not hear of it, and set out again alone in the opposite direction to that which he had taken previously.

In a few minutes he returned, reporting no better success than before. On that side, he said, the wall of the cavern was quite close. There was no sign anywhere of water; but to the left there were several narrow lanes leading at angles whose sides were nearly parallel to each other, and some distance to the right there was a broad and clear passage sloping downward directly away from the cavern.

"Is the passage straight?" I asked, struck with a sudden idea. "Could you see far within?"

"A hundred feet or so," was the answer. "Why? Shall we follow it? Can you walk?"

"I think so," I answered. "At any rate, I must find some water soon or quit the game. But that isn't why I asked. Perhaps it explains the sudden disappearance of the Incas. They knew they couldn't follow us through that narrow crevice; what if they have made for the passage?"

Harry grumbled that we had enough trouble without trying to borrow more.

We decided to wait a little longer before starting out from the cavern; Harry helped me to my feet to give them a trial, and though I was able to stand it was only by a tremendous effort and exertion of the will.

"Not yet," I murmured between clenched teeth, and again Desiree sat on the hard rock and supported my head and shoulders in her arms, despite my earnest remonstrances. Harry stood before us, leaning on his spear.

Soon he left us again, departing in the direction of the crevice by which we had entered; I detected his uneasiness in the tone with which he directed us to keep a lookout around in every direction.

"We could move to the wall," I had suggested; but he shook his head, saying that where we were we at least had room to turn.

When he had gone Desiree and I sat silent for many minutes. Then I tried to rise, insisting that she must be exhausted with the long strain she had undergone, but she denied it vehemently, and refused to allow me to move.

"It is little enough," she said; and though I but half understood her, I made no answer.
I myself was convinced that we were at last near the end. It was certain that the Incas had merely delayed, not abandoned, the pursuit, and our powers and means of resistance had been worn to nothing.

Our curious apathy and half indifference spoke for itself; it was as though we had at length recognized the hand of fate and seen the futility of further struggle. For, weak and injured as I was, I still had strength in me; it was a listlessness of the brain and hopelessness of the heart that made me content to lie and wait for whatever might come.

The state of my feelings toward Desiree were even then elusive; they are more so now. I had told her I loved her; well, I had told many women that. But Desiree had moved me; with her it was not the same—that I felt. I had never so admired a woman, and the thrill of that kiss is in me yet; I can recall it and tremble under its power by merely closing my eyes.

Her warm hand, pressed tightly in my own, seemed to send an electric communication to every nerve in my body and eased my suffering and stilled my pain. That, I know, is not love; and perhaps I was mistaken when I imagined that it was there.

"Are you asleep?" she asked presently, after I had lain perfectly quiet for many minutes. Her voice was so low that it entered my ear as the faintest breath.

"Hardly," I answered. "To tell the truth, I expect never to sleep again—I suppose you understand me. I can't say why—"I feel it."

Desiree nodded.

"Do you remember, Paul, what I said that evening on the mountain?" Then—"I suppose my face must have betrayed my thought—she added quickly: "Oh, I didn't mean that—other thing. I said this mountain would be my grave, do you remember? You see, I knew."

I started to reply, but was interrupted by Harry, calling to ask where we were. I answered, and soon he had joined us and seated himself beside Desiree on the ground.

"I found nothing," was all he said, wearily, and he lay back and closed his eyes, resting his head on his hands.

The minutes passed slowly. Desiree and I talked in low tones; Harry moved about uneasily on his hard bed, saying nothing. Finally, despite Desiree's energetic protests, I rose to my knees and insisted that she rest herself. We seemed none of us to be scarcely aware of what we were doing; our movements had a curious purposelessness about them that gave the thing an appearance of unreality—I know not what; it comes to my memory as some indistinct and haunting nightmare.

Suddenly, as I sat gazing dully into the semidarkness of the cavern, I saw that which drove the apathy from my brain with a sudden shock, at the same time paralyzing my senses. I strained my eyes ahead; there could be no doubt of it; that black, slowly moving line was a band of Incas creeping toward us silently, on their knees, through the darkness. Glancing to either side I saw that the line extended completely around us, to the right and left.

The sight seemed to paralyze me. I tried to call to Harry—no sound came from my eager lips. I tried to put out my hand to rouse him and to pick up my spear; my arms remained motionless at my side.

Desiree lay close beside me; I could not even turn my head to see if she, too, saw, but kept my eyes, as though fascinated, on that silent black line approaching through the darkness.

"Will they leap now—now—now?" I asked myself with every beat of my pulse.

It could not be much longer—they were now so close that each black, tense form was in clear outline not fifty feet away.

Chapter XXIII.
WE ARE TWO.

Whether I would have been able to rouse myself to action before the shock of the assault was actually upon us, I shall never know.

It was not fear that held me, for I felt none; I think that dimly and half unconsciously I saw in that black line, silently creeping upon us, the final and inexorable approach of the remorseless fate that had pursued us ever since we had dashed after Desiree into the cave of the devil, rendering our every effort futile, our most desperate struggles the laughing-stock of the gods.

I was not even conscious of danger. I sat as in a stupor.

But action came, though not from me, so suddenly that I scarcely knew what had happened. There was a cry from Desiree. Harry sprang to his feet. The Incas leaped forward.

I felt myself jerked violently from the ground, and a spear was thrust into my hand. Harry's form flashed past me, shouting to me to follow. Desiree was at his heels; but I saw her halt and turn to me, and I, too, sprang forward.

Harry's spear whirled about his head, leaving a gap in the black line that was now upon us. Through it we plunged. The Incas turned and came at us from behind; one whose hands were upon Desiree got my spear in his throat and sank to the ground.

"Cross to the left!" Harry yelled. He was fighting them off from every direction at once.
I turned, calling to Desiree to follow, and dashed across the cavern. We saw the wall just ahead, broken and rugged. Again turning I called to Harry, but could not see him for the black forms on every side, and I was starting to his rescue when I saw him plunge toward us, cutting his way through the solid mass of Incas as though they had been stalks of corn. He was not a man, but a demon possessed.

"Go on," he shouted. "I'll make it!"

Then I turned and ran with Desiree to the wall. We followed it a short distance before we reached one of the lanes of which Harry had spoken; at its entrance he joined us, still bidding us to leave him to cover our retreat.

Once within the narrow lane his task was easier. Boulders and projecting rocks obstructed our progress, but they were even greater obstacles to those who pursued us. Still they rushed forward, only to be hurled back by the point of Harry's spear. Once, turning, I saw him pick one of them up bodily and toss him whirling through the air into the very faces of his comrades.

I had all I could do with Desiree and myself. Many times I scrambled up the steep face of some boulder and, after pulling her up safely after me, let her down again on the other side. Then I returned to see that Harry got over safely, and often he made it barely by inches, while flying spears struck the rock on every side.

It is a wonder to me now that I was able even to stand, after my experience on the spiral stairway in the column. The soles of my feet and the palms of my hands were baked black as the Incas themselves. Blisters covered my body from head to foot, swelling, indescribably painful.

Every step I took made me clench my teeth to keep from sinking in a faint to the ground; I expected always that the next would be my last—but somehow I struggled onward. It was the thought of Desiree, I think, that held me up, and Harry.

Suddenly a shout came from Harry that the Incas had abandoned the pursuit. It struck me almost as a matter of indifference; nor was I affected when almost immediately afterward he called that he had been mistaken and that they had rushed forward with renewed fury and in greater numbers.

"It is only a matter of time now," I said to Desiree, and she nodded.

Still we went forward. The land had carried us straight away from the cavern, without a turn. Its walls were the roughest I had seen, and often a boulder which lay across our path presented a serrated face that looked as though it had but just been broken from the wall above. Still the stone was comparatively soft—time had not yet worked its leveling finger on the surfaces that surrounded us.

We were standing on one of these boulders when Harry came running toward us.

"They're stopped," he cried gleefully, "at least for a little. A piece of rock as big as a house gently slid from above onto their precious heads. It may have blocked them off completely."

We hurried forward then; Harry helped Desiree, while I painfully brought up the rear. At every few steps they were forced to halt and wait for me, though I did my utmost to keep up with them. Harry had taken my spear that I might have both hands to help me over the rocks.

Climbing, sliding, jumping, we left the Incas behind; no sound came from the rear. I began to think that they had really been completely shut off, and several times opened my mouth to call to Harry to ask him if it would not be safe to halt; for every movement I made was torture. But each time I choked back the cry; he thought it was necessary to go on and I followed.

This lasted I know not how long; I was staggering and reeling forward like a drunken man, so little aware of what I was doing that when Harry and Desiree finally stopped at the beginning of a level, unbroken stretch in the lane, I stumbled directly against them before I knew they had halted.

"Go on!" I gasped, struggling to my feet in a mania.

Harry stooped over to assist me and set me with my back resting against the wall. Desiree supported herself near by, scarcely able to stand.

"We can go no farther," said Harry. "If they come—"

As he spoke I became aware of a curious movement in the wall opposite—a movement as of the wall itself. At first I thought it a delusion produced by my disordered brain, but when I saw Desiree's astonished gaze following mine, and heard Harry's cry of wonder as he turned and saw it also, I knew the thing was real.

A great portion of the wall, the entire side of the passage for a length of a hundred feet or more, was sliding slowly downward. Glancing above I saw a space of several feet where the rock had departed from its bed. The only noise audible was a low, grating sound like the slow grinding of a gigantic millstone.

None of us moved—if there were danger we would seem to have welcomed it. Suddenly the great mass of rock appeared to halt in its downward movement and hang as though suspended; then with a sudden jerk it seemed to free itself, swaying ponderously toward us; and the next moment it had fallen straight down into some abyss below, thundering, tumbling, sliding with terrific velocity.

There was a deafening roar under our feet, the ground rocked as from an earthquake, and it seemed as though the
wall against which we stood was about to fall in upon us. Dust and fragments of rock filled the air on every side, and
one huge boulder, detached from the roof above, came tumbling at our feet, missing us by inches.

We were completely stunned by the cataclysm, but in a moment Harry had recovered and run to the edge of the
chasm opposite thus suddenly formed. Desiree and I followed.

There was nothing to be seen save the blackness of space. Immediately before us was an apparently bottomless
abyss, black and terrifying; the side descended straight down from our feet. Looking across we could see dimly a
wall some distance away, smooth and with a faint whiteness. On either side of us other walls extended to meet the
farther wall, smooth and polished as glass.

"The Incas didn't do that, I hope," said Harry, turning to me.

"Hardly," I answered; and in my absorbing interest in the phenomenon before me I half forgot my pain.

I moved to the edge of one of the walls extending at right angles to the passage, but there was little to be made of
it. It was of soft limestone, and most probably the portion that had disappeared was granite, carried away by the
force of its own weight.

"We are like to be buried," I observed, returning to Harry and Desiree. "Though for that matter, even that can
hardly frighten us now."

"For my part," said Harry, with a curious gravity beneath the apparent lightness of his words, "I have always
admired the death of Porthos. Let it come, and welcome."

"Are we to go further?" put in Desiree.

Just as Harry opened his mouth to reply a more decisive answer came from another source. The rock that had
fallen, obstructing the path of the Incas, must have left an opening that Harry had missed; or they had removed it--
what matter?

In some way they had forced a passage, for as Desiree spoke a dozen spears whistled through the air past our
heads and we looked up to see a swarm of Incas climbing and tumbling down the face of a boulder over which we
had passed to reach our resting-place.

I have said that we had halted in a level, unbroken stretch that still led some distance ahead of us. At its farther
end could be seen a group of rocks and boulders completely choking the lane, Beyond, other rocks arose to a still
greater height--the way appeared to be impassable.

But there was no time for deliberation or the weighing of chances, and we turned and made for the pile of rocks,
with the Incas rushing after us.

There Desiree and I halted in despair, but with a great oath Harry brushed us aside and leaped upon a rock higher
than his head with incredible agility. Then, lying flat on his face and extending his arms downward over the edge, he
pulled first Desiree, then myself, up after him. The whole performance had occupied a scant two seconds, and,
waiting only to pick up the three spears he had thrown up the sloping surface of the rock to another yet higher and
steeper.

"Why don't we hold them here?" I demanded. "They could never come up that rock with us on top."

Harry looked at me.

"Spears," he said briefly; and, of course, he was right. They would have picked us off like birds on a limb.

We scaled the second rock with extreme difficulty, Harry assisting both Desiree and me; and as we stood upright
on its top I saw the Incas scrambling over the edge of the one below. Two or three of them had already started to
cross; many more were coming up from behind; and one, as he made the top and arose to his feet, braced himself on
the sloping rock and raised a spear high above his head.

At sight of him I started, crying to Harry and Desiree. They turned.

"The king!" I shouted; and I saw a shudder of terror run over Desiree's face as she, too, recognized the black
form below. At the same instant the spear darted forward from the hand of the Child of the Sun, but it landed
harmlessly against the rock several feet away.

The next moment the Inca king had bounded across the rock toward us, followed by a score of others.

I was minded to try my luck with his own weapon, but we had no spears to waste, and Harry was dragging
Desiree forward and shouting to me to follow. I turned and ran after them, and just as we let ourselves down into a
narrow crevice below the Incas appeared over the edge of the rock behind.

Somehow we scrambled forward, with the Incas at our heels. Sharp corners of projecting rocks bruised our faces
and bodies; once my leg bent double under me as I fell from a ledge onto a boulder below, and I thought it was
broken; but Harry jerked me to my feet and I struggled on.

Harry seemed possessed of the strength of ten men and the heart of a thousand. He pulled Desiree and me up and
over boulders and rocks as though we had been feathers; the Lord knows how he got there himself! Half of the time
he carried Desiree; the other half he supported me. His energy and exertions were titanic; even in the desperate
excitement of our retreat I found time to marvel at it.
We did not gain an inch; our pursuers kept close behind us; but we held our own. Now and then a stray spear came hurrying through the air or struck the rock near us, but they were infrequent and we were not hit.

One, flying past my head, stuck in a crevice of the rock and I grasped the shaft to pull it out, but abandoned my effort when I heard Harry shouting to me from the front to come to his aid.

He and Desiree were standing on the rim of a ledge that stood high above the ground of the passage. At its foot began a level stretch leading straight ahead as far as we could see.

"We must lift her down," Harry was saying.

He let himself over the ledge, hung by his hands, and dropped. "All right!" he called from below; and I lay flat on the rock while Desiree scrambled over the edge, holding to my hands. For a moment I held her suspended in my outstretched arms; then, at a word from Harry, I let her drop. Another moment and I was over myself, knocking Harry to the ground and tumbling on top of him as he stood beneath to break my fall.

By then the Incas had reached the top of the ledge above us, and we turned and raced down the long stretch ahead. I was in front; Harry came behind with Desiree.

Suddenly, as I ran, I felt a curious trembling of the ground beneath my feet, similar to the vibrations of a bridge at the passing of a heavy load.

Then the ground actually swayed beneath me; and, realizing the danger, I sent a desperate shout to Harry over my shoulder and bounded forward. He was at my side on the instant, with Desiree in his arms.

The ground rocked beneath our feet like a ship in a storm; and, just as I thought we were gone, my foot touched firm rock as I passed a yawning crevice a foot wide under me.

One more leap to safety, and we turned just in time to see the floor of the passage which we had traversed disappear into some abyss beneath with a shattering roar.

We stood at the very edge of the chasm thus suddenly formed, gazing at each other in silent wonder and awe.

"The beggars are stopped now," said Harry finally. "That break in the game is ours."

Looking back across the chasm, we saw the Incas tumbling by twos and threes over the boulder on the other side. As they saw the yawning abyss that separated them from their prey they stopped short and gazed across in profound astonishment.

Others came to join them, until there were several hundred of the black, ugly forms huddled together on the opposite rim of the chasm, a hundred feet away.

I ran over the group with a keen eye, seeking the figure of the Inca king, and soon my search was successful. He stood a step in front of the others, a little to the right. I pointed him out to Harry and Desiree.

"It's up to him to walk right out again," said Harry.

Desiree shivered, and proceeded to send her last invitation to the devil.

Turning suddenly, she grasped Harry's spear and tore it from his hand. Before we realized her purpose, she stepped forward until her foot rested on the very edge of the chasm, and had hurled the spear across straight at the Inca king.

It missed him, but struck another Inca standing near full in the breast. Quick as lightning the king turned, grasped the shaft of the spear, and pulled it forth, and with his white teeth gleaming in a snarl of furious hate, sent it whistling through the air straight at Desiree.

Harry and I sprang forward with a shout of warning; Desiree stood motionless as a statue. We grasped her frantically and pulled her back, but too late.

She came, but only to fall lifeless into our arms with the spear buried deep in her white throat.

We laid her on the ground and knelt beside her for a moment, then Harry arose to his feet with a face white as death; and I uttered a silent and vengeful prayer as I saw him level a spear at the Inca king across the chasm. But it went wide of its mark, striking the ground at his feet.

"There was another!" cried Harry, and soon he had found it where it lay on the ground and sent it, too, hurtling across.

This time he missed by inches. The spear flew just past the shoulder of the king and caught one who stood behind him full in the face. The stricken savage threw his arms spasmodically above his head, reeling forward against the king.

There was a startled movement along the black line; hands were outstretched in a vain effort at rescue; a savage cry burst from Harry's lips, and the next instant the king had toppled over the edge of the chasm and fallen into the bottomless pit below.

Harry turned, quivering from head to foot.

"Little enough," he said between his teeth, and again he knelt beside the body of Desiree and took her in his arms.

But her fate spoke eloquently of our own danger, and I roused him to action. Together we picked up the form of
our dead comrade and carried it to the rear. I hesitated to pull forth the barbed head of the spear, and instead broke off the shaft, leaving the point buried in the soft throat, from which a crimson line extended over the white shoulder.

A short distance ahead we came to a projecting boulder, and behind that we gently laid her on the hard rock. Neither of us had spoken a word. Harry's lips were locked tightly together; a lump rose in my throat, choking all utterance and filling my eyes with tears.

Harry knelt beside the white form and, gathering it gently in his arms, held it against his breast. I stood at his side, gazing down at him in mute sympathy and sorrow.

For a long minute there was silence—a most intense silence throughout the cavern, during which the painful throbbing of my heart was plainly audible; then Harry murmured, in a voice of the utmost tenderness: "Desiree!" And again, "Desiree! Desiree!" until I half expected the very strength and sweetness of his emotion to bring our comrade back to life.

Suddenly, with a quick, impulsive movement, he raised his head to glance at me.

"She loved you," he said; and though there was neither jealousy nor anger in his voice, somehow I could not meet his gaze.

"She loved you," he repeated in a tone half of wonder. "And you—you--"

I answered his eyes.

"She was yours," I said, with a touch of bitterness that persuaded him of the truth. "All her beauty, all her loveliness, all her charm, to be buried—Ah! God help us—"

My voice broke, and I knelt on the ground beside Harry and pressed my lips to the white forehead and golden hair of what had been Le Mire.

Thus we remained for a long time.

It was hard to believe that death had in reality taken possession of the still form stretched as in repose before us. Her body, still warm, seemed quivering with the instinct of life; but the eyes were not the eyes of Desiree. I closed them, and arranged the tangled mass of hair as well as possible over her shoulders. As I did so the air, set in motion by my hand, caused some of the golden strands to tremble gently across her lips; and Harry bent forward with a painful eagerness, thinking that she had breathed.

"Dearest," he murmured, "dearest, speak to me!"

His hand sought her swelling bosom gropingly; and his eyes, as they looked pleadingly even into mine, shot into my heart and unnerved me.

I rose to my feet, scarcely able to stand, and moved away.

But the fate that had finally intervened for us—too late, alas! for one—did not leave us long with our dead. Even now I do not know what happened; at the time I knew even less. Harry told me afterward that the first shock came at the instant he had taken Desiree in his arms and pressed his lips to hers.

I had crossed to the other side of the passage and was gazing back toward the chasm at the Incas on the other side, when again I felt the ground, absolutely without warning, tremble violently under my feet. At the same time there was a low, curious rumble as of the thundering of distant cannon.

I sprang toward Harry with a cry of alarm, and had crossed about to the middle of the passage, when a deafening roar smote my ear, and the entire wall of the cavern appeared to be failing in upon us. At the same time the ground seemed to sink directly away beneath my feet with an easy, rocking motion as of a wave of the ocean. Then I felt myself plunging downward with a velocity that stunned my senses and took away my breath; and then all was confusion and chaos—and oblivion.

When I awoke I was lying flat on my back, and Harry was kneeling at my side. I opened my eyes, and felt that it would be impossible to make a greater exertion.

"Paul!" cried Harry. "Speak to me! Not you, too—I shall go mad!"

He told me afterward that he had lain unconscious for many hours, but that appeared to be all that he knew. How far we had fallen, or how he had found me, or how he himself had escaped being crushed to pieces by the falling rock, he was unable to say; and I concluded that he, too, had been rendered unconscious by the fall, and for some time dazed and bewildered by the shock.

Well! We were alive—that was all.

For we were weak and faint from hunger and fatigue, and one mass of bruises and blisters from head to foot. And we had had no water for something like twenty-four hours. Heaven only knows where we found the energy to rise and go in search of it; it is incredible that any creatures in such a pitiable and miserable condition as we were could have been propelled by hope, unless it is indeed immortal.

Half walking, half crawling, we went forward.

The place where we had found ourselves was a jumbled mass of boulders and broken rock, but we soon discovered a passage, level and straight as any tunnel built by man.
Down this we made our way. Every few feet we stopped to rest. Neither of us spoke a word. I really had no sense of any purpose in our progress; I crept on exactly as some animals, wounded to death, move on and on until there is no longer strength for another step, when they lie down for the final breath.

We saw no water nor promise of any; nothing save the long stretch of dim vista ahead and the grim, black walls on either side. That, I think, for hours; it seemed to me then for years.

I dragged one leg after the other with infinite effort and pain; Harry was ahead, and sometimes, glancing back over his shoulder to find me at some distance behind, he would turn over and lie on his back till I approached. Then again to his knees and again forward. Neither of us spoke.

Suddenly, at a great distance down the passage, much further than I had been able to see before, I saw what appeared to be a white wall extending directly across our path.

I called to Harry and pointed it out to him. He nodded vaguely, as though in wonder that I should have troubled him about so slight an object of interest, and crawled on.

But the white wall became whiter still, and soon I saw that it was not a wall. A wild hope surged through me; I felt the blood mount dizzily to my head, and I stifled the clamor that beat at my temples by an extreme effort of the will. "It can't be," I said to myself aloud, over and over; "it can't be, it can't be."

Harry turned, and his face was as white as when he had knelt by the body of Desiree, and his eye was wild.

"You fool," he roared, "it is!"

We went faster then. Another hundred yards, and the thing was certain; there it was before us. We scrambled to our feet and tried to run; I reeled and fell, then picked myself up again and followed Harry, who had not even halted as I had fallen. The mouth of the passage was now but a few feet away; I reached Harry's side, blinking and stunned with amazement and the incredible wonder of it.

I tried to shout, to cry aloud to the heavens, but a great lump in my throat choked me and my head was singing dizzily.

Harry, at my side, was crying like a child, with great tears streaming down his face, as together we staggered forth from the mouth of the passage into the bright and dazzling sunshine of the Andes.

Chapter XXIV.

CONCLUSION.

Never, I believe, were misery and joy so curiously mingled in the human breast as when Harry and I stood--barely able to stand--gazing speechlessly at the world that had so long been hidden from us.

We had found the light, but had lost Desiree. We were alive, but so near to death that our first breath of the mountain air was like to be our last.

The details of our painful journey down the mountain, over the rocks and crags, and through rushing torrents that more than once swept us from our feet, cannot be written, for I do not know them.

The memory of the thing is but an indistinct nightmare of suffering. But the blind luck that seemed to have fallen over our shoulders as a protecting mantle at the death of Desiree stayed with us; and after endless hours of incredible toil and labor, we came to a narrow pass leading at right angles to our course.

Night was ready to fall over the bleak and barren mountain as we entered it. Darkness had long since overtaken us, when we saw at a distance a line a large clearing, in the middle of which lights shone from the windows of a large house whose dim and shadowy outline appeared to us surrounded by a halo of peace.

But we were nearly forced to fight for it. The proprietor of the hacienda himself answered our none too gentle knock at the door, and he had no sooner caught sight of us than he let out a yell as though he had seen the devil in person, and slammed the door violently in our faces. Indeed, we were hardly recognizable as men.

Naked, black, bruised, and bleeding, covered with hair on our faces and parts of our bodies--mine, of recent growth, stubby and stiff--our appearance would have justified almost any suspicion.

But we hammered again on the door, and I set forth our pedigree and plight in as few words as possible. Reassured, perhaps, by my excellent Spanish--which could not, of course, be the tongue of the devil--and convinced by our pitiable condition of our inability to do him any harm, he at length reopened the door and gave us admittance.

When we had succeeded in allaying his suspicions concerning our identity--though I was careful not to alarm his superstitions by mentioning the cave of the devil, which, I thought, was probably well known to him--he lost no time in displaying his humanity.

Calling in some hombres from the rear of the hacienda, he gave them ample instructions, with medicine and food, and an hour later Harry and I were lying side by side in his own bed--a rude affair, but infinitely better than granite--refreshed, bandaged, and as comfortable as their kindly ministrations could make us.

The old Spaniard was a direct descendant of the good Samaritan --despite the slight difference in nationality. For many weeks he nursed us and fed us and coaxed back the spark of life in our exhausted and wounded bodies.

Our last ounce of strength seemed to have been used up in our desperate struggle down the side of the mountain;
for many days we lay on our backs absolutely unable to move a muscle and barely conscious of life.

But the spark revived and fluttered. The day came when we could hobble, with his assistance, to the door of the hacienda and sit for hours in the invigorating sunshine; and thenceforward our convalescence proceeded rapidly. Color came to our cheeks and light to our eyes; and one sunny afternoon it was decided that we should set out for Cerro de Pasco on the following day.

Harry proposed a postponement of our departure for two days, saying that he wished to make an excursion up the mountain. I understood him at once.

"It would be useless," I declared. "You would find nothing."

"But she was with us when we fell," he persisted, not bothering to pretend that he did not understand me. "She came--it must be near where we landed."

"That isn't it," I explained. "Have you forgotten that we have been here for over a month? You would find nothing." As he grasped my thought his face went white and he was silent. So on the following morning we departed.

Our host furnished us with food, clothing, mules, and an arriero, not to mention a sorrowful farewell and a hearty blessing. From the door of the hacienda he waved his sombrero as we disappeared around a bend in the mountain-pass; we had, perhaps, been a welcome interruption in the monotony of his lonely existence.

We were led upward for many miles until we found ourselves again in the region of perpetual snow. There we set our faces to the south. From the arriero we tried to learn how far we then were from the cave of the devil, but to our surprise were informed that he had never heard of the thing.

We could see that the question made him more than a little suspicious of us; often, when he thought himself unobserved, I caught him eyeing us askance with something nearly approaching terror.

We journeyed southward for eleven days; on the morning of the twelfth we saw below us our goal. Six hours later we had entered the same street of Cerro de Pasco through which we had passed formerly with light hearts; and the heart which had been gayest of all we had left behind us, stilled forever, somewhere beneath the mountain of stone which she had herself chosen for her tomb.

Almost the first person we saw was none other than Felipe, the arriero. He sat on the steps of the hotel portico as we rode up on our mules. Dismounting, I caught sight of his white face and staring eyes as he rose slowly to his feet, gazing at us as though fascinated.

I opened my mouth to call to him, but before the words left my lips he had let out an ear-splitting yell of terror and bounded down the steps and past us, with arms flying in every direction, running like one possessed. Nor did he return during the few hours that we remained at the hotel.

Two days later found us boarding the yacht at Callao. When I had discovered, to my profound astonishment, at the hacienda, that another year had taken us as far as the tenth day of March, I had greatly doubted if we should find Captain Harris still waiting for us. But there he was; and he had not even put himself to the trouble of becoming uneasy about us.

As he himself put it that night in the cabin, over a bottle of wine, he "didn't know but what the senora had decided to take the Andes home for a mantel ornament, and was engaged in the little matter of transportation."

But when I informed him that "the senora" was no more, his face grew sober with genuine regret and sorrow. He had many good things to say of her then; it appeared that she had really touched his salty old heart.

"She was a gentle lady," said the worthy captain; and I smiled to think how Desiree herself would have smiled at such a characterization of the great Le Mire.

We at once made for San Francisco. There, at a loss, I disposed of the remainder of the term of the lease on the yacht, and we took the first train for the East.

Four days later we were in New York, after a journey saddened by thoughts of the one who had left us to return alone.

It was, in fact, many months before the shadow of Desiree ceased to hover about the dark old mansion on lower Fifth Avenue, incongruous enough among the ancient halls and portraits of Lamars dead and gone in a day when La Marana herself had darted like a meteor to the hearts of their contemporaries.

That is, I suppose, properly the end of the story; but I cannot refrain from the opportunity to record a curious incident that has just befallen me. Some twenty minutes ago, as I was writing the last paragraph--I am seated in the library before a massive mahogany table, close to a window through which the September sun sends its golden rays--twenty minutes ago, as I say, Harry sauntered into the room and threw himself lazily into a large armchair on the other side of the table.

I looked up with a nod of greeting, while he sat and eyed me impatiently for some seconds.

"Aren't you coming with me down to Southampton?" he asked finally.

"What time do you leave?" I inquired, without looking up.
"Eleven-thirty."
"What's on?"
"Freddie Marston's Crocodiles and the Blues. It's going to be some polo."
I considered a moment. "Why, I guess I'll run down with you. I'm about through here."
"Good enough!" Harry arose to his feet and began idly fingering some of the sheets on the table before me.
"What is all this silly rot, anyway?"
"My dear boy," I smiled, "you'll be sorry you called it silly rot when I tell you that it is a plain and honest tale of our own experiences."
"Must be deuced interesting," he observed. "More silly rot than ever."
"Others may not think so," I retorted, a little exasperated by his manner. "It surely will be sufficiently exciting to read of how we were buried with Desiree Le Mire under the Andes, and our encounters with the Incas, and our final escape, and--"
"Desiree what?" Harry interrupted.
"Never heard of her," said Harry, looking at me as if he doubted my sanity.
"Never heard of Desiree, the woman you loved?" I almost shouted at him.
"The woman I--piffle! I say I never heard of her."
I gazed at him, trembling with high indignation. "I suppose," I observed with infinite sarcasm, "that you will tell me next that you have never been in Peru?"
"Guilty," said Harry. "I never have."
"And that you never climbed Pike's Peak to see the sunrise?"
"Rahway, New Jersey, is my farthest west."
"And that you never dived with me from the top of a column one hundred feet high?"
"Not I. I retain a smattering of common sense."
"And that you did not avenge the death of Desiree by causing that of the Inca king?"
"So far as that Desiree woman is concerned," said Harry, and his tone began to show impatience, "I can only repeat that I have never heard of the creature. And"--he continued--"if you're trying to bamboozle a gullible world by concocting a tale as silly as your remarks to me would seem to indicate, I will say that as a cheap author you are taking undue liberties with your family, meaning myself. And what is more, if you dare to print the stuff I'll let the world know it's a rank fake."
This threat, delivered with the most awful resolution and sincerity, unnerved me completely, and I fell back in my chair in a swoon.
When I recovered Harry had gone to his polo game, leaving me behind, whereupon I seized my pen and hastened to set down in black and white that most remarkable conversation, that the reader may judge for himself between us.
For my part, I do swear that the story is true, on my word of honor as a cynic and a philosopher.
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